

Lea Littlewolfe / SEVEN POEMS

duck

lakes: Peck, Bronson, Little Fishing, Worthington, Round
August dry reindeer moss washed out green
pine needles crunch
Maryanne and I pick blueberries of
shiny green and wine red leaves
it's a good year
we don't move far to fill ice cream pail
black bears, cinnamons too, share feast
we rattle cans, talk loud

"Lea, you like duck? I got whole freezer full
that Denny
I say to get me mallard or two
he takes fish nets, casts
comes back with twenty three, mud to his elbows
necks all neatly wrung, took just drakes
I wanted enough for soup
not soup for next dozen years
come to my place, get the rest
I'll tell Denny they made good soup"

"Maryanne, you know how there were lotsa mallards last year?
me and my old man we went hunting with the shotgun
saw a drake and hen in a puddle bound up together
shot him
I plucked and gutted him
his penis was still stuck out, big as my whole thumb

even after he was roasted that penis was big
sure tempts comparison”

“me and my oldest boy we drive to La Ronge
April four years ago
you ever been there, Lea?
water across road, ducks thicker than muskrats
game preserve signs up
he’s a good boy, he shoots a few
we throw plastic bag dinghy into ditch,
fetch birds from slough next to road
he just gets boat into truck and along comes natural resources jeep
son jams .22 under me just in time, I spread dress
boy says we pick up ducks somebody else shot
officers look for gun, I talk Cree
he says mom doesn’t speak English, has bad hearing
those ducks made good soup”

“one year, Maryanne, we used to drive past this slough beside
Lewis yard, hundreds of mallard and teal
kept talkin about duck soup
hot summer day, seems no Lewis home
my old man shoots off two shells
ducks floundering all over the place
guess who’s nominated duck dog?
I skin off pants and shoes, walk in, reach some birds
god it’s cold and sludgy
I take off socks and shirt, go further, grab more ducks
it’s icy and deep
leave bra panties glasses on willow branch
kind of float out, round up the rest of mallards

about a month later we're in the bar
Lewis girl comes up: 'Lea, how was your duck soup?'

"you remember, Lea,
how Harvey's pond used to be just covered with ducks?
ask him one time if I can net a few
he gets real riled up, says nobody's gonna get *his* ducks
I compromise: 'Harvey, can I have a pot of the water?'
those ducks are so thick the water smells like duck soup'
he gets even moodier, no way I can have some of his water
and just look at his place now: no water, no pond, no ducks"

that day we filled five-gallon pails with blueberries, six of them
and the bear shit got smellier

evening

It's a sad day. My uncle's dead, heart turned to jelly from drinking. The man who would give the shirt off his own back to someone in distress. Mom, Dad and I are to accompany his widow and oldest son to funeral parlor. We're rushing around, getting ready. Mom's in her panties and bra shouting orders, making sure the milking machines are washed properly, the shoes polished to her usual high standard, my hair combed just so. (Mother, please! This is my story.) We have to meet them in town at seven o'clock. I'm sent upstairs to get Mom's dress. Dad has to check the tire pressures. Brother must see the cows once more, it's calving time.

Then the knock on the kitchen door. Insistent, repeated. Suddenly self-conscious, Mom tells me to deal with whoever it is, outside, on the porch. She's pissed off, we're trying to get away, she wasn't counting on someone coming along, not tonight. And she hasn't her dress on yet.

The man on the porch is well-dressed — three-piece tan suit, highly polished black shoes, big book in his hand, thick briefcase in tow. He wants to see my parents. He demands to see them. I block the doorway. He's trying to get past me, to get inside. I push the door shut. He tries to peer in the window high on the door, but I stand my ground. I try to find out why he's here, what he wants. His pitch rises, he says I'm a minor, he must talk to my parents. I suggest it's not a good idea, that we're rushed. Politely I ask what I can do for him. I've dealt with salesmen before. He's getting more agitated, speaking staccato, even waving the book around. Says he has an important message for them,

that he can be our salvation. (Mother, this is my version. This is how *I* remember it.) Brother is back from checking the new cows. He tries to make the man understand our need for him to go away.

Suddenly the door is flung open. Mom doesn't have the dress on. She grabs the pitchfork that leans on the railing. She jabs the tines into his chest. "Get the hell out of here you little son-of-a-bitch! We don't need your kind here. Get out!" Now he's backing down the steps, picking up the book, opening the door to his Volks, throwing in the briefcase, blubbering as he falls in. Dad comes out onto the porch. Mom still waves the pitchfork, swearing and shouting. The man backs the Volks down the lane, shouting to Dad to chain her up, lock her away. (Mother, you can tell how it happened, later!) Dad wants to know what the book waver wanted. Brother and I agree he's a preacher, come to save us.

About six months later on the school bus the conversation comes around to the man, about how he traveled through the countryside telling neighbors about our crazy mother. Turns out he was an encyclopedia salesman. I wonder if the guy got a bonus.

