

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark jacket, is shown from the chest up, seated in a wheelchair. She is smiling and looking down and to her left. The background is a dense forest with sunlight filtering through the trees. The overall tone is serene and hopeful.

TIME *after* TIME

THE HEART RENDERING STORY
OF A YOUNG WOMAN'S BATTLE
FOR SURVIVAL AFTER A LIFE
CHANGING ACCIDENT

PAUL KELLY

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TIME AFTER TIME

By
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Publisher Information

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Synopsis

SARAH AMBROSE O'LEARY was born on December 21st 1921, in the tough Gorbals district of Glasgow to Irish parents, ROBERT & MARY O'LEARY, whose only wealth was in their children, for they had damned little else.

Sarah, or Sadie as she is called in the story, suffers an accident when she is fourteen, having been knocked down in the road and is immediately paralysed from the waist down, remaining that way until she died at the age of thirty-two.

This is her story as told through her diary ...a child's school copy book with dog ears. It is a humorous, self-effacing if somewhat arrogant chronicle, but it is inevitably tinged with much sadness. Sadie's destiny was mapped out for her and she had little choice about the way in which she would live her life. She was the youngest of seven children, all girls ...and then came a little boy to Sadie's great delight, but tragically he died of jaundice when he was only six months old, however, another male child was born a year after, causing even greater excitement to the O'Leary family, but to Sadie in particular. She cherished this little boy, perhaps even greater than the first little brother as she didn't want to lose two brothers and a brother was something very special to Sadie. They christened the child JIMMY and he became Sadie's pride and joy. There would have been more children in the O'Leary family if MARY O'LEARY didn't have so many miscarriages.

"He's a lovely wee boy," Sadie observes as she cradles little Jimmy in her arms . . . "I think he looks like a wee prince and hasn't he got beautiful long eyelashes."

Sadie's observations are the more obvious when she considers how she looks herself ... or at least how she sees herself. as a plain child, not particularly fair of face, but despite her view of herself, to someone who really saw Sadie, she had wonderful eyes that said

everything ... and made her the character that she was. She, like the whole family, experienced the agonies and hardships of extreme poverty in their developing years, but it was the disaster of the accident and the following years into her short adult life that gives impetus to her story, for Sadie, through the enforced solitude of her state due to her affliction. developed an intimacy in her dealings with God that was both simple and yet deeply theological ... and He never answered back ...

FATHER McFARLANE, the Parish Priest was constantly rebuking her for the error of her ways in being so chatty with her Creator, as he scratched his crotch and endeavoured to direct Sadie in the path of righteousness. Sadie's father, ROBERT O'LEARY excused the holy priest's 'scratching' as a sad and possibly serious affliction from God, explaining that many of His chosen saints were afflicted with maladies of this kind, but Sadie couldn't understand why the holy priest grinned all through his affliction, although she would never contradict her daddy.

SAMMY ESSEX is a young Jewish boy, evacuated with his parents from the London blitz during the war. His father is a Rabbi and Sammy eventually marries MARY, one of Sadie's sisters ...very much against the wishes of his Jewish parents. At first, Sammy regards Sadie as just a child ...a little girl.

"You'll make some man a good wife, Sadie," he says as he raises his eyebrows which makes the rest of the family think he is making a joke however when Mary dies giving birth to twins and Sammy is left bitter and resentful of the fate that has visited him, he discovers Sadie to be quite a young mother to his babies and he very soon falls in love with her. She will not return his love for many reasons and the principal one being her disability and she goes into hospital where she has many operations in an attempt to make her walk again. Several of these operations were done without an anaesthetic, since it was commonly accepted that because Sadie was paralysed,

she would feel no pain under the knife, but there was no account taken of the large mirrored, reflective lights above the operating table where Sadie could see everything that was going on.

“I just thought it best to lie still and hope that everything would work out alright and if it did, all the pain would have been worth while” Sadie tells herself and the love between Sammy and Sadie blossoms, despite the shyness of the latter and of all the adverse circumstances of their lives, but further tragedy occurs in the O’Leary household when Sadie is asked to make the ultimate sacrifice when her brother Jimmy is drowned at sea, serving with the Royal Navy.

“I thought I loved God until I heard about Jimmy’s death,” she recalls, speaking aloud in her bare bedroom, “but now I don’t care what happens ... about God or anything else. I never knew I could endure so much pain and the loss of my legs is nothing to this.”

