THE COLLECTED TALES OF NIKOLAI GOGOL

Translated and Annotated by

RICHARD PEVEAR

and

LARISSA VOLOKHONSKY

VINTAGE CLASSICS

Vintage Books / A Division of Random House, Inc. / New York
There is nothing better than Nevsky Prospect, at least not in Petersburg; for there it is everything. What does this street—the beauty of our capital—not shine with! I know that not one of its pale and clerical inhabitants would trade Nevsky Prospect for anything in the world. Not only the one who is twenty-five years old, has an excellent mustache and a frock coat of an amazing cut, but even the one who has white hair sprouting on his chin and a head as smooth as a silver dish, he, too, is enchanted with Nevsky Prospect. And the ladies! Oh, the ladies find Nevsky Prospect still more pleasing. And who does not find it pleasing? The moment you enter Nevsky Prospect, it already smells of nothing but festivity. Though you may have some sort of necessary, indispensable business, once you enter it you are sure to forget all business. Here is the only place where people do not go out of necessity, where they are not driven by the need and mercantile interest that envelop the whole of Petersburg. A man met on Nevsky Prospect seems less of an egoist than on Morskaya, Gorokhovaya, Liteiny, Meshchanskaya, and other streets, where greed, self-interest, and necessity show on those walking or flying by in carriages and droskies. Nevsky Prospect is the universal communication of Petersburg. Here the inhabitant of the Petersburg or Vyborg side who has not visited his
friend in Peski or the Moscow Gate for several years can be absolutely certain of meeting him. No directory or inquiry office will provide such reliable information as Nevsky Prospect. All-powerful Nevsky Prospect! The only entertainment for a poor man at the Petersburg feast! How clean-swept are its sidewalks, and, God, how many feet have left their traces on it! The clumsy, dirty boot of the retired soldier, under the weight of which the very granite seems to crack, and the miniature shoe, light as smoke, of a young lady, who turns her head to the glittering shop windows as a sunflower turns toward the sun, and the clanking sword of a hope-filled sub-lieutenant that leaves a sharp scratch on it—everything wreaks upon it the power of strength or the power of weakness. What a quick phantasmagoria is performed on it in the course of a single day! How many changes it undergoes in the course of a single day and night!

Let us begin from earliest morning, when the whole of Petersburg smells of hot, freshly baked bread and is filled with old women in tattered dresses and coats carrying out their raids on churches and compassionate passers-by. At that time Nevsky Prospect is empty: the stout shop owners and their salesclerks are still asleep in their Holland nightshirts or are soaping their noble cheeks, and drinking coffee; beggars gather near the pastry shops, where a sleepy Ganymede, who yesterday was flying about with chocolate like a fly, crawls out, tieless, broom in hand, and tosses them stale cakes and leftovers. Down the streets trudge useful folk: Russian muzhiks pass by occasionally, hurrying to work, their boots crusted with lime that even the Ekaterininsky Cañal, famous for its cleanliness, would be unable to wash off. At that time it is usually unfitting for ladies to go about, because the Russian people like to express themselves in such sharp terms as they would probably not hear even in the theater. An occasional sleepy clerk will plod by, briefcase under his arm, if he has to pass Nevsky Prospect on his way to the office. One may say decidedly that at that time, that is, until twelve o'clock, Nevsky Prospect does not constitute anyone's goal, it serves only as a means: it gradually fills with people who have their own occupations, their own cares, their own vexations, and do not think about it at all. The Russian muzhik talks about his ten coppers or seven groats, the old men and women wave their arms and talk to themselves, sometimes with quite expressive gestures, but no one listens to them or laughs at them, except perhaps some urchins in hempen blouses, with empty bottles or repaired shoes in their hands, racing along Nevsky Prospect like lightning. At that time, however you may be dressed, even if you have a peaked cap on your head instead of a hat, even if your collar sticks out too far over your tie—no one will notice it.

At twelve o'clock Nevsky Prospect is invaded by tutors of all nations with their charges in cambric collars. English Joneses and French Coques walk hand in hand with the charges entrusted to their parental care and, with proper gravity, explain to them that the signs over the shops are made so that by means of them one may learn what is to be found inside the shop. Governesses, pale misses and rosy Slavs, walk majestically behind their light, fidgety girls, telling them to raise their shoulders a bit higher and straighten their backs; in short, at this time Nevsky Prospect is a pedagogical Nevsky Prospect. But the closer it comes to two o'clock, the fewer in number are the tutors; pedagogues, and children: they are finally supplanted by their loving progenitors, who hold on their arms their bright, multicolored, weak-nerved companions. Gradually their company is joined by all those who have finished their rather important domestic business, to wit: discussing the weather with their doctor, as well as a little pimple that has popped out on the nose, informing themselves about the health of their horses and children, who incidentally show great promise, reading an advertisement in the newspaper and an important article on arrivals and departures, and, finally, drinking a cup of coffee or tea; and these are joined by those on whom an enviable fate has bestowed the blessed title of official for special missions. And these are joined by those who serve in the foreign office and are distinguished by the nobility of their occupations and habits. God, how beautiful some posts and jobs are! how they elevate and delight the soul! but, alas! I am not in the civil service and am denied the pleasure of behold-
ing my superiors’ refined treatment of me. Whatever you meet on Nevsky Prospect is all filled with decency: men in long frock coats, their hands in their pockets, ladies in pink, white, and pale blue satin redingotes and hats. Here you will meet singular side-whiskers, tucked with extraordinary and amazing art under the necktie, velvety whiskers, satiny whiskers, black as sable or coal, but, alas, belonging only to the foreign office. Providence has denied black side-whiskers to those serving in other departments; they, however great the unpleasantness, must wear red ones. Here you will meet wondrous mustaches, which no pen or brush is able to portray; mustaches to which the better part of a lifetime is devoted—object of long vigils by day and by night; mustaches on which exquisite perfumes and scents have been poured, and which have been anointed with all the most rare and precious sorts of pomades, mustaches which are wrapped overnight in fine vellum, mustaches which are subject to the most touching affection of their possessors and are the envy of passers-by. A thousand kinds of hats, dresses, shawls—gay-colored, ethereal, for which their owners’ affection sometimes lasts a whole two days—will bedazzle anyone on Nevsky Prospect. It seems as if a whole sea of butterflies has suddenly arisen from the stems, their brilliant cloud undulating over the black beedes of the male sex. Here you will meet such waists as you have never seen in dreams: slender, narrow waists, no whit thicker than a bottle’s neck, on meeting which you deferentially step aside, lest you somehow imprudently nudge them with your discourteous elbow; timidity and fear will come over your heart, lest somehow from your imprudent breath the loveliest work of nature and art should be broken. And what ladies’ sleeves you meet on Nevsky Prospect! Ah, how lovely! They somewhat resemble two airborne balloons, so that the lady would suddenly rise into the air if the man were not holding her; for raising a lady into the air is as easy and pleasant as bringing a champagne-filled glass to your lips. Nowhere do people exchange bows when they meet with such nobility and nonchalance as on Nevsky Prospect. Here you will meet that singular smile, the height of art, which may cause you sometimes to melt with pleasure, sometimes suddenly to see yourself lower than grass, and you hang your head, sometimes to feel yourself higher than the Admi-
ralty spire, and you raise it. Here you will meet people discussing a concert or the weather with an extraordinary nobility and sense of their own dignity. You will meet thousands of inconceivable characters and phenomena. O Creator! what strange characters one meets on Nevsky Prospect! There is a host of such people as, when they meet you, unfailingly look at your shoes, and, when you pass by, turn to look at your coattails. To this day I fail to understand why this happens. At first I thought they were shoemakers, but no, that is not the case: for the most part they serve in various departments, many are perfectly well able to write an official letter from one institution to another; or else they are people occupied with strolling, reading newspapers in pastry shops—in short, they are nearly all decent people. At this blessed time, from two to three in the afternoon, when Nevsky Prospect may be called a capital in motion, there takes place a major exhibition of the best products of humanity. One displays a foppish frock coat with the best of beavers, another a wonderful Greek nose, the third is the bearer of superb side-whiskers, the fourth of a pair of pretty eyes and an astonishing little hat, the fifth of a signet ring with a talisman on his smart pinkie, the sixth of a little foot in a charming bootie, the seventh of an astonishment-arousing necktie, the eighth of an amazement-inspiring mustache. But it strikes three and the exhibition is over, the crowd thins out . . . At three, a new change. Suddenly spring comes to Nevsky Prospect: it gets all covered with clerks in green uniforms. Hungry titular, court, and other councillors try with all their might to put on speed. Young collegiate registrars, provincial and collegiate secretaries hasten to make use of their time and take a stroll on Nevsky Prospect with a bearing which suggests that they have not spent six hours sitting in an office. But the old collegiate secretaries, titular and court councillors walk briskly, their heads bowed: they cannot be bothered with gazing at passers-by; they are not yet completely torn away from their cares; there is a jumble in their heads and a whole archive of started and unfinished cases; for a long time, instead of
a signboard, they see a carton of papers or the plump face of the office chief.

