

The Nose



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF NIKOLAI GOGOL

Nikolai Gogol grew up in present-day Ukraine. At 19, Gogol moved to St. Petersburg Russia where he failed to make it as an actor. Following acting, Gogol worked as a poet, but this career path literally went up in flames: in 1828 he bought all copies of books and magazines containing his poems and set fire to his entire catalog of poetry, vowing never to write another poem ever again. After working a series of academic jobs, Gogol found success as a short story writer throughout the 1830s. In the early 1840s, he wrote his first and only novel, *Dead Souls*. Shortly after the publication of *Dead Souls*, Gogol stopped writing and embarked on a quest to find spiritual peace. Eventually falling into a deep depressive state, Gogol burned his unpublished manuscripts and starved himself to death at the age of 42.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Gogol wrote "The Nose" during the age of Russian Enlightenment, Catherine the Great's investment in Russian art, philosophy, and science. Best remembered for contributions to Opera, the Russian Enlightenment made it possible for writers like Gogol to make a living from their work. Still, despite this investment in the arts, Russians lived under the oppressive imperial rule with stark wealth disparities. As open criticism of society would have ended in censorship and possible arrest, Gogol relied on satire to critique Russian society. "The Nose" implicitly offers a critique of the Table of Ranks, a system which determined citizens' social and economic status following standards set by the Imperial Russian government and military.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

At the time of its publication, *The Nose* was difficult to categorize. While the story shared a magical sensibility with E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Nutcracker and Mouse King* and the comedic elements of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Gogol's blend of realism, magic, and comedy was fresh and original. Today's literary landscape finds Gogol's story more company within the genre of magical realism, which refers to literature that situates magical elements within the real world. Although "The Nose," published in 1836, predates the genre of magical realism, it fits snugly within a lineage of stories which use magical realism to satirize society. These include [The Master and Margarita](#) by Mikhail Bulgakov, [Orlando](#) by Virginia Woolf, and [Wizard of the Crow](#) by Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** "The Nose"
- **When Written:** Between 1835 and 1836
- **Where Written:** 1836
- **When Published:** St. Petersburg, Russia
- **Literary Period:** Russian Enlightenment
- **Genre:** Short story
- **Setting:** St. Petersburg, Russia
- **Climax:** The police officer returns Kovalev's nose to him.
- **Antagonist:** The Nose
- **Point of View:** Third-person limited

EXTRA CREDIT

College Scam. Despite absolutely no expertise in medieval matters, Gogol conned his way into a job as a professor of medieval history at the University of St. Petersburg. For the year he held the position, Gogol skipped most the classes he was scheduled to teach. During the student's oral examinations, he faked a toothache—complete with a headwrap—in order to avoid asking questions.

Buried Alive. In 1931, the Russian government decided to move Gogol's remains from his original burial site to the Novodevichy Cemetery, a famous Moscow cemetery containing the graves of various notable Russian writers. When they opened the casket, authorities found Gogol's body lying face down. The positioning of Gogol's body spurred the conspiracy theory that Gogol was buried alive.



PLOT SUMMARY

"The Nose" details an "extraordinarily strange incident" of status-obsessed Kovalev and his **nose**. The story begins with drunken barber Ivan Yakovlevich unexpectedly discovering a nose in his breakfast, which he immediately recognizes as belonging to Kovalev, who is one of his clients. Fearing legal trouble, Ivan Yakovlevich hastily dumps the nose in the river. When a police officer asks him what he's up to, Ivan Yakovlevich nervously tries to sidestep the question, but the officer won't relent. The section ends at this exchange, leaving the subsequent encounter between the police officer and Ivan Yakovlevich a mystery.

The second section begins with Kovalev waking up one morning to a smooth patch of skin in place of his nose. Horrified and confused, Kovalev disguises the absence of a nose with handkerchief as he attempts to go about his day. Kovalev soon

discovers his nose dressed as a man of high rank entering a church. When Kovalev timidly confronts the nose, the nose responds with annoyance, declaring that he is own person—not Kovalev's nose. When Kovalev distractedly pauses to leer at a young woman, the nose slips away.

From there, Kovalev fails to place an ad for his nose in the newspaper when a newspaper clerk declares that the ad would be too strange to print. Then, the police commissioner refuses to assist Kovalev, essentially declaring that whatever happened was probably Kovalev's own fault. Kovalev returns to his apartment, withdrawing from his regular practice of social climbing and pursuing women.

That evening, though, the police officer from the first section returns the nose to Kovalev. The nose is no longer a gentleman, but is now lifeless and normal-sized. After failing to reattach the nose himself, Kovalev frantically requests a local doctor's assistance. The doctor ultimately declines to help Kovalev, determining that even though he *could* reattach it, he thinks Kovalev is better off without the nose. After offering to buy the nose from Kovalev—an offer the protagonist rejects—the doctor leaves.

Wondering how such a terrible fate could have possibly befallen him, Kovalev accuses Podtochina, the mother of a young woman he mistreated, of casting a spell on him. He sends Podtochina a letter threatening legal action. When Podtochina's reply indicates that she has no idea what Kovalev is talking about, he rules her out as a probable cause.

Meanwhile, rumors of the nose circulate throughout town, and the story of the nose eventually becomes a city-wide myth. With most of the city's population enthralled, some high-status men dismiss talk of the nose as crude gossip.

The third section picks up two weeks later. Upon waking up one morning, Kovalev is delighted to find his nose suddenly back on his face, as if it had never left. After a careful shave from Ivan Yakovlevich, Kovalev returns to his old ways, climbing the social ladder and objectifying women.

The narrator concedes how the story's bizarre and unexplained elements are difficult to believe. Still, the narrator maintains that the story is true. He ends the story: "such incidents do happen in the world—rarely, but they do happen."

rank to get women to sleep with him. In beefing up his credentials from collegiate assessor to major, Kovalev also reveals himself to be incredibly pompous and self-conscious. The closest thing to an act of kindness Kovalev commits in the story is giving the police officer who returns his nose a bit of cash. Even then, Kovalev hesitates to fork over the meager sum to the financially unfortunate officer. What's more, Kovalev's story arch doesn't produce the slightest bit of change in his character. In the end, he appears to have learned nothing from the story's events. After the nose—symbolizing his particularly toxic brand of masculinity—returns to his face, Kovalev returns to his old ways, harassing women, deeming himself better than other men, and deceitfully working his way up the ladder of Russian society.

Ivan Yakovlevich – Drunk barber Ivan Yakovlevich, Praskovya Osipovna's husband, is the central character in the first of the story's three sections. In this section, he finds and attempts to dispose of Kovalev's **nose**, which inexplicably appeared in the barber's breakfast. The narrator introduces Yakovlevich as a man who has lost his name in two ways: figuratively from poverty and literally as his name faded from the rundown sign outside his barbershop. In this vein, Ivan Yakovlevich represents the working-class men in Russia who fail to obtain any position in the Table of Ranks, Russia's social hierarchy. He thus sits below men like Kovalev and the police officers. Ivan Yakovlevich's poor conditions also reflect on his outward appearance: his coat is in poor shape, and his hands are filthy. Despite his low standing in Russian society, though, Ivan Yakovlevich demonstrates an odd reverence for elite men, and particularly the sumptuous clothes they wear. In particular, he admires the police in uniform, even as he imagines his arrest. His attunement to clothing points to the story's overarching idea that clothing in the world of the novel is a kind of visual language that reflects one's status.