Sadie capitulates to her God in an heroic degree, giving up all possibility of marriage to Sammy and denying her love for him until eventually the paralysis takes over completely and she is again taken into hospital for long periods at a time. She warns Sammy of the effects that her illness could take on her body and of the likelihood of the paralysis spreading, stressing how her hearing would be the last faculty to leave her if she became unconscious. Sammy laments in his Cockney jargon, describing his love for Sadie. He desperately wants her to know that he will never leave her during her ‘corpse-like’ times and sings and talks to her through it all when there is no apparent response.

“What good are the words I say to you?” he sings

“They can’t convey to you what’s in my heart,

If you could hear instead,

the words I’ve left unsaid

then TIME AFTER TIME.

I'll tell myself that I'm
So lucky to be loved by you.
So lucky to be ... the one you run to see ...

But Sammy cannot finish his song ...as he watches Sadie in her deep, deep sleep. Nothing more can be done for her at the hospital and she is discharged. Sammy cradles her in his arms in the moonlight, one evening on the patio of his parent's home. ...one cool, long, summer's evening with only a faint breeze and the sound of the cricket to disturb the peace.

Sammy's parents, MIRIAM & BENJAMIN also love Sadie but wish none the less that she could have been ' a nice Yiddish girl.' They tell Sammy that Sadie could not possibly hear him when he is talking and singing to her in her comatose state, but Sammy will not believe anything like that. He holds Sadie's hand tenderly as he sings his own little love songs to her as she sleeps, sometimes breaking into the ballads that were commonly sung on the radio at that time. He is aware that he has no singing voice, but that does not deter him ...That is the very least of his concerns.

"I felt 'er 'ead touch mine," he says, "ever so gentle-like ...an' then she smiled up at me, she did. I saw 'er lips movin' ... S'truff I did."

He looks on in awe, wide eyed as Sadie sings in a laboured and weak voice.

I only know what I know,
The passing years will show,
You kept my love so young ... and new
and TIME AFTER TIME,
You'll hear me say that I'm
SO LUCKY TO BE LOVED BY YOU.'

Sadie died moments after in Sammy's arms ... BUT HE KNEW ...

Chapter One

Glasgow, Scotland, Christmas 1951

Sadie's Diary ...

Jimmy the Second, was born on October 6th 1924. He succeeded Jimmy the First, who tragically died of jaundice in his infancy and he was only in this world for six months. Mammy and Daddy had a large family, you see ... well, that is if you count the eight miscarriages. Apart from Jimmy ... Jimmy the Second, that is ... Mammy had six other girls and then she had me. I was three years older than Jimmy, being born on December 21st, 1921, three years after the war had finished and I think the whole family were delighted when the little boy came along, as I am sure everybody was fed up with females all the time, especially Daddy, although when I say that, I think my sister Bernadette was always his favourite. Maybe it was the fact that she had the same colouring as Mammy and was what everyone called *auburn* ... although I thought Bernie was just plain ginger.

The first born was Loretta ... then came Carmel, then Bernadette, followed by Catherine and then the twins, Mary and Mercy. You might be surprised by the names, but Daddy's two aunties were nuns who taught at the local convent school and therefore we all got names from the good Sisters who taught there at that time. Don't we sound like real practising Catholics? Well, perhaps so, but I won't write about that here. It is another story and would be better told at another time.

What I ask myself is why the hell they called me Sadie ... ? It's a horrible name and I hate it ... always have done, but I was told that I was named after one of my aunts who was the Reverend Mother of the Convent of Our Lady of Mercy and her name was Mother Ambrose Mary ... well we already had a Mary in the family and

