

The family that
inspired the hit TV series

MRS BROWN'S
BOYS



The Granny

BRENDAN
O'CARROLL

O'BRIEN

The third book in the MRS BROWNE trilogy

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THE GRANNY

Becoming a granny is a big shock to Agnes Browne. At forty-seven she's not quite ready for it. The family is expanding, and spreading. Agnes realises that her 'chisellers' are slipping beyond her control. But that doesn't mean she will stand by and do nothing when the entire fabric of her once close-knit family seems about to disintegrate ...

The third book in the famous Mrs Browne trilogy, a hilarious, compassionate saga of working-class Dublin

Praise for *The Mammy*
'full of devastating wit'

BOOKS IRELAND

'A story as colourful as Moore Street itself, but there is also pathos, compassion and irony'

ENTERTAINER

Praise for *The Chisellers*
'It's a brilliant book'

SUNDAY INDEPENDENT

'The characters leap off the page ... you'll have to buy this book'

SUNDAY WORLD

'full of living and raw humour'

LEINSTER EXPRESS

Praise for *The Granny*

'The perfect book for reading on the bus – permeated
with a 'can-do' attitude and with a touching ending'

EVENING HERALD

'... a raconteur extraordinaire ... full of real people,
earthy humour and unforgettable characters'

WOMAN'S WAY

THE GRANNY

Brendan O'Carroll



THE O'BRIEN PRESS
DUBLIN

I dedicate this book, as I do my every breath,
to my wife
Jenny O'Carroll.
I have found the one my soul loves

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Introduction

To complete a trilogy should be a relief. You know what I mean, to bring something to a close, to write 'The End'. There should be some sort of celebratory feelings. No. When I finished this and handed it over to The O'Brien Press I was sad. I had a heavy heart. I was going to miss writing about the widow Agnes Browne and her wonderful family. But as they say, all good things come to an end. And quite apart from the end of the 'Mrs Browne' trilogy this was to prove correct for me in every sense of the saying!

I cannot adequately explain what success and fame do to some people. Let's not beat around the bush, by 'people' I mean ME. My first appearance on the Late, Late Show propelled me into the spotlight and was followed by fifteen more appearances. The radio series I wrote was a success. My stand-up tours were selling out everywhere I played. The Mammy was a bestseller. The Chisellers was a bestseller. The Course broke box-office records everywhere. My performance in Roddy Doyle's The Van was reviewed as brilliant. I was on the pig's back! I actually began to think that I REALLY WAS the person on the poster. I thought that if I wrote out my shopping list and put it on the stage it would be a hit! Ha, ha!! Life was about to teach me a lesson. A very expensive one! I won't go into detail here, because then you might not buy the autobiography when I write it, but let me put it this way ... In 1990 I was broke! By 1994 I was close on a millionaire and by 1998 I was broke again. I would be still broke for the next thirteen years.

I made many mistakes during that time, but I also made some great decisions. The most important thing I remembered to do was to keep going and keep working. The most important thing I forgot to do? Ah, well that was that I forgot to READ THIS BOOK!

When I wrote *The Granny* I wanted it to be full of optimism and hope. I think I achieved this. I also always wanted Agnes Browne to be humble, but strong. She is. When my world fell apart in 1998 I should have read this book for two reasons: 1) to ask myself 'What would Agnes do now?' and 2) to see that the answer to my difficulties lay in Agnes Browne.

To this day I cannot believe that it took me two years to realise that my next play should be about Mrs Browne. When it eventually dawned on me, thanks to a friend Denis Desmond, I felt like I had come home to my cuddly Mammy who would wrap me in her arms and tell me that everything would be all right. And it was. That first 'Mrs Browne' play would go on to become the five-part 'trilogy' (I know!) that is on tour now. It also became the BBC 1 sitcom *Mrs Brown's Boys*. I should have known that Agnes would have the answer, she always does! Enjoy this, my favourite part of the 'Mrs Browne Trilogy'. *The Granny* is more than just a book to me, it's the beginning of a new life, a new deal, a great adventure and I am determined to enjoy every hump and bump of it all. For the last time then ... my wife thanks you, my family thanks you, and I thank you. I really do.

Brendan O'Carroll
Dublin 2011

PART ONE

Chapter 1

DUBLIN 1980 ROTUNDA MATERNITY HOSPITAL

AGNES BROWNE WAS NO STRANGER to childbirth. Within fourteen years of marrying her now deceased husband Redser, she had given birth to seven children. But that was when she was between twenty and thirty-four years of age, young and fit. Now, at forty-seven, she wasn't able for it. With her eyes tightly closed and her fists clenched, she took a huge breath and let it out in short bursts, 'Ssst, ssst, ssst, ssst, ssst, ssst,' ending with a soft moan.

