




Narrative Poems by  
**ALEXANDER  
PUSHKIN**  
and by  
**MIKHAIL  
LERMONTOV**

Translated by

**CHARLES JOHNSTON**

Introduction by Kyril FitzLyon

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## THE NOVICE\*

I did but taste a little honey, and, lo, I must die.  
1 SAMUEL XIV:43

### I

Once, not so many years ago,  
where soundingly together flow  
Arágva and Kurá—the place  
where, like two sisters, they embrace—  
there stood a monastery. Still  
the traveller who comes down the hill  
sees pillars of a crumbling gate,  
towers, a church's vaulted state;  
but from it now there's no perfume  
of incense smoking in the gloom;  
and late at night no chanting rolls,  
no monks are praying for our souls.  
Just an old watchman, feeble, grey,  
attends the ruined church today;  
by men forgotten he has been,  
also by death, as he sweeps clean  
gravestones with legends which keep green  
tales of past fame—of how, worn down  
beneath the burden of his crown,  
a certain king conveyed his land,  
in such a year, to Russia's hand.

\* Lermontov's title for the poem is *Mtsyri*. He explains in a note: "*Mtsyri* in the Georgian language means 'a monk who does not serve,' something in the nature of a 'novice.'"

And so heaven's benediction fell  
on Georgia!—it has blossomed well;  
the hedge that friendly bayonets made  
since then has kept it unafraid,  
enclosed in its own garden-shade.

### II

Down from the mountains rode one day  
a Russian general, on his way  
to Tiflis, with a prisoner-child—  
the boy was ill, the road had piled  
up too much effort for him: wild  
as mountain chamois, about six,  
pliant and weak as kindling-sticks.  
But in him his exhausted plight  
had called forth some ancestral might  
of spirit. For however faint  
he felt, no groan, no least complaint  
passed those young lips; he thrust aside  
all ordinary food; in pride  
and in silence he all but died.  
A monk took pity on the waif,  
tended his malady, and safe  
in sheltering walls he lived on there,  
brought back to health by loving care.  
At first, detesting childish fun,  
he ran away from everyone,  
and, roaming silent, all alone,  
looked to the east with sigh and groan—  
yearnings too deep to understand  
turned him towards his native land.  
But soon his prison sentence grew  
familiar, the strange language too;



then, christened by that holy man,  
 he never knew the world; his plan  
 in the full prime of youth was now  
 to utter the monastic vow;  
 when suddenly, one autumn night,  
 he vanished—disappeared from sight.  
 Hills darkly wooded rose all round.  
 For three long days they searched the ground,  
 in vain; then on the steppe they found  
 him fainted, once more brought him in  
 back to the cloister; he was thin  
 and deathly pale and feeble too,  
 as from some fever he'd been through,  
 some hunger, while he'd been away,  
 or some ordeal. No word he'd say  
 to questions, visibly each day  
 he faded and approached his end.  
 Then came to him his reverend friend  
 with exhortation and with prayer;  
 proudly the sufferer heard him there,  
 then raised himself with all the strength  
 still left him, and thus spoke at length:

## III

"I thank you, sir, for coming here  
 for my confession. In your ear  
 words are the medicine that best  
 will ease the burden of my chest.  
 To others I have done no ill,  
 and so my actions for you will  
 be profitless to hear about—  
 or can a soul be detailed out?  
 I've lived my short life in duress.

No, two such lives—for one of stress  
 and terror, willingly I would  
 exchange them if I only could.  
 I've known one thought, one and the same,  
 a thought of passion and of flame:  
 worm-like, it lived in me; it ate  
 my soul away like fire in grate.  
 My dreams, from stifling cell's estate,  
 my prayers, it called to that brave world  
 where fears and battles are unfurled,  
 where lost in cloud are cliff and scree,  
 and where, like eagles, men are free.  
 This passion, in the dark midnight  
 nourished on tears, with all my might  
 to heaven and earth I shout today,  
 and for no pardon do I pray.