The Narrator – The narrator of "The Nose," who appears to be a Russian citizen, referring to St. Petersburg as "the northern capital of our vast country." Employing a reportorial style, the narrator details the dates and particulars about the setting, as well as critical facts about the story's politics and characters. For instance, when introducing Kovalev, the narrator details both Kovalev's sexual proclivities and, more generally, describes the various means of obtaining the rank of a collegiate assessor. The contrast of the story's comedic occurrences and the narrator's serious tone embeds a tinge of irony within the storytelling. The serious tone also allows the narrator to slip in ironic praise for Russian society. For instance, in the middle of detailing the ridiculous obsession with rank, the narrator cheekily mentions the goodness of Russian culture. In the conclusion, the narrator speaks frankly to one of the story's key ideas: that everyday life is infused with the weird and the absurd, and that not all things have an explanation.

The Newspaper Clerk – The clerk at the local newspaper



CHARACTERS

Kovalev – The story's protagonist. After Kovalev's **nose** disappears without explanation, he spends two weeks struggling to confront, locate, and reattach the nose. Despite being the story's protagonist, Kovalev is wholly unlikeable: from beginning to the end, Kovalev is cruel and pretentious. He's rude to his barber, Ivan Yakovlevich, castrating the man for his smelly hands. He's mean, laughing at the disfigured faces of beggar women. He's also devious, frequently lying about his

office. When Kovalev attempts to place an advertisement for his runaway **nose**, the newspaper clerk denies Kovalev's request. The clerk at first fears that Kovalev's situation is a joke intended to make him look foolish, but he sticks by his decision even after Kovalev shows his face and proves that he is, in fact, missing a nose.

Podtochina – Podtochina is the mother to a young sexual conquest of Kovalev. After struggling to come up with a rational explanation for his missing **nose**, Kovalev blames Podtochina, wrongly accusing her of using witchcraft as revenge for his mistreatment of her daughter (he toys with her but refuses to marry her). In the final section, she appears in passing as Kovalev likens Podtochina and her daughter to animals, highlighting how little he respects women.

The Doctor – The doctor who lives in the same building as Kovalev. Described as a wealthy man with meticulous grooming habits, a manly mustache, and the best apartment in the building, the doctor appears to be of higher rank than Kovalev. Indeed, doctors typically held higher positions than collegiate accessors in the Table of Ranks, Russia's system for governing society. During his brief appearance, the doctor yanks on Kovalev's face, indicating Kovalev's newfound submission without his **nose**—a symbol of his masculinity. The doctor provides little help and even advises Kovalev to live without the nose, gesturing to the idea that some events are so absurd that they resist all explanation.

The Police Officer – The police officer appears towards the end of the first and second sections of the story. In his first appearance, he apprehends drunk barber Ivan Yakovlevich for acting suspiciously. When he later appears with Kovalev's lifeless **nose**, readers can intuit that the encounter with Ivan Yakovlevich somehow led the officer to capture Kovalev's nose. As part of the Table of Ranks (Russia's system governing society), the officer sits above Ivan Yakovlevich (who holds no rank) and below Kovalev (a collegiate assessor). Readers get the sense that the police officer is of lower rank than Kovalev when the officer describes his financial hardship.

The Police Commissioner – A senior rank policeman who denies Kovalev's request for assistance locating the **nose**. In doing so, the police commissioner deeply offends Kovalev, telling him that a man of his rank is just the type to lose their nose while up to no good. The commissioner's dismissive attitude towards Kovalev indicates that he holds a higher status (indeed, commissioners held a higher rank than colligate accessors within the Table of Ranks, Russia's system governing society during the time the story is set).

Praskovya Osipovna – Ivan Yakovlevich's wife. The narrator describes her as "respectable," suggesting that her marriage to Ivan Yakovlevich degraded her status in society. Her attitude towards her husband reveals general frustration on his drunken state: when Ivan Yakovlevich finds the **nose**, Praskovya

Osipovna lashes out in anger, threatening to call the police and accusing her husband of drunkenly cutting off the nose.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



FASHION, APPEARANCES, AND STATUS

"The Nose" follows a man named Collegiate Assessor Kovalev as he inexplicably loses—and tries to get back—his **nose**. In the time between detaching and reattaching, the nose himself has an adventure: dressing and acting like a gentleman of higher rank than his owner. Set in status-obsessed St. Petersburg during a time of widespread economic disparity, Gogol embeds a scratching critique of society within the narrator's fashion-based descriptions of the story's three principal characters: Kovalev, Yakovlevich, and the titular nose. As the characters in the story rely on sartorial choices as a type of language to communicate social position, Gogol implies that this behavior shows how shallow the characters are: to a fault, they are all focused on outward appearances, not the persons underneath.

Like the age-old adage "dress for the job you want, not the job you have," Yakovlevich's own attire—plus his observations of other peoples' outfits—show that he aspires to be accepted by the upper crust of society and be perceived as a man of status and wealth, even though he has neither in reality. To eat breakfast in his own home, Yakovlevich pairs a dressy "tailcoat" with his "underclothes" for the "sake of propriety." Presumably the only bit of formal wear Yakovlevich can afford is the tailcoat, marking his outfit as both comic and tragic. While Yakovlevich is perhaps not doing the best job dressing like a true upper-class man, his breakfast outfit shows that he deeply admires the elite and longs to emulate them, even if he doesn't actually enjoy the riches and social rank that they do.

At breakfast, Yakovlevich finds a detached, lifeless nose in his breakfast, which he immediately recognizes as belonging to a man named Kovalev. To avoid any trouble with Kovalev, a man of a higher class than himself, Yakovlevich decides to dump the nose in the river. As Yakovlevich walks the napkin-wrapped nose to the river, he fears the patrolling officers. But, even as he fearfully imagines the police taking him in, his thoughts turn to the stately uniforms that the officers wear: "He could already picture the scarlet collar, beautifully embroidered with silver, the sword . . . and he trembled all over." Yakovlevich's admiration for the officer uniforms betrays a reverence for the power and status they hold in society. His "tremb[ling]"

suggests that he finds this power awe-inspiring, fearsome, and perhaps even rousing.

While Yakovlevich is repeatedly overcome with longing to be an upper-class man, the narrator reminds the reader through another fashion-based description that in reality, Yakovlevich is simply not part of the elite. The narrator provides more details Yakovlevich's coat, noting that it is "piebald [...] black, but all dappled with brownish-yellow and gray spots. In place of three buttons there hung only threads." Through this sartorial description, the narrator presents Yakovlevich as representative of his low class—"like every decent Russian artisan, a terrible drunkard"—emphasizing that clothing can be used as a type of language to denote status, or lack thereof.

