

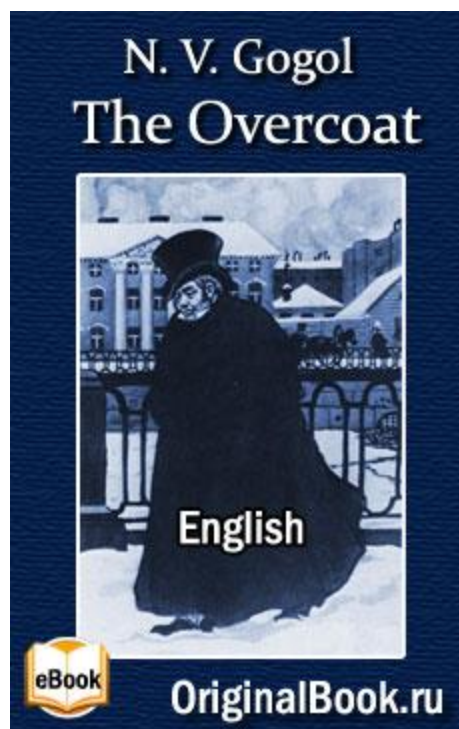
Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol

The Overcoat

Original: (Russian)

Николай Васильевич Гоголь

Шинель



1843

"The Overcoat" (Russian: Шинель, translit. Shinel; sometimes translated as "The Cloak") is a short story by Ukrainian-born Russian author [Nikolai Gogol](#), published in 1843.

The story and its author have had great influence on Russian literature, as expressed in a quote attributed to [Fyodor Dostoevsky](#): "We all come out from Gogol's 'Overcoat'."

The story has been adapted into a variety of stage and film interpretations.

Ebook: <http://originalbook.ru>

The Overcoat. Nikolai Gogol

In the department of. . . but it would be better not to say in which department. There is nothing more irascible than all these departments, regiments, offices—in short, all this officialdom. Nowadays every private individual considers the whole of society insulted in his person. They say a petition came quite recently from some police chief, I don't remember of what town, in which he states clearly that the government's decrees are perishing and his own sacred name is decidedly being taken in vain. And as proof he attached to his petition a most enormous tome of some novelistic work in which a police chief appears on every tenth page, in some places even in a totally drunken state. And so, to avoid any unpleasantness, it would be better to call the department in question *a certain department*. And so, *in a certain department there served a certain clerk*; a not very remarkable clerk, one might say—short, somewhat pockmarked, somewhat red-haired, even with a somewhat nearsighted look, slightly bald in front, with wrinkles on both cheeks and a complexion that is known as hemorrhoidal. . . No help for it! the Petersburg climate is to blame. As for his rank (for with us rank must be announced first of all), he was what is called an eternal titular councillor, at whom, as is known, all sorts of writers have abundantly sneered and jeered, having the praiseworthy custom of exerting themselves against those who can't bite. The clerk's last name was Bashmachkin. From the name itself one can already see that it once came from *bashmak*, or "shoe"; but when, at what time, and in what way it came from *bashmak*—none of that is known. His father, his grandfather, even his brother-in-law, and absolutely all the Bashmachkins, went around in boots, merely having them resoled three times a year. His name was Akaky Akakievich. The reader will perhaps find that somewhat strange and farfetched, but he can be assured that it was not fetched at all, but that such circumstances occurred of themselves as made it quite impossible to give him any other name, and here is precisely how it came about.

Akaky Akakievich was born, if memory serves me, during the night of the twenty-third of March. His late mother, a clerk's widow and a very good

woman, decided, as was fitting, to have the baby baptized. The mother was still lying in bed opposite the door, and to her right stood the godfather, a most excellent man, Ivan Ivanovich Yeroshkin, who served as a chief clerk in the Senate,¹ and the godmother, the wife of a police officer, a woman of rare virtue, Arina Semyonovna Belobriushkova. The new mother was offered a choice of any of three names, whichever she wished to choose: Mokky, Sossy, or to name the baby after the martyr Khozdazat. "No," thought the late woman, "what sort of names are those?" To please her, they opened the calendar² to another place; again three names came out: Trifily, Dula, and Varakhasy. "What a punishment," the old woman said. "Such names, really, I've never heard the like. If only it were Varadat or Varukh, not Trifily and Varakhasy." They turned another page: out came Pavsikakhy and Vakhtisy. "Well, I see now," the old woman said, "it's evidently his fate. If so, better let him be named after his father. His father was Akaky, so let the son also be Akaky." Thus it was that Akaky Akakievich came about. As the child was being baptized, he cried and made such a face as if he anticipated that he would be a titular councillor. And so, that is how it all came about. We have told it so that the reader could see for himself that it happened entirely from necessity and that to give him any other name was quite impossible.

When and at what time he entered the department and who appointed him, no one could recall. However many directors and other superiors came and went, he was always to be seen in one and the same place, in the same position, in the same capacity, as the same copying clerk, so that after a while they became convinced that he must simply have been born into the world ready-made, in a uniform, and with a balding head. In the department he was shown no respect at all. The caretakers not only did not rise from their places when he passed, but did not even look at him, as if a mere fly had flown through the reception room. His superiors treated him somehow with cold despotism. Some chief clerk's assistant simply shoved papers under his nose without even saying "Copy them," or "Here's a nice, interesting little case," or something pleasant, as is customary in well-bred offices. And he took them, looking only at the papers, without regarding the one who put them there or whether he had the right to do so. He took them and

immediately settled down to copying them. The young clerks poked fun at him and cracked jokes, to the extent that office wit allowed; told right in front of him various stories they had made up about him, about his landlady, a seventy-year-old crone, saying that she beat him, asking when their wedding was to be, dumping torn-up paper over his head and calling it snow. But not one word of response came from Akaky Akakievich, as if no one was there; it did not even affect the work he did: amidst all this pestering, he made not a single error in his copy. Only when the joke was really unbearable, when they jostled his arm, interfering with what he was doing, would he say, "Let me be. Why do you offend me?" And there was something strange in the words and in the voice in which they were uttered. Something sounded in it so conducive to pity that one recently appointed young man who, following the example of the others, had first allowed himself to make fun of him, suddenly stopped as if transfixed, and from then on everything seemed changed before him and acquired a different look. Some unnatural power pushed him away from his comrades, whose acquaintance he had made thinking them decent, well-mannered men. And long afterwards, in moments of the greatest merriment, there would rise before him the figure of the little clerk with the balding brow, uttering his penetrating words: "Let me be. Why do you offend me?"—and in these penetrating words rang other words: "I am your brother." And the poor young man would bury his face in his hands, and many a time in his life he shuddered to see how much inhumanity there is in man, how much savage coarseness is concealed in refined, cultivated manners, and God! even in a man the world regards as noble and honorable . . .

