



## BOOK RELEASE

# *The Wanton Troopers* By Alden Nowlan

Fiction  
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## Recently Discovered Final Page Completes Alden Nowlan Novel

First published posthumously in 1988, *The Wanton Troopers* is Alden Nowlan's passionate and shocking first novel about a young boy approaching adulthood on the eve of the Second World War. Recovered in the editorial process while preparing this new edition was the original last page of the manuscript. Never before published, this new page completes the novel for the first time.

Set in a small Nova Scotia mill town, *The Wanton Troopers* is the story of Kevin O'Brien and his hunger for opportunity. In unusually stark prose, Kevin observes his beloved mother's betrayal and grows to recognize, if not to fully understand, adult pathos and the yearnings of the heart. In this essential domestic novel, Nowlan depicts both painful intensity and poignancy in Kevin's relationships with the mother he adores, his violent father, and his conflicted grandmother. Nowlan's treatment of family relationships, sexual confusions, and the pains of love are direct, authentic, and affective.

*The Wanton Troopers* shows Nowlan in full flight as a storyteller, as a prose stylist with unique turns of phrase and an unusual perspective, and as the national treasure that he would later become. An essential book for those many readers who have admired the poems and stories of Alden Nowlan, *The Wanton Troopers* is now available for the first time in its complete form, with additional material to contribute to its enjoyability — an afterword by David Adams Richards, an extended biographical note by Nowlan biographer Patrick Toner, and an abridged version of Nowlan's last major interview, which later became the award-winning National Film Board documentary directed by Jon Pederson.

## THE AUTHOR

Alden Nowlan was one of the most significant Canadian writers of the latter 20th century and one of the most genuinely popular poets of his generation. He was born in 1933 in poverty near Windsor, Nova Scotia, to a girl not yet fifteen and her hard-drinking husband, who was twice her age. Abandoned by his mother, Nowlan spent his childhood under the care of his paternal grandmother. His education ended after a few days in grade five, and at the age of 14, he went to work in the village sawmill. Nowlan moved to Hartland, NB, when he was 19 to work at *The Hartland Observer* as a reporter and editor. In 1963, he and his wife Claudine Orser and their son John moved to Saint John, where he worked as a journalist for *The Telegraph-Journal*.

Though largely self-educated, Alden Nowlan was a truly popular writer, whose considerable achievements included the Governor General's Award for *Bread, Wine and Salt* (1967), a Guggenheim Fellowship, a New Brunswick lifetime achievement award named in his honour, and the publication of numerous works of poetry, prose, and drama.

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Alden Nowlan became Writer-in-Residence at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton in 1968, a post he held until his death in 1983. It was during this period that he met and became close friends with theatre director Walter Learning. The two collaborated on a number of play scripts including *Frankenstein*, *The Dollar Woman*, and *The Incredible Murder of Cardinal Tosca*.

Alden Nowlan wrote *The Wanton Troopers* in 1960, when a Canada Council grant allowed him to take a leave of absence as a reporter from *The Hartland Observer*. *The Wanton Troopers* came from an especially creative period which would also include three collections of poems, *Under the Ice* (1960), *Wind in a Rocky Country* (1961), and *The Things Which Are* (1962). He had hoped that a success with this novel would free him from the drudgery of work on a small town newspaper. Yet, it seems he submitted the manuscript to only two publishers — Ryerson Press and McClelland and Stewart, both of which declined to publish it. *The Wanton Troopers* was first published by Goose Lane Editions in 1988.

## ACCOLADES

“The brilliantly imagined story of a beautiful child and his parents locked in brutal, alcoholic poverty. Nevertheless, in a world where relentless pride can only express itself as rage, shame or vicious cruelty, Kevin O'Brien's spiritual longings remain unquenchable. Somehow, desperately, he continues to dream of beauty and of gentle goodness.” — Rudy Wiebe

“*The Wanton Troopers* is a remarkable book which will remain in the reader’s memory long after it is read. The characters of the mother and father are brilliantly drawn and cause a deep sympathy, as lasting as any.” — David Adams Richards

“Set in an isolated village in Nova Scotia, the boy’s thwarted idealism creates Bronte-like worlds where the good Kevin O’Brien conquers evil. An engaging story — in several ways better than the ones Nowlan later published if only because the man who wrote it was so close in time to the boy he was.” — Kathleen Tudor

“Alden Nowlan’s first novel describes a world of brute poverty in which even the birds are ‘the colour of frozen mud and dead grass, sluggish with cold.’ *The Wanton Troopers* is essential reading for anyone interested in the sources of Nowlan’s imaginative world, and for those intrigued by the emergence of a strong and significant poetic voice from conditions of powerlessness, confusion and terror.” — Janice Kulyk Keefer

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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