

"Showcasing the beautiful power of written and visual art forms."

ISSUE #11, WINTER 2026



GABBY & MIN'S *Literary Review*

POETRY BY
AURÉLIA
GERVASONI
HYCCE

ART BY
WYATT
JOHNSON
CLUSTER

FICTION BY
ADDIE
LUO
THE NINTH
SLICE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
JILL E.T.
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GANDER GLIDER



GABBY & MIN'S
Literary Review

ISSUE #11, WINTER 2026

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Canoe At Rest by Elizabeth Agre

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**A LETTER FROM THE
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

Dear Cherished Readers,

Winter has always asked us to slow down, but this season feels different. It is not only the pause of cold or quiet—it is the pause that comes from having traveled some distance already.

As we shape Issue #11 of *Gabby & Min's Literary Review*, we find ourselves reflecting not just on the work before you, but on the accumulation of voices, risks, and moments that brought us here. Earlier issues were driven by momentum and discovery. This one arrives with a steadier hand, shaped by trust—in our contributors, our readers, and the space we've built together.

The works gathered here speak softly, but with intent. They linger in memory, endurance, intimacy, and the quiet reckonings winter brings to the surface. There is less urgency to explain and more room to let silence and restraint do their work alongside language and image.

Issue #11 is still becoming. Like winter itself, it is a season in progress—one that asks for patience, attention, and care. We are deeply grateful to our contributors and to our readers who understand that meaningful creation is not always loud or finished all at once.

With gratitude and resolve,



Sage Delio, Editor-In-Chief, *Gabby & Min's Literary Review*

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HYGGE

AURÉLIA GERVASONI

You said I should stay warm and light candles
 When spring gives way to the midnight sun
 I fear not the eerie obscurity but only
 The raging anthem of my lost destiny
 But you didn't explain to me
 Where do the birds go
 When the night makes freedom a shadow
 "By the way", you said, "I'm not a diamond child"
 "My dad's an electrician and I was born in the dawn of February"
 I think that's why your body feels like a burst
 One shot hurts, but the other is power
 And then you said, "My name is fertility God"
 Will you have a child for another deity?
 Blonde hair like a promise of clarity
 In Reykjavik tonight the city stands still
 From the windows I see people with flames already extinguished
 There will always be wax on my hands, the wax of the imitated summer
 Will you one day explain to me
 Where the birds have gone
 When night made freedom her ally
 The walk is glacial, but the bath water is fiery
 Will I ever be able to dive in again
 There are still new auroras to reach
 Pink, blue and diluted greens like Pacific fish
 My toes in the snow
 I go gentle into the night
 In search of my bird -

UNCLE PIP'S SEVEN FUNERALS

MARCIE CHOONG

The best part of Ole Uncle Pip's funeral stunts were watching the funerary staff grapple with the circus as we challenged every preconceived notion of what a true "Celebration of Life" could look like.

Boys and girls, men and women, and every gender in between strode confidently in a face full of stage makeup to attend the seventh funeral of their longest and most beloved clown: Pipplio the Peculiar to those in the audience, but Ole Uncle Pip to us in the troupe. While no one in the troupe knew how old Pip was for there wasn't a member among us to predate Pip, the ongoing poll placed him anywhere between 70 and 110 years old.

This funeral declared Pip a well-rounded 88 years old, just a few days shy of 89. I knew the unlikelihood of this sign ringing true since his funeral six months ago placed him at 76 years old, but as someone whose money was on 88, I couldn't help the involuntary contort as my lips twisted up to match the painted smile on my face.

As the closest thing Pip had to a blood relative, I had the satisfaction of being in on the stunt this time—whatever it was, as I was not yet privy to the details. Over the years, I've received countless vague instructions to aid in Pip's new acts—always wanting my reaction to a performance to be genuine for the audience. For this service, per special request, I arrived at the parlor early and watched the parade of circus folk whom I called family, emerge for the party. It never gets old for the excitement among the troupe has never dimmed. We were performers through and through.

While the troupe brought life to the drab, dated home to celebrate

my uncle's seventh death, I watched the funeral workers attempt to tamp down their surprise. The shocked looks on their faces suggested that Auntie Tabitha's Funeral Home and Parlor situated in Southern Arizona had never looked more festive in the 93 years since its founding.

For the Twilight Cruise & Circus Corps—the famous travelling circus who separated themselves from the mainstream performing acts by driving cross-country in a caravan of sparkling midnight blue 1950s Rolls Royces—the only thing that was allowed to come close to a black were the cars that transported their bursts of color. Ever since Papa Larry and his Lioness wore black in a special, one-night-only act in 1983, which resulted in Papa Larry turning into Larry the Limbless, the color black had become a taboo. After twelve amicable years working together, for Larry's lioness to turn on him mid-performance could only be described and explained as the birth of a superstition they were made fantastically aware of by the fates. Since, their wardrobes were nothing but cascades of brilliancy. Travelling only at night, their midnight Rolls Royces crept from town to town blending into the starry sky before purging its rainbow clad contents.

Like butterflies emerging from cocoons, tens of colorful performers tumbled out of a string of vintage cars. Each act sported no less than three colors amidst their shimmering and feathery ensembles. In every pair of arms were either vibrant wildflowers, dancing ribbons, or some sort of strange-looking musical contraption which only hinted at a traditional instrument. Despite the variety and chaos that swirled around the troupe, the strange music that overflowed from the cars grew melodically sweet as they all plucked and piped their individual battery of devices. Cheers and jeers were thrown around, ping-ponging off one to land on another before moving onto a third.

If this were a real funeral, the troupe might have dampened their presence to a degree, but this was Pip we were talking about. He's held

his own funeral in the last six states we've toured.

Other troupe members asked me why he started doing this, but, like them, I can't get a word out of him on the subject. After he pops up from his simple casket, the crowd goes wild, he pays the home a gracious amount of money from tips and wages he's saved over his vast career clowning, and he never speaks of the event again.

