

#1 ATLANTIC BOOKS TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR
IDA LINEHAN YOUNG

*A Secret
Close to Home*

A NOVEL INSPIRED BY TRUE EVENTS

*A
Secret
Close to Home*

BY IDA LINEHAN YOUNG

NON-FICTION

No Turning Back
If I Cry I'll Fill the Ocean

FICTION

Being Mary Ro
The Promise
The Liars
The Stolen Ones

The Room Upstairs

A Secret Close to Home

*A
Secret
Close to Home*

IDA LINEHAN YOUNG

FLANKER PRESS LIMITED
ST. JOHN'S

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: A secret close to home : a novel : inspired by true events / Ida Linehan Young.

Names: Linehan Young, Ida, 1964- author.

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20230586333 | Canadiana (ebook) 20230586368 | ISBN

9781774571927 (softcover) | ISBN 9781774571934 (EPUB) | ISBN 9781774571941 (PDF)

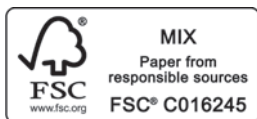
Subjects: LCGFT: Novels.

Classification: LCC PS8623.I54 S43 2024 | DDC C813/.6—dc23

© 2024 by Ida Linehan Young

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. No part of the work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means—graphic, electronic or mechanical—without the written permission of the publisher. Any request for photocopying, recording, taping, or information storage and retrieval systems of any part of this book shall be directed to Access Copyright, The Canadian Copyright Licensing Agency, 1 Yonge Street, Suite 800, Toronto, ON M5E 1E5. This applies to classroom use as well. For an Access Copyright licence, visit www.accesscopyright.ca or call toll-free to 1-800-893-5777.

PRINTED IN CANADA



This paper has been certified to meet the environmental and social standards of the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) and comes from responsibly managed forests, and verified recycled sources.

Cover Design by Graham Blair

FLANKER PRESS LTD.
1243 KENMOUNT ROAD
PARADISE, NL
A1L 0V8

TELEPHONE: (709) 739-4477 FAX: (709) 739-4420 TOLL-FREE: 1-866-739-4420

WWW.FLANKERPRESS.COM

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada



We acknowledge the [financial] support of the Government of Canada. *Nous reconnaissons l'appui [financier] du gouvernement du Canada.* We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, which last year invested \$153 million to bring the arts to Canadians throughout the country. *Nous remercions le Conseil des arts du Canada de son soutien. L'an dernier, le Conseil a investi 153 millions de dollars pour mettre de l'art dans la vie des Canadiennes et des Canadiens de tout le pays.* We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation for our publishing activities. Also, we acknowledge the support of Celebrate NL, a Crown corporation within the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation for its support of arts organizations in the year 2024, Year of the Arts.

*Truth is like light. Though altered in refraction,
the same event can be perceived differently but is
still the truth to those who tell it.*

This page intentionally left blank

Dedication

For Willie and Celie: may we carry on with the foundation you laid so firmly beneath us and the love you had for one another as a guide, as we embark on our new journey, picking up where you left off.

This page intentionally left blank

1

Spigot Harbour, Newfoundland

1905

Jimmy Bailor paused for—if he'd counted—the hundredth time before his stiff form stumbled onward through the burgeoning thicket. His plodding gait, as he traversed the long way home from the two-room schoolhouse, was getting to be as much a habit as a habit could be. His attempt to avoid the more frequently travelled routes scoring the water's edge and near the main wharf in the bustling town wasn't working out as he'd hoped.

With fists clenched by his sides, he grumbled to conceal the crunch of his leather soles and to take his mind off his frustration for thinking avoidance wise in the first place. Even the scud of snow made it harder. He tripped in hidden tree roots and holes formed by the underlying moss that had risen with the frost of the previous week.

Boughs on the thick spruce whipped him as he pushed past. He couldn't find the more pronounced path through the trees. The taunting forest added to his grievances against nature in general, his small-for-his-age, waiting-to-sprout form, and the overall unpleasantness of the day.

