

**SPECIAL SECTION**

**Toldi**

**An Epic Poem (1846)**

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## PROLOGUE

"I now remember times long pass'd away,  
When the good Nicholas Toldi had his day."

— Hosvai

As on an autumn night a herdsman's fire  
Across the sea-like prairie flashes higher,  
So Nicholas Toldi to my gaze is cast  
Out of his time, ten generations past.

I seem to see his stateliness of height,  
And his stout lance in devastating fight;  
I seem to hear the thunders of his voice,  
Like the loud tongue that God's deep wrath employs.

That was a man, a hero of the best;  
His match lives not to-day from east to west;  
If from his grave he rose to you and me,  
You'd think his deeds were wrought by sorcery.

Three men to-day could not lift up his mace  
Or set his sling-stones or his lance in place;  
You would turn pale to see his massy shield  
And his gigantic jack-boots, spurry-heel'd.

## CANTO ONE

“He lifted, with one hand, a massive pole,  
To point the way to Buda, then their goal.”

— Ilosvai.

Sun-scorch'd, the spare heath-grass is brown indeed,  
Grasshoppers there in languid cohorts feed;  
Among the bulrush-rootstocks nought is seen  
Of sprouting grass; nor is the prairie green.

A dozen farm-hands in the hay-stack's shade  
Are snoring, as if all were well array'd;  
Yet, empty or half-fill'd, big hay-carts stand  
In idleness amid that summer land.

The lean fork of a draw-well, long and bleak,  
Looks deep into the well, its draughts to seek.  
You'd think it an enormous gnat, whom dearth  
Had sent to suck the blood of Mother Earth.

Beside the trough, a herd of oxen lies,  
Parch'd, and molested by a host of flies;  
But with the noon-day heat the men are spent,  
And none draws water for their discontent.

As far as glance can scan the earth and sky,  
Only one waking person can you spy;  
A mighty pole on his broad shoulder swings,  
Although upon his chin no down yet clings.

Fix'd on the high-road is his dreaming gaze,  
As if he yearn'd for other, distant ways.  
You would consider him a living post,  
Set on that hillock where two highways cross'd.

Why do you stand, my fair lad, in the heat?  
You see the others snore in soft retreat;  
The dogs lie on the grass, tongues lolling out,  
And would not dream of chasing mice about.

Haven't you ever felt a wind as hot,  
As this, that soon will wrestle on this spot,  
And, licking up the road, seem to invoke  
From dust a chimney's belch'd-forth clouds of smoke?

Ah, it is not the whirlwind that he sees,  
Spanning the long, dun road with mummeries:  
For there, beyond the grey dust, with its drums  
And glittering arms, a brilliant army comes.

And as it penetrates the fog of dust,  
A sigh from the lad's mouth breaks in a gust.  
With eager stoop, he sees the troops draw nigh  
As if his soul were focuss'd in his eye.

"O gallant Magyar soldiers, fine and true,  
How fain, how longingly I gaze at you!  
Where go you, and how far? Perchance to fight?  
And pluck in war fame's flowers pearly-bright?"

March you against the Tartars or the Turks  
To bid Good-night to them and all their works?  
Would I were one of you, and march'd along,  
You gallant Magyars, your brave troops among!"

Such was the course of Nicholas Toldi's thought,  
And carking furrows through his soul were wrought.  
As thus he brooded in his youthful brain,  
His heart became convulsed in yearning pain;

His sire had fought; his brother George he kenn'd  
Had grown up with the King's son as his friend,  
And at the court, while Nicholas draws in hay,  
That rascal proudly whiles his time away.

Meanwhile the troops drew near with martial tread,  
Great Endre Laczfi riding at their head;  
On his bay steed he sat, a man of note,  
With gold embroidery thick upon his coat.

Behind him rode smart, feather-capp'd battalions  
With gaudy saddles on their prancing stallions.  
As Nicholas gazes at that gallant corps,  
His eyes, with too much gazing, become sore.

"Hey, peasant! Which road leads to Buda-town?"  
Asks Laczfi, looking arrogantly down.  
Straight to the heart of Toldi goes that word.  
It forthwith gives a thump that can be heard.

"A peasant, am I?" Nicholas mused in hate.

“Who should be squire of this whole estate?  
Perhaps my brother George, that fox unstable,  
Busy to change the plates at Louis’ table?”

“A peasant, am I?” And his rising gorge  
Was full of horrid curses against George.  
Then whirling his vast pole, without a strain,  
By one huge end he seized it, like a cane,  
    And held it horizontal with one hand  
To point them Buda-ward across the land.  
Bands of wrought steel his arm’s stout thews resemble, —  
The out-stretch’d tree-trunk does not even tremble.

The Palatine and all his army bent  
Their gaze on him in sheer astonishment.  
Says Laczfi: “That’s a man, whoe’er he be!  
Come, lads, who’ll wrestle now with such as he?  
    Or who among you all can hold straight out  
That shabby sign-pole of the lusty lout?”  
They murmur, discontented: ’twould annoy  
A knight to wrestle with a peasant boy.

