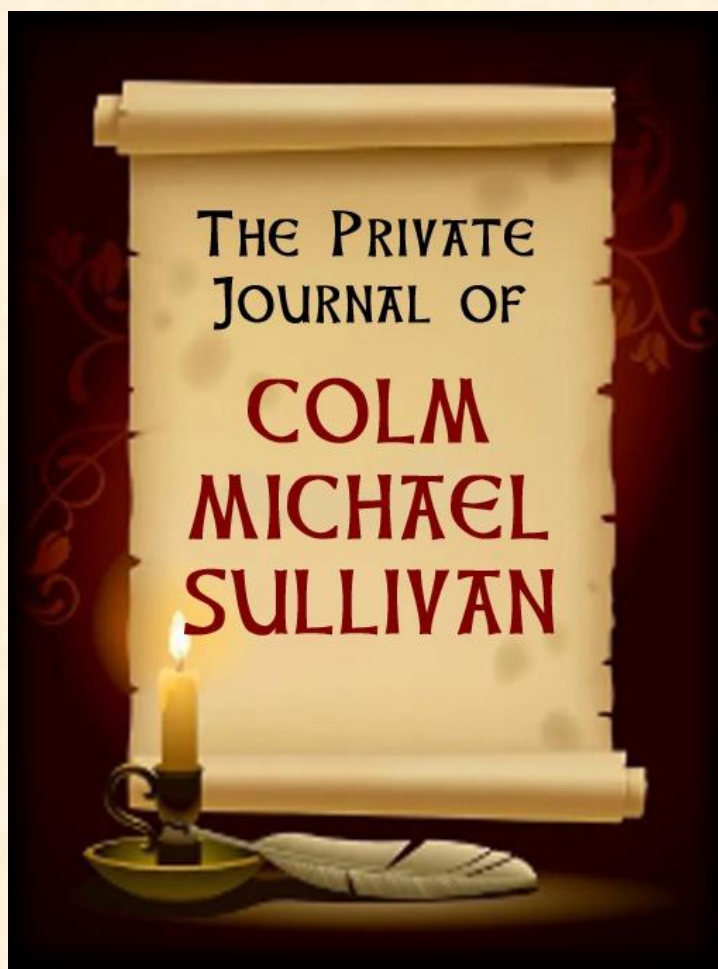


The Private Journal of Colm Michael Sullivan



*1st Keeper of the Banshee Point Lighthouse
Larkin Village, Maine, USA
June 1880 to January 1890*

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Colm Sullivan & Molly Larkin



Tuesday, 8th June 1880

My name is Colm Sullivan, known as Colmcille Súilleabháin in my native Ireland. I am alone in this world, my parents Michaleen and Eibhlín having been killed by British soldiers in 1879 and my darling little sister Bridget caught in a house fire in Malahide shortly thereafter. May God assail their souls.

I am the first lighthouse keeper at Banshee Point in Larkin City, Maine. This is my first day in Maine, on the demesne of Mr. John Larkin. He hired me a few days ago in New York City. He found me on the docks with other immigrants from Ireland, where we arrived two days earlier. Because I worked with lighthouses in my beloved Malahide, Mr. Larkin hired me to look after his new one. He seems like a fair-minded man from the old sod, and has sympathy for us just arriving in America.

I met the Larkin family cook. His name is Claude Mondoux, and he's French. Very nice fellow, I must say. He has none of the uppity airs one might expect from a fancy chef. There is something honest and sincere about him. I have a feeling he is a very kind-hearted gentleman. Hopefully I will get to know him better in the future.

Mr. Larkin also introduced the lot of us to his family. He has a wife named Anne, and a son and a daughter. The son's name is Roddy, and he is the oldest. The daughter is a sweet girl named Mary, but Mr. Larkin calls her Molly. She looks like she is sixteen if a day and is like a beautiful rose - Irish black hair and fair skin, with big dark eyes. I could not help but look at her a bit more than the others, and I think she looked at me, too. Her skin is so fair I believe she blushed when her father told her my name is Colm Sullivan, and that I was to be the first keeper of the Banshee Lighthouse. What a name for a lighthouse - but it fits.

The lighthouse at Banshee Point is a marvel, truly new fangled, but I am a fast learner. The cottage is like a house back in Ireland, and the view of the ocean reminds me of home.

It is cold and misty here, just like Ireland. I think I will be very happy here as soon as I learn how to run the new lighthouse. Mr. Larkin says he will teach me. And the cottage. I still cannot believe that this place will be my home, and my home alone.

Friday, 11th June 1880

Mr. Larkin has spent the last few days teaching me how to work the new lighthouse. It is not that hard. In fact, I think I could do it on my own now, but he insists on helping me for a few more days. Which is fine with me. Every day he is here, his lovely daughter Molly brings us lunch. She carries a small basket with her, and it is full of the best food I have ever eaten, all prepared by the family chef Claude Mondoux. We had cold mutton stew yesterday, and today Molly brought pieces of cheese and warm bread with ale. But the best part is seeing Molly. After we eat, she stays around to watch us while we work, or she takes a walk on the beach. She also likes to run her horse, Tempus, on the sand. She is a good rider for a lass.

I know I should not do so, but I cannot help but think about Molly Larkin. She is so beautiful. But I am the hired help here, and a poor one at that. I do not know what goes on up at the big house, but I am sure Molly must have beaux - as they call them here, men callers - but she never talks about them. She asks me questions about how I like the cottage, and she told me she and her mother decorated it. That makes me feel good for some reason. Molly had a hand in the way my new home looks, fancy that one.

The more I get a look at what Mr. Larkin owns, the more I understand how wealthy he must be. Mr. Larkin will pay me twenty American dollars a month, which is very good. Once a week a wagon goes into the village of Larkin with the servants in it, so they can do their own bit of shopping. I am going on the morrow to get some food for the cottage. There is a market in Larkin Village, Molly told me. They just built it last year, she said. Molly lets me know a lot of things that go on here. She says it is so I'll feel more comfortable, more at home. I think it is working.

It is odd, but I cannot stop thinking about Molly at night, after all the work is done, and all of us are supposed to be in bed asleep. I cannot seem to get the face of Molly Larkin out of my mind, even when I try.

At least dreams are free.

Saturday, 12th June 1880

Mr. Larkin had a coachman take us into the village of Larkin today to buy goods at the grocery there. To my surprise, Molly came with us. There were eight servants, and the coachman. We met at the stables and were almost ready to go when Molly came running up to the carriage. She was dressed in a simple frock, light brown in color, and her hair was pulled up into some kind of knot on her head. She looked like a vision, such a pretty colleen. She told the coachman her father had given her permission to go with us; that she needed to get some cloth to make a new dress at the grocery. The coachman did not seem to think this was odd, so he helped her up to sit next to him on the steering seat. I sat behind her in the lorry. I could smell the perfume of her hair, and every so often she would turn around and talk to me in a friendly manner. When she had her back to me, I watched her hair, her shoulders, and the movement of her whole body as it went over bumps in the lane.

The grocery was the biggest I've ever seen. There was clean sawdust on the floor, and the butcher block had fresh meat. I picked out a leg of lamb, and some beef to make a stew. Molly joined me after a bit and she helped me pick out fresh vegetables for my stew. Then she told me they grew a lot of vegetables out at the

estate, and if I ever needed any, to ask her. She was very helpful, and no one in the grocery seemed to mind that the daughter of John Larkin was there with the servants. No one even thought it was odd. She seemed at home around the servants, she treated them like they were equal to her. I found this most admirable in a person of her station.

