

Reverse Varmin': a Literary  
Third Verses  
Issue 3  
Zone





# VerseVarmint:



a Literary Zine  
Third Verses 🐾 Issue 3

*VerseVarmint: a Literary Zine*

*Third Verses*

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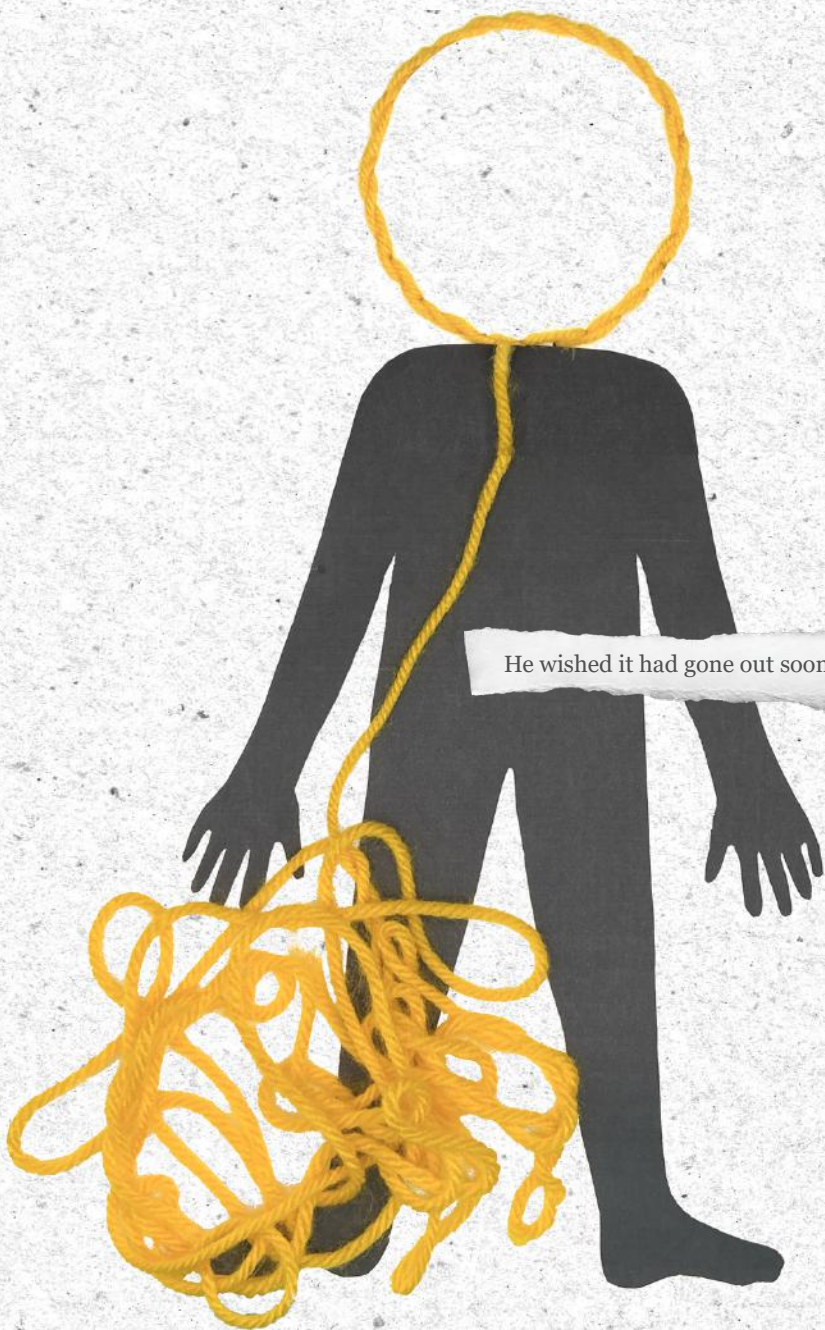
## A BOY FROM WISCONSIN

And when the sun finally went  
out, he was not afraid

He wished it had gone out  
sooner

For his hatred of life  
knew no bounds

- Louis Bourgeois



He wished it had gone out sooner

## A MAN NAMED JACK

Nonsense ruled his days. He ate oysters until he was sick and handed out loaves of bread to the poor, but they would not take his offering. They exclaimed, We simply don't like you, and we don't know why.

And he went home and breathed a sigh of relief that he didn't have to share his bread anymore.

- Louis Bourgeois



## IF ALL OUR TOMORROWS WERE YESTERDAYS

He'd spent two days in a row leaving behind \$72,232 dollars' worth of dental work performed within the boundaries of the tallest city in the world.

