

VOLUME I, ISSUE IV

MANY NICE DONKEYS



MAY 2023

Many Nice Donkeys

Volume I, Issue IV Editor-in-Chief:

Alexander Walz

Assistant Editors:

Jen Fischer Davis

Maggie Fulmer

Nik Moore

Jasmine Williamson

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear donkeys of the discourse,

I couldn't seem to plant my hooves into this new year. Perhaps that has been the same for us all. 2023 has been a series of waves, highs and lows in which to barely catch my breath: a job slowly coming apart at the seams. An evening out with friends. A death in the family. A clear, sunny day of yard work. Unexpected expenses. Such is the 2020's now. You'd think after several years of this, this constant barrage of swells, that we'd be used to it. But the world wants to worsen, and we continue as rocks in the surf.

A few weeks ago, I had a long week. Several seams came apart at my job all at once, and it felt like *this week of years has aged what once I knew as me* (Joseph Byrd, page 35). How many of these weeks have we all faced? These are the weeks that weaken us, but never to the point of breaking. We are borne through them, either by intense focus, or just sheer survival instinct. Perhaps that focus for me was reading through all of the pieces that came through our email for this issue. And perhaps that focus for you was writing them, our contributors. And now, perhaps that focus for you is in reading them, dear readers.

If those weeks of years have changed you, I hope that you do not dwell too harshly on the nature of that transformation. Perhaps those weeks stole the last vestiges of creative energy from you. Perhaps you are now staring at your own words, feeling *as if I am unprepared to take on the burden of something else's transformation* (Kai Pretto, page 10). Do not look at this change as failure. You have not failed. You have lived. Take those feelings, all of those events that have knocked you down during that week of years and use them. I always remember one of my professor's, Dr. Jessica Hindman, uttered the phrase "bad for life, good for writing" in our Creative Nonfiction courses in grad school. No matter what your genre is, no matter how much it might shake you to your core, what is bad for life can, at one point or another, be good for your writing.

I hope that this issue is "good for life, good for writing" for you all. Because it certainly was for me. Helping to build and curate this issue has given me a greater outlook for 2023. I might go so far as to say *I've been so unexpectedly, gratefully swept up by life* (Isa Pickett, page 16). I hope that this issue grants you the same feeling and energizes you along with the warm weather that makes its way into another rotation on our little planet. Find your inspiration, my friends.

Sláinte,

Alexander Walz
Editor-in-Chief
Volume I, Issue IV

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[It's a February day of just sun and birds] Poetry by Isa Pickett	5
re: re: re: re: reminders Fiction by Bridge Lower	6-7
Year of the Impossible Equine Sprint Poetry by Isa Pickett	8
witness Poetry by Italo Ferrante	9
Uncertainty, to Consume Poetry by Kai Pretto	10-11
catholic Poetry by Eben Bein	12-13
AIItA Poetry by Susan Barry-Schulz	14
At the wake Poetry by Dorothy Lune	15
Trans Day of I Will Tattoo a Bird on My Hand Poetry by Isa Pickett	16-17
Conducting Creative Nonfiction by Amy Cook	18
I Didn't Come Here to Make F.R.I.E.N.D.S Poetry by Nicola Andrews	19-22

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Still Life with Fruit Trees and Field Mice	23
Poetry by Andrea Krause	
Tulips	24
Creative Nonfiction by Dure Ahmed	
Alone on Your Kid's Birthday	25
Fiction by Dawn Tasaka Steffler	
What Democracy Looks Like and What It Really Looks Like	26
Poetry by Jenkin Benson	
An 18-Wheeler Is About to Drive Through the Back Seat of Philomena's Hatchback	27
Fiction by Alyssa Bushell	
At the altar of the broken-winged boat-tailed grackle	28-29
Poetry by Clara Bush Vadala	
How You Knew Fur: A Furstory in Five Dribbles	30
Fiction by Mikki Aronoff	
God says she doesn't like moving water	31-33
Poetry by Sam Moe	
Peak Citrus	34
Poetry by Andrea Krause	
Harvest	35
Poetry by Joseph Byrd	

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE IV

Isa Pickett

[It's a February day of just sun and birds]

It's a February day of just sun and birds
& I need a mascot. A slightly open sewer grate.
An unknown radio broadcast to describe my hands.

I'm eager for March, when I can tell you in person:
Roll up the rug, let's dance! The birds fat with bird meat.
We could make the most of our wires.

I'll be more than a leaky scarecrow, daily stuffing
myself with straw to clamor to my field—
baggy pants in a breeze & a button mouth trying to smile.

For now I can't remember what I've told you—
The music teacher's blouse today is like the ocean
& pastries are half-off at the corner baptist coffee truck.

What's more? I'm in love with a man trapped inside
a man's body. His father has one of five keys
to the city, & he does not make me laugh.

It's incredible how love makes love look
foolish when the moon's not full
& they've procedurally ripped all the lights from the bridge.

I long for a minor obstacle: the news anchor ending
every sentence with a period. The dog lazing like a little sock
balled up without the other.

The sun careful. Thoughts of you electric
like a kiwi inside & patient
like a name in my throat.

Isa Pickett is a writer and educator living in Philadelphia. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Five South*, *Philadelphia Stories*, *ANMLY* & *The Bitchin'Kitsch*. In 2021, she made the longlist for *Frontier Poetry's* Award for New Poets.

Instagram: @isapickett_

Twitter: @pickett_isa

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE IV
Bridge Lower

re: re: re: re: reminders

Honey,

Sorry for all the emails, I just keep remembering stuff you might need to know while I'm away. There's so much!

