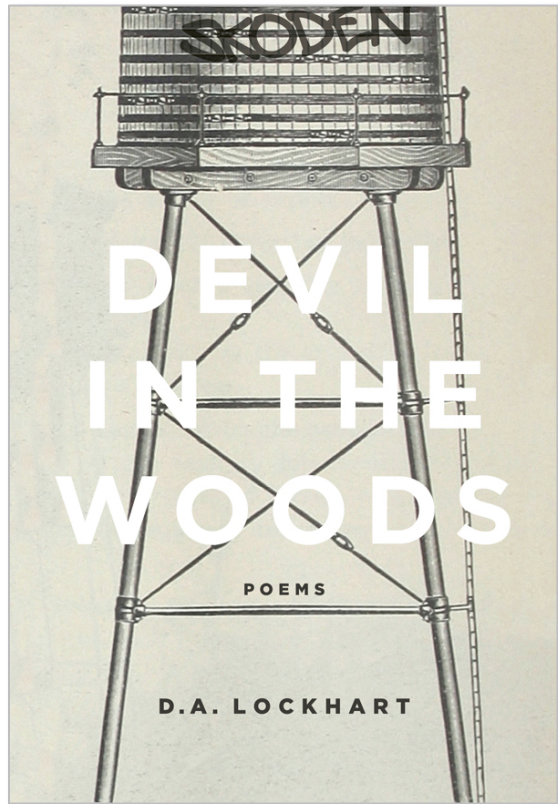


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Devil in the Woods D.A. LOCKHART



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Letter to lang from Henry Milloy's Dock, Lake Chemong, ON

Dear k.d.: Lawrence and I were talking during the descent of colour from across Buckhorn Lake when your name came up like steam from the water before freeze-up. Not that we have listened to *Shadowland* since those '90s pow pow cap-offs in Russell Snake's conversion van, making intertribal love to the Rama White Eye sisters and imagining during every slow track moment that broad prairie skies awaited us come daybreak. We would greet them as if breaking camp with Riel himself, well prepped for battles that surely would shake us all loose generations from now. But memory is that which is driven by the parts of lives we want to remember. Trauma is what we save for bits between; heroes, those who recall all of it with a steadiness akin to that sort of ice crust that first appears in autumn. Both of us get by with a voice that could taunt the worst loneliness from the woods. But you, k.d., let me say that you croon back every memory an old-time storyteller would want to throw down at a harvest social. We all find the voice of creation where we need to. Let's us

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remember why surface ice should never
get too deep down, and how in time
everything that must stir back to life
despite the gatherings of cold and dark
in hours that whittle down your last cigarette,

J.W.

Roll Up the Rim Prayer

Oh Lord, that our conveyor belt
of red tail lights might burn away
the half-light of 7:00 a.m. February
mornings, receive our prayer.

Tapped and rattled out with bit-part
change of soiled cup holders, hopeful
in the gathering of many, will come
but one transaction to save us

from the despair of long winter. Lord,
deliver to us daydreams of stainless
steel barbeques, warmth of sixty-inch
flat screens, and middle-class composure

of cobalt sedans. Because free double-doubles,
bonus donuts, and potato wedge cups
tease us like bureaucratic promises
of medical coverage and housing

not given to black mold and torn-
off siding. Oh Lord, let us sing anew,
in this pre-dawn light, a chorus
that shall not repeat PLEASE PLAY AGAIN.

*Letter to Waxman from Earl Sussex Motor Lodge on the
Highway 121 near Minden, ON*

Dear Al: I'm sure that this letter finds you as a surprise; simple truth is that it had to come to you in the same way that spring can settle in way too close to winter's prime. Fact of the matter is that the lady and I got held up in a swank little rental on the Gull River. You could call it a regular retreat so long as you call it in the same vein as squirrels building nests together with the refuse of existing trees and lazy consumers. Had to tell you that we came across the Larry King masterpiece of yours from the 1970s, all puffed out in that glorious red jacket with a grin that just dared the world to try and wrestle scraps away from you and yours. Even the lady couldn't get over how Kensington could look like Curve Lake during pow wows or those peak-of-sweet-summer days. We liked to believe that the science of fine art stems from being able to see one's self reflected in the work of others. Truth be known that work north of the headwaters struggles to get compensation for time put in the way the Leafs have since old George Armstrong notched up that clincher in '67. Sure there were movies for George and a new barn for the Leafs, but guys like you and I got stronger pasts to hold to than futures to reach for. Because it's clear that you know that too, there will always be a spot at the euchre table with us if you make it this far north because empty wallets and Casa Loma look the same on and off treaty lands. The only thing that makes or breaks a man is a total confidence to embrace

all of the things he can't have, and the perfect placement of a well-crafted joke. If anything, we should see ourselves the way we've always wanted to,

J.W.

Spring Runoff Prayer

I pray that words
come like water
in first runoff,
ice turned free
and sing-songed
over moss and rock
as drumlin changes
from glacial footprint
to shadow between
neighbours.

Pray that each letter,
as it shall follow,
finds those unmolested
by sentiments left
at the margins, snow
piles left in cold
dark place beneath pines.

Pray that this highland
meltwater shall slip into
and through headwaters
and quench the thirst
of those who recall
so little of the places
and words made silent
by the distance and guilt
that make every winter

a song we shall not
sing.

Letter to Wojack from Four Kilometers outside the Ross Memorial Hospital, Lindsay, ON

Dear Steve: Strangest thing with the one most sacred medicine is you can't use it within four kilometers of the places you go to get better. You above all others don't need to be told about the need to smoke in critical situations like crime scenes and hospital waiting rooms, the sort of places where frayed nerves and not-so-subtle post-colonial racism can drive a man to profound ends of darkness and brooding. We were waiting for Martin's test results to come and suspected a white bread overdose, well under our treaty rights proper, watching you strut around on classic TVO on the waiting room cathode ray tube, when we get onto one of these moments. Justice, as you know, is two parts nostalgia for the thing you lost, one part playing out the commercial in your head. Medicine free, we took to hollering at the third commercial too many, one full of Budweiser and pretty-boy bank tellers. Martin ignited a quick-spark light up of Treaty Day smokes in hopes of smudging the evils from the room. We took on the sturdy look of freeze-up on Buckhorn Lake when the orderlies arrived to tell us poverty and despiritualization weren't treatable conditions. Maybe it was that moment. Maybe it was the replay of the colourless scene from your first episode that made it all too real. The easiest way to pick up the pieces of a failed attempt at modern medicine is through an autopsy. We figured we'd send a chair at the TV, merge them like a great hybrid of the Northlands.

We fled before the tests came back. Question is how we can explain this away to a three-letter rule squad. By all means, figure this out and we can get a couple of cartons of failed-genocide discounted smokes your way. Chances are the tax boys wouldn't pay much attention to it. They come from the old line that nothing is more natural than a coroner out working on Indian problems. Always remember, we knew which side you stood on. Jack pine stoic stare and the burnt offerings you threw were always just enough to remind us that when push came to shove, justice was six long hauls of a Rothman finished with defiant stare down and away. Miigwetch in advance,

J.W.