

RAINNA'S GHALIB
A Transcreation
of Mirza Ghalib's Selected Verse



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Index to Malik Ram's
Centenary Volume (1969) by
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Millenniums must pine away
for sighs to take effect ;
How long can dwindling passion last,
or dream that blissful act ?

Through the hungry jaws of crocodiles
undulates the sea ;
Such smitten waves throw up the pearl
from unfathom'd catastrophe.

Patience is what love demands, yet
desires singe the heart ;
What colours must I wear until
my soul is rent apart ?

I doubt not that some distant day
my love shall heeded be ;
Except I must be long inter'd
ere she should hear of me.

Those tiny drops of dew must die
with the foremost streaks of morn ;
Nor may my life extend beyond
one look of a gentler scorn.

Life's ecstasies are as prolonged
as the twinkling of an eye ;
Passion's embers are most ablaze
the moment they must die.

What else but death may rectify
the agonies of Being ?
The Candle must consume itself
'mid every gathering !

If you should will that I produce
a face to match, alas,
In such a quest I cannot but
produce the looking-glass.

My eyes denied your beauty's sight
converge upon the heart,
And clutch in clusters to feigned delight,
and cause the stain, the smart.

Why is it so ordained that love
must lead to painful wait ?
Instead of instant satiety,
and fulfilment immediate.

O, better than measure the wilderness
immeasurably outspread,
Gather the desert in just a palm
and fling it over the head.

Just as the breeze in early spring
unfurls the flowers free,
So must red wine drip down my throat
ere spring can come to me.

O Ghahb, why be so upset
should the pious run you down ?
Was ever a man whom everyone
thought deserving of renown ?

This puny world performs to me
each night, each puny day ;
A sanctuary where I can see
the children at their play.

Suleman's mighty throne is but
a playful thing to me ;
And Christ, enshrined in miracles,
a mythical entity.

The desert crumbles down to dust
when I should so decree ;
And upon the dust the river wide
does rub its brow to me.

Ask me not how, in loneliness,
I languish in your love ;
Rather, see how, in front of me,
you undermine the vow.

Conscience holds me back from sin,
Temptation drags me on ;
The Idols lie in front of me,
behind me the holy Dawn !

A lover, yes, but every Eve
lays siege unto my heart ;
Devout Laila, in my presence, calls
Majnu an upstart.

Indeed the joy of of togetherness
excites exceptionally ;
But the death I had wished in separation
arrived through ecstasy.

If only this flood of turbulent tears
were to be misery's end !
But, watch out and see the catastrophe
that love does sure portend.

Decrepitude wastes my hands, no doubt,
but my eyes do yet defy ;
Then stay the cup before me still,
let me but glut the eye.

Friend and fellow and "confidant,"
and better than that is he ;
Then call Ghallib no slanderous names,
no, not in front of me.

These walls and doors that shut her in,
they cannot shut me out ;
My eyes can see beyond, before,
within, and all about.

The flood of tears upon my house
did such disaster pour,
That every door became a wall,
and every wall a door.

No shadows these that you now see,
of stooping walls and doors,
But stretching out to welcome her
the very walls and doors.

What potion does your mere presence
upon them all so pour,
That tipsied in your neighbourhood
is every wall and door.

Ghallib, do not confide in men,
O trust them not at all ;
For the only one that is fit to hear
is a dumb door, a tongueless wall !

How hard, how impossible
to do the things one can.
Ah that the mighty earthing
is hardly ever a man.

This flood of passion promises
but death to my abode ;
For peeling walls and windows are
upon the desert road.

Oh, this urgency of love
that renders me so mad !
That always I should wander forth,
and always turn so sad.

The naked sword makes lovers all
with glorious promise seethe ;
Much like the crescent heralding
the glory of the fad.

Into the grave with me the dream
of calling you my own ;
O prosper now, and be condemned
to watch yourself alone.

She swore she would no longer tease
when she had me slain for fun ;
That remorse should have so stricken her
after the deed was done !

Ah woeful fate, that I should not
be prone upon His door ;
Ah woeful fate, that I should not
be the flint that makes his floor !

The lengths to which this world has gone
to wipe me off its face —
As though I were the mark of Cain,
impossible to erase.

Condemn me not to perdition,
to everlasting grief,
For I may have sinned the sins of man,
but not of unbelief.

Pearls and diamonds and emeralds green,
none of these am I ;
Then why banish me from Grace, O God,
why banish me, oh why ?

The God that lets the soulless sky
stretch forth His feet to kiss,
Why deny me, Creation's principal end,
the promise of that bliss ?

O Ghallib, now extol the King,
whose bounty wills your breath ;
Those defiant days are all gone by
when servitude were death.

If I did bear with the wrongs,
 the tortures wrought by her,
 Then grant that I have truly been
 her only worshipper.

So stern my regal disposition,
 so high my noble stock,
 Even Kaaba, should its doors be barr'd,
 could scarcely make me knock.

The sigh that froze within the heart
 a festering wound became ;
 Just as the speck no river reached
 took desert for its name.

Unheard, unparalleled grief,
 my exclusive destiny,
 And my endeavours all accursed,
 all blighted miserably.

To know the ocean within the drop,
 the whole within the part,
 What vision must one need possess,
 and what perceptive heart.

Ghazals would be dismembered all,
 the rumour said, in a rout ;
 I went in time to watch the show,
 but it did not come about.

My sufferings do ill receive
 her sympathies galore ;
 O painful death is a better end
 than a condescending cure.

Why need you call a multitude
 to certify the wrong ?
 Oh, the shame in such an exhibit,
 the slander in the throng.

Strangers can hardly help me test
 my dubious destiny ;
 When your own dagger should, alas,
 refuse to set me free.