Her son Dermot, one of her twins – her fourth delivery and now twenty-five years of age – leaned close to her ear to speak. 'Mammy, for fuck sake will yeh stop,' he whispered.

'That's easy for you to say, Dermot, you have no idea what childbirth is like,' she answered through clenched teeth.

'I'll take your word for it, Mammy. Now give it up. People are staring at us!'

Dermot was right. Besides Agnes, her sons Rory, Dermot and Trevor, and her daughter Cathy, there were ten complete strangers in the waiting room. Every eye was staring in wonderment at this woman in a headscarf and trench coat holding a huge bag of fruit on her lap and going through the motions of childbirth.

Dermot's comment prompted Agnes to open her eyes and she glanced at the strangers, all of whom immediately found things on the walls, ceiling and floor

to look at. Agnes gathered herself together and sat up straighter. As she did this a melon rolled out of the bag of fruit and landed square between her feet with a thud. Everybody jumped. The room was silent for a moment as they all stared at the melon. Suddenly everyone erupted in spontaneous laughter.

‘Congratulations, Mammy, we’ll call him Pip,’ Dermot announced, and again the room broke up with laughter.

The door of the waiting room opened and the laughter stopped. In through the doorway peered the head of Ward Sister Mary Sheridan. She looked around with a scowl on her face. Now everybody was staring at the floor or the walls and trying desperately to act innocent. The Ward Sister said nothing and closed the door.

‘My Jesus, did yeh see the face on that one?’ Agnes asked this question of the entire room. Nobody answered. ‘I wouldn’t say she ever needs to buy yogurt, she just gets a pint of milk and stares at it.’

Once again everyone in the room laughed, but this time they either covered their faces or laughed through their nostrils so as not to be as noisy. When the laughter died the room once again fell into silence. After a couple of minutes Agnes suddenly stood up.

‘Nobody tells yeh anythin’ in this bloody hospital,’ she announced.

‘Mammy, sit down. If there’s any news they’ll come in and tell us,’ Rory Browne said to his mother.

Agnes thought for a moment and then suddenly said, ‘I’m goin’ out to ask. That’s my son’s wife in there and I’m entitled to know,’ and with that she left the room.

* * *

Mark Browne dabbed Betty’s forehead with a cool, damp cloth. Betty lay motionless, her eyes closed. She was resting between contractions. The last contraction had

been particularly long and painful. With the feel of the cool cloth across her forehead and down her cheek Betty smiled and opened her eyes to see Mark's smiling face looking down at her. She squeezed his hand.

'I'm not doin' very well, am I?' Betty spoke in a weak voice.

'You're doin' great,' Mark answered quickly.

'Thanks.'

Mark once again dipped the cloth in the cool water, squeezed it out and began to dab Betty's face. 'Everybody's outside in the waitin' room, except Simon - he's up in your mother's waitin' for her to come back.' Betty's mother was away on a pilgrimage at Knock that day. Her prayers were for a short labour for her daughter and the birth of a baby girl.

Betty smiled at the thought of the Browne family sitting out in the waiting room. 'It's a wonder your Mammy isn't in here with us cheerin' me on,' she said.

They both laughed. But no sooner had Betty spoken than from behind Mark she saw the delivery room door open slightly and Agnes Browne's head, wrapped in her headscarf, dart through. Agnes's head bobbed as she tried to check behind the screens around each of the beds in the delivery room.

'Jesus Christ!' Betty exclaimed as she turned her head away from the door. Too late - Agnes had spotted her.

'Yo hoo, Betty! I have some fruit for yeh!' Agnes called quietly and with a lilt in her voice.

Mark swung around. 'Mammy, for God's sake get out,' he snapped, 'you're not allowed in here.'

Before he had finished speaking Agnes was confronted by Nurse Mary Sheridan who blocked Agnes's view of the bed and simply said, 'Out.'

'I'm just checkin' -'

'Out.'

'Just lettin' her know we're all here.'

‘Out!’ Nurse Sheridan opened the door and, gripping Agnes’s coat, began to usher her out into the corridor. But not before Agnes waved goodbye to Betty with the advice, ‘Don’t push till they tell yeh, Betty. See yeh later.’

Out in the corridor Agnes straightened her coat under the stare of Nurse Sheridan.

‘I just wanted to give her some mortal support,’ Agnes said by way of explanation.