Pip has been in the troupe since at least 1969, which is when the second oldest troupe member, Lazy Susie with her two lazy eyes that could look independently in different directions, joined. She claimed he was much younger then, but still a grown adult at the time. When pressed, Lazy Susie would say he was anywhere from 15 to 50 years old. This was not helpful in the poll.

Once Uncle Pip declared I was his to keep, people started asking me what I thought of his age, but I was only a baby when Pip found me. In southern Arizona not too far from Pip's current funeral, the troupe was hightailing it to Nevada to catch the bustling Las Vegas weekend crowd, when Pip made the whole caravan pull over on the side of a deserted road after he spotted a cardboard box sitting starkly in their headlights against the blank, desert backdrop. As he'd told me in the years to come, he suspected he was about to get a new cat or even a whole litter—he'd been lonely since his last cat passed away the previous year—but instead he found me.

I had apparently caused quite a stir among the troupe. Some members adamantly upholding the "Finder's Keepers" way of being while others (typically the newly joined members of the troupe still acclimating to the lifestyle) wanted to turn me into the local officials for proper care and attention. Uncle Pip had won out, as he always had, and I stayed with them. How they were able to keep a baby without any ramifications or repercussions is still a mystery to me, though I suspect

Uncle Pip holds more sway in the real world than he lets on.

For, on my sixteenth birthday, he presented me with legitimate papers: a passport, a state ID card for Arizona, and a Social Security Number. He even managed to get me a birth certificate, but it gave no indication of where I actually came from. My date of birth was marked for the day they found me and my name read Odette Odd—short for my stage name, Odette the Oddity. He said it was my right to have a place in this world and that if I wanted to, I should have the means and the choice to find myself outside of our caravan. Twenty years later and I’ve yet to feel any such desire. Uncle Pip and the troupe were my home.

When asked how he managed to provide me with a real life, he danced around the question just like he did his age and any remnant of his life before 1969, and, now, his funerals.

For his first funeral, the troupe was pissed. I was pissed. Unlike this seventh show, I wasn’t involved at all and had thought, just like the rest of us, that Uncle Pip truly had passed away. He had faked a heart attack, paid off a couple of actors to play EMTs, and set up the whole service through a pre-arrangement he had straightened out with the home in advance. The event was a shunted version of today’s festivities—one member even wore a distasteful gray to the service. Yet, halfway through my speech leading up to riotous rendition of “O he’s a jolly good fella” Uncle Pip pulled the sheet down from his shoulders to reveal a cosmically brilliant tie-dyed suit. Pip yawned and stretched. Thanking the group for coming, he climbed out of the casket, shook the hand of the Funeral Director, and walked off. We were livid. And yet, if anyone tried to approach him about it, Uncle Pip feigned a frustrating ignorance to the whole ordeal.

The second funeral was a tepid affair. Unsure if it wasn’t going to be a repeat of the previous one but afraid to act as though it were, the

troupe attended with hesitance. This funeral was only different in one way from the previous funeral: there was a buffet in the middle of the service. The table was filled with foods from Taco Bell to Red Lobster all the way down to fine dining fit for royalty. Once Pip popped up from his casket in a fuchsia suit, we ate for hours and only when we had to be rolled out did we stop.

When the third funeral came around, since the buffet and time wore down at the anger, people were starting to look forward to the event. This event came with a special request: all in attendance were to wear their most enviable costumes—the timeless pieces and the fantastical one-of-a-kind jewelry. The crowd cheered when Pip rose from his casket in a jewel encrusted cerulean tux and the event turned into an all-evening ballroom soiree. Of course, on par with Uncle Pip’s unpredictability, the following funeral was the opposite. How he bribed the funeral home to allow a circus troupe to have a sleepover in their parlor was beyond me, but like the other events, Pip never mentioned it once it was over.

By the fifth funeral, not a member among us believed it wasn’t anything more than an absurd act put on by an absurd old man for our own entertainment.

In the fifth funeral home, around his casket, it looked like he’d bought out an entire local pawn shop. Heaps of jewelry and antiques piled around him with a sign that read: Free to Whomever. By the time Pip got up, wearing another sparkling suit this time in luscious lavender, and examined the piles, they were thoroughly picked over.

Come the sixth funeral, the buzz of excitement ran through them as they speculated when Uncle Pip would die again. Set for February 14th, Uncle Pip managed to find a particularly lively Funeral Home Director who was overzealous in leading the troupe through a comical round of

speed-dating. Uncle Pip being the real winner as he hopped from his casket in a vibrant red tuxedo bedazzled in a hand-stitched floral pattern.

By now, the fanfare surrounding the dead clown who refused to stay dead was beyond our troupe. There was some outrage from the religious sectors in towns who claimed Pip was mocking their Lord and Savior, but mostly we were greeted by avid spectators who showed up with signs in support of the notorious clown funeral. Towns and cities across the country reached out in hopes of Pip choosing one of their funeral homes for his next stunt. But as much as the public demanded, these remained closed affairs despite the allure of a paying crowd.

I watched the last of the troupe filter from their cars into the home, the music and noise muffled as the doors closed behind them.

“Miss Odd?” the director asked, placing a light hand on my arm, “Are you ready?”

I nodded.

“You’ve been instructed to enter through the main entrance and walk directly up the straightway to the casket. Once the services are over, if you would be so kind to meet me in my office, there are a few things Mr. Pipplio wanted me to discuss with you.”

Strange, but then again everything my uncle did was strange. I’ve learned over the years to not ask questions that could ruin a truly spectacular surprise.

As I neared the doors, I noticed that the raucous music wasn’t just muffled, it had stopped altogether. Confusion ruffled my brow. Without legitimate reason, my heart dropped a few inches in my chest. This was wrong.

