

EUGENE ONEGIN

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Synopsis

ACT ONE

In the garden of her country house Mrs. Larina gossips with the old nurse, Filippevna, as she listens to her daughters, Tatyana and Olga, singing a sentimental duet inside the house. A group of peasants approaches, bringing in the last of the harvest. They perform a choral dance for Mrs. Larina, who orders them be given wine. Meanwhile Tatyana and Olga have entered. Olga draws attention to Tatyana's pallor; she herself, she observes, is always carefree. But Tatyana attributes her own condition to the romantic novel she is reading. Suddenly their neighbor, Lensky, and his friend, Onegin, are seen approaching. Mrs. Larina receives them, then withdraws. The young people join in a quartet, Onegin comparing Olga unfavorably with Tatyana, Tatyana seeing in Onegin the man fate has chosen for her. Onegin comments patronizingly to Tatyana on the limitations of the world she inhabits; then they retire, leaving Lensky to voice his happiness with Olga. Mrs. Larina and the nurse return to invite everybody indoors, and notice that Onegin and Tatyana are missing. As the couple re-enter, the nurse sees that Tatyana is under Onegin's spell.

As Filippevna helps prepare Tatyana for bed, she asks about the nurse's past, then suddenly confesses she is in love. Requesting writing material and dismissing the nurse, she writes to Onegin declaring her love. By the time she has finished it is morning, and she begs the nurse to send her grandson to deliver the letter.

A few days later Onegin returns to give his reply; Tatyana flees into the garden, where he rejects her confession with appalling, if unintended, condescension, telling her, in effect, to grow up. Tatyana is humiliated.

ACT TWO

Mrs. Larina is holding a name-day party for Tatyana. A number of military men are present, as well as Lensky and Onegin. The latter is bored with the occasion, annoyed with Lensky for having brought him, and to get his revenge flirts with Olga by dancing with her. Olga abets him. Triquet, a Frenchman, sings some couplets he has written in Tatyana's honor, to her great embarrassment. During the following mazurka Onegin continues his flirtation with Olga; subsequently the two men exchange words, Lensky becoming increasingly heated until he loses his self-control and denounced Onegin. The guests have to separate them. Lensky rushes out, bidding farewell for ever to Olga, who faints.

The next morning on a riverbank Lensky and his second, Zaretsky, are awaiting Onegin. Lensky sings of his love for Olga. Onegin arrives late, bringing his valet, Guillot, as his second. Lensky and Onegin reflect separately on the situation in which they are caught. Preparations for the duel are completed; Onegin fires and Lensky falls dead. Onegin is horrified at what he has done.

ACT THREE

In a splendid St. Petersburg mansion Onegin is watching other guests dance a polonaise. After the duel he had left the area and some years have passed, but he remains troubled by what he has done, and bored with the society he finds himself in. An écossaise is danced; the arrival of Princess Gremina is announced. When she enters on her elderly husband's arm Onegin recognizes Tatyana. Prince Gremin tells Onegin of his love for Tatyana, then introduces his wife to him. Tatyana cuts short the meeting by pleading fatigue, and she and Gremin leave. Onegin confesses his love for Tatyana and leaves as the écossaise is resumed.

The last encounter between Onegin and Tatyana takes place at her home. She enters distraught, holding the most recent of his letters. Onegin rushes in and falls on his knees. She reminds him how he had rejected her, and asks bitterly whether it is her new status that has induced Onegin to lay siege to her now. She reflects how close happiness had once been for both of them, but says firmly she will remain faithful to her husband. Telling him to go, she confesses she still loves him. He embraces her, but she orders him out. In despair he leaves.