

POETRY

IMAGINATION

KALPANA

Rabindranath Tagore



Contents

THE UNBROKEN SELF	3
WITHOUT END	5
OUT OF SEASON.....	12
HOPE.....	15
MARKS OF PROGRESS	16
FANCY	24
UNGRATEFUL GRIEF.....	25
A CHAITRA NIGHT	27
THE THIEF'S FIFTY VERSES.....	29
TO JAGADISH CHANDRA BOSE	33
BIRTHDAY SONG	35
THE INVENTION OF SHOES.....	37
ON A STORMY DAY	42
HARD TIMES.....	46
CONSEQUENCE	49
THIRST	52
DESIRE FULFILLED	55
REVELATION.....	56
THE LOVE-QUESTION".....	60
THE SUPPLIANT.....	63
LAKSHMI OF BENGAL	65
THE YEAR'S END	67
SPRING.....	75
FAREWELL.....	78
MARRIAGE BENEDICTION	80
BAISHAKH	82

THE BROKEN TEMPLE.....	85
LAKSHMI OF INDIA.....	87
BHIKKHAYANG NAIBA NAIBA CHA.....	89
THE BEGGAR	91
THE MISSED HOUR.....	93
"AFTER MADAN'S IMMOLATION" / "BEFORE MADAN'S IMMOLATION"	95
THE MOTHER'S CALL	99
THE IMAGE OF THE HEART.....	102
PARDON.....	104
THE PLEA.....	106
NIGHT	108
THE BASHFUL ONE	110
PLAY.....	112
AUTUMN.....	113
HESITATION	116
THE PITEOUS ONE	117
SHE IS MY MOTHER.....	118
AUDACITY	120
DREAM.....	122
SONG OF THE ILL-FATED	125

THE UNBROKEN SELF

(অনবচ্ছিন্ন আমি, 1306 / c. 1899)

Today I lay lost in the heart of the universe,
and when I opened my eyes, I looked — and saw myself.

I lifted the trailing end of the earth's garment
and found the dust astir, trembling with the pulse of my own veins.

Beneath the endless sky I saw myself descending,
cradled and swinging, swinging, in a swing of light.

Today I had wandered to the farther shore beyond death,
and there, grown old, ancient beyond all years, I met myself once more.

Gazing on my own unbroken being, spread through all the world,
a shiver passed through me, a trembling in my own mind.

In water, on land, in the void — however far I search,
I find no corner left where I might lose myself.

Where water and land dissolve, in the innermost Spirit, the Dweller within all things,
there too, at its very heart, I found myself — still throbbing, still alive.

Notes:

- ব্রহ্মাণ্ড (brahmāṇḍa) — literally "Brahma's egg," the classical image of the cosmos as a cosmic egg; "universe" flattens the myth but has no tidy substitute.
- ধরণীর বস্ত্রাঞ্চল — really the earth's আঁচল, the trailing end of a sari, an image thick with maternal tenderness in Bengali. "Garment's hem" keeps the gesture but loses the domestic warmth.

- নাড়ী — sits between "pulse," "vein," the yogic subtle channel, and নাড়ি (umbilical cord) — so the dust of the earth is bound to the speaker by something closer to an umbilical cord than a mere pulse.

- অনবচ্ছিন্ন / অবিচ্ছিন্ন ("unbroken") — precise Vedantic vocabulary: the self is not separate but continuous with the universal Self across space, time, even death. The poem's closing স্পন্দমান ("throbbing") deliberately echoes its opening কম্পমান ("trembling") — dust and divinity beating with the same pulse.

WITHOUT END

(অশেষ, 25 Baishakh 1306)

(A long ode in which the poet, at the close of a life's day, is summoned again by a figure who is Death, Duty, and Muse at once — addressed by turns as devī, "goddess," and rāṇī, "queen.")

Again the call?

All the work that there was to do
I have finished now, today,
through the long, humble day.

The grove of madhavi flowers, once wakened,
lies long since forsaken
by fresh young dawn;

Striking with sharp thirst,
drinking the dew from every flower first,
noon too has gone;

At the field's far western rim
the afternoon, smiling faint and dim,
came to its close;

To cross over to the further shore
I have set my foot upon the boat once more —
and still the call arose?

Drowsy evening descends,
her golden veil-end come undone,
a lamp lit in her hand —

Over the day's murmuring tide

the cricket's cry has drawn aside
the thick curtain of the land.

Along that farther, darkened shore
the black night gathers more and more
its deepening stain;

Into that deep, thick dark
where does the eye go to embark,
and find no shore again?

Upon my eyelids, soft and slow,
a dream comes wrapping, and the song
falls still, half sung —

Weariness draws my limbs down
as a beloved's pleading might,
and still — the call?

O enchantress, O ruthless one,
O thirsty for blood, insatiate one,
my relentless mistress —

I gave you my day, entire —
must you now, at the end, require
my very night from me?

In all this world each thing that lives
finds, somewhere near the bourn of things,
an end at last —

Why then, piercing to the core,
tearing through every ending's door,
comes your command so fast?

The dark that covers all the earth
gives every solitary one his own
small place, at least —

From somewhere in that very dark
like lightning-fire, sudden and stark,
why does your summons strike?

Beyond the southern ocean's rim
where your bright palace-gateway stands,
O ever-waking queen,

does no soft song at evening's fall,
in slow, tired strains, not sound at all,
the word of calm serene?

There in that silent forest, do
the birds not fall asleep there too
in branches dimmed with shade?

Do not the stars, above your towers,
climb slowly up, hour by hour,
on wings that make no sound?

Beneath the flowering bowers, does
no bed of petals lie bestrewed
for one who'd rest, unbound?

O tireless one who knows no peace,
the day is over now, has ceased —
and still — the call?

Then let them stay — let them remain,
all that is mine, my own domain,
my hour alone,

my evening's lamp-lit glow,
my two eyes that watched the road,
my garland strung with care.

Let the ferry-boat sail on
bearing home its passengers,
to the village on the farther shore,

let the third day's slender moon
sink down slowly, sink down soon,
beside my cottage door.

My night is mine, my peace is mine,
let the deep spell of dreaming stay,
its gentle, cool release —

yet once again I turn, and go,
bearing, with my tired head bowed low,
your summons, and your call.

Tell me, then, what shall I play,
what flowers shall I bring today
to lay before your door —

what shall I write in blood, and learn,
with all my life, what shall I earn,
what work is there in store?

If my eyes should droop and fall,
if my slack hand should forget it all,
its old, practiced skill,

if no strength is in my breast,
if my eyes should fill, unblessed,

and my words catch and still —

do not look on me with scorn,
do not hold me in contempt, forlorn,
for my disgrace —

remember this, O ruthless one:
I accepted, though the time was wrong,
your summons, and your call.

Servants like myself there are,
a thousand, and a hundred more,
who wait outside your door —

they have been granted leave to rest,
they sleep together, and are blessed,
along the roadway's shore.

Only I still serve you on,
I am not given leave to go,
you call me, hour by hour —

you chose me, only me, for this,
this hard, this rare and heavy bliss
I carry with all my power.

In that pride I will stay awake,
all through the night, for your own sake,
with eyes that will not sleep,

in that pride around my throat
I'll wear, just like a wedding-garland wrought,
your summons, that I keep.

I shall win, I shall win, I shall be victorious,

O goddess, I fear nothing, glorious,
triumphant I shall be.

Your summoning word, I shall fulfill,
O queen of majesty, until
it all comes true through me.

My tired hand shall never shake,
my voice shall never break,
my vina-string won't tear —

for the new dawn that is to come
I'll keep watch through the night, alone,
my lamp will still burn there.

The burden of my work, when morning's light
is new, into some new servant's hands
I'll give, and take my leave,

and with my very last voice, I'll proclaim aloud, and cry,
declaring to the world as I die,
your summons, till the last.

Notes:

- আহ্বান ("the call/summons") is the poem's drumbeat, repeated at the end of nearly every stanza; I kept it as "the call" throughout to preserve that liturgical insistence, even where English rhythm might invite variation.
- The addressee shifts identity across the poem — মোহিনী (enchantress), স্বামিনী (mistress/ruler), দেবী (goddess), রানী (queen) — she is at once Death, the Muse, and Duty itself, demanding endless service even past the point of exhaustion. This ambiguity is deliberate in the Bengali and I've preserved it rather than resolving it.
- সেবক ("servant") carries devotional weight close to a bhakta's self-designation before his deity — "servant" alone loses the religious charge but is the closest single English word.

- I moved from strict rhyme (the Bengali is in tight, chiming short-long couplets) to a looser cadence with occasional rhyme, since reproducing the original's density of rhyme in English tends to force filler words and flatten the poem's emotional rise.

OUT OF SEASON

(অসময়, 1306)

Has the great lion-gate then closed, I wonder?
Is there still time, is there still time left?
Far off, a murmur sounds, faint and slow —
has the road ended? Have I come near the city?
It seems that same far, sweet fragrance
comes floating, now and then, upon the breeze.
In so much doubt I have delayed so long —
and now a barren evening has come into the sky.

Is that a lamp I see, there in the city's temple?
No — those are only two stars, far off in the western sky.
Is that the tinkling sound of golden anklets?
No — it is only crickets, thick along the forest path.
A line of mirage, colouring the horizon's road,
has, all this day, deceived me into despair.
In so much doubt I have delayed so long —
and now a barren evening has come into the sky.

By now, there, delighting every wood and grove,
a young new king has come with the new spring.
Hailing the golden image of youthful hope,
young men and women wander in new joy.
The vina's strings, weeping in restless rhythm,
call out to all who dwell in far exile.
In so much doubt I have delayed so long —
and now a barren evening has come into the sky.

Today all have adorned themselves with flowers and sandal-paste,
under the open sky they'll pass this moonlit night.
In troop after troop they go, arms bound in arms —
through the void rings out the song of victory.

New banners, in the new palace-courtyard,
fly in the southern wind, in the splendor of triumph.
In so much doubt I have delayed so long —
and now a barren evening has come into the sky.

All night long I held vain counsel with myself,
and the autumn morning passed while I gazed into emptiness.
At the hour of parting, to whom did I go to give comfort?
The travelers there had already gone, rowing the ferry-boat away.
I have only vainly cheated my own self,
offered up my life's oblation into what fire of hope and sighing!
In so much doubt I have delayed so long —
and now a barren evening has come into the sky.

In the morning all had beckoned to me with signs,
from among the many, they had chosen me —
when the great road rang out with music,
even then, once, my heart had leapt and danced.
Now, can I still cross over that wall?
Standing outside, whom shall I call, in vain?
In so much doubt I have delayed so long —
and now a barren evening has come into the sky.

Yet one day this hopeless road,
wandering far and farther still, will at last come to its end.
This long wandering will one day cease,
and the wind of peace will cool my weary frame.
Standing at the threshold, in the field outside,
I shall sound my trumpet with all my life's last effort!
In so much doubt I have delayed too long —
and now a barren evening is coming into the sky.

Notes:

- বন্ধা সন্ধ্যা ("barren evening") — বন্ধা usually describes infertility; applying it to an evening is a striking, almost violent metaphor for a life's chance gone unfructed.

I kept "barren" rather than softening it to "empty" or "grey," since the harshness is the point.

- Throughout, the poet mistakes ordinary things (stars, crickets, a mirage) for signs of the city he can no longer reach — I preserved the question-and-correction structure of each opening pair of lines rather than flattening it into statement, since the self-deception is the poem's subject.

- The refrain's despair sits in tension with the final stanza's resolve — I kept the very last line's tense shift (আসিছে, "is coming," vs. the earlier আসিল, "has come") as the only place the refrain changes, marking a shift from a completed defeat to one still, painfully, in progress.

HOPE

(আশা, 1305)

When this sun of my life had set and gone its way,
 O my Bengal, my mother, you said, "Come, child," and lay
 open before me the door into your inmost room,
 you kissed my brow; and at my pillow, through the gloom,
 you lit a lamp undying. Round my throat there hung
 a garland, thorned with flowers, that had once been strung
 as music's own reward — and its wound's burning ache
 still smoldered in my heart — you lifted it, to take
 each single thorn away, one by one, with your own hand,
 washed off its dust, and made the pale garland stand
 white and unhurt again — and placed it round my throat,
 and took me for your own, and let your blessing note
 proclaim me now, forever, as your child, your very own.
 My eyes, brimming with tears, then suddenly flew open —
 I woke with a start, and saw — it was only a dream, alone!

Notes:

- বঙ্গজননী ("Bengal-mother") — Tagore addresses his motherland directly as জননী (mother), a charged nationalist image from this era; "my Bengal, my mother" tries to keep both the intimacy and the political weight.
- The কণ্টকিত কুসুমের ডোর ("thorned garland of flowers") given as "music's reward" reads as a bittersweet image of poetic fame itself — praise that wounds even as it honors — so I kept "thorned" attached directly to "garland" rather than separating the images.
- The whole poem is a single unbroken sentence in Bengali, mirroring a dream's breathless, cascading logic; I preserved that long unbroken syntax up to the final, deflating short sentence — "it was only a dream" — which lands hardest by contrast.

MARKS OF PROGRESS

(উন্নতিলাক্ষণ, 1306)

(A four-part satire, each part built from a naive question and a bitterly ironic "Answer" — Tagore's target is the pretensions of Calcutta's Anglicized elite.)

I

O townsman, I am a stranger here,
ignorant of the ways of the world,
I ask you — in this hall of the city,
what sacrifice is being held today?

At the lion-gate, on both sides of the road,
I see no end to the carriages —
in whose honor have they gathered here,
all these turbaned, be-headdressed men?

Seated there, grave and solemn,
are the land's most learned elders,
entering the hall, in shyness and fear,
I, unlearned, nearly die of embarrassment.

What hero has washed away
the mire of his motherland's disgrace?
Who has made India's pure moon of fame
shine without a stain?

Kings and princes have gathered today
to bless whom, to honor whom?
These venerable men have taken their seats —
in whose worship, for whose sake?

Answer:

That sahib has gone, his pockets both stuffed full,
his belly well filled besides —
these great men will mourn him now
by setting up his statue.

Who is that wretched one, begging signatures,
wandering, weary, door to door,
yet still eager and determined to build
a memorial to someone?

In the evening he comes home, alas,
his eyes wet with tears,
his heart aggrieved, his ledger empty,
his purse utterly bare!

For whose sake does he go about begging,
wiping the sweat from his brow?
What has this man done for his country?
What crime, what wrongdoing?

Answer:

Nothing at all — except that his fathers and grandfathers
had raised him up high,
and he has decked his motherland around
with immortal clusters of flowers.

II

The ten-armed Goddess — hers will be the worship,
kinfolk will gather together —
but where has this second deity come from here,
demanding a new offering of worship?

For whose service is a short-lived lamb
being brought into the house?

To offer to whom do they bring, load after load,
huge quantities of bhetki fish?

What is in that vessel, on whose rim
thirsty flies have settled?
Skewered on spits and being cooked
are birds that Manu's law forbids.

Are these, then, the greatest of gods,
worshipped in the house of worship —
before whom the Goddess herself
has fallen behind, forgotten, unspoken?

Answer:

Mackay, Mackinnon, Allen, and Dillon —
having just left their shops,
amid noise and pride, on this festival of worship,
have lifted up their lotus-feet.

A humble devotee of the Goddess
had come to the door to see the worship —
why does he turn back, head bowed low,
his eyes red with the shame of insult?

The festival-hall is lit with rows of lamps,
the sun has gone down to set —
by what rule is the curious crowd
stopped at the door by the doorkeeper's hand?

Are these people, then, lawbreakers,
separate from society?
Do they hold worship, giving, meditation
to be mere child's play, contemptible in their minds?

Answer:

No, no — these are all humble neighbors
turning back silently —
the sahib-society is coming today,
and if these came too, it would bring disgrace.

III

Who is this man? He seems familiar somehow,
he has the rhythm of a Bengali face —
yet in his manner and bearing, quite without reason,
there's the scent of an Englishman's tree about him!

Dark-complexioned, wearing on his body
a black hat and a black coat,
if one of his own countrymen comes near him
he seems to stiffen, to turn hard as stone!

If someone appears wearing a dhoti,
he feels the deepest shame,
and at the sound of Bengali conversation,
in rage and torment, his very bones and marrow catch fire!

Will these men, in the end, abandon their country?
Are they haters of India?
Are they then, all of them, in troop after troop,
trying their best to become foreigners?

Answer:

These men are all heroes, they are counted
as representatives of the nation itself —
their coat-clad bodies, alas, they have devoted
purely for the sake of their own people.

