POETRY

THE GOLDEN BOAT

Sonar Tori

Rabindranath Tagore

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THE GOLDEN BOAT

(Sonar Tori — সোনার তরী)

Clouds rumbling in the sky; teeming rain.
I sit on the river bank, sad and alone.
The sheaves lie gathered, harvest has ended,
The river is swollen and fierce in its flow.
As we cut the paddy it started to rain.

One small paddy-field, no one but me -
Flood-waters twisting and swirling everywhere.
Trees on the far bank; smear shadows like ink
On a village painted on deep morning grey.
On this side a paddy-field, no one but me.

Who is this, steering close to the shore
Singing? I feel that she is someone I know.
The sails are filled wide, she gazes ahead,
Waves break helplessly against the boat each side.
I watch and feel I have seen her face before.

Oh to what foreign land do you sail?
Come to the bank and moor your boat for a while.
Go where you want to, give where you care to,
But come to the bank a moment, show your smile -
Take away my golden paddy when you sail.

Take it, take as much as you can load.
Is there more? No, none, I have put it aboard.
My intense labour here by the river -
I have parted with it all, layer upon layer;
Now take me as well, be kind, take me aboard.

No room, no room, the boat is too small.
Loaded with my gold paddy, the boat is full.

Across the rain-sky clouds heave to and fro,
On the bare river-bank, I remain alone -
What had has gone: the golden boat took all.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

তরী (*tori*) vs. নৌকা (*nouka*) — Bengali has an ordinary word for boat (*nouka*) and a higher, more lyrical one (*tori*, closer to "skiff" or "barque"). Tagore's title deliberately reaches for the elevated word. English has no everyday/poetic split this clean, so I leaned on rhythm and the recurring epithet "golden" to restore some of that lifted register rather than forcing an archaism like "barque," which would have felt costumed.

সোনার ধান (*sonar dhan*, "golden paddy") — Unhusked rice, ripened to gold at harvest. Read literally it's simply the crop of a season's labor; read symbolically — and this is the poem's real engine — it is everything a life produces: work, art, love, the self's offerings to the world. I kept "golden paddy/grain" plain rather than glossing it as "treasure" or "gift," trusting the poem's own repetition to let the symbol surface on its own.

খরপরশা (*khawroporosha*) — A compound fusing *khara* (swift, fierce) and *parash* (touch/edge), describing the flood-swollen river. Sanskritic compounds like this let Tagore pack a whole sensory judgment into one word; no single English word does the same work, so I unfolded it into "keen as a blade's edge, swift and sharp" — spending three phrases to earn what Bengali gets in one.

তরুছায়ামসীমাখা (*tarucchayamoshimakha*) — Literally "smeared with the ink of tree-shadow": tree + shadow + ink + anointed, describing a village seen faintly across the water. It's a painter's compound — the far bank rendered like an ink-wash. I rendered it as "steeped in the shadow-ink of trees" to keep that sense of the village being *painted* rather than merely seen.

রাশি রাশি ভারা ভারা / থরে বিথরে — Bengali loves reduplication ("heap-heap, bundle-bundle," "layer upon layer") for abundance and rhythm; repeating a word in English usually just sounds like a stutter. I translated the *sense* of accumulation ("heap upon heap, sheaf on sheaf," "row upon row") rather than the doubling itself, which keeps the incantatory pulse without the oddity.

করুণা করে ("of your mercy") — This phrase carries the vocabulary of bhakti devotion, the language a supplicant uses toward the divine. Its appearance here — spoken to a boatwoman for a load of rice — is what tips the poem from pastoral scene into prayer. I chose the plainer "of your mercy" over "compassion" to keep its devotional plainness rather than making it sound clinical.

ঠাঁই নাই, ঠাঁই নাই ("no room, no room") — The poem's emotional hinge, and one of the most quoted lines in Bengali literature. The repetition is doing all the work — flat, final, almost domestic in its refusal — so I left it exactly as bare in English as it is in Bengali.

The unnamed rower — Bengali pronouns don't mark gender, so who or what steers the boat is left open by the original; tradition (and the grammatical femininity of *tori* itself) has long read the figure as "she." I kept that convention, but it's worth knowing the ambiguity is native to the poem, not resolved by it — she has been read as Time, Death, Fate, the divine, or simply the current of life itself, indifferent to the individual field it passes.

On form — The Bengali is written in a tightly rhymed seven-line stanza of Tagore's own invention (later poets call this pattern the *Sonar Tori chhanda*), where each stanza's closing line curls back to echo its opening. Rather than force that rhyme scheme into English — which tends to sound sing-song or push the diction around to chase a sound — I followed the model of Tagore's own English self-translations in *Gitanjali*: unrhymed, cadenced verse that trusts repetition and breath-length lines to carry the music, and lets meaning lead.

The undercurrent of the poem — Read as a whole, *Sonar Tori* is less a river scene than a parable: a life's labor, once ripe, is gathered up and carried off by a force that takes everything except the one who grew it. What's left, at the end, is a bare bank, a circling monsoon sky, and a self the boat had no room for — Tagore's recurring meditation on how what we make outlives, and leaves behind, the maker.

BIMBABATI

A Fairy Tale

With great care the queen adorned herself, bound up her hair,
and, with much delight, put on a new dark-blue robe,
the color of a fresh-washed rain-cloud. Then, slowly,
she drew back its secret covering and brought out
the magic golden mirror. Reciting the spell,
she asked it — tell me truly:
who is the most beautiful woman living on this earth?
Slowly, in the mirror's depths, there bloomed
a face touched with a honeyed smile —
and seeing it, the queen's heart split in two —
it was Bimbabati, the princess, her own co-wife's daughter,
the most beautiful woman on the whole earth.

The next day the queen put on
a necklace of coral. She let down her hair,
which fell to touch her knees. A rose-colored veil,
like the very hint of shyness, she drew across her breast.
Setting the golden mirror in her lap,
she recited the spell again — tell me truly,
who today, on this earth, is the most beautiful?
That same moon-bright face bloomed again in the mirror.
Trembling, the queen said — a fire like poison burns in me —
I hung a garland of poisoned flowers round her neck myself,
and yet she did not die, burning, that co-wife's daughter,
the most beautiful woman on the whole earth!

The next day again — once more she shut the door
of her chamber. She put on a pearl necklace,
a mark of vermilion on her brow, kohl round her eyes,
a robe of deep red silk, its border woven with gold.
She asked the mirror — tell me truly,
who today, on this earth, is the loveliest?
On the bright golden surface there bloomed again
that same smiling face. Consumed with envy, the queen

threw herself upon her bed, and said, weeping —
I sent her into the forest, bound tightly, cruelly,
and still she did not die, that co-wife's daughter,
the most beautiful woman on the whole earth!

The next day again — once more, delighting,
she dressed herself in new jewels; with a smiling face she wove
her hair into a new style, curving her neck,
and put on, with great care, a robe the color of fresh sunlight, gold as morning.
Holding the mirror before her,
she recited the spell — tell me the truth,
who today, on this earth, is the most beautiful?
That same smile, that same face, bloomed again
in the enchanted mirror. The queen said, burning —
I tricked her, and fed her a poisoned fruit,
and still she did not die, that co-wife's daughter,
the most beautiful woman on the whole earth!

The next day the queen, with great care,
studded her whole body with gold and jewels.
She asked the mirror, full of pride —
tell me the truth — whose beauty is greatest of all?
Two lovely faces appeared, smiling, side by side —
a prince and a princess, together,
dressed for their wedding. Every vein in her body
stung the queen as if with a scorpion's sting.
Screaming, striking her own breast, the queen cried —
I watched her die with my own eyes —
by whose love did she live again, that co-wife's daughter,
the most beautiful woman on the whole earth!

The queen began to scour the golden mirror
with sand — its reflection would not fade.
She smeared it with black ink — still the image would not hide.
She put it to the fire — even then, the gold would not melt.
She hurled it to the ground with all her strength —
the enchanted mirror would not break. And there, on the ground,
suddenly the queen herself fell; her life snapped in an instant —

over her whole body the diamonds and jewels she wore
burned like fire. There on the floor, beside her,
in the golden mirror, two smiling faces still smiled.
Bimbabati, the queen's own co-wife's daughter,
is the most beautiful woman on the whole earth.

CHILDHOOD EVENING

Slowly, spreading, gathering on every side,
weariness, and peace, and the darkness of evening,
like the edge of a mother's veil. Standing alone,
gazing westward with unblinking eyes,
I stand still, watching. Sinking myself
into the depths, slowly I am filling
with this life — with this very picture before me today:
the empty riverbank, the setting sun,
the pale, swooning light — a red the color of weeping,
like the tired, sorrowful gaze
of weary eyes, silent, wordless — this deep sadness,
in water, on land, through all creation, a weariness, an exhaustion.

Suddenly, from somewhere, singing rose —
along some village path thick with the darkness of the woods,
a boy, a traveler, walking home.
His voice, overflowing, fearless, unconcerned,
trembled on the seventh note, a high, sharp strain,
as if it meant to cut the evening clean in two.
I cannot see him. There, ahead,
at the very edge of the field, toward the south,
past the sugarcane fields, past banana and betel-palm,
a dense grove of bamboo — and there, in its midst,
the village lies at rest; there my eyes wander.
There, toward some house, still singing, walks on
some cowherd's son, thinking of nothing,
looking toward nothing empty, with no thought before or behind.

Seeing, hearing this, I remember that same evening hour
of my own childhood. So many stories, so many childhood games,
the three of us, sleeping together in one bed;
was that only yesterday? How many days has it been!
Has the world, even now, not yet grown old?
Has it not forgotten its play and games; have its eyes
not yet been overtaken by that calm, cool drowsiness;
has it not yet, exchanging its childhood's toys,

gained hard-won, grown-up knowledge? Standing here
in the middle of the lonely field, in this silent evening,
hearing someone's song, it came back to my mind —
by how many hundred riverbanks, in how many mango-groves,
beside temples ringing with their bronze bells,
at the edge of how many fields of grain, on the banks of how many ponds,
in house after house a new smiling face is waking,
a young heart filling with joy after joy,
so many impossible tales, such wondrous fancies,
so much groundless hope, such endless longing,
such boundless faith. Standing here in the darkness
I saw, by starlight, in this boundless world,
the whole earth filled, brimming, with girls and boys,
with beds made ready for evening, a mother's face, the light of a lamp.

THE PRINCE AND THE PRINCESS

A Fairy Tale

1. IN THE MORNING

The prince would go to school,
and the princess went there too.
The two of them would meet along the way —
who knows since when this has been true.
The princess would shyly step aside,
the flowers from her hair would fall and slide,
the prince would come and gather them up
together with wild woodland blooms too.
The prince would go to school,
and the princess went there too.
Flowers bloomed on either side of the road,
birds sang their songs in the trees.
The princess walked on ahead of him,
the prince came behind, at his ease.

2. AT MIDDAY

Up above sits reading the princess,
down below sits the prince.
Opening their books, they learn many tongues,
laying out chalk, working out sums.
The princess forgets her lesson sometimes,
her book slips loose from her hand and falls open,
the prince comes and picks it up for her,
and again it slips and falls.
Up above sits reading the princess,
down below sits the prince.
The noon sun blazes fierce and bright,
on the bakul branch the koel calls, cuckooing.
The prince looks upward, toward her,
the princess looks down, below.

3. IN THE EVENING

The prince turns homeward, back to his house,
the princess goes to hers.
Taking off the pearl necklace from her throat,
the princess plays with it, idly.
Along the road she forgot it, let it fall,
the prince picked it up, that very string,
and, his own mind wandering elsewhere,
slipped his own jeweled necklace into the girl's hand instead.
The prince turned homeward, back to his house,
the princess went to hers.
The weary sun slowly sets,
alone at the river's edge, at last.
Both their lessons for the day were done,
each one went to their own home.

4. AT NIGHT

The princess lies on a bed of gold,
in her dreams she sees a wealth of beauty.
On a bed of silver lies the prince,
whose honeyed smile does he see?
Joy and sorrow come and go within,
sometimes the heart trembles, faint and thin,
sometimes a smile flickers on the lips,
sometimes the eyes well up and swim.
Whose face does the princess see in her dreams,
whose smile does the prince see?
The clouds crash, the rain pours down in sheets,
the wind goes wild and free.
Their heads laid soft on the pillow's cloud-like folds,
the night slips by, lost in dreams.

SHE WHO SLEEPS

I, a prince, have wandered land after land,
across seven seas and thirteen rivers' banks.
Wherever a lovely face was to be found,
I have left nothing unseen, unsought.
Some called out to me and spoke a word or two,
some lowered their eyes and turned away, looking at me;
some smiles cut like a knife's sharp edge,
some smiles were gentle as tears in the eyes.
Some went home again in pride,
some wept, and looked back again and again.
Some said not a single word to me,
some sang softly, quietly, to themselves.
So I have wandered, from land to land.
And now, far off, past the very edge of the wide plains,
in the land of sleep sleeps a princess —
and there I have come, and placed a garland round her neck.

One night, in the flush of my youth,
I woke with a start out of a dream.
I came outside and stood a while,
and gazed out over the earth, looking closely.
The morning star had grown thin and faint,
the night was breaking, there in the east.
In a corner of the sky, waking had begun to show,
but on the earth below sleep had not yet broken.
Before me lay a long royal road,
with a line of trees standing on either side;
opening my eyes, gazing into the far distance,
I thought to myself, once, silently —
just as I do, tonight, at this hour before dawn,
in some new land somewhere upon this earth,
laid on a bed as white as foam of milk,
a princess sleeps, dreaming her dreams too.

At once I set out, mounted on my horse,
and passed through so many lands, so many countries.

One day, at a grey and darkening dusk,
I found the gates of the city of sleep.
There, everyone lay still, unmoving, unconscious,
nowhere was a single living soul awake;
by the riverbank, in the murmur of the water,
the whole vast city lay sleeping.
I dared not set my foot down,
for fear that in an instant the whole land might wake.
I entered the palace carefully, cautiously,
my own fear walking always a step ahead of me.
The king slept, the queen mother slept,
beside the young prince slept the king's own brother;
in one room a jeweled lamp burned alone,
and there, sleeping, lay the princess.

A bed as pure as a lotus flower,
and sunk within it, her soft, slender form.
I gazed at her face, unblinking,
and in my breast a sweet ache stirred, like pain.
Her hair lay gathered in cloud-like masses,
falling in heavy waves across her pillow;
one arm lay resting on her breast,
the other trailed loose at her side.
Her veil had slipped and fallen away beside her,
her bodice seemed almost to come undone;
as if kept hidden in a fold of leaves,
lay two unopened blossoms of worship, still unbreathed.
I saw her there — I know no likeness for it —
a single dream in the land of sleep itself,
the princess sunk deep upon her couch,
alone, in her own ripening loveliness.

With trembling arms I could not help but hold her close,
my heart's own beating would not be stilled or checked.
I sat upon the ground, and bowed my head low,
and, closing my eyes, I kissed her, gently.
Through the veil of her lashes, her two starry eyes —
toward them I gazed, with my whole heart fixed,

as if through some half-open door I sought to see
what lay within that hidden, secret dwelling.
On a strip of birch-bark, with kohl for ink,
I wrote down my own name, and where I came from.
I wrote: "O you who lie sunk deep in sleep,
to you I have given my whole life."
With care I strung, on a thread of gold,
a necklace of jewels, and fastened it in place —
in the land of sleep sleeps the princess,
and round her neck I have placed this garland.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

সতিনের মেয়ে (Bimbabati) — "co-wife's daughter." I deliberately avoided the flatter "stepdaughter" here. In a polygamous royal household, *sotiner meye* names a very particular tension — not just a stepchild, but the daughter of a *rival wife*, which is precisely the fuel for the queen's jealousy. The refrain repeats this exact phrase every stanza like an incantation, so I kept it fixed in English too, letting the repetition do the same accumulating work it does in Bengali. Readers will notice the tale's clear kinship with the "Snow White" story-type — the magic mirror, the escalating murder attempts, the poisoned gift — though every image and word is Tagore's own; he labels the poem রূপকথা, "a fairy tale," openly signaling that he's working in that inherited folk mode.

মায়ের অঞ্চলসম (Childhood Evening) — "like the edge of a mother's veil." The *anchal* is the loose end of a sari — the part a mother uses to wipe a child's tears, to shield them from sun or rain, to carry small things in. Comparing the gathering dusk to a mother's *anchal* settling over the world carries a whole cluster of warmth, shelter, and tenderness that "veil" alone can't quite hold in English; I kept "veil" but anchored it to "mother's" to preserve at least the gesture of enclosure and comfort.

প্রভাতে / মধ্যাহ্নে / সায়াহ্নে / নিশীথে (The Prince and the Princess). The four section-titles — Morning, Midday, Evening, Night — turn a single day into a quiet allegory for an entire courtship, even an entire life: shy childhood glances, growing awareness at midday, a wordless exchange of gifts at dusk, and finally the private world of dreams at night. I kept the refrain-and-repetition structure of each section intact, since the gentle, sing-song repetition is doing much of the poem's emotional work — it reads almost like a nursery rhyme carrying real romantic weight.

অনাঘ্রাত পূজার ফুল দুটি (She Who Sleeps) — "two unopened blossoms of worship, still unbreathed." This is the poem's most delicate line, and the hardest to carry over. Literally, *anaghrata pujar phul* means "unsmelled flowers meant for worship" — flowers gathered for a temple offering that no one has yet touched or breathed in. Applying this image to the sleeping princess's body is a classical Indian poetic convention: beauty rendered sacred rather than merely physical, comparing her to an offering not yet given to a god. A literal, anatomical translation would lose this reverence entirely and read as crude where the Bengali is hushed and devotional; I chose "blossoms of worship" to keep that religious undertone intact.

সাত সমুদ্র তেরো নদীর পার — "across seven seas and thirteen rivers' banks." This is a fixed formula straight out of Bengali fairy tale diction (much like English "over hill and dale" or "far, far away") — it doesn't describe a literal itinerary so much as signal "an impossibly great distance, the kind only a fairy-tale prince travels." I kept the specific numbers rather than softening them into vaguer language, since the formulaic quality is itself part of the fairy-tale voice Tagore is invoking.

SHE WHO WOKE FROM SLEEP

In the land of sleep, sleep broke,
a murmur of voices rose.
On the branches birds awoke,
bees stirred among the blossoms.
In the stables the horses woke,
the elephants in their sheds.
In the wrestling-hall the wrestlers woke
and swelled their chests once more.
Along the roads the watchmen woke,
the gatekeeper woke at the gate.
Looking up, reading the hour by the sky,
men and women woke.
The high king rose and woke,
the queen mother woke.
Rubbing sleep from his eyes, beside the prince,
the king's own brother woke.
In a quiet room, the scent of incense,
a jeweled lamp burning —
waking upon her bed
the princess asked —
who placed this garland on me?

The veil that had slipped away
she drew back over her breast.
Looking down at herself,
she shivered with shyness.
Startled, with wide, darting eyes,
she looked all around her —
an empty room, a jeweled lamp
burning, unblinking.
Taking the garland from her throat,
holding it in her two hands,
she read the message
woven with care in golden thread.
She read the name, she read the home,

she read the writing there,
spreading it upon her lap
she read it a hundred times.
Sitting up in her bed, still,
the princess wondered —
I fell asleep in my own room,
entirely, utterly alone —
who placed this garland on me?

In the newly-wakened grove
the koel calls out, singing,
in spring's own kiss
all ten directions lie dazed.
The wind comes into the room
in restless, eager gusts,
carrying with it the scent
of fresh young flower-buds.
The court-singers wake
and sing their songs of praise,
at the palace gate a flute
lifts a sweet, winding note.
Along the cool, shaded riverside path,
water-jars upon their hips —
bangles ringing, anklets chiming —
the women of the palace walk.
Along the garden path
the leaves and branches rustle, trembling,
her eyes half-closed,
the princess wonders —
who placed this garland on me?

Sometimes she puts the garland on,
sometimes takes it off again,
pressing it in both her hands
close against her breast.
Spreading it upon her bed
she gazes at it, thirsting,
as if, this way, she might come to know

a little more of it.
So many sounds rise in the world today,
in so many disguises —
but there is one secret thing
that no one ever speaks.
Only the wind, close by her ear,
goes rushing past with a hollow sigh,
only the koel, without pause,
calls out — *kuhu, kuhu.*
In the quiet room her heart and mind
are wholly restless,
sitting on her bed in silence
the princess wonders —
who placed this garland on me?

What a hero's form it was,
shot through with such sweetness.
In his shining eyes
an unsatisfied thirst.
It seems to her she saw him once
in some dream, she almost believes —
she has forgotten all the rest,
only a boundless wonder stays.
It seems he sat beside her,
it seems he held her hand,
even now her own body seems
still fresh from his touch.
Startled, she covers her face with both hands,
her heart breaks with shame —
why did the shameless lamp
not go out in that very moment?
She flung the necklace from her throat
as if it were a flash of lightning,
falling across her bed
the princess wondered —
who placed this garland on me?

So, slowly, one by one,
the days and nights wear on.
That spring took its leave,
and carried the jasmine season with it.
The rains come with heavy clouds,
pouring down, rushing, roaring.
In the garden blooms new malati,
and the kadamba's golden stamens.
Clear-laughing autumn comes,
garlanded with full moons.
The whole forest grows restless
with the white shefali blossom.
Winter comes, bringing with it
long, sorrowful nights.
Among dew-fallen kunda flowers
the horizon laughs and weeps at once.
The month of Falgun comes again,
carrying baskets of flowers.
Sitting alone beside her window
the princess wonders, still —
who placed this garland on me?

YOU AND WE

You go on, laughing, flowing, passing by,
like the murmuring current of a river.
We stand upon the bank, only watching,
while so much longing dies, groaning, deep within.

Among yourselves you whisper, laughing, at ease,
flickers of mirth well up in your eyes, your faces,
your lotus-feet fall softly on the earth,
your golden anklets ring out, chiming, chiming.
Limb binds to limb in playful, teasing knots,
arm winds round arm like some slim, graceful vine.
Laughter rings out in glances full of meaning,
secret words pass, unspoken, from eye to eye.