But who would fight a duel with the thunder  
When wind and sultry murk are rent asunder?  
Who’d dream of fighting with God’s anger warm  
And His long, hissing arrow of the storm?  
    For only such a one such odds would give,  
If he loves God’s fair world and wants to live.  
For woe to him, in Nicholas’ hands bestead!  
He’d cry out for his mother, were she dead.

The troops, in thronging pageant, pass him by,  
And all pay tribute to his potency;  
All speak frank words of kindliness and grace;  
All beam upon him with a friendly face.  
    And one says: “Comrade, won’t you come to war?  
That’s what a lad like you is valued for!”  
Another says: “My good lad, what a shame,  
Sired by a peasant, you will be the same!”

The host has gone; its murmurs now are mute,  
Borne down the wind; the dust obscures its route.  
Home wanders Toldi, full of grieving pride;  
The fallow rocks beneath his mighty stride;  
    Like some insensate bullock's is his gait;  
The glooms of midnight in his eyes dilate;  
Like some mad, wounded boar's his wrath persists;  
The pole is almost crush'd in his great fists.

## CANTO TWO

“And when George Toldi home from Buda  
    came,  
His younger brother was assail'd with  
    blame.”

Ilosvai

While Nicholas thus his soul in grief was rending,  
At home at Nagyfalú a feast was pending:  
The chimneys smoked as if the house were burning;  
The sleepy well-prop never ceased from turning;  
    Calves, lambs, and sucking-pigs shriek'd out in gloom;  
The hen-yard underwent a day of doom;  
Maids that were ill had yet no breathing-space,  
The hearth was busy as a market-place.

One pour'd much water in a mighty pot,  
And there, when on the fire it bubbles hot,  
Into that bath the fowls are quickly dipp'd,  
Their feathers snatch'd away, their sandals stripp'd;  
    One fears that sweating may the lamb befall,  
And tears away its jacket, hide and all;  
Another maid belards the slender hare,  
That fat may drip from his lean carcass there.

One rocks a sucking-pig above a flame  
And scrapes away its bristles; here one dame  
Brings wine in wooden bowls, or skins instead,  
Or in a beechwood trough bears in the bread.

What meant this hubbub in a widow's house  
Where none had long been wont such din to rouse?  
Was it a wake for Lawrence Toldi's dame,  
Or some new feast of bridal for the same?  
Has her sad widow'd bed grown dull perchance,  
And does her fading body seek romance?

This is no wake for Lawrence Toldi's wife  
Nor has new marriage dawn'd upon her life.  
But all the cooking, roasting, has been done  
Since George comes home, the house's first-born son.

George was a great lord, with a wide demesne,  
Treasure in heaps, and contumelious spleen.  
Proud guards and well-armed lackeys throng his ground,  
And herds of whinnying stallions, packs of hounds.

He'd come now with a teeming retinue —  
A lazy, good-for-nothing, hungry crew —  
To gobble half the income, with a curse,  
And pocket the remainder in his purse.

In icy tones he did his mother greet —  
Who would have poured her soul out at his feet.  
“Where is the lad?” he gruffly asks his mother.  
No one would dream he meant his younger brother.

“He's outside with the farmhands, making hay.  
I'll send for him at once.” — “No, let him stay!”  
Shouts George. “No need for him.” The mother's heart  
Feels a great knife-stab slash its veins apart.

“No need for him” but lo! unhopéd, uncalled,  
The lad appears. Fierce pangs his spirit scald,  
His inmost self still felt the aftermath  
Of shameful grief and all-afflicting wrath.

But what a miracle would Heaven forge!  
No word of blame he utters against George.  
Something was quieting his soul's deep hate,  
Though what it was I cannot clearly state.

When unexpectedly he saw George face him,  
His arms, unwilling, opened to embrace him;

But the other pushed him back with scornful pride  
And from his worthy brother turned aside.

Out of the mother's eyes the teardrops run  
She steps up to her stony-hearted son,  
With trembling lips, hands clasping and unclasping,  
But George upbraids her hopes in accents rasping:

“Why, mother do you pet your lapdog so,  
And guard your darling child from winds that blow?  
Dip him in milk and butter, grant each plea,  
A famous blockhead he will grow to be!

Work on the meadows clamours to be done,  
But the young squire here must have his fun!  
He, like a dog, smells the fat dinner coming,  
And leaves the servants to the work benumbing.

“For him you've always wept, when I spoke out.  
He'll grow up nothing but a lazy lout;  
Too idle for a peasant, toil he mocks,  
Though he could work, as mighty as an ox.

Just stick him in the window as a show,  
And smile with pleasure as you see him grow!”  
Loud was the laughter with which George thus spoke  
And from the lips of Nicholas sorrow broke:

“Each word you utter is a lie -- or curse --  
No jot of truth is in this charge of yours.  
I know right well what you would have me be!  
May God love you as you are loving me!

My hopes in field or battle you would mock  
And even find my work a laughing-stock.  
You rage lest I should share the common bowl!  
You'd kill me in a twinkling, by my soul!