## IV

"Often I've heard how you did save  
 me, sir, from an untimely grave—  
 for what? . . . alone, and glum, and pale,  
 a leaf torn off by blast of gale,  
 I've grown up within walls of gloom,  
 in soul a child, a monk by doom.  
 'Mother' and 'father'—holy sounds—  
 I could call no one; in the bounds  
 of sanctuary you hoped I'd lose  
 the natural human wish to use  
 these sweetest of all names. In vain:  
 they were inborn. Once and again  
 others I saw on every hand  
 with home, friends, parents, native land;  
 for me, not only no one dear—

not even dear ones' tombs were here!  
 Then, without wasting time to weep,  
 I took an oath I swore to keep:  
 that at some time my burning breast  
 just for a moment should be pressed  
 against someone's, perhaps unknown,  
 yet from a land that was my own.  
 But now, alas, they're dead, those dreams  
 in the full beauty of their gleams,  
 and, as I've lived, I'll find my grave  
 in alien soil, an orphaned slave.

## V

"I have no horror of the tomb:  
 they say that suffering, in that room,  
 sleeps in cold, everlasting calm.  
 But, to stop living, . . . there's the harm.  
 I'm young, young . . . Have you never known  
 the dreams to which wild youth is prone?  
 Have you not known, have you forgot,  
 how hate was sharp, how love was hot;  
 how the heart beat more keenly while  
 from some tall battlemented pile  
 you saw the sun, the fields spread round,  
 and air was nipping, and you found  
 deep in the wall's recess sometimes  
 a huddled nursling from far climes—  
 a young dove that, driven in by fear  
 of raging storms, has fluttered here?  
 Perhaps the glorious world today  
 has cooled for you: you're weak, you're grey,  
 you've lost the habit of desire.  
 But you no longer need that fire.

You've got things to forget—for you,  
 you've lived—I wish I could live too!

## VI

"You ask what I contrived to see  
 during the days while I was free?  
 Rich plains, and hills that trees had crowned,  
 woods running riot all around,  
 in whispering clusters, fresh as spring,  
 like brothers dancing in a ring.  
 And frowning cliffs I saw, whose heart  
 cleft by the torrent, beat apart;  
 I guessed their thoughts: diviner's art  
 was given to me from on high!  
 their stone embracings in the sky  
 long since cut off, each day, each night,  
 they long, they thirst to reunite;  
 but years and ages pass in vain—  
 and never they shall join again!  
 And I saw mountain crests that seem  
 fantastical as any dream,  
 where, at the earliest hour of dawn,  
 as if from altars, smoke was drawn  
 up from the peaks into the blue,  
 and little clouds came swarming through,  
 leaving their secret sleeping-place,  
 turning to east their hurrying face—  
 in a white caravan, like bands  
 of birds flown in from distant lands!  
 Far off I saw, through vapoury strands,  
 where, glittering diamond of the snows,  
 grey bastion-Caucasus arose;  
 and then, for some strange reason, I

felt light of heart; in days gone by—  
 a secret voice so prompted me—  
 I'd lived there. I began to see  
 ever more clearly, now at last,  
 places and things from time long past.

## VII

"And I remembered father's hall,  
 and our ravine, our village, all  
 in cool shadow dispersed around;  
 I heard the evening thunder-sound  
 as homing horses galloped through,  
 the distant bark of dogs I knew.  
 On moonlight evenings, memory traced  
 the row of elders, swarthy-faced,  
 who sat with serious looks before  
 my father's porch; no, I saw more,  
 I saw the chiselled scabbards gleam,  
 on their long daggers . . . Like a dream  
 a row of pictures, indistinct,  
 came and before my vision winked.  
 My father, as in life, all prinked  
 in armour, stood there; chain-mail clinked  
 as I remembered; light ablaze  
 from rifle-barrels, and that gaze,  
 that proud, indomitable stare;  
 and my young sisters too were there . . .  
 their sweet eyes shone, their voices rang,  
 once more I listened as they sang  
 over my crib . . . A torrent sprang  
 down our ravine; it roared, it rolled,  
 but it was shallow; on its gold  
 sands I would play at noon; my sight

pursued the swallows in their flight  
 as, when a storm of rain was due,  
 they grazed the water while they flew.  
 I saw again our peaceful hall;  
 at evening, round the hearth, we all  
 listened to tales that would recall  
 how men lived in days long since gone,  
 days when the world still brighter shone.