Eyes lowered, alone, you string your flowers,
taking up a mirror, you bind your hair with care.
In your own hidden heart you play your private games —
what thoughts you think, how your long hours pass.
In an instant a stray curl slips loose and falls,
you lean, just slightly, and let your veil fall open —
before an eyelid blinks, before an eye has opened,
who knows, from the corner of your eye, whom you glance toward.
Your welling youth wants to break its banks, to spill over,
you keep it bound in cloth, in discipline, in law.
Yet still, a hundred times, in a hundred ways, it blooms,
as you walk, as you turn, it flashes, brims, and overflows.

We are fools, we do not know how to speak —
not knowing what to say, we say some other thing entirely.
Choosing the wrong moment, carrying our own hearts,
we lay them at your feet, and stand, staring, eyes flung wide.

Seeing us, you whisper together, quietly,
between one friend and another, restless now with laughter,
drawing your veil's end tight across your breast
you go, laughing, off beyond all our hoping.

We are like some vast, unthinking storm,
rushing on, swept forward by our own wild feeling.
Covering the boundless sky in a vast darkness,
we long to shatter, to break, our own heart's whole weight.

You want to be lightning, laughing as you flash,
cutting through the dark, piercing straight to the marrow,
tracing a line of fire across the face of the sky,
in an instant gone, leaving us behind, deceived.

Carelessly the Maker shaped these bodies of ours,
he did not fill our eyes, our lips, with language.
We do not know the sweet, bewitching spell —
how, then, are we to make ourselves understood?

Where are you now, and where do we stand waiting —
will no fortunate hour ever bring us close?
You will go on, laughing, flowing, passing by,
we will go on standing here, just as we are, forever!

THE GOLDEN BOND

You are held captive in the sweetest tenderness,
O goddess of the household, in this compassionate weeping,
in this human home so full of grief and want.
So, upon your two arms, a beautiful binding —
two golden bangles you carry on your body,
an auspicious sign, the delight of all the world's eyes.

A man's two arms grow hard, calloused,
in the world's long struggle, forever free of any chain;
through every kind of bitter strife and battle
he moves everywhere unbound, like a fire-arrow, like a thunderbolt.
You are bound instead within love, tenderness, compassion —
only good deeds, only service, night and day.
So who was it that drew, around your arms,
these two circles of gold, these two bright bangles?

SPENDING THE RAINY SEASON

The capital, Calcutta; on a third-floor roof
a wooden room set off to one side;
light comes from the east at first light of morning,
wind comes in through the southern door.

A bed spread on the floor, my head against the doorway,
I let my eyes go wandering outside —
hundreds of grand rooftops, hiding their hundred mysteries,
frowning up at the sky.
Close by, at the window, in one corner of the ledge,
a small patch of green at play —
a young peepul sapling
watches its own shadow dance, alone, the whole day long.

From every edge of the horizon
Ashadh comes down, the monsoon arrives, thickening, darkening,
across the whole sky Indra's horses roar,
the flickering blaze of lightning.
On every side, unceasing,
the rushing rustle of falling rain
exiles this small corner room,
seizing the ten directions,
casting it clean outside the whole wide world.

Sitting alone, without companions, for a while it pleases me
to read the tale of the *Meghdoot* —
outside, day and night, the wind
runs wild, spending its own useless restlessness;
through that long-ago Ashadh,
that cloud-darkened India
of mountain, river, city, I travel on,
so many sweet-sounding names, so many lands, so many villages,
I watch, gazing and gazing.

I know them well, both of them, the parted lover and his love,
two, on either shore of the world —

heart drawn to heart across a vast distance,
each shaping the other in imagination.
The Yaksha's wife, in her corner of the house,
counting her days out with flowers —
I look on, listen, and turn away again.
The rains come with a deep, rolling sound; carefully I draw into my lap
the verses of Govindadas.

Again and again, in a singing voice, I read the rainy tryst —
the dark bank of the Yamuna,
at midnight, young Radha, heeding no danger,
searching for the bower in the thicket.
Ceaselessly, steadily, the water falls, pouring, pouring,
and past it, a forest, farther still;
in every house the doors are shut,
no one else is with her — only one youth, Madan, the god of love.

Ashadh draws toward its end, weaving
the raga Mallar
into the tune of "the sky is heavy with rain."
Opening the first page
of the tale of the *Gita Govinda*,
I sing, "the sky is thick with cloud."
In the silent hour of midnight
the rain falls, drop by drop —
lying awake in a sweet, wakeful drowsiness,
"the night is dense with monsoon,
the thunder rumbling, rumbling" —
that song comes back into my mind.

"Lying upon her couch in delight,
her garment slipping loose across her limbs" —
sunk deep in a pleasant sleep —
that picture wakes within me,
in old Vrindavan,
Radhika's own solitary dream.
Softly, softly her breath comes and goes,
a smile just touches her lips,

her closed lashes tremble;
her head resting on her arm,
she lies there alone,
in the dim lamplight of the room's far corner.

Clouds call out from the mountaintops,
rain falls on the branches of the trees,
frogs cry the whole night through —
at such an hour, who knows what might happen,
just at such a moment there comes
a companion out of dreams, into her lonely room.
Ah, ah — and at the dream's end,
thrilled, still lost in that same feeling,
when she woke, alone,
she found the room empty,
the lamp guttering, dying,
the watchman calling out the hour.
The rain grows heavier,
the clouds call out, again, again,
the whole earth filled with the cry of crickets —
that thick, clouded night,
dream and waking blurred as one,
who can say how her heart must have felt.

Taking up one book, then another,
turning the pages, murmuring the words,
so the days and nights pass by.
Then I reach instead
for a volume of foreign verse,
and turn its pages back and forth —
where, in it, is the shadow of the monsoon,
the dark enchantment of the clouds,
the ceaseless sound of falling rain?
Where is that idle,
solitary, self-absorbed
deep ache of separation that fills a life?
In that same key as the rain,
filling the world within and without alike

in a torrent of song,
the spirit's own far
shores, brimming full —
where, alas, is that, in this foreign poetry!

Then I set the book down,
and, taking my seat at the doorway,
sit lost in my own thought;
there is nothing to do,
so I sit and wonder, gazing out,
how the long day will pass.
Bowing my head low,
sitting, I compose something,
with much care, the whole day through —
I feel, again and again, the wish
to write, one after another,
tales after my own heart.

Small lives, small sorrows,
small tales of small griefs,
utterly plain and simple;
out of a thousand scattered, forgotten things
that drift away, day after day,
just a tear or two of them.
No flourish of description,
no crowded rush of incident,
no doctrine, no moral lesson.
Some unsatisfied longing will remain within,
and even when I think I've finished,
I'll feel: it ended, and yet did not end.

The world's hundreds and hundreds
of unfinished tales,
buds broken off before their season,
unknown lives,
the dust of unrecorded deeds,
so much feeling, so much fear and error —
in every direction of this world

they keep on falling, day and night,
rustling down like the monsoon rain —
moments of tears, moments of laughter,
falling in heaps upon heaps,
I hear the sound of it, unceasing.

All those overlooked, neglected things,
that instant's flickering play,
gathering them, on every side, into a heap,
out of them I make
a rain of forgetting,
for the monsoon night of this life.

HING TING CHHOT

(The Auspicious Dream)

King Hobuchandra dreamed one night,
and Gobuchandra sat pondering its meaning, silent.
It seemed three monkeys sat beside his pillow,
picking lice from his hair with the tenderest care.
If he tried to stir even slightly, they slapped his cheek,
their claws scratched at his face and eyes.
Suddenly they vanished, and a snake-charmer appeared,
weeping and wailing, "The bird has flown away!"
Seeing the king before him, he hoisted him on his shoulder,
and set him swaying, seated, on a high perch.
Below stood an old woman, trembling, bent with age,
who laughed and tickled the soles of his feet.
The king cried, "What torment is this!" but none would release him,
he tried to lift his two legs, but could not lift them.
Like a bird the king flapped and fluttered wildly,
and the snake-charmer whispered in his ear — "Hing Ting Chhot."
The tale of the Auspicious Dream is sweet as nectar itself —
so says the poet Gaudananda; blessed are those who hear it.

In the kingdom of Hobupur, for six or seven days now,
no eye has known sleep, no belly has known rice.
Hand against sunken cheek, heads bowed low,
the whole kingdom, young and old, has been driven to distraction.
The children have forgotten their games, the scholars their lessons,
the women have fallen silent — such is the calamity.
Row on row they sit, no word upon their lips,
the heavier the worry grows, the lower the heads droop.
Like some buried root groping through the earth,
everyone seems to sit at some formless feast.
Now and then, heaving some strange, great sigh,
someone suddenly cries out — "Hing Ting Chhot."
The tale of the Auspicious Dream is sweet as nectar itself —
so says the poet Gaudananda; blessed are those who hear it.

From every quarter came the assembled scholars —
from Ayodhya, Kanauj, Kanchi, Magadha, Koshal.
From Ujjayini came the very crown of the wise,
of the line and lineage of the great poet Kalidasa himself.
Carrying great thick volumes, they turn the pages,
shaking their heads, topknots and all, again and again.
Their great heads, like fields of ripened grain,
sway in the wind, ears and all together.
Some consult the scriptures, some the ancient codes, some the epics,
some pore over grammar, some over dictionaries.
Nowhere at all can they find any meaning,
only a growing heap of grammatical marks and particles.
They sit in silence, in the direst difficulty,
and every so often cry out — "Hing Ting Chhot."
The tale of the Auspicious Dream is sweet as nectar itself —
so says the poet Gaudananda; blessed are those who hear it.

In despair, King Hobuchandra said,
"Is there perhaps some society of scholars in the land of foreigners?
Send for them, wherever they may be found —
perhaps the meaning will fall into their grasp."
Cropped hair, blue eyes, ruddy cheeks,
a foreign scholar arrives, drums and cymbals sounding.
A short, thick, ill-fitted black coat upon him,
his temper rising in the summer heat, a fearsome figure.
Without any preamble, opening his watch, he says —
"I have only seventeen minutes to spare;
if you have something to say, say it at once."
The whole assembly cries out together — "Hing Ting Chhot."
The tale of the Auspicious Dream is sweet as nectar itself —
so says the poet Gaudananda; blessed are those who hear it.

Hearing the dream, the foreigner's face flushed a deep red,
fire seemed ready to burst from his very mouth and eyes.
Striking his right fist into his left palm,
he said, in fury, "You've called me here to be mocked!"
There was a French scholar present, his face bright with a smile,
who said, bowing his head, one hand upon his chest,

"The dream I have heard is fit indeed for a king;
not every fate holds such a dream as this.
And yet, I still suppose, it remains only a dream,
though it found its place inside a royal head.
You want its meaning — the treasury holds riches enough,
but in a king's own dream there is no meaning, however one racks one's brain.
There is no meaning — and yet, I say it honestly,
how sweet it is to hear — Hing Ting Chhot."
The tale of the Auspicious Dream is sweet as nectar itself —
so says the poet Gaudananda; blessed are those who hear it.

Hearing this, the whole assembly cried, "Shame, shame —
what boorish fool, what heathen unbeliever is this!
A dream is only a dream, a disturbance of the brain —
how could we ever consent to such a thing?
We, a people famed the whole world over for our piety —
would you toss a dream aside as nothing! Robbery, in broad daylight!"
King Hobuchandra spoke, rolling his eyes,
"Gobuchandra, these people need to be properly taught.
Give them thorns to walk on, thorns above them too,
throw them to the hunting-dogs to be torn apart."
Before the seventeen minutes had quite run out,
not a trace of the foreign scholar could be found.
The whole assembly swam in tears of joy,
and peace returned once more to this pious kingdom.
The scholars, twisting their faces into fearsome scowls,
once more cried out together — "Hing Ting Chhot."
The tale of the Auspicious Dream is sweet as nectar itself —
so says the poet Gaudananda; blessed are those who hear it.

After this, from Gaur, at just this hour, there came
a pupil who had outdone even his own foreign teachers.
Bare-headed, unadorned, without shame upon his body —
his waist-cloth kept slipping loose, a hundred times over.
Whether he truly existed or not, so thin and stunted his frame,
yet when words came out of him, there was no doubting them.
That so small a frame could produce so great a sound
left the whole world in the deepest astonishment.

He offered no greeting, asked after no one's health,
and if asked his father's name, he'd raise his fist instead.
Proudly he demanded, "What is the matter for debate?
Let me hear it, and I can give you a word or two,
I can turn any explanation clean inside out."
Everyone cried out together — "Hing Ting Chhot."
The tale of the Auspicious Dream is sweet as nectar itself —
so says the poet Gaudananda; blessed are those who hear it.

Hearing the tale of the dream, with a grave and solemn face,
the Bengali holy man spoke, taking his time about it —
"The meaning is utterly simple, perfectly clear,
a very old idea, newly rediscovered.
Three-eyed Trinayana, the three times, the three qualities,
by difference of power, difference of self, twofold, threefold.
Evolution, revolution, involution, and so on,
the life-force and the god-force stand in mutual discord.
Attraction, repulsion, spirit and matter,
by atomic and magnetic force, form and its undoing.
On the tip of a blade of grass runs the soul's own lightning,
from which the concept of the Supreme Power itself arises.
The threefold power stands manifest, in threefold form, in the world of appearances —
in short, to put it briefly: Hing Ting Chhot."
The tale of the Auspicious Dream is sweet as nectar itself —
so says the poet Gaudananda; blessed are those who hear it.

Cries of "Well said! Well said!" shook the whole assembly,
everyone said — how clear, how perfectly clear!
Whatever had been obscure dissolved entirely away,
became as pure and empty as the sky itself.
King Hobuchandra rose, breathing a sigh of relief,
and, taking the crown from his own head,
placed it on the head of the thin Bengali —
so heavy, it seemed, his head might tear beneath its weight.
After so long, at last, worry took flight,
the reeling, foundering kingdom of Hobu stirred back to life.
The children took up their games again, the old men their tobacco,

in a single moment the women's faces opened again into speech.
The headache that had gripped the whole land let go at once,
and everyone understood, at last — Hing Ting Chhot.
The tale of the Auspicious Dream is sweet as nectar itself —
so says the poet Gaudananda; blessed are those who hear it.

Whoever hears this tale of the Auspicious Dream,
all their confusion will surely be dispelled, it cannot fail.
Never again will they mistake the world for the world,
they will understand at once that truth itself is falsehood.
What is, is no more, and what is not, now is —
this will stand blazingly clear before them.
Whatever they look upon, they will see it plain and simple,
and it will trail its own tail along behind it.
Come, friend — yawn, and lie yourself down flat,
in this uncertain world, this alone is certain —
everything in this world is false, all of it illusion,
only a dream is true, and nothing else is true at all.
The tale of the Auspicious Dream is sweet as nectar itself —
so says the poet Gaudananda; blessed are those who hear it.

THE TOUCHSTONE

The madman wanders, searching, searching for the touchstone.
Great matted locks upon his head, caked with dust and mud,
a thin body, faint as a fading shadow.
Pressing his lips shut tight, sealing the door of his heart,
day and night he keeps a fierce fire burning in his eyes.
His two eyes seem, forever, like fireflies of the night,
flying, searching for someone, by their own small light.
No home, no shelter has he, ash and dust smeared on his body,
only a grey loincloth wound about his waist.
No one in this whole world calls out to speak with him,
poorer than any beggar on the road.
Yet such is his pride — he counts gold and silver as nothing,
no longing for a king's own wealth troubles him at all.
Seeing his state, one wants to laugh — he wants nothing else,
he wants, entirely, only to hold the touchstone!

Before him the sea roars, fathomless, without end.
Wave rises upon wave and breaks, laughing, into fragments,
seeing this mad, unearthly spectacle.
The sky looks on, unblinking,
the wind rushes past, boundless, with a great sound.
The sun rises each morning on the forehead of the eastern sky,
in the evening the moon climbs slowly into view.
The mass of waters, ceaselessly,
murmurs on, as if longing to speak some fathomless secret.
It seems to know where the longed-for treasure lies,
and whoever understands its language may find and claim it.
Heedless of all else, singing its own great epic,
the sea listens only to its own voice.
Some go, some come, some weep, some laugh,
the madman wanders the shore, searching for the touchstone.

Once, long, long ago — so the old story tells —
a streak of gold first appeared upon the touchstone,
as the world itself first came into being, revealed against the sky.
All the gods and demons together, brimming with wonder,

came treading softly to this very shore.
Gazing into the fathomless deep, unblinking,
they stood there, silent, still, their heads bowed low.
For a long age they stayed silent, listening, eyes closed,
to this great ocean's eternal, unending song.
Then, in their curiosity,
they plunged into the bottomless water
and churned this endless mystery.
After long ages of labor and suffering, they beheld at last
Lakshmi, goddess of fortune, rising, matchless in beauty, into the world.
On that same shore, his body wasted, his rags worn thin,
the madman wanders, searching, searching for the touchstone.

By now, surely, all his hope must be spent.
Yet still he wanders, searching; he knows no rest, ever —
hope is gone, but the habit of searching has not left him.
A lonely bird calls, all night, from the treetop,
but the one it calls for, the luckless creature never finds.
Yet still it calls, the whole day through,
without hope, without weariness — its only task, to call, and to stay awake.
Forgetting every other task, raising waves against the sky,
who knows whom the sea itself longs for, without end.
However much it cries, alas, it never receives an answer,
and yet it lifts its arms to the empty sky — that alone is its vow.
Longing for someone beneath the heavens, the planets and stars go on their way,
the whole universe performs its own endless devotion.
Just so, on the shore, his long matted locks caked with dust,
the madman wanders, searching, searching for the touchstone.

One day a village boy asked him,
"O holy one, what is this I see at your waist —
where did you come by this golden chain?"
The ascetic startled — the chain was indeed gold now,
but he did not know when the iron had turned to gold.
What a wonder, what a marvel — he lifted it, looked again and again,
rubbing his eyes, wondering if this were not some dream.
Striking his own forehead with his hand,
he sank down onto the ground, longing to punish himself without mercy;

like a madman he stared about — where, oh where has it gone,
having once let itself be caught, his fulfilled desire has slipped away again!
Only, from long habit, he had gone on picking up pebbles, so many of them,
touching each one, with a clink, against the chain,
never truly looking, tossing each one far away —
who knows when, among them, he had thrown away the touchstone itself.

By now the pale sun was sinking toward its setting.
The sky turned the color of gold, the sea like molten gold,
the bride of the western horizon dreamed a golden dream.
The ascetic once more, slowly,
turns back along the eastern road,
to search anew for his lost treasure.
That strength is gone from him now; his body's weight bends him low,
his heart collapses within him like a felled tree.
The long, old road
lies before him, dead and still —
how much farther it stretches from here, there is no end to it.
From horizon to horizon
the desert sand stretches, bare and empty,
the coming night casts its pale shadow over every land.
Half his life spent searching, in that one unknown moment
when, eyes closed, he felt its touch, for the space of one instant —
the other half of his broken life
he now gives again, to search once more, for that same touchstone.

VAISHNAVA POETRY

Only for Vaikuntha — is this the whole of the Vaishnav's song!
The first stirring of love, its deepening, the play of pride and hurt,
the secret tryst, love's own sport, parting and reunion,
the tale of Vrindavan — this dream of love
on a night of Shravan, by the banks of the Kalindi,
gazed at with four wide eyes, at the foot of the kadamba tree,
in shyness, in reverence — is this truly for the gods alone?
Can this river of song's own sweetness not also serve
to quench the parched, earthly thirst
of us poor, mortal men and women,
night after night, day after day,
this burning thirst for love?

In the midst of this festival of song
he alone, and his devotee, dwell apart, in solitude;
we, men and women, stand outside the door,
listening eagerly, hoping to catch
one note or two of that far melody — and hearing it from a distance,
if, in youthful spring, in a fresh Falgun,
our hearts leap up in joy at that same tune,
we suddenly see our own earth
grown twice as sweet — the small river
that runs past the shade of our own grove
turns to honey; the kadamba that blooms
at the edge of our cottage in the rainy season — if, hearing that love-worn melody,
I turn and look beside me
and find, holding my left arm, standing there,
my own companion on this earth, her heart
reaching out toward me, carrying her own silent love —
if, in that very song, she finds her own voice,
if upon her face the full light of love should bloom —
whose loss is it then, friend — yours, or His?

Tell me truly, O Vaishnav poet,
where did you find this picture of love,

where did you learn this song of love,
burning with separation? Whose eyes did you look into,
that made you remember Radhika's own tear-filled gaze?
On some lonely night of spring, on the bed of union,
who bound you with the noose of her two arms,
and held you, sunk deep,
within the bottomless ocean of her own heart! So much talk of love —
did you steal it from Radhika's own heart's torn,
sharp restlessness — from whose face, from whose
eyes did you steal it? Has she, then, today, no claim at all
upon that very song! Will you rob her, from whose own woman's heart
it was gathered, of her own language,
forever?

In our own cottage garden
flowers bloom; some we give at the feet of god,
some we keep for those we love — in this
he takes no offense. This garland of love songs
is strung together at the meeting-place of men and women,
some give it to him, some hang it round a lover's neck.
Whatever we can give to god, we give also
to our beloved — whatever we can give our beloved,
that we give to god as well; where else could we find more!
We make our beloved into god, and god into our beloved.

The gift of love the Vaishnav poet strung together
travels on, night and day, in load after load,
along the road to Vaikuntha. Midway, men and women
snatch and struggle over that undying stream of nectar,
carrying it off, each to their own beloved home,
as much as each one can; through age after age,
forever, upon this earth, young men and young women —
men and women — are restless, fickle, just like this.

Both sides, meeting, grow entirely lost in themselves,
foolish, unknowing. Thieves of beauty, they
want to plunder and carry off everything. So much song,
so much rhythm, so much feeling overflowing with love,

so much sweetness flows past
the very door — and so they come running,
all together, with joyful noise, to that stream of nectar.
From that sea-fed river of love
they fill their pitchers and carry them off to the shore,
without a thought, to their own cottage,
for their own sake. You are wrong to lay blame,
he is wise and good, you are wrong to be angry.
He, whose wealth it is, sits there in boundless contentment,
smiling the smile of infinite tenderness.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

সুপ্তোত্থিতা. The title itself is a compact compound meaning "she who has risen from sleep" — the direct narrative continuation of *নিদ্রিতা* ("She Who Sleeps") from the earlier batch. The refrain কে পরালে মালা ("who placed this garland on me?") functions almost like a musical burden, repeated at the close of every stanza across the changing seasons — I kept it fixed and italicized to preserve that incantatory, unanswered-question quality that drives the whole poem.

