

DUNYASHKA. Yes, madam. And after he jumped, he took a cab and drove away.

ARINA. Are you telling the truth?

KOCHKARYOV. You're lying! It can't be!

DUNYASHKA. So help me—he jumped out! The grocer saw him too. He took a cab for ten kopecks and drove away.

ARINA, *stepping up to KOCHKARYOV*. What's this, sir, poking fun at us, are you? Did you think to laugh at us? Did we deserve this from you—to be shamed so? I've lived for almost sixty years and I've never been so disgraced! Even if you're an honest man, sir, I'll spit in your face for this. Even if you're an honest man, after this you're a crook. To shame a girl before the whole world! I'm a simple woman, but I wouldn't do such a thing. And you—you're a nobleman! You're a nobleman for dirty tricks, for making mischief—that's what your being a nobleman is good for! (*Goes out in a rage and takes AGAFYA away. KOCHKARYOV stands as if thunderstruck.*)

FYOKLA. So! There he stands. Knows all the tricks of the trade. Can arrange a marriage without a matchmaker! Now, I may have a mixed bag of bachelors, riffraff, all sorts, but the kind that jump out of windows I don't have—no thank you!

KOCHKARYOV. Ridiculous! It can't be. I'll run and get him. I'll bring him back! (*Goes out.*)

FYOKLA. Yes, you go, bring him back! Don't know much about the marriage business, do you? Now if a bridegroom runs out the door—that's one thing; but when he jumps out the window—you can kiss him good-bye!

Curtain.

The Government Inspector *A Comedy in Five Acts*

No use blaming the mirror
if your face is crooked.

Proverb

Characters

ANTÓN ANTÓNOVICH SKVOZNÍK-DMUKHANÓVSKY The mayor
 ANNA ANDRÉYEVNA His wife
 MÁRYA ANTÓNOVNA His daughter
 LUKÁ LUKÍCH KHLÓPOV Superintendent of schools
 HIS WIFE
 AMMÓS FYÓDOROVICH LYÁPKIN-TYÁPKIN The judge
 ARTÉMY FILÍPPOVICH ZEMLYANÍKA Director of charities
 IVÁN KUZMÍCH SHPÉKIN Postmaster
 PYOTR IVÁNOVICH DÓBCHINSKY } Landowners residing in town
 PYOTR IVÁNOVICH BÓBCHINSKY }
 IVÁN ALEXÁNDROVICH KHLESTAKÓV An official from Petersburg
 ÓSIP His servant
 KHRISTIÁN IVÁNOVICH HÜBNER The district doctor
 FYÓDOR ANDRÉYEVICH LYULYUKÓV } Retired officials, respected
 IVÁN LÁZAREVICH RASTAKÓVSKY } citizens
 STEPÁN IVÁNOVICH KORÓBKIN }
 KOROBKIN'S WIFE
 STEPÁN ILÍCH UKHOVYÓRTOV Police captain
 SVISTUNÓV }
 PÚGOVITSYN } Policemen
 DERZHIMÓRDA }
 ABDÚLIN A storekeeper
 FEVRÓNIA PETRÓVNA POSHLYÓPKINA A locksmith's wife
 A CORPORAL'S WIDOW
 MÍSHKA The mayor's servant
 A WAITER
Guests, merchants, townspeople, petitioners

Characters and Costumes

Remarks for the Actors

MAYOR. Advanced in years. A life spent in the government service. Shrewd in his own way. A grafter, but conducts himself with considerable gravity. Serious, even a bit sententious. Speaks neither too loudly nor too softly, neither too little nor too much. Every word carries weight. Coarse and hard features of a man who has worked himself up from the lower ranks. Shifts abruptly from fear to joy, servility to arrogance, as do persons of a crude nature. Customarily wears his official uniform with braids and high boots with spurs. His hair is cut short and is greying.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA, *his wife*. A provincial coquette, on the verge of middle age. Her character has been shaped in part by novels and albums, in part by running a house and supervising the maids. Very inquisitive. Given the chance, she'll display her vanity. Sometimes dominates her husband, but only because he is at a loss about how to react. Her power over him extends only to trifles, however, and manifests itself in scolding and sneering. Four changes of dresses in the course of the play.

KHLESTAKOV. A young man, about twenty-three. Extremely thin. Somewhat stupid and, as they say, "not all there." The type known in government offices as a "scatterbrain." Speaks and acts mindlessly. Incapable of keeping his attention fixed on any subject. Speaks in a staccato; the words fly from his lips and are totally unexpected. The more ingenuous and artless the performance, the more it will succeed. He is dressed fashionably.

OSIP, *his servant*. Like any other servant getting on in years. Speaks in a serious manner. Keeps his eyes lowered. A moralizer fond of lecturing his master under his breath. His voice is almost flat, but

in conversation with his master it acquires a stern, sharp, even a coarse tone. He is cleverer than his master and quicker to catch on, but doesn't care to talk much. Cunning, he keeps his own counsel. Dressed in a shabby gray or dark blue frock coat.

BOBCHINSKY and DOBCHINSKY. Both are short, squat, and very inquisitive. Virtually indistinguishable. Both have little potbellies and speak very rapidly, gesticulating wildly. Dobchinsky is slightly taller and more serious; Bobchinsky is more easy going and livelier.

LYAPKIN-TYAPKIN, *the judge*. Has read five or six books and as a result is something of a freethinker. Given to reading meanings into everything, which is why he lends weight to every word. The actor ought to maintain a portentous air throughout. Speaks in a deep voice. Drawls out each word; wheezes and huffs like an antique clock that hisses before it strikes the hour.

ZEMLYANIKA, *director of charities*. Corpulent, sluggish, and clumsy, but for all that, sly and scheming. Officious and servile.

POSTMASTER. Artless to the point of simplemindedness.

The other roles require no special explanation. Their prototypes are all around us.

The actors must pay particular attention to the last scene. The final words ought to strike everyone like a bolt of lightning. The entire group should change its position instantaneously. The women should let out a cry of astonishment as if in one voice. Disregard of these remarks may ruin the whole effect.

Act One

Act 1, Scene 1

A room in the MAYOR's home. MAYOR, DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES, SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS, JUDGE, POLICE CAPTAIN, DOCTOR, two POLICEMEN.

MAYOR. Gentlemen! I've summoned you here because of some very distressing news. A government inspector is on his way.

JUDGE. A government inspector?

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. An inspector?

MAYOR. From Petersburg, incognito! And with secret instructions to boot!

JUDGE. Well I'll be!

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. As if we didn't have enough troubles!

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS. Good God! And with secret instructions!

MAYOR. I felt it coming. All night I dreamed of two mysterious rats. I've never seen anything like them—black monstrous things! They stalked in, sniffed—and then vanished. But let me read you Chmýkhov's letter. You know him, Artemy Filippovich. Listen to what he says: "Dear friend, fellow townsman, and benefactor (*mumbles, rapidly skimming the letter*) . . . to inform you." Ah! Here we are. "I hasten to inform you—an official has arrived with instructions to inspect the entire province, and especially our district" (*raises his finger meaningfully*). "He's been passing himself off as an ordinary traveler, but don't let that deceive you. My information comes from the most reliable of sources. I realize you've been guilty of some indiscretions, as has everyone. You're a clever man, not the sort to let a good

thing slip through your fingers." (*Pauses.*) Well, all right, we're among friends. "I advise you to take every precaution. He may turn up at any moment, if he's not there already, living among you incognito. Yesterday I . . ." Hm, the rest is family business: "Sister Anna is here with her husband. Ivan Kirilovich has gotten very fat and keeps on playing the fiddle. . . ." Well, there you are. That's the situation.

JUDGE. Yes, a situation that . . . extraordinary, simply extraordinary. Something's behind it.

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS. But why, Anton Antonovich? Why us?

MAYOR. Why! It's clear why. Fate! (*Sighs.*) So far, they've been snooping around other towns. Now it's our turn.

JUDGE. In my opinion there's a subtle motive at work here—most likely of a political nature. Here's what it's all about: Russia . . . hm, Russia wants to declare war, and the Ministry has sent an official to uncover any evidence of treason.

MAYOR. Ech! What put that idea into your head! And you call yourself an intelligent man. Treason in a country town! Are we on the border or what? You could gallop for three years without reaching another country.

JUDGE. No, I must say, you didn't . . . you . . . the authorities keep their ears to the ground. Though they're miles away, nothing escapes them.

MAYOR. Well gentlemen, you've been warned. Look sharp! I've made certain arrangements; I advise you to do the same. Especially you, Artemy Filippovich. This inspector is bound to head straight for the charity hospital—that's your jurisdiction. See to it that the place is presentable. Stick some clean gowns on the patients. I don't want them looking like a gang of chimney sweeps. They can dress like slobs at home but not in the hospital.

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. No problem. We can put clean gowns on them, if you like.

MAYOR. And write something over every bed in Latin—or in some other language. That's your department, Dr. Hübner. Each illness, who got what when, day of week, date. And your patients shouldn't be smoking that foul tobacco of theirs. Whenever you

walk in, you sneeze your head off. Besides, we'd be better off if there were fewer patients—otherwise they'll put it down to poor management or the doctor's incompetence.

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. Oh! As regards medical treatment, Dr. Hübner and I have our own policy: let nature take its course. We don't use any of your expensive medicines. Man's a simple creature—if he has to die, he'll die; if he's going to get well, he'll get well. Besides, it's difficult for Dr. Hübner to consult with the patients. He doesn't know a word of Russian.

DR. HÜBNER *utters a sound, somewhat like the letter i and a little like e.*

MAYOR. And you, Ammos Fyodorovich, I'd advise you to pay some attention to the courthouse. Your guards have been breeding geese in the room where the petitioners wait. The damn geese are under everybody's feet. Of course poultry farming is an honorable profession, and why shouldn't a guard get into it? Only in a place like that . . . well, it doesn't look right. I've been meaning to mention it to you, but somehow I keep forgetting.

JUDGE. I'll have them remove every last goose to my kitchen at once. Would you like to come for dinner?

MAYOR. Another thing. Everybody's laundry is hung out to dry in the courtroom. That won't do. And your hunting crop's on the wall over the cabinet for court documents. I know you enjoy hunting, but you'd better take it down for the time being. Once the government inspector passes through, you can hang it up again. Then there's your clerk—a knowledgeable man, no doubt. But what a stink he gives off. It's as if he just stepped out of a distillery. That won't do either. I wanted to speak to you about him, but I had other business on my mind. If it's really his natural odor, as he claims, there are remedies. Advise him to try onions, or garlic. Or Dr. Hübner can prescribe some of his medicines.

DR. HÜBNER *utters the same sound.*

JUDGE. No, there's no getting rid of it. He says his nurse hit him with a bottle when he was a baby and ever since he's smelled of

vodka.

MAYOR. Well, I only thought I'd mention it. As for our private arrangements and what Chmykhov calls our little indiscretions—what can I say? It's even strange to talk about. None of us is without sin. God made us that way, even if the freethinkers deny it.

JUDGE. What do you consider sins, Anton Antonovich? There are sins, and sins. I'm not ashamed to say it—I take bribes. But what kind of bribes? Puppies! That's altogether different.

MAYOR. Puppies or whatever, a bribe is a bribe.

JUDGE. I can't go along with that, Anton Antonovich. Now if someone accepts a five-hundred-ruble fur, a silk shawl for his wife. . .

MAYOR. So what if you take puppies as bribes? The point is you don't believe in God, you never go to church. At least I'm firm in my faith. I never miss a Sunday. But you! Oh I know you. When you start spouting your crazy theories of the Creation, it's enough to make a man's hair stand on end.

JUDGE. But I arrived at it all by myself, with my own brains.

MAYOR. In some cases too many brains are worse than none at all. But I just wanted to get the courthouse out of the way. No one's likely to go poking his nose into that dump. The place has a charmed life—God Himself must be looking after it. And you Luka Lukich, as superintendent of schools you just have to do something about those teachers of yours. I realize they're learned people, educated in various colleges, but they have some very queer ways about them. Naturally, the sort of thing that goes along with the teaching profession. One of them—what's his name?—the one with the fat face—he can't get up in front of a class without twitching. Let me show you (*grimaces*). Then he starts smoothing out his beard with his fingers. Of course it doesn't matter if he makes a face like that at one of his pupils. It may even be necessary for their education—I'm not one to judge. But suppose he does it to a visitor? That could mean trouble. The government inspector might take it personally. Where the hell would that leave us?

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS. What can I do? I've already spoken

to him several times. The other day the marshall of the nobility stepped into his classroom, and he pulled such a face—I've never seen anything like it. He means well, but I get blamed. "Why are you filling the heads of our young people with subversive ideas?" everyone asks.

MAYOR. I'm compelled to make a similar remark about the history teacher. His head's crammed with information—no doubt about it, the man's picked up knowledge by the ton. Only he gets so worked up he forgets himself. I listened to him once; well, he was all right on the Assyrians and the Babylonians, but as soon as he came to Alexander the Great he lost his head. I thought the school was on fire. He bolted from his desk, grabbed a chair, and smashed it against the floor. Of course, this Alexander the Great was a hero, but why break chairs? The treasury loses on it.

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS. Yes, he's hot-headed. I've reprimanded him more than once. "Say what you like," he answers, "but for the cause of knowledge I'm prepared to lay down my life."

MAYOR. It's true, God moves in mysterious ways. An educated man turns out to be a drunk or he makes faces that would scare the saints.

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS. I wouldn't wish the teaching profession on my worst enemy. You're always frightened. Everyone interferes, everyone wants to show he's as smart as you.

MAYOR. That's all well and good. But it's this damned incognito. Any minute he'll stick his head through the door. I can hear him saying: "Aha, here you are, my angels! Who's the judge?" "Lyapkin-Tyapkin, sir." "Hand over Lyapkin-Tyapkin! And who's the director of charities?" "Zemlyanika, sir." "Hand over Zemlyanika!" That's what we're in for.

The POSTMASTER enters.

POSTMASTER. What's going on, gentlemen? Who's the visitor?

MAYOR. You mean you haven't heard?

POSTMASTER. I did hear something from Bobchinsky. He was just at the post office.

MAYOR. Well, what do you think?

Act 1, Scene 2

POSTMASTER. What do I think? I think it means war with the Turks.

JUDGE. I told you! That's my view of it too.

MAYOR. You're both talking through your hats!

POSTMASTER. Certainly. War with the Turks. The damn French have been stirring things up again.

MAYOR. War with the Turks! It's us, not the Turks, who are going to catch it. We all know what's coming. I have a letter.

POSTMASTER. In that case, there won't be war with the Turks.

MAYOR. Well, what about you, Ivan Kuzmich?

POSTMASTER. What about me? What about you, Anton Antonovich?

MAYOR. Me? I'm not scared. . . well, maybe a little. The merchants and the townspeople make me uneasy. They say I've been tough on them. But if I took a bribe now and then, it was without hard feelings. I even *(takes him by the arm and leads him aside)*. . . I even suspect someone may have complained about me. Otherwise, why are they sending an inspector? Listen, Ivan Kuzmich, couldn't you, for the common good, hold up every letter that passes through the post office and, you know, open it slightly. Skim through it to see whether it contains a secret report. If it's only a personal letter, you can easily seal it up again. Or you can deliver it as is—open.

POSTMASTER. I know, I know. You don't have to instruct me in these things. I've been doing it for years. Not because I'm cautious. Because I'm curious. I'm dying to find out what's new in the world. I assure you, it makes for very interesting reading. Some letters you read with sheer joy. How beautifully people write! And so educational! It's better than the *Moscow News*!

MAYOR. Well, tell me. You haven't come across anything about an official from Petersburg, have you?

POSTMASTER. From Petersburg—no. But plenty about officials from Kostromá and Sarátov. What a pity you don't read letters. I've found some marvelous passages! Just the other day an army officer described a ball to a friend in a most amusing. . . Really, it was quite charming. "Life, dear friend, flows," he says, "through Elysian fields—plenty of young ladies, the band plays, flags flap." Such feeling! I simply had to keep it. Would you like

me to read it?

MAYOR. I've no time for that now. Do me a favor, Ivan Kuzmich. If you come across a complaint, don't have any qualms, hold on to it.

POSTMASTER. It'll be a pleasure.

JUDGE. Be careful. Some day you'll have to face the music.

POSTMASTER. Oh no! You can't mean that!

MAYOR. Don't worry. It's not as if we're about to make it public. All in the family, I say.

JUDGE. Well, trouble's brewing! And to think, Anton Antonovich, I came over to present you with a little bitch—the sister of the hound I told you about. You must have heard—Cheptóvich and Varkhovínsky are suing each other, so I'm in clover. I can hunt rabbits on both their lands.

MAYOR. Good God! I can't bother about your rabbits now. That damned incognito is on my mind. Any minute the door is going to open and. . .

BOBCHINSKY and DOBCHINSKY *tumble in, breathlessly.*

BOBCHINSKY. It's extraordinary!

DOBCHINSKY. Surprising!

ALL. What? What?

DOBCHINSKY. Totally unexpected. We went to the inn. . .

BOBCHINSKY, *interrupting*. I went to the inn with Pyotr Ivanovich. . .

DOBCHINSKY, *interrupting*. Please, Pyotr Ivanovich, let me tell it.

BOBCHINSKY. Oh, no. Please, let me, let me. You don't have the proper style.

DOBCHINSKY. And you'll make a mess of it. You'll forget the best parts.

BOBCHINSKY. I won't, I won't, I promise I won't. Don't butt in; let me tell it. Now don't butt in! Please, gentlemen, tell Pyotr Ivanovich not to butt in.

MAYOR. For God's sake, get on with it! My heart's in my mouth. Be seated, gentlemen! Pyotr Ivanovich, here's a chair for you! *(All sit about the two PYOTR IVANOVICHES.)* Well, go on, what's it all about?

