

Poems in WordPerfect: C - D

by

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Poetry Collection
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Crossing the path of a ghost

Thinner, his face
as of steel, eyes
cast down, mouth
fixed
in a sour grin.

Did he see her
in the supermarket parking lot
as he hurled himself
with determined steps
in the familiar shoes,
gray pants and jacket,
in right hand lugging
bags of groceries.

His name escaped her lips
in an audible sigh
of surprised relief -
that he was alive,
though shabby with age
and, as before, forbidding.

Crossroads

Buffeted by Karmic winds,
I feel like Mrs. Moore
in E.M. Forster's Passage
to India - overwhelmed,
turning from the muddled,
prejudiced and often
well-intentioned men
deciding to sail back
home, but alas, instead
of a loved daughter
and safe England
suffering a massive
heart attack
on the deck
under the stars -
then buried
in the ocean,
devoured by sharks.

How merciful that we
can't glimpse the time
when death's
snout will devour us!

Card game

Out of the four cowboys,
two are raising hell.
It's Sunday, early morning,
my last summer day
in the prairie.

How easily do plans go awry!
Blunt fingers beckon to me:
Wake up! Deal! But
I only gamble to save face.

Care-giver's help

It's hard to resist assisting an old friend,
who harbors in the chest, inflated, a pain balloon,
whose brain is mauled by depression, wrecked
by incessant aches and pains in her frail loom.

When prayer does not help, we resort to fancy -
the magical thinking practiced as a child -
belief in wise wizards and good fairies.

As old age grows its seed,
in day-dreams we may meet
the respite imagination
brings to the mind.

Caresses

I'd like a mirror
to sing my body
a serenade,
the opaque glass
and my eyes
chastened
of expectations.

Stripped
of outmoded posters
of such as
Carole Lombard,
the rusty scale
of requirements
dug out
of my mind,
I'd dance for a fee,
with my body
embraced tight -
caressed by it,
an appreciative
lover.

Cast away

Give me a poem, I pray to a genie in the brain,
or to the spirit whose amanuensis I've become -
give me IMAGES, so that I know I'm
not dead or dying, really dying, yet.

The mind hops on frog legs to the movie Cast Away,
seen last night with a daughter,
a frightening experience, like a hurricane,
leaving shards of terror in the brain.

Scenes of the plane exploding, its wreck plunging
into the Pacific, the waves entombing
the actor. My daughter and I side-by-side,
holding breath, not hands, not touching.

On the highway home she says she carries a smoke mask
in her knapsack during air travel,
her repeated ocean crossings.
I used to think she was oblivious to the danger.

Casual neighbors

At the door of the supermarket where I used to shop,
a neighbor with a box, collecting for the hungry.
I greet her warmly. She is after my dollar.
Of course, she remembers me, she says,
blurting out, What is your name?
Then, she repeats after me the banal,
nice to see you.

For twenty-seven years I lived next door.
It's just three-and-a-half years since
I sold my house, to move downtown -
too soon to be so completely gone
from her memory. It hurts,
one's grotesque transience.

Not yet knowing she has Alzheimer's,
I think: Of course, we were merely polite,
casually friendly neighbors,
with an invisible fence
firmly planted between
her lot and mine. Neither
came to say good-by before I left.
I reap what I helped to sow.

Celebrating Karuna Willow

For years I wanted to live near you,
my daughter, son, son-in-law, aunt,
friend-of-the heart, turned pen-pal,
begging obscure Californian colleges
to employ me - to no avail.

But now, a baby is growing there,
a little willow, who has so far not known
much weeping, granddaughter who,
like the trees that have put on green skirts,
standing on their hands,
has mastered the scale of joyous shouts -
in less than five months!

Change of heart

It's time to give up the joyless
ride on a cart loaded
with rotting pumpkins,
and the crawling on graveled
roads, and the stains
of blood on hands
hoarding poisonous berries!

It's time for the child
to grow up or to be slapped,
scrubbed and fed, embraced
by an aunt or cousin,
not left to run around wild-eyed,
without panties, braids swirling with lice!

Chaotic order

Dare each day, polish your silver bullet,
tiny steps giant in the morning air.
Grasp grandfather's scythe. Slay sprouting fears.

Between the past and future locate a ledge.
Plant feet on it. Before the empty seats
and dark stage, pirouette - for the fun of it.

It's all a game, as most people know.
Even grade school youngsters comprehend the rules,
while they impatiently turn the page.

