

The Trilogy of the Three Wishes

By

John Poulson

Part 1) The Story of Prince the Parrot

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Part 3) How Susan's Music Saved the Forest

The end of 1945 had been a bitterly cold start to the winter, but now it was February 1946. The war was over; the days were getting longer and the weather was milder. Throughout Britain people were trying to return back to something like normality. Jen, who was 10 years old and her sister Susan, who was 12 had been evacuated from Manchester at the start of the war. They were sent to live with their grandparents on a smallholding in rural Lancashire. This is their story and the strange events that beset them..... But wait a minute, this is a traditional children's story and traditional children's stories nearly always begin with the same beginning.....

The Story of Prince the Parrot

Once upon a time not so very long ago lived a beautiful green and blue and yellow and red parrot. He was called Prince and he was the favourite pet of a lovely young girl called Jennifer; but most people called her Jen. Her mother and father on the other hand often called her their princess, because they loved her and they thought she was the most beautiful girl in the world.

Jen was living with her grandparents and an older sister, Susan, in the small rural village called Lydiate Bridge. Lydiate Bridge sat snugly amidst the flat rich farm lands of the Lancashire plain. Jen who was both strong in character as well as strong and lithe physically had never wanted for friendship and companions. But for all that, her best friend was Prince the Parrot. Jen thought the world of Prince. She confided in him all her secrets,

knowing that he could always be relied on never to tell them to anyone else.

To say that Prince wasn't a very good talker would be a huge understatement. But despite Prince being the worst talking parrot in the world, Jen still loved him and would feed him the finest seeds; give him the freshest spring water and tell him stories and fables from the four corners of the world.

One night, nearing the end of the winter a great storm approached from far out to sea in the Atlantic ocean. The raindrops fell from the sky like a waterfall cascaded down from the high peaks of a mountain. The wind began to howl as it blew in from the sea. It blew through the towns and villages, dislodging roof tiles throwing them into the air as if they were as light as confetti. It destroyed bridges and uprooted trees by the score. It sent birds and animals colliding into one another. It smashed flimsy garden sheds to pieces, sending them sailing high into the sky like ships on a stormy sea. It cracked open small boats moored in the Ribble estuary, leaving their remains floating like matchsticks in the surging torrents of water.

While most people huddled in their houses, listening to the raging storm outside and hoping that it would soon stop, the fierce west wind continued to roar across the sky howling and screeching his ferocious call and destroying many things in his path.

As he thundered through Lydiate Bridge and past Jen's house, he noticed a little gap in an upstairs window – and, not wanting to miss an opportunity for destruction, blew into Jen's bedroom. Jen who was a very deep sleeper, slept soundly – warm and cosy under her thick blankets which she clutched tightly around her body.

In the far corner of the room on an ornately carved table stood the cage of Prince the Parrot. He was also trying to sleep. The cage was covered by a warm silk scarf of many rich colours. And as the wind blew into the bedroom lifting the silk scarf

from the cage and giving Prince such a start that he nearly fell off his perch.

Half asleep and not knowing what had happened, Prince opened his eyes and as he did so to his amazement he saw a swirling ghostly figure like nothing he had ever seen before.

“Who are you?” asked Prince, fluffing out his multi coloured plumage in a very majestic way. He was a brave bird and not one to be overawed, even in such unusual circumstances. Besides, Jen was still asleep and he had to do something to distract this strange creature.

“What are you doing in my room?” demanded Prince.

The transparent figure turned towards Prince in a swirling gust of air and sighed, much like a steam engine coming to a halt after a long and arduous journey.

“Wooooooshsh.....I am the spirit of the Great West Winnnndd..... And you’re not actually supposed to be able to see me,” it gasped in a much put out sort of way.

Prince, who could not decide what it was that he was most surprised about – the fact that he could talk - or that he could understand what this spectre said to him - or that he could see the thing in the first place – said...

“But I CAN see you – so there.

“It sometimes happens that living things can see me. Although it hasn’t happened for more than a thousand years,” said the Spirit of the West Wind; looking somewhat less powerful and blustery and in fact a little nervous. If you can imagine a destructive phenomenon capable of flattening forests looking nervous.

“What’s the matter?” asked Prince.

The West Wind gave an enormous sigh before explaining to Prince that as long as the parrot held him in his gaze he could not leave the room to carry on wreaking havoc and destruction across the land, which happened to be the West Wind's favourite game.

Prince, who was not one to miss a trick, quickly saw an opportunity for some fun.

