

The Devil Inside

By Louise Welsh

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For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

Mark 8:36

All you have to do is to use the power of the imp in moderation, and then sell it to someone else, as I do to you, and finish your life in comfort.

‘The Bottle Imp’, by Robert Louis Stevenson

In each of us, two natures are at war – the good and the evil. All our lives the fight goes on between them, and one of them must conquer. But in our own hands lies the power to choose – what we want most to be we are.

Robert Louis Stevenson

PART ONE

Scene One

A mountainside at night time.

Total darkness. It is raining. Enter RICHARD and JAMES

Richard It is dark.
 We've come too far.
 I wish we had a light to guide the way.

Richard &
James I wish we had a light to guide the way.

A pinpoint of light appears in the dark sky. It faintly illuminates the two scruffily dressed young men, carrying backpacks.

James A star! A star!

Richard A star! What use are stars to hungry men?

They walk towards the light, which gets larger and more distinct until it is clear that it is not a star, but a window. We can see the men more clearly now. They are wet, their faces running with water.

James A strange place for a house,
 all alone
 on this mountainside.

James Let's ask for shelter.

Richard And some food.

James A bed with clean sheets and soft pillows.

Richard And the daughters of the house, to keep us warm.

They both laugh. The house comes closer and we see that it is an impressive building.

James This is a grand place,
a palace.

They knock at the door.

A sad looking elderly man, carrying a torch in one hand and an umbrella in the other, limps out of the house. The OLD MAN's clothes are expensive, but he is creased and unkempt. Richard and James sink into the shadows.

Old Man Who is there?
Do not be afraid.
I keep no dogs to bite you.

Richard walks into the open.

Richard Then perhaps it's you who should be afraid,
old man.

James hurries to Richard's side. He is jovial, but anxious. His friend's words have made him uneasy.

James We mean no harm.
We are travellers
looking for work.
We had hoped to reach town
before nightfall.
The road was longer than we thought.

Richard Steeper than we expected.

James We mean no harm.

Old Man I know what it is to travel
long roads,
to climb

steep mountains.
Come inside.
My house is yours.

The front of the house opens up, like a doll's house, to reveal an impressive mansion. Richard and James enter.

Richard What a glorious mansion.
The carpets are thick
like walking on clouds.

James The chandeliers glitter.
Pure crystal.
Everything so fine.

Richard Everything perfect.

Richard &
James Perfect!

Old Man My house is yours, yours.

Richard I wish it was.

James casts another nervous look at Richard. The old man has his head bowed, as if labouring under a weight of sorrows; but the envy in Richard's voice seems to alert him. The old man raises his head and stares at Richard.

Old Man You can have a house as good as this
or finer if you desire.
You have some money?

Richard gives a bitter shake of his head.

Richard Nothing.

Old Man Some money?

Richard No.

Old Man Not a penny?

Richard's bitterness increases.

Richard Nothing. Not a penny, not a euro, not a cent.

The old man turns to James.

Old Man And you?

James shrugs and turns away. The conversation is beginning to embarrass him.

Richard James is a squirrel.
He hides money away
for a rainy day.

James Every day is a rainy day
money drains away
like water.

Old Man How much do you have?

James Fifty dollars.

Old Man Fifty dollars?

James Fifty dollars.
That's all I have.
It must keep us both
until we find work.

Old Man I am sorry you have no more,
but it is yours.

Richard The house?

Old Man It is yours.

Richard
& James
TOGETHER The house?!

The old man takes a bottle from his pocket.

Old Man The bottle. The bottle.

Richard and James burst out laughing. The old man raises the bottle in the air. An absinthe-green light shines on the glass, illuminating it.

Old Man This bottle was tempered
in the flames of hell.
Inside it lives an imp.
See his shadow.
Watch it move.

Richard and James step closer and stare at the bottle. They both suddenly leap back as if burnt, in response to some movement within it.

Old Man Whoever buys the bottle
commands the imp.
All he desires,
love, fame, money,
a house like this house,
a city like the city below my mountain
all are his at a word.

James Let's go.
Better to face wind and rain
than spend the night with a mad man.

Richard It is warm here,
warm and dry.

Old Man This beautiful house,
all my wealth
and riches;
were granted
by the imp
who lives within
this bottle.

He holds the bottle up in the air, admiring it. Richard regards the bottle hungrily.

