

VOLUME I, ISSUE I

MARCH 2022

MANY NICE DONKEYS



Many Nice Donkeys

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dearest Donkeys,

As I write this, I'm obsessively refreshing news pages between lines. We're releasing art in a time of immense global turmoil — art which doesn't necessarily feel responsive in the way that, say, SNL tries to be in the white-capped wake of tragedy and trauma. I don't know what will have happened that will require a response by the time we share this work with the world in a few weeks. As we've learned, much can happen in a few days. Even hours.

refresh

The work in this issue is about what happens in moments, as intense, funny, heartbreaking, and real as anything else. When we watch footage of the criminal invasion of Ukraine, we see human moments in real-time. We see what photographers see, but they make stories out of moments as they happen. It's magic to watch. Writers...we're more reflective. We see and hear and taste, and then process *before* we can create.

refresh

Here you'll find up-and-comers on the page beside established writers, their moments intertwined in the white space, their work living together in peace for as long as we've got an internet.

refresh

This is not a war collection. If it were, there are plenty of wars and conflicts we could respond to. This issue is a collection of moments from the past, alive in the present, asking to tell you a story that matters. Cindy Hossain's stunning CNF piece *How Not to Emigrate* shows us a series of small but definitive moments under extraordinary circumstances. Sean Ennis' *Timorous* asks question after question in pursuit of some sense of control. In "sonnets of apology," Beth Gordon's speaker spirals in the pain of survivor's guilt, "objects caught / in the swallow of sorrow."

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I

We ask that you enter this issue with the mindset that all art is responsive to something, and that there are many valid and beautiful ways to respond to the feeling of being “a body that has been pulled from a canal after / three days in the water,” as Howie Good so evocatively explains in “Pertaining to Darkness.”

We know there is plenty of hideous wretch in the world beyond the current war that’s on all of our minds. Continents that have been ravaged by greed, hate, cruelty, and power-lust. Tribes and ethnic groups that have fled their homes to keep breathing, to keep their children breathing. We’re not here to preach or shame. We’re here to respond to moments. We believe something in this issue will provoke a response for you, because the writers who built it understand the call to examine the truth. In poetry. In fiction. In creative nonfiction.

refresh

Volume I, Issue II will be helmed by the brilliant and insightful Jasmine Williamson, comfy in the Editor-in-Chief’s chair (as our entire editorial team fulfills the role on a rotating basis). I’ll enjoy blind-reading our submissions, and I’m looking forward to the change of pace. But it has been an honor and a privilege to fill the EIC role for this inaugural issue. To everyone who’s taken a chance on us as a writer or reader, there’s no trench deep enough to host our gratitude.

Cheers, Sláinte, Budmo,

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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXODUS [Love poem for youyouyou, whoever notices this] <i>for rose zinnia</i> Poetry by Tyler Raso	7
Full of Grace sonnets of apology / Snakeroot/ Oleander / Belladonna / Poetry by Beth Gordon	8-10
TIMOROUS JEALOUS AND FEARFUL Fiction by Sean Ennis	11-12
Two ends of the same line Creative Nonfiction by Arden Hunter	13
EMILY AS I PREPARE THE MEAL-KIT CHEESY CHICKEN & PEPPER QUESADILLA Poetry by Darren C. Demaree	14
The Cold Smell of Green Poetry by Vanessa Maderer	15
Three Phalli: Glendalough, Tara, & Lehinch Poetry by Steve Leigh	16
(I was a) Nebraskan Teenage Werewolf Fiction by J. Archer Avary	17-19
How Not to Emigrate Creative Nonfiction by Cindy Hossain	20-22
Caleb Explains Déjà vu Poetry by Alexandra McIntosh	23
You Cant Be Gay if You're a Baptist and Make Cake from a Mix Provoked, Red Flag in Wind Poetry by John Dorroh	24-25

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I

At the Table of the Gods Poetry by Ayla Batton	26-28
Random Numbers Fiction by Debbie Robson	29-30
Let Me Tell You What Nathan Needs Fiction by Anika Carpenter	31
Catherine of Aragon (First Wife) Poetry by Chloe Cook	32
Pertaining to Darkness Poetry by Howie Good	33
Her language buckled in her mouth, unbuckled itself Poetry by Martha Silano	34
I don't know what to call this poem (images of a childhood divided by two) Poetry by Kaja van den Berg	35-36
A pack of wild donkeys Creative Nonfiction by Melody Wang	37
Posthumous Creative Nonfiction by Grace Jordan	38
“What Is the Way for Me to Be Me and Still Not Frighten You?” Poetry by Ace Boggess	39
Love Song for the Fragile Poetry by Kerry Trautman	40
Albemarle Cul-de-sac Poetry by Cameron Winship	41
All the Lonely Poets Say Hey! Poetry by Jeffrey Hermann	42
Haunted House Creative Nonfiction by Kacy Skiles Laws	43

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I

How to Keep Him Alive

Creative Nonfiction by Abby Alten Schwartz

44-45

Just because we call it Limbo doesn't mean that we don't love you

Poetry by Marie Little

46

Thanks to the Mass Burial

A Friend in Cincinnati

Poetry by Edie Meade

47-50

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I
Tyler Raso

EXODUS [Love poem for youyouyou, whoever notices this]

for rose zinnia

Today is my day off from being
imagined. So I'm standing in
my own palm like an apology.
 And I almost didn't notice

 I want to say
the pencil tongue of this flower.

I almost didn't notice I want
to say this hummingbird like talk
from another house. I want to say
the wide fingerprint of the pink sky.

But today, I almost didn't notice
noticing, notice you standing on the green
slope of my mind. Notice how I can't help
but be a thief for you like a kid

in a maze. Today is my imagination's
day off from being a crooked red fence
between two worlds. Today my body
is warm when no one is looking like

 breath. This is
the fuzz of a stem. It looks like a sound.
It doesn't have to be music. It doesn't
have to be a thousand bridges over

a valley made of light. I know you can't
 see it. I noticed it for you.

Tyler Raso is an MFA candidate at Indiana University, where they act as the Nonfiction Editor of the Indiana Review. Their work is forthcoming or featured in *DIAGRAM*, *RHINO Poetry*, *The Journal*, *Salt Hill Journal*, *The London Magazine*, and elsewhere.

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MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I

Beth Gordon

Full of Grace

You are the only other person who knows where we buried the moonshine.
You know the names we gave to dogwood trees by the creek: *lost cause, foolish heart*.
Which roots hold Uncle Jim's secret cornbread recipe.
Who else was there when the chickadee pair argued over twigs and dry moss?
When we drank coffee that smelled like strawberries in a firepit.
When the geese across the valley traded hidden codes in their rhymes.
A crate of martini glasses in the cob-webbed square beneath the stairs.
Dig deep enough and you'll find the guard dog's skeleton and deeper still, an unnamed cousin who
carried the bullet with him: his rib cage like a china cabinet.
Another crate for champagne flutes and the deviled egg tray: painted with a bouquet of lilacs
or hydrangea: we never could agree.

We murdered the line of azaleas that failed to bloom for three cold Springs.
You know their final resting place and final song.

I know where your mother's white dishes are hidden: the box labeled *mousetraps and jelly jars*.
The key to your storage unit where her green-stamp bureau resides.
I know that your thyroid function is fine this week but your hemoglobin levels are low.
When the doctor calls I won't ask which sin lit up your chart like a vine.
When the doctor calls I'll know: black ice or arsenic: slick pine needles: the layer of pollen that
turned your white car as golden as a calf.
The log truck in your rearview mirror: smoking furnace: tangled electric lines.
Lead in the water: water in the basement.
The last drop of whiskey: flat tire on a murky mountain road.

I'm already ready for it. I'm wearing my funeral shoes.
I'm already ready for it. Your heart in a puddle by the bed.

