

1. Scribble

“No regrets, I’m getting old.”

(What else is new?)

First line.

“I was granted the glory of a soul.”

(But can there be a soul that does no justice to that glory?)

Second line.

How presumptuous of me!

Born without tariff,

every day in this world undeserved,

yet I dare to covet

the best of what is humanly possible,

crying for the moon.

2. Companion

Under the dim light in the night train
I'm sure that you and I have been together.
Front seat or back or next seat over,
you must always have been there.
When I rested my tired body on its far travels
or was elbowing my way through a crowd
in the strange haste of loneliness,
there too I'm sure I had a glimpse of you.

When I've hesitated
along the ordinary course of my life
or fumbled toward the core of things,
I'm sure that someone always helped me.
Someone always brushed across
the solitary path of my heart.
I'm sure it was you.
Thus I became a sensitive instrument
that could be played by the hint of a breeze.

So now
I dedicate to you this table entire,
its food and perfect setting,
with the whole weight of my life behind it.
O my dear, you who have been my love for so long!
Today, in the full light of a white sun, I welcome you
as we bow together, bride and groom.

3. To My Poem 4

“I am no poet.
I am someone begging for poems.”
This used to be my true confession.

More than once,
holding up a white flag,
I have given in, saying
“I surrender. I surrender.”

While you took your pleasure to the fullest,
roaming the mountains and rivers,
I was the one on the lam,
vagabonding through foreign lands,
a habitual and total loser.
For this I apologize,
and repent.

Finally
an expert at unrequited love
and well-versed in your long absences,
now,

O Poem!
as you reveal yourself to me ever so faintly,
my heart begins to pound and once again
I reach out my arms toward you,
enraptured.

4. Winter Flowers

1

Hugged to a breast and carried along a snowy road,
a bunch of flowers.

Snow brushed off, you are stretched out to me.

Half ice,

and hot! burning with life,

fire-seeds hidden

within each frozen layer of skin,

aching, throbbing with cold...

the flower-light dazzles me.

2

At last I am relieved.

Crying in front of you,

I become human again.

Before you,

winter flowers,

beaming even with your stalks cut

and frosted leaves crunching,

my tears, so long dry, now well up

and I become human again.

5. Trees 5

O Trees!

Enduring such burdens,
unfolding fruit like birds' nests
and watching over them, watching tenderly over them,
unsleeping even at night.

Swaying and sagging with fruit
grown large and provident,
lift up those branches!
Lift them up!
Massive sun in mid-sky:
your flesh.

Your joy is most exactly that burden,
O Trees!
Blood and flesh swelling,
the more swollen the fruit the greater your resilience
and more splendid your power.

Today,
fruit harvested,
you let fall your leaves.

6. Trees 7

From the start, trees study how to stand,
how to look off in the distance as they grow,
how to accommodate any weather.
And when trees learn they cannot cuddle with one another,
they study how to wave to each neighbor in blue and green.

Trees live to study:
how to pump water through their roots,
how to greet all things one by one—
the farthest sky, clouds,
wildflowers, insects among the grasses,
and their most delicate brothers.
Their shadows too, they study their shadows,
and how to offer shelter to wanderers,
how to use their canopies to screen the sun.

Even at night, trees study:
as the sun sets and night deepens,
then too they uncover the beauty of the world
and the fact that on any given day
or through any night, no one is alone,
or far from any other.

7. Winter Laundry

Across the chill of a drift
the ardent morning sun, still unfolding,
throws itself down on its knees
as if to pray.

All night long
snow had washed the world as white
as the fresh laundry that lit the darkness.

Uncanny,
how even the shadows of garments
hanging from washlines over the snow—
purest white on purest white, overlapping ever so lightly—
seem to me alive and responsive,
how everywhere
a cool freshness and brightness
unkinks the knots within this world
and combs them out.
All that is left has a certain softness.

Among the humdrum of daily life
beauties
rapturous, overwhelming,
move a person to applaud
the spirits of the place.
Snow and sun are pleased with themselves
in what seems to be heaven's country
and the least I can do is stand aside,
make no shadow.

8. Tear

When I want to see a tear
I sit in front of the t.v.
and watch a children's show.
In moving images of classic children's stories,
there is extraordinary beauty
when a good child grows sad.
A translucent blue-glass tear
takes shape
and a strange glass thread
slips down across the cheek.

Shaken by wind,
the dew inside a flower
reflects God's country.
I can understand this, and I know
my heart once again
has been clarified.
And I think, this world is a good place,
a really good place.

9. Famine, That Story

Once, in a poor monastery,
a man ate four times more than the others,
who had so little they came close to starving.
Later, to their surprise,
all met again in heaven,
the glutton among them.

Said God:

“Because he ate only a quarter of the food
to which his great hunger entitled him
and left the rest to others,
my compassion has been aroused
and I have summoned him here to praise him.”

This drew belly laughs
from the celestial audience
but all soon fell quiet.

Here below the situation is desperate.
See: the piercing hunger
each has for someone else
and our insatiable appetite for something more.

10. Combing My Hair

I am combing my hair.
Combing tonight with a passion
as if combing out uncountable threads
of darkness.

Does a sleek jet-black light glisten
through each rich strand of hair
because human thoughts are so dark?

I pour more oil in the stove.
The pure flame, burning, calls out,
as in a scene where two spirits meet,
 each knowing full well
 what it is to be faithful,
and embrace for eternity.

Mankind has a history of ideas
that shone with possibility like the leftover light of dawn
then guttered out in firepits,
and no one can say the time was too short
to learn exactly what it means to be faithful.

Tonight
I am combing my long hair
as if softly combing out the fin of a fish of the abysses
under immense pressure.
I am cold like a woman sent packing.