“I do not want to linger in your way  
And so I'll gladly go from here today.  
A hundred miles the world is, up and down,  
And so I'm off, to win my own renown.

But what belongs to me I mean to take!  
Hand over, brother, what is my due stake,  
My portion of the estate -- cash, horse and arms --  
And then the Lord may bless us both from harms!”



“Lad, here’s your share! Don’t say you haven’t got it!” —  
George cried, and struck. His brother’s forehead caught it.  
But Nicholas Toldi is not chicken-hearted;  
Deep in his soul revenge is now imparted.

His eyes, like smitten steel, throw out a spark;  
His fist’s great bony mace prepares its mark.  
And George falls back in fear; his doom is sure  
If that one blow his body should endure.

For that one blow would lay him in a den  
Where, by God’s grace, he’d never eat again,  
Where, a cracked bone, shut in a narrow room,  
He’d not recover till the Day of Doom.

But in the brothers’ strife to intervene  
The mother with an outcry rushed between;  
Her body shielded George, and yet her fear  
Had been for Nicholas and his sad career.

The wild boy feels his muscles’ stress uncoil;  
He sadly turns his glances to the soil,  
And like a man freed from a fever’s bout,  
From his dead father’s home he totters out.

In misery he walked, in answer mute,  
Sat in the yard’s far corner destitute,  
There bent his throbbing head above his knee  
And burst out weeping, with no man to see.

### CANTO THREE

“With rage against young Nicholas he was  
filled  
Because a well-loved soldier he had killed.”

— Ilosvai

In the old house, the whole crew were elated;  
From food and drink men only ceased when sated.  
When they rose up from stout George Toldi’s board,  
His men in throwing spears their zeal outpoured.

Young blood and old wine in their veins upswirled;  
In their right hands the wooden lances whirled;

They all teased one another; like wild colts  
They romped around in spirited revolts.

George Toldi, after having swilled his share,  
Threw his proud self into a soft armchair,  
And from the wide verandah watched with pleasure  
How his gay troops made merry beyond measure;

Then marking in a corner the young lad,  
His brother Nicholas, all alone and sad,  
The sordid instincts of his soul awoke  
And to his lumpish louts with spleen he spoke:

“Hallo, boys! See that bustard sorrowing!  
He hides his mournful beak beneath his wing.  
Roosting is he, or dead? Use your best knack  
To bang that plank behind his sulky back!”

As when a hare is tossed among some hounds,  
The wanton soldiers' mischief knew no bounds.  
The boards behind his head banged loud with spears  
While still his earlier sorrow perseveres.

No mystery was this onset all unblest,  
The case was obvious and manifest;  
This drastic joke against himself was sped —  
Often the missiles hardly missed his head.

Though far from calm, Toldi endured their clangour;  
His soul still wrestled with his rising anger;  
Then mastered it, and rested in disdain  
That these rude varlets sought to give him pain.

For you must know, these rogues who caused him harm  
Could be swept off by his avenging arm,  
Like that of Samson that once killed alone  
A thousand infidels with one jaw-bone.

For long he kept his temper firm before them;  
It seemed his best revenge was to ignore them;  
He tried to hide his knowledge of their aim,  
And didn't move one ear for all their game.

But when a spearpoint grazed his shoulder-blade,  
His rage flared up in fearful fusillade:  
Seizing the millstone-block on which he sat,  
He hurled it at his foemen, crude and fat.

The heavy stone flies on: where will it stop?  
Upon whose head in thunder will it drop?  
Run, Nicholas, run! For death your neck will claim!  
Nothing can wash away a murderer's name!

Out from your father's home your path goes blurred  
Like a wild boar's when driven from the herd  
Because with his sharp fangs he's slain his fellow  
And the others drive him off with gash and bellow.

The mighty stone flew on, and where it fell  
It smote a noble soldier clear to hell;  
As in a mill, the weight his members crushes  
And oozing juice from out his body gushes.

The dusty soil drinks up the blood in haste,  
A film of death upon his eyes is placed.  
Thus the disaster that had stilled his breast  
Brought sudden agony to all the rest.

At this the wrath of George surpassed belief,  
The death of his bold soldier brought such grief:  
And he was happy that his brother's deed  
Could make his plans to ruin him succeed.

His cunning, crooked purposes, he saw,  
Could now be covered with the veil of law;  
And with such guise his slaughter to invest,  
He gave strict orders for his prompt arrest.

## CANTO FOUR

"Now Nicholas' mother, grieving for her son,  
In secret sent him food when he had none.

-- Ilsvai

As when the antlered stag, by arrows hurt,  
Darts to the forest-depths, with thickets girt,  
To seek the soothing water of a spring  
And herbs to heal his wound's keen suffering,

But finds, alas, the spring is dried-out ground  
And healing herbs are nowhere to be found;  
Scratched by all branches, pricked by every thorn,  
More dead than living is the beast forlorn,

Thus Nicholas strayed. Grief on his neck now rode;  
Its spurs his anguished side incessant goad;  
As in a burning barn a tied horse leaps,  
His own heart in his breast its pounding keeps.

