

HIDEAWAY

CHAPTER ONE

Big Sur • 2001

When Liam Sullivan died, at the age of ninety-two, in his sleep, in his own bed with his wife of sixty-five years beside him, the world mourned.

An icon had passed.

Born in a little cottage tucked in the green hills and fields near the village of Glendree in County Clare, he'd been the seventh and last child of Seamus and Ailish Sullivan. He'd known hunger in the lean times, had never forgotten the taste of his mother's bread and butter pudding – or the whip-swat of her hand when he'd earned it.

He'd lost an uncle and his oldest brother in the first Great War, had grieved for a sister who'd died before her eighteenth birthday delivering her second child.

He'd known from an early age the backbreaking work of plowing a field behind a horse named Moon. He'd learned how to shear a sheep and slaughter a lamb, to milk a cow and build a rock wall.

And he remembered, the whole of his long life, the nights his family sat around the fire – the smell of peat smoke, the angel-clear voice of his mother raised in song, his father smiling at her as he played the fiddle.

And the dancing.

As a boy he'd sometimes earn a few pennies singing in the pub while the locals drank their pints and talked of farming and politics.

His soaring tenor could bring a tear to the eye, and his agile body and fast, clever feet lift the spirit when he danced.

He dreamed of more than plowing the fields and milking the cow, much more than the pennies gathered at the little pub in Glendree.

Shortly before his sixteenth birthday, he left home, a few precious punts in his pocket. He endured the Atlantic crossing with others looking for more in the cramped confines belowdecks. When the ship rolled and rocked in a storm, and the air stank of vomit and fear, he blessed his iron constitution.

Dutifully, he wrote letters to home he dreamed of posting at the end of the voyage and kept spirits up by entertaining his fellow passengers with song and dance.

He shared a flirtation and a few eager kisses with a flaxen-haired girl named Mary from Cork who traveled to Brooklyn and a position as a maid in some fine house.

With Mary he stood in the cool, fresh air — fresh at last — and saw the great lady with her torch held high. And thought his life had truly begun.

So much color and noise and movement, so many people squashed into one place. Not just an ocean away from the farm where he'd been born and reared, he thought. A world away.

And his world now.

He was bound to apprentice with his mother's brother Michael Donahue as a butcher in the Meatpacking District. He was welcomed, embraced, given a bed in a room he shared with two of his cousins. While in only a matter of weeks he grew to hate the sounds, the smells of the work, he earned his keep.

Still, he dreamed of more.

He found the more the first time he turned over a bit of that hard-earned pay to sit in a movie theater with Mary of the flaxen hair. There he saw magic on the silver screen, worlds far beyond everything he knew, worlds holding everything a man could want.

There the sounds of bone saws, the *thwack* of cleavers didn't exist. Even pretty Mary faded away as he felt himself pulled into the screen and the world it offered.

The beautiful women, the heroic men, the drama, the joy. When

he surfaced, he saw all around him the enraptured faces of the audience, the tears, the laughter, the applause.

This, he thought, was food for a hungry belly, a blanket in the cold, a light for the damaged soul.

Less than a year after he saw New York from the deck of a ship, he left it to head west.

He worked his way across the country, amazed at its size, at its changing sights and seasons. He slept in fields, in barns, in the back of bars where he traded his voice for a cot.

Once he spent the night in jail after a bit of a dustup in a place called Wichita.

He learned to ride the rails, and evade the police – and as he would say in countless interviews over the course of his career – had the adventure of a lifetime.

When, after nearly two years of travel, he saw the big white sign spelling out hollywoodland, he vowed that here he would find his fame and fortune.

He lived on his wits, his voice, his strong back. With the wit he talked his way into building sets on back lots, sang his way through the work. He acted out the scenes he watched, practiced the various accents he'd heard on the trip from east to west.

Talkies changed everything, so now soundstages needed building. Actors he'd admired in their silence on-screen had voices that screeched or rumbled, so their stars burned out and fell.

His break came when a director heard him singing while he worked – the very tune the once-silent star was supposed to romance his lady with in a musical scene.

Liam knew the man couldn't sing worth shite, and had his ear to the ground close enough to have heard there was talk about using another voice. It was, to his mind, simply being sure he was in the right place at the right time to be that voice.

His face might not have appeared on the screen, but his voice held the audience. It opened the door.

An extra, a walk-on, a bit part where he spoke his first line.

Building blocks, stepping-stones, forming a foundation fueled by the work, the talent, and the Sullivan tireless energy.

He, the farm boy from Clare, had an agent, a contract, and began in that Golden Age of Hollywood what would be a career that spanned decades and generations.