From four o'clock on, Nevsky Prospect is empty, and you will hardly meet even one clerk on it. Some seamstress from a shop runs across Nevsky Prospect, a box in her hands; some pathetic victim of a humanitarian lawyer, reduced to begging in a frieze overcoat; some visiting eccentric for whom all hours are the same; some long, tall Englishwoman with a reticule and a book in her hands; some company agent, a Russian in a half-cotton frock coat gathered at the back, with a narrow little beard, who lives all his life in a slapdash way, in whom everything moves—back and arms and legs and head—as he goes deferentially down the sidewalk; now and then a lowly artisan; you will not meet anyone else on Nevsky Prospect.

But as soon as dusk falls on the houses and streets, and the sentry, covering himself with a bast mat, climbs the ladder to light the lantern, and prints which do not dare show themselves in the daytime peek out of the low shop windows, then Nevsky Prospect again comes to life and begins to stir. Then comes that mysterious time when lamps endow everything with some enticing, wondrous light. You will meet a great many young men, mostly bachelors, in warm frock coats or overcoats. At that time there is a sense of some goal, or, better, of something resembling a goal, something extremely unaccountable; everyone's steps quicken and generally become very uneven. Long shadows flit over the walls and pavement, their heads all but reaching the Police Bridge. Young collegiate registrars, provincial and collegiate secretaries stroll about for a very long time; but the old collegiate registrars, titular councillors, and court councillors mostly stay home, either because they are married folk or because their food is very well prepared by their live-in German cooks. Here you will meet the respectable old men who strolled along Nevsky Prospect with such gravity and such amazing nobility at two o'clock. You will see them running just like young collegiate registrars to peek under the hat of a lady spotted from far off, whose thick lips and rouge-plastered cheeks are liked by so many strollers, most of all by the salesclerks, company agents, shopkeepers, always dressed in German frock coats, who go strolling in whole crowds and usually arm in arm.

"Wait!" Lieutenant Pirogov cried at that moment, tugging at the young man in the tailcoat and cloak who was walking beside him. "Did you see?"

"I did, a wonderful girl, a perfect Perugino Bianca."

"But who are you talking about?"

"Her, the dark-haired one. And what eyes! God, what eyes! The bearing, and the figure, and the shape of the face—sheer wonders!"

"I'm talking about the blonde who walked after her in the same direction. Why don't you go after the brunette, since you liked her so much?"

"Oh, how could I?" the young man in the tailcoat exclaimed, blushing. "As if she were the kind to walk about Nevsky Prospect in the evening. She must be a very noble lady," he went on, sighing, "her cloak alone is worth about eighty roubles!"

"Simpleton!" cried Pirogov, pushing him toward where the bright cloak was fluttering. "Go on, ninny, you'll miss her! And I'll follow the blonde."

The two friends parted.

"We know you all," Pirogov thought with a self-satisfied and self-confident smile, sure that no beauty would be able to resist him.

