

MARCH 13, 2026

THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR

A NEW MUSICAL COMEDY

Adapted from Nikolai Gogol's 1836 play *Revizor*
by Andy Mangin and Jeff Takacs.

Music by Jeff Takacs.

For a full script and score, contact Jeff Takacs at
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To hear musical samples, go to [The Government
Inspector website](#).

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THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR

Characters

Anton Antonovich Skvoznik-Dmukhanovsky — the Mayor of a provincial Russian town

Anna — the Mayor's Wife

Maria — the teenage daughter of Anton and Maria

John Khlestakov — a traveler from Petersburg

Osip/Sofiya — John's servant, disguised as a man

Larisa — Director of Schools & the Board of Education

Amos — Judge and Director of Courts & the Department of Corrections

Irina — Director of Hospitals

Dennis — Director of Parks & Recreation

Dobchinsky — a gopher to the mayor

Eliza — a servant to the mayor's household

Valet — an employee at the inn

Tailor — a merchant in the town

Barber — a barber, cosmetologist, and money launderer

Various servants and valets.

Casting Note: no restrictions on gender, race, or other casting considerations!

Setting

The Great Room of a mayoral residence and a room at a dingy roadside inn. Provincial Russia in the time of the Tsars. Roughly 1830s.

Act I

Scene 1. Mayor's House

The overture plays as DOBCHINSKY enters and opens the window to a fair morning. He gives the room a twice-over as ELIZA enters with a samovar of tea. The BARBER, a personal stylist to the Mayor's wife and launderer of spoils, wheels in a spinning barber's chair. One by one, the four heads of the governmental offices arrive and prepare for the usual end-of-week meeting with the mayor. The overture gives way to a song.

Formatting note: for clarity, song lyrics are centered, spoken dialogue is left-justified.

Song: "A Little Off the Top"

Dennis

I love the sun

All

Do you?

Dennis

I do!

All

Why do you love the sun?

Dennis

I'll tell you

All

Tell us true!

Dennis

I'm the Director of Parks and Recreation
And when the sun comes out the kids do too
And they play all day on the jungle gym
And they skin their knee and they bruise their shin
And they pop a tooth and they lose an eye

And they rip their pants and they start to cry
And then it's time for a fundraising drive...
...to comply with the latest safety standards of the jungle gym...

All

And half the proceeds go to him

Irina

I like influenza

All

Do ya?

Irina

I da!

All

Why do you like the flu?

Irina

I'll tell you

All

Tell us true!

Irina

I am the director of hospitals and clinics
And when the flu arrives the bodies ache
Fatigue and fever, nighttime shakes
And that's what I get out my rake
Cause the worse it gets and the more it hurts
The rubles fall from every purse
And if it happens to get even worse...

All

She's the one who owns the hearse!

Mayor enters as the music plays.

All

Good morning, Mayor! Good morning!

Mayor

Good morning.

Dobchinsky

Cup of tea, Mayor?

Mayor

Yes, please.

Larisa

I run the schools and the Board of Education

Amos

I run the courts and the Department of Corrections

Larisa

I have the children up through graduation

Amos

Then I get the children for rehabilitation

Larisa and Amos

And we both need urgent enrichment funding for...Administration.

Mayor

Looks to be a beautiful day

Feels like something good is on the way

Hey...there's a blue jay.

Barber

I love a haircut

All

Do you?

Barber

I do!

All

Why do you love a haircut?

Barber

I'll tell you

All

Tell us true!

Barber

I am the barber, I cut the hair
If you need a friend or a shave, I've got the chair
Take a load off sit yourself right down
If you're in the mood, I'll spin you around

And then I'll take a
Little off the top, and a little off the side
A little off the bottom, and I take you for a ride

(He spins one of the officials in a chair and coins fall out of the official's pocket. Somebody sweeps up the money and gives it to the Mayor, who counts.)

I take a little off the top and a little off the bottom
A little off the back and then you know you got 'em
Oh...

All

(singing and exchanging money)

A little off the top, a little off the sides
A little off the bottom

Barber

Leave it wet or blow it dry?

You want a flat top, Popovich?

Everybody does it
You want the shears, Vladimir
Or should I just go ahead and buzz it?

All

A little off the top
A little off the sides

Barber

It's a living
It's larceny
It's the fine print, the hidden fees
It's the cost of doing business, and it costs just what I please!

Get in the chair, chump, it's a haircut

We can do it for the gents
We can do it for the hers
All the way from Vladivostok to Petersburg...

All

And all the proceeds go to us!

ANNA, the Mayor's wife, enters the shop wearing an elegant nightgown. She plops into the barber's chair.

All

Good morning, Anna!

Mayor

Good morning, my sweet wife.

Anna

Husband. Crooks. Barber, gimme a face.

Barber

What kind of day will this day be?

Anna

Long. Full. Dramatic.

Barber

What kind of face does a day like today need?

Anna

Long. Full. Dramatic.

Barber

Hair. Red, blonde, or *brun*?

Anna

Whatever says, "Give her room."

Barber

What's on the docket for the Mayor's wife?

Anna

A ribbon-cutting shindig then a Walk For Life.
They'll bring the scissors, I'll bring a knife.
I'll make a plea for charity and I'll extend my hand
The trick is to expect them to fulfill what you demand.

Barber

Your energy is boundless!

Anna

Because I am bound! To know that Petersburg is just a five-day ride away, and there the ladies have French silk, Belgian danishes, and Danish melancholy...every day I dig another inch through the wall of my cell.

Dennis

I'll sell you a shovel.

Mayor

Larissa, what's on your docket?

Larisa

Two of my teachers are suing...

Amos

Suit denied.

Larisa

You're the best, Amos.

Mayor

Dennis?

Dennis

Told the ref to call the fight if Amos's boy is on the ropes.

Amos

You're the best, Dennis.

Mayor

Irina?

Irina

Five deaths. Six or seven if we're lucky. Need the beds.