Ambrose is a boy's name, (Nuns do daft things like that and take men's names ... but don't ask me why.) so they gave me auntie's name *before* she took the holy veil, which was SARAH ... and then they added Ambrose so that I wouldn't feel left out ... as if I would have cared ... well. I ask you? Anyway, I was duly christened Sarah Ambrose O'Leary ... what a mouthful. I used to dream ... and still do, of being a Celeste or a Marigold or even a Gratiana ... oooh! that would have been just lovely. I even thought about Cleopatra, which I considered would have suited me down to the ground ... she *was* royal, wasn't she? but then they would have shortened it to Cleo and I wouldn't have liked that, so plain Sarah was my lot. Some even called me Sally, Sadie ... or worst still . . 'Sarahbash' so I eventually settled for Sadie. Anyway, less of that whilst I tell you about young Jimmy. He caused no end of excitement with the girls, especially as the first wee boy had died so young and before any of us had got to know him properly. I remember Daddy trying hard not to cry as he carried the wee white coffin up the centre aisle of the chapel and over to the Lady Altar, where he rested wee Jimmy at Our Lady's feet. I'll never forget the way he looked up at that statue. It was like he was offering our wee brother back to the Mother of all children . Mammy was heartbroken too, I remember and when Daddy came back to the pew and knelt down to pray, we all cried. I used to love to watch my Daddy when he prayed and when I was so very small that I could just kneel at his knees beside him in the chapel and peer up into his face. His strong hands, all full of veins that stood out like tree roots, were joined together with his fingers interfolded so tightly that those purple roots looked like they would burst. His eyes would be closed but I would watch his lips moving and I was always convinced that he was talking to God, man to Man like and I would glance up at the tabernacle expecting to see God up there, chatting away to my Daddy. I never saw Our Lord, but I often wonder if my Daddy did.

When we came back to the house after the funeral, we would get tea and cakes ... slab cake from the City Bakeries, it was the cheapest and went farther and the men would drink beer and

whiskey, when we could afford it. I'll never understand why people do that at funerals. It always seems such a sad time to me and yet people seem to celebrate. Daddy told us that Jimmy was a wee angel and that he was now in heaven and therefore it wasn't a time for sadness, but rather a time for rejoicing, but I watched Mammy's face when he said that and although she smiled, I could tell that her heart was broken. I was nearly five, you see and at that age, you can sense these things ... I still cry a lot when I'm on my own ... not that you get much chance of being on your own with a house full of chattering women, do you ... but I used to go to the lavvy. Nobody ever came there with you and you could cry as much as you wanted. ... until the queue started and someone banged on the door and then you had to move on.

The O'Leary's were always great talkers. We were so close, you see, having to live in such a small house where there were only two bedrooms. Mammy and Daddy slept in the concealed bed in the kitchen. This was a recess cut out in the wall with curtains drawn across it during the day. We children slept two and even three to a bed. There was no privacy, night or day. That's why I went to the lavvy when I wanted to cry. I think we all did but nobody ever spoke about that.

Sometimes, I would go to Queen's Park and do my mourning under an old oak tree there, just like a broody hen. I often wondered what Jimmy, the First would have looked like if he had grown up. I mean, all of us girls resembled Mammy in some way, but Daddy was nearly forty and I couldn't imagine any wee boy ever looking like my Daddy. Mammy used to say he was a '*one off*' and it didn't take any of us long to understand what she meant.

I wonder what they would have called wee Jimmy if he had been another girl. He was born on the feast of St. Therese of Lisieux, otherwise known as the '*Little Flower*' and somehow I can't imagine our wee yin as a Theresa.

A lot has happened since 1921. I feel more like a hundred and twenty one. They told me I should have been proud to have been named after Mother Ambrose as she took herself out to the Transvaal

in South Africa and built herself a convent there, somewhere in Johannesburg, I think. She was looking for vocations every time she came back to visit Scotland, but I always hid under the bed when she came. You see, although Daddy was born in Ireland, in the little village of Moville, near Belfast, his parents brought him over to Scotland when he was only two years of age and he had settled into the Scottish way of life, returning to Ireland nearly every year for a holiday. It was on these visits, 'home' as we all knew it, although we were all born in Scotland, that he met and fell in love with Mary Brigitte Doherty, who became Mrs. O'Leary ... my Mammy. She too was a native of Moville. However to return to Jimmy the Second, he was lucky in many ways, because he didn't have to wear the hand-me-downs, except for the occasional jumper that didn't look too girlish. I got the last of the clothes, being the youngest girl in the family and by the time they reached me, they were well and truly worn, I can assure you. Just as well I wasn't fashion conscious ... I would have had to sink that idea. Jimmy had thick black hair and a swarthy complexion in his years as a young man. His extraordinary dark ... very dark eyes, were surrounded by double layers of thick eyelashes which he flashed and fluttered to the fullest advantage in front of us, otherwise frugally gifted girls ... in the eye department, that is. Jimmy developed from a pale, pretty little boy into an extremely handsome and sensitive man. His sideburns were always neatly cut, showing against his clean skin, where he had shaved as though his hair line was drawn on with a black crayon. His whole face radiated health. joy and peace and he won my heart from the start. He was quiet and unassuming, bordering into shyness on occasions, yet always ready to defend the underdog. Jimmy was simply just 'Jimmy' and I adored him. Well, I would, wouldn't I. He was still my wee brother when he grew up to be six foot two inches, in his socks and dwarfed me ... even when he sat down.