তোমরা ও আমরা. The poem's whole architecture rests on the pronoun contrast in its title — *tomra* (you, plural/formal-familiar) versus *amra* (we) — a rhetorical "battle of the sexes" address that Bengali can sustain effortlessly across an entire poem simply by pronoun choice, without needing to specify gender explicitly until the imagery (bangles, veils, flowers in the hair) makes it clear. English has to lean more heavily on that imagery to carry the same weight, since "you" and "we" alone don't distinguish gender.

সোনার বাঁধন. The central pun is *বাঁধন* — which means both "bond" in the tender, affectionate sense (a bond of love) and "binding/fetter" in the sense of restraint. The poem holds both meanings in suspension throughout — are the bangles an ornament of love, or a mark of confinement? — and I chose "bond" over "fetter" in the title specifically to preserve that ambiguity, since English forces a choice that Bengali doesn't.

বর্ষাযাপন. This is Tagore's own literary self-portrait, and its richest layer is intertextual: he reads the *Meghdoot* (Kalidasa's classical Sanskrit "Cloud-

Messenger"), the *Gita Govinda* (Jayadeva's Sanskrit devotional poem of Radha and Krishna), and the *padabali* of Govindadas (a major Vaishnav Bengali poet) — three separate, centuries-old literary traditions of monsoon-and-longing poetry that a Bengali reader would recognize instantly by title alone. I kept the titles untranslated (rather than glossing each one inline) since Tagore himself treats them as familiar touchstones, not explanations — the poem assumes the reader already lives inside that literary furniture, the way an English poem might casually mention "Keats" without a footnote.

হিং টিং ছট্. This phrase is, and must remain, pure nonsense — it has no meaning in Bengali. The entire satirical engine of the poem depends on educated men (and, pointedly, foreign scholars from opposite temperaments — a clipped, impatient Englishman-coded figure, and a wry, philosophical Frenchman) mistaking meaningless gibberish for profound wisdom simply because it's delivered with enough scholarly ceremony. Translating or "explaining" the nonsense syllables would be exactly the mistake the poem is mocking; I left them exactly as transliterated sound, the way "Jabberwocky" leaves "brillig" and "slithy toves" untranslated. The recurring closing couplet (crediting "the poet Gaudananda") is a deliberate parody of the traditional Bengali *panchali* folk-verse convention, where the poet names himself and blesses the listener at the end of every stanza — I preserved that repetition intact, since the repetition itself is part of the joke, mimicking devotional/folk poetic form to deliver a joke about empty erudition.

পরশপাথর. *Parashpathar* (also *sparshamani*) is the Indian equivalent of the philosopher's stone — a mythical stone that turns iron to gold merely by touching it. The poem's devastating turn hinges on a single tragic irony: the ascetic has, unknowingly, already succeeded — the stone touched his chain at some point during his habitual, distracted pebble-testing — and he threw it away without ever truly looking at what was in his hand. I preserved the ambiguity of the ending deliberately: the poem never says whether he will ever find it again, only that he begins his search once more, which is the whole point.

বৈষ্ণব কবিতা. The poem's premise depends on knowing the conventions of Vaishnav *padabali* poetry (Radha and Krishna's love, allegorized as the soul's longing for the divine) — terms like *পূর্বরাগ* ("the first stirring of love, before meeting") and *অভিসার* ("the secret nighttime tryst") are technical categories from that tradition's own poetics, each naming a specific stage of romantic longing that

classical Vaishnav poets catalogued extensively. I unpacked these into descriptive phrases rather than single English words, since no equivalent taxonomy of love-stages exists in the English tradition to borrow a ready-made term from. The poem's real argument — that sacred and human love are not rivals but continuous, that the very passion trained on Radha and Krishna can, without theft or blasphemy, also kindle an ordinary man's love for his own wife — is classic Tagore theology, echoed throughout *Gitanjali*'s own insistence that the divine is met not by fleeing the world but by loving it more fully.

TWO BIRDS

There was a caged bird, kept in a golden cage,
and a bird of the forest, free, in the forest.
Once, somehow, the two of them chanced to meet —
who knows what was in the Maker's mind.
The forest bird says, "Brother caged bird,
come, let the two of us go, together, into the forest."
The caged bird says, "Bird of the forest, come instead,
let us live here, quietly, in this cage."
The forest bird says — "No.
I will never let myself be bound in chains."
The caged bird says — "Alas,
how could I ever go out into the forest!"

The forest bird sits outside and sings
every song the forest ever taught it;
the caged bird recites its own well-drilled phrases —
the two of them speak in two different tongues.
The forest bird says, "Brother caged bird,
sing me, then, a song of the forest."
The caged bird says, "Brother forest bird,
come, learn instead the songs of the cage."
The forest bird says — "No.
I want no song that has been taught to me."
The caged bird says — "Alas,
how could I ever sing a forest-song!"

The forest bird says, "The sky is deep and blue,
nowhere in it is there any wall."
The caged bird says, "This cage is beautifully made,
see how well it is enclosed, on every side."
The forest bird says, "Let yourself go free,
straight into the very heart of the clouds."
The caged bird says, "Come instead, and bind yourself
within this quiet, happy corner."
The forest bird says — "No.
Out there, where would I ever find room to fly!"
The caged bird says — "Alas,
among the clouds, where is there any place to perch!"

So it is with these two birds, loving one another,
and yet never able to come close.
Through the bars of the cage their faces almost touch,
and silently, eye searches into eye.
Neither one can understand the other,
neither one can make itself understood.
Each one, alone, beats its wings until it can go no further,
crying out, pitifully, "Come closer!"
The forest bird says — "No —
who knows when they'll shut the cage-door fast on me."
The caged bird says — "Alas,
I have no strength left in me now to fly."

THE MOON IN THE SKY

"Put the moon of the sky into my hands" —
this alone was his one refrain.
Day and night went on passing by,
and he wept, both arms lifted to the sky.
The sky laughed on, the wind blew on,
the birds sang out, rejoicing.
In the morning the herd-boy walked out to the fields,
in the evening he turned toward home.
Boys and girls, brothers and sisters together,
played in the corner of the courtyard,
and a mother, gazing at the child upon her lap,
smiled quietly to herself.
Some went to market, some went about their errands,
each one setting off to their own work —
how much talk, how much laughter and noise
rose up into the sky.
Travelers would come and ask him,
"Who are you, sitting here and weeping?"
And he would only say, through his tears,
"I could not hold the moon in my hand."

Morning and evening, unasked, flowers fell
and scattered into his lap.
The southern breeze passed its palm
gently across his brow.
The morning light laid its blessing-touch
upon his whole body,
and night wrapped him in the fold of her breast
with a silent tenderness.
A child would come close, asking to be held,
its small arms thrown round his neck;
a young man, drawing near, would seek him out
to make of him a friend.
Along this road, in this house, how much coming and going,
how much love passed to and fro,

how many small joys of this world drifted near him,
came, and drifted away again —
but he would only turn his face aside, and sit,
and say, through his tears,
"I want none of you, none at all —
I want only the moon, in the palm of my hand."

The moon stayed exactly where it had always been,
and he too went on sitting in that same one place.
At last, when the days of his life
had grown very few,
just then, struck by some sudden thought,
he turned his face around
and saw the earth, green and sweet,
along the deep blue shore of the sea.
In the golden fields a farmer sat,
cutting down the ripened grain,
small boats went sailing by, sails raised,
a boatman sat and sang his song.
Far off, in a temple, cymbals rang,
young wives walked down to the river-ghat,
along the country paths the villagers
made their way to the village market.
He sat there, breathing a long sigh, his eyes wide open,
and his downcast heart said,
"I do not want the moon, if only I might have
this same life, once more, again."

He looked, and saw a life-filled,
beautiful world of human homes,
forever murmuring with the joy and sorrow
of every passing day.
The goddess of the household, carrying the nectar of tenderness,
moved about within her home,
making sweet each single day
with each single day's small labor.
Morning and evening two brothers would come,
like children of that very house;

and night would gather everyone into her lap,
her eyes lowered gently.
Small flowers, small laughter,
small words, small joys,
the small loves of every passing moment,
small, smiling faces —
rose up, blossoming of their own accord,
all around the whole of human life —
and he, sitting on his lonely peak,
watched it all, turning to look, again and again.

He saw, far off, like a city built of shadow,
the whole line of his own past life,
written now in a new color
by the setting sun's golden light.
The very things toward which he had never once
lifted his eyes to look back,
now showed themselves to him in a fresh, new light,
along the shore of memory's sea.
In a despairing heart, weeping and weeping,
the raga Puravi played on,
and he stretched out both his arms, longing to return
into the midst of that same life.
The light of day faded slowly away,
and still he sat there, gazing back —
wanting only what he had already once had,
nothing more than that.
A golden life lay behind him there, unclaimed —
and where did he himself go, drifting?
Did he go on weeping for the moon
into some land without a sun, without a moon at all?

I WILL NOT LET YOU GO

The carriage stands ready at the door; it is midday;
the autumn sun grows sharper, hour by hour.
Along the empty village road the dust rises
in the noon wind; in the cool shade of a peepul tree
a weary old beggar-woman, her clothes worn thin,
has fallen asleep — as if the sun-drenched day itself were night,
so hushed, so still, on every side —
only in my own house is there no rest at all.
Ashwin has passed — the Puja holidays are over,
and today I must go back, far, far away,
to my place of work. The servants, all in a bustle,
tie up the baggage with rope after rope,
calling, shouting, from this room to that.
The lady of the house, her eyes brimming,
carries a stone's weight of pain close to her heart,
and yet has no time to weep,
not even for a moment; caught up in the business
of parting, she moves back and forth; no amount
of packing ever seems to her quite enough.
I say, "What is all this? So many jars, so many parcels,
pots and lids and boxes,
bottles, bedding, trunks — a whole kingdom's worth of baggage —
what am I to do with it all? Let me leave some of it here,
and take only a little along."

But no one pays my words the slightest attention.
"Who knows — by some mischance,
if this or that should turn out to be needed —
where, then, would you find it, in some strange, foreign land?"
Fine moong dal, thin rice, betel nut and leaf;
in that covered pot are hidden two or three
lumps of raw sugar; some dried coconut;
two jars of good mustard oil;
dried mango-pulp, mango pickle; two seers of milk —
and all these small bottles and boxes of medicine besides.

"There are sweets left, there, inside that pot —
mind you eat them, don't forget, remember to eat."
I understood: there was no use reasoning, it was wasted breath.
The pile of baggage grew as high as a mountain.
I glanced toward the clock, and then turned
to look at my beloved's face; I said, quietly,
"Well then — I'm off." At once she turned her face away,
and, head bowed, drawing the end of her sari
across her eyes, hid there, in secret, her tears — unlucky, unspoken.

Outside, near the door, sitting lost in thought,
was my daughter, four years old. By this hour,
on any other day, her bath would already be done,
and before she'd swallowed two mouthfuls of rice
her eyes would already be closing in sleep —
but today her mother had not once looked in on her;
the hour had grown so late, and still
she'd had no bath, no food. All this while, like a small shadow,
she had been trailing close behind me, at my heels,
watching, silent, unblinking,
every preparation for my leaving. Now, her small body tired,
she sat at the edge of the outer door,
thinking who knows what,
sitting quietly, saying nothing. When I said,
"Well, my dear, I'm off" — she said, her eyes full of sorrow,
her small face pale, "I won't let you go."
She stayed exactly where she was sitting;
she did not catch at my arm, did not block the door,
she only declared, simply, the one claim
her own heart possessed — "I won't let you go."
And yet the hour came to its end, and yet, alas,
I had to be let go.

O my foolish little girl,
who are you, where did you find such power,
to say a thing like that, with such defiance —
"I won't let you go"? In this whole wide world,
whom could you ever hold fast, in your two small hands,

proud one — with whom could you ever do battle,
sitting there at the edge of the door, your small body weary,
armed with nothing but that little breast, full of tenderness?
From an aching heart, in fear, in shyness,
only the heart's own private wish may rightly be spoken
in this world — only this much: "I do not wish
to let you go." Who else could dare to say
"I will not let you go"! Hearing that fierce, proud claim of love
from your small child's mouth, the world only laughed,
amused, and swept me off regardless —
and you, defeated, your eyes brimming with tears,
stayed sitting at the door, still as a picture,
while I walked on, wiping my own eyes as I went.

As I traveled on, I saw, on either side of the road,
the autumn fields of grain, bowed low under their own ripe weight,
basking in the sun. The rows of trees stood indifferent
beside the highway, gazing all day long
into their own shadow. The autumn Ganges ran on,
full and swift. Scattered white clouds
lay in the blue sky like some tender, newborn calf,
fed full on its mother's milk, sunk in a happy sleep.
Bare beneath the bright sun, stretched to the horizon,
weary with the passing of age after age,
I looked out upon the earth, and let out a long breath.

In what deep sorrow the whole sky was sunk,
the whole earth. However far I traveled,
I heard only that one heart-piercing refrain —
"I won't let you go." From the farthest edge of the earth
to the farthest shore of the blue heavens,
it echoed on, forever, in a voice without beginning or end,
"I will not let you go. I will not let you go." Everything
said, "I will not let you go." Even the smallest blade of grass,
holding it close to her own breast, mother Earth
says, with all her strength, "I will not let you go."
The dying lamp, its flame guttering, failing,
someone still pulls it back from the jaws of the dark,

saying, a hundred times, "I will not let you go."
Across this endless universe, filling heaven and earth alike,
the oldest cry there is, the deepest
weeping of all — "I will not let you go." And yet, alas,
still one must let go, still everything goes on, and passes away.

So it has gone on, since time without beginning.
Borne on creation's own flood — which carries within it
the ocean of dissolution too — with arms outstretched, straining,
with burning eyes, crying out, again and again,
"I will not, will not let you go" —
everything rushes on, with a great, rushing sound,
filling the shores of the whole world with its own anguished cry.
The wave behind calls out to the wave ahead,
"I will not, will not let you go" — and no one hears,
no one answers at all.

From every side, today,
without pause, it rises to my ears,
that same world-piercing, sorrowful cry,
now in my own daughter's voice; like a child's,
the whole world's unknowing speech. Forever,
whatever it gains, it goes on losing again — and yet
its grip never once loosens; still, unceasing,
like that same four-year-old girl,
it cries out, in love's own unbroken pride,
"I will not let you go." Pale-faced, tears in its eyes,
its pride breaking, moment by moment, instant by instant,
and yet love will not, in any way, accept defeat,
still, in a spirit of rebellion, with a choked voice, it says,
"I will not let you go." However many times it is defeated,
just as many times it says, "The one I love —
can they ever truly go far away from me?
Is there anything else, in this whole vast, powerful world,
as restless as my own longing, as all-consuming,
as boundless as this?" Saying this, in its own pride,
it goes on proclaiming,
"I will not let you go." And in that very instant it sees

its own cherished treasure blown away, like dry, worthless dust,
in a single breath;
its two eyes flood with tears,
it falls to the earth like an uprooted tree,
its pride broken, its head bowed low. And yet love says,
"God will not break his word. I have from him
a great covenant, signed with his own hand,
a deed of everlasting claim." — And so, its breast still swelling,
facing down the very jaws of death's whole power,
that small, delicate, fragile form
stands and says, "Death — you do not exist." What proud words these are!
Death only sits, and smiles.

That death-stricken,
yet undying love has covered over this whole
endless world; upon its own sorrowful eyes,
like the mist of held-back tears, in restless dread,
it trembles on, forever. A hopeless, weary hope
has drawn a veil of grief
over the whole world. Today it seems I can see it —
two innocent arms, in a useless, failing embrace,
wrapped around the whole of creation,
silent, aching. Upon the surface of the restless current
lies one motionless shadow —
the illusion cast by some cloud, heavy with unshed rain.
That is why, today, I hear in the rustling of the trees
such restlessness; in an idle, indifferent mood
the hot noonday wind plays its useless game
with the dry leaves; the day slowly passes on,
lengthening the shadow beneath the peepul tree.
Somewhere, in a rustic tune, eternity's own flute
seems to weep, across the open fields of the world;
and hearing it, listless, her hair unbound,
Mother Earth sits there, across her far-stretching fields of grain,
along the banks of the Ganges,
drawing across her breast one sun-yellowed,
golden veil; her two still eyes
sunk deep in the far blue sky; no word upon her lips.

And I saw, then, that same pale face of hers,
sunk there at the edge of the door, silent, heart-broken,
just like my own daughter, four years old.

TO THE SEA

(Written on seeing the sea at Puri)

O primal mother, Ocean — the Earth is your own child,
your one and only daughter, held in your lap. That is why sleep never comes
to your eyes, why your breast is forever full of dread, forever full of hope,
forever restless; that is why a voice rises from you, like the very hymns of the Vedas,
without end, into the calm sky, toward great Indra's own temple —
the heart's own endless prayer, sounding out, in an unceasing
song of blessing, in every direction; that is why, upon the sleeping earth,
you set countless kisses, and, in an embrace that circles her whole body,
bind her fast in the chain of your waves, wrapping her
carefully in your own sky-blue veil,
holding her whole form, so tenderly, with such gentle skill.

What a deep, grave game of tenderness this is,
O ocean — feigning, in pretense, a false neglect,
you slowly, softly draw your feet back, retreating farther away,
as if you meant to leave her; and then, in a tune brimming with joy,
you come rushing back, rejoicing, and fling yourself, roaring, upon her breast —
with heap upon heap of bright, laughing foam, with tears,
with the proud, tender joy of love,
you leave the earth's own pure brow wet
with your blessing.

Your vast heart is forever melting, forever overflowing —
your love has no beginning and no end — where, indeed, could its beginning or end ever be found!
Where is its depth! Where is its shore! Tell me, who could ever understand
its bottomless peace, its boundless restlessness,
its deep, deep silence, its ceaseless, murmuring speech,
its laughter, its floods of tears!

Sometimes it seems you cannot hold yourself back at all;
your breast heaving, swollen with love, you rush forward, half-mad,
and press the earth hard against your chest,

in a merciless surge of feeling; the earth shudders, trembling, under that fierce pressure,
her breath caught, gasping, wanting to cry out, weeping;
in a wild hunger of love, like some fierce, devouring demoness, you bind her
in a vast, overwhelming ruin. And then, the very next instant, as if in deep guilt,
you lie there at the foot of the shore, gone utterly still, sunk in sorrowful pain,
motionless, subdued — slowly, morning rises and comes,
and looks upon you with a calm gaze; evening, your loving companion,
softly touches you with a comforting hand
and goes on her way into the temple of darkness; and night listens, like a friend,
to your muffled sobbing, swelling again and again with restrained remorse.

I am a child of the earth, sitting here upon your shore,
listening to your voice. I think to myself, it seems almost
as if I can understand some part of your meaning —
the way a mute person's own gestured speech is understood
by someone close to them, by blood. It seems to me as if
the very blood that flows within my own heart's core
already knows that same language, and has learned nothing else at all.
It seems to me — I almost remember — that once, dissolved,
formless, I lay within that same vast womb,
among the unborn embryos of the whole world, and that for a million ages
your own unceasing murmur, deep within, was pressed
into me, again and again, until it left its mark; that memory from before my own birth,
that ceaseless pulse of life upon the earth still folded in the womb,
belonging to your own mother's heart — like the faintest trace of a memory
it seems to wake in every vein of my body, when, sitting with lowered eyes
on this empty shore, I hear that same old, murmuring song.

Counting from horizon to horizon, from age to age,
you were alone then, unbroken, shoreless,
lost in yourself, not yet understanding
the vast, great mystery of your own first pregnancy. Day and night, some deep,
hidden, restless tenderness, the first stirring of a mother's love,
an unseen, wondrous compassion,
a mass of unknown longing, rose ceaselessly, restlessly,
within your own empty, childless breast. Every morning the dawn would come

and try to guess the birth-day of your great child,
and every night the stars would keep watch, unblinking,
at the head of a bed still empty of any child.

That deep, restless tenderness of the primal mother, empty then of any life,
that waking longing of yours, so full of imminent, expectant waiting,
that unknown ache of yours, deep beneath your own fathomless life —
for some great, unarrived future — rises up, again and again,
within my own heart, like the memory of some age long past.
Within my own mind, too, filled with just such an unknown ache,
with just such an unfamiliar hope, toward some unseen, far-off end,
a murmuring voice rises. Deep in the ocean-bed of the human heart
it is as if some new continent were being formed, moment by moment,
and does not even know this of itself. Only a half-felt sense of it
makes it restless, and has planted within it
a vast hope, without shape, without form, never satisfied —
beyond all proof, dwelling somewhere outside all direct sight.
Reason mocks it, but the heart knows it to be true;
amid a thousand obstacles, still it will not accept doubt,
just as a mother knows the hidden child within her own womb,
the moment love wakes in her, the moment the milk rises and fills her breast.

Full of life, robbed of language, lost of all direction, carrying that same hope,
I sit here, gazing toward you; and you, O Ocean, laughing your vast laugh,
seem to draw me in, with some great, overwhelming force, by some cord of the blood itself,
drawing this very heart of mine into the midst of your own waves,
like a child drawn into its mother's lap.

O Ocean, will you ever understand
this human tongue of mine? Do you know that your own child, the earth,
tormented today by her own pain, tosses from one side to the other,
tears flowing from her eyes, her breath coming quick and hot?
She does not know what she wants, does not know what could ever quench her thirst,
lost within her own mind, she has lost all sense of direction,
caught in the mirage-net of her own fevered delirium. Will you, from your own bottomless depths,

seize her, shake her, and, breaking her free all at once
from her own endless dissatisfaction, devour her, undo her utterly —
or will you speak to her, from your own heart, some new word of comfort,
like the deep rumble of clouds in Ashadh; will you lay your own gentle, motherly hand
again and again, in rhythm, upon her fevered, thought-worn brow,
and, giving her a thousand tender kisses over her whole body,
tell her, "Peace, peace" — tell her, "Sleep, sleep, sleep."

