

# THE QUARANTINE REVIEW

Issue 12

Jennifer Bowering Delisle | **ELBOW BUMP**

**BULL'S EYE** | Maria Kubacki

Eva Tihanyi | **THE GIVEN**

**IN MY QUARANTINE** | Fereshteh Molavi

Annaliese Poto | **RED DAISIES**

and more + **OUR SUMMER READING HOT LIST**

# THE QUARANTINE REVIEW

ISSUE 12

## In This Issue

2 CONTRIBUTORS

4 EDITOR'S NOTE

### FICTION

5 Bullseye  
Maria Kubacki

23 Summertime Hot List

43 Red Daisies  
Annaliese Poto

### CREATIVE NON-FICTION

16 If/Then  
Molly McCarron

### INTERVIEWS

30 David Huebert

37 Charlotte Mendel

### POETRY

14 Homes | Angela Hibbs

15 2020 Vision | Eve Tihanyi

20 Just Don't Panic  
Wajahat Mahmood

21 Sonnet for the Elbow Bump  
Jennifer Bowering Delisle

28 In My Quarantine  
Fereshteh Molavi

29 Gesigawi'pit  
Angela Hibbs

35 Curbside | Suzanne Bowness

36 Field Guide to Weeds  
Moni Brar

42 The Given  
Eve Tihanyi

52 Front Window  
Jennifer Bowering Delisle

53 False Negative | Suzanne Bowness

**SUZANNE BOWNESS** is a writer/editor based in Toronto. She published a book of poetry titled *The Days You've Spent* (Tightrope Books, 2010) and had a play produced by Alumnae Theatre (*The Reading Circle*, 2019), with many other works in progress. Find her online at [www.suzannebowness.com](http://www.suzannebowness.com)

**MONI BRAR** is an immigrant settler on the unceded lands of the Treaty 7 Region. Her work explores the interrelation of time, place and identity, diasporic guilt, and, trauma. Her writing appears in *The Literary Review of Canada*, *Prairie Fire*, *The New Quarterly*, *Prism*, and *CV2*. She believes art contains the possibility of healing.

**MARIA KUBACKI**'s is the author of *A Plague of Frogs*, published by Frog Hollow Press. Her fiction has appeared in *The Fiddlehead*, and her news and feature articles have been published in newspapers including the *Telegraph Journal* and *Ottawa Citizen*. She lives in Ottawa.

**MOLLY MCCARRON** writes fiction and non-fiction. Her work has appeared in *Minola Review*, the *Globe and Mail*, *Memoir Mixtapes* and *Hinterland* magazine. She lives in Toronto.

**ANNALIESE POTO** is a painter/traditional artist. Find Annaliese's artwork on Instagram @annaliese.poto.

**JENNIFER BOWERING DELISLE** is the author of *Deriving* (2021) and *The Bosun Chair* (2017), and is a board member of NeWest Press. She lives in Edmonton/Amiskwaciwâskahikan/Treaty 6 with her partner and two young children. Find her online @JenBDelisle and at [www.jenniferdelisle.ca](http://www.jenniferdelisle.ca).

**ANGELA HIBBS** is the author of *Control Suppress Delete* (Palimpsest Press, 2017), *Sin Eater* (Arbeiter Ring Press, 2014), *Wanton* (Insomniac Press, 2009), and *Passport* (DC Books, 2006). She lives in Peterborough, Ontario, the traditional territory of the Mississauga First Nations.

**WAJAHAT MAHMOOD** is a former line cook, a former bookkeeper, a current law student, a lifelong writer, and poet. He hopes to one day publish a cookbook.

**FERESHTEH MOLAVI** is an Iranian-Canadian novelist and essayist who has been living in Toronto since 1998. She has published many books in Persian and several books in English. Her latest novel, *Thirty Shadow Birds*, was published by Inanna in 2019.

## Summer Stock

The early days of summer feel like a period of transition for many as school ends, swimming pools open, festivals pitch their tents and the chimes of ice cream trucks echo through the streets. In a way it's like summer camp for everyone, a couple of months where beautiful weather, splash pads and barbecues provide a welcomed relief from cold grey days or the monotony of stuffy hours at a computer.

This summer, more than the last two, represents an even greater transition, as many of us venture out to in-person events for the first time since the pandemic started. Word on the Street came back (and at Queen's Park too), and in-person book launches started in the late spring. Jazz festivals and carnivals are now back.

As we emerge from this pandemic, we take stock of what we lost and what we gained. We are not the same people we were in the winter of 2020.

We can look back at that first summer of the pandemic with Eva Tihanyi, in her poem "2020 Vision." We can look back at loved ones we have lost with Molly McCarron in "If/Then." We can assess the damage of quarantine, the impact it had on marriages and families, as in Maria Kubacki's "Bullseye."

Going forward, let's also take stock of the perspective we have gained, the appreciation for the small things we have missed.

Although doctors advise us to be cautious, to stay masked in crowded spaces and to take other reasonable precautions, we have more leeway to enjoy activities that we had shelved. Keep that mask on but get out and support your local businesses, find an outdoor concert or ballgame to watch, visit the neighbourhood bookshop. See the people who mean the most in your life while taking care to keep them safe.

Just like you, the *Quarantine Review* continues to grow and change, and figure out what it can be in rapidly changing times. Two years into this project feels both substantial and like nothing at all. The magazine and podcast continue to find their footing on the shifting ground of our time. There are still more stories to tell, more voices to share, and more experiences to explore together.

Enjoy the warm sun, the green grass, the laughter of children in the park or live music emanating from a band shell. Don't forget to bring a good book along with you, wherever you go. If you need recommendations, we have some excellent suggestions on page 23.

— Jeffrey Dupuis and Sheeza Sarfraz

EDITORS

Jeffrey Dupuis | Sheeza Sarfraz

The Quarantine Review is published by Dundurn Press Ltd.

©The Quarantine Review, 2022

We would love to hear from you. Write to us at [thequarantinereview@gmail.com](mailto:thequarantinereview@gmail.com) or connect with us online.

[@quarantinemag](https://twitter.com/quarantinemag)

[@quarantine\\_review](https://www.instagram.com/quarantine_review)

# Bullseye

Maria Kubacki

During the first lockdown, when the pandemic was a novelty and looked like it would only last a few weeks, Ian felt more alive than he had in years. Whereas Anna was paralyzed by the daily tally of the sick and dying, and tuned out as much as she could, Ian was mesmerized by the increasingly bleak reports out of Italy and New York and reported back to her, a macabre play-by-play.

In northern Italy, ICUs were reaching capacity and they would soon have to start triaging patients, the ventilators reserved for the strongest who might have a chance at survival. In New York, morgues were overflowing and they were stacking bodies in refrigerated trucks.

“New York looks like it’s set to outpace Italy,” he would shout to her from the living room while she made supper, like he was calling out the score in a close game.

In Ottawa, the numbers were low, a handful of new cases a day, only a few hundred in total, but a quiet panic was in the air. Grocery stores were rationing toilet paper and flour, and there was no hand sanitizer to be found anywhere.

Ian felt energized, like he was born to live in dangerous times. He threw himself into emergency preparations based on worst-case scenarios of widespread shortages, returning from Costco with 100 rolls of toilet paper, 10 kg bags of flour and giant jars of peanut butter. An early adopter of masks, he made stacks of neatly pleated ones on his mother’s

old sewing machine which had stood gathering dust in the basement for years. He was addicted to COVID Twitter and fell asleep doomscrolling every night.

Anna, a meditative (or maybe lazy) person, lover of luxury and idleness, never planned for anything and avoided discomfort. She was impressed by Ian’s energy, and loved him for his brave, boyish heart. Her response to the lockdown was to withdraw into binge-watching British and Scandinavian murder mysteries, napping excessively and dosing herself steadily with CBD oil throughout the day—a habit she had picked up from their daughter Eva, home from her first year at McGill and also in self-soothing mode. Sam, who had already been struggling in school, took the pandemic as an opportunity to give up on school altogether and lived a subterranean life in the basement, playing video games until 3 a.m. and sleeping until noon every day. Not alone, like a future school shooter, but socially, on his headset with his friends, playing a game where they were all on an island and had to kill everyone else, and eventually each other, in order to survive.

At supper time, Ian would pick at Sam half-heartedly but Sam played the pandemic card, hinting that he was stressed and maybe a little depressed.

“And it’s only Grade 11,” he pointed out.

Ian and Anna both taught at his school (Ian, history and Anna, English) and knew too much about his life—his friends, his mediocre marks, when he skipped gym.

He was under-performing long before COVID. But it was hard to tell if he was just playing them or really was depressed so Anna told Ian to lay off, just in case.

They were all restless and on edge, suddenly confronted with too much time, too much of themselves and too much of each other. Being alone was sad and boring but so was being together.

In the evenings, when he wasn't watching the news, Ian devoted himself to researching pandemics, reworking his grade 12 history curriculum to add a module on the Spanish flu, into which he sneakily added as a detour through the Black Death.

While Anna and Eva drank large glasses of chardonnay, he educated them, against their will, on the flu, which killed between 50 and a 100 million worldwide.

"The victims' skin would turn blue and their lungs would fill with fluid and suffocate them," he told them as he typed up his notes for his classes, which he delivered via video from the safety of his study.

"Fifty or 100 million—that's a pretty big margin of error," said Eva, sipping her wine.

He read with morbid fascination about how the Black Death swept through medieval Europe in wave upon wave, killing healthy young people within hours, leaving piles of bloated, rotting bodies in the streets. Victims would wake up with chills and a fever, followed by weakness, exhaustion, diarrhoea, vomiting and swollen lymph nodes, and, for many, an agonizing death. In urban centres up to half the population was wiped out.

"Imagine if half the population of Ottawa died."

Anna did not want to imagine. She felt her neck for swollen lymph nodes and read his Black Death notes over his shoulder. A quote from Piers Plowman, in bold, jumped out at her: "God is deaf nowadays and will not hear us."

Within the first months, it became apparent that in Ontario at least, it was mostly old

people dying in nursing homes. Which was sad, but a relief for everybody else, and with cases coming down, things opened up again. Everyone who didn't have a cottage was desperate to rent one or book a campsite. Anna disliked camping, had only gone along when the kids were little because it seemed wholesome and character-building for them, but Ian wore her down. He worried that Sam would disappear further into his gamer lifestyle and made the case that it would help them bond as a family and learn some survival skills. Even Eva was persuaded to go along to distract her from her missing her boyfriend, who had moved back in with his family in Montreal. Anna agreed to go but only if they rented a trailer. They managed to book a site at a lake in Algonquin Park, a relatively civilized spot with a store and laundromat. Eva, obsessed with tracking her boyfriend's social media activity, was reassured that there would be cell reception so that she could continue her forensic surveillance of the girls whose photos he liked and commented on.

"Look at this one—she's obese!" She showed Sam a photo of a curvy girl with long fake lashes, hoping he would agree she was fat, but he didn't.

