

POETRY

REMEMBRANCE

SMARAN

Rabindranath Tagore



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Even this morning my tired eyes
carry their clouded ache.
Keeping vigil on a bed of sorrow,
the night has worn itself into dawn.
With the newly opened garden,
with the winter wind just woken,
this body, this heart of mine,
even today, could not keep company.

Today, your morning is too much for me —
hide it, oh, hide it away.
This play, this fair, this light, this song,
carry them from here, today.
Tear me from the waking world,
fold me round in tender dark;
let the cord of your loving arms
bind up this desolate heart.



While she was living, all
she gave me, again and again —
I would repay her now,
but that time is no more.
Her night has turned to morning;
today, O Lord, you have taken her —
at your feet I lay down
this offering of gratitude.

Whatever wrong I did her,
whatever fault occurred,
I will beg her forgiveness through you,
low at your feet.

Whatever was never given her,
whatever I still long to give —
on your altar-tray I have placed,
today, that garland of love.



Love came, and opening the door, went out —
it will not come again.

Only one more guest is left to come;
with that one, the last acquaintance.

One day that guest will put out the lamp
and lift me into its chariot —
carry me from this house to some homeless
road among the stars.

Till then I will sit alone, the door open,
and finish what work remains.
When the day comes for that other guest,
it will meet no delay from me.
The rites of worship will be done, one day;
I mean to stand ready —
and, silent, with both arms held wide,
welcome that homeless guest.

The one who left today, opening the door,
called back as she went:
"Dry your eyes — one guest
still remains to come."

She said too: "Finish the garland one day,
picking the thorns from life;
carry it into the new house, homeless one —
the whole flowering vine."

IV

It was the dead of night; you left the house
by a road you had never taken, an unknown road.
At the hour of going you said no word,
you carried no farewell to anyone.
Alone you went out into a sleeping world —
I searched the dark and could not find you.
That kind, familiar form, so long known —
where, among the uncounted stars, has it gone?

If you had to go, did you go with empty hands?
Did you take nothing of this house with you?
Twenty years' weight of joy and sorrow
you left behind, laid in my lap.
Through the daily love of so many years
the home you built with your blessing hand,
filled to its brim with your hoarded tenderness —
today you left, and carried none of it away?

In your own household, now, without you,
how many good days, how many hard, still to come —
and I, in this emptied house, by old habit,
coming to look for you — to whom shall I turn?

Today only one question stirs in me:

O gracious one, if you had to go, if you went before me,
is there, somewhere, a bed kept spread
by two gentle hands, waiting, for the long evening?



In my house she is no longer — she is not there.
I go out and come back, and searching, do not find her.
My house, Lord, is only so much room —
whatever is lost from it stays lost.
Your house is boundless, a dwelling that holds the world;
it was there I came to look for her.
I stood beneath your evening sky
and looked toward you with wet eyes.
To some place from which no face, no joy, no thirst of longing
can ever again be lost,
I have brought this wounded heart of mine —
give it, give it, let it drown there.
The nectar my house no longer holds
I find again, that lost touch, in the midst of the world.

VI

When you were in the house you called me home
in your voice, tender, sweet as nectar.
Now that you have gone out into the world,
call me there, in that same tender tone.
The door you left standing open —
no one will ever tell me to shut it again.
You showed me the road that runs outside;
your silent leave-taking has stayed in my mind.
Sheltered now at the feet of the God of All,
show yourself — the goddess of my house, made goddess of the world.
Let a thread of light, drawn from every star,
mark, on your parted hair, its line of red.
Sitting apart, alone, I hold this thought like prayer:
may your blessing become the blessing of all.

VII

All the days you were near, tell me — by what art
did you keep yourself so hidden?
You stood behind your own labor,
seen only by the all-knowing eye of God.
Through the gap between one moment and the next
you went on, silent, your heart bowed low.
You made your whole household visible to everyone —
how unknown a house you kept for yourself!
Today, going, you opened the door
and showed me your shape entire.
Every day of that life, every broken task,
today lies scattered, fallen at my feet.
Your gaze now reaches the whole of time to come —
one unblinking look across every life.

VIII

Union with you is complete today
in this deep bond of the pain of parting.
You have come utterly close, leaving time and place behind,
broken through the wall and mingled with my heart.
Through your eyes now I see everything;
your sorrow I feel throughout the world.
I see your unseen hand at work in mine,
your longing lying folded in my own.
All we two had left to say to each other
that night gave you no time to say.
In the ache of that wordless leaving
I have looked about me, on every side, in vain.
Today, in this heart, under every thought,
your speech and mine have run together as one.