The young man in the tailcoat and cloak went with timid and tremulous steps toward where, some distance away, the colorful cloak was fluttering, now bathed in bright light as it approached a street lamp, now instantly covered in darkness as it left it behind. His heart was pounding, and he unwittingly quickened his pace. He did not even dare dream of gaining any right to the attention of the beauty flying off into the distance, still less to admit such a black thought as Lieutenant Pirogov had hinted at; he merely wished to see the house, to make note of where this lovely being dwelt, who seemed to have flown down from heaven right onto Nevsky Prospect and would surely fly off again no one knew.
where. He flew along so quickly that he was constantly pushing staid gentlemen with gray side-whiskers off the sidewalk. This young man belonged to a class which represents quite a strange phenomenon among us and belongs as much to the citizens of Petersburg as a person who comes to us in a dream belongs to the real world. This exceptional group is highly unusual in a city in which everyone is either an official, a shopkeeper, or a German artisan. He was an artist. A strange phenomenon, is it not? A Petersburg artist! An artist in the land of snows, an artist in the land of Finns, where everything is wet, smooth, flat, pale, gray, misty. These artists do not in the least resemble Italian artists—proud, ardent, like Italy and its sky; on the contrary, they are for the most part kind and meek people, bashful, lighthearted, with a quiet love for their art, who drink tea with their two friends in a small room, who talk modestly about their favorite subject and are totally indifferent to all superfluity. He is forever inviting some old beggar woman to his place and making her sit for a good six hours, so as to transfer her pathetic, insensible expression to canvas. He paints his room in perspective, with all sorts of artistic clutter appearing in it: plaster arms and legs turned coffee-colored with time and dust, broken easels, an overturned palette, a friend playing a guitar, paint-stained walls, and an open window through which comes a glimpse of the pale Neva and poor fishermen in red shirts. They paint almost everything in dull, grayish colors—the indelible imprint of the north. Yet, for all that, they apply themselves with genuine pleasure to their work. They often nurture a genuine talent in themselves, and if the fresh air of Italy were to breathe on them, it would surely develop as freely, broadly, and vividly as a plant that has finally been brought outside into the open air. They are generally very timid: a star or a thick epaulette throws them into such confusion that they unwittingly lower the price of their works. They like to play the dandy on occasion, but this dandyism always stands out in them and looks something like a patch. You will sometimes meet an excellent tailcoat on them and a dirty cloak, an expensive velvet waistcoat and a frock coat all covered with paint. Just as you will sometimes meet on their unfinished landscape a nymph painted upside down, which the artist, finding no other place, sketched on the dirty background of an old work he once delighted in painting. He never looks you straight in the eye; or if he does, it is somehow vaguely, indefinitely; he does not pierce you with the hawk's eye of an observer or the falcon's gaze of a cavalry officer. The reason for that is that he sees, at one and the same time, both your features and those of some plaster Hercules standing in his room, or else he imagines a painting of his own that he still means to produce. That is why his responses are often incoherent, not to the point, and the muddle of things in his head increases his timidity all the more. To this kind belonged the young man we have described, the artist Piskarev, shy, timid, but bearing in his soul sparks of feeling ready on the right occasion to burst into flame. With a secret tremor he hastened after his object, who had struck him so strongly, and he himself seemed to marvel at his own boldness. The unknown being to whom his eyes, thoughts, and feelings clung so, suddenly turned her head and looked at him. God, what divine features! The loveliest brow, of a dazzling whiteness, was overshadowed by beautiful, agate-like hair. They were curly, those wondrous tresses, some of which fell from under her hat onto her cheek, touched with a fine, fresh color called up by the cool of the evening. Her lips were locked on a whole swarm of the loveliest reveries. All that remains of childhood, that comes of dreaming and quiet inspiration by a lighted lamp—all this seemed to join and merge and be reflected in her harmonious lips. She glanced at Piskarev, and his heart fluttered at this glance; it was a stern glance, a sense of indignation showed on her face at the sight of such insolent pursuit; but on this beautiful face wrath itself was bewitching. Overcome with shame and timidity, he stopped, his eyes cast down; but how lose this divinity without even discovering to what holy place she had descended for a visit? Such thoughts came into the young dreamer's head, and he resolved on pursuit. But to do it without being noticed, he hung back, glanced around nonchalantly and studied the shop signs, while not losing sight of a single step the unknown lady took. Passers-by began to flit by more rarely, the street grew quieter; the beauty looked back, and it seemed to him that a slight smile flashed on her lips. He trembled all over and did not believe
his eyes. No, it was the street lamp with its deceitful light showing the semblance of a smile on her face; no, it was his own dreams laughing at him. But it stopped the breath in his breast, everything in him turned into a vague trembling, all his senses were aflame, and everything before him was covered with a sort of mist. The sidewalk rushed under him, carriages with galloping horses seemed motionless, the bridge was stretched out and breaking on its arch, the house stood roof down, the sentry box came tumbling to meet him, and the sentry's halberd, along with the golden words of a shop sign and its painted scissors, seemed to flash right on his eyelashes. And all this was accomplished by one glance, by one turn of a pretty head. Unhearing, unseeing, unheeding, he raced in the light tracks of beautiful feet, himself trying to moderate the quickness of his pace, which flew in time with his heart. Sometimes doubt would come over him: Was the expression of her face indeed so benevolent?—and then he would stop for a moment, but the beating of his heart, the invincible force and agitation of all his feelings, urged him onward. He did not even notice how a four-story house suddenly rose before him, how all four rows of windows, shining with light, glared at him at once, and the railings of the entrance opposed him with their iron thrust. He saw the unknown woman fly up the steps, look back, put her finger to her lips, and motion for him to follow her. His knees trembled—his senses and thoughts were on fire; a lightning flash of joy pierced his heart with an unbearable point! No, it was no dream! God so much happiness in one instant! such a wonderful life of two minutes!

But was it not a dream? Could it be that she, for one of whose heavenly glances he would be ready to give his whole life, to approach whose dwelling he already counted an inexplicable bliss—could it be that she had just shown him such favor and attention? He flew up the stairs. He did not feel any earthly thought; he was not heated with the flame of earthly passion, no, at that moment he was pure and chaste, like a virginal youth, still breathing the vague spiritual need for love. And that which in a depraved man would arouse bold thoughts, that same thing, on the contrary, made him still more radiant. This trust which a weak, beautiful being had shown in him, this trust imposed on him a vow of chivalric rigor, a vow slavishly to fulfill all her commands. He wished only for her commands to be all the more difficult and unrealizable, so that he could fly to overcome them with the greater effort! He had no doubt that some secret and at the same time important reason had made the unknown woman entrust herself to him, that some important services would surely be required of him, and he already felt in himself enough strength and resolve for everything.

The stairway wound around, and his quick dreams wound with it. “Watch your step!” a voice sounded like a harp and filled his veins with fresh trembling. On the dark height of the fourth floor, the unknown lady knocked at the door—it opened, and they went in together. A rather good-looking woman met them with a candle in her hand, but she gave Piskarev such a strange and insolent look that he involuntarily lowered his eyes. They went into the room. Three female figures in different corners appeared before his eyes. One was laying out cards; the second sat at a piano and with two fingers picked out some pathetic semblance of an old polonaise; the third sat before a mirror combing her long hair and never thought of interrupting her toilette at the entrance of a stranger. Some unpleasant disorder, to be met with only in the carefree room of a bachelor, reigned over all. The rather nice furniture was covered with dust; a spider had spread its web over a molded cornice; in the half-open doorway to another room, a spurred boot gleamed and the red piping of a uniform flitted: a loud male voice and female laughter rang out unrestrainedly.

God, where had he come! At first he refused to believe it and began studying the objects that filled the room more attentively; but the bare walls and curtainless windows showed no presence of a thoughtful housewife; the worn faces of these pathetic creatures, one of whom sat down almost in front of his nose and gazed at him as calmly as at a spot on someone's clothes—all this convinced him that he had come to one of those revolting havens where pathetic depravity makes its abode, born of tawdry education and the terrible populousness of the capital. One of those havens where man blasphemously crushes and derides all the pure and
holy that adorns life, where woman, the beauty of the world, the crown of creation, turns into some strange, ambiguous being, where, along with purity of soul, she loses everything feminine and repulsively adopts all the mannerisms and insolence of a man, and ceases to be that weak, that beautiful being so different from us. Piskarev looked her up and down with astonished wishing to make sure that it was she who had so bewitched him and swept him away on Nevsky Prospect. But she stood before him as beautiful as ever; her hair was as wonderful; her eyes seemed as heavenly. She was fresh; she was just seventeen; one could see that terrible depravity had overtaken her only recently; it had not yet dared to touch her cheeks, they were fresh and lightly tinted by a fine blush—she was beautiful.

He stood motionless before her and was about to fall into the same simple-hearted reverie as earlier. But the beauty got bored with such long silence and smiled significantly, looking straight into his eyes. Yet this smile was filled with some pathetic insolence; it was as strange and as suited to her face as an expression of piety is to the mug of a bribe-taker, or an accountant's ledger to a poet. He shuddered. She opened her pretty lips and began to say something, snuameri, intelligence left a person... It was all so stupid, so trite... alongside with chastity. He did not want to... was extremely ridiculous and as simple as a child. Instead of taking advantage of this favor, instead of being glad of such an occasion, as anyone else in his place would undoubtedly have been, he rushed out headlong, like a wild goat, and ran down to the street.

His head bowed, his arms hanging limp, he sat in his room like a poor man who found a priceless pearl and straightway dropped it into the sea. "Such a beauty, such divine features—and where, in what place!..." That was all he was able to utter.

