



## The Brewery of Egg-Shells

Courage, Culture

When a mother goes to the cradle in the morning, she realizes her baby has been swapped with a fairy. She gets a lot of different advice, but only takes the advice of a famous healer to get her baby boy back.



7 min



It is long and well-known in Ireland about **changelings**. The ‘Good People,’ or fairies, liked to swap small babies with one of their own. Which is why Mrs. Sullivan wasn’t truly surprised when she went to the cradle that morning.

Just overnight it happened. Where her bonny, blue-eyed baby boy had been was now a shriveled, dry and **wrinkled thing**. Its eyes were big and dark, and it began crying and squalling on seeing her. It made such a ruckus the neighbors came to see what was the matter. As soon as they saw him, they understood.

“It’s not bad, Mrs. Sullivan. Your boy’s with the Good People and they’ll take right good care of him,” they told her as she wept. They also had a lot of terrible advice to give her about what to do with the **fairy child**. One said to roast it on a griddle; another said, no, the way to go was to pull its nose off with hot pliers; and a third thought tossing it outside in a snowbank to freeze was a good idea.

But kind Mrs. Sullivan, though she believed it was a fairy, didn’t want to hurt it. Even if it was so wrinkled like a pink raisin and even if it was as skinny as her pinky. It still looked a little like her bonny baby. And harm him, **she would not**.

Then one day, who should she meet on the road but the famous healer, Ellen Grey. She always wore grey, from top to bottom. Even her eyes and shoes were grey. But she could do many **wonderful things**, like charm away warts or red spots, or find out if pets who had passed on were happy. She had the Gift, you see.

“You’re in grief this morning, Mrs. Sullivan,” she said. “What has you sad, now?”

“Well, Ellen, I have good cause for grief. My very own wee boy was taken from his cradle - without so much as an ‘ask your pardon’ - and a little old and shriveled fairy has taken his place. It’s no wonder I’m in such grief.”

“I see, Mrs. Sullivan,” said Ellen. “But are you sure it’s a changeling?”

“Ellen, as sure as I have two eyes in my very skull and as sure as **I’m a mother!**” she replied.

“Will you take an old woman’s advice, then?” asked Ellen Grey.

“I will, if it’ll get him back. I’d do most anything now,” said Mrs. Sullivan with hope in her eyes. “Can you help me?”

“Might be I can help, if you do as I say.” The mother nodded quickly. “This is **what you need to do:** Put a big iron cooking pot, filled with water on a peat fire. Make the water boil like mad! Then take a dozen fresh eggs from the henhouse, break them - but keep the shells. Throw the yolks out. Put the shells in the pot and boil them. That’s the moment you’ll know if it’s a fairy for certain.”

“How will I know?” asked Mrs. Sullivan.

“You’ll know, **plain as day.** If it is a fairy, take a red-hot poker and cram it down its tricksy, thieving, ugly throat. That’ll be the end of your fairy troubles.”

Mrs. Sullivan ran home and followed Ellen’s instructions exactly. The whole time the thing in the cradle screeched and screeched. It grew very quiet, though, when she put the eggshells, with no yolks, into the boiling water. It watched her with a strange gleam in its dark eyes.

He suddenly spoke, in a very old man’s voice: “What are you doing, **mammy mine?**”

Her heart pounded, nearly choking her throat in fear. There was no way that her bonny boy could speak; it was a supernatural trick. It was definitely a fairy! She carefully slid a poker into the fire.

**“I’m brewing, darling son.”**

“And what are you brewing, mammy mine?” asked the old-man voice. The second true proof he could not be her son.

“Oh, how I wish the poker were red already!” Mrs. Sullivan thought to herself. But she had to wait, so she said: “I’m brewing eggshells, darling son.”

“Oh wonders!” cried the fairy, sitting up in the cradle and clapping his hands in delight. “I’m fifteen hundred years in the world and never have I seen a **brewery of eggshells before!**”

The poker was finally red-hot. Mrs. Sullivan grabbed it from the cool end, turned and ran towards the cradle. But alas! She tripped and fell, and the poker slid **across the room**. She got up quickly and decided she’d just throw the creature into the pot.

But when she got to the cradle, what did she see? Why, none other than her own **bonny baby boy**, his blue eyes closed, his thumb in his mouth, fast asleep. This time, Mrs. Sullivan wept not with sorrow, but with happiness. Her heart was filled with joy and laughter.

And not once, not ever did the fairies bother Mrs. Sullivan or her **bonny wee boy again**.