O the honeyed rapture in your lips,
 surpassingly sweet ;
 Your enemy lost no palate when
 you hurled abuses meet.

She means to honour my abode,
 the rumour is about ;
 What irony, my only mat
 I should be without.

The yielding back of life is but
 the repayment of a loan,
 For it was he who gave to us
 our lives, all his own.

My wounds may well have healed away,
 but the blood yet trickles through,
 Then why must my arrested life
 refuse to run anew ?

My wounds may well have healed away,
but the blood yet trickles through,
Then why must my arrested life
refuse to run anew ?

She plucked my heart out all at once,
and vanished instantly ;
Was it an overture of love, or some
highway robbery ?

Out with some concocted song
to answer the lament
That Ghalib has all folded up,
suspiciously spent.

Alas, you bore with me again and again,
When you had meagre strength for trenchant pain.

Alas, that you ever thought of befriending me,
When this friendship proved to you such enmity.

You had indeed, ah, sworn a lasting love ;
O grief, that life should so betray you now.

These elements that let you down in death,
I hate them all, I hate this even breath.

The petals that your fragrant path would pave,
Alas, should now be laid upon your grave.

Ah woe, you crept behind this veil of dust ;
No more now need you keep the face I must.

Alas, how pass this night the deluge mars,
For I am wont to spend them counting stars.

My ears deprived of words, my eyes of her face,
Alas, how much hopelessness must I embrace.

O Ghalib, just when I was catching on to love,
Death wrenched her away from me to God above.

The urge to see, to look at her,
my heart was sunk in it ;
And now, even if she called on me,
my strength would prohibit.

Access to you may difficult be,
it isn't impossible ;
How impossible that such access
should be so possible.

My house, my friends, turbulence wild
did make me leave them all ;
But the desert raked my anguish more,
and not a friendly wall.

Lo, she steps for combat grim,
without a sword steps she ;
What valiant knight could ever survive
such disarming simplicity.

Often I have watched Assad,
alone, in company ;
If not utterly unhinged,
nor rightly hinged is he.

Faith, or trust, or honest love
are all but small concern ;
Words, that bring no sure relief,
and no contentment earn.

I thought my death would please her best,
and terminate my pain ;
But it went all wrong, for she couldn't find
such an easy prey again.

Futile to complain of lucklessness,
futile to cry for cure ;
I sought no luxuries, but death,
yet it did not come, for sure.

When every garment has been removed,
 and every tie abjured,
 The severance from nakedness
 is less easily secured.

When the tragedy of my abode was writ,
 act by dismal act,
 My name appeared upon the scroll
 as the principal architect.

Oh, even inside the silent grave
 respite was wrenched away ;
 When the thundering call did shatter all
 upon the Judgement Day.

The fear of death did constantly
 my consciousness surmount ;
 Upon me crept that ghastly pale
 long ere the final count.

When I was but beginning to grasp
 the gimmicks of the game,
 She turned about, and squarely
 denied my very name.

Never does this silken snare of love
 afford any respite;
 First yield the heart, and then lament
 the heart, forsaken quite.

My friends who, out of warm concern,
 confined me to this cell,
 Could ill confine my cactus mind
 which does with the desert dwell.

The dead man hence without a shroud —
 it is Assad passing by :
 Now hold your breath, and witness how
 the freedom-lovers die.

What is to keep the heart, no stone,

from welling up with pain ?

O, I shall weep a thousand tears

if you must tease again.

No house of friend, or foe, or God

where I abandoned lie ;

O, it is the untenanted road,

why uproot me then, oh why ?

Her splendour shames the midday sun,

impossible to espy ;

What needs she then the flimsy veil

to hide it from the eye ?

The rapier of your beauty's edge

must kill without a qualm ;

Why then should even your mirror'd face

confront your mortal charm ?

Suffering is synonymous

with the process that is life ;

Nor may one, ere the final hour,

eliminate the strife.

So certain of her magic grace,

irresistible to man,

The fickle fear no test of faith,

for she needs procure no fan.

Agreed she sins in man and God,

and loves not earnestly ;

Then those that care for love and God

why visit her alley ?

Ghalib excepted, the world of men

moves on relentlessly ;

Then what is there to shout about,

or justify a plea ?

My heart consumed itself at ease,
in fearless agony ;
Like patient embers quite content
to smoulder silently.

Memories and aspirations all,
and the urge to consummate,
Desires, dreams, oh everything
was wrecked in a fiery fate.

Alas, how sing my burning rhymes,
how burning utterance tame ?
I tried the desert, but as I spoke
the sands were all aflame.

I cannot show my heart, all burnt,
nor those myriad wounds of spring ;
And, oh, a wound or two will not
enlighten everything.

O Ghallib, no longer now the heart
for hurtful meritment ;
For every show of kind concern
has but an ill intent.

What stifles you, O sorely stricken heart ?
What magic draught may heal this deadly smart ?
That I should fawn and she indifference show,
To what purpose this insensible ado ?

I bear a tongue that can to utterance bend,
Should you but once enquire to what end.
One God, one arbiter, one omnipresent soul —
Then, pray, explain this endless rigmorole.

With what sly intent were these angle-faces made ?
And where is the point in strutting alluringly arrayed ?

What can explain those tresses curled aloft ?
And why the eyes, with darkened lashes soft ?

How did this world of foliage uprear ?
What constitutes the clouds and what the air ?

From such a one do I love's fulnesses expect,
Who wasn't ever suspected of any generous act.

What else is there for the sages to declare
Than that every trespass must extract a tear.

I sacrifice myself without ado ;
I know not, though, how best to pray for you.

The Lord bestowed both heaven and earth,
and believed me quite content ;
Yet, no contentment but gentle shame
does my vaulting wish prevent.

From wilderness to wilderness
the weary seekers trudge ;
No compass to suggest the goal,
no way by which to judge.

