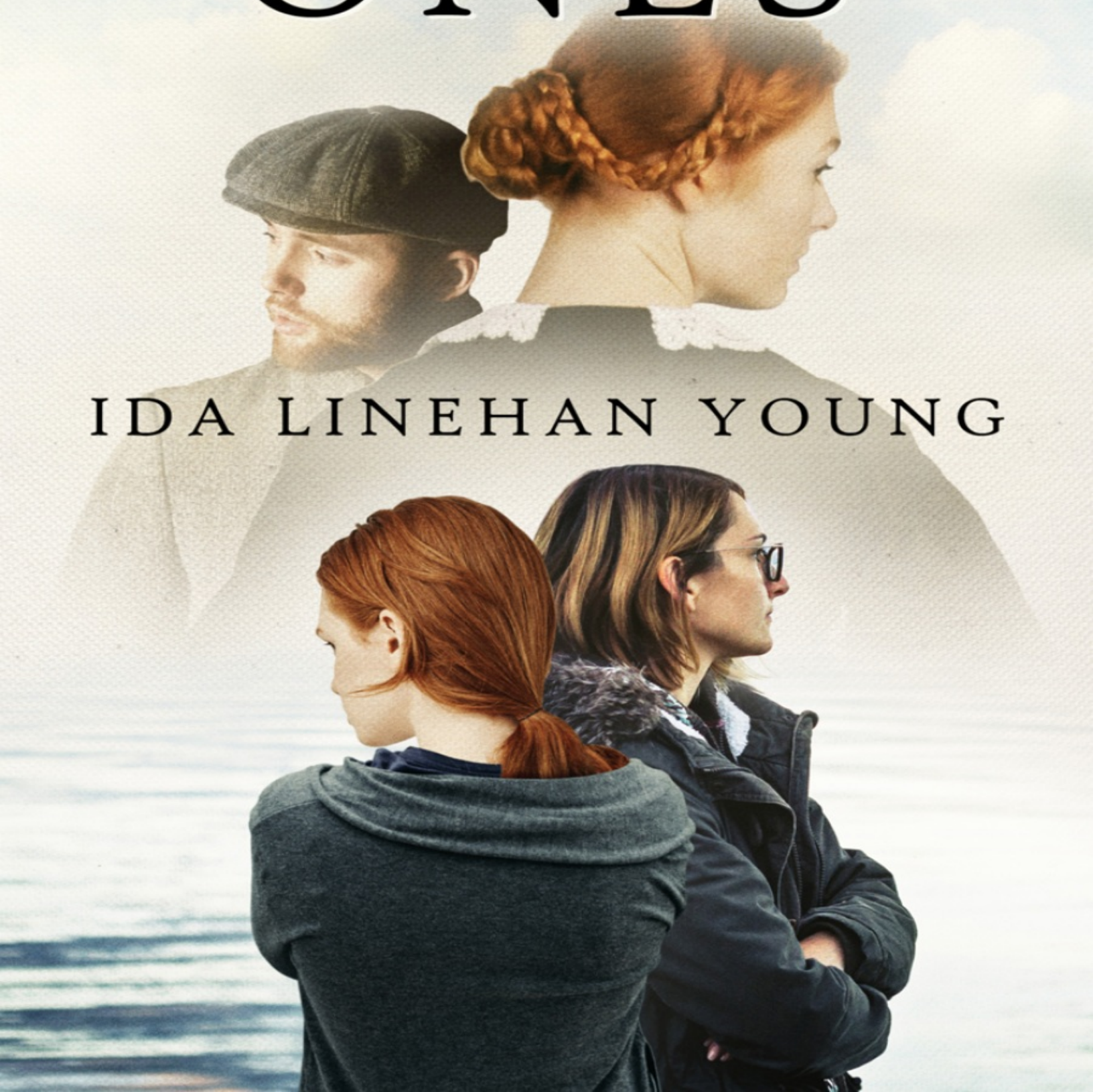


From the Bestselling Author of *The Liars*

the Stolen ONES

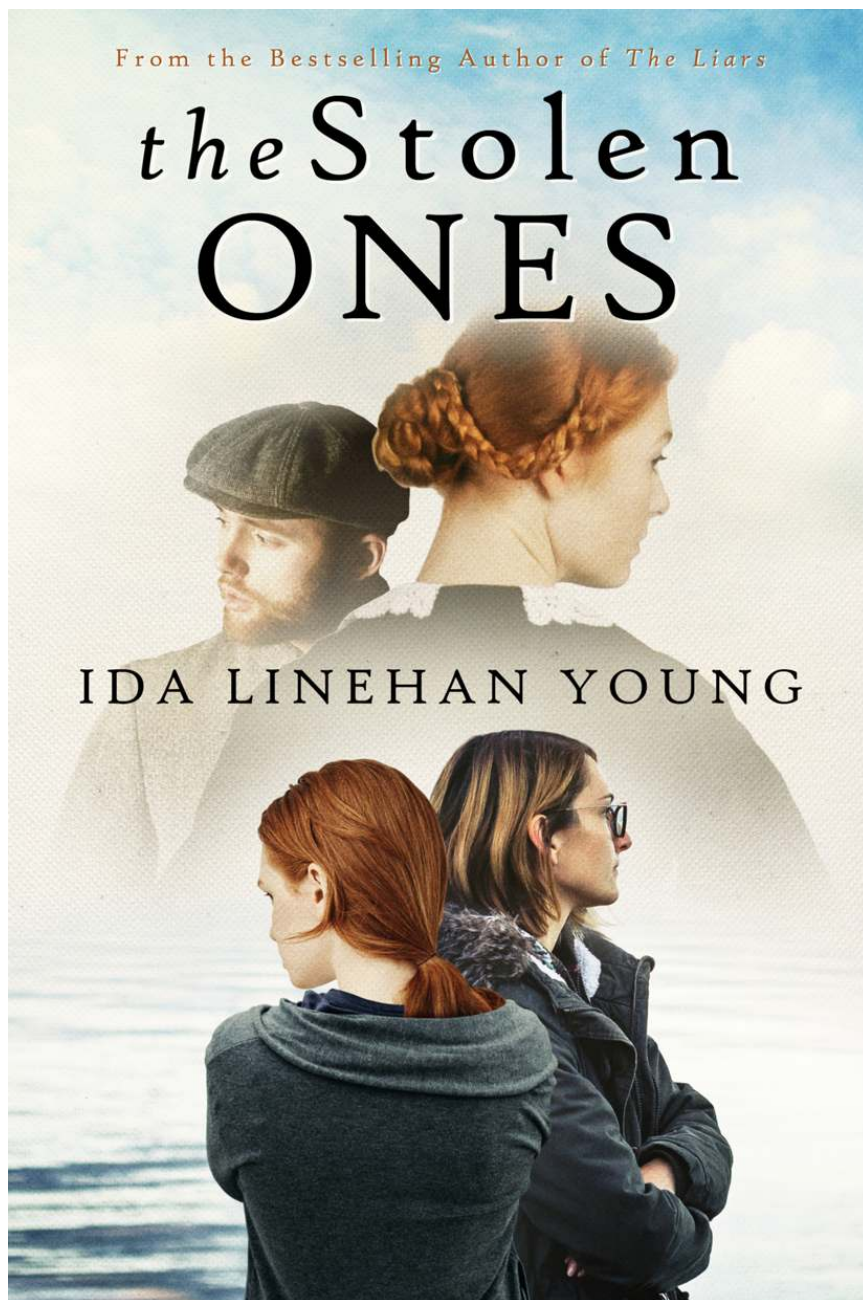
IDA LINEHAN YOUNG



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the Stolen ONES

IDA LINEHAN YOUNG



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PRAISE FOR *BEING MARY RO*

"A charming book."

THE SUDBURY STAR

"I cannot imagine anyone not enjoying *Being Mary Ro*. The material is suitable for mature young readers, contains small sketches (by Melissa Ashley Cromarty), and is an excellent first novel for Ms. Linehan Young." —
THE MIRAMICHI READER

"We're only halfway through the novel when Mary pulls the trigger. The strength and courage required to shoot the pistol is the same strength and courage that afterwards allows Mary to travel to . . . and pursue an independent career as a . . . I'm not telling. Find out for yourself. Read *Being Mary Ro*. It's first-rate entertainment." — *THE TELEGRAM*

PRAISE FOR *THE PROMISE*

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"Ida Linehan Young . . . evokes a time and a place and a strong female lead. She has also well-positioned this book to pilot into a follow-up. Her knowledge of, and research into, the processes pre-20th century household labour, or the state of the justice system after the 1892 fire, pay off." — *THE TELEGRAM*

PRAISE FOR *THE LIARS*

"Ida Linehan Young does well-researched well-paced melodrama well." — *THE TELEGRAM*

