



WAIT SOFTLY BROTHER

A NOVEL

KATHRYN KUITENBROUWER

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Also by Kathryn Kuitenbrouwer

All the Broken Things

The Nettle Spinner

Perfecting

Way Up

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A Buckrider Book

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Al Purdy, "The Dead Poet," *Beyond Remembering: The Collected Poems of Al Purdy*, ed. Sam Solecki (Harbour Publishing, 2000). Reprinted with permission of the publisher.

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For my brother

THE DEAD POET

by Al Purdy

I was altered in the placenta
by the dead brother before me
who built a place in the womb
knowing I was coming:
he wrote words on the walls of flesh
painting a woman inside a woman
whispering a faint lullaby
that sings in my blind heart still

The others were lumberjacks
backwoods wrestlers and farmers
their women were meek and mild
nothing of them survives
but an image inside an image
of a cookstove and the kettle boiling
– how else explain myself to myself
where does the song come from?

Now on my wanderings:
at the Alhambra's lyric dazzle
where the Moors built stone poems
a wan white face peering out
– and the shadow in Plato's cave
remembers the small dead one
– at Samarkand in pale blue light
the words came slowly from him
– I recall the music of blood
on the Street of the Silversmiths

Sleep softly spirit of earth
as the days and nights join hands
when everything becomes one thing
wait softly brother
but do not expect it to happen
that great whoop announcing resurrection
expect only a small whisper
of birds nesting and green things growing
and a brief saying of them
and know where the words came from

Perhaps if I make myself write I shall find out what is wrong with me.

– Dodie Smith, *I Capture the Castle*

DAY ONE

I PULL OFF IN TRENTON and text my therapist because I am sad and I need to hear her voice. Mandy is actually my best friend, but, you know, same difference. There are two Harrier jump jets hovering overhead. The military base is close by and I could have gone straight to Mum and Dad's, so why do I stop here? The jets are quiet, stealthy, but I can feel anxiety rising, like I'm being watched. I send Mandy that emoji with the skull and crossbones and then the broken heart one. It's pathetic. I'm pathetic. And when she calls, I answer with the Bluetooth and tell her there's been a death in the family and I'm heading to my parents for a while.

“Who died?”

“Me,” I say. “I died.”

She laughs nervously. Then goes quiet. Then asks, “Are you okay?”

I say, “You think about leaving your marriage, you fantasize about it, try it on in your mind, but when you actually go ahead and do it, it's not at all like you thought. You couldn't really fathom the injury it causes to yourself and then you think maybe no pain, no gain. Then it turns out that it hurts other people, too, and the narcissism that led to you leaving, that self-protective ego thing – or so you told yourself when you did it – is actually serving no one. Or maybe it is serving some unconscious need.”

She really is an analyst. So I know to add that last.

And she bites the bait. “So, you’re on a healing journey.”

Of course, I hate that kind of sentimentality. I picture the font it comes in and it nauseates me. I take a long, slow breath. I stare at the road, at the rain as it starts up again, listening to her voice soften. “Kathryn?” she says. “Are you there?”

“Yes,” I whisper. I’m wondering if it is bad form to yell at her. I don’t because, even though I need to yell, she doesn’t deserve it. It’s me I need to yell at. So I say that “it feels like more of a terrible wound. I keep thinking about the mystic Margery Kempe and all of her weeping and wailing.”

“Tell me what happened. Go slow.” She’s such a good person. I’m so lucky.

I say, “It started yesterday. I went out to the back patio to drink my tea. The first day warm enough to do so this spring. And, Mandy, there was a dead cardinal out there. The wind picked up its feathers and ruffled them prettily.” And I’m sobbing.

“Poor thing,” she says, about the bird or about me I am not sure.

“Such a sorry sight to see it robbed of flight. I suppose it hit a window.” Our house is replete with windows, looks out over the lake. It’s worth millions. Enough for all manner of freedoms, you’d think. “I put it in a shoebox and tossed it in the garbage can.”

“And that did it.”

“Yeah, it was the start of a very ugly argument. One of those arguments that dredges up the shit of generations. One there’s no coming back from. It started with me saying I was struggling with my manuscript. That I needed to know more about Wulf, and he said, ‘Your brother is never coming back no matter how much ink you spill,’ and I blew a fucking gasket.”