The coach ride back to the estate was even better. Molly sat next to me inside the lorry, right in the straw along with all the servants. She chatted with the maids, but she sat next to me. She kept smiling at me, asking me questions about Ireland. Then she asked me if I had a wife, and I told her no. She wanted to know if I had a special lass, and I told her no again. She asked me another question, this time she wanted to know how old I was. I thought that was a fine question, so I told her I was twenty, which I am. She told me I was the perfect age. I asked her, the perfect age for what? And she just laughed. She has a lovely laugh, it sounds like chimes on the wind. Just lovely.

By the time we reached the estate, it was near dusk. I kept looking at Molly, when she had her head turned away from me. I have to paint her somehow. But who would believe that a poor lad from

Malahide can also paint pictures? I can paint, though, and I have to find some way to prove to the Larkin's that I can. Perhaps then they will let me paint Molly. I heard somewhere that wealthy folk like to have pictures of themselves all over their walls.

Molly said good night at the stables and I came back to the cottage to write in my journal. It is getting late, so I will make my stew tomorrow. All I can seem to do at the moment is think about Molly Larkin. I wish I was rich so I could court her like other lads must do. She is too kind to ever laugh at my beggarly appearance. But at least I keep my clothes mended and clean, and I do bathe twice a week. Maybe if I cut my hair shorter, or washed it more? But it seems the longer I'm in the sun on the beach, the lighter my hair becomes. I wish my hair was dark, instead of the color of straw. I wonder what Molly prefers?

Monday, 28th June 1880

Here I am again. It is hard to believe what a difference a few weeks can make in the life of a poor sod like me. I must have been blessed by the angels the day my mum gave birth to me, because I surely have the luck of the Irish since I came to this place called Larkin, Maine.

Molly is too good to be true. Since I wrote the last time, she has come to my cottage with her lady's maid, of course. It would not do to have her come by herself. She helped me with my Irish stew - she had a few new ingredients that I had never heard of before - minced garlic and a few onions that were the color red. They were sweet. She said she likes being friends with me, that I treat her like a person is supposed to be treated, not like some statue on a "rotating stand" as she calls it. Her lady's maid is from Ireland, too, her name is Maureen Kelly. Molly and Maureen. Quite nice sounding together, but I am afraid I only have eyes for Molly, who is so far above me.

I told Molly I like to paint, and she said I could draw her sometime. I do not know when, but I look forward to it. She said she would get me some art supplies in the village soon. I love to watch her.

Sometimes when she comes, she tends to the flowers in the yard of the cottage. She also planted me some vegetables - peas, turnips, new lettuce and carrots.

Mr. Larkin only comes to the lighthouse a few times a week now, and stays a few hours each time. He tells me I am doing very good, that I learn quickly. I know how to operate the lights, the foghorn and the telescope all on my own now, and I find it quite enjoyable. There have not been any bad storms yet, but Mr. Larkin assures me they get quite a few in the autumn and winter.

I like Molly more than I should for my position here. I still think about her at night, alone in my bed while I listen to the waves make crashing noises on the shore. Right outside my bedroom porch is the view of the ocean. I like it better from here, even though the view from the lighthouse is more broad.

I have to quit thinking about Molly this way. I know I can never have her. But she smiles at me, touches my arm when she speaks to me and she stands so close to me when she is around me. I have this terrible urge to kiss her, but I dare not. But the way she looks at me when she talks to me makes me wonder if she wants me to kiss

her. I cannot help it. The next time she looks at me with her eyes downcast but still on me, I am going to kiss her. I have to see what happens. Mr. Larkin may kill me, or let me go from his employ, but I have to try. She is the only lass I have ever liked this way in my entire life, so I cannot let it pass me by. I think about her constantly, and I have to admit, all my thoughts of her are not pure.

I am weary, so I will end for tonight. I feel like this journal is my salvation. Who else could I trust with my true feelings? I know I can trust Claude, he has become a friend to me. And I think I can trust Molly.

Tuesday, 6th July 1880

I kissed Molly yesterday in the lighthouse. She came to see me, but bade her maid Maureen to stay in the garden at the cottage while she brought me ale and cheese. We were alone in the highest part of the lighthouse, where all of the equipment is. I took one look at her and kissed her. To my surprise, and my delight, she kissed me back. She put her arms around me and kissed me hard. Right on the lips. She ran her tongue over my teeth, and I nearly fainted from shock. We kissed for a long time. Then, when we stopped, she laughed in her pretty way, lifted her skirts to reveal her ankles, and ran down the stairwell back to the cottage garden with Maureen.

I am dumfounded. I want Molly Larkin for my own. But how do I go about it? I have been intrigued by her since I came here. Her image has not once left my mind, or my heart. Now what am I going to do? She is the daughter of my employer, who has been very kind to me. Molly is so different. What makes her different from my sort is that she is a Larkin. That will always make her different, and perhaps always desirable to me. I have to have her, but how? Oh, God help my me. I will never be the same again, not as long as I live. I have got to see to it somehow that we are together, that no other man can claim her as his own.

I have to think, I have to plan. I love Molly, and there is nothing I can do to change that now.

Saturday, 10th July 1880

A stormy day here. I have not seen Molly today as yet. However, the past few days have been so wonderful with her. Every chance she gets, she comes to see me at the lighthouse, or she comes into the cottage with her maid Maureen. Whenever Maureen left the room, Molly would get close to me and we would kiss like we did the other day. After awhile, we went out onto the porch off my bedroom while Maureen made tea in the pantry.

I asked Molly what she thought of me, and she said she adored me - those were her words exactly. That did not entirely satisfy me. I asked her if she considered me a servant, far below her, too simple to be taken seriously. She laughed at me and said: "Seriously? Do you mean as a beau?" I told her yes. Then she kissed me again and whispered in my ear: "One of these nights I will sneak down here and surprise you as you sleep. That will show you how serious I am about you." Then Maureen came into view, so we had to sit apart in a proper fashion.

So now I wait for Molly to come to me in the night. What will I do when she does? Do I know what to do? Should I be appalled by her brazenness? She is supposed to be a lady, but I cannot help myself. I

want her, and I think she wants me. I see no reason why we cannot have a wonderful life together. Mr. Larkin likes me. Would he accept me as an equal in his home?

I think I know the answer to that question, and I do not want to dwell on it any further. I will see what the night brings to me. I want it to bring Molly to me, I want to seal her to me forever. I want my blood to be a part of hers for generations to come, and even after that.

Sunday, 1st August 1880

Molly is mine. She came to me last night in the cottage, alone. The ocean was beating on the shore, and I was lying in bed, listening to the sounds of the sea. I did not hear her enter the room, but all of a sudden she was there, standing at the foot of my bed. She must have come in through the door leading to the porch. She left the porch doors open, and the wind blew in behind her, moving the curtains and her hair.

She wore a robe, and her hair was down around her waist, loose and free. She did not say a word. She got into the bed, and put her arms around me. I touched her face and kissed her. She kissed me in return, taking my hands and placing them on her breasts. Much to my surprise - and delight, I might add - I soon discovered she wore nothing underneath her robe. There was no one to stop us, no one to hear us above the crashing waves. We became one as only married people do, and more than once before dawn settled on Banshee Point. She gave herself to me with no reservation, and I responded willingly in kind.

I told her I loved her with all of my heart, but she did not answer me. She merely put her head on my chest and sighed. I have never

been so content in my life. My heart is so full of love for Molly. We were meant to be together. Our joining was full proof of that. And the end result of our love would be issue from our bodies - a human being made from the physical love between us. I can only hope it will happen.

Molly stayed until dawn, and then she donned her robe and left me alone in my bed. She promised to return to me again tonight. I kissed her hand as she slid away from me, back out onto the porch, and back to her rightful place in the Larkin mansion.

Soon to be my rightful place, beside her as her husband.