I opened the door and the troupe parted like the sea. The

instruments divorced from their fingers and mouths. The ribbons were flaccid by their sides and the flowers hung limp. At a glance, there was nothing unusual about this service. There was no parade of little monkeys in hats or fat ladies singing. No feast or pile of gold. Just a bare room flanked with large cardboard posters of Uncle Pip and me throughout my 36 years with Pip laid at the end of the long room. My surroundings were so quiet that for what felt like the first time in my life I could hear myself breathing. The frowns on my troupe’s faces contradicted the smiling facepaint that cracked on their cheeks.

“This way,” the director instructed, gently. I hadn’t heard her come in behind me. Was this the gimmick? I wondered. Pip always did have a visceral need to surprise the troupe, was the surprise a regular funeral to make everyone once again *think* he was actually dead, but then he’d spring up like a fresh chicken in a multicolored tux before the fireworks?

The truth settled into my stomach like a sack of rocks the closer I got to the open casket. His legendary sheet pulled up right to his chin, hiding his death costume.

“Before we begin,” the director said as we stopped shoulder to shoulder in front of my uncle, “I was instructed to introduce this funeral in honor of his pride and joy, Miss Odette.” With that she pulled back the sheet to reveal a dark, black tux.

The room gasped. Men and women alike fainted. Children screamed. Instruments dropped to the floor in strange, mangled noises. Uncle Pip did not move.

The room grew stale. The director, having executed her duty, excused herself saying she’d see me after the service. I stared at my Uncle as the pieces started to fall together: pride. I was his pride—his seventh deadly sin. And the last one. He had gone through them all to set us up for his final act.

Feet began to shuffle, and one by one the members of my troupe rounded the casket and paid their respects to Uncle Pip before giving me a hug and slipping money into my palm. I didn’t understand until it clicked that this was the real funeral. Uncle Pip was 88 years old. I had won the poll.

Blanketed in a heavy gray overtone, the following hours were a slurry of documents and signatures. Waiting back in the Director’s office were an attorney and several of her sharply-dressed colleagues. This is where I learned that my Uncle denied dialysis. Where I learned he needed his final acts to be full of life and cheer before he left us. Left me. It was here where I acquired all the legal documents of the circus—deeds nobody ever knew he possessed—and my uncle’s never-before-spoken-of fortune.

Overnight, I became the proud owner of the Twilight Cruise & Circus Corp. and the confused owner of heavily invested stocks and ‘sure-fire’ bonds that my Uncle had been squirreling money into for decades to support the troupe’s future—to take care of us when he was gone.

In the following hazy weeks, Ole Uncle Pip was cremated, and per his request, his remains were scattered in the same location where he found me 36 years ago.

A DANCING MIST
MAHNOUR JAVED

Clad thick
The tree sheds
Hold the seasonal wick
Every branch shrouds

Lay there dead leaves
A reformation herald
Every flower cleaves
Buds fall and twig bald

Breeze stays to change
The air listens and utters
Windy music bangs
Every plant mutters

Alternation of a year
Temperature reforms
Wear the thermal layer
A winter ritual forms

Are you listening
To the wind clatter
It is tales telling
Of clouding matter

A day has a shroud
The dew makes fog
Breeze playing loud
Listen to it oh log!

The day is dancing
Mist knows the secret
To the tunes of breezing
Snowfall is about to hit

Lit the hearth
Earth is thawing
Needy for warmth
For the mist is dancing



AFTER THE SESSION

DYLAN NIGHT

A couple, a man and a woman, attend a grueling therapy session. Their first as a couple; and the first ever for the man. Where they recounted to the attentive therapist presiding over them their mirthful origins. The first question she posed. Of how they began.

The woman's answer was much different from the man's. Openly admitting that her beginning was well before his. And that it was a gradual culmination, until it wasn't. That her feelings had accrued like a quickly compounding interest. With each day she spent in his presence, they built and built until she fell head over heels. "I loved who he was," she said. "He's a good person, kind and caring, but also wounded ... but not in a bad way, you know. It was endearing."

Whereas for him, his version was the opposite. He could pinpoint the day. The incident was that impactful. Like jumping off of a bridge. And he landed with a thud. Albeit much further into their courtship. Over a year after hers.

The therapist asked the woman how she felt that it took him that much longer to come to the realization. The woman said she didn't care. "I just wanted any amount of time with him I could have," she responded.

With the admission, a wave of sadness overwhelmed her, and she broke down and wept as a child. Not five minutes into the session, and it wasn't lost on the man the joke he had made moments before they entered the office of the platitude they were about to encounter. Deriding the couch where they would in fact sit opposite an overtly empathetic therapist, hanging on each of their words, and that there was indeed a box of tissues there and on the ready. "I can't wait to see if there are tis-

sues and a couch," he laughed.

He wasn't surprised she wept, however. For this was the woman's core emotion once the layers were peeled; what she carried behind her wanting, amber eyes. "*The sad-eyed lady*." Was the apt sobriquet he used in one of his novels in reference to the character he created based on her persona. And her daughter's. What was a nod to the Dylan song about the love he lost in the dunes and sitting up for days in the Chelsea Hotel. "*She and her daughter the same ... the saddest girls and eyes I ever saw*." Whilst from him, during his retelling of the monumental escape they took to the Malibu hills, the one that led to the day when he never left, his reaction was unadulterated maudlin sentimentality. Of the exact instant he fell in love with her. When she loved him at his worst.

Which immediately shot him back to those months before and what he said to himself and later wrote when she professed to him, of hers, "*Do you want to love someone or do you want to be loved*."

And on and on with the rest ... There they sat. Attempting to rebuild and redefine who they were as a couple. They would have run through fire. In a way, they already had.

After the session, each spent emotionally in a way that only unveiling yourself to a perfect stranger and in front of your lover can evoke—he felt like he could vomit, her head was pounding behind her eyes—they both surmised they had earned themselves a drink.

They drove straight to the nearest liquor store they could find. A box-store depot less than a mile away.

Inside, they went their separate ways.

The man approached the counter first with a pair of six-packs. German Hefeweizen. His favorite beer. There, he was met by a masked, sickly young female worker at the register to check him out.

