



The Legend of Bottle Hill

An Irish Folk Tale

Retold by Kathleen M. Muldoon

Many years ago, Mick Purcell rented a shanty in the green hills of Ireland. 'Twas tucked away in a far corner of the farm where he worked. There he hoed and weeded from dawn to dusk while his wife, Molly, cared for the wee Purcells. But no matter how hard Mick worked, his family grew poorer, until one day they had neither a potato for the table nor a halfpenny for rent.

"Sure and I must be selling the cow," Mick said. He buried his face in his hands, lamenting the loss of his children's milk source.

"You best be gettin' a fair price, Mick Purcell," Molly warned as she gave him their last bit of bread for his journey.

Sunshine painted Mick's path. Larks sang such merry tunes that he whistled in spite of himself as he trudged up the great hill with

no name. At its peak he rested. He took the tiniest of naps, and when he awoke, an ugly little man stood by his side. His scrunched face looked older than Earth.

"Top o' the mornin'," he said in a hollow voice.

Shivers slithered down Mick's spine. Sure 'tis one of the fairies who lurks in the bogs and wood, he thought. He had heard tales of their evil tricks. He jerked the cow's rope and started down the hill, but the little man raced beside them.

"Where might ye be takin' the cow?"

"I'll be selling her at the fair," Mick replied.

"Sell her to me, Mick Purcell, and I will make you a rich man."

Mick's heart pounded. The wee man knew his name! His legs quivered like reeds in a storm.

HE TRADED HIS COW FOR
AN EMPTY BOTTLE?



HE SHOULD HAVE HELD
OUT FOR MAGIC BEANS.

“Begone, ye devil!” he cried.

The little creature pulled an empty bottle from his coat. “’Tis your payment, Mick Purcell.”

Mick gasped. “An empty bottle?”

The man grabbed Mick’s jacket with his gnarled hand. He yanked till Mick’s face was inches from his own.

“Take the bottle home, Mick Purcell. Tell your wife to sweep clean the cottage and lay the table. Then put the bottle on it and say, ‘Bottle, do your job.’”

Mick opened his mouth, but no words came out. The ugly little man shoved the bottle into Mick’s hand, grabbed the rope, and led the cow away. Mick sobbed. How would he face Molly and his hungry children? Sure and Molly would kill him! Slowly he retraced his steps to the cottage. He shuffled inside and told Molly what he’d done.

“You fool!” Molly screeched. “Giving the cow to a hooligan! Are we to eat an empty bottle?”

She tried to hurl it across the room, but Mick stopped her. He begged her to obey the little man’s instructions.

“Maybe ’tis magic,” he said.

Molly frowned and grumbled. But she grabbed a broom and furiously swept the cottage. Then she spread a ragged, patched cloth on the table. Mick put the bottle on it, and he and Molly stepped back. The children huddled behind them.

“Bottle, do your job,” Mick whispered.

WHOOOOOSHHH! Two wee people exploded from the bottle. They said not a word

as they loaded the table with gold plates and cups. From the air they plucked platters of meat, potatoes, and fruits. Soon the cottage smelled like a royal dining hall. With a *POOF!* the wee ones returned to the bottle, but when Mick picked it up seconds later, it was empty. He corked the bottle and placed it on the mantel.

That night the Purcells went to bed with full tummies. Mick and Molly feared they might awake to find that they had dreamed their riches. But in the morning, sunlight bathed each golden plate. Mick sold one in town for a great deal of money.

Soon the Purcells had sold every plate and cup and had become very rich indeed. The cupboard that once stood empty was now stuffed with enough bread and potatoes for all of Ireland. Mick and Molly stowed away their money in bags beneath their bed. Although they tried keeping their riches secret, the villagers learned of their wealth.

One day the landlord came for the rent.

“And how came the likes of you, Mick Purcell, to be payin’ the rent with gold?” he demanded.

A cup of rich grape wine had loosened Mick’s tongue. He told the landlord all about the ugly little man and the magic bottle. The landlord begged Mick to sell him the bottle.

