YEVGENY ONEGIN

*Chapter One*

I

‘When my uncle, a man of the highest principles, fell seriously ill, he made himself respected and could have thought out no better way; his example is a lesson to others. But, my God, what a bore to sit with a sick man day and night without going so much as a pace away! What low cunning to amuse someone half-alive, to adjust his pillows, with gloomy countenance to bring him his medicine, to sigh and to think to oneself “When will the devil take you”’

II

So thought our young rake, flying in a post-chaise through the dust, the heir, by the highest will of Zeus, of all his relatives. Friends of Ruslan and Lyudmila [Pushkin’s epic poem printed in 1823], allow me to introduce you forthwith, without any foreword, to the hero of my novel. My good friend Onegin was born on the banks of the Neva, where perhaps you, my reader, were born or where you shone! Once I too lived a carefree life there: but the north is inimical me [Pushkin was exiled to the south in 1820].

III

Having served most impeccably, his father lived by debts, gave three balls a year, and finally squandered all his money. Fate preserved Yevgeny. First of all *Madame* looked after him, then *Monsieur* replaced her. The child was lively but lovable. *Monsieur l’Abbé*, a paltry Frenchman, taught him everything in a joking manner so that the child should not become exhausted, and did not bore him with stern moralizing, but scolded him gently for his pranks and took him walking in the Summer Gardens.

IV

But when the age of rebellious youth came to Yevgeny − the time of hopes and tender sorrow − *Monsieur* was given the sack. And now my Onegin is free; his hair is cut in the latest fashion; he is dressed like a London dandy − and at last he made his début in society. He could express himself in French, and write it too; with ease he danced the Mazurka and unconstrained he bowed. What more do you want? Society decided that he was intelligent and charming.

V

We have all learned − each of us a little − something or other. And so, thank God, it is not difficult with us to make a brilliant display of education. Onegin was, in the opinion of many (unhesitating and stern judges), a learned fellow, but a crank. He had the happy art of gently touching on everything in conversation without constraints, and, with the learned air of an expert, keeping silence in a weighty argument and arousing the ladies smiles’ by the fire of unexpected epigrams.

VI

Latin nowadays has gone out of fashion: to tell the truth, he knew enough Latin to decipher epigraphs, to talk about Juvenal, to put *vale* at the end of a letter, and he remembered − though not faultlessly − a couple of lines from the *Aeneid*. He had no inclination to rummage in the chronological dust of the history of our land: but he kept in his memory anecdotes of bygone days, from Romulus to out own time.

[*Stanzas VII-XLIV: Yevgeny’s life in St Petersburg is described − his visits to balls, to the theatre, to restaurants, his attempts to dispel boredom by writing and reading*.]

XLV

Having cast off, like him, the burden of society’s conventions and having set vanity aside, I made friends with him at that time. I liked his features, his instinctive addiction to dreaming, his inimitable oddity, and his sharp cool mind. I was embittered, he was sullen; we both knew the play of passions; life oppressed us both; in both of us the heart’s flame had burned out; the malice of blind Fortune and of men awaited us both in the very morn of our days.

XLVI

He who has lived and pondered cannot in his heart but despise people; he who has experienced emotion is disturbed by the phantom of irrevocable days, no longer feels fascination, is gnawed at by the serpent of memories and by repentance. All this often lends great charm to conversation. At first Onegin’s tongue embarrassed me; but I grew used to his caustic arguments and to his jokes mixed half and half with spleen, and to the spitefulness of his grim epigrams.

XLVII

How often in summer-time, when the night sky above the Neva is transparent and light and when the merry mirror of the waters does not reflect Diana’s face − how often, recalling romances of former years, recalling former love, sensitive once more, carefree once more, we silently relished the breath of kindly night! Just as the sleepy convict is transferred from his prison to a green forest, sow ere we carried away in our dreams to the beginning of our young life.

XLVIII

With his heart full of regrets and leaning on the granite parapet, Yevgeny stood pensively, just as the poet described himself. [A reference to N. M. Muravyev’s poem ‘To the Goddess of the Neva’.] All was quiet; only the night watchmen called to each other; and suddenly one could hear the distant clatter of a droshky from Milyonnaya Street; only a boat with waving oars floated along the slumbering river. And in the distance the horn band and spirited song entranced us . . . But sweeter, midst the joys of night, is the melody of Torquato’s *ottava rima*!

[*Chapter 1, Stanza XLIX, to Chapter 2, Stanza X: a short digression on Italy follows. Onegin and Pushkin part company. Onegin’s uncle dies and Onegin becomes a country squire. He is just as bored in the country as he was in the town. A young poet, Vladimir Lensky, arrives and settles in the neighbourhood*.]

*Chapter 2*

XI

In the wilderness, where only my Yevgeny could appreciate his gifts, he did not like the feasts of the lords of the neighbouring villages; he avoided their noisy chatter. Their sensible conversation about hay-making, wine, hounds, and their relatives did not of course shine with either emotion, or poetic fire, or humour, or intelligence, or the art of social intercourse. Yet the conversation of their dear wives was far less clever still.

XII

Rich and handsome, Lensky was everywhere received as an eligible bachelor; such is the country custom; everyone planned for their daughters to marry their *half-Russian neighbour*; as soon as he came into a room, straightway the conversation would begin to turn obliquely on the boredom of bachelor life; they would call their neighbour to the samovar and, while Dunya was pouring out tea, they would whisper to her: ‘Dunya, note him!’ Then they would bring the guitar and she would squeak (my God!): ‘*Come into my golden chamber!*’ [A very popular aria from a contemporary opera.]

