

POETRY

CHAITALI

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Contents

UNKNOWN WORLD.....	4
ON THE ENDLESS ROAD	4
DROUGHT.....	5
WOUNDED PRIDE	5
FEARLESSNESS	6
THE WRONG HOUR	6
THE LIMIT OF HOPE	7
RECEIVING A BLESSING	7
THE RIVER ICHAMATI.....	8
OFFERING	8
RITUSAMHARA	9
OPULENCE	9
COMPASSION	10
DUTY	10
POETRY	11
TO KALIDASA	12
THE SONG OF KUMARA'S BIRTH.....	12
A MOMENT'S MEETING	13
THE FERRY	13
SONG.....	14
SONGLESS.....	14
TRUTH AND BEAUTY	15
WITHOUT PHILOSOPHY	16
THE HERMITAGE	16
GRASS	16
ELDER SISTER.....	17
TWO SIMILES.....	17

TWO FRIENDS	18
A RARE BIRTH.....	18
THE GOD'S FAREWELL	19
THIS EARTHLY GROUND	19
MEDITATION	20
RIVER JOURNEY	20
WOMAN	21
PADMA	21
BORROWED GARB	22
ACQUAINTANCE.....	23
IN THE VILLAGE	23
PUTU	24
THE RECKONING OF MERIT	24
THE FIRST KISS	25
DAWN	25
ANCIENT INDIA	25
PRAYER	26
BELOVED	27
LOVE	27
THE BELOVED	27
MOTHER BENGAL	28
THE FOREST.....	28
IN THE FOREST, AND IN THE KINGDOM.....	29
YEAR'S END	29
FAREWELL.....	30
DISSOLUTION.....	30
RENUNCIATION	31

TO THE DEVOTEE	31
A FEARFUL, VAIN HOPE.....	32
NOON	32
THE REALM OF THE MIND.....	33
THE WOMAN OF THE MIND.....	34
THE SCENE OF UNION	34
THE SWEETNESS OF DEATH	35
THE CLOUD-MESSENGER	35
SILENCE.....	36
THE TRAVELER.....	36
THE PEACE-MANTRA.....	37
TENDING	38
THE LAST WORD	38
THE LAST KISS.....	39
THE COMPANION	39
THE DEVOTED WIFE	40
TO CIVILIZATION	41
THE ENDING	41
THE COMMON MAN	42
THE BONDS OF LOVE.....	43
A SCENE OF TENDERNESS.....	43
DREAM	44
SELF-INTEREST.....	45
MEMORY	45
THE HEART'S OWN LAW	46

UNKNOWN WORLD

(অজ্ঞাত বিশ্ব)

I was born into you a moment's guest, O boundless Nature — and in simple faith I called you home, I called you mother still. But this evening you bared claw and fang, rushing, roaring, in a fiend's dread shape, flinging your mother's guise into the void, tearing yourself to shreds in the storm of Baishakh, you came charging, terrible, on wings of dust, to root out life as though it were mere grass. Trembling, I ask you now, O vast and dreadful one — who are you, with a thousand arms encircling me, sealing the endless roads of sky on every side? Who summoned this brief life of mine to be? Where must I go — and why do I exist at all?

ON THE ENDLESS ROAD

(অনন্ত পথে)

Sitting at my window I watch her every day — a little girl, without play, without restlessness, grave in her duties, quick and busy-footed, coming and going to her daily tasks; with eyes half-blinded by unshed tears I watch her face, and smile at her with love. Today I loose my boat for a distant shore; she too will sail one day, her labor done, back to her own true country; she does not know me, nor I her — yet still I long to see where the last thread of her life will lead her. In what unknown village, what far-off land, in whose house will she be bride, and then at last a mother — and after that all ends — and after that, alas, where does this girl's road go?

DROUGHT**(অনাবৃষ্টি)**

I have heard that in ancient days, for love of mortal women, the gods themselves came down from heaven. That age is gone. Today, in this rainless hour, this dry-bedded river, this scorched field of Baishakh, a farmer's daughter cries her plaintive prayer again and again — come, O rain, and strike. With restless hope she lifts her sorrowful eyes to the sky, and searches it, and searches still. Yet no rain falls; the deaf wind only scatters every cloud, and rushes on unheeding, while the sun's fiery tongue licks dry the last moisture from the sky. In this dark age, alas, the gods themselves have grown old and weary. A woman's pleading now moves only men.

WOUNDED PRIDE**(অভিমান)**

Whom shall I blame, my friend, whom shall I blame? Useless, this bluster; useless, this rage. Those who only die, but never give their lives, have never yet been honored by anyone. However much I weep in print, however much I curse, it is my own blackened face that wears the deeper stain. To carry your complaint against the one who wrongs you night and day — straight to that very one! If you hold no power of judgment in your own hand, if, kicked, you cannot strike a single blow in answer — then stay at home, your head bowed low, and hold your peace; don't beat the drum of it in every weekly paper. On one side stands the sword, and scorn, unmoving; on the other, only ink — and only tears.

FEARLESSNESS

(অভয়)

Today, upon the last day of the year, O teacher, to whom do you show this fear of the last hour, sitting there? Endless assurance wakes today across the sky, an endless stream of life runs through the wind, the whole world has risen laughing in the joy of waking — only fear still clings to your parched face. God is no demon gaping wide with death — it is you who, deceiving, conjure up this dread. Better, almost, to forget God outright, so small the loss; the true harm is fear — is deep distrust of God. He himself, by making us forget, again and again, the fact of death, has let us nest and dwell in this world's household. Who are you, to raise this harsh voice of terror? Joy alone is the true worship of the Joyous One.

THE WRONG HOUR

(অসময়)

Let go this useless effort. A hushed silence will build its own story, in its own time. Today it lies in meditation — this heart of mine is like a hermit's grove, fearful its penance will be broken. At such an hour, here, in vain, my love, you have come wearing a garland of spring flowers, your skirt is full of memories of youth — but in this quiet bower there is no song today. Only along this hushed, unrustling forest path your two small anklets rise and hum. Beloved, you have come into this garden at the wrong hour; today, even yesterday's song lies mute. Seeing you, the flowers themselves grow restless, and every bud longs to open out of season.

THE LIMIT OF HOPE

(আশার সীমা)

All of the sky, all of the wind, all this green and
living earth, all its splendor, all its peace that
fills the evening sky,
all delight, all honeyed things, every smile touched
with sweetness, all the ever-new luxuries, the whole
intoxication of pleasure,
all the earth, all its glory, the whole weight of
its offerings, every labor of the world's churning,
every necklace of jewels —
if I had all of this, still endlessly my heart would
want for more — but if I have only her, then I ask
for nothing but one small corner of home.

RECEIVING A BLESSING

(আশিষ-গ্রহণ)

I go now to the battlefield, onto the road of
struggle; from far away comes the roar of the
world's upheaval. Before I take my leave, while
still I may, let me fill my heart entirely with your
voice, forever murmuring its sweetness, its generous
blessing — let me carry on my heart your kind touch,
this store of well-wishing. Grant me only this: that
in victory or defeat I may bow my head in quiet
humility, like a flower that carries a god's own
blessing. The trusted face of love, like a bad
dream, may turn hostile all at once — yet let it
never curdle the nectar of my heart; let me remain,
always, my own true self.

