

MANY NICE DONKEYS

VOLUME II, ISSUE III



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Many Nice Donkeys

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear friends,

At this point in time, I find myself at a loss for words. How fitting, then, that this submission window saw the most submissions we've ever had. Though hectic at times, it was comforting to read through the poetry, the prose. Your words. To see what you could make after the world continues to take. *Write it all, I must, all that soon won't be* (Esmé Kaplan-Kinsey, page 16).

Even as I write this letter, it feels like there's a lot that soon won't be. Perhaps I'm being dramatic. Perhaps this Midwestern heatwave is finally getting to me. *I have felt the wind today and it is dying* (James O'Bannon, page 20). Or perhaps it's the onslaught of information that confronts us all nowadays. Whatever is culminating in your life right now to send you into a darker headspace, I hope that we can all find some solace in the things that feed us creatively.

Perhaps it's planting new plants in the garden. I've watched the vines from a rhizome of Mt. Hood hops fight its way out of the soil and into the sky. Or perhaps it's seeing a loved one's eyes light up after tasting a new dish you've never prepared before. *I think that this is what it must be to worm a way out of suffering* (James O'Bannon, page 20). Whatever it is that helps you find that way out, that gives you that peace of mind, let it continue. And remember this about the world we live in: *It's beautiful. It's fucked up. It is not without hope* (Jennifer Maloney, page 5).

As we conclude this issue, we've decided we are going to use the rest of 2025 to get the barnyard ready for some new initiatives and events in 2026. We want to expand our offerings to you, our dear readers and dear contributors. In November of 2024, we hosted our very first open mic event, with writers reading their work from across the area. With the success of that event, and of the raffle we held with it, we plan to host more events like this in the future, and we hope you'll continue with us on this journey forward.

Sláinte

Alexander Walz
Editor-in-Chief
Volume II, Issue III

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Je ne suis pas un Poeme	5
Poetry by Jennifer Maloney	
When I said I could / keep this up forever	6
Poetry by Isa Pickett	
Memory Exercise: Describe it	7-8
Poetry by James O'Bannon	
Love Poem To Styrofoam	9
Poetry by CS Crowe	
Orcas Island	10
Poetry by Esmé Kaplan-Kinsey	
In My Wildfire Bliss II	11
Poetry by Svetlana Litvinchuk	
Flower	12
Poetry by Terri McCord	
Appeals	13
Poetry by Rachel Linton	
Kansas City as a Constant Companion	14-16
Poetry by Jennifer Rodrigues	
Dust People	17
Poetry by Esmé Kaplan-Kinsey	

TABLE OF CONTENTS

After she leaves me	18-19
Poetry by Esmé Kaplan-Kinsey	
The Imperfect Nature of Design: Neglected Places Maps Don't Show	20
Poetry by John Dorroh	
How to Unmake The City	21
Poetry by James O'Bannon	
Poem on 12/22/2022	22-23
Poetry by Isa Pickett	
Putting Out Feelers	24
Fiction by Michael Czyzniejewski	
Maybe the apocalypse is what we need right now	25
Poetry by Moriah McStay	

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME II, ISSUE III
Jennifer Maloney

Je ne suis pas un Poème

Wake up to the sun faking summer, brightness bouncing through cracks in blackout curtains, reflection made more of snow than shine. Down the street a garbage truck tweets just like a little bird, *cheap, cheap, cheap* it sings, *watch out, here I come*, heaves its sulfur sigh.

The world spins on, and it just gets easier, doesn't it? Easier, with every revolution, so greasy with blood and spit and bile that after a while we can't hold on any longer. Gravity shrugs, shoves its tiny hands in its pockets and strolls away to buy a ticket for another planet, a better job where nobody debates its very existence, and we whirl—virtually—virtuously—rapturously—out into the stars, discovering—yes! We are in fact the center of the universe, everything circling us as we circle the drain. The center of the universe, sitting smack in the middle of god's grubby palm like a bug or a booger he's about to wipe off on his pants and he's examining us closely, with interest, the way you do when you stand up and take a look in the toilet to see exactly what you've made, its color, texture, smell, deciding whether or not it's good, your fingers fiddling at the shiny chrome lever because, good or not, shit gets flushed.