The flame that lights up the gathering
in the heart of the circle lies ;
Yet they can't but stand by helplessly
while it dims, flutters, dies.

How can my well-intention'd friends
help me assuage my pain ?
For by the time the wound is healed
my nails must grow again !

How long can I relate my woe ?
How oft retell it, pray ?
If all that you must say at last is :
"Whatever did you say ?"

The good counsellor is welcome here,
if he should pay a call ;
But how he could make me understand
I understand not at all.

With me today I have it all, —
the sword, the shroud, the noose ;
Then how dare she delay the fatal act ?
upon what fresh excuse ?

O, I that am arrested by
her swirling locks of hair,
Would you expect me, then, the chains
and the dungeon house to fear ?

A love-destroying famine has swept
this good old town of Delhi ;
Then, if I should stay what would you say
I eat to fill my belly ?

The wounded shriek simulates no timbrel beat ;
It is the instant note of agonising defeat.

The Almighty manifests himself in every sod,
Yet no man, or beast, or blade is quite like God.

Succumb not so to your Identity,
For Identity may be, may not be.

O, pass this jollity for mellow concern;
If Spring be not gay, nor Autumn stern.

O Ghalib, if Self and God are both nonentities,
Then what are you, that persists in this "Nothing is" ?

If ever I could my burdened head
lift off this cumbrous world,
The sky recalled unheeded love,
and yet greater anguish hurled.

Alas, how make her understand,
how make her even know ?
Would she but burn the letters all
my wretchedness would glow.

Sooner can a burning coal be wrapped
within the soft cocoon,
Than love's simmering fire concealed within,
without being ever known.

She did but want to sight the wounds,
and draw some cruel delight ;
Or else the flowers held little charm
for her in the garden bright.

My ignorance was destined to
annihilate me in love ;
For you came merely to make it known
that you must hasten now.

Should silence be a better food
for the welfare of the heart,
I am glad I am not understood,
and remain a thing apart.

To whom relate the grievances
my heart so welters in ?
For the deepest sorrows, deepest wounds
have always tongueless been.

Those who question not at all
God's bountiful mercy win ;
O rain it now for my silence is
my acknowledgment of sin.

This mass of land was small, indeed,
to contain my turbulence ;
So out of shame the earth perspired,
and the waters flowed out thence.

Assad, be not grievously misled
by this ruse of existence ;
For this world is no more real than
some well-thought-out pretence.

Should you have faith in the efficacy of prayer,
Then, O pray for a heart devoid of desire.
Arraign me not for all my sins, O God,
Or count as well my wounds, to straighten the record.

O now that I have your portals made

my permanent ridge,

Must you persist in maintaining

that you know not where I hide ?

After I had endlessly leaped,

and thereby lost my speech,

"How should I know your grief," she said,

"unless you should beseech ?"

Such an entity am I to mould,

such a personage to woo,

Who hasn't leapted a better name

than "tyrant" hitherto !

Empireless lies within the heart,

and perimeters the soul :

Or else, had I had some content,

I should have spilt it whole.

My worship of her godless soul

shall never find decrease :

No matter my own repetitions

should in godlessness decrease.

In this my deafness you need perform

to speak in a louder strain :

I hardly comprehended well

the shout is "Once again !"

O Khalib, why demand yourself

why plead so tirelessly ?

You think she knows not all your ills,

you think she does not see ?

Terrified rains are well contained

within the sky shell ;

Yet the world passes leads the heart

a chthonophobic cell.

O spring is like the ripeness that

Beneath Autumn's solemn feet :

Life's perfunctory pleasures must

perfunctorily return.

Temp't me not to tramp within

the blooming garden floor :

I cannot under the flowers that must

laugh at me calmly.

Every flame within me works

such fire a vigilance eye :

Yet, oh, that sacred quinquessence

I have failed to spy.

O derive our passion's dimensions

from the appearance of desire :

I bear within my paired eyes

revolve of fire.

Avoid, I remember her

when I behold the sky :

For the words of estranged lovelessness

do worse hurt up there too.

In vain have I my soul expressed,
and all my dirges sung;
Bestow her a better heart, O God,
or me a better tongue!

There is yet a mighty obstacle
ere my worship should attain;
For the vision must be blur'd at best,
should consciousness remain.

The surging tide of sharp despair
all restraint defies;
Oh I should have wept with vigorous zeal,
but for this paucity of eyes.

Every morn do I disclose
a fresh wound to the world;
Alas, that they should mistake, each
for the golden dawn unfurled.

Poets populate this land
in competent array;
But, "How different Ghallib's wizardry!"
is what the people say.

My jealous heart prevented me
from disclosing your address;
So I ask: "Pray, where must I turn?"
as though in drunkenness.

Lo, now she joins the chant as well
"A loafer that must roam!"
In whose pursuit I did renounce
the comforts of a home.

In fevered haste I pace along
with each brisk passerby;
But, oh, my fated fellowmate
I cannot yet espy.

Imbeciles confuse my desire
with idolatry;
No worship but warm love provokes
this woeful urgency.

Again, in my silly swoon, do I
forget her happy house;
Or else I should have called on her
my senses to arouse.

Her hostility is not designed
to drive me off my chance,
Or to test the moorings of my love, —
it's a playful circumstance.

Since I have welcomed torture,
the torturer welcomes me ;
Should she be not so merciful,
nor unmerciful is she.

Where is the harm should love's deluge
wash out the little home ?
O, rather than stifle in a hundred yards,
the endless desert room.

Why need you ask what constitutes
my woe!ful destiny —
When upon my brow the mark of love
should sit so strikingly.

O succumb some tipsy evening to
a more intimate address ;
Lest one day I should misbehave
on a plea of drunkenness.