## VIII

"What did I do, you seek to know,  
 while I had freedom? I *lived*—so  
 my life were sadder far than this  
 dotage of yours, had it to miss  
 those three days of perfected bliss.  
 It's long since I began to yearn  
 to see far fields, and to discern  
 if earth was beautiful—to learn  
 whether for freedom or for gaol  
 we come to this terrestrial vale.  
 So in that dreadful hour of night  
 when thunder struck you down with fright,  
 when by the altar, pressing round,  
 you lay all prostrate on the ground,  
 I fled. I'd have been glad to race,  
 to enfold in brotherly embrace  
 that storm! My gaze pursued each cloud,  
 my hands caught lightning-bolts . . . Speak loud,  
 tell me, inside this walled-in space  
 what would you give me to replace  
 the friendship, keen, though brief and frail,  
 that stormy hearts feel for the gale?



## IX

"And so I ran, long hours and far,  
 I know not where! No single star  
 lighted me on my stumbling way.  
 Joyful it was for me to stray,  
 to let my tortured chest assay  
 the midnight freshness of the wood—  
 no more than that. I ran a good  
 long while, and then, worn out at last,  
 lay on a tussock thickly grassed,  
 and listened: no sounds of a chase.  
 The storm had died. A feeble trace  
 of light, a radiance, seemed to lie  
 between the earth and the dark sky,  
 and, patterned on it, stood out plain  
 the peaks of a far mountain-chain.  
 Silent, unmoving and unseen,  
 I lay; at times, from the ravine,  
 like a small child, a jackal wailed,  
 and smoothly, glitteringly scaled,  
 between the stones a serpent slipped;  
 and yet my soul was never gripped  
 by fear: wild as a beast, I slid,  
 snakelike, away from man, and hid.

## X

"Storm-swollen, on the lower ground  
 a torrent roared, and its dull sound  
 resembled closely, so I found,  
 a hundred angry voices. I  
 could understand this wordless cry,  
 this unformed murmur—endless shock

of wrangling with hard-fronted rock.  
 Now all at once the tumult fell  
 silent, now it began to swell  
 and break the stillness all about;  
 soon, on that misty height, rang out  
 the song of birds, and then the east  
 turned golden; suddenly released,  
 a breath shook leaves on every bough;  
 the sleepy flowers breathed perfume now,  
 and, like them, I saluted day,  
 looked out . . . and it's no shame to say,  
 as I peered round, I quaked with fear:  
 I had been lying on the sheer  
 brink of a frightful cliff; from here  
 an angry torrent, far below,  
 went whirling onward, and to show  
 the way down, steps cut in the face;  
 only a fiend expelled from grace,  
 thrown down from heaven, could ever dare  
 to seek hell's caverns down that stair.

## XI

"And, all around, God's garden bloomed.  
 Flowers that in bright raiment loomed  
 still kept a trace of tears divine,  
 and curling tendrils of the vine  
 wound brilliantly amid the sheen  
 cast by the leaves' pellucid green;  
 while, on them, heavy clusters slung  
 were like rich earrings as they hung  
 in splendour; sometimes to them flew  
 a flock of birds in timorous crew.  
 Once more I lay back on the ground,

once more I listened to that sound,  
 to those strange voices in the scrub  
 whispering away to every shrub  
 as if they had, by magic spell,  
 secrets of earth and sky to tell;  
 all nature's voices there were blurred  
 together; nowhere to be heard  
 one single human tongue to raise  
 the morning hour's majestic praise.  
 All that I felt then, all my mind  
 was thinking, left no trace behind;  
 if only I could tell it—then  
 just for a flash I'd live again.  
 Heaven's vault, it was so clear and chaste  
 that morning, sharp eyes could have traced  
 the flight of angels; through and through,  
 such even, deep, translucent blue!  
 My eyes and my soul drowned; but soon  
 under the blaze of sultry noon  
 my reveries were all dispersed  
 and I began to pine with thirst.