XIII

But Lensky, having of course no wish to bear the bonds of wedlock, desired to make his relationship with Onegin more intimate. They became close friends. Wave and stone, verse and prose, ice and flame were not so different in themselves. At first they bored each other with their mutual disparity; then they took to one another; then they met each day on horseback, and soon they became inseparable. So people (and I am the first to admit it) become friends from having nothing to do.

XIV

But even that friendship does not exist between us; destroying all prejudices, we consider all people to be nonentities, but ourselves to be the entities. We all strive to be Napoleons. The millions of two-legged creatures are for us merely a weapon; for us emotion is strange and amusing. More tolerable than many was Onegin. Although of course he knew people and in general despised them − still (there are no rules without exceptions) some people he preferred, and in his detachment he respected emotion.

[*Chapter 2, Stanzas XV-XXVI: Lensky has fallen in love with Olga, the daughter of a neighbouring landowner*.]

XXII

She [Olga] gave the poet the first dream of youth’s raptures, and thoughts of her inspired the first lament from his pipes. Farewell, golden games! He began to find delight in dense thickets, in seclusion, in tranquillity, and in the night, the stars, the moon − the moon, that heavenly lamp, to which we used to dedicate our walks in the evening darkness and our tears, our consolation in secret sorrows . . . But now the moon we merely see a substitute for dim lanterns.

XXIII

Ever modest, ever obedient, ever merry as the morn, simple as a poet’s life, sweet as a kiss of love; her eyes − blue as the sky, her smile, her flaxen locks, her movements, her voice, her slender figure − all this is in Olga . . . But take any novel and for sure you will find her portrait. It is very sweet, and I myself once loved such portraits; but then I became completely bored by them. Allow me, dear reader, to occupy myself with her elder sister.

XXIV

Her sister was called Tatiana . . . For the first time we will deliberately hallow the tender pages of a novel with such a name. And why not? It is pleasant, it sounds well, but with it, I know are inseparably linked recollections of the olden days or of the servant-maids’ quarters! We must all admit that we have precious little taste in our names − to say nothing of our verse. Enlightenment does not suit us, and all we have got from it is affectation − and nothing else.

XXV

And so she was called Tatyana. She had not the beauty of her sister, nor her rosy freshness to attract the eye. Shy, sad, silent, timid as a forest deer, in her own family she seemed a stranger. She did not know how to be affectionate with her father or with her mother; herself a child, she had no wish to play or skip amongst the crowd of children, and often she would sit the whole day long in silence by the window.

[*Chapter 2, Stanza XXVI, to Chapter 3, Stanza XXXI: the character and habits of Tatyana and her family, the Larins, are described Onegin is introduced to the Larins by Lensky and Tatyana falls in love with him. She tells her nanny, and writes a letter to Onegin admitting her love for him*.]

*Chapter 3*

XXXII

Tatyana now sighs, now groans the letter trembles in her hand; the pink wafer dries on her feverish tongue. She lets her head fall on her shoulder. Her light chemise slips from her exquisite shoulder. But already the moonbeam’s radiance dies out. There in the distance the valley becomes clear through the mist; there the torrent sparkles like silver, and the shepherd’s horn wakes the villagers. Morning has come. Everyone has long been up − but to my Tatyana it is all one.

XXXIII

She does not notice the dawn; she sits with her head bowed and does not press her engraved signet upon the letter. But quietly opening the door grey-haired Filipyevna brings her tea upon a tray. ‘It’s time, my child − get up: but you are already dressed, my fair one! O my early bird! Oh, how frightened I was yesterday evening! But you are well, thank God! There is no sign of last night’s sorrow − your face is like the colour of a poppy.’

XXXIV

‘O nanny, do me a favour.’ ‘Of course, my darling, just tell me.’ ‘Don’t think . . . indeed . . . suspicion . . . But you see . . . Oh, don’t say no!’ ‘My dear, I swear to you by God!’ ‘Well then, send your grandson on the quiet with this note to O . . . to the one . . . to the neighbour . . . and tell him − not to say a word, not to mention my name . . . ’ ‘To whom, my dear? I have become slow-witted nowadays. There are so many neighbours round here; how on earth can I even count them all!’

XXXV

‘How slow you are at guessing, nanny!’ ‘My darling friend, I am old, indeed I am old: my mind grows dull, Tanya; yet once I was keen-witted, once one word only of the master’s wish . . . ’ ‘Oh, nanny, nanny! What has that to do with it? What need have I of your wits? You see, it’s a letter about Onegin.’ ‘Well then, all right, all right. Do not be angry, my darling, you know that I am hard of understanding . . . But why have you grown pale again?’ ‘It’s nothing, nanny, really nothing. Now send your grandson.’

[*Chapter 3, Stanzas XXXVI-XXXVII: There is no answer to the letter. Lensky visits the Larins and tells them that Onegin is coming in the evening. Tatyana waits for him*.]