Indeed, pity never possesses us so strongly as at the sight of beauty touched by the corrupting breath of depravity. Let ugliness make friends with it, but beauty, tender beauty... in our thoughts it is united only with chastity and purity. The beauty who had so bewitched poor Piskarev was in fact a marvelous, extraordinary phenomenon. Her presence in that despicable circle seemed still more extraordinary. Her features were all so purely formed, the whole expression of her beautiful face was marked by such nobility, that it was simply impossible to think that depravity had stretched out its terrible claws over her. She would have been a priceless pearl, the whole world, the whole paradise, the whole wealth of an ardent husband; she would have been the beautiful, gentle star of an unostentatious family circle, and would have given sweet orders with one movement of her beautiful mouth. She would have been a divinity in a crowded hall, on the bright parquet, in the glow of candles, the awestruck company of her admirers lying speechless at her feet. But, alas! by the terrible will of some infernal spirit who wishes to destroy the harmony of life, she had been flung, with a loud laugh, into the abyss.

Filled with rending pity, he sat by a guttering candle. It was long after midnight, the bell in the tower struck half-past, and he sat fixed, sleepless, keeping a pointless vigil. Drowsiness, taking advantage of his fixity, was gradually beginning to come over him, the room was already beginning to disappear, only the light of the candle penetrated the reveries that were coming over him, when suddenly a knock at the door made him start and come to his senses. The door opened and a lackey in rich livery came in. Never had rich livery visited his solitary room, and that at such an unusual hour... He was perplexed and looked at the entering lackey with impatient curiosity.

"The lady whom you were pleased to visit several hours ago," the lackey said with a courteous bow, "bids me invite you to call on her and sends a carriage for you."

Piskarev stood in wordless astonishment; a carriage, a liveried lackey!... No; there must be some mistake here...

"Listen, my good fellow," he said with timidity, "you must have come to the wrong place. The lady undoubtedly sent you for someone else, and not for me."

"No, sir, I am not mistaken. Was is not you who kindly accompanied a lady on foot to a house on Liteiny, to a room on the fourth floor?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, make haste if you please, the lady wishes to see you without fail and asks you kindly to come straight to her house."
Piskarev ran down the stairs. A carriage was indeed standing outside. He got into it, the door slammed, the pavement rumbled under wheels and hooves, and the lit-up perspective of buildings with bright signboards raced past the carriage windows. On the way, Piskarev kept thinking and was unable to figure out this adventure. A private house, a carriage, a lackey in rich livery... he could in no way reconcile all this with the room on the fourth floor, the dusty windows, and the out-of-tune piano.

The carriage stopped in front of a brightly lit entrance, and he was struck at once: by the row of carriages, the talk of the coachmen, the brightly lit windows, and the sounds of music. The lackey in rich livery helped him out of the carriage and respectfully led the way to a front hall with marble columns, a doorman all drowned in gold, cloaks and fur coats scattered about, and a bright lamp. An airy stairway with shining banisters, perfumed with scents, raced upwards. He was already on it, he was already in the first room, frightened and drawing back at the first step from the terrible crowdedness. The extraordinary diversity of faces threw him into complete bewilderment; it seemed as if some demon had chopped the whole world up into a multitude of different pieces and mixed those pieces together with no rhyme or reason. Ladies' gleaming shoulders, black tailcoats, chandelier, lamps, airy gauzes flying, ethereal ribbons, and a fat double bass peeking from behind the railing of a magnificent gallery—everything was splendid for him. He saw at once so many venerable old and half-old men with stars on their tailcoats, ladies who stepped so lightly, proudly, and gracefully over the parquet or sat in rows, he heard so many French and English words, moreover the young men in black tailcoats were filled with such nobility, talked or kept silent with such dignity, were so incapable of saying anything superfluous, joked so majestically, smiled so respectfully, wore such superb side-whiskers, knew so well how to display perfect hands as they straightened their ties, the ladies were so airy, so completely immersed in self-satisfaction and rapture, lowered their eyes so charmingly, that... but the humble air of Piskarev, who clung fearfully to a column, was enough to show that he was utterly at a loss. At that moment the crowd surrounded a group of dancers.

They raced on, wrapped in transparent Parisian creations, dresses woven of the very air; carelessly they touched the parquet with their shining little feet, and were more ethereal than if they had not touched it at all. But one among them was dressed more finely, more splendidly and dazzlingly than the rest. Inexpressible, the very finest combination of taste showed in her attire, and yet it seemed that she did not care about it at all and that it showed inadvertently, of itself. She both looked and did not look at the crowd of spectators around her, her beautiful long eyelashes lowered indifferently, and the shining whiteness of her face struck the eye still more dazzlingly when a slight shadow fell on her charming brow as she inclined her head.

Piskarev made a great effort to force his way through the crowd and get a better look at her, but, to his greatest vexation, some huge head with dark, curly hair kept getting in the way; the crowd also pressed him so much that he did not dare move forward or backward for fear he might somehow shove some privy councillor. But then he did push to the front and looked at his clothes, wishing to straighten them properly. Heavenly Creator, what was this! He had a frock coat on, and it was all covered with paint: in his haste he had even forgotten to change into decent clothes. He blushed to his ears and, dropping his glance, wanted to disappear somewhere, but there was decidedly nowhere to disappear to: court chamberlains in brilliant uniforms stood in a solid wall behind him. He wished he was far away from the beauty with the wonderful brow and eyelashes. He fearfully raised his eyes to see whether she was looking at him: God! she was standing right in front of him... But what is this? what is this? "It's she!" he cried almost aloud. Indeed it was she, the very same one he had met on Nevsky and followed to her house.

She raised her eyelashes meanwhile and looked at everyone with her bright eyes. "Aie, aie, aie, what beauty!..." was all he was able to utter with failing breath. She looked around the whole circle of people, all of whom strove to hold her attention, but her weary and inattentive eyes soon turned away and met the eyes of Piskarev. Oh, what heaven! what paradise! Grant him strength, O Creator, to bear it! Life will not contain it, it will destroy and
carry off his soul! She made a sign, but not with her hand, not by inclining her head—no, but her devastating eyes expressed this sign so subtly and inconspicuously that no one could see it, yet he saw it, he understood it. The dance lasted a long time; the weary music seemed to fade and go out altogether, then it would break loose again, shriek and thunder. Finally—the end! She sat down, her bosom heaved under the thin smoke of gauze; her hand (O Creator, what a wonderful hand!) dropped on her knees, crushing her airy dress beneath it, and her dress under her hand seemed to start breathing music, and its fine lilac color emphasized still more the bright whiteness of this beautiful hand. Just to touch it—nothing more! No other desires—they are all too bold . . . He stood behind her chair, not daring to speak, not daring to breathe.

“Was it boring for you?” she said. “I was bored, too. I see that you hate me . . .” she added, lowering her long eyelashes.

“Hate you? Me? . . . I . . .” Piskarev, utterly at a loss, was about to say, and would probably have produced a whole heap of the most incoherent things, but just then a gentleman-in-waiting approached with witty and pleasant observations and a beautifully curled forelock on his head. He rather pleasantly displayed a row of rather good teeth, and each of his Witticisms was a sharp nail in Piskarev’s heart. At last some third person, fortunately, addressed the gentleman with some question.

