

# Everscribe

## *M a g a z i n e*

ISSUE NO. 11

### CUSTOS VERBORUM

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Embrace the art of the written word in Everscribe's eleventh issue, showcasing incredible works from our talented writers.

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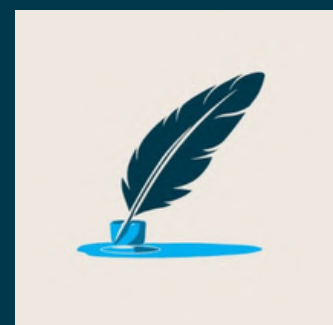
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## About Everscribe

Everscribe is a non-profit digital literary magazine dedicated to showcasing exceptional writing and talent. We invite individuals from all backgrounds, experiences, and ages to share their work with us.

Our primary goal is to showcase writing that is impactful, beautifully crafted, and thought-provoking — stories, poems, and essays that leave a lasting impression! We want to break down barriers and provide opportunities for all writers to showcase their talent and creativity, as we believe that talent should speak for itself. Everscribe aims to be a launching pad for those who have longed to share their stories but felt limited by traditional publishing routes. Our submissions are always open, and our process is free, easy, and unlimited!



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## Everscribe’s Platforms

Join the conversation and fun in Everscribe’s welcoming community across various platforms.

Visit our official [Discord](#) server and reach out to us on [X](#), and [Instagram](#)!

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# Editor's Note

Dear Scribe,

Welcome to our eleventh issue, *Custos Verborum* — the “Keeper of Words.”

Writing has always been an act of preservation. We hold onto fragments, overheard conversations, fleeting thoughts, the way light fell through a window, and give them form. Words outlive their writers, carrying forward what might otherwise be lost.

We remain deeply grateful to the contributors who entrusted us with their work and to the readers who return each month with curiosity and care. These pages exist because of passion, bold expression, and the conviction that language can still move us.

What comes next will surprise you! But for now, settle into this issue and spend a little time with what has been kept.

With thanks and respect,

*Dafia*

Founder & Editor-in-Chief



# Scribe's Corner



## Word of the Month!

The Scribes have spoken... The word of the month is: **Incandescent**!

Incandescent describes July's position in our lives, the center peak of the solar year, the height of passion and achievement. It's the white-hot blaze of purpose, that moment when everything feels lit from within. Incandescence never lasts forever. It flickers and consumes and transforms. But while it burns, it reveals everything: the truth, the ache, the beauty too bold to hide. July reminded us there is power in the heat of becoming.

Want to help choose our next Word of the Month? Vote in our polls on Discord and social media!

## Literary Technique Spotlight

Some meanings are never named outright, instead felt. **Allusion** invites readers to make connections, drawing on shared stories, history, or cultural knowledge to enrich a text without spelling it out. Whether invoking Icarus's fall, Eden's exile, or a fleeting reference to Woolf's lighthouse, allusion guides the reader not with a map, but with Ariadne's thread. It's subtle, layered, and powerful in the hands of writers who trust their readers. It lets the unsaid carry weight and add depth to the narrative.

When Sylvia Plath writes:  
"Out of the ash / I rise with my red hair / And I eat men like air" in *Lady Lazarus*, she alludes to both the mythological phoenix and the biblical Lazarus. These layered allusions intensify the poem's themes without ever needing to explain themselves.

## Question for our Scribes...

Have you ever written something intense or emotionally charged that carries hidden depths beneath its surface? This month, we're exploring how the most powerful writing often works in layers — bold on the surface, but threaded with quiet allusions and unspoken meanings. What's a piece you've written that meant more than its words revealed outright?

Send us your answers in our official Discord community, or post them on X, Bluesky, and Instagram using **#ScribesCorner**.



# Fictional Short Story



B.E. Nugent

# And Dog Makes Three

**I**t was the last day of June and late in the evening. The day was typical of mid-summer on the western sea front of County Clare. As their wont, the clouds spent the waking hours gathering and brooding until the sun, in a fit of pique no doubt, vanished behind the horizon, leaving only a blush of pink.

Anne and I retired to this coastal retreat five years ago, three years before the events I recall, leaving behind our adult children in Limerick, the city that no longer held us enchanted.

Pink to purple, day ceded to night. Not far above, the clouds bloated supreme, filling the sky like distended bladders. As the fading light flickered to extinction, they let loose their load, lashing against the lonely coastal road that leads from

*“Such was our routine and I found it entirely satisfactory.”*

here to the village and from the village to the town, drenching the low stone walls that divided the barren fields all around us. The downpour soaked the solitary crab apple tree that stood defiant in our back yard and beat on the roof slates, the walls and the doors of our house. Coming sideways, driven

by unforgiving winds, it battered an incessant, suffocating patter against the window facing me as I stood at the kitchen sink, cleaning the ware from our evening meal some hours before.

Anne left after eating to visit Sally, her friend who lived in another old country cottage about three miles away. In her absence, cleaning up lost its urgency and I loitered with a book and a coffee by the living room fire until, anticipating her return, stirred to attend to my duties. You would often have found me in the kitchen; washing dishes, sweeping the floor and wiping the surfaces; such was my contribution. Anne’s friends habitually passed remark on my domestic burden, to which I would shrug and answer that I had long ago accepted my fate. Neither their expressions of sympathy nor my feint of oppression held even a smidgen of truth. They and I knew very well that no-one would expect the dishwasher to assist with laundry, clean the bathroom, prepare the food, or any of the multitude of chores that maintained the semblance of good housekeeping. Regardless, these little exchanges lost nothing in their repetition, serving their purpose of indifferent courtesy. My preference for self-containment would not impinge on their amicable intrusions into our home to visit

their friend. I supplied them with tea and a brief interjection to their conversation before returning to the kitchen to sweep the floor again.

Such was our routine and I found it entirely satisfactory. Anne voiced no displeasure.

We raised four children together, two boys and two girls, managing to oversee their progress through their formative stages without inflicting insurmountable injury. They arrived, said very little that was intelligible for some time, settled in and couldn’t shut up, then later devolved back to monosyllables before I really came into my own and drove the fledglings from our nest.

“We must let them fly,” I said, to assuage her maternal anxieties.

Then, witness to horror, an addendum. “Plummeting comes before flying. They will be ok.”

They were more than ok and successfully breached that chasm between childhood and independence. Occasionally, they return to us, standing tall and meeting us eye to eye. Then as now, the world comprised an adventure that they expected to master.

I taught them nothing.

It was late. Anne preferred not to drive in darkness, particularly when the wind and rain conspired with her failing eyesight to render the journey most hazardous. Having

removed her spectacles from the table when clearing the plates, I knew she would be blind as a deaf bat out on the road. Whether hidden behind the salt cellar on the kitchen table or perched on top of her head, her glasses were forever impossible to locate. I finished my chores, resolved to make that telephone call to determine which of my imagined disasters had come to pass, when the front door burst open. Anne launched through and came hurrying down the hallway. The wind swirled behind her, fallen leaves orbited her small frame. Her hair was sodden and clung to her face, but her hands were in agitated motion, as though conducting the twirling raindrops in her wake.

"Quick, quick," she cried, "we need a vet."

There are many and varied responses that I can easily compose at this remove. Some pithy, some mundane, the most obvious being, "wouldn't we first need an animal?" I didn't pose this question, nor pass remarks, pithy or otherwise. I may have said "uh" and "wha...", though I could be mistaken, concentrating as I was on keeping step with the dancing leaves and raindrops as we were swept behind Anne outside to the car.

