

Poems in WordPerfect: E - F

by

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Poetry Collection
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Exile

Separated from family and friends
in a far country,
he turns the other way
when a recollection strikes,
offering the other cheek
to memory's fist hitting.

Whether that's fitting,
he no longer ponders.
Passive, he murmurs,
Take me to an inner stream.

Of course, he can talk
freely to the dead,
though lately,
he walks from that encounter.

Extending life

All day, I want to hold
Mary Oliver's peonies lightly,
reverently close, and inhale
the delicate ribbons of air
they honor by having opened.

They breathe so vibrantly on the page
where the poet put them! She must be
an Ancient One, an Anastazi. How else
could she grow such a harvest,
reminding the Creator
of His innumerable children,
rocks, lush or modest vegetation,
in awed words extending
their impermanence.

Early decisions

By age seventeen, with Jewish blood
in my veins, I had already practiced
wandering by skipping school,
more each year, roaming through Prague,
imprinting churches, river, parks
in my mind. One early spring morning
in nineteen forty-eight, at a hairdresser's,
not the classroom desk, I overheard the women
whisper, "Fenestration," of Jan Masaryk,
the beloved Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs,
son of President Thomas Garrigue Masaryk,
also a great humanist and after his mother
half American. That day I fled with
unpermed hair to march by the river
for many hours, saying to myself:
"He's a murderer!" - my first lover,
a twenty-one year old, handsome half Russian
film maker, writer, and, like so
many other young intellectuals,
an ardent communist. He, himself,
of course, did not throw Jan Masaryk
out the palace window, though secretly
might have approved of the act, having been
brainwashed by the Marxist doctrine
"The end justifies the means."
Soon after, I went into exile,
for I could not marry a "murderer."

Early nightmares

I remember the enormous snakes
swimming round me
like amorphous, fleshy sea-weed,
giant white severed limbs.

As if chained, I remained submerged,
terrified of their power to harm me,
while they almost nightly
fouled my sleep.

In daylight, the Nazis
marched in goose step,
saluting the Fuhrer,
their "Heil Hitler!" rocking
our household,. while Brother
gaped in an asthmatic attack.

Earthbound

The Anastazi, long hair flowing,
lean against trees,
tired feet planted
in old leaves.

Why do they hurl themselves down,
mighty warriors?

Their tepees are riveted
in the sky, skirting
the eagle wings
of the Great Spirit,

yet they choose to return
to guard the Earth
against further damage.

Mornings, they rest
in woods
washed by clean rain.

Eden revisited

The newly installed septic system
connected to a sparkling toilet
will provide a target for my nightly
visits, my groping in the dark
along unpainted walls, the hushed
petting of the dog so that she'd not
yap and waken the little girl.
Outside the doors without locks
will spread growing potatoes,
melons, mums straining for
daylight to display themselves.
There, we'll garden,
three generations of women.

Elsa

In the late afternoons, she sits,
watching a television program with her new friends
in the lounge of the Prague Jewish Home for the Elderly,
after languishing four months in hospital.

The residents bear the concentration camps' numbers
on their arms. Occasionally, they remember
Auschwitz, Buchenwald, talk about the people
they knew there, now long gone.

In 1945, my mother took me to Prague,
to visit Elsa, a cousin she never before mentioned.
At fourteen, I was dazzled by her high cheekbones,
above which she'd cock elegant hats she made for a living.

In the camps, she lost a young husband, a baby,
and numerous relatives. Later, she remarried -
a man who soon died of leukemia.

At ninety-two, she does not mind sharing her room
with four other women. Her own apartment
she signed over to her grand nephew.
I may never see her again, but I wish her well.

In her features she resembles my mother.

Encounters

Moved by the words of one I'll
not encounter, moved by his phrase,
I was young beside you, water -
I quote it, wishing I could
plagiarize his soul, its Jewish
eye, that seeing. It's marvelous
to embrace on a page.

A breeze is stirring,
wishing me to greet
this precious world
where I have been playing
blind man's buff -
and meet it like a newborn.

Entwining

Slowly I watch a ferryboat receding,
becoming minute, gliding the darkening sea.
If it returns, the frail pier will lie
empty of garlands, and of me,
as I once lay, wide like a June meadow,
spread for the sun, Pan playing in a tree.

You were the snake that pulled me
towards the yellow, which swooned inviting
as Mother's breasts once did.
The grass caressed us as our skin entwined,
myself a woman briefly, not just soil, just turf.

The set course

Surrounded by
old women
that's what I'm limited
to - aging - the old woman
I'm becoming and have become.

Behind their gaze, the crones
count my age, age spots,
awkward gait and other infirmities.

The stars in my universe
are old women draped in prayer,
shining down from the cataract sky.

The silent room is married
to a fan that groans day and night
through the fierce summer -
while the mind gallops a prairie
and the body clambers
along its set course.

My kin are voices
that occasionally pierce
the telephone.

Outside my cumbersome body
old women spin
their spreading webs.