Although he's of a higher class than Yakovlevich, Kovalev longs for people to perceive him as more elite than he really is and uses his clothing and general appearance to do so. The narrator reveals that Kovalev took the short, shady route to his current rank of collegiate assessor, and that Kovalev "could not forget it for a moment." This establishes Kovalev as a man of lower status than he would like, setting up for the ways in which he tries to signal a higher class through his appearance. To compensate, Kovalev dresses immaculately: "The collar of his shirt front was always extremely clean and starched." He also uses his appearance more generally to signal that he is a proper, sophisticated man: "His side-whiskers were of the sort that can still be seen on provincial and regional surveyors, architects, and regimental doctors." Of course, Kovalev is none of these things, but he attempts to indicate through his facial hair that he belongs among this segment of the elite. Kovalev even goes as far as to pass himself off as a major, which is higher than his actual rank. He attempts explicitly to do so through clothes, overcompensating with a bloated combination of "seals, of carnelian, with crests." Once again, clothing is a visual language that communicates status and power—even if the person in question doesn't truly hold those things.

In the second section of the story, the nose appears as a character in his own right. But not just as any man: the nose appears as a gentleman of even higher rank than Kovalev. The nose's ability to play the status game through the clothes it wears—not to mention the fact that the nose is, indeed, a nose—exposes the absurdity of St. Petersburg society's preoccupation with appearances. In a ridiculous turn of events, the nose passes as a "gentleman in a uniform." He travels around in a fancy carriage, donning a "gold-embroidered uniform with a big standing collar" with a pair of "kidskin trousers" and a "plumed hat" which together signal the "rank of state councilor." Like Kovalev and Yakovlevich, the nose attempts to propel himself into a higher class through his sumptuous clothes.

Later, lifeless and unclothed, the nose is more akin to a piece of "wood" than a person. Through the ridiculous character of the nose, Gogol deepens the idea that the story's characters are so

caught up in superficial appearances that they become blind to the people beneath the fancy clothes—like, for example, the fact that one such person was a nose. That the nose can pass as an elite member of society without a body indicates that the person wearing the clothes is inconsequential to the performance of a gentleman. Instead, it is the outward signal of wealth and power through fashion that counts. In this way, Gogol implies that in this society, being elite has little to do with actually holding any power, and that this reality is just as absurd as a nose strutting around town in a big feathered hat.



ABSURDITY, MAGIC, AND REALITY

In "The Nose," readers follow Collegiate Assessor Kovalev as he wakes up one day without a **nose** and later stumbles upon his missing organ sauntering

around town like a well-to-do gentleman. This strange tale predates magical realism but fits right in with the genre—as is typical of other works of magical realism, magic occurs in this story within a realistic setting, among real-seeming people, and without any discernable reason, making it all the more jarring and unbelievable. Through the magic, absurdity, and resulting comedy that pepper the pages of his otherwise commonplace story, Nikolai Gogol makes a statement that real life is also full of the absurd and the unexpected, and that not everything in life needs—or even has—an explanation.

Even though the story centers around the loss and rediscovery of Kovalev's nose—and thus readers might anticipate some grand reveal at the end of the story as to why this all happened—the story provides no logic or reasoning to explain the nose's disappearance and subsequent reappearance. For instance, when the nose randomly appears in Ivan Yakovlevich's breakfast, readers never find out why or how it got there. As he digs around in his breakfast, Yakovlevich struggles to process the strange event in a meaningful way: "Ivan Yakovlevich poked [the bread] cautiously with his knife and felt with his finger. 'Firm!' he said to himself. 'What could it be?' He stuck in his fingers and pulled out—a nose!" The scene is one of pure bewilderment and resists any kind of explanation. Meanwhile, Kovalev's discovery of his *lack* of a nose is just as jarring. When he first wakes up, he follows his idiosyncratic morning routine of making a "brr..." noise "with his lips—something he always did on waking up, though he himself was unable to explain the reason for it." Right away, this sets up the idea that some events are so peculiar that there is no explanation for them. Eventually, Kovalev peers into the mirror and discovers his missing nose: "He began feeling with his hand to find out if he might be asleep, but it seemed he was not. The collegiate assessor Kovalev jumped out of bed, shook himself: no nose!" Kovalev's bewildered reaction reveals that this event also has no rhyme or reason underpinning it: he simply no longer has a nose. Likewise, near the end of the story when the police officer returns the nose to Kovalev, the officer fails to explain how he

was able to apprehend the nose. Instead, he describes the capture as only “a strange chance,” reinforcing the idea that this event—like other bizarre happenings outside of the pages of the story—resists explanation and reason.

In the face of these odd events, Yakovlevich and Kovalev both struggle to make sense of how such a bizarre occurrence could have possibly taken place in “real” life. Upon finding the nose nestled in a loaf of bread, Yakovlevich “thought and thought and did not know what to think.” His wife, Praskovya Osipova, immediately tries to fill in the gaps of this strange event with one almost-reasonable explanation: her alcoholic husband pulled or cut off the nose when giving Kovalev a trim the previous day. The two devolve into what appears to be a usual argument, with Osipova dragging her husband for his drunkenness. The irony here is that although the inciting incident is extraordinary, the ensuing argument is typical, pointing again to the story’s overarching claim that strange, inexplicable things often play out against the backdrop of everyday life. Meanwhile, for most of the story, noseless and confused, Kovalev continuously questions his reality: “I must be dreaming, or just imagining it; maybe, by mistake somehow, instead of water I drank the vodka.” In a moment of slapstick comedy, “the major pinched himself so painfully that he cried out” in an attempt to make sense of events. The sudden disappearance of Kovalev’s nose is so wildly absurd that he is left grasping for possible explanations, and the only two he can come up with are that he is dreaming or drunk, neither of which are actually the case. As Kovalev is a realistic, run-of-the-mill character—emotional, proud, flawed, self-conscious—the story emphasizes how the weird and the inexplicable can happen to anyone at any time, even outside the confines of the story.

Adding to the story’s footing in reality, all these fictional events occur within the real city of St. Petersburg, Russia, allowing the story’s absurd elements to build off the absurdism of everyday life. At the beginning of the story, the narrator opens with this description of the setting and events: “an extraordinarily strange incident occurred in St. Petersburg.” With a real-life town as the story’s backdrop, the story highlights that the strange and the inexplicable abound anywhere and everywhere. Along these lines, the plot unspools among very ordinary places within the otherwise-ordinary city: a barber shop, cafes, city streets, apartments, and a newspaper office. At the story’s conclusion, the narrator still fails to find a reasonable answer for how or why the story’s events unfolded the way they did. In utter bewilderment, the narrator exclaims, “Such was the story that occurred in the northern capital of our vast country!” In using the possessive “our” in “our vast country,” and noting that these bizarre events happened in a well-known place—“the northern capital”—the narrator plays into the idea that the real-world of the reader is brimming with the absurd, and that many things in life resist an explanation. Likewise, the narrator closes the story declaring, “Say what you

like, but such incidents do happen in the world—rarely, but they do happen.” With this, the narrator—and, by extension, Gogol—is suggesting that the real world, outside of the pages of “The Nose” is also infused with absurdity.



INSECURITY, MASCULINITY, AND IDENTITY

In the story, Kovalev’s **nose**, disembodied and passing as a person of higher rank than himself, leaves both Kovalev’s face and sense of self exposed. Prior to this loss, it is clear that Kovalev’s own sense of masculinity hinges on his ability to manipulate and dominate over women and ingratiate himself with other powerful men. However, without his nose—symbolic of his masculinity—Kovalev is suddenly and uncharacteristically vulnerable, submissive to other men, and even leaves women alone. As soon as he gets his nose back, though, his behavior reverts. That the missing nose so swiftly robs him of this ability to perform his toxic masculine identity suggests not only that Kovalev’s masculinity is fragile, but also that he performs a hypermasculine identity as a means to cover up his many insecurities.

