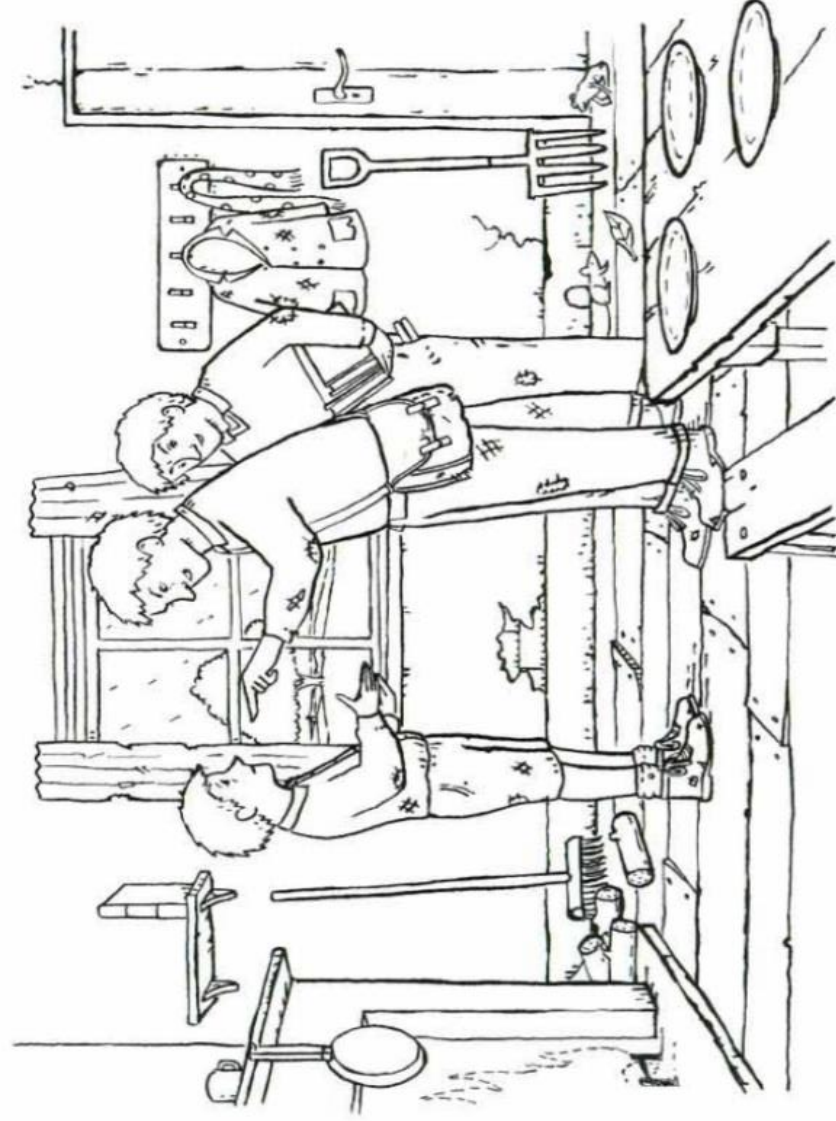


1 Ben's wishes

I have an uncle who writes books for children. I didn't see my uncle very often when I was a child because he lived in Africa, but he came to see us sometimes. When he did visit us, he usually told me one of his stories. I loved them all but 'Ben's wishes' was my favourite. My uncle told it to me one winter when it was very cold outside. I was about ten, I think.



A boy called Ben had two older brothers. The older boys often felt hungry and often got angry because they were so poor.

'Go and work in the fields!' they said to Ben each morning. 'Dig up some vegetables! Make us some soup for dinner!'

Ben always answered in the same way. 'But I want to go to school and learn all about the world!' The brothers just laughed and said, 'Don't be silly! You aren't clever enough to go to school like us.'

So Ben didn't go anywhere. He just worked in the fields in the rain, digging and planting, and planting and digging.

Then he opened a small book that belonged to one of his brothers. Ben looked at the cup one more time and said, 'I'm lucky to have this book with me today, but I'd like 100 new books so I can learn all about the world, please.'

Suddenly, 100 new books fell from between the leaves in the tree above him. Ben couldn't believe it! He felt so lucky!