THE RIVER ICHAMATI

(ইছামতী নদী)

O slender Ichamati, along your banks may peace live
on forever, hut by hut — may your bordering fields
stand thick with grain. Year after year, in the
rains, dressed in joy, with the deep roll of thunder
and the gathering dark, in the wave-festival stirred
by the eastern wind, lifting a sound of gladness
left and right through the two villages that you
shelter and feed, come flowing down in splendor from
your hill home, proud and radiant in your rejoicing
current. When I am gone, when this song is gone,
still, life moving on in the breast of the earth,
your joyful story, here in Bengal, O river-daughter,
will sound out, year after year, O Ichamati!

OFFERING

(উৎসর্গ)

Today in my vineyard-grove cluster on cluster the
fruit has formed. So heavy with their aching
sweetness they seem, this instant, about to burst;
in spring's reckless, wild wind they seem about to
bow down to the earth — so full, so unbearably
brimming with juice, layer on layer the fruit has
ripened.

Come now into this bowered home, come, you — the
fulfillment of all I have sought. Plunder, and fill
the fold of your garment with all the wealth that my
life holds; silent, utterly and gently bowed, take
spring's whole surrender for your own — carry away,
with a smiling face, all the grove's own offering of
longing.

Wounded, your nails stained red as with fruit-blood,
tear the stems and let them fall. Sitting at the

vine's root in blissful ease, the whole day through,
with idle fingers, as though at some pointless,
absent-minded task, pluck them one by one in play —
and let the ripe, full fruit break open beneath the
bite of your teeth, upon your lips.
Today in my vineyard-grove the restless bees hum on
and on. All day the restless wind breathes out its
long and rustling sigh, and in the stirring of the
forest's breast the leaf-edged branches tremble —
today in my vineyard-grove fruit has ripened,
cluster on cluster.

RITUSAMHARA

(ঋতুসংহার)

O prince of poets, Kalidasa, in an imagined bower
you sit in seclusion with your beloved, upon the
crown-prince's throne of youth. To bear your
footstool cut from emerald, the whole earth remains
in waiting; the whole sky holds a golden royal
parasol aloft for you two alone; six handmaidens —
the six seasons — come circling round to dance;
filling ever-new cups, they pour ever-new streams of
colored wine into your thirsting youth; the three
worlds become a single bridal chamber. There is no
sorrow here, no want, no crowd of men — you alone
are king, and she alone your queen.

OPULENCE

(ঐশ্বর্য)

This small blade of grass, here in the universe,
carries a plain greatness, and wears it lightly. The
new sun of morning, the moon of night — the blade of

grass sits with them, as an equal. This song of mine, too, mingles with the world's own song, and melts into the very heart of all that is; the pouring rain of Shravan, the forest's murmuring — among them all, it finds its own true home. But you, O lover of luxury, the weight of all your wealth is yours alone, locked behind one small, shut door. No sunlight falls on it, no moon looks down, it holds no share in the universe's constant blessing. And when death comes and stands before it, in an instant, alas, it turns pale, wasted, and utterly untrue.

COMPASSION

(করুণা)

In the afternoon, on the dust-choked streets of the city, a fearsome crowd; from the workshops worn-out men stream homeward, like the current of a river freed from its dam. Chariot-horses race on, breath heaving, driven by hunger and the driver's whip. Just then, a shopkeeper's child, lost in play, runs with arms flung wide to catch a fallen kite. Suddenly he falls beneath the wheels, and the stone-hard road shudders with the blow. A cry rises all at once into the empty air, as though, in heaven, the goddess of mercy wailed aloud. I look up, and see a woman, her clothes in disarray — a fallen woman — collapsed and weeping on the ground.

DUTY

(কর্ম)

I could not find my servant, come the morning. The

door stood open, no water drawn for bathing — the wretched fool had not come back all night. I do not know where my washed clothes have gone, nor any sign of breakfast being made! The clock ticked on while I sat there fuming — just let me catch him, I will teach him a lesson. At last, when the day had grown late, he came, bowed low, and stood before me, hands folded. I said to him, full of anger, "Get out of my sight — I don't want to see your face." Hearing this, he stood a moment like a man struck dumb, staring at my face, unable to speak — then said, in a voice thick and broken, "Last night, at midnight, my little girl died." Having said this, he quickly took his towel on his shoulder and went off alone to his daily work. Just as on every other day — scrubbing, cleaning, wiping — he left not a single task undone.

POETRY

(কাব্য)

Did you not have, then, your share of joy and sorrow, the same war of hope and despair we know, O immortal poet? Did you not endure, at every turn, court intrigue, hidden blows? Did you never bear the weight of insult, neglect, mistrust, unjust judgment, harsh and cruel want — did sleepless nights never pass with a spear driven into your chest? Yet, above it all, untouched and pure, your poetry's lotus of beauty has opened toward the sun of joy; nowhere in it is there any trace of sorrow, want, or hard days. Having drunk, yourself, the poison churned from life, whatever nectar rose, you gave it all away.

TO KALIDASA

(কালিদাসের প্রতি)

Today you are only a poet, nothing more — where is your royal court, where is your house, where is that city of Ujjayini — where has he gone, your king, Kalidasa, that emperor of emperors? No trace is left of any of it. And yet, today, it seems that you had always lived in endless joy, a citizen of Alaka. On the evening cloud-peak, when Uma's lord, his meditation broken, danced in the fullness of earthly rapture, while wet clouds rolled like thunder-drums and swift lightning kept the rhythm, beat by beat — you, in that very moment, would raise a hymn of praise, and at its close, Gauri herself, smiling with tenderness, would take the peacock feather from her ear and set it in your hair.

THE SONG OF KUMARA'S BIRTH

(কুমারসম্ভবগান)

When you sang, poet, before the divine pair, the song of Kumara's birth, the Pramathas gathered round on every side; upon the peak a slow, calm bank of evening cloud came down, its lightning-play suspended, its thunder stilled; Kumara's peacock lowered its tail and stood there quietly at Parvati's side, its raised neck gently curved. Sometimes the goddess's lips trembled with a faint smile; sometimes a sigh passed unseen; sometimes a welling of tears showed at the corner of her eyes — until at last a restless shyness settled, silent, on her downcast lids, and you, poet, looking on the goddess's face, fell suddenly silent, your song unfinished.

A MOMENT'S MEETING

(ক্ষণমিলন)

The one I hold as dearest of all kin — how long, how much do I really know of them! In the midst of endless time, for a single moment's meeting, their life has brushed against my own. However small the fragment of each other we have learned, we do not know, alas, its boundless rest. And when, one day, one of the two of us turns away their face, in all this wide world we two will never meet, face to face, again — who, in the endless universe, will hear the other's call! In this brief meeting, then, O charming one, why did I see you so achingly beautiful? Why, in this moment's flash of light, O one most inward, did I know you as someone always, already known to me?

THE FERRY

(খেয়া)

The ferry-boat goes back and forth across the current; someone travels home, someone leaves it behind. On the two banks, two villages know each other well, crossing over, morning until evening. In the world, how much conflict, how much ruin, how many new histories are made and unmade; out of the flow of blood, foaming up, how many golden crowns bloom, and then break; how many new hungers and thirsts of civilization rise, how much poison rises, and how much nectar too — yet here, on these two banks, that no one else has heard of, two villages simply gaze at one another. This ferry goes on forever, over the river's current; someone travels home, someone leaves it behind.

SONG

Thou fallest, laughing, into my heart, like a wave.
 In what full moon has the tide risen today, in this
 sea of my youth! In restless, wild waters, turning,
 returning, to a ceaseless beat, upon this lonely
 shore of mine — what game is this of thine! Across
 the whole shore of my breast, in how many dances,
 how many songs, thou comest near, thou goest far, a
 hundred thousand times. Thou fallest, laughing, into
 my heart, like a wave.

