

# MANY NICE DONKEYS

VOLUME II, ISSUE I



JUNE 2024

# Many Nice Donkeys

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

I. Love. Summer. In a crush of friends and family whose skin cells are melting to the ground like globs of dripping mint chip ice cream, my sweaty face is tipped to the sun. I savor the stickiness of the backs of my knees and the underside of my breasts because I know what's coming in far too few weeks. I don't want to hate on winter, to yuck anyone's yum, but the bone-shaking chill, the dark and gray, have always been my bane. I get it; *August is nobody's / Girl*, as Kait Quinn tells us in her poem "Elegy for August", page 17. But I am the obnoxious person who loves the heat. Don't get me wrong - I'll complain about it. But never to the point of wishing for the cold.

Volume II, Issue I - can you believe it? VOLUME TWO! It's here, and it's a sun-soaked day at a picnic in the park. It's a July hike in the mountains with a soft breeze on your bare shoulders. A chance to *Delight in the misty drizzle of / your woods*, as Elijah Woodruff so beautifully expresses in V2:I1's opening poem, "The anxious poet at the former Versace mansion that is now a restaurant."

This issue is wide open, like an old friend's arms at the airport, a fresh wound, a suitcase ready to be unpacked. The collective echoes this moment from Gina Twardosz's creative nonfiction piece, "On Riding It," which closes us out: *I've never even been appropriately dressed for the weather because I hate feeling stuffed or stifled inside a puffy coat; often, I feel the need to strip myself bare of flesh and run truly naked, muscles rippling, through the streets of the city.* V2:I1 is also our first issue to feature more prose than poetry, and we are thrilled with the result.

As I write this, the solstice is only a few days behind us, but we have been reveling in the long, beautiful days of spring and summer with the gorgeous work our contributors trusted us with once again. I hope our shared awe at the quality and care of writing in our inbox never fades for our team, that we always sit in wonder at *...what language the insects spoke, to build a structure like that, to bind a cluster of insects into one consciousness* (Esmé Kaplan-Kinsey's "Yellowjackets," page 14) I hope it never slips into winter darkness, that we can always find, as Alexandra McIntosh says on page 7 in her poem "Driving Through Your Hometown," *A summer treasure in January sun.*

## MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME II, ISSUE I

It's been my privilege and delight to act as Editor-in-Chief for *Many Nice Donkeys* Volume II, Issue I, after last sitting in the chair for our inaugural issue way back in March of 2022. Now I get to hand the inbox/incredible EIC powers back to Maggie Fulmer for Volume II: Issue II, expected in December 2024.

There is so much happening in the world that demands our focus, and with good reason. We hope you'll find something in these pages that resonates, illuminates, or even just entertains. Dark times demand art. We have the privilege of making art from art, knowing it doesn't make summer stick around and warm us, but hoping it provides some cool shade in the fatigue of the heat.

Sláinte!

Jen Fischer Davis  
Editor-in-Chief  
Volume II, Issue I

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>The anxious poet at the former Versace mansion that is now a restaurant.</b> Poetry by Elijah Woodruff	6
<b>Driving Through Your Hometown</b> Poetry by Alexandra McIntosh	7
<b>Lilac Time</b> Fiction by Beth Sherman	8
<b>Dolly the Sheep is Everywhere</b> Fiction by Jessica Klimesh	9
<b>Reincarnation</b> Poetry by Jason Fraley	10
<b>On A Field Trip, I Read A Queer Person's Words And Start Freaking Out</b> Poetry by Noah Powers	11
<b>Harvest</b> Poetry by Alyx Chandler	12-13
<b>Yellowjackets</b> <b>What We've Been Taught to Do With Death</b> Fiction by Esmé Kaplan-Kinsey	14-15
<b>What a Seventeen-Year-Old Aspiring Artist Packs After the Ban</b> Fiction by Kathryn Silver-Hajo	16
<b>Elegy for August</b> Poetry by Kait Quinn	17

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>sniff pray love</b> Poetry by Sammi Melander	18
<b>Lanterna Magica</b> <b>Two in Twilight</b> Fiction by Salvatore Difalco	19-20
<b>On Riding It</b> Creative Nonfiction by Gina Twardosz	21-22

**MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME II, ISSUE I**  
**Elijah Woodruff**

**The anxious poet at the former Versace mansion that is now a restaurant.**

Where is the sound of your foot?