Saturday, 7th August 1880

Molly is seventeen today. Her parents had a big party for her at the mansion this afternoon, but she came to me later at the cottage. I gave her an arrangement of wild flowers wrapped with a necklace I made from clam shells and sea weed. She was delighted, but laughed at my crude attempts at fashioning such a gift.

Besides herself, Molly brought me the long awaited drawing supplies she promised me. There was an entire stack of white drawing paper, and several kohl pencils. She also brought me some water colors. All I have to do is mix them with a bit of water to get them to paint well on the surface of the paper. She said she would pose for me soon in the yard of the cottage.

Molly has been coming to me late at night for a week now. We are becoming closer as the days go by. I assume no one is aware of what's going on between us, although I want to shout my love into the sky. I want to scream it at the heavens, but Molly tells me we have to keep our time together (as she calls it) a secret for now. I will wait because she asks me to, but I do not like it. I do not understand why we have to hide a love as pure and wonderful as ours.

I tell Molly I love her every dawn as she leaves me. She smiles at me and wafts out of the room. I want to hear it from her lips - I want to hear that she loves me, too. She must, or why would she give herself to me so freely and wonderfully? I say the words in my head, too, but they are different from the one's I say to her.

The words in my head are "I love you, Molly Sullivan." Would that it were true, and that she was my wife in body, soul and name. Soon, I am sure. Soon.

Tuesday, 10th August 1880

I painted Molly today in the yard of the cottage. She sat on a rock and smiled at me prettily, her riding crop in her hand. I loved painting her. I only got part of the way done, but she said she would come back in the afternoon tomorrow to pose some more.

She did not come to me later, and I do not know why. I saw a lot of lights on at the mansion, and the noises of many people. The Larkin's must have had a party, but Molly did not tell me of it. Perhaps she will tell me tonight very late, or tomorrow.

I hope there are no young men at the party. They will ogle my lovely Molly, and I do not believe I could stand that. Maybe that is why she did not tell me there was a party tonight. I will find out soon enough.

Saturday, 21st August 1880

Molly is in New York City. I found out from a maid at the mansion that the party held the other night was an engagement celebration for Roddy Larkin, Molly's older brother. He is to marry a wealthy lady from New York, and Molly is to be the maid of honor at the wedding, sometime next year. Molly went to New York with her mother and her future sister-in-law to purchase new clothing. I do not know when she will be back, but she has not come to me since the evening of 7 August, her birthday, and also the occasion of another party.

I am still painting on her portrait, but I am doing so from memory now. I have Molly's face in my mind, so it is not difficult - although I would rather have the live model before me. I am troubled as to why she did not even try and contact me before she left on her trip to New York. Could she not have sent word with her maid, Maureen? Perhaps Maureen is with her. Of course, I dare not ask anyone else about my love Molly.

I will bide my time, and continue with her painting and my work at the lighthouse.

Wednesday, 1st September 1880

Still no Molly. I hear she's now in the county of Westchester in New York, staying with her brother's betrothed in-laws. I hear little details when I go to the mansion to speak with Mr. Larkin about the lighthouse, which is an excuse to be there. I never ask any questions about Molly, but when I go through the kitchen to the back door, I hear Claude and the scullery maid talking about her, and the grand time she is supposedly having in New York.

I cannot believe Molly left for this long without a word to me. I am starting to feel some anger toward her, and I do not like it. How can I feel anger toward a woman I feel so much love for? Is such a thing possible?

I am almost done with her painting, although most of it I have done without her being here in the flesh to sit for me. It is turning out quite well, with or without her.

I am not one to speak foul words, but I am damn angry at Molly Larkin. How dare she do this to me? I am her lover, I am the only man who will ever love her this much. Surely she must realize that.

If I cannot have her as I want her, I have to somehow make sure that no one else will ever have her.

Friday, 15th October 1880

Molly came back this morning. I heard the carriages before I saw them from the lighthouse. They came under the awning by the front doors of the mansion. I used my telescope, and I saw Molly being helped out of the carriage by the coachman. She looked pale and tired, and thinner than I remembered, like she was ailing from some illness. My anger dissipated when I saw her like that. Something was wrong, and I had to find out what it was. I prayed she would visit me this very night.

I will wait for her. If she does not come to me tonight, I will manage to get up to the mansion somehow tomorrow in order to talk to her, or to talk to her maidservant, Maureen. I have to know what is wrong, and I also need to know why she left the estate without a word to me, and stayed away so long. I do not think it is too much too ask for some kind of explanation. I deserve that much.

Sunday, 17th October 1880

I am too devastated for words, and I do not know where to begin.

Molly came to me the same night she returned to the mansion. She was dressed in her casual clothes, carrying her riding crop. She looked very lovely, but very tired. I was in my bedroom when she came in off of the porch. She stood in the doorway. I was so happy that I ran to her and gathered her in my arms. I should have realized by her less than enthusiastic response that something was very wrong.

She walked further into the room, pointing her riding crop in the general area of my bed. "This is where you ruined my life," she said, her tone of voice so malevolent that I was startled. I wanted to know what she meant. She became very angry, keeping her distance from me. She started to shout at me, waving the riding crop in the air. She informed me that she was with child, and that I was responsible.

At that moment, I felt such a complete joy that I cannot fully describe it. I do know that I have never felt such joy in my life before or since that moment. Molly was carrying our child, the

fruits of our love. This child was a combination of the both of us. What could be more wonderful? But all I could see was how miserable and unhappy Molly appeared. She looked completely shocked and sorely upset.

I told her that was wonderful news, that I was very happy. What a fool I was. I told her we could get married now, that we could have a family together. She watched me with a look of horror on her face, as if she did not believe what I was saying. Finally, she began shouting at me again, using such foul language that I had never heard a man utter, much less a respectable young lady of breeding and wealth.

Molly told me I was a lowly peasant, that she would not marry me. She then informed me that I was not even fit to sit beside her at the dining table in the Larkin mansion; that I was mere dirt beneath her shoes. I was so bewildered that I asked her: "What about the love we shared? The happy moments we had?"

She laughed at me then - a cold, hollow sound in my ears. She almost spat the word at me: "Love? Carnal lust is not love, Colm Sullivan. I was merely curious about the act of fornication, nothing

more. I do not want this child, but I do not have a choice. My parents are not aware of yet, but when they find out, you can be sure your head will fall from your neck. I hate you, Colm."

I do not know from where my next words came, but came they did. I told her I wanted the child. That no matter what she did, I wanted our child. She laughed at me again, telling me no one would give a child to an unmarried man. I said I would marry anyone she wanted me to, as long as I could have the child and raise it. She looked at me quietly then, as if she was contemplating my words. She ended our conversation with: "I will talk to my father tonight and tell him of my predicament. There is no way to avoid having this thing inside of me, and I must give it away, or have it killed. If I give it away, it might as well be to you. I will let you know." And then she was gone from the cottage, leaving the same way she had entered it - through the doorway to the porch.

I stood still in the room. How could I have been so wrong about Molly Larkin? I thought she was different from other well-bred women I had observed in my life. But she was not different - she was the same, and much worse. She actually hated me. I could see it in her eyes. I had loved a mere image, not a person. I had a vision of

what I had wanted Molly to be, and I had not seen the real person. My God Almighty, how could I have been so blind? I am calmer now as I write this, but I was not so then. I was bereft, like I have never been in my life. I have lost the love of my life, only she was not a love at all. She was a farce, a concoction in my stupid, peasant brain.

Now I am angry. I am not taken to cursing that often, but Molly is a dirty, heartless bitch. A bloody bitch. I want our child, I want something from this terrible travesty. Why should an innocent child suffer because its mother is devoid of human feeling? I can give a child love, and knowing the child is mine, the love will be doubly strong. I can do this, and I can do without the bitch, Molly Larkin.

