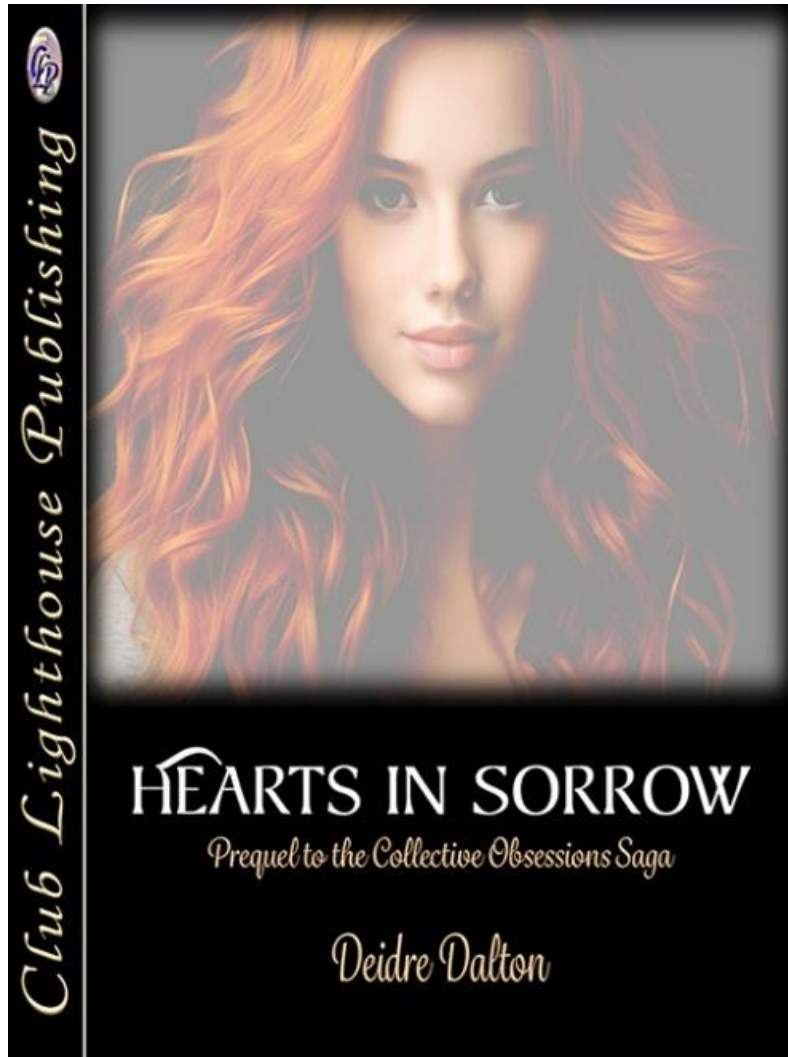


HEARTS IN SORROW

Prequel to the Collective Obsessions Saga

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The text in this book was set in *Lora* (body), *Merriweather* (headings), and *Grafolita Script & Seaker* (book cover). Additional fonts include *AR Blanca* (John Larkin's handwriting) and *Fine Hand* (Maeve O'Quinn's handwriting).

ABOUT "HEARTS IN SORROW"

Hearts in Sorrow by Deidre Dalton (aka Deborah O'Toole) is the prequel to the ten-part Collective Obsessions Saga. The book was released by Club Lighthouse Publishing in December 2024.

The Collective Obsessions Saga begins with the prequel, **Hearts in Sorrow**.

Long before emigrating to America to settle the town of Larkin, Maine, John Larkin falls for the hauntingly beautiful Maeve O'Quinn in his native Ireland. Although frail, she returns the love of the future Larkin patriarch in full measure as she envisions a rosy life with him, little knowing that fate has other plans for them.

Years before emigrating to America to settle the town of Larkin, Maine in 1866, John Larkin falls for the flame-haired and green-eyed Maeve O'Quinn in his native Ireland. Although frail, she returns the future Larkin patriarch's love in full measure as she envisions a rosy life with him. Yet their love is not meant to be as fate cruelly intervenes to deny them.