"She looks like a supermodel."

The day they left it was hot, hot, hot and as humid as a tropical rain forest.

Anna woke up first, feeling bloated and irritable, like she was about to get her period. She had to shake Ian awake but once up he sprang into action, barking orders at them like a scout troop leader or the drill sergeant in *Full Metal Jacket*. He checked his list of supplies: Deet, alcohol swabs, Band-Aids, Benadryl, compass, life jackets, flares. Anna was exhausted just from the list.

"Relax," said Eva, also pre-menstrual, as Ian herded them towards the rented truck that would pull the giant trailer.

"Why do we need a compass and flares?" Sam asked as Ian pushed him out the door.

"We're going to be in a trailer at a campground."

They stopped at a gas station a couple of hours from the city but after that it was trees, trees, nothing but trees as they made their way north. When Anna looked back at Sam and Eva, they were asleep, Eva with her mouth open and Sam with his head down and his arms crossed, just like when they were little. At first Anna tried to stay awake, looking out the window and reading *Heart of Darkness*, which she was thinking about teaching her Grade 12 students in the fall. But her thoughts started to meander and float, and she was hypnotized by the trees, road and power lines. It was peaceful but disorienting, like falling into a dream landscape that has no beginning or end. The fir, spruce and birch they were passing blurred into the jungle from the book as she drifted in and out of sleep, and the civilized world slipped away behind them.

The lake was bigger than it looked in photos and everyone exclaimed how beautiful it was and agreed it was so refreshing to be in nature. Anna thought it was mediocre and not worth the drive—it had a boring shape and the shoreline was flat, the bottom rocky—but she didn't want to rain on Ian's parade. As soon as they parked and set up the trailer, Ian was off to scout out canoe and kayak rentals, with Eva and Sam following in search of cellphone reception near the park store.

When Ian came back, he brought Richard and Marianne with him, a couple he had met at the store who, it turned out, were also from Ottawa—academics Anna guessed correctly, based on their Patagonia everything, expensive looking glasses and their pale, nerdy daughter, Olivia, who looked to be a couple of years younger than Sam. They had started chatting at the recycling bins. "What are the chances!" they all exclaimed when it turned out they had the site next to them. They should have a fire later, Ian suggested. "I am not entertaining their hobbit kid," Sam hissed to Anna, who

also resented Ian for railroading them all into what might turn into a nightly commitment. He had a habit of picking up strays wherever he went.

Ian built a blazing fire by the edge of the lake that night after supper and while the professors, as they called them privately, were stiff and boring at first, spouting off about their progressive politics and Olivia's giftedness, they loosened up after a few drinks. They all drank too much and laughed too hard at nothing, in the way you do with people you have nothing in common with. Eva got drunk with them, while Sam sat in sullen silence next to Olivia, not even pretending to listen when she went on about Harry Potter and her advanced math class.

"Is she autistic?" he asked when they got back to the trailer. "No, seriously."

Anna, Eva and Sam slept in in the morning, and lingered over coffee and eggs. By the time they wandered down to the beach, Ian was having his second coffee with Richard and Marianne. This became the routine for a few days but as predicted, Ian quickly grew bored and was easily persuaded to try and avoid them. He and Anna argued a bit whether it would be better to start getting up and jumping in the kayaks early, or hide in the trailer until noon and only come out when the others were having lunch. They decided on alternating randomly between the two so that there would be no discernible pattern to their behaviour, and within a few days successfully established an invisible boundary between their two campsites. Anna felt relieved to be free but also a little guilty so she waved to Richard and Marianne from a distance every day, although she made sure to turn away from their hopeful, needy faces and make her way quickly towards the water before they could get any ideas.

The weather was perfect, cloudless skies day after day. They swam or kayaked lazily around or read by the lake with a fresh breeze

on their faces and the pandemic somewhere far away like a bad dream.

Ian seemed to have forgotten his plague obsession, and Anna was surprised by how happy she was and how much she actually liked camping—even the daily housekeeping tasks, which took twice as long as they did at home but gave structure to the day. Every meal and snack had to be planned so as to use up all the food they had brought, perishable items first. Just washing the dishes in the tiny sink in the trailer took forever and preparing anything on the little bit of counter was awkward.

At first they all took turns cooking and cleaning but somehow she ended up doing everything by herself more and more often because everyone else would run off after meals—Sam and Eva to the camp store so they could go on their phones, and Ian to dump their garbage or get more firewood, but often he would stay and chat with whoever was hanging around. Anna enjoyed the break from having too many people in too little space but after a while she resented being a pioneer housewife while the rest of them just lived their lives, like she was the only adult and everyone else was a child.

Towards end of the first week, a heat wave set in and brought with it a restlessness and irritability that descended on them like an invisible fog. The days suddenly seemed endless. It was starting to feel like being in lockdown, but in a trailer at a lake. They only saw each other, being wary of the infectious potential of the other campers, and they had less and less to talk about. When Ian asked Sam what's new, Sam said, "Nothing. You were there for all of it."

Anna and Eva both started their periods, their cycles in sync, which made them grumpy and lethargic. They increased their CBD intake and retreated into the trailer to get away from the heat and watch shows they had downloaded onto their laptops. Coincidentally they were both watching true crime. "Don't murder me in my sleep," Ian joked. Sam spent most of his time near the

store, where he could get a signal and play games on his phone.

In the midst of the torpor and unease, a leopard print cat appeared at the edge of their campsite one morning, like a hallucination or a mirage. Anna hadn't had her coffee yet and thought she was seeing things but Ian saw it too. The cat languidly made its way towards them and started rubbing up against Ian's legs, purring and arching her back. A sleek dog with a velvety grey coat and startlingly blue eyes came next, followed by its owner, a tall, blonde woman.

"LOL, I am so sorry! My babies are so rude," said the blonde woman but did not seem sorry at all, and Anna instantly knew that she and her exotic pets would encroach on their campsite again whenever they pleased.

The cat was a Bengal and the dog a Weimaraner, the blonde woman said, unasked, and Anna realized they must be expensive. What would it be like to be that beautiful and entitled, Anna wondered when she saw that Ian was thunderstruck by this apparition of blondness who introduced herself as their neighbour, Candace.

"I didn't know they allowed pets, or I would have brought our dog," Anna said sulkily, but thought maybe it was a good thing they hadn't because the Weimaraner would have bullied their submissive golden doodle.

"Technically you're supposed to have them leashed," said Candace, "but mine are usually so good."

In other words the rules didn't apply to her.

"We're animal lovers so they can come visit anytime," said Ian, kneeling down to pet the cat, who lewdly turned her ass up at him.

"You should come over for a fire tonight," Ian said.

"Yes, definitely!" Anna chimed in, not meaning it.

They discovered over drinks that Candace and her equally tall and blond husband, Kevin, were from their neighbourhood, the more affluent part where the houses were identical and as big as barns. Anna drank to drown her resentment at being forced to socialize with

these people and became slightly belligerent.

"You two look like you could be brother and sister! No, seriously, I'm sure you must hear that all the time."

Further proof that Ottawa is the biggest small town in the world, their son was the same age as Sam and, in fact, was in some of his classes.

"You probably know our son, Matt!" Candace said.

"Yeah, everybody knows him," Sam said, which made Candace beam with pride but later Sam told Anna he was one of the obnoxious, competitive hockey players.

"Apparently he had sex with an unconscious drunk girl at a party last year."

Ian protested that was probably just a rumour. Sam was just glad that Matt had stayed home.

"Please tell me these people are not going to be our new best friends for the week," Anna pleaded with Ian in bed that night.

"I had fun with them. I like them," Ian said.

"You like everyone. It's your best and worst quality." Ian pointed out that he didn't like their other neighbours and had agreed to avoid them.

She couldn't argue with that, although the professors were starting to seem like the lesser of two evils.

"Anyway, you were sitting too close to them, especially her. We're in a pandemic, remember?"

But Candace was a close talker and it was hard to keep a distance from her. When Anna ended up sitting next to her at the beach she would find excuses to get up and fiddle with her bags and towels and then would subtly pull her chair over until it was the recommended six feet away. But when Ian was the one sitting next to Candace, she noticed that he did not pull away and did not seem to mind her being so close.

"What if she coughs on you?" she asked, even though Candace was not coughing and was the picture of good health.

Now that the connection was established, they had a new routine featuring Candace and Kevin. To avoid them, Anna implemented the same strategy she and Ian had devised to confound their other neighbours, setting her alarm for 7 am some mornings and racing to the beach and then going back to the trailer for an early lunch some days, and other days lying in bed bored and restless waiting for them to go in for their lunch before venturing out once the coast was clear. Candace noticed and jokingly accused her of avoiding them, which Anna denied.

Ian was oblivious to their secret, almost imperceptible catfight. He was happy to have sporty, outdoorsy companions and played Frisbee or tossed a football around with them while Anna read or hid in the trailer. Candace, determined to have everyone have fun her way, would sometimes burst into the trailer unannounced, trying to cajole and bully her into joining into whatever game they were playing. Anna was not surprised to learn that Candace, with her loud, superficial friendliness and unsubtle beauty, was in real estate. She vaguely remembered seeing her aggressive face on for sale signs with her icy intense eyes, the same Aryan blue as her dog's. Kevin was fine—he was quiet and not as dumb as he looked. He was a financial advisor but had done a double major in economics and history. He listened with seemingly genuine interest as Ian held forth about the Black Death, and talked books with Anna. Sometimes he would stay on the beach and read with Anna while Ian and Candace took off on a hike or out in the canoes.

"I can't keep up with her," he confessed to Anna, as they watched Ian and Candace paddle off across the lake until they became tiny specks off in the distance.

Towards the end of their second week, the weather turned cool and overcast, too cool for the beach, and they were all bored once again.

"I know—let's do an overnight canoe trip!" Candace said one night as they were sitting around the fire, drinking out of boredom.

She reminded Anna of a spirited horse, always jumping around and tossing her hair.

Anna leaned over and whispered to Ian, “She’s so annoying!”

But Ian wasn’t listening.

“That’s a GREAT idea!”

They would have to canoe to the far end of their lake and then portage to the next one over. Kevin said it sounded hellish and Anna agreed.

“We should just stay here and read on the beach,” he said, but neither of them wanted to stay behind while Ian and Candace had an adventure.

Even Sam and Eva were on board, desperate for a change.

The preparations gave Ian the purpose he had been lacking. There were canoes and tents to rent, wilderness camping things to pack (flares, compass, a small axe). The next morning, after Eva and Sam ran over to the store to text their friends and check their social media one last time, they set off.

---

The lake was clear and still, like a mirror, and they glided across it effortlessly, everyone in their own private morning world, slowly waking up, except Ian and Candace, who kept shouting to each other across the convoy of canoes. Ian thought the portage was up around the next bend in the shoreline, but looking at her map, Candace thought that was the wrong one, that the one they wanted was further. Anna tried to tune them out by reading.

