

The snow outside swirled around with the wind. The blizzard was a blanket of white that covered everything in its path, so that Claire could only see a few feet beyond the glass of the living room window. She turned and went back to the fireplace.

She sat on the couch in front of the fire, lost in her thoughts. It had been only yesterday that she had moved to her new house with her grandparents. Claire had hated it from the start – it was much smaller and older than their previous home, and was a big step downhill for the Browns.

“Claire? Are you alright?” It was Claire’s grandma, Mrs. Mary Brown.

“Yeah. I’m fine. I just wish we never moved here.”

“I’m sorry, but you know we can’t go back. Now that Marty’s lost his job, we have no choice,” Mrs. Brown replied.

“What are you two up to over there?” Mr. Brown walked into the room.

“The poor girl is so sad about moving,” Mrs. Brown said. “It’s just so tragic, isn’t it?”

“Maybe, maybe not – but I’ve got a little something that might cheer you up. I talked to the previous homeowners yesterday. They said they moved here fifteen years ago, and on the first day they found a strange ring in the attic, in a jewelry box with some papers. According to them, the papers stated that the ring has the power to give a family three wishes. To use the ring, you must put it on your right middle finger, raise your hand above your head, and whisper the wish.” He paused. “They also said that anyone who uses it won’t be happy with the outcome.” He dug his hand in his left pocket. When he brought it back out, he was holding a small silver piece of metal, which sparkled in the firelight.

“Oh, grandpa, this is so cool! Can you make a wish? Wish that we could move back!” Claire cried, seeing it.

“Alright,” Mr. Brown agreed, “I’ll wish.”

Mrs. Brown interrupted him. “Come on, Marty, you know this won’t work. Why try it?” she said.

“What do you mean? Magic always works!” He winked at Claire.

“Look, you said it yourself: ‘Anyone who uses it won’t be happy with the outcome.’ What do you think that means? Why should we waste our time doing something like this?”

Her husband looked at her closely, and then said slowly, “Are you afraid?”

“No, of course I’m not afraid! I just don’t think this’ll work, that’s all,” Mrs. Brown lied.

“Come on, grandpa,” Claire insisted. “Wish that we could move back!”

“Okay, I will. *I wish that we could move back to our old house from which we came,*” Mr. Brown said, before Mrs. Brown could stop him.

Mrs. Brown stared at him, a mixture of anger and fear in her eyes.



The next morning, Claire awoke to the smell of something burning. She opened her eyes, saw that her room was filled with smoke, and jumped out of bed, looking around wildly. She ran to the door and opened it, but not very wide – something heavy was blocking it. *I’m trapped,* she realized in horror. Suddenly, she heard a distant yell outside her window. She ran to it, flung it open, and stuck her head outside.

“Claire!” It was Claire’s grandpa. “Claire!”

“Grandpa, grandma, I’m trapped!” Claire screamed.

“We know, Claire!” Mr. Brown yelled back. “Try to climb out of the win—” A boom came from Claire’s bedroom. She screamed as a huge piece of roofing fell behind her, missing her head by inches. She grabbed the windowsill and tried to pull herself onto it to climb out of the window, but the timber had trapped her foot, and she couldn’t free herself.

“Help! My foot’s stuck!”

“Don’t worry, Claire! I’ll help you!” Mr. Brown ran up to the window and climbed inside. He seized the timber and pulled. The roofing moved a little, and he tried again. Then he straightened, wiped his forehead on his shirt, and bent down one last time—

The remainder of the roof above Claire’s bedroom buckled inward with a deafening crash. Claire lunged forward, grabbed the windowsill, and heaved herself out of the burning building right before the giant slab of wood collapsed on the spot where she’d just been standing. Mrs. Brown caught her, and Claire buried her face in her grandma’s shirt.

When the firefighters finally came to the scene and put out the rest of the fire, everyone was devastated (but not surprised) to hear that the falling roofing had killed Mr. Brown.



Within a week, Mrs. Brown and Claire had been relocated, along with the belongings that had not been damaged in the fire. Their insurance company had provided them with the money they needed to rebuild the burnt-down house, but

both grandma and granddaughter had agreed that they would rather move somewhere else. So it was decided that, since their old home was still vacant, it would be easiest for them if they were sent back to their previous residence. After all, they did now have enough money.

As soon as they got there, they began sorting through the things that had been recovered from the accident: a box-full of personal belongings, the sofa, two armchairs, a nightstand, and the kitchen table. And the ring.

Mrs. Brown found it while they were both sitting in the kitchen looking through the box. As soon as Claire saw the dreaded silver jewelry, she shuddered and said, "Throw it away, grandma. Haven't we seen enough of what it can do?"

"Enough?" Mrs. Brown's voice scared Claire. "Yes. Now we know that it works." She put it onto her right middle finger and began raising her hand in the air.

"Grandma, what are you doing?" Claire asked. She grabbed Mrs. Brown's hand, but the old lady resisted.

"I'm regaining what I lost, Claire. You should know that." She paused, biting her lip. "And I know just how to do it. *I wish that my husband, Mr. Marty Brown, had never died in that accident!*"

"No!" Claire cried, but it was too late.

There were a few moments of silence, and then Claire and Mrs. Brown heard a moan. It was coming from the second floor, and slowly getting louder and louder. Claire's eyes widened. She hardly dared to breathe.

The moaning stopped. Claire breathed out, immediately heard footsteps – heavy, uneven ones. Soon whoever – or whatever – was making them reached the staircase. The wooden stairs creaked, one by one, as the monster descended. Claire looked at Mrs. Brown. The old woman had taken off the ring and was clutching it in both hands, looking truly hysterical.

“Claire...Mary...” It sounded like Mr. Brown, only tired and in pain. “Claire...”

Claire said nothing. The staircase wasn't visible from the kitchen; only once the monster rounded the corner would he come into Claire's view. But she didn't have to wonder what it would look like. She already knew, and she was terrified.

“Mary, please...Claire, my grand...daughter...”

At this point Mrs. Brown, who had been sitting behind the kitchen table as silently as Claire, stood up. Claire jumped. Her grandma dropped the ring and ran with inhuman speed through the kitchen, rounding the bend that would lead her to her husband. Mr. Brown's footsteps changed, and it became clear that he'd conquered the staircase and was heading toward them.

Claire had a sudden idea. She grabbed the ring, and at just about the same time heard Mrs. Brown shriek, and Mr. Brown moan, “Mary...Mary, stop this...I would rather...die...” Claire shoved the ring onto her left middle finger. She raised it in the air and opened her mouth to wish, but then realized her mistake and lowered her shaking hand again.

Mrs. Brown's second scream was closer this time. Claire stuck the ring onto her right middle finger, raised her arm, and yelled, “*I wish the first and second wishes of this family unmade!*”



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