

NELLIE P. STROWBRIDGE

FAR FROM HOME

Based on a true story



“Give me a firm place on which to stand, and
I will move the earth.”
- Archimedes

This page intentionally left blank

Far From Home

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Strowbridge, Nellie P., 1947-

Far from home : Dr. Grenfell's little orphan : a novel / Nellie P. Strowbridge.

ISBN 1-894463-61-7

1. Grenfell, Wilfred Thomason, Sir, 1865-1940--Fiction. I. Title.

PS8587.T7297F37 2004

C813'.54

C2004-905027-3

© 2004 by Nellie P. Strowbridge

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 Agency, 1 Yonge Street, Suite 800, Toronto, ON M5E 1E5. This applies to classroom use as well.

PRINTED IN CANADA

PENNYWELL BOOKS

is an imprint of Flanker Press Ltd.

Cover Design:

Adam Freake

FLANKER PRESS

P.O. BOX 2522, STATION C

ST. JOHN'S, NL, CANADA A1C 6K1

TOLL FREE: 1-866-739-4420

WWW.FLANKERPRESS.COM

First Canadian edition printed September 2004

11 10 09 08 07

3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada



We acknowledge the financial support of: the Government of Canada through the Book Publishing Industry Development Program (BPIDP); the Canada Council for the Arts which last year invested \$20.1 million in writing and publishing throughout Canada; the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation.

Far From Home

Dr. Grenfell's Little Orphan

NELLIE P. STROWBRIDGE

a novel

PENNYWELL BOOKS
ST. JOHN'S, NL
2006

This page intentionally left blank



This page intentionally left blank

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1 — FAR FROM HOME / 1
Chapter 2 — TEA HOUSE HILL AND A STRANGE BOX / 5
Chapter 3 — A FORBIDDEN VISIT / 17
Chapter 4 — A NEW ORPHAN IN THE CRACKER BOX / 24
Chapter 5 — TREFFIE / 33
Chapter 6 — A MORNING FRIGHT / 48
Chapter 7 — SCHOOL AND A FEARED ENCOUNTER / 55
Chapter 8 — WINTER / 61
Chapter 9 — WAITING FOR CHRISTMAS / 73
Chapter 10 — DISAPPOINTMENT AT CHRISTMAS / 77
Chapter 11 — MISSUS FRANCES'S BOXING DAY VISIT / 93
Chapter 12 — NEWS OF CLARISSA'S FAMILY / 97
Chapter 13 — A CLOSE CALL / 102
Chapter 14 — QUARANTINED AND A SWEET LESSON / 106
Chapter 15 — SURPRISE FROM THE SKY / 110
Chapter 16 — A SPRING VISIT / 114
Chapter 17 — SPRING AWAKENING / 117
Chapter 18 — THE SCHOOL INSPECTOR / 123
Chapter 19 — THE GOVERNOR AND HIS LADY / 130
Chapter 20 — SUMMER / 134
Chapter 21 — SEESAW AND TRICKS / 141
Chapter 22 — NO PICNIC / 144
Chapter 23 — YOU HOP LIKE A GRASSHOPPER / 149
Chapter 24 — BARRED OUT / 159
Chapter 25 — A FALL IN SUMMER / 162
Chapter 26 — A SAVAGE ATTACK / 166
Chapter 27 — NEWS ABOUT GOING HOME / 172
Chapter 28 — PREPARING FOR HOME / 179
Chapter 29 — MYSTERY BOX ON TEA HOUSE HILL / 186
Chapter 30 — ON HER WAY / 197
Chapter 31 — A SISTER'S CONFESSION / 209
GLOSSARY OF TERMS / 219

This page intentionally left blank

*Inspired by and dedicated to
Clarissa Dicks: to the child she was
and to the woman she became.*

This page intentionally left blank

1

FAR FROM HOME

“I don’t belong here; I’m not an orphan,” Clarissa murmured as she fidgeted on the damp concrete steps of the Grenfell orphanage. She eyed the other children playing lallick in the grassy field outside the building. Shouts and laughter rose in the still air while she sat silently, her elbows in her lap, the backs of her hands under her chin. *I should be used to this by now*, she thought, *used to what the school ma’am called a heavy solitude that takes over a person’s mind when she cannot do the things she dreams.*