Exalted poet

"New Heaven and Earth", D. H. Lawrence's poem, tells more of the resurrection than priests proclaim in their pulpits. Lawrence sees absolute freedom from pain and any kind of attachment, yet continuing, remaining human - whatever that means, without strife.

Was he prophetic when he wrote those lines, or did Lawrence merely gather mankind's wishful thinking, which, like the ozone layer, barely protects the Earth? The dead know. Some living may have inkling of the surprise, then bliss, which awaits past death.

From the mangle

Waking early, after too short a night,
I lay, mind altered, as if rehearsing
the understanding that's to come
at death, one's life review.

The thoughts were clear, somehow firmly ironed
by a servant's strong and indifferent hand,
like the bed sheets, tablecloths, brought
home from the mangle, when as a child, I lived
in ignorance, yes, when I was so new
to the plots, betrayals, and violence of men.

I surveyed calmly my journey through the years,
the daisy chains I wove, naive, then with folly,
the prayers sent to sail above the heavy clouds,
tricked by the belief that love conquers all,
that goodwill is rewarded, as in fairy tales.

All distress was gone, all seen through a calm eye.
Yet all along I knew the peace was momentary.
On rising, I'd again begin to be pulled
into a blind merry-go-round and my folly.

Frozen

Icy snowflakes
from the avalanche
of time
keep pouring
white stuff
on the ground.

Passive, in a
sweater and
armchair,
I visualize
the homeless
huddling
under bridges,
for them,
no shreds
left out of
the American
dream.

Failure to achieve national recognition

Having finally finished
The Art of Drowning,
a Billy Collins' book,
published in 1995, by
the Pitts Poetry Series,
I skip my finger down
the names of lucky authors
and remember the Bible
quote: Many are called
but few chosen. A friend
of the family slapped me
with these words in response
to my - at age twelve -
presenting him with
my Czech verse. Since,
how I've tried to scale
the salubrious columns
of the University of Pittsburgh
Press, where Collins publishes,
without success.

Family inheritance

She carries the sack of secrecy on her young back,
the life-long scheming of her father,
who considers himself a genius, himself disturbed
by his father and mother.

What used to bind them together separates them.
They have run the course of frequent reconciliations.
The daughter longs for amnesia, the vacuum of sleep,
though on her back sticks the burden of learned thinking.

How can she free herself from troublesome genes
and the memory of his beating,
of the truths she was fed, which proved mere lies,
except by stumbling forward, reaching for change.

February

Let the peace of your spirit
spread in me
like summer breeze
in a well-tended garden.
Let the acres of your goodwill
thrust me forward
like a colt bursting
from a tight stable!
Let the hibernation cease!

Direct me outward
to assist the shut-ins,
the unjustly accused,
and the homeless,
to places where beggars
and the abused
shiver in fear!

Open to me vistas
beyond the thoughts
of the condemned,
a sky where rainbows
multiply,

and bring me to trust you
on the edge of each breath,
so that I'd weave meaning
into my days
and fall headlong
into deserved sleep,

like a toddler playing
in her father's footsteps!

First day of school

For Ian

In a classroom, with a group
of boys and girls, most of them
six to twelve months younger
than you, my five-and-a-half-year-
old grandson, on your very first
day of Kindergarten, you sit
at a small table or, most likely,
move around, instructing the teacher,
having so much to share,
with grown-ups.

How did you enjoy riding the school
bus, no longer a yellow wooden toy,
among the first cars you once pushed
on the willing floor,
dreaming of the outside
world of big boys' adventure?

Final surprise

So many words, songs,
gestures, pirouettes,
snapped in the end
within the snout of death,
weaving its tail among us,
nonchalant, haphazard!

Is death other than
we will it,
the pearly gate open
in blazing light,
bringing us healing,
piercing our sight with
loved relatives and friends?

The final promise
and death's firm handshake
will throw the words and deeds
like coins into a machine,
whose faultless reckoning
and the sum total
will amaze us.

Fingers from above

Touch me, infinite fingers from above -
and touch my loved ones.

I wish to be touched lightly
by someone who knew me
when I was young and pretty
and sat on the world's throne.

I want someone kind,
whose eyes see the soul
in the aging body,
to come near.

I need someone to guide me in remaining years,
which I wish to spend in diligent preparation -
to pass the test, then to proceed to the class
of wisdom, higher than inspiration.

First day of summer

Let me bask in the sunshine
and smell the varied flowers
you've planted in the yard,
where the deer scampers with the squirrel
and the possum wanders free of fear.

Allow me to spread
the tangled net out,
to recline in a lawn chair,
marvelously clean.

Bring the robin and blue-tit
to sing with the swallow
near my ear, and make the mockingbird
expand the harmony at night.

First Thanksgiving Day celebration

The bike Mama bought him
glows yellow
on the porch.
Apart from the training wheels,
he owns knee-pads
and other protecting gear.
Tomorrow, Papa'll bring him
to the park to ride. He's
not yet five but already
he fusses. I must wash it, he says,
pointing to the bike's spotless
chrome. He practices headstands,
propped up against the couch,
while we feast on the turkey.
Little sister is becoming a pal.
She sports his features,
mischievous nature.
At less than one year
she's decided she'll run -
toddling not being fast enough,
not as much fun.
It's their first Thanksgiving Day:
three children chuckling,
Genna, the youngest, crawling,
impressed by her cousins.

