

# Patsy's Pantry

**Note:** This story uses British spelling.

"Mmm ... *scrumptious*," twelve-year-old Conley McArdent mumbled through a mouthful. "The best shortbread I've ever tasted."

"Don't exaggerate," responded his fourteen-year-old sister, Patsy.

"I mean it."

"Really? It was just a wee experiment—throwing the usual ingredients together type of thing. You know—butter, flour, sugar and all. Naught special, except the butter, of course ... Ballyrashane."

"But they are so good," Conley said, reaching for the plate. Patsy stayed his hand.

"That's your fifth. I only made four for each of our guests."

"Oops."

"Okay, Con, since you are a satisfied customer, go ahead."

Conley's eyes lit up. "Speaking of customers, I bet I could sell these."

"What? *Sell* my dinky biscuits?"

"Aye. You don't think so?"

"I suppose," Patsy muttered.

"You *suppose*? I'm convinced! You don't know what a gift you have."

Patsy laughed scornfully. "A *gift*? Away wit' ye, Conley McArdent. I just enjoy cooking—baking to be precise. I don't think that rustling up a few shortbread biscuits amounts to much."

"Don't say that, Patsy. You always bake incredible stuff. And we both know there's shortbread and there's *Shortbread* with a capital 'Sh'!"

"Aye ... you're right. But then again, you've always been a sweet-tooth foodie."

"Then that makes me an expert, right?"

"Well ... yes, I suppose. Actually, when I was baking them, Mam came in and said how much people in town like to buy homemade cakes, pies, and biscuits during the Christmas season, especially shortbread; it's traditional."

"Well, then, bake some more and we can go out and sell them."

"We?"

"Aye. Or *I* will. We can wrap them up. I can even design and print out a little label. Does 'Patsy's Pantry' sound okay to you?"

"Umm, I don't know, Con. Sounds like a lot of time and trouble. We can see. But you're getting me somewhat excited about the idea ... I suppose."



Later that afternoon, following their parents' friends' visit, Conley barged into Patsy's bedroom where she was working at her computer.

"Did you hear everyone raving about your shortbread?"



"No. I wanted to get this project done by this evening so I can enjoy the holidays. But Mam told me that they were a hit."

"They certainly were. I had told everyone earlier how good your shortbread was, and it was as if they didn't believe me until they tasted it. Should have seen their faces! 'Patsy made these?' they said."

"Really?"

"Aye. Merrill even said—and you know how 'gourmet' he is—that for a youngster to successfully bake something so traditional takes *supernatural* skill. He actually used those words."

"Begorra," said Patsy. "I mean ... I just went by my instinct ... I suppose. After all, baking shortbread isn't exactly rocket science."

"I still believe we could sell them, Patsy."

Patsy hung her head. "I suppose," she said.

"I suppose, I suppose," Conley said, rolling his eyes. "No 'suppose' about it. You can laugh, but I believe that one day 'Patsy's Pantry' could be an Irish household name—at least in Leitrim County! Anyways, I think we could sell a bunch during this time."

"Well, actually, Mam did suggest we take some down to *Scrimp 'n' Save*," Patsy said with a flicker of a smile. "She knows the manager there. They have a Christmas display of local homemade cakes and pies and things, and the proceeds are going to Down Syndrome Ireland."

"Well, that's grand! So, it's worth a try, don't you think?"

Patsy shrugged. "You *have* got me a bit more excited about it. Anyways, I'll be baking a huge amount for New Year's and stuff later tonight."



The next morning, toting a laden knapsack, Conley sauntered down to the *Scrimp 'n' Save* supermarket. There, close to the checkout counters, stood a lavish display of homemade sausage rolls; fruitcakes; oatmeal biscuits; rhubarb, apple, blackcurrant, and gooseberry pies; and assorted jam tarts. He approached a nearby shop girl and pointed to them.

"Are these selling?"

"No idea."

"Have you tried any of them?"

"Nah. It's grand that we're promotin' local enterprise, but bein' a bit of a baker meself, I've usually found most of these contributions leave a lot to be desired."

Conley reached into his knapsack. "Here, try one of these. They are absolutely *delicious*."

