

The Magic Fishbone



Adapted from the short story by Charles Dickens

Claudia Haas

Adapted from the 1874 short story by Charles Dickens

Cover illustration by Susan Beatrice Pearse

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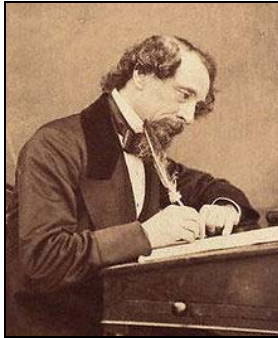
The Magic Fishbone

CLASSIC. Audiences of all ages will enjoy this humorous and touching play. Alicia is given a magical fishbone, which will grant her just one wish. With nothing but rotten vegetables to eat and no coal to keep the family warm, Alicia's 17 siblings implore her to make a wish. But despite the children's pleas for a pudding in every pot or a moat full of fish, Alicia can't decide what to wish for and is afraid she will not use her wish wisely. Confused, Alicia becomes even more determined to use the wish only after she has tried all she can to solve her family's problems with imagination, ingenuity, and perseverance.

Performance Time: Approximately 60 minutes.

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Charles Dickens, 1858

About the Story

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) enjoyed fairy tales as a youth, particularly "Jack and the Beanstalk," "Little Red Riding Hood," and stories from *One Thousand and One Nights*. In his long career as a writer, Dickens wrote only one fairy tale for children, "The Magic Fishbone," which was included in a collection of four tales entitled "Holiday Romance" and published in a children's magazine in the United States in 1867. "Holiday Romance" was published in England in 1868 and later appeared in the 1874 collection *"Edwin Drood" and Other Stories*.

Characters

(5 M, 12 F, 9 flexible)

(Flexible cast. Doubling possible.)

MRS. WATKINS: Always exhausted and prone to fainting spells; has 18 children and often forgets their names.

MR. WATKINS: Mrs. Watkins' meek, mild-mannered husband.

FLEESWEEP: Chambermaid who has an aversion to dust; female.

TRIFLE: Cook who is as sour as her name is sweet; female.

"PRINCESS" ALICIA: Eldest of the Watkins' 18 children; resourceful and intelligent, she cares for her younger siblings.

DUCHESS DU LECHE: A beautiful, regal Victorian doll who acts as Alicia's confidant and the narrator of the play.

PEGGOTY: Alicia's magical godmother/godfather who gives her a magical fishbone; flexible.

DORRIT: Second eldest; studious and bookish; born as a triplet with Jupe and Dillard; male.

JUPE: Second eldest; studious and bookish; born as a triplet with Dorrit and Dillard; male.

DILLARD/DILL: Second eldest; studious and bookish; born as a triplet with Dorrit and Jupe; flexible.

NELL: Third eldest; detailed seamstress and knitter; born as a triplet with Nora and Nola; female.

NORA: Third eldest; detailed seamstress and knitter; born as a triplet with Nell and Nola; female.

NOLA: Third eldest; detailed seamstress and knitter; born as a triplet with Nell and Nora; female.

JESSAMYN/JESS: Fourth eldest; athlete and fencer; born as a triplet with Francis and Larkin; flexible.

FRANCIS/FRANCES: Fourth eldest; athlete and fencer; born as a triplet with Jessamyn and Larkin; flexible.

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LARKIN: Fourth eldest; athlete and fencer; born as a triplet with Francis and Jessamyn; male.

GENEVA: Fifth eldest; talented decorator; born as a triplet with Clotilda and Delphine; female.

CLOTILDA: Fifth eldest; talented decorator; born as a triplet with Geneva and Delphine; female.

DELPHINE: Fifth eldest; talented decorator; born as a triplet with Geneva and Clotilda; female.

CORNELIA/CORNELIUS: Sixth eldest; master of all that happens in Alicia Land; born as a triplet with Altona and Parley; flexible.

ALTONA/ALTON: Sixth eldest; master of all that happens in Alicia Land; born as a triplet with Cornelia and Parley; flexible.

PARLEY: Sixth eldest; master of all that happens in Alicia Land; born as a triplet with Cornelia and Altona; flexible.

FLETCHER: Youngest in the family and a mirth-bringer; Sudie's twin brother; male.