IX

O Lakshmi, you have no inner chamber now;
today you have put on the sweet form of Saraswati,
standing on music's hundred-petalled flower.
The mind's own lake lies now beneath your feet,
colored through with the whole world's reflection.
Your heart's beauty meets no wall now —
today it mingles, rapt, through all creation,
with every joy, with every light,
with every blessing. Your bracelet
has given its soft radiance of grace
into the hand of every faithful woman.
Your tender, aching heart has melted
into the heart of every woman living.
That form of yours, grown to the world's size, in my own breast
takes its full shape — Lakshmi and Saraswati made one.



You did not say all you had to say — you could not say it;
you kept yourself made small, O bashful one,
all the while you were here. When your heart's hidden hopes
wished to rise and cry out, lifting their voice,
with a warning finger you hushed them carefully,
in anxious shyness, lest by mistake they meet with insult.
Your own claim, your own right, with a hand silent and unsparing,
you set behind everyone else in the house, and thought nothing of it.
Past all shame now, in death you have grown great —
seated, unseen by the world, on my heart's lotus-petal,
tell me, eyes lowered, the unfinished story of your life
in speech that needs no language. Let your arms, freed of the body,
wind once more about the very core of me —
keep, inside me, your last and final claim.

XI

From behind death's curtain you have come back again,
dressed as a new bride, into the wedding-chamber of my heart,
on a silent footfall. All the weariness of a tired life
has been washed clean in death's own bathing-water.
A new, rare beauty
you have gained from the world's own undying grace.
Smiling, softened, entranced, in the secret light of this heart,
you came, and stood, and said nothing.
Through death's great gate
you have entered the innermost self — come in from the world, beloved.
Today no music played, no crowd gathered to keep festival,
no line of lamps was lit for the day's joy —
only a peace, deep, still, wordless, drowned in tears;
today's news no one has heard, no one has known.
My own heart alone has lit a single lamp;
my own song alone, in solitude, gathers the words of this meeting.

XII

Within myself I feel
more whole, today, than I have been. Your glory
you have folded into me in a single instant.
With your own hand you have touched
the philosopher's stone of death to my life.
You have risen out of the fire of my mourning
new and unmarred; today you, faithful one,
wear the unstained light of your own devotion,
in which there is no scorch of grief, no dimming —
bearing the untiring majesty of blessing
you have merged, entirely, with my heart.
And so, today, I feel with my whole mind
that my own life has spread itself out wide,
and, forever joined within it, a woman death cannot touch.

XIII

You, in the midst of my life,
have mingled the sweetness of death.
With the glow of an endless leave-taking
you have colored this heart of mine;
you have traced, on every thought,
the practiced hues of a sunset.
The far ring of my life's horizon
has taken on a beauty unknown before;
in the sky of a heart washed clean with weeping
a distant city of heaven can be seen.
You, in the midst of my life,
have mingled the sweetness of death.

You, O shape of every blessing,
have made even death a grace.
From beyond life's farther shore,
each moment, in death's own light,
you send your heart across to me,
soft and damp with a silent love.
In death's quiet, gentle house
you sit beside the window still —
you have left a lamp burning there,

bright with a hope that does not end.

You, O shape of every blessing,

have made even death a grace.

You, my life and my death,

have bound together with your two arms.

Laying your own spirit bare,

you have mixed deathlessness into death;

death itself, life's own beloved,

you have made, with your hand, a bride.

You have thrown the door wide open,

you have drawn the curtain back,

and between being born and dying

you stand, silent, and do not move.

You, my life and my death,

have bound together with your two arms.

XIV

I found a handful of old letters —
a few small marks of a life spent in tenderness,
a few little toys of memory, kept
with such care, in secret, about the house.
From that great current of time, whose flood of ending
carries off suns and moons and stars by the thousand,
you, in much fear, stole away
these few small, worthless things
and hid them, telling yourself,
no one else has any claim on what is mine.
With whom will they find shelter now?
They belong to no one in the world, and yet they remain.
Just as your tenderness once kept them safe —
is there truly no one keeping you the same, today?

XV

In this house, once, dressed as a new bride,
you came and stood beside me,
and laid in my hand your own trembling hand —
was that chance? Was that an accident only?
It was not the happening of a single moment;
it was counsel decreed from time without beginning.
In the meeting of two, we two would be made whole —
carrying that one hope, we had come through many ages.
How much you have taken from my life,
how much you have given into this stream of living!
Through how many days, how many nights, how much fear and shyness,
how much loss and gain, how much winning and losing,
we went on shaping, untiring, together —
who but the two of us could ever finish it?

