Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol
The Nose

Original :

Нос

1836

Translated by Richard Pevear

"The Nose" (Russian: Нос) is a satirical short story by Nikolai Gogol. Written between 1835 and 1836, it tells of a St. Petersburg official whose nose leaves his face and develops a life of its own.
Ebook: http://originalbook.ru

The Nose. Nikolai Gogol

I

On the twenty-fifth day of March,1 an extraordinarily strange incident occurred in Petersburg. The barber Ivan Yakovlevich, who lives on Voznesensky Prospect (his family name has been lost, and even on his signboard—which portrays a gentleman with a soaped cheek along with the words "Also Bloodletting"— nothing more appears), the barber Ivan Yakovlevich woke up quite early and sensed the smell of hot bread. Raising himself a little in bed, he saw that his wife, quite a respectable lady, who very much liked her cup of coffee, was taking just-baked loaves from the oven.

"Today, Praskovya Osipovna, I will not have coffee," said Ivan Yakovlevich, "but instead I'd like to have some hot bread with onion."

(That is, Ivan Yakovlevich would have liked the one and the other, but he knew it was utterly impossible to ask for two things at the same time, for Praskovya Osipovna very much disliked such whims.) "Let the fool eat bread; so much the better for me," the wife thought to herself, "there'll be an extra portion of coffee left." And she threw a loaf of bread on the table.

For the sake of propriety, Ivan Yakovlevich put his tailcoat on over his undershirt and, settling at the table, poured out some salt, prepared two onions, took a knife in his hands, and, assuming a significant air, began cutting the bread. Having cut the loaf in two, he looked into the middle and, to his surprise, saw something white. Ivan Yakovlevich poked cautiously with his knife and felt with his finger. "Firm!" he said to himself. "What could it be?"

He stuck in his fingers and pulled out—a nose! . . . Ivan Yakovlevich even dropped his arms; he began rubbing his eyes and feeling it: a nose, precisely a nose! and, what's more, it seemed like a familiar one. Terror showed on Ivan Yakovlevich's face. But this terror was nothing compared to the indignation that came over his wife.

"Where did you cut that nose off, you beast?" she shouted wrathfully. "Crook! Drunkard! I'll denounce you to the police myself! What a bandit! I've heard from three men already that you pull noses so hard when you give a shave that they barely stay attached."

But Ivan Yakovlevich was more dead than alive. He recognized this nose as belonging to none other than the collegiate assessor Kovalev, whom he shaved every Wednesday and Sunday.

"Wait, Praskovya Osipovna! I'll wrap it in a rag and put it in the corner. Let it stay there a while, and later I'll take it out."

"I won't hear of it! That I should leave some cut-off nose lying about my room? . . . You dried-up crust! You only know how to drag your razor over the strop, but soon you won't be able to do your duties at all, you trull, you blackguard! That I should have to answer for you to the police? . . . Ah, you muck-worm, you stupid stump! Out with it! out! take it wherever you like! so that I never hear of it again!"

Ivan Yakovlevich stood totally crushed. He thought and thought and did not know what to think.

"Devil knows how it happened," he said finally, scratching himself behind the ear. "Whether I came home drunk yesterday or not, I can't say for sure. But by all tokens this incident should be unfeasible: for bread is a baking matter, and a nose is something else entirely. I can't figure it out! . . ."

Ivan Yakovlevich fell silent. The thought of the police finding the nose at his place and accusing him drove him to complete distraction. He could already picture the scarlet collar, beautifully embroidered with silver, the sword . . . and he trembled all over. Finally he took his shirt and boots, pulled all this trash on him, and, to the accompaniment of Praskovya Osipovna's weighty admonitions, wrapped the nose in a rag and went out.

He wanted to leave it somewhere, in an iron hitching post under a gateway, or just somehow accidentally drop it and turn down an alley. But unfortunately he kept running into someone he knew, who would begin at once by asking, "Where are you off to?" or "Who are you going to shave so early?"—so that Ivan Yakovlevich could never seize the moment. Another time, he had already dropped it entirely, but a policeman pointed to it from afar with his halberd and said: "Pick that up! You've dropped something there!" And Ivan Yakovlevich had to pick the nose up and put it in his pocket. Despair came over him, especially as there were more and more people in the street as the stores and shops began to open.

He decided to go to St. Isaac's Bridge: might he not somehow manage to throw it into the Neva? . . . But I am slightly remiss for having said nothing yet about Ivan Yakovlevich, a worthy man in many respects.

Ivan Yakovlevich, like every decent Russian artisan, was a terrible drunkard. And though he shaved other people's chins every day, his own was eternally unshaven. Ivan Yakovlevich's tailcoat (Ivan Yakovlevich never went around in a frock coat) was piebald; that is, it was black, but all dappled with brownish-yellow and gray spots; the collar was shiny, and in place of three buttons there hung only threads. Ivan Yakovlevich was a great cynic, and whenever the collegiate assessor Kovalev said to him while being shaved, "Your hands eternally stink, Ivan Yakovlevich"—Ivan Yakovlevich would reply with a question: "And why should they stink?" to which the collegiate assessor would say, "I don't know, brother, but they stink," and for that Ivan Yakovlevich, after a pinch of snuff, would soap him up on the cheeks, and under the nose, and behind the ears, and under the chin—in short, anywhere he liked.

This worthy citizen was already on St. Isaac's Bridge. First he glanced around; then he leaned over the rail, as if looking under the bridge to see if there were lots of fish darting about, and quietly threw down the rag with the nose. He felt as if a three-hundred-pound weight had suddenly fallen from him; Ivan Yakovlevich even grinned. Instead of going to shave the chins of functionaries, he was heading for an institution under a sign that read "Food and Tea" to ask for a glass of punch, when suddenly he saw at the end of the bridge a police officer of noble appearance, with broad side-whiskers, in a three-cornered hat, wearing a sword. He went dead; and meanwhile the policeman was beckoning to him with his finger and saying, "Come here, my good man!"

