Milking Pail

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"Buy me a milkin-pail,
 Mither, mither."
"Betsy's gane a-milkin,
 Beautiful dochter."

"Sell my faither's feather-bed,
 Mither, mither."
"Whaur will yer faither lie,
 Beautiful dochter?"

"Pit him in the boys' bed,
 Mither, mither."
"Whaur will the boys lie,
 Beautiful dochter?"

"Pit them in the pigs' sty,
 Mither, mither."
"Whaur will the pigs lie,
 Beautiful dochter?"

"Pit them in the saltin-tub,
 Mither, mither."

Montgomerie SNR (1946), 132 (no. 171), a little Scottified from Chambers PRS (1870), 36. Very defective and a bit garbled.

Gomme I.376 ("Milking Pails") has several better versions, though none from Scotland, which enable us to fill out the rest, somewhat like the following:

Mary's gone a-milking,
  Mother, mother,
Mary's gone a-milking,
  Gentle sweet mother o' mine.

[similarly:]

Take your pails and go after her,/ Daughter, daughter.
Buy me a pair of new milking pails.
Where's the money to come from?

Sell my father's feather bed.
What's your father to sleep on?
Put him in the truckle bed.
What are the children to sleep on?
Put them in the pig-sty.
What are the pigs to lie in?
Put them in the washing-tubs.
What am I to wash in?
Wash in the thimble.
Thimble won't hold your father's shirt.
Wash in the river.
Suppose the clothes should blow away?
Set a man to watch them.
Suppose the man should go to sleep?
Take a boat and go after them.
Suppose the boat should be upset?
Then that would be an end of you.

[A.B. Gomme, from a London nursemaid, 1876.] The verses are sung by one child, the Mother, and a line of others holding hands, who advance and retire as they sing the first, third, and alternate verses. The Mother replies in the other verses; at the last verse, all run off, and Mother pursues and beats them. The first (or last) caught becomes Mother in a new game.
Willa Muir Living With Ballads (1965), 20-1 (with tune), has part of a game very reminiscent of this, although its incipit seems to have been like "Three Dukes" and similar games (qq.v.): some strangers have arrived, and mother asks the daughters where they will be put. They answer: "Put them in the boys' bed, mother, mother./ Put them in the boys' bed, La la la/La la la." Similarly: "Where will the boys sleep, daughter, daughter/ Sleep in the wash-tub/ Where shall we wash the clothes"--at which point improvisation can begin, suggesting various improbable answers ("porridge pot", etc.), until it is recommended tha
all be tossed into the midden, and the game breaks up in laughter. [She finds a related game in Ireland, "Mother will you buy me a milking can".]
Opies Singing Game (1985), 271 (no. 63, "Milking Pails"), with Gomme's tune, noting that twentieth-century versions are usually sung to Nuts in May.

MS

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