ditch

March warmth
snow melting into fields of water
Mom and Dad drive toward the highway
find Woody with a crowbar
wedging stones into a culvert
against flooding on his side of the road
Mom's out of the truck, shovel in hand
chasing Woody and hollering
she knows water will go over the roadtop
Woody runs for the tractor in his field
Mom strikes his tire with her shovel
choice names on her tongue
something about his big nose and small penis
Dad restrains her, they resume their trip

at the doctor's office a large cyst, benign
in the middle of Mom's forehead
at least half an inch thick
maybe two inches across
is removed under local anaesthesia
at home she has a wide bandade over the site
slowly blood drains into her cheeks
both eyes are black and blue and
the patches are well down her face

two cops arrive
want to talk over something
get settled in lazyboys in the livingroom
talk about the weather and spring planting
enjoy coffee and sandwiches

after about an hour
one says Woody has laid assault charges against Mom
Dad tells the ditch story briefly
talk returns to the prospect of river flooding
Mom serves more coffee and pie
it's two hours before they leave

we don't hear another thing about it
for several months
on the school bus one day
we kids listen quietly
seems Woody gave Mom two shiners
back in March

busk

I figure to supplement income
each year I pay more tax
though my salary has been stuck many years
in Victoria I hit the waterfront
two-hour stints reading poetry most dramatically
first day thirty-three cents an hour
next day I move an elder to tears
and the ante moves to two dollars hourly
then I hit shallows day after day
I'm not alone
juggler, piper, harpist, opera singer suffer too
no longer do tourists throw money into hat or guitar case
I should train a capuchin monkey to clatter
dimes in a zinc cup and look soulful

I busk before a bakery coffee shop, welcomed by the owner
a pre-teen can't believe I think I'll get paid for this
and gives me a pack of bubble gum
a man, European accent, tells me to move away
turns out he's a john
waiting for an appointment with a pimp
the pimp grabs my poems
declares he can read them louder
so people can hear two blocks away
he finds he can't produce my volume
gets booed by coffee drinkers
nickels and pennies fall into the hat

the prostitutes take turns hassling me
while I read on
their mouths are obscene and hard
one laughs hysterically hoping to unnerve me
another promises gun farewell
they've not had busker competition before
finally they acquiesce, sit back to editorialize

I persist, learn to collect a large audience
and hold them
seduce them with my voice and swishing skirt
trademark white straw hat and rose on my head
but they don't part with their coins
maybe think I'm a bum
still, I'm a writer and relish an audience
a Czech journalist videotapes for half an hour
finishes with an interview
says I'll be on Prague television
wants to know if I've sold books in Europe

next year I could have a passport ready
hop to London, Edinburgh, Amsterdam
busk in Belfast and Warsaw
travel with a monkey

male menopause

values fly out the window
you get religion
every 16-year-old girl turns you on
you get morning sickness
the wife doesn't understand you any more
you get to AA meetings Thursdays
the priest can't get a straight word out of you in confession
you get to work late on Tuesdays
the grandkids can't get you to go fishing

you get bouts of inexplicable fear
the drinking buddies can't figure you out on no account
you get to worrying a lot about your past sins
the banker wonders why you stop making payments on time
you get bifocals and dentures
the doctor says your hearing's okay
you get grey hair, even in your beard

coffee keeps you awake at night, you become a tea granny
all you feel like doing is really, actually sleeping with the wife
the affairs with women fifteen years younger begin
you visit divorce court on your days off
the TV soaps appeal to you
you take iron pills and pack a hot water bottle to bed
you drive so slow other drivers honk
you find out where to buy pills that'll give you an eight hour erection
you think you'd like another son or two

every squeak and groan in the jalopy upsets you
you do your income tax on time, without cheating
political causes and speeches seem irrelevant to you
you develop strong feelings for the brotherhood of man
the united appeal can get you to volunteer canvassing time
you even figure it's okay to teach Sunday school
and you think I want to live with you still?

hell gate

don't remember what I was saying
can't say what I was thinking
lost on the roads I've driven a hundred times
where is east, which is north?
ears buzz, can't talk
legs walk, but they aren't mine

I'm crashing, out of touch
I'm on the endless tunnel, falling
I'm not me any more, where is me?

terror head pounding
blood pressure check every two hours
heart irregular nurse calls it anxiety
sedation anti-depressants
alone hours on a bed, without laces
voice gone, hysterical, can't give me away

I'm so afraid I won't get out
so afraid to think back
afraid to take what I want

more pills nightmare river
regular monitor of pulse and body temperature
meals at regular hours then pray
one on one counseling pray
supervised movement down corridor
can't walk past nursing station

I'm helpless to help myself
too numb to make decisions
so alone, and lonely for her

fear heart poundings
head threatens to implode
lonesome for her
signs outside: Saskatchewan Provincial Hospital
security guards and pain-clothes orderlies
unravel to psychiatrist where's Creator?
wife lies to staff about visit

I'm scared of myself
I want to go home
I'm afraid I'll never get outta here miss her

permission to phone her
check out what's normal
glasses make temples hurt
group tour downtown, guarded
homey advice from psychologist
urges three weeks more stay

I want outta here so bad
I need control of my living
I must get back to being me

wallet return money, identity in place
family pick up car smells the same
bickering in restaurant normal

me paying for meal expected
them wanting affection usual squabble
home again same bed

I want off the ride, off the world
I want to be free, want to receive
I want time off for good behavior

birth day

for your birthday I looked for persimmons
but the green grocer said she'd nothing in orange
I searched for condoms, alas they had only
sheepskins, not viral proof
I considered a golden lab and all that
chased its tail was a toy poodle
toonies didn't work out
the bank had only paper
kiwi aren't in season and
you won't touch sausage
an attempt to get cosmic consciousness
to start spring proved my lack of influence
the bus depot was closed or
you might have received a toy Greyhound

you'll have to settle for hugs and kisses
maybe a well placed caress or two
as part of the Mother Earth flow
I can send you a delightful dream
would you share a bubble bath
perhaps let me scratch your back?
a read-down might prove stimulating
or a walk on the snow

and she waved her magic wand
granted him long life and good scrounging
a twist of fame and regular income
protection for his voice
fantastic vision