Filled with love and devotion, to dispel
the sorrows of the land of Bengal,

this is a great assembly; its president
and members are the foremost of the land.

These men wish to offer, for their country's good,
their own flesh and blood —
then why does the greater part of this land
stay away from this assembly?

Why do they go off, troop after troop, far away,
not understanding their own good?
And if out of curiosity some come to the hall,
why do they fall asleep there?

Are these, then, people estranged from their own country,
who have stopped up their ears,
lest, by some trick of fate, even a single word
of good counsel should enter in?

Answer:

No, no — these are only the common people,
they know nothing but their own native tongue,
and so, alas, they are unfit vessels
to sit in a Swadeshi assembly.

IV

His dress and appearance seem quite modern,
his face is thick with beard,
but his speech is exceedingly ancient,
utterly decrepit with age.

Seated on a high seat, single-mindedly,
his gaze fixed upon the void,
this man, taking up the verses of Manu,
rains down a shower of words upon the young.

He is proving, as clear as water,
that nothing at all can be excellent
unless it was created before the years
even preceding the Shalivahana era.

Has he, from his childhood, grown ripe and mature
in the whole system of the Puranas?
Has he worn his young years thin and frail
over the ancient mantras of the Vedas?

Has he spent his days with Panini,
poring over worm-eaten manuscripts?
Has he wasted his life away
hunting for variant readings in the Vayu Purana?

His deep devotion to the ancient
shows itself perfected in his speech —
tell me then, good sir, in the ancient tongue,
just how far is his learning proven?

Answer:

He has plundered two volumes of the primer,
and two cantos of the Raghuvamsha —
and for the rest of his scriptural learning,
his authority comes from Max Müller.

The learned pandit, grave, his head shaven,
schooled in the ancient scriptures —
in the modern assembly, by novel means,
will impart religious initiation.

He explains, making it plain: this matter is simple —
the Hindu religion is true —
at its very root lies chemistry,

and nothing but physics.

In the tuft of hair kept on the head, hidden within it,
lies the power of magnetism —
through the line of the sacred mark electricity runs,
and that is why devotion awakens.

When evening comes, and with all one's strength
the conch and bell are sounded,
in the churned-up air, by the flash of electric current,
the mind becomes enlightened.

Flock after flock of graduates listen, amazed,
to this wondrous account —
Vidyabhushan is so terribly,
so tremendously masterful in science!

Well then, this teacher must have read a great deal —
at least a portion of Ganot's physics —
and Helmholtz, most terrible Helmholtz,
he has thoroughly demolished and confounded!

Answer:

Nothing at all, nothing at all — he knows not
one whit, one cowrie-shell's worth, of science —
only, with his imagination and his long tongue,
he goes running about, to and fro.

Notes:

- This is Tagore in pure satirical mode — a register very different from the devotional poems around it, and much harder to translate because the humor depends on very local targets: British trading-house names (Mackay & Co., Mackinnon Mackenzie), the fashionable "brown sahib," and a fraudulent pandit dressing up Hinduism in pseudo-science. I've kept the proper names as-is rather than substituting equivalents, trusting the surrounding lines to carry the joke.

- কড়ামূর্তি (lit. "a hard/stiff image, like a rigid statue") describing the Anglicized Bengali stiffening at his own countryman's approach — I rendered this as "stiffen, turn hard as stone" to keep the physical comedy of the image.
- বিদ্যাভূষণ is left as a proper name/title (a real honorific for Sanskrit scholars) rather than translated, since it functions here as the mock-honorific "Professor So-and-so."
- The refrain-like structure of naive question followed by a deflating "Answer" is the poem's whole engine — the pattern Tagore uses throughout his Kalpana-era satires — so I preserved the visual and rhythmic break between the two every time, even at the cost of a fully continuous verse-flow.

FANCY

(কাল্পনিক, 8 Ashwin 1304)

I have only sown my dreams upon the wind —
and so, in despair, I gathered flowers grown in air alone.
Like a shadow, the earth dissolves and fades away,
the boat of hope can find no shore to reach,
and the image formed by my mind floats, wandering, through the sky.

Nothing at all was ever bound by this knot of desire.
No one at all let themselves be caught by this far, far-reaching longing.
Sitting alone within my own mind,
what game did I play with the flame of fire?
At the day's end I see it has all turned to ash, in sighing and lament.
I have only sown my dreams upon the wind.

Notes:

- আকাশকুসুম — literally "sky-flower," a classical Sanskrit-derived idiom for something that by definition cannot exist (like "a hare's horn"), used to mean a pure fantasy. "Flowers grown in air alone" tries to preserve the impossible, self-contradicting image rather than translating it flatly as "castles in the air."
- মানসপ্রতিমা ("the image formed by the mind") — I kept this literal rather than rendering it as "imagined image" or similar, since the compound itself is doing the poem's central work: a প্রতিমা (idol/image, the same word used for a worshipped deity's image) made only of মানস (mind) — a false god built of nothing but longing.

UNGRATEFUL GRIEF

(কৃতঘ্ন শোক, Kartik 1326)

At dawn, she took her leave.

My mind sat down to explain to me: "It is all illusion."

I said, angrily: "Why, here on the table is her sewing-box, on the roof the flower-pots, on the bed her hand-fan with her name written on it — all of it is real, all of it is true."

My mind said, "Still — think it over —"

I said: "Be quiet, you. Look there — that storybook, with a hairpin marking its middle page, not yet finished being read; if this too is illusion, then how did that illusion become greater than this one?"

My mind fell silent. A friend came and said: "What is good is true, and that never departs; the whole world keeps it strung like a jewel upon its breast, in a necklace."

I said, angrily: "How do you know that? Was the body not good? Then where has that body gone?"

Just as a small child, in anger, strikes his own mother, so I began to strike out at everything in the world that had ever been my refuge. I said: "The world is a betrayer!"

Suddenly I started. It seemed someone said: "Ungrateful one!"

Outside the window I see, behind the casuarina tree, the third-day moon rising, as if it were the hide-and-seek of her own laughter, the one who has gone. From within the star-scattered darkness came a reproach: "Was it a deception, then,

when I let myself be caught and held — and is it this, this mere passing behind a veil, that you believe in so fiercely?"

Notes:

- This is a prose poem, one of Tagore's rarer forms, and its power lies in its plainness — I resisted any impulse to add lyricism the original doesn't have. The unadorned, almost domestic details (a sewing box, a hairpin left in a book) are the poem's real argument against abstraction, and they need to stay unadorned in English too.
- মায়্যা — "illusion," but with the full Vedantic weight of māyā, the veil the world wears; I kept the plain word "illusion" since the poem itself is staging an argument between that philosophical abstraction and stubborn, concrete grief.
- The closing reproach turns on ফাঁকি (a trick, a cheat, a con) versus আড়াল (something merely hidden, obscured behind a screen) — the dead beloved's voice asks whether love itself was a "ফাঁকি" or only an "আড়াল." I rendered these as "deception" and "mere passing behind a veil" to keep that distinction, which is the emotional crux of the whole piece.

A CHAITRA NIGHT

(চৈত্ররজনী)

Tonight, this mad, honeyed night, O
moon of the Chaitra midnight!
What do you see, gazing upon
this vast earth, sitting all alone,
O moon of the Chaitra midnight!

By how many riverbanks, in how many temples,
beneath how many windows —
how much whispering, how much heart's understanding,
how many pleadings, in how many guises!

Slipping in through the shelter
of branches, of doors, of windows,
how much joy and sorrow, how much mirth
you watch, sitting there alone,
O moon of the Chaitra midnight!

Look upon me too — there is no one, nowhere —
on the empty rooftop
the night-wind weeps.
Just like you, alone, by myself,

I sit here, gazing on,
O moon of the Chaitra midnight!

Notes:

- Chaitra is the last month of the Bengali calendar (mid-March to mid-April) — the very edge of spring, traditionally associated with restlessness and unfulfilled longing in Bengali poetry, a season charged the way "April" is in English verse but more specifically erotic. I kept "Chaitra" untranslated rather than substituting "spring," since the specific month carries a cultural charge no single English season quite matches.

- উন্মাদ মধুনিশি ("mad, honeyed night") — I kept both adjectives rather than picking one, since the pairing of "mad" (unmāda) and "honeyed" (madhu) is exactly the poem's tension: a night saturated with sweetness that borders on delirium.

- The poem's structure — three stanzas of the moon witnessing others' love, then a final turn to the speaker's own solitude — pivots hardest on that final "Look upon me too," which I set apart as its own short clause to mark the turn.

THE THIEF'S FIFTY VERSES

(চৌরপঞ্চাশিকা)

(The title alludes to Chaurapanchashika, the classical Sanskrit poem attributed to Bilhana, in which a poet condemned to death for loving a princess recites fifty verses of memory on his way to execution. Tagore addresses that legendary poet directly.)

O beautiful thief,
your learning was the golden-champak garland
of some evening, long gone by.

How many springs have passed away, alas,
how many poets today sing how many songs,
where is the princess now, upon her eternal bed,
O beautiful thief —
no song any longer breaks
her endless spell of sleep.

O beautiful thief,
how long ago was it, that morning
when your night of love turned to dawn!

When the lamp's flame went out in your bridal chamber
is nowhere written down,

the tender vine of love's caress has fallen and withered,
O beautiful thief —
the once-tight embrace of young love
has long grown slack and loose.

Yet, beautiful thief,
having lost even to death, weeping, wandering still,
go your fifty verses.

Fifty times over, turning, returning,
circling round and round the name of Vidya,
tearing at the heart's core with sharp anguish,
O beautiful thief —
age after age they die weeping,
brimming with foolish, helpless passion.

O beautiful thief,
unknowing are they, deaf are they,
utterly blind are they.

They neither see nor hear who comes or goes,
they do not even know what it is they long for,
they only sing, in a single tune, a single name,
O beautiful thief —

not knowing, not understanding, in futile pain
they let fall their tears.

O beautiful thief,
hearing your fifty songs, all bound to one same tune,
it seems to me —

as if, reared in secret within the palace,
nurtured on the princess's tender love,
sitting upon your breast they had learned their song,
O beautiful thief —
tame parrots and mynahs, sweet of throat,
as if fifty pairs of them.

O beautiful thief,
in the golden cage of rhythm
that you yourself composed, they are held captive.

They see nothing at all around them,
only sing, forever, again and again,
before the eternal door of your two beds,
O beautiful thief —
today, in both your two pairs of eyes,
lies an endless spell of sleep.

Notes:

- সুন্দর চোর ("beautiful thief") refers to Bilhana, who "stole" the love of a king's daughter — I kept "thief" rather than softening it to "lover," since Tagore is deliberately keeping the transgressive frame of the legend alive throughout.
- বিদ্যা is both the princess's proper name in the legend and the Sanskrit word for "knowledge/learning" — the pun is untranslatable, so I've simply kept it as her name, "Vidya," trusting readers to feel the doubling without spelling it out.
- The poem's real subject, emerging in its final third, is a meta-poetic irony: Bilhana's fifty verses have outlived and outlasted the love that inspired them, becoming a "golden cage" that traps later readers who weep over words without understanding what they mean — poetry surviving, and in a sense betraying, the passion that made it. I tried to let that turn land with "golden cage of rhythm" as the poem's hinge phrase.

TO JAGADISH CHANDRA BOSE

(জগদীশচন্দ্র বসু, 4 Shraban 1304)

To the beloved western temple of the Goddess of Science,
on that far distant ocean shore,
O friend, you have gone; and the garland of victory,
brought back from there,
you have gently placed upon the shame-bowed head
of your poor, humble mother.

In that foreign land, brilliant and crowned with glory,
in the assembly of scholars,
much acclaim, in many a voice,
you have heard, with honor.
That sound, in a deep and solemn resonance, spreads on every side,
crossing over the ocean.

Today your mother sends, tear-drenched,
her word of blessing,
unknown, unrecognized, before the assembly of the world,
through a poet's voice, O brother!
That word will enter only into your own heart,
in your mother's faint, small voice.

Notes:

- This is a dedicatory poem to Jagadish Chandra Bose, the pioneering Bengali physicist and biologist, on the occasion of his being honored abroad. "The Goddess of Science" (বিজ্ঞানলক্ষ্মী, literally "Lakshmi of Science") is Tagore's own coinage, casting Western scientific recognition as a temple of the goddess of fortune and learning — I kept it capitalized and titled to preserve that invented-deity quality.
- "Your poor, humble mother" (দীনহীনা জননী) is India herself, echoed from the same maternal-nation imagery as in "Hope" above — colonized India, "shame-bowed," finding a moment of pride through her son's achievement abroad.
- The poem deliberately shrinks in scale from public triumph (learned assemblies, applause crossing oceans) to something intensely private in its last lines — a mother's "faint, small voice" that only the son himself can hear. I kept the closing image as quiet and understated as the Bengali, resisting any temptation to swell it rhetorically.

BIRTHDAY SONG

(জন্মদিনের গান)

From fear, into your fearless refuge,
grant me a new birth, oh!
From poverty into imperishable wealth,
from doubt into the house of truth,
from inertia into new-born life,
grant me a new birth, oh!

From my own will, O Lord,
into the midst of your will —
from my own self-interest, O Lord,
into your work of grace —
from the many, into the bond of the One,
from joy and sorrow, into the lap of peace,
from myself, O Lord, into you, take me —
grant me a new birth, oh!

Notes:

- This short hymn is built almost entirely on paired হইতে... মাঝে/-এ constructions ("from X, into Y") — a rhetorical scaffold close to litany or prayer-response. I kept that exact "from... into..." repetition in English throughout, since the incantatory structure carries as much of the poem's meaning as its individual images do.

- অক্ষয় ধনে ("into imperishable wealth") contrasts with দীনতা ("poverty/lowliness") — a favorite Tagore opposition between worldly lack and a spiritual abundance that cannot decay; I kept "imperishable" rather than "eternal" to preserve the sense of wealth specifically immune to decay, which is what অক্ষয় denotes.

- Despite the title, there's nothing occasional or celebratory in the Western sense of a "birthday poem" — জন্ম here means spiritual rebirth, not the anniversary of physical birth, closer to being "born again." The title's simplicity is worth preserving as-is rather than expanding it into something like "A Prayer for Rebirth," since the

plainness of "Birthday Song" against the poem's spiritual intensity is itself part of Tagore's gesture.

THE INVENTION OF SHOES

(জুতা-আবিষ্কার)

Said King Hobu, "Listen, O Gobu Ray,
last night I lay awake and thought it through —
why must this filthy dust come to cling to my feet
merely from setting foot upon the earth!
All you do is draw your wages and divide them,
none of you pay the slightest heed to the king's affairs.
My own earth dirties me, its very king!
What monstrous disorder is this, in my own kingdom!
See that this is remedied at once,
or none of you shall be spared."

Hearing this, Gobu turned pale as death in thought,
in dreadful terror sweat broke out over his body.
The pandits' faces turned the colour of ash,
the ministers could find no sleep at night.
In the kitchens no pot was set to boil,
weeping and wailing filled every household,
and drenching his grey beard with tears,
Gobu spoke at Hobu's very feet:
"If no dust is ever again to touch your feet,
by what means, then, shall we ever obtain the dust of your feet!"

Hearing this, the king swayed to and fro in thought,
and said at last, "What you say is indeed true —
but first, banish the dust entirely,
and think about the doctrine of foot-dust afterward.
If, for want of dust, you cannot obtain the dust of my feet,
then all of you are drawing your salaries falsely —
why else have I kept so many
titled, learned, scientific servants in my pay?
See to the first task first,

and think of what comes after, later still."

Seeing only darkness ahead, hearing the king's words,
the minister carefully gathered together
every learned and skillful person there was,
every engineer, at home and abroad.
They all sat down, spectacles fixed firmly on their noses,
and used up nineteen barrels of snuff in their thinking.
After much deliberation they said, "But if all the earth is gone,
then where, pray, will the crops be grown?"
Said the king, "If that cannot be managed,
then what use are you, my learned men, at all?"

Together they took counsel, and settled at last
on buying seventeen and a half lakh brooms.
Under the fury of their sweeping, the dust of the roads
rose up and filled the king's own face and breast.
No one could open their eyes for all the dust,
the sun itself lay hidden behind clouds of it.
People coughed themselves half to death in its fury,
the whole city vanished, swallowed up in dust.
Said the king, "In trying to be rid of dust,
we have filled the entire world with dust instead!"