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I
Beth Gordon

sonnets of apology

i'm sorry for comparing you to new
rabbits for eight years winter rabbit snow-
prints your undertow face flickering like
a fluorescent ceiling light i'm sorry
for metamorphosis metaphors worms
swimming in the afterbirth for tadpoles
for drownings for losing you in my dream
i'm sorry for the colors dolphin blue
voices far beyond the binoculars
where lightning is never seen without death
your eyes a memory of memory
i'm sorry i've forgotten your human
fingers the grey of empty hurricanes
for the DNA I gave you forgive me

for losing you in my dream for airport
voices runway lights guiding you beyond
the weather lightning fog that grounds all flight
i'm sorry i was wine drunk when you closed
your eyes when you hushed your cricket chatter
to the ears of the grounded forgive me
the listings of superstitions simple
plagues hurricane gods heart attacks foreign
objects caught in the swallow of sorrow
where stars disappear where stars disappear
your bloom a memory of memory
i'm sorry I've forgotten your tadpole
fingers the blue of sudden dragonflies
forgive me for the DNA I gave you

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I
Beth Gordon

/ Snakeroot/ Oleander / Belladonna /

I fell out of the belly of a dandelion: I fell out of the bottom of a well: I fell out of the clock
and swallowed a nest of empty nests: a sticky oil-slick hornet wrapped with twine inside my walls.

A bundle of love letters from the nightshade-flavored men: a long-desired miscarriage and every
floor / every ceiling / all the open doors/ disappeared like hands. I climbed into my good stomach.

I climbed into the mole beneath my pubic hair. Honeysuckle / mud wasp / blackberry bramble/
blackberry bramble. The goddess of thistles branded me. Seed-wish. Jimsonweed. Hemlock witch.

No: in a world where men own the blackberry vines / the highway off-ramps / fire extinguishers /
ATM machines / conveyor belt cameras / my skin is an amplifier of memory: the shrieking demon

trapped in wood grain: flower moon / ocean moon / tornado moon / moon: blindness disguised
as salt. Temporary nausea: the necessary purging of all that came before. Loss of feeling in face and

fingers and toes: a trio of major arcana. High Priestess. Starsong. Death. Three days later I rose from
my tiny room. What happened on the stairs beneath the God-faced door? Crow witch. Spine

burned raw by shag carpet in 3 shades of wolf: Chrysanthemum Orange. Bikini Yellow. Dirty Gold.

Beth Gordon's poetry has been published in numerous journals and nominated for Best of the Net, Pushcart Prize, and the Orison Anthology. She is the author of *Morning Walk with Dead Possum*, *Breakfast and Parallel Universe* (Animal Heart Press), *This Small Machine of Prayer* (Kelsay Books) and *The Water Cycle* (Variant Lit, 12/21). Beth is Managing Editor of *Feral*, Assistant Editor of Animal Heart Press, and Grandma at Femme Salve Books.

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MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I

Sean Ennis

TIMOROUS

There's an intersection by my house where I know one day I'll have an accident. You don't have to see the future – it's only a two-way stop. My prescience fails when it comes to just how injured I will be. Will the car be ruined? Will I have said a proper goodbye to my family? Can I afford this? It's possible that everyday I drive through the space where I will be killed. Thinking like this is somewhat exciting, adding an extra complication to my days, which are otherwise pretty straightforward.

For instance, there's this technical part of my job where I look for a specific cord for half an hour. The building is filled with cords, so many cords, but the right one? Close at hand? The one that fits? No, never. The point is the effort – I'm modeling behavior. Then we're all searching for the cord together, splitting the rooms and closets among us, hunter-gathering. What we find, of course, is an adapter.

Is it cowardly that I slow down at that intersection? Adjust my behavior even though I have the right-of-way? I'm just in a Mazda, waving my hands, when truck after truck blows the stop sign.

He helps make them, so Kevin is describing what allows a bullet to fire. There's this tiny indentation, a tiny amount of very dangerous powder. Sometimes, at his work, the dust builds up and – pop! – dozens of bullets are fired with no gun. Mainly, it strikes me that he'd make a good teacher.

We're in his garage because there's the type of rain that makes driving nearly impossible. The temperature is dropping fast. Fall is coming, like, tonight.

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I

Sean Ennis

JEALOUS AND FEARFUL

There's some interest in cats, and the veterinarian says it looks like ours was hit by a car's fan belt. My apathy here is complicated – I don't wish pain or infection or death on anything really. It's dogs who ask for help, and the cat just waltzed back into the car port, like, "Good evening, I'm bleeding," and me with my allergies and resentment. Grace's bedside manner is sexy, but it's not a metaphor for our relationship. We have dogs, but I can't get into them here. A king returning from battle, in a kennel, the cat suffers no one.

Sean Ennis is the author of *CHASE US: Stories* (Little A) and his fiction has recently appeared in *Wigleaf*, *Jellyfish Review*, *Hobart* and *Pithead Chapel*.

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MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I

Arden Hunter

Two ends of the same line

She was working Christmas Eve because why not? It was time and a half. She was taking her time collecting the carts as she had been stuck in under the fluorescent lights for six hours already, listening to people going off about how their bad time management was now her problem. She was smiling, her cheeks stiff in the cold. She liked this bit – when all the carts slotted cleanly together, uniform, but still able to undulate in their own way as she pushed them along. There was a silly sinuous nature to them, and as long as she didn't take a chunk out of anyone's paintwork, she could enjoy it. She had rounded up the last one, adding it to the merry line of metal, and was heading back to the store.

He had just arrived in the supermarket car park and was getting ready to go inside for those last minute items that made him into a stereotype. It was a cold winter day, and while staring at the list in a mittened-hand he slipped on a patch of ice and ended up abruptly sitting on the floor. His ankle ached and he wrenched his neck, turning just as he heard a thundering metallic noise. An attendant was pushing a long row of shopping carts ahead of her, oblivious to the hapless customer who was quite out of place, her linked carts jingling and rattling like the death of Christmas come to visit. He stared down the length of identical metal bars, a corridor of the ridiculous and felt for some unknown reason almost happily resigned.

Arden Hunter is an aroace agender writer, artist and performer. With an eclectic range of interests from the horrific to the whimsical, the theme tying all of their work together is an inexplicable and unconditional love of the ridiculous beast that is called 'human'. Arden has words and art hosted in multiple literary magazines plus two recently released books: 'Pull Yourself Together' through Alien Buddha Press, and 'Drifting Bottles' through Gutslut Press. They also host a weekly online meetup for writers and anyone is welcome, just get in touch!

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MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I

Darren C. Demaree

EMILY AS I PREPARE THE MEAL-KIT CHEESY CHICKEN & PEPPER QUESADILLA

There are a lot of ships
& not a lot of ocean
in a marriage.

We cannot deny
there is water just because
nobody went anywhere

today. We taste salt
without swimming
all the time.

Darren C. Demaree is the author of sixteen poetry collections, most recently "*a child walks in the dark*", (Harbor Editions, December 2021). He is the recipient of a 2018 Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Award, the Louise Bogan Award from Trio House Press, and the Nancy Dew Taylor Award from *Emrys Journal*. He is the Editor-in-Chief of the *Best of the Net Anthology* and the Managing Editor of *Ovenbird Poetry*. He is currently living in Columbus, Ohio with his wife and children.

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I
Vanessa Maderer

The Cold Smell of Green

Mint sprigs taste cold; the fragrance unroots and
spreads its chill to the breeze,
to land on my tongue and
secrete a fresh scent into my
saliva. That flavour
pops green at the back of my throat like
I can swallow the garden whole and
lick leftover frost off blackened
fingertips. But
when I sprout, when I
sweat saplings from parched pores,
who would prune me when I tangled and
tore? When crisp leaves dried to a snapping crunch?
I cannot weed myself, though I have tried.
I cannot pry seeded weeding roots
from my own knot. It feels some days like
I may wither away and shrivel underneath
the mess.
Or perhaps I'll bear
persistent peppermint fruit -
candy which handles even
the harshest winter's bite and
icy chew.
Maybe I'll prove fertility under barren conditions, growth
protruding from permafrosted patchwork
skin.
Someday I'll be able to forage
myself for nourishment, like the
veritable orchard
I have the potential to become.