On the back seat, Anne kept the woollen coat that had been my gift to her on her birthday. Costing more than I considered entirely necessary, my daughters thought otherwise. It was their thought that counted. No longer rolled in a ball, it now lay stretched the length of the back seat. On the coat, there was a large collection of wet fur from which a pair of black eyes blinked wearily at me as I crouched for a closer view.

Picture an adult Labrador and you have its size; imagine that Labrador's clandestine liaison with a border collie and you have the dubious pedigree lying on its side, with black fluid pooled under its hind leg. Streams of water joined at my delicate extremities and yielded to gravity from the tips of my nose, my chin and my ears. I swept the excess from my face. The movement drew a whimper from the dog, as though I meant him harm. To another whimper I gently touched the hind leg and felt his mouth close lightly over my hand, ready to bite down, I knew, should my examination prove malicious. Though unfamiliar with the specific dimensions of canine anatomy, it was clear that he had a joint where none should exist, a clean break to his leg at a point where bone surfaced through skin. The blood had thickened and darkened but the injury remained severe.

At Anne's insistence, I carefully gathered both the dog and the thoughtful coat and hurried indoors while she recounted their sudden encounter on the darkened road. His colouring blended seamlessly with the roadside in the driving rain. She shivered when recalling the terrible thump as her wheels careered over his hind quarters.

In the interests of moving this along, I'll skip to where Anne and I, dripping wet, more closely examined the grievously injured dog, placed ever so carefully on a rug on the kitchen floor. As a younger man, I would have reached this point in my tale much sooner and with some sense of urgency. I was in a hurry back then. If there's one thing that experience teaches, it's how to deal with premature

articulation.

"We need a vet," Anne repeated.

"It's late. They're all closed."

"I'll check for out of hours emergency services. There has to be one."

"That will be expensive," I said.

*"We have that money in the kitchen dresser."*

Receiving no response, I ventured, "more expensive than the shovel we have in the back hallway."

"This is no time for stupid jokes," Anne said, somewhat charitably.

I chose not to contradict. Instead, I repeated myself.

"He's badly injured. I don't think we can afford this. We just don't have that kind of money."

"We have that money in the kitchen dresser. There's at least four hundred euros there."

"Yes. But that is for the hotel in Mayo. Two weeks from now? With your sisters? Remember?"

"We're not going to Mayo."

"Oh! That's new. Why not?"

"We have an injured dog? Remember?"

"Of course."

Anne ended the conversation with a look of impatient consternation. Secretly, I was dreading that three-day break in Mayo. Not that I have anything against Anne's sisters. Individually, each is as pleasant and kind as one is likely to meet. Collectively, however, they exist behind a wall of sound that I find impenetrable. Some time ago, I realised that I simply don't speak quickly enough to keep pace with the ebb and



and further ebb of their conversation. And I state conversation in singular because each episode is merely an extension of the previous. Even after more than thirty years, I have not deciphered the code that was encrypted prior to my inclusion in the family. It requires an agility that I don't currently possess but, truthfully, I've never been much of a gymnast. But, I digress. With the dog as a viable excuse, Anne would cancel with her sisters and I would be absolved of sabotage.

Anne searched online for an out of hour's veterinary service, eventually arriving at a mobile number that answered. The dog lay flat on the rug, occasionally raising his head in a call for action. And act we did, carrying him back to the car and the fifteen mile journey to the veterinarian, a young woman in a new practice, fluent in the sombre facial gestures that confirmed the expense we would incur. She even mentioned it more than once, but expressed a more positive prognosis when the four hundred euros was proffered. We managed half that again three days later when we collected our new addition to bring him home. Wearing his surgical collar, he resembled a kitsch '70's table lamp.

Though I preferred "the dog", with or without circumstantial expletives, Anne insisted on calling him Charlie, after her childhood pet. Unsurprisingly, none came looking for him but he soon repaired and adopted us entirely. At least he seemed very fond of Anne that solitary occasion when she returned from visiting Sally to find

*"With an empty nest, we reverted to two."*

and tolerant of me, no doubt because I was part of the package. The children and their children found him adorable and he gave every indication that this pleased him greatly, behaving more doglike and less the duplicitous manipulator of my suspicions. He joined Anne and me on our coastal walks and kept her company on those rare occasions that I had business in Limerick.

Anne seemed convinced that Charlie and I shared a masculine affection that, in the manner of males of every species, was stubbornly subverted into laconic gruffness. As evidence, she cited me sleeping on the couch with him

stretched out beside me, also asleep, his head on my leg. I can still recall the sudden realisation that struck both dog and me as we leapt from our repose. He slinked away to his bedding in the back kitchen as I brushed myself down. I could not have thought myself more unfaithful had Anne returned to find another woman's head resting on my lap.

Many years ago, Anne and I were two that became one. The addition of four children brought exponential variation for a time until, with an empty nest, we reverted to two, within touching distance of unity once more. This dog brought an upheaval that I have yet to enumerate. Within these mathematical conundrums are the mysteries of life, I am certain, but I still count with my fingers. Anne tells me that I am doomed to failure precisely because I try to reason when it is understanding that is required.

Our home has been opened to a creature that, Anne insists, brings far more than he takes. He's worked me out, though, throwing surreptitious glances as he curls at Anne's feet of an evening, declaring, within his limited vocabulary, that he is not the first mutt she has rescued.

**B.E. Nugent** is Irish and new to creative writing with nine stories published.

Rachael Bae

# Summer Castles

There was a new family in the house across the stream.

Christie Lee peered out her window with wide, dark eyes. The other house had been empty for a long time, probably as long as she could remember, silent and undisturbed amid the steady flow of changing seasons. It had a hickory-red shingled roof and shutters the color of the surrounding woods on sleepy summer afternoons, ivy curling along the white brick walls like sheets of green lace. Flowers of all kinds blossomed out in front, overgrown from years of neglect. Tangles of gardenia and lilac, great big bunches of lantana, sprigs of dandelion and baby's breath.

"It's a right mess over there," her father would say, whistling a long, sliding note, "Whoever buys the place is going to have their work cut out for them."

But Christie rather liked it like that. She pretended it was a fairy cottage, and on warm days, after finishing her schoolwork, she would hop over the stepping stones studded along the width of the stream—it wasn't very wide at all, but Christie's parents insisted she use them—to sit among the flowers and sun-dappled grass. The breeze always smelled a little sweeter there, the sun a little brighter, small critters a little braver. Squirrels stopped to nibble on nuts, rabbits

came close enough to touch. Birds swooped down close, and with her eyes shut to the brightness of the day, Christie felt as if they might one day be daring enough to brush their soft feathers against her head. Sometimes, with that little thrill of doing a thing she perhaps ought not to do, she would sneak up to the windows, hoping to catch a glimpse of a fairy or two. She hadn't seen one yet, only cobwebs in corners and dust motes floating in glowing shafts of sunlight, but that had no power to discourage her.

"Maybe they disappear, right when I poke my head up. It wouldn't do for fairies to be spotted so easily, after all. That's part of the magic of it," she mused to her parents one night after a day of play.

"That could be," her mother nodded sagely, her lips quirked. Her father only smiled indulgently, but Christie took that as agreement all the same. Parents had a hard time understanding magical things anyhow. Their own house was pretty enough, all gray stone and warm, oaken beams, but they had been living in it too long for there to be any fairies left. It wasn't their fault they couldn't see.

And it really was odd, she thought to herself now, to see movers bustling about, carrying boxes and making an honest ruckus. She hoped the new family wouldn't trim down the flowers. Christie was

excited at the potential prospect of a new child to play with, but she couldn't help feeling a little mournful too. Surely now that there were people there, the fairies would no longer want to visit. But Christie wasn't one to dwell on disappointments, and she quickly cheered herself with the thought that a new friend would be good company for finding new fairy hiding spots. She decided she would ask.

