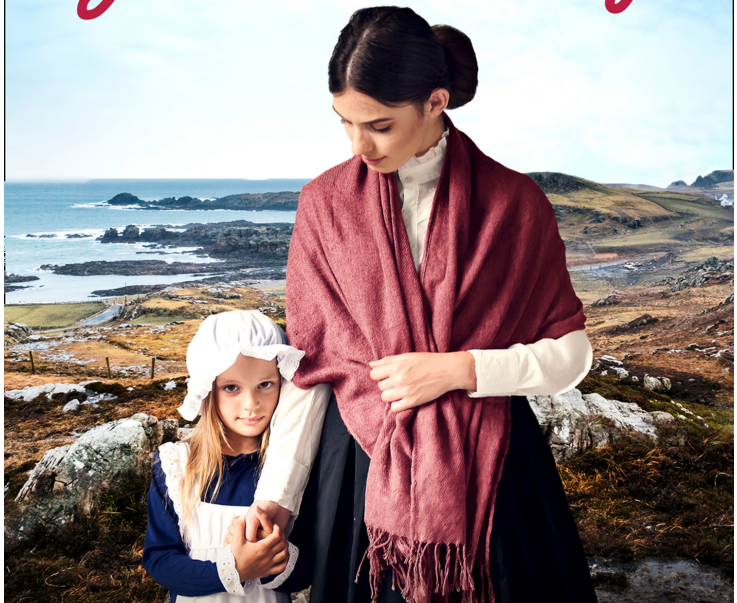
Anne Doughty

The Girl from Galloway



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Аннотация

The hardest times can build the strongest friendshipsCounty Donegal, Ireland, April 1845.Since following her heart and moving from her comfortable home in Scotland to the harsh mountainside of Ardtur, County Donegal, Hannah McGinley hasn't had the easiest life. But surrounded by her two children and her loving husband Patrick she has found happiness.When her daughter returns home with news that her school may close as one of the teachers is moving away, Hannah feels compelled to take the vacant post. With the schoolmaster Daniel having lost his sight, Hannah knows that he won't be able to manage the children alone.But the money from teaching is poor and as the potato crops begin to fail all around them, times are getting tougher still. Will Hannah be able to help her family and save the school?This lyrical saga full of depth and emotion will sweep you away to a simpler time.Readers LOVE Anne Doughty:'I love all the books from this author''Beautifully written''Would recommend to everyone''Fabulous story, couldn't put it down!''Looking forward to the next one.'

Содержание

About the Author

ANNE DOUGHTY is the author of *A Few Late Roses*, which was nominated for the longlist of the *Irish Times* Literature Prizes. Born in Armagh, she was educated at Armagh Girls' High School and Queen's University, Belfast. She has since lived in Belfast with her husband.

Praise for Anne Doughty

‘This book was immensely readable, I just couldn’t put it down’

‘An adventure story which lifts the spirit’

‘I have read all of Anne’s books – I have thoroughly enjoyed each and every one of them’

‘Anne is a true wordsmith and manages to both excite the reader whilst transporting them to another time and another world entirely’

‘A true Irish classic’

‘Anne’s writing makes you care about each character, even the minor ones’

The Girl from Galloway
ANNE DOUGHTY

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Author's Note

In 1845 Ireland was ruled by Queen Victoria. Irish Members of Parliament went to London and represented all thirty-two Irish counties. The only internal divisions in Ireland were the ancient provinces: Ulster, Leinster, Munster and Connaught.

Donegal is the most northern and westerly county in the northern province of Ulster, which is made up of nine counties. Every schoolchild could recite them in geographical order: Armagh, Down, Antrim, Londonderry, Tyrone, Fermanagh, Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan.

Throughout the period of our story most people in all four provinces spoke Irish, unless they had come from Scotland or England in the first place. Many Irish speakers from Donegal went to Scotland each year to help with the harvest. There they learnt a second language, which they called Scotch, but we would call English.

Chapter 1

Ardtur, County Donegal
April 1845

Hannah McGinley put down her sewing and moved across the tramped earth floor to where the door of the cottage stood open through all the daylight hours, except in the coldest and stormiest of weather. She stood on the well-swept door stone, looked up at the pale, overcast sky and ran her eye along the stone walls that enclosed their small patch of potato garden. Beyond the wall, the hawthorns partly masked the stony track, which ran down the mountainside.

There was no sign of them yet. No familiar figures walked, ran, or skipped up the narrow rocky path leading steeply up the mountainside from the broader track that ran along the lower contours of the mountain. Below that, the final, bush-filled slopes dropped more gently to the shore of Lough Gartan. The only movement she could detect in the deep quiet of the grey, late April afternoon were flickers of light reflected from the calm surface of the lake itself, just visible between the still-bare trees and the pale rise of smoke from the cottage of her nearest neighbour.

Dotted along the mountainside above the lake, clusters of cottages like Ardtur itself huddled together in the shelter of the mountain, its brooding shape offering some defence against the

battering of westerly winds from the Atlantic, westerlies that brought both mildness and heavy rain to this rugged landscape.

She moved back to the hearth, hung the kettle over the glowing embers of the turf fire and took up her sewing again. She paused to push back a few strands of long, fair hair that had escaped from the ribbon with which she tied it firmly each morning. Touching the gleaming strands, she smiled to herself, thinking of her daughter. Rose was as dark as she herself was fair, her eyes and colouring so like Patrick, her husband, while Sam, a year younger, pale-skinned and red-haired, so closely resembled her father, Duncan Mackay, far away in Scotland where she had been born and grew up.

They were good children, always willing to help with whatever task she might have in hand; Rose, the older, patient and thoughtful; Sam quick, often impatient, but always willing to do as she asked. Even now, though he was lightly built and only eight years old, he would run to help if he saw her move to lift a creel of potatoes or turf, or to pick up the empty pails to fetch water from the well.

She thought for a moment of her everyday tasks and reflected that she had not become entirely familiar with the harsh, yet beautiful place where she'd lived for the ten years of her married life. It surprised her that she still woke up every morning thinking of the well-built, two-storey farmhouse in Galloway and the view from the south-facing window of the bedroom she had shared with one of her older sisters. Then, she had seen a very

different landscape: green fields and trees sloping gently towards the seashore, rich pasture dotted with sheep, well cared for and prosperous, the delight of her hard-working father who loved his land as well as or perhaps even better than he loved his God.

Duncan Mackay was seen by many as a hard man, one who did not suffer fools gladly, shrewd in his dealings, strong in his Covenanter beliefs and not given to generosity, but, to his youngest daughter, Hannah, he showed a gentleness few others ever saw. It was Hannah's sorrow that in making her own life she'd had to leave him, widowed and now alone, her brothers and sisters married and moved into their own lives, two of them far away in Nova Scotia. Only her youngest brother, Matthew, running a boat-building yard on the Galloway coast close to Port William, was near enough to make the journey to their old home near Dundrennan, once or twice a year.

She knew her father still grieved for the choice she had made, though he had long ago accepted the quality of the man she'd married. But it had been hard for him. Patrick McGinley was a landless labourer, one of the many who took the boat from Derry, or Belfast, or the small ports nearest to the Glens of Antrim and went over to Scotland and the North of England to provide extra labour on the farms through the long season from the cutting of grass for silage, to the final picking and storing of the potato crop.

From early May till late October, or even November, if there was other farm work that needed doing, the 'haymakers' came. They lived in a barn cleared out for them each springtime, and

worked on the land, labouring from dawn to dusk in the long summer days, and they sent home money each week to support their families on rough hillsides with tiny holdings like this one. The only source of food was potatoes from the small patch of land behind or beside each cottage and what could be bought with the earnings of the few women who had the skill to do embroidery such as whitework, or sprigging.

For three years Patrick had come with a group of men and boys from Donegal, all good workers, as her father freely acknowledged. While they frequently worked on neighbouring farms, their base was Mackay's, the farm south-east of Dundrennan, the one her father had bought after long years of working with his brother in the drapery trade in Dumfries.

Her father had always wanted his own farm. His elder brother, Ross, had once told Hannah that even as a small boy in their home in the far north-west of Scotland, he had talked about it. He'd explained to Ross when he was still a boy that he wanted good soil and fine pasture so he could keep cattle or sheep, that would be plump and well fed, not bony like the few animals they had on the poor piece of land they rented from an English landlord they had never seen.

Years later, Ross and Duncan arrived barefoot and penniless in Dumfries, two victims of the Sutherland clearances; they'd been turned out of their croft and land in Strathnaver, with only the clothes they wore and what few possessions they could carry. As they tramped south looking for a means of survival, it seemed

that Duncan's dream had remained intact.

Hannah would never forget the way her father told parts of their story over and over again, throughout her childhood. Every time they sat down to eat, he would give thanks for their food, even if it were only a bowl of porridge. He reminded them time and time again that he and their uncle Ross had travelled the length of Scotland on 'burn water and the kindness of the poor', with no place to lay their heads but the heather on the hill.

*

By the time the Mackay brothers arrived in Dumfries they were famished, their boots long disintegrated, their clothes tattered, stained and faded from sleeping in the heather, being drenched by rain and exposed to the sun. When they'd seen the notice in a draper's window asking for two strong lads, they'd tidied themselves up as best they could and tried to look robust, despite their thinness.

The shop, in the main street of Dumfries, sold fabric but its main purpose was as a collecting centre for woven materials brought in from outworkers who spun, or wove, in their own homes – small cottages with a tiny piece of land, a potato garden, or a cow, as their only other support. The older man, the draper who ran the business, needed strong lads to hump the bales of fabric coming in from the home workers, the bundles of handkerchiefs and napkins going out to merchants in England and the heavy webs of woollen cloth going much further afield. The brothers were weak with hunger, but both now in their

twenties and knowing well how much depended on it, they managed to heft the heavy bales as if they were merely parcels.

They got the job. The hours were long, but there was a loft to sleep in and a daily meal as part of their small income. Neither of them knew anything about fabric, about the mysteries of spinning or weaving, but they learnt quickly, grew stronger in body and more confident in mind. According to Ross, even in those first years when they earned very little, Duncan had already begun to save for 'his farm' from his meagre salary.

Hannah's father took pride in telling her how they had helped the older man to expand the business and make it so very profitable that he regularly increased their wages. Some five years later, he offered them each a share in the business as well.

With no son of his own and well pleased with their commitment to their work, Mr McAllister, the draper, regularly said that when he retired he hoped they would be able to buy the business from him. In the meantime, he did all he could to make that possible for them.

He was as good as his word. A few years later, when Sandy McAllister finally decided to retire, the two brothers bought the business and Duncan then sold his share to his brother. With the money released and his savings Duncan then bought a small, neglected farm just a few miles outside Dumfries itself.

