The Nose — text 2 of 2

On the 25th of March, an extraordinarily strange incident occurred in St. Petersburg. The barber Ivan Yakovlevich, who lived on Voznesensky Prospect (his surname has been lost, and even on his sign—where a gentleman is depicted with a lathered cheek and the inscription "And bloodletting performed"—nothing more is displayed), the barber Ivan Yakovlevich woke up rather early and smelled hot bread. Rising slightly in bed, he saw that his spouse, a rather respectable lady who was very fond of drinking coffee, was taking freshly baked loaves out of the oven.

"Today I, Praskovya Osipovna, will not drink coffee," said Ivan Yakovlevich, "but instead I feel like eating a hot bread roll with onion."

(That is, Ivan Yakovlevich would have liked both, but he knew that it was completely impossible to demand two things at once, for Praskovya Osipovna very much disliked such whims.) "Let the fool eat bread; it's better for me," thought the spouse to herself, "there'll be an extra portion of coffee left over." And she threw one loaf onto the table.

For the sake of propriety, Ivan Yakovlevich put on a tailcoat over his shirt and, seating himself at the table, poured out salt, prepared two heads of onion, took a knife in his hands and, putting on a significant expression, set to cutting the bread. Having cut the bread in two halves, he looked into the middle and, to his surprise, saw something whitish. Ivan Yakovlevich picked at it carefully with the knife and felt it with his finger. "It's firm!" he said to himself. "Whatever could it be?"

He stuck his fingers in and pulled out—a nose!.. Ivan Yakovlevich's hands dropped; he began to rub his eyes and feel: a nose, it really was a nose! and what's more, it seemed somehow familiar. Horror appeared on Ivan Yakovlevich's face. But this horror was nothing against the indignation that seized his spouse.

"Where did you cut off a nose, you beast?" she cried out in anger. "Scoundrel! drunkard! I'll report you to the police myself. What a robber! Why, I've heard from three different people already that when you shave, you tug at noses so hard they barely stay on."

But Ivan Yakovlevich was neither alive nor dead. He recognized that this nose belonged to none other than Collegiate Assessor Kovalev, whom he shaved every Wednesday and Sunday.

"Wait, Praskovya Osipovna! I'll put it down, wrapped in a rag, in a corner; let it lie there a little while, and afterwards I'll take it away."

"I won't even listen! That I should allow a cut-off nose to lie about in my room?.. A crusty old dry-bread! All he knows is how to run a razor along a strop, and soon he won't be able to perform his duty at all, the slut, the scoundrel! That I should answer to the police for you?.. Oh, you slob, you stupid log! Out with it! Out! Take it wherever you like! so that I don't even hear a whiff of it!"

Ivan Yakovlevich stood utterly stunned. He thought and thought—and didn't know what to think.

"The devil knows how this happened," he said at last, scratching behind his ear with his hand. "Whether I came home drunk yesterday or not, I really can't say for certain. But by all the signs it must be an impossible occurrence: for bread is a baked thing, and a nose is quite another matter. I can make nothing of it!.."

Ivan Yakovlevich fell silent. The thought that the police would find the nose on him and accuse him threw him into complete bewilderment. Already he seemed to see a scarlet collar, beautifully embroidered with silver, a sword... and he trembled all over. At last he got out his underclothes and boots, pulled all this rubbish onto himself and, accompanied by Praskovya Osipovna's not-so-gentle exhortations, wrapped the nose in a rag and went out into the street.

He wanted to slip it somewhere: either into a gatepost box, or just somehow drop it by accident and turn into a side alley. But, unfortunately, he kept running into some acquaintance who would immediately start asking: "Where are you going?" or: "Who are you off to shave so early?"—so that Ivan Yakovlevich simply couldn't find the right moment. Another time he had already dropped it completely, but a watchman pointed at it from afar with his halberd, adding: "Pick it up! You've dropped something over there!" And Ivan Yakovlevich had to pick up the nose and hide it in his pocket. Despair seized him, all the more so because the crowd in the street kept growing, as the shops and stalls began to open up.

He resolved to go to the Isaakievsky Bridge: might he somehow manage to fling it into the Neva?.. But I am somewhat to blame for not having said anything so far about Ivan Yakovlevich, a man respectable in many respects.

Ivan Yakovlevich, like every decent Russian craftsman, was a terrible drunkard. And although he shaved other people's chins every day, his own was forever unshaven. Ivan Yakovlevich's tailcoat (Ivan Yakovlevich never wore a frock coat) was piebald; that is, it was black but covered all over with brownish-yellow and grey spots; the collar was greasy, and instead of three buttons there hung only

threads. Ivan Yakovlevich was a great cynic, and when Collegiate Assessor Kovalev would usually say to him while being shaved: "Your hands always stink, Ivan Yakovlevich!"—Ivan Yakovlevich would reply with a question: "Why should they stink?"—"I don't know, brother, but they stink," the Collegiate Assessor would say, and Ivan Yakovlevich, having sniffed some snuff, would for this lather him on the cheek, and under the nose, and behind the ear, and under the beard—in a word, wherever he took a fancy.

This respectable citizen was already on the Isaakievsky Bridge. First he looked all around; then he leaned over the railing, as if to look under the bridge: how many fish were swimming about, and quietly tossed the rag with the nose. He felt as though ten poods had fallen off him at once; Ivan Yakovlevich even smiled. Instead of going to shave officials' chins, he set off for an establishment with the sign "Food and Tea" to ask for a glass of punch, when suddenly he noticed at the end of the bridge a district inspector of noble appearance, with broad side-whiskers, in a three-cornered hat, with a sword. He froze; meanwhile the district inspector beckoned him with his finger and said:

"Now come here, my good fellow!"

Ivan Yakovlevich, knowing the etiquette, doffed his cap from afar and, coming up briskly, said:

"I wish Your Nobility good health!"

"No, no, brother, not Nobility; tell me now, what were you doing there, standing on the bridge?"

"By God, sir, I was going to shave, and just stopped to see how fast the river was running."

"You're lying, you're lying! You won't get off with that. Be so good as to answer!"

"I am ready to shave Your Grace twice a week, or even three times, without any contradiction," replied Ivan Yakovlevich.

"No, friend, that's trifles! Three barbers shave me, and they consider it a great honor besides. But now be so good as to tell me what you were doing there?"

Ivan Yakovlevich turned pale... But here the incident is completely shrouded in fog, and what happened next is absolutely unknown.