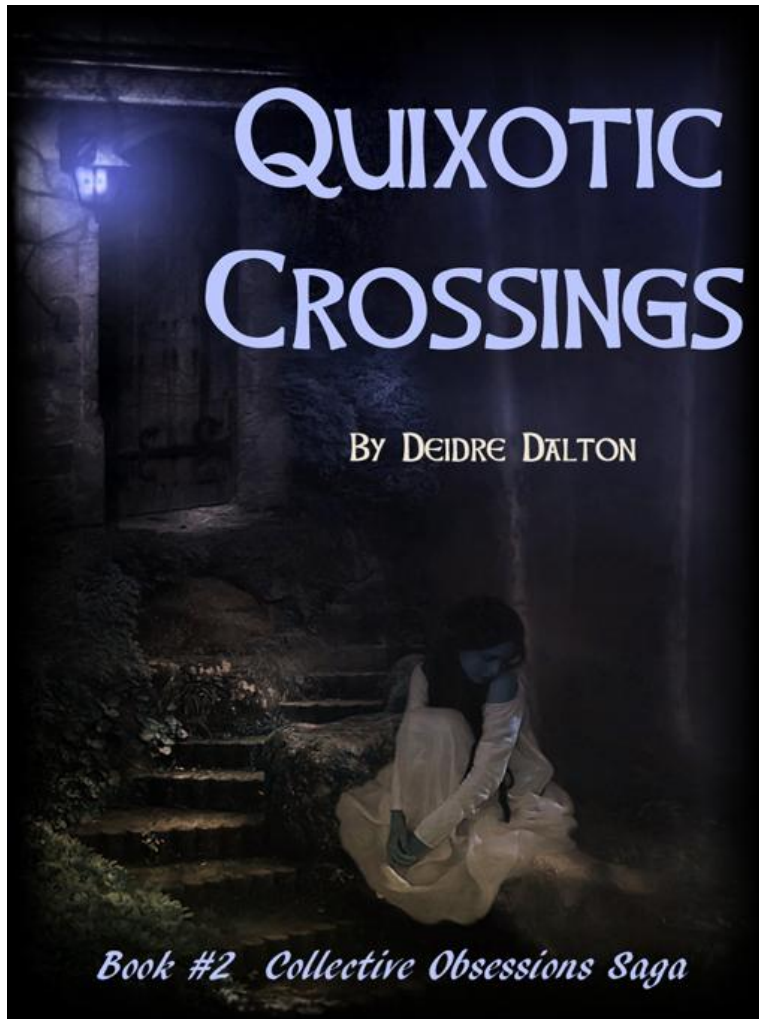


Excerpts from:
Quixotic Crossings
By Deidre Dalton (aka Deborah O'Toole)



QUIXOTIC CROSSINGS (*Book #2 in the Collective Obsessions Saga*)

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ABOUT "QUIXOTIC CROSSINGS"

Quixotic Crossings by Deidre Dalton (aka Deborah O'Toole) is the second book in the *Collective Obsessions Saga*.

Fate continues to entangle the Larkin and Sullivan families amidst madness, murder and obsessive love. Colm and Molly's grandson Jean-Claude Sullivan finds his life driven by greed and perversely tainted pleasures. Beloved family chef Claude Mondoux watches helplessly as Colm slowly loses his mind in ghostly visions of Molly, while Colleen Larkin seeks love in the arms of another man with deadly consequences...

After the death of family patriarch John Larkin in 1926, the strains of madness filter their way into the second and third generations of the irrevocably entangled Larkin and Sullivan families.

Colm and Molly's grandson Jean-Claude Sullivan finds his life driven by greed and perversely tainted pleasures, while Molly's coldly-calculating nephew Patrick Larkin propels the family business to impressive heights as he fosters a new generation with his wife Colleen McGarren.

Murder, obsession, self-indulgence and avarice continue to haunt the Larkin and Sullivan families. Patrick has an affair with his wife's sister Phoebe McGarren but is then rendered less than a man after an accident. He retreats to the attic in the family mansion to ponder his fate much like Molly Larkin did before him, where he becomes increasingly ominous yet ever vigilant.

Beloved family chef Claude Mondoux watches helplessly as Colm slowly loses his mind in ghostly visions of Molly Larkin, while Colleen seeks love in the arms of another man with deadly consequences.

For more, go to:

<http://deidredalton.com/>

QUIXOTIC CROSSINGS: Excerpt from Chapter Five

Spring-Summer 1928
Larkin City, Maine

MICK SULLIVAN WAS forty-seven years old in 1928. The year before, he was forced from his position as lighthouse keeper at Banshee Point because the US Lighthouse Service decided to automate the lights by changing from oil to electricity, eliminating the need for a keeper. Mick had been crushed at first, but Roddy Larkin was a decent sort and he saw to it that Mick had a job to go to.

Roddy opened the Larkin Harbor Tour Company shortly after the lighthouse automation was in place. He hired Mick to guide tours on the harbor as well as a leisurely route around the lighthouse area and the Larkin's private beach. Mick was not a boat-pro, but he quickly adapted to the 65-foot wooden schooner known as *Lady Banshee*.

The vessel was constructed at the Shipbuilders Station on the harbor, and was made with traditional two-inch carved cedar planks over white oak frames. The schooner had a roomy fifty-six feet on deck, with cushioned edge seats and grip rails. The beam was fourteen feet with a draft of six feet six inches. *Lady Banshee* had 18,000 pounds of ballast and carried 1,600 square feet of sail.

Mick was plenty busy during the summer tourist season, but winter brought a lull to his activity. Apart from general maintenance around the lighthouse once a month, which Roddy paid him for, Mick was left to his own devices from October to April each year.

It wasn't that Mick needed the money. He rarely touched the \$450,000 John Larkin willed to him. He spent bits here and there, but Mick was determined to provide his own income. He heartily disliked being idle. His wife, the former Layla Barton-Brooks, often begged him to relax. "You could retire right now," she told him. "There's no need for all this restlessness. Enjoy life, my darling. Find an interesting hobby, and *simply retire*."

But Mick loved the Banshee Point Lighthouse. He didn't care if he had a million dollars; he yearned to work in his beloved lighthouse. Since that was no longer possible, he made do with the harbor tours. Yet it was a poor replacement for his true calling.

Instead of the blissful quiet of the keeper's cottage, Mick and Layla now lived in a two-story house on the waterfront of Larkin Harbor. Mick dipped into his inheritance to buy the house outright for \$10,000, and he allowed Layla a generous \$2,000 to furnish the home.

The house was painted white with beige trim, and included a deck that wound its way around the back of the house which faced the water. There were tall windows on the first and second floors, with boxed flower planters under many of them. Mick attached framed gas lights over the front and back doors, and built deck chairs and a table for him and Layla.

The inside of the house contained four bedrooms, an attic loft, a large kitchen overlooking the harbor and a parlor that faced the front of the house. Most mornings Mick and Layla awoke to the gently lapping tide in the harbor, a peaceful beginning to any day. Mick built a shed when they first moved in, where he fiddled with woodwork or fixed

household appliances. He was also only a half-mile away from the Larkin Harbor Tour Company, so he never had far to go.

Mick loved the house, although he still secretly yearned for the keeper's cottage. In the evenings, he liked nothing better than to sit on the deck of his harbor home with a pint of ale to watch the sun set. Layla often joined him, sipping white wine to his ale.

Mick and Layla had been married for twenty-three years, and their relationship was affectionate and comfortable. He remained enchanted by his wife's head of dark curls, her pale skin and her delicate physique. Despite her apparent outer frailty, Layla was a strong woman with many opinions of her own. She did not view Mick as her lord and master, and he admired her independence.

One evening in late May, Mick and Layla settled on the deck. Each had their favorite libation in hand as they watched the sun set together in silence. Their time was quiet, apart from the sounds of harbor bells and buoys.

Finally, Layla spoke. "I talked to Jean-Claude this morning. Jennifer miscarried last night."

Mick was dismayed. "Oh, God no. Is she all right?"

"Yes, but very depressed."

He felt a twinge of sadness, the loss of an unknown grandchild bringing a tear to his eye. "The poor dear. Should we go and see her? Is she still at the hospital?"

"Jean-Claude said she's going home from the hospital in the morning," Layla told him. "Maybe we should stop by tomorrow afternoon."

Jean-Claude and his wife, Jennifer O'Connor, had married the year before. Jean-Claude worked at the offices of the *Larkin Gazette*, where he edited articles for the daily publication. He had fallen into the job after graduating from Larkin City University with degrees in English and American history. He started at the *Gazette* as a part-time clerical worker, but the editor soon recognized his talents and promoted him to assistant editor.