It would hardly be possible to find a man who lived so much in his work. It is not enough to say he served zealously—no, he served with love. There, in that copying, he saw some varied and pleasant world of his own. Delight showed in his face; certain letters were his favorites, and when he came to one of them, he was beside himself: he chuckled and winked and helped out with his lips, so that it seemed one could read on his face every letter his pen traced. If his zeal had been rewarded correspondingly, he might, to his own amazement, have gone as far as state councillor; yet his reward, as his witty

comrades put it, was a feather in his hat and hemorrhoids where he sat. However, it was impossible to say he went entirely unnoticed. One director, being a kindly man and wishing to reward him for long service, ordered that he be given something more important than the usual copying—namely, he was told to change an already existing document into a letter to another institution; the matter consisted merely in changing the heading and changing some verbs from first to third person. This was such a task for him that he got all in a sweat, rubbed his forehead, and finally said, "No, better let me copy something." After that he was left copying forever. Outside this copying nothing seemed to exist for him. He gave no thought to his clothes at all: his uniform was not green but of some mealy orange. The collar he wore was narrow, low, so that though his neck was not long, it looked extraordinarily long protruding from this collar, as with those head-wagging plaster kittens that foreign peddlers carry about by the dozen on their heads. And there was always something stuck to his uniform: a wisp of straw or a bit of thread; moreover, he had a special knack, as he walked in the street, of getting under a window at the precise moment when some sort of trash was being thrown out of it, and, as a result, he was eternally carrying around melon or watermelon rinds and other such rubbish on his hat. Not once in his life did he ever pay attention to what was going on or happening every day in the street, which, as is known, his young fellow clerk always looks at, his pert gaze so keen that he even notices when someone on the other side of the street has the footstrap of his trousers come undone—which always provokes a sly smile on his face.

But Akaky Akakievich, even if he looked at something, saw in everything his own neat lines, written in an even hand, and only when a horse's muzzle, coming out of nowhere, placed itself on his shoulder and blew real wind from its nostrils onto his cheek—only then would he notice that he was not in the middle of a line, but rather in the middle of the street. Coming home, he would sit down straight away at the table, hastily slurp up his cabbage soup and eat a piece of beef with onions, without ever noticing their taste, and he would eat it all with flies and whatever else God sent him at the time. Noticing that his stomach was full, he would get up from the table, take out

a bottle of ink, and copy documents he had brought home. If there chanced to be none, he made copies especially for his own pleasure, particularly if the document was distinguished not by the beauty of its style but by its being addressed to some new or important person.

Even in those hours when the gray Petersburg sky fades completely and all clerical folk have eaten their fill and finished dinner, each as he could, according to his salary and his personal fancy— when all have rested after the departmental scratching of pens, the rushing about seeing to their own and other people's needful occupations, and all that irrepressible man heaps voluntarily on himself even more than is necessary—when clerks hasten to give the remaining time to pleasure: the more ambitious rushing to the theater; another going out to devote it to gazing at silly hats; another to a party, to spend it paying compliments to some pretty girl, the star of a small clerical circle; still another, and this happens most often, simply going to his own kind, to some fourth or third floor, two small rooms with a front hall and a kitchen, with some claim to fashion, a lamp or other object that cost great sacrifices, the giving up of dinners, outings—in short, even at that time when all clerks disperse to their friends' small apartments to play cutthroat whist, sipping tea from glasses, with one-kopeck rusks, puffing smoke through long chibouks, repeating while the cards are being dealt some gossip blown over from high society, something a Russian man can never give up under any circumstances, or even, when there is nothing to talk about, retelling the eternal joke about the commandant who was brought word that the horse of Falconet's monument³ had had its tail docked—in short, even when everything strives for diversion—Akaky Akakievich did not give himself up to any diversion. No one could say he had ever been seen at any party. When he had written his fill, he would go to bed, smiling beforehand at the thought of the next day: What would God send him to copy tomorrow? So flowed the peaceful life of this man who, with a salary of four hundred, was able to content himself with his lot, and so it might have flowed on into extreme old age, had it not been for the various calamities strewn along the path of life, not only of titular, but even of privy, actual,

court, and other councillors, even of those who neither give counsel nor take any themselves.

There exists in Petersburg a powerful enemy of all who earn a salary of four hundred roubles or thereabouts. This enemy is none other than our northern frost, though, incidentally, people say it is very healthful. Toward nine o'clock in the morning, precisely the hour when the streets are covered with people going to their offices, it starts dealing such strong and sharp flicks to all noses indiscriminately that the poor clerks decidedly do not know where to put them. At that time, when even those who occupy high positions have an ache in their foreheads from the cold and tears come to their eyes, poor titular councillors are sometimes defenseless. The whole of salvation consists in running as quickly as possible, in your skimpy overcoat, across five or six streets and then standing in the porter's lodge, stamping your feet good and hard, thereby thawing out all your job-performing gifts and abilities, which had become frozen on the way. Akaky Akakievich had for a certain time begun to feel that he was somehow getting it especially in the back and shoulder, though he tried to run across his allotted space as quickly as possible. He thought finally that the sin might perhaps lie with his overcoat. Examining it well at home, he discovered that in two or three places—namely, on the back and shoulders—it had become just like burlap; the broadcloth was so worn out that it was threadbare, and the lining had fallen to pieces. It should be known that Akaky Akakievich's overcoat also served as an object of mockery for the clerks; they even deprived it of the noble name of overcoat and called it a housecoat. Indeed, it was somehow strangely constituted: its collar diminished more and more each year, for it went to mend other parts. The mending did not testify to any skill in the tailor, and the results were in fact crude and unsightly. Seeing what the situation was, Akaky Akakievich decided that the overcoat had to be taken to Petrovich the tailor, who lived somewhere on a fourth floor, up a back entrance, and who, in spite of his blind eye and the pockmarks all over his face, performed the mending of clerkly and all other trousers and tailcoats quite successfully—to be sure, when he was sober and not entertaining any other projects in his head. Of this tailor, of course, not much should be said,

but since there exists a rule that the character of every person in a story be well delineated, there's no help for it, let us have Petrovich here as well. In the beginning he was simply called Grigory and was some squire's serf; he began to be called Petrovich when he was freed and started drinking rather heavily on feast days—first on great feasts, and then on all church feasts indiscriminately, wherever a little cross appeared on the calendar. In this respect he was true to the customs of his forebears and, in arguing with his wife, used to call her a worldly woman and a German.⁴ Now that we've mentioned the wife, we ought to say a couple of words about her as well; but, unfortunately, not much is known about her, except that Petrovich had a wife, and that she even wore a bonnet, not a kerchief; but it seems she could not boast of her beauty; at least, when meeting her, only guardsmen looked under her bonnet, winking their mustaches and emitting some special noise.

