

The

SANDY RIVER

REVIEW



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EDITOR

Alexandra Umstadt

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Annie Moloney

COVER PHOTO

Couture



Juliet Degree

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Foreword

As editors, the inclination is towards choosing pieces that resonate with us, and which we hope will resonate with our readers. With each piece, we pick a feeling, and with each feeling, the compendium of human experience grows. It was a pleasure reading the work of our many contributors, and it is my hope that all who've taken part in this—artists and readers—will feel the hum in their chests too. Enjoy the music to follow.

—Alexandra Umstadt

“We don’t need a list of rights and wrongs, tables of dos and don’ts: we need books, time, and silence. *Thou shalt not* is soon forgotten, but *Once upon a time* lasts forever.”

—Philip Pullman

“What Are Your Plans For the Weekend?”

.....
Ace Bogges

—internet ad

Staring into a bowl of milk where the city was—
homebound, snow-sick, stuck—wondering
when did *The Weather Channel*
decide we need names for inland storms?
Jonas, the meteorologist says. Serious.
Why not twenty-four hours of Colonel Klink?
Bozo the Blizzard? Batman? I'd rather think of it
as a joke, not wait for lights to blink out of existence
should the power fail. Around me:
serenity like opiate sleep, a great release.
I could stare at it for hours, don't want to have to,
locked in my house like a prison cell.
Where's winter storm Cool Hand Luke
when you need it? An antihero
who always offers a promise of escape?
Looks like I'm staying in—
the city broken in full plaster cast,
my eyes lulled by the peace out there,
my heart holding a shovel & a flame.

An Aubade with Separation

Tyler Gadaire

I would bend every hour of night,
Strain each minute's seconds
Just to slow the creeping sunbreak,

To slow those pearl-like stars
From dropping back into
An immeasurable wall of blue

That unfolds into the morning,
Because the daybreak
Only comes to tear you away again –

And when you're away,
I stumble to a cower,
Frigid and clay-like in the

Absence of your hands,
Of the subtle tone
You breathing makes next to me,

Where the comforting feeling of
Of your warmth is lost,
Replaced with the dismay

Of rolling over to find cold, barren ashes
And not your gentle cheeks,
Like pale roses plucked soon after winter's break –

I know that once
You are awake,
We'll argue again:

“Can we not do this again?”

“Don’t do this again.”

“This again?”

Because unlike me, you’ve always
Loved the sun’s rise,
Rimmed in golden-amber;

“It’s like the rising of a phoenix, isn’t it?”
You always say,
Trying to avoid the reality of our separation

When you leave reborn and renewed,
While I stay here,
In the ashes you leave behind.

“It’s like the rising of a phoenix, isn’t it?”
You always say,
Before unfurling your newly christened wings.

I Didn't Know It Would Grow To Be Like This

.....
Jade Wallace

I saw someone like you at a bar in Novelty;
maybe it was you.
But I met you at a flea market,
when I was meant to be getting neon signs, shot glasses, magnets.
I picked you up unintentionally
and took you home with me instead.
After that, everything was yes with you.
Is this okay? I'd ask
and you'd say, *Yes, yes, yes.*
And once you'd given your affirmation to my receding hairline,
your validation to my music choice,
my voice, and my disarrayed apartment,
I wanted you to stay and approve everything in my life,
every last quip and unwashed plate.
Confirm my suspicion that I'm worth something.
When you moved it was like
your body was saying my name.
Bob, bob, bob.
We'd meet at baseball games,
at antique stores,
and I'd take you home again like it was the first time.

I swore I'd keep you until I died,
but now that I'm dying,
cancer in my bowels, my lungs, my liver,
I only want to send you out to see the world.
Meet my family, visit a museum,
join a travelling show.
I will ask in dreams if you are in a beautiful place
and you will smile and nod
and I will know that the world can still be good.
Memories of me will be brushed from your shoulder
and settle like dust wherever you go.

Stairwell

.....
Juliet Degree



Weather Reports

.....
Seth Jani

Death, with his coffee-colored
Hands, fills the geometry
Of houses. On Mondays
We mistake his soft tappings
For a cursory wind, or maybe
The sound of the rain played back
To us through the morning news.
It's gonna be a doozy
Reports the weatherman,
Everything we know uprooted.
Only pliable bodies will survive,
Native plants bright with starlight.
I come out of sleep and find a flood
Entering my thinking.
I have no dams inside me,
So I build a boat from what remains
Of old philosophies.
It's hard being this empty,
People are always confusing you
With the open sea.

Saying Goodbye to Your Mother

Suzanne Langlois

Peeling yourself from the half moon
curve of your mother's crooked arm,
feels like a snail plucked from its shell.
Soft parts get torn off in the process,
and though you try to prevent it,
the fingernails of your grief
rake trails of blood in her skin.

Yanking her voice from the hollow
of your ear is like pulling up flowers
whose roots are your own nerves.
You must tug carefully and slowly,
which hurts more,
but won't leave bits behind to fester—
her broken song a cyst
echoing your plaintive wail.

Scrubbing her scent from your memory
is like scouring off your own freckles.
The inside of your nose is raw and stings
as your breath drags air
across the open wound of forgetting.

The touch of her hands
blisters off like a sunburn,
falling away in shreds, replaced with skin
that doesn't know what love feels like.

Saying goodbye to your mother
is like being born again,
but lonelier,
and all the pain is yours this time.

Seriously Injured

.....
Paul Gleed

Kelly

It's just the joyless execution of an unending to-do-list. I'm not sure when it all became so cold, so unreal. If life was a little ball in my palm, I could let it roll and bounce away. I wouldn't care. I wouldn't have a preference one way or the other.

Sitting here at work makes me think this way. Another office 'retreat' day, another fucking waste of six hours in the company of Barbara from Head Office and Ken from HR.

"There are opportunities and we're not embracing them," drones Barbara. "Our customers are satisfied, yes. But in this market, is that enough? No, they have to be very satisfied. And to achieve that, we need to be as competitive as possible. Lean. So let's look again at our opportunities as we move forward. For a start, one of our greatest opportunities lies in restructuring at the personnel level. Our senior leadership team—all the way up to Rick—are certainly looking to embrace this opportunity as we move forward."

She suddenly has my attention. Fuck. Was that Bullshit for 'people are gonna get canned'?

I'm getting old, I guess. I remember when "opportunities" were a good thing.

I look around. The people who've been here a while and know the language are all squirming. They know what they heard. The new kids are just sitting tight, nodding, looking bright and young and invincible. Idiots. I want to slap them. But Ken from HR would say that wasn't a 'positive contribution to the conversation.'

My phone buzzes in the bag at my feet. No one else notices so I let it go. Now would *not* be a good time to step out. Barbara's cranking up the Power Point and strutting around like she's giving a fucking TED talk. I really, really don't give a shit any more, not about her Key Performance Indicators, her lectures on great customer service, or any of this stuff. In fact, to be honest, I'm not sure I really give a shit about *anything* anymore.

A minute goes by and then Craig, the temp they put on the front desk, peeks his head round the conference room door. "Sorry to interrupt," he says. "But Kelly, your daughter's school is on the phone. She's sick, I guess."

No. No. No. Not today. Not right now. I feel my face burning like the inferno I want to throw that dick Craig into.

“Excuse me,” I say to no one and everyone, heading for the door as gracefully as I can. “I’m so sorry.” I feel every pair of eyes on me. Barbara misses a beat in her monologue as I bump into a chair leg.

“And so... we’re overhauling the performance assessment process,” Barbara continues. “We need to maintain maximum agility in all areas, including the application of insights learned through employee data gathering.” I reach the door and then remember my bag, complete with phone, car keys and purse, still resting against my chair.

Michael

“You should go see him,” Mom had said. “I don’t want to sound...*you know*...but I really think you should see him.”

This wasn’t the first time she’d reckoned Dad was on death’s door. Each time she’d said as much, though, he’d managed to pull through. But maybe that’s not surprising. At full strength, years ago, he’d been a scary son of a bitch. Even now, mostly bed-ridden, spoon-fed and out of his damn head, maybe he’s still wanting to grab something by the throat and squeeze. Now, I guess, instead of taking hold of me or Mom or Alice, it’s the last shadows of life that get bruises the shape of Dad’s fingers. *I bet they won’t put up with his shit anywhere near as long as we did.*

Still, on the bright side, I guess he taught me how *not* to be a dad, lessons I get to apply once every other weekend nowadays.

“I don’t want to,” I had told Mom. “It wouldn’t mean anything to me to see him now. You know that. I’ve gotten him out of life...I don’t want to let him back in.”

“You’ll regret it,” she’d replied. “You know you will. Loose ends, Mike. You don’t want them if you can avoid it.”

