

Parkdale Book Club

April 2026 – In Winter I Get Up at Night

Schedule – 2nd Saturday each month, 10 am, Zoom

2026

May 9

Prairie Edge

Conor Kerr

Beth

June 13

The Bookbinder

Pip Williams

Debbie

Our book club has a Facebook page. See <https://www.facebook.com/ParkdaleBookClub>

It's Time to Nominate!

What wonderful books would you like our Book Club to discuss next year?

Submit your nominations to Lynn at sloanelm@shaw.ca

cans of cheap beer in between. Grey, once a passionate advocate for change, has been hardened and turned cynical by an activist culture she thinks has turned performative and lazy. One night, though, she has a revelation, and enlists Ezzy, who is hopelessly devoted to her but eager to avoid the authorities after a life in and out of the group home system and jail, for a bold yet dangerous political mission: capture a herd of bison from a national park and set them free in downtown Edmonton, disrupting the churn of settler routine. But as Grey becomes increasingly single-minded in her newfound calling, their act of protest puts the pair and those close to them in peril, with devastating and sometimes fatal consequences.

Next month's selection

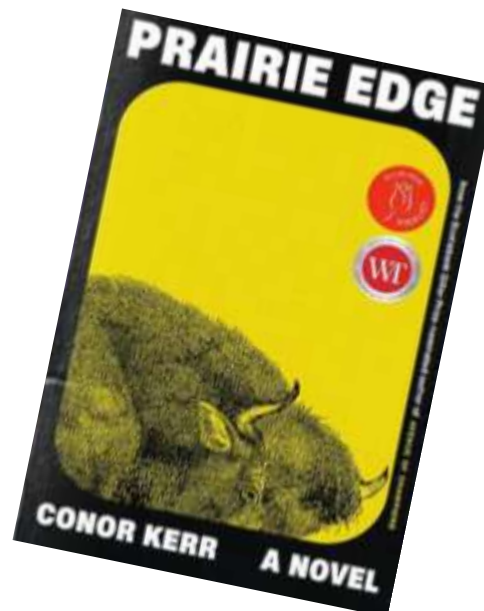
Prairie Edge

by Conor Kerr

Saturday, May 9th at 10:00 am

From Amazon:

"Meet Isidore 'Ezzy' Desjarlais and Grey Ginther: two distant Métis cousins making the most of Grey's uncle's old trailer, passing their days playing endless games of cribbage and cracking



For readers drawn to the electric storytelling of Morgan Talty and the taut register of Stephen Graham Jones, Conor Kerr's *Prairie Edge* is at once a gripping, darkly funny caper and a raw reckoning with the wounds that persist across generations.."

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82432011683?pwd=SEgwSFFIOTRZODVtSmVuYW1vOXNwdz09>

Meeting ID: 824 3201 1683

Passcode: 284356

If you're not able to join the meeting, you are welcome to send your comments about *Prairie Edge* to sloanelm@shaw.ca or bethbalshaw@shaw.ca before May 9th so they can be shared with the group and included in our next Book Club Newsletter.

April's discussion

In Winter I Get Up at Night

Nine of us gathered on Saturday to discuss this lovely novel by Jane Urquhart, met with consistently positive reactions.

First, the title. "As a child it would put me in mind of a line of that poem that had been read aloud to us by our poetry-loving Master back in Ontario: "In winter I get up at night," he had begun, "and dress by yellow candle-light."

Here is the rest of the poem by Robert Louis Stevenson from which it's taken:

Bed in Summer

In winter I get up at night
And dress by yellow candle-light.
In summer, quite the other way,
I have to go to bed by day.

I have to go to bed and see
The birds still hopping on the tree,
Or hear the grown-up people's feet
Still going past me in the street.

And does it not seem hard to you,
When all the sky is clear and blue,
And I should like so much to play,
To have to go to bed by day?

The poem echoes the book's theme of the restrictions of childhood – restrictions of broken children in hospital beds... as well as honouring the defining climate of the setting.

