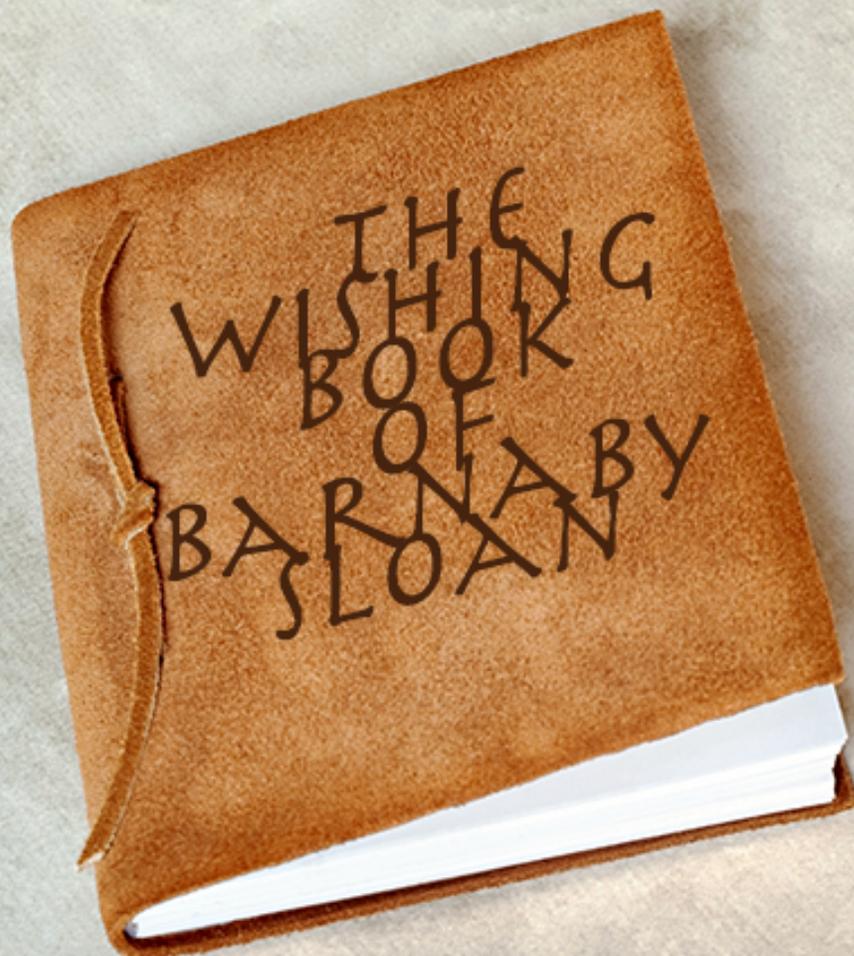


THE WISH SERIES #1

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THE WISHING BOOK OF BARNABY SLOAN

SECOND EDITION

JENNA LYNN BROWN

THE WISH SERIES I

MINOR BLUE PRESS

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Barnaby Sloan doesn't believe in magic. His life is ordinary in every possible way: grad school, volunteering, spending time with his friends. He has a crush on the director of the museum where he volunteers, Liam Morrison, but has never allowed himself to believe it could become anything more. What could a man like Liam see in somebody as ordinary as *him*?

For his twenty-fifth birthday, Barnaby's beloved aunt gives him a leather-bound journal. Since it's his birthday and people expect him to have wishes, Barnaby writes his wishes in the journal: that he could go to Egypt with his archaeologist aunt, that he could work at the museum permanently, and that he could share his life with Liam.

Barnaby Sloan is about to learn that magic happens everywhere, sometimes in the smallest of ways.

NOTE ON THE SECOND EDITION

The Wishing Book of Barnaby Sloan was originally published by Torquere Press. It has been edited for clarity and aesthetics.

THE WISHING BOOK OF BARNABY SLOAN

Barnaby Sloan waved goodbye as the bright yellow school bus trundled away with the day's last group of schoolchildren, when his fellow docent Tai stopped at his side. "Arthur wants you in his office right away."

Barnaby lowered his hand. "Why would Arthur need to see me? Is something wrong?"

"He didn't say," Tai said with an unconcerned shrug, shifting her stack of manila folders from one arm to the other. "But I'd hurry."

"Right," Barnaby said and went through the nearest Staff Only entrance to the rabbit warren of hallways that made up the inner workings of the Museum of Nature and Science. He ducked into a men's room to check of his tie (straight), shirt (clean), and hair (smooth), in case Arthur's complaint was his appearance, but nothing was out of place.

He took the stairs to the directors' and curators' offices. Most of the office doors were open, though instead of humming with the usual chatter and bustle, the hallways were quiet, as if everyone had already left for the day.

The door to Arthur's office was also open. Barnaby tapped it with his knuckles. "Arthur? Tai said you wanted to see me."

"Come in," Arthur said and looked up from his paperwork with an absent smile a moment later. "Barnaby, hello. Have a seat."

Barnaby perched on one of the straight-backed chairs in front of Arthur's desk, feeling as nervous as he had the day he interviewed for the docent position.

Arthur folded his hands on the desk. "How long have you been volunteering with us, Barnaby?"

"Six months," Barnaby said. He didn't know what to do with his hands -- clutching the sides of the chair seemed too nervous, while folding them over his knee made him slouch. He settled on clasping them together in his lap and winced when he realized they were damp. "Since I began the anthropology graduate program at the University of Colorado."

Arthur nodded, and Barnaby thought, Oh, of course he knows all of that. "Do you like volunteering here?"

"I love it," Barnaby said. "I realize I haven't gotten as far in my research as some of the other students, but fitting it in between classes and teaching and everything else has been more difficult than I anticipated."

