

EUGENE ONEGIN

ACT I: Autumn. The Larin estate in the Russian countryside. Madame Larina makes preserves and listens to her daughters Tatyana and Olga. As the girls sing of young love lost, Larina and the old nurse Filipyevna remember their own youth. A group of peasants carries in a decorated sheaf of grain, and they sing and dance for Larina. Olga, wishing to join their merriment, teases Tatyana for being bookish and misty. Then Larina enters and likewise asks Tatyana the reason for her pallor. Olga in turn teases both her mother and sister, for she sees the approach of her fiancé, the poet Vladimir Lensky. Tatyana, learning that his elegant friend Eugene Onegin is with him, tries to flee in embarrassment.

Lensky arrives with Onegin. Tatyana falls instantly for the handsome stranger, who derides Lensky in private for having chosen the less interesting sister. Lensky and Olga commiserate having spent a whole day apart.

At bedtime, Tatyana can't sleep. She asks the nurse to tell her stories of the olden days — then confesses she's fallen in love. She spends the night writing to Onegin; and in the morning she asks Filipyevna to have her letter delivered.

Onegin finds Tatyana in the garden. He's read her letter and wishes to reciprocate her candor — for he cannot reciprocate her feeling. She is a treasure, but he's simply not the marrying kind. He tells her she'd do well to restrain her artless ardor, lest another take advantage of her. His sermon ended, he offers her his arm and leads her inside.

ACT II: The Larin estate. Onegin, whom Lensky has persuaded to attend Tatyana's name-day party, finds himself seated directly across from her. She is mortified. He is restless. After the toasts he decides to punish Lensky for subjecting him to such a tiresome gathering and sweeps Olga off to dance for the rest of the evening.

The jealous Lensky quarrels with Olga, then with Onegin. To everyone's dismay, he demands satisfaction for his offense. The party dissolves.

At dawn the two friends meet as foes. While Lensky waits for Onegin, he sings of poetry and of Olga. Regretting the folly of their prideful challenge, they still proceed for honor's sake. Lensky is killed.

ACT III: Saint Petersburg, several years later. Returned from long travels, ridden with guilt for the death of his friend, Onegin attends one of the parties he has always detested, this one at the home of Prince Gremin. He wonders aloud about the elegant young woman who seems to hold the room in sway, and Gremin proudly presents his adored wife — Tatyana Larina. She greets Onegin serenely.

This time it is Onegin who pours out his love in a letter to Tatyana. He calls on her and begs her to run away with him. And this time hers is the sermon. She loves him as she did that day in the garden; but she is resolved to remain in this house with her husband. She flees the room, leaving Onegin alone in despair.