Clarissa knew she had been sent to the Grenfell Hospital when she was little, and that Dr. Grenfell had operated on her paralyzed legs. She didn’t know why she was sent from the hospital to the orphanage and kept there for almost as long as she could remember. She brushed aside unsettling thoughts and looked towards tall, skinny Cora playing lallick with abandonment. A magical thing it was that anyone could stand on two feet, lift them and run without toppling over. How heavy her own legs felt; how light everyone else’s looked. Running was something Clarissa knew she would do someday. She clenched her warm, full lips tight with determination.

She picked up the wooden crutches beside her and, grasping the handgrips, leaned against them, her shoulders lifting as the wooden crosspieces slipped under her armpits. She stood up drenched in the glow of this sunny Saturday, one that had slipped away from summer and hidden in the dying leaves of fall, only to jump out like a surprise. She looked towards the bay, its waves rolling gently into St. Anthony Harbour.

A faint sigh of satisfaction rose in Clarissa's throat when Peter, tagged "bully-boy" by all the orphanage girls, tripped Cora. Her glare met his grin as she got up panting and rubbing her right knee. She plopped down on the fading grass of the orphanage lawn, and Clarissa called hopefully, "Are you ready to go up Tea House Hill?" They had not been up there all summer. The year before, the girls had sneaked up on the hill twice to play cobby house with seashells and chainies of broken dishes they had found along the beach.

Cora's mother, Mrs. Payne, the orphanage cook, was usually too busy to mind where Cora went. Rules were upheld by Missus Frances, the headmistress, but they were enforced with more vengeance by Miss Elizabeth. Once Clarissa was hooked by the younger mistress's stern, brown eyes, she felt as if she would slide right off her long, thin nose into the wretchedness of her punishment.

Cora had promised Clarissa that she would go up the hill today, but as soon as the girls came outside after lunch, she skipped off to play lallick. Clarissa sat idling time, tossing a big black marble into the air and catching it on the back of her hand. It was a game she soon wearied of.

"I'm tired now," Cora said as she stood up and scuffed her way up the steps. She sat down and opened her mouth wide, drawing in the crisp air for a good breath. She rubbed

her tongue over a tooth that was turned and facing her cheek.

“You’re tired,” Clarissa said crossly. “I should be tired, having to hobble up and down stairs and hills on wooden legs. I wish I had your perfectly good legs.”

“No – you – wouldn’t,” Cora panted. “Some days they’re too tired; you wouldn’t want my breath either. ’Tis days when it’s heavy and hard to pull up from inside me. You know I’ve been this way ever since I had a bad cold.”

“Let’s forget about what ails us for now.” Clarissa looked around, and then up at the high windows of the brick orphanage which had almost as many eyes as a spider. Her strong, healthy face broke into a wide grin. “There’s no staff in sight, not even Ilish and Georgia. Let’s go.”

Cora shrugged. “We’re eleven, old enough not to have to ask to go outside the gates. Playing games is no fun with bullies like Peter around.” She scowled. “I’d like to trip him good. I will yet, even if Miss Elizabeth and Missus Frances do punish me.”

Clarissa looked towards blond, curly-haired Peter, with his smooth, white face and large, bottle-green eyes. She decided he was nondescript. That was the word Miss Ellis, the school ma’am, used for anything ordinary looking. Now he was flopping his elbows at his sides, his hands pinching and pulling up pants that were always drooping like a rag doll’s. *He’s so scrawny*, she thought, *half a bullet could shoot him into the hereafter*. She wondered where he got the energy for his acrobatics: hanging upside down, doing cartwheels, scratching his poll with his toe like someone digging for head lice. She turned to Cora and giggled, “He likes you.”

Cora shuddered as though snails had just crawled into her ears.

Clarissa laughed. "Come on. Let's go." She swung herself along on her crutches. Cora pulled open the black wrought-iron gates and grinned as they clanged shut behind the girls. They were on their way up to Tea House Hill, where Clarissa could look out over the sea and beyond its smoky rim, and imagine the place she had come from, the home to which she longed to return.