MARIA, the daughter of the Mayor and Anna, enters.

Mayor

Good morning, my little blemish.

Maria

Good morning, father.

All

Good morning, Maria!

Maria

Good morning, everybody.

Dobchinsky

The sun has returned to the steppe! Good morning, Maria!

Maria

And the night to his bedchamber goes! Good morning, Dobchinsky!

Anna

Raise the cheekbones, Barber.

Maria

Father, Mother, I want to go to the ball.

Anna

Oh, you'll never get a date with a face like that.

Maria

But that's the thing. I have been asked.

Anna

By whom?

Maria

Well, by fifteen of them.

Dobchinsky

And the ones who didn't ask are cowards!

Anna

Every generation declines in taste.

Mayor

If it is true that one did ask you, my ugly little liar goose, he is one who seeks the favor of association with the mayor.

Dobchinsky

But her beauty, her wit!

Mayor

It is the fate of every cod-faced mayoral daughter: none is worthy of her, and she is worthy of

none.

Maria

Then I will never go to a ball.

Mayor

Well, that's fine then, my little babushka-before-her-time.

Maria

Then I'll never find a husband!

Mayor

And I will never have to pay your dowry!

Maria

Then I will never leave the house!

Mayor

And that's just how your mother wants it.

Anna

Now hold on just a second. I want it both ways.

Irina

Mayor, let's think this over.

Dennis

Yes, I think we should.

Irina

Why would you not let her go to the ball?

Mayor

Well, for one: I'd have to buy her a dress: 100 rubles! Then just imagine they were to fall in love! Then I owe his father a dowry! Who invented this practice?

Larisa

A father of boys.

Irina

You're not thinking about this right. Irina owns the dress shop and the tux shop. They can dine at Dennis's restaurant. Security contract goes to Amos's brother. You're paying us our fees, but since you, the Mayor, are responsible for the law and order that ensures the safety of the proceedings of businesses and balls, you are due referral fees of, oh let's call it 20% more than whatever you paid.

Dennis

And we can write off the taxes on the transactions because...

All

...it's all for the children.

Dennis:

You've turned a profit in the snap of a finger.

Maria

May I go, father?

Anna snaps her fingers.

Maria

Thank you, mother.

Anna

(to Maria)

Fifteen have asked you. Ha! When I was your age, fifteen *thousand* asked me. Who do you think you are?

Song: "Maria's Song"

Maria

So who am I now?
What am I supposed to be?
Am I a thunderstorm
Or just the passing breeze?

I think I turn the plot
But does the plot turn me?
Will I ever know?
I guess I'll have to wait and see

I think I'm made for spring
I'm made to take the wing
...that's not right at all
Just the opposite
I'm the one who makes the sky to fall

Drifting down and floating, floating, floating, falling
What is that I...I only wish I knew, I only wish I knew, I only wish I knew, I wish I knew

I'm wanting something
I think it's the whole world...
What I'm needing now
I don't think it's a...

Mayor

(interrupting the song and extending a muffin to Maria)

Chocolate swirl?

Maria

No, thank you.

(reconsiders)

Actually, I will have that.

(takes chocolate swirl, offers some to Dobchinsky.)

Would you like to share my chocolate swirl, my liege?

Dobchinsky

Thank you very much, Cleopatra!

Maria

The pleasure is all mine, Antony!

Dennis

Let's take care of this business right now.

Mayor

Skip to the end. We just paid you 2,000 rubles apiece. The four of you each owe us 700 rubles.

The cronies find their cash and hand it to the Mayor.

Barber

(to Anna, who holds a mirror to her face)

How do we look?

Anna

My God, it's hideous.

Barber

What? No!

(Anna turns the mirror around so the Barber can see his own face. She laughs.)

Mayor

Dobchinsky!

Dobchinsky

Yes, sir!

Mayor

Has any mail arrived this morning?

Dobchinsky

Yes, sir, I have picked up the mail!

Mayor

Did you bring it here?

Dobchinsky

Yes, sir!

Mayor

Summarize.

Dobchinsky

Dennis's bakery is offering fifty percent off all double-priced goods with the purchase of one normal priced good...

Dennis

It's a steal.

Mayor

Next!

Dobchinsky

New civic group forming: Fathers Against Skipping Stones on the Lake.

Irina

Oh! Did somebody get hit?

Larisa

No, some fathers just aren't good at it.

Anna

A hundred ruble filing fee and they're in. Collect it, Barber.

Mayor

Next!

Dobchinsky

Mrs. Bloc wants help paying for her husband's funeral.

Anna

Did she think her husband would never die?

Irina

She shoulda thought about that when she married him.

Dobchinsky

She claims he received poor care from the hospital. He was only 48.

Irina

He had severe complications. Ran out of credit halfway through the surgery.

Mayor

Next!

Dobchinsky

A letter from your sister.

Mayor

Read it.

Dobchinsky

Yes, sir! First class postage paid.

Mayor

Skip that section.

Dobchinsky

(opens it and reads)

Oh, yes sir! You want me to start where it says, "Dear Brother...?"

Mayor

Yes, Dobchinsky.

Dobchinsky

Okay! "Dear Brother, Greetings from the dascha! Included in this package is the hemorrhoidal cream..."

Mayor

Skip this part!

Dobchinsky

"Also included is the emetic your lovely wife requested for her bowel obstruction..."

Mayor

Skip it, skip it!

Dobchinsky

"Please give Maria my very best. She's my favorite niece. I pray every night that some poor man will look past that graceless face..."

(Dobchinsky takes issue with the letter)

Now hold on just a second! Maria's face could launch a thousand ships!

Anna

Away from her.

Mayor

Keep going, Dobchinsky.

Dobchinsky

Yes, sir. "...Filip and I got a new cow. We've named it after the tsar, should his highness ever venture out this way." That's the end of the letter.

Mayor

Fine. Moving along, then. Irina, what's the status on the...

