

**Sylvie Bertrand** is a writer living in Brooklyn. A native French speaker, she was born and grew up in Montreal. She writes poetry, short stories and is writing her first novel. Her stories have appeared in *Epiphany Magazine*, *Del Sol Review*, *Cleaver Magazine*, and *Penultimate Peanut Magazine*. She was nominated for the 2017 Pen / Robert J. Dau Short Story Prize for Emerging Writers as well as for two Pushcart Prizes. She received a 2018 Pushcart Special Mention.

## *Barely Unscathed*

by Sylvie Bertrand

No one knows for sure, but there's a rumor that  
my great-great grandmother on my father's side  
was a squaw who married a Frenchman whose  
grandson, my great uncle, was tall and dark  
and had a nose like an eagle's beak and  
lived in a wooden cabin up the river all  
by himself and shot birds and squirrels  
he then grilled and ate for dinner. He drank a  
lot too, my mother would add, *like all savages do*.  
Her side of the family? Martyrs run as  
smooth as a river all the way through the great  
white north and across the ocean to  
La Rochelle, a French fishing village *her*  
ancestor, a *donnée extraordinaire*,  
left in 1644 to come and protect  
the Jesuit priests in their evangelical missions;  
little did he know that Jesuits were madmen  
yearning for salvation through various forms  
of martyrdom, especially the kind inflicted  
by the savages they hoped to evangelize;  
little did he know that some of them would  
become historical figures who died  
in their missions, the most famous ones burned  
alive, slowly mutilated, scalped or  
struck dead with a tomahawk to the head;  
little did he know that down the ancestral line,  
one of his descendants would fall for a  
man whose own ancestors were survivors  
of these early battles, and thanks to  
this ongoing mating between the  
barely unscathed, here I am now,  
tall, dark, vegetarian, a moderate  
drinker with a mousy nose, childless,  
the end of the line. I shall  
sacrifice myself for no one.  
Watch me as I write, watch  
me as I persist and breed  
rumors as wild as any offspring.

