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Rapid City, SD 57709

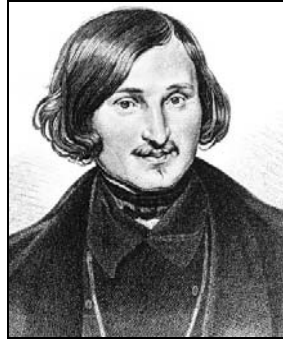
THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR

CLASSIC FARCE. Audiences will love all the twists and turns, mistaken identities, and absurd situations in this timeless, side-splitting farce adapted from the play by Nikolai Gogol. The mayor of a small town receives a letter informing him that a government inspector is coming in disguise to uncover evidence of bribes and corruption. The mayor realizes he has to hide any evidence before the inspector gets there. But before he can do so, news comes that a stranger came to town two weeks ago and is staying at a local inn. The mayor and his cronies assume that the stranger must be the government inspector and try to impress him by offering him money and gifts, which the stranger happily accepts. And it's not long before the stranger is even engaged to the mayor's daughter. But when the postmaster intercepts a letter that reveals the stranger's true identity, not only do the town officials realize that they have been duped, but they learn that the real government inspector is on his way!

Production Time: Approximately 90-120 minutes.

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Nikolai Gogol (1809-1852)

ABOUT THE STORY

Dramatist, novelist, and short story writer Nikolai Gogol was born in a small Ukrainian town. At age 12, he attended a boarding school, where he participated in school theater as both an actor and a director. As an adult, Gogol worked in the civil service and began writing stories about the Ukraine in his spare time. First performed in 1836, *The Government Inspector* is known as one of Gogol's finest works. It satirizes Russian provincial bureaucracy by presenting an absurd, corrupt world where self-deception rules. Other notable works include Gogol's short stories "The Overcoat" and "The Nose" and his novel *Dead Souls*.

CHARACTERS

(8 M, 7 F, 14 flexible, extras)
(Doubling possible.)

GOVERNOR: A corrupt governor of a remote, rural, small town; has the typical hard, stern features of an official who has worked his way up from the lowest rank in government service; male.

ANNA: Governor's self-absorbed wife who like to bicker with her daughter; female.

MARIA: Governor's daughter; female.

MIA: Governor's servant; female.

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS: The Inspector of Schools; male.

MRS. INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS: The Inspector of Schools's wife; female.

JUDGE: Judge; male.

HOSPITAL SUPERINTENDENT: Oversees the hospital, a sly, cunning scoundrel; wears eyeglasses; flexible.

POSTMASTER: Postmaster who likes to open other people's mail and read it; flexible.

DOB CHINSKY: A country squire and town gossip; resembles Bob Chinsky but is more subdued; has a paunch and talks rapidly with emphatic hand/body gestures; wears a frock coat; male.

BOB CHINSKY: A country squire and town gossip; resembles Dob Chinsky but is livelier; has a paunch and talks rapidly with emphatic hand/body gestures; wears a frock coat; male.

ALEXANDER KHLESTAKOV: A copying clerk from the city who is a womanizer, opportunist, and gambler; locals mistake him for a powerful government inspector; fashionably dressed; male.

OSIP: Khlestakov's clever servant; his eyes are always a bit lowered and his voice is usually monotonous, but to Khlestakov his tone is blunt and sharp with a touch of rudeness; wears a shabby gray or blue coat; male.

SERVANT: Servant who works at the inn where Khlestakov is staying; flexible.

CITIZEN 1: Esteemed citizen; male.

MRS. CITIZEN 1: Citizen 1' wife; female.

CITIZEN 2, 3: Esteemed citizens and an ex-officials; flexible.

POLICE CAPTAIN: Police captain; flexible.

POLICE SERGEANT 1, 2: Police sergeants; flexible.

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LOCKSMITH'S WIFE: Wife of a locksmith; female.

WIDOW: Widow of a non-commissioned officer; female.

MERCHANT 1, 2, 3: Local merchants; flexible.