Richard Something moves inside it
like light inside a flame,

James also stares at the bottle, but what he sees there frightens him. James points at the old man's face, beseeching Richard.

James Look at his eyes.
They are insane.
He is a rich fool
brought low by drugs!
Look at his face,
even this fine house
brings him no pleasure.

Old Man What do you have to lose?
Think of what you could gain.
You may toil for fifty years,
grow old in poverty.
Die with nothing.

Richard Fifty years.
Poverty.
Alone,
with nothing.
Dead.

James Let's go now. Let's go!

Old Man But with this bottle . . .

The Old man passes the bottle to Richard who takes it and looks, entranced, at the movement within. Richard tries to be jovial, but he is already smitten by the idea of the bottle.

Richard With this bottle . . .

Old Man . . . you can have all that I have
and more.
The imp will bring you
All you desire.

(overlapping)
Richard We can have all that he has and more.
The imp will bring you all you desire.
All we desire.

James If we leave now
we may reach town
before dawn.
The night is dark
But there's a shadow in this house.
I fear it.
Don't you?

James shoulders his backpack.

Richard and the old man ignore James. They are each fascinated with the prospect that the other holds for them.

Richard Why would you sell such a wonder?

Old Man I have all I want,
Now I'm growing old.

Richard is scornful.

Richard So wish for youth,
wish for eternal life.

Old Man The bottle has one flaw,
it cannot keep men young.
And if a man should die
before he sells it,
he burns in hell.
For ever.

James I want no part of this.
I will risk my life,
on the rocky path
down the mountainside
rather than stay here

The old man throws the bottle to the ground with great force. Richard lunges for it. He misses, but the bottle does not smash. Richard lifts it up gently, cradling it like a child.

Richard The bottle is glass!
It should have smashed!

The old man addresses Richard.

Old Man It cannot be broken.

Richard If this was true you would sell it for a high price.
Not for fifty dollars.

Old Man Long ago this bottle and the imp within
cost a King's treasury.
But it must sell for less
each time it changes hands.

(Echoing the old man)

Richard Less each time.

James is scared, but he tries to put up a front.

James The ravings of a madman,
A drunk,
an addict.

Old Man It has had many owners,
made many fortunes
the price melting away
like ice on a gatepost.

The old man holds out a hand to James.

Old Man Give me fifty dollars
and wish for a hundred.
Double your money
at a word.

James starts to laugh, but Richard puts a hand on his arm.

Richard Do it.

James And risk our money
on a magic trick?

Richard Do it.

Old Man If the trick does not work
I will return your money
And fifty dollars more.

James Fifty dollars!

Richard Either way we win.

James But I may lose my soul.

Richard But money is real.

James Money is real
and we can double ours.
Either way we win.

(overlapping)
Richard Either way we win,
We can double ours.

James tentatively takes the money from his pocket and holds it out to the old man, in a sharp, jerking movement.

James Give me the bottle.

The old man snatches the money from James and hands over the bottle. The old man's attitude is immediately altered. He stands straight as if a burden has been lifted from him. He looks younger. A smile spreads across his face.

Richard is intent on the bottle and does not notice the change in the old man, but James does.

Richard Wish! Wish!

James is full of trepidation.

James Imp of the bottle,
bottle imp,
give me a hundred dollars!

James's hand goes into his pocket. He draws out the money he has wished for. Richard is jubilant, but James is afraid. He turns to the old man.

Richard This is a wonderful bottle!

James Take it back.

Old Man Now leave my house.

James shoves the bottle and the money at the old man, who takes a step backwards and puts his hands behind his back, as if scared that he might end up with the bottle again.

James Take it back.
I want nothing of this devilry!

Old Man Go now, and the devil go with you.

Richard and James are ejected from the house, which closes behind them. It is dawn. Richard puts a comforting arm around his friend.

Richard You will wish yourself rich
and when it is done
you will sell the bottle to me.
You will have a house
as grand as his house.
I will buy a ship
the finest yacht
crewed by pretty girls
we will sail the seas
the girls and I, drinking rum
whisky and gin.
Take the good along with the evil.

James If magic exists
so must the devil.
No good
ever came from him.

Richard and James exit. James is bowed but Richard is jaunty.

Scene Two

James' office high up in a skyscraper, overlooking a city.

James and Richard are both dressed in smart suits. Their fortunes have clearly improved, but although Richard looks dapper and well put together, James is scruffy and unkempt. We would not be surprised to learn that he slept in his suit the previous night. There is an atmosphere of unhappiness about James. He is bowed under a weight of sorrows, like the old man in scene one.