Why had she pushed so hard for this? *Loose ends?* Don’t give me that! What that bastard had done to me had no end, loose or otherwise. It’s been twenty years since I left home and sometimes my heart *still* pounds when I hear a rumbling truck pull up somewhere, like he’s arriving home and you know he’s gonna be in a filthy mood.

Mom had hated him back then, too, apologized to me and Alice all the time that we didn’t leave. I’ll never understand why she stayed—made Alice and me stay. The money, she said. And the way he could say sorry and cry like he meant it. It probably was just that simple, I guess. I kind of get it. But I can’t figure out why Mom seems to have given him a pass now he has no clue who she is, or who *he* is. Maybe she likes that he’s so helpless. Maybe some deep, dark part of her gets a kick out of him suffering, wants to watch it long and often. Maybe *that’s* why

she visits him every day? I guess I could get onboard with that. Or maybe—and this would be even more messed up—she actually cares for him now. “He wasn’t violent like that in the beginning,” she’d say from time to time over the years. And now he really is harmless and mild, a baby rightdown to the diapers he’s sitting in.

So now I’m in the parking lot of the care home. I’m doing it for her, though—not him. But either way, I’m thinking I’ve made a mistake. I just want to drive away. But I know she’s in there waiting for me. I can see her in the lobby. She can see me. She waves. I unbuckle my seat belt but don’t turn off the engine. The car beeps to warn me that I might be in danger. Each tinny chime stops my heart for a moment, stabs into my belly. The beeps seem to get higher, faster, building to some kind of crescendo. I snap off the ignition and get out the car.

Mom waves me towards her like its dinner time and I need to come in from the yard and wash my hands.

“He’s in a good mood today,” she says. “I think this is a good thing you’re doing.”

The lobby is clean and tidy and depressing as hell. A wooden sign, all wannabe-cutesy-and- country, sits above the receptionist. “It’s Never Too Late for a Happy Ending,” it says. Jesus Christ, does no one here know what irony is?

Kelly

“So what exactly *is* wrong with her, then?” I say to the school nurse on the phone.

I’ve stopped trying to hide from these people how much they piss me off. “She’s a *little warm*? How warm’s a “little” warm? One hundred! And *that’s* it. There’s nothing else going on with her? Can’t she just...?”

It’s no good, I know. I’ve been here before. School policy. No choice. And so on. *Rules are fucking rules.*

“Yes,” I sigh. “...No. No there’s no one else that can...Yes, I’ll be there as soon as I can. About forty minutes.”

It’s okay. It’s okay. It’s a day long ‘retreat’ with Barbara and HR at work. I just have to pick Ryleigh up from school and drop her off at home. She’s obviously fine. She can be on her own for a few hours. Then I’ll get back to work and say something clever before it all wraps up. No, this whole me-leaving-the-office- thing could be just a real nuisance, and nothing more. Hopefully.

From my cubicle, through the big glass window, I can see into the conference room. Barbara’s nodding, listening to someone speak. I crane my head. It’s that piece-of-shit-new-hire, Chloe. She’s probably “really excited about moving forward” with some shit or another. Or maybe she’s expressing “total faith in our

Senior Leadership Team.” Damn it, why is authenticity so fucking unappreciated? Why must the road to job security be paved with pure bullshit?

I have to get out of here. The sooner I go, the sooner I can get back. Between me and the exit is Craig on the front desk, sipping from a bottle of Icelandic mineral water and surfing the internet on his phone.

“Everything okay? Is she okay?” he asks as I pass. Maybe he cares, and maybe he doesn’t. I think it’s reached the point now where, unless someone’s proven otherwise over several years of faithful friendship, I’m just going to assume they’re a cocksucking shithead.

“She’s puking her guts out,” I say without stopping, as if he’d personally fed Ryleigh a petri dish of chilled salmonella. Walking to the car, I think about my lie. It was totally instinctive. Why? Maybe I was thinking it all needed to sound real bad in case Barbara starts sniffing around later. Then I think that maybe I wanted sympathy, even if it was only from Craig. Just for someone to say *Kelly sure does have a lot going on. Kid to look after. Mother in the hospital again. Kelly’s really trying her best. Good for her!*

God, I hope not.

Michael

A nurse lets us into the ward by swiping her card. “It stops the residents from coming and going,” Mom adds, unnecessarily. My heart is racing, moving so much that I feel sick to my stomach.

“He’s probably in his room,” Mom says, obviously trying to keep things light, give the impression of an everyday visit. “It’s too early for lunch,” she continues, “but sometimes they have him in the lounge watching television.”

We walk on through the corridor. Moaning comes from behind an open door as I pass. Instinctively I look, catching a glimpse of the resident, all bone and sunken flesh, laying on his bed. I turn away. An elderly woman sits in her wheelchair in the corridor, looking up expectantly as if she longs for eye-contact from someone, anyone. But when I glance at her and nervously half smile, I immediately know she doesn’t see me. We pass another room; this time smells rather than sounds emerge. A body losing what little control it ever had.

“Let’s try the lounge first,” says Mom. She ducks into the room before I have time to think. I follow her instinctively. A man sits in a wheel chair, watching the television. His back is turned to us, the Hallmark Channel bathing over him like electronic moonshine. Then he turns, eyes barely open, mouth gaping, looking for something...something...but finding only me.

“Oh, that’s just Robert,” says Mom, and she waves as if she’s greeting an

old friend. He looks at her with something much less than comprehension, and then I realize that Mom too is sinking, fading slowly from the world like a distant roll of thunder. Maybe she's spent too much time in this place. Maybe this shit is catching. Maybe it infects you through the air—that smell! That smell of too many years piled on top of each other, sagging and rotting, one under another. No air. *No air.*

“I’m sorry,” I say, “I can’t do this. Not today. Not...”

I don’t wait to finish or for Mom to start, to try to talk me into staying because I’ve come this far and it’s the right thing to do. She calls after me, but I’m gone already, heading for the door to leave the ward. I’m going to drive away and never come back.

Kelly

The traffic’s heavy this morning. I’m trying hard not to, but I’m sitting here at a red light resenting Ryleigh. Why go to the school nurse if you’re not throwing up? Just sit there in class! I mean, come on. Why mention it! God, girl, that’s what life is, afterall, just sitting through shit you don’t feel like doing in the hope that no one figures out you’re not paying attention. I’m not saying it’s easy or fun, but just get on with it.

I picture myself yelling at her when we get home, or giving her the silent treatment. Fuck, I hate myself. How have I become so hard on the softest thing in my world, the only thing that even matters? The mother-to-be in me wouldn’t even begin to understand this, wouldn’t recognize herself in me. But she’s long gone, I’m afraid.

I merge into the interstate traffic, weaving in and out of traffic for a mile or two, and then exit near Ryleigh’s school. I’ll take the back way to slow down, cool down a bit. I won’t shout at her. *I won’t blame her.* I must just take it all like a punch to the gut, but don’t let her feel any of the pain. It’s mine to keep, not hers. Some guy cuts me off and I give him the fucking beep of a lifetime, and he gives me the finger out his window as he pulls away. That was probably the most honest and rewarding exchange I’ve had today.

Michael

I can’t get that old man’s gaze out of my mind. I knew right there, as he looked at me like that, with wet and pale eyes, how I didn’t want to see the same look in my father’s eyes, no matter how much I hated him. Then I realize why. I don’t want to pity him, don’t want to let go of the hate and the blame. It hits me like a freight-train that I need someone to hold responsible, a doorstep to lay it all at.

The sun glints white in my eyes and I fumble for my sunglasses, but they're not here. Burning, the light stings sharp; my eyes begin to water. I suddenly catch on to the fact I have absolutely no idea where I'm driving to. I missed the turning to go home, didn't even notice it. A stop sign emerges suddenly to my right like that old man's gaping mouth. I slam on the break. The car moving across the intersection beeps at me.

That beep sounds like a shout, like an angry, violent shout. I'm back home again, all those years ago. My father's fist near my face, shaking with fury.

Kelly

I hate these back streets. This was a mistake; it's winding me up not cooling me down. All this damn stopping and starting. But when I pick up Ryleigh I'll be nice to her. Ask how she's doing. I won't shout. Won't tell her what's happening at work today. It's not her fault.

Jesus, who's this fucking retard in front. Fuck, some of us have places to go, buddy!

Michael

I can't pull them out of my head, the old guy I saw and the one I didn't see. Shit, I'm just sitting in the turning lane. I hate this left at the light here. Focus. Come on. And where are my goddam sunglasses?

Kelly

Fuck, you could have gone then, dude. There was enough space. Jesus, what are you waiting for? You could have gotten three cars across in that gap. I honk at the bastard. Jesus, it feels good.

