A Speck

of Wishing

Powder.

Written by Stuart Baum

Started 8/29/98.
For our new little baby, Camilla or Berek.
Hoping all your wishes come true.
Well, *almost* all of them.

(Camilla Audrey Baum, born 9/3/98)

Shhh. Look over there. Behind that tree. The one to the left. See that branch that looks like a long 'V'? Just behind there, if you look a little to the side you can see it. It looks like a humming bird. Just floating there. Quickly batting its wings and staying in exactly the same place. But it's not a hummingbird. Look! It's wearing a light green dress. A very, very light green dress. Lighter than the leaves. Almost clear. And see its long white hair and pale skin. And arms and legs. It's a faery. Shhh. A real faery. No bigger than your hand. And it's a child one, I think. A girl. Shhhh. Don't move. Here comes a larger one. This one is an older faery. A woman faery. Maybe the queen. She looks so lovely. Dressed in a long, flowing light blue robe. With some sort of golden crown on her head. I can't quite see what it is, but it might be a crown. She could be the queen. Ohhh, how fancy she looks!

She's giving the smaller faery a pink ... bag of ... something. It seems to be important, though. Because it looks like she's telling the little faery to be careful. And she's not smiling. She is very serious. Shhh. Listen. You can hear her. What a deep voice she has for a tiny creature. She's saying,"..and don't even let the tiniest speck of this get away from you. Bring it quick to the Queen." So the older one isn't the queen after all. But she must be important, because that little faery looks nervous. I wonder what the powder is. Shhh. The little faery is asking a question. She's bowing her head, so you know the older faery is important. Shhh. "Myralline..." That must be the woman faery's name. "Myralline. What's in the bag?" The older faery is smiling softly now and she's saying, "Wishing powder." She stopped smiling and is serious again. "And if even the tiniest speck gets out, then you never know what will happen. So be very careful!" Did you hear that?!? Wishing powder! Shhh. Let's see what happens next.

The older faery flits away and the younger faery (wonder what her name is?) is slowly, gently floating ... towards ... us*! Quick move over a little so she doesn't see us. Behind this tree here. Good. The faery is still floating closer to us. Wait, she stopped. What's she doing? She's opening the bag. I'm sure she isn't supposed to do that! She's going to get in trouble. But I do wonder what wishing powder looks like.*

Shhh. Isn't that amazing? A little girl faery, floating right in the open like that. Holding a bag of wishing powder. I don't think we'll ever see anything like this again. What's that? Oh no! There's a huge bird, a crow, coming right towards her. The bird is bigger than she is! And she doesn't see it! Wait, now she sees it. She quickly darts behind the tree, but oh no! She dropped the bag. And the bag bounces off a branch and hits the ground! And the wishing powder is spilling out all over the place. The crow is gone, but I think this might even be worse! The wishing powder is so beautiful though. Each tiny speck looks like a miniature rainbow and all together they look like a puddle full of rainbows. Now the little faery is picking them up, one by one, very gently and putting them back into the bag. I hope she gets them all. Wow! Look at how fast she is working! I've never seen anything move so fast before. Look at how fast her tiny wings are beating! Imagine if you could clean up your room that fast! Now she's done. And it looks like she got them all. Incredible. Now she's closing the bag. And leaving. Now she's gone.

Wasn't that fun? I don't think we will ever see anything like that again. Hey, wait a second! What's that little speck floating over there. Way up in the air. Above the tree. It looks like a tiny, tiny rainbow. Oh no! It's a speck of wishing powder. She must have missed one. She's going to get in big trouble if anyone finds out.

Hey, I have an idea. Let's follow that speck of wishing powder and see where it lands and then we can have a wish. Good idea? Let's go.

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Sent to bed without dessert again. It's not my fault. It's not fair. A beautiful summer night like this and it's a complete waste to be in bed while the lightning bugs are in the backyard flying around just daring me to catch them. Now who will catch them?

Shhhh. The wishing powder speck is floating down.

It's not my fault because Rhino was the one who broke the swing. And I told them so, but Mother and Father don't believe me. How could I, little Michael, smaller even than all of my friends, break a tire swing like that one? With such a thick rope? It would take a much heavier person. Or a

much heavier animal. A rhinoceros. And that was what did do it. Rhino did it. Didn't you Rhino?

The speck is floating towards that white house over there. Hurry, let's go see where it lands!