It took a whole week for them to move in, ending just as summer break began. She saw a woman and a man darting about, directing movers and carrying what they could, but no children. Christie sighed, looking out at the now fairy-less cottage from the front door, left slightly ajar to let a bit of

*"The breeze always smelled a little sweeter there."*

cool air in. She really had been hoping for a new playmate. There weren't many children here in Alderdale. Her entire second-grade level consisted of a single classroom with four other children, and they lived closer to the city, so it was difficult to play with them much.

But then, a few days later, just a



week into vacation, her new neighbors' clunky blue truck pulled in after breakfast. When did they leave, and where were they coming back from so early in the morning? Again, that little thrill. Christie ran up the stairs to her room, fetching the magnifying glass her father had gifted her for her last birthday. Any good detective needed a magnifying glass, and this was a mystery she had to solve.

"Omma, can I play outside?" She called out to her mother, who was baking carrot bread in the kitchen, the sweet, nutty aroma already wafting from the oven.

"Yes, but come inside when it gets too hot!" Mrs. Lee was a small, willowy woman with a graceful abundance of laugh lines. She believed in the importance of play for children, particularly since she had grown up in the countryside herself before moving to the city for her studies. Now, back in the familiarity of rolling hills and wooded groves and a laughing creek, she allowed her daughter outside whenever the weather and their schedule permitted, so long as she didn't track dirt into the house.

So Christie dashed out the door, only slowing once she was across the stream and approaching the still overgrown riot of flowers in front of the fairy-less cottage. Crouching down, she scampered about, inspecting the truck with a serious little face, magnifying glass held close to her eye. Hmmm. No mud on the wheels, only the usual layer of dust from the unpaved roads. Not a dawn fishing trip like the ones her father would take every so often. Maybe they'd gone to dance in a clearing in the woods, under the moonlight and the rising

gold of morning. Maybe they'd met fairies there! It did seem like a place one would find fairies.

An exciting thought struck Christie. What if the fairies had followed them? The sides of the cargo bed were tall enough that they could hide from plain sight. Perhaps, if she were quiet enough, she could catch a glimpse of them before they blinked out of sight!

Heaving herself up onto the side step as silently as she could, Christie carefully rose to the tips of her toes. There was something there, she just knew it. If only she could get a little closer, a little higher! Reaching over to grip the edge of the side walls, she clambered up, trying to pull her chin over it.

The sudden slam of a door.

*"There was something there, she just knew it."*

Christie lost her balance, tumbling down and landing hard with a breathless huff. Tears welled at the sting of pain, but she'd fallen enough times to bear it. Adventurers were tougher than that! So she pushed herself up, feeling rather proud of her own courage, and brushed the dust from her skirt. There was no time to sit about; another mystery was at hand. After a moment of inspecting her magnifying glass, which had fallen from her hand when she toppled, and happily finding it free of cracks, she peeked around the corner of the truck—

Only to come nose-to-nose with another child.

With a startled yelp, Christie jumped back. The other child—a boy, she could see now—stepped back too, though with a big, toothy smile.

"Hi!" He waved. The boy had hair the same amber as the wheat field past the hills, and eyes the color of mossy bark, cheeks ruddy from the pleasure of a trick well pulled. He looked like the fairies drawn in soft watercolor on the pages of her picture books.

"Hi," she blurted, "Are you a fairy?"

"No," he laughed. But not in a mean way, like some of the older children in school. It was more a sound of joy, as if he liked the idea of it. "I'm Isaak."

She flushed, a little embarrassed. Of course, he wasn't a fairy. He was too big for that, and she was sure fairies had whimsical names like Bluebell or Daisy or Robin, not Isaak. She hurried to change the subject. "My name's Christie. I'm seven."

"Well, I'm eight!" Isaak declared proudly, chest puffed out. His face quickly scrunched with curiosity, however, and he asked, "Have you seen a real fairy before?"

She shook her head. "I've tried, but they disappear real quick. I'm pretty sure they lived in the fairy cottage, though."

"Where's that?"

Christie pointed at the house behind him. "But they're probably not there anymore."

"Wow," he breathed, seeming to look at the place in a new light, "I wonder if they left anything behind." The boy turned back to her. "Do you want to go look?"

"In the fairy cottage? How?"

He laughed again. "I live here

now, don't you know?"

So there *was* a new child in Alderdale! Christie could hardly contain herself, bouncing a little in her glee. Her investigations had

borne more fruit than she'd imagined, and now she had someone to play with *and* the chance to finally enter the fairy cottage. "Can we then? Can we

really go look?"

He grinned in answer, all teeth and squinty eyes. Hand in hand, the two raced inside toward the mysteries and magic in store.

**Rachael Bae** is an emerging writer and a student pursuing a degree in English at Chapman University. A lifelong reader, Rachael aspires to spark imagination and stir emotion through her stories. Her writing often explores the complexities of family, love, and grief. She also strives to express the quieter beauties of human connection, reflected in her self-published children's book, *The Little Boat*. Rachael's dream is to become a bestselling author and a creative writing professor.



Alexei Raymond

# The Mourning Hounds

The man's five hounds are restless. They surround him with ten pleading eyes: Toma, Sophie, Toby, Strelka, and Stas. These days, caring for them is lonelier. They, too, feel a certain lack. They mostly sit listless across the apartment, wandering to and fro. At night they try to accompany

*“Her shiny black nose is adorned by a single yellow petal.”*

him to bed, but he refuses them; their company keeps him awake and there isn't much space on the mattress. So, they disappear into the dark until he wakes. Once morning comes, waking up is still difficult, but he's reenergized by the light; he can appreciate the hounds' loyal company anew.

Toma's milk-and-chocolate fur is softest to the touch, black Sophie's grey eyes belie startling understanding; plump, straw-colored Toby's appetite is voracious as of late—hard to refuse; white Strelka's alert nose prolongs any walk as every trace is sniffed out and investigated, and Stas—panda in wolf form—whose ears perk up like furry antennae at the slightest suspicious sound. So anxious; why? They are a lot to take care of, and sometimes, the man wonders

whether he's capable. He is thankful that his sense of duty is still enough to get him out of bed. The hounds are his wards and tethers.

When he rises in response to their collective whine, they pick up on his willingness to take them outside, and so they hop and clack on the ceramic tiles of the floor. Their canine excitement is infectious, and the energy in their kind eyes stirs the man to play along. He questions them, uses their favorite words, *let's go for a walk? Gulyat'?! and they answer with another wave, more eagerness. They jump and skip and lead him to the door—Toma and Toby already picking up their respective leads. They know how the ritual goes. He follows them and reaches out, and they plunge into his hands; they receive his caresses. He straps a collar onto each neck, loosely, and he forgets his sorrow. They are all in tune, and life becomes as simple as can be.*

Once all five leads are firmly grasped—three in the left hand, two in the right—they pour out of the apartment into the hushed, dark lobby. A mayhem of claws and the beat of his boots send echoes up and down the stairwell. He is apologetic, but there's nothing he can do, and soon they are out in the sunlit street. Out there, they are a synchronized pack beneath blue, cloud, and angel. The man chooses

the direction, and the hounds lead down the street.

It's still early, and much to the man's relief, the streets are mostly empty. He feels at ease this way, for there is no need to be ashamed for walking so extravagantly with not one, not two, but five large hounds that take up space. They are all eager, and the man is thankful he doesn't need to restrain them too much. He allows them to trot further away from him to their wolfish hearts' content.

