
O'Hara's Legacy

by Leigh Michaels

copyright 1986, 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved

CHAPTER ONE

IT was the first really warm day of spring, with the daffodils poking their golden crowns through the snow that remained in shaded corners here and there. The soft breeze tugged at Kelly's honey-blonde hair.

She shook her head in wonder at the suddenness of the change. Just last week, it had been bitterly cold, and the snow had still been a foot deep across the land. Just last week, when they had laid Patrick O'Hara to rest on this little hill, it had still been winter.

She stooped beside the freshly-turned earth of the new grave. A few more weeks and they would cover this scar in the earth with sod, and then she could bring some flowers out to plant. And next autumn she'd put daffodil bulbs beside Patrick's grave, so that in the spring...

She brushed tears away and tried to smile. He had loved daffodils. She had read the Wordsworth poem to him so many times that she knew it by heart. "*And then my heart with pleasure fills, and dances with the daffodils*," she murmured. "I hope there are lots of flowers in heaven for you, Patrick."

He'd been such a funny old man, she thought. He could bark with anger when something displeased him; he'd been the terror of the nurses on the hospital floor. Kelly had been frantic the first time they'd sent her to sit and read to him. "I'm a volunteer in this hospital," she'd protested to the head nurse. "I'm not a battalion of combat troops!"

Once inside his room, she had been startled by the brightness of his blue eyes. In the wasted, drawn face, they looked like polished sapphires. "Well, what are you here for?" he had barked. "Got the palsy, girl? You're shaking like a leaf."

Kelly had been too startled to answer.

"Can't a man have a little privacy, even in a hospital room?"

Kelly had gathered her scattered courage. "Is that why you're so nasty? Every patient they've brought in to share your room has asked to be moved within a day."

He had stared at her for a long moment, and his eyes had sharpened to daggers. Kelly had stood her ground, trying to stop her knees from shaking.

Then, abruptly, he had started to laugh. It was a creaky, rusty sound, as if he didn't do it much. "Well, it works," he'd said. "I get a private room, without paying for it. Come in, come in. What's your name?"

O'Hara's Legacy

by Leigh Michaels

**copyright 1986, 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved**

“Kelly Sheridan.” She had found her way to the chair beside his bed, not taking her eyes off him.

“With two good Irish names like those, you ought to be a redhead.” It had sounded like an order.

“I don’t plan to dye my hair to please you, Mr. O’Hara.” Then she had swallowed hard at her own impertinence.

He had loved it. In the next two weeks, as his health fluctuated and he lay in the hospital bed, Kelly had spent hours reading to him, and listening to him talk about his cat and the old days. He wanted to go home, he said, but there was no one to take care of him there. And they both knew, though they never said it, that for Patrick O’Hara, going home was a dream that would never come true.

The day they had moved him to the nursing home had been the worst, she thought. He had clung to her hand, trying to thank her, and for the first time she had seen the gleam of tears in the old man’s eyes.

She hadn’t said anything to him then, but when she’d turned up at the nursing home the next day, with his favorite book in her hand, he had cried, unashamedly.

They said he’d died of congestive heart failure, but Kelly knew better. He’d made up his mind that he’d rather be here, on the quiet hill surrounded by warm breezes and daffodils, than lying in that hard mechanical bed, with life support systems standing by. He had quietly resigned himself from life, and set about dying...

“What happened to your cat, Patrick?” she asked quietly. “You never told me where you left Rapunzel. Or did she die, too, and you just didn’t want to admit that she was gone?”

She brushed a hand across the small marble headstone. The date of death had not yet been chiseled in; she hoped that someone would take care of that. He’d had a family, somewhere, but he’d never talked about his relatives. At least, she assumed he’d had a family. There had been a woman at his funeral, one Kelly had never seen before. A white-haired, distinguished woman in her fifties—a sister, perhaps? Or an old love? Kelly hadn’t wanted to intrude; she had stayed on the fringe of the small group of people and left as soon as the ceremonies were over. After all, she had no real place there, among Patrick’s people.

She rubbed a finger across the slick surface of the stone. Well, if the date remained uncarved, she’d take care of it herself, just as soon as she had a few extra dollars to pay for the work.