Act 1, Scene 3

BOBCHINSKY. Allow me. I'll tell it all in the right order. As soon as I had the pleasure of leaving you . . . you had just seen fit to become upset by that letter . . . well, I dashed over to . . . Please, don't interrupt, Pyotr Ivanovich. I remember all of it, yes sir, all of it. So there I was, you'll be pleased to note, dashing over to Korobkin's. I didn't find Korobkin at home, so I headed for Rastakovsky. Rastakovsky wasn't at home either, so I dropped in on Ivan Kuzmich . . . to inform him of the news. And on my way from there, I ran into Pyotr Ivanovich . . .

DOBCHINSKY, *interrupting*. . . near the stand where they sell pies.

BOBCHINSKY. . . near the stand where they sell pies. So I met Pyotr Ivanovich, and I asked: "Have you heard the news? Anton Antonovich has got it from a reliable source." But Pyotr Ivanovich had already heard it from Avdótya, who had been sent to Pochechúyev for . . .

DOBCHINSKY, *interrupting*. . . a keg of French brandy.

BOBCHINSKY, *pushing DOBCHINSKY aside*. . . a keg of French brandy. Well, I set out for Pochechuyev's with Pyotr Ivanovich. . . Now, Pyotr Ivanovich, this is simply . . . don't interrupt, please don't interrupt! So we set out for Pochechuyev's, and on the way Pyotr Ivanovich said, "Let's," he said, "stop at the inn. I haven't eaten since breakfast. My stomach's rumbling." That's Pyotr Ivanovich's stomach. "They've just delivered some fresh salmon," he said. "We can have a bite to eat." No sooner do we step into the inn than we see . . .

DOBCHINSKY, *interrupting*. . . a young man, not bad looking, in civilian clothes.

BOBCHINSKY. . . not bad looking, in civilian clothes. He's pacing up and down the room, and he has such a thoughtful expression on his face . . . and his appearance, the way he carries himself . . . you could see at once (*points to his head*) he's deep, very deep. I had a hunch, so I said to Pyotr Ivanovich, "Pyotr Ivanovich, there's more here than meets the eye." Pyotr Ivanovich had already snapped his fingers to call over the innkeeper . . . innkeeper Vlas, that is. His wife gave birth three weeks ago. Such a clever little rascal, some day he's going to run a tavern, just like his daddy. So we called over Vlas, and Pyotr Ivanovich asks him

quietly, "Who," he asks, "is that young man?" "That," Vlas answers, "That . . ." Oh don't interrupt, Pyotr Ivanovich, please don't interrupt. You won't tell it right. God knows you won't. You lisp. One of your teeth whistles. "That young man," Vlas says, "is an official from Petersburg." Yes sir! "His name," Vlas says, "is Ivan Alexandrovich Khlestakov, and he's travelling to Saratov. He acts very peculiar," he says. "It's his second week here and he never leaves the inn. He takes all his meals on credit and won't pay a kopeck." Well, it suddenly dawned on me— "Aha!" I said to Pyotr Ivanovich.

DOBCHINSKY. No, Pyotr Ivanovich, it was me who said, "Aha!"

BOBCHINSKY. You said it first, then I said it. We both said: "Aha! Why does he stay on if he's really headed for Saratov?" Yes, sir! That's him. That's the official.

MAYOR. What official?

BOBCHINSKY. The official. The one you received a warning about. The government inspector.

MAYOR, *in terror*. My God! What are you saying? It can't be him.

DOBCHINSKY. It's him. He doesn't pay his bills and he doesn't go on his way. Who else could it be?

BOBCHINSKY. It's him. It's him. It must be him. He's so observant, he examined everything. Noticed we were eating salmon—on account of Pyotr Ivanovich's stomach, that is. He even peered into our plates. He's very sharp. I was scared stiff.

MAYOR. God save us! What room is he in?

DOBCHINSKY. Number five, under the staircase.

BOBCHINSKY. Where those officers got into a brawl last year.

MAYOR. Has he been here long?

DOBCHINSKY. Two weeks.

MAYOR. Two weeks! (*Aside*.) The Holy Saints preserve me! In these two weeks the corporal's widow was flogged! The convicts haven't been fed! The streets are a pig sty. Oh, the shame of it! The humiliation! (*Clutches his head*.)

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. What do you think, Anton Antonovich? Should we pay him an official visit?

JUDGE. No, no. First to go are the town council and the clergy. The merchants too. I read it in a book on protocol.

MAYOR. No! Let me handle it my way. I've been in some tight spots in my time, but things worked out. I was even thanked afterwards. Maybe God will pull us through this time too.
(Addressing BOBCHINSKY.) You say he's young?
BOBCHINSKY. Yes. Not much over twenty-three or twenty-four.
MAYOR. All the better. A young man's easier to feel out—he's an open book. It can be murder when they send some old devil. . . . Gentlemen, put your departments in order. I'll stroll over by myself, or maybe with Pyotr Ivanovich, and, you know, casually drop in to inquire how the travelers are getting along. Svistunov!
SVISTUNOV. Yes, sir?
MAYOR. Quick, get the police captain. No, wait, I'll need you. Tell someone out there to hurry and bring the police captain. And come right back.

OFFICER SVISTUNOV *rushes out.*

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. Let's go, Ammos Fyodorovich. Things look bad.
JUDGE. What are you frightened about? Shove your patients into clean gowns and you're in the clear.
DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. Clean gowns—my foot! The regulations say keep the patients on oatmeal, and my corridors stink of cabbage. You don't dare walk through without holding your nose.
JUDGE. I'm not worried. Who on earth would want to visit a district court? And if he does look at our files, he'll soon curse the day he was born. Fifteen years on the bench and I still can't make sense of their depositions. Solomon himself couldn't judge who's lying and who's telling the truth. (The JUDGE, DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES, SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS, and POSTMASTER go out, colliding in the doorway with OFFICER SVISTUNOV, who is returning.)
MAYOR. Is my carriage ready? Act 1, Scene 4
SVISTUNOV. Yes, sir.
MAYOR. Go out to the street. . . . no, wait! Go get. . . . but where are the others? Just you? I ordered Prókhorov to be here too. Where the hell's Prókhorov?

SVISTUNOV. He's at the station house, but he's not fit for duty.
MAYOR. What's that?
SVISTUNOV. They carried him in this morning, dead drunk. We soused him with two buckets of water, but he hasn't sobered up yet.
MAYOR, *clutching his head.* My God! My God! . . . Quick, go to the street, no, wait, first run to my room—do you hear!—and bring me my sword and my new hat. Let's go, Pyotr Ivanovich.
BOBCHINSKY. Me too, me too, please; me too, Anton Antonovich.
MAYOR. No, Pyotr Ivanovich, out of the question. It would be awkward, and besides, we couldn't all fit into the carriage.
BOBCHINSKY. It doesn't matter. I can run alongside. . . . like this: Hop, hop! Hop, hop! I just want to peek through the keyhole and see how he behaves.
MAYOR, *taking his sword, to OFFICER SVISTUNOV.* Run, quick; take some men and have each of them grab a. . . . Oh hell, the sword's scratched. Damn that Abdulin—he knows the mayor's sword is in bad shape, but does he think to send a new one? Oh, they're a sly bunch—those storekeepers! I bet the bastards are already getting up their petitions. . . . Have each of them grab a street—what the!—grab a broom and sweep up the street that leads to the inn. And sweep it up clean. Do you hear! And watch your step! You! Yes, you! I'm on to you. You act chummy with everyone, and then go around swiping silver spoons. Just watch out! I've got eyes! What did you pull on Chernýáyev? Eh? He slipped you two yards of cloth for a uniform, and you made off with the roll. I'm warning you! Take your bribes according to your rank! Get going! (OFFICER SVISTUNOV goes out; the POLICE CAPTAIN enters.) Ah, Stepan Ilich. For Christ's sake, where've you been hiding? What do you think you're doing?
POLICE CAPTAIN. I was outside, right behind the gate.
MAYOR. Look here, Stepan Ilich! The official from the capital has arrived. What arrangements have you made?
POLICE CAPTAIN. We're following your orders. I sent Sergeant Pugovitsyn and his men to clean up the sidewalk.
MAYOR. Where's Derzhimorda?
POLICE CAPTAIN. Derzhimorda's gone off on the fire truck.

MAYOR. And Prokhorov's drunk?

POLICE CAPTAIN. Yes.

MAYOR. How could you allow it?

POLICE CAPTAIN. God only knows. We had a brawl outside of town yesterday. He went to restore order and came back plastered.

MAYOR. Listen, here's what I want you to do. Sergeant Pugovitsyn is very tall—station him on the bridge, it'll make a nice impression. And get rid of that rotten fence by the shoemaker's. Set up a boundary mark, so it looks like we have a project planned. The more we tear down, the better for us. It shows the mayor is doing something. Oh my God! I forgot, there's enough garbage dumped around that fence to load up forty carts. What a cesspool this town is! Put up anything, from a monument to a fence, and they litter it with their trash. Where the hell do they get it all from! (*Sighs.*) And if the inspector asks our civil servants whether they're satisfied, have them say, "We're completely satisfied, Your Excellency." If anyone's unhappy, well, I'll give him something to be unhappy about! . . . Oh, oh, oh, I've sinned, I've sinned a lot (*picks up a hatbox instead of his hat*). Dear God, let me off the hook this time, and I'll light such a candle for You . . . it'll be enormous. I'll make every son-of-a-bitch of a merchant come across with a ton of wax. Oh my God, my God! Let's go, Pyotr Ivanovich! (*Instead of the hat he puts on the cardboard box.*)

POLICE CAPTAIN. Anton Antonovich, that's a box, not a hat.

MAYOR, *throwing it aside*. So it's a box. The devil take it. And if he asks how come the chapel for the charity hospital hasn't been built—you know, the one for which funds were appropriated five years ago—Remember! We started on it but it burned down. I even submitted a report. Otherwise some damn fool will let on that it wasn't even begun. And tell Derzhimorda not to be too free and easy with his fists. I realize he's strong for law and order, but he's been giving everyone a shiner, the innocent along with the guilty. Let's go, Pyotr Ivanovich. (*Goes out and returns.*) And don't let the soldiers out in the street half naked. That scum will put on a uniform with nothing on down below. (*All go out.*)

ANNA ANDREYEVNA and MARYA ANTONOVNA *run on stage*.

ANNA. Where are they? Where are they? Good heavens, where . . . (*Opening the door.*) Anton! Anton! Antosha! (*Speaks rapidly.*) It's all your fault. The way you fuss. "I'll just fix my pin, straighten my kerchief." (*Runs to the window and cries out.*) Anton, where are you going? Has he arrived? Is he really the inspector? Does he have a mustache? . . . What sort of a mustache?

MAYOR'S VOICE. Later, dear, later.

ANNA. Later? That's a fine piece of news! Later! I don't want your later. Just tell me, What's his rank? Is he a colonel? What? (*Contemptuously.*) He's gone! (*To MARYA.*) I won't let you forget this! The way you carried on. "Mama, Mama, wait for me, I'll only tie my kerchief, I won't be a minute." So here's your minute! We haven't found out a thing. You and your silly flirting. You heard the postmaster was here, and you just had to primp in front of the mirror, first one pose, then another. You think he's interested in you, but he turns up his nose the moment you look away.

MARYA. Oh Mama! It doesn't matter. We'll know in a few hours.

ANNA. A few hours! Thank you very much. That's brilliant. Why not a month while you're at it. (*Leans out the window.*) Avdotya! Avdotya! What have you heard? Has someone arrived? You haven't heard? Oh, the fool! He shooed you away? But you might have asked. You couldn't? What a featherbrain; nothing but men on her mind. What? They rushed off? You should have run after them. Go now. Hurry! Do you hear? Run—ask where they've gone. Find out the details. Who is he? Is he handsome? Do you hear? Peek through the keyhole. I must know everything. Are his eyes dark? Is he tall? And come right home. Do you hear? Hurry, hurry, for God's sake, hurry! (*Shouts until the curtain drops. The curtain closes upon them standing at the window.*)

Act Two

A small room in the inn. A bed, table, suitcase, empty bottle, boots, clothes brush, and so forth. OSIP, alone, is lying on his master's bed.

Act 2, Scene 1

[OSIP. Damn, I'm hungry! My stomach's rumbling. Sounds like an army band beating out a drum roll. . . . We'll never get home, and that's the truth! What the hell am I supposed to do? It's over a month since we left Petersburg. He blew all his money along the way, the sport! Now he's sitting on his tail and won't budge. There'd be enough—more than enough—to pay for horses. But no, you had to show what a big spender you are. (*Mimics KHELESTAKOV.*) "Osip, book me a room, the best they've got, and order a first-rate dinner. I can't stomach bad cooking; I've got to have the best." As if he amounted to something! He's only a lousy clerk—the botton of the heap. He takes up with some stranger, out come the cards—and before you know it, he's down to his last kopeck. Ugh! I'm fed up with this life! Things are easier back in the village—not so much going on, but less to worry about. Find yourself a woman and lie around all day stuffing yourself on home cooking. . . .

But when you come right down to it, there's no place like Petersburg. If you got the cash, life's nice 'n refined—teeayters, dancing dogs for your pleasure, the works! Everybody talks so genteel, almost like aristocrats. At the market the storekeepers call you "sir"! On the ferry you get to rub elbows with a government official. Feel like company? Just drop into any store: some soldier'll chew your ear about army life, or tell you what the stars

in the sky mean. An officer's lady will come traipsing in, maybe a chambermaid. . . and what a chambermaid! Wow! (*Bursts out laughing, shaking his head.*) Damn it, what polish, what manners! You never hear a word that ain't polite. Everybody calls you "mister." Tired of walking? Then take a cab and sit back like a lord. If you don't want to pay, it's up to you. All the houses have alleys—you can duck through so fast the devil himself couldn't catch you. It ain't all peaches and cream though. Some days you eat grand, and some days you're croaking from hunger. Like now. And it's all his fault. You'd think he'd hang on to the money his old man sends him. Fat chance! Give him a ruble and off he goes. All I hear is, "Osip, get me teeayter tickets." And in a week—what do you know, he's sending me to hock his new coat in the flea market. He'll pawn everything, down to his last shirt. Honest to God, it's true. And what cloth—classy English stuff! The coat alone set him back a hundred and fifty rubles, and he sells it for twenty. No use talking about the pants—they go for nothing. And it's all because he won't do an honest day's work. Catch him going to the office! He'll be strutting along the avenoo or out playing cards. Oh, if your old man got wind of it! Government clerk or no, he'd drop your pants and give you a good hiding. You'd be rubbing yourself for the next four days. If you're going to work, then work. The landlord says he won't feed us till we pay up. So, what happens if we don't pay? (*Sighs.*) God! What I wouldn't give for a bowl of cabbage soup. I'm so hungry I could eat a bale of hay.

[Somebody's knocking. I bet it's him. (*He jumps off the bed.*) KHELESTAKOV. Here, take these (*hands OSIP his hat and cane*). Aha, lying on my bed again?

Act 2, Scene 2

OSIP. What do I want your bed for? You think I've never seen a bed before?

KHELESTAKOV. Liar! You were sprawling all over it. It's rumpled.

OSIP. You think I don't know what a bed is? I've got legs. I can stand. What do I need your bed for?

KHELESTAKOV, *pacing up and down the room*. See if there's any tobacco left in my pouch.

OSIP. Where are you going to find tobacco? You smoked it up four

days ago.

KHLESTAKOV, *pacing, pursing his lips in various ways. Finally speaks in a loud and decisive voice.* Look here, Osip!

OSIP. Yes, sir.

KHLESTAKOV, *in a loud but not so decisive voice.* Go down . . .

OSIP. Where?

KHLESTAKOV, *in a voice not at all decisive or loud, almost an entreaty.* Down to the dining room. Tell them . . . tell them to send up some lunch.

OSIP. Oh no. I'm not going. No, sir.

KHLESTAKOV. How dare you! Idiot!

OSIP. It's no use. The landlord says we've had our last meal.

KHLESTAKOV. How dare he refuse! Ridiculous!

OSIP. He says he's going to the mayor. "Your master hasn't paid for two weeks. You're chiselers," he says, "and your master's a crook. We," he says, "we've seen such dead beats and riffraff before."

KHLESTAKOV. And you're only too glad to repeat it to me, you pig!

OSIP. "At this rate," he says, "all my customers will make themselves at home, run up a bill, and I can't even kick 'em out. I'm not one to fool around," he says. "I'm off to make a complaint. It'll be the clink for you two."

KHLESTAKOV. That's enough, you moron. Go on, go on, tell him about my lunch. What a clod you are!

OSIP. Better I call the landlord and you tell him.

KHLESTAKOV. What do I want with the landlord? Go on, tell him.

OSIP. But sir, I . . .

KHLESTAKOV. All right, damn it! Call the landlord! (OSIP goes out.)

KHLESTAKOV, *alone.* It's terrible, being so hungry. I thought a walk would make my hunger pass. No, dammit, it won't go away. Now if it wasn't for that fling in Pénza, I'd have enough money to get home. That infantry officer really put one over on me. Amazing the way the son-of-a-bitch plays cards. He sat in for no more than a quarter of an hour and cleaned me out. Still, I'm dying to have another crack at him. Just haven't had the chance yet. What a grubby town! The grocers won't give anything on

credit. How stingy can you get! (*Whistles, first from "Robert le diable," then "Red Sarafan," and finally nothing in particular.*) What's keeping them?

OSIP returns with a WAITER.

WAITER. The landlord sent me to see what you want, sir.

KHLESTAKOV. Hello, hello, my good man! How are you? Well, I hope?

WAITER. Yes, sir—thank God.

KHLESTAKOV. And how are things in the inn? Everything going smoothly?

WAITER. Yes, thank God, everything's fine.

KHLESTAKOV. Many guests?

WAITER. Enough.

KHLESTAKOV. Look here, my good man, they haven't brought me my lunch yet. Please, hurry it up a bit. You see, I have some important business to attend to this afternoon.

