

# Sagacious Abridgment

by J. Mykell Collinz

Sean stood waiting in the shadows. The longer I'm away from Ireland, he mused, the less I want to go back. America offers me promise for the future. Ireland demands my retribution for the past. Ever since the Fenians it's been an eye for an eye. Not that I don't agree with it under the circumstances but a history of brutality, reaching back to Pembroke, has left its mark and there's nothing I can do now to change that.

"Stay alert, lad," an older man whispered: "They'll be here soon. We want no slip-ups now."

Sean silently scanned the dark alley from his position in a passageway situated between two buildings directly across from the back door of the pub. Finally, he saw the designated targets coming out through the door. Light flooded the area for a moment and then it was dark again. Sean quickly stepped from between the buildings and shot them dead.

"That's a good job, son," the older man said, tugging at Sean: "Let's get the hell out of here."

Will it ever end? Sean agonized as they drove away in the older man's car.

At the drop off point, Sean looked into the older man's eyes while listening to him speak: "Here's your new identification, train tickets, and some extra cash. You know your next destination. Any questions? Good! You did well. And I'll put that in my report."

They're so much alike, he thought, so sure of their right to kill. Yet they always need someone else to do it for them.

He knew what would happen if he walked away and refused to obey their orders. He would dishonor his deceased father's name. His mother would suffer back home, as well as his brothers and sisters. And they've had enough of that, he felt. No, he would not walk away, not yet, he concluded as he made his way to the train station and his next assignment.

A cloudy autumn morning greeted Sean as he stepped from the trolley at Grand Central Station. On his way to the tracks he purchased a copy of The New York Times dated October 24, 1934. It was, he read, the fifth anniversary of 'Black Friday,' the day the Stock Exchange experienced the greatest sell-off in its history.

He boarded the train, found a seat next to a window, and waited patiently for the ride to begin. A few moments later, a conductor hurried down the aisle cheerfully announcing the train's departure. It moved with a jerk at first and then smoothly roll from the station.

As Sean looked out the window, he heard a female voice say: "Is this seat taken? There's a gentleman bothering me and I'd like to get away from him. You don't mind if I sit here, do you?" Without waiting for his answer, she slipped into the seat next to him.

He sat up to create room, and said: "No, I don't mind if you sit here. But, if the guy was bothering you, he can't be much of a gentleman. Do you want me to teach him some manners?"

She touched his arm lightly with her finger tips as she turned to face him, and said: "Oh, no, please don't. He's just had too much to drink, that's all."

The touch sent a tingle through Sean's body. Their eyes met and his heart began beating so fast it took his breath away.

He wondered if she could be feeling a similar emotion and he tried to speak: "Are you, ah . . . ?"

She laughed nervously, and said: "Going to Pittsburgh? Yes."

Her name was Katy Doyle, he learned. She had just arrived from Derry on her way to a new life "in this American land of promise" with the help of relatives who had preceded her.

How many stories were like hers, he wondered? And why couldn't he find such promise, with hope for the future? He was afraid to hope. A voice inside of him insisted, until the job is done, there is no use dreaming impossible dreams.

The train ride became a pure delight for Sean. Katy Doyle opened his heart and released his spirit. I can't believe it, he thought, I'm falling in love. He could not take his eyes off of her. He could not get enough of her.

When the train arrived in Pittsburgh, and passengers disembarked, Sean felt distressed over separating from Katy. He watched from a distance inside the crowded train station as the Doyle clan milled around her. They were hugging, kissing, and laughing as if they hadn't a care in the world.

Katy waved her hand, urging Sean to join them. Then they all looked his way expectantly. But he knew he couldn't do it. They were good people and they didn't need what he was carrying around inside of him. Even if they were from the north, and they didn't move in the same circles as his target, his false ID would not go undetected for very long.

"I'm Pat Doyle, Katy's uncle," a burly, red faced older man said, reaching out to shake Sean's hand: "If you have no one meeting you, why don't you come with us until you're settled?"

Pat's grip was vise like, yet something in the older man's eyes reached out to him.

"Do come, please," Pat urged as he tugged at Sean's hand and wrapped a beefy arm around his shoulders.

Sean tried to release himself, saying: "I can't. I would like to, but I can't."

Pat persisted: "You can! You've nothing to fear from us."

"But you may have something to fear from me," Sean replied.

Katy walked over to join Pat. Taking Sean's free arm, she said: "God knows, man, you needn't be so strange. Now, come along."

Sean felt tears beginning to cloud his eyes. He abruptly pulled himself away and shouted, his voice husky with emotion: "I can't. Please understand." As he spoke, he noticed a figure standing in the crowd staring in his direction and he wondered: Is that my contact?

Katy and Pat were startled and alarmed by the vehemence of Sean's outburst. Pat placed his arm around Katy, and said: "Whatever is troubling you, lad, it can be dealt with. We're in the phone book, under Patrick Doyle, give us a call."

Katy stopped at the exit to look back. Their eyes met for an instant and then she was gone.

A voice close behind him said: "Don't turn around. Go down the street to your left as you exit the station. Go to the trolley stop. Take the number Seven up Lincoln Avenue to the East End. Get off at the last stop and wait. There's been a change of plans."

A change of plans? Is it my turn to die, he wondered? The implications swirled through his mind as he stood in the crowded train station staring at the exit. He felt faint, his feet seemed to swell beneath him, and he heard a ringing sound in his ears. Sweat started pouring from his forehead and his underarms.

He sensed his father watching from beyond the grave. Only God can save you now, he heard him say. And the certainty of that statement welled throughout his whole being, clearing his head and strengthening his resolve. He had never been more certain of anything. I'll put myself in the hands of God, he thought, yearning for redemption. I'll turn and walk away, God willing. In this state of surrender, he felt bitterness and anger, fear and hatred, doubt and confusion dissolving into nothingness, leaving a calm acceptance in their wake, along with the additional certainty that redemption would not be easy or guaranteed.

An intense sun beamed down between fast moving clouds as he turned right outside the train station.