GUEST 1, 2, 3: Guests; flexible.

EXTRAS: Coachman, Guests, Merchants, and Citizens.

Note: For flexible roles, change the script accordingly.

Setting

A remote, rural, small town from which "you may gallop for three years and yet arrive nowhere."

Set

Drawing room in the Governor's house. The room is richly decorated and has a window. There is a writing desk and chair.

The room is separated from the next room with folding doors.

Small room at an inn. There is a bed and a table.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I: Room in the Governor's house.

ACT II: A small room at an inn.

ACT III: Room in the Governor's house.

ACT IV: Room in the Governor's house.

PROPS

| | |
|---|---|
| Men's hatbox | Piece of paper |
| Travelling bag/suitcase, for Khlestakov | Official dress uniforms/attire for Judge, Postmaster, Governor, Dob Chinsky, and Bob Chinsky |
| Empty bottle, | 5 Ceremonial swords |
| Clothes brush | Cigar |
| Hat, for Khlestakov | Candle |
| Overcoat, for Khlestakov | Paper for letter |
| Cane | Ink |
| Serving tray | Wallet, for Dob Chinsky |
| Plate of roast beef | Seal |
| Bowl of soup | Basket of wine |
| Fork, spoon, cloth napkin | Sacks of sugar |
| Money (can use play money) | Small silver tray (for bribe money) |
| Frock coat, for Dob Chinsky | Scarf, for Maria |
| Ladies handkerchief | Unsealed letter |
| Broom | |
| "Plaster" (white paste to put on Dob Chinsky's nose) | |

SOUND EFFECTS

Footsteps
Coughing
Horse hooves

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**“THE MORE YOU THINK,
THE LESS YOU KNOW
WHAT’S GOING ON IN YOUR HEAD.”**

—GOVERNOR

ACT I

(AT RISE: A remote, rural town. A room in the Governor's house. The Governor, the Hospital Superintendent, the Inspector of Schools, the Judge, and Police Sergeants 1, 2 are onstage.)

GOVERNOR: I have called you to tell you an unpleasant piece of news. (*Dramatic pause.*) A government inspector is coming.

JUDGE: What?! A government inspector?!

HOSPITAL SUPERINTENDENT: What?! A government inspector?!

GOVERNOR: Yes, an inspector from [insert name of city].

Incognito...and with secret instructions, too.

JUDGE: A pretty how do you do!

HOSPITAL SUPERINTENDENT: As if we hadn't enough trouble without an inspector!

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS: With secret instructions!

GOVERNOR: I had a sort of premonition. Last night, I kept dreaming of two rats...regular monsters! Upon my word, I never saw the likes of them—black and supernaturally big. They came in, sniffed, and then went away. Here's a letter. Listen to what he writes... (*Reads.*) "My dear friend... (*Mumbles, glancing rapidly down at the page.*) ...and to let you know..." (*Scanning letter.*) Blah, blah, blah. (*Finds the part he is looking for.*) Ah, that's it. (*Reads.*) "I hasten to let you know, among other things, that an official has arrived here with instructions to inspect the whole government and your office especially. (*Raises his finger significantly.*) I have learned of his being here from highly trustworthy sources, though he pretends to be a private person. So, as you have little, petty offenses—you know, like everybody else—you are a sensible man, and you don't let the good things that come your way slip by—" (*Stops.*) Hmmm. (*Reads on.*) "I advise you to take precautions, as he may arrive any hour, if he hasn't already, and is staying somewhere incognito." The rest regards family matters. (*Reads.*) "Sister Anna here is visiting us with her husband. John has grown very fat and is always playing the fiddle," etcetera, etcetera. So there you have the situation we are confronted with.

JUDGE: An extraordinary situation! Most extraordinary! Something behind it, I am sure.

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS: *(To Governor.)* But why? What for? Why should we have an inspector?

GOVERNOR: It's fate, I suppose. *(Sighs.)* Till now, thank goodness, they have been nosing about in other towns. Now our turn has come.