Vanessa Maderer was a young reader turned editor, writer, and finally enthusiastic poet who has recently debuted her first chapbook entitled, 'Cusp of Dusk' after a decade of revision. Now, she has an insatiable appetite for new ideas and themes, most commonly celestial or pastoral.

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MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I

Steve Leigh

Three Phalli: Glendalough, Tara, & Lehinch

St. Kevin's spire jabs at low clouds
announcing to his god
that he has arrived
"See what I have built! Come find me
in this gorse-clad valley!"
the edifice cries to mist-wrapped sun.
Fifteen centuries later,
Kevin's legacy lies in magnificent ruin.
Two black-winged souls wheel and circle,
crying as they nest inside
an ancient window where, perhaps,
Kevin once peered out.

At Tara hilltop a plain, unadorned gray stone
as high as a person's chest
erupts from clover-laden grass.
Here high kings once placed
a hand or perhaps a bare foot
before being hailed and crowned.
The stone remains
while the names of lost kings are gone,
more ephemeral than morning fog
in the valley below.

On the beach at Lehinch,
someone has scribed two large circles
topped by a mushroom-headed shaft in the sand.
The phallus points defiantly at white-capped breakers
the color of torn paper,
a transient creation lingering
until high tide caresses it,
leaving no ruins and no memory
of those bare lines.

I know men and their affinity for the phallus
but I wonder...
what symbol might a woman
draw on the beach
to be erased by a sea
Relentless
Complacent
Eternal

Steve Leigh has published novels, short stories, and a bit of poetry under his own name and the pen name S.L. Farrell. His most recent book is *AMID THE CROWD OF STARS* (DAW Books, Penguin Random House, Feb. 2020), about which *Publisher's Weekly* wrote: "This finely crafted sci-fi saga is full of both surprises and charm." Steve's work has been nominated for and won awards within the sf/fantasy genre.

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MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I

J. Archer Avary

(I was a) Nebraskan Teenage Werewolf

I was a Nebraskan teenage werewolf. I wore paisley rayon shirts and blue jeans with the cuffs rolled at the ankle. It was 1990. I hung out with my friends Brad, Chad, and Circus Dan at Crossroads Mall.

Brad was a zombie, Chad was Jeffrey Dahmer, and Circus Dan was Frankenstein. We worked together in the haunted barn at Peabody's Pumpkin Patch. People from all over the Omaha metro came to sip hot apple cider and have the living shit scared out of them. Good clean fun.

The werewolf's primary job responsibility was to wait at the end of a long, dark corridor, just around the bend. A small TV showed customers approaching and they didn't stand a chance. Out jumped the werewolf and the people screamed every time.

On paydays we hit Crossroads like high rollers. Brad & Chad spent their entire paycheques on cassette tapes at Backspin Records. Circus Dan tried to impress some girls from another school by getting his ear pierced but it didn't work.

"You look like a dickhead with that thing," said Brad. "I hope it gets infected."

"He already looked like a dickhead," said Chad. "Now he looks like president of the dickhead society."

I thought it looked cool but didn't say so.

"At least I'm trying to meet girls from other schools," said Circus Dan. "None of us stand a chance with girls from our school because they know we're freaks."

I had my eye on a stylish pair of hiking boots. They looked entirely futuristic, made of bluish-grey suede and accented with strips of fluorescent pink and blue leather. I had to have them but they were \$70.

At the foodcourt Circus Dan ate like a king. He had the combo platter from Lucky Panda with broccoli beef and sweet and sour pork. It came with pork fried rice, crab rangoon, and glow-in-the-dark dipping sauce. I bought myself a 99¢ egg roll.

"I won't eat chicken," said Circus Dan between bites. "My mom says chicken is what poor people eat."

"Poor people eat rice, you dickhead," said Brad.

"My cousins are poor," said Chad. "The government gives them huge blocks of cheese."

Brad & Chad sat there lamely, reading the lyric sheets of their respective purchases, watching us eat our Lucky Panda. What did they know about being poor? I felt bad for them anyway and loaned them each a dollar so they could get an egg roll, on the condition they gave me their fortune cookies.

"Who eats those things anyway?" said Brad.

"Only dickheads," said Chad.

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I

J. Archer Avary

I ate fortune cookies but didn't say so.

The biggest night at Peabody's haunted barn was Halloween. My voice was shot from weeks of constant werewolf howling. The crowds were steady, getting older and more spirited as the night wore on. Alcohol was involved, I could smell it on their breath.

A group of high school seniors came through the werewolf's corridor and I scared them good. The guy in front shrieked when I popped out in my costume. His friends started laughing and he punched me in the face. I didn't see it coming.

I still had my black eye when we went back to Crossroads Mall. I noticed girls from other schools looking at me and whispering to each other. The black eye was really working for me. I was a Nebraskan teenage werewolf in a paisley rayon shirt. I stood my hair up in the front with gel and it hardened into a wall. I looked dangerous.

I followed my friends to Backspin Records. The new Depeche Mode album was out and Brad & Chad each wanted a copy.

"That makes no sense," said Circus Dan. "Just buy one and make copies. My dad's stereo has high-speed dubbing and then we can all hear the album."

"Stuff it, turd," said Brad. "I need the actual cassette for my collection."

"I'm not letting you dickheads dub my copy for free," said Chad. "I bought it with my own money. Get your own if you love Depeche Mode so much."

In 1990, it seemed like everyone loved Depeche Mode. I certainly did.

We took the escalator to the second level to the shoe store. It was time to spend my haunted barn money. An employee dressed like a football referee brought me a pair in my size and I tried them on.

"Turn them down," said Circus Dan. "They're hurting my eyes."

"They make you look like a dickhead," said Brad.

"He already looked like a dickhead," said Chad. "Now he looks like a three-star general in the dickhead army."

"You're the dickhead," I snapped. I couldn't let these boneheads disparage my fluorescent suede hiking boots. "These boots are cool. I'm going to wear them to school and start a new trend."

I scanned the food court. Maybe we could get a table near some girls from another school. We were teenagers and already getting stuck in our habits. Circus Dan once again had the Lucky Panda combo platter, and once again Brad & Chad were out of money. I had just enough money left to buy one each for the three of us.

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I

J. Archer Avary

“See those girls over there,” said Brad. “They’re laughing at your boots.”

I turned to look. Brad was right. Girls from another school, laughing at me. I bit through the crunchy fried exterior of my egg roll. I chewed and swallowed but tasted nothing.

“Can you believe he paid \$75 for those?” laughed Chad. “What a dickhead.”

Strangers pointed and laughed from other tables. I wanted to hide but there was nowhere to go. Was this attraction to fluorescent suede hiking boots sign of a more serious personality defect?

I cracked open a fortune cookie and read it out loud. “It says a new pair of shoes will do you a world of good.”

“The cookie is right,” said Circus Dan. “You’ll never get laid wearing those hideous boots.”

J. Archer Avary (he/him) is a former TV weatherman and champion lionfish hunter. He was born in Albuquerque and lived in several cities before leaving the United States in 2014. After stints in the Cayman Islands and the UK Channel Islands, he has finally settled in the grim north of England.

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How Not to Emigrate

My first glimpse of adulthood was not as much fun as I thought it would be. Drying my clammy hands against my jeans, I could feel the vibrations of the wheels rolling over the tarmac. Anton gave me a counterfeit confident smile. Months of planning and saving amounted to this. As the metal giant gained momentum, my mind replayed flashes of plane crash documentaries I have watched. Old Spice and Dove soap, the thought of what mum and dad smelled like during our final embrace brought me comfort. “You won’t even notice it, you are only young,” Tracy said when she booked our seats.

How wrong Tracy was. Even young bottoms could undeniably feel the burn of eighteen hours of immobility. In Dubai, I stuck to Anton like feathers stick to a toddler’s fingers in a craft project. Here we actively avoided the temptation of Duty-Free shops, as we knew we would need to turn every Rand over twice in England. Heathrow Airport was no friend of a sapling; this we discovered as we encountered our first snag.