## XII

"Then to the torrent from that height,  
 from crag to crag, as best I might,  
 clutching the pliant bushes, I  
 set off downhill. A rock would fly  
 from underfoot, and roll and bound;  
 smoking, the dust behind it wound;  
 it rumbled down, with jump and thud,  
 and then was swallowed in the flood;  
 dangling, I hung above the scree,  
 but death held no alarms for me,

for hands are strong when youth is free!  
 As I groped down the steep descent,  
 the mountain water's freshness went  
 aloft to meet me, and I fell  
 thirstily on the torrent-swell.  
 Then, all at once, a voice—and light  
 footfalls . . . and in instinctive fright  
 I ducked behind the scrub, and out  
 timidly I peered round about,  
 I listened with a kind of thirst.  
 And ever nearer, burst by burst,  
 the Georgian maiden's singing rang;  
 with such an artlessness she sang,  
 so sweet and clear and free her tone,  
 you'd think she'd learnt to sing alone  
 the names of loved ones of her own.  
 Nothing more simple than that strain,  
 but in my thought it lodged; again  
 at nightfall I can hear it ring,  
 as if, unseen, her soul should sing.

## XIII

"Holding her pitcher on her head,  
 the maiden took the path that led  
 down to the mountain torrent's bed.  
 Sometimes, on rock, her foothold slipped;  
 she laughed as awkwardly she tripped.  
 Her dress was humble; down the track  
 she walked lightfooted and brushed back  
 her winding *chadra*. Sultry days  
 had covered in a golden haze  
 her face, her breast; and summer's glow  
 breathed from her mouth and cheeks. But so



deep was the darkness of her eyes,  
 so full of secrets to surmise,  
 love-secrets, that my head went round.  
 All I remember is the sound  
 the jug made as it slowly drowned,  
 a murmuring through the torrent flood . . .  
 When I came to, and when the blood  
 had flowed back from my heart, she'd gone  
 some distance off; as she walked on,  
 slow, yet lightfooted, straight and trim  
 beneath her load, she was as slim  
 as any poplar-tree that stands  
 and queens it over neighbouring lands!  
 Not far away, in close embrace,  
 two cabins grown from the rock-face  
 loomed through the chilly evening mist;  
 above one's roof, in a blue twist,  
 smoke rose. As now, I see again  
 how the door gently opened, then  
 it shut once more! . . . For you, I know,  
 it's past conceiving why I'm so  
 brimful of yearning and so sad—  
 it's past conceiving, and I'm glad;  
 the memory of those moments I  
 would wish in me, with me to die.

## XIV

"By the night's travail quite worn out  
 I lay down in the shades. Without  
 effort my eyes were sealed about  
 by blissful sleep . . . I saw once more  
 that Georgian girl and, as before,  
 a strange, sweet yearning came to break

my heart and make it pine and ache.  
 I fought, I fought to breathe—but soon  
 I woke up. And by now the moon  
 was high and shining; after it  
 a single cloudlet seemed to flit  
 with arms wide open for the embrace.  
 And the dark world was still; in space  
 far distant, ranges tipped with snow  
 sparkled away, and seemed to throw  
 a silhouette of silvery glow.  
 Splashing its banks, I heard the stream;  
 and in the cabin a faint gleam  
 would flicker up, and once more die;  
 just so, across the midnight sky,  
 a bright star shines, then dies up there!  
 I longed to . . . but I didn't dare  
 go over to the hut. I'd planned  
 one thing—to reach my native land;  
 one thing alone—so hunger's pain  
 I quelled as best I could. Again  
 I started on the straightest way,  
 timid, without a word to say—  
 but all at once began to stray  
 as soon as in the forest's night  
 I'd lost the mountains from my sight.

## XV

"In my despair, to no avail,  
 I clutched, at moments on my trail,  
 some thorny bush, with ivy crowned:  
 eternal forest all around  
 grew denser, grimmer, every pace;  
 with million coal-black eyes, the face

of darkest night looked through the scrub,  
 peered through the twigs of every shrub . . .  
 My head was turning; for a time  
 I tried the trees, began to climb;  
 but always, on the horizon's edge,  
 the same woods rose in spire and wedge.  
 Then I threw myself down and lay  
 sobbing in a despairing way,  
 biting the earth's damp breast; a spell  
 of weeping came, and my tears fell  
 to ground in scalding streams of dew . . .  
 but help from men, I swear to you,  
 I'd have at no price . . . Through and through,  
 like a steppe beast, to all their crew  
 I felt a stranger; and if my  
 weak tongue had by the feeblest cry  
 betrayed me, reverend father, why,  
 I'd torn it out, as I may die.