Dobchinsky

Oh, there's a post-script. She must have thought of it after writing and signing the main body of the letter.

Mayor

What does it say?

Dobchinsky

Oh, it's just a public service announcement.

Mayor

Read it, Dobchinsky.

Dobchinsky

"...be aware, brother, that an incognito Government Inspector is visiting towns like yours to make sure the public offices are operating efficiently and without graft, extortion, or other abuses of power. Hope all is well. Miss you! Kisses."

Mayor

Repeat that last part.

Dobchinsky

"Kisses."

Mayor

Before that.

Dobchinsky

“Miss you!”

Mayor

About the Government Inspector.

Dobchinsky

“...an incognito Government Inspector is visiting towns like yours to make sure the public offices are operating efficiently and without graft, extortion, or other abuses of power...”

Mayor

That’s enough.

Eliza

Graft! Mmm, sautee it with butter, a little garlic. Delicious.

Dennis

(hands full of cash)

Yellow-bellied G-man won’t find any graft here.

Mayor

In-cog-nito. He’ll answer, no doubt, to the Tsar himself. You ever seen the inside of the Tsar’s prison? Are our affairs in order?

Larisa

Mine are. Now I don’t know about Irina here.

Irina

What? You point the finger at me? The hospitals are in fine shape! And profitable! Everybody uses them when they need to. Now the courts...

Amos

The courts? The courts are perfect! We have the fastest time-to-conviction in the realm!

Irina

What is the realm?

Amos

You fools! Look at the Parks. Dennis Denisovich, were the Government Inspector to take one look at your parks he'd throw you in jail!

Dennis

The parks are beautiful! Especially when no one is there. Insofar as the parks are less than perfect it's because of these illiterate hooligans the schools send our way!

Larisa

Now just a moment! Our pass rate is one hundred percent! We haven't been a classroom brawl since last Tuesday!

Anna

None of you seem to understand that the Tsar's prison has more than one cell.

A DELIVERY PERSON enters from the street.

Delivery Person

Book delivery: *How to Spot Suckers and Intimidate People.*

Anna

Here.

Delivery Person

Hey, you're the Mayor's wife. And you're the Mayor.

Mayor

Dobchinsky!

Dobchinsky goes to escort the Commoner out.

Delivery Person

My landlord raised my rent thirty percent! How could you let him do that? There's still mercury in our well...

Dennis

And water!

Delivery Person

You said you would fix it!

Dobchinsky and the Barber force him out. Dobchinsky returns.

Dobchinsky

Poor guy.

Dennis

He's the one who moved by the wrong well.

Mayor

Make no mistake. Our very way of life is at stake. And my sweet wife is right. We all hang together, or we all fall apart.

Dobchinsky

I will hang with you, Antoinette!

Maria

And I with you, Robespierre!

Mayor

I have a couple questions. Irina Nikolaevna...you run the hospitals and clinics.

Irina

Very well. Yes?

Mayor

Well, that's just the thing now. I got a letter the other day complaining that the floor of the hospital was streaked with blood.

Irina

Oh, Meyer Mikhaelovich refused a bandage again.

Mayor

Or did he refuse the 2000% upcharge on in-house bandage purchases?

Irina

Am I supposed to know what's in his head?

Mayor

It was a brain surgery! Listen! Complaints against our administration are mounting every day. I'm afraid we can't keep cutting services then offering restitution of said services to only those who purchase membership in a platinum club.

Eliza

I love a nice club. Cut it into little triangles, some potato salad and dill on the side...

Mayor

A few of the complaints: "Why does the Director of Parks close the park for a private family event?" "How come my kids teacher works three jobs?" "Why are all the floors filthy?"

Irina

What's that?

Mayor

The floors. Everybody complains about the floors.

Eliza

I set a mousetrap last night and caught a whole family.

Irina

I can commit to cleaning the floors.

Larisa

So can I. I will step up our floor-cleaning protocols immediately.

Amos

Me too. They say justice is blind. Well our floors are gonna shine so bright you'll go blind if you look at them!

Mayor

About that, Amos. I keep hearing Justice went to the ophthalmologist.

Irina

We haven't had any payment from Justice.

Eliza

I like a little justice with pork.

Mayor

(to Amos)

You run the courts and are also a judge.

Amos

Yes, and virtuous. Well-dressed.

Mayor

What makes a man innocent?

Amos

Well, he has not been arrested.

Mayor

And what makes a man guilty?

Amos

Well, he *has* been arrested!

Mayor

Is that all?

Amos

There are mitigating factors. If he was arrested on the accusation of his brother-in-law, then he is innocent.

Irina

Unless he was arrested on the accusation of his brother-in-law but his brother-in-law contributed more to your reelection campaign...

Amos

Then he is guilty.

Dennis

Unless...

Mayor

Oh, confound it! What happens when the opposing parties are presumed by the court to be completely equal under the law? What happens then?

Amos

Completely equal...?

Mayor

Yes.

Amos

Well...it's...it's...it's never happened.

Song: "The Thing That Has Never Happened"

Cronies

The thing that has never happened
Is the thing that hasn't happened yet
Who knows if it will ever happen
Since it hasn't ever happened yet
Happened yet
Happened yet
It hasn't ever happened yet

The thing that has never happened
Is the thing that hasn't happened still
Who knows if it will ever happen
Who knows if it ever will
Ever will
Ever will
Who knows if it ever will?

Like a carriage that runs without horses
Like a boat that can sail to the stars
Like the total abolition of serfdom
Like the end of the reign of the Tsars
God, protect our Tsar, protect our Tsar, protect our Tsar!

Like a trading route that cuts through the Americas

Or nuclear bombs launched from subs
Or the full eradication of polio
Or a world series win for the Cubs

No, the thing that has never happened
Is the thing that is unlikely to
To bet on what has never happened
Seems like a foolish thing to do
Thing to do
Foolish thing
A foolish thing to do

Maria

The thing that has never happened
Is the reason that you knock on wood
But everything that's ever happened
Was once just a thing that could
Thing that could
Thing that could

Maria and Dobchinsky

The thing that has never happened
Is still a thing that could.