XXXVIII

Meanwhile her heart ached and her languorous eyes were full of tears. Suddenly the clatter of horses’ hoofs! Her blood froze. Nearer and nearer! The horses are galloping . . . and Yevgeny drives into the courtyard. ‘Ah!’ she cries, and lighter than a shadow Tatyana jumps into the entrance hall, from the porch to the courtyard, and straight into the garden she flies, she flies; she does not dare to look back; in an instant she rand through borders, across small bridges, a little field, down the avenue leading to the lake, through a copse, breaking down lilac shrubs, flying over flower-beds towards the brook − and gasping for breath, upon the bench . . .

XXXIX

. . . she fell . . . ‘He’s here! Yevgeny’s here! O God! What did he think!’ Her heart, full of torment, harbours an obscure dream of hope; she trembles and burns with excitement, and waits: is he not coming? But she hears nothing. In the garden on the beds the servant girls were picking berries among the bushes and were singing in chorus by order (an order designed to stop their sly mouths from secretly eating their master’s berries, and to occupy them with singing: a true invention of provincial cunning!).

[*Chapter 3, Stanza XL, to Chapter 4, Stanza X: Onegin meets Tatyana in the garden. Pushkin describes his early amorous successes and his attitude to women*.]

Chapter 4

XI

But having received Tatyana’s epistle Onegin was deeply touched: the language of girlish reveries stirred up within him whole swarms of thoughts; and he remembered dear Tatyana’s pale complexion and her despondent air. And he plunged his soul into a deep sinless dream. Perhaps the old ardour of his feelings seized him for a moment; but he did not wish to deceive the trustfulness of an innocent soul. And now we will fly across into the garden where Tatyana met him.

XII

For about two minutes they were silent, but Onegin came up to her and said: ‘You have written to me, do not deny it. I read the admissions of your trustful soul, the confessions of your innocent love; your sincerity touches me; it has set astir feelings which have long been silent; but I do not wish to praise you; I will repay you for it with an avowal just as artless; accept my confession. I put myself on trial before you.

XIII

‘Had I wished to confine my life to the domestic round; had some pleasant fate ordered me to be a father and a husband; had I just for one second been captivated by the picture of family life − the, in truth, I would have sought no other bride than you alone. I will say this without any madrigalian flashes: finding in you the ideal of my youth, I would truly have chosen you alone to be the companion of my sad days, as a pledge of all that is beautiful, and I would have been happy . . . in so far as I could!

XIV

‘But I was not made for bliss; my soul is alien to it; your perfections are in vain: I am completely unworthy of them. Believe me (my conscience is a guarantee of this), marriage would be torment for us. However much I loved you, I would fall out of love with you as soon as I got used to you; you would begin to weep; your tears would not touch my heart but would only enrage it. Judge now yourself what roses Hymen would prepare for us − and perhaps for many a day!

XV

‘What can be worse on earth than a family in which the poor wife sorrows for her unworthy husband and is alone day and night; in which the bored husband, knowing her true value (yet cursing fate) is always gloomy, silent, angry, and coldly jealous! Such would I be. And was it such a man that you sought with your pure passionate soul when you wrote to me with such simplicity, such intelligence? Can it be that such a lot was prescribed for you by stern fate?

XVI

‘Daydreams have no return; I cannot renew my soul . . . I love you with a brother’s love, and perhaps even more tenderly. But listen to me without anger: a young girl will many a time replace one light reverie with another; thus a sapling changes its leaves each spring. Thus it is clearly ordained by heaven. You will fall in love anew: but . . . learn to have mastery over yourself; not everyone will understand you as I have done; inexperience leads to misfortune.

[*Chapter 4, Stanzas XVII-XXIII: Tatyana listens to Onegin in silence and goes back to the house with him. After a digression on love and friendship, Pushkin describes the effect of the meeting on Tatyana*.]

XXIV

Alas, Tatyana fades away, grows pale and dim and silent! Nothing occupies her or stirs her soul. Gravely shaking her heads, the neighbours whisper among themselves: ‘It’s time, high time she got married!’ But that’s enough. I must now quickly cheer the imagination with a picture of happy love. I cannot help but feel oppressed by pity, my dear ones; forgive me; I so love my dear Tatyana!

XXV

Hourly more captivated by the charms of young Olga, Vladimir abandoned himself with all his soul to sweet captivity. He is always with her. In her chamber the two sit in darkness; of a morning they stroll hand in hand in the garden; and what is the result? Enraptured by love, in the confusion of tender bashfulness, he only dares sometimes, emboldened by Olga’s smile, to play with an untwined ringlet of he hair or to kiss the hem of her dress.

XXVI

Sometimes he reads to Olga an edifying novel in which the author knows nature better than Chateaubriand does, while from time to time he blushingly skips two or three pages − empty rubbish, fairy tales, dangerous for the hearts of young girls. At times, retiring far from all the others, they sit over the chess board, leaning on the table, plunged deep in thought, and Lensky absent-mindedly takes his own castle with a pawn.

[*Chapter 4, Stanzas XXVII-XXIX: a digression on the poetry written by Lensky to Olga follows. Pushkin then returns to Onegin and describes his carefree life in the country*.]

XL

But our northern summer flashes by and is gone − a caricature of southern winters. This is well known, though we do not like to admit it. Already the sky breathed autumn, and ever rarer shone the sun; the days were growing shorter; the mysterious shade of the forests was baring itself with mournful sound; mist settled upon the fields, and the caravan of clamorous geese moved southwards: that rather boring time was drawing near − November was already at hand.