SUDIE: Youngest in the family and a mirth-bringer; Fletcher's twin sister; female.

BLUEGILL: Local fishmonger; flexible.

FINNY: Local fishmonger and Bluegill's assistant; flexible.

CASTING: The number of siblings may be reduced or increased. Reassign lines in the script accordingly to accommodate a smaller or larger cast.

NOTE: For flexible roles, change pronouns and names in the script accordingly.

Setting

Victorian London, the Watkins' home.

Set

Nursery/dining area of the Watkins' home. The interior is shabby but has a touch of grace. It is a lived-in, worn room that serves as the children's nursery as well as the family's dining area. Toys and books are strewn about and there is a rocking horse (optional). There are two tables that seat six each. Benches can be combined with chairs for seating. The tables can rest along the set walls. For dining scenes, the tables can be pulled out so the only set shifts necessary are setting the tables for dinner and then returning the tables to their resting place.

Synopsis of Scenes

Prologue: Nursery.

Scene 1: Nursery.

Scene 2: Nursery and dining area before dinner.

Scene 3: Nursery and dining area, later that evening.

Scene 4: Nursery, the next day, late morning.

Scene 5: Nursery and dining area, that evening.

Scene 6: Nursery, the next day, morning.

Epilogue: Nursery, a short time later.

Props

Dust	Turnips
Books	Salmon
Toys	Platter of fish
Handmade tiara, for Alicia	Large thick book
17 Handmade crowns, for children	Sock or towel with fake blood on it
Whistle or horn	Large fishbone
Hat and coat, for Mr. Watkins	Bandages
Ledger	Sewing/needlepoint supplies
Wagon for fishmongers' fish	Black cape, for Jupe
Pieces of fish	Lantern
Dinner bell or gong	Duster
Tray	Platter of rotten vegetables
	Jar or pot of coins

Sound Effect

Music, the sound of a clock, or the sound of birds chirping to signify time has passed

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*“I cannot
warn you enough,
you must take
great care
with wishes.”*

—Mrs. Watkins

Prologue

(AT RISE: Victorian London, the Watkins' nursery. Perched on a chair is the Duchess du Leche, a Victorian doll. Duchess springs to life.)

DUCHESS: *(To audience.)* Welcome to the magical nursery in Alicia Land. Yes, you are quite correct if you are thinking I am a doll. By plum pudding, Charing Cross, and all that is proper, I am a true doll! No cracks, no imperfections. A permanent smile. I can always be counted on to do what is suitable. I am the Grand Duchess du Leche and I dwell in Alicia Land, where all things are possible. In this wonderland of Alicia's mind, you see only possibilities. Sweepings from the floor become castles in the mind. Chunks of stale bread are sweet cakes, and watery soups are made savory by the mere act of wishing it. Here, we celebrate each day and don't gripe about what we do not have. You have come early. Miss Trifle, our sweet, illustrious cook has just risen and is set on preparing breakfast.

(Trifle enters, complaining to herself as she makes her way to the kitchen.)

TRIFLE: Bake the morning bread! Is there flour enough! *No!* Is their sweet sugar to temper spirits? *No!* It's an impossible job, it is! Preparing meals for a large family with *no* ingredients! *(Exits into kitchen.)*

DUCHESS: *(To audience. Working to keep her perfect smile.)* Dear...honeyed Trifle. She must have gotten up on the wrong side of the bed. Also employed in the royal household is Miss Fleesweep, a chambermaid with an unfortunate aversion to dust.

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(Fleesweep enters. She blows some dust off of a piece of furniture, sneezes, and cleans up by throwing some books or toys under a piece of furniture. She sneezes again.)

FLEESWEEP: *(To herself.)* Dust! Nothing but dust. The fortunes of this family have dried up and all that remains is dust. *(Exits into the kitchen)*

DUCHESS: *(To audience.)* Alicia Land does have its trials every now and then. But I must tell you that in Alicia Land even a doll can rise to the highest office in the land, for I am the Princess Alicia's advisor...in all things that truly matter. Let me introduce you to the royal family. First and foremost, we have the eldest of 18 children...the Princess Alicia!

(Alicia enters, wearing a tiara.)

