The Nose and Other Stories

Nikolai Gogol
Susanne Fusso, Translator
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Supernatural creatures and earthly temptations haunt the characters of Nikolai Gogol's *The Nose and Other Stories*.

A man is forced to win back a stolen letter by playing cards with the devils who took it. A clerk becomes convinced that dogs write letters, and that he himself is the king of Spain. A civil servant wakes up one morning to find his nose wandering the street by itself. These characters and others face strange, otherworldly challenges in this short story collection derived from the works of a beloved nineteenth-century writer.

Nikolai Gogol was born in what is now Ukraine, but spent his most productive years in Russia. His stories owe much to Ukrainian storytelling traditions and to his time in St. Petersburg and Rome. They include themes of temptation, religious parallels, and the dangers of beautiful women. But no gloomy tales are these: while they deal in subjects including witchcraft, demonic influence, and madness, Gogol's stories are as humorous as they are bizarre. They often mock those in power, especially those who allow a small amount of power to go to their head: "The Carriage" and "The Overcoat" both feature blowhards who face very different consequences for their pomposity.

"Rome," an unfinished work, reflects a departure from Gogol's usual motifs. It is dominated by flowing descriptions of nineteenth-century Paris and Italy, with only hints of the story that might have been. The book's endnotes elaborate on cultural specifics and untranslatable jokes. This makes the book perfect for learning about Gogol's subject cultures and time periods.

Filled with unusual stories with hidden meanings, *The Nose and Other Stories* is filled with ill-fated characters, strange happenings, and satirical commentary.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (September / October 2020)

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