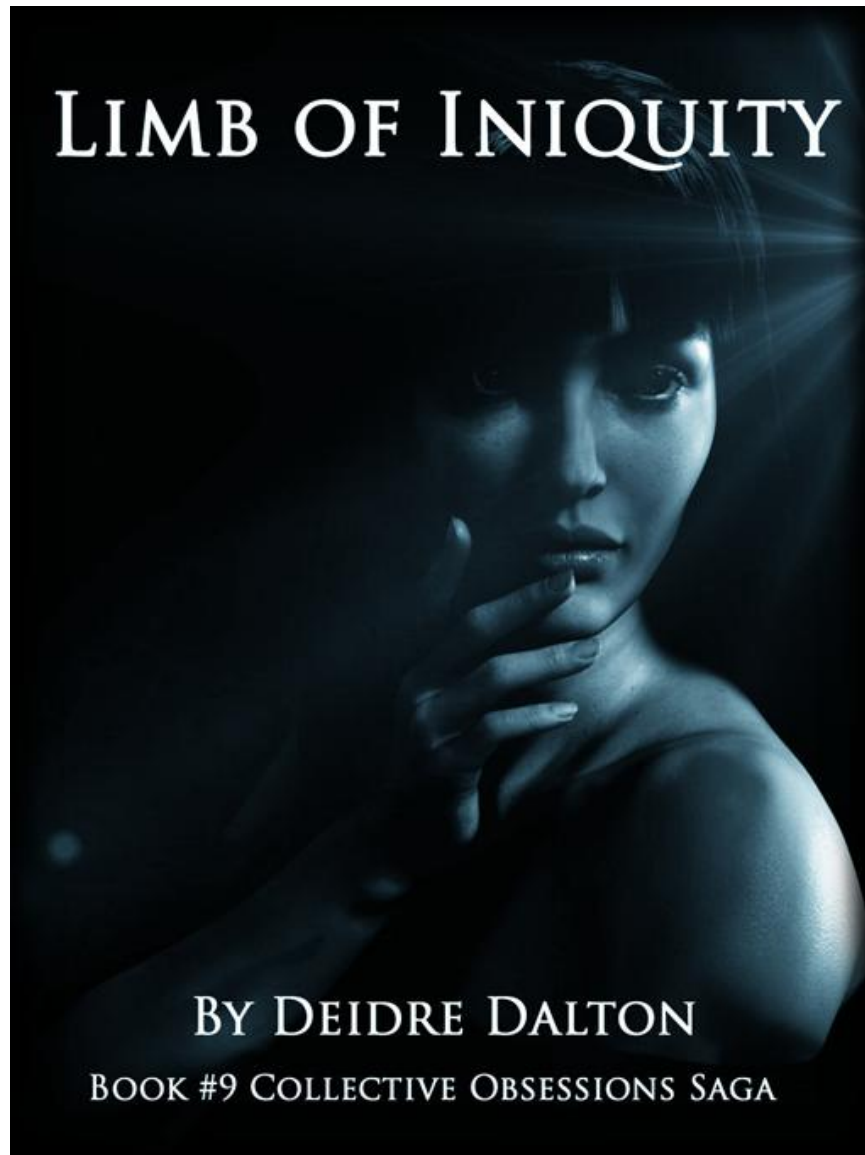


****EXCERPTS ONLY****

Limb of Iniquity

Book #9 Collective Obsessions Saga
By Deidre Dalton (aka Deborah O'Toole)



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The text in this book was set in *Lora* (body), *Merriweather* (headings) and *Trahan Pro* (book cover).

ABOUT "LIMB OF INIQUITY"

Limb of Iniquity will be released in 2025, part of the Collective Obsessions Saga by Deborah O'Toole writing as Deidre Dalton. The ten novels in the saga chronicle the extraordinary loves and intricate obsessions between two families sweeping a span of more than 150 years, all set against the backdrop of a Gothic seaside mansion in Maine.