Ivan Yakovlevich, knowing the rules, took off his peaked cap while still far away and, approaching rapidly, said:

"Good day to your honor!"

"No, no, brother, never mind my honor. Tell me what you were doing standing on the bridge."

"By God, sir, I'm on my way to give a shave and just stopped to see if the river's flowing fast."

"Lies, lies! You won't get off with that. Be so good as to answer!"

"I'm ready to shave you twice a week, sir, or even three times, with no objections," Ivan Yakovlevich answered.

"No, friend, that's trifles. I have three barbers to shave me, and they consider it a great honor. Kindly tell me what you were doing there."

Ivan Yakovlevich blanched . . . But here the incident becomes totally shrouded in mist, and of what happened further decidedly nothing is known.

II

The collegiate assessor Kovalev woke up quite early and went "brr . . ." with his lips—something he always did on waking up, though he himself was unable to explain the reason for it. Kovalev stretched and asked for the little mirror that stood on the table. He wished to look at a pimple that had popped out on his nose the previous evening; but, to his greatest amazement, he saw that instead of a nose he had a perfectly smooth place! Frightened, Kovalev asked for water and wiped his eyes with a towel: right, no nose! He began feeling with his hand to find out if he might be asleep, but it seemed he was not. The collegiate assessor Kovalev jumped out of bed, shook himself: no nose! . . . He ordered his man to dress him and flew straight to the chief of police.

But meanwhile it is necessary to say something about Kovalev, so that the reader may see what sort of collegiate assessor he was. Collegiate assessors who obtain that title by means of learned diplomas cannot in any way be compared with collegiate assessors who are made in the Caucasus.2 They are two entirely different sorts. Learned collegiate assessors . . . But Russia is such a wondrous land that, if you say something about one collegiate assessor, all collegiate assessors, from Riga to Kamchatka, will unfailingly take it to their own account. The same goes for all ranks and titles. Kovalev was a Caucasian collegiate assessor. He had held this rank for only two years, and therefore could not forget it for a moment; and to give himself more nobility and weight, he never referred to himself as a collegiate assessor, but always as a major. "Listen, dearie," he used to say on meeting a woman selling shirt fronts in the street, "come to my place; I live on Sadovaya; just ask, 'Where does Major Kovalev live?'—anyone will show you." And if he met some comely little thing, he would give her a secret order on top of that, adding: "Ask for Major Kovalev's apartment, sweetie." For which reason, we shall in future refer to this collegiate assessor as a major.

Major Kovalev had the habit of strolling on Nevsky Prospect every day. The collar of his shirt front was always extremely clean and starched. His side-whiskers were of the sort that can still be seen on provincial and regional surveyors, architects, and

regimental doctors, as well as on those fulfilling various police duties, and generally on all men who have plump, ruddy cheeks and play a very good game of Boston: these side-whiskers go right across the middle of the cheek and straight to the nose. Major Kovalev wore many seals, of carnelian, with crests, and the sort that have Wednesday, Thursday, Monday, and so on, carved on them. Major Kovalev had come to Petersburg on business—namely, to seek a post suited to his rank: as vice-governor if he was lucky, or else as an executive in some prominent department. Major Kovalev would not have minded getting married, but only on the chance that the bride happened to come with two hundred thousand in capital. And therefore the reader may now judge for himself what the state of this major was when he saw, instead of a quite acceptable and moderate nose, a most stupid, flat, and smooth place.

As ill luck would have it, not a single coachman appeared in the street, and he had to go on foot, wrapping himself in his cloak and covering his face with a handkerchief as if it were bleeding. "But maybe I just imagined it that way: it's impossible for a nose to vanish so idiotically," he thought and went into a pastry shop on purpose to look at himself in the mirror. Luckily there was no one in the pastry shop; the boys were sweeping the rooms and putting the chairs in place; some of them, sleepy-eyed, brought out hot pastries on trays; yesterday's newspapers, stained with spilt coffee, lay about on tables and chairs. "Well, thank God nobody's here," he said. "Now I can have a look." He timidly approached a mirror and looked: "Devil knows, what rubbish!" he said, spitting. "There might at least be something instead of a nose, but there's nothing! . . ."

Biting his lips in vexation, he walked out of the pastry shop and decided, contrary to his custom, not to look at anyone or smile to anyone. Suddenly he stopped as if rooted outside the doors of one house; before his eyes an inexplicable phenomenon occurred: a carriage stopped at the entrance; the door opened; a gentleman in a uniform jumped out, hunching over, and ran up the stairs. What was Kovalev's horror as well as amazement when he recognized him as his own nose! At this extraordinary spectacle, everything seemed to turn upside down in his eyes; he felt barely able to stand; but, trembling all over as if in a fever, he decided that, whatever the cost, he would await his return to the carriage. Two minutes later the nose indeed came out. He was in a gold-embroidered uniform with a big standing collar; he had kidskin trousers on; at his side hung a sword. From his plumed hat it could be concluded that he belonged to the rank of state councillor. By all indications, he was going somewhere on a visit. He looked both ways, shouted, "Here!" to the coachman, got in, and drove off.

Poor Kovalev nearly lost his mind. He did not know what to think of such a strange incident. How was it possible, indeed, that the nose which just yesterday was on his face, unable to drive or walk—should be in a uniform! He ran after the carriage, which luckily had not gone far and was stopped in front of the Kazan Cathedral.

He hastened into the cathedral, made his way through a row of old beggar women with bandaged faces and two openings for the eyes, at whom he had laughed so much before, and went into the church. There were not many people praying in the church: they all stood just by the entrance. Kovalev felt so upset that he had no strength to pray, and his eyes kept searching in all corners for the gentleman. He finally saw him standing to one side. The nose had his face completely hidden in his big standing collar and was praying with an expression of the greatest piety.

