

THREE WISHES

By **POUL ANDERSON**

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*Some writers achieve lasting fame with a single story. Others never win any fame at all—they simply fade into that Limbo where forgotten writers go. But a few, though not famous overnight, have a more satisfying fate—because over the years they keep developing and refining their talent until one day they wake up dominant figures in their field. That's where Poul Anderson is now. Astonishingly versatile, he repeatedly shows that he can go from such weighty novels as *The High Crusade* to polished miniatures like "Three Wishes"—in which kindly Papa Himmelschoen has everything going for him, until a figurine named Iulia begins granting wishes that soon put an end to all that.*

PAPA HIMMELSCHOEN got the little statue quite by accident. He had fixed a pair of pants for Mrs. Polanyi's youngest son, and before she could pay him, her husband lost his job. When she told Papa about it and asked how she could make it up to him, he smiled and spread his hands and told her to forget the bill.

"Ach, so liddle a ting it iss," he said. "Let it be a fafor from vun neighbor to anudder."

"But we are not your neighbors," said Mrs. Polanyi. She was tall and straight and dark, and spoke English better than most people thereabouts, in spite of being from Hungary or some such outlandish place. "We live two blocks down."

"Vell, ve are all neighbors on de goot green eart," said Papa Himmelschoen. There was not a blade of grass for miles, only sidewalks and tenements, and the

hot air smelt of gasoline and garlic. But he liked to talk that way. "Forget it, please."

"No," said Mrs. Polanyi. "In spite of all they say about the Romany folk, we do pay our debts, for good or ill. And since we may have to move away soon looking for work, I will pay you the only way I can." So she brought him the statue. Soon afterward her family did go, and Papa never heard of them again.

The statue was sure a pretty little thing, and it must have been very old. It was bronze, and green with many hundred years. It. No—*she*. You could not be thinking of that tiny laughing girl with the wings on her shoulders as anything but *she*. Papa set her up on his bench and got much pleasure from looking at her now and then while he worked. But then, Papa got pleasure from everything. Maybe he was the only really happy man in the world.

But he had much to be happy about. It isn't everyone who can come over as a scared hungry little kid and end up as the best custom tailor in town. Maybe everybody didn't know Himmelschoen was the best, but enough people knew it to keep him busy at the work he liked. And his Martha was a fine woman—the best of wives—always cheerful like himself and a cook for angels. Their kids were all doing

well too. Herman had come back from the war with lots of medals and had started a booming used-car business, and Esther was married to a good boy and had given them a fat little rascal of a grandson, and Morris was at the University doing something big in physics and all the time getting his name in the papers. Yes, life had been good to Papa Himmelschoen.

So it happened one morning that he came down into the shop from the upstairs flat where he and Martha lived, full of her fine breakfast and glad with all the world. "Goot morning, goot morning, goot morning!" he cried to the shears and the sewing machine and the bolts of cloth. "A happy goot morning to all!" And as a ray of sunshine came dustily in and touched his little bronze girl: "Und goot morning to you too!" And he picked her up and kissed her, so good was he feeling.

"Yipe!" cried Papa Himmelschoen, and let her go. For all of a sudden there was a warm wiggling thing in his hand, like a puppy dog maybe. And when his fingers opened, the little girl flew out and perched on the counter. Only she wasn't bronze any more, she was live flesh and blood, with little sparkles of light dusted over her wings. A real live fairy!

She yawned and stretched her-



self, and her voice was like little fiddles and bells. "Oh my, I've slept a long time!"

"Who iss you?" asked Papa, getting up nerve.

"Oh, I am Iulia," she answered, curtsying very prettily. "Morgan le Fay was angered with me and condemned me to sleep in the form of a bronze statue until the Happy Prince kissed me and brought me back to life." She looked him up and down and her face got puzzled. "But are you a prince?"

"No, no, liddle lady, I am chust old Himmelschoen," he said, keeping his eyes away and not calling Martha down to look at this. Because a statue without clothes on is one thing, but a live girl in the same is another, and he was an old married man.

"Pleasse," he said, taking out his handkerchief, "do you mind wrapping dis around your . . . uh . . . around you?"

"Why in Faerie should I do that?" asked Iulia.

"Vell—dey dress different now," said Papa Himmelschoen.

"As you wish, my deliverer," said she, and tucked the handkerchief around her middle.

"No, no, a liddle higher up too, if you pleasse," begged Papa. "Up around de—de lungs too."

"I can't," said Iulia, after trying. "My wings get in the way." So she sat down, dangling her feet over the edge of the counter,

and looked at him instead. "I never thought the Happy Prince would be thus," she murmured. "Have you no royal blood at all?"

"I am chust a common old man," said Papa. "But I am happy, efen if you are not dressing qvite de vay I like ladies in my shop should dress."

"But you must be a prince!" cried Iulia. "Just a moment, I will look into your time line if you don't mind—a few centuries back—"

"You vill *not*!" said Papa firmly. "Undecent enough you are already!"

