

Classic Poetry Series

**Nikolay Alekseyevich
Nekrasov
- poems -**

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Nikolay Alekseyevich Nekrasov(1821 - 1878)

Nekrasov was a Russian poet and journalist. His first collection of poems - Dreams and Sounds was published in 1840. His second collection The Poems of Nikolay Nekrasov (1856) brought him great success.

In 1847-1866 he held the post of the editor-publisher of the magazine "Sovremennik" ("Contemporary"). His writings represented the life of common people of cities, the life of Russian peasantry, and the destiny of Russian women. His poems Red-Nosed Frost Grandfather (1864), Russian Women (1871-1872), Who lives happy in the Russia(1866-1876).

Nekrasov's poetry was closely connected with folklore and had a great influence upon the Russian literature. The last years of his life are dedicated to the magazine "Otechestvennie zapiski" (Fatherland's notes).

A Farewell

Farewell! Forget the days of trial,
Of grudge, ill humor, misery--
Tempests of heart and floods of weeping,
And the revengeful jealousy.
Ah, but the days whereon the sun rose
To light love's wonder, and begot
In us the power of aspiration,--
Bless them and forget them not!

Nikolay Alekseyevich Nekrasov

Freedom

Oft through my native land I roved before,
But never such a cheerful spirit bore.

When on its mother's breast a child I spy--
Hope in my inmost heart doth secret cry,

'Boy, thou art born within a favoring time,
Thine eyes shall glad escape old sights of crime.

Free as a child, thou can'st prove all and be
The forger sole of thine own destiny.

Peasant remain,--as to thy father given--
Or like the eagle swing thyself to heaven!

Castles in air I build! Man's spirit opes
To many ways to frustrate all my hopes.

Though serfdom's sad conditions left behind,
Yet there be countless snares of varied kind!--

Well! Although the people soon may rend thee,
Let me, oh Freedom, a welcome send thee!

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I Shall Soon Fall Prey To Rot

I shall soon fall prey to rot.
Though it's hard to die, it's good to die;
I shall ask for no one's pity,
And there's no one who would pity me.

With my lyre I won no glory
For my noble family name;
And I die as distant from my people
As the day that I began to live.

Ties of friendship, unions of the heart-
All are broken: from my youth,
Fate has sent me foes implacable,
While my friends all perished in the struggle.

Their prophetic songs were left unfinished,
They fell victim to misfortune, were betrayed
In the bloom of life; and now their portraits watch me
From the walls, reproachfully.

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In War

Hearing the terrors of the war, sore troubled,
By each new victim of the combat torn--
Nor friend, nor wife I give my utmost pity,
Nor do I for the fallen hero mourn.
Alas! the wife will find a consolation.
The friend by friend is soon forgot in turn.

But somewhere is the one soul that remembers--
That will remember unto death's dark shore,
Nor can the tears of a heart-stricken mother
Forget the sons gone down on fields of gore.
One soul there is that like the weeping willow
Can never raise its drooping branches more.

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Morning

You're unhappy, sick at heart:
Oh, I know it-here such sickness isn't rare.
Nature can but mirror
The surrounding poverty.

All is ever drear and dismal,
Pastures, fields, and meadows,
Wet and drowsy jackdaws
Resting on the peaked haystacks;

Here's a drunken peasant driving
His collapsing nag
Into far-off blueish mists,
Such a gloomy sky . . . It makes one weep!

The rich city is no better, though:
The same storm clouds race across the sky;
It's hard on the nerves-steel shovels
Scraping, screeching as they clean the streets

Work's beginning everywhere;
From the fire tower an alarm goes up;
A condemned man's brought outside
Where the executioners already wait.

At the break of day a prostitute is hurrying
Home from someone's bed;
Officers inside a hired carriage
Leave the city-there will be a duel.

Shopkeepers have roused themselves
And they rush to sit behind their counters:
All day long they need to swindle
If they want to eat their fill at night.

Listen! Cannon fire from the fortress!
There's a flood endangering the capital . . .
Someone's died: Upon a scarlet cushion
Lies a first-class Anna decoration.

Now a yardman beats a thief-he got him!
Geese are driven out to slaughter;
From an upper floor the crackle
Of a shot-another suicide. .