Then off they rushed, in swarm after swarm,
twenty-one lakh water-carriers, water-skins on their hips.
In every pond and marsh, only mud was left,
in the river's waters no boat could sail at all.
The creatures of the water died for want of water,
the creatures of the land struggled about, half-swimming;
all commerce sank down, mired in the mud,
the whole country was laid waste with colds and fever.
Said the king, "What a pack of asses —
in killing off the dust, they have turned it all to mud!"

Once again they were all called into council;
once more the wise and skillful men sat down —
their heads spun, their eyes swam with sparks,
for still, alas, no end to the dust could be found.
One said, "Let us cover the earth with matting,
we shall spread out carpets and put a stop to the dust."
Another said, "Keep the king indoors instead,
let there be no gap or crevice left anywhere.
If he never sets his foot into the dust,
then no dust will ever touch his feet at all."

Said the king, "That is a sound idea indeed,
but a doubt has arisen in my mind —
for fear of dirt, my whole kingdom will fall to ruin
if I must stay shut up, day and night, indoors."
Then all said, "Let us call for a tanner, then,
and have him wrap the whole earth round in leather.
With the dusty earth hidden away in a leather sack,
the great king's great glory shall stand secure forever."
And all agreed, "This can be done with ease,
if only a sufficiently skilled tanner can be found."

The king's messengers ran here and there,
everyone dropped their work and rushed about.
Nowhere could a sufficiently skilled tanner be found,
nor leather enough, of the proper sort, could be got.
Then, slowly, the elder of the tanners' guild
came forward, and said, smiling a little,
"If I may be permitted to speak,
there is an easy way this wish might be fulfilled.
Cover only your own two feet instead —
then there will be no need to cover the whole earth at all."

Said the king, "Could such a simple thing be true,
when the whole country nearly died from thinking on it!"

The minister said, "Impale the fellow on a stake,
and shut him up, locked away in prison!"
But the old man, sitting there at the king's very feet,
covered the king's feet in a wrapping of leather.

The minister said, "I too had half a mind
to wonder how the rascal worked it out."

And from that day on, the wearing of shoes began —
Gobu was saved, and the whole earth was spared.

Notes:

- Hobu and Gobu are nonsense-comedy names — light, sing-song sounds in the tradition of Bengali folk-tale kings and their hapless ministers, closer in spirit to "King Cole and his fiddler" than to any real title. I left them untranslated rather than inventing English equivalents, since the poem's tone depends on their sheer silliness.

- পদধূলি ("the dust of the feet") is the pivot of the whole comedy: touching or receiving the dust from a revered person's feet is a real gesture of blessing in Bengali custom. Gobu's tearful complaint — "how shall we get the dust of your feet, if you'll have no dust on them at all?" — reads as sincere devotion and self-interested absurdity at once, and that double meaning is the joke, so I kept the literal phrase rather than translating around it.

- লক্ষ (lakh = 100,000) — I kept the Indian numbering term ("seventeen and a half lakh brooms," "twenty-one lakh water-carriers") rather than converting to millions, since the sheer, deadpan specificity of the numbers is part of the comic bureaucratic excess.

- The poem is Tagore in full nonsense-verse mode — nearer to Edward Lear or to Sukumar Ray's absurdist verse than to his devotional lyrics — built on a folk-tale structure of escalating, catastrophic overcorrection (dust → sweeping → dust storms → flooding → mud and plague → carpeting the earth → leathering the

earth) before the obvious answer arrives. I aimed for that same deadpan comic momentum in English, letting the logic run itself into the ground.

ON A STORMY DAY

(ঝড়ের দিনে, 1306)

Today, in this restless month of Ashwin,
in this wild, cloud-covered, evil day,
over the fields of ripening rice the wind has risen wild and mad —
how will you find your way, knowing the path,
today, in this wild and evil day?

Do you not see, O bold one,
the flickering, glimmering flame of lightning!
Think it over in your mind, then — will it stay bound, in this storm,
the shefali-garland in your braided hair?
Think it over, O bold one!

In such a tempest as today's,
does anyone tie anklet-bells to their feet?
If the rain today should wash away
the blue border of your sari,
will you go, in shame, along the village road,
in such a tempest as today's?

O restless one, listen, hear me —
is some door left open, somewhere?

At the end of this winding path, where the field merges into cloud,
is anyone still sitting there, waiting, even now,
in this storm — listen, oh, listen.

If a lamp is lit today at the door,
will it not go out, again and again?
If a flute plays today, will its song not be swept away,
lost in the endless dark of Ashwin,
in the storm's gusts, again and again?

If the clouds rumble low and deep,
and your limbs tremble in mid-dance,
at whom will you feel anger, on whom will you lay the blame,
if your breast should flutter, quick with fear,
when the clouds rumble low and deep?

If you meant to go, did it not occur to you —
why did you not call and take me along?
I was only sitting there, beside the road, at my own door,
lost in absent thought, all alone.
Why did you not call and take me along?

I know not when the hours struck and passed,
there was no work at all for me today.

No one came home, the whole day the house stood empty,
and the trees have wailed and lamented all day long.

There was no work at all for me today.

However furiously the storm might roar,
however thick the clouds that veiled the sky,
however endless the darkened road might stretch through the night,
I would have felt no fear at all —
however furiously the storm roared.

At the very flash and flicker of the lightning
this breast of mine would dance, keeping time to it.
My shawl would fly out like an eager, upturned wing,
and I would merge into the sky, into the underworld itself,
at the very flash and flicker of the lightning.

You and I together —
what a wild and terrible journey that would have been.
Your anklets today would have rung out amid the cataclysm,
the lightning would have struck against our very eyes —
our journey would have been mad, and terrible.

Why do you go today, all alone?

Why have you tied small bells about your feet?

On this evil day, for what reason has there come to your mind
some forgotten tale out of spring?
Where do you go today, all alone?

Notes:

- The poem's voice is deliberately ambiguous — it isn't clear whether the speaker is a living companion left behind, or something closer to a ghost or a memory, addressing a woman who no longer hears him. I preserved that ambiguity rather than resolving it; the plaintive, unanswered "why did you not call me" reads very differently depending on which you assume, and Tagore leaves it open.
- সাহসিকা / উতলা — "the bold one" / "the restless one" — both feminine forms used as direct address rather than a name, a common device in Tagore's lyrics that lets the addressee remain both intimate and unnamed. I kept them as epithets rather than inventing a name.
- কিস্কিনী and নৃপুৰ both refer to ornamental ankle-bells — I varied the English between "anklet-bells" and "anklets" for rhythm, though the Bengali is using near-synonyms for the same image throughout, reinforcing the obsessive circling quality of the speaker's memory.
- The poem's final stanzas turn from present tense into a conditional/subjunctive mood ("what a journey that would have been") — a shift from watching to imagining a shared storm that never happened, which I marked clearly in English to preserve the poem's central ache: not fear of the storm, but grief at being left out of it.

HARD TIMES

(দুঃসময়)

(An extended address to a bird — read as an apostrophe to the soul, or to courage itself, facing the dark.)

Though evening comes on, slow and faint,
though every song has fallen silent, at some unseen sign,
though there is no companion in the endless sky,
though weariness has come down to settle in your limbs,
though a great foreboding murmurs its silent spell,
and every quarter of the horizon lies veiled and hidden —
yet, bird — O my bird —
do not, blindly, fold your wings just yet.

This is not the murmuring rustle of the forest's leaves,
this is the sea itself, swelling with a python's roar;
this is no grove tinted with jasmine blossom,
this is a surge of foam, swaying in restless, babbling waves.
Where now is that shore, heaped high with flowers and leaves,
where now that nest, where that sheltering branch —
yet, bird — O my bird —
do not, blindly, fold your wings just yet.

Still ahead lies a long, unending night,
the dawn sleeps on, far off, beyond the western hills;
the whole universe, holding its very breath,
sits still upon its seat, counting the hours out, alone;
only now has appeared, swimming up through the shoreless dark,
far off on the horizon, a thin and crooked moon —
O bird, O my bird,
do not, blindly, fold your wings just yet.

High above, the stars, stretching out their fingers,

make their silent signs, gazing steadily toward you;
 below, restless death, deep and welling up,
 surges toward you in a hundred rushing waves;
 from a shore far, far away, someone calls, hands cupped in prayer,
 in a voice steeped in sorrowful pleading — "Come, come" —
 O bird, O my bird,
 do not, blindly, fold your wings just yet.

There is no fear now, no bond of tenderness or attachment left;
 there is no hope now — hope is only an empty, false deceit.
 There is no speech now, no use in sitting down to weep;
 there is no home now, no bed of flowers to be made.
 There is only the wing, only the vast courtyard of the sky,
 painted with a thick darkness that has lost all sense of dawn —
 O bird, O my bird,
 do not, blindly, fold your wings just yet.

Notes:

- বিহঙ্গ ("bird") is addressed throughout with the tender, urgent মোর ("my") — "my bird" — which I kept exactly, since the whole poem's force rests on this being spoken to something intimate and endangered, not a bird observed from outside.
- The poem's central pivot is a series of contradictions — "this is not the rustle of leaves, this is the sea's python-roar" — each stanza reframing what looked like a survivable hardship as something closer to cosmic dissolution. I kept these as flat contradictions ("This is not X, this is Y") rather than softening them into comparison, since the sudden scale-shift from forest to ocean, from grove to abyss, is the engine of the poem's mounting dread.
- The next-to-last stanza's repeated নাই ("there is no...") strips away every comfort one by one — fear, hope, speech, home — until only "the wing" and "the sky" remain. I preserved this litany structure exactly, since its stark, incantatory bareness is doing work no paraphrase can replace.

4. New Parting

Seeing the deep, dark blue-green of the sky,
I remembered eyes, kohl-lined and moist with tears —
 lips touched with tender sorrow,
 a face traced with the ache of pleading,
 a silent, steady gaze
 at the hour of parting —
seeing the deep, dark blue-green of the sky.

The rain falls, pattering down, the lightning strikes,
the wind runs wild through the forest in a mad song.
 Somewhere within the folded petals of my heart
 a pain blossoms open,
 whose memory rings out
 in some corner of my breast —
seeing the deep, dark blue-green of the sky!

- Tagore marks this as written to Raga Malhar — the classical Hindustani raga specifically associated with rain and the monsoon — which is worth knowing even though it can't be carried into an English text: the poem is, formally, a song, and its short, cyclical structure (returning always to "seeing the deep, dark blue-green sky") mimics the way a raga's melodic phrase returns to its home note.

- পরানপুটে — literally "in the folded cup/bud of the heart" (পুটে suggesting a folded leaf-cup or a flower bud) — I rendered this as "the folded petals of my heart" to keep the image of something closed that a sudden pain forces open, rather than a flatter "deep in my heart."

CONSEQUENCE

(পরিণাম — set to Raga Bhairavi, Jhanptal, 1306)

I know, O Lord, that when the morning comes, your boat of mercy
will carry me to the shore of the ocean of this world.
I have no fear; singing your praise alone, I shall go on,
and I shall come to stand at your door of immortality.

I know, O Lord, that age after age, your arms encircling me,
you have kept me within your boundless world.
You have given me birth, from one light into another light,
you have carried me, from one life into a new life again.

I know, O Lord, that in virtue and in sin alike, my heart forever
lies open before your very eyes.
Your hand remains in mine, day and night together,
on every path and every wrong turning, in joy and in sorrow both.

I know, I know, that my life shall never be in vain,
you will never cast it down into the sea of the fear of destruction —
such a day will come when you yourself, filled with mercy,
will lift it up, gently, as one lifts a flower!

Notes:

- ভবসাগর ("the ocean of worldly existence") is a standard term for samsara — the sea of birth, death, and rebirth one must cross. "Ocean of this world" tries to keep both the literal image and the philosophical weight without requiring a footnote.
- অমৃত-দুয়ার ("door of nectar/immortality") — amrita is the nectar of the gods, granting immortality; I kept "door of immortality" as the closest single English phrase, though it loses the specific mythic flavor of nectar itself.
- The poem's repeated জানি হে ("I know, O [Lord]") functions almost as a sung refrain of certainty pushing back against fear — I preserved it at the head of every stanza rather than varying it, since the plainness and repetition are themselves an act of faith in the poem's own logic.

The Vendor Woman

(পসারিনী — Shilaidaha, boat, 25 Jyaishta 1304)

O vendor-woman, come, let me see
what it is you carry in your basket.
Such a weight — ah, how, how do you go on bearing it,
soft and pitiable, your body worn with weariness.
To what palace, in what far kingdom will you go, how much farther still,
in pursuit of what difficult, impossible desire?
Look ahead of you — the road has no end in sight,
and the burning sand strikes like arrows of fire.
Vendor-woman, heed my word, do not go on down that distant road,
stop here, just for a moment, and rest.

See here, this banyan tree, its roots bound round, shaded with branches,
a pond brimming to its very banks, its water clear as a crow's eye —
sloping down on every side, thick with soft young grass,
deep green, and smooth, and tender.
A stone ghat stands there, and not a living soul about,
a mango grove, thick and cool.
Let your buying and selling wait a while, O weary vendor-woman,
spread your garment out and rest, right here.

You shall wash your two aching feet in the water,
and string a garland of wildflowers to wear about your neck.
Carrying the scent of mango-blossom, soft and slow,
the breeze will lift and stir your loosened hair.
In the dove's call, in the cricket's cry, what secret spell will it whisper,
that your eyelids will close, drowsy, of their own accord.
If, setting your burden down upon the ground, you should slip into sleep,
and a sweet, languid drowsiness should steal over your limbs,
and if, forgetting yourself in slumber, your veil should slip and fall away,

you need have no fear at all of that, here.

And if evening should fall, and the sun go down to its setting,
and the road can no longer be seen across the empty field —
it will not matter that you never reached that far and distant palace,
it will not matter that you never reached the market of jewels.
Have no fear at all — my house stands nearby,
I shall go ahead of you and show you the way —
through the moonless, blind night, hold on to my hand,
if your heart should grow too greatly afraid.
I shall spread out, with my own hands, a bed white and soft as foam,
and light a lamp in the corner of the room —
and tomorrow, when the cuckoo wakes to the sound of the milking,
I myself shall come and wake you.

O vendor-woman,
at midday, everyone rests behind closed doors,
and burning sand flies up along the scorched road.
Stop here, go no further — set down the weight of your burden,
and place your basket in my hands.

Notes:

- পসারিনি is a female itinerant peddler carrying goods to sell, door to door or town to town — a specific figure of Bengali village life without a tidy English equivalent; "vendor-woman" is functional but flatter than the original's more textured social image.

- কাকচক্ষু জল ("water like a crow's eye") is a classical idiom for water so clear and still it resembles the small, bright, unblinking eye of a crow — I kept the image literally rather than substituting "crystal-clear," since the specificity of the comparison is characteristically Tagore.

- The poem reads as an invitation shading into gentle seduction — offered rest, a bath, a garland, a bed prepared "with my own hands" — and I let that warmth and mild eroticism stand as written rather than either sharpening or softening it; the tenderness and the desire are inseparable in the original.

THIRST

(পিয়াসী, 1304)

I asked for nothing at all.
I stood hidden in the shelter of the trees,
my eyes cast down.
Even then the drowsy red of dawn
still lingered, dim, in my eyes.
Even then the breeze still carried, wrapped within it,
the tears of the night's dew.
The scent of fresh grass rose up
on the soft morning wind;
you sat alone outside your cottage,
in the shade of the ashvattha tree,
your hands, fairer than fresh-churned butter,
milking the cow —
and I stood only there, sorrowful, lost in wonder,
entranced, watching.

I spoke not a single word.
In the bakul branches, I know not what bird
gave voice to what restless longing.
In the mango grove the buds had formed,
falling and scattering beside the path;
one by one, humming, a few
bees came flying by.
By the lakeside, the doors were opening
in the little Shiva temple;
a sannyasi sang his morning hymn
in a voice deep and calm.
With your pitcher held in your lap, sitting beneath the tree,
you went on milking —

and I, bearing only an empty vessel,
stood there, consumed with longing.

I did not go any nearer.

The restless wind, playing in your loosened hair,
did — who knows what, to it.

The temple bell was ringing then,
the sky was waking to itself,
and the earth looked up toward the heavens above,
begging the blessing of the gods.

Along the village path, in the light of morning,
the dust raised by cattle-hooves rose in the air;
their brimming pitchers bound about their hips,
the young wives of the village passed along.

Your bangles rang out, again and again,
and the milk rose up, foaming, in the pail —
and I, with thirsting eyes, stood in one corner,
my heart silently troubled.

