

## Lea Littlewolfe / THREE POEMS

### cardiac ward

In forty-eight hours they did it:  
lassoed your outbursts, stilled your legs.  
With intravenous drip and blood drawing,  
scheduled feedings and blood pressure cuff  
sedated angiogram and nursely inquiry  
they've sapped your temper, flattened your paunch,  
turned you from my bravado.  
With glazed eyes you pick at hospital grub  
eighteen hundred calories daily  
washed out steam color, salt-free, sugarless, tasteless.  
Bed rest and blood thinner reduce you to  
placid smile and sexless energy  
asking permission to shower in tepid disinfectant  
calmly accepting local anaesthesia and ordered institution.  
But they're not perfect:  
Closed stairwells reek of urine and  
dustballs billow on the steps.  
Your doctor appears weekly, if at all.  
Fellow patient died tonight, his call buzzer unheeded.  
Beware, my pretty.  
Beware the practical nurse removing your nitroglycerine  
patch at eight o'clock sharp.  
Beware learning intern prescribing diuretic,  
orderly pushing empty gurney,  
technician seeking autopsy fix.  
Remember extreme heat in the real world  
cyclone wind and animal fat frying.

Antiseptic rooms dull your nose to blue refinery smog  
hushed steps still your ears to bad cowboy tunes  
luke-warm air lulls your fingertips to my dangerous skin  
filtered eater subverts the taste of cheap wine.  
Before you submit to quadruple bypass or  
chicken-wire angioplasty  
quicken your pulse to the memory of  
strangled breath and sharp chest pain.  
Think on the dream of un-knowing,  
the un-safeness of out here.

## middle class

I sit in waist deep tepid  
sexless stagnant water.  
Vegetating vorticella, volvox,  
stentor, spirogyra, gleopcapsa  
settle on my submerged decaying skin  
and absorb vitamins, minerals, energy  
from bored body.

I barely breathe or twitch  
properly vaccinated, supplemented, advised.

I need no driving enthusiasm for  
criminal, spiritual, social conviction.  
It would not matter if I were untethered  
in space with years supply of oxygen,  
pressure, drip feed and  
many stars for staring.

## hospital

the visitors limp a little more, scowl a bit more sincerely, slouch expertly. grey, burgundy, charcoal accent crutch, wheelchair, IV trolley. aristocrat doctor clutches styrofoam coffee. disdainful technician in Afro hairdo wears flapping white lab coat. over brown sterile floor tile bob housekeeping staff and O.R. workers, their blue hair covers telling their expertise. asthmatic puffs dramatically, the genetically diseased laughs delightedly, arthritic moves slowly, slyly peeking for witnesses you know people die here. the grieving face trembles. the finger pulls a tear. the greasy hair goes unbraided. in dry halting speech the stroke ex-executive bids his martyr wife, even as he glares at my impertinence. the black suited chaplain indulges in bohemian literature and syrupy cinnamon roll. artefact stethoscope hangs on nutritionist neck, cheap briefcase supports administrator elbow, khaki understatement announces RN.

the coffee shop merchandizes sugar, salt, caffeine, cholesterol, guarantees future traffic. so too our extravagant abdomens and the lumpy bellies of young ladies waiting to be induced. the negativity-creativity collective. from cancer clinic roll the treated, hair still intact, the puking yet to be.

we leave here re-committed, scurvy teeth tightened, fever morphined, vision corrected, scabs scraped until the next plague. secret sneaking from the ovens of language the truths of ancestry slip out

"she snuck west from Manitou Island"  
"he brought his birth-shame from Ottawa Valley"  
"I really was born Micmac"  
"here your father and I made our own reserve  
what did you think we were up to?"

thought whispers intermittently  
carefully physical signs are excused

"his big squashed out nose isn't very Caucasian"  
"your hands are awfully wide for a white"  
"you people all have prominent cheekbones"  
"I knew you were native the first time I laid eyes on you"  
"your aunt sure is brown"

a light haze of knowing tugs  
dream tells incongruous truth

"Indians always pluck geese ass-last"  
"how do you like the moose I shot  
this morning from my doorstep?"  
"here's the four-door our nephews  
burned last night—after they took off  
the tires and pushed it over on its side"  
"we can turn these clamshells into genuine Indian earrings"

appropriate artefacts suggest assimilation  
genuflection in a mainstream church fools 'em

"who would have thought a new 32-inch TV  
was in that broken down shack?"



imagine all their men earning sixty grand tax-free a year  
hauling logs and all they own are  
new trucks and Mexican blankets”

antagonism simmers under the differences  
acknowledgement grudgingly speaks

“you people get it all — new dentures every nine years  
glasses every other year, name brand drugs  
free ambulance rides”

“if they can hunt any time, then I can poach”

“what exactly does lactose intolerance mean anyway?”

poverty is relative  
ill luck has a cause

“this ten-year-old kid pulls out twenties and  
torches them with his lighter — Hobbema oil money”

“mineral rights paid off your brothers’ and sisters’  
student loans and got their first cars”

“her three houses burned and one blown away in  
tornado—that’s bad medicine”

straggly threads barely join us to the rez  
as we flee several-hundred-thousand volt pylons  
for a trillion stars over black spruce muskeg lands