"*Patsy's Pantry*," the girl muttered. "Who's Patsy?"

"My sister. She made them."

"A little partial, are we?" the girl said with a grin.

"W-well, the proceeds will go to Down Syndrome Ireland."

"A grand cause. But does that make 'em taste any better?"

The shop girl took a bite and Conley watched expectantly. Her eyes widened.

"Mmm ... *scrumptious*," she said. "Melts in yer mouth. And tastes like she used the best creamery butter."

"Aye. She did say she used the best."

"Where on earth did she get the recipe?"

"Made it up herself," Conley replied with a beam. "Sort of threw it together."

"Brilliant. Hey, tell you what we can do ... what's your name?"

"McArdent. Conley McArdent."

"Edna McKeen. Look, Conley, for starters, we can move some of these other questionable contributions aside to make room for your sister's shortbread here in front."

"Grand. I have *tons* in here."

"Let's just give a couple o' dozen a go first, shall we? I'll start out with putting some bits on a tray as sample tastings. And right now, I will eat another for good measure."

After thanking Edna, Conley left the supermarket and jaunted down to the post office where he queued up to mail some postcards.

"What's that yer snackin' on, sonny?" said a man standing behind him. His face, hands, and overalls were grimy, but his eyes twinkled kindly. "Looks like ye're enjoyin' it."

"One of my sister's shortbread biscuits."

"Ah. They're good?"



"Delicious. Here, try one."

"Me 'ands are a bit dirty."

"That's okay. The biscuits are wrapped."

"*Patsy's Pantry*," the man said, looking at the label. He tore open the wrapper, took a bite and beamed. "Mmm ... *scrumptious*. These fer sale?"

Conley nodded. "Twenty-five cents each. Five for a euro. Proceeds are going to Down Syndrome Ireland."

"My brother has a daughter with Down's syndrome," said the man and reached into his pocket. "Grand. I'll take twenty for starters. Look, it's lunch hour, and the boys over at the plant would go fer these. Empty that bag o' yern in no time."

Conley mailed his postcards, waited for the man to take care of his business of paying a bill, and then followed him across the street to a car repair yard.

"Ne'er introduced meself," the man said. "Name's Brendan Brogan."

"Conley McArdent."

"And this is me team," Brendan said, cheerily acknowledging about half a dozen men in oil-stained overalls who were sitting on tires, perched on car bonnets and leaning against the corrugated iron shed while eating packed lunches.

"He's the foreman of us sorry lot," one of them joked as Brendan introduced Conley.



"Wotcha carryin', Conley?" asked another. "Looks like ye got yer home on yer back!"

"His sister's shortbread biscuits," said Brendan.

"Fer sale?"

"Aye. Jes' bought twenty meself. Go grand with a cuppa. And what's more, the proceeds are goin' to a good cause ... DSI."



Carrying an empty knapsack, a full wallet, and wearing a broad smile, Conley was jaunting home, when someone called to him from across the street. Edna McKeen was standing in front of *Scrimp 'n' Save*. Conley dashed over to her.

"Hey, I'll take a few dozen more o'..." she began, and then her freckled face fell. "Seems your knapsack's empty."

"It is," said Conley. "Why? You sold all the ones I gave you?"

“Almost. It took but a few free samples to the shoppers as they wandered by and they are going like, er ... hot cakes! I even have orders for more—like around fifty at *least*. Someone even came back and asked if we have other baked goods from *Patsy’s Pantry*.”

“That’s grand. I’ll tell my sister right away.”

“An’ tell her to get a-bakin’,” Edna said with a wink. “Christmas is a-comin’, us geese want to get fat, and *Patsy’s Pantry* and DSI’s going to need all hands on deck!”

“Thanks, Edna,” Conley said as he ran off. “Happy Christmas!”

“And the same to you!”



“Mam ... Mam! What happened to the shortbread I baked until the wee hours? They’re almost all gone.”

Patsy’s mother shrugged. “All I knows is that Conley took a whole lot upstairs to his room before he left this morning.”

“Why? Was he hungry?”

“I don’t see how, seein’ he put away a sizeable trad Irish breakfast! He was busy up there with the printer and stuff for quite a while.”

