

Subsequently the case proceeded with that abnormal rapidity our courts normally pride themselves on. Documents were dated, entered, numbered, sewn together, recorded – all in one day and the case was filed away in a cupboard where it just lay and lay – one, two, three years. During that time many girls found themselves husbands; a new street was laid out in Mirgorod; one of the judge's double teeth fell out, together with two eye-teeth; more children than ever ran around Ivan Ivanovich's yard – God alone knows where they came from. To insult Ivan Ivanovich, Ivan Nikiforovich built a new goose shed, slightly further back than the other one, and completely blocked himself off from him, so that these worthy gentlemen hardly ever set eyes on each other. And the papers continued to lie in the cupboard, which became mottled with ink-spots. Meanwhile an event of the greatest importance for Mirgorod took place: the mayor gave a reception. Where can I find brush and palette to portray the varied gathering at that magnificent banquet? Take your watch, open it up and see what's going on inside. You won't deny that it's dreadful nonsense! Now try and imagine about the same number of wheels – if not more – all standing in the mayor's courtyard. What carriages and wagons were there! One was wide behind and narrow in the front, another narrow behind and wide in the front, a third a carriage and wagon combined, and a fourth neither carriage nor wagon. One looked like a huge haystack or a fat merchant's wife, another resembled a dishevelled Jew or a skeleton not

quite freed from the skin. Another, if you viewed it from the side, looked just like a long-stemmed pipe, while yet another looked like nothing on earth, suggesting some strange, shapeless, absolutely fantastic object.

In the middle of all this chaos of wheels and coach boxes one could glimpse what appeared to be a carriage with a window with a heavy transom, just like in a house. The drivers, in grey Cossack overcoats, short Ukrainian coats, sheepskin hats and caps of varying sizes, all holding their pipes, led the unharnessed horses through the courtyard. What a reception the mayor gave! If you will allow me, I will just run through the guests.

There were: Taras Tarasovich, Yevpl Akinovich, Yevtikhy Yevtikhiyevich, Ivan Ivanovich (another one), Savva Gavrilovich, our own Ivan Ivanovich, Yelevfery Yelevferyevich, Makar Nazaryevich, Foma Grigoryevich . . . that's enough for now. I've no strength left, my hand's tired from all this writing. And so many ladies! Dark- and fair-complexioned, short and tall, some of them fat, like Ivan Nikiforovich, and others so thin you could easily picture them hiding in the scabbard of the mayor's sword. And the hats and dresses! Red, yellow, coffee-coloured, green, blue, new, turned, recut; and the shawls, ribbons and handbags! Farewell, my poor eyes! You will never see properly again after such a sight. And the long table they laid out!

How Ivan Ivanovich

Quarrelled with Niki forovich

Meanwhile Akaky Akakievich continued on his way to the office in the most festive mood. Not one second passed without his being conscious of the new overcoat on his shoulders, and several times he even smiled from inward pleasure. And really the overcoat's advantages were two-fold: firstly, it was warm; secondly, it made him feel good. He did not notice where he was going at all and suddenly found himself at the office. In the lobby he took the overcoat off, carefully examined it all over, and then handed it to the porter for special safe-keeping.

No one knew how the news suddenly got round that Akaky Akakievich had a new overcoat and that his 'dressing-gown' was now no more. The moment he arrived everyone rushed out into the lobby to look at his new acquisition. They so overwhelmed him with congratulations and good wishes that he smiled at first and then he even began to feel quite embarrassed. When they all crowded round him saying they should have a drink on the new overcoat, and insisting that the *very least* he could do was to hold a party for all of them, Akaky Akakievich lost his head completely, not knowing what to do or what to answer or how to escape. Blushing all over, he tried for some considerable time, rather naïvely, to convince them it was not a new overcoat at all but really his old one. In the end one of the civil servants, who was nothing less than an assistant head clerk, and who was clearly anxious to show he was not at all snooty and could hobnob even with his inferiors, said: 'All right then, I'll throw a party instead. You're all invited over to my place this evening. It so happens it's my name-day.'

Naturally the others immediately offered the assistant head clerk their congratulations and eagerly accepted the invitation. When Akaky Akakievich tried to talk himself out of it, everyone said it was impolite, in fact quite shameful, and a refusal was out of the question. Later, however, he felt pleased when he remembered that the party would give him the opportunity of going out in his new overcoat that very same evening.