Like a waking thou risest in mine eyes and kissest
 my brow. At the far edge of sleep thou showest
 thyself, slowly, in a light new-born. Gazing,
 gazing, at last thou comest into the whole of my
 heart and standest there, thy hair flung loose, upon
 feet of rose-red — the whole sky breaks open and
 fills to the brim with thee, every grove bursts to
 flower, in life, in youth. Like a waking thou risest
 in mine eyes and kissest my brow.

Breathing like a blossom, thou fallest, petal by
 petal, upon my breast. In the guise of secret dew,
 drop by drop of tears, thou drenchest my life. A
 silent throng of fragrance steals into my soul,
 unveiling sweet dreams in the hidden heart. At the
 thrill of thy touch the dawn comes into eyes still
 heavy with sleep, and thy kiss moves through my
 every limb. Breathing like a blossom, thou fallest,
 petal by petal, upon my breast.

SONGLESS

My lyre-bearer has gone away — how long since, I do
 not know. In what neglect, what forgetfulness, upon
 the forgotten dust, she has left her lyre behind.
 The flowers have opened — in all the world today the
 day for singing has come, all ten directions ring,
 the tireless mad koel calls, the spring-wood
 overflows with rapture. A pain has struck up in me,

an anguish filling my whole being, so many words
rise and fill my mind, yet I sit here the whole day,
songless, without praise — my lyre-bearer has gone
away.

Never again in that fresh new strain will the lyre
fill and rise, never again will the old melody play;
like a young ascetic woman, keeping her eternal vow
of silence, you, my lyre, now lie indifferent. Who
will sit on this seat, in this grove of the mind's
lotus, in whose lap shall I lay you down — stay
lying there, gazing up at the sky — my lyre-bearer
has gone away.

If sometime, forgetting myself, I should lift you up
and try, foolishly, to play you against my breast;
though the whole earth in spring is filled with
song, still today I cannot sing. Today my words are
but the husk of words, no melody is left in them, I
know now that my woven rhythms are in vain — my life
is filled with tears, no music murmurs in it — my
lyre-bearer has gone away.

I used to think this lyre, strung to melody, was
mine to keep, a boon given by my own god; that from
my very life, in a stream of nectar full of
incantation, it had received a voice of song that
would never fade. One evening, in the twilight, my
eyes brimming with tears, I drew it close and held
it to my breast — it no longer wished to sound, and
only then did I understand, alas, my lyre-bearer has
gone away.

TRUTH AND BEAUTY

I have heard, O world-ocean, that in thy depths lie
priceless gems and pearls without end. Night and
day, in every land, learned divers labor on, forever
searching them out. For that I have no craving, O
great deep! The light that burns upon thy surface,
the mystery that sways beneath thy breast, the

majesty spread across thy blue waters, the music that rises at thy ceaseless beat, the wondrous play that dances in thy great dance — if ever in this world I should know their end, if ever, through all my days, I should grow weary of them, then I shall dive into thy fathomless depths, where the jewel lies, or where death lies.

WITHOUT PHILOSOPHY

Let whoever wishes sit with eyes shut fast in meditation, and win the knowledge of whether the world is real or illusion. I, meanwhile, will sit with eyes that never tire, and take the world in, simply, by the light of day.

THE HERMITAGE

When with the mind's eye I see ancient India, from east to west, from north to south, the great forests appear, wrapped in their vast shade. The king, leaving his pride of kingdom behind in the town, ties up his chariot-horses far off, and goes forward with head bowed, for his guru's counsel — on the banks of a flowing river the great sage sits in the posture of meditation, and his pupils study apart, beneath the trees, in the calm morning wind; while the daughters of the sages, binding their soft, tender youth in rough bark-cloth, water the young saplings at their roots. Through the forest gate enters, having left his throne behind, a crownless king, his hair grown white, the calm radiance of renunciation upon his brow.

GRASS

O friend, be at peace, put your anger away; this quarrel of mine with you is vain. I only wish to walk the road I mean to walk, and on it there is no

lack of room for anyone. The seven worlds walk that road side by side, and still it has no end in the great sky. Your heaped-up riches, within the walls of your house, dress themselves in glittering pride, holding the universe cheap. But carry them out onto that universal road, and in an instant they will stand small, dim-faced, and bowed — there, nobler than they, is a fresh blade of grass, lush and green in the streaming rains of the monsoon. There, nobler than they, O Pride, is this — my very small song of today.

ELDER SISTER

By the riverbank the migrant laborers from the west dig earth, stacking it into heaps. Their little daughter comes and goes about the landing-steps; scrubbing and scouring pots, bowls, and plates, she comes running, running, a hundred times a day; her brass bangles clink and clatter against the brass tray; busy the whole day long — while her tiny brother, shaven-headed, mud-streaked, without a stitch of clothing, follows behind her like a tamed little creature, and sits waiting on the high bank at his sister's command, in patient stillness. A full water-jar upon her head, a plate tucked under one arm, in her right hand she holds the small hand of the child — a mother's deputy, bowed beneath her burden of work, this very small elder sister.

TWO SIMILES

The river that has lost its current, that can flow no more, is bound about by a thousand ropes of clinging weed; the nation that has lost its life, grown still and numb, is bound at every step by its own withered customs. On the road where everyone walks, at every hour, no grass or weed can ever take

root; but the nation that never walks that road at all has its feet held fast by scripture, spell, and rite.

TWO FRIENDS

The dumb beast, wordless, its heart unable to speak — where, one wonders, does it ever meet the human? Yet in some first heaven, on creation's morning, as though heart passed daily into heart in constant crossing, a footprint was pressed down, and to this day, through all the ages, it has never quite been lost — and so the two still know each other. The kinship of that first day has receded very far; and yet, suddenly, in some wordless strain, a faint memory of that old time wakens in the soul, a nectar-sweet affection wells up within, and the beast turns a spellbound, simple, tender gaze upon the face — while the human beholds it with an amused, fond tenderness. It is as though, in two disguises, two old friends had chanced to meet — and after that, a strange and wondrous play unfolds between two lives.

A RARE BIRTH

One day this seeing will come to its very end, the last blink will fall upon these eyes. The next day, the night will pass just as before, and morning will wake over a world still wide awake. The play of this world will go on with its noise and clamor, in joy and sorrow, the hours will pass from house to house. Remembering this, I look out today at the whole of existence with eyes full of longing, full of eagerness. Whatever meets my eye, nothing now seems small or worthless, everything today feels precious beyond measure. Precious is even the tiniest speck of this earth, precious is even the most wasted,

failed life in this world. Let what I have not received remain unreceived; let what I have received stay mine; and whatever I once thought too small to want — that too, now, give me.

THE GOD'S FAREWELL

In the god's temple an aged devotee sat telling his prayer-beads, night and day. Then, one evening, dust-covered in body, clothless, wretched, poor, someone entered that house. He said in a pleading voice, "I have no home; out of mercy, give me a corner, a place to stay." The devotee, drawing back in distaste, said to him, "Get away, get away, you unclean thing, go far from here." The stranger said, "Then I go" — and in the blink of an eye the beggar took on the very form of the god. The devotee cried, "Lord, what trick have you played on me!" The god replied, "It was you who drove me away. I go through the world in the shape of the poor, seeking out compassion — only where the homeless are given a home do I myself dwell."

