

The Devil's Bridge

Retold by David K. McDonnell

There was an elderly woman named Megan who lived on one side of the River Mynach. Her home was on a lonely road some distance from the nearest village. She was not far from a ravine formed by the River Mynach and there was no way to cross the ravine. There were stairs going down to the bottom, called for many years *Jacob's Ladder*, but one could only go down and then back up. One could not use the stairs to cross the ravine. Her road was thus somewhat of a dead end. No one traveled on the road unless it was to see her, and no one ever traveled on the road to see her.

She was very poor, with but a few meager belongings. She did own one cow which she relied upon for her sustenance. She also had a dog, but not much else. From time to time her cow produced more than enough milk for Meagan to consume, and it was on those days that she traveled into the village to sell her extra milk. She never went into the village otherwise, and nor did villagers ever chose to visit her.

One morning, she left the house to milk her cow. But the cow was not there! Meagan walked around the area for quite some time, but could not find her cow. Eventually, she came to the ravine at the River Mynach and was shocked at what she saw.

She saw her one and only cow on the other side of the ravine. How the wrong-headed animal had got there, Megan could not guess. Still less did she know how to get it back.

"*What is the matter Megan?*" said a voice behind her.

Megan was surprised to hear a voice, since she thought she was alone and had not heard anyone coming. She turned around and saw a man. He was dressed as a monk, with a long dark

robe and a hood covering his face. The hood covered his face and Megan could not see any features.

“I am all but ruined,” said Megan. *“I have but one and only cow, my sole support in this, my old age. It is, for reasons beguiling to me, on the other side of the river and I do not know how to get it back.”*

“Do not worry, dear Megan,” said the monk. *“I will get the cow back for you. I am quite skilled at building bridges and, if you like, I will build a bridge across this river.”*

“Indeed, nothing would please me better,” said Megan. *“But I have no money. To build a bridge across here would be a difficult task. How am I to pay you?”*

“I am easily satisfied,” said the monk. *“Let me have the first living creature that crosses the bridge after I have finished. That will be sufficient.”*

“Very well,” said Megan.

“Then return to your home,” said the monk. *“I will fetch you when the bridge is finished.”*

Megan complied and returned to her cottage.

But the more Megan thought about the agreement she just made, the more suspicious she became. She didn't know this monk, yet the monk knew her by name. She remembered something very peculiar about the manner in which she stood, and suddenly realized what it was. His knees were on the back of his legs, and not in the front.

She thought about the task of building the bridge at the falls. It was such a deep ravine. It was hard to fathom construction of such a bridge by one mortal man. Perhaps he wasn't mortal at all?

And what about his compensation? What did he mean when he said: *“Let me have the first living creature that crosses the bridge after I have finished.”*

Megan spent the rest of the day and most of the night trying to figure things out. Who was this monk? And how am I to get my cow?

By the next morning, she had a plan.

Early in the morning, the monk came to Megan's cottage. He said, "*Hello to the house. The bridge is ready.*"

Megan came out of the house. She brought with her a loaf of bread and her dog.

She followed the monk to the ravine. From time to time, she pulled off a bit of the bread and dropped it to the ground. Her dog followed her, grabbing each bit of bread as soon as it fell.

When they reached the ravine, Megan saw the new bridge spanning the ravine. It was built of stone, in a single arch, crossing the ravine a few yards down Jacob's Ladder. The bridge was, indeed, quite a marvel for it would now be easy to cross the bridge from one side of the ravine to the other.

"*The bridge is for you,*" said the monk, proudly pointing to the new bridge. "*Now go across and fetch your cow.*"

"*Wonderful,*" said Megan. "*It looks like a proper bridge. But is it strong?*"

"*Of course it is strong,*" protested the monk. "*I built it myself.*"

"*Will it hold the weight of this loaf of bread?*" asked Megan.

The monk laughed. "*Hold the weight of bread? It will hold the weight of both you and your cow. Throw the loaf and bridge and test it for yourself.*"

In response, Megan threw the loaf of bread. But she did not throw the loaf on to the bridge. She threw the loaf across the bridge clear to the other side.

As the loaf landed on the other side of the ridge, Megan's dog scampered across the bridge and grabbed the loaf of bread.

“Yes, yes, the bridge will do. And thank you kind sir for building it for me,” said Megan.
“I will cross it now to fetch my cow.”

“And,” she added, *“since my dog is the first creature to cross the bridge, you are welcome to him. I thank you very much for all of your trouble.”*

“That silly dog is no good to me!” said the monk, and with that, he vanished into thin air.

From the smell that he left behind, Megan knew that the strange man was no monk. It was the Devil himself she had outwitted.

The Devil hatched a plot to take Megan’s soul. Instead, all he was offered was Megan’s hungry dog.

And that is how, to this very day, the bridge is known by all as ***The Devil’s Bridge.***