XLI

Dawn arises in a cold mist; the sound of work in the cornfields has grown silent; the wolf and his hungry she-wolf come out on to the road; the passing horse scents him and snorts, and the wary traveller rushes uphill at full speed; at dawn the herdsman no longer drives his cows from the shed, nor does his horn call them into a ring at midday; singing in her cottage the maiden spins, and the splinter − the friend of winter nights − crackles before her.

XLII

And now the brittle-hard frosts have set in, shining silver amidst the fields . . . (the reader is already expecting the rhyme ‘roses’ [rhymes with ‘frosts’ in Russian]; here you are then, take it quickly!). Neater than a fashionable parquet floor the river gleams, clad in ice. The joyful crowd of boys with hissing sound cur the ice with their skates; the heavy goose on its red web feet, having decided to swim upon the bosom of the waters, steps carefully on to the ice, slips, and falls; the merry first snow flickers and swirls, falling like stars upon the bank.

[*Chapter 4, Stanzas XLIII-LI: Lensky, who is to marry Olga in a fortnight, tells Onegin that he is invited to Tatyana’s name-day party. Onegin agrees to go*.]

*Chapter 5*

I

That year the autumn weather dragged on; nature waited and waited for winter. But the first snow fell only in January − on the night of the third. Waking early, through the window Tatyana saw the courtyard, which had grown white in the early morning, the flower-beds, the roofs, and the fence, and the delicate patterns on the windowpanes, the trees in their winter silver, the cheerful magpies in the courtyard, and the hills softly strewn with their shining carpet of winter. All around was bright, all was white.

II

Winter! The peasant with joyful heart renews his journeys on his sledge; his little horse, scenting the snow, jogs along at a trot; the dashing *kibitka* flies by, digging up the powdery furrows; the coachman sits on the box in his sheepskin coat and crimson belt. Here the house-boy runs to and fro, having put his dog Zhuchka on his toboggan and turned himself into a horse. The little rascal’s fingers are already frost-bitten: it’s painful, yet it makes him laugh, while his mother wags her finger through the window . . .

III

But perhaps such pictures do not attract you: all this [you will say] is bas nature; there is not much that is graceful here. Warmed by the god of inspiration, another poet has painted for us with luxurious style the year’s first snow and all the shades of winter’s joys [Vyazemsky, ‘First Snow’]; he captivates you, I am sure of it, by drawing secret sledge-rides in his fiery verses; but I do not intend to compete either with him yet awhile, or with you, singer of the young Finnish maid [E.A. Baratynsky, ‘Eda’]!

[*Chapter 5, Stanzas IV-X: On the evening before her name-day Tatyana goes to bed*.]

XI

And Tatyana dreams a wondrous dream. She dreams that she is walking through a snowy glade, surrounded by a gloomy mist; in the snow-drifts before her the seething, dark, grey torrent no longer fettered by winter, resounds with swirling billows; two small stakes, stuck together with ice − a trembling, perilous little bridge − are laid across the torrent: and in front of the roaring abyss she stopped, full of bewilderment.

XII

Tatyana chafes at the stream, as at a grievous parting; she sees no one who might give her a hand from the other side; but suddenly the snowdrift shifted − and who appeared from beneath it? A large, shaggy bear. ‘Ah!’ cried Tatyana; and he roared and stretched out to her a paw with sharp claws. Checking her fear, she leaned on it with trembling arm, and with timorous steps crossed over the stream; she started off, and what do you think? The bear followed her!

XIII

Not daring to look back, she hastens her hurried pace; but she simply cannot run away from her shaggy attendant; grunting, the horrid bear shambles on. Before them lies a forest; the pines are motionless in their sullen beauty. All their boughs are weighted down with clumps of snow. Through the tops of the naked aspens, beeches, and limes shine the rays of the stars of the night. There is no path; bushes and steeps have been covered by the snowstorm and are plunged deep in snow.

XIV

Tatyana enters the forest; the bear follows her; the crumbling snow is up to her knees; now a long branch catches her by the neck, now her golden ear-rings are violently torn from her ears; now her wet shoe gets stuck in the brittle snow and comes off her dear sweet foot; now she drops her handkerchief − she has no time to pick it up; she is afraid − she hears the bear behind her, and she does not even dare to lift the hem of her dress with trembling hand; she runs, and he keeps following her; and now she no longer has the strength to run.

XV

She fell into the snow; nimbly the bear seizes her and carries her; lifeless and submissive she dares not move or breathe; he rushes her along the forest path; suddenly between the trees a wretched hut appears; all around is thick forest; on all sides the hut is covered with desolate snow, and the little window shines brightly, and in the hut there is noise and shouting; the bear said: ‘Here my gossip lives: go and warm yourself for a little in his hut!’ He goes straight into the entrance passage and sets her on the threshold.

XVI

Tatyana comes to and looks around: the bear has gone; she is in the entrance passage; behind the door are shouts and the ring of glasses, as at a great funeral feast. Seeing no sense at all in this, she peeps stealthily through a crack − and what does she see? Monsters are sitting around a table: one has horns and a dog’s muzzle, another has cock’s head; here sits a witch with a goat’s beard, here an austere proud skeleton. There sits a dwarf with a little tail, and here a creature that is half-crane, half-cat.