2

TEA HOUSE HILL AND A STRANGE BOX

The girls passed the few houses along the bottom road of Fox Farm Hill and the hospital Dr. Wilfred Grenfell had built. When they started up Fox Farm Hill, Cora asked anxiously, "Have you got company bread in yer pocket?"

"You know I don't believe in fairies," was Clarissa's quick retort. An uncertain look crossed her face and she added slowly, "Even if I did believe in them, I know that a bit of bread in a pocket won't keep them away if they want us."

"Never mind then," said Cora reaching into her pocket. "I've got some crumbs of hard tack. I'll throw them along our path."

Clarissa giggled. "Maybe we should be more scared of the Norsemen ghosts Peter boasts about. He may think his ancestors were Norsemen warriors, but all his father ever did was trap rabbits and foxes - and gun kittiwakes."

Cora shook her head. "That thing he wears around his neck on a piece of leather - a broken piece of flint, it 'tis. He brags that it came from his grandfather, and long-gone

Norsemen have the piece that matches it. He calls it a hag-stone – supposed to be lucky.”

“He dreamed a story, or read it in that history book Miss Ellis told him he had to read,” Clarissa said scornfully.

There was still a ways to go up the hill. Clarissa’s arms ached as she balanced herself on her crutches to climb the rocky path up to and past Dr. Grenfell’s castle to the Tea House. Her round cheeks bloomed into blushes like apples ripening whenever she was hurrying on her crutches, her green-flecked brown eyes twinkling under a forehead of dark curls.

Fallen leaves lay scattered like gold coins among stones in a path spotted on both sides with orange crackerberries on bows of red leaves. Here and there, the cragged noses of cliffs stuck up under the girls’ feet. Brooks sang under crossing boards, their clear water alive in silvery movements. In this peaceful setting, the girls forgot the discordant noises of the orphanage.

Clarissa stopped to take a little weight on her right toe while she knocked the cap off a mushroom, the kind Missus Frances called a chanterelle. “Here’s something for the fairies,” she said, laughing. “The devil’s bread.”

Cora looked at her in dismay. “If you touch fairy caps and the fairies see you, they’ll get angry and take yer.”

Clarissa scoffed. “You can’t go believing stories other people dream. You’ll be frightened to death all your livelong life.”

The girls reached the Grenfell castle standing in a dell surrounded by trees. Clarissa slid her crutches along the rutted walk and stopped to look in through the long windows of the large, green house with a roof almost as steep as a witch’s hat. Today the windows looked like black sheets of ice.

Clarissa moved closer and peered into one window hoping to see Mrs. Grenfell at her desk and her little girl playing with a china doll on the floor. It wasn't a Children's Home, not like the one where she and Cora lived. Dr. and Mrs. Grenfell had two boys and a girl, though there was no sign of anyone now.

Some distant memory of her own family stirred in Clarissa each time she was by this place. The windows set in the tiny room under the peaked roof in the large house seemed familiar and she had a vague memory of sitting by a window in a house smaller than the orphanage. She wanted to be in a smaller place with people who didn't taunt her, a place where she didn't have to climb so many stairs. Sometimes she daydreamed about living in the castle with Dr. Grenfell and his lady. Mrs. Grenfell was big and strong and regal looking; on her visits to the orphanage she wore a dolly hat over a mass of fine, brown hair. Clarissa liked Mrs. Grenfell, even though she had an uppity air about her. She liked her because she was willing to give out a measure of kindness whenever she saw fit, and she didn't treat the children of the orphanage as if they were lowbrow creatures. Her face looked kind most of the time.

The girls went past the house, past Fox Farm Hill and up towards the Tea House. Cora led the way. Her blue dress and yellow wool sweater, against scarlet autumn leaves, was an image of colour and energy even if her breathing rattled sometimes.

The wind began to freshen and leaves rustled to the ground. Clarissa watched one leaf flutter at the edge of the others like a butterfly. A snipe's long t-werps echoed as the bird glided up the hill on a light breeze. The wind fell dead on the land and the snipe dropped to its feet. It looked around as if startled. Then it flew back into the air.

This page intentionally left blank

This page intentionally left blank