

to come, and Kathleen was not fascinated by old George and his daughter as Patrick was, and was intolerant of her brother's folly.

She could see nothing in Muriel Crackenthorpe to admire. For the matter of that, no one could, except Patrick. She was a pale, heavy-browed, sad-eyed girl, with masses of magnificent hair, too great for her small head, and an insignificant figure. She had never had a lover any more than Kathleen O'Kelly herself. Her father's gay companions, in the days before the money was spent, had hardly known of her existence. Her father had often commented unflatteringly on her appearance.

'Seeing that I was known as Beau Crackenthorpe in my day,' he had often said, 'and that your mother was bewitching when I married her, I am hanged if I know where you got your plain looks.'

These things gave Muriel a low opinion of herself and a desire to shrink from publicity. She was very happy at Ballysallagh, content to wait on her father, who grew old and querulous and ill, and when she was off duty, and could leave him asleep or reading the London papers which she managed to procure for him, to wander in the pleasant fields about the Spa House, or sit in the garden, or climb to the mountain, or stray in the woods.

It was surprising what small things could give Muriel joy—the leafage of spring-tide, the colors in the autumn trees, a robin on a bough, a little brook running over golden and silver sands. In time Patrick O'Kelly began to appreciate the things that would please her, and would present himself before her shyly with a trail of wild roses on a bough, or an armful of red wild-cherry leaves with hips and haws, or a great mass of cowslips, and would feel himself only too well repaid by the pleasure that would send the sudden color to her cheek and the light to her eyes before her soft voice thanked him. It was with Muriel's voice that Patrick O'Kelly first fell hopelessly in love. His own sisters' voices were rough and loud. To be sure, he was not unacquainted with soft-speaking peasant girls, but Muriel's voice was another matter. That was really her one beauty, although so few people heard it that it hardly counted in her favor.

George Crackenthorpe went off quietly in his sleep one night. He had not seemed to concern himself as to what was to become of his daughter hitherto. But the day before he died he had suddenly developed a care for her, which made poor Muriel's heart beat faster with disproportionate love and gratitude.

'When I leave you, my girl,' he said, 'you'd better write to your Aunt Henrietta. She's the best of the lot. Not but what we're all rotten with pride, the whole lot of us. I believe I could gabble the family tree myself this minute. There was never a mesalliance in the family. Write to your Aunt Henrietta. She's your godmother, too. It's her place to look after you.'

What possessed him to talk of mesalliances the very last night?

The next morning, when old George did not waken, and Muriel discovered him cold and quiet, her frantic pull at the bell brought Patrick first to her aid. Patrick closed the dead man's eyes with a quiet hand. He saw to everything, even that the orphan should be undisturbed in her grief. He did not think to ask if he should write to anyone, and perhaps Muriel forgot it too. So it came to pass that when George Crackenthorpe was laid to rest he had only two mourners, his daughter and Patrick O'Kelly.

Patrick could never understand how his avowal of love was made. He had certainly never contemplated anything so audacious. Miss Crackenthorpe was a lady, and as far above him as the stars in the sky. To be sure, the O'Kellys were once great people. There was still an O'Kelly in Connaught who led a sort of chieftain life, and was a cousin of Patrick's. But the gentility in the blood had become so attenuated by admixture with a commoner strain that it appeared not all in Patrick's brothers and sisters. Patrick himself was a throw-back to old days and the old stock. He was essentially a gentleman, although the accidents were against him. Doubtless, first of all, he adored Muriel because she represented to him that exquisite thing, ladyhood.

But the sight of Muriel in her poor black gown, broken-down, trembling with sobs, helpless in her loneliness, made him mad. He had flung himself on his knees beside her, and had taken her in his arms before he could remember that it was a mad thing to do. To his bewilderment and delight, her soft lips turned to meet his kisses, her arms went about his neck. For the first time in her life she wept upon a breast that was hers.