On a dying planet, sail your universe,
while million other universes squirt
sperms into space teeming with aliens.

Play, pray, submit, hush. Know your place.

Child who loves Huckle

For Ian Jones

You are the sun that for us rises
full of smiles, chuckles. Before it sets,
you give us moments of surprises
like a fair's whirling carrousel.

We watch you tumble, run, and stir
us, staid heaps, like autumn leaves.
Two months before you turn age two
you chase, catch, reason,

playing peek-a-boo with strangers
whom you greet like a Roman
with a raised arm and a "Hi!",

listing new words daily in your lexicon,
singing with Richard Scarry's cat
Huckle, your older friend.

Chink in a curtain

How could I ever, ever think
that I have seen it all -
when each hour news of events bring
what would amaze a hall

full of the people I have been -
the verses read each day
by poets whose minds couldn't dream
the poets that in me lay.

Truly to view the cup half full
remains the sanest reason when
prayers' and hard work's scaffolding
like innocence ends in treason.

Choices

After studying dreams for eight years,
from books and in workshops,
she assisted us, a group of earnest women,
to decipher the bizarre messages
the unconscious had sent us.

Aahs and oohs of surprise
filled the room, claps of appreciation,
as we unlocked the doors behind which,
veiled, dream gifts floated
like captured butterflies.

Next time I see an angel
wedged in a gate of awakening,
I may, after what I have learned,
welcome it as my higher self,
or else I might,

marvel at its separateness
from my confused brain.

Closest

Childless, you shuttle between the continents,
comforting the sick, installing courage
in weary caretakers, teaching the innocent,
fighting the plague.

Soon, you'll be blown far away again
by the winds of fate.
You know well what it means
to be powerless
over the closest,
and you know hate
spitting at the victims.

I hold you high
as an offering.
My, Do with her as you please,
hopes to settle the matter,
the wild cry, the tears.

Closest to love

"If only we'd let ourselves be dominated
as things do by some immense storm,
we'd become strong too, and not need names,"
says Rainer Maria Rilke. There was a time
when I could have read him in German.
Instead, I was swept away by motherhood,
five children, the first of four
girls born dead. But how I relished
their domination, the succession
of tiny demanding tongues,
coos, succulent skins!

"When we win, it's with small things,
and the triumph itself makes us small."
How true. My minuscule victories
have shrunk into blobs
in memory's field.

"What is extraordinary and eternal
does not want to be bent by us,"
writes Rilke. Yet I spent decades
bucking against the horns of fate!

"Man grows by being defeated,"
says the Rilke. The irony is:
I flourish -
reading him.

Colt Park

Among vast stretches of wet grass
and flocks of scavenging gulls
feeding on it, a man is pushing
a supermarket cart with one hand,
as he stumbles on a cane.
He looks like a tired grandmother,
taking a grandchild for an outing.
In that carriage lie limp
three empty soda bottles
and some rumpled plastic bags.
I can't talk, he motions,
pointing to his mouth,
watery eyes of a sage
filled with light,
meeting mine, as he crosses
himself. A mute, I think,
but then I notice a deep hole,
size of a nickel, in his neck.
Are you in pain, I ask.
He points to his right thigh,
nodding. I have no money
with me, I say, emptying
before him my pockets.
He smiles and shakes his head.
Do you live near, I ask,
not wanting to hear he's homeless.
He mouths something I chance to repeat,
not having a clue what his sounds mean.
He nods, bowing, crossing himself,
and joining hands in tattered gloves,
he points them heavenward.
a hard time, I say, in tears.
Should I push his cart?
Is he drunk? Can he be carrying
a gun? I'll pray for you,
I say, feeling foolish,
a privileged woman on her walk.
He is gone, when I turn back,
a few seconds later.
Was he an angel or a good
spirit from a fairy tale?

Combined effort

Strange, how they hang on,
the ninety-year olds,
one year or more
makes no difference -
prayer,
booze or cups of tea
with friends
to numb the nausea,
sharp pain and
the bother of constant
doctor appointments.

The younger ones
take witness,
help with notes,
casseroles, pick-ups,
calls to enquire
about the results
of the blood tests -
combined energy pouring
into the prolonging
of their friends'
age.

Commanding words

Trying to control and to reap
a little thrill which verses bring,
each morning I sit, with pen in hand,
replacing the cords that cannot sing,
church hymns or folk songs, areas,
with silent words, lined up as soldiers.

