

THE ADVENTURES OF AN APE

By *Mikhail Zoshchenko*

We reproduce below the story attacked so vehemently by Zhdanov in our previous selection; let the reader judge for himself. The author (1895—1958) had been perhaps the most widely read Soviet writer of the 1920's. His satires on everyday Soviet life became distinctly unfashionable in the more rigid days which followed. It is likely that Zoshchenko was condemned because the Party required a scapegoat to dramatize its new line. Zoshchenko may have been chosen because of his long career of nonconformity. He was expelled from the Union of Soviet Writers and his work no longer appeared in print. After 1950 he was permitted to publish again, but he had learned to tone down his satire and to choose his themes.

For more Zoshchenko stories, see his *Nervous People and Other Satires*. There is an article devoted to his disgrace in Ernest Simmons (ed.), *Through the Glass of Soviet Literature* (paperback). For an assessment of Zoshchenko as a writer, see V. Zavalishin, *Early Soviet Writers*, and Gleb Struve, *Soviet Russian Literature*, as well as William Harkins, *Dictionary of Russian Literature* (paperback). The Party's literary policy from the end of World War II to the death of Stalin is analyzed in Avrahm Yarmolinsky, *Literature under Communism*, and Vera AJexandrova, *A History of Soviet Literature*.

In a certain city in the south, there was a zoo. It was a small zoo, in which there were one tiger, two crocodiles, three snakes, a zebra, an ostrich, and one ape, or in other words, a monkey. And, naturally, various minor items—birds, fish, frogs, and similar insignificant nonsense from the animal world.

At the beginning of the war, when the Fascists bombed the city, one bomb fell directly on the zoo. And it exploded there with a great shattering roar. To the surprise of all the beasts.

The three snakes were killed, all at

the same time, not in itself a very sad fact perhaps. Unfortunately, the ostrich, too.

The other beasts did not suffer. As the saying goes, they only shook with fear.

Of all the beasts, the most frightened was the ape, the monkey. An explosion overturned his cage. The cage fell from

From Mikhail Zoshchenko, *Scenes from the Bathhouse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), pp. 177-83. Copyright © by the University of Michigan, 1961. Used by permission of the publisher.

its stand. One side was broken. And our ape fell out of the cage onto the path.

He fell out onto the path, but did not remain lying there immobile in the manner of people who are used to military activities. On the contrary. He immediately climbed up a tree. From there, he leaped on the wall. From the wall to the street. And, as though he were on fire, he ran.

He's running, and probably he's thinking: "Eh, if there are bombs falling around here, then I don't agree." And that means he's running like mad along the city streets.

He ran all the way through the city. He ran out on the highway. He runs along this highway till he leaves the city behind. Well, an ape. It's not a man. He doesn't understand the whys and wherefores. He doesn't see any sense in remaining in this city.

He ran and ran and tired himself out. He was all tired out. He climbed a tree. He ate a fly to recoup his strength. And then a couple of worms. And he fell asleep there on the branch where he was sitting.

At this time, a military vehicle came along the road. The driver saw the ape in the tree. He was surprised. Quietly he crept up to it. He flung his coat over it. And put it in his vehicle. He thought: "It's better I give him to some friend of mine rather than have him die of hunger, cold, and other hardships." So that means, on he went along with the ape.

He arrived in the city of Borisov. He went about his official business. But the monkey remained in the vehicle. He said to it: "Wait for me here, cutie. I'll be back soon."

But our monkey wouldn't wait. He climbed out of the vehicle through a broken window and went strolling along the streets.

And, so, he proceeds, the dear little thing, along the street, strolling, ambling

along, tail up. The people, naturally, are surprised and want to catch him. But catching him isn't all that easy. He's lively and nimble, and runs quickly on all fours. So they didn't catch him, but only succeeded in tormenting the fugitive in vain.

Tormented, he wearied and, naturally, wanted to eat.

