

THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR

Written by

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Adaptation and Original Songs
by
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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Anton - (40s-50s) The Mayor

Ivan - (Late 20s) The Director of Communications

Artemis - (30s-40s) The Director of Health

Amos - (60s) The Judge

Anna - (40s) Anton's wife

Marya - (18) Anton's daughter

Alina - (30s) A wealthy land owner

Khlestakov - (Early 20s) A visitor to town

Osif - (50s to 60s) Khlestakov's servant

The Doctor - (40s) A doctor

There are also 4 Townspeople, 2 men and 2 women, usually doubled by Alina, Amos, Marya and Artemis.

Demos of the music in the play can be heard at the following url:

soundcloud.com/oded-gross/sets/the-government-inspector

ACT I - SCENE I

The rich and powerful file on stage and start to sing.

CAST

(Singing)

Life's not fair
That's just a fact of it
Most out there
They have a lack of it
Then there's us
We get some flack for it
Cause we take advantage of our life

Life's not fair
That's just a fact of it
Most out there
Have no impact on it
They don't care
Or they would go after it
Just as well cause that leaves us with more

(The) more you have
The better life becomes
So life's not good as it should be
Unless we have it all, you see

But we don't think that's asking much
Why would anyone resist
Not taking all the things you want
That's a little communist

You can
Have all the happiness you want
It's yours to pursue
Because it's
Always been your right to have your
Dreams come true

You're entitled to your share
Just remember life's not fair.

Remember this and just maybe
If you act accordingly
You'll get everything you want
But here's one little caveat
The more you have
The more you have to lose.

MAYOR'S HOME

ANTON, The Mayor, is flanked by his staff: IVAN, The Director of Communication, ARTEMIS, The Director of Health and AMOS, the district Judge.

Amos is wearing judge's robes. Artemis is grossly obese and is currently eating a strudel. Ivan is doing nothing but sits poised to talk.

ANTON

Gentlemen, I have news of a dire nature and great import to us all, and as such I request you allow me to tell in full that which I have to report before interjecting with questions that might stray me from my purpose. Agreed?

Agreed.

ALL

What types of questions?

IVAN

They all look at Ivan.

IVAN (CONT'D)

I only ask because it seems I have a reputation to stray people from their purpose. I have recently resolved to improve myself and as my tangential tendencies are clearly a shortcoming, I'd like to make attempts to address them. What types of questions?

These types of questions, Ivan.

ANTON

Go on.

(He nods, intrigued)

ANTON

We were talking about important news that I have to give and your question has strayed me from my purpose.

I see. This is helpful.

IVAN

This is annoying.

AMOS

I am merely trying to better myself.

IVAN

ANTON

And we appreciate your interest in self-improvement.

IVAN

As the Director of Communications, should I not strive to be the best communicator I can be?

ANTON

You should.

IVAN

I'll be the first to admit I am not perfect.

AMOS

Far from it.

ANTON

Amos, please.

AMOS

I want to hear the news.

ANTON

And it's critical that I tell it.

AMOS

But he's doing what he always does.

ANTON

And he's acknowledged that. He's trying to improve. Lord knows, we all have our foibles.

AMOS

Not me.

ARTEMIS

Not me.

IVAN

What a fun couch this is! Where did you get it?

Ivan takes a seat on the couch.

ANTON

You two are suggesting you have no foibles? You're perfect?

AMOS

I trust you have no objection to your subordinates being perfect, Mr. Mayor.

ANTON

Of course not. It is in my best interest to surround myself with people who have conquered their flaws. But there is no such thing as being perfect.

AMOS

You don't get to be in our position by being flawed.

ANTON

You don't get to be in our position by admitting flaws.

AMOS

And yet you'd like us to admit them now.

ANTON

It is also in my best interest to know your shortcomings. So I can have you playing to your strengths, not your weaknesses.

AMOS

I have no weaknesses therefore this conversation is a waste of time. And as they say, time is money and the last thing I like to waste is money. I love money! Money, money, money!

IVAN

(Sincerely)

You never told me you had no weaknesses.

ANTON

I'm not sure I can trust someone who thinks they're perfect.

ARTEMIS

I'm slightly over weight. There, I said it. I hope I've earned your trust. My dark secret has finally come out.

AMOS

Artemis. We know you're fat.