The last panic-driven forward thrust deposited a dusting of snow down the back of his neck. He stumbled onto the roadway panting and, admittedly though it was next to impossible, fearful of becoming lost. Jimmy looked around and got his bearings before making a dash to a house a little more distant than he'd anticipated. A well-timed gust in the trees at the head of the trail that he should have been on mocked him with a flurry of snow that momentarily blinded him. He staggered as he passed.

Despite his woes, there was something to be said for the time engaged in being lost. His schoolmates were all home by now waiting for supper, and he wouldn't come across any of them. Darkness would be on the harbour soon to perfectly match his dismal mood. With his head down, he entered through the house door, avoiding the shop entrance. His mother would be finishing her daily business obligations—as she called them—when he got home.

Jimmy hoped to raid the pantry for a fistful of cookies and escape to his room. He didn't need any warnings they would spoil his supper, because experience proved this not to be true. He knew this to be a comfort afforded the privileged. At least that was what his schoolmates were ever eager to point out. They wore stains that came with feeding hens, cows, or goats and filling wood boxes before school, while he arrived with impeccably pressed trousers.

Raised voices coming from the kitchen startled him, and the door banged louder than he intended. He grimaced. With slow, quiet movements, he took off his coat. His notion of remaining unnoticed was betrayed by the jacket as it tangled in the broom handle, which clattered to the floor. Jimmy cringed in the dimness of the small square foyer at the bottom of the stairs, knowing he would have to face his parents as his coat fell from the hook and joined the broom.

How long had it taken him to get home? His father shouldn't have been there until well after dark. Confused, he glanced outside. It wasn't that late, yet here his father stood, looming inside the door. William Bailor turned and grabbed him. His father twisted Jimmy's palms face up, then dragged the boy into the glow of the lamplight and the gloaming through the windows. Jimmy shrivelled under his father's scrutiny.

"James, it's time we toughen up those hands," William boomed. His barrelled chest was permanently puffed out like a strutting rooster's. "How can I call you my son with the likes of those? I'm ashamed to have you around the docks."

William threw Jimmy's hands away and turned to his mother, Loretta. Jimmy swallowed the urge to say he didn't fancy being around the docks. He didn't bother to look around his father for a comforting smile from his mother. She would be busy placating her husband.

"Leave him alone, Will," Loretta said. Her scolding tone underscored a growing rift between the couple. "Our son is just fine like he is. Aren't you, Jimmy?"

"Loretta, I told you to call him James." William hit the table and rattled the cups. "He's too old for that sissy *Jimmy* business."

Jimmy reddened and lowered his head between his shoulders. A shiver, which wasn't necessarily attributed to the remnants of snow that had melted there or to the draft from the porch, grazed his spine.

He hated these more frequent conversations-turned-shouting-spurts. Jimmy hated his father calling him James. He hated his mother calling him Jimmy. He hated that he had to go to school. He hated everything about his life. While he was listing the things he detested, it was just as well to add he hated not having the opportunity to grab a few cookies and escape to his room.

Jimmy slunk into the gloom. He dared not attract his father's attention for fear the man would see the bruise on his cheek—the one that would surely give him a black eye before nightfall. But his father rarely gave him a sideways glance nor the time of day. Jimmy heard the words *a disappointment as a son* every time the man spat out his name or shot him a glance.

What hurt the most was Jimmy knew his father wasn't wrong. The boys who came to walk the girls home after school each day knew his father wasn't wrong. That's why his cheek throbbed. Terry Hardy thought Jimmy had looked at Emma Winsor the wrong way and had to teach him a lesson. It was a quick one. Jimmy had gone down on the first punch. He heard laughter as he buried his head into the arms of his wool coat, bracing for the kick that thankfully didn't come. Jimmy waited for the crowd to leave and take their cruel, taunting sniggering with them. He refused to cry, though the impulse was strong.

