

THE IRISH TWINS



THE IRISH TWINS

By Lucy Fitch Perkins

ILLUSTRATED BY THE AUTHOR



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CONTENTS

GRANNIE MALONE AND THE TWINS	1
THE TEA-PARTY	11
THE TALE OF THE LEPRECHAUN.....	25
THE TINKERS.....	32
THE TWINS GET HOME	42
HOW THEY WENT TO THE BOG	48
THE BOG	55
“DIDDY”	61
THE SECRET.....	73
SCHOOL	81
THE FAIR	89
HOW THEY SOLD THE PIG	96
WHAT THEY SAW	105
SUNDAY	117
MR. MCQUEEN MAKES UP HIS MIND.....	124
MR MCQUEEN PAYS THE RENT	131
TWENTY YEARS AFTER	143

GRANNIE MALONE AND THE TWINS

ONE day of the world, when it was young summer in Ireland, old Grannie Malone sat by her fireplace knitting. She was all alone, and in her lap lay a letter.

Sometimes she took the letter in her hands, and turned it over and over, and looked at it. Then she would put it down again with a little sigh.

“If I but had the learning,” said Grannie Malone to herself, “I could be reading Michael’s letters without calling in the Priest, and ’t is long since he passed this door. ’T is hard work waiting until some one can tell me what at all is in it.”

She stooped over and put a bit of peat on the fire, and because she had no one else to talk to, she talked to the tea-kettle. “There now,” she said to it, “’t is a lazy bit of steam that ’s coming out of the nose of you! I’ll be wanting my tea soon, and no water boiling.”

THE IRISH TWINS

She lifted the lid and peeped into the kettle. “’T is empty entirely!” she cried, “and a thirsty kettle it is surely, and no one but myself to fetch and carry for it!”

She got up slowly, laid her knitting and the letter on the chair, took the kettle off the hook, and went to the door.

There was but one door and one window in the one little room of her cabin, so if the sun had not been shining brightly it would have been quite dark within.

But the upper half of the door stood open, and the afternoon sun slanted across the earthen floor and brightened the dishes that stood on the old dresser. It even showed Grannie Malone’s bed in the far end of the room, and some of her clothes hanging from the rafters overhead.

There was little else in the room to see, except her chair, a wooden table, and a little bench by the fire, a pile of peat on the hearth, and a bag of potatoes in the corner.

Grannie Malone opened the lower half of the door and stepped out into the sunshine. Some speckled hens that had been sunning themselves on the doorstep fluttered out of the way, and then ran after her to the well.

GRANNIE MALONE AND THE TWINS

“Shoo—get along with you!” cried Grannie Malone. She flapped her apron at them. “’T is you that are always thinking of something to eat! Sure, there are bugs enough in Ireland, without your always being at my heels to be fed! Come now,—scratch for your living like honest hens, and I ’ll give you a sup of water if it ’s dry you are.”

The well had a stone curb around it, and a bucket with a rope tied to it stood on the curb. Grannie let the bucket down into the well until she heard it strike the fresh spring water with a splash. Then she pulled and pulled on the rope. The bucket came up slowly and water spilled over the sides as Grannie lifted it to the curb.

She poured some of the water into the dish for the hens, filled her kettle, and then



THE IRISH TWINS

straightened her bent back, and stood looking at the little cabin and the brown bog beyond.

“Sure, it ’s old we all are together,” she said to herself, nodding her head. “The old cabin with the rain leaking through the thatch of a wet day, and the old well with moss on the stones of it. And the hens themselves, too old to cook, and too old to be laying,—except on the doorstep in the sunshine, the creatures!—But ’t is home, thanks be to God.”