After an unimaginable tragedy, John is left numb with grief but forges ahead to establish his own family. He settles for Anne O'Quinn, Maeve's older sister, who holds no candle to Maeve's beauty. Anne is tall and awkwardly big-boned, with golden brown hair, a long narrow face and dark coal eyes. She quickly agrees to marry John, secretly in love with the dashing man who had been meant for her sister.

Anne wonders if their marriage will be enough to hold John's interest, especially after they emigrate to America.

Or will he forsake her for another?

For more, go to:

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HEARTS IN SORROW: Excerpt from Chapter One

October 1854

Castletownbere, County Cork, Ireland

THE MINUTE JOHN O'Larkin saw her, he instinctively knew with absolute certainty that he would never want anyone else with such ferocity again, not for as long as he lived and breathed.

Her flaming red hair and vivid green eyes were breathtakingly apparent, even from a distance. The late afternoon sun appeared to cast a warm glow around her pale face, giving her an ethereal presence. As she grew closer, he saw the scant dusting of freckles on the bridge of her pert nose and high cheekbones.

It was only then that John paid attention to her two travelling companions. There was a man - perhaps in his forties - and a girl not much older than the red-haired beauty, who were also situated on the wood wagon, being slowly led by an ancient donkey. Who were they? And, more importantly, who was *she*?

The older man in the wagon raised his hand in greeting. With a slight smile, John rose to his full height from the chair he had been sitting on. Behind him, the O'Larkin cottage stood in the fading sunlight, its whitewashed exterior gleaming with cleanliness. He waved in return, stepping off the porch. He moved with an easy yet long stride, seemingly comfortable in dark brown trousers and a white shirt, sleeves rolled to his elbows.

The older man stopped the wagon in front of the cottage, but John's eyes remained riveted on the girl as he spoke. "Hello," he said with a degree of enthusiasm. "What brings you to Castletownbere on this fair afternoon?"

The man jumped to the ground from the wagon, his hand outstretched. "Hello to you," he said affably. "My name is Dary O'Quinn, from Bantry. These are me two daughters, Anne and Maeve."

John tore his eyes away from the redhead and placed his attention on Dary. "Pleased to meet you, to be sure. My name is John O'Larkin. What brings you so far afield from Bantry?"

While Dary was rather tall with sandy-coloured hair and green eyes, John still towered over him with his long, lean body, somewhat intimidating in his appearance with jet-black hair, sideburns and naturally pale skin. The older man had to look up in order to meet John's azure blue eyes, noticing the prominent yet attractive cleft in his chin.

"We came to Castletownbere to visit with my sister but found her cottage empty. I cannot find a soul who can tell me where she is."

John studied Dary, a thoughtful expression on his face. "I'm a lifelong resident of Castletownbere. Perhaps I know of her. What would be your sister's name?"

"Aoife McCarthy. Her husband is Daniel McCarthy."

John pursed his lips. "The same Daniel and Aoife McCarthy who owned O'Shea's Tavern on the Square?"

Dary nodded. "Indeed. Danny bought the place some years ago, right after he married my sister. I was going there next to look them up."

John knew most of the inner workings of his native Castletownbere, just as his neighbours knew much about him. "They left a fortnight ago," he informed Dary quickly. "Daniel sold the tavern, and then he and Aoife emigrated to America aboard the SS *Herman Roosen*, taking the Dublin to New York City route. Apparently, Daniel has a brother living in Boston, so they went to seek their fortune across the pond."

Dary appeared stunned. "And she didn't tell me? Aoife and Danny were my only kin in these parts."

John regarded Dary with sympathy. "Perhaps Aoife sent you a letter and you just haven't received it yet," he suggested.

"You're probably right," Dary agreed. "I'll likely have a letter from her when I get home."

John's eyes went back to the redhead, who remained in the wagon as she met his stare unblinkingly. "It's late in the day," he stated suddenly. "Why don't you stay here for the night and return home tomorrow? It's a long road from here to Bantry, I reckon about seven or eight hours. It will be dark soon, so you're more than welcome to pass the night in my humble cottage."

