

PETERSBURG

Prologue

Your Excellencies, Your Worships, Your Honors, and Citizens!

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What is this Russian Empire of ours?

This Russian Empire of ours is a geographical entity, which means: part of a certain planet. And this Russian Empire includes: in the first place—Great, Little, White, and Red Rus; in the second place—the Kingdoms of Georgia, Poland, Kazan, and Astrakhan; in the third place, it includes. . . . But—et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

This Russian Empire of ours consists of a multitude of cities: capital, provincial, district, downgraded; and further—of the original capital city and of the mother of Russian cities.

The original capital city is Moscow, and the mother of Russian cities is Kiev.

Petersburg, or Saint Petersburg, or Pieter (which are the same) actually does belong to the Russian Empire. And Tsargrad, Konstantinograd (or, as they say, Constantinople), belongs to it by right of inheritance. And we shall not expatiate on it.

Let us expatiate at greater length on Petersburg: there is a Petersburg, or Saint Petersburg, or Pieter (which are the same). On the basis of these same judgments, Nevsky Prospect is a Petersburg prospect.

Nevsky Prospect possesses a striking attribute: it consists of a space for the circulation of the public. It is delimited by numbered houses. The numeration proceeds house by house, which considerably facilitates the finding of the house one needs. Nevsky Prospect, like any prospect, is a public prospect, that is: a prospect for the circulation of the public (not of air, for instance). The houses that form its lateral limits are—hmmm . . . yes: . . . for the public. Nevsky Prospect in the evening is illuminated by electricity. But during the day Nevsky Prospect requires no illumination.

Nevsky Prospect is rectilinear (just between us), because it is a European prospect; and any European prospect is not merely a prospect, but (as I have already said) a prospect that is European, because . . . yes. . . .

For this very reason, Nevsky Prospect is a rectilinear prospect.

Nevsky Prospect is a prospect of no small importance in this un-Russian—but nonetheless—capital city. Other Russian cities are a wooden heap of hovels.

And strikingly different from them all is Petersburg.

But if you continue to insist on the utterly preposterous legend about the existence of a Moscow population of a million-and-a-half, then you will have to admit that the capital is Moscow, for only capitals have a population of a million-and-a-half; but as for provincial cities, they do not, never have had, and never will have a population of a million-and-a-half. And in conformance with this preposterous legend, it will be apparent that the capital is not Petersburg.

But if Petersburg is not the capital, then there is no Petersburg. It only appears to exist.

However that may be, Petersburg not only appears to us, but actually does appear—on maps: in the form of two small circles, one set inside the other, with a black dot in the center; and from precisely this mathematical point, which has no dimension, it proclaims forcefully that it exists: from here, from this very point surges and swarms the printed book; from this invisible point speeds the official circular.

Chapter the First

in which an account is given of a certain worthy person, his mental games, and the ephemerality of being

*It was a dreadful time, in truth,
Of it still fresh the recollection . . .
Of it, my friends, I now for you
Begin my comfortless narration.
Lugubrious will be my tale. . .*

Pushkin

Apollon Apollonovich Ableukhov

Apollon Apollonovich Ableukhov was of venerable stock: he had Adam as his ancestor. But that is not the main thing: it is more important that one member of this venerable stock was Shem, progenitor of the Semitic, Hessitic, and red-skinned peoples.

Here let us make a transition to ancestors of an age not so remote.

Their place of residence was the Kirghiz-Kaisak Horde, whence, in the reign of the Empress Anna Ioannovna, Mirza Ab-Lai, the great-great-grandfather of the senator, valiantly entered the Russian service, having received, upon Christian baptism, the name Andrei and the sobriquet Ukhov. For brevity's sake, Ab-Lai-Ukhov was later changed to Ableukhov, plain and simple.

This was the great-great-grandfather who was the source of the stock.

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A lackey in gray with gold braid was flicking the dust off the writing table with a feather duster. A cook's cap peeped through the open door.

"Looks like himself's already up. . . ."

"He's rubbing himself down with eau de cologne, he'll be taking his coffee pretty soon. . . ."

"This morning the fellow who brings the mail was saying there was a letter for the master all the way from Spain, with a Spanish stamp on it."

"I'm going to tell you something: you shouldn't stick your nose in other people's letters. . . ."

The cook's head suddenly vanished. Apollon Apollonovich Ableukhov proceeded into the study.

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A pencil lying on the table struck the attention of Apollon Apollonovich. Apollon Apollonovich formed the intention: of imparting a sharpness of form to the pencil point. He quickly walked up to the writing table and snatched ... a paperweight, which he long turned this way and that, deep in thought.

His abstraction stemmed from the fact that at this instant a profound thought dawned on him, and straightaway, at this inopportune time, it unfolded into a fleeting thought train.

Apollon Apollonovich quickly began jotting down this unfolded thought train. Having jotted down the train, he thought: "Now it's time for the office." And he passed into the dining room to partake of his coffee.

By way of preliminaries, he undertook an insistent questioning of the old valet.

"Is Nikolai Apollonovich up yet?"

"No indeed, sir, he's not up yet. ..."

Apollon Apollonovich rubbed the bridge of his nose in dissatisfaction:

"Er . . . tell me: when, tell me, when does Nikolai Apollonovich, so to speak. . . ."

And, immediately, without awaiting an answer, he looked at the clock and proceeded to his coffee.

It was precisely half past nine.

Every morning the senator inquired about the times of his awakening. And every morning he made a face.

Nikolai Apollonovich was the senator's son.

In a Word, He Was Head of a Government Institution . . .

What, then, was the social position of the person who has arisen here from non-being?

I think the question is rather out of place: Ableukhov was known by all Russia for the eminent expansiveness of the speeches that he delivered. These speeches noiselessly effused certain poisons, as a result of which the proposals of an opposing camp were rejected in the appropriate place. With Ableukhov's installation in a responsible position, the Ninth Department became inactive. With this particular Department Apollon Apollonovich did dogged battle, both through official papers and, where necessary, through speeches, in an effort to promote the import of American haybalers into Russia. (The Ninth Department did not favor their import.)

Apollon Apollonovich was head of a Government Institution. Oh, uhhh, what was its name?

Were one to compare the wizened and utterly unprepossessing little figure of my elder statesman with the immeasurable immensity of the mechanisms managed by him, one might perhaps lapse into naive astonishment for quite some time. But then, after all, absolutely everyone was astonished at the explosion of the mental forces which poured forth from this particular cranium in defiance of all Russia.

My senator had just turned sixty-eight. And his pallid face recalled a gray paperweight (in a moment of triumph), and papier-mâché (in an hour of leisure). The stony senatorial eyes, surrounded by blackish green hollows, looked more blue and more immense in moments of fatigue.

On our part let us add: Apollon Apollonovich was not in the least agitated when he contemplated his ears, green all over and enlarged to immense size, against the bloody background of a Russia in flames. Thus had he recently been portrayed on the title page of a gutter rag, one of those trashy humor rags put out by the kikes, whose bloody covers in those days were spawned with staggering swiftness on prospects swarming with people. . . .

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Northeast

In the oak dining room the wall cuckoo clock had already cuckooed. Apollon Apollonovich had sat down before his porcelain cup and was breaking off warm crusts of bread. Over coffee—even then, even then—he would have his little joke:

"Who is the most respected of them all, Semyonych?"

"I suppose, Apollon Apollonovich, that the most respected of them all is an Actual Privy Councillor."

Apollon Apollonovich smiled with his lips only:

"You suppose incorrectly: a chimney sweep. . . ."

The valet already knew the way the riddle ended, but he kept quiet about it.

"But why, if I may venture to ask?"

"People make way for an Actual Privy Councillor, Semyonych. ..."

"I suppose that's so. . . ."

"A chimney sweep. . . . Even an Actual Privy Councillor will make way for him: a chimney sweep can get you all dirty."

"So that's what it is, sir."

"Yes, precisely. Except that there is an even more respected occupation. . . ."

And then and there he added:

"A cesspool cleaner. . . ."

