

## REVIEWS FOR REAPERS

*Reapers* is Bryan Davis's best work yet. With a refreshing new concept that takes you deep into a dystopian world, *Reapers* will keep you riveted through the last page. Phoenix, Singapore, and Shanghai create a strong new cast of characters who must navigate the underbelly of ghost-filled Chicago to discover the secrets behind the mysterious Gateway.

—Amanda L. Davis  
(Author of *The Cantral Chronicles*)

Bryan Davis's *Reapers* is hands down the best science fiction/fantasy book I have read in decades! Not since I was first introduced to the genre's greats like Asimov, Heinlein, Anthony, and Tolkien have I been so engrossed in a story from page one to the cliff-hanging ending. This fresh take on a post-apocalyptic world is captivating and engaging with enough plot twists to keep even the most ardent sci-fi aficionados on their toes. Bravo, Bryan! This is your best novel to date. Now please, back to work! I need to know what happens next!

— Donna Daigle

With a thrilling and austere brush, Bryan Davis paints a world of dystopian beauty where nothing is quite what it seems. Hidden deep within this dark and fascinating

world are many gems; gems of masterful storytelling, gems of character begging to be discovered, and gems of mind-bending science fiction. From cover to cover *Reapers* thrills the imagination. Every time I pick up a Bryan Davis book late in the evening, I rediscover the joys of turning the last page to the light of morning's dawn, and *Reapers* was no exception.

— Jeremy Fear

*Reapers* is by far one of the most intense books I have ever read. It literally left me gasping for breath by the end. Mr. Davis's dive into the first-person point of view serves to make the emotions of this pulse-pounding tale even more electrifying. Be ready to sacrifice some sleep, because once you pick this book up, you're sucked in—and there's no going back.

—Cassidy Clayton

*Reapers* is by far one of Mr. Davis's best works. It carries a darker, grittier tone than his previous novels yet still remains clean enough for the young-adult audience. The characters will endear and terrify you in this imaginative dystopian tale, and the pacing and mystery will keep you turning the pages. This is a definite must-add to your bookshelf.

—Victoria Tucker

*Reapers* had me staying up at late hours with the main characters. It was hard to stop reading!

—Natasha Sapienza

*To Susie – Thank you for taking my hand. Our  
clasp will stay firm until the Great Reaper  
carries one of us beyond the Gateway, where we  
will be reunited – hand-in-hand forever.*



# REAPERS

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# REAPERS

BOOK 1 OF THE REAPERS TRILOGY

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*“The people who walked in darkness have seen  
a great light: they who dwell in the land of the  
shadow of death, upon them the light has shone.”*

*May those who walk in dark places find that  
blazing light and never walk in darkness again.*



## CHAPTER ONE

THE DEATH ALARM sounded, that phantom punch in the gut I always dreaded. I touched the metallic gateway valve embedded in my chest at the top of my sternum—warm but not yet hot. The alarm was real. Someone in my territory would die tonight, and I had to find the poor soul. Death didn't care about the late hour. Reapers like me always stayed on call.

I rose from my moth-eaten reading chair, blew out the hanging lantern's flame, and stalked across my one-room apartment to the window, guided by light from outside. The internal alarm grew stronger. Prickly vibrations raced along my cloak from the baggy sleeves to the top of the hood, tickling the two-day stubble across my cheeks and chin. Time was growing short—probably less than an hour left.

I shoved open the window sash and leaned into the darkness of the urban alley. With electricity cut-off hour long past for residents, only streetlamps glowed from a neighborhood road to the left. A tall woman in a black trench coat stood at the corner holding an umbrella over her head and a suitcase at her side, as if she were waiting for a ride, maybe a taxi.

I leaned farther out to get a better look. It hadn't

rained in three days, and the skies were clear—a dry night in Chicago and too warm for a trench coat. No cabbie would pick up this woman even if he could see her.

A slight glow around her eyes confirmed her status. She was a ghost, probably level two, far too opaque to be newly dead and glowing too much to have wandered for more than a couple of weeks. If not for the death alarm, I could take the time to collect her. For now she would have to keep wandering. I had to use all my senses to figure out who was about to die.

Moist air wafted past my nose, carrying the odor of a nearby brewery—malt and hops. A horn blared far away, and a siren wailed farther still. Otherwise, all was quiet.