Dary seemed surprised. "That's very thoughtful of you, John. Are you sure we won't be a burden?"

"Not a bit of it," John replied. "I live here alone. It was the cottage of my parents, but they have both passed on. You and your daughters can easily take your rest here before returning to your home in Bantry."

"Thank you kindly, my friend."

John stepped toward the wagon. "May I assist you, miss?" He squinted his eyes at the redhead as he continued. "And which daughter would you be?"

She smiled at him, revealing her even, white teeth. He noticed her full and sensuous lips for the first time, causing him to pause. She held out her hand as she spoke. "I'd be Maeve, kind sir." She glanced over her shoulder to the back of the wagon. "And that is my sister, Anne."

John was momentarily mesmerized by the husky tone of Maeve's voice. For such a petite and delicate young woman, the nuances of her tone were surprising, yet they charmed his ears. He barely nodded to the other sister, who stared at him from the back of the wagon.

Stepping closer, John took Maeve's hand to assist her from the wagon. She was wearing a navy-blue dress with white trim that, while clean, had likely seen better days. She also wore a black cloak about her shoulders. The warm touch of her skin against his and the faint scent of bergamot wafting from her forced him to swallow quickly in order to maintain an air of nonchalance.

"Thank you, kind sir," she said softly.

Not forgetting the manners his mother had instilled in him many years ago, John also helped Anne from the wagon. She and her sister were as physically different as night and day. Where Maeve was small and dainty, Anne was as tall as Dary with golden brown hair and dark coal eyes.

He noticed Anne's hands, which were as large and calloused as that of any man. Being tall, she was also somewhat big-boned. Her face was long and narrow, her lips thin, her feet overlarge and her skin as pale as his own. While not ugly by any means, Anne was still no comely match when compared to Maeve. He found it difficult to believe they were sisters.

Dary watched with interest as John briefly interacted with his daughters. His two girls were exact opposites in almost all things, although they managed to relate to each other in sisterly fashion most of the time. It did not surprise him that John appeared to favour Maeve over Anne. Maeve's outer frailty seemed to draw on the protective nature found in most men, while Anne's lummo bearing did little to endear her to the opposite sex, God love her.

"Let's go inside," John said. "I have a pot of lamb stew on the stove, with freshly-baked bread and recently churned butter."

Anne appeared startled. "You cook your own meals, sir?"

John chuckled. "I'm a bachelor, but I like to eat good food. My sainted mother taught me well."

Maeve giggled, the light sound music to John's ears. "Lucky for us, kind sir," she teased him gently.

HEARTS IN SORROW:

Excerpt from Chapter Three

TWO DAYS LATER, John made his way to Bantry aboard his fishing boat, the *Lady Banshee*. He decided to sail rather than take a horse because travel time was less. Riding a horse would take about five hours as opposed to a wagon, which took seven or eight hours for thirty-one miles. The route by boat was only nine miles, which appealed to his sense of urgency to see Maeve again.

He rarely manned *Lady Banshee* alone while fishing, when he took along two of his employees to operate the oars and to help him with the catch. The boat had belonged to Kevin O'Larkin, serving him well for many years. The boat itself was flat-bottomed with a modest sail. John and his crew only used the oars when manoeuvring the boat closer to their selected fishing grounds. The vessel was painted light blue with a white trim. John kept the boat in near pristine condition, repainting it every few years and replacing nets and other equipment when necessary. It was sturdy and reliable. He used nets to farm the mussels and other shellfish, but quite often he would anchor the boat while he dove into the water to pluck mussels clinging to rocks and other hard surfaces.

Using the oars was a laborious task, especially for a roundtrip voyage of roughly eighteen miles, but John was in superb physical condition after his many years of fishing. He made the trip to Bantry in just over three hours. Bantry Bay was one of the longest inlets in southwest Ireland, bordered on the north by the Beara Peninsula and on the south by Sheep's Head Peninsula.