THIS EARTHLY GROUND

Small words, small songs come to my mind today — whatever meets my eye, on every side. I feel as though I am sailing on, rowing my boat along, and on either bank I see the green earth pass by. Everything says, "I am going, I am going," in moment after moment, and because I see it only for an instant, I look on it with love. From the shore, sorrow and joy, that brother and sister, gaze back at my face with such pitying eyes. Shadowy villages appear along the banks, and I think to myself, how much love must surround them. And when I gaze and gaze with eager, longing eyes, something passes from my own soul into the soul of this earth — good and

bad, sorrow and joy, darkness and light, and it comes to me: taking it all together, this earth is good.

MEDITATION

The more I love, the greater I see thee to be, the more truly, my beloved, do I see thee as thou art. The less I make of thee, the less truly do I know thee — sometimes I lose thee from sight, sometimes I call thee back to mind. Today, on this day of spring, my mind opening wide, I behold a strange and wondrous dream — as though this world did not exist, as though nothing else remained, as though there were only one vast, boundless ocean, with no day, no night, no hour, no passing moment, the waters of a great dissolution, still and unmoving; and as though, in the very midst of it, fully blossomed, thou alone remained afloat there, a single lotus; and the King of the universe, seated forever in his great love, beholds within thee his own reflected self.

RIVER JOURNEY

My boat moves on, filled by a gentle wind. The morning's white clouds rest at the edge of the sky. The river, swollen with the rains, sleeps like a satisfied child, waveless, its body full and heavy, sleeping without a sound. On both banks the fields lie still, thick with green grain, the earth slow with drowsiness, as though heavy with child. Why is everything today, all this water and land, so utterly still? No boat is seen upon the river, the banks lie empty of people. Sitting alone in the midst of this abundant earth, Death itself, ancient beyond all ages, its eyes today grown dim, has dressed itself in beauty, its hair heavy with cloud,

a faint, pale light falling upon its brow. It hums,
it sings, in a low and grieving tone, and it is
drawing my restless soul away, making it forget.

WOMAN

You are the mind's own creation, and so within the
mind your image dwells so easily, so entirely at
home. When I behold you at the world's shore it
seems as though you had stepped outside my own mind.
When I see you standing there within the mind itself
it seems as though you had dwelt in this soul
lifetime after lifetime. You are the form the
imagination gives itself, and so, in every
direction, you go mingling and merging with all
beauty. In the moon is the loveliness of your face;
in your face, the rising of the moon; with the whole
of creation you are in ceaseless exchange. The
mind's endless thirst wanders the world and dies
away, blending with you into the sweetness of the
whole universe. And after that, the mind surrenders
— this life and the life beyond — to the very god it
has itself imagined and made.

PADMA

O my Padma, you and I have looked upon each other a
hundred, a hundred times. One day, upon your empty
sandbank, in the blessed hour of twilight, in a day
of late autumn, calling to witness the sun sinking
in the west, I gave over my very soul to you. In the
fading light of evening you lay there that day,
bowed-headed like a young bride, silent and still;
the evening star alone, with tender, playful eyes,
gazed toward you, her face full of smiling light.
Ever since that day, O my Padma, you and I have
looked upon each other a hundred, a hundred times.
Many people come to me on many kinds of business;

they do not know of this bond between our two souls,
 they do not know why I come, at evening's secret
 meeting-hour, to this lonely shore spread with a bed
 of sand. When your chattering flocks of ruddy geese
 lie hushed upon the water, their clamor set aside,
 when, in the silent village along your eastern bank,
 the doors are shut, one cottage after another, what
 song do you sing, what song do I sing — no one on
 either shore has ever traced their source. In
 private, through autumn, summer, winter, and the
 rains, a hundred times we have looked upon each
 other, you and I. How often, sitting on your bank,
 have I wondered: if in another life I should come
 back again to this earth, if from some far, unknown
 land of birth I should come floating down, rowing a
 boat, into your swift current — how many villages,
 how many fields, how many tangled thickets of
 tamarisk, how many sandbanks, how many crumbling,
 fallen banks, would I cross before arriving at this
 very place — would no deep, buried consciousness in
 me stir awake? For a hundred lifetimes, at this same
 lonely shore, my secret heart has come out to meet
 you; will it not happen again, at that same shore,
 that same evening hour, that you and I shall look
 upon each other once more?

BORROWED GARB

Who are you, going about dressed in your masters'
 finery? Does not your disguise multiply your shame
 fourfold! Sitting upon your own body, these borrowed
 clothes — are they not, every day, insulting you
 yourself? Are they not saying, "You wretch, hold
 onto me carefully; am I not far nobler than your own
 skin?" If there is no self-respect left in the
 heart, then on the back a black coat becomes only a
 mark of disgrace. That paltry little cap, perched
 upon your head, is it not heaping scorn upon your

own people? It is saying, "The head that now lies beneath my feet has had its lowliness erased, only by my own mercy." To carry humiliation over your whole body — what pride is this! Know well: beside that, a worn, ragged cloth would be an ornament.

ACQUAINTANCE

One day I saw that naked little boy sitting in the dust, his two legs spread out before him. Sitting at the landing-steps, his sister was scrubbing a water-pot, turning it round and round, scooping up bits of clay to clean it. Not far off, a soft, downy little kid-goat wandered slowly along, grazing, up and down the riverbank. Suddenly it came near, and pausing, again and again, it gazed at the little boy's face, and called out to him. The boy startled, trembled, burst into frightened tears, and the sister dropped her pot at the landing-steps and came running. Taking her brother onto one hip and the little goat onto the other, she divided her affection equally between the two of them! The child of the beast, the child of man — with their sister between them, she bound the two together with the cord of acquaintance.

IN THE VILLAGE

Here, I find her near me — as near as this very earth beneath my feet, as near as flower and fruit, as near as the air, the water, all around. Like the song of a bird, like the murmur of water, like this morning light itself, like this very softness, the deep green of the forest — just so do I love her. Like a beautiful evening, like the tuberose, like the morning star at the edge of the sky, like the dawn, stainless, washed clean with dew — just so beautiful do I find her. Like the rain's water, like

the floor of the sky, like the sweet, deep sleep of night, like the river's current, like the banyan's shade over the forest track — just so is she my very own. Like tears that gather and fall, brimming from the eyes, just so easily, so naturally, come my songs — just as life itself pervades, filling every corner of the heart, just so does her love fill mine.

PUTU

The Chaitra noon will not pass, the thirsty earth burns in the day's blaze. Then, out of nowhere, I heard someone call from far away — "Putu-rani, come!" On the empty riverbank, in the scorching noon, a tender voice woke my curiosity. I closed my book and rose, unhurried, opened the door a crack, and looked outside. A great buffalo, mud upon its flanks, stood at the water's edge with mild, soft eyes. A young man had waded in and called to her — to bathe her — "Putu-rani, come!" I saw the youth — I saw his Putu-rani — and my quiet, sweet expectancy dissolved, laughing, into the ordinary.

THE RECKONING OF MERIT

When the holy man rose to heaven, he called for Chitragupta and said, "Bring me the ledger of my merit." Chitragupta laid the book before him and watched to see what his face would show. The sadhu started: "What a monstrous error! The early pages you have filled with marks, but on the last leaf I find only emptiness — all the years I was sunk in the mire of the world, how could such merit have come to me then?" Hearing this, Chitragupta smiled to himself. The sadhu, in fury, cried, "On the page of my youth why have you written so much merit, under the ledger of worship?" Chitragupta answered,

smiling, "This is hard to understand — what men call love, that is what is called worship."