Remember Penny has dance class on Thursday and Sam has soccer right after so you have to run — and I mean run — from one to the other. They will complain the whole time and it will be awful. The kids' Social Security numbers, which you won't need, are on a Post-It on the bulletin board by the phone, as is the number for the pediatrician, which you might need. Penny isn't allergic to coconut, but that lotion I got on sale from Whole Foods has coconut oil in it and it once gave her a rash so be careful. It started with pinpricks then bloomed all over like a rose. If this happens again, soak her in an oatmeal bath, and then a regular bath to get all the oatmeal out of her hair. Then clean the tub to get all the oatmeal out and pour Drano down the drain. And then buy more oatmeal and Drano. Or maybe just buy a new lotion? On sale, please.

Don't forget to feed them three meals a day, often four, sometimes five. And remember to remind them to use the bathroom because somehow they forget. It's almost as though their insides are on the outside and they can tend to them — or not — as they please. As a woman who has birthed two children, let me tell you, I never forget about my body, not for one minute.

Remember when I became a runner because Trump got elected and then we binge-watched *The Handmaid's Tale* and I realized I couldn't run even one mile without stopping? In the show, the mom runs and carries her child at the same time and that's still my goal, but the children keep getting bigger and I keep getting older and I just don't see it happening. Maybe they'll end up carrying me. What if all this time I was training for the wrong disaster?

Remember 2020? We were together all day, every day, and we were mad about it. Mad! What if that was everything and we wished it away? Remember 2016 through 2019? And 2021 and 2022 and 2023 and 2024? What if that one year at home, gathered together while the world came apart, was actually the best we'll ever be?

Don't forget to get groceries but remember we both hate eggplant. No eggplant! You're welcome to keep trying, but we've been down that road before. You can try new things while I'm away — I won't hold it against you if you change your mind about stuff we agreed we both hated. Just don't forget the groceries in the car again. God, remember when you forgot the lox? It was in the car over the whole Easter weekend. The smell, Brian! It haunted us for months. I can't eat lox anymore, but guess what? I never liked it in the first place, but you did. It was just easier.

Remember we took vows and signed birth certificates together. They ask who the father is — that line is optional but we chose it. Twice, we wrote in your name. The mother line is not optional, it's pre-printed.

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE IV

Bridge Lower

Don't forget a baby's head has a soft spot and you can't touch it. The head might feel hard, stable, and safe and then whoops! The soft spot. We don't have a baby, but it's just good to keep in mind. Because we did once. Twice.

Remember when we had a dumb fight at the beach and we found ourselves at an impasse, stuck in that dark, syrupy center of an argument, and we couldn't get out for hours. It felt impossible. I said I wanted to walk into the sea and you thought I meant forever. You called me a fucking bitch for saying I'd leave you and our children. Remember? I just wanted to cool off with a swim. Both Penny and Sam cried and they were completely destroyed. Later, the four of us built a sandcastle and they still talk about it. The next day you acted like you forgot the whole thing.

Remember when we drank at a winery at dusk, took up tennis, went on cruises, laughed at our gray hairs, ambled around, and died happy together? That's ok. I forgot the future too.

Don't forget there is no tooth fairy — it's you! Haha. Really though, set an alarm.

Remember, my mother can be annoying. It'll be hard to forget how annoying she is because she'll keep asking where I am and you won't have an answer but she will never stop asking.

Don't forget, you are the sun, but that doesn't make me the moon or a planet. I, too, could be a sun. There can be two suns. Kafka wrote, "There are two tasks at the beginning of your life: to narrow your orbit more and more, and ever and again to check whether you are not in hiding somewhere outside your orbit."

What does this mean, Brian?

Actually, never mind. I know what it means.

But what does it mean to you?

Actually, never mind.

Remember you can track my flight. I'll either be back on the first flight, the last flight, or no flight. And if I'm late to the airport, I can run to the gate. I will practice carrying my suitcase while I run. If the plane leaves without me or I forget about the airport, remember children have many different cries, but this one will be new.

Love,

Sara

Bridge Lower is a writer, teacher, and recent graduate of The Writer's Foundry MFA program. She lives in Brooklyn, NY.

Instagram: @bridgelower

Twitter: @bbrbb

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE IV

Isa Pickett

Year of the Impossible Equine Sprint

Before the civil suit against the bus system. Before licorice mobilized against candied ginger. You stayed up late each night, determined to find a new way horses could move: walk, trot, cantor, gallop—what was the secret form? We might use it to float over the water. O lover lay me up.

Where we lived we heard the elevated train. It was the early 2020's: you had a mullet. I got a job as village microphone. Everyone, all day, singing into my mouth. Billboards of palm trees, lawyers tightening their belts. I liked when our carabiners touched. When the wind was right.

It was the month of the collagen shortage, the day the gas station offered name changes, the early hour we fed the brown cat oranges. You rolled over in bed, asked if I'd ever considered true imagination. All I could see was a locked barn. You on the roof with a handsaw.

Parallelogram of morning by the bedroom window. We talked about pursuits, what it meant to find eggs on Easter. Later we walked along the river and the water looked like a shut-off TV. Our weird bodies still. The geese getting smaller before they were nothing.

Other parts of that autumn are hazy, but the ice patch by the catholic church. But the minnow-shaped leaves dappled over ponds in Amish country. But the strangers squinting in golden traffic. Sometimes I can still hear the train, still see it. The people piling in. Their secure faces.

You would give up the horse dream, move on to other concerns: a new curse word, rearrangement of dusk & dawn. Nightly you massaged my jaw & gently burped my head of lodged words. I did not hold you as a bird held a branch. It was impossible. We were both birds.