Climbing the stairway leading to Petrovich, which, to do it justice, was all dressed with water and swill, and redolent throughout of that spiritous smell that makes the eyes smart and is inevitably present in all back stairways of Petersburg houses—climbing the stairway, Akaky Akakievich was thinking about how much Petrovich would ask, and mentally decided not to pay more than two roubles. The door was open, because the mistress of the house, while cooking fish, had filled the kitchen with so much smoke that even the cockroaches themselves could no longer be seen. Akaky Akakievich passed through the kitchen, unnoticed even by the mistress herself, and finally went into the room, where he saw Petrovich sitting on a wide, unpainted wooden table, his legs tucked under him like a Turkish pasha's. His feet, after the custom of tailors sitting over their work, were bare. The eye was struck first of all by his big toe, very familiar to Akaky Akakievich, with a somehow disfigured nail, thick and strong as tortoise shell. From Petrovich's neck hung a skein of silk and thread, and on his knees lay some rag. He had already spent three minutes trying to put a thread through the eye of a needle and missing, and therefore he was very angry with the darkness and even with the thread itself, grumbling under his breath, "Won't go through, the barbarian! Get the better of me, you rascal!" Akaky

Akakievich was upset that he had come precisely at a moment when Petrovich was angry: he liked dealing with Petrovich when the latter was already a bit under the influence, or, as his wife used to put it, "got himself tight on rotgut, the one-eyed devil." In that condition, Petrovich usually gave in and agreed very willingly, and even bowed and thanked him each time. Later, it's true, his wife would come, lamenting that her husband had been drunk and had asked too little; but a ten-kopeck piece would be added, and the deal was in the hat. Now, however, Petrovich seemed to be in a sober state, and therefore tough, intractable, and liable to demand devil knows what price. Akaky Akakievich grasped that fact and was, as they say, about to backtrack, but the thing was already under way. Petrovich squinted at him very intently with his only eye, and Akaky Akakievich involuntarily said: "Good day, Petrovich!"

"Good day to you, sir," said Petrovich, and cocked his eye at Akaky Akakievich's hands, trying to see what sort of booty he was bringing.

"I've come to you, Petrovich, sort of. . ."

It should be known that Akaky Akakievich expressed himself mostly with prepositions, adverbs, and finally such particles as have decidedly no meaning. If the matter was very difficult, he even had the habit of not finishing the phrase at all, so that very often he would begin his speech with the words "That, really, is altogether sort of. . ." after which would come nothing, and he himself would forget it, thinking everything had been said.

"What's this?" said Petrovich, at the same time giving his uniform a thorough inspection with his only eye, beginning with the collar, then the sleeves, back, skirts, and buttonholes—all of which was quite familiar to him, since it was his own handiwork. Such is the custom among tailors: it's the first thing they do when they meet someone.

"And I've come, Petrovich, sort of. . . this overcoat, the broadcloth . . . you see, in all other places it's quite strong, it got a bit dusty and so it seems as if it's old, but it's new, only in one place it's a bit sort of. . . on the back, and

here on one shoulder it's a bit worn, and on this shoulder a little bit—you see, that's all. Not much work . . ."

Petrovich took the housecoat, laid it out on the table first, examined it for a long time, shook his head, and reached his hand out to the windowsill to get his round snuffbox with the portrait of some general on it—which one is not known, because the place where the face was had been poked through by a finger and then pasted over with a rectangular piece of paper. Having taken a pinch, Petrovich stretched the housecoat on his hands and examined it against the light and again shook his head. Then he turned it inside out and shook his head once more, once more opened the lid with the general pasted over with paper, and, having filled his nose with snuff, closed the box, put it away, and finally said:

"No, impossible to fix it—bad wardrobe."

At these words, Akaky Akakievich's heart missed a beat.

"Why impossible, Petrovich?" he said, almost in a child's pleading voice. "It's only a bit worn on the shoulders—surely you have some little scraps. . ."

"Little scraps might be found, we might find some little scraps," said Petrovich, "but it's impossible to sew them on—the stuff's quite rotten, touch it with a needle and it falls apart."

"Falls apart, and you patch it over."

"But there's nothing to put a patch on, nothing for it to hold to, it's too worn out. They pass it off as broadcloth, but the wind blows and it flies to pieces."

"Well, you can make it hold. Otherwise, really, it's sort of. . .!"

"No," Petrovich said resolutely, "it's impossible to do anything. The stuff's no good. You'd better make yourself foot cloths out of it when the winter cold comes, because socks don't keep you warm. It's Germans invented them so as to earn more money for themselves." (Petrovich liked needling the Germans on occasion.) "And it appears you'll have to have a new overcoat made."

At the word "new" all went dim in Akaky Akakievich's eyes, and everything in the room became tangled before him. The only thing he saw clearly was the general with paper pasted over his face who was on the lid of Petrovich's snuffbox.

"How's that—new?" he said, still as if in sleep. "I have no money for that."

"Yes, new," Petrovich said with barbaric calm.

"Well, if it must be a new one, what would it, sort of. . ."

"You mean, how much would it cost?"

"Yes."

"Three times fifty and then some would have to go into it," Petrovich said and pressed his lips together meaningfully. He very much liked strong effects, liked somehow to confound one completely all of a sudden and then glance sideways at the face the confounded one pulls at such words.

"A hundred and fifty roubles for an overcoat?" poor Akaky Akakievich cried out—cried out, perhaps, for the first time in all his born days, for he was always distinguished by the softness of his voice.

"Yes, sir," said Petrovich, "depending also on the overcoat. If we put a marten on the collar, plus a hood with silk lining, it may come to two hundred."

"Please, Petrovich," Akaky Akakievich said in a pleading voice, not hearing and not trying to hear all Petrovich's words and effects, "fix it somehow, so that it can serve a while longer at least."

"Ah, no, that'll be work gone for naught and money wasted," said Petrovich, and after these words Akaky Akakievich left, totally annihilated.

And Petrovich, on his departure, stood for a long time, his lips pressed together meaningfully, without going back to work, feeling pleased that he had not lowered himself or betrayed the art of tailoring.

When he went outside, Akaky Akakievich was as if in a dream. "So it's that, that's what it is," he said to himself. "I really didn't think it would come out

sort of. . ." and then, after some silence, he added, "So that's how it is! that's what finally comes out! and I really never would have supposed it would be so." Following that, a long silence again ensued, after which he said, "So that's it! Such an, indeed, altogether unexpected, sort of. . . it's altogether. . . such a circumstance!" Having said this, instead of going home, he went in the entirely opposite direction, without suspecting it himself. On the way, a chimney sweep brushed against him with his whole dirty flank, blackening his whole shoulder; a full hat-load of lime poured down on him from the top of a house under construction. He did not notice any of it, and only later, when he ran into an on-duty policeman who, having set aside his halberd, was shaking snuff from his snuff bottle onto his callused fist, only then did he recover his senses slightly, and that only because the policeman said, "What're you doing, barging into my mug! Don't you have enough sidewalk?" This made him look around and turn back home. Only here did he begin to collect his thoughts, see his situation clearly for what it was, and start talking to himself, not in snatches now but sensibly and frankly, as with a reasonable friend with whom one could discuss the most heartfelt and intimate things. "Ah, no," said Akaky Akakievich, "it's impossible to talk with Petrovich now: now he's sort of. . . his wife must somehow have given him a beating. I'll do better to come to him on Sunday morning: he'll be cockeyed and sleepy after Saturday night, and he'll need the hair of the dog, and his wife won't give him any money, and just then I'll sort of. . . ten kopecks in his hand, he'll be more tractable then, and then the overcoat sort of. . ." So Akaky Akakievich reasoned with himself, encouraged himself, and waited for the next Sunday, when, seeing from afar Petrovich's wife leave the house for somewhere, he went straight to him. Petrovich was indeed badly cockeyed after Saturday, could hardly hold his head up, and was quite sleepy; but for all that, as soon as he learned what it was about, it was as if the devil gave him a nudge. "Impossible," he said, "be so good as to order a new one." Here Akaky Akakievich gave him a ten-kopeck piece. "Thank you, sir, I'll fortify myself a bit for your health," said Petrovich, "but concerning the overcoat, please don't trouble yourself—it's no good for anything good. I'll make you a new overcoat, I'll do it up famously, that I will."

