

# MANY NICE DONKEYS



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Volume I, Issue II

# **Many Nice Donkeys**

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear equus asinus,

Did you know that donkeys are called beasts of burden?

I think we can all relate to that on some level. Especially after the past few years. Burdened and beastly.

This letter has been hard to write. Not because the content is difficult. Not because I have nothing to say. But because I'm a neurodivergent mother of two, with a full-time job and multiple part-time jobs, and a heavy dose of existential dread. It's a virtual smorgasbord of reasons I could choose from on which to blame my procrastination and/or lack of focus and/or lack of space (physical and metaphorical) to sit down and write this dang letter to you beautiful bovines. And my fellow writers, I know you understand this battle. I know you feel the weight of words begging to be spilled, screaming at you while you cook your stupid dinner for your stupid mortal body, take another stupid walk for your stupid mental health, and drive to your stupid job in this stupid capitalist hellscape that just keeps taking taking taking. And you think *this is not/what I/signed up for* (McDonald, page 13). When is it OUR TIME? Time to stare at the space between molecules until our art manifests. Somehow we keep finding it, even if it's in between work emails and meal planning. I bet most of us have written a poem on the clock, secretly reveling in being a "paid writer". It doesn't matter that the ones paying us don't realize that's what they paid for. (Call them our patrons). We pilfer time in the name of art and feel not an ounce of guilt. (Ask me if I'm being paid to write this letter right now, but please don't ask my employer). Somehow, every writer featured in this issue found the time and space to deliver the goods like an ethereal UPS package straight to our brains, hearts, and guts. We are so thankful. We might even read this issue on stolen time.

## MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II

Though it has taken me longer to write this letter than I had hoped, I feel privileged to be doing it. To the writers featured in this issue, please understand, you have been on my mind. Some of you have been haunting me; your words bouncing off the walls of my skull, echoing *rebirth's a bitch* (Kristina Erny, page 19). My bones chanting *admire the shine* (BEE LB, page 27).

And I do. I admire each and every one of you, dear donkeys. And I admire our collective shine as a literary community. We continuously evolve. We die and are reborn by our belief in the power of words to connect with each other, make change, reveal and create mysteries, and take a stake in this chaotic world even when it's painful. And that will be apparent in these pages. In here you will find pain, pleasure, and all states between and transcendent.

So let's get to the grit of it. *Show me stories, ink.* (Reynolds, page 35)

Sincerely,

Jasmine Williamson

Editor-in-chief for Volume I, Issue II

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**MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II**  
**William Doreski**

**A Weird Story**

Six deer snort in the garden  
at dusk. You insist I count  
every bud they nip and bill  
the cosmos for the damage.

I can barely see their forms  
moving formally from shrub  
to shrub, their meaty bulk anchored  
to the planet by faith in matter.

You don't share that faith. Objects  
confound you, demanding repair  
or renewal, paint, screws, or nails.  
Spring baptizes your efforts

with rain, critiques you with thunder.  
I return to a book about  
touring the England of M. R. James.  
His weird stories often recur

in our backyard on windy nights  
when pines threaten our little house  
and the cries of owls seem personal.  
You're still transfixed at the window.

I could scare the deer away  
with a shout of gnashing resonance.  
But though you resent their greed  
you surely don't want them to starve.

The sky toughens into porcelain.  
It's pleasant to read into the dark  
with a cup of ginger tea  
and innocence the color of stars.



**MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II**  
**William Doreski**

The deer move along, their breath  
clinging to the stripped branches  
like tatters of disembodiment  
we used to mistake for ghosts.

**William Doreski** lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire. His most recent book of poetry is *Dogs Don't Care* (2022). He has published three critical studies, including Robert Lowell's *Shifting Colors*. His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in many journals.

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**MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II**  
**Rosie Garland & Meg Pokrass**

**You hear them roaring in the wilderness**

A mountain lion cowers behind the dumpster at Chez Panisse. It is used to starving in San Francisco. Holds out a paw, counts the tumble of pennies and quarters. Licks gutter puddles.

It pads the Mission mile, searching for signs of life. The little bodegas and Santa Muerte stores have been colonised by yoga studios and organic coffee hubs. People with goat cheese breath and wheatgrass hair, who hip-bump into kombucha bars, choose from menus printed on handmade paper. The cafés used to bulge with frijoles, empanadas. Meat used to drool off the bone, melt in its mouth.

It is separated from its pride. Lions are long gone from Dolores Park; exiled first to Oakland, then Berkeley and beyond. It digs its claws into the memory of when it roared poetry, splashed murals, danced in the arms of jaguar and leopards.

**Rosie Garland** has a passion for language nurtured by public libraries, & writes poetry, prose and things that fall between & outside. Named by Val McDermid one of the UK's most compelling LGBT writers, she is author of *The Night Brother*, described by *The Times* as "A delight... with shades of Angela Carter." [rosiegarland.com/](http://rosiegarland.com/) Twitter - @rosieauthor / Insta - @rosiegarlandwriter / [facebook.com/rosielugosi](https://www.facebook.com/rosielugosi)

**Meg Pokrass** is the author of 8 collections of flash and prose poetry. She is the Founding Editor of New Flash Fiction Review and the Series Co-Editor of Best Microfiction. Meg lives in Inverness Scotland. [megpokrass.com/](http://megpokrass.com/) Twitter - @megpokrass / Insta - @megpokrass / [facebook.com/megpokrass](https://www.facebook.com/megpokrass)

## MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II

Lisa Creech Bledsoe

### XX Sings the State of Healing

*"Reality is not a given."* –Orland Bishop

On the first day of her life, XX entertained the forest with an impromptu dance party. Knock knock knock on wood and you better believe she sang every word.

She shared her first flat in the city with two queens. Back then, stepping onto the subway in full getup was not very careerist. There were secrets and nothing was Top 40. Change sometimes can't come

fast enough. Back then, when you switched from LP to 45 on the Hi-Fi, you had to adjust the rpm setting. Back then and now, fidelity requires you and you and you. It's easier to become something you're not, harder to be who you are

meant to become. XX would like to tell you what's going to happen but it's increasingly hard to speak the future. She doesn't want to lose you.

Yes of course spirits reside in trees. Gods and fledgelings are everywhere. Like Yes and No, Love is a thunderous power. If we could only speak the same language, we could become coherent.

XX can't say it all in a three-minute song, tries anyway.