Mayor

All right, you dirty little premillennialists. Then we are agreed. You will operate above board, charge fair prices, and keep your floors clean.

Irina

But, Mayor.

Mayor

Yes?

Irina

And wife of mayor...

Anna

Yes?

Irina

Respectfully, upon whose desk does the ruble stop?

Larisa

That's fair.

Dennis

Fair.

Amos

Quite fair.

Dobchinsky

Wait wait...I know this one. It's the Mayor's desk, right?

Anna

Misdirection denied. Spare me your bolshevik. Oh, the irony when poor Amos here is imprisoned in his own jail.

Eliza

Irony? Dress it up with a little cream of mushroom sauce and dill...sounds delicious.

Larisa

Wasn't irony banned by the tsar?

Maria

I thought he made it the house style.

Anna

What's that, pale imitation of me?

Maria

Never mind, Mother.

Eliza

Your biscuits are ready. Or, as they say, "here's your thanksgiving feast in prison!"

Dennis

Gimme some of that.

Anna

You don't have time for biscuits, Dennis. A Government Inspector is on his way. Your house is in disorder and your solyanka stinks. And that goes for the rest of you too.

Irina

My solyanka? My solyanka?

Larisa

You note the borscht in my eye but you don't see the blini in yours!

Amos

You disrespect my wife's cooking you disrespect me!

Mayor

Stop it! Stop it! Friends. Colleagues.

Dobchinsky

Partners in crime!

Mayor

Dobchinsky! Never say that phrase again.

Maria

He meant it metaphorically.

Mayor

He said it formulaically. Never again. We know neither the day nor the hour when this Government Inspector will arrive. All those dirty floors must get clean and now!

Dennis

You do realize the floor of the parks are grass and sand.

Mayor

I meant it imagistically!

Dennis

You said it egotistically!

Mayor

Hyperbole!

Eliza

Hyperbole....oooh, with a side of crepes and sour cream...it waters your mouth.

Anna

Obediently, listen to me! Floors, windows, ceilings, balance sheets and souls...all clean, all spotless. If the Government Inspector sees beds in hallways and blood on the floor...if he sees brawls in the classroom and bottles in the park...he will shut down our operations quicker than you can say "the Volga only flows in one direction and that direction is prison." And we must all do our part. No weak links. Are we agreed?

Song: "Cronies Theme"

Cronies

We are agreed, we are agreed
And we will rally round the point
There is room enough for all of us
In a cold Siberian joint

We must improve, we must improve
Till the Inspector's work is through
Then we'll improve all our improvements
And our business may resume.
And our business may resume.

Maria

But for how long? How long can you keep your proverbial floors to clean? A day or two? What if he doesn't arrive for another week?

Mayor

What we need to do is find this Government Inspector, show him a sparkling town, and send him on his way.

Larisa

It could be anyone. We don't know everyone who comes and goes.

Dobchinsky

(Having an epiphany)

I know who it is...oh, dear. I know who it is! I saw him this morning.

Mayor

He's here now?

Dobchinsky

This very morning I was out gathering flowers for a garland for Maria, just in case she was to find a husband or something. I got some tiger lilies, rhododendron...

Anna

We'll need to work on your time management strategy...What about the Government Inspector, Dobchinsky?

Dobchinsky

Just down the road from here, near the...the...the...Potempkin Inn! Yes! Just outside the inn. At the first light of dawn, I saw a carriage arrive. Thick with dust, it had been traveling all night. Out of it stepped a figure...he had the look and bearing of a Petersburg courtier! He removed his cap, smoothed back his hair, looked up and down the street, scanning with his little Petersburgian eyes. Oh, he was looking for something. Then a servant stepped out. He was about yea high. Had a huge bag, larger than the bags of most men. A mustachioed little fellow. Remember when that troupe of Petersburgian players toured through here with their production of *Tartuffe*?

Maria

Yes! That was a wonderful play!

Anna

I didn't care for it. I just didn't *believe* them, you know? Seemed like they were acting.

Dobchinsky

The servant had just the kind of mustache the actors wore in the play. It must be the Petersburg style. They whispered to each other, as if they didn't want to be heard, but I do believe I heard the rustling of chains and cuffs in their bags.

Mayor

Chains and cuffs?

Dobchinsky

Either that or paper clips and staplers. What's the difference, really?

Mayor

A traveler with a servant, indicating he is of a class above servants.

Dobchinsky

The very thing.

Mayor

This is the man who will decide our fate. Good work, Dobchinsky. Colleagues! Clear your schedules and leave here now. Today you've one job to do.

Amos

Clean our floors.

Larisa

From top to bottom.

Anna

I'll kill the Walk for Life. Bring him here. We'll have him as a guest. Home field advantage. Let's go get him, team.

Song: "Cronies Theme Part II"

All

(singing to the Cronies theme)

Where we go one, we go all!
And that's where we're gonna be.
In a twinkling sparkling town
Where *complimentary* means *free*

Where we go one we go all!
And that's where we're gonna be
From the flatlands to the plains,
From the ocean to the sea.
We'll avert calamity!

Mayor

Dobchinsky. Maria. To the Potempkin Inn we must go.

End Scene 1.

Scene 2. The Potempkin Inn

A dingy room with one bed and a filthy window. Enter VALET.

Song: "Weak Tea"

Valet

Welcome to the Potempkin Inn, for travelers with no other option.
We hope you endure your stay.

I've got your tea
It's compliment'ry
But it won't be getting any compliments
It is not hot it is not strong it has no flavor
It is weak tea but it is wet

It is weak tea but it is wet!
It is the tea at the Potempkin Inn.