But Rhino is outside, telling the fireflies all my secrets. How I pretend to be moving my hand one way then quickly move it the other so I can catch them. They are always fooled by that! Now I'll have to come up with a new trick.

It's going right into that window there. See? There's a little boy sitting up in his bed talking to himself.

This night is a complete loss. No dessert. No after dinner lightning bug hunt. And now tomorrow night's hunt will be even harder. All because Rhino broke the swing and Mother and Father refuse to believe that Rhino did it. Refuse to believe that Rhino exists at all. And it might even rain tomorrow night so there will be no bug hunt at all.

Now the speck is floating right towards the boy on his bed!

Just because they couldn't see Rhino. Parents. They only believe what they can see. And they call Rhino an 'imaginary friend.' He's not really even my friend that much and he's not imaginary. I can *see* him! Well, I can *sort of* see him. But Mother and Father can't see him at all. And they blame me for everything he does!

That speck landed right on that little boy's nose! How funny!

Well, I wish ... I wish... that my parents... no, that everybody ... could see that Rhino ... and all the other imaginary friends in the world ... really exist! That they all do... really ... exist.

Did you hear that? A 'popping' sound. And now the speck of wishing powder is gone. That little boy heard it, too. See? He's looking around to see what made the 'pop' sound. And he's touching his nose, so it must have felt funny when the wishing powder went off. I hope he wished for something good.

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Wake up! We're still in the little boy's room. It's really late at night. I'm not sure what time it is, but look! The faery is gently opening the window a crack. She's pretty strong for something so small. Must be magic. She looks really upset. Are those little glittery things under her eyes tears? I bet she's in trouble for losing a speck of wishing powder. I wonder if she knows it's gone for good. That the boy's wish has gone off. I still wonder what it is?

Michael woke up when he felt something tickling his nose. He looked around his room, eyes still groggy from sleep. He saw nothing. He figured the tickling must have been ... well, nothing important anyway ... and he rolled over to go back to sleep. The faery, whose name was Aemerilla, quickly darted out of the way, nearly getting crushed by the boy when he rolled over.

Hee hee! Did you see that? He almost squished the faery! Sorry. You're right, I guess that's not very funny. You're right that she could have been hurt. Shhhh. Let's keep watching.

Aemerilla flew back over to Michael's face. She made a tiny fist and swatted at the boy's nose again as hard as she could. It wasn't very hard, about as hard as getting hit in the nose with a grape, but it was enough to startle Michael awake again. Michael opened his eyes and looked around the room. For the second time he saw nothing. But it seemed like there was something that made looking around the room difficult. There was something flittery right in front of his eyes. He tried to focus on it, but it was too close, so he waved his hand in front of his face to try to swat it away. But it was too fast and he missed it. Again, he tried to focus on it, but it was still too close. And it was buzzing loudly at him. A sort of squeaky, buzzy whisper. Almost as if it were trying to tell him something. Something important. But bugs couldn't talk.

Though Michael was still half asleep, he was awake enough to try his bug-catching trick. He put his hand in front of his face, just to the side of the little buzzing creature and he slowly moved the hand away from the insect. Before the little creature realized what was happening, Michael quickly moved his hand towards the bug and snagged it in his hand.

Hah! See that? His bug catching trick even works on faeries!

Fortunately, Michael was very gentle when he caught bugs, so Aemerilla wasn't hurt at all when Michael's hand closed around her. She was caught, but not for long. She rubbed her hands together, closed her eyes and chanted, "Queen of Faeries. Queen of Faeries. Make me strong. Make me strong. For just five seconds. Not for long."

Incredibly, to Michael anyway, the little bug he had captured was bending his fingers back! He strengthened his grip, but this bug was stronger! How can that be possible? It was so small! Michael suddenly understood, or at least thought he did. He was dreaming.

He relaxed his grip and let the little creature pry his hand open. And, for the first time, he got a good look at what he thought was an insect. It was a faery! Now he was sure he was dreaming. And the faery was looking at him, the little mouth working just like a real-sized mouth. The little eyes blinking and flashing, as if she were angry. Even the tiny little nose was flaring at him. Well, thought Michael, if an insect could be a faery and a faery could talk, then the least he could do is to listen to what this pretty, but angry, little faery had to say.

What are you doing? Shhhh. Listen to the faery. Oh, I see! You're trying to repeat the faery's chant. I don't think it will make you stronger. I think she also used some sort of magic, or makes magic by rubbing her hands together. But I'm not sure. Either way, shhhh, let's hear what the faery has to say.

