Album

Titular Councillor Kraterov, thin and slender as the Admiralty spire, stepped forward and, addressing Zmhykhov, said:
"Your Excellency! Moved and touched to the depths of our souls by your long-standing leadership and fatherly care...
For more than ten whole years," prompted Zakusin.
"For more than ten whole years, we, your subordinates, on this momentous... er... day for us, present to Your Excellency, as a token of our respect and deep gratitude, this album with our portraits, and wish that throughout the rest of your illustrious life, for a long, long time, until death itself, you may never leave us... With your fatherly guidance on the path of truth and progress..." added Zakusin, wiping the sweat that had instantly broken out on his forehead; obviously, he very much wanted to speak and, most likely, had a speech prepared. "And may your banner fly for a long, long time yet in the field of genius, labor, and public consciousness!" he concluded.

A tear crawled down the left wrinkled cheek of Zmhykhov.
"Gentlemen!" he said in a trembling voice. "I did not expect, never thought that you would celebrate my modest jubilee... I am touched... even... very much... I will not forget this moment until my dying day, and believe me... believe me, friends, that no one wishes you well as much as I do... And if there was anything, it was for your own good..."

Zmhykhov, an Actual State Councillor, kissed the Titular Councillor Kraterov, who had not expected such an honor and turned pale with delight. Then the chief made a gesture with his hand, indicating that he could not speak from emotion, and wept, as if they were not presenting him with an expensive album, but, on the contrary, taking one away... Then, having calmed down a little, said a few more heartfelt words, and given everyone his hand to shake, he, amid loud joyful exclamations, went downstairs, got into a carriage, and, accompanied by blessings, drove away. Sitting in the carriage, he felt a surge of joyful feelings hitherto unknown to him in his chest and wept again.

At home, new joys awaited him. There his family, friends, and acquaintances gave him such an ovation that it seemed to him that he had indeed brought his fatherland very much benefit and that, were he not in the world, the fatherland would, perhaps, have fared very badly. The jubilee dinner consisted entirely of toasts, speeches, embraces, and tears. In short, Zmhykhov did not expect at all that his merits would be taken so much to heart.

"Gentlemen!" he said before dessert. "Two hours ago I was satisfied for all those sufferings that a person who serves, so to speak, not the form, not the letter, but duty has to endure. Throughout my entire service I constantly adhered to the principle: not the public for us, but we for the public. And today I have received the highest award! My subordinates presented me with an album... There! I am touched."

Festive faces bent over the album and began to examine it.

"And the album is nice!" said Zmhykhov's daughter, Olya. "I think it costs fifty rubles. Oh, what a delight! Daddy, give me this album. Do you hear? I'll hide it... It's so nice."

After dinner, Olechka carried the album to her room and locked it in the desk. The next day she took the officials out of it and threw them on the floor, and in their place inserted her institute friends. The formal frock coats gave way to white capes. Kolya, His Excellency's little son, picked up the officials and painted their clothes red. On the mustacheless ones he drew green mustaches, and on the beardless ones brown beards. When there was nothing left to paint, he cut out little people from the cards, pricked their eyes with a pin, and began playing soldiers. Having cut out Titular Councillor Kraterov, he fastened him to a matchbox and in this form carried him to his father's study.

"Papa, a monument! Look!"

Zmhykhov laughed, swayed, and, touched, kissed Kolya's cheek passionately.

"Well, go, rascal, show mama. Let mama see too."