But Iulia had already done it. She nodded and smiled. "Quite all right," she said. "I notice descent from several Electors of Brandenburg by their mistresses, from Frederick Barbarossa by a girl he met at an inn, from Charlemagne by fifteen different—"

"Shtop! Shtop!" cried Papa, as close to anger as he ever got. "First my shop you run around like it was a bating beach only more so, den you defame my ancestors, und vot now?"

"Now I must get back to Faerie," said Iulia. "It's been such a long time!" She paused as she was standing up, with her wings shimmering like a small rainbow. "Oh! I almost forgot! My deliverer gets three wishes."

"Tree vishes?" asked Papa. "Just like a fairy story yet!"

"That's right. The rules, you know."

"No, I do not know."

"Now you do. What are your wishes?"

"Vy . . . vy" Papa scratched his bald head. "Vy, I don't know, liddle lady. I got all a man needs. Now, you chust run along und forget it, no?"

"But I have to give you three wishes!" cried Iulia. "It's in the rules. Oberon will be furious if I don't. He'll put me on toad-stool patrol for a hundred years."

"Oh, vell, in dot case," said Papa. "Let me see now. De vorld iss not so happy like it should be for many poor peoples, so—"

"Can't grant wishes to or for anyone but you yourself," said Iulia quickly. "The rules don't allow it. Anyway, I have only so much strength, you know."

"But I don't need nutting for mineself!" said Papa. "I got goot vork, my vife is de best cook in de vorld, my kids is all grown up und doing vell, ve all haff healt und enough money. Vot more are ve wanting? You are tinkin I am John D. Rockenheimer, maybe?"

"You have to wish!" wailed Iulia. She was close to tears.

"But I don't vant to vish!" cried Papa.

"Please," begged Iulia. "For my sake. Just to help me, won't you take a pot of gold?"

"No," said Papa. "Vit gold I am not wanting nutting to do. It

iss unlawful to haff gold anyway. Und too much money makes trouble by de income tax. I should sit up all night filling out ten miles of forms?"

"Maybe you want to be young and strong and handsome again?" purred Iulia.

"Ach, no!" cried Papa in horror. "I am young again, vot vould my vife say? Vot are my customers saying, who iss dis young schlemiel moving in und taking Himmelschoen's shop, vill ve do business vit him? No! Und my old chess-playing friends, ven I come up und vant a game dey vill laugh and say I am crazy in de head, a baby like me should be wanting to play vit experts. No, I like my own age, tank you chust de same."

"Travel!" suggested Iulia. "Adventure! The glamor of the mysterious Orient!"

"No, tank you," said Papa firmly. "I am so seasick coming ofer I am not wanting to set foot on so much as a rowboat in all my days. Efery summer Martha und I take two veeks up by Danbury, vere ve haff friends und a comfortable place to stay. I should sleep on de ground yet vit lions und tigers und tom-toms prowling around? Nefer!"

"But I have to give you three wishes!" sobbed Iulia.

She looked so pretty and unhappy, dabbing at her eyes with a corner of Papa's handkerchief,

that he was glad when he found the answer. "Nefer you mind, liddle lady, I vill haff my vishes," he said grandly, with a broad smile.

"You will?" Right away Iulia was sparkling with happiness and throwing off showers of rainbows from her wings. "Oh, thank you, my Prince! What is your first wish?"

"Vell," said Papa proudly, for it was a fine plan he had gotten, "I vish I had tree tings to vish for."

"Your wish is granted," said Iulia, too excited to stop and think.

All at once, Papa did remember three things he wanted. It had never bothered him before, but suddenly he knew that his shiny head was sort of funny and he would like a little more hair on it. And he hadn't thought of Rodtstein's Beer for years, since you couldn't get it any more, but now he remembered that it was the best beer in the world. And yes, there was that bragging old fool Hyman down at the club who always beat him at chess and talked about it, he would like to put Hyman in his place.

Good! Fine! What more than those three wishes did a man need?

"I am first wanting a goot head of hair," said Papa.

Iulia giggled and waved her

hand. All at once his scalp felt funny. He went over to the mirror and, horror, three feet long and red as fire the hair was coming out on top.

"Not so!" he bellowed. "Vite, und like a man, not a dustmop!"

Iulia magicked him his hair the way he wanted it. "Chust a little closer around der edges," he said, "und take a liddle off der top. Ah, dere it iss."

"And now what is your desire?" asked Iulia.

"Now, a big barrel vit Rodtstein's Beer, vot dey don't make any more but iss de best beer in de vorld. Lager, pleasee."

So a huge keg appeared out of nowhere, and when he tapped it it was the beer of his dreams. Maybe Martha wouldn't like it, him having this barrel and right in the shop, but a man needs one weakness anyway.

"Ach, wunderbar!" said Papa Himmelschoen. "Und now—"

"That makes three wishes, I think," said Iulia, and her eyes got wide as she saw what had happened. But it was too late, and fairies do not go feeling sorry when they have all the gossip of many hundred years to catch up on.