Watched by crows and friend to salamanders, **Lisa Creech Bledsoe** is a hiker, beekeeper, and writer living in the mountains of Western North Carolina. She is the author of two full-length books of poetry, *Appalachian Ground* (2019), and *Wolf Laundry* (2020), as well as a chapbook, *Reflection With Crow* (2022). She has poems out in *Chiron Review*, *Otoliths*, and *Quartet*, among others.  
[www.AppalachianGround.com](http://www.AppalachianGround.com)

## Two Back-Facing Scenes of Solitude at the Beach

### I. Plage des Ponchettes, Nice

I leave my blue travel towel and sandals on the gray pebbles, along with a pack containing my phone, digital camera, wallet, and hostel key. I couldn't find my way back without these things, so I wade into the water glancing over my shoulder, then turn to face them as I soak. They fade into the foreground, give way to the crescent of palm trees along the street, a row of sunset-colored buildings lined with balconies—little shelves for strangers and their stories. An unblemished sky rises up and up and up behind them.

The stones dig into the soles of my feet. Not the most relaxing beach in the South of France, but the clear water lets me look through a distorted lens at my tired toes. Behind me, the sea, the train journey from Bilbao, the school year with my hundreds of teenage students, well-wishing older colleagues, and a host mother who always wanted the address of where I was staying. Now, no one knows exactly where I am. Not even my own mother. I bob up and down in the water, lulled like a baby, the murmurs of French mixing pleasantly with the indecipherable languages of the sea and the gulls.

I am betwixt worlds. No phone number, no job, no plans in the hometown I left five years ago; the expired Spanish work visa tucked next to my passport holds only sentimental value now. I float in this nebulous, buoyant space, and as the sun bears down on my shoulders, I look not at the great expanse of the sea, but at the labyrinthine city, my only company a sense of romantic possibility.

### I. Brighton Beach, Brooklyn

I claim my spot on the beach, far more than six feet from others, and strip down to my swimsuit, fold my clothes and homemade face mask on one corner of a faded indigo towel and breathe deeply. A pair of flip flops and a water bottle hold the other edges in places, but I carry my tote bag with me as I wade thigh-deep into the cloudy ocean—metro card, phone, Kindle, and keys clutched above my waist. Three years has taught me to take fewer chances.

After a quick glance out at the sailboats, I face back toward my blanket and the brick apartment buildings zipped up with fire escapes, polka-dotted with air conditioning units. It's my last summer Friday but first beach trip of the year. A season of sameness I didn't imagine when I moved here. My life feels almost like the suburban one I left behind, but without the easy comforts of my parents' car and backyard.

## MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II

Emily Polson

Coney Island sits empty to my left, the Parachute Jump a signal flare; to my right, a group of gray-haired women speak Russian punctuated with the universal language of hearty laughs. Before me, five miles north, lies the apartment where I just signed a second lease renewal; nine miles beyond, the empty office I might return to someday; thirty miles northwest of there, my boyfriend in his mother's New Jersey home preparing for the LSAT and four more years of school.

The wind whispers, *the longer you linger, the more sunburned you'll get*, but I step back farther, hold my bag higher. In response, the waves slap against my lower back, urging me toward shore.

**Emily Polson** is a Pushcart-nominated writer whose work has appeared in *HAD*, *Salt Hill Journal*, *Capsule Stories*, *Wizards in Space*, and elsewhere. She earned a BFA in creative writing from Belhaven University. Originally from Iowa, she now lives in Brooklyn and works as an editor at Scribner. You can find her on Twitter @emilypolson and read more of her work at [emilypolson.wordpress.com/writing](http://emilypolson.wordpress.com/writing).

**MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II**  
**Matthew McDonald**

**That Nora Jones song is still drinking lattes**

The earth gets tetchy but smooths  
things over with a reference  
to a message on a t-shirt claiming  
the problem with winter is coats  
covering humorous messages on t-shirts.

Swinging from glib to bleak it imagines  
a troll by a bridge yelling horrid  
dodecaphonic melodies into a parrot's rib cage.

A second parrot is reconstructing jazz  
from textbooks but only getting  
as far as pecking the keys of a gutted piano  
with its flaky keratinous beak.

Meanwhile a third parrot,  
a PR consultant in a polo shirt,  
is absent-mindedly flinging  
glossolalic tongues into a river  
teeming with tiny cotton crocodiles.

The parrots meet in a pub,  
laughing and nodding in agreement  
as each takes turns to say  
the only sentence they know:  
this is not  
what I  
signed up for.

**Matthew McDonald** is an Australian musician and poet living in Berlin, Germany. He holds an MA in creative writing from the Open University. Matthew is the principal double bassist of the Berliner Philharmoniker, and a co-founder/editor of *Berlin Lit*, a journal for new poetry.

## MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II

Jared Povanda

### Attachment

Every winter, Grandpa tossed chunks of stale baguettes to the little birds because he loved them. Slush stained my mother's black heels at his wake. We shivered as we cried outside of the funeral parlor.

In the trees, his birds adorned the bare branches. Tiny dots of obsidian, of soot. Their talons gripped the bark, and if I ever climbed up and examined the marks they left, I'm sure I'd find evidence of their grief. Pinpricks like stars.

Every winter, I remember this. How attached we all are to one another. How he tore the old loaves apart and smiled.

**Jared Povanda** is a writer, poet, and freelance editor from upstate New York. He has been nominated for Best of the Net and Best Microfiction, and his work has been published or is forthcoming in literary journals including *Wigleaf*, *The Citron Review*, and *Milk Candy Review*. You can find him online @JaredPovanda, jaredpovandawriting.wordpress.com, and in the Poets & Writers Directory.



**MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II**  
**Matthew McDonald**

**The Spoon Bender Justifies Diminishing Spoon Bending Powers at the Tribunal  
for Telekinesis**

In heaven I'll be given  
a position in middle management  
as once I willed an apple mid-flight

to land in a bin and it did.  
In summer I beckon mosquitoes  
to send their kind

to sing in my ear at night  
and they obey.  
When my therapist asked me

if I ever feel  
I can control external events  
and my answer was yes

she looked up from her notes  
and said 'really?'—  
which is exactly what I wanted to happen.

**Matthew McDonald** is an Australian musician and poet living in Berlin, Germany. He holds an MA in creative writing from the Open University. Matthew is the principal double bassist of the Berliner Philharmoniker, and a co-founder/editor of *Berlin Lit*, a journal for new poetry.

## Tractor Heist

If we weren't supposed to borrow the big cherry red tractor atop the dirt road with the confused rooster crowing every fifteen minutes, it wouldn't sit in the middle of the fresh hayed field under a halo of sunshine. Hans figured I'd be the better driver, and as a woman, I can confirm with assurance he's right. Though, he may still be sore from when we were young and tried to attach his blue tricycle to my fancy purple bike adorned with crisp yellow streamers, using a half-chewed bungee cord.

