

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **Rabindranath Tagore**

**- poems -**

**Publication Date:**

2004

**Publisher:**

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

## **A Moments Indulgence**

I ask for a moment's indulgence to sit by thy side. The works  
that I have in hand I will finish afterwards.

Away from the sight of thy face my heart knows no rest nor respite,  
and my work becomes an endless toil in a shoreless sea of toil.

Today the summer has come at my window with its sighs and murmurs; and  
the bees are plying their minstrelsy at the court of the flowering grove.

Now it is time to sit quite, face to face with thee, and to sing  
dedication of life in this silent and overflowing leisure.

Rabindranath Tagore

## Authorship

You say that father write a lot of books, but what he write I don't understand.

He was reading to you all the evening, but could you really make out what he meant?

What nice stores, mother, you can tell us! Why can't father write like that, I wonder?

Did he never hear from his own mother stories of giants and fairies and princesses?

Has he forgotten them all?

Often when he gets late for his bath you have to and call him an hundred times.

You wait and keep his dishes warm for him, but he goes on writing and forgets.

Father always plays at making books.

If ever I go to play in father's room, you come and call me, "What a naughty child!"

If I make the slightest noise you say, "Don't you see that father's at his work?"

What's the fun of always writing and writing?

When I take up father's pen or pencil and write upon his book just as he does, -a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h,i,-why do you get cross with me then, mother?

You never say a word when father writes.

When my father wastes such heaps of paper, mother, you don't seem to mind at all.

But if I take only one sheet to take a boat with, you say, "Child, how troublesome you are!"

What do you think of father's spoiling sheets and sheets of paper with black marks all over both sides?

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Baby's Way**

If baby only wanted to, he could fly up to heaven this moment.

It is not for nothing that he does not leave us.

He loves to rest his head on mother's bosom, and cannot ever bear to lose sight of her.

Baby know all manner of wise words, though few on earth can understand their meaning.

It is not for nothing that he never wants to speak.

The one thing he wants is to learn mother's words from mother's lips. That is why he looks so innocent.

Baby had a heap of gold and pearls, yet he came like a beggar on to this earth.

It is not for nothing he came in such a disguise.

This dear little naked mendicant pretends to be utterly helpless, so that he may beg for mother's wealth of love.

Baby was so free from every tie in the land of the tiny crescent moon.

It was not for nothing he gave up his freedom.

He knows that there is room for endless joy in mother's little corner of a heart, and it is sweeter far than liberty to be caught and pressed in her dear arms.

Baby never knew how to cry. He dwelt in the land of perfect bliss.

It is not for nothing he has chosen to shed tears.

Though with the smile of his dear face he draws mother's yearning heart to him, yet his little cries over tiny troubles weave the double bond of pity and love.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Baby's World**

I wish I could take a quiet corner in the heart of my baby's very own world.

I know it has stars that talk to him, and a sky that stoops down to his face to amuse him with its silly clouds and rainbows.

Those who make believe to be dumb, and look as if they never could move, come creeping to his window with their stories and with trays crowded with bright toys.

I wish I could travel by the road that crosses baby's mind, and out beyond all bounds;

Where messengers run errands for no cause between the kingdoms of kings of no history;

Where Reason makes kites of her laws and flies them, the Truth sets Fact free from its fetters.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Beggarly Heart**

When the heart is hard and parched up,  
come upon me with a shower of mercy.

When grace is lost from life,  
come with a burst of song.

When tumultuous work raises its din on all sides shutting me out from  
beyond, come to me, my lord of silence, with thy peace and rest.

When my beggarly heart sits crouched, shut up in a corner,  
break open the door, my king, and come with the ceremony of a king.

When desire blinds the mind with delusion and dust, O thou holy one,  
thou wakeful, come with thy light and thy thunder

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Benediction**

Bless this little heart, this white soul that has won the kiss of heaven for our earth.

He loves the light of the sun, he loves the sight of his mother's face.

He has not learned to despise the dust, and to hanker after gold.

Clasp him to your heart and bless him.

He has come into this land of an hundred cross-roads.

I know not how he chose you from the crowd, came to your door, and grasped you hand to ask his way.

He will follow you, laughing the talking, and not a doubt in his heart.

Keep his trust, lead him straight and bless him.

Lay your hand on his head, and pray that though the waves underneath grow threatening, yet the breath from above may come and fill his sails and waft him to the heaven of peace.

Forget him not in your hurry, let him come to your heart and bless him.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Brink Of Eternity**

In desperate hope I go and search for her  
in all the corners of my room;  
I find her not.

My house is small  
and what once has gone from it can never be regained.

But infinite is thy mansion, my lord,  
and seeking her I have to come to thy door.

I stand under the golden canopy of thine evening sky  
and I lift my eager eyes to thy face.

I have come to the brink of eternity from which nothing can vanish  
---no hope, no happiness, no vision of a face seen through tears.

Oh, dip my emptied life into that ocean,  
plunge it into the deepest fullness.  
Let me for once feel that lost sweet touch  
in the allness of the universe.

Rabindranath Tagore



## **Chain Of Pearls**

Mother, I shall weave a chain of pearls for thy neck  
with my tears of sorrow.

The stars have wrought their anklets of light to deck thy feet,  
but mine will hang upon thy breast.

Wealth and fame come from thee  
and it is for thee to give or to withhold them.  
But this my sorrow is absolutely mine own,  
and when I bring it to thee as my offering  
thou rewardest me with thy grace.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Closed Path**

I thought that my voyage had come to its end  
at the last limit of my power,---that the path before me was closed,  
that provisions were exhausted  
and the time come to take shelter in a silent obscurity.

But I find that thy will knows no end in me.  
And when old words die out on the tongue,  
new melodies break forth from the heart;  
and where the old tracks are lost,  
new country is revealed with its wonders.

Rabindranath Tagore

## Clouds and Waves

Mother, the folk who live up in the clouds call out to me-

"We play from the time we wake till the day ends.

We play with the golden dawn, we play with the silver moon."

I ask, "But how am I to get up to you?"

They answer, "Come to the edge of the earth, lift up your hands to the sky, and you will be taken up into the clouds."

"My mother is waiting for me at home," I say, "How can I leave her and come?"

Then they smile and float away.

But I know a nicer game than that, mother.

I shall be the cloud and you the moon.

I shall cover you with both my hands, and our house-top will be the blue sky.

The folk who live in the waves call out to me-

"We sing from morning till night; on and on we travel and know not where we pass."

I ask, "But how am I to join you?"

They tell me, "Come to the edge of the shore and stand with your eyes tight shut, and you will be carried out upon the waves."

I say, "My mother always wants me at home in the everything-how can I leave her and go?"

They smile, dance and pass by.

But I know a better game than that.

I will be the waves and you will be a strange shore.

I shall roll on and on and on, and break upon your lap with laughter.

And no one in the world will know where we both are.

Rabindranath Tagore

## Colored Toys

When I bring to you colored toys, my child,  
I understand why there is such a play of colors on clouds, on water,  
and why flowers are painted in tints  
---when I give colored toys to you, my child.

When I sing to make you dance  
I truly now why there is music in leaves,  
and why waves send their chorus of voices to the heart of the listening earth  
---when I sing to make you dance.

When I bring sweet things to your greedy hands  
I know why there is honey in the cup of the flowers  
and why fruits are secretly filled with sweet juice  
---when I bring sweet things to your greedy hands.

When I kiss your face to make you smile, my darling,  
I surely understand what pleasure streams from the sky in morning light,  
and what delight that is that is which the summer breeze brings to my body  
---when I kiss you to make you smile.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Death**

Hi There! I see you're enjoying the site, and just wanted to extend an invitation to register for our free site. The members of oldpoetry strive to make this a fun place to learn and share - hope you join us! - Kevin

Rabindranath Tagore

## Defamation

Why are those tears in your eyes, my child?

How horrid of them to be always scolding you for nothing!

You have stained your fingers and face with ink while writing-  
is that why they call you dirty?

O, fie! Would they dare to call the full moon dirty because  
it has smudged its face with ink?

For every little trifle they blame you, my child. They are  
ready to find fault for nothing.

You tore your clothes while playing-is that why they call you  
untidy?

O, fie! What would they call an autumn morning that smiles  
through its ragged clouds?

Take no heed of what they say to you, my child.

They make a long list of your misdeeds.

Everybody knows how you love sweet things-is that why they  
call you greedy?

O, fie! What then would they call us who love you?

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Distant Time**

I know not from what distant time  
thou art ever coming nearer to meet me.  
Thy sun and stars can never keep thee hidden from me for aye.

In many a morning and eve thy footsteps have been heard  
and thy messenger has come within my heart and called me in secret.

I know not only why today my life is all astir,  
and a feeling of tremulous joy is passing through my heart.

It is as if the time were come to wind up my work,  
and I feel in the air a faint smell of thy sweet presence.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Dungeon**

He whom I enclose with my name is weeping in this dungeon.  
I am ever busy building this wall all around; and as this wall goes up into  
the sky day by day I lose sight of my true being in its dark shadow.

I take pride in this great wall, and I plaster it with dust and sand  
lest a least hole should be left in this name;  
and for all the care I take I lose sight of my true being.

Rabindranath Tagore



## **Endless Time**

Time is endless in thy hands, my lord.  
There is none to count thy minutes.

Days and nights pass and ages bloom and fade like flowers.  
Thou knowest how to wait.

Thy centuries follow each other perfecting a small wild flower.

We have no time to lose,  
and having no time we must scramble for a chance.  
We are too poor to be late.

And thus it is that time goes by  
while I give it to every querulous man who claims it,  
and thine altar is empty of all offerings to the last.

At the end of the day I hasten in fear lest thy gate be shut;  
but I find that yet there is time.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Face To Face**

Day after day, O lord of my life,  
shall I stand before thee face to face.  
With folded hands, O lord of all worlds,  
shall I stand before thee face to face.

Under thy great sky in solitude and silence,  
with humble heart shall I stand before thee face to face.

In this laborious world of thine, tumultuous with toil  
and with struggle, among hurrying crowds  
shall I stand before thee face to face.

And when my work shall be done in this world,  
O King of kings, alone and speechless  
shall I stand before thee face to face.

Rabindranath Tagore

## Fairyland

If people came to know where my king's palace is, it would vanish into the air.

The walls are of white silver and the roof of shining gold.

The queen lives in a palace with seven courtyards, and she wears a jewel that cost all the wealth of seven kingdoms.

But let me tell you, mother, in a whisper, where my king's palace is.

It is at the corner of our terrace where the pot of the tulsi plant stands.

The princess lies sleeping on the far-away shore of the seven impassable seas.

There is none in the world who can find her but myself.

She has bracelets on her arms and pearl drops in her ears; her hair sweeps down upon the floor.

She will wake when I touch her with my magic wand and jewels will fall from her lips when she smiles.

But let me whisper in your ear, mother; she is there in the corner of our terrace where the pot of the tulsi plant stands.

When it is time for you to go to the river for your bath, step up to that terrace on the roof.

I sit in the corner where the shadow of the walls meet together.

Only puss is allowed to come with me, for she know where the barber in the story lives.

But let me whisper, mother, in your ear where the barber in the story lives.

It is at the corner of the terrace where the pot of the tulsi plant stands.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Farewell**

I have got my leave. Bid me farewell, my brothers!  
I bow to you all and take my departure.

Here I give back the keys of my door  
---and I give up all claims to my house.  
I only ask for last kind words from you.

We were neighbors for long,  
but I received more than I could give.  
Now the day has dawned  
and the lamp that lit my dark corner is out.  
A summons has come and I am ready for my journey.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Flower**

Pluck this little flower and take it, delay not! I fear lest it  
droop and drop into the dust.

I may not find a place in thy garland, but honour it with a touch of  
pain from thy hand and pluck it. I fear lest the day end before I am  
aware, and the time of offering go by.

Though its colour be not deep and its smell be faint, use this flower  
in thy service and pluck it while there is time.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Fool**

O Fool, try to carry thyself upon thy own shoulders!  
O beggar, to come beg at thy own door!

Leave all thy burdens on his hands who can bear all,  
and never look behind in regret.

Thy desire at once puts out the light from the lamp it touches with its breath.  
It is unholy---take not thy gifts through its unclean hands.  
Accept only what is offered by sacred love.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Free Love**

By all means they try to hold me secure who love me in this world.  
But it is otherwise with thy love which is greater than theirs,  
and thou keepst me free.

Lest I forget them they never venture to leave me alone.  
But day passes by after day and thou art not seen.

If I call not thee in my prayers, if I keep not thee in my heart,  
thy love for me still waits for my love.

Rabindranath Tagore

## Friend

Art thou abroad on this stormy night  
on thy journey of love, my friend?  
The sky groans like one in despair.

I have no sleep tonight.  
Ever and again I open my door and look out on  
the darkness, my friend!

I can see nothing before me.  
I wonder where lies thy path!

By what dim shore of the ink-black river,  
by what far edge of the frowning forest,  
through what mazy depth of gloom art thou threading  
thy course to come to me, my friend?

Rabindranath Tagore



## **Give Me Strength**

This is my prayer to thee, my lord---strike,  
strike at the root of penury in my heart.

Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and sorrows.

Give me the strength to make my love fruitful in service.

Give me the strength never to disown the poor or bend my knees before insolent  
might.

Give me the strength to raise my mind high above daily trifles.

And give me the strength to surrender my strength to thy will with love.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Innermost One**

He it is, the innermost one,  
who awakens my being with his deep hidden touches.

He it is who puts his enchantment upon these eyes  
and joyfully plays on the chords of my heart  
in varied cadence of pleasure and pain.

He it is who weaves the web of this maya  
in evanescent hues of gold and silver, blue and green,  
and lets peep out through the folds his feet,  
at whose touch I forget myself.

Days come and ages pass,  
and it is ever he who moves my heart in many a name,  
in many a guise, in many a rapture of joy and of sorrow.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Journey Home**

The time that my journey takes is long and the way of it long.