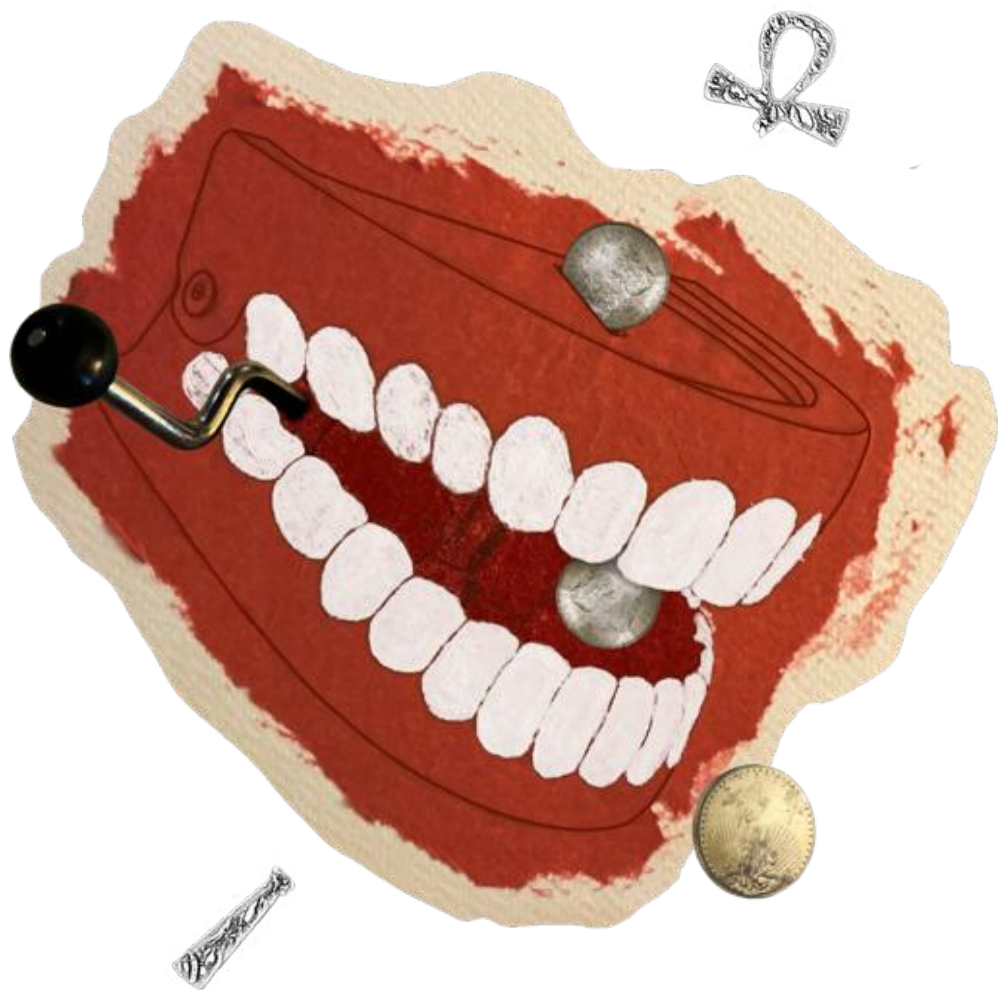
His teeth were exquisite and none compared to them that he knew of.

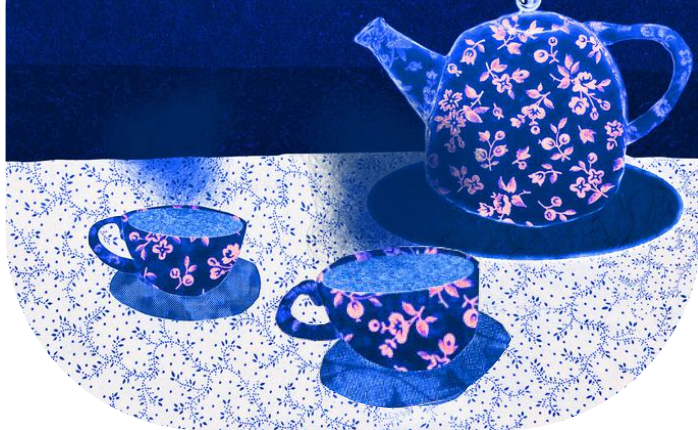
On the way home, he was hit in two different directions by two mid-size economy cars.

When it was all said and done, his teeth were not teeth anymore, just a mass of gruel where his anus used to be.

How stupid of anyone to talk about tomorrow, or to spend so much time and money on one's teeth.

