ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

**CAST** of characters in the scene:

* Nora O’Malley: mother
* Seamus O’Malley: father
* Eileen O’Malley: one of the sick O’Malley twins
* Nancy O’Malley: the other sick O’Malley twin
* Dr. Harvey: physician
* Martin: one of the 3 O’Malley boys

**CONTEXT**: The O’Malley parents are Irish immigrants now living in Philadelphia in 1918. They have five young children: three boys followed by the mother’s long-awaited twin girls. People have been talking about the recent cases of flu; some have gone to a sanitarium while others have died. Nora, though, has been adamant that she takes good care of her large, healthy family. Just recently, though, her twins have begun to exhibit symptoms of illness…

*The O’Malleys’ apartment. Center stage is a single wooden rocking chair with a missing rung in the backrest. Stage left is a cramped kitchen area with a small oven and stovetop facing the audience, and a sink and countertop to the right. There is a window over the sink. A round table with five mismatched chairs is just in front of the kitchen area. Stage right there is a double bed, unmade, and a crib just a few inches from its headboard. Next to the bed’s footboard is the front door to the apartment. Between the crib and the kitchen is another door, leading to the boys’ bedroom. Hearing a honk in the alley, Nora runs to the kitchen window.*

SEAMUS, *coming through the door*: Doctor Harvey says it could just be a cold, Nora. Let him see Eileen. *Seamus is followed in by the stolid, middle-aged man carrying a black medical bag.*

DR. HARVEY: When did the symptoms start?

NORA: This morning.

DR. HARVEY: I see. *He pries Eileen from her mother and listens to the child’s labored breathing with a stethoscope.*  Mm hmm…My that is a warm forehead.

NORA: I’ve made soup. *She wrings the edge of her apron in her hands.*

SEAMUS: She’s been tired. And coughin’ something horrible, too. *To his wife:* he should know that, Nora.

NORA, *looks away*: Yes.

DR. HARVEY: And the other child?

NORA: Me little Nancy has just been layin’ in the crib most of the day and—

DR. HARVEY: Lethargic?

NORA: Well, I guess so. And a wee teeny cough. But she hasn’t got the fever like Eileen. I think maybe—

SEAMUS: But she’s been throwing up her food.

NORA, *with an effort*: Yes.

DR. HARVEY, *having given Eileen to her father and now examining Nancy, who pulls at his glasses, giggles, then sneezes*: I see. *Opening his black bag, he takes out a pill bottle.* These are quinine tablets. Give one to each child in the morning and one at night. Use cold compresses to try to reduce the fever. Be attentive.

NORA, *taking Nancy from him*: I’ve been carin’ for both me girls!

DR. HARVEY: As I said, keep watching.

MARTIN, *who has remained quiet by the front door*: Is it flu? Has he got Eileen and Nancy?

DR. HARVEY, *clears his throat as he closes his bag*: Yes, Eileen seems to have contracted it. Don’t let the girls sleep in the same crib, Mr. and Mrs. O’Malley. And keep your boys away from their sisters if you can. You don’t want an epidemic in your own house. Good day. *He exits.*

SEAMUS: running his fingers through his thick red hair: I’ll ladle the soup to the boys and see if Nancy will take some.

NORA: Maybe Eileen will quiet with a cool bath and then a compress, like the doctor said. *With a pause*. Seamus, I—

SEAMUS: Don’t Nora. They’ll be all right. Come, Martin, call your brothers in from the alley. We’ll gather round for this recipe that comes all the way from Ireland. Your mother’s mother made it for her when she was little. *Sets out bowls and fills them with the chunky chicken broth.*

*Nora snuggles Nancy and looks toward Eileen, sleeping and breathing heavily in the crib.*