Michael

I can't focus. All I can see is old-man- eyes looking at me. Damn it, why do all those old people look like they're crying? A beep comes from behind. I know it's beep, only that's not how I'm hearing it. It's my Dad shouting—"Come here now!"—and I have to go to him. It only makes it worse if I go slow. My foot hits the accelerator and I thunder forward. Shit! Where did this guy come from? *No, he can't be there. He wasn't there a moment ago. How can he be there now?* The crunching, cracking, thud clears my head, but I wish it hadn't. God, I wish it hadn't.

Kelly

Jesus Christ. That moron's just fucking driven right out. Driven right out

into a guy on a bike! Fuck.

I sit for a moment. My blinker ticks and ticks, but I don't move. Some other people have stopped. There's a crowd gathering. People on their cell phones calling for an ambulance or the police or someone. It's being handled. I just sit for a moment more, then slowly pull out of the turning lane and back into the flow of traffic.

The whole mess disappears in my rear view mirror. It occurs to me that the guy on the bike might be dead. I realize that I saw him actually fly through the air like a tossed dog toy. Moving forward. *That's an odd phrase to use about some guy smashed off his bicycle.* But then I realize that it's Barbara's, Barbara's eternal proclamation to do this, that or the fucking other as we "moving forward."

Approaching Ryleigh's school, I'm shaking. I must be in shock. But it's not the shock I was expecting. I'm cold and sweating because I'm trying to feel bad for that dude on the bike, but I can't. He doesn't have to move forward anymore.

Michael

Nothing changes. No good ever came from Dad calling me to him. No good at all. Someone always seems to get hurt.

Kelly

Ryleigh and I walk silently to the car. In my head I hear Barbara speaking words that might be said later today. They echo words I've heard from her before: "I understand, Kelly. I understand. Family's important. The company gets it. But thinking about performance goals, we have an opportunity here, moving forward, to robustly focus on your work-life balance..."

...*Life balance.* The phrase repeats itself in my head until it becomes something else entirely. All Barbara's hollow jargon collapses into a jarring thud. I hear that crunching, sickly-smacking noise of car hitting bike and bone.

...*Life balance,* Barbara says again.

Ryleigh takes my hand and it startles me. I had forgotten she was there.

Sunset Over Farmington

.....
Meagan Jones



Families

.....
Toti O'Brien

She tried hard
for the beauty of mother.
Climbing up a silvery web
she smeared over her fingers
only slippery shadows.

Turning Back
she glanced at the disgrace
of father. It befell her
warm and fit as a glove
a graft, an imported skin.

Holding Out

.....
Allison Grayhurst

A hundred years of fire and prevention, never the ticket,
never the fountain base repaired,
leaking like a broken skull,
nightmares of treading water,
swarmed by watery prehistoric things,
of being blown apart and not dying,
not resting, seeing love
ineffectual, and God—so far away.
Days of the world having its pulling-tugging say,
and my tongue pulsing with a swelling thirst,
waiting to be swept clean
of heartache and these despairing sensations,
waiting without a photograph or résumé,
just the summer ahead and my children, so beautiful—

Steeple



Juliet Degree



Goya's Country House

.....
Carol Hamilton

He deeded it to his grandson
when he left Spain, the walls
frescoed with his nightmares,
his visions of his homeland,
Saturn biting off the second arm
of his already decapitated son
and other horrors. Did Mariano
ever live there? He could have
whitewashed away the Black Paintings.*
Goya taught his companion's daughter
to draw there, called her Mariquita,
Ladybird. His oeuvre, his life:
open arms to good and evil,
darkness and light. They say
living there, though old and ill,
Goya was in high spirits.
Fastidiousness did not curse him.
I wear a starched white sleeve
over the devoured arm's space.
I beg Cyclops not to pluck out
his fake eyeball. The catacombs,
El Día de los Muertos,
the Mummy Museum in Guanajuato ...
no hay fronteras, no border crossings
or battle lines between life and death.
Cronos was Saturn's other name,
time eating us bite by bite.
Though Goya was pure Spain,
proud and tortured and sparkling
in brilliant blue air, he died
in France, left us everything.

*Current research posits perhaps the Black Paintings were not done by Goya at all.

Zeus Replies to Prometheus

.....
Jessamine Price

(in response to Goethe's "I know of no poorer thing under the sun than you gods!")

Rail on, Prometheus, take your pleas
 in triplicate to every court,
 tell anyone who'll listen of your hardships,
 your bones still bruised from wrestling Titans,
 your rosy scars from stealing
 fire-secrets you don't understand.

Beat your outrage against the gates
 of grief and chance that you imagine
 standing at my door in some Olympian desert.
 You won't find me there.
 Your cloudy sighs of joy and sorrow
 here in this cold morning of the world
 come from my lungs; your juicy, glowing
 heart swells with the weight of my blood.
 You scoff at gods for being only vapor, fogs—
 and then distill your laughter from our misty
 breaths. Your mockery sails on borrowed wings.

Why would I envy your drafty shack?
 The dewy flame in your kitchen hearth
 trembles before the burning breath of stars
 that heats my home. The earth you stand on
 with your head cocked proudly
 is a stone to build my palace walls.
 Envyng you would be like
 envying my own elbow.

Time and Destiny, my masters?
 My brothers-in-arms, in fact!

For what are change and fate
without the shivering matter of my cosmos:
the quintessenting waves and atoms of the deep
who-knows-what-it-is you call Creation?

Forget my name, child.
I'm a swan, a bull, a heap of gold,
and I'm the copper pots and rings
you smelt today to gift a new race—
You think they won't soon turn their eyes
beyond your crown and scepter
to the melting curtains of the sky,
and call my name?

Go on, Prometheus, revile me,
rattle my atom-bones
up and down the Milky Way—
you great greasy human,
sweating fury, sharp as gin—
Yes, young hero, I'm a right bastard,
true, but I'm your father, too.

Kali

.....
Robert Brian Mulder

When she comes—
while you lie awake at night,
before the first light of morning—
with her genocidal jaw,
six long limbs charred black,
and a garland of skulls and dead flowers
draped the full length of her dancing frame—

Do not avert your gaze,
retreating to misty dreams.
Do not reach for your knife,
entangling yourself in struggle.

Stand in the center of the fire—
Grow accustomed to flame—
In time, your trembling bones
will grow as light as white ash,
and Her mask of Terror—
will be lifted.

Poison

.....
Aliza Dube

Belladonna; with a name meaning “pretty woman” this poison’s effects are anything but beautiful. This plant is notorious in nature for being a devil in disguise. A warning that things are hardly ever as they appear.

“That’s it! I’m gonna go punch him in the face!” Shane says, getting high off my heartbreak’s second hand smoke. Her face is about as red as her hair. Shane, me and whatever guy Shane dragged out of the Spring Fling college dance are standing in the student center lobby catching air. I feel like I’m suffocating. I’m overstimulated on bad rap and a tequila buzz. I am doing my best not to clap my hands over my ears--to start crying like good little drunk girls do. I am trying desperately to get an image of my almost boyfriend, Rich, dancing with some other girl, out of my brain. He’s just a string bean, I tell myself, suppressing the fact that suspiciously skinny has always been my type. He’s got a rat face. I’m beating him up in my mind the way Shane wants to beat him up in person. Shane’s guy is holding her hand, holding her back from running back into the fray to kick Rich’s ass. It’s for the boy’s own interest though; he will not be getting laid tonight if Shane gets arrested for decking Rich.

“I would rather you didn’t hit him,” I tell her. “Let’s just go. I knew it was gonna happen, and I’m fine with that, but I don’t need to watch it happen.”

Shane shrugs, jumping onto the back of her boy toy, piggy back style as we make our way to the exit. I think the boy’s name is Nathan, but I can’t remember between the bass and the tequila. I have a hard time keeping my own name straight on nights like these, let alone anyone else’s.

Nathan’s not bad looking, but over toned, with muscles popping out at the edges like the loose stuffing of a teddy bear. He’s the type of guy that actually would say “Do you even lift bro?” But that’s Shane’s type anyways: gym rats.

It’s a short walk home to my apartment through the commuter parking lot but it feels like eternity. My fingers are itching for a cigarette, anything to hold on to, to settle their shaking. I like to act like shit don’t phase me, but sometimes trying to keep it all together is like sitting in a burning

house and trying to ignore the smoke. Just make it through this parking lot without sobbing and we'll be ok, Liza, I think to myself. I'm staring up at the sky, keeping the tears in their ducts through gravity. A full moon stares back at me, denying my right for any star to wish on, no matter how much I need it. I walk ahead, impatient to get out of these heels, get out of these too tight shorts that Nathan's eyes are glued to. I am through with being on display for the night.