"Walk with me, Barnaby," said Arthur, rising, and Barnaby swallowed hard before getting to his feet. They left Arthur's office, and Arthur said, "We prefer a long commitment to a short one, so you can take all the time you need. Feedback from the groups you've guided has been positive. You know the collections and you have good rapport with our visitors."

"Thank you," Barnaby said. They passed the empty offices and went down the stairs.

"And, of course, there's your family connection to the museum."

"Of course," Barnaby murmured. His great-grandfather's name was on a plaque in the Egypt room, which gave a brief history of the first Barnaby Sloan's explorations and discoveries in the early twentieth-century. There was no Sloan wing in the museum -- the Sloans never had that kind of money -- but over the decades they had contributed to many of the museum's exhibits and treasures, including the papyrus records Barnaby himself was translating for his thesis.

He was not an explorer the way his great-grandparents had been, but he liked to think he could contribute to the world's knowledge of the ancient world, in his own small way.

"Have you thought about teaching elementary school?" Arthur asked, and Barnaby snapped out of his reverie.

"Sometimes," Barnaby admitted, "but only if anthropology doesn't work out." They were approaching the break room now, and Barnaby's hands hadn't stopped sweating. "Arthur -- sorry, did I do something wrong?"

Arthur said, "How old are you, Barnaby?"

"Twenty-five today," said Barnaby, still confused.

"Good," said Arthur, pushing open the door to the break room, "we got the right number of candles," and everyone in the break room shouted, "Surprise!"

Barnaby exhaled and managed a smile. He'd eaten some cake and sung "Happy Birthday" to other employees, but it had never occurred to him they might have a party for a lowly docent, a volunteer. It was his turn to look self-conscious yet appreciative as everyone sang, Tai with a mischievous expression like she'd gotten him good, and closed his eyes a moment before he blew out the candles.

Kristy from the catering department handed him a knife to cut the cake. "It's the dark chocolate with raspberry filling," she said. "I think you said that you liked that."

"I do," said Barnaby. Catering had decorated the cake like a King Tutankhamen death mask, a personal touch that Barnaby found adorable if clichéd. They had no one as famous as King Tut in their little Egyptian collection. "It's so pretty I almost don't want to eat it." He cut into it anyway, and handed out plates, accepted people's congratulations, and smiled at their jokes about mummies.

A low voice said, "Can I have a piece without too much frosting on it?" and Barnaby looked into the dark brown eyes of Liam Morrison, the museum's general director.

Barnaby swallowed and said, "Of course," as breathless as if he found handing out paper plates strenuous. He cut a slice that wasn't thick with faux gold and lapis lazuli, laid it carefully on the plate, and handed it to Liam.

"Thanks," Liam said. "Are you having a good birthday, Barnaby?"

Barnaby nodded and managed to squeak, "Yes." He cleared his throat. "It's been great. I'm really touched that you guys, I mean, that the staff threw this for me."

"We appreciate you," Liam said and ate a bite of cake. It left a tiny smear of raspberry filling next to his full lower lip, and Barnaby allowed himself exactly two seconds to fantasize about grasping Liam by the shoulder and licking the smear away. "We wanted to make sure you know."

"Yeah," Barnaby murmured as the fantasy now evolved into licking the taste of chocolate from Liam's mouth.

"Barnaby," Liam said. Barnaby tore his gaze away from that delectable mouth to focus on something -- anything -- else. Looking into

Liam's eyes seemed simplest -- they were amused now, and he licked the raspberry filling from the corner of his mouth. "You should get yourself some cake before it's gone."

"Right," Barnaby said, "yes," and cut a slice for himself. If he was eating no one would expect him to talk.

Except that once he'd shoved a forkful of cake into his mouth Liam said, "Any big plans for tonight?" and Barnaby had to hastily chew and swallow.

"My roommate's throwing me a party. Beer, pizza, and DVDs."

"Student parties never change." Liam smiled at him fondly. "Just drink responsibly. We want you back in one piece."

"Yes, sir." He shoved another bite of cake into his mouth.

Liam said, "You've got chocolate on your face," as he wiped Barnaby's mouth with his thumb. He licked the frosting from the ball of his thumb, still gazing at Barnaby.

Barnaby blurted out, "Would you like to come?" and Liam raised his eyebrows. "I mean, to the party. My party. Tonight." He wanted to sink into the floor but the words were out there and wouldn't go away. How ridiculous would that be, to have the *museum director* over to drink cheap beer with a bunch of students, even if he was only a few years older than they were?

Liam hesitated, then said, "I'd love to. What time and where?"

"Eight or so. We're informal. Um, address, address..." Barnaby searched his pockets for a piece of paper.

"How about if I get it from HR?" Liam said, still looking amused.

"Yes. Good. Eight o'clock."

"I'll be there," Liam said, but before he could say more, the marketing director called from the other side of the room, "Liam, are you still eating cake? We're expected upstairs."

Liam said, "Excuse me, Barnaby. Happy birthday. Enjoy your cake."

"You too." Barnaby blushed. "I mean -- thank you. See you later."

Liam smiled and said, "You, too," and left the break room with the other directors -- probably with relief. Probably wondering why they'd decided to make such a fuss over a mere volunteer. Probably wondering what

had possessed him to make conversation with Barnaby in the first place, and probably already planning his excuses.

Barnaby retreated to a folding chair beside the lunch table and ate the rest of his cake while the party went on around him.



Catering gave Barnaby the leftover cake in a cardboard box. He balanced it on his knees during the bus ride to his apartment downtown, and toyed with the string that bound the box closed as he watched the city go by. He doubted his roommate had made or bought a cake, which was fine with him -- it was enough that Miller was springing for the beer and pizza. If they cut the rest of the cake into small slices it would be enough to feed their friends.