James is leaning back in his chair with his feet on the desk. Richard slams a sheaf of papers on the desk.

Richard Your stocks are rising
as fast as your buildings

James London, Paris, Dubai
we build them high.

Richard We build them tall.

James Nothing under
one hundred stories.
We have the Midas touch.

Richard You have the bottle.

James The Midas touch.

Richard The bottle.

James Every skyscraper
turns to gold.
No sooner built
than it is sold.

Richard opens the document and points to a relevant page.

Richard You are a rich man

(overlapping)

James We are rich men.

Richard You are a rich man.

James A rich man and his shadow . . .

Richard . . . are not easily parted.
You have everything.

James Not everything.

Richard But everything a man desires.
Money, respect, beautiful women,
a house in the country,
a mansion in town.

James A chateaux in France
a condominium in California

This is news to Richard who raises his eyebrows

Richard California?

James nods.

James A condominium in California

*Richard reaches into a drawer in James's desk and takes out the
bottle. He stares lovingly at it.*

Richard You even have a private plane.

James I designed
the hostesses' uniforms

myself.

Richard You have everything
a man desires.

*James takes the bottle from Richard and puts it back into the drawer.
There is something mean and scrooge-like in the gesture.*

James Not everything.

*James considers Richard. He does not entirely trust his old friend, but
something is on his mind and there is no one else he can confide in. He
gets up from his seat, walks to the window and regards the city below.*

James From up here
people look like ants,
scurrying about their business.
Busy little nothings.
I could crush them with my thumb.

*(James raises his hand to his eyes and pretends to squash something
between his thumb and forefinger)*

They are so busy scratching an existence
they hardly know what it is to live
truly live.
Without the bottle
I would have been one of them.
A tiny speck, a particle,
blown through the air
then lost upon the winds.
And yet . . .
and yet . . .

James looks at Richard, unsure of how to begin.

James This morning
my driver collected me
as usual
from my apartment building.
It was raining
so he waited at the door

with an umbrella

Richard makes an impatient gesture.

Richard How nice for you.

James I sat in the back
checked messages
from Australia, South Africa, America

Richard *(bitterly)*
All telling you how rich you are, no doubt.

James Rain battered the windows,
ran in tiny rivers down the glass.
I looked up
to ask why we had stopped
and saw an old couple
crossing the road.
They were holding hands
in the rain.
Water streamed down their faces,
but they held hands against the storm.

Richard *(sarcastic)*
My heart is breaking.

James Soon one of them will go
but they walked on slowly together
together,
with no fear of Hell,
holding hands.
And as they passed me
they smiled.

All my wealth.
All my wishes.

Richard takes the bottle from the desk drawer again. He steps beyond James's reach and holds it up in the air. His manner is conciliatory and concerned, but an anxious edge betrays that his motives are not entirely pure. He wants the bottle for himself.

Richard You have kept the bottle too long,
drank too deep of its wishes.
Your eyes are the eyes
of the madman
we met on the mountain.

James I wish for what I need,
no more.

Richard is angry again.

Richard You have become his slave.

James He serves me.

Richard Sell him to me.

James I will sell him soon.

Together
Richard Sell him to me
now!

James Soon I will sell him
but not now!

Richard Sell him to me. That was the plan.

James The bottle is a friend to me.

(overlapping)
Richard It is evil.

James The bottle makes me whole.

(overlapping)

Richard It drains you of life.

James Without the bottle
 life has no colour.

Richard It will kill you,
 and once you are dead
 it will damn you to Hell.
 No hands to hold.
 No kisses. No smiles.

*James knows the truth of what Richard is saying. He hesitates. Richard
grabs his advantage and plays his trump card.*

Richard Call the imp!
 Look on his face.
 As long as you own the bottle
 he owns your destiny.
 Look into his eyes
 and see your fate.

James You want the bottle for yourself.

Richard Call him.

James You crave its powers.

Richard I will wish for money, a yacht,
 true love, why not?
 But I will sell him fast
 before he hooks me
 in his grasp.
 Call the imp!
 If you trust him with your soul,
 look on his face.

Richard hands the bottle to James, who grasps it at first tentatively, then with more resolve.

James Imp of the bottle
show yourself.

The bottle is suddenly illuminated a sickening absinth green. —Both men leap back in horror as they hear an unearthly, ungodly sound.