"I'll tell you what I will do," said the mischievous parrot. "I will let you go on your way if you will do something for me."

"Tell me what you want and if it is within my power to grant it, then I will," replied the Spirit of the West Wind.

Prince pondered for a moment as a thought emerged in his mind and grew and grew and grew. Eventually he came out with it.

"What I want is to escape from my cage for one night and fly with you across the skies. I want to see forests, great rivers, hills and mountains and all the animals and birds that live across the whole wide world. But I must be back in my nice warm room safe and sound by morning and in time for my breakfast."

"So be it," said the Spirit of the West Wind, "but beware! In order for this to happen, your spirit must leave your body sleeping soundly in your cage. Your spirit will fly with me across the sky and you will see all that you have asked for. If however you do not return before dawn then your spirit can never unite with your body again and you will be condemned to roam the earth as a genie."

"I understand completely," said the confident parrot. "I will be back before dawn. I never miss my breakfast."

And as Jen rolled over in her sleep, comfortable and unknowing of all that had gone on around her, the two spirits flew off into the night.

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The following morning Jen woke with the clear winter sun rising over the eastern hills, silhouetting the Lydiate Bridge Parish Church steeple against the turquoise sky. The rays of sunlight projected a rainbow pattern on her bedroom wall as Jen stretched like a cat; jumped out of bed grabbing her dressing gown and sauntered over to Prince's cage. As she walked towards the cage, she lazily began humming a tune that she had learned at school the day before. It was a lovely day and she was happy. It was Saturday; no school and she could do what ever she liked. It was then that she noticed that the silk cover lay half on and half off the cage.

Jen thought to herself, "that is strange, I am sure that I put that on straight last night." But she dismissed it as soon as she thought of it. It wasn't important. Jen walked over and picked up the parrot seed bag and water jug that stood next to the ornate table. She leaned over towards the cage and removed the silk scarf.

WHAT MET HER STARE NEARLY TURNED HER HEART TO STONE!

On the floor of the cage, still and lifeless lay her beautiful parrot. It's red, green, blue and yellow feathers glistened in the sunlight streaming in through the window.

Jen dropped both seed and water as she screamed for her sister, who came running from the next bedroom wondering what on earth had happened. At the same time Jen's grandmother came bounding up the stairs fearing the worst. As soon as Susan entered the room she realised that Prince the Parrot was dead.

Susan and her grandmother spent the rest of the morning trying to comfort Jen without much success and the more they tried the more Jen sank into a deep melancholy. To make matters worse, at lunch time Jen's grandfather came home. He had given Jen the parrot as a present. He, being a rather silly old man who always thought he knew the answer to everything, accused her of negligence; saying that she had not been feeding, watering and exercising the bird properly. Jen knew that this was not true but she still felt guilty and responsible for what had happened and with tears flooding her eyes, she ran out of the house.

After walking around the village for some time in the cold afternoon sunshine, Jen decided to go and see a friend of Susan's, who was in her class at school. His name was Paul. Paul was a clever young man but rather eccentric which was what both Jen and Susan liked about him. He was also very good at conjuring tricks. But most of the other children thought him strange.

"Weird is cool!" Susan had said to Jen one time, "and nobody is weirder than Paul."

As it was Saturday, Jen knew that Paul would be at home in his own little workshop practicing his magic tricks. His house was only a quarter of a mile down the hill from Jen's house. As Jen walked down the hill towards Paul's house she remembered Susan telling her how the other kids at school thought that Paul was just too weird because he had an uncanny ability of dreaming about things before they actually happened.

"Whether this was true or not," thought Jen, "Paul has always been kind and helpful to me and I need someone to help me understand what happened to Prince and Why!"

It wasn't very long before Jen was sitting in Paul's shed, drinking a glass of ginger beer and telling him of the tragedy that had befallen her. When Jen had finished, Paul looked

thoughtfully into space, his eyes wandering aimlessly around the studio.

All around him, the room was filled with pots of paint, brushes, paper of every kind, chisels, saws, hammers and all manner of tools, scattered in chaotic abandonment.

To the outsider it looked like an untidy mess – but Paul knew where every box of screws, every pot of paint, and every brush lay, as well as every chisel and piece of wood. Within this landscape of boyhood creativity, Jen told Paul of her loss.

After she had finished speaking, Paul became very thoughtful - as he reflected on the events that he was already aware of - but felt unable to tell Jen. Some moments went by before Paul said to her,

“You know there is much more to this than meets the eye. Parrots don’t just drop dead without any apparent reason. Particularly one’s that have so much to live for.”

