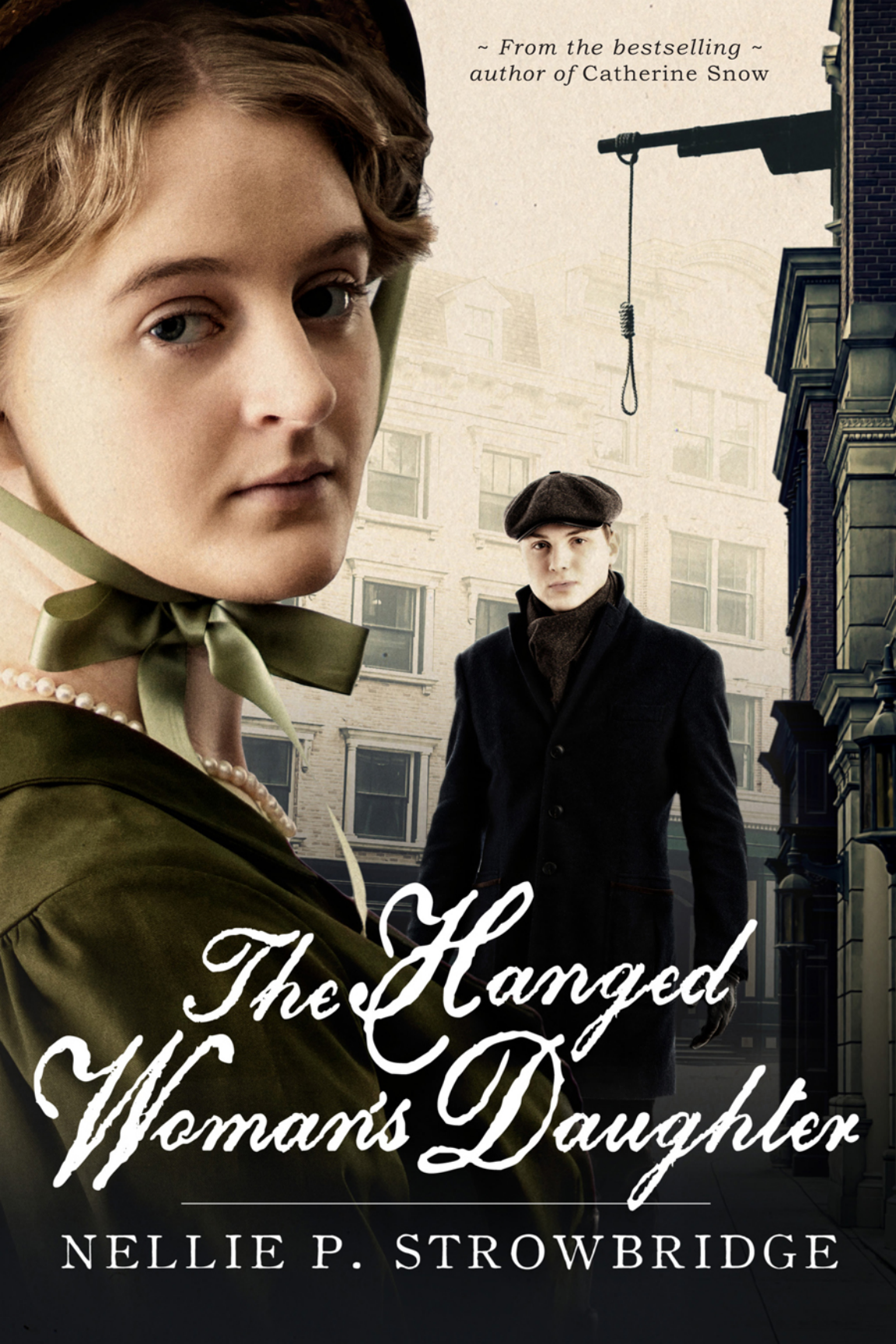




~ From the bestselling ~
author of Catherine Snow

The Hanged Woman's Daughter

NELLIE P. STROWBRIDGE

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Woman's Daughter*

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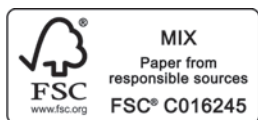
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Dedicated to anyone who has suffered from a past that threatens their future, and to the truth that yesterday is a far country left behind, today a place to build hope.