## XVI

"You will recall, no teardrop came  
 from me in childhood; all the same  
 I now was weeping without shame.  
 For who could see except the dark  
 forest, the moon high on its arc?  
 Lit by its rays, all floored with sand  
 and moss, I saw before me stand,  
 impenetrably walled, a glade.  
 Suddenly there, a flickering shade,  
 two sparks of fire that darted round . . .  
 from the dark forest in one bound  
 a creature sprang, rolled on its back,  
 lay playing on the sandy track.

It was the waste's eternal guest—  
 the huge snow-leopard. He caressed  
 a moistened bone, he gnawed it, squealed  
 for sheer enjoyment; then he wheeled  
 on the full moon his bloodshot eyes,  
 thumping his tail in friendliest wise—  
 his coat with silver gleams was shot.  
 I waited for the fight; I'd got  
 in hand a cudgel—and on fire  
 my heart with sudden wild desire  
 for war and blood . . . yes, fate, I'll say,  
 has led me on a different way . . .  
 but if I'd lived at home, I swear  
 I'd never have been counted there  
 as one of those who feared to dare.

## XVII

"I waited. Now, through shades of dark,  
 he smelt an enemy—and hark,  
 a sad howl, like a groan, drawn out,  
 came forth . . . In rage he set about  
 to paw and furrow up the sand,  
 he reared right up, as people stand,  
 he crouched, and his first furious leap  
 threatened me with eternal sleep.  
 But I forestalled him, and my stroke  
 was sure and swift. My cudgel broke  
 open his wide brow like an axe . . .  
 He toppled over in his tracks,  
 groaned like a man. But now once more,  
 though blood was streaming from his score  
 in a broad, thickly pulsing vein,  
 the mortal fight boiled up again.

## XVIII

"He rushed my chest in one swift bound;  
 but with my weapon I had found  
 his throat, twice I had turned it round . . .  
 he whined, and with his final strength  
 began to jerk and twitch; at length,  
 like a snake-couple tight-enlaced,  
 more closely than two friends embraced,  
 we fell together, in dark night  
 continued on the ground our fight.  
 And at that moment I was wild  
 and fiercer than the desert's child,  
 the snow-leopard; like him, I blazed,  
 I howled—as if I had been raised  
 by leopards and by wolves beneath  
 the woods' cool overhanging sheath.  
 It seemed as if I'd lost the power  
 of human language—in that hour  
 my chest brought out a wild sound—why,  
 it seemed from childhood never I  
 had learned to make a different cry . . .  
 But weakness now crept on my foe,  
 he tossed, he turned, he breathed more slow,  
 he crushed me one last time . . . in ire  
 his staring pupils threatened fire—  
 then gently closed up in the deep  
 onset of everlasting sleep;  
 but, meeting death, he knew to keep  
 facing it and his conquering foe,  
 the way a fighting man should go!

## XIX

"You see these deep scars on my chest  
 scooped where the leopard-talons pressed;  
 they haven't grown together, still  
 they gape; but earth's damp cover will  
 bring them the freshness of the field,  
 by death for ever they'll be healed.  
 I forgot all about them then,  
 called my reserves of strength again,  
 in deepest forest plunged in straight . . .  
 But all in vain my fight with fate:  
 it laughed at me and my estate!