From the outset, the narrator describes Kovalev as a man driven by a deep sense of inferiority and insecurity. Specifically, the narrator details two paths to the title of collegiate assessor: earning multiple degrees or through the bribery-laden (and therefore less respected) Caucasus. Kovalev earned his rank through the Caucasus and, in doing so, carries less social currency than his college-educated peers. To compensate, Kovalev puffs himself up, pretending to be a man of higher rank. Namely, “to give himself more nobility and weight,” Kovalev inflates his title to from assessor to major, trying to overcompensate for his insecurity by inflating his civil status. Still, Kovalev “cannot forget it for a moment” that his beginnings were so shady, revealing that his insecurity is all-consuming and setting up for the ways in which he overcompensates for this insecurity.

In particular, Kovalev inflates his position to manipulate women, whom he sees as objects. As the narrator puts it, Kovalev exaggerates his title to major specifically to prey on women. Under the guise of a major, he would often approach a woman and, seeing her as nothing but “little thing,” give her “secret orders” to meet him in his apartment, presumably so he can sleep with her. That Kovalev commands women—whom he explicitly sees as trivial objects, or “little thing[s]—to sleep with him reveals that his particular brand of masculinity is rooted in dominance over and objectification of women. Similarly, when Kovalev’s nose inexplicably disappears, and he considers who might’ve cast a spell against him, his thoughts immediately turn to Podtochina’s daughter, a girl he was sleeping with but wouldn’t marry. In thinking of this girl, Kovalev talks about her as if she’s a thing: he has been “dallying with her, but kept avoiding a final settlement.” Later in the story, he likens

Podtochina's daughter to a "hen." By conflating her with livestock—an animal bred for food or other practical purposes—Kovalev robs Podtochina's daughter of her personhood and points again to the way that his masculinity rests on having control over women and objectifying them.

Stripped of his nose and his masculinity, though, Kovalev becomes a completely different person. No longer puffed up and domineering, the noseless Kovalev is timid and submissive toward women and high-powered men. This highlights the fact that, up until this point, Kovalev has been engaging in a performance of hypermasculinity in an attempt to blot out his feelings of inferiority and insecurity. In denying Kovalev's request for help getting his nose back, the police commissioner makes a disparaging comment about Kovalev's rank. As Kovalev is ashamed of his roots and attempts to fit in among the elite, this interaction leaves Kovalev feeling further emasculated, as if "a square hit, right between the eyes." Note how the narrator uses combative language to describe the interaction, suggesting that Kovalev's lesser rank leaves him physically vulnerable. The encounter ultimately exposes Kovalev's underlying delicateness, or as the narrator describes him, "an extremely touchy man."

A similar encounter occurs later in the story when Kovalev calls for a nearby doctor for help reattaching the organ. The doctor, who lives in the fanciest apartment in Kovalev's building, is an "imposing man, possessed of handsome, pitch-black side-whiskers," representing his strong masculinity. While the story earlier noted that Kovalev specifically trims his whiskers just like the "surveyors, architects, and regimental doctors" do, which would in theory allow him to at least pretend to be this man's equal, Kovalev instead shows signs of intimidation with the doctor, allowing the doctor to handle him aggressively, flick his face, and jerk him around "like a horse." Again, without his nose, Kovalev is unable to stand his ground with other men.

Without his mask of masculinity—the titular nose—Kovalev is also suddenly meek toward women. At one point in the story, Kovalev briefly pauses the pursuit of his nose when he sees an enticing young woman and begins to leer at her. However, once he recalls that his nose is gone, Kovalev "jumped back as if burnt." Without his nose, Kovalev feels too emasculated to ogle at the young woman and begins to cry: "in place of a nose he had absolutely nothing, and tears squeezed themselves from his eyes." As a symbol of his masculine identity, Kovalev's nose was like mask that he could use to cover up his insecurities; without that mask, Kovalev is left vulnerable, cowering, and exposed.

When Kovalev gets his nose back by the end of the story, he's renewed. Back to his old self, manipulating women, and playing up his status, Kovalev again takes up his performance of masculinity to re-conceal all of the vulnerability and insecurity he laid bare in his noseless state. Puffed up once more, Kovalev even goes so far as to feel superior to men with smaller

noses—now a phallic symbol—feeling pleased with himself when he notices a man "who had a nose no bigger than a waistcoat button." Interestingly, the absence of Kovalev's nose is never really upsetting to him because it disrupts his ability to smell or breathe, but rather because loss of his nose—his mask of masculinity—threatens to expose Kovalev as an insecure, simple accessor, making it clear that he's not the big man major he presents.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE NOSE

Kovalev's nose symbolizes fragile masculinity predicated on exerting dominance over women. As the narrator describes, Kovalev is obsessed with moving up in rank (and, by proxy, his social status.) But Kovalev, having earned his title of collegiate assessor the shady way, is insecure about his rank. To boost his fragile ego, Kovalev constantly seeks reassurance about his status, particularly by manipulating women. Specifically, Kovalev notoriously uses his rank to trick women into sleeping with him. Without a nose, though, Kovalev feels unable to perform his toxic masculinity with full enthusiasm: he shamefully backs down when gawking at a woman's body in church and pauses his manipulative trysts with young women. Because the absence of the nose inhibits Kovalev's ability to perform his signature despicable flavor of masculinity, the nose itself stands in for Kovalev's manhood. Additionally, Kovalev's nose serves as a symbol of physical virility; in the final section of the story, the nose operates as a stand-in for a penis, with Kovalev feeling superior to men with smaller noses.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *The Collected Tales of Nikolai Gogol* published in 1999.

Section 1 Quotes

☞ On the twenty-fifth day of March, 1 an extraordinarily strange incident occurred in Petersburg. The barber Ivan Yakovlevich, who lives on Voznesensky Prospect (his family name has been lost, and even on his signboard— which portrays a gentleman with a soaped cheek along with the words “Also Bloodletting”— nothing more appears), the barber Ivan Yakovlevich woke up quite early and sensed the smell of hot bread.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Ivan Yakovlevich

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 301

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator opens the story with a fact-based description of the story's setting and time. The tone of this introduction lends a bit of credibility to the storyteller—an irony, given the series of unreal events to come. In this short passage, two details foreshadow details confirmed later in the story. First, Ivan Yakovlevich's decline. Later on, readers will learn that Ivan Yakovlevich is a drunkard. That information is foreshadowed here through the description of Ivan Yakovlevich's rundown barbershop. Second, the mention of scent foreshadows the importance of the nose through the story.

Finally, note the mention of bloodletting. Ivan Yakovlevich is what was known as a "barber-surgeon." Throughout the 18th century, doctors would send patients to barbers to have their infected blood drained from the body. The practice was deemed dangerous and it faded out in the late 18th century. The red stripe in a barber's poll used to signify that the barber inside practiced bloodletting. However, the narrator does not mention that Ivan Yakovlevich practiced bloodletting on the man with the missing nose.