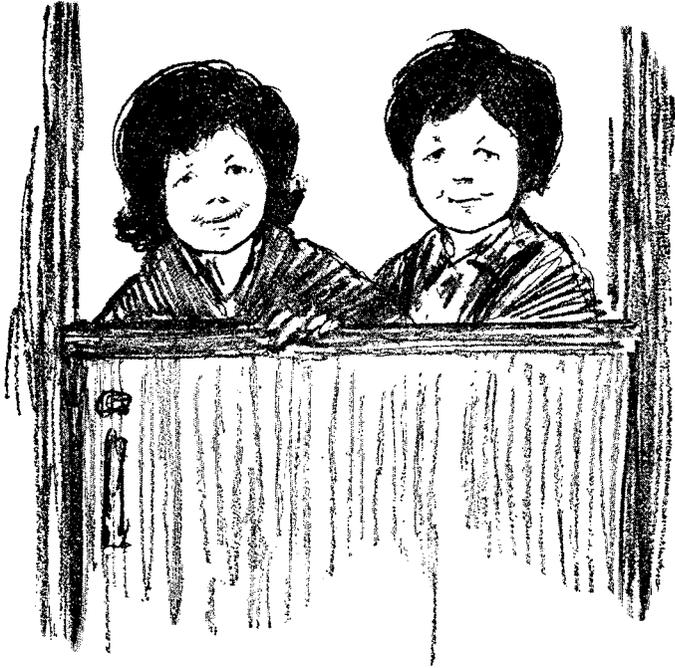
She lifted her kettle and went slowly back into the house. The hens followed her to the door, but she shut the lower half of it behind her and left them outside.

She went to the fireplace and hung the kettle on the hook, blew the coals to a blaze with a pair of leaky bellows, and sat down before the fire once more to wait for the water to boil.

She knit round and round her stocking, and there was no sound in the room but the click-click of her needles, and the tick-tick of the clock, and the little purring noise of the fire on the hearth.

Just as the kettle began to sing, there was a squawking among the hens on the doorstep, and two dark heads appeared above the closed half of the door.

GRANNIE MALONE AND THE TWINS



A little girl's voice called out, "How are you at all, Grannie Malone?"

And a little boy's voice said, "We 've come to bring you a sup of milk that Mother sent you."

Grannie Malone jumped out of her chair and ran to the door. "Och, if it 's not the McQueen Twins—the two of them!" she cried. "Bless your sweet faces! Come in, Larry and Eileen! You are as welcome as the flowers of spring. And how is your Mother, the day? May God spare her to her comforts for long years to come!"

THE IRISH TWINS

She swung the door open as she talked, took the jug from Eileen's hand, and poured the milk into a jug of her own that stood on the dresser.

"Sure, Mother is well. And how is yourself, Grannie Malone?" Eileen answered, politely.

"Barring the rheumatism and the asthma, and the old age in my bones, I 'm doing well, thanks be to God," said Grannie Malone. "Sit down by the fire, now, till I wet a cup of tea and make a cakeen for you! And indeed it 's yourselves can read me a letter from my son Michael, that 's in America! It has been in the house these three days waiting for some one with the learning to come along by."

She ran to the chair and picked up the letter. The Twins sat down on a little bench by the fireplace, and Grannie Malone put the letter in their hands.

"We 've not got *all* the learning yet," Larry said. "We might not be able to read it."

"You can try," said Grannie Malone. Then she opened the letter, and a bit of folded green paper with printing on it fell out. "God bless the boy," she cried, "there 's one of those in every

GRANNIE MALONE AND THE TWINS

letter he sends me! 'T is money that is! Can you make out the figures on it, now?"

Larry and Eileen looked it over carefully. "There it is, hiding in the corner," said Larry. He pointed to a "5" on the green paper.

"Five pounds it is!" said Grannie Malone. "Sure it 's a fortune! Oh, it 's himself is the good son to me! What does the letter say?"

The Twins spread the sheet open and studied it, while Grannie hovered over them, trembling with excitement.



"Sure, that 's Dear, is n't it?" said Eileen, pointing to the first word.

"Sure," said Larry; "letters always begin like that."

THE IRISH TWINS

“Dear G-r-a-n-n-i-e,” spelled Eileen. “What could that be but Grannie?”

“’T is from my grandson, young Patrick, then,” cried Grannie. “Indeed, he ’s but the age of yourselves! How old are you at all?”

“We ’re seven,” said the Twins.