Isa Pickett is a writer and educator living in Philadelphia. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Five South*, *Philadelphia Stories*, *ANMLY* & *The Bitchin'Kitsch*. In 2021, she made the longlist for *Frontier Poetry's* Award for New Poets.

Instagram: @isapickett_

Twitter: @pickett_isa

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE IV

Italo Ferrante

witness

after Emily Berry

never look at yourself
in the mirror when you're crying;
the silence behind your shoulders
will chop you up

you'll want to take your breaths
back in – one by one

when did you last spoon
a living thing? what made you
pamper him back to front
until the softness of your palm
became a shard of sea

there was no bruising after all

no one will tie you down to numbers –
forget how many escape routes
mirrored his silhouette,
how much tickling your skin
took in

so sad you couldn't sit up
& blink in the half-light,
so low you saw the devil
around the base of the toilet

did you tell god
you put your voice into his

Italo Ferrante (he/him) is a queer poet who earned a BA in English Literature and Creative Writing from the University of Warwick. To date, his work has been selected for publication by *Poetry Salzburg*, *Impossible Archetype*, *Cardiff Review*, *Sage Cigarettes*, *Inflections Magazine*, *Lighthouse*, and *Orchard Lea Press*. Recently, his poem "Ode to Abruzzo" has been shortlisted for the Oxford Brookes' International Poetry Competition (2022).

Uncertainty, to Consume

Often when I am hungry
I do not eat.
I have been small bird, small
bird with open mouth and this hunger
has been grub burrowing under skin—unpleasant
but just below the surface,

wriggling almost imperceptible,
unseen. Something I could put
in a pocket and send
through the wash and cross my fingers
it would come out only a little scathed. Or, too, jangle
of loose change,
sticky cost of being, tiny discomfort
on a list of sights and sounds
and brightbright lights & subway cars.

Things must be kept
until the point when they no longer are,
for a special occasion that will never be, until
the apples have rotted
and the blackberries have congealed
and the warm soft bread
from the bakery has turned
to brick and green.

To take raw food and change
its science has always left me

uncomfortable,

as if I am unprepared to take on the burden
of something else's transformation,
as if to put water to boil
is to fill my lungs with caterpillars and expect
their chrysalises to materialize
in this ensuing damp. As if

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE IV

Kai Preto

this cooking and making
and imperfection of mush to mouth to gut
is to cut out my own tongue
and expect butterflies.

Kai Preto is a genderqueer & neurodivergent emerging poet whose poetry vacillates between the deeply surreal and the uncomfortably grounded. They currently reside in Western Massachusetts, where they work as a speech therapist & organize queer poetry events in their spare time. They value a quirky sense of humor, thunderstorms, and good boots. Their poetry has been published in *Stirring*, *The Shore*, and *Fauxmoir Lit Mag*.

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE IV

Eben Bein

catholic

It's stupid. Everybody uses elbows when cellentani is *the* mac & cheese pasta shape. Like, unarguably. Like, fuck me. Like some little gomitis got freaky-decky in the fromage & mutated into oozing spiral tubes that crisp then slather, crisp then slather into perfection.

And yet, for years I swear the 8% of my DNA that is Italian would shout *sellout!* each time I tossed a box of cellentani into the cart because I thought it was pronounced *sell-one-Tony*— like the Barilla® marketing team pulled the shells over our eyes, like our eyes were breasts & the shells were pasties & my face was a mermaid & here in America where the sex is better than the food we would endlessly ram any old carb into our mouth holes to the tune of millions.

Turns out, some worker found a broken pasta die at Barilla squeezing out accidental corkscrews that jiggled like the signature dance moves of '70s Italian Rock icon Adriano “sprung” Celentano, a story even more delectable than the golden curls of a semolina mermaid / merman / mertheyd or some other toothsome chimera from before fig leaves were in.

Now I'm barely Italian & Celantano isn't queer but I declare *chay-len-TAH-nee* creamed ambrosia manifest hankering for a mythic epoch of sex, pasta, and rock'n'roll so goddamn catholic that mutants are the golden mean

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE IV

Eben Bein

& craving for any body is as indisputable,
as gratifying as the best damn tube
ever to loop in then out,
& *again*, in then out of the cheese.

Eben E. B. Bein (he/they) is a biology-teacher-turned-climate-justice-educator at the nonprofit Our Climate. He was a 2022 Fellow for the Writing By Writers workshop and winner of the 2022 Writers Rising Up “Winter Variations” poetry contest. Their first chapbook *Character Flaws* (*Fauxmoir* lit, 2023) is forthcoming and they’ve published with the likes of *Fugue Literary*, *New Ohio Review*, and *Columbia Review*. They are currently completing their first full collection *From the top of the sky* about parent-child estrangement, healing, and love. He lives on Pawtucket land (Cambridge, MA) with his husband.

Website: ebenbein.com

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE IV
Susan Barry-Schulz

AIItA

for fixing fried eggs
with gluten-free toast

smothered in Smucker's low-
sugar strawberry jam while

watching my uncle's
funeral mass on Zoom?

I was never good with time
zones—always forgetting

who was ahead or behind.
And yes. Yes, I am.

Susan Barry-Schulz grew up just outside of Buffalo, New York. She is a licensed physical therapist living with chronic illness. Her poetry has appeared in *SWWIM*, *Barrelhouse* online, *New Verse News*, *Nightingale & Sparrow*, *Shooter Literary Magazine*, *The Wild Word*, *Bending Genres*, *B O D Y*, *Gyroscope Review*, *Quartet*, *Moist Poetry Journal*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *West Trestle Review*, *One Art* and elsewhere.