"Ugh. . . ."

And a gulp of coffee.

"Well, Apollon Apollonovich, there were times when Anna Petrovna . . ."

But with the word "Anna Petrovna" the gray-haired valet stopped short.

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"The gray coat, sir?"

"Yes. . . ."

"And the gloves, sir?"

"Let me have the suede gloves. . . ."

"Kindly wait a moment, sir. Your Excellency, your gloves are in the chiffonier: Shelf B—northwest."

Only once had Apollon Apollonovich taken note of the trivia of life: he had made an audit of the household inventory. The inventory was registered in proper order and a nomenclature for all the shelves, large and small, was established: there appeared shelves labelled with the Latin letters A, B, C. And the four corners of each shelf received the designation of the four corners of the earth.

Putting away his spectacles, Apollon Apollonovich would note in the register, in a fine, minute hand: spectacles, shelf B and NE, that is, northeast. As for the valet, he was given a copy of the register.

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In the lacquered house the storms of life flowed noiselessly on; here, nonetheless, the storms of life did flow destructively on.

Harrowing, Harrow

A long-legged bronze rose up from the table. The lampshade did not glow in a delicately decorated violet-rose color (our age has lost the secret of this tint): the glass had darkened with time, and so had the delicate painting thereon.

From all sides golden pier glasses swallowed the drawing room in greenish mirror surfaces. They were crowned by the wings of cute little golden-cheeked cupids. A small mother-of-pearl table glittered.

Apollon Apollonovich flung open the door, resting his hand on the faceted, cut-glass knob. His step tapped along the gleaming panels of parquet. From all sides leaped cabinets with porcelain baubles. They had brought these bibelots from Venice, he and Anna Petrovna, some thirty years earlier. The remembrance of the misty

lagoon, the gondola, and an aria sobbing in the distance flashed inappropriately through the senator's head.

He immediately shifted his eyes to the grand piano.

There, from the yellow lacquered lid, sparkled tiny leaves of bronze incrustation. And again (oh, tiresome memory!) Apollon Apollonovich recalled: a white Petersburg night; in the windows the racing river; and the motionless moon; and the thunder of a Chopin roulade: the memory that Anna Petrovna now and then used to play Chopin (never Schumann). . . .

Tiny leaves of incrustation—mother-of-pearl and bronze—sparkled on the little boxes and on the little shelves that stood out from the walls. Apollon Apollonovich seated himself in an Empire armchair, where tiny garlands curled their way over the pale azure satin of the seat. And from a small Chinese tray his hand seized a packet of letters, still sealed. His bald head inclined over the envelopes.

And the envelopes were torn open one after the other: an ordinary one delivered by mail, with the stamp stuck on askew:

"I see, I see, fine . . ."

"A petition . . ."

"A petition, another petition. . . ."

In due time, later, sometime or other . . .

An envelope of heavy paper, and with a monogram, with a seal on the wax.

"Hmmm . . . Count W. . . . What's this?"

"Hmmm. . . ."

Count W. was head of the Ninth Department.

Next, a tiny pale pink envelope. The senator's hand trembled; he recognized this script. He scrutinized the Spanish stamp, but did not unseal the envelope.

"But wasn't the money sent?"

"The money *will* be sent!!!"

And Apollon Apollonovich, thinking it was a pencil, extracted an ivory nailbrush from his waistcoat and was preparing to make a notation with it. . . .

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"The carriage is here, sir."

Apollon Apollonovich raised his bald head and departed from the room.

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Over the grand piano hung a reduced copy of David's "Distribution des aigles par Napoléon Premier."

The picture represented the imperious Emperor in laurel wreath and ermine-trimmed royal mantle.

Cold was the magnificence of the drawing room, because of the total absence of rugs. The parquet gleamed. Had the sun illumined it for even an instant, one would have squinted involuntarily.

But having things cold was elevated into a principle by Senator Ableukhov.

It left its imprint on the master of the house, on the statues, on the servants, even on the dark brindle bulldog, who made his residence somewhere in the vicinity of the kitchen. In this house everyone felt ill at ease, deferring to the parquet, pictures, and statues, smiling, ill at ease, and holding their tongues. Everyone bowed and scraped and wrung cold hands in an access of sterile obsequiousness.

With the departure of Anna Petrovna the drawing room grew still, the piano lid was lowered; no more the thunder of roulades.

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When Apollon Apollonovich descended to the vestibule, his gray-haired valet, descending to the vestibule as well, kept glancing at the venerable ears, while gripping a snuffbox, the Minister's gift.

Apollon Apollonovich stopped on the staircase.

Apollon Apollonovich searched for the right word:

"What has, well, you know who, been up to ... been up to?"

"?"

"Nikolai Apollonovich."

"He's getting along just fine."

"And what else?"

"It's his pleasure to shut himself up in his room and read books."

"And read books?"

"He walks around his rooms, sir."

"Walks around? And? How so?"

"In a dressing gown, sir."

"I see. Go on."

"Yesterday he was waiting for . . ."

"Whom?"

"A costumer."

"What do you mean, a costumer?"

"A costumer, sir."

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Apollon Apollonovich rubbed the bridge of his nose. His face lit up and suddenly became senile.

"Mmm. Did you ever have a harrowing experience?"

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"But you were brought up on a farm, weren't you? So you must have had a harrow."

"Yes, sir, my parents had one."

"There, you see, and you didn't even know."

The Carriage Flew into the Fog

An icy drizzle sprayed streets and prospects, sidewalks and roofs.

It sprayed pedestrians and rewarded them with the grippe. Along with the fine dust of rain, influenza and grippe crawled under the raised collars of a schoolboy, a student, a clerk, an officer, a shady type. The shady type cast a dismal eye about him. He looked at the prospect. He circulated, without the slightest murmur, into an infinity of prospects—in a stream of others exactly like him—amidst the flight and din, listening to the voice of automobile roulades.

And—he stumbled on the embankment, where everything came to an end: the voice of the roulades and the shady type himself.

From far, far away, as though farther off than they should have been, the islands sank and cowered in fright; and the buildings cowered; it seemed that the waters would sink and that at that instant the depths, the greenish murk would surge over them. And over this greenish murk the Nikolaevsky Bridge thundered and trembled in the fog.

On this sullen morning the doors of a yellow house flew open. The windows of the house gave onto the Neva. And a gold-braided lackey rushed to beckon the coachman. Gray horses bounded forward and drew up a carriage on which was depicted a coat of arms: a unicorn goring a knight.

A jaunty police officer passing by the carriage porch gave a stupid look and snapped to attention when Apollon Apollonovich Ableukhov, in a gray coat and a tall black top hat, with a stony face resembling a paperweight, ran rapidly out of the entryway and still more rapidly ran onto the footboard of the carriage, drawing on a black suede glove as he ran.

Apollon Apollonovich Ableukhov cast a momentary, perplexed glance at the police officer, the carriage, the coachman, the great black bridge, the expanse of the Neva, where the foggy, many-chimneyed distances were so wanly etched, and whence Vasilievsky Island looked back at him in fright.

The lackey in gray hastily slammed the carriage door. The carriage flew headlong into the fog; and the police officer who had happened by glanced over his shoulder into the dingy fog, where the carriage had flown headlong. He sighed and moved on. The lackey looked there too: at the expanse of the Neva, where the foggy, many-chimneyed distances were so wanly etched, and whence Vasilievsky Island looked back at him in fright.

Here, at the very beginning, I must break the thread of my narrative, in order to introduce the reader to the scene of action of a certain drama.

Squares, Parallelepipeds, Cubes

There, where nothing but a foggy damp hung suspended, at first appeared the dull outline, then descended from heaven to earth the dingy, blackish gray St. Isaac's Cathedral: at first appeared the outline and then the full shape of the equestrian monument of Emperor Nicholas I. At its base the shaggy hat of a Nicholas grenadier thrust out of the fog.

The carriage was flying toward Nevsky Prospect.

