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LYRICS FROM KURUNTOKAI

TRANSLATED FROM TAMIL

by A. K. Ramanujan

What she said:

Bless you, my heart
The shell-bangles slip
from my wasting hands.
My eyes, sleepless for days,
Are muddied.

Come, let's get out
of this loneliness here.

Come, let's go
where the tribes wear
the narcotic wreaths of Cannabis
beyond the land of Katti,
the chieftain with many spears,
Let's go, I say,
to where my man is

enduring even
alien languages.

[Kur 11, Mamulanar]

What she said:

It would be nice, I think,
if someone didn't mind
the hurry and the long walk,
and went to give him the good word:

the wound that father got
pulling-in that big shark
is healed and he's gone back
to the blue-dark of the sea;

and mother's gone to the salt-pans
to sell her salt for white rice;

if only someone would reach my man
on his cold wide shore and tell him:

this is the time to come!

[Kur 269, Kallatanar]

What he said:

Where the white waters
crash through the mountain-caves,
it flowers on the slopes;
and there, the little hill-town chief-
tain's younger daughter,
with great arms,

tender as water,
fancy her, quelling my fire!

[Kur 95, Kapilar]

What she said:

Coo Coo
 crowed the cock
 and my poor heart missed a beat
 that the sword of morning came down
 to cut me off from my lover
 twined in my arms

[Kur 157, Allur Nanmullai]

What she said:

I am here. My virtue
 lies in grief
 in the groves near the sea.

My lover
 is back in his hometown. And our secret
 is with the gossips
 in public places.

[Kur 97, Venputi]

What he said:

Does that girl,
 eyes like flowers, gathering flowers
 from pools for her garlands, driving away the parrots
 from the millet-fields,
 does that girl know at all
 or doesn't she,
 that my heart is still there with her
 bellowing sighs
 like a drowsy midnight elephant?

[Kur 142, Kapilar]

What he said:

None can tell morning
from noon from listless evening,
townslept night from dawn, then one's love
is a lie.

If I should lose her
I could proclaim my misery in the streets
riding mock-horses on palmyra-stems in my wildness:
but that seems such a shame.

But then,
living away from her,
living seems such a shame.

[Kur 32, Allur Nanmullaiyar]

These poems are from *Kuruntokai*, an anthology of short love-lyrics. It is one of the eight famous anthologies of Classical ('Cankam') Tamil, compiled probably during the first three centuries A.D.