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PROLOGUE

The first Christmas after John Snow disappeared, months before Catherine, his wife, was hanged, Bridget, seventeen, their eldest daughter, opened the door to a lone mummer's rap. Startled, she slammed the heavy pine door and leaned against it, her chest lifting and falling in rapid motion. Her brothers and sisters, rushing to get a look, stopped at the sight of their sister's face drained of colour. Bridget later described the mummer to fourteen-year-old Eliza as someone standing motionless in a hooded, brown garment, the face covered and a rope around the neck. Bridget cautioned her sister, "Don't be lettin' the young ones near the door when there's mummers about, and don't answer to any knock."

Eliza nodded, her eyes wide and fearful.

During the twelve days of Christmas, a mummer's rap on the door of any house was persistent. The door was opened cautiously and a family faced the mummers, made bolder under face masks. Sometimes a disguised voice was as loud as a knock: "Any mummers 'lowed in?"

Humping and stomping, the grotesque creatures crowded into the house, entering the kitchen where they twirled and danced while the family looked on or joined in the dance.

Mumming was a chance for poor mortals to dress mysteriously and make their rounds looking to have fruitcake served with a drink of *swanky*, plump spring cranberries floating in the hot festive drink. Other times, there might be a piece of raisin cake and a tumbler of *freely*, a bakeapple drink.

"Tip a drop from the keg," a brazen mummer would coax. It was easy to tell he was one for the drink when he spilled his grog on his cuff and

sucked on it to not waste a drop. Another mummer, a frayed flour sack over his head, a hole over one eye, and one for the mouth, might gull down his piece of raisin cake, wanting to be on to the next house.

Once they'd eaten, some mummers stayed to "plank 'er down," stamping and scuffing as they swung each other forward and backward, arms lifted, hands clasped. It was told that one lot of mummers fell through the floor of one house down to where a cache of moonshine was stored. That night they had the time of their lives.

Mummers had attempted to get into the Snow house in the early days when the family lived in Bareneed and again after John had moved his family to Salmon Cove, a lonely outreach of land across the sea from the Bareneed fishing village. Whenever they tried to talk their way in, he'd threaten, "Be off with you or I'll turn your faces inside out."

Catherine had always lifted an eyebrow and given him an indulgent smile. "A harmless bit of fun, Jack. Sure, the hobby horse, with its chattering teeth, and the pantomiming of King George and the Dragon, all come from Black Protestants such as yerself."

"The godawful choking noises let out under that false face can curl your hair," he had retorted.

"Not yours, John," Catherine said. "Your black mop is already crinkled. The mummers draw in their breath to disguise their voice. That's all, John. Thomas Martin and John Jacob, those business and drinking chums of yours, you allow them in, and have for years without trouble. They only come for a lively dance and a jig with the spoons and *cardin*. Afterwards, if their hands find a mug of *swanky* or rum and a piece of cake, they'll think of nothing but our hospitality. They'll leave with themselves, and there'll be only the floors to wipe."

"Bite yer tongue, woman," John answered, his face darkening. "Who knows but there'll be a stranger come among them wanting to spy out a man's holdings for later gain, or one ready to commit harm straight away."

"If that be true," she reasoned, "your shotgun is on the ready. Trouble is not something to be looking for when there's no cause."

John was adamant. "There you is, then, ready to sweeten their tongues with cake. I'll take no chances."

John always brought home dates, raisins, and dried orange peel from St. John's for Catherine's Christmas cake. Once it was baked, she drenched it in rum and wrapped it in cloth.

"Only for family and friends," John warned.

Catherine listened to the sounds of music and laughter coming from Ruth and Edward Snow's house. John's brother always allowed the mum-

mers in to scuff the kitchen floor with various jigs. There was plenty of prattle, along with sweets and grog.

Catherine's voice was wistful as she turned to John. "There's a lively time to be had with the mummers in."

John's back was already turned. There was no way to change his mind.

Except for the lone mummer with a rope around his neck, mummers didn't venture near the Snows' house the first few days of Christmas 1834. They may have feared seeing the ghosts of Catherine, Arthur Spring, the indentured Irish servant, and Tobias Mandeville, Catherine's cousin who was John's bookkeeper, hanged for John's suspected murder. After a few nights with the liquor in and "a face on," they got bold.