Apollon Apollonovich Ableukhov was gently rocking on the satin seat cushions. He was cut off from the scum of the streets by four perpendicular walls. Thus he was isolated from people and from the red covers of the damp trashy rags on sale right there at this intersection.

Proportionality and symmetry soothed the senator's nerves, which had been irritated both by the irregularity of his domestic life and by the futile rotation of our wheel of state.

His tastes were distinguished by their harmonious simplicity.

Most of all he loved the rectilinear prospect; this prospect reminded him of the flow of time between the two points of life.

There the houses merged cubelike into a regular, five-story row. This row differed from the line of life: for many a wearer of diamond-studded decorations, as for so many other dignitaries, the middle of life's road had proven to be the termination of life's journey.

Inspiration took possession of the senator's soul whenever the lacquered cube cut along the line of the Nevsky: there the numeration of the houses was visible. And the circulation went on. There, from there, on clear days, from far, far away, came the blinding blaze of the gold needle, the clouds, the crimson ray of the sunset. There, from there, on foggy days—nothing, no one.

And what was there were lines: the Neva and the islands. Probably in those distant days, when out of the mossy marshes rose high roofs and masts and spires, piercing the dank greenish fog in jags-

—on his shadowy sails the Flying Dutchman winged his way toward Petersburg from there, from the leaden expanses of the Baltic and German Seas, in order here to erect, by delusion, his misty lands and to give the name of islands to the wave of onrushing clouds.

Apollon Apollonovich did not like the islands: the population there was industrial and coarse. There the many-thousand human swarm shuffled in the morning to the many-chimneyed factories. The inhabitants of the islands are reckoned among the population of the Empire; the general census has been introduced among them as well.

Apollon Apollonovich did not wish to think further. The islands must be crushed! Riveted with the iron of the enormous bridge, skewered by the arrows of the prospects. . . .

While gazing dreamily into that illimitability of mists, the statesman suddenly expanded out of the black cube of the carriage in all directions and soared above it. And he wanted the carriage to fly forward, the prospects to fly to meet him—prospect after prospect, so that the entire spherical surface of the planet should be embraced, as in serpent coils, by blackish gray cubes of houses; so that all the earth, crushed by prospects, in its lineal cosmic flight should intersect, with its rectilinear principle, unembraceable infinity; so that the network of parallel prospects, intersected by a network of prospects, should expand into the abysses of the universe in planes of squares and cubes: one square per "solid citizen," so that. . . .

After the line, the figure which soothed him more than all other symmetries was the square.

At times, for hours on end, he would lapse into an unthinking contemplation of pyramids, triangles, parallelepipeds, cubes, and trapezoids.

While dwelling in the center of the black, perfect, satin-lined cube, Apollon Apollonovich revelled at length in the quadrangular walls. Apollon Apollonovich was born for solitary confinement. Only his love for the plane geometry of the state had invested him in the polyhedrality of a responsible position.

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The wet, slippery prospect was intersected by another wet prospect at a ninety-degree right angle. At the point of intersection stood a policeman.

And exactly the same kind of houses rose up, and the same kind of gray human streams passed by there, and the same kind of yellow-green fog hung there.

But parallel with the rushing prospect was another rushing prospect with the same row of boxes, with the same numeration, with the same clouds.

There is an infinity of rushing prospects with an infinity of rush-

ing, intersecting shadows. All of Petersburg is an infinity of the prospect raised to the *n*th degree.

Beyond Petersburg, there is nothing.

The Inhabitants of the Islands Startle You

It was the last day of September.

On Vasilievsky Island, in the depths of the Seventeenth Line, a house enormous and gray looked out of the fog. A dingy staircase led to the floors. There were doors and more doors. One opened.

And a stranger with the blackest of small mustaches appeared on its threshold.

Rhythmically swinging in his hand was a not exactly small and yet not very large bundle tied up in a dirty napkin with a red border design of faded pheasants.

The staircase was black, strewn with cucumber peels and a cabbage leaf crushed under foot. The stranger slipped on it.

He then grasped the railing with one hand; the other hand (with the bundle) described a zigzag. The stranger wished to protect the bundle from a distressing accident, from falling onto the stone step, because the movement of his elbow mimicked a tightrope walker's turn.

Then, meeting the porter, who was climbing the stairs with a load of aspen wood over his shoulder, the stranger began to show increased concern about the fate of the bundle, which might catch against a log.

When the stranger reached the bottom, a black cat underfoot hitched up its tail and cut across his path, dropping chicken innards at the stranger's feet. And a spasm contorted his face.

Such movements are peculiar to young ladies.

And movements of precisely this same kind sometimes mark those of our contemporaries who are exhausted by insomnia. The stranger suffered from insomnia: his smoke-redolent habitation hinted at that. And the bluish tinge of the delicate skin of his face also bore witness.

The stranger remained standing in the courtyard, a quadrangle completely paved with asphalt and pressed in from all sides by the five stories of the many-windowed colossus. Stacked in the middle of the courtyard were damp cords of aspen wood. And visible through the gate was a section of the windswept Seventeenth Line.

Oh, you lines!

In you has remained the memory of Petrine Petersburg.

The parallel lines were once laid out by Peter. And some of them came to be enclosed with granite, others with low fences of stone, still others with fences of wood. Peter's line turned into the

line of a later age: the rounded one of Catherine, the regular ranks of colonnades.

Left among the colossi were small Petrine houses: here a timbered one, there a green one, there a blue, single-storied one, with the bright red sign "Dinners Served." Sundry odors hit you right in the nose: the smell of sea salt, of herring, of hawsers, of leather jacket and of pipe, and of nautical tarpaulin.

Oh, lines!

How they have changed: how grim days have changed them!

The stranger recalled: on a summer evening, in the window of that gleaming little house, an old woman was chewing her lips. Since August the window had been shut. In September a brocade-lined coffin was brought.

He was thinking it was getting more and more expensive to live. Life was hard for working folk. From over there pierced Petersburg, both with the arrows of prospects and with a gang of stone giants.

From over there rose Petersburg: there buildings blazed out of a wave of clouds. There, it seemed, hovered someone spiteful, cold. From over there, out of the howling chaos someone stared with stony gaze, skull and ears protruding into the fog.

All of that was in the mind of the stranger. He clenched his fist in his pocket. And he remembered that the leaves were falling.

He knew it all by heart. These fallen leaves were the last leaves for many. He became a bluish shadow.

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And as for us, here's what we'll say: oh, Russian people, oh, Russian people! Don't let the crowd of shadows in from the islands! Black and damp bridges are already thrown across the waters of Lethe. If only they could be dismantled. . . .

Too late. . . .

And the shadows thronged across the bridge. And the dark shadow of the stranger.

Rhythmically swinging in his hand was a not exactly small, yet not very large bundle.

And, Catching Sight, They Dilated, Lit Up, and Flashed . . .

The aged senator communicated with the crowd that flowed in front of him by means of wires (telegraph and telephone). The shadowy stream seemed to him like the calmly current news of the world. Apollon Apollonovich was thinking: about the stars. Rocking on the black cushions, he was calculating the power of the light perceived from Saturn.

Suddenly—

—his face grimaced and began to twitch. His blue-rimmed eyes rolled back convulsively. His hands flew up to his chest. And his torso reeled back, while the top hat struck the wall and fell on his lap.

The involuntary nature of his movement was not subject to explanation. The senator's code of rules had not foreseen. . . .

Contemplating the flowing silhouettes, Apollon Apollonovich likened them to shining dots. One of these dots broke loose from its orbit and hurtled at him with dizzying speed, taking the form of an immense crimson sphere—

—among the bowlers on the corner, he caught sight of a pair of eyes. And the eyes expressed the inadmissible. They recognized the senator, and, having recognized him, they grew rabid, dilated, lit up, and flashed.

Subsequently, on delving into the details of the matter, Apollon Apollonovich understood, rather than remembered, that the upstart intellectual was holding a bundle in his hand.