Richard I am not sure I want him.

James And I am not sure I want to let him go.

They look each other in the eye. They are dealing with the forces of Hell and this is a serious moment.

Richard Forty-nine dollars and ninety-nine cents?

James hesitates and then nods. Richard hesitates and then puts his hand in his pocket and takes out an envelope which he hands to James. James opens it and looks inside.

James hands the bottle to Richard. His manner is brighter. His haunted weary look has passed to Richard along with the bottle.

James The exact amount.

Richard The exact amount.

The two men shake hands formally. Both men know this is a parting of the ways.

James Go now, and the Devil go with you.

They embrace and Richard turns to exit. A young woman, CATHERINE enters. She asks Richard something we do not hear. Richard turns to James.

Richard Your new client.
Her name is . . . ?

Richard looks at Catherine inviting her to introduce herself.

Catherine Catherine.

James Catherine
Welcome, Catherine.

Richard gives a sad smile. He has lost his previously good posture; his shoulders are weighed down by the bottle.

Scene Three
A hotel bedroom

Catherine and James have just got married. They sweep into their hotel room in a flurry of wedding veil and confetti, laughing and in high spirits. There is lots of playful touching, kissing and laughter.

Catherine My father told me,
 “Find a man with money”.

James puts his arms around Catherine, birls her in the air and sets her down again.

James I am a man with money.

Catherine A man who could treat me well.

James takes Catherine in his arms.

James I want to treat you well.

Catherine pushes James away playfully.

Catherine But I never wanted
 a man with money.

James pretends to be worried.

James But your father always told you . . .

Catherine faces James and looks into his eyes.

Catherine I want an honest man,
 with a good heart
 and a blameless soul.

*James is not as light-hearted as before,
but Catherine does not notice.*

James A blameless soul.

Catherine I love your blameless soul.
 Rich men only chase money.
 I want a man with time
 for his children . . .

James brightens.

James For our children.

Catherine ...time for our children.

James &
Catherine Our children.

Catherine takes James's hand in hers.

Catherine You've made your money.

James All I thought of was money.

Catherine Now it's time to make a family

The prospect delights James.

James

Time to make a family.

Together

A family!

They continue to express their affection.

Scene Four

A Room in James and Catherine's house

It is Catherine and James's third wedding anniversary. Catherine is alone, waiting on James to come home. She opens anniversary cards as she waits and lets them drop to the floor.

Catherine 'Happy Anniversary'
A flutter.
A feeling.
A flutter of the soul.
'To the Perfect Couple'
I stared at the horizon
sensing rain,
fearing bad weather.
'Love on Your Special Day'.
My body shifted, shifted,
and I dared to hope.
'Love on Your Special Day'.
(She lets all of the cards fall)
But it was death
that grew inside me.
Not new life,
not new life.
To die in love is painful
Oh how painful to die,
but I am loved
so loved and in love.
Three years.
We had three years
of loving,
of being loved.

James enters. He only hears Catherine's last few words.

James Three years!
Tradition demands a special gift
for every married year that passes.
The first was cotton.

Catherine You bought me a negligée

so sheer, it's like sleeping naked.

James puts his arms around Catherine. He does not seem to notice that she is sad.

James I like you naked.

Catherine (aside)
Oh how painful to...

James The second was paper.

Catherine You bought me a book
of love poems.
We read them together.

James Between kisses.

Catherine (aside)
... to die.

James The third anniversary is leather.

James kisses Catherine and takes an envelope from his pocket. She opens it and takes out two airline tickets.

James We will fly to Andalucía,
where the finest leather
is tooled beneath the Spanish sun.

It is too much for Catherine who covers her face. James thinks she is overcome with happiness. He pulls Catherine to him, kisses her again and then holds her at arm's length.

James But tonight I want to give you
the gift of time.

*James takes a small box from his pocket and opens it so she can see
what is inside.*

Catherine A watch.

*James takes the wristwatch from the box and fastens it around
Catherine's wrist. He is buoyant with excitement and joy. He does not
notice his wife's distress.*

James With a strap of fine leather.
It will count the minutes
of our life together.
I hate every moment we're apart.
Listen to the tick of the second hand
and think of my heart
beating for you.

Catherine I went to the doctor . . .

It is hard for Catherine to get the words out.

Catherine I went to the doctor and she told me . . .
she told me . . .