ALICIA: Good morning, Duchess. I hope the day will be fine and good fortune finds us. *(Freezes in a pose.)*

DUCHESS: *(To audience.)* Next in line are three exceedingly literate triplets: Dorrit, Jupe, and Dillard.

(Dorrit, Jupe, and Dillard enter carrying books. They assume a studious pose. Note: All the Children wear homemade crowns.)

DILLARD: "I think, therefore I am."

JUPE: There is nothing good or bad but thinking makes it so.

DORRIT: Thought is action...in rehearsal.

DUCHESS: *(To audience.)* I told you they were bookish. After our studious triplets, we have the three crafters always hard at work. *(Nell, Nora, and Nola enter and assume a needle-crafting position.)* Nothing escapes their detailed eye.

NELL: *(To Nora.)* You dropped yet another stitch!

NORA: I didn't try to. You must learn to be more forgiving!

NOLA: A stitch in time saves nine.

NELL/NORA: You don't say!

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DUCHESS: Our three athletes come next, followed by the “silly sisters,” also known as our decorating crew. (*Jessamyn, Francis, and Larkin assume a fencing pose. Geneva, Clotilda, and Delphine form a circle.*) Our second to last set of triplets have decided that they are the masters of all that happens in Alicia Land and our youngest—the twins—are our mirth-bringers. (*Cornelia/Cornelius, Alton/Altona, Parley enter and form a circle. Fletcher and Sudie follow and each one goes to a circle.*) In Alicia Land, they are perfect little princesses and princes, as are their parents, King Watkins and Queen Watkins!

(Mr. and Mrs. Watkins, Fleesweep, and Trifle enter and watch in the background. The Children, still assembled in circles, sing one stanza of a nursery rhyme. Note: “London Bridge” works well. Out on the street, Bluegill, the fishmonger, and Finny, his assistant, are spied with Peggoty. They stop what they are doing and listen to the Children’s song approvingly. When the Children’s song is over, all applaud. The Children do perfect little bows and curtsies and then freeze.)

BLUEGILL: Ow! What fine royal children dwell in the castle, dear Peggoty!

PEGGOTY: Not a wart between any of them. This is a jolly castle of genuine deliciousness, it is!

FINNY: De-liciousness!

MRS. WATKINS: (*Indicating Children.*) Are they not dear little ones, Mr. Watkins?

MR. WATKINS: They are national treasures, my dear. Now, I must be off to the counting house.

(Children look at their father and freeze.)

DUCHESS: At the mere mention of the counting house, the spell was broken. No longer did the children dwell in lovely

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Alicia Land but were returned to a true world of need and want...and work.

(All at once, the Children take their crowns off. Dorrit hits Jupe over the head with a book and Dillard attempts to pull him off. Nell and Nora fight over a sewing accessory while Nola attempts to separate the two. Each circle of Children is embroiled in a tug-of-war fight and the result is chaos.)

MRS. WATKINS: Oh, dear! Oh, dear! I feel a swoon coming on!

(Mrs. Watkins starts to faint, and Mr. Watkins deftly pulls a chair out for her to faint into.)

BLUEGILL: *(To Finny and Peggoty.)* The castle has been besieged!

FINNY: Be-seiged!

PEGGOTY: A jolly good time for an exit, don't you think?

(Bluegill, Peggoty, and Finny exit.)

MR. WATKINS: I say, children...children? My dear...sweet children?!

(Hullabaloo continues. Mr. Watkins is clearly ineffectual. Trifle blows a whistle or a horn and the Children stop.)

TRIFLE: Breakfast at the quarter-hour. Them that's not there go to lessons hungry! I daresay I only have crumpets for 18!

CORNELIA: Eighteen! I am sure I counted 20 yesterday night.

TRIFLE: The mice must have got 'em!

MRS. WATKINS: *(Awakens.)* Mice! Ohhhhhhh! *(Faints.)*

DILLARD: Methinks the lady doth swoon too much.

DORRIT: Books!

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JESSAMYN: Breakfast!

GENEVA/CLOTILDA/DELPHINE: Hair ribbons!

FLEESWEEP: Dust!

NOLA/NORAL/NELL: Ohhh! Dust!

(All crisscross and run off to get ready. Mr. Watkins is left holding Mrs. Watkins, who is still unresponsive. Duchess has returned to her doll state. Uncomfortable, Alicia stands not knowing what to do.)