But in the city, where could he eat? There wasn't anything edible in the streets. With his tail, he could hardly get into a restaurant. Or a co-operative. All the more since he had no money. No discount. Ration coupons he does not have. It's awful.

Nevertheless, he got into a certain co-operative. Had a feeling that something was doing there. And they were distributing vegetables to the population: carrots, rutabagas, and cucumbers.

He scampered into this store. He sees: There's a long line. No, he did not take a place in this line. Nor did he start pushing people aside in order to shove his way through. He just leaped along the heads of the customers to where the goods were. He leaped on the counter. He didn't ask how much a kilo of carrots costs. And, as the saying goes, that's the kind he was. He ran out of the store, satisfied with his purchase. Well, an ape. Doesn't understand the whys and wherefores. Doesn't see the sense of remaining without rations.

Naturally there was commotion in the store, hubbub, confusion. The public began to yell. The salesgirl who was weighing rutabagas almost fainted from surprise. And, really, one could well be frightened, if instead of the usual, normal-type customer, a hairy creature with a tail hops up. And what's more, doesn't even pay.

The public pursued the ape into the street. And he runs and on the way he chews on a carrot. He's eating. He

doesn't understand the whys and wherefores.

The little boys are running at the head of the crowd. Behind them, the grown-ups. And, bringing up the rear, the policeman is running and blowing on his whistle.

And from somewhere, Lord knows where, a dog leaped out into the melee. And also sets out after our little monkey. Not only is he yelping and yowling, but he's even trying to sink his teeth into the ape.

Our monkey picked up speed. He runs, and probably he's thinking to himself: "Och," he's thinking, "should never have left the zoo. Breathing was easier in the cage. First opportunity, I'm going to head right back there."

And, so, he runs as hard as he can, but the dog isn't giving up and still wants to grab him.

Then our ape hopped up onto some kind of fence. And when the dog leaped up to grab the monkey by the feet, as it were, the latter blipped him full force with a carrot on the nose. And he hit him so hard that the dog yelped and ran home, wounded nose and all. Probably he was thinking: "No, citizens, better I should lie quietly at home than go catching monkeys and experiencing such extreme unpleasantness."

Briefly speaking, the dog fled and our ape leaped into the yard.

In the yard at this time a teen-age boy was chopping wood, a certain Alesha Popov.

There he is, chopping wood, and suddenly he sees an ape. All his life he's dreamed of having an ape like that. And suddenly—there you are!

Alesha slipped off his jacket and with this jacket he caught the monkey who had run up the ladder in the corner.

The boy brought him home. Fed him. Gave him tea to drink. And the ape was quite content. But not entirely. Because

Alesha's grandma took an instant dislike to him. She shouted at the monkey and even wanted to strike him across the paw. All this because, while they were drinking tea, grandma had put a piece of candy she had been chewing on a plate, and the ape had grabbed grandma's candy and tossed it into his own mouth. Well, an ape. It's not a man. A man, if he takes something, wouldn't do it right under grandma's nose. But this monkey—right in grandma's presence. And, naturally, it brought her almost to tears.

Grandma said: "All in all, it's extremely unpleasant having some kind of macaco with a tail living in the apartment. It will frighten me with its inhuman face. It will jump on me in the dark. It will eat my candy. No, I absolutely refuse to live in the same apartment with an ape. One of us is going to wind up in the zoo. Can it be that I should move straight over to the zoo? No, better let the monkey go there. And I will continue to live in my apartment."

Alesha said to his grandma: "No, grandma, you don't need to move over to the zoo. I guarantee that the monkey won't eat anything more of yours. I will train it like a person. I will teach it to eat with a teaspoon. And to drink tea out of a glass. As far as jumping is concerned, I cannot forbid it to swing from the lamp that hangs from the ceiling. From there, naturally, it could leap on your head. But the main thing is that you shouldn't be frightened if this happens. Because this is only an ape that means no harm, and in Africa it was used to leaping and swinging."