We did great until he couldn't pedal fast enough going down the mountain and the bungee broke. He tumbled onto *this* same road. Same spot even. Though after almost twenty years it's got to be new dirt. And that tiny pebble that bore under his skin came out after a year. He's still got the scar to prove it. I've got the pebble.

Why heist a tractor?

Because it was there and my body wasn't ready to go sit under the tree to pay my ever confused respects, while hoping the breeze ripped me in two. A tractor heist is less of an option in the city. Mainly because Hans and I revert to acting like children again when we visit this place where nature swallows us and the birds cheer us on.

Climbing up was easy, and as muddied as the tires were, the metal body glistened like a slick coat of raspberry lip gloss. Almost as if last night's rain wanted to freshen her up for this exact opportunity. Turning her on was simple. Keys were right in the ignition, giving thumbs up to this moment of distraction we search for every six months.

Hoisting second-guessing Hans up while his face contorted like he suddenly remembered the bike too, strained my shoulder. He's not four anymore. My fingers wrapped around his arms, his pulse rapidly banged at my steady hands.

"Come on." On the last tug, I swear he almost slipped down. But he managed to pull himself together in time. All the while the leaves on dad's tree waved at us from across the street. The rooster crowed, and we ducked as a car barreled up the dirt road past. We peeked up, inspected the cloud of dirt, and watched each speck settle. We had a full half hour before another car should come, maybe longer. There was more chance of a wandering cow than a person to catch us here.

The wheels moved.

## MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II

Beck Erixson

I don't know what one of us hit, but my quick thinking and his ability to act before falling off of things now led to all four of our hands on the wheel. That tractor did the fastest and the slowest donuts I'd ever done in my life. My insides spun. The exhilaration of our combined laugh, scream, and cry punched out the emotional dam we don't talk about. Each turn within the safety of the beast seemingly slowed as the view of his tree passed us.

The stupid rooster called again. And again.

The tractor stopped spinning, and we both ducked down while the road shook. The front of my dusty black shirt gained two clear wet runs down the front, while the center of his gray collared shirt showed clear marks from his teeth.

Peeking up and the damn thing left us facing him. The tree, that is.

Dad's tree.

This is where he rests.

"This was a fun one," Hans said. "What if it wasn't from him?"

"Dad wouldn't forget we were coming."

"Why doesn't he leave coins or like a cardinal or something?" Hans rubbed his forehead.

We both leapt from the tractor with open arms and a nervous laugh when an old rooster wandered in front of the tree.

**Beck Erixson** is a writer and academic who completed writing and history courses as part of her Doctor of Letters at Drew University. Despite regular trips to Ireland and NI to visit friends and extended family, she rarely gets lucky enough to see donkeys. When not with her family, failing badly at learning to sail, or working, she typically can be found writing by the Navesink River in New Jersey.

Twitter: @BErixson Instagram: @BeckErixsonAuthor Website: beckerixson.com

**Before the Wake**

A friend, a friend of the friend, and I drink whiskey  
in a courtyard of a downtown bar. The late afternoon sky  
is blue as an old man's veins. The friend of the friend,  
a veterinarian, tells us the strange story  
of the hearts of bearded dragons, how they keep beating  
too long after death. *Like chickens?* I say.  
*Worse*, she says, but yes, decapitate  
a dragon, and the relentless heart still pumps  
like pistons in a combustion engine. *But wait,*  
*there's more!* she exclaims, like a salesman hawking gadgets  
on a late-night infomercial. I can't resist  
the pitch: *What more can there be?* Then she describes  
the scalpel sliding into the leathery breast  
of the dead dragon, her fingers withdrawing the heart,  
and holding it, a small, plucked fruit in her palm,  
*and still it was beating*, she said, and out she held  
her empty hand, but my friend and I could imagine  
quivering there as if real and impossibly alive  
the heart so small we sat stunned to think it could power  
anything—itsself, an animal, the wonder that spun  
within our big bodies, fragile and leaning toward dusk.

**Jo Angela Edwins** has published poems in various venues, recently including *Thimble*, *Halfway Down the Stairs*, and *Mom Egg Review*. Her chapbook *Play* was published in 2016. She has received awards from Winning Writers, Poetry Super Highway, and the SC Academy of Authors. She is the poet laureate of the Pee Dee region of South Carolina. Her website is [joangelaedwins.wordpress.com](http://joangelaedwins.wordpress.com), and Twitter is @JoAngelaEdwins

## MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II

Kristina Erny

### On the Eve of our Fourteenth Wedding Anniversary

Wind, again, outside. We aren't supposed to write  
of the weather, or the moon, wry blue ash tips,  
once-loved sky. But what else is so new  
it deserves a second glance? I peeled

curtains back like a bandaid and saw no one.  
Heard once that a tornado sounds like a train.  
Our daughter grinds her teeth. Rain, rain,  
our toe-up yard sogged to shambles. Every hour

another flicker of bad news. We hiss  
*it's sad, real sad*. So you chew  
up our house and spit it out  
as a chrysalis. When you exhale

that's when we'll hatch. Rebirth's a bitch.  
What a callous story: transcontinental move,  
low-paying job, opportunity's snapped branch, regret.  
The solution slaps like a wet dress.

I can only see as far as the yard, its honeysuckled edge.  
Are you even listening? Have a heart. It's not even spring yet,  
and I'm sneezing, water dripping from both my eyes.  
I swear I heard a dog bark somewhere outside.

**Kristina Erny** is a third-culture poet and artist raised in South Korea. She holds an MFA from the University of Arizona. Her work has been the recipient of the Tupelo Quarterly Inaugural Poetry Prize and the Ruskin Art Club Poetry Award. Her poems have appeared in *The Los Angeles Review*, *Yemassee*, *Blackbird*, and *Tupelo Quarterly*, among other journals. She divides her time between Kentucky and Shanghai, where she teaches with her husband and three children.  
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**MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II**  
**Joseph Kerschbaum**

**At the Graduation Party**

Nothing will look familiar  
but you will swear you are  
backtracking in an endless,  
sprawling city where every decision  
feels equally wrong & sure  
you could ask for directions  
but no one knows  
where they are going,  
besides, what destination  
would you request since  
there isn't one, there will be  
the omnipresent feeling  
of going in circles  
while the GPS spins  
grasping for the faint signal  
broadcasting from a higher power  
somewhere in space  
but you will still have faith  
even as the soothing, robotic voice  
tells you to take a sharp left turn  
into a Starbucks in the lobby  
of a fifty-story skyscraper  
& you are as shocked as a bird burst apart  
because that building  
has no business occupying the sky,  
a monolith of mirrors in the clouds,  
& the last thing you will see is yourself  
breaking your own neck.  
But you are going to do great things.  
That is what the sheet cake says.

**MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II**  
**Joseph Kerschbaum**

You asked for advice? Yes,  
in that parable, your life is the city,  
the GPS is whatever source of truth  
you will lose along the way,  
& you are the skyscraper, you are  
the Starbucks, you are the mirror,  
you are the bird, you are the descending,  
you are the concrete, breaking your fall.

**Joseph Kerschbaum**'s most recent publications include *Mirror Box* (Main St Rag Press, 2020) and *Distant Shores of a Split Second* (Louisiana Literature Press, 2018). Joseph has been awarded grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Indiana Arts Commission. His recent work has appeared in journals such as *Hamilton Stone Review*, *Panoply*, *Flying Island*, *Ponder Review*, *Main St. Rag*, *The Inflectionist Review*, *Last Stanza Poetry Journal*, and *Black Coffee Review*. Joseph lives in Bloomington, Indiana with his family.



*Draw Your Own Picture*

said my niece, age 4, all the crayons  
strewn in front of her, three Blues  
in her fist. She was planning  
a horse. Her sheet of blank newsprint  
paper covered the table. It rolled  
against my arm and she said, *Don't touch  
my drawn!* in her outdoor voice.  
So far only five blue legs stretched up  
from the view of blue grass. *You bet I won't,*  
I said, but she ignored me, which meant  
she wanted me there.

In one of my desk drawers  
there's still a piece of faded crayoned shape  
in Robin's Egg Blue mixed with Sky Blue  
and a lobe of dark Royal Blue  
that she'd taken her time with, coloring  
first up and down then across  
over and over until you could practically  
climb over the five legs and tail  
of that bodiless creature and settle down  
as if for the rest of your life  
on the outline of a saddle.

Winner of the Bill Holm Witness poetry award, **Jayne Marek** has also been nominated for Best of the Net and Pushcart Prizes. She has published six poetry collections, with her next volume, *Dusk-Voiced*, due in 2022. Her writings and art photos appear in *Rattle*, *Spillway*, *Bloodroot*, *One*, *Salamander*, *Eclectica*, *Gulf Stream*, *Calyx*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *Notre Dame Review*, and elsewhere.

## MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II

Ron Pullins

### Sonata

The room is square and dark. Walls of pastel fading gray. It's dusk. Light — night lights — moonlight — streetlights — ambient city light — come through two windows in the far wall. Moonlight striped by Venetian blinds crawls across the floor.

Dada in his boxer shorts enters from the hallway. Bony legs slightly curved, a hairy chest and legs, his thick head on his thick neck, a shank of hair atop it all.

An armchair, a coffee table, a lamp with fringe around its shade, a pull string with a bauble. Its light is off. A dark wood floor covered with a darker rug. A sofa with curved legs. An outside door is closed. A doorway to the bedroom. A doorway to a hall. A doorway to the kitchen. The lingering smell of burning meat.

"I wasn't clear," Dada says. Maybe she is standing there. Or maybe not.

It is quiet. Perhaps quieter than before. Darker, too, than before.

He shifts his weight between his legs.

"We had our words," he says.

Outside cars pass along the street, headlights cross across the blinds, tires crunch on snow. It's winter.

"I no longer know what it was I meant," he says.

A handle rattles on the bedroom door. The metal click of bolt. It opens just a crack.

"Words," he says.

The door opens. She has nothing on.

"All this noise," she says. "I can't sleep with all this yelling."

"I wasn't clear."

"Who can sleep in all this racket?"

A baby cries. A baby rustles out onto the rug, and stops, and sits, looks up, from left to right, and mews.

"See," she says. "Who can sleep in all this racket?"

She shrugs.

"All this yelling."

She turns to leave.

The baby cries again.

"I'm going back to bed," she says.

"Words," he says.

"Such racket. You woke the baby up."

She shuts the door behind her. The sound of metal. Latches.

"I wasn't clear."

The baby whimpers.

"Words fail me," Dada says.

## MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II

**Ron Pullins**

Outside the moon is passing overhead. Or, does the earth spin in such a way, in tandem with the moon, rotations relative each to each, earth around the sun, sun around...., etcetera.

A cottonwood with waxy leaves interposed between Dada and the moon.

“Words fail us,” Dada says, and turns on his bowed legs, shifts weight from one leg to the other, rotates around, imagines where to go, the way of getting there, then steps towards this new ideal, falling forward as we always do, which we call walking, into further darkness, through another open door and shuts it.

The baby sits in street light falling through Venetians, upon the rug, a graph in light.

Outside the tree with the waxy leaves seen from a passing car appears to be aglow in moonlight, as if it were a fire, not flames but moonlight, and when a gentle wind blows up, it rustles, sounding like the rattle of a baby.

**Ron Pullins** is a fiction writer, playwright, and poet working in Tucson AZ. His works in fiction, poetry and drama have been published in numerous journals including *Typishly*, *Southwest Review*, *Shenandoah*, etc., including here in *Many Nice Donkeys*. His works can be found at [pullins.com](http://pullins.com)

## MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II

Mario Duarte

### Mystery, You

color my car's interior with flickers  
of sunset tinged by forest fires,  
  
while I roll down the avenue and bypass  
a girl like you in a blue tube top,  
  
a boy chasing a rolling red yo-yo,  
a long string dangling just out of grasp.  
  
I skirt the university hospital,  
endlessly glistening green glass,  
  
neon restaurants, dim-lit bungalows,  
everything hovering, wavering  
  
in and out of focus, self-absorbed.  
Everything squinting, streets writhing  
  
as I park, and follow the pavement,  
shuffling block after block, nowhere,  
  
unfiltered maroon light, and wonder if pale  
faced mothers and golden faced fathers  
  
like us made a difference, and if the stars  
inside/outside of us will meld  
  
with heavy future footsteps, closing,  
a powerful drop inside of us.

**Mario Duarte** is a Mexican-American writer and a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop. His poems and short stories have appeared in *Aaduna*, *Abstract Elephant*, *American Writers Review*, *Digging Through the Fat*, *Emerald City*, *New Croton Review*, *Pank*, *Plainsongs*, *Red Ogre Review*, *Rigorous*, *Typishly*, and *Zone 3*. New work is forthcoming in *Journal X*, *Native Skin*, and *West Trade Review*.

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II

Nate Hoil

**3 outs, you're out.**

Now is now,           but *then* used to be now too.  
Now and then I wake up on a stretcher with a giant beard.

I fear no army; I fear every person individually.  
I go to sleep in winter and I wake up in the fall.

I'm a part of the universe, which makes me important  
with my eyes the size of my bottomless dread.

What's the point of selling your soul if you still have a 40 hour work week?  
Give me insurance or I'll put you in the hospital.