"Huh," he thought. Which is what he usually thinks when he sees a person in a mask this far on the other side of the pandemic. That

they're either truly sick and now have the excuse to be pardoned for caution; or, that they are paranoid.

Though he could immediately deduce by the air of the cavernous room that this particular young lady was in truth suffering from some sort of malady.

And not only due to her N95 mask in a room of such size and working by herself. Nor of the ashen hue of her skin. There was certainly something amiss about her. Something unnamed, but palpable. Inasmuch as he could almost taste it coursing between them before he spoke. Whether concocted or actual, he could not attest, as aside from her pallid complexion and the mask, she was hale of body and working a job where she stood and restocked bottles of booze for eight hours a day. Just that she had the look of sickness on youth. He thought all this, then smiled and inquired of her day. And how she was faring.

"How's it going," he asked.

"I'm pretty good," she replied. Smiling under the mask, he could tell by the creases around her soft brown eyes and the glint they shone. "I can't complain," she added. "Just happy to be here."

The man smiled. Then sighed heavily. Like the unopened case of gin he spied at her feet she would need to hoist to a shelf after he and his lover had paid and left. This was when he had the notion that nearly swept him from his feet. Of all the trials and tribulations he and his lover had endured to land him where he now stood. Waiting at the counter for her return from the whiskey section of the store with her evening's libations. He felt as if he'd been waiting for years.

Suddenly, he jogged himself out of his reverie and rejoined, "Like they say, 'Any day above ground is a good day,' right." He held her eyes.

"I hear that," the young lady affirmed.

They each laughed.

Before his lover appeared at his side with a bottle of Glenlivet 14 in hand. Smiling her crooked smile under her sad, wanting eyes.

"You ready," he said.

"Yep." She snuggled under his arm.

They paid and left. As simple as that.

But not. The man quietly considered on their way to their vehicle that this is the precise reason why he proceeds. For moments such as these. The seemingly minuscule and mundane, ephemeral connections that tie humans together and endure through time, infirmity, and inexorable hardship.

"It's what makes life worth living," he voiced to his lover as he unlocked the door for her.

That we all hurt. We all fall and fail. Nevertheless, as long as there is still breath in his lungs and ability in his veins, he will stop. He will not give in.

Not even for death. At least not until death stops him cold.

He doesn't know what became of the young lady behind the counter. For that sort of onus is too much for any one person to bear. What he does know is of the impact they had on each other that day. All three of them. And that all it took was a smile to build a bridge. A moment of kindness, kinship, and understanding of what it means to be alive.

CABIN
ELIZABETH AGRE

MEET-CUTE WITH THE PAPER TOWEL MAN

JEANNE BLUM LESINSKI

She stood in the hall, at the plate glass office window,
staring but not seeing the parking lot, tears welling,
not drenched in rain and sorrow on a heather-strewn moor.

He wasn't high-born, wealthy, young and buff,
or the rogue on the cover of a Restoration bodice-ripper, but
a graying, tender-fingered soul caught in the corporate maze.

She was slogging through another workday, yet
trying to believe her daughter's "Don't give up, Mom—
There might be someone out there for you."

He slowed, then stopped his lunch-hour power walk.
"Are you all right?" Reaching into his pocket,
he found, offered a paper towel, a few minutes later, a hug.

She accepted both.

WOULD YOU TELL THE OCEAN?

SONAKCHI PRADHAN

Would you tell the ocean?

And, how do you tell the ocean
That you are just swimming,
Even without touching the water?
How do you tell her
That you are simply drowning in air—
And that you wouldn't even need to go to an ocean
To swim or drown, 'Cause you already are, simply, in air?

How do you tell the ocean
That you didn't feel the grasp in your feet,
Or the blinded suffocating,
Without even entering the ocean?
How do you tell her
That you experienced the drowning
Without even seeing her?

And if you do go to the ocean,
Would you tell her that you did keep swimming,
Chasing a shore as a form of illusion?
As all you had was hope—
A hope that there was a shore,
Even while simply drowning in air?

And when you finally reach the shore,
I hope you tell her that you stopped swimming-
'Cause you reached your shore,
And that she was more emphatic than air,
As you didn't drown in the ocean, but in air.

CANOE AT REST
ELIZABETH AGRE

A photograph of a winter landscape. In the foreground, there are several evergreen trees heavily covered in snow. The branches are thick with white snow, and some snow has accumulated on the ground. In the background, a mountain peak is visible, also covered in snow. The sky is a pale blue with some light clouds. The overall scene is a serene winter scene.

PACIFIC CREST WINTER

THE NINTH SLICE

ADDIE LUO

No one knows who originally invented the rice porridge. Was it some rich people who wanted to put their digestive system on a break from consuming steaks and ribs, or was it some poor people who needed to create the illusion of fullness by diluting their food?

Presently sitting in front of a bowl of rice porridge of the latter kind, Shan could see his own reflection in the meager breakfast that was merely a trifle cloudier than hot water. Around the table sat his seven younger siblings who, unlike children of their ages, displayed no sense of excitement or anticipation for the beginning of a new day. Some of them were blowing on the porridge; some were taking careful sips. Among the seven, five were old enough to use a scythe to cut pigweed, four could shoulder some tasks in the field, and two could carry a load to the market to sell.

The cracking of a hard-boiled egg in the kitchen made everyone prick their ears. Every beat after that—the removal of the shell, the impartial cutting, and the mother’s footsteps—danced on the children’s nerves. Shan watched as his mother deposited a thin slice of duck egg into each bowl of porridge, knowing that it would leave nothing for the parents to eat. The slice seemed rather slender this morning, and even as a significant addition, it provided no calming effect to the churning stomach.

Outside the house, Shan’s father was in an ill humor. Chewing on a stalk of hay, the man squatted next to the door, mumbling his most recent discontent—

“My oldest son should be my best helper...Mighty stupid idea to send him to school...Much work, there’s much work to do in the field.”