The next day Alesha left for school. And begged his grandma to look after the ape. But grandma did not begin to look after it. She thought: "What am I going to do yet, stand here looking after every monstrosity?" And with these

thoughts, grandma went and fell asleep on purpose in her armchair.

And then our ape leaped out into the street through the open casement window. And walked along on the sunny side. It isn't known whether he maybe just wanted to go for a little stroll, or whether he wanted to go have another look at the store to see if there was anything he wanted to buy for himself. Not for money, but just so.

And along the street at this time a certain old man was making his way. The invalid Gavrilych. He was going to the bathhouse. And in his hands he carried a small basket in which there were some soap and a change of linen.

He saw the ape and at first he didn't even believe his eyes that it was an ape. He thought it only seemed that way to him because he had just drunk up a jug of beer.

So he looks with amazement at the ape. And it looks at him. Maybe it's thinking: "What kind of a scarecrow is this, with a basket in his hands?"

Finally, it dawned on Gavrilych that this was a real ape and not an imaginary one. And then he thought: "With luck, I'll catch it. Tomorrow I'll take it to the market and I'll sell it there for a hundred rubles. And with that kind of money I can drink ten jugs of beer in a row." And with these thoughts in mind Gavrilych set about catching the ape, murmuring: "P'st, p'st, p'st . . . here now."

No, he knew it wasn't a cat, but he wasn't sure what language to speak to it in. But then it struck him that this was, after all, the most highly developed creature of the animal world. And then he took a piece of sugar out of his pocket, showed it to the ape, and said, taking a bow: "Monkey, old friend, old beauty, wouldn't you like to eat a little piece of sugar?"

The latter replied: "Please, yes I

would. . . ." That is, actually, he didn't say anything because he didn't know how to talk. But he simply walked right up, grabbed this little lump of sugar, and started to eat it.

Gavrilych picked him up in his hands and put him in his basket. It was warm and snug in the basket. And our monkey didn't try to get out. Maybe he thought: "Let this old sot carry me in his basket. It's even rather pleasant."

At first Gavrilych thought of taking it home. But then he really didn't want to go home again. And he went to the bathhouse with the ape. He thought: "Better I should go to the bathhouse with it. There I can wash it up. It will be clean, pleasant to look at. I'll tie a ribbon around its neck. That way I'll get more for it at the market."

And so he arrived at the bathhouse with his monkey. And began to wash himself, and to wash it too.

And it was very warm in the bathhouse, boiling—just like Africa. And our monkey was quite pleased with this warm atmosphere. But not entirely. Because Gavrilych was washing him with soap and the soap got into his mouth. Naturally, it didn't taste good, but that was no reason to scream and kick around and refuse to be washed. Our monkey began to splash furiously, but at this point soap got into his eyes. And from this, the monkey really went out of his mind. He bit Gavrilych on the finger, tore himself loose, and leaped out of the bath as though he were on fire.

He leaped out into the room where people were getting dressed. And there, he frightened them all out of their wits. No one knew it was an ape. They see: something round, white, and foamy has leaped out. At first it leaped onto the couch. Then on the stove. From the stove onto the trunk. From the trunk

onto somebody's head. And again up on the stove.

Several nervous-type customers cried out and started to run out of the bathhouse. And our ape ran out too. And went scampering down the stairs.

And there below was the ticket office, with a little window. The ape leaped through this little window, thinking it would be more peaceful there, and, most important, there wouldn't be such a fuss and commotion. But in the ticket office sat the fat woman who sold the tickets, and she sobbed and squealed. And ran out of the ticket office shouting: "Help! Emergency! Seems a bomb fell in my office. Quick, some iodine!"

Our monkey hated all this yelling. He leaped out of the office and ran along the street.