The brook he roved; among the rushes hid;  
But found no resting-place in all he did.  
In vain he'd sought for solitude apart;  
He found no remedy to heal his heart.

And like a reed-wolf, by a shepherd chased,  
He entered a broad cane-brake's arid waste;  
Yet every reed-stem whispered in his ear  
That none in all the world had woes more drear.

Root-stocks his pillow were, and reeds his bed;  
God's firmament of blue stretched overhead.  
At last the dark night took him to her breast  
And pitched a tent of black above his nest.

Sleep like a butterfly came fluttering  
With drowsy sweetness on its dusky wing,  
But scarcely dared upon his eyes to light  
Until the rosy dawn has routed night.

Sleep was afraid of gnats, of reed-stems harsh,  
The rustle of wild beasts that thronged the marsh,  
The far-off noise of those who sought him out,  
But most of all his soul's dismay and rout.

But when at last day touched the eastern hill,  
The gnats sought out their roosts, and all was still.  
On the lad's head sleep stole down in disguise  
And spread two soothing wings above his eyes,

Then kissed dream-honey on the boyish lips,  
Culled from night's poppies with obsequious sips,  
Honey of magic spells, with charms replete —  
From Nicholas' mouth pure water trickled sweet.

But urgent hunger grudged him even that,  
Roused him from slumber like an autocrat,  
Drove him and spurred him with intent so harsh  
That soon he wandered through the whole wide marsh.

He sought the nests of wild birds in the muck,

The homes of moorhen, plover, gull and duck;  
He wrecks their houses, steals their motley eggs,  
Because his starving maw for fodder begs.

Having with eggs allayed his hunger's pains,  
In making future plans he racked his brains.  
Where should he go? What should he start? My God!  
His ardent soul alone its pathway trod.

He could depart and hide in some strange guise  
But for his mother's face before his eyes.  
If no news came, his safety sure to make,  
Her aged heart, he knew, would slowly break.

For three long days he brooded on his fate,  
Then heard the reeds a rustling penetrate.  
Thinking it was a wolf, he stayed his arm —  
Only his brother would intend his harm.

But it was Ben, his servant old and true,  
Sent by his mother without more ado.  
Upon his master's neck he falls with joy  
And presently addresses thus the boy:

“How glad I am to find you, master dear!  
For three long days I've rummaged for you here.  
Through bogs I've sought you, as a wife a pin,  
And lost all hope to find where you had been.

That you were starved with hunger I was sure  
Or eaten by the wild beasts on the moor.  
Here is my satchel, open it and dine!  
For there's roast meat, white bread and bottled wine.”

With this, the old retainer rubbed his eye;  
Then knelt down on the soil, where standing nigh  
He'd set his satchel. This he now unpacked,  
Course after course, in a delightful act.

He even made a table, laying out  
The satchel and its lid in joy devout,  
Laid on it bread, the wine-flask and the meat,  
And with two apples made the meal complete.

He then took out his clasp-knife, star-bedight,  
And offered it in his young master's sight;  
The latter took the knife and sliced the bread —  
On it and meat right hungrily he fed.

With joy the faithful Ben beheld him eat,  
More pleased than if himself he downed the meat;  
As if he ate himself, his mouth would move,  
And his grey lashes showed a tear of love.

When the lad brought his appetite in check,  
The old man fiercely wrung the wine-flask's neck;  
The flask shrieked, and poured out its bubbling blood  
In the old servant's hands in rosy flood.

First with the wine his master's health he drank;  
A few drops down his throat in fervour sank;  
Then, seeking Nicholas with the flask to ply,  
He wiped his mouth upon his shirt-sleeves dry.

Wine freed the old man's spirit like a sluice;  
His heart swung open and his tongue got loose!  
With Nicholas' grandsire he began his tale  
(A whip-boy had he been, of small avail);

Of Nicholas' sire and dame his yarns he'd forge,  
Of Nicholas, too, and of his brother George;  
Perhaps to the world's end his words had been,  
If Nicholas had not sadly broken in:

"It hurts to hear you, while your heroes stalk!  
Have done, I beg you, with this painful talk!  
Once, sitting at the hearthside, glad and gay,  
I could have listened until Judgement Day!

Oft have you praised my father's noble force  
Until the midnight ended our discourse.  
Thereafter sleep stayed absent in the skies:  
Often till dawn I couldn't close my eyes!

"What was, is past! That which was good is gone.  
A new pen writes. My lot has changed anon.  
I killed a man, an outlaw I became.  
Who ever knows when I can clear my name?

Yet I believe in God, the orphan's stay.

Perhaps I'll shed my blood, some noble day,  
And wipe away the shame, obscene and dread,  
That my dear brother brought upon my head.

