

The night is dull ; but occasional and feeble rays of the moon are mirrored on the silver cloth, which the cold season of winter has spread over the soil. At the entrance of the steppe, two enormous trees, with knotted trunks, extend their black arms, like sombre sentinels charged to watch on the threshold of the kingdom of immensity. The crows, those funereal birds, fly to the horizon, uttering their cry of ill omen ; and now a frightened hare darts away at the noise of the galop of the horse, who strikes his iron shoes to the ground, letting his mane blow with the sharp and piercing north breeze. Over this silvery surface all objects appear in black—the horse going at his liveliest, the sleigh and its two occupants, even to the runaway hare—have all the appearance of a drawing in *silhouette*. May Nastasia and Paul Belorouki not meet with any worse adventure during their night course ! But strange to say, the young man appears to hide himself at the bottom of the sleigh, and it is the young girl who drives. Whence comes this ? and then why do brother and sister, at this advanced hour of night, find it necessary to cross this frozen steppe ?

We must, however, go back a little to explain this contrast, which appears to give the lie to Nature.

The Count and Countess Belorouki had a lively desire in the first year of their married life, that the birth of a son should come, to assure them of the perpetuity of a glorious name, written in the annals of Russia. It was, however, a daughter which God sent them ; they called her Nastasia. To console himself for his disappointment, the count gave to his daughter the education of a boy. He took her with him in his bear and wolf hunts, so frequent in Russia. Nastasia soon learnt to take good aim ; her young hand held firmly the reins of his fiery horse, and she managed her oar as well as she did her gun. The countess secretly deplored this masculine education of her daughter, but she dared not oppose herself to the absolute will of her husband. Five years after, a second child was added to the household. This time it was a son : but the bent was already given. Nastasia was five years old, her father loved her foolishly, and had made her take the masculine dress. She already accompanied him in the chase, mounted on a little Cossack poney. He paid but small attention to Paul, a charming rose and blonde baby, on whose head the countess lavished all her tenderness. Her husband had made of his girl a boy, she would make Paul a girl. The child did not quit his mother ; he amused himself with women's work, which kept him about her. He excelled in embroidery, whilst his sister handled the oar and the pistol. The difference of age helped to perpetuate this contrast. On arriving, Paul found his sister in possession of life and the paternal