"What'd you think of the girls making out in there?" Nathan asks because it's been silent, oppressively, crushingly silent up until this point, with nothing to be heard but the scrape of our feet on the concrete. There had been a gaggle of girls at the dance, in bikini tops and heels, drunk and clinging, arms catching arms like trees in a hurricane. Lip glossed and tequila tinted lips locking, biting. It's a show, for the boys, for attention. There is no love there.

"Me and Liza kiss girls too!" Shane announces proudly from Nathan's back. "It's kinda our thing."

Nathan's bulldog face lights up with a smirk.

"Oh, really?" he asks. He's just won the lottery, walking two drunk, bi girls home. He's counting up his chips and it appears to be amounting to a threesome. I gulp, terrified of the greed laid naked before me.

"But we don't kiss each other," I correct. Nathan looks as if I've just kicked him in the nads. "We know too much about each other. It'd complicate everything."

"Right," Shane agrees. I've saved our skins, but I don't want to admit that Shane is not my type, that I've seen what she's done to men and I'm not signing up for that kind of torture. She's a hilariously bitchy friend, but no, too cruel for anything else. Shane has a habit of eating people alive.

We reach the bottom of my fire escape porch, I plow through the rose bush that is attempting to eat the railing. Thorns trail across my bare arms like tiny hungry sets of teeth.

"Good night guys," I shout behind me. "Don't do anything I wouldn't do."

"Wait!" Shane whines. "I have to grab my phone!"

I'm not sure I want Nathan in my house. I don't hold the branches back for them, they can come in, but I'm not going to make their path any easier. Shane pulls Nathan up the fire escape and through the door anyway and into the living room. Nathan plops down on our ice cream stain splattered futon like he lives here. Shane yanks her phone from the wall, scrolling

through her screen while she drapes her legs across Nathan's lap. I do what I usually do when I'm unsure of what to do with my hands, I fix us drinks. Blueberry vodka and lemonade.

"This doesn't have roofies in it, right?" Nathan asks when I hand him the mason jar. I laugh dryly because I'm trying to take it as a joke, because I don't have the energy to explain that it's not. I change the subject.

"Adam's girlfriend was there alone..." I think aloud. Adam's girlfriend had been dancing by herself, but no, not smiling, she never seemed to be happy. I wanted to shake her; you have everything that I want! Be happy dammit! But I'm also terrified she'll kill me in my sleep, so I keep my distance. "Homewrecker," she had called me this winter, as if it were my name when she found my texts on Adam's phone. As if any of us in college really could call any place "home" yet. It was months ago, a wound scabbing over. But still my fingers itched to rip it open again. "Maybe I should be trying to hit Adam up tonight instead of worrying about the Rich thing...."

Shane looks like she did outside the dance, like she's ready to smack some sense into somebody.

"I will honestly have to kill you myself if you go running back to Adam again," Shane shrieks. Shane knows the history too well. Whenever my life is out of control, I run to him. Adam doesn't ask me questions about what's wrong or where I've been, we just pick up where we left off, as if he'd never left at all. "You are not going to ruin things with Rich because of that asshole."

The second Rich looped his arms around another girl's waist, things were ruined. It had nothing to do with me. I don't have the energy to explain this to Shane. There is nothing I could do to remedy this, nothing I can do that would poison it further either. Our relationship is dying, and the best I can do is pretend I don't care. The person who wins any break up is the one who leaves with the most blood on their hands. I will be that victor.

My fingers are on my phone and I'm texting Adam, breaking our four months of silence like a vow of chastity.

Growing nearly five feet tall, the Belladonna flower is a welcoming shade of pink, with petals stretched out like open arms. She's a beauty, an eye catcher for certain, and there's where her danger lies. No one could believe that something so beautiful could be so evil, until it's too late.

An hour later Shane's home asleep. Nathan has wriggled his way into my bed. I'm pacing a hole in the floor of my room, waiting on two other guys: Adam to text me he's coming over and Rich to text me and tell me to come over to his dorm. Nathan, this six foot of idiot under my covers is a human roadblock to both plans and I wish he'd leave. Or die, whichever works. He came back for his phone and said that he would stay for a drink, but clearly he was thirsty for something other than vodka.

For the first time in my life I am saying no. I can't pull another person into this burning building that I call my body. I should be condemned, but still I stand, with shiny windows and an open door.

"I just can't!" I say for what seems like the fifth time since Nathan got there. My fingers are woven through my hair, gently threatening to tear it from my skull if the situation calls for it. I'm sitting on my floor, because with Nathan sitting in it, my bed is a foreign country. I'm shirtless and I don't remember why.

"Tease," Nathan says. It's something I've never been called before. Whore, yes. Slut, yes, but I always go too far to be just tease. I don't tease, I bully, I invoke emotional and physical trauma. I hit and run. My choices are fatal, not irritating. A bullet wound and never a rash. I thought the word tease would make me feel powerful, as if I were in control of my own destiny, as if the thing I was protecting was worth something. But instead the letters sit in my throat like a dry heave, a sickness with nothing to show for it.

"You don't understand," I clamor. "I'm caught between a new flame and an old burn, new love or the love of my life." Nathan laughs at my sentiments. Only a girl would phrase it this way. I do not usually speak like a girl. Admitting that I have feelings is new territory for me to tread, and I'm terrified of falling through the ice.

"Between the string bean and the drug addict," Nathan summarizes all he's heard about my other guys in a simple sentence. I want to ask Nathan why he thinks he is any different. A twenty four year old at a college dance prowling for jail bait. A dude that thinks he's gonna hit me up with a one night stand after dancing with my friend all night. Nathan is no better. If anything he is worse.

"You don't understand. We have history," I plead, but I know I am only speaking on behalf of Adam. My debate sided with him the moment he entered the equation, it always did. Nathan pulls me back to the bed and

tries to kiss me, I don't kiss back.

"We could make history," he whines. I laugh. No, it's not a laugh, it's the cackle of child-eating witch. I cover my mouth, embarrassed at my cruelty to a man who is only going after a pretty girl. He does not realize that he is bargaining for a monster. But pick up lines? Come on.

"Please get off of me," I demand. Nathan consents and I sit back on the floor, pulling on my Hooters tank top.

Nathan looks hurt. He's trying not to look at me, examining my artwork thumbtacked across the walls because I can't stand blank space anymore than I can stand silence. The paintings are near pornographic images of red girls wrapped around blue boys. The girls are vines, using the bodies of the boys for support. The girls cannot stand on their own.

"Ya know, I just thought we could be like those people in your paintings," Nathan says.

"They are not people," I correct. "It is one boy and one girl, the same every time."

"That's not how I heard the story," he's calling me on my bullshit and it stings, because as much as I'd like it to, life rarely imitates art. "How can you be in love with two people at once?"

"Well, you're still in love with the first person, but the universe won't let you be together, so you still love him, but you can't have him. But hey, this other guy will do for now while you're waiting. You could practice by loving this guy for a while," I explain. I wince. How would Rich take it if he knew he was only *practice*? I could never *love* Rich, but I did love being loved by him; it gave me something to do with my hands.

"But once you commit to one person, that's it. If you were truly in love with the first person, then you wouldn't have fallen for the second," Nathan says. The poor sap is quoting Johnny Depp and he doesn't even know it. But maybe he's right? Maybe I do not love, could not love anyone but Adam.

Adam is a nicotine addiction to me. I can make up any excuse I want; I just need something to do with my hands, I just need something to take the edge off, I only do this when I'm drunk. But anyone can see it in the shaking of my fingers, in the way I say his name; I am hopelessly addicted, and though I carry this love around with me like a cancer in my chest, I cannot seem to quit for the life of me even though it is slowly killing me. I don't have the energy or the willpower to fall for anyone new.

I'm frustrated, angry. Nathan's making me think, and I survive by sweeping things under the carpet.

“Adam has a girlfriend now,” I admit, trying to explain. I have never heard how stupid this sounds outside of my own mind. I love Adam, but could never put my finger on why. It doesn’t matter; this stranger has no capacity to comprehend fate. He is too busy quoting Facebook inspirational memes to try to get in my pants.

“It’s about who wants to know how your 3 pm was, not about who wants you at 3am.”

Nathan quotes and the words echo my mother’s advice and I want to scream. But I know I can’t scream, what will this look like? A strange man playing Buddha in boxers in my bed. “Otherwise they’ll use you to the bone and then there’ll be nothing left. You’ll have sold your soul for nothing.”

“Souls don’t exist,” I say. It still feels like blasphemy dripping off my Catholic tongue. It’s what I’ve come to believe because it is too tragic a consideration to process that I had a soul once and lost it out of boredom.