"How shall I approach him?" thought Kovalev. "By all tokens, by his uniform, by his hat, one can see he's a state councillor. Devil knows how to go about it!"

He began to cough beside him; but the nose would not abandon his pious attitude for a minute and kept bowing down.

"My dear sir," said Kovalev, inwardly forcing himself to take heart, "my dear sir . . ."

"What can I do for you?" the nose said, turning.

"I find it strange, my dear sir . . . it seems to me . . . you should know your place. And suddenly I find you, and where?—in a church. You must agree . . ."

"Excuse me, I don't understand what you're talking about. . . Explain, please."

"How shall I explain it to him?" thought Kovalev, and, gathering his courage, he began:

"Of course, I . . . anyhow, I'm a major. For me to go around without a nose is improper, you must agree. Some peddler woman selling peeled oranges on Voskresensky Bridge can sit without a nose; but, having prospects in view . . . being acquainted, moreover, with ladies in many houses: Chekhtareva, the wife of a state councillor, and others. . . Judge for yourself... I don't know, my dear sir . . ." (Here

Major Kovalev shrugged his shoulders.) "Pardon me, but... if one looks at it in conformity with the rules of duty and honor . . . you yourself can understand . . ."

"I understand decidedly nothing," replied the nose. "Explain more satisfactorily."

"My dear sir . . ." Kovalev said with dignity, "I don't know how to understand your words. . . The whole thing seems perfectly obvious. . . Or do you want to . . . But you're my own nose!"

The nose looked at the major and scowled slightly.

"You are mistaken, my dear sir. I am by myself. Besides, there can be no close relationship between us. Judging by the buttons on your uniform, you must serve in a different department."

Having said this, the nose turned away and continued praying.

Kovalev was utterly bewildered, not knowing what to do or even what to think. At that moment the pleasant rustle of a lady's dress was heard; an elderly lady all decked out in lace approached, followed by a slim one in a white dress that very prettily outlined her slender waist, wearing a pale yellow hat as light as a pastry. Behind them a tall footman with big side-whiskers and a full dozen collars stopped and opened his snuffbox.

Kovalev stepped closer, made the cambric collar of his shirt front peek out, straightened the seals hanging on his gold watch chain, and, smiling to all sides, rested his attention on the ethereal lady who, bending slightly like a flower in spring, brought her white little hand with its half-transparent fingers to her brow. The smile on Kovalev's face broadened still more when he saw under her hat a rounded chin of a bright whiteness and part of a cheek glowing with the color of the first spring rose. But he suddenly jumped back as if burnt. He remembered that in place of a nose he had absolutely nothing, and tears squeezed themselves from his eyes. He turned with the intention of telling the gentleman in the uniform outright that he was only pretending to be a state councillor, that he was a knave and a scoundrel, and nothing but his own nose . . . But the nose was no longer there; he had already driven off, again probably to visit someone.

This threw Kovalev into despair. He went back and paused for a moment under the colonnade, looking carefully in all directions, in case he might spot the nose. He remembered very well that he

was wearing a plumed hat and a gold-embroidered uniform; but he had not noted his overcoat, nor the color of his carriage, nor of his horses, nor even whether he had a footman riding behind and in what sort of livery. Besides, there were so many carriages racing up and down, and at such speed, that it was even difficult to notice anything; and if he had noticed one of them, he would have had no way of stopping it. The day was beautiful and sunny. There were myriads of people on Nevsky; a whole flowery cascade of ladies poured down the sidewalk from the Police to the Anich-kin Bridge. There goes an acquaintance of his, a court councillor whom he called Colonel, especially if it occurred in front of strangers. And there is Yarygin, a chief clerk in the Senate, a great friend who always called remise when he played eight at Boston. There is another major who got his assessorship in the Caucasus, waving his arm, inviting him to come over . . .

"Ah, devil take it!" said Kovalev. "Hey, cabby, drive straight to the chief of police!"

Kovalev got into the droshky and kept urging the cabby on: "Gallop the whole way!"

"Is the chief of police in?" he cried, entering the front hall.

"No, he's not," the doorman replied, "he just left."

"Worse luck!"

"Yes," the doorman added, "not so long ago, but he left. If you'd have come one little minute sooner, you might have found him at home."

Kovalev, without taking the handkerchief from his face, got into a cab and shouted in a desperate voice:

"Drive!"

"Where to?" said the cabby.

"Straight ahead!"

"How, straight ahead? There's a turn here—right or left?"

This question stopped Kovalev and made him think again. In his situation, he ought first of all to address himself to the Office of Public Order, not because it was related directly to the police, but because its procedures were likely to be much quicker than elsewhere; to seek satisfaction from the authorities in the place where the nose claimed to work would be unreasonable, because it could be seen from the nose's own replies that nothing was sacred for this man, and he could be lying in this case just as he lied when he insisted that he never saw him before. And so Kovalev was about to tell the cabby to drive to the Office of Public Order when it again occurred to him that this knave and cheat, who had already behaved so shamelessly at their first encounter, might again conveniently use the time to slip out of the city somehow, and then all searching would be in vain, or might, God forbid, go on for a whole month. In the end it seemed that heaven itself gave him an idea. He decided to address himself directly to the newspaper office and hasten to take out an advertisement, with a detailed description of all his qualities, so that anyone meeting him could bring him to him or at least inform him of his whereabouts. And so, having decided on it, he told the cabby to drive to the newspaper office, and all the way there he never stopped hitting him on the back with his fist, saying: "Faster, you scoundrel! Faster, you cheat!" "Eh, master!" the coachman replied, shaking his head and whipping up his horse, whose coat was as long as a lapdog's. The droshky finally pulled up, and Kovalev, breathless, ran into a small reception room, where a gray-haired clerk in an old tailcoat and spectacles sat at a table, holding a pen in his teeth and counting the copper money brought to him.

