

The family that
inspired the hit TV series

MRS BROWN'S
BOYS



The Chisellers

.....
BRENDAN
O'CARROLL

O'BRIEN

The second book in the MRS BROWNE trilogy

THE CHISELLERS

The second book in the famous *Mrs Browne* trilogy.
Agnes Browne wants the world for her seven 'chisellers'.
But they have plans of their own and sometimes a mother,
even an iron-willed woman like Agnes, has to stand back
and let her children follow their dreams, even when the
dream turns into a nightmare.

Praise for *The Chisellers*

'It's a brilliant book'

Sunday Independent

'The characters leap off the page ...'

Sunday World

'Full of living and raw humour'

Leinster Express

'Great crack'

Books Ireland

'Language as rich as oxtail soup'

Irish World

'... has everyone in stitches'

Evening Herald

Other books by Brendan O'Carroll

The Mammy

The Granny

The Scrapper

See  for full details

THE CHISELLERS

Brendan O'Carroll



THE O'BRIEN PRESS
DUBLIN

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Introduction

I was startled by the success of the first part of this trilogy, *The Mammy*. I had not been prepared for it. You have to keep in mind that I left school at twelve. The only thing I am trained to be is a waiter, which I was for eighteen years. Suddenly I found myself, aged forty, doing stand-up comedy to audiences of thousands and with a best-selling book under my belt.

My first meeting with publisher Michael O'Brien after *The Mammy* reached number one in The Irish Times bestseller list was in The Halfway House, a pub on the Navan Road. It was a great watering hole and they did a super lunch to boot. Michael wanted to show me some promotional material for *The Mammy*. Plus he wanted to buy me lunch. Over lunch he told me stories he had heard from the booksellers, stressing that they'd said that many people buying *The Mammy* were new to reading novels. He was right. At book signing after book signing people came to me telling me the only book they had ever read was *The Mammy*.

I'm very proud of this. The man who introduced me to reading was a young teacher named Billy Flood. I never had any interest in reading. Books were for wusses! Billy Flood changed my mind, and my life. I will never forget him.

But back to lunch – following a lovely dessert, Michael produced some point-of-sale boards he wanted me to approve. They were great! I found it hard to believe that it was my name on the book cover, really. And that's when he asked. I knew the question was coming. I knew that this

was what the lunch was about. Michael wanted another book, and he wasn't sure that I would stay with him. The O'Brien Press, Michael's company (founded with his father who had a mobile door-to-door library trailer on the back on his bike in the 1940s), was a small operation. I believe that Michael thought that now I had a success on my hands other - bigger - publishers would invite me to write for them. He was right, they had. But they were wasting their time. I enjoyed the whole experience of that first book with the O'Brien Press too much to be swayed simply by more money.

Michael got more than he was looking for that day. From the moment I finished *The Mammy* I knew it would be a trilogy. So we shook hands that day on a two-book deal, for this book and the one I hope you will want to read next, *The Granny*.

The launch of *The Chisellers* was held in a pub called Ralph La Porter in Dublin's St. Francis Street. We picked that place because it was directly across the road from the Tivoli Theatre, where just hours after the launch I was making my debut as a playwright, producer, director and actor all at the same time. This was also the opening night of the famous Dublin Theatre Festival. I was terrified; I had written this, my first play, *The Course*, FOR the Dublin Theatre Festival - and they had rejected it. So I decided to produce it anyway myself and run it for the three weeks parallel to the festival.

Like *The Mammy*, *The Chisellers* also went to number one in the bestseller list. The O'Brien Press did a wonderful job promoting it and I got stuck in to writing part three. Oh, and the play? *The Course* ran for twenty-two weeks and broke box office records wherever it played. How's that for luck!

Within these pages Agnes Browne yet again takes us on a journey through part of her life. Like my own, Agnes's life is built on the foundation of her rock-solid belief that

everything works out just the way it's supposed to. I did not know it at the time, but life was about to take a tumultuous turn for me ... but that's for another introduction. Enjoy the book and again, my wife thanks you, my family thank you and I thank you.

Brendan O'Carroll
2011

**Dedicated to my children
Brendan, Fiona, Danny and Eric,
You have made every moment of being your father
such an honour and such a joy!**

**And to Dolly
Dowdall
a good mother-in-law for eighteen years
and a welcome friend for twenty-seven years.**

Prologue

LONDON 1970

MANNY WISE READ OVER THE SHORT DOCUMENT once again. He smiled. His weekend visit back to his father's home in Ireland had not been a waste of time. His father's business itself was not doing well. But the property the factory was on was located in Dublin's city centre and without doubt would be of value when the old man kicked the bucket. Everything had worked out very well. He had only intended his short visit to yield him a few pounds from the old man. He needed only two grand to put together this Amsterdam deal that would establish him as one of the major players in the cocaine business in London.

Thankfully he arrived to find the old man very sick and bed-ridden. His doctor had him drugged up to the eyeballs. Manny got his money – and getting his father to sign the document that transferred everything he owned over to his son Manny 'For love and natural affection' had been easy, the man was so confused.