John moored the *Lady Banshee* in Bantry Harbour, near the Quay, and then walked the short distance to the O'Quinn cottage on Tom's Lane. The house was small, but well-kept, with a thatched roof and a surrounding white picket fence, nicely shaded by evergreen oak and willow trees. As John came abreast of the structure, he spied Anne in a rather large garden on the left side of the cottage, where she was pulling carrots from the ground. She wore a faded blue flower dress, with her head enfolded by a dark blue scarf.

She looked up when he came to a stop, an expression of surprise on her face. He made his way through the gate to the property, waving at Anne as he came closer to her. She came forward, wiping her hands on a white half-apron wrapped around her waist with a basket full of carrots balanced on her wrist.

"Greetings, Miss O'Quinn," John said affably when they were face to face.

"Good afternoon, Mr. O'Larkin," she returned with a slight smile. "I didn't expect to see you again so soon."

"You know of my courtship of your sister?"

She nodded. "She told me all about it. My father is very pleased."

"You'll probably see more of me from now on," he told her as he gazed at the cottage. "Is Maeve at home?"

Anne shook her head. "My father took her to a shop in the village, but they should return shortly. Can I offer you a cup of tea while you wait?"

"It wouldn't go amiss, thank you."

The inside of the O'Quinn cottage was clean, just as John expected it would be. The living area blended into the compact kitchen, and a room to the left served as bedroom for both Anne and Maeve, while Dary made do with a smaller room to the right of the kitchen. It was a similar layout to his own cottage, which was typical of modest Irish homes. Even though he did not know her well, John had noticed Anne's fastidiousness when the family had spent the night with him in Castletownbere. She appeared to favour cleanliness, order and harmony, traits he found admirable. However, on the flip side, Maeve was spontaneous and exuberant without care or concern about keeping her surroundings tidy, which he also found utterly enchanting.

Anne served him a hot cup of tea at the modest, square-sided kitchen table. "How long do you plan on staying with us?" She asked casually as she took a seat.

"A few days, if Dary is agreeable."

She gave a short laugh. "Oh, he'll be agreeable."

"How can you be so sure?" John queried as he took a sip of tea.

"I know my father," she responded flatly. "You are a respectable and decent man. In his eyes, you are perfect for one of his daughters. He realizes he won't have to worry about Maeve with you in the picture. You aren't wealthy by any means if first impressions are correct, but your life is seemingly comfortable, which bodes well for my sister."

John was somewhat taken aback by Anne's frankness, but also appreciative of her honesty. Anything to give him an inroad with Maeve was valuable to him, although he knew she was already enamoured of him as he was of her. He suddenly felt pity for Anne. She was the less attractive older sister, with little to no marital prospects to be had. Her lot in life, by all appearances, was not a happy one. She might become his sister-in-law someday, true, but would it be enough to attract suitors to her?

He forgot all about Anne when Dary and Maeve came into the cottage, bearing packages. When Maeve saw John smiling at her, she dropped her parcels to the floor and ran to him.

They embraced briefly - to be expected as Dary was present - before John set her back from him to admire her gown. It was yellow with dark green pinstripes,

her tiny waist cinched with a narrow black belt. Her green eyes were shining, the happiness in seeing him impossible to hide or temper.

"How long can you stay?" She asked breathlessly.

John looked to Dary, who regarded him with a wide grin. "A few days only, if your father will permit it."

Maeve's face fell. "Just a few days only?"

"I have a business to attend to," John reminded her gently.

"You're welcome to stay as long as you like," Dary spoke up.

"Maybe next week Maeve and Anne can come to Castletownbere," John suggested. "I'd eventually love to show Maeve how I do my work, and perhaps see other sights as well. All properly chaperoned, of course."

"I consent," Dary agreed. "Maeve is always eager for new experiences."

"Castletownbere is much smaller than Bantry," John warned Maeve. "You might find it boring."

"Oh, never!" Maeve declared with fervour, her voice deepening. "Being in your company would *never* be boring, no matter where we are or what we're doing."

John beamed as Maeve knew he would. "I'll do my best, Miss O'Quinn," he assured her.

