



# westwind journal of the arts

*poetry fiction creative non fiction art*

*spring 2023*

# *spring 2023 staff*

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## *a letter from the editors:*

Both of us Managing Editors joined *Westwind* in our first quarter at UCLA, Fall 2019. Our advisor, Reed Wilson, once said that the four years we've been at UCLA have been the most eventful of his several decades on campus. We've lived through a pandemic, a strike, and nationwide protests, all while balancing the turmoil of the world with our own journey (or perhaps stumble) into adulthood. Now here we are, publishing our final issue as *Westwind* staff members.

*Westwind* itself has gone through a lot in the past few years. We lost some of our journals, published them again, and cycled through several generations of staff members. However, *Westwind's* particular brand of chaos has been a constant in both of our college careers. The rhythm of submission review, production, and launch has marked time more than the changing of the seasons in Los Angeles. *Westwind* has a life beyond any one staff member. We are lucky to have stewarded it for the past two years.

We would like to thank our board and staff members for making this a wonderful year for *Westwind*. We managed to make it through in one piece, with three wonderful journals to show for it. The full reality of life without *Westwind* will probably start to sink in a few months from now, but one thing is certain: *Westwind* will live on, and even thrive, without us. We're honored to have been a part of its history for as long as we could

With love,

*Jade Lacy & Katherine King*  
Managing Editors Spring 2023

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\*\*\* please be advised  
that this issue contains  
sensitive content,  
including discussion of  
depression,  
dermatillomania,  
abuse, grief, and  
animal cruelty \*\*\*

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## *from the poetry board:*

This past quarter we had the joy of watching spring sprout, bud, and blossom; now we find ourselves looking out over the shores of summer—what a view! We hope you forgive all the clichés, but it has really been a time of new beginnings. This is especially true for our graduating staff members who, by the time you read this, will have already enjoyed their Commencement Ceremony, and the commencement of their post-undergrad lives.

With so many changes and new experiences (and so many more yet to come) one can't help but give into musings about what has been and what may be. In the mix of it all, we indulge the daydreams of "what is not" and "what might have been" before reminding ourselves of "what is." And before it all becomes too confusing, we write it down. Always, we write with a metaphorical pen informed by the past, affected by the present, and exploring the future.

We invite you now to marvel at how time has changed us, where it has brought us—and to enjoy the three poems we have collected here. Reflect with us on the past, savor the present, dream of the future, and celebrate your own. Celebrate "what could be."

And now, we must give thanks where thanks are due. Thank you to our staff for their hard work this quarter. Thank you to our contributors for their endeavors and vulnerability. As always, this journal's continuance would not be possible without Professor Reed Wilson and all our readers—thank you all. Thank you, dear reader, for being here and making our work matter.

*Lauren Kogelman and Kylee Kropf*

# No Peacock to Claim the Victor

*Susan Calvillo*

at the state fair, where we popped balloons with darts  
and broke in fun-house warped mirrors with our wet  
tongues, where we avoided the petting zoo portion  
because the hay and fur make my face puff up bigger  
than a winter sheep's wool—a fire broke out. it was just  
a little one, but you couldn't have known that until  
it was all over. in the panic, the farmers unlatched the gates  
to give the animals a chance. the pigs just rolled over in their mud  
and the cows went on sleeping standing upright. the chicks ran  
about in circles, but they'd been doing that even before  
the doors were open. only the peacocks managed an escape.  
but they only got as far as the classic car show, where they were found  
later, every last one of them dead. whether for territory or courtship,  
each peacock had fought his own reflection in the stainless steel hubcaps,  
leaving the pavement masked in an iridescent carpet of eyes.

Sanka Rag  
*Dan Murphy*

The story begins with orange door, stucco sky, plum tree  
in back that gives year-round! We're building a pool  
with inheritance money. Dad is drunk and lost

his job so we're on vacation, a car ride  
across the states. The Ford's engine caught fire  
outside Vegas but there's a pool with aqua slide

by the Black Hills and a boy holds me underwater.  
I'm learning to breathe, chlorine stings my eyes,  
states blur placemat to placemat, parcel

and crop, matchstick and sunflower. Back home  
subdivision on burial grounds, 100 degrees all summer,  
ice cream cone for breakfast, re-runs in the day, out

at night pimping beer. A light in Northwest sky  
flares from a test site no one can name.

listening to your playlist while driving  
made me feel like i was in your car again  
going around l.a.

*jimmy vega*

—driving the 5, thinking of damian

*for no reason at all*—i hold his surrender  
inside the back pocket of my iris

ways he hurt himself to bury a dead name  
dark sleepy eye acquiesce shape shifter

—i miss the color of his grogginess—

taiwanese night market rummaging for his  
mother's shadow in dizzy streets of burgundy  
bone broth warm salt & ash tucked in no light

i'd reach for the fishbone stuck in his throat

if he let me

driving the 5, i scream—

suffocate my goddamn self  
past griffith park thinking of damian  
*for no reason at all*—i hold his smile  
inside the trunk of my under-the-influence  
self-aware pity, mirrorless gaze haunts me

i wonder if i ever gave damian enough of my love



—my love, i hope you're okay in the bay  
i hope you don't stumble around searching  
for your keys in the morning  
*for no reason at all*—i suffocate myself  
only to recall october sunset embers  
fire burnt mid-city late drives & swallowing  
ash—probably could've died if i made  
that right lane switch                      heard your voice instead

i've been trying to find you inside a merwin poem

a later piece without punctuation

& it's the saddest ones who have the raspiest voices  
why'd you leave me in a city that is constantly burning

—driving the 5, whispering to myself  
who's judas in all of this, thinking of damian  
*for no reason at all*—i stroke my lament till  
it becomes prayer or sacrilege fragment

*are some of the old colors still there*

i've been searching for you between quintessence & dusk

have you finally collected your teeth

notes:

the title is a stolen line from a text message my friend damian sent me. i once sent him a photo of a w.s. merwin poem that we had read once in a class we took with harryette mullen. i miss his smile and his poetry. i hope he's safe.