I fool myself. As angry as I am now, I cannot help but love Molly. Why was I given this lot in life? I will go to my grave loving her, and hating her. The only happiness I can possibly hope for now is to watch my child grow healthy, and to carry on the Sullivan name. All of this cannot be in vain.

I will not let this be in vain. I will make this time in my life matter. I swear it.

Thursday, 21st October 1880

The cat is out of the bag, so they say.

Mr. Larkin came to see me last night. For three days after Molly had spoken to me of the child, I lived in fear of some sort of retribution from my employer. One must remember that I fully respect the man, and my inner turmoil was as much about angering him as it was of my own disgust at Molly's behavior. My main concern, however, remains the welfare of my unborn child. Apparently, Mr. Larkin has similar feelings toward his first grandchild, albeit an unborn one.

Mr. Larkin came to me at the cottage. His first words were to assure me that my position at the lighthouse would remain the same, no matter what happened. He told me he was highly disappointed in Molly, and myself, for conducting ourselves in such a lewd way. But he did not say it in anger - he said it with a tone of regret. Then he went on to tell me that I could have the child and raise it, as long as I remained on the Larkin estate, and as long as I married a woman to make this appear more seemly to the community. I agreed to those conditions, happy that I would be able to keep my child, but I was

curious as to whom he had in mind for me to marry. I was not overly fond of anyone besides Molly.

Mr. Larkin suggested that I ask Molly's maid, Maureen Kelly, to be my wife. He said that Maureen was of marriageable age - fifteen - and that she was from a good, Irish Catholic family. I thought about it for a moment, surprised that I did not find the idea altogether unbearable.

I knew Maureen fairly well, as she had always accompanied Molly on her excursions down to the cottage, although Maureen had been very discreet about it all. I asked Mr. Larkin if Maureen was agreeable to the idea of marrying me, and he said yes. He told me that Maureen was aware of what was going on, and she had even volunteered to marry me and help raise mine and Molly's child. He added that Maureen was also willing to have our marriage be a true one, and that she would gladly bear me any more children that I might want.

I agreed to all of this, but I had one more question for Mr. Larkin. I could not help myself. I asked him if Molly was at all interested in our child, if she was keen on at least seeing the baby. Mr. Larkin

looked sad, and he replied: "No. My daughter has no interest in the child she carries. As soon as it's born, she wishes to marry a noted gentleman and move elsewhere. I am sorry to say this, but it is true. I never thought my own flesh and blood would turn her head away from one of her own, no matter how it was begot."

I accepted his words outwardly, but inside my heart was breaking. I told him I would comply with all of his wishes, and that he could arrange my marriage to Maureen Kelly as soon as he saw fit. He explained to me that it would be soon, and that it would be announced shortly thereafter that Maureen was with child. No one from the village would see either Molly or Maureen for the months of the confinement, so any ill rumors would not abound. The child would be born, and it would be declared legal issue between myself and Maureen. This is when Mr. Larkin turned to me and said: "Therefore, for the first several months of your marriage to Maureen, you must live as brother and sister. It would not do to have Maureen become pregnant, while she is supposedly already so to the world."

I said nothing. As he rose to leave, Mr. Larkin turned to me and said very softly: "I will want to see my grandchild, however. I will

come down here and visit quite often. That being the case, I think it is proper for you to address me as John." My mood lightened, and I thanked him. Then I inquired if Mrs. Larkin would also be coming to see the child. John's face became very red, and he told me no, that his wife was not interested in pursuing any kind of relationship with her own grandchild.

And then he left.

Monday, 1st November 1880

Maureen Kelly and I were joined in marriage today by Father Martin Neeson in the living space of my cottage. Witnesses were Mr. John Larkin and his coach driver, Danny Borelli. The ceremony was very brief, and I seemed to repeat the good father's vows almost as if I were in a trance. Maureen spoke very quietly, very timidly. She seemed to be ill at ease, and somewhat frightened. How can I blame her for that? I am almost like a stranger to her - she knows who I am and she has seen me these many months, but she really does not know me as a woman should know a man before they marry.

Maureen and I were left alone after the ceremony. Mindful of Mr. Larkin's warning that I should not assert my husbandly rights upon Maureen until Molly bears my child, I was at a loss as what to say to my new wife. Maureen is all of fifteen years old, and very shy. I prepared us some stew for a repast, and a large pot of tea. I told her we would have to sleep in the same bed as I had no other, but that I would not act the husband with her until the time was appropriate. She merely nodded her head and said she understood, that she would try and make me a good wife and a mother to my child, when it came.

I should describe my new wife. Maureen is very small, with long, auburn hair and green eyes. She still has a touch of her accent from the old sod. She wears very modest clothes on her small frame, plain of style and color. Her hair she keeps up in a respectable bun atop of her head, demurely kept under a white lace cap. Maureen has very fair skin, like the color of fresh Irish cream. She is pretty in a very non descriptive way - her looks are not outstanding, but neither are they repulsive. Her waist and her breasts seem very small, and I notice her wrists are delicately boned. She looks down much of the time, and I am not sure what to say to her, to assure her I am not a bad man, that I will not mistreat her. Perhaps someday we will also have a child, or children. At this point, however, I doubt it very much.

No word of Molly from Mr. Larkin, either. Did she know I was to marry her servant today? Did she even care? Our child is in her, and it is due to be born in either May or June of next year. Does she even care about that? I know the answer to that question, however painful it is to recall. Her hateful words, the look of disgust in her eyes as she looked upon me. I still cannot believe that she has turned on me. I am numb, emotionally, and she could care not

a whit. I am alone. I may have a wife who will help me raise my child, but I am still alone. My heart was stolen by Molly, so how can I ever love and cherish the woman I took to wife today? Will there ever be a time when I will look at Maureen with tenderness, with love? I cannot foresee it on the day.

I am weary and ready for my bed, although Maureen also rests there now. I need to put my mind at ease for at least one night. Pray the next dawn will bring me hope for the future. I need to keep my sanity for my child and for our life together.

Thursday, 30th June 1881

I was surprised to see Mr. Larkin at the cottage tonight. It was late, past ten o'clock when he knocked on the door. He carried a baby swaddled in a shawl. Clea trailed him, another bundle in her arms. Behind Clea was her husband, Nigel, carting a large baby crib. I knew Molly was near her time, but why were they bringing two babies?

After they came into the cottage, I asked them: "Why do you have two babes?"

Mr. Larkin grinned at my puzzled expression. "You have twin lads, Colm," he told me. "The first one is a bit bigger than the other, born at eight-thirty tonight. The second lad is smaller, born at nine twenty-five. They are both physically healthy, but I'm afraid the second one might have a few problems."

I was stunned, but delighted. Then Mr. Larkin's words rang in my ears. "What problems are you talking about?" I looked at the babe in his arms.

Mr. Larkin came to the point. "Dr. McGarren said the second babe is slightly underweight, although physically healthy. However, the doctor thinks the child might grow to be mentally retarded. The baby has malformed eyes, they are overly large, and his forehead protrudes. McGarren said he had seen this when he practiced medicine in Connecticut, and that the children were stunted mentally. Physically healthy, but mentally inept."

I felt a fierce well of protectiveness overcome me. "No matter," I said. "He is my child, too, and I will see that he is well taken care of."

Mr. Larkin smiled at me. "That's what I was hoping you'd say. Now, I have a document I want you to sign."

I was instantly wary. "What sort of document?"

"You know I cannot publicly acknowledge these children as blood related to the Larkin's," he said, watching me and Maureen as we stood together. "But I will recognize them as my grandchildren privately, and in a way you can show them when they are older, and when they will understand. All I ask is that you keep this to

yourselves, and only reveal the truth to the children when the time comes."

