

# The 13<sup>th</sup> Apostle

A Novel of a Dublin Family,  
Michael Collins, and the Irish Uprising

Dermot McEvoy

“You will not get anything from the British government unless you approach them with a bullock’s tail in one hand and a landlord’s head in the other.”

—Michael Collins

# Preface

For seven hundred years the British occupied Ireland, stealing its land, looting it of its meager wealth, and imposing a famine on its inhabitants.

On Monday, 24 April 1916, a handful of rebels commandeered buildings around Dublin City and fought the British to a standstill for nearly a week.

After their surrender, fourteen of the leaders were shot in the breaker's yard of Kilmainham Gaol. In all, sixteen men were executed for their Uprising against the British.

With the elimination of 1916 leaders, another generation of revolutionaries rose to take their place.

This cadre was led by Eamon DeValera, the senior commandant not executed because of his natural born American citizenship, and Michael Collins, who would soon rise to hold the positions of Minister for Finance in the first *Dáil*, and Director of Intelligence of the Irish Republican Army.

Collins reign as a revolutionary was short. He would only live a lively six years, between the Easter Rising and his assassination on 22 August 1922.

But in that short period he led a bloody guerrilla warfare which is now textbook for all emerging revolutionaries, much studied by the likes of Mao Tse-Tung and Yitzhak Shamir, who later would become Prime Minister of Israel.

In that short period of time Collins built the *only* great intelligence network that the British encountered in any of their colonies.

One of his cohorts was a fourteen-year-old Dublin boy he met in the General Post Office during Easter Week.

His name was Eoin Kavanagh.

This is their story.

And more.

And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead; and the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell upon his face to the earth.

—1 Samuel 17:49

October, 2006

1.

“Johnny Three,” said the barely audible raspy voice, “it’s time to come get me. Now.” Then the phone went dead.

Eoin Kavanagh III—known as Johnny Three to everyone—knew it was his grandfather’s way of summoning him back to Dublin for the final farewell. “I have to go to Dublin,” Kavanagh said to his wife, Diane. “I think I should go alone.”

“I’m coming,” the wife said and Kavanagh was smart enough not to argue this time.

When the flight from New York landed he immediately headed to the old man’s house in Dalkey. “I don’t like this,” said Johnny Three to his wife as their taxi swung to the southside of Dublin Bay.

“Why?”

“Do you know what the date is? October 16th.”

“So?”

“Michael Collins’ birthday,” replied Johnny. “You know the old man.”

“He’s picked his death day,” said a shocked Diane.

“Yes, he has.”

When they arrived at the house Bridie, his grandfather’s long-time housekeeper, opened the door. “I shouldn’t have,” she said, then repeated, “I shouldn’t have.”

“Are you alright, Bridie?” said Johnny Three as Diane took the distraught woman by the arm.

Johnny Three heard a ruckus from the bedroom above, as if there was a kerfuffle going on. He knew his grandfather, the original Eoin Kavanagh, was not going out quietly. “Bless my ancient HOLE,” he heard his grandfather say, the feeble voice cracking.

“I shouldn’t have called the priest,” said Bridie again as a priest, purple stole flying about him, came running down the stairs.

“He’s incorrigible,” said the harassed curate as he took the stole off and kissed the cross on the back.

“Thank you, Father,” said Bridie.

“Incorrigible,” repeated the priest to Johnny and Diane.



“Contrary,” corrected the grandson.

“Whatever!” said the defeated cleric as he exited the house.

Johnny chuckled at the priest’s distress and hit the stairs, followed directly by his wife.

“How are you, grandpa?”

The old man looked up and a sparkle came into his eyes as he surveyed his only grandchild and his wife. “Not good,” he said, motioning the couple towards his bed, which had a panoramic view of Dublin Bay.

The younger Kavanagh reached down and kissed his grandfather on the forehead. “Did you make your peace, granddad?” he said, not so gently applying the needle.