He laughed and laughed, put the old cup in his pocket, carried the books home, sat down by the fire and read them all.



When Ben's older brothers came home, they were really angry.

'Where's our dinner? Where's our vegetable soup?' they shouted.

Ben looked up and said, 'I found an old cup in the field today. I think it understands about wishes. It gave me hot chocolate, a warm coat and 100 new books to read. I've learned all about the world and all the animals that live in our world too. If you want your dinner, just ask the silver cup for it!'

The two older brothers looked at Ben's new coat, his new books and the silver cup on the table. One of them picked it up. He got very angry. 'We have a wish too! Give us our dinner! We want it this minute!' he said.

The empty bowls were suddenly full of vegetable soup. The brothers couldn't believe it!

'Cup!' the oldest brother shouted. 'Give me a room full of money.'

'Give me more money than my brother and a room full of sweets,' the other brother said.

Suddenly, there were sweets and money everywhere. The brothers began to fight.

'Give me that cup!' one shouted.

'No!' the other one said. 'It's mine. It's not yours. Give it to me!'



The cup fell on the ground and broke, and all the sweets, the money, the vegetable soup, Ben's warm coat and his 100 new books disappeared.

They were nowhere in the house.

I felt very sad when my uncle told me that part of the story. But then he added, 'But the cup couldn't make all the stories about the world disappear from Ben's head. And when Ben was a man, he visited all the countries in the world and wrote lots of stories about the animals and people who lived there to tell to children.'

I never knew my uncle's first name. I just called him Uncle.

Perhaps, just perhaps, it was Ben.



The glove, the fork and the old pair of glasses



Emma was on holiday with her parents and she was bored. There were too many people in the swimming pool. She had no-one to play tennis with and her mum and dad just wanted to sit in the sun, so Emma walked down to the beach and sat on the sand.

‘What a boring day!’ she thought.

Then something hit her on the head. It was a beach ball.

‘Sorry!’ a little boy said. He picked up his ball and stood in front of her. He was only about six or seven. Emma wanted him to go away.

‘What do you want?’ Emma asked him.

‘Nothing,’ he said. ‘But you look unhappy. What’s the matter?’

‘I’m bored,’ Emma said.

‘We could look for treasure,’ the little boy said.

Emma thought that was a silly idea. ‘Where are your parents?’ she asked.

‘They’re on our ship, out there by the island. I’m the son of a pirate,’ he said.

Emma laughed. ‘There’s no ship and you can’t be a pirate,’ she said. ‘Pirates are only in stories.’

The boy didn’t move. ‘I am the son of a pirate and our ship *is* there. You can’t see it because you believe that we’re only in stories.’

Emma thought the little boy was funny, and suddenly she didn’t feel bored. ‘OK,’ she said, and stood up. ‘Let’s look for treasure!’

The boy pointed at some rocks. ‘Shall we look there?’ he whispered.

Between the rocks there were lots of pools of sea water. They were full of small fish and shells.

‘Those shells are lovely, aren’t they?’ the little boy said. ‘They’re a kind of treasure.’

‘Hmmm,’ Emma said. Then she saw something blue in the rock pool too.

‘What’s that? It’s a glove, isn’t it?’

‘Yes,’ the little boy said. ‘Perhaps someone lost it here in the winter.’ He picked up the wet glove. ‘This is a kind of treasure too,’ he said, and put it in a big bag that he carried on his shoulder.





There was something at the bottom of the next rock pool too.

‘What’s that?’ Emma asked. ‘It looks like a silver fork. Can you get it for me?’

‘Of course,’ said the little boy. He pulled out the silver fork and put it in his bag too.

Then Emma saw something else. There was an old pair of glasses in another rock pool. She pointed to them and the little boy pulled them out.

‘More treasure!’ he laughed.

Then they arrived at another rock pool. Emma and the little boy looked down into the water. It was very, very deep.

‘It’s dangerous here,’ Emma said. ‘Come on. Let’s go back to the beach.’

But the little boy said, ‘Look! There’s a ring under that black and gold fish. I’ll get it for you. That’s the best kind of treasure!’

‘But the water’s too deep. That fish has got very big teeth. It looks angry. And that crab might bite you too!’ Emma said.