MR. WATKINS: Alicia?

ALICIA: Yes, Papa?

MR. WATKINS: Your mother has had one of her swoons.

ALICIA: Yes, Papa.

MR. WATKINS: Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!

DILLARD: *(Offstage, calls.)* Alicia!

ALICIA: Coming!

MR. WATKINS: Oh, dear!

(Lights fade to black.)

Scene 1

(AT RISE: Children's nursery. All is quiet. Duchess is frozen. Alicia and Mrs. Watkins are onstage. Alicia is holding laundry, toys, and/or books.)

MRS. WATKINS: Alicia, I am ever so tired. Would you plan dinner?

ALICIA: Of course, Mama.

MRS. WATKINS: I rather fancy fish. Fresh fish. Oh, that decision was exhausting! Excuse me while I rest.

(Mrs. Watkins exits. Mr. Watkins makes his way to the door, about to leave for work. He puts on his hat and coat and checks his ledger. Fleesweep enters.)

FLEESWEEP: *(To Alicia.)* That room's a might bit dusty, but I can't work until the stuff is cleared away. Clutter is not good for a room, you know. It sends off evil spirits and they hide in the dust to snatch you when you're asleep. You understand, don't you?

ALICIA: Of course, Miss Fleesweep. I will get it all cleared away and dusted so you may clean.

(Fleesweep exits.)

MR. WATKINS: Your mother is resting, Alicia?

ALICIA: Yes, Papa. She made a decision and it quite exhausted her.

MR. WATKINS: And your brothers and sisters are off to lessons?

ALICIA: Indeed, Papa. You kissed them goodbye. Don't you remember?

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MR. WATKINS: Now that you mention it, I am beginning to recollect. It was a lot of kisses. Have you thought out dinner?

ALICIA: Indeed, Papa. Mother rather fancied fish.

MR. WATKINS: Fish? That is very dear, is it not?

ALICIA: I can try to stretch it so it's a proper meal.

MR. WATKINS: I may be able to purchase a small piece.

ALICIA: We are ever so poor, aren't we, Papa?

MR. WATKINS: It is true that until quarter day, we have little to sustain us.

ALICIA: We shall have to try our very best to work with what we have.

MR. WATKINS: Yes, as there is no choice. Alicia, I do believe there is a proper way of picking out fish. I do not think I have the knack.

ALICIA: I have watched Mama. I will try to help, Papa.
(*Drops the items she is carrying on top of Duchess.*) I am ready.

(*Mr. Watkins and Alicia exit. Duchess springs to life and picks up the items.*)

DUCHESS: By Big Ben and Victoria Station there is much to do in this... (*Trying to keep her smile up*) ...perfect home. Much to do.

(*Duchess exits. A fish wagon is brought on by Bluegill and Finny. Note: This can be done with a light change. Alicia and Mr. Watkins follow the wagon onstage.*)

BLUEGILL: (*Shouts.*) Fresh fish here! (*Louder.*) I say, fresh fish!

FINNY: (*Shouts.*) Fresh fish!

BLUEGILL: I already said that!

FINNY: And you said it so well!

BLUEGILL: (*Shouts.*) Fresh fish here!

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(Mr. Watkins and Alicia enter.)

MR. WATKINS: Yes...I hear perfectly well, thank you. No need to yell.

BLUEGILL: *(Shouts.)* Oh! 'Allo! Want some cod?

MR. WATKINS: I don't rightly know.

FINNY: The cod's fresh today, it is!

(Peggoty has entered and is standing in the corner.)

PEGGOTY: *(To Mr. Watkins, trying to get his attention.)*
Pssst...the salmon!

MR. WATKINS: This whitefish looks fair, don't you think, Alicia?

PEGGOTY: You'll be wanting the salmon!

ALICIA: *(To Mr. Watkins.)* The whitefish looks yellow, Papa.

BLUEGILL: A little lemon water, and he'll be a whitewashed whitefish fresh from the sea!

FINNY: Fresh from the sea!

PEGGOTY: *(To Mr. Watkins and Alicia.)* The salmon!

ALICIA: Salmon!

MR. WATKINS: Expensive.