James takes Catherine in his arms. He kisses her.

James A child!
A child is all we need
to make us complete.
Our love has made new life.

Once I was reckless,
and dived with dark forces.
Now I'm a husband,
now I'm a dad!
I will be a sober man.
I'll take no chances.

Catherine The doctor told me I am dying.
You should have bought an hourglass
My time is running out.

James is devastated. He looks at his wife trying to take in what she has told him.

James I thought . . .
I thought perhaps . . .
I thought perhaps you . . .

Catherine takes James' hands in hers.

Catherine Something else grows within me.
There is no hope.

(Overlapping)

James No hope?

Catherine No cure.

James No cure?

Catherine My time is running out.

James

Catherine!

James holds her in his arms. The bad news has sunk in, his mind is decided. He is like a warrior about to go to war, but he is not unafraid. The hell he is about to brave is real, so too is the damnation he risks.

Catherine knows nothing of the imp. Her resoluteness takes a different form – she feels wretched, but is determined to die with dignity. She wants James to remember her well after her death.

Catherine

My time is running out.

James

I'll brave Hell to keep you alive.
Death will not part us.
We will grow old together.

Scene Five
Richard's office

Richard is alone in his office. He has aged, and though his clothes are good quality he looks scruffy and ill. He is engaged in trying to put a ship in a bottle, but his fingers are not dexterous enough and he struggles with its rigging. He sets it aside in frustration.

Richard Temptation.
The bottle is hunger.
The imp crouched within
whispers 'more, more, more.'
Desires you never knew before
infect your blood
and wishes fall.
I almost forgot time,
almost forgot the bottle's flaw,
if a man dies
before he sells it,
he will burn in hell.
Forever.
James sold the bottle,
escaped damnation,
but the imp still haunts him.
'More, more, more.'

James enters. Richard pretends to be pleased to see him.

Richard Friend of my youth,
my friend forever.
They know you best
who knew you young.

James We travelled together,
saw the world and drank together,
fought and were poor together.

(overlapping)

Richard Together.

Richard Nostalgia only goes so far.

James We were closer than brothers,
no blood tied us,
but friendship bound us.

Richard is mocking.

Richard The girls were prettier
and the sun always shone

James Friend of my youth.
They know you best
who knew you young.

Richard shrugs

Richard They know you best who saw you damned.
What brings you here?

James realises that the game is up. It is time to give his pitch. Richard pretends to be politely disinterested.

James I got married.

Richard How was the wedding?

James She's beautiful. She's called Catherine.

Richard
I would have come,
if you had asked me.
I would have danced at your wedding
with your beautiful bride.

James
Now she is dying.

Richard takes a step backwards. The news has shocked him out of his cynicism.

Richard
We all die.

James
I've come for the bottle.
It is our only hope.

Richard
I sold it.
I sold it to a young man
with big ambitions.
I told him to make a pile of money
and sell it quick.

Richard writes down a name and address on a scrap of paper and hands it to James. James turns to go, but Richard grabs his arm.

Richard
Do you still see the imp?
Can you still feel it move,
mad with fury
inside the bottle?

James
Once or twice,
my shadow fell the wrong way,
I thought I saw the imp
in the corner of my eye.

Richard His eyes watch me
 from the windows of high buildings,
 from the cracks in the pavements.
 When I love
 I see him in the line of a woman's throat.
 The imp is always there
 by my shoulder,
 closer than an eye.
 I dream of glittering canyons
 and emerald palaces,
 a kingdom in a bottle.
 He forces the current of my blood.
 I sold the bottle,
 but I still hear the imp
 calling me.

James Good can come from evil.
 The bottle will save Catherine's life.

*Richard grips James's arm. He has a confession to make.
James wants to be free of Richard, but they are old friends and he
cannot dismiss him out of hand.*

Richard I know the bottle's flaw
 and so I sold it.
 But the imp called to me,
 he called to me,
 and so
 I bought him back.

James cannot believe what he is hearing.

James You have it now?

Richard I sold it again,
 but once again he called me.

And so I bought it
and sold it
and bought it
and sold it
and...

James And each time the price grew lower.

Richard Desire burns
like a sickness in my blood.

James Have you damned me?

Richard The price is now so low that
if you buy the bottle
to sell it again
may prove impossible.