Akaky Akakievich tried to mention mending again, but Petrovich did not listen to the end and said, "I'll make you a new one without fail, please count on me for that, I'll do my best. It may even be in today's fashion, the collar fastened by little silver clasps with applique."

Here Akaky Akakievich saw that he could not get around a new overcoat, and his spirits wilted completely. How, indeed, with what, with what money to make it? Of course, he could count partly on his future holiday bonus, but that money had been placed and distributed long ago. He needed to get new trousers, to pay an old debt to the shoemaker for putting new vamp on his old boot tops, and he had to order three shirts from the seamstress and a couple of pairs of that item of underwear which it is indecent to mention in print—in short, absolutely all the money was to be spent; and even if the director was so gracious as to allot him a forty-five- or fifty-rouble bonus, instead of forty, all the same only a trifle would be left, which in the overcoat capital would be like a drop in the ocean. Though he knew, of course, that Petrovich had a trick of suddenly asking devil knows how incongruously high a price, so that his own wife sometimes could not keep herself from exclaiming, "Have you lost your mind, fool that you are! One day he takes a job for nothing, and now the evil one gets him to ask more than he's worth himself." Though he knew, of course, that Petrovich would agree to do it for eighty roubles—even so, where to get the eighty roubles? Now, it might be possible to find half; half could be produced; maybe even a little more; but where to get the other half? . . . But first the reader should learn where the one half would come from. Akaky Akakievich was in the habit of setting aside a half kopeck for every rouble he spent, putting it into a little box with a lock and key and a small hole cut in the lid for dropping money through. At the end of every half year he inspected the accumulated sum of copper and exchanged it for small silver. Thus he continued for a long time, and in this way, over the course of several years, he turned out to have saved a total of more than forty roubles. And so, one half was in hand; but where to get the other half? Where to get the other forty roubles? Akaky Akakievich thought and thought and decided that he would have to cut down his usual expenses, at least for a year; to abolish the drinking of tea in the evening, to

burn no candles in the evening, and if there was a need to do something, to go to the landlady's room and work by her candle; to make the lightest and most careful steps possible when walking in the street, over cobbles and pavements, almost on tiptoe, thereby avoiding the rapid wearing out of soles; to send his linen to the laundry as seldom as possible, and to prevent soiling it by taking it off each time on coming home, remaining in a half-cotton dressing gown, a very old one, spared even by time itself. Truth to tell, it was a bit difficult for him at first to get used to such limitations, but later it somehow became a habit and went better; he even accustomed himself to going entirely without food in the evenings; but instead he was nourished spiritually, bearing in his thoughts the eternal idea of the future overcoat. From then on it was as if his very existence became somehow fuller, as if he were married, as if some other person were there with him, as if he were not alone but some pleasant life's companion had agreed to walk down the path of life with him—and this companion was none other than that same overcoat with its cotton-wool quilting, with its sturdy lining that knew no wear. He became somehow livelier, even firmer of character, like a man who has defined and set a goal for himself. Doubt, indecision—in short, all hesitant and uncertain features—disappeared of themselves from his face and actions. Fire occasionally showed in his eyes, the most bold and valiant thoughts even flashed in his head: Might he not indeed put a marten on the collar? These reflections led him nearly to distraction. Once, as he was copying a paper, he even nearly made a mistake, so that he cried "Oh!" almost aloud and crossed himself. In the course of each month, he stopped at least once to see Petrovich, to talk about the overcoat, where it was best to buy broadcloth, and of what color, and at what price, and he would return home somewhat preoccupied yet always pleased, thinking that the time would finally come when all this would be bought and the overcoat would be made. Things went even more quickly than he expected. Contrary to all expectations, the director allotted Akaky Akakievich not forty or forty-five but a whole sixty roubles; whether he sensed that Akaky Akakievich needed an overcoat, or it happened that way of itself, in any case he acquired on account of it an extra twenty roubles. This circumstance speeded the course of things. Another two or three months of going a bit hungry—and Akaky

Akakievich had, indeed, about eighty roubles. His heart, generally quite calm, began to throb. The very next day he went shopping with Petrovich. They bought very good broadcloth—and no wonder, because they had begun thinking about it six months before and had hardly ever let a month go by without stopping at a shop and inquiring about prices; and Petrovich himself said that better broadcloth did not exist. For the lining they chose chintz, but of such good, sturdy quality that, according to Petrovich, it was even better than silk and looked more attractive and glossy. They did not buy a marten, because it was indeed expensive; but instead they chose a cat, the best they could find in the shop, a cat which from afar could always be taken for a marten. Petrovich fussed with the overcoat for a whole two weeks, because there was a lot of quilting to do; otherwise it would have been ready sooner. For his work, Petrovich took twelve roubles—it simply couldn't have been less: decidedly everything was sewn with silk, in small double seams, and afterwards Petrovich went along each seam with his own teeth, imprinting it with various designs. It was. . . it's hard to say precisely which day, but it was probably the most festive day in Akaky Akakievich's life, when Petrovich finally brought the overcoat. He brought it in the morning, just before it was time to go to the office. At no other time could the overcoat have come so appropriately, because very bitter frosts were already setting in and, it seemed, were threatening to get still worse. Petrovich came with the overcoat as befits a good tailor. His face acquired a more important expression than Akaky Akakievich had ever seen before. It seemed he felt in full measure that he had done no small thing and had suddenly revealed in himself the abyss that separates tailors who only put in linings and do repairs from those who sew new things. He took the overcoat out of the handkerchief in which he had brought it; the handkerchief was fresh from the laundry, and he proceeded to fold it and put it in his pocket for further use. Having taken out the overcoat, he looked very proud and, holding it in both hands, threw it deftly around Akaky Akakievich's shoulders; then he pulled it down and straightened the back with his hands; then he draped it over Akaky Akakievich unbuttoned. Akaky Akakievich, being a man of a certain age, wanted to try the sleeves; Petrovich helped him on with the sleeves—it turned out that with the sleeves it was also good. In