They turn, cross the road, and are suddenly shaded by a row of flowering trees. The brick pavement is littered with fallen petals, full flowers, some crushed, others yet spared. A breeze, as well as the pack's movement, sends some flowers rolling away. *Roll, save yourselves.* Strelka is the only one to slow down her pace. She brings her nose low, sniffs at something unseen—*chto tam?*<sup>2</sup>—and as she looks up at the man, her shiny black nose is adorned by a single yellow petal. They move on and the air that way is suffused with the smell of gentle flowery rot. It is mildly distasteful, but the man doesn't fault the flowers or the trees that grieve them. The wind, then, picks up, resulting in more floral casualties, though more importantly, in the street's foliage being set adance. Gently. Lovely. To some unheard music.

<sup>1</sup> Gulyat (гулять, Russian): verb meaning “to go for a walk”; here “walkies.”

<sup>2</sup> Chto tam? (что там? Russian): “What's there?”

Before the pack continues, Stas halts them all. He lingers, ears raised, twitching. The road is silent and allows a faint hiss to reach Stas's perked up ears. It is a strange sound, not easily recognized. With a small nudge and scratch between the ears, Stas is torn away from his reconnaissance and the pack moves on. The source of the hiss can soon be seen—it is a pair of teens tagging a wall. It seems too early for such activities, but the man doesn't slow down to consider it further. He only wonders how the sharp, pleasing smell of the spray cans is registered by Strelka's sensitive nose, and whether it's offensive.

They reach the path's end, and before they turn a corner, a few of the hounds relieve themselves. This too is easier when the streets are empty. The man feels neither watchful eyes nor any guilt over offending passersby. Around the corner, the street slopes downward. The angle augments the pack's speed. But before they can settle into their new pace, Sophie spots a distant figure. She barks once, twice, and growls before the man urges her to be quiet. *Tiho, tiho*<sup>3</sup>. He squints to make out the figure—is it approaching or receding? For a moment, he regrets having left his glasses at home, but no matter—he has no need of them in these familiar streets. And yes, unfortunately, it does seem like the figure is approaching them. The man tenses up then, and holds the hounds firmly, closer. He is confident in their behavior; but when people show fear, it confuses his hounds. They react, they are sensitive. The figure is now close enough, the man can see that it's another man on a morning stroll,

likely around his age. He approaches fast, and the man tries to keep his eyes trained on the road ahead. He mustn't look down; it would be sad to look down. Why should he and not the other man? He maintains the direction of his gaze, and bizarrely feels the urge to smile, just to smile. It is *strangely intimate*, he thinks, *the way we're walking briskly toward one another on this empty path. I feel like smiling at you.*

And then the other man is gone. He moves past them swiftly, and the hounds are not disturbed. They are well-behaved; they are deserving of trust. With the unexpected presence behind and out of mind, the man's thoughts begin to wander down avenues of their own. The path becomes slightly narrower, and Toma is forced to walk behind the other hounds. Toma is at the man's side, and the reminiscing owner absentmindedly glides his fingers through his soft fur. Aided by the softness, the man's mind inevitably turns to aborted love stories, old friends. In their absence—the inability to hear them speak—he is forced to ventriloquize their remembered mouths, their hazy approximations. Nothing he forces them to say rings true. He cannot

*“Around the corner,  
the street slopes  
downward.”*

know what they think of him now, and if at all. He is thankful when Toby gives him reason to halt his self-pitying thoughts. The substantial hound, peckish, has

found something to nibble on. The man quickly reprimands the hound, even checking with his fingers to make sure nothing untoward is eaten. But the man isn't cross. Toby is faultless, the *durachok*<sup>4</sup>. The man wipes his wet fingers on the inside of his pocket and briefly wonders what to eat once he's back home.

They now turn to walk beside a large road, already growing busy with the morning's traffic. The man looks at the other side, to the houses there, and focuses on a spindly, lone fir. He amuses himself by thinking it akin to some morose Ent in a foreign land, scrutinizing the horizons for the lost Entwives. Closer, his side of the street is lined with a different kind of tree. These have a look of the tropics about them. Their trunks are strange, thick and round at the midsection, as if pregnant with something verdant. Were they always that way? They glow green with alien contentment. They look heavier, near bursting. The man is unnerved and steers the pack toward the first crossing to begin the walk back home on the opposing side. *It's fine to head back now; the hounds have relieved themselves, and walking farther would be inconvenient. People are waking up, going to work. Walking farther, through her street—no, too narrow for us. There's not enough room there. We'd bother people.*

On the way back, the man feels that he can no longer afford to pay individual attention to each hound. He must simply get them all home. So, he urges them, hurries them, to get them something to eat, and then invent an excuse to avoid work, and then. Well, *who knows*. The street grows cacophonous; they walk by

<sup>3</sup> *Tiho, tiho* (тихо, тихо, Russian): “Quiet, quiet.”

<sup>4</sup> *Durachok* (дурачок, Russian): “Little fool.”



an overflowing garbage bin, and at some point, the street, unexpectedly and simply, pisses itself—sewage is spilling out of a manhole, reeking and wetting the street. The man can't tell whether it's happening out of fear or some missed hilarity. He pauses with his hounds held close, who are growing anxious. The leash handles strain against his palms. Then, they carefully walk around the flowing stream. As he looks down so that they all avoid stepping into the flowing sewage. He winces when he spots a wet, crushed carcass of a large roach, seemingly hurled up

from the sewers below. *Enough.*

He is now almost home, and by the lingering scent of aerosolized paint, he recognizes the spot of the earlier teen effort to tag the street. The black graffito reads “כאן אהבתי פנים”.<sup>5</sup> *So you did. I did too. Why am I here? Still.*

At the apartment building, the hounds behave strangely. They seem to pick up on a presence. They begin to skip, jump, and all at once overpower the man's grip. His heart sinks as they dash up the black staircase in a whirlwind in an upward avalanche of claws on stairs on stairs and he runs after missing

a step stumbling swearing he can sense a scent it can't be, no, I have to catch them, it's not—

He reaches his floor breathlessly. It is a dark, silent, yawning space. And she, of course, is not there. He unlocks the door, steps inside, and sinks until he is seated in the washed-out grey of the apartment. And the hounds, oh, the hounds. They gather round him, close, closer, and he hugs them, burying fingers into fur, until it is hair, until it is gold, tight, tighter, until they are part of him and not apart. To numb them. He's had enough of his senses for today.

<sup>5</sup> כאן אהבתי פנים (kan ahavti pa'am, Hebrew): “I loved here once.”

**Alexei Raymond**'s words explore moments of threshold, post-Soviet diasporic lives, and conflicted identities. Born in the Middle East, he is currently based in Belgrade. His stories appear in publications such as *The Argyle Literary Magazine*, *Empyrean Literary Magazine*, and *The Crawfish*, with additional work forthcoming in *miniMAG*, *Citywide Lunch*, *Querencia Press*, and elsewhere. Connect with him at [x.com/enemyofcruelty](https://x.com/enemyofcruelty).

Emily Kuok

# A Night to Remember

“What is it about you and dinner parties?” James nudged him as they carried their champagne glasses across the room. “You positively despise them, yet you manage to get invited to every single one.”

“Well, don’t ask me,” Talbot said with a grimace, taking a sip as they stopped at the high table nearby. “You of all people should know what my job requires,” he tilted his head towards the three men in the corner, deep in conversation as they scanned a piece of paper.

“Ah, another case,” James grinned. “But I swear, you never seem to get the perk of these things. When’s the last time you let yourself have a little fun?”

“Well,” a wistful smile escaped Talbot’s lips. “If you mean serious, devilish fun—”

“Don’t tell me—summer ‘95?” James held up a finger.

