



***“Her wild eyes glittered and let off orange light.
She looked a little wicked.”***

Dear Reader,

All stories about Nova Scotia must have some darkness in them, I say. Because of all the bones.

There are lost cemeteries and unmarked graves everywhere, here. Many people have no idea. But if you stay in Nova Scotia long enough — and if you don’t mind dark things — you pick up bits of truth about it, like broken sea glass on the shore.

The Witch of Willow Sound was inspired by the bits of broken glass that haunt me most.

Even just a stone’s throw from where I sit to write these words, dear reader, forty unmarked graves rest under wild grass. The “Poor Farm for the Harmlessly Insane” burned down in 1929, and residents of the poor farm remain buried in the land, there, their names and stories lost. Over time, their graves have sunk, leaving coffin-sized depressions in the ground, the way the whispers of their forgotten stories have sunk into the lines of this letter, and the pages of *The Witch of Willow Sound*.

For generations, Nova Scotia was known as the Lost Person Capital of North America, because its death-dealing shorelines cut deep into land smothered by sprawling, thick forests that have a history of swallowing people up. My childhood was spent wandering the woods of Nova Scotia and clambering along its steep, oceanside cliffs. Defying death without knowing it, I suppose, in my little second-hand shoes. These memories inspired the fictional place I named Willow Sound.

The humble cottage in Willow Sound was inspired by my secret desire (sometimes) to yank out all the cables and cords that tether us to the modern world and go live cozy in a cottage in the woods, surrounded by creaking hemlocks and wild pansies and piles of books to read through the steam of blackberry tea.

However, in East Coast Canadian history and witch lore, women who freed themselves from the rules and limitations of society were not admired, but misunderstood and often feared. Knowing this, the cozy cottage I wrote became filled with shadows. Secrets burbled in dark corners.

The Witch of Willow Sound is a story about strong, defiant women and sheds light on what societies do with people, and the past, they don’t want.

There are strange things ahead, and the woods are dark and deep. Dear reader, are you in?

Vanessa Penney

Vanessa F. Penney