“How unbearable!” she said, raising her heavenly eyes to him. “I’ll go and sit at the other end of the room. Meet me there!”

She slipped through the crowd and disappeared. He shoved his way through the crowd like a madman and was already there.

Yes, it was she! She was sitting like a queen, the best of all, the most beautiful of all, and was seeking him with her eyes.

“You’re here,” she said softly. “I’ll be frank with you: you must have thought the circumstances of our meeting strange. Could you really think that I belong to that despicable class of creatures among whom you met me? To you my actions seem strange, but I will reveal a secret to you. Will you be able,” she said, fixing her eyes on him, “to keep it forever?”

“Oh, I will, I will, I will! . . .”

But just then a rather elderly man approached, spoke to her in
He lay in bed till noon, wishing to fall asleep; but she would not appear. If only she would show her beautiful features for a moment, if only her bare arm, bright as snow on a mountaintop, could flash before him.

Abandoning everything, forgetting everything, he sat with a crushed, hopeless look, filled only with his dream. He did not think of eating anything; without any interest, without any life, his eyes gazed out the window to the courtyard, where a dirty water-carrier was pouring water that froze in the air, and the bleating voice of a peddler quavered: "Old clothes for sale." The everyday and real struck oddly on his ear. Thus he sat till evening; when he greedily rushed to bed. For a long time he struggled with sleeplessness and finally overcame it. Again some dream, some trite, vile dream. "God, be merciful; show her to me for a moment at least, just for one moment!" Again he waited till evening, again fell asleep, again dreamed of some official who was an official and at the same time a bassoon. Oh, this was unbearable! At last she came! her head and her tresses... she looks... Oh, how brief! Again the mist, again some stupid dream.

In the end dreams became his life, and his whole life thereafter took a strange turn: one might say he slept while waking and watched while asleep. If anyone had seen him sitting silently before the empty table or walking down the street, he would certainly have taken him for a lunatic or someone destroyed by hard drinking; his gaze was quite senseless, his natural distractedness developed, finally, and imperiously drove all feeling, all movement, from his face. He became animated only with the coming of night.

Such a state unsettled his health, and his most terrible torment was that sleep finally began to desert him entirely. Wishing to salvage this his only possession, he used every means to restore it. He heard that there was a means of restoring sleep—one had only to take opium. But where to get this opium? He remembered one Persian shopkeeper who sold shawls and who, whenever they met, asked him to paint a beauty for him. He decided to go to him, supposing that he would undoubtedly have this opium. The Persian received him sitting on a couch, his legs tucked under him.

"What do you need opium for?" he asked.
Piskarev told him about his insomnia.

"Very well, I give you opium, only paint me a beauty. Must be a fine beauty! Must be with black eyebrows and eyes big as olives; and me lying beside her smoking my pipe! Do you hear? Must be a fine one! a beauty!"

Piskarev promised everything. The Persian stepped out for a minute and returned with a little pot filled with dark liquid, carefully poured some of it into another little pot and gave it to Piskarev, with instructions to take no more than seven drops in water. He greedily seized this precious pot, which he would not have given up for a heap of gold, and rushed headlong home.

On coming home, he poured a few drops into a glass of water and, having swallowed it, dropped off to sleep.

God, what joy! It's she! She again! but now with a completely different look! Oh, how nicely she sits by the window of a bright country house! Her dress breathes such simplicity as only a poet's thought is clothed in. Her hair is done... O Creator, how simply her hair is done, and how becoming it is to her! A short shawl lightly covers her slender neck; everything in her is modest, everything in her is—a mysterious, inexplicable sense of taste. How lovely her graceful gait! how musical the sound of her footsteps and the rustle of her simple dress! how beautiful her arm clasped round with a bracelet of hair! She says to him with tears in her eyes: "Don't despise me. I'm not at all what you take me for. Look at me, look at me more closely, and say: Am I capable of what you think?" "Oh, no, no! If anyone dares to think so, let him..." But he woke up, all stirred, distraught, with tears in his eyes. "It would be better if you didn't exist, didn't live in the world, but were the creation of an inspired artist! I would never leave the canvas, I would eternally gaze at you and kiss you. I would live and breathe by you, as the most beautiful dream, and then I would be happy. My desires could reach no further. I would call upon you as my guardian angel, before sleep and waking, and I would wait for you whenever I had to portray the divine and holy. But now... what a terrible life! What is the use of her being alive? Is the life of a madman pleasant for his relations and friends who once used to love..."
Having come up with such a light-minded plan, he felt the flush of color on his face; he went to the mirror and was himself frightened by his sunken cheeks and the pallor of his face. He began to dress carefully; he washed, brushed his hair, put on a new tailcoat, a smart waistcoat, threw on a cloak, and went out. He breathed the fresh air and felt freshness in his heart, like a convalescent who has decided to go out for the first time after a long illness. His heart was pounding as he approached the street where he had not set foot since the fatal encounter.

He spent a long time looking for the house; his memory seemed to fail him. Twice he walked up and down the street, not knowing where to stop. Finally one seemed right to him. He quickly ran up the stairs, knocked at the door: the door opened, and who should come out to meet him? His ideal, his mysterious image, the original of his dreamt pictures, she by whom he lived, lived so terribly, so tormentingly, so sweetly. She herself stood before him. He trembled; he could barely keep his feet from weakness, overcome by an impulse of joy. She stood before him just as beautiful, though her eyes were sleepy, though pallor had already crept over her face, no longer so fresh—yet still she was beautiful.

"Ah!" she cried out, seeing Piskarev and rubbing her eyes (it was then already two o'clock). "Why did you run away from us that time?"

Exhausted, he sat down on a chair and gazed at her.

"And I just woke up. They brought me back at seven in the morning. I was completely drunk," she added with a smile.

Oh, better you were mute and totally deprived of speech than to utter such things! She had suddenly shown him the whole of her life as in a panorama. However, he mastered himself despite that and decided to try whether his admonitions might have an effect on her. Summoning his courage, he began in a trembling and at the same time fervent voice to present her terrible position to her. She listened to him with an attentive look and with that sense of astonishment which we show at the sight of something unexpected and strange. With a slight smile, she glanced at her friend who was sitting in the corner and who, abandoning the comb she was cleaning, also listened attentively to the new preacher. 

Collected Tales
“True, I’m poor,” Piskarev said finally, after a long and instructive admonition, “but we’ll work; we’ll vie with each other in our efforts to improve our life. There’s nothing more pleasant than to owe everything to oneself. I’ll sit over my paintings, you’ll sit by me, inspiring my labors, embroidering or doing some other handwork, and we won’t lack for anything.”

“What!” she interrupted his speech with an expression of some disdain. “I’m no laundress or seamstress that I should do any work!”

God! in these words all her low, all her contemptible life was expressed—a life filled with emptiness and idleness, the faithful companions of depravity.

“Marry me!” her friend, till then sitting silently in the corner, picked up with an impudent look. “If I was a wife, I’d sit like this!”

And with that she made some stupid grimace with her pathetic face which the beauty found very funny.