“I can’t see any signs, and our ticket says it departs in fifteen minutes; where is the bus station?” I fired at Anton.

“How should I know!” he snapped back.

Our confusion and foreign directions from helpful bystanders delivered us to the bus station untimely and cost us another bus fare. Even though it was dusk and raindrops stuck to the window, I could see the winter greenery of my new home. The hedges, grass, and treetops a surprising beauty and stark contrast to the yellow, sundried country I left behind. The exhaustion lowered Anton’s defences and he succumbed to the hum of the engine and the warm wind from the fan. In his slumber, his vocal cords seemed to morph with those of a wild boar and the most disturbing grunts emerged from his mouth.

“Wake up, you’re snoring!” I said to him, before resorting to giving him a sharp stab in his side with my elbow.

It was only briefly effective before his exhaustion triumphed again. For the remainder of the six-hour journey, I met the gazes from fellow passengers with the same disbelief at the snoring stranger next to me.

“Try ringing again,” I prompted Anton.

“Forget it; I’m just going to walk,” he said.

“Walk where? We don’t even know the address!” I sniggered back.

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I
Cindy Hossain

We now stood in Manchester on the pavement outside the bus station, as instructed by Tracy, waiting for our driver. The buildings around us were illuminated with bright, festive lights that rendered the street lights superfluous. These brick giants with their glowing eyes were crisp contrasts to the buildings in the small town, with its three traffic lights, that I emanated from. The streets were lined with night crawlers undeterred by the December cold, immune, unlike us, with our thin African clothes. By now I was soaked with a mixture of rain and tears. Exhaustion from thirty two hours of no sleep left me unable to keep my composure. I cried like a scared, lost child in a crowd of oblivious pub hoppers. Thudding rap music coming from a dark blue people carrier with blacked-out windows and tiger claw scratches on the left side passenger door drew our attention.

“Get in quick; I’m not supposed to park here!” the driver shouted in a strong Cape Town accent, flashing his gold teeth through the rolled-down window.

The driver took us to our new home. The smell of matured rubbish assaulted us as we opened the door of the shared terrace house. Our room had an arctic climate thanks to the air let in through the golf-ball-sized hole in the windowpane.

“It has a double bed,” I said, confused, standing at the doorway staring in.

“And?” the driver responded apathetically.

“We are not together like that!” I spluttered.

“That is all you are getting,” he said, before abandoning us.

Our South African housemates told us that we should consider ourselves “lucky” as the room had exclusive use of the toilet in the loft. However, this “lucky” toilet was out of order due to choking on half a forest of empty toilet rolls stuffed down its neck. The house was located in a less desirable area, and we were on the receiving end of daily verbal xenophobic attacks by the teenagers that gathered like feeding flies on the corner of the street.

“Go back to your own country!” “Do you speak English?” “Is this a brothel?” they shouted at us across the road when we couldn’t avoid passing them.

They also often decorated our front garden with used sanitary products.

This excitement of a new country was fast fading. I was here on false pretences. I was led to believe I would be working in an office, but I soon realised that the office administration responsibilities I was promised, trained for, and paid extra money for was nothing more than a cloud of fabrications.

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I
Cindy Hossain

“Faster, faster!” the line manager shouted.

The other workers on the line were able to sort and label the ready meals at double the speed my cold fingers were willing to do. I loathed every minute spent in the factory, but the threat of losing my passport to my South African landlord made me a willing drone.

“Do you mind?” I said to Anton as I turned down the volume on the radio.

“Not at all,” he smirked as he blew cigarette smoke into my face and belted out the remaining words of the song.

Anton spent most of his evenings like this – drunk, attempting to numb the reality of what life was really like in the land of milk and honey.

“I think I am going to come home. This is not how I thought it would be,” I said to my grandma with a cough as I tried to disguise the quiver in my voice inside the urine-drenched, red phone box.

“Just give it some more time,” she said.

Cindy Hossain was born and raised in the Free State Province, South Africa. She immigrated to Manchester, United Kingdom in 2006 where she now raises her beautiful young family whilst doing a degree in English Literature and Creative Writing. She is an enthusiastic reader and writer of micro prose, and believes little stories sometimes deliver the biggest punch.

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MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I
Alexandra McIntosh

Caleb Explains Déjà vu

He says it happens when our brains
label a short-term memory as long-term,
which must be why this feels so familiar,
his arm around me, my hand in his
against my shoulder. The river is high,
geese paddle over the park steps,
their almond eyes translucent as the drops
of rain pooling on their feathers. Time spins
like the tree branch pinned in the current
by the stone footer of a building that used
to exist. He saw me cry at the museum,
for Monet's *Rocks at Belle-île, Port Domois*.
We wondered how vibrant the colors
were when it was first painted, tried
to guess which stroke was the last.

We're laughing now, his face warm
next to mine, the overcast clouds
hold in the humidity. What's more
astounding — the number of things
the brain does correctly, or that even
its mistakes are a sort of magic?

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. She received her B.A. from Asbury University, her M.A. in English from Northern Kentucky University, and her MFA in Poetry from Miami University. You can find links to her publications and pictures of her dog on her website AlexandraMcIntosh.com.

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MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I

John Dorroh

You Cant Be Gay if You're a Baptist and Make Cake from a Mix

People gather at my wit's end
waiting for desserts and peeks into
my kitchen, which is off limits absolutely
no fucking way you're coming in
with your viruses and bacteria-laden hands,
tongues dripping with malicious malcontent.
There's a seasoned gossip in ever threesome,
a troubadour of trouble in groups of five or more.
I've seen it so many times that I can reel it in blind.
The "ooohs" and "ahs" as trays of food are brought in
to the crowded ballroom.

This place is made for dancing. The Baptists are the worst.
Hypocrites and jealous foragers of evil. They love disputes
and take the Lord's name under their breaths as they size me up,
place their bets, smile and call me Darling. Darling, would you be
so kind to bring me some sugar – *real* sugar, the white stuff,
not that brown unbleached crap from who-knows-where.
I'd rather kiss a snake-handler from a West Virginia
Holiness church than to hold hands with a Baptist.
They're always up to no good.

We are busy in the kitchen, short-staffed, ruffled
from low pay and the threat of dying early deaths
from breathing vapors from their uncovered mouths.
Why are we doing this? They don't know crème Brule
from Apple Brown Betty. I think I'll go home, take off
my pants and make a cake from scratch.

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I
John Dorroh

Provoked, Red Flag in Wind

Somewhere in Australian waters
are box jellyfish that have enough

toxin in each tentacle to kill 60 people.
Not that that would ever happen, unless

a boat full of yakking tourists capsized
in a bed of these gelatinous killers,

and not that it would be something
that the jellyfish planned. Perhaps

the tourists, with their mouths and
purses and pant pockets still open,

interrupt their mating rituals, or
their dinner. And in Japan there

have been blooms of giant red-hued
jellies, clogging the fishermen's nets,

stinging their arms and hands and
faces whose expressions reflect

disbelief, even after being warned
that it's dangerous to fish that

day. Off the island of Palau in the
Pacific Ocean, the mastigas jellyfish

pulsate in mass, enough to stir up
oceans with as much vigor as tides

& wind. I am not impervious
to that kind of pain. One must

get a grip, become accustomed to
beautiful things exuding venom

in a multitude of ways. There's not
a pill for most forms of ignorance.

John Dorroh has never fallen into an active volcano or caught a hummingbird. However, he did manage to bake bread with Austrian monks and consume a healthy portion of their beer. Two of his poems were nominated for Best of the Net. Others have appeared in *Feral*, *Selcouth Station*, *Pinyon*, *Os Pressan*, and many others. His first chapbook comes out in 2022.

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MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I
Ayla Batton

At the Table of the Gods

I.

Silver and yellow trout
wait patiently
to be beheaded, sliced, disemboweled, and fileted.
Women's work,
here in the kitchen.

She washes each egg carefully.
The elixir of life
in a perfect porcelain cradle.
Soft green or milky white
like the underside of clouds
or her breasts.