He scratched his head as he looked into her tear stained eyes. Then very uncharacteristically and rather dismissively he said to Jen,

“It’s going to take me some time to think about this. If I come up with anything I will come round in a few days and we can talk about it. In the meantime I suggest that you go home, carry on as best you can and if I haven’t got back to you, come and see me. But I’m a little busy just now.”

Then he added in a more sympathetic tone, “But remember Jen; you are not to blame yourself. You loved that bird and gave it all the kindness you could.”

And as he watched her walk down the garden path into the fading light of the chilly wintry afternoon, he thought to himself. “I can’t tell her what really happened she will think I am completely bonkers.”

He turned and walked back into the shed but before he had sat back on his stool. The shed door flew open as Jen stood in the space it had vacated.

“You know something – don’t you? Are you going to take this seriously or are you just intent on patronising me?” Jen shouted. It was obvious she wasn’t very happy with the advice he had given her.

“What do you mean?” grinned Paul, unwrapping a chocolate bar and pouring out his second glass of ginger beer.

“I came here for some serious help and all you do is roll your eyes around in your head, stuff your face with chocolate and swill down pop.”

It wasn’t like Jen to be so rude, particularly not to a friend. But the shock of losing her beloved parrot had really upset her and Paul knew that she didn’t mean what she had said. But he still needed to keep his secret for the time being.

“Well I’ve helped some already, haven’t I?” asked Paul.

“What do you mean?” replied Jen, the anger clearly showing now in her deep brown eyes.

“I’ve stopped you feeling sorry for yourself by making you mad at me,” laughed Paul; his fat tummy wobbling up and down like an oversized jelly.

“Get lost!” shouted Jen, slamming the door behind her as she stormed out of the ram shackled shed. She never ever thought Paul would be so cruel. He had always been such a good friend and with only the faint sound of a muffled giggle emanating from a chocolate stained face from within the shed, she made her way home.

Not long after Jen left, Paul fell into a deep sleep and while he slept he had the strangest of dreams. The dream was the same dream he had had the previous night. It told him of how the Spirit of the West Wind had entered Jen’s bedroom in the dead

of night and of the pact that Prince the Parrot had made in order to visit the forests, hills and lakes and of all the wonderful sights the parrot had seen.

What the dream also told Paul was that Prince had had a strange encounter during his journey.

All had gone well at first and Prince was delighted with his flight of discovery. But nearing the end of his journey, Prince began to feel very tired.

“Strange,” thought Prince, “I am practically weightless and the West Wind is keeping me airborne, even though I am flying against it. But I do feel really tired.

It was as Prince was passing a beautiful wood stretching out along a valley bottom not that far from his home, that Prince decided to land. Although he didn't know it at the time, the place was called Cuerden Valley. It had a clear crystal river snaking through the forest floor. The river seemed to have sparkling jewels of reflected light floating in the water. It looked so inviting that Prince decided to have a rest.

He floated down and landed on the branch of an ancient dead oak tree in a sheltered part of the wood. But little did he know that longing eyes had already spied the beautiful coloured Spirit-bird.

For deep within that ancient oak, awaiting the coming of spring, slumbered “*JACK IN THE GREEN*”, guardian of all the trees and plants that grew in the forest.

Jack had never seen such a beautiful multi coloured spirit-bird and vowed that he would catch it and keep it to give to his beloved, Dwynwen the water nymph. And so with magic and cunning, he created an image of the tastiest seeds, fruits and clearest water and set it out on a tray just inside a large hole in the oak tree.

Prince, who had always been too greedy for his own good, just couldn't resist the temptation. Without a second's hesitation, he

hopped into the dark hole and onto the tray. Alas, no sooner had he done it, than the tree closed in on him and he was trapped. There Prince had to stay, afraid and in complete darkness, until the morning sun rose from the east heralding a new day and ensuring that never again would he be able to return home to his cage and the warm room he shared with Jen.

Paul suddenly woke with a start. It was late in the afternoon. He rubbed his eyes to clear them before grabbing a pen and notebook and writing down all that he had dreamed.

It disturbed Paul that such a fate had befallen his young friend's beloved pet bird. He also felt a bit guilty for upsetting her. But no one was going to take notice of his weird dream unless he could get some evidence. He decided therefore that the very next day he would set off to Cuerden and go and search for the old oak tree. He knew more or less where the place was because his mum and dad had taken him once for a hiking trip. It wouldn't take him more than a day, to get there and back on his bicycle.