Mick shook his head. "I don't want to intrude. You should call first. You know how Jennifer is about her privacy."

"You're right," Layla agreed. "I'll telephone Jean-Claude before we go over."

Jean-Claude Sullivan, named after the uncle Johnny he never met and the effervescent Claude Mondoux, was parsimonious with money. The \$100,000 John Larkin left him sat in the bank earning interest. Even Jennifer wasn't aware of the fortune, but Jean-Claude had his own reasons for keeping the knowledge from her. He was meticulous, careful and organized. Jennifer was an unknown quantity so early in their marriage, and Jean-Claude wanted to be certain she would be with him for the long haul before he let her in on his bounty. It was unromantic and calculating, but he planned for the future with exacting detail, viewing the inheritance as his retirement nest egg.

Mick drained his glass of ale. "I have this funny feeling Jennifer doesn't like us."

Layla sighed. "I get the same feeling, but I don't understand it. We've been nothing but kind to her."

"Jennifer is different," Mick admitted. "She seems obsessed about her privacy, and almost paranoid about outside interference."

"Jean-Claude appears to be happy enough with her."

"That's all that matters," Mick said. "As long as he is happy in his marriage, we can't complain."

* * *

JENNIFER O'CONNOR SULLIVAN glared at her husband Jean-Claude as he tucked her into their bed carefully.

"Why can't you just leave me alone?"

Jean-Claude ignored her and continued to see to her comfort. He resembled his father to a remarkable degree, and thusly like his grandfather Colm.

"You are a bastard," Jennifer sneered. "You think you're handsome and smart and debonair because you work at the paper, but you're nothing more than the son of an unemployed lighthouse keeper."

Jean-Claude ignored her again. She glanced at the water vase on her night stand. Without hesitating, she grabbed the vase and smashed it down viciously on her husband's head.

He staggered and then stumbled to his knees. He clutched at his head, feeling the wet mixture of blood and water. *His own blood.*

He stood to his feet, looking down at his wife. She appeared pleased with herself, returning his stare with a small smile.

"You're a crazy bitch," he muttered.

"Oh grow up! Don't start bleating about how I abuse *you*," she taunted him. "Who in this town could believe a man - a *real* man - would let his wife intimidate him?"

Jean-Claude still held his hands to his head. "You need help, Jen."

"What I need is peace and quiet," she exclaimed. "You're no help at all. Leave me alone, for the love of God."

Jean-Claude left the room gladly. He walked down the narrow hallway to the small kitchen, where he found a tea towel and pressed it to the wound on his head. Then he went to the bathroom and looked in the mirror. Removing the tea towel, he inspected the damage. There was a thin cut on his left temple, but he didn't think it was worth a trip to the doctor. Not this time, anyway.

He had known Jennifer since they were young children. She was the granddaughter of Patrick O'Connor, one of the four men John Larkin hired in New York off the boat from Ireland in 1881. In high school, Jennifer and Jean-Claude became good friends, although by the time they graduated their relationship took a romantic turn.

She had been sweet and lovely then, with long blonde hair and large blue eyes. She was a happy person, full of humor and kind deeds. After their wedding a year ago, Jennifer seemed content to throw herself into their marriage with enthusiasm. She enjoyed fixing up their small cottage on Curry Street while Jean-Claude worked at the *Gazette*. Although their home was small and fairly bland, she kept the two bedrooms clean and cheerful with flowered wallpaper, fresh linens and small bowls of chopped cinnamon and vanilla. The kitchen was spotless, even down to the drab olive color of the walls. Jennifer added little touches here and there - frilly white lace curtains and decorative place mats on the table - and she was a superb cook. Their living room window faced the tiny front yard and Curry Street, and most evenings they would sit and read after dinner, or talk about their respective days.

Jennifer suffered her first miscarriage four months after their wedding. Afterward, she developed extreme mood swings. She would strike out at Jean-Claude with regularity and no warning, once breaking his finger when she tried to pull his wedding ring off. He

had gone to the hospital then, explaining to the attending doctor he had caught his finger in a cupboard door.

She became pregnant again, and her moods seemed to settle. But she miscarried a second time, and the hostility began anew. When Jean-Claude tried to talk to her about her hysteria, Jennifer refused to acknowledge she had a problem, instead blaming him for her reactions. Jean-Claude was too embarrassed to ask her doctor about the circumstances he found himself in, so he continued to live in shameful fear of his wife. The idea of divorcing her never entered his mind. They were married for life, whether the union was miserable or not.

Now she had miscarried a third time within a year. Jean-Claude dreaded what the coming months would bring.

The telephone rang, startling Jean-Claude. Leaving the towel on the bathroom sink, he returned to the kitchen and picked up the wall receiver.

"Jean-Claude, it's mother," Layla said. "How is Jennifer doing?"

He tried to keep the frustration from his voice. "She's very depressed, as you can imagine. I just got her settled into bed."

"You're father and I would like to come and see her," Layla continued. "Would tomorrow morning be convenient?"

Jean-Claude hesitated. He couldn't allow his parents to see his injury. "Why don't you give her a couple of days before coming over? She needs to rest so she can recover fully."

"Very well," Layla said, sounding surprised. "Please give her our love, and tell her we'll stop by in a few days for a visit."

"Thank you, mother."

Jean-Claude sat at the kitchen table after replacing the telephone receiver. He looked around the room and frowned at the mess. There were dirty dishes in the sink, crumbs on the floor and newspaper strewn all over the table. In her right mind, Jennifer would be stunned by the disarray.

He stood from the table. He was going to clean up before going to bed. He wanted a good night's sleep before returning to work at the Gazette tomorrow. When Jennifer was in her difficult way, he usually slept on the lumpy couch in the living room.

Before he could move, a blood-curdling scream rent the air. Jean-Claude froze, recognizing Jennifer's wail. "*Oh God, what is it now?*" he thought in a panic.

He raced into the hallway, and then heard a second scream. He stopped short near the bathroom, seeing his wife standing at the sink. He came to the doorway, and she looked at him, her head moving with a twitching motion.

"What is it, Jen?" he asked. "What's wrong?"

There were tears streaming down her face. She had the bloody tea towel in her hand, holding it out to him. "What have I done?" she sobbed. "The blood....it's like the color of roses. Is it *mine*? Is it the baby's? Or is it yours?"

Jean-Claude wanted to go to her, but he was uncertain. If he held her in his arms, would she turn on him as she had so many times before? He kept his distance. "It's my blood," he said quickly.

She threw her head back and let out another slow-building squall. She took the tea towel and began rubbing it over her face, her chest, her belly.

He was shocked by the display. Jennifer had lost her mind, he realized with devastating clarity. *She was completely barmy.*

He went to her then. She collapsed in his arms, dropping the bloodied towel to the floor.

QUIXOTIC CROSSINGS: Excerpt from Chapter Six

*Spring 1929
Larkin City, Maine*

COLM SULLIVAN WAS feeling the affects of his age shortly after his 69th birthday in March 1929. He had led a rather quiet life since the death of John Larkin two years earlier. Colm kept his cottage in Larkin City, whiling away his days with painting and reading. He wrote weekly letters to his youngest son Aidan, a Catholic priest serving in Toronto, Canada, and once a week Colm's oldest son Mick stopped by the cottage to visit with his wife Layla. On occasion, Mick's son Jean-Claude came to see his grandfather with his wife Jennifer or his best friend Mason Berger. Colm usually rustled up a big pot of Irish stew, which Jean-Claude and Mason seemed to enjoy immensely.

Colm had not been to the Larkin estate since John's funeral. He was tired of funerals, having just attended the service for Lizbeth Bisiker at the Larkin Cemetery. John's mistress was now gone, as if God was running through Colm's generation. He had no reason to go the mansion, although he sometimes felt the desire to see Molly's grave.

Claude Mondoux came to Larkin City every Saturday for supplies, as he had done for years, and he always came to see Colm. The two usually had lunch together at Colm's cottage, or they sometimes went to Bruno's Café for a hearty meal.

Claude and Colm were the best of friends, yet they rarely mentioned the past or Molly Larkin since Nigel's funeral. Claude knew Molly still haunted Colm's mind. It was an unspoken knowledge. Colm had been a dutiful and affectionate husband to his wife Maureen until her death twenty years ago, but Molly had always been on the peripheral edges of their marriage. Maureen had been aware of this of course, yet she loved Colm until her dying day.

* * *

COLM'S TWO-STORY cottage was located at the end of Cove Hollow Circle in Larkin City. The cottage was clapboard slate-gray, with two chimneys and a fenced rear garden. The interior was pleasingly decorated in eggshell blues and pale greens, with pale yellow wallpaper and comfortably cushioned window seats.