Her hands repeat the mantra
of her sex:
a silent endless rhythm
that ebbs and flows like the tide
within her.

II.

Her grandmother gave her that table
and the memories in her mind
of being young
and green
as the spring grass,
smoke from a cigarette
perpetually rising,
a radio crooning softly,
the sound of cards being turned over
with purpose.

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I
Ayla Batton

Her grandmother had a fox as a girl.
A wild thing
tamed by clever hands.
The same way the grain and yeast
submitted to certainty,
the fate of becoming bread,
the fox and the girl both became
something different
than their nature.

She could move the earth with those hands
and nothing would change.
The right ingredients together create life,
when the tangible shrugs up
against the unknown,
in a womb
or right there in the dirt.

Both lay within her grasp.
The most important thing in the cosmos
as common as dumb luck.

No wonder she believed she was powerless.
She did not know
she sat
at the table of the Gods.

III.
Her daughter sits at that long wooden table now,
contemplating a basket of lemons.
The small fruit firm and round,
like her body. Untested.
Strong.

She balances the world in her palm.

Behind her, a thousand lemons
paper the walls.

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I
Ayla Batton

She is beginning to know
the repetitive work
of understanding
self.

IV.
In this sink,
tea bags and bones gather
alongside the epiphanies
and doubts.

Her hands pursue both
with joy.

Ayla Batton is an artist, poet, soap maker, and birth doula from Three Oaks, MI. She is honored to be the poet laureate of her small town as of 2020. Ayla enjoys hiking the dunes of Lake Michigan, working in her garden, volunteering in her community, and pondering the mysteries of the universe. Her poetry often focuses on matrescence, magic, mother earth, and the unknown.

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MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I

Debbie Robson

Random Numbers

My name's Mary and I live in the 20th century most of the time. It's much more tangible than the present. For instance, I love to visualise switchboard operators with their red painted lips and red nails switching calls between subscribers. A cigarette hanging out of their mouths or stubbed in an ashtray. Just a minute please. The long rubber lead with the steel head fitting nicely in the socket. Voices plugged together. And the old phone numbers of my grandmother's time. Numbers and letters. Pennsylvania 65000!

Or even the old landlines. Kevin's on the phone, my mum would yell. You could giggle and wrap the curly cord around you whilst you hid in the broom cupboard just like Meg Ryan. Now our phones hide in our handbags so thin it takes ages to find them.

And dating apps. They are intangible too. I wonder a lot about all those swiped left people. I mean where do their alter egos go? For instance, all the women swiped left – their happy profiles and bios – are they sent back to a world where they are left standing against the wall of a church hall tapping their feet to a Chuck Berry tune, whilst all the pretty girls get asked to dance?

Does the essence of all the rejected people drift off into the cosmos and finally land in another dimension? Perhaps picked up by a faulty car radio that has sprung to life in a pink Cadillac parked in a crumbling old garage. I'm 32 and like walks on the beach. I'm 57 and like opera, the radio announces.

And then it happened one day. Mark, a writer friend from Twitter, tweeted his phone number before our lunch meeting a week off. I tweeted back mine and thought all was good. On the day of the meeting, I confirmed I was coming by text. And received this reply from the cosmos.

Wrong number.
Really hope it's a typo & not Mark
being a typical male. There's a lot of us
around.
Have a great day Mary

That's the trouble with texts. Again, nothing definite. No voice on the end of the line. Just words on a screen, but the 'us' suggested male rather than female and the full stops hinted at older rather than younger. I took a snapshot to have something concrete, but was too embarrassed to reply. Days passed and I kept looking at the text from my mysterious stranger. In the end, on day five, I texted back.

Thank you for your reply. Mark is a friend
and he soon realised he'd given me the
wrong number.
But I just wondered if I could text you
from time to time. Mary

Sure. My name is Bill

Hi Bill. Favourite movie?

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I

Debbie Robson

The Adjustment Bureau.

I love that movie! Mine is The Age of Adeline
I believe Blake Lively is very good in it.

She is marvelous. Favourite book?

Fahrenheit 451

Good choice!

The length and frequency of our texts increased. We exchanged email addresses and recent photos of ourselves, our children and grandchildren. Tentatively, after finding out we only lived an hour away from each other we made a date at an Italian restaurant, Emilio's. It is midway and by the freshwater lake that stretches between us. For fun, I took a book and a red rose along just like Meg Ryan did in You've Got Mail, except my book was Dandelion Wine, one of the flower books from Age of Adeline. Bill bought me a bunch of pink roses to match his car. Can you guess what type of car it is? Yep, that's right!

Debbie Robson is the author of *Tomaree and Crossing Paths: the BookCrossing Novel*. She loves to write fiction set in the first sixty years of the last century. She has had stories and flash published in *Words and Whispers*, *The Birdseed*, *Vestal Review*, *The Dalloway* and others and poetry in *Dwelling Literary*, *Wine Cellar Press*, *Lothlorien Poetry Journal*, *Tiny Wren Lit* and more and has been nominated for Best Micro Fiction.

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Let Me Tell You What Nathan Needs

Try, for a moment, to imagine he wasn't hallucinating, dehydrated, disoriented, half-drowned. Accept that what he said wasn't crazy. Admit that just because you can still see his tattoos doesn't mean that the sea didn't take them. He fell into the water with a sacred heart pierced with arrows, octopus tentacles wound around his forearms, his daughter's name intertwined with stars across his chest, and now, trust me, they're gone. He watched the ink pulled from his skin and into the raging water, where it reached for the backs of halibut and grabbed hopelessly for waving seaweed before sinking into sand destined to become shot glasses.

He won't benefit from recalling, reliving being hauled onto a lifeboat, rolled on the heart-black tongue of the ocean. No good will come of him picturing himself through the salt-stung eyes of the rescue crew – forlorn, useless in the shell of a sodden jumper whimpering, 'She was right there, my girl, my Lena. She was the size of a blue whale. She swam right under my boat. She wanted me in the water, to swallow me up.'

There's no benefit to him conjuring an image of himself wrapped in a foil blanket, not for warmth but to make him a water-worn treasure, the latest gewgaw for your dear psychiatrist.

I saw Lena once too, miles from shore, dancing on a spume of water forty-foot high. Should I be sedated too?

Lena and I used to play darts in the Ship and Anchor, watched by locals sipping beer, boots stuck limpet-tight to the spilt-sticky floor. They rolled their eyes at the saltwater seeping from her shoes and the lighthouse flashes she cast across their weathered faces. Every one of them claims to have seen her walking into the sea – 'steady as if she were walking down the aisle, keeping going until her head was covered, not sending up so much as a bubble.'

Lena wasn't swallowed by a whale, like the nurses here joke she was, oh I've heard them. No, she's swimming through cetacean arteries, carving poetry into blubber, humming to the churning of passing ships.

There's no movement in this hospital. The steadiness of the floors upsets Nathan's stomach. The food, I believe, is tasteless. You know he smothers it with salt. The consumption of crystals suffused with the spirits of rays and angler fish will only make things worse.

If you want to see some improvement, signs of recovery, let me empty bags of wet sand onto the dayroom floor. Enough for him to sink his sock-free feet into to soak up new imagery – ghost crabs skittering up his legs and across his back. Familiars settling on his shoulder blades among sea-smoothed glass and the rose-like casts of lugworms. This will help. This will make sense.

Anika Carpenter lives and works in Brighton, UK. Her stories can be found in *Ellipsis Zine*, *The Molotov Cocktail*, *TSS* and *Janus Literary*. Her work has been shortlisted for the Bath Flash Fiction Prize and the Bridport Prize.

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MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I
Chloe Cook

Catherine of Aragon (First Wife)

Scorched sounds announce
my arrival to your once-chambers.
What echoes is the nakedness

of vows. Pitter faucet
curves over the lavender bath,
mimics the murmurs you spewed

during second birth. Cathedrals
mourn because they're supposed to.
Your womb warrants black

organs. Across the wilds
beneath the bronzesmith's fire
something is born

like a golden chain: smooth.
Peaceful. Here, your bedroom window frames
and captures the dull stars

your muted gown wrinkles
to ankle, helm. How do I ask you
for another, demand a maybe-death after a certain?