"There is no doubt that she is amongst the best of the

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"The storyline of mystery, intrigue, and plot twists that Linehan Young expertly crafts in *The Liars* is the result of true events that occurred in the late 1800s in Newfoundland. Her ability to formulate a fictitious story by intertwining the results of her research with that of the plot details conceived in her mind is brilliant. *The Liars* is another compelling read for those who enjoy history, suspense, and wonderfully descriptive writing. The female characters are strong, simple, but complex individuals, who reinforce the theme that there is no greater warrior than a mother protecting her child. Kudos to Ida Linehan Young in creating a work of art that will leave you wanting more." — *FIRESIDE COLLECTIONS*

"Ida Linehan Young skilfully weaves this complicated tapestry from its first warp and woof on a loom in Labrador to its final hemstitch in North Harbour, St. Mary's Bay." — HAROLD WALTERS, *LIFE ON THIS PLANET*

The Stolen Ones

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Canadiens de tout le pays.

Dedication

With fondest memories of my cousins Brenda and Pat Critch. They will always be remembered with an abundance of love.

In Memory of Elsie Ryan, who died from burns in North Harbour two days after her nightdress caught fire, February 23, 1920. She was ten years old.

For my grandparents, Frank and Ida Power, and Edward and Mary Theresa (Nash) Linehan, whose lives inspire me with a curiosity for the past.

As always and forever for my father, Edward Linehan, my sister, Sharon, and my brothers, Francis, Richard, Harold, and Barry Linehan. You were all loved beyond measure.

1

Boston
April 2020

"I can get her, Mom," Tiffany Carter said softly, her shaky voice betraying her attempt to be strong.

"No, it has to be me. They're strict about that. You stay here," Darlene said woodenly as she girded her will to be up to the task.

"Please be careful." Tiffany swallowed a gasp and grabbed her mother's arm frantically. "I'm scared."

"I won't be long." Darlene's voice was a hushed whisper. She gulped for air to quell the mounting anxiety from gaining ground.

Darlene stepped out of the taxi and into a nightmare. Who was she kidding? This was day seven, or eight, or ten, or fourteen of the pandemic, and normal was no more.

The streets were eerily quiet for downtown Boston on a Tuesday. She glanced back and saw Tiffany lean forward and stare wide-eyed after her through the lightly tinted glass. Darlene turned and joined the line that had formed with its terminus, the side door of the huge brick building.

The silent and sombre procession was slow. It was as if an invisible turnstile controlled everything. As one person clicked out of the alley, she clicked forward toward the entryway and somebody like her joined the other end of the line. They shuffled forward, mindful of the worn painted lines, directional arrows, scuffed footprints, and warning signs on the dirty concrete.

Counting time seemed a distant memory of a period when there was never enough of it. Like when she had rushed to work after being waylaid by something that was now insignificant, or when she'd caught a bus with Tiffany after a shift at the diner, or when the laundry had finished washing and she needed to find a free dryer so that the task wouldn't take all evening. The list had been endless in the feverish pace of her daily life. Now, putting one foot in front of the other was the only way she could survive, and time

just sat there waiting to start once again.

Shuffle after shuffle, orderly, quietly, they moved until she was second in line. The man ahead of her said a name, then bowed his head as the door closed and the attendant vanished.

Her heart pounded, and she didn't know if she would be able to speak when she needed to form words. The person returned and handed the man ahead of her a small package. He raised it to his face, wiped his eyes with the cuff of his coat, turned, and left without making eye contact. The door slammed. It was loud, like a cannon had been fired in the alley, the noise ricocheting all around her. Darlene moved up, her wobbly legs barely keeping her upright with each step.

She closed her eyes at the yellow sign emblazoned with bold black letters that read *Employees only beyond this point*. She opened them when she heard the click of the latch release on the other side of the steel barrier.

"Name, please," the masked man dressed in the washed-out paleness of blue paper clothing said, his weary eyes staring at the wall over her head and reflecting distorted defeatedness on the visor that covered them.

"Em-Emma Carter," she stammered.

"Pardon? Please speak up."

Darlene cleared her throat, pinched her mask, and pulled it away from her mouth. "Emma Carter."

The door closed with a whoosh and resounding clunk. She hung her head. How was she going to do this? How was she going to go on?

"Ma'am. Emma Carter."

Darlene shook her head to clear the fog and gazed up at the man two steps above her and holding the grey door back with his hip.