O'Hara's Legacy

by Leigh Michaels

copyright 1986, 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved

At any rate, she told herself firmly, it was time to stop sitting about the cemetery and get over to the hospital. Even if she was only a volunteer, the nurses still depended on her to show up on time. She picked her bicycle up from the graveled path and pedaled off trying to make up for lost time.

Patrick would have smiled at that, too, she thought. He often had chided her for putting things off till the last moment and then arriving at a dead run. "Kelly Green," he would say, "you're going to give yourself a nervous breakdown, doing that." And Kelly would smile at the nickname, and promise to plan ahead next time.

She was still pinning her hair up into a roll at the nape of her neck when the elevator delivered her to the nurses' station.

The dark-haired young woman at the desk looked up from a patient's chart with a smile. "I knew that had to be you, Kelly," she said. "The elevator only has that particular hurried wheeze when you're on board."

"Thanks a lot, Cathy." She put the last hairpin in and reached into a closet for the red jacket that marked her as an official volunteer. "Anything special to be done today?"

"Oh, Mrs. Ainsley's being a pill. She's just at the awkward stage—enough better that she doesn't need a nurse at her fingertips every moment, but still feeling too awful to entertain herself."

"I can't wait," Kelly said. She'd tried to keep Mrs. Ainsley company before.

"And one of the florists dumped off a whole truckload of cut flowers. Why, I have no idea. But if you'd like to practice your flower arranging..."

"Can I do that instead of sitting with Mrs. Ainsley?" Kelly asked, bright-eyed.

"Sorry. The head nurse said the sour comes with the sweet. Oh, you had a phone call, too. He wanted you to call back." She flipped through a stack of message slips.

"He?" Kelly questioned. She took the slip of paper with a frown. Who would be calling her at the hospital?

"It wasn't your beloved Allen," Cathy said. "I've talked to him so often I'd recognize him in my sleep. Here it is."

Kelly ignored her. Cathy had never liked Allen. "Roger Bradford, of Bradford and Parrish? That's Allen's father's law firm. I wonder..."

"Well, why don't you call, so we can all stop wondering?" Cathy recommended, and set the phone on to the counter where Kelly could reach it. "Maybe it's a job offer."

O'Hara's Legacy
by Leigh Michaels
copyright 1986, 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved

"I couldn't be so lucky. I've gone six months now without a paying job—wouldn't you think something would turn up soon?"

"That's one thing about nursing," Cathy mused. "The pay isn't great, but there are always jobs."

"I'm just about to go back to school."

Cathy grinned. "What's the matter? Are you afraid to leave Allen alone over in the College of Law?"

"Not at all. I'm not the jealous sort. But I'm thinking of taking up something useful." She paused, and then added dryly, "Welding, maybe."

A dulcet voice on the other end of the line reported that she had reached Bradford and Parrish, Attorneys at Law.

"Kelly Sheridan returning Mr. Bradford's call," she said crisply.

"Very good. Maybe you could be a secretary," Cathy applauded.

Kelly cupped her hand over the phone. "You know I've tried. Do you know how many secretaries are out of work in this town? Good ones, too—that type and file and everything."

"Miss Sheridan?" It was a new voice, thin and reedy. She hoped that Roger Bradford didn't spend much time in a courtroom; he'd put all the jurors to sleep.

"Did you know Mr. Patrick O'Hara?" The man's question was sharp, and for a moment Kelly panicked.

"Of course I did," she said.

"And did you take it upon yourself to visit him in his last illness, and did he even at times refer to you as—let me see..."

"Kelly Green," she supplied irritably. She didn't like the tone of these questions. Surely there was no law against visiting an old man in a nursing home!

"Miss Green—I'm so sorry, I meant to say Miss Sheridan. Could you come to my office this afternoon?"

"Give me one good reason," she said, a little tartly.

O'Hara's Legacy
by Leigh Michaels
copyright 1986, 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved

Roger Bradford laughed. "I'm sorry if it sounded like an inquisition," he said. "It's just that Patrick wasn't very clear about precisely who you were, and I've been looking for you for a couple of days. We'll be reading the will this afternoon, you see."