The apartment was quiet when he arrived home. He put the cake on the counter and his backpack in his room, hung up his suit, put on a T-shirt and jeans, and went back to the kitchen. The day's mail waited for him on the kitchen table: birthday cards from his family, bills and advertisements, and a brown paper-wrapped package that bore stamps from Egypt and was addressed to him from Vianne Sloan. Barnaby smiled as he pulled off the paper -- his globe-trotting aunt hadn't forgotten his birthday once in twenty-five years. She'd gotten him interested in Egypt in the first place -- when he was six, she'd given him a book filled with pictures of pyramids and pharaohs, and told him how for centuries no one knew how to read the mysterious picture writing that covered their temples and tombs. Years later, he'd been disappointed to learn that it had been deciphered and he couldn't unlock the secret himself.

There was a card inside the small box, which was packed with raffia to protect his gifts: a scarab carved from turquoise on a braided leather cord, and a leather-bound blank journal, its cover embossed with hieroglyphics.

Darling Bay,

I found these at a market in Cairo and thought they might tempt you to join me someday. You need to see this country firsthand! Climb the pyramids, sail the Nile, walk the Avenue of the Sphinxes! I will get you here. Until I do, enjoy a few small treasures.

Have a wonderful birthday.

All my love,

Auntie Vi

Barnaby put on the necklace and opened the leather journal. The paper was fibrous, as if it had been pounded from papyrus reeds like documents of old, and nubby under his fingertips. He held the journal to his nose and inhaled the scent of leather and paper, and then decided to decipher the hieroglyphics to see if they said anything meaningful or were random symbols chosen for their aesthetic value.

By the time Miller came home, a canvas bag of groceries hanging slung over his shoulder and a case of beer under his arm, Barnaby had a decent translation worked out. "What have you got there, Bay?" Miller said, leaning over his shoulder.

"It's a prayer to Osiris, asking for blessings," Barnaby said. "It's more accurate than your usual tourist junk. They threw me a party at the museum and gave me the leftover cake," he added when Miller opened the cake box. "We'll have the rest of it tonight."

"Looks tasty." Miller shoved the case into the fridge so the beer would be cold by the time their guests started arriving.

"We might have one more person, too," Barnaby said, trying to sound casual.

"Oh, yeah? Who?" Miller said absently as he rearranged their freezer so he could fit in a carton of ice cream.

"Liam Morrison," Barnaby said, and Miller stopped rummaging.

"Liam Morrison? As in the director of the museum? Your boss?"

"Technically Arthur is my boss, but yeah, the museum director."

"That still makes him your boss."

"He probably won't come," Barnaby said, tracing the hieroglyphics on the journal cover with his fingertip. "He probably said yes to be polite."

"Guess we'll find out," Miller said and went to answer the front door as the doorbell rang.

Barnaby turned to a new page. He dated it and wrote, *I don't believe in wishes. Wishing doesn't make things happen. But it's my birthday and you're supposed to make wishes on your birthday, so here's mine. I wish I could go to Egypt with Aunt Vi.*

"Birthday boy!" called Miller's girlfriend Zoë as she came into the kitchen, and he rose to hug her as she held a cake pan out of the way. "I made you a cake. You like chocolate, right?"

"Wow, thank you," said Barnaby. "I love chocolate." She had frosted it in chocolate, too, and written, "Happy birthday, Barnaby!" in white icing. "We'll have plenty tonight -- they made me one at work, too, and I brought home the leftovers."

Zoë peeked into the box. "Oh, it's pretty! You'll get two wishes today."

Barnaby said, "Maybe one of them will actually come true," though he hadn't really made a wish at the museum party and didn't expect to make another tonight.

Miller turned on the vacuum cleaner in the living room, and Zoë went to help him tidy. Barnaby sat at the table again and wrote, *I wish I could work in the museum forever.*

He didn't have many wishes to make, really. He was fairly happy with his life -- he made enough money as a T.A. to supplement his savings and student loans, rent was affordable and Miller was a good roommate, his extended family looked after him, and he had friends who didn't mind his obsession with a thousands-year-old dead language.

He could hear Miller and Zoë talking as they cleaned, in the comfortable tones of people who got along and knew each other well. If he wished for anything, it was that -- someone to read with on a lazy afternoon, someone to run errands with, someone to ask to stay the night.

In a perfect world, it would be Liam Morrison.

Barnaby wrote, *I wish I had someone to share my life with. I wish that person was Liam Morrison,* and closed the journal with a sigh.

Miller came back into the kitchen with his cellphone in his hand. "Time to order the pizza, don't you think?"



Their friends -- fellow grad students from Barnaby's anthropology classes and Miller's biology program, neighbors, a few students they taught as T.A.s -- showed up with snacks and treats to supplement the pizza and beer. Miller hooked Barnaby's iPod to his mini-stereo speakers, and set it to play the Absolute Favorites playlist. As Barnaby wandered through the apartment, it was full of people eating, laughing, talking, and dancing.

It made him deeply happy. There was only one person missing, and he hadn't expected Liam to come, anyway.

Barnaby was dancing with one of Miller's classmates when the doorbell rang again. "Surprise stripper, Bay?" said Miller as he climbed over a sofa. He opened the door and said, "Uh, hi."

"Hello," said Liam Morrison, in a classy person's version of casual clothes: a plain white button-down shirt, jeans, and bright yellow sneakers. "Does Barnaby Sloan live here?"

"Yes!" Barnaby yelled and went to the door. "I mean, hi. Come on in. Everybody, this is Liam Morrison from the museum."

"Hi," Liam said pleasantly. There was no time for more words as Miller steered him to the kitchen to get food and introduced him to everyone they passed along the way. Barnaby wished he had something cool to press to his flushed face.

