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WISHER TAKES ALL

By WILLIAM F. TEMPLE

If you ever meet a fairy, and are granted a wish, don't try to be clever—you might very easily outsmart yourself . . . and get nothing!

BRIGGS swept out under the glassware counter, where he had not swept for many a day. Something like a tinsel-adorned Christmas-tree fairy came tumbling out with the dust. Only she picked herself up and dusted off her wings, which a Christmas-tree fairy would hardly do.

"Hello," said Briggs. "What are you—animal, vegetable, or mineral?"

"I'm a fairy," said the fairy. "Hibernating. We're pretty rare, you know. Incidentally, before I get back to sleep, would you like three wishes?"

"How much?" asked Briggs.

"Quite free. We're not allowed to charge."

"Okay, fire away," said Briggs promptly.

"Well, what's your first wish?"

"I wish I had a hundred wishes," said Briggs.

"What?" said the fairy faintly.

"You can keep the change—I mean the other two wishes. Don't believe in putting too keen an edge on business," said Briggs generously.

"That's nice of you. Oh, well, start wishing. . . ."

"My first wish is for larger business premises. My second wish is for per-

fect and lasting health. My third wish. . . ."

Presently: "Your ninety-ninth wish?" asked the fairy exhaustedly.

"Um . . . I wish I could always know what the other guy's got in his hand at gin rummy."

"Granted. And your last wish?"

"I wish I had another hundred wishes."

The fairy reeled.

"Really!" she protested. "Is that your idea of fair business? You should realize it's hard work for me. I've made you the strongest man in the world, the best pitcher, the best pool player. You can play the piano, the piccolo, the trumpet, the zither. Your corns are gone. And you are the richest man in the world—all that juggling with currency takes it out of one, you know."

"Yes, I understand," said Briggs, soothingly. "I feel pretty mean about it, in a way. I wish I could give you a wish or something."

He stopped, realizing.

"Thanks a lot," said the fairy quickly, and quite brightened up. "I'll grant you that wish. You're a nasty man. I wish I'd never met you."

Nor had she.