Chapter Two

The Family

Mammy started taking to her bed a lot of that time, after Jimmy the Second was born. I couldn't understand why she did this when I was a child, although she confided in me, more than she did with the others, which you may think strange since I was the youngest daughter as I have already said. I can't give any reason or explanation for this but I understand a lot more about her '*bedtimes*' now, than I did then ... since we children, although very poor, never had the responsibilities that she had.

We had all the discomforts that poverty brings to life; the hand-me-down clothes, the sharing of the bath water on a Saturday night, the neatly cut squares of newspaper in the lavvy ... but as children, we were happy. We had no responsibility and we had food in our bellies, no matter how meagre ... it was always there, in some fashion or other on the table. If we had no blankets to keep us warm at nights, as frequently happened, then we used our coats and huddled up together. There was always a way to improvise, when you had to. We passed our childhood with very little care, but Mammy's role was very different. She never knew, on many occasions where the next meal was coming from, since it all depended on Daddy getting work and he was not a skilled man ... he was a navvy. He did everything from painting the sides of large ships in the docks at the Govan dockyards to making the tea. He got work, when and where he could and the National strike of 1926 didn't help matters either. They say there was a hundred jobs to each man and you had to line up all night in the queue, regardless of the weather, so that you could get the job. I know Mammy used to take a flask of 'soup' and sandwiches out to Daddy at four o'clock in the morning, if he hadn't left the waiting queue by that time to get a job. The soup was boiled potato water with an ample dollop of salt, to give it *body*. ... the sandwiches were bread and dripping. On one occasion,

I remember he did get a job and he was over the moon when he came home to tell us the good news. It was clearing the water in the underdocks, where the ship's scaffolding often polluted the water with sawdust and lumps of wood and metal which hindered the ship from being lunched smoothly. Daddy was a '*skivvy*' ... we all new that, but we never used the word.

Mammy had a lonely life too when I think back now. Oh yes, she had her husband and her children and the house was always ringing with some sort of chatter or sing-song, but she was a woman of a kind, who would never complain, whatever the hardship, but sometimes, I think that is not a good way to be. She lived only for Daddy and her children. She never wore make-up because she didn't need it. She had beautiful skin, without a wrinkle all through her life, even when she was very ill. She never smoked nor drank, not many women did in her day, but the curse of her life was a dreadful leg-ulcer which plagued her for many years and I don't think her multiple pregnancies helped either. She was always on her feet and no doctor or midwife could get her to rest when there was work to be done around the house. We all insisted on helping ... even wee Jimmy, but when we did, she would become more emphatic that we would have enough to do when our time came and that we should be children for as long as possible. "You'll all grow up soon enough, have no fear," she would say and turn her hand to the next chore. She would wave away any complaint that we made with a song or a lullaby, for she had a lovely singing voice to match her soft, gentle Irish brogue, but don't get me wrong. ... I don't say that my Mammy was particularly beautiful, but she had a *particular beauty* with qualities and features that would have made a more elegant and sophisticated woman jealous. She had that rare quality of warmth and sincerity in everything she did and we all envied her and hoped that somewhere in our genes those qualities would be ours too. Her hair was auburn and very thick which she mostly wore in a bun tied around the back of her head, but when she let her hair down it would reach well below her waist and she would brush it with tender care. I think this was the entire extent

of her vanity, for I never ever saw her gaze at herself in a mirror ... never at any time in her life. Her eyes were her most striking feature ... she *talked* with them and she never raised her voice in temper but we all knew when she was displeased about anything. The eyes said everything, but on the other hand, those optics also shared our joys and pleasures and her tears were like precious diamonds to us all. She was a mother who was greatly loved, but as with all children whose parents are dead, there are moments when I wished I had treated her differently ... Times when I regret not telling her how much I loved her ... and fighting back the tears of shame when I reflect on that. *'I love you Mammy ...'*