This morning in the doorway, it’s me and Matthew and the boys – Magnus, Ross and Harry. They are just old enough, teenagers all three of them, to repress why I might be leaving and so abruptly. It’s not them, I tell them. Which only leaves one person to blame. They turn and stare at their father, who shows us his palms as if their bloodlessness is evidence of innocence. He says, “What? I didn’t do anything.” At which I scoff because this is precisely the problem. These arguments go round and round. Twenty years of frustration, fights that give in to incremental change, that end in lackadaisical, predictable backsliding. Fights

that result in him continuing to do nothing, to not be there, to annex himself from us under the guise of work.

“I hope you’ll be happy now,” he says to me the night before I leave.

“It’s not happiness I’m after,” I say.

He says he thought we would be one of those marriages that survived because we lead such separate lives.

It’s like I’m a wayward character in a story I suddenly refuse. For the first two acts, I liked the drama, the rising action, while also waiting for the main players to lock into their respective arcs, to dare to engage, to risk change. But somewhere along the plot it’s clear that it’s me who is changing, me who has outgrown this story, me who finally walks.

“You’ve changed.” His tone is accusatory.

“Yes! Yes, I have.” For that is what I thought characters were supposed to do. That is how narrative works and how could I not? How could I refuse the call to change?

I say, “It’s never been happiness I wanted. Not really. I wanted a marriage.” I wanted the fairy tale is what I mean.

Be careful what you want.

“Are you sure?” he says. By which he means there will be no going back. By which he means I can’t turn the clocks back on this decision once I make it. Because, whatever happiness or unhappiness might mean to him, he will never reflect, never puzzle, never confront the piece of this story that belongs to him. He’s churlish standing in the doorway to the house like there’s something there he won’t ever let me have back. But the thing I wanted, that’s been a husk for years. He’s a minor character in this. The sort that doesn’t change at all. And the character he won’t change from is one I can no longer abide. You know the part of the Hollywood blockbuster where the hero blasts through fire and escapes? That’s me. Only the fire is a suburban home with a lonely housewife.

O, simpering cliché!

And when I am done telling Mandy all this, and apologizing for trotting out the same old, same old, she says, “I support you.” And for this I am grateful. I watch the aircraft accelerate and disappear. And then she says, “A novel about Wulf?”

“Well, autofiction.”

“What’s that? Like memoir but not true? Kathryn, Wulf never lived.”

“I know. I know.” That in itself feels sad enough to occupy a story.

I get off the phone and drive on, up the 401, buzzing to the Batawa exit, an entire town built around a shoe factory. Then I head north, up through Frankford, across the Trent-Severn Waterway, and farther north, snaking through Stirling to that godforsaken plot. It’s still raining. The culvert under the laneway is conducting a tumult of water and there are pools and vernal ponds dotting the front field. The old cattle pond has burst at its seams. A couple of ducks airlift as I pull up. I’m driving backwards in time, back to the home where I grew up, where Mum and Dad still live, in a land so rocky even sheep can barely be sustained – a place where the oceans receded after the last ice age, leaving a landscape prone to bog and cedar copse, sweet air, mosquitoes and a history of depression. The land the Scots claimed because it reminded them of the home they’d left, not stopping to consider how their expansion might affect those currently occupying it. The stone croft house where I was raised was built five generations ago. A solid edifice to misery and my family’s devotion to it.

The front door swells shut in the spring and no one ever uses it anyway – too fancy for the likes of us. So, I’m at the old side door, the one through the kitchen. I should have called first.

“What’s going on?” Mum says. Dad’s head pokes out behind her.

“Invite her in, at least,” he says.

“Of course.” Mum shifts aside.

It’s all I can do to sputter out that we’ve argued again, Matthew and I, with the boys all throwing in their two cents, making it worse.

“I couldn’t stand it anymore,” I say.

Her eyes are bright with this information, as if leaving is a possibility she has never considered, as if I have opened up a portal into some grand venture. Then the brightness collapses into an accusatory twinge, her cheeks alive with fear. “So, you just left?” Mum says. A whole lifetime unfolds in an eyeblink. “It can’t be all that bad.”

“Mum,” I say, “it’s been years of not-all-that-bad.”

“And let me guess, you want to stay here.”

I nod, chastened, barely in the door, water now heaving out of the sky and glacier-cold tears, plenty of them, runnelling down my face. I’m calving some horrendous disaster. I can’t decide whether my anguish is about the story I can’t manufacture about Wulf or the one I can’t contain about my marriage. I keep thinking maybe I have picked my marriage apart in pursuing Wulf. It is true that if you start to scratch at the threads of any narrative, you discover it is just another enchantment. You discover there is no such thing as realism. All of it just made up. All of life, all of everything.