“Who brings a book on a canoe trip? Anna, you are hilarious!” Candace said and laughed like it was the funniest thing ever, and Ian laughed too.

Around noon they stopped at a rocky little beach to eat and stretch their legs, and like a child Anna asked how much further. She was stiff and sore already from sitting in an uncomfortable position for so long and was all twisted up with period cramps. Eva also complained of cramps and

slinking off to find a private spot to change her tampon.

By now they were quite far from their trailers, which looked tiny off in the distance, when Anna looked back. They had registered with the park office, telling them where they were camping and when they were planning to return, so that if they didn’t come back as expected within three days, someone would come looking for them. Three days seemed like a long time before anyone would start to worry about them.

After some further debate between Ian and Candace about where exactly they were and where they were going, they set off once again and not long after saw a yellow sign indicating they had arrived at a portage, which they thought (hoped) was the right one. It was. According to the sign, it would take them to the lake with the island. They got out and hoisted their knapsacks onto their backs and their canoes over their heads and started trudging along the trail, which was rocky, uneven and overgrown so that when they came to a fork that was unmarked they weren’t sure whether to keep going or turn off to the left. To Anna it all looked the same—she was blind to whatever meaning the trees and the rocks held, like she was trying to read a foreign language in another alphabet. They turned left and kept going deeper into the dense evergreen forest.

“Are you sure this is the right trail?” Sam asked in a whiny voice, which embarrassed Ian.

“Man up!” Ian said in a booming, fake voice that Anna had never heard him use before. “Don’t be a little bitch,” he added, which made Candace snort with laughter.

“Sorry bud—just kidding,” he said afterward, putting his arm around Sam, clearly feeling guilty.

“Fuck this fucking shit,” Sam muttered under his breath, even though he had no choice but to trudge on.

Eva complained that she had a rock in her shoe and Anna twisted her ankle because she wasn’t paying attention. By now, the three of them were starting to hate Candace a little

and, by extension, Ian, who seemed to be a different person when he was around her.

About an hour in, Anna’s ankle was so painful and wobbly that she had to stop and rest. She was relieved when Ian announced he could see the lake up ahead and that they would set up camp on the shore for the night. They ate canned beans and bread, drank shots of whisky and listened to the loons calling.

Ian and Sam shared a tent, and Anna shared one with Eva. Eva couldn’t sleep because they could hear the yip yip of coyotes or wolves off in the distance and she was worried they would smell their menstrual blood and come and find them.

“Don’t worry, they’re too far away and they would never attack a big group of people,” Anna said, as though she knew anything about the ways of wolves and coyotes.

Eva was still worrying about her boyfriend being tempted to cheat on her while they were apart and said she wanted to go back to the campground in the morning so she could text him. Like Anna, once she got something in her head she couldn’t let it go and went around and around in circles. Anna tried to reassure her they wouldn’t get eaten by wolves or coyotes and that her boyfriend hadn’t forgotten her, but Eva was wound up and starting to have a panic attack, and she had forgotten her CBD capsules back at the trailer.

Anna didn’t know what to do so she pulled *Heart of Darkness* out of her backpack and started reading it out loud like a bedtime story. Eva listened for a long time before falling asleep, and the next morning she said, “Who is Kurtz in this scenario? Daddy, or Candace?” And they both laughed, partly because they were happy to have survived the night.

---

The island looked magical from a distance as they paddled towards it and they all agreed it had been worth it, although no one except maybe Ian and Candace really believed that.

Once they were actually on the shore, it was a bit of a letdown.

“It’s an island with a bunch of trees and rocks on it,” Sam said after wandering around for a few minutes.

They sat down on some rocks and chewed on some beef jerky, and looked back at the shore from which they had paddled, which also now, from the vantage point of the island, looked magical, although it had not felt that way when they were on it. Only Ian and Candace insisted on hiking around to the other side of the island, in case there was something interesting on the other side.

“Like what?” Kevin asked. They didn’t know, but made the rest of the group all wait for over an hour while they went to find out.

“So, did you find anything exciting?” Anna asked when they got back, flushed and sweaty.

No, but it was a good hike, they said, not looking at each other.

\*\*\*

A few days later Candace woke up with a chill and by lunchtime she was shivering and felt dizzy. She spent the day in the trailer, slept 12 hours that night and the next day woke up still exhausted, and complaining of a headache and aches and pains. Had she eaten something, had she been exposed to anyone to who was sick, Anna asked. Ian knew immediately what she was thinking and said not to be ridiculous; that Candace had been with them for the last week and there was no way she had been in contact with anyone who could be infected. Cases were so low and no one who had COVID was camping, for god’s sake. But Candace admitted that she had seen her girlfriends the night before leaving on the camping trip and that one of them had recently been to Toronto, where cases were surging. The following morning, Candace looked flushed and puffy. There was fear in her wide blue eyes, which almost made Anna feel sorry for her, but mainly she was afraid for herself, Ian and the kids, and angry with Ian for insisting on going on the canoe trip.

She accused him of letting Candace breathe on him.

“When?” he asked.

“On the island.”

He said it was just her anxiety making her paranoid. No, he had not let Candace breathe on him. Or kiss him?

“For fuck’s sake,” he said.

Anna was not used to him swearing. She asked if he was sure.

“For fuck’s sake,” he repeated, but later when she thought about it she realized he had not actually said no.

Candace and Kevin left, and the following day Anna and Ian packed up and headed home as well, Anna obsessively worrying that Candace had infected them and asking Eva to check her head to see if she had a temperature.

“Why are you being such a psycho?” Eva asked her, putting the back of her hand against her forehead, like she was the mother and Anna was the child.

“It’s cold. I think you’re dead.”

Even after they were safely back in Ottawa, in their family bubble once again, Anna would lie awake at night nauseous with suspicion, calculating the risk of contagion, going over in her mind all the times Ian and Candace could have been alone together.

Her worst fears came true when Ian spiked a fever. His glands were as big as plums, and he complained of a headache, a rarity for him. He would get up and get dressed but by the time he came down and made a coffee, he was exhausted and had to lie down again. Sam and Eva jokingly referred to his *Downton Abbey* flu, because he only had enough energy to crawl down to the family room and watch episode after episode for hours on end. He liked it for the history, he claimed.

“Sure, Dad, we believe you,” Sam said. “Maybe you should stop being a little bitch and get off the couch.”

But then he immediately felt bad, because Ian was so weak and vulnerable.

“Just kidding, Dad.”

Anna watched over him anxiously, and assessed him against a list of COVID

symptoms. “Do you have a sore throat, are you short of breath, does your chest feel heavy?”

She brought him various pungent foods to make sure he hadn’t lost his sense of taste and smell. He hadn’t, which reassured her, but only somewhat, because not everyone had those symptoms. She bought an oximeter and measured his blood oxygen level several times a day, ready to call 911 at any time if it dipped but it was consistently near perfect at 98 or 99.

When the telltale red rash with the white spot in the centre appeared on his thigh, she googled it and was relieved: Lyme disease. He had probably picked up a tick when they were camping. Caught early, it was easily treated with antibiotics and he was back on his feet in no time.

Candace too had recovered, although they still weren’t sure what she had, as she refused to get tested, Kevin told Anna when she ran into him while grocery shopping.

“We have to have you guys over,” he said as they were parting, and they texted back and forth a few times trying to plan it but there was always something, the timing never seemed to work, and they didn’t see each other until the following spring.

They were in another lockdown and everyone was constantly going for walks because there was nothing else to do. Anna was walking their doodle, Henry, at the neighbourhood dog park when she got distracted by her phone and let the leash slip, and Henry took off, bounding around like an idiot and indiscriminately play bowing at every dog. Most ignored him, except for an elegant grey hound, who pretended to be aloof but suddenly snarled viciously and tried to bite him as he bounced by. Henry yelped in pain.

“Control your dog!” the owner of the grey dog yelled from up the path.

Anna was about to yell back, spoiling for a fight, a surge of dog park rage welling up in her, when she saw it was Candace with her Weimaraner.

“Oh, it’s you!” Candace said, laughing, as she approached holding her beast on a short

leash, encroaching on Anna’s invisible six-foot bubble of personal space.

“Oh, Anna, always daydreaming,” she said, shaking her head. “I’m sorry he got a little aggressive, but he does react to untrained dogs.”

Anna felt at once both enraged and embarrassed for herself and for Henry.

And then she saw it: a bullseye on Candace’s leg, just above her knee. For a moment she was disoriented, but then she realized it was just a coincidence, that Candace and Ian had been bitten separately, almost a year apart. Candace saw her staring at her leg and said it looked worse than it was, that thankfully she had caught it in time and was on antibiotics.

“It’s the tall grasses,” she said. “You have to be careful.”

Afterwards Anna told Ian she had seen Candace and that she also coincidentally had Lyme disease, and she watched his face carefully to gauge his reaction to hearing Candace’s name.

“Oh yeah?” he said distractedly, as though he could barely remember who she was.

But Anna felt a shame she couldn’t identify when she pictured Ian’s rash in more or less the same spot as Candace’s.

“You have to be careful,” Ian said.

“Yes, it’s the tall grasses.”



# Homes

Angela Hibbs

There's a wolf behind the bed  
Don't look, it will go away

There's a wolf behind the bed  
it passes you a book on how to get rid of it

The wolf eats your Grandmother  
She does not exit undigested  
The wolf writes your Grandmother's obituary

There's a wolf  
There's a wolf behind the bed  
but we live in a cave  
we sleep on the ground

There's a knock at the door  
it's time to vote for the wolf

# 2020 Vision

Eva Tihanyi

The lake sings its blues  
in this odd despondent summer like no other  
when we sit apart cherishing the air.

Your heart beats, your lungs breathe,  
your sad soul has been tempered  
by sad knowledge, yet still it holds  
a calloused trust in the goodness of things.

Don't hesitate: address the birds,  
the trees, the flowers.

Tell the remarkable world how much,  
despite itself, you love it.

## If/Then

Molly McCarron

Early on in the pandemic, when two weeks of staying at home had turned into more and it wasn't clear what lay ahead, my mother said she was worried she might never see some of the people she loved again.

This wasn't, at that point, something I'd contemplated. I thought my mother, often prone to drama, was just playing to form. I calmed her down. The restrictions would end! She would be able to travel again. People would take care of themselves, and each other. We'd all reunite when the virus had run its course, whenever that might be. In the meantime, we were just all frozen in place.

A year later, I was up early to write. I checked Facebook after about seven minutes, part of a routine of procrastination that world events have served to extend. There was a Memory on my timeline, something I'd posted twelve years earlier. I clicked on it and read through the comments below.

One of them was from my friend R's ex-wife, who had silently defriended me after their marriage fell apart, a year or two after her comment. I wondered idly what she was doing now. I knew she'd left him to go back to England, and then reconnected with someone from her youth. I clicked on her new married name. To my surprise, her profile was open and I scrolled down and enjoyed, in the nosy way social media enables, glimpses of life in a charming village. Stone walls. Flowers and foxes. And then, to my surprise, an old

photo I'd seen before of R, sitting behind a table covered in empty plates and glasses, looking into the camera with an inscrutable expression, his children goofy and pink-cheeked on either side.