“Oh, really?” Nathan asks, an eyebrow cocked. “If souls didn’t exist, then you’d be on top of me right now.” I wince because I can picture it behind my eyelids and I don’t like what I see.

“I think underneath whatever you’re going through, you’re probably a really nice person,” Nathan tells me.

“No,” I say, shaking my head as fervently as I did when I was trying to get him to stop kissing me. “No, I’m really not.”

Despite its beauty, Belladonna takes its namesake from the pretty women of old Italy, who would use Belladonna extract as eye drops to dilate their pupils and make them appear more seductive with their enhanced Bambi eyes. The “prettier” the women got, the closer to blindness they became.

Nathan walked me to Rich’s dorm building through the pitch black. The moon had gone behind a cloud and I couldn’t see a foot in front of my face.

“You’re beautiful,” Nathan said at the door, even though the view of my face was gloomy at best. “Have a nice life.” He kissed me on the forehead and walked away. I watched the night swallow him whole.

“Come back.” The words knocked at the back of my teeth, but I wouldn’t let them out. Nathan had helped me see things clearly, and now with him gone I felt my blindness closing back in around me. I pressed my forehead against the glass of the door and watched my reflection breathe fog until I could no longer make out my bambi eyes staring back at me. Rich swung the door open and I fell into his too-thin arms, with his too-small eyes staring down at me. I suppress the voice in my head that is commenting on how ugly our babies would be.

In the hour since then, me and Rich have fucked in the bathroom, and we’ve fucked in his dorm bed—his roommate in the next bed over.

“He’s asleep, it’s ok,” Rich assures me, but I can still hear the rustling of covers and the rhythmic glide of skin against skin. I am not stupid and his roommate is not asleep. I am a porn star putting on a live performance. When Rich bites my neck all I can think about is why am I not getting paid?

“It’s time for bed,” Rich says when he’s through with me because he doesn’t know what else to do with me. I drape his arm across me like a seatbelt because I like this part about him, his illusion that if I crash, he will keep me safe. Should I forgive him? I have committed so much worse tonight than he had even come close to doing. My anger has cooled to nothing but a sad understanding. After all, he brought me home at the end of the night, he chose me in the end. But it is not enough. He will never be enough.

“I might have to leave,” I admit. “My roommate is, like, puking.” It’s a lie, truth is I’m waiting for Adam to text me back, waiting to run back to him because after all this time, I still look forward to his visits like the second coming. The end of the world and possibly the only thing that makes it worth existing at all.

Rich buys it, either because he is too drunk to care or he honestly doesn’t give a shit either way. Or is it because he trusts me? No, I cannot bear to think that now, I’m already in too deep to think that now. I don’t belong to him. He made that clear today. I don’t give a fuck anyways. I’m cradling my phone in my hand like a baby bird. The heart of our embrace is an impending betrayal and like any good time bomb I’m waiting for it to go off and break us in two.

Used occasionally to treat insomnia, Belladonna walks a fine line between sweet dreams and death. One drop too many and you’ll never have trouble sleeping again. Also called nightshade, Belladonna has a way of turning the day to night.

It's 4:30 and I don't know if it's night or morning. I'm racing home in kitty heels, a block ahead of Adam. So that he'll never know that I have spent my time waiting for him twiddling someone else's dick and not twiddling my thumbs. The sky is breaking like an eggshell, cracking into a morning that will be too optimistic for me to stomach. I have a way of living every moment candy coated in doom. My love for Adam is tragic. It will not go like the song says, no love, marriage, or fucking baby carriages. We will not make it out of these affairs alive. I fear I cannot make it through the night. I only exist at night. I would shoot down every lark in the branches lest their morning song awake the dawn.

"Baby, what are you doing with your life?" I ask a fading moon, but the man in it has no answers for me.

Belladonna has occasionally been used recreationally. It is known to be a psychoactive aphrodisiac and to induce hallucinations. This is rare due to the likely possibility of accidental overdose. Those who survive report notoriously bad trips that they never wish to repeat. Belladonna trips are marked by hellish, threatening and demonic images. Some would argue the dangers are outweighed by a heightened sense of awareness and the lucid dreaming the pretty woman drags along with her. Being on Belladonna feels a lot like being in love, it feels a lot like hell on earth.

I barely recognize Adam when he shows up on my stoop. I want to tell him stories about a lost little party girl and the boy who let her borrow his shoes because she was too drunk to walk home in heels. A fairy tale about a vodka punch Cinderella in vans slippers. But we are not those people anymore. Our once upon a time was too long ago for it to matter anymore.

"S'up?" I say to the stranger who sticks his cigarette-rolled tongue down my throat, choking me with the taste of history.

"S'up," he echoes. He wears glasses now, he puts them in my jewelry box for safe keeping. He's skinnier now, like his skeleton has sensed the end

is near and wants out before the whole building goes down. It's trying to edge it's way out of this doomed skin anyway it can. My skin and bones in shining armor coming to my rescue once again, no questions, no explanation needed. I want nothing more than to be buried in his earth brown eyes.

There is a hunger here. We rip at each other's throats like caged pit bulls, trained to kill. I taste blood when I kiss him, biting his lip. I can no longer tell if it's my blood or his that has been spilt at this altar and perhaps it makes no difference anymore. I am carving canyons in his back, sowing tiny rows with my fingernails to plant a vengeance in his girlfriend. I was here bitch! I'm carving my initials across his skin like it's the bark of a tree—because this is what lovers do. Perhaps we will be lovers again, but if I know one thing for certain, it's that nothing is.

I know now the ecstasy that I could not explain to my stranger. You cannot explain religion to a non-believer. Adam's saying my name like a psalm, a safe word that's gonna deliver him. This is as close to heaven as two sinners are ever gonna get. His hand's in a fist around my neck, biting shoulders, tendons, I'll eat you up I love you so baby—if only you'd give me the time.

I can't breath, but I don't live off oxygen anymore. I'm filling my lungs with sips from his lips. I read once that kissing builds bonds, and that's why prostitutes don't do it. If I can just keep my mouth there, maybe he will keep me forever. I'm barely moving my lips from his, desperate, like I'm trying to resuscitate a corpse, bring us back to life. If I keep kissing, will he stay with me? If I kiss till my mouth is dry and I can no longer speak my own name--will he let me fall asleep in his arms? Will he call out my name always, like the dirtiest curse he knows and the strongest act of contrition?

For the first time in all our years of fuckery, Adam stays the night. He is too big for my bed, his six foot limbs dangling off the sides of the mattress at weird angles that remind me of road kill. He's snoring within seconds. There is no room for me by his side, but I am used to this by now. I lay a blanket out on the floor and try to get some sleep.

It's seven in the morning. Shane will be waking up soon, waiting for a text from Nathan that will never show up. Rich will be waking up alone soon, still believing I was mopping up vomit somewhere across town. I lied to him, I cheated. We will never be the same. Whatever hope we had for a mutual future has been doused. I have strangled our relationship cold with my bare hands. Adam's girlfriend will be waking up alone soon, in tears, because she knows exactly where he went. I'm tossing and turning over all

the poison seeping from the work of my hands into everyone else's life. I did it for love, I defend to myself. But even I know that that's just putting a pretty name on an ugly thing.

If a dose of Belladonna is left untreated, it will eventually result in death. Only 7% of victims have been known to survive. If you do not heed the warning, the Belladonna may be the last thing you ever see.

Low Tide on the Biddeford Pool

Jenna Arcand



Geoff & Maggie

.....
Anne Tommaso

It had been raining. Maggie pulled her hood over her hair to walk from the parking lot, and Geoff wore an old golf hat on with sweat stains around the band. Their white sneakers squeaked against the shiny linoleum at Winger's IGA where they would shop together at least twice a week. He would push the cart up and down the aisles, and she'd pull items from the shelves, her blue pocketbook hanging in the crook of her arm.

At register 4, he scoffed at tabloid headlines while she unloaded ground beef, bananas, English muffins, and vanilla ice cream from their cart. Were they going to have baked haddock tonight or meatloaf? She shook out a head of celery and placed in on the belt and was into the second layer of groceries when Geoff interrupted her.

"What are these? Why do we have these?" He pulled a box from the cart.

"They're Triscuits. What do you mean?"

"I don't eat Garden Herb. You know that. We don't want those." He thrust the box at her. To avoid further conversation, he pulled a Martha Stewart magazine off the rack and starting flipping pages.

She held the box. But the customer in front of them was writing a check and blocking the way out, and the cart and her husband barricaded the narrow aisle. She was stuck.

Geoff noticed and in a huff, backed the cart out to release her.

"Get Plain," he said.