I’m sobbing by now, bent over on the couch. No one ever talks about how hard it is to start a story over again.

“Oh, honey,” says Mum, and Dad goes to put the kettle on since words fail him in the primordial way they seem to fail all men.

Mum tucks the Woolrich blanket around me, and Dad hands me a proper cup of tea. They stand there in a kind of tableau, assessing me, waiting for whatever comes next. Dad eventually says, “You poor bairn,” and Mum snickers. The Gaelic always sets her off, since it is not him but rather his own father speaking through him. He cocks his eyebrow at me with some expectation that I will give them reasons, calm their anxiety.

“I don’t really want to talk about it,” I say. And then I dare to say the thing I have been thinking about. I’m trying to make the big deal it is seem like no big deal, to minimize my desire. “I’m writing about Wulf.”

They fold their arms across their chests and nod, mouths arcing to the devil or hell, I do not know which. “There’s nothing to say,” Mum says. Dad just looks stern because, of course, she is right. “Maybe you should call Matthew and apologize. Twenty-five years is a long history to leave.”

“He took a mistress,” I say. Which is strictly speaking true, but it was some years ago and is only a loose thread in the larger yarn. Something I am not above using, though, since it is shorthand for “not my fault, really.” They soften a little but not enough to get me all that far.

“Poor bairn,” says Mum. She is sarcastic of course. There is nothing she has not already seen in her long life. She’s thinking, ‘What’s a mistress, in the long view?’ Mum’s eyes flit to Dad with the scrutiny of one who has stayed and

conquered, and something, some energy of that or some secret past, concusses the room.

“You made a promise to Matthew,” says Dad.

Mum nods.

The edifice of marriage – those who’ve committed to it, who protect it to death do they part. To be buried side by side, I think, as the ultimate goal of life, the measure of a successful union. Dad clears his throat and says, “I’d like to call Matthew; I feel sorry for him.” He starts to shuffle toward the stairs, to make a private call.

“Sorry for *him*?”

He stops and stares me down. “Yes, sorry for him. Who will cook for those boys?”

“So, I’m a charwoman, then?”

“Don’t be stupid.” He ambles down the hallway to the kitchen, where the old landline resides. They keep it for when storms take out cell service, which is more and more often these days.

“I wish you’d sit down,” I call after him. He turns and looks at me while I plead: “Tell me the story of Wulf.” I know it hundreds of times over, long inscribed as it is. It’s old family lore, but we like a silly old tale to keep us tethered to one another. I give him the puppy eyes, make myself irresistible. “Please,” I say. “Tell it to me again.”

And he returns and lowers himself into the La-Z-Boy, switches the heating pad on and settles in. He has not taken his eyes off me the whole time, like prey gauging a cat’s pounce.

“It was a time of great sorrow in the family. We were just the two of us, before you and your sisters came. And your grandmother so aloof. The McIvers do not really do any sort of emotion.”

“Except me.”

“Yes, you are exceptional in that regard.”

“What did he look like?”

“Ugly. Like every baby. A wet little nothing.”

“He came and he went, I always said,” adds Mum. She is rocking a little. “I do wish you wouldn’t dwell so.”

“Mum went into shock. Her organs were failing and the doctor, and this was unusual at the time, called me into the delivery room.”

“I was dying,” Mum says it like an accusation, as if I might have been the culprit in her demise.

“Let Dad tell it.”

“The doctors said that one or the other could be saved but not both. Of course, I chose your mother.”

“Do you ever regret it?”

They laugh.

“Well, you’d not be here,” Dad says. He clears his throat. “The priest came and did his priestly thing. I named him Wulf as your mother and I had previously discussed, after the poem. He was buried before your mother had recuperated enough to know he was gone.” Mum looks at Dad, mutters something about the old story being just that, a story. I say I know that but just the same. It’s lore and that is its own sort of home, is it not? She tilts her head in reluctant agreement, the clenching along her jaw a path so well-trod, she’s got grooves there.

I think of the time before houses and people. I think of the ancient ocean spread out over the land. I think of all manner of sea beasts that cavorted here, right beneath where I now sit. Whales – narwhal, beluga – and other sea creatures. Shark. Walrus even, some say. Seal. And then, though I know it is whimsical, I think of the basement filled to the brim with salt water, the lap of tide, a concrete lung filling and emptying. This is nonsense, of course. The sea was long gone before the stones were piled to make this farmhouse. Before it was built into a knoll facing south to veil against the weather, my great-grandfather chiselling and setting the lime mortar between these stalwart boulders.

