

Poems in WordPerfect: G - K

by

Helena Jungová Lawson ¹

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

Poetry Collection
47 pages

© Copyright Helen Lawson

*Avoid the sin of conception
(For either you kill your seed and will be tormented by conscience,
or you will be responsible for a life of pain.)*

CZESLAW MILOSZ

Generations

When my little grandson is crying,
I see it before him, a life of pain,
to which he hangs attached on a thread
like a spider.

While, as a displaced teenager,
I roamed foreign cities,
I would swear
never to have children.

Of my four babies, one is married.
She's the mother of the three-month-old.
Talk of the family's honor!
Yes, we're proud of his searching eyes, prowess!
But when he cries,
I tremble, conscience tormented.

Gift From an Ocean
For Gordon

In a dream, my mother
bent in her kitchen
over a child we shared,
a red-haired little girl,

practicing her first steps
among auburn leaves,
which filled the orchard
till the whole place
shone red.

In the Kutná Hora house,
the baby tiptoed the floors
as my mother kept watching
from her kitchen chair.

"You are a grandmother now.
Do you mind being called Granny?"
I asked. "Babička is better,"
she softly said in Czech,
while I replied, "All right.
You'll be babička and I babi."

The next moment, the child
tumbled down a shallow hallway step
and burst out crying.
As I went to kiss her,
she changed into a reddish colt
and ran outside.

Grey celebration

How grand it was to have a man
play us old tunes, invite to dance
those with zest left -
others clapped, in memory lane.

He said another repertoire
he could present us if we cared -
so, likely again, in a year's time,
he'll be our Valentine,
to while away aches and winter doldrums.

The goodies were scrumptious, and no Tums
were afterwards required. Thanks
for good show, Grey, for good fun!

Growth spurt

The bruising your tongue
caused my self-esteem,
each word poison, unleashed
in spurts by scorpion instinct,
keeps stinging me, as I recoil,
old friend who meant well,
naive as always! Truly,
there seems no pleasing you:
you complain when I remain
silent or when I dare
to offer my concern.
What you wish is for me
to dance with you
a dizzy mazurka of denial.
I forgive you, I keep
muttering in prayer,
for your lashing out.
As always, you've cut,
a guru, into my mask,
behind which self-aggrandizement
masquerades as kindness.

Guarded

A ranger sits at a picnic table
near the bubbling stream.
I seek communion with a round
rock instead, turning my back
on prospective chit-chat,
feeling robust away from everyday
haunts, the corridor, high ceiling
of an apartment building where old
women nurse losses as glowing stigmata.

Guessing

Having read a poem by Amy
Clampitt in the New Yorker,
I check how old she was
when she died last year -
seventy-four. Will I last
that long? Another ten years
is hard to imagine, yet it
seems a perfect age to pass on.

Until then, what's there
to enjoy, accomplish -
travel in Portugal, new
manuscripts, some charitable
deeds - before the body is
disbanded in ashes and the
soul whipped to a space
where, I guess, I will not
buzz like a fly in a bottle.

Guns in schools

The wind is rising, as predicted.
For almost two hours, I'll have to grip
the steering wheel on this Sunday's highway.
No church today. Instead, I'll play
with two grandchildren, comfort the one crying,
when her mama leaves on a business trip.

That's what we do, from day-to-day trying
to survive, work, drive or stumble forth,
helping one another, thankful that a tragedy
has so far bypassed our family.
Should I should I not bring my son-in-law,
daughter, a report on guns in schools?

The magazine lies at my side. I've read it:
the near epidemic of guns and hate,
bullying and revenge among the young.

We must love more, watch, listen and speak -
aiming to break the code of silence many children live,
viewing grown-ups as strangers.

Habits

A habit may grow
out of an unconscious
craving to be held
like water by a dam,
or flow down a rock
in familiar trickles,
reflecting sunbeams
that cascade with as little
effort as it takes
to remain elemental,
insensitive to wind,
rain. A habit echoes
a child's feet
running,
obeying
a parent's call.

Halting comments

Anticipating a poem to emerge -
either from an ocean's depth
or some shallow pool
near the mind's surface,
I think of Jesus.
I bet he didn't articulate
a miracle each morning!

Verses faintly echo
an actor's soliloquy,
his fluid lips
measuring the world
with the yardstick of the senses -
those arrogant toddlers
shouting me, me, me.