Hemmed in by a stream of vehicles, the carriage had stopped at an intersection. A stream of upstart intellectuals had pressed against the senator's carriage, destroying the illusion that he, Apollon Apollonovich, in flying along the Nevsky, was flying billions of miles away from the human myriapod. Perturbed, Apollon Apollonovich had moved closer to the window. At that point he had caught sight of the upstart intellectual. Later he had remembered that face, and was perplexed by the difficulty of assigning it to any of the existing categories.

It was at just that moment that the stranger's eyes had dilated, lit up, and flashed.

In the swarms of dingy smoke, leaning back against the wall of the carriage, he was still seeing the same thing in his eyes. His heart pounded and expanded, while in his breast arose the sensation of a crimson sphere about to burst into pieces.

Apollon Apollonovich, you see, suffered from dilatation of the heart.

Automatically putting on his top hat and pressing his hand to his racing heart, Apollon Apollonovich had abandoned himself to his favorite contemplation, cubes, in order to give himself a calm account of what had occurred.

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The horses came to a halt. The policeman saluted. Behind the glass of the entryway, beneath the bearded caryatid supporting the stones of a little balcony, Apollon Apollonovich saw the same thing as always. The heavy-headed bronze mace gleamed there;

the dark tricorne had fallen onto the shoulder there: the octogenarian doorman dozed over *The Stock Exchange Register*. Thus he had dozed the day before yesterday and yesterday.

Thus he had been sleeping for the past five years. Thus he would sleep on.

Since the time that Apollon Apollonovich had driven up to the Government Institution as head of the Government Institution, more than five years had gone by. And there had been events: there had been turmoil in China, and Port Arthur had fallen.

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The door flew open. The bronze mace rang out. From the carriage door Apollon Apollonovich transferred his gaze into the entryway.

"Your Excellency. . . . Do sit down, sir. . . . Heavens, you're all out of breath. . . ."

"You're always running like a little boy. . . ."

"Maybe you'd like some water?"

But the eminent statesman's face became all wrinkles:

"Tell me, if you will: who is the husband of the countess?"

"Which countess, may I ask?"

"Oh, just any countess."

"?"

"The counter."

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"Heh, heh, heh, sir. . . ."

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Of Two Shabbily Dressed but Sweet Girl Students

Amidst the crowds that slowly flowed past, the stranger was flowing past. Or rather, he was flowing away in utter confusion from the intersection where he had been pressed against a carriage, from which had stared an ear, a top hat.

He had seen this ear before!

He broke into a run.

Cutting across columns of conversations, he caught fragments, and sentences took form.

"Do you know?" was heard from somewhere on the right. And died away.

And then surfaced:

"They're planning . . ."

"To throw . . ."

A whisper from behind:

"At who?"

And then an indistinct couple said:

"Abl. . ."

They passed by:

"At Ableukhov?!"

The couple completed the sentence somewhere far away:

"Abl-ution is not the sol-u-tion for what . . ."

And the couple hiccuped.

And the stranger stopped, shaken by all he had heard:

"They're planning . . ."

"To throw . . .?"

Whispering began all around:

"Probable . . . proof . . ."

The stranger heard not "prob" but "prov," and finished it himself:

"Prov-ocation?!"

Provocation began its revelry all along the Nevsky. Provocation had changed the meaning of the words that had been heard.

He had simply, on his own, added the preposition "at." With the addition of the letters "a" and "t" an innocent verbal scrap had changed into a scrap with horrible contents. And, most important: the preposition had been added by the stranger.

Provocation, accordingly, had its seat within him.

Oh, Russian people!

You are becoming shadows of swirling whorls of mist. From time immemorial the mists have been swirling out of the leaden expanses of the seething Baltic. Into the mists stared cannons.

At noon a muffled cannon-shot triumphally filled all of Petersburg, the magnificent capital of the Empire. And the mists were rent asunder, and the shadows dispersed.

Only one shadow, a young man, was not shaken and did not disintegrate from the shot, as he continued his run to the Neva unhindered.

Suddenly he saw, fastened upon him, the eyes of two shabbily dressed but sweet girl students.

Why Don't You Keep Quiet!

"We-me . . ."

But it sounded like:

"Me-me."

And a scraggly bunch of gents in suitcoats would start squealing:

"A-aha-ha, aha-ha!"

.

A Petersburg street in autumn is piercing; it both chills you to the marrow, and tickles. As soon as you leave it and go indoors, the street flows in your veins like a fever.

The stranger experienced all that when he came into the sweaty and steamy vestibule, jam-packed with every which kind of black, blue, gray, yellow coat, with lop-eared caps, and with every conceivable kind of overshoe. A steamy pancake smell hung everywhere:

"Aaa! . . ."

.

The restaurant premises consisted of a small grimy room. The floor was waxed. The walls had been decorated by some amateur painter, and depicted remnants of a flotilla, from above which Peter was pointing off into space.

"A little picon in it?"

"No, no picon!"

He was thinking: why had there been a frightened look behind the carriage window? The eyes had bulged, gone petrified, and shut. The head had reeled back and disappeared. A hand had trembled impotently there; it was not a hand but . . . a tiny paw.

And in the meantime snacks were drying up on the counter; and wilted leaves of some kind were turning sour under a mound of overdone meat patties.

.

Lingering there at a distance was an idle sweating stalwart with a coachman's beard, a blue jacket, and blacked boots. He was knocking back glass after glass. Now and then he would summon the waiter:

"How's about a little somethin'?"

"Some melon, sir?"

"Your melon, it tastes like soap with sugar on it."

"Perhaps a banana, sir."

"That's a dirty-sounding fruit."

.

Thrice had my stranger swallowed the acerbic poison. And his consciousness, detaching itself from his body, like the handle on the lever of a mechanism, began revolving around the organism.

And the stranger's consciousness became clear for an instant. Yes: where's the bundle? Here it is, right beside me, here. . . .

The encounter had knocked his memory out.

.

"A nice piece of watermelon, sir?"

"The heck with your watermelon. All it does is crunch between your teeth, and there's nothin' left in your mouth. . . ."

"All right, how 'bout some vodka. . . ."

.

"Buy you a drink, pal?"

The idle sweating stalwart with a beard gave a wink.

"But why not?"

"I've already had enough."

"Come on, have a little drink, just to keep me cumpaneee. . . ."

My stranger realized something: he looked at him suspiciously, clutched at the damp bundle, at a sheet (of newspaper). He covered the bundle with it.

"Hey, you from Tula, pal?"

"Not at all."

.

He was thinking, and he wasn't. His thoughts were thinking themselves, and they produced a picture: tarpaulins, hawsers, herring, sacks crammed full of something; amidst the sacks a workman dressed in blackest leather, and standing out distinctly in a fog of fleeting surfaces, kept hoisting sacks onto his back; and the sacks thudded dully into a barge overloaded with beams; the workman (something familiar about him) was standing over the sacks and was taking out a pipe.

.

"Here on business?"

(Oh, Lord!)

"No!"

"O-ho, and me, I'm a coachman."

.

"Now my wife's brother, *he* drives for Konstantin Konstantinych. . . ."

"Well, so what?"

"So what? So nothin'!"

.

Suddenly . . .

But about suddenly, we shall speak later.

The Writing Table Stood There

Apollon Apollonovich was taking aim at the current business day. And there arose: reports from the previous day; he pictured papers

on the table in his office, their sequence, and the pencil notations he had made: the blue "*expedite*" with a curlicue on the silent "e" the red "*further information*," with a flourish on the "n"

While between the staircase of the department and the doors to his office, Apollon Apollonovich, by an act of his will, shifted the center of his consciousness. Cerebral play was retreating to the edge of the field of vision, as were the whitish patterns of wallpaper: a small pile of dossiers placed parallel shifted to the center of the field, as had the portrait.

The portrait? That is:

"He's gone—and Rus he has deserted. . . ."

Who? The senator? He? Apollon Apollonovich Ableukhov? Why, no: Vyacheslav Konstantinovich. And what about him, Apollon Apollonovich?