Hannah had never known that first farm. But her father had told her the tale of how it had been owned by an old woman, long widowed, her sons all in America. Although the sons had

sent her money, it was only enough to buy food; she had none left over to pay for labour.

She had watched the few small fields fill with rushes and weeds, her only comfort the memory of happier times with her husband and children. They'd never had much money but the boys had been fed and clothed and walked barefoot to the local school. There, they became star pupils. By the time Duncan Mackay bought the farm from the old woman's executors, and learnt the story of its previous owner, her sons were wealthy businessmen in Detroit who barely noticed the small sum of money from the sale of their old home, their inheritance from a life long-forgotten.

*

The fire was burning up more brightly since Hannah had added a few pieces of fresh turf, but there was still no sound of children's voices. It was too soon to make the mugs of tea that welcomed them home at the end of their day. She spread the patterned damask on her knee, smoothed it out and began hemming the last side of the napkin as her mind wandered back to her father's stories of his younger days.

Duncan Mackay's second farm was much further away from Dumfries. It was there that Hannah herself was born, the seventh and last child of Duncan and the former Flora McAllister, the daughter of the draper who had taken Duncan and Ross barefoot from the main street in Dumfries, fed them and given them boots and clothes for their new job.

Duncan loved Flora dearly but he had so wanted a son he could hardly contain his impatience in the tiny farmhouse where his three daughters were born one after the other. He was overjoyed when his first son was born, to be followed by two more. Hannah, as everyone used to tell her when she was a child, was 'the surprise' – an unexpected, late child born many years after her nearest brother. It was always Hannah's sadness that she never knew her mother. She had died within a year of her birth, perhaps – as so many women were in those days – worn out by the daily drudgery of work on a farm and the continuous demands of miscarriages, pregnancies and births.

She pushed away the sad thought and remembered instead her three older sisters: Jean, Fiona and Flora, who had all taken care of her and played with her, the wide gap in age making her almost like their own first child. She had been loved and cherished by all three of them. What surprised all of them, as baby Hannah got to her feet and walked, was the way in which she attached herself to her father from the moment she was steady enough to follow him around.

Later, they had each told her how she followed him wherever he went, unless he explained kindly, which he always did, that it was not safe for her to be with him just then and she must go back to her sisters.

But it was not Hannah's devotion to her father that surprised her good-natured sisters the most; it was their father's toleration of such a young child. From the point at which Hannah could

walk they began to see a very different man from the fair, hard-working, but very impersonal father they themselves had known in their growing years.

Now in his sixties, her father had no one to share the solid, two-storey house with. It was once such a busy place, full of life and activity, its small garden rich in flowers, her mother's great joy, which her sisters had gone on caring for in her memory throughout Hannah's childhood. They often brought bouquets and posies into the house to add colour to the solid furniture and plain whitewashed walls.

Her sisters were now long married and scattered, her brothers Gavin and James were in Nova Scotia, and she, her father's youngest and most beloved daughter, in Donegal, his only contact the letters Hannah wrote so regularly. At least Duncan could rely on the yearly arrival of his son-in-law, Patrick, still coming to labour alongside him with some neighbouring men from Casheltown and Staghall who had been haymakers all their working lives.

Hannah still remembered the first time she'd seen Patrick, walking down the lane to the farm, one of a small group hired for the season to take the place of her absent brothers. Lightly built, dark-haired with deep, dark eyes, tanned by wind and rain, he moved with ease despite the weariness of the long walk from the boat that had brought them from Derry to Cairnryan.

Her father had greeted them formally, one by one, showing them into the well-swept barn where they would live for the

season.

'This is my daughter, Hannah,' he had said, more than a hint of pride clear in his voice. Patrick had looked at her and smiled. Even then it had seemed to her as if his eyes were full of love.

She was just seventeen and working as a monitor at the local school, the one she herself had attended. It never occurred to her, when she offered to help the small group of harvesters with learning what they called 'Scotch', that she would also become fluent in another language and through it, come to love a man who listened devotedly to all she said but thought it wrong to speak of his love to a young girl who seemed so far out of reach.

Hannah dropped her work hastily now and reached for the teapot warming by the hearth as a sudden outburst of noise roused her and grew stronger. She made the tea, set it to draw, and stood watching from the doorway as the small group of children of Ardtur ran up the last long slope, their shouts and arguments forgotten, as they focused on open doors and the prospect of a mug of tea while they relayed the day's news.

'Oh, Ma, I'm hungry,' said Sam, rolling his eyes and rubbing his stomach, the moment she had kissed him.

'You're always hungry,' protested his sister, as she turned from hanging up her schoolbag on the lowest of a row of hooks by the door. 'You had your piece at lunchtime,' she said practically, looking at him severely. 'I'm not hungry. At least not very,' she added honestly, when Hannah in turn looked at her.

'Well,' said Hannah, unable to resist Sam's expressive twists

and turns. 'You could have a piece of the new soda bread. There's still some jam, but there's no butter till I go up to Aunt Mary tomorrow,' she added, as he dropped his schoolbag on the floor.

Sam nodded vigorously. Then, when Rose looked at him meaningfully, he picked it up again, went and hung it on the hook beside Rose's and sat down at the kitchen table looking hopeful.

'So what did you learn today?' Hannah asked, as she poured mugs of tea and brought milk from the cold windowsill at the back of the house. She knew from long experience that Rose would tell her in detail all that had happened at school while Sam would devote himself entirely to the piece of soda bread she was now carving from the circular cake she had made in the morning's baking.

'Can I get the jam for you, Ma?' he asked, as he eyed the sweet-smelling soda bread she put in front of him.

'Can you reach?' she asked gently.

'Oh yes, Ma. Da says I'm growing like a bad weed,' he replied cheerfully. 'Look,' he went on, jumping up from the table and standing on tiptoe to open the upper doors of the cupboard. He stretched up, clutched a jam jar firmly in his hand and studied the contents. Hannah saw his look of disappointment and was about to speak, but then he smiled.

He'd seen the jar contained only a small helping of the rich-tasting jam she'd made from the bowls of berries they'd helped her to pick the previous year but now, as he looked at it hungrily, Sam was already reckoning there would be more next season. By

September, he would be bigger; he could reach places he'd had to miss last year. He would also be able to get at places where the big boys had got to before him.

He sat down in his place, unscrewed the lid and scraped out every last vestige of the sweet, rich, dark jam and then spread it carefully over his piece of soda bread.

He heard nothing of what Rose had learnt at school that day and didn't even notice the small envelope she fetched from her schoolbag and handed to his mother.

Chapter 2

The April evening was well lengthened from the shorter days of March, but it was still growing dark when Hannah heard Patrick greet a neighbour, as he walked up the last steep slope of his journey home from Tullygobegley, where he'd been helping to reroof a farmhouse that had fared badly in the winter storms.

The children were already asleep. Hannah moved quickly to the open door and held out her arms. She'd only to watch him for those last few yards to know that he was tired out, his shoulders drooping, his arms hanging limp by his sides. He'd admitted to her earlier in the week that it was heavy work, humping slates up a steep roof, exposed to the wind and rain. Now, as he put his arms round her, kissed her and held her close she could see he was quite exhausted.

'Bad news, astore,' he began, speaking Irish as he always did when they were alone. 'The job will finish the end of the week. No money then till yer father sends the passage money for me an' the other boys,' he said anxiously.

'That's not bad news, my love,' she said warmly, drawing him over to the fire and closing the door behind them. 'I'm pleased to hear it. Have you forgotten I've four weeks' pay due to me sometime next week when your man from Creeslough comes for the napkins?'

'Aye, I had forgot,' he said, looking up at her, his face pale with

fatigue. 'Sure, what wou'd we do if ye hadn't hans for anythin' an' you never brought up to a rough place like this?'

She saw the anxiety in his face, the dark shadows under his eyes and suddenly became sharply aware that sometime in the next few weeks the letter would come with the passage money. Her heart sank. When the letter came, they would be separated for months.

Parting never got easier. No matter how hard she worked on the piles of napkins, the cooking over the hearth, keeping the floor swept, the clothes clean and mended, when he was here, she knew at the end of the day there would be the warmth and tenderness of the night. It never ceased to amaze her how despite their exhaustion they could still turn to each other's arms for comfort, an enfolding that quickly turned to passion.

When the letter with the postal order came from her father, her days would be the same as they were now, but there would be neither comfort, nor passion, nor shared laughter, just notepaper in the drawer so she could write a little every day, as he did, for all the long months till the first chill of autumn stripped the yellow leaves from the hawthorns and the birds feasted on the red berries.

'You must be hungry, love,' she said quickly, as he released her and sank down heavily in his armchair by the hearth. 'It's all ready over a saucepan. Do you want to wash?'

'Oh yes, indeed I do, for I'll not bring the dust of that roof to our bed,' he said firmly.

He stood up again with an effort and went out by the back door to the adjoining outhouse, where he'd set up a wash place for them all with a tin basin on a stand, a jug for water and hooks on a board attached to the wall for the towels.

She heard the splash of the water she'd left ready for him as she poured a glass of buttermilk to go with his meal. She checked that his food was properly hot, carefully lifting the saucepan lid that covered the large dinner plate set over the simmering water below.

She thought then of her sisters who had used this same method of ensuring their father's meal was hot. He always intended to be in at a certain time, but in this one thing that most reliable of men was unreliable. It was almost a joke between Duncan and his daughters, the way he would assure them he'd be in by such and such a time, and then, invariably, he would find yet one more job he must do before he could possibly think of coming in for his meal.

Hannah picked up her sewing and watched quietly as Patrick ate in silence. He had never spoken much at the table in their time together, but these days, she knew it was not the long shadow of his own father's strict rule about not talking with food on the table; it was simply tiredness. At least when he went to Dundrennan he would be doing work he enjoyed, and her father, though he expected a lot, would not expect any man to work harder for him than he would expect to work himself.

Patrick cleared his plate, pushed it away from him and crossed

himself. 'That was great,' he said. 'It would put heart in ye. Did they have a good day at school the day?' he asked, as he moved his armchair nearer to hers.

She put her sewing back in its bag and took his hand.

'They did indeed,' she replied smiling. 'Rose got all her spellings right and Sam managed to give out the slates this time without dropping any,' she said laughing. 'But there's more news than that,' she went on more slowly, suddenly concerned that he was so tired he might be anxious about what she was going to say next.

'Oh, what's that then?' he asked, a flicker of a smile touching his lips.

To her surprise and delight, she saw his blue eyes light up.

'Sure, ye know I always need a bit of news to pass on to the boys tomorrow,' he said, his tone lightening as she watched him.

'Well, it seems Daniel's niece, Marie, has been walking out with a young man from Creeslough direction and they've named the day.'