XVII

Still more terrifying, still more wondrous: here is a crab riding a spider; a skull on a goose’s neck twists around in a red cap; a windmill dances squatting, rattles and waves its sails; barking, laughing, singing, whistling, banging, people talking and horses’ hoofs clattering! But what did Tatyana think when amidst the guests she recognized him whom she loved and feared, the hero of our novel! Onegin sits at the table and glances furtively at the door.

XVIII

He gives a sign: and they all bustle; he drinks: they all drink and shout; he laughs: they all roar with laughter; he knits his bows: they are all silent. He is the master there − that is clear. Tanya no longer felt so frightened, and in her curiosity she now opened the door a little . . . Suddenly a wind blew, quenching the flames of the night lamps; the band of goblins fell into confusion; Onegin with flashing eyes thunderously rises from the table; they all get up; he walks to the door.

XIX

But Tatyana is terrified, and she makes hasty efforts to run away: it is quite impossible; rushing impatiently hither and thither, she wants to cry out, but she cannot. Yevgeny pushed open the door and the girl appeared before the eyes of the hellish apparitions; a burst of wild and violent laughter rang out; the eyes of all, hoofs, crooked trunks, tufted tails, tusks, whiskers, bloody tongues, horns and bony fingers − all point at her and cry out: ‘Mine! Mine!’

XX

‘*Mine!*’said Yevgeny sternly, and suddenly all the band disappeared; the young man remained alone with him in the frosty darkness; Onegin gently entices her into a corner, lays her on a rickety bench, and leans his head on her shoulder. Suddenly Olga comes in with Lensky following. Light flashes. Onegin waves his arms; his eyes rove wildly and he curses the uninvited guests; Tatyana lies there barely alive.

XXI

The argument grows louder and louder; suddenly Yevgeny seizes a long knife and in an instant Lensky is felled; frighteningly the shadows thickened; an intolerable cry rang out . . . The hut rocked . . . And Tanya awoke in terror . . . She looks around: it is already light in the room; through the window’s frosted glass the purple ray of dawn flashes; the door opened. Olga flies in to her, rosier than the northern dawn and lighter than a swallow; ‘Well,’ she says, ‘tell me now. Who did you dream of?’

[*Chapter 5, Stanzas XXII-XXIX: Tatyana tries in vain to interpret her dream from a dream-book. By the evening the house is full of guests. They go in to dinner. Lensky and Onegin enter*.]

XXX

They are seated directly opposite Tanya. And, paler than the morning moon and timider than the hunted deer, she does not lift her darkling eyes: the heat of passion blazes violently within her; she suffocates, feels faint; she does not hear the two friends’ greetings; tears are just about to drop from the eyes; the poor girl is on the point of fainting; but her will and her power of reason won the day. Quietly she uttered two words through her teeth and remained seated at the table.

XXXI

Yevgeny had long been unable to tolerate tragic-neurotic displays, girls’ fainting fits and tears; he had put up with enough of them in his time. The odd fellow, arriving at the huge feast, was already angry. But noticing the languid maiden’s sudden fit of trepidation, he lowered his glance in irritation and began to sulk, vowing in his indignation to enrage Lensky and to take fitting vengeance on him; and now, exulting in advance, he began in his mind to sketch out caricatures of all the guests.

[*Chapter 5, Stanzas XXXII-XL: later in the evening dancing begins*.]

XLI

Monotonous and senseless, like a gust of young life, the noisy gust of the waltz whirls round; couple by couple the dancers flash by. Approaching the minute of revenge, Onegin, smiling secretly, goes up to Olga. Swiftly he spins with her around the guests, then seats her on a chair and starts talking of this and that. Then a minute of two later, he continues the waltz with her afresh; all are amazed. Lensky himself cannot believe his eyes.

[*Chapter 5, Stanza XLII, to Chapter 6, Stanza XVI: Lensky leaves the ball in anger. On the next day he challenges Onegin to a duel. Dissatisfied with his own conduct, Onegin nevertheless decides to fight. Lensky visits Olga*.]

*Chapter 6*

XVII

And once again pensive and despondent in the presence of his dear Olga, Vladimir has not the strength to remind her of the day before; he thinks: ‘I shall be her saviour. I shall not permit the libertine to tempt her young heart with the fire of sighs and flattery, nor the despicable poisonous worm to nibble at the lily’s slender stalk, nor shall I allow the flower on its second morn to fade away still half unfolded.’ All this, my friends, meant ‘I am going to fight a duel with my friend’.

XVIII

If only he had known what anguish burned my Tatyana’s heart! Had Tatyana known, had it been possible for her to know, that on the morrow Lensky and Yevgeny were to dispute about the shadow of the grave − ah, perhaps, her love would have united the two friends afresh! But as it happens no one had yet disclosed this passion. Onegin remained silent about it all; Tatyana pined away in secret; only her nanny might have known, but she was slow at guessing.

XIX

All evening Lensky was distraught − now silent, now cheerful again; but he who is nurtured by the muse is always like that: knitting his brow he would sit down at the piano and would strike only chords on it; now he would turn his gaze on Olga and whisper: ‘Is it not true? I am happy.’ But it grew late; it was time to go. His grief-laden heart was wrung; when he parted from the young maiden it seemed as though it was bursting. She looked him in the face. ‘What is the matter with you?’ ‘Oh, nothing.’ And he went on to the porch.