Manny read the legal phrase again, 'For love and natural affection'. He laughed aloud, though nobody heard him as he was alone in the study of his five-roomed apartment on Edgware Road WC1. What was laughable about the phrase was that there was not one shred of love between the two men.

Manny folded the document and inserted it into an envelope on which he wrote 'Dublin Papers', then placed it in the safe below his bookcase, alongside the £10,000 cash that was ready for the Amsterdam people. It would be there

for him when the time came, sooner he hoped rather than later. As he closed the door and spun the combination dial he said aloud, 'Thanks, Pop! You fucking loser.'

PART 1

Chapter 1

DUBLIN 1970

AS HE SAT ON HIS HIGH STOOL behind the podium, centre-stage, Pat Muldoon scanned the assembly before him. It was an impressive sight. An audience of five hundred at least, all sitting facing him with their heads bowed. The silence was eerie, the only sound in this packed room being the whirring of the bingo machine as it tossed its numbered balls and fed them up the tube at random. Pat Muldoon had been calling the bingo numbers in St Francis Xavier Hall since 1962. In those eight years never before had he seen the 'Snowball' reach the massive sum that it stood at tonight. The makeshift sign outside the hall announced the record amount: 'Snowball now standing at £615 and 53 calls!' He knew it would be won tonight. The first person to shout CHECK before he extracted the fifty-third number would take it all! He read the number on the ball in his hand and called, 'All the fours - forty-four!'

The bingo nights at the Francis Xavier Hall each Wednesday and Friday would usually attract an average of two hundred and fifty to three hundred people. It was the size of the Snowball which had doubled the crowd in the last three weeks. Extra chairs were borrowed from the Community Centre to accommodate the influx of strangers that arrived from every corner of Dublin. Still, the regulars who sat on the same chairs every Wednesday and every Friday, week-in week-out, were not discommoded in any way - that was important for they were the ones who would

be there when the Snowball went back down to just one hundred pounds.

About two-thirds of the way down the hall, and close to the toilets, sat Agnes Browne and her merry group of six. Next to Agnes was Carmel Dowdall, a neighbour of Agnes's in James Larkin Court. Like Agnes, Carmel had a thirteen-year-old daughter. Coincidentally, both young girls were named Cathy, and they were best pals both in and out of school. Sitting beside Carmel was a large red-faced woman, built like a man and adding to this by wearing her husband's crombie coat. This was Nelly Robinson. A long-time friend of Agnes's, Nelly was a dealer in Moore Street with a stall no more than fifty feet from Agnes's own pitch. Sitting facing these three were Nelly's twin daughters, affectionately known to all the dealers in the market as Splish and Splash. The twin girls had matured well, and although quite pretty, at nineteen had still not managed to secure themselves either husbands or steady boyfriends – probably because, thanks to a lisp they shared, they had an inability to say 'Give us a kiss' without covering their suitor in spittle. The last of the six was an elderly man. This was Bunnie Morrissey. Agnes and the other women knew Bunnie only from the bingo nights. A long-time widower, Bunnie, like many others, used the bingo as a reason to get out for the night. He would arrive every Wednesday and Friday with a plastic check multi-coloured shopping bag, from which he would remove his bingo board and clip, his two bingo pens – one red, one black – and, last of all, a single tattered tartan carpet slipper.

This last item had an interesting history. Two years previously, while coming down the stairs of his tiny pensioner's flat in Dorset Street, Bunnie slipped and twisted his ankle. The subsequent swelling meant that Bunnie could not get his right shoe onto his foot. So that evening Bunnie had arrived at the bingo wearing just one shoe, on his left foot, and on his swollen right foot this

carpet slipper. After fifteen years of bingo-playing, that night was the first time that Bunnie ever won anything – he collected £15 for a full house, and for the couple of seconds it took him to call ‘Check’, he was the focus of every eye in the hall. Since then Bunnie never started a night of bingo without first slipping off his right shoe and putting on his tatty ‘lucky’ carpet slipper. Sadly, since that night Bunnie had failed to win a single penny, and each session would end with him firing the slipper into the plastic bag, grunting, ‘Lucky slipper, me bollix!’ Yet, before every game every night of the bingo, out would come the lucky slipper again.

‘One and seven – seventeen.’ Mr Muldoon called out the twelfth number.

Suddenly a cry of ‘Check’ went up and all heads lifted simultaneously and looked in the direction of the hand in the air holding the salmon-coloured bingo book and claiming the line prize.

‘Only twelve calls? That’s early,’ mused Agnes aloud.

‘Yeah, it is, very early,’ replied Nelly, as the two stared over at the upraised hand.

‘Who is it?’ asked Carmel.

‘Yer woman with the yellow teeth from Sheriff Street, Clarke I think her name is. Her husband does the telegrams, rides a motor bike,’ Agnes informed the group.

‘I hear that’s not all he rides,’ remarked Nelly, and they all burst into laughter.

The burst of laughter brought a look from the line winner, Mrs Clarke. Agnes caught her gaze and waved to her with a smile. ‘Have it and you’ll get it!’ she shouted. The woman smiled and waved back.