Twitter: @suebarryschulz

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE IV

Dorothy Lune

At the wake

At the wake
divine orchestra fickle veil sprite on my shoulder.

I asked you Why
you're here & you say for me people melt into

the fold-out
chairs like butter sticks— I'm still of course (I'm

precious Gem &
Image you brought / home / from the mines).

Divine orchestrations
I squashed a scalpel in the autopsy room (I'm

too beautiful
to be autistic). You bring the conversation

back to songs
communication by image maybe I'm precious Gem

& Image
because of the pictures you like that you shouldn't be.

I'm too veiled
to be autistic my veil knows it (everyone does)

divine orchestral
sprite— my shoulders melt so I ask if my arms

are now
butter sticks. Fickle freckles into oblivion, at the

wake I asked you
if you loved me & you said what're you talking about.

Dorothy Lune is a Yorta Yorta poet, born in Australia. Her work has appeared in *Pinhole Poetry* & more. She is looking to publish her manuscript, can be found online @dorothylune, & has a substack: <https://dorothylune.substack.com/>

Instagram: @dorothylune

Twitter: @LuneDorothy

Website: dorothylune.weebly.com/

Trans Day of I Will Tattoo a Bird on My Hand

Filled with longing—a petulant girl
king, smirking at nothing, stomach full of coins

on my trans day of attitude, pettiness, waking up soft
Anymore I'm a spiritual miscreant, a fading horse

Waving a white flag like that? It means surrender
Don't worry, there's joy there

The kaleidoscope blacking my eye?
Don't worry, I liked it

He-him'd at the tractor supply
We are all of ___'s children

These were the exit days of autumn,
the fish out of the pond—

Naked on the dock
with only my socks on

with so many stars I puked
Is it naive to be sure?

In your passenger seat
I was a dutiful wife in the passing

of trinkets between my lips to yours
Now my tongue spends her days

interrogating my mouth

Commuter cars
Mick Jagger praise

I've been so unexpectedly,
gratefully swept up by life

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE IV

Isa Pickett

I've forgotten to be distressed
on my trans day of

crying at towers,
the pharmacy line

I saw a night-shift street artist
pull a hat out of a rabbit

I walked to the waterfront
to see the blue whales

but it was a river—
it had a lousy end to it

A second grader asked me
right before break

If someone described clouds to you
and then you saw clouds, would you be surprised?

I tell her yes
I tell her I'm surprised right now

Isa Pickett is a writer and educator living in Philadelphia. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Five South*, *Philadelphia Stories*, *ANMLY* & *The Bitchin'Kitsch*. In 2021, she made the longlist for *Frontier Poetry's* Award for New Poets.

Instagram: @isapickett_

Twitter: @pickett_isa

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE IV

Amy Cook

Conducting

Les Misérables: In Concert at the Royal Albert Hall is an unparalleled recording; vibrant and grandiose in sound, rich in contrast. With 250 singers and *seventeen* Valjeans, it is easy to get lost inside in the grandeur of its presence in my day. When I listen, I am fifteen again, hiding out in my rear-facing bedroom, playing all of the parts.

I was not special in my obsession with the tedious task of learning the score; understanding that the rhythm and pace and breath required to bring these characters to life was vital to even talk shop with those who knew their stuff. I would fly around my room, off of the bed and the chair and sometimes the dresser; singing, acting, pretending to dance. I was a part of it.

In thirty years, I have been unable to shake the habit. A dorm shower. My roommate's car on the backroads of Knox County, Ohio. The airy attic of a Brooklyn Victorian. The East River path, at sunrise. Astoria Park. Wall Street, with the buildings that block the sun but exaggerate my vibrato. The three blocks on the way to the supermarket.

It's coming on winter now. I wear a mask outside, and it's less obvious to strangers that I walk through my life singing *Les Mis* and *RENT*, *Mean Girls* and *Diana: The Musical*. I sing loudly enough to be heard, but only if you're close. I have mostly stopped dancing. I often conduct myself.

Amy Cook (she/they): MFA candidate, Rainier Writing Workshop, 2021 *Kenyon Review* Writers Workshop. Amy's work has appeared in *The Advocate*, *Queer Families: An LGBTQ+ True Stories Anthology* and fifteen literary journals. Affiliations: BMI Lehman Engel Musical Theatre Workshop (Advanced), NYCGMC alum.

I Didn't Come Here to Make F.R.I.E.N.D.S

(Except for [Hera Lindsay Bird](#) and [Tim Grgec](#))

Charlie

Charlie

Charlie

Charlie

Charlie Wheeler off popular sitcom F.R.I.E.N.D.S

The only recurring Black character in 236 episodes of this damn show

She makes me want to rip all of my graduate diplomas to shreds

She makes me want to stride into the New York Museum of Natural History

and take all of our taonga back, Killmonger-style

She makes me want to point out that Living Single only got five seasons

Or start a Reddit thread about how Julie, Kristen, and Charlie all deserved better

But that none of them were ever going to be endgame romantic partners,

Because exactly none of them were white,

And remember, the original title of the show was *Friends Like Us*.

Charlie Wheeler is a Black woman and a Professor of Paleontology at New York University

Who Ross undermines before they've even met as colleagues

Complaining about being asked to support his new workmate, which he never does

Despite Charlie's crystalline credentials and professionalism,

And the shoddy publishing, predatory abuse of power, and unregulated bouts of rage

That have propagated Professor Geller's career

Instead, he immediately catalogues Charlie as fuckable

And a non-threat to his tenured mediocrity

As the laugh track titters at the plot twist – imagine, a *lady dino-nerd!*

But I just have to point out

That it doesn't seem very believable

I mean, how many Black female paleontologists do you think were around in 2003?