With these words as seasoning, the food suddenly became hard to swallow for Shan, as if some fish bones had lodged in his throat.

“Eat your breakfast,” said Shan’s mother to Shan, in a half caressing, half remonstrative tone. She was presently placing on a piece of cloth some books, a pair of shoes, and a tiny sack of rice. Enduring her husband’s whining, she resiliently wrapped the cloth, before stepping out to deliver her subdued tongue-lashing.

“Work your son like cattle, and he will never be more than cattle! D’ya want him to plow the soil like an ox by day, and plow the womb of a cow like a bull by night? Whose fault was it that we have eight hungry mouths to feed?”

Rising in agitation, Shan’s father kicked an already broken stool, which collapsed readily into a pile of firewood. The noise startled the children into stiffness. Shan, who couldn’t bear to look, almost made up his mind to pick up the plow, and never mention the school ever again. Fortunately, minutes later, no more altercation came. When Shan turned his mildly trembling body, he saw his father leave for the field with a yoke on his shoulder and two barrels in his hands. The nearer his father walked to the ox, the mistier the image became, and no one ever knew who put the yoke on whom.

“Now don’t hang around. Get goin’ for school.”

The mother’s words brought back Shan’s tenor of thought, which kept searching for something to do or say. Taking the cloth pack from his mother, Shan secured the crucial belongings under his armpit, yet not without some hesitation that prevented him from setting out.

“Go!” Shan’s mother gave him a shove, as if weaning a reluctant cub.

Shan walked barefooted for about an hour. Once the school was in sight, he tidied his feet in a brook, dried them on some reed grass, and then from the pack took out the shoes to put on, presenting all the

reverence he could summon for his education. Even during a time of war, one could not easily camouflage poverty in a nation losing her head. One of Shan's classmates, having fled the country's capital with his family to evade air strikes, brought his knowledge of the automobile and the taste of a western candy named "chocolate" to the class, surpassing the teacher in empirical wisdom. Unwilling to admit the sentiment, Shan had often felt ashamed by the scrutiny of the ambiguous glimmer in this classmate's eyes, which didn't seem to be dimmed by the enemy's air strikes, but was rather provoked by a fellow countryman's threadbare clothes.

That day at school, Shan had lessons in abacus, The Analects, and the Tang poetry. Dogged by his father's words at breakfast, he found the abundance of knowledge less magical a land for his mind to get lost in without the presentiment of disenchantment. Do I need the abacus to feed the pigs? Can reading The Analects stop the weasels from eating our chickens? Will poetry thaw the early spring frost that bruises the cabbage in the field? Thoughts like such more than once pulled his attention from the teacher.

Commonly seen in remote villages, the school was also the teacher's residence, and for lunches, the students could have a bowl of cooked rice at the teacher's place, for every two to three ounces of dry rice they handed in as a compensation. As Shan was unfolding his pack for the rice sack, the thought of quitting school dashed across his mind. Weighing the options, his fiddling fingers exposed another neatly folded handkerchief underneath the rice sack. Inside the handkerchief, Shan found another slice of the boiled duck egg, the ninth slice his mother had secretly cut and saved for him from breakfast.

The ninth slice rocked back and forth on his tremulous palm, like a soundly anchored little boat withstanding a stormy weather.

HEAVENLY HERE

HARLEY WEST

Leaves fell around you, pools of autumn at
 Your feet. The sun hidden away, quiet
 Sounds. No birds, no insects. Only a defiant
 Waiting for the snow. Finally, at last
 The coolness turns to bitter cold. Our spat,
 Long forgotten. I hold you, pious
 Only to the heavenly here. Quiet,
 Lay with me, think of here. We have no past.
 It was full with blistering skin, painful
 Heat. Beaming down. That is meant to be heaven?
 I much prefer the cozy; beautiful
 Winter time. Full of snow, the confession
 Of all the time we lay, without baneful
 Summer sting. Here, only with you, is heaven.



GANDER GLIDER

Shelf Life
Presley Acuna

The cookies and milk had been placed on the coffee table, within sight of our blue spruce: eight feet of fragrant pine aglow with colored lights. Its feathered branches drooped slightly from the weight of our ornaments.

In the darkness of the night, Molly and I crept down the stairs in our stocking feet as quietly as possible. We had both been awake, unable to sleep in anticipation of Christmas morning, when we had heard the snow muffled soft thump of the sleigh as it alighted upon our roof. It was happening! We could barely breathe in anticipation of the prospect of seeing Papa Noel in the flesh. We imagined him busily muttering to himself as he dispensed presents from his weathered sack to positions under the tree.

Upon reaching the ground floor, we both inched forward until we were at the edge of the living room archway. Molly poked at me, her eyes aglow in wonder, upon hearing the crunch of a cookie and soft clink of the glass of milk as it was placed back on the glass coffee table. Taking a deep breath, we both peered around the edge of the archway into the living room proper.

In an instant we saw and could not believe. There was a man standing in our living room and he was looking directly at us, as if expecting us. He was plump, he was bearded, he wore red, and he was smiling, but it was not a jolly smile. With a gruff “Got you!” he lunged forward and threw his sack, empty of any presents, over our heads. Once we were

enveloped, he grabbed the bottom of the sack, pulling it upwards so that Molly and I were tumbled off our feet, now captives inside it. He tied the sack at the neck and lifted us up effortlessly, throwing the sack over his shoulder.

As he climbed up the chimney with the two of us in tow, we heard him say, “Welcome to the team, whelps. Elves have a limited shelf life, you know.”



TAXONOMY

CHLOE JEWEL

Taxonomy. The science of classification.
Dividing and individualizing all things.
Yet through the separation,
one truth remains,
The universal line of ancestry.
We all evolved from just one thing,
a lonely atom in the universe,
tied to all beings.
Mammals, amphibians, fungi, and trees,
everything connected indefinitely.
So is loneliness a construct,
in the grand scheme of things?
If everything is family,
then you are not alone,
when the connection around you breathes.
The Earth turns continuously,
and the sun will burn until it does not.
So push aside illusions of solitude,
because there are things to be done.