Them I command. But whence they come
lies beyond my comprehension.
I send them ahead to fight the day.
But then I think this childish play
hardly deserves a mention,
for they'll dissolve in fire, air
like the hand holding the pen.

Communion

In Chapel, we are told the old fable
of the Immaculate Conception,
Virgin Birth. We sing to Mary,
Mother of Jesus, Mother of us all.

During the Communion, the priest
insists that Christ died for me:
I drink that truth-myth in,
a salty wave within brims over.

Later, I hurry home
after purchasing a shower curtain
liner, for words punch my ears
like gentle boxers.

I want to take down the poem before I die.
Death lurks near as a possibility
because the demons of grief, love,
self-pity tear apart my heart.

Mid-August trees scamper and spill
like preschoolers. Precocious
autumn practices cool kisses.
I cannot bear the marvels of this world.

Companions on a journey

Sunny Sunday February
morning with the wind
howling in the chimney shaft.
Cheered by a Billy Collins poem,
I languidly reach for Gerald Stern,
wishing to waken a dormant bell.
Something has happened.
Alice has fallen into a well.

Blessed the journey,
the steady sliding
into the silent eerie place
that Billy Collins rarely inhabits,
where freely roams dear Gerald Stern -
a damp and distant underground region,
the doomed souls' motherless, chilly realm
with slippery ground which an iceberg sails
on prickly waves where further ocean diving
beckons and looms eminent.

Company

She sits in her apartment
with several diseases for company.
They are her flesh and blood enemies,
who often visit, seated on wiggly
chairs as friends clustered round
the coffee table. She need not bother
serving sandwiches to them;
they consume whatever they find.

They rise and fall in synchrony,
whipped up by an aged conductor,
the heart, its fickle baton.
The walls lean inward
like in a Chagall painting,
propped up by full bookcases,
collecting dust. The walls
crowd together, moving,
two sets of Siamese twins,
holding hands in corners.

Consumer's calendar

The supermarket lies near,
convenient. Recently enlarged,
its aisles display more varieties
of produce, though
I don't try new offers,
abundant like the brambles
in my yard.

Like the standard
human brain,
I function at some 7%
of my capacity.

Once a week, I do stop and shop
and buy bananas, bringing them home
in my buggy. Each morning,
I tear one from the bunch,
a leaf in the calendar.

Once opened, the day tastes bland,
yet consuming it,
I relish its flavor.

Contentment

I used to visualize an isolated cottage
on a wild Irish or English moor
and myself alone there, writing -
far away from what I truly craved,
a house full of family, growing old among them.

I did not get my wish yet frequently can reap
the fruits of love from children's glowing faces.
With enough food, safe roof, books, remembered embraces -
what finer time can an aging woman heap
on lavish solitude?

Corridors

Why not let the Sunday bell descend
in a night meeting where the faded
familiar fabric of the sweatshop into a coat
of dreams spins itself, as the sand sifts
in an hourglass filled with the flawed imaginings
of a mind whose crippled ego plays blind man's buff,
lost in the corridors of stunted self-confidence?

Counting what is left

Near the end of a dream
someone told me I was dead.
It took me a while to comprehend
that the flesh I'd carried
was an illusion, air,
but then I began to like
myself as a phantom.

And yet, on waking,
old concerns began to scratch
in the wall again, mice
nibbling at silly questions.
Will the contractor come?
Will there be time?

Beyond, the steady drone of,
How should I invest
the few years that remain --
gamble, gain,
or spread lazily like moss
over the less than
one acre of land, hoarding
my few pieces of silver?

Courting danger

Why, many might ask,
do you bother writing poetry?
It's time-consuming and few
people read it. True.
Yet each time, I return
uplifted, as if a friend
plunged deep into my secrets,
sighed, and for a while
helped me to bear the weight.
When I write, I always stumble
over a surprise bolder
in a changing landscape.

Today, I read
a Chicano poet, now dead.
His verses froze me with terror.
Boarding a poet's subterranean train,
whistles me through delicious danger.

Crippled

A restless night, a dream of convoluted passion
and guilt, which surfaced subdued shame.
On waking, the past remembered. A lesson,
or the sight of folly enshrouding prime years?
Why did she maim herself, the spirit of those near her?

From early on accusations came,
from tender age a poison, malady
fed her and twisted, till the prophesy
was fulfilled. Too late to mourn
the blame and sore neglect.