I came out on the chariot of the first gleam of light, and pursued my voyage through the wildernesses of worlds leaving my track on many a star and planet.

It is the most distant course that comes nearest to thyself,  
and that training is the most intricate which leads to the utter simplicity of a tune.

The traveler has to knock at every alien door to come to his own,  
and one has to wander through all the outer worlds to reach the innermost shrine at the end.

My eyes strayed far and wide before I shut them and said `Here art thou!'

The question and the cry `Oh, where?' melt into tears of a thousand streams and deluge the world with the flood of the assurance `I am!'

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Lamp Of Love**

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Rabindranath Tagore

## **Last Curtain**

I know that the day will come  
when my sight of this earth shall be lost,  
and life will take its leave in silence,  
drawing the last curtain over my eyes.

Yet stars will watch at night,  
and morning rise as before,  
and hours heave like sea waves casting up pleasures and pains.

When I think of this end of my moments,  
the barrier of the moments breaks  
and I see by the light of death  
thy world with its careless treasures.  
Rare is its lowliest seat,  
rare is its meanest of lives.

Things that I longed for in vain  
and things that I got  
---let them pass.  
Let me but truly possess  
the things that I ever spurned  
and overlooked.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Leave This**

Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads!  
Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut?  
Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!

He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground  
and where the pathmaker is breaking stones.  
He is with them in sun and in shower,  
and his garment is covered with dust.  
Put off thy holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil!

Deliverance?  
Where is this deliverance to be found?  
Our master himself has joyfully taken upon him the bonds of creation;  
he is bound with us all for ever.

Come out of thy meditations and leave aside thy flowers and incense!  
What harm is there if thy clothes become tattered and stained?  
Meet him and stand by him in toil and in sweat of thy brow.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Let Me Not Forget**

If it is not my portion to meet thee in this life  
then let me ever feel that I have missed thy sight  
---let me not forget for a moment,  
let me carry the pangs of this sorrow in my dreams  
and in my wakeful hours.

As my days pass in the crowded market of this world  
and my hands grow full with the daily profits,  
let me ever feel that I have gained nothing  
---let me not forget for a moment,  
let me carry the pangs of this sorrow in my dreams  
and in my wakeful hours.

When I sit by the roadside, tired and panting,  
when I spread my bed low in the dust,  
let me ever feel that the long journey is still before me  
---let me not forget a moment,  
let me carry the pangs of this sorrow in my dreams  
and in my wakeful hours.

When my rooms have been decked out and the flutes sound  
and the laughter there is loud,  
let me ever feel that I have not invited thee to my house  
---let me not forget for a moment,  
let me carry the pangs of this sorrow in my dreams  
and in my wakeful hours

Rabindranath Tagore

## Light

Light, my light, the world-filling light,  
the eye-kissing light,  
heart-sweetening light!

Ah, the light dances, my darling, at the center of my life;  
the light strikes, my darling, the chords of my love;  
the sky opens, the wind runs wild, laughter passes over the earth.

The butterflies spread their sails on the sea of light.  
Lilies and jasmines surge up on the crest of the waves of light.

The light is shattered into gold on every cloud, my darling,  
and it scatters gems in profusion.

Mirth spreads from leaf to leaf, my darling,  
and gladness without measure.  
The heaven's river has drowned its banks  
and the flood of joy is abroad.

Rabindranath Tagore



## **Little Flute**

Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail  
vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life.

This little flute of a reed thou hast carried over hills and dales,  
and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new.

At the immortal touch of thy hands my little heart loses its limits in  
joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable.

Thy infinite gifts come to me only on these very small hands of mine.  
Ages pass, and still thou pourest, and still there is room to fill.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Little Of Me**

Let only that little be left of me  
whereby I may name thee my all.

Let only that little be left of my will  
whereby I may feel thee on every side,  
and come to thee in everything,  
and offer to thee my love every moment.

Let only that little be left of me  
whereby I may never hide thee.  
Let only that little of my fetters be left  
whereby I am bound with thy will,  
and thy purpose is carried out in my life---and that is the fetter of thy love.

Rabindranath Tagore

## Lost Star

When the creation was new and all the stars shone in their first  
splendor, the gods held their assembly in the sky and sang  
'Oh, the picture of perfection! the joy unalloyed!'

But one cried of a sudden  
--- 'It seems that somewhere there is a break in the chain of light  
and one of the stars has been lost.'

The golden string of their harp snapped,  
their song stopped, and they cried in dismay  
--- 'Yes, that lost star was the best,  
she was the glory of all heavens!'

From that day the search is unceasing for her,  
and the cry goes on from one to the other  
that in her the world has lost its one joy!

Only in the deepest silence of night the stars smile  
and whisper among themselves  
--- 'Vain is this seeking! unbroken perfection is over all!'

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Lost Time**

On many an idle day have I grieved over lost time.  
But it is never lost, my lord.  
Thou hast taken every moment of my life in thine own hands.

Hidden in the heart of things thou art nourishing seeds into sprouts,  
buds into blossoms, and ripening flowers into fruitfulness.

I was tired and sleeping on my idle bed  
and imagined all work had ceased.  
In the morning I woke up  
and found my garden full with wonders of flowers.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Lotus**

On the day when the lotus bloomed, alas, my mind was straying,  
and I knew it not. My basket was empty and the flower remained unheeded.

Only now and again a sadness fell upon me, and I started up from my  
dream and felt a sweet trace of a strange fragrance in the south wind.

That vague sweetness made my heart ache with longing and it seemed to  
me that it was the eager breath of the summer seeking for its completion.

I knew not then that it was so near, that it was mine, and that this  
perfect sweetness had blossomed in the depth of my own heart.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Lover's Gifts II: Come to My Garden Walk**

Come to my garden walk, my love. Pass by the fervid flowers that press themselves on your sight. Pass them by, stopping at some chance joy, which like a sudden wonder of sunset illumines, yet elude.

For lover's gift is shy, it never tells its name, it flits across the shade, spreading a shiver of joy along the dust.

Overtake it or miss it for ever. But a gift that can be grasped is merely a frail flower, or a lamp with flame that will flicker.

Rabindranath Tagore

### **Lover's Gifts IV: She Is Near to My Heart**

She is near to my heart as the meadow-flower to the earth; she is sweet to me as sleep is to tired limbs. My love for her is my life flowing in its fullness, like a river in autumn flood, running with serene abandonment. My songs are one with my love, like the murmur of a stream, that sings with all its waves and current.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Lover's Gifts LII: Tired of Waiting**

Tired of waiting, you burst your bonds, impatient flowers, before the winter had gone. Glimpses of the unseen comer reached your wayside watch, and you rushed out running and panting, impulsive jasmines, troops of riotous roses.

You were the first to march to the breach of death, your clamour of colour and perfume troubled the air. You laughed and pressed and pushed each other, bared your breast and dropped in heaps.

The Summer will come in its time, sailing in the flood-tide of the south wind. But you never counted slow moments to be sure of him. You recklessly spent your all in the road, in the terrible joy of faith.

You heard his footsteps from afar, and flung your mantle of death for him to tread upon. Your bonds break even before the rescuer is seen, you make him your own ere he can come and claim you.

Rabindranath Tagore



## **Lover's Gifts LIV: In the Beginning of Time**

In the beginning of time, there rose from the churning of God's dream two women. One is the dancer at the court of paradise, the desired of men, she who laughs and plucks the minds of the wise from their cold meditations and of fools from their emptiness; and scatters them like seeds with careless hands in the extravagant winds of March, in the flowering frenzy of May.

The other is the crowned queen of heaven, the mother, throned on the fullness of golden autumn; she who in the harvest-time brings straying hearts to the smile sweet as tears, the beauty deep as the sea of silence, -brings them to the temple of the Unknown, at the holy confluence of Life and Death.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Lover's Gifts LVI: The Evening Was Lonely**

The evening was lonely for me, and I was reading a book till my heart became dry, and it seemed to me that beauty was a thing fashioned by the traders in words. Tired I shut the book and snuffed the candle. In a moment the room was flooded with moonlight.

Spirit of Beauty, how could you, whose radiance overbrims the sky, stand hidden behind a candle's tiny flame? How could a few vain words from a book rise like a mist, and veil her whose voice has hushed the heart of earth into ineffable calm?

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Lover's Gifts LVIII: Things Throng and Laugh**

Things throng and laugh loud in the sky; the sands and dust dance and whirl like children. Man's mind is aroused by their shouts; his thoughts long to be the playmates of things.

Our dreams, drifting in the stream of the vague, stretch their arms to clutch the earth, -their efforts stiffen into bricks and stones, and thus the city of man is built.

Voices come swarming from the past, -seeking answers from the living moments. Beats of their wings fill the air with tremulous shadows, and sleepless thoughts in our minds leave their nests to take flight across the desert of dimness, in the passionate thirst for forms. They are lampless pilgrims, seeking the shore of light, to find themselves in things. They will be lured into poets's rhymes, they will be housed in the towers of the town not yet planned, they have their call to arms from the battle fields of the future, they are bidden to join hands in the strife of peace yet to come.

Rabindranath Tagore

## Lover's Gifts LXX: Take Back Your Coins

Take back your coins, King's Councillor. I am of those women you sent to the forest shrine to decoy the young ascetic who had never seen a woman. I failed in your bidding.

Dimly day was breaking when the hermit boy came to bathe in the stream, his tawny locks crowded on his shoulders, like a cluster of morning clouds, and his limbs shining like a streak of sunbeam. We laughed and sang as we rowed in our boat; we jumped into the river in a mad frolic, and danced around him, when the sun rose staring at us from the water's edge in a flush of divine anger.

Like a child-god, the boy opened his eyes and watched our movements, the wonder deepening till his eyes shone like morning stars. He lifted his clasped hands and chanted a hymn of praise in his bird-like young voice, thrilling every leaf of the forest. Never such words were sung to a mortal woman before; they were like the silent hymn to the dawn which rises from the hushed hills. The women hid their mouths with their hands, their bodies swaying with laughter, and a spasm of doubt ran across his face. Quickly came I to his side, sorely pained, and, bowing to his feet, I said, "Lord, accept my service."

I led him to the grassy bank, wiped his body with the end of my silken mantle, and, kneeling on the ground, I dried his feet with my trailing hair. When I raised my face and looked into his eyes, I thought I felt the world's first kiss to the first woman, -Blessed am I, blessed is God, who made me a woman. I heard him say to me, "What God unknown are you? Your touch is the touch of the Immortal, your eyes have the mystery of the midnight."

Ah, no, not that smile, King's Councillor, -the dust of worldly wisdom has covered your sight, old man. But this boy's innocence pierced the mist and saw the shining truth, the woman divine....

The women clapped their hands, and laughed their obscene laugh, and with veils dragged on the dust and hair hanging loose they began to pelt him with flowers.

Alas, my spotless sun, could not my shame weave fiery mist to cover you in its folds? I fell at his feet and cried, "Forgive me. " I fled like a stricken deer through shade and sun, and cried as I fled, " Forgive me. " The women's foul laughter pressed me like a cracking fire, but the words ever rang in my ears, " What God unknown are you?"

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Lover's Gifts V: I Would Ask For Still More**

I would ask for still more, if I had the sky with all its stars,  
and the world with its endless riches; but I would be content with  
the smallest corner of this earth if only she were mine.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Lover's Gifts VIII: There Is Room for You**

There is room for you. You are alone with your few sheaves of rice. My boat is crowded, it is heavily laden, but how can I turn you away? Your young body is slim and swaying; there is a twinkling smile in the edge of your eyes, and your robe is coloured like the rain cloud.

The travellers will land for different roads and homes. You will sit for a while on the prow of my boat, and at the journey's end none will keep you back.

Where do you go, and to what home, to garner your sheaves? I will not question you, but when I fold my sails and moor my boat I shall sit and wonder in the evening, -Where do you go, and to what home, to garner your sheaves?

Rabindranath Tagore

### **Lover's Gifts XIII: Last Night in the Garden**

Last night in the garden I offered you my youth's foaming wine. You lifted the cup to your lips, you shut your eyes and smiled while I raised your veil, unbound your tresses, drawing down upon my breast your face sweet with its silence, last night when the moon's dream overflowed the world of slumber.

To-day in the dew-cooled calm of the dawn you are walking to God's temple, bathed and robed in white, with a basketful of flowers in your hand. I stand aside in the shade under the tree, with my head bent, in the calm of the dawn by the lonely road to the temple.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Lover's Gifts XIX: It Is Written in the Book**

It is written in the book that Man, when fifty, must leave the noisy world, to go to the forest seclusion. But the poet proclaims that the forest hermitage is only for the young. For it is the birthplace of flowers and the haunt of birds and bees; and hidden hooks are waiting there for the thrill of lovers' whispers. There the moon-light, that is all one kiss for the malati flowers, has its deep message, but those who understand it are far below fifty.

And alas, youth is inexperienced and wilful, therefore it is but meet that the old should take charge of the household, and the young take to the seclusion of forest shades and the severe discipline of courting.

Rabindranath Tagore



## **Lover's Gifts XL: A Message Came**

A message came from my youth of vanished days, saying, " I wait for you among the quivering of unborn May, where smiles ripen for tears and hours ache with songs unsung."

It says, "Come to me across the worn-out track of age, through the gates of death. For dreams fade, hopes fail, the fathered fruits of the year decay, but I am the eternal truth, and you shall meet me again and again in your voyage of life from shore to shore."

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Lover's Gifts XLII: Are You a Mere Picture**

Are you a mere picture, and not as true as those stars, true as this dust? They throb with the pulse of things, but you are immensely aloof in your stillness, painted form.

The day was when you walked with me, your breath warm, your limbs singing of life. My world found its speech in your voice, and touched my heart with your face. You suddenly stopped in your walk, in the shadow-side of the Forever, and I went on alone.

