

BEAUSANG

The moment of my death was the moment of my birth. If that surprises you, imagine how I felt. I had been enjoying some exquisite dalliance with the King's Irish mistress, Louison O'Murphy, my red-haired Morphise.¹ It was not my place to dally with her, but circumstance had favoured opportunity. 'Lucretius Beausang, you are the keenest courtier,' Morphise flattered me. I flattered myself that I was a *connoisseur* of her Irish geography. I had her, however, for too short a time when came the Fall. Hands tore me from her in the moment of my greatest joy. I struggled, vainly. The axe, I reasoned, comes to all, as they placed my head upon the block. Chop! I was divided — but not quite. The same hands, it seemed, that had glued me to my death now rescued me from murky depths. And I was pulled forth: bloodied but unbowed, bruised but (surprise, surprise) intact. Reborn! In Ireland! Her territory! What irony! Such tears I shed. Don't get me wrong; I was happy in my salvation. I think, however, that I glimpsed then what I now clearly see. Life for me would be recollection of Morphise. I had lost her. Yet I still desired her. Yes, I wish I had her back. Even for an instant. Even in this distant century. But it cannot be. And what is her country, when she is lost to me? I had suffered a Revolution. The moment of my birth was the moment of my death.

¹ Louison O'Murphy (1737-1823), born in Rouen of an Irish father, was the mistress of France's Louis XV and bore him a daughter when she was just 17. Known as Morphise, she was the subject of a famous painting by François Boucher.