As a child she was told that she deserved nothing -
so when later a fake happiness was found,
she grasped it, a mad woman clinging
to her lover's skeleton, terrified
to face life alone, without it.

Doris in the pool

The body sails a ship,
not looking for a harbor.

The body floats a child
in the arms of a mother,

skilled in hiding deficiencies,
soothing shame.

Dancing in Bristol

Around the park she gingerly
heaves the stroller with the sleeping
baby, scaling bulging roots and stones,
afternoon heat prickling skin.
Her eyes are cast down like a nun's,
avoiding loud neighbors. Isolated
in the tight circle of caring,
she startles when she sees - something -
white, planted silently in the
leaves of the dark pond - an egret?
Its head a small knot, tying the long beak
to the long neck, eyes pinned to a brain
not bigger than a nickel, yet sufficient
to the massive body, the smooth marvel
of feathered flesh, balanced on spindly legs.
An egret in a northern city?
It remains motionless in the silent water.

Later, an old man shouting,
"Hey, lady! Hey, look - a stork!"
wakes the baby, pointing to -
a stork, not an egret, lost
and so alone - like Nijinsky
with ballet steps striding
across the sandy stage,
while we, his awed audience,
watch breathlessly.

Darkening days

Come to me, poem!
Become my comforter -
you, who know better
than my tired brain,
jostled by hormones,
bruised by accidents,
neurons that malfunction.

Give me hope that my days will open,
free of rusty locks and hinges,
on the road I chose
many years ago.

Before I meet the light being
welcoming me to life's
other side, I'd like to find
a place where, I'd be
lovingly cared for.

Dark soldiers

One by one they surface,
massive medieval soldiers.
I recognize them instantly,
as members of the neighboring
clan named Fear.
I scan the thoughts
behind the heavy foreheads
and know them squatting
in my anxious words,
caused by an ancient death
that still lives in me.

Days of love

This Valentine's Day
fresh snow on the ground,
sky clear, sunshine,
two cards from female friends
and the memory of moving
a stone page into another chapter,
distracted by a daughter and
three-year-old grandson.
It ended with dinner at Chili's.

Ghosts of loved ones
weave among the trees,
all intrigues forgotten.
A deer munches on
rhododendron leaves,
ignoring me.

Dazed on waking
For Karuna

So we now have a baby girl
in the family, Margaret's first!
She's – about 7lbs. 4 ozs.,
but definitely female.
On Friday night her Mom's
contractions started.
On Sunday, the child
arrived about noon,
after 3 hours of hard labor.

I felt a wreck,
devoured a box of chocolates,
unable to sleep.

There'll be more poems
to celebrate
the child,
her soul,
basking in a new body.

Death row with Jesus

A force pushes from underneath
the earth. The inner avalanche
will not be silenced. The throat
wants to serve as its vehicle.
The woman kneels to press against
the stirring mound, fingers splayed
against the sinister weight lifter.
Fierce goes the fight for - against
happiness, entombed deep on its
illusionary wings. She calls for
strength to live through defeat.

Denied

Feeling the weight,
of the stone where I'm
buried, the emptiness,
the fear, anxiety, and doubt,
barred from the touch,
shrinking from being held,
dreading the seductive moon
looming overhead,
for in a monstrous stone
my body is dissolving,
longing for - I dare not
cry - water - more -
how we once blended
when our flesh and spirit
entwined.

Desirous to unfold

As babies, do we come
fully equipped, with a script
tightly rolled in our genes,
a seed to germinate,
push through the flesh,
show green shoots,
stem, thorns,
a bud
desirous to unfold,
dependent on the soil, sun, rain?

My two-months-old grandson,
reflects in his eyes
the unfathomable field
from which he gleaned
the ingredients
for a future harvest,
before he cast himself forward
on stage one of his journey:

my son-in-law's sperm,
my daughter's womb.

Dialogue

What is it you want,
asks language,
my closest friend.

You lead me
to places I don't
see or think of.

You drag me
underground,
into a labyrinth,

your senses
nonexistent,
sharp,

not perfect,
for you are
contaminated

by the tainted
me.

Different world

I'd like to migrate
to a world
where people are born old and fat
and remain old and obese
till they die.

The TV commercials would display
huge butts elegantly swinging,
thunder thighs heaving
while promoting products
which induce and preserve
wrinkled, sagging largeness.

The skin
of all such beautiful folk
would glow like a precious quilt
of brown, black, yellow,
red or white.