I fall through the window and I fall through another window.  
I say to myself *it's a beautiful day*.  
I'm looking fresh as new road kill, and the sun looks like you'd picture it.

And this poem is the jam.  
And I'm trying to get this bread.

If it's been a whole day then the day is over,  
so loosen my tie and take out my false teeth.

My heart hurts for obvious reasons.  
I give it all away

then I get some more of it.

**Nate Hoil** is at a loss for words.

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II  
BEE LB

**my brother; bronzed grackle**

*after Natalie Diaz*

you cough up feathers, a spluttering mess.  
a pile sheening against the floor.

the sun slips in its own puddle, splashes light  
across the sky. you do not see. your back rests flat

open concrete. three layers to scare off  
the frost. does not startle. sinks into you  
shivers you alert.

your voice catches on a twig, the start of a nest in your throat.  
*tell, tell*, you plead. sound escapes itself.  
we ache apart. our voices trail.  
nothing follows.

your mouth a wingspan spread.  
my mouth a ~~trial~~ trail woven through.

our voices hide in the dark throat.  
who is left seeking?  
who holds the light?

time melts into itself, spreads into a second eternity.  
a leak builds and then bursts. pressure relief. a valve  
opened; shut. pressure strains.

my knife in your hands. a release of air. broken window  
left open. siren wails. cage builds around your body.

i watch, eyes closed  
from the other side.

**MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II**  
**BEE LB**

anger blooms beneath ribs, no rose.  
weeping poppy. sepal splitting.

your clothes shed your body.  
hands grasp, search. three layers  
replace your own.

a voice not your own comes from your throat.  
the presence of life announces your body.  
a beak        in place        of lips.

*yeah, yeah*, you sing. your voice        a horse  
my ears        a hose. sound a ring chasing  
itself. we follow behind, leave        no trail.

a cradle made by a palm. a box of voice held        within.  
two hands reach. hold. release. hold.

i pluck a quill from beneath your teeth.  
      admire        the shine.  
wipe        the spit.

a yellow coin squints        closed.

**BEE LB** is an array of letters, bound to impulse; a writer creating delicate connections. they have called any number of places home; currently, a single yellow wall in Michigan. they have been published in *Revolute Lit*, *After the Pause*, and *Roanoke Review*, among others. they are the 2022 winner of the Bea Gonzalez Prize for Poetry. their portfolio can be found at [twinbrights.carrd.co](http://twinbrights.carrd.co)



## MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II

Sophie Riley

### Motherhood

The woman on the train to Montserrat said motherhood is like touching the sky with your hands, but I haven't decoded the meaning of that yet. I thought maybe her German accent clouded my understanding, but maybe motherhood is motherhood is motherhood, no matter where your cradle lies, or what it's made of, or who sleeps inside, or does not sleep inside. But the woman on the train had one child. My mother had three. Somewhere in Uganda a woman had forty-four, and I wonder if she, too, has felt the sky in her hands, or if the sky itself lives inside her. If her sky is blue or thunderous. If she ever wanted to touch the sky at all, or if it simply fell on her like a great blue rock.

**Sophie Riley** is a recent graduate of Asbury University, where she double majored in Creative Writing and Art & Design. While she loves poetry, her true passion is writing and illustrating content for young readers. She currently lives in Rockford, Illinois, but has aspirations of running a writers' residency on the east coast, owning a coffee shop, or becoming an editor. Maybe all three. Instagram: @purely.sophia

**Laundering**

Navy soup outside your window.  
What is there to say to the sparrows  
Other than shush, you'll get what's coming to you,  
Folding your socks by the foot of the bed.  
His sweater is still in your closet  
But he got the Tupperware in the divorce.  
The morning after, you took the peacoat  
Off the hook and finally wore it to lunch.  
Washed your hair with herbal shampoo,  
Put on the silver necklace with its glittering pendant,  
Pulled the turtleneck over your head  
So you'd have at least one thing to hold  
You in the sinking elevator, him tripping  
Down the stairwell across the street.

**June Lin** is a writer from Canada. She loves practical fruits, like clementines and bananas. More of her work can be found in issues of *perhappened*, *Gone Lawn*, and *Vagabond City*. Her debut chapbook, "how to construct a breakup poem", is forthcoming with fifth wheel press. She tweets sometimes at @junelinwrites.

**MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II**  
**Daniel Addercouth**

**Failing Light**

I found the first screw the day my brother called to tell me our father was dying. I'd just returned from work when I saw it lying on the cobblestones in front of my building. I picked it up. The screw was the length of my little finger and surprisingly heavy. My father hadn't taught me much about tools, but I knew the cross in the head meant it was a Phillips. I put it in my jacket pocket.

I saw another screw on my way to the underground station the next morning. I remembered the first screw and, on a whim, knelt down and got it.

The idea for the jar came to me that evening when I looked in the refrigerator and saw the pickles that had been sitting there since my parents' visit the previous year. My father had discovered the pickles the first time they came to see me in Berlin, more than a decade earlier, and I always bought a jar when they visited. I threw out the few remaining pickles and poured the brine down the sink, then I washed out the jar and scrubbed off the label with steel wool. The two screws looked lonely in the bottom. I decided I would collect all the screws I could find and put them in the jar. Part of me believed — though I didn't want to formulate the thought for fear of jinxing it — that if I managed to fill the jar then my father would live.

I took a week off work and flew to Glasgow. My father seemed mostly his normal self but fell asleep in front of the TV, which he'd never done before. A nurse came round every morning to give him an injection; I never managed to find out what for. Desperate to feel useful, I spent most of my time doing my father's usual chores: cutting the grass, weeding the flowerbeds. I went to church with my mother on Sunday. I hadn't been in years, but it felt like the right thing to do. She now went during the week as well. One evening I surprised her in the bedroom as she was saying the rosary

My brother and his wife came round as often as they could to see my father and bring my mother food. My father was hardly eating, and she'd stopped cooking for herself. My brother took me aside one evening and told me there was nothing the doctors could do. He had a few weeks; they couldn't be more precise than that. At least he would be able to spend his last days at home. That was what he wanted, my brother said.

No one talked about the illness itself. It was as though it was a malevolent spirit that would become angry if it heard its name mentioned.

I found a screw under my seat at the airport gate. I took it as a sign.

Back in Germany, there was nothing I could do apart from phoning my father for conversations that got increasingly shorter as time went on. Guilt nagged my stomach during that drawn-out limbo as he faded away. Guilt for living abroad and being out of touch. Guilt for not having visited more often. Guilt for being unable to do anything. Collecting the screws gave me solace, the way collecting bottle caps had comforted me when I was bullied at school.

**MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II**  
**Daniel Addercouth**

I started finding screws everywhere, in various shapes and sizes. I wondered who was losing all these screws in the street. I suspected they'd been there all along and I'd never noticed them, but I liked to think the universe was conspiring on my behalf, helping me to fill my jar, trying to keep my father alive.

I wondered if this was another thing I'd inherited from my father, like how I checked all the windows were closed before leaving my flat. When we lived on the farm, my father always picked up any screws or nails he saw lying around. Partly because he worried they might puncture a tractor's tyres, but also because he thought they might come in useful. He kept them in an old shortbread tin in his workshop. I often saw him putting screws in there, but I never saw him take any out.

I kept the jar on the nightstand next to my bed. Before going to sleep, I would take the screws out and examine them, feeling the cold hardness of the metal, running my finger over the sharp ridges. The level was growing, but I didn't want to hope too much. I couldn't deal with hope.

The jar was half full when I got the second call from my brother. When I packed my suitcase for the trip, I emptied the jar into a sandwich bag and laid it on my dark suit. I tossed the screws into the grave at the funeral. They glinted like rain in the failing light as they fell into the clay shaft. If anybody noticed, they didn't mention it. If they'd asked me what I was doing, I wouldn't have been able to explain.

That was over a year ago. The jar still sits on my bedside table. Now it's almost full. At night I take the screws out, just as I did when my father was ill. I hold a screw between my thumb and forefinger and press. Just enough so I feel the pricking as the tip needles into my skin.

**Daniel Addercouth** grew up on a remote farm in Scotland but now lives in Berlin, Germany. His stories have appeared in *Briefly*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Seaborne Magazine*, *Nanoism* and *National Flash Fiction Day's FlashFlood*, among other places. Twitter: @RuralUnease

**MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II**  
**Alexandra McIntosh**

**Forever Tonight**

When you don't watch my Instagram story, I miss you.  
This is embarrassing. On the way home from your place,  
Paul Simon's "Gumboots" plays four times, saxophone  
spilling out my windows into the river dark  
under the bridge. You say art is a long faithfulness.  
*You don't feel you could love me but I feel you could.*  
I'm asking politely that you'd love me, always  
giving you permission to leave.

**Alexandra McIntosh** lives and writes in Kentucky, her favorite place in the world. Her debut book of poetry, *Bowlfuls of Blue*, is available from Assure Press. Alexandra currently teaches English and creative writing and serves as Managing Editor for *Moon Cola Zine*. You can find links to her publications and pictures of her dog on her website [AlexandraMcIntosh.com](http://AlexandraMcIntosh.com).  
IG: @the\_real\_alexmac / Twitter: @realalexmac

**MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II**  
**Devon Miller-Duggan**

**Suppose You Woke Up Happy**

and that one morning, before you had a notion of the weather,  
or remembered the day's regulating list,  
you woke from a long, discursive dream  
in which you and your husband  
visit friends who farm:  
The men were off walking the sharply rolling fields,  
their pockets full of their hands,  
or rocks, or stories they sometimes forget to tell each other.  
You sit inside the porch. The other wife shucks beans  
or pores over berries while you catch each other up.  
None of this is what will wake you into laughter—  
the friendship's old and steep,  
the vegetables cling each to each in the dusty soil.  
Then, the other wife goes off to fetch some necessary thing  
and through the open window, bunnies fly.  
They sail in a basket—bowl-shaped, brown and willow-woven—  
like a nursery rhyme, except there isn't one like this.  
Twenty of them, you believe, all Dürer-brown, Bambi-eyed.  
Their ears are thick, flat, sable soft,  
And vibrating all in sync, they make the basket fly.  
Suppose you wake remembering: One theory says that  
every object in a dream is you.

**Devon Miller-Duggan** has published poems in Margie, *The Antioch Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, and *Spillway*. She teaches at the University of Delaware. Her books include *Pinning the Bird to the Wall* (Tres Chicas Books, 2008), *Alphabet Year* (Wipf & Stock, 2017), and *The Slow Salute* (Lithic Press Chapbook Competition Winner, 2018).

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II  
Rebecca Reynolds

AXIS VERTEBRA

*for my father*

There is nothing new today      aside from pivoting  
show me that your god encamps inside of possibility    I don't believe  
in supernumerary beings or threads

and yet  
to be without is piteous    show me  
what maintains you, the cashless flux of poverty

the poverty of my unfaith  
ash-bone snow that drips down the back stair  
not being beautiful because of the gray air

when branches are holes between  
the ligaments    between peculiar foramen  
in the epistropheus show me stories, ink

articulation of the atlas and the ring      an inner  
sound      the transverse and the process    show me  
the hangman's fracture    for this is the knitted stair begin

"Once there was bone" nothing too minor  
to include, even how you arrive here  
linking colorless and leafless winter

**MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II**  
**Rebecca Reynolds**

with March and snow      and finger keys

a search that shuttles between

Gray's Anatomy and

The Inner Body      show me everything      the back end

of a kitchen stall      the kitten

who trots with pilled toy in mouth      vibrato mews

each woolen mouse he finds belonged to former cats      there is

that death surrounding us      so show me you.

**Rebecca Reynolds** has published two ancient books of poetry with New Issues Press: *Daughter of the Hangnail*, and *The Bovine Two-Step*. Her first book, *Daughter of the Hangnail*, received the 1998 Norma Farber First Book Award, from the Poetry Society of America. Her poems have appeared in print and online journals and reviews, including *Quarterly West*, *Boston Review of Books*, *Web Conjunctions*, *Jacket*, *American Letters and Commentary*, *The Literary Review*, *The Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, and *Verse*, among others. She is an over-extended cat owner (not always a cat lover), gardener, poet, and silver craftswoman, and lives in the wild half of New Jersey, US in a very small house with her wife. IG: @rebecca.reynolds



## MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II

Drew Pissarra

### Niobium

Who foretells weeping on a second date?  
I'd certainly not come to make you cry.  
Yet why'd you arrive after cocktail eight  
when we met for drinks? I'm a sober guy.  
I expected coffee. You came pickled  
as the onion garnishing your Gibson  
glass. Your rank breath left me far from tickled.  
As to those cockeyed come-ons, I raised one  
hand for the bill then pleaded for fresh air.  
Outdoors, events swung from bad to worse:  
that kiss like a hatchet, the groped despair,  
and your mournful entreaty was the curse  
I couldn't refract. Then I broke your fall  
as you sobbed like Niobe.

Please don't call.

A literary grantee of the Cafe Royal Cultural Foundation and Curious Elixirs: Curious Creators, **Drew Pissarra** is the author of *You're Pretty Gay* (2021), a collection of short stories; *Infinity Standing Up* (2019), a collection of poetry; and *The Strange Case of Nick M.* (2021), a radio play commissioned by Imago Theatre and first broadcast at K-BOO FM.

