

## Decolonize This

Lisa Bird-Wilson

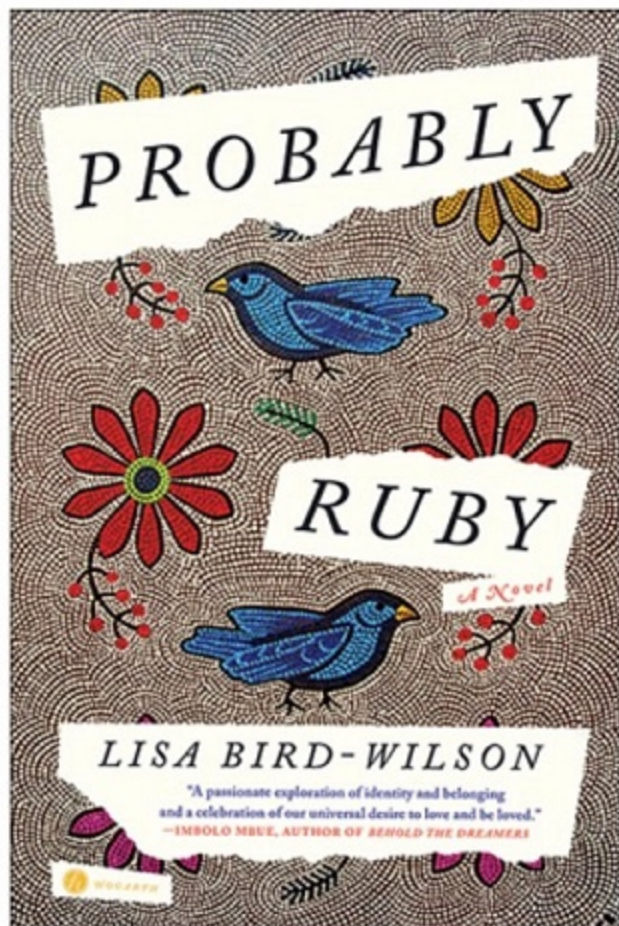


photo: George Gingras, Gabrie I. Dumont Institute

Like Ruby, the protagonist in *Probably Ruby* (Hogarth, Apr.), Saskatchewan Métis and nêhiyaw writer Lisa Bird-Wilson was raised by adoptive white parents in the 1970s, during a decades-spanning period when Indigenous children were systematically taken from their biological parents by the Canadian government and placed into foster care.

*Ruby* is Bird-Wilson's U.S. debut. She published her first book in Canada in 2011, a work of nonfiction commissioned by the Gabriel Dumont Institute for Métis education and culture, an organization she now heads. A story collection followed, and then a book of poems. In 2016, she returned to fiction.

"I just started writing stuff about being adopted and being indigenous," Bird-Wilson says.

Ruby is meant to embody and connect to a multitude of Indigenous perspectives, not just her own, and Bird-Wilson notes that the character came to her after speaking with white people who had adopted kids like her and responded defensively to her story collection at book events. Her work challenged the "colonial myth" that they had saved their adopted children from some kind of "horrible fate," she says.

David Ebershoff, editor-in-chief at Hogarth, says *Probably Ruby* is an "in-house favorite" that stood out to him for two reasons. First, he'd never come across a story of an Indigenous adoptee; and second, he felt "great affection and love" for the character. He also pointed out that while it's a story from Canada, it will resonate with readers in the U.S. It's "not just a Canadian story, it's a North American story," he explains, in that it shows how for the Métis and other Indigenous peoples, the border is porous. The author adds that it's "artificial."

Bird-Wilson recalls that Ruby felt real to her after she discovered her laugh, which Ruby uses to protect herself—whether to dismiss her feelings or to shrug off other people—and to express genuine joy. "That's when her character was able to just go and be as wild as she is," she says.