"Your name?"

"Darlene Carter."

"Do you have your identification?"

Darlene nodded and pulled her driver's licence from her coat pocket and raised it for him to see. He bent forward, nodded, pulled away, and straightened. He made notes on the clipboard and rested it on the ledge of the stairwell inside the door. His latex-covered hands grabbed the metal cylinder that was also resting on the ledge. He finger-checked a number on it against something on the form, pulled off a tag, and turned to her.

His voice and movements were robotic as he reached forward and said, "Please don't touch me."

Darlene nodded and cupped her hands together, pushing them forward as the person ahead of her had done. The man plopped the small cylinder into her palms. She braced for the mighty weight that would be far from physical. The door whooshed closed.

She stood, dazed, with her arms outstretched and stared into nothingness. The person behind her *ahemmed*, bringing her back from wherever she'd gone, and she staggered away from the door and out of the alley.

The trudge toward the street was in slow motion. Before she realized it, she was in the sunshine of the sidewalk. Her arms and heart ached in unison.

The taxi door slammed.

"Mom!"

Tiffany's shout echoed off the buildings, and the pigeons on the marble step at the front entrance took flight. Several heads rose momentarily in a lineup that extended down the block.

Darlene looked away from the cool metallic container resting in her open palms as Tiffany reached her. Tiffany whipped a bottle of sanitizer from her purse and smothered Darlene's hands as well as the urn. She guided her mother to the cab, opened the rear door, and let her in. She pushed Darlene to the middle and bundled in beside her. Tiffany held her mother, and they both wept as the taxi pulled away from the curb.

Emma Carter became a memory, reducing them to a broken and sad family of two. Darlene took on the weight of duty her mother had carried as head of the household. Every ounce of Darlene's being dislocated and began the process of settling back into a crippled form that would remain uneven and, according to the phone call from the psychologist that came a month later, someday tolerable.

2

John's Pond, Newfoundland 1878

Mary Rourke splayed her fingers and brushed them along the furry tips of the tall hay growing at the edge of the path. The hem of Mary's skirt swayed to the rhythm of her walk, darting from side to side as if it, too, had a purpose.

Her red hair caught fire as she passed through shafts of sunlight streaming between the limbs of the spruce trees above the old slide path. The trail was beaten down in the winter by the horses and sleds hauling firewood out from the country to the little fishing village of John's Pond, nestled on the coast of St. Mary's Bay.

In the summer, the trail was a passageway to their secret hideaway, a tiny jut of land on the bend of the brook where a pond formed. It was a quiet place, where silence was broken by the sound of the trout breaching the glassy surface, lured by the insect that ventured too close, or by the hum of the bumblebee in the dandelion at the edge of the thicket, or by the sound of Mary turning a page.

Their first meeting there had been an accident of sorts. Mary's father had sent him to find her. She'd gone for a walk earlier in the day and hadn't returned for supper.

Peter Nolan had set out along the trail and nearly jumped out of his skin when she spoke from the shelter of the trees as she was stepping out onto the path. They both laughed, both startled by the encounter. Mary had a book in her hand, and she said she'd been distracted by the story and forgot the time.

A few days later, he had been collecting eggs, one of the many tasks Mary's father put to him, finding the nests of the hens that were laying out. Mostly he wanted to keep busy so he wouldn't feel the sting of the leather strap from his Aunt Johannah. Peter liked and respected Mary's father. He'd enjoyed spending time with the Rourke family. Menial chores like finding eggs or bringing in water hadn't bother him. Mr. Rourke paid Peter a

pittance once a month for cutting wood, which the man was quite capable of doing on his own. Peter protested with a bit more vigour than he felt—in truth he was saving every coin he could get to leave John's Pond behind. However, because of Mr. Rourke's intervention with Aunt Johannah, things had gotten markedly better at home, and leaving wasn't a certainty like it used to be.

That day, he fooled himself into believing he wasn't overtaken with curiosity and hadn't really wanted to see what Mary was up to. He was looking for eggs. When he pushed through the thick young spruce along the side of the path, he noticed her within moments, surrounded by dandelion and daisies, sitting, leaning against the thick trunk of a large tree, and reading a book. The sun, glistening off the pond in the background, glowed around her. He cupped his hand over his eyes to break the glare until her dark shape came into focus. He drew a deep breath that he smothered with his hand so she wouldn't know he was there.