I've got your crumpet
It's hard as stone
It might break your tooth but it will fill your mouth
There is no butter, no berries, no jam nohow
If you want it you can pay in cash right now

It is stale but it's on sale
It is the crumpet at the Potempkin Inn.

Don't like it?
Don't take it up with me
I just work here and I do not do my best

Beware, beware of the lice in the bed
If you are already infested get some rest
If I were you I'd
Go to bed fully dressed with a hat

It is the bed at the Potempkin Inn

Wanna complain
You may do that
You can take it right to the kitchen
Not to me, not to me, not to me
My right ear doesn't hear and my left one doesn't listen

Welcome to the Potempkin Inn
Welcome to the Potempkin Inn

Valet
(to guests)
Right this way.

Enter JOHN KHLESTAKOV, a low-level clerk from Petersburg, and SOFIYA, disguised as OSIP, John's servant. They have just checked in after traveling a long way. They are very tired. Osip pushes back the curtain from a window. Valet exits.

John
What a view.

Osip
Indeed.

Osip
Now this streak here. See it? That's a sunset on a terrace at a wedding.

John
And that little booger right there...

Osip
I see it.

John

A ruble hanging from a ruble tree.

Osip

That's the spirit.

Valet reenters with a samovar of tea.

Valet

Here's your tea and here's your bill. This is a prepay kinda deal.

Osip

We need to pay on credit. We've been traveling.

Valet

The surcharge for credit purchases is fifty percent.

Osip

Fifty percent?

Valet

This town runs on extortion. Sign here.

John signs it.

Valet

Should you need anything, anything at all, feel free to pray. That's the way at the Potempkin Inn.

Valet exits.

John

How much do we have left?

Osip

Nothing, John. Nothing. Less than nothing, actually. We owe fifteen thousand rubles in sum. To an innkeeper, a cardshark...

John

Fifteen thousand?

Osip

...another cardshark...

John

Where did it all go?

Osip

...a bartender, another innkeeper...

John

I'm sorry.

Osip

It's time to write a letter to your father. You need cash, and fast.

John

He drew the ace.

Osip

And you bet the table.

John

I had a good hand.

Osip

Not compared to his, which is how the game works.

John

I looked into his eyes.

Osip

And didn't see the full house.

Osip

What do you see when you look into my eyes?

John

Oh, Osip, what a silly game.

Osip

Play it. Humor me.

John

I see a player of silly games.

Osip

And?

John

“And?” I see someone who always wants something else.

Osip

And?

John

Oh, Osip. A friend. A best friend.

Osip

Is that all you see when you look at me?

John

Oh, Osip! You’re as impossible as a woman.

Osip

We’re broke. Dead broke. Creditors may be on your tail right now. They can throw you in jail. Write a letter.

John

Will you write it? Your words are better than mine.

Osip

The same words are available to us all.

John

Semantic dissembling does debase you, Osip. The words are the same, but you have the better

usage. Here's the form: bow, bow, scrape, scrape, plead for money, kisses...

Osip

"Dear Father, it is John, your wretched scoundrel of a son. A raccoon in boots, a pig in pants..."

John

Tell him we were robbed by Cossacks! My father hates Cossacks.

Osip

Your father is your savior, and to him you would lie?

John

Oh, Osip! I am nothing! I am beyond redemption. Of all the Volga's vulgar I am the verified villain! Why do you stay with me?

Osip

(aside, to the audience)

Here he hits upon the central question. Why? *Why?! Why* would I stay and serve a roustabout, a lout? *Why?* Well, on the one hand, maybe I am both of those things and worse.

This mustache is not real. Did we fool you? Of course not. No, you saw it clear. Cause you're not in the play. But he is in the play, and in his play he is the title character, and if he wasn't the title character, he'd think he was. Is he? We'll see. He is vulnerable to being fooled. Fooled by a gambler with a good hand. Fooled by a roast mutton. Fooled by a mustache. A mustache I stole from a traveling production of *Tartuffe*.

Some of us have a desire *to see*, and some *not to see*. Some of us have a desire *to be seen*, and some *to not be seen*. Now we have a multi-factorial problem with exponential permutations. When the ones who want *not* to be seen meet the ones who do not want *to see*, everyone gets what they think they want, and they live in darkness. When the ones who *want to be seen* meet those who *do not want to see*, no one is seen and only *one* gets what they think they want. And the other is sad.

Or perhaps it's reversed: one wants to see but the other wants not to be seen...same result. You see? It's difficult. It only works when *both* want to see and be seen, and that's why it's so rare... I looked into *his* eyes, and I saw something good. I love him. That is why. I do, but I can't, but I do, and I will not show my face. But why?

(Aside ends.)

Osip

Because I like you, John.

John

Thank you, Osip. I like you too. I am so tired. We've been traveling all night. Can we sleep, please?

Osip

Of course.

John

Take the bed. I don't deserve it.

Osip closes the curtains.

Song: "Don't We Dream?"

John

Oh don't we dream, don't we dream...
Every night when Sandman comes around
...Don't we dream that this might be our town
Our town... Our town?

John and Osip

Dreams come between each waking day
If we're lucky and it's soft whereon we lay
Don't we dream that we may ever dream
Dreams of you...and me

Osip

Don't we dream of a life without disguises
Costumes, fake mustaches, and all
(removes mustache)
Don't we dream that we might have a partner
At the ball...the ball?

John

(speaking)

Osip, you shaved your mustache.

Osip

(speaking)

Yes.

John

(speaking)

It looks good.

Osip

(speaking)

Take to the bed, master.

John

Yes, Osip.

John takes the bed.

Osip

(singing)

Oh don't we dream, don't we dream
Each night when our eyeballs start to dance...
Don't we dream that we might have a chance...
A chance...A chance...

John

Oh don't we dream of beef and sausage
Creamy, with potatoes on the side
Don't we dream of ice cream sundaes
With a chocolate glaze every night

(Osip puts mustache back on.)

