

THE 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... (counting again) One, three, zero... when he's just a windbag with a fancy 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 get 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 fifteen anniversary...

SHIPUSHIN: Thank you, I'll remember this 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 splendid 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.

SHIPUSHIN: 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 few speeches)

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 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 Day -- 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! 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.

MRS. M: 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?

MRS. M: (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)

SHIPUSHIN: May I? (taking her petition)

TATYANA: (having lost her audience, she turns to Hirin) Oh, but I really have to start back from the very beginning of it all, you see, it all started when I got a letter from Mama last week -- a complete surprise -- and she mentioned that a fellow named Grendilevski had proposed to Katya -- my sister -- a nice man, well-mannered and everything, but no money and no job, but the worst of it was that Katya was so flattered that she lost all judgment and common sense and really seriously considered the proposal, so Mama wrote for me to come as soon as possible so that I could convince Katya that she was being silly to...

HIRIN: Pardon me for interrupting, but I'm trying to work, and now I've lost my place what with your Mama and Katya and I don't give a...

TATYANA: Never try to do two things at once, you should have been listening to me, after all I am the chairman's wife, be polite, you shouldn't be so irritable all the time, what's the matter anyway, are you in love?

SHIPUSHIN: Mrs. Merchutkina, I can make no sense of this, what exactly is your complaint?

TATYANA: Oooh, you are, you're in love, look, he's turning red!

SHIPUSHIN: My dear, do you think maybe you could wait in the reception room, I won't be a minute.

TATYANA: Well, alright, but I want to finish my story and I can't stay all day. (she exits)

SHIPUSHIN: You see, the problem is that you're in the wrong place, what you want has nothing whatsoever to do with this bank. What you should do is take this to the Government Department where your husband was secretary, and ...

MRS. M: I've done that, I've been to five different offices already and nobody pays any attention. I was furious, then my son-in-law, Boris Mateyevich? Bless the boy, told me to see you. "Shipushin, go to Shipushin, he can fix you up, he's got clout! He can move mountains!" So. Is he right? Can you move mountains? You're my last hope, your Honor, sir!

SHIPUSHIN: Mrs. Merchutkina, please, I understand, but there is nothing we can do for you. Your husband seems to have been a Medical Secretary for the War Department, and this is a private bank. Bank, War Department, no connection at all, do you see?

MRS. M: If you're suggesting my husband is a malingerer, your honor, sir, it's just not true. Here's a note from his doctor that proves it, see? Right here, read here, it says...

SHIPUSHIN: That's very good, but that doesn't change the fact that this is a bank and...

From the next room Tatyana laughs boisterously, and several men join in soon after.

SHIPUSHIN: (to Hirin) Oh my, what do you suppose she's saying to them? Now, Mrs. Merchutkina, I understand you've got a terrible problem, so what I would suggest is that you ask your husband where to...

MRS. M: That good-for-nothing, what does he know? With him it's always, "Leave me alone, keep your stupid nose out of my damn business." Men! Selfish and vain, all of them. (Hirin has a coughing fit)

SHIPUSHIN: One more time. Your husband worked for the Government, we have nothing to do with the Government, this is a private institution, a bank, a place where...

MRS. M: Fine, fine, I understand, your Honor, sir, I understand perfectly.

SHIPUSHIN: Capital. Now this is our Anniversary Day, and I am exceptionally busy, so good luck with your petition and good day.

MRS. M: What about my fifteen rubles? If you don't give money orders, I'll take cash.

SHIPUSHIN: The what...?

HIRIN Andrey Andreyevich, if...!

SHIPUSHIN: Hold on, just a minute! Now listen to me. Coming here for your husband's pay is like going to a drug store for a divorce, or like going to the tax bureau for a loan, or like...

TATYANA: (knocking) Andrey, can I come back in, now?

SHIPUSHIN: Hold on, just a minute! I can't help it if the Government cheated you, the Government cheats everybody, that's the Government. Whatever your problem is, this bank is not responsible! And this is an extraordinarily important day for us, I have tremendous amounts of very important business to attend to, and I would be forever indebted to you if you would vacate the premises. Right now!