"Vot?" cried Papa. "Vy, I haff only vished for—"

"First you wished for three things to wish for—remember? Then the hair and the beer makes three." Iulia stretched herself,

trembling like a bird with eagerness. "Now, goodbye, Happy Prince, and fortune walk with you all your days."

"But you can't leafe me like dis!" wailed Papa. "Before, I am so happy nutting iss wrong. Now I am vishing for vun ting only you can giff me. It ain't fair! I made de vishes only to help you!"

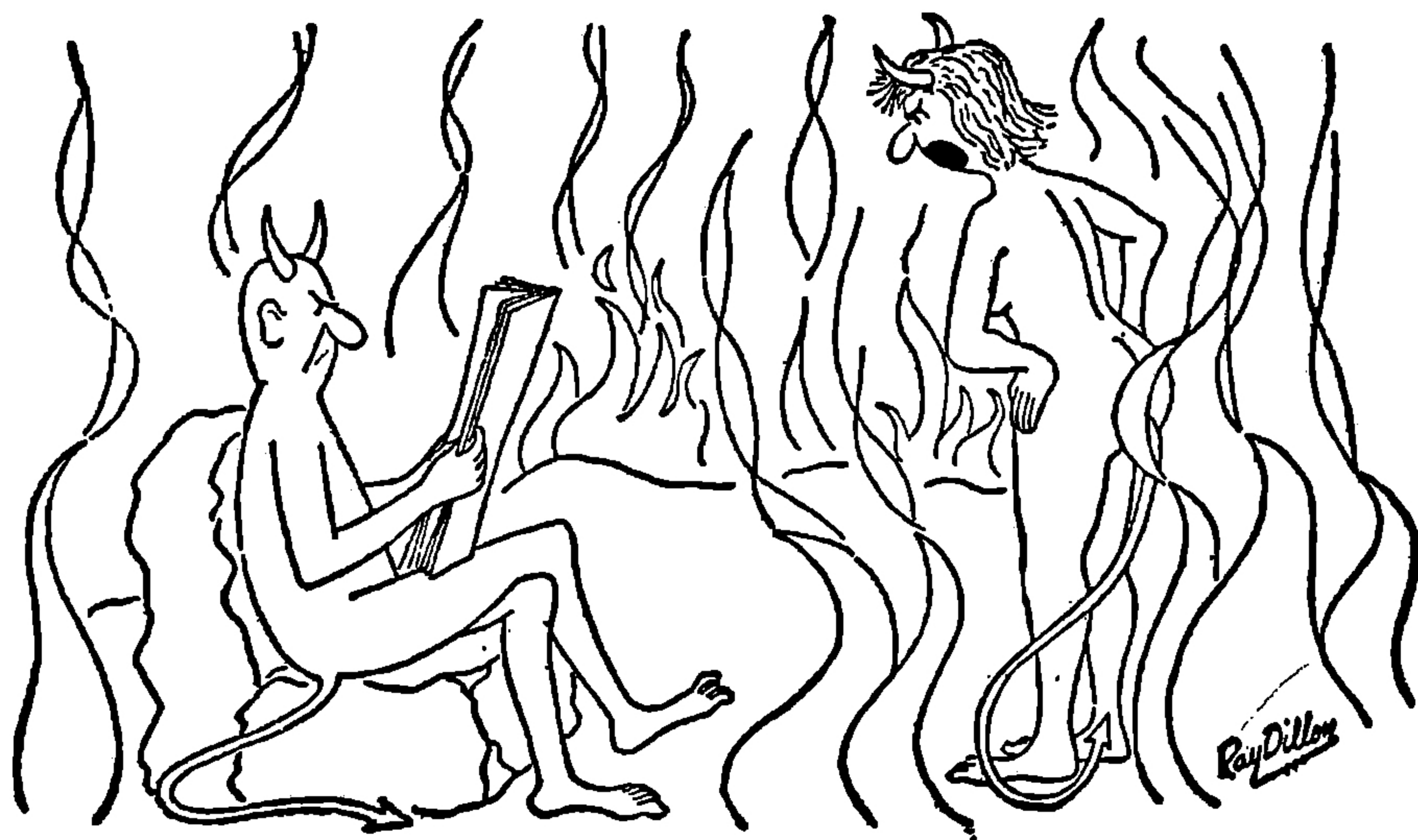
"I'd like to give you one more wish, really I would," said Iulia. "But I'm only allowed three." She pouted with thinking. "I have only one suggestion. Morgan le Fay always was short-tempered and must have turned

many other fairies into bronze statues. If you can find another" She laughed and flew up and kissed him on his forehead. "Now, goodbye, my Prince!"

And she was gone.

Papa groaned and tapped a glass of Rodstein's Beer.

So if you see a little old man haunting pawnshops, especially those in Hungarian neighborhoods, and looking wistfully at all the dusty statuettes in the place—that is Papa Himmelschoen, searching for the only way in the world to checkmate that bragger Hyman.



"Go where?"