Alexandra Cimarelli wreaks havoc on the Larkin estate, luring her young twin cousins, Dary and Kaito Larkin, into a web of lust and revenge.

Limb of Iniquity brings to light the deadly antics of Alexandra Cimarelli, who made her debut in *The Twilight*, Book #7 in the Collective Obsessions Saga.

Alex was the illegitimate daughter of Scott Page, who was the longtime beloved husband of Shannon Larkin. Alex was abandoned as a child by her biological mother Andrea St. John, only to be adopted by Angela Page, Scott's oldest daughter, and her husband, Tom Cimarelli.

Alex and Shannon have a difficult relationship. Shannon has little use for her late husband's bastard, barely civil to the child even as she grows into an adult. The hostility also creates tension between Shannon and Angela, a friction that endures for years and creates a breakdown of the mother-daughter bond.

Alex wreaks havoc on the Larkin estate, luring her young twin cousins, Dary and Kaito Larkin, into a web of lust and deceit. The grisly death of a prominent member of the Larkin family seems to cement the St. John vow of revenge, and leads the local police chief to investigate Alex's background and the sudden reappearance of her birth mother.

Will Alex be the downfall of the Larkin family, once and for all?

For more, go to:

<https://deborahotoole.com/deidredalton/>

LIMB OF INIQUITY: Excerpt from Chapter One

Greenwich Village, New York
March 7, 2020

ALEXANDRA CIMARELLI SLOWLY came awake to the strains of *The Addams Family* theme on her cell phone, which rested flat on her bedside table. Eyes still closed, she reached over and began slapping the surface of the table with the palm of her hand, vaguely anxious to silence the annoying interruption to her slumber. Her hand finally made contact with the phone. She slid it toward her, and then placed it to her ear.

"Hello?" She mumbled.

"Alex?" A female voice asked her breathlessly.

"Who's this?" She grouched.

There was a slight pause before the woman continued. "This is your mother."

Alex's eyes flew open. She struggled to sit up in her bed, the phone still to her ear. As she came into a sitting position, the strap of her pink negligee dipped from her left shoulder.

"Who is this, really?" Alex demanded irritably. "Is this some kind of sick joke?"

"No joke," the woman replied firmly. "I'm your natural mother, Andrea Hogan. Or, as I was once known, Andrea St. John."

Alex sucked in her breath. Never, not in a thousand years, had she expected to hear from her birth mother again. The woman had abandoned her when she was eight years old, a little over seventeen years ago. Andrea had simply walked out of the home she had shared with Alex in Larkin City, Maine, without care or concern of what might become of her. Alex's drunken grandmother, Cora Ann Hogan, wanted nothing to do with the child, either, and fled the scene shortly afterward. As luck would have it, Alex was legally adopted by her half-sister, Angela Page and her husband, Tom Cimarelli, whom she had lived with since. Angie and Alex shared a father, Scott Page, who had an affair with Andrea while married to Shannon Larkin, Angie's mother. While she sometimes wondered what became of her birth mother, Alex had stifled the bitterness and anger at being discarded by her own flesh and blood, almost succeeding in wiping the woman from her mind.

Alex's mouth formed into a stubborn, grim line. "If you truly are who you say you are, why are you calling me *now*, after all these years? And what makes you think I'd be interested in anything you might have to say?"

"I deserve that," Andrea responded frankly. "And more, I'm sure, in your mind. I just wanted to see how you are, and maybe convince you to meet me for coffee so I can see for myself."

"I'll ask you again - *why now?*"

"Whether you believe it or not, you haven't been very far from my mind since I left Larkin City all those years ago. I've kept loose tabs on you as best I could without being discovered, but it's not the same as seeing you in person . . ."

"Why did you dump me in the first place?" Alex broke in, her tone angry and blunt.

"I want to explain all of it to you," Andrea told her quickly. "There was a reason for it, I assure you. If you'd just meet me somewhere, I can tell you everything. It might change your opinion about me, and my past actions."