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

দুই পাখি (Two Birds). The whole poem is built on a single untranslatable grammatical trick: both birds speak in the same simple declarative structure, but their *content* is a mirror-image contradiction — freedom offered as the answer to captivity, captivity offered as the answer to freedom — and neither can hear the other's offer as anything but incomprehensible. I kept every "The forest bird says... / The caged bird says..." exchange in strict parallel structure to preserve that call-and-response symmetry, since the *shape* of the dialogue is doing as much work as its content: two creatures who love each other but are permanently sealed into incompatible vocabularies of what safety and life actually mean.

আকাশের চাঁদ (The Moon in the Sky). The devastating final image — *রবিশশীহীন দেশে*, "a land without sun or moon" — is a common Bengali euphemism for death or the afterlife, but it lands with cruel irony here: after a lifetime spent refusing to want anything but the moon, he may be carried at last into the one place where there is no moon, and no sun, at all. I chose to leave the ending genuinely ambiguous, as Tagore does — whether he "goes on weeping" is phrased as a question, not a statement, and I preserved that uncertainty rather than resolving it either toward tragedy or redemption.

যেতে নাহি দিব (I Will Not Let You Go). This is among Tagore's most autobiographical and best-loved poems, and its central word is *যাওয়া* ("to go" / "to leave") repeated so many times it becomes almost a drumbeat — I kept the refrain "I will not let you go" fixed and unvaried throughout, exactly as the Bengali repeats it verbatim from the daughter's mouth to the poet's meditation to the whole universe's cry, because the poem's entire power comes from one child's small, stubborn sentence expanding, unaltered, into a description of everything alive

resisting death and loss. Note also *করজোড়ে*-style domestic detail (the wife packing jars of ghee, medicine, sweets) is not incidental scene-setting — Tagore is deliberately grounding the poem's later cosmic meditation on love-versus-death in the most ordinary, unglamorous texture of a real departure, so that the leap to "even the smallest blade of grass says 'I will not let you go'" earns its scale by having started from something so plain.

সমুদ্রের প্রতি (To the Sea). This poem draws on a genuinely ancient current in Indian thought — the ocean (সিন্ধু/সমুদ্র) as the primal womb from which the earth and all life emerged, echoed in Vedic cosmogony and reinforced here with an almost proto-evolutionary intuition: the poet imagines that human blood itself still "remembers," at a cellular level, the eons spent dissolved within the ocean before birth. I rendered *আদিজননী* as "primal mother" rather than a more clinical "primordial" to keep the warmth of *জননী* (a mother, tenderly named) rather than a cold scientific register. The closing address — asking the sea to either "devour" the suffering earth or comfort her to sleep — is left genuinely open in the Bengali between destruction and consolation, and I preserved that same unresolved tension rather than smoothing it toward one reading; some critics have read the "tormented earth" here as carrying an implicit undertone of colonial-era anguish for India itself, though the poem never states this directly, and I've left that possibility to the reader rather than importing it into the translation.

WAITING

(Pratikshā)

O Death, I know you have made your home within my breast — there, where in a solitary bower blooms all my tenderness and love, the secret hopes of my heart, life's sorrows and its joys, the inmost pain of the soul, all the desires and strivings of my endless days, etched with the traces of laughter and of tears; where, in a shade of paradise, fearlessly at play, are the treasures of my heart, the small dolls of affection, the lifelong memories of love, the rays of my gladness; so much light, so much shade, so much of the song-filled speech of small and nameless birds — O Death, I have learned that it is there, in the very midst of it, that you have come and made your home.

Day and night, without end, play spans the whole world, and life is never still. I look, and see, upon the highway, tireless, the crowds of travellers passing by; in the sun-pale blue the birds go flying with a speed full of life; in the wind-shaken forest, at night's ending, flower after new flower wakes and lifts its head; on every side, so much meeting, so much passing, each morning, each evening; every day, each new morning, opens a fresh chapter of this life. You alone sit apart, at the world's one edge, day and night, your still eyes open — and now and then, at night, you rise, beating your wings, and my whole breast trembles.

From what far kingdom, beyond what distant sea, have you come here to me? Have you brought some new tidings from that place, some word kept secret still? There, on soundless shores, the waves beat out, wave upon wave, a vast and solemn music — and how is it you make that very sound ring on, within my small and narrow breast? Night and day, throb upon throb, at the shore of my heart's own cage, beats a wave out of the infinite, unceasing, in a deep and steady rhythm that no one else can hear. Into my heart's own small and modest songs, its murmur of tenderness, who was it brought, to mingle there, the terrible music of that shoreless sea?

Do you, then, love this bird of my own soul that dwells here in my breast, that you have come and settled by its side, so slowly, and so near? Day and night, unblinking, your gaze fixed upon its eyes — a silent, ceaseless discipline; sitting in your still and voiceless seat, with single-minded longing — a terrible devotion. The restless, fickle darling will not be caught, will never long stay still, but spreads its

many-coloured wings and flies from branch to ever-newer branch; and still you sit, single of purpose, in your silent vow, tireless, upon your one unmoving seat. Little by little it will be caught at last, its singing will fall still, and it will yield to you.

Then to what place will you lure it, beguiled, away — by what road of emptiness, carrying the senseless, unresisting darling, careless, upon your chariot of the dark, to where beginningless Night remains a virgin, still, forever — where the touch of light in all these countless years has never traced one line upon her skin; to the far edge of all creation, to that endless innermost chamber, where never, by even the strangest chance, does the faintest footfall-echo of the farthest star so much as brush the threshold — there will you spread your vast wings open, wide and free, bound by no bond at all, and there, against your breast, the newly wedded bride will tremble, new in her freedom.

Will she forget, then, little by little, that small nest of earth woven of grass and leaf — this joyful light of the sun, this tenderness, this home, these flowers and their leaves? Will she, in time, with love, come to call even you her own, her kin, and will the two of you, in that dark bridal chamber, speak a silent, wordless speech? Your calm, deep, unwavering shape of love, your boundless and unshaken trust, your still blue eyes, your matted locks that reach across the whole wide world, your silent lips — beside all that, the restless joys of the earth will surely seem so small; does the river, once it melts into the sea, still hold the memory of its many, many shores?

O Death, o my beloved — yet stay a little longer here in this world with us. Do not, not yet, take her away, dressed as a bride, into that country of the endless wedding-night. Not all her songs are finished yet, not the songs of every evening, every dawn; still, in her own breast's warmth, in her sweet and heated nest, she goes on sleeping through the night; still, with the birds of passage, she has yet to travel to lands ever new, to ocean-shores, to flowering groves, in search of the gladness of springs still to come. O Death, why is it that even now you have come to sit within her nest? Do you mean, out of your very love, to darken all the love that is in her?

If it is true that upon this earth of clay all this is but a moment's play, all this facing of one face to another, all this meeting, a fair that lasts an hour, if even this love, given with the whole of one life, is only a bond of falsehood after all, crumbling at

a single touch, and after it an hour or two of weeping in the wild — then you alone are lasting, you alone the vast and final end without a shore, where every hope, every love finds, in your darkness, an endless rest at last — then, Death, go far from here; do not, not yet, break open this palace of our play; delay a little longer; do not steal away these few last days that still are mine.

One day the evening will come down, the conch of worship will sound in some near temple; the birds will fall silent, and in the forest's depth the cricket's cry will rise; all our labour will be finished, and, at the end of the world's long war, its victory and defeat; a heaviness of sleep will settle on the traveller's eyes, utterly worn with weariness; the last light of the day will fade into the far horizon, and the earth grow dark — and only, far off, along the road of the infinite journey, will the small lamps of the stars still burn; and into the eyes of those who sit, unmoving, at the bedside, after the body is laid down, will come the weight of a great tiredness, through the sleepless night, in a dimming, failing light.

One by one, friend and companion, all will go back to their own homes; the oil-starved flame will gutter, and go out, somewhere near the middle of the night; a rising wind will carry in the fragrance of flowers no one can see; and, filling all the darkness, will come the sound of waves from unknown and unnamed shores. O Death, in that very hour, come to her lonely bedside dressed as a bridegroom comes. My soul's own bride will stretch out her tired hand to you, out of so much love, and take hold of your arm; and then, speaking the sacred words, take her for your own — and with one long, unbroken kiss upon her reddened lips, let them go pale in yours.

THE BEAUTY OF MY MIND

(Mānasa-sundarī)

Today, no task at all — set everything aside, every measured verse, every written song — come to me now, beloved, my whole life's labour and treasure, my beautiful one, poetry, my vine of imagination. Only this once, come, sit close beside me. Let there be, today, only a cooing, a murmuring between the two of us; only the silent drinking, together, of this evening light's own gold — until the very veins within me fill and brim over with a flood of grace, until, in some great gladness, the tangled knot of feeling and of pain comes loose at last, and I forget it all — what hope went unanswered in my heart, what strain of music fell silent before its time, what nectar of joy came to the very edge of my lips and left, unsatisfied, the hunger of my heart, and dried away. Let this peace, this sweetness, cast its soft and fading radiance over all the sorrow, the poverty, the longing of this life — a tender, sorrowful glow, deep and lovely.

Set down your vina, come to me, o beauty of my mind — fill only these two empty hands of mine with your embrace, twine your arms about my neck — at the touch of your lotus-stem arms a shiver of gladness climbs through me, piercing to the heart, my restless breast trembles, my eyes brim over, my rapt body seems almost to die away, and only my inmost self comes alight along the very edges of my limbs, as though the bonds of sense were breaking, breaking, even now. Spread half your veil and sit down close beside me; call me by the sweetest of love's names, say, beloved; say, dearest — keep your face, tangled in your loosened hair, against my breast, and whisper, mouth close to my heart's own ear, so softly, say in secret whatever comes to your lips, words beyond all meaning, and yet full of feeling. O my love, when I beg a kiss of you, do not, smiling a little, turn your neck aside, do not look away; keep, upon the cup of your two lips, that bright, red, nectar-brimming sweetness, for love's devoted bee — one whole, unbroken kiss, and smile on smile, tender and lovely; lift your face to me as a new-opened flower lifts on its bending, matchless stem; let your two wide eyes, shadowed under their lashes, rest upon my face in a calm and trusting gaze, in utter surrender. If tears should come to your eyes, we will weep together; and if, upon your soft cheek, a faint smile should rise and float, then sit here, in my lap, your waist within my arm, your face against my shoulder, and laugh, in silence, your eyes half closed. If some word should come to you, speak it then, in your own murmuring voice, light with a running gladness, like a little spring, and,

for half the night, tell me tale after tale, memory and wave of fancy, the honeyed murmur of your throat. And if a song should please you, sing it. And if your rapt soul only wishes to sit in silence, still, gazing ahead in peace, then I too will be still, beloved, and stay. We will watch, close by, the Padma, stretched along her high bank like a tired, beautiful woman, her whole body laid out along the wide hem of her garment, lying there in the evening light; and darkness will come down over her eyes the way eyelids come down; the evening star will step, softly, carefully, down to the riverbank, to the forest's edge; and night will spread her single bed of darkness across the whole unmeasured world. And we two will sit and gaze into that boundless dark; nothing else will remain anywhere — only the palm of your hand resting in mine, only the two of us, so close, two living souls in that immense and lonely quiet; sorrow of parting will have swallowed everything else, in all this moving, unmoving world — and only, at its one last edge, sunk in that great dissolving, will remain one trembling union still: two hands, two hearts that beat like frightened doves, and in these two souls there blooms only a single fear, a single hope, a single tear-brimmed, humble love. And so, tonight, the whole night through will pass in this slow and idle joy.

O you without all pride, O first love of my life, o moon of beauty in the sky of my own fortune, do you remember, once, in some flowering grove of jasmine, far back in my childhood, how we two would meet, each half-knowing the other? You were the daughter of some neighbour of this earth; with what games would you come to me, laughing, some restless boy of the world, in the young morning — a fresh, girlish figure, dressed all in white, new-bathed in the stream of the first light of dawn, your face bright and blooming as an open flower, appearing to me as I woke from sleep, and pulling me away to gather shefali blossoms in the grove; again and again luring me from my childhood's duties, scattering my books, snatching away my slate, showing me the secret path to set me free from the schoolroom's prison; carrying me off, sometimes, to some quiet corner of the house, some chamber of mystery; on the empty rooftop, under the open sky, what games we played, what strange and wondrous things you said to charm me, marvellous as a dream, without meaning — whether truth or make-believe, only you know. Pearls swayed at your two ears; on your two wrists were bangles of gold; over your two cheeks loose curls of hair would play; from your two clear eyes a light would tremble, like the pure spray of a waterfall caught in sunlight. Before the two of us had truly come to know each other, in an easy, trusting faith, we ran, we played together, endlessly — our talk, our dress, spread wide and without end.

Then, one day — who now can say when it was — when, in youth's own springtime, in the forest of my life, the first breath of the southern wind had stirred, and a hundred new hopes were budding into bloom, startled, all at once, by my own song, I looked, astonished, and saw that you had come, from that old field of play, at some unnoticed hour, into my inmost self, and there, in your own inner room, sat crowned in glory, like a queen. Who was it brought you there, and welcomed you? At the city gate, who raised the joyful cry! Who filled their skirts and scattered new-blown petals upon your bowed and modest head, in love and gladness! In the sweet strain of the wedding-pipe, in the soft note of the flute, what a festival there was, then, in my whole world, that day when, first, along a path strewn thick with flowers, your face just budding into shyness, in garments red as dawn, you came, a bride, forever, into the inner house of my heart — that hidden dwelling where the Indweller keeps watch, holding joy and sorrow both, where all my shame, my hope, my fear, tremble always, too delicate a thing to bear the lightest touch! Once you were only my companion in play; now you have become the mistress of my inmost being, the presiding goddess of my life.

Where now is that causeless laughter and those tears, that restlessness, that idle, endless talk? A gaze grown tender, deeply calm, clear as an autumn sky of blue; a smile grown still, washed clean in a dew of tears; a body come at last to its own fullness, like a flowering vine; love and its tenderness rise now in a deep strain of music, ringing, ringing from the strings of a golden vina, bearing an endless sorrow. Ever since that day, beloved, I have remained in wonder — gazing at you, I can find no end to you anywhere. In what far country, past the edge of the world, does your birthplace lie? How far will your music carry me away — to what realm of imagining will it hold me, a captive thrilled by its own song, like some bewildered deer? This sorrow of mine — does it have any language at all? This longing of mine — does it have any end, any fulfilment? This vast sea, in the very midst of which, as your own helmsman, you have set sail a beautiful boat, while, on every side, an unclear murmur of waves, through days and nights without number, says something I cannot understand at all — does even this have a shore? On this ocean of beauty, in the wind of sorrow that drives my small boat of a heart onward, how many times have I feared my very sail was about to be torn from me; and yet, seeing your wide eyes, so full of a fearless trust, I take heart again, and a vast faith wakes within me — that there is one great and final shore, along this coast of beauty, upon this strand of longing, that is the home of both of us.

You are smiling, slowly, gazing into my face, o sweetly mysterious one! What is it you wish to tell me, my sorrowing love, my boundless one — what do you want me to understand? There is no need for words — only cover my whole self, mind and body, in the fold of your veil; take me wholly, and by force, away from my very self; breast bared to breast, let me hear, beloved, the secret of your heart. The trembling of your own heart, like a plucking finger, will strike the strings of mine, and a wave of music will rise up, murmuring, trembling through the whole length of my life. Let me understand nothing, say nothing, weave no song, walk no measured, patterned road, dragging my shy heart out into the light. Let me only forget every word and tremble, filled with music; let me, like a star, shiver and burn in one unsteady flame; let me only, like a wave, break and fall into your wave; let me only live, only die, and do nothing more than this. Give me that vast and singular flood, in which, in a single moment, my whole life made complete, without a word, I go, mad, sweeping onward, past all restraint.

O you shaped only in the imagination, o dweller in desire, o clothed in light, o speaker in silences, in what other life will you take on flesh at last, to be born into some human house, in a woman's shape, peerless in beauty? For now you only drift, somewhere within the infinite; between heaven and this earth you wander; in the gold of evening you dye your veil; from the melted gold of dawn you shape your girdle; in the swelling waters of the river you spread out, in ripple and glimmer, your soft young form, in the wind of spring; you let your restless ache of longing show itself in a fragrant sigh; on sleepless nights of the full moon, alone in the empty sky, with a tired hand, you spread your bed of milk-white separation; in the first light of autumn you rise to gather shefali blossoms for a garland, and then, forgetting it, you fling it down beneath some tree, and, your hair undone, sit apart, unheeding, in the forest's deepest shade; in the flickering play of light and shadow, in the evening, with trembling fingers, you weave your garment under the bakul tree; from somewhere, softly, in the day's own weary light, from some thick-leaved bower beside a lake, you sing, in a dove's own sorrowing voice, some plaintive air; sometimes, unknown to me, you come and touch my very soul in play; you leave my heart undone, and when I reach to hold your veil you slip away, laughing your rippling laugh, waking in me a boundless swarm of longing, and, mocking me, run swiftly off, and vanish into the blue of the sky. And sometimes, when I am lost, deep in some work, your white and slipping form flashes across my eyes like naked lightning, and startles me, and is gone. And when, at the window, sitting alone in the darkening evening, I hide my face in my hands and weep a long while, like a motherless child, for the light of tenderness

— and wish that the dark current of the night would come and wipe away, from creation's whole canvas, this faint and meaningless trace that is my life, then, full of compassion, you come and show yourself, coming silently from the edge of the hushed night, where the stars burn, and wipe away, with your own veil, the water of my tears; you look into my face with tender, questioning, compassionate eyes; you kiss my eyes, and pass your gentle hand across my brow; and, without a single word, having filled my soul with comfort, having lulled your poet at last to sleep, you go away again on silent feet.

Will that very you ever take on a bodily shape? Will this mortal ground ever feel the touch beneath your reddened feet? Gathering yourself in from every quarter — from within, from without, from all the world, from empty space, from water and from land — you who are everywhere, will you, upon one corner of this earth, ever take up a single, sweet and living form? Taking your motion from the river, from the vine, will you set it rippling, limb by limb, in a thousand graceful turns, bending at the arm, leaning at the neck, brimming with feeling? What blue will you wear, my beauty? What bangles will circle your two wrists? How will you bind your hair, weaving your careful braid? How will your soft young locks, falling over your white throat, tremble in the wind, like the blossoms of the shirish tree? That deep and tender look that shows itself, in the month of rains, at the far horizon, in the heavy clouds, so young, so blue, so delicate — I cannot guess what shape that look will take in a woman's eyes! What close shade of lashes, what long and deep radiance of darkness will it gather, deep within some enraptured heart, like a night of joy! With what gift of sweetness will your lips stay parted, brimming with unspoken meaning, motionless and still! Grace upon grace, how will your body, budding and unfolding, rise and overflow in unceasing beauty, in a youth almost too much to bear?

I know, I know, my friend, that if our eyes should ever meet along that road of some other life, I would stop, startled; my sleeping past would wake, trembling, into sudden knowledge. I know it would seem to me that those dark eyes, so full of a recognition older than this whole life, were like my own fixed star, unchanging always. Taking the light from my own eyes, taking the longing from my own inmost self, my secret love, I would feel, had shaped and made that very face. Would you, too, in your own heart, know me again? Would the two of us come together, then, at last? Would you, girl, with your two arms, ever place a garland of spring flowers about this neck? Would I ever be able to hold you, my heart's own queen, close against my breast, bound fast? Touching, touching,

would we, giving ourselves each to the other, die away in a sweet enchantment at the very threshold of the body? Would every day of my life, then, know your light, never parted from it; would every night of my life turn sweet with your own sweetness; would your melody sound through my whole body and my mind? Would your bright smile fall on every joy of my life, your tear on every sorrow? Would your two good hands be present in my every act, and always keep alight, within my house, the glow of a good fortune?

Is this, then, only the vain pleading of desire, only a trick of the imagination? Who has such knowledge of the divine, who could tell me, with any certain proof, whether, in some earlier life, you were not, in a woman's shape, flowering in beauty within the very forest of my life, opening in love. Once you were bound to one single place, in union; but, breaking that bond, in separation, you have spread out, today, across the whole world, beloved, and I see you now wherever I turn to look. The incense has burned itself away, and its fragrant smoke has filled, today, every quarter of the sky. Once you were the woman of a single house; that house now broken, you have risen, today, in the shape of all the world's own poetry — and yet, by what enchanted thread, forever tender, have you still taken hold of my heart, waking within it some strange, unfamiliar air, forever laden with memory. That is why even now this hope still lives in me, that I will find you once again, bound close within my touch. So does this whole world, too, in its endless ruin and its making, kindle and go dark, like the light of a firefly, now only a feeling, now taking on a form.

The night has grown deep, the lamp is going out; across the far bank of the Padma, in the western sky, the last gold line of evening has, at some hour, faded quite away; the Seven Sages have shown themselves in the darkened heavens; her last pitcher filled, some young bride has, by now, gone home; I see the moonless fortnight, the eleventh night of its waning, the long road, the empty field; some wandering traveller has become, tonight, a guest in a villager's house; somewhere, the noise of voices has fallen still, out past the fields, from the farming hamlet; on the riverbank, in some old farmer's worn and lonely hut, an evening lamp was lit, at some hour, and has, at some hour, gone dark again — I know nothing more of it.

What was it I was saying, I hardly know, beloved, half unconscious, sinking into my own mind as though enchanted by a dream. Did you hear any of it, did you understand any of it, my love — is there, anywhere in it, any meaning at all? I

have forgotten every word; only, here, on the shore of this sleep-filled midnight, the endless sea of tears within me has risen, swelling in my heart, in one long, deep, unbroken murmur. Come, sleep; come, peace; come, beloved, in your rapt and silent, sorrowful grace; draw me to your breast — lay me down gently in death's own tender, white, forgetful bed.

UNWANTED

(Anādṛta)

Then the young sun, in the hour of morning, was bringing dawn's own worship on a golden plate. The boundless blue water rippled and rocked, a red line burning, glowing in its wreath of rays. Then the sun was rising on the forehead of the sky.

I sat upon the shore, weaving my net. Once I looked, slowly, out toward the fathomless deep — I heard some voice call out, and it drew my very soul, and carefully, lifting the net up onto my head, I swung it round, and cast it into the far waters.