Life, like a child, laughs, shaking its rattle of death as it runs; it beckons me on, I follow the unseen; but you stand there, where you stopped behind that dust and those stars; and you are a mere picture.

No, it cannot be. Had the life-flood utterly stopped in you, it would stop the river in its flow, and the foot-fall of dawn in her cadence of colours. Had the glimmering dusk of your hair vanished in the hopeless dark, the woodland shade of summer would die with its dreams.

Can it be true that I forgot you? We haste on without heed, forgetting the flowers on the roadside hedge. Yet they breathe unaware into our forgetfulness, filling it with music. You have moved from my world, to take seat at the root of my life, and therefore is this forgetting-remembrance lost in its own depth.

You are no longer before my songs, but one with them. You came to me with the first ray of dawn. I lost you with the last gold of evening. Ever since I am always finding you through the dark. No, you are no mere picture.

Rabindranath Tagore

### **Lover's Gifts XLIII: Dying, You Have Left Behind**

Dying, you have left behind you the great sadness of the Eternal in my life. You have painted my thought's horizon with the sunset colours of your departure, leaving a track of tears across the earth to love's heaven. Clasped in your dear arms, life and death united in me in a marriage bond.

I think I can see you watching there in the balcony with your lamp lighted, where the end and the beginning of all things meet. My world went hence through the doors that you opened-you holding the cup of death to my lips, filling it with life from your own.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Lover's Gifts XLIV: Where Is Heaven**

Where is heaven? you ask me, my child,-the sages tell us it is beyond the limits of birth and death, unswayed by the rhythm of day and night; it is not of the earth.

But your poet knows that its eternal hunger is for time and space, and it strives evermore to be born in the fruitful dust. Heaven is fulfilled in your sweet body, my child, in your palpitating heart.

The sea is beating its drums in joy, the flowers are a-tiptoe to kiss you. For heaven is born in you, in the arms of the mother-dust.

Rabindranath Tagore

### **Lover's Gifts XLVII: The Road Is**

The road is my wedded companion. She speaks to me under my feet all day, she sings to my dreams all night.

My meeting with her had no beginning, it begins endlessly at each daybreak, renewing its summer in fresh flowers and songs, and her every new kiss is the first kiss to me.

The road and I are lovers. I change my dress for her night after night, leaving the tattered cumber of the old in the wayside inns when the day dawns.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Lover's Gifts XLVIII: I Travelled the Old Road**

I travelled the old road every day, I took my fruits to the market,  
my cattle to the meadows, I ferried my boat across the stream and  
all the ways were well known to me.

One morning my basket was heavy with wares. Men were busy in  
the fields, the pastures crowded with cattle; the breast of earth  
heaved with the mirth of ripening rice.

Suddenly there was a tremor in the air, and the sky seemed to  
kiss me on my forehead. My mind started up like the morning out of  
mist.

I forgot to follow the track. I stepped a few paces from the  
path, and my familiar world appeared strange to me, like a flower  
I had only known in bud.

My everyday wisdom was ashamed. I went astray in the fairyland  
of things. It was the best luck of my life that I lost my path that  
morning, and found my eternal childhood.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Lover's Gifts XVI: She Dwelt Here by the Pool**

She dwelt here by the pool with its landing-stairs in ruins. Many an evening she had watched the moon made dizzy by the shaking of bamboo leaves, and on many a rainy day the smell of the wet earth had come to her over the young shoots of rice.

Her pet name is known here among those date-palm groves and in the courtyards where girls sit and talk while stitching their winter quilts. The water in this pool keeps in its depth the memory of her swimming limbs, and her wet feet had left their marks, day after day, on the footpath leading to the village.

The women who come to-day with their vessels to the water have all seen her smile over simple jests, and the old peasant, taking his bullocks to their bath, used to stop at her door every day to greet her.

Many a sailing-boat passes by this village; many a traveller takes rest beneath that banyan tree; the ferry-boat crosses to yonder ford carrying crowds to the market; but they never notice this spot by the village road, near the pool with its ruined landing-stairs,-where dwelt she whom I love.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Lover's Gifts XVIII: Your Days**

Your days will be full of cares, if you must give me your heart.  
My house by the cross-roads has its doors open and my mind is  
absent, -for I sing.

I shall never be made to answer for it, if you must give me  
your heart. If I pledge my word to you in tunes now, and am too  
much in earnest to keep it when music is silent, you must forgive  
me; for the law laid down in May is best broken in December.

Do not always keep remembering it, if you must give me your  
heart. When your eyes sing with love, and your voice ripples with  
laughter, my answers to your questions will be wild, and not  
miserly accurate in facts, -they are to be believed for ever and  
then forgotten for good.

Rabindranath Tagore



## **Lover's Gifts XXII: I Shall Gladly Suffer**

I shall gladly suffer the pride of culture to die out in my house,  
if only in some happy future I am born a herd-boy in the Brinda  
forest.

The herd-boy who grazes his cattle sitting under the banyan  
tree, and idly weaves gunja flowers into garlands, who loves to  
splash and plunge in the Jamuna's cool deep stream.

He calls his companions to wake up when morning dawns, and all  
the houses in the lane hum with the sound of the churn, clouds of  
dust are raised by the cattle, the maidens come out in the  
courtyard to milk the king.

As the shadows deepen under the tomal trees, and the dusk  
gathers on the river-banks; when the milkmaids, while crossing the  
turbulent water, tremble with fear; and loud peacocks, with tails  
outspread, dance in the forest, he watches the summer clouds.

When the April night is sweet as a fresh-blown flower, he  
disappears in the forest with a peacock's plume in his hair; the  
swing ropes are twined with flowers on the branches; the south wind  
throbs with music, and the merry shepherd boys crowd on the banks  
of the blue river.

No, I will never be the leader, brothers, of this new age of  
new Bengal; I shall not trouble to light the lamp of culture for  
the benighted. If only I could be born, under the shady asoka  
groves, in some village of Brinda, where milk is churned by the  
maidens!

Rabindranath Tagore

### **Lover's Gifts XXVIII: I Dreamt**

I dreamt that she sat by my head, tenderly ruffling my hair with her fingers, playing the melody of her touch. I looked at her face and struggled with my tears, till the agony of unspoken words burst my sleep like a bubble.

I sat up and saw the glow of the Milky Way above my window, like a world of silence on fire, and I wondered if at this moment she had a dream that rhymed with mine.

Rabindranath Tagore

### **Lover's Gifts XXXIX: There Is a Looker-On**

There is a looker-on who sits behind my eyes. I seems he has seen things in ages and worlds beyond memory's shore, and those forgotten sights glisten on the grass and shiver on the leaves. He has seen under new veils the face of the one beloved, in twilight hours of many a nameless star. Therefore his sky seems to ache with the pain of countless meetings and partings, and a longing pervades this spring breeze, -the longing that is full of the whisper of ages without beginning.

Rabindranath Tagore

## Maya

That I should make much of myself and turn it on all sides,  
thus casting colored shadows on thy radiance  
---such is thy Maya.

Thou settest a barrier in thine own being  
and then callest thy severed self in myriad notes.  
This thy self-separation has taken body in me.

The poignant song is echoed through all the sky in many-coloured tears  
and smiles, alarms and hopes; waves rise up and sink again,  
dreams break and form.  
In me is thy own defeat of self.

This screen that thou hast raised is painted with innumerable figures  
with the brush of the night and the day.  
Behind it thy seat is woven in wondrous mysteries of curves,  
casting away all barren lines of straightness.

The great pageant of thee and me has overspread the sky.  
With the tune of thee and me all the air is vibrant,  
and all ages pass with the hiding and seeking of thee and me.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Moment's Indulgence**

I ask for a moment's indulgence to sit by thy side. The works  
that I have in hand I will finish afterwards.

Away from the sight of thy face my heart knows no rest nor respite,  
and my work becomes an endless toil in a shoreless sea of toil.

Today the summer has come at my window with its sighs and murmurs; and  
the bees are plying their minstrelsy at the court of the flowering grove.

Now it is time to sit quite, face to face with thee, and to sing  
dedication of life in this silent and overflowing leisure

Rabindranath Tagore

## **My Friend**

Art thou abroad on this stormy night  
on thy journey of love, my friend?  
The sky groans like one in despair.

I have no sleep tonight.  
Ever and again I open my door and look out on  
the darkness, my friend!

I can see nothing before me.  
I wonder where lies thy path!

By what dim shore of the ink-black river,  
by what far edge of the frowning forest,  
through what mazy depth of gloom art thou threading  
thy course to come to me, my friend?

Rabindranath Tagore

## **My Song**

This song of mine will wind its music around you, my child, like the fond arms of love.

This song of mine will touch your forehead like a kiss of blessing.

When you are alone it will sit by your side and whisper in your ear, when you are in the crowd it will fence you about with aloofness.

My song will be like a pair of wings to your dreams, it will transport your heart to the verge of the unknown.

It will be like the faithful star overhead when dark night is over your road.

My song will sit in the pupils of your eyes, and will carry your sight into the heart of things.

And when my voice is silent in death, my song will speak in your living heart.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **O Fool**

O Fool, try to carry thyself upon thy own shoulders!  
O beggar, to come beg at thy own door!

Leave all thy burdens on his hands who can bear all,  
and never look behind in regret.

Thy desire at once puts out the light from the lamp it touches with its breath.  
It is unholy---take not thy gifts through its unclean hands.  
Accept only what is offered by sacred love.

Rabindranath Tagore



## **Ocean of Forms**

I dive down into the depth of the ocean of forms,  
hoping to gain the perfect pearl of the formless.

No more sailing from harbor to harbor with this my weather-beaten boat.  
The days are long passed when my sport was to be tossed on waves.

And now I am eager to die into the deathless.

Into the audience hall by the fathomless abyss  
where swells up the music of toneless strings  
I shall take this harp of my life.

I shall tune it to the notes of forever,  
and when it has sobbed out its last utterance,  
lay down my silent harp at the feet of the silent.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Old And New**

Thou hast made me known to friends whom I knew not.  
Thou hast given me seats in homes not my own.  
Thou hast brought the distant near and made a brother of the stranger.

I am uneasy at heart when I have to leave my accustomed shelter;  
I forget that there abides the old in the new,  
and that there also thou abidest.

Through birth and death, in this world or in others,  
wherever thou leadest me it is thou, the same,  
the one companion of my endless life  
who ever linkest my heart with bonds of joy to the unfamiliar.

When one knows thee, then alien there is none, then no door is shut.  
Oh, grant me my prayer that I may never lose  
the bliss of the touch of the one  
in the play of many.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **On the Seashore**

On the seashore of endless worlds children meet.

The infinite sky is motionless overhead and the restless water is boisterous. On the seashore of endless worlds the children meet with shouts and dances.

They build their houses with sand, and they play with empty shells. With withered leaves they weave their boats and smilingly float them on the vast deep. Children have their play on the seashore of worlds.

They know not how to swim, they know not how to cast nets. Pearl-fishers dive for pearls, merchants sail in their ships, while children gather pebbles and scatter them again. They seek not for hidden treasures, they know not how to cast nets.

The sea surges up with laughter, and pale gleams the smile of the sea-beach. Death-dealing waves sing meaningless ballads to the children, even like a mother while rocking her baby's cradle. The sea plays with children, and pale gleams the smile of the sea-beach.

On the seashore of endless worlds children meet. Tempest roams in the pathless sky, ships are wrecked in the trackless water, death is abroad and children play. On the seashore of endless worlds is the great meeting of children.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Only Thee**

That I want thee, only thee---let my heart repeat without end.  
All desires that distract me, day and night,  
are false and empty to the core.

As the night keeps hidden in its gloom the petition for light,  
even thus in the depth of my unconsciousness rings the cry  
---`I want thee, only thee'.

As the storm still seeks its end in peace  
when it strikes against peace with all its might,  
even thus my rebellion strikes against thy love  
and still its cry is  
---`I want thee, only thee'.

Rabindranath Tagore

## Paper Boats

Day by day I float my paper boats one by one down the running stream.

In bid black letters I write my name on them and the name of the village where I live.

I hope that someone in some strange land will find them and know who I am.

I load my little boats with shiuli flower from our garden, and hope that these blooms of the dawn will be carried safely to land in the night.

I launch my paper boats and look up into the sky and see the little clouds setting thee white bulging sails.

I know not what playmate of mine in the sky sends them down the air to race with my boats!

When night comes I bury my face in my arms and dream that my paper boats float on and on under the midnight stars.

The fairies of sleep are sailing in them, and the lading ins their baskets full of dreams.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Parting Words**

When I go from hence  
let this be my parting word,  
that what I have seen is unsurpassable.

I have tasted of the hidden honey of this lotus  
that expands on the ocean of light,  
and thus am I blessed  
---let this be my parting word.

In this playhouse of infinite forms  
I have had my play  
and here have I caught sight of him that is formless.

My whole body and my limbs  
have thrilled with his touch who is beyond touch;  
and if the end comes here, let it come  
---let this be my parting word.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Passing Breeze**

Yes, I know, this is nothing but thy love,  
O beloved of my heart---this golden light that dances upon the leaves,  
these idle clouds sailing across the sky,  
this passing breeze leaving its coolness upon my forehead.

The morning light has flooded my eyes---this is thy message to my heart.  
Thy face is bent from above, thy eyes look down on my eyes,  
and my heart has touched thy feet.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Patience**

If thou speakest not I will fill my heart with thy silence and endure it.  
I will keep still and wait like the night with starry vigil  
and its head bent low with patience.

The morning will surely come, the darkness will vanish,  
and thy voice pour down in golden streams breaking through the sky.

Then thy words will take wing in songs from every one of my birds' nests,  
and thy melodies will break forth in flowers in all my forest groves.

Rabindranath Tagore



## Playthings

Child, how happy you are sitting in the dust, playing with a broken twig all the morning.

I smile at your play with that little bit of a broken twig.

I am busy with my accounts, adding up figures by the hour.

Perhaps you glance at me and think, "What a stupid game to spoil your morning with!"