Swallowed up in the conversation

on the bathroom's threshold.

Do not panic as you pass through; instead

hang your head so as not to look them in the eye.

Say sorry with lips that just go through the motions.

Remember that Miami is the opposite of you,

Ohio boy. Delight in the misty drizzle of

your woods, how you carved the names

of every tree you found into your heart

and crushed their leaves beneath your feet.

You are not for this place

but it is not for you either.

**Elijah Woodruff** (He/Him) is a high school English teacher and when he's not working, he's hanging out with his wonderful wife. His work has appeared in *Beaver Magazine*, *Roi Fainéant Literary Press*, and others.

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

**Driving Through Your Hometown**

My love, I've never seen so many grain silos, so many tractors, so many yards filled with truck parts. I imagine you as a child, head pressed to the window of your dad's blue S10, assembling and disassembling the wreckage in your mind. I've never felt so at home in Ohio, hills rolling out towards the horizon, toward Appalachia just beyond. There's an aesthetic to these yards, these farms and fields, a country that I recognize in the pattern of your shoes in our closet, your paint brushes in coffee cans, Café Bustelo and Maxwell House, in your toolboxes, Milwaukee, Dewalt, and Bosch, the framed paintings lining your studio walls, their sharp blues and yellows. My love, you remind me of my Papa, my mom's father, whose glasses were wire-rimmed like yours, who laid flooring most of his life, knees calloused by subfloor and staples, whose stories I keep like the geodes gathered at Lake Cumberland, my cousins and I piling them on the wet outdoor-carpet of the houseboat deck. We'd stash the Carhart-brown spheres in our duffel bags, haul them home to store in closets until winter, when we'd bring them outside, watch our dads smack them with hammers, the sharp crystal centers exposed at last. A summer treasure in January sun.

**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. You can find links to her publications and pictures of her dog on her website.

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## MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME II, ISSUE I

Beth Sherman

### Lilac Time

Each blasted limb, heavy as rotting sugar. Where blossoms used to smile, mines sprout, cratering soil. Insects always survive – mosquitoes, dragonflies, the pink crab spider embracing a terrified mite. Who has time for lilacs? On the opposite bank, soldiers gather in clusters, smoking cigarettes, plotting. Wild daisies cannibalize the grass. Their petals taste dirty, bombs falling like rain. A chaffinch inches down the tree headfirst, warily. An ordinary garden by the Dnipro River. Last April, lilac blossoms floated on the wind like confetti. Two broken chairs. Jackdaws cry. Each ashy flower delicate as fairy dust. The sky – still here.

**Beth Sherman's** writing has been published in more than 90 literary journals, including *100 Word Story*, *Fictive Dream* and *Flash Boulevard*. Her work will be featured in *The Best Microfictions 2024*. She's also a Pushcart, Best Small Fictions, and multiple Best of the Net nominee.

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## MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME II, ISSUE I

Jessica Klimesh

### Dolly the Sheep Is Everywhere

Each lunch break, the engineers follow a path around the perimeter of their building, all of them walking in the same even strides. They avoid silence, the way it hangs heavy like an albatross, and they avoid inquiries of a personal nature—of families, partners, kids—for the same reason. Instead, they might collectively point to a kettle of hawks soaring across the sky, and ease into a comfortable conversation about the pitch of the hawks’ screeches or how hawks take advantage of the air current. One or another engineer might mention that red-tailed hawks mate for life, *‘til death do us part*, to which the other engineers will respond with inquisitiveness. *Oh, fascinating. I’ve heard the same is true for turtle doves and snowy owls. In fact, most bird species are monogamous, aren’t they?* Each day as they make their way around their workplace’s boundary, the engineers throw out other factoids, too. *Did you know that a collection of engineers is called a design?* They discuss genetically modified food and plants. The Hale-Bopp comet. And cloning. It’s the late ‘90s. Dolly the sheep is everywhere.

#

One lunch break, as the engineers follow their well-worn path, one of them steps sharply off the walkway, pulls a brochure out of their pocket, and says they’re planning a tropical getaway for their anniversary on an island with a nude beach and a restaurant called Clothing Optional, and they just wondered, you know, what they should pack, *wink wink*.

