

A.D. LAUREN ABUNASSAR

*Cryptid Poem*

All I want is the bug collector. A matchstick large as a bone—a *bone has different sizes*. So they tell me. So the long winter goes: sun tessellate, fractal, soft-thrush insistent. There's a death worm in the closet so I keep the door closed. Simple. But I feed it, sliding sleeves of lettuce through the cracks. All I want is something slid back. All I fear is something slid back. All I want is all I fear and this says something. Simple? Too much so. These days I'm not dreaming much. Sleep with a soup pot by my head, its white globe iridescent & knocking at the eyes. When I drive, I leave one wiper pulled up—looks like a cutlass I don't have to carry, needling fog and the inclement. Every month another state-sized glacier cleaves. For this, I tally. Hook-shaped carvings on the closet door, one for every un-dullable noise. World is stiff & loud as an attic: the neighbor-bird's tapping, the salt thrown outside, loud as an omen, the death worm's small shuffling. *A worm has different meanings*. So they tell me. Simple? Enough to be true. All I want is a ladle, a box for my bread, a smaller soup pot. As a girl, I was taught how to fold paper boats just so. *Small enough for a very small body*. So they told me. Every now and then I try to fold myself to fit the shape. Always easier to greet hunger with ribbon than with blood. Always easier to say worm than starlight. Bread than weapon. Angel than shadow. All I want is a new shadow. Old winter shoved in a jar. A wind at the door I can mistake for a voice.

## *Medium: A Reading*

Lois is weatherworn, waterborne, kelpie-  
haunted & eclipsed  
by tiny hungers.

Lois knows how to chew the cherry stem right  
how to hide her gray wings  
and peel clementines in one long sheet.

When she stands below the mangosteen, sun searches her,  
dear Lois, asks for forgiveness for Lois's  
lost belongings. The neighborhood kids  
bike by and think there goes Lois — practically lidless  
you never see her blink to shut the day out  
even for a moment. She never walks — she swims  
the asphalt tender. Her body all hard knot of scar  
and comma-curves saying *sentence end*  
*soon* saying *and and and*.

Lois, does his spirit linger in the tub draining,  
did he take his coffee flooded with milk,  
did you grow a second mouth to pray to him?

Lois all fibrous and hair like tangled radish roots,  
eyes like an empty room where someone  
forgot to catch the lights.

Swimming, as she will, through grocery store aisles saying  
*and once I had a son* to the canned mangoes  
*once* a word knuckling two worlds.

We pass her and say *yes, she lives in Once*.

Her forehead all lacquered and smelling of hemp.  
Lois, when you buried him, did the rain  
make the ground pliant? Did you find exigencies  
uttered in your wristwatch's each and every  
ticking? Did you stand flat-footed  
like a new bloom needling the loam telling  
the ground, *take from me, hold him as my arms held him.*  
*And I will keep going.*

## *Eavesdropping*

1. What water said about loss:

his body is a small tributary. And a mostly blue planet. And a fig suspended in the sad remnants of a river. Though sometimes lagoonal, more often a wound built in the morning when every light looks winter.

2. What loss said back:

I trust him to know but also I call him equally fathomless—real beauty coming in the way people gather in droughts. The bleachy moon over towns abandoned by water—great husks of crop petrified like the parts of an engine. Smothered in sand. Asking for his trim, unending gaze—graceless as a moment feels tenseless, a tiny aperture: the reasons why there's more black in the lake than blue.

3. What I told water:

I want a single word for complex acts like forgiveness and going. Like your ice-blue fingers tipping balut toward the mouth—a mottled body soft when swallowed. I want time compressed on the surface of a meager lake: how it freezes so easy yet it doesn't feel like cheating. I want less ice from your skin than a tender flake torn from a great storm & landing soft here.

4. What I told loss:

Show me how to thumb the valleys of my ribs for air. How to gut an errant fish with no waste, make an altar from its bones. How to love in the service of loneliness, use what I'm given. Teach me how a cloud shoulders a storm. It shouldn't hold but it does and I don't know why.

5. What water said back:

I have answered in hurricanes. In small waterfalls and the sounds of ice cleaving. In teaching you how to float on your back like a loose orchid.

6. What I looked for in loss, and found only in water:

A body losing volume. My ear pressed to the chest of a stranger—searching for sound, finding only an unmoved sycamore—a shell in a shell where the ocean drank back its moan.

7. What loss said back to me: Imagine a lake that swallows snow  
and does not turn white. Says:  
*every time I love you*  
*it surprises me.*



Shoshana Kertesz, *Frozen Lake*, photograph

*Autobiography As a Headless Girl*

*after Rita Dove's "Party Dress for a First Born"*

I therefore learned my hands,  
was still dissatisfied. Their shapeless wander

AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS FOG

I wrote about the party dress,  
cut clear acres into milk glass.

There is no one I am pretending to be.  
This means something

AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS PARTY DRESS

Skin shelved a moment — what makes a party  
a party, a dress worth

tearing. There was blood. That was something.  
My skirt tried to catch

AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS PENCIL TIP

's nearly indiscernible scratching. When I wrote  
about fearing everyone after

it did nothing to nub the tip. Rendered down  
grief is no more than scratching. My fear

has no hardy instruments

AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS HOUSEBOAT

there in the legs: shifting, trying, somewhat  
to take somewhere. No longer

blood smeared or dirtied. It washes. In many ways  
legless in many ways bodied not —

a houseboat with other plans than sailing  
with moving nowhere again and again

men caught at the dock and coming inside me  
a joke told and sundered

a thing worth sinking. *The pronoun of boats*  
*is she*, he told me. All boats boating towards

her-ness. As if this made  
a difference

### AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS ERRANT FISH

circling oxygen like a bat in a tanning salon  
*what uses what uses*

for light. That age-old question  
that rhymes with my name

here always for flinging. I water not.  
Nots love me. Not drinking. Not asking. Not watching

for lurkers. Not cupped by a hand rehomeing  
my hardness — I am memory all over.

I am trying to find my way back to the water.  
I am not doing the things they say to do. Not sleeping.

I dream the way I think horses dream:  
of running until I starve

### AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS THE RIGHT WAY HOME

housing no findables. Alleys unfilled and not  
waking the children. Keep going keep going

my spine my spine. Anything said twice is more  
true. Appears in a mirror right before the old woman —

I know her. I call to her. I am her. She saint-prays  
on my buckled limbs: lost causes in tendon, those unanswerable

questions. Would have found you anywhere anyway. Was dead  
set on the earthquake. Tucking holes in your tiny

joys. As a street walked I am urging. If you take off your shoes  
you won't be able to run. If you don't look behind you you won't be able

to face yourself. See these long nights descending. See these tidal  
bones ricked this way then that: a pyre you burn

for the light only. A staving. Off of wholeness  
of those first nights after when you traced your neck for a seam

when you found skin and it surprised you. When your body  
was walked down and they said, soon you'll forget it

and your voice drove your body out. Said you are  
*Okay now, okay—*



Talar Kalajian, *Directions Are Overrated*, photograph