XX

Arriving home, he examined his pistols, then put them back again in their case, and, having undressed, he opened Schiller by the light of a candle; but one thought only absorbs his mind; his sorrowful heart does not slumber; in all her inexplicable beauty he sees Olga before him. Vladimir shuts his book and takes his pen; his verses, full of amorous rubbish, ring out and flow. He reads them aloud, in lyrical passion, like Delvig, drunken at a feast. [Baron Delvig, poet and school-friend of Pushkin.]

XXI

His verses have by chance survived; I have them; here they are: ‘Whither, O whither have you gone, golden days of my youth? What has the coming day in store for me? In vain my gaze seeks to grasp it; in the deep darkness it is concealed. There is no need; the law of Fate is right. Should I fall, pierced by an arrow, or should it fly past − it is all to the good; the appointed time for wakefulness and sleep comes; blessed is the day of cares − blessed, too, is the age of darkness!

XXII

‘The ray of dawn will sparkle on the morrow and the bright day will shine; but I − perhaps I shall descent into the mysterious shadow of the tomb, and slow Lethe will swallow up the memory of the young poet. The world will forget me; but will you come, maiden of beauty, to shed a tear over my early urn and think “He loved me, to me alone he dedicated the sad dawn of his stormy life”? Beloved friend, precious friend, come, Oh come! I am your spouse!’

XXIII

Thus he wrote *darkly* and *limply* (we call it Romanticism, though here I cannot see any Romanticism at all; but what has it to do with us?), and at last, just before dawn, inclining his weary head, Lensky quietly fell asleep on the fashionable word ‘*ideal*’; but no sooner has he sunk into oblivion of blissful sleep than his neighbour comes into his silent study and wakes Lensky up, calling: ‘Time to get up: it’s already past six. Onegin is sure to be waiting for us.’

[*Chapter 6, Stanzas XXIV-XXVII: Onegin and Lensky with their seconds, Guillot and Zaretsky, meet at the mill where the duel is to take place*.]

XXVIII

Enemies! Was it so long ago that his thirst for blood separated them from each other? Was it so long ago that they amicably shared their hours of leisure, their board, their thoughts and deeds? Now, filled with malice, just like hereditary enemies, as in a fearful, incomprehensible dream, they prepare destruction for each other calmly and in cold blood . . . Should they not burst out laughing before their hands are stained with blood, should they not part in friendship? But fashionable feuds are terribly afraid of false shame.

XXIX

But now their pistols have already flashed. The hammer knocks against the ramrod. The bullets go into the faceted barrel and for the first time the cock is snapped. Now the powder is poured in a thin greyish stream on to the pan. The jagged flint, firmly screwed on, is raised once more. Confused, Guillot stands behind a nearby stump. The two enemies throw down their cloaks. Zaretsky measured out thirty-two paces with extreme accuracy, took the friends apart, each to the end mark, and both took their pistols.

XXX

‘Now approach!’ In cold blood the two enemies, not yet aiming, covered the four paces − the four fatal steps − with firm gait, calmly and evenly. Then, without ceasing to advance, Yevgeny first began calmly to raise his pistol. Now they have stepped five more paces, and Lensky, screwing up his left eye, also began to aim − but at that very moment Onegin fired . . . The fateful hour struck: the poet, silently, drops his pistol . . .

XXXI

. . . quietly puts his hand on his breast, and falls. His misty glance portrays death, not agony. Thus a heap of snow falls slowly down a mountain slope with sparks flashing in the sun. Suffused with a sudden cold, Onegin hastens to the young man, he looks at him, he calls him . . . in vain: he is no more. The young singer has found an untimely end! The storm wind blew, and the fair blossom faded at the dawn of day, the flame on the altar went out!

[*Chapter 6, Stanzas XXXII-XXXV: Onegin is shaken by Lensky’s death. The body is taken away*.]

XXXVI

My friends, you are sorry for the poet: still in the bloom of joyful hopes, not yet having realised them for the world, barely out of the clothes of infancy, he faded away! Where is the passionate emotion, where is the noble flight of young, lofty, tender, dashing feelings and thoughts? Where are the stormy desires of love and the thirst for knowledge and toil, and the fear of vice and shame, and you, cherished reveries, you, phantom of unearthly life, you, dreams of sacred poetry!

XXXVII

Perhaps he was born for the good of the world or even for glory; his lyre, now silent, might have set a thunderous, uninterrupted sound ringing through the ages. Perhaps a high rung on the ladder of the world awaited the poet. Perhaps his martyr’s shade carried off with it the holy mystery, and for us a life-giving voice has become silent, and beyond the grave no hymn of ages, no blessing of the peoples will rush to greet that shade.

[*Stanza XXXVIII is defective*.]

XXXIX

And yet, perhaps, a normal fate might have awaited the poet. The years of youth would have passed: the ardour of the soul would have grown cold. He would have changed in many ways, he would have parted from the muses, married, and in the country, happy though cuckolded, would have worn a quilted dressing-gown. He would have come to know life as it really is, would have got gout at forty, would have drunk, eaten, become bored, fat, and ailing, and finally he would have died in his bed, surrounded by children, tearful women, and doctors.

[*Chapter 6, Stanza XL, to Chapter 7, Stanza VII: A description of Lensky’s grave follows. After a lyrical digression we return to Lensky’s grave. Stanzas VIII and IX of Chapter 7, which describe how Olga visited the grave, were omitted by Pushkin in the final version*.]