This poem is not a pipe. It's not a painting. This poem needs psych meds and insulin. It has a knife in its boot and knows where to get a gun. This poem has microplastics in its brain and a bullet lodged near its spine.

This poem is broke, cartoon moths flutter from its pockets. This poem spent the rent on milk and eggs, on scratchers and weed. The landlord changed the locks and now this poem is homeless.

It's not a sit-in, a love-in, a protest, a march. This poem is analogue, monologue, seeks dialogue. It needs action, a reaction, and it can't get no what, now? It won't berate you, manipulate you, and it can't anticipate you, that's the algorithm's job.

The sun is shiny as a brass band, yellow as trumpet, bugling a call—not a text, not an email, nothing digital, traceable, vulnerable. Garbage trucks are metaphors we can't afford; birds tweet. Letters post. Worlds revolve and people evolve and light is not all that can reflect. Wake up. Look in the mirror and see this poem. It's beautiful. It's fucked up. It is not without hope.

Jennifer Maloney writes poetry and fiction; find her work in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, *Synkroniciti Magazine* and forthcoming in *Ninth Letter Web Edition*. She is the author of *Evidence of Fire* (Clare Songbirds Publishing, 2023) and *Don't Let God Know You are Singing* (Before Your Quiet Eyes Publishing, 2024). Jennifer is a parent, a partner, and a very lucky friend, and she is grateful, for all of it, every day.

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME II, ISSUE III

Isa Pickett

**When I said I could
keep this up forever**

I meant ten weeks. My forever must be torn at the wing.
Could I have known? I am a heap of bandages. The manhole
cover sails through the air & the fish heads in the market sing.
As a kid, I heard a rumor the man who sang *Don't Worry,
Be Happy* committed suicide. It's not true, but the grief still
loped through the hills & pushed down the grass of my
psyche to sleep.

An older kid once told me *A boy died in that grain silo.*
What happened? *He couldn't find a corner to piss in.* Later
Matthew passed & I imagined him in silhouette. Now here.
I am at the bottom of his breathing & a pinhole collapsing.

I have more questions than death: Is that cave closed off?
Do salmon still spawn here? Were those fireworks
or gunshots? Is that an active lighthouse? Do you still
love me? What if I did this? What if I did it all the time?
Now? Still?

Isa Pickett is a Master of Divinity student currently living in Philadelphia. Her poems have appeared in *ANMLY* and *Colorado Review*. She sings and yells with her band The Life Blood.

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME II, ISSUE III
James O'Bannon

Memory Exercise: Describe It -

1. (Describe it)

Granddad's house no still Granny's
Asphalt driveway no
concrete matches sidewalk
matches graveled air off-white memory
matches dead thought of walking
up empty porch matches draped windows no one sitting in chair

2. (Describe it)

Red brick exterior slight break in foundation slight block in sunrise
no
in sunset slight levitation in these bones
once no twice no three times renovated
every change documented re- documented
logged for some future ghost

3. (Describe it)

Interior design alive then
metallic then falling like fresh
moonlight never quite
the same
color shape always not quite

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME II, ISSUE III
James O'Bannon

how I imagine
convulsing into something
that doesn't quite hold the people
I remember.

James O'Bannon (He/Him) is a Black writer, born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio. He holds a BA in English from Northern Kentucky University, an MFA in poetry from Fresno State University, and is a *Tin House* Winter Workshop Alumnus. His poetry has appeared in *Waxwing*, *Mid-American Review*, *Triquarterly*, and elsewhere. His work argues with itself about grief and the ways we sit with it.

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MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME II, ISSUE III
CS Crowe

Love Poem To Styrofoam

Like my love for you it lasts
As long as microplastics,
Which might be forever;
Schrodinger's pollution,
Poisoned cat in a box love;
Don't worry. It's only toxic
If it kills you when you eat it.
What about if it makes you
Infertile? Depressed? Queer?
If they *were* putting chemicals
In the water to make the frogs gay,
I'd know because my trans friends
Would drink from the damn tap.
Instead, they buy Brita filters
That promise to purify 99%
Of whatever is least healthy
At the present time of writing.
Let me dream of this moment:
It would be a seven beer night,
And I'd ask them, lovingly, like a kiss,
Have you had enough water today?
I would smile as they ran to the kitchen,
Stuck their head beneath the faucet,
And the water. Fluoride and testosterone,
Flowed directly into their mouth,
A single line from their tongue to the sea.