Chloe Cook is an undergraduate student attending Northern Kentucky University. She currently serves as Editor-in-Chief for the student-run creative magazine, *Loch Norse Magazine*. Her work is featured or forthcoming in *Sutterville Review*, *Oakland Arts Review*, *Sledgehammer Lit*, *Stoneboat Literary Journal*, and elsewhere. Her first poetry chapbook, entitled *Surge*, is forthcoming from dancing girl press.

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I
Howie Good

Pertaining to Darkness

A phone ringing in my dream wakes me. I feel like a body that has been pulled from a canal after three days in the water. Gerhard Richter says that only when he destroys a painting, scratches it out, is it fit to be seen. If I look back, I see snakes and coffins, and if I look ahead, I'm walking on corpses instead of the ground.

&

Used paper face masks litter the sidewalk. How's that allowed? Even the crows on the wire must be wondering what the fuck. A series of incidents doesn't necessarily add up to a plot. I want to shake this person and that person and tell them, "You can't be lost in your own world all the time."

&

I was sitting up in bed reading a book called *People Love Dead Jews* when I came across a quote from a Jewish sonderkommando. His responsibilities at Auschwitz included disentangling the naked corpses lying in heaps in the gas chambers and carting them to the ovens for cremation. Although hair caught fire first, he noted with scientific dispassion, it was the head that took the longest to burn.

Howie Good is the author of *Failed Haiku*, a poetry collection that is the co-winner of the 2021 Grey Book Press Chapbook Contest. It is scheduled for publication in summer 2022.

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I

Martha Silano

Her language buckled in her mouth, unbuckled itself

~ Kazim Ali

Her language buckled in her mouth, unbuckled itself
like a bulky red suitcase, and out spilled from that dented

luggage the story of turning thirteen, the lime Jell-O cake
she couldn't get enough of, the coming home and the door

stuck shut, cursing the door as much as she cursed
the year for making her older. Though struggling

to enter, she wanted nothing to do with singing or dancing.
Confirmation. She was becoming a new city—possibly Paris,

possibly Montserrat—but she also wanted where she was, not
somewhere else. Even if it meant the door would always

be stuck, because anyway there was always the garage,
its pastel blue swimming pool ladder, four friendly bicycles,

a companionable hoe and rake. To kill time, she fried
wet leaves in the puddles—breeding made of sand.

When language unbuckles there's no telling where or when.
It could be it springs from a hatbox you lugged all the way

from Antibes, each of its forty-eight beaches winking as words,
without prompting, disembark, take up shop in your subdivided self.

Martha Silano is the author of five full-length poetry collections, including, most recently, *Gravity Assist* (Saturnalia Books 2019). Co-author of *The Daily Poet: Day-by-Day Prompts for Your Writing Practice*, Martha's poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Paris Review*, *American Poetry Review*, and elsewhere. Honors include *North American Review's* James Hearst Poetry Prize and *Cincinnati Review's* Robert and Adele Schiff Award. She teaches at Bellevue College.

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MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I
Kaja van den Berg

I don't know what to call this poem
(images of a childhood divided by two)

3 // spring

in the morning we tiptoed downstairs
to watch TV while everyone else was still in bed
even the daisies in the garden were sleepy-heads –
and we sang in the backseat of the car
like the birds waking up outside our window

we've stopped growing now but both know
how far we have come and that I'll be
an elephant for you if need be, let me
lift all the weight off your shoulders,
I can take it from here

2 // summer

I've always liked the rain, you were the summer child
you climbed on trees with the garden hose on sunny days
so I could make use of an umbrella, still
you love riding waves and I'm scared of deep waters
since that one time I fell into a pond, diving with goldfish –
we cut all flowers in granny's garden to play flower shop;
hearing our laughter, she couldn't be mad about the massacre

we say 'I love you' at the end of each phone call,
as if we could ever forget
that magnolias have bloomed longer than bees have existed
their pinkish floral leaves always remind me
how deeply we root for each other

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I
Kaja van den Berg

6 // autumn

we believed strongly that our stuffed animals had a life of their own,
while we weren't looking, the trees shed their summer dresses
and I helped you pick out the crayons for your drawing
your colour-blindness had ruined too many
and I don't like seeing you sad, so let's draw together –

walking through dry leaves almost sounds like the ocean
which I know you miss during colder seasons
the sun you still carry around on your skin

6 // winter

mum sewed us costumes because
if you were a sheep, I was a sheep
like the ones we used to count before bedtime –
if we tried hard enough, maybe we could have pasta for lunch
in a house both our parents still live in;
where their love isn't frozen in time and
we could be kids again, unbroken
dad wanted me to be born on February 2nd but
they don't do c-sections on Sunday
so now my birthday multiplied equals yours,
which makes it easy to remember
how much I love being your little sister

Kaja van den Berg (she/her) is a twenty-something bilingual writer and blogger from Germany. She's an enthusiast for rain, books, art and people. Her work can be found on her blog www.ausdemakörbchen.com, in *Apropos Magazin* and various other lit mags, and on the *lithe EP* by *FRANKLY SAID*.

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MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I

Melody Wang

A pack of wild donkeys

They suddenly trot across the heat-cracked road right in front of us, forcing my husband to slam on the brakes as our car lurches forward with a screech. In the pause, an overwhelming stench permeates the air and seeps into our car. I recall hearing somewhere that donkey dung does not actually smell bad, unlike the stomach-turning odors of manure produced by ever-so-lovable humans, horses, and dogs. These donkeys don't seem affected by the stench that may or may not have emanated from them. Is it the heat mixed with another animal's fresh dung that caused this vile bloom? Or is it perhaps their own sub-par diet that produced this particularly potent crop? Maybe these burros had some mean bean burritos for lunch.

I watch them sway heavy heads to a dust-whistled melody only they seem to hear. These regal monks continue their procession as if traipsing down to their far-off monastery, laser-focused on some sacred calling. I muse at their matted black manes and heavy bollocks (males, all of them!) and wonder who among them they've crowned as donkey king or if they've agreed upon some sort of donkey democracy. Their hooves kick up rust-hued dust as mountain peaks in the backdrop shrink away like their tired muscles. I squint and can detect the outline of each rib, each no-longer-sinewy leg – only just strong enough to carry them now to what they must yearn for: shale-green shade, the next resting place far away from prying eyes like mine.

Melody Wang currently resides in sunny Southern California with her dear husband and wishes it were autumn all year 'round. Her debut collection of poetry "*Night-blooming Cereus*" was released in December 2021 with Alien Buddha Press.

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MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I

Grace Jordan

Posthumous

There you are, walking down the street, a maroon stretch dress hanging off your shoulder, your hair messier than I remember. Time, I forgot, I guess. I pull the dog, against her will, a way we never go. I run behind you. I don't plan on saying hi. A homeless woman turns, she doesn't see me but her face confirms that I was very wrong about her being you. The dress is a rag, not something you wear to dance class. This woman is (probably) not on her way to do advanced ballet at BDC. You are not you in front of me on 8th Avenue.

I can keep rubbing the page with my pencil and write our lost love story, again. I can create a chasm of the past to climb into when I need to leave the day. That's always. I can perhaps what if into an oblivion of forever, undulating between websites. I'm not dodging death, I'm chasing it. I am still chasing you. I am still waiting to run into you at a Broadway theatre, picking out yogurt in Westerly's tight dairy aisle, riding the subway to work a job I care nothing about. I only go there because on my way I may run into you.

My feelings for you are fake. I love you the way my mother loves God, the creation myth and all the verses that follow full of both passion and reproach. Song of Solomon, porn to the lord, her prayers to God. My words were/are/have always been, wasted on you, I excised a portion only to have you say, "I'm scared of you" unable to cipher out the seeds of truth. I got drunk on the wine alright. Loving like that is what we are taught as Christian kids, along with speaking in tongues. I spoke to you in a made up language. I expected you to understand.