JUDGE: My opinion is that the cause is a deep one and rather political in character. It means this: that this country intends to go to war, and the government has secretly commissioned an official to find out if there is any treasonable activity anywhere.

GOVERNOR: *(Sarcastic.)* The wise man has hit it. Treason in this little town! Why, you might travel three days from here and reach nowhere!

JUDGE: The government is shrewd. It makes no difference that our town is so remote.

GOVERNOR: Anyhow, I have given you warning. I have made some arrangements for myself, and I advise you to do the same. You, Hospital Superintendent, this official, no doubt, will want first of all to inspect the hospital. So you better see to it that everything is in order...that the hospital gowns are clean and that the patients don't go about as they usually do, looking as grimy as blacksmiths.

HOSPITAL SUPERINTENDENT: Oh, that's a small matter. We can get hospital gowns easily enough.

GOVERNOR: And over each bed, you might hang up a placard stating in Latin or some other foreign language the name of the disease, when the patient fell ill...the day of the week and the month. And I don't like your invalids to be smoking such strong tobacco. It makes you sneeze when you come in. It would be better, too, if there weren't so many of them. If there are a large number, it will instantly be ascribed to bad supervision or incompetent medical treatment.

HOSPITAL SUPERINTENDENT: Oh, as to treatment, I have worked out our own system. Our rule is...the nearer to nature the better. We use no expensive medicines. If a patient dies, he'd die anyway. If he gets well, he'd get well anyway. Besides, the doctor would have a hard time making the patients understand him. He doesn't know a word of English.

GOVERNOR: And you, Judge, had better look to the courthouse. The courthouse's entrance hall has been turned into a poultry yard, and the geese and goslings go poking their beaks between people's legs. The courthouse is not exactly the place for a chicken coop. I

had meant to tell you so before but somehow it escaped my memory.

JUDGE: Well, I'll have them all butchered today. Will you come and dine with me?

GOVERNOR: As for your assessor, he's an educated man, to be sure, but he reeks of liquor, as if he had just emerged from a distillery. That's not right, either. I had meant to tell you long ago, but something or other drove the thing out of my mind. If his odor is really a congenital defect, as he says, then there are ways of remedying it. You might advise him to eat onions or garlic or something of the sort.

JUDGE: No, there's no cure for it. He says his nurse struck him when he was a child, and ever since, he has smelt of vodka.

GOVERNOR: Well, I just wanted to call your attention to it. Regarding the internal administration and "petty offenses," I have nothing to say. Why, of course, there isn't a man living who hasn't some sins to answer for. That's the way God made the world, and the freethinkers can talk against it all they like, it won't do any good.

JUDGE: What do you mean by "sins"? There are sins and *sins*. I tell everyone plainly that I take bribes. I make no bones about it. But what kind of bribes? That's quite a different matter.

GOVERNOR: Hmmm... (*Thinks.*) Too much brain is sometimes worse than none at all. But you, Inspector of Schools, ought to have an eye on the teachers. They are very learned, no doubt, with a college education, but they have funny habits. One of them, for instance, the one with the fat face—I forget his name—the moment he takes his chair, he screws up his face like this. (*Screws up his face.*) It doesn't matter, of course, if he makes a face at the pupils. Perhaps, it's even necessary. I'm no judge of that. But you yourself will admit that if he makes a face to a visitor, it may turn out very badly. The Inspector, or anyone else, might take it as meant for himself, and then who knows what might come of it.

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS: But what can I do? I have told him about it time and again. Only the other day, when the school superintendant came into the classroom, he made such a face at him as I had never in my life seen before. I daresay, it was with the best of intentions. But I get reprimanded for permitting radical ideas to be instilled in the minds of the young.

GOVERNOR: And then I must call your attention to the history teacher. He has a lot of learning in his head and a store of facts. That's evident. But he lectures with such passion that he quite forgets himself. Once I listened to him. Upon my word, I thought a fire had broken out. He jumped up and down, picked up a chair, and dashed it to the floor. The state must bear the cost.