short, it appeared that the overcoat was just right and fitted perfectly. Petrovich did not miss the chance of saying that it was only because he lived without a shingle, on a small street, and, besides, had known Akaky Akakievich for a long time, that he was asking so little; that on Nevsky Prospect he would pay seventy-five roubles for the work alone. Akaky Akakievich did not want to discuss it with Petrovich, and besides was afraid of all those mighty sums with which Petrovich liked to blow smoke. He paid him, thanked him, and left for the office at once in the new overcoat. Petrovich followed him out and, standing in the street, went on for a long time looking at the overcoat in the distance, then went purposely to the side, so as to make a detour down a crooked lane, run back out to the street ahead of him, and thus look at his overcoat from the other direction—that is, straight in the face. Meanwhile, Akaky Akakievich walked on in the most festive disposition of all his feelings. At each instant of every minute he felt that there was a new overcoat on his shoulders, and several times he even smiled from inner satisfaction. In fact, there were two profits: one that it was warm, the other that it was good. He did not notice the road at all and suddenly found himself at the office; in the porter's lodge he took the overcoat off, looked it all over, and entrusted it to the porter's special care. In some unknown way everyone in the department suddenly learned that Akaky Akakievich had a new overcoat and that the housecoat no longer existed. Everyone immediately ran out to the porter's lodge to look at Akaky Akakievich's new overcoat. They began to congratulate him, to cheer him, so that at first he only smiled, but then even became embarrassed. And when everyone accosted him and began saying that they should drink to the new overcoat, and that he should at least throw a party for them all, Akaky Akakievich was completely at a loss, did not know what to do, how to reply, or how to excuse himself from it. After several minutes, blushing all over, he began assuring them quite simple-heartedly that it was not a new overcoat at all, that it was just so, that it was an old overcoat. Finally one of the clerks, even some sort of assistant to the chief clerk, probably in order to show that he was by no means a proud man and even kept company with subordinates, said, "So be it, I'll throw a party instead of Akaky Akakievich and invite everyone tonight for tea: today also happens to be my name day." Naturally,

the clerks straight away congratulated the chief clerk's assistant and willingly accepted the invitation. Akaky Akakievich tried to begin excusing himself, but everyone started to say that it was impolite, that it was simply a shame and a disgrace, and it was quite impossible for him not to accept. Afterwards, however, he was pleased when he remembered that he would thus even have occasion to take a stroll that evening in his new overcoat. For Akaky Akakievich the whole of that day was like the greatest festive holiday. He came home in the happiest state of mind, took off his overcoat and hung it carefully on the wall, having once more admired the broadcloth and the lining, and then he purposely took out for comparison his former housecoat, completely fallen to pieces. He looked at it and even laughed himself: so far was the difference! And for a long time afterwards, over dinner, he kept smiling whenever he happened to think of the condition of his housecoat. He dined cheerfully and wrote nothing after dinner, no documents, but just played a bit of the Sybarite in his bed until it turned dark. Then, without tarrying, he got dressed, put on his overcoat, and left.

Precisely where the clerk who had invited him lived, we unfortunately cannot say: our memory is beginning to fail us badly, and whatever there is in Petersburg, all those houses and streets, has so mixed and merged together in our head that it is very hard to get anything out of it in a decent fashion. Be that as it may, it is at least certain that the clerk lived in a better part of town—meaning not very near to Akaky Akakievich. Akaky Akakievich had first to pass through some deserted, sparsely lit streets, but as he approached the clerk's home, the streets became livelier, more populous, and better lit. Pedestrians flashed by more frequently, ladies began to appear, beautifully dressed, some of the men wore beaver collars, there were fewer cabbies with their wooden-grill sleds studded with gilded nails—on the contrary, coachmen kept passing in raspberry-colored velvet hats, with lacquered sleds and bearskin rugs, or carriages with decorated boxes flew down the street, their wheels shrieking over the snow. Akaky Akakievich looked at it all as at something new. It was several years since he had gone out in the evening. He stopped curiously before a lighted shop window to look at a picture that portrayed some beautiful woman taking off

her shoe and thus baring her whole leg, not a bad leg at all; and behind her back, from another room, some man stuck his head out, with side-whiskers and a handsome imperial under his lip. Akaky Akakievich shook his head and chuckled, and then went on his way. Why did he chuckle? Was it because he had encountered something totally unfamiliar, of which everyone nevertheless still preserves some sort of intuition; or had he thought, like many other clerks, as follows: "Well, these Frenchmen! what can you say, if they want something sort of. . . it's really sort of. . ." But maybe he didn't think even that—it's really impossible to get inside a man's soul and learn all he thinks.

At last he reached the house where the chief clerk's assistant lived. The chief clerk's assistant lived in grand style: the stairway was lighted, the apartment was on the second floor. Entering the front hall, Akaky Akakievich saw whole rows of galoshes on the floor. Among them, in the middle of the room, a samovar stood hissing and letting out clouds of steam. On the walls hung overcoats and cloaks, some among them even with beaver collars or velvet lapels. Behind the walls, noise and talk could be heard, which suddenly became clear and loud as the door opened and a lackey came out with a tray laden with empty glasses, a pitcher of cream, and a basket of rusks. It was evident that the clerks had gathered long ago and had already finished their first glass of tea. Akaky Akakievich, having hung up his overcoat himself, went into the room, and before him simultaneously flashed candles, clerks, pipes, and card tables, while his hearing was struck vaguely by a rush of conversation arising on all sides and the noise of chairs being moved. He stopped quite awkwardly in the middle of the room, looking about and trying to think what to do. But he was already noticed, greeted with cries, and everyone went at once to the front hall and again examined his overcoat. Akaky Akakievich was somewhat embarrassed, yet being a pure-hearted man, he could not help rejoicing to see how everyone praised his overcoat. After that, naturally, everyone dropped both him and his overcoat and turned, as usual, to the tables set up for whist. All of this—the noise, the talk, the crowd of people—all of it was somehow strange to Akaky Akakievich. He simply did not know what to do, where to put his hands and

feet, or his whole self; he finally sat down with the players, looked at the cards, looked into the face of one or another, and in a short while began to yawn, feeling himself bored, the more so as it was long past the time when he customarily went to bed. He tried to take leave of the host, but the host would not let him go, saying that they absolutely had to drink a glass of champagne to the new coat. An hour later a supper was served which consisted of mixed salad, cold veal, pate, sweet pastry, and champagne. Akaky Akakievich was forced to drink two glasses, after which he felt that the room had become merrier, yet he was unable to forget that it was already midnight and long since time to go home. So that the host should not somehow decide to detain him, he quietly left the room, went to the front hall to find his overcoat, which he saw, not without regret, lying on the floor, shook it, cleaned every feather off it, put it over his shoulders, went downstairs and outside. Outside it was still light. Some small-goods shops, those permanent clubs for servants and various others, were open; those that were closed still showed a stream of light the whole length of the door chink, indicating that they were not yet devoid of company and that the housemaids and servants were probably finishing their talks and discussions, while their masters were thrown into utter perplexity as to their whereabouts. Akaky Akakievich walked along in a merry state of mind, and even suddenly ran, for some unknown reason, after some lady who passed by like lightning, every part of whose body was filled with extraordinary movement. However, he stopped straight away and again walked very slowly, as before, marveling to himself at this spright-liness of unknown origin. Soon there stretched before him those deserted streets which even in the daytime are none too cheerful, much less in the evening. Now they had become still more desolate and solitary: street lamps flashed less often—evidently the supply of oil was smaller; there were wooden houses, fences; not a soul anywhere; only snow glittered in the streets, and sleepy low hovels with closed shutters blackened mournfully. He approached a place where the street was intersected by an endless square that looked like a terrible desert, with houses barely visible on the other side.

