

THE WISH RING

An American Folktale

There once was a young couple. Each came into the marriage owning a small field, but the fields were not close. So every day the young husband would eat his lunch as he walked between the fields to farm them.

One day an old caillach, an old woman, came by as he was eating. She was bent with age and looked longingly at his food.

“Old mother, why not stop and eat with me? All I have is oat cakes and buttermilk, but of that I have plenty.”

She thanked him and they sat on a mossy log and shared the simple meal. As she got up to go on her way, she took a plain gold ring from her finger. “I want to give you this.”

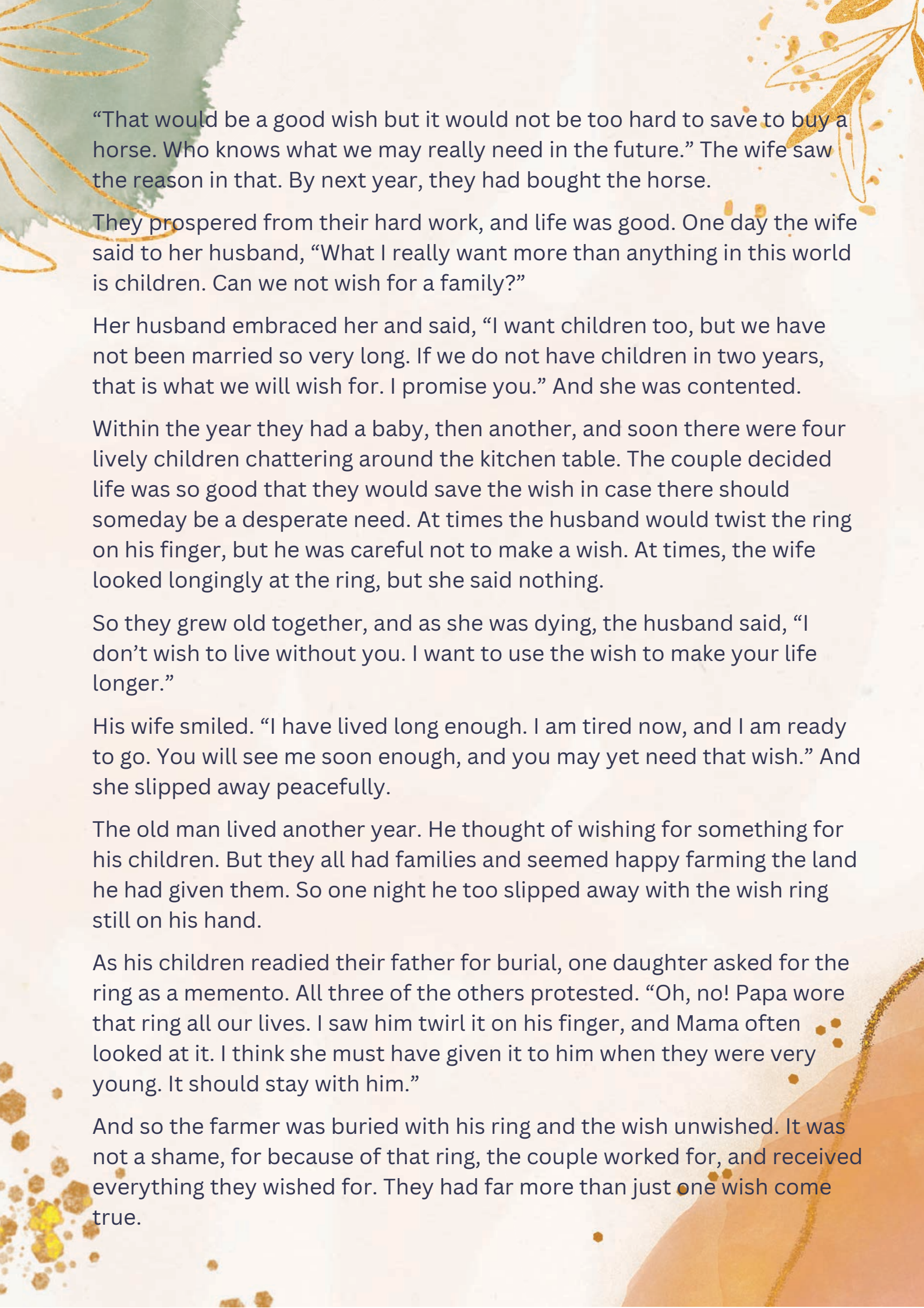
“Oh, no. You needn’t pay me.”

“Tis not a payment, but a gift for your kindness. Turn it round twice on your finger, and it will grant a wish. But it contains only one wish, so consider carefully what you really want.” And she went on her way.

He farmed the second field, and when he got home shows his wife the ring. They weren’t sure whether to believe it, but dozens of fantastic wishes came into their heads. We could wish for a castle. I’ve always dreamed of being a princess. How about a large ship. I’d fancy being a sea captain. Or a solid gold carriage. Or a huge diamond. After a while, they settled down to reality and the wife said, “I think it makes the most sense to wish for the piece of land between our two fields.”

The husband agreed, “But darling, if we work hard and save our money, we could buy that land. Let’s not was the wish on something we can get for ourselves.”

The wife agreed, and they worked hard for several years. The crops were good, and they bought that piece of land. Then the wife suggested, “Let us wish for a horse to help us plow the extra land.”



“That would be a good wish but it would not be too hard to save to buy a horse. Who knows what we may really need in the future.” The wife saw the reason in that. By next year, they had bought the horse.

They prospered from their hard work, and life was good. One day the wife said to her husband, “What I really want more than anything in this world is children. Can we not wish for a family?”

Her husband embraced her and said, “I want children too, but we have not been married so very long. If we do not have children in two years, that is what we will wish for. I promise you.” And she was contented.

Within the year they had a baby, then another, and soon there were four lively children chattering around the kitchen table. The couple decided life was so good that they would save the wish in case there should someday be a desperate need. At times the husband would twist the ring on his finger, but he was careful not to make a wish. At times, the wife looked longingly at the ring, but she said nothing.

So they grew old together, and as she was dying, the husband said, “I don’t wish to live without you. I want to use the wish to make your life longer.”

His wife smiled. “I have lived long enough. I am tired now, and I am ready to go. You will see me soon enough, and you may yet need that wish.” And she slipped away peacefully.

The old man lived another year. He thought of wishing for something for his children. But they all had families and seemed happy farming the land he had given them. So one night he too slipped away with the wish ring still on his hand.

As his children readied their father for burial, one daughter asked for the ring as a memento. All three of the others protested. “Oh, no! Papa wore that ring all our lives. I saw him twirl it on his finger, and Mama often looked at it. I think she must have given it to him when they were very young. It should stay with him.”

And so the farmer was buried with his ring and the wish unwished. It was not a shame, for because of that ring, the couple worked for, and received everything they wished for. They had far more than just one wish come true.