WAITER. The landlord says he's not serving you any more. He means to complain to the mayor today.

KHLESTAKOV. What's he got to complain about? Think about it, my friend, how am I supposed to manage? I have to eat! If things go on like this, I'll waste away. I'm famished.

WAITER. Right, sir. The landlord says, "I'm not serving him any more meals till he's paid up." That's what he said.

KHLESTAKOV. Then reason with him, persuade him.

WAITER. But what do I tell him?

KHLESTAKOV. Explain that it's serious—I have to eat. The money will take care of itself. Just because a peasant like him can go a day without eating, he thinks others can do the same. That's absurd!

WAITER. All right, I'll tell him. (OSIP and WAITER go out.)

KHLESTAKOV, *alone.* It'll be rough though, if he won't give me anything to eat. I never dreamed I could feel so hungry. Maybe I can raise some cash on my clothes? Sell my pants? No, I'd rather starve. I've just got to show up at home in my Petersburg suit. A pity nobody would rent me a carriage. It would have been marvelous, dammit, coming home in style. I'd fly like the devil

Act 2, Scene 3

right up to some neighbor's front door, lamps lighted, Osip behind me in livery. I can just imagine the stir, everybody shouting: "What's going on? Who is it?" And I can see my footman, all in gold braid (*drawing himself up and impersonating a footman*). "Ivan Alexandrovich Khlestakov of Petersburg, will you receive him?" Of course those yokels haven't the slightest idea what "receive him" means. When one of our landowners pays a visit, the clumsy bear just rumbles straight into the living room. As for me, I'd waltz over to their prettiest daughter. "Miss, how delighted I am. . . ." (*rubbing his hands, bowing and scraping*). Pfoo! (*Spits.*) Damn, I'm hungry! I'm even feeling nauseous.

OSIP enters.

KHLESTAKOV. Well?

OSIP. They're bringing it.

KHLESTAKOV, *claps his hands and bounces on his chair*. Food! Food! Food!

WAITER enters, with a tray.

WAITER. The landlord says it's the last time.

KHLESTAKOV. Landlord! Landlord! I spit on your landlord!

What've you got there?

WAITER. Soup and a roast.

KHLESTAKOV. What? Only two courses?

WAITER. That's it, sir.

KHLESTAKOV. Nonsense! I won't accept it. You tell him this is preposterous! It's not nearly enough.

WAITER. He says it's too much.

KHLESTAKOV. And how come there's no gravy.

WAITER. There isn't any, sir.

KHLESTAKOV. Why not! I saw them preparing heaps of it when I passed the kitchen. Just this morning two little runts were gorging themselves on salmon in the dining room.

WAITER. Well, maybe there is, and maybe again there ain't.

KHLESTAKOV. What do you mean "ain't"?

WAITER. There just ain't.

KHLESTAKOV. And salmon? Fish? Cutlets?

WAITER. That's for them as are more respectable, sir.

KHLESTAKOV. You're an idiot!

WAITER. Yes, sir.

KHLESTAKOV. A filthy swine! How is it they can eat and I can't?

Why can't I eat like them, dammit? Aren't they guests just like me?

WAITER. But everybody knows they're not the same kind.

KHLESTAKOV. What kind are they then?

WAITER. The regular kind! Everybody knows the difference. They pay cash.

KHLESTAKOV. I'm not going to argue with you, you imbecile.

(*Helps himself to some soup and eats.*) You call this soup? It's dishwater, not soup. It has no taste, though it smells bad enough. I don't want it. Bring me something else.

WAITER. I'll take it away, sir. The landlord says if you don't want it, you don't have to eat it.

KHLESTAKOV, *protecting the food with his hands*. Keep your paws off it, you numbskull. You're used to treating others like this, but I'm a different sort, my friend! I don't advise you to try anything with me. (*Eats.*) My God, what soup! Has anyone ever eaten such slop? There are chicken feathers swimming around in it. (*Cuts up the chicken in the soup.*) Ugh! Where did you get that chicken? Give me the roast! Osip, there's a drop of soup left, you can have it. (*Slices the roast.*) What's this supposed to be? It's not a roast.

WAITER. What is it then?

KHLESTAKOV. Who the hell knows what it is, only it's not a roast.

You roasted the cleaver instead of the beef. (*Eats.*) Bandits, cheats! The garbage they feed you! One bite and your jaws ache. (*Picks his teeth with his fingers.*) Sons-of-bitches! It's like tree bark; I can't get it out. My teeth'll turn black. Rotten bastards! (*Wipes his mouth with his napkin.*) Any more?

WAITER. No, sir.

KHLESTAKOV. You could have at least served me gravy or a pastry. You're just a pack of thieves out to fleece the traveler.

The WAITER and OSIP clear the table and carry the dishes out.

KHLESTAKOV, *alone*. I feel I haven't eaten, only whetted my appetite. Now if I had some change, I could send out for a roll.
OSIP, *entering*. The mayor's downstairs. He's asking about you.
KHLESTAKOV, *taking fright*. What? Oh no! That pig of a landlord has managed to complain already. Suppose he really drags me off to jail? Well, what of it? If they treat me like a gentleman, maybe I'll . . . No, I won't go. Officers hang around the inn, they might see. Just to show them a thing or two, I put on airs and winked at that storekeeper's pretty daughter. No, I won't go! Who does he think he is? How dare he? What does he take me for? A storekeeper? A laborer? (*Screwing up his courage and standing erect.*) Yes, I'll tell him straight to his face, "How dare you, how . . .?"

The door knob turns. KHLESTAKOV turns pale and shrinks. The MAYOR and DOBCHINSKY enter. The MAYOR freezes, and he and KHLESTAKOV stare at each other for several moments, both frightened, their eyes popping.

Act 2, Scene 4

MAYOR, *recovering a bit and coming to attention*. Greetings, sir.

KHLESTAKOV, *bowing*. How do you do?

MAYOR. I hope I'm not intruding.

KHLESTAKOV. Not at all.

MAYOR. It is my duty, as chief official of the town, to see to it that travelers and people of quality suffer no inconveniences which . . .

KHLESTAKOV, *at first stammering a bit, but speaking loudly toward the end of the speech*. I couldn't help it. It's not my fault. I'll . . . honest, I'll pay. They'll send money from home. (*BOBCHINSKY peeks in from behind the door.*) Blame the landlord, not me. The roast beef was as tough as shoe leather. And the soup—God knows what he slopped into it. I should have tossed it out the window. He's been starving me for days. There's something funny about the tea. It smells like fish, not tea. Why pick on . . . This is outrageous!

MAYOR, *frightened*. I'm very sorry. It's really not my fault. We

always keep quality meat in our market. Reliable dealers supply it, sober, decent people. I have no idea where he got his from. But if anything's wrong, I'll . . . May I suggest you accompany me to other lodgings.

KHLESTAKOV. No, nothing doing! I know what "other lodgings" mean. They mean jail. How dare you? By what right? I, I . . . I hold a government post in the capital. (*Proudly.*) I, I, I . . .

MAYOR, *aside*. Oh my God, he's losing his temper. He's on to us. Those damn storekeepers have tipped him off.

KHLESTAKOV, *blustering*. Even if you bring the entire police force, I won't budge! I'll speak to the minister! (*Banging his fist on the table.*) Just who do you think you are? Just who?

MAYOR, *drawing himself up and trembling*. Your Excellency, spare me, I have a wife, children. Don't ruin me.

KHLESTAKOV. No, I won't budge. What's it to me? Just because you have a wife and children, I'm supposed to go to jail. That's rich! (*BOBCHINSKY peeks in at the door and hides himself in fright.*) No, thanks, I'm staying here.

MAYOR, *trembling*. It was my inexperience. I assure you, merely inexperience. And an insufficient income. Please, Your Excellency, judge for yourself. An official's salary doesn't even keep me in tea and sugar. If I took any bribes, they were mere trifles—a little something for the dinner table or cloth for a suit. As for the story about my flogging the corporal's widow, it's slander. Take my word for it—sheer slander. My enemies thought it up. They can't wait to do away with me.

KHLESTAKOV. So what? They're no concern of mine. (*Thinks for a moment.*) But why are you telling me about enemies, or some corporal's widow? A corporal's widow is one thing . . . no, you'd better not lay a hand on me. You're not big enough for that. What nerve! I'll pay, I'll pay cash, only I don't have it on me now. That's why I'm stuck here. I'm flat broke.

MAYOR, *aside*. Ah, he's a sly one. So that's his game! He lays down a smokescreen, so you can't tell what he's after. From what angle do you approach him? Well, let's give him a try. Take a stab and see what comes of it. (*Aloud.*) If you're actually in need of funds, sir, I'm at your service. At a moment's notice. It's my duty to

assist travelers.

KHLESTAKOV. Excellent! Give me a loan. I'll settle with the landlord. About two-hundred rubles should do it.

MAYOR, *offering the bills*. Exactly two-hundred rubles. Don't bother counting.

KHLESTAKOV, *taking the money*. Much obliged. I'll send it to you the minute I get home. All this happened so . . . I see you're a gentleman. Now things are looking up.

MAYOR, *aside*. Phew! Thank God! He took the money. It'll be smooth sailing from now on. Just to make sure, I slipped him four hundred instead of two.

KHLESTAKOV. Osip! (OSIP *enters*.) Call the waiter. (To the MAYOR and DOBCHINSKY.) But why are you standing? Please be seated. (To DOBCHINSKY.) Take a seat, please.

MAYOR. Don't trouble yourself, sir. We can stand.

KHLESTAKOV. Oh, please, do sit down. It's become quite clear to me that you people are generous as well as hospitable. I admit, I thought you'd come in order to . . . (To DOBCHINSKY.) Will you sit down!

MAYOR and DOBCHINSKY *sit*. BOBCHINSKY *peeks in at the door and eavesdrops*.

MAYOR, *aside*. I must be bolder. He wants to remain incognito. Fine. We can bluff too, act as if we don't have a hint who he is. (Aloud.) Pyotr Ivanovich Dobchinsky and I—Dobchinsky here is one of our local landowners—well, since we were in the neighborhood on official business, we made a point of stopping in to determine whether the guests are being treated properly. Some mayors may not concern themselves with the welfare of others, but I, I . . . insist that a good reception be extended to all persons. Not only because my position demands it, but also out of Christian love for humanity. And now, as if in reward, fortune has afforded me such a pleasant acquaintance.

KHLESTAKOV. I'm also glad. If not for you, I might have been stranded here for ages. I was racking my brains how to pay the bill.

MAYOR, *aside*. Sure, tell it to the birds! Didn't know how he'd pay,

did he? (Aloud.) May I be so bold as to ask to what parts you are bound?

KHLESTAKOV. Saratov. I'm on my way home.

MAYOR, *aside, an ironic expression on his face*. Saratov, eh? And without a blush! Oh, you've got to be on your toes with him. (Aloud.) A most worthy enterprise, sir. They say there's great inconvenience from delays in getting horses; but on the other hand, traveling does divert the mind. I imagine you're making the trip chiefly for your own amusement?

KHLESTAKOV. No, my father sent for me. The old man's sore because I still haven't gotten anywhere in Petersburg. He thinks the minute you arrive they stick a medal on your lapel. Well, I'd like to see him scrambling in the office for a while.

MAYOR, *aside*. Listen to him pile it on! He's even dragged in his father! (Aloud.) Will you be staying long, sir?

KHLESTAKOV. I really can't say. My old man's as stubborn as a fence post. Really stupid. I'll tell him straight to his face: "I just can't live outside of the capital." Why on earth should I waste my life among filthy peasants? Nowadays people have different needs. My soul thirsts for culture.

MAYOR, *aside*. How nicely he strings it all together! Lies and lies, and never trips up. And he's not much to look at either, a little pip-squeak. I could squash him under my thumbnail. Well, just wait. I'll make you come clean yet! (Aloud.) Very true, sir. What can one accomplish in the provinces? Take this town; you spend sleepless nights doing your best for the fatherland, you don't spare yourself, and as for rewards—who knows when they'll come. (Glances around the room.) This room seems a bit damp?

KHLESTAKOV. It's a wretched room. The bedbugs! I've never seen anything like them. They bite like dogs.

MAYOR. That's shocking! A distinguished guest like yourself, and what you have to put up with! Worthless bedbugs who ought to be wiped off the face of the earth. The room's a bit dark too, isn't it?

KHLESTAKOV. Pitch-black! The management has taken to refusing me candles. Now and then I feel like doing something—reading, or scribbling a word or two. But I can't—it's always dark.

MAYOR. Might I venture to suggest . . . Oh no, I'm not worthy of the honor.

KHLESTAKOV. Why, what is it?

MAYOR. No, I can't. I'm not worthy.

KHLESTAKOV. Come on, what's this all about?

MAYOR. If I'm not being presumptuous . . . I have an excellent room at home, sunny, quiet. But no, I fear the honor is too great. Don't be offended. I assure you, I offered it in all sincerity.

KHLESTAKOV. On the contrary, I'm delighted. I'll be much more comfortable in a private home than in this flophouse.

MAYOR. How pleased I'll be! And my wife will be overjoyed!

That's the way I am—hospitable since childhood, especially if my guest is a man of culture. Don't think I'm saying this to flatter you. No, I'm free from that vice. I say it from the bottom of my heart.

KHLESTAKOV. Much obliged. I'm like that too, don't care for two-faced people. Your generosity is gratifying. You know, I ask for nothing in life but devotion and respect, and respect and devotion.

The WAITER enters, accompanied by OSIP; BOBCHINSKY peeks in at the door.

WAITER. You called, sir?

KHLESTAKOV. Yes, give me the bill.

WAITER. I've been giving you a bill every day.

KHLESTAKOV. I can't keep track of your stupid bills. Well, how much?

WAITER. On the first day you ordered the dinner, on the second salmon, and then you started taking everything on credit.

KHLESTAKOV. He's going to itemize! How much altogether, you numbskull?

MAYOR. Don't trouble yourself, Your Excellency. He can wait.

(To the WAITER.) Go on, get out of here. We'll send it.

KHLESTAKOV. Certainly. That's correct. *(Puts his money away. The*

WAITER goes out. BOBCHINSKY peeks in at the door.)

MAYOR. Would Your Excellency care to inspect some of our local

institutions now? The charity hospital, for example.

KHLESTAKOV. Why? What have you got there?

MAYOR. Oh, just to see how we're running things . . . the way the town is administered.

KHLESTAKOV. Delighted! At your service. *(BOBCHINSKY pokes his head through the door.)*

MAYOR. Also, if you feel so inclined, we might proceed to the district school and observe our methods of instruction.

KHLESTAKOV. Of course, by all means!

MAYOR. Then you might wish to visit the town jail—to see how the prisoners are cared for.

KHLESTAKOV. The jail? I'd really prefer the hospital.

MAYOR. As you please, sir. Shall we go in your carriage or mine?

KHLESTAKOV. We'd better take yours.

MAYOR, *to Dobchinsky*. Well, Pyotr Ivanovich, there won't be room for you now.

DOBCHINSKY. Don't mind me, I'll manage.

MAYOR, *aside to DOBCHINSKY*. Listen, run as fast as your legs'll carry you. Take two notes—one to Zemlyanika at the charity hospital, the other to my wife. *(To KHLESTAKOV.)* Will you excuse me, sir, if I jot down a line to my wife so she can prepare to receive our distinguished guest?

KHLESTAKOV. Why bother? . . . Well, all right, there's the ink, only I don't know about paper . . . Can you write on this bill?

MAYOR. The bill will do fine. *(Writes, talking to himself.)* Now we'll see how things go after a good lunch and a couple of bottles. We have a local Madeira in the house, nothing to brag about, but it'll knock an elephant off its feet. If I could only find out who he is and how much I've got to fear from him. *(After writing the notes, he hands them to DOBCHINSKY, who walks to the door. At that moment the door falls off its hinges and BOBCHINSKY, who has been eavesdropping, flies on to the stage with it. All exclaim. BOBCHINSKY picks himself up.)*

KHLESTAKOV. Are you all right? You haven't hurt yourself?

BOBCHINSKY. It's nothing, sir, nothing to speak of. No cause to be disturbed, sir, only a tiny bump on the tip of my nose. I'll run over to Dr. Hübner—his plaster will heal it in no time.

MAYOR, *making a sign of reproach to BOBCHINSKY*. It's really nothing, Your Excellency. With your permission, we'll go now. I'll have your servant bring your luggage. *(To OSIP.)* Be a good fellow and bring your master's things over to my place, to the mayor's; anyone can show you the way. After you, Your Excellency. *(Shows KHLESTAKOV out and follows him, but turning back, scolds BOBCHINSKY.)* That's you all over! Couldn't find another place to take a flop! Sprawling out like the devil knows what! *(Goes out, BOBCHINSKY after him.)*

Curtain.

Act Three

Act 3, Scene 1

The MAYOR'S home, the same room as in Act I. ANNA ANDREYEVNA and MARYA ANTONOVNA are standing at the window without having changed their positions.

ANNA. See here, we've been waiting for an hour and you haven't stopped your silly preening. You were completely dressed; but no, you had to go on fussing. *(Looking out the window.)* I shouldn't pay her any mind. Oh, it's so annoying! Not a soul about—as if to spite me. How dead the town seems!

MARYA. Really, Mama, in a few minutes we'll know what it's all about. Avdotya should be here soon. *(Looks out the window and shouts.)* Oh, Mama, Mama, someone's coming. There, at the end of the street.

ANNA. Where? You're always imagining things. Ah yes, someone is coming. Who is it? . . . Very short . . . in a dress coat . . . Who could it be? Now, this is annoying!

MARYA. It's Dobchinsky, Mama.

ANNA. Dobchinsky? Where do you get these peculiar notions? It's not Dobchinsky at all. *(Waves her handkerchief.)* You! Come here! Quickly!

MARYA. Really, Mama, it is Dobchinsky.