"I have no opinion about you one way or another," Alex said coldly. "You are nothing to me, and haven't been for a very long time." She paused, wanting to hurt the faceless voice speaking to her on the phone. "I have a *real* family now, so in truth you did me a great favor by abandoning me. If I'd stayed with you, I'm sure my life would have taken the same sordid direction yours likely did."

Andrea sighed. "We all make difficult choices in life, Alex, but sometimes those choices are the wrong ones. I'm not proud of my past life, and the things I had to do to survive, yet I'm a completely different person now. I would like to make amends to you in any way I can." She paused. "If you'll let me."

"How did you get my phone number?" Alex wanted to know, disregarding Andrea's statement.

"I found it on the website of your employer," Andrea replied promptly. "You've made quite a name for yourself with the exclusive perfumes you've created for the fashion designer, Suki Sutton Shimada. I can't help but be proud of you."

Alex snorted. "So, *that's* it! You're sniffing around because you think I have money to burn. If it's a loan you're after, you called the wrong number."

"I don't want anything from you," Andrea was quick to defend herself. "Except for one meeting so I can see how you are for myself. If you don't want to see me again after that, I'll never bother you again."

"I don't want to see you," Alex said flatly. "And please, lose my phone number."

"Alex, *please*. I'm begging you." Alex could hear the desperate break in Andrea's voice. "Just one meeting, that's all I ask."

Alex was silent as she pondered the woman's words. She admitted to herself that she was curious to see how Andrea had fared over time, and it might be enjoyable to lord her success in her birth mother's face. Rub her nose in it, as it

were. Perhaps rationally explaining her cold-blooded abandonment might shed Andrea less of an ogre in Alex's eyes, and it couldn't hurt to hear the story. Besides, she had the day off and had nothing else to do. Why not kill a half-hour with her birth mother, just for kicks?

Angie and Tom would be horrified if she told them, but they need never know.

Before she could change her mind, Alex found herself agreeing to Andrea's request. "The Amano Cafe on 172 West 4th Street," she directed crisply. "In one hour. I'll give you thirty minutes, no more."

"Thank you," Andrea said happily. "I'll be there. You won't regret it, Alex."

"That remains to be seen," Alex snapped, ending the call.

She tossed her cell phone to the foot of her double bed, drawing her knees to her chin. She was a strikingly beautiful young woman of twenty-four, and knew it. She was tall - reaching five-foot-ten - and her olive-tinted skin and green eyes, framed by a pageboy mop of shiny black hair, bespoke her kinship with Angie and their father, the late Scott Page. Her physical resemblance to her half-sister and father was unmistakable. Mixed in with the stunning beauty was an outwardly sparkling personality, socially coquettish when the need arose, and a buoyant sense of humor when the mood struck her. There were other times, however, when she became brooding and viscous-minded, traits she had managed to conceal from both Tom and Angie, along with Tom's father, Vito Cimorelli, who also lived with them in the their three-bedroom apartment on West Fourth Street in Greenwich Village. Alex felt the old man, as she liked to refer to Vito in her mind although she openly addressed him as Grandpa, was wise to her true persona, although he never acknowledged it. He was always civil when interacting with her, so she considered him to be rather harmless.

Alex was shaken from her personal reverie by the sounds of a frying pan crashing to the floor in the kitchen. Leaping from the bed, she donned her blue cotton robe and dashed from her room. She skidded to a halt when she reached the kitchen, seeing Vito seated at the table, his gaze on a cast iron skillet resting upside down on the floor.

"What happened?" She demanded, clutching the robe to her. "Are you okay?"

Vito glanced at her sheepishly. "I was setting the pan on the stove when it slipped from my hands. I'm okay, just mad at myself for being so clumsy."

Alex bent over to retrieve the skillet from the floor, placing it gently on the stove. Rain or shine, Vito always had scrambled eggs and toast for breakfast with a large cup of black coffee. She noticed the coffeemaker brewing in a corner on the

counter, it's pungent yet welcome aroma filling the room. There was also a carton of eggs on the counter, along with two slices of white cottage bread.