- Louis Bourgeois





## ETERNAL SOLACE

Mark Keane

No one in Eternal Solace is younger than seventy-five. Eternal Solace caters to the shrivelled, the senile, and the weak of bladder. The residents are seasoned performers, rich in personal history though poor in potential. Behind the scenes, young workers do the heavy lifting. The oldies have put in their shift and operated the machinery long enough. It's the turn of the youngsters to keep the show on the road.

In Eternal Solace, the oldies take their time, tottering between walking sticks or shuffling behind walking frames. Four shops from a total of twenty trade in the accoutrement of impaired mobility. There's no demand in Eternal Solace for ski equipment or running gear. Other shops deal in goods with an oldie dimension—food that doesn't require much chewing, soft clothing easy to put on and take off, and furniture suitable for brittle bones. There are six pharmacies, three card shops, a place that sells

religious do-das, and two stores specialising in pillows and cushions.

The streets in Eternal Solace are painted in primary colours as the oldies can be confused by names and numbers. Each house has a picture of the resident on the outside wall—a three by three framed photograph beside the front door. This ensures that the oldie knows where to go when returning from an outing to the church or pillow shop. Some oldies reach a stage of such confusion that they fail to recognise their own faces. When that happens, they are confined indoors.

Molly Small passes an hour each afternoon in Betty's Tea-Room, availing of *Betty's tea deal*: two pots for the price of one. This afternoon, she is having tea with Annie Hulme.

"You know," Molly says, "poor Mrs. Nolan on Blue Street isn't doing so well."

"Is that so?" says Annie.

"Oh, yes." Molly nods. "Mrs. Nolan doesn't know herself. They found her on Green Street trying to force her key into Mrs. Zhang's front door. She had to be taken home and fitted with a bracelet."

Molly pours more tea and adds two spoons of sugar. Small by name and small by stature, more so at the age of eighty-four. The oldies tend to shrink with age. In Molly's case, this serves to concentrate her sweetness.

"Isn't that terrible," Annie remarks before taking a sip of tea.

“There’s nothing else for it. She can’t look after herself.” Molly reaches for the sponge cake, part of Betty’s tea deal.

“I go over every morning to see her.”

“You’re such an angel, Molly.” Annie stares at the remaining slice, her eyes bulging, a consequence of an overactive thyroid.

“I do what little I can.” Molly gestures to the plate. “Help yourself to more cake.”

Annie exchanges a smile with one of the Jennings sisters seated at a table by the window. Molly adjusts her scarf and shifts in her seat.

“Is something wrong, Molly?”

“I find it a little draughty.”

“Do you want to move to another table?”

“No, dear, it’s nothing. At our time of life, we must expect a little discomfort. Think of Kitty Jennings in hospital, at death’s door.”

“I didn’t know.” Annie raises a hand to her mouth and looks over at Lizzie Jennings.

“A very sad case.” Molly frowns. “Weren’t you in the same class as Kitty at school?”

“That’s right.”

“A beautiful girl I’d say, back then. And very popular, or so I’ve been told. Awful to think she tried to kill herself.”

“What do you mean?” Annie leans forward.

“Attempted suicide, I’m sorry to say. An overdose of pills. Lucky I found her when I did, doing my rounds—the Good Samaritan visits. Kitty had been very depressed.”

Annie shakes her head. "I never realised."

"Isn't that her sister over there?"

"Yes, Lizzie Jennings."

A stooped old dear, leaning on a blackthorn stick, stumbles across the room towards them. The stick makes a click-clack sound as it hits against table legs and chairs.

Molly turns to greet this oldie. "Carmel, how are you?"

Carmel stares wide-eyed past them, her frail body trembling from her withered legs to her wizened dewlap.

"You're looking well," Annie says.

Carmel backs away, smiling all the time.

"What time is it?" she asks.

"Four o'clock."

"Too early for bed."

They watch Carmel execute a three-point turn, banging against every obstacle.

"Twelve children," Molly says, *sotto voce*. "And not one of them is willing to offer her a home."

Annie waits until Carmel is out of earshot. "She's well looked after here."

"Of course. But twelve children, Mrs. Hulme. You'd think one of them would take her in."

"I suppose."

Molly pours more tea. "How's your lad doing? Jimmy, isn't it?"

"James. He'll be fifty-five in July."

"Isn't he a surgeon?" Molly tilts her head, examining Annie's face. "Can he do nothing for your eyes?"

“James has enough to deal with.” Annie looks down at her lap and straightens the linen napkin. “Anyway, he specialises in paediatrics.”

“Paediatrics.” Molly purses her lips. “You must be very proud of him.”

