

THE GARDENER

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The Gardener by Rabindranath Tagore

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RABINDRANATH TAGORE

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PREFACE

Most of the lyrics of love and life, the translations of which from Bengali are published in this book, were written much earlier than the series of religious poems contained in the book named *Gitanjali*. The translations are not always literal—the originals being sometimes abridged and sometimes paraphrased.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE.

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Servant

HAVE mercy upon your servant, my queen!

Queen

The assembly is over and my servants are all gone. Why do you come at this late hour?

Servant

When you have finished with others, that is my time.

I come to ask what remains for your last servant to do.

Queen

What can you expect when it is too late?

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Servant

Make me the gardener of your flower garden.

Queen

What folly is this?

Servant

I will give up my other work.

I throw my swords and lances down in the dust. Do not send me to distant courts; do not bid me undertake new conquests. But make me the gardener of your flower garden.

Queen

What will your duties be?

Servant

The service of your idle days.

I will keep fresh the grassy path where you walk in the morning, where your feet will be greeted with praise at every step by the flowers eager for death.

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I will swing you in a swing among the branches of the *saptaparna*, where the early evening moon will struggle to kiss your skirt through the leaves.

I will replenish with scented oil the lamp that burns by your bedside, and decorate your footstool with sandal and saffron paste in wondrous designs.

Queen

What will you have for your reward?

Servant

To be allowed to hold your little fists like tender lotus-buds and slip flower chains over your wrists; to tinge the soles of your feet with the red juice of *ashoka* petals and kiss away the speck of dust that may chance to linger there.

Queen

Your prayers are granted, my servant, you will be the gardener of my flower garden.

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"Ah, poet, the evening draws near;
your hair is turning grey.

"Do you in your lonely musing hear
the message of the hereafter?"

"It is evening," the poet said, "and
I am listening because some one may
call from the village, late though it be.

"I watch if young straying hearts
meet together, and two pairs of eager
eyes beg for music to break their
silence and speak for them.

"Who is there to weave their pas-
sionate songs, if I sit on the shore of
life and contemplate death and the be-
yond?"

"The early evening star disappears.

"The glow of a funeral pyre slowly
dies by the silent river.