One morning in early April Colm set up his easel in the garden behind his cottage. It had rained earlier, and the drops fell heavily on the grass, shrubs and flowers. The sun broke through the clouds, gradually dissipating the liquid bubbles of rain, creating a persistent drip amongst the foliage.

Colm was painting his image of the garden, a collection of lilac bushes, roses, tulips, peonies, and larkspur. It was a riot of color, and Colm loved nothing better than to convey the sight with splashes on his canvas.

He stored his finished artwork in a spare room inside the cottage. Aside from portraits he had given to John Larkin and members of his own family, Colm kept all of his paintings, rarely showing them to anyone. It wasn't because he was insecure about his talent - he knew the art was good - but he had no desire to become part of a showcase to

promote his work. He painted for the enjoyment of it, not the possible financial windfall it might provide. He was also mindful of the terms of John Larkin's will. Some of the portraits depicted the relationship between him and Molly, and were therefore not suitable for public consumption.

All finished works were well-organized in wooden crates, carefully separated by large pieces of thick tissue paper. One box held miniatures he had painted over the years: some of Molly, but mostly of his children and grandchildren. Bigger portraits, such as landscapes, lighthouses, gardens and other people were in tall, slender crates.

Colm continued to work, humming to himself as he deftly stroked the canvas with his paintbrush. He had been painting for the better part of an hour when all of a sudden he felt the hairs rise on the back of his neck. Someone was in the garden, watching him.

He laid the brush on the easel ledge, setting his paint board face-up on the garden table next to him. He wiped his hands on a small towel tied to one of the belt loops on his trousers.

"Can I help you?" he asked without turning around.

Silence greeted him.

Colm sighed, standing up from his chair. He turned around, expecting to see a vagrant standing in his garden. Instead, the vision before him took his breath away and set his heart pounding with fear.

It was Molly Larkin, looking like she did the last time he saw her...*forty-three years ago*.

Colm blinked his eyes, willing the image of her away. But when he opened his eyes, she was still there.

She was staring at him, her regard expressionless. There seemed to be a white, muted fringe around her figure, as if she were suspended in time. She was hollow-cheeked, pale and thin just as she had been on the last night of her life, but her beauty was still haunting. The hood of her dark green cloak was thrust back and resting on her shoulders. He looked at her hands, which held open the cloak, and he could see they were still bony and blue-veined.

"What do you want?" Colm cried, grabbing the back of his head with his left hand. "You're dead, for pity's sake. Am I losing my mind? Are you here for a reason?"

She smiled then, her lips parting slightly. "You are not losing your mind," she said in a cool whisper. "I'm only here because you want me to be here. I waited a long time to hear your voice."

Colm shook his head. "*Nonsense*. I don't want you here."

"Your thoughts brought me here," she said gently. "You've thought about me ever since I fell from the cliffs, haven't you Colm?"

He turned away from her, trying to convince himself he was having a hallucination, but then the cold caress of her hand smoothed over his shoulder.

"Don't be scared, Colm. I'm not here to hurt you."

"But you're dead," he insisted. "And you didn't just fall from the cliffs. You threw yourself onto the rocks at Banshee Point."

"All true. Please, Colm, look at me."

He turned again and found her only inches away from him. He was weak at the knees, terrified by her presence.

Molly smiled again. "That's better. There is nothing to fear, Colm. When I died, you and I weren't really through with one another. Before my last night on earth, you went on with your life while I lived in despair, true, but there was never a proper end for us. My father saw to that, with his almighty interference and righteousness. You were forced into a marriage with my maid to save face for our children..."

Colm found the courage to face her ethereal image, meeting her eyes for the first time. "My marriage to Maureen may have been a convenience at first, but I loved her in the end."

"Like you loved me?" Molly questioned.

He was defeated. "No. There was never the love...nothing like I felt for you."

"That's better," she said, gladness in wraithlike her eyes. She glanced at his hair, his hands, and his body. "You've held up remarkably well, Colm. If only my father had left us to our own devices, we could be alive together right now, enjoying our twilight years in peace."

Every time she spoke, Colm could feel her icy breath on his face. Was it because she was dead, and as eternally cold as the earth? He still felt as light as air, as if he were in the middle of a surreal dream. "You're dead, so you must be seeing your father in the confines of heaven. Have you talked to him, confronted him with your anger?"

Her eyes grew dark, almost turning black. "What makes you think I went to heaven?" she countered in a whisper.

Colm recoiled in horror, perspiration forming on his brow. "You came from hell?" he asked, trepidation in his voice.

"That's one theory," she said softly, her non-earthly wisp of a voice sending a shiver through his body. She evaded a direct answer to his question. "I'm Catholic, and I killed myself. What other logical conclusion is there to my ultimate fate?"

Colm's eyesight dimmed and he felt his limbs turn to water. Turning away from her, he found his chair by the easel and sat down.

His brain rattled: *I'm talking to Molly Larkin, who is fresh from hell to see me...*

QUIXOTIC CROSSINGS: Excerpt from Chapter Ten

*Spring 1935
Larkin City, Maine*

PATRICK LARKIN LOVED the attic in the family mansion. It wasn't a typical attic filled with cobwebs and creeping rodents, but a light and airy place with well-ordered boxes, covered furniture and bric-a-brac located on one end. The floors were of highly polished hardwood, laid with a long Oriental carpet down the center walkway. The attic was cleaned and dusted by maids on a weekly basis, one of the few times Patrick allowed himself to leave the blissfully quiet confines.

The other side of the attic, which was located up a few steps from the entrance doorway, was a vast, unoccupied space. A rounded carpet held a solitary antique chair with a high back and thick armrests. Above was a window that went across the breadth of the ceiling, revealing sunlight in good weather and clouds, rain and snow in bad. It was Patrick's favourite spot, as it had once been Molly Larkin's refuge from the world.

The design of the ceiling window was ingenious, sprung from the mind of John Larkin for the top and final level of his extraordinary home. Patrick would often stare up into the stars, or look out the porthole windows on either side of the attic, watching the mist roll in from the ocean, and the automated beacon sweeping across the estate from the Banshee Point lighthouse.

A rounded, wooden door on the other side of the attic led to the widow's walk on the roof the mansion. Patrick sometimes stood on the dizzying height of the walk to look at Larkin City in the distance, but the view did not impress him. The populace of Larkin City and the township itself no longer held any allure for him.

He was far removed from human contact in the attic, which is what he preferred. The high-grade insulation blocked any and all sounds from the rest of the mansion. He often screamed to release his deep tensions, secure no one else could hear him.

A maid brought his meals, leaving the food on a tray outside the attic door. Shortly after his accident, Patrick built a lavatory in the attic, located just inside the entrance. He purchased a simple double bed that he placed in a corner, but he rarely slept there. Sometimes he went downstairs to his old room to get fresh clothes and the odd book, and every night no matter the weather he took a long walk around the estate grounds, alone. He spent each night at the keeper's cottage, and then made his way back to the mansion in the early morning hours to return to the attic, thus ensuring little human contact.

Patrick felt half a man since the accident at the lumber yard. He had no desire to show his face to the community ever again, especially to the men at the lumber yard. He allowed Gary McCain to run the company, although he kept close tabs by telephone. A courier delivered paperwork and payroll checks to the mansion each week for Patrick's signature. A maid would bring the documents to the door of the attic and then leave. He would take the papers and affix his moniker, and then leave them for the maid to pick up again. It was an odd process, but it worked for him.

No one could penetrate the shield Patrick had surrounded himself with - not Roddy, not Sascha, and not Colleen. Even his children, proof of his former manhood, could

not rouse him. He wanted to be left in peace, and no amount of pressure or cajolement could persuade him otherwise.

* * *

COLLEEN CLIMBED THE short staircase from the fourth floor of the mansion to the attic. She dreaded her mission, but it could not be helped. Patrick had barely spoken two sentences to her since his accident, and yet she still never invaded his lofty sanctuary. Until now.

Their sons, Brian and Rory, aged fifteen and eleven respectively, were finally asking her about Patrick's strange behavior. Although used to their father's long absences in the past due to work, they were now stymied that his constant presence in the house kept him from their lives. Colleen was concerned about their mounting resentment, and the only possible solution was to bring the matter to her husband's attention.

She walked up the short steps into the attic, the cloudy day making the area a bit murky but still well illuminated from the ceiling window. She saw Patrick sitting in the high-backed chair, his hands on the arm rests. He was staring up at the overhead window, his profile expressionless.

"Patrick?" She spoke softly, with uncertainty.

He started and turned his head to look at her. The shock in his eyes was soon replaced by anger. "What are you doing here?" he snapped.