“Yes.”

“And... you’re still thinking about her?” he leaned forward.

Talbot sighed. “More than I care to admit.” He swept a gaze across the room. Not much had changed about these occasions. Not in the past five years, at least. The same crowds in polished finery, the same tinker of glasses and idle chatter, the same drowned-out jazz in the background, the same undercurrent of loneliness that

could seize one’s soul and engulf it whole. In truth, he knew the real reason he was here tonight, and he would’ve given anything to be staring it in the face once more.

Vienna, 1995

Talbot ascended the steps of the Vienna State Opera, glancing past the statues and distant lamp-lit halls as clusters of finely dressed guests swept past him. He had neglected to ask the way to the Marble Room, and felt the weight of that mistake at once. He glanced at his watch— less than five minutes. He sighed and stuffed his hands in his pockets, sweeping a desperate glance about the place. The staff had vanished from the lobby, as was expected, and everyone around him was too absorbed, too unreliable to be asked for help. He clicked his tongue, taking another uncertain

*“Or maybe it was something else entirely.”*

step up—

“Not lost, are you?”

He froze. That voice.

He turned. She stood leaning against the balustrade, champagne glass in hand, smiling at his blank stupefaction. She had that same look about her—that paradox of

poise and mischief, those glinting eyes that both teased and beckoned, that same, tinkling chuckle he had missed for years. Yet there was something different. Maybe it was the way her hair was curled. Maybe it was her dress. Maybe it was the way she held herself. Or maybe it was something else entirely.

“Vanessa...?” he finally managed to say.

“Who else would it be?” She laughed again, taking a sip from her champagne glass, and made her way towards him.

“Well, haven’t you changed,” she patted his shoulder, looking up at his newly tousled hair.

“And you,” he smiled. “Look just the same.”

“Really?” she studied him for a moment, raising her eyebrow in a slight frown. “I’m not sure how I’m supposed to feel about that.”

“What?” he laughed, flabbergasted. “Wasn’t that a compliment?”

“Apparently you haven’t learned a thing about women,” she shook her head in mock disapproval. “Now, come on,” she linked her arm through his. “Let’s get to the Marble Room, shall we?”

“How did you—” he stared, stunned.

“You forget, I’ve been trained just the same as you,” she smiled.

“Fair enough,” he grinned, and let



her lead him through the labyrinth of corridors and people.

“So, what are you doing here, exactly?” He asked, turning to her.

“The same thing I assume you’re doing,” she said, not quite looking at him.

“But for who?” He lowered his voice to a whisper. “MI6? The CIA?”

She paused, turning to look at him, then said softly, “Don’t ask questions you won’t be able to answer.”

*“Do you think we could ever... go back to the way it was?”*

“Alright,” he said, slightly taken aback. She nodded, and gave a smile that didn’t quite reach her eyes. She walked slightly ahead of him now, and before he knew it they had reached the large paneled doors of the Marble Room. She reached for the doorknob, but he quickly stepped forth, and held the door open. “After you,” he extended a hand.

She looked up—surprised, maybe even touched. “So, someone’s finally learned something.”

“About time I did,” he grinned, and she smiled back, more warmly this time.

He shut the door as they both entered. The dinner party was in full swing, ablaze with conversation and light music, packed with guests in tuxedos and gowns. Beneath the soft glow of the chandeliers, long tables of cocktail and canapés lined one side of the room, while several candlelit tables filled the other. He tried to weave his way through the crowd, scanning each face as he

did. And sure enough, he found exactly what he was looking for.

In the far corner, a short man in a tux stood conversing with a younger woman in an emerald green dress. She was the broker, and he, was the one who would lead Talbot to what they needed, though he didn’t know it yet. A small smile escaped Talbot’s lips. But this could wait. The time would come later.

He turned to Vanessa, who was now walking towards him with two champagne glasses in hand. “Let’s sit down, shall we?” He tilted his head towards a table in that very same corner. “Yes,” she nodded with a smile, and they slid into the velvet-covered seats.

She slid him his champagne glass, and he nodded, looking up at her nervously. “Well,” he said. “It’s been a long time, since we... sat together like this.”

She chuckled, her eyes glinting with more warmth than he had seen the entire evening. “Yes,” she leaned forward, and something else surfaced in her gaze—soft, unarmored, wistful even. “But somehow, it still feels the same, doesn’t it?”

“It really does,” he said, gazing softly at her. The dim light framed her face in just the right way, and as she sat there, her eyes interlocked with his, he found himself wandering the trails of of his memory—their secret night-outs in Cambridge, their dates at Café de Flore, their near-engagement on a yacht in Monte Carlo.

“Vanessa?” He whispered.

“Yes?”

“Do you think we could ever... go back to the way it was?”

“Talbot,” she sighed, grasping his hand gently. “You know we can’t.

Not after what happened in Venice, not after—everything else. And people like us—we’re just—not right for this sort of thing,” her voice faltered, and the warmth in her eyes was replaced with a tainted, bruised sadness.

And despite everything, he found himself saying, “Then let’s leave this all behind, Vanessa! Just for one night,” and he found himself clasping her hand tight, tighter than he had ever held on to anything in his life.

She scoffed, and flung his hand off with surprising deftness. She looked down. When she lifted her gaze again, it wasn’t her eyes he saw—it was the operative. “That’s easy for you to say,” her expression darkened. “Do you know what happened, that night at the Teatro La Fenice?”

“Yes, but—”

“Do you know why they called it the Black Ember Protocol?”

“Not exactly—”

“Because your team framed mine, and now they think I was the one who planted the device in the gallery. The explosion, the deaths—all of it,” she took a deep breath, and spoke again, more composedly. “I need to prove my loyalties tonight, Talbot. If I don’t walk out with what they want, I won’t walk out at all,” then she lowered her voice. “I know what you’re after, and it’s what I need too,” her voice was dangerously low now. “You know what I’m capable of, Talbot. Please don’t let me go through you.”

He sighed, and looked her straight in the eyes, then said softly, “So what happens now?”

She seemed rather surprised at his composure, and leaned forward again. “You have the first chain of

coordinates, I have the other. So perhaps, we could strike up some sort of bargain,” she smiled, and took a sip of her champagne.

He chuckled, shaking his head. “You never did change, did you?”

She laughed. “Not in the integral ways.”

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The lights shone dimmer on the great marble stairwell, casting flickering shadows on the statues and gilded walls. Vanessa walked ahead of him, coat in hand, with everything else safely in her clutch. He reached out and laced a hand through hers, instinctively. “So, you’ve gotten everything you’ve come for?” he asked.

“Well, yes,” she smiled. “And it’s thanks to you.” Her gaze lingered on him a second longer, and she

placed a light kiss on his cheek—warm and burning against the coolness of his skin. He closed his eyes. When he opened them, she was still looking at him.

“Will we ever see each other again?” He asked.

She smiled all the warmer, placing a hand on his shoulder. “Perhaps,” she paused. “But we’ll always have what we had.”

Something caught in Talbot’s throat, and all he could do was nod. They walked out the main door, where a single cab parked waiting.

“Till we meet again, I suppose,” she said.

“Till we meet again,” he nodded. She turned to the cab, offered him a last, small smile, and shut the door. The cab sped away, and Talbot remained tethered to his feet,

wishing, wondering, waiting.

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“Talbot!” James hurried forth. “You won’t believe it! Come with me,” he gestured behind him.

“What is it?”

“Just come!”

Talbot glanced at the three men in the corner, then turned to James, and stood up. He followed him through the crowd, until James stopped in front of the gallery entrance, and signaled for him to enter, smiling widely. Talbot frowned suspiciously, then walked in.