Notes:

- The title পিয়াসী ("thirsting," feminine form) describes the speaker's own gaze — পিয়াসী নয়নে, "with thirsting eyes" — an unusual grammatical choice in which the adjective's gender doesn't necessarily fix the speaker's identity so much as it colors the eyes themselves; I translated the title simply as "Thirst" to keep that ambiguity rather than assigning a gender the poem itself keeps oblique.

- নবনবনীনিন্দিত — literally "shaming fresh butter" — a classical Sanskrit-style compound praising the fairness/softness of hands by claiming they outdo butter itself. I unpacked this into "fairer than fresh-churned butter" since a literal compound ("butter-shaming") would read as strange rather than complimentary in English.

- Each stanza is built from a triad of refusals — "I asked for nothing," "I spoke not a word," "I did not go any nearer" — framing the poem as a record of restraint rather than of action; everything that actually happens, happens only in the speaker's

watching. I kept these three openings as close to identical in structure as English allows, since the poem's ache comes from what the speaker does not do.

DESIRE FULFILLED

(পূর্ণকাম — Kirtan style)

I had given my heart to the world; you yourself
have taken that heart away from it!
I had asked for sorrow, calling it happiness; you
have given me happiness, calling it sorrow!
This heart of mine, that lay scattered in a hundred pieces
chasing after a hundred selfish desires —
how did you gather it up again,
and bind it fast in the bond of devotion!

Crying "happiness, happiness," you sent me searching
from door to door, in how many directions, how many ways!
Now, at last, you have made me understand
just how truly you were mine all along.
By what path does your mercy lead,
and where does it carry each of us!
Suddenly, opening my eyes, I saw
that you had brought me to your very own door!

Notes:

- Marked as কীর্তন — a devotional song genre built for communal, ecstatic singing, often centered on divine love expressed in the vocabulary of human romance. I kept the direct, breathless address to "you" throughout, since kirtan songs characteristically blur devotional and romantic language on purpose.
- The poem turns on a series of exact inversions — sorrow-called-happiness, happiness-called-sorrow — that I preserved as mirrored pairs rather than resolving into a single clearer statement, since the paradox (that what felt like loss was gift, and what felt like gift was loss) is the poem's whole theological point.
- ভক্তিবান্ধনে ("in the bond of devotion") — I kept "bond," with its connotation of both binding and belonging, rather than a softer word like "embrace," since বাঁধন specifically means something tied or fastened — the heart isn't just held, it's deliberately, gratefully bound.

REVELATION

(প্রকাশ, 1304)

A thousand thousand years passed by, and no one spoke a word of it —
the bee returned again and again to the madhavi bower, the vine wound round the tree;
the chakori bird flew, gazing up at the moon, lightning played among the clouds,
the river ran on, swift, searching everywhere for the sea it could not find;
as the sun rose in the morning sky the lotus opened its eyes,
and no sooner had the young Ashadh month arrived than the chatak bird rose up,
calling —
so much secret union of heart with heart exists, in world after world,
yet how did that secret first come to be revealed, and to whom!

I know not in what corner of the world that poet lived, day and night,
merged as one with the vines and leaves, the moon, the clouds!
He was silent as a flower, hidden away behind his own mind,
he knew how to gaze as the moon gazes, his eyes steeped in dream;
he could wander, like the wind, on some unseen chariot of desire,
along an aimless road of travel, free of longing, striving, or pain —
like a cloud he knew how to gather his own shadow deep within himself,
and, sitting alone in his corner, weave a thick and grave enchantment.

Neither in heaven nor on earth did anyone imagine there was someone seeking
something there —
no one suspected, even for a moment, that he understood anything at all.
And so all of Nature kept no guard against him,
again and again her veil slipped loose, in feeling, in gesture, in song;
if ever the window of her bridal chamber happened to swing open,
seeing him seated there, beside the door, she would still not think to shut it —
if he ever lifted his eyes to gaze toward her secret resting-place,
no one would think to fling flower-dust to put out the lamp beside her pillow.

When the moon, eye to eye, drank in the water-lily's love,
she would see him there and think, smiling, "This man knows nothing of the
language of eyes."

When the lotus opened her heart wide, gazing toward the sun,
she thought, "This one understands nothing of what a flower's fragrance means."
When the lightning fled, in one swift, startled instant, kissing the clouds,
it thought, "How could this madman ever understand what lies in the speed of fire!"
Trembling upon the mango branch, the malati-vine thought to itself,
"Only I, and the tree, know the secret language of these murmuring leaves."

Once, on a Falgun evening, as the sun was taking his leave,
and in the eastern sky the full moon was slowly rising;
some woman of the town, on the pretense of watering a tree,
caught her sari's end on a branch, on purpose, and glanced back over her shoulder;
some bold girl swung upon a swing, flashing lightning-bright laughter,
unwilling to come down, unwilling to stop, heedless of any word of caution;
some enchantress fed a fawn its grass, absorbed, single-minded,
and though she knew well who stood beside her, would not turn even the corner
of her eye toward him —

At that very moment, the poet rose up and sang: "Listen, men and women, all of
you —

for how long a time, what a mystery has been unfolding through the whole of
creation!

Who among you ever dreamed, ever knew, that gazing up at the sky's moon,
the pale-cheeked water-lily lay all night long, sleepless, in her eyes!

When the sun rises over the eastern hills and the lotus blooms upon the water —
by what secret trick has that truth lain hidden, printed and sealed, all this while!
And all the spells the bee has whispered into the ear of the young malati-blossom
—

not one of all our greatest scholars ever understood their meaning!"

Hearing this, the sun went down to his setting, filling the whole sky with shame,
hearing this, the moon stopped short and hid himself behind the forest's edge.

Hearing it, the lotus on the lake at once shut her eyes tight, in haste —
the south wind had already told her: everything, everything, has now been found out.

Hearing it, the vine cried "shame, shame!" and shook her branches, shivering all over;

she thought, "Who knows what else this chatterer will go about proclaiming now!"

The bee said, in an assembly of jasmine flowers, "The one who seemed as good as dumb —

see how his mouth has opened wide enough, when it comes to spreading others' secrets!"

Hearing this, men and women at once clapped their hands and burst out laughing —

each one, taking hold of the one they loved, stood there, side by side, in rows.

"It is proven!" "It is proven!" they all cried, laughing,

"Not one single word of what has been said was ever invented or false."

Binding arm in arm, gazing eye into eye, they said,

"In heaven, in the underworld, on this mortal earth, nothing remains secret anymore today."

Laughing, taking garlands in their hands, standing pressed close, side by side, they said,

"If all three worlds together have been found out and caught —
then where, after this, can you and I still hide!"

Alas, poet, alas — from that day on, Nature has grown wary and guarded —
she has drawn her veil close, wrapping it round her head and over her breast.

However many tricks I try today, however far and long I wander after the world,
never again does any new, secret word come to me, however I search.

Only in the humming of bees, the cooing of birds, in scent alone, a suspicion rises
in the mind

that some hidden word is blowing on the wind, from one wood to the next;

it seems as though some feeling lies brimming, hidden in light and shadow both —
alas, poet, alas, nothing at all falls, any longer, into our open hands.

Notes:

- This is, in effect, a myth Tagore invents about the origin of poetic difficulty: once, a poet lived so wholly merged with nature that he could perceive — and eventually sang aloud — every secret romance hidden within it (moon and lily, sun and lotus, bee and blossom). His public revelation embarrassed Nature into permanent secrecy, and every poet since has been locked out, left only with hints and suspicions instead of full knowledge. The final line — "nothing at all falls, any longer, into our open hands" — is Tagore situating his own poetic labor as living in the aftermath of that first poet's costly disclosure.

- চকোরী (the chakori) and চাতক (the chatak) are stock figures from Sanskrit and Bengali poetic convention: the chakori is a mythical bird believed to live on moonbeams, forever yearning toward a moon she can touch but never fully possess; the chatak supposedly drinks only fresh rainwater caught directly from the clouds, refusing all other water, and became a byword for single-minded, unappeasable longing. I kept both bird-names untranslated with minimal gloss, since English has no equivalent creature carrying the same ready-made symbolism.

- সহকার (a variety of mango tree) and মালতী (a fragrant night-blooming jasmine vine) form a classical Sanskrit-derived pairing — the tree and the vine that twines around it — used across centuries of Indian poetry as an image of romantic union. I translated them plainly as "mango branch" and "malati-vine" rather than substituting generic "tree" and "flower," since their specific, conventional pairing is exactly what lets the vine's closing line ("only I, and the tree, know...") land as a private joke among the flowers.

- The poem's long middle section, where sun, moon, lotus, lightning, and vine each privately congratulate themselves on their secrecy just before the poet's song exposes them all, is essentially comic — a fable of collective, blushing exposure — before the final stanza turns serious and elegiac. I tried to let that tonal shift happen exactly where the Beng979 does, without smoothing the poem's swing from playful gossip to genuine loss.

THE LOVE-QUESTION"

প্রণয়প্রশ্ন

Is this, then, all of it true,
O thou, my eternal devotee?
In the lightning-bright glow of my eyes
storm-clouds flash within your heart —
is this true?
My honeyed lips, red as a bride's
first blush of shyness,
O thou, my eternal devotee,
is this true?

Has the eternal flower of heaven bloomed within me?
Does the vina's ringing note sound wherever I set my foot?
Is this true?

Does the night's dew fall, having looked on me?
Does the thrill of morning light close round me?
Is this true?

Restless at the touch of my burning cheek,
does the breeze grow drunk as wine,
O thou, my eternal devotee?
Is this true?

Does day hide itself in darkness in my black tresses?
Is death's own bond tied fast within my two arms?
Is this true?

Does the whole world melt into the fold of my veil?
Does the universe fall silent at the sound of my voice?
Is this true?

Do I alone hold the three worlds within me?
Have I one who loves me, utterly?
O thou, my eternal devotee,
is this true?

Has your love, age after age, for my sake,
wandered wakeful from world to world?
Is this true?

In my words, my eyes, my lips, my curls of hair,
did you find, in a single instant, the rest of all your lifetimes?
Is this true?

On my delicate brow is written
the very secret of the infinite,
O thou, my eternal devotee —
is this true?

Translator's Notes

- চিরভক্ত (chirbhakta), "eternal devotee." This is the poem's whole engine. Bhakta is a devotee in the specifically religious sense — a worshipper of a god — so the lover here is cast, from the very first line, as a worshipper rather than a suitor, and the woman speaking is cast, whether she wants it or not, as something closer to a deity. I let the "O thou" of the refrain carry that religious weight, while keeping the surrounding lines in plain English, since the poem's irony depends on the gap between her ordinary self-description (lips, cheek, hair) and the cosmic claims he apparently makes about her.

- চিরমন্দার (chirmandar). Mandara is the coral tree of Indra's heaven, one of the five wish-fulfilling trees of paradise. There is no English flower with equivalent mythic freight, so I translated the idea — "the eternal flower of heaven" — rather than transliterating a name that would mean nothing to an English reader.

- অঞ্চল (anchal). The loose, trailing end of a sari, often used by Bengali poets as a synecdoche for shelter, embrace, or the whole feminine presence. "The fold of my veil" tries to keep both the physical garment and the enveloping gesture.
- The poem is a string of questions with no answers — she never confirms or denies any of it. I kept every line as a genuine question in English, resisting the temptation to let any of them harden into statement, because the entire poem lives in that suspended, half-teasing uncertainty.

THE SUPPLIANT

প্রার্থী

I have come only to ask for a garland —
one poured with the fresh dew of your new morning.

Wrapped in shyness, how many roses,
how many proud oleanders,
how many blossoms have opened
to light up your garden!
I have come only to ask for a garland.

The pure, autumn-cool breeze
moves through your hair,
the young rays of dawn
have come to rest upon your lips.

From the edge of your garment, along the forest path,
flowers keep falling, scattering —
so much jasmine, so much shefali,
have filled your basket.
I have come only to ask for a garland.

Translator's Notes

- রাগ কালাংড়া (Kalangra). This is one of several poems in the sequence carrying a raga heading — a melodic mode it was written to be sung in. I have kept these headings as Tagore gave them; they signal that these are songs first, poems on the page second, and something of their shortness and refrain-heavy shape only makes sense with that in mind.

- করবী (korobi), "oleander." Common in Bengali gardens and poetry alike for its showy, faintly dangerous beauty (the plant is toxic) — "proud oleander" tries to keep a little of that edge rather than flattening it to a generic "flower."

- শেফালি (shefali, also shiuli). A small white night-flowering jasmine (*Nyctanthes arbor-tristis*) that blooms in the dark and drops its blossoms whole at dawn — it is the flower of Bengali autumn, carrying an association with fleeting beauty that no English flower shares. I left it untransliterated on the page but glossed it here rather than substitute "jasmine," which the poem also uses separately for kunda.
- The addressee of this poem is deliberately unresolved in the Bengali — is it a woman, or the dawn/autumn itself personified as one? I preserved that ambiguity rather than choosing for the reader.

LAKSHMI OF BENGAL

বঙ্গলক্ষ্মী

In the midst of your fields, on your riverbanks,
in a thousand cottages ringed by mango groves,
in cowsheds loud with milking, in the shade of the banyan,
at the twelve temples on the Ganges' stone ghat,
O thou ever-blessing Lakshmi, O mother of Bengal,
you go about your countless tasks yourself,
day and night, with a smiling face.

In this world of nations
your son's hand has no part in any work,
he does not even know the news of it. You alone, mother,
keep watch, night and day, at his sleeping pillow,
fanning him with a sandal breeze. You remain, mother, forgetting
that from your own gracious body they have unclasped, one by one,
the bangle of good fortune from your hand,
the jewel that once adorned the parting of your hair,
your very glory — and bound it, kept it
pawned to merchants of some far and foreign land.

Ever intent on your daily labor, O motherland,
at dawn you make the flowers of worship open,
at noon you spread wide your leafy mantle
to hold back the sun's heat; and when night falls,
your rivers, from every side,
sing on without end their lullabies,
holding the weary villages in a hundred arms.

In this brief autumn-noon leisure, today,
having given a moment's rest to your sacred household toil,
amid the swaying blossoms of early winter,

in the still hour murmurous with doves,
you sit, O mother, your smiling lips
holding a wordless contentment; your gentle eyes,
in one patient, tranquil gaze across every quarter,
scatter forth a forgiving blessing.
Seeing that self-forgetting, love-drenched,
sweet, unmoving, auspicious image,
the poet bows his head, and his eyes fill with tears.

Translator's Notes

- লক্ষ্মী (Lakshmi). Goddess of fortune, abundance, and the well-run household — and, crucially, the figure every Bengali mother is affectionately compared to. Tagore is doing both at once: Bengal is Lakshmi, and Lakshmi is simply what a devoted mother looks like. I kept the name untranslated rather than reaching for "Fortune" or "Prosperity," which would lose the domestic warmth entirely.

- সীমন্তরতন (simanta-ratan), "the jewel of the hair-parting." This refers to a specific ornament worn by married Hindu women along the parting of the hair — part of the visible signature of a married woman's status and dignity. Its removal, in the poem, is not mere jewelry theft; it is the stripping of a wife's — and by extension a nation's — very married dignity, sold off to distant merchants. This is Tagore's coded picture of colonial economic drain, and I expanded the compound into a full descriptive phrase so an English reader can feel the loss rather than just read past an unfamiliar noun.

- The poem's real subtext — Bengal impoverished by trade with "বহুদূর বিদেশের বণিকের" (merchants of a far and foreign land) even as she goes on serving her oblivious "son" (the Bengali people, absorbed elsewhere) — is never stated outright. I kept it exactly as submerged as Tagore left it.

THE YEAR'S END

(Written in a storm, 30 Chaitra 1305)

বর্ষশেষ

Massed clouds from the northeast come rushing, blind with speed,
free of every barrier,
casting a deep, kohl-dark shadow over bamboo groves in far villages,
striking down long lines of rain.
The year draws to its close, the day comes to its end,
Chaitra departs —
the heart longs to sing the old, tired year's
very last song.

The field lies grey and dust-pale, the cattle raise their faces to the sky,
the farmer runs for shelter,
hurriedly furling sail, all the frightened boats on the river
come in to the bank.
In the west, through broken cloud, evening's tawny glow
reddens the eye —
through a sky torn open by lightning, flock after flock
of startled birds go winging away.