And there he is running along the street all wet and foamy with soap, and behind him, once again, people are running. The boys at the head. Behind them, the grown-ups. Behind the grown-ups, the policeman. And behind the policeman, our ancient Gavrilych, dressed harum-scarum, with his boots in his hands.

But at this point *that dog* leaped out again from some place or other, the very same one who'd been after the monkey the day before.

Having seen this, our monkey thought: "Well, now, citizens, I'm done for once and for all."

But this time the dog didn't go after him. The dog only looked at the fleeing ape, felt a sharp pain in its nose, and stopped running; even turned around. Probably thought: "They don't supply you with noses—running after apes." And although it turned around, it barked angrily: as much as to say, run where you will, I'm staying put.

At this very time our boy, Alesha Popov, returned home from school. He did not find his dear little ape at home.

He was terribly roused up about it. And tears even came to his eyes. He thought that now he'd never see his glorious, divine little monkey again.

And so, from boredom and sorrow, he went out on the street. He walks along the street in a melancholy funk. And suddenly he sees—people are running. No, at first he didn't grasp that they were running after his ape. He thought they were running because of an air raid. But at this point he saw his ape—all soapy and wet. He flew toward it. He picked it up in his arms. He hugged it to himself, so as not to give it up.

Then all the people who had been running came and surrounded the boy.

At this point our ancient Gavrilych emerged from the crowd. And exhibiting his bitten finger for all to see, he said: "Citizens, don't let this fellow take my ape in his arms. I want to sell it on the market tomorrow. This is my very own ape, which bit me on the finger. Just look at this gored finger of mine. And that testifies that I'm telling the truth."

The boy, Alesha Popov, said: "No, this ape isn't his, it's my ape. Look how happily it came to my arms. And this testifies that I'm telling the truth."

But at this point yet another man emerges from the crowd—that very driver who had transported the ape in his vehicle. He says: "No, it's not your ape and it's not yours either. It's my monkey because I transported it. But I'm returning to my unit, so I'm going to give the ape to the one who keeps him kindly in his arms, and not to the one who'd sell him pitilessly on the market for the sake of a few driblets. The ape belongs to the boy."

And at this point the whole audience applauded. And Alesha Popov, beaming with happiness, hugged the ape still

more tightly to himself. And triumphantly carried him home.

Gavrilych, with his bitten finger, went to the bathhouse to wash up.

And, so, from that time on, the ape came to live with the boy, Alesha Popov.

He's still living with him. Not long ago I took a trip to the city of Borisov. And I purposely went to Alesha's place to see how the ape was getting on. Oh, it was getting along very well indeed! It didn't run away anywhere. It had become very obedient. Wiped its nose

with a handkerchief. Doesn't take candy from strangers. So that even grandma is satisfied now and doesn't get mad at it, and no longer wants to move to the zoo.

When I entered Alesha's room, the ape was sitting on the table. Sitting there with a sense of importance, like a ticket taker at the movies. And was eating some rice cereal with a teaspoon.

Alesha said to me: "I've educated him like a man, and now all children and even some grown-ups can take him as an example."

THE BATHHOUSE

I hear tell, citizens, they have some excellent bathhouses in America.

For example, a citizen just drives in, drops his linen in a special box, then off he'll go to wash himself. He won't even worry, they say, about loss or theft. He doesn't even need a ticket.

Well, let's suppose it's some other, nervous-type American, and he'll say to the attendant, "Goot-bye," so to speak, "keep an eye out."

And that's all there is to it.

This American will wash himself, come back, and they'll give him clean linen—washed and pressed. Foot-wrappings, no doubt, whiter than snow. Underdrawers mended and sewed. That's the life!

Well, we have bathhouses, too. But not as good. Though it's possible to wash yourself.

Only in ours, there's trouble with the tickets. Last Saturday I went to one of our bathhouses (after all, I can't go all the way to America), and they give me two tickets. One for my linen, the other for my hat and coat.