“Patrick might be eight,” said his Grandmother, “but surely the clever children like yourselves and the two of you together should be able to make it out. There ’s but one of Patrick, and there should be more learning between the two of you than in one alone, even though he is a bit older! Try now.”

Larry and Eileen tried. This was the letter. It was written in a large staggery hand.

Dear Grannie
We are all well we hope
these few words will
find you the same.
Dada is an alderman
now. He has a silk
hat and one day he
rode in a procession.
He says he is going to
Ireland to get you some
day and bring you back

THE TEA-PARTY

to this house I have
a pup. I call him
Bud. So no more at
present from your
loving grandson
Patrick Malone

“Will you listen to that now!” cried Grannie Malone. “Is it taking me back to America, he’d be! ’T is a terrible journey altogether, and a strange country at the end of it, for me to be laying my old bones in! But I’d be a proud woman to see my own son, in any country of the world, and he an alderman!”

There was a letter from Michael himself in the envelope also, but the Twins could not read that, however much they tried.

So Grannie was obliged to put the two letters and the green paper under the clock over the fireplace, to wait until the Priest should pass that way.



THE TEA-PARTY

“SURE, this is a fine day for me, altogether,” said Grannie Malone as she got out her bit of flour to make the cake. “I can wait for the letter from himself, the way I know they ’re in health, and have not forgotten their old Mother. Troth, we ’ll have a bit of a feast over it now,” she said to the Twins. “While I ’m throwing the cakeen together do you get some potatoes from the bag, Eileen, and put them down in the ashes, and you, Larry, stir up the fire a bit, and keep the kettle full. Sure, ’t is singing away like a bird this instant minute! Put some water in it, avic, and then shut up the hens for me.”

Eileen ran to the potato bag in the corner and took out four good-sized potatoes. “There ’s but three of us,” she said to herself, “but Larry will surely be wanting two, himself.”

She got down on her knees and buried the potatoes in the burning peat. Then she took a little broom that stood near by, and tidied up the hearth.

THE IRISH TWINS



Larry took the kettle to the well for more water. He slopped a good deal of it as he came back. It made great spots of mud, for there was no wooden floor—only hard earth with flat stones set in it.

“Arrah now, Larry, you do be slopping things up the equal of a thunderstorm,” Eileen said to him.

“Never you mind that, now, Larry,” said Grannie Malone. “It might have been that the kettle leaked itself, and no fault of your own at

THE TEA-PARTY

all! Sure, a bit of water here or there does nobody any harm.”

She hung the tea-kettle on the hook over the fire again. Then she brought the cakeen and put it into a small iron baking-kettle, and put a cover over it. She put turf on top of the cover. “’T will not be long until it ’s baked,” said Grannie, “and you can be watching it, Eileen, while I set out the table.”

She pulled a little wooden table out before the fire, put three plates and three cups on it, some salt, and the jug of milk. Meanwhile Larry was out trying to shut the hens into the little shelter beside the house. But he could n’t get them all in. One old speckled hen ran round the house to the door. Larry ran after her. The hen flew up on top of the half-door. She was very much excited. “Cut-cut-cut,” she squawked.

“Cut-cut yourself now!” cried Grannie Malone.

She ran toward the door, waving her spoon. “Shoo along out of this with your bad manners!” she cried.

Just that minute Larry came up behind the hen and tried to catch her by the legs.

“Cut-cut-cut-á-cut,” squawked old Speckle;

THE IRISH TWINS

and up she flew, right over Grannie's head, into the rafters! Then she tucked herself cozily down to go to sleep.

“Did you ever see the likes of that old Speckle, now?” cried Grannie Malone. She ran for the broom. “Sure she must be after thinking I was lonesome for a bit of company! Do you think I'd be wanting you at all, you silly, when I have the Twins by me?” she said to the hen. She shook the broom at her, but old Speckle was n't a bit afraid of Grannie; she did n't move.

Then Grannie Malone put the broom under her and tried to lift her from her perch, but old Speckle had made up her mind to stay. So she flew across to another rafter, and lit on Grannie Malone's black coat that she wore to Mass on Sundays. She thought it a pleasant warm place and sat down again.

