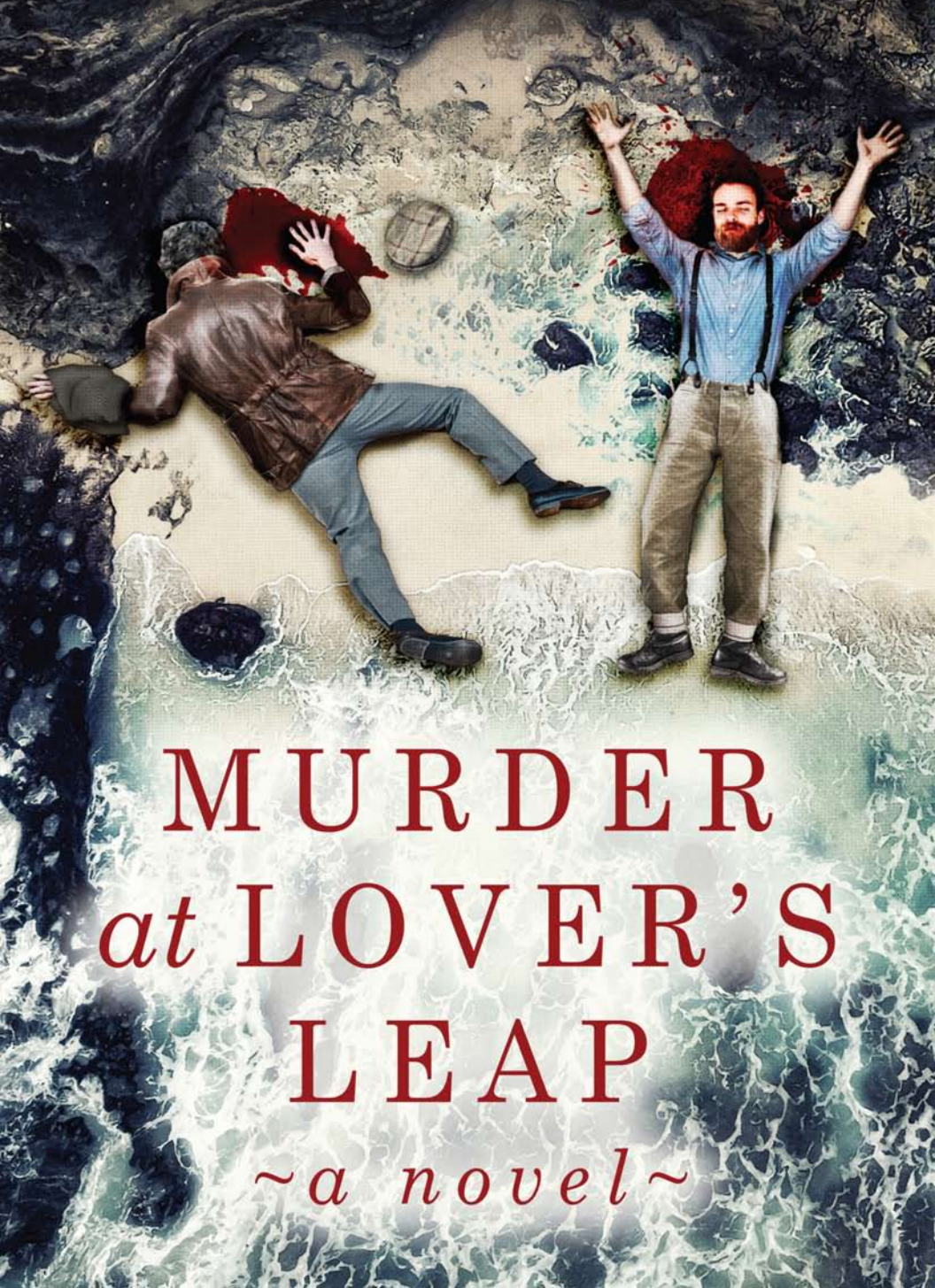


From the bestselling author of *The Body on the Beach*

PATRICK J. COLLINS



MURDER
at LOVER'S
LEAP
~ a novel ~

PRAISE FOR PATRICK J. COLLINS

The Body on the Beach

“Collins has done an excellent job at creating a story that flows seamlessly. It is well-paced, making the story interesting and keeping readers hooked until the very end. *The Body on the Beach* is a wonderful read for any armchair detective who enjoys an escape from reality and an opportunity to step back in time.”