ARTEMIS

Impossible. I've gone through huge lengths to conceal it.

AMOS

Huge pants, perhaps.

ANTON

It's all right, Artemis. As the years have passed, we've all put on a few pounds.

AMOS

A few hundred pounds?

ANTON

He needn't be a picture of health.

AMOS

He is the Director of Health.

ARTEMIS

I love sweets! Is that a crime? It's my favorite food group.

AMOS

It's a crime that you think sweets are a food group!

ANTON

Gentlemen, please!

THE DOCTOR has entered the room.

IVAN

(Re: The Doctor)

Who's this?

ARTEMIS

Oh, that's my personal physician.

AMOS

Personal physician?

ARTEMIS

Yes. He's from Germany.

THE DOCTOR

Guten Tag. Ich bin verpflichtet, dem Dicken mitzuteilen, dass er keinen Apfelstrudel essen sollte. (Good day. I am obliged to tell the big man he should not be eating apple strudel.)

ARTEMIS

I recently hired him to help me with my problem of eating too much junk food. I'm resolved to improve, as well, Ivan.

AMOS

(Aggravated)

Why is everyone resolved to improve?

ARTEMIS

My strong desire for confectionery delights has started to become a problem.

IVAN

I don't have a strong desire for anything. Especially not the Mayor's daughter!

ARTEMIS

I'm so committed to better myself, I bought a book on self-improvement.

IVAN

What did it say?

ARTEMIS

It suggested I visualize my self-improvement goals. It suggested I 'Act As If'.

ANTON

Act as if?

IVAN

I have trouble acting at all.

AMOS

That's because you're too busy talking.

IVAN

That reminds me of an unrelated story.

ARTEMIS

Act as if! Act as if I've already achieved the goal I want. So I started acting as if I had lost 15 pounds.

IVAN

Brilliant.

AMOS

Only 15?

IVAN

How did you feel?

ARTEMIS

I felt great. I felt so good, in fact, that I had a slice of cheese cake because I figured, screw it! I just lost 15 pounds!

(Then)

Oddly enough, I gained 47 on the Act as If program. So now I have hired Doctor Hubner here from Germany to help me curb my appetite for sweets.

AMOS

Unless he's inclined to eat the sweets for you, I doubt he'll do any good.

ARTEMIS

When I am inclined to eat a sweet, he will warn me against it and advise me on a healthy alternative.

AMOS

You're eating strudel now.

ARTEMIS

And he warned me.

AMOS

What did he say?

ARTEMIS

I don't know. He only speaks German!

ANTON

Enough with your foibles!

(Then)

Just so you know, this news that I have which you won't let me give is perhaps the worst news you'll ever hear!

Beat.

ARTEMIS

I doubt it.

IVAN

So do I.

AMOS

That's just his foible.

ANTON

What?

ARTEMIS

You have a tendency to hyperbolize.

ANTON

That's the craziest thing I've ever heard.

AMOS

None of us are perfect.

ARTEMIS

Strudel is perfect.

IVAN

When I was five I went to the market.

ANTON

There is an Inspector on his way to see us!

Beat. The Mayor finally has their full attention.

ARTEMIS

What kind of inspector?

AMOS

A Government Inspector?

ANTON

An Inspector General.

ARTEMIS

Is there a difference?

AMOS

No, they go by many names!

ARTEMIS

This is terrible news.

IVAN

Why didn't you tell us this before?

The Mayor restrains himself from barking at Ivan.

AMOS

You're sure he's coming here?

ANTON

I received a letter from someone I trust.

The Mayor pulls out a letter and reads.

ANTON (CONT'D)

He writes, "Dear Anton, I hasten to let you know that an official from Petersburg will be arriving shortly if he hasn't arrived already with instructions to inspect your district. This news has been confirmed. The official in question is of a very significant rank, though he pretends to be a private person."

AMOS

A private person?

ANTON

He travels incognito.

ARTEMIS

In Cognito? Why are we worried, that's over a hundred miles from here.

AMOS

Not the town of Cognito you bloated imbecile. Incognito! In disguise.

ARTEMIS

What does he want to inspect us for?

ANTON

He's traveling here to deem whether or not there's any unnecessary corruption.

AMOS

That's absurd. Unnecessary corruption? Here? All our corruption is absolutely required!