I knew there must be something wrong. No divorced spouse, now married to someone else, posts photos of their ex-husband on social media to reminisce about the good times. That's how I found out R had died. The message above the photo was short, but confirmed my fear. I sat downstairs on my sofa feeling entirely, achingly alone with the news.

We'd met when we began working in the equity research department of a small investment bank at the same time. I'd been hired fresh out of business school. The process had kicked off when the research director phoned me so early in the morning I hadn't had coffee and I went along with his rambling story telling, offering wisecracks without worrying whether that was, in fact, wise. When he somehow got onto the War of 1812, I stopped him and said "Which war of 1812? There were two," and he laughed and said, "You mean Tchaikovsky didn't write an overture about Queenston Heights?" That got me in the door.

R, on the other hand, was a legacy hire in the classic mould, someone's friend's son. He was

smart—he had just finished a PhD in political philosophy, focused on a less-known British thinker; he possessed an obsessive mind and could spend hours researching some obscure corner of the market—but his number one qualification to work in finance was having a successful figure in the investment field as a father. He got invited to meetings because he was T's boy, was in the room because he was T's boy, was listened to because he was T's boy. While my job, in its early days, consisted of typing up a senior analyst's handwritten notes, distributing photocopies, and trying to teach myself, unaided, how to work the complex financial models a predecessor had created, R read about things he was interested in and got taken out for lunch.

When he wasn't being wined and dined, we ate together with the rest of our misfit gang of associates in the food courts of the huge First Canadian Place office complex and beyond: Szechuan Szechuan, Thai Island, where everyone flipped their ties back to avoid splashes when eating noodles. Drinks after work, in groups. On our own. Once, during one of the many cold months of the Toronto year, just the two of us in dim twilight in the basement bar of a restaurant near the St. Lawrence market. R downed double-scotches so quickly I lost track, then looked at his watch, realized the time, and left hurriedly to drive home. I wasn't a driver, and was fuzzy on how much one could drink before exceeding the legal level of alcohol in your blood. How much had he drunk? How much did he weigh? He somehow got home to his wife and new baby safe and sound. Over a decade later, when R confessed to me that he was a now-recovering alcoholic, that image of him rushing out the door, key in hand, came to mind, and I felt a chill again, realizing that I shouldn't have let him go, should have slowed him down, grabbed the keys, made him call a taxi.

If you'd told me, when I was leaving the job that brought us briefly together, that R would be the friend I kept from that stage

of my life, I'm not sure I'd have believed you. But you never know which of the friends you meet along the way will stick. It takes years to shake out. R's funny and fierce observations of our snake pit of a workplace kept me sane during my short tenure there. But at the same time, he curried favour, masked his insecurity with head-tossing arrogance, demonstrated his love of the sound of his own voice in meetings where he didn't really need to speak. He could be dismissive and disdainful in a way that goaded me into responding in a childish manner. One of these exchanges happened on 9/11, when we came upstairs from the daily pre-market morning meeting to find a close-up image of a building with a gash in it on the TV in the corner, and watched in puzzled silence while the shocked anchors posited that a "small plane" may have got off course.

"They set off bombs in the towers before, maybe they've come back to finish it off," said R, and I rounded on him.

"That's ridiculous. They failed once, they're not going to target exactly the same place."

He raised his eyebrows, or shook his head. I reminded him of it every year thereafter. It's one of a series of minor personal events I remember from that day: Seeing the second plane hit. My parents each calling me to see if I'd heard from my sister, who worked in lower Manhattan. Crying into my coffee. Leaving the office because the market closed early. Dialling, dazed and dutiful, into an earnings conference call later that day. ("Great quarter, guys.") Picking up the book next to my bed much later that night (*Everyday Stalinism*, not much comfort) and then putting it down, forever. Which of those memories come to mind changes each year, like lenses in a kaleidoscope, but the sequence always starts with standing looking up at the television with R.

After I learned R had died, I spent hours poring over old messages and texts and

social media posts trying to reconstruct our friendship. At some point, I had changed email providers, erasing several years' worth of correspondence, but the hard drive of an old computer turned out to hold a cache of messages from that earlier email address. The collection wasn't comprehensive, suggesting there had once been a cull, based on a criteria I didn't recall. Oddly, the messages were all saved as replies from me, so that, for once, I ended up having the last word in all exchanges.

A dispiriting amount of the back-and-forth involved efforts to meet up with each other: from the floating of an initial idea, to selecting a date, through last-minute cancellations and apologies and renewed efforts. Someone always owed someone a drink (post-AA, a meal). I was busy, R was unreliable. He'd cancel dinner plans at the last minute, register us for lectures he then couldn't make, buy tickets to concerts I sang in and never show up.

But whether we succeeded in seeing each other in person or not, we were frequently in touch, messaging back and forth about our shared interests: messy family relationships, economics, Ladas, politics, obscure Canadian bands of the early nineties, the Toronto of our childhood, the golden light in Jerusalem, dim sum, spy movies. He was always there. We were mid-conversation for decades.

This type of audit is one of my rituals to mark the loss of someone in my life. For a period of days or weeks or months after the death of a friend or family member, all I want to do is remember them, think about them, talk about them. Everything else seems beside the point. I've come to understand that it's a way of holding on not only to my memories of the person who is gone, but also to the version of myself that person saw, and that no one else will ever know. I'll be left, soon, with only my own imperfect recall of that relationship.

"How close were you?" more than one person asked when I told them about R's death, as if grief works on some inviolable

if/then basis: if you are X, feel Y. I don't know how to measure that, but the formula, if there is one, is more complex, something with multiples and powers, like:

$$\frac{(((\text{time passed}) \times (\text{time spent})) + ((\text{number of regrets}) \times (\text{suddenness of death})))}{\text{potential future years of friendship}}$$

R had a house guest for the first few months of the pandemic, an overseas friend who came to visit out of the blue and then, as borders shut down, was stranded in Canada for months. "Come by for dinner!" R exhorted. We could stay outside, on the balcony. There was no way to know, at the time, that summer 2020 was a golden period of low case counts, that we should make the most of the low risk of socializing while we could. I assumed, when I demurred, that I was simply delaying a meal with R by another few months, standard operating procedure. Instead, he died suddenly later that year. We never had dinner on the balcony. We never saw each other again.

But I prefer to end here: not long before the pandemic began, the stars had aligned. We went together to a lecture on the difficult history of rock music in Russia, delivered to a small audience by a veteran Moscow music journalist. That this was the last thing we would do together was perfect, esoteric in all the ways that linked our mutual interests: music, Russian history, obscure corners of academia. We were happy to be sharing the experience together.

When the world first went quiet, I believed the pandemic was like a game of freeze tag, stopping us all in place. At some point, someone would tell us it was over, and then we'd pick up where we left off: go back to the office with the out-of-date calendar, rebook the plane tickets for the cancelled trip, pick up with the friends we'd only seen on screen for months. But I now see it more like a big wave, an overwhelming tsunami that came

all at once, then retreated, sweeping away everything here, but just a little there, eroding and reshaping the shore in ways we'll still be puzzling over for years to come. Everyone has lost something over the past couple of years. Or someone.

# Just Don't Panic

Wajahat Mahmood

My eyes to the earth,  
I am, rooted by vines.  
My breath is the wind.  
Rattling the barring woods

My eyes to the sky  
I am, borne aloft  
as the dirt crumbles  
and the clouds retreat.  
I free fall into the blue.

My heart remains unsettled.

So, my eyes to the horizon.  
I am, seeking balance.  
Leaping; earth to sky,  
Falling; sky to earth.  
light and unbound.

Until the sun sets,  
Until both turn to darkness,  
Until I am not.

# Sonnet for the Elbow Bump

Jennifer Bowering Delisle

O elbow bump, souvenir of first pandemic days  
when people tweeted that *King Lear* was writ  
in quarantine of plague, and made sourdough  
and worried over handshakes and replacing them.  
Yet you remain on the landing page of Zoom—  
stock pic of chicken arms in business casual.  
I'm not sorry that this office knock of bone  
did not come to pass, but miss its innocence.  
These models were first to learn to smile with eyes.  
And photographers who rushed to shoot what seemed  
a normal we might live in, new, but braced  
by touch, were neither profiteers nor prophets  
but humans hopeful for togetherness  
and quick reprieve, even as they feared their breath.

## The Summertime Hotlist

For your reading pleasure, we have assembled a list of recent releases—fiction, poetry, and nonfiction titles—to bring to the beach, on road trips, to a dock by a lake, or a park bench.

**MAD HONEY** — Katie Welch  
(Wolsak and Wynn, 2022)

Katie Welch's debut novel is one of those rare treats that shows the reader a small slice of the world through entirely fresh eyes. Welch does for beekeeping what W.P. Kinsella did for baseball or Ernest Hemingway did for fishing. Through her deftly-controlled description, we see bee colonies, and the humans that tend to them, from a perspective that is engaging and eye-opening. There is a stop-to-smell-the-flowers quality to the writing that reminds readers of what we tend to overlook in the world around us. We are invited to peel back the layers of Welch's characters and their almost idyllic, agrarian lives to see the pain and angst beneath. With *Mad Honey* as a debut, readers will wait with baited breath to see what Katie Welch comes out with next.



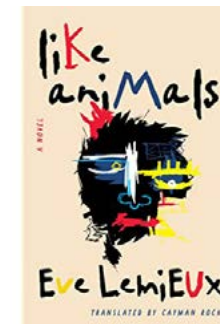
**THE SISTERS SPUTNIK** — Terri Favro  
(ECW Press, 2022)

Favro's own multiverse of madness, *The Sisters Sputnik*, is a journey into the fantastic. A master of storytelling with a penchant for 20th century history and pop culture, Favro's novel is part epiphany and part acid trip. There isn't just an appreciation of Frank Sinatra and other references from the past, but a deep love of storytelling, and an understanding of how these figures tell the story of our past and of the culture that spawned them and that they themselves spawn. This meta, multiversal narrative makes for a unique read from one of the most expansive imaginations in CanLit.



**LIKE ANIMALS** — Eve Lemieux  
(Dundurn Press, 2022)

The shifting goal posts between desire, neediness, and obsession are explored in Eve Lemieux's debut novel *Like Animals*. The Montreal-based actor, writer, and comedian takes readers on a journey of sex and longing for a young woman in La Belle Province. This stylistically-raw novel pulls readers in and leaves them vulnerable in a way that great debuts can, like the rollercoaster-rush of young love. The visceral impact of this book cannot be understated, leaving the reader feeling the highs and lows of its protagonist.