"I'll make your breakfast," she told him kindly.

"Thank you, Alex. You know how I like it."

She chuckled. "Indeed I do, Grandpa." She began heating butter in the skillet, and then whisked two eggs in a bowl with milk, salt and black pepper. She set the table with a plate, knife and fork, after which she popped the bread into a toaster.

The kitchen was galley-style with dark red walls and cherry wood cabinets, with a counter partition. It was small but modern and included a breakfast nook and closet pantry. A sliding glass door led to a small balcony overlooking West Fourth Street. It was a cozy location inside the apartment she shared with Angie, Tom and Vito, all she really ever known since she was a child. It filled her with a soothing comfort she rarely found anywhere else.

"Aren't you eating?" Vito asked her after she poured him a cup of coffee.

Alex shook her head. "I'm meeting a friend at the Amano Cafe in about forty minutes. I'll eat something when I get there." She glanced at the older man. "Where are Tom and Angie? Surely they're not working on a Saturday."

Vito shrugged. "They high-tailed it out of here about an hour ago. Something about a break in the story they've been following about the Corona virus."

Alex shuddered as she stirred the eggs in the skillet. "I hope it never comes to pass, but at least Tom and Angie are trying to get at the truth." Tom, owner of the long-standing and respected *Manhattan Daily Journal*, was as devoted to his work as was Angie. They were dogged reporters, always attempting to bring the truth to light on any story they were working on. The offices of the paper were located in Tribeca, which was about two miles away from the apartment.

She deftly slid the eggs onto Vito's plate, along with two slices of buttered toast. She smiled at him. "Enjoy, Grandpa. I'm going to go and get dressed."

"Thanks, Alex," he replied appreciatively. "It looks delicious."

She returned to her bedroom and flung open the closet door. What to wear for her meeting with Andrea St John? Deciding not to fuss about it - what did it matter what Andrea thought of her, anyway? - Alex donned a pair of snug-fitting black jeans and a dark red sweater pullover, with knee-length shiny, black leather boots. She sat at her light blonde dressing table and applied a touch of sienna eye shadow and the barest hint of black eyeliner. Her dark coloring called for little else, and her brilliant green eyes spoke for themselves. She took a small, silver wristwatch - a gift to her from Tom and Angie - and slipped it over her left wrist. Running a comb through her shiny hair, she rose and went to the living room of the

apartment. By now, Vito was seated on the couch, reading the latest copy of the *Manhattan Daily Journal*.

At the front door, Alex slipped into her black, waist-length coat striped with grey on the sleeves. She put on a dark red knit cap, tucking strands of hair behind her ears. "I won't be gone long," she said as she reached for the doorknob.

Vito nodded vaguely, his eyes still engrossed in the newspaper. "See you later."

When Alex reached the street after stepping from the fire-engine red apartment building on West Fourth Street, she noticed the day was overcast and cold. Dipping her chin into the front of her coat, she began walking the half-mile to the Amano Cafe. She followed the curve to Greenwich Avenue, which in turn joined with 6th Avenue in Greenwich Village. It was still fairly early, just past nine o'clock, so the sidewalks weren't as littered with people as they typically were on a Saturday.

The cafe was small, but light and airy with tall windows, white floors and leafy greenery positioned in corners. In all, there were only about a dozen tables for seating. Alex drew in a deep breath as she entered the establishment, her highly-tuned sense of smell appreciating the aromas of coffee and baking bread, which deftly provided a cozy ambience to the space. She removed her hat and ran her hand through her hair as she gazed about, looking for the presence of her birth mother. Would she recognize Andrea St. John after more than seventeen years?

Then she saw the woman sitting at a small table in the corner. Even seated, it was obvious she was tall, as her long legs stretched out under the table. Short, dirty blonde hair was now streaked with copious amounts of grey, the brown eyes surrounded with wrinkled folds of skin and black eyeliner. The long, wide nose was as pronounced as ever, bulbous in appearance. The woman wore a khaki-colored raincoat, a small beige purse resting on her lap. Alex noticed her thinness in long, tapering fingers that, even from a distance, seemed red and chapped.