I was touched by Mr. Larkin's admission of heritage to my two babies. I chided myself for doubting the man.

Mr. Larkin took papers from his jacket and handed them to me. "Please read this and make sure it's all in order," he said softly. "My wife has already signed it. She refused to come to the cottage tonight, but I did manage to convince her to put her name to the document. Please read it."

Maureen and I read the document together:

To whom it may concern:

I, John Kevin Larkin, do attest that the legally recorded offspring of Colm and Maureen Sullivan born today, are in fact the children of my youngest child, Mary Margaret Larkin, known also as Molly, and my lighthouse keeper, Colm Sullivan. The children born today are twin boys, named Michael Kevin and John Rory Sullivan. Molly gave birth to the children in her room in my home on the hill above Banshee Point.

This true parentage of these children will be withheld from public knowledge, and I declare it here so they may know their true heritage. It is legally recorded that Colm and Maureen Sullivan are the natural parents of the boys, but they are, in fact, my grandchildren. Since Molly has chosen not to see or raise her children, and since she is not wed or likely to be in the near future, I thought it best that these innocent children have a decent home. I also wanted them close enough so I could watch them grow for as long as I live. Deep in my heart I rejoice at my flesh and blood continuing in this fairly new world.

Witnessed this day of 30 June 1881 by myself, John K. Larkin, by my patient and understanding wife, Anne O'Quinn Larkin, and by Colm and Maureen Sullivan. May God assoil our souls.

The document was marked with a wax seal, impressed with a large "L" in the center. I looked at Mr. Larkin with tear-brightened eyes. "It looks fine, John," I said. "I'll sign it." I got a pen from the kitchen cupboard. Maureen and I signed the document, which was written on heavily embossed cream-colored paper.

"I will send you a copy of the document and the birth certificates in a few days," Mr. Larkin said.

I had a sudden urge to give Mr. Larkin something in return. "Can you wait a minute before leaving?" I asked him.

He nodded. "There's no need, but I'll wait."

I hurried into the bedroom and returned with a covered canvas. I set it on the floor in front of Mr. Larkin, and unveiled the portrait underneath. I told him: "When Molly came to see me last summer, most of our time was spent on this. She asked me to do it for your birthday last October, but when everything got out of control, I put the painting away and forgot it until now."

Tears welled in Mr. Larkin's eyes as he looked at the likeness of his daughter. "Thank you, Colm. This is the most wonderful gift I have ever received. It's extraordinary. You have amazing talent. The likeness is uncanny. It fairly breathes."

"And I thank you, John. Because of you, the children will know that they are part Larkin and part Sullivan."

Mr. Larkin picked up the portrait. "I will hang it in my study," he said quietly. "Maybe someday I will be able to show it to Molly."

* * *

After Mr. Larkin departed the cottage, Maureen and I went into the bedroom to look at the sleeping babies, so peaceful and safe.

"How will you feed them?" I whispered.

"With a bottle," Maureen replied. "Mr. Larkin sent Nigel down two days ago with baby bottles, nipples, diapers, and even some toys. We have fresh milk, so all I have to do is warm it and put it into the bottles."

"How do you know all of this?"

"Clea gave me a crash course in motherhood," Maureen told me. "If I falter, all I have to do is ask Clea. Don't worry, everything will be all right. You'll see."

I looked at his babies, marveling at the differences in them. The larger baby had blond hair and dark eyes, while the smaller baby had dark hair and blue eyes. "Do you mind that Mr. Larkin named the twins?" I asked Maureen.

"No, not at all. I think the names are quite nice. Michael Kevin is named after you and Mr. Larkin's father, and John Rory is named after Mr. Larkin and Dr. McGarren. I find that very appropriate and very kind of Mr. Larkin."

"So do I."

Baby Michael opened his eyes and stretched his tiny arm into the air, the miniature hand clenched and shaking. I reached into the crib to hold my son's hand, and Michael opened his fist and curled his fingers around my finger. My heart melted.

I stood staring in awe at my twin sons, and made a vow: "I will protect and honor Michael and John with my life. They will have my name and my love for as long as I live, and I will never let them come to any harm or retribution from Molly Larkin. Especially poor little Johnny. This I swear on my life."

With that, I felt a surge of unconditional love fill me body and soul.

Thursday, 21st October 1886

I am rejoicing. Maureen gave birth to our son this morning. Clea came from the mansion and assisted with the birth, which was an easy task because the baby came quickly and there was no need for Dr. McGarren to come.

After the birth, Maureen lay in bed while Clea tended to the baby in the crib. I looked at my new baby and smiled. He had Maureen's auburn hair and my blue eyes, and was crying with all the vigor he could muster.

"What do you want to name him, M'reen?" I asked my wife.

"I like the name Aidan," she said softly. "That was my late father's name. And I'd like him to have two middle names."

"Two? One isn't enough?"

"Not this time, Colm, love. I'd like our son to be baptized as Aidan Jack Kelly Sullivan. The Jack is for my uncle who runs Quinn's Forge in the village."

"Aye, I know. Don't I get a say in the lad's name?"

"Not this time. He has your last name." Maureen smiled.

I chuckled. "You win. Aidan Jack Kelly Sullivan it is."

Maureen smiled at me. I was struck by how beautiful, truly beautiful, she looked at that moment, glowing with an inner happiness that softened her face and brightened her eyes. I realized I'd come to love Maureen in my own way. Not like the violent and extreme passion I experienced with Molly that left me anxious and distraught, but a calm, steady affection that made me feel secure and warm. There had been no fireworks with Maureen when we began having marital relations, but it was an affectionate coupling that we both enjoyed at least twice a week. My mind-shattering passion for Molly had been one-sided.

Little Michael, almost four months past his fifth birthday, stood in the bedroom doorway. Mick looked just like me, except his eyes were coal black. "Do Johnny and I have a little brother now? Do we Daddy?" he asked excitedly.

I smiled at my oldest son. "Indeed you do, Mick. Would you like to see him?"

Mick nodded vigorously.

"Go get Johnny, and you both can see your new brother," Maureen said. "Where is Johnny?"

"He's in the kitchen with Claude," Clea said.

"Non," Claude said, leading Johnny by the hand into the room. "He's right here."

Mick ran over to his twin brother. Johnny was startled by the fast movement. Mick apologized by rubbing his brother's arm. "Sorry, Johnny. I forgot. Come on, let's see our new baby brother."

Shy Johnny, a much smaller version of robust Mick, was very pale, with red-blond hair and protruding blue eyes. Looking up at Claude, he raised a thin hand to his mouth and coughed.

Claude nodded. "Oui, petite monsieur. Go and see your new brother. I will wait here."

Johnny smiled timidly, and said in a tiny voice: "Oui, Claude. I mean, yes." Mick grabbed Johnny's hand and led him slowly to the crib. I watched them, feeling a wave of sadness envelop me.

While Mick and Johnny looked at their new brother under Clea's watchful eye, Claude walked over to me. "Join me in your kitchen, Beauty?" he asked softly. I nodded and followed him out of the bedroom. Once in the kitchen, Claude came to the point. "Why do you look so sad when you look at le petite Jean?"

I sighed. "Johnny gets sick so easily. That's nothing new, I know, but now he has a cough that won't go away. I took him to see Dr. McGarren yesterday, and he said if Johnny doesn't get over this chest cough, it could go into pneumonia, and it could kill him. He says Johnny's little body can't take much more, that his natural immunity to illness has weakened because he gets sick so often. That means it's harder and harder for him to fight these awful colds he gets." "Keep him warm and inside the cottage," Claude said simply. "He may not like it, but he will stay alive."

