

## *Onegin's Demon* – the Musical Synopsis

*"While filled with vanity, he was afflicted by a pride even more intense, one which made him admit with identical indifference both good and evil actions — the result of his perhaps-false feelings of superiority."  
Epigraph to Alexander Pushkin's novel in verse "Eugene Onegin"*

Two French nurses are pushing along a wheelchair-bound old man – it is Eugene Onegin, who has ended up in a mental hospital to live out his final years. He is talking nonsense, mumbling that he is waiting for a letter of some sort, that Tatiana loves him. The nurses give him a shot, and the old man, dozing off, hears in his sleep the voice of his second in the duel – the duel which, once upon a time, destroyed his life and the life of his beloved. Onegin awakens in horror, but he is denied peace even when conscious – a Demon appears before him. The old man charges the Demon with his troubles; the Demon is to blame that Onegin's life has turned out this way! But still, he ventures to ask, *why* this way? In answer, the Demon opens the curtains, and behind them we see characters from Onegin's youth. A young Eugene himself is visible among the other citizens of Petersburg. Let the old man have a look at himself, at what he's done, how he's lived, and find an answer to his own question – why did his life turn out this way?

...The young Onegin is interested only in the beauties of high society. He is an insidious flirt, dabbling in others' feelings, and the Demon agrees to teach him "the science of tender passion" – a field in which love is wholly unnecessary. And even when Onegin falls into debt, facing imprisonment, the Demon offers his aid: Onegin receives a will written by his dying uncle. Onegin's creditors offer him some relief, and he travels to see his uncle at his country estate.

Tatiana Larina lives a dreamy and unhurried life in the country with her family. She is a romantic at heart, and pines for premonitions of the kind of love she's only read about. She lives with her mother, nurse, her flighty, simple sister Olga, and Olga's fiancé, the poet Vladimir Lenskiy.

Tatiana's family calls her into the fields to celebrate together with the villagers. While the girls are fortune-telling to figure out their fates and future husbands, the passing Onegin runs into Tatiana. The handsome man from the capital captures the heart of the innocent dreamer at first sight.

Arriving at his estate, Onegin drags his feet, reluctant to take care of his sick uncle, and the Demon obligingly kills Onegin's uncle with his cursed breath.

Meanwhile, Tatiana is dreaming of Onegin – during the festival of Ivan Kupala, amid the flickering fires and girls playing in the water, she hears his name: "Onegin..."

Onegin is characteristically cynical, and, hearing Lenskiy's lyrical confession of love before Olga, he instructs the poet: "The less we love our women, the more attractive they find us."

The Demon is nearby; using Lenskiy, he procures Onegin an invitation to Tatiana's birthday.

Tatiana ventures to Onegin's estate under the guise of returning a book she borrowed from his uncle. Onegin is gallant and seductive, leaving Tatiana bashful, but no sooner are they alone together than her passion ignites within her. In her dreams she is already dancing with him – unsuspecting that the Demon himself is her partner.

The Demon likes this girl more and more – she is natural and guileless, her illusions of love are a far cry from reality, and she could be the ideal prey for his pupil, Onegin.

Tatiana's mother, nurse, and sister drag her from her vortex of dreams; hastening to the bathhouse, they begin to read fortunes. Her mother is eager to find out when and whom her daughters will marry. Their nurse reads the signs – both girls will marry military officers. Olga is

incensed: she will of course marry Lenskiy! And Tatiana, agitated by the unwanted perspective, decides to confess her feelings to Onegin. She writes a letter, full of sincerity and passion: "whether fated by higher council, or the universe's will – I am yours."

At night she dreams of horrors – she sees the Demon, and he is surrounded by evil spirits. Onegin appears among the demons, dagger in hand, and strikes Lenskiy with a fatal blow!

Tatiana wakes up in shock. Suspecting nothing, her mother, nurse, and sister greet her with cries of "happy birthday," present her with a new dress, and wish her happiness. Her mother bustles about, checking that the festivities are in order; guests arrive with presents, the French Mousier Triquet sings a joking aria celebrating the birthday girl – but Tatiana is waiting only for Onegin.

When he, at last, arrives, Tatiana flees to the garden in her apprehension. Onegin follows her, remarks that he read her letter, and answers her coldly: "Learn to control yourself; inexperience leads to misfortune." The Demon tries to unite them, but Onegin tears himself away. No, love and marriage is not for him!

At this, the Demon is beside himself with rage. Onegin returns to the guests at the ball, and the Demon pushes Olga to him – she dances with him and falls under his spell. Lenskiy is irately jealous at the perceived seduction of his beloved, and challenges Onegin to a duel.

The Demon is pleased – Onegin deserved this, with his attempts to escape from under the Demon's control. But the nurse, in this moment, begins singing a song about a little demon, and the Demon recognizes himself in these words. He looks around at the surrounding people and sympathy for them stirs in his heart...

The Demon is ready to put a stop to the duel; he takes the glove from Lenskiy's hand. Onegin is also ready to make peace – he didn't have any untoward intentions with Olga. But Lenskiy cannot be calmed; he is itching to defend himself against this perceived slight. Hearing of the duel, Tatiana prays to God: let Onegin be saved, in return she is ready to accept that her love will be forever unrequited....

The duel commences. The seconds announce the rules, and the duelers approach one another. A shot is fired! Lenskiy falls, cut down by a bullet, at the very moment that Tatiana is hurrying to them, ready to stop the duel. But Onegin has no time for her – he throws himself at his slaughtered friend in desperation, he can't process what just happened...

Old Onegin is watching this scene as well – only now does he understand that he was a murderer.

Tatiana tells her sister, mother, and nurse that Onegin killed Lenskiy. The Larin family is shocked and dismayed...

Only half a year later does Tatiana find the strength to visit the empty Onegin estate. Onegin himself has gone abroad after the duel. Olga has married a military officer. Their nurse has passed away.

Tatiana wanders about his study, trying to understand with whom she fell in love – was he an angel or a demon? The Demon beguiles Tatiana, sending her visions from the past – first her meeting with Onegin, then the duel, then her nurse's prediction that Tatiana will marry a military officer. A military officer? "No!" cries Tatiana, retreating. But – yes. A military officer.

And she marries General Gremin, in Moscow...

Onegin returns to the capital. He meets Tatiana at a ball, and almost does not recognize the girl he once turned away in the stately, dignified lady standing before him. He can't take his eyes off her.

Onegin only now understands the depth of his love for her. He writes her countless letters, but every last one goes unanswered. Resolving himself, he goes to Tatiana's home to ask for her

love. Tatiana answers that she loves him as before, but she asks him to leave her in peace: she has given herself to another and will remain faithful.

Onegin is devastated. Gremin enters, ready to lead Tatiana away – but it is as though the Demon freezes the whole image. He looks at Onegin in his wheelchair – does he now understand why his life turned out this way?

The old man is praying, begging God's forgiveness. This prayer frees Tatiana from the Demon's power at last. She appears, seemingly overcoming the restraints of space and time, and approaches the old man. Her prayer mingles with his – she forgives Onegin, and prays to God to forgive and release him. The old man stands up from his wheelchair, finding this new strength for the first time, and walks out in an emerging ray of light. He is dying, at long last gaining freedom and peace for his tortured soul.