"Who here takes advertisements?" cried Kovalev. "Ah, how do you do!"

"My respects," said the gray-haired clerk, raising his eyes for a moment and lowering them again to the laid-out stacks of coins.

"I wish to place . . ."

"Excuse me. I beg you to wait a bit," said the clerk, setting down a number on a piece of paper with one hand, and with the fingers of the left moving two beads on his abacus.

A lackey with galloons and an appearance indicating that he belonged to an aristocratic household, who was standing by the table with a notice in his hand, deemed it fitting to display his sociability:

"Believe me, sir, the pup isn't worth eighty kopecks, I mean, I wouldn't give eight for it; but the countess loves it, by God, she loves it—and so whoever finds it gets a hundred roubles! To put it proper, between you and me, people's tastes don't correspond at all: if you're a hunter, keep a pointer or a poodle, it'll cost you five hundred, a thousand, but you'll have yourself a fine dog."

The worthy clerk listened to this with a significant air and at the same time made an estimate of the number of letters in the notice. Around them stood a host of old women, shop clerks, and porters holding notices. One announced that a coachman of sober disposition was available for hire; another concerned a little-used carriage brought from Paris in 1814; elsewhere a nineteen-year-old serf girl was released, a good laundress and also fit for other work; a sturdy droshky lacking one spring; a hot young dapple-gray horse, seventeen years old; turnip and radish seeds newly received from London; a country house with all its appurtenances—two horse stalls and a place where an excellent birch or pine grove could be planted; next to that was an appeal to all those desiring to buy old shoes, with an invitation to come to the trading center every day from eight till three. The room into which all this company crowded was small and the air in it was very heavy; but the collegiate assessor Kovalev could not smell it, because he had covered his face with a handkerchief, and because his nose itself was in God knows what parts.

"My dear sir, allow me to ask . . . It's very necessary for me," he finally said with impatience.

"Right away, right away! Two roubles forty-three kopecks! This minute! One rouble sixty-four kopecks!" the gray-haired gentleman was saying as he flung the notices into the old women's and porters' faces. "What can I do for you?" he said at last, turning to Kovalev.

"I ask. . ." said Kovalev, "some swindling or knavery has occurred—I haven't been able to find out. I only ask you to advertise that whoever brings this scoundrel to me will get a sufficient reward."

"What is your name, if I may inquire?"

"No, why the name? I can't tell you. I have many acquaintances: Chekhtareva, wife of a state councillor, Palageya Grigorievna Podtochina, wife of a staff officer . . . God forbid they should suddenly find out! You can simply write: a collegiate assessor, or, better still, one holding the rank of major."

"And the runaway was your household serf?"

"What household serf? That would be no great swindle! The one that ran away was . . . my nose . . ."

"Hm! what a strange name! And did this Mr. Nosov steal a large sum of money from you?"

"Nose, I said . . . you've got it wrong! My nose, my own nose, disappeared on me, I don't know where. The devil's decided to make fun of me!"

"Disappeared in what fashion? I'm afraid I don't quite understand."

"I really can't say in what fashion; but the main thing is that he's now driving around town calling himself a state councillor. And therefore I ask you to announce that whoever catches him should immediately present him to me within the shortest time. Consider for yourself, how indeed can I do without such a conspicuous part of the body? It's not like some little toe that I can put in a boot and no one will see it's not there. On Thursdays I call on the wife of the state councillor Chekhtarev; Palageya Grigorievna Pod-tochina, a staff officer's wife—and she has a very pretty daughter—they, too, are my very good acquaintances, and consider for yourself, now, how can I ... I can't go to them now."

The clerk fell to pondering, as was indicated by his tighdy compressed lips.

"No, I can't place such an announcement in the newspaper," he said finally, after a long silence.

"What? Why not?"

"Because. The newspaper may lose its reputation. If everybody starts writing that his nose has run away, then . . . People say we publish a lot of absurdities and false rumors as it is."

"But what's absurd about this matter? It seems to me that it's nothing of the sort."

"To you it seems so. But there was a similar incident last week. A clerk came, just as you've come now, brought a notice, it came to two roubles seventy-three kopecks in costs, and the whole announcement was that a poodle of a black coat had run away. Nothing much there, you'd think? But it turned out to be a lampoon: this poodle was the treasurer of I forget which institution."

"But I'm giving you an announcement not about a poodle, but about my own nose: which means almost about me myself."

"No, I absolutely cannot place such an announcement."

"But my nose really has vanished!"

"If so, it's a medical matter. They say there are people who can attach any nose you like. I observe, however, that you must be a man of merry disposition and fond of joking in company."

"I swear to you as God is holy! Very well, if it's come to that, I'll show you."

"Why trouble yourself!" the clerk went on, taking a pinch of snuff. "However, if it's no trouble," he added with a movement of curiosity, "it might be desirable to have a look."

The collegiate assessor took the handkerchief from his face.

"Extremely strange, indeed!" said the clerk. "The place is per-fecdy smooth, like a just-made pancake. Yes, of an unbelievable flatness!"

"Well, are you going to argue now? You can see for yourself that you've got to print it. I'll be especially grateful to you; and I'm very glad that this incident has afforded me the pleasure of making your acquaintance . . ."

The major, as may be seen from that, had decided to fawn a bit this time.

"Of course, printing it is no great matter," said the clerk, "only I don't see any profit in it for you. If you really want, you should give it to someone with a skillful pen, who can describe it as a rare work of nature and publish the little article in The Northern Bee"3 (here he took another pinch of snuff), "for the benefit of the young" (here he wiped his nose), "or just for general curiosity."