BLUEGILL: But tasty. Salmon, it is. Finny, here, will wrap it up—

MR. WATKINS: But I didn't—

PEGGOTY: But you did—

FINNY: I'm wrapping it up—

MR. WATKINS: I say, the salmon's too dear.

PEGGOTY: But the salmon it is!

MR. WATKINS: I don't know you—

PEGGOTY: But I know you...and the Princess Alicia.

MR. WATKINS: Who?

PEGGOTY: For I am the Princess's magical godparent.

MR. WATKINS: Say what?

BLUEGILL: Say who?

FINNY: Say salmon!

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ALICIA: (*To Peggoty.*) I always wished for a magical godparent.

PEGGOTY: And I heard! From as far away as Magical Godparent Land I have come to your assistance.

MR. WATKINS: Here! Here! There will be no interfering in my daughter's life or in my fish order!

PEGGOTY: (*To Alicia.*) Ignore this man who does nothing but utter complaints and lend me your ear—

MR. WATKINS: Alicia!

PEGGOTY: (*To Alicia.*) Tonight in Alicia Land, make sure everyone gets a taste of the salmon—

MR. WATKINS: Everyone? It may not agree with everyone.

PEGGOTY: Are you quite finished? We hear a great deal too much about this thing disagreeing and that thing disagreeing! Don't be greedy! I think you want it all yourself! (*To Alicia.*) When all is consumed, wash and dry the fishbone. Rub it and polish it until it shines like the mother-of-pearl. Take good care of it, for it is a present from me.

MR. WATKINS: Are you mad?

PEGGOTY: (*To Alicia.*) Keep it in your pocket.

MR. WATKINS: Oh, the odor!

PEGGOTY: Are you done remarking and complaining? Don't catch people short before they have done speaking. Just the way with you grown-up persons! You are always doing that! (*To Alicia.*) To finish my instructions...when it is time, you may make a wish on it, and it will be granted...provided you wish your wish at precisely the right time!

MR. WATKINS: What is the reasoning behind this?

PEGGOTY: Will you be good, sir? The reason for this and the reason for that, indeed! You grown-ups are always wanting the reason! No reason! There! Hoity-toity me! I am sick of your grown-up reasons!

MR. WATKINS: Nonsense. Spreading druff and drues about a magical wish!

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PEGGOTY: If you doubt my magical abilities, you short-sighted grown-up, behold!

(Peggoty lifts up a piece of fish and Mr. Watkins is instantly mute. He tries to make sounds.)

BLUEGILL: Ooh! I have some children I'd like to do that to, I do!

FINNY: Why do you look at me?

PEGGOTY: Splendiferous! I love it when I get to use my magic!

ALICIA: Turn him back! Turn him back, magical godparent!

PEGGOTY: It's Peggoty, dear Princess. Just plain Peggoty!

ALICIA: Dear Peggoty, return my father to his natural talking state if you please!

PEGGOTY: As you wish. I rather fancied his silence. *(Turns him back.)*

MR. WATKINS: Well, I never! That was fascinating. Disconcerting, yet interesting. You truly are magical.

PEGGOTY: That I am, and I am what I said. *(To Alicia.)* Now, do you remember your instructions?

ALICIA: Yes, Peggoty, but I am confused. How will I know when it is time to wish?

PEGGOTY: When all else fails, it will be time. Now, off with you! There are others in need. I can't be doing a layabout with you all day, even if you are a royal princess! Be good, then... *(Turns to Mr. Watkins)* ...and...don't! *(Exits.)*

BLUEGILL: *(To Mr. Watkins.)* Eighty pence and you're on your way.

FINNY: *(To Mr. Watkins.)* On your way!

MR. WATKINS: Eighty pence! But the sign said 40!

BLUEGILL: Forty pence for regular salmon. Eighty when it has a magic bone.

FINNY: *(To Mr. Watkins.)* Time to pay!

MR. WATKINS: I never— *(Realizes time. Pays for fish.)* Oh! I daresay I shall be late. The clock ticks on. Ta-ta, Alicia.

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ALICIA: Goodbye, Papa.

(Alicia and Mr. Watkins separate and exit.)

PEGGOTY: You owe that family 40 pence, Bluegill. See that they get 40 pence worth of fresh fish this week. Fresh, Bluegill. Fresh! Or you won't be speaking for a week.