Far away, God knows where, a light flashed in some sentry box that seemed to be standing at the edge of the world. Here Akaky Akakievich's merriment somehow diminished considerably. He entered the square not without some inadvertent fear, as if his heart had a foreboding of something bad. He looked behind him and to the sides: just like a sea all around him. "No, better not to look," he thought and walked with closed eyes, and when he opened them to see how far the end of the square was, he suddenly saw before him, almost in front of his nose, some mustached people, precisely what sort he could not even make out. His eyes grew dim, his heart pounded in his chest. "That overcoat's mine!" one of them said in a thundering voice, seizing him by the collar. Akaky Akakievich was about to shout "Help!" when the other one put a fist the size of a clerk's head right to his mouth and said, "Just try shouting!" Akaky Akakievich felt only that his overcoat was taken off him, he was given a kick with a knee and fell face down in the snow, and then felt no more. After a few minutes, he came to his senses and got to his feet, but no one was there. He felt it was cold in the field and the overcoat was gone; he began to shout, but his voice seemed never to reach the ends of the square. In desperation, shouting constantly, he started running across the square, straight to the sentry box, beside which stood an on-duty policeman, leaning on his halberd, watching with apparent curiosity, desirous of knowing why the devil a man was running toward him from far away and shouting. Akaky Akakievich, running up to him, began shouting in a breathless voice that he had been asleep, not on watch, and had not seen how a man was being robbed. The policeman replied that he had seen nothing; that he had seen him being stopped by two men in the middle of the square but had thought they were his friends; and that, instead of denouncing him for no reason, he should go to the inspector tomorrow and the inspector would find out who took the overcoat. Akaky Akakievich came running home in complete disorder: the hair that still grew in small quantities on his temples and the back of his head was completely disheveled; his side, chest, and trousers were covered with snow. The old woman, his landlady, hearing a terrible knocking at the door, hastily jumped out of bed and ran with one shoe on to open it, holding her nightgown to her breast out of modesty; but when she opened the door she stepped back,

seeing what state Akaky Akakievich was in. When he told her what was the matter, she clasped her hands and said he must go straight to the superintendent, that the inspector would cheat him, make promises and then lead him by the nose; and that it was best to go to the superintendent, that he was a man of her acquaintance, because Anna, the Finnish woman who used to work for her as a cook, had now got herself hired at the superintendent's as a nanny, and that she often saw him herself as he drove past their house, and that he also came to church every Sunday, prayed, and at the same time looked cheerfully at everyone, and therefore was by all tokens a good man. Having listened to this decision, Akaky Akakievich plodded sadly to his room, and how he spent the night we will leave to the judgment of those capable of entering at least somewhat into another man's predicament.

Early in the morning he went to the superintendent but was told that he was asleep; he came at ten and again was told: asleep; he came at eleven o'clock and was told that the superintendent was not at home; at lunchtime the scriveners in the front room refused to let him in and insisted on knowing what his business was, what necessity had brought him there, and what had happened. So that finally, for once in his life, Akaky Akakievich decided to show some character and said flatly that he had to see the superintendent himself, in person, that they dared not refuse to admit him, that he had come from his department on official business, and that he would make a complaint about them and they would see. The scriveners did not dare to say anything against that, and one of them sent to call the superintendent. The superintendent took the story about the theft of the overcoat somehow extremely strangely. Instead of paying attention to the main point of the case, he began to question Akaky Akakievich—why was he coming home so late, and had he not stopped and spent some time in some indecent house?—so that Akaky Akakievich was completely embarrassed and left him not knowing whether the case of his overcoat would take its proper course or not. He did not go to the office all that day (the only time in his life). The next day he arrived all pale and in his old housecoat, which now looked still more lamentable. Though some of the clerks did not miss their chance to

laugh at Akaky Akakievich even then, still the story of the theft of the overcoat moved many. They decided straight away to take up a collection for him, but they collected a mere trifle, because the clerks had already spent a lot, having subscribed to a portrait of the director and to some book, at the suggestion of the section chief, who was a friend of the author—and so, the sum turned out to be quite trifling. One of them, moved by compassion, decided at least to help Akaky Akakievich with good advice, telling him not to go to the police because, though it might happen that a policeman, wishing to gain the approval of his superior, would somehow find the overcoat, still the overcoat would remain with the police unless he could present legal proofs that it belonged to him; and the best thing would be to address a certain *important person*, so that the *important person*, by writing and referring to the proper quarters, could get things done more successfully. No help for it, Akaky Akakievich decided to go to the *important person*. What precisely the post of the *important person* was, and in what it consisted, remains unknown. It should be realized that this *certain important person* had become an important person only recently, and till then had been an unimportant person. However, his position even now was not considered important in comparison with other, still more important ones. But there will always be found a circle of people for whom something unimportant in the eyes of others is already important. He tried, however, to increase his importance by many other means—namely, he introduced the custom of lower clerks meeting him on the stairs when he came to the office; of no one daring to come to him directly, but everything going in the strictest order: a collegiate registrar should report to a provincial secretary, a provincial secretary to a titular or whatever else, and in this fashion the case should reach him. Thus everything in holy Russia is infected with imitation, and each one mimics and apes his superior. It is even said that some titular councillor, when he was made chief of some separate little chancellery, at once partitioned off a special room for himself, called it his "office room," and by the door placed some sort of ushers with red collars and galloons, who held the door handle and opened it for each visitor, though the "office room" could barely contain an ordinary writing desk. The ways and habits of the *important person* were imposing and majestic, but of no great

complexity. The chief principle of his system was strictness. "Strictness, strictness, and—strictness," he used to say, and with the last word usually looked very importantly into the face of the person he was addressing. Though, incidentally, there was no reason for any of it, because the dozen or so clerks who constituted the entire administrative machinery of the office were properly filled with fear even without that; seeing him from far off, they set their work aside and waited, standing at attention, until their superior passed through the room. His usual conversation with subordinates rang with strictness and consisted almost entirely of three phrases: "How dare you? Do you know with whom you are speaking? Do you realize who is standing before you?" However, he was a kind man at heart, good to his comrades, obliging, but the rank of general had completely bewildered him. On receiving the rank of general, he had somehow become confused, thrown off, and did not know how to behave at all. When he happened to be with his equals, he was as a man ought to be, a very decent man, in many respects even not a stupid man; but as soon as he happened to be in the company of men at least one rank beneath him, he was simply as bad as could be: he kept silent, and his position was pitiable, especially since he himself felt that he could be spending his time incomparably better. In his eyes there could sometimes be seen a strong desire to join in some interesting conversation and circle, but he was stopped by the thought: Would it not be excessive on his part, would it not be familiar, would he not be descending beneath his importance? On account of such reasoning, he remained eternally in the same silent state, only uttering some monosyllabic sounds from time to time, and in this way he acquired the title of a most boring person. It was to this *important person* that our Akaky Akakievich came, and came at a most unfavorable moment, very inopportune for himself, though very opportune for the important person.