Bridget heard them beating at the door and rushed to blow on the frosted windowpane. She looked out. The mummer with the rope around his neck was nowhere in sight.

She nodded for Eliza to take the younger children upstairs. They went reluctantly.

Bridget opened the door, and a cold breath swept in around her. She faced a group of mummers.

"Any mummers 'lowed in?" a voice croaked.

"Indeed," Bridget said. She swung the door wide open.

The mummers ruffled her hair and pinched her cheek as they ambled into the kitchen. One mummer grabbed her bum. She was quick to pull away. One by one, mummers were identified and had no choice but to unmask from their cumbersome disguises.

"Christmas box on you!" they called in unison as the door slammed behind them. A small lantern wobbled on a post outside.

The next night, Bridget let in more mummers. One, at the back of the others, wore a black hat tipped down his forehead, black crepe over his face. A snow blind covered one eye. He danced along, not making contact with anyone. Before cake and *swanky* were served, even before the guessing began, he slipped away, mumbling as he passed Bridget. She watched him go, instantly seized by a mixture of puzzlement and trepidation. She hurried to the back window and watched him stride past her aunt Ruth and uncle Edward's house. The mummer turned, looking back before he disappeared over crusted snow silver under the soft light of the moon, a shining ornament strung beneath a white bough of cloud.

"A stranger, that one. Not a familiar article of clothing on him," she murmured, letting the curtain drop. Then she hurried back to the other mummers. It was only then she realized what she had heard the mysterious mummer say, "Handle yerself with care—there's wolves about."

The next night, from behind a kitchen curtain, Bridget observed a black form at the end of her father's stagehead. She wanted to believe it was the shadow of a post—she knew it wasn't. Moonlight splashing across the lapping water of the cove had caught the ghostly figure. A memory that had skirted Bridget's mind and run away before she could grab it, hold it, and let it whisper its truth surfaced. Sometimes, in the sun's evening light, she had glimpsed a shadowy figure, like a tall, dark fir on a hill up from the house.

Now a dark cloud, like a hand, moved over the moon. A sliver of unease started at the back of Bridget's head and slithered down her back. She felt a lunge in her chest as if her heart was cautioning her to move away from the window. Still, she took another look. Whoever had been there was gone.

ONE

Early Summer 1835

I am not going to sleep in this bed!

Not in this room!

Not in this place another night!

Bridget woke murmuring these words. She thought she had heard her father coming up the stairs in his *clodhoppers*. She must have been dreaming. He would never come upstairs in his heavy boots. Her mother would see to that. Then reality set in. She lay unsettled, low in spirits. Sad thoughts, like heavy, gritty sand, had filled her since the night of August 31, 1833, the beginning of the end for her family. Now she had no mind for anything. She needed to be rid of this place.

Still she stayed. Night came, and she struggled to envelop herself in the mindlessness of sleep. Bridget finally drifted and was gripped by the Old Hag. She tried to squeeze her breath up past a knot in her throat and free her body from its paralyzing grip. It took all her might to break free. She quickly opened her eyes and scravelled out of bed.

Her mother had told her in a firm voice: "Your mind has to fight to free the body from the spell of the Old Hag. Otherwise, it will take your breath and never give it back." She believed that a pair of men's shoes placed beneath the bed would keep the creature away. *I'll never have a man's shoes under me bed and a man in it*, she thought. Neddie Noseworthy, the only boy she had ever cared for, had been turned from her.

Night thinned, light slipping in as if through a worn curtain, as Bridget stared through the window to the ocean. Whispers of wind through the house came like remnants of voices no longer there, sibilant sounds drift-

ing. The disappearance of her father, the murder of her mother, and the scattering of her sisters and brothers made her want to distance herself from the place and people who had shunned her.

Bridget ate little all day. Then as the evening sun crept across the hills, casting mottled shadows, she turned from staring out a back window. Her eyes brimming with tears, she dragged herself up the stairs and across the landing to her room. She put on her best dress, wrapped a cloak and shawl around her, and filled a gunny sack with her clothes and sundries.