'Ach, sure, that's great,' he said. 'That'll be a bit of a gatherin' at some point or other,' he said cheerfully. 'They'll maybe have a kitchen racket at Daniel's.'

Daniel's house was not only the place used as the local makeshift school he presided over, but also a popular place for gathering to hear the best stories and songs shared between friends of an evening.

'Yes, it is good news,' she agreed, 'but it will be hard on Daniel.

She'll be living down in Creeslough so she'll not be able to go on working with him in the schoolroom. He can do so much and everyone says it's like he's got eyes in the back of his head, he's so sharp, but he *is* blind. How can you teach children if you haven't got at least one pair of eyes in the room, and a woman as well as a man when there's wee ones to look after?'

'Ach dear, it would be a great loss if that wee schoolroom were to be no more. Sure, where wou'd our childer go? I know there's been talk of getting a National School up here for years now, but nothin's ever come of it. If it weren't for Daniel being an educated man there'd never have been anywhere up this part of the mountain where they could go. How could he do anythin' at all on his lone? Sure, he can talk away, an' teach them their history, and tell the old stories and hear their readin' till the cows come home, but what about the writin' an' the figures? Sure, Marie must have done all that. How cou'd he do anythin' where he had to look at their work?' he asked, his voice suddenly weary again.

'They did seem to work very well together,' Hannah said slowly, her unease returning, now it had come to the point where she'd have to tell him about the note Marie had sent with the children.

'Would you like a mug of tea?' she asked, getting up and hanging the kettle over the fire.

'That would go down well,' he said, watching her carefully as she moved about the room fetching mugs and milk.

He always knew when she was thinking about something, for she moved more slowly and kept looking at the kettle as if she expected it to start singing at any moment when she knew perfectly well it would take a while. He waited till she had put his mug in his hand and then said: 'Are you worried there'll be nowhere for our pair to go?'

She couldn't help but laugh, for he had taken her by surprise. So often, it was she who read *his* thoughts, but this time he had tried to read hers. It didn't matter that he hadn't got it quite right. It just somehow made it easier for what she needed to say.

'Daniel was wondering if I would come and give him a hand,' she replied. 'Apparently, I told him once years ago that I was a monitor back in my own old school in Dundrennan. He has an extraordinary memory,' she said, shaking her head.

'An' wou'd ye like that?' he said quickly, his eyes widening. 'Sure, it wou'd be company fer ye when I'm away,' he went on, brightening as she looked across at him.

'It wouldn't pay very much, Patrick,' she said cautiously. 'Certainly not as much as the sewing.'

'Aye, I can see that might be the way of it,' he said, nodding slowly. 'Sure, none of the families up here has much to spare. There must be childer Daniel takes in that can't go beyond their pieces of turf for the fire. I know some of them bring cakes of bread and a bit of butter for Daniel himself,' he said, shaking his head, 'but that would be because there was no tuppence that week, or whatever it is these days, that wou'd otherwise

be forthcomin'. How does Daniel manage at all? Sure, everyone knows the masters of these hedge schools don't see a penny when times are bad and Daniel wou'd never be the one to turn a chile away if it hadn't brought its few pence.'

Patrick himself had never been to school and he'd never figured out why people called these local places where children could learn to read and write 'hedge schools'. But Daniel's house, which he used for the school, was not typical. Most of the other schools in the area were far less robust: abandoned cottages, or caves, or even old cattle pens with a bit of a roof thrown over. But then, there was a time when running a school would have got you into trouble. There were laws against schools, like there were laws against celebrating Mass.

'Maybe yer da will give us all a bit more money this year, if the price of cattle keeps going up,' he offered cheerfully. 'Are you thinking about doin' it?' he asked directly.

'Well …'

'Well, indeed. What wou'd stan' in yer way if you had a mind to do it? Sure, Sam and Rose wou'd be there with ye … and sure, what'll *they* do if Daniel has to give up? Though you could teach them yourself like you taught me, couldn't you? Sure, you're a great teacher and me no scholar,' he ended sheepishly.

Hannah laughed and felt her anxiety drain away. She remembered again how she'd offered to help her father's harvesters to write their letters home, and how, in the process, she had ended up learning Irish. Patrick had been a diligent pupil.

He had learnt not only how to read and write, but also to make his way in English. It might well be English with a strong Scottish accent but it still stood him and his fellows in good stead when work called from south of the border around Carlisle, or even Lancaster.

She could still see the scrubbed wooden table in the farm kitchen where they had normally sat at mealtimes, covered with reading books in the evenings. Her own school, where she was then a monitor, had let her borrow what she needed for when she taught the haymakers, while her sister, Flora, the youngest of the three older sisters, still living nearby in those years, had bought jotters and notepaper for her pupils out of her egg money until she and her husband, Cameron, moved to take up a new job in Dumfries.

'My Irish isn't that great,' Hannah said feebly now, remembering her own difficulties when she had first begun to teach the Irishmen and found they had so very little English to begin with.

'An' when have I ever not been able to understan' you?' he asked, his voice gentle, his eyes looking at her directly. 'I'm for it, if it's what ye want. Sure, why don't we sleep on it,' he added, standing up and putting his hand on her shoulder.

*

It was still dark next morning when Patrick picked up his piece from the kitchen table and kissed her goodbye. She walked out of the cottage with him, pausing on the doorstep as they looked

up at the sky.

'That's better,' he said, slipping his arm round her and pulling her close for a few moments.

It was a fine-weather sky, the sunrise clouds tinted pink, the air calm with a distinct hint of mildness. As she stood watching him make his way down towards the lough, she found herself hoping that the mildness might go on to the end of the week. If it did, then the last few days of the roofing job would not be as taxing as it had been, especially during the last weeks when the turbulent west wind had made the exposed site bitterly cold and the pitched roof more hazardous.

He stopped and waved to her as he reached the bend in the track. Beyond this point he would be hidden by a cluster of hawthorns and the last group of cottages before the steep slope to the main track. She stood a moment longer till he was out of sight and then, already thinking of all she had to do, she turned and went back into the big kitchen.

She stood for a moment looking at the table, the empty bowls and crumbs from her breakfast with Patrick, as if they would help her to decide what to do. Certainly, she would always want to help Daniel in any way she could. Patrick was indeed keen for her to have company in the long months when he was away, but he had paid little attention to the possible loss of her earnings from the sewing.

This winter he had found quite a few jobs locally, but there were other years when there was no work of any kind. Then the

only income was from her sewing. Without her sewing money and the savings she had made while he was away, she couldn't have kept them in food and turf.

If she went to help Daniel teach, with the house still to run and the children to care for, the hours to spend sewing would be very hard to find, even with the better light of the long, summer evenings.

She glanced out of the open door as if there was some answer to be found out there. The light was strengthening and a few gleams of sunlight were reflecting off the whitewashed cottage walls. Whatever her decision would be, there was no need to delay her visit to Daniel.

She made up her mind to go up to Casheltown and see what Daniel had to say. She knew she needed to wake the children right away so that she had extra time to fit in washing and dressing herself, something she usually left till after they'd gone and she'd done the dustiest and dirtiest of the morning jobs.

They were both fast asleep in the tiny bedrooms Patrick had partitioned off from the single, large bedroom of their two-room dwelling, the bedroom where they had begun their married life, in October 1835, ten years ago this coming autumn.

Sam woke up the moment she touched him, threw his arms round her and hugged her. Rose was always harder to wake and was very often involved in some complicated dream that, given any possible opportunity, she would talk about until they were both ready to leave. This morning, Hannah knew she would have

to discourage her usual recital if they were all to leave the house on time.

They did manage it, though as Hannah pulled the front door closed behind her, she was only too aware of all the tasks she had had to leave aside. Out of her normal morning's routine, only the making up of the fire had been done.

Stepping into the brightness of the April morning, she set aside the crowding thoughts and focused on Rose and Sam who were now telling her what they were going to do with Miss McGee today and what story the master had promised them if they all did their work well.

Hannah listened carefully but as they picked their steps through the broken stones of the track and turned right towards Casheltown, she found herself looking up at the great stone mound, once a fortified place, that looked out over the waters of Lough Gartan. She thought of her own very different walks to school in the softer green countryside of Galloway. There, the sea was almost always in sight, the fields a rich green, the school itself a sturdy, stone building with separate entrances marked Girls and Boys, and a patch of land at the back where the older boys learnt gardening.

She remembered Flora taking her by the hand on her first day and walking her briskly along the familiar lanes to the school where she herself had been a pupil some twelve years earlier.

Suddenly feeling sad, thinking of her brothers and sisters scattered 'to the four winds' as her father often said, she was glad

when a girl in a tattered shift ran down from a nearby cottage and greeted them all cheerfully.

As Mary O'Donoghue fell in beside her, Hannah gathered her straying thoughts and asked the children how many scholars there currently were in their school.

Neither Rose nor Sam were very sure about the number, but Mary, a year or two older than Rose, was quite clear about it. There were fifteen on the roll, she said, when they were all there, but mostly they weren't all there at the same time. She explained that often pupils couldn't come if they were needed at home, for driving the cow to the fair or planting the tatties.

'But that's a good thing, Mrs McGinley,' she went on, as Rose and Sam fell silent. 'If they were all there, the wee ones would have to sit on creepies. Mr McGee doesn't like that, but there's only room for twelve on the chairs and benches.'

Hannah nodded her agreement. The low, homemade stools might be all right for listening to a story, but they certainly weren't suitable for any written work, or even reading aloud comfortably. She was surprised that there could be any thought of fifteen in a kitchen not much bigger than her own.

Moments later, as they turned off the main track and walked the short distance up to Daniel's house, she saw Daniel himself waiting near the open door. He was greeting each child as they appeared.

'Hannah, you're welcome,' he said warmly, holding out his hand to her before she had even opened her mouth.

She was completely taken aback. Of course he knew her voice, and he was well known for knowing everyone's footsteps, but how did he know she was there when she hadn't yet said a word?

'Good morning, Mary; good morning, Rose; good morning, Sam,' he went on briskly, then, taking her arm, he led her towards the stone seat where he sat so often when the evenings grew lighter.

'I'm heart glad you were able to come,' he said, as the three children ran into the big kitchen that served as the classroom. 'I'd be even more glad if you could see your way to helping me out, but we'll not say a word about that yet. Marie is going to start the work indoors and then she'll come out and tell you how we manage between us and what we each do. I don't want to give you a false picture. It's hard work, I confess, but then you've never been afraid of that or you wouldn't have married your good man. Is he still working on that house up at Tullygobegley?'