Chapter 7

X

My poor Lensky! Though pining, Olga did not weep for long. Alas! The betrothed matron was unfaithful to her sorrow. Another captured her attention, another succeeded in lulling her suffering with amorous flattery, an Uhlan knew how to captivate her − in her soul she loved an Uhlan . . . And now already she bashfully stands with him before the altar beneath the marriage-crown, with head inclined, her lowered eyes burning and with a slight smile upon her lips.

XI

My poor Lensky! In the confines of remote eternity beyond the grave, was he, the melancholy bard, discountenanced by tidings of her fateful betrayal? Or is the poet, lulled o’er Lethe and blessedly unfeeling, no longer disturbed by aught, and is the world for him now closed and silent? Yes, indeed, indifferent oblivion awaits us beyond the grave. The voice of enemies, of friends, of lovers suddenly grows silent. Only about the inheritance does the angry choir of heirs start its unseemly argument.

[*Chapter 7, Stanzas XII-XIV: Tatiana sees Olga and her husband off. She is sad and lonely*.]

XV

It was evening. The sky was growing dark. The waters streamed quietly by. A beetle buzzed. Already the dancers were dispersing; already, beyond the river, a fireman’s fire burned and smoked. In the open field by the silvery light of the moon Tatyana walked long alone, plunged in her dreams. She walked on and on. And suddenly from a hill she sees before her the manor house, the village, the grove at the foot of the hill, and the garden above the bright river. She gazes − and her heart within her began to beat more often and more strongly.

XVI

Doubts confuse her: ‘Shall I go on, shall I go back? He is not here. I am not known here . . . I will have a look at the house, at this garden.’ And now Tatyana comes down the hill, barely breathing; she casts around her a gaze full of bewilderment . . . and she enters the deserted courtyard. At the sound of her frightened cry a whole family of servants’ children gathered noisily around. Not without scuffling the boys chased the dogs away and took the young lady under their protection.

[*Chapter 7, Stanzas XVII-XX: Tatiana visits Onegin’s study. She asks permission to return*.]

XXI

Tatyana said farewell to the housekeeper beyond the gate. A day later she appeared early in the morning in the abandoned dwelling. And in the silent study, for a time forgetting everything in the world, she at last remained alone, and for a long time she wept. Then she set about the books. At first she had no time for them; but then the choice of books seemed strange to her. With eager heart Tatyana abandoned herself to reading; and a new world was opened up to her.

XXII

Although we know that Yevgeny had long ceased to love reading, still he excluded some works from banishment: the singer of the Giaour and Juan [Byron], and with him one or two more novels in which the age was reflected and modern man quite faithfully portrayed, with his amoral soul, self-loving and dry, utterly addicted to dreaming, with his embittered mind seething in vain activity.

XXIII

Many a page kept the sharp imprint of his nail; on them the eyes of the attentive girl were keenly fixed. With trepidation Tatyana saw what thoughts, what remarks Yevgeny had been struck by, what he had agreed in with in silence. On the margins of the pages she meets his pencil marks. Everywhere Yevgeny’s soul cannot help expressing itself, now with a short word, now with a cross, now with a question mark.

XXIV

And now little by little my Tatyana began to understand more clearly −thank God − the man for whom she was condemned to sigh by powerful fate: this gloomy, dangerous crank, this creation of hell or heaven, this angel, this haughty demon − what, then, is he? Can it be that he is an imitation, a worthless phantom, or yet again a Muscovite in Childe Harold’s cloak, a reproduction of the vagaries of others, a dictionary full of fashionable words? Can it be that he is a parody?

[*Chapter 7, Stanzas XXV-XXVII: Tatyana’s mother decides to take her to Moscow in the hopes of finding a fiancé. Tatyana is alarmed at the prospect*.]

XXVIII

Rising with the first rays, now she hurries to the fields, and gazing on them with tender eyes. She says: ‘Farewell, peaceful valleys, and you, the tops of familiar hills, and you, familiar forest! Farewell, heavenly beauty, farewell, joyous nature! I am exchanging the dear quiet world for the clamour of brilliant vanities. Farewell, too, my freedom. Whither am I hastening and why? What does my fate hold in store for me?’

XXIX

Her walks last longer. Tatyana cannot help stopping, captivated by the charm now of a hillock, now of a stream/ She hurries yet again to converse with her groves, her meadows, as with old friends. But swift summer flies by. Golden autumn has come. Nature, quivering and pale, is luxuriantly bedecked like a sacrifice . . . Now the north wind, driving the clouds together, blew and howled − and here comes the sorceress Winter herself.

[*Chapter 7, Stanza XXX, to Chapter 8, Stanza XVI: They travel to Moscow. Tatyana is unable to get used to the atmosphere and is bored by society. She marries a general. Onegin cannot settle down after the duel and takes to aimless travelling. He turns up at a ball in Moscow and recognizes Tatyana*.]

*Chapter 8*

XVII

‘Can it be,’ thinks Yevgeny. ‘Can it be she? But it’s just like . . . No . . . From the remote villages of the steppes!’ And each minute he trains his importunate lorgnette on the one whose aspect reminded him vaguely of forgotten features. ‘Tell me, Prince, do you not know who that is over there in a crimson toque talking to the Spanish ambassador?’ The Prince looks at Onegin. ‘Aha, you *have* been away from society for a long time! Wait, I’ll introduce you.’ ‘Yes, but who is she?’ ‘My wife.’