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II  
Kristina Erny

**O God**

I stand outside of my office looking up  
neck pinched tight as an arrow.

O daughter-shaped cloud pitched forward  
asking for a spot on the couch  
so she can make a rainbow  
of her body

O condensation son-pile, like rolling raccoons,  
claws backbending into blue

I stare at this holier cathedral ceiling  
exhale saying *this is beautiful*

O God of that rainbow  
O slick bow of their bodies

Yesterday, a student told me a story  
of campers with Froot-loop and macaroni necklaces,  
dingy knees, how he had heard that their young bodies  
were cleaved, bows bent,  
a sick counselor, someone they trusted,  
a man my student, too, had known, and also had trusted

Later, in Arby's, with my sons, my daughter,  
we watched over sliders and a tray of fries,  
the TV, saw a line of women, five sisters,  
give their testimonies, pour words through their mouths  
with tears streaking into them

**MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II**  
**Kristina Erny**

Women heart-pierced by arrows,  
and those Pennsylvanian priests,  
hundreds and hundreds of girls bent low  
to snap under their hands

Can we still love this world?  
There is no small tremor of our murmuring  
that can refuse what's holy under the crack  
of a cloud's lip

Or a daughter's body made rainbow  
instead of a snuffed out wick

What rises up after the campground,  
wet-wrong with lake water,

Where are we left in our looking, Lord

and what spell can we conjure?

**Kristina Erny** is a third-culture poet and artist raised in South Korea. She holds an MFA from the University of Arizona. Her work has been the recipient of the Tupelo Quarterly Inaugural Poetry Prize and the Ruskin Art Club Poetry Award. Her poems have appeared in *The Los Angeles Review*, *Yemassee*, *Blackbird*, and *Tupelo Quarterly*, among other journals. She divides her time between Kentucky and Shanghai, where she teaches with her husband and three children.

IG: @kristina.erny Website: kristinaerny.com.

**MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II**  
**Courtney LeBlanc**

**I Watch the Chernobyl Mini-series While Getting Tattooed While Ukraine is Being Attacked**

Hayden turned it on to distract me from the pain vibrating up my arm but the buzz from the tattoo machine is constant so I keep the volume low, the captions on. I know the gist of what's happening in Ukraine but get overwhelmed by the news so I don't always know the details. What I do know: the soldiers on that island told the Russian ship to *fuck off* and no one heard from them again, that old woman gave a soldier sunflower seeds so they might grow where his body falls, the Ukrainians aren't giving in, the Russians aren't either. The ink is slowly taking over my arm and I narrate the show to Hayden as she's bent over me—she's seen it before but still, we both gasp at the sheer denial of what is happening: reactors failing, people dying, poison leaching into skin and soil. I don't understand nuclear power or fission or atoms slamming into one another or why Russia is attacking but I understand the catastrophe of it all—the people who will die, the cities that will crumble, the bright yellow flowers that may one day bloom where blood once fell.

**Courtney LeBlanc** is the author of the full length collections *Exquisite Bloody*, *Beating Heart (Riot in Your Throat)* and *Beautiful & Full of Monsters (Vegetarian Alcoholic Press)*. She is a winner of the Jack McCarthy book prize and her next collection of poetry will be published by Write Bloody in spring 2023. She is also the founder and editor-in-chief of *Riot in Your Throat*, an independent poetry press. She loves nail polish, tattoos, and a soy latte each morning. Read her publications on her blog: [wordperv.com](http://wordperv.com). Follow her on twitter: @wordperv, and IG: @wordperv79.

**MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II**  
**Salem B. Holden**

**Dear Mom,**

You said pink glitter pink  
You said long blonde hair  
You said ballet, holding hands with boys  
You said stop crying, sit still, listen  
I said wait—  
Wait short strands of dishwater  
Wait playing hockey with the boys  
Wait crescent moons of red  
Backwards baseball caps  
No wait rainbows swallowed by vantablack  
Wait canvassing my body and puncturing holes of metal  
Wait holding hands with other boygirls  
Wait David Bowie on starlit gravel  
You said grandpa  
You said no more pink lines drawn in the sand  
You said lines can only be horizontal  
I said wait—  
Ocean blue (or is it more gray?)  
I said wait  
I am the chambered nautilus  
The garbage shark of gender  
Wait  
Please...  
    wait.

*\*Inspired by Eileen Myles*

**Salem B. Holden** is a neurodivergent genderqueer artist based in Cincinnati, Ohio. They have received the R.M. Miller fiction award twice and were a contributing editor to Licking River Review and Lions Online. Salem received their Master's degree in English and Creative Writing from Northern Kentucky University. Their most recent endeavor of collage making has been featured in SOS Art Cincinnati's 2022 "Pride Art Celebration."

## MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II

Lisa Creech Bledsoe

### I went to my confessional priest of health sins

and told him I ate a chocolate bar for breakfast.  
It did have almonds. I also took a few days off  
and failed to drink my smoothies. Well

he said, let's put you up on the first world  
table of massage and see what we can do. You  
still subscribe to the triumphalist mythology  
of progress? About that, I told him. I'm having doubts.  
Ecocide, imperialism, oppression—they're starting  
to get to me. And there's the shitshow at home.  
(He also hears life miseries. There's a good  
shoulder-opening trick he does for those.)  
I had a headache all night, and two doses of  
pepper + turmeric haven't touched it. Is it even possible  
to get through this life without having bitter enemies?  
I've tried to slip inside the broken stories  
looking for origins, understanding, compassion.  
I keep getting shredded. Can you make me less—  
I don't know—shreddable?

A tall order, he noted, as the scent of birch  
oil spread through the room.

Ahh, I told him. Amazing how a deep breath can help.

Do more of those, he told me, and I did,  
each secret floating to the floor like leaves.