“Bad luck to you for an ill-favored old thief!” screamed Grannie. “Get off my Sunday cloak with your muddy feet! It's ruined you'll have me entirely!”

She shook the cloak. Then old Speckle, squawking all the way, flew over to Grannie's bed! She ran the whole length of it. She left a little path clear across the patchwork quilt. Larry stood in one corner of the room waving his arms.

THE TEA-PARTY



Eileen was flapping her apron in another, while Grannie Malone chased old Speckle with the broom. At last, with a final squawk, she flew out of the door, and ran round to the shelter where the other hens were, and went in as if she thought home was the best place for a hen after all. Larry shut her in.

THE IRISH TWINS



As soon as the hen was out of the house, Eileen screamed, "I smell something burning!"

"'T is the cakeen," cried Grannie.

She and Eileen flew to the fireplace. Eileen got there first. She knocked the cover off the little kettle with the tongs, and out flew a cloud of smoke.

"Och, murder! 'T is destroyed entirely!" poor Grannie groaned.

"I'll turn it quick," said Eileen.

THE TEA-PARTY

She was in such a hurry she did n't wait for a fork or stick or anything! She took right hold of the little cakeen, and lifted it out of the kettle with her hand!

The little cake was hot! "Ow! Ow!" shrieked Eileen, and she dropped it right into the ashes! Then she danced up and down and sucked her fingers.

"The Saints help us! The cakeen is bewitched," wailed poor Grannie. She picked it up, and tossed it from one hand to the other, while she blew off the ashes.

Then she dropped it, burned side up, into the kettle once more, clapped on the cover, and set it where it would cook more slowly.

When that was done, she looked at Eileen's fingers. "It 's not so bad at all, mavourneen, praise be to God," she said. "Sure, I thought I had you killed entirely, the way you screamed!"

"Eileen is always burning herself," said Larry. "Mother says 't is only when she 's burned up altogether that she 'll learn to keep out of the fire at all!"

"'T was all the fault of that disgraceful old hen," Grannie Malone said. "Sure, I 'll have to be putting manners on her! She 's no notion

THE IRISH TWINS

of behavior at all, at all. Reach the sugar bowl, Larry, avic, and sit down by the table and rest your bones. I 'll have the tea ready for you in a minute. Sit you down, too, Eileen, while I get the potatoes." She took the tongs and drew out the potatoes, blew off the ashes, and put them on the table. Then she poured the boiling water over the tea-leaves, and set the tea to draw, while she took the cakeen from the kettle.

"'T is not burned so much, after all," she said, as she looked it over. "Sure, we can shut our eyes when we eat it."

She drew her own chair up to the table; the Twins sat on the bench on the other side. Grannie Malone crossed herself, and then they each took a potato, and broke it open. They put salt on it, poured a little milk into the skin which they held like a cup, and it was ready to eat.

Grannie poured the tea, and they had milk and sugar in it. The little cakeen was broken open and buttered, and, "Musha, 't is fit for the Queen herself," said Larry, when he had taken his first bite.

And Eileen said, "Indeed, ma'am, it 's a grand cook you are entirely."

"Sure, I 'd need to be a grand cook with

THE TEA-PARTY

the grand company I have,” Grannie answered politely, “and with the fine son I have in America to be sending me a fortune in every letter! ’T is a great thing to have a good son, and do you be that same to your Mother, the both of you, for ’t is but one Mother that you ’ll get in all the world, and you ’ve a right to be choice of her.”

“Sure, I ’ll never at all be a good son to my Mother,” laughed Eileen.



“Well, then,” said Grannie, “you can be a good daughter to her, and that ’s not far behind. Whist now, till I tell you the story of the Little

THE IRISH TWINS

Cakeen, and you 'll see that 't is a good thing entirely to behave yourselves and grow up fine and respectable, like the lad in the tale. It goes like this now:¹—

“It was once long ago in old Ireland, there was living a fine, clean, honest, poor widow woman, and she having two sons, and she fetched the both of them up fine and careful, but one of them turned out bad entirely. And one day she says to him, says she:—

“‘I ’ve given you your living as long as ever I can, and it ’s you must go out into the wide world and seek your fortune.’