**YOU STILL LOOK THE SAME** — Farzana Doctor  
(Freehand Books, 2022)

Here, Farzana Doctor, a successful novelist, tries her hand at poetry and proves there is little she can't do. Fans of Doctor's novels will recognize her keen observations into relationships, changing bodies, and the push-pull of being a woman in a world that desires them one moment and is openly hostile the next. This poetry collection proves Doctor's versatility as a writer with a clear understanding of the craft.



**SHIMMER** — Alex Pugsley  
(Biblioasis Press, 2022)

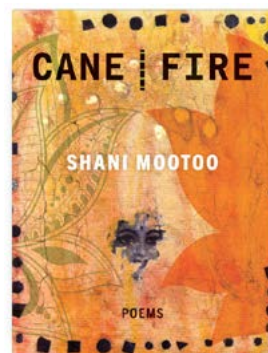
Alex Pugsley's *Shimmer* collects short stories written over 26 years—the first in the collection was originally published in 1996. There is something refreshing about reading the ten stories and seeing the evolution of Pugsley's technique. The *Aubrey McKee* author's short stories start with the blustery, swinging-for-the-fences style of a young writer and unfold into precise, but not compromised, prose. There is something very intimate, very personal about these stories that remind us of the power held by a good collection of stories. We not only see the author's growth as a stylist, but also witness the



growth and transformation, or failure to grow, of the characters. Puglsey gives us windows into lives that are both familiar and yet distant, exploring them within the limits of the form. *Shimmer* is a great collection for fans of short stories looking for a summer read that will stick with them through the changing seasons.

**CANE/FIRE — Shani Mootoo**  
(Book\*hug Press, 2022)

*Cane/Fire* represents Shani Mootoo's triumphant return to poetry after such acclaimed novels as *Moving Forward*, *Sideways Like a Crab* and *Polar Vortex*. That said, it's worth pointing out that *Cane/Fire* feels more like a hybrid work than simply a collection of poems. The order in which the poems are laid out, as well as the original artwork, makes this publication a layered experience that reads almost more like a story collection. This collection stands out of its technical prowess, while also being an excellent gateway to introduce new readers to the promise of what poetry can be.



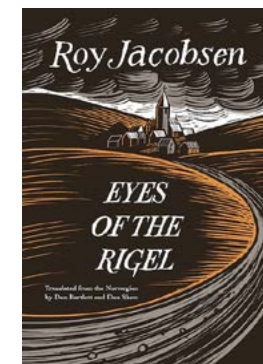
**GOD ISN'T HERE TODAY — Francine Cunningham**  
(Invisible Publishing, 2022)

Every so often, the world of Canadian literature is gifted with a collection of short stories that explores the fantastic through a very grounded lens. In the past, we have been given worlds that we recognize as our own, but long-dead ballplayers show up in fields of corn. In *God Isn't Here Today*, God works out of a downtown office, where the endless droning of ice cream truck jingles can drive you mad, where a person can find themselves transformed under the unflinching gaze of a stalker. Unlike many stories that flirt with the fantastic, Cunningham's do not present an idyllic, small-town homogeneity, but show the Canada that so much traditional literature ignored, the sex shops, the lonely streets, the police officers quicker to blame the victim than to be helpful. Cunningham's characters find light in darkness, music in silence, and moments of transformation when they least expect it.



**EYES OF THE RIGEL — Roy Jacobsen**  
(Biblioasis Press, 2022)

*Eyes of the Rigel* is Roy Jacobsen's third novel to feature Ingrid Barrøy. It picks up after World War Two, with Ingrid travelling on foot across post-war Norway to find the father of her infant child. Jacobsen's novel, both epic and intimate, takes us on a journey through a world in the process of rebuilding, a world of uncertainty that has a familiar feeling to many of us as we emerge from the pandemic. This translation by Don Bartlett and Don Shaw has beautiful rhythms and reads like an elegy. It is a great read for someone looking to be transported to another time and place and feel like they experienced it.



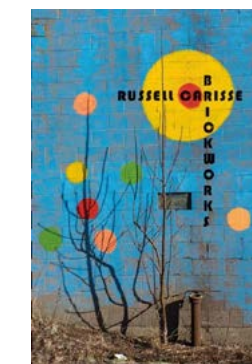
**GODS OF KIRANIS — Ronald A. Geobey**  
(Temple Dark Books, 2022)

For those looking for serious science fiction this summer, *Gods of Kiranis* delivers an epic space-opera with the in-built philosophies that make great sagas like *Star Wars* or *Game of Thrones* so riveting. With the second book in the series out later this year, now is the right time climb aboard the Kiranis train. This novel does not compromise on action and character development, meticulously building a world that feels very familiar. For fans of sci-fi looking for a new universe to explore, this NYC-Big-Book-Award winner is waiting for you.



**BRICKWORKS — Russell Carisse**  
(Frog Hollow Press, 2021)

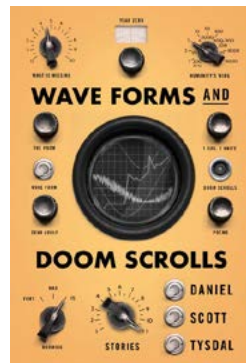
You will know brick masonry, construction and erecting walls after reading Russell Carisse's *Brickworks*, even if the how-to is beyond you. You will understand the words and the rhythms, the sweat and the labour. You will smell the brick dust and breathe it in by the lungful. Poetry is able to leapfrog a step, inputting sensations and understanding directly into our consciousness, and Carisse's chapbook does that perfectly. Their series of connected poems based on styles of brick masonry, tells the story of the construction of our material society, and those who toil to lay its foundation. Carisse's poems are almost



hypnotic in their musicality and one can't help but feel that something is lost while something is gained with each new construction project.

**WAVE FORMS AND DOOM SCROLLS — Daniel Scott Tysdal**  
(Wolsak and Wynn, 2022)

Daniel Scott Tysdal provides a conscience and sensitivity to our voyeuristic culture. His stories speak from the medium itself, understanding how we interact with information and how it interacts with us. In a world where reality is TV, and everyone is part of an audience, Tysdal shows us the impact of approaching life like an interactive media experience. Often the narrative voice of the stories take us into the characters' lives, well keeping us on the outside looking in, as though we see the world he creates through Instagram posts and TikTok videos. The effect is one not often found in short story collections and is an achievement in itself. This highly enjoyable collection transforms how the reader will see social media and the world outside of their smartphone and laptop.



**UMBOI ISLAND — J.J. Dupuis**  
(Dundurn Press, 2022)

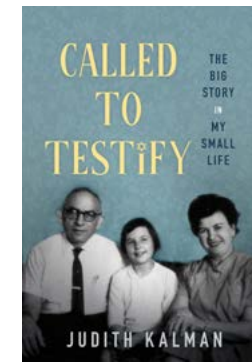
The third book in the Creature X series takes Laura Reagan and her TV crew to a lush, remote island of the coast of Papua New Guinea in search of the Ropen, a legendary creature some think may be an extant pterosaur. Within a day of their arrival, the TV crew witness something strange in the sky above the rainforest at night, and find the body of a primate researcher in their camp in the afternoon. A dangerous game ensues as Laura is both the hunted and the hunter, trying to stay alive in the rainforest long enough to find the killer and get her team to safety. The scale, action and mystery have all been dialed up from the previous books, making *Umboi Island* an exciting summer read.



**CALLED TO TESTIFY — Judith Kalman**  
(Sutherland House Books, 2022)

It is with a great sadness that one must acknowledge that the lessons of the Holocaust are still very relevant to today. As time passes, memory fades and revisionists assault history with their lies, it becomes more critical to understand the horrific acts of the past. Although for many of us gentiles it is easy to relegate the Holocaust to the distant past, pretending that its ramifications have not left scars on the generations since.

In Judith Kalman's memoir, we are shown a side of the story not often told. We meet a woman called to testify at a war crimes trial of an SS officer in his nineties. She is to testify about a half-sister who died in Auschwitz, a half-sister she'd never met. That is really the thread that bind the book together, the legacy of lineage, of family, of identity. Although death is never far from the central focus of the book, *Called to Testify* is about living, it's about carrying on in the wake of one of the most heinous acts in human history.



# In My Quarantine

Fereshteh Molavi

In my quarantine  
Morning coffee remains untouched  
Lumbering along the room, shortening the gap  
The wall mirror, a falling fog.

Not that I wanna question you, but what day is today?  
I hold my breath to hear my silenced mind  
What day is TODAY? I repeat.  
You sulk, and I recall the good old days, you know

Wake up, wake up, it's morning! Said my granny smiling  
One of the seven birds of the week is tweeting  
Open your eyes, open the window!  
Open your mind and let the bird pick up a name!

The good old days are gone, just like granny.  
The grey matter is shrinking into a dry seed  
And each of the seven birds is busy  
Burying their names, burying our games.

My noggin wasn't always this way, you know  
Who are you speaking to, oldie?  
I'm humming to my cold coffee cup  
Rehearsing the final forgotten song in front of the glass wall.

In my quarantine  
Time keeps hollowing and  
I fall into the fog  
Not hearing the scream of slivers, or the cry of the infinite void.

# Gesigawi'pit<sup>1</sup>

Angela Hibbs

Let us crush single-use champagne flutes into the last  
piece of land that isn't a landfill.  
Earth is Exhibit A of everything we're sorry for,

where we invented polyester and steroids to treat the rashes it produced  
and decimated cultures and offer essays in place of reparations.  
Intergalactic travel may not reveal the apologies  
or the implosion that could dislodge the Milky Way;

the way all good breakup fantasies go. The good hands one was in  
will not survive. Don't forget the if-only fantasy: we could've stopped  
driving, using Styrofoam, heating our homes, insert your cause here!

Better yet, admit that the planet always had an expiry date  
and it was a great place to do all our wrongs. Not even  
the Taylor Burton diamond will survive.  
But why end there? Any of our lists may survive.

Invent a word like civilized and bestow it willy nilly.  
Look up at some million year old stars. Stop counting.

