



An
Unmod-Episode
Wish



By Ardat Rekha

An Upside-Down Wish

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Synopsis: What if a wish had the power to change lives forever? A little semi-metaphysical vignette on the power of wishes... and poor wording.

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An Upside-Down Wish

“He’s cool, isn’t he?”

Maggie looked down at Conor and smiled as she took a sip from the champagne glass. “Who is, sweetie?”

“The guy with the chips.”

First-name Dylan. Maggie had to hide a smile from her young son. The last thing she wanted Conor doing, after everything they’d already been through, was latching onto and idolizing a *professional gambler*.

But she had to admit, if only to herself, that the man had something.

Men almost never persisted in trying to flirt with Maggie James when she shut them down, calling them on their tactics. Most backed off right away, and many tried to verbally flay her as they went, in an attempt to save face. But Dylan had smiled, conceded her point, and then continued trying to flirt with her. It had been... oddly *charming*. In fact, she had to admit to herself, she’d begun flirting *back*, something she hadn’t done since long before Roy died.

In an odd way, he reminded her of Roy. Not in looks – Roy’s eyes and hair had been much darker, and he’d been a stickler about staying clean-shaven – but in bearing and mannerism. The look in his eyes as he’d offered her the glass of champagne had reminded her of a long-ago night when she’d been rescued from a bad prom date by a mysterious young man with a glass of mildly-spiked punch. It had been the start of something out of a fairy tale, something that had come to a brutal and bloody end almost two years ago on a random Baghdad street.

Maggie had thought she’d died, too, for a while, and the only thing that had kept her from collapsing and going under was her son – *their* son – and how much he needed her to be strong. They’d become a team after a while, both of them looking out for each other while they rebuilt their lives. She’d gone back to school, with her son’s encouragement, and was only one semester away from getting her Associate Degree in accounting. And Roy’s parents – who’d lavished them with this extraordinary Christmas gift – were going to help her get a job in the firm they’d hoped their son might one day join. Life was finally starting to come together at last, but...

But.

She *was* lonely, and she knew Conor was too. Her bed, at night, was still cold and empty, a widow’s bed. And Conor didn’t have anybody to father him, to play baseball with him out in a backyard, or take him fishing, or any of the things Roy had been looking forward to doing with their son. He had other male role models in his life – his grandfathers, his uncles – but no *father figure*.

And you know perfectly well, Maggie James, that Mr. Blue-Eyed Charm, first-name Dylan, is probably the worst man out there to choose for something like that.

Charming as he might be, the man smoked and gambled, two things she didn’t want Conor trying to emulate. And he was *clearly* on the prowl. Her widow’s bed might be cold and lonely, but she’d rather be there than carving a notch in Dylan’s hotter bed for the space of a very few nights. Hers would feel all the colder when she returned to it at the end—

And that’s more than enough out of you, Margaret Eleanor Quincy James, she scolded herself, in her mother’s drag-out-the-full-name style. *That man is officially off-limits to you **and** Conor. Nothing good will come out of this.*

“Mom? Hey Mom!”

“Yeah, honey?” Had she completely blanked out in front of him?

“I *said*, what’s his *name*?” Conor had the exasperated look on his face that he usually only got when they were arguing about how much TV he could watch.

“Dylan,” she answered before thinking. *Oh, great.* “But look, I don’t want you pestering him, okay? He’s probably a very busy man.”

And a very bad influence.

“You like him!” Good God, she’d heard him use that same teasing tone with a friend of his last month, right before he burst into the *sitting in a tree* song.

Am I blushing? I’m blushing!

“He’s... he’s very nice,” she admitted.

“You two should go out.”

“Conor!” She stared at him in shocked disbelief.

“You *should!*” he insisted, crossing his arms like a miniature of his father. “Grandma and Grandpa James were talking about it, and they’re right. You’ve been single long enough.”

I swear, sometimes I think he’s seven going on seventy... She knelt down so that they were at eye level.

“You know, they’re probably right... and I know that your father would want me to find someone I could be happy with. But... Dylan isn’t that someone, okay, honey? There’s just no way a man like that would ever belong in our lives, not *that* way.”

She could see very Roy-like stubbornness hardening his features. “But—”

“No, honey, I’m serious. He’s a nice man, but our lives would have to turn completely upside-down before there’d be any way.” She leaned forward and kissed his cheek. “Now, you’d better go get the New Years horn from the Captain, hadn’t you?”

Conor sighed, submitting to her kiss before disentangling himself from her and heading for the podium. She watched him go, rising to her feet again.

I’m sorry, Conor. I didn’t realize you were so lonely, too. When they got back to the States, she promised herself, she’d try harder to socialize.

There were eyes on her; she could feel them. Turning and looking up towards the balconies, she saw *him* again. Dylan, watching her with piercing blue eyes. He lifted his half-full champagne glass in a silent toast, and she found herself lifting her own in response.

There’s just no way it would work, she told herself again as she sipped from the glass he’d given her. *Even if he **did** want more than a few nights.*

It’s just not fair, Conor thought as he headed for the stage.

Tonight might have been the first time his *mother* had noticed Dylan Johns around the ship, but *he’d* noticed several times. Especially because the man was *always* looking at her. He’d seen him around the ship several times, too. Out on the decks, where almost nobody ventured on these chilly December days, running. Conor had imagined running like that. When his father had still been alive, *he’d* run like that, sometimes with Conor piggybacking the whole way. *You’re still lighter than my full gear,* he’d joked, saying that Conor would probably be too *cool* to be carried anymore before he became too *heavy*.

Almost two years since his death, Conor knew that he would *never* be too cool for one more piggyback ride... but he’d never have it, either.

But he’d heard his grandparents talking about how his mom needed a new man... and how *he* needed a new father. And they were right. It didn’t even hurt so much to think about that. He knew his Daddy would have wanted that, for both of them. He was finally old enough to understand that dead was forever, and his father wasn’t coming home. But that didn’t mean they had to stay lonely forever.

He wanted a father. And he’d picked the one he wanted.

There was just one big problem... his mom.

He didn’t *understand!* He saw the way she smiled and blushed when she talked about Dylan. *Just* like the girls on the playground did. But she’d told him it wasn’t possible, not unless their lives turned upside down.

It’s not fair!

He climbed onto the podium and smiled up at the Captain. He liked the Captain a lot. This whole trip had been made especially nice by how sweet he was to both of them. If he didn’t seem to already have the hots for someone else – that singer, Gloria – Conor might have thought of *him* as potential father material. But Dylan was even better.

*Our lives already **are** upside-down. They have been ever since Daddy died. I wish—*

As he held the New Years horn in his hand, it came to him. Wasn’t New Years like a birthday? Maybe you could make a wish on it, the way you could on your birthday... and maybe it’d come true.

“Ten! Nine! Eight! Seven! Six!” Around him, the count grew louder and louder.

If our lives are already upside-down, then turning them upside-down again would make them right, wouldn’t it? He lifted the New Years horn to his lips.

“Five! Four! Three!” Out in the crowd he could see his mom chanting, too, her champagne glass raised. And up in the balconies, there he was – Dylan, his eyes on Maggie, his lips moving in time with the count.

We’ve been sad long enough. We don’t need to be sad any longer.

“Two! One! **HAPPY NEW YEAR!**”

Please, God... turn our lives upside down again. Bring me a father.
Conor James sounded the horn.