"--heard a word I say?" Aemerilla finished her sentence, truly agitated at this boy named Michael. The boy obviously wasn't paying attention to what she was saying and time was running out fast!

"I'm sorry, wha-" Michael started, but Aemerilla quickly hushed him.

"Try to whisper. Do you want to wake the whole neighborhood?"

"I'm sorry," Michael said again. Then he rubbed his eyes sleepily. "Am I dreaming? What time is it?"

The faery was impatient and spoke quickly and softly, making it hard for Michael to hear what she had to say. "No, you're not dreaming. It's about four in the morning, just two hours before sunrise. I am-"

"Are you a faery?" asked Micheal.

"Shhh!" The faery spoke more clearly, more slowly. And though the words she said were somewhat mean-sounding, she spoke them out of urgency and not out of anger. "If you would listen, I can explain everything. But if you keep asking questions, then we'll be here until sunrise and all will be ruined." Michael said nothing. "Good. Here's the story. I was given a bag of wishing powder by Myralline, my aunt, to deliver to the Queen's tree and I accidentally spilled it. I tried to get every particle, but I missed one. It floated here and must have landed on you, because you made a wish and now it's gone. If I don't undo your wish and get another particle then I'm going to be in big trouble, bigger than you can imagine. But I need your help. Any questions, so far?"

"Yes," said Michael.

"Go ahead," said Aemerilla, "It's important you understand everything before we get started. I can't do this alone."

Michael wondered what the faery meant when she said 'get started,' but he asked his original question anyway, "What's a particle?"

Do you *know what a particle is? A speck. One tiny piece of something. Wait a second, the little faery is pulling out a small piece of paper. Let's edge a little closer and get a better look. It's a map! She's showing it to the boy. And she's drawing something on the map. A little 'x'.*

"We're here," explained the faery. "And we have to meet in front of this tree. There's an entrance to the cave there." She drew a small 'x' on the tree. "You have to meet me there as soon as possible. I have to get the key and I'll be there in five minutes. Or sooner. But just so you're not afraid when we meet him, let me tell you who we're going to see–"

We can't wait to hear who they're going to meet. I know the tree she means. We have to hurry there and hide, so when she opens the cave we can sneak in and follow, or else we'll miss the rest of the adventure. Unless you're too tired. We can stop here if you'd prefer. No? You sure you're not too tired? It is very late. Good. Let's hurry.

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You fell asleep again. The boy and the faery went through that door there. Can you see it? Look closely at the trunk of the tree. See how the bark draws a line across and down and back across? And the knot right there where a door handle would normally be? The little faery put an odd-shaped key into the knot and then pulled that little branch there and the door opened. I'm going to try the door right now. Just wait here a second. Shhh. And try not to fall asleep if you can.

I'm pulling the branch and ...the door is opening! How funny to be able to open a small door in the side of a tree! Wow, it's dark in here. I can't see anything at all. Did you bring a flashlight? No? Me neither. Well, what do you think? Do we wander through the dark here hoping we find them or at least a light of some sort, or do we wait here until they -- Shhh. I can hear them! They're just a little up ahead. Hurry and maybe we can catch them!

Aemerilla asked in a whisper, "Can you see yet? Have your eyes grown used to the dark."

Michael started to say something, but his voice, even in a whisper echoed too loudly, so he simply nodded his head.

"Good. Let's start moving forward now. You have to hold me since I cannot fly in here. And if I walk it will take too long. We've already taken too much time as it is. Your wish is going to come true at sunrise. We'll never get what we need done by then, but perhaps we can finish before too much damage is done."

Michael picked up the faery, gently. She felt funny, like an overly-large bug that vibrated constantly. It was like holding onto a tiny gyroscope. He had so many questions, but he was too uncomfortable to ask them. He felt

too big and too loud in this tree-land – or was it a tree? Maybe it was a path *underneath* the tree. He couldn't tell if he were walking down or up or just straight. He could only tell that the ground was slightly squishy and sticky, and that the edges of the tree or whatever it was, were brushing against his side as he walked. Like he was barely thin enough to fit through this passage. Everything smelled like wet leaves and old pumpkins. There was a small reddish light far ahead and he could see the path well enough to get there, but not well enough to see what the path or the walls looked like.

