

The Bottle Imp

Robert Louis Stevenson

The good sailor Keawe took shore leave in San Francisco; he pocketed his pay, and set out to explore the city. In the window of a fine house, he noticed a man looking out to sea with longing. That man noticed Keawe marvelling at his mansion.

"We seem to envy each other," said the man. "But there is no reason you can't have a house like this too. How much money do you have?"

"Fifty dollars," said Keawe.

"That will do."

"But surely a house as grand as yours costs more than that," said Keawe.

"It's not the house I sell, but this bottle. It contains an imp who grants wishes." The man took out a round-bellied bottle with a long neck; the glass was white like milk, with changing rainbow colours in the grain. Winthinsides something obscurely moved, like a shadow and a fire. "I will gladly sell it to you."

"Why part with such power? And why for such a low price?"

"You are wise to ask. The bottle comes with a catch. If you should die in possession of it, you will burn in hell. You cannot cast away the bottle, it will always return to you, but you may sell it, as long as you do so at a loss. At one time, the bottle was worth millions. They say the pharaohs owned it, and Caesar, Charlemagne, Napoleon and Captain Cook. I bought it for eighty dollars. Now it can be yours for only fifty!"

"How do I know you aren't telling me a tale?"

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Keawe gave the man all his money, took the bottle and said, "Imp of the bottle, give my pay back." Instantly, his purse was heavy again.

"Good day," said the man, his mood much changed; and pushed Keawe out into the street. "Now, be gone, and the devil go with you for me!"

Keawe felt troubled. "Is this bottle truly magic?" thought he. "Is my soul truly in jeopardy? Or was the old man of the mansion a magician, who, with sleight of hand, refilled my purse as some kind of practical joke?" Keawe went back to work and by-and-by returned to his home in Hawai'i. Deep in his heart, he still coveted a mansion of his own.

Upon returning to Hawai'i, Keawe was met with news that his uncle and cousin were drowned at sea. Keawe was filled with sorrow. The news was all the sadder because his uncle had just finished building a grand house overlooking the sea at Ho'okena. Keawe inherited the estate; when Keawe saw his new home, it was the picture of his thought of an ideal house.

"Was this the work of the imp?" thought Keawe.

One day, Keawe passed a shop that sold shells and clubs from the wild islands, old heathen deities, old coined money, pictures from China and Japan, and all manner of things that sailors bring in their sea-chests; here he had an idea. Keawe took the bottle from his sea-chest – for there he kept the strange thing still; and took it to this shop. He offered the bottle for a hundred dollars. The shop-man laughed at him at first, and offered him five; but, indeed, it was a curious bottle – so prettily the colours shone under the milky white, and so strangely the shadow

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"I reckon I'm going anyway," returned the sailor; "and this bottle's the best thing to go with I've struck yet. No sir!" he cried again, "This is my bottle now, and you can go and fish for another."

"Can this be true?" Keawe cried. "For your own sake, I beseech you, sell it me!"

"I don't value any of your talk," replied the boatswain. "You thought I was a flat; now you see I'm not; and there's an end. If you won't have a swallow of the rum, I'll have one myself. Here's your health, and goodnight to you!"

So off he went down the avenue towards town, and there goes the bottle out of the story.

But Keawe ran to Kokua light as the wind; and great was their joy that night; and great, since then, has been the peace of all their days in the Bright House.



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She clasped his knees in a moment; she kissed his knees with flowing tears.

"O," she cried, "I asked but a kind word!"

"Let us never one think hardily of the other," said Keawe, drawing her up; and departed.

Now, the money that Keawe had taken was only some of that store of centime pieces they had laid in at their arrival. It was very sure he had no mind to be drinking. His wife had given her soul for him, now he must give his for hers.

At the corner, there was the boatswain waiting.

"My wife has the bottle," said Keawe, "and, unless you help me to recover it, there can be no more money and no more liquor tonight."

"You do not mean to say you are serious about that bottle?" cried the boatswain.

"Do I look as if I was jesting?"

"You look as serious as a ghost."

"Well then," said Keawe, "Here are two centimes; you must go to my wife, and offer her these for the bottle, which (if I am not much mistaken) she will give you instantly. Bring it to me here, and I will buy it back from you for one; for that is the law with this bottle, that it must be sold for a less sum. But whatever you do, never breathe a word that you have come from me."

"Mate, I wonder are you making a fool of me?"

"It will do you no harm if I am."

"That is so," said the boatswain.

"And if you doubt me," added Keawe, "you can try. As soon as you are clear of the house, wish to have your pocket full of

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