

ACT I

Scene 1: Madame Larina's Garden

Madame Larina, Olga and the nurse are finishing the party dresses and gossiping about Tatiana's upcoming birthday festivities. Madame Larina speculates on the future and reminisces about her own lost beauty and youth.

Lensky, a young poet engaged to Olga, arrives with a friend from St. Petersburg. He introduces Onegin, who, bored with the city, has come to see if the country can offer him any distraction. Tatiana, full of youthful and romantic fantasies, falls in love with the elegant stranger, so different from the country people she knows. Onegin, on the other hand, sees in Tatiana only a naive country girl who reads too many romantic novels.

Scene 2: Tatiana's Bedroom

Tatiana, her imagination aflame with impetuous first-love, dreams of Onegin and writes him a passionate love-letter, which she gives to her nurse to deliver.

Intermission

ACT II

Scene 1: Tatiana's Birthday

The provincial gentry have come to celebrate Tatiana's birthday. They gossip about Lensky's infatuation with Olga and whisper prophecies of a dawning romance between Tatiana and the newcomer. Onegin finds the company boring. Stifling his yawns, he finds it difficult to be civil to them; furthermore he is irritated by Tatiana's letter which he regards merely as an outburst of adolescent love. In a quiet moment he seeks out Tatiana and, telling her that he cannot love her, tears up the letter. Tatiana's distress, instead of awakening pity, merely increases his irritation.

Prince Gremin, a distant relation, appears. He is in love with Tatiana and Madame Larina hopes for a brilliant match but Tatiana, troubled with her own heart, hardly notices her kindly, older relation.

Onegin, in his boredom, decides to provoke Lensky by flirting with Olga who light-heartedly joins in his teasing. But Lensky takes the matter with passionate seriousness. He challenges Onegin to a duel.

Scene 2: The Duel

Tatiana and Olga try to reason with Lensky but his high romantic ideals are shattered by the betrayal of his friend and the fickleness of his beloved; he insists that the duel take place. Onegin kills his friend and for the first time his cold heart is moved by the horror of his deed. Tatiana realizes that her love was an illusion and that Onegin is self-centred and empty.

Intermission

ACT III

Scene 1: St. Petersburg

Onegin, having travelled the world for many years in an attempt to escape his own futility, returns to St. Petersburg where he is received at a ball in the palace of Prince Gremin. Gremin has recently married and Onegin is astonished to recognize in the stately and elegant young princess, Tatiana, the uninteresting little country girl whom he once turned away. The enormity of his mistake and loss engulfs him. His life now seems even more aimless and empty.

Scene 2: Tatiana's Boudoir

Tatiana reads a letter from Onegin, which reveals his love. Suddenly he stands before her impatient to know her answer. Tatiana sorrowfully tells him that although she still feels her passionate girlhood love for him, she is now a woman and she could never find happiness with him or have respect for him. She orders him to leave her forever.