He met his Rosemary when he and the pert and popular Rosemary Ryan starred in a musical – the first of five films they'd make together in their lifetimes. The studio fed the gossip columns stories of their romance, but none of the hype was necessary.

They married less than a year after they clapped eyes on each other. They honeymooned in Ireland – visiting his family, as well as hers in Mayo.

They built a grand glamour of a home in Beverly Hills, had a son, then a daughter.

They bought the land in Big Sur because, as with their romance, it was love at first sight. The house they built facing the sea they named Sullivan's Rest. It became their getaway, then as years passed more their home.

Their son proved the Sullivan-Ryan talent spanned generations, as Hugh's star rose from child actor to leading man. As their daughter, Maureen, chose New York and Broadway.

Hugh would give them their first grandson before his wife, the love of his life, died in a plane crash returning from a location shoot in Montana.

That son would, in time, place another Sullivan star on the screen.

Liam and Rosemary's grandson Aidan, believing, as with Sullivan tradition, he'd found the love of his life in the silky blond beauty of Charlotte Dupont, married in glittery style (exclusive photos in *People* magazine), bought a mansion in Holmby Hills for his bride. And gave Liam a great-granddaughter.

They named the fourth-generation Sullivan Caitlyn. Caitlyn Ryan Sullivan became an instant Hollywood darling when she made her film debut at twenty-one months playing the mischievous, match-making toddler in *Will Daddy Make Three?*

The fact that most reviews found little Cate upstaged both adult leads (which included her mother as the female love interest) caused some consternation in certain quarters.

It might have been her last taste of preadolescent stardom, but her

great-grandfather cast her, at age six, as the free-spirited Mary Kate in *Donovan's Dream*. She spent six weeks on location in Ireland, and shared the screen with her father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and great-grandmother.

She delivered her lines in a west county accent as if she'd been born there.

The film, a critical and commercial success, would be Liam Sullivan's last. In one of the rare interviews he gave toward the end of his life, sitting under a flowering plum tree with the Pacific rolling toward forever, he said, like Donovan, he'd seen his dream come true. He'd made a fine film with the woman he'd loved for six decades, with their boys Hugh and Aidan, and the bright light of his great-granddaughter, Cate.

Movies, he said, had given him the grandest of adventures, so this, he felt, was a perfect cap for the genie bottle of his life.

On a cool, bright February afternoon, three weeks after his death, his widow, his family, and many of the friends he'd made through the years gathered at his Big Sur estate to — as Rosemary insisted — celebrate a life well and fully lived.

They'd held a formal funeral in L.A., with luminaries and eulogies, but this would be to remember the joy he'd given.

There were speeches and anecdotes, there were tears. But there was music, laughter, children playing inside and out. There was food and whiskey and wine.

Rosemary, her hair as white now as the snow that laced the tops of the Santa Lucias, embraced the day as she settled — a bit weary, truth be told — in front of the soaring stone fireplace in what they called the gathering room. There she could watch the children — their young bones laughing at winter's bite — and the sea beyond.

She took her son's hand when Hugh sat beside her. "Will you think I'm a crazy old woman if I tell you I can still feel him, as if he's right beside me?"

As her husband's had, her voice carried the lilt of her home.

"How can I, when I feel it, too?"

She turned to him, her white hair cut short for style and ease, her eyes vivid green and full of humor. "Your sister would say we're

both crazy. How did I ever produce such a practical-minded child as Maureen?"

She took the tea he offered her, winged up an eyebrow. "Is there whiskey in it?"

"I know my ma."

"That you do, my boy, but you don't know all."

She sipped her tea, sighed. Then studied her son's face. So like his father's, she thought. The damnably handsome Irish. Her boy, her baby, had silver liberally streaked through his hair, and eyes that still beamed the bluest of blues.

"I know how you grieved when you lost your Livvy. So sudden, so cruel. I see her in our Caitlyn, and in more than the looks. I see it in her light, the joy and fierceness of her. I'm sounding crazy again."

"No. I see the same. I hear her laugh, and hear Livvy laugh. She's a treasure to me."

"I know it, and to me as she was to your da. I'm glad, Hugh, you found Lily, and after those long years alone found happiness. A good mother to her own children, and a loving grandmother to our Cate these past four years."

"She is."

"Knowing that, knowing our Maureen's happy, her children and theirs doing well, I've made a decision."

"About what?"

"The rest of my time. I love his house," she murmured. "The land here. I know it all in every light, in every season, in every mood. You know we didn't sell the house in L.A. mostly for sentiment, and the convenience of having it if either of us worked there for any stretch of time."

"Do you want to sell it now?"

