



# WISHES COME TRUE, NOT FREE

Meryl Streep, Emily Blunt, James Corden, and Anna Kendrick obtain wishes within the *Woods*

By Michael Gioia

It begins at “Once upon a time,” when fantasy and folklore meet first-world problems in Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine’s *Into the Woods*. A fair maiden named Cinderella, a childless Baker and his wife (along with Little Red Riding Hood and a penniless lad, Jack) state through song, “Into the woods to get my wish. I don’t care how; the time is now.”

The time *is* now, and Meryl Streep—as an old enchantress looking to reverse a curse—has been enlisted to send James Corden’s Baker (and a few others, including Anna Kendrick’s Cinderella and Emily Blunt’s housewife) into the iconic forest, where dreams are obtained, objectives get lost, and wishes come true.

“There’s an awful balance in everything, and that’s what we live with, and you don’t know that when you’re young and aiming for something that you imagine is there,” says Streep, whose Witch wants beauty and recognition.

“It reminds me of all those surveys [for] young people across the country that say, ‘What do you want to do when you are older? What’s your goal?’ And, the goal is to be famous—not what they’re going to *do*, what they’re going to achieve, not the quality of their output or what they’re going to be. It’s ‘famous,’ and that’s when you should *really* be careful of wishing. It’s extremely compassionate, this piece, in its understanding of how we all aim at things—whether they’re good things or bad things—we strive for them, and at a cost, sometimes.”

Growing up, Streep recalls, “I wanted to be a mother, I knew that—and that costs you big!”

In *Into the Woods* parenthood comes at a price for the Baker and his wife, as they lie and steal to acquire pieces to the Witch’s puzzle, which disarm the charm if obtained in time.

“At the time, I was pregnant,” explains Blunt, who gave birth to her first child, Hazel, a year

ago in Feb. 2014. “I hadn’t had my daughter yet, but it was kind of extraordinary being pregnant and playing this woman, who was desperately yearning to be pregnant, and feeling like I was the luckiest person in the world... In a way, it gave me a deeper insight into this woman and her yearning to be a mother. Those maternal instincts were kicking in for me. It was kind of a trip, being pregnant and hiding behind every tree in the woods by the end of my pregnancy!”

Corden, the father of three-year-old son Max and newborn girl Carey, admits, “For me, the thing that struck a chord is the end of the film—to be sat, holding a newborn baby, telling the story and feeling what it would feel like to be trying to do that on your own. That’s the chord that struck with me the most. As a parent, the world changes when you have kids, and I do think it was useful to me to be a father and play such a role.”

As for *Cinderella*, she longs for love and belonging, and Kendrick can relate.

“You have a fearlessness as a child, and even though I dealt with early-age rejection, I definitely knew that I had that abstract goal of being on Broadway,” she recalls. “But even then, when I was doing [*High Society*] at 12, it was amazing and exciting, but there were times when I was kind of lonely because I was the only kid in the cast. I was away from my friends and a lot of my family, so ‘Wishes come true, not free’ definitely applies to that situation.”

Although the four at *Woods*’s core have put up their fair share of fight in their careers, this project was admittedly a happy-ever-after kind of moment.

“There was a day that I was standing with Tracey Ullman on a big forest set, and Chris Pine was riding in on a horse, and Emily’s there, and Meryl’s there, and everything just looks so gorgeous, and they have been completely transformed,” Kendrick remembers. “And, Tracey Ullman turned to me and was like, ‘Can you believe we get to be here right now?’ And, I was thinking the same thing, ‘Yeah, I can’t believe we get to be here right now,’ and also I can’t believe that Tracey Ullman is saying that to me.”

Streep had a similar experience with legendary songwriter Stephen Sondheim. She

explains, “We were going to go to London and get off the plane and go into a recording studio and start singing and laying down the tracks, and I was first up! It was terrifying and ultimately thrilling—really thrilling—because he was very pleased with what I was doing, and I was pleased that he was pleased... It was one of the great, great afternoons of my life, working with him.”

As for Corden, his wish came true, both on screen and off. “I just wanted to perform,” he says in all sincerity. “The first time I ever stood on stage my life changed, and it’s got better every day since.... This particular experience of making this movie was like nothing I’d ever known—the feeling of being in this company, the rehearsal process, working with a director like Rob [Marshall], being in the company of such high-esteem... It’s all you ever wish for.”



Meryl Streep



Emily Blunt and James Corden

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