But where is a naked man going to put tickets? To say it straight—no place. No pockets. Look around—all stomach and legs. The only trouble's with the tickets. Can't tie them to your beard.

Well, I tied a ticket to each leg so as not to lose them both at once. I went into the bath.

The tickets are flapping about on my legs now. Annoying to walk like that. But you've got to walk. Because you've got to have a bucket. Without a bucket, how can you wash? That's the only trouble.

I look for a bucket. I see one citizen washing himself with three buckets. He is standing in one, washing his head in another, and holding the third with his left hand so no one would take it away.

I pulled at the third bucket; among other things, I wanted to take it for myself. But the citizen won't let go.

"What are you up to," says he, "stealing other people's buckets?" As I pull, he says, "I'll give you a bucket between the eyes, then you won't be so damn happy."

I say: "This isn't the tsarist regime," I say, "to go around hitting people with buckets. Egotism," I say, "sheer egotism. Other people," I say, "have to wash themselves too. You're not in a theater," I say.

But he turned his back and starts washing himself again.

"I can't just stand around," think I, "waiting his pleasure. He's likely to go on washing himself," think I, "for another three days." I moved along.

After an hour I see some old joker gaping around, no hands on his bucket. Looking for soap or just dreaming, I don't know. I just lifted his bucket and made off with it.

So now there's a bucket, but no place to sit down. And to wash standing—what kind of washing is that? That's the only trouble.

All right. So I'm standing. I'm holding the bucket in my hand and I'm washing myself.

But all around me everyone's scrubbing clothes like mad. One is washing his trousers, another's rubbing his drawers, a third's wringing something out. You no sooner get yourself all washed up than you're dirty again. They're splattering me, the bastards. And such a noise from all the scrubbing—it takes all the joy out of washing. You can't even hear where the soap squeaks. That's the only trouble.

"To hell with them," I think. "I'll finish washing at home."

I go back to the locker room. I give them one ticket, they give me my linen. I look. Everything's mine, but the trousers aren't mine.

"Citizens," I say, "mine didn't have a hole here. Mine had a hole over there."

But the attendant says: "We aren't here," he says, "just to watch for your holes. You're not in a theater," he says.

All right. I put these pants on, and I'm about to go get my coat. They won't give me my coat. They want the ticket. I'd forgotten the ticket on my leg. I had to undress. I took off my pants. I look for the ticket. No ticket. There's the string tied around my leg, but no ticket. The ticket had been washed away.

I give the attendant the string. He doesn't want it.

"You don't get anything for a string," he says. "Anybody can cut off a bit of string," he says. "Wouldn't be enough coats to go around. Wait," he says, "till everyone leaves. We'll give you what's left over."

I say: "Look here, brother, suppose there's nothing left but crud? This isn't a theater," I say. "I'll identify it for you. One pocket," I say, "is torn, and there's no other. As for the buttons," I say, "the top one's there, the rest are not to be seen."

Anyhow, he gave it to me. But he wouldn't take the string.

I dressed, and went out on the street. Suddenly I remembered: I forgot my soap.

I went back again. They won't let me in, in my coat.

"Undress," they say.

I say, "Look, citizens. I can't undress for the third time. This isn't a theater," I say. "At least give me what the soap costs."

Nothing doing.

Nothing doing—all right. I went without the soap.

Of course, the reader who is accustomed to formalities might be curious to know: what kind of a bathhouse was this? Where was it located? What was the address?

What kind of a bathhouse? The usual kind. Where it costs ten kopecks to get in.

THE CRISIS

Not long ago, citizens, they were hauling a load of bricks along the street. God almighty!

My heart, you know, fluttered with joy. Because, citizens, we are building. They're not hauling these bricks just for nothing. It means a little house is being built somewhere. It's been started—spit twice and keep the evil eye off!

Maybe in twenty years, maybe even less, each citizen will probably have a whole room to himself. And if the population doesn't make the mistake of increasing too rapidly, and if they let everyone have abortions, maybe even two rooms. And maybe even three per person. With bath.

