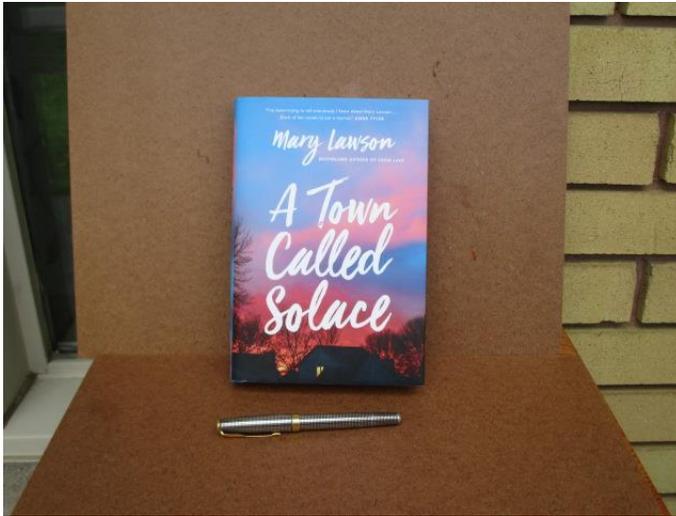


A Town Called Solace

By Rod Fraser



All of Mary Lawson's books are charmers and this one is no exception. So far, she has written three novels. These are largely stories of those who come from Northern Ontario.

Since I was brought up near the area she writes about, I am kindly disposed to her books. The fact they are lovely stories only adds to their appeal.

This novel has three main characters. There is Clara, the delightful seven-year-old who lives next door to Mrs. Orchard. Clara chats regularly with her elderly neighbour and plays with her cat. It is a close

relationship they both enjoy.

Clara is also close to her sister, Rose, who has recently left the family home, after a row with her parents. No one knows where she is and Clara is fearful for her sister's safety.

Elizabeth Orchard, the neighbour next door, is unwell. Early in the novel, she is bundled off to the hospital where it seems she is likely to die. Elizabeth has asked Clara to come to her house each day to feed her cat and play with him. The cat's name is Moses. Clara is given the key to the back door of Mrs. Orchard's house.

This is good news for Clara. She likes Moses and is happy Mrs. Orchard trusts her to do this. Since Clara is concerned with her missing sister, Mrs. Orchard's home is a quiet place where she can think about things, and puzzle out all the confusion.

One bit of confusion is that her parents keep lying to her, first about Rose leaving home, and then later about Mrs. Orchard's health issues. As the weeks pass, Clara grows increasingly concerned that Mrs. Orchard isn't coming back.

Soon Clara notices a strange man has moved in next door. She continues to feed Moses, morning and evening, but only after she observes this man leaving the house. He doesn't know Clara is visiting

two times each day. He doesn't even realize there is a cat in the house. Clara wants him gone.

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Elizabeth Orchard is a widow, happily married for many years to a husband who remains unnamed in the story. While unnamed, he is still important to her life – even after his death many years earlier. In the chapters that tell Elizabeth's story, she often talks quietly to her departed husband, and always with love and affection.

Elizabeth never had any children, but for a short time in her married life, she was entrusted with the care of a small boy named Liam Kane. She became very fond of this small boy, and he with her.

This ended badly when Liam's affection for Elizabeth became so pronounced, his mother was overwhelmed with jealousy. To resolve the matter, Liam's family moved west.

Elizabeth never saw Liam again, but her affection for him never wavered. In the last few months of Elizabeth's life, she named Liam as the sole beneficiary of her will.

When Liam moved into his newly inherited house, Clara soon realized Mrs. Orchard was dead. She was furious with her parents because they lied to her. They didn't tell Clara their neighbour was dead and

they haven't told her what they know about Rose's disappearance. Clara saw this as betrayal.

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When Liam Kane first became an adult years earlier, he moved to Toronto, and married a woman named Fiona. This marriage was not a success. It ended at a time when Liam found he was the beneficiary of Mrs. Orchard's will. Since he had no place to go, he packed up his personal possessions in a number of boxes and drove the six hours to Solace – to see what he might make of his inheritance.

He initially intended to sell Mrs. Orchard's property for what it could fetch. But after arriving in Solace, he realized he wasn't in a hurry to return to the city. He wanted to take the time to sort himself out.

He soon discovered the house needed major repairs, so he offered to work for a local contractor in exchange for a lower price on the house repairs. Over time, he found he enjoyed this work and helped the contractor with other jobs in town.

It was inevitable Clara and Liam would meet. She was in his house twice a day feeding Moses. And although she initially resented him moving into Mrs. Orchard's home, this feeling passed, as she realized that Liam had done nothing wrong and seemed a

trustworthy sort.

The fact is: Clara no longer trusted her parents to answer her questions. She needed to know what had happened to Mrs. Orchard, why Liam had inherited her property, and what could be done to find Rose. She hoped Liam would provide the answers she needed.

I'll leave you to find out the rest of the story, when you read *A Town Called Solace*. Like many stories of rural areas – told by people who love the small towns that give them meaning – I'm sure you'll be pleased if you take the time to do so.

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