"I was not born -- these thoughts my spirit flog --  
To hide among the rushes like a frog!  
Nor was I made a cowherd, or a serf,  
Or doomed to draw in haycocks from the turf.  
I shall stay here until the night sets in  
And shadows on the fields their watch begin.  
Then, when across the world I make my track,  
Even the wind will bring no message back!"

Ben, as he heard these words, became depressed  
That his young master sought to leave the nest.  
He stood in silence, then with sudden wails  
Wrote crosses on his sandal with his nails.

Then he began to speak and begged the lad  
Not to grow angry at the thing he bade,  
But truly this was folly he proposed.  
Why go from home, when home all good enclosed?

"Look here, dear master: In four days at best  
Your brother George will leave for Budapest.  
Then what has happened will be quite forgot.  
You'll be our little King, as like as not.

Your honest servants would you leave alone,  
Who feel for you as if you were their own.  
Bimbó and Lombár would you leave behind,  
Such oxen as one nowhere else could find?

"Your favorite pastimes would you quite forgo?  
Who in the mill two sacks as one can stow?  
Who lift a millstone, and all men confound?  
Don't go, my dear! Stay on familiar ground!

Do not afflict with sorrow, through and through,  
All the sad village folk of Nagyfalú!  
The ancient house of Toldi guard and save!  
Don't push your poor old mother to the grave!"

The lad kept silence as the old man pled.  
At painful words, he merely shook his head.  
But when his mother's name those pleas impart,  
It rolls a stone upon the young man's heart.

He gives no answer as the old man pleads,  
And sighing gazes at the whispering reeds;  
Upon the whispering reeds he looks so long  
That tear-drops to his lashes slowly throng.

As if he wiped away his forehead's sweat,  
His finger to his eye he slowly set;  
The tears along his finger flowed to earth  
While he to Ben expressed these words of worth:

“Dear Ben, please tell my mother from my lips  
That her son's star is darkened in eclipse.  
No word or sight of it her love will win;  
It will be lost as though it had not been.

“It will not really die, but disappear  
As when a man shall hide for many a year,  
But afterwards, when he returns again,  
He shall be found a marvel among men.

My mother this shall hear in deep content;  
Even small babes shall feel astonishment;  
My mother's heart will leap with happiness.  
May it not burst in all its joyful stress!”

So Nicholas spoke. Then Ben took up his task:  
Back in the empty satchel put the flask,  
Wiped off his clasp-knife with devoted care  
And folded up the lardy linen there;

Then shouldering his knapsack, said Good-by  
And set off homewards. His reluctant eye  
Showed that he longed to stay. His course he knew,  
And 'mid the waving rushes passed from view.



## CANTO FIVE

Nicholas went wandering about the marsh,  
Along the brook, amid the reed-fields harsh.

— Ilosvai

Day to the reedy marsh had closed her eye,  
But left her big red mantle in the sky;  
Then Night prevailed and stopped the crimson mirth,  
Drawing a funeral cloth o'er sky and earth,  
    Setting it neatly off with coffin-nails,  
A million million stars in glittering trails;  
Then laid the crescent moon, in silent walk,  
A wreath of silver on the catafalque.

Then Nicholas on his unknown path set out,  
Into the reedy marsh more deep he'd scout;  
But just as if a rope had pulled him back,  
He could not leave his mother by that track.  
    He would look backward, but in vain, I ween;  
There was no living creature to be seen.  
He looked again, then turned himself around:  
To take his leave of her, his steps were bound.

But as he backward turned in slow retreat,  
The marshy soil gave way beneath his feet;  
A wild wolf's lair below was manifest —  
Two little whelps were whining in their nest.  
    Nicholas was sorry to have trod upon them,  
And bending down, he set caresses on them,  
As when a shepherd boy, who trains his pup,  
Pats his small, hairy head to cheer him up.

But here, kind pats were wholly out of place,  
For suddenly reeds rustle; fierce of pace,  
The she-wolf, entering with a fiendish howl,  
Attacked him, and at once the fight grew foul.  
    On her hind legs the wolf in fury rose,  
Scratching with poisoned paws at Nicholas' nose;  
Teeth in her ravening jaws gleamed weirdly white  
And seemed to sparkle in the moon's fierce light.

Toldi turned quickly round to meet the attack;  
Blows from his great fists beat the onset back;  
From the beast's mouth and nose the blood-drops flew;  
Its staring eyes bulged forth and bloodshot grew.

Its tongue, which the wrecked mouth could not contain,  
Was gashed on by the teeth in frenzied pain;  
Like a mad dog's, its thick saliva fell;  
None ever saw a beast more fit for hell.

Nicholas at last, irked by such savage heat,  
Called for sure succor from his sturdy feet,  
And as a bull might throw with horns unsoft,  
With one great kick he hurled the wolf aloft.

Down in the bog far off the creature dropped,  
Breaking the span of reeds on which it flopped,  
And as upon the earth it tumbled prone,  
It thumped the surface with a mighty moan.

As if a devil in its hide were hid,  
It bounded up, no faltering invalid,  
And with a roar, its frenzy to unsheath,  
Renewed the battle as with sharpened teeth.

