



2011

Soft Applause for the Day

As the sun goes down,
the wind ruffles the trees—
soft applause for the day.

*

Little maple tree,
two inches high,
even your three leaves are turning.

*

It's enough
to be the first to walk across a field
after a snow.

*

What a good time to look at the woods,
before the leaves get in the way.

*

Strange--
all of us who live along the brook
forgot to give it a name.

*

Summer:
the woodchuck keeps an eye on me
as he enjoys the water.

*

Our brook is well-protected;
a thousand flowers bloom along its banks.

*

The sun comes up like a detective,
discovering clue after clue.

*

Please be careful as you climb over the rocks--
you might disturb the moss.

*

Each day lasts slightly longer,
like a giant eye slowly opening.

*

A kite caught in the trees--
special decoration for Easter Sunday.

*

The flowers waste their perfume on me,
as if I were a bachelor still.

*

The lilacs must be glad
the rhododendrons bloom a little later.

*

These trees

must have been planted in a row,
but so many years ago.

*

A breeze passes,
and ripples of excitement
run through field after field.

*

They all listen—
the robin, the rabbit,
the old man at the window.

*

Surrounded by a thousand goodbyes,
I wait for my plane to take off.

*

How pleasant!
As she comes through the door,
she smells of nothing but fresh air.

*

Here, in another city,
a second chance for spring
(and for sneezing).

*

Like ladies of loose virtue,
iris offer themselves
along the road.

*

She gets on the train
with flowers in her arms—
presents for everyone.

*

Going out and coming back:
the only difference is,
the deer has gone.

*

“Knowledge is power,”
says our cat, as she investigates the garden.

*

The perfect circle of the moon—
someone must have practiced
quite a lot.

*

All the bushes
pull at our clothes with their thorns,
saying, Stay, stay with me.

*

Like a spider web,
the old fence in the forest
dips from tree to tree.

*

Both of them have white hair, mother and son;
which is old, and which is young?

*

Her body wraps around the cello,
as if she were pregnant with it.

*

Like children counting,
crows come out of the tree carefully,
one, two, three.

*

I hope you can come with me
as far as Greene,
or even Whitney Point.

*

Such a long drive,
to hear a few birds sing,
to see some moss-covered rocks.

*

At night, my glasses on the table
stare at me—
a ghost of myself.

*

Against all odds—
who knows what dangers
the evening primrose has survived?

*

As the car swerves around me,
the driver shouts,
“Stop writing poetry!”

*

Our dog loves the spring,
which she doesn’t understand,
and doesn’t need to.

*

At the garage sale
they’re selling everything
except the children.

*

They’re just as beautiful in winter,
these window boxes full of snow.

*

They all seem to be dancing in place—
the bushes, the grass, and the trees.

*

The wind winnows the tree from the top,
like a girl slowly undressing.

*

A skeleton hangs from our neighbor’s tree;

I know it's just Halloween.

*

Fall:
the slow x-ray of the tree
reveals its nests and other secrets.

*

A strange dog drops his ball at my feet
and wonders why I hesitate.

*

How fragile it is,
the shadow that I cast
from the light of the moon.

*

Every morning,
the yellow buses roam the streets,
looking for children.

*

The beauty of the pine tree is not for us,
but for other pine trees.

*

March:
just like our marriage,
the snowdrops have survived another winter.

*

Some days, I get as far as the pine trees;
some days, as far as the oaks.

*

A pity—
the pretty girl next door
only wants to play with my dog.

*

The sparrow hops past me;
I don't bother him,
he doesn't bother me.

*

Like frozen water,
the grain of the wood
eddie around all the knots.

*

Summer:
the dog and I
watch a rabbit eat a leaf
in the driveway.

*

Walking in the woods,
pointing out interesting things
to an absent friend.

*

After their fight over food,

all the seagulls fly away together.

*

Walking in the snow through the woods,
following the footsteps of my son.

*

Our dog is multitasking:
walking, sniffing, barking, urinating.