ANNA. That's just like you. Anything to start an argument. I've told you—it's not Dobchinsky.

MARYA. Well, Mama? Well? You see!

ANNA. Of course it's Dobchinsky. I can see for myself. Why are you arguing? *(Cries out the window.)* Hurry! Hurry! How you dawdle! Well, where are they? What? Speak from there—it

doesn't matter. What's that? Very stern, you say? What? And my husband? . . . (*Stepping back from the window, annoyed.*) The fool, he won't talk till he's inside! (DOBCHINSKY *enters.*) Well? Aren't you ashamed of yourself? I was counting on you; I thought you were a gentleman—but you had to go flying after the rest of them. I was left without a shred of news! Really! You ought to be ashamed! I stood godmother to your Vánichka and Lizanka, and see how you treat me.

DOBCHINSKY. As God is my witness, madam, I ran so quickly to pay my respects I'm out of breath. My respects, Marya Antonovna.

MARYA. Good day, Pyotr Ivanovich.

ANNA. Well? Speak! What happened?

DOBCHINSKY. Here's a message from your husband.

ANNA. But what is he? A general?

DOBCHINSKY. No, not exactly, but every bit as good as a general. Such a cultured gentleman! And so dignified.

ANNA. Ah! Then he must be the one in Chmykhov's letter.

DOBCHINSKY. It's him all right. I was the first to spot him, along with Pyotr Ivanovich.

ANNA. Tell me, how did everything go?

DOBCHINSKY. Thank God, everything went well. At first he gave your husband a cool reception. Yes, ma'm. He lost his temper and said the inn was atrocious. He refused to visit you or go to jail either. But when he realized it wasn't Anton Antonovich's fault, his attitude changed. Then, thank God, everything went smoothly. They've gone to inspect the charity hospital. . . . And, you know, your husband was sure there'd been a secret denunciation. I was a little edgy myself.

ANNA. But what have you to be afraid of? You don't work for the government.

DOBCHINSKY. Yes, but you know how it is. When an important official speaks, you shake in your boots.

ANNA. But this is all so trivial. I'd rather you tell me what he looks like. Is he old or young?

DOBCHINSKY. Young. Quite young. About twenty-three. But he talks like an old man. "If you please," he says, "I'll go—I'll go

there and there too." (*Waves his arms.*) And he said it so nicely! "I," he says, "am fond of both reading and writing, but I can't," he says, "because the room's dark."

ANNA. But what does he look like? Does he have blond hair? Brown?

DOBCHINSKY. No, more of a light brown. And the way his eyes dart about—like two little animals. It makes you very uneasy.

ANNA. What's in my husband's note? (*Reads the note.*) "Dearest, I hasten to inform you that my situation was extremely unfortunate, but trusting in God's mercy for two pickles extra and a side order of caviar—one ruble, twenty-five. . . ." I can't make this out. What have pickles and caviar to do with it?

DOBCHINSKY. Your husband was in a hurry and wrote on a scrap of paper. I think it's a bill.

ANNA. Oh, yes. Certainly. (*Continues reading.*) "... trusting in God's mercy, I believe we'll pull through safely in the end. Get a room ready for our distinguished visitor as quickly as you can. The room with the yellow wall paper should do fine. Don't fuss over dinner, as we'll be having a bite at the charity hospital. But order plenty of wine. Tell Abdulin to send the very best—or else I'll turn his cellar upside down. Kissing your little hand, I remain your Anton Skvoznik-Dmukhanovsky." Oh good heavens! I must hurry! Mishka! Mishka!

DOBCHINSKY, *rushes to the door and yells.* Mishka! Mishka! (*MISHKA enters.*)

ANNA. Listen, Mishka. Dash over to Abdulin's. . . wait, I'll give you a note. (*Sits at a table and writes while speaking.*) Hand this to Sidor and tell him to run to Abdulin's for wine. And you, hurry and straighten out the guest room. Put in a bed, a wash-basin, a lamp, anything! (*MISHKA runs off.*)

DOBCHINSKY. Excuse me, Anna Andreyevna, I'll run along and see how he's conducting the inspection.

ANNA. Run along, run along, I won't keep you. (DOBCHINSKY *goes out.*) Well Máshenka, what shall we wear? He's one of your Petersburg gentlemen—we mustn't give him a chance to laugh at us. Your blue dress, the one with the tiny flounces, is very becoming.

MARYA. Oh, Mama, not the blue! I don't care for it at all. The Lyapkin-Tyapkin girl wears blue, and so does Zemlyanika's daughter. No, I'll put on my flowered print.

ANNA. The print! Really, you'll say anything to spite me. The blue will be far more appropriate, since I'll be in yellow. I simply adore yellow.

MARYA. Oh, Mama, yellow doesn't suit you!

ANNA. What do you mean, it doesn't suit me?

MARYA. It doesn't, I'm quite certain it doesn't. You have to have dark eyes to wear yellow.

ANNA. You're so clever! I suppose I don't have dark eyes? They're as dark as dark can be. How silly you are! They must be dark—I always turn up the queen of clubs when I tell my fortune.

MARYA. Oh, Mama, you know you're the queen of hearts.

ANNA. Ridiculous! Quite ridiculous! I've never been the queen of hearts. *(Goes out quickly with MARYA and speaks from off stage.)* The things that pop into your head! The queen of hearts! Good heavens! *(As they leave, a door opens and MISHKA sweeps out rubbish. OSIP enters from another door carrying a suitcase on his head.)*

OSIP. Where do I dump this?

MISHKA. This way, grandpa, right here.

OSIP. Hold on. Let me catch my breath. Whew! It's a dog's life. On an empty belly any load weighs a ton.

MISHKA. Well, grandpa, what do you say, will the general show up soon?

OSIP. General? What general?

MISHKA. Your master. Who else?

OSIP. My master? What kind of a general is that?

MISHKA. You mean he's not a general?

OSIP. He's a general all right—only the other way round.

MISHKA. Is that more or less than a real general?

OSIP. More.

MISHKA. You don't say! So that's why they've been whipping up a storm around here.

OSIP. Look here, sonny, I can see you're a sharp young fellow. How about whipping up something for me to eat?

Act 3, Scene 2

MISHKA. Nothing's ready yet for the likes of you, grandpa. You won't eat our plain grub. When your master sits down at the table, you'll get the same.

OSIP. And what do you have of the plain?

MISHKA. Cabbage soup, kasha, meat pies.

OSIP. Cabbage soup! Meat pies! Let me at 'em! I'm not choosy, I'll eat anything. Come on, let's lug the suitcase in. Is that the way out?

MISHKA. Right.

] Act 3, Scene 3

They carry the suitcase into the side room. POLICEMEN fling open both halves of the door. KHELESTAKOV enters; after him the MAYOR, followed by the DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES, SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS, DOBCHINSKY, and BOBCHINSKY, who has a plaster on his nose. The MAYOR points out a piece of paper on the floor to the POLICEMEN; they run to pick it up, colliding in their rush.

KHELESTAKOV. Excellent institutions! I like the way you show visitors the sights of the town. In other towns, they didn't show me a thing.

MAYOR. If I may say so, in other towns the mayors and officials are primarily concerned with their own advantage. Here we think only about meriting the attentions of our superiors by our vigilance and virtue.

KHELESTAKOV. The lunch was delicious. I really ate too much. Do you eat like that every day?

MAYOR. Something special for our most welcome guest.

KHELESTAKOV. I'm wild about good food. That's what life is all about—to pluck the blossoms of pleasure. What do you call that fish?

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES, *rushing up*. Filet of sole, sir.

KHELESTAKOV. Very tasty. Where was it that we had lunch? Seemed like a hospital.

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. That's right, sir. The charity hospital.

KHELESTAKOV. Yes, I recall now. I saw the beds. Have all the patients recovered? There didn't seem to be very many.

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. No more than ten. All the others have

recovered. It's the way things are arranged, the system we have here. You may not believe it, but since I've taken over, they've been recovering like flies. A patient no sooner sets foot in the hospital than he's cured. And it's not so much our medicines as honest and efficient administration.

MAYOR. If I dare say so, such are the obligations that rack the brains of a mayor! So many matters rest on his shoulders: sanitation, repairs, civic improvements. . . . Even a genius would find himself in trouble. But, thank heavens, everything's running smoothly. Other mayors may be feathering their nests, but I assure you, even in bed, I'm consumed by a single thought! "Almighty God," I pray, "teach me to satisfy my superiors and show them my zeal." . . . Not that I'm after rewards—that's up to them—but at least I'll have a clear conscience. The streets are swept, the convicts are treated well, we have very few drunkards—what more could I ask? No, honors don't interest me. Of course, they're tempting, but compared to virtue, all is vanity.

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES, *aside*. The grafter! How he lays it on! God gave him one hell of a talent!

KHLESTAKOV. That's very true. I admit I like to philosophize myself—sometimes I do it in prose, and sometimes I fall into verse.

BOBCHINSKY, *to DOBCHINSKY*. Nicely put, Pyotr Ivanovich, very nicely put. You can see he's widely read.

KHLESTAKOV. Say, what do you have in the way of entertainment around here? Are there any clubs where a fellow can try his hand at a game of cards?

MAYOR, *aside*. Oho, my boy, I can see what you're driving at! (*Aloud*.) God forbid! We won't hear of allowing such establishments here. In all my life I've never held a card in my hand, and if I did, I wouldn't know what to do with it. The sight of a king of diamonds is enough to turn my stomach. Once, merely to amuse the children, I built a house of cards, and the blasted things gave me nightmares. How can people waste their precious time like that?

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS, *aside*. And the son-of-a-bitch took me for a hundred rubles last night.

MAYOR. I prefer to spend my time serving my country.

KHLESTAKOV. Well. . . but that's going a bit far. It all depends on how you look at it. . . . Now if you pass when you ought to raise . . . then, of course. . . . No, no matter what you say, it's very enjoyable to play a hand now and then. (ANNA ANDREYEVNA and MARYA ANTONOVNA enter.)

MAYOR. Allow me to present my family, Your Excellency. My wife, my daughter.

KHLESTAKOV, *bowing*. How delighted I am, madam, to have the pleasure of your acquaintance.

ANNA. It's even more of a pleasure for us to meet you.

KHLESTAKOV, *posturing*. Oh no, madam, not at all. It's far more pleasant for me.

ANNA. How can you say that, sir! You're only trying to flatter us. Please be seated.

KHLESTAKOV. Standing near you, madam, is joy itself. But if you insist, I'll sit. . . . How delighted I am at last to be sitting beside you.

ANNA. Oh my! I dare not dream your compliments are intended for me. . . . I imagine, after the capital, traveling through the provinces must have been quite disagreeable.

KHLESTAKOV. Exceedingly so. Accustomed as I am, *comprenez-vous*, to moving in the best society, and suddenly to find myself on the road—filthy inns, the dark gloom of ignorance. . . . I must say, if not for the good fortune. . . . (*glancing at ANNA ANDREYEVNA and posturing*) that has rewarded me for all my trials and tribulations. . . .

ANNA. Indeed, how disagreeable it must have been.

KHLESTAKOV. At this moment, madam, everything is most agreeable.

ANNA. You can't mean that, sir! You do me too much honor. I'm not worthy.

KHLESTAKOV. Why aren't you worthy? Madam, you *are* worthy.

ANNA. I live in the country.

KHLESTAKOV. Yes, but the country also has its hillocks, its rivulets. . . . Of course, there's no comparing it with the capital. Ah, Petersburg! That's the life. You may think I'm only a copy clerk.

Act 3, Scene 4

Not at all. I'm on a friendly footing with my department head. He'll pat me on the back and say, "Come on over for dinner, my good man." I only drop in at the office for a minute or so, merely to issue instructions—"Do this like this, that like that"—and before you know it, the clerks are scratching away like a pack of rats. "Scr, Scr, Scr." They even wanted to promote me, but I said to myself, "What for?" The doorman runs after me with a brush. "Allow me, sir," he says, "may I polish your shoes." (*To the MAYOR.*) But why are you standing, gentlemen? Please, sit down.

All in Unison

MAYOR. Men of our rank can stand, sir. We know our place.

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. We can stand.

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS. Don't bother about us, sir.

KHLESTAKOV. Forget about rank. Do sit down. (*MAYOR and others sit.*) I'm not one to stand on ceremony. In fact, I always do my best to slip by unnoticed. But it's impossible to escape attention. Simply impossible! The minute I step out the door, people shout, "There goes Khlestakov!" Once I was even taken for the commander-in-chief. The soldiers leaped out of the guardhouse and presented arms. The officer, who's a great friend of mine, said to me later, "You know, old man, we actually took you for the commander-in-chief."

ANNA. No!

KHLESTAKOV. Yes, I'm known everywhere. Acquainted with all the pretty actresses. You see, I also write for the stage . . . amusing little pieces . . . all kinds. I'm in with the literary crowd. Very chummy with Pushkin. Often I'll say to him, "Well, Pushkin, my boy, how goes it?" He'll answer, "So-so, my friend, so-so." Yes, he's quite a character.

ANNA. So you write, too? An author's life must be fascinating. No doubt you write for the magazines?

KHLESTAKOV. Oh yes, the magazines also. By the way, I have many works to my name—*The Marriage of Figaro*, *Norma*, *Don Giovanni* . . . I can't even remember all the titles. And it was luck—I didn't intend to write anything, but the directors kept begging me, "Please Ivan Alexandrovich, write something for

us." So I said to myself, "Why not?" Right on the spot I dashed them all off. Everybody was flabbergasted. My mind works with extraordinary speed. Everything published under the name of Baron Brambeus—"The Frigate Hope," *The Moscow Monthly Telegraph*—I wrote it all!

ANNA. Imagine! So you're Baron Brambeus?

KHLESTAKOV. Certainly. I correct the poems of all the best poets.

A publisher pays me forty thousand for that alone.

ANNA. Then *The War of 1612* must be yours.

KHLESTAKOV. Yes, of course.

ANNA. I knew it all along.

MARYA. But Mama, it says on the cover it's by Mr. Zagóskin.

ANNA. There you go again! Arguing even about this!

KHLESTAKOV. Oh, yes. She's right. It's actually by Zagóskin.

There's another *War of 1612*. That one's mine.

ANNA. Well, I must have read yours. How beautifully it was written!

KHLESTAKOV. It's true, I live for literature. I keep the best house in Petersburg. Everybody knows it. They call it Khlestakov House. (*Addressing everyone.*) Please, gentlemen, if you're ever in the capital, I urge you to visit me, by all means. I give parties, you know.

ANNA. I can imagine the glitter and elegance of a party in the capital.

KHLESTAKOV. Words can't describe them! I'll have a watermelon on the table that sells for seven-hundred rubles! A tureen of soup straight off the boat from Paris! You lift the lid, and the aroma—ah! There's nothing in the world to compare to it. I'm at a party every day of the week. We have our own card game: the foreign minister, the French ambassador, the German ambassador—and me. We play till we're exhausted. It's incredible! I'm barely able to drag myself up to my room on the fourth floor and say to the cook, "Hey, Mavrúshka, take my coat." What am I blabbering about? I forgot, I live on the first floor. My staircase alone is worth . . . But you'd find my vestibule extremely interesting—counts and princes jostling each other, buzzing like bees—all you hear is bzz, bzz, bzz. Sometimes even a cabinet

minister drops by. . . (*The MAYOR and the others get up from their chairs, trembling.*) My letters are addressed, "Your Excellency." Once I even ran a ministry. Very curious—the director had vanished, nobody knew where. Well, naturally, there was a lot of talk. "How will we manage?" "Who will replace him?" The generals were keen on taking over, and some of them gave it a whirl. But the job was too much for them. What seemed easy enough turned out to be the damndest thing. They saw it was no use—they had to call on me. In a flash messengers came pouring down the streets, then more messengers, and more messengers. . . . Think of it—thirty-five thousand messengers! "What's the problem," I asked. "Ivan Alexandrovich Khlestakov! Come! Take charge!" I confess, I was a bit taken aback. I came out in my robe, meaning to turn them down. But I thought to myself, the tsar will hear of it, and there's my service record to worry about. . . . "All right, gentlemen, I accept. Very well," I said, "I accept. Only I won't stand for any nonsense. No, sir! I'm always on my toes! I'm the sort who. . . ." And that's exactly the way it turned out. When I made my rounds of the ministry, you'd have thought an earthquake had struck—everyone quivering, shaking like a leaf. (*MAYOR and others tremble in terror. KHLESTAKOV is carried away.*) Oh! I'm not one to play games! I put the fear of God into every last one of them! Even the cabinet is scared stiff of me. And why not, I ask you? That's how I'm made! No one gets in my way. I tell one and all—I know who I am. I'm everywhere! Everywhere! I pop in and out of the palace. Tomorrow they're promoting me to field marshal! (*Slips and almost falls to the floor. The officials support him deferentially.*)

MAYOR, *approaches, trembling, making an effort to speak.* Yo. . . Yo. . . Yo. . . Yo. . .

KHLESTAKOV, *in an abrupt sharp tone.* What is it?

MAYOR. Yo. . . Yo. . . Yo. . .

KHLESTAKOV, *in the same tone.* I can't make out a word. You're talking gibberish.

MAYOR. Yo. . . Yo. . . Yo Lexency. . . Excellency might wish to rest up. . . . Your room is ready.

KHLESTAKOV. Rest? Nonsense! But maybe I could use a rest. The lunch, gentlemen, was excellent. I'm satisfied, completely satisfied. (*Exits declaiming.*) Filet of sole! Filet of sole! (*Goes off into the side room, followed by the MAYOR.*)

BOBCHINSKY, *to DOBCHINSKY.* Now that's a man for you, Pyotr Ivanovich. That's what I call a man. In all my life I've never been in the presence of such an important person. I nearly died of fright. What's your opinion, Pyotr Ivanovich? Who is he. . . I mean, what's his rank?