I do not know what all rose up within that net. Some of it poured out light, the way laughter does; some of it, welling, brimming, like hard and crystal tears; some of it, like the false blush on a young bride's cheek — that day, upon the sea-shore, in the morning hour.

The day wore on; the sun, leaving the east behind, rose, proud, into the middle of the sky. Forgetting hunger, forgetting thirst, I cast my net, and drew it up, again, again — until the dust of twilight rose into the grey-gone heavens, and the cattle ran home, lowing in their gladness.

Carrying the whole day's burden, I turned back toward home; by then the moon was climbing in the sky. No one walked the village path; only light and shadow lay there, together; my own two eyes fell nearly shut, heavy with their dreaming; somewhere a lonely bird was calling, in a voice of grief.

She, by then, all her household tasks completed, sat within the garden, a garland at her throat. A flower, one or two, fell, broken, from the tree, and these she tore,

to pieces, catching them in her fingernails, idling there, lost in her own thoughts, letting the hour slip by.

Once I stepped toward her; once I stepped back. At last I came and stood close by, my eyes bowed down. All I had brought I laid before her feet, until it covered the very ground, and she looked, and looked again, and said, "I know none of this." — Hearing this, I only stood there, my head bent low.

I thought to myself: all day, this whole long day, sitting there, what mere child's play I had been at! I do not know what strange spell led me to the shore of that shoreless sea; I leapt in, on an idle whim — and brought back only a heap of unknown rubble, from some unknown ocean.

I never fought for it, never sought it in any market — was it fitting, then, to offer such a careless gift? One who feels no sorrow, no thirst of any longing — of what use, to her, could any of it be! In shame, I gathered it all up again, myself.

All that night I sat there, by the doorway, and, one by one, I threw it all away, at the road's far end. Without gladness, without treasure, I went off, indifferent, unheeding — and the next morning some traveller came by and gathered it all up, and carried it away, to his own land.

ON THE RIVER

(Nadīpathe)

The sky is hidden in a heavy cloud, the wind runs on with a fierce speed. Lightning cracks and rattles, thunder sounds, again, again — waves rise, waking, on the river. The wind runs on with a fierce speed.

On the bank, the ranks of trees are swaying, in a restless, rustling murmur. A flickering, glittering light starts up on every side, tearing through the dark as it goes on. On the bank, the ranks of trees are swaying.

The rain comes down in streams, without a pause, without rest. Once it seems to still a moment, then, twice as wild as before, mad again, it falls once more, the rain coming down in streams.

The road is lost within the clouds, and so the hours stand still. I look up toward the sky, I cannot say for certain whether the day has passed, or not; the hours stand still.

I have moored my little boat along the bank, and stayed there the whole long day. There is, they say, still a good way left to go, and a heavy night is coming down. I have moored my little boat along the bank.

Sitting alone, in a corner of the boat, I think, quietly, to myself — spreading her bed upon the floor, she keeps awake tonight, no sleep will come into her eyes. Sitting, I think, quietly, to myself.

She trembles at the sound of thunder, pressing her heart with both her hands. She looks up toward the sky, and finds no comfort there, and passes the whole night through in fear, trembling at the sound of thunder.

Sometimes, in a sudden gust of wind, the door rattles and clangs. The lamp gutters low, her shadow shivers in fright, tears fall down from her eyes, her breast trembles, shaking.

Her two startled eyes come back into my mind, again, again. Outside, a great storm rages, the thunder crashes and roars, the sky itself cries out in anguish. Her eyes come back into my mind.

The sky is hidden in a heavy cloud, the wind runs on with a fierce speed. Lightning cracks and rattles, thunder sounds, again, again — waves rise, waking, on the river. Today the wind runs on with such speed.

THE TEMPLE

(Deul)

I had built myself a temple, over long days, bearing many griefs. I left it no window, no door, on every side, only darkness, carrying, with such care, the weight of stone out of the mountain's own body — I had built myself a temple.

Setting my deity there, in its centre, I sat, gazing only upon his face. Casting the three worlds outside from my mind, forgetting every soul in this world, I gave my meditation, every moment, to him alone, with my whole being — setting my deity there, in its centre.

I passed my nights, nights without end, lighting a hundred fragrant lamps. From bowls of gold and jewel rose the sweet smoke of incense; the scent of heavy sandal and of aloe streamed out, and my whole soul grew drunk with it — I passed my nights, nights without end.

Sleepless, sitting there, my mind fixed on one thing, how many pictures I painted on the four walls! Wondrous as a dream, with no likeness for them anywhere — such colours, such shapes, who could ever find words for them all! So many pictures I had painted on the four walls.

Around the pillars, coiled a hundred times over, serpent-maidens held their hoods raised high. Above, ringing round all four sides, misshapen demons, terrible to see, held up, upon their own heads, the whole stone weight of the roof — serpent-maidens held their hoods raised high.

Creations beyond all nature, of every kind: a hundred winged horses, and more, went flying there. Among the carved vines, like flowers, women's faces opened and shone, their eyes cast down in a love-filled modesty and shame — creations beyond all nature, of every kind.

In the midst of a world so full of every sound, this house alone knew no sound of its own. Spreading my seat of tiger-skin, weaving verses of every kind, I read my rites, day and night, in a low and murmuring chant, in the midst of that soundless house.

In this way, how many days went by — I knew nothing of it, lost only in myself. My mind, unblinking, like a flame that only reaches upward, my body, faint and fainting, grown thin in feeling's fever — in this way, how many days went by.

One day, with a terrible, tremendous roar, the lightning came and struck upon my house. One pain, the sharpest I had known, went in, and pierced my heart, like a fiery serpent it cut through my very soul — the lightning came and struck upon my house.

The mass of stone was, all at once, torn open, and daylight came bursting into my house. Shattering my silent meditation, casting far off its rigid bonds, the boundless music of the living world came rushing in — the mass of stone was, all at once, torn open.

I looked, once, toward my deity, and saw the light had fallen on his face. A new radiance, a new majesty, had risen, shining, on his brow; a smile of grace had woken all about his lips — I looked, once, toward my deity.

In shame, my lamp burned low, and dimmer still, and wished to hide itself in an endless dark. All those dream-shapes, chained fast upon the painted walls, seeing the light, struck through with shame, yet could not run away — in shame, my lamp burned low, and dimmer still.

The song that I myself could never make, that very song rose up, today, on every side. The sun himself had come to light my lamp; Nature had come to paint her picture; a hundred poets had woven their songs together, in garland after garland of verse — what a song rose up, today, on every side!

The door of my temple stood open, at last — what was within, what was without, embraced each other now. At the touch of that greater god of light, my own small deity rose, awake; the long-imprisoned night fled off, lifting its wings of darkness — the door of my temple stood open, at last.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

On these five poems. All five appear to belong to the mid-1890s, the phase of Tagore's writing often called the "Mānasī–Sonar Tori" period — the years when he

was managing family estates along the Padma river and produced some of his most celebrated lyric and philosophical verse. **Deul** ("The Temple") is a well-known poem from *Sonar Tori* (1894), and **Mānasa-sundarī** belongs to the earlier collection *Mānasī* (1890), whose title supplies the very concept the poem explores. I mention this because both facts change how the poems should be read: *Sonar Tori* is the volume where, as Tagore later put it, the surrounding rural life of the Padma first fully entered his poetry, and the river-haunted, boatman's-eye quality of "On the River," "Unwanted," and "The Temple" all sit naturally within that world, whether or not each was collected there.

"তুই" — the intimate address to Death, in *Waiting*. Bengali marks familiarity through pronoun choice far more sharply than English can. Throughout this poem Death is addressed not with the respectful "আপনি" or even the neutral "তুমি," but with "তুই" — the pronoun reserved for children, the closest intimates, or (as here) for something so constantly, wordlessly present that formality has become impossible. English "you" cannot carry this, so I have leaned instead on direct, unhedged address ("O Death," repeated address without honorific softening) and, in the closing stanzas, the frank tenderness of calling Death "beloved" outright — trying to reproduce in tone what Bengali achieves through grammar.

"পরানবধূ" (parān-bodhu) — "the soul's own bride." The poem's closing conceit turns on this compound: the soul imagined as a bride, Death as the bridegroom who has been patiently, almost bashfully courting her throughout the poem. It is a startling image in English — a marriage-night substituted for a deathbed — but it is exactly the image the Bengali insists on, down to the wedding Sanskrit of "মন্ত্র পড়ি নিয়ো" ("take her, reciting the sacred vow," i.e., the mantra spoken at a Hindu wedding). I kept the marriage vocabulary explicit rather than softening it toward a generic "peace," since the entire power of the poem depends on treating death as a consummation rather than an ending.

"মানসী" / "মানসসুন্দরী" (Mānasī / Mānasa-sundarī) — "the woman of the mind." This is one of Tagore's central and most personal figures: an imagined ideal beloved who is at once his own childhood memory (a half-real playmate recalled from boyhood) and pure poetic abstraction (a figure who "drifts within the infinite," never quite taking bodily form). The poem deliberately will not resolve whether she is a real woman transfigured by memory, or the personification of poetic imagination itself, or both — the ambiguity is the point, and I have tried not to tip

the translation toward either reading. "Beauty of my mind" is the plainest English I could find for a term that has no real equivalent; "muse" is closer in function but imports a Greco-Roman frame the poem doesn't have.

কল্পনালতা — "the vine of imagination." Typical of Tagore's habit of reaching for a vegetal, growing image for the creative faculty rather than an abstract one — imagination as something that climbs, flowers, and entangles rather than something one simply "has." I kept the literal image (vine) rather than translating it as a dead metaphor like "flight of fancy."

যৌবন — "youth," but closer to "the ripeness of a woman's body." *Mānasa-sundarī* moves without embarrassment between devotional, familial, and frankly erotic registers — the same figure is childhood playmate, wife, muse, and object of physical longing within a few dozen lines. English poetic convention tends to keep these apart; I have tried to let Tagore's own fluidity stand, since smoothing it into either chaste reverence or plain sensuality on its own would flatten exactly what the poem is doing.

The refrain-stanza form in "Unwanted," "On the River," and "The Temple." All three use a Bengali stanza pattern with a strict, chiming rhyme scheme and, in the first two, a refrain that opens and closes each stanza with the same or a nearly identical line — a form associated with Tagore's most musical, almost song-like shorter narrative poems. Reproducing the rhyme in English reliably produces sing-song rather than music, so I have kept the refrain structure (repeating the stanza's own opening image at its close) as the carrier of the original's incantatory rhythm, while translating the interior lines as unrhymed free verse.

"চিনি নে কিছু" — "I know none of this," in *Unwanted*. The plainness of this line is deliberate and devastating in the Bengali — after two long stanzas of strange, luminous treasure pulled from the sea, the beloved's entire response is four flat syllables of non-recognition. I resisted the temptation to soften or explain her dismissal; the poem's whole pathos depends on the gap between what the net brings up and what she is able to see in it.

গুরু অগুরু ("guru-aguru"), in *The Temple*. These are two grades of aromatic wood — aloeswood (agar) and a heavier, more resinous variety — burned as temple incense; I have rendered them descriptively ("heavy sandal and aloe") rather than transliterating, since the specific botanical names would mean little in

English but the sensory weight they carry (a thick, overpowering sweetness, almost narcotic) is essential to the poem's atmosphere of closed, self-intoxicating devotion.

"দেউল" itself, and its allegory. A *deul* is specifically a temple built to house a stone image (mūrti) of a deity — as opposed to an open shrine or a natural site of worship. The poem's arc, from a temple with "no window, no door" to one whose door is finally torn open by lightning, reads as an allegory for a religion — or an art, or a self — that has shut itself up with its own private image of the divine, elaborating it in darkness, until the larger world of sun, weather, and ordinary human music breaks in and reveals that the god's true glory was always meant to be lit from outside. I have kept "temple" for *deul* throughout rather than the vaguer "shrine," to preserve this sense of a built, enclosed, image-housing structure, since the poem's whole tension depends on that specific architecture being breached.

THE WORLD-DANCE

In what vast, deep, and honeyed thunder shall the music sound! The heart shall rise and dance, forgetting itself entirely. Every bond shall break in a great gladness; new songs shall find new rhythms; and the full moon rising over the sea of the heart shall waken a longing never known before.

A laughter drenched in tears shall wake upon that unseen face; the crimson rays of dawn shall bloom within its eyes. In its right hand it holds the lute — the golden strings will ring and thrill, and the enchanted spell will tremble across the clear blue sky.

With laughing cries, in voices overflowing, restless, babbling on, from every quarter, in maddened streams, all things come rushing swift to meet it. They run together in mighty waves, they close around it in a ring of joy, and, leaping past all hindrance, crush the thorns along the path.

Gazing toward heaven, that ocean of all being tears away every binding chain, and in a boundless rapture lifts the earth into its lap, and laughs. In the play of the waves the sun's own light flashes and glitters, gold on gold — while hindrance, danger, grief, and death float off like foam upon the water.

O who is it that plays? I seem to hear it — steeped in some vast mystery, sitting through all time upon the sky, in a voice profound and deep. The very planets have gone mad; they whirl and dance, forever restless; and across the heavens, veil after veil of light keeps slipping loose and falling.

O who plays there, and who can hear it — what unimaginable strain, I cannot tell! The ocean sways and swells and dances like a serpent of a thousand hoods. The dense forest sways in gladness, lifting a hundred arms to the boundless sky, forgetting, in the midst of its own song, the very words it sang — while day and night go rustling by.

The waterfall pours in welling joy down its rugged, rocky path; in rhythm after lovely rhythm it steals away the stony heart. In tender tones its bubbling murmur flows on, unceasing, liquid, sweet — like jeweled anklets, ever ringing, bound about its restless feet.

The six seasons dance and know no rest, arm linked in arm together, robed in green and gold and every hue, wearing ever-new attire. At every footfall the wild forest flowers bloom and break in restless longing, and the great heart of the earth swells up, filled with laughter and with weeping.

Beast and bird and creeping insect — the stream of life goes rushing on. In what vast game does its wave, at the hour of death, at last break down? Here is light, and there is shadow; new forms wake and rise, unending; and this strange enchantment, full of awareness, bursts and vanishes like bubbles, one by one.

Who is it plays, by day and night, seated upon the throne within — on time's own instrument, so strange a tune, that some may hear, and others never hear at all? I cannot fathom what it means, though many a sage and seer has pondered it; and still the great mind of humankind rises, forever, at its bidding.

Why, then, is there no gladness here? Why does everything lie hushed and still? I see no star in the western sky, I see no dawn break in the east. Only, on every side, an ancient stone, vast as a tomb that spans the world, has swallowed up a myriad living souls, and stands unmoved, in its own stubborn pride.

The stream of life, like the sacred river, has drawn far off and slipped away. Only this remains: a barren waste, grey sand, dying in the shape of desert. No motion

here, no music here, no labor here, no living breath — only some vast extinction sits enthroned, wearing a crown of darkness.

My heart cries out, longing to lose itself in the great heart of humankind — to walk the wide highway with all creation, through every day and night. Since birth I have lain here as one already dead, defeated in the midst of lifeless matter. Who will give one single drop of life's own nectar to this thirsting soul?

With music to set the whole world dancing, who will come to rouse these silent ones! Who will give them to drink of the world's own life, and call them back, alive, from death! They shall tear away the nets of caste; the wind shall touch the freed heart; and, casting off this false, this hollow fear, shall shatter, at last, this crumbling cage.

Let the music sound — vast, deep, and honeyed thunder! Let the heart rise up and dance, forgetting itself entirely. Let every bond break, let a great gladness come; let new songs find new rhythms; and let the full moon, rising over the sea of the heart, waken a longing never known before.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

- **মন্দ্র (mandra)** — a deep, resonant rumble, like distant thunder or the lowest string of an instrument. English has no single word that carries both the *sound* and the *sacredness* of this, so I rendered it as "thunder," accepting some loss of the musical-instrument overtone.
- **বাসনা (bashona)**, translated "longing" — this is not the ordinary word for "wish" (ইচ্ছা); it carries an elemental, almost cosmic craving, closer to *desire* in its Sanskritic, quasi-devotional sense. I chose "longing" over "desire" to keep it wistful rather than merely appetitive.
- **সহস্রশির নাগিনী** ("the thousand-hooded serpent") — draws on the mythic image of Ananta/Vasuki, the cosmic serpent coiled beneath creation. I kept the image literal rather than domesticating it, trusting the strangeness to register as intentional myth rather than error.
- **জাতিজালপাশ** — a compressed compound meaning something like "the net-and-noose of caste/community" (জাতি covers both "caste" and "nation/people"). No single English word holds both senses, so I settled for

"nets of caste," which carries the poem's social charge even if it narrows the word's full range.

- **মহানির্বাণ** ("great nirvana") — normally a word of liberation, here Tagore uses it *against* itself, to describe not release but deathly stagnation. I rendered it as "vast extinction" to preserve that ironic reversal, since a literal "great nirvana" would read as positive to an English reader and lose the poem's meaning.

INCOMPREHENSIBLE

You cannot understand me? With a calm and sorrowful gaze your two eyes question me, searching to find my meaning — even as the moon looks down, with a still and lowered face, upon the breast of the sea.

I have hidden nothing at all. Whatever there is, all of it lies open before your eyes — my mind spread wide, unbounded. I have given you everything, to hold and to know. Is that, then, why you cannot understand me?

If this were only a jewel, I would break it into a hundred pieces, shape them with care into a hundred forms, count them out one by one, string them all upon a single thread into a necklace — and place it round your neck.

If this were only a flower, small and round and lovely, just opening in the morning light, swaying in the wind of spring, I would gently pluck it from its stem and set it in your dark, unbound hair.

But this, dear one, is my whole heart. Where the water lies, and where the shore begins, one loses every sense of direction here — a boundless dwelling place of mystery. Of this kingdom you know neither the beginning nor the end, my queen — and yet it is your own capital.

What is it, then, that I would have you understand? Deep within this heart I do not know myself what it is that plays, day and night, in a silent music — filling the wordless stillness of the sky, the way the very sound of night fills it.

If this were only happiness — a single smile, come to rest upon the edge of the lips, waking one moment's joy — you would grasp the heart's whole message in an instant, and there would be no need for any word.

If this were only sorrow — two drops of tears trembling in two eyes, lips gone sad, a face gone pale — you would see plainly the pain within, and, in silence, the truth would tell itself.

But this, dear one, is the heart's own love — of joy and sorrow, and of every kind of pain, having neither a beginning nor an end: gold that is forever poor, and forever full. New longings wake in it, day and night, without end — and that is why I cannot make you understand.

Then let it be, if you do not understand me. Only go on reading me, forever, eye to eye, in ever new and changing light, through every night and day. A love half-known, a heart half-grasped — but who, after all, has ever understood the whole of anything?

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

- **সখী (sakhi)** — a term of address for a female friend or beloved, deeply embedded in the Vaishnava love-poetry tradition (the language Radha's companions use with her). "Dear one" or "dear friend" in English loses the genre-signal entirely; a Bengali reader hears an entire poetic lineage in this one word.
- **রাজ্যের… রাজধানী** ("kingdom… capital") — Tagore builds a small pun here (রাজ্য/রাজধানী share a root), turning the beloved into the sovereign of a country she has never mapped. I kept "kingdom… capital" in English specifically to preserve this play, even though the etymological echo that makes it clever in Bengali is invisible in English.
- **চিরদৈন্য চিরপূর্ণ হেম** — literally "eternally-destitute, eternally-full gold," a deliberate paradox. I resisted the urge to smooth it into sense ("richly poor" or similar) and instead translated it as "gold that is forever poor, and forever full," letting the contradiction stand, since the whole point of the line is that love cannot be logically resolved.
- The poem's central conceit — comparing an ordinary, "explicable" love (jewel, flower, single smile, single tear) against the poet's own unmappable, wordless one — depends on Bengali's ease with conditional constructions ("যদি হইত… তবে…"). English needs more scaffolding ("If this were only…") to hold the same shape without becoming clunky.

THE SWING

Tonight I shall play, with my very soul, the game of death, in the depth of night. The rain falls thick, the sky is dark; see how the streaming water weeps on every side. In fearful sport, upon the waves of being, I set my raft afloat; I have come out, casting aside the bed of dreams, in this hour of night.

O, tonight, in the wind, the sky, the sea — what a tumult of sound! *Swing, oh swing!* From behind me, with a great laughing cry, the drunken storm comes rushing, pushing on, as though a hundred thousand goblin-children roared with laughter all at once. In the sky and in the underworld, among the mad and the drunk — what an uproar! *Swing, oh swing!*

Today my soul has woken and risen, and sits close by, here near my breast. Now and again it trembles, it starts, it clutches tight against my chest; in the cruel, close joy of this bond my heart goes dancing on. In terror and in ecstasy my soul has grown restless, close to my breast.

Alas, for so long I had kept her with such tender care, laid upon a bed. For fear that pain might touch her, that sorrow might wake her, day and night, in so much devotion, I had made ready a bridal bed strewn with flowers; I had shut the door fast, and kept her in a secret room, with such tender care.

How I caressed her — kissing the lids of her eyes, so tenderly. Resting my head beside her, I whispered to her so many dear names, in soft and honeyed speech; I hummed low melodies, I sang to her on moonlit nights. Whatever was sweet, I gave to her with these two hands, so tenderly.

But at last, upon that bed of happiness, my weary soul sank into languor, overcome with ease. Touch her now, and she wakes no longer; the garland of flowers has grown heavy upon her; sleep and waking blur into one, through night and day alike. A painless, numb indifference creeps into the very core of the heart, overcome with ease.

Pouring out sweetness upon sweetness, my own dear bride — I fear I am losing her; I search, and cannot find her. The bridal lamp is guttering, going out. With anxious eyes I look on every side, and find only heaps and heaps of withered

flowers, piled high. Sinking into a fathomless sea of dreams, I struggle, dying — searching, I hardly know for whom.

And so I have resolved: tonight I must play a different game, in the hour of night. On the swing of death I shall grip the ropes, and we two shall sit close, close together; the storm will come, with a great roaring laugh, and push us on. I, and my very soul, shall play, the two of us together, the game of the swing, in the depth of night.