"I need to talk to you," she replied, finding the courage to be firm. He might expect her to quaver, but she had no intention of giving him the satisfaction.

"You know I don't like to be bothered when I'm up here," he said coldly.

"But you're *always* up here," Colleen countered. "When else can I talk to you?"

He was quiet for a moment, and then he looked away. "Fine. Make it quick, please."

She stepped closer, coming to stand in front of the chair. She saw his body recoil slightly from her proximity, and she realized he was determined to avoid all human touch. Perhaps her mission was pointless after all, but she had to try. "I've been patient with your self-imposed exile," she began, her tone strong yet somehow still gracious. "I've given up trying to help you. I don't care about your peculiarities for myself, but now Brian and Rory are asking questions. They know you're here, holed up in the attic, and they're becoming a bit angry about not seeing you. It's as if you are rejecting them."

Patrick glanced up at her, and she saw the dead emotion in his eyes. She was not reaching him. "What would you have me do?" he asked sardonically. "Play catch with them on the front lawn? Swim with them in the ocean?"

Colleen hated her husband in that moment. He was callous and unfeeling, unable to see past his own miserable existence. His coldness toward her was inconsequential, but his disregard of his own two sons was unforgivable. She forced herself to remain civil. "Can't you just talk to them?" she pleaded. "Act like a normal father. Take an interest in their lives, show them that you care."

"Whatever for?" he snorted with derision. "You've managed quite well on your own. You don't need me to bolster their little egos."

She cringed inwardly, furious at his inference, his subtle plea to be needed. Maybe a few years ago she would have fallen for it, but not now. Patrick no longer had a hold on her.

She lost all respect for him long ago, and considered their marriage one in legal name only. What affection and love she once felt for him had vanished, and it was irretrievable.

"I never thought I'd see the day," she said bitterly, losing her cool composure. "You are actually rejecting your own flesh and blood."

"Well, you *are* seeing the day," his tone was dismissive. "I have no use for anyone."

"Rejecting your sons over the loss of your manhood," she spoke again, this time her voice accelerating with anger. "Brian and Rory are not at fault because of your delusional insecurities. Why make them suffer for it?"

Patrick narrowed his eyes. "Are you quite finished?"

Colleen whirled away from him, walking toward the stairway. She stopped on the first step. Her scalp tingled, her rage giving her face a clammy sheen. "When did I become nothing to you?" she wanted to know, her voice a whisper.

Patrick wanted to tell her the truth, that he still loved her as he loved their sons, but he could not form the words. The pain and shame of his reality was too crushing, and he could not overcome it.

"What makes you think you were anything to me in the first place?" His voice came like ice, and he regretted the words even as he said them. But in order to keep Colleen away from him, he had to hurt her. "It was my responsibility to carry on the Larkin line, and I've completed my duty. Just be glad you remain my wife, and that you can continue to live here and fiddle with your beloved charities."

She choked back a sob, his cruel words slashing at her confidence. But she was quick, and now was the time to clear the air. "So you don't care what I do?" she asked calmly. "Is that what you're trying to tell me? As long as I leave you to your wretched asylum?"

He was alerted by her words, sensing she was alluding to an important milestone or decision. "Do what you will as long as you don't shame my family," he said with conviction. He watched her guardedly, certain she was hiding something.

"I'll remember that," she retorted. "Do what you will, and I shall do the same."

She could no longer look at him. She ran down the attic stairs, slamming the door behind her.

Patrick returned to his normal stance, leaning his head back and looking out the ceiling window again. But this time a lone tear crept out of his left eye, rolling unchecked down his cheek.

QUIXOTIC CROSSINGS: Excerpt from Chapter Sixteen

August-September 1948
Paris, France

TIME HAD BEEN SOMEWHAT unforgiving to Jean-Claude Sullivan and Mason Berger. Their first years in France had been comfortable ones, filled with prosperity, an endless round of parties to enhance their social visibility, and frequent sensual interludes.

Jean-Claude wrote an advice column for the daily evening newspaper *Le Monde*, while Mason published a blue novelette titled *Amour Interdit* ("Forbidden Love") in 1943. The book was a scathingly honest portrayal of two women deeply in love. Mason reversed the gender in his fictional account, but the words, actions and love scenes were purely Jean-Claude and Mason. The novel sold well despite its scandalous content, and could be found in fashionable as well as backstreet book shops. It made Mason the toast of the underbelly for quite some time, a role he relished with great aplomb.

Jean-Claude and Mason rented a sumptuous flat on Passy Street in the Bois de Boulogne Auteuil area of Paris. The newly *au courant* quarter housed many from the Paris stylish set. Before long, Jean-Claude and Mason were well-known for their eccentric yet lavish parties. They attracted echelons of high society, successful artists, writers and those of their own persuasion. Their widely known yet rarely acknowledged sexual orientation drew in other men like a magnet, although rendezvous were conducted with the utmost discreetness-in-hand under the noses of the established social keepers.

But Jean-Claude and Mason's love of fine wines, rich food and fancy digs soon sent their fortunes awry. Jean-Claude's heavy drinking and experimentation with opium intensified, making him unreliable and lethargic. After failing to meet several deadlines with *Le Monde*, he lost his job. And despite the popularity of his novelette, Mason could not seem to bring forth any new literary masterpieces.

Eight years after arriving in Paris, Jean-Claude and Mason accepted defeat and moved into a smaller flat in Saint Germain des Pres, a bohemian neighbourhood that was filled with jazz musicians, struggling artists, hopeful writers, prostitutes and drug addicts. The two men survived on small pension checks, erratic royalties from Mason's publisher and the occasional freelance article written by Jean-Claude.

They stayed close to Rue Guénégaud, sharing their one bedroom apartment that also included a small private terrace, a kitchen, a bathroom and a cramped sitting room. Despite their financial woes, they brought with them the furnishings from their flat on Passy Street. Over time, however, they were forced to pawn various possessions for cash. Still, they maintained an elegant air of genteel austerity.

One Sunday morning in late August 1948, Jean-Claude and Mason enjoyed a breakfast of warm croissants and coffee on their terrace as they read the *Le Figaro*, their newspaper of choice since Jean-Claude was fired from *Le Monde*. Birds were perched and chirping on tree branches next to the terrace, and the two men could hear people walking and talking on the street below as they went about their business.

"We should take a walk to the Quai de Conti this afternoon," Mason said vaguely from behind the political section of *Le Figaro*. "It's a beautiful day, no? *Ein vollkommener Tag für ein Picknick*."

Jean-Claude bit into his third croissant. "I don't know, Mason darling. I'd rather just sit here on the terrace, watching the people go by."

Mason looked across the table at his beloved. Jean-Claude was pale this morning, the wispy remnants of his once-blond-hair exposing a reddened pate. His eyes were puffy and heavy-lidded, and his hands shook as he took a sip of coffee.

Mason loved Jean-Claude unconditionally. They were both getting older, but years of dissipation had accelerated the aging process. Jean-Claude was only forty-one, yet he looked sixty years old. Mason felt every second of his fifty-two years in his arthritic joints, hip degeneration and failing eyesight.

Suddenly, their white Persian cat strolled out onto the terrace, her tail swishing high in the air. She gave a soft, mewling sound, a signal she wanted to be fed. Mason leaned down to scratch the feline on the head, but she pulled away in disdain.

Jean-Claude laughed. "I see Madame Larkin is in fine form as usual. Give her some cream, Mason. Royalty commands the best."

The cat was so-named because the two men felt their cat was regal, pompous and condescending beyond measure, much as they viewed members of the Larkin family back in Maine. Yet they loved their little feline to bits, treating her like a daughter, and calling her "Le Petit Mademoiselle" when she was naughty.

Mason had just poured cream into a small bowl when they heard a soft rap on the front door.

"Drat," Mason muttered as he set the bowl down on the ground for the anxiously waiting Madame. "I'd rather not entertain any guests today. A nice afternoon stroll would have been nice, but we don't have to talk to people on the street. If they come to our door, we are forced to be polite, to offer *erfrischung* – refreshment..."

"When do we have company since moving to Rue Guénégaud?" Jean-Claude asked as he rose from the table. "The last time we had proper guests was two years ago last Christmas."

Leaving Mason on the terrace with Madame, Jean-Claude walked slowly through the crowded small apartment to the front door.

When he beheld the presence of his son, Jean-Claude was speechless with shock. He never expected to see George again, but his eyes drank in the image anyway. Jean-Claude also felt a wave of pleasure wash over him, a somewhat euphoric sense of happiness that made him giddy.

George was fresh-faced and tall, his blue eyes sparkling. His blond hair was close-cropped, with razor-straight short fringes protruding along the top of his forehead. Jean-Claude was reminded of himself, as well as Colm and Mick Sullivan all rolled into one.