THE FIRST KISS

All ten directions fell silent, their eyes bowed low — every bird that had been singing hushed its song. The wind grew still; the water's murmuring stopped in an instant; the forest's whisper sank slowly into the forest's own whispering. On the waveless river's empty bank the evening shadow came down without a sound, and the mute rim of the sky lay speechless on the earth. In that hour, at the window, silent, alone, came our first kiss. At once, in every quarter, rang out the conch and bell of evening worship in the temple. The endless world of stars shivered, and our eyes filled, brimming, with tears.

DAWN

Pure young dawn, and a cool wind — the quiet river shivers and shivers again. Not yet have the wild swans come down to the water, not yet has any boat unfurled its white sail. Not yet has the village bride come to the landing, no farmer walks the road, no cattle in the field. I sit alone at the open window, my burning forehead laid against the open sky. The breeze runs its caressing touch through my hair, the glad light falls and settles on my face. The birds' glad singing, from every quarter, rocks the blue heaven in a flood of nectar. Blessed am I, who behold the light of the sky, blessed am I, who have loved this world so well.

ANCIENT INDIA

On every side appear Vidarbha, Virata, Ayodhya, Panchala, Kanchi — heads held high, defying the very vault of heaven with sidelong glances, in the

neighing of horses, the trumpeting of elephants, in the clash of swords, the twang of bows, in the music of the lute, the ringing of anklets, in the bard's praises, the swell of festival, in the wild roar of conches, the joy of victory, in the rumbling thunder of chariots, the roar of the road — forever sounding, with the din of restless work. Not far off, the hermitage of the Brahmin — speechless, grave, calm, restrained, and vast. Here, the drunk and swelling pride of the Kshatriya glory; there, the still and mighty silence of the Brahmin's majesty.

PRAYER

Today — by what wealth, by whose hand, could the world leave me deprived? Yours — the jewel-dust of your lotus feet lies gathered and kept within me. However — harsh and cruel the glances that graze me, however many thorns rain into the depths of my heart, still — my heart and mind, touched by that nectar, thrill, moment after moment! Today — what thirst is left unquenched, O supreme beloved of my life? In my heart — eternal nectar is poured, by your hand's tender, compassionate touch. Here — for how many days and nights, struck by insult, I have stood with bowed and shamed head, still — the brow of my heart, by your own hand, remains marked with the sacred sign. Here — who is it that, in harsh words, in my ear, sounds the clash of discord! In my soul — day and night there rises the murmuring of your lute. Lord — let each keep what is theirs; let me remain forever disgraced. Only — may you, in this life, before my eyes, remain, remain forever longed for.

BELOVED

A hundred curses on me today, O lovely one, that I should wish to see you made so small. Your radiance of glory, from your very form, falls into my heart and scatters through the world. When my eyes had not yet fallen upon you I had not yet seen the beauty-goddess of the world. You anointed my eyes with heaven's own collyrium, you left me standing in this endless place. Would this blue sky have pleased me half so much, if your bright face had never come to mind? By some strange, unearthly magic, your laughter and song have won a thousand lives throughout the world. You came first, a lamp held in your hand, and after you, the whole world entered my heart.

LOVE

A dense, moonless night, a wilderness without end — in every direction, by the hundred-thousand, travelers are crossing over. A tryst in the dark, toward what road, for whose sake — the wayfarer himself does not know. Only it seems that the joy of a whole lifetime is about to appear, smiling, at any moment. So many touches, so many scents, so many sounds and songs pass close by and set the heart trembling. By some chance the light of lightning flashes out, and whoever I glimpse in it, I love — I call out to them and say — blessed is this life, for your sake alone have I wandered so far. In the dark, all the others come near and pass by too, but I cannot tell whether they are there at all.

THE BELOVED

O beloved, O most gracious one, O player of the lute, today, seated alone on the lotus-throne of my heart, you pour out heaven's own nectar; above my

head the rain-washed, freshly bathed blue heaven has laid its gentle hand, full of blessing; before me the earth, ripe with grain and rippling, brushes my eyes with an immortal kiss; the restless wind comes and takes me in its arms; stirring within me a rush of joy, the brimming river flows on; the noonday clouds weave a garland of dreams across the brow of the horizon. Today, enchanted, you have made me forget — made me forget the world's hundred thousand words — and with the sound of your lute, you have built a vast silence.

MOTHER BENGAL

Through virtue and sin, through sorrow and joy, through falling and rising, let your children grow into human beings — O Bengal, land aching with tenderness, within the fold of your house, do not keep us eternal children any longer. Wherever, among all the lands of the earth, each one's place may be, let us go seek it out and find it for ourselves. Do not, at every step, bind us with small prohibitions, keeping us tied and called your good, obedient children. Let us give our lives, bear our sorrows, and with our own hands struggle it out, for better or worse. Take your sons — thin, meek, and saintly as they are — and cast them out of house and home, cast off from fortune, all of them. Your seven crore children, O bewitched, doting mother, you have kept as Bengalis — you have not made us into human beings.

THE FOREST

Green, beautiful, and serene — O land of the forest, you are the ancient dwelling-house of humankind. You are not still and lifeless, like a marble palace — your countenance is forever new, alive and moving

with life, with love, with thought, with meaning.
You give us your shade, you give us flower and
fruit, you give us cloth, you give us bedding, you
give us freedom; day and night, murmuring, you speak
so many words, the mantras of an unknown tongue; in
strange and varied music you sing the song of
waking; and in the deep of night you spread out
silence like the end of a sari drawn across a
mother's breast; in your restless, shifting waves
you play with children at their games; and with the
old you speak the ancient word, that lies beyond all
speech.

IN THE FOREST, AND IN THE KINGDOM

Having spent the whole day upon the throne, Rama
came, at evening, into his chamber of rest. Half of
the bed had long lain empty; upon it he laid his
weary brow. In a temple emptied of its deity, like
any devotee, he sat down upon the ground, his eyes
filled with tears, and said, kneeling, in a grieving
breath — "As long as I was destitute, dwelling in
the forest, with no gold, no jewel, no pearl to my
name, you were always my Lakshmi, my visible
goddess. Today I am lord of a kingdom — but you are
no more; only your image remains, wrought in gold
and gem." Eternal joy, in its beggar's dress, went
back to the forest; and a golden woman is the king's
undying grief, in the king's own house.

YEAR'S END

This pure dawn, all the birds that there ever were
have risen calling, in every wood, on every branch.
In the doyel's and the shama's throat, a burst of
joy; the papiya sings and sings, its longing never
spent. In a plaintive, pleading voice, the tireless
cuckoo fills the whole world with the heart's own

petition. Some dance, some sing, some fly as if in rapture, as though they had won back a world they had lost. Not one bird knows that today the year comes to its end; they hear no sermon from any wise old crane. As long as this life lasts beneath this sky, there is no "end of the year," so far as they know. But man, joyless, clings through the day and night, dividing himself into a hundred separate pieces.

FAREWELL

O river, in that city there is no murmuring music like your voice; no open sky so generous, no unwritten scripture of blue leaves kept open from horizon to horizon; no calm, tender earth that, with its green collyrium, keeps truth's own form ever fresh before clear, unclouded eyes — there, in that place, one has only one's own heart to lean on, alone, in the midst of a shoreless world. And so, like a frightened child, my heart does not wish, today, to take its leave of you, and all your company. And so, with all its strength, it clings, in a desperate embrace, to the goddess of this solitude. Bind for me your blessing of peace, tie it into my heart — I will wear it, always, at my throat.