DOBCHINSKY. I'd say he must be a general.

BOBCHINSKY. And I'd say a general isn't fit to tie his shoelaces! He must be the generalissimo himself! You heard how he wiped the floor with the cabinet. Let's run and tell Lyapkin-Tyapkin and Korobkin. Goodbye, Anna Andreyevna.

DOBCHINSKY. Goodbye, madam. (*They go out.*)

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES, *to SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS.* I've never been so scared. And it makes no sense—we're not even in uniform. What if he sobers up and whips off a report to Petersburg? (*Goes out, sunk in thought, accompanied by the SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS. Both say, "Goodbye, madam."*)

ANNA. What a charming man!

MARYA. Oh! He's a darling!

ANNA. So refined. You can see at once he's from the capital. His manners are exquisite. Oh, it was simply delightful. I'm terribly fond of young men like him. He was much taken with me, too. Did you notice how he stared at me?

MARYA. Oh, Mama, it was me he was staring at.

ANNA. Don't be silly, my dear. It's quite out of the question.

MARYA. No, Mama, he really was.

ANNA. What? Again! Must you always argue! It's impossible! Why on earth should he want to look at you?

MARYA. Honestly, Mama, he *was* looking at me. When he talked about literature, he glanced at me, and also when he told about playing cards with the ambassadors.

ANNA. Well, perhaps once or twice, but only out of politeness. He must have said to himself, "All right, I might as well give her a look."

MAYOR, *entering on tiptoe*. Shhh...sh! **Act 3, Scene 6**

ANNA. What is it?

MAYOR. I'm sorry I got him drunk. Suppose even half of what he says is true? (*Reflects.*) And why shouldn't it be true? When a man's drunk, it all slips out. Sure, he stretched things a bit. But then, without fibbing, nobody would ever say a word. So he hobnobs with the ministers and drops by the palace... Oh, what the hell's going on in my head? I feel as if I'm standing on the edge of an abyss or waiting to be hanged.

ANNA. And he didn't intimidate me in the least. As far as I'm concerned, he's a gentleman of culture and good breeding. His rank doesn't interest me.

MAYOR. Women! That says it all. You and your feathers and flounces! You'll blurt out any rubbish. They'll let you off with a bawling out, and I'll get it in the neck. By the way, you were very familiar with him—as if he were some Dobchinsky.

ANNA. I wouldn't worry if I were you. We women know a thing or two... (*glances at her daughter.*)

MAYOR, *to himself*. Try and talk to them!... What a predicament! I still can't get over the scare he gave me. (*Opens the door and calls out.*) Mishka, call officers Svistunov and Derzhimorda. They're outside, by the gate. (*After a brief pause.*) The world's gone cockeyed. You expect a man who looks the part, and you wind up with a skinny little twerp. How can I figure out his rank? When a man's in uniform, you know who he is, but in a suit he's like a fly with its wings clipped. Back at the inn, he wouldn't open up. With all his double talk and claptrap, I thought I'd never squeeze anything out of him. But he finally gave way, even spilled more than was necessary. You can see he's still young.

OSIP *enters*. All rush to him, beckoning him.

ANNA. Come here, my good fellow! **Act 3, Scene 7**

MAYOR. Shhh!... Well? Is he asleep yet?

OSIP. No, just stretching.

ANNA. What's your name?

OSIP. Osip, ma'm.

MAYOR, *to his wife and daughter*. That'll do! I'll handle it. (*To*

OSIP.) Well, my friend, did they feed you enough?

OSIP. They fed me fine—real fine. Thank you kindly, Your Honor.

ANNA. Osip, dear, I imagine many counts and princes call on your master?

OSIP, *aside*. What do I say? They fed me fine now, and it can only get better. (*Aloud.*) Yes, ma'm, counts and everything.

MARYA. Osip, dear, your master is so handsome!

ANNA. Please, Osip, how does he...

MAYOR. Be still! You're in my way with your silly chatter. Well, my friend...

ANNA. What's your master's rank?

OSIP. Er... the usual.

MAYOR. Good God! You and your stupid questions! I can't get a word in edgewise. Well, Osip, tell me about your master. Is he strict? Does he give people a hard time?

OSIP. Yes, he's one for order. Wants everything just right.

MAYOR. You know, Osip, I very much like your looks. You seem to be a decent fellow. Now what does your master...

ANNA. Osip, does your master wear a uniform in the capital or...

MAYOR. Enough! Damn, what chatterboxes! We have a crisis on our hands. A matter of life or death... (*To OSIP.*) Osip, my friend, I've grown very fond of you. You know, an extra cup of tea doesn't hurt any when you're on the road—and it's a bit cold out. Here, take a few rubles... for tea.

OSIP, *taking the money*. Much obliged, sir. God bless you. You helped a poor man.

MAYOR. Think nothing of it. And now, Osip...

ANNA. Osip, what color eyes does your master prefer?

MARYA. Osip, dearest! Your master has such a sweet nose!

MAYOR. Shut up, you two, and let me get a word in! (*To OSIP.*) Osip, can you tell me what sort of things your master is especially interested in... I mean, what does he enjoy when traveling?

OSIP. Well, it all depends on what turns up. Mostly he likes a friendly welcome, and to be served good food.

MAYOR. Good food?

OSIP. Yes, Your Honor, good food. I'm only a peasant, but still he sees to it that I'm well fed. Honest! Whenever we make a stop,

he'll ask, "Well, Osip, did they treat you proper?" "Rotten, Your Excellency!" "Osip," he'll say, "that one's a poor host. You just remind me when we get back." But (*waving his hand*) who am I to make a fuss?

MAYOR. Very true, very true, you make a lot of sense, my friend. I gave you something for tea; here, this is for biscuits.

OSIP. Very kind of you, Your Honor. I'll be sure to drink to your health.

ANNA. Come here, Osip! I've got something for you, too.

MARYA. Osip, dear! Give your master a kiss for me! (*KHLESTAKOV coughs in the other room.*)

MAYOR. Shhh! (*Stands on his tiptoes. The remainder of the conversation is in a whisper.*) God help you if you make a sound! You've prattled enough. Get out!

ANNA. Come, Mashenka! There's a little thing I noticed about our guest we can only discuss in private. (*ANNA and MARYA go out.*)

MAYOR. The drivel they'll spout! It's enough to make you want to plug your ears. (*Turning to OSIP.*) Well, Osip, my friend. . . (*DERZHIMORDA and SVISTUNOV enter.*) Shhh! Stomping in here like a pair of overgrown bears! I thought a ton of bricks dropped someplace. Where the hell have you been?

DERZHIMORDA. Proceeding per orders we was. . .

MAYOR. Sh! (*Claps his hand over DERZHIMORDA's mouth.*) Stop your quacking! Are you a duck or what? (*Mimics him.*) "Proceeding per orders!" What a bag of wind! (*To OSIP.*) Osip, my friend, you run along and get everything ready for your master. My house is at your disposal. (*OSIP goes out.*) As for you two—stand by the front door and don't budge! And don't admit anyone who doesn't belong here, especially the storekeepers! If you let even one of them in, I'll. . . The minute you see anybody with a petition, or even someone who looks like he might be thinking of a petition, grab him by the neck and throw him out! Smash him one! Let him have it! (*Demonstrates a kick.*) You get me? Shhh. . . shhh. . . (*Goes out on tiptoe after the policemen.*)

Act Four

Act 4, Scene 1

The same room in the MAYOR's house. The JUDGE, DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES, POSTMASTER, SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS, DOBCHINSKY and BOBCHINSKY enter cautiously, almost on tiptoe. All are in their official uniforms. They speak in hushed voices.

JUDGE, *arranging them into a semicircle.* For heaven's sake, gentlemen, hurry, in line! More orderly, please. The man is in and out of the palace and tells off the cabinet, damn him. In formation! At attention! It must be in military order. Pyotr Ivanovich, hop over there; and you, Pyotr Ivanovich, stand here.

Both PYOTR IVANOVICHES—BOBCHINSKY and DOBCHINSKY—skip over to their places on tiptoe.

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. This is all very well, Ammos Fyodorovich. . . but we ought to take some action.

JUDGE. What do you have in mind?

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. We all know what.

JUDGE. Slip him something?

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. Well, yes, let's say we slip him something.

JUDGE. It's risky, damn it. He's liable to raise the roof—you know these Petersburg types. But maybe we can dress it up as a contribution for a monument?

POSTMASTER. Or we can say, "Here, sir, we found this money in the mail and don't know who it belongs to."

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. Watch out he doesn't pack you off in the

mails. Look here, this isn't how things are handled in a well-ordered state. Why are we all here? We ought to pay our respects one by one and, behind closed doors, with no one looking on, do what has to be done. Now that's how things are handled in a well-ordered state! Ammos Fyodorovich, you go first.

JUDGE. No, you go first. After all, our distinguished visitor dined in your department.

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. It would be more appropriate if Luka Lukich were to go first—as the educator of our young people.

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS. I couldn't, gentlemen, I couldn't! It's the way I was brought up. If an official even a rank higher speaks to me, I go to pieces. My tongue sticks in my throat. No, gentlemen, you must excuse me. I simply couldn't.

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. Well, Ammos Fyodorovich, that leaves you. You're our Cicero.

JUDGE. Really . . . Cicero! The things you say. Just because I sometimes get carried away about my kennels and dogs . . .

ALL. No, Ammos Fyodorovich, not only about dogs; you can talk about all sorts of things.

About the Creation, and the Tower of Babel, and God knows what.

Please, Ammos Fyodorovich, don't let us down.

Save us!

Please, Ammos Fyodorovich.

JUDGE. Leave me be, gentlemen! (*Footsteps and coughing in KHESTAKOV'S room. All rush headlong to the door, jostling and struggling to get out. Several are jammed in the doorway. Exclaim in hushed voices.*)

BOBCHINSKY'S VOICE. Ouch! Pyotr Ivanovich, Pyotr Ivanovich! You stepped on my toe.

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES' VOICE. Step back, gentlemen. You're squashing me. I can't breathe. (*A few more cries of "Ow!" "Ouch!" At last all squeeze out. KHESTAKOV enters looking sleepy.*)

KHESTAKOV, *alone*. I must have had a good snooze. Where on earth did they get those mattresses and feather beds? I'm dripping sweat. That was some wine they gave me to drink at

Act 4,
Scene 2

lunch. My head's still pounding. . . . Seems I can have a good time around here. It warms my heart to meet cordial people. Especially when they sincerely mean to please and aren't trying to get something out of me. The mayor's daughter isn't half bad, and her mother's the type who just might . . . Ah, I really go for this life.

JUDGE, *enters with money clenched in his fist, halts, and speaks to himself*. Please, Lord, please! See me through safely. Oh, my knees are buckling. (*Aloud, snapping to attention and placing his hand on his sword.*) I have the honor of introducing myself, Your Excellency: Judge of the District Court, Collegiate Assessor, Lyapkin-Tyapkin.

KHESTAKOV. Have a seat. So you're the judge here?

JUDGE. Twenty years ago our nobility graciously elected me for a three year term, and I've held the office ever since.

KHESTAKOV. Do you find being a judge profitable?

JUDGE. After my third term I was presented with the Order of St. Vladimir, Fourth Class, and a commendation from my superiors. (*Aside.*) If he'd only take the money! My fist is on fire!

KHESTAKOV. I prefer the Vladimir myself. Now a Third Class St. Anne isn't nearly so impressive.

JUDGE, *extending his clenched fist with the money in stages. Aside*. Oh Lord! Where am I? I'm on hot coals.

KHESTAKOV. What's that in your hand?

JUDGE, *flustered, drops the money*. Nothing, sir.

KHESTAKOV. What do you mean "nothing"? Didn't you drop some money?

JUDGE, *trembling in fright*. No, Your Excellency. It's not money. (*Aside.*) Oh my God! It's jail for me! I can hear the police wagon coming.

KHESTAKOV, *picking it up*. Of course it's money.

JUDGE, *aside*. That's it! I'm lost!

KHESTAKOV. You know what? Lend it to me.

JUDGE, *hastily*. Certainly, Your Excellency, certainly. Delighted! (*Aside.*) Courage, now! Courage! . . . Holy Mother of God! Give me strength.

KHESTAKOV. I ran through all my money on the road, what with

one thing and another . . . you know how it is . . . I'll send it to you as soon as I get home.

JUDGE. Don't give it a thought, sir! How can you even suggest . . . I consider it an honor . . . You may rest assured, I'll zealously employ all my meagre powers to show my devotion to my superiors and merit their approval. (*Stands up, snaps to attention, his hands at his sides.*) I dare not disturb you with my presence any longer. Does Your Excellency have any instructions for me?

KHLESTAKOV. Instructions?

JUDGE. I mean, will you be issuing any directives to our district court?

KHLESTAKOV. What on earth for? I have no use for the court now.

JUDGE, *bowing and going out. Aside.* The town is ours!

KHLESTAKOV, *upon the JUDGE'S exit.* That judge is a splendid fellow.

The POSTMASTER enters, holding himself erect, in uniform, his hand on his sword.

Act 4,
Scene 3

POSTMASTER. I have the honor of introducing myself, Your Excellency: Postmaster, Court Councilor Shpekin.

KHLESTAKOV. Ah! Please, do come in. It's always a pleasure having congenial company. Have a seat. I suppose you're a permanent resident here?

POSTMASTER. Quite right, sir.

KHLESTAKOV. I've grown very fond of this little town. Of course, it doesn't have many people—but why should it? After all, it's not the capital. Am I right—it's not the capital?

POSTMASTER. Quite right, sir.

KHLESTAKOV. Only in the capital does one find the right *bon ton*.

None of your boorish provincials. Don't you think so?

POSTMASTER. Precisely. (*Aside.*) He's not a bit snobbish; he asks my opinion about everything.

KHLESTAKOV. But one can live well in a small town too. Do you agree?

POSTMASTER. Exactly.

KHLESTAKOV. After all, what does a man need? To be treated with

respect and to be genuinely liked. That's true, isn't it?

POSTMASTER. Perfectly true, sir.

KHLESTAKOV. I must say, I'm awfully glad you agree with me. You know, some people might consider me odd, but that's how I'm made. (*Looking the POSTMASTER over, speaks to himself.*) Wonder if I can touch him for a loan! (*Aloud.*) An extraordinary thing has happened. I completely ran out of money on my trip. Could you lend me three-hundred rubles?

POSTMASTER. Of course. I'd consider it a supreme pleasure. Here, sir, kindly accept it. I'm only too happy to be of service.

KHLESTAKOV. That's very generous of you. You know, when I'm traveling I hate to deny myself anything. And why should I? Do you agree?

POSTMASTER. Completely, sir. (*Stands, snaps to attention, placing his hand on his sword.*) I don't dare disturb you with my presence any longer . . . But perhaps Your Excellency has some observations regarding the postal system?

KHLESTAKOV. Not a blessed thing. (*The POSTMASTER bows and goes out. KHLESTAKOV lights up a cigar.*) The postmaster is a fine fellow, too. At least he's eager to please. I appreciate people like that.

The SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS is shoved through the door. A muffled voice off stage: "What are you afraid of?"

Act 4,
Scene 4

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS, *coming to attention while trembling, his hand on his sword.* I have the honor of introducing myself, Your Excellency: Superintendent of Schools, Titular Councilor Khlopov.

KHLESTAKOV. Ah, do come in. Sit down, sit down. Would you care for a cigar? (*Offering one.*)

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS, *to himself, hesitating.* Oh my God! I never expected anything like this. Should I take it, or shouldn't I take it?

KHLESTAKOV. Take it, take it. It's not a bad cigar. Of course, it's not what you find in Petersburg. Why, in Petersburg, my friend, I smoke cigars that sell for twenty-five rubles a hundred. One puff and you're smacking your lips. Here, light up. (*Hands him*

a candle. Trembling he attempts to light up.) Hey, not that end! SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS, drops the cigar in fright, spits, and with a wave of the hand, says to himself. Damn! My blasted shyness has ruined everything.

KHLESTAKOV. I can see you're not a connoisseur when it comes to cigars. I'm afraid they're my weakness. Women too. I can't resist them. How about you? Which do you go for—brunettes or blondes? (The SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS, nonplussed, remains silent.) Come on, you can be frank with me—brunettes or blondes?

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS. I don't dare think about such things, sir.

KHLESTAKOV. No, no. Don't try to wriggle out of it. I'm very curious about your tastes.

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS. Might I venture the opinion . . . (Aside.) My God! What am I saying!

KHLESTAKOV. Aha! You're not talking! I'll wager some pretty little brunette already has you in her clutches. Come clean—she has, hasn't she? (The SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS remains silent.) Ah! Ah! Look, you're blushing! Why aren't you saying anything?

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS. I'm s-s-scared, Your Hon. . . Your Excel. . . Your High-n-n-ess. . . (Aside.) I'm done for! My damn stammer!

KHLESTAKOV. Scared? Well, I can understand. Something about my eyes does inspire awe. At least I never met a woman who could resist them. Am I right?

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS. Quite right, Your Excellency.

KHLESTAKOV. By the way, the strangest thing happened to me. I ran out of all my money. Could you lend me three-hundred rubles?

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS, searching his pockets frantically, to himself. What a pickle I'm in if. . . Whew! I've got it. (Hands over the bills, still trembling.)

KHLESTAKOV. I'm very grateful.

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS. I don't dare disturb you with my presence any longer.

KHLESTAKOV. Goodbye.

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS, hurries out, almost at a run, saying aside. Well, thank God for that! Now maybe he won't look into the classrooms.

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES enters, snaps to attention, his hand on his sword.

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. I have the honor of introducing myself, Your Excellency: Director of Charities, Court Councilor Zemlyanika.

KHLESTAKOV. How are you? Come, sit down.

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. I had the privilege of personally accompanying Your Excellency to the charity hospital entrusted to my care.

KHLESTAKOV. Oh yes. I remember. You served an excellent lunch.

