

THE MAIDEN'S HEART

IN an ancient city of the ancient orient
There blossomed for a while a young maiden.
The fair maid's tyrannical father was rich
And very famous, possessing endless treasures.
But for love there exists no poverty or riches:
A poor youth fell in love with the maiden,
And the maiden, too, loved him with passion;
And they longed to become man and wife:
 'If there is one for me,
 It is none other than he!'

'No, never!' cried out the wealthy father.
'I would render my daughter to the black earth
Than give her away to an unclothed beggar!'
So saying, he stood fast like a mountain rock.
But for love there exist no rock or mountain:
The youth was mad with his love for the maiden,
And the maiden, too, loved him with passion;
And they longed to become man and wife:
 'If there is one for me,
 It is none other than he!'

The inflexible rich man grew exceedingly angry
And locked up the maiden in a tall tower,
Away from the world and the youth she loved.
'Let them thus forget each other!' he said.

But for love there exists no lock or tower:
The youth was endlessly in love with the maiden,
And the maiden, too, loved him with passion;
And they longed to become man and wife:
 ‘If there is one for me,
 It is none other than he!’

Seeing the helplessness of his power,
The stubborn rich man, insane with anger,
Set fire to that tall, ancient tower,
With his unparalleled daughter inside it!
But where love has kindled a fire,
Of what avail is even fire itself?
And though the fury of the raging flames,
The maid screamed as she burnt, calling out:
 ‘If there is one for me,
 It is none other than he!’

And the formidable tower burnt down to the ground;
With it, too, burnt the fair, innocent maid
And turned to ashes—all but her heart,
Which by some miracle escaped, and remained alive
Beneath the cold ashes... There the youth
In love shed tears upon those ashes,
And took himself away to distant lands,
To weep out his days and bewail her,
 All alone, a stranger,
 Unconsoled.

Oh tender mystery, oh sweet miracle,
The burnt maiden’s heart beneath the ashes,

Beneath her own ashes was still alive:
But not a soul knew this, not a soul...
Some time elapsed after this sad event,
Moistened with tears beneath those ashes,
From that ever living heart aflutter,
There grew a beautiful poppy,
 Red and feathery,
 But...with a black heart...!

The mourning youth in despair roamed about,
Bewildered and miserable, from land to land,
But he could not find what he sought from life:
Everywhere there was the grief of his dead love,
Which ever, awake or in his sleep,
Tormented him, ceaselessly tormented him.
But for love there is no ending and no death:
The youth's sighing reached the maiden
 In the immortal life
 Of the world beyond.

Thereupon roused, filled with yearning and pity,
The maiden flew away from the immortal life,
With love and with fresh, sweet fragrance,
She visited in his dreams the youth she loved.
'Listen, my mourner, listen to me,' she said,
'From beneath my ashes a flower has grown,
And in this flower there is my heart,
The yearning, maddened heart of a young maiden-
 Full of love
 And of dreams...'

It has within it a magical power
That can make one drunk, oh so deeply drunk!
Squeeze out and drink the strength of that flower:
It will save you, my mourner, it will save you...
It will make you forget me and my fiery love,
It will take you away from that harsh world,
And you will live without grief and happy of soul,
You will laugh forevermore in an unfading life,
 In the distant freedom
 Of a world of dreams...'

Oh sweet miracle, oh tender mystery:
The youth became happy from that day!
Drunk with the sacred strength of that flower,
Ever with renewed yearning and vigour,
Having forgotten his grief of yore,
Far away from that uncouth and harsh world,
Ha lived joyfully, in rich pleasures,
His heart overflowing with unbridled love,
 In the distant freedom
 Of a world of dreams...