Child, I have forgotten the art of being absorbed in sticks and mud-pies.

I seek out costly playthings, and gather lumps of gold and silver.

With whatever you find you create your glad games, I spend both my time and my strength over things I never can obtain.

In my frail canoe I struggle to cross the sea of desire, and forget that I too am playing a game.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Prisoner**

` Prisoner, tell me, who was it that bound you?'

` It was my master,' said the prisoner.

` I thought I could outdo everybody in the world in wealth and power,  
and I amassed in my own treasure-house the money due to my king.  
When sleep overcame me I lay upon the bed that was for my lord,  
and on waking up I found I was a prisoner in my own treasure-house.'

` Prisoner, tell me, who was it that wrought this unbreakable chain?'

` It was I,' said the prisoner, ` who forged this chain very carefully.  
I thought my invincible power would hold the world captive  
leaving me in a freedom undisturbed.  
Thus night and day I worked at the chain  
with huge fires and cruel hard strokes.  
When at last the work was done  
and the links were complete and unbreakable,  
I found that it held me in its grip.'

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Purity**

Life of my life, I shall ever try to keep my body pure, knowing  
that thy living touch is upon all my limbs.

I shall ever try to keep all untruths out from my thoughts, knowing  
that thou art that truth which has kindled the light of reason in my mind.

I shall ever try to drive all evils away from my heart and keep my  
love in flower, knowing that thou hast thy seat in the inmost shrine of my heart.

And it shall be my endeavour to reveal thee in my actions, knowing it  
is thy power gives me strength to act.

Rabindranath Tagore

## Roaming Cloud

I am like a remnant of a cloud of autumn  
uselessly roaming in the sky, O my sun ever-glorious!  
Thy touch has not yet melted my vapor,  
making me one with thy light,  
and thus I count months and years separated from thee.

If this be thy wish and if this be thy play,  
then take this fleeting emptiness of mine,  
paint it with colors, gild it with gold,  
float it on the wanton wind and spread it in varied wonders.

And again when it shall be thy wish to end this play at night,  
I shall melt and vanish away in the dark,  
or it may be in a smile of the white morning,  
in a coolness of purity transparent.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Sail Away**

Early in the day it was whispered that we should sail in a boat,  
only thou and I, and never a soul in the world would know of this our  
pilgrimage to no country and to no end.

In that shoreless ocean,  
at thy silently listening smile my songs would swell in melodies,  
free as waves, free from all bondage of words.

Is the time not come yet?  
Are there works still to do?  
Lo, the evening has come down upon the shore  
and in the fading light the seabirds come flying to their nests.

Who knows when the chains will be off,  
and the boat, like the last glimmer of sunset,  
vanish into the night?

Rabindranath Tagore

## Salutation

In one salutation to thee, my God,  
let all my senses spread out and touch this world at thy feet.

Like a rain-cloud of July  
hung low with its burden of unshed showers  
let all my mind bend down at thy door in one salutation to thee.

Let all my songs gather together their diverse strains into a single current  
and flow to a sea of silence in one salutation to thee.

Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day  
back to their mountain nests  
let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home  
in one salutation to thee.

Rabindranath Tagore

## Seashore

On the seashore of endless worlds children meet.  
The infinite sky is motionless overhead  
and the restless water is boisterous.  
On the seashore of endless worlds  
the children meet with shouts and dances.

They build their houses with sand  
and they play with empty shells.  
With withered leaves they weave their boats  
and smilingly float them on the vast deep.  
Children have their play on the seashore of worlds.

They know not how to swim, they know not how to cast nets.  
Pearl fishers dive for pearls, merchants sail in their ships,  
while children gather pebbles and scatter them again.  
They seek not for hidden treasures, they know not how to cast nets.

The sea surges up with laughter  
and pale gleams the smile of the sea beach.  
Death-dealing waves sing meaningless ballads to the children,  
even like a mother while rocking her baby's cradle.  
The sea plays with children,  
and pale gleams the smile of the sea beach.

On the seashore of endless worlds children meet.  
Tempest roams in the pathless sky,  
ships get wrecked in the trackless water,  
death is abroad and children play.  
On the seashore of endless worlds is the  
great meeting of children.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Senses**

Deliverance is not for me in renunciation.  
I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight.

Thou ever pourest for me the fresh draught of thy wine of various  
colours and fragrance, filling this earthen vessel to the brim.

My world will light its hundred different lamps with thy flame  
and place them before the altar of thy temple.

No, I will never shut the doors of my senses.  
The delights of sight and hearing and touch will bear thy delight.

Yes, all my illusions will burn into illumination of joy,  
and all my desires ripen into fruits of love.

Rabindranath Tagore



## **She**

She who ever had remained in the depth of my being,  
in the twilight of gleams and of glimpses;  
she who never opened her veils in the morning light,  
will be my last gift to thee, my God, folded in my final song.

Words have wooed yet failed to win her;  
persuasion has stretched to her its eager arms in vain.

I have roamed from country to country keeping her in the core of my heart,  
and around her have risen and fallen the growth and decay of my life.

Over my thoughts and actions, my slumbers and dreams,  
she reigned yet dwelled alone and apart.

Many a man knocked at my door and asked for her  
and turned away in despair.

There was none in the world who ever saw her face to face,  
and she remained in her loneliness waiting for thy recognition.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Signet of Eternity**

The day was when I did not keep myself in readiness for thee;  
and entering my heart unbidden even as one of the common crowd,  
unknown to me, my king, thou didst press the signet of eternity upon  
many a fleeting moment of my life.

And today when by chance I light upon them and see thy signature,  
I find they have lain scattered in the dust mixed with the memory of  
joys and sorrows of my trivial days forgotten.

Thou didst not turn in contempt from my childish play among dust,  
and the steps that I heard in my playroom  
are the same that are echoing from star to star.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Silent Steps**

Have you not heard his silent steps?  
He comes, comes, ever comes.

Every moment and every age,  
every day and every night he comes, comes, ever comes.

Many a song have I sung in many a mood of mind,  
but all their notes have always proclaimed,  
'He comes, comes, ever comes.'

In the fragrant days of sunny April through the forest path he comes,  
comes, ever comes.

In the rainy gloom of July nights on the thundering chariot of clouds  
he comes, comes, ever comes.

In sorrow after sorrow it is his steps that press upon my heart,  
and it is the golden touch of his feet that makes my joy to shine.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Sit Smiling**

I boasted among men that I had known you.  
They see your pictures in all works of mine.  
They come and ask me, 'Who is he?'  
I know not how to answer them. I say, 'Indeed, I cannot tell.'  
They blame me and they go away in scorn.  
And you sit there smiling.

I put my tales of you into lasting songs.  
The secret gushes out from my heart.  
They come and ask me, 'Tell me all your meanings.'  
I know not how to answer them.  
I say, 'Ah, who knows what they mean!'  
They smile and go away in utter scorn.  
And you sit there smiling.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Sleep**

In the night of weariness  
let me give myself up to sleep without struggle,  
resting my trust upon thee.

Let me not force my flagging spirit into a poor preparation for thy worship.

It is thou who drawest the veil of night upon the tired eyes of the day  
to renew its sight in a fresher gladness of awakening.

Rabindranath Tagore

## Sleep-Stealer

Who stole sleep from baby's eyes? I must know.

Clasping her pitcher to her waist mother went to fetch water from the village near by.

It was noon. The children's playtime was over; the ducks in the pond were silent.

The shepherd boy lay asleep under the shadow of the banyan tree.

The crane stood grave and still in the swamp near the mango grove.

In the meanwhile the Sleep-stealer came and, snatching sleep from baby's eyes, flew away.

When mother came back she found baby travelling the room over on all fours.

Who stole sleep from our baby's eyes? I must know. I must find her and chain her up.

I must look into that dark cave, where, through boulders and scowling stones, trickles a tiny stream.

I must search in the drowsy shade of the bakula grove, where pigeons coo in their corner, and fairies' anklets tinkle in the stillness of starry nights.

In the evening I will peep into the whispering silence of the bamboo forest, where fireflies squander their light, and will ask every creature I meet, "Can anybody tell me where the Sleep-stealer lives?"

Who stole sleep from baby's eyes? I must know.

Shouldn't I give her a good lesson if I could only catch her!

I would raid her nest and see where she hoards all her stolen sleep.

I would plunder it all, and carry it home.

I would bind her two wings securely, set her on the bank of the river, and then let her play at fishing with a reed among the rushes and water-lilies.

When the marketing is over in the evening, and the village children sit in their mothers' laps, then the night birds will mockingly din her ears with:

"Whose sleep will you steal now?"

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Song Unsung**

The song that I came to sing remains unsung to this day.

I have spent my days in stringing and in unstringing my instrument.

The time has not come true, the words have not been rightly set;  
only there is the agony of wishing in my heart.

The blossom has not opened; only the wind is sighing by.

I have not seen his face, nor have I listened to his voice;  
only I have heard his gentle footsteps from the road before my house.

The livelong day has passed in spreading his seat on the floor;  
but the lamp has not been lit and I cannot ask him into my house.

I live in the hope of meeting with him; but this meeting is not yet.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Still Heart**

When I give up the helm  
I know that the time has come for thee to take it.  
What there is to do will be instantly done.  
Vain is this struggle.

Then take away your hands  
and silently put up with your defeat, my heart,  
and think it your good fortune to sit perfectly still  
where you are placed.

These my lamps are blown out at every little puff of wind,  
and trying to light them I forget all else again and again.

But I shall be wise this time and wait in the dark,  
spreading my mat on the floor;  
and whenever it is thy pleasure, my lord,  
come silently and take thy seat here.

Rabindranath Tagore



## **Stream Of Life**

The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day  
runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures.

It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth  
in numberless blades of grass  
and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers.

It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean-cradle of birth  
and of death, in ebb and in flow.

I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world of life.  
And my pride is from the life-throb of ages dancing in my blood this moment.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Strong Mercy**

My desires are many and my cry is pitiful,  
but ever didst thou save me by hard refusals;  
and this strong mercy has been wrought into my life through and through.

Day by day thou art making me worthy of the simple,  
great gifts that thou gavest to me unasked---this sky and the light, this body and the  
life and the mind---saving me from perils of overmuch desire.

There are times when I languidly linger  
and times when I awaken and hurry in search of my goal;  
but cruelly thou hidest thyself from before me.

Day by day thou art making me worthy of thy full acceptance by  
refusing me ever and anon, saving me from perils of weak, uncertain desire.

Rabindranath Tagore

## Superior

Mother, your baby is silly! She is so absurdly childish!

She does not know the difference between the lights in the streets and the stars.

When we play at eating with pebbles, she thinks they are real food, and tries to put them into her mouth.

When I open a book before her and ask her to learn her a, b, c, she tears the leaves with her hands and roars for joy at nothing; this is your baby's way of doing her lesson.

When I shake my head at her in anger and scold her and call her naughty, she laughs and thinks it great fun.

Everybody knows that father is away, but if in play I call aloud "Father," she looks about her in excitement and thinks that father is near.

When I hold my class with the donkeys that our washer man brings to carry away the clothes and I warn her that I am the schoolmaster, she will scream for no reason and call me dada.

Your baby wants to catch the moon. She is so funny; she calls Ganesh Ganush.

Mother, your baby is silly! She is so absurdly childish!

Rabindranath Tagore

## Sympathy

If I were only a little puppy, not your baby, mother dear, would you say "No" to me if I tried to eat from your dish?

Would you drive me off, saying to me, "Get away, you naughty little puppy?"

Then go, mother, go! I will never come to you when you call me, and never let you feed me any more.

If I were only a little green parrot, and not your baby, mother dear, would you keep me chained lest I should fly away?

Would you shake your finger at me and say, "What an ungrateful wretch of a bird! It is gnawing at its chain day and night?"

Then go, mother, go! I will run away into the woods; I will never let you take me in your arms again.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Astronomer**

I only said, "When in the evening the round full moon gets entangled among the branches of that Dadam tree, couldn't somebody catch it?"

But dada laughed at me and said, "Baby, you are the silliest child I have ever known. The moon is ever so far from us, how could anybody catch it?"

I said, "Dada, how foolish you are! When mother looks out of her window and smiles down at us playing, would you call her far away?"

Still dada said, "You are a stupid child! But, baby where could you find a net big enough to catch the moon with?"

I said, "Surely you could catch it with your hands."

But dada laughed and said, "You are the silliest child I have known. If it came nearer, you would see how big the moon is."

I said, "Dada, what nonsense they teach at your school! When mother bends her face down to kiss us, does her face look very big?"

But still dada says, "You are a stupid child."

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Banyan Tree**

O you shaggy-headed banyan tree standing on the bank of the pond,  
have you forgotten the little child, like the birds that have  
nested in your branches and left you?

Do you not remember how he sat at the window and wondered at  
the tangle of your roots and plunged underground?

The women would come to fill their jars in the pond, and your  
huge black shadow would wriggle on the water like sleep struggling  
to wake up.

Sunlight danced on the ripples like restless tiny shuttles  
weaving golden tapestry.

Two ducks swam by the weedy margin above their shadows, and  
the child would sit still and think.

He longed to be the wind and blow through your resting  
branches, to be your shadow and lengthen with the day on the water,  
to be a bird and perch on your topmost twig, and to float like  
those ducks among the weeds and shadows.

Rabindranath Tagore

## The Beginning

"Where have I come from, where did you pick me up?" the baby asked its mother.

She answered, half crying, half laughing, and clasping the baby to her breast-

"You were hidden in my heart as its desire, my darling.

You were in the dolls of my childhood's games; and when with clay I made the image of my god every morning, I made the unmade you then.

You were enshrined with our household deity, in his worship I worshipped you.

In all my hopes and my loves, in my life, in the life of my mother you have lived.

In the lap of the deathless Spirit who rules our home you have been nursed for ages.

When in girlhood my heart was opening its petals, you hovered as a fragrance about it.