CS Crowe is three crows in a trench coat that gained sentience after eating a magic bean. He spends his days writing stories on a stolen laptop and trading human teeth for peanuts. A poet and storyteller from the Southeastern United States, he believes stories and poems are about the journey, not the destination, and he loves those stories that wander in the wilderness for forty years before finding their way to the promised land.

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

Orcas Island

Sailboats, and the rotten wind
off a seal carcass—in this saltmist
I remember myself. I pocket green stones
to weigh myself down. I am not the eagle
clawing fish from the waves, but perhaps
one day I could be. For now
I blow smoke across the water like every other
human. The pod of orcas, a myth
because I've never seen them. At the edge
of the world there is more world.
There always has been. I must remember
these promises. I must throw my body
over, and trust. Misplace the map,
for now. Be a fragment of what
already is. If you want to be more
than you are, you must go to the abrupt edge
and leap.

Esmé Kaplan-Kinsey is a California transplant living in Portland, Oregon. In their writing, they hope to explore human-nature relation and deconstruct binaries that cast humankind in opposition to the natural world. Their work appears in publications such as *Adroit Journal*, *SmokeLong Quarterly*, and the *Cincinnati Review*. They can be found on X/Bluesky/Instagram @esmepromise.

In My Wildfire Bliss II

I look for God in the tulip bed. I search the bag of grain the mice got into. I think maybe they had left a door open for me somewhere in what they took away, a portal through which only those made small can travel. All hallways are shamanic. I find my laundry praying for absolution, heaped in a corner of the bedroom where I put my ear to the wall and listen for the language of prayer. My language proficiency is limited to my own tongue, so only the sound of my own shadow greets me, lying crumpled against the pile where it tucked itself in for sleep. All day and all night, I sit by the window watching the squirrels ferry acorns down the river until my cat comes to me, a secret in her mouth. The crescent moons of her pupils shine black in the daylight, then she curls into sleep in a sunspot on the windowsill, becoming a whole moon. Beyond her, a thousand forest fires blaze and for a moment I think I hear whispers in the distant crackles, sounding like a river I once knew before it died from poisoning. The flames sway and puncture the night sky with stray embers turned shooting stars. I step into the night and greet the ancients, make out the silhouettes of my ancestors until my breath catches fire and a whole colony of termites perishes at my feet. All around me the future burns—the earth is covered in such tinder. Strewn pinecones and mushrooms beckon me to return to the soil. I pick up my shovel, dig two holes for my legs and stand in the rain. Mouth open, eyes closed, waiting for God to enter.

Svetlana Litvinchuk is the author of a debut poetry chapbook, *Only a Season* (Bottlecap Features, 2024) and a forthcoming full-length collection (spring 2026). Nominated for Pushcart and Best of the Net, her poetry appears in *swamp pink*, *About Place*, *Flyway*, *ANMLY*, *Sky Island Journal*, *Strange Horizons*, and elsewhere. Originally from Ukraine, she now tends her garden in Missouri. She is the Managing Editor of *ONLY POEMS*.

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Terri McCord

"There is a train inside this iris"
from David St. John's "Iris"

a fiery dragon inside a Rose of Sharon
that grows outside the gallery,
the glowing eyes in the pistils,
a burgundy depth of a cave,
the dragon emerging
 a scaly tongue,
and the hot breath of the flower
 that won't let up

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Appeals

The basil plant outside tries
to give up the ghost every few days.
Maybe it's a plea for attention—
it's too hot out here, bring me in!
It doesn't understand that the cat will eat it,
just like the cat doesn't understand
why she can't eat the basil,
or the croissant, or the chocolate cake.
She mews pitifully at me, staring
out the window at the basil plant,
wilting back.

I carry the water out to it
and stare back at the cat
through the window screen,
heavy with the unbearable weight
of knowing better.

Rachel Linton is a playwright, poet, and (depending on when you're reading this) either has recently or will soon graduate from the University of Chicago Law School. Her poetry has appeared in *Strange Horizons*, *Emerge Literary Journal*, and *The Sunlight Press*, among others, and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. You can find more of her work at rachellinton.com.