James looks at Richard in horror. He reads the address on the piece of paper in his hands. There is a moment of indecision and then he makes up his mind. Richard takes hold of his arm again, as if to stop him, but James shakes him free and runs off stage. Richard covers his face with his hands. He is weeping, but it is uncertain whether his grief is for his friend or for his own thwarted desires.

Scene Six

A room in James and Catherine's house

Catherine's good health has been restored. She is packing for a holiday in the sun. James sits despondently staring into the bottle's depths.

Catherine The sun is shining.
The sea is warm and
soon we will walk together
along white sands.
Hand in hand,
forever lovers.
I was saved by a miracle.
Now we will walk together,
in the sunshine.

James mutters to himself.

James Only a penny
to save my wife,
the price was low
but I paid more than my life.

Catherine takes a pretty summer dress from the case and holds it against herself.

Catherine The sun is shining,
love sweetens the air,
and we will walk together,
forever lovers.
We will walk together.

James The stranger grabbed my coin.
Passed me the bottle,
took back his soul,
sent me to Hell.

James drops the bottle on the ground. Catherine lifts it. She gazes at it and shivers. Feelings of wonder, desire and revulsion pass through her.

Catherine A strange bottle
 a horrible light flickers within
 like a green fairy.
 Throw it away.

James takes the bottle from Catherine with a bitter laugh.

James I can throw the bottle away a thousand times,
 sink it beneath the ocean,
 crush it between two mountains,
 send it into flames
 or outer space!
 It will always return.

Catherine Do you still love me?

James Still love you?
 How can you ask me that?

Catherine takes the bottle from James. Contact with it taints her mood, but she is fascinated by the light within.

Catherine I was dying.
 A flaw ran through me
 like a strange light,
 bitter evil, it tried to rip me apart.
 I am healed
 but you still see a fault line
 running through my body.
 Corruption,
 decay.
 Making love to me
 is like loving a corpse.

James You are my only happiness.
Your body is my consolation.

Catherine Are you worried about money?

*James makes a dismissive gesture. He takes
the bottle from her and regards it with hatred.*

James It's not money.
I have a burden I must bear alone.

Catherin We can bear it together.

James A mistake of my youth,
it brought good with the bad.
I can not regret it.

*Catherine takes the bottle from James. She cradles it, unconscious of
what she is doing.*

Catherine Is it a child?
Even though it were not mine
I would welcome it.
I would welcome a child.

James There is no child.

Catherine closes the suitcase. There is finality in her movements.

Catherine Tell me your secret.

James I can't.

Catherine picks up the suitcase.

Catherine Then you are free to keep it.

She gives him a last sad look and turns and walks away. After a second's hesitation James runs after her. He grabs her.

James The night was darker than Hell,
we were soaked to our bones
and deathly weary.
We met an old man with a grand house...

James explains, unheard, the back story to Catherine. We see Catherine react with fear and horror as James relates the story of the bottle imp: first their weariness and the rain; then the Old Man handing the bottle to him; the dashing of the bottle on the ground and its failure to smash. He shows that his pockets are empty, and makes a wish. He puts his hand in his pocket again. He removes his hand from his pocket, revealing handfuls of cash.

Catherine covers his mouth in horror, but then suddenly bursts out laughing. She runs down stage bringing James with her. She has the bottle in her hand, holding it lightly in the air.

Catherine Magic exists!

James But so does the Devil.

Catherine We can have what we want.

James And be damned.

Catherine We can wish for a child!

James is horrified by this suggestion.

James No!
A child of the imp
would be born in hell
and most likely bound there too.
Never ask me
to wish the bottle for a child,
promise never to ask me that.

Catherine is sobered by James's terror. It is a hard promise for her to make, but she gives it.

Catherine I promise.
You risked your soul for my sake.
We will sell the bottle and save you
from damnation.

James The price is too low.
I bought it for only a penny.
There is no coin smaller.

Catherine shakes her head, still sad, but amused at her husband's ignorance.

Catherine It is clear your fortune was conjured by the imp.

Catherine laughs, tearing up their plane tickets.

Catherine You have no business brain my love.
There are countries on the far side of the world
whose currencies have smaller coins.
We will wish ourselves richer.

and fly to where we can sell this curse.

Catherine is triumphant, but James cannot match her enthusiasm. He is still weighed down by the bottle. James has more experience of its curse and despite the sense in his wife's plan, he cannot quite believe in it. He fears that their troubles are not yet over,

Scene Seven

In the open, outside a temporary lodging, on an island somewhere.

