

Poems in WordPerfect: B

by

Helena Jungová Lawson ¹

¹ Helen Lawson
80 Wethersfield Avenue
Hartford, CT 06114, USA
helenajlawson@aol.com

Poetry Collection
30 pages

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Broken

In the funeral chapel
we sat,
rattling memories
in the box of time.

At the small organ,
Ales played
the Czech national anthem:
Where is my home,
while a soul prepared
for its flight.

I sobbed
during the whole service,
shoulders heaving
under a raccoon collar,
the leather jacket purchased
from earnings as a substitute.

He lay shortened, emptied,
a stuffed puppet
in the open coffin.

My daughter
beside me
in a leg cast.

By, by, men

For ten years or more
she hardly gives them a thought.
On the street, they represent another race.
Inside flits an occasional son-in-law or grandson.

A fierce Amazon, she used to roam a prairie.
Contrary, she hoped to become a lesbian -
to ease the pain – from men.
Mercifully, she aged into a eunuch.

Babi's song

On the day the forsythia blossomed,
your mother dressed you
in a yellow T-shirt,
draped over with sunflower rompers,
a size too big, and left you in my care,
at 7:30. After your second feed,
you sleep restlessly, nose in the air,
little chin trembling, round face crumpled,
complaining in a dream
about street noises and the freak heat
which may hit ninety degrees.

Little girl with bare feet
and trouser legs rolled up,
you look like Tom Sawyer,
waiting for his friend Huck,
like a midday boy asleep
under a corn stack.

Soon, I'll have to leave you,
as I did your brother,
at four months.
No more leisurely chats
between us, your cooing,
my massaging
of your feet.
How I'll miss you!

Will you remember me,
as a grown up,
dream of me as a soft-lapped
grandmotherly presence,
and the blissful long days
we were given
during your first months?

Bad news

The telephone pressed heavy
against my ear,
for I knew
his words would hurt -
sharp stones with
blood-stained edges.

Yet all he did was pry open
the lid of a pit,
in response to my questions.

I aired the news outdoors,
near a tree displaying itself thin
like an auburn beauty fighting against aging,
tinted hair fluffed up by the sun,

my own heart dropping
into its well,
as I thought of him,
filled and encircled by doom,
the merciless clock ticking.

Barefoot

Surfacing is the only path
she takes from all waters,
however shallow or deep,
into the air buzzing with
cicadas in the midst of winter.
As she moves forward, snow melts,
crocuses sprouting wherever
her feet touch the frozen earth.
She knows the language of the deer
and easily learns the speech
of other animals who normally
shun the presence of humans.
Barefoot on stony ground,
among the hungry she scatters
pomegranates whose seeds grow
in places where her tears have fallen.

Barred windows

I'm sorry I did not fly back to
you a year later - you'd asked me
on your ninetieth birthday
to visit you soon again, so that we'd chat.
Looking back, I see you as a room
floating in the air, locked door,
windows barred. I peer in
through the slats, trying to catch you in my arms,
prying the door lock open with twigs,
bird beaks. My eyes have turned
into laser beams, drilling holes
in the cement you used for your barricade.
I want to split it open, making you emerge
like a chicken from an egg.
It's Father's Day. How long haven't
I had a father? But I shall not allow
the litany of your sins to drown
the stream of love dashing toward
you in me! Instead, I'll allow you
to fit into history, the one in which
you are a four-year-old,
whose father has just died,
then a young man courting heroism,
mourning his father for many decades,
as I have done.

Based on Toni Morrison's book

The movie blazes a fire
lit by angels,
prejudice in handfuls
stuffed in their mouths,
in a story of a mother
from whom no cry,
from whose eyes no tears
burst, her hunger flowing
into a mythical river,
silenced by the earth.
Beloved, a trumpet of slavery -
existent since man first
walked on the earth.

Slavery - officially abolished
some hundred and sixty years ago,
practiced in Ku Klux Klan rallies,
Neo-Nazi thinking,
and teems in US garment district
sweatshops that are splitting their seams
with illegal immigrants, who suffer
as Beloved did, torture, hunger, fear.
After the Federal Government's
occasional raid and a token closing
of one sweatshop, the victims are deported
to their native land's hell,
or killed by their masters,
the gangsters. Pressed into coffin
like cubicles at night,
gasping for breath,
especially during the summer,
many of these slaves turn mad
or commit suicide.
Will the Time Magazine's
tribute to them make a difference?
Abolitionists of the nineties, unite!

Be

Imagine yourself a tree, bush, daisy,
a painting, poem, a chair. Soon
your dust will blend with air,
when kind hands pour it over a ground
or lake. Be rooted, glad for a least
movement, breeze round your body.
Rebirth may or may not come,
but even if it happens, you will not
be yourself in this moment.