“Where do you think the dead go when they go?” I say now. I think I might be bringing Mum to the edge of tears, for she knows I am thinking of wee Wulf. And I am not ashamed to say that I do not care. I would be happy to see some feeling. But no.

“They haunt us,” she says. And to keep it together, she sniffs and says that if I want to stay, I will be put to work. “Speaking of ghosts, we are clearing out the pig shed.”

They’ve been hoarding for years, accreting to the hoard that five past generations of McIvers have stacked in this space. The sediment of not-letting-go, mould and mouse excreta.

“That sounds fair,” I say.

“You’ll find all sorts of stories in there, that’s for sure.”

“I only really want one,” I say, a retort they ignore.

They say, “Well,” and glance to one another, then rise in unison. They are creatures of habit and it is time for their afternoon constitutional. I watch them through a north-facing window as they meander in their wellingtons. I love them, I think, their old bodies moving in sync. It would have been nice to stay married for all time like them. I wanted that. I stand there overlong, recalling the supple skin along Matthew’s clavicle, how I used to snuffle and bite him there. What is the difference between a ghost and a memory, I wonder, and where does adoration go when it goes? I think it stays to haunt us, too.

My parents are long on their walk. I give up waiting for them. The tea in my mug is cold, the milk puckered on its surface, so I settle on the couch for a nap. I shudder away thoughts of Matthew and the boys, the flutter of my jacket as I threw it in the car, the way the suitcase I hastily packed clipped my leg to bleeding as I heaved it into the trunk. They’re like photographs seen from the distance of ages. I can’t take any of it in. I hear my phone ringing and make myself impervious to its jangle. It stops and begins and stops and begins again, as I drift in and out of sleep. Its persistence foretells. I reach for it eventually and swipe it open.

“Hi,” Matthew says. “How are you?”

“Tired,” I say. “Really fucking tired.” I say goodbye before he gets anything more out. He calls back and I put the device on silent, mutter at my phone to shut the fuck up, and then there is, for some long minutes, quiet.

I wake up with Mum and Dad peering at me. Dad is waving a soup ladle.

“Is she awake?” says Mum.

“Dead to the world.”

I try to keep my eyes from fluttering. “Awake,” says Mum. “You can’t fool the fool.”

I shake my head, mutter, “Not awake. Dreaming.”

“The soup will grow cold,” says Dad.

I heave myself up from the couch, grab a Kleenex and empty my nose. The dinner table itself is something from Denmark circa 1970. The chairs match, upholstered in black Naugahyde. There is fresh-baked bread, sliced and warm, and an immaculate pat of salted butter on the table. Each plate is willow patterned

and flanked by the requisite silver, heavy and ancient, hauled over the ocean with a class expectation that never materialized. Great-grandmum's dowry. The napkins are folded into little snails and nestled up to the wineglasses. There are salad bowls and a mended tureen at the centre of all this. My father serves, and then they wait for my hands to clench in prayer.

"May we thank God for this bounty, and thank Him for the safekeeping of family," says Dad, raising an eyebrow in my direction.

"For richer, for poorer," I mutter. "Until death do us part."

"Now, Kathryn," says Mum. And once I've eaten, she leans in and gives me that look, one that would chill even the devil to the bone. "You'll want to go to your room, now. It'll be an early day of sorting tomorrow."

DAY TWO



THE PIG SHED BOXES CONTAIN multitudes. A photograph of Mum, twenty years younger than I am right now, newly married and just before she became pregnant with Wulf. I hold it up and she grabs it from my hands. “In the Poconos,” she says, “they had these honeymoon packages. Heart-shaped beds, everyone there newly married. It was a place of blissful beginnings.”

“We have the same body,” I say. “Those are just my legs.”

“Well, I certainly do not have that body anymore.”

“No,” I say. “Nor do I, I suppose. But what a babe you were.”

“I was a catch,” she says, squinting at it.

“And so happy.” I peer into the frame, willing it to give me more, to offer up its story. I have never seen my mother smile so openly as in this picture. “Maybe we can put the best pictures aside and make an album, and get rid of the rest.”

But no, she will not get rid of photographs. There is something particular about them, some magic to them that makes them impossible to burn or bury. “We will archive them,” she says. By midmorning we have worked our way through one and a half small shoeboxes. The material in the pig shed seems suddenly insurmountable. We will never succeed in cleaning it up. “Wasn’t it one of Hercules’s labours to divert a river to clean out a barn?”