But for now he needed to see Jen and try to comfort her. She had seemed very upset when she had left earlier. And so Paul set out to Jen's house. But on arriving he was told that she had become quite ill with sadness and had been put to bed by her Grandmother.

The next day saw another frosty sunny start to the winter morning. And so, straight after breakfast, Paul told his mum and dad that he was going for a day's biking. He wasn't sure they were convinced by his tale about needing more exercise and wanting to get fit, but it was Sunday; he didn't have to go to school so they made no objection to him going. He collected together what tools he thought he might need, plus something for lunch and packed them into his rucksack. He then cycled east with the early morning frost crackling under the weight of the bike as it sped down empty roads.

It was nearly 12 o'clock by the time he arrived in Cuerden and after consulting the crude map that he had drawn from what he remembered from his dream, Paul soon found the tree.

“That was the easy part. Now was going to be the hard part,” thought Paul; despite the aching in his legs and bottom, from the cycle ride he just wasn't built for.

“I have got to work fast,” Paul murmured to himself as he unloaded his tools.

He knew that he was going to have to deal with fairy magic before it was any use hammering away with a mallet and chisel.

Before Paul would be able to release Prince the Parrot from the fairy king's trap, he would have to acquire “the luck of the wood”, which would enable him to see into the tree and find exactly where Prince was imprisoned.

At this point you might be asking yourself, “What is the luck of the wood and how did Paul know this?” To explain I will have to tell you about Paul's grandfather who had worked in wood for more than 50 years and was reputed to have been a bit of a wizard at making things.

What people hadn't realized was that Paul's grandfather really was a WIZARD!

He taught Paul many things that most people regarded as nonsense or old folk tales or just plain old superstition.

And because of this knowledge, Paul had come prepared. He reached into his pocket and withdrew a crumpled piece of very old parchment. After carefully unfolding it he began to read out aloud a strange verse that he had been told would give him the luck of the wood.

And these are the words that he spoke:-

“I walk through the wood to where the great oak tree stood
And I bow do I to the great oak tree

And it lets me go down to the depths of its crown
And luck it goes with me up and down
From the wood, the wonderful wood.

Now show me your prize oh “king of the greenwood”

No sooner had Paul spoken these words in front of the ancient oak tree, than things started to change. The tree began to shimmer and take on a translucent state.

What had been a hard dark dead trunk, covered with ivy, seemed to take on an opaque glass like appearance. This was made even more magical by the fact that the morning mist still swirled around the lower part of the oak tree, blanketing the forest floor.

Paul didn't waste any time, for he knew that this wouldn't last long. He took out from his rucksack, an ancient bow saw and began to cut just above and just below the area where he could just make out the form of a bird in a statuesque pose. The bird's wings were outstretched and its head reaching forward, as though it was trying to fly away.

Paul worked hard with chisel and saw until eventually he was able to take out a piece of oak wood about the size of a shoe box that shimmered and glowed in the strange vapour, swirling at the base of the tree. Paul bent and laid the piece of wood on the ground and no sooner had he done it than it became nothing more than a plain piece of wood.

The tree returned to its natural colour and texture and to Paul's amazement the hole in the tree he had just made disappeared completely.

It was as if nothing had happened.

So without further ado Paul sat down on a tree stump close by and started to carve the piece of wood with the skill of an experienced craftsman.

He chiselled and chipped and smoothed, slowly teasing out the form of the trapped bird until eventually he finished working and placed the sculpted wood on the ground. In that instant, with a flash and a loud crack! The Spirit of Prince rose out of the statue and flew into the afternoon sunshine, free from its prison at last.

“Thanks for getting me out of there,” squawked Prince in his new guise as the ghostly parrot spirit.

“It’s time to go home,” said Paul, “I am a friend of Jen’s and she misses you terribly.”

“I’m afraid I can’t do that,” replied Prince, “for I am no longer a mortal bird. My destiny now is to roam forever as a genie of the forest.”

And with that he soared high into the sky above the tree tops.

“Wait!” shouted Paul, “surely you owe me something for getting you out of there?”

“OK,” said Prince, “I will grant you a wish.

“You have ten seconds,” he squawked in a strange high pitched laugh.

Paul was a little taken aback. He hadn’t expected this, and so wasn’t prepared for it at all. What had become of the beautiful friendly pet parrot?

“Yes! The bird always was a cheeky imp, but he’s taken on this new role like a fish takes to water,” thought Paul.