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME II, ISSUE III
Jennifer Rodrigues

Kansas City as a Constant Companion

What are we but what we offer up? Larry Levis

I

I am back where I used to live

See a white farm house through a window

All is still & silent, I can smell this house

It reminds me of my grandmother's

In the country, LaGrange, Georgia

It smells of propane, of dust burning,

Cigarettes & Olay bar soap

Every time I lift my thermos for a hot sip

There's a reflection behind me

So close to my eyes

Past farmers of this land moving in reverse

Letting go of the plow handle

Walking backward to a screen door

Eyes covered in the shade of a wide brim hat

Sticky chew of tobacco

Then I become hard Earth

The spine of weeds

Dirt caking on shoes

I am muffled wind

The farmer lifts his hands for pig snout,

Trotting backwards

Erasing the future

Somewhere in the distance a tractor engine

Rumbles to an idled stop

A worm slithers back to glistening grass

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME II, ISSUE III
Jennifer Rodrigues

A butterfly upstrokes back onto
The tufted face of a flower



II

Some gifts are seen but not heard
So says the harvest field overjoyed
With abundant pollinators

With a Summer pardoned of drought
It makes me wonder if a baby's
Cold friction-expansion of lungs

Hurts on that initial breath
& why we call the sound of
The first cry a gift

I put sunglasses to my eyes &
Again see echoes behind me
Sheep shuffling side to side

A herding dog skipping backwards
Chickens quickly placing dry kernel on dirt floor
An opposite to erasure if I watch long enough

Crimson leaves floating up to fingered branches
Churning in light to brown, peppered yellow,
Shining green

They know this land once fostered someone else,
A whole group of someone else's
Sweat that also lifted up to brow,

A tiny puddle seeping back into pore
Long before the cylinder propane tanks
Were installed, between the juvenile oaks

A barren clothes line



MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME II, ISSUE III
Jennifer Rodrigues

III

Then I heard the sounds of scraping on road
Metal to asphalt
I sat outside in the white of it
No other sounds except a wood pecker
Knocking & hopping
Wind wafting through the now frozen
Lingering leaves that make the faintest
Clacking noise I've ever been

Fortunate to hear

There is a window behind me &
This time I see a bigger picture
A frozen, muddy road with ruts
From hoofs & skinny tires
Backdroping that, tall trees,
Frozen & dormant
A different wood pecker on a juvenile tree
Jerks its head back & back & back
Hops up & up & up

I become the short stabs of grass peeking through snow
I am ice forming on roof's edge
Then I melt down into the roots of a baby oak
The tail of a horse trots back with a
Heavily coated man atop, looking East
Off in the distance, only a slight clearing
I see sheep & herd dog standing still
Watching me

Jennifer Rodrigues lives on the sacred Powhatan land of Fairfax, VA. She is trained as a certified yoga therapist & trauma informed yoga teacher, is a queer & neurodivergent military spouse, & mom. Her poetry & photography have been featured in *Passengers*, *Susurrus*, *FERAL*, *The Jelly Bucket*, *Mid-Atlantic Review*, & several military anthologies. Her photography has been nominated for Best of the Net.

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

Dust People

On the television, the meteorologist is crying.

I fill my days with great mouthfuls of nothing.
I sleep to survive the heat.

In the garden, tomatoes weep from prickling vines.
Sweet tea in the round glass jar on the windowsill.

In some close-by chamber the worth
of our continued living is calculated,
deemed unprofitable.

I walk in the woods until my feet cry mercy.
Mercy, I cry for the woods.

I am looking for a way in,
a way out or through.

The way is to tell myself there is a way.

Then I go home. Then I lure myself into bed,
dream of a continent resketched in charcoal.

I've been reading a book
which attributes human self-centeredness
to our inability to comprehend geological time.

So why do I still find myself, caring, so much,
about everything?
All my damn precious time spent in frenzies
of preservation or regret?

Write it down—phrase forever sharp in my throat.
Write it all, I must, all that soon won't be.

Catch it, snare it, pin it against the wall
and kiss it like a last goodbye. One day, soon—

geologically speaking—it will be a last goodbye.