Your tender softness bloomed in my youthful limbs, like a glow in the sky before the sunrise.

Heaven's first darling, twain-born with the morning light, you have floated down the stream of the world's life, and at last you have stranded on my heart.

As I gaze on your face, mystery overwhelms me; you who belong to all have become mine.

For fear of losing you I hold you tight to my breast. What magic has snared the world's treasure in these slender arms of mine?"

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Boat**

I must launch out my boat.  
The languid hours pass by on the  
shore---Alas for me!

The spring has done its flowering and taken leave.  
And now with the burden of faded futile flowers I wait and linger.

The waves have become clamorous, and upon the bank in the shady lane  
the yellow leaves flutter and fall.

What emptiness do you gaze upon!  
Do you not feel a thrill passing through the air  
with the notes of the far-away song  
floating from the other shore?

Rabindranath Tagore



## The Chanpa Flower

Supposing I became a chanpa flower, just for fun, and grew on a branch high up that tree, and shook in the wind with laughter and danced upon the newly budded leaves, would you know me, mother?

You would call, "Baby, where are you?" and I should laugh to myself and keep quite quiet.

I should slyly open my petals and watch you at your work.

When after your bath, with wet hair spread on your shoulders, you walked through the shadow of the champ tree to the little court where you say your prayers, you would notice the scent of the flower, but not know that it came from me.

When after the midday meal you sat at the window reading ramayana, and the tree's shadow fell over your hair and your lap, I should fling my wee little shadow on to the page of your book, just where you were reading.

But would you guess that it was the tiny shadow of your little child?

When in the evening you went to the cow shed with the lighted lamp in your hand I should suddenly drop on to the earth again and be your own baby once more, and beg you to tell me a story.

"Where have you been, you naughty child?"

"I won't tell you, mother." That's what you and I would say then.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Child-Angel**

They clamour and fight, they doubt and despair, they know no end to their wrangling.

Let your life come amongst them like a flame of light, my child, unflickering and pure, and delight them into silence.

They are cruel in their greed and their envy, their words are like hidden knives thirsting for blood.

Go and stand amidst their scowling hearts, my child, and let your gentle eyes fall upon them like the forgiving peace of the evening over the strife of the day.

Let them see your face, my child, and thus know the meaning of all things; let them love you and thus love each other.

Come and take your seat in the bosom of the limitless, my child. At sunrise open and raise your heart like a blossoming flower, and at sunset bend your head and in silence complete the worship of the day.

Rabindranath Tagore

## The End

It is time for me to go, mother; I am going.

When in the paling darkness of the lonely dawn you stretch out your arms for your baby in the bed, I shall say, "Baby is not here!"-mother, I am going.

I shall become a delicate draught of air and caress you and I shall be ripples in the water when you bathe, and kiss you and kiss you again.

In the gusty night when the rain patters on the leaves you will hear my whisper in your bed, and my laughter will flash with the lightning through the open window into your room.

If you lie awake, thinking of your baby till late into the night, I shall sing to you from the stars, "Sleep, mother, sleep."

One the straying moonbeams I shall steal over your bed, and lie upon your bosom while you sleep.

I shall become a dream, and through the little opening of your eyelids I shall slip into the depths of your sleep; and when you wake up and look round startled, like a twinkling firefly I shall flit out into the darkness.

When, on the great festival of puja, the neighbours' children come and play about the house, I shall melt into the music of the flute and throb in your heart all day.

Dear auntie will come with puja-presents and will ask, "Where is our baby, sister?" Mother, you will tell her softly, "He is in the pupils of my eyes, he is in my body and in my soul."

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The First Jasmines**

Ah, these jasmines, these white jasmines!

I seem to remember the first day when I filled my hands with these jasmines, these white jasmines.

I have loved the sunlight, the sky and the green earth;

I have heard the liquid murmur of the river thorough the darkness of midnight;

Autumn sunsets have come to me at the bend of a road in the lonely waste, like a bride raising her veil to accept her lover.

Yet my memory is still sweet with the first white jasmines that I held in my hands when I was a child.

Many a glad day has come in my life, and I have laughed with merry-makers on festival nights.

On grey mornings of rain I have crooned many an idle song.

I have worn round my neck the evening wreath of bakulas woven by the hand of love.

Yet my heart is sweet with the memory of the first fresh jasmines that filled my hands when I was a child.

Rabindranath Tagore

## The Flower-School

When storm-clouds rumble in the sky and June showers come down.

The moist east wind comes marching over the heath to blow its bagpipes among the bamboos.

Then crowds of flowers come out of a sudden, from nobody knows where, and dance upon the grass in wild glee.

Mother, I really think the flowers go to school underground.

They do their lessons with doors shut, and if they want to come out to play before it is time, their master makes them stand in a corner.

When the rain come they have their holidays.

Branches clash together in the forest, and the leaves rustle in the wild wind, the thunder-clouds clap their giant hands and the flower children rush out in dresses of pink and yellow and white.

Do you know, mother, their home is in the sky, where the stars are.

Haven't you see how eager they are to get there? Don't you know why they are in such a hurry?

Of course, I can guess to whom they raise their arms; they have their mother as I have my own.

Rabindranath Tagore

## The Further Bank

I long to go over there to the further bank of the river.

Where those boats are tied to the bamboo poles in a line;

Where men cross over in their boats in the morning with  
ploughs on their shoulders to till their far-away fields;

Where the cowherds make their lowing cattle swim across to the  
riverside pasture;

Whence they all come back home in the evening, leaving the  
jackals to howl in the island overgrown with weeds.

Mother, if you don't mind, I should like to become the boatman  
of the ferry when I am grown up.

They say there are strange pools hidden behind that high bank.

Where flocks of wild ducks come when the rains are over, and  
thick reeds grow round the margins where water-birds lay their  
eggs;

Where snipes with their dancing tails stamp their tiny  
footprints upon the clean soft mud;

Where in the evening the tall grasses crested with white  
flowers invite the moonbeam to float upon their waves.

Mother, if you don't mind, I should like to become the boatman  
of the ferryboat when I am grown up.

I shall cross and cross back from bank to bank, and all the  
boys and girls of the village will wonder at me while they are  
bathing.

When the sun climbs the mid sky and morning wears on to noon,  
I shall come running to you, saying, "Mother, I am hungry."

When the day is done and the shadows cower under the trees,  
I shall come back in the dust.

I shall never go away from you into the town to work like  
father.

Mother, if you don't mind, I should like to become the boatman  
of the ferryboat when I am grown up.

Rabindranath Tagore

## The Gardener IV: Ah Me

Ah me, why did they build my  
house by the road to the market  
town?

They moor their laden boats near  
my trees.

They come and go and wander at  
their will.

I sit and watch them; my time  
wears on.

Turn them away I cannot. And  
thus my days pass by.

Night and day their steps sound  
by my door.

Vainly I cry, "I do not know  
you."

Some of them are known to my  
fingers, some to my nostrils, the  
blood in my veins seems to know  
them, and some are known to my  
dreams.

Turn them away I cannot. I call  
them and say, "Come to my house  
whoever chooses. Yes, come."

In the morning the bell rings in the  
temple.

They come with their baskets in  
their hands.

Their feet are rosy red. The early  
light of dawn is on their faces.

Turn them away I cannot. I call  
them and I say, "Come to my garden  
to gather flowers. Come hither."

In the mid-day the gong sounds  
at the palace gate.

I know not why they leave their  
work and linger near my hedge.

The flowers in their hair are pale  
and faded; the notes are languid in  
their flutes.

Turn them away I cannot. I call  
them and say, "The shade is cool  
under my trees. Come, friends."

At night the crickets chirp in the  
woods.

Who is it that comes slowly to my  
door and gently knocks?

I vaguely see the face, not a word  
is spoken, the stillness of the sky is  
all around.

Turn away my silent guest I  
cannot. I look at the face through the  
dark, and hours of dreams pass by.

Rabindranath Tagore



## **The Gardener IX: When I Go Alone at Night**

When I go alone at night to my  
love-tryst, birds do not sing, the wind  
does not stir, the houses on both sides  
of the street stand silent.

It is my own anklets that grow loud  
at every step and I am ashamed.

When I sit on my balcony and listen  
for his footsteps, leaves do not rustle  
on the trees, and the water is still in  
the river like the sword on the knees  
of a sentry fallen asleep.

It is my own heart that beats wildly  
--I do not know how to quiet it.

When my love comes and sits by  
my side, when my body trembles and  
my eyelids droop, the night darkens,  
the wind blows out the lamp, and the  
clouds draw veils over the stars.

It is the jewel at my own breast  
that shines and gives light. I do not  
know how to hide it.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener LI: Then Finish the Last Song**

Then finish the last song and let us  
leave.

Forget this night when the night is  
no more.

Whom do I try to clasp in my  
arms? Dreams can never be made captive.

My eager hands press emptiness to  
my heart and it bruises my breast.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener LIX: O Woman**

O woman, you are not merely the handiwork of God, but also of men; these are ever endowing you with beauty from their hearts.

Poets are weaving for you a web with threads of golden imagery; painters are giving your form ever new immortality.

The sea gives its pearls, the mines their gold, the summer gardens their flowers to deck you, to cover you, to make you more precious.

The desire of men's hearts has shed its glory over your youth.

You are one half woman and one half dream.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener LV: It Was Mid-Day**

It was mid-day when you went  
away .

The sun was strong in the sky.

I had done my work and sat alone  
on my balcony when you went away.

Fitful gusts came winnowing  
through the smells of may distant  
fields.

The doves cooed tireless in the shade,  
and a bee strayed in my room hum-  
ming the news of many distant fields.

The village slept in the noonday  
heat. The road lay deserted.

In sudden fits the rustling of the  
leaves rose and died.

I gazed at the sky and wove in the  
blue the letters of a name I had known,  
while the village slept in the noonday  
heat.

I had forgotten to braid my hair.  
The languid breeze played with it upon  
my cheek.

The river ran unruffled under the  
shady bank.

The lazy white clouds did not move.

I had forgotten to braid my hair.

It was mid-day when you went  
away.

The dust of the road was hot and  
the fields panting.

The doves cooed among the dense  
leaves.

I was alone in my balcony when you  
went away.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener LVII: I Plucked Your Flower**

I plucked your flower, O world!  
I pressed it to my heart and the  
thorn pricked.  
When the day waned and it  
darkened, I found that the flower had  
faded, but the pain remained.  
More flowers will come to you with  
perfume and pride, O world!  
But my time for flower-gathering  
is over, and through the dark night  
I have not my rose, only the pain  
remains.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener LXI: Peace, My Heart**

Peace, my heart, let the time for  
the parting be sweet.  
Let it not be a death but completeness.  
Let love melt into memory and pain  
into songs.  
Let the flight through the sky end  
in the folding of the wings over the  
nest.  
Let the last touch of your hands be  
gentle like the flower of the night.  
Stand still, O Beautiful End, for a  
moment, and say your last words in  
silence.  
I bow to you and hold up my lamp  
to light you on your way.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener LXIV: I Spent My Day**

I spent my day on the scorching  
hot dust of the road.  
Now, in the cool of the evening, I  
knock at the door of the inn. It is  
deserted and in ruins.  
A grim ashath tree spreads its  
hungry clutching roots through the  
gaping fissures of the walls.  
Days have been when wayfarers  
came here to wash their weary feet.  
They spread their mats in the  
courtyard in the dim light of the  
early moon, and sat and talked of  
strange lands.  
They woke refreshed in the morning  
when birds made them glad, and  
friendly flowers nodded their heads  
at them from the wayside.  
But no lighted lamp awaited me  
when I came here.  
The black smudges of smoke left by  
many a forgotten evening lamp stare,  
like blind eyes, from the wall.  
Fireflies flit in the bush near the  
dried-up pond, and bamboo branches  
fling their shadows on the grass-  
grown path.  
I am the guest of no one at the end  
of my day.  
The long night is before me, and I  
am tired.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener LXIX: I Hunt for the Golden Stag**

I hunt for the golden stag.

You may smile, my friends, but I  
pursue the vision that eludes me.

I run across hills and dales, I wander  
through nameless lands, because I am  
hunting for the golden stag.

You come and buy in the market  
and go back to your homes laden with  
goods, but the spell of the homeless  
winds has touched me I know not when  
and where.

I have no care in my heart; all my  
belongings I have left far behind me.

I run across hills and dales, I wander  
through nameless lands--because I am  
hunting for the golden stag.

Rabindranath Tagore



## **The Gardener LXVIII: None Lives For Ever, Brother**

None lives for ever, brother, and  
nothing lasts for long. Keep that in  
mind and rejoice.

Our life is not the one old burden,  
our path is not the one long  
journey.

One sole poet has not to sing one  
aged song.

The flower fades and dies; but he  
who wears the flower has not to  
mourn for it for ever.

Brother, keep that in mind and  
rejoice.

There must come a full pause to  
weave perfection into music.

Life droops toward its sunset to be  
drowned in the golden shadows.

Love must be called from its play  
to drink sorrow and be borne to the  
heaven of tears.

Brother, keep that in mind and  
rejoice.

We hasten to gather our flowers lest  
they are plundered by the passing  
winds.

It quickens our blood and brightens  
our eyes to snatch kisses that would  
vanish if we delayed.

Our life is eager, our desires are keen,  
for time tolls the bell of parting.

Brother, keep that in mind and  
rejoice.

There is not time for us to clasp a  
thing and crush it and fling it away to  
the dust.

The hours trip rapidly away, hiding  
their dreams in their skirts.

Our life is short; it yields but a  
few days for love.

Were it for work and drudgery it  
would be endlessly long.

Brother, keep that in mind and  
rejoice.

Beauty is sweet to us, because she  
dances to the same fleeting tune with  
our lives.

Knowledge is precious to us, because  
we shall never have time to  
complete it.

All is done and finished in the eternal  
Heaven.