MRS. M: Your honor, sir, I'm also an orphan! An orphan, and lame. And worried to death! I have to evict my tenants, my husband's pay, his health, my health, and still I have to clean and cook and now my son-in-law got laid off too! I'm asking so little...

SHIPUSHIN: Mrs. Merchutkina, this is not a good time, I cannot, cannot, afford talk to you now, you confuse me, besides which you're wasting everyone's valuable time including your own! (to Hirin in a mutter) She's mentally deficit, sure as I'm a Shipushin! You talk to her, explain that... you know. I'm getting a drink. (he slips out)

TATYANA: (offstage) Oh, Andrey, there you are, so where was I? Oh, yes, so...

HIRIN: (slamming his fists down on the desk) Alright! What the hell do you want?!

MRS. M: I'm not a well woman, I may look strong, I may pretend to be strong, but not one part of my body is healthy. Everything is falling apart. I get such dizzy spells I can hardly stand up, and I don't enjoy my morning coffee anymore.

HIRIN: Do I look like I care? I don't, I don't care, just tell me what you want?

MRS. M: Fifteen rubles now, the rest by the end of the month.

HIRIN: Didn't you hear him? This is a bank!

MRS. M: And that's why I'm here. See, here's the note from his doctor? Read here, right here, it says...

HIRIN: Are you stupid or crazy? What's in that head of yours, old rags?

MRS. M: I'm not asking for anything that belongs to anyone else, just my own money.

HIRIN: Wood shavings! You're wasting my time! Get out of here!

MRS. M: What about the money?

HIRIN: Sawdust and horse glue!

MRS. M: Listen, you animal! You might treat your own wife like this, but I'm the wife of a Government First Secretary, so watch your step!

HIRIN: Head (taps on his head), desk (knocks on his desk), the same material! Concentrate, see if you can understand, I'm going to call the guard and he is going to kick you out! Kick! Understand?

MRS. M: Fine, you call the guard.

HIRIN: I can get violent!

MRS. M: A temper like a goose! You don't frighten me!

HIRIN: I what?! Get out! I can get very violent! Can't I get through to you? Violent, me, insanely angry, out of control! Physically violent! Physically very violent!

MRS. M: Your bark's worse than your bite.

HIRIN: What!

MRS. M: I've dealt with your kind before.

HIRIN: Well I have never seen anything like you! I can't finish the report because... women, the whole bank's crawling with them, and then... and then you... I'm... I'm... I'm...

MRS. M: Think about it, what am I asking for? No charity, just justice. (sudden shock) Good heavens, look at you! Felt boots! In a beautiful office like this!

Tatyana and Shipushin enter, she is still relating her adventures at Mama's, Shipushin has developed a migraine.

(laughing derisively) He's a hick! He's just a country bumpkin!

TATYANA: ...and after that we went to the Berzhnitski's dinner party, Katya in a pale blue watered silk cut low at the neck, with her hair worn high, very flattering, I did her hair myself, and you know when she takes the trouble, she can be stunning, that girl...

SHIPUSHIN: (at various points during her story) ...wonderful, yes, oh yes, stunning... now the Delegation is due at...

MRS. M: Your honor, sir!

SHIPUSHIN: (having forgotten who she is) Yes, what is it, may I help you?

MRS. M: That man? That man right there? Him? He taps his head, then he tapped his desk! He was supposed to help me, and all he does is abuse me! I get dizzy spells, and I get no respect from anybody, your honor, sir...

SHIPUSHIN: Absolutely, I understand, I'll attend to it tomorrow, good-bye, see you then, I am developing a horrendous headache and I won't...

HIRIN (confidentially) Andrey Andreyevich, let me go get the guard, he can kick her out of here so hard that she won't be able to...

SHIPUSHIN: No, no! She'll raise a fuss and it'll make the Bank look bad...

MRS. M: Your honor, sir...

HIRIN: (almost in tears) But if we don't, I'll never finish, it's past three now and... I'm never... I... (dissolves into tears)

MRS. M: ...how do I get the money? Tell me now, and I'm off.