I love you the way my Dad still loves the play he wrote when he was 19, his only play, more of an excuse to quit trying than an accomplishment. It's good, but it's only one thing. A lone ranger, his play, still roaming around in the past, the wild west of the page, all that wistfulness.

When I wrote all those shitty passages about you after we first broke up, I thought they said something about you. They don't. Neither does this, it only says something about me.

Grace Jordan is a professional lesbian, essayist, and playwright who calls the still seedy part of Hell's Kitchen home. Grace's play *Moses* was a two-time semi-finalist at the Eugene O'Neill National Playwrights Conference. Dramatists Guild Grant Recipient, Amoralists Writers Group Finalist, Ball Grant Finalist, NAP series Semi-Finalist. Publications include stories and essays in *Schuylkill Valley Journal*, *Cleaver Magazine* and *Bluestockings*. Story of the Month Prize at *Adam Jeffrey, Jr Monthly*. Pen Grant Recipient 2020. Yale Writers Workshop 2021.

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MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I
Ace Boggess

“What Is the Way for Me to Be Me and Still Not Frighten You?”

—Heather Dooley, Facebook post

If you leave knives
unsheathed—
for protection
or genuine threat of use—
juggle them.

Allow patrons minor entertainments
while they maintain their distance,
electing not to disturb
your balance
rather than worry about a wounding.

Look at the blades:
pretty, sparking
as they cross beams of sunlight
through a dusty window.

All you wanted was isolation
& to silence lurkers
in the wilderness of babble.

Your daggers quiet dives,
subway cars, auditoria.

If you catch blades with your teeth
all who missed the menace will applaud.

Ace Boggess is author of six books of poetry, most recently *Escape Envy* (Brick Road Poetry Press, 2021). His poems have appeared in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Harvard Review*, *Rattle*, *Rhino*, and other journals. An ex-con, he lives in Charleston, West Virginia, where he writes and tries to stay out of trouble.

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MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I
Kerry Trautman

Love Song for the Fragile

Our breaks arise differently—mine either from having been yanked or from slow compression.

I still wake in shock that I never grew up to become Ginger Rogers, ashamed of my utter lack of fringe, stiletto tap shoes or moxie.

You do not fault me for this.

There are ways we can splint each other's fracturing.

Decades ago, when ponded snowmelt in the back yard froze-over, we neighbor kids played what we called hockey with grey tennis balls. A small girl broke through, and we formed a chain to pull her from shin-deep water, as was our duty.

I still wake in shock that I never am climbed upon without splintering.

The tooth of a megalodon would fill your man-sized hand entirely.

My one crop of deciduous teeth has long since dropped, like a pear tree's season wasted in a foreclosed yard.

There are ways we can jump fences, climb, rescue abandoned fruit.

I have no exoskeleton. No horns nor scaly hide.

I still wake in shock that you never have seen me broken.

My parents had a cabinet of glass fruit and fish, lead crystal decanters and snifters from years teaching in war-torn Czechoslovakia.

There are ways to convey these things so easily destroyed.

I still wake in shock that I never became unbreakable.

Kerry Trautman is a poetry editor for *Red Fez*. Her work has appeared in various anthologies and journals, including *Slippery Elm*, *Free State Review*, *Midwestern Gothic*, and *Gasconade Review*. Kerry's books are *Things That Come in Boxes* (King Craft Press 2012,) *To Have Hoped* (Finishing Line Press 2015,) *Artifacts* (NightBallet Press 2017,) *To be Nonchalantly Alive* (Kelsay Books 2020,) and *Marilyn: Self-Portrait, Oil on Canvas* (Gutter Snob Books 2022.)

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MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I
Cameron Winship

Albemarle Cul-de-sac

The first neighborhood I remember
Was also the last stand of our nuclear family.

Briarwood (where I thought Br'er Rabbit was from)

Evening strolls our tradition, the three of us
Mom and Dad still holding hands, at least for show
I make myself sugardrunk on each honeysuckle
Bush my chubby fingers can reach, drooling
Like a lush, my childhood chin sticky
Enough to attract attention.

He sure takes after his old man, doesn't he?

Return home to adventure in suburban form
TV dinners and Marty Stouffer's *Wild America*
Orange corduroy La-Z-Boy stretches like a tabby
Dad controls the "boob tube" with his non-drinking hand
Crisscross applesauce on cinnamon Berber carpet
I scarf Salisbury steak and pretend.

Before evening eyelids close, I race back outside
With Calvin-&-Hobbes enthusiasm, determined
To conquer a backyard hill littered
With dogwoods and ant mounds and childhood
Hope strewn across rusted metal remnants, but
My steed is different! Crayola-etched lightning
Ripples from her flanks, worthy of Thor himself!
Wheels spiked with kings and jacks like a Ben-Hur chariot!
Gravity my fuel, imagination my co-pilot, glory lives forever!
—As does the gnarly, 5-stitch scar chilling on the back of my dome—

Think childhood dreams stunt our growth?

Cameron Winship is currently finishing his master's in English at Northern Kentucky University. Two of his poems have been published, one in *Proud to Be: Writing by American Warriors, vol. 9*, and the other received an honorable mention in the Wergle Flomp Humor Poetry Contest from *WinningWriters.com*. He plans to publish his first chapbook later this year if his garden ever allows him to leave.

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I
Jeffrey Hermann

All the Lonely Poets Say Hey!

Look at this morning we have
It has a blue you can't find

Look at you still in bed
hands between your thighs

If I wake a moment I see
your mouth open a little your mind
listening to something I can't

I make the case for March
every year but I see the downside

In the end I'm waiting for more
just like you

The fact is our bodies are not
together much these days

Our hearts are roughly the size
and shape of lumps of clay
left on a table

a potato raw pulled
from the soil

Most meteorites
could fit in your hand
but they're flying
through space

never finding an atmosphere
to puncture, a sphere to impact

Oh and the size and shape
of wool socks rolled into a ball

A canning jar that might
hold coins or might hold fruit

But they only ever tell you
it's like a fist

Jeffrey Hermann's poetry and prose has appeared in *Hobart*, *Lost Balloon*, *trampset*, *Rejection Letters*, and other publications. Though less publicized, he finds his work as a father and husband to be rewarding beyond measure.

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I

Kaci Skiles Laws

Haunted House

There is a ghost in my house. It is here where the hallway light flickers, sometimes so softly, I think I'm seeing things. Other times bold, like a strobe as I near closer and it continues, erratic. I tell my husband, "There is a ghost. See the light there?"

He watches and says, "The bulb is going out."

Every night for weeks it – *is going out*, intermittent, fluttering more eager as I brush my teeth and stare up at it waiting for me to pass by to our room. It follows me; in bed my son's light up shoes are on the floor blinking to life, and all I see is red and blue then nothing. "What was that light?" I ask.

My husband answers, "What light?" It doesn't happen again, never when I need it to.

It's dark in the early morning, but my son and I are awake. He grabs a flashlight and wants to explore dawn. "Not now," I say as he slides the lock back in place, I latch the window, and the hallway goes black. I expect to see his hand on the switch when it comes back on but he's dumbfounded by the door.

"Why did that happen?" He asks.

"I don't know...but Dad will," I say, afraid.

I ask Dad, and all he says is, "Hmm."

I hum when I go down the hallway alone, back into the house to see that I haven't forgotten anything, nothing left on. I feel something. I hurry out, happy to see my cats as I re-enter from the hall. I am quick to say, "Bye for real this time," because I don't want to linger too long.

Not long before I know my dog is dying, she rests under the light by our bedroom door and it flashes then too, even days after she passes, until it stops so sudden. "It's Iris," I say my dog's name.

"No," my husband doesn't want to hear it; "Then what?" I demand and my son asks, "How?" I don't know.

"Say her name!" I'm angry.

"No, you're being crazy." *My husband is too. My son is too.* We leave the house; we all think about the light. I want to say it, but it's too much gristle to chew.

