THE PLAIN
TRUTH

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FEUILLETON

NOT RETROACTIVELY

A tale of one goalkeeper, one till and one money box, as told by eyewitnesses and the newspapers

I. THE RUMOUR

The rumour that Molibdensk would have no winter this year was not confirmed. Something else was: on Friday night the frost struck, and the rink in the savings bank courtyard froze solid in two hours. In fairness, it had taken a week to flood.

The rink belonged to the courtyard team Volfram. Its goalkeeper was the savings bank cashier, Timofei Nepropuskayev. He let no puck past him, just as the till let no forged rouble past: silently and at first glance. Timofei dreamed of the big thing, playing for the town at the regional youth cup.

Two things stood in the way: the till and his mother.

“The till is for life,” said his mother. “Hockey lasts till your first tooth.”

“I’ve still got all my teeth.”

“Because you sit at the till.”

“Mum, and if I let none in?”

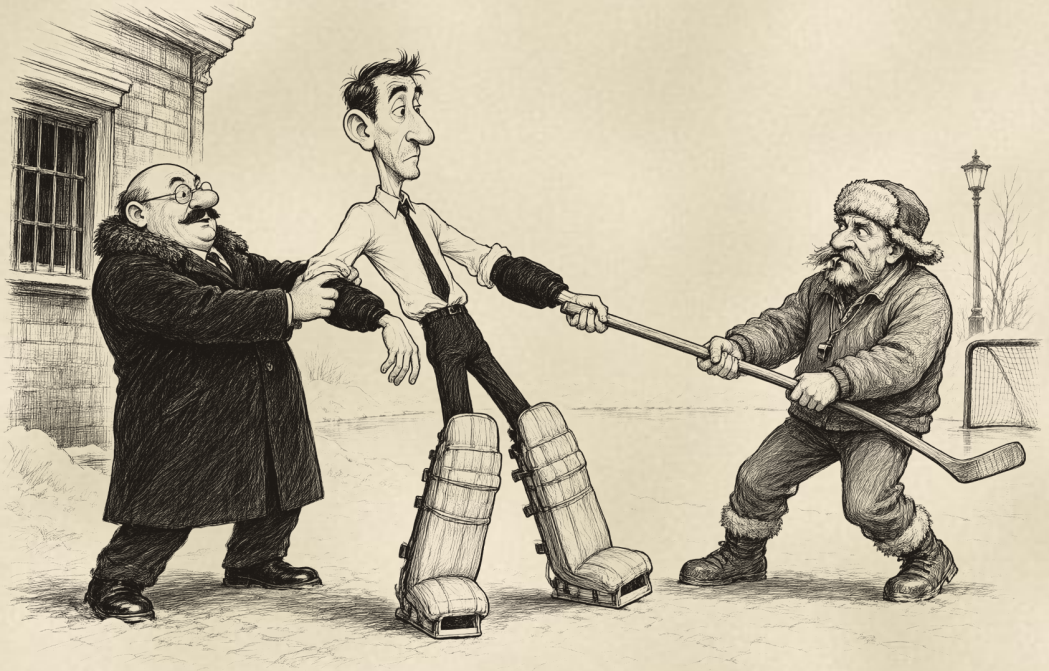
“Then you’ll let dinner go cold.”

Timofei said nothing and went to the rink. He could keep quiet convincingly, like a goalkeeper with nothing to let in.

II. THE TILL

The head of the savings bank was Arkady Ilyich Vypiskin. He had disliked the Volfram coach since childhood. The coach returned the feeling, but free of charge, as he was retired.

Vypiskin wanted the cashier at his window from seven till seven. The coach wanted the goalkeeper in his goal



The parties agreed on the hours; the cashier remained the subject of negotiations.

FACT FILE

The Finance Ministry has proposed exempting manganese, chromium, tungsten and molybdenum from the windfall tax, as these metals are hardly exported. It did not support extending the tax to banks, microlenders and gambling businesses.[1]

THEIR WAYS

Canada’s prime minister said Russian hockey players would not get visas for the world junior championship; the sports minister later added that they would not be let in even with visas.[3] In Molibdensk the visa for the rink is issued by the yard keeper, with a broom.

LETTERS

Dear Editor, I have flooded the rink for six years and never received a single coin. Please consider my income unsystematic.