I found the book to be a slow-moving story but, in a way, it mirrors the slowness of the lived experience of Emer. Urquhart really captures the long, painful days Emer spent in the hospital. I can imagine how lonely and frightening it would have been for her to be in hospital for a year without any visits from her surviving family. Reading this story made me think a lot about my friend who had a serious illness as a child. She spent long periods of time in the hospital without contact with her family. Sadly, the thinking at the time (1950s) was that it was disruptive to children to have their parents visit. From my Google search: "In the 1950s, parents visiting children in hospitals was highly restricted, often limited to short, weekly visits or banned entirely due to policies prioritizing infection control and strict ward routines. Separation was thought to prevent distress, but studies later showed it caused profound psychological damage, leading to the landmark 1959 [Platt Report](#) recommending daily, open visitation." This is very different from current practices at the Children's Hospital in Calgary where parents can sleep overnight in their child's hospital room if they wish. They are treated as allies in the healing process, not as interference. There were some good things that happened while Emer was in the hospital. I liked the developing relationships with the other children (Friedrich, Tatiana, Eli, Sophie) and discovering the POV of the children as they experienced the doctors, nurse/nuns and visitors. Mr. Porter Abel was such a kind man and it was so lovely that he took the time to visit Emer whenever the train passed through the town.

Both Emer and her mother were involved with men who were not emotionally available to them (Harp and Mr. Stillwell); they were faithful to their lovers even though they got little in return. What keeps women in relationships like this, even when they

recognize the relationships are harmful to them? I liked that Emer confronted Walt Stillwell at the party, telling him she had read his letters to her mother. He denied any knowledge and said she was mistaken but they both knew she was right. I'm glad she left the party.

On second reading, I found the book to be much sadder than I remembered from the first time through, and it reminded me of Robertson Davies' works. Canadian expansionism with its concomitant devastation of Indigenous people and species and biodiversity; racism; KKK... The racism was heart-breaking; for example, the Irish woman (main character Emer's mother) disdaining to ride in the 'colonists' car on the train west.

I appreciated the critiques embedded in the story.

"Most of us come from Irish and Scottish tribes cast out by the mother country. But we are still reading her poems and singing her songs. How odd that we define foreignness as those whose speech hold the trace of another language, and then we ignore altogether our own foreignness on land that was never our own."

"One tribe, forced out of its homeland by imperial dominance, war, and scarcity, migrates across the sea and forces another tribe out of its homeland." the people they displaced, "pushed off this land by the clutter of avarice and insatiability," they built "residential schools in which dwelt stolen and grief-stricken indigenous children."

"We take the ignorant and cleanse them and dress them in fresh garments. We give them the gift of the English language. We make them into a reasonable facsimile of ourselves. Because who . . . has a cleaner, more reliable life-version than we ourselves."

I appreciated Friedrich's character, and the significance of Emer's beloved's discovery for Friedrich's life.

I marvelled at the part of the story after the big wind when Emer's father and brother carried her on a door

to the train, flagged down a train, and entrusted them to take Emer to get help. And they do.

Emer McConnell is among the twice born: "I was born twice, you see. Once gently, and once violently, which is why, although I am not yet old, I have the stick." In Davies' opening to the Deptford trilogy, *Fifth Business*, Dunstable, adopts "Dunstan" after a war injury. Davies refers to this as being twice-born. [listen](#)

Interesting echo with current news – Stillwell, Swalwell.

Nominations so far

Sept. 2026 to June 2027

We're at the very exciting brainstorming stage, so while we're looking for nominations from more folks, a few of these earlier ideas may be eliminated for the final version of nominations. This list is in roughly alphabetical order. More descriptions of books will come; meanwhile, feel free to look them up.

Send in your ideas. We'll have a final list for the May NL, then voting, then the winners in the June NL.

1. Deb is nominating *The City and Its Uncertain Walls* by Haruki Murakami.
2. *Janine suggests *The Emperor of Paris* by C S Richardson.
3. *Endling*, Maria Reva, nominated by Lynn.
4. Beth is nominating *Finding Flora* by Elinor Florence. "Scottish newcomer Flora Craigie jumps from a moving train in 1905 to escape her abusive husband. Desperate to disappear, she claims a homestead on the beautiful but wild Alberta prairie, determined to create a new life for herself. She is astonished to find that her nearest neighbours are also female. ... While battling both the brutal environment and the local cynicism toward female farmers, the five women struggle to find common ground. When their homes are threatened with expropriation by a hostile government, they join

forces. To complicate matters, there are signs that Flora’s violent husband is still hunting for her. And as the competition for free land along the new Canadian Pacific Railway line heats up, an unscrupulous land agent threatens not only Flora’s livelihood, but her very existence.”