Be not overwhelmed entire
by this lofty enterprise ;
For built into this wondrous world
is destruction in disguise.

I would drink each passing day
upon credit of every pie,
In the hope that my penance would
one day fructify.

Even this stricken song of grief
consider but a boon ;
For this lyre of life must silenced lie
soon, oh very soon !

O, every time you question my
 pretension to converse,
 Pray, what manner of polite address is this ?
 if I may be so terse.

The flesh and bone is all consumed,
 so must my heart have been :
 Then why rake the ashes now, why poke ?
 why belatedly so keen ?

O not the blood that courses through
 the veins and vessels by ;
 For blood is no blood until
 it oozes from the eye.

My utterance has all ebbed away,
 or, could I yet communicate,
 Upon what hope make my lament ?
 in what declining state ?

Now favoured of the royal court,
 he struts about in a dance,
 For no renown does Ghazib occupy,
 except that circumstance.

The things that zest inspires man to do !
 Were there no death, what dullness would ensue !
 How long this wilful disregard, O Love ?
 To know it all, and yet to say : "What now ?"

I see the kindnesses rivals receive ;
 Then why complain ? What will it all achieve ?
 Lust is like the fire that eats the straw ;
 What life can love from such impatience draw ?

My breath is like the surge of a swooning sea ;
 What if the Saaki should ungenerous be ?

Each single drop but knows itself the sea ;
 So are we part of Him, eternally.

When did you hear me boast of patience great ?
 Then why these trials, why this lingering fate ?

Her honeyed words, her gestures, her lithe design, —
 O everything distracts this life of mine !

Countless dreams ambush the heart,
 each imperiously supreme ;
 Countless dreams have been fulfilled,
 fulfilment still a dream.

What keeps you from the slaughter, pray,
 for no blood shall stain your head ;
 Except the blood that I have shed
 through streaming tears instead.

Indeed, I have heard of Aadam's dismissal
 from Grace to ignominy ;
 Yet how much more ignominious
 my retreat from your alley !

The people I had hoped would lend
 compassion to my grief,
 Turned out to be in greater need
 of compassionate relief.

Love simultaneously prolongs
 and suffocates the breath ;
 Her beloved face spells at once
 both survival and death.

The tavern and the holy priest, —
 antipodal quantities ;
 Yet, even as I drunkenly emerged,
 I saw him, if you please !

The flame properly expires
 into the pensive pall of smoke ;
 Love's embers wore upon my death
 the black, funeral cloak.

I weep for the dismal end of Love,
 I weep for Love's deluge ;
 For what other bosom, when I am gone,
 could give to it refuge ?

Do not recount to me the miracles of the Lord ;
Not until by some such miracle my ills are cured.

The law, indeed, does dire offence decry,
But what about a culprit who murders with the eye ?

I dare not venture to edge in a word !
It suits her best to talk and to be heard !

O the abominations I hurl in excess of pain,
I pray to God may find no scandalous refrain !

Take no heed of evil in syllables ill-meant ;
Circulate no evil deed with slanderous intent.

Hold off the misguided from mistaken ways ;
Forgive the erring, forgive the one who strays.

Consider, oh, the multitudinous ill ;
How many wants attend, how many fulfil !

If Sikander turned the nectar down despite his guide,
Then whom acknowledge master, by whom abide ?

When faith and trust are vestiges in vain,
Then why confound the heart, why complain ?

Well might my unrequited love
be but a make-believe ;

Yet why not let your reputation
some enhancement receive ?

Suspend not relatedness

to such a cool extreme ;
If nothing else, let hostility
some acquaintance seem.

Should it be that a somebody
pines upon your door,

Then, O fickle Love, I am
my own ill-wisher no more.

If the self alone does validate
everything create,

Then ignorance is as pregnant, full,
as the realised ultimate.

Life affords but little time,
being so speedily stilled ;

Much, indeed, may not be done,
but desire may well be killed.

To turn upon my avowal

I cannot countenance ;
If not the fulfilment of love,
the promise of penance !

Surely, O my tyrannous Love,
somewhere you must relent ;

Grant at least the indulgence
to plead and lament.

Since you must always disregard,
and I must be bereft,
I shall school my turbulence,
and endeavour to accept.

O Ghallib, if some passion must
the two of us relate,
Then, if not consummation meet,
the wish to consummate !

Consider how the trickle turns
into the boundless deep ;
So does our anguish culminate,
and perish in a sleep.

Our luckless love could best compare
a coded instrument ;
The lines were snapped the moment when
the numbers did relent.

My heart has expended itself,
fighting every groan ;
Much like a bit of beaten rope,
unwhirling on its own.

O God, that I should be deprived
even of her contempt ;
Such rooted hostility to love
who could have ever dreamt ?

Now when my simmering grief in sighs
has found a cold release,
I can believe that water does
evaporate into breeze !

As soon may I erase the writ
of your love from my heart,
As seek to sever from the nail
its fleshly counterpart.

Behold how the fleecy clouds in spring
burst forth resplendent ;
So shall my tears drain out entire
my glories yet unspent.

If truly the flowers had no desire
to scatter along your ways,
Then why is it that the fragrant breeze
into your casement strays ?

O look, at least, at the rusted green
of your own looking-glass ;
And behold how the summer rains sprout
a riot of green *en masse* !

O Ghalib, where zest is yet alive,
there are colours to perceive ;
The eyes must melt in every shade,
and every shade receive.

With your footprints float into my mind
Verdurous visions of the ambrosial kind !

Upon Judgement Day the sun, descending red,
Did halt above the earth by a discreet head.

The looking-glass, oh, whatever will it prove ?
Do but see how longingly I look at you.

Disguised, O Ghalib, in my beggarly attire,
I watch this world, this drama of desire !