“Tantalus.”

“No, Mum, he was the guy with the rock.”

“That was Sisyphus, I think.”

“At any rate, maybe the question to ask is ‘Will you miss it?’ Or maybe, ‘Will someone else enjoy it more than you?’”

“How can you know what you will miss before you miss it? Just when it’s too late?”

And I can feel the dig, so I stop and glare at her for a bit. She’s impervious to my moods, though. She has been barricading herself from them for as long as I can recall. I am her creation, so whenever I misbehave, she just carries on until I adjust to whatever she expects. That way, I get to maintain my role as transgressor instead of occupying the one I would much prefer – that of being myself.

“What exactly are you working on these days?” she finally asks, by way of oiling the crank in our conversation.

“Autofiction,” I say.

Mum’s eyebrows flare. “Whatever that is.”

“It’s a sort of memoir.”

“And how do you expect to write a memoir? Given your memory, I mean.”

Mum and Dad used to say that if my head weren’t screwed on to my body, I’d forget where I left it. “There will likely be lacunae,” I say. “That is kind of the point.”

She nods.

“Since it’s about Wulf,” I say, and I can see her freeze again.

“We keep telling you. There’s no story there.” She huffs a bit and then shrieks

a quiet “That’s my story,” which is factual. Wulf is her stillbirth, her old wound, her story. “I do wish you’d stop all this nonsense.”

“The nonsense of the writing or the nonsense of leaving Matthew?”

“It’s all the same, isn’t it?”

This is a curve I hadn’t expected. The thought that she sees clearly how one thing unleashes the next. How thoughts cascade into actions. How vulnerable we are to our traumas, as we write. One is the other; it’s all tangled together.

“You won’t solve yourself by picking at this,” she says.

I dare, then. “It’s just this, Mum. I was telling this friend of mine, she’s a sort of therapist, about Wulf, about your stillbirth, and she said it’s common for mothers to be depressed afterwards, especially when they don’t have support.”

“I never had time to be depressed. You came right afterwards.”

“That is my point. It occurs to me that you might have had a lot of unworked-through grief and, who knows, self-blame.” I don’t mention that some of this unworked-through grief has become her legacy to me. Instead, I pull out another box, crack the tape with my Opinel knife. It’s a box of porcelain women experiencing pastel motherhood, drinking tea and wearing long swirling gowns in meadows. It’s a box of idealism that the Royal Doulton brand invented to keep women nostalgic and thoughtless. “Charity pile, right?” I say.

“These are going in my bedroom,” she says. “Why do you hate women so?”

What I hear is: Why do you hate *me* so?

“I love you, Mum. I love women, too,” I say. “I just wish they wouldn’t buy into this.”

“Buy into having pretty things?”

“Yes. No. That’s not it.”

“What is it, then?”

“Mum, what if all women did what I’m doing?”

“Left their families?”

“Left mediocrity, left unhappy situations, sought joy.”

“I’m not unhappy. Why do you get to proclaim that we’re all unhappy? Maybe there are a lot of happy women in happy situations. Besides, what would the men do?”

I laugh of course. Because: What *would* the men do? And as I laugh, my eyes catch hold again of the photograph of my mum at twenty-one, her smile

opening up the universe. I pick it up and smile back at her. “Do you remember who you were?” I say.

“It’s a long time ago,” she says. It’s true. She’s an old lady now, thick with age but still attractive.

“I wonder if these happy memories sustain us in unhealthy ways.”

“There you go again. It’s not because you’re unhappy that the rest of us have to be, too.”

“I’m not even sure I care about happiness,” I say.

And then I hear Dad pushing a wheelbarrow into the pig shed.

“I care about freedom,” I say. “I care about my body rediscovering joy.”

And Dad, because he would do almost anything to avoid conflict, says, “Load her up!” And because we would do anything to avoid dragging him into this, we comply.

For days, I haul bags of photographs and document boxes from the pig shed, and we pore through them deciding what to file, what to throw away, what to keep. Everything I think I might be able to use, I set aside to digitize, promising Mum that I won’t damage anything, and that once I am done, I will archive everything in plastic bins, safe from mould and from the rains, which have, incidentally, not abated.

Toward the end of the week, at breakfast, Mum ceremoniously hands me a manila envelope.