The collegiate assessor was totally discouraged. He dropped his eyes to the bottom of the newspaper, where theater performances were announced; his face was getting ready to smile, seeing the name of a pretty actress, and his hand went to his pocket to see if he had a blue banknote4 on him, because staff officers, in Kovalev's opinion, ought to sit in the orchestra—but the thought of the nose ruined everything!

The clerk himself seemed to be moved by Kovalev's difficult situation. Wishing to soften his grief somehow, he deemed it fitting to express his sympathy in a few words:

"I'm truly sorry that such an odd thing has happened to you. Would you care for a pinch? It dispels headaches and melancholy states of mind; it's even good with regard to hemorrhoids."

So saying, the clerk held the snuffbox out to Kovalev, quite deftly flipping back the lid with the portrait of some lady in a hat.

This unintentional act brought Kovalev's patience to an end.

"I do not understand how you find it possible to joke," he said in passion. "Can you not see that I precisely lack what's needed for a pinch of snuff? Devil take your snuff! I cannot stand the sight of it now, not only your vile Berezinsky, but even if you were to offer me rappee itself."

Having said this, he left the newspaper office in deep vexation and went to see the police commissioner, a great lover of sugar. In his house, the entire front room, which was also the dining room, was filled with sugar loaves that merchants brought him out of friendship. Just then the cook was removing the commissioner's regulation boots; his sword and other military armor were already hanging peacefully in the corners,

and his three-year-old son was playing with his awesome three-cornered hat; and he himself, after his martial, military life, was preparing to taste the pleasures of peace.

Kovalev entered just as he stretched, grunted, and said: "Ah, now for a nice two-hour nap!" And therefore it could be foreseen that the collegiate assessor's arrival was quite untimely; and I do not know whether he would have been received all that cordially even if he had brought him several pounds of sugar or a length of broadcloth. The commissioner was a great patron of all the arts and manufactures, but preferred state banknotes to them all. "Here's a thing," he used to say, "there's nothing better than this thing: doesn't ask to eat, takes up little space, can always be put in the pocket, drop it and it won't break."

The commissioner received Kovalev rather drily and said that after dinner was no time for carrying out investigations, that nature herself had so arranged it that after eating one should have a little rest (from this the collegiate assessor could see that the police commissioner was not unacquainted with the sayings of the ancient wise men), that a respectable man would not have his nose torn off, and that there were many majors in the world whose underclothes were not even in decent condition, and who dragged themselves around to all sorts of improper places.

That is, a square hit, right between the eyes. It must be noted that Kovalev was an extremely touchy man. He could forgive anything said about himself, but he could never pardon a reference to his rank or title. He even thought that in theatrical plays everything referring to inferior officers could pass, but staff officers should never be attacked. The commissioner's reception so perplexed him that he shook his head and said with dignity, spreading his arms slightly, "I confess, after such offensive remarks on your part, I have nothing to add . . ." and left.

He returned home scarcely feeling his legs under him. It was already dark. Dismal or extremely vile his apartment seemed to him after this whole unsuccessful search. Going into the front room, he saw his lackey Ivan lying on his back on the soiled leather sofa, spitting at the ceiling and hitting the same spot quite successfully. The man's indifference infuriated him; he gave him a whack on the forehead with his hat, adding, "You pig, you're always busy with stupidities!"

Ivan suddenly jumped up from his place and rushed to help him off with his cape.

Going into his bedroom, the major, weary and woeful, threw himself into an armchair and finally, after several sighs, said:

"My God! my God! Why this misfortune? If I lacked an arm or a leg, it would still be better; if I lacked ears, it would be bad, but still more bearable; but lacking a nose, a man is devil knows what: not a bird, not a citizen—just take and chuck him out the window! And if it had been cut off in war or a duel, or if I'd caused it myself-—but it vanished for no reason, vanished for nothing, nothing at all! . . . Only, no, it can't be," he added, after reflecting briefly.

"It's incredible that a nose should vanish, simply incredible. I must be dreaming, or just imagining it; maybe, by mistake somehow, instead of water I drank the vodka I use to pat my chin after shaving. That fool Ivan didn't take it away, and I must have downed it."

To make absolutely sure that he was not drunk, the major pinched himself so painfully that he cried out. This pain completely reassured him that he was acting and living in a waking state. He slowly approached the mirror and at first closed his eyes, thinking that the nose might somehow show up where it ought to be; but he jumped back at that same moment, saying:

"What a lampoonish look!"

This was indeed incomprehensible. If it had been a button, a silver spoon, a watch, or something of the sort, that had vanished— but to vanish, and who was it that vanished? and what's more, in his own apartment! . . . Major Kovalev, having put all the circumstances together, supposed it would hardly be unlikely if the blame were placed on none other than Podtochina, the staff officer's wife, who wished him to marry her daughter. He himself enjoyed dallying with her, but kept avoiding a final settlement. And when the mother announced to him directly that she wanted to give him the girl's hand, he quiedy eased off with his compliments, saying that he was still young and had to serve some five years more, until he turned exactly forty-two. And therefore the staff officer's wife, probably in revenge, decided to put a spell on him, and to that end hired some sorceress, because it was by no means possible to suppose that the nose had been cut off; no one had come into his room; and the barber Ivan Yakovlevich had shaved him on Wednesday, and the nose had been there for the whole of Wednesday, and even all day Thursday—he remembered that and knew it very well;

besides, he would have felt the pain, and the wound undoubtedly could not have healed so quickly and become smooth as a pancake. He made plans in his head: to formally summon the staff officer's wife to court, or to go to her in person and expose her. His reflections were interrupted by the light flickering through all the chinks in the door, signifying that Ivan had already lighted a candle in the front room. Soon Ivan himself appeared, carrying it before him and brightly lighting up the whole bedroom. Kovalev's first impulse was to grab the handkerchief and cover the place where his nose had been just the day before, so that the stupid man would not actually start gaping, seeing such an oddity in his master.