Across the alley, a dark silhouette sat on the railing of a fire-escape landing barely more than a leap away—Sing, short for Singapore, the female Reaper from the bordering district. Although I met her for the first time only two weeks ago, I could never mistake her petite, yet athletic form.

She stared at me from her second-floor perch. Her dangling legs kicked slowly into and out of the light, providing glimpses of her forest green pants and black running shoes—standard garb for a Reaper.

“Hello, Phoenix,” she said in her low, silky voice.

I squinted, hoping to read her expression, but darkness veiled her face. I attempted a teasing tone. “What’re you doing out here in the dark? Spying on me?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know?” She added a friendly laugh. “If you don’t like being watched, you should lower your shade.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

"And what are you doing poking half your body out the window? Did you get an alarm?"

I nodded. "Early warning. Just thought I'd look for a messenger."

"My guess is Molly. Word on the street says she had a seizure a few hours ago. From fever, I heard."

"Molly." I hid a tight swallow. "She's only seven."

"All the better. You'll meet quota faster." Her cloak shimmered, evidence that she carried at least one soul in its fibers. "Who do you have on board now?"

"A middle-aged man, a young mother, and a teenager." I felt their photo sticks in my cloak pocket, their tickets to paradise. "Molly wouldn't quite put me over the top, but I could go to tonight's executions. I should be able to get enough there."

"Then will you take them to the Gateway in the morning?"

"Maybe." I bent to one side, again trying to catch a glimpse of her expression. "What's it to you?"

"I thought you might like to have... I don't know... an extra set of eyes to watch for bandits. I've never been to the Gateway, so..."

"Right. Your first cycle." I glanced along the trash-cluttered alleyway below. Still no messenger. With bandits abundant lately, a messenger likely wouldn't venture out until the last minute. "How many souls do you have?"

"Not enough." She leaned into the light, revealing the whites of her eyes, a stark contrast against her skin's lovely dark tone, a hue resembling coffee with a shot of cream, quite different from my cream-only complexion, though her hair color matched mine—darker brown than

her skin. "If I meet quota by morning," she said, "will you take me with you?"

"If you knew what the Gateway extraction feels like, you wouldn't be so anxious to go."

"A Reaper has to learn sometime, and I'd rather go with someone who knows the ropes."

"Fair enough." I wrinkled my brow. "Are you going to the executions to make quota? Do you have any idea how dangerous it is?"

"You go reap Molly. I can handle a little danger." She thrust herself off the rail and dropped, plunging through the brighter light. With her shimmering black cloak fanned out, she looked like a glowing raven sailing toward the pavement, though sepia curls lifting above her head spoiled the image.

She landed, bending her knees to absorb the impact, and ran toward the alley opening. The ghost at the corner stood nearby, but Sing paid no attention as she breezed past and slinked into the shadows—a sable cat, stealthy and sleek.

I leaned out again. Why didn't she try to collect the ghost? As a rookie, maybe she thought she wasn't experienced enough to handle such a difficult reaping.

A motorcycle rumbled to life in the direction Sing had run, and the sound slowly drifted away. That could mean trouble—a Death Enforcement Officer had probably spotted Sing and was now tailing her. These DEOs couldn't stand to let a death go by without harassing a Reaper and tracking every soul's progress through the Gateway.

I didn't have time to worry about Sing. She would have to handle her own troubles.

I slammed the window down and whispered,

“Molly... anyone but Molly.” The dosage I gave her must have been too low. But how could I have known? No doctor had darkened any door in my territory in months. The going bribe was just too high.

Again guided by light from outside, I reached behind my radiator, pried a wall panel loose, and pulled out the white plastic box lodged within. I sat on my unmade bed and opened the box. Inside lay three pill bottles, two empty syringes, and four vials of various drugs. I snatched up a bottle and shook it. Two pills rattled inside, the last of the antibiotic I got in trade for a pair of leather work boots—payment for reaping a construction worker’s soul last month.

I filled a syringe from one of the vials, slid a plastic sleeve over the needle, and laid it and the pill bottle carefully in my cloak’s outer pocket. The powerful liquid antibiotic had expired long ago. For all I knew, it might now be toxic, so it would have to be the last resort. Maybe, just maybe, the pills would work, if I could get to Molly in time.

I stowed the medicine box back in its hiding place, grabbed my weapons belt from under the bed, and checked the attached equipment—camera, smoke capsules, flare pellets, twin daggers, spool line and throw weight, and a flashlight. Everything seemed intact, including the three keys to my door’s deadbolts.