5. Janine is nominating *Francie’s Got a Gun* by Carrie Snyder.
6. Beth is nominating *The Gales of September : The Untold Story of the Edmund Fitzgerald* by John U. Bacon. “For three decades following World War II, the Great Lakes overtook Europe as the epicenter of global economic strength. The region was the beating heart of the world economy. ... The 729-foot-long Edmund Fitzgerald was the biggest, best, and most profitable ship on the Lakes. But on November 10, 1975, as the ‘storm of the century’ threw 100 mile-per-hour winds and 50-foot waves on Lake Superior, the Mighty Fitz found itself at the worst possible place, at the worst possible time. When she sank, she took all 29 men onboard down with her, leaving the tragedy shrouded in mystery for a half century. ... Focused on those directly affected by the tragedy, *The Gales of November* is both an emotional tribute to the lives lost and a propulsive, page-turning narrative history of America’s most-mourned maritime disaster.” This event is memorialized in Gordon Lightfoot’s song, “The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald.”
7. Roz is nominating *How to Share an Egg: A True Story of Hunger, Love, and Plenty*, by Bonnie Reichart.

Note: This author is speaking at Central Library
Thursday, May 7, 7 - 8:30 p.m.

See <https://randomhousebooks.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/HOW-TO-SHARE-AN-EGG-Reichert-Book-Club-Kit.pdf> for recipes and author’s letter. “A moving culinary memoir about the relationship between food and family—sustenance and survival—from a chef, award-winning journalist, and daughter of a Holocaust survivor. When you’re raised by someone who once survived on potato peels and coffee grounds, you develop a pretty healthy respect for food. Bonnie Reichert avoided everything to do with the Holocaust until she found herself, in midlife, suddenly typing those words into an article she was writing. The journalist had grown up hearing stories about her father’s near-starvation and ultimate survival in Auschwitz-Birkenau, but she never

imagined she would be able to face this epic legacy head on. Then a chance encounter with a perfect bowl of borscht in Warsaw set Bonny on a journey to unearth her culinary lineage, and she began to dig for the roots of her food obsession, dish by dish. Tracing the defining moments of her life, from her colorful childhood in the restaurant business to the crumbling of her first marriage and the intensity of young motherhood, her decision to become a chef and that life-altering visit to Poland, the author recounts a tale of scarcity and plenty, stepping into the kitchen to connect her past to her future. Whether it’s the flaky potato knishes and molasses porridge bread she learned to bake at her Baba Sarah’s elbow, the creamy vichyssoise she taught herself to cook in her tiny student apartment, or the brown butter eggs her father, now 93, still scrambles for her whenever she needs comfort, cuisine is both an anchor and an identity; a source of joy and a signifier of survival. *How to Share an Egg* is a journey of deep flavors and surprising contrasts. By turns sweet, salty, sour, and bitter, this is one woman’s search to find her voice as a writer, chef, mother and daughter. Do the tiny dramas of her own life matter in comparison to everything her father has seen and done? This moving exploration of heritage, inheritance, and self-discovery sets out to find the answer.”

8. Continuing the ‘how to’ theme: *How to Read a Book*, Monica Wood, nominated by Lynn.
9. Deb is nominating *I Am, I Am, I Am: Seventeen Brushes with Death* by Maggie O’Farrell. I second this nomination! A memoir of near-death experiences.
10. *The Master Butcher’s Singing Club*, Louise Erdrich, nominated by Lynn. It was a challenge to narrow down my list of possible nominations to just 3, and in doing so, I had to choose between two by Louise Erdrich. The close runner-up to this one was *The Round House*.
11. Beth is nominating *The Smiling Land: All Around the Circle in My Newfoundland and Labrador* by Alan Doyle. Doyle takes you on “a freewheeling road trip through Newfoundland, its history, and its culture. From Fogo Island to the Southwest Coast, Labrador to Ferryland, and everywhere in between, Alan’s Newfoundland awaits you. ... Wildly entertaining, informative, and brimming with Alan’s classic brand of storytelling and romping good fun, *The Smiling Land* is a celebration of

Newfoundland—both its storied past and its ever-vibrant present.”

12. Janine suggests *Watching You Without Me* by Lynn Coady.
13. From Janine we have *When God was a Rabbit* by Sarah Winman.



The **big book club** (formerly Literary Kaleidoscope) meets on the third Wednesday of each month from September to May. In-person meetings are held at the Marda Loop Community Hall, 3130-16 St SW, 10:00 to 11:30 am. Each month, a prominent guest speaker guides the discussion. \$12.