Swing, oh swing! Swing, oh swing! Raise up a tempest on this vast sea! My bride — I have found her again; once more she fills my lap. My beloved has been shaken, roused awake, by this roar of dissolution. In the blood of my breast there rises again — what a surging swell! Within me, without me, there has woken — what a tumult of sound! Her hair flies loose, her veil flies loose, her garland of forest flowers flies, wind-tossed and wild; her bracelets ring, her small bells chime, in a drunken, ringing speech. *Swing, oh swing!* Come, O storm — carry far away every covering of my soul's own bride; plunder, tear away the veil, loosen every garment! *Swing, oh swing!* Soul to soul, face to face, today — let us know each other, casting off all fear and shame; let breast touch breast, the two of us, lost in a single rapture. *Swing, oh swing!* The dream has broken, and out into the world two mad souls have come. *Swing, oh swing!*

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

- **পরান (poran)** — the everyday, poetic-colloquial form of প্রাণ ("life-breath," "vital spirit," "soul"). Tagore treats it here as an intimate second self, almost a second person living inside the speaker — which is why, once it is called বধূ ("bride"), I shifted the pronoun to "she/her." This personification is the poem's entire engine, and losing it would flatten the poem into a generic storm-lyric.
- **বধূ (bodhu)** — "bride" or "young wife." The poet's own life-force is figured as a bride he has kept safe, cloistered, and — fatally — over-protected into numbness. This is the poem's central, startling conceit: that a soul too carefully guarded from pain goes dead, and only the shock of the storm restores it to life.
- **দে দোল্ দোল্** — an onomatopoeic, chant-like refrain (literally "give a swing, a swing!") that mimics the rocking motion physically in its sound. "Swing, oh

swing!" carries the sense but necessarily loses the reduplicated, drum-like beat of the Bengali original, which is meant to be almost shouted.

- **অবগুণ্ঠন** — the bridal veil, specifically the kind that shields the face in modesty. Its being torn away by the storm is the poem's climactic image of the soul's self-concealment finally breaking open — I kept "veil" simple in English but wanted to flag that it is doing heavy symbolic work in the original.

THE HEART'S JAMUNA

If you would come to fill your pitcher, come — O come, into the waters of my heart. The deep waters shall murmur and cry, rippling about those two soft and tender feet. Today the rains stand at their thickest; clouds, like dense dark tresses, have come down upon my two shores. That sound I know — the tinkling of your anklets. Who are you, coming so alone, so softly? If you would come to fill your pitcher, come — O come, into the waters of my heart.

If you would set your pitcher afloat and simply sit, forgetting yourself — here the grass lies green, the sky is freshly blue, and the woodland has opened into flower. Through your two dark eyes your mind will wander forth, and your veil will slip loose and fall away. Gazing into the flowering thickets, who knows what memory will rise in you, sitting on a grassy seat, in the arbor, on the green shore. If you would set your pitcher afloat and simply sit, forgetting yourself.

If it is bathing you desire, then come, come down, here, into the deep water. What use have you now for your blue garment — leave it there, upon the shore; the clear blue water will cover every modesty. Waves of tenderness, rising in throngs, will seize your whole body, will surge up and melt against your breast — turning, circling on every side, now weeping, now laughing, in a soft, murmuring speech, with so many playful turns. If it is bathing you desire, then come, come down, here, into the deep water.

If it is death that you would find, then come, and plunge into the water's depth. Cool, calm, and fathomless — having no bottom, having no shore — a still blue water, deathlike, dwells there, unmoving. There is no night, no day, no measure of beginning or end; in that abyss no song, no music sounds at all. Go — forget everything; loosen every bond of the world; leave behind, upon the shore, every task there is. If it is death that you would find, then come, and plunge into the water's depth.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

- **যমুনা (Jamuna/Yamuna)** — the river of Radha and Krishna's trysts in Vaishnava poetry. By naming his own heart "হৃদয়যমুনা," Tagore doesn't just use a metaphor, he borrows an entire devotional-erotic tradition. I kept

"Jamuna" as a proper noun rather than translating it as a generic "river," since the allusion is the point.

- **কুম্ভ** ("pitcher") — evokes the classical image of women going to riverbanks to draw water, a scene loaded with erotic and pastoral suggestion throughout Sanskrit and Bengali poetry (compare the *gopis* at the river). I translated it plainly, trusting the scene itself to carry the resonance.
- The four stanzas form a rising sequence — drawing water, idling and dreaming, bathing, drowning — each an increasingly intimate invitation. I preserved the anaphoric "If you would…/come…" structure across all four stanzas deliberately, since the repetition is what makes the final turn to death feel like the natural, terrible culmination of the sequence rather than a jarring swerve.
- **মরণ লভিতে চাও** ("if you wish to attain death") — here death is not horror but total, oceanic dissolution — no shore, no time, no song. This reflects a recurring Tagore theme (the self dissolving into the infinite) that I chose to render very plainly, without softening it into a euphemism, since the poem's power depends on stating it directly.

WASTED YOUTH

This night that passes now — how shall I ever call it back again? Why do these tears keep falling, uselessly, from my eyes? Take this adornment from me, dear one, take it; this garland of flowers has grown unbearable. Such a night has gone by, in separation, upon my bed. This night that passes now — how shall I ever call it back again?

In vain I came, for a tryst, to this bank of the Jamuna. In vain I carried my heart's own hope, and loved so much. Now, as the night ends, my face grown dim, my feet grown weary, my mind grown listless, I turn back — toward what joyless house! Alas, this night that passes now — how shall I ever call it back again?

How the moon had risen, in that fathomless midnight sky! In the woods the flowers had swayed, their fragrance troubling the very wind. The rustle of trees, the murmur of the river, had touched my ear like a dream; and from far away a song had come, and entered into my hearing. Today that night is passing — how shall I ever call it back again?

It had seemed to my heart as though she were calling out to me — as though, through ages without end, she had kept me always in her mind. She would come, I thought, bearing a heart brimful of love; she would waken the very river of my youth; she would come by night, and bind me fast in bonds of tenderness. Ah, that night is passing now — how shall I ever call it back again?

Oh, better then to forget — what use is there in weeping, any longer, in vain? If it had to go, alas, why does my heart still long to turn and follow it? Like a foolish child at the garden gate, how long shall I go on sitting, from night until morning! This time, spring has gone out of my life, and will not come again. Alas, this night that passes now — how shall I ever call it back again?

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

- **অভিসার (abhisar)**, the implicit genre behind "যমুনাপারে... এসেছি" ("I came… to this riverbank") — in Vaishnava poetics, *abhisar* is a technical term for the lover's secret nighttime journey to a tryst. English has no single word for this specific act, so I settled for "tryst," which captures the event but not the whole poetic tradition it invokes.

- **যৌবননদী** ("the river of youth") — a compound that fuses river-imagery with the idea of youth as a flowing, finite current. I translated it literally, since English tolerates the same metaphor without strain.
- The refrain — every stanza circling back to "কেমনে?" ("how?") — is the poem's real structure: not narrative progress but a single unanswerable question, asked five times. I kept "how shall I ever call it back again?" essentially unchanged at each return, resisting the temptation to vary the wording, because the *repetition itself* is what enacts the speaker's inability to move past that night.
- The title, ব্যর্থ যৌবন, literally "failed/futile youth," is slightly harsher than "Wasted Youth" in English — ব্যর্থ carries a stronger sense of *failure* than mere waste. I chose "Wasted Youth" for its idiomatic naturalness in English, at some cost to that sharper edge.

IN THE FULLNESS OF BHADRA

The river runs full from bank to bank, the fields stand full of rice. I sit here, wondering what song I ought to sing. The screw-pine blossoms, along the water's edge, have opened in every thicket and grove; and, undisturbed, weighed down with flowers, stands the bakul grove. Brimful, to the very edge, is my own heart.

The leaves shimmer and glimmer, the light flickers and gleams. I sit here, wondering whose two eyes are dark. A long row of kadamba trees, their glossy young leaves have deepened the fragrant darkness beneath them. Whom is it I wish to tell, whom is it I hold dear?

Unfading and bright is the day; the rain has ceased at last. I sit here, wondering what gift I ought to give, today. Fragments of cloud, layer upon layer, borne on a listless wind, wander and wander to every corner of the sky, like something lost in despair. I long to break myself into a hundred pieces.

The very day seems numbed, grown languid with idleness. I wonder whether anyone else sits thinking, even as I do now. Carelessly, upon the branches, a whole throng of kamini blossoms keeps falling, petal by petal, all through the day. What flute is this that plays forever, at dawn and at dusk?

The woodland is filled with the glad songs of birds. I sit here, wondering why tears keep rising to my eyes. The magpie-robin, swaying on its branch, sings a song steeped in sweetness; and, hidden away, screened by the leaves, a pair of doves. All of this, together, has overwhelmed me.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

- **ভাদর/ভাদ্র (Bhadra)** — a month of the Bengali calendar (roughly mid-August to mid-September), the tail end of the monsoon. There is no English month that carries the same seasonal charge — heavy rivers, ripening rice, the first clear skies after rain — so I kept "Bhadra" as a proper noun rather than substituting an approximate English month, trusting the poem's imagery to supply the feeling.
- **কানায় কানায় পূর্ণ** ("full to the very brim") — কানা refers to the rim of a vessel, so the idiom pictures the heart as a jar filled right up to its edge. I

rendered it as "brimful, to the very edge" to keep that physical, almost tactile image of overflow.

- **কেতকী, বকুল, কদম্ব, কামিনী** — screw-pine, Spanish cherry, kadamba (long associated with Krishna), and orange jasmine: all monsoon-blooming flowers thick with sensory and devotional association for a Bengali reader. Rather than replace them with approximate English flower names that would lose these associations entirely, I kept the Bengali names themselves, the way Tagore's own English translations often retained original nouns rather than forcing an equivalence that doesn't exist.
- The poem's engine is its repeated "আমি ভাবিতেছি…" ("I sit here, wondering…"), returning in every stanza to frame a different, unanswered question. I preserved this anaphora as the poem's structural heartbeat — a speaker surrounded by a world in ripe, singing fullness, unable to say who or what his own fullness of feeling is *for*.

THE REFUSAL

(Prottakhan — প্রত্যাখ্যান)

Do not look at me with such beseeching eyes. Do not sing to me in that voice, sweet as honey, sorrowful as parting.

In the morning, on your daily errands, coming and going along the road, do not pass, I beg you, through this courtyard of mine.

Do not look at me with such beseeching eyes.

I have kept what is in my heart locked away with care; in vain you wander, begging for that one buried jewel.

It is nothing, believe me — a trifle, only a few scattered drops of tears, one single wound, still stained blood-red with pain.

Do not look at me with such beseeching eyes.

In whose hope do you come knocking at this door? I do not know what image you have made of me in your mind!

I live here hiding my shame; I own no queen's adornments — only the tattered rags of a desire long since worn thin.

Do not look at me with such beseeching eyes.

What treasure have you brought, heaping it in both your open hands? Do not, I beg you, fling it down so carelessly into the dust.

If I should try to repay this debt, where in the world would I find the means? I would have to sell myself, my whole life long, to clear it.

Do not look at me with such beseeching eyes.

I have resolved to stay in the corner of my house, to carry my hidden grief folded within my own breast.

For what should I go on hoping? I try to speak, and find that I have no words at all — a longing remains in me still, though I cannot see how it should ever be answered.

Do not look at me with such beseeching eyes.

That melody you have poured into the hollow of your flute — how could I ever hope to sing along beside it?

If I tried, the song would break apart, my whole being would rise up in flood, and this foolish, ungovernable weeping would refuse to hear reason.

Do not look at me with such beseeching eyes.

You have come to me wearing a garland round your throat, dressed in fresh new robes, adorned in beautiful ornaments.

But where, in this house, is the golden dish? Where are the flowers? Where is the garland? Who is there left to keep the bridal rites?

Do not look at me with such beseeching eyes.

You have lost your way, dear friend, and wandered to this house by mistake. Who ever exchanges wedding garlands in the dark?

Since evening I have lain alone upon the hard, unyielding ground, the lamp put out, spending this long night that is my life.

Do not look at me, not any longer, with such beseeching eyes.

SHAME

(Lajja — লজ্জা)

My heart, my very life, I have given away entire, as a gift — only my modesty I have kept back for my own.

Watching always over myself, wakeful through the night and day, with such tender care I have kept myself veiled.

O beloved, this thin, transparent garment only makes a mockery of me; I can never hold it close enough, or long enough.

When you glance at me from the corner of your eye, and smile to yourself, I could very nearly die of shame.

Caught by the south wind, my veil slips loose and falls away before I even know that it is happening.

My heart, startled by a sudden thrill, opens like a flower through my whole body, and then, just as suddenly, my senses come rushing back to me.

Shut up within this house, when my breath grows short and stifled, I loosen, just a little, the knot of my garment,

and go and sit beside the window in the sweet evening wind, forgetting myself entirely for one brief moment.

The light of the full moon comes pouring down, faint and swooning, onto this bud of my new-opening youth;

tenderly, smiling gently, it wraps itself about my body, within the two soft shores of its own quiet radiance.

Over my face, my breast, the loosened strands of my hair, the wind goes wandering, hungry to play, and the scent of flowers drifts across the sky —

and if, just then, you came to me, it would feel like nothing but a dream; nothing else at all would stay behind in memory.

Let it be, beloved — let it go, do not snatch away even this small thing; let me keep this much of shame still my own.

It is the very last thing left me, this one faint trace of modesty, with which to cover even half of myself.

Do not reproach me with your brimming, tearful eyes — I too have lain awake and wept through how many long nights.

I cannot fully explain it, even to myself — why, having given you everything, I have gone on binding it all together with this one last thread of shame —

why there remains, even now, one small secret I keep from you, why I still turn my face a little away from yours.

This is not distrust, believe me, nor is it any kind of mockery, my friend — no, no — this is not some game of deceit.

In the spring night, beloved, take the fragrance, take the honey, look upon my face with tenderness.

Set me swaying, gently, here and there, speak to me in soft, low words — only leave untouched this one slender stem.

Resting upon that stem alone, holding such sweetness within me, I have opened, I have blossomed entirely toward you;

in this one enchanting posture a new brightness, a new grace, spills and scatters across the whole of my body —

and always, at such an hour, the restless wind goes playing about me, while on every side the spring flowers gather in their fair.

Listen, beloved, listen well: everything else shall be yours — only let this one thing, my modesty, remain my own.

THE REWARD

(Puroshkar — পুরস্কার)

That day the rain came down in torrents, and the poet's wife said to him:

"You have gone on heaping up rhyme upon rhyme, sitting there composing your great thick books — do you even notice the roof about to fall in on your head?

You string together metres long and short, nothing but husks and ashes and cinders — will it ever bring you a horse, an elephant? It will not bring you a single grain of rice.

There is no food in this house, only endless talk — what is this child's game you play, day and night? Leave off worshipping Bharati for a while, and turn instead to the worship of Lakshmi.

Throw down your books and your pen, I beg you — whatever must be done, go and do it now. You have learned so much in your life, and never learned this one small thing — how a few coins are earned!"

Seeing her turn into such a figure of doom, the poet's heart trembled with fear; yet, forcing a smile, he answered her, palms pressed together in mock humility:

"I do not fear that scolding face of yours — Lakshmi is kind even to the luckless. Who would ever believe that she lives here and keeps no treasury in this house!

My fortune runs backward to everyone else's: restless Lakshmi has made me a man who never moves, and Bharati, for all the worship I give her, will not sit still with me for a single moment.

That is why I bolt my door and search through heaven and earth for the one true rhyme — if my mind should wander even an instant, everything is lost."

Half-laughing, half-serious, his wife replied:

"I cannot bear this any longer — our whole household has gone to ruin, and still you make a joke of it all."

So saying, twisting her mouth, making her bangles ring, snatching up the end of her sari, she turned and walked off in pretended anger. Watching her go, the poet, all in a fluster, called after her:

"Do not walk off trampling my heart like that. If you will not be caught, I shall catch you by the feet — only tell me what I must do, and I will fill this house with gold and silver.

Wherever I find an empty space I set your picture there instead — but nowhere at all does wisdom about money grow; the whole ground is a desert."

"Enough, enough, that is not good enough," she said, laughing despite herself.

"Such humility, such devotion — how fortunate I am in my own fate! You have never once lacked for an answer; whatever I say, you always have a reply.

But now, O prince of fine words, let us see if words alone are heard in this world. Open the almanac, find an auspicious hour, take your books, and forget your idleness —

go to the royal court. Our king is known to be a patron of talent; how many men have risen through him! What use is it, hoarding your verses here at home?"

A thunderbolt seemed to strike the poet's head. He thought, "Today I am truly in danger — I have never known kings in my life; who can say what my fortune holds!" But aloud he laughed and said:

"Is that all! I feared you would ask something harder. I would gladly give up my life for you, only I fear you would then become a widow!

If I must go, why wait? Quickly, then, bring me my finery — golden earrings, a jewelled crown, armbands, a necklace of gold. Call my charioteer, tell him to choose the finest horses,

and settle which of the servants shall go with me."

His wife answered, "For a man whose tongue never fails him, what more is needed? Once your mouth is set loose there's no more need of chariots and horses. See — I have already borrowed all sorts of finery from the neighbours,

diamonds, silver, gold. Dress yourself, satisfy your fancy, and let your tongue rest a while."

So saying, she hurried to bring every manner of costume and ornament. The poet, turning pale, thought to himself, "The omens today are bad indeed." His wife sat close beside him, scrubbed him and polished him, and with her own careful hands tied the sash about his waist. She set the turban upon his head, wound the necklace about his throat, slid the armbands over his arms, and hung the earrings from his ears. The more jewels she piled upon him, the more he sat like a painted picture — until even her own handiwork seemed, that day, almost to defeat her.

Taking a good long while to finish dressing him from head to foot, she stepped back a little, tilting her graceful neck to look, and seeing his utterly solemn face, could not help but laugh aloud. Taking his chin in her hand, she said:

"Oh, how splendidly you are decked out!"

She held a mirror up before him, and murmured, half-teasing:

"You will surely go and break the hearts of every woman in the palace, and come home again — but do not, in your pride, forget your own poor wife; remember this favour, and one day you must dress me in just such jewels yourself."

Sitting upon his lap, her arms about him, laughing softly, cheek against his cheek, she whispered into his ear until the poet's own laughter broke free, his enchanted heart nearly bursting with tenderness. He cried out:

"I will not be refused! I shall recite such sweet verses that I will draw the whole royal treasury home with me, and lay it at your reddened feet."

And with his chest swelling with pride and his turbaned head held high, he stepped out of the house and hurried toward the palace. His wife, brimming with curiosity, ran to the window to watch him go, laughing to herself, a light dancing in her dark eyes.

"So many people pass along the royal road," she thought, delighted, "and yet my own eyes have never once fallen upon another quite like the one who is mine."

But the poet's courage ebbed away with every step, and by the time he entered the king's hall he wished only that he could die. The guards, the courtiers — nothing here was like his own wife at home; row upon row of bearded men left him bewildered. Why, he wondered, should one man wear toward another such a mask of Death — and his heart sank within him.

There sat the great king, Mahendraray, like some far mountain-peak, gazing down indifferently upon the forest of humankind below — a picture of unmoved and unshaken stillness, though from him, as from a waterfall, mercy fell in streams, and watered a hundred lands. The poet gazed up at him, filling his eyes with that majesty.

When the day's judgments were finished, at the minister's signal, the kingdom's chief spy came forward, hands joined — a man of the most saintly appearance, whose face never once betrayed him, though his true trade was the hunting of men. Dressed in the sacred stole of a wandering ascetic, keeping every pious observance, dispensing free instruction from door to door, he stole sidelong glances that missed nothing — who was doing what, and where — through every leaf and root he kept his watch. When he bowed before the king, the minister whispered some petition in the royal ear, and at once the king ordered:

"Give this man five thousand rupees."

"Well done, well done!" cried the whole assembly, a thrill of pleasure running through them all. "Here indeed is a gift given to a worthy vessel — not a soul in the kingdom could grudge it." The holy man bowed low in humility; only on the minister's lips there flickered the faintest trace of a smile.

Next came a grammarian, shuffling forward, his feet thick with dust, leaving their sacred, muddy print upon the royal carpet — sweat standing on his brow, his skin loose with wrinkles, fierce as a living flame, so that the pupils trembled at the very sight of him. Paying no heed to anyone, he flung open his mouth and recited his verses as though grinding gravel and dried peas together between his teeth. Not a soul understood a word, but all sat with heads bowed, and the king said, "Give this man his fee, with your right hand."

After him came an astrologer, whose calculations so astonished the king that he went off again with his money ringing behind him; then an old and honoured man, bearing a few blades of sacred grass in his joined palms, whose bag the king

filled to overflowing; then actors, bards, the royal priest, some alone, some trailing disciples, some in red turbans, some in green; then Brahmins, each with his own need — a daughter to marry off, a father's rites to perform — and each received his due, for today the king gave like Karna himself. One by one they went back to their homes.

The poet sat wondering what he should do, until the king noticed him in his corner, his face a picture of helplessness.

"Who is that, sitting over there? Come, minister, let us find out."

"I am nobody at all," the poet said, rising. "I am only a poet."

"Indeed!" said the king. "Come, then — today we shall speak of poetry." And with great honour he seated the poet beside him, taking both his hands. The minister, thinking, "I had best leave now, before this becomes mere child's play," asked leave to withdraw on the pretext of business, and at a wave of the royal hand the whole court filed out — ministers, favourites, plaintiffs and the accused, high and low alike, pouring away like a flood.

When all had gone, the two sat down face to face, and the king said, "Now, poet, let your song begin." And the poet, joining his hands upon his breast, bowed his head and offered his hymn to the goddess of speech:

"Reveal to me, Mother, before my very eyes, your gracious countenance — you who dwell upon the clear lake of the mind, robed in white, white-smiling, sweet of voice,

adorned with the vina, throned upon the lotus. Enthroning you within my heart, I have lived on, content in the corner of my house, without wealth or honour, forever like some wandering, careless fool.

All around me the world divides itself up, each man carefully counting his own share; I, only by listening to your tender voice, have tasted the very nectar of heaven.

That is enough for me, and I count it a great treasure — and yet, now and again, this poor heart cries out; for you know well, Mother, that on melody alone no mortal hunger was ever yet stilled.

Whatever is to come, let it come; I will not think of it now. Mother, only once more let your lute sound; strike up that melody which floods the whole world, that stream welling from the very source of the deathless.