XVI

In this brief life, the few glad days,
trembling, full of rapture, dissolved in the ache of song,
that you had won, my Lakshmi — will you let them go to waste?
And so I go on searching. In the gold cloud-banks of sunset
I look, unmoving — there, in what tender lettering
have you written the lost story of that life's evening!
Today, at noon, the murmured tune of the leaves
carries some sigh of yours, from I do not know when!
In the warm winter sun you spread abroad, with your own hand,
how much of the deep, still happiness of winter noons!
Sitting, looking into myself, I think this thought —
how many of your days and nights, how many longings, still surround me;
hearing them weep, you keep coming back, again and again, near.

XVII

As thunder goes ahead, announcing rain,
who could have known your grief, in that same way,
would bring, all at once, into my life
the deep, unbroken flow of union!
Gathering, tenderly, each drop of my tears,
threading them into your parted hair, over my useless mourning
you strike, silently, your teasing smile.
The farther you drifted from everyone else,
the nearer, by that same measure, you came to me. I do not know how,
stealing yourself away into the midst of death,
you have taken hold, in my own life, of life itself,
and lit, in my own eyes, a light —
this my grief, until now, did not know.

XVIII

You were the woman who once arrayed our house;
array my life now in that same way —
wherever the least litter of straw remains,
whatever neglected, broken pieces are left
of many slack and weary days and nights. Bring water,
wash every stain away today,
throw out, past the door, all that is refuse.
Where my prayer-room stands, in its quiet shrine,
come there silently, and open the door, gently —
in the golden vessel of blessing fill, with care,
the holy water of pilgrimage; gather the hundred-petalled
lotus of worship with your own hand and bring it in. There, together,
let us sit before the god, on a single seat.

XIX

How many times, mad with spring, dressed as a guest,
has he come laughing to your door and mine, a lute in hand,
bringing his store of songs, his spells to charm the mind,
his whole array of flowers and leaves, gathered for his sorcery —
calling, in the cuckoo's note: open, oh, open the door.
Forget your work today, forget the world, forget yourself.
Coming, coming, so many days, he went away, having only knocked —
whatever task held me then, I gave him no reply.
Today you have gone, and he has come, borne on the south wind —
today I have no strength to forget him, even a moment.
He brings your gaze, your speech that finds no words;
in the grove he stirs, murmuring, your own restless heart.
The one I slipped away from, so many times, in our days together —
your parting now calls him, again and again, into this empty house.



Come, Spring, come today,
come to my door as well.

No flowers gathered, the plans all broken,
the lamp gone out, the seat left empty —
laugh, if you must, at the graceless, dulled
poverty of my house.

Yet, Spring, yet, today,
come to my door as well.

Today every window I have
stands open, stands wide.

An unhindered day lies before me now,
no hope left in it, no task left to do;
of its own will, in the south wind,
my heart's swing rocks and sways —
every window of this emptied house
stands open, today.

So many days' laughter and weeping
have here run their course, and ended.
Let them go free into your sky,
let them draw breath in your wind;

let them, in new and newer shapes, be born again
in bakul-flower and champak.

All the laughter, all the weeping of days now gone,
that here have run their course, and ended.

In my breast, in the middle of its ache,
hold your festival.

Bring your laughter, bring your flute,
bring flowers and green leaves, heap on heap,
let every bird there is
turn, and turn, and go on singing.
Sounding out this pain of mine,
hold your festival.

In that clamor, deep within,
I will find, I will find an answer.
When heaven and earth, bound into one company,
raise up your tumult, all together,
laughing, laughing, at death's own door
you will knock, again, again —
in that clamor, deep within,
I will find, I will find an answer.

XXI

That which makes the many one, which makes the various sweet,
which brings the whole abundant world beneath one small, slight finger,
which leads the day, restless with its many strivings, gently on
into the deep-sleeping, calm, golden dark of evening,
into a rest, deep and content, lit only by the steady polestar,
that which drowns the fretful noise of many words into one song
in the nectar of sorrow — of that love, beloved,
do not leave me deprived; stay wakeful, every day, and watch.
At the day's end let the gold gleam of your bracelet
trace a golden dream across sleep's dark canvas;
let the fall of your footstep, on my hushed evening sky,
come to rest without a sound, in a faint red, like henna;
let this life be drawn on, by the unblinking pull of your eyes,
into your own inner room, toward a death made whole.