Handicapped

From the poems I forced myself
to scan, just one impressed me,
about a woman with no legs,
sitting on a porch, watching
her son polish his motorcycle.

Hands held against heaven

A line of a poem
while the snow is falling
recalls your car
parked safe in the yard
for almost two decades.

How could I have held you
under a spell that long
when the heart I craved
belonged to a cave man?

If I pressed my hands
firmly against the sky,

I could not prevent
the relentless storm
to unleash itself
in milliard snowflakes,

yet I tried to bind you
in love's rusty chains,
failing each precious moment.

Hankering after Prague

What if I returned to my native land
as a tourist - not letting old friends,
a close kin and distant relatives know
about my usurping their border?
I'd ignore a lawyer and two supposed
translators rest in ignorance of my
incognito presence - how glad they'd
all be in retrospect not to be obliged
to welcome me with a face slit
by a thin smile, not have to justify,
like the others, not answering my letters,
not keeping their promises - and I'd be free
to roam the streets of Prague, city of my birth,
without attending the class reunion.
I'd spend the nights at Hotel Dvořák -
The small pension by the river.
Later, with an American friend, I'd rent
a car, drive into the countryside to visit
the wild poppies covering the fields
near my childhood town, without
pressing the doorbell on the house
that now belongs to my brother.

Happily

The thoughts that haunt me
I shall not put down.
Rather, I'll listen to the far-off sound
of the sea.

The fear that slices sharply through my mind
I'll turn from.
Instead, I'll hear
the loud giggles of a little girl,

three-year-old.
I'll watch them scamper happily,
the three babes in our family -
Karuna, Morgan and Genna -

headed by the seven-year-old Ian.

Happy First Birthday!

On January 21, 1994,
a baby, already named Ian,
had to be wrenched
from his mother's pelvis
during a Caesarian.

The labor had been induced,
And the doctor claimed
there was time
for the child to be born
on his own.

The pitocin seemed to drip in vain,
but finally the water broke,
and the contractions started.
Oh, so much pain -
resulting in a Caesarian.

The pelvis
proved too narrow.
Ian came out dark blue.

Now a one-year-old
little Lord Fauntleroy,
running and laughing,
needing new shoes,
the happy boy.

Happy news - Elizabeth sent home from hospital for a week's
bed-rest

The jells, the pitocin,
did not work.
No: The baby was not ready.
Determined like its parents,
it wishes to be born
at its own good time.

Wise of the doctors
to capitulate.
Soon, the two future aunts
will gather
to wag magic wands
over the happy trio,
the rest of us adoring,
like the shepherds, the holy babe.

Haunted

In the few moments left to write a poem
conflicting feelings cross and overlap
between the heart and brain stem,
from which the sap of my being
springs like a geyser.

Within the misty foam one keeps ever emerging.
On her I wrote yesterday the final epitaph.
With it, a fistful of dirt fell on her coffin.
Then I ran, glad to turn from the strange hurt
her unjust good-by inflicted.

After some tearful thoughts,
I forgave.
Leave me,
apparition,
once friend!

Healing bonds

For Tina T.

You are so right, my friend, twelve years older,
when you say, See only the cup half full,
for, as soon as I do, I feel myself grow bolder
and in the half-full cup view a magnificent moon
whose mystic energies spill into my senses,
bathing the mind, stripping it of defenses.

As if some gentle hands, of angels or good fairies
massaged my limbs and caressed my head,
my breathing lightens.

Healing dream

During the night he came to me,
as always handsome, tall, and strong,
released by eternity
to claim our once so firm a bond.

How royal was he, I a child,
sixteen or so. By later years tinted
my longing for him, mistrust- marred.
Another woman I suspected.

Yet on his chest I laid my head
and whispered to him a confession -
how bare my life to its end sped -
long, lonely days in sad progression.

By that time I lay fully awake,
needing to hold on to him longer -
not just to him - to passion's tread
that made me briefly young, no, stronger.

Help!

Where does it lurk,
the evil slave who weaves
fat on her loom night
and day, not stopping
for a break, a holiday,
in any weather?
I wish her hands amputated,
her genes surgically replaced!
They infuriate me!
I'm weary of fighting
this robot, worst enemy!

Once more, swollen,
I lumber on
distended ankles,
heave thunder thighs
forward, as Atlas
dragged the world!
Jesus, please, slice off
my massive breasts
and belly! Deflate
the balloons of my cheeks!
Transform the cellulite
on my arms to graceful flab
or, better, annihilate altogether
the greedy ogre
permeating me!

