

**TWINKLETOES, A  
TALE OF  
CHINATOWN**

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Twinkletoes, a tale of Chinatown by Thomas Burke

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**THOMAS BURKE**

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# *Twinkletoes*

*A Tale of Chinatown*

By

*Thomas Burke*



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To  
*Cranstoun Metcalfe*



## I

**M**ONICA MINASI was named Twinkletoes by the teacher at the Council School which she attended in her early years ; and you had but to glance at her tempestuous limbs to realise that no other name belonged to her.

When she arrived in Shantung Place, Poplar, she had a mother and a father. But within a week she had other friends. Mother at first didn't like her to play in the streets as other children did. She said it would make her grow up rough, and run in the gutters, and tear her clothes ; and that nobody respected a mother who allowed her children to run in the gutters. But there were nice differences in Shantung Place ; it was easy to find a sympathetic set ; and when Twinkletoes told her mother how nicely the Matchkey boys and girls behaved, she was allowed to play in the street after school, so long as she didn't run in the gutter, and came in before dark.

You see, Twinkletoes hadn't got a garden, because she and Mum and Dad lived in one room. Dad worked all day as a sign-writer, but only Twinkletoes seemed to recognise

## *Twinkletoes*

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what a wonderful sign-writer he was, because, however hard he worked, he never got much money. And he wanted money; he often told Mum so; not for himself, but in order to give Twinkletoes a good show; for, as he often said, "If a kid—girl especially—don't get a good send-off these days, she don't never get nowhere."

Still, Twinkletoes was happy. Living in one room does not necessarily imply living in a piggery, a miserable corner of a miserable garret, all dirt and disorder. It all depends on the manager. Mum knew all the tricks. That one room was not a piggery; no, a snugger. For a long time Twinkletoes thought it diplomatic to hide the horrid truth, fearing, from what she had overheard between Mum and Dad, that it carried some kind of social outlawry. But she let it out gradually to the Matchkey boys and girls, and when Mum said they might come to tea, and when they said they didn't care whether it was one room or Windsor Castle, Twinkletoes touched heaven.

The elder Matchkey boy adored her. Her peach-soft face; her nineteen golden curls; her eyes like flowers that made a resting-place for a thousand expressive butterflies; her

## *A Tale of Chinatown*

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epigrammatic legs in their darned stockings ; her black silk coat and the flaming vermilion tam-o'-shanter and the glory that dances about a girl when she is twelve ; all thrilled the Matchkey boy as he waited at the gate of the boys' playground at the Council School to see her turn the corner.

At dinner-time they would walk home together, turning down side streets to see if Twinkletoes' Dad was working ; and when they saw a brown ladder outside a shop they knew that Dad was atop of it, with his palette and his knife and his brush, creating wonderful golden words, like :

THE HOPE AND ANCHOR  
FREE HOUSE

OR

THE KING'S HEAD  
CHARRINGTON & CO'S ENTIRE

OR

GOOD PULL UP FOR CARMEN  
NO CONNECTION WITH THE HOUSE OPPOSITE

And Dad, a little, wiry, elf-like man, would look down at them, and spit, very carefully out of their way, and say :

“ Well, old Cockalorum, 'ow's she going ? ”

And Twinkletoes would look up, and say :