Because

On a dreary day when humidity's high
we must go on.
when the storms come, ushered in
by interminable rain,
when the brain's a spat out cherry stone,
The night hours a procession of mourners,
we must go on
because around the corner
a little child laughs, playing with a puppy,
and the dead are lead into the light.

Though we don't see the angels
and the spirits supporting us,
and though Jesus often appears
only a man meaning well,
though friends turn from us
when we need them most,
we must go on.

Becoming in time's fetters

The coffee table divides them
as they sit, staring at each other,
the old and the younger woman,
almost ninety and almost seventy.

It' been a long time, remarks
the first, thinking of their get-togethers.
Three months, replies the second,
remembering the long sickness,

The hospital and nursing home visits.
They have been good friends
for over three years. The precise time
elapsed matters in Time's fetters.

From the older the younger one learns
to give thanks for every minute pleasure,
or the absence of it in face of adversity.
She is appalled how much frailer

her friend has become in a few days.
The first regrets to see the second fatter,
though each is supposed to be
becoming the treasure she's been seeking.

Before a race

The poem which does not
wish to be written,
which likes to play games,
looms like a cloud
near my ear.

The poem sings a ditty about tasks
sprouting around like mushrooms,
wailing like toddlers to be picked up,

then grasps my hand
and leads me to the bleachers
from which I watch myself
running breathless
in a losing race.

Before it rains

Before I raise the shades,
I feel the drip-drip
along sluggish veins,
in muscles that quarrel
like hostile neighbors.

The spirit does not soar on such days,
I mean the great, great, great, great
grandchild of the one Noble Spirit
that descended on Jesus at baptism
and later made his disciples speak in tongues.

Yet I welcome wet days for the story
they tell in their plain language:
the course run by us mortals -
the moody sea, nature deafened
by the TV, automobiles, babies' first cry,

the thousands contracting the HIV virus
each minute in Africa, and the smile
on the face of Christ I like to imagine.

Beginning

Start where a tooth aches.
Start where the mind hinges,
Where nothing is permitted,
Where joy's pompons rock
Alien cheerleaders.

Start.

Praise - green TB in a resurrected spittoon.
Success - a leer on uncomprehending face.
Start on no path with no words,
Without breath or vision!

Behind and within

Tired brain – today
you can't grasp the meaning
of a poet's gloomy words.
They seem to bring just sound,
carefully arranged syllables,
nothing new.

Yet you strain
for a good novel
to distract yourself
after the day's chores,
performed without humor,
lacking zest - to postpone

death that waits
in each corner
of a room or street
sneering behind
the lines
of most poets.

Behold the man

On this particular day,
he wished to float,
a small feather
gently entwining his hair
like the comb of a rooster,
he wished to remain circulating,
a minuscule electrical impulse,
barely a ripple
on the lagoon of his brain.

He longed to shuffle,
loose like an old man
through hushed rooms,
sniffing at objects,
scuttling between them
like a fly searching
for succulent food.

On this good Friday,
he would shower himself
free of dust and desire,
and hoist himself high
on his childhood tree,
dim and crumpled,
yet a star.

Bella

She came at a time least expected,
leaving a message that she was ready to help
when negative influences threaten
the peace I try so hard to cultivate.

She also said I'd cleanse my chacras.
Do you know the name, requested the intermediary.
Yes, I replied without hesitation, for immediately
Bella emerged before me, though I'd only met her once.

The woman at whose birthday party we had met
was my then young daughter. Bella was her friend,
older than me. Soon after, Bella chose to quit
her suffering of terminal cancer.

She's all golden here, the medium said, pointing
to her bosom - and she was not a slim lady
by any means. I do remember her hips shaking.
but how can I cleanse my chacras,

I requested when the service ended.
Go into meditation and ask her to help.
She'll do it for you. So I really have a friend
on the other side ready to assist me.

Bent over a novel

Along the cobblestone streets
you push me, a two, then three-year old,
in a stroller, to the nearby cemetery,
where the old chestnut trees open
their umbrellas for you, who don't like the sun.
You sit on a bench, bent over a novel.
I play on the broken, moss-covered grave stones.
Flat beetles scuttle around. I watch them, hushed.

Like the words you read, your thoughts
are foreign to me. I am taken up by movement,
substance, color, shape, yet these silent
afternoons make me stay near you.

After an hour or two, you push me
across the street to a patisserie,
where you order Turkish coffee
with a pastry. I feast on a cream-
filled, chocolate covered snowman -
sixty-eight/nine years ago.

