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My Lovely Shudder

The end of the shudder is
the end of my life,
so I have wandered in search of the shudder for my life.

Every life conceived in a shudder
and passed through trembling legs
spreads out its tentacles and longs for the world of communion.
Because one's habit forms one's fate
there is no liberation as long as one is alive;
the fluttering in the web is the existential dance.

Plunging into vacuum saves me from this hell of shuddering.
But the vacuum is no less another hell,
because shudder is the energy of life.
All life allows is to move from one hell to another.
In the moment of transition,
in the pause between shudder and stillness,
heaven passes like a shadow.

The off-beat shudder of my life
written in a score of long hell and short heaven,
my lovely shudder.

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My Lovely Tremor

I am alive today
because of my tremor for you.

As my body trembles at the air caressing my lungs
your words vibrate delicately
and tap the drum of my ear,
and your love
with its many tongues like huge waves
twines round my body.

In the thrusting and pulling
our boundaries fuse
converging in a peak that crests.
The high tide of your love invades me
and I drown in a sea of tremor.

The shudder of death will not be much different.

With your many fingers you smooth
the ebbed-out mud field of my life;
the wave of love running through your fingers
joins with that of my pulse
and flows through my spine into eternity.

In the sea bridging life and death,
I am alive today
just because of your tremor in me.

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Soap Opera

The bubbles are delirious
that the hands of the world
create by touching me.

When they rub me hard
I grow molten
and dowse myself in the white foam.

Because I knew
that all life is dirt and stains
I decided to love
the disgraces that cannot be erased,
and those with the hands like Lady Macbeth's.

When they put out
their hands aching with scars and conspiracies
I melt my own body
and fold them in.

Because there are things that cannot be spoken,
and true love
is but for the two involved,
I choose silent dissolution rather than disclosure.
I suppose love is, above all else,
to dissolve oneself
and to melt away.

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Aching Body

Chiselling aches. Chipped away,
decades old flesh is ripped off.
The cry of the wood runs through the chisel handle
and through my hand up to my elbow.
At the shock of hammering my bones turn numb.

A festival of the Brazilian kingwood, the American chisel,
and the Korean sculptor.
The kingwood resists revealing its inner flesh like a coy woman.
The harder the wood resists, the sharper the chisel sets its edge
and the sculptor's hammer exerts more strength.
Each claims its own being resolutely.

I carve the wood and think
that my love of the wood is, in reality, my desire
and my desire is *your* pain,
that it is pain that melts desire into love,
that only when *your* pain becomes mine
and we are united in it
does desire change its body into love,
and that all communion begins from pain.

When the wood opens its body willingly
the sharp edge of the chisel becomes the caressing finger
and strokes the wood's body,
and the sculptor's hammer awakens the wood's soul.
The grain of his dream and the hidden grain of the wood meet
and yield a pattern unknown to the world.

Joy fills the kingwood bowl.

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Autumn Nirvana

Suffocation is
delirious.

"Please let me go free, now."
The tree agrees to cease to breathe;
the carbon dioxide stops
circulating in the capillaries
and oxygen
fills in
the water and sieve tubes.

The trunk which trembled with light green
and the limbs which cried with dark green
sit still, in silence
and the leaves which howled in the storm
swallow the motion;
now they burn only a red resignation
like funeral lamps.

On my way down,
holding a leaf lit with their lights,
my irregular pulses burst open,
undoing my endeavor to stop breathing;
I am unworthy even of the bliss of suffocation.
Even at the feeblest movement of the air
the web of my life trembles

and captures
the pain of the sad beings
who can't help but breathe.

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Forsythias

Yellow spurts
ejected forth
with the tickle of the spring breeze,
though buried and cooled in the frozen earth
and their hot bodies are soothed with ice.

The burning bush at Mount Horeb
which did not burn up
walked out of the book
and bloomed in this world of man.
Words of fire
which light the shadowy ground.

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A Prison Like This

Would there be such a prison,
once you are in,
you can never walk out,
or rather you never wish to escape,
a prison that melts with soft touch
my spider hands stretching to all corner of the world,
and brings to a halt with a breezy smile
my wandering glances?

Would there be such a prison,
which thralls me in from the lot
of my empty life slaving toward freedom
and would teach that every flower blooms
only in the dark patch of the lot where it has taken root,
and that only its push and struggle,
being unable to move even a step outside,
and its patience and longing
finally break open the darkness and open the flower,
the one which teaches that the pattern of tears
and fragrance of pain are engraved in every blossom?
Would there be such an ecstatic prison
which takes me in?