"I think no. The memories there are dear as well. You know we have the place in New York and that I'm giving it to Maureen. I want to know if you'd want the house in L.A. or this one. I want to know because I'm going to Ireland."

"To visit?"

"To live. Wait," she said before he could speak. "I may have been reared in Boston from my tenth year, but I still have family there, and roots. And the family your father brought me is there as well."

He laid a hand over hers, lifted his chin to the big window, and the children, the family outside. "You have family here."

"I do. Here, New York, Boston, Clare, Mayo, and bless us, London now as well. God, but we're far-flung, aren't we, my darling?"

"It seems we are."

"I hope all of them come to visit me. But Ireland's where I want to be now. In the quiet and the green."

She gave him a smile, with a twinkle in her eyes. "An old widow woman, baking brown bread and knitting shawls."

"You don't know how to bake bread or knit anything."

"Hah." Now she slapped his hand. "I can learn, can't I now, even at my advanced age. I know you have your home with Lily, but it's time for me to give back, we'll say. God knows how Liam and I ever made so much money doing what we did for the love of it."

"Talent." Then he tapped a finger gently to her head. "Smarts."

"Well, we had both. And now I want to shed some of what we reaped. I want that lovely cottage we bought in Mayo. So which is it for you, Hugh? Beverly Hills or Big Sur?"

"Here. This." When she smiled, he shook his head. "You knew before you asked."

"I know my boy even better than he knows his ma. That's settled then. It's yours. And I trust you to tend to it."

"You know I will, but —"

"None of that. My mind's made up. I damn well expect I'll have a place to lay my head when I come visit. And I will come. We had good years here, me and your da. I want what came from us to have good years here as well."

She patted his hand. "Look out there, Hugh." She laughed as she saw Cate do a handspring. "That's the future out there, and I'm so grateful I had a part in making it."

While Cate did handsprings to entertain two of her younger cousins, her parents argued in their guest suite.

Charlotte, her hair swept back in a chignon for the occasion, paced the hardwood, her Louboutins clicking like impatient fingersnaps.

The raw energy pumping from her had once enthralled Aidan. Now it just made him tired.

"I want to get out of here, Aidan, for God's sake."

"And we will, tomorrow afternoon, as planned."

She whirled on him, lips sulky, eyes sheened with angry tears. The soft winter light spilled through the wide glass doors at her back and haloed around her.

"I've had enough, can't you understand? Can't you see I'm on my last nerve? Why the hell do we have to have an idiotic family brunch tomorrow? We had the goddamn dinner last night, we had this whole endless deal today – not to mention the funeral. The endless funeral. How many more stories do I have to hear about the great Liam Sullivan?"

Once he'd thought she understood his thick, braided family ties, then he'd hoped she'd come to understand them. Now they both understood she just tolerated them.

Until she didn't.

Weary to the bone, Aidan sat, gave himself a minute to stretch out his long legs. He'd started to grow a beard for an upcoming role. It itched and annoyed him.

He hated that, at the moment, he felt exactly the same about his wife.

The rough spots in their marriage had smoothed out recently. Now it seemed they'd hit another bumpy patch. "It's important to my grandmother, Charlotte, to my father, to me, to the family."

"Your family's swallowing me whole, Aidan."

She did a heel turn, her hands flying out. So much drama, he thought, over a few more hours.

"It's just one more night, and there'll only be a handful of us left by dinner. We'll be home this time tomorrow. We still have guests, Charlotte. We should be downstairs right now."

"Then let your grandmother deal with them. Your father. You. Why can't I take the plane and go home?"

"Because it's my father's plane, and you, Caitlyn, and I will fly home with him and Lily tomorrow. For now, we're a united front."

"If we had our own plane, I wouldn't have to wait."

He could feel the headache growing behind his eyes. "Do we really need to go there? And now?"

She shrugged. "Nobody would miss me."

He tried another tack, smiled. He knew, from experience, his wife reacted better to the sweet than the stern. "I would."

And on a sigh, she smiled back.

She had a smile, he thought, that just stopped a man's heart.

"I'm being such a pain in the ass."

"Yeah, but you're my pain in the ass."

On a quick laugh, she walked over, cuddled on his lap. "I'm sorry, baby. Almost sorry. Sort of sorry. You know I've never liked it up here. It feels so isolated it makes me claustrophobic. And I know that doesn't make sense."

He knew better than to stroke that shining blond hair after she'd had it styled, so he lightly kissed her temple instead. "I get it, but we'll be home tomorrow. I need you to stick just one more night, for my grandmother, my dad. For me."

After letting out a hiss, she poked his shoulder, then offered him her signature pout. Full coral lips, sulky and soft crystal blue eyes dramatically lashed. "I better get points. Big points."