XXII

In the way that, taking a woman's shape, his own sweetness
the Lord of the World steals away from himself;
in the way he is beautiful through all that moves and all that is still;
in the way his joy makes a game of love;
in the way there is the flower on the vine, the ripple on the river;
in the way Lakshmi, ruler of the world, holds her quiet sway;
in the way the young cloud gives its gift of rain,
and the river gives the earth her own milk to drink;
in the way the One, restless for joy, makes of himself
two, and finds, in that, his happiness,
and from the meeting-shock of the two a manifold sorrow
goes on shaping color, and fragrance, and song forever —
O woman, coming for a moment to my side,
you filled my heart with one glimpse of that very mystery.

XXIII

Light it, oh, light it — light the evening lamp,
that small measure of light, at one corner of the heart,
keep alive with your own hand. And there, behind it,
sit and stay, through this coming night,
your hair braided with care, dressed in red,
to draw back my scattered mind
out of the net of living. I understand, today,
that so much striving, achievement, fame, all that array,
turns to a dry weight, all of it comes to nothing,
if, behind that whole heap of endeavor,
there is not one single smile; if pride from every side,
effort of every kind, does not, in the evening light,
come home again to one house, and hold still there,
its tired head bowed at the feet of a single love.

XXIV

As dusk comes silently and draws its own hem
over every wound, every tarnish of a house worn out with labor,
the poverty of a broken home, the shame of a torn garment —
for your sake let a hushed grief, with two soft hands, in that same way,
spread wide an unbound, generous dark
over the stumbling, the brokenness, the loss, the worn and shattered ruin
of so many troubled days and nights of this life of mine —
let it gather my whole self, the good and the ill together,
inside one vast, golden circle of sorrow.
Let no wanting, no bitterness, remain in me today;
let me not keep turning, again and again, toward what was never enough —
whatever is gone, let it go; I will go on, slowly, softly,
to where your lamp of union burns, unwavering,
in the tireless joy of the god of the three worlds.

XXV

Wake, oh wake, my heart, wake —
the tide has risen in the sea of tears.
It knows no shore,
it obeys no dam any more;
to its own roaring song, wake.
Your small boat dances on the sea of tears.

Today, in this blessed hour of dawn,
a new sun has climbed the sky.
In the wind that has lost its way
that same great mantra sounds.
In this hour of an unknown journey,
from one horizon to the sky's far rim.

I do not know what wakes, in the wide white sky,
in the first bright red of morning.
I do not know for what reason
the depths have risen, waking,
lifting their arms, asking for whom, into the sky —
gone wild at the bright gleam of whom.

On this bare, desert shore of the sea

the flood has grown wild in its fierce play.

Here the waking day
goes without a bird's own song,
on this empty, sand-bound shore,
in this play of foaming waves.

It sways, oh, it sways, the tear sways,
striking against the shore of my breast.
Ahead lies the boundless world,
and go I must, wherever that may be —
shoreless, restless grief sways on,
running toward some far, golden shore.

Do not cling blindly, O earth;
loosen, oh, loosen the moored boat.
On the restless sail
the wind strikes, crying out —
stay behind, far off, O earth;
hold this boat bound no longer.

XXVI

Sleep now; I will keep watch at the door tonight —
I will keep the lamp lit.
You loved enough; today, alone, it falls to me alone
to go on loving.
For my sake you will never again need to adorn yourself;
for yours, from now,
I will keep my own heart dressed in flowers,
through every day, every night.
Your arms, forgetting weariness and grief through so many days,
went on serving;
today, lifting them free of all their labor,
I will hold them, set them upon my head.
Now you have finished your worship, and gone your way,
your whole heart given over;
from now, take my worship too, in these tears of mine —
take this, my hymn.

XXVII

You loved this green earth well;
your smile was full of a great gladness —
joining the current of all creation
you had learned how to be glad;
and so your heart was a heart that stole other hearts away.
This green earth was your very own.

Today, over this quiet field, along the sky,
your eyes still seem to turn and look back.
That small smile of yours,
the joy of that long, easy gazing,
goes on, touching everyone, singing its goodbye,
down this palm-grove, this village, this open field.

Tracing that old delight of yours onto my own eyes,
you have left your gaze resting inside my sight.
Today, all alone,
I see with the seeing of two —
you go on taking your pleasure, dwelling in my mind,
your rapt look traced upon my very stars.

This light of winter, trembling through the wood,

these siris-leaves, falling on the wind —
your mind and my mind
go on playing, every moment,
in this restless shiver of shadow and half-light,
in this murmuring wood of a winter noon.

Live on, oh, live on, in my life.
Through my own heart you go on wanting things —
so that I understand, in my mind,
most secretly of all,
that today, inside me, you live on, having become me.
Live on, oh, live on, in my own life!

