

TO THE LOCH NESS

Or more specifically its monster,
long tail whisper
in our swimming pool: in a valley
girl's mind. Girls, mind
the valley,

its cunts, the dark water,
Jurassic trees' sweep
late at night—Riot
Grrrl Loch Ness is churning.
We towel off, full

frothed, Sweet Valley
Ophelias, who haven't quite
drowned. No, we float by the usual
suburban fiends—the parent
who uses, the lover/

aggressor who lays in wait
by the lockers, the janitor
who slithers, *hey girls show me*
your tits. A Yale interviewer rubs
his thumbs under bra

straps, puts his hands on my hips.
From our pool an L.A. River
is beginning to course. Podge emerges
from pre-teen, grows up heart-first
like some women

just have to do. She loves a man
who tries to kill her.
She slits his face with fingernails,
tries to kill him back. We fish
whole futures from stank

waters, keep monsters fed. Shelter
perversion. Mostly others'. Sometimes
ours. We say nothing's dead that couldn't once
be living. Every single fossil out there
once managed to survive.

LINEAGE

My grandmother the model did not suffer
the supernatural, or God, or pianos
or all bourgeois things,

but the blood in the glass was enough
to stop her from having the abortion.
Instead she kept the fetus, a little worm

inside her. *Less terrifying*, she told me
over steak tartar. My lover & I
want travel but that night my brain unpacked

its lobes like a suitcase (or a stroller)
because what would it be like to hold one small *us*
in my hands?

Mom renounces: *the drinking, depression,*
your father—the whole trip—except for *you girls*.
A woman is whole only when she's

with child. A woman pumps a watermelon
out the width of a coin. A woman is whole
only when she leans forward. It is selfish

to not have a child. It is selfish to have.
I am selfish. *We/he/she* are selfish.
My lover takes beef pink as white infants,

sears it, both sides. *We never travel*,
I want to tell him. My body's a ghost ship,
a red moon, a blood glass. Our shelter, a torn

tent, a white flag, a time-blind dissolving,
the whole empty
night sky.

ROAD ATLAS: TWO

We dug them up from backyard soil—
turned over rocks, tipped up

their homes. We are the earthquakes,
we girls, drafting our dream team

of pill bugs. We don't give a shit
who dies in this game.

Our pets, small minions.
We pile our pill bugs

in Payless shoeboxes. We paint stripes
with nail polish, let them learn

as the varnish seeps in
how it feels to poison oneself

into *tame*. We take them into Mom's car.
To Canada! Mom rallies. No men

on this trip. Just a beat-up leather bag
of backseat car games & these bugs,

our earth-holders. They tuck their last mites
of soil in their bellies as they roll.

What if our world
were as simple as that?

I don't say. We get in the car.
Mom pulls out from Hayvenhurst

to the wide stream, the real river, the 101
Freeway. Girls, bugs, we pummel

ourselves up the coastline, un-being
a kept thing. We keep all our legs

in our stomachs. Our homes
burying deeper inside
as we go. What a race
of pretending,
to think anyone gets away.

NO PROBLEMO

when grade school takes *Colonial Week!*, rebrands it *California Days!*, saying *We*, in their best white protestant accent, in polos, salmon chinos, *must celebrate our distinctive past*. I am last

wave, one of the old-school forced to read *The Scarlet Letter*, respond to Goody, weave wool on looms. Podge is younger, *la nueva tendencia*: Spanish skirts & mission bricks, or even:

the Tongva, Uto-Aztecan, absorbers of the Hoka-tongued. Once we brought Podge, August tan, down to Tijuana. Mom said: *careful or those border men will claim she's one of them*.

That October week of *California Days!*, I watch Podge cross over oak trees' roots, mortar acorns, mouth *Gabrieleño, Fernandeno, Nicoleño*, throw each round string of sounds aside. Our school

chooses her to lead its "Mission Pageant." She is a bronzer-shaded, faux-*Mestiza* starlet. A natural on the stage. Still—patience. *California Days!* can't last forever. We know how this ends.

Viernes, Podge plays noble savage, then virtuous ranchero bride. But soon as school breaks for the weekend the tribes all catch the flu. The missionaries pull out. Slaughter comes. Spain leaves

& Anglos swarm. Eastern traders, Midwestern men, dust-clad & digging for land, water, gold. Come Monday, our teachers start class with, *Back to Business!* Episcopalian prayers, proper

grammar, the heaving canon. They remind us to stay ever vigil—we are a valley on a hill, a wagon circled round by illegals, crack fiends, & casinos. Podge learns history is a pack of lies. I tell her

noir is everywhere. Every plot's a cover-up. We unearth the loom, place our hands on yarn. The warp & weave. Inheritance, by land & sea. The dictionary becomes our blanket, smallpoxed, homespun,

contexere. We look that up. Latin— "to weave." Warp is simpler, we are fluent:

"that which is thrown away."

HALLOWS

Mom's moustache is kohl-lined, clean. Our father's
a Jewish Klingon. Podge, harem floozy.
I'm a witch. I wear jeans. I don't bother
with costumes or slashers, drugs or boozing.
Being fourteen's enough horror as is.
Mom appears: slim suit, cufflinks—a mister.
Id sleep with myself. Our father thumbs his
pager. He won't put it down to kiss her.
My sister's bellybutton casts a spell
on candy-handers. O pre-teen promise.
Last night I dreamt I was a man. I fell
in love with a girl, her hair's soft blonde kiss.
More gorgeous, my mother, cross-dressed manly,
walks out of the house, leaving the family.