I understand that my grandfather on my Daddy's side was rather a wealthy man and that he had decided to set his four sons up in a business of their choice when they were young and able enough to enjoy the benefits of this, rather than waiting until he passed away and they would inherit his wealth. Daddy chose to have a business in horse drawn carriages, as he loved horses. The business catered for weddings and funerals as well as other fancier functions and he was only twenty-one when he started with three horses and a few carriages to suit each occasion, however as with any business gamble, it became his heartache rather than his potential for a bright future. One day as he was driving the coach and pair to pick up a party going to Greenock en route for New York on the "*Rumanian Castle*", a young woman ... well, no more than a girl, threw herself in front of his horses and he could not avoid her being trampled to death. The police said she was a young unmarried woman who was expecting a baby in a few months' time and that she had left a note saying that she couldn't live with the shame and wanted to end it all ... but that was no consolation for my Daddy. Mammy said that the memory of that young girl's face, when Daddy picked her up from under the horses hooves, stayed with him for the rest of his life and he was never the same again. The girl was only fifteen from what I was told and sad though daddy was, he continued with the business for two more years and then another tragedy struck. His stable boy, a lad of thirteen, decided one day that he would have a smoke within

the stable confines ... and the whole place went up in a raging blaze within a short time. It was like an inferno and all but one of the then five horses, had to be shot. Mammy said you could smell the burning flesh for miles around and the wild neighing and horrific screaming of the animals took my Daddy to a mental asylum for over six months and Mammy thought she had lost him forever. She took a job as a cleaner at the hospital so that she could be near him and of course, because we needed the money since another little O'Leary was on the way. It is no easy task to scrub floors on your hands and knees when you are seven months pregnant, but that's what she did ... with wide skirts and a willing smile, no one need be any the wiser and in this way, she kept her job until she was well into her seventh month when she had a miscarriage.

Daddy came home looking paler and very much thinner than he had ever been before but his dark, handsome features were still there. He wouldn't go on the dole for any reason and started straight away to look for work. He was twenty-four by this time and had been married for four years with two children. Mammy was twenty-one. She was only seventeen when she got married. There would have been more children if it hadn't been for the miscarriage and the two that were stillborn. They would have been twins and Mammy never seemed to stop being pregnant and although I was sure there was a great love affair going on between my parents, I never ever saw them kiss ... not once ... not even a by-the-way cuddle. They were very undemonstrative people. They never spoke about their love, nor how they met, nor how they conducted their courtship and we never asked ... well, that's not quite true ... none of the others asked, but I did and I'll tell you about that later, but I have seen that same undemonstrative man crying tears into the floor as he scrubbed it on his knees when my mother was wailing and writing in childbirth in the concealed bed in the kitchen. The chores had to be done and the house was always spotless even if we were poor.

I learned very much later that both my parents were second cousins and this knowledge frightened me, as I was led to understand that such a union could result in children being not

'quite right upstairs ... and sometimes even 'downstairs ... This knowledge about my parents relationship came to me when we were being taken to school by a well-intentioned Auntie, a lady whom I learned later had been in love with Daddy before he got married and only married his brother on the rebound. Naturally I went to confession, not so much to confess my sins, although I was never short of material there either, but to ask the priest if there was anything wrong in cousins getting married ... to each other, of course and if there could be such dire consequences ... He wasn't much help. He scolded me for saying *'bugger'* twice and for pinching some jam from a neighbour at a party and told me that it was alright for cousins to marry provided the Pope had given them a dispensation. I left that confessional box in utter confusion ... wondering if I was truly born in Catholic wedlock, or if I was just another bastard. ... To make matters worse and on further questions to the wrong people, I might add, I was told that children of such a union could indeed be retarded in some way, due to the close blood ties. I began to think then that not only could I be a bastard, but a silly bastard at that and life was fast becoming unbearable until the priest who chewed me up for stealing the jam and using that bad word twice, was very kind on the next occasion when I went to confession. He said he was sure that a dispensation had been sought and obtained and that I was quite sane ... sane enough, he added to be responsible for using bad language and stealing jam and that I should do everything in my power to return it in full measure. Now how the hell could I have done that, when I'd eaten the bloody stuff and it's very difficult to put a couple of spoonfuls of jam back into a pot, don't you agree?