"Turn right here," said the faery. Michael didn't see any turn, but he turned to his right and continued forward and, though he expected to smash into the wall, there was a new path leading to another dim, this time greenish light. After a few steps, he saw that the light wasn't as far away as he thought; it was simply very small and stuck into the floor. He saw another greenish light further ahead. And another one even further away.

"Follow the green path," whispered the faery, "to the end and then we'll meet him. Try to walk more quietly, if you can. I know it's hard, but try."

He tested his voice, "How long will it be?"

"Ten more lights," she answered. "Try not to talk. We don't want to disturb him until we get to the end."

Michael was not afraid, though the picture he had in his mind of the creature he was going to meet was terrible. It was huge. As big, he thought, as Rhino. Half frog, half person. Old and mean. The creature's name was Lotif. As he counted the lights – three ... four ... five – he wondered why he was so unafraid. He knew it wasn't a dream, but it felt more like a dream than dreams usually do.

His fear rose as he got closer to the tenth light, especially since the path got thinner and thinner until it felt more like squeezing through the scratchy, drippy walls instead of walking on a path.

Which way do you think we should go? The red path or the green path? The green path? OK. It's looks pretty tight up ahead, but for some reason I think you're right and that the green path is what we need. Shhh. You are *right. Look they're just up ahead. They seem to have stopped.*

Lotif was exactly as Michael had imagined, except that he was much, much, much smaller. Then Michael realized that to the faery, Lotif was very, very big. He was more than twice as big as she was. But to Michael, Lotif was about as big as a small hamburger or a large frog. In fact, Lotif *was* a large frog. He was oddly colored, but it was probably because Lotif was wearing clothes. Or something clothing-like. Michael couldn't tell.

"Put me down and kneel Michael," whispered Aemerilla. "You are in the presence of a great wizard." Michael did as he was told and felt the soggy leaves seeping water though the knees of his pajamas.

The frog's voice was startling, but not mean-sounding at all, just gruff. "Hunnn- broooop- hungry!"

Michael did not know what to say so he said nothing. The frog spoke again, "You have commme - brooop- for a wishing powder speck and I ammm- ammm- brooop- hunngrrrry."

Aemerilla spoke softly. "You are correct, we have come for wishing powder specks-"

"Speckssss? Brooop. " Now the frog sounded angry. "Do you thinnn- brooop- think that it's soooo- brooop- easy to make wishing powder that I would give you more than one ssss- ssss- brooop- speck?!?" His gruff, now even more growly voice echoed off the walls.

Can you hear? Good then we don't need to get any closer. I don't like the sound of that new animal.

"And a boy!" growled the frog. "You have brrr- brooop- brought a boy here?! Surely you knnn- brooop- know better than that, faery."

"Aemerilla," whispered the faery as she bowed. "My name is Aemerilla. I am Myralline's niece." The frog grunted once. "And I have made a terrible mistake. As has this boy. And only you can undo it." She bowed her head a little when she said this. Then looked right into the frog's face. "But you must help us fast. And if you do help, then this boy will bring you food that you cannot imagine." She paused a second for effect. "People food."

"I have everrrr- errr- brooop- everything I need to eat here," growled the frog, but the drool that escaped from Lotif's lips made it obvious to Michael that Aemerilla had found Lotif's weakness. After a moment, Lotif growled, "How mmm- brooop- *many* specks?"

"Just two," said Michael quickly and as softly as possible, however, the loudness of his voice made both Aemerilla and Lotif wince.

"*Just* two?!? You think wishing powww- brooop- powder is easy to make. That I just unrolllll- brooop- my tongue and wishing powder drops off?"

"I didn't mean that-" Michael started, but the faery shushed him.

"We know how hard it is to make wishing powder," said Aemerilla. Michael thought about it and actually had no idea how one would make wishing powder, let alone how a frog would do it. Aemerilla continued, "But it is urgent. We need to undo a wish. As soon as possible."

The frog seemed to think for a little while and then asked, "Whennn-nnnn- brooop- does the wish take effect?"

"Sunrise," said Michael and the faery together.

Lotif made a sound like a short, sharp bark. The sound a small dog might make. A sound Michael never expected to hear from a *frog*. While Michael was surprised by this odd sound, for some reason, he was not surprised that a frog could talk. "It cannot be donnne- brooop- in time," said the frog. "So-"

Aemerilla quickly interjected, her voice firm as if she speaking to a disobedient child, "But it *must* be done as *soon* as possible."