ODE TO THE ONE GLOVE

nonstop on the radio. If it fits, the
Iranian carpool mom won't drive up the driveway. Her Bentley scrapes
its belly on the white family's tar. If it fits, the kids skip school for a week
due to *riots*. The white family lives twenty miles from the burning—
might as well live in Canada, the mother says. Is there even one black
family living here in Encino? Jews don't count. If it fits, the children
hear *violence is not the answer* looped like a noose, but they also hear
show your work. Every calculation: *show your work*. The mother takes
the children downtown during the *OJ*. The whole family has heard
about Rodney King, Daryl Gates. *Can't we all just get more gates*. The
children see a body dragged from a truck & smashed like a watermelon
on pavement. Videos looped like a noose. If it fits. The mother in the
warehouse gets the children to make tuna salad. She pulls out ten five-
gallon jars of relish. The children hate relish. *So what it's not for you*. The
children know *OJ* for: slow driving; glove jokes; the fact that he is not
a juice box; the rumor he did it, but *so what it's not for you*. Once the
white family got lost driving by Compton. The mother peed on a towel
instead of leaving the car. The family has read *Bonfire of the Vanities*.
What's urine on terrycloth. What's a glove on a black man. What's a
white woman but a good excuse for lynching. But what if he didn't?
Looped like a noose. The girls draw gloves in their art class. Take their
hands & then trace them like bodies. Like bodies but *not* bodies. They
wash their hands in the sink, play house.

ALWAYS TELLING

the truth is as pathological as lying.

My fingers

are naked. My lover swallowed my engagement ring at last call. Now he's sober so I wait to see how he'll take me, eyes open wide in the dark. What I'll find in his pupils: my own flaws reflected, the formerly beer-goggled cut sharp.

My body

isn't twenty. Big whoop but it betrays me each day. What I loved about drinking: the infinite truths I could hold & not see. Twenty was lying like a hot drunk on a futon, spread eagle & not giving a fig.

Love & time

are both fuckers. I watch the women in my family age to plastic. Perma-MILFs in veneers, they raise a glass, keep their heads above second/third waves of feminism, decades of rock-hard nipples, bonfire bras & the rank sell-by stamping of *A Certain Age*.

I play

shoot the bitch games on my lover's PlayStation, siphon coffee with a fervor that lights up my veins, exhale in AA meetings in church basements with drunks, chant to dark spaces: *I am. I am. I am*. My body: only, yet always, the cage.

My sick

lover has ten days without whiskey, gimlet, Slow Comfortable Screw. He tells me *it's like I can see the world clearly*. I have years I've spent sober. I see enough to get by. It is awful/awe-filled, so much clearness. I say nothing, watch my language as close & tight as the bottle, line the shots up of *one day at a time*.

FRONTIER

Mom made us matching guidebooks to Alaska, copied, bound in a Kinkos in the Valley on a school day.

We have made it. The frontier.

Rented car & Day Four:
Mom hides out in a Kodiak

internet café, dashes off missives to RootBeer, secret boyfriend, former country-music DJ.

RootBeer is not yet a known threat to our family. We drive through Denali, denial. I listen only & wholly

to Barenaked Ladies, press play, play, play. I pretend it hardly matters our father refuses our rotation

of sitting backseat. The only male, he is perpetually the assumptive *shotgun*. I am fourteen. Life just now grows

its big tits of *unfair*. We are here in Alaska on a ten-day car trip. In six months, she'll admit the affair.

In a year he'll sign off on divorce. I'll stay a virgin three years after that but here in Alaska

is the first place men see me, see my breasts orbiting within my galaxy of skin.

My body's the eventual
swirling Milky Way. When a stranger
in flannel blows a kiss on the highway,

I press one nipple to the window
of our rented Ford Escape.
My family drives three hours

to stare at black worms trapped in glaciers.
We come back at twilight & walk in pairs: girls
& grown-ups on the dock.

Between salmon dead
& salmon dying, Mom
holds our father's hand in the light.

It's midnight & I notice
men & women everywhere
flip a universe for cock.

BULLET

You watch them from high chairs & rocking
horses, backseats like gaped mouths, kid-sized
barstools. One could store a little girl (or two)

nearly anywhere. A closet. Can
of beer. First rule of noir: the body's the carpet. Step

lightly. Some girls
swivel hips like the cars snaking Sunset
& Vine. You know there are whole

hindquarters of the Valley—San
Pornando—girls can't see? Saint

of labia surgery, money shots, camcorder. She's
whispering. There are more lines
than you can write down in this poem.

On that table. In the script.
On her face. Stardust trails

cum cocaine & Tinkerbell.
The clapping the audience makes (even the dead
that's just the carpet) is the play—

not the light on the wall. You sleep curled, silver
spoons. Baby dolls in pink twin jars,

in Chatsworth, West Hills, Cowboy Palace,
airplane hangar. Tight O of small lips
parting small light pulsing...

A woman's body's a shadow sewn every day—
each stitch, a bullet—

for whom?