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They sat and talked as old friends do, for Daniel was one of the first people she had met when she came to Ardtur. Patrick had taken her to meet him one evening when they'd been back only a week or so. She'd found a house full of people, not one of whom she yet knew, but Daniel welcomed her warmly, made her sit beside him by the hearth and introduced her new neighbours one by one with a story about each of them, or a joke. Then he had told a long, traditional story after which he encouraged his visiting neighbours to sing, or to recite.

There followed many evenings at Daniel's house before the children were born. When he had someone with a violin, or a penny whistle, he'd insist the young ones take the floor. Once, indeed, to please him, she had taken the floor herself with Patrick to learn 'The Waves of Tory'.

She would never forget that evening: being passed from hand to hand by young men in shirtsleeves, dipping her head below raised arms, making an arch herself with a new partner, and all the time the lilt and dip of the music mimicking the flowing waves.

Hannah's regular visits to Daniel were interrupted when she had her first miscarriage and then again when Patrick went back to Scotland. It was only a week after his departure when Daniel himself came to call on her. He told her that he still expected to see her, Patrick or no Patrick, whenever she could spare the time.

So she had walked up there on her own, or joined with another neighbour from Ardtur, for the long months when Patrick was away in Scotland. And so the year turned and Patrick returned. But it was only after two more miscarriages that she finally managed to carry Rose to full term. Then, there could be no more evening visits for her until Patrick was at home over the winter.

But Daniel made it clear that he was not prepared to be deprived of her company for all those long months. If she could not come to him in the evening because of little Rose, then he would come down and visit her in the afternoons. That is what he then did, almost every week.

Sometimes he brought a book and asked her to read to him, sometimes they just talked, but always he asked her about 'home', her father, her brothers and sisters, their lives, their travels and their families. Slowly and very intermittently, he told her something about his own unusual background and how he came to have a formal education that included Latin and Greek.

It was while Rose was still a baby that he came one afternoon to tell her of a decision he'd made. He said that since a young man who took pupils had left the adjoining townland quite unexpectedly, there was now no school anywhere nearby. He had decided that unless he did something himself, a generation of children would grow up on the mountainside who could neither read nor write. He was going to start a school and he needed her advice as well as her encouragement.

Chapter 3

As the morning passed and the sun climbed higher, Hannah felt the warmth on her shoulders for the first time that year. Her spirits rose as, first Daniel, and then Marie, came to sit beside her on the stone bench a little way from the open door of the cottage, where the table and benches had now been rearranged and set up to serve as a schoolroom.

She was aware of the murmur of children's voices. Like the hum of bees, it reflected the pattern of the morning's activity, the sound oscillating but never intruding on the conversation she was having with whichever of the two teachers was sharing the stone bench with her.

It was Daniel who came first, joining her after he had conducted the roll call. She had heard him clearly as he called out the names and then less clearly as he asked his questions about the pupils who were missing. He explained later that he always asked those present about the absentees, whether they were needed at home, or on the land. If they were ill, then he wanted to know who was looking after them and whether there was any question of a doctor having to come.

Daniel's first comments to Hannah when he joined her on the bench were on what they were trying to do with the children, encouraging them to speak out, to pay attention to other people, to ask questions and find out things for themselves. Marie, who

came a little later, offered her detailed descriptions of each of the pupils, including Rose and Sam.

Hannah listened with growing interest and admiration. She was impressed by the way in which they dealt with the range of ages and abilities in the children who had come to them. There were several little girls barely five years old and some big boys already twelve. They were the ones most often absent if there were potatoes to be harvested or produce of any kind to go to market.

Daniel and Marie had managed to work out an overlapping pattern where the older children helped the younger ones and encouraged them to read aloud and recite the poems Daniel had taught them. At the same time, those who'd been present were asked to share what they'd been doing with those who'd been absent. Everyone was persuaded to talk about what they'd been doing at home, what visitors had called to see them and what answers they'd had to questions they'd been given by way of homework, things they could ask their parents, or other members of their family.

Daniel and Marie both said in their different ways, when they took their turn to talk to her, that they'd not realised to begin with how good it was for their pupils to be required to help each other in this way and what beneficial effects the shared activity had produced.

'Shyness has little educational value,' Daniel declared, when he sat down again after he'd taken a session on spelling. 'These

children need to be able to communicate with other people whatever their rank or status. We're trying to develop their confidence. That way they can begin to educate themselves, however many, or few, their school years might turn out to be.

It was Marie who shared with her the surprise they'd had when they discovered Daniel's inability to see could be turned to good purpose. Each new achievement of an individual, or a small group, was brought before Daniel, for it had emerged very early on, that once a child grasped fully that he could not see, then he or she saw for themselves the need to explain exactly what they'd done. The effort of explaining, telling him what letters, or words, they had learnt, what information they had found out at home, had meant that among other benefits there were no problems of behaviour, nor of bullying, such as might occur in a traditional school.

Hannah had to smile when Daniel referred to his own memory and what a resource it had been to him. She remembered so well when she and Patrick first visited his home on their arrival together from Scotland how amazed she had been listening to the first of the long, complicated stories he told.

Now, it seemed, Daniel used the gift to benefit each one of the pupils.

When they had to report to him on some lesson they had learnt, or information they had found out, he would respond by offering encouragement, then remind them of something else they had recently achieved. He'd continue by telling them a joke

or asking a riddle. He would then ask more questions. He'd encourage their answers and if they didn't have one, he'd ask them to go away and try to find one. They could ask other pupils if they wanted to, parents, or people they knew, or they could begin by looking up the indexes in the small selection of books they'd been given by a visiting English lady.

At one point, Daniel admitted freely that when they began their work in the schoolroom they'd been concerned his blindness would be a serious problem and put too great a burden on Marie, but they'd quickly come to see how facing the problem had actually shaped a way of working they might otherwise never have discovered.

Shortly after noon, the pupils all came outside carrying the pieces they had taken from their satchels. Hannah waved to Rose and Sam, then watched Mary O'Donoghue as she left her piece with Rose and came to ask the three adults if they would like mugs of tea. She and her friend then went and made it, Mary carrying it back outside to them on a tray, her friend carrying the milk jug separately so it wouldn't spill on the clean tray as they moved over the bumpy ground.

Hannah was impressed and said so. Daniel smiled and said nothing. Marie and Hannah sat watching today's class of twelve finish up the last crumbs of their lunch and begin their half hour of playtime. Some of them walked down to the lough shore in the hope of seeing the swans, others fetched a book and sat reading in the sunshine, and some played marbles on the flattest piece

of ground they could find. Two of the older boys came and said they were sorry they had to go now. They explained they were needed at home to help plant the new crop of potatoes.

Hannah studied the two boys as they talked to Daniel. Scantily dressed, but robust, they smiled at him as he listened to them and then gave them a message for their parents.

'Tell them,' he said, pausing for effect, 'you've divided up a whole bag of big numbers with Miss McGee this morning and planted a few rows of new words forby. If you do as well with your potatoes, you'll have plenty to put by for the winter.'

Hannah had to smile when he got each of the boys to repeat his message until he was sure they had it word-perfect. Then he told them both to be sure to come tomorrow, even if it wasn't for the whole day.

'Thank you, sir,' said one. 'We'll do our best,' said the other, and they ran off cheerfully to pick up their battered satchels, which now contained only a pencil and an exercise book, all trace of the morning's piece having disappeared. As they said their goodbyes she suddenly felt quite overwhelmed by sadness.

She was back in the grey stone school in Dundrennan where her sisters had sat before her. In that school, there were plenty of pencils and pens and a monitor to fill their inkpots when they practised their writing in copybooks. Behind the teacher's desk there was a cupboard full of books, as well as those they each had in their satchels. There were proper wooden desks, and chairs, and maps, and pictures, hung around the walls. But in that

Scottish school, where she herself had worked for three years as a monitor, the children were often too anxious to speak, even when asked a question during lessons.

'*Silence was golden*' indeed, in that school. If pupils were ever caught talking at any time except 'playtime' they would most certainly be caned.

But then the master, Mr McMurray, was a rigorous, older man who had no great love of children. In his youth he had wanted to be a minister but he had failed in his examinations to get enough marks in theology. The mistress was an elderly spinster whose favourite word was 'discipline'.

The contrast between the two schools was stark indeed. While the parents of children in the small farms around Dundrennan were not particularly well off, their school was entirely free of charge and no child came to school hungry. Here on this mountain, where the meagre soil occurred only in patches, and parents struggled to feed their families, the pupils had little equipment to work with in this makeshift school, but Hannah was now absolutely clear in her mind they had something valuable that had been sadly lacking in Dundrennan.

She felt herself grow thoughtful, as memories of happy times with her sisters when she came home from school continued to flood back. She remembered how they had encouraged her to paint, and embroider, to read aloud to them and write poems. How fortunate she had been.

As they sat together in the warm sunshine enjoying the last

of their tea, Hannah decided it would be much more fitting to celebrate all that Marie and Daniel had achieved in this unlikely situation, than regret what might be missing.

She had so many questions she wanted to ask in the remaining minutes of playtime, she hardly knew where to begin, but when Marie came and sat down again after picking up and comforting the littlest girl who had fallen and cut her knee, Hannah told Daniel she had one question, not of an educational nature, that just wouldn't wait any longer, as she'd been puzzling about it all morning.

'And what would that be?' he demanded, turning towards her, his blue eyes twinkling in a way that seemed to suggest he 'saw' more than most sighted people.

'Well, you did ask me to come when I could spare the time,' she began, looking at him and smiling, 'but you greeted me this morning before I'd even said a single word. How *did* you know I was there?'

'Shall I tell her, Marie, or shall I keep it a secret?' he asked, leaning towards his niece with a conspiratorial whisper.

'Well, to tell you the truth, I was wonderin' about that myself?' Marie replied promptly, her large, dark eyes opening wide.

'Well then, if I have double my usual audience, my vanity will always get the better of my inherent modesty,' he said, smiling and turning from one to the other and then seeming to rest his gaze on Hannah.

'It is entirely a process of deduction,' he began. 'I heard

footsteps and recognised Sam, and Rose, and Mary, as I would always do, when they walk towards me. But, I then observed that Sam was not talking to Rose in the way he usually does. Mary, however, had just finished making a comment that I did not hear properly, but I deduced from her tone that it had not been addressed to either Sam, or Rose, but probably to an older female companion. The most likely candidate was you, Hannah, my dear. You have a way of inspiring confidence in young people. And you are a very good listener. Don't you agree, Marie?'

'I do indeed, Uncle Daniel,' she said warmly. 'If I knew Hannah was going to come and help you here I could go off happy,' she went on, turning to Hannah herself. 'You see, Hannah, I think my Liam is really thinking of America when it comes to the bit, but he knows I don't want to leave Uncle Daniel and the scholars if there's no one to help him, so he's not admitting it,' she said, shaking her head.