That had been the first time his normal teasing, roughhousing response didn't kick in. Instead, his stomach went all aflutter, and frightened by this new sensation, he backed out of the scene and ran to Rourke's, dropped off the eggs he'd found, and headed to Aunt Johannah's. He believed he'd come down with a sickness that might be cured at the end of Aunt Johannah's leather belt.

The lure of the newness of this strange illness pulled him back. She sat quietly by the tree. His body tensed around his bones, and a wave of heat flooded through him. That time he forced himself to stay and watch her from the cover of the spruce. She was so mesmerizing and his turmoil so unfamiliar, he dozed off and landed head first in the bushes. He crawled out to the trail to the sound of a muffled giggle and ran home.

The third time he ventured there, she stirred, her ear twitched, and she turned toward him. Mary asked him what he was looking at. She asked him to join her and patted the ground at the base of the tree. A surge of fear stampeded through him. He ran home again, forgetting to drop off the eggs on his way.

It was almost two weeks before Peter dared go there again. This time, Mary had an extra book with her. She told him she'd carried it for him for a week. This time, he suppressed the urge to run and gathered the courage to approach her. He sat silently on a large grey stone a little way into the clearing and threw rocks into the pond while she read. He didn't take the

book she'd offered and concentrated instead on the plop of the rocks as they were swallowed by the pond. It was a few weeks later before he dared to get closer. He built a bough house there that year, just to be around her.

In the winter, she read in the house or in the hay on the stable loft after school. He found many reasons to help Mr. Rourke that winter. The next summer, when she returned to the woods, he busied himself with chores, getting up early to get them done, before heading to where Mary was. He was fifteen and didn't tire of listening to her talk about her dreams. He even had illusions of perhaps having some of his own.

She wanted to be a nurse like her mother.

He didn't want to be anything other than with her.

When he was sixteen, the romance finally blossomed into a first kiss. It was awkward and startling and beautiful. By the time he was seventeen, Peter was certain he wanted to marry her. There would be nobody else in the world for him but her.

His brother Ed wanted him to go off to sea, perhaps to Boston to make their fortune. The time was right. Aunt Johannah had passed away a few months earlier, severing the tenuous familial connection to John's Pond.

He couldn't wed Mary for at least two more years and not without something to offer. Peter wanted her father to know he'd be a good man to his daughter, just like her father had taught him. He had to be a provider. He couldn't do that with the little work he'd gotten in the cannery the past two summers. He struggled with the want to stay with her and the want to make something of himself for her.

Peter hadn't told Mary about Ed's plans because he didn't want her to be upset. Today, when he watched her come up the path, his heart was pounding as he ran to the tree to wait for her.

"Peter," she called.

He waved and patted the ground next to him, his heart racing as if he'd run up along the ridge and back. She bounded toward him, fell to her knees, and cuddled in beside him.

"What's that pout for?" he asked.

"It's just that it was such a wonderful day. School's almost out. But Mom says I have to go to Mount Carmel in the fall to get more education if I'm going to be a nurse." She nestled in closer. "I don't want to go."

"I know how that feels," Peter said wryly as he tightened his arm around her.

“Are you going to Mount Carmel, too?” She pushed away from him. Her eyes widened with excitement and prospect as she gazed at him expectantly.

Peter cupped her face with his hands. She knew he had only stayed around the last two years because of her and Ed. Most others his age were long fishing with their fathers.

“No, farther than that. Me and Ed are going to St. John’s and then to Boston looking for work.”

Mary pushed herself to her knees and stared at him. “What?”

He repeated what he’d said.

“But why?”

He paused. Over Mary’s shoulder, Peter watched two sparrows as they flitted from one branch to another in the thick spruce on the other side of the pond. A chase as old as time and much less complicated. She touched his arm and drew his eyes to her face. He gently grazed her cheek with the back of his fingers before pushing a fallen lock of hair behind her ear.

“I have nothing to offer you. I want to build a home, build a life, but I can’t do it if I stay here.” His voice held an air of regret.

“There’s logging in Colinet, or you could go fishing.”

“Ed is leaving. I have to go with him.” Peter looked away.

“You could stay.”

“You know how Ed is. Always getting himself in trouble.”

“And you’re always there to help him out.”

“I’m all he has. It’s just the two of us.” He reached for her hands, but she stuffed them in the pockets of her dress.

“I have no hold on you, Peter Nolan. No hold at all.” She stared at the ground as she forced the words from her mouth.