Alas, that, in our grief, we should
yet keener hopes retain,
And consider joys as loaned to Him
which He must pay again !

O consign yourself to noble death
for visions to unroll ;
The straw is never more iridescent
than on the burning coal !

Her conscience led to greater grief,
for she said with repentance strong :
"How dare I show my face to you,
for shame of all my wrong !"

The seven heavens are all awbirl,
spinning destinies ;
O surely they must bring about
occasional release.

Hostility may well be understood
as proof of some address ;
But how term her hopeless indifference
as any relatedness ?

O never shall I my friends betray,
never abdicate ;
No matter what the reckoning be,
or what the mortal state.

Through all my life did I await
the curtailment of breath ;
Let me now discover what
difference lies in death.

"Ghalib, what are you, just who ?"
they ask of me today ;
Pray help, and tell me, after all,
whatever I shall say.

If in a moment of mild regret
 she feels a kindly twinge,
 The memory of her many wrongs
 shames at mercy's fringe.

The distress of my heart and soul,
 and her doubts about my pain, —
 Too angry to enquire, she ; and I ? —
 unable to explain.

O abysmal hopelessness,
 why such despair, oh why ?
 For even the visions I bear of her
 are slipping by and by.

I love to look at your loveliness
 as well as the others do ;
 Yet, oh, I cannot bear to watch
 the others look at you.

So helplessly have I been scotched
 upon this blistering path of love,
 That nor can I hold on to it,
 nor race for shelter now.

When rivals now carouse with her
 what tortures must ensue !
 Considering I could ill wish her,
 "May God be with you !"

Her love for me was promptly dubbed
 as disdain in disguise ;
 Oh, must this world from every good
 some sinister ill surmise ?

This fateful day do I proceed
 to tell my turbulence ;
 But wait and see if actually
 I make some bitter sense.

To a bygone age do they belong,
 O spare them their romance !
 These people who answer anguish with
 carousal and with dance.

This fire within the breast cannot
 discourage me enough ;
 For lovers even the gentle air
 is incendiary stuff.

Each syllable that escapes her lips
 provokes the name of God ;
 Well may she claim, some solemn day,
 full parity with the Lord.

O that I had been instantly consumed
by the radiance of her face,
Than have to steel myself to bear
this blazing disgrace.

Behold how she advances bold
for fatal reprimand ;
I die for envy of the sword,
for there might be my hand.

Upon the brimful cup is proved
the guilt of a massacre ;
For the toxic tempo of your élan
is impossible to bear.

The blisters upon my burning soles
had terrified all my sense ;
How heartening to discover that
the path is thorny hence.

When I espy those massive walls
of stone, that do not give,
All my mad insensed appeal,
my agonies I relive.

My faculties, all charmed, salute
the true critic of my verse ;
Unto him I bequeath my soul,
besides this poetic converse.

Why must the lover pine, lament,
when his heart he gifts away ?
A breast bereft of a throbbing heart
should not have much to say.

O, she must but always take offence,
and I cannot yield my soul ;
Or, would you that I bend on my knee
to wheedle and cajole ?

Oh grief that my own confidante
should so embarrass me !
Why trust a bosom that cannot bear
love's secret agony ?

If I must break my crazy head
to silence painful moan,
Then why do so upon your door ?
why not some other stone ?

Tremble not but tell, O tell
news of the garden green ;
The nest that unto the lightning fell
my own need not have been.

Do not unjustly charge me with
generating all the strain ;
For should you not wrench yourself away
no tension need remain.

Your love is potent enough to kill,
as surely as it can ;
Why need the gods then trouble themselves
to annihilate such a man ?

You ask me why I must object

to strangers meeting you ?

How justly asked ! Do ask again,
do ask, oh do, oh do.

O Ghailb why delude yourself

to try such trickery now ?

No slander can ever assist you to
blackmail her into love.

Should I be destined to survive some more,
My heart is set on remedies untried before.

Infernal hell but coldly compares
My smouldering passion, my scalding tears.

Her note delivered, the messenger stares,
Afraid to speak the word his visage bears.

How tempting it is to tell mysterious fate,
Except that dissolute death ensues from such a state.

Your trials over, Ghailb, now brace your breath
To prepare for the final trial of sudden death.

Lost in night, my hopes have foundered all ;
And no inkings of respite, however small.

O death indeed shall come some destined day,
But why must friendly slumber stay away ?

My suffering heart would once arouse my mirth ;
But nothing distracts me now, nothing on earth.

I know that eventime is sacrosanct ;
O helpless grief, my will should ill relent.

Do not misconstrue my speechless state,
For there are things no tongue may ever relate.

So sunk am I in insensible despair,
I hardly know myself, I hardly care.

In my desire for death I yearn and die,
Death dances close to me, yet passes by.

How dare I confront Kaaba with my sins ;
Such ego, and such lack of shame, impious twins.

How small this various world to those
who are but ill content ;
For us the sky could verily be
the eggshell of an ant.

Countless worlds in your pursuit
take motion, one by one ;
Just as specks have radiant life
because of the radiant sun.

The brittle heart that broken lay
upon the path was mine ;
They looked at the pool of red, and said :
"What a wasted cup of wine !"

You do maintain no rival did
obtain a kiss from you ;
Ah, hold it there, for you must know
I know a thing or two.

This evil world made her succumb
out of sheer desire ;
Well may she like her cool abode,
so quickly drained of fire.

O Ghailb, I am content in that
she treats me callously ;
For, could she not trust my love for her
she couldn't so callous be.

That I should tease her and provoke
 no untoward retort ;
 O, had she but downed some rousing wine,
 what wonders would be wrought.

Calamity, catastrophe,
 or whatever may ensue, —
 Nothing could ever a difference make
 if only I had you.

If remorseless misery had to be
 my apportioned part,
 Then He might as well have granted me
 a heart in place of heart.