After strapping the belt on under the cloak and relighting the lantern, I walked to my dresser and picked up a pocket watch, a gift from Kwame, a black man who lived in a former cash-for-title business wedged between a liquor store and a strip joint.

I popped open the watch’s brass-colored cover and

read the analog face—ten fifteen—then closed it and looked at the partial engraving for the thousandth time—*From A*. The rest of the message had been worn down.

I pushed the watch into my pants pocket. If I hurried, I could make it to Molly's home by ten-thirty and still get to the midnight executions. One issue remained. I needed a bribe, something that would get a DEO off my back, just in case he decided to ask too many questions. Walking the streets with medical contraband in my pocket was never safe.

I yanked open the dresser's bottom drawer and rummaged through my collection of reaping payments—an electric razor, wool socks, two cans of Sterno, and... I picked up a portable police-band scanner, complete with ear buds. Perfect. Legal, but scarce.

After adding the scanner to the items in my pocket, I fastened the cloak at my chest and inserted the clasp's key into my sternum's gateway valve, giving it the usual turn to lock it in place. The metal in the clasp warmed to the valve's temperature, though still not hot. The energy cell within the clasp would need more of my blood soon, but the current supply was likely enough to collect a little girl.

"What's in the cloak pocket, Phoenix?"

As my cloak shimmered to life, I rolled my eyes. Crandyke. Always ready to jabber the moment the fibers energized. I didn't need to answer him. After all, he was dead, a disembodied passenger in my cloak, though a talkative one. "Just some pills, Crandyke. You're too dead to take them."

"Very funny." He let out an exaggerated laugh. "Hear me laughing at your wit?"

“Glad you’re entertained.” On the dresser’s top, I slid a tri-fold picture frame closer and ran a finger along the photos of my father, mother, and Misty. I touched her image. *Misty*. The girl across the street. The girl I had known all my life before I had to leave for good.

I touched the pewter band on my ring finger, a gift from Misty when we were both thirteen, the day we confirmed our promise to each other—the day I left home for the last time.

Her voice, flavored as always with a lovely Scottish accent, filtered into my mind. “Twenty years is a long time,” she had whispered as she rested her head on my shoulder. “No matter what, I’ll be waiting for you. Just promise me you’ll do everything you can to get out early. I hear there are shortcuts.”

I pushed the frame back in place. Someday I would see her again... if she was still alive.

After blowing out the lantern again, I walked to the window and reopened it, letting in warm air. With the gossip network burning people’s ears about Molly’s condition, bandits could be lurking at the apartment building’s main entrance. The window was a safer option.

I climbed out to my fire-escape platform, closed the sash behind me, and vaulted over the railing. The plunge felt oddly pleasurable, like leaping into death itself. Most people feared death. Reapers welcomed it. The end of life meant the end of pain, the end of suffering, the end of mystery. We longed for the revelation, to see where we had been taking souls all these years... to see if we had been conducting them to promise or perdition.

After copying Sing’s landing on the alley’s pavement, I whipped the flashlight from my belt and dashed

toward the street. As I closed in on the ghost, I slowed and pointed the beam at her. The light passed through her body and shone on the sidewalk. Definitely a level two. Her eyes carried the typical aspect—confused about her whereabouts and circumstances, not yet accepting her status as a departed spirit. Non-Reapers might be able to see her by now, at least in sporadic glimpses.

“Can you help me?” she called, her voice frail. “I need to find my husband. He was supposed to pick me up here at nine.”

My cloak vibrated again, pricklier than ever. I shook my head and hurried on. This ghost was too entrenched, too difficult to collect. I had to get to Molly in time.

I hustled into the park, a shortcut. Molly lived near the center of my forty-block territory, in the midst of what we called shantytown. I had asked to live in a more centralized apartment to allow for better ability to detect death alarms and for quicker access to the dying, but the powers-that-be said nothing suitable was available, meaning that they hadn’t yet found a mid-district apartment worth stealing from its owner.

I aimed the flashlight at a dirt path and ducked low. At the speed I was running, no bandits would likely ambush me, at least not in numbers. I could always handle a lone assailant. Fortunately, this former kiddie playground wasn’t nearly as dangerous as the more forested park that lay between here and the train station. I avoided that place at night.