But earth's flowers of illusion are

kept eternally fresh by death.  
Brother, keep that in mind and  
rejoice.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener LXXIX: I Often Wonder**

Hi There! I see you're enjoying the site, and just wanted to extend an invitation to register for our free site. The members of oldpoetry strive to make this a fun place to learn and share - hope you join us! - Kevin

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener LXXV: At Midnight**

At midnight the would-be ascetic  
announced:

"This is the time to give up my  
home and seek for God. Ah, who has  
held me so long in delusion here?"

God whispered, "I," but the ears  
of the man were stopped.

With a baby asleep at her breast  
lay his wife, peacefully sleeping on  
one side of the bed.

The man said, "Who are ye that  
have fooled me so long?"

The voice said again, "They are  
God," but he heard it not.

The baby cried out in its dream,  
nestling close to its mother.

God commanded, "Stop, fool, leave  
not thy home," but still he heard not.

God sighed and complained, "Why  
does my servant wander to seek me,  
forsaking me?"

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener LXXVI: The Fair Was On**

The fair was on before the temple.  
It had rained from the early morning  
and the day came to its end.

Brighter than all the gladness of  
the crowd was the bright smile of  
a girl who bought for a farthing a  
whistle of palm leaf.

The shrill joy of that whistle floated  
above all laughter and noise.

An endless throng of people came  
and jostled together. The road was  
muddy, the river in flood, the field  
under water in ceaseless rain.

Greater than all the troubles of  
the crowd was a little boy's trouble--  
he had not a farthing to buy a painted  
stick.

His wistful eyes gazing at the shop  
made this whole meeting of men so  
pitiful.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener LXXXI: Why Do You Whisper So Faintly**

Why do you whisper so faintly in  
my ears, O Death, my Death?

When the flowers droop in the  
evening and cattle come back to their  
stalls, you stealthily come to my side  
and speak words that I do not  
understand.

Is this how you must woo and win  
me with the opiate of drowsy murmur  
and cold kisses, O Death, my Death?

Will there be no proud ceremony  
for our wedding?

Will you not tie up with a wreath  
your tawny coiled locks?

Is there none to carry your banner  
before you, and will not the night be  
on fire with your red torch-lights,  
O Death, my Death?

Come with your conch-shells sound-  
ing, come in the sleepless night.

Dress me with a crimson mantle,  
grasp my hand and take me.

Let your chariot be ready at my  
door with your horses neighing impatiently.

Raise my veil and look at my face  
proudly, O Death, my Death!

Rabindranath Tagore

## The Gardener LXXXIII: She Dwelt on the Hillside

She dwelt on the hillside by edge  
of a maize-field, near the spring that  
flows in laughing rills through the  
solemn shadows of ancient trees. The  
women came there to fill their jars,  
and travellers would sit there to rest  
and talk. She worked and dreamed  
daily to the tune of the bubbling  
stream.

One evening the stranger came down  
from the cloud-hidden peak; his locks  
were tangled like drowsy snakes. We  
asked in wonder, "Who are you?"  
He answered not but sat by the  
garrulous stream and silently gazed at  
the hut where she dwelt. Our hearts  
quaked in fear and we came back home  
when it was night.

Next morning when the women  
came to fetch water at the spring by  
the deodar trees, they found the doors  
open in her hut, but her voice was gone  
and where was her smiling face?  
The empty jar lay on the floor and her  
lamp had burnt itself out in the  
corner. No one knew where she had  
fled to before it was morning--and the  
stranger had gone.

In the month of May the sun grew  
strong and the snow melted, and we  
sat by the spring and wept. We  
wondered in our mind, "Is there a  
spring in the land where she has gone  
and where she can fill her vessel in  
these hot thirsty days?" And we  
asked each other in dismay, "Is there  
a land beyond these hills where we  
live?"

It was a summer night; the breeze  
blew from the south; and I sat in her  
deserted room where the lamp stood  
still unlit. When suddenly from  
before my eyes the hills vanished like  
curtains drawn aside. "Ah, it is  
she who comes. How are you, my  
child? Are you happy? But where  
can you shelter under this open sky?  
And, alas! our spring is not here to  
allay your thirst."

"Here is the same sky," she said,  
"only free from the fencing hills,--  
this is the same stream grown into a

river,--the same earth widened into  
a plain." "Everything is here," I  
sighed, "only we are not." She  
smiled sadly and said, "You are in  
my heart." I woke up and heard the  
babbling of the stream and the rustling  
of the deodars at night.

Rabindranath Tagore



## **The Gardener LXXXIV: Over the Green**

Over the green and yellow rice-fields  
sweep the shadows of the autumn  
clouds followed by the swift-chasing  
sun.

The bees forget to sip their honey;  
drunken with light they foolishly hover  
and hum.

The ducks in the islands of the river  
clamour in joy for mere nothing.

Let none go back home, brothers,  
this morning, let none go to work.

Let us take the blue sky by storm  
and plunder space as we run.

Laughter floats in the air like foam  
on the flood.

Brothers, let us squander our  
morning in futile songs.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener X: Let Your Work Be, Bride**

Let your work be, bride. Listen, the guest has come.

Do you hear, he is gently shaking the chain which fastens the door?

See that your anklets make no loud noise, and that your step is not over-hurried at meeting him.

Let your work be, bride, the guest had come in the evening.

No, it is not the ghostly wind, bride, do not be frightened.

It is the full moon on a night of April; shadows are pale in the courtyard; the sky overhead is bright.

Draw your veil over your face if you must, carry the lamp to the door if you fear.

No, it is not the ghostly wind, bride, do not be frightened.

Have no word with him if you are shy; stand aside by the door when you meet him.

If he asks you questions, and if you wish to, you can lower your eyes in silence.

Do not let your bracelets jingle when, lamp in hand, you lead him in.

Have no words with him if you are shy.

Have you not finished your work yet, bride? Listen, the guest has come.

Have you not lit the lamp in the cowshed?

Have you not got ready the offering basket for the evening service?

Have you not put the red lucky mark at the parting of your hair, and done your toilet for the night?

O bride, do you hear, the guest has come?

Let your work be!

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener XI: Come As You Are**

Come as you are; do not loiter over  
your toilet.

If your braided hair has loosened if  
the parting of your hair be not straight,  
if the ribbons of your bodice be not  
fastened, do not mind.

Come as you are; do not loiter over  
your toilet.

Come, with quick steps over the  
grass.

If the rattle come from your feet  
because of the dew, of the rings of bells  
upon your feet slacken, if pearls drop  
out of your chain, do not mind.

Come, with quick steps over the  
grass.

Do you see the clouds wrapping the  
sky?

Flocks of cranes fly up from the  
further river-bank and fitful gusts of  
wind rush over the heath.

The anxious cattle run to their stalls  
in the village.

Do you see the clouds wrapping the  
sky?

In vain you light your toilet lamp  
--it flickers and goes out in the  
wind.

Who can know that your eyelids  
have not been touched with lamp-  
black? For your eyes are darker  
than rain-clouds.

In vain you light your toilet lamp--  
it goes out.

Come as you are; do not loiter over  
your toilet.

If the wreath is not woven, who  
cares; if the wrist-chain had not been  
linked, let it be.

The sky is overcast with clouds--it  
is late.

Come as you are; do not loiter over  
your toilet.

Rabindranath Tagore

### **The Gardener XIII: I Asked Nothing**

I asked nothing, only stood at the  
edge of the wood behind the tree.

Languor was still upon the eyes  
of the dawn, and the dew in the air.

The lazy smell of the damp grass  
hung in the thin mist above the earth.

Under the banyan tree you were  
milking the cow with your hands,  
tender and fresh as butter.

And I was standing still.

I did not say a word. It was the  
bird that sang unseen from the thicket.

The mango tree was shedding its  
flowers upon the village road, and the  
bees came humming one by one.

On the side of the pond the gate of  
Shiva's temple was opened and the  
worshipper had begun his chants.

With the vessel on your lap you  
were milking the cow.

I stood with my empty can.

I did not come near you.

The sky woke with the sound of  
the gong at the temple.

The dust was raised in the road  
from the hoofs of the driven cattle.

With the gurgling pitchers at their  
hips, women came from the river.

Your bracelets were jingling, and  
foam brimming over the jar.

The morning wore on and I did not  
come near you.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener XIV: I Was Walking by the Road**

I was walking by the road, I do not know why, when the noonday was past and bamboo branches rustled in the wind.

The prone shadows with their outstretched arms clung to the feet of the hurrying light.

The koels were weary of their songs.

I was walking by the road, I do not know why.

The hut by the side of the water is shaded by an overhanging tree.

Some one was busy with her work, and her bangles made music in the corner.

I stood before this hut, I know not why.

The narrow winding road crosses many a mustard field, and many a mango forest.

It passes by the temple of the village and the market at the river landing-place.

I stopped by this hut, I do not know why.

Years ago it was a day of breezy March when the murmur of the spring was languorous, and mango blossoms were dropping on the dust.

The rippling water leapt and licked the brass vessel that stood on the landing-step.

I think of that day of breezy March, I do not know why.

Shadows are deepening and cattle returning to their folds.

The light is grey upon the lonely meadows, and the villagers are waiting for the ferry at the bank.

I slowly return upon my steps, I do not know why.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener XIX: You Walked**

You walked by the riverside path  
with the full pitcher upon your hip.

Why did you swiftly turn your face  
and peep at me through your fluttering  
veil?

That gleaming look from the dark  
came upon me like a breeze that sends  
a shiver through the rippling water  
and sweeps away to the shadowy  
shore.

It came to me like the bird of the  
evening that hurriedly flies across the  
lampless room from the one open  
window to the other, and disappears  
in the night.

You are hidden as a star behind the  
hills, and I am a passer-by upon the  
road.

But why did you stop for a moment  
and glance at my face through your  
veil while you walked by the river-  
side path with the full pitcher upon  
your hip?

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener XL: An Unbelieving Smile**

An unbelieving smile flits on your eyes when I come to you to take my leave.

I have done it so often that you think I will soon return.

To tell you the truth I have the same doubt in my mind.

For the spring days come again time after time; the full moon takes leave and comes on another visit, the flowers come again and blush upon their branches year after year, and it is likely that I take my leave only to come to you again.

But keep the illusion awhile; do not send it away with ungentle haste.

When I say I leave you for all time, accept it as true, and let a mist of tears for one moment deepen the dark rim of your eyes.

Then smile as archly as you like when I come again.

Rabindranath Tagore

## The Gardener XLII: O Mad, Superbly Drunk

O mad, superbly drunk;  
If you kick open your doors and  
play the fool in public;  
If you empty your bag in a night,  
and snap your fingers at prudence;  
If you walk in curious paths and  
play with useless things;  
Reck not rhyme or reason;  
If unfurling your sails before the  
storm you snap the rudder in two,  
Then I will follow you, comrade,  
and be drunken and go to the dogs.  
I have wasted my days and nights  
in the company of steady wise neighbours.  
Much knowing has turned my hair  
grey, and much watching has made  
my sight dim.  
For years I have gathered and  
heaped up scraps and fragments of  
things:  
Crush them and dance upon them,  
and scatter them all to the winds.  
For I know 'tis the height of wisdom  
to be drunken and go the dogs.  
Let all crooked scruples vanish,  
let me hopelessly lose my way.  
Let a gust of wild giddiness come  
and sweep me away from my anchors.  
The world is peopled with worthies,  
and workers, useful and clever.  
There are men who are easily first,  
and men who come decently after.  
Let them be happy and prosper,  
and let me be foolishly futile.  
For I know 'tis the end of all works  
to be drunken and go to the dogs.  
I swear to surrender this moment  
all claims to the ranks of the decent.  
I let go my pride of learning and  
judgment of right and of wrong.  
I'll shatter memory's vessel, scattering  
the last drop of tears.  
With the foam of the berry-red  
wine I will bathe and brighten my  
laughter.  
The badge of the civil and staid  
I'll tear into shreds for the nonce.  
I'll take the holy vow to be worthless,  
to be drunken and go to the dogs.

Rabindranath Tagore



## **The Gardener XLIII: No, My Friends**

No, my friends, I shall never be an ascetic, whatever you may say.

I shall never be an ascetic if she does not take the vow with me.

It is my firm resolve that if I cannot find a shady shelter and a companion for my penance, I shall never turn ascetic.

No, my friends, I shall never leave my hearth and home, and retire into the forest solitude, if rings no merry laughter in its echoing shade and if the end of no saffron mantle flutters in the wind; if its silence is not deepened by soft whispers.

I shall never be an ascetic.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener XLIV: Reverend Sir, Forgive**

Reverend sir, forgive this pair of sinners. Spring winds to-day are blowing in wild eddies, driving dust and dead leaves away, and with them your lessons are all lost.

Do not say, father, that life is a vanity.

For we have made truce with death for once, and only for a few fragrant hours we two have been made immortal.

Even if the king's army came and fiercely fell upon us we should sadly shake our heads and say, Brothers, you are disturbing us. If you must have this noisy game, go and clatter your arms elsewhere. Since only for a few fleeting moments we have been made immortal.

If friendly people came and flocked around us, we should humbly bow to them and say, This extravagant good fortune is an embarrassment to us. Room is scarce in the infinite sky where we dwell. For in the spring-time flowers come in crowds, and the busy wings of bees jostle each other. Our little heaven, where dwell only we two immortals, is too absurdly narrow.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener XLV: To the Guests**

To the guests that must go bid  
God's speed and brush away all traces  
of their steps.

Take to your bosom with a smile  
what is easy and simple and near.

To-day is the festival of phantoms  
that know not when they die.

Let your laughter be but a meaning-  
less mirth like twinkles of light on  
the ripples.

Let your life lightly dance on the  
edges of Time like dew on the tip of  
a leaf.

Strike in chords from your harp  
fitful momentary rhythms.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener XLVI: You Left Me**

You left me and went on your way.

I thought I should mourn for you  
and set your solitary image in my  
heart wrought in a golden song.

But ah, my evil fortune, time is  
short.