BLUEGILL: You...wouldn't happen to be my fairy godparent now, would you?

PEGGOTY: Let's just say...I will see to it that you always get what you deserve.

FINNY: What you deserve!

(Bluegill and Peggoty look at each other as the lights fade to black.)

Scene 2

(AT RISE: *Children's nursery and dining area before dinner. Duchess is alone getting the table ready for dinner. Fleesweep is sleeping in the nursery.*)

DUCHESS: *(To audience.)* Ahhh! So quiet! It is so rare and so welcome...and so very fleeting. But all is well at the Watkins Castle. You can tell by my smile that all...is well. I am preparing for the first dinner shift. You see, even in Alicia Land there is not a table to be had that can sit a family of 20. And so the days flow, one after another, in utter chaos and mayhem. By all that is right by London Gates, 'tis time for dinner!

FLEESWEEP: *(Aside, to audience.)* Did I hear someone mention dinner? Better make haste then. Don't want to be around when the likes of them enter! They splatter, leaving dust wherever they go.

(Fleesweep exits. Trifle enters, carrying a bell or a dinner gong. She brings a tray with the fish and some turnips to the table. Trifle sets the table. Trifle sees Duchess move. Duchess freezes.)

TRIFLE: *(To herself.)* Me eyes are fancying things, they are. I thought I saw that doll move. Oh, Trifle! Get on with you before people think you're daft! *(Duchess retreats when Trifle isn't looking. Calls.)* Dinner is served!

(Geneva, Clotilda, and Delphine enter and sit down.)

GENEVA: *(To Clotilda and Delphine.)* Did you hear?

CLOTILDA: I did! I did!

DELPHINE: Magic in the castle! Alakazoo! Alaka-wish! It is time for us to make a wish!

GENEVA: We'll be living in a tub of clotted cream...

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CLOTILDA: Swimming in a pot of butter...

DELPHINE: On our way to Buckingham Palace!

GENEVA: Food...to ensure we will never go hungry again!

GENEVA/CLOTILDA/DELPHINE: (*Sink back into their seats.*)

Ahhh! Food!

DUCHESS: (*To audience.*) Such lovely children! Such charming, wonderful children!

(*Cornelia, Alton, and Parley enter, arguing.*)

CORNELIA: (*To Alton and Parley.*) Stop making lists of wishes. We are only granted one.

ALTON: Then you simply wish for extra wishes.

PARLEY: Apparently, there are rules about that. Whoever begins the magic determines the number of wishes.

CORNELIA: Really? Is there a rulebook about wish-making?

ALTON: There is a rulebook about everything! This is London!

(*Cornelia, Alton, and Parley take their seats at the table.*)

DUCHESS: (*To audience.*) Aren't they...interesting?

(*Fletcher and Sudie enter, all smiles and happiness. They swoop down and take their seats.*)

FLETCHER: Finally! A well-coursed meal! Salmon!

SUDIE: I love salmon and puddings—

FLETCHER: Salmon pudding? Really, Sudie! You will eat anything!

SUDIE: I will. I truly will!

FLETCHER: And tonight is the wishing meal. (*Closes eyes.*) I wish...

SUDIE: (*Closes eyes.*) I wish...

(*Mr. and Mrs. Watkins enter.*)

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DUCHESS: (*To audience.*) Oh, my. The king and queen. I shall have to play my part. (*Becomes a doll.*)

MR. WATKINS: I am so glad you feel well enough to join us, my dear wife.

MRS. WATKINS: Well, salmon...that's a rather nice surprise. However, I am not sure about that wishbone. Fluff and nonsense, I say! Don't I always say that, dear?

MR. WATKINS: I have no idea, dear.

MRS. WATKINS: Well, I do. And if you ever listened to one word I say, you would know that.

(*Awkward pause.*)

SUDIE: Mama, the wishbone is truly fantastical.

FLETCHER: (*To Mrs. Watkins.*) It is a stroke of luck...of the most marvelous kind.

TRIFLE: Salmon and turnips for all!

PARLEY: I don't fancy turnips.

TRIFLE: Ooh, that is good, it is! Because to speak plainly, I don't have enough for you all.

PARLEY: But you always say, "Eat your vegetables or you will get warts!"