"George?" Jean-Claude finally asked, leaning weakly against the door frame. "Is it really you?"

"Papa, it's me," George grinned, taking his father into a warm embrace. Jean-Claude felt his son's physical strength, his stocky frame, and was assailed with a sense of pride.

"Come in," Jean-Claude gasped out when George released him. "Please come in."

George picked up a small suitcase from the hallway floor, a battered yellow piece of luggage Jean-Claude instantly recognized. It was the same traveling bag Jennifer used on their honeymoon twenty-one years ago.

Jean-Claude shut the door after his son entered. "How on earth did you manage a trip to Paris?" he wanted to know. "Certainly your mother didn't approve. Or did you even tell her? Has Larkin City changed? Are you working, going to school...?"

George laughed, holding up his hand. "One question at a time, Papa. My return flight to the States isn't until the second week in September, so we have plenty of time to catch up."

Jean-Claude brightened. "How wonderful! Mason and I can show you the sights of Paris, and we can become reacquainted again." He touched George on the arm, almost hesitating before he spoke. "Come to the terrace and meet my dear friend Mason, and then we'll have a bit of breakfast after your long journey."

* * *

IT DIDN'T TAKE GEORGE long to fully understand the true nature of his father's relationship with Mason Berger. He was slightly repulsed but not overly shocked, having suspected Jean-Claude's inclinations for a long time just by the tone of his letters and the affectionate mentions of Mason. The more time he spent with the two men the more he realized how instinctive their relationship was.

Jean-Claude and Mason seemed to flow together. They finished each other's sentences, or they sniped at each other playfully, just like an old married couple. In truth, the two men were married in a spiritual sense, their unconditional love evident in every touch and vocal gesture.

George brushed his initial repulsion aside, and soon found himself enjoying their company. He was not inclined toward their sexual preference - had never thought about it, actually - but he did appreciate their frequent bitchy humour and embellished repartee.

Jennifer Sullivan would be aghast if she knew her son had ditched the French Club tour to be with his father for the duration of the trip, and that Mrs. Tremblay agreed to the subterfuge because she knew the history of Jean-Claude and Jennifer, having attended high school with the former many years ago. Marie Tremblay had never liked Jennifer O'Connor during their teenaged years, and did not like her as Jennifer Sullivan, either, although she took great pains to hide that fact for George's sake. She was glad to be a part of George's long-awaited reunion with his father, however brief it might be.

George had no illusions about his mother, or bitterness that she tried to protect him from knowledge of his father. Now that he grasped Jean-Claude's lifestyle, it was understandable that she wanted to shield him from it. Jennifer had problems of her own to be sure - she had never remarried, had no interest in dating men, and preferred her nightly tipple - but she was a good woman at heart, and he could not have asked for a better mother.

After George polished off the croissants and coffee, Mason cleared the table and left the terrace, giving father and son time alone. Madame curled up in Jean-Claude's lap, while George lit a cigarette.

"How is your mother doing?" Jean-Claude asked. "Even though we are no longer together, I still care about what happens to Jennifer. I hope you believe that."

"Mother is well," George replied, blowing a smoke ring into the air. "You'd never know she just passed her thirty-seventh birthday. She's as spry as a young girl, although as plump as a hen. Mother spends a lot of time with her church group, and every spring she plants a huge vegetable garden. She's a great collector of all things feline as well - cat figurines, garden statues, tissue boxes, lamps - oh, you just name it."

Jean-Claude nodded. "And you? Do you have a girlfriend?"

George's eyes lit up. He crushed out his cigarette in a small glass ashtray on the table. "Her name is Susan O'Reilly. We've known each other since second grade. Over the summer we fell in love and well..." he grinned, glancing at his father. "We have one more year of high school left, but I think I'm going to ask her to marry me anyway. I thought about it on the flight over here, all the way. Susan and I are like soul mates. We know each other so well, and I can't imagine being with anyone else."

"That sounds wonderful," Jean-Claude said with all the sincerity he could muster, although he was wary that his son was placing all his eggs in one basket at such a tender age. "Tell me about her."

"Susan's father owns a chain of restaurants known as *The Sand Trap*, and he is rather affluent. They live in Harbour Hill. They seem to like me. Mother likes Suz, too, and thinks she is a smashing girl." George lit another cigarette, leaning back in the chair. "Suz and I want the same things, you know. We are on the same wavelength."

Jean-Claude stroked the top of Madame's head, listening to the cat purr contentedly. He glanced at his son, who was looking heavenward as he smoked his cigarette. "Have you decided to go to college? Or are you just going to stay in Larkin City after high school and find work?"

George shrugged. "I haven't decided yet. I'm not really good at anything in particular. I mean, I know how to do a lot of different things, but I can't seem to focus on just one. I can fix a car, unstop a plugged sink drain, or I can build tables and chairs from piles of lumber, but all of that won't get me far, will it? I need to figure out how to make a living, but nothing has come to me yet."

"It sounds like you are underrating yourself," Jean-Claude observed. "If you know how to do many things, then you are valuable in many ways. You could offer yourself as a handyman in Larkin if you want to stay there and get married, or you could go to college and perhaps a true vocation will come to you there. You are young, George, and the possibilities are endless. But grab opportunities as you can, take them and run, because time marches swiftly and grasps away your choices."

George looked at his father thoughtfully, tapping the ash of his cigarette into the ashtray. "I do want to stay in Larkin," he admitted. "I love the place, but maybe I could talk Susan into going with me to school in Portland, or Boston even. We could get married and I can go to college anyway, and then when I'm done we can move back to Larkin and get our life going."

Jena-Claude smiled. "It sounds like a plan. A very good plan. Whatever makes you happy, George. Grab life with gusto, and take happiness where you can find it."

Mason returned to the terrace, having changed into khaki slacks and a white cotton shirt. He addressed his beloved: "Since your son is here, will you finally agree to leave this apartment and show him some of the sights?"

Jean-Claude laughed, causing Madame to hiss and jump from his lap. She flicked her tail and waltzed back into the flat. "You win, Mason, Let's go."

George grinned. "I'm game. Where to?"

* * *

GEORGE FELL IN LOVE with Paris during his two-week stay. True to their word, Jean-Claude and Mason showed him the sights. He saw the Eiffel Tower, viewed popular Picasso and Dalí exhibits at the Musée de l'Orangerie, took strolls along the River Seine and underneath the Arc de Triomphe, walked about the Place de la Concorde, visited Notre Dame, took in an opera

at Opéra National de Paris Garnier, and listened to Mason talk about the liberation of France from the Germans in 1944.

"I am German, yes," Mason told George one evening as the three men sat on the terrace at Rue Guénégaud, drinking red wine and smoking cigarettes. "But I deplore Hitler, and hate being associated with the German race because of him. Those first few years in Paris, I tried to hide my accent but to no avail. Luckily, our friends didn't seem to mind my origins, and took me at face value, knowing I would never support the actions of a complete *verrückt—uhm lunatic*." He shook his head, taking another sip of wine. "For God's sake, some of our best friends are *Jüdisch*—Jewish, no? How could I support the inhumane action, the atrocities practiced by Herr Hitler?"

George soaked it all in, enjoying the conversations, the trips around Paris, but most of all getting to know his father again. Jean-Claude was a complex man, his son realized. Intelligent, articulate and with a sense of humour, the elder Sullivan also possessed traits that were typically abhorred by others but seemed to blend in effortlessly with his other quirks: he was priggish, spoiled and expectant that Mason would take care of unpleasant details, and make reality a better place to be. Mason accepted Jean-Claude as he was, warts and all, and even seemed gladly willing to be the one who nurtured and comforted his partner without expectation of the same in return.

To this end, George realized Jean-Claude did the best he could with that he had, with what he was capable of offering as a father. George felt no resentment at the lack of a father figure during the course of his adolescence. In fact, he was proud of the uniqueness of his father and his lifestyle, that he had the courage to do as he pleased and damn the consequences. Jean-Claude Sullivan lived life as he saw fit, with no apologies.

Near the close of his visit to Paris, George's thoughts returned to his life in Larkin City. Granted it would seem dull and boring when compared to his time in France, but he was looking forward to getting back to Susan, of asking her to marry him. They would finish out their last year of high school together, get married, and then he would apply to colleges in Portland and Boston. Surely by then he would know what he wanted to do with his life, if only vaguely, and college would fill in the rest of the blanks.

George spent the night before his departure from Paris with Jean-Claude and Mason on the terrace of their flat. The three men dined on chicken and dumplings, and drank substantial amounts of wine. It was during the meal that Jean-Claude broached the subject of money with his son.