"As shall I." Maeve gazed at John with boundless love expressed in her eyes. He was completely mesmerized.

HEARTS IN SORROW: Excerpt from Chapter Five

June 1855

Castletownbere & Bantry, County Cork, Ireland

MAEVE WAS BACK to normal the next morning, albeit with a slight cough. She and Anne planned to return to Bantry before noon, so John tried to make the best of his time with Maeve.

They left the cottage and walked to the graves of Kevin and Rachel O'Larkin, holding hands. She wore another gingham dress - blue this time - and her hair was free and hanging to her waist. They stopped at the graves and crossed themselves.

"Just think," John said. "This time in two weeks, we'll be man and wife."

She seized his arm, hugging it to her body, eyes aglow with happiness. "These last several months have moved so slowly. I thought for sure I would go mad with the waiting, even though it's my fault because I wanted the wedding to take place in spring or summer. Now that our ceremony is around the corner . . . I have to pinch myself to make sure it's real."

He pulled her closer, the fronts of their bodies making a brief but rousing contact. "We will make splendid babies, *Cailín Álainn*," he whispered in her ear.

She kissed his cheek gently. "The minute I laid eyes on you, my life changed. It has been the biggest adventure so far. Bearing your children will only deepen my love for you, like icing on a cake."

He smiled at her statement. "Our life together *will* be a big adventure, from beginning to end, and hopefully thereafter. It is truly magical now. I can only imagine the rest."

John kissed Maeve softly, not wanting to let her go, even if it was just to Bantry to make final preparations for their wedding. He reached over and caressed her cheek, brushing strands of her glorious hair from her face.

Suddenly, his expression changed from rapture to concern. He felt the light perspiration on her face, and her skin was overly warm. He stepped back slightly to observe her.

"Are you sure you feel well enough to travel?" He asked her.

She seemed mildly surprised. "I feel quite well, John. So much better than yesterday. Travelling to Bantry is no great feat."

"Please rest as much as you can," he said firmly. "And don't tire yourself before our big day."

"I won't, I promise."

An hour later, Maeve and Anne were ready to leave. John stood by their wagon, embracing Maeve before he helped her up to the seat. He also assisted Anne, who was going to drive the wagon home. "Thanks for tending to our horse," she told him.

"Not a bit of it. I feed and water my own horse, so it's just as easy to do two as one." He glanced at Maeve. "Take care, *Cailín Álainn*. I shall see you soon."

Maeve smiled at him, showing her teeth. "Next time it will be for good," she replied as Anne urged the horse to begin moving.

John watched them as they went down the lane. Just before they disappeared around a curve in the road, Maeve turned in her seat and waved at him.

He returned the wave, his heart aching as she left his sight.

"Next time it will be forever," he thought as he went back into the cottage. "Never to be parted again."

HEARTS IN SORROW: Excerpts from Chapter Six

July 1855

Castletownbere, County Cork, Ireland

ANNE WAS NERVOUS as she and Dary made their way to Castletownbere a week later. For the first time in as long as she could remember, she was seated next to her father in the wagon instead of being relegated to the flatbed behind them.

She chewed her bottom lip as they grew closer to Castletownbere. It was the end of June, and a rare, sunny day. She felt odd sitting next to her father, dressed with care in a blue gingham dress. Memories of Maeve in the same place not so long ago crossed Anne's mind. Two weeks had almost erased her presence, although she was fully aware John might feel differently about it.

Dary had told her about his talk with John a fortnight ago, which set her nerves on tenterhooks. Depending on what John had decided, Anne would either return home to Bantry with her father, or become betrothed to a man she secretly loved but who had originally been meant for her sister.

Dary glanced over at his daughter as they continued their trek, taking in her dispassionate expression. He had not seen her cry – not even once – since Maeve's death. She appeared strangely calm on the surface, which came as no surprise to him as he knew Anne's ways more than she realized. She had always been able to tuck away her true feelings as she displayed a strong front.

"How are you faring, Annie?" Dary finally asked her.

She glanced at him. "I'm well, father. Why do you ask?"