## XX

"I left the woodland. Now the day  
 was waking up; before its ray  
 the dance of travelling stars went out.  
 Then the dark forest all about  
 began to talk. From an *aül*\*  
 far off, smoke started up. A full  
 boom from the gorge, a voiceless hum  
 blew on the wind . . . I heard it come,  
 I sat and listened; but it died  
 just as the breeze did. Far and wide  
 I turned my gaze: that countryside,  
 surely I knew it? And a strong  
 terror came over me, for long  
 I couldn't credit that once more  
 I'd headed back to prison; or  
 that all these days I'd spent in vain  
 nursing my secret hope—the pain,

\* Moslem village.



the yearning patience every hour,  
 and all for what? . . . That in the flower  
 of years, and hardly having seen  
 God's world, that having scarcely been  
 allowed in murmuring woods to know  
 the bliss of freedom, I must go  
 and carry with me to the tomb  
 the longing for my home, the gloom  
 of cheated hope and of self-blame,  
 of your compassion and its shame! . . .  
 Still sunk in doubt, I lingered there,  
 I thought it all was some nightmare . . .  
 Suddenly in the silence fell  
 once more the distant tolling bell  
 and all was lucid in no time . . .  
 At once I'd recognised its chime!  
 How often from my childish eyes  
 it had chased out the bright disguise  
 of dreamland, forms of kith and kin,  
 the steppe's wild liberty, the spin  
 of lightfoot horses, and the shocks  
 of splendid fights among the rocks,  
 and I the winner! . . . So I heard,  
 tearless and strengthless. In a word  
 it seemed my heart was where the chime  
 came from—as if someone each time  
 struck it with iron. Then I knew,  
 though vaguely, nothing I could do  
 would to my homeland bring me through.

## XXI

"Yes, I've deserved my destined course!  
 On the strange steppe a mighty horse,  
 with its unskilful rider thrown,

from far off will find out alone  
 the straightest, shortest homeward way . . .  
 I cannot equal him. Each day  
 in vain my heart desires and yearns;  
 feeble the flame with which it burns,  
 plaything of dreams, malaise of mind.  
 On me my prison left behind  
 its brand . . . Just so there grows in gaol  
 on the wet flags, alone and pale,  
 a blossom, and long time puts out  
 no youthful leaves, but waits about,  
 languishing for life-giving rays.  
 It waits, and there pass many days  
 till some kind hand, touched by the grief  
 of the poor bloom, to bring relief  
 moves it to a rose-garden, where  
 from every side there breathes an air  
 of life and sweetness . . . But, once there,  
 no sooner comes the sunrise hour  
 than with its incandescent power  
 it scorches the gaol-nurtured flower.

## XXII

"Just like that blossom, I was burned  
 by day's remorseless fire. I turned  
 to no avail my weary head,  
 I hid it in the grass; instead  
 my brow by withered leaf was wreathed  
 in thorny crown, and the earth breathed  
 into my face its breath of flame.  
 High up above me circling came  
 motes in the sun; the vapour steamed  
 from the white rocks. God's whole world seemed  
 numbed in a heavy slumber there,

the deep dull slumber of despair.  
 If only a cornerake from the hill  
 had called; if only the quick trill  
 of dragonfly wings, or a rill  
 childishly chattering . . . Just a snake  
 was rustling through the dried-up brake;  
 across its yellow back, light played  
 as if upon a golden blade  
 engraved all down with letters, and  
 scattering a small wake of sand  
 it crawled meticulously, then  
 it played, it basked, it writhed again  
 in triple coil, then gave a start,  
 just as if scalded, in one dart  
 it dived inside the bushes' heart,  
 and deep in scrub it disappeared.

## XXIII

"But now the sky was calm, and cleared  
 of cloudscape. Far, through mists that steamed,  
 rose two dark mountains, and there gleamed  
 underneath one of them a wall—  
 our cloister's battlemented hall.  
 Arágva and Kurá below  
 were lapping with their silvery flow  
 at feet of islands cool and fresh,  
 at whispering bushes and their mesh  
 of roots, and pulsing on their way  
 in gentle harmony . . . but they  
 were too far off! I tried to rise—  
 everything whirled before my eyes;  
 I tried to shout—my dried-up tongue,  
 voiceless and motionless it hung . . .