"I heard through the grapevine that my father Mick, your grandfather, died in 1945," he said as he poured out more wine into the three glasses. "I am so very sorry to hear that, George. Were you and Mick close?"

George sipped the fresh wine. "Yes, we were. I spent a lot of time with Mick and Granny Layla. I used to go out on the harbour with Mick in the summer when he worked for the Larkin Harbour Tour Company, which is still going strong by the way. It was awful the way Mick died, you know, he had a sudden heart attack as he was sailing the *Lady Banshee* with a group of tourists of New York City. He was the picture of health before that, so his death was quite a shock."

"I'm so sorry," Jean-Claude repeated, keeping the proper amount of respect in his voice.

Mason was alert at once. He glanced at his lover and saw his mind working. Jean-Claude was not so much concerned with the death of his father or the welfare of his widowed mother

as he was with the remaining fortune left behind by Mick Sullivan. He was being circumspect, but he was getting to the point in his own way.

"Didn't Granny Layla write to you, tell you that Mick died?" George wanted to know.

Jean-Claude shook his head. "No. After I left Larkin City, I never heard from your grandparents. I have a few friends left there, and I think the news came to me in a Christmas card a few years ago. I can't recall." He sipped his wine, his eyes on George's face. "How is your grandmother these days? I imagine Mick left her well off with the Larkin inheritance willed to him years ago."

George popped a dumpling into his mouth, shrugging. "Oh yes, she doesn't have to worry about money, that's for sure. He left me a little bundle, too, although I haven't touched it apart from taking some out to make the trip to Paris." He took another sip of wine. "Granny is doing okay, though. She takes regular excursions to Portland to shop, usually on weekends, and she had her whole house redecorated a few years ago."

"Don't forget, you have another inheritance coming to you," Jean-Claude advised his son in a serious tone, as if his welfare was of the utmost importance to him. "In two more years you'll turn eighteen, and it will be time to collect your comeuppance from Grandfather Colm."

"It seems so far away I never think about it," George admitted. "Although fifty thousand dollars would come in handy for Suz and me, you know, for starting our life together. We can buy our own house with that kind of money, and then some. That way I wouldn't have to touch what Mick left me for quite some time." He emphasized his last sentence, looking out the corner of his eyes to gauge his father's reaction.

Jean-Claude fingered the stem of his wine glass, his eyes narrowing. Mason quickly gulped down the rest of his wine, setting his glass on the table. He knew his lover was plotting *something*; there was no doubt about it. And it had something to do with getting money out of his son. Mason did not demur, desperate for funds in his own way. The fact that George was here to reconnect with his father, and that Jean-Claude seemed touched by the gesture, was becoming lost in the perpetual need to survive.

"My original inheritance is long gone, of course," Jean-Claude said aloud, while Mason drew in his breath. "One doesn't live in Paris without paying the price."

George pushed his plate aside and lit a cigarette, regarding his father across the table. He had come to realize how financially destitute Jean-Claude and Mason really were in the two weeks he had stayed in their home, and was amused by their attempts to hide the fact. Jean-Claude had not made any moves to ask for a loan, but somehow George knew it was coming now. The subject had not been appropriate until they discussed Mick Sullivan's death.

"I suppose I'm lucky," George said slowly, blowing a smoke ring in the air. "Not only do I have the fifty thousand coming to me from the trust left by great-grandfather Colm, but I have clear access to the three hundred thousand left to me by Grandfather Mick."

Jean-Claude's jaw nearly dropped, while Mason coughed into his wine glass. George enjoyed the reaction, but continued smoking his cigarette in leisure fashion.

Jean-Claude moistened his lips, offering his son a wan smile. "Good Lord, George. That's quite a bit of money. Are you sure it's in a safe place? You know how banks are these days. You need to keep an eye on it so you don't lose it."

"It's still where Mick left it," George said. "In the bank. The interest is piling up quite nicely, thank you."

Mason watched the slight game between father and son, somewhat amused that George played the dolt while Jean-Claude tried his best to cajole financial facts and figures out of him with what he thought was clever finesse.

George stubbed out his cigarette in the ashtray. "I can't understand why Mick didn't leave you *something*," he said, drumming his fingers on the table with exaggerated slowness. "You were his only son, after all. He left Granny Layla the bulk of the estate, of course, but I suppose that will come to me one day, too."

"My father did not approve of my lifestyle," Jean-Claude said bluntly, the time for games over in his mind. "I was not worthy because I felt love for another man rather than a woman, as is natural to most people. I was a loyal and giving son until Mick and Layla turned their backs on me, when they found out about my lifestyle. Parents should love their children unconditionally, don't you think? It shouldn't have matter what I did, they should have loved me through thick and thin. It's not as if I went out and killed someone, or robbed a bank, for God's sake."

To Mason's surprise, George agreed. "Yes, Papa, that's the way it *should be*. It was a terrible oversight on the part of Mick and Layla, but I cannot fault them too much because they always treated me with kindness. I can see your point, though, and it's unfair that you should be left out in the cold by your parents' misguided ill will."

Jean-Claude held his breath.

George's happiness at being able to see his father again, combined with the knowledge of Jean-Claude's tendency to excess, gave him a surge of generosity. It was unusual for a son to provide for his father in normal instances, but George had long ago realized his family was not normal, nor were the events of their lives.

Knowing he may never see his father again after leaving Paris, George decided to be more than magnanimous.

"I can send you some money," he said, happy to see his father's eyes light up with glee, and a hint of relief. "I can spare it, since I received what would have probably been yours under normal circumstances. Would you mind terribly accepting money from your son, or would you rather forget about it?"

Jean-Claude's eyes widened with a brief flash of panic, and then he reached across the table to pat his son affectionately on the hands. "I trust your judgment, George. Whatever you think is best. It's your money after all, although you were probably right in assuming it would have been mine if my life had gone differently."

George nodded, rising from the table. "Thank you, father, for trusting me. As soon as I get back to Larkin City, I'll send you a bank draft for thirty thousand dollars. Would that help you and Mason for a little while?"

Mason stifled an exclamation of surprise by covering his mouth, while Jean-Claude kept his cool exterior. "You are more than generous, my son," he said smoothly. "We are eternally grateful for your assistance during this difficult time. Hopefully I can pay you back in due course."

George waved his hand, dismissing his father's words. "No need, Papa. We are family, you and I. Whatever I give you is a gift, not to be repaid like an impersonal bank loan. Perhaps in another year or so I can send more money, if you and Mason require it."

"I would be more than grateful," Jean-Claude said, his voice choking with emotion. "Thank you, George. Thank you so much. You have lifted a great burden from both of us, and we will forever be in your moral debt."

"*Ja, danke, George,*" Mason sputtered, tears of relief dampening his cheekbones. "What a wonderful son you are."

George smiled. "Please, consider it a gift from a grateful son. I have truly enjoyed our time together. It has been priceless, and will warm my memories for many years to come. Please use the money to keep yourselves warm in the winter months, or to treat yourselves to an opera or two at the Garnier, or to get Madame a delicacy from the fish market."

Mason dabbed at his eyes with his table napkin, while Jean-Claude gazed at his son with wonder. "You will never know how you saved us, my son," he said. "You saved us, plain and simple."

"*And my thoughts will always be with you, Papa,*" George said to himself silently, gladdened by the genuine love he saw in his father's eyes.

QUIXOTIC CROSSINGS: Excerpt from Chapter Nineteen

January 1956
Larkin City, Maine

GEORGE SULLIVAN PACED THE waiting room at Larkin City Hospital, his rubber-soled boat shoes squeaking every so often on the clean floor. He clasped his hands behind his back, his head down in concentration as he passed back and forth in front of his mother on the waiting room couch.

"George, you have to calm down," Jennifer Sullivan told her son. "You're going to wear out the new Perry shoes I gave you for Christmas."

"The hell with my shoes," George snapped. He stopped and pointed in the general direction of the hospital corridor. "My wife is in there giving birth to my first child. How on earth am I supposed to remain calm under those circumstances?"

"Babies are born every day," Jennifer responded. "The doctors know what they're doing, and Linda is strong and healthy."

"My baby isn't born every day, mother," George declared, and then resumed his pacing with a renewed fervor.

Jennifer sighed, remaining seated on the couch. It wouldn't do if they were *both* on the verge of hysteria, so she decided to take the high road. She let her son go on with his nervous pacing, a slight smile playing about her lips.

George had done well for himself in the last few years. He finished high school, even managed a year of general study at Larkin University afterward, and had since taken over as the captain of *Lady Banshee* for the Larkin Harbor Tour Company. Occupying the position his grandfather Mick had once held, along with a small handful of other locals, gave George a sense of history and he seemed happy with his work, though it continued to remain seasonal.