I remember wishing at that time that Mammy and Daddy had been Protestants. It would have made life ever so much easier, however I was compensated in the knowledge that my parents were wonderful in so far as they loved each other, each with a love that I have since learned is very rare in any marriage and I am sure my siblings would say the same.

The following Sunday ... and I am sure, by pure coincidence, Father McFarlane gave a sermon on incest and when I got home, I couldn't eat my dinner. My old worries had returned despite the assurance from the priest in confession that everything was O.K. I wished I hadn't gone to Mass that morning and yet if I hadn't done, that would have been another sin to confess. I went to bed early that evening wondering if there was any way in which I could appease the wrath of God for the sins of my Daddy. ... but mind you, I never really took to that Father McFarlane. He was quite an old man ... about thirty, I would think and he was always scratching himself ... you know where, when he came to give the Religious Instruction at the school. He did it under his cassock and when I told Daddy about it, he made every excuse he could think of to fob me off.

"The good priest maybe has an irritation that causes him great discomfort," he said.

"But he smiles as he's doin' it Daddy ... A funny sort of smile ... like this . ." I said and tried to imitate that grin that I saw on the priest's face.

"Oh, that could be what we call a '*tic*' Darlin' and it only looks like he's smilin'"

Well I know that I wouldn't like to contradict my Daddy, but Father McFarlane smiles an awful lot when he's sufferin' that untold discomfort ... I thought.

Possibly, very much like other families, I suppose, we all paired off in two's. Loretta and Carmel were always together and went off to do their nursing training, to the same hospital and on the same day. Bernie and wee Kitty-Boo, the name we gave to Catherine, because she cried a lot ... more than any of us when she was wee, although we were soon to discover why ... and the findings were none too pleasant, were inseparably bonded ... and then, quite naturally I suppose, the twins were rarely apart. Finally there was only we

Jimmy and me left.

Mammy kept his hair cropped close to his head, just so that everybody knew that he was a boy and no mistake ... She was so proud of him.

Loretta was a tall girl for her age, with the usual O'Leary dark hair, but with added bushy eyebrows, which she hated. She was always admiring herself in the mirror and plucking the bloody things . .oops, there I go again ... another one for the confessional, but there's more. She would study her breasts every day when she reached her puberty and kept a measuring tape in the pocket of her navy blue school drawers. I remember so clearly how she couldn't wait to get out of those things and would dance around dangling her first set of suspenders from her wool and cotton liberty bodice thinking she was another Isadore Duncan. She became quite a young lady and was totally made up when she put on her first pair of silk stockings but she went too far when she kept whispering something to Carmel and we later found out to our horror that she thought every boy she met got the horn, just looking at her ... Stupid bitch ... I think she'd run a mile if she saw it. ... the horn, I mean ...

Carmel was also dark , but with tight curly hair. Her face was a like a wee China doll and she laughed a lot. She was always telling jokes, but she didn't have the '*dignity*' of Lady Loretta and I think she was much prettier. Perhaps because she wasn't at all self-conscious of her looks or anything else for that matter ... and she was always so innocent and somewhat naive. I remember when she asked me what the 'horn' was and I told her it was something the devil had on his head and that we should always make the Sign of the Cross if ever we saw one. She believed me and crossed herself immediately, in the event that one day she might encounter a horn for herself.. ... Carmel's weakness, if I can call it that, was the same as Mammy's. She was constantly brushing her hair, trying to take the curl out and straighten it, but without success. She battled with a hundred brush strokes every night before she crawled into bed, 'incarcerating' her beautiful curls in a coarse hair-net, tied around her forehead with a

piece of string, the mark of which never went away until at least ten o'clock the following morning and Mammy used to apply a liberal dose of witch hazel to remove the line.

Bernadette was the wee fat one of the family with the same coloured hair as Mammy. I used to tease her mercilessly and tell her that she was nothing but a wee fat ginger blob, but Daddy adored her. He loved us all of course, but it was an accepted fact that he had a *special thing* for Bernie and he called her Ginger Rogers. She hated being called ginger, even by Daddy, until the day she saw Ginger Rogers dancing with Fred Astaire in '*Top Hat*' at the 'Cinerama' in Victoria Road and she swooned for weeks, between the kitchen and the bedroom, falling onto the bed with great grace and charm, just like her heroine, only Ginger's swoons were more glamorous and her magnificent Hollywood suite had nothing on our twelve foot square bedroom with its three beds and our essential, if not luxurious, potty under the bed in the corner. After she saw that film, she would never wear a hat or any head covering for a long time, not even when it rained and Daddy scolded her for her vanity and warned her it might stop her getting into heaven.