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My Mother's Garden

I never imagined that so many flowers would have bloomed.
When Father was hospitalized
and Mother left home to nurse him
I worried about the plants
and went out onto the balcony;
it was full of flowers--
hydrangea, gardenia, thyme,
and others whose names I didn't know.
Suddenly it struck me
that her dreams and longing as a girl,
when she herself was a yearning flower,
have rushed away like rapids
through the valley of her deep-wrinkled life,
and that she now tends so many flowers
to sustain her weak body and dwindling life.
When I collected myself and looked again
the girl who was to be my mother, whom I have never seen,
wearing a pigtailed with ribbons, blushing
and smelling of fragrance more exquisite than hydrangeas,
was sitting quietly in the garden.

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Terminal at Midnight

There are people who cannot get off even at the last stop.
They hear the repeated warning
"Last stop on this line,"
but the heavy souls who rented their bodies to fatigue and desire
cannot wake up.
At a time when the clock calls it a day
and narrows its spread hands into a black hole of zero degrees,
the train threatens to return to its base,
but those who have no base
desperately cling to their ecstatic coma.
Carrying their fears of more of the same
and their prayers for something different,
the train leaves the terminal towards the yards.
Only a long shadow which even death refuses to carry along,
because it is mortgaged to life,
hovers on the dark platform.

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The Damascan Spring

The new shoots
at the end of boughs
look like green spears.
They operate the keratotomy
of removing the hardened parts
which have been festering
during the long winter.

Incising my eyes open
the high tide of life strikes me;
my gaze slips
between the azalea and mountain cherry,
and a dizziness, like motion sickness
traps me.

An occupation army, spring
takes me by surprise,
removing
the thick scap of death
encrusted as I have lived as a prisoner of life.

At the splendid cruelty of the spring
I lose my way
and stand agape.

The life which overpowers me drives me to live.

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Lost Water Bottle

When I turned around the mountain waist and began to climb the steep slope, my heart pounded hard, and sweats oozed from the open pores and streamed down along my back. Though I had crossed several passes the mountain was reluctant to show its peak and I gasped severely, almost out of breath. I collapsed on a flat rock and groped for the water bottle I always carry in the net pocket outside of my sack. But I couldn't find it. My hand grasped only the empty mesh. Where on earth did I drop it? How could I not hear it fall?" With the sense of betrayal that what should always be is not where it should always be, my thirst doubled, sudden despondency invaded me. Wiping away at sweat, I calmed down. When I picked up my sack, it felt too heavy; I had only put a storm jacket into it. When I hurriedly zipped it open, the bottle was waiting for me, scoffing at me. I climbed down the mountain bewildered at my sense of the betrayal and despondency, and also the unexpected sense of relief.

And waiting at home, there was my wife.

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Winter Walk

I

No snow is so heavy it can beat the sun.

The boundary between the sunny side and the shadowy one,
between melted snow and frozen
is muddy and slippery.

All boundaries in this world are this dangerous.

Flowers bud
at the scars where the boughs incised their own bodies.
Only the precarious spots of death
raise life.

II

The slightly bent oak
opens its body to the caressing sunbeam,
and its root pushes sap upward with all their might.
When the sunbeam and the sap break their boundaries
and accepts each other,
the tree breathes misty haze
and hides its shyness.

By pecking away the winter frozen within itself
with his entire body,
a woodpecker
sprouts spring.

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Rain Carries Many-layered Sorrow

Rain falls, weeping off the broad leaves of paulownia outside the window.
People say it rains sadly
but rain isn't sad at all,
because its body has neither pockets nor a heart
to contain sorrow.
Even if it feels sorrow
the feeling would never penetrate into its inside
so as to trouble the inner being of the rain.
Instead, sorrow climbs on the back of the rain and vanishes quickly.
Only we are sad
who watch the rain.
It is nothing but our own sorrow that makes the rain sad
which does not know sorrow at all.
But to know that rain is never sad
and the sorrow of the rain is ours entirely
is a sadder thing indeed.
Rain falls sadly,
carrying many-layered sorrow.

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Cranes at the DMZ near Chulwon

They dance, caressing each other's necks.
Taking the tunnels inside the mountains,
which the acid of man's hatred has dug for the pipes of an organ,
the deep sound of their love
makes exquisite music,
melting the mines.

With their intense motion
they swallow
even the sound of cannon fires
rumbling in the gray sky.

Love may begin from a place like this
where hatred collapses.
The cranes, as messengers of indifferent winter
nullify all man-made boundaries.
Ignoring man's admiring eyes,
they soar high
while I plunge into the dust.

The festival of life is ecstatic
even on rice fields covered by nothing but stubbles.
What is more obstinate than life itself
is the will to be alive.
The cranes witness this cruel truth
with their delicate white and black bodies,
and I am ashamed of myself for being a man
who has no clothes to cover my shame.

The twilight over the mountains
encircling the rice fields
hides its blushing body within the dusk.