*

The farmer in his tractor
hunches down
between two enormous tires.

*

How nice—
the pretty girl talking to my son
takes no notice of me.

*

Summer—
my wife comes back from the market
with three different kinds of grass.

*

The deer in the front yard
are the least demanding pets
we've ever had.

*

Watching the houses
being torn down—
what happens to all the ghosts?

*

Like a woman in curlers,
the bushes will be beautiful next spring.

*

I stand by the door;
should I go out
into this beautiful snowstorm?

*

Walking with my son through the snowstorm,
watching his hair grow whiter still.

*

“Great day,” I say,
and my neighbor, not to be outdone, says,
“The best yet.”

*

Like a bodybuilder showing off,
the river ripples here and there.

*

The young guitar player on the street
looks away as I leave a coin.

*

Summer—
the garage door opens slowly, slowly,
and reveals a car.

*

A breeze—
the leaves begin
their restless, silent commotion again.

*

Morning:
my watch waits like a spider
on the table next to my bed.

*

At the Christmas tree farm,
all the trees that didn't sell
are growing still.

*

A perfect day—
as if we were getting
yet another second chance.

*

Somewhere, deep inside her,
does our dog understand
that autumn has come?

*

Leaf after leaf falls on the pond,
until the whole surface is on fire.

*

The elderly grocer
gently examines
each iris in the bunch.

*

The apple tree
has a full head of apples—
she's ready and willing.

*

The pillows wrestle with each other,
like a couple not quite at rest.

*

Someone called my name,
and a little boy, five years old,
turned and answered.

*

Early January—
for a moment,
I'm as young as the new year.

*

"The spring is so violent,"
my neighbor says,
"I prefer the winter."

*

“Gracie, Gracie,”
our neighbor calls,
more loudly than he would
for his wife.

*

Walking the dog,
dragging my precious cargo of mistakes
behind me.

*

Reading poems—
discovering things
that somehow, I already knew.

*

Like sleeping walruses,
the giant boulders
sun themselves on the beach.

*

Walking on the beach,
dodging waves
that began a thousand miles away.

*

A healthy dinner:
eating my salad,
reading my book of poems.

*

The two old dogs going for a walk,
at either end of a long leash.

*

Bulbous nose,
collapsed cheeks,
puffy eyes—
I better stay at home today.

*

I still dream
that one day a deer will cross the field
and eat from my hand.

*

The maple tree changes
from season to season,
the pine tree never.

*

Looking at my books,
admiring them—
almost as good as reading them.

*

Running for the plane,
did I forget, again,
to tell her something?

*

It's cold!
Without this home to go to,
I'd have to move to Florida.

*

Looking at the flowers
in my wife's garden—
what can I offer her?

*

Waking up,
waiting for the morning
when only one of us wakes up.

*

The waves rush toward the shore,
like children running
toward their parents.

*

Two young deer—
afraid of everything,
fascinated by everything.

*

In the evening—
standing on the corner,
waiting for the light to change.

*

I almost envy it,
this pine tree

growing out of my parents' grave.

*

The rabbit chases the squirrel
chases the robin
across the road.

*

Talking to women,
warming my hands
at the low fire of their beauty.

*

I wish I could die like this,
a leaf leaving the tree
with no regrets.

*

The leaf moves six inches on the street,
slowly finding its proper place.

*

At the next table:
a man on his cell phone,
arguing with his wife.

*

At the reading:
beautiful, brilliant women
listening carefully.

*

Not exactly happy,
but grateful
for the absence of tragedy.

*

Nests fill up with snow,
a kind of soft cement
preserving them for spring.

*

The pretty girl at the hotel counter
is so rude to me—
old age.

*

In my Easter bunny suit—
a tiny child
offers me a carrot.

*

If only I had stuck to it,
I could have been a minor poet.

*

Age sixty-eight, I'm happy to say,
still alive,
still making mistakes.

*

Cemeteries are so selfish—
so much space

for people past their prime.

*

The woman handing out flyers on the street
frowns as she studies one.

