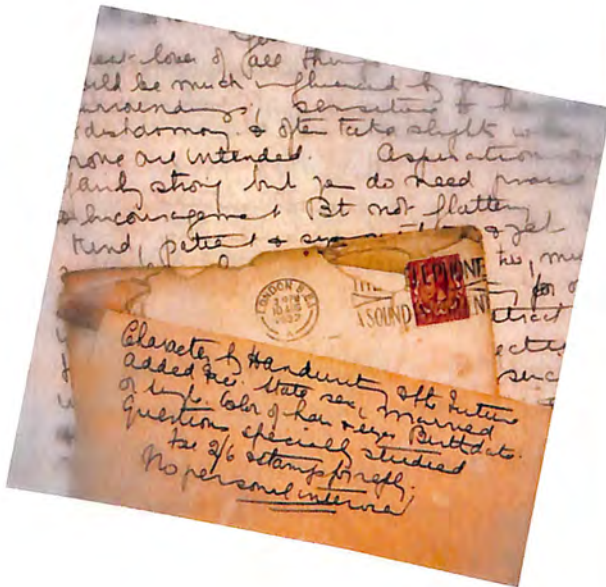




# Meet Sarah

By Ella Hagon

1920



# Sarah

Sarah kicked the hot sheets off her legs and draped herself across the cotton mattress. She sighed. This had had to be the longest, hottest summer night in Cottesloe's history. A mosquito whined in her ear and flies buzzed around her clammy hands. The underside of Sarah's knees felt sticky and raw from sweating. She had tried opening up all the windows, but the sea breeze had not come in yet, so it felt as if Cottesloe was baking. She could hear Emily, her 8-year old sister's deep, sluggish breathing coming from beside her. She was tossing and turning on her damp pillow, throwing her head full of golden curls around. Sarah had always wanted her sister's beauty. With her short, greasy knotty mud brown hair, colourless eyes framed by thick bushy eyebrows, chubby round face and countless freckles, Sarah was rather the runt of the family of three [Sarah's father had been killed during the Great War, so her mother raised the two girls alone]. She had always wondered why she looked so different to her family- they all had silky sandy-blond curly hair, emerald green eyes and pale soft skin. Sarah knew that it did not really matter how she looked, it only mattered how she acted, as her mother had told her. But Sarah had always longed to be pretty, to have silky long hair like her sister that she could comb and brush.

"Sarah?" Emily whispered, interrupting Sarah from her thoughts. "Mmmmmh?" "I can't sleep". "Neither can I" replied Sarah sleepily. She sat up and eyed her sister. "Can you come onto the deck with me for some air? Please? Please Sarah!"

The two sisters ran out on to the deck barefoot, the stiff old wood panels creaking beneath their toes. Sarah stood out on the deck and observed the beautiful big old red-brick houses with iron lace-work wrapped around the balconies that stretched down the street. 'I am so lucky to live here', she thought as she watched the sun rise slowly from behind the dark green pine trees.

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"Don't you just love the summer holidays, Emily? Ahh, I know the nights are terrible, but- Emily? Are you listening" Sarah said crossly. It was lunch time and Emily was busy pecking at the sandwiches, puddings and fresh fruit in the thatched picnic basket. "What? Oh, yes, it's lovely", Emily muffled through a mouth-full of bread and left over roast meat. Sarah could not stay cross for long. She and Emily had been paddling in the turquoise salt water all morning until the pads of their fingertips were pink and wrinkled. Now they were relaxing on the grass

embankment underneath the sturdy Norfolk pine trees, tired but happy and crusted with salt.

## The Attic

The Lemon-coloured sun was low in the sky and the summer air was growing cool when Sarah and Emily returned home. Feeling tired and worn out from the beach, they lay in the afternoon sun in the garden, reading. The breeze was light and was playfully tugging at the lace bow of Sarah's straw boater. "I'm bored", moaned Emily. Sarah continued to read her book.

"Sarah"? Whispered Emily, "What?!" "Want to play hide and seek? I'll be 'it', and if I don't find you in the first four minutes of looking, then you get my new yo-yo. Ok?" "Fine" Sarah sighed. Emily started counting. 'Where shall I hide'? Thought Sarah, as she wandered around the cottage. She stopped in front of the attic stairs. Mama had told her to never go up there. Sarah didn't know why. Was it dangerous? "48, 49, 50! I'm coming to find you, Sarah!" Sarah gulped and slowly made her way up the narrow winding creaky staircase.

At the top stood an old door that looked like it was going to give way any second. Sarah lifted a big exquisite key with carved curls and intricate patterns from the grimy floor in front of the attic door. Quickly, she placed the key in the crumbling key hole. She pushed open the big rusty door and entered the room. Dust flew everywhere and little creepy-crawlies scuttled around the floor. Sarah glanced around in amazement at the big old chests, papers and albums. "Wow", she whispered, truly amazed. Sarah kneeled down and lifted a navy blue photo album, stroking the soft cover with layers of dust. She flipped through the pages. It was a baby's photo diary, full of dates and pictures. The small chubby baby looked very familiar. She had very short brown hair, big grey eyes and small birthmark on her tiny fist.

At the back of the book in a pouch were some papers. They were adoption papers. 'Hmmm', thought Sarah, 'Why would Mama keep all of these books and papers in here?' Sarah brushed away the dust and squinted to read the curly old fashioned handwriting. "Adoption name - Sarah O'Damien. Born on the 17<sup>th</sup> of September, 1910." Sarah was speechless. 17<sup>th</sup> of September 1910 was her birthday.

Suddenly, Emily burst out from behind the attic door. "Yes! I found you with one minute and thirty four seconds remaining! I get to keep my yo-yo!" She pumped her fists in the air and grinned. Sarah didn't smile. She didn't care about the yo-yo.

Because she had the same name and birthday as the girl on the adoption paper. And she had the same small, round birthmark as the baby. She, Sarah, was adopted.

## Adopted

“So, Mama, am I really adopted”? Sarah stammered. “What about my real parents? Where are they? Why did they leave me”? Mama groaned and rested her head in her hands. “Oh, my dear Sarah! Your Father and I adopted you when you were a tiny weeny baby, only four months old! Your other parents.... Well, they died when you were two months old from influenza. When John, your father, and I adopted you, we decided to change your last name to Rourke. Sarah Rourke.” Sarah stared at her mama- well, the lady who had adopted her. “So, my real name is Sarah O’Damien”. “Yes. Darling, we still love you just as much as we love our real daughter, Emily. You are like a true child to us.” Mama stroked Sarah’s hand, opened a draw from the small table beside her and took out a photo. She handed it to Sarah. “These are your parents”, she told Sarah. Sarah observed the black and white photo of a couple on a beach that was framed with angels and roses. The couple looked blissful, young and happy to be living. She turned over the photo. “Mary O’Damien and Tom O’Damien”, Sarah read, “1907”, A salty tear dribbled down Sarah’s face and splashed onto the words, smudging the ink. “Sarah”, Mama said, caringly, “Just because you are adopted, it doesn’t change anything”. Sarah nodded slowly hugged her mam and took a long, deep breath. “Emily!” She called, “Emily, let’s play hide and seek again!”

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