



# L'apparition du chevreuil

Élise Turcotte

Excerpt translated by  
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## ÉLISE TURCOTTE

An accomplished writer, **Élise Turcotte** has received many literary awards for her poetry, short stories and novels. She won the Grand Prix du livre de Montréal in 2011 as well as two Governor General Literary Awards, for her novel *Guyana* in 2002, and for *Rose: derrière le rideau de la folie*, a poetry book

for children, in 2009. In 2011, Élise Turcotte was honoured with the prestigious career grant from the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec.

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## Synopsis

After receiving threats on social media, a writer takes shelter in the woods. There, instead of the peace she was longing for, she finds herself haunted by her troubled family past and surrounded by a nature as hostile as the civilization she left. The cabin nearby is supposed to be abandoned, but what if someone was hiding there?

Like a roe in the snow, this panting story provokes a necessary clatter and tells a family drama that has to be revealed once and for all.

Rights held: World

Rights Sold : France (Le mot et le reste)

Press

★★★★

« Breathtaking. »

Anne-Frédérique Hébert-Dolbec, *Le Devoir*

« This novel shines bright with intelligence and mastered originality. »

Claudia Larochelle, *L'Actualité*

« Élise Turcotte gives a moving novel, shocking by its realism. »

Marie-France Bornais, *Journal de Québec*

## Protecting Women's Voices

Every day on her Facebook page, writer Élise Turcotte relays the voices of women through articles that legitimize what they say (and don't say). The page includes pleas for the rights of sexual assault victims, reflections on equality and anger, a range of socially engaged works of art, and denunciations of double standards facing female politicians and influential women.

So it's no surprise Turcotte found herself at the center of debates on the movements *Been Raped Never Reported* in 2014 and *Me Too* in 2017.

"The courageous voices that spoke out, and their often insidious silencing, were constantly on my mind," says Turcotte at a café in Montreal.

"I realized the consequences of speaking up weren't just social, but also personal. The microaggressions we face when our words are challenged can cut deep and erode our relationship with our families."

In *L'apparition du chevreuil*, a writer holes up in a cottage after being harassed online. During a snowstorm, she senses a looming threat coming from the forest around her and the ramshackle cottage next door. As she delves into her anger, she struggles with her own voice, which has often been dismissed. Gradually, the true threat emerges: a family drama that has tracked her like a predator. Has someone followed her to this secret location?

Turcotte came up with this story of stalking, censorship, and self-affirmation while spending time in the woods writing her previous novel, *Le parfum de la tubéreuse*.

"From my worktable, I could see an abandoned cottage, which kept creeping into my imagination. I felt there was something in there that needed saving. That something, I soon realized, was the novel I'd write, the voice of my narrator, the voices of women who dare speak out."

Though her novel isn't autobiographical, Turcotte is no stranger to the insults and threats being hurled at women online. "*You don't like men, you have no sense of humor, you're an extremist*. These comments, which I hear and read repeatedly, seek to deny women a voice. I wanted to examine this insidious violence,

which society overlooks and which can gnaw at us and wear us down."

Like a hunted deer, the book's narrator is the victim of what's known as "persistence hunting": tracking an animal relentlessly till it becomes exhausted and easy prey.

"Like most women who write and speak up, my narrator starts to feel exhausted, too. From always having to justify themselves and reassure those around them, women end up doubting their own experience." So they keep quiet.

Even within her own family, the narrator sees her observations and experiences constantly called into question and perceived as too radical. "Family is a place where people embrace the status quo," Turcotte says.

"No one wants the boat rocked, so writers, with their lucid and curious gaze, aren't always welcome aboard. But as James Baldwin put it, you can live your life two ways: accept things or deny them and run. We writers can't live in denial, despite the risks of speaking up."

To convey the doubt, ever-present tension, and jumble of questions haunting her protagonist, Turcotte has built an impressive narrative structure, juxtaposing time frames, juggling subplots, and blending the present with memories of family get-togethers and sessions with a psychologist who's in deep denial.

The result is breathtaking and incredibly dense. "This novel, though only 160 pages long, sprang from an internal monologue that lasted nearly five years."

The author defies expectations and shakes up the linear narrative. She avoids naming places and characters or giving justification and instead boils her story down to events and raw emotions.