“Peace my arse,” said Eoin. “Bloody priests never change.” The grandfather shooed his grandson away and motioned for Diane to come to him. “How are you, dear?” he said as he kissed her hand and then patted her gently on her round Presbyterian rump.

“Oh, grandpa,” she said and started to cry.

“There, there,” he said and patted her bottom again as he looked at his grandson and smiled. Johnny Three turned away so his wife couldn’t see *him* smile. Death was banging on the door but the old rebel kept petting Diane’s caboose.

The old man was crazy about Diane Kavanagh. Even after three children she was a remarkably beautiful and fit woman. She had gorgeous brown hair, dancing blue eyes, and one of the most remarkable bottoms God had ever created. “How did an eejit like you end up with a woman of that caliber?” he liked to chide his grandson.

“She fell in love with you,” he replied with some truth, “but she married me.”

Diane was still sniffing and the old man was still massaging her grand arse. “There, there,” he continued, keeping in rhythm to his ass-pat. Eoin Kavanagh may have been a centenarian, but he possessed the lusty eyes of an eighteen-year-old.

“Grandpa,” Johnny Three finally interrupted.

“Yes, son.”

“Should I follow your wishes?”

“Yes,” said the grandfather. “To the letter.” He looked intently at his grandson. “I have a surprise for you.”

“You’re leaving me the house?”

“Who else would I leave it to? You’re the last *real* Kavanagh,” he said coldly and definitively.

“How about the Church or the State?” A negative smile gave the answer. “What’s the surprise?”

“You’ll see.” With that the old man serenely laid his head on the pillow and closed his eyes.

“Is he?” asked Diane with concern.

Her husband was a little more cynical. “I wouldn’t bet on it,” he said.

Suddenly Eoin's eyes shot open and he urgently motioned the grandson to his lips. "Yes, grandpa."

"Fook," he said, suddenly having trouble forming words.

"Fuck?" repeated Johnny.

"Fook Eddie DeValera."

The old man was defiant to the end, then, by a blink of his eyes he asked his grandson to come closer. "How did he do it?" he said in a whisper.

"Who?" said Johnny.

"How the fook did Mick Collins pull it off?"

"I don't know, grandpa."

"Neither do I, son." A single tear rolled down Eoin's Kavanagh's cheek. "My God, I loved that man." The tear died in his beard and a smile covered the old man's face. Suddenly, the couple realized he was dead.

"Oh, Johnny," shrieked Diane. "He's gone. He's gone." He took his wife in his arms and hugged her as hard as he could. "He's gone," she said again. With that Diane heard the loudest laugh she had heard in a long time. It was her husband. He was doubled over. "What are you doing?"

"I'm giving the old man," he said, catching his breath, "the send-off he deserves."

LAST GPO REBEL DEAD AT 105 read the *Irish Times* headline.

Johnny Three looked at the newspaper and smiled. He handed it back to the army officer the Irish prime minister, the *Taoiseach*, had sent over to set up the viewing in Dublin's City Hall.

Eoin Kavanagh, TD, the rebel of the headline, lay in the simple box. He was dressed in his Volunteer's uniform. He hadn't gained a pound since 1916.

"Can I be alone?" he said to the officer. He straightened the tricolour on the bottom half of the coffin and looked at his grandfather. The old man still wore his beard and his head of Paul O'Dwyer-esque white hair—the closest thing to an Irish halo—was still full. He had insisted on being viewed in the City Hall because that was where his boss, Michael Collins, had laid-in-state after he was assassinated in 1922. You couldn't mention the name of Eoin Kavanagh without people saying that he was The Big Fellow's personal bodyguard—or perhaps something more. Sometimes, with an unsettling gleam in his eye, Eoin would refer to himself as "Mick's Thirteenth Apostle," never elaborating, just letting it sit there like a ticking time bomb, waiting to explode and further complicate Irish revolutionary lore. The old man knew his place in history and even in death he wanted to be sure he got all he had coming to him, right down to the twenty-one gun salute at Glasnevin where he would be buried in the army cemetery, right next to General Collins.