"My turn has come, in very truth . . .
Beloved Delvig calls for me. . . ."

My turn is my turn: there comes a turn for everyone—

"And o'er the earth new thunderclouds have gathered,
The hurricane . . ."

The small pile of papers leaped to the surface of his consciousness. Apollon Apollonovich took aim at the current business day.

"Hermann Hermannovich, be so good as to prepare that, oh, what's it called . . .

"The dossier on the deacon Zrakov's pupil!"

Now he recalled (he had completely forgotten): yes, the eyes. They had been astonished, they had grown rabid. . . . And why that zigzag? A most unpleasant one. And he seemed to have seen that upstart intellectual at some time or other. Or maybe—nowhere, never.

Apollon Apollonovich opened the door to his office.

The writing table stood there, and the logs in the fireplace crackled away. Apollon Apollonovich was warming his frozen hands at the fireplace, while his cerebral play went on constructing misty planes:

"Nikolai Apollonovich . . ."

At this point Apollon Apollonovich . . .

"?"

Apollon Apollonovich stopped at the door.

His innocent cerebral play again moved spontaneously into his brain, that is, into the pile of papers and petitions. Apollon Apollonovich perhaps would have considered cerebral play on the same plane as the wallpaper of the room; the plane, however, in moving apart at times, admitted a surprise into the center of his mental life.

Apollon Apollonovich recalled:

Once before he had seen that upstart intellectual—just imagine—in his very own house.

One time he had happened to be descending the staircase. Nikolai Apollonovich, leaning over the balustrade, was chatting with someone. The statesman did not consider that he had the right to make inquiries about Nikolai Apollonovich's acquaintances. His sense of tact naturally prevented him from asking:

"Kolenka, my dear boy, who is it that's visiting you?"

Nikolai Apollonovich would have lowered his eyes:

"Nobody special, papa: people come to see me."

That was precisely why Apollon Apollonovich had not taken the slightest interest at that time in the identity of the upstart intellectual wearing an overcoat and looking in from the vestibule. The stranger had the very same small mustache and startling eyes (such as you would encounter at night in the Moscow chapel of the Martyr Panteleimon, which is by the Nikolsky Gate; such as you would encounter in the portrait of a great man appended to his biography; and further: in a neuropathological clinic).

Even then the eyes had dilated, gleamed, and flashed. Therefore, it had already happened once and, perhaps, would be repeated.

.

Apollon Apollonovich suddenly looked beyond the door: tables and more tables! Piles of dossiers! And, inclined heads! What a bustling and mighty paper mill!

.

The cerebral play of the wearer of diamond-studded decorations was distinguished by strange, very strange, extremely strange qualities: his cranium was becoming the womb of thought-images, which at once became incarnate in this spectral world.

Oh, better that Apollon Apollonovich should never have cast off a single idle thought, but should have continued to carry each and every thought in his head, for every thought stubbornly evolved into a spatiotemporal image, and continued its uncontrolled activities outside the senatorial head.

Apollon Apollonovich was like Zeus: out of his head flowed goddesses and genii. One of these genii (the stranger with the small black mustache), arising as an image, had already *begun to live and breathe* in the yellowish spaces. And he maintained that he had emerged from there, not from the senatorial head. This stranger turned out to have idle thoughts too. And they also possessed the same qualities.

They would escape and take on substance.

And one fugitive thought was the thought that the stranger really existed. The thought fled back into the senatorial brain.

The circle closed.

Apollon Apollonovich was like Zeus. Thus, scarcely had the Stranger-Pallas been born out of his head when from there another Pallas, exactly like it, came crawling out.

This Pallas was the senators house.

.

The lackey was climbing the staircase. Oh, most beautiful staircase! And the steps: soft, like the convolutions of the brain, over which cabinet ministers had climbed more than once. The lackey was already in the hall. . . .

And then again the hall: most beautiful. Windows and walls, somewhat cold. . . .

We have cast an eye over this habitation, guided by the general characteristics which the senator was wont to bestow on all objects.

Thus:-

—having found himself on one rare occasion in the flowering bosom of nature, Apollon Apollonovich saw: the flowering bosom of nature. For us this bosom would immediately break down into its characteristics: into violets, buttercups, pinks; the senator would again reduce the particulars to a unity. We would say, of course:

"There's a buttercup!"

"There's a nice little forget-me-not. . . ."

But Apollon Apollonovich would say simply and succinctly:

"A flower. . . ."

Just between us: for some reason, Apollon Apollonovich considered all flowers the same, bluebells.

He would have characterized even his own house with laconic brevity, as consisting, for him, of walls (forming squares and cubes) into which windows were cut, of parquetry, of tables. Beyond that were details.

But we would do well to remember: what has flickered by (pictures, grand piano, mirrors, mother-of-pearl, small incrustated tables)—everything that has flickered by—was only an irritation of the cerebral membrane, if not an indisposition of the cerebellum.

An illusion of a room would be constructed, and it would then fly apart, leaving no trace. And when the door to the small hollow-echoing corridor slammed shut, it was only a hammering in the temples.

There proved to be no drawing room behind the slammed door but rather, cerebral spaces: convolutions, gray and white matter,

the pineal gland; while the heavy walls of sparkling spurts (due to the afflux of blood) were a leaden and painful sensation: of the occipital, frontal, temporal, and sincipital bones.

Apollon Apollonovich was sitting at the table, busy with dossiers; he had the sensation that his head was six times larger than it should be, and twelve times heavier than it should be.

Our Role

Petersburg streets possess one indubitable quality: they transform passersby into shadows.

This we have seen in the case of the mysterious stranger.

Having arisen as a thought, he somehow became connected with the senator's house. He surfaced there on the prospect, immediately following the senator in our story.

From the intersection to that restaurant on Millionnaya Street we have obligingly described the route of the stranger as far as that notorious word "suddenly," which interrupted everything.

Let us investigate his soul. But first, let us investigate that restaurant, and even the vicinity of that restaurant. There are grounds for this.

In the investigation that we have quite naturally undertaken, we have merely anticipated Senator Ableukhov's desire that an agent of the secret policet should doggedly follow the steps of the stranger. While the insouciant agent is still inactive back in his office, we ourselves will be this agent.

But haven't we made fools of ourselves? Now what sort of agent are we? The real one does exist. And he's on the alert, so help me, he is.

When the stranger disappeared through the doors of that restaurant, we turned and spied two silhouettes cutting through the fog. One was both fat and tall and conspicuous for his build. But we could not make out his face (silhouettes, after all, have no faces). And yet we did discern an open umbrella and galoshes and a hat, half sealskin, with ear-flaps.

The mangy little figure of an utterly undersized gentleman was what largely comprised the second silhouette. His face was visible: we did not manage to see his face, for we were astonished by the enormous size of a wart. Thus facial substance had been obscured by insolent accidentality (which is as it should be in the world of shadows).

Pretending to be looking into the clouds, we let the indistinct pair pass ahead. The pair paused in front of the restaurant door.

"Hmmm?"

"Here. . . ."

"That's what I thought."

"What measures have you taken?"

"I've placed a man there, inside the restaurant."

.

"Hmmm . . . I'll have to . . . Hmmm! . . . wish you success. . . ."

The undertaking had been set like a clock mechanism.

"Hmmm?"

"What's wrong?"

"Damned head cold."

"Listen: you should accept some remuneration. . . ."

"No, you just won't understand me!"

"Yes, I will: you're definitely out of handkerchiefs."

"What?"

"But you have a cold!"

"I'm not working for remuneration: I am an artist!"

"In a manner of speaking."

"What?"

"I'm using the tallow candle cure."

The little figure took out its snotty handkerchief:

"Be sure to report it: Nikolai Apolionovich has given a promise. . . ."

"A tallow candle is a wonderful remedy!"

"Tell them everything!"

"At night you smear your nostrils with it and in the morning you're fit as a fiddle."

Again the handkerchief began its work beneath the wart. The two shadows were already flowing off into the brain-chilling murk. Soon the shadow of the fat man reemerged from the fog, and looked distractedly at the spire of Peter and Paul.