☞ “Devil knows how it happened,” he said finally, scratching himself behind the ear. “Whether I came home drunk yesterday or not, I can’t say for sure. But by all tokens this incident should be unfeasible: for bread is a baking matter, and a nose is something else entirely. I can’t figure it out! . . .”

Related Characters: Ivan Yakovlevich (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 302

Explanation and Analysis

Ivan Yakovlevich struggles to figure out how a nose made its way into his breakfast. Looking down at the nose, a stunned Ivan Yakovlevich recites the common Russian expression, “Devil knows how it happened” (or, in Russian, “**черт его знает как это случилось**”). The declaration reflects the story's setting (St. Petersburg in 1836), a notably superstitious and Christian place where people would regularly attribute misfortune to the devil.

In blaming the devil, Ivan Yakovlevich demonstrates an inability to square the magical elements of this story with the world he knows. That is, Ivan Yakovlevich quickly determines that he cannot make sense of the nose in his breakfast within his understanding of the natural world. Therefore, he concludes that the nose is the result of some supernatural event. Throughout the story, many characters will try to use logic to explain away the story's events (assuming that the story of the nose isn't meant literally, or that it's a joke), and the narrator simply avoids giving away too much detail about the mechanics of the nose's disappearance and reappearance altogether.

☞ Ivan Yakovlevich fell silent. The thought of the police finding the nose at his place and accusing him drove him to complete distraction. He could already picture the scarlet collar, beautifully embroidered with silver, the sword . . . and he trembled all over.

Related Characters: Ivan Yakovlevich (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 302-303

Explanation and Analysis

Shortly after finding the nose and realizing that the nose's owner is a man of much higher status, Ivan Yakovlevich realizes that having the nose is a liability. That is, even though he's pretty sure he didn't cut off his client's nose, having the nose around could get him in trouble.

In this passage, Ivan Yakovlevich pictures what will happen if

he's caught disposing of the nose. In imagining his arrest, Ivan Yakovlevich oddly focuses on the specific details of the officer's uniform, all of which indicate a higher social status. The way he describes the officer's suit suggests that he feels a mix of admiration and fear. The note of a shiver further suggests a sexual element wrapped up in his fear and admiration of the men who may do him harm.

Section 2 Quotes

☛☛ Kovalev stretched and asked for the little mirror that stood on the table. He wished to look at a pimple that had popped out on his nose the previous evening; but, to his greatest amazement, he saw that instead of a nose he had a perfectly smooth place!

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Kovalev

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 304

Explanation and Analysis

On the same morning that Ivan Yakovlevich discovered the nose and disposed of it, Kovalev wakes up without a nose. Of course, Kovalev has no idea that Ivan Yakovlevich has found the nose, but readers understand that these two sections are connected.

This passage contains three critical details that give readers a sense for Kovalev's character. First, he's a rather vain man, as shown by the thought of his appearance first thing upon waking. Second, Kovalev has a higher rank than Ivan Yakovlevich, as noted in the presence of staff to bring him a mirror. Third, as the passage describes Kovalev looking at his nose before bed, readers may infer that the nose was not removed during his shave the previous day (so Ivan Yakovlevich is innocent). Instead, the nose appears to have disappeared without any signs of surgical intervention throughout the night.

☛☛ "Of course, I . . . anyhow, I'm a major. For me to go around without a nose is improper, you must agree. Some peddler woman selling peeled oranges on Voskresensky Bridge can sit without a nose; but, having prospects in view . . . being acquainted, moreover, with ladies in many houses: Chekhtareva, the wife of a state councillor, and others . . . Judge for yourself. . . I don't know, my dear sir . . ."

Related Characters: Kovalev (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 307

Explanation and Analysis

After catching sight of his nose passing as a gentleman of higher rank than himself, Kovalev follows the nose into a cathedral. There, Kovalev eventually works up the courage to confront his nose. This mealy-mouthed confrontation reveals Kovalev's inability to think of the world outside of rank—even when it comes to getting his own nose back.

At the time the story is set, in 1836, the Table of Ranks governed Russian social and economic life. The Table of Ranks filed people into specific hierarchical categories. Theoretically, a person's rank depended on their performance (how well they did at their job) or potential (number of degrees). However, people frequently cheated the system (elsewhere, the narrator indicates that Kovalev may have obtained his rank with bribes). The obsession with the Table of Ranks ran deep within St. Petersburg society. Kovalev's fixation on rank is on full display here, wherein he shows deference to his own nose purely because the nose wears the markers of higher status. Further, Kovalev's brain appears too contaminated with thoughts of rank to declare the truth of the situation. That is, he talks about status instead of outright confronting the nose. Note that Kovalev explains that he is an unfortunate victim of such misfortune because he is a man of rank, saying a poor woman would be a more appropriate target. In doing so, Kovalev reveals how the Table of Ranks stands in place of any discernable ethics.

☛☛ The clerk himself seemed to be moved by Kovalev's difficult situation. Wishing to soften his grief somehow, he deemed it fitting to express his sympathy in a few words: "I'm truly sorry that such an odd thing has happened to you. Would you care for a pinch? It dispels headaches and melancholy states of mind; it's even good with regard to hemorrhoids."

Related Characters: The Newspaper Clerk (speaker), Kovalev

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 314

Explanation and Analysis

Desperate to get his nose back, Kovalev goes to the newspaper and requests an ad for the retrieval of his nose. The newspaper clerk denies his request, fearing that an advertisement for a nose will make the paper look foolish. Kovalev pleads with the newspaper clerk, revealing the smooth flat place where his nose once sat. The sight, as the passage here describes it, inspires pity on the part of the newspaper clerk (although, not enough pity to motivate him to help Kovalev). In what he presumably thinks is a gesture of kindness, the newspaper clerk offers Kovalev a hit of snuff.

Snuff, a pulverized tobacco product, delivers a quick hit of pleasure when ingested through the nose. Because it travels through the nostrils, snuff is basically useless for a person without a nose—so offering Kovalev snuff as a consolation for refusing to help him find his nose is inconsiderate at best, and outright cruel at worst. Assuming that the newspaper clerk made an honest mistake, this moment underscores how everyone in the story is unable to confront the missing nose head-on: people are literally blind to the nose, mistaking it as a gentleman when it wears fine clothes, and assuming that Kovalev's story is fiction or farce. Even when confronted head-on with the missing nose and acknowledging that it's missing, the newspaper clerk still cannot truly internalize the reality of what has happened. If the nose symbolizes masculinity, and the missing nose is an embodiment of emasculation, then perhaps the fear of emasculation is too potent for the clerk to truly accept what is happening, leading him to block the reality out and inconsiderately offer snuff.

●● But nothing in this world lasts long, and therefore joy, in the minute that follows the first, is less lively; in the third minute it becomes still weaker, and finally it merges imperceptibly with one's usual state of mind, as a ring in the water, born of a stone's fall, finally merges with the smooth surface. Kovalev began to reflect and realized that the matter was not ended yet: the nose had been found, but it still had to be attached, put in its place.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Kovalev

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 318

Explanation and Analysis

Back home, after searching all day for the nose and drifting into self-pity, Kovalev is reunited with his nose when an unknown police officer arrives with it. With the officer gone, an ecstatic Kovalev turns to the mirror and excitedly attempts to stick the nose to his face.

