

THE LEPRECHAUN'S POT

BY TERESA
BATEMAN

ONCE, IN IRELAND, there lived a lass named Roisin who longed to marry the love of her life, Tomas. Alas, they were both poorer than watered-down porridge and would have to wait until they could afford a dress, a preacher, and a wee cottage all their own. So Roisin lived with her parents, saving every spare penny and dreaming of her wedding day.

One morning, while her parents were away, Roisin decided to do the laundry. She filled their one good pot with water and swung it over a crackling fire, then went outside to string the drying lines. She couldn't help but think how the freshly washed sheets would billow in the breeze just like a wedding veil.

That, of course, set her to dreaming, and time flew by until she suddenly realized she had forgotten the water entirely.

When Roisin ran inside she saw, to her horror, the family's one and only pot boiled dry, with a crack right through the bottom of it.

Her heart fell, for what use was a pot that couldn't hold water? She would need to find a tinker to mend the crack, and it would likely cost her all the coins she had saved for her wedding or more. Still, the blame was hers and so, too, must be the remedy.

Gripping the handle with a rag, Roisin took the pot from the fireplace and hurried

down the lane. Tinkers traveled from village to village, and what with pots and pans clattering on the sides of their wagons and the hammering of their pot mending, they were usually easy to find. So Roisin hurried toward the village, listening for a tinker's wagon.

The pot had cooled, and Roisin was tiring when she heard a promising *tap-tap* from the other side of a hedge. She slipped through the shrubbery and, to her astonishment, traded gazes with an equally flummoxed leprechaun tapping a tiny hammer on the heel of a shoe, a pot of gold at his side.

She made to speak but, just at that moment, spied a red fox slinking up behind the leprechaun, thinking him an easy snack now that his attention was directed elsewhere.

As the fox leaped, Roisin dove forward and, swift as a sparrow, popped the pot she was carrying over the leprechaun. The fox, hoping for a tender morsel, instead cracked a tooth on the iron pot then shot away, Roisin's shouts ringing in his ears.

Noise of a different kind erupted from the pot.

"There was a fox," Roisin explained through the crack. "And I'm not freeing you until you're calm. I have trouble enough without a leprechaun's curse to add to it."

Silence, still as a shadow, settled over the clearing. A small eye peered through the crack

Illustrated by Lisa Mertins

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TINKERS WERE TRAVELING CRAFTSMEN
WHO MENDED AND SOLD POTS AND PANS. ...





and blinked. Feeling reassured, Roisin lifted the pot with a smile.

The leprechaun caught a glimpse of the fox's tail disappearing into the woods. "Ye saved me indeed, lass," he admitted reluctantly. "I owe ye a debt. Now what sort of reward would ye be expecting?"

"Why, nothing," Roisin replied, for she was a good girl who helped others for the sake of helping, not the promise of reward. Still, her eyes strayed to the leprechaun's treasure, and he noticed.

"So it's me pot of gold, then?" he asked. "I wouldn't have needed rescue if ye hadn't distracted me in the first place."

"It's not the gold," Roisin interrupted. She held up her pot and looked at him through the crack. "I'd planned to spend my wedding money on a tinker, but now I see your fine, strong pot. Would you trade? It would make no difference to you, since yours holds coins, not water. And I think my pot's already proven its worth."

She dumped his pot into hers and shook it to prove the coins wouldn't fall out. "My pot's a bit bigger than yours, so you'll not lose by the bargain," Roisin noted. "If you feel any debt over the matter of the fox, could we switch? Then I'll be on my way."

The leprechaun looked at the problem from left to right, top to bottom, twice clockwise and once widdershins, but could see no fault with her reasoning. Indeed, she was letting him off easy, for every Irishman knows that whoever catches a leprechaun has claim to his gold. So what could he do but agree?

"Bless you," Roisin said. "Now I can keep my pennies for the wedding." She kissed the top of his head then hurried home, happy as a hummingbird.

The leprechaun passed his hand through his hair and rubbed the beard on his rosy cheeks. The thought struck him that his debt had not been paid in full, but what could he do? Perhaps something more . . . ?

That evening Roisin's betrothed, Tomas, came to visit. He helped her fold the fresh-dried sheets as she told the tale of the leprechaun and showed him the new pot.

"I don't believe it," Tomas said.

"I'll show you exactly where it happened," Roisin replied, taking him by the hand. When they'd walked a good way and ducked through a hedge, she pointed to a dent in the grass. "That's the very spot where the leprechaun was sitting."

"Perhaps it was a hedgehog," Tomas teased, not sure what to believe. Then his eyes caught sight of something glittering in the twilight. He reached down. It was a gold coin. A little further on was a second, and a third.

"Oh no," Roisin lamented. "I told him his gold was safe in my old pot, despite the crack. It appears I was wrong. We must find him and return his gold."

Tomas shook his head. "Have you ever fished coins through a piggy bank's slot?" he asked. "You need a knife and a good deal of patience. These didn't fall accidentally. You made a friend with your good heart, and this is how you are repaid."

LEGENDS SAY THAT IF YOU CATCH A LEPRECHAUN, HE HAS TO GIVE YOU HIS POT OF GOLD.



OH, REALLY. WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU SAW A LEPRECHAUN?



HEE HEE HEE!



Roisin wasn't so certain, but just then they heard a soft laugh in the woods nearby, although they could see nothing and nobody. It seemed Tomas was right.

What could they do but enjoy the blessings of good fortune and a good friend? With the three gold coins they were able to buy fine white satin, pay for the preacher, and set down some money on a little cottage all their own.

When her parents returned home, Roisin and her mother began stitching the beautiful white cloth into a fine wedding gown, and soon there was a joyful wedding in the church.

Roisin and Tomas were as happy as larks on a sunny day.

When they went home to their new cottage, what should they find on the doorstep

but a pot. Just a plain black pot . . . with a single gold coin inside.

"Now *that's* what I call a wedding gift," said Tomas, snatching up the coin.

"Indeed it is," Roisin agreed, seizing the pot. "It's just the size for porridge and laundry and cabbage and potatoes. Though not at the same time, of course."

Tomas laughed. "It's always the pot and never the coin with you," he said.

Roisin's eyes twinkled. "Well, a coin is soon spent. But a pot—that's something you'll use the rest of your life, as long as you don't leave it over the fire unattended."

"And even that might turn out well," Tomas added.

Then, holding the pot between them, they entered their new home, smiling. 