"I WILL NOT LET YOU GO"

I

The carriage waits at the door. It is now midday.
The autumn sun is getting more and more intense.
Midday gusts waft the dust across the deserted village path.
An old beggar woman has spread her rags beneath the cool shade
of the banyan tree in tired slumber.
On all sides stretches a sun-flooded night void of speech or sound
or sign of life.
Only in my house there is no trace of rest or sleep.
II

Aswin is over and my autumnal holidays are ended. I must return to my distant place of work again.
Busy servants fit about with cords and ropes,
Call one another from room to room and tie up many pacts.
My wife with grief-laden heart and eyes dim with tears,
Lacks leisure even to weep alone.
She bustles about to make sure I have all I need.
However much the luggage piles up, she is not satisfied.
In despair I ask, “What do you intend?
What shall I do with all this wealth of a king’s household,
With so many jugs and pots and plates
And bottles and beds and boxes?
Let me leave behind some and take some with me.”

III

No one pays any attention to what I say.
“Who knows—if suddenly you need these things in an alien land—
Where will you find them then?
Pulses like gold and rice of the finest grain,
Areca nuts and betel leaves are there.
Some jaggery cakes I have put in that covered dish.
Here are some coconuts, there two jugs of mustard oil,
Mango pancakes, mango dried and two seers of milk.
Here are bottles full of medicine, and there some sweets.
Swear that you won’t forget to eat them on the way.”
I knew it was useless to argue or reason.
The luggage piled up like a miniature mountain.
I looked at the watch and looked at the dear dear face.
Slowly I said, “Now I must go.”
She turned her face and pulled her scarf over her lowered eyes
to hide her tears lest they do me harm.
My four-year-old daughter was sitting absent-minded by the door.
On other days, she would, by now, have bathed and gone off to sleep with scarce half-finished meal.
Today her mother could not attend to her.
Though it is late, she was neither bathed nor fed.
So long she had shadowed me
And watched in attentive silence all I did.
Now, with tired limbs she sat quietly by the door
And none knew what was on her mind.
I spoke to her, "Little mother mine, good-bye."
With sad eyes and solemn face, she said, "I will not let you go"
She kept on sitting where she was,
She did not cling to me nor seek to block the door,
With love's assurance she only said, "I will not let you go,"
But it was time to go and alas! I went.

Who are you, my foolish girl?
Where did you find the strength to say
Words so bold and proud: "I will not let you go."
Whom will you hold in the fleeting world with your tiny hands,
   proud maid?
Will you sit with tired limbs by the homestead door
And fight the forces of the world with the force of love alone?
Our hearts are full of grief and yet all that we can say
Is expression of a timid hope,
   "We want that you should stay."
Who is there that dares to say: "I will not let you go"?
Your infant lips voiced the proud claim of love.
POETRY

The world laughed at you and dragged me off.
With defeated eyes you sat by the door like a sad picture in a frame.
I looked at you and left with tearful eyes.

VI

I went along my way. On both sides of the road
I saw the autumn fields weighed with corn and basking in the sun.
The rows of trees stand desolate by the roadside,
And all day long gaze at their own shadow.
The Ganges flows to sea in full autumnal flood.
White strips of cloud lie upon the azure sky,
Like new-born calves sleeping after a feed of mother’s milk.
The age-old earth is bare in the bright sunlight and stretches to the far horizon.
I looked at her tired stretch and a deep sigh welled up from my heart.

VII

What sombre sadness broods over earth and sky.
Far as I go, I hear one monotonous wail,
One melancholy note: “I will not let you go.”
From the earth’s rim to the farthest horizon
There echoes the endless cry: “I will not let you go.”
A mere wisp of grass, but Mother Earth clings to it,
Hugs it to her heart and cries, “I will not let you go.”
A flame flickers in the dying lamp.
Before darkness can develop it, there rings a cry, “I will not let you go.”
Throughout heaven and earth’s boundless stretch,
It is the oldest cry, the deepest wail, “I will not let you go.”
And yet all things go and we must let them go!
This is the law since the flow of time began.
Creation's currents sweep to Destruction's sea.
We stretch out eager arms, our eyes glow with hope,
We proclaim, "I will not let you go."
And yet all are swept by the resistless flood.
In vain we fill the shores of time with sad lament.
The wave behind calls to the forward waves, "I will not let you go."
No one listens to the call and no one heeds.

VIII

I heard voiced the sad lamenting wail
Welling up from the heart of the universe—in my little daughter's words.
From every side across the same unreasoning claim in unceasing notes.
The earth ever loses what she gets but will not lose her hold,
Will, like my little daughter four years old,
Declare in the pride of love, "I will not let you go."
Pale of face and eyes dim with tears
Every day and hour her hopes are rudely blown
And yet Love will not know defeat,
Will still declare in defiant tones, "I will not let you go."
Every time she tastes defeat, she says, "How can he I love go away from me?
What's there so strong, supreme or boundless as my desire?"
Love declares in pride of inner strength, "I will not let you go."
But alas! like dry dust wafted by the idle breeze
Love sees the beloved borne away by flow of time.
Her eyes are washed with tears,
With broken heart she crumbles down to earth,
And still insists, "God will not break His troth.
He has promised Love eternal mastery."
Love with her slender grace boldly faces Death,
Stands before his overpowering might
And denies the very fact of death.
Her proud words make Death laugh.
Love that suffers death and yet for ever lives
Permeates the vastness of the universe,
Like tears of ever present fear that veil the eyes.
The heart keeps fighting against the loss of hope,
And spreads a pall of sadness o'er the world.
I look inward and I see:
Two unreasoning arms that hold in vain embrace the dumb and
painful earth.
A steady shadow broods over the moving waters.
Is it the shadow of a cloud full of tears?

IX

I hear in the rustle of the trees a voice full of yearning.
In idle indifference the warm midday wind plays with the dead
dry leaves.
Slowly, the day wanes and the shadows lengthen beneath the
Aswatha tree.
The infinite plays a sad rustic pipe across the plains of the world.
The earth listens to the tune.
With loosened hair falling over her neck
And a golden scarf that gleams in the yellow sun flung across her
breasts,
She sits in the vast fields of corn by the river-side.
Her steady eyes gaze at the distance.
Her voice is mute.
I look at her sad and solemn face,
And it is the face of my four-year-old daughter
As she sat brooding by the door.

Translated from the Bengali by Humayun Kabir