That melody which, heard day and night, melts even God himself with boundless joy, flowing on through this dim and dusty world, forever lost within itself;

that melody which, flooding over the sky, rises trembling like the flame of a sacred fire, and flings itself, plunging, into the boundless and the beginningless, sounding from the great string of the universe;

that melody which, through birth after birth, rises calling from the very cave of the heart, filling the whole of life with tears and with laughter, and rushes onward in a thousand streams —

who is there, and where; who comes, and who goes; appearing for an instant, and gone the next — nothing more than a play of shadow and light upon the sands at the shore of time.

All the kings and emperors of this earth, who were here but yesterday — where are they today? In the morning, joy and sorrow and pride come into blossom; by evening they are already broken and gone.

Yet through the midst of it all one melody still sounds, vast, and deep, and sweet; and in it, forever, the whole floor of the sky lies drowned, and overflowing full.

Whoever has once heard that timeless sound has set the boat of his heart adrift upon it; he knows himself no longer, nor the earth, nor the noise and clamour of this world.

That man is mad, his very self undone; tearing the chain that bound him to this shore, leaving all things behind, he has come, none knows how, to fall at last before your feet.

The fragrance of your spotless lotus pours into every heart a boundless joy —"

Such was his wondrous song, its rhythm made of light, ever new to hear.

"Let that lute sound on; let the whole earth drown in it. Mother, make us forget, if only for one moment, who is great and who is small, who is rich and who is poor, who comes first, and who comes after;

whose is the victory, and whose the defeat; whose fortune rises, and whose declines; who is good, and who is not so good; who stands above, and who below.

Let all be woven into a single song — the great and the small of this small world alike — and let them lie content at your feet, like a single garland.

Come, stand in the very centre of the mind, revealing your sweet form, fair as the jasmine, smiling gently, the vina in your hand, O goddess of the lute.

Sun and moon and stars shall drift on, and every line of humankind, wanderers out of beginningless time, borne upon the stream of your music.

I shall see, in the vault of the sky, great Time himself beating out the measure, note by note, while the brides of the ten directions, their hair unbound, go dancing in from every quarter of the world."

Having sung this hymn, the poet, after a moment, unfolded before the king, in words heavy with sorrow, the sacred story of Raghava — how, bearing an unbearable grief without end, his whole life had burned itself away, and to his very last day an endless, hopeless sighing had remained.

"Think, only once, of that single day when he set out along the forest road in the dull bark-garments of an exile — his young brother Lakshmana beside him,

and Sita, the new bride, stripped of her ornaments, dissolving like a fading shadow into grief, mounted with him the chariot of their leave-taking.

Throughout the palace a great wailing rose; the people wept in long rows along the road — has such a thunderbolt ever before fallen upon such a house!

A coronation was to be held that day, and all around, the air was full of festival joy — yet in a single instant's storm the lamps of that joy were put out into darkness.

And think, too, of that other day when Rama, with Lakshmana beside him, returned to their quiet forest home and found that Sita was no longer there —

crying her name, again and again, in anguish, he searched from grove to grove throughout the forest, while the great wood, its face dark and silent, only gazed back at him without a word.

And think, at last, of how the story ends — how she who was the very treasure of so much sorrow, so much longing, so much striving,

that same Sita, in the hall of the court, bowing in farewell before the lord of the Raghus, in wounded pride and modesty vanished forever into the reluctant earth.

Those days, too, have long since passed away; of that unbearable grief, what trace remains? It left, after all, no everlasting scar burned into the body of the earth.

The cloven ground has closed again; the forest blossoms once more with its burden of flowers; along the river's banks the green grass sways, a bright line of blossoming life.

Only one single strain out of that day still travels on, across the years and the distance, still weeping, still wounding every heart with its sweet and mournful melody;

for at the very centre of that great soul there sounded a mighty music, and even today that song still rings, within the great music of the world, in the ears of all mankind."

Then the poet told another tale — the story of the war between the Kurus and the Pandavas:

"A terrible, drunken madness of kinship's quarrel spread over the whole land; like two trees standing close together, whose friction kindles flame,

until a great forest-fire rises up at last and swallows the whole wood around it. From a single mountain, like two thin streams, two currents of hatred, creeping like serpents,

came together at last in cruel and wounded pride — and before long there had gathered all the warrior-blood of India, and the terrified earth rang with the song of that flood.

Before long the banks themselves went under; self and other became impossible to tell apart; every bond of kinship was torn out by the root, and rivers of blood came rushing on.

The very sea of death rose up foaming; the whole world held its breath; the sky itself trembled, closing its hundred eyes, and put out both the sun and the stars.

When at last the flood of war had passed, golden India lay one vast burning-ground; every royal house lay flattened to the earth, scattered here and there —

and a terrible Peace, her eyes red, sat upon a bed of bloodied mire, gazing down at the earth with bowed head, no word left upon her lips.

After long ages the grief has passed; in death, every parting has found its end; and the great, terrible offering of human life to the fire of hatred was at last complete.

Having fulfilled every desire, having shattered every pride, the five brothers came at last and sat upon the empty golden throne.

The palace stood silent, dark with sorrow; from the burning-grounds came only wailing — the heart-breaking cries of all the widowed women of that house.

'Victory, victory to the sons of Pandu!' cried the rows of gatekeepers at their posts; yet today it sounds like nothing but a bitter and empty mockery.

That same India which, but yesterday, filled the sky the whole day with its thunder, and played its game of colour in the blood of kings, careless of every bond of kinship,

the very next day sits smeared with the ashes of the pyre, wrapped in the robe of a renunciant, alone, her heart heavy with grief, in the midst of an empty burning-ground.

The Kurus and Pandavas are all wiped away now; that terrible game of war has fallen silent; of that fearsome funeral fire not even the ashes remain;

and the land for which there was so much slaughter — whose is it today, no one can even say; where the king once was, where the capital once stood, no trace of it remains any longer.

And yet, from somewhere, that same sound still comes, as though that undying ocean of war had taken a new body in the shape of one vast song;

after victory, that great final leave-taking, that vast sorrow within a hope fulfilled, bestows upon the eternal soul of mankind a distant, quiet peace."

Then the poet turned from history to his own heart:

"Alas, upon this earth, how many endless winters and springtimes, year after year, have filled every corner of the horizon with joy and sorrow, and drifted away laughing;

just such a rainy season as today's has come and gone, times without number, the sky bowing low beneath new clouds, shedding its floods of tears.

Age after age, people have come and gone; the sorrowful have wept, the joyful have laughed, and whoever loved, loved deeply, just as we do today —

they themselves are gone, but the songs they scattered with both hands remain behind as their gift; from land to land, beyond all counting, how many of them still drift on.

I look upon this green and boundless earth with eyes full of wonder; and why, through my whole being, who can say, the tears come welling up —

this beautiful earth, covered over with the love of countless human hearts, painted with the joys and griefs of countless days, steeped through with the music of a hundred thousand ages.

I have no wish to raise my voice here in argument or in dispute; whatever few days remain to me I shall spend content, answering only my own heart's desire —

let each keep what is his; I do not wish to trespass on what belongs to another, if only I may be allowed to live in peace, in some one quiet corner of the world.

Only place the flute once more into my hand, that I may sit and play it, my whole heart open, and let my songs blossom, like flowers, upon the very forehead of the sky —

gathering words up from deep within, let me build a small world of joy, and sprinkle even the dust of this life with the flowing nectar of song.

On the most inaccessible peak of creation, in the vast cavern of endless time, the great waterfall of the universe forever pours down in its own rushing music,

and all the stars, waves of that same sound, go rushing through empty space with no destination — from there I will draw down a single stream of it into this small flute of mine.

I will fill the green, cupped hands of the earth with that song I bring, and mingle into the wind one single utterance, brimming with sweet meaning.

In the fresh rains I will weave a new enchantment, leaving behind me a deeper shade; I will clothe the very body of spring in robes the colour of new blossom.

Upon the earth, upon the face of the sky, in the waters of the sea, in the shade of the forest, I will leave behind, everywhere, just a little more colour of fresh light.

In the midst of this world I will leave a note or two, made sweet; I will draw out a thorn or two — and then, at last, I will take my leave.

Joyful laughter will shine a little brighter; even tears will grow more beautiful; the floor of every home, steeped in tenderness, will feel a little more truly its own.

In the eyes and lips of every beloved woman I will leave a little more honey behind; on the face of every child a little more tenderness will remain, like the morning dew.

Unable to explain it, not understanding it himself, man wanders forever searching for the words, as the cuckoo cries out its one note, seeking just such a melody —

some part of that restless longing I will ease, some part of that unspoken ache I will soothe; before I take my leave, I will leave behind a few last, sweet-sounding words.

Remain enthroned within my heart, Mother Bharati — at your feet alone I lay the worship of my whole life; I wish to turn toward none but you, I place my hope in no one else.

How much joy there was, turned now to sorrow; how many friends have turned away; how much eager, longing love has faded now and dimmed.

Only those feet remain within my heart; only that lute plays on forever, calling to me, in a voice of such tenderness, from somewhere deep within — Come, my child, come.

Leave behind your laughter and your weeping, tear away every false and empty bond; here there is shade of an everlasting joy, here an eternal springtime blows.

So let it be, Mother — let whatever must pass, pass; once, for this whole life, I have chosen you; at your two soft, lotus-scented feet, again, and again, I bow, and bow."

So the poet ended his song, and sat there still, his eyes lost in wonder, while his own heart went on sounding within him like the last note of a struck lute. The king, thrilled through, his eyes brimming, rose from his throne and came down; and stretching out both arms, his whole soul overflowing, he took the poet into his embrace.

"Blessed, O poet, blessed!" he said. "My heart is overwhelmed with joy — what more is there for me to say, but this: may you live happily all your days. I cannot even think what gift would satisfy you — whatever there is in the royal treasury, all of it I would gladly bring and give to you."

His eyes brimming with the tears of his overflowing joy, the poet answered:

"Only give me, from around your own neck, that one garland of flowers, to wear about mine."

And binding the garland into his hair, the poet set off for home, while others travelled by palanquin or chariot, and people went every which way about their business. He walked on lost in his own thoughts, his eyes filled with a kind of rapt wonder, as though in his mind he were milking the very nectar-milk of the legendary wish-granting cow.

Meanwhile his wife, her hair bound up, dressed like the evening itself in red, sat alone beside the window, a happy smile on her face, while a flock of doves circled about her, dancing and calling, and she slowly fed them grains of barley from her

hand. Even as her fingers moved, who knows what thoughts passed through her mind — until, glancing down the road, she suddenly caught sight of him coming.

She set her bracelets ringing softly with a wave of her arm, and threw the whole net of her matchless laughter about him as he came near. His heart leapt up with joy, and hurrying to her he said, smiling with mischief:

"See what I have brought you, my dear. Others received all kinds of jewels; but I have brought, with such careful trouble, a garland — one fit for your own throat — the very garland from the king's neck."

And so saying, he lifted the garland from his own head to place it round hers — but she pushed his hand away in mock anger, and turned her face aside. She feigned displeasure, though inwardly her heart was stirring with tenderness, and love welled up in her, full of pride, and joy overflowed within her.

The poet thought, "Fate is against me — I see disaster close at hand," and sat there downcast, his eyes fixed on nothing. But his wife, turning half away, kept stealing glances at him now and again — and seeing the look on his face, she let her veil fall, and burst into open laughter; her small pretence melted away, and in an instant she moved close and fell against his chest, and there, hiding her face, laughing and weeping together, her arms about his neck, she kissed him, again and again, of her own will.

The poet, astonished, almost overcome, could find no words at all for his joy — and his wife, taking up the garland, placed it, with tender love, about her own neck.

And the poet, moved with a kind of devotion, thought to himself, gazing upon that face so full of love — that here, bound together in the single knot of one garland, were Lakshmi and Saraswati at once.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

On "The Refusal" (Prottakhan)

- **দীননয়নে (dīnanayane)**, "with humble/downcast eyes" — দীন carries "poor," "wretched," "meek," and "pitiable" all at once, an image of eyes that

beg without pride. No single English word holds all of this, so I rendered it as *beseeching*, trading away the poverty-connotation to preserve the emotional charge of pleading.

- **সুধা-করুণ সুরে (sudhā-karuṇa sure)**, literally "in a nectar-mournful tune" — a compound yoking sweetness (সুধা, ambrosia) to sorrow (করুণ) in a single breath, a hallmark Tagore paradox: sweetness that wounds. I expanded it into *sweet as honey, sorrowful as parting* to keep both halves, at the cost of the single-word compression.
- **জীর্ণচীর বাসনা (jīrṇacīra bāsanā)**, "a tattered garment of desire" — বাসনা (desire) shares its root with বাস (cloth, dwelling), so the phrase quietly puns on both "worn-out rags" and "worn-out longing" at once. English has no equivalent pun, so I let the image of rags carry the desire as pure metaphor.
- **মালা-বদল (mālā-badal)**, "exchange of garlands" — in the Hindu wedding rite, bride and groom garland each other as the marriage's culminating gesture. The speaker's objection ("who exchanges garlands in the dark?") is really a refusal of marriage itself, staged as a practical complaint — I kept it literal, trusting the ritual meaning to come through by context.

On "Shame" (Lajja)

- **লজ্জা / শরম** — both are usually glossed "shame," but neither carries the guilt-laden weight the English word has by default. Here it means something closer to "modesty" or "bashfulness" — a delicate, treasured quality the speaker guards as her last possession, not something she wants to shed. I alternate between "shame" and "modesty" in English since no single word covers both registers.
- **বৃন্তটুকু (bṛntaṭuku)**, "the little stem" — the poem's central image: the speaker is a flower whose fragrance, colour, and petals may all be freely taken by her beloved, but whose বৃন্ত — the botanical stalk anchoring the flower to the plant — must be left alone. It stands for her innermost, ungivable self. English "stem" lacks the specific technical resonance of the Bengali, so the surrounding lines have to carry the metaphor.
- **দক্ষিণ পবন (dakṣiṇa pavana)**, "the south wind" — in the Sanskrit-Bengali poetic tradition the south wind is specifically the wind of spring and awakened longing, not a neutral compass direction as in English. Readers should hear it as charged with erotic restlessness, the way "west wind"

carries a specific freight in English Romantic poetry — though the particular association itself doesn't transfer.

On "The Reward" (Puroshkar)

- **ভারতী (Bhāratī)** and **লক্ষ্মী (Lakṣmī)** — Bharati is another name for Saraswati, goddess of speech, learning, and art; Lakshmi is the goddess of wealth and fortune. The wife's opening demand — "leave Bharati, go worship Lakshmi" — sets up the poem's entire argument, art versus money, and its resolution depends on the reader recognizing both names at the closing line. I left both untranslated rather than substitute something like "the Muse," which would lose the specific mythological weight.
- **কড়ি (kaṛi)** — cowrie shells once used as small change in Bengal. I rendered this simply as "a few coins," since the wife's meaning (petty, everyday money) matters more than the specific antique object, which would need its own footnote.
- The domestic scenes lean on **mock-heroic hyperbole** — the wife's anger as "a figure of utter doom," the poet's terror at being sent to court — very much in the tradition of Bengali comic-domestic verse. I tried to preserve the gentle irony rather than flatten it into plain description.
- Lines like **বীণাগঞ্জিত মঞ্জুভাষিণী কমলকুঞ্জাসনা** are strings of compound Sanskritic epithets in praise of Saraswati ("she whose speech is graced by the vina," "she throned in a lotus-grove") — a devotional form (stuti) that Bengali can chain almost indefinitely but English cannot. I unpacked these into short descriptive clauses rather than coining artificial English compounds.
- The closing image — **মাল্য-বাঁধনে লক্ষ্মী-সরস্বতী**, "Lakshmi and Saraswati bound in one garland" — is the poem's whole argument compressed into a single picture: the wife, by choosing the garland (art, love, honour) over gold, becomes both goddesses at once. I kept this line as close to literal as English allows, since nothing should soften it.
- **On form**: the original is written in tightly rhymed Bengali *payar*-style couplets with a driving comic-narrative pulse. I chose unrhymed, cadenced free verse throughout all three poems, following Tagore's own practice when he translated his Bengali verse into English — most famously in *Gitanjali* — where he consistently let go of metre and end-rhyme in favor of natural English rhythm and image.

THE EARTH

(Bosundhara — বসুন্ধরা)

Take me back, O Earth, your child, into your lap, beneath the vast end of your garment. O mother of clay, let me lie dissolved within your very soil;

let me spread myself in every direction like the joy of spring; let me tear open this ribcage, break these walls of stone, this narrow, joyless, blind prison of myself, rippling, rustling, trembling, slipping, scattering, shivering, catching light and thrill, and flow out over the whole earth, from end to end, north and south, east and west —

rising, made green with hidden sap, into moss and meadow, grass and branch and bark and leaf; touching, with the sway of my fingers, the golden, bowed heads of the grain; filling new petals in secret with lines of gold, with the scent of nectar, with the weight of honey;

spreading myself through the blue of the great sea, dancing along every shore of the silent world in an endless song of waves; in joy scattering language, wave upon wave, to every quarter of the horizon;

and, like a white shawl, laying myself across the mountain peaks, in the towering solitude of spotless snow, in a silence past all sound.

That desire which has risen, unknown to me, like a hidden spring, for years, filling slowly every corner of my heart, now wants to break its banks and pour itself, in a wild, free, generous flood, to water you —

how shall I loose that aching wish and send it, in a hundred thousand streams, piercing through my own heart, to every land, in every direction! I only sit here in the corner of my house, reading, with a hungry mind, of those who have wandered, out of pure wonder, from country to country — and with them, in my thought, I go on winding you about in a net of imagining.

Far, impassable lands — endless plains without tree or path, the very arena of thirst; where the burning heaps of sand in the sunlight prick the eyes like needles; where, spread to the horizon on a bed of dust, a fevered Earth seems to lie

collapsed, her body scorched, her breath a furnace, her throat parched, companionless, silent, without mercy.

How many days, sitting at my window's edge, gazing out, have I painted in my mind the shape of far, unvisited lands — mountains ringing a lake, blue, silent, alone, clear as crystal; torn clouds clinging to the peaks like infants at their mother's breast; a line of snow, far off, blocking the eye, as though a row of unmoving prohibitions had risen, piercing heaven itself, at the gate of some meditating god's forest of penance.

In my mind I have wandered beyond the sea to the land of great Meru, where the earth has taken a vow of eternal solitude, clothed in snow, companionless, desireless, bare of all ornament; where, after the long night, day returns without sound, without song; where night comes and none is left to sleep, and beneath the endless sky it lies awake, unblinking, heavy with a drowsiness it cannot break, like a mother with an empty bed whose only son has died.

As I read the names of new lands, hear their strange descriptions, my mind presses forward, longing to touch it all —

a fishing village hemmed by small blue hills, nets drying on the shore, a boat adrift, a sail filling, a narrow river twisting somehow down a mountain path — I long to take that small, contented nest of human life, murmuring with its waves, and hold it in the circle of my arms.

I long to make my own whatever exists, wherever it may be — to melt myself into the flowing river and go, along both its banks, giving water to the thirst of settlement after settlement, singing my low song through day and night; to stretch myself across the breadth of the earth, from the sea of sunrise to the sea of sunset, and, as the towering ranges dwelling in their own far-off mystery, in the hard stone lap, in the bitter mountain wind, secretly raise up, one after another, ever-new peoples.

I long, in my heart, to be kin to every people, in every land — to drink camel's milk and be born a wild, free son of Arabia; to wander the aloof stone citadels on the mountainsides of Tibet, among its Buddhist monks; to be the wine-drinking Persian in his garden of roses; the fearless, mounted Tartar; courteous, vigorous Japan; ancient, patient China, faithful to its labor through the turning days — in every one of their houses I long to be born.

A healthy, strong, fierce, naked barbarism, with no right or wrong, no custom, no chain, no fever of thought, no doubt, no quarrel, no line between home and stranger — an open stream of life running day and night, striking forward and taking the blow in turn without complaint; a life not torn by looking back in vain regret, not staring at the future in false hope, but dancing on, wave-crest after wave-crest of the present, rejoicing in its own passion — that unruly life, too, I love; how often I have longed, in that storm of being, to go rushing on, sails full, light as a boat.

The fierce tiger of the forest carries its great strength carelessly through its body, its coat gleaming beneath the forest cloud like hidden fire, like lightning; and with a low, thunderous roar it falls, in an instant, upon its unsuspecting prey — that effortless majesty, that joy sharpened by violence, that proud splendor — I have longed, just once, to taste it; longed, again and again, to drink, from every cup this world holds, the wine of gladness, in ever-new streams.

O beautiful Earth, gazing upon you how often has my heart broken into song with a wild, enormous joy; how I have longed to seize and hold, fast against my breast, your waist girdled with the sea; to spread myself, boundless as the morning light, over forest and hill, dancing all day upon the trembling of leaves, kissing every flower-bud, embracing the thick, soft, green fields, swinging, the whole day long, upon every wave in a swing of joy;

and at night, softly, on silent feet, as sleep spread over all the world, to pass my hand over the eyes of your every beast and bird, entering bed after bed, nest after nest, house after house, cave after cave, spreading myself like a great garment to cover the whole earth in gentle dark.

You are my earth, of many years' keeping. Mingling me into your soil, with feet that never tire you have circled the sun through the endless sky across uncounted nights and days, age upon age; your grass has risen within me, your flowers have opened in heavy abundance, your trees have rained down leaf and bloom and fruit and drifting pollen. That is why, some day, sitting alone and lost in thought on the bank of the Padma, my rapt eyes open before me, I feel, through my whole body, my whole mind, how the blades of grass tremble as they rise within your soil; what stream of living sap moves ceaselessly through your depths; with what blind gladness the bud breaks open, restless, at the mouth of its stem; with what secret thrill, what innocent delight, tree and vine and grass and shrub rise up

rejoicing in the new sun — like a child, worn out and satisfied from its mother's breast, its face still smiling in a happy dream.

That is why, some day, when the autumn light falls on the ripened gold of the fields, when the palm-fronds tremble in the wind and glint in the sun, a great restlessness wakes in me, and I remember, it seems, that day when my mind had spread itself through everything — through water and earth, through the leaf-thick dwellings of the forest, through the blue of the sky. It is as though the whole world calls to me, again and again, in a voice beyond words; from that vast and various playhouse I seem to hear, mingled like a distant murmur, the old, familiar sound of my companions' endless, joyful games.