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On The Day Of Gogol's Death

How blessed's the good-natured poet,
With little bile and much emotion:
All lovers of the gentle arts
Send him sincerest greetings;

The admiration of the crowd
Sounds in his ear like rippling waves;
He is a stranger to self-doubt-
That torture of creative souls;

Lover of comfort and tranquility,
Shunning audacious satire,
He firmly dominates the crowd
With his peace-loving lyre.

He is not cursed nor driven out
But worshipped for his splendid mind,
While all his countrymen prepare
A monument to him in life.

But fate will show no mercy
To one whose noble genius
Has led him to unmask the crowd,
Expose its passions and mistakes.

His heart abrim with hate
His lips all clad in satire,
He wanders down a thorny path
His wrathful lyre in hand.

He is reviled at every step:
He catches sounds of admiration
Not in sweet murmurings of praise
But in wild cries of enmity.
With disbelief and new belief
In his high calling's dream,
He preaches love to all
Through venomous denial.

His speech's every syllable
Engenders for him cruel foes,
And all men, whether smart or dull,
Are quick to vilify him.

They curse at him from every side,
And only when they see his corpse
They'll understand how much he did,
And that in hate, he was yet full of love!

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The Love Letter

Letter of love so strangely thrilling
With all your countless wonder yet,
Though Time our heart's hot fires have mastered,
Bringing a pang of pained regret!
The while your blest receiver holds you,
His banished passions still rebel,
No longer reason sacrifices
His sentiment,--so then farewell!
Destroyed be this love-token treasured!
For if 'tis read when time has flown,
Deep in the buried soul 'twill waken
The torment vanished days have known.
At first but a light scorn arousing
For silly childishness,--at last
With fiery yearning overwhelming,
And jealousy for all the past.

O Thou, from whom a myriad letters
Speak with the breath of love to me,
Though my gaze rest on thee austerely,
Yet, yet,--I cannot part with thee!
Time has revealed with bitter clearness
How little thou with truth wert blessed,
How like a child my own behaviour--
Yet, dear to me I still must save
This flower scentless, without colour,
From off my manhood's early grave!

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The Russian Soldier

Then up there comes a veteran,
With medals on his breast;
He scarcely lives, but yet contrives
To drink with all the rest.
'A lucky man am I,' he cries,
And thus to prove the fact he tries.
'In what consists of a soldier's luck?
Pray, listen while I tell.
In twenty fights, or more, I've been,
And yet I never fell.
And, what is more, in peaceful times
Full meal I never knew;
Yet, all the same, I have contrived
Not to give Death his due.
Again, for sins both great and small,
Full many a time they've me
With canes unmercifully flogged,
Yet I'm alive, you see!'

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The Songs Of Siberian Exiles

We stand unbroken in our places,
Our shovels dare to take no rest,
For not in vain his golden treasure
God buried deep in earth's dark breast.

Then shovel on and do not falter,
Humble and hopeful, clear we see--
When Russia has grown rich and mighty,
Our grandchildren will grateful be!

* * * * *

Though streams the sweat in rivers downward,
Our arms from shoveling grown weak,
Our bodies frozen to an ice crust
While we new strength in slumber seek--

Sweating or freezing, we will bear it!
Thirst-pain and hunger will withstand,
For each stone is of use to Russia,
And each is given by our own hand!

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Thoughts At A Vestibule

Here's a vestibule. On holidays
Overcome by slavish fear,
The whole population, in a state of awe,
Rushes to the sacred doors.
Having left their names and ranks.
All these visitors return then to their homes
They are all so deeply satisfied
You might think this was their calling!
Yet on other days this ornate vestibule
Is beset by much more wretched sorts:
Schemers and position-seekers,
By a widow and an aged man.
To and fro each morning without cease
Couriers bustle with their papers.
Some returning seekers whistle a tune
While some others walk and weep.
Once I saw some peasants who stopped by,
Simple Russian villagers.
Having crossed themselves they stood aside
And they hung their flaxen heads.
Then up came a doorman.-"Let us in," they said
With a look of torment and of hope.
He surveyed the visitors: how ugly they all looked.
Sunburned hands and faces
Threadbare coats upon their backs,
On bent shoulders knapsacks,
Crosses round the neck and bloodied feet
Shod in hand-made bast
(Must have come from far away,
From some far-flung province).
Someone yelled out to the doorman: "Send them off!
Our boss doesn't care for ragged mobs!"
And the door was shut. In time
They untied their bags
But the doorman spurned their meager offerings
And they walked off through the burning sun,
Saying: God will be the judge!
With their arms thrown wide in consternation,
I observed them 'til they disappeared,

And they never donned their caps.