That's how we're going to be living then, citizens! In one room, let's say, sleep, in another, entertain guests, in the third, something still different . . . Isn't that something! There'll be things to do in a free life like that!

Well, for the time being, it's a bit difficult on account of the space ration, which is limited in view of the critical situation.

I was living in Moscow, brothers. I just came back from there. I experienced this crisis at firsthand.

I arrived, you know, in Moscow. I'm walking along the streets with my things. That is, nowhere in particular. It isn't as though I had a place to stay—a place to put my things.

For two weeks, you know, I wandered around the streets with my things—I grew a beard and gradually lost my things. Well, so, you know, it's easier walking without my things. I'm looking for a place to stay.

Finally, there's a house where one guy on the staircase lets me in.

"For thirty rubles," he says, "I can set you up in the bathroom. A luxurious little apartment," he says . . . "Three toilets . . . Bath . . . In the bathroom," he says, "you can live all right. Even though," he says, "there's no window. There is a door. And water right at your fingertips. If you want," he says, "you can fill the bathtub full of water and dive under, even for the whole day."

I say: "Dear comrade, I am not a fish. I," I say, "don't need to dive. I'd just as soon," I say, "live on dry land. Take off a little," I say, "for the dampness."

He says: "I can't, comrade. I'd like to, but I can't. It doesn't depend entirely on me. It's a communal apartment. And our price on the bathroom has been very strictly set."

"Well," I say, "what can I do? O.K. Grab my thirty," I say, "and let me in right away. Three weeks," I say, "I'm pounding the pavements. I'm afraid," I say, "I might get tired."

Well, O.K. They let me in. I began to live.

But the bathroom really was luxurious. Everywhere, no matter which way you move—there's a marble bathtub, the water heater, and faucets. But there isn't much place to sit. Unless you sit on the side, and then if you slip, you fall straight down into the marble bathtub.

Then I built myself a plank of boards, and I'm living.

Within a month, among other things, I got married.

My wife, you know, was young and good-natured. She didn't have a room.

I thought that on account of this bathroom she'd refuse me, and I did not foresee any family happiness and comfort, but she didn't refuse at all. She only frowned a little, and she answers: "What of it," she says, "lots of nice people live in a bathroom. And if worse comes to worse," she says, "we can divide it off. In one place," she says, "we might make a boudoir, for example; and in another a dining room . . ."

"You can screen it off, citizen. But the tenants," I say, "the devils, won't let you. Even now they're saying: No remodeling."

Well, O.K. We take things as they are.

In less than a year a little boy is born to us.

We called him Volod'ka, and we go on living. We bathe him right here in the bathtub—and we live.

And, you know, it's even going pretty well. The boy, that is, is getting bathed daily and he doesn't even catch cold.

There's only one inconvenience—in the evenings the communal tenants pour into the bathroom to wash themselves.

At this time my whole family is pushed out into the corridor.

I even asked the tenants: "Citizens," I say, "bathe yourselves on Saturdays. You just can't," I say, "take a bath every day. When," I say, "are we supposed to live? Enter into our position."

But there are thirty-two of them, the bastards. And they're

all cursing. And in case I do anything, they threaten to smash me in the face.

So what is there to do—you can't do anything. We take things as they are.

After some time, my wife's mother from the province visits us in the bathroom. She settles down behind the water heater.

"I," she says, "have dreamt a long time of rocking my grandson. You," she says, "can't refuse me this pleasure."

"I'm not refusing you. Go ahead," I say, "rock. To heck with you. You can," I say, "fill up the bathtub and go diving with your grandson."

But I say to my wife: "Maybe, citizen, you have more relatives who are planning to visit us; if so, you better speak up right now, don't torment me."

She says: "Only a kid brother for the Christmas holidays . . ."

Since I hadn't expected any brother, I left Moscow. I am sending my family money by mail.