"I worry about Johnny. He started out with a disability, and now he has to contend with constant sickness. How can it be that Mick is so strong and never sick, while Johnny seems to have never had a healthy day in his short life?"

Claude shrugged. "This is Mother Nature, non? If you take extra care with le petite Jean, he will be fine. Keep him close and warm, Beauty, and the child will do good. You'll see."

"I hope you're right." I smiled for Claude, wanting to lighten the mood. "Enough of my dire doom, aye? How would you like it if you were little Aidan's godfather?"

"This is the new babe's name? Aidan?"

"Dai," I teased. "Aidan Jack Kelly Sullivan. Will you stand in as his godfather?"

"Dai, naturally," Claude said, excited. "I would love that, Colm. I will be honored to be his godfather."

"It's settled then. Now we'll see what Maureen has to say about it."

Claude snorted with humor. "She gave your new son a mouthful of a name, non? Certainly she will not protest moi as the sainted godfather!"

We laughed as we left the kitchen together.

Tuesday, 16th November 1886

The birth of Aidan fell behind me as Johnny lay ill, his little body wracked with a relentless cough. Twice Dr. McGarren came to the cottage, and twice he told Maureen and I to keep the child warm and out of the icy winds blowing off the Atlantic. I set up a cot for Johnny in front of the fireplace, and kept the fire high night and day. I slept on the hearth cushions every night to be with Johnny, and Mick joined Maureen in the big double bed in the bedroom, where the babe Aidan slept in his crib.

Despite the fact that Johnny and Mick are not her natural children, Maureen loves them deeply. They have no idea who Molly is, but they know John Larkin, who comes to visit them at least twice a week. Mick calls Mr. Larkin "Granfar," and Johnny follows suit, although he has a hard time saying Granfar, so the word comes out sounding like "Grabter." Mr. Larkin is completely smitten with his two grandsons, but they are too young to understand how he can be their grandfather when he is not related in any way to their parents.

By the end of the second week in November, Johnny's health worsened. I was beside myself, and sent for Dr. McGarren again. It

took two days for the doctor to appear and then he shook his head and told me to prepare for the worst.

"What do you mean?" I demanded, not wanting to accept the doctor's words.

McGarren tried to be as gentle and compassionate as he could. "I'm sorry, Colm. The lad is just not strong enough to withstand all this sickness. He's never had a chance to get better because he's not strong. All you can do is keep him warm and be with him. The best hope I can offer you is that it can go either way: either he'll make himself better, or he won't. I don't need to tell you what will happen if he won't. I'm sorry."

It was Tuesday, November 16, 1886, the longest night of my life. Maureen took Mick to bed after putting Aidan in his crib, while I stayed by the fireplace. I put several blankets in front of the hearth, and then gathered shivering, coughing Johnny in my arms, and pulled more woollen blankets over us. I felt my son's every breath and cough, and prayed that he would make it through the night, as though it was a magic point of departure between life and

death. And all night Johnny moved, coughing, crying, snuffling, trying to breathe. It was a time of torture for both of us.

In the middle of the night, Johnny had a brief respite. He looked up at me, his mouth trembling. He raised his thin arm and put his cold hand on my face. Then Johnny smiled and whispered: "I love you, Daddy."

I stroked the top of Johnny's head gently. "I love you too, boyo. You're a good lad."

"Mick's a boyo, too? And Aidan?"

"Aye, son," my voice broke. "All three of you are my boyos. But you're my favourite. Johnny, you're my special little boyo."

"Claude says I'm le petite Jean," Johnny's voice was becoming weaker.

"And so you are, lad. You're all of those things and more." My heart was breaking. His head on my shoulder, Johnny closed his eyes and took a deep breath. I tightened my hold on my son, feeling

the frailty of his bones and hearing his difficult breathing. And then Johnny was still. The coughing stopped, the breathing stopped, and those sad, blue eyes were closed forever. The trusting little smile was still on his face, and I was struck at how serene Johnny looked. He was peaceful and rested now.

I laid my head atop of Johnny's, hot tears scalding my cheeks. My little boy was gone. The poor lad suffered from the moment of his birth, but had always been so happy and curious and trusting. I wondered, numb with grief and exhaustion, where was he now? Was Johnny wandering alone in the mistiness and haze of heaven, looking for his father and mother? Was this it? The boy had only been allowed to live for such a short time. Is that all there was to it?

"Colm, love, let him go." Maureen stood over us, dressed in her robe, her hair in disarray.

"No," I choked, "I don't want to let him go, M'reen. He needs me."

"Colm, Johnny is dead. We have to send for Father Neeson."

"The priest can't have him!" I said violently, holding Johnny's limp body even closer. "I won't give my son to God, not yet."

Maureen sighed, the tears from her eyes rolling down her cheeks.

I was not be consoled. "God took Johnny because of what Molly and I did," I cried, rocking my dead son back and forth gently in my arms. "What we did was wrong, and this is God's way of punishing me. Molly's punishment is her own hell, her own insanity. I would have gladly given my life for that terrible sin. Why did God have to take my little boy? Why, M'reen, why?"

Maureen knelt down by me. "God is not to blame, nor are you. Poor little Johnny was born with a weak, sick body. It's not a punishment; it's just the way it is. He's with God now. Holding on to him will not bring him back. You wouldn't want him to stay in his sick body. He's in a better place now, where he won't be sick anymore."

"I can't let him go. Look at him. He's so sweet and lovely. How can you ask me to let him go?"

Maureen stood. Then, more sharply than she had ever spoken to me before, she said aloud: "Colm, get up."

Startled, I looked up at her. "What?"

"Get up, I said. Stop acting like a hysterical child. You have to go to the mansion and let Mr. Larkin know his grandson is gone. Now is the time to be strong. You have to help Mr. Larkin through this, too."

I let go of Johnny slowly, easing my son's body onto the blankets and carefully laying his head on a pillow. Then I stood, wiped my face and eyes with the backs of my hands, and looked at Maureen.

She took my hand. "Come now, love. Go up to the mansion and wake Claude. He will help you."

I nodded, moving to the front door. "Aye, Claude. Claude will help me."

I put on my wool coat, flipping the collar up around my neck. I looked back at Maureen again. "Don't touch my boyo until I get back," I said. "He has need of me."

Then I opened the door and left the cottage.

Friday, 19th November 1886

My Johnny boy was buried today. It was a long carriage ride from the mansion to the Larkin City Cemetery, especially in the cold of winter. We left the estate in a small flat-bed carriage, which bore the oak casket containing my son's small body.

I don't know how I got through the service, but I was not alone. Mr. Larkin was there, as were Claude and Maureen. We did not bring Mick because he was too young to understand, and the service might upset him further. I was grateful for Claude's presence. Mr. Larkin appeared sad, having adored his namesake grandson, who had touched all who had known him with his sweet disposition and sunny personality. I could not see John's full grief, since, as usual, he hid his feelings. I know each person deals with sorrow differently.

I thought of Molly only briefly, after Father Neeson finished the prayer by the grave site. In a flash, I thought: "Does Molly even know, or care, that one of her children is dead? That little Johnny did not even live to see his sixth birthday? Or is she so wrapped up in her own feelings that this is just another day for her?"

Once back on the Larkin estate, Claude accompanied me and Maureen to the cottage. Maureen went into the kitchen to make a pot of tea, while Claude and I settled into the hearth cushions by the fire. Mick and the babe Aidan were at the mansion, being looked after by a kitchen maid. Mr. Larkin had thoughtfully volunteered to keep the children for a few hours after the funeral, allowing me to settle myself and come to grips with my emotions. I had to maintain my strength for my other children now, especially in front of Mick.

