

EUGENE ONEGIN

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Act I, Scene 1: With her devoted servant Filippyevna, the widowed Madame Larina sits in the garden of her country estate. Her daughters, Olga and Tatiana, sing a love song that reminds the older women of days gone by. Peasants coming from the fields bring freshly cut hay for their mistress and celebrate the completion of the harvest with songs and dances. Olga taunts Tatiana for failing to enjoy the festivities. Pale and shy, Tatiana remains pensive and apart, wrapped in the fantasy of her beloved novels. As the peasants leave, the poet Lenski, Olga's suitor, and his worldly friend Eugene Onegin arrive. When Madame Larina and Filippyevna enter the house, the four young people mingle, awkwardly at first. Then Lenski pours forth his love to Olga. Onegin, strolling with Tatiana, asks if she does not tire of her bucolic existence. Visibly upset by the handsome stranger, the girl answers with difficulty. As night falls, the two couples go in for dinner.

Scene 2: In her bedroom, Tatiana persuades Filippyevna to speak of her first love and marriage. Filippyevna notices that the girl's mind is wandering and asks if she is ill. Tatiana declares she is in love and begs to be left alone. Resolved to reveal her passion to Onegin, Tatiana sits up the entire night and writes to him, full of fear and shame. She closes by pleading for his mercy and understanding. When day breaks, she gives the letter to Filippyevna for her grandson to deliver.

ACT I, Scene 3: As they work to pass the time, a group of women gathered in Madame Larina's garden sing about flirting with boys. When they leave, Tatiana hurries in, soon followed by Onegin, who asks that she hear him out. He admits he was touched by her letter but adds he would tire quickly of marriage. Though she has all the virtues he might wish in a wife, the most he can offer is a brother's love. He advises more emotional control, lest another man fail to respect her innocence. Crushed, Tatiana rushes away.

Act II, Scene 1: Some months later in Madame Larina's house, a party is under way in honor of Tatiana's name day. As young couples glide merrily across the floor, the older guests sit watching and gossiping. Onegin dances with Tatiana but clearly is bored with these country people and their provincial sensibilities. To get back at Lenski for dragging him there, he dances with Olga, who is attracted momentarily and responds to his advances. Onegin's game is interrupted by Triquet, an elderly French tutor, who serenades Tatiana with a song he has written in her honor. When dancing resumes, Lenski jealously confronts Onegin. The merrymaking stops. Madame Larina implores them not to quarrel in her house; Lenski is remorseful but cannot contain his rage at Onegin, who accepts his challenge to a duel.

Scene 2: At dawn on the banks of a stream near an old mill, Lenski and his second, Zaretski, await Onegin. Reflecting on the folly of his brief life, and saddened by its now unalterable course, the young poet imagines his beloved Olga visiting his grave. Onegin arrives with his second. The two men, standing apart and without looking at one another, sing a canon in which each admits privately that they have acted rashly -- that they would rather laugh together than fight -- but pride and impulsiveness prevail. The duel is fought and Lenski is fatally shot.

Act III, Scene 1: Several years later, in a hall of a palace in St. Petersburg, a magnificent ball is in progress. Onegin has traveled widely, seeking to alleviate his boredom and give his life meaning. With bitterness he says his search has led him tonight to a monotonous social event. Suddenly he recognizes Tatiana across the room, but she is no longer the girl he knew: sumptuously gowned, she walks with poise and dignity. Questioning his cousin, Prince Gremin, he learns that Tatiana is now Gremin's wife. The older man tells of his marriage two years earlier and describes Tatiana as his life's salvation. When Gremin introduces Onegin, Tatiana maintains her

composure, excusing herself after a few words of polite conversation. Captivated, Onegin dashes from the palace.

Scene 2: In the Gremins' town house, Tatiana receives Onegin in answer to an impassioned letter he has written. When he falls at her feet, she remains controlled. Now that she has a rich and noble husband, she asks, does he desire her position or her shame? She recalls the days when they might have been happy; now he can bring her only grief. As Onegin's pleas grow more ardent Tatiana prays for courage. Suddenly finding strength, she rushes out, leaving the distraught Onegin behind.