---

<sup>1</sup>Moving fast, Mi'kmawi'simk



# “Story is a strange and slithering animal; it doesn’t like to be looked in the eye”

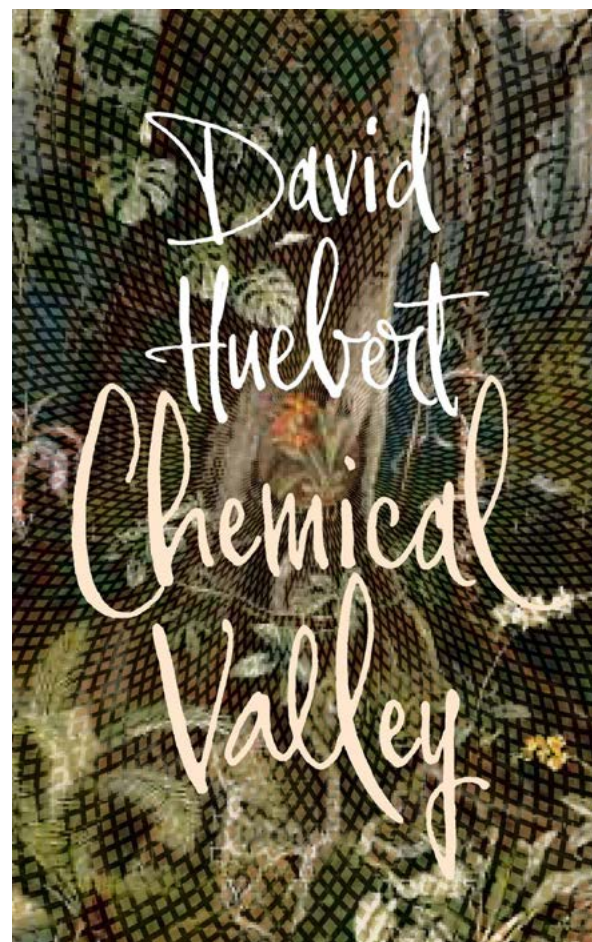
## An interview with David Huebert

For the fourth installment of Pros on Prose, a column where we interview writers about their craft, we chatted with David Huebert about the impact of the Industrial Revolution on the natural world and the intersection of environmental and social justice.

### What makes now the right time for a collection that tackles over a hundred years of industrial pollution?

In this moment, everyone I know is transfixed, terrified, arrested, panicked. Many people can’t even talk about this Event. Yet it’s on, or in, everyone’s minds, a collective fugue of despair. We’re living with a very particular dread that is felt widely, though differently. Environmental consciousness and angst has risen massively since 2017, when I was starting this collection. The question of the Anthropocene, of the human scar left in the geological record, of the massive extent of our self-poisoning, of the flattening of biodiversity, of what it means to live and interact with very few species and to feel always the melancholia of that loss, to sense somehow that our burden is to carry with us the agitated nonhuman dead—all of this is a massive wound in our species self-regard and our existential imagination.

It’s been fascinating going to readings and doing interviews where people basically expect me to predict the future. Someone asked me: “But is there hope?” I can’t answer, of course, and I don’t. My role as a fiction writer is just to see that person asking that question, to witness them. But the question itself suggests a lot about



the zeitgeist. We are scared, uncertain, desperate. I was just trying to make sympathetic characters who were living, directly and indirectly, in the clench of that. They’re just stories about people. Hurting people, struggling people, people trying to cope. We’re just animals, of course. Wounded animals with no place to flee. So we huddle together, snarl at outsiders, cope how we can.

### We are seeing a climate reckoning in CanLit. What are your thoughts on this moment, where books like yours can join Catherine Bush’s *Blaze Island* or Sydney Hegele’s *The Pump*, each in its own way a criticism of the effects of the Industrial Revolution?

I think there’s so much room for good, diverse environmental storytelling. *Blaze Island* and *The Pump* are great examples—I admire both those books. But I’m hesitant to say that climate writing is fundamentally new, in Canada or elsewhere. All stories written today are written in the throes of this ecological spasm; in that sense, all contemporary writing is climate writing. There are degrees of directness of approach and, as we all know, in storytelling the more direct approach is often not the strongest. But I’d look to Esi Edugyan’s *Washington Black*, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s *This Accident of Being Lost*, the work of Thomas King and the stories of Alistair MacLeod for some recent and older examples of powerfully ecological storytelling in Canada.

For me, story has always been powerfully ecological. As John Berger wrote in 1977, the “the first metaphor was animal.” The ancient Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh* is a profoundly ecological story, we might even call it an anti-logging story, though that would be reductive. Homer’s *Odyssey* is a menagerie of oceanic imagination and interspecies magic realism. The Eden stories of the Abrahamic religions contain powerful nonhuman atmospheres and moralities. Indigenous creation stories across Turtle Island and beyond show a less extractive

relation to the nonhuman. Eco-fiction texts that haunt me are those of Herman Melville, Toni Morrison, William Faulkner, and Zora Neale Hurston, among others.

I’m also hesitant to say I’m criticizing the effects of the industrial revolution. I’d say my characters are just trying to live in the drama of this long fallout. It’s important to remember that the industrial revolution has seen many good things, many conveniences for individual human beings, such as food distribution not previously possible and massively improved health care standards. What would it mean, really, to live without these things? How could we get there without eugenics?

I think that literature can help provoke productive discomfort, but I don’t think it’s at its best when it’s sounding overt alarms. I do think ecological action and ecological justice are vital and necessary. In some ways, we’re living in a very exciting time. Getting involved in environmental activism makes on part of a world historical endeavor that will lead to real world change.

I also see part of my role as a teacher and a writer as working towards decolonizing the metaphors of ecology. The environmentalist movement is, historically, problematically white and bourgeois. But the concerns of environmental justice intersect with the concerns of social justice; we can’t think one without the other.

### What did your research process look like for *Chemical Valley*? How was your storytelling influenced by what you found out?

In 2017, I happened to be living in London and I got wind of Sarnia. I took part in a Toxic Tour, led by water protector Vanessa Gray, who was working for an organization called Aamjiwnaang Solidarity Against Pipelines (ASAP). I also interviewed a couple of local petroleum workers, and I learned a lot about the industry, and about the interactions between environmental justice and social justice. From the industry workers,

I learned a lot through their reticence. They were scared, and they were suspicious of me. This job was, for them a route to upward mobility. And many of the refinery workers in Sarnia are Indigenous folks. We're talking about people who are trying to feed their families, people who are made to feel that their work, their livelihood is immoral. The whole thing is fascinating and difficult and messy.

I also dug through archives and old newspapers and I read many books: Gary May's *Hard Oiler*, Christina Burr's *Canada's Victorian Oil Town*, David D. Plain's *The Plains of Aamjiwnaang*, John Henry Fairbank's journals. In the early days, oil innovators were self-mythologizing in fascinating ways, and oil was seen as innovative and gleaming with promise. In December of 1861, *Scientific American* wrote that "There is nothing in the industrial world at the present time more remarkable than the production of petroleum." Reading about oil gradually led me to understand that oil is an intrinsically gothic substance, a slick black abjection rising up from the underworld, a zombie-like revenant of former vegetal life. Once I saw that, I could never unsee it.

**There is no doubt about the environmentalist theme of in your book, but it is not heavy-handed. The people at the centre of these stories are never short-changed to make a point. In the weaving together of the overarching theme and the lives of these characters, how did you weigh the two when writing these stories?**

Environmental subjects are polarizing and tend to get reduced through the discourses of climate martyrdom and sensationalism. Here, it seems, we are in the realm of Evil (oil barons) and Good (redemption in a head of organic kale). I try not to reduce things to Good and Evil; I seek to focus instead on mess, entanglement, convolution, and complication. I think that's a truer approach, and its one that suits the leaky metaphors of oils and swamps, what I think of, sometimes, as the dank.

One thing I always try to do, and which I think is one of fiction's great aptitudes, is to look for the unexpected angle. Environmental issues are so polarizing and, often, for me at least, Good and Bad is relatively clear. I want to unsettle those dichotomies, to open cracks in them and peer through.

One thing I did, for example, was to think about oil workers, to think hard about them, to see them. This is partly a class issue; given access to education and privilege, many people want to believe they can buy righteousness and get an EV rebate. I try to stay vigilant, remembering that these issues are complicated, and that human beings are complicated, that change is a lethargic creature. As a fiction writer, I think it's my job to look at various sides of a situation, and to see—to really look at and see—as many people with as many motivations and advantages as I can.

**When did petroleum begin to fascinate you as a writer?**

It's been there, from the beginning, in the murk of me. Growing up, all my heroes were contaminated. As a child of the 1980s, just an average consumer of pop culture, I was confronted again and again by mutants and mutation, radiation parables and the poetics of toxicity. Superman, Mad Max, the Incredible Hulk. I was drawn to all of these. Chernobyl was very, very real and threatening in the Western imagination. In that same childhood, I stared at gasoline rainbows in parking lots. I watched weeds grow out of concrete and was told, again, and again, that this was Progress, this was Civilization. I saw footage of 9/11, footage of the Gulf War oil spill. There were nights I had trouble sleeping.

Oil is perhaps the most insidious and ubiquitous species of toxicity that lives among us, a haunting spectacle, a deep time revenant. Petroleum is also, I think, a great metaphor. It comes up from the underground, gives us enormous power and monstrous energy, and

poisons us at the same time. Those metaphors are what I'm really trying to chase throughout the collection, as I track oil from its source and follow it outward, through different narrative atmospheres.

I also have oil in my blood. My grandfather worked for Shell Oil. He was an engineer, a specialist in lubrication. He designed sophisticated refineries. He might say he made the world cleaner, more efficient than it would otherwise have been. I suppose my work on oil is partly driven by atonement, but mostly by curiosity.

**Connections drawn between the natural**

**world and the artificial, as well as the conflict between the two, form the basis for so many of these stories. In the story "The Pit," we see Lilly, a high-tech sex doll, whom you flesh out as a character almost like any other. What did you set out to explore with this story and what do you think it tells us about our dependence on the synthetic?**

Drawing inspiration from thinkers like Donna Haraway and Bruno Latour, I'm suspicious of the idea that there is a "natural" world. One of the things I'm interested in putting pressure on is the very idea that some things are natural and others aren't. For instance: what's a natural form of love? The sex robot seemed to me an extreme manifestation of codes of perversion. I wrote a PhD dissertation, not too long ago, on the idea of species panic. So I'm really interested

**“ In an age where we manipulate our hormones with pharmaceuticals, carry plastics in our teeth, fuse our bones together with metal, divert rivers, and suck carbon out of the atmosphere, I'm not sure how much value remains for us in the idea of the 'natural'. ”**

in what happens when certain forms of life and love make us recoil. Sex robots do that for many of us, but they're also extremely popular, with a rapidly growing number of buyers, many of whom live with these robots as romantic companions. In an age where we manipulate our hormones with pharmaceuticals, carry plastics in our teeth, fuse our bones together with metal, divert rivers, and suck carbon out of the atmosphere, I'm not sure how much value remains for us in the idea of the "natural." And yet many of us still form a huge part of our identity around the natural and the unnatural.

Edward, the main character in "The Pit," lives in the heart of some of these contradictions, in the porous membrane between the given and the made. I don't think the story offers a lesson about the synthetic; rather I think it asks readers to empathize with both Edward and Lily, which, I hope, might provoke an uncanny feeling and perhaps some delightful confusion.

**Many stories have been written that highlight a disconnect between human beings and the natural world. In contrast, *Chemical Valley* seems to call attention to the disconnect between human beings in the industrial world, even though it touches all facets of our lives. How does that dissonance inform the way you construct your characters?**

We live in a moment of environmental melancholy. I'm profoundly interested in motivation, not as a crass craft tool, but in the way any human encounter is shaped and inflected by desire. I'm interested in moments when we talk to each other and don't listen, when we listen and don't hear. Communicative fissures are profound nodes of story. For example, I think that what goes unsaid in a family might tell us the most about that family. I think the thin-ness, the impoverishment of our contemporary ecological experience resonates and echoes in my stories through the distance between and among human beings. I think we all long for more grass, more trees, more earth and animals, and this is part of the reason we look for things in one another, in our phones, and those others reflect us sadly, saying, "Never enough."