And how many grabby white hands lifted sacred taniwha out of Indigenous lands,

Christened them in Latin, and isolated them behind glass?

Charlie, Charlie, Charlie, diversity hires don't date their mentors

He's going to leave you out to dry

Like a precious being swaddled in plaster-of-Paris

And carried further and further from home

Okay, well, I guess at this point in the poem

I'd better mention that as a young girl

I desperately wanted to be a paleontologist

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE IV

Nicola Andrews

Which all the adults thought was pretty strange
Because what brown kids at decile 1 schools
Go around reading Bakker and memorizing taxonomy?
But honestly, my pretentiousness was tolerated
So I really thought this was a viable career path
And if scientists resurrected an entire deinocheirus
From a solitary specimen of clasped claws
Then why couldn't the next whiz-kid dino-genius
Have come hurtling out of a dump in West Auckland?
My mother tired of these delusions of social mobility
So eventually, she took me into the front garden,
Thrust a clunky spade into my slickening palms
And told me not to come traipsing back
Until I'd dug up the remains of a former family pet.
The clods of clay and geranium revealed so much –
The quiet unease of unearthing something sacred
And the perilous menace of maggots and millipedes.
As I leaned the spade against the weathering fence
I think I mumbled something about the improbability
Of a dig succeeding without major grant funding
But truthfully, I had just come to recognize
That everything we claim as a discovery
Is someone's dear, once beloved

Charlie

Charlie

Charlie

Charlie

Charlie Wheeler from mega-hit sitcom F.R.I.E.N.D.S

Charming, intelligent, poised, and “a hottie!” (thanx Monica)

Subject of Ross and Joey's own version of 'The Bone(r) Wars

And viewed only in the context of other men

Like her ex, Benji, who won two Nobel Prizes

Or her father, who was alcoholic, obviously

But for fuckssake, was Charlie even her full name?

Who did our Charlie have on speed dial

When confronted with the caucacity of shatterproof glass ceilings?

You know, a [study](#) published in 2014 states that

That over 20% of female scientists have been

Sexually assaulted while doing fieldwork

And of course these numbers are always underreported

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE IV

Nicola Andrews

Imagine meeting a malign male in Montana, Mongolia, or Morocco
And the only recourse you have is to spend hours in the searing sun
Scraping away at a minute patch of sediment with a glorified toothbrush
Hoping that you'll be the one to expose something long overlooked
And it will be your name in tiny italicized letters
On the plaque that nobody reads
In the museum where his uncle
is a revered trustee

Any scientist worth their salt can tell you
That there are three main kinds of rocks:
Igneous, which is molten rock that solidifies
Sedimentary, which form in layers of minerals and water
And Metamorphic, which are rocks changed by heat, or pressure
Sometimes I think about the layered strata of my life
And how the fiery tension of white supremacy has caused it to buckle
In ways where scientists of the future
Can calmly and clearly point out of all my faults
Charlie was Ross' final ex-girlfriend before he settled down
With his Rachel – *she's* his lobster, after all.
Well here's the thing about lobsters:
Lobsters eat each other without a second thought
And even crabs will tear each other down
Crustaceans clawing, cannibalizing carnivorously
But sure, call it aspirational if it makes you feel better
Maybe I am making Charlie something she is not
Like when Marsh debuted his discovery of the Brontosaurus
And 18 years later, paleontologists realized it was just another Apatosaurus
Incorrectly coronated in his rush to conquest Cope
So it's worth remembering just how instantly
That Charlie dropped Ross cold for her beloved Benji –
Her own personal awardee of the Man Looker Prize
And to know that for even just one day
Ross Geller was the Distinguished Chair
Of being massively 0wn3d

Sometimes I think about if the sitcom F.R.I.E.N.D.S were set in Aotearoa
With the characters flapping together in some palatial apartment in Herne Bay
Picture it, our palatable heroes jump into the fountain in Albert Park, brollies akimbo
And inevitably, the shenanigans ensue, for example,

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE IV

Nicola Andrews

The One Where A Man Called Chandler Bing Thinks His Māori Colleague Has a “Funny Name”;
The One Where Joey’s White Fragility Makes Things Worse and Worse;
The One Where Monica Opens an Asian-Fusion Pop-Up With a Racist Mascot;
The One Where Phoebe Appropriates Hauora Māori For Profit;
The One Where Rachel Follows a Māori Woman Around Smith & Caughey’s Because She Suspects Her of Shoplifting;
The One Where Ross Insists Mātauranga Māori Is Not Science;
Or The One Where My white Friends Say, “I’m Sure They Didn’t Mean It That Way”

I’m so tired of these damn reruns
But go on, tell me again
About how you’ll be there for me
I’m so tired of these never ending seasons
But go on, and tell me
Who among us has not aged poorly
Take your six mild butter chickens to go
I didn’t come here to make F.R.I.E.N.D.S

Nicola Andrews (Ngāti Paoa, Pākehā) currently lives on Ramaytush Ohlone territory. An alum of the Voices of Our Nations Arts Foundation and Rooted & Written fellowships, in 2022 they were awarded second place in the Kohukohu Library Poetry Prize and Takahē Monica Taylor Poetry Prize. Their micro-chap *Sentimental Value* is forthcoming with Ghost City Press, and their debut chapbook *Māori Maid Difficult* is forthcoming with Tram Editions. In their spare time, they watch dinosaur documentaries with their cat.