His back had stiffened. He was fifteen, and fifteen-year-old boys didn't cry. Fourteen-year-old boys didn't, either. However, Jimmy had proven that theory wrong the year before. He was still living down that ordeal, which had also been at the hands of Terry Hardy.

Jimmy, whatever about being a sissy, was no tale-teller. He didn't say a thing about any of the misfortunes that befell him at school, but admittedly, that was for a different reason. He didn't want his father to toughen him up. Jimmy saw how that went for other boys in the two-room schoolhouse, and he wanted no part of it. Terry was living proof of what it was like to be toughened up. Jimmy brushed his fingers across his cheek and winced.

"Isn't that right, Jimmy?" his mother asked. "Jimmy, are you even listening to me?" Her footfalls on the kitchen canvas grew louder. Jimmy glanced up before hanging his head deeper into

his chest as his mother peeked at him in the shadows. He missed the rest of his parents' heated conversation as he stared at the shiny linoleum.

"James is going with me in the morning, and that's that," William said. The table rattled beneath his fist, and Jimmy flinched. "There's not one other young fellow in school his age. Not one," he shouted as he wagged his index finger at the ceiling. "James is not going back. He's going with me. No ifs, ands, or buts about it."

Jimmy cringed. Where would he be going? He had missed that part. There was no use trying to figure it out. He would do whatever he was told in the morning.

He hated his life. It couldn't possibly get worse than this.

2

Spigot Harbour was named for its unique shape. It was notched into the rocky eastern coastline of Newfoundland, a rugged Dominion of the British Empire. A sprawling, shallow river that drained from the sodden marshes at its farthest northern reaches etched the ovate cove. Steep cliffs shouldered the deep channel that coupled the harbour to the wild sea and afforded shelter from harsh winds and winter ice.

Houses and fish stages huddled along the ocean's edge in various hues of weathered grey. Wharves—their timbered decks and stilted pilings—congregated along the shoreline like fingers operating marionette strings attached to creatures beneath the murky depths. Great stands of black spruce and balsam fir, hobbled by trails and dwellings, cloaked the towering bluffs to either side and the vast barrens atop the hill at the rear. The old folks said the land used Spigot Harbour to pour its excess into the Northwest Atlantic.

The three-masted schooner *Annie May* moaned and stretched the lines taut as a downward draft siphoned through the channel, filled the canvas sails, and propelled her out into

open water. There wasn't a light in any kitchen as it pulled away from the wharf behind the handful of other boats that had ventured out this late in the year. Snow squalls and high winds had kept them ashore for four days, and Jimmy's father was anxious to get to the fishing grounds.

Being late, as William Bailor put it, had been another of Jimmy's faults, he said to the other five crewmen who were waiting on the wharf.

"We just got here," Dan Acreman said as he gave a sidelong smile to Jimmy in the lamp glow. "Weren't waiting any time."

"That's time we could be on the water," William said as he made a swipe at his son, who had learned to be ready and succeeded to sidestep the whack most mornings.

Despite the piece of butterless toast Jimmy had eaten before daybreak, his guts wound and twisted into a tangled ball, and bile rose in his throat. That was on land, and only at the thoughts of going aboard. He discovered it was better to have something down to come up than to have dry heaves on the way to the fishing grounds. His father told him he would grow out of the seasickness and deemed it another of his son's useless qualities. But after almost a year, Jimmy had thrown up every single day of the first winter fishery, most of the spring, every day of the hot summer, and so far all but two days this fall.

Jimmy wouldn't have believed he would pine for the times when he had to rebuff the mean streak of Terry Hardy. That was easy compared to his father's constant tirades about his "good-for-nothing" son. He heard this phrase all day, and it spilled over into the evening at the supper table. Unlike school, there was no taking the long way home, either. His father continually called for him to hurry up from the moment he stepped on the wharf until he crossed the threshold at home.