"You're in time for cake!" said Zoë. "We need to do this before midnight. Mill, where's a lighter?"

He tossed her one and she lit the "2" and "5" candles on the cake she'd made. Everyone sang while Barnaby tried not to look bashful. Liam sang too, smiling, and everyone applauded when Barnaby blew out the candles.

"I seem to recall being here before," Liam remarked as Barnaby cut the cake and passed out plates.

"I haven't had two birthday cakes since elementary school, I think." Barnaby laid a slice on Liam's plate, between the pizza and potato chips.

"It's not as fancy as the King Tut cake, but Zoë's a good baker. It should be tasty."

"Thanks. Now, she's your roommate, right?"

"My roommate's girlfriend," Barnaby corrected.

"And the tall redhead with the beard, he must be your boyfriend."

"Miller? No, Miller's my roommate. I don't have a boyfriend right now."

"Oh," Liam said. He hugged Barnaby briefly around his shoulders with one arm. "Happy birthday. I'll come find you later." He went into the living room to eat, and Barnaby looked after him, bewildered, until one of his friends asked for more cake.



About the time the party guests were licking frosting from the fingers and wandering into the kitchen to see if there was any cake left over, the seldom-used landline phone rang. "Quiet down, quiet," Miller scolded as he picked up the phone, and said in delight, "Vianne! Of course it's not too late. We're giving Bay his birthday bash. We won't be asleep for hours. I'll get him." He moved the mouthpiece away and hollered across the apartment, "Bay, come talk to Vianne!"

Barnaby made his way to the kitchen and took the phone from Miller's hand. "Aunt Vi, it's Barnaby."

"Happy birthday, sweetheart!" she said, her voice echoing through the line of her satellite phone. "I know it's late in Colorado but I have wonderful news, and I couldn't wait until morning in your time zone to tell you. You are coming with me to Egypt next summer."

"Auntie Vi," Barnaby said and rubbed his eye with the heel of his hand. Miller told people to hush and someone turned off the stereo. "I appreciate the invitation --"

"It's not an invitation, it's a fact," said Vianne. "The funding for my next expedition came through and there's enough for another assistant."

That assistant is you. Pack your work boots, my love. You're coming to Egypt."

Barnaby slumped against the nearest wall, too shocked to hold himself up a moment longer. "Auntie," he breathed, "I don't know what to say."

"Say 'thank you.'"

"Thank you," Barnaby said fervently. "Thank you."

"You're welcome, sweetheart. We'll talk more tomorrow. Enjoy your party," said Vianne.

"I will. Stay safe." He hung up and told everyone, "My aunt found a way to get me to Egypt for field school next year."

"Hey, awesome!" Miller said and Barnaby's classmates started cheering. Someone handed Barnaby a cup of beer. "It's a dream come true, right?"

"Yeah," Barnaby said and had a swig to the sound of more whistles and cheers. When he glanced in Liam's direction, Liam had a fond, proud look in his eyes. "I've done everything but wish on stars for it."

"Well, it is your birthday," Miller said as he went back to the living room to start up the music again. "Good things are supposed to happen on your birthday."

Maybe, but they usually don't, Barnaby thought. He caught Liam's eye across the pass-through that separated the kitchen from the living room, and at that Liam drained his cup and came back to the kitchen.

"That's great news, Barnaby. I'm happy for you."

"It's amazing news. Do you want something other than beer? I think we've got some pop in the fridge, and I know we've got iced tea. Miller loves his iced tea."

"Iced tea would be great," Liam said, so Barnaby got him a can from the bottom shelf of the fridge. Liam cracked it open and drank. Barnaby leaned against the kitchen counter and sipped his beer.

It might have been the beer, or it might have been happiness from his good news, but Barnaby felt courageous enough to say, "Why did you come tonight?"

Liam lowered the iced tea can. "Because you asked me to."

"Really? That's it? I asked you and you came?"

"Is that so weird?"

"No," Barnaby said, "but I've never had a boss come to one of my parties before. Of course," he added, "I've never asked a boss to come to one of my parties before."

"You're experiencing a lot of firsts today, it seems." Liam nodded to the sliding screen door off the kitchen. "What's out here?"

"The balcony. It's not much of a view, just the courtyard of the apartment complex. Want to see it?"

"Sure," Liam said, so Barnaby unlatched the door and they went outside. The balcony had Miller's vertical herb garden, an old wood park bench, and a small neon sign of a coffee cup squeezed into its tiny space. Barnaby plugged in the neon sign, and he and Liam sat on the bench under its flickering purple light.

"What's the story with the sign?" Liam asked as he had a swig of tea.

"It was here when we moved in, and we've never gotten rid of it."

"I like it. It's quirky."

They were quiet for a few minutes, drinking. Barnaby said, "The plan is to watch some movies soon. Miller's got my favorites out."

"For a night of beer and pizza and DVDs, this isn't a bad party," Liam said. "He's trying really hard to make you happy, and you're trying really hard to enjoy it. Even though you hate parties."

"I don't *hate* parties," Barnaby said. "I like them when they're like this, when they're low-key. Everybody's together and we're enjoying each other's company."

"You were miserable at the museum party, sitting in a corner all by yourself."

"After a day of answering questions and telling stories, I need to decompress before I can handle more people."

Liam looked at him, the can dangling from his fingers. "So the surprise party was a bad idea."

"No, no, no," Barnaby said. "I know everybody meant well. You were right -- I felt appreciated."

"You like working there, don't you? You like volunteering?"

"I love it. The kids were so sweet. They call me Mr. Barnaby and they want to hold my hand, and they ask the funniest questions. Today one of them asked me if I'm ever scared the mummies will wake up and come after me."

"What did you say?"