James sits alone on the doorstep. He and Catherine are so sick at heart that they have not bothered to unpack. Suitcases and boxes litter the porch. James has the bottle in his hand.

James I feel you
 tied to my soul,
 thirst and hunger,
 my death,
 damnation.
 People are wiser than I'd hoped.
 They sense danger.
 The price is too low,
 the stakes are too high.
 Six months of travel
 and failing hopes.
 Washed up on this island,
 and still we cannot sell you.

James drops the bottle on the ground. It lies there unbroken. He picks it up again and regards it with loathing.

A VAGRANT enters. He is down on his luck, dishevelled and poorly dressed.

Vagrant I heard you have a bottle for sale.

James This bottle can grant all you desire.

Vagrant Sell it to me.

James I am obliged to tell you;
 it will damn you,
 old man.

James turns away, anticipating rejection.

Vagrant
I am old, and will die soon.
I can't leave my family in poverty
and misery.
Sell me the bottle
and save my family from its fate.

James looks up. He cannot quite allow himself to give in to hope.

James
The price is three centimes.
Good can come from evil,
but do not hope to sell it for less.

The Vagrant hands over the money in exchange for the bottle. James is immediately restored to his old, buoyant self. He is free!

The Vagrant is bowed down by the weight of the bottle.

James
Go now, and the Devil go with you.

May your family have
joy of your wishes!

James embraces the Vagrant.

Now I must find my wife.

James runs off stage to find Catherine.

The Vagrant looks at the bottle with disgust. He is stooped beneath its curse.

Vagrant
I feel a weight of sorrows.
The names of my dead comrades

are ringing in my head.
I wish I had some whisky
to drown them out.

A sudden weight in the pocket of his overcoat makes the Vagrant reach inside. He pulls out a bottle of whisky. He is surprised and suspicious, but his need for a drink wins and takes a slug from the bottle. It is the good stuff, but the Vagrant is wary rather than elated. This means the rumours he has heard about the bottle are true.

Vagrant I wish I had a lot of money. (*warily*)

Notes cascade from the ceiling. He rushes to put them in his pocket.

Vagrant It's true,
the bottle is enchanted,
and whoever owns it damned.

Catherine enters. The Vagrant holds out the bottle to her.

Vagrant I have had my wishes,
now keep your promise and buy the bottle back.

Catherine I know what it is to be alive and face death.
Quiet sleep.
I want to run away,
leave this old man to his fate

Vagrant You promised me a wish (*Terrified*)
not damnation!

Catherine I will keep our bargain.
All I ask is one last moment
of freedom.

Vagrant The devil is on my back.
You are young and good looking,
some fool may still buy the bottle from you
for one centime.
I am too old to dice with Hell.

Catherine makes a visible effort to pull herself together. She knows that however much she wants to delay she must accept her fate.

Her words and the words of the old man criss-cross and overlap.

Catherine I want to run away

Vagrant I have children,
a grandson.
Now I have money
they will welcome me.

The Vagrant takes a knife from his pocket.

I will not let you send me to Hell.

The Vagrant wields the knife in Catherine's direction.

The mention of children attracts Catherine's attention more than the knife. She turns to look at the Vagrant. He senses her compliance and stuffs the knife back into his pocket.

Catherine My husband
bought the bottle
for my sake.
Now I will buy it for his sake.
Sometimes I wish he had let me die. (Desperate)
Here. Two centimes.

She hands him the money. The Vagrant gives her the bottle and immediately looks lighter. Catherine is bent under the burden of the bottle imp.

Vagrant May God have mercy on you.

The Vagrant reaches out a hand to touch Catherine, but cannot bring himself to come into contact with her. He takes a swig of his whisky and hurries off stage, eager to get away from the bottle and its strange powers.

Catherine is alone. She holds up the bottle and stares at it.

Catherine I could wish for a child.
Tiny fingers curling around my hand,
around my heart.
New life!
I must not.

Catherine hides the bottle.

James enters, carrying an open bottle of champagne. He is elated.

James We are saved! I sold it!
An old tramp who had no fear of Hell.

The spell is broken, Catherine is overcome. She covers her face with her hands. James thinks his wife is crying because she is happy and relieved. He puts his arms around her and leads her into a dance.

James We are saved!

Catherine I cannot celebrate damnation.

James I risked my soul
for love of you.
You don't know
what it is to face Hell.

James
& Catherine Eternal deserts,
eternal pain.