Oh, this was too much! This was more than he could bear! He rushed out, having lost all feeling and thought. His reason was clouded: stupidly, aimlessly, seeing, hearing, feeling nothing, he wandered about for the whole day. No one could say whether he slept anywhere or not; only the next day, following some stupid instinct, did he come to his apartment, pale, dreadful-looking, his hair disheveled, with signs of madness on his face. He locked himself in his room, let no one in and asked for nothing. Four days passed, and his locked room never once opened; finally a week went by, and the room still remained locked. They rushed to the door, began calling him, but there was no answer; finally they broke the door down and found his lifeless body with the throat cut. A bloody razor lay on the floor. From his convulsively spread arms and terribly disfigured appearance, it could be concluded that his hand had not been steady and that he had suffered for a long time before his sinful soul left his body.

Thus perished, the victim of a mad passion, poor Piskarev, quiet, timid, modest, childishly simple-hearted, who bore in himself a spark of talent which in time might have blazed up broadly and brightly. No one wept over him; no one could be seen by his lifeless body except the ordinary figure of a district inspector and the indifferent mien of a city doctor. His coffin was quietly taken to Okhta, even without religious rites; only a soldier-sentry wept as he followed it, and that because he had drunk an extra dram of vodka. Not even Lieutenant Pirogov came to look at the body of the unfortunate wretch upon whom, while he lived, he had bestowed his lofty patronage. However, he could not be bothered with that; he was occupied with an extraordinary event. But let us turn to him.

I don’t like corpses and dead men, and it always gives me an unpleasant feeling when a long funeral procession crosses my path and an invalid soldier, dressed like some sort of Capuchin, takes a pinch of snuff with his left hand because his right is occupied with a torch. My heart is always vexed at the sight of a rich catafalque and a velvet coffin; but my vexation is mixed with sadness when I see a drayman pulling the bare pine coffin of a poor man, and only some beggar woman met at an intersection plods after it, having nothing else to do.

It seems we left Lieutenant Pirogov at the point of his parting from poor Piskarev and rushing after the blonde. This blonde was a light, rather interesting little creature. She stopped in front of each shop window to gaze at the displays of belts, kerchiefs, earrings, gloves, and other trifles; she fidgeted constantly, looked in all directions, and glanced over her shoulder. “You’re mine, little sweetie!” Lieutenant Pirogov repeated self-confidently as he continued his pursuit, covering his face with the collar of his overcoat lest he meet some acquaintance. But it will do no harm if we inform readers of who this Lieutenant Pirogov was.

But before we tell who this Lieutenant Pirogov was, it will do no harm if we say a thing or two about the society to which Pirogov belonged. There are officers in Petersburg who constitute a sort of middle class in society. You will always find one of them at a soiree, at a dinner given by a state or actual state councillor, who earned this rank by forty long years of labor. Several pale daughters, completely colorless, like Petersburg, some of them overripe, a tea table, a piano, dancing—all this is usually inseparable from a bright epaulette shining by a lamp, between a well-behaved blonde and the black tailcoat of a brother or a friend of
the family: It is very hard to stir up these cool-blooded girls and make them laugh; it takes very great art, or, better to say, no art at all. One must speak so that it is neither too intelligent nor too funny, so that it is all about the trifles that women like. In this the gentlemen under discussion should be given their due. They have a special gift for making these colorless beauties laugh and listen. Exclamations stifled by laughter—"Ah, stop it! Aren't you ashamed to make me laugh so!"—are usually their best reward. Among the upper classes they occur very rarely, or, better to say, never. They are forced out altogether by what this society calls aristocrats; however, they are considered educated and well-bred people. They like talking about literature; they praise Bulgarii, Pushkin, and Grech, and speak with contempt and barbed wit of A. A. Orlov. They never miss a single public lecture, be it on accounting or even on forestry. In the theater, whatever the play, you will always find one of them, unless they are playing some Filatkas, which are highly insulting to their fastidious taste. They are constantly in the theater. For theater managers, these are the most profitable people. In plays, they especially like good poetry; they also like very much to call loudly for the actors; many of them, being teachers in government schools, or preparing students for them, in the end acquire a cabriolet and a pair of horses. Then their circle widens: they finally arrive at marrying a merchant's daughter who can play the piano, with a hundred thousand or so in cash and a heap of bearded relations. However, this honor they cannot attain before being promoted to the rank of colonel at the very least. Because our Russian beards, though still giving off a whiff of cabbage, have no wish for their daughters to marry any but generals, or colonels at the very least. These are the main features of this sort of young men. But Lieutenant Pirogov had a host of talents that belonged to him personally. He declaimed verses from *Dmitri Donskoi* and *Woe from Wit* superbly well, and possessed a special art of producing smoke rings from his pipe so skillfully that he could suddenly send ten of them passing one through another. He could very pleasantly tell a joke about a cannon being one thing and a unicorn something else again. However, it is rather difficult to enumerate all the talents fate had bestowed on Pirogov.
Before him sat Schiller—not the Schiller who wrote *Wilhelm Tell* and the *History of the Thirty Years’ War*, but the well-known Schiller, the tinsmith of Meshchanskaya Street. Next to Schiller stood Hoffmann—not the writer Hoffmann, but a rather good cobbler from Ofitserskaya Street, a great friend of Schiller's. Schiller was drunk and sat on a chair stamping his foot and heatedly saying something: All this would not have been so surprising to Pirogov, but what did surprise him was the extremely strange posture of the figures. Schiller was sitting, his rather fat nose stuck out and his head raised, while Hoffmann was holding him by this nose with two fingers and wagging the blade of his cobbler’s knife just above the surface of it. Both personages were speaking in German, and therefore Lieutenant Pirogov, whose ‘only German was “Gut Morgen,”’ was able to understand nothing of this whole story. Schiller’s words, however, consisted of the following:

“I don’t want; I have no need, of a nose!” he said, waving his arms. “For this one nose I need three pounds of snuff a month. And I pay in the Russian vile shop, because the German shop doesn’t have Russian snuff; I pay in the Russian vile shop forty kopecks for each pound; that makes one rouble twenty kopecks; twelve times one rouble twenty kopecks makes fourteen roubles forty kopecks. Do you hear, Hoffmann my friend? For this one nose, fourteen roubles forty kopecks! Yes, and on feast days I snuff rappee, because I don’t want to snuff Russian vile tobacco on feast days. I snuff two pounds of rappee a year, two roubles a pound. Six plus fourteen—twenty roubles forty kopecks on snuff alone. That’s highway robbery! I ask you, Hoffmann my friend, is it not so?”

Hoffmann, who was drunk himself, answered in the affirmative. “Twenty roubles forty kopecks! I’m a Swabian German; I have a king in Germany. I don’t want a nose! Cut my nose off!”

And had it not been for the sudden appearance of Lieutenant Pirogov there is no doubt that Hoffmann would have cut Schiller’s nose off just like that, because he was already holding his knife in such a position as if he were about to cut out a shoe sole.

Schiller found it extremely vexing that an unknown, uninvited person had suddenly hindered them so inopportunely. Despite his being under the inebriating fumes of beer and wine, he felt it somewhat indecent to be in the presence of an outside witness while looking and behaving in such a fashion. Meanwhile Pirogov bowed slightly and said with his usual pleasantness:

“You will excuse me . . .”

“Get out!” Schiller drawled.