"I said yes," Barnaby said. "I said when I'm helping to close up at night, those long dark halls get spooky and anything seems possible. I worry about the dinosaurs waking up, too."

Liam chuckled and leaned back in the bench so he could put his feet on the railing. Barnaby smiled and sipped his beer. Liam said, fingers tapping on the can, "I meant to come at eight but a meeting I was in ran long."

"It's fine," Barnaby. "I didn't expect you to actually come. I'm glad you did," he added hastily. "Of course I'm glad you did."

Liam smiled at him. "I have news for you. I'm afraid after your aunt's call it's going to be anticlimactic."

"Okay," Barnaby said slowly.

"In two years we're hosting the Treasures of Tutankhamen tour."

"Liam," Barnaby breathed. "That's wonderful!"

Liam's smile grew wider. "I knew you'd think so. I want to offer you the assistant curator position while it's here."

Barnaby tried to speak, but all that came out was an undignified whimper.

"Provided you have your degree by then," Liam said. "Or are at least in the dissertation defense stage. I'm willing to bend the rules for you a little."

"Um," was all Barnaby could get out.

"Basically you'll be a liaison between the collection's curator and the museum, but I know you're capable of handling it. You're good with all kinds of people." He looked at Barnaby. "Barnaby? Breathe, please." He put his hand on Barnaby's back and Barnaby leaned over to put his head between his knees. Liam patted his back. "This isn't the reaction I expected."

"Sorry, sorry," Barnaby said, "things are happening very fast, it's hard to deal with. I was just getting used to the idea that I'm going to Egypt next year and then you offer me this --"

"Breathe," Liam said, "in through the nose, out through the mouth."

Barnaby breathed as instructed and the world stopped tilting. "I accept," he said when he could speak. "I've wanted something like this so much. I thought it would be years before I'd even have a chance."

"I know you'll do us proud."

"Why are you making me the offer? Wouldn't this be Mr. Drake's decision?"

"Mr. Drake isn't going to be with us much longer," Liam explained. "He's moving to Massachusetts to be near his family, so I'm looking for someone to take over his position as well. I wanted this in place before we bring the new blood in. Besides," he added, "technically, staffing is my job, and I have a weakness for keeping the family together."

His eyes were so warm and his smile was so gentle that Barnaby thought, *I could kiss you, I could kiss you right now and you might let me.* He was trembling. He let his cup drop from his fingers as he moved closer to Liam. Liam moved closer too, his arm stretched across the back of the bench. That arm curled around Barnaby's shoulders as Barnaby leaned in and kissed him.

Liam hadn't shaved before the party, and the scratch of his stubble felt intimate and carnal against Barnaby's skin. He tasted lemony like the iced tea. Barnaby felt tipsier from Liam's end-of-the-day scent than on the beers he'd drunk -- even more so from Liam's warm chuckle when Barnaby took his face in both hands and straddled his thighs so he could kiss Liam deeper. Liam gripped his hips and arched up to him, and Barnaby shivered.

"Liam," Barnaby whispered and kissed down his neck. "I've wanted this from the first moment I saw you, I've wanted you so much, as much as--" He stopped and opened his eyes, and Liam looked up at him, dark eyes even darker. "Everything else that's happened today," he said and slid off Liam's lap. Liam watched him with a slight frown, and kept his arm around him. "Can I ask you something?"

"Anything."

"When did you decide to come to the party?"

Liam looked confused as he said, "When you asked me. I said I would, didn't I?"

"Yes, but -- I mean--" Barnaby screwed up his face, trying to think. "Something weird is happening tonight."

"What do you mean?"

Before he could answer, the screen door slid open and Miller leaned out. "We're about to start *Mamma Mia!*, unless you have another request."

"No," Barnaby said, "*Mamma Mia!*'s great. We'll be right in."

Miller nodded and went back in. Barnaby asked Liam, "Do you want to stay for the movie? We do the sing-along version. It gets rowdy."

Liam smiled, though the worry didn't leave his eyes. "Will you sing?"

"I always sing. I love to sing."

"Then I'll stay."

Barnaby held out his hand to Liam and took him inside, and squeezed him into a corner of the couch so Barnaby could sit on the floor, leaning against his legs.



The party was in the midst of "Lay All Your Love On Me" when Barnaby figured he wouldn't be missed, and he slipped out of the living room to find the leather journal. He had wished he could see Egypt with Aunt Vianne and she found a way for him to do just that. He had wished he could stay with the museum, and then he got an offer that would keep him there for another three years, possibly longer, possibly as long as he wanted to stay. And he had wished for Liam Morrison to want him, and Liam did.

One wish was a miracle. Two wishes made him wonder. Three wishes... well, who got three wishes outside of a fairy tale?

In his bedroom, Barnaby flipped through the pages of the journal, not sure what he was looking for. The only handwriting within was his own, the front page with his translation of the cover hieroglyphics and the second page with his wishes. Inside the back cover was the printer's logo, the

symbols for "scribe" in a cartouche, and the only other writing was the prayer to Osiris on the front cover -- a prayer Barnaby knew asked for wishes to be granted.

Barnaby shoved the journal across his desk. *Ridiculous*. This wasn't six thousand years ago, when people thought the sun was chased by monsters through the underworld every night. This was the modern world and he was a modern man. He worked in a natural history museum and was surrounded by people who loved research and science. He spent his free time explaining things like space exploration and fossils to children. Osiris was another story he told, like Prometheus and Gilgamesh and Kokopelli.

Still, there was no denying that something weird was going on. If he'd made a wish that made Liam go from a friendly superior to believing he wanted Barnaby, then it wasn't right. Was it?