Is it any wonder, that none one of us O'Leary girls, ever thought to enter the Convent and take the veil? We would have driven the saintly Mother Ambrose Mary round the bend and she would never have wanted to leave her warm haven in South Africa.

Now Bernie was a 'scratcher' She would scratch and scratch ... I'm sure just out of pure habit for there was no other reason for her doing that. If it wasn't her face it was her hair or her arm or her leg and I won't go any further on that subject. Poor Bernie ... I think she would have been more sympathetic to Fr. McFarlane than any of us. She went to work at the biscuit factory when Loretta and Carmel gave in their notice to take up nursing and apart from Mammy, Bernie was the only ginger in the family, but I think wee Jimmy the First might have had that colouring too from the little I saw of the wee laddie before he was put in his coffin. I still think of him lying under all that heavy earth and feeling so cold and I want to dig him up again and cuddle him and keep him warm ... Aren't I

a silly old duffer for a girl?

We called Catherine, '*Kitty-Boo*' for the simple reason that she was always crying when she was a baby. Crying and peeing ... peeing and crying ... she never seemed to stop. She was like a little sponge and yet she turned out to be the sweetest of us all. We all loved Kitty-Boo with a very special love. She was a great favourite with everyone, friends and family alike. She had rather a large nose and not very thick hair when she was a child, but even that apparent drawback looked beautiful on Kitty-Boo and she had long, lanky legs and Daddy's eyes. Beautiful dark, deep thoughtful eyes ... and she loved sports and wanted to be a gym mistress. She also had a lovely singing voice which I gather she got from Mammy and she loved poetry, just like Jimmy which earned him the title of '*Rabbie Burns*.' Kitty-Boo loved music and the arts, but she never seemed to take much notice of the opposite sex.

I think Mary was the quiet, studious one of the family, always with her nose in a book and had to have reading glasses when she was still very young. She always had long, flowing black hair and again, like Jimmy ... very blue eyes. Perhaps we had a Spanish influence in our family somewhere as most of us were dark and Jimmy was often taken to be Spanish, especially when he left his boyhood and became a man. Well anyway, Mary was a little doll. She was Mercy's twin but they were as different as chalk and cheese. She used to cry a lot when she had her periods where none of us others made any fuss at that time. In fact, if it hadn't been for Mary, nobody would have known anything about a menstrual cycle, except for the box of sanitary towels that Mammy kept in the little cupboard above the sink in the kitchen, when we all began to grow up. It was a saving, I suppose, that Mammy could buy so many of these things in bulk as we were all pretty much of the same age ... well ... those of us who reached that stage of puberty.

Mercy was the last, apart from myself ... and wee Jimmy, of course. She too was dark haired although she preferred to keep it short and always looked very much like a boy. She was the vocational type. She wanted to be a doctor and could cope better than any of

us with Mammy's illness later on and didn't mind the sight of vomit or blood ... ugh! I can't stand either. She was a bit like Carmel and hardly ever looked for long in the mirror, except when she washed. She was a bit of a Tom Boy, I guess and like Kitty-Boo, didn't take much notice of the boys, but with one big difference ... the boys took a lot of notice of Mercy, much to the frustrated displeasure of Loretta. Mercy had pink cheeks and a pert little nose that turned up at the end. She was very sweet natured and would help anyone. Oh, and I must add, she had the loveliest little circle of freckles around the bridge of her nose and I thought that was funny as I always associated freckles with ginger people. Bernie never did have freckles. At least, if she did ... I never saw them.

As I have said, the twins were so different ... It was hard to imagine that they came from the same embryo. Perhaps the reason for this is that they were not the first set of twins that Mammy had. The other two died ... they were stillborn

Mercy preferred football and cricket to dolls. She could converse on the attributes of cricket as though she were a professional, talking about things like '*short legs*', '*long stops*' and '*googlys*', whatever they were. She often joined the boys at football and would come home with a cut knee or a limp on many an occasion, but these things never seemed to bother her. She would just grin and say it was a hazard of the game ... Daddy use to call them 'Martha and Mary', the two women from the gospels who were so kind to Our Lord, but even He found them to be so different when He visited their house for something to eat. Martha did all the serving and Mary just sat at His feet. With the O'Leary twins, it was much the same only it was Mercy and not Martha that did all the running about. Mary was the same as the Mary in the gospels. She was a thinker, more than a do-er, but they grew up well. considering they both had rickets when they were born.