“That’s not what I’m saying, Mary. I want to come back to you. In fact, I want to marry you. Will you wait for me?”

Mary raised her head and searched his face. A slow smile came. She released her hands and grabbed his arms. “Peter, I’ll wait for you forever. You know that. I love you, too. I just don’t like the thought of not seeing you for who knows how long.”

“I don’t have much to offer right now. But I have this.” Peter fished a braided line from his pocket. It formed a small and intricate loop. He took her hand and moved the line in on her finger. “Someday, my darling Mary, this will be a golden band.” He kissed her. “I’ll come back for you as soon as I can. You won’t have to wait for me forever.”

Two years later, he stood at her doorstep. She was a vision. He had to stop himself from sweeping her into his arms and running away from the world toward their hideaway, where he could unchain himself from the burden of his duty to Ed. She pulled on her coat, her eyes glistening and her face hopeful. Mary came to sit on the sawhorse beside him. She was aglow with love and promise. She reached for his hand, but he didn't take it.

He would be scarred forever by the look on her face when he told her that he was getting married the following week.

"Her name is Martha Walker."

He was hopeful that his upside-down world would someday be tolerable and the heartbreak he felt in that moment would stitch closed and see its way to mending. The scar, he was sure, would torment him forever.

3

Boston

Present day, June 2021

Darlene pulled the zipper closed on her mother's large violet-coloured suitcase. She had everything she needed for the trip, and what she didn't have, she'd buy. Her heart wasn't in it as Tiffany joked, "What does one wear when going to Newfoundland?" Neither of them had any idea what it was like there beyond the images they saw online.

"Tiff, are you packing or are you gaming?"

"Gaming? Do you even know what that is?"

"I might," Darlene said as she gave the zipper one final tug. "That stuff you look at on your phone."

Tiffany laughed. "You mean my social media?"

"Whatever they call it."

"You must be the only person who's not online."

"I have email."

Tiffany stopped in the hall and shook her head while she rolled her eyes. Her mother smiled at her.

"And I'm packed, Mom. I was finished before you." Tiffany, with her auburn ponytail wagging behind her, sauntered into the bedroom, flopped across the knitted throw at the foot of her mother's double bed, spread her arms, and gazed at the ceiling with a sigh.

"So dramatic," Darlene muttered under her breath.

Tiffany rolled to her side, bent her elbow beneath her, and propped herself on her upturned palm.

"I'm losing so many shifts down at Ray's."

"Uh, uh, uh," her mother said as she wagged her finger at Tiffany. "Ray's will be there when we return. Despite what he says, he will take you back in a flash. You're his best girl."

"He keeps me there because of you," Tiffany said, her grin wide. She winked at her mother. "Ray Junior keeps asking about you."

“Ray Junior is full of himself. Don’t you give him my number.”

Tiffany pulled her phone out of the back pocket of her faded jeans, and Darlene feigned a grab for it. Tiffany pulled away and laughed.

“He’s not a bad guy, Mom. And he’s not hard on the eyes, according to the old women who eat there.”

“Are you calling me old?” Darlene asked as she eyed her daughter. “Besides, you shouldn’t be worrying about work.”

“I’m saving for college, remember,” Tiffany said.

“You’re nineteen, remember.”

“What were you doing when you were nineteen?”

“Probably working at Ray’s.” Darlene paused and smiled. “With Grandma. Oh, and Ray Senior, and probably trying to avoid Ray Junior.”

Tiffany reached out and patted the suitcase. “Is Grandma in there?” She craned her neck to get a glimpse of the nightstand behind Darlene.

“No,” Darlene said as she reached around and picked up the metal urn. “This was Grandma’s trip. She is going in my purse.”

“Are you sure you’ll get through customs with her? I checked on the website. It only mentioned requiring proof of vaccination, but it wasn’t clear to me that you could take, you know . . .”

“I called, and the agent assured me that it would be all right. I’d feel bad stuffing her in this tightly packed thing.”

“And your purse is better because . . . ?” Tiffany asked with a grin.

Darlene threw a pillow at her and laid the urn back where she got it. “I’ll be putting her in my coat pocket when I stow my purse. I want to have her close to me. This was Grandma’s dream trip. She bought this purple luggage for it.”

“Violet, Mom. She said violet was for mystery. And for the future.”

“Future, right.” Darlene shook her head and closed her eyes. “It should be you and her going tomorrow.” She straightened from her task, threw her head back, and let out a heavy sigh. “It should have been you two going last year. Damn COVID.”