Am I to be totally swallowed
by this monster? Or eaten
by it in segments as
Herodotus was, by worms?

Helping Africa

Three days later, I return to the TIME article
and read about a Botswana truck driver,
a Zimbabwe prostitute, learn that dry sex
is what the truck driver prefers.
To please him, the woman sits in a basin of bleach
or stuffs her vagina with a fertilizer -
until the inside tissue swells and sex is
painful for her, and dangerous.
The truck driver knows about the HIV
but will never allow himself to be tested,
claiming one has to die of something,
that means his wife and children, too.
The prostitute looks prim and proper
in her calf-length dress. Her husband
is dead. She has three children
for whom she needs school fees.
I read on - the case histories
too harrowing to dwell on.
Most babies die in their first or second year.
These children could be protected
For four dollars each with nevirapine.

Brazil provides generic AIDS drugs
free for all its infected citizens.
A war is on between Indian drug
manufacturers and US/European
pharmaceutical companies - who are
suddenly willing to provide
the AIDS Cocktails cheaply to Africa,
despite their previous patents, but only
a vaccine can ensure a lasting cure.
The vaccine is nowhere in sight.

He meditates by the stream

A kind-faced Chinese professor
with two living daughters,
has chosen to spend many years,
largely alone, in the wilderness
with a few remaining pandas,
charting the progress of one cub,
by now an adolescent.
For several weeks each year,
his students come to help him.

After the professor's repeated
protests against logging,
the Chinese government agreed
to label the ravished region
a Protected Area, thus allowing
the pandas to feast on their bamboo.

Their survival depends
on that one young female -
who needs to be annually found,
captured, drugged and carried
on the professor's back, like
a daughter, to his hut - to be
examined, weighed and measured.

Still a virgin, she must
put up with her fright,
eye to eye with the human species,
for the sake of her descendants.

Hidden pages

Among a heap of papers, almost thrown away,
two copies of a somber announcement
whose original is filed somewhere.

My father. Now I know for sure
it's six years since death took him.
The bitter wonder hitched to guilt.

I chose to miss the funeral,
bowing to subtle subversion,
shaken by a relative's intrigue.

We'll dance like two clouds,
my enigma father and I.
He'll read to me

from his hidden pages
on the cliffs of forgiveness.

His name is Osteoporosis

The hunchbacked landlord
plots his revenge.

He scrambles the steps
of my back,
lumbering up to his
first floor flat,
where he hoards
cobwebs
his wife
does not dare
to disturb.

Three-year-old, I hide
behind the hall umbrella stand,
watching him in terror -
another malevolent man,
no doubt conspiring with Hitler.

The Fuhrer cruises close,
outside. The hunchback
owns us even in the lav.

He embodies the second
hate lesson
my parents teach me,
while they grudgingly
pay him rent.

Decades later,
he chisels at my spine,
bending it
into a bold curve,
his picket line.

The hunchback
owns my bones,
crumbling them
into cobwebs.

His second mother

He hears her voice clearly,
advising, cheering, though dead -
perhaps fifteen years -
she plods beside him
as his second mother,
and now she says
she's glad he called her.

Always, she knew more,
but now she really
holds the key
to the puzzle beyond,
mellowed,
stripped of disapproval.

Home 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 I sent to sail the stormy sky,
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 the blind merry-go-round and my folly.

Autumn burial

Hopefully over a wide meadow
will the wind lift
the poems I've written,
thousands unpublished moods -
after a stranger
pours them out of boxes.

The wind will scatter
the pages like ashes
with indifferent fingers,
in the way it reaps leaves,
when trees no longer cling
to their offsprings.

Hot spring

Mornings, we wait for the heat,
the thermometer expected
to soar into the nineties.

Already wearied by the last
three days, we long for this fierce
heat wave to subside.

Earth is heating fast;
floods are everywhere.

We'll soon be inhabiting
the twin
of burnt out Mars.

Humbled

Together, an artist, art historian
and poet walk through an exhibit
of Picasso's paintings, but only
the poet likes the canvasses from
Picasso's old age. The artist
regards them sloppy, the art historian
shrugs with, I could not have any
on my wall. The poet sees an old
man, staring past his model,
no longer satisfied with the visible.
His studio holds emptiness,
transparency of flesh,
the paleness suggesting death,
biding her time. Not needing
any more fame, the master
Paints the moment.
Gone are sexual zest
and fervor. Picasso stands
before the unknown
waiting.