But, as this passage describes it, the return of the nose creates yet another roadblock. Specifically, the nose does not reattach. The nose has nothing to hang on to and no adhesive quality to enable reattachment. And so, as the narrator describes it here, Kovalev's mood once again plummets. In a distinctively lyrical description, this shows how Kovalev's joy is absorbed by the difficult reality of his situation—he wants his life to go back to normal, but he has no way to make it so.

This could also be a description of how people integrate unusual events into their normal logic of the world: first something seems unusual and then “it merges imperceptibly with one's usual state of mind” when one instinctively explains the event in logical terms (just the way characters in the story explain the missing nose as a joke or a metaphor).

●● He called Ivan and sent him for the doctor, who occupied the best apartment on the first floor of the same building. This doctor was an imposing man, possessed of handsome, pitch-black sidewhiskers and of a fresh, robust doctress, ate fresh apples in the morning, and kept his mouth extraordinarily clean by rinsing it every morning for nearly three quarters of an hour and polishing his teeth with five different sorts of brushes.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), The Doctor, Kovalev

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 319

Explanation and Analysis

After the surprising return of his now-lifeless nose from an unknown officer, Kovalev sets to work reattaching the nose to his face. But the nose doesn't adhere to the smooth, flat surface between his cheeks. Panicking, Kovalev asks his

servant Ivan (not to be confused to barber Ivan Yakovlevich) to call for the doctor living in his building.

The doctor lives in a much more beautiful apartment than Kovalev. The comparatively better living space indicates a higher level of rank. Indeed, according to the Table of Ranks, which governed social status in St. Petersburg in 1836, doctors held much higher ranks than colligate assessors like Kovalev. The narrator introduces the doctor, detailing his elaborate grooming practices, which indicate his high status. The impressive facial hair ("sidewhiskers") and mention of a curvy ("robust") wife ("doctress") likewise communicate that he's a very masculine and rich person. These details help readers understand why, during his upcoming examination, Kovalev is very submissive towards the doctor, and they also set the doctor up as someone who is vain and unhelpful.

Section 3 Quotes

☹☹ Perfect nonsense goes on in the world. Sometimes there is no plausibility at all: suddenly, as if nothing was wrong, that same nose which had driven about in the rank of state councillor and made such a stir in town was back in place—that is, precisely between the two cheeks of Major Kovalev.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Kovalev

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 323

Explanation and Analysis

Here, in the introduction to the story's concluding section, the narrator describes the nose as back on Kovalev's face. The narrator describes the incident as "perfect nonsense," which subtly reinforces the narrator's credibility. In other words, by pointing out the strangeness of the story, the narrator relates to the audience's presumed disbelief. This is the narrator's way of saying, "Look, I know this is wild Here, in the introduction to the story's concluding section, the narrator describes the nose as back on Kovalev's face. The narrator describes the incident as "perfect nonsense," which

subtly reinforces the narrator's credibility. In other words, by pointing out the strangeness of the story, the narrator relates to the audience's presumed disbelief. This is the narrator's way of saying, "Look, I know this is story is absurd. That's why you must believe me." As this is a work of fiction, the tone of the narrator is an example of the use of irony for comedic effect.

☹☹ And Major Kovalev strolled on thereafter as if nothing was wrong, on Nevsky Prospect, and in the theaters, and everywhere. And the nose also sat on his face as if nothing was wrong, not even showing a sign that it had ever gone anywhere. And after that Major Kovalev was seen eternally in a good humor, smiling, chasing after decidedly all the pretty ladies and even stopping once in front of a shop in the Merchants' Arcade to buy some ribbon or other, no one knows for what reason, since he was not himself the bearer of any decoration.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Kovalev

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 325

Explanation and Analysis

As the story wraps up, the narrator checks in with Kovalev, detailing his behavior since the return of his nose. As the narrator describes it here, the return of the nose has brought Kovalev back to his old self. Unfortunately for anyone else involved, this is a rather nasty person: a bully, braggart, and misogynist.

In this passage, the narrator describes how easily Kovalev slips back into his former life. The ease in which Kovalev dips back into his old habits indicates that, despite the earth-shattering events of the previous section, he's learned nothing. He is no more careful of his nose and no less abusive to those around him than if nothing happened at all. Kovalev's character arc is thus flat, with no hint of any transformation. Further, the ribbon he purchases is likely for himself in preparation for higher rank, indicating that he's still all-consumed with social climbing.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

SECTION 1

The narrator introduces the story of an “extraordinarily strange incident” that occurred in St. Petersburg on March 25th.

The story begins with Barber Ivan Yakovlevich. He lives in his shop, which has a dilapidated sign from which his name has faded away. In a gesture of formality, he wears a tailcoat on over his underclothes as his wife, Praskovya Osipovna, prepares breakfast. Ivan Yakovlevich decides to forgo coffee, which he believes his wife would like to have for herself, opting instead for some bread. Upon slicing upon the loaf of bread, he notices a strange, white object within.

Ivan Yakovlevich digs around the bread mass, pulling at the pale object a buried deep inside. To his surprise, it's a **nose**.

Ivan Yakovlevich recognizes the **nose** as belonging to one of his regular clients, collegiate assessor Kovalev. This realization fills Yakovlevich with dread and fear.

Praskovya Osipovna immediately threatens to call the cops and accuses her husband of drunkenly removing the nose during a shave. To these accusations, a bewildered Ivan Yakovlevich responds: “Devil knows how it happened.”

Unable to make sense of how the nose got to his table, Ivan Yakovlevich begins to imagine a well-dressed police officer placing him under arrest. He “tremble[s]” when he thinks of the ornate officer uniform, which is “scarlet” and threaded with silver. Hoping to avoid any trouble with the law, Ivan Yakovlevich decides to dispose of the **nose**, which he first wraps in cloth to disguise it.

This story details magical events (“extraordinarily strange”) within an ordinary setting (St. Petersburg, Russia). Adding magical elements to a real environment is a feature of magical realism.



Gogol uses fashion cues to develop Ivan Yakovlevich's character. Specifically, the narrator's note of a formal coat over pajamas hints at the character's low class and clumsiness.



The nose appears without any reason or explanation, adding to the bizarreness of the story as a whole.



Ivan Yakovlevich's fear is rooted in his lack of power compared to Kovalev, a man of much higher class.



“Devil knows how it happened” (or, in Russian, “черт его знает как это случилось”) was a common phrase at the time of this story's publication in 1836. At this time in St. Petersburg, a profoundly superstitious and Christian environment, it was commonplace to blame any unexplainable misfortune on the devil.



Ivan Yakovlevich's fear of the police (who are of a much higher class than himself) inspires a strange mix of fear and awe. At the thought of the uniform, Ivan Yakovlevich's tremble suggests there's a sly bit of pleasure tucked deep inside his imagining of a police officer—even when that thought involves harm.



Ivan Yakovlevich, who is a “terrible drunkard,” walks to a bridge. As he stumbles, the narrator describes how his only coat is oddly formal and in terrible condition. Just before he throws the **nose** into the water, he recalls how Kovalev would berate him for his smelly hands. Making sure no one is watching, Ivan then tosses the nose into the waters below.