Different tongues would be revered
and practiced by families,
schools and universities,
where students
would study folk art
and numerous forms of loving.

Disagreeing with a writer

"Our greatest tragedy,"
said Norman Mailer,
"may be that we are not immortal."

I wonder. For instance,
in last night's dream,
I associated with two women
and four men never before seen,
yet we conversed vividly as friends
in rooms and streets
I knew intimately,
though they too were newly spun.

Then there was the night
many years ago
when mother called me
to assist her dying,
flying me with her
in her moving up
to the strange light
which may have been Elijah
breaking the darkness
with radiant arms.

That night she whisked me
to the heart of Europe
from Sunderland, a dingy English town,
imparting birth to me a second time,
soul to soul, so that I'd remember
her finally smooth sailing
into the unearthly brightness
in moments of doubt.

Discarded objects

When I am gone, my belongings
will be discarded on a street curb,
but I hope my poems will linger a bit longer,
those cries of an ever-searching woman,
who was blown here and there.
She attempted to cling to things and people,
then gave in to the formidable foe,
whose embrace frees the soul.

Disliking Sylvia Plath

I don't want to read
any more of this!
Sick, sick, sick
are the poems.
Yet she is famous.
She's been anthologized.

Perhaps -
I'm getting tired of poetry.
Mine too.
Just want to breathe,
silent,
for a while.

Disturbed flight

The stewardess came
with her statement -
and the news was bad,
bringing disappointment,
or so it seemed,
for part of me was glad,
yet I have not slept since,
and still sense the disturbance
mixed with exhaustion.

Donations

On a pitch-dark Armenian road
a woman trudges along,
shining a flashlight -
a doctor, after a long day's
work returning home,
where for more than a year
electricity has not functioned.
She accepts a ride from tourists
and reluctantly shares her story:
father and nine brothers
killed by the Turks,
the last brother in hospital,
both legs amputated.

As I lay the newspaper down
to ponder this tragedy,
the phone rings -
the Greenpeace man
is requesting
a monthly pledge.

Dopis do Los Angeles

Dlouho jsem s Tebou nemluvila.
Byla jsi nemocná, a pak jsi stále spala.
Jako stromy na začátku října jsi se bála,
že se brzy změníš, že něco z Tebe spadne.
Teď slyším od Tvé přítelkyně Dáši,
že jsi v nemocnici, kam jsi tolik nechtěla,
jako k Bohu, ve kterého nevěříš,
přesto, že věříš v Nostradama
a jiné proroky. Budu spěchat domu,
abych se dozvěděla nejpozdější zprávy.

Sedím u volantů, místo abych se procházela.
Na střechu auta mi teď spadla větev,
aniž by byl vítr, jako by uhodil blesk,
znenadání, za medového odpoledne.
Snad jsi to ty, a snad ještě živa, která
tak se mnou přes Ameriku komunikuješ.
Nahrazovala jsi mi matku a otce. Bojím se,
že budu znovu sirotkem. Cívím na stromy,
zaplavené sluncem. Jejich listy se podobají
Tvé pleti, narudlým vlasům, které na druhém světě
budou opět husté, a zářit žlutě, jako za mlada -
koruna, kterou jsi si už tehdy zasloužila,
kterou Ti znovu nasadí buď Nostradamus,
či manžel, hodný strýc Robert,
nebo Benny, který na Tebe nedočkavě čeká.

Jsem zpět doma. Z mašiny slyším vzkaz,
že je Ti lepe. Jsi přece Bennyho kočička.
Ze všeho se vylížeš, a dlouho ještě
budeš s námi! Tak Ti zase zpívám,
osm-a-osmdesátileté, Andulko Šafářova...

Doris in the pool

The body sails a ship,
not looking for a harbor.

The body floats a child
in the arms of a mother,

skilled in hiding deficiencies,
soothing shame.

Drilling holes in the cement

I regret that I did not fly back to
you a year later, when 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, a locked door,
the windows barred. I peer in
through the slats, running after you,
trying to catch you in my arms
which have grown huge in the effort,
prying the door lock open with twigs,
bird beaks. My eyes have turned
into laser beams, drilling holes
in the cement in which you've barricaded
yourself. I want to split the shell 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 love dashing toward you in me!
Instead, I'll fit you into a story
in which you are a four-year-old,
whose father has just died,
then a young man courting heroism,
mourning his father through
all his bereft years, a legacy
which I have continued.