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. Only too happy to be of service to the fatherland.

KHLESTAKOV. You know, food is my weakness—I'm just wild about good cooking. Say, weren't you a little shorter this morning?

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. It's quite possible, Your Excellency. (Falls silent for a moment.) I can truthfully say that I spare no efforts in zealously performing my duties. (Moves his chair closer and speaks in hushed voice.) Now take the postmaster. He doesn't do a lick of work; everything's neglected, parcels are piled up—you might wish to investigate for yourself. The judge too—he was here a while ago—all he does is chase rabbits. He kennels his dogs in the courthouse, and as for his morals. . . may I be frank with you? He's a relative and a friend, but for the good of my country I'm obliged to say it—his morals are simply shameful. We have a landowner in our town—Pyotr Ivanovich Dobchinsky—you've met him. Now the moment this Dobchinsky leaves the house, the judge pops in to while away the time with his wife. I'm prepared to take an oath on it. You only have to look at the children—not one of them resembles Dobchinsky. All of them, even the little girl, are the spitting image of the judge.

KHLESTAKOV. No! I never would have thought it.

Act 4,
Scene 5

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. The superintendent of schools too. It's beyond me how the authorities could have entrusted him with such a responsible position. He's a flaming radical. He's cramming the heads of our young people with subversive ideas—things too shocking to repeat. If you like, I'll put it all in writing.

KHLESTAKOV. Why not? It will be quite entertaining. You know, I very much enjoy some light reading when the time drags. . . .

What did you say your name was? I keep forgetting.

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. Zemlyanika, sir.

KHLESTAKOV. Oh yes, Zemlyanika. Well, Zemlyanika, tell me, do you have any children?

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. Certainly, sir. Five. Two are already grown up.

KHLESTAKOV. How about that? Grown up! And what do they. . . uh, what are their. . . ?

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. Does Your Excellency wish to ask their names?

KHLESTAKOV. Yes. What are their names?

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. Nikolay, Ivan, Elizaveta, Marya, and Petunia.

KHLESTAKOV. That's charming.

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. I dare not disturb you with my presence any longer, or take up time devoted to sacred duty. (*Bows.*)

KHLESTAKOV, *seeing him to the door*. Not at all. What you told me was all very amusing. Please, any time. I enjoy this sort of thing. (*DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES goes out. KHLESTAKOV calls after him.*)

Say! What do they call you? I keep forgetting.

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. Zemlyanika, Your Excellency.

KHLESTAKOV. Do me a favor, Zemlyanika. A curious thing has happened to me. I ran through all my money. Would you happen to have four-hundred rubles on you?

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. Yes, sir.

KHLESTAKOV. What luck! Thank you very much.

BOBCHINSKY and DOBCHINSKY enter.

BOBCHINSKY. I have the honor of introducing myself, Your Excellency: Pyotr Ivanovich Bobchinsky, a local resident.

DOBCHINSKY. Pyotr Ivanovich Dobchinsky, Your Excellency, a local landowner.

KHLESTAKOV. Oh yes. We've met. You took a flop, didn't you? Well, how's your nose?

BOBCHINSKY. First rate, sir! Please don't trouble yourself about it. It's healed, quite healed.

KHLESTAKOV. I'm glad. (*Suddenly and abruptly.*) Got any money on you?

BOBCHINSKY. Money?

KHLESTAKOV, *loud and quick*. A thousand rubles.

BOBCHINSKY. I don't have anything like that. Honestly. Perhaps you do, Pyotr Ivanovich.

DOBCHINSKY. Not on me. Forgive me, Your Excellency, but all my money is tied up in the state bank.

KHLESTAKOV. Well, if not a thousand, then make it a hundred.

BOBCHINSKY, *rummaging in his pockets*. Do you have a hundred rubles on you, Pyotr Ivanovich? All I've got is forty.

DOBCHINSKY, *searching his wallet*. Twenty-five—that's all.

BOBCHINSKY. Now, look thoroughly, Pyotr Ivanovich. You have a hole in your pocket. I know you do. Most likely something slipped into the lining.

DOBCHINSKY. No, nothing in the hole.

KHLESTAKOV. Well, it doesn't matter. Just thought I'd ask. All right then, make it sixty-five. It's all the same. (*Takes the money.*)

DOBCHINSKY. May I presume to ask Your Excellency about a very delicate circumstance?

KHLESTAKOV. What is it?

DOBCHINSKY. It's extremely delicate, Your Excellency. You see, I had my oldest son before I was married.

KHLESTAKOV. You don't say!

DOBCHINSKY. Only in a manner of speaking, Your Excellency. He was born exactly as children of married people are born. And afterwards we did the proper thing by assuming the lawful bonds of matrimony. So you see, Your Excellency, I want him to be my legitimate son, and to bear my name—Dobchinsky, Your Excellency.

Act 4,
Scene 6

KHLESTAKOV. Fine. Let him be Dobchinsky! It can be arranged.
 DOBCHINSKY. I wouldn't have bothered you, only I'm sorry for the boy. The little fellow shows great promise! He recites poems by heart, and if you put a knife in his hand, he'll carve a very clever horse and wagon. The boy's a magician, sir. Pyotr Ivanovich can vouch for it.

BOBCHINSKY. Yes, he has great talent.

KHLESTAKOV. All right. I'll do my best. I'll put a word in with . . . uh, I hope . . . Rest assured, it'll all be taken care of. (*Turning to BOBCHINSKY.*) Don't you want to ask me something?

BOBCHINSKY. Yes, Your Excellency. I have a very humble request.

KHLESTAKOV. What about?

BOBCHINSKY. I humbly beg you, sir, when you return to the capital, tell all those great gentlemen—the senators and admirals and all the rest—say, “Your Excellency or Your Highness, in such and such a town there lives a man called Pyotr Ivanovich Bobchinsky.” Be sure to tell them, “Pyotr Ivanovich Bobchinsky lives there.”

KHLESTAKOV. Very well.

BOBCHINSKY. And if you should happen to meet with the tsar, then tell the tsar too, “Your Imperial Majesty, in such and such a town there lives a man called Pyotr Ivanovich Bobchinsky.”

KHLESTAKOV. Fine.

DOBCHINSKY. Excuse us for troubling you with our presence, Your Excellency.

BOBCHINSKY. Excuse us for troubling you with our presence, Your Excellency.

KHLESTAKOV. Not at all. It's been a pleasure. (*Sees them out. Alone.*) The place is crawling with officials. . . . Seems they've taken me for someone from the ministry. I must have laid it on thick this morning. What a pack of fools! I really ought to write Tryapichkin about them. He'll stick them into one of those pieces he scribbles for the papers. They'll be the laughingstock of Petersburg. Osip! Bring me paper and ink! (*OSIP peeks in the door and says, “Right away.”*) Now if Tryapichkin gets his teeth into anybody—watch out! He wouldn't spare his own father for a wisecrack. Anything for a ruble. But on the whole these officials

Act 4,
Scene 7

are a good-natured lot. It's a point in their favor that they lent me money. I'll just check what I've got. Three hundred from the judge. Three hundred from the postmaster . . . six hundred, seven, eight . . . Ugh! What a greasy bill! Eight, nine . . . Oho! Over a thousand . . . Well, captain! Just let me catch you in a game now. We'll see who takes who! (*OSIP enters with paper and ink.*) So, dimwit, see how these people treat me, the fuss they make over me! (*Begins writing.*)

OSIP. Yes, we've been lucky! Only you know what, Ivan Alexandrovich?

KHLESTAKOV, *writing*. What?

OSIP. Let's clear out. God knows, it's high time.

KHLESTAKOV, *writing*. Ridiculous! What for?

OSIP. Really, Ivan Alexandrovich. Go while the going's good.

We've been living high off the hog—well, enough is enough. To hell with this town. Before you know it, someone will turn up. Honest to God, Ivan Alexandrovich, the horses here are terrific. We'd race along like the . . .

KHLESTAKOV, *writing*. No. I want to hang around for a while. Tomorrow.

OSIP. Tomorrow! For God's sake, Ivan Alexandrovich, let's go. I know they're treating you like a prince, but still, we'd better get out of here. It's certain they've taken you for someone else. Besides, your father'll fly off the handle—we're late as it is. . . . Oh, what a grand ride we'd have! The horses here are out of this world.

KHLESTAKOV, *writing*. All right. Mail this letter, and you can arrange for horses on the way. And see to it that they're first-rate. Tell the drivers, if they speed me through like the tsar's courier, it's a ruble each. And have them sing songs! (*Continues writing.*) I can just picture Tryapichkin. He'll die laughing.

OSIP. I'd better pack, and send your letter with one of the servants.

KHLESTAKOV, *writing*. Fine. But bring me a candle.

OSIP, *goes out and speaks from off-stage*. Listen, pal! Deliver a letter for us to the post office, and tell them there's no charge. And send over the best troika on hand—the one for official messengers. As for the fare, my master don't pay. We're on

government business. And see that they hop to it, or my master'll have their heads. Wait! The letter isn't ready yet.

KHLESTAKOV, *still writing*. Wonder where he's living these days—Post Street or Pea Street. He's also one to move around. Skips out whenever the rent comes due. I'll take a chance on Post Street. (*Folds the letter and addresses it. OSIP brings in a candle.*)

KHLESTAKOV *seals the letter*. POLICEMAN DERZHIMORDA'S *voice, offstage*: "Hey you old goat! Where do you think you're going! No one's allowed in.")

KHLESTAKOV, *giving OSIP the letter*. Here, take it.

VOICES OF STOREKEEPERS. Let us in! You've no right to keep us out. We're here on business.

DERZHIMORDA'S VOICE. Move along! Move along! He's not seeing anybody. He's asleep. (*The hubbub outside grows louder.*)

KHLESTAKOV. What's going on, Osip? See what the commotion is all about?

OSIP, *looking out the window*. Some merchants are trying to get in, but the policeman won't admit them. They're waving papers. I guess they want you.

KHLESTAKOV, *going up to the window*. What can I do for you good people?

VOICES OF STOREKEEPERS. We're here to appeal to Your Gracious Excellency. Order them to accept our petitions, Your Lordship.

KHLESTAKOV. Let them through! Osip, tell them they can come in. It's all right. (*OSIP goes out. KHLESTAKOV receives the petitions through the window, opens and reads one of them.*) "To His Most Noble and Illustrious Excellency and Distinguished Lord of Finances, from the merchant Abdulin." What the hell's this! There's no such title.

The STOREKEEPERS enter, carrying a basket filled with bottles of wine and sacks of sugar.

KHLESTAKOV. Well, my friends, what can I do for you?

STOREKEEPERS, *bowing to the ground*. We most humbly beg Your Grace's mercy.

KHLESTAKOV. But what do you want?

STOREKEEPERS. Save us from ruin, Your Lordship! We're suffering

Act 4,
Scene 8

unjustly. We're being abused.

KHLESTAKOV. By whom?

A STOREKEEPER. It's the mayor, it's all his doing. We've never had a mayor like him, Your Honor. The ways he insults us... billeting soldiers in our homes till we're squeezed dry. Grabbing us by our beards and calling us godless bastards. It's true, Your Honor. His abuses are more than we can stand—we might as well hang ourselves. And it isn't as if we're disrespectful; we always do the right thing by him: a silk dress for his wife, a petticoat for his daughter—we're not against that sort of thing. But nothing is enough for him. Whatever he can lay his hands on, he takes. "Hey, my good man," he'll say, "a fine piece of cloth you've got there. Send it over." And what he calls a piece will have close to fifty yards in it!

KHLESTAKOV. Really? But that's highway robbery!

STOREKEEPERS. God help us—it's so! No one can recall a mayor like him. When we see him coming, we hide everything under the counter. And it's not only the caviar and sturgeon. He'll make off with worthless garbage—prunes moldering in a barrel for seven years—my helper wouldn't touch them with a stick, and he grabs them by the handful. His birthday's on St. Anthony's Day—you'd think we'd brought him all that a man could need. "No," he says, "give me more. I celebrate on St. Onúfry's, too."

KHLESTAKOV. The man's a criminal!

STOREKEEPERS. He is, by God, he is! And just try saying no—he'll put up an entire regiment in your house. Or he'll order your store locked up. "I won't flog you," he says, "and I won't torture you, because it's against the law. But before I'm through, you'll be eating dirt."

KHLESTAKOV. Ha! What a crook! Siberia's too good for him!

STOREKEEPERS. Wherever Your Excellency sends him is fine with us. Just make it far. May we offer you a few sacks of sugar and this basket of wine. Be so kind as to accept our modest gifts, Your Grace.

KHLESTAKOV. I wouldn't dream of it. It's against my principles to take bribes. Now if you were to offer me, let's say, a three-

hundred-ruble loan, well, that would be altogether different.
I do take loans.

STOREKEEPERS. By all means, Your Honor. Whatever you like.
(*They take out money.*) But why three hundred! Here, take five hundred. Only protect us from him.

KHLESTAKOV. Fine. I accept. I've got nothing against loans.

STOREKEEPERS, *offer him money on a silver tray*. Please, Your Grace, take the tray too.

KHLESTAKOV. I might as well.

STOREKEEPERS, *bowing*. May we throw in the sugar now.

KHLESTAKOV. Oh, no. I couldn't possibly accept a bribe.

OSIP. Your Highness! What are you doing? Take it! Everything comes in handy on the road. Hey, give us those sacks and the basket! Fork 'em over! We'll find a use for them. What's that? Rope? Throw in the rope, too! Rope is also handy when you're traveling. If the carriage breaks down, you can tie things together.

STOREKEEPERS. We beg you, Your Excellency, take our part. What will become of us if you refuse to help us? We might as well hang ourselves.

KHLESTAKOV. Of course, of course. I'll do my best. (STOREKEEPERS *go out.*)

VOICES OF TWO WOMEN, *off-stage*. How dare you turn me away!
I'll complain to His Excellency!
Stop your shoving! You're hurting me!

KHLESTAKOV. Who's out there? (*Goes to the window.*) What's the trouble?

VOICES OF TWO WOMEN. Have pity on us, kind sir!
Order them to admit us, Your Honor.
Hear us out.

KHLESTAKOV. Let them in.

The LOCKSMITH'S WIFE and CORPORAL'S WIDOW enter.

LOCKSMITH'S WIFE, *bowing at KHLESTAKOV'S feet*. Have mercy on me, kind sir.

CORPORAL'S WIDOW. Have mercy . . .

KHLESTAKOV. But who are you?

CORPORAL'S WIDOW. Corporal Ivanov's widow, Your Honor.

LOCKSMITH'S WIFE. Fevronya Petrovna Poshlyopkina. My husband's the town locksmith, and I . . .

KHLESTAKOV. Slow up. One at a time. (*To the LOCKSMITH'S WIFE.*) Now, what can I do for you?

LOCKSMITH'S WIFE. Pity a poor woman. I beg you. It's the mayor. I pray God send all His plagues on him. May he, the swindler, and his children and his uncles and his aunts never have a moment's peace.

KHLESTAKOV. Why? What has he done?

LOCKSMITH'S WIFE. Shaved my husband's head and sent him off to be a soldier, that's what! And it wasn't even our turn. Oh, the snake! Besides, it's against the law—him being a married man.

KHLESTAKOV. How could he do such a thing?

LOCKSMITH'S WIFE. Oh, he did it all right—the bandit! God strike him down in this world and in the next too! May boils grow on his flesh and vermin crawl over his body, and on his aunt too, if he's got an aunt. And his father, if his father's still living, the stinking dog, he can choke and rot in hell. By right he ought to have taken the tailor's son, but the boy's a drunk; and besides, the parents bought him off with a fancy gift. So he came to me. "What do you need a husband for?" he says. "He's of no use to you any longer." Now that's my business. I'm the one that knows if he's of any use, you crook. "Your husband's a thief," he says. "Maybe he hasn't stolen anything yet, but it's all the same; he's bound to steal sooner or later. And anyhow, they'll take him next year," he says. Now what'll become of me without a husband, you bastard! I'm a helpless woman, and you're a son-of-a-bitch. I pray none of your relatives ever again sees the light of day, and if you've got a mother-in-law, may the old hag . . .

KHLESTAKOV. Enough, enough! (*Sees the old woman out.*) Well, what about you?

LOCKSMITH'S WIFE, *going out*. Don't forget me, kind sir. Have mercy!

CORPORAL'S WIDOW. It's the mayor, Your Honor. I've come to

Act 4,
Scene 9

complain about . . .

KHLESTAKOV. What is it? Make it short.

CORPORAL'S WIDOW. He flogged me.

KHLESTAKOV. What's that?

CORPORAL'S WIDOW. By mistake, Your Honor. Some of us women got into a fight in the marketplace. The police didn't show up in time—so they grabbed me. Whipped me so I couldn't sit down for two days.

KHLESTAKOV. Well, what can be done about it now?

CORPORAL'S WIDOW. Of course, what's done is done. But make him pay me a fine for the mistake. No sense in turning my back on a piece of good luck. And besides, I can use the money.

KHLESTAKOV. Very well. Run along now. I'll see to it. (*Hands extend through the window holding petitions.*) What now? (*Goes up to the window.*) No more. No more. I've had enough for today! (*Stepping back.*) Damn it, but I'm sick of them. Osip! Don't let anyone else in!

OSIP, *yelling through the window*. Get going! Scram! We've no time for you now. Try tomorrow!

The door opens, and an enigmatic figure in a shaggy coat emerges. He is unshaven, with a swollen lip and bandaged cheek. Several others appear behind him in perspective.

OSIP. Move on! Move on! Where do you think you're going? (*Shoves the foremost figure in the belly and pushes him into the hallway. Goes out with him, slamming the door.*) MARYA ANTONOVNA enters.)

MARYA. Oh!

KHLESTAKOV. Don't be frightened, miss.

MARYA. But I wasn't frightened.

KHLESTAKOV, *posturing*. Let me assure you, I'm very flattered to be taken for a man who . . . May I ask where you were going?