Barnaby picked up his cell phone and dialed Vianne's number. It went to her voice mail, which made him scowl. "Auntie Vi, it's Bay. I have to ask you a weird question, and please don't think I'm crazy because I already feel a little crazy. The journal that you sent me, is it -- special? In any way? Because stuff has happened to me today that never happens to me and I can't figure out why. Call me as soon as you get this, no matter what time it is." He hung up and knocked his head against the phone a few times, then put it beside the journal and went back to the party.

He found Miller in the kitchen, tossing used paper plates and cups into a trash bag. Barnaby stopped to help, and Miller said, "Hey, birthday boy, get back to having fun."

"I'm having lots of fun," Barnaby said. "Besides, it's past midnight. My birthday's over." He said casually as he wrapped leftover pizza in plastic to put into the fridge, "Weird about my boss showing up, right?"

"Not so weird. He likes you."

"He's offered me a job."

Miller stopped stacking plates to stare at him. "Get out! Really?"

"The museum's getting the Treasures of Tutankhamen exhibit in two years, so provided I'm in the defense stage or have my doctorate by then, I'm the new assistant curator. Unless there's a disaster in the next two years

I shouldn't have any trouble doing that. I think Liam came to the party to tell me in person."

"Bay, that's great news! This is turning out to be a fantastic day for you."

"Yeah." Barnaby hauled himself onto the cleanest kitchen counter. "And then he kissed me," he told Miller quietly, and Miller stopped cleaning again to listen to him. "Well, I kissed him, but he kissed me back. There was mutual kissing."

"I can't tell if you think this is a good thing or a bad thing," Miller said.

"I can't either," said Barnaby miserably. "I've had the worst crush on him since the first time I saw him, but I never thought he'd like me back, and now I think he might, but it's weird because I wrote these down in the book and now they're happening--"

"Whoa, stop," said Miller, holding up his hands. "What book? What are you talking about?"

"The book Vi gave to me, the one with the prayer to Osiris on the cover. It's a prayer to have wishes granted, and I wrote wishes in it, and now they're coming true and I don't know if they're ... real."

Miller peered into Barnaby's eyes. "Are you drunk? How many beers did you have?"

"No!" Barnaby said. "Maybe a little buzzed but that's not important. What if all of this gets taken away from me tomorrow? What if Liam was coerced into kissing me and I'm guilty of non-consensual kissing?"

Miller leaned against the counter beside him, his arms crossed and his brow furrowed. Barnaby bit his lip, certain that his methodical, biologist roommate could make sense of this. Finally Miller said, "Bay, this is crazy talk. No more beer for you."

"Miller--"

"No, dude, listen to me. There's no cosmic power behind all of this. Good things happened to you today. Accept it. Rejoice in it. Go back out to the living room and make out with your cute boss some more." He put his arm around Barnaby's shoulders. "I know it's tempting to put a pattern on random events, but that's all this is, random events that coalesced. Vi got

funding today. The museum board decided today. And today, your boss realized you're awesome. You deserve this." He rubbed Barnaby's shoulder and let him go.

"I'll try to look at it that way." He slid down from the counter. "Thanks, Miller."

Miller resumed cleaning the kitchen, and Barnaby went back to the living room. Liam sat in the corner of the little sofa again, and when Barnaby sat at his feet Liam played with his hair until they both got up to sing along with "Take A Chance On Me."



After the third DVD, their guests started to say it was time to call it a night, and hug Barnaby and wish him a happy birthday one more time. Most of their friends lived within walking distance or in the complex itself, and for those who didn't, Miller had confiscated a few keys during the night and now offered to drive them home.

"Do you want to stay a while?" Barnaby said to Liam as his friends gathered their leftovers and shoes. "I'm going to walk a few people home but it won't take me more than half an hour."

"I should get some sleep." Liam rubbed his eyes. "Jesus, is it really four a.m.? The last time I stayed up this late I was jetlagged."

"Stay," Barnaby said. "You're too tired to drive."

Liam nodded with a tired smile. "Mind if I crash on your bed?"

"Please do." He kissed Liam quickly and then put on a jacket for the walk.

It took only twenty minutes to see his friends home, and Miller was still out when Barnaby returned. Barnaby hung up his jacket and took off his sneakers, and went through the apartment to check for strays (none) and trash (plenty, but nothing that needed his immediate attention).

He went to his bedroom last. On the walk, he'd resolved to tell Liam about the journal and let Liam decide what he wanted to do next, but now that he was home and knew Liam was waiting for him, and also knew that

Miller was likely staying at Zoë's tonight, made him want to put off any big decisions until tomorrow.

His bed was just a narrow twin, part of the well-used furniture he and Miller had collected over their student years, more functional than comfortable. Tonight, he thought it was the most beautiful piece of furniture ever because Liam was asleep on the far side.

Barnaby tossed his clothes into the overflowing hamper and got into bed beside Liam. Talk could wait. If all these good things today had been caused by wishing and would be taken away as soon as the sun came up, at least he'd have one night to sleep at Liam's side.



Barnaby's ringing cell phone woke him a few hours later. Liam inhaled and Barnaby laid a hand over his ear as he reached over him to get the phone. Liam batted his hand away and Barnaby kissed his cheek, then turned away to climb off the bed and talk to whoever was calling at this time of the morning -- ah, yes. Vianne, who he'd asked to call him whenever.

"Good morning, Auntie Vi," he said, holding the phone to his ear with his shoulder as he pulled on last night's jeans.

"Bay, my love, what's this about wishes?"

"It's the journal you gave me," Barnaby said and went into the living room so he wouldn't wake Liam. "It's got a prayer to Osiris on the front cover."

"I thought that's what it was," Vianne said. "You're so much better at translation than I am. Do you not like it?"