Instagram: @poi_division

Twitter: @maraebrarian

Website: bit.ly/NicolaAndrews

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE IV

Andrea Krause

Still Life with Fruit Trees and Field Mice

Happy hour is served on the back patio,
through the doorway of a pacified day.
The umbrella keeps a snapping

chill at fingers length, combs dusk
crumbs from our hair. I cradle the bright face
of my screen. You chase stealth gray mice

along the fence with a broom – they covet
the drops, apples rotting morbid
in the dirt like a grass casket,

imbibing on tumbled sugar. What is ours
to protect? Our glasses clink like change.
We sip Campari because we like the taste

of pretend, our eyes slipping
into invisible. The baby is asleep
and the olives are salty. The hush is

as umami as it is quiet. Astringent
orange flames melt this young
dark, sweet in our throats.

Andrea Krause lives in Portland, Oregon. Her work has been published in *The Penn Review*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *The Inflectionist Review*, *HLAD*, and elsewhere.

Twitter: @PNWPoetryFog

Website: andreakrausewrites.com

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE IV

Dure Ahmed

Tulips

The door of the deserted mosque is locked. Philadelphia is silent except for ambulance sirens, cops, lurid sky. The tulips the state grows on the university grounds, guarded with tax-funded pigs, are cartoon-red, plastic-bright.

My sister's footfalls are quick in front of mine. The brown pharmacist's eyes are deer-like above his mask, and I have to stifle a giggle. I say I'm picking up my "Sprintec" instead of calling it "birth control", dressed as I am in Jumma Prayer primness. I want to pause to marvel at the mica glow in the pavement, pink of magnolias, the woman in a bright cardigan on top of a burka, but my sister needs us to return to the smell of Lysol on her doorknob, walls, tabletops, spice jars, oil bottle, the paper on the bread loaf, glass stovetop, the cover of the book of mandalas we color together. I fill a thrifted vase with water and stolen flowers.

My nails are cut to the quick, because I'm paranoid about germ-traps and I wonder if I'll ever have children, how people just *have* children: clinging at their knees, staring wide-eyed.

It's Friday afternoon and I prepared: my toenail clippers, the only sound in the room, for the congregation of loneliness towards the long shadow of God's empty house. *Come, wash your limbs*, I appeal to the softness I know my sister possesses because of the way she talks to her flat mate and Zoom screen. *Please stand next to me*, we used to pray together when we were first taught how. When we were taught to be good, and I know she wants nothing to do with being good anymore, so I need to say something else. I've watched hope leave her face, but what is complaint if not prayer? I know she's always known that ritual settles in bones, the way we know our mother's suffering: her back rounded in prostration; her hands raised in prayer. The memory of her face bare between her chador's circles around her head. Who wants to be like our mother, I know, but I need a companion in worship.

With our mother I never talked back. I confirmed her theories, kept my transgressions secret, delicately publicized my virtues. With God it's less easy. I don't want to be alone. *It's about survival*, I appeal to her rationality. If something exists up there, how can we risk not being Its favorite?

Dure Ahmed is an immigrant, Muslim writer who lives in New Jersey. Their work has been published, or is forthcoming in *Guernica*, *ANMLY*, *Black Warrior Review*, and *Autofocus* among others.

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE IV

Dawn Tasaka Steffler

Alone on Your Kid's Birthday

This reminds you of the postpartum depression. Except it's different. The same but different. You call your son to say happy birthday and you hear your ex in the background, *You need to put your shoes on, tell Mom you'll call her back from the car.*

It's different. You're not exhausted anymore from hours of listening to him colic cry. And he's old enough now to have his own phone and tie his own shoes. You wish you knew how to fix this.

The pediatrician had told you to swaddle him and you did but you didn't trust yourself so you laid him in the crib while he colic cried for hours. You sat in the rocking chair and stared out the window at the dreary end-of-February weather. You didn't know what was wrong with you. Then, when your son was four and your husband asked for a divorce, you agreed.

The weather outside is dreary. But you need fresh air so you put your shoes on for a walk. The divorce was his idea and you agreed because at the time your head felt like a dryer, the same thoughts tossed around and around. You check your pockets to make sure you have your phone because your son is going to call you back.

You walk and it starts to snow. You leave the maze of townhouses where you and all the other divorced people live and head into the neighborhoods with the houses where all the married people live. Your son calls you back and you hear his friends in the background, he says they're going to Dave and Busters. You feel two things in your body: that you wish you were there in the car with him and you wish you had never had him in the first place.

The streetlights flicker on and the windows of the houses light up like little tv screens, their families moving around oblivious of any audience. The snow crunches under your boots. You were able to buy some time last year because you told yourself your son was only seventeen. But now that he's an "adult" and he doesn't "need" you anymore, you can't stop staring into the lit up houses, knowing they can't see you staring at them because it's dark out here on the sidewalk where you are.

Dawn Tasaka Steffler is an emerging fiction writer from Hawaii who lives in the San Francisco Bay Area. A few years ago she spent Thanksgiving alone in a timeshare and it totally sucked. Her work appears in *Heimat Review* and *SoFloPoJo*; upcoming in *Alternative Milk Magazine*, *MicroLit Almanac* and *Flash Frog*.

Twitter: @DawnSteffler

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE IV

Jenkin Benson

What Democracy Looks Like and What It Really Looks Like

How many cicada poems have you written?

I have written upwards of 3.

10 years ago, at a summer workshop in Provincetown, Massachusetts, 8 people with disposable income injected a poisonous serum into me. It worked through my system too fast to kill me.