The frog made that barking sound again. "What isss- brooop- the wish?" asked the frog.

As Aemerilla told him, the frog started sucking in air in loud, raspy breaths. When he had heard the entire wish, Lotif had sucked in so much air, he was nearly twice as big as he was earlier. Michael could tell that, though she pretended she weren't, Aemerilla was terrified by this now, puffed up frog.

Lotif gave Michael such a look of hatred and fear that Michael was frozen in place. He actually felt chills running through his body and wondered whether it was always this cold in here.

The frog expelled the air inside him as he spoke, "That-is-the-most-horrible-and-awww-brooop-awful-wish-I-have-everrrr-brooop-heard!" The frog was now back to his normal size, but his expression was still one of hatred and fear aimed at Michael. "Do you know what you have done, llll- brooop- little boy?" Michael tried but couldn't speak. He saw that Aemerilla was trembling noticeably, and that she was on the verge of tears.

Lotif continued, louder and angrier than before. Now Michael knew why the faery was so scared of this frog. "You have unnn- unnn- brooop- unleashed the most powerful and dangerous force in the www- brooop- world. Stronger than all magic combined."

As if he were suddenly an older, smaller, very tired frog, all the anger disappeared from Lotif and once again he made that odd barking sound.

Aemerilla was crying now, but she found her voice, "So you *will* help?"

"I mmm- brooop- must help," said the frog sadly. Then all the anger came back into his face as he spoke directly at Michael, "and so mmm- mmm- brooop- must the boy. And, when all this is over, should www- brooop- we all still be aaaa- brooop- alive, I expect you to fill this rooommm- ooommm- brooop- with people food."

Michael, scared, nodded his head quickly.

"Now," said the frog, "I'm going to nnnn- brooop- need a few things. And make ssss- broop- sure-"

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Wake up! Wake up! You fell asleep again. And this time you've been asleep for quite a while. It's a wonder they didn't see us as they went by. The three of them left about two hours ago. Maybe more. I might have nodded off a little myself. It's been a long night. We've done a fair amount of hurrying around. So no one can blame us for catching a few winks.

I hope the tree door is still open. Did you hear the part about unleashing the most powerful force in the world? Even stronger than all magic combined? Do you know what the frog meant by that? I'm not completely sure either. But, well, we're about to see, because it's almost sunrise. I also think that this is going to be the scary part of our adventure. I wouldn't blame you if you decided that it was time for you to go to bed. If you like, I can bring you home and come and get you again when it's all over.

Here's the door. Good, it's still unlocked. And I opened it.

Uh oh! Do you see that? Just above the tree there? It's the sun. It's morning. Do you know what that means? It means that all the imaginary friends have come to life. That can't be good.

(A long, growly yawn.) I fele difrint. Sumthing verry difrint wiff me. Wundr wut? I cuvrd in ferr. Bukz at end uv my arms. Wingz stil wrk. Nos kold. And dripee. (Another long, growly yawn.) Cuvrd in ferr. Wayt. Allretty did dat wun. Wundr wut is nue?

There they are. All three of them. In that clearing over there. They're surrounded by books and bottles and blankets and buckets and it looks like they're burning a small pile of leaves. Michael and Aemerilla look happy, so I suppose the frog must have finished the wishing powder. Let's sneak a little closer and maybe we'll be able to hear them.

(A short, growly yawn.) Yes. I am nue. Maybee my frend kan help. I fli ovr too him. Hmmm. Wundr wut dat iz. Luks lik my frend Georgie. Wiff a frog and a smal wingd creechr. Nup, not Georgie. Difrint boee. Smallr. Mit be enmees uv my frend.

What's that above them? Some sort of flying, odd-shaped bear. Look at that! Can you imagine anything so strange? A huge bright blue bear! With even larger, even brighter pink wings. And instead of hands he has huge books at the end of his arms. And across his side is written, in white fur, the words "Story Bear." Can you imagine anything even close to that? I see it, but I can't imagine it! I almost don't believe I'm seeing it! But we've seen some amazing things tonight, so this is just one more. I bet he's someone's imaginary friend. And now I know what the frog meant by the most powerful force in the world. It's a child's imagination! I could never think of such a thing as a blue, pink-winged, flying story bear. Let's not get too close, just in case he's not as nice as he looks. He does look friendly. And 'Story Bear' sounds nice enough. But for some reason I have a bad feeling about him.