Hannah looked away, touched by the real concern in her eyes. She knew, in that moment, that however much thought she should give to taking this new opportunity being offered to her, some part of her had already decided.

A handful of children in an out-of-the-way place in a remote westerly corner of Ireland, with few prospects of work, or betterment, and no one apart from their ill-provided parents concerned for them. How could she turn her back on them any more than Daniel had, if there was anything she could do to help?

At the end of playtime, when Marie rose to go back to work,

Hannah decided she needed some time to herself. She had not intended to stay so long and had brought no piece to eat. If she went back home she could have a bite by the fireside, and come back in time for Daniel's story, which always ended the school day.

She was concerned that neither Marie nor Daniel had had anything to eat themselves, but when she mentioned it to Daniel he explained that he preferred his piece after playtime, while Marie was at work with the children. Marie, he explained, would have a cooked meal waiting for her at her mother's house as soon as school ended, so she only brought food when her mother was away staying with one of her sisters.

One thing was very clear to Hannah as she walked back home to Ardtur and stirred up the dying fire – and that was how well Daniel and Marie worked together. She tried to remember how long it was now since they had begun their work. She counted on her fingers. Rose had been six and Sam not quite five. Rose was now nine and Sam just eight, so it was three years ago.

Perhaps she had thought it was longer because the children going to school seemed such a permanent part of their life, like the visits of the draper from Creeslough who collected her needlework, or their walks up to see Patrick's Aunt Mary, 'over the hill' in Drumnalifferny, or her own visits to the much older couple she had met in Ramelton. The wife had once lived in Dundrennan, though that was long before Hannah was born.

It was when Hannah stood up to go and wash her mug and

plate that she noticed the two envelopes on the table. One had been delivered by hand and she recognised the familiar brown envelope without needing to open it. It was the quarterly request for rent. The other envelope had a Scottish postmark and was addressed to Mr Patrick McGinley. The writing was just as familiar as the style and shape of the brown envelope had been. She picked it up and looked at it closely, her eyes filling with tears, staring at it as if there was something the envelope itself could tell her. But she already knew what the letter would say. It always said exactly the same thing.

Her father was sending the money for the boat fares to Scotland, a sum that would be repaid in weekly instalments from the wages of the team of labourers through the next six or seven months. Patrick would organise their departure within the week. He would not return until the autumn. She felt lonely already.

She washed her mug and plate, cut some slices of soda bread and wrapped them up for Daniel, then wandered round the room as if she had forgotten something. But it was nothing she could put a name to, just a feeling that she was soon to be alone and would have to make up her own mind what to do next.

Marie was not getting married till Easter, still a few weeks away, but it would help both Marie and Daniel if she could decide what she was going to do before Patrick and his team had to make their way to Derry for the boat.

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She walked slowly back along the familiar track, savouring

the first truly spring-like day of the year. The birds were active, darting around in the bushes, taking off and landing in some random activity she could not explain. Somewhere a blackbird was singing. She was almost sure the hawthorns were greener than they'd been in the morning and the sun was now high in a completely blue sky. How often one could look back up at the mountain and see its rugged outline without even a wisp of cloud.

'A pet day' Aunt Mary would call today. A gift to be cherished but not to be expected, something that might not come again, or at least not for a few more weeks.

She gathered her thoughts. What had not been mentioned in any of their talks yet was the question of payment. Clearly Marie did receive a salary, but how much, and when, she did not know. She did know that Rose and Sam took their two pennies each week along with their pieces of turf for the fire every Friday morning, but she guessed that some of the other children would be irregular in their payments. They might indeed bring extra turf, or some potatoes, or meal, but actual money might not always be available. What she could be sure of was that Daniel would not turn any pupil away because they hadn't brought their pennies.

There was no one sitting on the stone bench as she walked up the slope and all was silent as she approached the open door of the cottage. She paused and listened and after a few moments she heard Daniel's voice. It was a mere whisper, but within moments she found that it was the voice of a Fairy Queen coming to the

aid of a princess locked up in a tower in a dark forest. Even here, outside the door, she could hear every word clearly for there was no sound whatever from any of the pupils.

At the end of the story there were cheers, then the scrape of feet on the floor, as the class stood up to recite a blessing, a protection for the dark hours of the night until the dawn came again. She heard the 'Goodbyes' to both Daniel and Marie, as they began to spill out into the dazzling sunshine, going off in both directions, up and down the rough track towards the scattered groups of cottages where they lived.

'Hello, Ma. Have you come back for *us*?' demanded Sam, the moment he set eyes on her.

'No, of course not,' replied Rose quickly. 'We can go home by ourselves, Sam. Haven't we been doing that for all of this year?' she said, looking at Hannah for agreement.

'Yes, of course you can go home by yourselves,' agreed Hannah, giving them each a hug, 'but that's when I'm at home waiting for you. Today, I'm here, because I need to talk a bit more to your teachers. We can all go home together. I'm sure Miss McGee would let you go and look at the books while I'm busy.'

Rose nodded promptly. Clearly, she thought that was a good idea. Sam was less enthusiastic, but at a nod and an encouraging smile from Hannah, he followed Rose back into the cottage, just as Daniel was coming out to greet her.

'Ah, Hannah, you've come back. I thought maybe you'd had enough of school for one day!'

'No, Daniel, not a bit of it. I needed a bite to eat and I knew the fire would need making up. I think I've a few more questions to ask.'

'Well, ask away, for you know you'll only get honest answers, even if it's not to my advantage,' he said, as he sat down at the far end of the stone bench to leave room for her.

Hannah couldn't bear the thought of Daniel being at any disadvantage after the splendid account she'd had of what they'd managed to do for this handful of children. But clearly, Daniel had already faced that possibility and what he said next restored her hope.

'When I first thought of running a school, you may remember a good friend of mine suggested I went round the local gentry and asked them if they could help out,' he said, looking at her directly.

She certainly remembered now that she had encouraged him but she'd forgotten that it was her who suggested he ask their local gentry for help. She'd written letters on his behalf to the charitable organisations active in the county, who might give some support. She'd also made a list of children in Ardtur and the adjoining townlands who might become his pupils, so that he could speak to the parents and see what help might be forthcoming from them.

'I was treated kindly enough but what I collected up wasn't a large sum. In the end it was only enough to get started. A few benches and desks and exercise books and such like. But all that

money is gone now,' he went on matter-of-factly. 'When Marie first thought of helping me, we added up the pennies the children brought each week and to begin with, that made a salary for her.

'Not surprisingly,' he went on wryly, 'it proved to be irregular through no fault of the parents, so I had to add to it from some small savings I had,' he said, speaking in the same steady tone he'd used all day. 'Those savings are almost gone and the pension I've had for many years from my half-brother is now in some doubt. If that goes, I won't be able to pay my own rent, never mind find a salary for an assistant,' he went on quickly, with a short laugh. 'Probably, we did well to manage for as long as we did, but now I need an income for me, as well as for a teacher. There's nothing for it but to ask for a miracle,' he ended, throwing up his hands towards the blue sky, his voice grown solemn.

She'd certainly have to agree; if that were the case, the prospects looked bleak. She was surprised now that he and Marie had asked her to come and even more surprised that given the overall situation they had both talked with such enthusiasm about all they had done.

She looked closely at his face, now in shadow as the sun sank beyond the ridge of the mountain behind them. The brilliant blue sky remained, but the temperature had dropped suddenly and she shivered.

He took a deep breath and went on.

'You must be wondering why, in the circumstances, I asked you to come and kept you from your sewing and your work

at home. I've been asking myself that too,' he added, laughing wryly. 'But I have thought long and hard and I still have this feeling that if anyone could see a way forward, it would be my friend Hannah. She's the girl from Galloway who gave up her comfortable home and left Scotland, left all her family and friends to marry the man she loved and to make a home and a family for him on an Irish mountainside. That's the kind of miracle that might save the school.'

Chapter 4

'Daniel, I'll only be a moment or two,' said Hannah quickly, as she stood up. 'I'm just going to see what the children are up to now school's over. I expect Marie will be leaving soon to go to her mother's.'

She hurried across to the door of the cottage, preoccupied with what he had just said about needing a miracle. She was dazzled by the strong light reflecting off the whitewashed walls, her mind racing as she wondered what she could possibly say to him in reply.

She peered into the shadowy room. Marie was nowhere to be seen, but over by the back window where the light was best, Rose was sitting on a chair reading to her brother. Sam sat cross-legged on the floor, looking up at his sister with a solemn face. He was listening to every word.

'Well, are they reading?' asked Daniel, as she came and sat down again on his right side – the best position for catching the gleams of light from the lough and an occasional sight of the swans.

'Yes, they are,' she replied. 'And a very good advertisement for your school, they are too,' she added firmly. 'I'm quite amazed to see Sam listening so attentively and I did think Rose was reading rather well.'

'Well, like their mother, they're bright,' he said. 'A pity this

country of ours can't offer them somewhat more in the way of schooling,' he went on, an unusual note of bitterness creeping into his voice.

'I owe you some explanations, Hannah,' he said directly, before she had time to reply. 'When I told you of my plan to set up a school some years back, I said I had a pension from an estate where I once worked. That wasn't strictly true. It was my mother who worked for the estate. She was a servant, lovely to look at by all accounts and foolish enough not to resist the advances of a very affluent young man. He was my father, of whom we will not speak,' he said abruptly, pausing and staring away towards the far horizon.

'It was *his* father, and not him, who made some attempt at reparations to my mother's family when she died in childbirth and I lost what little sight I might ever have had. He provided for me in childhood, sending me first to school and later to live with my aunt, Marie's grandmother. It was he who set up a pension for my lifetime.'

Hannah realised suddenly that she did know something of Daniel's background but it had seemed such a long time since he'd told her that his mother had died at his birth and that he'd been brought up by her older sister. She cast her mind back, trying to remember details of what had not seemed all that important at the time.

'It was that pension and your encouragement that let me set up this school in the first place,' Daniel continued. 'Without his

provision and your good sense, the children you saw today would have no possibility of betterment. I do have hopes for them and whether my hopes succeed or fail, I'd still like to share them with you as I did in the first place.'

Hannah was about to say she had done very little to help him apart from listen and write a few letters on his behalf, but he did not even pause. Staring away across the rocky path that led down to the lake, he went on quickly, his voice softer.

'Do you remember the story you told me one of those afternoons when I came to see you, when I first talked about starting the school? You told me of your father's family being evicted from Strathnaver and the way your father and uncle travelled the length of Scotland on "burn water and the kindness of the poor".' He turned towards her and dropped his voice as he quoted her exact words.

For a moment, Hannah couldn't speak, tears jumping unbidden to her eyes. How could she ever forget that story, one her father had told over and over again?

