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A Christmas Miracle

By Alexei Bayer

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It's the Christmas season, and this is a time when you're supposed to tell sentimental stories that end happily and warm the cockles of your listeners' hearts.

Once upon a time, there was a spunky Russian technology startup. It was built from scratch by some of the country's best Ph.D. scientists who hadn't yet immigrated to the United States. For many years, the spunky startup provided new technologies to other Russian companies and government agencies, making the economy more modern and, along the way, earning the trust of its clients and respect of its partners abroad.

Then one day a bunch of gangsters came to visit the spunky high-tech company. They were not your usual gangsters because they wore the uniforms of a law enforcement agency. Nonetheless they were real gangsters — even though they had sworn a solemn oath to protect their Motherland from other gangsters — and they demanded a huge bribe for the right to stay in business.

The managers of the company thought about it and decided that the government gangsters

should not be given the bribe but sent packing. It was, as I said, a spunky little company.

Gangsters don't like it when ordinary people refuse offers they shouldn't refuse. In their slang, Russian gangsters call ordinary people fryers, which, by coincidence, sounds like an English word for a plump chicken ready for the frying pen. Gangsters know that if fryers stop fearing them they will be put out of business. That's why fryers must always be taught a lesson, and the law enforcement gangsters decided to destroy the Russian company to demonstrate to other fryers what would happen to them if they don't give in to the gangsters' demands.

So the gangsters put on their uniforms and came to the successful company in an official capacity. They slapped huge fines on the company and threatened to put its managers in jail. They had no leg to stand on, but by the time the company could win an appeal in the court system it would have surely gone bankrupt. If the company eventually did go bankrupt, the gangsters would sell it to the highest bidder and then cancel the fines.

It was a dastardly plan, and it almost worked because the gangsters had all the power and knew that no one could come to the company's rescue.

Then one day before New Year's Eve, President Dmitry Medvedev was reading blogs on the Internet and ran across a description of what the gangsters were doing to the company. He was outraged. He picked up the phone and called the company.

"Have no fear, my friends," he said. "I will personally see to it that the gangsters are punished."

"Thank you very much, Mr. President," said the owners of the company. "But there is no need to punish them on our account. Let them repent and go free."

"I disagree," Medvedev said. "They are thieves, and thieves must go to jail."

The gangsters were stripped of their rank and epaulets were torn from their shoulders, and they were sent to a Siberian prison to chop wood. And the spunky little Russian company went on with its important work of modernizing the Russian economy and making it more efficient.

You don't believe this story? Perhaps you are too cynical to believe in miracles. So am I.

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The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

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