"for no reason at all" borrowed lyric from roar's title track song, "i can't handle change," ep released in 2010.

"are some of the old colors still there" is a borrowed line from merwin's poem "no believer," featured in his 2016 collection garden time.



Fabri Fibra  
*Mario Loprete*

medium: oil on concrete

## *from the fiction board:*

A famous person once said, "How lucky am I to have something so special, that makes saying goodbye so hard."

That famous person is Winnie the Pooh, and this quote perfectly encapsulates how painful it is to say goodbye to Westwind. Since we're both graduating this year, the Spring 2023 Journal will be our last. But we will carry the stories from Westwind and the memories we created with our fiction staff every Tuesday afternoon for the past year with us forever.

Our spring fiction collection has something for everyone: a woman battling anxiety, childhood friendship, and angel taxidermy (it is as bone chilling as it sounds). We hope these stories move you and excite you in ways that our time at UCLA and Westwind have done for us.

Thank you to our fiction authors for unforgettable and beautiful stories. Most of all, thank you to Westwind, for giving us a place to call home.

*Jules Shinbrot and Louise Kim*

# Dissecting Angels

## Mason Koa

When hunting season started, my brother Roger and I brought out the Remington and shot down angels by the creek. We'd hike up there at dawn and lug back the carcasses in the evening. We bottled the blood for the chapels and sold the bones for change to research teams on the black market. Whatever was left, Roger kept in jars under his bed.

He taxidermied one for us as a Christmas decoration. He displayed it in the living room and prayed to it every night at ten. I dressed it in an old sweater and jeans I had fished out of the closet. He said it looked better the wild way.

"I'm a proponent of idol worship," Roger told me, touching the angel's arm. "Gives me something to feel. Something to believe in."

"Lord have mercy," I said, starting to cross my chest before shaking my head. I think it was last year when we decided that we were done waiting for Jesus. We said that he could have resurrected and died about four hundred times by now.

"I know where that rogue is, right now. He works in a cubicle. Doing spreadsheets," said Roger. That's why we live out here, he told me, because if he saw him in the workplace, he would blast the king of the cosmos' brains out, right then and there.

Roger replaced the stuffed angel's eyes with 8-balls, black and cold. I thought it was kind of crude. It still looked alive.

Mom used to tell me to read the Bible. We were a Bible family. By the time she died, I had only read Genesis. It was Roger who really read it, and when he told me that the Bible said to move down by the creek to hunt angels, I had no bones to pick. Even so, I thought a lot about Genesis, especially about Cain, tiller of the ground. I thought a lot about God, like why He praised Abel's sacrifice but not Cain's. I thought again about Cain, who

bludgeoned Abel to death. Then I thought again about God, who banished Cain to wander forever. I think God should have forgiven Cain. Maybe Abel deserved it.

When we were younger, we ran out on the lawn and pretended to be the brothers. Roger chose first and chose Abel, naturally. I was left with Cain, and I wadded the grass into my fists. I laid down the bundles on the tree stump while Roger waved around a stick to guide his imaginary sheep. He frowned.

"A good shepherd has real animals," he said.

I ignored him until, the next day, he placed a dead possum on the stump. I would not have assumed it was dead before I saw the red marks around its neck. Roger's hands were twitching when he asked me to help him hide the stick.

I relived the memory as I walked over to the living room to set the table. When I ran out of knives, I put down the scalpels we used to dissect the angels. I retrieved two plates, the bread, and the wine bottle. I noticed that the wall looked empty, then realized that the stuffed angel was gone.

Upstairs I went to check up on Roger, wine bottle still in hand. I heard a low groaning sound from the room and opened the door to find Roger panting over the frozen angel on the bed, jeans strewn across the floor. With wide eyes, he stared back at me. The face of Cain flashed in my mind, and suddenly I was on the lawn again, pretending to be the brother who saw injustice and struck against it. When I stopped pretending, I gripped the bottle with both hands and brought it down shattering over his head. With wine staining the sheets, the angel poised unfazed at what looked like a murder scene.

"You and I, we're family now."

Quietly, I carried the angel back downstairs. I closed the curtains and whispered a little prayer. Over broken bread, I looked back to the taxidermied angel. It—she—with her dead 8-ball eye, winked.



# Tearing Yourself Apart

*Lauren Kogelman*

Waking up is hard. The bed is warm, the world is cold. There's a metaphor there or something like that. It's always easier to just flop in bed or on a couch or something somewhat comfortable, to cover yourself up with blankets and pretend to be a rock. You know, to just lie there and be motionless and be apart from everything, unconcerned with anything, just sitting there and that's it. And to stay there for hours and hours when you should be doing anything else.

Her hands wandered along her legs and—there. What—there—what is that? Roughness. A roughness. Different from the rest of her skin. It bothered her, it bothered her, oh it bothered her so much, she wanted it gone, she wanted it gone now and no one was around so why not? It was too easy to just not think about it, to take her leg out from underneath the blankets, push the blankets aside, and settle on the mattress, her leg positioned so she could see. The roughness. A scab from last time. And she should be repulsed but she wasn't thinking or feeling anything. Her fingers traced her skin, settled on the scab, felt the edges. Her fingers curved; her nails set to work. She always kept her nails short to avoid this but they're still strong, maybe somehow that made them stronger. The nail of her index finger aligned itself with the edge of the scab, searching for an edge, something with purchase, something to hold onto. She could feel her nail sliding into a small space between scab and skin and plucking like it was a guitar string. Plucking until the edge was raised, then picking to separate scab from skin. Picking the dead skin and pulling. Pulling and then tearing scab from skin. Picking, pulling, tearing in rhythm and she felt it, but she felt nothing. She knew this was bad, she knew this was self-destructive, but she didn't know why she did this. She just did.