MARYA. Nowhere in particular.

KHLESTAKOV. And why, may I ask, weren't you going anywhere in particular?

MARYA. I thought Mama might be here . . .

KHLESTAKOV. But you must tell me, Why weren't you going

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Scene
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anywhere in particular?

MARYA. I'm afraid I disturbed you. You were occupied with important business.

KHLESTAKOV, *posturing*. Your eyes fascinate me as no business possibly could. No, you're incapable of disturbing me. On the contrary, you might offer me much pleasure.

MARYA. You talk as they do in the capital.

KHLESTAKOV. Only to such a lovely creature as yourself. Allow me the happiness of offering you a chair. Oh, how I wish it were a throne!

MARYA. Really, I shouldn't. . . I ought to be going. (*She sits.*)

KHLESTAKOV. That's a beautiful scarf you're wearing.

MARYA. Oh, you men. Anything to laugh at us provincials.

KHLESTAKOV. How I wish I were your scarf, miss, that I might embrace your lily white neck.

MARYA. What can you have in mind, sir? It's only a scarf. . . . Funny weather we're having lately.

KHLESTAKOV. Your lips, miss, entice me as no weather possibly could.

MARYA. The things you say! . . . Would you write a verse or two in my album as a keepsake? I expect you know many.

KHLESTAKOV. For you, miss, I'd do anything. What sort of verses would you like?

MARYA. Well, something pretty and up-to-date.

KHLESTAKOV. Ah, poetry! Nothing to it. I know loads of poems.

MARYA. Oh! Which will you recite for me?

KHLESTAKOV. Why recite them? I know them well enough.

MARYA. But I'm terribly fond of verses.

KHLESTAKOV. Well, all right. Here's one I wrote myself: "O my love is like a red, red rose, that's newly sprung in June; O my love is like the melody . . ." and I've got others too. . . . Only I can't remember them right now. Anyhow, it's all such rubbish. I'd much rather speak to you of my love. One glance from your eyes has . . . (*Drawing his chair closer.*)

MARYA. Love? What do you mean by that, sir . . . ? (*Moving her chair away.*) I know nothing about love . . .

KHLESTAKOV, *moving his chair closer*. Don't move your chair away.

It's more intimate sitting side by side.
 MARYA, *moving away*. Why side by side? We can be intimate at a distance.
 KHELESTAKOV, *moving closer*. Why at a distance? We can be even more intimate side by side.
 MARYA, *moving away*. But for what purpose?
 KHELESTAKOV, *moving closer*. Though we may appear to be side by side, pretend we're at a distance. How happy it would make me, miss, if I could enfold you in my arms.
 MARYA, *glancing out the window*. Look. Something flew by. A magpie, wasn't it?
 KHELESTAKOV, *kisses her on the shoulder and looks out the window*. Precisely.
 MARYA, *gets up indignantly*. What impudence! Now you've gone too far. . .
 KHELESTAKOV, *detaining her*. Forgive me, miss. I did it out of love, true love.
 MARYA. I'm not a common provincial, you know. (*Makes an effort to leave.*)
 KHELESTAKOV, *still detaining her*. It was love, true love. I didn't mean anything by it. Don't be angry, Marya Antonovna. I'll even get on my knees to beg your forgiveness. (*Falls to his knees.*) Forgive me, please forgive me. See, I'm on my knees.

ANNA ANDREYEVNA enters.

ANNA, *seeing KHELESTAKOV on his knees*. Oh, good heavens!

KHELESTAKOV, *getting up*. Damn!

ANNA, *to her daughter*. What's the meaning of this, young lady! Is this a way to behave?

MARYA. Mama, I was only. . .

ANNA. Leave the room! Do you hear? Out, out! And don't dare let me set eyes on you. (MARYA ANTONOVNA goes out in tears.) I must apologize for her, Your Excellency. You have my word, I was simply astounded. . .

KHELESTAKOV, *aside*. She's a tasty dish herself—not bad, not bad. (*Throws himself on his knees.*) Madam, you see me consumed by love.

Act 4,
 Scene
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ANNA. What are you doing, sir? On your knees? Oh, do get up. The floor is so dusty.

KHELESTAKOV. No. On my knees. Absolutely! Madam, decide my destiny—will it be life or death?

ANNA. I beg your pardon, sir, but I don't fully grasp the drift of your conversation. If I'm not mistaken, you're declaring your intentions regarding my daughter.

KHELESTAKOV. Not at all. It's you I'm in love with. My life hangs by a thread. If you reject my undying love, I no longer deserve to dwell in this vale of tears. My heart ablaze, I ask your hand.

ANNA. But allow me to point out—in a certain sense. . . I'm married.

KHELESTAKOV. Well, love knows no barriers, and as the poet says, " 'Tis the laws that condemn." We shall flee to a haven of shady streams. Your hand, madam, your hand.

MARYA ANTONOVNA runs in.

MARYA. Mama, Papa says you're to. . . (*Seeing KHELESTAKOV on his knees.*) Oh, good heavens!

ANNA. Well? Well? What is it? Such a scatterbrain! Rushing in here as if the house were on fire. Well, what are you gaping at? What ideas have popped into your head? A child, simply a child! No one would believe she's eighteen years old. When will you start behaving like a well-brought-up young lady? When will you finally learn to conduct yourself properly?

MARYA, *in tears*. Honestly, Mama, I didn't realize. . .

ANNA. Your head's always in a whirl. Why copy those Lyapkin-Tyapkin girls? Why them? There are better examples for you to follow—you have your mother!

KHELESTAKOV, *grabbing the daughter's hand*. Madam, don't stand in the way of our happiness! Give your blessing to our undying love.

ANNA, *in astonishment*. So it's her?

KHELESTAKOV. Decide! Life or death?

ANNA. There, you silly fool! It was you! It was for trash like yourself that His Excellency deigned to get down on his knees. Bursting in here like some lunatic! It would serve you right if I said No.

You don't deserve such happiness.
MARYA. I'll never do it again, Mama. I promise I won't.

The MAYOR bursts in.

MAYOR. Have mercy, Your Excellency, don't destroy me.
KHELESTAKOV. What's wrong?

MAYOR. I know the storekeepers have been complaining. On my word of honor, not half of it is true. They're the ones who cheat and shortchange their customers. The corporal's widow lied to you. As if I flogged her! It's a lie, I swear it, a damn lie! She flogged herself.

KHELESTAKOV. The corporal's widow can drop dead. I've got better things to think about.

MAYOR. Don't listen to them! They're all liars—a child would know better than to trust them. The whole town knows they're liars. And swindlers too. Of the worst sort!

ANNA. Are you aware of the honor His Excellency is conferring on us? He's asking for our daughter's hand in marriage.

MAYOR. What? What? . . . You're out of your mind! Please, Your Excellency, don't lose your temper. She's a bit touched. Her mother was the same way.

KHELESTAKOV. It's true. I'm asking for your daughter's hand. I'm in love.

MAYOR. I can't believe it, Your Excellency.

ANNA. Are you deaf? He just told you.

KHELESTAKOV. It's serious. I'm head over heels in love.

MAYOR. I can't believe my ears. I don't deserve such an honor.

KHELESTAKOV. Yes, it's so. If you don't give your consent, there's no telling what I might do.

MAYOR. I just can't believe it. You must be joking.

ANNA. What an imbecile! Can't you get it through your thick skull!

MAYOR. I still can't believe it.

KHELESTAKOV. Consent! Consent! I'm desperate. Who knows what I might do? I'll shoot myself, and they'll bring *you* to trial.

MAYOR. Trial? Oh my God! But I didn't do anything. I'm innocent. Spare me, spare me! I'll do whatever Your Excellency

Act 4,
Scene
12

asks. My head's spinning . . . What's happening to me? I'm turning into a complete fool.

ANNA. For heaven's sake, give them your blessing! (MARYA and KHELESTAKOV approach the MAYOR.)

MAYOR. God bless you, and don't forget, I'm innocent. (KHELESTAKOV and MARYA ANTONOVNA kiss. The MAYOR stares at them.) What the devil! It's true! It's true! (Wipes his eyes.) They're kissing. Holy Saints, they're kissing! What do you know—a bridegroom! (Shouts and prances for joy.) Hey, Anton! Hey, Anton! Three cheers for the mayor! How things have worked out!

OSIP enters.

OSIP. The horses are ready, sir.

KHELESTAKOV. Fine . . . give me a minute.

MAYOR. Your Excellency is leaving?

KHELESTAKOV. Yes, I'm on my way.

MAYOR. But when . . . I mean, didn't Your Excellency drop a hint about . . . a wedding?

KHELESTAKOV. Only for a moment . . . well, a day. To visit my uncle. The old boy's rich. I'll be back tomorrow.

MAYOR. Looking forward to your safe return, we won't presume to detain you.

KHELESTAKOV. Of course, of course. Back in a flash. Goodbye, my love. I can't begin to tell you what's in my heart. Goodbye, my darling! (Kisses MARYA ANTONOVNA'S hand.)

MAYOR. May I be of any service? I seem to recall you were a bit short on cash.

KHELESTAKOV. Oh no, no need for that. (After a moment's reflection.) But if you insist.

MAYOR. What would be sufficient?

KHELESTAKOV. Let's see now. You lent me two hundred—no, it was four—I don't want to take advantage of your mistake. Well, why not the same amount again, to make it an even eight.

MAYOR. At once, Your Excellency! (Takes the money out of his wallet.) And I happen to have it in brand new bills, too.

KHELESTAKOV, takes the bills and examines them. Very nice. As

they say, new bills mean a new life.

MAYOR. That's right, sir.

KHLESTAKOV. Goodbye then, Anton Antonovich! Much obliged for your hospitality. I've never had so warm a reception. Goodbye Anna Andreyevna. Goodbye, my dearest Marya Antonovna.

All go out. From off-stage:

KHLESTAKOV'S VOICE. Farewell, my angel, my heart. Farewell, my Marya Antonovna.

MAYOR'S VOICE. What? You're not going by public coach!

KHLESTAKOV'S VOICE. Well, yes. I'm used to it. Smooth rides give me a headache.

COACHMAN'S VOICE. Whoa! Whoa!

MAYOR'S VOICE. At least let me spread a rug on the seat. Shall I send for one?

KHLESTAKOV'S VOICE. No, don't bother. It's not necessary. But . . . fine. A rug can't do any harm.

MAYOR'S VOICE. Avdotya! Run to the storeroom for a rug—the best we've got—the Persian with the blue border. And make it quick!

COACHMAN'S VOICE. Whoa!

MAYOR'S VOICE. When may we expect Your Excellency?

KHLESTAKOV'S VOICE. Tomorrow or the day after.

OSIP'S VOICE. Say, is that our rug? Spread it out! And some hay on this side.

COACHMAN'S VOICE. Whoa!

OSIP'S VOICE. Right over there! Good! It'll be a grand ride! (*Slaps his hand on the rug.*) Now you can sit, Your Lordship!

KHLESTAKOV'S VOICE. Goodbye, Anton Antonovich!

MAYOR'S VOICE. Goodbye, Your Excellency!

WOMEN'S VOICES. Goodbye, Ivan Alexandrovich!

KHLESTAKOV'S VOICE. Goodbye, Mama!

COACHMAN'S VOICE. Giddyap, my beauties, giddyap.

Ring of coach bells. Curtain.

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Act 5,
Scene 1

Act Five

The same room. MAYOR, ANNA ANDREYEVNA, and MARYA ANTONOVNA.

MAYOR. What do you say, Anna Andreyevna? Eh? Did you ever expect anything like this! What a catch, dammit! Confess—it's beyond your wildest dreams. From the wife of a small-town mayor to . . . Ah! Damn, a man that powerful in our family!

ANNA. I knew it all along. It's extraordinary for you because you're so common. You've never met people of quality.

MAYOR. What's that? I'm a person of quality myself. But think about it, Anna Andreyevna—we've turned into a fine pair. Eh, Anna Andreyevna? We're flying high now, dammit! Just wait and see—I'll make it hot for them, sneaking about with their complaints and petitions! . . . Who's out there? (*POLICEMAN enters.*) Ah, it's you, Pugovitsyn. Get the storekeepers in here. I'll fix those sons-of-bitches! Complain about *me*! Goddamn Judases. Just wait, sweethearts! Before, I only twitted your mustaches; now I'll rip out your beards by the roots. . . . I want the name of everyone who so much as grumbled about me. Especially the grubby scribblers who wrote up their petitions. And announce it everywhere—the whole damn town ought to know. This is how God has chosen to honor their mayor. He's not marrying his daughter to a nobody; he's marrying her to the most important man in the world, a man who can do anything, anything! Shout it from the rooftops, ring the church bells, dammit! If we're going to celebrate, let's celebrate! (*POLICEMAN goes out.*) So, Anna Andreyevna? What's it going to be? Eh?

Where will we live? Here or Petersburg?

ANNA. The capital, of course. How could we possibly stay here?

MAYOR. Then it's the capital. But it wouldn't be bad here either.

Well, it's all over with being a mayor. To hell with it, eh, Anna Andreyevna?

ANNA. Certainly. What does a mayor amount to?

MAYOR. Well, Anna Andreyevna? Could we wangle a top rank now? After all, he pals around with the ministers and is in and out of the palace. He can arrange for a promotion, even make me a general. What do you think, Anna Andreyevna? Could I become a general?

ANNA. I should say so! Indeed you can.

MAYOR. Ah! Damn, a general's life must be glorious! They hang a sash across your shoulder. Which sash do you prefer—the red or the blue?

ANNA. What a question! The blue. It's more elegant.

MAYOR. So that's what you've set your heart on! But the red's not bad either. You know why I want to be a general? Adjutants and couriers gallop ahead of you, shouting, "Horses, give the general horses!" All those captains, mayors, and officials are screaming for horses, while you're as cool as a cucumber. You get to dine with the governor. And if some mayor shows up, they tell him: "Wait your turn. You're in the presence of a general!" Ho, ho! (*Bursts into hearty laughter.*) Yes, dammit, that's what I like about being a general!

ANNA. Your tastes are so coarse, my dear. Remember, we shall have to change our way of life completely. You won't be running around with a judge who kennels dogs in his parlor. Or a fool like Zemlyanika. On the contrary, your friends will be the most refined aristocrats. . . . Only I'm apprehensive about your behavior. The shocking things you say! Words never heard in polite society.

MAYOR. So what? Words can't hurt.

ANNA. That's all very well for the mayor of a provincial town. But life in a metropolis is entirely different.

MAYOR. Yes, I've heard they have two kinds of fish there—eels and smelts. They make your mouth water at the first taste.

ANNA. Fish! Is that all you can think about! I am determined to have the finest home in the capital. I'll have my boudoir drenched in perfume. It will be impossible to enter without sniffing. (*She squints and sniffs.*) Ah! Delicious!

The STOREKEEPERS enter.

MAYOR. Aha! So here you are, my fine friends!

STOREKEEPERS, *bowing*. We wish you the best of health, Your Honor!

MAYOR. So, my pets, how's it going, eh? How's business? You tea-swilling peddlars! Went and complained, eh? You thieving bastards, double dealing scum, cross-eyed swindlers! Complained? Well, did it get you much? Thought you'd see me clapped behind bars? Eh? . . . You know what it'll get you? A pack of screaming devils and an old witch stuffed into your teeth, that's what!

ANNA. Dear heavens! What language, Antosha!

MAYOR, *irritated*. I can't worry about language now. . . . That inspector you complained to—are you aware he's engaged to my daughter? What do you say to that? Eh? Oooo! I'll fix you! Hoodwinking people left and right. . . . You chisel the government out of a hundred thousand by supplying rotten cloth, donate twenty yards of the stuff to charity, and expect a medal for it! If they caught on, they'd. . . . Look at them! Strutting about with their fat bellies. "We're merchants, don't anyone touch us, we're as good as the nobility." Some noblemen! You stinking swine! A nobleman has some education. They may whip him in school, but it's for a purpose. So he can learn something useful. But you! Before you've even memorized the Lord's Prayer, you're shortchanging. And when your paunches are filled out and your pockets are bulging, there's no talking to you. Look at them! God's gift to the world! As if guzzling sixteen samovars of tea a day makes them important. Well, I spit on you! And I spit on your importance!

STOREKEEPERS, *bowing*. We were wrong, Anton Antonovich.

MAYOR. Complain, will you? What about the bridge? Who helped you with your scheming then! Charging twenty thousand for

Act 5,
Scene 2

lumber and not even using a hundred rubles worth. I helped you, you old goats! Did you forget that? Had I squealed, I could have had the lot of you shipped off to Siberia! What do you say to that? Eh?

ONE OF THE STOREKEEPERS. We were wrong, Anton Antonovich. The devil tempted us. We swear, we'll never do it again. Anything you ask, only forgive us.

MAYOR. Forgive! Now you're groveling at my feet. How come? I'll tell you how come! Because I'm on top. If the scales had tipped the other way, you'd have trampled me into the mud, you bastards.

STOREKEEPERS, *bowing to the ground*. Spare us, Anton Antonovich.

MAYOR. Now it's "Spare us, spare us!" But what did you say then? Eh? I'd like to take you by the throats and . . . (*With a wave of the hand*.) Well, God can forgive you! I'm not one to bear a grudge. But watch your step from now on! My daughter isn't marrying just anybody. Make sure your congratulations are appropriate to the occasion. Do you follow me? There'll be no getting off with a bit of sturgeon or a bag of sugar this time. Now get going!

The STOREKEEPERS go out. The JUDGE and DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES enter.

JUDGE, *still in the doorway*. If we can credit the rumors, Anton Antonovich, fortune has certainly smiled upon you.

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. Congratulations on your extraordinary good fortune. I was sincerely delighted to hear it. (*Kisses ANNA ANDREYEVNA'S and MARYA ANTONOVNA'S hands*.) Anna Andreyevna! Marya Antonovna!