O Ghallib, some day, surely,
 she would have made redress,
 Had death not hastened life away
 with remorseless urgency.

It pleased the light from heaven to show
 in the form that you possess ;
 And Revelation was but half revealed
 except your loveliness.

O Waiz, nor do you indulge,
 nor can you entertain ;
 Custodian of people's godliness,
 O leave us to our stain.

She who slew me now shouts me down
 upon this Judgement Day,
 For fear that the Lord may, after all,
 my goodnesses repay.

These chiselled faces may not be housed
 with the rest of heaven's brood ;
 Yet do not discount their sanctity,
 for they were thence removed.

Must the answer to each one be
 the evasive "THAT I AM" ?
 Come let us unto the mount proceed, —
 it may not be the same.

A certain zest in tempers does
 but truly entertain ;
 Yet, whoever tried to talk with her
 did instantly complain.

O Sire, should you but grant to me
 a place in the retinue,
 The blessings I may at Mecca find
 I shall pass them on to you,

The wonders of this world to me
are dust, and nothingness ;

Suffering, yes, but now the heart
is drained out in distress.

What heavenly personage is that
for whom this breathless wait ?

And for whom do myriad flowers bright
the footfalls decorate ?

If compassion failed to move her heart,
oh why didn't I relent ?

But there is no potency, alas,
no edge to my lament.

My verses, Assad, are meant no more
as serious enterprise ;

That the world has meagre use for them
is such an old surprise.

O call me tenderly whenever you should ;
I am no bygone time, now lost for good.

Sooner could I swallow some deadly draught or two,
Then swear with any conviction by our rendezvous.

Unruly fire does best compare
 the fierceness of her mind ;
 Should bliss not lie in blazing heat,
 I am a heretic, I am blind.

I know not how long I have been
 a part of this sordid mess,
 For each night has been a million years,
 and each day — a little less.

Since she wished for me the agony
 of sleepless wait for good,
 She promised, when I dreamt at night,
 to come, whenever she would.

O let me scribble another plea,
 more poignant than the previous one,
 For I know the answer he must bring
 when my courier should return.

Never before did her gracious wine
 flow across to me ;
 Then why tonight ? Oh I tremble lest
 the cup should poisoned be.

No deceit can ever be worked on her,
 a stranger to painful love ;
 Then why need I fear the endeavours
 of my friend, pray tell me now.

My bliss in this togetherness is halved
 for fear of a rival claim ;
 But why that uneasiness in you,
 for it is no double game.

Me, and this promise of delight !
 O praised be God's decree ;
 In gratitude I should have gifted life,
 but I forgot, in ecstasy.

Her brow within the veil is creased
 by a frown of great disgust ;
 So potent that the veil itself
 does catch the crease and bust.

In every amorous overture
 spasms of delight ;
 And every tender annoyance
 a captivating sight.

The moan that does across the sun
 a mighty fissure draw,
 Falls in her heart to find
 the foothold of a straw.

The eloquence that makes the ship
 sail forth in the desert sand,
 Has, likewise, proved so impotent
 to make her understand.

It is ages since she granted me
the pleasures of a host ;
And ages since the house was lit
with wine at every post.

Afresh do I assemble now
those bits of a shattered heart ;
Afresh, to taste the pain again,
the blessing of her dart.

Ages since I broke restraint,
or let anguish have its say ;
Afresh does throttled passion seek
to blow the curbs away.

Afresh does commiserative love
prepare to ease the fault ;
Afresh, to look to the festering wounds
with a fresh supply of salt.

Afresh does this yearning heart desire
to abdicate to her ;
Betraying honour, ego, pride,
betraying everywhere.

Afresh the urge to capitulate
to a winsome customer ;
Surrendering heart and soul and life,
to clinch the deal with her.

Afresh the lust to gaze upon
her swooning loveliness :
Her face ambushed with fainting care
by dark, descending tress.

Afresh the desperate desire
to have her opposite ;
Her face riotous, like the spring,
flushed, and softly lit.

Afresh the urge to laze beside
the portals of her estate ;
Imploring first the mercy of
the man who keeps the gate.

Afresh the thirst for nights and days
when quiet and ease embrace :
For time to close the mind to all
but the remembrance of her face.

O Ghallib forbear, withhold me not,
for, with the potency of tears,
I have, afresh, determined on
the storm, that now uprears.

The gleeful song of flowers, nor the timbral beat,
I am the voice of my desperate defeat.

O, but for this intense relationship,
I could yet this sinful world outstrip.

God, grant me such a miracle to desecry,
When, instead of dreams, I have her by I

Not a drop of blood do I now bear
As hasn't been used up in tearful despair.

There was God even before
there was Nothingness ;
Had Creation not intervened,

He would have been, no less.

Myself am I the root and cause
of all my despair ;
What if I should have remained
unborn, unaware ?

Agas since Ghalib gave up the ghost,
yet his memory is with us :
How, at every argument,
he would wonder : "thus or thus ?"

I do believe that Judgement Day
is on the calendar ;
But not as unrelieved in pain
as this separation from her.

When I present myself to her
no greeting does she tell ;
And when I quit the gathering,
nor does she wish me well.

Should she at all remember me
she remembers me this way :
"Ah, how is it the assemblage
is so civilized today ?"

They say that grief and glee rotate, —
they may, I cannot tell ;
For a heart constantly aggrieved
into my portion fell.

O Ghallib, make no mention of
the rendezvous she set ;
What mockery, that you recall,
and she says : "I forget !"

What boots it to wag my tireless tongue
to such a cynical ear ?
And where is the poignancy in words
should she disdain to hear ?

Fruitlessly have I called to her,
O, the anguish of my soul ;
May desire so drown her heart
as to leave her no control.