She kept going. She knew it would scab over again, she knew this would leave a scar and she would regret that scar, she would hate that scar. She would look at it and feel ugly. She'd hate herself but she kept picking, pulling, tearing. She tore and watched as the scab separated from her skin, saw what was hidden underneath, the raw pink skin it left behind. She watched the edges tear from the surrounding skin, the place where healthy skin met skin trying to heal. She knew she was reversing the healing process but she needed it gone, she needed this roughness, this imperfection to be gone. She watched fibers connecting the scab to the skin tear apart, break, and felt it smart, it stung, there was pain but she barely registered it. There was just one corner connecting the scab to her skin and carefully she twisted, tore, pulled it away and it hurt, it stung—this part was always the worst—but then it was gone! The roughness was gone and only smooth skin was left behind, a stretch of raw, smooth pink skin. It was almost even with the regular skin. Almost—it dipped down ever so slightly, forming its own little crater.

She watched the places where the damage had been too much—little spots, like pores, scattered across the raw pink surface—she watched as they became pinpricked with red. Then red swelled out from these spots, forming perfect beads, and the beads coalesced into an amorphous entity, like water, wet, translucent, but so red, and the blood trickled down her leg in a perfect stream. And she knew she had torn herself apart, reversed the healing she needed, she'd been working on this, she'd talked about this in therapy, but still she had caused herself pain and made herself bleed. But she had felt nothing and thought nothing, not really, and now it was done, it was gone! The roughness was gone and she could stop.

She looked up and sighed, relieved that no one was there to see. She grabbed toilet paper to wipe away the blood, grabbed a band-aid from her purse, covered the wound, used more toilet paper to



remove any dried skin lying around. She cleaned up the scene, threw the toilet paper and band-aid wrapping and skin away and it was over. Still, she felt unsettled. She went back to bed and did her best to ignore the dull stinging.

This “bad habit” of hers wasn’t a cosmetic thing, she didn’t think it made her look better. Well, maybe a little. Back when she had bad acne, she couldn’t stand the protuberances on her face, she couldn’t stand the sight of pus and blackheads and redness that she was sure everyone else could see. It didn’t look bad, she didn’t... how do you say it? She didn’t apply those same “beauty standards” to other people. Just herself. But she did wonder—how can other people stand it? Do they all just have more self-control? Do they not notice? Do they not care? She wondered what that must be like. One time she saw someone with a perfect whitehead on the side of their face and she just knew that if it was her—she just felt this urge to puncture it with a needle, to remove it, to make it gone. Was she happy about it all? The picking, the band-aids, the blood? No. No, not at all, but there was just... it had bothered her so much and now that bothersome thing was gone and there was relief. So, time for the next thing. The day passed and when she got back to the apartment she thought about showering. On campus, she thought that she could go back to the apartment and just hop in the shower, then it would be done. But, how to explain... It’s just hard sometimes to find the energy. The energy to do anything, to do anything remotely productive, no matter how basic. She used to love showers, the heat, the relaxation, she definitely used to take showers that were way too long. But something changed, she didn’t know when, but it—like everything else—became just another chore, another boring, time-consuming chore, it was...

...wash your face shampoo your hair make sure to scrub your scalp  
wash your neck your shoulders along your collarbone your arms your

underarms your chest your sides your stomach double-check your underarms your hips flip your hair over your shoulder so you can wash your back your shoulder blades along your spine your lower back along your tailbone your backside and then between your legs your legs your thighs your knees your lower legs your ankles your heels your feet your toes between your toes make sure everything is washed and rinsed and condition your hair and wash and rinse and face wash again if you can...

...and it's a lot and it's so boring, it's a hassle, it's a chore, and she knew she didn't always think this way, that depression was changing her perceptions, she learned that in therapy, but she's been depressed before, she's been depressed so long, what changed? Something changed. It doesn't matter.

Anxiety, depression, mental illness, it all changes your perceptions. It's funny how it does that. Things that used to be one way, become something else. Or it's just always been different. Some things have always been different, I mean, beyond the whole we're-all-different-and-special kind of different. Thought patterns, perceptions, they're different because of something intrinsic, inherent, sometimes even genetic, something that you can't even name until you're older. One time she shared a short story in a creative writing class, a short story that represented what it was like to live with mental illness. The thought patterns, the skewed perception, the spiraling. And the biggest question she got was, "How did your character end up this way? What happened to her? What's her backstory?" And that took her aback. Nothing happened to her character, there was no backstory. She's just always been this way.

She's heard that some people get cavities because they're so depressed they couldn't bring themselves to brush their teeth. And that made sense to her. She knew what it was like to have no energy,

to have no will to do the basic things that come with taking care of herself. It's not that she didn't care about herself. It's not that she didn't want to take care of herself. Actually, she's always been obsessed with good personal hygiene and her own appearance, even a perfectionist (though that's probably because of the anxiety). But still, it just becomes hard to do anything, anything at all, anything remotely draining.

*Some people get cavities because they're so depressed they can't even bring themselves to brush their teeth...*

That would never be her, though. She couldn't stand the thought, the feeling of anything sticking around in her mouth. She could barely stand that feeling of morning breath, it's a feeling. She couldn't stand when things were stuck in her teeth or on her teeth, residue from food, from anything. She couldn't stand taking a bite of one thing and then taking a bite of another thing without having a drink of water in between. When she ate, she used water to make sure nothing would stick. Why? Pet peeves. Personal preferences. Perfectionism, maybe. Anxiety? Who knows. It's just a thing, and it's not harmful, so why psychoanalyze it?

She has never had a cavity in her life.

It was tempting to get up and floss right now but she had stuff to do. Work to do. Stuff to read.

She didn't want to. She felt half-asleep but couldn't sleep. She didn't want to do anything, didn't even want to listen to music or binge-watch a show, something fun. She didn't want to emotionally eat or compulsively clean either, even though that usually made her feel better.