Daniel was repeating the words 'burn water and the kindness of the poor' to himself, as if they had some special significance for him. When he spoke to her again, his tone was firmer.

'If I can somehow find the resources to go on with the school, I have a project in mind as ambitious as your father's wanting to own a farm,' he announced firmly. 'I want to teach these children English. Or Scotch, as they call it in these parts,' he added, laughing wryly, 'so that, whether they go, or stay, they'll

have more possibilities open to them than they have at present.'

'But how would you do that, Daniel?' she asked, baffled at the very idea of it.

'Very easily, my friend, if I *still* had a school to teach in.' He hesitated and then went on: 'If I've had the foolishness to deny all knowledge of English, and indeed of having been educated, because of the nationalistic fervour of my youth, then I think it's time I found some way of reversing that limiting decision.'

Hannah was completely taken aback. He had switched to English, had spoken firmly, and fluently, when she'd never heard him speak anything other than a soft and eloquent Irish. To her amazement, he had moved completely away from the captivating, melodic voice so admired by all who gathered nightly to listen to his stories and poems. He was speaking just as fluently as he spoke in Irish, but his English was more formal in tone and had a much sharper edge than anything she had ever heard him say in Irish. But the real shock for Hannah was that she recognised an accent rarely to be heard in the hills of Donegal.

She thought how the villagers or even her own dear Patrick might react if he heard someone speak in this manner.

'Sure, he's gentry at the least and maybe some lord or other. I've only heard one man talk like that and he was a lord, some visitor or other from England to Stewart of Ards,' she imagined her husband saying.

'You can see there would be a problem for me,' Daniel went on quickly, before she had recovered herself. 'My change of

approach to the language of our overlords could cause problems with people who have known me for a long time. They might find it hard to accommodate their view of me to my new way of speaking.'

'But would you feel you had to speak English outside the classroom?' she asked, now moving to English herself.

It would be a shock indeed for all the friends and neighbours who were just as unaware of this part of Daniel's history as she had been herself.

To her surprise, he did not answer her question directly. Instead, he began to explain how this state of affairs had come about.

'My pension comes from the estate of an English lord you'll probably never have heard of. His family once had land in Donegal, but sold it off at the turn of the last century to concentrate on their English lands. Some of the family are well known for their interest in agriculture and the improvements and innovations they've made and written about.

'Over the years of my life those estates have been divided up between a number of sons. Some flourished, some didn't. Last week, I had a letter telling me that as the pension I received was discretionary and in the gift of the title holder, now deceased, I would have to provide evidence "of my right to continue receiving the aforementioned sum",' he said, the now familiar sharpness of his tone moving towards real bitterness.

'You know yourself, Hannah, that these days, between trying

to improve their land and not always getting their rents, any more than the landlords here, English landlords are looking for savings on their outgoings just as much as the ones in Ireland are. I would imagine it's not even a personal thing. It's probably just some man of business looking to see where economies could be made for his employer.'

'So you could lose your pension?' she asked anxiously.

'To be strictly accurate, I've already lost it. It has been suspended for the moment, until I make an appeal. Meantime, I can afford a bite to eat, but I may not have enough to pay the quarter's rent and it's due at the end of the month.'

Hannah took a deep breath, utterly distressed at the thought of Daniel being without money.

'Don't distress yourself, my dear,' he said quickly, his voice softening, as he moved back to speaking Irish. 'Much worse things have been happening to my countrymen for several centuries now. If all else fails I would at least be eligible for the new workhouse in Dunfanaghy where I could continue speaking Irish and thereby keep hidden the secret of my unfortunate birth.'

Hannah worried about Daniel and the future of the school. It had been very discouraging to begin with, but they had persisted in their efforts and eventually one trader in Dunfanaghy produced a sum of money quite beyond their expectations. At the very same time, Marie finished her training as a teacher and decided that instead of staying in Dublin as she had planned, she would come home to be near the young man with whom she'd fallen in love. At

that point, Marie and Daniel had made their plans, had decided to travel hopefully, and things had gone rather well.

It was a very different situation now. Marie was going and without Daniel's pension there was not enough money to support a master, never mind an assistant. Keeping the school going looked almost impossible and the project of teaching English seemed highly doubtful, if not already condemned to failure.

*

Apart from Sam saying that he was hungry, and *very* thirsty, neither of the children said very much on the way home. The temperature was dropping rapidly as the sun fell yet lower behind the mountain, but the late afternoon was still bright.

Hannah knew she was preoccupied with all she and Daniel had talked about, but now as she picked her way along the rocky path overlooking the lough, she remembered she hadn't had time before school to fetch water from the well. There might be some left in the bucket but even if there was, there was only the remains of yesterday's bread and neither jam nor butter to put on it.

She felt suddenly tired as they turned off the broad track and began to make their way up the well-trodden path to the main group of cottages and outbuildings. The door of their own cottage was open and for a moment she was alarmed.

One of the many things she had to learn when she first arrived in Ardtur was that there were no locks on doors. Neither were there any thieves. Patrick's explanation was that there was nothing worth stealing, but her nearest neighbour, Sophie

O'Donovan, had explained more fully that if there was no one at home a neighbour might come to leave something on the table, an item they had borrowed, or a jug of milk, or butter that had been asked for. As often as not, in a village of open doors, they did not close the door behind them unless it was raining hard or the wind had got up.

There was indeed something sitting on the table as they came in together. Three things, in fact. As the children hung up their schoolbags she lifted the lid on a familiar covered dish and found a large pat of butter.

'You're in luck, children,' she cried. 'Aunt Mary's sent us down our butter. Shall we make some toast with yesterday's bread?' she asked, as she peered at the other large item, her own baking bowl that contained chopped-up potatoes.

For a moment she was puzzled. The potatoes were not peeled but they had been cut in pieces.

'Of course,' she said to herself, smiling as she remembered the message Daniel had made the two boys memorise earlier in the day when they'd sat in the sun at playtime. She tried to recall it: *You've divided up a whole lot of numbers and planted some rows of words … if your potatoes do as well you'll have plenty to put aside for the winter…* Well, something like that, she decided, as Sam asked if he could fill the kettle for her and Rose began to fetch mugs from the dresser.

A moment later, Patrick appeared at the door, his face streaked with sweat, a second, slightly smaller baking bowl in his

hands.

'Da, are ye plantin'?' cried Rose.

'Can I come and help you, Da? asked Sam. 'When we've had our tea and toast,' he added quickly.

Patrick kissed them all and then met Hannah's gaze.

'We got finished quicker than we thought and yer man let us go early,' he explained, 'an' I foun' yer father's letter waitin' on the table. Ye've not looked at it yet,' he went on, glancing at the brown envelope, sitting just where he had left it. 'He wants us at the end of next week.'

Hannah's heart sank. 'So soon?

'Aye, well it's not far off the usual. The season's a wee bit earlier in your part of the world, but I thought I'd better make a start on the tatties, seein' we've a wee bit more groun' since old Hughie died.'

She nodded and took the water bucket from Sam who had fetched it from the cupboard. There was just about a kettle full left in the bottom. The seed potatoes and the plans for next week could all wait till they'd stirred up the fire, made the tea and sat round the table exchanging the news of the day from Casheltown and Tullygobegley, over toast and Aunt Mary's butter.

Chapter 5

Cutting the seed potatoes to create an 'eye' in each portion was not a very skilled job, but Patrick, always cautious by nature, and knowing the children would want to help as soon as they came home, had made sure they were done properly by cutting the pieces himself and leaving them ready on the table.

Now, when he went back to the work of planting the main crop, Rose and Sam followed him, knowing exactly what they had to do. As he turned over the soil, they would place the cut portions, eye side up, where he pointed. Without their help the continuous bending would have made the job both painful and exhausting.

Hannah was grateful that the children were now old enough to help him with the planting. As she began to clear the table and think what needed doing next, she was equally grateful that she had an empty kitchen. There was quite enough to do to catch up on the day's tasks, but now she also had to give her mind to all the extra things that needed doing to get ready for Patrick's departure.

Part of her mind was indeed focused on what had to be done right now – making up the fire, fetching drinking water and washing water and making champ for their supper – but, try as she might, she could not stop thinking about the experiences of the morning.

She had been quite amazed at Daniel's capacity to teach so effectively despite his disability. She'd always assumed Marie had done most of the work and Daniel had confined himself to Irish history and storytelling. Then she thought of how amazed she'd been to find he had such a command of English. But, most of all, what simply would not leave her mind was the unbearable thought that should he not manage to get his pension reinstated, he'd not only have to give up the school, and his dream of teaching his pupils English, but he might have no option but to go into the workhouse.

And then her eyes fell on the napkins, still waiting to be hemmed.

The napkins were the least of her worries. It was true that the draper, expected tomorrow, would not pay for an incomplete dozen, but given the rest of her month's work, baled and wrapped ready in the dust and smoke-free safety of the bedroom, that was no cause for worry. She'd almost finished her full assignment. He would take all she had done, make a note of the missing four and pay her for that complete dozen when he came next time.

When he handed over the money for this month's work, she'd already have enough to pay for the meal and flour they bought regularly, the milk from her neighbour and the butter from Aunt Mary. The delayed income on the final dozen would not leave her short this month.

She took a deep breath and tried to collect herself. She reminded herself that it was not just a question of money. She

always felt anxious and unsettled when Patrick was going away and this was the way it usually showed itself. She'd simply worry quite unnecessarily about something or other.

'Surely, after all these years, I should be used to it,' she said aloud in the empty kitchen.

Of the two of them, she was the more practical one. She was certainly better at ensuring they always had enough money for food and the essential clothing for Patrick she couldn't make herself, the heavy trousers and the underwear he needed till the weather got warmer, the boots that got such hard wear, the cap he wore both winter and summer.

Compared to most of their neighbours, especially those with five or six children, they were well off. She saved in the summer when Patrick sent home money every week and had it by her if there was no work for him over the winter. Of course, this last winter there had actually been some work on the roof of the farmhouse at Tullygobegley so she had not had to dip into so much of last summer's savings.

Sometimes too, her father sent her a gift of money after the harvest, but this she never used. The gold coins rested in a small fabric bag she'd made for them and were kept in a box that had a place in the hard earth under their bed.

Patrick had smiled and shaken his head some years back when she'd asked him to dig a hole to hide the old wooden box. Sometimes, since then, he would make her laugh by suggesting some extravagance like a new dress for her, or a waistcoat for

himself. Then, knowing he was joking, she would say: '*But if I did that I'd have to get you to dig under the bed.*'

She smiled, feeling easier, as she peeled the last of the potatoes for supper and went outside for the handful of scallions to chop up and mix in with them when they were cooked and mashed with Aunt Mary's butter.