— FIRESIDE COLLECTIONS

“Written by Patrick J. Collins, this novel deals with long-lasting rejection and heartache and the idea that the past is never truly forgotten. While old demons rise, new ones come into play like addiction and job demotion. It’s up to us to make amends, find closure, and deal with the torments at hand while taking time to heal. In the midst of Fallon’s downfall plays out a mysterious and thrilling crime.” — TINT OF INK

“If you are in the mood for a little history with your mystery, this one’s your choice. The writer’s familiarity with both the town and its history enlivens this story, which is based on a true and perpetually unsolved incident.” — NORTHEAST AVALON TIMES

“I enjoyed my ramble with Frank Fallon [in *The Body on the Beach*]. And you know what? I hope Constable Fallon returns tout de suite for another mosey around Harbour Grace.” — LIFE ON THIS PLANET

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PATRICK J. COLLINS

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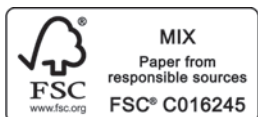
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*For Jack and Irene Collin,
two of the best parents and grandparents—ever!*

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Prologue

The Residence of Sergeant Frank Fallon (Ret'd)
July 1977

Ring. Ring.

“Damn it.” Fallon awoke with the very first ring.

The steady blast of heat from the propane fireplace had greatly deepened his midday nap. At the age of eighty-six, sleep came easy in his comfortable recliner. Today, however, his noon-day snooze was broken.

“Christ, woman. I asked you to turn that heat down.” Seldom did he speak to his wife in this manner, and he immediately felt guilty and annoyed at himself.

Feeling dampness around his collar, he wiped the drool from his chin. Even to shift position was a challenge. He grumbled, his frustration not so much to do with his wife as it was with the paralysis in his left arm and leg. He cursed this so-called golden age and had come to realize what it really meant to them both.

Ring.

Another shrill ring of the telephone, lodged on a tiny table between them. This time he'd moved just close enough to pick up the receiver.

"Frank Fallon here."

This was how he had answered the phone during his forty-four years of service. Old habits were hard to break. He had retired from the Newfoundland Constabulary in 1949 at the age of sixty, the last thirty years as sergeant in charge of the Harbour Grace police station.

"Hi, Sergeant." Unlike some of the calls he'd answered, the caller's deep voice was quite recognizable. "I'm Sergeant Maloney with the RCMP detachment here at Harbour Grace. I've heard many great things about you."

"Thank you for your kind words, sir," Frank replied in a raspy voice. He placed his hand over the speaker to clear his throat.

Sergeant Maloney continued. "We've discovered some information which I believe you may want to know about."

Frank came fully alert. He grunted as he changed position again in an attempt to gain a little more comfort, hoping it was inaudible.

"Are you okay, sir?"

"It's all good. Go ahead," said Frank.

"I had a call from the province's chief archaeologist in St. John's concerning an artifact recovered on a path near a cliff called Lover's Leap."

By now Frank was wide awake. "Lover's Leap was the site of a frustrating, unsolved mystery."

"Yes, sir. A metal detectorist—they call them treasure hunters—found a lead, egg roll-shaped object buried about six inches below the ground. The casing appears to be hand-moulded. The archivist realized it had no historic value, but she thought

it might be an artifact relating to a criminal matter from years gone by. She sent her findings to me.”

Now Frank was very interested. “Really. A criminal matter? How so?”

“The treasure hunter had already pried open the container before sending it to the archaeologist in St. John’s. A conservator at the Newfoundland Museum managed to save the contents. She found two items: a handwritten note, and a typed letter with the British War Office letterhead, scrolled up and tied over with a shoelace.”

Frank listened in silence. *Why is he calling me?*

“Can you still hear me, sir?”

“Yes, Sergeant, continue.”

“Because of its age, the paper on both sheets has disintegrated into tiny pieces. However, the lab still managed to piece each of them together. Only a portion of the words and phrases were legible. The written note was dated August 21, 1927. Since you were a policeman here at that time, I thought this finding might have some relevance to an old file on the murder of a Nicholas Peddle.”

Frank was speechless. Reaching for a small glass near the phone, he finished the drink he had started before he’d fallen off to sleep. In his forty-four years of service, Sergeant Frank Fallon had only one unsolved case. It was a cold case dealing with the murder of the teacher Nicholas Peddle in the neighbouring community of Bristol’s Hope.

“Are you still there, sir?”

Frank cleared his throat again. “Yes, I am. Please go on.”

“The note says, ‘Nicholas Peddle will die tonight, August 21, 1927. I am not alone in this deed.’ That was as much as they could retrieve, I’m afraid.”

Frank was astonished.

"Sir, the lab is using another process in an attempt to recover the entire note and the official letter from the War Office." Sergeant Maloney waited a moment. "Sir, did you hear all of that?"