Strike, strike the vina's strings, a hard, ringing, clashing note,
raise the melody high,
let the heart, beneath merciless blows, come streaming, crashing down,
violent and abundant.
Run on, O song, life brimming, like a storm, headlong upward
into the endless sky.
Let the withered, wasted, worn-out leaves be swept off, carried far away
on one great breath.

Mingling joy with dread, roaring in weeping and in triumph,
in a wild, wailing clamor,

binding on the storm's own anklet-bells, let the mad nor'wester's
dance begin.

With rhythm on rhythm, step on step, in the whirl and lash of her flying skirts,
let it be scattered, consumed to nothing —
whatever fruitless hoard the old year has gathered up,
like dust, like straw.

I have thrown the door wide open; whatever storms of rain the sky holds,
come, into my breast —
lift up, like a conch-shell, and blow one great blast
straight against my heart's own mouth.
Let a roar of triumph, piercing the very heavens, rise up
in one auspicious thunder,
waking in the wakeful mind a bare, unclothed, and cleansed,
hard contentment, like a sage's.

Let that full, deep-toned sound, plain and grave as a Vedic hymn, a Sama chant,
come forth in a single instant
from the whole of my inmost being, taking one unbroken shape.
Let there be in it no sorrow and no joy, no old smouldering regret,
no trembling, shame, or fear —
only the shout of triumph of a life newly bathed, upright, white, and free.

O New One, come thou, filling the whole sky
in mass upon mass —
spreading wide, blotting out all, in layer on layer, cluster on cluster,
a dense, dark heap.
From somewhere, all at once, for a single moment, veiling
every quarter, every horizon,
stay a while in your thick, gentle, black, terrible
darkness.

May your signal, as though from beneath a deep, hidden frown,
break forth in lightning,
may your music, through a hundred rifts torn open in the sky,

come roaring on the wind,
may your downpour, with a fierce and piercing force,
strike through and pierce all thirst —
may your peace bring on a sleeping, deep, dark, immensely grave,
and silent night.

This time you have not come on spring's slow, swaying wave,
kissing petals,
this time you have not come amid rustling coo and murmuring hum —
blessed, blessed are you.
Your chariot-wheels grinding, you have come like a conquering king,
proud and unafraid —
whatever you proclaimed in your thunder-tongue, understood or not understood
by me —
victory, victory to you!

O untamable one, O certain one, O new one, cruel and new,
naturally, effortlessly strong —
just as the fruit, shattering and scattering the withered petals on every side,
breaks out,
tearing, splitting open the old husk of leaf
into a shape never seen before,
so, with such strength, you have come, fully, into being —
I bow to thee.

I bow to thee, O terrible one, so gentle, so deep-green,
untiring, unfading!
Newborn, great hero, what is it you carry with you —
you yourself do not know.
Your banner flies — the sun's ray, escaping through a torn rift of cloud,
its cloud-edged line —
with joined palms I stand gazing upward, unable to read
what is written there.

O young prince, with a smiling face draw taut your bow

till it rings and sings,
piercing through the ribs of the breast, let a keen, trembling
note be felt within.

O boy-hero, lift high your great war-drum of victory,
sound out the call —
we will rise and stand, we will come running out,
we will give up our lives.

We will not look behind us, we will not heed bonds or weeping,
we will not look to any side,
we will not count the days or hours, we will not argue, we will not weigh —
wild wayfarers that we are.
In one instant we will drink, filling ourselves to the brim,
death's foaming madness —
casting off the hundred thousand humiliations and reproaches
of this weary, withered life.

Only the shame of merely getting through the days, merely holding on to life,
a whole basket of humiliation,
night after night in the shuttered room, the small, dying flame
of a lamp streaked black with smoke,
the endless tug-of-war of profit and loss, the smallest broken fractions and shares,
the quarrels, the doubts —
I can bear no more, I can bear no more this life, broken into pieces,
wasting away hour by hour.

Set me down at the edge of that road
along which countless souls have travelled in terrible silence,
that I may look upon the vast, true shape
of ages upon ages.
Like a falcon, tear me suddenly free, carry me up
out of the mire,
bring me face to face with great death
in the light of the thunderbolt.

Afterward, cast me away, crush me, do with me as you will,
break my wings —
wherever it is you fling the plucked leaves, the fallen petals,
the shattered branches,
your momentary playthings, the leavings of your merciless
plunder and pillage —
there, throw me too, into that country of forgetting,
of endless dark.

Still, unresting, the rain falls on the new-sprouted cane fields;
along the hidden road of the clouds, from darkness into darkness,
the day has gone.
In the now-quiet storm, in the cricket's cry, in the earth's cool breathing fragrance,
at my open window,
I have finished the year's last song, and lifted it, cupped in both hands,
as an offering to the midnight sky.

Translator's Notes

- কালবৈশাখী (Kalbaishakhi), the "nor'wester." This is the specific, ferocious late-afternoon thunderstorm of pre-monsoon Bengal, violent and sudden, that has no real equivalent elsewhere — I named it directly ("the mad nor'wester") since it is a recognized enough term in South Asian English, rather than reaching for the more generic "storm."

- চিতা (chita), "funeral pyre." The poem's imagined self-immolation into the storm is deliberately morbid — this is not decorative imagery but the poem's actual wish: to be burned clean of the "old year's" accumulated smallness. I kept the pyre and ash language as blunt as the original.

- The poem's addressee shifts roughly halfway through — from a description of the storm to a direct, ecstatic address to it as "নূতন" (New One) and "ভীষণ" (terrible one). I marked that turn in English by shifting from third-person description into direct "thou/you" address exactly where Tagore does, letting the poem's own structure carry the escalation rather than smoothing it into one continuous register.

- হে নূতন...হে ভীষণ ("O New One... O terrible one"). The poem refuses to resolve whether the storm — standing in for the new year, for death, for a longed-for violent renewal — is friend or destroyer. I preserved that unresolved doubleness rather than picking a side for the reader.

Benediction of the Rains

বর্ষামঙ্গল

There she comes, there — in fierce and terrible joy,
in the eager rush of rain-washed earth-fragrance,
in cloud-borne majesty, the newly-young rains,
dark, grave, and brimming over.
At the deep thunder the blue forest shivers,
the restless peacock wanders, crying its wild call;
gladdening every heart,
in cloud-borne majesty comes the rain, drunk with itself.

Where are you, young women of the road,
village brides with eyes startled bright as lightning,
where is the maker of jasmine garlands, the favorite attendant,
where are you bound, you women hurrying to your trysts?
Come beneath the thick forest, robed in deepest blue,
let golden anklets ring out to graceful dancing,
bring the enchanting vina.
Where is the one who pines apart from her love — where are you bound tonight?

Bring the mridanga, the muraj drum, the sweet-voiced flute,
sound the conch, raise the joyful ululation, brides —
the rains have come, O newly-enamored one,
O sharer in a lover's happiness!
In the bower, you whose eyes brim with feeling,
write a new song on a leaf of birch-bark

in the raga Meghmalla.
The rains have come, O newly-enamored one!

Perfume your hair with ketaki pollen,
string oleander blossoms and wear them at your slender waist,
strew kadamba pollen across the bed.
Line your eyes with kohl.
With both your bangles ringing in rhythm,
set the household peacock dancing, counting out each beat,
your face smiling, opening like a flower —
strewing kadamba pollen across the flower-bed.

On this soft, wet day, dark with kohl-black cloud,
the helpless hours pass in a slow and languid spell;
moonless, starless, the night lies deep in darkness —
where are you now, women of the city?
Today the doors are shut, house after house,
the empty road weeps in the restless wind,
the bright lightning flashes.
On the empty bed, where does the city-woman lie awake!

The scent of jasmine comes on the wet breeze,
the frogs are calling in the dark tamal grove —
wake, my companion, do not forget this night,
tie the swing to the kadamba branch.
Flower-pollen will fall in shower after shower,
lip will find lip, curl will mingle with curl —
what can be set beside such joy!
On the kadamba branch, friend, tie the swing with a cord of flowers!

The rains have come, the young new rains have come,
filling the sky — the whole world's trust has come —
the forest paths sway, rustling in the wind,
every vine and creeper full of song.
Poets of a hundred ages, gathered together in the sky,

send ringing out, into the wild, wine-drunk wind,
the songs of a hundred ages.
The forest paths ring with a hundred hundred songs.

Translator's Notes

- অভিসারিকা (abhisarika). A stock figure of classical Sanskrit and Bengali poetry: a woman who goes out secretly, often through storm or darkness, to meet her lover. There is no single English word for this — "a woman bound for her tryst" is the closest I could manage without a footnote-length explanation inside the poem itself.

- মেঘমল্লার (Meghmallar). A raga traditionally associated with rain, said to be sung to summon the monsoon. I kept the name rather than translating it as "a rain-song," since it names a specific, still-performed musical mode, not a generic idea.

- কদম্ব (kadamba). A tree with round, orange, intensely fragrant blossoms that flower specifically with the monsoon, and that carry strong associations with Krishna in Vaishnav devotional and erotic poetry. It recurs three times in this poem and I kept the name each time rather than varying the translation.

- হুলুরব (hulurab), "ululation." The high, trilling cry Bengali and other South Asian women make at weddings and other auspicious moments — I used the closest available English term, though it inevitably loses the specifically festive, communal sound of the original.

- Unlike the other poems in this set, this one addresses a plural chorus of village women throughout ("তোরা," "সখী"), a folk, festival register rather than a solitary devotional one — which is why I kept it in contemporary "you" rather than extending the "thou" of the hymn-poems to it; an archaic register would have worked against its collective, singing-and-dancing energy.

SPRING

বসন্ত

Ten thousand years ago, O Spring, in that first Phalgun,
mad with a wild eagerness,
the very first day you flung open Eden's southern gate
and came walking down to earth,
you stood, all at once, in the courtyard of a human house,
dressed in yellow silk,
scattering, from your restless mantle, on a wind gone wild,
sprays of coral-blossom.
Men and women came running out in crowds, flinging their doors open,
carrying vina and flute —
mad with wild dancing, laughing, they struck at one another,
flinging showers of pollen.

Friend, in that far-off, newly-born first month of honey,
to the young earth
you brought flowers, steeping them in the molten gold
of the hot sun's rays —
that same old, that same eternal, ever-ancient
array of ever-new blossoms
you have gone on bringing, year after year — and with them, once again today,
you have filled your basket.
That is why those flowers carry, written into them,
the forgotten news of the world's most ancient days,
that is why their fragrance still carries the weary, lovely sweetness
of vanished ages, of lost worlds.

That is why today, out of the thick-flowering bower,
there rises, welling up,
the many-colored ache of youth from a hundred thousand days and nights,
tears, songs, and laughter.

In the garland I have strung today to offer you as a gift,
in petal after petal
is traced, in tears, the old, worn story of longing
of some nameless woman.
In the red, carefully-watered, newly-opened petals
of this rose,
countless histories of trembling, timid kisses
lie folded, still in bloom.

In my night of spring, the few words
that woke between our watching eyes —
your flowers, O Spring, that secret message they carried,
where have they taken it?
That champak, that bakul, that restless, startled jasmine
with its smiling, pale face,
that young tuberose, straining upward, eager with longing,
utterly playful —
across a few springs they read, all of them,
the poem of my youth,
resting throat to throat, they listened, between two breasts,
to the flute-song of desire.

Those few, supreme chapters of a wasted life,
O month of honey,
in the fragrance of your flowers, year after year, in sky, in water, on land,
will go on being told.
Strung into bakul, into champak, they will travel on
from age to age,
in spring after spring they will rise, restless, in bower after bower,
in the cuckoo's calling voice.
My grief, undying, O Spring, has stayed caught
in your rustling breath —
the fevered enchantment of youth has stayed, stained in blood-red sunlight,
in the evening sky of Chaitra.

Translator's Notes

- ফাল্গুন (Phalgun), চৈত্র (Chaitra). The last two months of the Bengali calendar year, roughly mid-February to mid-April — Phalgun is the traditional start of spring, Chaitra its fading, feverish end. The poem opens in one and closes in the other, tracing spring's whole arc, which is why I kept both as proper nouns rather than translating them both simply as "spring."

- চম্পক, বকুল, চামেলি, রজনীগন্ধা — champak, bakul, jasmine, tuberose. Each of these flowers carries a specific, centuries-old place in Bengali and Sanskrit erotic poetry (bakul especially, associated with awakening desire). Substituting generic English equivalents ("blossom," "bloom") would erase distinctions the original poem is deliberately making, so I let the Bengali names stand.

- মন্দারমঞ্জরী (mandar-manjari), "sprays of coral-blossom." As in Pranay Prashna, mandara is the flower of paradise — here I translated by sense ("coral-blossom," from the tree's other common name) rather than repeating "mandara" a second time in this collection, so the image stays vivid without demanding the reader already recognize the mythic reference from poem one.

- The poem's central, quietly devastating move — spring as an eternal, impersonal force that keeps recycling one man's very personal, unrepeatable heartbreak into "a hundred hundred songs" for other lovers, forever — is easy to lose in translation if the tone tips into prettiness. I tried to keep the final stanza's "অমর বেদনা" ("deathless sorrow," rendered here as "my grief, undying") as plain and unadorned as its surrounding lines are lush, so that the grief actually lands.

FAREWELL

বিদায়

Now, then, I go.
The hour has drawn near — now
the bond must be broken.
The restless water ripples and gleams,
a murmuring clamor has woken,
the boat's flag, ever astir,
trembles, crying its restless cry.
The hour has drawn near — now
the bond must be broken.

I am cruel, I am hard, I am harsh,
merciless am I, today.
No more delay — the fearsome war-drum
has begun sounding outside.
You lie sleeping, your eyes closed,
you tremble, stirred by a dream of parting,
waking at dawn to an empty bed
you will lie there, weeping, gazing.
The hour has drawn near — now
the bond must be broken.

Rose-red are your young lips,
piteous your eyes —
so many honeyed words, so many tender words,
are left still unspoken.
The bird will fly out beyond the sea,
its happy nest will be left behind,
from the great sky, again and again,
all of them are calling me.
The hour has drawn near — now

the bond must be broken.

When the whole universe asks for me,
who then is truly my own?
When my own Maker wakes within me,
where, then, is my home?
What, after all, is happiness — how many days is this life!
There — the song of battle has risen,
deathless death, its feet stained red,
dances on in glory.
The hour has drawn near — now
the bond must be broken.

Translator's Notes

- ভৈরবভেরী (Bhairab-bheri), "the fearsome war-drum." Bhairava is the fierce, world-destroying aspect of Shiva; bheri is a large war-drum. The compound fuses a specific instrument with a specific god, giving the departure a martial, almost apocalyptic charge that a plain "drum" cannot carry alone — hence "fearsome war-drum" rather than simply "drum."
- The poem's addressee is deliberately double: on its surface, a sleeping woman left behind; underneath, quite possibly the ordinary, comfortable life itself being renounced for a harder calling — the poem never says which "call" (a lover's departure, a soldier's, a soul's) is meant, and both readings work simultaneously through to the last stanza, where "my own Maker" (বিধাতা) makes the religious undertone explicit for the first time. I kept the ambiguity of addressee intact rather than resolving it toward either romance or renunciation.
- অমর মরণ রক্তচরণ ("deathless death, its feet stained red"). A deliberate paradox — death that dances triumphant and undying — that I rendered as literally as English allows, since softening it into something like "glorious death" would lose the actual contradiction Tagore is holding open.

MARRIAGE BENEDICTION

বিবাহমঙ্গল

Spread a single seat for two hearts,
and be thou seated there, O Lord of the heart.
With an auspicious, blessing thread
bind fast the hands of both.
O Lord of Life, may thine own unending love
awaken an ever-new spring within this life;
upon the fresh union of these two souls
let fall thy merciful glance.

The road of household life is long and hard;
two young travelers now set out upon it —
today may the crimson dawn of thy grace
rise for them as a new morning.

Thy blessing, thy greatness,
thy sweetness, thy truth —
may they abide forever in the hearts of both,
day and night, in ever-renewing forms.

Translator's Notes

- হৃদয়নাথ / প্রাণেশ (hridoy Nath / pranesh), "Lord of the heart" / "Lord of Life." Both are epithets Tagore uses elsewhere for God, but both are also, in ordinary Bengali usage, tender terms a wife might use for her husband. The wedding blessing works precisely because it will not choose between the two meanings — the poem is praying to God over the couple while sounding, almost, like it is addressing the bridegroom himself. I kept both epithets capitalized and did not resolve the ambiguity, which is the entire point of the poem's tenderness.