Translator's Notes

The guest who is Death (অতিথি). Sections III and XIX depend on a motif that has no clean English equivalent: atithi, "guest," carries an obligation of hospitality in Bengali/Indian culture that "visitor" does not. Death is not an intruder but an atithi one is bound to welcome with open arms — hence "গৃহহীন অতিথি," the "homeless guest," in III. I kept "guest" throughout rather than "visitor" or "stranger" to preserve that duty-of-welcome undertone, even though it reads slightly stranger in English than in the original.

লক্ষ্মী / সরস্বতী / সতী — the shifting divine register. The poem repeatedly recasts the dead wife as Lakshmi (goddess of the household and of fortune), then as Saraswati (goddess of art, music, wisdom), and calls her satī — literally "a virtuous/devoted wife," but the word is inseparable from the goddess Sati, whose self-immolation is the root of the term "suttee." English has no single word that carries both "faithful wife" and "goddess-figure of sacrificial devotion" at once, so I translated contextually ("faithful one," "devotion") rather than importing "Sati," which would misleadingly suggest the specific myth of self-immolation rather than the broader cultural ideal of wifely constancy Tagore is invoking.

গৃহলক্ষ্মী → বিশ্বলক্ষ্মী (VI, IX). This pivot — "goddess of the house" becoming "goddess of the world" — is the structural hinge of the whole cycle: private grief opening out into cosmic consolation. I rendered it as literally as English allows ("the goddess of my home, become the goddess of the world") because the parallelism is the point; smoothing it into freer language would lose the deliberate echo.

পরশমণি (XII) — the touchstone. In Bengali folklore and alchemy, the parashmoni is a legendary stone that turns base metal to gold on contact. "মৃত্যুর পরশমণি" ("the touchstone of death") is Tagore reaching for this image elsewhere too (famously in the song "আগুনের পরশমণি"). I translated it directly as "the

philosopher's stone of death," since that's the nearest live image in the English tradition — an object whose touch transmutes rather than destroys.

করুণ. This word recurs constantly (করুণ ঘোর, করুণ আঁধার, করুণ রব) and sits in a gap between English words: it means something like "tender-and-sorrowful at once" — closer to "plaintive" or "pitying" than either "sad" or "gentle" alone. I varied the English (tender, plaintive, gentle) by context rather than fixing on one word, since no single English adjective holds both halves of its meaning together the way করুণ does.

সংকোচ / লজ্জা (X) — reticence as virtue. Section X turns on the idea that the wife suppressed her own claims out of sankoch (shy self-restraint) and lajja (modesty/shame) — not English "shame" in the sense of guilt, but a culturally prized self-effacement, especially expected of women in the household. "Anxious shyness" is my best compromise; "shame" alone would import a negative moral judgment the Bengali doesn't carry.

The বিচ্ছেদ-মিলন paradox (separation as union). The philosophical center of the cycle, especially VIII, XI–XIII, and XVII, is that biccheda (parting) becomes the very ground of a deeper milan (union) — grief is not opposed to love but is love's final, most complete expression. This is the same devotional logic found in Vaishnava poetry, where the pain of separation from the divine beloved is itself a form of intimacy. I tried to keep the paradox stated plainly rather than softened ("union with you is complete today in this deep bond of the pain of parting"), since blunting it into ordinary consolation ("I feel closer to you now") would erase exactly what makes these poems distinctive.

Meter and song-form (I, XIII, XX, XXV, XXVI). Five sections are written as actual songs, in short rhymed lines with refrains that return at the start and end of each stanza (a form Tagore used for pieces meant to be sung, several of which entered the Rabindrasangeet repertoire). The rest are written in continuous, unrhymed

payar-style long couplets, closer to blank verse. I marked this structural difference by setting the song-sections in italics with their refrains intact, and letting the couplet-sections run as continuous free verse — an attempt to preserve the shape of the difference even where the rhyme itself (Bengali end-rhyme is far denser and easier to sustain than English) could not be carried over without badly distorting the sense.

Sanskritic compounds. Lines like "শোকযজ্ঞত্যাগে" (literally "in the fire-offering of the sacrifice-of-grief") or "মৃত্যুর সিংহদ্বার" ("death's lion-gate," i.e., great ceremonial gate) pack an entire clause into one compound noun — a resource Bengali inherits from Sanskrit that English simply doesn't have. I unpacked these into short English phrases ("the fire of my grief's sacrifice," "the great gate of death") rather than coining artificial compounds, since forced English compounds tend to sound comic rather than solemn.