"Yes. Yes. Sorry. I heard you, Sergeant. Was the note signed?" Frank waited with bated breath.

"Yes, sir. It was definitely signed, but the signature is illegible."

Frank's face registered grave disappointment. His wife was alarmed by his reaction. "You okay, Frank?"

He covered the receiver, nodded, and whispered, "Yes, I'm fine."

Sergeant Maloney continued. "As I said, sir, the lab technicians are using another process to see if they can recover more of the text. I just wanted to let you know, and I will update you as soon as I hear anything new."

After all these years, Frank was certain he would never again hear about the killing of Nicholas Peddle. He had resigned himself to the idea that someone had gotten away with murder. The case was all the more memorable because the days working on it coincided with a major personal crisis in his own life.

"Thank you for this, Sergeant Maloney. Should the lab have any success, I would be grateful to hear about it." Frank knew his years, and maybe even his days, were numbered. Having this case solved before he left this world would answer the nagging question bothering him since August 22, 1927. What really happened at Lover's Leap that terrible, rainy night?

After taking a deep breath, he relaxed back into his comfortable recliner and passed the handset over to his wife. The telephone call was a two-edged sword for the tired old sergeant, both exciting and exhausting.

She carefully rested the receiver back in the cradle, making certain it fit properly into its horned grooves. Frank didn't explain the conversation to his wife, as it was obvious she had heard what was said.

"Finish your nap, Frank, my darling," she said as she gently brushed back the few remaining strands of grey hair from his forehead. "I always knew something would turn up."

Frank smiled, closed his eyes, and allowed his mind to slip back to the summer of 1927.

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1

Newfoundland Constabulary Police Station, Harbour Grace
Monday, August 22, 1927
7:00 a.m.

Sergeant Frank Fallon's head pounded. His stomach churned. Last night he had planned to have one drink, just to take the edge off. But one drink became two. And, as they say, history repeats itself. His first day back at work in four weeks was going to be a challenge.

Chief Hutchings had been generous. The Newfoundland Constabulary had done something unorthodox when they agreed to allow him, a twenty-two-year veteran, time off to go to New York so he could spend time with his dying aunt, his father's sister and the last of the Fallon clan. The sergeant, in the eyes of the police force, deserved time off, having gone without a sustained vacation for several years.

However, only the chief and his fiancée, Christine Sullivan, knew that Frank was actually attending a sanatorium for individuals affected by alcoholism. Christine, an investigative

journalist working with the *Harbour Grace Standard*, had done the research and made all the arrangements. There were few places to assist those who were troubled by the drink. Taking the pledge at church or making repeated promises were not really effective for anyone. She and Frank had been together for seven years. It was at her insistence that he went to New York in the first place. She could have scheduled an earlier stay at the hospital for Frank, but the local magistrate insisted that all police leaves be scheduled for late July and August, citing the busy spring court docket.

For years now, Christine wanted Frank to stop drinking. Not believing it was a problem, he vehemently resisted the idea. When he saw she was serious about leaving their relationship, he reluctantly gave in. He thought it a bitter irony for Christine Sullivan, a pursuer of truth about all matters, to support an absolute lie about his having a dying aunt, just so he could get to New York without folks knowing the real reason for his absence. All of this just to push him toward total sobriety, something he didn't feel necessary.

The chief's last words in a letter to him were:

Your record alone is more than ample reason for us to support you in your personal life. Your honesty, integrity, and dedication to the Newfoundland Constabulary for the last twenty-two years have earned you the confidence we bestow on your judgment to conduct your affairs as required. I hereby grant you leave without compensation effective July 15 for five weeks, to return to your position no later than August 22, 1927.

The Charles B. Towns Hospital's Inebriate wing was equivalent to a first-class hotel. Every modern convenience was at his

fingertips, including a telephone, a radio, and even room service. At eighty US dollars a day, the proprietors could afford to indulge its patients. Frank felt they could dress it up all they wanted but thought it to be just a drunk tank by another name. He figured he wasn't like the others he met there. He hadn't assaulted anyone, stolen from anyone, or broken any laws. They all had issues. He didn't.

Going four full weeks without even a thimble of liquor was something he'd not once thought he could accomplish. It was challenging. But he did it. Then, in the final week of his stay, he was scheduled for the most intensive part of the treatment, with a drug extracted from a plant called belladonna. Once he completed the drug treatment, the hospital would consider him permanently sober.

According to Dr. Charles Towns, he would be freed from the shackles of booze. But even after three weeks of sobriety, Frank hadn't considered a drink of whiskey as something from which he needed freedom.