And Patrick was a new man. There was no more mis-giving for Patrick. She loved him, and she would marry him. He trod the earth with a new step; he walked upright from that minute. The change in him made him more beautiful to look on than ever. There was something about him that made his sister Kathleen more short-tempered than usual on their next meeting.

'You look as if you'd been to your wedding instead of to a funeral,' she said acidly.

'Sometimes a wedding follows a funeral,' he answered radiantly.

She pretended to misunderstand him.

'Miss Crackenthorpe will be going to her own people?' she said. 'I'll be able to fit up the house for next summer. If you like to put some of your two hundred pounds into the furnishing it will pay you well. Michael is giving us twenty-five pounds. I'm putting in twenty-five pounds of my own. To be sure, I can't touch the children's.'

'No, you can't touch the children's,' he said. 'And I think I'll be wanting my two hundred. As for Miss Crackenthorpe, the poor little thing, she's like left alone in the world for all she has to turn to. I'm going to clear out and leave you and Michael to manage for yourselves and the children. You'll make more of it than I could, I've no doubt. Miss Crackenthorpe is going to marry me.'

'Indeed!' said Kathleen, as though she had not guessed it. 'I'm afraid 'tisn't much use she'll be to you for a wife. How are you going to earn her bread and your own?'

Patrick passed over the lack of sympathy in her voice. He was used to Katty's way.

'I've been to the Colonel about it, and he has offered me a steward's place, with a cottage at Lara. I've seen a picture of the cottage; 't's as pretty as a picture.'

'A steward's place! Are you mad, Patrick O'Kelly? I thought you'd be buying a bit of land for yourself somewhere.'

'With two hundred pounds! I won't begin life with *her* saddled with debt.'

He had his own reasons for accepting the Colonel's offer. He felt intuitively that there would be nothing in the life at Lara to offend his Muriel. The steward's cottage was a cottage *ornée*, built fantastically, like a Swiss chalet, amid the woods and waters of the lonely mountainous country. Life there with Muriel would be paradise to him. They would be entirely alone. None of that equal intercourse with uneducated people, which he felt would fret Muriel sorely, need be necessary. He felt with an uplifting of the heart that Kathleen and Michael would hardly ever visit them at Lara.

If there was anything wanted to make it certain, it was supplied in their indignation at his accepting the position of Colonel Denis's steward. He was an affectionate fellow, but his family had been contemptuous of affection and its outward signs. The young ones growing up were faithful replicas of Kathleen and Michael. It was bewilderingly sweet to him to find one who, like Muriel, thought that Love was the most precious thing in the world. Hitherto, only his horse and his dogs had been of that mind with him.

Patrick had a pound a week and the cottage from the Colonel. With Muriel's consent the two hundred pounds were put away, safely invested against a rainy day.

At the time of their marriage she had about fifty pounds left of Aunt Henrietta's last remittance. She spent it on some things for herself and for the cottage, to make it habitable according to her notions. There was room and to spare for stowing away the articles of furniture which had proved quite sufficient for the needs of the late steward.

Colonel Denis never visited his steward. If he had, he would have been surprised at the air of austere elegance which Muriel managed to impart to the long room which was the sitting-room. To be sure, it had two deep windows opening on to balconies and overlooking a superb prospect of wood and lake and mountains. A few strips of matting, a couple of wicker chairs, soft muslin curtains at the windows. Muriel's piano, a bookcase with her books, made the room refined, homelike.

Patrick was out riding over moor and mountain all day, inspecting the Colonel's mountain cattle here, visiting some drainage works there, seeing that the ploughmen were at their work in one place, that the women were at work at another picking off the stones that continually intruded themselves in the Colonel's cultivated land.

The life suited him. Certain unspoken teachings of his wife on ordinary manners and behaviour had been eagerly acted upon by him. After all, Muriel had only married a gentleman in the rough. Patrick was so gentle and so pathetically eager