Patsy scrambled upstairs and returned to the kitchen a couple of minutes later.

“Seems I’m going to have to bake some more,” she said, putting on her coat. “I will need to zip down to *Scrimp ’n’ Save* for some more Ballyrashane butter before they close.”

“Well, it’s good to see you with some get up and go.”

“Get up and go, Mam?”

“Aye. Gettin’ up off yer southern hemisphere and bein’ self-motivated like yer brother.”

Patsy sighed. She had heard enough self-motivation lectures not so subtly inculcated through morning podcasts during breakfast, presumably for her benefit.

“Why does Conley have what I don’t, no matter how hard I try?”



Patsy’s mother shrugged. “Some things come naturally to some and not to others. Those ‘others’ have to be taught.”

Patsy was about to leave the kitchen in despair, when she stopped and smiled.

“Speaking of motivation, you know what Con has that I could have?”

Patsy’s mother shrugged again. “Dunno. But the thing is, dearie, I think you underestimate your own particular worth.”

“Like what?”

“Like cooking ... baking, for instance. Remember those amazing sausage rolls you made with that flaky pastry for Dad’s birthday?”

“Hmmp. Well, baking a few biscuits is naught to get flash about.”

“Realising your own worth is not being flash when you give the good Lord the credit. Anything short o’ that is false humility, which is the stinkiest form of egotism in my book.”

Patsy nodded. “You’re right, Mam ... I suppose.”

“But tell me,” said Patsy’s mother as she took her daughter’s hand. “What exactly is it that Conley has that you could have?”

“Well, you know what you and Dad always remind us about Christmas?”

“And what is that?”

“Christmas is about *others*, right? Not self.”

“True, dearie, but I don’t know what ye be drivin’ at.”

“I’ll tell ya later, Mam. See ya.”

As Patsy checked out her purchase at *Scrimp ‘n’ Save*, Edna McKeen happened to be at the cash register.

“Seein’ as ye are buying the best Irish creamery butter, I assume you are bakin’,” Edna remarked.

“That I am.”

“Have you tried these?” Edna said, pointing to a tray of shortbread samples.

“Can’t say I have.”

“Incredible recipe. Uses that same butter. Try one.”

Patsy took a bite, and her eyes lit up. “Pretty good ... *delicious*, in fact. Makes me want to throw in the towel regarding baking.”

“Me too,” said Edna.

“Who made them?”

Edna handed her a package of the shortbread, and Patsy’s mouth fell open.

“Y-you mean these are actually *mine*?”