Holding the yellow box in both hands, Maggie walked back into the aisles. She always knew her husband wasn't observant, but maybe he was becoming forgetful. She was picturing all the times he had eaten Garden Herb Triscuits before. Maybe even last week. He had dipped them into tomato soup and hadn't said anything. And they weren't actually called Plain as he had demanded, but Original. It was clearly printed against a blue diamond on the lower right of the box. She thought about him flipping through the magazine with disgust, how he was so impatient with everything, so resistant to something new. How last week when she shifted the coffee maker six inches to the left to make more room for the paper towel holder, he moved it back. How when she made chocolate chip cookies instead of oatmeal raisin, he

left his on the plate.

And then she thought about how she liked Garden Herb Triscuits. How the flavor hit the front of her mouth with a zing. How she could just snack on them out of the box without needing cheese or dip. How the taste lingered pleasantly on her lips after the cracker was finished. How they were something she looked forward to eating. She really did. And that she bought them for a reason. And who was he to tell her to put them back and announce that “we don’t want those”? She walked past coffee and tea, spices, and flour and sugar, and then through the middle aisle past pretzels and chips towards the crackers, thinking all the while about what she should have said.

“Try something new for once.”

Or “You’ve eaten these a thousand times before, you dolt.”

Or, “I don’t care if you like them. I like them. We are buying them for me.”

And when she arrived back at the Triscuit section of the snack aisle, there was no way she was putting Garden Herb back on the shelf. We can have both in the cupboard. She pulled a box of Original off the shelf. He should be able to handle that. She’d tell him so too. “We’ll have both, okay?”

Maggie’s steps gained energy as she walked back towards the cashiers. She moved through paper products and pet food with confidence thinking about how even after 42 years of marriage, there were still things he needed to work on like being more accepting and accommodating someone else. The two yellow boxes held against her chest were emblems of that change. She wasn’t going to back down, and she was still going to make him happy. He could eat Plain Triscuits as he called them, and she could put the box in front of him as he ate his lunch showing him that he was indeed eating Plain. In fact, maybe she would politely point out their official name was Original. She was giving him what he wanted and not asking him to do anything for her. And she was getting what she wanted too. The salty smack of Garden Herb and the chance to have something she liked.

She turned into the big front aisle of the store where the cashier lines started and saw Geoff standing in the middle. Apparently in her absence at checkout--the checkbook was in her purse--the cashier had asked Geoff to back out of the aisle to let another customer go through. He was looking lost, scared even, holding on to their cart. A woman in running tights asked him to move so she could access the energy drinks in the cooler blocked by his cart. He backed up knocking into the cardboard pie filling display. Geoff scanned the other carts and customers for his wife.

Maggie watched her husband's panic from the edge of the gift card and magazine display. She could tell how steamed he was. The twin boxes of Triscuits got heavy against her chest. She wanted to run to him and save him from his own discomfort and awkwardness. But she turned into the aisle to stop herself and gather the strength the two boxes had given her. But instead she felt selfish and silly. The magazine faces stared at with her arms full of purse and Triscuits. She slid one of the boxes on top of a pile of National Geographics and made a beeline to her husband.

A Day for Everything

.....
Adam Giles

Sweat rolls down Alice's face as she sleeps, cascading around the oxygen mask muzzling her nose and mouth. Nurse Tom, in full hazmat suit, checks Alice's IV, presses a button to silence a beeping machine, and places a cool cloth on his patient's forehead. Nurse Tom twists the plastic cap off a bottle of TastyWater, pours some into a Styrofoam cup, and leaves it on Alice's bedside table in the event that today is the day she wakes up.

Alice's grade 11 Environmental Studies students gather outside the big glass wall of her quarantined hospital room because the school only had one Environmental Studies teacher (Alice) and now these kids all have a last period spare.

This superbug Alice has contracted is the 999th confirmed case of antibiotic-immune bacteria in the Greater Toronto Area.

Nurse Tom unpins the calendar from the bulletin board over Alice's bed. He flips the page to December and pins it back up.

December 1: Phishing Prevention Day

Stop clicking links in bogus emails. You're costing your employers millions. What is it that gets you? The promise of a "larger unit?" Subject lines like, "Confidence Pills...Cheap" or "Totally Real Stock Tips?" Blindly clicking links and opening attachments is akin to having sex without a condom: there are bugs everywhere out there, just waiting for you to let your guard down. Help us spread the word by forwarding this message to everyone in your contacts list—tell them to click the "Practice Safe Emailing (and Sex)" link for additional helpful tips. Toronto forecast: 26°C, mainly sunny.

December 2: Rock Hard Abs Appreciation Day

For too long, men and women with rock hard abs have been alone in appreciating their own rock hard abs (typically in front of change room mirrors). Seriously, do you know how hard it is to get rock hard abs? Participate in today's March to End Obliviousness about Rock Hard Abs—the exercise might even help you firm up that soft middle of yours, tubby.

December 3: First Annual Heckle a Scientist Day

The scientists have been muzzled; they can't say anything back. It's amazing. They have to stand there and take it like those British guards with the big fuzzy hats. Toronto forecast: -1°C, freezing rain.

December 4: Drone Safety Day

Yes, there is a metric ton of traffic up there. Mid-air collisions are not necessarily intentional. Drone safety starts with minimizing air rage, so breathe, take it easy, and have a cold refreshing bottle of TastyWater. Why do you have to get upset over every little thing? Didn't anyone ever teach you to pick your battles? Everyone's got a drone to fly. A little consideration goes a long way. And, for the love of god, can we collectively agree to stop hovering outside the windows of those who are careless with their curtains? It's called not living up to the stereotype that all drone operators are perverts? We all love the naked human body as much as the next special interest group, but let's try to keep it professional up there.

December 5: Deter a Smoker Day

Don't be afraid to get right up in their face about it. Smoking tobacco is socially unacceptable now—strength in non-smoking numbers! Toronto forecast: 24°C, partially cloudy.

December 6: Day to End Vaping

Because, really, just smoke a cigarette. You look stupid.

December 7: Ham Sandwich Appreciation Day

The ham sandwich—increasingly demonized for its “unnecessary” slaughter of “innocent” pigs—doesn't enjoy the love it once enjoyed. Do we want the pigs to have died in vain? The best way to honour the pigs is to eat their carcasses. They're already dead. What are we going to do, just toss out all that perfectly good meat? Let us appreciate the ham sandwich. The pigs would have wanted it that way. Toronto forecast: 41°C, heat alert.

December 8: TastyWater Superbug Selfie Challenge Day

Post a selfie of yourself enjoying a cold, refreshing bottle of TastyWater and the TastyWater Corporation will donate five cents to superbug research. Together we can take the *super* out of *superbug*! Don't forget to tag your selfie

with #TastyWaterIsAnEthicalForwardThinkingCompany to make sure your entry counts. Important cause! Spread the word. The clock is ticking on people with this terrible affliction. Look at poor Alice here (pictured with bottle of TastyWater on bedside table). She's been unconscious for weeks. And her grade 11 Environmental Studies students? There's less of them looking in on their teacher through that big glass wall because some of them are using their last period spare to make out behind dumpsters and try out this vaping thing everyone's talking about. So let's see those selfies. Help us help doctors help Alice.

December 9: Hug a Proctologist Day

Look, they don't want to be up in there any more than you want them up in there, but those action figures have to come out. Show some appreciation. Wouldn't you say their job is a total pain in the...butt? We'll be here all day. Toronto forecast: 43°C, crazy humid.

December 10: Frolic in Nature Day (weather permitting)

Get out there and enjoy this balmy winter weather. Have a picnic, frolic in the bushes, join the tree-huggers and hug a tree. But if it happens to be at all chilly and you're not up for frolicking in nature, Plan B could be to find one of those tree-huggers and ask where their global warming is now. Watching them try to explain science they don't understand is a delightful little shit show.

December 11: Mysterious Itch Identification Day

As usual, mobile dermatology labs will be set up in a neighbourhood near you. Frolic in Nature Day participants encouraged to attend. Toronto forecast: 45°C, gustnado watch.

December 12: Airborne Sheet Metal Awareness Day

How many unsuspecting pedestrians must be decapitated by untethered sheet metal blowing away from rooftop construction sites before we, as a society, act? With the sustained winds and unpredictable supergusts nowadays, the amount of sheet metal swirling around out there is only going to rise. Until our lawmakers beef up (and actually enforce) our sheet metal regulations, keep your heads up.

December 13: Toenail Fungus Sympathy Day

It's time toenail fungus sufferers got the sympathy they deserve. What, just because toenail fungus isn't one of the sexier ailments, these poor folks have to go unrecognized? Well, guess what, sometimes we have to face things we don't want to face. Sometimes we have to pay attention to the discoloured, smelly signals our bodies are sending us and adjust our behaviours to avoid a full-blown discoloured, smelly public health catastrophe. Bring a toenail fungus sufferer near you some synthetic socks and watch their face light up. Toronto forecast: 47°C, gustnado imminent.