And it went into that restaurant.

And Besides, the Face Glistened

"Suddenlys" are familiar to you. Why, then, do you bury your head like an ostrich at the approach of the inexorable "suddenly"?

"It" sneaks up behind your back. Sometimes it even precedes your appearance in a room. You feel horribly uneasy. In your back grows the sensation that a gang of things invisible has shoved its way in through your back, as through a door. You turn, you ask your hostess:

"Madam, would you mind if I close the door? I have a peculiar kind of nervous sensation: I can't bear to sit with my back to the door."

They laugh. You also laugh: as if there were no "suddenly."

"It" feeds on cerebral play. It gladly devours all vileness of thought. And it swells up, while you melt like a candle. "Suddenly," like a fattened yet unseen dog, begins to precede you, producing in an observer the impression that you are screened from view by an invisible cloud. This is what your "suddenly" is.

.

We left the stranger in that restaurant. *Suddenly* he turned around. It seemed to him that slime had gotten under his collar and had begun to ooze. He turned around. But there was nobody behind his back. And from there, from the door, something invisible shoved its way in.

At that very moment when my stranger turned away from the door, an unpleasant fat man came in through it. And as he walked toward the stranger, he set a floorboard creaking. His yellowish, clean-shaven face, inclined slightly to the side, smoothly floated on its own double chin. And besides, the face glistened.

At this point our stranger turned around. *The person* was waving a hat at him, half sealskin, with ear-flaps:

"Alexander Ivanych . . ."

"Lippanchenko!"

Round *the person's* shirt collar was a necktie, satin-red, loud, and fastened with a large paste jewel. A dark yellow striped suit enveloped *the person*. Polish gleamed on his yellow shoes.

Taking a seat at the stranger's table, *the person* yelled:

"A pot of coffee! And listen, some cognac. My bottle's there, under my . . ."

And around them was heard:

"What about you? Did you have something to drink?"

"I did."

"Something to eat?"

"I did."

"Then permit me to say you're a pig."

.

"Careful!" exclaimed the stranger. The fat man, called Lippanchenko by the stranger, was about to set his dark yellow elbow on the sheet of newspaper covering the bundle.

"What?" Here Lippanchenko, lifting the paper, saw the bundle. His lips quivered.

"Is that the . . . the? . . ."

His lips still quivered, resembling pieces of sliced salmon, not yellowish red, but oily and yellow.

"How careless you are, Alexander Ivanovich, if I do say so." Lippanchenko reached his clumsy thick fingers toward the bundle,

all aglitter with the fake stones of his rings, all swollen, nails gnawed (and on the nails showed dark traces of brown dye, of a color identical to that of his hair; an attentive observer could draw the conclusion: why, this person dyes his hair).

"After all, the slightest movement (if I'd just set down my elbow), after all, there might have been a catastrophe."

And with special caution *the person* now transferred the bundle to the chair.

"Well, yes, we would both have been splattered all over the walls," the stranger joked unpleasantly.

.

And around them was heard:

"Don't you dare call me a pig."

"I didn't mean anything by that."

"Yes, you did. You're mad you had to pay."

"All right, go on and eat, let's forget it."

.

"Well then, Alexander Ivanovich, well then, my dear fellow, as for this bundle"—and Lippanchenko looked out of the corner of his eye—"ake it to Nikolai Apollonovich right away."

"Now wait a minute. The bundle will certainly be safe at my place."

"That's not convenient. You might be arrested. *There* it will be safe."

And the fat man, leaning over, began whispering something in his ear:

"Pss-pss-pss . . ."

"Ableukhov's?"

"Pss . . ."

"To Ableukhov? . . ."

"Pss . . ."

"With Ableukhov? . . ."

"No, not with the senator, with the son. Deliver this letter to him along with the bundle, here it is."

Lippanchenko's low narrow forehead was practically touching the stranger's face. His searching little eyes were guarded, his lips quivered slightly and sucked at the air. The stranger lent a close ear to the whispering of the fat gentleman, carefully trying to make out the contents of the whispering, which was almost drowned out by the voices in the restaurant. And from the repugnant lips came a rustling (like the rustle of ants' legs on a dug-up anthill). And it seemed as if the whispering had horrible contents, as though worlds and planetary systems were being whispered about here. But it was

worthwhile listening closely, because the dreadful contents of the whispering were disintegrating into something humdrum.

"Be sure to deliver the letter."

.

Around them was heard:

"What is Man?"

"Man is what he eats."

"I know."

"Well, since you know, grab a plate and eat."

.

Lippanchenko's suit reminded the stranger of the color of the yellow wallpaper in his habitation on Vasilievsky Island, a color associated with insomnia. That insomnia evoked the memory of a fateful facet with very narrow little Mongol eyes. The face had looked repeatedly at him from the wallpaper. When he examined this place during the day, he could make out only a damp spot, over which crawled a sow bug. In order to distract himself from memories of the tormenting hallucination, he grew garrulous, to his own surprise:

"Listen carefully to the noise."

"They're noisy, all right."

"You think you hear 's-s-s,' but you really hear 'SH'. . . ."

Lippanchenko, in a daze, had retreated into his own thoughts.

"You can hear something dull and slimy in the sound 'sh.' Or am I mistaken?"

"No, not at all," and Lippanchenko tore himself away from his thoughts.

"All words with 'sh' are outrageously trivial. 'S' isn't like that. 'S-s-s': sky, concept, crystal. The sound 's-s-s' evokes in me the image of the curve of an eagle's beak. But words with 'sh' are trivial. For example: the word *fish*. Listen: *fi-sh-sh-sh*, that is, something with cold blood. And again: *slu-sh-sh-sh*: something slimy; *mush*, something shapeless; *rash*, something diseased."

The stranger broke off. Lippanchenko was sitting before him like utterly shapeless mush. And the ash from his cigarette slushed up the grayish atmosphere. Lippanchenko was sitting in a cloud. The stranger then looked at him and thought: "Ptui, what filth, how Tartarish." Sitting before him was simply some kind of "SH."

.

From the next table someone hiccuped and shouted: "Don't you shush me, you!"

.

"Excuse me, Lippanchenko: are you by any chance a Mongol?"

"Why such a strange question?"

"Every Russian has some Mongol blood."

.

What Costumer?

Nikolai Apollonovich's quarters consisted of a bedroom, a study, and a reception room.

The whole of the bedroom was occupied by an enormous bed. It was covered by a satin spread, with pillow covers.

The study was lined with oak shelves crammed with books, before which silk could be slid back on rings to reveal rows of leather bindings.

The furniture in the study was upholstered in dark green. There was a handsome bust of—it stands to reason—Kant.

For two years Nikolai Apollonovich had not risen before noon. For two and a half years before that, however, he had awakened at nine o'clock, and had appeared in a student uniform buttoned up to the neck.

Then he did not walk around the house in a Bukhara dressing gown. A skullcap did not grace his oriental drawing room. Two and a half years ago Anna Petrovna, the mother of Nikolai Apollonovich and the spouse of Apollon Apollonovich, had abandoned the family hearth, inspired by an Italian singer. It was after her flight with the singer that Nikolai Apollonovich appeared on the parquetry of the domestic hearth in a Bukhara dressing gown. The daily encounters over morning coffee broke off by themselves.

The senator partook of his coffee considerably earlier than did his son.

A dressing gown began to appear on Nikolai Apollonovich. Tartar slippers were introduced. A skullcap made its appearance.

Thus was a brilliant student transformed into an Oriental.

Nikolai Apollonovich had just received a letter in an unfamiliar hand, some pathetic doggerel with the striking signature: "A Soul Aflame."

Nikolai Apollonovich began rushing about the room, looking for his spectacles, rummaging among books, quills, and pens.

"Oh!

"Damn it all!"

Nikolai Apollonovich, just like Apollon Apollonovich, talked to himself.

