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Picture Books

The Sandcastle
Mark Robertson
Rising Moon
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Any child who has ever built sandcastles on the beach can relate to the frustration experienced by the young hero of this book. No matter how carefully Jack builds his castles each morning, the sea washes them away by evening. He is trying vainly to order the sea to "stay back!" one morning when he finds a special shell that glistens like a jewel, puts it on top of his castle, and uses it to make two wishes—requests most children would consider very appropriate. "I wish my sandcastle was as big as a real castle and I wish that I was king."

Jack wakes up that evening to discover that his first wish has come true; his sandcastle of the morning has become life sized. Entering it, he is greeted by a girl with a horn of shell and escorted to a ballroom where he is cheered by crowds and crowned king of the castle. Thus, his second wish has also been granted. A festive dance follows, interrupted only when the sea begins to invade the castle, and the dancers undergo a sea change developing scales and fins. They swim away, and Jack and the girl are driven to the top of the castle by the rising tide. There she reminds Jack, just in time, that he has one wish left, at which point he decides "I don't want to be a king any more… I wish I was safe at home in bed."

Robertson's illustrations match the story well: realistic and detailed during Jack's daytime activities and more elaborate and colorful during his nighttime adventure. The metamorphasis of the sandcastle into a full-size fortress is especially well portrayed. The magical granting of three wishes, with the last one used to cancel the others, is a classic fairytale theme familiar to most young readers and should make this a pleasant and comfortable bedtime story.

Jean Kubala