I seemed to die. Herald of death,  
 a madness crushed me, squeezed my breath.  
 And then it seemed to me that I  
 on the moist bed had come to lie  
 of a deep river—there I found  
 mysterious darkness all around.  
 And quenching my eternal thirst  
 the ice-cold stream, in bubbling burst,  
 into my chest came flowing deep . . .  
 My only fear, to fall asleep,  
 so sweet, so blissful was my plight . . .  
 And there above me in the height  
 wave thronged on wave, and through the bright  
 crystal of water the sun beamed,  
 with a moon's graciousness it gleamed . . .  
 From time to time, across its ray  
 fish in bright flocks began to play.  
 And one, more friendly than her mates,  
 caressed me. Backed with scaly plates  
 of gold, I still can see her coat,  
 as round my head she came to float;  
 and, deeply gazing, her green eyes  
 were sweetly sad . . . and a profound  
 amazement seized me at the sound  
 of her small voice's silvery strain:  
 it sang to me, then ceased again.

That voice, it seemed to say: 'My child,  
 do thou stay here with me:  
 our life down in this watery wild  
 is cool, and rich, and free.

'My sisters all I will enrol  
 and with our circling dance

we shall divert thy weary soul  
and cheer thy fainting glance.

'Now sleep away, soft is thy bed,  
thy sheet, shot through with gleams.  
The years, the ages o'er thy head  
will pass in wondrous dreams.

'Beloved, let me tell thee true,  
I love thee, as down here  
the current flowing freely through  
and my own life are dear ...'

Long, long I listened; and I found  
the stream had set its quiet sound,  
the tale its lilting whisper told,  
to music from that fish of gold.  
I swooned. The light that God had lit  
quenched in my eyes. The raving fit  
passed from my fainting body then.

## XXIV

"So I was found, brought here again ...  
I've finished, for you know what more  
there is to tell. Believe me or  
believe me not—I do not care.  
Just one thing grieves me, this I swear:  
my body, lifeless, cold and dumb,  
will never to my homeland come  
to moulder there; my grievous thrall  
in the deaf circle of this wall  
will never be rehearsed, or claim  
a sad repute for my dim name.

## XXV

"Father, your hand, please, in farewell;  
mine is on fire, as you can tell ...  
Since childhood, well-concealed, suppressed,  
this flame has lived inside my breast;  
but now there's nothing left that burns;  
it's blazed its way out, and returns,  
returns once more to Him who gives  
just measure, to each man who lives,  
of pain and peace ... but what do I  
care? Yes, in realms behind the sky  
my soul will find its refuge due ...  
alas! I'd barter, for a few  
moments among those steep and strange  
rocks where my childhood used to range—  
heaven and eternity I'd change ...

## XXVI

"But when I'm dying—for that date,  
believe me, there's not long to wait—  
give orders I be carried out  
into our garden, just about  
where bloom two white acacias, where  
the turf's so thick, and the cool air  
so perfumed, and the leaves that play  
so limpid-gold in the sun's ray!  
There bid them set me; of bright day  
and the sky's radiant blue I will  
there for the last time drink my fill.  
Thence Caucasus is clear to see!  
perhaps, down from his summit, he  
will send me, on the wind's cool breath,



his farewell . . . and before my death  
 perhaps near by once more I'll hear  
 my native tongue! and someone dear,  
 I'll dream, some brother, or some friend,  
 how, gently, over me he'll bend,  
 how, tenderly, he'll wipe my brow  
 clean of death's icy sweat, and how  
 he'll sing to me in undertone  
 of that dear country, once my own . . .  
 and so I'll sleep—no curse, no groan!"



## THE DEMON

An Eastern Story

PART I

I

A Demon, soul of all the banished,  
 sadly above the sinful world  
 floated, and thoughts of days now vanished  
 before him crowdingly unfurled;  
 days when, in glory's habitation,  
 he shone out a pure cherubim,  
 when comets flying on their station  
 rejoiced to exchange a salutation  
 of welcome and of love with him,  
 when through the vapours of creation,  
 hungry for knowledge, he flew on  
 with caravans in their migration  
 to space where headlong stars have gone;  
 with love and faith to lean upon,  
 happy first-born of our condition,  
 he knew no evil, no suspicion,  
 his mind undaunted by the length  
 of fruitless aeons sadly falling . . .  
 so much, so much there was . . . the strength,  
 the will now fails him for recalling!

II

He wandered, now long-since outcast;  
 his desert had no refuge in it:  
 and one by one the ages passed,