Can a poem of thanks reach heaven?
It's Mother's Day. You've stayed
dead too long, over forty years.

Better life

La maestra stands before the blackboard,
chalk in hand. She still has
another hour and fifty minutes to spend
teaching the gringos Beginning Spanish.
They come and go - staying in the dark
classroom Monday through Friday
on the average for two weeks;
they overlap. She was born in San Miguel
but does not wish to die there. For nine
months, she has been a widow - with a son
and fifteen-year-old daughter, who is
pregnant. Once her first grandchild is born,
though she is terrified of snakes, she'll try
to cross the border to the Estados,
with her brother, if she saves enough money
to pay the guide. It will be her brother's
second attempt to secure for the family a better life.

Juanita no longer thinks about the gringos
as she washes the floors after their departure.
Her mind circles Marta, her mistress – friend,
child. Marta could have been her daughter,
had Juanita known a man. They have so much
in common, kindness, sunny temperament.
I'm just her employee, a servant, Juanita
reminds herself, gazing in adoration
above the fireplace at the painting
of the smiling Marta next to her rich
Arab husband. Within a week, they'll
fill the grand, clean, polished mansion
where Juanita lives in an attic room.
During the year, they travel worldwide,
with homes in London and North Africa.
The children are now eight and ten.
The husband makes no effort to learn
Spanish, though he says Buenos días.
?Como esta? each morning. This summer,
the children will stay two weeks,
then be dropped off at a music camp
in the Estados. The husband will
fly somewhere on business, but Marta
will return to Mexico, to spend
a full month alone in San Miguel,
resting. She'll swim under the stars

and drink bitter margueritas in the warm
Jacuzzi, with Juanita hovering near
with a beach towel, golden teeth
glowing in the moonlight.

Filomena lets random thoughts
keep her company, as she cooks
for the gringos, cleans their
dishes, soaking them in bleach
or loading the dishwasher on
the rare occasion when it works.
Over the years, she's picked up
a few words of English and four
of French, with which she impresses
the gringos, when she feels well.
Working two jobs a day, she observes
rather than interacts with the folk
who briefly rent each house -
she stands quietly at the sink
or stove, a philosopher. At nightfall,
she climbs a steep path to her home,
the hovel, with a goat and five grubby
grandchildren, who crave sweets.

When Pedro wakes up to the cock's late
crowing, his seven siblings are gone
to their jobs. His father lies in hospital,
coughing up black phlegm. Pedro looks
forward to his long day of weeding,
mowing, and tending Marta's two outdoor
pools where the gringos like to splash.
He only wishes he was paid much more.
He'd then marry, live in the Estados,
having no doubt he'd make the crossing.
Later, he'd go to Hollywood. With his
good looks, he'd pass for Antonio
Barreira's cousin. He'll shed his shyness
and become Mexico's new idol.

At home in the States, the gringos
are glad not to brush teeth with
bottled water. They've unpacked
the crates with Dolores Hidalgo
ceramics, did their own laundry,
not opened a single textbook of
Spanish, though they still exchange
Buenos días in the morning. The world

of the maestra, Juanita, Filomena
and Pedro is receding in East Coast's
muggy air like a sweet dream.
They talk about possibly returning
to San Miguel next summer,
or giving another place a try,
such as Cuernavaca. Without
the servants, the grand house,
two Jacuzzis and the pool, they
don't feel privileged as they
read the paper or listen to
the news - in an economy where
lay-offs are rampant and
increasing. Any day, they may
find themselves jobless and
consider emigrating to Mexico.

Between the walls

Something holds me
back from the world
I was hurt
Don't want to be again
Something holds me

Something holds me
between the walls
The outside peers in
through the lace curtains
It calls

I cover my ears
Shut the eyes tight
The light is insistent
I'm too old
Something holds me

Bill Clinton

No longer debonair,
he looks into the camera
to confess that, yes,
he's lied to the nation,
which watches and listens, stunned.
Next morning, he's to leave
for a planned vacation.
As one of many, who don't
wish to hear any more news
until the crisis settles,
in my own sinful heart
I ask,
who am I to cast a stone
on this smart lawyer
who made it to the top -
whom I elected?
A stone has been thrown
into already murky water.
The ripples are spreading, far.
What his wife and daughter
are going through, I can hardly
imagine, betrayal,
a loss of face on a global level.
There's an irony to this tragedy,
though this is no Denmark
with noble prince Hamlet:
The President - who lies
to us so blatantly -
tricked by denial
to rationalize, minimize.
Clouds of change
are spreading over the USA
and all nations
following in its footsteps.
Let us hope that,
as a result,
the pendulum will not swing
further to the Right,
festering racism, neo-nazism,
and the bashing of homosexuals.