While the owner of this lavish palace
Was still nestled in deep sleep's embrace . . .
You who think so highly of a life
Full of thrilling, shameless flattery,
Gluttony, philandering and play,
Wake now! There's a greater pleasure:
Call them back. For you are their salvation!
But the sated are to goodness deaf.

Heavenly thunder doesn't frighten you,
Earthly thunders you hold in your hands
That is why these unknown men must carry
Grief disconsolate within their hearts.

But what does this desperate sorrow mean to you?
What do you care for these desperate folk?
A life racing by in endless holidays
Keeps you from awakening.
And why care? For you the people's good
Is an idle game for scribblers;
You will live a glorious life without it
And you'll die a glorious death!
Your declining days will pass
Peacefully like some Arcadian idyll:
Under Sicily's charming skies,
In the fragrant shade of trees,
Contemplating crimson suns
As they sink into the azure sea
Casting shining rays of gold,-
Lulled by the soft melody
Of Tyrrhenean waves-just like a child
You will slumber, satisfied in every need
By your dear and loving family
(Who await your death impatiently);
Your remains they'll transport back to us
To reward them with a funeral feast.
Like a hero you'll be lowered to the grave,
By your homeland silently cursed,
Glorified by boisterous praise! . . .

Still, why bother such a personage
With the pains of trivial folk?
Rage at them instead-a great idea!
It's less dangerous. . . and more amusing,
Find ourselves some kind of solace . . .
What a peasant bears is no big deal:
It's what fate that guides us
Has decreed . . . And anyway, he's used to it!
In some lowly inn outside the city gates,
These poor men will drink their final rubles down
And then head for home, begging all the way,
Moaning humbly . . . O my homeland!
Tell me now of some abode-
I have surely never seen it-
Where your sower and your guardian,
The meek Russian peasant, does not moan?
In the fields he moans, and on the roads,
In the prisons and stockades he moans,
And in ore mines, wearing iron chains;
Moans burst out from barns and stacks of hay,
And from carts where he sleeps in the steppe;
In his own poor hut he moans,
Warmed by nothing on God's earth;
In each godforsaken town he moans,
In the vestibules of courts and palaces as well.
Go out to the Volga: hear whose moan
Rises over Russia's greatest river?
In our land, this moan is called a song-
It's the boatmen straining in their traces! . .
Volga! Volga! In the spring your torrents
Cannot flood the fields as much
As our people's awful pain
Floods our land-
Where you are there's moaning-O, my people!
What can all this endless moaning mean?
Will you ever waken, filled with strength,
Or, obeying fate's command,
Have you done all that you can,
Fashioning a song so like a moan,
While your soul remains forever mired in sleep?..

What The Sleepless Grandam Thinks

All through the cold night, beating wings shadowy
Sweep o'er the church-village poor,--
Only one Grandam a hundred years hoary,
Findeth her slumber no more.

Harkens, if cocks to the dawn be not crowing,
Rolls on her oven and weeps,
Sees all her past rising up to confront her--
O'er her soul shameful it creeps!

'Woe to me sinner old! Woe! Once I cheated--
When from the church door I ran,
And in the depths of the forest strayed hidden
With my beloved Ivan.

'Woe to me! Burning in hell's leaping fires
Surely will soon be my soul!
I took a pair of eggs once at a neighbor's--
Out from her hen--yes, I stole!

'Once at the harvest at home I did linger--
Swore I was deadly sick,--when
Taking my part in the drunken carousals
Saturday night with the men!

'Light was I ever with soldiers! Yet cursing
God's name, when from me at last,--
My own son they took for a soldier!
Even drank cream on a fast.

'Woe to me sinner! Woe to me wretched one!
Woe! My heart broken will be!
Holy Madonna, have pity, have mercy!
Into court go not with me!'

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Ye Songs Of Mine!

Ye songs of mine! Of universal sorrows
A living witness ye;
Born of the passion of the soul, bewailing
Tempestuous and free,
The hard heart of humanity assailing
As doth her cliffs the sea!

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