On Nicholas' shoulders then its paws were spread;  
It gaped its jaws beside the youngster's head;  
Its hind-legs on his knees pressed resolute —  
God damn to hell the incorrigible brute!

All might be well, but now to help his kind  
A howling he-wolf dashed in from behind.  
How now, bold Nicholas? Does not terror fill you?  
Had you a thousand lives, they still would kill you!

Not in the least! One rather must suppose  
That as the danger grew, his courage rose.  
He will win out. Don't doubt the lad's a winner.  
He was not born to be the grey wolves' dinner.

Then as the she-wolf in her grappling twists,  
He held and pressed her throat with both his fists;  
Her paws grow feeble in abrupt surprise,  
Strength vanished from the sinews of her thighs;  
Her eyes protruded, full of tears and blood;

Her tongue was like a coulter in the mud;  
Breath could not issue, prison'd in her throat;  
Her jaws staying gaping, from their rage remote.

Toldi then raised her; with a mighty swing  
He flailed her at her mate, about to spring.  
Twice beaten back, the male, with tail a-twitch,  
In utter fury bit at his own bitch.

It was quite clear that he would rise again  
Unless young Toldi slew him there and then.  
He therefore pounded him: from such a fray  
He would not wake until the Judgement Day.

Thus having slain the beasts by mighty deeds,  
He took a little rest among the reeds.  
The pair of young wolf-whelps were likewise dead,  
Trampled and lifeless in the bulrush-bed.

The parents lay, one here, one farther on,  
The sickle moon upon their corpses shone;  
Coolly she looked upon that reedy place,  
A golden sauce-pan with a shining face.

Nicholas now racked his brains with worry's yeasts,  
But not, I fear, in grieving for the beasts.  
Of his own wolf he thought, his brother bad,  
Who sought to eat him up and all he had.

Why should his brother treat him like a cur?  
Why would he be his executioner?  
No ill to George did Nicholas e'er bequeath:  
Why should he gnash upon him with his teeth?

If with the wolves he made comparison,  
His brother was far worse to think upon.  
Wild beasts are warlike to defend their lair;  
Do not provoke them, and they will not care.

When the starved belly urges them to kill,  
They slay no more than would their needs fulfil.  
From farmers' herds, only a tithe they win,  
And never prey on their own kith and kin.

But see his brother, see that man of strife;  
Why did he have designs on Nicholas' life?  
Why did he seek his blood, in malice stony?  
Why would he drive him from his patrimony?

What if to him, who did his life pursue,  
He meted what to wolfish souls is due?  
Or are men out of tougher stuff contrived,  
And George's death-day had not yet arrived?

Stop, Toldi, stop! Murder is your intent.  
Do not in such a deed your grievance vent!  
A murdered kinsman's blood to heaven cries  
And calls for vengeance to the sky of skies!

Know you, that if your brother you should kill,  
Your soul you'd damned to everlasting ill.  
Be not afraid, for God above you stands.  
Leave all retaliation in his hands.

As if a quick resolve his mind had swept,  
He rose, and to the creatures' corpses stepped,  
Shouldered them swiftly and set out in wrath  
Upon his dangerous nocturnal path.

In headlong haste the tangled reeds he bent,  
And left a swath behind him as he went.  
The two dead wolves were dangling down his back  
As to his mother's house he kept his track.

## CANTO SIX

“And now it came to pass, George Toldi's  
mother  
For Nicholas deeply grieved, his younger brother.”  
Hosvai

At the thorp's edge, beneath the fair moon's light,  
The house of Lawrence Toldi glimmered white.  
Behind it a great orchard spread out green,  
Broad as some lowland forest's wide demesne.

One doorway of the house the garden faced:  
Here Madam Toldi's bedroom had been based,

Rosemary pots mourned on its window-sill.  
This was the spot where Nicholas lingered still.

He laid the wolves upon the dewy grass;  
On tiptoe, like a thief he seemed to pass  
And went up to his mother's close-locked door.  
Long time his ears some signs of life implore,

    But all in vain. High in the lintel gray,  
Only a death-watch beetle ticked away.  
He would have rapped, but fear his pulses gripped;  
His fingers on the handle slid and slipped.

What was the reason for this sudden fear?  
He could have faced old Satan with a sneer  
But dread to startle her his zeal destroys,  
Lest she should wake up frightened by the noise;

    For if he woke her up too suddenly,  
She might not dare to open at his plea;  
Nay, she might rouse the household with a shriek  
And cancel every hope with her to speak.

Putting the wolves upon his shoulders wide,  
He went round to the building's other side;  
There, too, all living souls had gone to bed,  
Even the dogs were sleeping in a shed.

    The door was open; George he could survey;  
A coverlet of moonbeams on him lay;  
And deep in slumber on the portico,  
The sentinels were stretched out in a row.

With all asleep, he did not hesitate  
But on the doorstep laid the wolves' twin weight  
And seized with his great hands primordial  
The spears that had been leaned against the wall,

    Then nailed the garments of the guards to earth  
Lest they should quickly rise to prove their worth.  
He stepped into the room. Ha, brother evil,  
Now is the time for you to join the devil!

