

Celebration

The office of the Chairman of the Board of the Mutual Bank. The room it is ostentatiously decorated. The furniture includes two desks -- one elaborate and one considerably less so -- some armchairs, a sofa, oriental carpets, and several plaques and statues. Hirin sits at the simpler of the two desks working an abacus and scribbling furiously in a ledger. He is dressed in wools and wears felt boots. With a great sigh he throws down his pen and sits back in his chair to rub his temples. Then he jumps to his feet, thrusts his head out the door and yells into the outer office.

HIRIN

Would one of you please go get me a large tin of headache pills! And please, please bring me some fresh water. And don't make me ask again.

He returns to the wrong desk and starts back to work but his books and abacus are missing! He searches for them in a panic, certain they've been stolen, when he notices his mistake and sinks his head into his hands in anguish.

I'm exhausted. I've been at this for three days, dawn to dusk here, dusk to dawn at home, no sleep at all. *(a sudden, violent cough)* Oh, what a cough. I'm feverish, my legs ache, and there's numbers dancing in front of my eyes.

He grabs the papers in front of him and returns to his own desk. He distractedly reads the papers in his hand, and is suddenly furious.

That crook! That conceited, self-centered charlatan! The Chairman of the Board's annual address to the Stockholders "Our Bank: Looking Forward to Tomorrow." I am, too. He acts like he's the god of banking... (one, three, zero) ...when he's just a windbag with an expensive tailor. (three hundred twenty eight) A desk chair admiral with a solitary galley slave... (five, zero, four) ...me. (four hundred thirteen) He fills his speeches with "forevers" and superlative nonsense... (four, seven, zero, five) ...but I'm the one who has to grind out the reports. (seven hundred eighteen) And *he* gets the glory! To hell with him. At least I'll have a bonus out of this. A gold medal and three hundred rubles, which I'd better see, if he knows what's good for him. I take no responsibility for my temper... (two hundred twenty three) ...over broken promises.

There is applause offstage, and we hear Shipushin speaking in response.

SHIPUSHIN

My dear associates, my oldest and most prized associates, thank you, I am forever in your debt. I shall treasure this forever as a token of the greatest day of my life!

He enters

Thank you again, forever, thank you!

Blows kisses out the door.

Thank you!

He shuts the door and still in a state of reverie, deposits the gift on his desk. The clacking of the abacus reminds him of Hirin's presence.

SHIPUSHIN

My dearest, oldest and most prized associate... um, Kuzma Nikolayevich! So, how's it coming?

HIRIN

Rising for the occasion.

Andrey Andreyevich, it is my honor to congratulate you on the Bank's fifteenth anniversary.

SHIPUSHIN

Thank you, I'll remember the day forever! Taking into account the joy of this occasion, and granting this day represents a new upward turn in our mutual fortunes, let me shake your hand.

He takes Hirin's hand

Thank you, thank you, thank you, my oldest and most valued associate

Overwrought, he embraces him and kisses him on both cheeks.

Thank you for your treasured labor, for your capital contribution, your inestimable loyalty, for everything, everything! Together, we have changed banking forever. I credit my achievements as Chairman to people like you, to the intrepid clerks and bookkeepers, this best of all banking units gives currency to the term, solid! Fifteen years, fifteen years today, fifteen years as sure as I'm a Shipushin. (*complete change*) So, how's the report coming? Almost finished, I hope. Time is money!

HIRIN

Five more pages.

SHIPUSHIN

Superb! You think it'll be ready by three?

HIRIN

If nobody bothers me it will be. There's not much left to do.

SHIPUSHIN

Capital, a triumph, sure as I'm a Shipushin! Since the meeting's at four, give me what you've got so I can look it over.

Hirin picks up a sheaf of papers and spills them all over the floor, he wearily gets down to gather them and to try to put them back in order, coughing all the while.

SHIPUSHIN

Was that necessary? Come, come, time is money, time is money! I'm investing my reputation in this report, you know, this is the *payoff* of my career... thus far... this is my jubilee parade, my drum corps, and my fireworks, all right here in this report, sure as I'm a Shipushin!

Hirin hands him the papers and staggers back to his desk.

Oh, but I am spent. The rheumatism acted up last night, then I had a whole morning on my feet, going here, going there, speeches, congratulations, working the crowds. I feel as frail as an old note.

HIRIN

Clicking the abacus and blinking, he waves his hands in front of his eyes, trying to clear them.

Two, four, nine... two hundred fifty...

He continues like this through the next speech.