If thay bad, I eet thay. Dat iz wut I sposd too doo. Eet bad enmees uv Georgie. I fli doun and eet thay. Dat iz wut I doo.

That Story Bear is getting closer. I really do have a bad feeling about this. How about you? He's landing near them and they have stopped what they are doing and are watching him. No, wait, the frog is still working, but the boy and the faery are moving towards the bear. The bear is sitting down. He's opening one of his books. It looks like he's going to read them a story after all. He's opening his mouth to speak- Oh my! Look at those teeth! The bear's teeth look like knives! The boy has started to walk backwards. The bear stands up and is running towards the boy, who is now fleeing for his life. The faery flies in between the bear and the boy. The bear slams his two bookhands together, trying to crush the faery between them. Phew! He missed. The faery looks terrified! She tries to fly away, but the bear smashes his bookshands together again and– Oh no! That's terrible. You might want to look away. The bear has crushed the faery. The boy is screaming now. The frog hands the boy a small sack, but the boy doesn't seem to notice. The frog starts to hop off quickly and now the bear is chasing the frog, smashing his books against the ground, just missing him every time. Oh no! That time the bear didn't miss. Now the frog is crushed. The boy is just standing there screaming, unable to move. He keeps looking back and forth between his two crushed friends. Now the bear is moving towards him. This doesn't look good, I think we should go home.

This can't be happening. I must be dreaming. Wake up, Michael. Wake up, Michael. Bears can't fly. They can't have books for hands. He can't have crushed Aemerilla and Lotif. Wake up, Michael! Wake up! If I close my eyes and open them again, I'll wake up and be in my bed and it will be morning and everything will be okay. Close. Open. Crud! That blue bear is still coming towards me. Aemerilla is dead. Lotif is dead. And I'm next.

Shhh. There's something else coming! Over there, through the woods. It's loud. Sounds like it's knocking down trees and bushes in its way. Must be really huge! I hope this one is friendlier than Storybear.

Close my eyes. Open my eyes. Close. Open. Come on, Michael. Wake up! Close. Open. This can't be happening! It has to be a dream. A faery? Wishing powder? A talking magician frog? And now a bear with books for hands, pink wings, and giant teeth? Close. Open. Pinching myself ... oww! How can this *not* be a dream? Close. Open. Please wake up. Please!

It's about to come through the woods. Right there. See? It knocked a tree, a pretty big tree, right down into the clearing. It's a big animal. It's greenish-grey. It's got a huge horn on its head-.

It's Rhino! Rhino! Over here! Rhino! Quickly! Help me, Rhino!

The bear sees that rhinoceros and has stopped. Now it's the bear that looks scared. It's turning away from the boy and running, fast. But that rhinoceros is also moving really quickly. The bear is flapping its huge pink wings, trying to get away. The rhinoceros is closing fast. The bear is rising ... off the ground now, but the rhinoceros looks like it might ... just ... get ... nope. Oh well. The bear got away. Now the rhinoceros has stopped and is moving towards the boy. This one looks friendly. The boy has run over to the rhinoceros and is hugging him and crying. That was close!

Rhino, you saved me! That bear killed my friends and almost got me. Take me home now. Back to bed. I want Mother and Father and I want this to be over. I want to wake up and have everything back the way it was.

Now let's hurry. Back to the boy's house. I'm sure he'll go home now. Then we'll see what happens next. Hurry, we have to hurry. That rhinoceros moves really quickly and I'd like to get there before they do.

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Wow. They must have moved fast. They're here already. There. By the swingset. They're sitting on the ground in front of the broken swing. Is that rhinoceros talking? Now I've seen everything!

In a very precise, gentle, deep, fatherly voice, Rhino said, "Dear little Michael. You have a very big decision to make and only you can make it."

"What's that?" asked Michael.

"The bag you are holding contains wishing powder," explained Rhino. Michael looked down at the small, green velvet bag in his hand. He didn't remember Lotif giving it to him. Rhino continued, "And you must decide what your wishes will be."

"I have to wish Aemerilla back to life! And Lotif!" said Michael. "And that Storybear dead."

"But you only have two specks of wishing powder. And that's three wishes."

"And I have to wish all the imaginary friends back to the way they were," added Michael. But then he noticed that Rhino suddenly looked sad.

I didn't know that rhinoceroses could cry. See those tears? They're really big tears. I wonder what made the rhinoceros so sad all of a sudden?