There was no doubt, even after the passage of so many years, that the woman was her birth mother. Perhaps a little worse for wear, but definitely the woman who had given her life.

Then the woman met her gaze, a smile instantly coming to her lips. She half-rose from her chair as Alex quickly walked toward the table. She slid into a seat across from Andrea, placing her hands on the table and regarding the woman with anything but affection.

LIMB OF INIQUITY:

Excerpt from Chapter Two

AFTER LUNCHING WITH Quint at the nearby Nerai eatery - where they both opted for *Lavraki* (Greek-roasted sea bass) with wild mushroom risotto - Alex returned home to West Fourth Street. Tom and Angie were still absent, while Vito was taking a nap on the couch.

Shrugging her shoulders, Alex retreated to her room. She sat on the bed as she removed her boots, laying them in a careless heap on the floor. Leaning back against her pillows, she flipped through her cell phone to see if she had missed any messages while with Quint. She noticed a text from Suki Sutton Shimada, her boss and friend.

Feel like coming to the West Village for a spot of dinner tonight? I'm making Yakisoba, your favorite. Let me know.

Alex stared at the text screen, a faint smile playing around her lips. She and Suki had been intimate on many occasions, although they were not exclusive. Alex considered herself to be heterosexual for the most part, but enjoyed the infrequent sensual forays with the bisexual Suki. She had never told Quint about the visits, however, not wanting him to think less of her.

Alex replied to Suki's text:

I'd love to come for dinner. Can I bring anything?

Suki was quick to answer her.

No, just bring yourself. See you around 7pm. :)

Next, Alex called Angie's cell phone, curious as to what was keeping her and Tom so late. Angie answered after the second ring.

"Alex! What's up?"

"I was wondering the same thing about you and Tom. Everything okay?"

Angie snorted. "We can't get straight answers from higher-ups about the virus, but they've assured us they will have an announcement soon."

"It sounds serious," Alex replied, worry in her tone.

"It could be, so we need to take extra steps to protect ourselves in the meantime. I suggest we wear face masks when we leave the house from now on."

"I'm going to Suki's townhouse for dinner tonight. Is it safe?"

"It should be. Just try not to interact with too many people, Alex, until we know all the details about the virus. If we don't get home before you leave for your dinner, then we'll just see you tonight."

"All right. Be careful the two of you."

"Likewise to you."

Alex set her cell on the bedside table, staring up at the ceiling as she continued to lounge in bed. Angie was more like her best friend than a mother, which suited her fine. They were half-sisters, after all. Angie had saved her from going into the foster system when she stepped in to adopt her years ago, after Andrea deserted her.

And Tom was perhaps the perfect father. He never snooped or intruded into her life, although he made it clear he cared for her as he would a daughter. The man was so deeply involved in his business, he likely found it a relief that she didn't require constant emotional maintenance.

Alex had learned to be self-sufficient and resilient with Angie's pragmatic yet loving guidance, enabling her to obtain a BA in chemical engineering from New York University in 2017. She had always been fascinated with science, most specifically in the composition of chemicals to produce a variety of subtle aromas found in perfumes and soaps. Suki had hired her almost at once when Alex applied for a chemist position at her company, where she met Quinton Cabot for the first time.

Suki had spared no expense when she had the fragrance lab built on her business premises, assembling shelves, storage areas, gleaming white tables, refrigeration units, glass beakers, flasks, funnels, steel scales, herbs, spices and other chemicals to assist in scent-making. Alex and Quint always wore white lab coats, rubber gloves to prevent contamination and clear goggles to protect their eyes in case of spillage.

