

Osip Brik

Brief outline for a script

A gang of thieves ran their operations in a certain large city. In the dead of night along deserted streets they used to divest belated passersby of their clothing. They palmed off their plunder on a dealer in stolen goods who had the clothes altered and sold in the town markets. On the grounds that alteration was an expensive business, he gave the thieves a very low price. . . . In the end the thieves grew tired of this kind of exploitation and decided to eliminate the middleman and somehow or other take charge of altering and selling the clothes themselves.

They gradually set up the business of altering the clothes in one of the town's basements. One morning a knock was heard and an old fellow came in carrying a bundle. He'd heard that this was a tailor's workshop and asked them to make him a coat. His request caused a bit of embarrassment, but it was awkward to refuse. The thieves got together and tipping each other a wink, took the old man's measurements and fixed a day for the fitting.

After the old fellow had left, the thieves considered the matter from all angles and decided that in the interests of the conspiracy it was inadvisable to make a mess of it – they'd have to sew the coat properly. They set to work without delay and with the single-mindedness characteristic of thieves.

Evening drew in and the time came to go about their nightly trade, but no one wanted to go out, or in fact had the time. 'You go, I have to tack in the sleeves'; 'Well I have to cut the lining again . . .' – they kept passing things off onto each other. However, they did manage to push out two of their number.

That night they robbed someone on the bridge. Pulling off the man's fur and jacket the two thieves rushed to the street lamp and examined the sleeves in its light. There and then they settled an argument which had begun back in the workshop on the proper way to sew in a sleeve.

A few days later the old fellow received his finished coat. He was very pleased with the cut and the workmanship, and the price seemed acceptable. He even promised to send them clients.

After the old fellow had gone, the thieves gathered around the money they'd received for their work. What should they do with it? Keep it for luck? Spend it on drink? They had no idea. All that was clear was that this was an unusual kind of money.

The old man kept his word and clients started turning up. The work kept growing. By the time evening came the thieves were worn out. They didn't feel like roaming around out of the way

places. They just wanted to sleep.

Then something unpleasant happened – the thief who was most expert at making buttonholes was picked up. The incident demoralised the whole workshop.

The thieves learnt to sew quite well. They bought a tailor's dummy. Fashion magazines started appearing in the workshop. The business began to bring in a reasonable income. Thieving was a risky business and if you took the risk into account, it wasn't even profitable.

They went out on their nightly raids more and more rarely, and eventually gave it up altogether. They were up to the ears in work at the shop. Gradually they started making things for themselves. When one of their number decided to get married they pooled their efforts and 'put together' a smart fur coat for him.

The young newlyweds went to the cinema, to the last performance. On their way home in a dark alley the groom was robbed of his fur.

The indignation of the workshop knew no bounds. 'What's the world coming to! It's impossible for decent people to go out into the streets!'

Translated by Diana Matias