- মঙ্গলডোরে (mangal-dorey), "the auspicious, blessing thread." Refers to the actual cord used in Hindu wedding ritual to bind the couple's hands together during

the ceremony (as part of the hasta-milap/hand-joining rite) — a concrete ritual object, not a metaphor, which is why I kept the physical image of "binding the hands" rather than abstracting it into something like "bond of union."

- This is the shortest poem in the set and, unusually for this collection, entirely free of any darker undertow — I let its English run in a full, unbroken devotional register (thou/thy throughout) accordingly, since nothing in the poem pulls against that solemnity the way the more ambivalent hymns do.

BAISHAKH

বৈশাখ

O thou terrible one, O fierce Baishakh,
your matted, tawny locks flung wild, grey with dust,
your body scorched, worn thin with penance, lifting to your lips the dread horn —
whom do you call to?
O thou terrible one, O fierce Baishakh!

Your shadow-shapes, your countless followers —
through what rift in the burnt-copper horizon do they come rushing!
With what terrible, unseen dance do they rise, wild, into the noon sky,
silent and fierce —
your shadow-shapes, your followers!

The furnace-wind pants, maddened with its own labor,
again and again, burning, burning, it rises, whirling, with savage speed,
spinning up grass and leaves, churning the void in a reeling rhythm,
crushed heaps of dust —
the furnace-wind pants, maddened with its own labor.

O thou gaunt ascetic with burning eyes,
come, sit in the lotus-posture, lift your bloodshot gaze to your brow,
on the dried riverbank, in the harvest-empty, thirst-cracked field,
a detached wanderer —
O thou gaunt ascetic with burning eyes!

Before you burns
the greedy flame of the funeral pyre, licking, licking at the vast sky,
turning to ash the whole world's abandoned heap of the dead —
the year now past —
the pyre burns before you.

O thou renunciate, chant the litany of peace.
Let your vast, detached voice go rushing right and left,
let it cross the river, let it travel from village to village,
filling every field —
O thou renunciate, chant the litany of peace.

With your compassionate mantra
let every heart-piercing sorrow spread out across the world,
in the weary dove's throat, in the thinned, exhausted voice of the Ganga,
in the shade of the peepul tree —
with your compassionate mantra.

Sorrow, joy, hope, and despair —
let them, greedy for the very breath of you, rise like dust into the sky,
let them fill, together with the scent of fallen flowers from the bower,
the restless heavens —
sorrow, joy, hope, and despair.

Spread wide the saffron hem of your robe
across the vault of heaven, covering, in your vast renunciation,
the millions upon millions of hearts, men and women, undone with anxious thought
over age, death, hunger, and thirst —
spread wide your saffron hem.

Sound thy call, O fierce Baishakh!
Breaking free of the noonday drowsiness, I will rise and go out to my door,
and stand gazing, silent, wordless, toward the horizon
of scorched grass, emptied of every living thing —
O thou terrible one, O fierce Baishakh!

Translator's Notes

- ভৈরব (Bhairab). Doing triple duty in the title's refrain: it is a plain adjective meaning "terrible" or "fearsome," it names Bhairava, the fierce, ash-smeared, ascetic form of Shiva, and it is also the name of an austere early-morning raga.

Tagore is not choosing between these; the fierce summer month, the wild god, and the solemn music are meant to be heard together. "Terrible one" carries only the first sense in English, so I have flagged the other two here rather than try to cram all three into one word.

- সন্ন্যাসী / বৈরাগী (sannyasi / bairagi). Two related but distinct Hindu renunciate figures — I kept "ascetic" for the first and "renunciate" for the second so an English reader can track that these are two separate invocations within the poem, not a repeated one.

- গেরুয়া (geruya), "saffron/ochre." The color of cloth traditionally worn by Hindu renunciates, immediately recognizable in South Asia as a marker of having given up worldly life. "Saffron hem" keeps the specific color rather than generalizing to "robe," since the color is doing real symbolic work — Baishakh's punishing heat is figured as a vast, world-covering renunciation.

- The poem imagines the fierce, killing heat of the month of Baishakh not as senseless cruelty but as a kind of purifying asceticism — burning away the old year like a body on a pyre so that something cleaner can follow. I tried to keep that reverence audible even in the poem's most violent images, rather than let the English read as simple complaint about the weather.

THE BROKEN TEMPLE

ভগ্ন মন্দির

O thou god of the broken temple!
To weave a hymn in your praise, the vina's
strings lie snapped, fallen silent.
No conch, in the evening sky, sounds out
the news of your hour of worship.
Your temple stands, still and grave —
O thou god of the broken temple!

Into your empty, deserted house
comes, now and again, a restless fragrance
on the new spring wind.
The flower that was never woven into an offering,
that was never laid at those rose-colored feet,
brings the news of its own blooming
into the empty, ruined house.

Your worship-less priest —
where does he wander, all day long, indifferent,
a beggar now for whose grace?
In the twilight hour, in the forest's shade,
forever fasting, forever hungry,
he comes back, again and again, to the broken temple —
your worship-less priest.

O thou god of the broken temple!
How many festivals have gone silent,
how many nights of worship have passed away!
How many new images, how many farewells at Bijoya,
how many have come and gone — what more is there to tell —
only, forever, unserved, remains

the god of the broken temple.

Translator's Notes

- The poem's power lies in its refusal to specify what, exactly, has been broken: it can be read as a decayed religious shrine, a lost love, a diminished faith, or a diminished self, all at once, and none of the four readings cancels the others. I resisted the urge to tip the English toward any single one of these — no capital-letter cues, no added context — leaving the same bare ambiguity Tagore leaves in the Bengali.

- বিজয়া (Bijoya). The final day of Durga Puja, when the goddess's clay image is ceremonially carried to the river and immersed, and worshippers bid her a tearful, affectionate farewell until she returns the following year — a day that fuses festival joy with real, ritualized grief. "Farewells at Bijoya" tries to gesture at that entire emotional complex — a yearly practiced loss — that a single English word cannot hold.

- ছিন্না বীণার তন্ত্রী (chinna binar tantri), "the vina's strings lie snapped." A small but exact detail: not merely an unplayed instrument, but a broken one — worship has not simply paused here, its very instruments have decayed past use. I kept "snapped" rather than a softer "silent" or "unplayed" to preserve that finality.

LAKSHMI OF INDIA

ভারতলক্ষ্মী

O thou enchantress of the whole world's heart!
O earth, radiant with the pure sun's light,
mother of all our fathers and mothers!
Thy feet washed by the waters of the blue sea,
thy green mantle trembling in the wind,
thy brow the sky-kissed Himalaya,
crowned in white snow!

The first dawn rose in thy sky,
the first sacred chant sounded in thy forest hermitage,
first proclaimed, in thy woodland dwelling,
were wisdom, faith, and how many tales told in verse!

Ever-blessing art thou, and blest,
to every land, every country, thou givest of thy grain;
Ganga and Yamuna, flowing with a molten compassion,
are rivers of holy nectar from thy breast.

Translator's Notes

- This is the most densely Sanskritic of the eleven poems, closer to classical hymn than to lyric, and I let the English lean fully into "thou/thy" throughout — the one other poem besides the wedding blessing where I do this without reservation, since nothing in the poem's tone pulls against pure devotion the way the more conflicted hymns (Baishakh, Barsha Shesh) do.

- ভুবনমনমোহিনী (bhubanmanomohini), "enchantress of the whole world's heart."
A compound epithet — bhuban (world) + mana (mind/heart) + mohini (enchantress) — of a kind common in Sanskrit devotional poetry but unworkable as a single compound in English; I unpacked it into a phrase rather than force an ungainly coinage like "world-heart-enchantress."

- সীমন্তরতন-style imagery returns here in spirit, if not in the same words as in Bangalakshmi: India is again figured through the body of a woman — feet, mantle, brow — merging landscape and motherland into a single physical presence.
- পুণ্যপীযুষস্তন্যবাহিনী (punya-piyush-stanya-bahini), literally something like "bearer of holy-nectar-breast-milk," describing the Ganges and Yamuna. Rendered word-for-word this is unreadable in English; I resolved it into "rivers of holy nectar from thy breast," keeping the maternal-nourishment image — the rivers as milk sustaining the nation — without the compound's impossible literalness.
- This poem, written in 1303 (1896–97 CE), predates the Swadeshi movement poems for which Tagore later became famous, but its vocabulary of India-as-mother-goddess clearly belongs to the same current of devotional nationalism that would soon produce songs like Vande Mataram's Bengali-language relatives. I have translated it as the hymn it is, without either softening or inflating that political undertone.

BHIKKHAYANG NAIBA NAIBA CHA

ভিক্ষায়াং নৈব নৈব চ

Those who keep thee at a distance, who hold thee in daily contempt,
O my native land,
it is to them we turn, seeking honor,
and wear their very dress!

The foreigner does not know thee, and so, in careless neglect,
heaps insult on thee —
yet we, thine own children, still trail behind him,
eager to join his ranks!

Whatever poverty is thine, mother, that itself is my truest ornament —
why do I forget it!
Shame on the pride that glories in another's wealth — with joined palms
I go about filling my beggar's bag!

With thy own blessed hand, set on my plate the plainest greens and rice —
let that alone taste sweet to me.
If thou weave for me coarse cloth with thine own hands,
in that let all my shame be undone.

Let the very throne be nothing more than the spread of thy sari's edge,
and give me, there, thy tender love.
Whoever holds thee in contempt, mother — what honor
could he ever give to me!

Translator's Notes

- The title itself. "নৈব নৈব চ" (naiva naiva cha — "not, not, and [certainly not]") is a stock formula of Sanskrit rhetorical emphasis: a doubled negation used in classical and scriptural texts to close off a possibility completely. Tagore borrows this almost liturgical weight for what is, on its face, a poem about social climbing — the effect

is to make the refusal to seek honor "through begging" [from foreign approval] sound less like personal pride and more like scripture. I rendered the title "Never Through Begging" to try to keep some of that flat, absolute finality.

- ভিক্ষাবুলি (bhikkha-jhuli), "beggar's bag." A concrete image of literal mendicancy — the woven bag a religious beggar carries for alms — used here for the shame of imitating a colonizer's manners in exchange for social standing. I kept the physical object rather than abstracting it to something like "seeking charity."

- অঞ্চল (anchal) returns here as it does throughout this whole body of poems — the loose end of a sari, standing in for shelter, dignity, and the mother's embrace all at once. Here it becomes, almost defiantly, a "throne": the poem insists that the poorest possible seat, so long as it is the mother's own, outranks any honor a stranger could confer.

- Note that the poem never names who the "foreigner" (বিদেশী) is — the entire piece works by addressing an unnamed colonial relationship obliquely, through the domestic, familial vocabulary of mother and children, rather than through direct political language.

THE BEGGAR

ভিখারি

O beggar, thou hast made a beggar of me too —
is there still more that thou dost want?
O beggar, my own beggar — dost thou go on,
must I go on singing thee this mournful song?
Every morning I had meant
to please thee with treasure ever new,
beggar, my own beggar!
Alas, in a single instant I have given all to thy feet,
and now there is nothing left.
O beggar, thou hast made a beggar of me too —
is there still more that thou dost want!

I drew the very veil from over my breast
and dressed thee in it.
I emptied out my whole world
to fill thy desire.
My life, my mind, my new-blossomed youth,
lie fallen now beneath thy open hands,
beggar, my own beggar!
Alas, if still thou dost want more, give something unto me,
and whatever it is, I will give it back to thee again.
O beggar, thou hast made a beggar of me too —
is there still more that thou dost want!

Translator's Notes

- কাঙাল and ভিখারি. Both words mean "beggar," but they sit at slightly different registers — kangal is the softer, more affectionate word (closer to "poor thing," even teasing), while bikhari is the more formal, literal term for a mendicant. English has no equivalent pair, so I used "beggar" for both, but the alternation in

the Bengali refrain is worth knowing: the poem is, in effect, calling its beloved a "poor dear" in one breath and a "beggar" in the next.

- The poem's central reversal — the divine or beloved figure cast as the one who begs, while the devotee, having given everything away, ends up destitute in turn — is one of the signature moves of Tagore's devotional poetry from this period (compare the well-known Gitanjali image of God as a beggar at the devotee's own door). Nothing is resolved by the poem's end; both parties remain beggars, each still asking the other for more.

- করপুটতলে (karaputa-tale), "beneath your cupped hands." Karaputa specifically means hands held together, cupped, as when receiving alms — a small but exact detail I kept as "open hands" to preserve the begging-bowl image running under the entire poem, even in the line where it is the speaker's own life lying spent in the beloved's palms.

THE MISSED HOUR

ଅଷ୍ଟି ଲଗ୍ନ

The lamp at my bedside had only just gone out,
I woke to the morning koel's call.
With unhurried steps I came and sat at the window,
and wound a fresh garland into my loosened hair.
Just then, along the dawn-grey road,
a young traveler appeared, in a royal chariot.
On his golden crown lay the light of first daybreak,
a string of pearls hung fair about his neck.
He asked, anxious, "Where is she? Where is she?" —
stepping down, eager, at my very door —
and dying of shame, I could not bring myself to say, alas,
"O young traveler, that is I — that very one is I."

At the hour of cattle-dust twilight, the lamp not yet lit,
I was placing a mark of gold upon my brow,
holding a golden mirror in my hand at the window,
binding up my hair, lost in my own thoughts.
Just then, along the dusk-grey road, there came,
his eyes full of sorrow, a young traveler in a chariot.
His horses were wild with foam and sweat,
his robes and ornaments all covered over with dust.
He asked, anxious, "Where is she? Where is she?" —
stepping down, weary, at my very door —
and dying of shame, I could not bring myself to say, alas,
"O weary traveler, that is I — that very one is I."

It is a night of Phalgun, the lamp burns in the room,
the south wind is dying, spent, against my breast.
In its golden cage the chattering myna sleeps,
before the door, the gatekeeper has fallen asleep.

The bridal chamber lies grey with incense-smoke,
 every limb restless with the scent of aloeswood.
 I have put on a bodice the blue-green of a peacock's throat,
 and drawn across my breast a veil the dark green of new grass.
 I remain here, gazing out at the empty highway,
 sitting beneath the window, come down into the very dust —
 through all three watches of the night I sit alone and sing,
 "O despairing traveler, that is I — that very one is I."

Translator's Notes

- লগ্ন (lagna). A precise astrological term: the auspicious hour or planetary alignment calculated in advance for a wedding to begin. "ভ্রষ্ট লগ্ন" is not vague "bad timing" but a specific, once-calculated, now irrecoverably lost window for union — a wedding hour that came and went unused, three times over. I chose "The Missed Hour" to keep that sense of a precise, unrepeatable appointment.
- The refrain "সে যে আমি, সেই আমি" ("that is I — that very one is I") returns three times with only the traveler's epithet changing — নবীন/young, শান্ত/weary, হতাশ/despairing — charting his growing exhaustion across dawn, dusk, and night, while the woman's shame never once lifts even as his need visibly deepens. I kept this structure exactly, changing only the single adjective each time, as the original does.
- গোধূলিবেলা (godhuli-bela), literally "cow-dust hour." The traditional term for dusk, named for the dust raised by cattle being driven home in the evening light. I rendered it "the hour of cattle-dust twilight" to preserve the pastoral specificity rather than simplifying to a plain "dusk."
- ফাগুন (Phalgun/Fagun), as elsewhere in this set, is kept as the specific Bengali calendar month (roughly February–March) rather than generalized to "spring," since its particular restlessness — the month is strongly associated in Bengali poetry with unfulfilled longing — is part of why the final stanza's failure lands as hard as it does.
- Tagore never explains the woman's silence — he only names it, twice, as শরমে মরিয়া, "dying of shame." I resisted the urge to add any psychological explanation of my own in translation; the poem's ache depends on that reticence.

"AFTER MADAN'S IMMOLATION" / "BEFORE MADAN'S IMMOLATION"

মদনভস্মের পর / মদনভস্মের পূর্বে

After Madan's Immolation

Burning him with thy five-flowered arrow — what hast thou done, O ascetic?
Thou hast scattered him across the whole world!
His restless, deeper pain now rises, sighing, on every wind,
his tears fall, rolling down the whole sky.
The entire universe fills with Rati's song of mourning,
every direction breaks, of itself, into weeping.
In the month of Phalgun, in a single unguarded instant, at some unknown signal,
the earth shivers, and falls, fainting, to the ground.

That is why today I cannot understand what pain is playing,
with such vast rapture, upon the heart's own vina —
the young woman sits and wonders herself to death, not knowing what counsel
heaven and earth together are whispering to her.
What words rise, rustling, in the leaves of the bakul tree,
what language does the humming bee rise up speaking?
Face lifted upward, whom does the sunflower remember, what beloved,
what thirst does the running stream carry on and on?