SHIMOOGAMO JINJA MASKED MIKO

JAMES HEJNA

ENDLESS AFTERNOON

IBRAR SAMI

I have just passed
an endless, despairing afternoon.
“Passed” might be wrong—
better to say I still stand
in the hush of it.

Waiting for an ineffable, beautiful evening,
beside a half-broken wooden bridge
where the river’s dead branches lie in stillness,
I stood there, searching for purity.

Then, in the last light of day,
you walked barefoot
on the mist-soaked green grass,
like a devastating flame.

Shrouded in nicotine smoke
against the open sky—
the sun’s final gleam
slipped away into
the muddy water of the naked, lifeless river.

Standing in the sun’s shadow,
suddenly your long silhouette
floated across the water.
From between my lips emerged—
‘not the shadow of a goddess,
but the shadow of a curse.’

Without a word, you quietly walked away,
falling like a silent grievance
into the river’s mud.

In every shadow of my city
your footsteps still linger—
a light has dimmed,
an evening has faded,
like a river holding its breath in silence.

The river stands still again,
yet you seem to flicker still,
like the fire of an unextinguished cigarette,
still burning in my memory.

COLOGNE CHRISTMAS MARKET II

DEAR HERO IMPRISONED

ELAINE MAGUIRE O'CONNOR

On the morning of her wedding to Noel, Grace dressed herself in a tasteful white skirt suit, carefully applied her makeup and began the two-hour journey to the country's maximum-security prison. Boarding the train to Portlaoise, she tried to ignore the niggling whisper of her subconscious telling her that it wasn't too late to change her mind and distracted herself with a feature about what AI meant for the Future of Education in her copy of *The Big Issue*. She'd bought it from some unfortunate outside the train station, feeling a burst of self-congratulatory elation as she'd handed over the five euro note and told him to keep the change. What even was AI, she wondered? Another fad, no doubt, like cryptocurrencies or that Instagram trend of girls posting pictures of themselves pretending not to be wearing any makeup even though you could clearly see that Niamh Doyle had filled in her eyebrows and was using concealer to cover her undereye bags.

The thought of Niamh caused a spasm of shame to ripple through her insides and she shifted her thoughts to Noel, and their future together. She liked him well enough. He was handsome and respectful and had beautiful handwriting - elegant with elongated loops- but they didn't seem sufficient reasons to marry a man. Eight months ago, the notion would have been inconceivable, but now, after dozens of letters and a handful of visits, the idea wasn't completely preposterous, if not exactly orthodox. Grace had discovered that she enjoyed the old-fashioned practice of letter writing and that there was something charming and gentle - almost therapeutic -in their communications, especially in this age where women were reduced to swiping right on men with shirtless selfies and DTF in their dating profiles in the hope

that they just might find love. Noel was one of the dissidents. She'd liked that. It gave a certain air of romantic sacrifice to his crimes that differed him from the others. History had never been her best subject in school, though she did recall a vague sense of patriotic pride when Mrs. Maguire had taught them about the heroic tales of Connolly and Casement and that lot.

When Noel had proposed, Grace's heart had soared and she'd immediately accepted, momentarily dismissing the catalogue of complications involved in such a union. But she'd been at a low ebb, and Noel was so sure about things - about *her* - and she supposed she got a little caught up in the moment, especially when the other inmates and visitors in the room had cheered, and the prison guard had given them a minute to hug before shouting 'NO TOUCHING,' loudly and giving her a little wink. It felt like she was in a film and that this time there would be a happy ending. Only when she got home, did the doubts crawl into the back tunnels of her mind and the panic set in. Attractive and patriotic though Noel was, she couldn't actually marry him. All she'd wanted was to be a good person and to help those less fortunate, and now she'd gone and committed her life to a criminal.

The day after the proposal, Grace felt much calmer. The administration and facilitation of a wedding behind bars would undoubtedly take months, if not years, to arrange, by which stage she would come up with a suitable plan to extract herself from the situation in a manner which would cause minimum offense. She continued to write and to visit, enjoying Noel's company and how he was always so grateful for her company, telling her she was the kindest, most thoughtful woman he had ever met and how much he appreciated the money she lodged in his account each week to spend in the tuck shop. But the arrangements had taken almost no time, and before she knew it, the date had been set and she was picking out a vintage silk wedding suit in Jenny Vander.

At Kildare station, a jet of freezing air rushed into the carriage and Grace shivered, pulled up the silk collar of her blazer, and pushed down the anxiety that was rising from her gut. It had been a record cold month with two dumps of snow already. A winter wedding was not what she had wanted. But then her last attempt at matrimony had been in the spring, and that hadn't worked out, regardless of the weather. The memory was soupy and smeared and difficult to grasp but Grace still felt the burning sting of humiliation at the thought of it, even now, two years later. The wedding all paid for and Grace on the way to the church, sipping bubbles in the back of the Mercedes Saloon Sedan with her father proudly sitting beside her. Ciara and Fiona dressed in lavender silk in the car one behind. As the car had approached the Malahide roundabout, David had flagged them down, Aidan Nolan next to him, both in their suits and lavender ties and pocket squares. But why weren't they at the church already? Had their car broken down? Aidan shaking his head and telling him that he was making a mistake. Grace saw the look in David's eye and knew what was coming.

'I'm sorry Grace,' he'd said. 'I just can't do it.'

'You're telling her now? Here, on her way to the church?' Da had roared, incredulous.

'I tried, I tried telling you,' David had turned and spoken to her, tears in his eyes.

He'd met someone else, *fallen in love*, he'd said, like he'd accidentally tripped and stumbled into Niamh Doyle's bed. Of course, Grace had already known for a few weeks by then. Fate, or perhaps intuition, had compelled her to look at his phone and there she was, Niamh, like a glazed donut all shiny and bronzed, her sticky, over filled lips wrapped around him as she looked up into the camera. David stroking her stringy hair extensions and whispering about how good it felt.