Two years ago George married Linda Bisiker, daughter of Adam Bisiker, after they met at a dance social in Ellsworth. While born in Larkin City, Linda had been raised in Ellsworth by her mother following her divorce from Adam, who went on to marry two more times before his death in 1951.

Small and dainty with dark blonde hair and oval-shaped blue eyes, Linda Bisiker was five years younger than George. She was pretty and affable, her pleasant manner a refreshing change into the lives of George and his mother in recent history.

Ever since he returned from Paris and found out Susan O'Reilly had disappeared without a word or a trace, George changed. He took his own apartment near the harbor after graduating from high school, and worked a summer in the fish cannery before attending Larkin University. He continued to send Jean-Claude funds at least once a year, and corresponded with his father regularly. After he began work at the Larkin Harbor Tour Company, George settled into a mundane routine, though still haunted by thoughts of Susan and what he perceived as her abandonment and deception. He was deeply wounded, but knew in his heart that he still loved her despite her perfidy.

Working as the captain of a tour boat was not glamorous by any means, or one that pleased his sensibilities, but it was a money-maker in season. He wanted to be self-

sufficient, stable and secure and not reliant on trust funds and inheritances. He was frugal. He used his money to buy sensible clothes, a reliable car, and to pay his rent on time. He wanted to live on the money he made rather than taking from his inheritance. Giving money to his father was acceptable. The older man needed it to survive, and George was his only salvation.

Meeting Linda was a God-send. She was different than Susan, easier to read and much more amenable to letting him take the lead. She was pretty in a nondescript fashion, and George found himself yearning for the stability of a life with her. He didn't feel the passion and curiosity he had once felt for Susan - and doubted he would ever feel again - but he was ready to settle for happiness, simplicity and constancy, three things Susan had not - and *would not* - give him.

* * *

MICHAEL JOHN SULLIVAN WAS born on 11 January 1956, healthy and screaming with a head full of blond hair. Even as a newborn, he had pale, translucent skin, almost effeminate to a casual observer. His dark blue eyes were spaced close together, long-lashed and striking, as was the child's singular and extraordinary beauty.

George was stunned by his son's perfection. Not only was he healthy in body and spirit, he possessed a startling physical gorgeousness that struck all those who laid eyes on him. Jennifer was taken aback by her grandson's resemblance to Colm Sullivan, never having guessed such splendor could be replicated twice in one family line.

As he was only one year old when Colm died in 1933, George relied on old photographs and paintings to confirm his mother's observations. It was true. Michael was a double for Colm in every physical way. Even Linda was awed by her newborn son, amazed that she had produced such a faultless human specimen.

The day after his son's birth, George held Michael in his arms as he sat in a chair in Linda's hospital room. His wife was dozing, having just nursed the baby. George pushed the chair near the window that overlooked the front of Larkin City Hospital, and the bustle of Main Street. The infant stared up at him as if fascinated, his blue eyes studying George's face with breathless expectation and a serene calm.

"You'll be important someday, Mike," George whispered to his child. "You'll make something of yourself. You'll find happiness and success where I have fallen short, and where my father before me fell short. You have the world at your fingertips, and the good fortune to have both Sullivan and Larkin blood flowing through your veins. That particular combination of heritage hasn't helped *me* much or *my* father, but you are blessed by the angels. You are a God-send from your great-great-grandfather Colm. How can you go wrong with all that in your favor?"

The baby gurgled, smiling and reaching up to touch George's face. He stood from the chair and looked out the window, raising Michael in his arms as if to have a look at the city street down below. "This is the place of your ancestors, Mike, and don't forget it. You have as much right to it as anyone else with the same blood."

"Who on earth are you talking to?" Linda asked groggily from the bed.

George turned around and walked to her side. "I'm telling Michael here that he is blessed by the angels, and that he will make something big of himself someday."

Linda smiled at her husband. "That's beautiful, George."

George glanced down at his son again, noting the child was growing sleepy-eyed. "I mean every word," he said in wonder. "Michael will be someone important one day, and not one soul in this harbor town will ever forget him."

* * *

August 1958
Larkin City, Maine

AS PHOEBE MCGARREN NEARED her fifty-ninth birthday, she decided it was time to retire. She had proven herself a successful businesswoman for almost forty years, bringing high fashion to Larkin City at affordable prices, at the same time creating a large profit margin for herself. She had tucked away a tidy retirement sum, enough to live comfortably for the rest of her life, and she felt it was time to start reaping the benefits of her long years of hard work.

Despite her age, Phoebe was still formidably attractive and stylish, giving off an elegant air that was a natural part of her now. She had taken to coloring her hair to retain its shade of brown, and she switched to wearing more conservative clothing although she still had the figure to highlight the latest fashions.

"High fashion is for the young," Phoebe told her sister Colleen. "I've had my day in the sun, but now it's time for someone else to take over in my stead."

The obvious choice was Phoebe's long-time assistant, Teresa Davis, a forty-year-old divorced mother of two who had worked at the boutique for more than twenty years, right out of high school. Phoebe wanted to sell her shop but knew Teresa could not afford it in one lump sum, so the younger woman secured a loan with Larkin City Bank & Trust and began to take over the boutique. Glad to hand over the reins - and assured by Teresa that the name of the shop would remain Phoebe's Boutique - Phoebe started plans for her retirement future.

The first order of business was moving out of the apartment located over the shop, so Teresa could move in with her two children.

"Come and stay at the mansion until you find a house in town," Colleen offered. "Take your time and find a place you like. In the meantime you can keep me company at the estate, and spend more time with the children. There are plenty of empty rooms in that mansion, you know that."

Phoebe agreed. She began to pack her belongings, smiling with fond remembrance as she tucked away photographs of her cat, Lady Sam, who died of old age many years ago. Not meaning to replace her beloved feline but rather to find another companion, Phoebe bought a stray cat from the local animal shelter, naming the rambunctious white-and-gray kitten Lucinda. The feline, now six years old, would be part of her life no matter where she lived.

It was a warm Sunday afternoon in August when Phoebe packed up the last of her belongings. Colleen was due to arrive with Rory Larkin to transport boxes to the mansion, where Phoebe would stay until she found a suitable house in Larkin City. Placing Lucinda in her pet carrier, Phoebe set the cat by the main door of the apartment and looked around to make sure she hadn't left anything behind.

She was leaving the furniture and kitchen appliances for Teresa, as well as and a few of the plants and commercial seascape paintings.

Phoebe had taken almost half of her life - along with all of her memories, good and bad - into boxes and crates, with no clue where they would eventually find a permanent home. The mansion was a good place to start, but she had no intention of living out her days on the good graces of her sister or the Larkin's.

Phoebe was grateful Colleen was removing herself from her self-imposed exile on the estate to make a rare foray into Larkin City to help her. Colleen was genuinely excited for her sister, happy to see her retiring and relegating hard work aside to enjoy her life. She felt it was about time.

Once Colleen arrived with Rory and a few strong-armed men from the lumber yard to move her belongings, Phoebe and Colleen went from room to room in the apartment to check for items left behind. They stopped in the bedroom, standing in the middle of the room for one last look.

"I spent so much time in here," Phoebe said ruefully. "Now it will be Teresa's little escape from life's pressures."

Colleen put her arm around Phoebe's shoulder. "You're doing the right thing, darling. You need to enjoy life, and not work so hard. I know you're sad, leaving all this behind. It wasn't just your place of business. It was your home, too."

Phoebe nodded, wiping a tear from her eye. "I know, but you're right. I need to put work behind me. I'd love to just be idle for a month or two, and then maybe I'll start traveling. I'd love to go to London, or maybe Rome, just like a regular tourist." She glanced at her sister. "You could always go with me."

Colleen hesitated. "I don't know," she demurred. "The house, the kids...I don't think I would be comfortable leaving them."

"You need to relax just as much as I do," Phoebe pointed out. "You've worked for years at that mansion, making it what it is today. You've given your life over to the Larkin's, just as I gave mine over to the shop. It's about time you started enjoying yourself, too. You overdue a proper rest." She studied her sister, taking in her pale demeanor and wan expression. "You look so tired, Colleen - *just plain worn out*. Neither one of us are getting any younger, you know, so it's time we did something for *ourselves*. We need to take our chances where we find them."

Before Colleen could reply, they heard a crash from the living room. Both women rushed out to find the cause, only to come face-to-face with a sheepish Rory holding a partially ripped cardboard box.

"I lifted this up and it fell apart," he explained. "I hope nothing is broken."