With the **nose** gone, Ivan Yakovlevich feels great, and he decides to celebrate with a drink. However, before he can get a glass of punch, a police officer stops him and asks what he was tossing in the river. Ivan Yakovlevich panics and offers the officer his grooming services. But the officer does not let up, pushing Ivan Yakovlevich to explain himself. Ivan Yakovlevich turns white. The narrator ends the scene with the following summation: “But here the incident becomes totally shrouded in mist, and of what happened further decidedly nothing is known.”

SECTION 2

On March 25th, Kovalev wakes up and immediately reaches for a mirror to check on a zit on his **nose**. However, to his complete shock, there’s no nose. Smooth, flat skin now covers the center of his face. Kovalev jumps up and hurriedly has his servant dress him, intending to go straight to the police.

The narrator pauses from the plot of the story to provide background information on Kovalev and his position as a collegiate assessor. There are two ways to the rank of collegiate assessor: (1) a long path involving earning many diplomas, and (2) a short route of working in the Caucasus. Kovalev took the Caucasus route and has held his rank for just two years—“and therefore could not forget it for a moment.”

Kovalev fudges his “nobility and weight,” going by the rank of Major instead of collegiate assessor, particularly when he’s around women. Often when he meets a beautiful young woman, he’ll “give her a secret order” to meet him in his apartment.

Again, Gogol relies on clothing cues to develop Ivan Yakovlevich’s character. From his poor hygiene and the pitiful coat, readers get the sense that Ivan Yakovlevich himself is unraveling: broke, drunk, and desperate.



“The Nose” details several strange events without any explanation. To avoid complicated rationalizations of an irrational incident, Gogol’s narrator states that the “incident becomes totally shrouded in mist.” Unexplainable events do not rely on a governing rationale or system of logic. Like a dream, the strange events in this story simply occur.



The first thing Kovalev does upon waking up is check his appearance, indicating that he’s a vain man. Also, note that Kovalev has another man dress him, indicating a higher class status than pitiful Ivan Yakovlevich.



In 1836, St. Petersburg society was all-consuming with Russia’s Table of Ranks. The Table of Ranks classified people by civil or military position and thus determined one’s status in society. The higher up a person was in the Table of Ranks, the higher their social status. Promotions were theoretically based on job performance and degrees—but, because of corruption, this wasn’t always the case. Kovalev’s quick rise through the ranks suggests bribery.



Underneath Kovalev’s big ego seems to be a deep insecurity about this shady advancement up through the Table of Ranks. To compensate for this insecurity, Kovalev exploits women.



Usually, Kovalev likes to roam the park dressed as a big, important man. He wears an excessive number of seals and keeps his mustache trimmed in the fashion of a high-class man. Indeed, Kovalev is a notorious bachelor who would only agree to marriage for significant financial gain. Today, though, Kovalev timidly roams the streets, covering the center of his face with a handkerchief, and dipping into empty shops to catch a glimpse of his face.

Suddenly, Kovalev spots a gentleman dressed as a state councilor exiting a carriage and entering a cathedral. To his great shock, Kovalev realizes that the man is his missing **nose**.

Astonished, Kovalev races into the cathedral behind his **nose**, tripping over the “old beggar women with bandaged faces” he would typically mock.

Once inside the cathedral, Kovalev spots his **nose** praying diligently in a high, fancy collar. Kovalev stumbles to confront the nose, spluttering ineloquently about his rank.

The **nose** demands that Kovalev get to the point. Kovalev continues to sputter details about his rank and social status, failing to directly mention anything about the situation at hand until the nose again demands that Kovalev clarify his accusation. Kovalev then exclaims, “But you’re my own nose!” The nose replies, “there can be no close relationship between us. Judging by the buttons on your uniform, you must serve in a different department.”

Kovalev is then briefly distracted by the appearance of a young woman. He takes a moment to leer at her body and face. Realizing she is young, he moves in. But then Kovalev suddenly remembers that his face is missing a **nose**, and he “jump[s] back as if burnt.” The realization of his face's odd state fills Kovalev with both sadness and dread, causing him to forgo any attempt to approach the beautiful young woman.

Kovalev spends his time posturing as a high-ranking playboy. But he seems not to really care about women themselves—only how women reflect or affect his rank. Indeed, Kovalev is only interested in marriage if it would improve his status. Thus, rank is Kovalev’s central, all-consuming concern.



Inexplicably, the nose now appears as a person. With the dreamlike transition from the first to second section, readers are left without any explanation of how or why the nose changed form.



The lack of nose leaves Kovalev unable to go about his regular practice of harassing of women.



The nose’s high rank is indicated by his fancy clothes. Even though it’s his nose, Kovalev treats the nose with the politeness demanded by the rank he assumes that the nose has. This suggests that Kovalev’s fixation with rank causes him to dissociate from himself.



The nose’s ability pass as a gentleman indicates general, cultural-wide obsession with rank: people pay no mind to the person behind the badges. Ridiculously, dressing and acting as a man of high rank, the nose even intimidates Kovalev.



Kovalev ogles at the unnamed woman, briefly distracting himself from the ongoing crisis. Without his nose, Kovalev lacks the confidence to approach the young woman. He feels “burned”: he’s wounded as if castrated. The nose is thus a symbol for Kovalev’s masculinity and a proxy for his physical manhood (penis).



Kovalev notices that the **nose** is gone. Unable to locate the nose, Kovalev heads to the police station. With the police commissioner out of the office, Kovalev takes a moment to think about his situation. He then realizes that, as the nose is at a higher rank than himself, the police might not provide much help. He decides to take out an ad in the newspaper for his nose.

Kovalev asks a newspaper clerk to arrange an advertisement for the nose. The newspaper clerk declines his request, recalling that he was recently tricked into printing a fake ad involving a poodle. Kovalev pleads with the newspaper man, revealing his face as proof that he is not kidding.

The newspaper clerk agrees that Kovalev, with his **nose** missing, is not likely pulling a prank. Still, the newspaper clerk concludes that request is too strange and printing the ad would make him seem foolish, thus he still refuses to place the ad. The newspaper clerk then offers Kovalev bit of snuff which, without a nose to ingest it, Kovalev must decline.

After failing to obtain any help at the newspaper, Kovalev goes to the police commissioner's home. Annoyed with Kovalev for disrupting his time at home, the police commissioner refuses help, implying that Kovalev probably had his **nose** removed by roughhousing in the usual manner of a major. The insult to men of his rank deeply offends Kovalev.

Dejected and offended by the police commissioner's remarks, an "extremely touchy" Kovalev returns home. He suddenly feels disgusted by his own apartment and lashes out towards a servant. Feeling deeply confused, Kovalev pinches his face quite hard to make sure he's not in a dream. He wonders if he is drunk.

After a bit of brainstorming, Kovalev comes up with one possible explanation for his misfortune: vengeful witchcraft. Specifically, lays the blame on Podtochina, the mother of an attractive young girl he's knowingly leading on.

In general, "The Nose" is a story about realistic characters brainstorming solutions to unrealistic circumstances. Specifically, in this section, Kovalev walks through how best to grapple with his bizarre situation. For Kovalev, the ability to imagine a solution is limited by his own fixation on rank.