Kelly blinked. "Patrick named me in his will?"

"He probably left you the cat," Cathy muttered under her breath.

"I'm not at liberty to discuss it further at this time," the lawyer said smoothly. "Shall we say, four o'clock?"

"I'll be there." She put the phone down, feeling a little dazed. "Patrick—"

"I heard," Cathy said. "I would never have dreamed that he owned anything of value."

"Oh, I don't know. He was a wise old guy when it came to saving money." She smiled a little, thinking about Patrick's never-fail method to save the cost of a private room.

"Whatever it is, I hope it's worth all the time you spent with him."

"Cathy!" She was horrified. "I visited him because I liked to, not because I hoped he'd leave me something."

"Good. Because you'll probably end up with his complete set of William Wordsworth."

"Don't forget the cat," Kelly recommended, and went off with a lighter heart to read to Mrs. Ainsley.

The smell of spring had even reached downtown, and the small trees that lined the city streets seemed to have an aura of hazy green. In another two weeks, the leaves would have burst forth in full glory, but right now there was only promise. The gutters were running full with melting snow as the last of winter disappeared. If she closed her eyes, Kelly thought, she could pretend to be out in the country, beside a babbling brook.

She had never been to the law office before. Allen was just starting law school, and in another couple of years he would join his father's firm, as soon as he passed his bar exams. He'd practically grown up in that office, but to Kelly it was a new world. Something of a scary one at that, especially since Allen's father thought that a first-year law student was far too young to commit himself to marriage. She wasn't even really sure that Allen had told his parents much about her.

O'Hara's Legacy

by Leigh Michaels

copyright 1986, 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved

There was plenty of time for that, she thought. They were in love, but they weren't foolish enough to rush into anything. They had both seen young marriages crack under the strain when the wife worked in order to put the husband through school, or when the new couple had to depend on their parents for support. No, it made more sense to wait till Allen was finished at school. Then they could be married, have their own apartment, begin their new lives...

Frankly, Kelly told herself, she was glad that it was Roger Bradford, and not John Parrish, that she would be seeing today. She didn't want to complicate things for herself and Allen.

Absorbed in her thoughts, she almost missed the entrance to the parking lot, and at the last minute she had to swerve her bicycle across two lanes of traffic. Brakes squealed behind her, and the bumper of a dark-blue sports car seemed to brush against her back wheel as she started her turn. A man's head popped out of the car window, and he yelled across the street, "You ought to be locked up!"

She shrugged, trying to look suitably apologetic. It hadn't been exactly polite of her to turn without signaling, but there was no reason for him to be so upset, she thought. After all, he'd been following her too closely, or he wouldn't have had any trouble stopping. He must be a Type A personality, she diagnosed. Nervous, fretful, intense; a perfectionist who was always trying to stay five minutes ahead of himself. The kind who would die of a heart attack before he was fifty.

But nice-looking, she added to herself. His hair had gleamed black in the sunshine, his face showed a nice, even winter tan, and from that brief glimpse of his broad shoulders she could tell that he was powerfully built. Too bad that such a handsome man has to be afflicted with an abrasive personality, she thought. *I'll bet if he'd just slow down and smile he'd be charming.*

She locked her bike up carefully on the sidewalk and entered the quiet, elegant office suite. Patrick would have applauded, she thought as she checked her watch. She was two minutes early.

A heavy door across the reception room opened, and Allen came out. He looked astonished at the sight of Kelly, and came quickly across the room to her. "What are you doing here?" he demanded in a conspiratorial whisper. "It's not very smart of you, that's sure. If Dad finds out you're sitting here waiting for me..."

"Don't tell him," Kelly recommended, "because I'm not waiting for you. I didn't expect to see you here."

O'Hara's Legacy

by Leigh Michaels

copyright 1986, 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved

"I'm doing some research for Dad. If you're not here because of me, then why—?"

A tall, bald-headed man had opened another office door, and now he said, "Miss Sheridan? Come in, please." Allen looked astounded as she walked across to Roger Bradford's office.