Too shocked, or just too proud, Grace had let it go, telling herself that it was a final fling before he settled down, and she could forgive. Boys will be boys, as her mother, God rest her soul, had always said when Grace's own father would stay out all night before crawling in before after dawn, smelling of stale beer and loose women. Twice in the week before the wedding, David had said he needed to talk, and she'd felt the air thickening as though someone had cut the oxygen supply. She'd fobbed him off, said it wasn't a good time, spent the night in Ciara's with stories of spray tans and pre wedding superstitions that necessitated her spending the night away from him. But on that April afternoon, the spring sun filtering through marshmallow clouds – it was the perfect day for a wedding - Grace was forced to reckon with the truth. She'd tried and failed to push down the liquid rising in her throat, a stream of prosecco and bile cascading from her mouth and into the shrubbery. Ciara had pulled back her hair. 'Your dress! Watch your dress!' she'd cried, the lack of any need for a white lace wedding gown not yet registering. Da swinging at David, a solid blow that just grazed his jaw. The hot heat of shame rising to her cheeks. Jilted on the roadside like some modern-day Mrs Havisham.

She'd taken to the bed for weeks and when she finally emerged, a raw mass of confusion and mortification, Grace needed a distraction, anything to escape the carousel of memories circling her mind. Tinder, someone had suggested, and she tried it, though it all seemed so uncouth, choosing prospective suitors from a vast menu of photos, like they were burger options in McDonald's. Fiona, her friend from the temp agency, had slept with seventeen different men who she'd met on the apps and not one of the encounters had blossomed into a relationship of any sort. Jay, that was the fella she'd met on Tinder, he didn't call Grace back anyway.

Nothing brightens a prisoner's day more than receiving a letter, read the website of the non-profit, and it gave her a profound, uplifting joy, to know that she could be responsible for the highlight of a person's day. A surge of adrenalin had rushed into the empty cavern of her stomach as she'd dropped that first envelope in the post box. From his letters, she could sense that Noel was honourable— not a man who would request nude photographs or videotape women performing vile acts of debauchery. Of course, the fact he wouldn't have access to a mobile phone for the next four years would be a barrier, even if he was that way inclined. She liked that. But now, as the train hurtled closer to its destination, thoughts of her family's reaction flooded her mind. Her father would be confused and disappointed. Yes, boys would be boys, but a seven-year sentence for armed robbery wasn't quite the same as an extra marital fling with Sadie Hickey who worked behind the bar in McCann's. And Ciara would never understand. Just a few weeks beforehand, she'd broached the topic with her sister, subtly, when she'd been visiting for Sunday dinner. All she'd done was mentioned a feature that had been in the paper that morning on *Loneliness in Prisons*, and how much the letters helped them through, and Ciara had immediately given an, 'ah no, Grace,' a layer of worry veiling her pretty features. 'Is this because of what happened with David?' A concerned glance at Andrew, too busy at the oven with a tray of boiling goose fat and semolina dipped potatoes to pay heed to the hollow ramblings of his mentally fragile sister-in-law.

'What? No Ciara, it was an article I read, for God's sake,' she replied too quickly, realising then that the enthusiasm of her response was betraying her. 'And who'd be able to read my terrible handwriting' she'd joked and then gave a tinny laugh that came out strangled and distorted and Ciara looked at her, a hundred questions in her wary eyes. Little Finn saved her from the inquisition by choosing that moment to

drive his electric toy vespa into the double doors of the living room, a deafening cacophony of harrowing wails and crashing metal. By the time he had recovered, the potatoes were crisping up and Andrew deftly shifted the conversation to his prowess in the kitchen, mentioning, not for the first time, his admiration for Nigella Lawson's recipes causing Ciara to roll her eyes and mutter something under her breath about knowing two reasons for that.

As the train pulled into Portlaoise station, Grace made a decision. She would apologise but tell him that they simply could not get married. Depositing her phone and handbag with a female guard, she made her way through the airport-style metal detectors and X-ray scanners. Menacing sniffer dogs snarled in her direction and a woman swore as she was forced to remove the stringy hair extensions glued to her scalp. In a small room, Grace looked up to see Noel, not wearing his usual grey tracksuit bottoms and sweatshirt but handsome and cleanshaven in a suit and a smile on his face. Yes, he was flanked by prison guards and perhaps his suit was ill-fitting and there was no lavender pocket square, but he told her that he loved her, and that she'd saved him, and her face flushed pink with gratification. She thought of David, and Jay from Tinder and of her own father and how boys will be boys and then, abandoning the decision she'd made just twenty minutes beforehand, she looked at Noel and said two simple words. 'I do.'



ART IS LIGHT!
HENRY VINICIO VALERIO MADRIZ

EMPTY CHRISTMAS

WILLIAM A. KOFOED

trim the tree
 fire the hearth
 presents for
 just myself

no large meal
 to eat alone
 cause my love
 is now gone

seasons matter
 not to me
 all is dark
 and all is cold

days do pass
 nights alone
 seasons greetings
 are not heard

hope may come
 again one day
 joy again
 perhaps will be

house is dark
 no one home
 without her
 why there be

trim the tree
 fire the hearth
 buy presents for
 just myself

LIVING IN A MITTEN



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Henry Vinicio Valerio Madriz born in 1969 in Atenas, Costa Rica, is a teacher of English, linguistics, and literature, as well as a photographer. His poems, short stories, and photographs have been published internationally in both online and print venues. His work has been shortlisted for Voice of Peace: 1st Intercontinental Poetry and Short Story Anthology (2021), received an Honourable Mention in the Dark Poets Prize II (2024), and won the Literary Cocktail Magazine Enticing Shutterbug Award (2024) and The LoveQuest: A Celebration of Love poetry competition (2025).

