

The Next Thing I Touch
With apologies to Midas and the ancient Greeks

Young Michael was enamored of anything with transistors, chips and processors, but he was a poor ten-year old without resources. Well, he wasn't really poor at all, but his parents wouldn't buy him any of the latest electronic gadgets, expecting he should appreciate the nice Sony Walkman his grandpa has passed on to him. It picked up the FM stations as well as AM, although the cassette tape it came with, grandpa's Mel Torme album, was long off its spool.

Mike spent his evening in the typical way, not with his family watching television, but dreaming over his collection of newspaper inserts from Best Buy, Radio Shack, and Ultimate Electronics.

He had a visitor later that night, a mysterious robot. She spoke in a mechanical yet oddly melodious voice, reminding him of the GPS navigator in his Uncle's car.

"I am Genie, an experimental dream fulfillment android. My engineers have assigned me to your coordinates for beta testing. What is your wish?"

With visions of laptops spinning, he could only stammer before he heard an impatient, "Recalculating. What is your wish?"

"An iPad! A cell phone! A 17 inch laptop computer! And a Game Boy!"

"That is four wishes. Recalculating. What is your wish?"

It came in a flash, an idea for a single request that would yield a continuous flow of all the things he coveted.

"I wish that each thing I touch turns to an electronic device, the newest kind."

"Arriving at destination. Your wish is granted. Good bye."

Michael fell in contented sleep, knowing he just had the dream of his life. He woke to his mother calling him to breakfast, and he sprang from bed, excitedly thinking, "What will be the next thing I touch?"

"I have oatmeal ready for you, Michael, dear. Your toast has popped up, why don't you get it?"

But what he lifted from the toaster was an iPod! Mike was so thrilled he ran to his room and didn't even touch the rest of his breakfast. He played with the device all morning, downloading every application he could (but only the free ones, because, while his fingers had magic, his parents had the credit card.)

He was pretty hungry by lunch time and hurried down at his mother's call. "Thanks, Mom! Grilled Cheese! I'm starving!"

But the next thing he touched wasn't a grilled cheese sandwich. It was a laptop computer, the shiny Apple of his eye. She heard him run off but wasn't concerned, just assuming he took his sandwich with him. He was off registering his new Mac Air, setting up passwords, playing with the onboard camera, configuring the software, and checking out Facebook.

Six hours later, Michael was famished. With aromas wafting from the kitchen, he realized his predicament. How could he attack that beautiful plate of spaghetti and meatballs without it turning to something electronic, ugly and indigestible?

Seated at the table for dinner with the family, he maneuvered his face to the plate to get a strand of spaghetti to his lips. But what he slurped wasn't a noodle, it was copper wire, coated, but not in his Mom's delicious sauce.

The rest of the plate was still perfectly edible, but Michael couldn't bring himself to another bite. He asked to be excused from the table and his parents watched with concern as he returned to his room.

When they came to check on him a little later, the bed and floor were free of the clutter of brochures and advertising. There was no computer or iPod either, but of those they had been unaware and took no notice of the void.

Dad felt his son's forehead. No fever, just a boy in slumber. He switched off the old Walkman on the pillow, playing a favorite FM station. There was the quiet rumble of an empty tummy.

Michael had fallen asleep with a resolution. "If she shows up again, the next thing I touch will be her power-off button." She didn't return.

He was the first person in the kitchen the next morning, and the next thing he touched, a pop tart straight from the package, was perhaps the best meal of his life. The second one, which he toasted, was pretty good, too. The bacon and eggs his mom fixed a little while later were a great dessert.