ANTON

Of course it is. You can't lead people without being a little corrupt. Anyone who says otherwise has never been in government.

IVAN

But this high ranking official is being sent by the government. Our government. Surely they know we must be corrupt.

ARTEMIS

If they know it, why are they sending this Inspector?

IVAN

I don't know.

ARTEMIS

We've done nothing wrong.

IVAN

I agree.

ARTEMIS

We're merely pawns in a corrupt system.

IVAN

I love chess!

ANTON

We are pawns. Of that you can be sure. Tasked to do the impossible. Our job requires us to act in the best interest of the many, but in order to keep the job we need to take money from people who'd rather we act in the best interest of the few.

ARTEMIS

How can we possibly reconcile that?

ANTON

We promise to many but deliver to few.

AMOS

For which we can hardly be faulted. It's the nature of the beast.

IVAN

We do profit considerably. Can we be faulted for that?

AMOS

Hardly! We've been put into a position which requires us to bend our morals, act unethically and go against everything we believe in. Should we not be compensated for that?

ANTON

We have done nothing wrong.

IVAN

Good.

ANTON

But discretion is key.

IVAN

Right.

AMOS

Discretion? I have nothing to hide.

ANTON

I know! We are neither more nor less corrupt than anyone else in government.

ARTEMIS

Then why must we be discreet? Why are they sending the Inspector here?

AMOS

There can only be one reason. We're obviously going to war!

ANTON

War? No. If the country is going to war, why would they care if our little district is corrupt?

AMOS

I don't know. All I do know is any time someone gets wind that our government might be corrupt we usually end up going to war.

ANTON

I don't think it's war. It seems to me they are looking for a scapegoat. A patsy. A pigeon.

ARTEMIS

I ate pigeon once.

IVAN

I thought you only eat sweets.

ARTEMIS

It was coated in chocolate.

AMOS

A scapegoat for what?

ANTON

Surely you've noticed all the uprisings lately.

AMOS

How could I not? Thousands of vagrants occupying the streets all over the country. And for what? Do they even have an agenda?

ARTEMIS

I think they want money.

AMOS

Then they should work harder.

IVAN

I think they want jobs.

AMOS

They don't even have jobs?

ANTON

I think they want higher taxes.

AMOS

I have no problem with that.

ANTON

For the rich.

AMOS

What? That's absurd! That affects me!

ANTON

They are denouncing corporate greed and disparities between rich and poor and criticizing politicians for not prioritizing the needs of working people.

IVAN

How can we prioritize the needs of the working people? We're too busy being corrupt.

ANTON

I know. But this group has grown powerful.

ARTEMIS

So? Why does that concern us? They haven't organized here.

ANTON

It doesn't matter. Our government is being forced to appease them, show them they are cracking down on unethical activity.

IVAN

So what's the government going to do?

ANTON

As close to nothing as possible. They certainly don't want things to change. So they send an Inspector General here, the smallest district in the country, to make an example of us.

ARTEMIS

But we don't want things to change either.

IVAN

They're going to send us to the big house!

ANTON

No!

ARTEMIS

The big house? Please tell me it's called that because the portions are so large.

AMOS

Would you forget about food!

IVAN

We're going to get cut by a shiv, a shank, a bleeder!

ARTEMIS

Oh my God! Did you say forget about food?

ANTON

They're not going to send us anywhere! I promise you, this Inspector General is not going to learn anything about us we don't want him to know.

AMOS

You're damn right he's not! This Government Inspector wants to put us under the looking glass? Evaluate our every move? Well I will not be judged! Judge not lest ye be judged!

IVAN

I find that ironic coming from a judge.

ANTON

We must protect ourselves.

(To Amos)

Amos, you have connections in Petersburg, no? Perhaps we can call someone, see if they know who this Inspector General is and if he has any weaknesses we can exploit.

AMOS

I only know one person. A gentleman named Popov but we never met face to face and either way, I doubt he'd do me any favors.

IVAN

Why's that?

AMOS

He ran a Privatized Juvenile Detention Center and would send me kickbacks any time I sentenced a child to his facility. I made a lot of money with Popov.

ARTEMIS

There were that many guilty children?

AMOS

No.

IVAN

You sent children to a Juvenile Hall for crimes they didn't commit?