May 20 – (in person) Anne Logan presents *The Measure* by Nikki Erlick.

Read more about the [big book club](#) and sign up for their newsletter to receive announcements of meetings.

YEAR ROUND wordfest

Wordfest hosts interesting evenings with authors throughout the year. Check out the [Wordfest Schedule](#) for information about authors who are launching their new books in April and May.

Mon., April 20, 7:00 pm, Patricia A. Whelan Theatre, Central Library – Wordfest presents Caro Claire Burke and her debut novel, *Yesteryear* about a social media influencer and “tradwife” who wakes up one morning living 170 years in the past.

Sun, May 3, 1:00 pm, Memorial Library -- Wordfest welcomes the world’s leading forest ecologist, Suzanne Simard, to celebrate her new book, *When the Forest Breathes: Renewal and Resilience in the Natural World*.

Books Read

The Fourth Consort, Edward Ashton. Soft sci-fi (more sociological than hard science) about first contacts. One of the Goodreads reviews called it “lightweight enough to be bench-pressed by a fruit fly”. I don’t agree. It was light, but with some interesting explorations of capitalism, honour, interspecies anthropology, and more. I enjoyed the thread about the translation software that, with a high setting for confidence, returned too many words as untranslated. So confidence level is reset to 50%, and thereafter, some words are translated with a questioning tone and a confidence rating like 65%. Given that main character’s job is alien diplomacy, uncertainty about translation adds a significant challenge. And I’ll always appreciate an author who gives a nod to Douglas Adams. “Probably best to just stick with something simple, like, So long, and thanks for all the fish.”
3.8* 18326

DNF: *Set My Heart to Five*, Simon Stephenson. Perhaps this robot story set in 2053 is “a profound exploration of what makes us human and a love letter to outsiders everywhere.” I’m not sure what proportion was the writing and what the narration but this was too goofy for me. Abandoned at 3%.

The Master Butcher’s Singing Club, Louise Erdrich. I love this novel. Covering the period from 1917 to 1954, the book features Erdrich’s usual amazing writing, characterization, detail of description. Elaborately interconnected lives. One of my nominations.

“Our songs travel the earth. We sing to one another. Not a single note is ever lost and no song is original. They all come from the same place and go back to a time when only the stones howled.”

On reading: “The pleasure of this sort of life – bookish, she supposed it might be called, a reading life – had made her isolation into a rich and even subversive thing. She inhabited one consoling or horrifying persona after another...That she was childless and husbandless and poor meant less once she picked up a book. Her mistakes disappeared into it.”

“When small towns find they cannot harm the strangest of their members, when eccentrics show resilience, they are eventually embraced and even cherished.”

“To Delphine, the hesitation of March was cheering. March was all expectation, a gathering of power. Still cold but marginally warmer every day - a hopeful time of the year.”

5* 2532026

In Winter... 3+26

Girlfriend on Mars, Deborah Willis. This was a recent nomination for book club and I'm sorry it did not make the cut – it would have made for an interesting discussion. Is it fun and cute? Is it instructions for living? Is it a book about grief? Did the publisher do Willis wrong with the cover illustration chosen? ...

4* 5426

A Truce That Is Not Peace, Miriam Toews. A nonfiction memoir that makes it clear how much of *All My Puny Sorrows* (2014) is autobiographical. The memoir is difficult to describe, and probably will be liked by people who already like Toews. A non-linear chain of recollection, roughly held together by the question Why do I write? I enjoyed the references to a planned Wind Museum. And again, I always appreciate a nod to Douglas Adams. One of the author's cyclical musings on the question, Why do I write? (her answers to which never satisfy the person organizing the conference): "Okay, Conversación Director. The writing is the reason. And 42."

"My sister punctuated her life with long periods of silence. It was during these periods that she begged me to write her letters — about anything, my life, the days — and in that asking was an offering. She taught me how to stay alive. Silence and words: both are good, both are failures, both are efforts, and in that effort is where life lies — not lies, or maybe it does — but where it exists. And the fragments in between are the spaces where she and I meet."

"In that space or spit of land or corridor, the silence of my sister, the suffering that destroyed her language, or destroyed language, or destroyed faith in language's ability to communicate anything of the human soul, or of her soul, it's all wind, the unmaking of her world, of the world—and in that space or spot of land or corridor, is her asking me to write, to re-make my world, her world, the world."