RASTAKOVSKY, *entering*. Warmest congratulations, Anton Antonovich. God grant you and the young couple long life. May he bless you with a numerous posterity of grandchildren, great-grandchildren . . . Anna Andreyevna! Marya Antonovna! (*Kisses their hands*.)

KOROBKIN, *his WIFE, and LYULYUKOV enter*.

Act 5,
Scene 3

KOROBKIN. It's a privilege to congratulate you, Anton Antonovich. Anna Andreyevna! Marya Antonovna! (*Kisses their hands*.)

KOROBKIN'S WIFE. My heartfelt congratulations on your happiness, Anna Andreyevna.

LYULYUKOV. Permit me to congratulate you, Anna Andreyevna! (*Kisses her hand and, turning to the audience, clicks his tongue with an air of bravado*.) Marya Antonovna! It's a great pleasure! (*Kisses her hand, turning to the audience with the same bravado*.)

A crowd of guests in tails enters and kisses ANNA ANDREYEVNA'S and MARYA ANTONOVNA'S hands, repeating:
"Anna Andreyevna! Marya Antonovna!" BOBCHINSKY and DOBCHINSKY *push to the front*.

BOBCHINSKY. I have the honor of congratulating you . . .

DOBCHINSKY. Anton Antonovich! I have the honor of congratulating you.

BOBCHINSKY. . . . on your good fortune!

DOBCHINSKY. Anna Andreyevna!

BOBCHINSKY. Anna Andreyevna! (*They collide, banging their heads together*.)

DOBCHINSKY. Marya Antonovna! (*Kisses her hand*.) It's an honor! You'll be supremely happy. Imagine! Parading about in gold dresses, dining on delicate soups. What fun you'll have!

BOBCHINSKY, *interrupting*. Marya Antonovna, it's an honor! God grant you prosperity, piles of money, and a bouncing baby boy—a tiny one (*indicates with his hand*), so small he can fit in the palm of your hand. Oh, how the little rascal will cry! "Wah! Wah! Wah!"

Several more guests, among them the SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS and his WIFE, enter and kiss ANNA ANDREYEVNA'S and MARYA ANTONOVNA'S hands.

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS. I have the honor . . .

SUPERINTENDENT'S WIFE, *dashing ahead of him*. Congratulations, Anna Andreyevna! (*They kiss*.) I was so thrilled to hear the news. They told me, "Anna Andreyevna is marrying off her

daughter." "Oh good heavens!" I thought. I was so thrilled, I just had to tell my husband. "Lukánchik," I said, "how wonderful for Anna Andreyevna!" "Well," I thought, "thank God for that!" And I said to Lukanchik, "Lukanchik, I'm so delighted I can't wait to tell Anna Andreyevna." "Oh my," I thought, "Anna Andreyevna was always searching for a good match, and what luck! Things have worked out just as she wanted." I was so thrilled I cried and cried. There I was, sobbing away. Finally Lukanchik said to me, "Why are you crying, Nástenka?" "Lukanchik," I said, "I don't know myself. The tears just keep streaming down my face."

MAYOR. Please be seated, ladies and gentlemen. Mishka, bring some more chairs.

The GUESTS sit. The POLICE CAPTAIN and POLICEMEN enter.

POLICE CAPTAIN. Allow me to congratulate Your Honor, and wish you a long and prosperous life.

MAYOR. Thank you, thank you. You may sit, gentlemen. (*They sit.*)

JUDGE. Please, Anton Antonovich, can you tell us, step by step, how all this came about?

MAYOR. It came about in an extraordinary fashion. His Excellency was kind enough to do the proposing himself.

ANNA. And in the most respectful and refined manner imaginable. He spoke beautifully. "Anna Andreyevna," he said, "I'm prepared to do anything out of respect for your rare qualities." Such an excellent man, extremely well-bred, and of the noblest principles. . . . "Believe me, Anna Andreyevna, life without you isn't worth living. Admiration for your rare virtues compels me. . . ."

MARYA. Oh Mama! He said that to me.

ANNA. Hush! What do you know? Mind your own business!

"Anna Andreyevna, I'm overwhelmed by your. . ." Oh, he said the most flattering things! I was about to reply, "We don't dare dream of such an honor," when he fell to his knees and spoke like a true gentleman—"Anna Andreyevna! Don't deny me my happiness. My life is in your hands."

MARYA. Really, Mama! He was speaking to me.

ANNA. Yes, of course. There was something about you too. I don't deny that.

MAYOR. He gave us quite a scare. Kept shouting, "I'll shoot myself, I'll shoot myself."

GUESTS. Is that so!

Really?

JUDGE. Well I'll be damned!

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS. It must be fate.

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. Not fate, gentlemen. Fate is too fickle.

I'd call it a reward for true merit. (*Aside.*) Some pigs have all the luck!

JUDGE. How about it, Anton Antonovich? I'll sell you the puppy we were dickering about.

MAYOR. I can't be bothered about puppies at a moment like this.

JUDGE. Well, if not that one, perhaps another.

SUPERINTENDENT'S WIFE. Oh Anna Andreyevna, you can't imagine how thrilled I am!

KOROBKIN. May I inquire where our illustrious guest is now? I heard he had to leave town.

MAYOR. Oh yes. But just for the day. On very important business.

ANNA. To visit his uncle and ask his blessing.

MAYOR. To ask his uncle's blessing, but tomorrow he's sure to. . . . (*Sneezes. A roaring chorus of "Bless you!"*) Thank you! He'll be back tomorrow and. . . . (*Sneezes. The same roar of blessings.*)

Loudest are:

POLICE CAPTAIN. Best of health, Your Honor!

BOBCHINSKY. May you live a hundred years!

DOBCHINSKY. A hundred and fifty!

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. Choke, you bastard!

KOROBKIN'S WIFE. Go to hell!

MAYOR. Thank you very much! I wish you the same.

ANNA. We're planning to live in the capital. The atmosphere here is too. . . . too provincial. I must say, it's most distasteful. As for my husband, he will be promoted to the rank of general.

MAYOR. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, I, I, dammit, I'd really love to be a general.

Act 5,
Scene 4

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS. May God grant it then.

RASTAKOVSKY. With God all things are possible.

JUDGE. A great ship travels far.

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. Honors according to merit.

JUDGE, *aside*. A neat trick, making him a general! Like putting a saddle on a cow! No, old man, not by a long shot. There are better men than you around.

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES, *aside*. So now he's worming his way in among the generals. What's worse, he may even make it. God knows but the son-of-a-bitch swaggers enough. (*Addressing the MAYOR.*) You won't forget your old friends, will you Anton Antonovich?

JUDGE. If something turns up, I mean if we should require your assistance, you won't refuse us your patronage?

KOROBKIN. Next year I'll be taking my son to the capital to enter him in the government service. Please, Anton Antonovich, help the poor boy out, be his protector.

MAYOR. I'm prepared to do whatever is possible.

ANNA. Antosha! You're always making promises. There won't be time for that sort of thing. And why in the world should you burden yourself with such obligations?

MAYOR. Why not, my dear? Sometimes a man can arrange things.

ANNA. I don't doubt it. But one simply doesn't take every nonentity under his wing.

KOROBKIN'S WIFE. Did you hear how she talks about us?

A WOMAN GUEST. She's always been like that. Seat a peasant at the table and she'll stick her feet on it.

The POSTMASTER bursts in, breathless, with an unsealed letter in his hand.

POSTMASTER. Ladies and gentlemen! Prepare yourselves for a shock! The man we took for the government inspector wasn't the government inspector.

ALL. Not the government inspector?

POSTMASTER. Not in the slightest. I found it out from this letter.

MAYOR. Letter? Letter? What letter?

POSTMASTER. *His* letter! Someone handed me a letter at the post

Act 5,
Scene 5

office. I couldn't help noticing the address—Post Street! It bowled me over. My first thought was, "He's reporting me for some irregularity in our postal system." Naturally, I opened it.

MAYOR. How could you?

POSTMASTER. I don't know myself. A mysterious force urged me on. I was about to send it off express when my curiosity got the better of me. It was incredible. Something irresistible kept tugging at me, drawing me on. In one ear I heard, "Don't open it or you're a dead duck," while in the other a devil whispered, "Go ahead, open it, open it!" I touched the seal—and fire ran through my veins. I opened it—and turned to ice. . . yes, ice! My hands shook and everything went black.

MAYOR. How dare you open the letter of such an important personage!

POSTMASTER. That's just it. He's not powerful and he's not even a personage.

MAYOR. Then what is he in your opinion?

POSTMASTER. He's a nobody, a nothing. The devil knows what he is.

MAYOR, *furious*. What do you mean, a nobody and a nothing? How dare you call him a nobody and a nothing! I'll have you arrested.

POSTMASTER. Who? You?

MAYOR. Yes, me!

POSTMASTER. You don't have the authority.

MAYOR. Are you aware that he's marrying my daughter, that I'm to be an important person myself, and that I'm about to pack you off to Siberia?

POSTMASTER. What's this about Siberia, Anton Antonovich? Before running on about Siberia you'd better let me read this letter. Gentlemen! Do I have your permission?

ALL. Read it! Read it!

POSTMASTER, *reads*. "My dear Tryapichkin, some amazing things have been happening to me. On my way here, an infantry officer cleaned me out of my last kopeck. The innkeeper was set to have me thrown into jail, when suddenly the whole town took me for a government inspector. It must have been my Petersburg clothes

Act 5,
Scene 6

and manners. I'm staying at the mayor's, living it up, flirting like mad with his wife and daughter. I haven't decided who to start with. Probably the mother—she looks ready to go all the way at a wink. . . .

"Remember how hard up we were, the meals we sponged, and the time the waiter threw me out on my ear for charging our dinner to the king of England? Now the tables are turned. They're falling all over themselves to lend me money. What oddballs! You'd die laughing. Why not put them into some of those sketches you write for the papers? Take the mayor—as dumb as an ox. . . ."

MAYOR. Impossible! He couldn't have said that.

POSTMASTER, *showing him the letter*. Here! Read!

MAYOR, *reads*. "Dumb as an ox." It can't be! You wrote it yourself.

POSTMASTER. How could I?

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. Read on!

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS. Read!

POSTMASTER, *reads*. "The mayor's as dumb as an ox. . . ."

MAYOR. Oh hell! Do you have to repeat it? The letter's bad enough as is.

POSTMASTER, *reading*. Hm. . . hm. . . hmmmm. . . "as an ox. The postmaster's a decent fellow but. . . ." (*Stops*.) Uh, there's something rude about me, too.

MAYOR. No! Read it!

POSTMASTER. But what for?

MAYOR. Dammit, if you're going to read, then read! All of it!

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. Here, let me have it. (*Puts on his eyeglasses and reads*.) "The postmaster is the spitting image of that half-wit watchman in my office. The son-of-a-bitch must drink like a fish."

POSTMASTER, *addressing the audience*. The miserable brat! He ought to be whipped!

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES, *reading*. "The director of chari-ti-ti-ti. . . ."

KOROBKIN. Why did you stop?

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. The handwriting's unclear. Besides,

anyone can see he's a scoundrel.

KOROBKIN. Give it here! My eyesight's better than yours.

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES, *holding on to the letter*. We can skip that part. Further on it's legible.

POSTMASTER. Read it all! We didn't omit anything before.

ALL. Let him have it, Artemy Filippovich! Give him the letter. (*To KOROBKIN*.) Read it.

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. Just a minute. (*Hands over the letter, covering the passage with his finger*.) Here. . . start from here. (*All crowd around*.)

KOROBKIN, *reads*. "The director of charities is a pig in trousers."

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES, *to audience*. It's not even witty. Where do you find a pig in trousers?

KOROBKIN, *reading*. "The superintendent of schools reeks of onions."

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS, *to audience*. So help me God, I never touch onions.

JUDGE, *aside*. Thank heavens, there's nothing about me.

KOROBKIN. "The judge. . . ."

JUDGE, *aside*. Uh oh! Here it comes! (*Aloud*.) Gentlemen, this letter is far too long. What's the sense of reading such rubbish?

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS. No!

POSTMASTER. Read on!

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. Every word!

KOROBKIN. "Judge Lyapkin-Tyapkin is the ultimate in *mauvais ton*. . . ." (*Stops*.) Hm, must be French.

JUDGE. God knows what it means. If it means "crook," well, all right. But it might be worse.

KOROBKIN, *reading*. "On the whole, though, they're a good-natured bunch. Very hospitable. So long, Tryapichkin, old pal. I intend to follow your example and take up literature. Life's dreary, my friend. In the long run a man hungers for spiritual nourishment. I'll just have to devote myself to the higher things in life. Write me in Saratov." It's addressed, "Ivan Vasilyevich Tryapichkin, Esq., St. Petersburg, 97 Post Street, courtyard entrance, third floor, on the right."

ONE OF THE LADIES. How shocking! It's a slap in the face!

MAYOR. He's slit my throat, slit it from ear to ear. I'm finished, played out, dead! . . . I can't see straight. Pig snouts everywhere—no faces! Nothing! . . . Bring him back! Bring him back!
(*Waves his arms.*)

POSTMASTER. It's hopeless! As luck would have it, I ordered the stable man to give him the fastest horses available.

KOROBKIN'S WIFE. This is simply . . . ! I've never seen such confusion!

JUDGE. But dammit, gentlemen, he borrowed three-hundred rubles from me.

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. And three hundred from me, too.

POSTMASTER, *sighing*. And three hundred from me.

BOBCHINSKY. From me and Pyotr Ivanovich—sixty-five. Yes, sir!

JUDGE, *spreading his arms in perplexity*. How could we have been so mistaken, gentlemen!

MAYOR, *striking his forehead*. How could I? How could I? I'm an old fool, an ass! My brains have gone soft with age! . . . Thirty years of service, and not a single merchant, not a single contractor put one over on me. I've cheated the cheats and swindled the swindlers. Thieves and frauds willing to steal from their own mothers fell into my clutches. Three governors in a row—I hoodwinked every one of them! What the hell are governors!
(*With a wave of the hand.*) Governors aren't worth a damn!

ANNA. I just can't believe it, Antosha. He's engaged to our Mashenka.

MAYOR, *furious*. Engaged! Engaged! Stuff your engagement! . . .
(*In a frenzy.*) Look at me, look at me, I want the whole world, every Christian man and woman, to look at me. See what a fool he's made of the mayor. Call him fool, fool, the old son-of-a-bitch! (*Shakes his fist at himself.*) Oh you thick-nosed idiot! Taking that squirt, that worm, for an important person! And now he's bouncing along the road, carriage bells jingling, spreading the story everywhere. He'll turn you into the laughingstock of all Russia. What's worse, some cheap hack will stick you into a comedy. That's what hurts. He won't show respect for your position. And they'll all grin and clap.
(*Addressing the audience.*) What are you laughing at? Laugh at

Act 5,
Scene 7

yourselves! (*Stamping in fury.*) I'd love to get my hands on those writers! Ooooooh! You pen pushers! Sniveling liberals! Devil's seed! I'd tie you into knots, pound you into jelly, kick the lot of you down to hell! (*Strikes out with his fist and stamps on the floor. A pause.*) . . . I still can't get over it. What they say is true, "Those who God wishes to destroy, He first deprives of reason." What was there about that birdbrain to make us take him for a government inspector? Nothing! Not that much!
(*Shows his little finger.*) And yet everyone was suddenly yapping: "It's the inspector! The inspector!" Who started the rumor? Answer me! Who?

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES, *spreading his arms*. For the life of me, I can't explain it. We were in a fog. The devil blinded us.

JUDGE. You want to know who started it? I'll tell you who—these two geniuses! (*Points at DOBCHINSKY and BOBCHINSKY.*)

BOBCHINSKY. Not me, honestly, not me. It never crossed my mind.

DOBCHINSKY. Not me either. I had nothing to do with it.

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. Of course it was you!

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS. No question about it. They came running from the inn, raving like lunatics. "He's here, he's here, and he won't pay his bill." Some prize you found!

MAYOR. It must have been you! Damned liars, town gossips!

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. Go to hell! And take your inspector and your tales along!

MAYOR. Snooping around town, making trouble—that's all you're good for. Windbags, rumor mongers, twittering magpies!

JUDGE. Bunglers!

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS. Dunces!

DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES. Potbellied runts!

All crowd around them.

BOBCHINSKY. I swear to God, it wasn't me. It was Pyotr Ivanovich.

DOBCHINSKY. Oh no, Pyotr Ivanovich. You said it first.

BOBCHINSKY. No, Pyotr Ivanovich. You said it first.

[A GENDARME enters.

Act 5,
Scene 8

GENDARME. His Excellency the government inspector has arrived from the capital. In the name of the emperor he demands your immediate presence at the inn.

The words strike everyone like a thunderbolt. The ladies let out a simultaneous cry of consternation. The entire group changes its position suddenly and remains frozen.

Dumb Scene

The MAYOR stands in the middle like a post, his arms extended and his head thrown back. On his right, his wife and daughter, their bodies straining to reach him. Behind them, the POSTMASTER transformed into the shape of a question mark addressed to the audience. Behind him, the SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS in a state of innocent bewilderment. Behind him, at the far end of the stage, three LADIES leaning toward each other and directing very satirical looks at the MAYOR's family. On the MAYOR's left, the DIRECTOR OF CHARITIES, his head inclined slightly to the side as if listening for something. Behind him, the JUDGE, his arms extended, squatting almost to the floor, and moving his lips as if about to whistle or mutter, "We're in for it now, my friends!" Behind him, KOROBKIN, turned to the audience, winking and making a sarcastic allusion to the MAYOR. Behind him, at the far end of the stage, BOBCHINSKY and DOBCHINSKY, arms straining toward one another, mouths gaping, and eyes popping. The other GUESTS simply stand like posts. The frozen group holds its position for almost a minute and a half. Curtain.

The Gamblers

An Incident out of the Remote Past