She tied the strings of her bonnet and closed her eyes for a moment. Then she hurried down the stairs and out the door, standing still as night crept over the headland like a menacing presence, damp air pressing against her face and breathing down her neck. The branch on a scraggly tree outside the porch cracked and swung down. *Cracked like a neck!*

Bridget tightened her arms around her gunny sack and rushed down the path to the stage. Under the light of the moon slipping out from under a cloud, she unlocked the door and stepped inside. She pocketed the heavy, long-shafted key—a similar key fitted her father's money box, a box that had disappeared with her father. Bridget had held the heavy box once when he had left it on his desk. Only he and Tobias Mandeville, his bookkeeper, had known its contents.

Out on the stagehead, Bridget turned and looked up toward the house, remembering her mother on the doorstep, sometimes at the window, other times calling from the path, gathering her children home before dark. Magistrate Robert John Pinsent, a man whose heart was as cold as a winter moon, had scattered the children. Who would mind them now? Would they be treated harshly? She blessed herself, wishing she had her mother's rosary of garnets with its Celtic Cross. She could no longer stay in Salmon Cove. For so long, her mind had been like a seesaw, rising in hope, dropping in fear, then knocked astray by the shock of her mother's hanging.

Someone else would stir the fire in the hearth that had lit up the children's faces and warmed their bodies in the dead of winter. Someone else would light the lantern at dusk to drive out the darkness drifting over the bay and the house. Her parents' bed, with its curtain box, would be occupied by strangers.

Ruth Snow had warned her niece, "Bad memories will weigh you down. You have to remember the good times and not allow the past to shape your morrow."

Memories washed over her, and she slid into them as if they were cool waters on a hot day, her sisters and brothers like charms on a gold bracelet: lively Eliza eyeing a boy she was sweet on, mischievous Johnny on the

stagehead catching his first sculpin, quiet Martin squinting at the sight of the ugly-looking fish, adventurous Katie on the beach holding up a fistful of squirming silvery capelin, squealing as they wiggled, tickling her palm, spirited Maria and cherub-faced Johanna running through a field of daisies. She thought of brothers Emelia and Thomas, who had died as infants, and Richard, her youngest brother, whom she had never seen.

I'll carry my family in me heart and try to banish the memory of that terrible night, she promised herself.

Bridget listened to the soft rustle of water around the legs of the stagehead and tried to banish thoughts of what Magistrate Pinsent and Constable John Bowes claimed happened here. Then, without hesitation, she threw the gunny sack down into her father's punt and felt her way down the stagehead ladder. The boat stirred as if awakened by her foot on the gunnel. She jumped down, and the boat rocked under her weight. She reached to release the painter fastening the boat to the stage railing, coiled it, and threw it into the stem.

The boat lifted on a swell, and Bridget grabbed the sculling oar and slipped it through the score and into the water, shattering the sea's dark face. The heavy air breathed around her, the sea's dark breath rising to meet it.

John Snow had told his daughter, "When you're on the ocean, you draw in the sea's own breath. It becomes part of your own. The ocean itself becomes a second skin, its life beating through your veins."

Bridget did not look behind her as she followed a path through moonlight, its fractured light gleaming over shadowed water. She tried to keep her balance as the boat tipped forward on a swell. A shudder slithered down her spine at the thought of creatures lurking in the sea, creatures large enough to overtake the small craft. She pulled the sculling oar into the boat and reached for the side paddles. She sat on the thwart, lifted the paddles, and thrust them through the thole-pins. Her hands tightened on them as they knocked against the wooden pins, their blades dipping into the water. The heartbeat of the ocean filled Bridget's ears as she steered the boat toward the open sea under the cold eye of the moon—out into the unknown.

Fear, like a cold fist, gripped her spine. She could be passing over her father's grave if, as Magistrate Pinsent claimed, his body was anchored in silt at the bottom of the ocean. She visualized the scene painted from statements read out in the St. John's courthouse, unverified statements attributed to Tobias Mandeville and Arthur Spring that they had shot her father on his stagehead, tied him to his boat, dragged him out into the bay, and dropped him attached to his own anchor.

He's not there. He can't be. She banished her heavy thoughts, and while the coveyers slept and the moon in a dark sky brushed a silver swath across the water, she rowed the boat out, out into what seemed like an endless sea. She had never been far from home, only as far as St. John's to visit her mother in jail. Nothing that could happen to her on the ocean could be worse than losing her parents and having her family scattered.