"How about a long weekend in Cabo points?"

On a gasp, she grabbed his face with her hands. "You mean it?"

"I've got a couple weeks before I start production." So saying, he rubbed a hand over his scruff. "Let's say we hit the beach for a few days. Cate'll love it."

"She has school, Aidan."

"We'll take her tutor."

"How about this?" Now she circled her arms around him, pressed her body, still in mourning black, against his. "Cate has a long weekend with Hugh and Lily, which she'd love. And you and I have a few days in Cabo." She kissed him. "Just us. I'd love some just us, baby. Don't you think we need some just us?"

She was probably right – the smooth patches needed tending as much as the rough. While he hated leaving Cate, she was probably right. "I can make that work."

"Yes! I'm going to text Grant, see if he can do some extra sessions this week. I want a perfect bikini body."

"You already have one."

"That's my sweet husband talking. We'll see what my hard-assed personal trainer says. Oh!" She hopped up. "I need to shop."

"Right now we have to get back downstairs."

The flicker of annoyance marred her face before she smoothed it away. "Okay. You're right, but give me a couple minutes to fix my face."

"Your face is gorgeous, as always."

"Sweet husband." She pointed at him as she started toward her makeup counter. Then stopped. "Thanks, Aidan. These past few weeks, with all the tributes, the memorials, it's been hard on all of us. A few days away, well, that'll be good for us. I'll be right down."

While her parents made up, Cate organized a game of hide-and-seek as the final outdoor game of the day. Always a favorite when the family gathered, the game had its rules, restrictions, and bonus points.

In this case, the rules included outdoors only — as several of the adults had decreed no running inside. The It got a point for every hider found, with the first found designated as the next It. If that hider, now It, was five or under, he or she could choose a partner on the following hunt.

If a hider went three rounds without being found, that meant ten bonus points.

And since Cate had been planning this game all day, she knew how to win them.

She darted off when Boyd, age eleven, started the countdown as the first It. Since Boyd lived in New York like his grandmother, he only visited Big Sur a couple times a year at most. He didn't know the grounds like she did.

Plus, she had a fresh hiding place already picked out.

She rolled her eyes as she saw her five-year-old cousin Ava crawl under the white cloth of a food table. Boyd would find Ava in two minutes.

She nearly backtracked to show Ava a better spot, but it was every kid for herself!

Most of the guests had gone, and more were taking their leave. But

a lot of adults still milled around the patios, the outdoor bars, or sat around one of the firepits. Remembering why, she felt a pang.

She'd loved her great-grandda. He'd always had a story to tell, and lemon drops in his pocket. She'd cried and cried when her daddy told her Grandda had gone to heaven. He'd cried, too, even when he told her Grandda had had a long, happy life. How he'd meant so much to so many, and would never be forgotten.

She thought of his line from the movie they'd made together, while he sat with her on a stone wall, looking over the land.

"A life's marked along the way, darlin', by the deeds we do, for good or ill. Those we leave behind judge those marks, and remember."

She remembered lemon drops and hugs as she scurried to the garage, and around the side. She could still hear voices, from the patios and terraces, the walled garden. Her goal? The big tree. If she climbed to the third branch, she could hide behind the thick trunk, in the green leaves that smelled so good, ten feet up.

Nobody would find her!

Her hair – Celtic black – flew behind her as she ran. Her nanny, Nina, had tucked it back at the sides with butterfly pins to keep it out of her face. Her eyes, bold and blue, danced as she flew out of sight of the multitiered house, far beyond the guest cottage with its steps leading down to the little beach, and the pool that overlooked the sea.

She'd had to wear a dress for the first part of the day, to be respectful, but Nina had laid out her play clothes for after. She still had to be careful of the sweater, but knew it was okay to get her jeans dirty.

"I'm going to win," she whispered as she reached up for the first branch of the California bay, put her purple (currently her favorite color) sneaker in the little knothole for purchase.

She heard a sound behind her, and though she knew it couldn't be Boyd, not yet, her heart jumped.

She caught a glimpse of the man in a server's uniform, with a blond beard and hair pulled back in a ponytail. He wore sunglasses that shot the light back at her.

She grinned, put a finger to her lips. "Hide-and-seek," she told him.

He smiled back. "Wanta boost?" He nodded, then moved forward as if to give her one.

She felt the sharp needle stick on the side of her neck, started to swat at it as she might a bug.

Then her eyes rolled back, and she felt nothing at all.

He had the gag on, zip ties on her wrists and ankles in seconds. Just a precaution, as the dose should keep her out for a couple hours.