Hurricane season

The howling of the tropical storm
shakes the island,
its claws grasping distant trees,
the forecast deluge absent
from the sticky air where
only the fruit flies
circulate unencumbered.

Three hefty raindrops swing
from the window frame.
Beyond, yellow leaves
blur the clammy sky,
while the crickets,
stunned by the downpour,
rest their fiddles.

Hurry before the fall

The dark secrets we carry
deemed bright in the eyes of God -
or so we hope - when hurry
and new obsessions foam with froth
at the mouths of horses that we whip
as we race on, race on.

Sooner or later a deep ravine
opens before our amazed gaze.
In that dark depth we then must leap,
pushed by a hand we'd rather kiss
while begging for forgiveness.

When the worst happens

For E. J.

After all, no life lasts forever.
The baby whom we've already decked
as a male athlete with laurel, whom
we've seen as a fine woman,
may have been too fearful
to re-enter this earth.

The baby may be strictly following its course,
and may have gathered all the data it needed,
while we, ignorant of the script, grieve.

The baby's soul may already
be planning a trip elsewhere,
aiming at a goal past our understanding.

It may be softly whistling its song,
grateful for the shelter you have given it.

Ignorant search

Wordless, like homeless,
or senseless implies loss,
fall from plenty. Yet,
each state carves roads
to a magnificent world.

Abundance, peace
glow with fruits
we stretch for,
blind and deaf as always
to God's mysteries.

Though pointless,
our craving may
also hide a merit.

Imagining heaven

Belatedly, I'm getting to know a man
who died in 1963, British poet
Louis MacNiece. It's year 2001.

My head is bursting with another cold.
The poems were composed when MacNiece
drove the country lanes and loved at thirty.

The lines I write fall like tired petals
on the dull table that I have become.
My blood used to foam with images.

I delight in the young poet's vigor,
then gratefully return to aged Yeats
and visualize him glowing,

all golden - with Neruda, Goethe
and Rilke reading brand-new verses
to a glad audience of which I am one.

Immersed in space and time

The wood
belongs to me
as much as Manhattan
to a New Yorker
or my cheek
to the mosquito
claiming its meal.

Growing older
equals
swimming
in slow laps,
water ebbing
between the fingers.

Indecision

Something prevents
the lagoon from spilling:
fear - of the fall, breakage,
the mercury scattering
in malicious balls,
fear of the loss of control,
of the Golem springing forth,
fear of the risk,
of the premeditated,
the misunderstood.

And all along one idiot hand
blessing the status quo,
the other steadying the boat
from rocking, while the manic
wind whistles through
its teeth "Peace,"
calling autumn spring
and nightfall sunrise.

Memories of the Pandora's Box
opening, despite all the determined
gazing at the lilies of the field,
the sparrow who trusts she will be fed.

India - as a metaphor for leaving

Aware of living on brief borrowed time,
I try to recollect a dream - about you leaving
back to India and your old purpose
of serving in the land your father used to praise.
But no, I did not want to return to a loneliness
greater than we both knew in the West.
My substitute was ready - her name Margaret -
to follow you into the dust, heat, to scale the Himalayas -
not much to look at but young and willing.
In my dream again I clutched on to you,
chasing around, stethoscope dangling.
Finally, you peered over a courtyard wall
down to where I was planted. Our eyes locked.
No words were said. I marveled at your eyes -
different, luminous and full of the soul's pleading.
Sad about the decades of your love's absence,
though hurting, I knew I had to let you go.

In Father's footsteps

"What I hear is 'prison.'
You conceive of yourself
either in or out of it,"
the therapist said, referring
to my struggle with
an eating disorder.

"True," I said, "I've modeled
myself on my father" -
who was in and out of prison
during World War II,
who'd go to prison fat
and come out skin and bones.

But how can I shed
the ingrained handcuffs,
the bars, chains, dank air,
taunting the Gestapo
to have me shot
for Father's work
in the Resistance?

Inger

While the bleaching
of the leaves continues,
due to the rain,
a bird - high up -
cries, "Inger! Inger!" -
perhaps a stranded lover,
searching for his mate.