The wind howled outside of the cottage, and spatters of rain hit the windows as it whipped in sudden gusts. Over the whining of the gale, Claude heard the waves crashing onto the shore. Still wearing my coat, I sat staring into the flames.

"Mr. Larkin holds himself in, doesn't he?" I asked.

"Oui," Claude replied. "The Monsieur has always been that way. He's very closed in to himself when he is sad."

I sighed. "I wish I could be that way, and then maybe I wouldn't hurt so much."

"Non, Beauty. You must not hold grief inside, or it will slowly drive you mad. That is the way of the Monsieur, but it is not the way for everyone. You have to express your sadness. To keep it bottled up inside is very bad for you."

"Spoken like a true Frenchman," I smiled.

"So I should know, eh? I still believe one of these days the Monsieur will explode with his grief. No one can keep it inside forever. It has to come out eventually."

I finally took off my coat. "Does Mrs. Larkin know about my Johnny?"

"Oui," Claude said. "She knows. So do Roddy and his wife. Everyone knows."

"What did Mrs. Larkin say?"

Claude shook his head. "Nothing, but that is her way. She bottles up her feelings, too. This must be an Irish thing, non?"

"Not for all Irish," I said. "Mrs. Larkin never cared, anyway. As far as she is concerned, I don't exist and the children were never born. I'm surprised she even signed that paper of John's when the twins were born. You know, the one I told you about?"

"Oui. The paper that says John is the grandfather, and Miss Molly the mother. You showed it to me."

I was silent for a moment, glancing toward the kitchen to make sure Maureen was out of earshot. Then I whispered: "Does Molly know her son is dead?"

Claude nodded. "Oui. Mr. Larkin wanted to keep it from her, and he instructed Clea to say nothing. I didn't think that was right, so I told Mademoiselle myself. I took her lunch to the attic the day after le petite Jean died, and I told her."

"What did she say?"

Claude hesitated, but then said: "She said nothing, my Beauty. Not one word. She just stared at me, and then she looked away."

"The bitch," I said between clenched teeth, but kept my voice low so Maureen would not hear me. "The cold, heartless bitch."

Claude said nothing. Maureen came into the room carrying a tray with a teapot and cups, setting them on a small table by the hearth. "I'm going to walk up to the mansion and get the children," she told me. "It's time they were home with us."

I agreed. "Yes, they have been in that house long enough" I looked at Claude. "Will you stay a while?"

"Of course," Claude said. "I would enjoy seeing my godson, Aidan. I will stay for as long as you like, Beauty."

After Maureen left, I said: "Thank you, Claude, for being here. I don't know how I would have managed...."

I saw the tears filling Claude's eyes. "We are friends, non? I will always be your friend, Colm, and I will always be here for you. That's what friends are for, nez pas?"

"Oui, Claude. That's what friends are for."

Friday, 26th November 1886

I spent the afternoon alone in the lighthouse, working on the keeper's logbook. I watched a dark day turn into a wet snow storm, which continued to gather force. The wind blew strong enough that I decided to spend the afternoon in the tower to watch for any ships in trouble.

I kept a fire burning in the small stove, with wood piled beside it, to keep the heat steady and comforting. Because of the warmth, I abandoned some of my warm clothing, but kept it near in case I had to go outside. Safe in my lighthouse cocoon, with the dark outside shrinking my vision, and the snow quieting the sound of the storm, I was absorbed in his work and unaware when Molly stepped into the tower.

"Colm." Her voice was deep, silky and familiar. The hair rose on my neck, and I spun around. Hollow-cheeked, pale and thin, her beauty was still haunting. The pen fell from my fingers. My voice was stuck in my throat. She had aged. The hood of her cloak covered all but her pale face, which was expressionless. I looked down at her hands that held the cloak and saw that they were bony and blue-

veined. What did I feel for her? Sadness, impatience, anger? I did not know. "What are you doing here?"

"I had to see you."

"Why?"

She shrugged. I waited silently for her to speak or leave. She walked closer. I smelled the clean, floral smell that I associated with her, and my body reacted. I started to tremble.

"I owe you an apology," she said softly.

"For what?"

"For a long time I blamed you for my ill fortune. I've been punishing myself for years, but also blaming you."

"You had choices, Molly." My voice was steady, thankfully. "You could have made a life for yourself. You could have married a rich man and had a good life. I didn't force you to stay hidden in the mansion. You did that to yourself, and you know it."

"The problem was, I could not choose. After the babies were born, I sank into a depression so low that I could not make any kind of decision. I'm still in that depression now, but the doctors have me loaded up on laudanum."

"I can tell. You aren't the same."

She smiled thinly. "Exactly."

"What does that have to do with me?" I felt her presence, something I thought I would never feel again. I thought I was out of her reach, but was a fool to think I could ever be immune to her.

"I tried to deny you and deny the existence of the twins," she said as she went over to the telescope and put her hand on it. She turned to me, her eyes were brimming with tears. "Did you know that when the babies were born, Clea tried to show them to me before Daddy took them? Do you know what I said to her?"

"What?"

"That I didn't care if she threw both of them over the cliff, because I never wanted to lay eyes on them."

Appalled, I said nothing.

"But it wasn't the truth." She moved toward me. "I didn't understand it then, but I had all the emotions mothers have. I thought if I denied the babies, I could atone to my father for the shame I brought to him. And by rejecting the twins, I could also repudiate you, and erase you from my mind and my life. But it didn't work out that way. I never quit thinking about you, or the babies. It took me so long to realize the result of my actions."

She looked so sad that I almost felt sorry for her, but suddenly I was uneasy. I knew she was kept confined to the mansion because of her depression. Why was she here, and how did she manage to get out? I stood slowly. Molly watched me, from head to toe, as she used to.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"Getting a cup of tea," I said, trying to hide my unease. "Would you like one?"

"Yes, that would be nice."

I walked to the stove and poured two cups of tea, and gave her one. My hand brushed her cold hand, so I drew away quickly.

She sipped the hot tea, looking at me. "My touch still bothers you, doesn't it?"

I had not fooled her. How could I expect to deceive her, when even after all of this time I still wanted her? I returned to my desk and sat down, trying to sound stern. "You should not have come out here in this weather. You'll catch cold, Molly. You really should go back to the mansion."

When she replied, the acidity in her voice made my skin crawl. "In other words, you're wondering how I escaped the prison I created for myself?"

I turned to look at her. She stood holding the tea cup, staring at me coldly. "No one expects me to try and leave. They all think I'm drugged and scared, but they don't know I'm immune to the laudanum now, and I'm addicted to it. I control the dose, though, by pretending to take it and spitting it out after they leave. On the days when I want a clear head, I don't take as much. Like today."

"Who gives you laudanum?"

"The doctors prescribed it; Clea usually gives it to me."

"Oh."

"How did you feel when I told you a moment ago that I never quit thinking about you and our children?" Her voice was flat, and her eyes cold.

She blows hot and cold. It must be the narcotic. "I'm thankful you realize how important the twins are. And I pity you."

"Pity me? Why?" Her eyes flashed briefly.

"Because you never got to know Johnny. You let resentment and fear get in the way of your own children. Johnny was a gem, he was. He had problems from birth, he was never very healthy. But he was so special, so wonderful. Hard to believe, but I looked up to him, I thought of Johnny as my hero. No matter how bad he felt or how sick he was, he always smiled and tried to make everyone around him happy." She listened quietly, and then looked down.

"There is still time for you to get to know Mick," I continued, wondering immediately why I had said it. The last thing I wanted was Molly to be around Mick. "Of course, you couldn't tell him you are his birth mother. He loves Maureen, and calls her Mummy. But if you'd like to meet him, perhaps I can arrange something."