Darlene squeezed her hands into fists by her side. Then she raised her fingers to her brow and massaged her temple. Her head hung low. “I still can’t believe she’s gone,” she whispered. She dabbed at her eyes with her sleeve after a sudden spill of tears.

Tiffany rolled onto her belly and wrapped her arms around the pillow, resting her chin there and staring at her mother. “Grandma would be so

proud that you're bringing her to Newfoundland."

"I know, baby. I know. It's hard sometimes, that's all." Darlene grabbed the portfolio from the bed, pulled out several sheets, and slid the rest into the front pouch of her carry-on. "It was just the three of us for so long. I miss her." She grabbed her glasses from the nightstand and sat on the bed, her face sombre as her finger hovered and grazed along the handwritten words.

"I miss her, too," Tiffany said. A flicker of sadness shadowed her eyes, and her lips drooped momentarily to a frown as she regarded her mother. "This was Grandma's mission to find a *family*." She made a fist and thrust it Superman-style into the air, her voice a booming echo on the word, "family." They both laughed half-heartedly at the memory.

"I've gone over all her notes and questions she had for Aunt Ammie. Grandma took this seriously. I wish I had."

"I'm guilty, too. I should've paid more attention. I thought it was another one of Grandma's whims." Tiffany took some of the papers from her mother and scanned the list of items. "Ammie's not our real aunt, though, right?"

"I'm not entirely sure. It was Mom who did all the work on that *website*." Darlene's face contorted as if the memory of the hours her mother spent researching was a bitter one. She tossed her glasses on the bed and stroked her face with her fingers before retrieving them again. "What was it called?" she said absently as she riffled through the sheets looking for the name. "*DNA Strands*, or something like that. Something science-y."

Tiffany nodded and eyed her mother as she pointed to a particular page. "Yeah, that's it." Tiffany plucked out the sheet.

"She could be a distant cousin. Mom called her Aunt Ammie, and so will we when we get there. That's what her granddaughter says everyone calls her."

"Just imagine turning a hundred and one," Tiffany said. "I've never met a centenarian before. It will probably be a pretty tame party. Aunt Ammie, I like the sound of that, though. Amelia, right?"

Darlene sat on the bed and tapped her finger on the notes. "How am I going to remember all of this?" She traced her finger down the page and stopped on an entry. "Yes, Amelia Nolan Power, born 1920."

"You don't need to remember everything. Nobody expects that."

"I expect it." Darlene laid the papers on the comforter and shoved her fingers through her shoulder-length dirty-blond hair. "Everything is out of whack." She grabbed the papers, set them on her lap with a thud, adjusted

her glasses to hold them in place, and peered at the names again.

Tiffany reached out but stopped short of touching her mother. She pulled away and hugged the pillow instead. "There are so many names. Remember when Grandma got her DNA results and all those people first popped up in Canada?" she said gently.

Darlene straightened her back, pushed aside the papers, and laid her hands on her knees. She took a deep breath, then another, before offering Tiffany a flaccid smile.

"Grandma said it was a miracle because so many showed up at once. She had me searching names for her online. Then she ordered *DNA Strands* DNA kits for the two of us, and that made her worse," Tiffany teased. "Poor Grandma said she wanted to be sure that it wasn't a mistake."

"Yes, when she set her mind to something, she followed it through," Darlene said with another innocuous smile. She gazed at the ceiling and nodded slightly before resting her cheek in her palm. "Remember the time she took up quilting?"

"Yeah, that's why I don't have a closet."

"I have two of them in here," Darlene said as she patted the baggage. "That's why the suitcase is so full. I thought it would be a nice gesture for Aunt Ammie's birthday."

"That's a good plan. Grandma would have wanted that."

Darlene pushed herself out to rest on the edge of the bed, then paused there before standing. "Remember the time she decided she was a senior and wanted to play bingo and bocce ball?"

"Yep. I spent that summer on a lawn with her. Oh, and in a church hall. I was traumatized by the bingo hall. Who can forget the bingo hall? Not me!" Tiffany faked a shudder.

Darlene laid her hand on the papers, pursed her lips, and slowly shook her head from side to side. "It's a shame she never got to go. She'd have had such fun." She wiped at another tear. Her voice softened. "I hope she knows I'm taking her. Even if it is a year later."

"She knows you. She knows you'd do what she couldn't." Tiffany reached out and squeezed her mother's hand. "What about 'Aunt Ammie's' family?" She air-quoted the name for effect.

