

THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR

Nikolai Gogol, translated by Stephen Mulrine

KHLESTAKOV: (*entering*) Here, take this.

Hands OSIP his cap and cane.

HAVE YOU BEEN FLOPPED OUT ON MY BED AGAIN?

OSIP: Now why would I do that? D'you think I've never seen a bed before?

KHLESTAKOV: That's a damn lie. Look at it, it's all rumpled.

OSIP: What would I want with your bed? D'you think I don't know a bed when I see one? I've got legs, I can stand. What do I need your bed for?

KHLESTAKOV: (*pacing around the room*) Look in that pouch, see if there's any tobacco.

OSIP: Tobacco? That's a laugh. You smoked the last of it days ago.

KHLESTAKOV continues pacing up and down, pursing his lips into various shapes. Finally he speaks, loudly and resolutely.

KHLESTAKOV: Right, OSIP - now you listen to me!

OSIP: Yes, sir - what is it?

KHLESTAKOV: (*loudly, but not quite so resolutely*) You go down there, right?

OSIP: Down where?

KHLESTAKOV: (*his voice no longer either loud or resolute, but almost pleading*) Downstairs, to the dining-room ... And tell them ... Tell them I'd like a bite of lunch.

OSIP: No chance. I'm not going down there.

KHLESTAKOV: What? How dare you, you ignorant lout!

OSIP: Even supposing I did go, it'd make no odds. The landlord says he's not giving us no more food.

KHLESTAKOV: Eh? What damnable cheek!

OSIP: And what's more, he says, I'm going to see the Mayor, he says - that's over two weeks now your master hasn't paid. You and that master of yours, he says, are a right pair of deadbeats, and your master's a nasty piece of work. We've seen your kind before, he says - nothing but riff-raff, the scum of the earth.

KHLESTAKOV: Yes, and you're delighted now, aren't you, you pig, telling me all this!

OSIP: We can't let just anybody come here, he says, and settle themselves in and run up a bill - we'd never get rid of them. I'm not joking, he says, I'm going to the police right now to make a complaint, to have you two flung in jail.

KHLESTAKOV: All right, that's enough, you idiot! Now, go and tell him what I said. Damned ill-mannered brute.

OSIP: Look, I'd better send the landlord up to see you himself.

KHLESTAKOV: What? What do I want with the landlord? You go and tell him.

OSIP: Honestly, sir, it's no ...

KHLESTAKOV: All right, then, damn you! Send the landlord up.

OSIP exits.

God, I'm absolutely ravenous! I went for a stroll, thought it might kill my appetite, but it hasn't, damn it. Yes, and if I hadn't gone on that binge in Penza, we'd have enough money to get home. That infantry captain really took me to the cleaners, he plays a marvellous game of faro, the swine. I couldn't have been sat down for more than quarter of an hour, and he skinned me alive. Even so, I was still raring to have another shot at him. Never got the chance, though. God, what a miserable dump this is. You can't even get credit at the greengrocer's. It's absolutely disgusting. (*Begins whistling a popular aria, then a folk song, finally anything that comes into his head.*) Well, looks like nobody's coming.

Enter Waiter.

WAITER: The landlord sent me to ask what you wanted.

KHLESTAKOV: Ah, good day, my dear chap! How are you keeping?

WAITER: I'm fine, thanks be to God.

KHLESTAKOV: And how are things in the hotel line? Going well, I trust?

WAITER: Very well, thanks be to God.

KHLESTAKOV: Plenty of guests?

WAITER: Enough to be going on with.

KHLESTAKOV: Listen, my dear chap, they haven't sent up my lunch yet, so if you wouldn't mind hurrying them on a bit - I've some urgent business after lunch, you see.

WAITER: The landlord says you're not allowed any more. And he's going to make a complaint about you to the Mayor's office today.

KHLESTAKOV: What d'you mean complaint? My dear fellow, I've got to eat, you can see for yourself. Good Lord, I'm wasting away here. I'm absolutely starving, I tell you, this is serious.

WAITER: Yes, sir. He said: 'I'm giving him no more lunches, till he's paid for what he's already had.' Those were his very words, sir.

KHLESTAKOV: Well, reason with him, talk him round.

WAITER: And what am I supposed to tell him?

KHLESTAKOV: Explain to him, in all seriousness, that I need to eat. Money doesn't come into it.

The man's obviously a peasant - he thinks because he can go a whole day without food, everybody else can. Well, that's news to me!

WAITER: All right, I'll tell him. (*Exits*).

KHLESTAKOV: God, this is frightful, if he really won't give us anything to eat. I've never felt so hungry in my whole life. Maybe I could flog some of my clothes? A pair of trousers, say? No, I'd rather starve, than go home in anything but my best Petersburg outfit. Yes, what a pity Joachim's wouldn't hire me that carriage in Petersburg - dammit, that would've been something, rolling home in a splendid coach-and-four, driving like a demon up to some neighbour's porch, with the lights blazing, and OSIP in livery perched up behind. I can just imagine them all going wild: 'Who is it? What's going on?' And then some flunkey enters (*Draws himself up and mimics a footman*): 'Ivan Aleksandrovich KHLESTAKOV, from St Petersburg - is Madame receiving today?' These country bumpkins don't even know what 'receiving' means. When some oaf of a landowner pays them a call, he barges straight through to the drawing-room, like a bear. And you can march right up to one of their pretty little daughters: 'Delighted to meet you, I'm sure ... ' (*Rubs his hands together and bows*) Ugh! (*Spits*) Oh Lord, I feel sick, I'm so hungry.

OSIP re-enters, followed by the Waiter.

KHLESTAKOV: Well?

OSIP: They're bringing lunch now.

KHLESTAKOV: (*claps his hands delightedly and jumps up on a chair*) Lunch! They're bringing lunch!