“OK,” said Paul, “I wish that Jen reverts back to being her happy self and that er!she enjoys happiness throughout her life.

After all you were her favourite pet and it is because of her that I am here trying to help you.”

“Fine, it is done,” screeched Prince the Genie, through bouts of high pitched laughter.

“What is the matter with you?” called out Paul, who was beginning to feel rather annoyed by the attitude of this pompous creature. He had always been such a friendly bird, apart from the odd peck on the finger when you weren’t watching.

“Squawk! Squawk! Squawk!” screamed Prince, “what a fool you are.”

“What do you mean and why do you say that?” snarled Paul through gritted teeth.

“For a start,” croaked Prince, “everyone has periods of happiness throughout their lives. That was a stupid wish. You were swayed by sentimentality and by your own feelings towards your young friend.

And secondly everyone knows that genies can grant three wishes. You should have wished for the other two wishes.” And without further ado he vanished.

All that was left was a distant squawking echo lingering across the valley becoming fainter and fainter until that too disappeared.

On the ground lay the wooden sculpture of the bird from which Prince had escaped. Paul bent down and picked it up.

“What a waste of time that was,” he thought, throwing it into his rucksack.

And after carefully picking up all his tools and placing them in the bag with the wooden bird, he set off home.

It took him a long time to reach Lydiate Bridge, but instead of going straight home, Paul stopped at Jen and Susan’s house. He knocked at the door and was welcomed in by the happy smiling face of Jen.

“Oh! Your back. Where have you been?” she asked. “I went to see you this afternoon. I feel so much better than I did yesterday and I know I was silly to get so upset about Prince. I will miss him terribly but I know it wasn’t my fault, even though my granddad said it was. I was a bit stroppy with you and I’m sorry. I had a weird dream last night and I know he’s in a good place now”

Paul sat down in the living room and told Jen and Susan the story of his dream and everything he had done that day. The two sisters sat silently through the telling of the adventure, both with mouths half open in disbelief. Susan was the first to speak and when she did it was in a loud mocking tone.

“That was a very good tale, but you’re crazy if you think we’re going to believe that. Things like that don’t happen..... You are very weird Paul,” she continued.

“Oh but they do!” exclaimed Paul. “Magic didn’t just exist thousands of years ago. It has always been there. It is all around us.”

“Rubbish!” said Susan. “Magic never existed.”

Suddenly Jen who had been completely silent until now, spoke, “I dreamed a dream last night very similar to your story,” she said. “Only the ending was different.”

Oh don’t you start,” interrupted Susan.

“In my dream, after Prince escaped from the tree, he flew off to a secret hideaway through a magic door that opened and closed all by itself,” continued Jen, ignoring Susan who was looking blankly into space.

“In this place Prince had a golden cage that stood on a box of fabulous treasure. The box was in a strange cave; in a forest and all the plants were blooming as though it was summer.”

“That’s why I felt so much better this morning,” continued Jen. “The dream made me think that Prince was ok. He was in such a beautiful place. But I never thought that it could be real. I just thought it was me.....”

This time Paul interrupted her. “Say that again about a box of treasure only give us a bit more detail.”

“What.... What do you mean,” asked Jen, more than a little confused.

“Just go through it again,” said Paul, “only a little more slowly and say how it happened..... in detail.”

“You two are completely bonkers,” chipped in Susan, despite the fact that she was all ears and eager to hear it again.

Jen began to speak slowly. “..... and Prince flew away from the old oak tree, along the river to a banking where there was a secret hideaway and he went through a magic door....”

“How did he get through the magic door?” butted in Paul before Jen could finish her sentence.

“I don’t know!” she cried, “just let me tell you what I can remember.”

“Ok, Ok sorry,” said Paul.

Jen carried on reciting her dream. “In this place he had a golden cage which stood on a box full of treasure and that is all I can remember.”

The three of them sat in silence for what seemed an age until Jen broke the silence.

“That ungrateful bird owes you 2 wishes Paul. And I think we should go and find him and get the 2 wishes,” she shouted.

You’re dead right,” agreed Paul, “and if the treasure really exists I wouldn’t mind some of it.”

“Yeah!!” thought Susan out loud, “I’m up for it.” Still only half believing the bizarre tale but getting more interested every minute.

And so the three adventurers decided to plan what to do.

They spent all that evening and the next one talking until finally they had the bones of a plan. And so they decided to.....

Ah but that’s another story for later.