**Did you labour to achieve the right balance between the despair and inherent coldness of the industrial world in which your stories are set and the humanity and warmth we find within them? It's very easy for a writer to go one way or the other, how did you keep yourself in the middle of that road?**

This one is not easy, but it is simple: love. First I need to get to know a character, then I need to figure out how to love them, nurture them. I find what they need and show that to the reader in flashes. Only then can the prose get to the level where it can affect people the way I want it to. And there it is: I make people up and learn to love them so I can build a rickety bridge between myself and readers. Because story is a strange and slithering animal; it doesn't like to be looked in the eye.

## Curbside

Suzanne Bowness

Blame the car radio,  
and the mission almost  
made routine by six long years,  
only this time at cemetery curbside—  
the post-season retrieval  
of the wreath off Dad's grave,  
fetched by a kind-faced man  
in an unprecedented time.  
He rises from his lawn chair,  
places my red silk ring of roses  
a social distance outside  
the Pine Hills gate.  
I hope I'm far enough to hide  
the tear tracks down my face,  
triggered by a dumb 80s pop song and  
my ardent singalong, that lulled me  
into forgetting this cruel April,  
and forced me to realize afresh  
that except for fleeting amnesia  
I will never be as carefree again.

# Field Guide to Weeds

Moni Brar

this season, florid and shapeless,  
is the one they will remember,  
the one they will tell  
to those who follow them  
from seed to seed to seed.

as hands hesitate, hover  
over soft-tissued bodies  
and settle on damp earth,  
eyes refocus, strain to recognize  
the value long forgotten,  
in plant and petal—

pasture sage  
[artemesia frigida]  
unbound spreads silvery blue mats,  
riddles the air with the sweat of sagebrush

shepherd's purse  
[capsella bursa-pastoris]  
erects stems from basal rosette,  
capped in rounded clusters

lamb's quarters  
[chenopodium album]  
with grayish axils, pulses the want of seeds  
as waxy leaves stretch skyward, sunward

watson's willowherb  
[epilobium watsonii]

with short rhizomes and long narrow fruit,  
births ripe pods adorned with white hair plumes

tufted vetch  
[vicia cracca]  
roots its thick wiry system,  
as seeds swell to cascade purple locks—

as hands hold them gently and re-evaluate  
what was once plucked away  
so quickly, so carelessly.  
this season, the weeds will thrive,  
and reclaim their worth.

# “I wanted to create a page-turner that inspired people to imagine a future that they can contribute to”

Charlotte R. Mendel on her new novel *Reversing Time*

Jeffrey Dupuis

In *Reversing Time* we see the strain that serious environmentalism can have on every day relationships and a person’s mental health. What, in your opinion, is the balance between blissful ignorance and a healthy existential concern?

Unfortunately, we cannot afford to be blissfully ignorant. The balance I strive for is to live my life as though there is a climate crisis, without letting it impact my life too negatively. In other words, I include a climate calculation in every choice I make, but that doesn’t mean that I don’t touch meat or boycott flying. I will go mad if I don’t leave NS once a year—and my individual contribution is so negligible that insanity isn’t a reasonable price to pay. But I only travel by plane once a year. That’s the balance. If you love meat, keep eating it, but cut down to a couple of meals a week. Walk more. Support sustainable companies. Write to your MP or MLA about your climate concerns. We can change so many aspects of our lives if we look at our decisions through the lens of the climate crisis. And doing this enables us to live with this crisis in a healthy way, because we avoid the despair that comes with inaction.

The YA audience understands the urgency of the climate crisis in a way that most people from older generations do not. How does that influence your approach to writing about this subject?

That is true; many young people understand the urgency, but they lack a sense of agency,

because action and change seem impossible in the context of huge issues like climate change. Our media spouts gloom and doom predictions and many CliFi (Climate Fiction) works reinforce the media’s negative outlook, because they are usually set in a post-apocalyptic world. How can our young people feel hopeful when the future is depicted as disastrous?

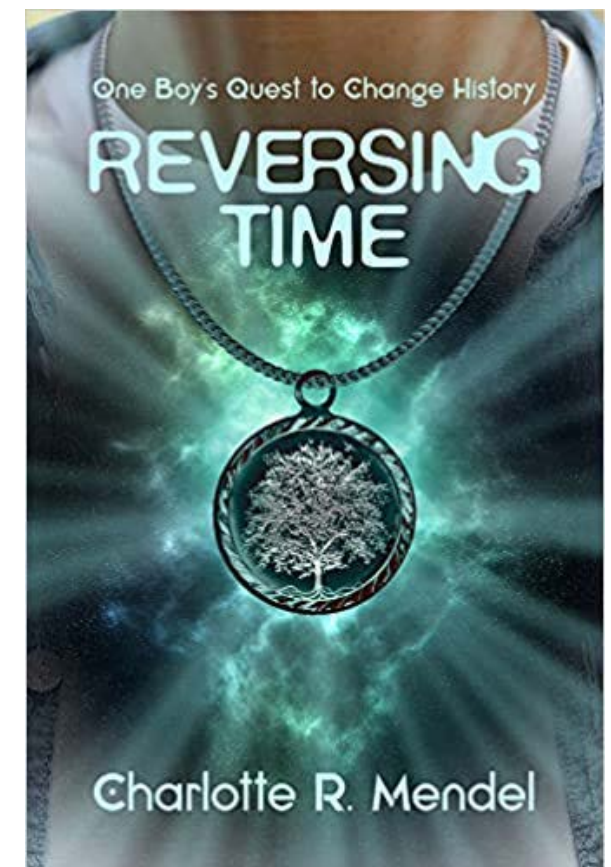
We need to find new and creative ways to engage our young people and give them a sense of agency.

With *Reversing Time*, I wanted to create a page-turner that inspired people to imagine a different future: a future that they can contribute to. The premise behind the book was to create an enjoyable read that—by tracing the protagonist’s hero’s journey from a bullied, frightened boy to a Gandhi-like hero—demonstrates the opportunities for personal action in the battle against climate change. I hope *Reversing Time* will give hope to young people, by showing that what we do matters.

It’s interesting to see the impact that Simon’s mother has had on her son. Although her environmentalist views make sense, her lifestyle has helped make her son an outcast at school. As a writer, did it challenge you to balance how your readers view the mum, Alley, and how Simon views her?

My first book destroyed any expectations I had about controlling how my readers view

“ We can change so many aspects of our lives if we look at our decisions through the lens of the climate crisis. ”



my characters. At the launch for *Turn Us Again*, someone in the audience said she loved the authentic way I had portrayed the Asperger tendencies of my character, as she had two sons with Asperger’s. “Thank you,” I replied, “Umm, which character has Asperger’s?” So I learned that readers interpret characters through the lens of their own experiences. Alley’s story was inspired by the famous folktale about the Selkie, in which the farmer falls in love with a seal woman and steals her seal skin so she cannot disappear back to the sea. I hope people, ultimately, will empathize with her—as Simon does.

Limiting your protagonist’s time travelling ability to his own lifetime is a stroke of narrative brilliance, locking readers into the near-term

consequences of climate change. Were you ever tempted to have Simon travel to a distant, post-apocalyptic future or did you always want to stay within a time period that readers themselves will experience eventually?

I don’t think there’s going to be an apocalypse. Since I have become involved in environmentalism, I feel like I am plugged into a huge tsunami of change. There are amazing things happening all over the globe and increasing numbers of people who are joining the fight.

Difficult times bring out the best in humans—this is an exciting time to be alive! The experts and scientists tell us we have a few years to avert catastrophic climate change and that time is now, so I wanted Simon to stay within this crucial time period. This is the time when each one of us has

to choose between being part of the solution, or part of the problem.

**If you had the magical, time travel-enabling pendant from your book, would you revisit your childhood or would you rather see the tail-end of your life to witness how it all turns out?**

That's such a good question I think I will use it during workshops, to encourage readers to place themselves in Simon's shoes.

Revisiting my youth might be interesting, but I'm not sure if I would learn anything new. On the other hand, I might get a nasty shock if I visit the end of my life—like Simon did—and the knowledge might impact my present in unforeseen ways. I think I would be like Alley, and venture only a few years from my current timeline.

**Alley, comes from an isolated island where everyone can time travel. Early in the book she makes the point that the ability to travel throughout your own lifetime leads to a greater wisdom, comparing it to democracies that function better through government transparency. Alley's community, however, hoard this ability, instead of sharing it with the world, when it could potentially convince humanity to abandon their exploitative and detrimental practices. Applying that allegory to our present, what responsibilities do countries like Canada have when it comes to sharing clean technology with other nations to ward off global devastation?**

The climate crisis doesn't respect borders; we have all caused this together and we must all fix it together—and rich nations have caused the most damage so they should lead the way towards the cure.

Canada has a responsibility to share any discoveries we make that can help in the fight to avert catastrophic climate change. I think countries understand this to a great degree; there's

a lot of collaboration over this crisis. Just like the globe came together to fight Covid, I think we will see a generous sharing of technologies and knowledge with the climate crisis as well.

**There's a very poignant scene in the book—an exchange between an environmentalist and an oil executive—where the conversation follows a familiar pattern among those who deny climate change. The oil executive first denies the scientific consensus, and after that fails, he falls back on the “what can I do” excuse, before attempting to poke holes in the environmentalist's position. How do you think we can best communicate the urgency of climate change effectively? Is it a matter of sticking to the facts or should we frame the discussion in terms of personal stakes, as Simon contemplates later in the book?**

Oh, the million dollar question—how to communicate the urgency of climate change? Sanctimony certainly doesn't work, so although in my heart I believe that anyone who is not living their lives as though there is a climate crisis is either ignorant or unprincipled—this is not a helpful communication if one wants to change people's behaviour. We need to empower people to see what will happen if we do act—because it's possible to change the future if we act now.

As I mentioned in my response to your second question, the problem is that people feel they have no agency against this huge threat. They point at the big corporations and China and think—what does it matter what I do, when they are polluting away? But if each of us focuses on our own emissions, then we'll be half-way there—and all power to the people who also sign petitions and use their democratic rights to influence the big corporations! As cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world: indeed it's the only thing that ever has.”

During WWII, when England had just suffered a military defeat and was under threat of German

invasion, people probably didn't feel a sense of agency either. But Churchill didn't do what our media are doing—list the dire consequences of a German invasion. He said, “We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the fields and in the streets. We will never surrender.” Zelensky isn't telling his people in Ukraine what will happen when the Russians win—he's encouraging them to fight. That is the type of language that gives people a sense of agency. That is what Simon is doing, as well as millions of people across the globe. I hope people feel both a sense of urgency, and a sense of agency, after reading this book.