Youth wanes year after year; the  
spring days are fugitive; the frail  
flowers die for nothing, and the wise  
man warns me that life is but a  
dewdrop on the lotus leaf.

Should I neglect all this to gaze after  
one who has turned her back on me?

That would be rude and foolish,  
for time is short.

Then, come, my rainy nights with  
pattering feet; smile, my golden  
autumn; come, careless April, scatter-  
ing your kisses abroad.

You come, and you, and you also!

My loves, you know we are mortals.  
Is it wise to break one's heart for the  
one who takes her heart away? For  
time is short.

It is sweet to sit in a corner to muse  
and write in rhymes that you are all  
my world.

It is heroic to hug one's sorrow and  
determine not to be consoled.

But a fresh face peeps across my  
door and raise its eyes to my eyes.

I cannot but wipe away my tears  
and change the tune of my song.

For time is short.

Rabindranath Tagore

### **The Gardener XLVIII: Free Me**

Free me from the bonds of your  
sweetness, my love! Nor more of this  
wine of kisses.

    This mist of heavy incense stifles  
my heart.

    Open the doors, make room for the  
morning light.

    I am lost in you, wrapped in the  
folds of your caresses.

    Free me from your spells, and give  
me back the manhood to offer you my  
freed heart.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener XVI: Hands Cling to Eyes**

Hands cling to hands and eyes linger  
on eyes: thus begins the record of our  
hearts.

It is the moonlit night of March;  
the sweet smell of henna is in the air;  
my flute lies on the earth neglected  
and your garland of flowers is  
unfinished.

This love between you and me is  
simple as a song.

Your veil of the saffron colour  
makes my eyes drunk.

The jasmine wreath that you wove  
me thrills to my heart like praise.

It is a game of giving and with-  
holding, revealing and screening again;  
some smiles and some little shyness,  
and some sweet useless struggles.

This love between you and me is  
simple as a song.

No mystery beyond the present;  
no striving for the impossible; no  
shadow behind the charm; no groping  
in the depth of the dark.

This love between you and me is  
simple as a song.

We do not stray out of all words  
into the ever silent; we do not raise  
our hands to the void for things  
beyond hope.

It is enough what we give and we  
get.

We have not crushed the joy to  
the utmost to wring from it the wine  
of pain.

This love between you and me is  
simple as a song.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener XVIII: When Two Sisters**

When the two sisters go to fetch water, they come to this spot and they smile.

They must be aware of somebody who stands behind the trees whenever they go to fetch water.

The two sisters whisper to each other when they pass this spot.

They must have guessed the secret of that somebody who stands behind the trees whenever they go to fetch water.

Their pitchers lurch suddenly, and water spills when they reach this spot.

They must have found out that somebody's heart is beating who stands behind the trees whenever they go to fetch water.

The two sisters glance at each other when they come to this spot, and they smile.

There is a laughter in their swift-stepping feet, which makes confusion in somebody's mind who stands behind the trees whenever they go to fetch water.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener XX: Day After Day He Comes**

Day after day he comes and goes  
away.

Go, and give him a flower from my  
hair, my friend.

If he asks who was it that sent it, I  
entreat you do not tell him my name--  
for he only comes and goes away.

He sits on the dust under the tree.

Spread there a seat with flowers and  
leaves, my friend.

His eyes are sad, and they bring  
sadness to my heart.

He does not speak what he has in  
mind; he only comes and goes away.

Rabindranath Tagore



## **The Gardener XXI: Why Did He Choose**

Why did he choose to come to my door, the wandering youth, when the day dawned?

As I come in and out I pass by him every time, and my eyes are caught by his face.

I know not if I should speak to him or keep silent. Why did he choose to come to my door?

The cloudy nights in July are dark; the sky is soft blue in the autumn; the spring days are restless with the south wind.

He weaves his songs with fresh tunes every time.

I turn from my work and my eyes fill with the mist. Why did he choose to come to my door?

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener XXII: When She Passed by Me**

When she passed by me with quick  
steps, the end of her skirt touched  
me.

From the unknown island of a  
heart came a sudden warm breath of  
spring.

A flutter of a flitting touch brushed  
me and vanished in a moment, like a  
torn flower petal blown in the breeze.

It fell upon my heart like a sigh of  
her body and whisper of her heart.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener XXIV: Do Not Keep to Yourself**

Do not keep to yourself the secret of  
your heart, my friend!

Say it to me, only to me, in secret.

You who smile so gently, softly  
whisper, my heart will hear it, not my  
ears.

The night is deep, the house is  
silent, the birds' nests are shrouded  
with sleep.

Speak to me through hesitating  
tears, through faltering smiles, through  
sweet shame and pain, the secret of  
your heart!

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener XXVI: What Comes From Your Willing Hands**

"What comes from your willing hands I take. I beg for nothing more."

"Yes, yes, I know you, modest mendicant, you ask for all that one has."

"If there be a stray flower for me I will wear it in my heart."

"But if there be thorns?"

"I will endure them."

"Yes, yes, I know you, modest mendicant, you ask for all that one has."

"If but once you should raise your loving eyes to my face it would make my life sweet beyond death."

"But if there be only cruel glances?"

"I will keep them piercing my heart."

"Yes, yes, I know you, modest mendicant, you ask for all that one has."

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener XXVII: Trust Love**

"Trust love even if it brings sorrow.  
Do not close up your heart."

"Ah no, my friend, your words are  
dark, I cannot understand them."

"Pleasure is frail like a dewdrop,  
while it laughs it dies. But sorrow is  
strong and abiding. Let sorrowful  
love wake in your eyes."

"Ah no, my friend, your words are  
dark, I cannot understand them."

"The lotus blooms in the sight of  
the sun, and loses all that it has. It  
would not remain in bud in the  
eternal winter mist."

"Ah no, my friend, your words are  
dark, I cannot understand them."

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener XXVIII: Your Questioning Eyes**

Your questioning eyes are sad. They seek to know my meaning as the moon would fathom the sea.

I have bared my life before your eyes from end to end, with nothing hidden or held back. That is why you know me not.

If it were only a gem, I could break it into a hundred pieces and string them into a chain to put on your neck.

If it were only a flower, round and small and sweet, I could pluck it from its stem to set it in your hair.

But it is a heart, my beloved. Where are its shores and its bottom?

You know not the limits of this kingdom, still you are its queen.

If it were only a moment of pleasure it would flower in an easy smile, and you could see it and read it in a moment.

If it were merely a pain it would melt in limpid tears, reflecting its inmost secret without a word.

But it is love, my beloved.

Its pleasure and pain are boundless, and endless its wants and wealth.

It is as near to you as your life, but you can never wholly know it.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener XXXIV: Do Not Go, My Love**

Do not go, my love, without asking  
my leave.

    I have watched all night, and now  
my eyes are heavy with sleep.

    I fear lest I lose you when I'm  
sleeping.

Do not go, my love, without asking  
my leave.

    I start up and stretch my hands to  
touch you. I ask myself, "Is it a  
dream?"

    Could I but entangle your feet with  
my heart and hold them fast to my  
breast!

Do not go, my love, without asking  
my leave.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Gardener XXXVIII: My Love, Once upon a Time**

My love, once upon a time your poet  
launched a great epic in his mind.

Alas, I was not careful, and it struck  
your ringing anklets and came to  
grief.

It broke up into scraps of songs and  
lay scattered at your feet.

All my cargo of the stories of old  
wars was tossed by the laughing waves  
and soaked in tears and sank.

You must make this loss good to me,  
my love.

If my claims to immortal fame after  
death are scattered, make me immortal  
while I live.

And I will not mourn for my loss nor  
blame you.

Rabindranath Tagore



## **The Gift**

I want to give you something, my child, for we are drifting in the stream of the world.

Our lives will be carried apart, and our love forgotten.

But I am not so foolish as to hope that I could buy your heart with my gifts.

Young is your life, your path long, and you drink the love we bring you at one draught and turn and run away from us.

You have your play and your playmates. What harm is there if you have no time or thought for us!

We, indeed, have leisure enough in old age to count the days that are past, to cherish in our hearts what our hands have lost for ever.

The river runs swift with a song, breaking through all barriers. But the mountain stays and remembers, and follows her with his love.

Rabindranath Tagore

## The Hero

Mother, let us imagine we are travelling, and passing through a strange and dangerous country.

You are riding in a palanquin and I am trotting by you on a red horse.

It is evening and the sun goes down. The waste of Joradighi lies wan and grey before us. The land is desolate and barren.

You are frightened and thinking-"I know not where we have come to."

I say to you, "Mother, do not be afraid."

The meadow is prickly with spiky grass, and through it runs a narrow broken path.

There are no cattle to be seen in the wide field; they have gone to their village stalls.

It grows dark and dim on the land and sky, and we cannot tell where we are going.

Suddenly you call me and ask me in a whisper, "What light is that near the bank?"

Just then there bursts out a fearful yell, and figures come running towards us.

You sit crouched in your palanquin and repeat the names of the gods in prayer.

The bearers, shaking in terror, hide themselves in the thorny bush.

I shout to you, "Don't be afraid, mother. I am here."

With long sticks in their hands and hair all wild about their heads, they come nearer and nearer.

I shout, "Have a care, you villains! One step more and you are dead men."

They give another terrible yell and rush forward.

You clutch my hand and say, "Dear boy, for heaven's sake, keep away from them."

I say, "Mother, just you watch me."

Then I spur my horse for a wild gallop, and my sword and buckler clash against each other.

The fight becomes so fearful, mother, that it would give you a cold shudder could you see it from your palanquin.

Many of them fly, and a great number are cut to pieces.

I know you are thinking, sitting all by yourself, that your boy must be dead by this time.

But I come to you all stained with blood, and say, "Mother, the fight is over now."

You come out and kiss me, pressing me to your heart, and you say to yourself,

"I don't know what I should do if I hadn't my boy to escort me."

A thousand useless things happen day after day, and why couldn't such a thing come true by chance?

It would be like a story in a book.

My brother would say, "Is it possible? I always thought he was so delicate!"

Our village people would all say in amazement, "Was it not lucky that the boy was with his mother?"

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Home**

I paced alone on the road across the field while the sunset was hiding its last gold like a miser.

The daylight sank deeper and deeper into the darkness, and the widowed land, whose harvest had been reaped, lay silent.

Suddenly a boy's shrill voice rose into the sky. He traversed the dark unseen, leaving the track of his song across the hush of the evening.

His village home lay there at the end of the waste land, beyond the sugar-cane field, hidden among the shadows of the banana and the slender areca palm, the coconut and the dark green jack-fruit trees.

I stopped for a moment in my lonely way under the starlight, and saw spread before me the darkened earth surrounding with her arms countless homes furnished with cradles and beds, mother's hearts and evening lamps, and young lives glad with a gladness that knows nothing of its value for the world.

Rabindranath Tagore

## The Journey

The morning sea of silence broke into ripples of bird songs;  
and the flowers were all merry by the roadside;  
and the wealth of gold was scattered through the rift of the clouds  
while we busily went on our way and paid no heed.

We sang no glad songs nor played;  
we went not to the village for barter;  
we spoke not a word nor smiled;  
we lingered not on the way.  
We quickened our pace more and more as the time sped by.

The sun rose to the mid sky and doves cooed in the shade.  
Withered leaves danced and whirled in the hot air of noon.  
The shepherd boy drowsed and dreamed in the shadow of the banyan tree,  
and I laid myself down by the water  
and stretched my tired limbs on the grass.

My companions laughed at me in scorn;  
they held their heads high and hurried on;  
they never looked back nor rested;  
they vanished in the distant blue haze.

They crossed many meadows and hills,  
and passed through strange, far-away countries.  
All honor to you, heroic host of the interminable path!  
Mockery and reproach pricked me to rise,  
but found no response in me.

I gave myself up for lost  
in the depth of a glad humiliation  
---in the shadow of a dim delight.

The repose of the sun-embroidered green gloom  
slowly spread over my heart.  
I forgot for what I had traveled,  
and I surrendered my mind without struggle  
to the maze of shadows and songs.

At last, when I woke from my slumber and opened my eyes,  
I saw thee standing by me, flooding my sleep with thy smile.  
How I had feared that the path was long and wearisome,  
and the struggle to reach thee was hard!

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Judge**

Say of him what you please, but I know my child's failings.

I do not love him because he is good, but because he is my little child.

How should you know how dear he can be when you try to weigh his merits against his faults?

When I must punish him he becomes all the more a part of my being.

When I cause his tears to come my heart weeps with him.

I alone have a right to blame and punish, for he only may chastise who loves.

Rabindranath Tagore

## The Land of the Exile

Mother, the light has grown grey in the sky; I do not know what the time is.

There is no fun in my play, so I have come to you. It is Saturday, our holiday.

Leave off your work, mother; sit here by the window and tell me where the desert of Tepantar in the fairy tale is.

The shadow of the rains has covered the day from end to end.

The fierce lightning is scratching the sky with its nails.

When the clouds rumble and it thunders, I love to be afraid in my heart and cling to you.

When the heavy rain patters for hours on the bamboo leaves, and our windows shake and rattle at the gusts of wind, I like to sit alone in the room, mother, with you, and hear you talk about the desert of Tepantar in the fairy tale.

Where is it, mother, on the shore of what sea, at the foot of what hills, in the kingdom of what king?

There are no hedges there to mark the fields, no footpath across it by which the villagers reach their village in the evening, or the woman who gathers dry sticks in the forest can bring her load to the market. With patches of yellow grass in the sand and only one tree where the pair of wise old birds have their nest, lies the desert of Tepantar.

I can imagine how, on just such a cloudy day, the young son of the king is riding alone on a grey horse through the desert, in search of the princess who lies imprisoned in the giant's palace across that unknown water.

When the haze of the rain comes down in the distant sky, and lightning starts up like a sudden fit of pain, does he remember his unhappy mother, abandoned by the king, sweeping the cow-stall and wiping her eyes, while he rides through the desert of Tepantar in the fairy tale?