Ivan had just gone back to his closet when an unfamiliar voice came from the front room, saying:

"Does the collegiate assessor Kovalev live here?"

"Come in. Major Kovalev is here," said Kovalev, hastily jumping up and opening the door.

In came a police officer of handsome appearance, with quite plump cheeks and side-whiskers neither light nor dark, the very same one who, at the beginning of this tale, was standing at the end of St. Isaac's Bridge.

"Did Your Honor lose his nose?"

"Right."

"It has now been found."

"What's that you say?" cried Major Kovalev. Joy robbed him of speech. He stared with both eyes at the policeman standing before him, over whose plump lips and cheeks the tremulous candlelight flickered brightly. "How did it happen?"

"By a strange chance: he was intercepted almost on the road. He was getting into a stage coach to go to Riga. And he had a passport long since filled out in the name of some official. The strange thing was that I myself first took him for a gentleman. But fortunately I was wearing my spectacles, and I saw at once that he was a nose. For I'm nearsighted, and if you're standing right in front of me, I'll see only that you have a

face, but won't notice any nose or beard. My mother-in-law—that is, my wife's mother—can't see anything either."

Kovalev was beside himself

"Where is it? Where? I'll run there at once."

"Don't trouble yourself.. Knowing you had need of him, I brought him with me. And it's strange that the chief participant in this affair is that crook of a barber on Voznesenskaya Street, who is now sitting in the police station. I've long suspected him of being a drunkard and a thief, and only two days ago he pilfered a card of buttons from a shop. Your nose is exactly as it was."

Here the policeman went to his pocket and took out a nose wrapped in a piece of paper.

"That's it!" cried Kovalev. "That's it all right! Kindly take a cup of tea with me today."

"I'd consider it a great pleasure, but I really can't: I must go to the house of correction . . . The prices of all products have gone up so expensively . . . I've got my mother-in-law—that is, my wife's mother—living with me, and the children—for the oldest in particular we have great hopes: he's a very clever lad, but there's no means at all for his education ..."

Kovalev understood and, snatching a red banknote from the table, put it into the hand of the officer, who bowed and scraped his way out, and at almost the same moment Kovalev heard his voice in the street, where he delivered an admonition into the mug of a stupid muzhik who had driven his cart right on to the boulevard.

On the policeman's departure, the collegiate assessor remained in some vague state for a few minutes, and only after several minutes acquired the ability to see and feel: such obliviousness came over him on account of the unexpected joy. He carefully took the found nose in his two cupped hands and once again studied it attentively.

"That's it, that's it all right!" Major Kovalev kept repeating. "There's the pimple that popped out on the left side yesterday."

The major almost laughed for joy.

But nothing in this world lasts long, and therefore joy, in the minute that follows the first, is less lively; in the third minute it becomes still weaker, and finally it merges imperceptibly with one's usual state of mind, as a ring in the water, born of a stone's fall, finally merges with the smooth surface. Kovalev began to reflect and realized that the matter was not ended yet: the nose had been found, but it still had to be attached, put in its place.

"And what if it doesn't stick?"

At this question, presented to himself, the major blanched.

With a feeling of inexplicable fear, he rushed to the table and set the mirror before him, so as not to put the nose on somehow askew. His hands were trembling. Carefully and cautiously he applied it to its former place. Oh, horror! The nose did not stick! . . . He held it to his mouth, warmed it a little with his breath, and again brought it to the smooth space between his two cheeks; but in no way would the nose hold on.

"Well, so, stay there, you fool!" he said to it. But the nose was as if made of wood and kept falling to the table with a strange, corklike sound. The major's face twisted convulsively. "Can it be that it won't grow back on?" he repeated in fear. But no matter how many times he put it in its proper place, his efforts remained unsuccessful.

He called Ivan and sent him for the doctor, who occupied the best apartment on the first floor of the same building. This doctor was an imposing man, possessed of handsome, pitch-black side-whiskers and of a fresh, robust doctress, ate fresh apples in the morning, and kept his mouth extraordinarily clean by rinsing it every morning for nearly three quarters of an hour and polishing his teeth with five different sorts of brushes. The doctor came that same minute. Having asked him how long ago the misfortune had occurred, he raised Major Kovalev's face by the chin and flicked him with his thumb in the very place where the nose had formerly been, which made the major throw his head back so hard that it struck the wall behind. The physician said it was nothing, advised him to move away from the wall a bit, told him to tip his head to the right first, and, having palpated the spot where the nose had been, said, "Hm!" Then he told him to tip his head to the left, said, "Hm!" and in conclusion flicked him again with his thumb, which made Major Kovalev jerk his head back like a horse having its teeth examined. After performing this test, the physician shook his head and said:

"No, impossible. You'd better stay the way you are, because it might come out still worse. Of course, it could be attached; I could perhaps attach it for you now; but I assure you it will be the worse for you."

"Well, that's just fine! How can I stay without a nose?" said Kovalev. "It can't be worse than now. This is simply devil knows what! Where can I show myself with such lampoonery! I have good acquaintances; today alone I have to be at soirees in two houses. I know many people: Chekhtareva, a state councillor's wife, Podtochina, a staff officer's wife . . . though after this act I won't deal with her except through the police. Do me the kindness," Kovalev said in a pleading voice, "isn't there some remedy? Attach it somehow—maybe not perfectly, so long as it holds; I can even prop it up with my hand on dangerous occasions. Besides, I don't dance, so I can't injure it with some careless movement. Regarding my gratitude for your visits, rest assured that everything my means will permit. . ."