Jill E. T. Bemis is a photographer and inspiring writer. She intertwines her passions for photography and writing as she explores the complexities of family, nature, and personal storytelling. Engaging in nature photography allows her to exercise her body, while writing lets her reflect on deep emotional needs and exercise her mind. Her work may be viewed at <https://jetbemis.com>. Jill, a long-term governmental analyst, lives in Minnesota.

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Elizabeth Agre ran far away from city life and into the north woods of Minnesota. There she discovered nature. She has never looked back.

Harley West is a writer drawn to the quiet clarity of nature and the connections it inspires. Her work explores the intersection of the natural world and human experience, blending observation with storytelling. In addition to writing, she enjoys teaching and helping others find their voice on the page.

Ashley Patrice hails from Pontiac, MI, where she began writing poetry at thirteen. Her chapbook *Adoration*, published in July 2021, is available through Dorrance Publishing Company. Her poems appear in *Ranger Magazine Issue #4*, *WILDsound Festival*, and *Central Review*. Patrice graduated from Central Michigan University, obtaining a bachelor's degree in English Literature, Language, alongside a Creative Writing Certificate. She received her master's degree in Creative Writing in May 2025.

Mickey Bertram Jeppesen Jensen is a Danish furniture designer and cabinetmaker, born and based in Rødovre, Denmark. He is the founder and designer behind *MadeBySatelite – Rooted in Legacy*, a design studio dedicated to carrying forward generations of Nordic craftsmanship. Drawing inspiration from his grandfather, a traditional boatbuilder, Jensen's work merges timeless Scandinavian traditions with a modern sculptural language. Each design explores faith, form, and endurance through organic precision and hand-built integrity.

Douglas G. Campbell lives in Portland, Oregon. He is Professor Emeritus of art at George Fox University where he taught painting, printmaking, drawing and art history courses. His poetry and artworks have been published in a number of periodicals including *Harbinger Asylum*, *Nourish*, *Off The Coast*, and *Indiana Voice Journal*. His artwork is represented in collections such as The Portland Art Museum, Oregon State University, Ashforth Pacific, Inc. and George Fox University. You can see Douglas' artwork at: <http://www.douglascampbellart.com>

Ibrar Sami is a Bangladeshi poet whose work blends social commentary with lyrical introspection. His poems explore memory, injustice, transformation, and the fragile borders between shadow and light. His writing has appeared in international journals, and he continues to craft poetry that confronts silence, questions power, and seeks emotional truth.

Aurélia Gervasoni is a Belgian poet and multidisciplinary artist. In her work, she addresses questions of gender and intimate relationships. Unaltered yet always poetic, she exposes these subjects that concern us all but that we do not always dare to look at directly. Her work also explores communication between individuals and the theme of autism, which affects her personally. In parallel, she is a researcher in law and literature at the University of Zurich. She currently lives somewhere between Brussels, New York, and Bogotá.

James Hejna is an American living in Kyoto, Japan, where he is an emeritus professor in the Graduate School of Biostudies at Kyoto University. He is a molecular biologist (PhD) an amateur writer (MFA), and a less-than-amateur photographer. Notable poets whose time he wasted include Donald Hall, Joseph Brodsky, Charles Wright, Howard Moss, Mark Strand, C.K. Williams, Carol Muske-Dukes, and John Ashbery. If you don't think that you can capture an interesting moment in Kyoto by holding up your smart phone and taking a random photo, he welcomes you to come to Kyoto and try it yourself.

Wyatt Johnson is a Milwaukee-born creative and entrepreneur who lives and works in Milwaukee. His work spans poetry, visual art, and theater, alongside projects in startups and technology, often exploring themes of identity, place, and human connection. He remains active in the local arts community and shares his creative and entrepreneurial work on Instagram at @wyattjohnson26w.

STAFF

Sage Delio might be considered a modern day renaissance woman, with her diverse interests and talents spanning across the fields of creative writing, computer science, music, and the arts. In May 2022, she published her debut poetry collection, *Blue Confessional: Poetry and Prose*. A second edition of the collection is being adapted with Sage's own art and illustrations. For *Gabby & Min's Literary Review*, Sage holds the roles of Editor-In-Chief and Poetry & Prose Editor.

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Matthew Evan is an accomplished photographer and passionate car enthusiast. He has developed a sharp eye for capturing the beauty and essence of his subjects through his lens. He leads *Gabby & Min's Literary Review* as the publication's Photography Editor.

WHAT WE CARRY THROUGH THE COLD

Winter does not announce itself the way other seasons do. It arrives quietly—through shorter days, heavier thoughts, and the gradual turning inward that feels both instinctual and unavoidable. There is no single moment where winter begins; instead, it settles in slowly, becoming part of the rhythm of our days.

This inward shift is not always easy. Winter has a way of clearing away distraction, leaving us alone with what remains. In that stillness, absence can feel louder, but so can attention. What appears quiet is often full—of memory, of reflection, of things waiting to be understood.

As this issue draws to a close, we are reminded that literature and art often do their most meaningful work in these quieter spaces. Not in spectacle, but in recognition. Not in resolution, but in presence. Across the pages of this winter issue, we encounter stories that sit with loss without rushing to heal it, images that honor stillness rather than disruption, and poems that understand endurance as its own form of movement.

Looking back across previous issues, it is clear how much has shifted. Earlier volumes reached outward—toward community, momentum, and experimentation. This issue looks inward instead, not as retreat, but as necessary gathering. It reflects a publication that has learned to listen more carefully: to its contributors, to its readers, and to the emotional climates we are all navigating.

What we carry through winter matters. We carry memory. We carry unfinished conversations. We carry art that does not insist on optimism, but still insists on meaning. And we carry the understanding that creation does not end in silence—it waits, patiently, for the right conditions to

speak again.

As you close this issue, we hope you take something with you: a line that stays, an image that lingers, a feeling that refuses to be dismissed. Winter will pass, as it always does. But what we carry through it helps shape what comes next.

Thank you for reading. Thank you for staying. We look forward to what the thaw will bring.

END