The engineers catch a glimpse of the brochure with its glossy photos of bare skin, heart-shaped beds, and lip-locked couples, and they all feel the heat of a united blush. Conversation abruptly ceases. Only the hawks continue to talk, chitchatting raucously, oblivious to the discomfiture below them. The engineers all lock eyes with the ground, racking their brains for a topic to broach, anything to change the subject.

“They’re all alike, aren’t they?” one of the engineers finally blurts, glancing up and gesturing wildly to the hawks in the sky.

“Like Dolly the sheep,” another says.

Inspired, a third says, “If you could clone anyone, who would you clone?”

The question elicits thought, and the engineers ponder in communal solitude, with an occasional “hmm” or “interesting question” to fill the void until one finally says, “I can’t think of anyone I’d want to clone.”

And all the other engineers agree, heads nodding vigorously all at once, their legs moving in unison like a marching band, twenty pairs or more, awkward silence and personal discussion averted.

**Jessica Klimesh** (she/her) is a US-based writer and editor whose creative work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Flash Frog*, *Cleaver*, *Atticus Review*, *Whale Road Review*, *trampset*, and *Flash Boulevard*, among others. Her work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, Best Microfiction, Best Small Fictions, and Best of the Net. She is currently working on a collection of linked flash stories.

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**MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME II, ISSUE I**  
**Jason Fraley**

**Reincarnation**

earlier, I ate / a park bench / rusted bolts / goose poop-stained slats / metal arm railings / the *in loving memory* /

what does practice entail / pencil erasers / dixie cups / toothpicks / lattice fencing / flinted gums / enough youtube revenue /

for chromium dentures / an external stomach / wheeled in a stroller / trench coat to camouflage my stoma / and artificial throat /

few express astonishment / instead reminisce / Dr. and Mrs. Francis / could identify woodpeckers / I've never seen / just by their clatter

**Jason Fraley** is a native West Virginian who lives, works, and periodically writes in Columbus, OH.

On A Field Trip, I Read A Queer Person's Words And Start Freaking Out

What do you mean my body is a puzzle  
full of dead ends, small metal balls,  
adorned in carpentered wood  
like a coffin? I do not feel safe  
when I wear the ugly patterned shirts,  
talk about how yes, today is colder than yesterday,  
yes it is hard to predict. I do not feel safe  
with my nails painted, my voice sliding on syllables  
like a figure skater. My ears pierced with tiny hearts,  
I look in the mirror, see a hand, a shoulder line,  
take form, the rest empty glass. How to get the rest?  
Piercings, tattoos, shave head, change clothes—  
my head is cut to the skin, under I feel ripples, blunted  
claws threaten to carve the epidermis. My skin is bare,  
is hairy, is pockmarked with small red bumps like exit signs—  
a tunnel opens and closes like an eyeball. If I torture myself enough,  
I may confess, yes, if I stab enough holes,  
if I let my holes be stabbed, if I pump iron in a gym  
until my skin bulges, if I peel my skin like a clementine—  
this is a lot about skin, no? It is a cowboy circling the cattle,  
a moon orbiting a celestial object, when I hear celestial I think  
sexual, and when I think sexual I think about not knowing  
what I am when I walk into a bar looking for someone  
to fuck, looking for someone to see me, put a flower  
behind my ear, pull my tongue until it rolls out  
like a scroll they sign their name on, I clear my throat,  
spit ink onto my birth certificate, tuck my nose  
inside the navel of a question mark and inhale,  
grasp air inside my lungs until I inflate,  
until something within me pops, the exterior falls  
apart in a shower of confetti, a blur of color, flesh.

**Noah Powers** (they/he) is a queer Kentuckian and MFA candidate at the University of Alabama. Their writing has been published or is forthcoming in *Rejection Letters*, *Bullshit*, *Screen Door Review*, *DON'T SUBMIT!*, *Fish Barrel Review*, and *Autofocus*.

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MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME II, ISSUE I  
Alyx Chandler

Harvest

I cut thyme's spiraling legs  
as they go wild in my pot

before the first frost claims  
the night, its lick of moon.