*

A single goose flies by,
looking for a leader
or for followers.

*

Like a lover on a bed,
the snow lies in the field,
waiting to melt.

*

Should I say goodbye
to that woman on the train
I never spoke to?

*

April—
the snow hesitates
as if it knew it didn't quite belong.

*

Who'll tell me when I become
a pain in the neck,
a figure of fun?

*

She puts her hand in mine,
like a butterfly
visiting a flower.

*

Walking,
I thought I heard someone behind me,
but it was just the wind.

*

A maple leaf on the street,
like an open hand someone left behind.

*

Years ago,
when people my age died,
I thought, they should be satisfied.

*

Today, I'm pretending to be mature,
one of my many disguises.

*

She flies to the top of the tree,
and then, just in case,
she flies away.

*

Was I a success or a failure?
There must be someone I could ask.

*

From the plane,
the earth looks like
all those photographs
taken from a plane.

*

The language of insects,
the language of dogs—
so many still to learn.

*

Will she remember this,
years from now,
flirting with him in the museum?

*

The old man stands on the shore,
watching ice floes of memory
float away.

*

The ant scurries over my foot—
just another hill for him to climb.

*

And yet
they look so happy,
all the flowers beaten down
by the rain.

*

Our cat is very human;
“Give me love, make me purr,
or I’ll scratch you.”

*

Autumn, and I feel
I’m turning another color,
darker, perhaps.

*

My girlfriend at age twenty—
shouldn’t I remember her
in my will?

*

Autumn:
the old lady, four feet high,
slowly prunes the hedge,
ten feet high.

*

Do barking dogs know the difference
between greeting and attack?
Do we?

*

I’m tired
of pretending to be strong,
tired of pretending to be kind.

*

At age seventy,
yes, you're supposed to be profound.
Well, let me think ...

*

The snow hesitates,
as if it knew what would happen
if it settled.

*

Even without our dog,
the other dogs greet me.
I'm sort of famous.

*

In the snow by the tree,
from the edge of the hole,
an eye is watching me.

*

How heroic she is,
this old woman going out
to her mailbox.

*

Haunted by other people's heroism,
I get dressed and go to work.

*

Dragonflies patrol the garden,
while butterflies seduce the flowers.

*

Writing on a Japanese scroll—
insects flying among the flowers.

*

They make conversation
like lawnmowers
cutting through a flower bed.

*

At some point,
you become afraid
not of dying but of surviving.

*

Preparing for the test—
not realizing
the test has come and gone.

*

Every morning, in the half-light,
the ghost of me slowly reappears.

*

Such energy—
as if they had been waiting all their lives
to be eighty.

*

Old age—
the crows call to each other

from one dead tree to another.

*

Perhaps, if I stand here long enough,
I too will become a snowman.

*

It's louder than you might think,
the sound of apples falling to the ground.

*

Dozing on the bus,
I completely missed the beautiful view again.

*

Retirement—
surely I won't be bothered by ambition
any more.

*

The obit editor decides
which of us will have a famous death.

*

Surrounded by flowers,
surrounded by people—
I should learn their names.

*

December:
the deer

on their Fred Astaire legs
come dancing through the snow.

*

I haven't lived there in fifty years,
and yet, when they ask for my address ...

*

So many birds
left their tracks on our walk,
I had to stop shoveling.

*

Winter—
on the way back,
our dog studies her own footprints
in the snow.

*

After all these years,
old age comes
not as a prize but as a test.

*

In a plane—
looking at the backs of heads,
as interesting as the front.

*

Early morning run—
like a plane,

I turn into the wind and take off.

*

Because of the spring,
she kept our dog alive
a little bit longer.

*

April—
like an adolescent,
the trees are breaking out all over.

*

Having learned too well ourselves,
we never taught our dog obedience.

*

There is no courage without fear,
and no virtue without temptation.

*

We know each other so well,
we know the length of the leash between us.

*

The clumsy frogs
jostle the reeds
as they swim
far below the surface.