Yard keeper, Tungsten Street

— Notice —

MOLIBDENSK SAVINGS BANK

Cashier wanted. Not retroactively

Window ..... **7 till 7**
Statement ..... **in 7 minutes**
Coin ..... **by inventory**
Advice ..... **billed**

Sources (RBC, 15 November 2026, in Russian):
1. The Finance Ministry proposes exempting four metals from the windfall tax — rbc.ru/society/15/11/2026/6af9d071b18dd4bb640ed52a
2. Le Monde learns why the US opposes discussing Ukraine at the leaders’ meeting — rbc.ru/politics/15/11/2026/6af9a8ce783d9d339b477263
3. IIHF bars Russia from the world junior championship in Canada — rbc.ru/sport/15/11/2026/6af9ef83b18dd4bb640ed54e
4. Estonia to close its border with Russia from 1 December — rbc.ru/politics/15/11/2026/6af9cebb288c43bfcc422092
5. The Finance Ministry agrees to pass data on personal transfers to the tax service from 2027 — rbc.ru/economics/15/11/2026/6af9d8f1ee33b02a2fd5d13b

from seven till seven. They agreed only on the hours.

"A cashier on the ice is embezzlement," said Vypiskin.

"A goalkeeper at a till is a crime against sport," replied the coach.

"A window is small. It's easier to defend."

"A goal is big. Talent shows better in it."

"Talent isn't on the staff list."

"It's on the fixture list."

Vypiskin sent abroad for a personnel consultant. The consultant sent advice: keep the cashier at the window. A bill came with the advice. The bill was longer than the advice and written in a foreign language, so that nobody would dispute it.

Timofei decided not to choose. By day he sat at the till, by night he stood in goal under the street lamp. After every save the fans threw him a five-kopeck coin. He put the coins in a money box, systematically and with pleasure.

III. THE MEETING

On Monday the town council met to decide whether Volfram would go to the cup. The council resolved to consider the meeting a meeting and moved on to the agenda.

First they discussed the windfall tax: the coins in the goalkeeper's money box were growing faster than the price of coal. Manganese, chromium, tungsten, molybdenum and the goalkeeper were exempted from the tax. Hardly any of them ever left town.[1]

The question of the cashier was not raised.

"The till has not been part of this track," the chairman explained. "It does not seem appropriate to touch on it."[2]

While they sat, a telegram came from the region. After careful assessment of alternative options, the host side had decided to remain the host and not to host Volfram.[3] The road checkpoints already worked from seven till seven. From the first of December they were to close altogether, and the neighbours had been notified in writing.[4]

"And the cup?" asked the coach.

"The cup will go ahead," said the chairman. "Without us. That is also a result."

"What kind of result is that?"

"A negative one. But final."

Timofei asked for the floor. He was not given it: the council was short of floor itself. So Timofei went home and put a second coat of ice on the rink.

IV. THE INVENTORY

On Tuesday an inspector from the town finance office, Obratnosilov, came to the savings bank.[5] He found that the cashier was systematically receiving income from other citizens, a coin per shot. Vypiskin produced a statement of the money box in seven minutes, faster than any statement in his life.

The inspector drew up an inventory:

INVENTORY OF PROPERTY
Skates — 1 pair
Taped stick — 1
Catching glove — 1
Money box with coins — 1
Local fame — not weighed

"We'll tax it from last year," said Obratnosilov.

"A year ago I had no coins."

"Never mind. The law can act retroactively."

"I can only act in goal."

An hour later a clarification came from the region: the new rule applied from the first of January, not retroactively.[5] Obratnosilov wilted, like a man whose surname had been taken away.

"A cashier with outside income cannot be a cashier," Vypiskin reminded him. "Either the window or the coins."

Timofei put the till keys on the desk. The keys clinked like a puck off the post. Vypiskin said nothing. He kept quiet with interest.

V. THE CUP

On Saturday Molibdensk held the cup at home. The host was the savings bank courtyard; the teams were Volfram and the town council side. There were no others: there was nowhere to go and nowhere to come from.

The council side shot at goal by the regulations, after careful assessment of alternative options. In that time Timofei managed to make a save, drink a glass of tea and get back in goal.

"Not one let in," said the coach.

"He never let in a forged rouble either," said Vypiskin. "I brought him up."

"You kept him behind a window."

"A window is a goal too. Only with a till."

"The only checkpoint in the district open seven days a week," remarked the chairman. "And it lets nothing through."

"Son, and the till?" asked his mother.

"The till is for life, Mum. I'm for the cup."

By evening Molibdensk had finished pickling its cabbage and tipped its potatoes into the cellars. The cup, a samovar with a broken tap, went to the goalkeeper. Winter arrived on schedule.

The frost over Molibdensk held as before. Now it held for Volfram.

From press reports



The council side carried out a careful assessment of alternative options.

Sources (RBC, 15 November 2026, in Russian):
1. The Finance Ministry proposes exempting four metals from the windfall tax — rbc.ru/society/15/11/2026/6af9d071b18dd4bb640ed52a
2. Le Monde learns why the US opposes discussing Ukraine at the leaders' meeting — rbc.ru/politics/15/11/2026/6af9a8ce783d9d339b477263
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