"In the weeks, following my father's death, I yelled often, viciously, in public – and always at men attempting to explain the rules to me. There were no more rules; every rule lay smashed to pieces on the ground. Don't talk to me about the rules. I'll smash your face in with a brick. I. Hate. You."

"A student of English literature, whose class I recently visited, has suggested that now is the time for me to stand back and listen. I've had a platform long enough." Gasp!

"She (mother) was translating English words and lines into her medieval language, which she describes as pusht. One evening, as soon as I walk through the front door, she said, oh, great, hey, listen, I'm having a problem with one of these sentences. The sentence was "I dare you to say no." There was no word for "dare" in her language, I asked her if she could use a word like "defy" or "challenge," and she said, no, no, come on, we don't have words like that! She couldn't stop laughing. Really – she almost choked to death. Even as I lay in bed that night, trying to get to sleep, I could hear her start up again with the laughing." Such a good illustration of how language reflects culture.

(the young Toews' travels in Europe with Wolfie) "All this to say, we've only been here for two days, but we've already made a couple of important decisions – including the decision that we're never going to be offended by anything. And we're not gonna be boring or embarrassed. Or squabble endlessly about stupid things."

"My father had a heart attack at school, in his classroom, his favorite place, a world where he made sense to himself". This concept struck me – making sense to oneself.

"Silence and writing are, if not quite the same thing, then allies, each a misdirection of the unspeakable, and each a way of holding on."

"Are writing and suicide related? The same thing? Or estranged relatives, at least? Angry siblings, whose origins are the same. An attempt – a fragment of an attempt – to save life, preserved life, to freeze it in a moment, to end what is real, to survive by ending. To preserve, in silence, what is authentic."

"I have a plan for retirement, I tell my kids. I'm gonna be happy for the next 20 years, and then I'll kill myself. It doesn't work that way! They say.

Yes, I say. It does!"

and I agree. 5* 7426

Forest Euphoria: The Abounding Queerness of Nature, Patricia Ononiwu Kaishian. Two of my favourite things in one title – what's not to like?

Rejoicing and grieving mixed together in a memoir-ish book. Hmm, what does it mean when many negative reviews of a book say 'it wasn't what I expected.' Isn't the problem, then, the expectations? The reader, or the promotion of the book, rather than the book itself? Grr. In the Epilogue, Kaishian wrote about Mary Banning, whose story echoed that of fictional Alma Whittaker (*The Signature of All Things*) as well as

other real-life women scientists who were disappeared from the record. 4.5* 9426

“Ignoring your intuition feels like walking face first through an invisible spider web, again and again”

“Ultimately, queerness invites us all, regardless of our identities, to be more undefined, unclear, transitional, merging, interdependent, cooperative, and nonhierarchical—a very fungal way of being.”

DNF after 10%: *Superfan*, Jenny Tinghui Zhang. Sometimes I wish I could sit down for a coffee and chat with the me who puts some of these books on hold. This one could have been intriguing as an anthropological study of the cult-like behaviour of superfandoms – celebrity obsession from both sides - - but there are so many books on my library shelf, and Audible shelf, and Kindle shelf, and actual wooden shelves full of books. 12426

Gender Queer, Maia Kobabe (e/em/eir). A graphic novel (very quick read) that was great, very resonant. OMG, author is a kpop fan! 4.5* 13426

Ocean's Godori by Elaine U. Cho. Korean space opera. Did you ever think you'd see those words strung together? I enjoyed it, really enjoyed the female main character, this view of the future... 4.5*. 16426

And another thing:

The Change

Not book-related, but may be of interest. I just finished (for the 2nd time) a series available on Kanopy (a streaming service available with our wonderful library cards): *The Change*. 50-year-old Linda finds out that the myriad of health challenges she's trying to get the doc to listen to may all be signs of menopause. She heads out on her motorcycle to the Forest of Dean where she rents a 'luxury' caravan and embarks on a journey of self-discovery in this sharp feminist comedy from comedian Bridget Christie. I promise you've never seen anything like it. Two seasons of 6 short episodes each.