Her mother's words in jail echoed: "I've lost all hope, all me children—and soon I'll lose meself." Her eyes were dull and haunted in a face thin from sufferin', her hair jibbed off. She was no longer the mama Bridget had known: a woman with sparkling blue eyes and a generous flow of dark hair.

Bridget looked up at the sky. *I, too, have lost everything, Mama, and soon I will lose meself to the unknown.* She did not care where she was going, did not care if the sea swallowed her. Her mind had been knocked astray ever since her mother was hanged. Disheartenment had trenched itself deep inside her heart. She tightened her teeth against her bottom lip and pulled on the paddles as hard as she could. The boat rippled the deep, cold waters as she steered it away from the cove and out into the bay through a beam of shimmering moonlight.

I'll leave meself in God's hands and hope He'll forgive me for rushing into the ocean with hardly a hope.

She couldn't tell how long she'd been on the ocean before her hands slackened and her eyes grew heavy. *Water is so soft when I trail my hand through it, like molasses when I'm paddling for a long time.* She pulled the paddles into the boat, letting the boat drift like a leaf. The murmur of the sea became a lullaby, and she leaned back on the gunny sack, her body settling, the kiss of a gentle wind on her face. She closed her eyes, locking her inside her own darkness, and drifted out into the open waters of the Atlantic Ocean, its depths as dark as a covered grave. Waters lulled her as if she were an unborn child in the waters of her mother's body. Sleep slipped over her like a blanket, dreams taking her back to the past.

She walked back down to the hill to her home in Salmon Cove, to the night of August 31, 1833. *I shouldn't have gone to the wake. If only I'd come home early, there mighten have been this nightmare.*

TWO

“Mind you don’t go across the hills to William Hele’s wake. You went last night. Your fardher won’t hold with yer goin’ again,” Catherine told her daughters. “The fellars are about fer sure, wanting to have a look at yers.”

Eliza, thirteen, giggled. “Bridget’ll want a look at Neddie. She’s old enough now that she’s sixteen.”

“I’ll have an eye for any gaffer noticing Eliza,” Bridget promised.

A wake was the chance for Bridget and Eliza to be away from Salmon Cove Point on a Saturday night, a chance to meet with friends.

William Hele, an Anglican Englishman of Spectacle Hill, Cupids, had been John’s acquaintance and far cousin. He had dropped in for a visit only a week before. Catherine gave him a cup of tea and a blueberry bun. Then he had lowered down a drink of John’s moonshine. He had left wheezing and whistling, his breath like a squeezed southerly wind. “A pulmonary condition or your grog,” Catherine had told John.

Sometimes Bridget heard snatches of her mother’s conversation with Ruth, her voice uneasy. “Jack and his cohort are in the shed boiling moonshine, straining a spoonful and striking flint to steel to light it. If there’s a woof of flame, they know it’s got the strength they’re looking for. Still, if Jack’s not careful, he’ll blow us all to kingdom come.”

Bridget often heard her mother’s caution: “Less moonshine, Jack, and more sunshine is what I want us to enjoy.”

The day everything changed was like other Saturdays. Bridget could not have foreseen how crucial her observations from that time would be. She had helped spread salted fish on flakes to catch the cool, dry winds

coming off the water. By afternoon, her parents had sailed across the neck to Bareneed as they did every Saturday, if the weather allowed, to bring a load of dried cod to John Jacob, the merchant. Her father had built the boat for his use around the cove. His large western boat, with hired men and Johnny, nine, had left days before to fish in deeper waters.

Salmon Cove Head stretched out into the bay like a slumbering animal in the darkening night as her parents neared the shore about 7:30 p.m. John left the stage lantern in the boat and followed Catherine up the rails of the stagehead, calling for her to fill a pan of water for his wash. He intended to go back to John Jacob's for a cuff and a smoke with his friend and, perhaps, have an argument about discrepancies in their business dealings. Bridget knew that arguing with a merchant was like walking through stinging nettles. Her father would be the one left with the sting, her mother there to soothe it.

After a wash, John dressed in his good clothes: his best wool pants and blue waistcoat. He put on his hat and left the house, walking down the path to return by boat to Bareneed. Tobias Mandeville always came back with him to do his books and go back across on Monday.