The whole day was like a triumphant holiday for Akaky Akakievich. He went home in the most jubilant mood, took off his coat, hung it up very carefully and stood there for some time admiring the cloth and lining. Then, to compare the two, he brought out his old 'dressing-gown', which by now had completely disintegrated. As he examined it he could not help laughing: what a *fantastic* difference! All through dinner the thought of his old overcoat and its shocking state made him smile. He ate his meal with great relish and afterwards did not do any copying but indulged in the luxury of lying on his bed until it grew dark. Then, without any further delay, he put his clothes on, threw his overcoat over his shoulders and went out into the street. Unfortunately the author cannot say exactly where the civil servant who was giving the party lived: his memory is beginning to let him down badly and everything in Petersburg, every house, every street, has become so blurred and mixed up in his mind that he finds it extremely difficult to say where *anything* is at all. All the same, we do at least know for certain that the civil servant lived in the *best part* of the city, which amounts to saying that he lived miles and miles away from Akaky Akakievich.

The Overcoat

Major Kovalyov always carried plenty of seals with him – seals bearing coats of arms or engraved with the words: 'Wednesday, Thursday, Monday', and so on. Major Kovalyov had come to St Petersburg with the express purpose of finding a position in keeping with his rank. If he was successful, he would get a vice-governorship, but failing that, a job as an administrative clerk in some important government department would have to do. Major Kovalyov was not averse to marriage, as long as his bride happened to be worth 200,000 roubles. And now the reader can judge for himself this major's state of mind when, instead of a fairly presentable and reasonably sized nose, all he saw was an absolutely preposterous smooth flat space. As if this were not bad enough, there was not a cab in sight, and he had to walk home, keeping himself huddled up in his cloak and with a handkerchief over his face to make people think he was bleeding. 'But perhaps I dreamt it! How could I be so stupid as to go and lose my nose?' With these thoughts he dropped into a coffee-house to take a look at himself in a mirror. Fortunately the shop was empty, except for some waiters sweeping up and tidying the chairs. A few of them, rather bleary-eyed, were carrying trays laden with hot pies. Yesterday's newspapers, covered in coffee stains, lay scattered on the tables and chairs. 'Well, thank God there's no one about,' he said. 'Now I can have a look.' He approached the mirror rather gingerly and peered into it. 'Damn it! What kind of trick is this?' he cried, spitting on the floor. 'If only there were *something* to take its place, but there's nothing!'

He bit his lips in annoyance, left the coffee-house and decided not to smile or look at anyone, which was not like him at all. Suddenly he stood rooted to the spot near the front door of some house and witnessed a most incredible spectacle. A carriage drew up at the entrance porch. The doors flew open and out jumped a uniformed, stooping gentleman who dashed up the steps. The feeling of horror and amazement that gripped Kovalyov when he recognized his own nose defies description! After this extraordinary sight everything went topsy-turvy. He

could hardly keep to his feet, but decided at all costs to wait until the nose returned to the carriage, although he was shaking all over and felt quite feverish.

About two minutes later a nose really did come out. It was wearing a gold-braided uniform with a high stand-up collar and chamois trousers, and had a sword at its side. From the plumes on its hat one could tell that it held the exalted rank of state counsellor.⁵ And it was abundantly clear that the nose was going to visit someone. It looked right, then left, shouted to the coachman 'Let's go!', climbed in and drove off.

Poor Kovalyov nearly went out of his mind. He did not know what to make of it. How, in fact, could a nose, which only yesterday was in the middle of his face, and which could not possibly walk around or drive in a carriage, suddenly turn up in a uniform! He ran after the carriage which fortunately did not travel very far and came to a halt outside Kazan Cathedral.⁶ Kovalyov rushed into the cathedral square, elbowed his way through a crowd of beggarwomen who always used to make him laugh because of the way they covered their faces, leaving only slits for the eyes, and made his way in. Only a few people were at prayer, all of them standing by the entrance. Kovalyov felt so distraught that he was in no condition for praying, and his eyes searched every nook and cranny for the nose in uniform. At length he spotted it standing by one of the walls to the side. The nose's face was completely hidden by the high collar and it was praying with an expression of profound piety.

'What's the best way of approaching it?' thought Kovalyov. 'Judging by its uniform, its hat, and its whole appearance, it must be a state counsellor. But I'm damned if I know how to go about it!'

The Nose