He stared at her. "Your sister just died, Annie, and you might become the wife of John O'Larkin shortly. Your world must feel topsy-turvy at the moment."

"Not so much," she replied faintly.

"Sorry?"

"I miss Maeve," Anne responded flatly. "But I'm not going to sit around weeping all day. Life does go on, whether we want it to or not. We cannot mourn forever."

Dary felt anger rise in him. "There are two hearts in sorrow because of Maeve's death," he told her hotly. "But apparently yours isn't one of them."

She shrugged. "Think what you will. We all mourn in our own different ways."

"You showed more emotion when our old burro died last year," he accused her with belligerence.

"Not true," she returned stubbornly.

Dary waved his hand in the air. "I'm done with this conversation," he ground out.

"You and me both," came her cool response.

* * *

JOHN WAS WEEDING his vegetable garden when they came upon the O'Larkin cottage. He waved at them and came forward, wiping his hands on his thighs. Anne noted his clinging brown trousers and white shirt, and the healthy glow of his skin. He looked much better than he had two weeks ago, although there was still an air of unmistakable sadness about him.

He helped her down from the wagon. "Anne," he acknowledged her in a polite tone.

"John," she replied stiffly.

Dary dropped to the ground from the wagon, rubbing his hands together. "Greetings, John. How are you coping?"

"A bit better than the last time you saw me," John admitted. He gestured to the cottage. "Let's go inside and have tea."

John readied the tea with a plate of soda biscuits. The threesome enjoyed the light repast, talking about happenings in their respective villages. Dary informed John that he had finally heard from his sister, Aoife, and her husband, Daniel McCarthy. "Their letter told me they've travelled to Boston, where Danny was able to start a new pub in the Charlestown district."

John seemed pleased. "Good for them. It's lucky, they are."

After a brief lull, John rose from the table. "Anne, would you care to take a walk with me?"

"Of course." She stood up and took his arm.

Dary could barely contain his glee as the couple left the cottage. Had John taken his advice, after all?

John and Anne walked to the edge of the property, which was a sloping hill that overlooked the sea waters of Castletownbere Harbour.

He turned to face her. "Are you aware of your father's wishes regarding us?"

She nodded, watching his face.

"I've thought about what he said, and it makes sense. I have to move on. Do you think you can be happy here in Castletownbere? Happy with me?"

She wanted to give him an enthusiastic answer immediately, but held herself in check for several long seconds. "Castletownbere is a beautiful place," she said slowly. "And you are a pleasant man."

"Is that a yes?"

She swallowed. "Can I ask you a question? Will you answer me truthfully?"

He looked at her, his face sombre. "I'll do my best."

Anne licked her lips anxiously. "I know you will never love anyone as much as you loved my sister, but do you think in time you could come to care for me?"

"I care for you now," he responded easily. "Yet, you're right. The love I felt for Maeve was once in a lifetime, never to be forgotten but impossible to repeat with another. I'm sure we can build deep affection in time as we go about our lives. That's all I can offer you - aside from my name and my home - for the time being." He gazed out to sea. "Will it be enough for you?"

Anne felt a twinge in her heart. He had not hesitated to confirm his love for Maeve, yet it did not seem to matter so much anymore. "*Maeve is dead and I'm alive,*" she thought. "*I'll have his name, but she never will. That has to count for something in the long of it.*" She touched his arm. "It will be enough for me," she murmured.

He turned to her. "There will be no banns, and no church wedding. I'm sorry if it disappoints you, but I will never trust God again. He took Maeve, despite my prayers to the contrary. I will not step foot inside another church again, until it's time for my own funeral." He sighed. "Do you mind marrying here, in my cottage?"

Anne felt a stab of annoyance. *Damn Maeve for ruining what could have been the natural course of events.* "I will marry you anytime," she said firmly. "Anywhere."

"Are you certain?"

"Aye."

He cocked his head slightly. "There won't be any going back once the deed is done."

"I understand."

"What if one day I decide to go to America?" He pressed.

"Then I will be by your side."

