

THE SHOEMAKER AND THE DEVIL

On Christmas Eve, a hardworking but poor shoemaker named Fyodor Nilov laments his lot in life as he finishes a pair of boots for a disturbing and peculiar customer from Kolokolny Lane. Consumed by thoughts of inequality and frustration with his poverty, Fyodor finds himself confronting the bizarre reality of his customer—who turns out to be the devil—with a horse-like hoof for a foot. Seeing an opportunity, Fyodor strikes a deal with the devil, asking to be made rich in exchange for his soul.

The devil, flattered by Fyodor's request and reasoning, grants his wish. Fyodor is transformed into a wealthy man, indulging in a lavish dinner and acquiring a sumptuous lifestyle overnight, complete with servants, a luxurious home, and a beautiful but demanding new wife. However, the new wealth does not bring Fyodor happiness. He becomes obsessed with the security of his money, struggles with the societal expectations of the rich, and is tormented by thoughts of his lost soul and the inevitability of death. Even his attempts to enjoy simple pleasures, like singing or playing an instrument in public, are met with disdain due to his social standing.

The story captures Fyodor's transformation and ensuing realization that wealth cannot buy happiness or contentment. Despite his new status, Fyodor can neither escape the societal rules that govern behavior nor find peace with his superficial success. Amid encounters with the police, beggars, and his unsatisfied wife, he is confronted by the devil to fulfill his end of the bargain. Fyodor's dealings with the devil, his overnight change of fortune, and the subsequent disillusionment critique the social inequities and the human desire for wealth at the expense of spiritual values, showcasing the moral that true happiness lies beyond material wealth and social standing.