Birds

If it weren't for the weight of the body,
We could lift up like birds, fly here and there,
Not burdened by the earth's pull.
We could levitate without being spirit-filled,
Fly north or south, visit foreign lands.

Even then, we'd be vulnerable to man,
His guns, traps, and to gales, pestilence.
But we could fly - not just in the dreams.

We would perch on a thin branch, nap on one leg,
Splash in the birdbath. In winter,
We'd know that we must somehow survive.
We'd look at earth-bound humans and envy them.

Bird-watching

Amazing: what once hung
in the air too minute
to finger, invisible,
now sleeps corporal
upstairs on a firm mattress
as my twenty-eight-year-old!

They stretch grand,
her long limbs,
muscular back, belly
and shoulders, feet, hair -
Californian, yoga-bred,
yet with seeds of me
germinating through them.

This once home spreads
as a mere stop-over,
place to swap planes, refuel,
a runway.

Too soon again
she'll swoop down,
a mirage
and flutter away.

Blue

Scrambling up
the ladder of the heart
to reach You,
I carry, adhering to my hands
and in the mouth, gravel,
the sharp taste of the earth
that binds me - except
in moments when the soul
does take flight, gasping
for its native substance.

Gratitude runs in the melody
of the clouds on which I rest
my elbow. Gravity no longer
imprisons me as I gaze
into Your blue face.

Blue impossibility

Foreign sound Pablo Neruda's
love poems, not a single one pounding
the drum, not whipping up
the flame. The flute and the violin
also wax silent on the stage
where the cymbals of passion
once thundered. Thin runs the blood
diluted by age and treason.

Lured out of darkness,
like white meteors drop down
the ones long dead,
though occasionally
a new lover descends
as manna in dreams
to make his bows,
to disappear
on waking.

Bounced in the universe

I listen to the song of stars,
wishing to unravel
a quasar, or a meteor,
its rounds
in regions other than
the barren fields
where
mankind hangs
suspended
above
the dark earth.

I listen... to hear
a hollow clock
distantly clicking.
I'm pulled further
from the orbit
where time planted me
under the lanterns
of light years,
with familiar stars
rushing away.

What remains is the one eye
empty space staring -
a curtain before
a black hole's teeth.

Braving the hurdles

A neighbor called, offering soup or custard,
solicitous about my feverish cold,
and then she drew back the curtain between us,
revealing the death of husbands,
hers and her daughter's, resilience, luck.

I saw her always overcoming hurdles
pinned to her path by the invisible hand -
a frail woman of few words, but how she stands
in her late eighties, and how full of zest
her grand quiet days, spent volunteering.

Brazil's street children

I was stunned by the headline,
the picture: eight to twelve-year-old boys
with blank faces, huddling around
a make-shift cross wound with white daisies,
a thin thirteen-year-old, some seven months pregnant,
in tight jeans, frowning as if puzzled past the camera,
a newsman's arm steadying the cross,
and a grim bearded fellow
in front of the sun-drenched church
on whose steps the six boys
were massacred while sleeping.
The seventh boy was mowed down
before the Fine Arts Museum.
The eighth is in hospital,
badly grazed by bullets. -
Then I stare at the second photo:
skinny limbs jumbled as if boneless,
the rags covering the body steeped in blood
which flows from the head down the sidewalk.
His little friend's face's old with anger,
while two other young squatters are praying.
This time, Rio's police chief
condemned the brutality of the act.
Two token officers were arrested.
This time, Brazil's president
issued a protest and assigned
an investigation of
the banking district massacre.

But according to the newspaper report,
this half year 320 have been killed
in Rio alone; during the previous three years
4,600 street children
were massacred in Brazil!
All that time, I was buying dresses
which now hang unused in the closet!
While I sit writing this poem
in my house
surrounded by glistening green bushes,
millions of homeless children
in Brazil are selling their bodies,
sniffing glue, pilfering,
plaguing the shopkeepers who in turn
are hiring death squads to murder them.

But for God's mercy

Finally having slept
seven hours, I do not guess
with which irony
today will prick me,
and concentrate
on a robin
searching
for his breakfast.
As I continue to squint,
my myopic eyes notice
a blue-tit,
also digging for worms
in the April grass.

Last night, I read
about the Heaven's
Gate cult, the thirty-eight
disciples, and their leader,
who'd been preparing themselves
for a pick up by aliens,
for that purpose
committing suicide.
Their corpses were found rotting
on a South California ranch.

I could have easily
become an acolyte,
because daily I wait
for God's mercy
to uplift me
like a spaceship.