Then Nicholas watched, behind the mosquito-net,  
His brother's snores in sequence rise and set.

Just take one grip! — had he a thousand souls,  
An everlasting peace upon him rolls.

Said Nicholas softly: "Now I could commit it,  
And rightly, but my conscience won't acquit it.  
This time I'll spare you, and shall disappear,  
And only leave a sign that I've been here."

And having spoken thus, the wolves he spread  
Upon the edge of the old-fashioned bed,  
And gently spoke to them: "There, there abide you!  
Behold your elder brother lies beside you!"

Then into the next chamber he proceeds,  
Where sits his mother in her widow's weeds.  
Her folded hands upon the table lay  
And over them her head bent sad and grey.

Sweet sleep had sought to ambush her, in vain;  
He was unable to break through her pain.  
At last he won, accomplishing his will  
By borrowing the mantle of a chill;

Into her head his potions did he pour,  
Down to her heels and back again once more,  
Crippling her senses with his languor deep.  
Thus must he work, before she fell asleep.

Nor was her silent slumber long to last;  
Quickly, at Nicholas' steps its spell was past.  
The lady startled when she heard him stir,  
But Nicholas spoke, her terrors to deter:

"My dearest mother, do not be afraid!  
For with no harm do I this house invade  
Though in the darkness, like a wandering ghost.  
By day-light, as you know, my life were lost.

The widow, at these words, felt no alarms.  
But folded her dear son within her arms,  
No space a farthing's span was surely missed  
Upon his face, that was not softly kissed.

"Ah, do I see you then?" his mother cried.  
"Through my despair for you I almost died.  
Alas, a softer tone my tongue must keep —  
Your brother in the next room lies asleep."

Such were her words. No more would she have said  
Were they on the broad Hortobágy instead!  
There had she clasped him in the same embrace  
And rained maternal kisses on his face.

He felt her tremble, as emotion quelled her;  
She would have fallen if he had not held her.  
He, too, was deeply stirred, and did not dare  
To answer while stark sorrow was his share.

Firmness he sought, but it was all in vain;  
As if sharp needles gave his nostrils pain,  
Or sharp horse-radish underneath his nose  
Were grated, did it twist in tingling woes;

From his two eyes the tears that overflowed  
On his dear parent's visage were bestowed;  
As rillets down a hillside merge as one,  
The twofold streams of tears together run.

Nicholas then steeled his soul from such despair.  
He touched his forehead to his mother's hair;  
Then gathering up his strength in vigour rude,  
He somehow overthrew his weeping mood,

And soon addressed his mother, speaking thus:  
"Cease now, dear mother, from embracing us.  
My hours are numbered, and I dare not stay.  
I must take leave, because I go away.

"I do not hope that I at home could live  
With George — to whom may God his judgement give!  
'Twould end, I fear, in my destroying him.  
May God defend me from that seizure grim.

This is my message: Do not be oppressed.  
Drive off the mighty terror from your breast.  
Hopes for my sure return with gladness fill me  
I trust in God; His mercy will not kill me.

"In my two arms enormous strength I feel.  
In barn or mill I shall not waste my zeal.  
My father's warlike deeds our annals grace;  
Shall I alone bring shame upon our race?

I'll seek the King, a soldier to become,

I'll show for him some exploit mettlesome;  
Nor shall I shame my brother's soul accurst —  
Nay, from sheer envying, his spleen will burst.

“Therefore, dear mother, hear my earnest plea:  
Don't worry or shed tears because of me.  
Why sorrow ere their death for mortal men . . .  
When even the deceased will rise again?”

He would have talked in time's sheer disregard,  
But the dogs started howling in the yard,  
On hearing this, he straightway realized  
That he had made a blunder ill-advised.

The anger of the dogs had been aroused  
By scent of the two wolves while still they drowsed;  
Servants would wake, the barking to report,  
And Nicholas cut his conversation short:

“Not for a moment longer dare I stay.  
May the Lord bless you as I go away!  
God bless you in this world, and in the other!  
That is my heart's true wish, my darling mother.”

Then “Bless you . . . bless you . . .” he the echo caught.  
Who should bless whom was tangled in her thought;  
But well she knew that God's all-seeing eye  
The secrets of her inmost heart could spy.

When from her breast the boy had passed again,  
No poet could describe her fearful pain.  
Her soul, that chained them both, in sorrow's chutes  
Was not unclasped but torn out by the roots.

Meanwhile the beagles whined and whimpered still  
And even sought the door with baying shrill;  
The servants, with an effort, got up now;  
George also was awakened by the row.

“Who's there? What was it?” Everybody cried,  
Until the two wolf-carcasses they spied.  
“'Tis Nicholas' work. Nobody else could do it.  
Chase after him, you curs, or you will rue it!”



As if a nest of hornets rose to sting --  
Such was that house's furious murmuring.  
Colliding down the gallery they go;  
On foot or horse, they eddy to and fro.