Should she forget or tire of
my love, a mere sport,
May her addiction to adulation become
a surer antidote.

Cursed be such daintiness,
be she so fair and good,
If a mere touch, once close by me,
unsettles her maidenhood.

What unseen presence manipulates
the show so wondrously ?
Such cosmic curtains blind us out
as cannot lifted be.

What, wish sinister Death away ?
Ah, it must overtake !
And Desire, should you disappoint,
no sense would ever make.

No more can I put back the load
that saw me stagger dead ;
Nor even blunder through the task
stupendously ahead.

Sooner may one chill the sun,
 or restrain the hail,
 Than regulate love's regal might
 that scorns such rationale.

Once again does my stifled grief
 surge into the eye ;
 And once again to heart and soul
 seek utterance in a cry.

Just when the pang of parting had
 dull'd down deceptively,
 Assailed that shattering thought again
 with fiercer agony.

Consider, O the innocence
 that so betrays me now ;
 It is not the disdain I recall
 but the look of tender love.

Diversions of other sorts
 could have bemused my days ;
 Then why did I succumb to grief
 in the memory of your ways ?

What mortal argument must ensue
 between myself and the Lord,
 Should I in paradise recall
 your superior abode ?

Once again down that haunting lane
 meanders my mind ;
 O that I should have recalled
 the heart I left behind.

Despair urged me on to seek
 some desolate sanctuary,
 But desolation, as I recalled my house,
 less desolate seemed to be !

Once, as a child, I picked a stone
to fling at Majnu's head,
But, ere the playful deed was done,
I recall'd my head instead !

That Laila went to the wilderness
to console her paramour, —
"Such things," some said, "could come to pass,
we had never heard before !"
Compassion melts my gentle heart
at all her daintiness ;
O Ghallib, spare her love's stravail,
spare her love's address.

O do not measure passing time
by the slanting sun, the moon ;
Let instant lightning keep the clock,
for it ticks away so soon.

The heel, the heel has cracked apart,
oh, the bewildering dismay !
Nor can I verily stand about,
nor verily run away.

This tipsy wine does well
for heavenly ecstasy,
Although to some such merriment
should so impious be.

Impossible to espy the Soul,
the lightning Energy,
That is so thickly curtained off
by all this greenery.

My eyes may well content themselves
by merely watching you ;
But what about this heart that pines
for consummation true ?

O for a world bereft of men,
unhallowed and unsung ;
Some nook where no talkers tramp,
and no one speaks the tongue.

O for a hut that would without
a door, a wall withstand ;
Naked, without a neighbourhood,
without a helping hand.

Where in sickness and travail
there is no kindly nurse ;
And in the hour of lonely death
no mournful converse.

Jealousy rebels at her unfriendly wrong ;
Yet good sense knows no one could trust her long.

Each speck derives its motion from God above,
As Majnu's restlessness derived from Laila's love.

Love must lead us back into eternity,
As a speck to desert sand, a drop to the sea.

When you are rapt, looking into your glass,
I look at the image mirror'd in my heart, alas !

No matter Farhaad clipp'd the mountain stone,
It won him not his love, but broke his bone.

The urge to die to innocence
does once again so fill,
Alas, that she should carry forth
a cutlass for the kill.

Consider but the certain charm
of her alluring tongue,
Whatever she spoke I truly felt
was all my veins among.

O surging wave of hopelessness,
forbear from such mistrust ;
Lest even this taste of hopelessness
should equally turn to dust.

My smouldering heart may well contain
a seething Inferno ;
Yet who compares with Judgement fierce ?
who, oh tell me who ?

Fragrant, colourful flowers all

are Beauty's fine rebirth ;

Yet, how many more faces stifled lie
beneath the cumbrous earth.

I too caroused in dizzy youth

'mid riotous revelry ;

But now, at last, the thrill is past,
and all the ecstasy.

O let your lifeblood wet your eyes

in this twilight of despair ;

I shall but deem that a dual spark
does light the darkening air.

In heaven shall I my vengeance wreak

upon these angel-faced lies,

Should it be their doubtful destiny
to attain to Paradise !

Visions, and, slumber, and snuggling nights,

all portions of the head

Upon whose arm your tresses lie
luxuriously overspread.

My entry into the garden touched

a symphony of pain ;

For my doleful sighs made all the birds
take up the sad refrain.

Those eyes that at my lucklessness

their lovely lids did drop,

Why should they yet so pierce my heart
and make all my pulses hop

Perpetual suffering must one day

insensitise the heart ;

Such a world of ills did crash on me
as silenced every smart.

Should Ghalib's tears well forth unchecked,

like an unabated spout,

Then O, be warned, one dreadful day
the world shall be washed out.

Ah life, engaged frustratedly
 in rootless wandering,
 The heart, for now the hope of death
 is quite a real thing.

How long complain of throbbing pain,
 of sick deliriousness ?
 Each hair upon my fever'd frame
 is a tongue in mute distress.

She has the steady heart that can
 distinguish truthfulness ;
 But that her vanity renders it
 blind and purposeless.

On evenings blanched by cool moonlight
 I drink without restraint ;
 My chill humour does but always need
 some potion, warm and faint.

Between the house and the tenant lies
 a tender relatedness ;
 The desert, alas, on Majnu's death
 is plunged in deep distress.

Never could this world of safe device
 defiant love suppress ;
 No trappings could ever conceal the fact
 of Majnu's nakedness.

The sprawling wound within could not
 release my stifled heart ;
 Even the arrow, like a bird in fright,
 did panic and depart.

The scent of flowers, silent moan,
 the smoke from pensive flame, —
 Whatever emerged from your abode
 took Despair for its name.

My yearning heart was like a feast
 of poetic turbulence ;
 Friends and fans did all devour,
 each unto his sense.