Bridget wanted to be gone to the wake before her father returned. He never wanted her and Eliza to go the length of themselves outside his property. His unnatural excitement for fiery drinks often rendered him unfit for an agreeable conversation. Catherine told Kitty White, the housemaid, and Mary Connolly, the servant, to accompany the girls and stay for one hour.

As they left, she called after them, "Don't be long, or your fardher'll have a fit."

Tobias and Arthur were late getting to the wake. They were in no hurry to leave, so Bridget waited for them.

Arthur had come to the wake dressed in the only good clothes he owned. He was a big lad with a short, thick body and a round face, light blue eyes and a winsome smile. His behaviour that night was no different from other times. Arthur moved over to the table where a row of TD pipes lay. He pinched tobacco from a blue bowl and filled a pipe. Tobias, the more handsome of the two, garnered looks from the attending young women who liked his tousled red hair, crystal-blue eyes, and freckles. He went for a tankard of ale and lowered it down. He was soon high-spirited and making talk with the girls from Cupids. Bridget spent time catching up with her friends' news. She was reluctant to leave, hoping Neddie Noseworthy would make an appearance. They'd been on walks several times, and he had kissed her on the cheek twice, asking her to be his girl. She gave up watching for him and listened to ghost stories old-timers were telling. It was getting late, and Tobias and Arthur reluctantly agreed to leave with

the girls and servants. They huddled together as they trekked over the hills, keeping in the rocky path as well as they could without a light or a shred of moonlight. When they slipped, one letting go of the other, they squealed, pretending to be scared.

Bridget stopped suddenly as she and the others came down the slope to the door of her house. She lifted the latch as quietly as possible, pushed open the door, and went in. An unsettling stillness made her heart pound. She hoped her father had grown tired of waiting up and his anger had petered out enough for him to have fallen asleep on the settle. There was no one there. A fire, usually banked with live coals and ash in the hearth to hold a spark of life, easily roused in the morning, had gone out, leaving the house cold.

Bridget took hold of a lit lamp and hurried upstairs. She found her parents' room empty. Martin, Katie, and Maria were asleep heads to tails in the next room. Where had her parents gone with baby Johanna? Bridget ran down the stairs and out the door. She hurried up the path, going blindly, stumbling as she reached Ruth's door. It had happened many times that Catherine had gone from trouble to seek refuge with her sister-in-law while John stomped about muttering *blaighard* not fit for anyone's ears. Bridget found her mother and Johanna inside. Her father was nowhere to be seen.

BRIDGET STIRRED AND OPENED HER EYES TO THE SMOTHERING PRESENCE of darkness. The moon had slipped behind a cloud. The ocean dampness brought a deep chill, reminding her of the times she had walked by the flickering light of a candle down stone steps into the dungeon that held her mother in darkness.

Bridget had waited, hoping every day for news that her mother was coming home. Time seemed to hold its breath. Wild birds were black tracks patterning a grey sky on autumn evenings. She put away her sisters' calico frocks for woollen dresses and leggings and outfitted the boys in sweaters and lined britches.

Soon, snow puffed through the air and pillowed against the house, windows sketched in silver ferns. Winter drew Bridget and the children together, parcelled and bored in the house. The children played sticks and stones in the porch. They went upstairs only when it was time for bed, the little ones looking for their mother to tuck them in.

"Soon, Mama," she whispered, icy winds brushing her lips as she stood outside. She didn't know that January would bring bad news. Hope would stretch taut like a frayed rope ready to break—summer would come bringing the worst news ever.

THREE

Bridget moved her hand and caught hold of the risings on the boat. What she'd been dreaming had actually happened—and more. Her heart felt sore, as if someone had taken a maul to it, the pain rebounding. She closed her eyes tight, as if that would help her dismiss the folly of what she had done: taken herself away from home to become a lone speck on a vast ocean. *I've lost everything. I no longer care what happens to me.*

It seemed then that she heard her mother's voice: "The most precious person in your life is you. Running away won't heal your torn heart."

The boat rocked gently, as if her mother's foot were on the rocker of a cradle holding her.

Carrying the truth of her mother's words and lulled by the sea, she drifted back asleep.