"According to this Nikki lady, everything is arranged. We'll be picked up in St. John's in two days. We'll arrive after midnight and stay at a hotel close to the airport, where somebody will come for us the next morning."

“No car rental, I remember. We’ve talked about this a hundred times.”

“It’s not a hundred, thank you very much.” Darlene looked at Tiffany beneath a hooded gaze as if to silence her, then continued. “I want to go over it again.” She paused, looked at the ceiling, and swallowed. “Nikki said a car will be available for us.”

“But no car of our own. No way to escape, either.” Tiffany tipped her head sideways and gave her mother a wide-eyed look.

That thought had crossed Darlene’s mind as well. “I know.” She gave Tiffany a pensive look and grimaced.

“Come on, Mom. I was kidding. Same as last time you told me about it.”

“She seems friendly enough from her emails,” Darlene said absently, while Tiffany rolled her eyes and cocked her head. “Let’s hope there’s no reason to escape.”

Tiffany furrowed her brow. Her mouth became a taut line across her face as she gave her mother a pinched stare. “You really should try and enjoy this, you know. You’re off work. Grandma’s savings and insurance were meant for this. Try and make it a vacation. I can’t remember you ever having one.”

“I had vacation. I just chose to spend it here with you and Grandma.”

“That’s not the same. I really wish you’d, I don’t know, stop trying to be responsible for everything.”

“I don’t do that.”

“You’ve had this same conversation with Grandma about getting away by herself,” Tiffany went on. Then her tone softened. “You’re still a young woman. There’s a lot of room between now and—I hate to be morbid, but between now and death. That room is not meant for all work, or at the least no enjoyment. Maybe join a quilting group like Grandma did, or do something social, something you could enjoy, and meet people.”

Darlene stared at her daughter. “I do more than work,” she said, her voice defensive, though she tried to make light of the remark. “Besides, we only have so much closet space for quilts.”

“Tell me what you do.”

Darlene tapped her bottom lip with her index finger. “I go to Ray’s for coffee,” she said.

“Yes, conveniently just before the end of my shift. You don’t want me getting the bus home alone at night.” Tiffany paused. “Going for coffee can’t be the highlight of your life. I won’t be working at Ray’s forever.” She pushed off the bed and came around to hug her mother. “I’m not judging you. I’m

concerned for you. Just like you were concerned about Grandma.” Stepping back, she added, “But please don’t go playing bingo. I’d draw the line there.”

Darlene laughed and hugged Tiffany again. “Maybe that’s what we’ll do at Aunt Ammie’s party.”

“We’ll have to leave, that’s all,” Tiffany said as she took an exaggerated turn and pressed her nose into the air. She looked over her shoulder at her mother, her brow wrinkled and tone grave. “I think I might even be serious about that.”

“Ah, Tiff, what would I do without you?”

“You’re not going to know until I finish college.” She pretended to punch her mother in the arm. “Got to put up with me for a few more years.”

“I don’t want to think about that.” Darlene put her hands over her ears and sat on the bed. Moments later, she reached for her mother’s urn and rolled it between her palms. She slowly shook her head. “Time is really nothing. Mom couldn’t wait to see you go to college.”

Tiffany squeezed her mother’s shoulder. Her face grew serious. “Mom, you’re not going to like what I’m going to say next, so I’m going to say it, then leave the room.”

Darlene gazed up at her. Tiffany held her stare.

“You are not the reason Grandma died. You are not responsible.”

Darlene’s bottom lip trembled, her lids drifted shut, and she let herself fall back onto the bed. The whisper of pants legs faded, and “I love you” was uttered before the door closed.

Darlene and Tiffany left Boston at 6:00 p.m., changed flights in Toronto, and boarded the three-hour flight to St. John’s. To calm her nervousness, Darlene took out the family tree printout her mother had prepared the year before. She had close to memorized it over the last week, but now confusion was setting in.

“Grandma’s grandparents, that would make them your what?”

“My great-great-grandparents,” Tiffany said quietly, startled from a doze by her mother’s voice. Tiffany’s heavy “not again” sigh had no effect on Darlene’s persistence.

“So, according to Grandma’s research and the calculation from this *DNA Strands* place, one set of great-great-grandparents, Danol and Erith Cooper, indicates that Danol was born in New York but was a policeman in Boston, and Erith Lock had birth records tracing back to England. I’m not sure how