"I like it! I do. But I wrote some wishes in it last night and," he lowered his voice, "they seem to be coming true. I think it's the journal."

Vianne burst out laughing. "Bay. Bay, darling, look at this objectively. What happened?"

"I wished I could come to Egypt with you, and you got funding. And then I wished I could stay at the museum longer, and I was offered a job as an assistant curator once I've finished my doctorate."

"Barnaby Sloan! That's wonderful! Why didn't you tell me last night?"

"It happened after you called. But doesn't it seem like more than coincidence to you?"

"Two life-changing events in one day is unusual," Vianne said, "but not unheard-of. It's coincidence they both happened yesterday."

"Three life-changing events," Barnaby said. "I wished I had someone to share my life with, and now this man I really like seems to really like me too. There was kissing and he slept over. I think this could really be something, but if it happened because I wished for it and it's not genuine--"

"Bay," Vianne said gently, "are you near a mirror?"

"No."

"Go to one, and tell your reflection that you're a bright young man with a promising future and sweet disposition, and you deserve whatever person you've found to love." He sighed, and Vianne said, "Darling, the journal is just a journal. It's not magic. There's no such thing outside of stories, and as beautiful as stories are, they're not life."

"Okay," Barnaby said, though he found himself wishing there was a little more magic in day-to-day life.

"Now get some rest. You sound exhausted. I love you."

"I love you too," Barnaby said and hung up.

"Should I be jealous?" said Liam from the hallway. He looked much younger than usual, with his hair and shirt ruffled and his face still flushed from sleep. He could be another student, instead of the equivalent of a CEO.

Barnaby held up the cell phone. "My Aunt Vianne."

"Sometime when she's in town you've got to ask her to give a few lectures at the museum. I think our patrons would love her."

"Have you met her?" Barnaby slid off the arm of the couch where he'd perched himself, and Liam padded across the room and curled up on the couch with him, his bare feet tucked under him.

"Never, but I've read her books. I'd love to meet her in person some time."

Barnaby pushed Liam's bangs back into place. "She'll scope you out from top to bottom if we -- you know."

"If we start dating," Liam said. "Does this have something to do with that journal you were talking about?"

Barnaby swallowed. "Yes. I know it sounds crazy but it's just too much to believe that I'd suddenly get these chances and you'd suddenly want me--

"It's not sudden," Liam said. "How long do you think your aunt has been working on getting funding for next year?"

"Since before she left for this year's dig," Barnaby said.

"And how long do you think we've been discussing offering you the assistant curator position?"

"A week?"

"Two months," Liam said. "Ever since Bill Drake said he's leaving." He leaned closer to Barnaby and Barnaby looked into his eyes. "How long do you think I've liked you?"

"A day?" Barnaby whispered.

"Since you started volunteering."

Barnaby moved a little closer to him. "Why didn't you say anything?"

"I'm your boss," he said simply. "I never had the chance to be casual with you before. And I figured you were with somebody. But I like you enough to want to work with the fraternization rules." He grinned at Barnaby and poked his chest. "And tonight, I discovered you're single."

Barnaby couldn't quite smile back yet. "But I made that wish--"

"Barnaby, I kissed you because I wanted to, and have wanted to for a lot longer than you've had that journal." He put his arm around Barnaby's shoulders. "Good things happen to you because of you." Barnaby laid his head on Liam's arm and sighed. Liam kissed his hair and stroked his shoulder, then rested his chin on Barnaby's head. "Where's the journal?"

"On my desk."

"Stay right here." He went to Barnaby's room, and came back with the journal and one of Barnaby's pens. "I wish for Barnaby to believe I want to

be here," he said as he wrote. "I wish for Barnaby to be happy I'm here." He capped the pen. "There. I've made wishes, too. They'd better come true."

"Now you're just making fun of me," Barnaby said, but he smiled anyway and nudged Liam's foot.

"Made you smile," Liam teased.

"You did." He moved closer to Liam, leaned over their knees, and kissed him carefully -- and then not carefully as he pushed Liam onto the couch cushions. "You do make me smile." He ran his hands over Liam's chest and down his hips, and Liam held him by the hips and kissed him eagerly.

They parted, trembling and breathing hard. Liam shoved his hands into Barnaby's back pockets and lifted his head to kiss him again, but Barnaby shook his head and climbed off him.

"Miller and I have an agreement. No sex in the public spaces. Come on."

"Does that mean no shower sex?" Liam said as he followed Barnaby back to his room.

"Yeah, sorry." They toppled onto his bed, kissing furiously and tugging at each other's clothes.

"My place, then." Liam kissed his neck. "You're going to love my shower. And my bed. God, I can't wait to get you into my bed."

Barnaby smiled up at him. "I'll love being in your bed. But now I've got you in my bed and there's nowhere I'd rather be."

Liam held his jaw and kissed him. His kisses grew slower, deeper, and his hand left Barnaby's face and slid up his arm to hold his hand. Barnaby pressed up to feel Liam hard against him, and slid his hands over Liam's strong back and lightly furred chest.

"So sweet." Liam kissed his chest. "So, so sweet." He opened Barnaby's jeans and worked them down his hips, and kissed along them, too. Barnaby whimpered as Liam nuzzled his cock through his underwear and pushed a hand into Liam's hair as Liam pulled those down as well. Liam murmured, "So sweet," again and kissed Barnaby's cock.

Barnaby stroked his hair and moaned as Liam licked him. He couldn't get his legs open wider than the jeans tangled around his knees,

there was a belt buckle digging into his back, and the door latch hadn't caught so he could see a sliver of hallway when he looked over -- and he couldn't be happier. Liam wanted him, really wanted him, thought he was wonderful, wanted to take him home. Wanted to be with him. *Him*, Barnaby Sloan.