“‘Mother, I will,’ says he.

“‘And will you take a big cake with my curse, or a little cake with my blessing?’ says she.

“‘A big cake, sure,’ says he.

“So she baked a big cake and cursed him, and he went away laughing! By and by, he came forninst a spring in the woods, and sat down to eat his dinner off the cake, and a small, little bird sat on the edge of the spring.

“‘Give me a bit of your cake for my little

¹ Adapted from “Marygold House,” in *Play-Days*, by Sarah Orne Jewett.

THE TEA-PARTY

ones in the nest,' said she; and he caught up a stone and threw at her.

"'I 've scarce enough for myself,' says he, and she being a fairy, put her beak in the spring and turned it black as ink, and went away up in the trees. And whiles he looked for a stone for to kill her, a fox went away with his cake!

"So he went away from that place very mad, and next day he stopped, very hungry, at a farmer's house, and hired out for to tend the cows.

"'Be wise,' says the farmer's wife, 'for the next field is belonging to a giant, and if the cows get into the clover, he will kill you dead as a stone.'

"But the bad son laughed and went out to watch the cows; and before noontime he went to sleep up in the tree, and the cows all went in the clover. And out comes the giant and shook him down out of the tree and killed him dead, and that was the end of the bad son.

"And the next year the poor widow woman says to the good son:—

"'You must go out into the wide world and seek your fortune, for I can keep you no longer,' says the Mother.

THE IRISH TWINS

“‘Mother, I will,’ says he.

“‘And will you take a big cake with my curse or a little cake with my blessing?’

“‘A little cake,’ says he.

“So she baked it for him and gave him her blessing, and he went away, and she a-weeping after him fine and loud. And by and by he came to the same spring in the woods where the bad son was before him, and the small, little bird sat again on the side of it.

“‘Give me a bit of your cakeen for my little ones in the nest,’ says she.

“‘I will,’ says the good son, and he broke her off a fine piece, and she dipped her beak in the spring and turned it into sweet wine; and when he bit into his cake, sure, it was turned into fine plum-cake entirely; and he ate and drank and went on light-hearted. And next day he comes to the farmer’s house.

“‘Will ye tend the cows for me?’ says the farmer.

“‘I will,’ says the good son.

“‘Be wise,’ says the farmer’s wife, ‘for the clover-field beyond is belonging to a giant, and if you leave in the cows, he will kill you dead.’

THE TEA-PARTY

“‘Never fear,’ says the good son, ‘I don’t sleep at my work.’

“And he goes out in the field and lugs a big stone up in the tree, and then sends every cow far out in the clover-fields and goes back again to the tree! And out comes the giant a-roaring, so you could hear the roars of him a mile away, and when he finds the cow-boy, he goes under the tree to shake him down, but the good little son slips out the big stone, and it fell down and broke the giant’s head entirely. So the good son went running away to the giant’s house, and it being full to the eaves of gold and diamonds and splendid things.

“So you see what fine luck comes to folks that is good and honest! And he went home and fetched his old Mother, and they lived rich and contented, and died very old and respected.”

“Do you suppose your son Michael killed any giants in America, the way he got to be an Alderman?” asked Eileen, when Grannie had finished her story.

“I don’t rightly know that,” Grannie answered. “Maybe it was n’t just exactly giants, but you can see for yourself that he is rich and respected, and he with a silk hat, and riding

THE IRISH TWINS

in a procession the same as the Lord-Mayor himself!"

"Did you ever see a giant or a fairy or any of the good little people themselves, Grannie Malone?" Larry asked.

"I 've never exactly seen any of them with my own two eyes," she answered, "but many is the time I 've talked with people and they having seen them. There was Mary O'Connor now,—dead long since, God rest her. She told me this tale herself, and she sitting by this very hearth. Wait now till I wet my mouth with a sup of tea in it, and I 'll be telling you the tale the very same way she told it herself."