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A young man, struggling with poverty and mental instability, avoids his landlady and wanders through the crowded and chaotic streets of Petersburg. He visits an old woman to sell his watch, but becomes angry when she offers a low price. He then becomes overwhelmed with guilt and wanders into a tavern, where he meets a drunk man named Marmeladov. Marmeladov shares his own struggles with poverty and questions society's treatment of the poor. The speaker also reflects on the impact of science and political economy on society.