***The Belham Collection***

Way back in 2007 when I wasn’t a published author, and I had no idea if I would ever *be* a published author, the only reason I wrote was for pure enjoyment. I love to make up stories and create worlds. (Of course, now that I am a published author, I also write for you, my readers, and that’s a lot of fun, too.) But back then it was just me playing goddess of my imaginary friends in an imaginary location.

Well, not entirely imaginary…

I decided to set what would become my first published novel, *Shelter Me,* in a town that looks suspiciously like my own semi-rural berg outside of Boston. I didn’t use its actual name because I wanted to be able to put things there that weren’t there in real life—like Cormac’s Confectionery (which my fellow townspeople and I really wish were there in real life).

I got a kick out using town landmarks but switching up the names so locals could guess what they were. For instance we have an old lakeside bar called The Chateau, affectionately known as The Chat. I called it The Palace, or The Pal. It was a fun little inside joke.

Then I actually got published (to my shock, *Shelter Me* even became a bestseller) and “Belham,” was suddenly known far beyond the confines of our little town.

The protagonist of *Shelter Me* is Janie LaMarche, a young mother who is suddenly widowed and must find the strength and support to carry on. One of her staunchest supporters is her cousin, Cormac McGrath, a funny, gentle giant of a man who is engaged to Barb Spencer. After the book came out, readers often asked me if I would write a sequel to *Shelter Me*, but I felt I had told the story I wanted to tell with those characters.

Or had I?

After writing my second book, *Deep Down True,* about a newly divorced mother trying to reinvent herself in both her personal and professional life, I came up with a way to give readers a peek into Janie LaMarche’s next chapter without writing an entire sequel. In my third novel, *The Shortest Way Home,* Sean Doran has spent twenty years in the world’s most downtrodden places as a nurse, only to be drawn back to his hometown of Belham, Massachusetts when his family needs him. Sean’s best friend from high school, who helps him navigate the ongoing crises, is Cormac McGrath, now married to Barb Spencer McGrath.

In order to give readers of *Shelter Me* more about Janie’s life after the end of that story, she runs into Sean at Cormac’s Confectionery where she gives him an update. It’s very satisfying to hear from readers of *The Shortest Way Home* how much they appreciate that little glimpse into Janie’s future.

My next book was *The Tumbling Turner Sisters*, a historical novel set in 1919 about a family with four daughters who go on the road in vaudeville as an acrobatic act. At first there didn’t really seem to be a way to include Belham until I decided that one of the performers they meet is from Boston. The actual lakeside bar in my town—The Pal in my novels—is from the 1920s. I had him play the piano there.

I then went on to write another historical novel, *City of Flickering Light*, about three young Hollywood hopefuls in the silent movie era. As I had with Janie LaMarche in *The Shortest Way Home,* I brought one of the Turner sisters in as a secondary character. Readers of *The* *Tumbling Turner Sisters* love seeing Gert Turner on movie sets in the Roaring Twenties.

After writing a contemporary novel, *Catch Us When We Fall*, about a young alcoholic who is pregnant and has to get sober so she can keep the baby, I found myself hankering to return to Belham. Thus the protagonist of *The Half of It*, Helen Spencer—a woman whose past suddenly catches up to her—is Cormac McGrath’s mother-in-law.

In the novel I’m working on now, Cormac’s father, Charlie, is one of the main characters. Cormac is always a secondary character, but as the linchpin that unites all the stories, he’s arguably the most important!

The four books (so far) of the Belham Collection aren’t sequels. *The Tumbling Turner Sisters* shares no characters with the other three novels at all. And while the contemporary novels do have a linear progression through time--*Shelter Me*, then *The Shortest Way Home*, then *The Half of It—*they are each complete unto themselves and can be read in any order (though it can be a little more fun to go sequentially to see what happens to the previous books’ characters).

If you’d like to try them out, a free chapter of each is available at [www.juliettefay.com](http://www.juliettefay.com).

However you decide to read them, I hope you enjoy your time in Belham!