Watched by crows and friend to salamanders, **Lisa Creech Bledsoe** is a hiker, beekeeper, and writer living in the mountains of Western North Carolina. She is the author of two full-length books of poetry, *Appalachian Ground* (2019), and *Wolf Laundry* (2020), as well as a chapbook, *Reflection With Crow* (2022). She has poems out in *Chiron Review*, *Otoliths*, and *Quartet*, among others.  
[www.AppalachianGround.com](http://www.AppalachianGround.com)

### Likelihoods

If, in fact, I once flew low circles over central Ohio in a small, nameless plane, I would have been eight—scrawny, freckled, full of syllables, semi-tangled hair—perhaps seven or nine. Obviously, this was before my uncle’s death by heart-attack-plane-crash-possible-poisoning— after which my mother grew uncharacteristically superstitious about sending us up. (I, on the other hand, take paradoxical comfort in the fact of my uncle’s crash; after all, what are the odds of two relatives dying in separate plane crashes? They must be extremely low.<sup>1</sup> I should, instead, be worrying about how much having a brilliant but disturbed maternal uncle increases one’s own odds of going mad, or being assumed mad—already a job hazard for writers.) Anyway, the pilot was not Uncle Bill, but, I think, one of my grandfather’s friends—he seemed old, but was likely middle-aged, with beer gut and salt-and-pepper hair. He wore a navy-blue polo. I wore a t-shirt printed with flowers and leggings printed with different flowers.<sup>2</sup> The absence of jackets and goggles would seem to confirm my impression that it wasn’t a biplane or crop-duster. Nothing so fun and primitive. The interior of the plane was not unlike the interior of an old car—right down to the grease-and-gas smell and the fact that I was too short to see much out the windows until the plane tilted sideways to reveal oceans of green corn. Then again, this vestibular memory of tilting and circling may in fact derive from a ride at the Pickaway County Fair, which I visited annually until age 11.<sup>3</sup> It was loud in the plane—so loud, I think, that the pilot couldn’t hear my voice and I stopped asking questions. I still have questions. Was my grandfather in the plane? In my memory, the seat beside me is empty, but then he might have been more likely to sit up front with his friend. Where was the airfield and how had we gotten there? (We drove, presumably, in my grandparents’ Honda.) Were there seatbelts? I think so. I would have been anxious if there weren’t. I was that kind of kid, worried about the absence of belts on school buses. I’m still that kind of kid. So the plane had seatbelts, I think, though probably they were adult-sized: a strangling hazard. I remember nothing of take-off and landing<sup>4</sup>, but am still struck by the way the plane tilted during circles—that frisson of precarity as I imagined falling through the window toward a trampoline of corn, without, for once, actually fearing the plummet.

1. Though perhaps the fates of estranged relatives are, like coin tosses, completely independent. Uncle Bill was told never to return after he brought a small arsenal (stored loaded in the guestroom dresser) to my grandparents 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. My father, who has an ear for drama, may even have deployed the phrase “never darken our door again”.

2. Although if Vanessa helped me pack for the trip to Circleville, the chances I wore matching, or at least not clashing, clothes increase by roughly 37%. I should perhaps mention that, as my half-sister, Vanessa is not related to Uncle Bill.

3. And which in 2020 would prove to be a high-risk Covid-spreading event—few masks, big crowds, lackluster hygiene protocol at the lemonade stand.

4. The most nerve-racking moments now that I understand these are the windows, statistically, for most catastrophes.

**Ceridwen Hall** is a poet and book coach. She holds a PhD from the University of Utah and is the author of two chapbooks: *Automotive* (Finishing Line Press) and *Excursions* (Train Wreck Press). Her work has appeared in *TriQuarterly*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *Tar River Poetry*, *The Cincinnati Review*, and other journals. You can find her at [ceridwenhall.com](http://ceridwenhall.com).

## MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II

Jayne Marek

### What Was Said in the Field

—after Louise Glück

The fact spoke itself in the field, in rain, gray years before now:  
a cat's white fur face bodiless, matted, toothless,  
sank its teeth in. Taste of wet dirt on my lips, salt of tears.  
Above us, the town's water tower stood with squat head  
and strident legs uncaring, over us but not for us to climb,  
and so we walked, and so we found the dead.

We found the dead, we did not know this white pet  
but we knew animal deaths, we knew the cruelty of youth  
that beats and discards. The field itself mute about what was  
amid the slant rain vision of long ago. Not passion, this fact  
cold as November and as lonely, because had it been passion  
I could remember who you were, and ask you.

Winner of the Bill Holm Witness poetry award, **Jayne Marek** has also been nominated for Best of the Net and Pushcart Prizes. She has published six poetry collections, with her next volume, *Dusk-Voiced*, due in 2022. Her writings and art photos appear in *Rattle*, *Spillway*, *Bloodroot*, *One*, *Salamander*, *Eclectica*, *Gulf Stream*, *Calyx*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *Notre Dame Review*, and elsewhere.



## MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II

Drew Pissarra

### Nihonium

What constitutes bona fide chemistry?  
Is it electric? Seismic? Magnetic?  
What laws might apply from sexology?  
The dynamic or the theoretic?  
Does one's physical form have properties  
one could reclassify as reagents?  
Should I test out various theories  
that challenge bygone rules of engagement?  
I prematurely abandoned the lab  
where all-nighter research gets computed.  
You could've been both my probe and my slab  
of meat. Such facts cannot be disputed.  
As I type this sonnet, I sort of wish  
I could put us back in that petri dish.

A literary grantee of the Cafe Royal Cultural Foundation and Curious Elixirs: Curious Creators, **Drew Pissarra** is the author of *You're Pretty Gay* (2021), a collection of short stories; *Infinity Standing Up* (2019), a collection of poetry; and *The Strange Case of Nick M.* (2021), a radio play commissioned by Imago Theatre and first broadcast at K-BOO FM.

**MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II**  
**Kristina Erny**

**CAST**

moon bright in the bone house  
moon loves the bone spouse

moon slipped into bone stew  
moon sifted for bone roux

moon bowl, bone cup  
sky's crumbs heaped up

bone light in the moon swing  
moon slung in the bone tree

moon drunk off bone beer  
little moon the bone fears

moon heart knocked from bone table  
moon speaks a bone fable

moon clench of bone fist  
moon-cheek bone-kissed

moon-white of bone's eye  
moon towel the bone dry

moon broke bone curse  
moon longs for bone nurse

bone hard moon-shin  
moon lost, bone wins

moon gone bone dark  
moon music in bone's bark

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE II

Kristina Erny

moon high bone flute  
moon wrung bone mute

moon's maybe, bone's yes  
moon gold in bone chest

bone break into star shard  
moon sword of bone-guard

it's a moon snow in the bone-cold  
swallow the moon, you'll never get old

a moon hoop, bone's toy  
what's a moon but forgotten joy

moon green, bone sick  
moon salt, bone lick

moon field with bone-stalk  
moon whisper bone talk

moon penny is bone money  
moon gin laced with bone honey

moon groan the bone birth  
moon asks, *what's the bone worth?*

moonshine in the bone shed  
moon's yeast makes the earliest bread

**Kristina Erny** is a third-culture poet and artist raised in South Korea. She holds an MFA from the University of Arizona. Her work has been the recipient of the Tupelo Quarterly Inaugural Poetry Prize and the Ruskin Art Club Poetry Award. Her poems have appeared in *The Los Angeles Review*, *Yemassee*, *Blackbird*, and *Tupelo Quarterly*, among other journals. She divides her time between Kentucky and Shanghai, where she teaches with her husband and three children.

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