This puzzled Lieutenant Pirogov. Such treatment was completely new to him. The smile that had barely appeared on his face suddenly vanished. With a sense of distressed dignity, he said:

“I find it strange, my dear sir . . . you must have failed to notice . . . I am an officer . . .”

“What is an officer! I am a Swabian German. Mineself” (here Schiller banged his fist on the table) “I can be an officer: a year and a half a Junker, two years a sub-lieutenant, and tomorrow I’m right away an officer. But I don’t want to serve. I’ll do this to an officer—poof!” Here Schiller held his hand to his mouth and poofed on it.

Lieutenant Pirogov saw that there was nothing left for him but to withdraw. Nevertheless, such treatment, not at all befitting his rank, was disagreeable to him. He stopped several times on the stairs, as if wishing to collect his wits and think how to make Schiller sensible of his insolence. He finally concluded that Schiller could be excused because his head was full of beer; besides, he pictured the pretty blonde and decided to consign it all to oblivion. Next morning, Lieutenant Pirogov showed up very early at the tinsmith’s shop. In the front room he was met by the pretty blonde, who asked in a rather stern voice that was very becoming to her little face:

“What can I do for you?”

“Ah, good morning, my little dear! You don’t recognize me? Sly thing, such pretty eyes you have!” at which Lieutenant Pirogov was going to chuck her nicely under the chin with his finger.

But the blonde uttered a timorous exclamation and asked with the same sternness:

“What can I do for you?”

“Let me look at you, that’s all,” Lieutenant Pirogov said with a very pleasant smile, getting closer to her; but, noticing that the
timorous blonde wanted to slip out the door, he added, "I'd like to order some spurs, my little dear. Can you make spurs for me? Though to love you, what's needed is not spurs but a bridle. Such pretty hands!"

Lieutenant Pirogov was always very courteous in conversations of this sort. "I'll call my husband right now," the German lady cried and left, and a few minutes later Pirogov saw Schiller come out with sleepy eyes, barely recovered from yesterday's drinking. Looking at the officer, he recalled as in a vague dream what had happened yesterday. He did not remember how it had been, but felt that he had done something stupid, and therefore he received the officer with a very stern air.

"I can't take less than fifteen roubles for spurs," he said, wishing to get rid of Pirogov, because as an honorable German he was very ashamed to look at anyone who had seen him in an improper position. Schiller liked to drink without any witnesses, with two or three friends, and at such times even locked himself away from his workmen.

"Why so much?" Pirogov asked benignly.

"German workmanship," Schiller uttered coolly, stroking his chin. "A Russian would make them for two roubles."

"Very well, to prove that I like you and want to become acquainted with you, I'll pay the fifteen roubles."

Schiller stood pondering for a moment: being an honest German, he felt a bit ashamed. Wishing to talk him out of the order, he announced that it would be two weeks before he could make them. But Pirogov, without any objection, declared his consent.

The German lapsed into thought and stood pondering how to do his work better, so that it would actually be worth fifteen roubles. At that moment, the blonde came into the workshop and began rummaging around on the table, which was all covered with coffeepots. The lieutenant took advantage of Schiller's thoughtfulness, got close to her, and pressed her arm, which was bare up to the shoulder. Schiller did not like that at all.

"Mein' Frau!" he cried.

"Was wollen Sie doch?" answered the blonde.

"Geh'n Sie to the kitchen!"

The blonde withdrew.

"In two weeks, then?" said Pirogov.

"Yes, in two weeks," Schiller replied ponderingly. "I have a lot of work now."

"Good-bye! I'll be back."

"Good-bye," answered Schiller, locking the door behind him.

Lieutenant Pirogov decided not to abandon his quest, even though the German lady had obviously rebuffed him. He did not understand how he could be resisted, the less so as his courtesy and brilliant rank gave him full right to attention. It must be said, however, that Schiller's wife, for all her comeliness, was very stupid. Though stupidity constitutes a special charm in a pretty wife. I, at least, have known many husbands who are delighted with their wives' stupidity and see in it all the tokens of childlike innocence.

Beauty works perfect miracles. All inner shortcomings in a beauty, instead of causing repugnance, become somehow extraordinarily attractive; vice itself breathes comeliness in them; but if it were to disappear, then a woman would have to be twenty times more intelligent than a man in order to inspire, if not love, at least respect. However, Schiller's wife, for all her stupidity, was always faithful to her duty, and therefore Pirogov was hard put to succeed in his bold enterprise; but pleasure is always combined with the overcoming of obstacles, and the blonde was becoming more and more interesting for him day by day. He began inquiring about the spurs quite frequently, so that Schiller finally got tired of it. He bent every effort towards quickly finishing the spurs he had begun; finally the spurs were ready.

"Ah, what excellent workmanship!" Lieutenant Pirogov exclaimed when he saw the spurs. "Lord, how well made! Our general doesn't have such spurs."

A sense of self-satisfaction spread all through Schiller's soul. His eyes acquired a very cheerful look, and he was completely reconciled with Pirogov. "The Russian officer is an intelligent man," he thought to himself.

"So, then, you can also make a sheath, for instance, for a dagger or something else?"
“Oh, very much so,” Schiller said with a smile.

“Then make me a sheath for a dagger. I’ll bring it. I have a very good Turkish dagger, but I’d like to make a different sheath for it.”

Schiller was as if hit by a bomb. His brows suddenly knitted. “There you go!” he thought, denouncing himself inwardly for having called down more work on himself. He considered it dishonest to refuse now; besides, the Russian officer had praised his work. Shaking his head a little, he gave his consent; but the kiss Pirogov brazenly planted right on the lips of the pretty blonde threw him into total perplexity.

I consider it not superfluous to acquaint the reader a little more closely with Schiller. Schiller was a perfect German in the full sense of this whole word. From the age of twenty, that happy time when a Russian lives by hit-or-miss, Schiller had already measured out his entire life, and on no account would he make any exceptions. He had resolved to get up at seven, to have dinner at two, to be precise in all things, and to get drunk every Sunday. He had resolved to put together a capital of fifty thousand in ten years, and this was as sure and irresistible as fate, because a clerk will sooner forget to leave his card with his superior’s doorman than a German will decide to go back on his word. On no account would he increase his expenses, and if the price of potatoes went up too much compared to usual, he did not spend a kopeck more but merely decreased the quantity, and though he occasionally went a bit hungry, he would nevertheless get used to it. His accuracy went so far as the decision to kiss his wife not more than twice a day, and to avoid somehow kissing her an extra time, he never put more than one teaspoon of pepper in his soup; on Sundays, however, this rule was not fulfilled so strictly, because Schiller then drank two bottles of beer and one bottle of caraway-seed vodka, which he nevertheless always denounced. He drank not at all like an Englishman, who bolts his door right after dinner and gets potted by himself. On the contrary, being a German, he always drank inspiredly, either with the cobbler Hoffmann or with the cabinetmaker Kuntz, also a German and a big drinker. Such was the character of the noble Schiller, who was finally put into an extremely difficult position. Though he was phlegmatic and a German, Pirogov’s behavior still aroused something like jealousy in him. He racked his brain and could not figure out how to get rid of this Russian officer. Meanwhile, Pirogov, as he was smoking his pipe in a circle of his comrades—because Providence has so arranged it that where there are officers there are also pipes—smoking his pipe in a circle of his comrades, hinted significantly and with a pleasant smile at a little intrigue with a pretty German lady with whom, in his words, he was already on quite close terms and whom in reality he had all but lost hope of attracting to himself.