What courage must one needs possess
 to brace the last refrain.
 O that even this awesome enterprise
 should have proved to me so plain !

My gathering pain does once again
 imperiously reform,
 What had barely been a tear before
 in an overflowing storm.

The string of beads my love possessed
 had a heart for every bead ;
 Nor did she tell them one by one,
 but crushed them all, indeed.

That the flower show should please her so
 but prove her heartlessness ;
 For each burnished rose gives her repose
 as a red wound in distress.

I should be quite content in heaven
 should I but spot you there ;
 For no fairies may ever resemble you
 is the quick of my despair.

O bury me not in your alley,
 once you have murdered me ;
 Why should they get to know your house
 from where my grave should be ?

O pour the ample wine tonight
 to guard your generous pride ;
 For a humble draught or two I do
 but always have beside.

O gentle friend, I know you not,
 but, should you my courier find,
 Do pass my greetings on to him, —
 some gesture to remind.

Tell me, O all of you that are
 good neighbours to my love,
 If you should Ghallib find somewhere,
 quite unning'd above.

I know not what relationship

with the rival you maintain ;

But where is the harm should you permit
some kinship to remain ?

O, you cannot escape entirely

when Judgement shall befall ;

Even if my rival had murdered me
you would have witnessed all.

Do they indulge in cruelty

do they forget so soon ?

Conceded you are no mortal but
the sun, the golden moon.

What boots it where I drink, alone,

when the tavern is closed to me ?

Be it the mosque the school, the shrine,
they must serve equally.

They must be all correct, of heaven

the eulogies we hear ;

But, may God so command that He
is discovered somewhere there.

Tendrils grow on walls and doors,

spring, O happy spring !

That I should wilt in the wilderness,
and back home burgeoning !

Politeness does but ill secure
 my survival with her ;
 I stuck despite her hints that said,
 "Unwelcome customer" !

It was but that my timid heart
 took fright at the sentry's shout ;
 Or else a lame appeal or two
 I wouldn't have passed without.

Oh, life must hasten eternally
 to hungry death at last ;
 Even a Khizr, with all his holiness,
 must shrivel into a past.

Ah woe, that she should so bestow
 a kiss without request ;
 Oh, how did she learn the adult art ?
 where pass the dreadful test ?

That eventually she should forbear
 need not cloud intent ;
 For truly she has a thousand times
 her ardent promise sent.

O Ghalib, do but consider
 what answer could she give ?
 Supposing you said everything,
 and she heard you, and she knew ?

Well may she, in some fleeting dream,
 furnish calm redress ;
 But before I dream gentle sleep
 must bless my restlessness.

The tremulous tear upon your lid, —
 a sight I faint to tell ;
 Nor can I name another one
 who wets her eyes so well.

By a melting quiver of your lips
 O murder me entire !
 Kiss me not, but speak one word
 to quell this raging fire.

The throbbing rendezvous, the keen dismay, —
All insensate now, with the passing of the day.

No leisure now for love's elaborate appeal ;
And no desire to wonder, to admire, or even to feel.

Not the heart alone, but the intellect
As well is victim to decrepit neglect.

O, all that glamour was gathered in a face ;
With that is gone the glory of the race.

To shed those tears of blood, or old passions rake,
My tired heart, alas, can no longer undertake.

That I should have to grapple with this worldliness, —
O, think of me, and think of all this mess.

Youth is gone, O Ghallib, and ecstasy is past ;
Slow time has scattered that harmony at last.

If, in my loneliness, I watch
the door, the window rear,
It is that the breeze may bring some word,
or the courier may appear.

O joy, that within my humble house
she steps in, actually.
I gaze at her, then at my walls
in stupefied ecstasy.

Why must these people watch my wound ?
why survey the harm ?
For their evil eye, I fear, may hurt
her hand, her delicate arm.

The jewels that lie upon your breast,
they do not interest me ;
I wonder how they got up there,
I squirm enviously.

Consummation was not to be
the crowning of my fate ;
A lifetime more would find me still
'mid reveries uncreate.

Forget that I have lived so long
by the promises received ;
I should have died of ecstasy
had I been undeceived.

The satiety of your arrow's dart
my heart can best explain :
Had the steel not held, but cut through clean,
would poorly entertain.

That friends should all turn counsellors,
what pious mockery !
Instead of risking discomfort
in helpful sympathy.

Should you but inject into stone
grief and agony,
In lieu of sparks streaks of blood
would drip unceasingly.

So long as the heart is what it is,
suffering must endure ;
If not the tribulations of love,
of survival, for sure.

Who is there will understand
the knell that sundown rings ?
Death were welcome, but not, indeed,
all through the evening.

Should slander be my destiny,
I wish I would rather drown
Than have some graveyard advertise
my ignominious renown.
Such metaphysics, such argument,
such peerless eloquence ;
I were a prophet had not sweet wine
befuddled my better sense.

The world, they say, does constitute
the waist of the Creator tall ;
I wonder how that could be so,
I don't think it is at all —

The drop, indeed, is the river wide,
and the desert the tiny sod ;
But like Mansoor I need not shout,
"I am God, I am God !"

If tyranny is what pleases you,
then, oh, practise tyranny ;
But do not write me off entire,
do not indifferent be.

The theme her tender Loveliness,
and mine the rapt address ;
Good confidante, who heard the tale,
forsook his friendliness.

I wish the sky were not to be
my restraining roof, my floor ;
Had I been stationed nearer earth
I could have built some more.

Rather than scribble on and on
the story of the flood,
Better to show to her my quill
and my fingers, dripping blood.

Lest my brow should quite erase
the stone upon her door,
She had the slab removed entire,
and replaced by another four.

Gifted with no great talent,
and recklessly unwise, —
Then why should God be pitched against
my harmless enterprise ?

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