The little boy put his bag down on the rock. ‘I’m not afraid. I’m the son of a pirate, so deep water, fish with big teeth and crabs aren’t problems for me,’ he said.

The little boy took out the glove, the fork and the old pair of glasses. He put the glove on his hand. Then he put the old pair of glasses on to the end of the fork and put his hand and arm into the deep water. The fish couldn't bite through the glove and the little boy hooked the ring out of the water with the end of the glasses. He gave it to Emma.

The ring was beautiful, but when Emma looked up to say thank you to the little boy, he wasn't there. She was very surprised.

Where was he? Emma didn't know, but she carried the ring carefully back to the hotel to show her parents. They weren't sitting in the sun, so Emma went upstairs to their room. Emma's mother was there. She looked very sad.

'What's the matter, Mum?' Emma asked.

'I've lost my beautiful gold ring. I went for a swim in the sea and it came off my finger.'

Emma opened her hand. 'Is this it?' she asked.

'Yes!' her mother said. 'Where did you find it?'

'The son of a pirate found it in a rock pool,' Emma answered.

Emma looked out of the hotel window. A pirate ship was sailing away and a little boy was waving to her.

And this time, Emma could see them both – the son of a pirate *and* the pirate ship!





Robert and the three envelopes

Robert lived in a flat in a tall grey building in the middle of a big city. When he looked out of his window, he could only see more tall grey buildings and lots of roads and noisy traffic. Sometimes, this made Robert feel sad. He liked watching television programmes about climbing mountains and going to places where there were waterfalls, lakes and beautiful beaches. He loved reading stories about ships that sailed across the sea and about people who lived on strange islands or in other exciting places.



‘Why must we live here in the city?’ he asked his mother.

‘Because my job at the busy hospital is here, Robert. But perhaps we can have a nice holiday in the countryside next summer. Would you like that?’

‘Oh yes!’ Robert laughed.

That night, when Robert went to bed he thought about going on holiday. But then he remembered something. Last year, his mother said the same thing, but they didn’t go to the countryside. They spent the summer at home in the city because they didn’t have enough money to buy train tickets or stay in a hotel in the countryside.

Robert opened the envelope. There was a piece of blue paper inside with some writing on it. Robert read it carefully.

‘If you find me, go and look in your biggest, oldest book.’

Robert couldn’t understand the message but he put the piece of paper in his pocket.

When he got home he sat down and looked at the message again.

‘“In your biggest, oldest book”,’ he thought. ‘What does that mean?’

Robert decided to try something. He got a chair from the kitchen and carried it into the living room. Then he put the chair in front of the bookcase and stood on it. The biggest and oldest book was at the top of the bookcase. Robert took it down from the shelf. It was very heavy.



Robert opened it and a thin envelope fell out. Inside the envelope was a little book. Its pages were yellow because they were so old, and they had lots of numbers on them. He jumped down and ran back into the kitchen to show the little book to his mother.

‘What’s this?’ he asked her.

His mother took the book and opened it.

‘It’s the kind of book that banks gave people a long time ago,’ she said. ‘This person had lots of money in the bank. And look! There’s a name on the front. It says “Helen Bird”. I don’t believe it! That was my grandmother’s name! I’ll go to the bank tomorrow and show this to Mr Flag.’

When Robert's mother gave the old book to Mr Flag the next day, he looked at it very carefully, picked up his telephone and spoke to someone in an excited kind of way. Then he put the telephone down again. He had a big smile on his face.

'Well,' he said, 'you must thank your son for finding this little book. Your grandmother left all this money in our bank for you a long time ago, but we didn't know that until now. What are you going to buy with it?'

Robert's mother smiled. 'Something that Robert wants very much.'

When Robert came home from school later that afternoon, he found a bigger envelope on the kitchen table. 'Open it!' his mother said.

Inside the envelope were two plane tickets and two train tickets and two boat tickets!

'Robert, Mr Flag at the bank says we've got enough money now. We're going to have a wonderful holiday.'

'Because of your grandmother's little book?' Robert asked.

'Yes,' his mother said.

Robert looked out of the window at the sky. He couldn't see the big black and white bird high in the clouds, but he knew the bird was there.



'And because of the big black and white bird!' Robert smiled.

'What do you mean?' his mother asked.

'That's my secret!' Robert said.