She didn't weigh much, and as a man in excellent shape, he could have carried her the few feet to the waiting cart had she been a full-grown woman.

After shoving her into the cabinet of the service cart, he rolled it toward the caterer's van — outfitted for just this purpose. He pushed it up the ramp, shut the cargo doors.

In under two minutes, he drove down the long drive, wound to the edge of the private peninsula. At the security gates, he entered the code with a gloved finger. When the gates opened, he drove through, made his turn, then hit Highway 1.

He resisted pulling off the wig, and the fake beard.

Not yet, and he could handle the annoyance of them. He didn't have far to go, and expected he'd have the ten-million-dollar brat locked inside the high-class cabin (owners currently in Maui) before anyone even thought to look for her.

When he turned off the highway again, started up the steep drive to where some rich asshole decided to build a vacation paradise stuck in with a bunch of trees, rocks, chaparral, he was whistling a tune.

Everything had gone smooth as silk.

He caught sight of his partner pacing on the second-story deck of the cabin and rolled his eyes. Talk about an asshole.

They had this knocked, for Christ's sake. They'd keep the kid sedated, but wear masks just in case. In a couple of days — maybe less — they'd be rich, the kid could go back to the fucking Sullivans, and he, with a new name, new passport, would be on his way to Mozambique to soak up some sun in style.

He pulled the van around the side of the cabin. You couldn't see the cabin from the road, not really, so he knew no one would see the van blocked by trees around the side.

By the time he hopped out, his partner had run down to meet him.

"Have you got her?"

"Shit yeah. Nothing to it."

"Are you sure nobody saw you? Are you sure —"

"Jesus, Denby, chill."

"No names," Denby hissed, pushing up his sunglasses as he looked around as if somebody waited in the woods to attack. "We can't risk her hearing our names."

"She's out. Let's get her upstairs, locked in so I can get this crap off my face. I want a beer."

"Masks first. Look, you're not a fucking doctor. We can't be a hundred percent she's still out."

"Fine, fine, go get yours. I'll stick with this." He patted the beard.

As Denby went back inside, he opened the cargo doors, hopped in to open the cabinet doors. Out, he thought, as in o-u-t. He rolled her out onto the floor, dragged her back toward the door — not a peep from her — then hopped out again.

He glanced back when Denby appeared in his Pennywise the Dancing Clown mask and wig, and he laughed like a loon. "If she wakes up before we get her inside, she'll probably faint from fright."

"We want her scared, don't we, so she'll cooperate. The little spoiled rich bitch."

"That'd do the trick. You're no Tim Curry, but that'd do the trick."

He slung Cate over his shoulder. "Everything ready up there?"

"Yeah. The windows are locked down. Still got a hell of a view of the mountains," Denby added as he followed his partner inside the rustic plush of the entryway, the open living area. "Not that she'll enjoy that, since we're keeping her out or the next thing to it."

Denby jumped as "The Mexican Hat Dance" played from the phone clipped to his partner's belt.

"God damn it, Grant!"

Grant Sparks only laughed. "Used my name, nimrod." He carted Cate up the stairs to the second floor, open to the first with its cathedral ceiling. "That's a text from my sugar. You gotta chill, man."

He carried Cate into the bedroom they'd selected because it faced the back and had its own bathroom. He dumped her on the four-poster

Denby had stripped down to sheets — cheap sheets they'd bought, and would take away with them.

The en suite was to avoid dragging her out of the room, avoiding a potential mess neither of them wanted to clean up. If she made one, they'd wash the sheets. Once they'd finished, they'd remake the bed, nice and tidy, with the original bedding and remove the nails hammered into the window locks.

He looked around, satisfied that Denby had taken out anything the kid could use as a weapon — as if — or bust out a window with. She'd be too drugged up for that, but why take chances?

When they left, the house would be exactly as they'd found it. No one would know they'd ever been inside.

"You took out all the lightbulbs?"

"Every one."

"Good job. Keep her in the dark. Go ahead and clip those ties, take off the gag. If she wakes up, has to piss, I don't want her doing it in the bed. She can beat on the door, scream her head off. Won't make a diff."

"How long do you figure she'll be under?"

"A couple hours. We bring her some doctored soup when she does, and that'll keep her out for the night."

"When are you going out to call?"

"After dark. Hell, they're not even looking for her yet. She was playing fucking hide-and-seek, as advertised, and headed straight for the grab spot."

He gave Denby a slap on the back. "Smooth as silk. Finish up, make damn sure you lock the door. I'm getting this crap off my face." He pulled off the wig, the wig net under it, revealing a short, stylish mop of sun-streaked brown hair. "I'm going for a beer."