Lobe piercing Lip piercing Eyebrow
piercing Septum piercing Tongue piercing
Nipple piercing Nose piercing Frenulum
piercing Other Nipple piercing West German
Eye in Mouth peering

Rose Emoji and Black Flag Emoji

That's really compelling. So you simultaneously desire a Post-WWII capitalist social democratic welfare state, but you also yearn for a revolutionary anarchistic non-hierarchical horizontalist commune. That's terribly fucking stupid; I'm glad it consoles you.

Imagine horizontally living with a person who looks like me.
Imagine horizontally mass producing penicillin for 8 billion people.

Vile luxuries Vile robots Vile space
Vile tenderness Vile incommensurability
Vile new methods of analysis Vile
futurity Piles of human biomass
underlying your automation

In the summer of 2020 we were about to march and a guy in Continental European boots sauntered up to me and told me that he couldn't march today but he would love to march sometime and until they day he could march he had English Major skills that he thought could be really useful and maybe even help us march. Skills like proofreading and knowing how to use semicolons really well.

Plankton are dying en masse and you're worried about a better synonym for "authority."

Jenkin Benson is a 1st year PhD student at the University of Notre Dame du Lac. He principally studies the creative interchange between Welsh and Irish modernists. He occasionally writes poetry. You can find his work in *New Note Poetry*, *The /temz/ Review*, and *KEITH LLC*.

Twitter: @jenkinwithout

Other creative projects: jasperisaband.bandcamp.com

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE IV

Alyssa Bushell

An 18-Wheeler Is About to Drive Through the Back Seat of Philomena's Hatchback

When she gets out of the hospital, she'll go home with a neck brace, a prescription she'll never fill because pain meds make her feel loopy, a key ring with only the key to her front door, and an appointment to get her stitches out. She'll register for Netflix to stave off the boredom and binge adventure documentaries when the nightmares steal her sleep. She'll look around her cluttered apartment and wonder what has changed.

On her first day back at work, with the fading bruises almost hidden under a cakey layer of makeup and a strategic yellow scarf, she'll find flowers at her desk that make her sneeze. She'll make it all the way to 1:00 p.m., and then she'll walk into her manager's office and declare her resignation with a finality that surprises even her. She'll sit the rest of the day in a drowsy Taco Bell that's the only thing open within walking distance, drink too much Mountain Dew and wonder what has changed.

After the insurance check comes through, she'll find herself in a gym. She'll work and sweat and push herself, endurance training with a furor she never put into her day job. She'll buy a bicycle. She'll shower cold every morning, fill herself with protein, stare at the unfamiliar muscles that confront her in the mirror and wonder what has changed.

Her sister will try to stage an intervention when Phil announces that she's going to climb Everest in the spring. She'll brush off all their pleas and counsel, and scoff at their concerns. She'll empty her apartment, making room for all the gear, and spend months trekking at altitude to acclimatize. She'll reach base camp right on schedule, and beneath strings of fluttering prayer flags, she'll look up at that mountain and wonder what has changed.

Adrenaline coursing through her, she'll make the final push for the summit on the 24th of May. As her lungs scream for air, she'll come across a body in the ice, a crumpled warning, frozen in time. Right there, at 8,500 meters, to the dismay of her guides, she will turn around.

She'll take down the picture of the mountain on the fridge that's fueled her drive. She'll cancel Netflix, turn down three job offers before she accepts the right one, get a cat and four house plants. Her climbing gear will gather dust in a basement storage locker that she'll never open again. And on the 17th of August, on the first sunny day that month, she'll pick up her sister for a family picnic in a new-to-her sedan. Over cold fried chicken and lukewarm potato salad, while the nephews catch frogs and the grownups hope for rain, everyone but Philomena will wonder what has changed.

Alyssa Bushell lives and writes at the shore of Lake Huron in southern Ontario. Alyssa's work appears in print in *Blank Spaces* magazine and online at *Ellipsis Zine*, *Reckon Review*, and *Leon Literary Review*, among others. She is currently working on her debut mystery novel and can often be found baking up new ways to procrastinate.

Instagram: @WritesAly

Twitter: @WritesAly

Website: AlyWrites.ca

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE IV
Clara Bush Vadala

At the altar of the broken-winged boat-tailed grackle

in the Walmart parking lot
the inhabitants of the ecosystem
startle.

The grackles are watching
their sister stand underneath
the car where she

has fallen with the French fries
from the pocket of the car door
that smacked her there.

Her wing is malpositioned,
feathers fluffed, each muscle
in each follicle standing

them on end. In the end
they are wrong to watch her
and do nothing

the way I do when I hear
what sounds like a jaguar
or a jungle possum

cackling and screeching,
and realize it is just a black bird
with a boat tail

and a broken wing calling
all the wild things
to the spectacle of her

knowing she will die, but
it will probably be slow
or at the hand

of a cat, or a fox like the one
I once saw near the bleachers,
flinging its prey

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE IV
Clara Bush Vadala

and yipping in glee, learning
how to play, to revel in the fear
of those weaker than it.

Clara Bush Vadala (she/her) is a poet and veterinarian from North Texas. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Moss Puppy*, *New South Review*, and *Daily Drunk Mag*. Her full length collection, *Resembling A Wild Animal*, is forthcoming from ELJ Editions in 2024.

Twitter: @doctorVpoetry.

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE IV

Mikki Aronoff

How You Knew Fur: A Furstory in Five Dribbles

Bedtime, your mother tucked you tight, read *Donkey Skin* and *Allerleirauh*, crossing her fingers under her apron to magic away the words. She gave you a rabbit's foot, blue like dyed carnations, for luck. Beats four-leaf clovers, she said. You kept it on its keychain in your pocket. Poor rabbit.

