

The Fable of Benny

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The Fable of Benny

As Retold by Sam Aurelius Milam III

In ancient times, in a faraway and exotic land, there lived a mage's apprentice called Benny. Actually, his name was much longer and more complicated than that but, for now, I'll call him Benny. Besides that, while it is generally known and acknowledged that the use of a man's true name can give one power over him, it is less generally known and acknowledged, but just as true, that the use of a man's true name might also give him power over the user. So, for convenience and for my own protection, I'll call him Benny.

As I noted, Benny was a mage's apprentice and, at the time of this incident, had been apprenticed to that particular mage for several hundred years. Much time is needed to learn the Mage's Arts and, necessarily, mages lend to their apprentices the years of longevity that are necessary for such study. Once an apprentice becomes a mage, he is entirely capable of seeing to his own longevity but, while an apprentice, he gets it from his master.

Benny thoroughly studied all that was assigned to him by his mage, and did all that was required of him. Even so, he never told his master of his real agenda, but he did have one. His real agenda was to be endlessly and immensely wealthy. So, while he did as instructed by his master, he also secretly studied certain arts, potions, incantations, and powerful spells which were, shall we say, extracurricular. After several centuries, he was ready. However, he needed first to dispose of his master, who would certainly have prevented any such scheme as Benny had in mind. Several decades of preparation were required for that but a mage must be patient above all else, and that's one of the first things that an apprentice learns. So, eventually, in the fullness of time, Benny succeeded in disposing of his master. After that, it was a simple matter to evoke the fearsome phantom that would be capable of granting Benny's wishes. The phantom appeared when called and was happy to grant the wish. However, the phantom imposed one condition, as was its right.

The phantom granted Benny unending and immense wealth, provided only that Benny never cut his beard. He was warned to never cut it, however long it grew. Not only, warned the phantom, would Benny's wealth immediately disappear, if ever he cut his beard but, as an additional consequence, Benny would be instantly changed into a fancy, ornamental funeral vase.

Benny happily agreed to the condition and instantly became endlessly and immensely wealthy. He lived in unimaginable luxury for many years, during which his beard grew to such a length that he needed servants to follow him around, carrying it behind him.

There was, however, an unexpected side effect of being endlessly and immensely wealthy, which is what Benny had demanded of the phantom, word for word. The unexpected side effect resided in the "endlessly" part. In order to be endlessly wealthy, Benny had to live forever. A beard can grow quite long in several millen-

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nia and, eventually, it became impossible to manage. There eventually came a time when Benny began to suspect, or at least to hope, that, after so long, the phantom had probably forgotten all about him anyway, and maybe it wouldn't hurt anything, after all, to just shave the beard completely. After all, he could become wealthy all over again and the beard would probably be long again before the phantom even noticed, if it ever did. Just to be on the safe side, Benny hid a large quantity of funds where even the tax collectors wouldn't be able to find it. If it was safe from them then it would certainly be safe from the phantom. Then, Benny shaved off his beard. As the last whisker was severed, the phantom poofed into existence and changed Benny into an urn.

Moral: A Benny shaved is a Benny urned.