**It was fascinating to see how you portray the impact of the climate crisis on family dynamics. Simon's parents occupy different sides of the debate and we see Simon being pulled in both directions. Was it challenging to depict this conflict without casting either parent as the villain?**

It was a conscious decision not to cast anyone as a villain. Who am I to judge someone who comes from a different place than me? Perhaps their whole life has been embroiled in the oil industry, and their transition involves a rejection of their previous life. How much more difficult that would be, than anything I have had to renounce! Humans have tribal tendencies, and are too apt to define the ‘other’. I feel that this is the root of racism, as well as the root of polarization. I have right-wing friends that deny that humans are causing climate change. I have left-wing friends that lament the situation every day, but travel around the world just the same. I don't think it's worse to be ignorant, than unprincipled, and I don't think the average footprint of a leftie is smaller than that of your average rightie. Millions are choosing to be part of the solution, but those who continue to be part of the problem aren't villains, even though “ignorant” and “unprincipled” are negative attributes. They're challenges. Perhaps they need a sense of urgency and agency to change.

**It has been argued that the cultural community, including writers, artists and musicians, can play a unique role in engaging our audiences in conversation about climate change and the environment. What do you think writers can bring to the table in the struggle against climate change?**

So much. Writers have traditionally played vital roles in great societal changes. Let's use art to inspire our readers' imagination to envision a future which is still within our grasp. Let's use art to show our readers what they can do to get there.

# The Given

Eva Tihanyi

In the beginning there's always a road  
but all roads end, and time owes us nothing.

Memory orders up the old defeats,  
dredges the past forgotten days.

The heart waxes and wanes  
predictable as the moon.

The obliging sun does not distinguish  
between good and evil.

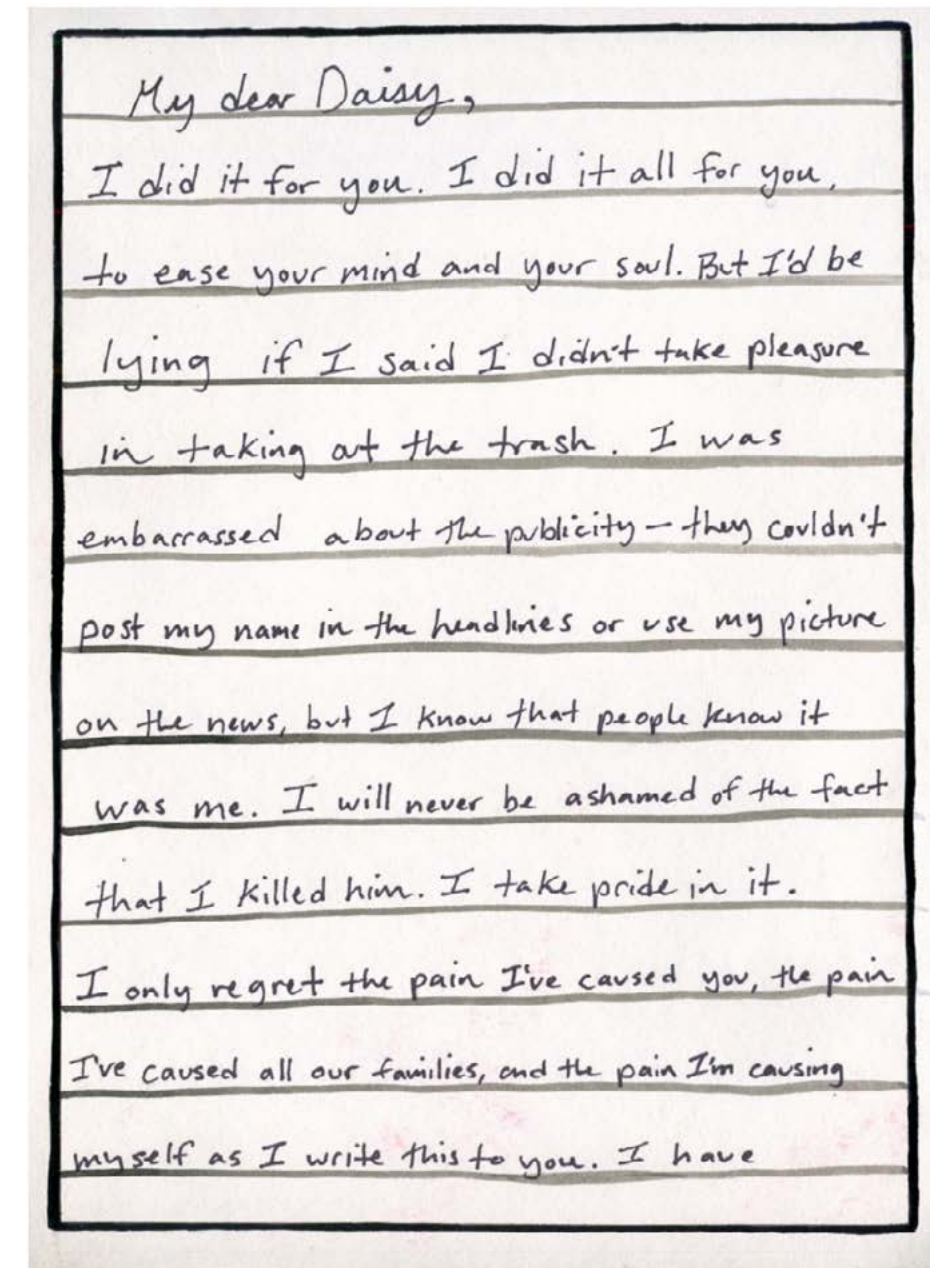
The wind has no volition,  
the stone no voice.

Our pixilated souls consider nothing,  
can't see their million mirror shards.

This is how we travel  
(sometimes aware, sometimes not)  
to the inevitable.


# Red Daisies

An excerpt from a forthcoming graphic novel by Annaliese Poto



nightmares every night — that he's still alive,  
 that he's hurting you and I'm unable to stop it.  
 In this terror, I feel closer to you than  
 ever before. I feel like I am you, and  
 we are one broken flesh. And I don't  
 know how to feel about that.

~~Maybe in another life, I could've been a~~  
~~poet, and you could've been mine~~  
~~and we could've been together.~~






# CHAPTER 1: NOSTALGIA





HERE, WE DANCED AROUND HER LIVING ROOM TO



HAYLEY KIIYOKO'S NEW ALBUM. SOMETHING ABOUT



"GRAVEL TO TEMPO" REALLY STRUCK A HEARTSTRING...



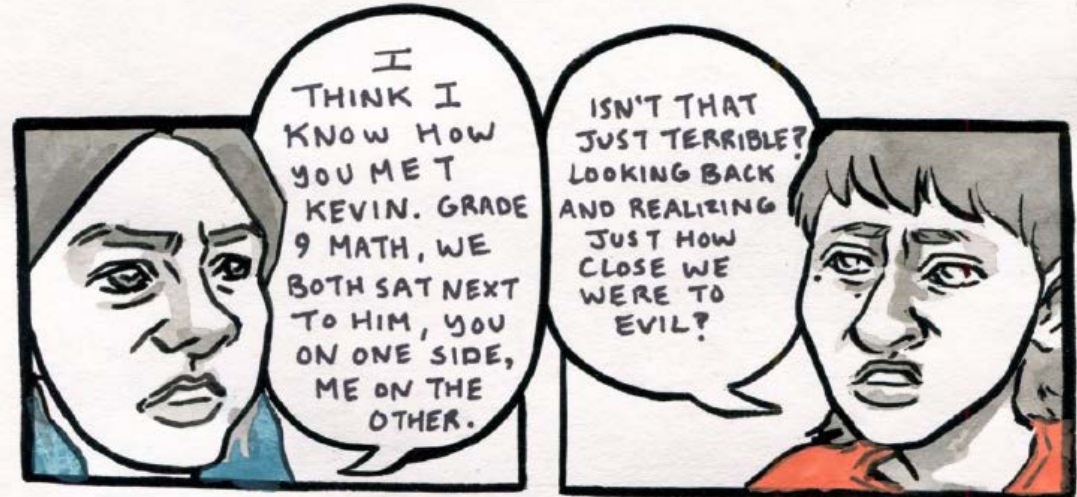
BUT THERE'S ONE MEMORY I HAVE OF HER THAT I DIDN'T VIDEO-RECORD. THERE'S JUST TWO PICTURES: MY SIDE, AND HIS.



HE WAS MY FRIEND. I NEVER THOUGHT HE COULD...

AND THE COPS DIDN'T DO ANYTHING FOR YOU?

THE FIRST TIME I MET HIM...



I THINK I KNOW HOW YOU MET KEVIN. GRADE 9 MATH, WE BOTH SAT NEXT TO HIM, YOU ON ONE SIDE, ME ON THE OTHER.

ISN'T THAT JUST TERRIBLE? LOOKING BACK AND REALIZING JUST HOW CLOSE WE WERE TO EVIL?



AND SURVIVING IT.



IT STILL HURTS TO SAY HIS NAME, DOESN'T IT?

# Front Window

Jennifer Bowering Delisle

It seemed the birch was dead  
or dying, its crown already sheared, the last green branches bending  
down, away from light. Yet northern flickers often filled the tree  
to chip and probe for insects burrowed in the wood.  
The snow always yellowed with the sawdust of their project,  
glitter sprinkled on white paper. We cut it down  
and in the hole we put a sapling, grafted with three kinds of apple  
and the children looked for buds, though the neighbours' trees  
had turned to red, the air already sharp with frost. I want to say  
we did not know what was about to come.  
But this is immaterial, for we never do.

My spouse returned from Superstore with dried beans, cans  
and colouring books, and feeders shaped like bells  
to hang outside the window that the birch once filled.  
So the kids could watch while stuck inside, so fewer birds  
would slam against the glass they thought was air.  
We wait, not quite believing seeds have scent in cold,  
that anything could perch on something tolling in the wind  
or eat with children pressed against the glass, a feather  
still stuck to it with blood.  
Not quite believing what we've lost.  
It was a kind of hope, to plant an apple, tie it down with yellow rope,  
knowing it would be years for nests and fruit,  
not knowing which would be sweet or sour, mealy in its flesh.  
And it is a kind of hope to offer food up to the wild, like a child  
who shares her cereal in a sticky fist. The flickers  
have already found a place to roost and feed, and need no help.

# False negative

Suzanne Bowness

A weeklong headache  
impervious to painkillers,  
chills and sweats  
that made me question normal,  
fatigue undeterred  
by ten hours in bed—

despite Zoom fatigue,  
it was hard to miss  
the slight widening  
of my doctor's eyes  
when I described  
my symptoms—

her certainty derailed  
the past reassurance of  
words on a screen  
that my *this* was not a *that*.

Now in the limbo  
of a false negative,  
I'm not sure how I feel,  
sick or safe? Trusting or  
wary? Like I've landed  
on an outcropping  
without knowing  
if there is further to fall.