John

(speaking)

Osip, you grew your mustache back.

Osip

Go to sleep, John.

John

Okay.

John sleeps.

Suddenly, a knock on the door. John and Osip spring up.

John

I just had a nightmare...the police had come to take me away!

Another knock, then the Valet enters.

Valet

Sir, you have a visitor.

John

A visitor?

Valet

The city officials would like a word with you.

Osip

May my master and I have a moment alone?

Valet

No.

(calls offstage)

Sir? He's ready for you.

John

I'm going to jail.

Osip

Follow my lead.

John

Always.

The valet enters, followed by Mayor, Dobchinsky, and Maria.

Mayor and John

(talking over each other)

Good morning...

Mayor

Sorry.

John

Sorry.

Mayor

Apologies.

John

Apologies.

Mayor

Top of the day.

John

Good morning.

Mayor

How do you do?

Osip

How do you do?

Mayor

You're in your shirtsleeves.

John

I wasn't expecting guests.

Mayor

I should have rung before.

John

It's okay.

Mayor

What is?

John

Shall I change?

Mayor

You are perfect.

John

I'm not perfect, you're perfect. I'm terrified.

Mayor

I've never been so scared in my life.

John

What are you afraid of?

Mayor

Come again?

John walks toward the door.

Mayor

Where are you going?

John

I'm going to leave and return. You said "come again."

Osip and Maria

Gentlemen...

Maria

Please, you first.

Osip

Introductions. I am Osip, servant to John Khlestakov of St. Petersburg.

(John bows)

Maria

I am Maria, daughter of the Mayor. This is the Mayor. *(The mayor bows)* His name is Anton Antonovich Skvoznik-Dmukhanovsky. And this is Dobchinsky. He's always around.

Mayor

She's right.

Dobchinsky

She's always right.

John and Mayor

(to the ladies)

What should we do now?

Maria

Have some tea. Your mouths are very dry.

Osip gives them each a cup of tea. They drink and stare at each other.

Osip

So, what brings you to our room?

Maria

We just wanted to meet the new visitors, maybe show you around. We are known as the Friendliest Town on the Volga and the Sausage Capital of the Realm.

Osip

What is the Realm?

Maria

It's like a circle on a map. So what brings you here?

Osip

My master is traveling through, en route to his father's house.

Maria

And how are you enjoying your stay so far?

Osip

Well, all we've seen so far is this rat trap of an inn.

John

Osip!

Osip

Shhh.

Mayor

I can fix that! I can fix that! Valet, refund them their money...

Valet

They're on credit.

Mayor

Charge it to the Mayor!

John

That is so generous of you.

Mayor

Why don't you stay with us at the Mayor's residence tonight? We have the room. And why don't you let us take you to lunch and show you around?

John

That would be...

Osip

Just say yes.

John

I accept.

Mayor

Wonderful! Dobchinsky, will you run their suitcases over to the house and tell Anna we will be back this afternoon after lunch?

Dobchinsky

I will. Until later, my new friends.

(to Maria)

Fräulein, auf wiedersehen.

Maria

Mögen die Stunden schnell vergehen.

Dobchinsky exits.

Mayor

Shall we head out?

John

Yes, sir.

Mayor

Well, that's very good, then. Isn't that good, Maria?

Maria

You're doing great, Papa.

John

Is this is a good plan, Osip?

Osip

So much better than no plan.

John

I'm ready if you are.

Mayor

Wonderful. Right this way!

(walking confidently in the wrong direction)

Our town was founded during the reign of Ivan. Some say he was terrible...

(Mayor and John go offstage.)

Osip

Shouldn't we be following them?

Maria

They went the wrong way, they'll come this way again.

(Mayor and John re-enter and walk proudly across the stage.)

Mayor

...Andouille, bratwurst, liverwurst, kielbasa, chorizo, Jimmy Dean, Pepperidge Farm....

(Mayor and John exit.)

Maria

We can go now.

Osip and Maria follow them off.

Song: "Weak Tea Coda"

Valet

There is a Mayor
Thinks he's a player
But he might be in a bit over his head

There is a kid
He's on the skids
His accounts are absolutely in the red

And the servant and the daughter seem to be the master plotters
Like the otters in the water they can spring up anytime they smell distress
I can see that servant in a dress
It's a win-lose situation

Depending on your station

And life goes on outside the Potempkin Inn.

End of Scene 2.

SCENE 3. The Mayor's House.

The great room of the Mayor's House. ANNA paces. Eliza enters with a samovar of tea and places it next to Anna's chair.

Eliza

Your tea is served.

Anna

Now let's look at this, darling. What would you say is missing?

Eliza

Missing?

Anna

Yes, what looks missing to you?

Eliza

Well if it's missing I wouldn't see it, would I?

Anna

The sugar, dear. The sugar. It is true we are of different stations, but are we not both flesh and blood and does not flesh and blood want sugar with its tea?

Eliza

Oh, I stopped using sugar a year ago. The tax went up eighty percent! Where does it go? Where exactly does it go?

Anna

In the twelfth cupboard. Glass jar.

Eliza

At your service.

Anna

Yes. Yes, you are.

Eliza exits. Dobchinsky enters.

Dobchinsky

The guest rooms are all set. It's curious. The servant's bags are much bigger than the master's.

Eliza enters.

Eliza

Your sugar, Ma'm. *(looks out the window)* Who's that?

Anna

What?

Eliza

Coming up the drive.

Dobchinsky

That's the servant!

Anna

At attention!

Dobchinsky and Anna straighten up. They wait awhile.

Anna

Is he alone?

Dobchinsky

Yes.

Anna

What's taking so long?

Dobchinsky

The servant is tying his shoe. Now he's examining the rhododendron. He's picking a flower and putting it behind his ear. Looking around as if to see if anyone has seen him. He's put the flowers down...

Anna

Oh, go get him!

Dobchinsky

Yes, Ma'm.

Dobchinsky exits.