Just like I was taught, I bunch  
together sprigs, tie them

tight with twine. Here, alone  
in a city I can't afford—

salvaging what summer  
didn't scorch from my hands.

In Alaska, a woman plucks  
an ember berry from a burning bush

and presses its acidic scent  
to my nose, her fingers

like torrents of rain on my cheek.  
I inhale familiarity: *more, more*

tough and pungent as thyme,  
I marvel at its easy invasion.

A cloudberry passes from hand  
to hand down a line of hikers

till it reaches the last mouth,  
whittling fatigue's chokehold

into a spear on tongues.  
Within reach are berries so similar

my lips almost cleave into  
poison. Ripe taunts that

stain fingertips but never  
enter bellies. Thirsty, she says

**MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME II, ISSUE I**  
**Alyx Chandler**

*a drought isn't so bad  
when you know the end*

*is near.* I take nothing  
from the Chugach Mountains

but leave with numb toes and  
a swollen nose, blind feet that

find the gurgle of river drowning  
every person I once ached to be.

**Alyx Chandler** (she/her) is a writer from the South who received her MFA in poetry at the University of Montana, where she was a Richard Hugo Fellow and taught composition and poetry. Her poetry was a finalist for the Michelle Boisseau Poetry Prize with *Bear Review* and can be found in the *Southern Poetry Anthology*, *Cordella Magazine*, *Greensboro Review*, *SWWIM*, *Anatolios Magazine*, *Sweet Tree Review*, and elsewhere at [alyxchandler.com](http://alyxchandler.com).

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**MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME II, ISSUE I**  
**Esmé Kaplan-Kinsey**

## Yellowjackets

That summer, they built a great big paper home in the cedar tree at the park. We spent quite a lot of evenings in the park in those days, because that was the summer we discovered marijuana. It was me and Jenny and Zeke, a rusted bench and a badly rolled joint, and the bulging, buzzing gray nest swaying over our heads. Night to night to night—how our parents must have worried, we never once thought. But of course, after all that company, we thought of the nest/the bugs/the queen/her swinging city as a sort of friend. Of course we spent dusk after dusk soundtracked to the hum of settling wings. We wondered what language the insects spoke, to build a structure like that, to bind a cluster of insects into one consciousness. We wanted to learn the words of the wasps. The mumbling stoned sentences we spoke to each other were sacred, we were realizing. If we found the right words, if we could communicate like the yellowjackets, perhaps we could become more than the sum of our flimsy human parts. Perhaps together, we could find a way to build something.

In those days Jenny was queen bee and Zeke and I were her two little stinging mercenaries. We were both in love with her, obviously, hindsight being the easiest most burning thing—but she knew about Zeke and his love, and so did I, and so I didn't say a damn word of it, held my swollen tongue tight behind the fence of my teeth until the hive split open and we went winging our ways off to colleges in opposite corners of the country.

Then this morning, leaving a philosophy lecture with my thoughts all derailed, trying to reconcile the reality of a world that makes no sense with the living-in-it-anyway, I stepped on a yellowjacket in the grass of the great rolling lawns out front of the university. It was the first time I'd ever been stung. The little gray needle stuck out from the reddening skin of my ankle, stinging and stinging again.

I texted Jenny, *do you remember the yellowjackets?*

But what was there to remember? Only the company, and how it all came crashing down.

How as our adulthood came sneaking up on us we found ourselves in the park more and more, chemicalizing the terror from our bodies with increasingly complex cocktails—the weed and the wine, the vodka and the cigarettes, a sprinkle of psychedelia. And so there we were, three weeks out from the upheaval of every normalcy we'd ever known, drunk as skunks, and Zeke was throwing sticks as boy-men love to do. *Bet I can hit that garbage can.* Thwack. *Bet I can get this one to the other side of the lake.* Thwack. And then, *Bet I can knock the yellowjackets right out of the tree.*

Turned out he could. Thwack. Turned out the nest was poorly attached and came floating down through the night, a reverse balloon, and broke itself open on the ground. Then we were running, all animal instinct, not a thought but the fear of a million accumulated hurts. Then we were out of the park and we were people again, drunk ones, and I could not stop crying and Zeke told me to chill the fuck out and that's how I knew he'd never felt so guilty about anything in his life.