She just didn't want to do anything but lie there on her bed, on her side, face turned to the wall. It's funny how crying works when you're positioned like this. Her left ear was pressed into the pillow, her nose turned to the wall, her right eye higher than her left because of how her face was positioned. When she cries like this, tears gather in the leftmost corners of her eyes. They gather there, pool there, until the water can't withstand its own weight and it falls, down her face, toward her ear, into the pillow. Once, she felt tears start in her right eye, her vision went blurry, and then they fell, falling-dripping across the bridge of her nose, then tracing a line below her left eye, parallel to her left waterline, falling towards her ear, she felt it enter her hairline there and seep into the pillow. The pillow ended up soaked, so wet she had to turn it over so she could lay her head back down and cry some more. Not the happiest memory, yet an important one. But not a good one to dwell on now.

She decided not to dwell. She sat up in bed, threw off the covers; maybe she would do something productive. She pulled her feet towards her, ready to swing her legs off the bed, and there she saw it: a white patch on her heel, a dry patch of skin. She could pick, pull, and tear it. She wanted it gone. It would be so easy, the skin was already dead. With her nails, she picked at it, found a place to pinch and pulled. She tore it away. She tore and pulled and picked and picked and pulled and tore and then the dead, white skin was gone.

But the edge between the skin on the surface—the calloused skin of her heel—and the smooth skin that had been under the dead, dried layer... that edge was there, she could pick that edge, she could smooth it out. And so she did, she picked and plucked and pulled and the edge came up, she peeled her skin, picking, pulling, tearing, peeling it away, tearing away this top layer of skin, it bothered her so much. She tore strips of skin away. It was all calloused skin, surface skin, this wasn't bad at all. Every time she pulled skin away there was

a new edge, an edge significant enough, rough enough, that she could pick, pull, tear. She kept picking and pulling and tearing and the area of skin she pulled away grew wider and wider—

—and then she went too far. She pulled up a piece of skin that was thick, a piece of skin that ran deep. A biting pain—she grimaced. If she kept pulling at this piece of skin, it might go even deeper and hurt more and bleed. She couldn't just pick, pull, tear, rip; she had to do something. She went to her bedroom, spent three minutes looking, found her nail clippers. She found them, used them to cut the strip of skin as close as she could without hurting herself too much. Then she clipped the loose edges close so she wouldn't be tempted to pick pull tear any more. She'd already done too much.

The piece of skin she'd cut away was more than a full inch in length, maybe half an inch in width. She expected it to be delicate but when she pulled at the edges, it stayed taut. It was almost like a strip of rubber, the kind that doesn't stretch. Maybe like the tire shavings you see on the side of the road among the twisted car parts left behind from whatever accident happened there. Just a different color. It wouldn't tear, it wouldn't rip, it wouldn't break. What's the expression—she was made of stronger stuff? She laughed to herself, just the kind of exhale-through-your-nose laugh. All at once: bitter, amused, cynical, and something else she couldn't name. Funny, not funny.

Then she looked and saw the pile of torn skin, dead skin she had pulled from her foot. Thank god no one was there to see, she would've been mortified. She was already embarrassed as is. How had she let it get this far? How had she let it get so bad? She'd gotten better, she used to scratch her legs so much and she didn't do that anymore but now she was starting again, she was picking pulling tearing at herself again, tearing herself apart. She rushed to the bathroom for more toilet paper to pick up the pieces of dead skin.

For some reason she didn't want to touch it, there was something gross and wrong about it. Something funny, too, it was like some kind of macabre confetti. She picked up every last piece and threw it away. Every time she put her foot down she felt where she had pulled her skin away. It was something between discomfort and pain, enough to make her inwardly cringe but not enough to make her openly wince. It wasn't *pleasant*. She always knew there were consequences to this.

When that was done, she decided she was up. She would get her laptop, she would get started, she would be productive. She placed her laptop on the coffee table beside her and settled on the couch under a blanket. She should start working, but it was so warm and she just had no motivation. It was already night but it wasn't too late, she could take a break, she could start in a little bit...

*...she looks at the stars and thinks they're beautiful and feels sentimental and so overcome, overcome by beauty and truth and righteousness and hope because they're real, they exist, there's something greater among the stars—or because humans have attributed meaning to the stars and associated heaven with the sky and socially constructed the Something Greater Out There as a coping mechanism, a coping mechanism to distract us from thinking about the nothingness after death and the meaninglessness of our lives and the fact we'll be forgotten after the Earth burns in a gasoline fire and gradually recovers without us, the "blip" of human existence in the timeline of the Earth as a planetary body that will be there beyond us, beyond all of us, beyond all that is and was and will be for us, funny how heaven is in the sky when the Earth made us, feeds us, outlives us. The couch isn't comfortable but she's not motivated enough to move—groaning, she gets up, looks to the kitchen cabinets above the fridge. Maybe there's still more firewhiskey.*

Nope nope nope that's not a good coping mechanism. Instead she drinks water and eats a granola bar. That's productive, that's good. Her therapist will be proud of her. She sits down on the couch, places the blanket over her lap, but doesn't lie back this time. She opens her laptop and starts reading.

It's so weird to read sometimes. And to write. Sometimes it all just feels stupid. Meaningless. Something we made up just to give ourselves something to do. Why do we write? To create something or say something or represent something. And why do we read? To... learn something? Feel something? Aside from age, what makes Shakespeare's work so different from the self-published fiction on Wattpad? There's so much writing these days, it's so easy to write and self-publish, there's so much these days, does it matter? Does it mean anything? We read, trying to see what it means. Picking, pulling, tearing at the language for meaning, picking, pulling, tearing at the world and the pages and each other and ourselves for some sense of something greater, something that matters at all.

She puts her fingers to her temples and shakes her head. Her hands wander to her face and she feels something there, along her forehead. A roughness. She starts scratching.