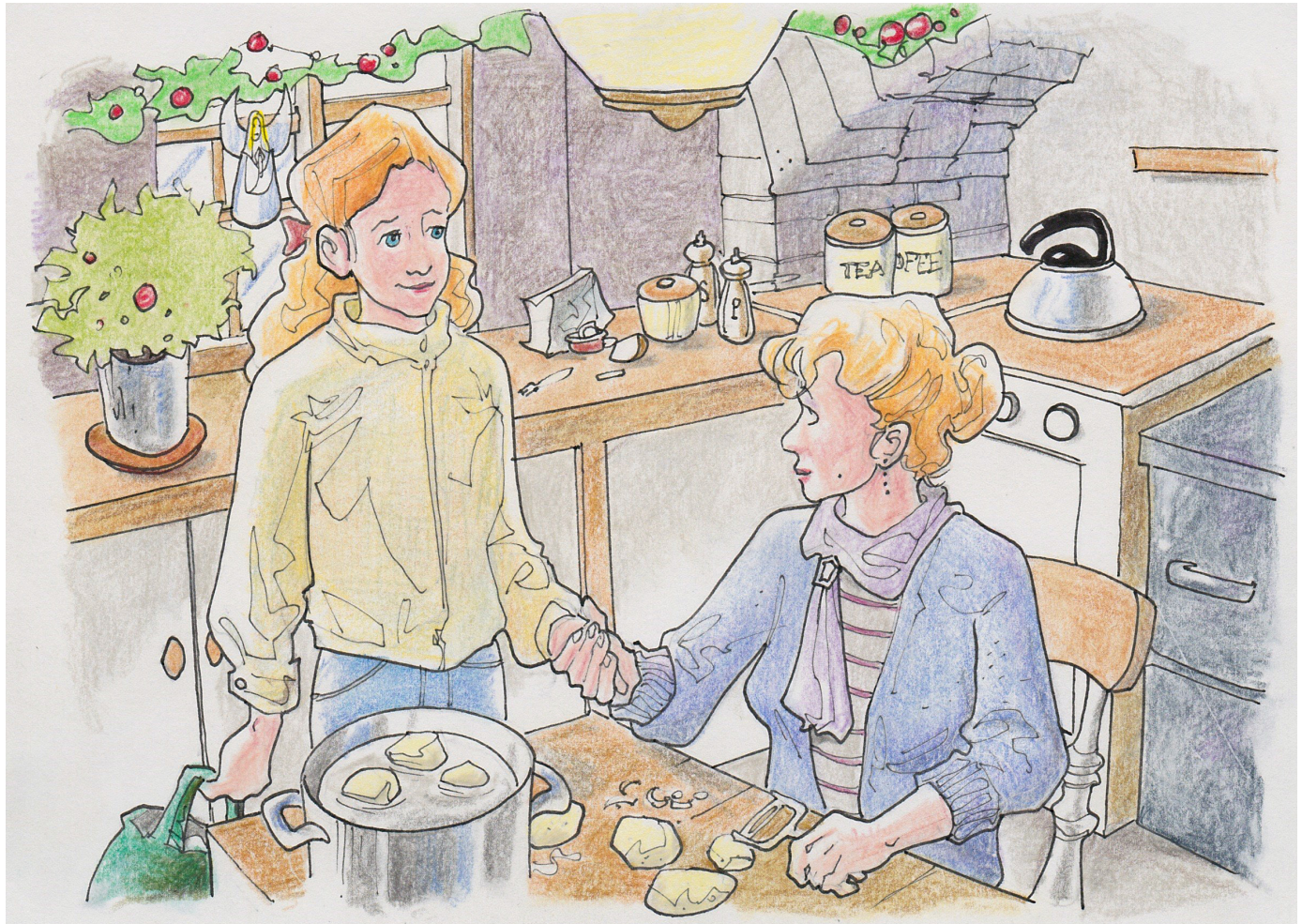
“Are they? You’re ‘Patsy?’”

Patsy nodded, and tears welled up as she studied the packet’s finely executed label.

“You mean to say you didn’t know?”

Patsy shook her head.

“Then you can thank your brother,” Edna said. “Like I told him, they are going like hot cakes, so you need to get a-bakin’! Here’s your change, Patsy, and do have a happy Christmas break.”



“H-happy Christmas,” Patsy said distantly and wandered out of the supermarket.



In honour of the townspeople’s liberal participation in various charity drives, including those having donated their culinary talents, spotlights were ablaze at *Scrimp ‘n’ Save* supermarket on New Year’s Eve a few days later. Patsy, microphone and prepared notes in hand, smiled nervously at the cameras and shoppers gathered around her.

“From all accounts, Miss McArdent,” said a local news reporter. “Considering your young age, your baking company contributed substantially to Down Syndrome Ireland’s fundraising this year. To what do you attribute this?”