First tooth

Morgan, the next day,
at home, I still feel the slobbering
kisses you, a teething baby,
lavished on me!

Fishing in the river

Several women of varying ages
worked on an assignment
from a Taiwanese, who'd first drawn
her picture - of a joyful place.

Not one of us designed
any scene past childhood,
and a few had found
even that tricky.

We deciphered the primitive landscapes
of rooms, parks, towns,
telling the group the whereabouts,
bringing to life our stick figures.

Grandmothers emerged,
maiden aunts, huge feather beds,
hideouts in weeping willows,
crowds of playmates.

We stood in the river,
fishing for trout with bare hands.
Like crows we circled
over our drawings

before swooping down
on the spot that spread
the carcass of happiness.

Five

Slit the darkness before my forehead,
the swirling fog spilling into the nostrils!
Lead me, an unwilling beast, to your pasture,
spread like a fresh tablecloth
from the drawer of the earth.
My skin squirms. The scalp itches
for the cooling circling of your nails.
The doors behind my eyes are thrown
open for you, not admitting anyone else!

Fleeing the henhouse

I want to go away for years with no luggage
and exist without food, hunger, roof
as trees do, minimally aware, as if
sailing in a dream that shimmers like a slow river.

I want God to scoop me with both hands
out of the dusty henhouse at daybreak,
a warm egg, newly laid by the fleeing stars,

and roll me gently back and forth
for centuries on his vast bosom,
whispering to me new pet names,

so that I would, after a long rest,
find enough dare to hatch,
naive and different, elsewhere.

For Adele B.

Glistening, moist,
she bobs on the choppy waters
of passion, far out, forgetful
of the marooning steel rope,
which also permits the distance.

No longer a stranded barge,
glowing, square, stocky,
all mass and movement,
she serves her purpose,
fulfilling the task.

Not asking any questions,
a buoy beside the sea anemone,
the coral, schools of fish
cooling flamed haunches,

steadily desiring Neptune,
she sways ageless,
having mastered the lesson.
It takes a long time
to grow young.

Forecasts

Sleet is forecast, then much icy rain.
Cars will slide, causing nasty accidents.
Women in high heels and the elderly will land
on their wrists or hips and break them.

Like the prophets of old the weathermen warn,
suggesting hiding indoors, if at all possible.
I think of grandchildren , sons-in-law,
whose job it is to care for their young,

to bring them safely home from school or daycare.
Old age fell on me. My ware, poetry,
will be consumed by avid flames.

For Jill

Your mother's death
challenged me,
the whole process:

a sudden stroke
during baby-sitting,
the paralysis racing
in the ambulance,
engulfing
the whole right side of the body,
then half of the brain
showing black on the X-ray,
with death's greedy fingers
reaching
into the brain stem.

Who will sit near me
when I am dying?

Chastised by
your mother's passing,
I grasp words,
light,
tastes, sounds
and the silence
where the mystery
resonates.

For Karuna and Morgan, cousins born three weeks apart

The sounds made on your baby flutes
are free from cacophony, pollution,
mud, anger and all excess.

Allow us to carry you
on the troubled Earth
to sparkling air and inventions
not yet discovered!

For Mary Oliver

Returning to a friend
who does not know me,
who may have already
rejected my manuscript
in the annual
poetry competition,
where she judges
us who do what she does -
tying the ribbons
of the incomprehensible
into bows,
sometimes creating
greater tangles -
I felt uplifted in her poem "Rain"
by the section "The Forest,"
where a snake sheds the skin,
then moves forward,
vulnerable, satin,
despite harsh twigs
and nearby enemy, the owl.

For the fun of it

Arrogance makes me start
writing a poem, robot-like,
after reading one written
by a master who said it all
so beautifully, sweeping
over the world like a comet
followed by Irony and Pain.

Arranging words on paper
brings me closest to living,
beyond breathing in and
breathing out - that is why
I resort to this exercise in
futility. Another day began
without my assistance
as I slept late, lost
in a dream where I heard
a bird singing.

Forward bound

From the black thickness
of the earth, through the bushes,
springs a face of a creature,
human, spry like a deer,
glaring, a young male
who whispers, "Don't fear!"

Still squatting, he stretches
a muscular arm through the greenery,
and I glide with him
over sharp twigs, twisting
when they sting.

Leaping and hopping,
the man pulls me
forward,
the incessant crawl
resembling flight,
yet always
the two of us rolling
on the expanding
crest of the ground.

Fridge in a tree
Poem for small children

A squirrel
hopped from branch to branch,
in his mouth
an enormous
mushroom.

He had lunched
on crunchy acorns;
his tummy was tight,

but he wanted
to pop
the huge mushroom
in his nest,

which would keep
like a fridge
the mushroom
fresh
for his dinner.