Molly looked up with a caustic smile. "Perhaps." She changed the subject abruptly. "I left the house by the back way, the servants' stairs. Clea thinks she gave me enough laudanum to last until tea time, but I spit it out after she left."

I was alert. "You wanted to see me one more time?"

Molly sighed. "I think its best I never come here again. Don't you?"

"That's your decision."

She came over and stood in front of me. "What happened to my painting?" she asked softly.

"I gave it to your father the night the twins were born."

"You did? Why?"

I looked away from her intense stare. "It felt right at the time. He wanted to be a part of the twins' lives, and I appreciated his interest, so I gave him the picture. He was touched and happy to get it."

"Where is it now?"

"He said he was going to hang it in his study."

"Oh. I haven't been downstairs in the study in years, which is probably why I haven't seen it."

She turned away again. "Daddy gave my horse to Sascha to use," she said absently, peering out the window at the blowing snow. "She likes to ride. You did know that Roddy married Sascha McShane five years ago?"

"Yes, I knew." The conversation was pointless, and I was uncomfortable with her presence in the lighthouse. I did not want her there. She was a slight on Johnny's memory.

She seemed to sense my withdrawal from her, and her face was sad. It was time to go, but she had one more thing to tell me. She put down her tea cup and, smiling, came back to stand in front of me. She studied my face as if trying to memorize it. "I want you to know one thing," she said. "I never told you, but I did love you. I think I loved you the minute I saw you. I know I hurt you by not telling you I loved you, and I'm sorry. I'm so sorry about a lot of things, but it's too late for me now. I'm grateful that the love we had, however brief, created another soul in Michael. And in Johnny, may he rest in eternal peace. Michael will keep us connected forever, even if you don't like it. Our blood, the Larkin's and the Sullivan's, will be forever intermingled. Nothing can change that, not an edict from my father or a cold shoulder from my mother. I even forgive her now,

as much as I forgive myself. She cannot help what she is, any more than I can, or you can, or my father can."

I felt a deep sense of longing fill me, but tried to fight it. This was Molly, the woman I once loved so deeply and violently that I thought I would never get over her. She had loved me. She had finally said the words. "I loved you, too," I choked. "It could have been so different for you and me, Molly. It didn't have to be this way."

"I know, but we cannot change the past. You are married now, and you have a new son. You have your family, and I have my life. We made our own choices, for good or ill."

"True."

Molly still wore her cloak with the hood up. "I have to go," she said.

"Do you want me to walk with you to the top of the path?" I asked.

Molly smiled and shook her head. Sadly, at one time I would have begged her to stay, but now I could not wait for her to go. "I'll be all right. I've walked the path many times by myself."

I watched her silently.

Her luminous black eyes gazed at me from a calm and serene face. "Please don't judge me too harshly, Colm. Not even in the privacy of your mind. I never meant to hurt you."

I nodded.

"Goodbye, Colm."

"Goodbye, Molly." Goodbye my love, I thought.

She turned and disappeared down the steps.

Tuesday, 30th November 1886

Molly died the night she came to me in the lighthouse, throwing herself from the cliffs on Banshee Point. I'm not sure what caused her to take such a drastic action, or if I could have stopped her had I known, but I did not mention to a soul that she had come to visit me. What purpose would it serve?

Mr. Larkin buried Molly in a lone plot on the grounds of the estate, off to the left of the path to the lighthouse and the beach. Hers was a simple headstone:

Mary Margaret Larkin 1864-1886

Plain. Simple.

And quite unlike the woman I loved.

Saturday, 25th January 1890

The New Year is cold, like it is supposed to be. I am rather idle in the winter months - it is rare that ships come upon the ocean in this foul weather. So I am content to stay in my cottage by the sea with my wife and our children.

I have decided to stop writing in this journal after today. Ten years is a long time to keep a record of one's life, even if I am supposed to be a keeper. I want to live my life now, not write about it.

I still think about Molly Larkin every day, although I have come to love my wife, Maureen, very deeply. It was better for me to have married Maureen, rather than Molly. But how can I not think about Molly? I see her every time I look into our son's eyes. Michael's eyes. Three-and-a-half years ago, Molly took her own life off of the cliffs at Banshee Point, shortly after Michael's poor twin brother, Johnny, died. I think Michael pines for his brother, but he says naught to me about it. He is eight years old now and quite smart for a child. Someday, when he is older and much wiser, I will tell him about his real mother. I hope and pray he will understand. I am thirty years old now, and not even sure I understand what happened between myself and Molly Larkin.

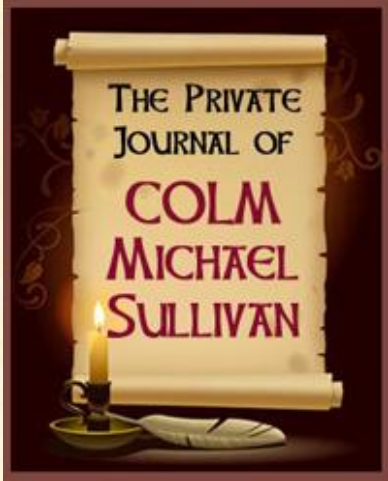
From this time forth, I wish nothing but the best for my family, and for the Larkin's. Michael is one of them now, whether he knows it or not, although I swear someday he shall. May the future hold promise for all of us here on Banshee Point and in Larkin Village. It is time for new beginnings.

There is a lesson I have learned these last ten years, and one I will pass on to all of my offspring, however many that may be at the end of my time on earth: Memories of the past are permanent and enduring - and are never forgotten.

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The Private Journal of Colm Sullivan

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Author's Note

Transcripts for Colm Sullivan's Journal were extracted from "Book One: The Advent" and "Book Five: The Keeper's Journal," which are part of the nine-novel Collective Obsessions Saga by Deidre Dalton.

Titles in the saga include:

- 1. The Advent*
- 2. Quixotic Crossings*
- 3. The Twain Shall Meet*
- 4. Exthrallment*
- 5. The Keeper's Journal*
- 6. Hearts Desires*
- 7. The Twilight*
- 8. Megax's Legacy*
- 9. Limb of Iniquity*

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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 one hundred years, all set against the backdrop of a Gothic seaside mansion in Maine. Titles in the eight-part family saga include *The Advent*, *Quixotic Crossings*, *The Twain Shall Meet*, *Enthrallment*, *The Keeper's Journal*, *Hearts Desires*, *The Twilight* and *Megan's Legacy*. A ninth book in the saga, *Limb of Iniquity*, is tentatively scheduled for release in 2025.



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

In addition, 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 to the *Collective Obsessions Saga*), and *The Private Journal of Colm Sullivan*.

Writing under her real name of Deborah O'Toole, Deidre is author of the fiction titles *Celtic Remnants*, *The Crypt Artist*, *Glinhaven*, *In the Shadow of the King*, and *Mind Sweeper*, along with the *Short Tales Collection* (juvenile fiction), and a book of poetry known as *Torn Bits & Pieces*. For more, visit <https://deborahotoole.com/>.

Deidre is a native of Greenwich, Connecticut. She has also lived in San Francisco, Tucson, Reno and Spokane, among other US cities. She currently resides in the mountain west with her significant other, Jerry Dalton, and their two cats.

Her favorite authors and biggest writing influences include Dorothy Daniels, Marilyn Ross, Elizabeth Byrd, James Clavell, Ken Follett, Marilyn Harris, Bertrice Small, Susan Kay, Leon Uris, Alison Weir, Edward Rutherfurd and Kathleen Woodiwiss.

A lifelong Tudor, Irish history and Gothic novel buff, Deidre likes to browse through her local paperback exchange. She also enjoys computer solitaire, needlepoint, growing her own herbs and experimenting in the kitchen on whim.

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