SHIPUSHIN

And it's not enough I have all the festivities to manage, but your wife came in to see me again this morning. She complained that last night you'd been chasing her with a meat cleaver, she and her sister both! Now, ...um, Kuzma Nikolayevich, was that dignified?

HIRIN

Andrey Andreyevich, it's the Bank's Anniversary Day, and I've been slaving away on this report, so excuse me if I ask you to (*suddenly angry*) keep your stupid nose out of my private affairs! Please.

SHIPUSHIN

Now, now, now, so volatile! Really, my friend... um, Kuzma Nikolayevich, generally you're a pretty solid fellow, respectable and hard-working, but when it comes to women you act like Jack the Ripper. I can't figure out what it is you dislike about them.

HIRIN

What's there to like?

SHIPUSHIN

(he sighs, and has nothing more to say) Would you look at this! What a thoughtful gift, how endearing. It's rumored, you know, that a Special Delegation from the Board has made provisions for a speech on my behalf this afternoon and maybe even a little trophy of some kind. Very endearing, sure as I'm a Shipushin. And it enhances our public image, you can count on it! People appreciate a financial institution that exhibits style and flair. Dignity and decorum! Of course, I wrote the speech myself. And ordered the trophy. Wait until you see the speech cover I bought, Italian leather, embossed. Forty rubles, but it was worth it. The Board never pays any attention to details, so if I don't, who will? Look at this office, for instance, it makes a statement, don't you think? You can bank on it, and all on my account! They all say it doesn't matter if the brass is polished, or the tellers have silk ties, or if we have a doorman in a fancy uniform! But I'm telling you, our depositors notice. This *feels* like a bank to them, and it's because I show interest in the details! The details! How things look, how people behave. Or don't behave. Now at home I could be as much of a slob as the next guy, beat my wife, dress like a...

HIRIN

I thought I told you to mind your own business...

SHIPUSHIN

What did I say? Don't be so touchy! I just meant that at home *I* can act any way *I* like, but here, at the *bank*, it's different. *Everything* here must proclaim "dignity, and decorum"! My highest credit as Chairman is that I have restored respect to banking, forever!

The approach seems not be working, so he tries something somewhat more direct

My God, man, it just registered! Look at you, look at how you're attired! The Special Delegation will be here any minute and you're wearing felt boots! And look at that old scarf, take it off, take it off right now! And that coat, you should be wearing tails, or a dark jacket at the very least...!

HIRIN

Resisting Andrey's attempts to take his scarf.

I've got a fever and a rash, so to hell with your Delegation, I'm taking care of my health.

SHIPUSHIN

But you appear so out of place. You're a debit to the style of the Bank! You unbalance the room!

HIRIN

Fine, when they come I'll hide in the closet. And speaking of "out of place", why did you to invite all those females to the Anniversary Celebration Supper?

SHIPUSHIN

All those females...?

HIRIN

I know, I know, you think they make a nice effect, style and flair, balance the company and all that, but what about the trouble they cause!

SHIPUSHIN

Trouble? I don't agree. The company of women dignifies an occasion, it elevates.

HIRIN

Elevates, I see, like your supposedly educated wife...

SHIPUSHIN

I wasn't speaking of her, exactly...

HIRIN

Last Monday, right in public she says, and in a loud voice, she says, "My husband bought a huge block of Dria-Pria stock just before the bottom fell out, and now he's worried it'll bust the bank. But the bank is always almost busted, so what's the big deal?" Why do you tell her these things?

SHIPUSHIN

You just reminded me, she's on her way here. In fact... *(checking his watch)* Oh well, too late. I was supposed to meet her at the station, you see. Poor dear, but there hasn't been time, and I'm too tired to go rushing off now. And even though I'm always delighted to see her, today isn't the best time for a visit. She would have been better off at her mother's for the weekend. She's got it in her head that she's joining me for dinner, so of course she will, and of course then I have to default on my plans for after dinner, which were... well, which promised to be very amusing. *(Hirin coughs violently)* You're right, why should I give up my evening? I'll be firm with her, firm, solid as a rock, that's me, solid as a rock, sure as I'm a Shipushin!

Tatyana enters wearing a raincoat and carrying a traveling bag. She is a very attractive young lady, about ten years younger than her husband. She speaks almost without pausing for breath.

SHIPUSHIN

Well, look who's here, wonderful, what perfect timing! Hah, hah, my dear, my dear! So glad to see you!

TATYANA

Sweetheart!

She kisses him affectionately.

SHIPUSHIN

My only love. We were just talking about you, weren't we, um... Kuzma Nikolayevich?