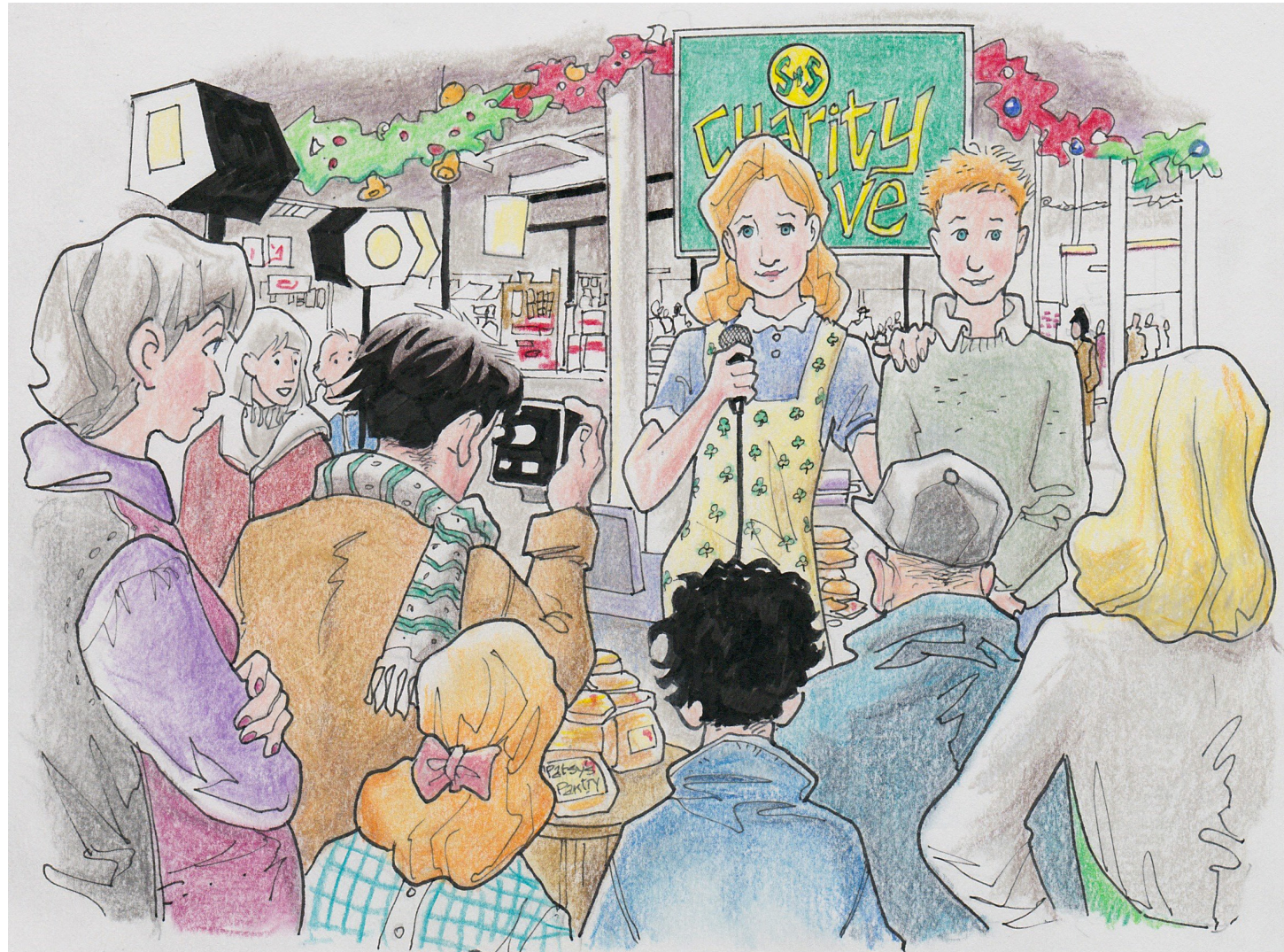
“By all accounts, I baked a scrumptious batch of shortbread biscuits and other pastries and tasties!” Patsy replied with a grin and beckoned Conley to join her.

"You certainly did," a woman called out. "I'm orderin' more of everything."

"Thank you."

But to be honest, the credit for the success of Patsy's Pantry must go to me brother, Conley here, and his enthusiasm. Like I told me mam the other day, more important than him being a self-motivator—which he is, and wonderfully so—if it wasn't for him being an *others-motivator* also, me wares would have gone no further than a kitchen dinin' table within the four walls of a three-up two-down on Donahue Street!

"And I do hope and pray by the good Lord's grace," Patsy added after pausing for the audience's laughter and applause, "that I meself, not being much self-motivated, can at least be an *others-motivator* like he is! Here, Conley, say a little sump'n'."



Conley, blushing, took the microphone. "Thanks a million, sis," he said and addressed the crowd. "I must say that Patsy not only contributed the funds, but devoted most of her precious holiday waking hours to baking! But all that to say, we are proud and happy to contribute to the drive for Down Syndrome Ireland, of which our parents are members. Here's wishin' you all a happy New Year! Oh, and by the way, you can purchase more Patsy's Pantry wares in the pastry section."