The attorney indicated a chair and told the secretary to bring her a cup of coffee.

After a few minutes of small talk, he saw her glance at her wristwatch. "I'm sorry to delay you, Miss Sheridan," he said smoothly. "We must wait for Patrick's cousin to arrive before we can read the will."

The woman at the funeral, Kelly thought, and congratulated herself. "Patrick never talked about his relatives," she said. "Were they close?"

"Well, as far as that goes," Mr. Bradford caught himself before he let a confidence slip. "He's late now, and I can't think what's keeping him. It isn't like him."

He? she wondered. Well, it would soon be explained.

"How did you get to know Patrick, Miss Sheridan? Oh, yes, I remember now—at the hospital. His last illness was really an extended affair, you know. He hadn't been well for over a year."

It sounded like some kind of warning. Kelly wondered why, and then dismissed it. It was probably just the lawyer's way—conservative to a fault.

What would Patrick's cousin be like, she wondered, and couldn't help but picture Patrick himself, white-haired, gentle, but in good health, as he must have looked five years ago. "Is his name O'Hara too?" she asked. "The cousin, I mean?"

"No. His name is Clayton. Ross Clayton." He looked at her as if he expected her to applaud.

There was a tap on the door, and Kelly sat up straight, wanting to make a good impression. Then a very good-looking, very irritable young man came into the office, and she would have given anything to be able to turn herself into a puff of smoke and vanish out the window. This was Patrick's cousin? she thought, in disbelief.

"Sorry to be late, Mr. Bradford," the man said briefly, "but a dumb bicyclist did a U-turn in front of me, and by the time I recovered from that I'd missed the parking lot and had to go clear around."

I was right, Kelly thought. *He does have a charming smile.*

O'Hara's Legacy
by Leigh Michaels
copyright 1986, 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved

Then he saw her, and the smile died.

"You!" he said. His eyes were blue, and right now they were as hard as the sapphires they looked like. He had Patrick's eyes, she thought—but Patrick had never looked at her like this.

"It was not a U-turn, it was a *left* turn," Kelly snapped, and then bit her tongue.

"I don't give a darn if you'd suddenly decided to fly to the moon, it was a damn fool thing to do. You could have killed yourself!"

"Not to mention scratching your bumper," she said sweetly.

"It's probably worth more than you are. So you're Uncle Patrick's little—"

She gritted her teeth. "You'd better be careful what you say," she warned. "There's an attorney present, and he'd make a wonderful witness at a slander trial."

He grinned evilly, and then finished his sentence. "*Friend*," he said, with awful emphasis. "But tell me, Miss Sheridan—why did you jump to the conclusion that I was going to say anything unflattering about you?"

"Children, children!" Roger Bradford said. They both stared at him. He seemed to suddenly hear what he had said, and he colored. "Well, you sound like kids," he added mildly. "If you'd stop this infernal bickering, we could get down to the business at hand."

"This is a waste of time, you know," Ross Clayton said clearly. "Patrick never owned anything more than the clothes on his back."

The attorney cut him off in mid-sentence. "Good," he said. "Then since we're all in agreement about the importance of reading the will, let's not drag it out any longer than necessary."

Kelly would have liked to applaud. Instead, she settled back in her chair and said sweetly, "I haven't had the—pleasure—of being introduced, Mr. Bradford."

The young man fired a look of disgust at her, and then said, curtly, "Let's get on with this."

The attorney reached into a drawer.

Kelly continued, "Aren't you a bit young to be a cousin to Patrick O'Hara?"

Mr. Bradford cleared his throat.

O'Hara's Legacy

by Leigh Michaels

copyright 1986, 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved

Kelly favored him with a smile and said, apologetically, to Ross Clayton, "I just wanted to get it clear in my mind, you see. Mr. Bradford said you were cousins, but then you called him *Uncle* Patrick. Patrick never mentioned you at all, and—well, I'm sorry, but you were a bit of an unpleasant surprise."

"Likewise, Miss Sheridan."

She swallowed hard at the loathing in his voice, and then went on. "I was just puzzled, you see," she confided.