The important person was in his office and was talking away very, very merrily with a recently arrived old acquaintance and childhood friend, whom he had not seen for several years. Just then it was announced to him that a certain Bashrnachkin was there. "Who's that?" he asked curtly. "Some clerk," came the reply. "Ah! he can wait, now isn't a good time," said the

important man. Here it should be said that the important man was stretching it a bit: the time was good, he had long since discussed everything with his friend and their conversation had long since been interspersed with lengthy silences, while they patted each other lightly on the thigh, saying: "So there, Ivan Abramovich!" "So it is, Stepan Varlamovich!" But, for all that, he nevertheless told the clerk to wait, in order to show his friend, a man who had not been in the service and had been living for a long time on his country estate, what lengths of time clerks spent waiting in his anteroom. At last, having talked, or, rather, been silent his fill, and having smoked a cigar in an easy chair with a reclining back, at last he suddenly recollected, as it were, and said to his secretary, who stood in the doorway with papers for a report, "Ah, yes, it seems there's a clerk standing there. Tell him he may come in." Seeing Akaky Akakievich's humble look and his old uniform, he turned to him suddenly and said, "What can I do for you?" in a voice abrupt and firm, which he had purposely studied beforehand in his room, alone and in front of a mirror, a week prior to receiving his present post and the rank of general. Akaky Akakievich, who had been feeling the appropriate timidity for a good while already, became somewhat flustered and explained as well as he could, so far as the freedom of his tongue permitted, adding the words "sort of" even more often than at other times, that the overcoat was perfectly new and he had been robbed in a brutal fashion, and that he was addressing him so that through his intercession, as it were, he could sort of write to the gentleman police superintendent or someone else and find the overcoat. For some reason, the general took this to be familiar treatment.

"What, my dear sir?" he continued curtly. "Do you not know the order? What are you doing here? Do you not know how cases are conducted? You ought to have filed a petition about it in the chancellery; it would pass to the chief clerk, to the section chief, then be conveyed to my secretary, and my secretary would deliver it to me . . ."

"But, Your Excellency," said Akaky Akakievich, trying to collect the handful of presence of mind he had and feeling at the same time that he was sweating terribly, "I made so bold as to trouble you, Your Excellency, because secretaries are, sort of. . . unreliable folk ..."

"What, what, what?" said the important person. "Where did you pick up such a spirit? Where did you pick up such ideas? What is this rebelliousness spreading among the young against their chiefs and higher-ups!"

The important person seemed not to notice that Akaky Akakievich was already pushing fifty. And so, even if he might be called a young man, it was only relatively—that is, in relation to someone who was seventy years old.

"Do you know to whom you are saying this? Do you realize who is standing before you? Do you realize that? Do you realize, I ask you?"

Here he stamped his foot, raising his voice to such a forceful note that even someone other than Akaky Akakievich would have been frightened by it. Akaky Akakievich was simply stricken, he swayed, shook all over, and was quite unable to stand: if the caretakers had not come running at once to support him, he would have dropped to the floor. He was carried out almost motionless. And the important person, pleased that the effect had even surpassed his expectations, and thoroughly delighted by the thought that his word could even make a man faint, gave his friend a sidelong glance to find out how he had taken it all, and saw, not without satisfaction, that his friend was in a most uncertain state and was even, for his own part, beginning to feel frightened himself.

How he went down the stairs, how he got outside, nothing of that could Akaky Akakievich remember. He could not feel his legs or arms. Never in his life had he been given such a bad roasting by a general, and not his own general at that. He walked, his mouth gaping, through the blizzard that whistled down the streets, blowing him off the sidewalk; the wind, as always in Petersburg, blasted him from all four sides out of every alley. He instantly caught a quinsy, and he reached home unable to utter a word; he was all swollen and took to his bed. So strong at times is the effect of a proper roasting! The next day he was found to be in a high fever. Owing to the generous assistance of the Petersburg climate, the illness developed more quickly than might have been expected, and when the doctor came, after feeling his pulse, he found nothing else to do but prescribe a poultice, only so as not to leave the sick man without the beneficent aid of medical science;

but he nevertheless declared straight off that within a day and a half it would inevitably be kaput for him. After which he turned to the landlady and said, "And you, dearie, don't waste any time, order him a pine coffin at once, because an oak one will be too expensive for him." Whether Akaky Akakievich heard these fatal words spoken, and, if he heard them, whether they made a tremendous effect on him, whether he regretted his wretched life—none of this is known, because he was in fever and delirium the whole time. Visions, one stranger than another, kept coming to him: first he saw Petrovich and ordered him to make an overcoat with some sort of snares for thieves, whom he kept imagining under the bed, and he even called the landlady every other minute to get one thief out from under his blanket; then he asked why his old housecoat was hanging before him, since he had a new overcoat; then he imagined that he was standing before the general, listening to the proper roasting, and kept murmuring, "I'm sorry, Your Excellency!"—then, finally, he even blasphemed, uttering the most dreadful words, so that his old landlady even crossed herself, never having heard anything like it from him, the more so as these words immediately followed the words "Your Excellency." After that he talked complete gibberish, so that it was impossible to understand anything; one could only see that his disorderly words and thoughts turned around one and the same overcoat. At last poor Akaky Akakievich gave up the ghost. Neither his room nor his belongings were sealed, because, first, there were no heirs, and, second, there was very little inheritance left—namely, a bunch of goose quills, a stack of white official paper, three pairs of socks, two or three buttons torn off of trousers, and the housecoat already familiar to the reader. To whom all this went, God knows: that, I confess, did not even interest the narrator of this story. Akaky Akakievich was taken away and buried. And Petersburg was left without Akaky Akakievich, as if he had never been there. Vanished and gone was the being, protected by no one, dear to no one, interesting to no one, who had not even attracted the attention of a naturalist—who does not fail to stick a pin through a common fly and examine it under a microscope; a being who humbly endured office mockery and went to his grave for no particular reason, but for whom, all the same, though at the very end of his life, there had flashed a bright visitor in the form of an overcoat, animating

for an instant his poor life, and upon whom disaster then fell as unbearably as it falls upon the kings and rulers of this world . . . Several days after his death, a caretaker was sent to his apartment from the office with an order for him to appear immediately—the chief demanded it. But the caretaker had to return with nothing, reporting that the clerk could come no more, and to the question "Why?" expressed himself with the words: "It's just that he's already dead, buried three days ago . . ." Thus they learned at the office about the death of Akaky Akakievich, and by the next day a new clerk was sitting in his place, a much taller one, who wrote his letters not in a straight hand but much more obliquely and slantwise.