No. She knows what she's doing. This wasn't good, this isn't good for her. She can leave her skin alone and it will heal. It will take time, and that's okay. She can pull her hand away, she can pull her hand away, she pulls her hand away. She focuses her eyes on the words. There's always something, always some meaning, and even if there isn't, this is good. Reading. Words. She can learn, she can focus, she can feel, she can rest. She might be falling apart. But she doesn't have to tear herself apart because of it.

# Cheeseburger

## *Savannah Plasch*

Thea shrieked as she ran down the hotel hallway chased by a small girl she had just met. Stained beige and purple carpet flashed under her feet as she dodged people, weaving through the other pageant contestants and their mothers. She skidded to a halt in front of an elevator and tapped the call button aggressively. Her giggles picked up as she looked behind her and saw the girl gaining.

"Dorothea!" Thea froze at the sound of her mother shouting her given name. The girl caught up to her and smacked Thea's shoulder hard. A pathetic whimper slipped out of Thea's mouth. It wasn't fair.

"Tag!"

A high-pitched ding alerted the girls to the elevator's arrival. The reflective metal doors parted, revealing a younger pageant girl, probably in the division below Thea, who stepped off with her parents. Thea moved aside, polite as always, and allowed them to exit before she entered.

"Come on," Thea urged her new friend to join her. The girl complied happily.

Thea pressed the button for the top floor before frantically tapping the 'door close' button. Her mother continued her march to the elevator. Why were elevator doors always so unbearably slow? Go, go, go! As she approached, Thea saw the familiar look on her mother's face: annoyance rather than anger, which was perhaps worse. A chill coursed through Thea, filling her veins with



sluggish ice. Her short fingers poked and prodded at the button again, careful even in her anxious state not to stub her press-on nails on the metallic surface.

"You know that button doesn't actually work?" her friend said. The girl faced the mirrored wall of the elevator and attempted to tame her windblown pigtails. She was Thea's height, but slimmer. Most of the girls here were thinner. Some days her mother was thinner than Thea, whose belly protruded forward like she swallowed a whole melon. A girl at school had asked her if she was pregnant and while she should have been offended, she felt nothing but a cold numbness, as if ice replaced her blood.

The doors slowly pressed closer together, but her mother's hand darted in between them at the last second, forcing the two halves apart again.

"Dorothea. Out. Now."

Thea stepped off the elevator with her head low, refusing to meet her mother's eyes. Her mom grabbed her wrist and pulled her back to the conference room they had been preparing in. She turned back to see the elevator doors close with the pigtails girl still inside, solemnly watching Thea's march of shame. Hopefully, Pigtails got to see the penthouse, even if it was without her. Back in the conference room, Thea's mother spread out the beauty pageant supplies: tubes of crimson lipstick, iridescent powders for her eyes and cheeks, several cans of ultra-strong hairspray—the same brand her mother used in the nineties, always reliable. Her mother set to work on crafting Thea's perfect pageant persona.

Why did her mother put so much effort into these stupid regional

competitions? Thea already secured her place for the state competition next month and competing in this was like rubbing salt in the wound for all the other girls. She'd win, and it would mean nothing, just like when her older sister won that scholarship for university from the local Rotary club; her family would be able to pay for college no matter what, but it looked good on her applications. Thea winning these competitions was more of a matter of pride to her mother, a way to build up the number of titles her daughter had secured. It was something her mother liked to brag about to the other parents in the after-school committees and at church. All the other mothers seemed so impressed by Thea's titles and wins, even in spite of, as her classmate Carla's mother had said, her weight gain. They grow out then up, Carla's mother said, as retold by Carla herself. Out then up. She'll be tall, don't worry. At the time, she did not know why she should have been worried, but she was coming to understand. Her too-tight sequin top forced the reflective little disks to dig into her underarm, chafing and burning and stabbing her delicate skin until it was rubbed raw, red and bloodied. She fidgeted with the armhole openings, adjusting and readjusting every time her mother turned her back to grab some other cosmetic item, until finally her mother swatted at her and dabbed at the scraped skin with a single crumpled tissue. Thea pretended not to hear her mother mutter about how unhealthy the school lunches were; she did not know why, but the words felt like an insult to her, personally.

A man—probably someone's father—entered the conference room with a grease-soaked paper bag that Thea spotted instantly. As he passed by, the scent of toasted buns and red meat flooded Thea's senses, forcing her to confront her hunger. When had she last eaten? Her mother was always so strict with her food intake and her body, especially on pageant days. Her

eye trained on him; she watched as the man pulled a burger from within the bag, handing it to his carbon-copy daughter, both sporting a sweaty brow and dimpled chins. This girl peeled the paper from the grease-soaked burger like it was nothing, as if she did not know what a prize she had had before her. The girl bit into the food, drops of the juices from the meat dribbling down her dimpled chin. Thea's mouth watered.

Her mother dipped a mascara wand into the inky tube several times then held up the brush to Thea's eye.

"Okay, blink. Atta girl, blink again."

"I'm hungry."

"We'll have dinner after the show," her mother said. Of course that was her answer, it always was. They'd always have dinner after the show.

"I'm hungry now," Thea said. And, contrary to what her sister would have said, it was not an impotent gripe. If only her mother knew how hungry she was, that at any moment her stomach would turn on her and start digesting itself for survival. If her mother knew how dire the situation was, surely, she'd let her poor daughter eat.

"I have some almonds in my purse."

Almonds, it was always almonds, not even cashews. She liked cashews, and almonds were okay when they were dusted with sugar or dipped in chocolate, but her mother never carried treats like that. Thea sighed, she needed a cheeseburger like the other girl, something tasty and filling and greasy and cheesy.

"A handful of almonds is so filling Dorothea, it's really all you need."

Her mother pulled a small clear plastic bag from her purse filled with small oval nuts. Thea turned her head up at the bag and continued to pout. The salads and nuts and smoothies were never filling, no matter how much her mother pretended they were. And Thea knew her mother pretended; she'd seen the pictures of her in her youth, round and plump like a red berry, and she'd seen the assorted candy wrappers stuffed away in secret in her mother's bedside table, next to the unsoiled In-N-Out napkins. Wouldn't her mother like a cheeseburger, too? They could split one even, although Thea was hungry enough to have her own. Yet, when she had said to her mother that she wanted to share a cheeseburger, Mother had refused.

