religious traditions that conflicted with their desires.

A highlight of the anthology is "Letters to God," contributed by Chana Rosenfarb, one of Canada's most celebrated Yiddish authors. This story about a middle-class Holocaust survivor caring for his dying father stands out with a brilliant translation by Goldie Morgentaler and captivating writing, replete with rich imagery and complex structure and emotionality. Originally published almost 30 years after the other stories, "Letters to God" at first seems to break up the coherence of the collection, but ultimately its inclusion is a strength, contributing to the anthology's diversity and refusing the condensation of all Yiddish women's writing into one type of story.

Perhaps one weakness of this collection is that the stories included tend overly to the darkly tragic, and there are too few glimpses of the wry humour for which Yiddish is so famous. Nonetheless, *Arguing with the Storm* gives us a tantalizing taste of the variety and talent within Yiddish women's writing, and in so doing, accomplishes its goal of inspiring readers to delve further into this little-known wealth of Yiddish literature.

Sharon Power is working towards her MA in Women's Studies at York University. She has Bachelor degrees in Biochemistry and Women's Studies, and her research focuses on the location of science in Women's Studies

MY WEDDING DRESS: TRUE-LIFE TALES OF LACE, LAUGHTER, TEARS AND TULLE

Susan Whelehan and Anne Laurel Carter, Eds.
Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2007

REVIEWED BY CLARA THOMAS

Do not be put off by this title, fearing a hearts and flowers bath in sentiment. This time the blurbs are right: the book is "enchanting," as June Callwood testifies, "thoughtful" in Leah Mclaren's opinion and you will join with Heather Mallick in "a toast to the editors and their tribe of brides." Twenty-six brides of widely differing ages, races, and circumstances have told their stories, the all-important dress, the ceremony, its background and most important, how it all worked out. Every one of them is a satisfying narrative; every one of them will add to your understanding of the myriad complexities that attend a wedding and its aftermath. The book is divided into four parts, according to the ages-old advice: "Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed, Something Blue." In each category the stories cluster around these separate themes which provide convenient take-off points for their widely divergent tales. They are all framed by the contributions of Stevie Cameron and her daughter Amy, who provide a satisfying note of unity in the striking diversity of the whole collection.

In the first, the "Old" section, Anita Rau Badami tells of the catastrophe of her family heirloom sari whose dye ran and stained her body shocking pink: "A few hours after my wedding I was locked in the bathroom of the honeymoon suite of our hotel. I had been there for more than an hour.… Our wedding night would end as one that was literally and figuratively written into my skin." The poet, Joanne Arnott, tells of her traditional Métis wedding, climaxing in the wrapping of the couple in a traditional Marriage Blanket: "Treat this blanket with reverence … Treat it with respect, because it is your marriage. You were two, with two different lives … now you are one."

In "Something Borrowed," Edeet Ravel, a Canadian living in Israel and conscripted into the army, had to fulfill the requirements of a proper Jewish wedding which took only a few minutes but was rigorous in its various pre-wedding requirements: "The day before the wedding Yaron's father appeared at our door with two head coverings: Yaron's creased but still shiny bar mitzpah kippah, and a white veil for me.… Apart from the veil, I had to wear either a skirt or dress." The only way Jews can marry in Israel is through the rabbinate. Accordingly, they had two rabbis as witnesses and the janitorial staff provided the required number of ten males: "The shtetl-like atmosphere of burlesque and improvisation suited me perfectly.… Judaism, I have always felt, is far more flexible than some of its practitioners would have us think." Eight years later, back in Montreal, they divorced. Yaron didn't want a child, Edeet did—so they parted. "It was the right thing to do, but I would never be loved again as I was loved then, and parting was agony. We both wore jeans."

"Something Blue" becomes … "or Peach or Striped or Floral" in the final section led by Michele Lansberg's testimony to colour—"The most important thing about the dress was that it wasn't white, it wasn't long and it had not a whisper of tradition clinging to it." The whole idea of marriage was, to her, a construct of patriarchy which she despised. Her wedding dress, simple, patterned and splashed with pink and green, signified her rejection of the traditional woman's role

but her rebellious marriage was only the beginning of a long life together—43 years, three children, two grandchildren and mutually successful careers: "Despite her early aversion to conventional roles, Michele turned into an extravagantly and joyously maternal adult who loves cooking and gardening."