"Captain," said Johnny summoning the army officer.

"Yes, sir."

“Could I have that paper back?” The officer handed the *Times* to Kavanagh. “Thanks. I think I need a drink. I’ll be back in a while.” Johnny went down the front steps of the City Hall into Cork Hill. He swung into Palace Street at one of the Dublin Castle side gates, and headed down Dame Lane that would take him across South Great Georges Street and into Dame Court. He and the old man had walked this narrow street many times as Eoin told him how Collins and him would often case English touts to the gates of the Castle itself, then retreat to the Stag’s Head for a drink.

At night the Stag’s Head was a madhouse, but in the daytime it was serene, one of the most beautiful Victorian pubs in Dublin. Johnny Three was first brought there by his grandfather when he would visit him during the summers in the late 1960s and ’70s. It was then that Johnny Three and the old man, always close, had come to deeply love one another.

The death of Jack Kennedy had taken a lot out of the old man—for a while. It was like losing Collins again. Eoin Kavanagh was the only member of congress to travel with Kennedy on his trip to Ireland in 1963. He regaled Kennedy with stories of 1916, the War of Independence, and being Michael Collins’ personal bodyguard. They had sat with the *Taoiseach*, Seán Lemass, and retold the 1916 stories in intimate detail for the young president. Although Kavanagh and Jack Lemass had been on opposite sides in the Irish Civil War, they had remained friends, even after Kavanagh had left Ireland in 1922 and gone to America. During World War II, the Kavanagh-Lemass relationship heated up, as Congressman Kavanagh served as Lemass’ personal intermediary with Eoin’s long-time friend, Franklin Roosevelt, during Ireland’s “Emergency.” Kennedy had marveled at the close relationship between Lemass and Kavanagh and had also noticed that the Congressman never uttered a

word to President DeValera, Lemass' mentor, who was sitting on the same dais. It brought a smile to Kennedy's face, a man who knew about the Irish and their grudges.

After Kennedy died, Lemass had phoned: "Come back to Ireland," he told his old friend. Kavanagh did, ran for the *Dáil* as an independent in the South Dublin district he had been born in, and ended up sitting in the opposition aisle to his friend, the *Taoiseach*. "You're nothing but a troublemaker," Lemass laughed after Eoin Kavanagh was sworn in as a TD, *Teachtaí Dála*, Deputy to the *Dáil*, the Irish parliament.

"Jack," Kavanagh deadpanned, "how could you think such a thing?"

And a troublemaker he was. In 1971, after Lemass died, Deputy Kavanagh began running guns to the North after internment without trial was instituted by the British government. When Liam Cosgrave became *Taoiseach* in 1974 he was indicted. He refused to resign his seat in *Dáil Éireann* and had stood trial, where he proudly declared his guilt—and was found innocent by a jury of his delighted peers. "This is a great day for Ireland," he declared on the steps of the Four Courts where he and his wife of fifty years stood before the assembled media, "and a bad day for Liam Cosgrave and those other *Fine Gail* eunuchs who are trying to turn the Irish government into the sub servants of the British imperialists! What a bunch of pussies! Mick Collins would be appalled!" When infuriated, the New Yorker in Eoin Kavanagh had a tendency to surface with a bang. Mrs. Kavanagh looked straight into the gutter, hoping her feminist friends back in New York would not see the smile on her face.

Johnny Three had been with him when he crossed paths with Eamon DeValera for the last time. It was at a function at the Gresham Hotel in O'Connell Street in June 1975, just months before Dev's death. The two old antagonists had literally bumped into each other at

the reception. DeValera, blind as a bat, was mentally as sharp as ever. “Eoin Kavanagh,” he said looking down at the diminutive Kavanagh and seemingly knowing him by instinct, “I see young, respectable Cosgrave doesn’t like you.” Dev had had his own run-ins with the father, W.T. Cosgrave, during the Civil War.