DISSOLUTION

As though her two eyes, freshly blue, were floating, blossoming today across the boundless sky. In the rippling light of a rain-washed morning her tear-streaked smile opens and unfolds. That tender play of hers, in a thousand forms, surrounds me now, out of the whole wide world. The shimmering light on the river in the rains, the deep, dark shadow of the far woods on the bank, the still ranks of cloud at

the green edge of the sky — all these seem her face,
dressed in a hundred forms. Her eyes seem to speak,
gazing into my face — "This morning, every bird has
risen up to sing; only my own voice, in this morning
wind, has gone and lost itself in the endless
world."

RENUNCIATION

In the deep of night, the renunciate of the world
declared — "Today I shall abandon this house, for
the sake of my chosen god. Who has kept me here,
deceived, all this while?" The god said, "I have." —
He did not hear it. Clutching her sleeping child to
her breast, his beloved slept in peace at the edge
of the bed. He said, "Who are you two, this trickery
of illusion?" The god said, "I am." — No one heard
it. Rising from his bed, he called out, "Where are
you, Lord?" The god said, "Here." — Still, he did
not hear. The child wept in his sleep, reaching for
his mother — the god said, "Turn back." — He did not
hear that word. The god, letting out a sigh, said,
"Alas — leaving me behind, where has my devotee
gone?"

TO THE DEVOTEE

Simple, warm, and tender young heart — by what merit
have I won you over? I wonder at it. With eyes
lifted, glad and shining, you gaze at my face in the
light of your affection, and, by that gaze, you make
me glow. Your youth, taking its own grace as a gift,
hangs it round my throat, and dresses me, after the
shape your own heart imagines, into the form of a
god, setting me up in devotion's high and lofty
place. There, alone, I am dying of embarrassment.
There, with daily incense, lamp, and offering, who
is it that keeps me fixed upon that motionless seat?

I only wander the roads, singing as I go — a poet,
no more; I am not the pole-star, I am not the sun.

A FEARFUL, VAIN HOPE

I call you "Mother! Mother!" out of terror — hoping,
perhaps, some memory of a mother's tenderness might
come to you, hearing my desperate cry. As if, like a
tigress, all at once forgetting her violence, her
hunger, all her greed, you might lick the son of man
with love. Hiding your claws, lifting your breast,
full and warm, to feed him from your own mouth; upon
your painted breast letting him sleep, his head laid
there in peace. Such a hope — and such a vain one!
You exist in a hundred thousand million worlds —
planets, stars, moon and sun, all blazoned in the
sky — O most exalted one! If you should lift your
thunderbolt fist and knit today your terrible,
dreadful brow — I, this faint and tiny life, where
would I fall? I will call you "Mother" still, and
try, in vain, to charm you into kindness, O
demoness!

NOON

It is high noon. A small, thin river, choked with
weed, lies still, without current. Half-sunk in an
old boat a kingfisher sits; on the bank two cows
graze a field bare of any crop. Lifting its
calm-eyed face, a buffalo stands submerged in the
water. At the river's edge an empty boat lies
moored, no one aboard. At the deserted landing, a
crow, sun-scorched, bathes in the water, flapping
its wings. On the green grassy bank a wagtail swings
its tail, dancing as it goes. A brightly-colored
butterfly, on clear, thin wings, floats and flies
through the air, resting now and then upon the weed.
Wild geese nearby, at the village landing, lift

their babbling cry, washing their white feathers with wet beaks. The hot wind runs past, carrying with it the smell of dry grass — and goes on, far away. Now and then a village dog barks out, caught up in some quarrel. Now the calm lowing of cattle, now the call of a myna, now the rustle of an old, worn banyan; now, far off, against the empty sky, the sharp, piercing cry of a kite; now, borne on the wind, the plaintive creak of a moored boat — noon's inarticulate, mournful monotone; the forest's tender shade; the village's deep-slumbering hoard of peace — and here, in the midst of it all, I sit, a stranger, far from home. Yet I feel no ache of exile in my heart; it is as though I have merged into everyone around me; as though I have come back to my very first birthplace after a long, long age — as though, beneath the breast of the earth, with all the beasts and birds and insects, I have gone back to some fresh morning of an earlier life, in the first rapture of being alive, when I clung to sky and wind, to water and land, like an infant at its mother's breast — drawing in the primal, original nectar of joy.

THE REALM OF THE MIND

On the solitary peak of Mount Kailash-of-the-Mind, in that far world, you dwelt in the courtyard of Mahesh's own temple, his very own poet — poet Kalidasa. Bright as the sheen upon the blue-throated god's neck, soft, blue, in the ever-still, gathered clouds of Ashadh, beneath the shining feet of the Seven Sages in their heaven of penance — even today you keep your dwelling in that realm of the mind; forever you shall remain there, O prince among poets, filling the whole world with the song of Shankar's life. — In between flowed the court of Ujjayini, King Vikramaditya, the assembly of nine

gems — from somewhere, a dream showed itself, bright for a moment. That dream faded away, that vast and glittering image, but you remain, forever, in the realm of the mind — a poet for all time.

THE WOMAN OF THE MIND

You are not only the Creator's making, O woman — man has shaped you too, pouring beauty into you out of his own heart. Seated, the poets weave your garment on threads of golden simile. Bestowing upon you an ever-new grandeur, the artist makes his image of you immortal. So many colors, so many scents, so many ornaments — pearls come from the sea, gold comes from the mine, a wealth of flowers comes from the springtime forest, and even the cochineal insect gives its life to redden your feet. With modesty, with adornment, with veil after veil, they have made you precious by hiding you, made you rare by keeping you concealed. Upon you has fallen a burning, radiant desire — you are half a woman of flesh, and half imagination.

THE SCENE OF UNION

Do not laugh, do not laugh, you who are so proud of your reason! Call to mind, just once, O maker of distinctions, that great day, when Shakuntala, loving toward all her own kin, was taking her leave from the hermitage of her birth — her friend the mango tree, her vine-sister Madhavi, the whole family of animals, the motherless fawn, the doe heavy with young, stood all around her; a plea of tenderness rose murmuring, weeping, in the rustle of the leaves, in the trembling voice of the river Malini's flowing water; and through it all sounded the old ascetic's grave, choked, faltering hymn of farewell and blessing. Trees and vines, beast and

bird, river and wood, man and woman — all met together in one sorrowful union.

THE SWEETNESS OF DEATH

My soul says, softly — O sweet death, is this blue sky, then, your very own inner chamber? Today it seems to me that this green earth is a vast, soft bed that you yourself have spread. Today's play of water and land, in this season of rain, this peace, this loveliness — all of it is yours. It feels as though, without ever having met you, I have been, till now, unbearably small in this whole wide world. With calm and compassionate eyes, with a gentle, smiling mouth, you are calling me, through everything that moves and does not move. A bride's first fear of union has broken, at last, seeing your vast form, and finding it sweet. Everywhere the wedding-flute is rising into song; everywhere, today, I see your welcoming lap.

THE CLOUD-MESSENGER

Quenched and broken, that great majesty passed away the day a curse fell from the gods above and entered that kingdom of joy — the flame of parting, kindling its fire along the pathway of youth. Youth's world-devouring, drunken pride melted in a moment, like a mist-mirage before the fierce sun. The queen of the six seasons let fall her royal parasol, and breaking up her court, suddenly lifted the curtain on the pageant — suddenly it opened, like a painted picture, this tear-drenched, beautiful world of ours. On every side appeared mountain and forest, town and city and village — and there, upon the very throne of the world's own civilization, your lute of exile, compassionate, still plays.

