

NO. 13 - THE FOOD + DRINK ISSUE

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M A G A Z I N E

FOOD FIGHT
COMPASS COMMUNITY
HEALTH CENTRE IS
STEPPING UP TO THE PLATE
ON FOOD INSECURITY

A DEEP DIVE
LOCAL PHOTOGRAPHER
STEVE HAINING HAS
EARNED HIS THUMB

ARTS & CULTURE

HAMILTON READS

MAXIE DARA IS NOW WORKING ON THE SECOND INSTALLMENT OF HER MODERN-DAY GRIM REAPER TALE THAT INCLUDES DEFINITE HAMILTON VIBES. BY JESSICA ROSE

Kathy Valence likes things boring and predictable. She's mid-divorce, pregnant with her ex's baby, and is terrified she doesn't have what it takes to be a mom. Yet, there's something decidedly different about her. She's a modern-day grim reaper who works for S.C.Y.T.H.E. - Secure Collection, Yielding, and Transportation of Human Essences.

"Kathy definitely isn't your run of the mill grim reaper! But that was always my goal," says Hamilton's Maxie Dara, who released *A Grim Reaper's Guide to Catching a Killer* in October. "When I was first playing around with her character, I knew I wanted to contrast the extraordinary nature of the job with a very ordinary person. Death is this big, scary subject, so I wanted to make its representative anything but," she says.

Dara, a writer, actor, and freelance journalist, says the book gave her the unique opportunity to explore life and death through one very messy, very human package. During what's supposed to be a routine transportation of a recently deceased soul to the afterlife, Valence finds herself searching for Conner Ortiz, a teen who insists he didn't die of natural causes - he was murdered. Kathy has only 45 days to find out the truth before he is doomed to roam the earth as a ghost forever.

Dara's path to publishing this book is unique. After querying literary agents and getting nowhere, she answered an open call for submissions from the Berkeley imprint of Penguin Random House. "Essentially, Berkeley



AUTHOR MAXIE DARA

"I truly feel like the luckiest person. This is something I've dreamed about since I was a kid, so the fact it's actually come true is very surreal!"

While *A Grim Reaper's Guide to Catching a Killer* is set in an unnamed town, Dara says Hamilton vibes have "definitely snuck in," especially in the town's architecture and atmosphere.

"Hamilton is such an inspiring place to be a writer," she says, adding that she prefers to write in local cafes and parks instead of at home. "The fact that the arts community is so vibrant and thriving in Hamilton makes being a writer here such a joy. Because it's such a solitary, self-directed job, it can be easy to feel like what you're doing isn't real, but when you're surrounded by other artists and writers, it grounds the experience in such a

OTHER LOCAL READS

BACK WHERE I CAME FROM: ON CULTURE, IDENTITY, AND HOME
EDITED BY TASLIM JAFFER AND OMAR MOUALLEM

This collection of personal 26 essays takes readers to mountains, beaches, bustling cities, and remote villages around the world. Hamilton is here, too. Mariam Ibrahim's essay, "Bullets, Soldiers, and Checkpoints: A Family Vacation" shares her family's journey to become one of the first Arab families to settle here. "Mother, Land" was written by Lishai Peel, Hamilton's first Poet in Place. These essays navigate the intricacies of hyphenated identities, sharing nuanced stories of heritage and a re-defined sense of home.

BROKEN: HOW FAR WOULD YOU GO FOR A DOG THAT YOU LOVE
BY MICHELLE STARK

When Michelle Stark, a Waterdown-born civil litigation lawyer, decided to buy her first dog, she chose a fancy purebred, a silken windhound she named Raisa. Her powerful new memoir *Broken* shares the heartbreak she felt when Raisa suffers her first devastating and unexpected leg break as a young dog. In her quest to uncover what's happening to her beloved companion, Stark stumbles upon disturbing revelations about the dog breeding industry.

WINDY ACRES WORKSHOP: ART, NATURE & LITERATURE EDITION
BY SARAH UREN

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