I feel like a blade of grass,
a raindrop, released
when a cloud maiden
loosens her hair.

Inhale

No longer seeking to wrestle with the world,
I observe, concerned, the tug-of-war
my children engage in. Often, anxiety
cuts short the breath, when I watch them at it.

How I wish we lived in a peaceful world,
each weaving a wreath of sunny prosperity.
Still - we know that things could be much worse.
So inhale - and let go solemnity.

Inheritance

He wants to enter
a different beginning,
despite the gray stubble
on his stubborn chin.

Today he reaches for
his father's cane
to stroke it.
Soon the hook will bear
his own shaking hand
and stooping weight,
for as long as
sore joints sustain him.

He'll then hobble
among restored buildings,
his father's ghost
on his shoulder
like a crow,

screeching
through the kingdom of old age,
where at last the son
has given up rebelling.

Inner peace
For Nyima

In the busy clatter of the traffic,
phone calls, pressing chores,
how energizing it's to linger still
within the self, breathing in
the empty space illusion has fled.

Here, the area filled
with wordless prayer,
we hover relaxed,
each a sheltered baby.

Ivory tower

I asked last night before sleep
for a dream to bring me an answer
to the riddle told by a psychic,
whose gaze glowed with divine luster
like no eyes I had before seen.

No dream came. Instead, my bowels
protested - in a reminder
that in a human the ivory tower's
exceeded by the body's claim
which persists, hour by hour.

The bombardments of this world -
full of slimy harmful agents,
politicians, earthquakes, plagues,
disappointments, colds, bone breaks,
all oppress the immune system.

I wonder if the waiting isn't more cruel

Better, I believed, to be allowed
to watch the blossoms in death's orchard
to turn into cherries, plums.

But now I wonder if one can ever prepare
for the gaping casket,
if the waiting isn't more cruel,
as I see the falling
in your jaw,
after your visit in hospital
of another once only HIV
friend,
now shriveled from AIDS.

July's end

On the day Morgan learned
to drink from a sippy-cup,
her father was laid off
from his job of a draftsman.

Morgan was cavorting on the floor,
practicing crawling-standing up,
when Gordon came in, at 2 P.M.,
with an armful of papers.

Elizabeth and I were sitting
side-by-side on the sofa;
she'd just told me the news.
"He's primarily a musician," I said.
"Don't tell him that," she exclaimed,
raising her arms in horror,
as Gordon walked in
like Atlas, full of gloom.

Then he gathered Morgan at his feet
and pressed her to his grizzly cheek
with, "How is my Cupcake?"
In return, she touched her papa's beard,
vulnerable, clad in a diaper, and cooed
to him her first song, her first sound, "Aboo."

Driving soon after to my home of a retiree,
I learned from the Public Radio
about the brand-new theory
of the Fluid Vacuum,
in which our whole universe
might be swallowed any moment,
in a fraction of a second.
Scary - but at least we'd all
die together, without pain.

June

I.

Slipping
under the skin
of the universe
I ask
you to help me
remake me
I know
fragments
of the shafts
of light
understanding
eludes me
Surround me
with your arms
Lift me
into the cochlea
of your ear
Chisel
my senses
Allow me
to perceive
to sing
for you
with
the body
of my soul

II.

I've
obeyed the dream
its bidding
Words
move
between us
A cascade
vapor
lifting me
up
sideways
for at times
you recline
there
my creator

Karma

Splintered, jutting
in all directions,
frozen in me
on a mild morning,
fear - of being torn
from the remaining
shelter where doors
are being closed
on rooms in which faces,
gestures, and voices
hang impacted.

Soon, diminished in size,
I will hawk in the winter yard
my possessions, banking
from a money belt and watching
pennies swell in a frosted jar.

Once the carpets are rolled,
books packed,
furniture given away,
stored, or dumped,
the treasured pines
and protecting shrubs
I will visualize and cling to,
as I am pushed
elsewhere.

Katherine

Along the carpeted corridors
she swings her walker towards years
ahead. At age eighty-seven, she keeps
herself cheerfully grateful, writing
poems and having them printed
in Weekly Bulletins. Though
a deep thinker, she lightens
what she says, to have others
comprehend. All the residents
are her friends, but the one
with whom she really converses
is Mother Angelica on T.V.
Once a month a priest comes
to give a mass. The Holy Communion
uplifts her. She walks -
awed by great grandchildren
and the latest findings in astronomy.