“Why the hurry?” Crandyke’s voice again filtered into my ears, muted and tinny, as if ear buds had been inserted at the wrong angle.

"I'm checking on a sick little girl named Molly. I don't have much time."

"Well, even if she's already dead, you'll have at least an hour to collect her. They say the souls always stay around to watch their loved ones weep."

"Is that what you did?"

"No... I didn't have any loved ones."

"Figures." As I ran, I glanced in all directions, watching for the DEO. If he came anywhere close, I would hear his motorcycle. Considering my plans, I preferred to work without anyone looking over my shoulder. "I hope to heal Molly, not collect her."

"Ah! That explains the pills."

"Brilliant deduction."

"If she's close to death, pills won't help. Too slow."

I leaped over a toppled swing set without slowing my pace. No need to tell him about the antibiotic in the syringe. I didn't want to field more inane questions. "As if you know anything about medicine."

"Nothing about medicine, but I was a clerk at DEO headquarters, so I know the danger. I compliment you on your willingness to risk your neck to save a little girl, but you'd better watch your step. The Council's spies abound."

"I'm not looking for compliments." I reached the edge of the park near a streetlamp and stopped within sight of Molly's house. As I paused to catch my breath, I scanned the area for shifting shadows. "You just want me to get to the Gateway in one piece. You're thinking about saving your own eternal hide."

"How little you know about me and what I value. But I will admit that going to heaven would be a lot

better than being stuck in your cloak, especially when you sweat. It gets uncomfortable."

I let myself smile in spite of the danger. Even though Crandyke was irritating at times, having him around was better than being alone. Fortunately, he couldn't tell anyone what I was up to, unless another Reaper happened by. "Don't con me, Crandyke. It's not that bad. I've been a Reaper long enough to know better."

"Is that so? How old are you? Sixteen? Seventeen?"

"One of those." Using the flashlight, I scanned Molly's home, a narrow, two-story row house with three crumbling concrete steps leading to a windowless front door. I aimed the beam at scraggly rosebushes near each side of the steps. No bandits lurked. "They took me at the usual age."

"Then you've been a Reaper three years, four at the most. And since you've never been inside your cloak, you can't possibly know how it feels when—"

"Quiet. I have to concentrate." I disconnected the clasp from my valve, silencing Crandyke. I returned the flashlight to the belt and pulled my hood over my head far enough to shade my eyes. I had to display the persona. To the dying and the bereaved, confidence in my abilities meant everything.

I patted my cloak pocket where the pill bottle and syringe lay. Communicating my hope to cure instead of collect would be tricky. As Crandyke said, the Council's spies could be anywhere, even in the midst of a close-knit family.

"Phoenix?"

I turned toward the voice. A man in Reaper garb

approached on the sidewalk, his gait tenuous, cautious. His hood shadowed his eyes.

“Who are you?” I pushed back my cloak and grasped the hilt of a dagger on my belt. “Show your face.”

He stopped out of reach and lowered his hood, revealing the pockmarked face of a man with dark, shaggy locks and a long scar from ear to chin. I barely recognized Mex. Looking much older than his thirty-three years, he had deteriorated a lot since his banishment. His cloak—ratty, stained, and bearing a roamer’s triangular patch at the end of the right sleeve—shimmered up and down that side from shoulder to knee.

I gave him a casual nod. “What’s up, Mex?”

“Glad you recognized me.” His usual hint of a southern accent gave away his Texas roots, and his voice jittered as he glanced from side to side. “Listen, Phoenix. I’m in trouble. I need one more soul to meet quota. Just one. Age doesn’t matter.”

“Okay.” I stretched out the word. “Just go to the executions and pick one up.”

“It’s not that easy.” He took a step closer. “I’m on the probation list. Suspicion of trafficking souls.”

“Just suspicion, huh?”

“Of course.” He glanced both ways again but said nothing more.

I knew where he was leading, but making him ask would put me on higher ground. “Why are you telling me your sob story?”

“Well, I heard you’re about to hit up Molly, so you’ll have plenty, right? I mean, she’s what? Six years old? She’ll put you way over the top. You can transfer someone to me.”

“My quota is higher than you think.” I looked at my cloak, no longer shimmering. Mex must have seen me before I disconnected the clasp. “Look. Even if she did put me over the top, I don’t have an adapter, and besides, I have to get going—”

“No worries.” From his cloak pocket he withdrew a four-foot-long opaque tube, slightly curled and about the diameter of a garden hose. “You can keep your distance. I’m not crazy about valve locking anyway.”