‘I’m sure she’s delighted. Now, Mrs Browne, stay out of there, all right?’ Nurse Sheridan turned her back and went to re-enter the delivery room.

Agnes called after her. ‘Nurse, how’s she doin’, really?’

Although Nurse Sheridan was annoyed at Agnes’s intrusion, she could hear the genuine concern in the woman’s voice and she softened a little.

‘She’s doing well, Mrs Browne. She’s got a bit to go yet, but still, she’s seven centimetres.’ Nurse Sheridan turned and was gone, leaving a puzzled Agnes behind in the corridor.

Agnes re-entered the waiting room and with an air of authority walked back and took her seat. As she did so she was followed by every head in the room. For a few moments Agnes sat quietly.

‘Well?’ asked Dermot.

‘Well what?’ Agnes answered very smugly.

‘How is she?’

‘Oh, I’m very pleased with her, she’s doin’ well,’ Agnes answered as if she had personally examined Betty. ‘Although she has a bit to go yet, about seven litres.’

‘Seven litres? What does that mean?’ Dermot asked.

‘Oh, it’s a gynaecological term, Dermot, you wouldn’t understand,’ Agnes brushed off the question and extracted her packet of cigarettes from her handbag.

Two hours later there was still no news. Dermot had gone down to the newsagent’s across the road from the hospital and bought a deck of cards. Now he, Rory,

Trevor and one of the other men who had been waiting for hours in the waiting room were sitting in a corner playing Don.

Agnes was staring across the room at a young man who spent the whole time biting his nails. Agnes was thinking that if this man's wife didn't have her child soon he'd have chewed his hand off. At this point the man looked up and caught Agnes's eye. He smiled and she smiled back.

'Is it your first?' she asked.

'Yeh.'

'Ah that's nice. Is she long in there?' Agnes asked, nodding towards the door.

'Four hours.'

'Don't be worryin', son. The first is the longest. Oh don't remind me! On me first - Mark, that's the baby's father inside - I was ninety-six hours in labour.'

The man's eyes opened wide and he gave a short, silent gasp.

The man playing Don in the corner with Mrs Browne's three sons muttered softly, 'Ninety-six fuckin' hours!'

Dermot smiled. 'Don't mind what she's sayin'. The first time I heard her tellin' that story it was sixteen hours. Jaysus, by the time I'm havin' a child she'll be sittin' in the waiting room tellin' everyone that she was so long in labour that Mark was born with a moustache.'

The four men laughed. Agnes eyed them suspiciously.

Finally the door of the waiting room opened slowly and in walked a dazed Mark Browne. His blue eyes were glazed and he had a smile on his face from ear to ear. Nobody moved. Mark looked over at his mother and his eyes cleared as if he had suddenly woken up. He could see the question in her face.

'It's a boy,' he said simply.

Agnes and Cathy threw their arms around Mark and hugged him warmly as tears streamed down their faces.

Trevor, Dermot and Rory jumped up simultaneously, sending playing cards scattering across the room. They first congratulated their brother and then they began to congratulate each other. Just in the nick of time, it seemed, Simon and Mrs Collins, Betty's mother, entered the waiting room.

'It's a boy,' the Browne family all announced together.

Thirty minutes later the Browne family and Mrs Collins stood in a semi-circle around the baby crib at the bottom of Betty's bed, their eyes glowing with pride as they beheld the newest Browne to enter the world. Betty Browne sat propped up by four pillows, sipping a cup of hot tea. She was delighted with her new offspring and thrilled that the event should bring so much joy to so many people. Her smile beamed. Agnes looked at Betty and she too was smiling in delight. Betty gave her a wink.

'Where's Mark?' Agnes asked.

Betty pointed at the door. 'Gone to the toilet.'

'I think I need to go meself,' said Agnes, 'the excitement is killin' me.'

She got to the door of the Ladies just as the door of the Gents on the opposite side of the corridor opened and Mark stepped out.

'Are yeh all right, Mammy?'

Agnes turned and smiled at her eldest son, as proud of him as she always had been. She walked over to him and placed her hands on his shoulders.

'I'm fine, Mark, and I'm so, so happy for yeh, son.'

'And I'm happy for you - Granny!' Mark grinned, and turned back towards the ward.

Agnes stood in the hallway for a moment. Granny? Granny!

The word fell like a sack of coal across Agnes's back. She felt her shoulders dip and her spine bend. For some inexplicable reason she hadn't thought about it like that at all. She looked down at the back of her left hand - it

looked wrinkled and her wedding ring seemed to sink into the flesh of her fourth finger. For the first time in her life Agnes Browne felt old.