Notes. Birohobina ("lute of separation/exile")

invokes viraha, the classical Indian aesthetics of longing — no single English word covers it. The poem addresses Kalidasa, the ancient Sanskrit poet whose own Meghaduta imagined an exiled spirit sending a cloud as messenger to his beloved; Tagore's poem answers him across the centuries.

SILENCE

Whatever I try to say comes out in vain — my own mind shakes its head: no, not this, not this. In what words could the fullness of my life ever be told, that stays unsung upon this lute? It only rises, brimming with the passion of tears, ringing the sky of my heart with thunderclouds; now and again, in a riven streak of lightning, what does it mean to show, tearing my inmost open? Silence, dumb and fathomless, gathers the dark and suddenly weeps, at deep midnight, in a hundred streams. Choked in my throat, O stunned and speechless life, where have you lost the very word that was your own? As if there were no flute at all, only a wasted breath — instead of a night of song, only a flood of tears. Notes. Mown is not mere absence of sound but a brooding, stopped-up muteness — closer to "struck dumb" than "quiet." The lute/bina recurs across this sequence as the poet's figure for his own voice.

THE TRAVELER

O traveler, you must go to a far and distant land. What will you sit here thinking, at the road's very end? For what sorrow does your heart weep? Toward whose face do you gaze, sitting, sitting, letting your days pass only in looking here and there, only wiping your moist and clouded eyes? At whose words

does your body catch fire in the mind's own blaze?
 Where, at last, will your household come to rest!
 Where will its clamor enter and take its dwelling!
 It will dissolve like a bubble, like a dream — where
 will even the small scratch of today's grass-root
 remain! Silently, along the two sides of your road,
 will burn the lamps of planet and star, in rank on
 rank. And still you walk on, alone, into the endless
 world — from where to where you go, no one will stay
 behind with you.

Notes. Jatri ("one who journeys") carries the weight
 of samsara — life itself as pilgrimage, not just
 travel. Kushankura-kshata, "the tiny scratch left by
 a blade of new grass," is one of the most delicate,
 near-untranslatable images in the sequence — the
 mark of something almost too small to have existed
 at all.

THE PEACE-MANTRA

Tomorrow I loose my boat and sail back into the
 world of men, to my own work returning once again —
 O goddess who dwells within, do not forsake me, do
 not let me drift alone on this sea of worldly pain,
 in the clamor of labor. There, through every storm,
 let this one note of blessing sound forever in my
 mind, upon your lute. By the arrow of parting my
 breast lies pierced, and blood is drawn — let your
 healing nectar, like your own gathered tears, fall
 drop by drop upon my wounded life. Conflict will
 rise, terrible, with a hundred wounds and cries —
 and you, in a voice grown gentle, give me the sound
 of the peace-mantra — "All gain is false, all is
 false" — whisper it into my ear — I am only your
 eternal companion, seated at your side.

Notes. Shantimantra echoes the Vedic peace-chants
 recited to close a ritual. The "goddess who dwells

within" is left ambiguous in the Bengali — inner muse, Nature, or the poet's own deeper self — and I've kept that openness rather than resolving it.

TENDING

Carrying my pain-wounded life into your house, O river, so rich with a hospitable tenderness, you tended me — your soft hand brought a touch of nectar to my scorched heart. Evening came stealing on; on the western bank the blood-red sun sank slowly over the ripening paddy. On the eastern shore no village grove was to be seen, only a ridge of treetops against the burning skyline; and from that darkness came, low and far, the sound of unknown hamlets ending their day's labor. Lifting two wings of peace from your two banks you drew me close and covered me against your breast. Whispering low, you told me: "Child, let it go — joy and sorrow belong to the outer world; peace is of the soul alone."

Notes. Shushrusha specifically means the tender nursing of the sick or wounded, not generic "care" — a river addressed as nurse and mother at once.

THE LAST WORD

Sometimes it seems that under the weight of a thousand words my heart has sunk and drowned, entire. As though some vast, unknown feeling, through long unseen preparing, were moving in the farthest chamber of my inmost self. Like the restless murmur of the sea, its sound keeps coming, again and again, from very far to very near. It feels as if all rhythm, every melody, every wondrous tale that ever was, unheard, unsung — all that poets everywhere have ever composed — were melting now

into one strange confluence within me; and any moment, brimming over with sorrow, losing its footing, this whole soul of mine will swell and rise like a great tide. But in the end my heart only breaks, and I can say no more than this — O Eternally Beautiful One, I love you.

Notes. The final line is one of Tagore's most quoted single lines in Bengali; I kept it almost bare, since the whole poem is built to earn that plainness after so much gathering ornament.

THE LAST KISS

Far off in the sky hums a silent song of dawn; the sorrowing moon of daybreak, a wan and wasted face. The stars grow pale; the cheek of the eastern bride lies dew-drenched, pallid, weary. Slowly, slowly the last lamp-flame guttered out, and the dream-boat of the night traveler broke apart. Through the window came, grieving, the raw red wound of morning's light, merciless and unrelenting. In that very moment, hurried, deep within the house, was our very last kiss of parting. Suddenly the wind rose up on every side with the grinding roar of labor, out on the road of the world. With a great cry the lion-gate of the world swung open — and wiping away my tears, I walked far, far away.

Notes. "Lion-gate" (shingho-dwar) is a literal term for a grand ceremonial gateway, as of a palace or temple — kept literal here since it lands as a threshold-image in English too.

THE COMPANION

Another day's memory came back to me. Once, by a riverbank, on a grassy stretch, a gypsy girl sat

braiding her hair alone in the late afternoon. A pet puppy came up from behind her, and seeing the loose end of hair swing, took it for play — leaping up again and again, barking, it kept snapping at her braid, over and over. The girl scolded it, twisting her neck around, but that only doubled its eagerness for play. She lifted a small stick as if to strike — twice as wild grew its delight in the game. Then, laughing, she lifted it against her breast and stroked it, tenderness upon tenderness.

Notes. Bede'r meye names a girl of the Bede community, a traditional river-dwelling people of Bengal; "gypsy girl" is the nearest common English gloss, though it only approximates the specific social identity carried in the original.

THE DEVOTED WIFE

Among the devoted women of the world there have been many faithful wives; their stories still shine bright within the ancient tales. But there are hundreds of thousands more, unknown, unnamed, without fame, without a single line of chronicle — some dwelt in royal palaces, some in huts of leaves; some were cherished, some were never honored; pouring out only devotion, effacing their own names, they went their way, and left a hundred kinds of dust behind. And beside them sits a fallen woman too, branded most sinful of all, yet in heaven a crown among the faithful. Seeing her among the devoted, the lotus-born himself bows his head; the god-fearing lower their eyes in shame. Do you wish to know her story? Only the Witness who dwells within — only He knows the tale of her devotion.

Notes. Sati here is used purely in its virtue-sense — "devoted, faithful" — not in reference to the historical funeral practice, which the poem does not

invoke. Antaryami ("the inner witness," an epithet for God as the one who perceives all hearts) is rendered to keep its specific theological precision rather than flattened to "God."

TO CIVILIZATION

Give back that forest, take away this city; take back your iron, your lumps of ore, your timber and your stone. O new civilization! O cruel, all-devouring one, give me back that hermitage's shade of holiness, those shameless, glareless days, that hour of evening song, that pasture of cattle, that deep and quiet calm, that garment of bark, that fare of wild rice and grain, that plunging, alone, into self-communion with the great and final truths. In your prison-house of stone there is no safety, no true royalty for me — there is no freedom, no wide spreading of the wings, no strength to find again, spread wide against my breast, no touching of another without tearing loose the bond that beats — endless — at the heart of this whole world.