Esmé Kaplan-Kinsey is a California transplant living in Portland, Oregon. In their writing, they hope to explore human-nature relation and deconstruct binaries that cast humankind in opposition to the natural world. Their work appears in publications such as *Adroit Journal*, *SmokeLong Quarterly*, and the *Cincinnati Review*. They can be found on X/Bluesky/Instagram @esmepromise.

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

After she leaves me

I go to the lake. I peel
a tangerine. So what
if my hands get sticky.
I sleep with a boy
who smells like sunlight.
I remember that I like
to love things. I love
things I've never noticed.
There are so many trees
on this earth I'd like
to befriend. So many
bird calls to mistake
for company. I grow
my nails long again
like company. Am I
the kind of creature
who breathes its own air?
No, the wind a composition
of the exhales of every
living thing.
So I am
every living thing.
So I am eating salmon-
berries by the trail.
So I am something
like a bear, and I love
bears, and their sleeping.
After she leaves me,
I take a long-ass nap.
I slouch off into dreamland,
return the opposite
of a prophet. No one asked
the future of me.
Not even her.
So I still have it all
for myself. I'm lucky
like that. I get a tattoo
of a Venus flytrap
hungry and buzzing
against my ribs.
There is a future in which
I pierce my nose
and don't think about

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

looking like a mad cow.
After she leaves me, I start drawing again.
The view from the hotel window. Animals
untethered from the brushstrokes of species.
I am no good. It feels good not to
have to be good. Here,
there is echoing space I've forgotten. after
she leaves me, I fill it with myself.

Esmé Kaplan-Kinsey is a California transplant living in Portland, Oregon. In their writing, they hope to explore human-nature relation and deconstruct binaries that cast humankind in opposition to the natural world. Their work appears in publications such as *Adroit Journal*, *SmokeLong Quarterly*, and the *Cincinnati Review*. They can be found on X/Bluesky/Instagram @esmepromise.

The Imperfect Nature of Design: Neglected Places that Maps Don't Show

Discreet places in deep-juiced furrows almost never make it into archived places, as if their existence never mattered. That marine vents and trenches get noted in National Geographic are exceptions. Microorganisms that thrive off of heat and gaseous sulfur at 35,000 feet under the surface of the sea, sub-varieties of species that you and I will never see in a lab. Gigantic squid and cousins of squid pulsing through frigid waters unhurriedly, their cartilaginous bodies having adapted to immense pressure, their indigo ink serving no purpose whatsoever. Those, too, become extinct over time, replaced by other mapless creatures that defy classification. The sunken cheeks of 100-year-old Egyptian grandmothers, their brown temples creased with time, weathered by routine and supplanted by younger bodies with ample amounts of energy but with less wit and wisdom. They never yell over the mountain range that their place deserves a papered prominence on Rand-McNally's Hall of Fame. Maps fail to tell the whole story. Invisible cracks and fissures on the floor of the Mojave desert, surrounded by cholla cacti, their pink and white blooms, rattlesnakes and desert tortoises, scrubby hares whose ferocious paws pouncing over the subterranean funnels, propelling sand, dirt, and debris into dark holes, blocking passage for desert ants, jumping spiders and curious crustaceans that seek refuge from daytime heat, preventing safe escape after torrential wash-outs in pre-fall weather. Mapless features deserve respect, perhaps for no other reason than for having escaped the onslaught of human intervention, the eventual buy-in and demise of things that once weren't seen.

John Dorroh travels as often as possible. He inevitably ends up in other peoples' kitchens exchanging culinary tidbits and telling tall tales. Once he baked bread with Austrian monks and drank a healthy portion of their beer. Six of his poems were nominated for Best of the Net. Others have appeared in over 100 journals, including *Feral*, *North of Oxford*, *River Heron*, *Wisconsin Review*, *Kissing Dynamite*, and *El Portal*. He had two chapbooks published in 2022. He lives in rural Illinois, USA, near St. Louis.