One day, while strolling along Meshchanskaya, he kept glancing at the house adorned by Schiller’s shingle with its coffeepots and samovars; to his great joy, he saw the blonde’s head leaning out the window and watching the passers-by. He stopped, waved his hand, and said: “Gut Morgen!” The blonde greeted him as an acquaintance.

“Say, is your husband at home?”

“Yes,” answered the blonde.

“And when is he not at home?”

“He’s not at home on Sundays,” the stupid blonde answered.

“Not bad,” Pirogov thought to himself, “I must take advantage of it.”

And next Sunday, out of the blue, he appeared before the blonde. Schiller was indeed not at home. The pretty hostess got frightened, but this time Pirogov behaved quite prudently, treated her very respectfully and, bowing, showed all the beauty of his tightly fitted waist. He joked very pleasantly and deferentially, but the silly German woman replied to everything in monosyllables. Finally, having tried to get at her from all sides and seeing that nothing would amuse her, he offered to dance. The German woman accepted at once, because German women are always eager to dance. Pirogov placed great hopes in this: first, she already enjoyed it; second, it would demonstrate his tournure and adroitness; third, while dancing he could get closer and embrace the pretty German, and thus start it all going—in short, the result would be complete success. He started some sort of gavotte, knowing that German women need gradualness. The pretty German stepped out into the middle of the room and raised her beau-
tiful little foot. This position so delighted Pirogov that he rushed to kiss her. The German woman began to scream, thereby increasing her loveliness still more in Pirogov's eyes; he showered her with kisses. When suddenly the door opened and in-came Schiller with Hoffmann and the cabinetmaker Kuntz. These worthy artisans were all drunk as-cobblers.

But I will let my readers judge of Schiller's wrath and indignation for themselves.

"Ruffian!" he cried in the greatest indignation. "How dare you kiss my wife? You are a scoundrel, not a Russian officer. Devil take it, Hoffmann my friend, I am a German, not a Russian swine!"

Hoffmann responded in the affirmative.

"Oh, I will not the horns have! Take him by the collar; Hoffmann my friend, I will not," he went on, swinging his arms violently, and his face was close in color to the red flannel of his waistcoat. "I have lived in Petersburg for eight years, I have my mother in Swabia and my uncle in Nuremberg; I am a German, not a horned beef! Off with everything, Hoffmann my friend! Hold his arm and leg, Kuntz my comrade!"

And the Germans seized Pirogov by his arms and legs.

He vainly tried to fight them off; the three artisans were the most stalwart fellows of all the Petersburg Germans, and they behaved so rudely and impolitely with him that I confess I can find no words to describe this sorry event.

I'm sure that Schiller was in a bad fever the next day, that he trembled like a leaf, expecting the police to come every moment, that he would have given God knows what for all of yesterday's events to have been a dream. But what's done cannot be undone. Nothing could compare with Pirogov's wrath and indignation. The very thought of such a terrible insult drove him to fury. He thought Siberia and the lash the very least of punishments for Schiller. He flew home so that, having changed, he could go straight to the general and describe for him the violence of the German artisans. He also wanted to petition general headquarters at the same time. And if the punishment of general headquarters was insufficient, he would go straight to the state council, or else to the sovereign himself.

But all this ended somehow strangely: he stopped at a pastry shop on his way, ate two puff pastries, read something from The Northern Bee, and left the place already in a less wrathful state. Besides, the rather pleasant, cool evening induced him to take a little stroll on Nevsky Prospect; toward nine o'clock he calmed down and decided it was not nice to trouble the general on a Sunday, and besides he had undoubtedly been summoned somewhere; and therefore he went to a soiree given by one of the heads of the college of auditors, where there was a very pleasant gathering of functionaries and officers. He enjoyed the evening he spent there, and so distinguished himself in the mazurka that not only the ladies but even their partners were delighted.

"Marvelous is the working of our world," I thought as I walked down Nevsky Prospect two days ago, calling to mind these two events. "How strangely, how inconceivably our fate plays with us! Do we ever get what we desire? Do we ever achieve that for which our powers seem purposely to prepare us? Everything happens in a contrary way. To this one fate gave wonderful horses, and he drives around indifferently without ever noticing their beauty—while another, whose heart burns with the horse passion, goes on foot and contents himself with merely clicking his tongue as a trotter is led past him. This one has an excellent cook, but unfortunately so small a mouth that it cannot let pass more than a couple of tidbits; another has a mouth as big as the archway of general headquarters, but, alas! has to be satisfied with some German dinner of potatoes. How strangely our fate plays with us!"

But strangest of all are the events that take place on Nevsky Prospect. Oh, do not believe this Nevsky Prospect! I always wrap myself tighter in my cloak and try not to look at the objects I meet at all. Everything is deception, everything is a dream, everything is not what it seems to be! You think this gentleman who goes about in a finely tailored frock coat is very rich? Not a bit of it: he consists entirely of his frock coat. You imagine that these two fat men who stopped at the church under construction are discussing its architecture? Not at all: they're talking about how strangely two crows are sitting facing each other. You think that this enthusiast waving his arms is telling how his wife threw a little ball out the
window at a completely unknown officer? Not at all, he's talking about Lafayette. You think these ladies . . . but least of all believe the ladies. Peer less at the shop windows: the knickknacks displayed in them are beautiful, but they smell of a terrible quantity of banknotes. But God forbid you should peer under the ladies' hats! However a beauty's cloak may flutter behind her, I shall never follow curiously after her. Further away, for God's sake, further away from the street lamp! pass it by more quickly, as quickly as possible. You'll be lucky to get away with it pouring its stinking oil on your foppish frock coat. But, along with the street lamp, everything breathes deceit. It lies all the time, this Nevsky Prospect, but most of all at the time when night heaves its dense mass upon it and sets off the white and pale yellow walls of the houses, when the whole city turns into a rumbling and brilliance, myriads of carriages tumble from the bridges, postillions shout and bounce on their horses, and the devil himself lights the lamps only so as to show everything not as it really looks.

Today an extraordinary adventure took place. I got up rather late in the morning, and when Mavra brought me my polished boots, I asked what time it was. On hearing that it had long since struck ten, I quickly hastened to get dressed. I confess, I wouldn't have gone to the office at all, knowing beforehand what a sour face the section chief would make. He has long been saying to me: "Why is it you've got such a hotchpotch in your head, brother? You rush about frantically, you sometimes confuse a case so much the devil himself couldn't sort it out, you start the title in lowercase, forget the date or number." Cursed stork! He must be envious that I sit in the director's study and sharpen pens for His Excellency. In short, I wouldn't have gone to the office if it weren't for the hope of seeing the treasurer and maybe cajoling at least some of my pay out of that Jew in advance. What a creature! For him to hand out any money a month ahead—Lord God, the Last Judgment would come sooner! Even if you beg on your life, even if you're destitute—he won't hand out anything, the hoary devil! Yet at home his own cook slaps him in the face. The whole world knows it. I don't see the profit of working in my department. Absolutely no resources. In the provincial government, in the civil courts and treasuries, it's quite a different matter: there, lo