The duo became invaluable to Suki as time went on. She raised their wages whenever they produced a new perfume, soap or body splash. In just two years, Alex and Quint had created the perfumes *Calamity Untamed* (wildflower scent in a black-pink bottle), *Calico Breeze* (coconut and vanilla in beige packaging), *Nocturnal Lunacy* (sage and sea salt mixed with patchouli, blue-green packaging with black lettering), *Onyx Jade* (black violets in a black/emerald bottle with gold lettering), *Purrvescence* (cream and sugar cookie scent for children, brass/white packaging), and *Waterfall Bay* (lemon and lime scents mixed with wild cherries and rum, dark red and deep yellow packaging). The body splash line included *Almond Cream*, *Cherry Dreamscape*, *Cinnamon Sticks*, *Earthy Musk*, *Mint Reflections*, *Poppy & Pears* and *Vanilla Pearl*.

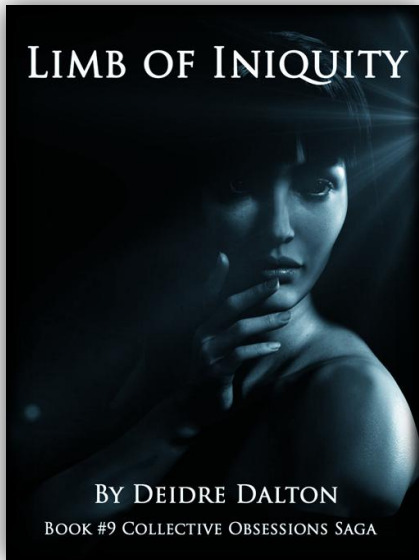
In essence, Alex was happy with her perfect life and fulfilling career. She loved residing in the busy yet glamorous New York City, and could not envision living anywhere else. She was financially secure, thanks to the posthumous largesse of Scott Page. While he was her father, she had no tangible memories of him as she had been all of seven years old when he died nearly two decades ago.

Alex grew drowsy as she mused on her good fortune, closing her eyes with a smile on her face.

BOOK INFORMATION

Limb of Iniquity will be the ninth and final book in the Collective Obsessions Saga by Deidre Dalton. The novel is tentatively scheduled for release in 2025.

More excerpts will follow in the coming months.



<https://deborahotoole.com/collective/limb.htm>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Deidre Dalton is author of the *Collective Obsessions Saga*, which chronicles the extraordinary loves and intricate obsessions between two families sweeping a span of more than 150 years, all set against the backdrop of a Gothic seaside mansion in Maine. Titles in the ten-part family saga include *Hearts in Sorrow*, *The Advent*, *Quixotic Crossings*, *The Twain Shall Meet*, *Enthrallment*, *The Keeper's Journal*, *Hearts Desires*, *The Twilight*, *Megan's Legacy* and *Limb of Iniquity*.

For more, visit <https://deborahotoole.com/collective/>

She is also author of the *Bloodline Trilogy*, which follows the uniquely magical journey of three women through time. Books in the trilogy include *Bloodfrost*, *Bloodlust* and *Blood & Soul*.

For more, visit <https://deborahotoole.com/bloodline/>



Deidre is author of the *Larkin Community Cookbook*, which is a compilation of recipes mentioned or prepared by characters in the *Collective Obsessions Saga*, and the electronic versions of *About Larkin* (companion guide to the *Collective Obsessions Saga*), and *The Private Journal of Colm Sullivan*.

Writing under her real name of Deborah O'Toole, Deidre is also author of the fiction titles *Celtic Remnants*, *The Crypt Artist*, *Glinhaven*, *In the Shadow of the King*, *Mind Sweeper*, a book of poetry known as *Torn Bits & Pieces*, and the *Short Tales Collection*.

For more, visit <https://deborahotoole.com/>

Using the pseudonym Shenanchie O'Toole, she also writes for the cooking/recipe website Food Fare. She is author of a dozen cookbooks, along with more than forty titles in the *Food Fare Culinary Collection*.

For more, visit <https://deborahotoole.com/FoodFare/>

Deidre is a native of Greenwich, Connecticut. She has also lived in San Francisco, Reno and Spokane, among other US cities. She currently resides in the mountain west.

For more, go to Deidre's website: <https://deborahotoole.com/deidredalton/>