“It’s for your memoir,” she says. “Some correspondence mailed to your great-grandfather. You might as well have it. It’s about his father, Russell Boyt, who would have been your great-great-grandfather. Though there was little great about him by all accounts. I was thinking this will help you with the Civil War bits of your book. He fought, you know. They say he was cuckoo – even before the war.”

“First of all, Mum, we don’t say ‘cuckoo’ anymore, and second of all, you’re kidding, right?”

“Nothing is *really* known about him,” she says, like she hasn’t heard me. “Well, a little is known.”

“I’m not writing a family history. I’m writing an extended fictional essay about my dead brother.”

She purses her lips in that dangerous way she has. I have crossed a line. She says, “You never know. You might need it,” and starts to walk away.

I look down at the envelope in my hands. I pull the letter out. It’s on blue airmail paper. There’s another envelope inside the first. The gist of the note on the blue paper is that the enclosed much older envelope was found in an archive of dead letters at a post office being dismantled in Richmond, Virginia, in 1969. The archivist is certain we are the proper recipients of this letter. “Wait,” I say. “Was I there the day this came in the mail?”

“Oh, no, you’d have been at school.”

Private Russell Boyt is the name on the front of the envelope, and he is, in fact, my great-great-grandfather.

“He was more or less disowned by the family,” Mum says. “Insane. He was institutionalized after the war.”

I gently pull the older letter from its envelope. It’s foxed and yellowed, brittle, a scrawl of dainty grey quill-pen cursive:

*Dear Pvyte Boyt. I do not know why you did what you did and I suppose you must have reasons of your own. For my part I wish I never was tangled in your business and you never got tangled in mine. And yet if you send me back my rightful property I think I can carry on some. Otherwise wee Charles requires new breeches and a decent flaxen shirt. Please do send money and news when you can.
Sincerely, Cristiana Muldon.*

“My God,” I say. “Have you read this? Who was she?”

“I think she was a mistress.”

I hand the letter to Mum. “I’m really not planning to write anything particularly historical,” I say. I do not want this. This is the last thing I want.

She pushes my arm away. “Throw it out if you don’t want it.”

Bait.

I am stupid. I bring the letter up to my room. Sit on the bed and read it over. It smells of some kind of perfume – rose, maybe, and dust and a hint of barnyard, which might be its years of sitting in the pig shed. I know Mum gave

me the letter to distract me from my fixation on Wulf. But I won't be waylaid.

I tell myself this, but who am I kidding? The thing has its hooks in me already. They say that everything you write, just like everything you dream, is a replica of you, or your unconscious self. They say you can't write a character who is not, in some true way, an aspect of yourself. If this is true, then all fiction is autobiography. All writing is self. Maybe I can find my way to Wulf this way. Maybe it's the only way to him. I set the letter on my dresser and sit down to write. I try to become Russell Boyt, my mentally ill ancestor.



Kathryn Kuitenbrouwer is the bestselling author of the novels *All the Broken Things*, *Perfecting* and *The Nettle Spinner*. She is also the author of the story collection *Way Up*. Her work has appeared in *Granta*, *The Walrus*, *Maclean's*, *The Lifted Brow*, *Significant Objects*, *Storyville* and others. Kathryn teaches literature and creative writing at the University of Toronto.

“They say that everything you write, just like everything you dream, is a replica of you.”

After twenty years of looping frustrations Kathryn walks out of her marriage and washes up in her childhood home determined to write her way to a new life. There she is put to work by her aging parents sorting generations of memories and mementos as biblical rains fall steadily and the house is slowly cut off from the rest of the world. Lured away from the story she is determined to write – that of her stillborn brother, Wulf – by her mother’s gift of crumbling letters, Kathryn instead begins to piece together the strange tale of an earlier ancestor, Russell Boyt. As the water rises, and more truths come to the surface, the two stories begin to mingle in unexpected and beautiful ways.

Praise for Kathryn Kuitenbrouwer

“Kuitenbrouwer has written an achingly beautiful novel about a bond between a bear and a boy whose relationship embodies the Canadian desire for reunion with the wilderness. . . . Kuitenbrouwer’s writing is powerful and evocative.”

– *Toronto Star* on *All the Broken Things*

“Serious, melancholy, realist and quietly beautiful . . . Kuitenbrouwer’s writing is careful and skilled but never showy or manipulative. By illuminating one tiny corner of the world, Kuitenbrouwer opens an almost infinite space to think about responsibility, the meaning of family and the connectedness of things.”

– *National Post* on *All the Broken Things*

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