Jenny wrote back quickly. *What about them? Haha. Of course.*

*I miss them,* I told her, which meant *I miss you.* I missed our hive and the buzzing language we used to speak and I missed how she used to be my queen and how my every thought was for our stupid common good. But it was too late already. The nest had broken open. The yellowjackets had buzzed angrily off in the dark. I don't suppose I'll ever know where they landed.

I hope they built a home somewhere new.

**MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME II, ISSUE I**  
**Esmé Kaplan-Kinsey**

**What We've Been Taught to Do With Death**

*after Ada Limón*

When Aunt Teresa died, we put her out in the field for the vultures to take care of.

Just kidding. My parents wouldn't let me. Even though it was in her will. They had her cremated. She would have hated that.

So I went to the store and I bought the biggest, cheapest hunk of meat I could find. I walked to the field, and I threw the flesh as far as I could into the rippling summer grass. Then I waited.

Aunt Teresa had a vulture tattoo on her right arm. When I was little, I asked Dad why, and he said *because she thinks she's so macabre*. They never really got along.

The vultures didn't take long to arrive, on their silent wheeling wings. One came, and then several more. Soon it was a dinner party. I watched them make the dead meat alive again with their sharp pink beaks.

I asked Aunt Teresa about the tattoo, years later when I wasn't a child anymore, and she said *it's a prayer for reincarnation*.

She flexed her bicep, and the vulture flexed its wings.

I watched the birds, squawking, feasting, the whole world their dining table, and my insides echoed with want. Rattled with the emptiness of just how gone she was. How one can fly and curse and ride a motorcycle just like her, so sure and so living, and then can become something else, just like that.

The vultures climbed back up into the air, flesh digested into flight.

How I, too, would like to give new soaring life to the dead.

**Esmé Kaplan-Kinsey** is a California transplant studying creative writing in Portland, Oregon. Their work appears or is forthcoming in publications such as *Beaver Magazine*, *JMWW*, and *Anti-Heroine Chic*, and has been recognized by the National YoungArts Foundation and the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards. They are a prose reader for VERDANT, a mediocre guitarist, an awe-inspiring procrastinator, and a truly terrible swimmer.

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**MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME II, ISSUE I**  
**Kathryn Silver-Hajo**

**What a Seventeen-Year-Old Aspiring Artist Packs After the Ban**

iPhone with Frida Kahlo hard case  
Comfy sweats and Hershey's kisses  
Baby picture of her tucked inside Dad's jacket with Mom's arm around them on Galveston Beach during Tropical Storm Dean  
Dumb romance novels from BFF Ashley for the trip  
Sketchbook and charcoal sticks  
Ripped picture of no-balls ex-boyfriend Timmy stuck together with tape  
\$565 in small bills—savings from Walmart job for past three years  
Felt bag filled with Pomp's heavenly soft fur  
Heating pad, big bottle of Ibuprofen for after  
Application to Colorado College  
Phone numbers for Planned Parenthood and Motel 6  
One way bus ticket to Denver

**Kathryn Silver-Hajo** is a Pushcart Prize, Best Microfiction, Best Small Fictions, and Best American Food Writing nominee. *"The Sweet Softness of Dates"* was selected for the 2023 *Wigleaf Top 50* longlist. Her work appears in many lovely journals. Her flash collection *Wolfsong* and her YA novel *Roots of The Banyan Tree* were both published in 2023.

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**Elegy for August**

August smells like sunscreen and ripe peaches,  
skin stained like regret: indigo rose, all the daisy  
chains we never made, friendship bracelets  
we forgot to bead and braid. August is nobody's  
girl, volcanic heart, liminal sword of light where two  
curtains meet. Already she swims in grey tulle rolling  
in from September like coastal Maine fog. The silver  
lining: the mosquitos are migrating mudward  
for winter. We are past July. We are no longer  
drowning in the deep end of humidity.  
I am no longer a child. The maples shuffle  
the cards and cut the deck; lay August,  
like a wet sheet, out to dry.

**Kait Quinn** (she/her) enjoys repetition, coffee shops, tattoos, and vegan breakfast foods. Her work has appeared in *After Happy Hour Review*, *Anti-Heroic Chic*, *Olney Magazine*, *Reed Magazine*, *Slippery Elm*, *Watershed Review*, and elsewhere. Kait is an Editorial Associate at Yellow Arrow Publishing and a poetry reader for *Black Fox Literary Magazine*. She lives in Minneapolis with her partner and their very polite Aussie mix.