Instantly, he saw. Standing in the center, wearing the exact same dress, bearing the exact same smile—was Vanessa.

And this time, if she turned away—he’d follow.

**Emily Kuok** is a writer and student with a passion for literary fiction, cinematic fiction and film noir. She draws inspiration from classic films, European literature, and the exploration of all things said and unsaid. “A Night to Remember” is her tribute to stories of almos



Sarah R. New

# The Whispers in the Winds

“Do you know where the wicked go after death?” The words repeat over and over again in her mind, first as a shout, then a whisper, then a disapproving voice, and then a horrible, terrible scream. The voices she had heard all her life, the moral faults that tormented her so, come to life in the hands and the words of men, women, vipers that had surrounded her all her life. Was she ever in charge of her own destiny? Could she ever have been? It felt like she didn’t know anything anymore.

The wilds of the moors, so violent, so desolate, and yet she continues. The earth, open to the elements, and she, alone for miles in the wilderness, then suddenly plunged into dark forests she could not see. The winds had felt gentle at first, but the longer she was entangled here, the harsher the feeling became, and the more fear crept up her throat. The winds whip around her legs, skirts pulling roughly behind her, pulling her to and fro. Sheets of rain thrown down from the skies, the cold freezing in her veins and pulling her into the grounds, becoming one with the earth. She had been lonely for as

long as she could remember, swept through life on these boorish winds she could never escape. These lands are wild and savage, and yet

*“It felt like she didn’t know anything anymore.”*

so tame compared to the hearts and actions of men. But this was what she deserved. It was what she had been told her whole life, so it must be true.

In darkness lit by candlelight, she thought she had found salvation, but instead it had been a desperate fraud. And the tempers rose as the candles burnt down and she ran, ran, ran away from everything, from love, from pain, from everything she had ever known. And she fled as that place burnt down behind her, and her whole life tumbles apart. But she’ll never be free. She sees him in the periphery of her vision, in the shapes of the reeds, the trees, hears his words whispered on the winds. She would never escape, never be free, not even in death. Her wickedness condemned her.

‘Wretched imp!’ screams in the

winds as they rip around her skirts. Were the words formed on the breeze, or did they spark in her mind, instead? She had been running for so long, perhaps all her life. She’d rather take on the moors than the man she left behind, arms outstretched in a blind haze, screaming her name, or the downward spirals of her imaginations, and the horrors she conjures within. He would never leave her. She knew that for certain.

In the distance, she saw the sweet relief of a dark forest. In any other life, she would have run far, far away from this, but, at this point, how could the trees be more dangerous to her than man? In one way, she wished for the forest to open up and swallow her whole, to envelope her in the damp dirt and to hide her away, never leaving. She could become one with the spirits of the forest, become a living haunt herself, her ghostly remains haunting the treeline forever. It would not be the worst fate.

And as the rains pelt down and she ran with all her might towards the trees, she wished she could fly, far away from here, away from burned down halls and gilded cages, and be free.

**Sarah R. New** has been writing since she was 6. She specialises primarily in horror or fiction with horrific elements, but also writes speculative fiction and non-fiction. Her self published travel memoir, *The Great European Escape*, was released in 2023, and her Gothic horror novella, *Amissis Liberis*, was published in 2024. Sarah lives in the U.K., but frequently travels internationally. She can be found on Bluesky, Instagram and Twitter under the username aldbera.



# Nonfiction Short Story



Marc Audet

# Snowshoeing in New Hampshire

If you were to drive from Boston and visit New Hampshire, you would see signs for the NH Liquor & Wine Outlet. The NH license plates sport the state motto, "Live Free or Die", which may explain why New Hampshire has no sales tax, a good incentive to cross the state line and stock up on wine and spirits. Further north along Route 16, you enter the White Mountain National Forest and admire the foothills of the White Mountains. Soon, you will glimpse the peaks of the Presidential Range, some over four-thousand feet high, named after various presidents such as Washington, Adams, and Jefferson. In the summer, you are probably coming to hike sections of the Appalachian Trail. On a clear day, from the top of Mount Washington, over a mile above sea level and well above the tree line, you can look north towards the horizon and see all the way into Canada. Closer afield, about twelve miles northeast, you can see the town of Berlin, where I grew up.

When I lived there about fifty years ago, there was a paper mill and about fourteen thousand people. Berlin straddles the Androscoggin River and is bounded by hills and forests, giving it a sense of peaceful isolation. The region is scenic and the vivid fall foliage with its red-yellow-orange autumnal

palette attracts visitors from all parts of New England. During foliage seasons, I remember taking Sunday afternoon drives with my parents. I saw cars from Massachusetts, fewer still from Maine and Vermont, and occasionally, one or two from Rhode Island and Connecticut. Visitors also came from Quebec, and on a rare occasion, Ontario.

During the long summer vacations, I rode my bike, played basketball with my friends, and visited the local library, a gift from Andrew Carnegie. Occasionally, we hiked into the forests, walking through woods scented with fragrances from pine trees, balsam firs, and other evergreens, the stillness accentuated by the murmurs of running brooks. I remember the excitement upon reaching a peak, feeling the cool air breezing over my bare arms, and admiring the landscape stretching out below me, a benign world where any dream could come true. Life got quiet after the July 4th celebrations, and as the summer progressed, I would get restless and look forward to school starting up again.

During the winter months, the gray snow clouds would settle in and hide the tall peaks in the distance, and I sensed the world shrinking, confined by the hills surrounding us. My dormant

feelings of teenage loneliness would rise to the surface, edging towards melancholia, as if my hopes for the future would remain frozen in time. Yet, winter always crept towards spring, gray skies turned blue, and the snow-covered peaks glistened in the midafternoon sun. During my last year in high school, I anticipated the week-long winter vacation approaching.

*"And I sensed the world shrinking, confined by the hills."*

John, one of my friends, had invited me to go snowshoeing with him. He would provide the snowshoes and be our guide. I had never been snowshoeing before, and I was eager to try something new. My dad gave me permission to go out for the day and with a generosity of spirit, he let me use the family car, a green Buick LeSabre purchased the previous spring.

On that Tuesday morning, the skies were gray and the forecast was for one to three inches of snow. The temperatures were mild, just below freezing, so John and I decided to go ahead with the hike rather than wait for a sunny day. Our destination was Rogers Ledge, a popular vantage point located in

the hills just north of Berlin. I drove us towards the Berlin Fish Hatchery where we could park the car near the trailhead. The snow was falling lightly as I turned into the parking lot. We were the first to arrive and a custodian was busy hooking a snow plow to a pickup truck.

John showed me how to lace the snowshoes, and we shuffled towards the small sign marking our trail. John was well used to snowshoeing and I was surprised by how fit he was. Though I considered myself to be in decent shape, trekking through snow was harder than I expected and it was an effort for me to keep up with him. There is a technique to snowshoeing and I learned how to adjust my stride to compensate for the width of the snowshoes so as to not trip over my own two feet.

The winter woods were silent without any small animals rustling through the undergrowth or birds calling from the treetops. The falling snow dampened any sounds that might have passed through the forest. That deep hush conjured up the impression that we were far removed from the outer world; we could have been one mile or one hundred miles away from Berlin, the effect would have been the same.

*“The back wheel spun, digging itself into a rut of icy snow.”*

The climb was gradual, and we walked quietly, exchanging only a word or two until we came to a junction in the trail. John paused and pointed towards a rocky-faced

hill in the distance, Rogers Ledge. I could barely see it through the falling snow. I pulled out my camera from my backpack and took a single, uninspiring picture of the granite outcrop, a low contrast blur of trees and hills set against a gray sky.