"What's the matter?" Michael asked Rhino.

"If you wish us away, I'll really be gone," said Rhino sadly.

"Why?"

"Because to make a wish come true, you must really believe it. And when you made that first wish, you believed – or more likely – *wanted* to believe that we really exist. But now you want to believe we do not. All the time you were being chased by Storybear, you thought you must be dreaming. You thought it couldn't possibly be true that there were such

things as a giant blue bear with books for hands, talking frogs or faeries. And if those can't exist, then what hope do I have?"

"But you saved me! You must exist," pleaded Michael.

"I do exist," explained Rhino. "Only because you believe I exist. But when you wish away all imaginary friends, I too will go."

"You saved me," repeated Michael. "You knew that I'd stop believing in you, but you saved me anyway." Rhino simply nodded. Then Michael said forcefully, "I will not wish you away! I won't!" Michael grabbed Rhino around the neck and gave him a big hug. He repeated, "I will not stop believing in you, ever."

What do you think the boy should do? What would you do? Wait! Where is he going? Into the house and up to his room? The rhinoceros is still sitting by the swingset. He's still sad, but it looks like he is no longer crying. Let's go up to the boy's room and see what he does. Quick, quick! We don't want to miss anything.

Okay, we're up in his room now. He's lying down on his bed. He's getting under the covers and pulling the covers up to his neck. Now he's opening the small sack and taking out one of the specks of wishing powder. He places the speck onto his nose–

"I wish I never made that wish." *pop*

What just happened? It got dark out! Just like that. It's night time. Hey, I know! It must be last *night again, the same time he made the wish before. The boy looks very sleepy now. He's closing his eyes. Shhh. Now he's rolling over and ... falling asleep. Imagine being able to fall asleep after all that excitement. I guess his wish must have undone everything that happened this morning. No talking frog. No talking rhinoceros. No flying bookhanded bear. I guess that's all. And it's time we got you to bed. It looks like you're not going to miss any sleep after all. You must be very tired. I know I am. But wait a second ... What's that sound? Shhhh. Listen closely.*

There's a scratching at Michael's window, which is closed. Then there's a gentle, soft voice, barely audible through the windowpane. "Queen of Faeries. Queen of Faeries. Make me strong. Make me strong. For just five seconds. Not for long." And then the window is gently opened.

Look! It's the faery. She's alive again! That's so *good to see. I'm sure* you *were worried. She's flying over to where Michael is sleeping. She's reaching down next to him and taking the small sack. Remember how many specks there were in that sack? There's one left. Just what she needs. Now* **she's** *flying over to his face and she's leaning towards him and she kisses him lightly on his cheek. She's whispering something to him, but I can't hear what she's saying. Did you? I wonder if she knows that he helped bring her back to life again.*

Aemerilla looked back once at the human boy named Michael before she left. She smiled at him. And then repeated what she whispered in his ear, "Thank you for believing in us." And then -zip!- she was out the window and gone.

Quick to the window! Look down, over there. There's the faery flying towards the woods. She circling ... circling ... down ... down towards ... towards ... oh look! There's the rhinoceros! And sitting on his back is that frog again. I guess all is well. The faery lands on the rhinoceros' back. Now the rhinoceros is walking ... slowly ... away ... into the woods. And gone. I can't see them anymore. Well, I'm glad that everything is all better again. And you really must be getting to bed. So let's get you back to your room, and your bed. You must be exhausted from all this hurrying around. Do you think any of this really happened? Or do you think we imagined it? Either way, good night and sweet dreams.

*

Epilogue.

**

The following morning, Michael woke up and had breakfast just like any other day. After breakfast, he went outside with his Father and, together, they fixed the broken swing. Michael told his Father he was sorry he broke the swing and that he'd be more careful next time. After that, the two of them played catch for a little while. Then his Father explained that he had to run a few errands and left Michael in the back yard by himself.

After he was sure his Father had left the house, and he saw that his Mother was busy upstairs, Michael took a box out of the storage shed and snuck into the kitchen. He opened up the kitchen cabinet and filled the box with a little of everything in the pantry. He took the now full box outside to edge of the woods. He put the box down by a large tree and walked back into his yard.

Just before dinnertime, Michael went back to where he left the box full of food and saw that it was gone. In his mind, he pictured a small, talking frog in a soggy cave completely filled with people food. He hoped that Lotif would share some of the food with Rhino and Aemerilla.

*

The End.

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