Bunnie was too bothered to laugh with the others. ‘I hardly have a fuckin’ mark at all!’ he grumbled.

The twins, too, were preoccupied.

‘Ma, did he call tirty sisks?’ asked Splish, spraying Agnes’s knees.

‘No, not yet. I don’t think so.’

‘Bunnie, d’you know, did he call tirty sisks?’ Splish tried again.

‘What are yeh askin’ me for?’ snapped Bunnie, still annoyed about his bad luck. ‘Sure I hardly have a fuckin’ mark at all.’ He spoke as if Splish were to blame for his lack of marks.

There now followed a short interval during which the claim for a line would be checked. With only twelve numbers gone it was looking very likely that the Snowball would indeed be won this evening. Agnes used the interval opportunity to light up a cigarette, as did most of the other bingo players. The room was a-buzz with anticipation as everyone realised the early call on a line meant that most probably the Snowball would go.

Agnes blew out the match and exhaled the first drag, then, picking a piece of tobacco off her tongue, she turned to Carmel.

‘You know,’ she announced suddenly, ‘your Cathy’s language has gone to the dogs.’

‘Wha’, Agnes?’ Carmel asked, not catching Agnes’s drift.

‘Your Cathy – her language has gone to the dogs.’

Carmel thought for a moment, then began to nod her head. ‘D’yeh know, Agnes you’re right. It’s fuckin’ dreadful. And she’s an imperint little bitch as well. I think she gets the bad language off the O’Briens in eighty-one, fuckers they are.’

The bingo ball machine began to whirl again and as the audience prepared themselves, Mr Muldoon called. ‘Here we go for the full house, and the Snowball. Eyes down and your first number is ...’

Every pen in the hall hovered and the electricity of anticipation was so strong you could almost hear it hum.

‘Two fat ladies – eighty-eight.’

After a further eight numbers, Agnes was able to mark off seven. Nelly, noticing the constant moving of Agnes’s

pen half-whispered to her, 'Jaysus, Agnes, you're flyin'.'

'I know. Shut up, you'll put the mockers on me!'

'It's well for yeh. I haven't a fuckin' mark at all,' piped in Bunnie.

'Shush,' said Agnes as Mr Muldoon called out the next number.

'Was she worth it? Two and six - twenty-six.'

Agnes didn't have twenty-six - and she didn't have the next six numbers either. But over the next fifteen calls she steadily marked off a couple of twos and threes called in a row, until she suddenly realised her card was starting to fill up, and with just four calls to go she had only one number left. The number seven.

'Jaysus - I have a wait!' Agnes said to nobody in particular.

'Agnes has a wait,' echoed Carmel, passing on the news.

'Oh Mammy, me nerves!' mumbled Splish, picking up the sudden tension.

'Come on - number seven,' said Agnes fervently, as if she were in prayer.

'Two little ducks - twenty-two.'

'Number seven, number seven - come on, number seven,' Agnes was intoning now.

'Pull it, mister ... Pull it! ... Oh Jaysus, Agnes.' This was Carmel.

'Shut up, shut up! Come on, number seven.'

'There's only two calls to go,' says Bunnie, 'and I'm still waiting on three more numbers. I'm out of the runnin'.'

'Top of the house - ninety.'

Agnes held her hand up to her now-perspiring forehead. 'Ah what's wrong with yeh, mister! Come on, number seven.'

'And this is the final call for the Snowball ...'

'On its own, number seven, please God. On its own, number seven,' Agnes groaned.

'On its own ...'

‘Yes! Yes! Call it – seven!

‘– number four.’

There was momentary silence and a collective intake of breath in the hall as everybody waited for the inevitable call of ‘Check’. But it didn’t come. Hardly anybody except those in her company heard Agnes’s groan. The non-event was met with a mixture of sighs, moans and then giggles in the knowledge that the big Snowball would be there yet again this coming Friday – only even bigger, and with the calls moving up to fifty-four, it had to be won!

Mr Muldoon moved on, wondering at the back of his mind where he was going to get the extra chairs he would need for Friday’s session.

‘Unlucky for some – thirteen.’

Still no call. Although the Snowball was now gone, the full house would still be worth fifty pounds. Not to be sneezed at, not to be sneezed at at all.

‘One little duck – number two.’

Bunnie Morrissey’s attempt to jump straight up was thwarted. The pushing of his full weight onto the back of the chair in his effort to spring up split the cross member of the chair and as it splintered and collapsed he fell backwards. His right leg shot up like the blade of a flick-knife, sending his lucky slipper flying across the room, where it caught an elderly woman full in the face, mashing her Woodbine against her heavily lipsticked mouth and sending sparks in all directions. As the back of Bunnie’s head hit the ground a barely audible gurgle of ‘Check’ came from him.

Mr Muldoon, not realising what was happening and thinking there was just a slight commotion, exclaimed, ‘Keep it quiet there, please.’

To which Bunnie, now spread-eagled on his back, his bingo pen lying ten feet from him and his right arm stretched upright, perpendicular to his body and clasping the bingo board, screamed, ‘Check! For fuck’s sake, check.’