"Believe me," the doctor said in a voice neither loud nor soft but extremely affable and magnetic, "I never treat people for profit. That is against my rules and my art. True, I take money for visits, but solely so as not to give offense by refusing. Of course, I could attach your nose; but I assure you on my honor, if you do not believe my word, that it will be much worse. You'd better leave it to the effect of nature herself. Wash it frequently with cold water, and I assure you that you'll be as healthy without a nose as with one. As for the nose, I advise you to put it in a jar of alcohol, or, better still, add two tablespoons of aquafortis and warm vinegar—then you'll get decent money for it. I'll even buy it myself, if you don't put too high a price on it."

"No, no! I won't sell it for anything!" cried the desperate Major Kovalev. "Better let it perish!"

"Excuse me!" said the doctor, bowing out. "I wished to be of use to you . . . Nothing to be done! At least you've seen how I tried."

Having said this, the doctor, with a noble bearing, left the room. Kovalev did not even notice his face but, plunged in profound insensibility, saw only the cuffs of his shirt, clean and white as snow, peeking out from the sleeves of his black tailcoat.

He resolved to write to the staff officer's wife the next day, before filing a complaint, on the chance that she might agree to return to him what she owed without a fight. The content of the letter was as follows:

My dear madam, Alexandra5 Grigorievna!

I am unable to understand this strange act on your part. Rest assured that in behaving in this fashion you gain nothing and will by no means prevail upon me to marry your daughter. Believe me, I am perfectly well informed concerning the story of my nose, as well as the fact that none other than the two of you are the main participants in it. Its sudden detachment from its place, its flight, its disguising itself first as an official and now finally as its own self, are nothing else but the results of witchcraft, performed either by you or by those who exercise similarly noble occupations. I, for my part, consider it my duty to warn you: if the above-mentioned nose of mine is not back in place this same day, I shall be forced to resort to the shelter and protection of the law.

Nevertheless, with the utmost respect for you, I have the honor of being

Your humble servant,

Platon Kovalev

My dear sir, Platon Kuzmich!

I am extremely astonished by your letter. I confess to you in all frankness, I never expected, the less so with regard to unjust reproaches on your part. I warn you that I have never received the official you mention in my house, either disguised or as his real self. True, Filipp Ivanovich Potanchikov used to visit me. And though he indeed sought my daughter's hand, being himself of good, sober behavior and great learning, I never gave him reasons for any hope. You also mention a nose. If by that you mean that I supposedly led you by the nose and intended to refuse you formally, I am surprised that you speak of it, since I, as you know, was of the completely opposite opinion, and if you were to propose to my daughter in a lawful fashion right now, I would be ready to satisfy you at once, for this has always constituted the object of my liveliest desire, in hopes of which I remain, always ready to be at your service,

Alexandra Podtochina

"No," said Kovalev, after reading the letter. "She's clearly not guilty. She can't be! The way the letter's written, it couldn't have been written by a person guilty of a crime." The collegiate assessor was informed in such matters, because he had been sent on investigations several times while still in the Caucasus. "How, then, how on earth did it happen? The devil alone can sort it all out!" he finally said, dropping his arms.

Meanwhile, rumors of this remarkable incident spread all over the capital, and, as usually happens, not without special additions. Just then everyone's mind was precisely attuned to the extraordinary: only recently the public had been taken up with experiments on the effects of magnetism. What's more, the story about the dancing chairs on Konyushennaya Street was still fresh, and thus it was no wonder people soon began saying that the nose of the collegiate assessor Kovalev went strolling on Nevsky Prospect at exactly three o'clock. Hordes of the curious thronged there every day. Someone said the nose was supposed to be in Junker's shop6— and such a crowd and crush formed outside Junker's that the police even had to intervene. One speculator of respectable appearance, with side-whiskers, who sold various kinds of cookies at the entrance to the theater, had some fine, sturdy wooden benches specially made, which he invited the curious to stand on for eighty kopecks per visitor. One worthy colonel left home earlier specifically for that and made his way through the crowd with great difficulty; but to his great indignation, he saw in the shop window, instead of the nose, an ordinary woolen jacket and a lithograph portraying a girl straightening a stocking and a fop with a turned-back waistcoat and a small beard peeping at her from behind a tree—a picture that had been hanging in the same place for over ten years. He walked off saying vexedly, "How is it possible to upset people with such stupid and implausible rumors?"

Then the rumor spread that Major Kovalev's nose went strolling not on Nevsky Prospect but in the Tavrichesky Garden, and had long been going there; that when Khozrev-Mirza7 lived there, he wondered greatly at this strange sport of nature. Some students from the College of Surgeons went there. One noble, respectable lady, in a special letter, asked the overseer of the garden to show this rare phenomenon to her children and, if possible, with an explanation instructive and edifying for the young.

All these events were an extreme joy for those inevitable frequenters of social gatherings who delight in making the ladies laugh and whose stock was by then

completely exhausted. A small portion of respectable and right-minded people was extremely displeased. One gentleman said with indignation that he did not understand how such preposterous inventions could be spread in our enlightened age and that he was astonished that the government paid no attention to it. This gentleman was obviously one of those gentlemen who wish to mix the government into everything, even their daily quarrels with their wives. After that. . . but here again the whole incident is shrouded in mist, and what came later is decidedly unknown.

III

Perfect nonsense goes on in the world. Sometimes there is no plausibility at all: suddenly, as if nothing was wrong, that same nose which had driven about in the rank of state councillor and made such a stir in town was back in place—that is, precisely between the two cheeks of Major Kovalev. This happened on the seventh of April. Waking up and chancing to look in the mirror, he saw: the nose! He grabbed it with his hand—yes, the nose! "Aha!" said Kovalev, and in his joy he nearly burst into a trepak all around the room, but Ivan hindered him by coming in. He ordered a wash at once and, as he was washing, again glanced in the mirror: the nose! Drying himself with a towel, he again glanced in the mirror: the nose!