XVIII

‘So you’re married? I didn’t know before! Have you been married long?’ ‘About two years.’ ‘Who to?’ ‘A Larin.’ ‘Tatyana!’ ‘Does she know you?’ ‘I’m a neighbour of theirs.’ ‘Oh well, let’s go then.’ The Prince goes to his wife and brings his relative and friend to her. The princess looks at him . . . And whatever stirred her soul, however great her amazement and surprise, nothing betrayed her: she preserved exactly the same tone, her bow was just as serene.

XIX

In very truth, far from shuddering of suddenly becoming pale or crimson, she did not even move an eyebrow, nor did she even compress her lips. Although he gazed with all attention, Onegin could not find a single trace of the former Tatyana. He wanted to start a conversation with her and − and could not. She asked whether he had been here long, where he had come from, and whether he had come from their parts. Then she cast a weary glance at her husband; slipped out . . . and he remained immobile.

XX

Can it really be the same Tatyana to whom once, in the beginning of our novel, in those remote and distant parts, he recited admonishments *tête à tête* in the noble glow of moral exhortation? Can it be she, the writer of the letter he keeps, in which the heart speaks, in which everything is expressed, everything is freely spoken − that same girl . . . or is this a dream? That same girl, whom he had scorned in her humble lot − could it be that she was so indifferent, so unconstrained with him?

[*Chapter 8, Stanzas XXI-XLI: Onegin falls in love with Tatyana, but she pays no attention to him. He writes to her, but gets no answer. Winter passes, and in spring Onegin goes to Tatyana; he finds her reading a letter and crying; he falls at her feet*.]

XLII

She does not raise him from his knees, and without taking her eyes from him she does not remove her impassive hand from his greedy lips . . . What does she dream of now? The long silence draws on, and at last she says quietly: ‘Enough; get up. I must speak my mind to you with candour. Onegin, do you remember that hour when in the garden, in the alley, fate brought us together and I listened so humbly to your lecture? Today it is my turn.

XLIII

‘Onegin, I was younger then, more beautiful, it seems, and I loved you; and well, what did I find in your heart? What answer? Only severity. Is it not true? Was the love of a humble girl no novelty to you? And now − O God! − my blood grows cold as soon as I remember your chill glance and sermon . . . But I do not blame you: in that dreadful hour you acted nobly, you were right in your attitude to me: with all my soul I am grateful . . .

XLIV

‘Then − is it not true? − in the wilderness, far from empty Fame, you were not taken with me . . . Why then do you now pursue me? Why have you set your sights at me? Is it because I must now appear in high society, because I am rich and of high rank, because my husband was crippled in battles and because the court favours us for that? Is it not because my disgrace would now be noticed by everybody and might bring you tempting renown in society?

XLV

‘I weep . . . If you have not yet forgotten your Tanya, then know that if it were only within my power I would prefer the sting of your obloquy, your cold, severe discourse, to this offensive passion, to these letters and tears. Then at least you had pity on my childish reveries and at least you had respect for my years . . . But now! What has brought you to my feet? What a trifle! How, with you heart and intelligence, can you be the slave of petty emotion?

XLVI

‘But for me, Onegin, this splendour, the tinsel of this hateful life, my successes in the whirl of society, my fashionable house and my soirées − what is there in them for me? At this moment I would be glad to give all this shabby masquerade, all this glitter, noise and vapour for a shelf of books, for a wild garden, for our poor dwelling, for those places where I saw you for the first time, Onegin, and for the humble graveyard, where now my poor nanny lies beneath a cross and the shade of branches . . .

XLVII

‘Yet happiness was so possible, so close! But now my fate is already decided. I acted imprudently, perhaps: with tears and entreaties my mother implored me; for poor Tanya all lots were equal . . . I married. You must leave me, I beg you; I know that in your heart there is both pride and true honour. I love you (why dissemble?) but I am married to another; and I shall be true to him for ever.’

[*Chapter 8, Stanzas XLVIII-LI: Tatyana goes out of the room. Her husband enters. At this point Pushkin leaves Onegin and says farewell to his readers*.]

*Extracts from Onegin’s Journey*

[*Originally planned at Chapter 8, but later replaced by the present Chapter 8 and printed under the above title. Onegin travels from Moscow to Nizhny Novgorod and thence to the Caucasus and the Crimea. Pushkin recalls his own past*.]

And there, amidst the Tatars’ huts … what passion awoke in me! By what enchanting melancholy was my ardent breast constricted! But, O muse, forget the past!

Whatever feelings were concealed within me at that time − now they are no longer: they have passed or changed . . . Peace be unto you, emotions of bygone years! At that time I thought I needed wildernesses, the pearly crests of waves, and the sound of the sea, and rocks piled high, and the ‘ideal’ of a proud maiden, and nameless sufferings. Times change, dreams change: you have grown calm, high-flown reveries of my spring, and I have poured much water into my poetic goblet.

I need other pictures: I love a sandy hill-side, two rowan trees before a little cottage, a wicker gate, a broken fence, little grey clouds in the sky, heaps of straw in front of the threshing-floor − and a pond beneath the shade of thick willows where young ducks are free to swim at will; the balalaika and the drunken stamping of the *trepak* dance before the tavern’s threshold are what I now like. My ideal is now a housewife; my desires are peace and quiet, and *a bowl of soup and myself my own master*. [Russian saying.]

*Pushkin: Selected Verse*. With introduction and prose translations by John Fennell.

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