

Classic Poetry Series

**Mikhail Alekseevich
Kuzmin
- poems -**

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Mikhail Alekseevich Kuzmin(1872 - 1936)

Mikhail Alekseevich Kuzmin (1872–1936) was a symbolist poet, prose writer, and playwright. Openly gay, he wrote the first celebrations of gay themes in Russian literature, and the first Russian coming-out novel, *Wings* (1907), in which a young man learns to accept his sexuality, which makes him feel as if he has grown wings. Kuzmin too was a poet who mined his own biography, incorporating its associations and events in his poem-cycles.

As censorship tightened and ideological wars raged in proletarian literature, Kuzmin's diary (1906-1934) chronicled a life lived through sexuality, art and contemplation of the everyday. His finest autobiographical poem cycle, *The Trout Breaks through the Ice* (published in 1928) demonstrated the muscularity and range of his mature voice, and evoked a reply from Anna Akhmatova, her famous *Poem without a Hero*.

Mikhail Kuzmin died on March 1, 1936 of pneumonia.

Artesian Well

In the feathergrass steppe
Sources lie buried,
The thirsty sun knows
Life isn't raspberries.

In barren haymeadows
A child tarries,
Walnut crosier
Outstretched, gold-eyed,
The bracing treasure,
Slender, streams.

They bubble deep,
Both song and splashes, -
In the live coppice
An April peal.

More wondrous than God's lightning bolts,
The artesian well fills
The sham spays' dry dugs
With love's hypogean milk.

Mikhail Alekseevich Kuzmin

Fuji In A Saucer: The Poem

Through tannic steam I catch a glimpse of Fuji:
Against a yellow sky volcanic gold
A saucer narrows nature very strangely,
In shallow ripples lovely to behold.
The clouds, like little webs, like spider legs,
Are pierced by sun no bigger than a mote,
And bird-fish, fish-birds, flecks that will be dregs,
Spin azure topaz outlines as they float.
A tiny world with spring a world in it:
There comes an air of almonds, blare of horns,
And all the gulf if twice as large would fit
Encompassed in the hug of porcelain shores.
But now an unexpected twig - mimosa -
Has fallen where its shadow split the sky,
Just so, at times, in philosophic prose
A glint of poetry will catch the eye.

Mikhail Alekseevich Kuzmin

I Am Leaving Alexandria

Ah, I am leaving Alexandria
and will not see it for a long time!
I will see Cyprus, dear to the Goddess,
I will see Tyre, Epheses and Smyrna,
I will see Athens - the dream of my youth,
Corinth and far Byzantium
and the crown of all desires,
the goal of all strivings -
I will see great Rome! -
I will see everything, but not you!
Ah, I am leaving you, my darling,
and will not see you for a long, long time!
I will see much beauty
and look into many eyes,
I will kiss many lips,
I will caress many curls,
and I will whisper many names
waiting for trysts in many woods.
I will see everything, but not you!

Mikhail Alekseevich Kuzmin

I Gather Motley Flowers

I gather motley flowers
And braid, braid a garland,
Sharp spears fall
At your victorious feet.

The sisters turn spindles
And spin, spin yarn.
Wild hops creep
Over fallen banners.

The cavalry flew by and vanished,
The storm thundered and hushed.
Lawlessness bore down, bore down -
Silence and light all around.

I stand in the middle of a mown field.
You stand beside me in shining armor.
I have found myself a Leader -
He is glorious and winged.

You will advance with a bold step,
Lead me into a new battle.
I will do whatever you want:
I am inseparable from you.

Mikhail Alekseevich Kuzmin

May Dew

May dew and haze
I catch in taut canvases.
Stuffed in a costrel tight,
I'll take them home come light.
Blissful constellations blaze
the Zodiac cites.
Planets make marriages
guarding my rite.
And now I pick the rotted plant
of bitter and of living life.
Vatic bubbling rants...
Flame, fiery ally!
All from death must sink from sight,
(Are the stars in well or sky?)
Clear stubble of bygone vine
I'm given again to derive.
Bark and pinkish light, -
Everything's back from dust.
Whoever knows no terror of decay
is never to be subject to destruction.
If wind's lush steed should pass this way,
it will not tip the treetop down.
An otherworldly spring will crown
the head, if holy fire's alive.