TATYANA

You missed me, didn't you? You don't feel well, do you? I didn't stop home, I came right here from the train. Oh, the stories I have to tell you! No, I'll keep my coat, I'm only here a minute. Hello, Kuzma Nikolayevich! So how's everything at home?

SHIPUSHIN

Couldn't be better. You look like a million! Being away agrees with you! You're even prettier than when you left. It is obviously to your profit. Being away.

TATYANA

Mama and Katya send kisses. Vasily Andreyevich sends a kiss. My Aunt sends you some jam. They're all upset you never write. Zena sends a kiss. Oh, if you only knew all that's been going on, the things that have been happening, oh, it makes me nervous just to mention it, terrible, dreadful stories.

Teasing Shipushin, who is grinning like a fool.

Oh, but look at that sad face, you're not one bit glad to see me, are you?

SHIPUSHIN

Hah, hah! Not glad, no, no, where did you get that idea? Not glad, haha!

He kisses her earnestly while Hirin clears his throat many times.

TATYANA

That's better. Poor, dear, Katya, my heart bleeds for her, poor, poor girl.

SHIPUSHIN

Yes, well, it's not that I'm not glad, it's that a Special Delegation from the Board is due any minute, and I wouldn't want you to feel inappropriately attired – not on our Anniversary Celebration – especially since everyone knows that you're usually the most elegantly attired lady in all of...

TATYANA

The Special Delegation, of course, "We have the great honor of presenting this address to...", the speech you wrote for yourself that they raised such a fuss about giving? So they gave in after all! Are they going to surprise you like you insisted they do? Did you have to give them bonuses, too?

SHIPUSHIN

Listen, sweetheart, it's better not to talk about... don't you think you ought to check to see how things are at home?

TATYANA

That can wait, I want to tell you the news first. It'll only take a minute, then off I go!

As she tells her story, she removes her raincoat, hat, scarf, gloves, and muff, and scatters them about the room, something that drives Shipushin mad.

Okay, here's everything, the whole week, right from the beginning. So, remember how I sat next to that big fat lady on the train and right away started reading – because, you know, I hate talking on the train – well, that worked fine for three stops, but when it started to get dark I got into one of my moods like I do, and well, there was this nice-looking young man across from me, dark hair, you know, so we started chatting, and then a navy officer joined us, then a student of some kind – I had dropped a hint that I was single, so as you can imagine I was getting all kinds of attention – and so we went on and on like that until midnight at least, and the handsome one with the dark hair was a real comedian, – I laughed and laughed till I thought I'd burst – and the navy man had a wonderful singing voice so when he found out my name was Tatyana, well, you know sailors, he started right in on "Onyegin I will not deny, I crave with Tatyana to lie!", what a riot!

SHIPUSHIN

Capital, yes, but don't forget ...um, Kuzma Nikolayevich is here, so maybe it would be better if you told me all this later.

TATYANA

He can listen too, I don't mind. It's so interesting, and I'll be finished in a minute anyway, so anyway, Seryozha met me at the station, with another nice-looking young man, some kind of tax man I think, but with the most beautiful big eyes, and so Seryozha introduced us and off we went in an open taxi in this gorgeous weather...

There is a ruckus offstage and Mrs. Merchutkina enters carrying a roll of papers. She is a woman in her fifties of an imposing if somewhat rustic demeanor, who speaks in questions when she's trying to make a point.

MERCHUTKINA

Don't you touch me again, I'm here to see the boss! *(to Hirin)* Ah, sir, yes, your honor? Please let me make my introductions to you, sir, I am Nastashya Fiodorovna Merchutkina? My husband was a Secretary in Government Service? Well, I am his wife. Your honor, sir?

SHIPUSHIN

May I help you?

MERCHUTKINA

(to Shipushin) Yes, your honor, sir, my husband? The one I just spoke about? The one in Government Service? A First Secretary, sir. Well, he was on leave from his job for five months due to an illness? And all of a sudden, for no reason at all, he gets laid off! So I go to pick up his pay, and what do you think? They have deducted twenty-four rubles and thirty-six kopeks, no reason at all! So I demand that they tell me why? And they tell me that he borrowed from Mutual Aid, and that's why they took money out of his pay! But how could he borrow from Mutual Aid? He never asked *me* if he could! It doesn't add up! I'm a poor woman, I rent out my rooms to strangers just to keep food on the table. I have no money, I get dizzy spells, I get no respect from anybody, and nobody ever says anything nice to me. Excuse me. *(she cries a little)*