“Are ye thinking I’m a moron?” cried Mick with a mighty laugh.

But the landlord persisted. “There’s something ye be needing more than money, Mick Purcell,” he said. “I’ll trade you this farm and the pretty pastures around it for that bottle, I will.”

OK, BOTTLE, DO YOUR JOB.
MAKE ME RICH!



I THINK YOU NEED TO
TAKE OFF THE CAP.

Mick hesitated. His family did have all the money they needed. But imagine living on the farm rent-free!

Molly punched him.

“Give it to him!” she hissed.

Mick sighed, then handed the bottle to the landlord.

That night the Purcells danced around the table.

“We’re rich, we’re rich!” they chanted.

Mick and Molly were certain that they would never again be poor. But bit by bit they squandered away their money. There came another day when they had nothing but a sparse potato patch and a skinny cow.

“What shall we do?” cried Molly.

“We’re hungry!” wept the half-grown Purcells.

“Sure and I’ll take the cow to the great hill and get another bottle from the wee man,” Mick promised.

On this day, the larks did not sing. The sun hid behind a bank of rain clouds. But when Mick reached the top of the hill, he met the ugly little man. Before Mick could speak, the little man grabbed his coat.



“So, Mick Purcell, you are no longer rich?” he snarled.

Mick hung his head. He explained all that had happened.

“Would ye be trading me just one more bottle for this fine cow?” he pleaded.

“Are you thinking you deserve another chance, Mick Purcell?”

A tear trickled down Mick’s cheek.

PHODEY! THIS BOTTLE
ISN'T MAGIC.





“Tisn’t for me,” he said. “Tis for my wee ones.”

A horrible scowl crept over the little man’s face. But he reached into his great coat and took out a bottle.

“Here’s what ye deserve, Mick Purcell,” he growled, thrusting the bottle into Mick’s hand.

Without another word, the little man grabbed the skinny cow’s rope and led it away.

Mick raced home. He whistled and stomped as he entered the cottage.

“Sure and ’tis another bottle!” Molly cried.

She and the children joined hands and danced a merry jig. Then Molly swept the floor and covered the table. Mick set down the bottle.

“Bottle, do your job!” he ordered.

A terrible roar shook the walls. From the bottle sprang two enormous men swinging clubs. They smashed the table. They beat Molly and Mick and the children. Then, after destroying everything in the room, they disappeared into the bottle. Mick leaped from the floor and corked it.

“Begorra!” cried Mick. “Sure and the little man cursed us!”

“Now we shall starve!” moaned Molly Purcell.

“Oh no, we shan’t!” Mick said. “I’ve got some tricks of my own, I have.”

He grabbed the bottle and rushed to the landlord’s home. He arrived in the midst of a great feast. Smells of roast lamb floated through the door and tickled his nose.

“I’ve brought you another bottle,” Mick told the landlord. “Sure ’twill make you a hundred times richer than the other. I’ll trade you this one for my old bottle.”

The landlord howled. “And you think me a fool like you, Mick Purcell?”

“Let me in, and I’ll show you,” Mick persisted.

He followed him to the great dining room. There he placed the bottle on the table and uncorked it. Then he stood back.

“Bottle, do your job,” he sang.

Two brutes rushed from the bottle, screaming like banshees. They smashed the tables and golden plates. They beat the landlord, his servants, and guests.

“Stop them!” shouted the landlord.

“I shall when I’ll be getting my bottle,” Mick Purcell replied.

The landlord reached into a cupboard, yanked out the original bottle, and threw it to Mick, who clutched it to his breast and ran from the landlord’s house. He ignored the yelps and thumps and cries behind him as he crossed the grassy fields and headed home.

No One Ever saw Mick Purcell or any of the Purcells again. Some folks claimed that they packed up, moved, and became the richest family in Ireland.

The villagers named the great hill “Bottle Hill.” Today, visitors to its lush green peak are bound to hear the story of how one day a farmer named Mick Purcell was just as tricky as the wee people who lurked in the bogs and woods. 

