TATIANA’S LETTER

FROM “EUGENE ONIEGIN” [CHAPTER THREE, AFTER 31]

I write to you . . . when that is said

What more is left for me to say ?

Now you are free (I know too well)

To heap contempt upon my head

Yet if some sparks of pity dwell

Within your breast you’ll surely not

Abandon me to my hard lot

When first I saw you I desired

To hold my peace : my shame (’tis true)

Would ne’er have been revealed to you

Had life's conditions but inspired

One gleam of hope that you would come

To see us in our country home

From time to time, so that I might

Hear but one word : catch but one tone.

And live by dreaming on alone

Till our next meeting, day and night.

But then it seemed there was no hope ;

Our rustic quiet bored you so,

Folk said you were a misanthrope ;

And we — we do not make a show —

You found us narrow in our scope.

Why did you come to visit us

In this forgotten quiet place ?

I need not have been tortured thus

If I had never seen your face.

My inexperienced heart maybe

Had grown resigned to this dull life,

And future years had brought to me

Some other love — my destiny

An honoured mother and true wife.

Another’s ! Nay, to none on earth

Could I have given this heart of mine.

By the decree of the Most High,

And by Heaven’s willing, I am thine.

Allotted unto you was I

E’en from the moment of my birth

And loyal to my future fate ;

And God, I know, sent you to be

My champion and my advocate

Till the grave closes over me. . . .

Oft in my dreams you did appear ;

I loved you then before the days

When palpably I saw you here ;

I languished in your wondrous gaze

And in my heart your voice rang clear

Long since . . . It was no dream to me I

You came — at once I understood

This swift confusion in my blood,

While my thoughts whispered : “Lo, ’tis he.”

Was it not true ? Am I not sure

You spoke with me in hours of peace

When I went visiting my poor,

Or when I strove by prayer to ease

The pain in which my spirit toss’d ?

Was not your image wont to rise

A vision sweet — too quickly lost —

To light my gloom ? Did not mine eyes

See you bend gently o’er my bed ?

Were not some words low whispered

Of love and hope ? Now in what guise

Come you ? As guardian angel good,

Or tempter in some wily mood ?

speak, and set my doubts at rest !

What if all this should prove at best

The empty dream, more light than froth,

Of a heart simple and untried ?

Well, be it so ! But from henceforth

1 must to you my fate confide.

Must weep my tears about your feet

And for your sheltering love entreat.

Picture me now. ... I sit alone

With none to heed or guess what ails . . .

And now my very reason fails !

I wait for you. One glance of yours

Fresh hope unto my heart restores ;

Or else the cruel dream comes back

Of merited contempt . . . Alack !

[She seals the letter. ]

Tis done ! I scarce dare read it through,

But overcome with shame and fright

I trust my honour now to you.

And dare to think I trust aright.

Translated by Rosa Newmarch.

THE DUEL

FROM “EUGENE ONIEGIN” [CHAPTER SIX]

28

Yes, foes ! — How many days, bethink you,

Since hatred stepped the two between,

And since in hours of thought and leisure,

At work, at table, they have been

As comrades ! Now, with purpose dread,

Like men in mutual loathing bred,

Each plans, as though in broadest day

A heavy nightmare on him lay,

The other’s downfall in his heart.

Oh, could they smile but once, while still

Their hands are pure from deed of ill,

And then their sev’ral ways depart !

But worldly hate, like worldly fame,

Shrinks at the breath of worldly shame.

29

. . . . . .

30

— Now, come together !

Calmly, coldly,

Not aiming yet, with haughty glance,

And tread assured and light, though measured.

The combatants four steps advance,

Four steps to death — whereon Eugene,

Still forward moving o'er the green,

(The other likewise) first began

To raise his weapon, fix his man. . . .

Nine steps now of the fateful quest

Were counted — Lensky, with a frown,

His left eye closed, took aim — when down

Oniegin’s thumb the trigger prest . . .

Reverse the sand-glass ! — Lensky sighed —

No more ! — and let his pistol glide.

31

He sought his breast with clutching fingers —

He fell, his glance grew dim, and still

It spoke of death alone, not torment,

As when upon some eastern hill

All sparkling in the morning light,

The snow-wreath vanishes from sight

Oniegin, suddenly a-cold

With horror, saw his shot had told.

He hastened— o'er the poet's form

He stooped, he called his name — too late !

He was no more — untimely fate !

The flower had perished in the storm —

The music on the broken lyre,

And on the altar-stone, the fire !

32

And there he lay ! How unfamiliar

Upon his brow the languid grace !

Beneath his breast the ball had pierced him,

The smoking blood ran down apace,

Thence, where, a few brief moments past,

The pulse of life was bounding fast,

Where hate and hope and love were strong.

And warm emotions wont to throng.

The heart is now a house bereft

Of former inmates — every floor

Is dark and still for evermore,

With dusty panes. The host has left ;

And whither went he ? Who shall say ?

His very trace is swept away.

33

To write an epigram, a sharp one.

Your stupid foe to irritate,

Is very nice. To see him lower

His sullen horns, still obstinate,

And, *nolens volens* in the glass

With shame behold himself and pass.

Twere nicer still (the fool !), should he

Stand there and gape — Tis meant for me ! '

And silently to dig your foe

An honoured grave, to aim with care —

Your mark, the pallid forehead there,

A generous distance off — we know.

Is nicest But to see him fall

And lie, is scarcely nice at all !

34

We’ll just suppose, my friend, your pistol

Has stretched a young acquaintance dead —

Because of forward look or answer,

Because some idle thing he said

Had stung you o’er the wine last night,

Or even called you out to fight

Himself in boyish anger — well,

What kind of feeling, pray you, tell,

Came o’er you with a whelming rush,

When laid before you on the ground.

Without a motion or a sound,

He stiffens in the sudden hush ?

When dumb, with blinded stare, he lies.

Stone-deaf to your despairing cries ?

Translated by H. C. F.

From: *Poetry and Progress in Russia* by Rosa Newmarch [Jeaffreson], London: John Lane, The Bodley Head 1907.