His movements were abrupt, like his papa's movements. Like Apollon Apollonovich, he was distinguished by an unprepossessing stature and by restless eyes set in a smiling face. Whenever he sank

into serious contemplation, his gaze grew rigid: the lines of his totally white countenance stood out dry, sharp and cold, iconlike. His most noble feature was his forehead, finely chiselled, with tiny swollen veins. The pulsation of the veins on his forehead was a sign of sclerosis.

The bluish veins matched the circles around his immense dark cornflower blue eyes (in moments of agitation, his eyes grew black: from dilation of the pupils).

Nikolai Apollonovich was wearing a Tartar skullcap. Were he to remove it, there would appear a thatch of fine flaxen white hair, which softened his cold, severe exterior, with its stamp of stubbornness. It is rare to find hair of such a shade on a grown man. This shade is often to be seen on infants, especially in White Russia.

Here, in his own room, Nikolai Apollonovich would truly grow into a self-contained center, into a series of logical premises that flowed from the center and predetermined thought, soul, and this very table. Here he was the sole center of the universe, conceivable as well as inconceivable.

This center made deductions.

But no sooner had Nikolai Apollonovich managed to set aside the trivia of daily life and the abyss of inapprehensibilities called the world and life, than inapprehensibility again burst in.

Nikolai Apollonovich tore himself away from his book:

"Well? . . ."

A muffled and deferential voice was heard:

"Someone is asking for you, sir."

After locking himself in, and while reviewing the tenets of his system, which was being reduced to a unity step by step, he felt his body poured into "all" while his head was displaced into the light bulb's potbellied sphere of glass.

And having thus displaced himself, Nikolai Apollonovich would become a truly creative being.

He loved to lock himself in. And the rustle and tread of any intruder would shatter his consciousness.

So it was now.

"What is it?"

But a voice answered from afar:

"Someone has come."

.

At this, Nikolai Apollonovich's face assumed a satisfied expression:

"Ah, it's someone from the costumer. The costumer has brought me my costume. . . ."

And gathering up the skirts of his dressing gown, he strode off in the direction of the door. At the balustrade of the staircase, he leaned over and shouted:

"Is that you?"

"The costumer?"

What is this costumer business?

.

In Nikolai Apollonovich's room a box appeared. Nikolai Apollonovich locked the door. He cut the string with great fuss. He lifted the top and took out of the box: a half-mask with a black lace beard, and after the mask, a luxuriant bright red dominot with folds that rustled.

Soon he was standing before the mirror, all satiny and red, holding the miniature half-mask over his face. The black lace of the beard fell away and back onto his shoulders, forming a fantastic wing on each side, right and left.

After this masquerade, Nikolai Apollonovich, an extremely satisfied expression on his face, put first the red domino and then the black half-mask back in the box.

Wet Autumn

Tufts of cloud scudded by in a greenish swarm. The greenish swarm rose ceaselessly over the interminable remoteness of the prospects of the Neva; into the greenish swarm stretched a spire . . . from the Petersburg Side.

Describing a funereal arc in the sky, a dark ribbon, a ribbon of soot, rose from the chimneys; and it tailed off onto the waters.

The Neva seethed and shrieked with the high-pitched whistle of a small steamboat, it smashed steely, watery shields against the piers of the bridges, and it lapped at the granite.

And against this glooming background of hanging soot tailing above the damp stones of the embankment railing, eyes staring into the turbid germ-infested waters of the Neva, there stood, in sharp outline, the silhouette of Nikolai Apollonovich.

At the great black bridge he stopped.

An unpleasant smile flared on his face. He was gripped by memories of an unhappy love affair. Nikolai Apollonovich recalled a certain foggy night. That night he had leaned over the railing. He had turned around and raised his leg. He had lifted it, in shiny overshoe, over the railing. It would seem that further consequences ought to have ensued, but . . . Nikolai Apollonovich had lowered his leg.

Recalling this unsuccessful act of his now, Nikolai Apollonovich smiled in a highly unpleasant manner, cutting a rather comic figure. Wrapped up in a greatcoat, he seemed stooped and somehow armless, with the long wing of the greatcoat flapping in the wind.

"How handsome," was heard all around Nikolai Apollonovich.

"An ancient mask . . ."

"Ah, how pale the face . . ."

"That marble profile . . ."

But had Nikolai Apollonovich burst out laughing, the ladies would have said:

"What an ugly monster . . ."

At a porch where two lions mockingly place paw on gray granite paw he stopped, having spied the back of a passing officer. All entangled in the skirts of his greatcoat, he tried to overtake the officer:

"Sergei Sergeevich?"

For a moment some thought or other flickered over the officer's face. From the expression on his trembling lips one might have supposed that the officer was hesitating: should he recognize him or not:

"Ah . . . hello. . . ."

"Where are you going?" asked Nikolai Apollonovich, so that he might walk along the Moika with the officer.

"Home."

"That means we're going the same way."

Above the two of them, alternating with rows of windows on a yellow building, were rows of lion faces, each over a coat of arms entwined with a stone garland.

As if trying not to touch on something that was past, the two of them, interrupting each other, talked about how the disturbances of recent weeks had affected Nikolai Apollonovich's philosophical labors.

Above the two of them, alternating with rows of windows on a yellow government building, were rows of lion faces, each over a coat of arms entwined with a garland.

There's the Moika, and that same light-colored, three-storied, five-columned building; and the narrow strips of ornamented moulding above the third story: ring after ring; inside each ring was a Roman helmet on two crossed swords. They had already passed the building. And there's *the* house. And there are *the* windows. . . .

"Goodbye. Are you going further?"

Nikolai Apollonovich's heart began to pound. He was on the verge of asking something. But no, he did not ask. He stood all alone before the door that had just been slammed. He was gripped

by memories of an unhappy love affair, or rather, of a sensual attraction.

That same light-colored, five-columned building with a strip of ornamental moulding: inside each ring a Roman helmet on two crossed swords.

.

Of an evening the Prospect is flooded with fiery obfuscation. Down the middle, at regular intervals, hang the apples of electric lights. While along the sides plays the changeable glitter of shop signs. Here the sudden flare of ruby lights, there the flare of emeralds. A moment later the rubies are there, and the emeralds are here.

.

Nikolai Apollonovich was not seeing the Nevsky; before his eyes was that same house; windows and shadows behind the windows; perhaps merry voices: of the yellow cuirassier, Baron Ommau-Ommergau; and *her* voice, *her* voice.

Apollon Apollonovich Recalled

Yes, Apollon Apollonovich recalled: recently he had overheard an inoffensive joke told by the clerks about himself:

"He harps on the same note: disdain. . . ."

His defenders intervened:

"Gentlemen, that comes from hemorrhoids. . . ."

At that point the door flew open. Apollon Apollonovich entered. The joke broke off (thus does a nimble baby mouse scamper off into a crack). Apollon Apollonovich did not take offense at jokes.

Apollon Apollonovich then went up to the window. Two heads in the windows across the way saw opposite them the blur of the face of an unknown little old man behind a pane.

.

Here, in the office of a high Government Institution, Apollon Apollonovich would grow into a kind of center of governmental institutions and green-topped tables. Here he was a point of radiating energy, a grid, an impulse. He was a force in the Newtonian sense, and a force in the Newtonian sense is an occult force.

Consciousness would detach itself from individuality, becoming incredibly clear and concentrating in a single point (between the eyes and the forehead). A flame, flaring between the eyes and the forehead, would scatter sheaves of lightning bolts. His lightning-bolt thoughts would fly from his bald head in every direction like

snakes; a clairvoyant would doubtless have seen the head of the Gorgon-Medusa.

Consciousness would detach itself from individuality: and individuality presented itself to the senator's imagination as a cranium and as a container that had been utterly emptied.

From this armchair he would intersect his life by means of his consciousness. From this place circulars sliced up the patchwork field of humdrum life, which he would equate with sexual, vegetable, or other kinds of needs.

Only from here did he loom and hover madly over Russia, and in his foes evoke a fateful comparison (with a bat).