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS: (*Shaking his head.*) Yes, he is a hot one. I have spoken to him about it several times.

GOVERNOR: Your clever man is either a drunkard, or he makes such grimaces that you feel like running away.

INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS: Ah, heaven save us from being in education! One's afraid of everything. Everybody meddles and wants to show that he is more clever than you.

GOVERNOR: This cursed incognito inspector!

(*Postmaster enters.*)

POSTMASTER: Tell me, who's coming?

GOVERNOR: What? Haven't you heard?

POSTMASTER: Bob Chinsky told me. He was at the post office just now.

GOVERNOR: Well, what do you think of it?

POSTMASTER: What do I think of it? Why, there'll be a war with the [Canadians]. [*Or insert another country.*]

JUDGE: Exactly. Just what I thought.

GOVERNOR: (*Sarcastically.*) Yes, you've both hit in the air precisely.

POSTMASTER: It's a war with the [Canadians] for sure, all fomented by the [Mexicans].

GOVERNOR: Nonsense! War with the [Canadians], indeed! It's we who are going to get it, not the [Canadians]. You may count on that. Here's a letter to prove it.

POSTMASTER: In that case, then, we won't go to war with the [Canadians].

GOVERNOR: Well, how do you feel about it?

POSTMASTER: How do I feel? How do *you* feel about it, Governor?

GOVERNOR: I? Well, I'm not afraid, but I just feel a little...you know...the merchants and townspeople...I seem to be unpopular with them. But Lord knows if I've taken from some, I've done it without a trace of ill feeling. I even suspect that I may have been denounced. Or why would they send an inspector to us? (*Lowers*

voice.) Look here, don't you think you could—ahem!—just open every letter that passes through your office and read it—for the common benefit of us all, you know—to see if it contains any kind of information against me or is only ordinary correspondence. If it is all right, you can seal it up again or simply deliver the letter opened.

POSTMASTER: Oh, I know. You needn't teach me that. I do it not so much as a precaution but out of curiosity. I just itch to know what's going on. And it's very interesting reading, I tell you. Some letters are fascinating.

GOVERNOR: Tell me, then, have you read anything about any official from [insert name of city]?

POSTMASTER: No, nothing about an official. A pity you don't read the letters. There are some very fine passages in them. (*Lowers voice.*) I've kept some letters on purpose. Would you like to read them?

GOVERNOR: No, this is no time for such things. But, please, do me one favor. If ever you chance upon a complaint or denunciation, don't hesitate a moment, hold it back.

POSTMASTER: I will, with the greatest pleasure.

JUDGE: You had better be careful. You may get yourself into trouble.

POSTMASTER: Goodness me!

GOVERNOR: Never mind, never mind. It would be different if you broadcasted it, but it's a private affair, just between us. That cursed inspector! Any moment the door may open and in walk—

(Out of breath, Bob Chinsky and Dob Chinsky rush on.)

BOB CHINSKY: What an extraordinary occurrence!

DOB CHINSKY: An unexpected piece of news!

OTHERS: What is it? What is it?

DOB CHINSKY: Something quite unforeseen. We were about to enter the inn—

BOB CHINSKY: Yes, we were entering the inn—

DOB CHINSKY: (*Annoyed.*) Please, let me tell.

BOB CHINSKY: No, please, let me! Let me! You can't. You haven't got the style for it.

DOB CHINSKY: Oh, but you'll get mixed up and won't remember everything.

BOB CHINSKY: Yes, I will, upon my word, I will. *Please don't interrupt! Do let me tell the news...don't interrupt! (To others.) Pray, oblige me, and tell Dob Chinsky not to interrupt.*

GOVERNOR: Speak, for heaven's sake! What is it? My heart is in my mouth! Sit down. *(All seat themselves around Bob Chinsky and Dob Chinsky.)* Well, now, what is it? What is it?