*

Your Grandmother kept to herself. Your mother kept Grandmother's Persian lamb cape in the hall closet. The cape hung there wrinkled like a brain. You'd curl there in the dark, let your fingers walk its ridges and crevices. When you wrapped it around your shoulders, you could hear it bleating.

*

Uncle Bob lying back on the sofa, pops open a can of Rheingold, pulls up his T-shirt. "Hey, Missy, Mr. Bear's back!" He ripples his chest, a furry creature come alive. Glistening hair and skin. "Pet him." You stay at the dining room table, eyes down, finish your math homework.

*

Those days you kept lipsticks handy in your backpack. Fuchsia, orange, pink, didn't matter. Your high school classmates called you *The Defacer*. When the elevator operator at the fancy department store shuttered the metal gate, you sidled up to fur coats, sank like a sneak into mink and seal. Smear.

*

Snuggles with the mutts, one chinchilla-soft, the other rough as a Silverback gorilla, or so you believe. Such tiny things. They slam into your sides at night, trap you in your bed. A hand on each hurtles you over hillocks and hummocks, sweeps you past drumlins and back. Lucky you.

Mikki Aronoff's work appears in *New World Writing*, *MacQueen's Quinterly*, *Tiny Molecules*, *The Disappointed Housewife*, *Bending Genres*, *Milk Candy Review*, *Gone Lawn*, *Mslaxia*, *The Dribble Drabble Review*, *The Citron Review*, *Atlas and Alice*, *trampset*, and elsewhere. She's received Pushcart, Best of the Net, Best Small Fictions, Best American Short Stories, and Best Microfiction nominations.

God says she doesn't like moving water

i.

Preferably still water

In the kitchen,

Bluish light

Hollow edge of the knife, rabbit

Soft and crawling around like

It wouldn't be eaten in

Another life like

Sliced thin, everything is baby

Soft and bona fide

Beneath the buzzing wings

Stained old bulb

Your cast, hollow

My chest

Buttery and

Opening like wings

i.

The tablecloth is crenulated

Your mother eats my

Sweetbreads

My birth

A story for another day

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE IV

Sam Moe

Congeaed

An array of rude and

Pink

In the light we form a community

She wears blue gemstones in

The daith

Asks me about my faith

To her daughter

Did you tell her

About the night you almost

Drowned me

i.

On purpose, swans

Lavish and swing-necked

Their beaks in the mist

If this isn't a baptism

Then why are we in the water

You pivoted in the mud

Almost losing your balance

What if I love you

You replied before

Taking my head and pushing

Me

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE IV

Sam Moe

Below

And the hectares bunched

Do you remember pressing flowers?

And my lungs

Condensed, all creature

Now

I can love you

Better now the mother

Is fed.

Sam Moe is the first-place winner of *Invisible City's* Blurred Genres contest in 2022, and the 2021 recipient of an Author Fellowship from Martha's Vineyard Institute of Creative Writing. Her first chapbook, *Heart Weeds*, is out from Alien Buddha Press and her second chapbook, *Grief Birds*, is forthcoming from *Bullshit Lit* in April 2023.

Instagram: @SamAnneMoe

Twitter: @SamAnneMoe

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE IV

Andrea Krause

Peak Citrus

Low clouds are posted on the bulletin board,
tacked up next to chaos. We have entered
witness protection season, so

don't call it a sign—
let ritual pass like an overheard
blech, squint jaundiced glances, then

ponder the odor of onions
and secrecy. Sweep a few roaming
hairs behind my ear, just as you peel

grapefruit, curving around non-sharp
corners, tender lust-spiking zest. Taste is
best uncovered by touch, you claim,

skinning the fog, as if our hip bones
were never blades. We catch the sun self-
immolating in rural Arizona, population:

me, you, and copious hydrogen to broil.
I want to be blanched open, my face
in your hards, tailored cuticle

ignited away. With care, you plunge open
pith. I always resist,
even though I like this part the best.

Andrea Krause lives in Portland, Oregon. Her work has been published in *The Penn Review*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *The Inflectionist Review*, *HAD*, and elsewhere.

Twitter: @PNWPoetryFog

Website: andreakrausewrites.com

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE IV
Joseph Byrd

Harvest

I turn to talk to you and the
wintered fig tree leans in,
telling me to stay. I have not
left you. This week of years has

aged what once I knew as me.
A squirrel forages in the tree,
hoping for something that
remains. He stops at my glance,

poised to take what fleeing can
give. And I wonder if that's you,
waiting for me to find what fruit
you've left behind. Hardly have I

eaten since you left, not only in
ways that mean little or less. I have
bitten down on texts we'd sent the
days before you died, tongued

what was laughed over and seeded
with possibilities and promise.
We always said what needed saying.
The squirrel finds a withered fig,

moves on. And I want to find the
words you've not yet said. But let
me climb where first we were
when everything sprang open

before this end. Let me find the
fruit that made us mad with what
it meant to call each other friend.
Then, I will move on, too.

Joseph Byrd's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Punt Volat*, *Pedestal*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *DIAGRAM*, *Clackamas Literary Review*, and *Novus Literary Arts*. He's a 2023 Pushcart Prize nominee, and was in the StoryBoard Chicago cohort with Kaveh Akbar. An Associate Artist in Poetry under Joy Harjo at the Atlantic Center for the Arts, he is on the Reading Board for *The Plentitudes*.

Thank you for reading.



twitter.com/manynicedonkeys



instagram.com/manynicedonkeys