20 Years of Reading in Parkdale Book Club

If you know of one that's missing, please email me

Air We Breathe, The
Albatross

Alone in the classroom

Altar in the World, An

American Dirt, Cummins

And the Birds Rained Down

Art of Leaving, The

Art of Racing in the Rain, The

An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth

An Audience of Chairs

Annabel

Atonement

Bad Medicine, Judge John Reilly

Barney's Version

Bedlam

Being mortal

Bel Canto, Patchett

Belonging

Best Laid Plans

Birth House, The

Black Candle, The

Body Surfing

Book of Negroes, The

Book Thief, The

Bookbinder, The

Bookwoman of Troublesome Creek, The

Britt-Marie Was Here

Cat's Table, The

Cause for hope

Children Act, The

Children's Blizzard, The

City of Girls

Clear, by Davies

Colour of water

Confidence Game, The

Cool Water, Warren

Crow Lake

Cruellest Month, The

Curious Charms of Arthur Pepper, The

Davita's Harp

Demon Copperhead
Dying to Be Me
Eat pray love
Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine
Elegance of the Hedgehog, The
Embroideries
Enchantment, May
End of Your Life Book Club, The
Endless Knot, The, by Gail Bowen
Erotic Stories for Punjabi Widows
Exile
Fatal Grace, A
Fatal Passage
Fifteen Dogs
Fighting Castro: a love story
Finding Chika
Forgotten Garden, The
Gentleman in Moscow, A
Geography of Bliss, The
Ghost Keeper
Girl, Woman, Other by Bernardine Evaristo
Girls, The
Glass Castle, The
The Glass Hotel by Emily St. John Mandel
God's hotel
Good to a fault
Green Grass, Running Water
Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society, The
H is for Hawk
Hamnet and Judith by Maggie O'Farrell
Happiness Project, The
Heaven and Earth Grocery Store, The
Hello Beautiful
High Mountains of Portugal , The
Hillbilly Elegy
Hotline
House at Tyneford, The
Housekeeper and the Professor , The
Humans, The
I am Hutterite
I shall not hate
Illegal, The
Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks, The

In Winter I Get Up At Night, Urquhart
In search of April Raintree
Inconvenient Indian, The
Infidel
Instructions for a Heat Wave
Into the Magic Shop
Irish Country Doctor, An
Juggler's Children, The
Kite Runner, The
La's Orchestra Saves the World
Late Nights on Air
Latitudes of melt
Lessons in Chemistry
Light Between Oceans, The
Lila
Little Bee
Long Way From Home, A
Maisie Dobbs by Jacqueline Winspear
Man called Ove, A
Mao's Last Dancer
Married to a Bedouin
Martian , The
Masseby murder, The
Medicine Walk
Memory board
Midnight Library
Migrations, McConaghy
Mistress of Nothing, The
Moral disorder
Mother of All Questions, The
Mr. Pip
My Grandmother Sends Her Regards and Apologises
My Sister the Serial Killer by Oyinkan Braithwait
New Season, A, Fallis
Nightingale, The
Nikolski
No Time Like the Present
No Time to Spare
Notebook, The
Old Filth, Jan Gardam
One Brother Shy
One Drum, Wagamese
One Plus One

Open Secrets, Alice Munro
Orphan train
Outliers, The
Payback
Power of One, The
Prairie Edge
Proof of heaven
Pull of the Stars, The
Putting Away Childish Things
Quiet
Remarkably Bright Creatures
Rhinestone Button, A
Road to Little Dribbling, The
Rosie Project, The
Russian winter, the
Samurai's Garden, The
Sarah
Saturday Big Tent Wedding Party
Second-Last Woman in England, The
Secret daughter
Secret Orphan
Shack, The
Shadow of the Wind
Shoe on the Roof, The
Signature of All Things, The
Slaughterhouse Five
Small Things Like These, Keegan
Snow Road Station
Spiral Staircase, The
Splendid and the Vile, The
Spoon Stealer, The
Station Eleven
Still Alice
Still Life, Winman
Stone Carvers, The
Sufferance, King
Suite Francaise
Take This Bread
Tartufo
There Will Be No Miracles Here
Three cups of tea
Three Sisters Bar and Hotel, The
Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow

Too Close to the Falls
Traveling Mercies
Truth About Stories, The
Two Old Women
Uncommon Reader, The
Universe Versus Alex Woods, The
Unless
Unnecessary Woman, An
Up and down
Warlight
Water for Elephants
Weight of Ink, The, Kadish
Where the Crawdads Sing
Whistling past the graveyard
Widower's tale, The
Woefield Poultry Collective, The, Juby
Woman Outside My Door, The, Ryan
Women, The
Writing on my forehead, The
419, Ferguson