“Well, Chief,” said Eoin, “neither did his old man!”

DeValera laughed, enjoying his first conversation with Kavanagh since 1922. “God be with you, Eoin Kavanagh.”

DeValera wasn’t going to get off that easy. “Chief,” he said.

“Yes.”

“Mick was right.”

DeValera looked down with unseeing eyes through his thick glasses and sighed.

“Perhaps,” he responded. “Perhaps.”

“God bless, Chief,” were the last words Eoin Kavanagh said to his former antagonist.

DeValera slowly moved through the room on his way out. “Look,” said Eoin to Johnny Three. DeValera had extended his supine hands to the side, like the Blessed Virgin Mary, so people could touch him. “Look at that old bastard work the room!” said Eoin with genuine admiration. “Goddamn it Johnny, Jack Kennedy couldn’t have done it better.” Eoin Kavanagh appreciated political talent when he saw it.

Diane joined Johnny Three at the Stag’s Head. “Man, you look good,” he said as he rubbed her hip, sliding his hands across the back of her black mourning dress.

“Poor grandpa,” said Diane, “and you’re feeling me up.”

“Funerals make me horny,” said Johnny. “It must be something to do with stiff.”

“You Kavanagh men are all alike!”

His cell phone rang. It was the City Hall. The *Taoiseach* had arrived for the trip to the Pro-Cathedral for the funeral mass. “Time to go, honey. Bertie’s waiting for us.”

Diane and Johnny went out the side entrance of the Stag’s Head and retraced his steps back along Dame Lane to the City Hall. When he got to the coffin Bertie Ahern, the *Taoiseach*, was waiting for him.

“My condolences,” said Ahern in a flat Northside Dublin accent.

The old man couldn’t stand Ahearn. But like him or not, Eoin Kavanagh insisted the *Taoiseach* and the American ambassador show up. He figured it was the least they could do. The Irish President and head of state, Mary McAleese, would also join them at the Pro Cathedral. Johnny Three introduced Diane, then told Ahern: “My grandfather would be proud that the *Taoiseach* of a free Irish nation had the time to attend his funeral. Let’s get moving.”

Johnny watched as they closed the lid on the old man for the last time. The soldiers hoisted the narrow pine box on their shoulders and slowly marched out of the City Hall, down the front steps, then carefully lowered the casket and placed it in the old-fashioned horse-drawn glass hearse for its short trip to the Pro-Cathedral in Marlborough Street. The black horses snorted and snapped their heads, making their black funeral plumes dance a spastic jig. The old hearse was Eoin’s idea, perhaps remembering the Dublin of his youth when his



Mammy and younger brother and infant sister had prematurely made this same sad trip to Glasnevin Cemetery.

Johnny Three and Diane climbed into the trailing limousine with the *Taoiseach* and the Ambassador. Slowly they followed the hearse as it made its way down Dame Street. Citizens stopped in their tracks, stood at attention, and removed caps as the old rebel began his final journey. Johnny peeked for a banshee without success.

First they came to South Great Georges Street and it reminded Johnny that his great-grandfather's barber shop, set up by Michael Collins himself, was only a few blocks away on Aungier Street. To the left they passed Temple Lane where his great-grandmother had lived before she married his great-grandfather in 1900. Further up was Crow Street and building #3 where Eoin had worked in Collins' intelligence office, compiling the dossiers that would culminate in the assassination of the British Secret Service in Dublin in November 1920.

Suddenly there was a dry lump in Johnny Three's throat and the color left his face. Diane asked if he was alright, and he shook his head as a single tear slowly ran down his cheek. Then he knew what it was—the body of Eoin Kavanagh was slowly drawing him back to another time, a time of sickness, revolution—and freedom. As he followed his grandfather's casket he was slowly, but ineluctably, being transported back to his grandfather's time—the terrifying Dublin of 1916.