"It's a bit of a climb from here," John said. "What do you think?"

We had been standing still and after a few minutes, I could feel my feet getting cold. I looked down, my boots were damp, the leather was grossly discolored.

"My feet are wet. These boots were supposed to be waterproof," I said.

I unlaced one of my boots and found that the leather was soaked through. John looked on, no longer smiling.

"We better head back, it's only going to get colder," he said, turning around and heading back the way we came. The return leg was downhill, and we made good time. As long as I kept moving, my feet were warm. When I saw the parking lot in the distance, I knew that we were back, and I stopped worrying.

Other cars had arrived since the morning and the pickup truck was busy clearing the snow. We took off our snowshoes and brushed the snow off the car. I started the engine and started to drive out. The parking lot was slick from the fresh snow, and my back wheels were slipping. I was tentative about driving in snow since I had just gotten my driver's license three months earlier. As I backed the car out of the parking space, the car fishtailed into a low-lying ridge of snow. The back wheel spun, digging itself into a rut of icy snow. We

were stuck.

John got out, leaned onto the side of the car, and tried to rock it, hoping that the wheel would catch, but it did not help. I got out of the car. John looked sheepish, unsure about what to say or what to do next. At that point, the custodian drove up in his pickup truck. He looked over the situation and told me to get back into the car. He inched forward slowly, tapping my rear bumper with his snowplow. I touched the accelerator, the wheels found traction, and we were free.

The main road had been plowed and sanded, traffic was light, and we were back in twenty minutes. I dropped John off at his house and thanked him. He smiled and waved goodbye as I continued home. It had been a good day out.

My dad was sitting at the kitchen table when I entered the house. He often did that, sit at the table with his boots, watching Mom working in the kitchen. He might then go outside and sweep away any snow that might have blown onto the porch, clear the stairs, and finally, enjoy a cigarette while keeping an eye on the neighborhood. Today he was waiting for me to return. I said hello to my mother in French. My parents were French-Canadian, having immigrated from Quebec twenty years earlier. We always spoke French in the house; it was also my first language. Mom was standing at the kitchen counter, knife in hand, chopping an onion on a cutting board that Dad had made for her decades earlier from a well-seasoned maple plank. The board was warped, yet Mom never replaced it.

My dad asked me how the day went, and I said "Fine!" I stepped out



of the kitchen into the small vestibule where I hung up my coat and took off my boots. A moment later, I heard the kitchen door open and close. Dad had stepped out. Mom and I chatted, half listening to the local radio station.

Dad came back into the house. "Did something happen? There seems to be a dent in the back on the driver's side."

I was perplexed; I had no accident. Perhaps someone had hit the car in the parking lot. Certainly, someone would have reported it. I put my coat and boots back on and went to the garage to check the car, leaving Dad sitting in the kitchen and Mom standing by the stove, stirring the soup.

I slid the garage door open and turned on the light, a bare, solitary bulb that cast a harsh light with deep shadows. I examined the driver's side of the car. I could just make out that the panel over the back wheel was dented. I realized what had happened. This was the section of the car that John had leaned against when we were trying

to free the car. The side panel had buckled into a mirror image of its normal shape. I had not noticed the dent earlier in the day, but my Dad had.

I remained clear-headed. I opened the trunk and saw the panel bulging inward. I reached into the trunk and using the flat of my hand, I pressed on the bulge. With a popping sound, the panel snapped back into its original shape. The flexing of the panel had been gentle enough so as not to mar the paint work. There remained no visible

*"Mom and I chatted, half listening to the local radio station."*

evidence of the damage. I closed the trunk, flipped off the light and slid the garage door shut and headed back into the house.

My dad was sitting at the kitchen table, waiting for me. Instead of explaining to him what had

happened and how I had fixed the problem, I simply said, "There is nothing wrong with the car." This was technically correct since I had fixed the dent and there was now nothing to see. I said it with a straight face confident that my dad would know that I was putting him on and we would laugh about it later.

Dad got up, zipped up his coat and went back to the garage for a second look. He came back a few minutes later looking confused, "Perhaps it was the light. I can't see anything now." Mom stood by the stove and looked at each of us in turn and, satisfied that the car was okay, continued preparing the evening meal. Dad took off his coat and boots, found his slippers and went into the living room to watch the local news on the television. He had taken me at my word and doubted what he had just seen a few minutes earlier. I went upstairs to my room and read until dinner was served. The dent was never mentioned again.

**Marc Audet** lives near New Haven, Connecticut, where he is self-employed as a web application developer. He has traveled and lived in Canada, England, and Ireland. In addition to writing computer code in various languages, he also writes short stories, creative nonfiction, and poetry. His work has appeared in *Across the Margin*, *The Gilded Weathervane*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *Rappahannock Review*, *The Prose Poem*, *Exquisite Death*, and elsewhere.



# Poetry



# Hamzah Taleb

## *The Shepherd*

There's a shepherd  
somewhere in the dust,  
far enough to hear no slogans,  
close enough to smell the smoke.  
He sings, not for the sheep,  
but for himself.  
His songs outlive the cities.  
He once came down from the hills.  
Once.  
He listened.  
And what did he hear?  
Merchants selling virtue like lentils,  
poets drunk on their own couplets,  
priests counting coins in the name of mercy.  
So he left.  
Let the righteous choke on their sermons.  
Let the armies bury themselves.  
Let the flags burn.  
He drinks water pulled from dry wells.  
Eats bread without a name on it.  
Sleeps without a ceiling or a god to flatter.  
And when he sees us,  
killing in the name of progress,  
lying in the name of peace,  
weeping as performance  
He smiles, but not kindly.  
The shepherd is not waiting for us to change.  
He is only watching  
to see how long we can pretend  
We haven't already failed.

**Hamzah Taleb** is a poet, editor, and emerging legal scholar based in Toronto. Published widely in journals across Canada, The United States of America, and the Middle East his work explores themes of love, memory, resistance, and the poetics of displacement. He is the founder and Editor in Chief of *Muses of Justice*, a scholarly journal at York University. He has been profiled for his artistic and scholarly contributions by media outlets in Toronto.

Azalea Aguilar

# Hide and Seek

Sometimes my children  
hide in plain sight  
pull covers over themselves  
when I enter a room  
sometimes I do it too  
when papi arrives home  
I curl up on the sofa  
between them  
he meows his way to us  
before pulling down  
the blanket to our screams  
other times they crouch  
behind furniture  
too small to hide  
their growing bodies  
the youngest still  
draws on walls  
equations on the window sill  
her sister's name on the staircase  
a rainbow in the doorway  
lately I rarely tuck them in  
days heavier as I age  
they come to say good night  
youngest nuzzles  
her face in my chest  
oldest offers her  
forehead for a kiss  
they still seek for me  
insist I witness  
look mommy, look, look  
for how long I wonder

**Azalea Aguilar** is a Chicana poet from South Texas, gulf scents and childhood memories linger in her work. Her poetry delves into complexities of motherhood, echoes of trauma, and resilience found in spaces shaped by survival. Her work has appeared in *Angel City Review*, *The Skinny Poetry Journal*, and *The Acentos Review*.