TRIFLE: Turnips are the exception that proves the rule.

CORNELIA: (*To Parley.*) I will share my turnips.

PARLEY: No, thank you. I shall be exceedingly kind and offer up my part.

TRIFLE: No need. You may share with Sudie.

CORNELIA: But I said—

MRS. WATKINS: Geneva, do not talk back to the help, please. Most unseemly.

GENEVA: I didn't!

MRS. WATKINS: I know you didn't.

GENEVA: Cornelia did!

MRS. WATKINS: (*Confused.*) Cornelia? Whoever is Cornelia?

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(Cornelia gives a little gasp and a sibling puts his or her hand over her mouth. Forgetting children's names is a regular occurrence for Mrs. Watkins. Pause.)

MR. WATKINS: *(To Children.)* Now, we shall eat in a nonsensical, quiet manner so your mother may digest properly.

CHILDREN: Yes, Papa.

(Note: They may hold hands for a minute in a moment of silence as if saying grace or they may simply begin to eat.)

PARLEY: I daresay, one needs a magnifying glass to see the salmon portion.

ALTON: Don't be a Greedy Gregory, Parley. Be grateful for what you have.

MR. WATKINS: Indeed. The salmon cost a pony, I can tell you that!

CLOTILDA: It's not the salmon that's important. It's the wish!

DELPHINE: Papa? What shall we wish for?

MR. WATKINS: I'm afraid the wish is up to Alicia. Yes, the odd godparent was very specific about that.

FLETCHER: I would wish for peace throughout the world.

CORNELA: But how would that benefit us?

FLETCHER: The whole world would be at peace!

CORNELIA: And we'd still have little to eat!

SUDIE: I'd wish for a pudding in every pot! It would make for a sweet world!

PARLEY: I'd wish for a moat around our castle. That would be most practical. It would be filled with plenty of fish so every day would bring fish! Fresh fish!

(Knock at the door. Bluegill and Finny enter. Finny is holding a platter of fish.)

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BLUEGILL: *(To Mr. Watkins.)* Fish!

FINNY: *(To Mr. Watkins.)* Fresh fish!

MR. WATKINS: You stiffed us enough today. We are not buying any more fish!

BLUEGILL: Nooooo, the fish is for you. Peggoty said—

(Listening, Mrs. Watkins moves away from the table.)

MRS. WATKINS: *(To herself.)* Peggoty? Did he say, “Peggoty”?

MR. WATKINS: *(To Bluegill.)* Peggoty this, Peggoty that...am I not in my home?

BLUEGILL: Of course...

MR. WATKINS: And is a man not a king in his own castle when he is at home?

BLUEGILL: I suppose...

MR. WATKINS: Then pray, stay out of my castle or I shall have you thrown in the dungeon.

(Mr. Watkins pushes Bluegill and Finny out the door.)

FINNY: But Peggoty said—

(Finney and Bluegill exit.)

BLUEGILL: *(Offstage, shouts.)* Fish!

FINNY: *(Offstage, shouts.)* Fresh fish!

MR. WATKINS: *(To Children.)* Carry on, all. *(Clotilda bursts into tears.)* Oh, dear. Oh, dear. Now...now. Mrs. Watkins! Do comfort your daughter!

(Mrs. Watkins returns to the table.)

MRS. WATKINS: Whatever for?

MR. WATKINS: I believe she is crying. *(Clotilda begins to wail.)* Yes. Upon my soul, that is definitely crying.

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(More sobs from Clotilda.)

MRS. WATKINS: *(To Clotilda.)* Delphine...

DELPHINE: I'm Delphine, Mama. That's Clotilda.

MRS. WATKINS: Very good. Clotilda, why are you crying?

CLOTILDA: Because Parley wished for fresh fish, and then Mr. Bluegill entered offering us fresh fish, and now I fear our wish is used up...on fffffressshhhh...fish!

(All gasp.)

MRS. WATKINS: Fluff and nonsense, that's what I always say. *(To Mr. Watkins.)* Don't I, dear?

MR. WATKINS: If you say so. I, for one, have never heard you say that.

ALTON: But what if Clotilda's right? What if we used up our wish? All we will have is a lifetime of fresh fish!