“James was a very intelligent boy.” Annie pauses and smiles. “I don’t know where he got it from, certainly not from me. Reading by the time he was two, always top of his class at school and university.”

“His job must be very stressful.” Molly adds milk to her tea.

“He’s away at the moment at his holiday home, in France.”

“That sounds nice. Has he not invited his mother?”

“I’d only be in the way.” Annie brushes some crumbs from the table. “He’s sent me photographs. The views from the balcony are magnificent.”

“He’s done well for himself. A holiday home in France, isn’t that something. With magnificent views, you say.” Molly sighs. “When I think of Kitty Jennings, hooked up to how many machines in the hospital. Or poor Mrs. Nolan shackled to her dresser, nothing to see but the four bare walls.”

“And how’s everything with you, Molly? You must be kept busy with your Good Samaritan volunteering.”

“It’s nothing, a drop in the ocean.” Molly pulls out the tissue she keeps under her sleeve and blows her nose. “I wish I could do more, but I’m a weak old thing.”

“Don’t say that.” Annie raises her hands and laughs. “You’re a little dynamo and so independent. A true Good Samaritan, visiting how many people and bringing them such comfort.”

Molly lifts the lid from the teapot and peeks inside. “Time for our second pot. I’ll let them know in the kitchen.”

She puts on her reading glasses, swipes her phone screen and taps in her request.

“Aren’t you very handy with your phone and all those apps?” Annie rummages in her handbag, takes out her phone, then puts it back again. “I hate the thing,” she says. “But you’re great with the internet, and social media, and all that stuff.”

Molly returns her reading glasses to their case and snaps it shut. “It’s the best way to connect with like-minded folk.”

Annie takes another sip of tea and dabs her mouth with the napkin. The sound of quiet laughter drifts over from other tables.

“It’s good, isn’t it, Molly? Here, in Eternal Solace.”

“Oh it is. No better place at our stage of life.”

“You’ve been here how long now?”

“I’ve been here since the start.”

“What do you like best?”

Molly sits up in her chair, hands folded on the table. “I like the certainty.”

Seventy-six year old Greta Noone brings a pot of tea and plate of cake.

“Thank you, Greta.”

“You’re welcome, Molly.”

“The sponge cake is so moist.”

“I’ll pass on your compliments, Mrs. Hulme.”

Molly pours the tea.

“Sometimes,” Annie begins, a faraway look in her soft face. “I wish we could see the young people.”

“What do you mean?”

“The young ones in the kitchen who make the tea and bake the cakes and pastries. Wouldn’t it be good to see a young smiling face?”

“Mrs. Hulme, you know the rules.” Molly dips her knife in the pot of jam. “It’s much better this way.”





## About the Authors

**Louis Bourgeois**

Louis Bourgeois was born in New Orleans, Louisiana. He is primarily a poet, but he has [also] published translations, fiction, memoirs, and interviews in over two hundred magazines and journals in North America, Europe, and Asia. He graduated from Louisiana State University with a BA in English and was the first graduate of The University of Mississippi's MFA program in Creative Writing. He is the Executive Director of VOX PRESS, as well as the Program Director for the Mississippi Prison Writes Initiative.

**Mark Keane**

Mark Keane has taught for many years in universities in North America and the UK. Recent short stories have appeared in *The Sunlight Press*, *The Interpreter's House*, *Foofaraw*, *Inlandia*, *Paris Lit Up*, *Prosetrics*, *Twin Bird Review*, *For Page & Screen*, *Shooter*, *untethered*, and *Night Picnic*. He lives in Edinburgh (Scotland).



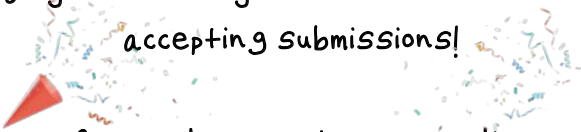
# Varmint's Verse

A note from the editor...

Our first short story sent my spell-checker into a red wavy tizzy. The British English spellings in "Eternal Solace" perplexed even me at first, but ultimately, challenge accepted!

## An exciting morsel of news:

July marks one year since we started  
accepting submissions!



We look forward to another rewarding year!

(Issue 4 is already gobbling up new writing)



Join the Varmin+Gaze\*!

Send us  
poetry, flash fiction, and/or short essays!

Also seeking art!  
(because our editor's art is great and all,  
but we are hungry for yours!)

Guidelines at:  
[versevarmin+.com/submissions](http://versevarmin+.com/submissions)

\*a gaze is a group of raccoons or, in this case, a group of literary varmints

**Th****ANK** *you*

*for*

*Reading!*

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