Linette Rabsatt

# *The Shadow Eyed Wolf*

as I walked through the valley  
of the shadow eyed wolf  
trying my best to focus  
on what Mama said was good  
his coarse whispering – almost  
reaching me like tentacles  
sent enough fear to clog  
the chambers of my ventricles  
a walk that only I could take  
solo mission – a journey  
charting into an unknown fate  
focus lost and regained  
trepidation swallowed and upchucked  
no sight of the powerful wolfbane  
to keep him away from me  
a flora-less valley – a chasm  
of his and my hurt and disdain  
the dare of my youthful conscience  
to get past the mistakes and the pain  
the shadow eyed wolf – always a fiend  
lives in my head and threatens  
my heart to commit bad deeds  
as I daily walk through the valley  
of the shadow eyed wolf  
I fight with myself on trivialities  
the need to be bad or good

**Linette Rabsatt** is a Virgin Islands poet. Find her work in her Kindle book, *Be Inspired: Poems by Linette Rabsatt*, in *Pulse Poetry Magazine*, on her blog, *Words of Ribbon*, and on the *Visual Verse* and *Micromance Magazine* websites. Her poems are published in various journals, magazines, and anthologies. She won the 2024 Read Yuh Ting TOO Virtual Caribbean Poetry Contest and placed second in the 2025 Tell Yuh Story Contest.

# Uchechukwu Onyedikam

## *Carpe Diem*

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It is night outside and mourning inside  
yesterday is lost in the box of memory and  
Thus, I don't need to explain the past...  
for I am an artifact of hard collection of one  
rare art form, with no clique to claim

Carry me go yonder mountain let me  
while away the days of heavenly race  
writing my testament on the face of  
troubled days — of hunger and deceit  
that deferred my dreams to an unknown  
push back of restless tomorrow

With bags of cowries in his hand  
the day is pumped up for a jolly fellow  
to ride in the midnight stars to somewhere  
he can catch the gorgeous beauty of the  
universe in a glimpse of the night

This life is one breath we breathe  
choking it with the struggle of things  
of one's wish, relatively snatches one  
away from the good time we refuses  
to acknowledge with hugs & kisses

For I hope you live the dream of your  
sleepless nights evidently as you wouldn't  
have to rip your soul off your mind for  
transient experiences and events that  
fancies a lie for a lifestyle

And I hope the life you choose to sustain  
doesn't come like a thief in winter's night  
haunting you with dark shadows of undone  
places, friends, family, with placards picketing at the entrance of your heart

Be beautiful to yourself  
and with a pinch of madness  
save the last meal  
for yourself



Simon Collinson

# Lost in Translation

Lots of times I'm baffled and confused  
when people say things that are unclear  
everyone else understands what they mean,  
while to me it's all a big mystery,  
like a game and you don't know the rules  
but then I'm the one  
with a communication  
disorder, apparently,  
they say I take things literally  
I certainly have great difficulty,  
when people say things like,  
"At the end of the day, it is what it is"  
or, "The object is over there"  
and I'm left standing around thinking for ages,  
what on earth is an "Is" and where the hell is "There"?

**Simon Collinson** is a writer from England. He seeks solitude, shade and shadow.

Sam Aureli

# Why We Keep Going

Because the robin keeps singing  
even after the branch  
has bent beneath her.

Because a poem  
can be a steady hand on the back  
when no one else stays.

Because grief does not knock,  
and neither do we.  
We just arrive  
with whatever language we have left.

I write  
not to be heard by thousands  
but to find the one  
standing barefoot in a dim kitchen,  
cup cooling in her hand,  
reading by the light  
of what I almost didn't say.

Because silence is heavier  
than the weight of being misunderstood.  
Because sometimes,

a poem is the only place  
where truth doesn't tremble.

You ask, why bother.  
I ask—what else is there  
that even briefly  
makes the heart  
recognize itself?



# Sam Aureli

## Morning Song

After “Prelude in Grey Major” by Christian Wiman

The sun gathers itself, *luminous*,  
*l* and *u* soft as morning, a *luster* born  
where night and day collide.

Mist curls low, *m* humming sweet  
through the waking woods,  
its breath a quiet exhale of the earth,  
drifting slowly from the river’s edge.

A doe and fawn slip quietly from trees—  
a *serendipity* of calm, *s* whispering a gift,  
my world slowing to their stride,  
a quiet wink from rare chance.

**Sam Aureli** is a design and construction professional from Italy, living in Boston, MA. He turned to poetry later in his journey, seeking refuge from the chaos of daily life. His poems have appeared, or are forthcoming, in *Humana Obscura*, *Sontag Mag*, *Underscore Magazine*, *Prosetrics The Magazine*, among other literary journals.

Brian Clark

# Before I Forget

Before I forget  
There's so much I want to say  
Time's getting short  
Must get it out of the way

You all mean so much to me  
Since the day you were born  
My love flows in every direction  
Trying to keep your heart warm

Memories I used to cherish  
Are left out in the dust  
Slowly beginning to perish  
In despair and rust

Like sand in an hourglass  
Slowly falling through the spout  
I want to go back in time  
I know I left something out

These words are all I could come up with  
I hope it helps you feel comfort  
When my days are finally over  
Let our love wash away the hurt

My beautiful daughter  
Sensitive, strong, and true  
Watching you go through all this  
Makes me melancholy blue

My fun-loving son  
Grown-up way too fast  
I never wanted this for you  
Let's make these moments last

The words are flowing for now  
I must jump at the chance  
To say how proud I am of you  
And hope you enjoy life's romance



I want to make sure you know how I feel  
Before my memories leave  
There's nothing that can be done  
While I'm here don't grieve

I want to write it all down while I can  
My brain is flying through clouds  
How much I love you I can't summarize  
Because my brain cells overcrowd

This disease is a butcher  
Cutting slices from my brain  
It steals like a burglar  
Memories fall like rain

The dreams I'm having  
They're beautiful and real  
Or is it my daily life in a fog  
That's making it surreal?

I try to put words to paper  
The words just aren't willing to part  
Why can't I write something simple  
To express the love in my heart?

Don't let your memory  
Have the same problem as mine  
Remind the loves of your life  
You love them all the time

If I forget the feeling of your touch  
Please remind me  
If I forget the smell of your perfume  
Please remind me  
If I forget your beautiful laugh  
Please remind me  
If I forget the sound of your voice  
Please say you love me

I'll forget today's memories  
As soon as next year  
Enjoy every moment with me  
And live without fear

Heaven will send for you  
When your number is called  
Appreciate every today  
Tomorrow is not promised to all

**Brian Clark** is a 53-year-old Agile Development Manager and Personal Fitness Trainer. He has a BS in Marketing and an MS in Secondary Education. He is preparing to send out queries for his first novel.

# Acknowledgements

We extend our sincere thanks to our amazing writers for shaping Everscribe into an accessible path for remarkable authors. Your unique voices and stories are what make this publication special.

We also want to express our appreciation to our dedicated Editorial Team and Readers, whose hard work and commitment have brought this incredible issue to life. It's a true labor of love, and we couldn't have done it without you.

Additionally, we thank our founder for envisioning a platform for young and emerging writers, as well as our partners for their invaluable support. Lastly, a big thank you to everyone who has contributed to Everscribe in any way. For inquiries or feedback, please reach out to us through our website, socials, or at [info@everscribemag.com](mailto:info@everscribemag.com).



# Future Issues

We're thrilled to announce that our next issue, Issue No. 12, ***Somnia et Charta***, will be coming soon! Everscribe releases a new issue every 1st of the month, so stay tuned!

Writers can always submit their works through our website at [everscribemag.com](https://everscribemag.com). Join our community by connecting with us on our [Discord server](#), where both writers and readers are welcome. Stay updated on issue releases, special opportunities, news, and more by following us on [social media](#).

For inquiries or questions, feel free to reach out to us at [info@everscribemag.com](mailto:info@everscribemag.com). We hope you enjoyed reading Everscribe's ninth issue, and we extend our thanks to all the writers for making this dream come true!

Until next time,  
The Everscribe Team