In response to the mindboggling description of a nose disappearing off a face, the newspaper clerk concludes that the nose story is a gag. In doing so, the newspaper clerk models one way of rationalizing the irrational: that it is a lie or a joke.



Snuff – a tobacco product – delivers a quick hit of pleasure when inhaled through the nose. That the newspaper clerk offers Kovalev a hit even after Kovalev shows him that his nose is missing shows the clerk's lack of compassion. He insensitively offers Kovalev snuff, and refuses to help a panicked, noseless man find his nose because he worries about his own reputation.



Kovalev is submissive towards the police commissioner, signifying that he's of lower rank. Indeed, according to the Table of Ranks, assessors were of lower status than police commissioners. The interaction thus depicts how the Table of Ranks governed many aspects of life, including a person's ability to get justice.



Kovalev's interaction with the police commissioner bruises his delicate ego. In parallel, as Kovalev unsuccessfully attempts to figure out the source of his bizarre misfortune, he bruises his own face. The injury of the missing nose thus hits Kovalev on many levels for comedic effect.



Kovalev is quick to blame a woman he's mistreated for his misfortune. As such, Kovalev's misogyny operates in tandem with a fear of women's power.



A police officer arrives at Kovalev's door. The narrator tells the reader that this is the same officer who confronted Ivan Yakovlevich at the end of first section. The police officer announces that he has Kovalev's missing **nose**.

Putting the more fantastical action off the page (how the police officer finds out about and procures the nose) affords Gogol the opportunity to avoid having to explain away the story's magic.



When Kovalev asks the officer how he got the **nose**, the police officer recounts that, due to his poor eyesight, he first thought that the nose was a gentleman. Without much explanation, the officer then claims that "the chief participant in this affair" is the drunk barber Ivan Yakovlevich. Fishing something out of his pocket, the officer reveals the nose wrapped in paper, lifeless and normal-sized. Kovalev is overjoyed.

The nose passes as a gentleman to everyone but Kovalev and the police officer. Perhaps due to his poor eyesight, the police officer was able to discern the nose was a nose: it might be that poor vision allowed the officer to see past the details of the nose's uniform which signified the nose's rank and blinded everyone else.



When the police officer mentions his family's financial misfortunes, Kovalev sends him off with a little money. With the officer gone, an exuberant Kovalev attempts to plop the **nose** back to his face. But the nose doesn't stay in place. Kovalev calls for a doctor living in his same apartment building for help.

Kovalev doesn't seem to care about the details of the nose's transformation or capture. He's exclusively preoccupied with getting back to his old self, implying that he isn't interested in learning from his experience.



The doctor occupies the most beautiful apartment in the building, sports an impressive mustache, and practices an elaborate personal grooming routine. When he arrives, the doctor knocks Kovalev's head around, groping the smooth surface in the center where Kovalev's **nose** once sat. After a rough examination, the doctor concludes that reattaching the nose will do Kovalev more harm than good. Kovalev begs the doctor to reattach the nose anyway but the doctor stands firm in his decision and even offers to buy the nose from Kovalev.

Kovalev is submissive towards the doctor. As with the police officer, Kovalev holds a lower position in the Rank of Tables. The doctor treats Kovalev accordingly, seemingly more interested in purchasing the oddity than helping his patient. Kovalev's deference towards the doctor and the doctor's lack of genuine concern for his patient reveals how the Table of Ranks governed both social and medical aspects of life.



With the doctor gone, a now-miserable Kovalev returns to the mystery of losing his **nose**. Determined to make sense of recent events, Kovalev reflects on his actions over the past days. Deciding that Podtochina's witchcraft was the most probable cause of his misfortune, Kovalev sends a note to Podtochina threatening legal action for the disappearance of his nose.

"The Nose" is set in 1836— long after the bloodiest period of Russia's witch-hunts, which occurred in the 1700s. Still, even in 1836, many people in St. Petersburg were profoundly superstitious and preoccupied with the devil, leading to prosecutions for witchcraft up through the 1800s.



Podtochina quickly pens a reply. In her note, she assumes that Kovalev's mention of a **nose** is figurative, taking it to mean a social snub. When he reads the letter, Kovalev concludes that Podtochina is innocent, leaving him more even more confused and sad than before.

As with other characters (like the newspaper clerk), Podtochina models one reasonable explanation of the bizarre situation: assuming that Kovalev is speaking figuratively, rather than literally, about his nose.



Over the next several days, Kovalev fails to rally the courage to partake in his regular social engagements – especially those involving young women. Meanwhile, the general public excitedly spreads rumors about the **nose**. Eventually, circulation of the fantastical story of Kovalev’s nose blends in with more mundane social chatter. Likewise, respectable gentlemen begin to regard the story as too trashy to discuss, deeming the nose as an unfit topic for men of higher rank.

Again, without his nose, Kovalev is unable to perform a masculinity predicated on the mistreatment of women. The nose thus serves as a symbol for Kovalev’s toxic masculinity. That some consider gossip about the nose sordid further indicates that the nose is a symbol for a penis.



The narrator ends the section: “[B]ut here again the whole incident is shrouded in mist, and what came later is decidedly unknown.”

The first and second sections end in the same way, obscuring precise details of the story’s magical elements from the reader to maintain a dreamlike mood.



SECTION 3

In early April, some two weeks after the **nose** disappeared, Kovalev wakes to find his regular face with a nose in the middle.

Mention of the date and place allows the narrator to adopt an objective, fact-based tone. The measured tone strikes a contrast with the story’s outrageous events.



Joyous Kovalev visits Ivan Yakovlevich. Kovalev asks the nervous Ivan Yakovlevich if his hands are clean (Ivan Yakovlevich affirms they are) before proceeding with a careful shave.

Kovalev appears to have learned nothing from his time as a social outcast. Picking on downtrodden Ivan Yakovlevich for his stinky hands, Kovalev returns back to his old bully-self the moment his nose reappears on his face.



With a fresh shave, Kovalev hits the town. He resumes his regular practice of hitting on women and treating women rudely and merrily stuffing snuff up his nostrils.

Kovalev continues to vacuum up snuff up his nostrils, failing to take better care of his nose even after its loss. Thus, he did not learn anything from his experience.



When he sees Podtochina and her daughter, Kovalev mockingly refers to the pair as “hen-folk.” The narrator describes how, moving forward, Kovalev was particularly pleased with his appearance. He even goes so far as to say that Kovalev was proud of his **nose**, feeling superior to men with smaller noses.

Kovalev returns to his manipulative old ways with women, reducing Podtochina and her daughter to animals. The nose again is a symbol for Kovalev’s performance of toxic masculinity. That is, with the nose, he feels authorized to harass women. Further, as Kovalev compares the size of his nose to that of other men, the nose plays the role one would expect of a penis.



The narrator reflects on the story as a whole. As he describes it, the story is strange and nonsensical and raises many questions like, “how did the nose end up in the baked bread and how did Ivan Yakovlevich himself...?” However, the narrator is unable to answer any of his own questions and declares that the story is simply one of the many weird and inexplicable events to occur in the real world: “Such was the story that occurred in the northern capital of our vast country!”

The narrator struggles to contain all the story’s magical elements into one all-encompassing narrative. Further, in this conclusion, the narrator juxtaposes the story’s magical elements with its real-life setting, suggesting that unexplainable events are a part of everyday life.





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