It brought a brief escape. The boat was jostled by a wave jarring her awake to thoughts of Arthur Spring, an Irish lad her father had used very hard. Catherine had told John, after he had hired him, "'Tis gettin' too big for your britches, you is of late—increasin' yerself in money and now another servant."

John had swaggered across the floor unbuttoning his shirt, sweat clinging to the hairs on his chest. He grabbed Catherine and smacked his mouth on hers.

She pulled away and licked his salty kiss from her lips.

Arthur had arrived from Cork County, Ireland, where he had lived in a thatched one-room cottage with his family. Hardly nourished and rested after a long voyage, he was put to work as soon as he got off the ship. John

had hooked a nants-nerry to their strongest horse for him to drag stones off the field. "Something you must have been doing in the old country," Bridget had heard her father say. "There's more than turf and sticks to be had for burning on this island. We'll be cutting trees and laying up wood for the winter. You had better be up to the work."

The lad had carried the spirit of Ireland with him, and a belief in fairies and leprechauns. Sometimes, he had the look of someone pining for something lost: a glorious place, its people, though poor, full of the *craic*: dancing, singing, and story-telling, along with a drop of grog.

On a September morning, only days after her father went missing, Bridget pulled back the Irish lace curtains at the window in time to see Arthur escorted to the magistrate's boat. One hand was behind him in a fist. Tears burned her eyes as she let the curtains fall in place. She turned to see her mother's anguished look.

Tobias had been arrested at John Jacob's warehouse, where he worked as a cooper. Arthur would join him in the Port de Grave jail. John had claimed that he had hired Tobias to keep the merchant from robbing him. Now the men were gone and John's accounts not settled.

There had been nights, long before John disappeared, that Bridget and Eliza had awakened to the sounds of rough voices under the bank. Strangers had often come to do business with their father, and that night was no different. The men's English was off, and the sisters had heard a spattering of *oui* and *non* and a guffaw in the stillness. Sometimes, their father and the strangers' voices had sounded impatient and vexed.

"Let it bide," was all Catherine said.

Bridget never asked her father what was happening. It was his business, and he would not thank any of them for their inquisitiveness. That terrible night was the last time she and Eliza heard voices below the bank.

Her mother's face flashed in front of her, and she began to cry. *I don't believe you had anything to do with Papa's disappearance. Forgive me for leavin' and not carin' where I end up.*

"If something should happen to me," her mother had said, "you must care for the little ones. Promise me, daughter."

She had nodded solemnly, not thinking anything could happen to her mother—not thinking anyone could stop her from keeping her promise.

FOUR

After her father disappeared and her mother was imprisoned, and the housemaid and servants had gone, Bridget was left with a load of work. Eliza was sullen and unsettled. She often stared out the window as if waiting every day for their father and mother to come home.

“Mama’d be home if she could,” Bridget assured her. “She loves us so much.”

Bridget remembered how in the spring their mother would lean against the door facing and watch the younger children run through mops of piss-a-bed flowers. They grabbed air globes the dandelion flowers had left, and, as if touched by the wind’s wand, the downy turfs broke apart and rose into the sky, drifted and dropped to the ground like stars to be wished upon by nature for next year’s flowers. “To spring up without a whisper,” her mother had said. “Isn’t nature glorious!”

Now that her mother was absent, Bridget had to keep a constant eye on the children. Maria was always on the go, her short, chubby legs taking her away from the garden when one of the children forgot to close the gate. Bridget was afraid she would wander down to the stage or on the edge of the cliffs while she and Eliza were busy.

Bridget smiled at Katie burrowing her face in clothes drying on the line, the scent of wildflowers drawn through them by a gentle breeze. Katie reached to the swinging rope of the clothesline and grabbed the wooden pegs holding a dried bedsheet. She dropped the pegs and bedsheet into a basket and pulled the rest of the laundry from the line. She was growing into a little helper.

Later, Bridget called to Johnny and Katie playing hide and seek in the fishing stage, hiding in empty barrels and behind them. Johnny, a little daredevil, found a new spot to hide. He dangled from the rails below the stagehead. When Katie looked down and spied him, she let out a tinkling laugh and hurried up the path to answer Bridget's call. Johnny let himself drop into the water, hoping Bridget would come looking for him. Once he hauled himself out, shivering from the cold, Bridget scolded him.