Apollon Apollonovich was particularly sharp today. Not once did his head nod over a report. Lord knows why, Apollon Apollonovich had come to the conclusion that his very own son, Nikolai Apollonovich, was a scoundrel.

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At the entryway the caryatid was visible: a bearded man of stone.

The bearded man of stone rose above the noise of the street, above the seasons. The year eighteen hundred and twelve saw him freed from his scaffolding. The year eighteen hundred and twenty-five saw the crowds rage beneath him. The crowd passed by even now, in the year nineteen hundred and five. For more than five years Apollon Apollonovich had been looking daily from here at the smile carved in stone. The tooth of time was gnawing it away. During those five years events had flown by: Anna Petrovna was in Spain; Vyacheslav Konstantinovich was no more; the yellow heel had brazenly mounted the ridges above Port Arthur; there had been turmoil in China, and Port Arthur had fallen.

The door opened. The secretary, a young man with a medal flapping on his chest, flew up to the high personage, the over-starched edge of his cuff crackling deferentially. And to his timid question Apollon Apollonovich droned back:

"No, no! Do as I said. And you'd better do it . . ." said Apollon Apollonovich; but he stopped and corrected himself:

"I mean . . ."

He had wanted to say "be so good as" to the secretary, but it came out "you'd better do it."

The tales of his absentmindedness were legion.

Cold Fingers

Apollon Apollonovich Ableukhov, in a gray coat and a tall black top hat, with a stony face resembling a paperweight, ran rapidly

out of the carriage, and ran up the steps of the entryway, removing a glove as he ran.

He entered the vestibule. The top hat was handed to the lackey.

"Would you be so kind: does a young man often come here?"

"Young people do visit, Your Excellency."

"Yes, but . . . with a small mustache?"

"With a small mustache, sir?"

"Well, yes, and . . . wearing a coat . . . with a turned-up collar?"

Suddenly something dawned on the doorman:

"One such-like did come once, sir . . . he dropped in to see the young master."

"With a small mustache?"

"That's right, sir!"

Apollon Apollonovich paused for a moment. And suddenly, Apollon Apollonovich moved on.

The staircases were covered by a gray velvet carpet. This gray carpet also covered the walls. On the walls glittered a display of antique weapons: a Lithuanian helmet glittered beneath a rusty green shield; the hilt of a knight's sword sparkled; here were rusting swords, there halberds fixed at an angle; and a pistol and a battle mace hung at a tilt.

The top of the staircase gave onto a balustrade. Here from a matte-white pedestal a Niobe, forever frozen, raised her alabaster eyes heavenward.

Resting his bony hand on the faceted knob, Apollon Apollonovich briskly flung open the door.

Thus It Is Always

A phosphorescent blot raced across the sky, misty and deathlike. The heavens gradually misted over in a phosphorescent glow, making iron roofs and chimneys flicker. Here flowed the waters of the Moika. On one side loomed that same three-storied building, with projections on top.

Wrapped in furs, Nikolai Apollonovich was making his way along the Moika, his head sunk in his overcoat. Nameless tremors arose in his heart. Something awful, something sweet. . . .

He thought: could *this* too be love? He recalled.

He shuddered.

A shaft of light flew by: a black court carriage flew by. Past window recesses it bore blood red lamps that seemed drenched in blood. They played and shimmered on the black waters of the Moika. The spectral outline of a footman's tricorne and the outline of the wings of his greatcoat flew, with the light, out of the fog and into the fog.

Nikolai Apollonovich stood for a while in front of the house. He kept standing and then suddenly disappeared in the entryway.

The entryway door flew open before him; and the sound struck him in the back. Darkness enveloped him, as though all had fallen away (this is most likely how it is the first instant after death). Nikolai Apollonovich was not thinking about death now; he was thinking about his own gestures. And in the darkness his actions took on a fantastic stamp. He seated himself on the cold step by the door, his face buried in fur, listening to the beating of his heart.

Nikolai Apollonovich sat in the darkness.

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The stone curve of the Winter Canal showed its plangent expanse. The Neva was buffeted by the onslaught of a damp wind. The soundlessly flying surfaces glimmered, the walls that formed the side of the four-storied palacet gleamed in the moonlight.

No one, nothing.

Only the Canal streaming its waters. Was that shadow of a woman darting onto the little bridge to throw itself off? Was it Liza? No, just the shadow of a woman of Petersburg. And having traversed the Canal, it was still running away from the yellow house on the Gagarin Embankment, beneath which it stood every evening and looked long at the window.

Ahead the Square was now widening out. Greenish bronze statues emerged one after another from everywhere. Hercules and Poseidon looked on as always. Beyond the Neva rose an immense mass—the outlines of islands and houses. And it cast its amber eyes into the fog, and it seemed to be weeping.

Higher up, ragged arms mournfully stretched vague outlines across the sky. Swarm upon swarm they rose above the Neva's waves, coursing off toward the zenith. And when they touched the zenith, the phosphorescent blot would precipitously attack them, flinging itself upon them from the heavens.

The shadow of a woman, face buried in a muff, darted along the Moika to that same entryway from which it would dart out every evening, and where now, on the cold step, below the door, sat Nikolai Apollonovich. The entryway door closed in front of it; the entryway door slammed shut in front of it. Darkness enveloped the shadow, as though all had fallen away behind it. In the entryway, the black little lady thought about simple and earthly things. She had already reached her hand toward the bell, and it was then that she saw an outline, apparently masked, rise up before her from the step.

And when the door opened and a shaft of light illuminated the darkness of the entryway for an instant, the exclamation of a terri-

fied maid confirmed it all for her, because first there appeared in the open door an apron and an overstarched cap; then the apron and cap recoiled from the door. In the sudden flash a picture of indescribable strangeness was revealed. The black outline of the little lady flung itself through the open door.

Behind her back, out of the gloom, rose a rustling clown in a bearded, trembling half-mask.

One could see how, out of the gloom, the fur of the caped greatcoat soundlessly and slowly slid from the shoulders, and two red arms reached toward the door. The door closed, cutting off the shaft of light and plunging the entryway stairs once more into utter darkness.

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In a second Nikolai Apollonovich sprang out into the street. From beneath the skirts of his greatcoat dangled a piece of red silk. His nose buried in the greatcoat, he raced in the direction of the bridge.

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On the iron bridge he turned. And saw nothing. Above the damp railing, above the greenish waters teeming with germs, bowler, cane, coat, ears, nose, and mustache rushed by into the gusts of Neva wind.

You Will Never Ever Forget Him!

In this chapter we have seen Senator Ableukhov. We have also seen the idle thoughts of the senator in the form of the senator's house and in the form of the senator's son, who also carries his own idle thoughts in his head. Finally, we have seen another idle shadow—the stranger.

This shadow arose by chance in the consciousness of Senator Ableukhov and acquired its ephemeral being there. But the consciousness of Apollon Apollonovich is a shadowy consciousness because he too is the possessor of an ephemeral being and the fruit of the author's fantasy: unnecessary, idle cerebral play.

The author, having hung pictures of illusions all over, really should take them down as quickly as possible, breaking the thread of the narrative, if only with this very sentence. But the author will not do so: he has sufficient right not to.

Cerebral play is only a mask. Under way beneath this mask is the invasion of the brain by forces unknown to us. And granting that Apollon Apollonovich is spun from our brain, nonetheless he will manage to inspire fear with another, a stupendous state of being

which attacks in the night. Apollon Apollonovich is endowed with the attributes of this state of being. All his cerebral play is endowed with the attributes of this state of being.

Once his brain has playfully engendered the mysterious stranger, that stranger exists, really exists. He will not vanish from the Petersburg prospects as long as the senator with such thoughts exists, because thought exists too.

So let our stranger be a real stranger! And let the two shadows of my stranger be real shadows!

Those dark shadows will, oh yes, they will, follow on the heels of the stranger, just as the stranger himself is closely following the senator. The aged senator will, oh yes, he will, pursue you too, dear reader, in his black carriage. And henceforth you will never ever forget him!

End of the First Chapter