"Wait, Liam, wait, stop," Barnaby gasped as he realized what would make this better. Liam pulled off his cock and wiped saliva from his chin, and went easily onto his back when Barnaby turned him over. Barnaby knelt over him and unzipped his khakis, and pushed them down his lovely legs.

"Oh, you're brilliant," Liam sighed. He wrapped his arms around Barnaby's thighs and took Barnaby's cock between his lips, and Barnaby braced himself on his arms and did the same.

They stopped sometimes, to kiss each other's stomach and thighs, to whisper each other's name and caress each other's hair, even just to giggle, but mostly Barnaby was lost in the pleasure of being in Liam's mouth and having Liam in his, fingers curling into Liam's thighs as Liam stroked his hips and squeezed his ass.

He pulled off to gasp, "Liam, I'm going to--" Liam gripped his hips tighter and swallowed him deeper, and Barnaby clenched his hands and moaned, "Liam, Liam," as he shot down Liam's throat.

Still gasping, Barnaby fell onto his side. He laid his hand on Liam's trembling stomach, and then curled closer to Liam and opened his lips to lick his cock, head angled so Liam could watch. "Oh, Barnaby," Liam breathed, and his fingers dug into Barnaby's shoulder as he came onto Barnaby's lips.

They both rolled onto their backs, panting. Liam reached for Barnaby's hand and Barnaby gave it, and they lay together, eyes closed, breathing hard. They both started laughing again.



They ended up with their heads on Barnaby's folded blankets and their feet on his pillow. Barnaby buried his face in Liam's neck and Liam traced circles on Barnaby's back. Liam breathed slowly and his eyes were closed, and Barnaby thought if Liam wanted to stay in bed all day and sleep and make out, he was good with that.

"Miller calls you Bay," Liam murmured.

"It's a family nickname, and he's practically family so he's allowed."

"How do you get Bay from Barnaby? And where did Barnaby come from? It's not a name you hear much anymore."

Barnaby snuggled closer. "I'm named after my great-grandfather. I think my parents liked that it's unusual but it's not a made-up kind of unusual. When I was learning to talk I couldn't say Barnaby, so I called myself Bay. My parents picked up on it and then the rest of my family did, too. As nicknames go, it's not a bad one."

"I like it," Liam said. "Barnaby is like a tweed jacket and Bay is like a tie-dyed T-shirt."

"I am both those things." Barnaby nuzzled his neck.

"Do I get to call you Bay?"

Barnaby propped himself on his elbow so he could look into Liam's eyes. Liam was smiling sleepily, the sort of smile that was more in the corners of the eyes than in the mouth, and Barnaby kissed Liam to see if he could taste how happy Liam was. "You can call me anything you want," he murmured as he held Liam's face and stroked his cheekbones. "I would love it if you called me Bay."

Liam kissed him and Barnaby settled his head on Liam's shoulder again. "We've got a whole year before you head off to Egypt," Liam said after a while. "I keep thinking those three months are going to be tough, even though I know it's a dream come true for you."

"I'll come back."

"You'd better."

Barnaby listened to Liam breathe, then said as casually as he could, "Do you really think we'll last that long?"

"Yes," Liam said. "Should I write it in your book?"

Barnaby shoved him and Liam giggled as he caught himself from falling off the bed. "Don't make fun of me. I had a real, honest, genuine freak-out last night."

"I know," Liam said gently and ran a hand over Barnaby's head to soothe him. "But it was nice to believe, even for a little while, that something was looking after you, wasn't it?"

Barnaby had to think about it for a moment. "I don't know. I keep telling myself I don't believe in wishes, that wishing doesn't make anything happen, but maybe deep down I wanted something magical so badly I thought it had finally come along."

Liam rubbed Barnaby's back, expression thoughtful. "I think," he said slowly, "there is magic in our lives, but not storybook magic. Not fairy godmothers or wish-granting frogs. It's more like someone comes into your life and changes everything. Sometimes it's on the periphery, like the people who fund your aunt's research, and sometimes it's directly, like you and me."

"You think that's magic?"

"It's magic enough for me. I think I've been wishing for someone like you for a long time. Someone sweet and patient and smart, that I can be myself with. My friends are great," he added. "I don't want you to think they're phonies or snobs or anything like that. I hope you'll like my friends. I like yours. But you're not like them. You're... different."

"I'm just Barnaby," murmured Barnaby, blushing, and closed his eyes as Liam kissed him.

"I'm going to like figuring out what that means."

There were two rapid knocks on the door and Miller said as he opened it, "Bay, you up yet? I've got doughnuts -- oh. Hey, Liam."

"Hey, Miller," Liam said, perfectly at home.

"Anyway," Miller said. "There are doughnuts." He shut the door.

They both burst into giggles again. "I think I should clean up a little," Barnaby said and scrubbed a hand over his face. "And you should put some clothes on."

"I guess your roommate doesn't need to see me naked." He stretched luxuriously.

"Not any more than he already has," and that set them off again. Barnaby said when he had his breath back, "Or you stay here and I'll get us doughnuts."

"I like that plan. It means I don't have to move."

"Stay right there." He patted Liam's chest and got out of bed, pulled on a pair of sweats and went out to the bathroom to wash his face, then to the kitchen to pour them both glasses of milk and fill a plate with fresh doughnuts.

The leather-bound journal was still on the coffee table where Liam had left it. Barnaby paused, wondering if he should write down his new wishes, but then smiled to himself and went back to Liam. They had each other to make their wishes come true.

But first, they'd eat doughnuts.

The End

THE WISH SERIES

The Wishing Book of Barnaby Sloan
The Haunted Halloween of Barnaby Sloan
The Christmas Miracles of Barnaby Sloan
The Auld Lang Syne of Barnaby Sloan

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