“I wouldn’t know, but I—”

“Right. Solitary confinement.” Mex laughed. “I don’t envy you district hounds. At least roamers can find a little companionship now and then. No worrying about feeling those nighttime alarms.”

“Don’t rub it in, Mex.” My cheeks grew warm. “If you’re trying to schmooze your way into getting a soul, you’re doing a lousy job. And I don’t have time—”

“You’re right. You’re right. Let’s talk business.” Mex nodded toward Molly’s window. “And don’t fret about Molly. The Fitzpatricks haven’t blown out her candle. You have time.”

I turned that way. A silver taper stood just inside the pane, its wick burning. If I were to rush now, Mex would suspect that I had more in mind than reaping. “Okay. What do you want?”

“A trade.” Mex dug into a cloak pocket, withdrew a gold chain, and let it sway under his fingers. “This’ll fetch a pretty price almost anywhere.”

I cocked my head and eyed it skeptically. “Is that real gold?”

“Fourteen karat.”

"Then why don't you barter at the shroud? There's always a bandit or two fencing souls."

"It's not that simple. The Resistance has been too active for the Gatekeeper's liking. There's a crackdown going on, especially at the shroud."

I half closed an eye. "What kind of crackdown?"

"Meds and souls. You can hardly trade anything shadowy anymore. Spies are everywhere."

"That's not my problem." I waved him off. "Gold is worthless to me. Around here, if you can't eat it, keep warm with it, or use it for fuel, it's useless."

"Yeah, yeah, I get that." Mex stuffed the chain into his pocket. "But the crackdown might be your problem soon. Weird stuff is going on. I saw an Owl marching three families with children onto a bus. I don't like the looks of it."

"Maybe it's an isolated incident." I doubted my own words. Whispers about emptying the corrections camps buzzed among my district dwellers, but their murmurings of mass exterminations didn't make sense. Every city regularly executed criminals in the crematoriums. Why would they kill the camp dwellers? "If you see anything else like that, let me know."

"If I last long enough." As Mex glanced around again, his face twisted. With two shaky steps, he closed the gap between us. "Listen. I know I said I don't envy you district hounds, but that was a lie. Actually, you've got it easy—a fertile district, citizens who like you, your own apartment. And me?" He spread out his arms. "I got nothing. I scrounge for meals. I sleep in alleys. I got so desperate once I wheedled a drunk Reaper into giving me a soul, and I've been on the run from him ever since. And

now I have just one cycle after this one before I can retire from this gig and go home. You gotta help me out.”

I glanced at his gateway valve, barely visible in the glow of the streetlamp. His cloak clasp hung loosely in the keyhole, a sure sign that the valve had not closed properly. Mex was losing energy. Without a recharge at the Gateway, he wouldn't last much longer. Still, I couldn't afford to trade a soul for a gold chain, and I had already taken too long. I had to check on Molly.

“It's not my fault you're a Jungle roamer. You did that to yourself.”

I turned, but Mex grabbed my arm, spun me back, and jerked me close. “Why can't you show a little pity?” His bloodshot eyes widened. “Please! I gotta get a recharge! Just one more cycle!”

I knocked his hands away. The sudden shift sent him staggering backwards, and he landed with a thud on the sidewalk. As he sat with his head low, I straightened my cloak. “I saw a level two at the corner of Locust and Mohawk. She's probably still there. You can pick her up.”

“A level two?” Mex climbed to his feet and stood shakily. “I can't reap her, not in my condition.”

I looked Mex over. With his lack of confidence, he was probably right. Handling a level two required complete self-assurance. “Then go find her, and I'll meet you there to help you as soon as I'm done with Molly.”

“Thanks, buddy. You won't regret it.” A hand covering his valve, Mex skulked into the shadows.

When he faded out of sight, I took a deep breath and tried to settle my thoughts. I had to put his situation out of my mind. I couldn't trade a soul with just anyone who asked. I would never meet quota and get my own

energy recharged. Every Reaper knew this, especially the roamers.

After repositioning my hood over my eyes, I strode up the stairs and knocked on the door. Footsteps pounded, drawing closer. The door flung open with a loud squeak. A dark-haired female, maybe twenty years old, stood in the opening, holding a glowing lantern at face level. Pretty and pale, tear tracks stained her cheeks.