He was beginning to look like a thundercloud. "My mother and Patrick were first cousins," he said. "I always considered him my uncle because he was so much older. Now if that satisfies your curiosity, can we get on with the reading of the will?"

The attorney spread the sheaf of paper out on his desk blotter and took a deep breath.

Kelly shifted in her chair and murmured, "If you're so certain, Mr. Clayton, that Patrick didn't have anything worth leaving, then why are you so upset at the idea that he might have left some of it to me?"

Mr. Bradford put his head down in his hands. Ross Clayton looked as if he'd swallowed something unpleasant.

"That's the only thing that was puzzling me, you see," Kelly said politely.

There was a brief silence. Mr. Bradford looked up warily, as if to see if it was safe to come out. "May I go ahead now?" he asked.

Kelly waved a hand, disclaiming any desire to hold up the proceedings.

"Just a minute," Ross Clayton said. "I want to answer that, before I've heard what Patrick put in that will."

Mr. Bradford made a gesture, started to protest, then refolded the will and put it back in the drawer. "Whenever you're ready, let me know," he said, his voice resigned.

"I had no idea," Ross said, "that there was a young woman hanging about Uncle Patrick at the nursing home."

"Which was more than you were doing," Kelly pointed out. "Hanging about, I mean. You never spent any time with him."

He shot a look of animosity toward her. "I don't live here in town," he said, "and why I'm explaining this to you is more than I can understand."

O'Hara's Legacy

by Leigh Michaels

copyright 1986, 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved

“Oh,” she said, on a note of discovery. “That explains why I didn’t see you at his funeral.”

“I’ve been out on the West Coast finishing up a job, and it prevented me from— Look, this is ridiculous! I don’t have to explain anything to you!”

“That’s right,” she said sweetly. “And likewise, I don’t have to give you any excuses either. I’d be delighted to have something of Patrick’s, because he was a sweet little old man, and I miss him very much.”

“Yes, I’m sure you do,” he said, his voice heavy with irony. “It’s unfortunate for you, Miss Sheridan, that you didn’t stake out your territory a little more clearly. Or did Patrick die just a little sooner than you expected?”

“I think this has gone far enough,” Mr. Bradford said firmly. They both looked at him in astonishment, as if he’d suddenly appeared from nowhere. “If you two are going to come to blows, would you kindly do so out on the street—and not in my office?” He took the will from the drawer again. “I’ll skip the preliminaries, because there is no doubt, of course, that Patrick was of sound mind when he wrote this.”

“That remains to be seen,” Ross muttered.

The document was pages thick. There were an awful lot of words there to dispose of nothing, Kelly thought, and caught herself crossing her fingers. After six months without a job, anything Patrick might have left her would be like manna from heaven. Even a few hundred dollars would make a tremendous difference in how she was living right now.

Then she lectured herself. *Don’t be grasping*, she told herself sternly. *Blood is thicker than water*. If Patrick had owned anything important, he would surely want his family to have it, not her. He had no doubt left her some token, but it probably wasn’t cash. She rather suspected that Ross Clayton was right and that Patrick had owned very little.

“To Kelly Sheridan, I leave my complete set of A. Conan Doyle.”

“I’m a Sherlock Holmes fan,” Kelly murmured to Ross Clayton.

Mr. Bradford pressed on, allowing no time for an answer. “And my leather-bound William Wordsworth, in the hope that she will not forget the pleasure I found in the hours she read to me.”

Ross Clayton grinned. “You can’t win them all,” he said under his breath. “My condolences, Miss Sheridan.”

O'Hara's Legacy
by Leigh Michaels
copyright 1986, 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved

Kelly released the breath she'd been holding. Well, it was all she had expected, and it was nice of Patrick to have thought of her at all, she told herself.

"Also my mother's silver tea service," Mr. Bradford said smoothly, and Ross frowned.

A silver tea service? Kelly thought. That was the most impractical thing she'd ever heard of—but nice of Patrick for all that. Some day she and Allen would have a house to put it in.

"To Ross Clayton, I leave all of the family photographs which I have collected through the years..."

Kelly couldn't help it. She tried to smother the laugh, but it came out as something between a gulp and a sneeze.