Dan nudged Jimmy. Jimmy's wide eyes reflected an air of gratitude as Dan steadied him on the deck.

"Hang in there. You're doing just fine, lad," Dan said as he clapped Jimmy on the shoulder and indicated for him to release the forward tow rope while he went aft. The rest of the crew didn't give Jimmy the time of day, but Dan was different and always had been. When he started, all five of them had stood head and shoulders above Jimmy, but not so much now. He had stretched out over the summer and had more meat on his bones.

Dan often told William to go easy on the boy, but Jimmy's father paid him no heed. The others jumped when the skipper said jump, Jimmy guessed for fear they would lose their berth. Dan was different. He worked hard, but he had a kinder way about him. He often whistled or hummed a tune when they worked. William cursed the rain; Dan said there would be no flies. William cursed the fog; Dan said it wouldn't be too hot. Dan help Jimmy when he was heaving up over the gunnel. He had a kindness and easygoing way about him that Jimmy wasn't used to but liked just the same.

When Jimmy heard shouting, he turned from where he'd been folded over the gunnel in time to see Dan grab his father's oilskins. Jimmy gasped as another heave overtook him. His body protested, forming a painful bubble of rank air in his gullet that couldn't decide if it wanted to come up or go down.

"I'll not go along with this," Dan said as he pushed William away.

"I'm not asking you," William said as he swung a fist at him, catching Dan on the chin.

Dan staggered backward and fell across the nets before scrambling upright once again. He rubbed his jaw and glowered at William.

"You can't do that," he said as he looked for accord from the others.

"I'm not asking, I'm telling," William said. "I don't pay you to mind my business."

"It's not right," Dan said.

When his expectant gaze didn't find fellowship with the crew, he rushed toward William. William sidestepped and hammered a fist to Dan's back in passing, knocking him to the deck.

"You're off the boat, you hear me?" William said as he spat on boards near enough to splatter the downed man. He strode toward the wheelhouse.

When his father was out of sight, Jimmy slunk beneath the mast and helped Dan to his feet. "What's going on?"

Dan shook his head and scowled toward William. He yanked his arm from Jimmy's grasp and went below.

"Any of the rest of you have anything to say?" William shouted as he came back around the wheelhouse and scanned the crew, his corded neck a sign of his temperament. The men shook their heads, grumbled, and busied themselves at the nets or the twine as the skipper turned his back and trod along the gunnel to the bow.

Jimmy felt the bile rise in his throat, bolted for the side, and retched for what he was sure was the hundredth time that day. He sat on the nets to catch his breath and slouched into the mast rigging to stay upright. Whatever had set his father off would soon be directed his way when he was caught sitting. On shaky legs, Jimmy stood to help the men clear the kelp and other bits of ocean debris from the nets they had just taken aboard. The ropes and buoys were neatly wound and stacked as one net followed the other into the pile. His father expected any mending would be done as they made their way home. Though the deck

was cluttered, the work would be completed on the water instead of on the land. "I'm not paying you to sit around," was said more than once and kept the crew busy.

Jimmy wanted to find Dan but feared his father's wrath. Instead, he put his head down and, with cold-numbered hands, began to pull out mangled sculpins and kelp from the webbing. The boat slowed beneath him. Jimmy, thinking he had lost track of time, expected they would soon be home. But a glance at the horizon confused him. It wasn't the familiar bluffs of Spigot Harbour, the ones that always gave him hope to see the end of the day. Though the schooner was riding low, and the hull appeared to be full, perhaps his father had decided to set the nets one more time. Perhaps William, who always wanted more, anticipated bad weather and was racing the elements to ensure he brought home the most fish. Maybe that was what Dan hadn't agreed with. After all, it was the time of the year when the ice made its way down the coast and the gear could be destroyed. But his father knew best—and even if he didn't, who was going to go against William Bailor?