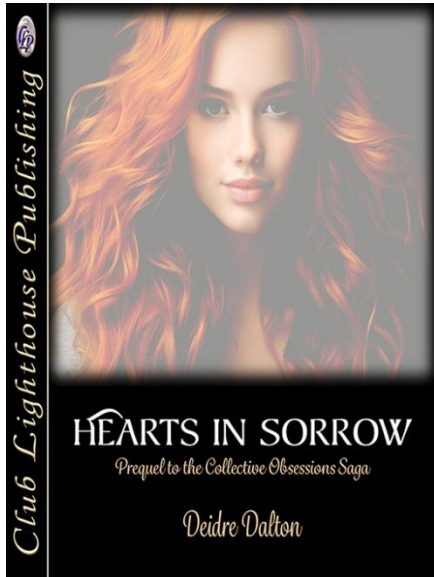
John offered his arm to her again. "Let us inform Dary."

"I'm sure he's chomping at the bit by now."

"Without a doubt," John managed a smile, giving her a brief glance before guiding them back inside the cottage.

BOOK INFORMATION

Hearts in Sorrow is prequel to the Collective Obsessions Saga by Deidre Dalton. The novel was released by Club Lighthouse Publishing in December 2024, and is available in Kindle and paperback editions.



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

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EXTRAS:

Collective Obsessions Saga @ Facebook:

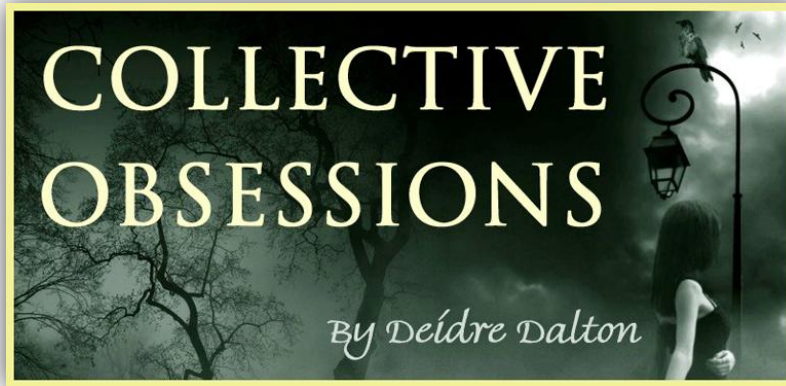
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"Collective Obsessions Saga" website:

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ABOUT THE COLLECTIVE OBSESSIONS SAGA

The Collective Obsessions Saga chronicles the extraordinary loves and intricate obsessions between two families sweeping a span of more than 165 years, most of which are set against the backdrop of a Gothic seaside mansion in Maine.



Follow the twists and turns of the Larkin and Sullivan families, who settle in America in the 1800s. John Larkin builds his vast business empire while daughter Molly and lighthouse keeper Colm Sullivan establish a connection that will endure for generations.

Amidst murder, madness, perverse self-indulgence and avarice the two families struggle to free themselves from a dark legacy of secrets and obsessions.

Years in the making, *Collective Obsessions* is a unique family saga set in the combined genres of mystery, paranormal and romance, all dotted with the macabre and hints of classic Gothicism.

The ten-part family saga includes *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, go to <https://deborahotoole.com/collective/>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Deidre Dalton is 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*. The books were released by Club Lighthouse Publishing.



She is also author of the *Collective Obsessions Saga*, chronicling the extraordinary loves and intricate obsessions between two families sweeping a span of more than 165 years, most of which are 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*.

Deidre is author and editor 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*, the *Short Tales Collection* (juvenile fiction), and a book of poetry known as *Torn Bits & Pieces*. The books were released by Club Lighthouse Publishing.

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

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

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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, visit Deidre's website at: <https://deborahotoole.com/deidredalton/>

OTHER BOOKS BY DEIDRE DALTON

THE BLOODLINE TRILOGY

Bloodfrost

Bloodlust

Blood & Soul

COLLECTIVE OBSESSIONS SAGA

Hearts in Sorrow

The Advent

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The Twain Shall Meet

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