See, mother, it is almost dark before the day is over, and there are no travellers yonder on the village road.

The shepherd boy has gone home early from the pasture, and men have left their fields to sit on mats under the eaves of their huts, watching the scowling clouds.

Mother, I have left all my books on the shelf-do not ask me to do my lessons now.

When I grow up and am bid like my father, I shall learn all that must be learnt.

But just for today, tell me, mother, where the desert of Tepantar in the fairy tale is.

Rabindranath Tagore

## The Last Bargain

"Come and hire me," I cried, while in the morning I was walking on the stone-paved road.

Sword in hand, the King came in his chariot.  
He held my hand and said, "I will hire you with my power."  
But his power counted for nought, and he went away in his chariot.

In the heat of the midday the houses stood with shut doors.  
I wandered along the crooked lane.  
An old man came out with his bag of gold.  
He pondered and said, "I will hire you with my money."  
He weighed his coins one by one, but I turned away.

It was evening. The garden hedge was all aflower.  
The fair maid came out and said, "I will hire you with a smile."  
Her smile paled and melted into tears, and she went back alone into the dark.

The sun glistened on the sand, and the sea waves broke waywardly.  
A child sat playing with shells.  
He raised his head and seemed to know me, and said, "I hire you with nothing."  
From thenceforward that bargain struck in child's play made me a free man.

Rabindranath Tagore



## The Little Big Man

I am small because I am a little child. I shall be big when I am as old as my father is.

My teacher will come and say, "It is late, bring your slate and your books."

I shall tell him, "Do you not know I am as big as father? And I must not have lessons any more."

My master will wonder and say, "He can leave his books if he likes, for he is grown up."

I shall dress myself and walk to the fair where the crowd is thick.

My uncle will come rushing up to me and say, "You will get lost, my boy; let me carry you."

I shall answer, "Can't you see, uncle, I am as big as father? I must go to the fair alone."

Uncle will say, "Yes, he can go wherever he likes, for he is grown up."

Mother will come from her bath when I am giving money to my nurse, for I shall know how to open the box with my key.

Mother will say, "What are you about, naughty child?"

I shall tell her, "Mother, don't you know, I am as big as father, and I must give silver to my nurse."

Mother will say to herself, "He can give money to whom he likes, for he is grown up."

In the holiday time in October father will come home and, thinking that I am still a baby, will bring for me from the town little shoes and small silken frocks.

I shall say, "Father, give them to my data, for I am as big as you are."

Father will think and say, "He can buy his own clothes if he likes, for he is grown up."

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Lotus**

On the day when the lotus bloomed, alas, my mind was straying,  
and I knew it not. My basket was empty and the flower remained unheeded.

Only now and again a sadness fell upon me, and I started up from my  
dream and felt a sweet trace of a strange fragrance in the south wind.

That vague sweetness made my heart ache with longing and it seemed to  
me that it was the eager breath of the summer seeking for its completion.

I knew not then that it was so near, that it was mine, and that this  
perfect sweetness had blossomed in the depth of my own heart.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Merchant**

Hi There! I see you're enjoying the site, and just wanted to extend an invitation to register for our free site. The members of oldpoetry strive to make this a fun place to learn and share - hope you join us! - Kevin

Rabindranath Tagore

## The Rainy Day

Sullen clouds are gathering fast over the black fringe of the forest.

O child, do not go out!

The palm trees in a row by the lake are smiting their heads against the dismal sky; the crows with their dragged wings are silent on the tamarind branches, and the eastern bank of the river is haunted by a deepening gloom.

Our cow is lowing loud, ties at the fence.

O child, wait here till I bring her into the stall.

Men have crowded into the flooded field to catch the fishes as they escape from the overflowing ponds; the rain-water is running in rills through the narrow lanes like a laughing boy who has run away from his mother to tease her.

Listen, someone is shouting for the boatman at the ford.

O child, the daylight is dim, and the crossing at the ferry is closed.

The sky seems to ride fast upon the madly rushing rain; the water in the river is loud and impatient; women have hastened home early from the Ganges with their filled pitchers.

The evening lamps must be made ready.

O child, do not go out!

The road to the market is desolate, the lane to the river is slippery. The wind is roaring and struggling among the bamboo branches like a wild beast tangled in a net.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **The Recall**

The night was dark when she went away, and she slept.

The night is dark now, and I call for her, "Come back, my darling; the world is asleep; and no one would know, if you came for a moment while stars are gazing at stars."

She went away when the trees were in bud and the spring was young.

Now the flowers are in high bloom and I call, "Come back, my darling. The children gather and scatter flowers in reckless sport. And if you come and take one little blossom no one will miss it."

Those that used to play are playing still, so spendthrift is life.

I listen to their chatter and call, "Come back, my darling, for mother's heart is full to the brim with love, and if you come to snatch only one little kiss from her no one will grudge it."

Rabindranath Tagore

## The Sailor

The boat of the boatman Madhu is moored at the wharf of Rajgunj.

It is uselessly laden with jute, and has been lying there idle for ever so long.

If he would only lend me his boat, I should man her with a hundred oars, and hoist sails, five or six or seven.

I should never steer her to stupid markets.

I should sail the seven seas and the thirteen rivers of fairyland.

But, mother, you won't weep for me in a corner.

I am not going into the forest like Ramachandra to come back only after fourteen years.

I shall become the prince of the story, and fill my boat with whatever I like.

I shall take my friend Ashu with me. We shall sail merrily across the ever seas and the thirteen rivers of fairyland.

We shall set sail in the early morning light.

When at noontide you are bathing at the pond, we shall be in the land of a strange king.

We shall pass the ford of Tirpurni, and leave behind us the desert of Tepantar.

When we come back it will be getting dark, and I shall tell you of all that we have seen.

I shall cross the seven seas and the thirteen rivers of fairyland.

Rabindranath Tagore

## The Source

The sleep that flits on baby's eyes-does anybody know from where it comes? Yes, there is a rumour that it has its dwelling where, in the fairy village among shadows of the forest dimly lit with glow-worms, there hang two shy buds of enchantment. From there it comes to kiss baby's eyes.

The smile that flickers on baby's lips when he sleeps-does anybody know where it was born? Yes, there is a rumour that a young pale beam of a crescent moon touched the edge of a vanishing autumn cloud, and there the smile was first born in the dream of a dew washed morning-the smile that flickers on baby's lips when he sleeps.

The sweet, soft freshness that blooms on baby's limbs-does anybody know where it was hidden so long? Yes, when the mother was a young girl it lay pervading her heart in tender and silent mystery of love-the sweet, soft freshness that has bloomed on baby's limbs.

Rabindranath Tagore

## The Unheeded Pageant

Ah, who was it coloured that little frock, my child, and covered  
your sweet limbs with that little red tunic?

You have come out in the morning to play in the courtyard,  
tottering and tumbling as you run.

But who was it coloured that little frock, my child?

What is it makes you laugh, my little life-bud?

Mother smiles at you standing on the threshold.

She claps her hands and her bracelets jingle, and you dance  
with your bamboo stick in your hand like a tiny little shepherd.

But what is it makes you laugh, my little life-bud?

O beggar, what do you bed for, clinging to your mother's neck  
with both your hands?

O greedy heart, shall I pluck the world like a fruit from the  
sky to place it on your little rosy palm?

O beggar, what are you begging for?

The wind carries away in glee the tinkling of your anklet  
bells.

The sun smiles and watches your toilet.

The sky watches over you when you sleep in your mother's arms,  
and the morning comes tiptoe to your bed and kisses your eyes.

The wind carried away in glee the tinkling of your anklet  
bells.

The fairy mistress of dreams is coming towards you, flying  
through the twilight sky.

The world-mother keeps her seat by you in your mother's heart.

He who plays his music to the stars is standing at your window  
with his flute.

And the fairy mistress of dreams is coming towards you, flying  
through the twilight sky.

Rabindranath Tagore



## The Wicked Postman

Why do you sit there on the floor so quiet and silent, tell me,  
mother dear?

The rain is coming in through the open window, making you all  
wet, and you don't mind it.

Do you hear the gong striking four? It is time for my brother  
to come home from school.

What has happened to you that you look so strange?

Haven't you got a letter from father today?

I saw the postman bringing letters in his bag for almost  
everybody in the town.

Only father's letters he keeps to read himself. I am sure the  
postman is a wicked man.

But don't be unhappy about that, mother dear.

Tomorrow is market day in the next village. You ask your maid  
to buy some pens and papers.

I myself will write all father's letters; you will not find  
a single mistake.

I shall write from A right up to K.

But, mother, why do you smile?

You don't believe that I can write as nicely as father does!

But I shall rule my paper carefully, and write all the letters  
beautifully big.

When I finish my writing do you think I shall be so foolish  
as father and drop it into the horrid postman's bag?

I shall bring it to you myself without waiting, and letter by  
letter help you to read my writing.

I know the postman does not like to give you the really nice  
letters.

Rabindranath Tagore

## Threshold

I was not aware of the moment  
when I first crossed the threshold of this life.

What was the power that made me open out into this vast mystery  
like a bud in the forest at midnight!

When in the morning I looked upon the light  
I felt in a moment that I was no stranger in this world,  
that the inscrutable without name and form  
had taken me in its arms in the form of my own mother.

Even so, in death the same unknown will appear as ever known to me.  
And because I love this life,  
I know I shall love death as well.

The child cries out  
when from the right breast the mother takes it away,  
in the very next moment to find in the left one its consolation.

Rabindranath Tagore

## Twelve O'Clock

Mother, I do want to leave off my lessons now. I have been at my book all the morning.

You say it is only twelve o'clock. Suppose it isn't any later; can't you ever think it is afternoon when it is only twelve o'clock?

I can easily imagine now that the sun has reached the edge of that rice-field, and the old fisher-woman is gathering herbs for her supper by the side of the pond.

I can just shut my eyes and think that the shadows are growing darker under the madar tree, and the water in the pond looks shiny black.

If twelve o'clock can come in the night, why can't the night come when it is twelve o'clock?

Rabindranath Tagore

## Untimely Leave

No more noisy, loud words from me---such is my master's will.  
Henceforth I deal in whispers.  
The speech of my heart will be carried on in murmurings of a song.

Men hasten to the King's market. All the buyers and sellers are there.  
But I have my untimely leave in the middle of the day, in the thick of work.

Let then the flowers come out in my garden, though it is not their time;  
and let the midday bees strike up their lazy hum.

Full many an hour have I spent in the strife of the good and the evil,  
but now it is the pleasure of my playmate of the empty days to draw my heart on to  
him;  
and I know not why is this sudden call to what useless inconsequence!

Rabindranath Tagore

## Vocation

When the gong sounds ten in the morning and I walk to school by our lane.

Every day I meet the hawker crying, "Bangles, crystal bangles!"

There is nothing to hurry him on, there is no road he must take, no place he must go to, no time when he must come home.

I wish I were a hawker, spending my day in the road, crying, "Bangles, crystal bangles!"

When at four in the afternoon I come back from the school, I can see through the gate of that house the gardener digging the ground.

He does what he likes with his spade, he soils his clothes with dust, nobody takes him to task if he gets baked in the sun or gets wet.

I wish I were a gardener digging away at the garden with nobody to stop me from digging.

Just as it gets dark in the evening and my mother sends me to bed,

I can see through my open window the watchman walking up and down.

The lane is dark and lonely, and the street-lamp stands like a giant with one red eye in its head.

The watchman swings his lantern and walks with his shadow at his side, and never once goes to bed in his life.

I wish I were a watchman walking the streets all night, chasing the shadows with my lantern.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **When and Why**

When I bring you coloured toys, my child, I understand why there is such a play of colours on clouds, on water, and why flowers are painted in tints-when I give coloured toys to you, my child.

When I sing to make you dance, I truly know why there is music in leaves, and why waves send their chorus of voices to the heart of the listening earth-when I sing to make you dance.

When I bring sweet things to your greedy hands, I know why there is honey in the cup of the flower, and why fruits are secretly filled with sweet juice-when I bring sweet things to your greedy hands.

When I kiss your face to make you smile, my darling, I surely understand what pleasure streams from the sky in morning light, and what delight the summer breeze brings to my body-when I kiss you to make you smile.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **When Day Is Done**

If the day is done,  
if birds sing no more,  
if the wind has flagged tired,  
then draw the veil of darkness thick upon me,  
even as thou hast wrapt the earth with the coverlet of sleep  
and tenderly closed the petals of the drooping lotus at dusk.

From the traveler,  
whose sack of provisions is empty before the voyage is ended,  
whose garment is torn and dust-laden,  
whose strength is exhausted,  
remove shame and poverty,  
and renew his life like a flower under the cover of thy kindly night.

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Where Shadow Chases Light**

This is my delight,  
thus to wait and watch at the wayside  
where shadow chases light  
and the rain comes in the wake of the summer.

Messengers, with tidings from unknown skies,  
greet me and speed along the road.  
My heart is glad within,  
and the breath of the passing breeze is sweet.

From dawn till dusk I sit here before my door,  
and I know that of a sudden  
the happy moment will arrive when I shall see.

In the meanwhile I smile and I sing all alone.  
In the meanwhile the air is filling with the perfume of promise.

Rabindranath Tagore



## **Where The Mind is Without Fear**

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high  
Where knowledge is free  
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments  
By narrow domestic walls  
Where words come out from the depth of truth  
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection  
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way  
Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit  
Where the mind is led forward by thee  
Into ever-widening thought and action  
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake

Rabindranath Tagore

## **Who Is This**

I came out alone on my way to my tryst.  
But who is this that follows me in the silent dark?

I move aside to avoid his presence but I escape him not.

He makes the dust rise from the earth with his swagger;  
he adds his loud voice to every word that I utter.

He is my own little self, my lord, he knows no shame;  
but I am ashamed to come to thy door in his company.

Rabindranath Tagore