"If you won't eat what's offered to you then don't complain about being hungry," her mother said. "Now, close your eyes." Thea's mother assaulted her with hairspray until her blonde curls were stiff as a board, like a carcass long past rigor mortis sitting on her skull.

"Why do you pretend you don't like junk food?"

"My body does not crave it," her mother said. "And I'm training your body not to either."

An announcement over the speakers told all the contestants for the eight-to-twelve-year-old division to line up. Thea's mother packed up her belongings and let Thea see herself to the line. Other girls were guided by their moms, but not Thea. She'd done this before.

The pageant contestants all lined up behind numerous tall screens to the side of the stage that were the venue's poor attempt to create wings. The first girl was clearly unnerved by being before everyone else. Thea could see her shaking from the wings of the makeshift stage; she knew the judges could see it too. This first contestant walked too fast, not giving the judges enough time to see her dress. As she waited for her turn to be called, Thea peeked out into the audience. She saw the father from earlier; he sat near the front row, sipping on a dark fizzy soda. Thea's stomach groaned and grumbled loudly.

"Ew." The older contestant in front of Thea turned around and scrunched up her nose. Thea sized the girl up; her hair was styled into big curls, but they were falling flat, already losing their structure and bounce. They wouldn't hold up for the entire pageant and no amount of retouching could make them look full again. This girl wouldn't place. The line moved forward one at a time, each girl strutting across the stage in an awkward fashion. Everyone smiled too big and posed too little. Thea was bored by her competition and distracted by the angry burning in her stomach. The stomach acid was bubbling violently within her, threatening to erupt through the lining of her belly, skin, and expensive costume. Did her mother know how dire this was—if her stomach ate her costume, she'd be in major trouble.

"Dorothea!" Thea heard her name from behind in a poor attempt at a whisper. She turned to search for the source and found the girl she had played tag with earlier.

"It's Thea," she shout-whispered back.

"Okay, Thea," Pigtails said. "Come here!" She punctuated the final word with a forceful wave. With a roll of her eyes, Thea stepped

out of line and went to stand with her newfound friend. She opened her mouth to greet the other girl, but her stomach growled loudly before she could speak. Face flushing red, she ducked her head and held her stomach behind her arms, as if she could retroactively silence it. But her friend just giggled.

"I'm so hungry, too. My mom didn't let me have breakfast," her friend said.

"Mine told me to eat almonds."

"I hate nuts," Pigtails grimaced. Thea told her friend how badly she wanted a cheeseburger. The line moved forward one more. Pigtails confessed to Thea that she had a few dollars hidden in her pocket.



untitled  
*Elisa Espinoza*

medium: digital photography

[ww/art/30](http://ww/art/30)

*from the cnf editor:*

We have two very different CNF pieces for this issue of our journal, but I am honored to have both pieces representing Creative Nonfiction.

"The Slugs" by Lila Dubois is a beautifully and thoughtfully written piece, imbuing readers with wistful childhood nostalgia and playfulness. Dubois sets a simultaneously fun and intense childhood scene, saturating the piece with sensory language and a sense of place. Our staff was drawn to the pacing and language of this wonderful piece!

Our other CNF piece for this issue, "Tell Me," by our very own Sabrina Ellis, is an honest and vulnerable telling of her experiences in therapy. Ellis' reflections on loss, therapy, and emotions really resonated with and moved our staff. I am so fond of this piece and proud to have it in our Spring 2023 Journal.

I also want to say thank you to the CNF staff, managing editors, and everyone who makes these journals possible. My experience as CNF editor has deepened my love for the genre and the community of Westwind. Enjoy these wonderful pieces!

*Ruby Yassen*



Tell Me.

*Sabrina Ellis*

I tried therapy twice. The first time, I was nine and my mom forced me and my sister to do joint sessions. She wanted us to have a healthy way to process our grief but I don't remember ever talking about my dad. The therapist would just ask about school and friends and our answers were always short and quick. I remember when we had a crush on a boy, we could write his name on a popsicle stick and she'd hide it in her box of games. It was top secret! Confidential information! If, next time we saw her, we didn't have a crush on that boy anymore, we could break the stick. A simple and satisfying crack. I'd break it in half and then break the halves down until it hurt me to hold onto the splinters. Every week, I'd come up with a new generic name. An imaginary Lucas or Pedro or João or Rafael to write down and destroy. Crushing my crush.

She let us play games, she'd let us ignore the reason why we ended up in that bleak room week after week, and sometimes she'd even let me write two names down at once. I hated writing with a sharpie on the rough wooden surface, but it was worth it in the end. She kept the archive of names whether they were broken or unbroken. The broken halves and quarters and odd splinters turned her box of secrets into a graveyard. We never mourned the deaths of the imaginary boys we were supposed to love. If the therapist ever found it strange that I'd fall in and out of love on a weekly basis, she never mentioned it. Maybe she was just kind. Or maybe she just had popsicle sticks to spare.

My second therapist didn't have any popsicle sticks or games. She had a shelf full of books that I never looked at because I'd sit on her couch with my back to them. The room was always dark and stuffy and the couch seemed to be made so that every position was almost comfortable, but not quite. She'd sit on a

white chair with her little white dress and her pretty white skin and her legs crossed one over the other. Her hands were always perfectly still as they rested on her knees and made me feel self conscious about my dancing fingers that fidgeted nonstop.