Anna

Eliza, how do I look?

Eliza

Like you'd shatter a block of ice if they dropped it on your head.

Anna

Thank you.

Dobchinsky and Osip enter.

Dobchinsky

Madame, I present to you...Osip! Servant of our guest and a natural tenor.

Anna

Pleased to meet you. Where are the rest?

Osip

They stopped at yet another shop on Main Street, and I was tired of shopping, so I ran along ahead.

Anna

Please, have a seat. Have some tea. There's plenty of sugar.

Osip

All right.

Anna

Would you like a crumpet? Eliza, get this gentleman a crumpet.

Eliza exits, Osip sits.

Anna

Has your master had a nice tour of our fine town?

Osip

I think he's enjoying himself.

Anna

What has been his favorite part?

Osip

He loved the swings at the park.

Dobchinsky

Maria loves the swings, too!

Osip

Yes, they swung together.

Dobchinsky

Did they?

Anna

Tell me, Osip. How does your master like to be addressed?

Osip

Well, let's see. One might address him proudly. But I would not. One might address him performatively. But I would not. One might address him familiarly. But I would not. One might wait to be addressed by him. This I would do. "What is his rank?" you seem to want to know. Perhaps you know the official rankings. Perhaps you have them memorized. Perhaps these rankings are but fantasies to give common people a place to perch their dreams.

Eliza

I like a good perch. Fry it up in buttermilk and flour.

Osip

Perhaps the mind that cannot imagine the rank beyond rank ranks among the rank.”

Anna

Once I was rank. Now I can see...

Osip

Did you not know?

Anna

He must have wonderful taste.

Osip

Very refined. He’s an expert in the great families marked by envy and ultimate tragedy. The Karenins, the Karamazovs, the Kardashians.

Anna

Does he know the Tsar himself?

Osip

Old Nicky? They are very tight. Very very tight.

Anna

The Tsar has become known for ruling with an unsubtle hand, yes?

Osip

A fist of iron.

Anna

What’s the secret?

Osip

Fashion.

Anna

Fashion?

Osip
Fashion.

Song: "Fashion"

Osip

Epaulets and hanging swords
That's the new way in the court
You want to look like you're heading out to war

Ribbons and medals, shoulder sashes
Waxed and trimmed upcurled moustaches
That's the way to favor with our lord

Ladies want a petticoat
Roughly the size of a navy boat
The silhouette by the corset is defined

Lots of sparkles, lots of pearls
That's the way for the women and girls
The tsar will not object to a low neckline

"What's it like?"

You ask me

"To serve in the court of the Tsar..."

It's startin' again in a garden again
Sure as a barking dog

No sooner did we know we were naked in the bog
Dolce & Gabbana launched its new spring catalog

Anna

(speaking)

And this is the secret to the Tsar's authority?

Osip

(speaking)

One day his sash became unclasped...the next day everyone came in with an unclasped

sash...the Tsar didn't know why...

Anna

What did he do?

Osip

He had them all killed.

Anna

Wise. Decisive.

Osip

Indeed.

Anna

I see...

(singing)

Threats to power are neutralized

When everyone is stylized

In the fashion of the Tsar's particular whim

Roles of high importance

Do not require competence

When fashion proves your bonafides to him

Anna

(speaking)

It sounds like a lot of work

Osip

(speaking)

You don't want idle hands

Anna

Eliza, bring the boa

(to Osip)

Tell the Tsar I have complied

Osip

It's startin' anew, in a living room

Like a buzz from a new beehive

No sooner did we know we were nude behind the vines

Anna: Victims of a crime

Eliza: Plainly serpentine

Osip: Subjected to time

All: Nowhere else to hide

All

...cut and dried!

No sooner did we know we were strange to the divine

Coco went and mixed us up some Chanel No 5.

Anna

(speaking)

What a great great man is the Tsar. He's returned to noble Russia a perfect panacea.

Osip

(speaking)

Well, it might not last.

Anna

(speaking)

Why?

Osip

(speaking)

The war in Crimea.

Anna

(singing)

Gold and silk and diamonds and lace

A diadem to frame the face

A train of velvet gathered in a pool

How elegant it all must be
The uniform of liberty
Like swimming fish fantastic in a school

That's the way
It must be
In a pure mayoralty

Osip

It's startin' again
We'll beg your pardon again
When we re-invent Tom Ford

When you serve at the pleasure of an unbecoming lord
Fashion is the cost of doing business and it's businesses' reward

Fashion.

Anna

I love it.

Eliza

So do I.

Osip

Women.

Dobchinsky
They're here!

Dobchinsky runs to the door.

Enter the Mayor, Maria, John, and the Cronies. John carries things the Mayor bought him at the shops. An extravagant hat, a toy sword, some epaulettes, a pinwheel candy cane on a stick. He is dressed ridiculously in costumes he found at stores—epaulettes, a toy sword, a tricorn hat.

John
(finishing a story)

...and then she said, "Well-behaved women seldom make history." And I replied, "Simply being contrary doesn't make one a *historian!*"

All laugh. Anna, following Osip's instructions, waits to be addressed. Perhaps there is an awkward silence.

Mayor

John, please come in. I would like to introduce you to the lady of the house.

Anna rises.

John

Pleased to meet you, madame.

Anna

Anna. Vice-mayor. But what is rank anyway? Pleased to meet you. Won't you sit down.

John

Oh, yes. Need to take a load off.

John sits where Anna sat, next to Osip, who did not rise.

John

How's it hangin', Osip?

Osip

Very good, Master.

Eliza

May I take your things?

Eliza takes some of John's props. He has trouble letting go of the candy cane, but he relents. Eliza exits with his stuff.

Anna and the Cronies either find a place to sit or arrange themselves around the room.

Mayor

John here was just regaling us of some of his Petersburg tales. It sounds as fantastical as we'd imagined!

John

But, you know, every place is fine when you have friends!

Mayor

And you must consider yourself our friend.