Whither? No person knew their quarry's tracks.  
All of them jumped about like maniacs.  
At last George scolded them, in fury hollo'd,  
Then took the lead and all the others followed.

But did the widow hear the hunt's wild sounds,  
The horns, the shouting, and the howling hounds?  
Heard she them bawling, "Hold him! Boldly snatch!",  
Well knowing whom they meant to hold or catch?

She did not hear it. As her son departed,  
Her feeble feet gave way; and broken-hearted  
She slowly fell unconscious on her bed;  
Only God knows how long she lay as dead.

## CANTO SEVEN

"He vowed, in pity for the lady's woe,  
He would avenge her son's sad overthrow."

— Ilosvai

Those who on earth have neither friends nor pelf  
Find their cause taken up by God himself.  
See how he made poor Nicholas' case his own:  
Across the moon an inky cloud was thrown;

In utter darkness, nothing could be found,  
Then thunder burst and lightning cracked around,  
The wrath of God a village soldier slew --  
At once he perished, without more ado.

George Toldi's filthy heart was full of dread  
When God's own lightnings circled round his head;  
His scattered dogs were called back by the horn;  
His strayed men also gathered, all forlorn.

The hours of night were drawing close to day  
As he rode homeward with his drenched array.

And all the while his anger fiercer grew  
Because his bloody plan had fallen through.

All night long, Nicholas wandered, staunch yet pale,  
Braving the rain, the lightning and the gale.  
And when the dawn the night afar had chased  
He found himself amid a desert waste.

Who was his comrade as the day passed by?  
The sun that followed him across the sky,  
Caught up, passed on, and sank at last from sight,  
Leaving him friendless in the sodden night.

Three days passed by: and on the fourth at noon  
He saw in a mirage great mountains swoon;  
He was amazed — the like he ne'er had seen —  
Not the mirage but mountain peaks serene.

He hastened on and on, through weary hours;  
When evening came, he glimpsed tall Buda's towers.  
And just before the sunset hour he came  
And saw the well-known field of Rákos' fame.

The field of Rákos close to Pest is set;  
It was at Pest that he with evening met,  
Beside a cemetery, in whose park  
The mound of a new grave was looming dark.

Whose grave it was, he did not greatly care,  
But — God Almighty! — who was standing there?  
Surely his mother, in a mourning dress,  
Bowed by a pair of crosses in distress!

Not she, but someone like her, it appears.  
A stone would have been melted by her tears.  
Why should not Nicholas make her grief his own,  
Having a heart much softer than a stone?

His bosom filled with pity, up he stepped  
And asked her who it was for whom she wept.  
Then the sad widow who this watch was keeping  
Answered his question with a storm of weeping.

“Oh, my dear lad! Your word my sorrow stuns.  
Today I buried here two gallant sons:

Upon an isle, by a Czech's hand they fell,  
And may God never save his soul from Hell!"

She spoke no more. This much was agonized,  
For with her grief her tongue was paralyzed.  
Down on the black mound of the grave she knelt  
And bowed there in the anguish that she felt.

This lasted long, and Nicholas held his peace  
Until her lamentation's voice might cease.  
And when at last her tears had had their vent,  
After a time her sorrow seemed nigh spent.

Then spoke he: "Madam, now your tears have end,  
What is your case, I cannot comprehend.  
Who slew, and why, I have not understood:  
And is there no one to claim blood for blood?"

On hearing this, the lady stood erect  
And all her cruel affliction sharply checked.  
The outline of her face was lean and wan  
And under glooming brows her great eyes shone:

"Blood calls for blood, you say. But I possess  
No one to succor me in my distress.  
My heart is like an autumn stubble-field  
From which the scythe has swept its golden yield."

Then Toldi said: "Don't cry. For from their biers  
Your sons will not be raised up by your tears.  
But may the Lord bring doom upon my neck  
If I do not take vengeance on that Czech.

I therefore beg you, and it will avail,  
Tell me the whole of an unvarnished tale.  
I have a widowed mother of my own  
And can have pity on a widow's moan."

The lady by this time had taken heart  
And now set forth her tale in every part:  
Upon a Danube isle a Czech knight fought  
In single combat, and great havoc wrought.

Of boasts and bluster was his conversation,  
And ever he abused the Magyar nation.  
Many had fought, and died, and left to mind them  
Widows and orphans in lament behind them.

But yesterday her sons had sought him out,  
Her sons, the Magyars' best beyond a doubt.  
In all the world were none so kind as they,  
And now together in one grave they lay.

The world grew fearful. There was none tomorrow  
To fight the cruel Czech and bring him sorrow.  
When morning came, he would be there at ease,  
Spouting his obscene words and blasphemies.

When Nicholas now the whole affair had heard,  
He did not, of his purpose, say a word,  
But took his leave, and set out for the city,  
Revolving mighty plans amid his pity.

From street to street his hasty steps would stray  
As if he were familiar with the way;  
Yet, of a fact, he only roamed around,  
For neither food nor shelter had he found.

(To be continued.)