Mr. Bradford sent her a quelling look. "...In the hope that he will continue to preserve them for future generations."

"There aren't going to be any future generations," Ross growled.

"Understandable," Kelly said. "What woman would have you?"

Mr. Bradford put the document down. "Would you two be serious?" he asked coldly, and continued before they could set off another argument. "Also the family Bible."

Ross Clayton put his hand over his eyes. "I came all the way out here to get the family Bible?" he muttered to no one in particular.

Kelly offered helpfully, "Perhaps Patrick thought it would benefit you to read—"

Mr. Bradford raised his voice and kept reading. "And my mother's set of bone china."

"Bone china? How am I supposed to get that home? I'll trade you for the silver service," he offered Kelly.

Mr. Bradford was starting to shout. "The remainder of my property, both real and personal, I leave—"

Kelly said, suddenly, "What about the cat?"

Mr. Bradford pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his perspiring forehead. He seemed to be debating with himself, but curiosity won out. "What cat?" he asked warily.

O'Hara's Legacy
by Leigh Michaels
copyright 1986, 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved

“Patrick’s cat,” Kelly explained patiently. “Rapunzel.”

“Patrick had a cat named Rapunzel?” Ross Clayton sounded as if he thought she’d finally lost her mind completely.

“Yes.” Kelly added demurely, “Of course, he called her that because she’d go out now and then and—um, let her hair down, and then she’d come home to have her kittens.”

Mr. Bradford started to choke. “Patrick made no specific provision for a cat, Miss Sheridan.”

“Oh. Well, you see, I can’t understand that. Patrick was very fond of Rapunzel, and—”

“You can have Rapunzel!” Ross Clayton shouted. “Now can we finish this?”

The other two looked at him in astonishment. Then Mr. Bradford picked up the will again, pushed his glasses up on the bridge of his nose, and read, very rapidly, “The remainder of my property, both real and personal, I leave to the aforementioned Kelly Sheridan—”

“What?” Ross Clayton shouted.

“...and to the aforementioned Ross Clayton as tenants in common, share and share alike.” Mr. Bradford stopped, breathless, and reached for his handkerchief again. “There. That’s all of it.”

There was a long moment of silence.

“What property are we talking about?” Ross asked genially.

“The main thing is the bookstore, of course,” Mr. Bradford laid his glasses aside. “There is a little money in a savings account, and—”

“I didn’t know Patrick owned a bookstore,” Kelly murmured.

“I’ll just bet you didn’t,” Ross Clayton said. “Well, Mr. Bradford, that’s simple enough. Sell the bookstore and mail me my money. Now if that’s all...” He was on his feet.

“That’s *not* all,” Kelly objected. “What if I want to keep the bookstore? I’d at least like to look at it.”

“Then look at it. But my half is for sale.”

O'Hara's Legacy
by Leigh Michaels
copyright 1986, 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved

Mr. Bradford sighed. "I'm afraid it really isn't that simple, Ross," he said, "for a couple of reasons. First is that Patrick had been ill for a long time, and the store had correspondingly not been kept up to standard. In fact, much of the time it hasn't even been open. Besides that, once the owner of a business dies, the good will that he has built up dies too."

"What does that mean?" Kelly asked.

"Basically, it means that the bookstore is only worth what the stock will bring. Since Patrick dealt mainly in used books, it won't be much—a couple of thousand dollars, perhaps. Besides that, Patrick had a lease on the building through the end of the summer, and the costs of that will have to be satisfied before the estate can be settled."

"So sell off the stock and settle the debts," Ross Clayton said. "That's your job, Mr. Bradford."

"I think it would be fun to run a bookstore," Kelly said obstinately. "I want to keep my share."

The attorney picked up his glasses again and perched them on the end of his nose. "And then, of course, there's the biggest problem of all," he said.

"And that is?" Kelly asked warily.

"The will names you as tenants in common. That means, basically, that neither one of you can act without the other's permission."

There was a moment of shocked silence. "Do you mean we have to agree on everything?" Ross Clayton said. There was an anguished note in his voice.

"That's what I mean," Mr. Bradford said sadly. "That is *exactly* what I mean."