Now, as I have already told you. Jimmy was my mate; the Love of my life. You might think that's a strange thing for a sister to say about her brother, but then you didn't know Jimmy. It wasn't just his looks that affected me, although all the girls at school used to

ask me to introduce them to him and always wanted to help me with any homework that I would have to take home, but strangely enough, . not particularly with work I had to leave overnight in the classroom. He was what was commonly known in Glasgow as a *'Bobby Dazzler'*. It was his character that drew people to him, but I must admit I think he was very beautiful in every other way too and I was proud to walk down the street with him. He was a thinker ... and quite unpretentious. His heart was as strong as a lion and as tender as a lamb and you can picture what that would mean, if the lion and the lamb lay down together. There was strength and gentleness in everything he did. I never told him how much I loved him, but I'm sure he knew. Well, you don't tell your brother that you love him now ... do you? But I did love him ... and I would have died for him.

As for me ... well, my very name describes me, I guess. Plain, ordinary Sadie ... and I really mean that. If I had any virtue at all, it was that I was never given to false modesty. Nothing about me seemed to match ... it was as though I was made up of so many different parts, like a patchwork quilt, serviceable ... useful in a way perhaps, but decorative? **No ... definitely not.** I was neither dark nor fair. Mammy said I was *'rich mouse'* ... bless her. I wasn't tall and I wasn't short, but that doesn't matter when you're in an invalid chair all day. Nobody could guess your height, even if they cared to consider it. My teeth were on the large side, so I tried not to smile too much when there were people around and it was easy not to smile when I was on my own, for I knew if I did, they might put me away, so life's little rules were not so difficult for me and anyway, allowances are always made when you are disabled, but I used to wish that people would talk to *me* when I was being taken for a walk ... and not my Carer. It was as though I wasn't there.

"Is she better today? She looks a wee bittie better. Cheeks more rosy, don't you think?"

Mrs. McGillicuddy always asked the same question when we met her in town. I know she meant well but I wanted so much to answer her back.

"I'm here Darlin' speak to ME. It's my legs that are buggered, not by bloody face."

Jimmy would laugh when I was in that sort of a mood and of course, I showed the teeth, didn't I? They looked like veritable tomb stones as I got older, but lovely Jimmy said they were an asset to my face and that I should share those *'pearls'* with the world more often ... Now didn't I tell you he was a poet? Well, the teeth were white and they were my own as Daddy would say. Life was just full of compliments ... simply for the taking ... if you had a mind to.

Chapter Three

James Francis O'Leary was born at 3.15 am on the sixth day of October 1924. That was how it was stated on the records of the Gorbals City Hall, but it didn't say that the wind was howling through the Gorbals street that early morning or that it was announced on the radio that we were to have a blizzard for the next few days.

Why Mammy christened the wee laddie, James, none of ever knew, except that it was probably because of the last little male bairn she had tragically lost. He was due to see the light of this world two days earlier, but Mammy said, 'better late than never' ... Nature is a contradiction at the best of times, I think anyway. She had hoped to call the baby Francis if it had been a boy and Frances, if it had been a girl, because of the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, on October 4th, when he should have been born. St. Therese of Lisieux had other ideas, I guess, with her feast on the 6th. The little, squirming, pink bundle of flesh was handed round for all to see and kiss when Daddy brought us to see Mammy in the concealed bed in the kitchen on the morning of his birth. I rubbed the sleep from my eyes as I didn't want to miss this treat, did I? A boy at last ! But the others didn't seem to think it was such a big deal and apart from the obvious, which was covered ... this was just another baby to them. I could see and feel the difference intuitively straight away because after all, I was three ... don't forget. We all stood around waiting for the kissing ceremony to finish but I was aching to dance my way into the streets as soon as I could to announce to all and sundry that *Unto us a child was born* ... and the fact that the child was a wee boy was especially important to me and my happiness that morning was totally complete.

Mammy smiled, but I knew she was in pain, because she covered her mouth with the sheets and I saw her wince. She smiled again, trying to assure the onlookers that she was alright, but it worried me all of that day to see her that way and more so to notice that