"Bark," I plead to the ghost, "Whine at the door to go out." I want it to make me angry so I can stop feeling so scared, *so sad*. It never does. It never can. Only when I don't want it.

Kaci Skiles Laws is a closet cat-lady and creative writer who reads and writes voraciously in the quiet moments between motherhood and managing Crohn's Disease. She grew up on a small farm in a Texas town alongside many furry friends, two sisters, and a brother. She has known tragic loss too well, and her writing is a reflection of the shadows lurking in her psyche.

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MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I

Abby Alten Schwartz

How to Keep Him Alive

Scour the internet for stories of remission. Remember you work in healthcare and spring into action — who do you know? Find a way to bring it up with every doctor you interview for work. Ask the same questions in myriad ways to unlock new answers.

Call in magic. When the number of likes on an IG post is the house number where you grew up. When that song from the 50s he played on home videos comes on the radio while you're driving. That's the Universe telling you he will be okay.

Amplify small victories. He ate the entire piece of salmon your brother dropped off. He took a few sips of the high-calorie vanilla drink you sent him, totally worth the \$175 to ship a case overnight though he'll only open one can. He laughed when the entire family gathered to watch the Three Stooges, his favorite, on what will be your final trip to Florida over Christmas break where everyone will be present and even your mom pretended to like *those idiots*, as she used to call them, and your love for Curly blossomed tenfold.

Get him an appointment up north at a renowned cancer center and when the doctor tells him he can take chemo pills back in Florida, don't cry when he hugs her out of gratitude and relief. Wait for the valet with your parents and when he pulls up in your car first, ignore the voice in your head screaming that this might be the last time you'll hug him. Go numb so your bones don't turn to liquid and pool on the lobby floor.

Pretend you are staying up north because he doesn't want you to see him that sick, when it's you who can't handle it, who needs a thousand-mile buffer. Pretend you are more useful coordinating things from here plus your mom and two siblings are there. Pretend it's too late to jump on the next plane because you'll probably miss the window closing fast.

Tell yourself you said everything you needed to because you made sure to say I love you every time and just yesterday your sister put you on speaker in his hospital room and even though he could no longer respond he definitely heard you because a tear rolled from his eye.

Trust that he understands (pleasepleaseplease) because he always, always told you, any time you were afraid he was mad or disappointed in you, he assured you, he promised: You and I are always good.

Conjure his presence as you buy plane tickets, call the funeral home, arrange for his remains to be shipped up north, notify extended family and friends. Take charge like he did, grasp the loose pieces and hold them tight. Keep us all from floating adrift.

Tell yourself he is still alive, just on another plane.
Tell yourself he can hear you when you talk to him.
Tell yourself it's like he's in Florida, you just can't call him.
Forget you can't call him.

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I

Abby Alten Schwartz

Look for him everywhere but beware the surprises that strike like a fist in the solar plexus. His handwriting on a birthday card. His photo on Facebook, posted by a cousin. That fucking song from the 50s that torments you when you hear it in the supermarket and can't escape fast enough to your car.

Collect talismans. His brown loafers. White handkerchiefs worn soft from washing that he'd hand you to dry your tears. Pillage his art portfolios and hang a memorial gallery of his best print ads on your kitchen wall.

Talk to psychics.

Pay attention to the signs. Quarters materializing in random places. Cardinals swooping past your line of vision. The license plate of the car in front of you that says DADDY.

Suddenly flash on the oil painting he made back in art college that hung in the basement when you were a teenager and forgot existed. Race to the house, still winter-empty, and frantically search the playroom, the basement. Hoist the garage door, stiff with disuse, step carefully through the maze of cobwebbed three-speeds, dirt-crusted shovels and mildewed cardboard boxes, and in a daze lift a paint-dappled tarp off the canvas propped against one wall.

Lay the painting with reverence in the back of your Subaru and take it home. Wipe the dust off gently with a dampened cloth and place the canvas on the fireplace mantle you never could accessorize to save your life despite being an artist like him and see now that it was waiting for this.

Abby Alten Schwartz is a Philadelphia-based writer whose work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Brevity*, *Hobart*, *Unbroken Journal*, *The Manifest-Station*, *Green Briar Review* and elsewhere. She moonlights as a healthcare copywriter, designer and marketing consultant and recently learned through DNA testing that her Smooth Collie-Shepherd mix is actually 34.1% Chow Chow. Abby is currently writing a memoir.

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MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I
Marie Little

Just because we call it Limbo doesn't mean that we don't love you

We pass fear between us
like a chain letter, afraid
not to share it
worried it might bloom like
mould if left alone.
There are days when
we let ourselves think of
other things: the green of
Fairy Liquid, the long
stretch from breakfast until
supper, the shine on a red
apple like a cricket ball
then back round again
we come
telling stories of you
telling your stories
badly, trying
not to tell ourselves
anything.

Marie Little lives near fields and writes in the shed. She has poetry featured in: *Ink Sweat and Tears*, *Cool Rock Repository*, *Full House Lit Mag*, *Fevers of the Mind*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *Honeyfire*, *Sledgehammer*, *Selcouth Station* and more. Marie also writes and publishes short fiction.

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MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I

Edie Meade

Thanks To the Mass Burial

“They have been dead for eighteen centuries, but they are human beings seen in their agony. This is not art, it is not imitation; these are their bones, the remains of their flesh and their clothes mixed with plaster, it is the pain of death that takes on body and form.”

– Luigi Settembrini, *Letter to the Pompeians*, 1863

most of what we know about Roman murals
was discovered through excavations of the ruins of Pompeii

Mount Vesuvius entombed the city in twenty feet of ash
burying terrified inhabitants in their homes

a tragedy but
next slide

thanks to the mass burial we know
much about the decorating preferences of the dead

the same ash smothering these inhabitants
miraculously preserved their backsplashes

an archeological treasure trove
a gift next

as you can see, behind the plaster casts of this family
domestic architecture was windowless, cramped

it would have been very claustrophobic huddling there
even without a volcano rumbling over the city

frescoes brightened up dark interiors
flashes of women, fruit baskets, birds

not everyone had it so good, of course
a poor family’s dwelling: trompe-l’oeil marble on stucco

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I
Edie Meade

a wall painting literally a painting of a wall
but it's a good example of relative perspective

imagine how stuffy the air would have been in these hovels
impossible to breathe next, please

by the reign of Augustus they were painting murals of doors
opening into banquet halls, unlimited space

final slide my favorite: a false window looks out
on the Bay of Naples, perhaps the occupant's last view

the atmospheric perspective is breathtaking, a blue haze
creating the illusion of endless distance, air

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I
Edie Meade

A Friend in Cincinnati

Dear friend, wait for me on the mountainside; stand close
to the cliff face, above the luxuriant thick-lipped river
where the landscape travels back through us,
belly-dancing, shining blind. Our shared bent past
digs in the cool breath of limestone
for our good throwing clay. Do you remember the way

Cincinnati ducks through our Kentucky side, our wild
rose, our kudzu, everything sacred kept hidden
even from ourselves. Cincinnati peers up in rivershine
to find us digging, mounding ourselves over mounds
of that clean gray mud, throwing spinning baking
mud? Do you remember the way, dear friend,

we pressed lips

of stolen clay

into all the things I still hold on to?
Move after move, caressingly swaddled
in the newspapers of far-flung escape attempts.

Why I don't know. Meaning hides what remains
sacred. Return in a thousand sips of habit
of reverence; I bring this
to my lips in the cool. Heat
transmits, permits me to make it mine.

So still, our Ohio.

Our Ohio unrolls long,
abundant,
peaceable silences

to measure the endurance
of our friendship.

MANY NICE DONKEYS: VOLUME I, ISSUE I
Edie Meade

If what you said was true, in leaving
a city we see only the clumsy hand of man
at work, what is it Cincinnati sees
peering up, through her jungly bangs, at us?

Edie Meade is a writer, artist, and mother of four in Huntington, West Virginia. Recent work can be found in *New Flash Fiction Review*, *Fractured Literary*, *Janus Literary*, *Ghost Parachute*, and elsewhere.

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