“Oh, Phoenix! You’re finally here!” Her Irish accent rode an unsteady voice. “Come in! Come in!”

Not bothering to ask how she knew my name, I entered the narrow foyer with steady, self-assured steps. The public persona had to continue. A Reaper must never appear flustered by impending death or frantic appeals.

“I’m Colleen.” She gestured with a trembling hand. “Molly is this way.”

I followed the lantern’s glow toward the end of a dark hall. Through a doorway to the left, two redheaded pre-teen girls sat opposite each other on the floor in a dim room, their eyes wide as I passed.

I knew these girls—Molly’s sisters, Anne and Betsy—but Colleen remained a mystery. Perhaps she was a distant relation who had been called to the family death-watch. “Did you send a messenger for me?” I asked.

She stopped at a closed door, her eyes filled with the flickering flame. “We sent a neighbor to fetch you an hour ago. Brennan. An older man, maybe sixty-five. Didn’t you see him?”

I shook my head. “He’ll show up. He probably just got lost.” I kept my tone calm. No use scolding them for sending a man of his age out at night. “We’d better see to Molly.”

“Yes... yes, of course.” Her hand again trembling, Colleen pushed the door open and led the way.

I entered the warm room and stopped just inside. Molly, dressed in a ballet leotard and skirt, lay on her back on a child-sized bed. Wheezing through labored breaths, she kept her eyes closed, her face slack. To the right of the bed, her mother, Fiona, sat on a stool, weeping as she brushed across Molly’s dark hair with a leathery hand.

Lit candles stood in nearly every possible spot—from ivory votives in the tiniest nooks to tall red tapers embedded in rustic candlesticks in larger spaces on shelves. Only the sill in front of an open window leading to the back alley lacked a candle. A light breeze wafted in, carrying the late-night sounds of the city and troubling the tiny flames throughout the room.

Molly’s father stood to the bed’s left, shifting from foot to foot as he stared at me from under bushy eyebrows and balding head. Although only five-foot-six, his stocky build gave him a formidable stature.

“Colm,” I said, nodding, “do you want your other children to witness the reaping?” I already knew the answer, but tradition demanded that I ask.

He gestured with his head toward the house’s front room. “Her sisters said their good-byes.” His brogue was thicker than usual. “They will stay where they are.”

“A wise choice.” I opened my hand. “Do you have the passage key?”

Colm extended a photo stick. His arm shook as if he were giving me a pen to sign Molly’s death warrant. “This is...” He cleared his throat and blinked away tears. “This is all we could find.”

I took the stick and wrapped my hand around it.

As it warmed, azure light flowed between my fingers and down to the floor. The radiance collected in an animated hologram—Molly dancing in her ballerina outfit. Although her gap-toothed smile displayed joy as she pretended to dance under stage lights, her awkward steps and near spills reflected her lack of lessons. Even the tattered tutu was an apt sign that no one in this neighborhood could afford such luxuries.

Since this stick didn't have the expensive audio option, I imagined a tune from a music box guiding her movements and off-key notes accompanying her stumbles. Although she was likely a beautiful ballerina to her parents, to me she was a symbol of the city's futility—another hope-filled flower, now wilted and ready to be uprooted, an unkept promise.

When I opened my hand, the image disappeared. "This will do fine. Molly will dance with the stars for all eternity."

Her mother looked up. "Then is there really no hope for my little angel?" Her voice cracked. "If she dies, I'll... I'll..." She buried her face in her hands and wept.

Colm circled to Fiona's side of the bed and rubbed her back. "There, there, dearest. Remember you said you would be brave. You promised me and the children."

"I know. I know." Her hands muffled her voice. "But I can't believe there's really no hope."

I touched the pill-bottle pocket again. This could be the opening I was looking for. "There is always hope for the faithful." I gave Colleen a glance, hoping Colm would notice my concern. She gazed with teary eyes at Molly, seemingly void of any suspicion as she held the quivering lantern.

“You are among friends,” Colm said. “Colleen knows about your, shall we say, unofficial profession. In our home, those who applaud death are the enemy, and those who cherish life are our friends. You are free to ply your trade.”

“Very good.” Trying to keep my hands steady, I slid the photo stick into my pocket and fished out the pill bottle. “Let’s see what we can do for Molly.”