

## Those Three Wishes

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1 No one ever said that Melinda Alice was  
2 nice. That wasn't the word used. No, she was  
3 clever, even witty. She was called — never to  
4 her face, however — Melinda Malice. Melinda  
5 Alice was clever and cruel. Her mother, when  
6 she thought about it at all, hoped Melinda would  
7 grow out of it. To her father, Melinda's very  
8 good grades are what mattered.

9 It was Melinda Alice, back in the eighth  
10 grade, who had labeled the shy, myopic<sup>1</sup> new  
11 girl "Contamination" and was the first to  
12 pretend that anything or anyone touched by the  
13 new girl had to be cleaned, inoculated,<sup>2</sup> or  
14 avoided. High school had merely given Melinda  
15 Alice greater scope for her talents.

16 The surprising thing about Melinda Alice  
17 was her power; no one trusted her, but no one  
18 avoided her either. She was always included,  
19 always in the middle. If you had seen her, pretty  
20 and witty, in the center of a group of students  
21 walking past your house, you'd have thought,  
22 "There goes a natural leader."

23 Melinda Alice had left for school early. She  
24 wanted to study alone in a quiet spot she had  
25 because there was going to be a big math test,  
26 and Melinda Alice was not prepared. That "A"  
27 mattered; so Melinda Alice walked to school  
28 alone, planning her studies. She didn't usually  
29 notice nature much, so she nearly stepped on a  
30 beautiful snail that was making its way across

31 the sidewalk.

32 "Ugh! Yucky thing," thought Melinda  
33 Alice, then stopped. Not wanting to step on the  
34 snail accidentally was one thing, but now she  
35 lifted her shoe to crush it.

36 "Please don't," said the snail.

37 "Why not?" retorted Melinda Alice.

38 "I'll give you three wishes," replied the  
39 snail evenly.

40 "Agreed," said Melinda Alice.

41 "My first wish is that my next," she paused  
42 a split second, "my next thousand wishes come  
43 true." She smiled triumphantly and opened her  
44 bag to take out a small notebook and pencil to  
45 keep track.

46 Melinda Alice was sure she heard the snail  
47 say, "What a clever girl," as it made it to the  
48 safety of an ivy bed beside the sidewalk.

49 During the rest of the walk to school,  
50 Melinda was occupied with wonderful ideas.  
51 She would have beautiful clothes. "Wish  
52 number two, that I will always be perfectly  
53 dressed," and she was just that. True, her new  
54 outfit was not a lot different from the one she  
55 had worn leaving the house, but that only meant  
56 that Melinda Alice liked her own taste.

57 After thinking awhile, she wrote, "Wish  
58 number three. I wish for pierced ears and small  
59 gold earrings." Her father had not allowed  
60 Melinda to have pierced ears, but now she had

61 them anyway. She felt her new earrings and  
62 shook her beautiful hair in delight. “I can have  
63 anything: stereo, iPod, CDs, DVDs, moped, car,  
64 anything! All my life!” She hugged her books to  
65 herself in delight.

66 By the time she reached school, Melinda  
67 was almost an altruist;<sup>3</sup> she could wish for  
68 peace. Then she wondered, “Is the snail that  
69 powerful?” She felt her ears, looked at her  
70 perfect blouse, skirt, jacket, shoes. “I could  
71 make ugly people beautiful, cure cripples ...”  
72 She stopped. The wave of altruism had washed  
73 past. “I could pay people back who deserve it!”

74 Melinda Alice looked at the school, at all  
75 the kids. She had an enormous sense of power.  
76 “They all have to do what I want now.” She  
77 walked down the crowded halls to her locker.  
78 Melinda Alice could be sweet; she could be  
79 witty. She could — The bell rang for  
80 homeroom. Melinda Alice stashed her books,  
81 slammed the locker shut, and just made it to her  
82 seat.

83 “Hey, Melinda Alice,” whispered Fred.  
84 “You know that big math test next period?”

85 “Oh, no,” grimaced<sup>4</sup> Melinda Alice.

86 Her thoughts raced; “That stupid snail made  
87 me late, and I forgot to study.”

88 “I’ll blow it,” she groaned aloud.

89 “I wish I were dead.”

<sup>1</sup>myopic *adj.*: nearsighted

<sup>2</sup>inoculated *v.*: vaccinated

<sup>3</sup>altruist *n.*: person who helps others  
without expecting anything in  
return

<sup>4</sup>grimaced *v.*: twisting or distorting the face  
in a way the expresses pain,  
irritation, contempt, disgust, etc.