But who could imagine that this was not yet all for Akaky Akakievich, that he was fated to live noisily for a few days after his death, as if in reward for his entirely unnoticed life? Yet so it happened, and our poor story unexpectedly acquires a fantastic ending. The rumor suddenly spread through Petersburg that around the Kalinkin Bridge and far further a dead man had begun to appear at night in the form of a clerk searching for some stolen overcoat and, under the pretext of this stolen overcoat, pulling from all shoulders, regardless of rank or title, various overcoats: with cat, with beaver, with cotton quilting, raccoon, fox, bearskin coats—in short, every sort of pelt and hide people have thought up for covering their own. One of the clerks from the office saw the dead man with his own eyes and recognized him at once as Akaky Akakievich; this instilled such fear in him, however, that he ran away as fast as his legs would carry him and thus could not take a good look, but only saw from far off how the man shook his finger at him. From all sides came ceaseless complaints that the backs and shoulders—oh, not only of titular, but even of privy councillors themselves, were completely subject to chills on account of this nocturnal tearing off of overcoats. An order was issued for the police to catch the dead man at all costs, dead or alive, and punish him in the harshest manner, as an example to others, and in this they nearly succeeded. Namely, a neighborhood policeman on duty had already quite seized the dead man by the collar in Kiriushkin Lane, catching him red-handed in an attempt to pull a frieze overcoat off some retired musician who had whistled on a flute in his day.

Having seized him by the collar, he shouted and summoned his two colleagues, whom he charged with holding him while he went to his boot just for a moment to pull out his snuffbox, so as to give temporary refreshment to his nose, frostbitten six times in his life. But the snuff must have been of a kind that even a dead man couldn't stand. The policeman had no sooner closed his right nostril with his finger, while drawing in half a handful with the left, than the dead man sneezed so hard that he completely bespattered the eyes of all three of them. While they tried to rub them with their fists, the dead man vanished without a trace, so that they did not even know whether or not they had indeed laid hands on him. After that, on-duty policemen got so afraid of dead men that they grew wary of seizing living ones and only shouted from far off: "Hey, you, on your way!" and the dead clerk began to appear even beyond the Kalinkin Bridge, instilling no little fear in all timorous people.

We, however, have completely abandoned the *certain important person*, who in fact all but caused the fantastic turn taken by this, incidentally perfectly true, story. First of all, justice demands that we say of this *certain important person* that, soon after the departure of the poor, roasted-to-ashes Akaky Akakievich, he felt something akin to regret. He was no stranger to compassion: his heart was open to many good impulses, though his rank often prevented their manifestation. As soon as his out-of-town friend left his office, he even fell to thinking about poor Akaky Akakievich. And after that, almost every day he pictured to himself the pale Akaky Akakievich, unable to endure his superior's roasting. He was so troubled by the thought of him that a week later he even decided to send a clerk to him, to find out about him and whether he might indeed somehow help him; and when he was informed that Akaky Akakievich had died unexpectedly of a fever, he was even struck, felt remorse of conscience, and was in low spirits the whole day. Wishing to divert himself somehow and forget the unpleasant impression, he went for the evening to one of his friends, where he found a sizable company, and, best of all, everyone there was of nearly the same rank, so that he felt no constraint whatsoever. This had a surprising effect on his state of mind. He grew expansive, became pleasant in conversation,

amiable—in short, he spent the evening very pleasantly. At supper he drank two glasses of champagne—an agent known to have a good effect with regard to gaiety. The champagne disposed him toward various extravagances; to wit: he decided not to go home yet, but to stop and see a lady of his acquaintance, Karolina Ivanovna, a lady of German origin, it seems, toward whom he felt perfectly friendly relations. It should be said that the important person was a man no longer young, a good husband, a respectable father of a family. Two sons, one of whom already served in the chancellery, and a comely sixteen-year-old daughter with a slightly upturned but pretty little nose, came every day to kiss his hand, saying, "*Bonjour, papa.*" His wife, still a fresh woman and not at all bad looking, first gave him her hand to kiss and then, turning it over, kissed his hand. Yet the important person, perfectly satisfied, incidentally, with domestic family tendernesses, found it suitable to have a lady for friendly relations in another part of the city. This lady friend was no whit better or younger than his wife; but there exist such riddles in the world, and it is not our business to judge of them. And so, the important person went downstairs, got into his sleigh, and said to the driver, "To Karolina Ivanovna's," and, himself wrapped quite luxuriantly in a warm overcoat, remained in that pleasant state than which no better could be invented for a Russian man, when you are not thinking of anything and yet thoughts come into your head by themselves, each more pleasant than the last, without even causing you the trouble of chasing after and finding them. Filled with satisfaction, he kept recalling all the gay moments of that evening, all his words that had made the small circle laugh; he even repeated many of them in a half whisper and found them as funny as before, and therefore it was no wonder that he himself chuckled heartily. Occasionally, however, a gusty wind interfered with him, suddenly bursting from God knows where and for no apparent reason, cutting at his face, throwing lumps of snow into it, hoisting the collar of his coat like a sail, or suddenly, with supernatural force, throwing it over his head, thereby causing him the eternal trouble of extricating himself from it. Suddenly the important person felt someone seize him quite firmly by the collar. Turning around, he noticed a short man in an old, worn-out uniform, in whom, not without horror, he recognized Akaky Akakievich. The clerk's face was pale as

snow and looked exactly like a dead man's. But the important person's horror exceeded all bounds when he saw the dead man's mouth twist and, with the horrible breath of the tomb, utter the following words: "Ah! here you are at last! At last I've sort of got you by the collar! It's your overcoat I need! You didn't solicit about mine, and roasted me besides—now give me yours!" The poor *important person* nearly died. However full of character he was in the chancellery and generally before subordinates, and though at a mere glance at his manly appearance and figure everyone said, "Oh, what character!"—here, like a great many of those who are powerful in appearance, he felt such fear that he even became apprehensive, not without reason, of some morbid fit. He quickly threw the overcoat off his shoulders and shouted to the driver in a voice not his own, "Home at top speed!" The driver, hearing a voice that was usually employed at decisive moments and even accompanied by something much more effective, drew his head between his shoulders just in case, swung his knout, and shot off like an arrow. In a little over six minutes the important person was already at the door of his house. Pale, frightened, and minus his overcoat, he came to his own place instead of Karolina Ivanovna's, plodded to his room somehow or other, and spent the night in great disorder, so that the next morning over tea his daughter told him directly, "You're very pale today, papa." But papa was silent—not a word to anyone about what had happened to him, or where he had been, or where he had wanted to go.

This incident made a strong impression on him. He even began to say "How dare you, do you realize who is before you?" far less often to his subordinates; and if he did say it, it was not without first listening to what the matter was. But still more remarkable was that thereafter the appearances of the dead clerk ceased altogether: evidently the general's overcoat fitted him perfectly; at least there was no more talk about anyone having his overcoat torn off. However, many active and concerned people refused to calm down and kept saying that the dead clerk still appeared in the more remote parts of the city. And, indeed, one policeman in Kolomna saw with his own eyes a phantom appear from behind a house; but, being somewhat weak by nature, so that once an ordinary adult pig rushing out of

someone's private house had knocked him down, to the great amusement of the coachmen standing around, for which jeering he extorted a half kopeck from each of them to buy snuff—so, being weak, he did not dare to stop it, but just followed it in the darkness, until the phantom suddenly turned around, stopped, and asked, "What do you want?" and shook such a fist at him as is not to be found even among the living. The policeman said, "Nothing," and at once turned to go back. The phantom, however, was much taller now, had an enormous mustache, and, apparently making its way toward the Obukhov Bridge, vanished completely into the darkness of the night.

[Nikolai Gogol](#), 1843