'Come on, Hannah,' she said to herself, as she waved to Patrick and the children at the far end of the garden. 'Why don't you just accept that you wish he didn't have to go, so you could share your bed every night and have the comfort of his arms?'

*

Supper was later than usual that evening and both children were so tired they could hardly keep their eyes open while they ate. They'd done very well, Patrick insisted. Sure, they were nearly half the way down one side and now they had the whole weekend ahead of them. There was no school and he would have his two helpers for both days. Sure, wasn't that just great?

Rose and Sam smiled at him wearily, looked pleased and made no protests whatever about going to bed.

'I don't think we'll be far behind them,' said Patrick, as she came back from tucking them in.

'You're right there, love. I don't think I could thread a needle this evening, never mind hem another napkin.'

'Aye, ye look tired. Did ye have a busy day?' he said gently. 'I wondered where ye were when the house was empty for ye said last night ye'd a batch to finish.'

She looked across at him. His face was still tanned even after the winter, his hair as dark as his eyes that looked straight at her, as they always did, with that gentleness she remembered from their very first meeting when she was only seventeen.

'I'm going to miss you so much, my love,' she said, suddenly, surprising herself.

'An' sure, d'ye not think I'm goin' to miss you just as much?' he replied briskly. 'It wou'dn't be much good, wou'd it, if it didn't matter all that much one way or another?'

She laughed and shook her head. 'You're quite right, but I'd love to have you home all the year round.'

'Aye, well. I'd need no persuadin', but sure what is there by way of work here? An' even if we were in Scotland an' me not an educated man, I'd still have to travel about the place,' he said, his voice dropping.

'Being educated is not the be all and end all of a man. There are other things just as important,' she said firmly.

He just looked at her as he bent down to the hearth to smoor the fire with turves, so it would stay alight all night.

She watched him placing the turves methodically with his habitual look of total concentration, then got to her feet and lit the small oil lamp to take them to bed.

*

In the end she told him the whole story of Daniel and the school and how he wanted to teach his pupils English. Sitting by the fire, on their few remaining evenings, she didn't even put out

her hand for her sewing bag, but sat enjoying a mug of tea with him as she waited to see if he had yet more questions to ask.

'An' if he could get his pension back, wou'd he be able to pay an assistant to take the place o' Marie?'

'Well, it would be a start, but then the income from the children is very variable,' she said steadily. 'You know Rose and Sam have their two pennies each, every week, and the turf's not a problem, but there are other children who would be less regular and there must be some can only pay at certain times of the year when there's less flour and meal to buy.'

'Aye, it depends, doesn't it?' he said thoughtfully. 'An' if yer man were to put the rent up, sure that has to come first, or the family's out on the street! Have ye any idea what to do to help him? Sure, you're far better at these things than I am. I wou'dn't have any idea what to do.'

His face was a picture of distress and she longed to be able to tell him it was all going to be all right. But she couldn't do that. He'd been honest and she would try to do the same.

'Well, I can certainly write letters for him. But I'd need to know who to write to and what to say,' she began, laughing. 'It's not so much my command of Irish as having to use the right legal phrases and so on. I thought I'd ask our friends in Ramelton. Joseph and Catriona know all the professional people, the doctor, and the land steward, and the minister. I'm sure there must be a solicitor they know as well who would be able to tell me how to go about it.'

'Ye might have to go under the bed for that,' he said promptly, a small smile flickering across his face. 'But it might be worth it. Wou'd ye like to go back to the teachin' yerself, like ye did afore I stole ye away?'

'I hadn't thought about it before,' she confessed. 'But like I told you Daniel hoped I might be able to help him out.'

'I know what yer father wou'd say,' he went on quickly. 'That money is meant for you, Hannah, to use in any way you want.' He looked at her, his usually mobile face almost stiff with concentration, his eyes sharply focused on her. 'Say the word and I'll dig it out fer you in the morning.'

'But, Patrick, we might need that money,' she protested. 'What would we do if one of the children needed a doctor? Or if you had an accident, heaven forbid, and couldn't work …'

'Hannah, you know I'm not a religious man an' I only go to Mass now an' again to keep Aunt Mary and the priest happy, but I think you always know what wou'd be the right thing. Just you send up a wee prayer and you'll not go far wrong. An' I'll do all I can to help, for Daniel's a good man and I know you're a great teacher yerself … sure, didn't you teach me an' those other young fellas who were with me then long years ago at the farm? Some o' them had never even held a pencil, or a pen, in their lives before.'

To her great distress, Hannah felt tears stream down her face. She wondered if perhaps, in the firelight, they might not show, but what Patrick did next was unambiguous. He came and put his arms round her, took out his large, crumpled handkerchief,

wiped away her tears and held her close.

'Not a word now,' he said softly. 'We'll go and sleep on it and see what the light of day shows us in the mornin'. You do the lamp an' I'll see to the fire.'

*

The remaining days flew by. The potatoes were planted, the draper came and collected Hannah's consignment of napkins and left her a bale of new ones. Before she'd even counted them, she mended the older pair of Patrick's working trousers and reinforced the new pair he'd bought in Derry on his way home last autumn. She baked wheaten bread and oatcakes that would supplement what food the men could buy on the journey and threaded new shoelaces into well-polished boots.

Patrick himself went round the house looking for jobs that might need doing. He borrowed a ladder and replaced some worn straw rope on the thatch of the roof ridge just to be sure it would not suffer with summer storms, then he took the donkey and cart and collected turf from his piece of bog to replenish the stack by the gable and build it up as high as it would go in case of bad weather.

One morning he got up very early indeed. He needed to walk over to Churchill to look for the carrier he knew there and catch him before he set out on his day's work. For some years now, Keiran Murphy had brought his wagon over to the old churchyard by St Columbkille's tiny, ruined church at the head of Lough Gartan. There he waited till the men from round about who were

bound for the Derry boat came with their families. It was the custom when the men were going off for many long months for the family to walk with them and keep them company as far as the church, join with them in asking a blessing and then say their goodbyes.

Now, Patrick paid Keiran a deposit out of the money his father-in-law had sent him and when the day and time were agreed, walked back to Ardtur knowing it would not be long before Hannah would be back there with him to say their farewells.

Hannah had always found both parting and the accompanying rituals hard to bear. She agreed bidding goodbye to the men bound for Scotland was not as sad as when families went to a place like The Bridge of Tears at the back of Muckish, to say what would probably be a final farewell to immigrants bound for America, but she still found the parting weighed heavy, surrounded by weeping women and distraught children.

Patrick had long ago agreed with her that the children should not come, but would go to school as usual, but she knew he needed her to be there with him, particularly so she could meet all his workmates, some of whom were going for the first time. These men and boys would be his constant companions for the next six or seven months. So she would go, she would try not to cry, but as the time grew shorter she longed for the parting to be safely over and Patrick's first letter to her, written on the Derry boat, secure in the pocket of her apron.

*

The April departure day was cloudy with the odd drifting shower, but there was no cold and the air was so still that the early evening crossing from Derry would probably be flat calm.

As Hannah walked back alone from the stone-built oratory where each man had laid a tiny item on the altar – a coin, or a woven cross, or a card with a prayer on it – she felt a dragging weariness. She blamed it on the early rise and the long walk, but a mile or so from the ancient churchyard she felt a familiar dampness between her legs.

She sighed and knew the first thing she had to do when she got home was to fold a pad of old, torn fabric from the supply she kept in the bedroom and put her stained knickers to soak in cold water before she tried to wash them.

She was glad the door was still closed when she walked wearily up the last rocky slope. No letter on the table, no offering from a neighbour, nothing to prevent her making herself comfortable and then sitting by the fire with a mug of tea.

She did what was necessary and sat down gratefully. Comfortable now, the pain in her back eased by a cushion carefully placed, she sat looking into the fire and found herself overwhelmed with sadness. For days now she'd been aware that her monthly bleeding was late. She'd had to keep reminding herself not to tell Patrick. If she had told him, he would have been so pleased, and so hopeful, for he had long wanted them to add to their small family. But it was not to be. At least she had

not raised his hopes. There was no harm done.

Patrick's wish to add to their family was not the familiar pressure of a man wanting sons, like her father had, it was a longing for the family he himself had never had. His mother had died in childbirth and he had been brought up an only child, by his Aunt Mary, who had never married. He had longed for brothers and sisters then. It was some time after they were married before Rose and Sam appeared and he had been so delighted.

But their arrival had not happened easily. There were delays and difficulties. Hannah had miscarried several times. She had been reassured by friends and neighbours that miscarrying once, twice, or even three times, before a first child was not unusual. But when that happened to her, Patrick was beside himself with distress.

Sadly, even after the safe arrivals of Rose and Sam there were further miscarriages. That was why she'd been so hoping for this last week or more, that she might carry a third child while Patrick was in Scotland. That would have been such good news to share in their letters. But the stain had made it clear. She was simply late. There was no pregnancy to celebrate.

Suddenly, she felt overwhelmed with weariness and sadness, feeling the emptiness of the house and the long months ahead before Patrick's return. Whatever this year of 1845 might bring she could now be sure it would not bring the longed-for third child.

Chapter 6

It was a mild, sunny morning a few days later when Hannah, hearing the sound of footsteps, looked up from her sewing and found a tall stranger standing at the open door clearly deciding whether to rap with his knuckles on the wood itself or to use the impressive knocker, the work of a local blacksmith and a gift brought as a welcome present from her Scots friend, Catriona, who lived in Ramelton.

'Good morning, do come in,' she said, standing up, immediately curious as to what such a well-dressed stranger could possibly want.

He returned her greeting so hesitantly, with so brief an apology for his inadequate Irish as he doffed his hat, that she laughed.

'Well, your lack of Irish will not stand between us,' she replied, switching to English, and observing the look of profound relief that crossed his rather angular but handsome face.

'Were you looking for someone?' she asked, unable to contain her curiosity any longer.

'Yes, I was. A Mister Patrick McGinley. I have some friends in Dunfanaghy and one of them mentioned that he spoke some "Scotch" as they called it, and so would be able to tell me about the conditions here. Specifically, the work available – or lack of it – for those with very small acreages. I should explain,'

he went on quickly, 'that I work part-time for a charitable organisation concerned with the economic difficulties you've been experiencing in Ireland, particularly since the famine year back in 1838. If we knew more about the causes of the problems we might be in a better position to help.'

'My goodness, how splendid,' replied Hannah, as she waved him to the other armchair. 'I'm afraid the bad news is that my husband is already in Scotland for the harvesting season, but the better news is that my English is much better than his and I may be able to help you. If I can't answer your questions then I'm sure I know someone who can.'

She smiled to herself when she saw an undisguised look of relief spread across his face. *Poor man*, she thought, *this is not exactly the sort of place he's familiar with.* In the way he spoke, there was more than a trace of an accent that spoke of formal education. She was already wondering what he and Daniel might make of each other.