Once I took out my pencil cases to show her. One was the basic Kipling that every girl in the grade had (a prerequisite for normalcy) but the monkey that hung from my keychain had been completely defaced. I used to pick at her when it was my only pencil case, until the cracks started appearing around her head, and one day it was hanging so loose from her skin that I just reached in, grabbed her plastic flesh and decapitated her. The blue furry skin was still attached, empty of any form or face but still with her name tag, "Debbie." I always thought of Debbie Ryan. My second pencil case was the one I showed my therapist because it wasn't filled with the regular school supplies. It was my very own hat to pull random objects from. A spring, some dice, two magnets, a chain, a broken pencil, some metal wires I "borrowed" from the art room, a fidget cube that I used less than my other unofficial fidget materials. My therapist didn't have much to say about it. She allowed me to play with my magic objects if it helped me focus and if it helped me speak.

This second therapist was always quiet. Silence would shove his hands down my throat and pull strings of words out so I could ramble and ramble and ramble. At least he never reached into my head, where my real reasons to be in therapy were, sitting there safely locked up while I spoke freely and aimlessly about my day. Sometimes the silence would win. He'd reach in a bit too far and a bit too aggressively and he'd take out the quick and quiet words and mygendermybodymyeatingmyskinmyblademyend would tumble out and be met with nothing. No questions asked even though I longed to answer them. She was a statue of a woman and she didn't move an inch as she sat there with that sympathetic smile carved onto her face. I don't even know if she

noticed she was smiling. She'd just sit and listen. I'd feel like asking, *begging* her to judge me. Please, tell me if I'm valid. Tell me what you think of my feelings, or, better yet, tell me *what* I'm feeling. Isn't that a therapist's job? Pointing out my problems? Diagnose me as stupid, distracted, insecure, weird, emotional, emotionless— just tell me. I'd just sit there, hoping one day she'd move her marble lips and speak.

Tell me I'm as broken as the popsicle sticks I loved. That the graveyard of boys couldn't be mourned because only one man was important to me and he's already been turned to dust and sprinkled on the ocean, as he wished. Tell me that I can stop thinking about how he'd give me his shirt at the beach and it would look like a dress on me. Tell me how I can stop thinking about how I broke the statue we gave him on Father's day right on the 8 year anniversary of his death and it felt like I'd killed him. *A simple and satisfying crack.* It felt like I'd killed him. I don't want to break anything ever again. Tell me how I can stop thinking about the laughs when we'd tease my mom by telling her I loved him more than her. Tell me how I can stop thinking about the time he made us ride on the front row of the roller coaster, the times he'd take me out on his motorcycle and I felt like the coolest person ever, the times we'd trace the tattoo of planets on his wrist and I'd tell him that when I got older I would get the same one. Tell me how I can stop thinking about that day, only one week before I was going to visit, when he called from the hospital and said he was feeling better. He said he'd be home soon. I never got to see him.

Tell me how I can stop thinking.



# The Slugs

## *Lila Dubois*

The most precious slugs were always on the side of the house, where the roof met the neighbor's Eucalyptus tree, and the pale leaves and terracotta tiles kissed to a permanent shade. A damp shade, where nothing ever dried, and the slugs stayed thick and firm and moist. A murky shade, a cavernous shade, a mysterious shade. A scary sort of shade, even, because we were kids and still revered the darkness.

Even with the darkness, the slugs on the side of the house were worth it. They were juicy and wet and alive. And we needed them for what we had planned.

So while the parents talked and drank on the porch, we kids began the hunt. Barefoot, we crept up the driveway, padded across the mossy rug of lawn, and gathered before the gate on the house's left side. The most remote side. Far from the porch lights and clinking green glass noses of Heineken and adults and belly laughter. The east-facing side, where the sun disappeared each day and the shadows of dusk dripped early like a navy honey down the house walls.

It was here at the gate by the side of the house where we gathered before entering the final frontier. Always here we would pause. Huddled. No one saying a word, everyone knowing what had to be done. Each mustered in their own way the courage that would be needed to reach out a small hand and push open the wooden gate, flecks of chipped white paint sticking to their clammy palm, and then—deep breath—step into the inky black beyond.

Eventually someone always did find the guts, and when the gate lurched open, the lot of us crept in single file. Utterly focused, thinking only of accomplishing the mission and getting out quickly with as few casualties as possible. Past the stack of firewood and collection of loose clay tiles—which had fallen from our roof, and which my dad had saved, piled along the side of the house, with every intention but, invariably, zero practical ability to put them back to their rightful places. Past the rusting ladder and the pooper scooper buzzing with flies. Past the chimes and the bird feeder all clogged up with leaves. Past the splintered shed that held the old pool noodles and halloween decorations and boxes from grandma. Then, finally, on the other side of that, were the big rocks. This was where the good slugs lay.

We made swift work of it. In single practiced motions we flipped the rocks and plucked the wriggling slug bodies from the ground. They squirmed and burrowed into the winkle ravines of our palms as we ran back to light.

The play was always short. The point of the game was to dress the slugs. To do this, you first vigorously rub a piece of chalk on the sidewalk, all in one spot, until the chalk becomes a useless nub, leaving behind only a pile of colored powder. The chalk will stick, as it turns out, to anything slimy or wet. So when you roll a slug in pink chalk—voila— the slug comes out completely painted. A whole new look. Totally and utterly suffocated in pink. Like a Barbie slug, these were my favorites. But you could do it with any color.

A blue policeman slug. A yellow fireman slug. A red devil. A white ghost. A tie-dyed hippie.

They never lasted long.

Though the science still remains unclear, it was evident that something in the chalk did not agree with the soft porous skin of the slug epidermis. Within minutes of dunking, their bodies began to writhe and twist. Their amorphous beings twisted and, had they been able to, I'm sure they would've gasped and screamed and maybe cried out for help.

Having been through it before we did not panic. We watched.

We recognized the scene before us as an inevitable consequence of life. The cost of play and fun.

The slugs shriveled into Raisinets, the moisture sucked from them like marrow until their guts had fried. After a few minutes, the slugs stopped moving.

Thus began the funeral procession.

The second part of the game. A parade of small feet *pat pat patting* barefoot against the sidewalk, cement still warm though the sun has begun its descent. Hands cupped around rubbery slug bodies. Death concealed like a pocketed booger.