Notes. One of the most anthologized poems in Chaitali — Tagore addresses industrial "civilization" directly, as if arraigning it. The "spreading of wings" and the closing "prison-house of stone" deliberately echo and answer each other — the very stone the poem demands back is what has become the speaker's cage.

THE ENDING

Though spring itself has passed, still, again and again, the heart longs to sing spring's own old song. If suddenly the fifth note sounds of its own accord, even then there is no need to startle and

stop. However sweet the sweetness that comes, let it end exactly where its own limit lies. Where the song wishes to rest on its own, let it stop there; and after, let only its whole memory remain. To make what is already full still fuller — ah, do not drag it, torn, into some vain and further hope! As silently as darkness comes at the close of day, so let the end come too, when leaving must be leaving. Let a sorrow-filled peace arrive, in quiet consolation — a beautiful farewell, at the very end of a sweet meeting.

Notes. "The fifth note" (Pancham) is the fifth degree of the classical raga scale, traditionally tied to spring and the koel's call. The poem is Tagore's own meditation on knowing when to stop — an *ars poetica* of restraint, fittingly placed near the sequence's close.

THE COMMON MAN

At evening, a basket on his hip, a bundle balanced on his head, a villager returns home along the riverbank. If, some hundred years from now, by some strange power, from the dead kingdom of the past this very man should appear again, made flesh once more, this same basket at his hip, wonder in his eyes — from every side a boundless crowd would gather close around him, whispering, hanging on each word he said. His joys and sorrows — yes, his loves, his affections, his neighbors, his own dear ones, his field, his cattle, his home — hearing it told again and again, no one's longing would be filled. The story of your own life, that today seems worth so little to you — one day it will be sung in the voice of poetry.

Notes. A recurring democratic turn in Chaitali: an unrecorded, "ordinary" life treated with the wonder

usually reserved for kings and heroes of legend.

THE BONDS OF LOVE

I could not recover this poem's printed title with confidence from the corrupted text; based on its content I've given it a working title rather than presenting a guess as fact.

Set him free from this blind knot of your infatuation — do not keep a sentry standing watch, wakeful, over him. O mother, do not keep your child forever a prisoner in the prison-house of your own tenderness. Wounding him with the touch of your own eagerness, wearing him thin on the taste of your indulgence, will you feed your own hungry heart by draining away his freedom, his very manhood? Having given him life out of your own long-borne devotion, will you now swallow him again in that same sea of love, and keep him still? Will he go on, forever, walking only behind you through this world? Is he no more than a part of you, and nothing else besides? He is his own; he is the world's; he belongs to the God of all being — he is not a mere child, O mother — he is not your possession.

Notes. Mohobondho ("the knot of infatuated attachment") is a precise term for delusion-born bondage (moha) — sharper than plain "love," and closer to a moral diagnosis than an endearment.

A SCENE OF TENDERNESS

He must be twenty years old, his body wasted thin by some long, incurable illness beyond cure. Seeing his listless face, empty of laughter, it seems there's not a shred of joy left for him in this world. Unable, in any way, to spare him, his mother gives

her own body, her whole life's strength; that short-breathed, wasted, long and withering weight she carries in her lap as if he were an infant still; with a hopeless, unshaken patience, her face worn pale with grief, she brings him, every day, to the edge of the road. The trains come and go, the crowds of people hurry past; if this restless, indifferent, curious swarm of mankind might turn, even a little, their gaze toward the world beyond him — holding only this much hope, she brings him along.

Notes. The poem withholds the name of the illness, and even the son's inner life, throughout — I've kept that reticence rather than filling in what Tagore leaves unstated.

DREAM

Last night I dreamed a dream — like a god's own blessing, someone sat beside my pillow, keeping compassionate eyes fixed upon my face, stroking my head slowly, slowly, with gentle fingers, a nectar-touch of one beloved — last night I beheld a dream. Seeing that face, my heart filled with sorrow, both my eyes brimmed and trembled with tears — a whole heart's complaint, lighting every corner within, seemed to rise welling up into my throat. Only with restless eyes, in silent and unfathomed grief, the figure asked, "What has happened to you?" Just as my heart broke, wanting to answer, that very moment, the spell of sleep broke too. The dark night sleeps on, alone; in the forest the cricket-song rises; at the window the pole-star watches, sleepless — the hour ticks by with unblinking eyes. In the lamp-quenched room, lying on an empty bed, I lay thinking, for how long I cannot say — my head upon the pillow, alone, lying there and lying still,

wondering what it was, what dream I had seen, in
that deep and moonless hour of night.

Notes. This poem shifts into a shorter,
refrain-based song-meter, unlike the sonnet-like
couplets used elsewhere in the sequence — I mirrored
that with shorter, more clipped English lines to
keep the change in register audible.

SELF-INTEREST

Who are you, self-interest — how small are you,
truly — yet at your touch the joy of the whole
universe goes dark, and endless truth hides itself
away. Love, affection — in one moment you twist them
into shameless distortion; the eternal discipline of
beauty comes to a halt before your petty mockery. O
my friends, let every self-interest be satisfied.

Gather in, hoard even the smallest grain into your
storehouses — leave nothing ungathered. As for me, I
have chosen and kept only the gift of a love that
asks nothing, in whose face flows an endless
message, mingled of nectar and of tears. Let there
remain for me only that old, wordless faith, tender
with its quiet, gentle mockery. Let the great
universe remain; let the seat of the heart remain,
wherever, in whatever corner, its lute goes on
playing still.

Notes. The turn is between swartho (self-interested
gain) and love free of self-interest — I rendered
the latter as "a love that asks nothing" rather than
a literal calque, which would misleadingly suggest
an absence of love instead of its opposite.

MEMORY

She who once, on another day, sat here upon this

very boat — her voice then was full of a nectar-sweet song. Her two eyes carried the shade of thick lashes, brimful of compassion, like a monsoon cloud. Her tender heart, overflowing with delight, would rise up laughing in simple, easy mirth. Sitting beside me she would talk her endless chatter, so many stories, so much restless longing! At daybreak, brimming with joy, laughing and laughing, she would come to me like a bird of morning. In the sheer excess of her affection, like a waterfall, she would surround and drench me in her bright and playful games. Where, in this endless universe, is she today — I sit and wonder, my eyes clouded over like a monsoon sky.

Notes. The poem never specifies who "she" is — child, sister, or beloved are all grammatically possible in the Bengali. I've kept that openness rather than resolving it toward any one relationship.

THE HEART'S OWN LAW

The heart is like a spring that cleaves through rock — it does not know how to look, anywhere, toward reason. Now and then there are marks of fracture upon it, which it has no wish to smooth into one whole. At midday, plunging its scorched body into the water, it calls out "Mother" to the cool riverbank that answers. When the moon peeks in, smiling, beside the house, the heart feels her to be the house's very own child, nectar-faced. All the trees and vines that have grown up around the home, the heart calls brother, calls sister. The creature in whose birth the heart senses something of its own, the heart itself, unasked, names "little darling." Reason overhears, and laughs — what foolishness, it says! And the heart, in shame, hides

its own heart's truth away.

Notes. Putu-rani, the pet-name in the original, is an affectionate Bengali endearment (roughly "little queen") of the kind given half-mockingly to a favorite animal or child — I translated its function ("little darling") rather than transliterating a name meaningless in English. This poem reads almost as an *ars poetica* for the whole sequence: the heart's illogical habit of naming moon, river, and animal as kin is exactly the faculty producing every poem around it.