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**MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME II, ISSUE I**  
**Sammi Melander**

**sniff pray love**

When Bobo and I walk together  
He must be allowed to go around back of the tennis court into the bushes  
And pluck himself from their leafskirts  
A fresh tennis-fruit if he can  
(He requires a supply for destruction).

So we stray from the path  
Because I feel this might be religion:  
This ritual, hope and reward.

Bobo is big, and honey brown,  
And he can fit all his teeth into a smile.  
But he is delicate with his harvest:  
The certain clamped-in citrus musk  
The plump to be pop-open flesh  
I imagine trying to savor a single firework

I know everything is finite  
That people stop playing tennis in the wintertime  
And the tennis-fruits on the ground will rot

But I also know that the slow and constant drip which drops them there  
Comes from a well that is vast and wide and deep

I will never explain this to Bobo.  
I will walk with him to the tennis bushes and let him see,  
And if he cries that they bear no more fruit,  
I will come again tomorrow to water them.

**Sammi Melander (she/her)** is a 24-year-old neurodivergent poet and artist who graduated with an honors BA in creative writing and theatre. Her work mainly focuses on the oddities of nature and consciousness, and she often draws inspiration from her work offering pet care services. She is always growing some uncommon plant or flower. Her debut poems are published online at *Bullshit Lit*.

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**MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME II, ISSUE I**  
**Salvatore Difalco**

**Lanterna Magica**

“It’s cheap, Frank. I’ll let it go for a hun. I’m making nothing on it I swear to God. I just think you oughta have it.”

“What the fuck am I gonna do with this thing?”

It looked daunting, with its hand-crank and beveled brass-work, its star-wheels and levers.

“Invite over some friends and stage a phantasmagoria.”

“You’re saying it works?”

“It works, it works.”

“What the fuck is a phantasmagoria?”

“A form of horror theatre. You scare folks with projected ghosts and what not. You know, like Schröpferesque and Cagiostroesque apparitions, that kind of stuff.”

“Sounds like a laugh.”

“They’ll be begging for more.”

Frank touched the hand-crank. It felt oily. He looked at his fingertips. Oily. He rubbed them together then wiped them on his pants. He barely knew this guy. How did he know he’d like this thing? He did like it, he wasn’t gonna lie. It was fucked up and cool.

“What if it don’t work?”

“You can always trick it up and use it for a reading lamp.”

“I wanna scare some people.”

“Like Phylidor.

“Like who?”

“He staged the first phantasmagoria.”

“You like that word.”

“I do. It makes me feel, I don’t know, smart.”

The magic lantern made a small creaking sound.

“Do you hear that?”

“I do. It’s saying, *Take me, Frank, take me.*”

**MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME II, ISSUE I**  
**Salvatore Difalco**

**Two in Twilight**

Bluff shadow obscured your face. The moon sat above the condemned blue house  
threatening to nudge it over the edge.

And you, beside yourself, fought something internal, maybe just the urge to let the  
moment get to you, as it got to me.

“Why didn’t you do more?”

“I was done. And no one would help me.”

Bats clicked through skeletal trees. We walked on crushed stone and glass, a sound I  
hear now when I think of you, your silhouette keeping its own dark counsel.

Up ahead the dogs trotted over old ground, now and then flashing their eyes back.

“They miss you.”

“But you don’t, and that makes this unbearable.”

**Salvatore Difalco** is a retired counselor for at-risk youth writing from Toronto, Canada. Recent work appears in *Cafe Irreal*, *RHINO Poetry*, and *Third Wednesday*.

## MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME II, ISSUE I

Gina Twardosz

### On Riding It

I do not think of myself as someone who is in any way free—trapped on the train every morning in the throes of motion sickness and solitude—but my friends in disastrous relationships tell me that I am the luckiest of all. What is luck anyway, but a woman who falls between the tracks and barely misses the electrified third rail? I never know what is meant by this: third from which direction? I'd like to avoid the tracks entirely, although sometimes I'm tempted to misstep. But I'm on the train now, riding it with the same blank faces as always. I'm not eager to get to work because on Friday I decided to turn the office holiday party's free bar into retribution for all the times I was forced to do something beneath me so that by the time I left, I was stumbling into the Uber and throwing up large chunks of bruschetta into my purse and this embarrasses me, for I am the pinnacle of good breeding. Actually, I come from a long line of white trash, and this is why I can't afford a car or why I act better than I am, otherwise I'd have nothing and I've always longed for something. I've banned myself from looking at my phone because whenever I do, I look at my ex's Instagram and today, I caught a glimpse of him wearing the peacoat I told him to buy and it broke my heart. This isn't even the worst thing to have ever happened to me, but in the video he's ice skating in the gray peacoat I told him to buy with a woman who looks like me but isn't me, and it hurts more or less than anything else. I've never even been appropriately dressed for the weather because I hate feeling stuffed or stifled inside a puffy coat; often, I feel the need to strip myself bare of flesh and run truly naked, muscles rippling, through the streets of the city. Sorry, that's a bit intimate, I know. I hate riding the train because then I'm overrun with the kind of thoughts I'd rather avoid. I think commuting an hour and a half to work each way every day is having negative effects on my body. I've spent many of these rides mentally penning a damning emotional letter to my ex telling him to fuck off but he sort of already has fucked off to Europe, or wait, the U.K. is not Europe. I Google "Brexit" and learn that *the "Inner Six" European countries signed the Treaty of Paris in 1951 establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)...thereby leading to the 1957 Treaties of Rome establishing the European Economic Community (EEC)* and I find the white spaces between the lines more interesting so I stop and feel sorry for myself. God, I need to shit, which I should've done before I left but here we are, where we always are now most days—in transit, intermediary, in distress, liminally adjacent, complacent, and/or stuck. I'm literally trapped next to someone and I feel suffocated under the mass of myself and this extra human body because the train has gotten full since the start of my journey which means it's almost over, yet almost time for the day to truly begin, and this is sickening, I feel sick again, and I wonder what I'm supposed to do in a sick world with my self-sick body. I try and transform the space with music, carving out something that's my own again, when an

## MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME II, ISSUE I

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\*NSYNC song plays: “You’re all I ever wanted, so tell me what to do now~’cuz I want, you, back.” I’m feeling emotional when I notice a man standing in front of my seat, asking me something. I can’t hear what he’s saying, but I don’t want to engage anyway for he could be asking me something obscene. It’s better just to pretend that I am ignorant or dead but he keeps touching my wall or he’s touching the Emergency Call Button. Now I’m starting to wonder if he’s actually talking to *me* so I take out my headphones and I hear him ask for assistance for a passenger who fainted. I look behind myself and find a few people standing over a woman on the ground. I wonder if she’s alive; everyone’s looking now. The train is silent, slashed only by an occasional confirmation that she’s still breathing. It’s only when the paramedics arrive that I discover what I missed: The woman stood and slowly slid down to where she lay now and the paramedic confirmed that this was better than if she had fallen rapidly and possibly concussed herself and it all feels so clinical. There’s a woman on the ground and she’s not moving. She’s not moving—what should we do? What should we do what should we do what should we—oh, now the paramedics are rousing her awake. She comes to with a start and a shout. She’s confused and upset like most people would be after finding themselves so suddenly on the ground with twenty strangers staring at them. Paramedics guide her towards the stretcher and they wheel her off the train and then I, and then I, and I, and then me, and all of we or us, yes us, still sitting or standing on the train, look around at each other. “These people live on the train,” says a man, “it’s not healthy.” People nod solemnly as I slowly deduce that he’s not referring to us but to the city’s unhoused population. Where is she supposed to go? I shift in my seat; sometime during the crisis, the person next to me got up and walked off the train. After a moment, the doors close with their familiar chime. The train starts to move forward, slowly building speed as it continues its journey. It’s time for the day to resume. It’s time for work.

**Gina Twardosz** (she/her) is a writer from Chicago, IL. She writes about herself to reach other people, mining her emotional trauma to create an abundant emotional language that her readers may use as they work to articulate their trauma. Her work is rich and diverse, boasting CNF, poetry, flash, and hybrid pieces. She has been nominated twice for the Pushcart Prize and twice for Best of the Net.

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