Without thinking, we knew to do this. To hide the bodies as we passed the parents and older siblings on the way to the gravesite. To clasp our fingers tighter and tighter around the bodies until our knuckles turned white. This was the only way to ensure we were holding them hard enough, to ensure nothing would fall from our grips over the course of the small trek. Even then we must have known that it was in some way a shameful thing, to be holding these unmoving boogers. We were couriers of death,



however innocently or not, and somewhere deep inside I'm sure we knew it. The price of our play we carried in our palms, pale raisiny slug corpses clutched quietly to our chests. We'd failed again to be benevolent gods.

Once more, barefoot, we crept up the driveway. Across the mossy rug of lawn. And just short of the white gate, we stopped, unwilling to pass twice in one evening into the side yard. We could just bury the slugs here. The soil was damp enough and the rocks along the fence were perfectly fine to cover them. There was no concern for headstones. We lifted the rocks that lined the outside of the fence—the heavier ones sometimes requiring two sets of hands—unfurled our white-knuckle grips and let the gummy little corpses roll to the dirt below.

Lying there in the cool mud, they reminded us of how they'd been when we first picked them—albeit crusted in flakes of fuchsia and purple and green. Suddenly, death had no part in it. They had been our playmates and we were just dropping them off and saying: *bye! same time tomorrow?* Out of our hands and back beneath the damp cover of rock and moss and soil, their bodies carried none of the shame. They were home. They were safe. We had returned them back (nearly) to where they should be, nestled by the side of the house. And we felt certain that if their slug parents had been home, they would have thanked us, saying how kind we were to have included their slug children in the neighborhood fun. We brushed the dirt and chalk speckles from our hands. Satisfied. Even lifeless, we all could agree, they were certainly the most precious slugs. We tucked them in and said goodnight.

By this time, evening was sneaking quickly into complete night. Parents had lingered long enough chatting on stoops and called



for us to return home. We ran back with haste, knowing what was coming. Knowing it was always better to be inside, snuggled tight and warm in our beds before the inky haze oozed out from the side of the house and smothered in darkness the whole sky.



qwerty  
*Elisa Espinoza*

medium: digital photography

*ww/art/41*

## *contributors*

Dan Murphy is a Los Angeles poet, mentored by the great Dorothy Barresi at California State University Northridge, where he received a Masters degree in Creative Writing. Murphy had a chapbook published by *Finishing Line Press*, and has been a finalist twice with *Tupelo Press* and once with *Codhill Press* (2022) in manuscript competitions. Murphy has been published in *Field*, *Zyzzyva*, *Spillway*, *North American Review*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Cortland Review*, *Image*, *Cafe Review*, and in many other worthy journals. He has worked as an elementary school teacher in the public-school system in Los Angeles and lives in North East Los Angeles with his family, his blooming yard, and a bag of coffee to grind, brew, and savor. He is working on *American Childhood Elegies*, which incorporates deep, painful realizations about his childhood, but also explications about the contemporary world the speaker finds himself in.

Elisa Espinoza is a student at UCLA, pursuing her Master's Degree in Social Welfare. She is an artist of many mediums, including photography, songwriting, zines, and improv comedy. In the future, she looks forward to combining her passions for mental health and creative arts by working as an expressive arts therapist.

jimmy vega is the child of Mexican immigrants, a Chicana Los Angeles born and raised poet, writer, educator, artist, and curator. He holds a B.A. in English with a concentration in Creative Writing from UCLA and an MFA from the School of Critical Studies, Creative Writing Program at CalArts, where they co-created the MFA in Creative Writing's HYPERLINK reading series. He is the Assistant Director of Beyond Baroque Literary Arts/Center. He instant-grams @jimmyyvega

Lauren Kogelman is a third-year transfer student and English major at UCLA. When she's not in class or angsty about What Comes After College, she likes to watch movies, listen to audiobooks, and play Taylor Swift albums on repeat, ideally while surrounded by cats and dogs.

Lila Dubois is a student and writer studying at the University of Pennsylvania, but thinking always of her native Los Angeles. Her work has appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* and various campus publications, such as *F-Word Magazine*, *Penn Appétit*, and *Equilibria*. She recently was awarded 3rd in the Parker Prize for Journalism. There is nothing she loves more than a good orange.

Mario Loprete's first love is painting. An important, pure love. Creating a painting, starting from the spasmodic research of a concept with which he wants to transmit his message this is the foundation of his painting. The sculpture is his lover, the artistic betrayal to the painting that voluptuous and sensual lover that inspires different emotions which strike prohibited chords.

Mason Koa has lived in Los Angeles for most of his short life. He has work published or forthcoming in *Vestal Review*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *Freshwater Literary*, and *Literally Stories*. He is Filipino- and Chinese-American and now lives in the Bay Area, CA. He is a graduate of the Stanford Pre-Collegiate Creative Writing Program. He is fourteen years old.

Sabrina Ellis is a second-year English major at UCLA. They love reading one-star reviews of whatever book they finish, completing every possible variation of the Wordle, and watching silly Brazilian telenovelas with their grandma.

Savannah Plasch is a UCLA English alumna who now resides in Northern California with her partner, their puppy, and three cats. Currently, she is pursuing her M.F.A. in Creative Writing from Queens University of Charlotte where she is an editorial assistant for the school's literary magazine.

Susan Calvillo is a Chinese/Mexican-American and the author of *Excerpts From My Grocery List* (Beard of Bees). Her writing is forthcoming in the *Audacious Women* anthology (HRM), *MOONLOVE Press*, the *Fly Heroes* anthology (Juventud/Flower Song Press), and other charming magazines. Keep reading at [susancalvillo.com](http://susancalvillo.com) Watch her embarrass herself on TikTok @thatbeardlessbard Or simply watch her eat cake and plant cacti on Instagram @susan\_calvillo

# WESTWIND

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