Whose garment is it I see, trailing, spread out in the moonlight,
whose eyes, silent, in the blue sky!
Whose face do I glimpse, veiled in the sun's own rays,
whose feet, resting soft upon a bed of grass!
Whose touch, in the fragrance of flowers, sets the heart and mind rejoicing,
rising, twining round the heart like a vine!
Burning him to ashes — what hast thou done, O ascetic?

Thou hast scattered him across the whole world!

Before Madan's Immolation

Once thou didst wander, wearing a body, through the newborn world —
ah, ah, bodiless god that thou hast since become!
On a chariot of flowers thy fish-emblazoned banner flew on the honeyed wind,
and the wayfaring bride bowed low at thy feet.
From every garment's edge, along the road, ashoka, champak, oleander were
scattered
by young men and women met together,
in the bakul grove the wind grew fragrant as wine —
and every heart turned the color of dawn.

When evening fell, bands of young girls, at thy lonely shrine,
would carefully light the lamps for thee.
When thy quiver stood empty, they would choose fresh flower-buds
and secretly fashion new arrows for thee.
The young poet, spellbound, sitting on thy temple steps,
would play the vina and compose new melodies.
The doe would come beside the stag, gazing with soft, humble eyes,
the tigress would come walking beside the tiger.

When, laughing, thou wouldst raise thy bow, the girl of sixteen, timid in love,
would clasp thy feet, pleading.
Taking thy five-flowered arrow up in secret, thrilled with curiosity,
the young woman would play at testing it, as though by accident.
Scattering honeyed sweetness over a bed of green grass,
thou wouldst sleep there, deep in languor,
and to wake thee, the shy young bride would practice so many small tricks —
sounding her two anklets, longing.

When the city-girl walked the forest path with her water-jar,
thou wouldst secretly strike her with a flower-arrow,
so that, lost in thought, on the bank of the Yamuna, letting her pitcher float away,

she would stand gazing, her eyes full of longing.
Rowing up in thy flower-boat, thou wouldst come before her, laughing —
and, shamed, the girl would start awake,
and, bending her brow in mock reproach, stepping down into the water,
she would strike the water, laughing, pretending anger.

Even now, just the same, the moon rises, the honeyed night grows wild,
the madhavi-vine closes into bud.
Beneath the bakul tree a woman sits alone, binding up her hair,
her two garments loosened by the sandal-scented wind.
On the lonely riverbank, even now, the ruddy sheldrake calls to his mate,
while between them runs the river of their separation.
A girl, aching with some secret pain, calls her friend aside in privacy,
and, weeping, tells her a sorrowful tale.

Come, then, today, wearing a body once more, thy companion at thy side,
a wild garland wound into thy hair,
come secretly, on soft footsteps, to the door of the bridal chamber,
by the low, dimmed light of the lamp.
Come, clever one — with a sudden, honeyed smile, quick as lightning,
startle the young bride into joy —
make new again the house of humankind, make the whole earth grow faint
at the moist touch of thy divine feet.

Translator's Notes

- The myth beneath the poem. Kama (Madan), the god of desire, shot Shiva with a flower-arrow to wake him from meditation and make him fall in love with Parvati; Shiva, enraged, burned him to ash with his third eye. Kama was thereafter called Ananga, "the bodiless one" — he did not cease to exist, but lost his visible form, becoming instead a force felt everywhere and located nowhere. Tagore never explains this myth in the poem itself — a Bengali reader would supply it instantly — so I have likewise let the English reader infer it from context rather than inserting an explanatory gloss into the lines.

- অনঙ্গ (Ananga), "the bodiless one." The poem's whole hinge is the difference between a god you could see, scold, and steal arrows from, and a god who is now only an unexplained ache in the wind. I kept the address "bodiless god" exactly where the Bengali places it — as an exclamation of grief in the middle of a memory of his former, embodied self.
- পঞ্চশর (panchashar), "the five-flowered arrow." Kama's signature weapon, each arrow tipped with a different flower rather than a blade — I kept this image literal throughout rather than simplifying to "his arrow," since the softness of the weapon is the entire point: desire wounds without steel.
- রতি (Rati), Kama's wife and goddess of sexual pleasure, whose grief at his death is itself the subject of a long tradition of classical poetry — I kept her named rather than generalizing her to "his beloved," since "Rati's mourning" is a specific literary reference, not an invented detail.
- On the register shift. I have used "thou/thy/thee" for both halves of this diptych, since both are, structurally, direct address to a god — first an accusation hurled at Shiva, then an extended, wistful, half-teasing memory addressed to Kama himself, ending in a plea for his bodily return. The one stretch I left in plain narrative English (the fifth stanza of "Before," beginning "Even now, just the same, the moon rises...") is the one moment in the whole poem that is not addressed to Kama at all, but simply describes the present world in his absence — I let the pronoun shift mark that difference for itself.

THE MOTHER'S CALL

মাতার আহ্বান

Just once, standing at thy door,
cry out and call to us, mother!
Evening is falling over thy open fields,
darkness is gathering over the earth.
Call out, "Come home, come, come to my lap" —
call in thine own compassionate tongue;
let that word wake tenderness in every heart,
let it ring through vein and artery —
so that whoever is out there, careless, lost in play,
wherever they are, starts up at once.

At dawn we crossed the river,
we turned away, chasing what foolish hope.
Gathering up the gleanings from another's harvest in the fold of our garment,
we poured them into the fire of our own hunger.
No ferry runs now, and I long to return —
send thy boat across, to this shore;
our own field, at the edge of our own village —
where has it fallen, where does it lie!
That vast, lonely, empty field
weeps now in the restless wind!

Trembling, trembling, thy lamp
gutters, near to going out, in the wind —
mother, guard it well,
shelter it in the fold of thine own garment.
Hold it up in thy right hand —
let its light fall upon thy brow,
so I may know it from far away, and find my way home,
not be deceived by the will-o'-the-wisp's false fire.

On this side, mother, every door stands shut,
in this house that belongs to strangers.

The fragrance of thy forest flowers
comes now on the evening wind.
Thy koel sings its last song
in the darkness of some far grove.
No one is left now on the road,
in the deep wood the fireflies burn,
my two eyes, filled with restless tears,
brim over, unable to hold still.
Call out once, standing outside thy door —
"You are still mine."

Translator's Notes

- The poem runs on the same double register as "Lakshmi of Bengal" and "Lakshmi of India" from the earlier set — জননী (jononi, mother) is simultaneously a literal mother and the motherland, and the "we" who crossed the river at dawn "chasing foolish hope" can be read as a migrant laborer's story, an allegory of Bengalis drawn toward foreign ambition, or both at once. I did not choose between these readings.
- আলোয়া (aleya), "will-o'-the-wisp." A real and specifically feared phenomenon of the Bengal river-delta: a flickering marsh-light, often blamed on the ghosts of drowned fishermen, said to lead travelers fatally astray on dark nights. I kept the concrete folk term rather than a vague "false light," since aleya names an exact, well-known danger rather than a generic image.
- উঞ্চ (uncha), "gleanings." Grain gathered, out of poverty, from a field someone else has already harvested — the lowest, most dependent form of subsistence, traditionally associated with destitution in classical Indian literature (the story of gleaning appears as a mark of poverty as far back as the Mahabharata). "Gleanings from another's harvest" tries to keep that specific, humiliating image intact.
- The final line — "তোরা যে আমার," "You are still mine." This is the single sentence the whole poem has been building toward: the one thing the speaker believes could guide a lost child home through the dark, spoken in the mother's own voice. I kept

it exactly as plain in English as it is in the Bengali, without ornament, since the poem itself treats this line as sufficient on its own.

THE IMAGE OF THE HEART

মানসপ্রতিমা

Thou art the evening cloud, calm and far away,
my longing's whole devotion,
my wanderer through the empty sky!
I have mingled into thee the sweetness of my own mind
and so fashioned thee, made thee —
thou art mine, yes, mine, only mine,
my wanderer through the boundless sky!

With the very red of my heart's own blood
I have colored thy feet,
O wanderer through the dream of evening!
I have painted thy lips, mingling nectar with poison,
breaking open my own joy and sorrow to do it —
thou art mine, yes, mine, only mine,
my wanderer through this solitary life!

I have lined thine eyes with the dark kohl
of my own enchanted dreaming,
O wanderer through eyes grown spellbound!
I have wound my own music, limb by limb,
around every limb of thee —
thou art mine, yes, mine, only mine,
my wanderer through life and death!

Translator's Notes

- মানসপ্রতিমা (manasa-pratima), the title. Pratima is the specific word for a consecrated deity-image — an idol installed and worshipped in a temple. Manasa-pratima is such an image that exists only in the mind: an icon that has never been installed anywhere, worshipped by no one but the person who imagined it. The

whole poem is essentially a confession built into its own title — this beloved was never met, only made. I translated the title "The Image of the Heart" to keep that devotional, icon-making sense rather than the flatter "mental image."

- বিহারী (bihari), "one who wanders," appears as the second half of five different compound epithets across the poem — "wanderer of the empty sky," "of evening's dream," "of this solitary life," "of eyes grown spellbound," "of life and death." Each compound is freshly built in the Bengali, not repeated, but I used a single consistent English formula ("my wanderer through ____") to preserve the incantatory, escalating rhythm of the refrain, which matters more here than exact lexical variety.

- সুধাবিশেষ মিশে, "mingling nectar with poison." A classical Sanskrit pairing (amrita and visha, the drink of immortality and of death, both born of the same mythical churning of the ocean) used to describe an experience that is inseparably both rapture and ruin. I kept both terms rather than resolving the pairing toward one meaning or the other.

- The refrain "তুমি আমারি যে তুমি আমারি" — "thou art mine, yes, mine, only mine" — borders on possessive in a way the poem seems half-aware of; this is a beloved entirely self-made, and the repeated claim of ownership reads almost like the speaker reassuring themselves rather than describing a fact. I let the repetition stand as insistently in English as it does in the Bengali, rather than varying it for elegance.

- রাগ ইমনকল্যাণ (Iman/Yaman Kalyan). An evening raga of the Hindustani classical tradition, traditionally performed just after sunset — a fitting mode for a poem built entirely from images of "the evening cloud" and "evening's dream."

PARDON

মার্জনা

Beloved, for the sin of having loved thee so,
in thy mercy, pardon me, pardon me.
Like a timid bird I have flown into thy cage —
yet do not, therefore, bar the door against me, do not bar it.
Whatever was mine, I could keep back nothing;
my restless heart I could not hide, not for one moment;
keep it, then, and hide it, thou, and show me thy compassion —
of thine own grace, pardon this helpless one, pardon her.

Beloved, if thou canst not love me in return,
still pardon, pardon this love of mine.
With the corners of thine eyes brimming with faint laughter,
look not, friend, upon this defenseless one — look not.
I will gather my robe about me and hasten back the way I came,
I will hide, startled with shame, in the darkness of death,
with both my hands I will cover the naked wound of my heart —
beloved, pardon this ill-fated one, pardon her.

Beloved, if thou wilt turn to me in love,
then pardon, pardon this abundance of my joy.
When I drift away helpless on the tide of thy tenderness,
sit not far off and laugh at me, friend — do not laugh!
When like a queen I sit upon a jeweled throne,
when I bind thee fast in love's close dominion,
when like a goddess I fulfill thy every desire,
oh then, my lord, pardon this proud one, pardon her.

Notes. মার্জনা carries a formal, near-liturgical weight — the word for asking absolution of a deity or elder — so using it for a lover's plea already blurs devotional and romantic address, a blur Tagore returns to all through this sequence. উতলা হৃদয় ("restless heart") sits between restless, overflowing, and helplessly eager; no

single English word holds all three. অবলা ("helpless one") is a traditional epithet for a woman — literally "without strength" — carrying centuries of self-description that "helpless" only partly recovers. সখা ("friend," for the beloved) has a devotional echo, the term for Krishna's companions in Vaishnava poetry, lost in plain English "friend." গরবী ("proud one") contains গর্ব (pride) inside its own grammar, a pun no translation can reproduce. The doubled refrain ("pardon me, pardon me") is kept rather than collapsed, since this is a song, not a spoken line — the repetition is what makes it sung rather than said.

THE PLEA

যাচনা — কীর্তন

With love, my friend, in secret and with care,
write my name — within
the temple of your heart.
The song that plays forever in my soul —
let it teach its rhythm — to
the anklets on your feet.

Hold and keep, with tenderness and fondness,
this chattering bird of mine — within
your palace courtyard.
Remember me, my friend, and bind and keep
this token thread from off my wrist — among
your golden bangles.

One small bud from off my flowering vine,
forgetfully gather and keep it — in
the knot of your dark hair.
Upon the bright vermilion of your remembrance,
trace a single dot — upon
the sandal-mark of your brow.

The sweet enchantment of my heart's own longing,
anoint yourself and keep it — in
the fragrance of your body.
This restless life of mine, this death —
break it, plunder it, and take it — into
your peerless, boundless glory.

Notes. কীর্তন marks this as devotional call-and-response song, which shapes the imperative "keep it, write it, bind it" structure throughout. রাথী — the thread tied at the wrist as a token of a bond — I rendered as "token thread" rather than

importing "rakhi," since in English it now carries a narrower sibling-festival sense the poem doesn't intend. স্বরণশুভসিন্দূরে ("the auspicious vermilion of remembrance") draws on sindoor, the mark of a married woman, so the line quietly asks to be made permanent, not just remembered. The closing verbs টুটিয়া লুটিয়া নিয়ো — "break it, plunder it, take it" — are startlingly violent for a poem about tenderness; I kept all three verbs rather than softening them, since the force is the point: total surrender asked for in the imagery of a raid.

NIGHT

রাত্রি

Make me the court-poet of thy silent, meditating assembly,
O Night, O veiled one!
Across thy sky, age after age, they murmur on,
those who have composed their hymns to thee.
Beneath thy darkness, the vast and voiceless labor
that wanders on from world to world —
take me up into that great chariot of thine,
bannerless, wheelless, rumbling onward in silence.

Thou art the sole queen, deep in the innermost chamber of the world,
grave and profound, O dark and lovely one!
Entering the vast, unfailing treasury of day,
silently thou fillest and keepest its store.
Upon thy sapphire throne of slumber, bright with jeweled stars,
thy great awakening keeps watch!
Keep me awake beneath that silent wakefulness,
unblinking, wholly conscious!

How many sleepless eyes, age after age, in thy darkness
have searched for the answer to their question!
How many devotees, palms folded, have sat gazing steadfastly
upon thy silent, speechless face!
When day has closed its eyes, the curious throng, with quiet steps,
entering cautiously thy courtyard,
have gone searching in secret through thy lightless chamber
for joy and sorrow, birth and death.

Setting the frozen masses of thick darkness suddenly trembling,
at midnight there has risen, overflowing,
a newly-blossomed word of Brahman from a sage's quivering throat,
stirring the dense accumulation of slumber.

For this suffering world, some great and pitying seer,
sudden as a streak of lightning,
standing alone in thy all-effacing darkness,
has glimpsed the path to freedom for the world.

All those wakeful watchers of the night, the whole world over,
thy courtiers, companionless —
who sits where tonight, somewhere upon this earth,
counting his secret treasure?
No one knows another; each upon his own separate seat
sits enthroned, free, a silent image —
O Night, within that wordless, wakeful assembly of thine,
make me thy court-poet!

— 1306 (Bengali era)

Notes. শবরী, the word for Night addressed throughout, is a Sanskrit-derived epithet rather than the plain word for night (রাত্রি used only in the title) — closer to invoking Night as a goddess than naming a time of day; "O Night" flattens this slightly but no English vocative carries the same weight. অবগুষ্ঠিতা, "the veiled one," refers to a woman in ghomta (veil) — used of night's darkness as a modest, covered face. The central paradox of the poem — সুপ্তিসিংহাসনে তোমার মহান জাগরণ, "upon thy throne of sleep, thy great awakening" — is Tagore's own; night appears to put the world to sleep while she herself keeps watch, and the poet asks to share in that watchfulness rather than the sleep.

THE BASHFUL ONE

লজ্জিতা — ভৈরবী

Why did you not wake me before the night had gone —
the day has come, and I die of shame!
With feet bound fast in bashfulness, how shall I
walk out into the road!