'Now, please make yourself at home. I was about to make a mug of tea,' she began. 'I hope you'll eat a piece of cake before you ask your questions. How did you get here, by the way?' she asked, noticing for the first time his boots, highly polished but not exactly in keeping with his very well-cut tweed suit.

'I walked,' he said smiling and relaxing somewhat, 'But only from Churchill,' he added. 'My friends in Dunfanaghy lent me their pony and trap, but they said it was too rough going for the mare beyond the village. I think they envisaged me being

“cowped into the ditch” as we might say at home,’ he ended, grinning.

‘And home is?’

‘Yorkshire. A big, old house outside Pickering. My family are clothing manufacturers, have been for a long time. I have three brothers working with me, so it’s possible for me to be away at certain times of the year.’

He stood up again as she set her sewing aside and reached for the kettle. ‘Forgive me for not introducing myself sooner. Jonathan Hancock, at your service, ma’am,’ he said with a smile as he held out his hand. ‘Would I be right in thinking you come from somewhat further north on that same island across the water? Across the border, perhaps?’

She laughed as she filled the kettle from the enamelled bucket and hung it over the fire, thinking as she did of the way in which people put together the clues to make a stranger less strange, exactly as they had both just done.

‘Yes, I suppose I still have my Scots accent when I speak English,’ she said, as the thought occurred to her. ‘I lived near Dundrennan, in Galloway, and my husband is there right now working for my father.’

‘And you are here on your own?’ he asked, surprised.

She shook her head. ‘No, I’m here because we have two children at school. They’re still too young to make that long journey, even setting aside the expense,’ she explained, as she brought mugs and a jug of milk to the table.

'And there is a school? I'd not heard about that.'

'That's not entirely surprising,' she replied, turning towards him as she took out the cake tin and cut him a generous slice. 'It's not a National School, not up here; it's what the Irish call a hedge school. Do you know about them?'

'No, I've never heard of a hedge school,' he said slowly. 'Surely they can't be in hedges!'

'Some were, apparently,' she replied, 'but, fairly, more were in abandoned houses, or sheep folds that had been given a sod roof, or a covering of layers of branches. Have you heard of the Penal Laws?' she asked gently, as she heated the teapot.

'Oh yes, I *do* know about those,' he said. 'They discriminated against Catholics in particular and everyone else in general, other than Anglicans, of course, so they couldn't have churches, or chapels, or priests, or meeting houses. There's a Mass rock in a field near where my cousins live, not far from Creeslough. I asked them if it was still in use and they said it was, but apparently, the law has either been removed or has simply faded away. Must have done, for there's now a chapel nearby,' he said, as she helped him to a slice of cake.

'I don't think they've been repealed,' she replied dubiously, 'but certainly there are chapels and priests, though some remote areas have no money for a building. That's mainly why Mass rocks are still being used. But the reason I asked,' she went on, 'is because the Penal Laws *also* discriminated against Catholic *education*. They weren't allowed to have schools even where

there might have been the money to create one. So people had to improvise. They're still doing it. Though I should say the "authorities" whoever they might be, do now just turn a blind eye. There's a hedge school in the next townland run by a friend of mine and his niece in his own cottage,' she said. 'Or at least there is at this moment. They have financial problems and may have to close.'

She paused as she poured the tea and then turned towards him. 'I'll tell you anything I can that you want to know but if I'm defeated I'll find reinforcements for you. I think perhaps you've come just at the right moment.'

*

The more they talked, the more sure she was that Jonathan Hancock was going to be able to help. However different his life might be, he seemed to have a capacity to understand very different situations, and he quickly revealed that he knew perfectly well how much, or how little, land was needed to feed a family if there was no other source of income.

'Do you mind telling me how much land you have yourself?' he asked politely.

'No, of course not,' she said. 'I can see perfectly well why you need to know, but I do get confused with the Irish system of measurement, especially the roods and perches. At home, we had the five-acre field and the ten, or the twenty, so I can visualise those. But the small measures here are beyond me. But I do know that last year the landlord did transfer a piece of land from a

cottage that became derelict when its elderly owner died. At least a rood, I was told. He put up the rent, of course, but it means we have an extra piece of potato garden. We can walk round it later if you like. My husband and the children planted the potatoes before he went to Scotland.'

Jonathan looked away and for some moments he didn't speak. She saw such a look of sadness pass across his face that she forgot what she was going to say about their nearest neighbours and the struggle they had to feed their much larger families on the smaller patches of garden they had.

She waited patiently as he produced a pencil and notebook. He put it down on the edge of the table but did not begin to write.

'I've read a good deal about Ireland from various travellers but I had no idea how difficult it might be,' he began. 'My relatives both in Creeslough and in Armagh are all landowners, and while they're kind-hearted people and generous in their own way, some of them just don't appreciate the situation many of their tenants are in,' he began, his body tight with tension. 'They can't see that only radical change will remove the risk that all these people live with.'

'If you mean political change, I'm afraid I'm not very well informed there,' Hannah came back at him. 'I've always felt that the lawmakers were too far away from the problems. I could never see how their deliberations could meet the situation if they'd never had experience of it for themselves.'

To her surprise, he laughed – a genuine, warm-hearted laugh.

'You would be so welcome at our local Meeting,' he said, enthusiastically. 'There are some wise people there and they insist that the first thing you must do, if you want to help people, is to go and look at the situation and try to see it from their perspective. That's what the Friends have tried to do; that's why I'm here.'

'So you're a Friend, are you?' she asked, beaming at him. She knew a little about the Quakers and their principles. 'I thought you might be. I have some cousins in Scotland who go to Meetings in Dumfries. I do know a little about your beliefs though my own family were Covenanters, good-hearted and kind, in my father's case, but usually very rigid and unbending.'

The talk moved on as they shared their very different lives and activities. It was quite some time before Jonathan paused and picked up his notebook.

'I think you've just answered a question for me I didn't know I needed to ask,' he said with a smile. 'Here I was, focused on information, like acreages, but what I really need to know is how the Central Committee could help improve matters. In this situation, in this place, at this time. What most needs doing right here? Now.'

'I think I *can* help you there,' she said, intrigued by the change in his mood, 'but might I suggest that first you begin making whatever notes you need to make, while I go and find some eggs to make us a bite of lunch.'

*

Jonathan had protested politely that he couldn't possibly impose upon her for lunch, but by that point in their conversation she was quite at ease with him. She remembered what she had once read about the Quaker view of life, their commitment to 'plain speaking' and to honesty in all their dealings. That had always seemed so appropriate to her.

Suddenly, as she searched in the outhouse for hidden eggs, she remembered her eldest sister explaining to her that Quakers would not swear oaths but only give their word. For a long time, she said, they had not been able to be Members of Parliament because of their unwillingness to swear. Her sister couldn't remember who was responsible for solving that problem, but 'affirmation' came to be accepted as the equivalent of 'swearing'. It was, of course, in keeping with the simple Quaker doctrine, that 'My *Yea* is my *Yea*, and my *Nay* is my *Nay*'. The first Quaker Members of Parliament, mostly Scottish, were then able to take their seats.

Jonathan was scribbling vigorously as she came back into the cottage by the back door, three brown eggs in one hand and a covered dish of butter in the other.

'I have to confess I was hungry,' he said later, as he wiped his plate with a piece of bread, but I had not the slightest expectation of anyone giving me such a nice lunch, or indeed any lunch at all. Thank you so much. I do hope there is something I might be able to do in return.'

She laughed and pointed to his notebook. 'I haven't got

anything written down, *but* I do have a list in my head,' she said. 'Could I share your practice of plain speaking and tell you what is on my list?'

'I should be delighted,' he said firmly. 'I've only got two more days here and then I'm due to go to Armagh.' His voice dropped markedly. 'I'll probably get back in the autumn, but you can always write to me, care of my home address if there's something else I can do. My housekeeper will always know where I am. Now, tell me more.'

*

After lunch a heavy shower of sleet came sweeping down the valley. It cleared as quickly as it had come, but one look at the sky and Hannah knew she'd better warn her visitor that he stood to get thoroughly soaked if he didn't get off the mountain before rain settled in for the rest of the day.

'The children might just get home dry from school but with them I can at least change their clothes by the fire,' she said, looking him up and down as he stood up, put his notebook in his pocket, and nodded.

'I'd like to have met them, Hannah, but I might manage that another time. This area of Donegal and the area round the city of Armagh is my personal research territory because I have family connections there. I've been to both places often enough, but I haven't yet any contacts for this work in Armagh. Do you know Armagh at all?'

'No', she said, sadly. 'I came straight to Donegal on the Derry

boat, so I've seen nothing of the rest of Ulster. I'd love to travel, but I haven't even travelled in Scotland, just from Dundrennan to Gretna Green and then along the coast north and west to a little place called Cairnryan. One of my brothers, Matthew, married into a boat-building family nearby. He gave us a bed for the night and wished us joy on our marriage. It was very good of him for I hadn't seen him for years. He's the youngest of the brothers, but still much older than I am,' she said, as she walked to the door with him and looked up again at the threatening sky.

'I don't know how to thank you,' he said. 'I've learnt more from you in one morning than I've learnt in most of my reading and all my efforts to study reports from the Central Committee. I shall write and tell you what I've been able to arrange. Please,' he said solemnly, 'will you keep me informed of anything you think I might be able to do. I do hope we'll meet again.' He held out his hand as a few large drops of melted sleet dripped from the thatch.

'Good luck,' she said. 'I'll do anything I possibly can to help.'

He raised a hand in salute and moved swiftly down the rocky track, which now glistened with moisture.

*

She moved around the kitchen, clearing the table, bringing out mugs for the children's expected tea. What an extraordinary thing to happen. Even before she had worked out exactly what needed to be done to resolve the problems of the school and Daniel's threatened income, help had appeared in the most unlikely guise.

He'd given her the name of an elderly Quaker who had been

a solicitor and was still entirely capable of advising her what to say and what to write in order to see if there might be hope for restoring Daniel's pension. He'd also assured her that reading books, pencils and paper could be provided quite quickly for the school and that she would receive at the same time a list of educational aids, like maps and copybooks, from a Quaker-run organisation in Dublin who would provide them free of charge.

As she refilled the kettle and took up her sewing, she wondered what Patrick and her father would say when they heard her news. Patrick would probably say: 'Sure, haven't you the lucky touch an' always have had,' while her father would laugh and say: 'Sure, didn't you always get what you wanted but never let it spoil you.' As for Daniel, he might not say very much at all, but she would look forward to seeing the anxiety melt away when she shared with him all that had happened since a smartly dressed stranger had knocked at the door in the middle of the morning.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.