James Don't you love me?

Catherine turns away from James.

James takes a swig of champagne from the bottle.

*Richard enters, limping and leaning on a walking stick for support.
He looks ill, ragged and bedraggled.
James opens his arms in welcome.*

James Friend of my youth,
my friend forever.

Richard grips James by the arm. He is desperate.

Richard I have crossed oceans to find you.
I need the bottle.

*James tries to pass Richard the champagne, but Richard bats it away.
James realises what he meant.*

James The imp is gone,
sold,

Richard has been caught up in his own pain, but he comes alive at the mention of Catherine's forfeited soul. He grabs her hands.

Richard You own the bottle?
The imp calls me,
I sicken for want of him.

Catherine The price is one centime.

Richard, Catherine &
James together Too low.
Too low.

Richard The imp calls me,
but the price is too low.

*Richard reaches out and takes the bottle from James.
He stares at it with love and dread.*

James The imp will soon be free.
Sell it to me.

Catherine snatches the bottle from Richard and holds it close, like a child.

Catherine The bottle is mine now.
I will not sell it yet.
There is a wish I want to make.

James I love you, Catherine.
I will make the journey instead.

Catherine The imp will soon be free.
What wickedness,
what fury!
This curse has haunted us too long,
it will end with me.

Richard takes a step towards Catherine. He puts a hand on her shoulder.

Richard Can you hear the imp?
Does it call you?

James has a centime in his hand. He holds it out to Catherine.

James My love,
my love.
Sell it to me
My love.

Catherine I could wish for a child

Richard That stormy night
I forced you on
though you wanted to go back.

Catherine Who are you?! *(To Richard)*

Richard I am Richard.

Catherine The one who started all this?

It starts to rain. Richard puts out a hand to feel the raindrops. He raises his face to the sky and lets the water run down it.

Richard looks at Catherine.

Richard How might my life have been?
If I had never met the imp,
devoured his wishes?
I could be alive now.

James You are alive.

Richard I am a dead man.

Richard smiles at James. He reaches into his pocket and takes out a small centime.

Richard offers the coin to Catherine. It catches the light, blinking brightly – salvation and damnation.

Catherine hesitates, then takes the money and puts the bottle down.

Richard picks the bottle up. He looks at the it, then at Catherine. He turns his gaze back to the bottle.

Richard I wish Catherine and James a healthy child.

Catherine A child to love!

Catherine touches her tummy in wonder, James sinks to the ground.

James Take it back!
Good cannot come from evil.

Richard looks from one to the other.

He smiles and uncorks the bottle. He clamps his lips around the neck of the bottle and tips his head back. It is a struggle, but he manages to force its contents down. James and Catherine watch, horrified. Richard falls to the ground clutching his throat.

James rushes to Catherine's side. They hold each other protectively.

Richard convulses, then lies still.

The rain stops. The sky lightens.

Catherine touches her belly again.

Catherine Something moves.

END

Character notes follow below

Cast Notes

- James** Left to his own devices James would never have bought the bottle, but once he owns it he is tainted. His love for Catherine appears at first to be a talisman against addiction, but owning it for a second time threatens to destroy him.
- Richard** Richard is susceptible to the bottle's charms – it works on him like a drug works on an addict. Initially Richard believes he can reap the benefits of the bottle and then get rid of it. Richard comes to the realisation that the bottle has the potential to kill him, but he cannot give it up. He travels from cockiness into despair.
- Catherine** Catherine desires a conventional domestic life – marriage to a man she loves and children. Her inability to conceive makes her miserable. The crisis triggered by her illness and James's retrieval of the bottle brings out a resolution and bravery she did not know she possessed. Catherine risks her soul to save her husband, but her desire for a child has the potential to destroy them both.
- The Old Man** The bottle has granted the old man a materially wealthy life, but the prospect of death does not seem as far away as it once did. Fear now outweighs the Old Man's desires and he would do anything to rid himself of the imp and its deadly forces.
- Vagrant** The Vagrant is an ex-sailor, a canny operator who has fallen on desperate times. He only engages with the imp because Catherine promises to buy the bottle back from him immediately after he has made his wish.
- The Bottle Imp** The imp never appears, but we hear its presence. It has been trapped within the bottle for aeons and the long confinement has turned it mad. The imp's one desire is to escape. A corrupted and corrupting force, the prospect of a mortal's damnation securing its freedom delights the imp.