"I wanted to highlight these voices without grounding them in anything nameable. The result is harder-hitting. My aim wasn't to achieve a kind of narrative wholeness or create a psychological novel that explains the hows and whys. I'm sick of always having to explain. To uncover truths, we need a more radical way of observing things."

— *Le Devoir*, November 15, 2019

## Excerpt

Nobody will believe me, but what's happening is that someone has followed me here. Or maybe not, maybe it's a neighbor, the man from the big fancy house, or someone else, a friend of Aron's. Except I don't see any vehicle. No footprints either, but the wind is so strong they'd be quickly erased. Even the driveway I shoveled is already snowed under.

In any case, he hasn't seen me yet, and I stay put, torn between going back into the woods and going to confront him.

He's an average-size man in a tight dirty-gray parka. He seems to be waiting for something. He must have just knocked on the door, and since there's no answer, he's wondering what to do. This doesn't bode well; if he was a friend of Aron's, he'd leave right away. I've left lights on and the door unlocked. If he goes in, I'm trapped. I'll die out here for nothing, and my body will be found frozen. I won't have defended my cause, my killing will be covered up like others, I'll be a rabbit, hunted down, lost. My brother will investigate, and the rest of the family will be pardoned. I had it coming.

He's still not moving. It's worse because I don't understand what he's up to. I breathe into my mittens so he won't hear me. He wouldn't anyway with this wind, but it's a reflex, the fear that grips women at night in the city. We try to mask any sign of life coming from us. But this is different: I'm in a forest, my forest. If it's Rock Dumont, if it's really the radical patriarch, this scene will turn into a nightmare, a B-movie. What everyone is quick to say afterwards is "It was an isolated event, a killer with a troubled past." If it's Rock Dumont, my death will be torn from its social context. But it can't be him. You can track someone through cellphone signals, but my phone isn't with me, I've lost my own trail. I check my pocket just in case. Okay, no, just bits of nuts, which I scatter in the snow. This damn filthy pocket, now's not the time. *I miss you, call me back. I know where you are.* The night before, I'd spoken to Aron, who'd then texted me directions to get here. Could someone have intercepted my texts? I glance at the other cottage. I knew something was up. I should have listened to myself and gone back to town with Aron. The nuts blow across the snow, they can be clues to my murder, reveal what I ate, that I'm always hungry, that I like carrying little bags of nuts with me, just in case. At times, it feels like my body is swallowing me whole, but not now. I'm not hungry, I'm not cold. My eyes remain fixed on the other cottage: I want to

switch enemies. I accept that the past is my enemy, the family drama that the black mass has contained since I got here. But not this crime story waiting at my door, not this.

The man in the parka glances at the woods, then heads a little way toward the road. If he keeps going, his face will be lit by the streetlight, he'll become the lead actor in this drama, the murderer in the halo of winter, the predator of the future.

But I have an advantage over him, thanks to the streetlight. I'll see his face, his expression, and if it's Rock Dumont, this image will be forever etched on my retina. If I don't die, he can't escape.

My optimism doesn't last; the man turns and strides across the stretch of land between the two cottages. I lose sight of him as he rounds a bend, but he reappears. Then he's gone again, inside that house with its dry rot. He, too, must be rotten to the core.

I wait for a light to come on, as if I need proof. It seems my brain can't process that the house has no electricity. Instead, everything becomes darker, like someone has suddenly pulled down a blind in a room. I breathe hard, feel the sweat on my back, my neck, under my arms—a cold sweat, I understand that expression for the first time.

The snow hasn't stopped falling—a real snowstorm, I tell myself—and the wind plasters the sweat to my body. Will everything I've wanted to do, or say, to be myself, will my whole life come down to this?

"You're gonna make enemies."

My brother's voice swirls around me in the snow.

Enemies? Because I got sucked into social media?

Oh no, I don't think so. What's happened is a shift in a state of tension that's much broader and deeper.

Okay, I'm walking, I reach the halo of the streetlight, I go on, mechanically, clear the way with my feet, I'm a machine, I head inside my cottage, I think of Aron and of shovels, of tomorrow and the unknown, I pull off my winter clothes, barricade the door, look out the window a hundred times, everything up close and far away smothered in snow. I could leave here, walk to town, and even though it's far, I could do it. The snow and icy wind would lash my body, trip me up. I chose the more familiar fear and open a bottle of wine. The night awaits, it's out of my hands.