The spicy-sweet fragrance of *Coup de Fouet* wafted up between them, forcing Rory to wrinkle his nose. "What in God's name is that smell?" he wanted to know.

Phoebe laughed. "It's my bottle of Madame Caron perfume, Rory. I have another, so it's not a great loss."

"I should say so," he mumbled, glancing down at the broken glass. "Nonetheless, I'm sorry for breaking it."

"I'll run down to the shop and get the mop and broom so I can clean this up," Phoebe told Colleen. "I'll be right back."

"And I'll keep moving," Rory said quickly, relieved Phoebe was not overly irritated with him for destroying her peppery bottle of perfume.

After Phoebe and Rory left the room, Colleen knelt down to pick up errant items from the ripped box. She touched the silver-rope handle of the broken perfume bottle,

smiling at Phoebe's earthy tastes in scents. Her sister had always liked uncommon accretions to fashion - not just in perfumes, but in accessories such as over-sized bracelets, dangling earrings and delicately carved hairpieces. She might not like them for herself, she had become conservative of late, but she did enjoy collecting the unusual and offering it up for sale as "exclusive" to her boutique.

Bent in her task, Colleen's eyes fell on a small bundle of letters that had fallen from the box. Startled to recognize Patrick's handwriting on the top envelope, she grabbed the stack and removed the first letter. She studied the envelope, noting it was postmarked June 1925 and addressed to her sister at the shop. The letter was more than thirty years old, saved by Phoebe as a keepsake obviously, but why on earth would Patrick write her - thirty years ago or at any other time prior to his death - and why had Phoebe not told her about it?

Curiosity got the better of her. Colleen took out a single sheet of yellowed paper from the envelope and started reading:

My Darling Pheeb,

I wanted to thank you for Thursday afternoon. It was a nice surprise, and kept me chipper for the rest of the day. I know your guilt assails you on occasion, but I want to assure you Colleen has no inkling of our meetings and never will from my lips.

Please understand that I love you, no matter that I am married to your sister, and no matter that we have two sons. Because of my position I am married for life, you know that, but my love lies with you and no one else. Please believe that.

*Yours always,
Patsy*

Colleen dropped the letter to the floor, where it fluttered and settled in a puddle of *Coup de Fouet*, its amber liquid seeping through the paper. She was shocked by what she just read, but not overly so. She had known Patrick to be cold and unfeeling toward her during their marriage, but she had no idea he saved his passion and his love for her sister, or that her sister had not seen fit to tell her about it even after all these years.

It was not a reaction of jealousy, Colleen realized dimly as she sat on the floor, feeling light-headed and dizzy all of a sudden. It was a reaction of hurt that her sister went behind her back to see Patrick, that the two of them had slept together knowing that she was safely back at the mansion caring for her children. The two of them had conspired together to have an affair right under her nose. She never suspected her sister or her husband of such cruel deception, such disregard for her feelings or basic common respect for her being.

Colleen felt a twinge in her chest, a painful twist that made her gasp. "*I didn't love Patrick, not like a wife should love her husband,*" she thought, aware that the shadows in the room were lengthening, making it hard for her to focus in the encroaching dark. "*The love of my life was Nicholas Bertrand, and Patrick took that away from me, too. He took any respect he had for me and threw it aside like a rag-doll, slept with my sister, and then decimated the only man I ever loved. I can believe Patrick behaving in such a fashion, but Phoebe? How could my own sister be a part of that?*"

Another knife of pain gripped Colleen's chest, forcing her to seize herself with both hands. The darkness seemed to wane, the bright sunlight streaming into the room again. She took a large gulp of air and fell over to her side on the floor.

Phoebe came to the doorway seconds later, a mop and broom in her hands. She stood transfixed for a moment, staring at her sister immobile on the floor, surrounded by envelopes and a sheath of perfume-soaked paper.

She knew what the envelopes contained without having to take a closer look. They were the few letters Patrick had written her so long ago, saved only because they were misplaced and not for fond remembrance. She had forgotten them, dismissed them when she placed them in the box the day before, considering them unimportant but not pausing to throw them away. They were merely set aside, much like the memories of the man who had written them to her.

Phoebe knelt next to her sister, alarmed by Colleen's shallow breathing. Her eyes opened and closed, fluttering in pain, incoherent sounds coming from her lips.

"Colleen," Phoebe shouted, shaking her sister and trying to get her to sit upright. "Colleen, what's wrong? Did you faint? Darling, please sit up and look at me." She pulled her sister close, into a half-sitting position, looking into her face and then almost drawing back in horror.

Colleen's head lolled to one side, her mouth in a twisted grin as if part of her face was numb. One eye was open, looking out sideways, while the other was partially closed but looking head on. The expression in that one half-eye made Phoebe take in her breath. Was it a look of hateful anger, betrayal or pain? Or all three rolled into one? And why was her sister as limp as a doll, her head unable to sustain itself?

Fear tore at Phoebe's insides when she finally understood. She held Colleen close to her, a sob forming in her throat. "Rory!" she screamed at the top of her lungs. "Rory, come quick. I think your mother had a stroke. Rory, please hurry!"

Phoebe heard the commotion downstairs, the pounding of more than one set of feet coming up the apartment stairs. In a flash, she realized she had to get rid of the cause for Colleen's collapse, or what she felt to be the reason. Still holding Colleen with one arm, Phoebe snatched up the letters with her other and stuffed the papers down the front of her dress, pushing them flat underneath the wire rim of her brassiere.

She cradled Colleen in her arms as Rory ran into the room.

"*What have I done?*" Phoebe thought to herself frantically. "*Oh God, what have I done?*"

"QUIXOTIC CROSSINGS" INFORMATION

Quixotic Crossings by Deidre Dalton (aka *Deborah O'Toole*) is available from Amazon (*Kindle*), Barnes & Noble (*Nook*) and Kobo Books.

Amazon (*Kindle*):

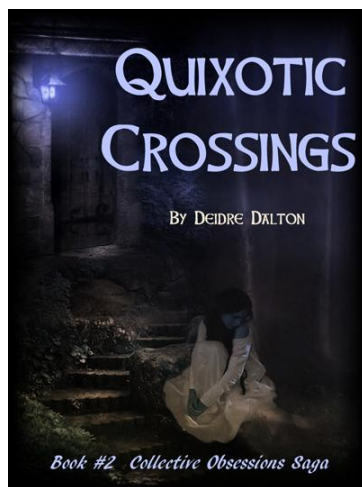
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EXTRAS

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<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Quixotic-Crossings/279115435464674>

"Collective Obsessions Saga" web site:

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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 one-hundred-forty years, all 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 mid-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.

More than twenty years in the making, *Collective Obsessions* is a unique family saga set in the combined genres of mystery, the paranormal, historical romance, and dotted with a touch of the macabre and hints of classic Gothicism.

The eight-part family saga includes *The Advent*, *Quixotic Crossings*, *The Twain Shall Meet*, *Enthrallment*, *The Keeper's Journal*, *Hearts Desires*, *The Twilight* and *Megan's Legacy*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Deborah O'Toole is the author of *Celtic Remnants*, a novel of enduring yet impossible love and betrayal set in the turbulence of Ireland, glamour of London and the wilds of Scotland. She is also author of the uniquely haunting *Mind Sweeper* and the gothic fiction novel *Glinhaven*.

In addition, Deborah writes short-story Juvenile Fiction (*Short Tales Collection*) and darkly abstract poetry (*Torn Bits & Pieces*), and is the author of a series of historical essays, articles and book reviews for *Ambermont Magazine* and *Class Notes*.

Writing as Deidre Dalton, Deborah is author of the "Collective Obsessions Saga," a series of eight books which chronicle the extraordinary loves and obsessions between two families sweeping a span of more than one-hundred-forty years, all set against the backdrop of a Gothic seaside mansion in Maine. Titles in the family saga include *The Advent*, *Quixotic Crossings*, *The Twain Shall Meet*, *Enthrallment*, *The Keeper's Journal*, *Hearts Desires*, *The Twilight* and *Megan's Legacy*.

Also writing as Deidre Dalton, she is author of the "Bloodline Trilogy," which follows the mysterious and magical journey of one family through time. Books in the trilogy include *Bloodfrost*, *Bloodlust* and *Blood & Soul*. All titles will be released through 2013-17.

Using the pseudonym Shenachie O'Toole, she also writes for the cooking/recipe web site Food Fare. She is writer and co-editor of the *Ambrosia Cookbook*, *Community Garden Cookbook*, *Food Fare Cookbook*, *Furry Friends Cookbook*, *Larkin Community Cookbook*, *Recipes-on-a-Budget Cookbook* and the *Soups & Stews Cookbook*, along with more than forty titles in the *Food Fare Culinary Collection*.