December 14: Preferred Sexual Position Verbalization Day

It's healthier when we can be open about sex. Plus, wouldn't you like to enjoy yourself for once? Today's the day to come out and tell your partner what drives you crazy (in a good way) and what drives you crazy (in a bad way). Your loins will thank you. Enjoy.

December 15: Day of Remembrance for that Time Richard Gere Learned Sign Language to Communicate with his Deaf Driver

Today marks a decade since Mr. Gere's viral Facebook post about how he googled sign language in the back of a cab to say "thank you" to his hearing-impaired driver. A candlelight vigil will be held to compensate Mr. Gere for the online backlash he endured for coming across braggy about his good deed. Yes, Mr. Gere has since confirmed that the story was fake (and that he doesn't even know what The Face Book is), but we take today to remember the general message of kindness/consideration anyway. Toronto forecast: 20°C, calm and clear, post-gustnado.

December 16: TastyWater Let's Get to the Bottom of Why There's Hardly Any Bees Left Day

The superbug thing brought in so much money—for the cause, we're focusing on the cause—so TastyWater is at it again. This time for the bees! Post a selfie of yourself enjoying a cold, refreshing bottle of TastyWater and the TastyWater Corporation will donate five cents to getting to the bottom of why there's hardly any bees left. Don't forget to tag it with #TastyWaterIsAnEthicalForwardThinkingCompany to make sure your entry counts. Important cause! Spread the word. Back to the superbug thing for a second: Alice's quarantine room is empty and her Environmental Studies students are gone. Nurse Tom is wheeling in this new unconscious superbug patient

named Bruce. And—lucky Bruce—his superbug is officially the GTA's 1,000th confirmed case, which, given the nice round number, means some reporters and camera crews may be popping by the hospital later today. We've sent someone to look into whether Alice got better (thanks to our company's efforts) or was carted to the morgue (in which case, it was out of our hands, but hopefully the money we raised will help this Bruce guy). Anyway, about the bees: let's see those selfies!

December 17: National Day to End Corporate Sponsorship of Social Issues

Is it not icky to have these corporations use society's problems as marketing opportunities? How about, if you really want to help, just write a damn cheque for the cause and stop being all loud about how great you are? We don't want to get into naming names, but when certain companies that bottle natural resources flip-flop on which issue to "own," it feels decidedly unethical and backward thinking. All of this and more at tonight's town hall at Budweiser Stage. Toronto forecast: -16°C, thundersnow.

December 18: Day to End Fresh Water Pilfering

Piggybacking on yesterday's corporate sponsorship thing, we're here to publicly shame certain unethical and backward-thinking companies that syphon the Earth's life blood out of the Earth, bottle it, and sell it back to us with their stupid lip-smacking logo (indicating tastiness) on the label. Join us for this evening's event: Jell-O Shooters to End Fresh Water Pilfering. Always a great time: after your first six or seven shots you'll even forget what cause you're supporting! We understand it's easy to get bummed out by all the bad news out there, which is why sometimes it's nice to incorporate booze into fundraisers: toss back a buttload of Jell-O shooters and numb the part of the brain that gets bummed out. Do yourself a favour though: after all the shooters, don't go home with that guy at the end of the bar who's always scratching his crotch. It won't lead anywhere good (and Mysterious Itch Identification Day next December is a long ways off). See? We already forgot what cause we're supporting! And hey, that guy at the end of the bar is attractive. Who says social do-goodery can't be fun?

December 19: Humour a Conspiracy Theorist Day

Take a day (today!) to hear them out. Have some empathy for these folks and their busy minds. Moon landings were faked, you say? Elvis is not

only alive, but managing a KFC in Indianapolis? The planet is doing everything in its power to eradicate mankind? Let them talk and smile through it, knowing you're better than them—if it helps, there might be a couple Jell-O shooters leftover from yesterday. Toronto forecast: 20°C, rain, flash floods.

December 20: Day of Appreciation for Phil Collins Lyrics

Seriously, listen to the words in those songs. The man wasn't just good at the drums. He didn't just have a voice sent to us from heaven. He tried to get people to focus on important social issues. Sadly, all anyone cares about is what's going on in their own little bubble. Just another day in paradise? Wake up and smell the injustice.

December 21: Middle-Aged White Male Day

Privilege schmivilege. Middle-aged white males are people too. Find one and tell them they're all right in your book (if you say it to the right one, who knows, maybe they'll even hook you up with a sweet internship—they have connections). Toronto forecast: 25°C, sustained winds, unpredictable supergusts, potential airborne sheet metal.

December 22: No Sexting and Walking Day (in conjunction with National Preservation of Snails on the Sidewalk Day)

Save that dick pic for later. Do you want to walk off the curb, get hit by a motor vehicle, and have a first responder find that shit on your phone? Plus, think of all the snails on the sidewalk you won't have to hear crunch underfoot when you pay attention to where you're stepping.

December 23: Overpriced Fossil Fuel Outrage Day

Can you please make it more expensive for us regular working-class folks to get to and from work? If we didn't have regular working-class jobs to get to and from, we'd organize and congregate and show you how angry we are rather than bottling it up and taking it out on our spouses after work. Toronto forecast: 0°C, freezing drizzle, potential flurries in time for Santa!

December 24: Bacon Shortage Panic Day

Calmly acknowledging perpetually low pork belly inventories, we've partnered with the Ham Sandwich Appreciation people to raise money for the creation of Pigs Unlimited: Toronto's new happy place for pigs to breed and roam and breed and graze and breed (and where nothing bad will ever

happen to the bacon—we mean, pigs).

December 25: Religious Observance of Your Choosing Day

Look, do whatever you want today, just don't wish anyone anything—you know how sensitive people are. If you're going to strike up a faith-based conversation with someone, do it with an atheist. Convert the hell out of them. Those people are animals. Toronto forecast: 10°C, steam devil over Lake Ontario.

December 26: National Day of Advocacy for Nuclear Disarmament

Because why do we want to kill ourselves? There are so many other things in this world that will do that for us.

December 27: National Day of Advocacy for Nuclear Proliferation

Because those soft pinko lefties are turning us into a nation of soft pinko lefties. Enough of this hippie political correctness. Religious Observance of Your Choosing on December 25th? Really? Keep the *Christ* in Christmas, keep the nukes proliferating, and if you don't like it go back wherever you came from (unless where you came from is here, in which case stay, but quit ruining everything for the rest of us). Toronto forecast: 63°C, scattered flame cyclones (stay indoors).

December 28: TastyWater Cycle Against Superbugs Day (formerly Diabetes Awareness Day)

The thing about the bees was a flop (apparently no one cares about the bees), so TastyWater is back to fighting the fight against the superbugs. Such an important cause. You might be wondering what happened to Diabetes Awareness Day. TastyWater bought out the diabetes people for the rights to December 28th because, really, what's a bigger threat to humanity, diabetes or the superbugs? Sadly, it turns out Alice is dead. So let's help out Mr. One Thousand (Bruce)! Grab your bike. Go cycle somewhere. And while you're at it, post a selfie of yourself enjoying a cold, refreshing bottle of TastyWater. You remember the hashtag, right? #TastyWaterIsAnEthicalForwardThinkingCompany. Five cents to superbug research for each one. Spread the word. The clock is ticking.

December 29: National Crud off the Streets Day

What a mess all those cyclists made yesterday. The streets are littered

with cycling bibs and orange-stained Styrofoam containers from when they all went for wings after. So let's get out there and pick up after those slob. Let's show them what a respectable city looks like! Toronto forecast: 30°C, lingering flame-cyclone-related wildfires at various city golf courses, the Toronto Islands, and that green patch in front of Queen's Park.

December 30: Big Picture Appreciation Day

As usual, The Fourth Wall art gallery will be offering free admission to its Big Picture exhibit: literally, the largest photograph in the world, ever. Remember, when you stand before the big picture, when you're considering it, step back from it, open your mind, take it all in, notice how insignificant (and unworthy of your time) some of the smaller elements are. Actually, as an exercise, prioritize the various elements, distinguish the crucial from the extraneous. How does this make you feel? Reflect on what this says, generally, about our collective focuses and energies. Also, take the time to appreciate the subtle (and not so subtle) metaphors at work. Free lunch (ham sandwiches and TastyWater).

December 31: Day in Support of No One but Yourself

Sometimes it can feel like there's a day for everything. Everything except you. Take today, ignore all those other causes, and do something kind for yourself. Buy that gas-guzzling Hummer you've had your eye on. Get that facial tattoo you've always wanted. Solicit a prostitute for once. While you're out and about, enjoy a free bottle of TastyWater at one of dozens of pop-up TastyWater stands throughout the city, on this the Fourth Annual Day in Support of No One but Yourself (sponsored by TastyWater).