John

Oh, I do! You see, Osip? New friends!

Osip

Very nice.

Mayor

John, we would like to ask you a question. An informal one, but an important one, if you understand my meaning...

John

Boy, am I tired.

Mayor

You've toured the town...

Dennis

The parks...

Irina

The hospital...

Amos

The courts...

Larisa

The schools...

Mayor

We believe our town lives up to its founding motto: "PLENTY, PEOPLE, PLACE". But we always keep an eye on our blindspot, so if you saw any room for improvement...

John has fallen asleep.

Anna

You really can bore anyone, can't you?

Mayor

We must find out his assessment of the town.

Cronies

Yes, we must, we must.

John begins mumbling in his sleep.

Osip

Shhh...he's talking. He does his best thinking when he sleeps.

(Osip translates his mumbles.)

"Schools...for fools...

Hospitals...sick...

The department of justice...more like the department of *in*justice...

Tell Nicky...tell Nicky..."

He means the Tsar. Wait!

(Osip listens for more.)

My soul sings "Hark"

For the swings in the park.

Dennis

Yes!

Anna

Eliza, help the man to his room. *(to Osip)* Why don't you and your master get some rest? Then, when you are ready, we can regroup for a heavy supper and light entertainment.

Osip

Thank you.

Eliza and Osip carry John offstage. The Cronies stare at each other.

Dennis

He loves the swings!

Anna

His judgment could not have been any worse

And you are all Achilles in reverse.

So totally exposed you ought to kneel

“But look,” you say, “at this unblemished heel.”

For the government inspector to tell us how it is... it was something like a kindness...

Mayor

We need a plan. We need a plan to get our man.

Song: “We’ll Get Our Man”

All

We’ll get our man

We’ll get our man

We’ll get our man

Dobinsky

Are you worried?

Mayor

No. I’ve seen chaps like him before.

Mayor

He’s no threat whatsoever.

He’s a yes-man, he’s a toady, he’s a bureaucrat, a fool

He’s the kind of kid the kids all kick at school

He’s a zero, he’s a nothing, he’s an imbecile, a jerk

He’s the very picture of the government at work

What a blockhead, what a dullard, what a lollard, what a dope

Maria and Dobchinsky

Ain’t we got this tiger by the toe?

Mayor

He’s a laughing stock

Larisa

You laughing?

Mayor

Yes I am, and so are you
He is no match for the minds in this room.

Mayor

He's a baby he's a lackey
He's a dunce

Dobchinsky and Maria

He's everything and nothing all at once

All

HE IS A DUNCE
HE IS A DUNCE

Maria

I think you've got it wrong
I don't think that he knows what he's doing
I think he's just a guy
The only trouble's the trouble you're brewing
I think he just wandered to this town.

Anna

(laughing at Maria)

Ha ha ha ha ha ha...
Aren't you very funny, you damaged little bunny
Someday you will understand
And then I will be thanked
I happen to know for certain
He's the rank beyond all rank

Mayor

[He will] ruin us forever, everything we all hold dear
He crusades against our families and careers

He's a special operative, he's a rising star
He might just be the godson of the Tsar

He's got our names and our games on a list
Oh Lord, he's a master strategist

He's a cipher, he's unknowable
He's probably unsnowable

Cronies

I think they've got this bear up in the tree

All

A tree
A tree
A tree

Mayor

We can change how we administrate...

Irina

You mean we should accommodate?

Mayor

It's not too late, the state...

Dennis

The state?

Dobchinsky

Humpty Dumpty, come down from that wall!

Mayor

The state is the fate of us all

Amos

We should run!
Take the treasure, leave the chest

Irina

We might as well confess

Mayor

Confess? You jest!

Irina

I jest.

Mayor

You jest?

Irina

I said it only as a test

Mayor

Friends, a house divided will not appreciate in value!

All

Where we go one we go all!
And we'll go there all the way
Like the lemmings on the hillside
We will plunge into the bay

And when we do, when we do
We will try to swim to shore
Then we'll climb back up the hillside
And we'll try to sin no more
Or at least we'll shut the door

Mayor

Yep, I can hear it! That's the spirit.

Besides, just remember...

He's a fool

He's a fool

He's a foolish little fool

Eliza

What about the servant?

Mayor

What about him?

He too is a fool

He's a servant just like you

Now, not a one of us should fear

The Government Inspector

Besides it's so much worse...

Irina

Where?

Eliza

Where?

Mayor

In the private sector.

Alrighty everybody, good work, good work.

Anna

Have we got a plan?

Mayor

What?

Anna

Have we...have we.. do we have a plan?

Music resumes:

All

HAVE WE A PLAN?

HAVE WE A PLAN?

HAVE WE A PLAN?

Anna

We must do what we know
Give a bribe

Irina

A bribe?

Anna

A bribe.

Dennis

A bribe.

Mayor

No bribes!
That's exactly what he thinks that we will do.
You must swear you will not bribe.

Irina

I swear!

Amos

I swear!

Larisa

I swear!

Dennis

I swear!

Anna

If not a bribe then a bride.

Mayor

A bride?

Anna

A bride.

A girl all in white.

With a mother by her side
A mother by her side
She will outshine the bride
She will outshine the light

Mayor

Maria dear, now's your chance
Here's your shot at romance
You will marry Khlestekov
And tonight we all will dance

MARIA

Have I got this right?

MAYOR

Yes, you have, you're the bride.

ANNA

Maria, if it be compulsory...
You are the Helen of the sea
Guinevere in agony
Overcome you are become
Nota bene
Now you are Francesca di Rimini!

Anna and Mayor

Put on your dress put on your lace
Put on your veil put on your face
Become the heroine of love
And show us what you're made of

Osip reenters.

Osip

Pardon me. Forgot my hat.

Osip takes his hat and leaves.

ALL

We have our plan to get our man

We have our plan!

We have our plan!

End of Act I.

Not for performance