Dying to its very heart at the touch of light,
see how the shefali blossom falls and scatters;
the kamini flower, in her loosened dress,
somehow still clings to life.
Why did you not wake me before the night had gone —
the day has come, and I die of shame!

The lamp of night flickered out, its life spent,
at the breath of the morning wind.
The moon of night, in a corner of the sky,
hides away, begging for shelter.
The bird calls out — the night is gone!
The young wife goes to the river, pitcher in hand —
how shall I go now to my work,
with my hair so wildly, restlessly undone!
Why did you not wake me before the night had gone —
the day has come, and I die of shame!

— The Yamuna, 7th Ashwin, 1304

Notes. কামিনী is doing two things at once: it is the name of a fragrant white flower, and it is also simply the word for "a woman in love" or "a passionate woman." So the line about the কামিনী "in her loosened dress" is at once a flower wilting at dawn and a woman disheveled after a night of love, ashamed as morning comes — a pun English has no way to hold in one word. শেফালি, the night-jasmine that

blooms after dark and drops by sunrise, is a stock image for something whose beauty belongs only to the night — here standing in for the speaker herself.

PLAY

লীলা — সিন্ধুভৈরবী

Why do you jingle your bangles, clink and clatter,
with so much coy pretense!
Come, go home now, with the golden pitcher
filled with water.
Why do you raise ripples in the water, splashing, splashing,
playing so idly!
Why do you glance, again and again, with startled eyes,
for whose sake —
with so much coy pretense!

See, on the banks of the Yamuna, in languid ease,
the day has slipped away,
while all the laughter-brimming waves go whispering
in murmuring voices —
with so much coy pretense!
See, on the far shore of the river, at the edge of the sky,
the gathered clouds,
laughing and laughing, gaze upon
your very face —
with so much coy pretense!

— [Bhadra/Ashwin] 1304

Notes. ছল — repeated as the poem's refrain, কত ছলভরে, "with so much ছল" — means something between coyness, artful pretense, and a lover's game; "coy pretense" is the nearest compromise, though it loses the sense that this is a deliberate, knowing performance. The setting on the Yamuna, and the teasing tone toward a girl who lingers too long at the water with her pitcher, echoes the Radha-Krishna pastoral tradition, where fetching water is the standard pretext for a secret meeting — the poem's speaker is gently calling out that pretext.

AUTUMN

শরত্

Today have I beheld thy sweet and radiant form
in this autumn morning!
O mother Bengal, thy green and verdant body
shines in spotless splendor.
The rivers can scarce contain their flowing waters,
field after field can hardly hold its rice —
the magpie-robin calls, the koel sings,
in the assembly of thy groves.
And there, in the midst of it all, O mother, thou dost stand,
in this autumn morning.

Mother, thy blessed invitation
has gone out to every corner of the earth —
with the new rice shall come the harvest-feast,
in house after house of thine.
No rest is left for thee now,
sheaf upon sheaf of rice passes by, load upon load,
and down every village path its fragrance
rises to fill the wind.
Mother, thou hast sent thy letter of invitation
out into all the world.

Lifting away the burden of clouds, thou hast made
thy sky a deep and lovely blue;
sprinkling the dew, thou hast made cool
thy green and verdant earth.
On land, on water, and through every reach of sky
a flute seems to play, as in some sweet, auspicious hour,
and to the foot of thy door they come, boat after boat,
crowding in from every quarter.
Thou hast made the sky a pure, deep blue,

and the earth soft and cool.

The first dew-laden breeze of the season blows,
soothing every weary limb —
in cottage after cottage, fresh new hopes
take flight with a newborn life.

On every side, mother, what preparations!
Thy kinsfolk, their faces brimming with smiles,
gather fresh new joys from thy storehouse,
handful by handful.

The breeze runs on, and in its trailing skirt
carries aloft a life made new.

Come, come, come, wherever you may be,
come running, all of you —
mother has flung open her storehouse door,
and the grain is there for the taking!
Come across from the other shore by ferry,
come, mother and daughter, from that other village —
who weeps of hunger? mother asks —
come, all of you, and gather here together.
Mother has flung open her storehouse door,
and the grain is there for the taking.

Around mother's throat, a garland of shefali blossoms
fills the earth with fragrance.
Her trailing skirt is studded with rainless clouds,
white and pure as fresh-churned butter.
She wears a crown of golden rays,
radiant with sweet and captivating splendor;
with feet adorned in flowers, decked in blossoms,
there stands my mother.
In light, in dew, in flowers and in ripened grain,
the whole earth breaks into laughter.

Notes. This poem addresses বঙ্গ, Bengal, directly as জননী/মাত — mother — and the whole piece works as an extended personification of the autumn harvest season as a generous, all-giving mother goddess; I have kept "mother" throughout rather than varying it, since the repetition is the poem's engine. নবান্ন, "new-rice," names a specific harvest festival — the first eating of the new season's rice — which I unpacked as "the harvest-feast" since English has no single equivalent. নবনী (fresh-churned butter) for the white autumn clouds is a lovely, homely image of purity that "butter" preserves better than "cream" would. Note the deliberate slippage in the final stanzas from "Bengal" to a more universal "mother," inviting every reader, of any village, into her open storehouse.

HESITATION

সংকোচ — ছায়ানট

If you forbid it, then
I shall not sing.
If you feel shy, upon your face
I shall not gaze.
If, while stringing your garland alone,
you should suddenly be disturbed,
into your flower-grove
I shall not go.
If you forbid it, then
I shall not sing.

If you should falter, and stop still
in the middle of the path,
I, startled, shall turn away
to other tasks.
If, upon your riverbank,
forgetful, I should raise a wave,
my little boat
I shall not row there.
If you forbid it, then
I shall not sing.

Notes. A quiet poem entirely built from conditional withdrawal — every stanza offers to disappear rather than intrude. সংকোচ itself means hesitation, shrinking-back, or scruple, and I have let the poem's own restraint (short lines, no ornament) carry the title's meaning rather than glossing it further. The gentleness here is worth noting against the more demanding, plundering love of poem 2 — this sequence keeps circling the same longing from very different angles of consent.

THE PITEOUS ONE

সকরুণা — আলেয়া

Friend, who is it that comes and goes, day after day, alas!
Give him a single blossom from my hair.
If he should ask who gave it, from what flower-garden,
I charge you by your oath — do not speak my name.
Friend, who is it that comes and goes, day after day, alas!

Friend, he who sits in the dust beneath the tree —
spread there a seat of bakul blossoms for him.
He it is who wakens pity with his piteous eyes —
what does he wish to say, and yet goes unspoken!
Friend, who is it that comes and goes, day after day, alas!

— The Nagar river, cloudy and raining, new moon, 10th Ashwin, 1304

Notes. The poem's whole ache sits in that final unanswered line — কেন কী বলিতে
চায় না বলিয়া যায় সে, "why, what does he wish to say, and goes without saying it."
I chose "goes unspoken" over a more literal "goes without telling" to keep the same
suspended, unresolved feeling in English. আলেয়া (the tune this is set to) literally
names a will-o'-the-wisp — a fitting undertone for a lover who appears daily and
never quite arrives at his meaning.

SHE IS MY MOTHER

সে আমার জননী রে — ভৈরবী। রূপক

Who is it that comes and goes, again and again,
with restless, tearful eyes?
Who gazes, in vain hope,
upon this face of mine?
She — she is my mother!

Whose voice, sweet as nectar,
fades away, met with neglect?
Whose language, alas,
does everyone wish to forget?
She — she is my mother!

For a moment leaving her tender embrace,
I can no longer recognize her.
Her own child
brings her only shame —
She — she is my mother!

In her blessed cottage, who sits
sorrowful, preparing the meal?
That gift of love
no longer pleases my taste!
She — she is my mother!

— 1304

Notes. The second stanza's turn to ভাষা — "whose language does everyone wish to forget" — signals that this "mother" is not only a person but, quite plausibly, the Bengali language and its culture itself, cast as a neglected mother whose own children are ashamed of her in favor of something foreign — a theme Tagore returns to often. I have kept the poem's ambiguity intact rather than resolving it

toward either reading, since the power of the piece is that "mother," "motherland," and "mother-tongue" are allowed to sit as one and the same figure.

AUDACITY

স্পর্ধা

He came and said, "Beloved, lift your face and look at me."
Scolding him, angry, I said, "Go away!"
Friend, oh my friend, I tell you the truth —
and yet, he did not go.

He stood before me; I told him, "Step aside."
He took both my hands; I said, "Oh, what are you doing!"
Friend, oh my friend, I will not lie to you —
and yet, he did not let me go.

He brought his face close to my ear, for no reason at all —
turning my eyes away, I told him, "Shame, shame!"
Friend, oh my friend, I swore it to him —
and yet, he did not move away.

Still, he touched my cheek with his lips —
trembling, I said, "I have never seen the like of this!"
Friend, oh my friend, what manner of thinking was this of his —
and yet, he did not turn his face away.

He placed his own garland round my neck —
I told him, "What use had I for a garland!"
Friend, oh my friend, he had no shame, no fear —
my pleading with him was in vain.

And now my garland too is gone, borne off around his throat,
I stood and gazed at him, struck with wonder.
Friend, oh my friend, I am adrift now in a flood of tears —
why did he not come back to me!

Notes. The poem plays as a comic, breathless catalogue of protests that never quite mean what they say — a familiar convention of Bengali love-lyric where refusal is itself a kind of invitation. The final stanza carries a deliberate ambiguity I have preserved rather than resolved: আমার মালাটি ("my garland") "goes, borne to the throat" — it is not fully clear whether this is the garland he had just given her, or her own garland now placed on him in return, the traditional silent gesture of a woman choosing her groom. I read it as the latter — her wordless answer, given just as he leaves — which is what makes the closing tears (and the question "why did he not come back") land as genuine heartbreak rather than continued coyness.

DREAM

স্বপ্ন

Far, far away,
in a land of dreams, in the city of Ujjayini,
I went once, seeking, on the banks of the Shipra river,
the first beloved of my former birth.
Powder of lodhra-blossom upon her face, a lotus toyed with in her hand,
buds of kunda-flower at the roots of her ears, kurubaka blooms in her hair,
her slender body bound in a robe of red, tied at the waist,
the anklets on her feet chiming, half-heard, half-hushed.
On a day of spring
I had wandered far, far away, finding my way, path by path.

Within the temple of Mahakala
the evening-worship bell was tolling then, deep and solemn.
The marketplace lay empty of all people — above, one could see
a streak of evening light upon the darkened rooftops.

My beloved's dwelling
lay down a winding, narrow path, hard to find, and lonely.
On her door was painted a conch and a wheel, and on either side
two young nipa-trees grew, tended like her own sons.
Upon the white pillars of the gateway
sat carved lions, grave and full of pride.

My beloved's doves had all returned home to roost,
the peacock lay lost in sleep upon its golden perch.
At that hour, a lamp-flame in her hand,
slowly, slowly, my Malavika descended.
She appeared at the threshold, upon the stair,
like the evening-star in the hand of the goddess of dusk.
The saffron-fragrance of her body, the incense-scent of her hair,
set my whole restless breath astir through every limb.

Through the half-slipped folds of her garment there showed
a leaf-pattern traced in sandal-paste upon her left breast.
She stood there like an image of the goddess,
in the hushed evening, when the city's murmur had ceased.

Seeing me, my beloved,
slowly setting down her lamp there at the door,
came forward, and placing her hand in mine,
asked, silently, with eyes full of tender sorrow,
"Friend, are you well?" I looked into her face
and tried to speak — but there were no more words.
I have forgotten that tongue — and both our names,
however hard we thought — they come to mind no more.
Long we thought, gazing into each other's eyes,
and tears fell, streaming, from our unblinking eyes.

Long we thought, standing beneath the tree by her door.
I do not know by what soft artifice, or when,
her tender hand came stealing
into my right hand, like a bird at evening
seeking its nest; and her face,
like a lotus bowed upon its stem,
sank slowly down upon my breast; and, restless, far away,
breath silently met and mingled with breath.

The darkness of night
made all Ujjayini vanish into one.
The lamp beside the door,
I know not when, went out in the wild wind.
Upon the banks of the Shipra,
the evening worship in Shiva's temple came to its end.

Notes. This is a conscious homage to Kalidasa's Ujjayini — the ancient city on the Shipra river, its Mahakala temple, its evening āratī — the classical landscape of the Meghadūta, here entered as a dream of a "former birth." I have kept the proper

nouns (Ujjayini, Shipra, Mahakala, Malavika) untranslated, as Tagore leaves them, trusting them to carry their own weight of antiquity. মালবিকা, the beloved's name, is itself a stock heroine-name from classical Sanskrit drama (Kalidasa's own *Mālavikāgnimitram*), reinforcing that we are inside a half-remembered, half-invented classical past. The single most delicate line — নীরবে মিলিল আসি নিশ্বাসে নিশ্বাস, "breath silently met and mingled with breath" — I left as plain and unadorned in English as it is in Bengali, since any further ornament would overstate what the original leaves almost unbearably quiet.

SONG OF THE ILL-FATED

হতভাগ্যের গান — বিভাস। একতলা

Friend,
for what do these tears fall, for what this long sigh!
Let us, with laughing faces, mock at Fate and pass it by.
Those who are stripped bare, who have lost everything,
are the true conquerors of this world —
they are no bondslaves of the proud goddess of Fortune.
Let us, with laughing faces, mock at Fate and pass it by.

We do not graze beneath the swollen shadow of joy's proud breast.
We do not fear to look upon the twisted, scowling face of grief.
On our broken drum, as best we may,
we will go on beating out the music of triumph,
lifting the tattered banner of our hope, to cleave the deep blue sky.
Let us, with laughing faces, mock at Fate and pass it by.

O goddess of Misfortune, disheveled one, thou art a goddess unwavering.
Thy ways are utterly plain, thou knowest no art of deceit.
Thou kindlest in our bellies a spark of fire —
and there is no treachery in that —
when thou drawest tight the noose of death, thou speakest no honeyed words.
Let us, with laughing faces, mock at Fate and pass it by.

The finest of men upon this earth are gathered in thy house.
That is why thou hast spread thy hard, narrow bed for us as well.
We are thy favored sons,
whatever thou shalt give, that we will take,
and, bearing ruin on our heads, we will still cry out our thanks to thee.
Let us, with laughing faces, mock at Fate and pass it by.

Set me, mother, upon the throne of the crown prince, seat of the fortune-forsaken.
Let all thy servants fan themselves with broken winnowing-fans.

On my scorched brow let the flame of destruction
trace, O mother, thy sacred mark,
and clothe me, shameless, in a tattered quilt, in torn and ragged garments.
Let us, with laughing faces, mock at Fate and pass it by.

Let the hollow laughter of the false friend go hide, at the sound of thy drum.
Let flattery, tail raised, go fleeing far away to Mecca and to Kashi.
Here, where none remembers the difference between self and other,
the broken door stands ever open —
thou wilt stay, and I will stay, together, evenly, the whole year through.
Let us, with laughing faces, mock at Fate and pass it by.

I have settled all accounts now — dread and terror, shame and modesty, praise and
blame alike.
That dust — the dust of thy feet — with that we devotees have anointed ourselves.
I say to Hope, "O great lady,
I know well enough thy many games —
even him whose whole fate is nothing but deception, him too wouldst thou
deceive!"
Let us, with laughing faces, mock at Fate and pass it by.

On the day when Death shall say, "Awake — thy night has turned to morning,"
I shall put out, in my own house, both lamps — the moon and the sun.
We two, ever close together,
neighbors through all of time,
he will wind his arms about my neck, in friendship's warm embrace —
and in that hour of parting, I shall have my last laugh at Fate.

— 7th Ashwin, 1304, the Boral river; revised 7th Ashadh, 1305, the Nagar river,
Patisar

Notes. This is the sequence's most defiant piece, and its wit rests on personifying
Fate (অদৃষ্ট), Fortune/Lakshmi, Misfortune/Alakshmi, and even Death (মৃত্যু) as
distinct, almost sociable figures the speaker addresses directly, teases, and finally
embraces. অলক্ষ্মী — literally "not-Lakshmi," the goddess of misfortune and the ill-

kept — I rendered as "goddess of Misfortune" rather than attempting an invented English name, since her role (honest where Fortune is fickle) is what the poem needs understood. The closing image, extinguishing "the moon and the sun" of one's own house at death, is a striking private-cosmos metaphor for closing one's eyes for the last time — I left it as bare as the original rather than explaining it away. The revision date given at the very end — a full year after the poem's first draft — is Tagore's own note, and a rare glimpse of him returning to polish a poem already once set down.