"Look, Ivan, I think I've got a pimple on my nose," he said, and thought meanwhile, "What a disaster if Ivan says, 'No, sir, not only no pimple, but no nose either!'"

But Ivan said:

"Nothing, sir, no pimple at all—the nose is clean!"

"Good, devil take it!" the major said to himself and snapped his fingers. At that moment the barber Ivan Yakovlevich peeked in the

door, but as timorously as a cat that has just been beaten for stealing lard.

"Tell me first: are your hands clean?" Kovalev cried to him from afar.

"Yes."

"Lies!"

"By God, they're clean, sir."

"Well, watch yourself now."

Kovalev sat down. Ivan Yakovlevich covered him with a towel and in an instant, with the aid of a brush, transformed his whole chin and part of his cheeks into a cream such as is served on merchants' birthdays.

"Look at that!" Ivan Yakovlevich said to himself, glancing at the nose. Then he tipped the head the other way and looked at it from the side. "There, now! really, just think of it," he continued and went on looking at the nose for a long time. At last, lightly, as cautiously as one can imagine, he raised two fingers so as to grasp the tip of it. Such was Ivan Yakovlevich's system.

"Oh-oh, watch out!" cried Kovalev.

Ivan Yakovlevich dropped his arms, more confused and taken aback than he had ever been before. Finally he started tickling carefully under his chin with the razor; and though it was quite difficult and inconvenient for him to give a shave without holding on to the smelling part of the body, nevertheless, resting his rough thumb on the cheek and lower jaw, he finally overcame all obstacles and shaved him.

When everything was ready, Kovalev hastened at once to get dressed, hired a cab, and drove straight to the pastry shop. Going in, he cried from afar, "A cup of hot chocolate, boy!" and instantly went up to the mirror: the nose was there! He gaily turned around and, with a satirical air, squinting one eye a little, looked at two . military men, one of whom had a nose no bigger than a waistcoat button. After that, he went to the office of the department where he had solicited a post as vice-governor or, failing that, as an executive. Passing through the waiting room, he looked in the mirror: the nose was there! Then he went to see another collegiate assessor, or major, a great mocker, to whom he often said in response to various needling remarks: "Well, don't I know you, you sharpy!" On the way there, he thought, "If even the major doesn't split from laughing when he sees me, then it's a sure sign that whatever's there is sitting where it should." But from the collegiate assessor— nothing. "Good, good, devil take it!" Kovalev thought to himself. On his way he met Podtochina, the staff officer's wife, with her daughter, greeted them, and was met with joyful exclamations— nothing, then; he was in no way damaged. He talked with them for a very long time and,

purposely taking out his snuffbox, spent a very long time in front of them filling his nose from both entrances, murmuring to himself, "There, that's for you, females, hen folk! and even so I won't marry the daughter. Just like that— par amour, if you please!" And Major Kovalev strolled on thereafter as if nothing was wrong, on Nevsky Prospect, and in the theaters, and everywhere. And the nose also sat on his face as if nothing was wrong, not even showing a sign that it had ever gone anywhere. And after that Major Kovalev was seen eternally in a good humor, smiling, chasing after decidedly all the pretty ladies, and even stopping once in front of a shop in the Merchants' Arcade to buy some ribbon or other, no one knows for what reason, since he was not himself the bearer of any decoration.

Such was the story that occurred in the northern capital of our vast country! Only now, on overall reflection, we can see that there is much of the implausible in it. To say nothing of the strangeness of the supernatural detachment of the nose and its appearance in various places in the guise of a state councillor—how was it that Kovalev did not realize that he ought not to make an announcement about the nose through the newspaper office? I'm speaking here not in the sense that I think it costly to pay for an announcement: that is nonsense, and I am not to be numbered among the mercenary. But it is indecent, inept, injudicious! And then, too—how did the nose end up in the baked bread and how did Ivan Yakovlevich himself. . . ? no, that I just do not understand, I decidedly do not understand! But what is strangest, what is most incomprehensible of all is how authors can choose such subjects ... I confess, that is utterly inconceivable, it is simply . . . no, no, I utterly fail to understand. In the first place, there is decidedly no benefit to the fatherland; in the second place . . . but in the second place there is also no benefit. I simply do not know what it. . .

And yet, for all that, though it is certainly possible to allow for one thing, and another, and a third, perhaps even . . . And then, too, are there not incongruities everywhere?... And yet, once you reflect on it, there really is something to all this. Say what you like, but such incidents do happen in the world—rarely, but they do happen.

Nicolai Gogol, 1836

Recommendations:

Emma, Northanger Abbey, Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen

Gobseck, Father Goriot, The Magic Skin by Honoré de Balzac

The Decameron by Giovanni Boccaccio

Don Quixote of La Mancha by Miguel de Cervantes

Oliver Twist, David Copperfield, A Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens

The Idiot, The Brothers Karamazov, Crime And Punishment by Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Faust Parts I & II , The Sorrows of Young Werther by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

The Overcoat by Nikolai Gogol

The Hunchback of Notre-Dame , Les Misérables , The Man Who Laughs by Victor Hugo

Trois hommes dans un bateau. Sans oublier le chien! by Jerome K. Jerome

The Trial , Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka

A Hero of Our Time by M. Y. Lermontov

Martin Eden , The Call of the Wild, White Fang by Jack London

Moby Dick Or The Whale by Herman Melville

Thus Spake Zarathustra by Friedrich Nietzsche

Eugene Onegin , The Queen of Spades by Alexander Pushkin

Treasure Island by Robert Louis Stevenson

The Antiquary by Walter Scott

Othello, King Lear by William Shakespeare

Fathers and Sons , A House of Gentlefolk by Ivan Turgenev

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain

Dick Sands, the Boy Captain by Jules Verne

The Picture of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde

Amok, Chess Story by Stefan Zweig