When the doctors explained belladonna was a hallucinogenic drug, he opted to walk away from the program. He had experience earlier in his career with people using another plant extract called cocaine. He justified not taking the belladonna by claiming that the terrible consequences cocaine led to in other people's lives was enough for him to adamantly reject the idea. Whether that was true or an excuse, he left the program. He cancelled his last week at the hospital and wired Christine that he was taking the very next Red Cross Line ship, the *SS Silvia*, home to St. John's, Newfoundland.

That first drink of Canadian Club, a double on the rocks, served up by the ship's bartender was very satisfying. Holding that single shot in his mouth for just a second allowed him to get the full peppery taste, unattainable in any other way. After al-

lowing the liquor to run down over his palate, a hint of almond and caramel lingered in his throat until he swallowed again. Why would he deny himself one of life's few pleasures when it was doing absolutely no harm to anyone? As the *Silvia* sailed toward Newfoundland, he was pleased there were thousands of miles and a huge ocean between himself and New York City.

Christine was at Bowring's Pier to meet him on the morning arrival. He knew she would be disappointed, but he had always been able to talk his way out of these situations in the past. She was always kind and understanding, though not satisfied. After disembarking, it didn't take long for Frank to realize this time was very different. He rushed to give her a big hug, but she did not respond in kind. Unlike the letters she wrote, she was cold and distant. Frank knew at the wharf she'd made up her mind, and he knew why. There was no need for a discussion.

He wasn't home for more than a couple of hours when she made it official.

"That's it. I'm leaving you," were her last words as she slammed the door to his house on the way out.

Thankfully, not much was happening at the Harbour Grace police station at 7:00 a.m. on that Monday morning. Frank sat at his desk and took a deep breath. He welcomed boredom.

The air inside the building was uncharacteristically stifling. Usually, it didn't get hot like this in July. With the overnight heavy rain nearly over, he was able to open both the east and west windows to create a draft through the building.

At work he could usually put aside any personal worries or concerns. This being his first day back, he thought it would be the perfect distraction. But no. Her words to him burned in his mind. *I've had enough, Frank. You promised you would try. You*

deceived me and yourself. Frank hated to be accused of being deceptive.

In the bathroom at the rear of the station, he opened the faucet and allowed the water to run cold. He stared at his reflection in the mirror. His five o'clock shadow from the day before had now become darker. His thinning black hair made him appear terribly unkempt. If he were a cadet, he'd be reprimanded and sent home. As there were no scheduled meetings, the tasks of shaving and getting a haircut could wait for another day. Lifting his cold glass of water from the sink, he pressed it against his forehead for a moment, hoping for relief from his aching head.

A full breakfast of bacon and eggs at Rosie's Diner hadn't helped, either. Sometimes all that grease actually worked to dispel a hangover. But not this time. Thank God, at least, there was no one else at the diner except the waitress. Nothing irritated him more than having to make small talk when he felt like this.

He hadn't thought Christine would make that decision. But she had. And it was final. Now at the age of forty, he was facing a time in his life when he held out little hope of ever having a loving and lasting relationship.

Corporal Fahey, who had been targeted for a promotion at headquarters in St. John's, had taken command at the Harbour Grace police station in Frank's absence. It seemed the corporal's poor reputation was widely known, yet he had still managed to get himself promoted. He must have had a powerful reference from someone within the system. Frank couldn't understand how, while he was in New York, Fahey's promotion had come through. The day before Frank returned to work, Fahey departed. He was never impressed with Fahey's work. Now on the first day back, he saw overwhelming evidence of the corporal's lack of effort.



Patrick J. Collins is a writer and retired educator who has taught in various communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. He finished his career in education as a curriculum program specialist, working in several school districts on the Avalon Peninsula and in Western Labrador. Patrick also worked as a sales and marketing representative with Lifetouch Canada until June 2011. He recently retired as a sessional instructor at the Canadian Training Institute in Bay Roberts.

Pat's twelfth and most recent work, *Murder at Lover's Leap*, is a novel inspired by true events.

His literary works published since 2010 are as follows: a biography of Dr. Charles Cron, *A Doctor for All Time: A Man Who Cured Our Hearts*; *The Harbour Grace Affray*; *The Spirit of the SS Kyle*; *Murder at Mosquito Cove*; *Belonging*; *Forsaken Children*; *Gibbet Hill*; *What Lies Below*; *The Fairy Ring*; *Tales Through Time*; and *The Body on the Beach*.

Born and raised in Riverhead, Harbour Grace, Patrick J. Collins continues to enjoy researching and writing in his retirement. He can be reached by email at pjcollins@eastlink.ca.

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