AMOS

You act as if I had a choice. I told you, he was giving me money. And most of those "innocent" children ended up becoming violent criminals anyway so I feel completely vindicated. In any case, I found a local detention center here which paid me twice as much, so I stopped doing business with Popov.

ANTON

That's why he won't do you any favors.

AMOS

Right.

(Then, gravely)

And, as it turns out, it was discovered he was abusing some of those children.

ARTEMIS

So they put him away?

AMOS

Away from children, yes. He's in government now. If only we kept in touch.

ARTEMIS

So what do we do when this inspector comes?

ANTON

We need to focus on the positive. Highlight the good things we've accomplished. For example, one year ago the people voted yes on proposition 83 which collected a Health Tax to improve and maintain Hospital Facilities.

IVAN

But the hospital is still in shambles.

ANTON

Artemis, what did you do with the revenue earned by proposition 83?

ARTEMIS

I spent it all on sweets and to pay this good doctor to keep me from eating sweets.

THE DOCTOR

Er hat mich auch einmal gezwungen, ihm ein Bad zu geben. (He also made me bathe him once.)

ANTON

We need to curb all corrupt activity immediately. Under no circumstances is anyone to do anything remotely corrupt.

(Then)

Ivan, from here on out, I need you to start reading everyone's mail.

IVAN

That sounds remotely corrupt.

ANTON

We need to find out who this Inspector is. Surely someone is corresponding with him.

IVAN

I could never read the mail of our private citizens. That goes against my oath as Director of Communications.

ALINA BOBCHINSKY enters.

ALINA

Mr. Mayor, I think I know who the Government Inspector is! And in case you are wondering how I even know there is a Government Inspector, Ivan told me after he read your mail. He's always reading your mail. He reads everyone's mail. That's just what he does. He reads mail. Anyway, I think I know who the Government Inspector is.

ANTON

Alina Dobchinsky, you are heaven sent.

ALINA

I know! Praise the lord! Heaven sent to bring back fiscal responsibility, free markets and constitutionally limited government except for when it comes to abortion and gays and then our leaders need to get involved and kill those aborting, homosexual bastards because that's what it says in the bible.

ANTON

Of course.

ARTEMIS

I love your piety.

ALINA

Artemis!

ARTEMIS

Alina!

They kiss.

ARTEMIS (CONT'D)

You taste like candy!

ALINA

You taste like Jesus!

They kiss again.

IVAN

Are you two going out or something?

ALINA

Yes. We are going out or something. It's crazy I know. We've been living in this town for so long. How have I not noticed him before?

AMOS

I don't think that's possible.

ALINA

But I have him in my sights now. God has opened my eyes. And now every time I see him, I just want to throw my arms around him.

AMOS

That's definitely not possible.

ALINA

I can't hide my love for him anymore. I don't want to. So I guess the cat's out of the bag.

AMOS

Just be careful Artemis doesn't eat it.

ALINA

You may disparage him all you like...

AMOS

Thank you.

ALINA

...But it's God's will he is as he is, so I wouldn't have him any other way.

She gives Artemis a treat.

ARTEMIS

Ooh. Turkish delight!

ANTON

It gives me great pleasure to see you and Artemis so happy. It is in my best interest to surround myself with people that are content and wanting for nothing.

ANNA, the Mayor's wife, enters. She is dressed quite well.

ANNA

Anton! How is it that your daughter has the latest in fashion and I walk around in these rags which are least three weeks old?

ANTON

I bought Marya a dress. It was her birthday. It was what she wanted. You know I can deny her nothing.

ANNA

And yet you deny me everything. Am I supposed to wear these tattered remnants of yesteryear when your Government Inspector arrives? Do you not want your wife looking her best?

ANTON

I think you look fine as you are.

ANNA

I look old and ugly in everything.

ANTON

So it's pointless to buy you a new dress.

ANNA

I used to be young and beautiful. The child has robbed me of my youth and looks.

ANTON

But she's not even your child.

ANNA

Yet she's robbed me all the same.

ANTON

That's nonsense. She hasn't robbed you of anything, she's given you a greater sense of purpose in exchange for your youth and looks.

ANNA

Well a new dress will serve my greater sense of purpose quite nicely.

ANTON

Fine. Then I encourage you to pick one up. But you must let me get back to my meeting. Alina here says she knows who the Inspector General is.