Susan Whelehan who, with Anne Laurel Carter, edited *My Wedding Dress*, wrote in her introduction of the genesis of the book: "A few years ago, a group of women friends who love to write sat around the table in my house and took turns calling out topics and writing for ten, fifteen, or twenty minutes. Then we read our pieces aloud. At one point I called out, "your wedding dress—Go!" From such a beginning this book developed, the product of many different voices and experiences. Taken singly or together they are beacons of hopeful beginnings for all the various women who read and those who wrote them.

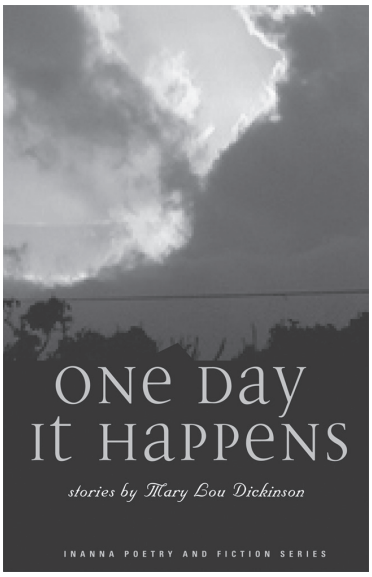
Clara Thomas was one of the two first women to be hired by York University. She has been with York since 1961, the year Glendon opened. She is now a retired Professor Emeritus. In 2005 York did her the honour of naming the libraries' Archives and Special Collections the Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, York University.

ONE DAY IT HAPPENS

Mary Lou Dickinson
Toronto: Inanna Publications and Educations Inc, 2007

REVIEWED BY LEE GOLD

Mary Lou Dickinson has created a rich and varied first collection of short stories, *One Day It Happens*. They reveal a full range of human



struggles, not purely feminine ones. These modern stories touch on issues of woman abuse, alcoholism, divorce, homosexuality, child sexual abuse, and mental illness. No longer forbidden topics, they still bring pain, shame, fear and, too often, silence. However these stories bear no resemblance to political tracts or diatribes. They do what good fiction does best: reveal the human condition in its endless permutations, differences, horrors, pleasures, and contradictions.

The narrator ranges from first person to third, from male to female and young to old. But always there remains an ability to find significance, humor, irony, or menace in small moments, brief encounters and prolonged friendship. A young child draws a house, surrounded by trees, on the lid of her father's cardboard coffin; a lecherous old man seeks out a new arrival in a nursing home to revive his lost sexual prowess. The stories challenge the reader to examine moments of adventure, to be open to connection as well as to fear and even death.

The collection has a rhythm, a structure that helps to make the darkness of several stories bearable. It can be read as a fugue of sorts, orchestrated to frighten, amuse, repulse and even, delight. The reader gets taken on a journey over time.

Some stories are directly informed by the writer's work as a crisis line counselor: "Slides from Exotic Places" and "From the Front," fictional accounts of such experiences, reveal the toll this work takes on one's body and spirit as well as the kinds of issues that arise in the course of a single shift. "The Essay" vividly portrays the mind of a woman whose sense of self has been so severely traumatized as a child that she has to struggle every moment to hold together the splintered pieces as a fragmented adult.

The stories are far from repetitive nor are they all bleak. Two, especially, stand out for their deft touch, wry humour, and self mockery. "Neighbours," about the deaths, a year apart, of two gay men from AIDS is as sensitive a telling of the ravages of this disease and the prejudices of a homophobic society as one could wish for. The other, very different in the telling as well as the subject, consists of PERSONALS, both his and hers. The reader witnesses the shift from an effort to find a companion, albeit playfully, to a woman simply finding pleasure in self-revelation over the space of a few years and giving up on finding "Mr. Right." These stories arrive when the reader needs a bit of relief: ironic light cast into the shadows of the more prevalent darkness of human experiences.

I struggled with one story in particular, a mad or perhaps not so mad, woman living in her fantasy world or acting out for the sheer adventure of it. I could never quite tell whether it worked or not. But the pleasure of such a collection lies in its variety, enough to satisfy a broad readership. Mavis Gallant once said she thought short stories should be read singly, with time in between. For me it depends on the writer and, of course, the stories. I read these three or four at a time over the course of a few days. None are very long but each feels complete. Only two involve the same characters.

The writing does not draw attention to itself; the stories occupy centre stage. The style lends itself to