The skipper shouted orders for the men to tie the mast as Dan appeared from below. A bruise had formed around the man's eye. He glanced toward the others, then made his way aft and disappeared for a few moments before joining the work of the crew. There were whispers and grunts and cautious glances from Jimmy to his father before the men finished lashing down the sail.

Jimmy got up to ask what was going on and noticed his father barrelling toward him. The man's stride was long and purposeful and so quick that Jimmy failed to react when William grabbed the back of his coat and pulled him from his perch. He shrank beneath the blow that didn't come and scrambled to get

his footing as his father towed him sternward and all but pitched him over the back rail and into the dory.

He tripped in the pound board of the tiny boat, and inertia sent him flying headfirst into the small triangular space at the bow. His head struck the wood, and he grimaced, sucking in a pained breath. Feeling for something solid beneath his hands, he pushed himself to a kneeling position on the pound board and held the gunnel in a vain effort to stabilize himself. The boat jostled, and he turned to see his father land between the rear pounds, where he immediately took up the oars. William untied the dory as he heard Dan shout from the deck, "Don't do this."

"Mind your business," Jimmy's father shouted over his shoulder, "and I'll mind mine, like I told you."

Jimmy's wide eyes flitted from his father to Dan and the others peering at him from the schooner. Dan was gesturing for him to look downward, and Jimmy didn't understand what he meant. Dan kept motioning toward the sea, and Jimmy looked over the side. When the crewman shook his head, Jimmy glanced toward his feet and saw Dan's lunch bag. Dan nodded, but Jimmy couldn't fathom what was happening nor why he would need it. With a few strokes of the oar, his father moved them away from the *Annie May* and toward land.

The splash of the oars and the lap of the sea against the sides of the dory filled the salty air between them. Jimmy wondered if there was anything he could ask that wouldn't anger his father when the dory gave a jolt, knocking him off the seat. William Bailor leaped from the rear and landed knee deep in the freezing water without a flinch.

He pushed the dory farther onto the beach and glared at his son. "Get out," William said between clenched teeth. "Hurry up. Get out." Jimmy couldn't possibly disobey the command,



First and foremost, Ida Linehan Young is a grandmother to the most precious little boys, Parker and Samuel, a mother to three adult children, Sharon, Stacey, and Shawna, and a wife to Thomas. In her busy daily life, Ida works in the information technology sector of the federal government of Canada, and she volunteers her time in the community of Conception Bay South with the Kiwanis Club of Kelligrews.

Ida had a fascination with writing in her high school days, when she dabbled in poetry and essays. In 2012, she became serious about her writing with a story to tell, and that led to her memoir, *No Turning Back: Surviving the Linehan Family Tragedy*, in 2014. Having found a passion for writing, and with a love of local history and lore, she published four works of historical fiction: *Being Mary Ro* (2018), *The Promise* (2019), *The Liars* (2020), and *The Stolen Ones* (2021). In June 2021, the first three novels were issued the Silver Medal for Best Series—Fiction by the Independent Publisher Book Awards. (*continued*)

The fourth novel in the series, *The Stolen Ones*, won the NL Reads 2022 competition and the Margaret Duley Award. The novel was also a 2022 Bronze Medal Winner (Historical Fiction) of the eLit Awards, presented by the Jenkins Group. Ida's second work of non-fiction, *If I Cry I'll Fill the Ocean*, appeared on the *Globe and Mail* bestsellers list. In 2023, Ida published her first work of speculative fiction, *The Room Upstairs*, which appeared on the *Atlantic Books Today* bestsellers list.

With strong influences from the familial art of storytelling passed down by her father, Ed Linehan, and her maternal grandfather, Frank Power, Ida writes stories about her beloved province, Newfoundland and Labrador. She enjoys researching events of the late nineteenth century and weaving fictional characters through historical tales that complement that cultural richness, renewing interest in the province's storied past. Sometimes she writes across different genres just to tell a story.

Follow Ida on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram:

@idalinehanyoung

Or on her website:

www.idalinehanyoung.ca