BOB CHINSKY: Permit me, permit me. I'll tell it all just as it happened. As soon as I had the pleasure of taking leave of you after you were good enough to be bothered with the letter which you had received, I ran out. *(To Dob Chinsky, annoyed, even though Dob Chinsky has not interrupted.)* Now, please, don't keep interrupting. I know all about it, I tell you. *(To others.)* I met Dob Chinsky—

DOB CHINSKY: At the stall where they sell pies.

BOB CHINSKY: *(To others, annoyed.)* At the stall where they sell pies. Well, I met Dob Chinsky and I said to him, "Have you heard the news that came to the Governor in a letter which is absolutely reliable?" So then I went with Dob Chinsky— *(To Dob Chinsky, annoyed.)* Will you stop? Please don't interrupt. *(To others.)* So off we went, and on the way Dob Chinsky said, "Let's go to the inn. I haven't eaten a thing since morning. My stomach is growling." Yes, his stomach was growling. "They've just got in a supply of fresh salmon at the inn," he said. "Let's stop for a bite." We had hardly entered the inn when we saw a young man—

DOB CHINSKY: *(To others.)* Of rather good appearance and dressed in ordinary citizen's clothes.

BOB CHINSKY: *(To others, annoyed.)* Yes, of rather good appearance and dressed in citizen's clothes...walking up and down the room. There was something unusual about his face, you know, something deep—and a manner about him—and here... *(Raises his hand to his forehead and turns it around several times.)* ...full, full of everything. I had a sort of feeling, and I said to Dob Chinsky, "Something's up. This is no ordinary matter." Yes, and Dob Chinsky beckoned to the innkeeper, you know. Three weeks ago his wife presented him with a baby. He'll grow up just like his father and keep a tavern. Well, we beckoned to him, and Dob Chinsky asked him on the sly, "Who," he asked, "is that young man?" "That young man," he replied, "that young man—" *(To Dob Chinsky.)* Oh, don't interrupt, please don't interrupt. You can't tell the story. Upon my word, you can't. You lisp and one tooth in your mouth makes you

whistle. I know what I'm saying. *(To others, continuing.)* "That young man," he said, "is an official." Yes, sir. "On his way from [insert city]. And his name," he said, "is Alexander Khlestakov, and he's going," he said "to [insert city]" he said. "And he acts so strangely. It's the second week he's been here and he's never left the house, and he won't pay a penny." When he told me that, a light dawned on me from above, and I said to Dob Chinsky, "Hey!"

DOB CHINSKY: *(Correcting.)* No, I said "Hey"!

BOB CHINSKY: Well first *you* said it, then I did. *(To others, continuing.)* "Hey!" said the both of us, "And why does he stay here if he's going to [insert city]?" Yes, sir, that's he, the official.

GOVERNOR: Who? What official?

BOB CHINSKY: Why, the official who you were notified was coming...the inspector.

GOVERNOR: *(Terrified.)* Oh, no! What's that you're saying?! It can't be him!

DOB CHINSKY: It is, though. Why, he doesn't pay his bills and he doesn't leave. Who else can it be?

BOB CHINSKY: *(To Governor.)* It's he, it's he, it's he. Why, he's so alert, he scrutinized everything. He saw that Dob Chinsky and I were eating salmon—chiefly on account of Dob Chinsky's stomach—and he looked at our plates so hard that I was frightened to death.

GOVERNOR: May the Lord have mercy on us sinners! In what room is he staying?

DOB CHINSKY: Room number five near the stairway.

BOB CHINSKY: *(To Governor.)* In the same room that the officers quarreled in when they passed through here last year.

GOVERNOR: *(To Dob Chinsky.)* How long has he been here?

DOB CHINSKY: Two weeks.

GOVERNOR: Two weeks?! *(Aside.)* In those two weeks, the prisoners were not given their rations, and the streets are as dirty as a tavern. A scandal! A disgrace! *(Clutches his head with both hands.)*

[END OF FREEVIEW]