Poem on 12/22/2022

The lake taking a half day.
A disappointed polar plunger
watching the dry bank
in his great pyrenees floaties.
My mind reeling from
a Nyquil dream of floating
bowties & an ex-lover
in espadrilles. The health
clinic near my house offering
bottom surgery vouchers
with purchase of a visor hat.
Is there a word for worrying
your teeth will fall out
in the plasticity
of garage lights?
In a line like the ghosts
of deer, I pick them
out of the snow. In your arms
I felt a love so intense
I started biting. I was all
gums & tongue & intrigue
deflating to the dark
of water. I read a poem
about an insignificant day
I spent in my body
& sobbed. The sky
was rosy-pink like
the oldest living pig
with his birthday cupcake
platter & somewhere
nearby a windmill
churned kindly.
If You don't want me

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME II, ISSUE III

Isa Pickett

here I'll leave but You do
so I stay. *Feelin' Good* by Nina
Simone on the radio. A brief
intense pain shouts from the
hill. Later I'll think
nothing of it.

Isa Pickett is a Master of Divinity student currently living in Philadelphia. Her poems have appeared in *ANMLY* and *Colorado Review*. She sings and yells with her band The Life Blood.

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME II, ISSUE III
Michael Czyzniejewski

Putting Out Feelers

We talked Mom into putting a new roof on the house after the fire whirl burned the old one away. I talked to my realtor buddy from the gym and he said yeah, of course you gotta get a roof if you're going to sell it, and of course he asks me if we're looking for a realtor. That was my fault, so I said sure, why not, and he was like, "Good. Now what's a fire whirl?" I called up my brother, Jack, who also knew the realtor guy, but from their kids' pee wee football, not the gym, and Jack, over speakerphone, explained that a fire whirl is when there's already a fire but then a wind swoops some flames up and twirls them around like a tornado. This is what happened when Mom's barn was burning down during that huge windstorm last week, the one that knocked down the old water tower. Mom had been outside the barn, having dragged the animals out, and luckily, too, as her upstairs bedroom was torched, including her bed, turned to solid ash. The realtor guy was like, "Wait, the barn burned down *and* there's fire damage upstairs?" and Jack and I said at the same time, "Yeah." The realtor wanted to know why we thought there was a chance we would *not* need a roof, let alone a new upstairs, on top of a new barn. He wanted to know if Mom had insurance. Jack told me to handle this and hung up. I asked the realtor if he could keep a secret. Before he could answer, I told him we wanted sell the house as is, except we guessed a house had to have a roof, and as far as the barn goes, *maybe* Mom, in her 80s, was able to get all the animals out, by herself, because *maybe* she kind of knew the fire was going to happen *wink-wink*. "So yeah, of course we had insurance." That's when the realtor guy covered his ears and told me not to talk to him again, like ever, and exited the locker room. I called Jack and said that we needed the roof for sure, and probably a new upstairs. When Jack asked about the realtor, I said he was out, and Jack said, "Good," because he already had someone, someone who didn't ask so many stupid questions.

Michael Czyzniejewski is the author of four collections of stories, most recently *The Amnesiac in the Maze* (Braddock Avenue Books, 2023). He serves as Editor-in-Chief of Moon City Press and *Moon City Review*, as well as Interviews Editor of *SmokeLong Quarterly*. He has received a fellowship from the National Endowment of the Arts and two Pushcart Prizes.

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME II, ISSUE III
Moriah McStay

Maybe the apocalypse is what we need right now

Imagine:

Backyards blooming
with broccoli & butternuts.
No more leaf blowers
fracturing birdsong.

Surviving neighbors ring doorbells
seeking sugar
& shotgun shells.

At night, we all gather outside,
marveling.
Can you believe how many stars?

We become self-taught
homeopaths.
We use garlic & honey
as poultice & salve.
Sometimes it works.

We don't worry about plots
to overthrow the government.
There's no more government.
Zombies/
nuclear winter/
cyber wars/
toxic algae wiped it clean,
then birthed this starry, butternut world
that will kill us
but quietly.

Holes in the ozone brilliant the sunsets.

Moriah McStay holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Memphis, where she also served as Fiction Editor and Managing Editor of *The Pinch*. Currently, she's pursuing a PhD in Literature while teaching creative writing and literature. She's the author of *Everything That Makes You* (HarperCollins, 2015), which has been translated into Italian, German, and Turkish. Her nonfiction has received an Honorable Mention in AWP's Intro Journals Project, and her poetry and fiction has been published in *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *Hyacinth Review*, *Summerset Review*, and elsewhere.

Thank you for reading.

Join the herd.



@manynicedonkeys