"You didn't come looking for me," he complained.

"You're gettin' old enough to take care of yourself," she told him. His look stopped her. Johnny missed his mother's attention. Bridget hugged him tight, tousled his hair, and told him, "We are still a family. We'll take care of each other."

That's what she had planned.

Most mornings she woke with a sick feeling, as if her mind was not going to be able to carry the day. The embers in the fireplace burst into a fire at her prompting, and once porridge bubbled in the iron pot, the children hurried to have breakfast. Days were long in going, and nights were lonely as she lay awake wondering if her mother would ever come home.

Some nights she stood on the steps and stared out over the water, the night air clinging to her face. She not only worried that her mother would be found guilty, but that the people who were guilty were on the loose. The lantern light on the stage pole beamed out over the water only so far, and she became afraid that outside the light, off in the blackness of night, an enemy would come for her and her family. Whenever she heard footsteps on the path to the stagehead, she felt her heart leap in fear. The words her mother often spoke, to begin a new year, came to her: "*Go mbeirimid beo ag an am seo aris*. May we all be alive this time next year."

Long after she went inside and to bed, Eliza curled against her, Bridget lay awake, her mind filled with worries about her mother's trial.

Months later, Judge Henry Bolton, in his long robe, a black cap atop his curled, grey wig, had given Bridget a flickering look before his face darkened and he sentenced her mother to death.

On Bridget's last visit to the jail, her mother had promised, "I'll keep you all in me mind right to the end." One hand had gone to her neck. The other trembled against her Celtic Cross.

After her mother's sentencing, the fear that her mother could hang was like a poised blade. July 21, 1834, the blade slipped into her heart, cutting her every which way. She had not arrived in St. John's in time to see her mother before she was hanged.

After attending the graveside, she climbed into the stagecoach travel-

effects of a life beset by trouble, sometimes not of the person's making. Can this novel help us to look deeper, be more sensitive to anyone caught in an unhealthy past and present?

19. Newcomers and immigrants often face suspicions. In the past, Newfoundlanders have often referred to someone they knew nothing about as a "Black Stranger." Do you understand the context in which this term was used, or do you see it as racist?
20. Bridget had two obstacles to overcome: her separation from her home, and the barrier she faced from the cove she entered under suspicion. Would you say it is difficult for a "come from away" to be assimilated into a community? How is Bridget's situation relevant today? Different?



Nellie P. Strowbridge is one of Newfoundland and Labrador's most beloved, prolific, and respected authors. She is the winner of provincial and national awards and has been published nationally and internationally. Her work is capsuled in the Na-

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A former columnist, editorial writer, essayist, and award-winning poet, Strowbridge has won the NL Arts and Letters Awards a record seventeen times. Al Purdy included her in the Sandburg Livesay Award Anthology *No Choice but to Trust*, featuring outstanding populist poets around the world. She has been Writer in the Library, a mentor to young writers, an adjudicator in the NL Arts and Letters Awards, an assessor on the NL Projects Grants Committee, and a judge for the WANL Book Awards and Fresh Fish Awards. Strowbridge has held school workshops in Canada and Ireland and hosted a Seminar/Gabfest for International Women's Day in Cobh, where she was writer-in-residence. The Canadian Embassy in Dublin sponsored a reading and reception for her. She also read from her work during a Scotland bus tour.

The author is a member of The Writers' Union of Canada (TWUC), The League of Canadian Poets (2009 NL and NS Representative), the Writers' Alliance of Newfoundland and Labrador (WANL), and Page One.

Previous books: *Widdershins: Stories of a Fisherman's Daughter*; *Doors Held Ajar* (tri-author with Isabel Brown and Peggy Krachun); *Shadows of the Heart*; *Dancing on Ochre Sands* (shortlisted for the Newfoundland and Labrador E. J. Pratt Award 2005, and long-listed for Relit); *Far from Home* (a bestseller and a finalist for the 2006 Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage and History Award); *The Gift of Christmas*; *The Newfoundland Tongue* (a bestseller); *Catherine Snow* (a bestseller); *Maiden from the Sea*; and *Ghost of the Southern Cross* (a finalist in the 2015 Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage and History Award). Nellie P. Strowbridge was also nominated for the NL Artist Achievement Award.