Mikhail Alekseevich Kuzmin

Music

I hug you, -
Both the rainbow to the river
And the clouds flame
In God's hand.
You laugh, - rain in the sun,
The mignonette bedewed,
And cunning is
A lilac star with eyelash.
Like a cloven comet
Figaro clowns.
Mozart's Tarot
Is cryptic and clear.
Lethean bliss
Sleeps sweet in trombones,
A tarry monastery rings
in a copse of violins.
What shadows does
a gaze cast into space?
You don't know? And you mustn't
look back, my friend.
Whose heart begins to glisten
at the blue, blue Si?
The Debussy still listens
who never was to be.

Mikhail Alekseevich Kuzmin

My Groom And Friend

My groom and friend came from afar.
I kiss your feet!
He drew his circle around me.
I kiss your hands!

Light seems to set the world apart.
I kiss your armor!
And earth's idols do not attract me.
I kiss your wings!

The yoke of love is light and sweet.
I kiss your shoulders!
Your brand is burned upon my heart.
I kiss your lips!

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Sun, Sun

Sun, sun,
divine Ra-Helios,
you delight
the hearts of kings and heroes,
sacred horses neigh to you,
in Heliopolis they sing hymns to you;
when you shine,
lizards crawl out onto rocks
and boys go laughing
to swim in the Nile.

Sun, sun,
I am a pale scribbler,
a library recluse,
but I love you, sun, no less
than a tanned sailor
smelling of fish and salt water,
and no less
than his accustomed heart
rejoices
at your royal rising
from the ocean,
my heart trembles,
when your dusty, but flaming ray
slips
through the narrow window by the ceiling
onto my filled page
and my thin, yellowish hand,
writing out in vermilion
the first letter of a hymn to you,
O Ra-Helios sun!

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The Sense Of Your Bidding

The sense of your bidding is unclear:
to pray, to curse, is it, to fight
you bid me, inscrutable genius?
The spring slackens, niggard, meager,
and Benozzo Gozzoli's courier
dozes in the drowsy thickets.

Hills are dark with honeyed cloud.
Look: I do not touch lithe strings.
Your gaze, prophetically flying,
is clenched, gushes no winged streams,
and beckons by no May road, trying
to outstrip Hermes in his flight.

Hobbled horses do not neigh,
Aging warriors sprawl in disarray...
Hold your palms open wide!
Risen spring is bright,
but groves of darkness are not given
to leap for joy having leapt from dreams.

The groom names not the hour,
be not guiled to tarry,
hark through ice the clarion voice,
your flax is drenched with chrism,
and, bidding goodbye to numb laze,
free, in love, you will rise.

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We Were Four Sisters

We were four sisters, four sisters were we,
All four of us loved, but had different "because:"
One loved because father and mother told her to,
another loved because her lover was rich,
the third loved because he was a famous artist,
and I loved because I fell in love.

We were four sisters, four sisters were we,
All four of us wished, but had different wishes:
one wished to raise children and cook oatmeal,
another wished to wear a new dress every day,
the third wished everyone would talk about her,
and I wished to love and be loved.

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When Someone Says: "Alexandria"

When someone says: "Alexandria,"
I see the white walls of a house,
a small garden row of gillyflowers,
an autumn evening's pale sunlight
and hear the music of distant flutes.

When someone says: "Alexandria,"
I see stars above the hushed city,
drunken sailors in dark quarters,
a dancing girl performing the "wasp,"
and hear tambourines and the noise of fights.

When someone says "Alexandria,"
I see a pale purple sunset above the green sea,
the flickering of furry stars
and the light grey eyes beneath thick brows
that I see even when
no one says: "Alexandria!"

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Where Will I Find Words

Where will I find words to describe our stroll,
The Chablis on ice, the toasted bread
And the sweet agate of ripe cherries?
Sunset is far off, and the sea resounds with
The splash of bodies, hot and glad for cool dampness.

Your tender look is playful and alluring, -
Like comedy's pretty, peeling nonsense
Or the capricious pen of Marivaux.
Your Pierrot nose and intoxicating lips
Set my mind awirl like "The Marriage of Figaro."

The spirit of trifles, charming and airy,
Love of nights luxuriant or stifling,
The happy ease of the carefree life!
Ah, a stranger to obedient miracles, I am true
To your flowers, happy land!

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