



## Page Half-Full Poems:

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Watermark Me Free (Part I)

a woman's life, roles, apart  
*by Pearl Pirie*

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## Loeb

Like a chickadee in sweat pants  
she darts and grabs and returns  
to the center of the aisle and her cart, her branch.

She scans and checks  
and her small eyes stretch out to her goal.  
She dashes ahead with her plan. She reaches for cookies.

Another presence nearby. She retreats thwarted,  
heart pounding, FAT as a loud clap in her ears,  
or as a sprinting cat towards her feeder.

One threat gone, she scans indecisive,  
makes a flutter towards it, returns, goes,  
snatches, then

with a fast slow weave,  
flies out of my sight

## Voices in your Pocket

I'll be Joe Blow, driftin' from job to job;  
I'll work nights, reading of the mob.  
I'm the Rev. Mother.

I'm a tireless vet.

I'm suddenly no life, no death, if two tiny specks...  
I'd show you love you can't believe...  
Would you put my grandchildren on my knees?

I'm a dimpled girl with big brown eyes  
I'm your friend; no one understands me like you do.  
I'm myself, apart from you, from your bellows.

There's two flames. Unite one wick.  
I'll sight the blind, heal the stricken  
I'm holy fire; Let me be, feed me;  
I'll holy cauterize, pan-Asians freed

I'm your fetus, from your penis, from your fire  
I'm your image, filling slimness, 'til I come.  
I'm the first one of five -- I'm a farmer working to survive.  
I'm a doctor -- C.E.O. -- civil righter -- taxman owed --  
I'm the homeless junkie, postage owing, at the docks --

## Watermark Me Free I: a woman's life, roles, apart

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### Maple taffy snow

floats to her kisses from God  
In a bare limbed black  
and white world.

### Party-Party

With a room-wide smile under her hijab,  
the stubby thumb of a woman sashays,  
tray balanced on her head,  
winking at three men, all four  
etched and smelling of gin and cigars.

### Taking her Lumps

He ain't got no balls - HE'S  
 got some balls - what about  
 a female metaphor for strength? "She  
 has SOME breasts..."  
 is too smooth, too soft, too gelatinous, like  
 a kirsch splashed chocolate pudding,  
 the bite of something extra, for a kick

away from flat incomplete plain of age 8  
 to falsies for the pubescent-awkward-senior

Strength lies elsewhere. Ah but weakness...

### Night is Near Delivery

Crimson spills across the sky  
 A soft-crowned sun is in sight.

Sunlight spies strings of pearl drops  
 On new shoots,  
 Buys them all in a wink.

Pairs of ragged-winged black birds  
 Shape figure eights  
 In a synchronized ballet.  
 Small birds chase a blackbird --  
 Galaxy-orbiting the intruder.

Three black swans  
 Circle the shadows of the bay  
 Sundial steady.  
 Two lovebirds roost  
 On the grassy bank  
 Dovetail close.

The sun dips to kiss the river  
 And leaves it with an orange-pekoie blush  
 Breathly in the falling darkness.

Look to the right.  
 The loose curve of the Heron --  
 A brushstroke on the blue Gatineaus.

## Hey, Sugar

Cars and transports rushing through yella'.  
Other folks hurrying under their black umbrellas.  
Old roll rolling across the street cold  
as fast as his feet can go, under heavy load.

But I'm walking with power, sunny day stride.  
I ain't sugar; I won't melt and sure won't hide.

Let rain stain my silk, birthmark me free.  
Don't offer me rides, or think me out of my tree.  
The sky may be leaden and the forecast low  
But what's that to me when I know what I know?

I ain't sugar; I won't melt and I won't hide.  
That's me walking with power, a sunny day stride.

I'm healthy, I'm strong, I've got a mind to boot  
I'm adept at putting the shoe on the other foot,  
Seeing the world from flip side round. Now,  
I've time off and I'll see the whole executive town.

I'm walking with power, a sunny day stride.  
I ain't sugar and I don't eat no humble pie.

## Lima a Montreal à Vancouver

Tengo hambre. Tengo sed.  
I have hunger, thirst, and age;  
They don't "have me" at this stage.  
They don't hold me back but

Neither can my family.  
Once a week we phone  
But I am 166 hours alone.  
Je suis fatigué. Estoy cansada.  
I am tired my mama.

Comprende usted?  
Peuvent-vous me comprendre;  
I will prevail. Like Wind.  
Like Work. Like Hope:  
Eso es. That is it.

## Law

It is a simple long band of cotton.  
It can be held loosely or tightly, used to  
Wipe hands of blood, be an emblem  
Ornately hung or wrung uselessly.  
Tallow dipped as a wick to light the way  
For burning souls to enact order  
Or revenge at the tattered end. It can  
bend to the work of dish rags of caste.  
A tool that does not advance, nor retreat.  
Piled onto the hands of a few, it takes  
The shape, heat, desire of those hands.  
It can be ripped into strands or  
It can bind the poor's hands and feet,  
Or tourniquet the injured, and plaster  
A cast for the broken. It can be thrown  
As a braided rope to let others escape.  
Renewed each day with each swaddled gift  
Raised from the womb, twin of Hope.

## A Mother

A mother is always watching her waste  
coupon clipping, patching, repatching,  
darning and knitting, stitching a quilt  
of potential savings of bread crusts  
burnt toast, dry brush edge of roast,  
sucking bone left with too many  
shreds of meat still clinging to it...  
The slop bucket is weighed against her.  
hands on hips, on the opposite pan  
she wants to come up light, lighter,  
right up to the beam, wanting the  
Scottish virtue end of her teeter totter  
to bang down, for her to be thrown clear  
of her scales. It's the only way off.

## 11-Year-Old

In newly reclusive bedroom, my little girl parades  
in the 'sissy itchy' baby dolls her aunt gave her.  
She plays with lipstick that she bought and hid  
with her cigarettes and pictures of heartthrobs.  
Last week, I nearly walked in on her and her mirror,  
its collar showing hastily rubbed away kisses.

Nightly, she fusses her hair into braids  
(tighter than she would have ever let me do)  
And every morning the tightly bound is unwound,  
cascading spring waterfalls over shoulders.  
As unsteadily as a spring river she gushes forward  
then freezes below the blown kisses of snow  
against the frozen coil spring bed beneath.

This morning brought a sudden cold snap  
during the morning traffic reports and radio news.  
Any attempt at discussing, or hearing,  
each others views was caught in a white out  
of 'TIS nooo--ot!'  
'Is too' and 'Not', between her and her brother.

At that moment she storms off to change her braids,  
declaring them to be giving her a headache,  
tossing one last 'It IS you know' over her shoulder  
with her ropes of hair.

Upon her return, this morning's sun kneels,  
fawns helpless in some invisible snarl in her honeyed hair,  
snared among the waves that I hope the boys can't feel,

Not yet. Past her spring-melt pond of syrup,  
beneath her farmhand reach for the hottest waffle,  
her nipples lift too small pajamas  
to her midriff, Bared jealousy sharpens  
my command to "put on a robe", [in front of my  
husband] "at breakfast." She laughs "why"  
and looks at me as if I'm the one who's changing.

I repeat and she spins on her heel  
and storms a little snowy twister to get on  
more clothes. She does not understand: the self  
she think she knows is held fast in a woman now.  
Yet neither did I at her time of life; my breasts and hips  
sprouting around a doll and popgun, all  
of us hostages of change.

We'll get her new winter pajamas tomorrow.