ANNA

You've seen him? Is he young? Handsome? Does he like older women?

ANTON

That's hardly relevant.

ANNA

You're hardly relevant.

ANTON

Anna-

ANNA

Honestly, you're the mayor of the smallest district in the country. Who cares what you do?

ALINA

For what it's worth, the man I saw was young and handsome. And he was accompanied by an older woman. A servant, I think.

ANTON

(Aimed at Anna)

Of course she was a servant. What other use could he have for an older woman.

ANNA

I can think of many uses. Older women have such experience.

ANTON

In my experience, older woman only have excuses.

ALINA

This is making me slightly uncomfortable.

ARTEMIS

This is making me slightly hungry.

IVAN

Seriously, where did you get this couch?

ANTON

I apologize. You were saying about the Inspector General? Where did you see him?

ALINA

He's staying at the Inn in the town square. I was having lunch with an acquaintance of mine when in walks this gentleman who I have never seen before and as you know I pride myself on knowing everything about everyone in this town. So I call over Mr. Kochev who runs the Inn and I ask him who the fellow is?

ANTON

What does he say?

ALINA

He's from Petersburg and he likes to throw his weight around like he's a big shot. He's been staying at the Inn for a week and has yet to pay his bill.

ANTON

He hasn't paid his bill?

AMOS

There are only two types of people that don't pay their bill. Those that can't.

ANTON

And those that don't need to.

ARTEMIS

What about those that accidentally eat it because they thought it was a Moravian cookie?

ALINA

That's when I remembered what Ivan had told me after reading your mail.

IVAN

(Covering)

I didn't read his mail. I scanned it looking for trigger words in the interest of defense.

ALINA

Mr. Mayor, this man from Petersburg is clearly your Government Inspector.

ANTON

Alina, I think you're right. The question now is how do we deal with him.

ALINA

That you have to deal with him at all seems utter nonsense. A Government Inspector? The government shouldn't be inspecting anything. It should let the local districts run as they see fit. It should leave big businesses to manage their own affairs without sticking it's nose in because when big businesses prospers everyone prospers. That's a fact. It should take all of the communists, socialists and Nazis out of our government and put God back in because I'll tell you something: unlike some leaders we've had, at least God was born in this country.

ANTON

Alina, you and I are going to the Inn. We are going to find this Inspector.

ALINA

You want me to come with you?

ANTON

If you're up to it?

ALINA

Oh I am up to it, all right. I may be just a simple wealthy land owner, but I am not averse to a little adventure. I am fit as a fiddle and protected by the All Mighty. I never get sick; I never get injured. Nothing can hurt me, the Lord is my shield!

ANTON

I just need you to help track down his room and then you can wait outside while I talk to him.

ALINA

(Saluting him)

Aye aye!

AMOS

You're going to confront him?

ANTON

Confront him? I think not. You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.

ARTEMIS

Then perhaps I should go with you. If there is honey involved.

ANTON

No. You three to your own departments. Make sure there isn't anything out in the open that could be deemed suspect.

IVAN

Like a ledger that shows financial contributions made in exchange for political favors that would ultimately re-open the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade?

ANTON

Yes. Something like that. I will head to the Inn under the pretense of seeing whether this guest from Petersburg is being taken care of, the way I would with any visitor to our town. He wants to play games? I can play games. I will not let this Inspector General ruin our way of life. We have to preserve it! Protect it! Not only for us, but for our children.

ARTEMIS

I don't have children.

IVAN

Neither do I.

AMOS

I used to send children to a Juvenile center where they were abused by a man who paid me money.

ANTON

Well I have a daughter. And everything I do is for her.

ANNA

Please! Everything you do is for yourself.

(To the others)

That's his foible.

IVAN

I thought it was hyperbole.

ANTON

You people are the worst at identifying foibles in the whole world.

(Then)

And everything I do is for my daughter. She means more to me than anything else. She is my light, my strength. She makes me feel that though I am obligated to do a few things which some people may deem corrupt in order to keep the train that is this district moving forward, I am not a corrupt person, someone who cares only about himself. I am a father. I am a family man with family values. I love my child. Everything I do is for her. And I know when I am old and infirm she will do everything for me.

ANNA

See, it all comes back to you.

ANTON

Gentlemen, we will reconvene here later! Alina, let's go.