SUDIE: Don't say that, Alton! I would have wished for sweet puddings!

FLETCHER: Parley! You have committed a heinous crime against our family by wishing out of turn!

PARLEY: I didn't—

FLETCHER: Did!

PARLEY: Didn't!

(Children argue. Alicia enters. Unable to cope, Mrs. Watkins moves away from the table. Mr. Watkins just keeps exclaiming, "Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!")

ALICIA: *(To Siblings.)* What a fine kettle of fish you are!

CHILDREN: Ohhh! *(Shout.)* Fish! *(Gasp and sob.)*

ALICIA: Quiet...please?

CHILDREN: *(Shout.)* Fresh fish!

ALICIA: *(To herself.)* What to say? What to do? *(Looks at Duchess, who mimes to keep a stiff upper lip. To Siblings.)* Keep...a stiff upper lip, please? *(Siblings are suddenly quiet.)*

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Aside, to Duchess.) It worked! *(To Siblings.)* Much better. And now all of you are to make ready for bed so your other brothers and sisters may partake of dinner. And if you are very good, I promise we shall play one-half of a game of marbles.

CHILDREN: Half?

ALICIA: Precisely. So nobody loses and cries and nobody wins and gloats! Time to do the washing up!

(Siblings exit.)

MR. WATKINS: You handled that quite well, Alicia.

ALICIA: Did I? I'm never sure.

TRIFLE: Righty-oh! Now, are you ready for round two of the dinner meal?

ALICIA: I hope so, for it will come whether or not I am prepared.

TRIFLE: Very good. Dinner is served! Again!

(Other Children enter and scramble for seats. Mrs. Watkins watches in amazement.)

MRS. WATKINS: Mr. Watkins, who are all these children?

MR. WATKINS: Why, they belong to us, Mrs. Watkins.

MRS. WATKINS: All of them?

MR. WATKINS: I believe so.

MRS. WATKINS: Swoon...

(Mrs. Watkins starts to faint and Mr. Watkins pulls out a chair for her to faint into.)

MR. WATKINS: Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Alicia, should we be polishing your magic fishbone?

ALICIA: Not yet, Papa. First, everyone needs to partake of the salmon.

MR. WATKINS: Oh, dear.

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LARKIN: May we eat?

(All reach for the middle platter for food. Blackout.)

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Scene 3

(AT RISE: Children's nursery and dining room, later that evening. Alicia and Duchess are together. Trifle and Fleesweep are clearing the table.)

TRIFLE: (To Fleesweep.) Salmon juice...turnip crumbs. Who knew turnips could produce crumbs? And who takes work in a home with 18 children? Daft! I am positively daft! There's definitely some bats flying around my belfry! And there's something fishy about that doll—

FLEESWEEP: It's the dust, it is. It makes dolls come alive with evil intentions!

TRIFLE: You are supposed to clear away the dust, Fleesweep!

FLEESWEEP: Not I! Hate the stuff. It brings disaster to a home, it does!

ALICIA: (To Trifle and Fleesweep.) What are you two saying?

TRIFLE: Begging your pardon, Miss, but I wasn't speaking to you. Them who eavesdrop never do hear good things! I'm off to bake the morning bread. Would you be needing anything?

ALICIA: Nothing, thank you. Goodnight.

(Trifle exits.)

FLEESWEEP: I'm off to bed, too. The day's duties have done me in. Give the floor a sweep before you retire, Miss, before bad fortune moves in here to stay! (Exits.)

ALICIA: Now that everyone's gone, may I tell you a secret, Duchess?

DUCHESS: By Prince Albert and Queen Victoria, I do believe a secret is only a secret when you don't tell anyone.

ALICIA: Oh.

DUCHESS: But I don't think it applies to dolls.

ALICIA: Splendid! I have a magic fishbone.

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DUCHESS: I know.

ALICIA: You do?

DUCHESS: It's the talk of the castle!

ALICIA: I suppose it is. But the trouble is...I don't understand anything about it. I don't know when I am supposed to wish, and I don't know what the correct wish would be, and I am so afraid I will not use it wisely! A wish is a huge responsibility, Duchess.

DUCHESS: It is. But I believe you will know what to do when the time is right.

ALICIA: How?

DUCHESS: I don't know.

[END OF FREEVIEW]