

*"The Ruminants" by Alexandra Leggat*

Every day at half past three, the dogs and I head to the curve of our road. Walk down the steep hill littered with tilting pines and fallen silver birch that twists from Galloway Road through the hidden way into Morningside Park. Sometimes I drop the dogs' leashes or else they'll pull me off my feet and I'll be dragged down like a rag doll. They are well-intentioned, excited, unaware of their strength. We head into the park at dusk to see the deer. They are always there at dusk and dawn, near the entrance, where other people venture in to feed them, to feed on the beauty of graceful creatures. I imagine for the others, like me, being in the presence of the deer is salvation, peace, a sanctuary from the stress of a day, from the city, jobs, marriage, children, parents, grief, loneliness, relationships, bills, debt, the vastness of a house one rents in a place called West Hill with two northern dogs I call *the wolves*.

We moved from a one-bedroom apartment in the Beaches. Picturesque but not in an open way. Like an Ansel Adams photograph, a-natural-setting-framed-and-behind-glass picturesque. Constricted. A part of the east end of the city along Lake Ontario, thin sidewalks, vein-like. In the summer it's congested with young parents coddling small children, golden retrievers, and shopping buggies. In the summer, the clogging worsens with tourists. Then there was me, sledding across its surface with my Inuit sled dog and Alaskan malamute, like warm air on skin, I thought, unaware of the fear I caused. "The wolves!" kids screamed. Yes, I squealed, but no, no, no. Parents' eyes on us as wide and dark as the lake, the comments thin and sharp like the sidewalks, like the minds of the whisperers, began to wear me down. Live and let live, I've always believed. "You shouldn't have dogs like that in the city," some muttered and I'd say, we're not in the city. The more tense I became, the tenser the dogs became, their howls and growls, their natural way of communicating intensified and we were vilified, "Direwolves?" some asked and, having never seen *Game of Thrones*, I was lost.