Take me back there, once more; take away this ache, this parting, that rises in me again and again, when I see, before me, the wide plain in the evening light, when the cattle turn home to their distant sheds, raising dust along the field-path, when a thread of smoke climbs from the tree-ringed village into the evening sky; when the moon appears, far off, slow as a weary traveller, over the empty, sandy riverbank, and I feel myself a lone exile, and rush forward, arms outstretched, to gather the whole visible world into my heart — this sky, this earth, this river, and upon it the still, white, sleeping flood of moonlight. Yet I can touch nothing; I only stand gazing into emptiness, restless with grief.

Take me back into that great All, from which life is forever sprouting, budding, blossoming into a hundred thousand shapes, where song hums in a hundred thousand melodies, where dance overflows in countless gestures, where thought flows on like a stream of feeling, where, in every hollow, a flute is sounding — there you stand, the green, wish-granting cow of legend, whom trees and vines and beasts and birds and every thirsting soul, uncounted, milk from every side, from whom the sap of joy pours down in so many forms, while the ten directions ring with the song of the surging tide.

All the manifold gladness of the universe I will taste in a single moment, all together, made one with everything that is. Will not your forest grow greener still with my joy? Will there not stir, in the morning light, a new tremor of brightness? With my rapt love the sky and the face of the earth will be painted in the colors of the heart — seeing which, poetry will wake in the poet's mind, a deep spell will fall across the lover's eyes, and song will rise, unbidden, to the bird's throat.

Your whole body, Earth, is stained with the joy of a thousand thousand beings; the stream of life, decking you again and again with its own living, has come and gone, has mixed its heart's love into your very soil, has written so many inscriptions there, has spread, on every side, the restless embrace of its longing; and with that, mingling carefully all my own love, I too will color the border of your garment with living hues; with everything I have, I will adorn you.

Will not some rapt ear, from the riverbank, hear my song in the river's murmuring? Will not some dweller of the earth, rising from sleep, see my laughter in the light of dawn? A hundred years from now, will not my spirit still tremble in the leaves of this fair forest? In house after house, forever, so many men and women will set up the small game of household life — shall I be no part at all of their love? Shall I not come down upon their faces like laughter, into their bodies as the sap of youth, into their days of spring as sudden joy, into some corner of their minds as the fresh, eager sprout of love?

Will you let me go from you altogether, O motherland — will the great bond of earth, forged through age upon age, be torn apart so suddenly? Shall I go, leaving behind the tender lap that held me a hundred thousand years? Will they not draw me back, from every side — these trees and vines, these hills and rivers and woods, this eternal blue of the sky, this generous, life-filled air, this light so full of waking, this fellowship of living things woven into the very heart of every creature?

I shall come back, and circle you, and dwell among your own kin; as insect, beast, bird, tree, shrub, and vine, calling me again and again, you will take me into your warm, living breast; age after age, birth after birth, giving your breast to my mouth, you will satisfy life's hundred thousand hungers, making me drink, to the very last drop, with deep tenderness, the milk of a hundred thousand joys.

And after that, as the Earth's grown son, I shall go out into the great continents of the universe, into the far, far company of the stars, by paths beyond all reach.

But even now my longing is not spent; even now the thirst for your breast's nectar still clings to my lips; your face still wakens beautiful dreams behind my eyes; even now I have not finished with anything of you — all of it is still full of mystery, and my unblinking eyes cannot find the floor of their own wonder; even now I remain, almost a child, at your breast, gazing up into your face.

Mother, take me, in a close embrace, into the circle of your two arms — take me for your own, into your breast — into that secret chamber from which the manifold spring of your vast life's joy rises up — take me there, and do not keep me far away.

THE DOCTRINE OF ILLUSION

(Mayabad — মায়াবাদ)

Ah, joyless land, wrapped in your own worn age, carrying the heavy weight of all your learning — you believe, in your heart, that you have caught God himself in deception, with the sharp, subtle sight of your clever eyes!

Taking up your wit, honed keen as a blade of grass, sitting idle through the night and day in the corner of your house, you have decided that this whole world, this earth, this starlit creation strewn across the endless sky, is false.

Through age after age, beast and bird and every creature go on breathing here, unshaken, unafraid, honoring this as the very lap of their Maker's world; but you, old man, will trust in nothing! This vast fair of the world, filled with its millions upon millions of lives — you have decided, in your heart, it is only a child's game.

PLAY

(Khela — খেলা)

Let it be play. You too must join this game with all the universe, restless with its joy. Why sit apart, in silence, having left it all, in some dark corner of your own heart?

Know this: you are a child in this vast being, in the lap of endless time, in the courtyard of the sky — however much you think you know, you know nothing at all.

With humility, with faith, with love, take up this great toy your Mother has given you, made of colour, and fragrance, and song; and if it turns to dust — then let it be dust! Where else is there dust like this?

Do not sit apart, grown old before your time, alone — how will you ever become fully human, if you will not play?

BONDAGE

(Bondhon — বন্ধন)

Bondage? Yes — bondage indeed; all of it is bondage: tenderness, love, the thirst for joy. It is the mother's own hand, drawing the child from one breast to the other, always making it drink, filling its heart with ever new streams of life.

The thirst for milk lies, a blessing in disguise, upon the infant's lips — just so, this same plain thirst — hope, love — draws out, through so much joy and grief, the very sap of the whole world, and shapes, birth after birth, filling heart and mind, this rare and difficult thing, a life; moment by moment carrying it on, with ever-fresh hope, into ever-fresh tastes, toward its resting place.

By what illusion of freedom would you destroy the thirst for milk, and tear apart the bond with your own mother?

THE COURSE

(Gati — গতি)

I know this life is full — joy and grief, laughter and weeping — and that in its hard bonds wounds are left, knot after knot; I know that in the churning of this world's sea, for some the nectar rises, for others the poison.

I do not know why it is so, nor what fruit this whole vast chain of labour bears. I do not know what is to come; all is dark, beginning and end, in this life of ours — whether there is an end to the world's sorrow, or none; whether the hungry heart's old hope is ever, at last, fulfilled.

I do not go to the scholar's door to learn this mystery of being born. I do not wish to break, alone, the cord that binds the universe together — my course is one with the course of a hundred million living things.

LIBERATION

(Mukti — মুক্তি)

Shutting the eyes, the ears, the mind, the will, turning my face from the whole of the world, holding only my own small, pure soul — in hope of freedom, who knows where I would swim!

Past me the great ship of the universe would go sailing by, filling the sky with the songs of its passengers, its white sails of light crowding every quarter of heaven, its countless souls brimming with a thousand kinds of beauty.

Slowly, slowly, it would pass, farther and farther, carrying all the world's laughter and its weeping, its darkness and its light; through empty space, in a voice of sorrow, it would bear away all the grief that fills this endless world.

If the whole world must go on, weeping as it goes — shall I sit alone, in the silence of my own liberation?

POWERLESS

(Akshama — অক্ষমা)

Wherever I have come, I belong to that place — I am the poor child of this humble earth. Whatever burden of joy and grief I have carried since my birth, I have accepted as my fortune, and made my peace with it.

You hold no boundless store of riches in your hands, O green, all-enduring, earthen mother. You would give bread to every mouth, and yet, so often, cannot — and your children cry, their faces pale and parched, "Where is our food, where?"

I know, Mother, that the joy in your hands is never whole; whatever you build crumbles again; death, who devours all, lays his hand on everything; you cannot, alas, fulfill every hope — but shall I, for that, ever leave your burning breast?

THE POOR ONE

(Daridra — দরিদ্রা)

Because you are poor, I love you all the more, O Earth; your tenderness pleases me the more for it — seeing the sorrowing smile upon your careworn face, a great ache rises in the depths of my heart.

Taking the very sap and blood of your own breast, you have given a small span of life to the body of your child; day and night you watch its face, though, for all your desperate love, you cannot give it the deathless thing it longs for.

For age upon age you have gone on shaping, out of colour and fragrance and song, a dwelling-place of joy; and still, by day, by night, it remains unfinished — there is no heaven, yet you have fashioned heaven's faint likeness.

That is why your face is soft with sorrow, and all your beauty brims with tears.

SELF-SURRENDER

(Atmasamarpan — আত্মসমর্পণ)

To your song of joy I will add whatever sweet, small melody of love I know, a verse or two out of my own heart; in the weeping of your sorrow my own voice, heavy with grief, will sound alongside yours.

With flowers and sandal-paste I will worship you; I will set vermilion at the parting of your hair. In manifold bonds I will bind myself to you, and set a swing, in some new rhythm, rocking upon the waves of your sea of delight.

I have no more pride left in the human soul. Gazing upon your tender, green, motherly face, I have come to love even your dust and clay. I will not despise the mortal lap I was born into, and run off in search of heaven, or of freedom.

THE UNMOVING MEMORY

(Achal Sriti — অচল স্মৃতি)

In the very heart of my own inner country there stands, forever waking, unmoving, white as a mountain peak, a single, unmoving memory.

Around that silent, snow-capped height, circling it, day after day, my days, my nights, come, and go, and turn again.

Wherever it has set its foot is the deepest ground of my heart; it holds its head raised above everything else that is mine.

My hundred fancies, like colored clouds, gather around it — laughing, weeping, bowing low, again and again, in tenderness.

My own green trees and vines, heavy with flower and leaf, long to bind it fast in a soft, warm embrace of arms.

Its summit melts into the sky, unreachable, unpeopled; and there, alone, the bird of longing flies on, through day and night.

All around it, such coming and going, such singing, such speech — and at its centre only a stillness, silent as prayer.

Even from far away, alone, that peak can still be seen — its everlasting line of snow stays etched upon the sky of my mind.

THE THORN'S TALE

(Kontoker Kotha — কণ্টকের কথা)

Once, in the gladness of morning light, a bird was singing, and the thorn, with a crooked, sidelong glance, called out to the flower —

"You are only a soft, pleasure-loving lotus, swayed by the wind; as the day's light fades, so fades your whole life's span; on one side the bee, drunk with honey at dawn, on the other the breeze, that thief of your scent — darling of the forest, it amuses me to watch you so petted, so adored.

Ah, what a bright dress you wear! Your fond smile never seems to end; all day you drift, steeped in soft delight, anointed with your own fragrance. Yet how few are the days of such petting, such a cherished game — that delicate sweetness, that colored indulgence, that festival of bees."

"I am no creature of pleasure like the rest of you — I know nothing of your coy looks, your laughter, your garments of so many colors. I stand here naked, holding fast to this earth as my own; who can drive me off, who can trample me into the ground?

I am not, like you, a thing of a single moment; in this world I belong to every day, forever; I fear no rain, no storm, no wind. Always alone, without companion — I owe no debt of love to anyone; and listening to flattering songs all through the night costs me nothing of myself.

Winter will come; the birds will fall silent; every flower, every leaf, will wither and drop away — and I will still remain. Look closely — there is no excess anywhere in me; everything about me is plain, and everyone already knows my worth.

In this timid world, the world belongs to whoever is hard enough to hold it. With one scratch of my nail I can leave my own mark upon it.

Some sway a fan gently over the world, stroke its feet with soft hands, bow their heads low, and lie down, prostrate, in the dust, to worship it. So many tricks are played to win its heart — someone's color, someone else's perfume — all of it a wasted bridal decking, lasting only a day or two.

I do nothing at all. I only stand, silent, my head held high, lodged like a barb in the very heart of this whole earth.

You will not so much as glance my way, from the corner of your eye; you have burst into bloom, swollen with your own delight, in your own heart. You have your honey — keep it, it is none of mine. You have your beauty; no one turns to look at me.

Some have branches, some have petals, some have flowers, some have fruit; only my hands stay empty, day after day, night after night.

O tree, you are vast, and old, and utterly indifferent to the likes of us — I am not great; I cast no shade; I am small.

Small as I may be, still I am a fierce and terrible thing to fear — my very poverty is my army, and it is that which wins."

THE JOURNEY TO NO KNOWN SHORE

(Niruddesh Jatra — নিরুদ্দেশ যাত্রা)

How much farther will you carry me, O beautiful one? Tell me — at what shore, at last, will your golden boat come home?

Whenever I ask, O stranger, you only smile, sweetly smiling — I cannot understand what it is, what you are keeping in your mind.

In silence you lift your hand and point to the shoreless sea, rising restless, to the sun sinking far in the west, at the corner of the sky. What is out there — what is it I am sailing on to find?

Tell me, I ask you, stranger still to me — is it there, where, on the shore of evening, the day itself lies burning on its pyre, where the water gleams like molten fire, where the floor of heaven seems to melt and fall, where the bride of the horizon stands with brimming, tearful eyes —

is your home out there, beyond the wave-loud sea, at the foot of the cloud-kissed mountain of the west? You only smile, looking into my face, and say nothing at all.

The wind goes on and on, sighing low. The rising water roars with a blind passion. The deep-blue sea is thick with doubt; whichever way I look, I find no shore; it is as though some boundless weeping, flooding the whole world, rocks it where it lies.

And on it floats your golden boat, and on it falls the light of evening, and there, in the midst of it, why do you sit smiling that silent smile? I cannot understand at all what such delight of yours can be for.

When first you called out, "Who will come with me," I looked once into your eyes, in that new morning light. You raised your hand and showed me, spread out toward the west, the boundless sea, where a restless light, like hope itself, trembled on the water.

Climbing into the boat, I asked you then whether new life was waiting for me there, whether the dream of hope would ripen there into fruit of gold. You only smiled, looking into my face, and said nothing at all.

Since then, sometimes the clouds have risen, sometimes the sun; sometimes the sea has raged, sometimes lain still as a painted picture. The hours pass; the wind fills the sail; where does the golden boat sail on to? I watch, in the west, the sun go down behind the mountains of its setting.

Now, once more, I ask you: is there a gentle death, out there? Is there peace, is there sleep, beneath the floor of the dark? You only smile, your eyes lifted, and say nothing at all.

Dark night will come now, opening its wings; the gold light in the evening sky will be covered over. Only the fragrance of your body drifts to me; only the murmuring water reaches my ear; only the loosened mass of your hair blows and falls across your shoulders in the wind.

With a broken heart, a body gone numb, I will call out to you, unable to wait, and say, "Where are you — come close, and let me feel your touch."

You will not answer. And I will no longer be able to see your silent smile.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

On "The Earth" (Bosundhara)

- **বসুন্ধরা (Bosundharā)** — an old Sanskrit epithet for the Earth, literally "she who bears wealth/treasure" (from *vasu*, wealth, + *dharā*, she who holds). English "Earth" loses this sense of the ground as a holder of riches — grain, forest, ore — that it distributes to its children; I chose the plain title "The Earth" over a more literal but stranger "Wealth-Bearer," trusting the poem itself to restore that sense of abundance.
- **অঞ্চল (añcal)** — the loose end of a sari, traditionally used by a mother to cradle, carry, or wipe the face of her child. "Beneath the vast end of your garment" in the opening lines tries to keep this specific, tender, maternal image rather than flattening it to a vaguer "beneath your embrace."
- The long central catalogue — Arab, Tibetan, Persian, Tartar, Japanese, Chinese lives the poet longs to have lived — is written with real ethnographic curiosity typical of the 1890s, not derision; I kept the list's specific, appreciative epithets (*wine-drinking Persian, fearless Tartar, courteous Japan*) as Tagore wrote them, as period detail rather than translating them into more neutral modern terms.
- **কল্পধেনু (kalpadhenu)**, "the wish-fulfilling cow" — a figure from Hindu mythology, a divine cow that grants any desire; here Tagore addresses the Earth itself as this cow, being endlessly "milked" by all living things for the sap of joy. I kept the image concrete ("the green, wish-granting cow of legend") rather than abstracting it to something like "the source of all bounty," since the physical act of milking is essential to the following lines about being drawn from her "in a thousand directions."
- The poem's whole momentum — one long, breathless, unbroken sentence-like outpouring in the Bengali original, held together by present participles (*hillolia, marmoria, kampia*…, a chain of eight verb-forms in a row) — cannot be reproduced in English without becoming unreadable; I broke it into clauses and short lines but tried to preserve the *cumulative, mounting* quality by keeping the verbs active and stacked rather than settling into flatter descriptive prose.

On "The Doctrine of Illusion" (Mayabad), "Play" (Khela), "Bondage" (Bondhon), "The Course" (Gati), and "Liberation" (Mukti)

These five sonnet-length poems form a connected sequence (all fourteen lines, all addressing the same underlying question: is the world real, and should one seek to escape it or embrace it?), and share several key terms:

- **মায়াবাদ (Māyāvāda)** — a specific philosophical term, "the doctrine of maya," referring to the Advaita Vedanta position (associated with the philosopher Shankara) that the visible world is ultimately illusory. Tagore is not attacking illusion in general but this specific school of thought, so I kept the philosophical weight in the title ("The Doctrine of Illusion") rather than softening it to something like "Illusion."
- **মুক্তি (mukti)**, "liberation" — the Sanskrit/Vedantic term *moksha*'s Bengali cognate, meaning release from the cycle of rebirth through solitary spiritual discipline. Tagore's poem "Mukti" is a direct rebuttal of the ideal of solitary liberation, imagining it instead as a kind of abandonment — sitting alone in a "tomb" while the "great ship" of the suffering, singing world sails past. I translated the closing image, *মুক্তি-সমাধিতে* (mukti-samādhite), as "the tomb of my own liberation," since সমাধি can mean both a meditative trance and a burial-mound/tomb — Tagore is clearly playing on both senses, and English "tomb" lets the darker meaning surface.
- **বন্ধন (bandhan)**, "bondage" — normally a negative term in Indian religious thought (the opposite of *mukti*), but the poem "Bondhon" deliberately reclaims it as something life-giving, comparing all love and desire to an infant's bond with its mother's breast. I kept "bondage" rather than softening it to "bond" or "connection," since the poem's whole argument depends on taking the harshest possible word for attachment and showing it to be, in fact, tender.
- **গতি (gati)** — means "motion," "course," or "the way one is going," and in a spiritual context can also suggest one's ultimate destiny after death. The poem uses it to mean something like "the direction my life takes, together with all other life," refusing the idea of an individual spiritual path apart from the rest of creation; I rendered the title simply as "The Course" to hold onto both the everyday and the fate-laden sense.

On "Powerless" (Akshama) and "The Poor One" (Daridra)

- **অক্ষমা (akṣamā)** — a genuinely difficult title. Sanskrit *kṣama* means "capable, able" (also, as a noun, "patience" or "forgiveness"); the feminine

adjective *akṣamā* — describing the Earth, addressed throughout the poem as a mother who "does not hold boundless riches in her hands" — most naturally means "powerless" or "without means," and I have translated it that way, though a reader could also hear an echo of "unforgiving" or "unable to be patient," given the word's other Sanskrit sense; the poem itself supports "powerless" far better, since its whole argument is that the Earth-mother cannot give her children everything, not that she withholds forgiveness.

- **দরিদ্রা (daridrā)** — simply the feminine form of "poor," again describing the Earth as mother; I translated the title as "The Poor One" rather than "Poverty," to keep the maternal, personal address rather than turning it into an abstraction.
- Both poems belong to a small cluster (with "Self-Surrender" following) built around the same conceit: the Earth as a mother too poor to grant her children full happiness, loved all the more for that poverty rather than less. The paradox — *দরিদ্রা বলিয়া তোরে বেশি ভালোবাসি,* "because you are poor, I love you more" — is the emotional hinge of the whole trio, and I kept it as bare and direct in English as it is in Bengali, resisting the temptation to soften "poor" into something gentler like "humble."

On "The Unmoving Memory" (Achal Sriti)

- **অচল (achal)** — literally "unmoving" or "immovable," and also a classical Sanskrit-derived word for "mountain" (that which does not move). The poem's title plays on both senses at once: a "still, mountain-like memory." English cannot hold both meanings in one word, so I translated the title as "The Unmoving Memory" and let the poem's own imagery (a snow-peak within the heart) carry the mountain sense that the title's wordplay implies.
- The poem never says what the memory is — of a person, a place, a moment — only that it stands fixed and permanent while everything else (days, fancies, longing) circles around it. I preserved this deliberate withholding rather than supplying an interpretation the original doesn't state.

On "The Thorn's Tale" (Kontoker Kotha)

- **কণ্টক (kaṇṭaka)**, "thorn," and **কমল (kamal)**, "lotus" — a very old pairing in Sanskrit and Bengali poetry, where the thorn is conventionally the lotus's humble, overlooked companion. Tagore inverts the convention: instead of

the thorn quietly resenting the flower's beauty, it delivers a long, proud, almost boastful speech about its own permanence and toughness, only admitting at the very end that its "poverty" (দৈন্য, dainya — a lack of beauty or softness) is itself its only real strength. I kept "poverty" rather than "plainness" for দৈন্য in the final couplet, to preserve its kinship with the same word-root used in "The Poor One" and "Powerless" earlier in this set — all these poems return to the idea that lack, rightly understood, is its own kind of power.

On "The Journey to No Known Shore" (Niruddesh Jatra)

- **সোনার তরী (sonar tori)**, "the golden boat" — this phrase gives the entire collection its name (*Sonar Tari*, 1894), and appears again here as the vessel piloted by an unnamed, silent, smiling woman down a sea toward sunset. I left "golden boat" untranslated-in-spirit (not "golden ship" or "golden vessel") specifically because of this title echo, which a reader of the whole collection would recognize.
- **অপরিচিতা / বিদেশিনী (aparichitā / bideshinī)**, "the unknown woman / the foreign woman" — the poem's addressee is never named or explained; she may be read as death, as fate, as poetic inspiration, or as life itself. I preserved the ambiguity by translating both simply as "stranger," resisting any interpretive gloss that would fix her identity.
- The poem's refrain — *তুমি হাস শুধু.. কথা না ব'লে,* "you only smile...without speaking a word" — recurs with small variations at the end of nearly every stanza, tightening as the poem moves from morning to sunset to full night, when even the smile disappears. I kept the refrain's wording as consistent in English as the Bengali allows, so that the reader feels its narrowing the same way — until the final stanza, where, for the first time, the smile itself goes dark and unseen.