Nurse Tom, hung over from New Year's, face bandaged from that forehead tattoo he treated himself to yesterday, unpins the calendar from the bulletin board in the hospital's quarantine room and tosses it into the garbage. He opens the new calendar to January and pins it up.

Sweat rolls down Bruce's face as he sleeps, cascading around the oxygen mask muzzling his nose and mouth. Nurse Tom, in full hazmat suit, checks Bruce's IV, presses a button to silence a beeping machine, and places a cool cloth on his patient's forehead. Toronto forecast: 26°C, mainly sunny.

The Lost Player

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Meagan Jones



Contributor's Notes

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JENNA ARCAND, 20, is a New Hampshire native enrolled at the University of Maine at Farmington, where she is currently pursuing a major in Creative Writing and a minor in Business. This is the second time she has been published in *The Sandy River Review* for her photography.

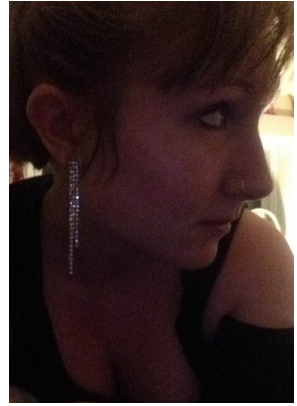


ACE BOGGES is author of the novel *A Song Without a Melody* (Hyperborea Publishing, 2016) and two books of poetry, most recently, *The Prisoners* (Brick Road Poetry Press, 2014). Forthcoming is a third poetry collection: *Ultra-Deep Field* (Brick Road). His poems have appeared in *Harvard Review*, *Rattle*, *River Styx*, and many other journals. He lives in Charleston, West Virginia.



JULIET DEGREE is a Vermont native artist. She is a graduate of Lesley University College of Art and Design (formally the Art Institute of Boston) for photography. She has previously been published in the *Sandy River Review* in. She has also been published in the first volume of *Maps for Teeth* magazine, *Taking In*, and most recently on an online exhibition for Lenscratch. She resides in Brighton, Massachusetts.

ALIZA DUBE is a senior in University of Maine at Farmington's creative writing program. She writes mainly nonfiction as she struggles to make meaning out of the chaos that is her life. After graduation she is hoping to pursue a master's degree in creative nonfiction.



TYLER GADAIRE is a 22-year-old from Easton, Maine. He is an undergraduate senior attending the University of Maine at Farmington, majoring in both English and Creative Writing. He has been previously published in *The Sandy River Review*.



ADAM GILES's short fiction won the University of Toronto Magazine Short Story Contest and was longlisted for PRISM international's Fiction Contest, the House of Anansi Broken Social Scene Story Contest, and the Penguin Random House Student Award for Fiction. His stories have been nominated for the National Magazine Awards, the Best of the Net Anthology, and have appeared in *Riddle Fence: A Journal of Arts & Culture*, *The Danforth Review*, *The Summerset Review*, and other literary journals. He lives in Mississauga, Ontario with his wife and two daughters. On the Twitter, he's @gilesadam.





PAUL GLEED holds a Ph.D. in English Literature (SUNY Buffalo) and teaches writing at the Harrisburg Area Community College. His fiction and non-fiction has recently appeared in *The Broadkill Review*, *Green Hills Literary Lantern*, and *Roanoke Review*. He can be found online at paulgleed.com.



ALLISON GRAYHURST is a member of the League of Canadian Poets. Three times nominated for Sundress Publications “Best of the Net” 2015, she has over 950 poems published in over 400 international journals. She has twelve published books of poetry, seven collections, nine chapbooks, and a chapbook pending publication. She lives in Toronto with her family. She is a vegan. She also sculpts, working with clay; www.allisongrayhurst.com



CAROL HAMILTON has recent and upcoming publications in *Paper Street Journal*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Common Ground*, *Gingerbread House*, *Main Street Rag*, *Sacred Cow*, *U.S.1 Worksheet*, *Pontiac Review*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Louisiana Review*, *Green Hills Literary Lantern*, *Poem*, *Plainsongs*, *Oklahoma Humanities Magazine*, *Texas Poetry Calendar*, *Dryland*, *Nebo* and others. She has published 17 books, most recently, *SUCH DEATHS* from the Visual Arts Cooperative Press in Chicago. She is a former Poet Laureate of Oklahoma and has been nominated seven times for a Pushcart Prize.

SETH JANI currently resides in Seattle, WA and is the founder of Seven CirclePress (www.sevencirclepress.com). His own work has been published widely in such places as *The Chiron Review*, *The Coe Review*, *The Hamilton Stone Review*, *Hawai`i Pacific Review*, *VAYAVYA*, *Gingerbread House*, *Gravel* and *Zetetic: A Record of Unusual Inquiry*. More about him and his work can be found at www.sethjani.com.



MEAGAN JONES is an artist and a Creative Writing BFA major with a Spanish minor at the University of Maine at Farmington. Originally from Windham, Maine, she spends her time alternating between writing English essays and creating her own artwork and stories.



SUZANNE LANGLOIS lives in Portland, Maine, where she teaches high school English. Her poetry has appeared in *The Fourth River*, *English Journal*, *Rust + Moth*, *Three Drops from a Cauldron*, *Off the Coast*, *Rattle Poets Respond*, *The Cafe Review*, and *Menacing Hedge* and in the anthologies *Passion and Pride: Poets in Support of Equality* and *Word Portland's Be Wilder*. Her work has also been featured on the Button Poetry channel. She holds a BA in English from Tufts University, Secondary English Teaching certificate from University of Maine at Farmington, and an Ed.M in Teacher Leadership from Harvard Graduate School of Education.





ROBERT BRIAN MULDER taught English in Papua New Guinea, Israel, and North Carolina. His poems have recently been published by *Evening Street Review* and *Schuylkill Valley Journal*. He also published a brief anecdote in *The Sun*, and has been a finalist for *The Boston Review* Short Story Contest. He currently works as a writing tutor at The Catlin Gabel School in Portland, Oregon.



TOTI O'BRIEN is the Italian Accordionist with the Irish Last Name. She was born in Rome and lives in Los Angeles. Her work has most recently appeared in *Indiana Voices*, *Italian Americana*, *Subprimal*, and *Salt Hill Journal*.



JESSAMINE PRICE has an MFA in creative writing from American University, where she was the prose editor of *Folio*. She also has an M.Phil. in economic and social history from Oxford. Her most recent essays have appeared in *Hunger Mountain* and a Creative Nonfiction anthology. In 2012, she was a three-night champion on *Jeopardy*.

ANNE TOMMASO lives in Portland, Maine and teaches high school English. She is a graduate of Bates College and The Bread Loaf School of English. Her work has appeared in *Paddlefish* and *The Portland Press Herald*.



JADE WALLACE is a legal clinic worker in Toronto, Ontario, whose short stories and poetry have appeared in *The Dalhousie Review*, *Brilliant Flash Fiction*, *Feathertale*, *A New Ulster*, *Acumen*, *Pac'n Heat: A Noir Homage To Ms. Pac-Man*, and seven chapbooks from Grey Borders Books.



KONNER WILSON will be graduating from the University of Maine at Farmington this year with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Creative Writing and a minor in Theater. She will be pursuing her Master of Fine Arts degree in Writing for the Screen and Stage at Northwestern. Konner hopes to someday achieve something great, despite being exceedingly ordinary.



Winter

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Konner Wilson



Editor's Notes

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ANNIE MOLONEY is assistant editor of *The Sandy River Review*. She is pursuing a double major in Creative Writing and English at the University of Maine at Farmington. Annie spends the rest of her time as a waitress, barista, mediocre bike rider and expert adventurer. She has found an impressive number of excuses to incorporate cake into her daily life.

ALEXANDRA UMSTADT is editor of *The Sandy River Review*. She is a senior Creative Writing and Geology dual major at University of Maine at Farmington. She loves to write and is an avid rock nerd, and hopes to contribute to the field of science journalism in the future. She is susceptible to suggestions of cake.

Editor: Alexandra Umstadt

Assistant Editor: Annie Moloney

Contributors:

Jenna Arcand

Ace Bogges

Juliet Degree

Aliza Dube

Tyler Gadaire

Adam Giles

Paul Gleed

Allison Grayhurst

Carol Hamilton

Seth Jani

Meagan Jones

Suzanne Langlois

Robert Brian Mulder

Toti O'Brien

Jessamine Price

Anne Tommaso

Jade Wallace

Konner Wilson