

Audio file

[2024-11-12 KST Kafka 05 My Business v1.mp3](#)

Transcript

My business. My business rests entirely on my shoulders. Two secretaries with typewriters and ledgers in the ante room, then my office with desk cashbox, coffee table, armchair and telephone – that's the whole set-up. Simple to run the eye over, easy to run. I am young and the business trundles along ahead of me, I don't complain. I don't complain. Just after New Year, a young man moved into the empty premises next to mine that I had foolishly refused for a very long time to rent myself. Another room and an anteroom, and a little kitchenette as well. I could surely have used the two offices – my two secretaries occasionally feel a little cramped – but then what would I have done with the kitchenette? That was the silly anxiety that kept me from taking it. Now I've got the young man sitting there. Harras, his name is. I don't know what he does. All it says on the door is 'Harras, Office'. I've made inquiries and people told me he has a business along much the same lines as mine, there was no reason to advise against giving him a loan, he's an ambitious young man whose business may be on an upward path; on the other hand they wouldn't go so far as to recommend investing in him, because by all appearances he had no capital. The usual advice you give when you don't know anything. Sometimes I run into Harras on the stairs. He always seems to be in a tearing rush. He shoots past me, so I've not really ever had a proper look at him. He has his office key ready in his hand and in a trice he's opened the door and slipped in like the tail of a rat and I'm standing in front of that nameplate again, 'Harras, Office', which I've clapped eyes on much more often than I'd like to have done. The wretched plywood walls that betray the honest man of business and shield the dishonest one. My telephone is mounted on the party wall, but I mention that mostly in a spirit of irony, because even if it was on the other side of the room, you'd still be able to hear everything that goes on. I've given up using the names of my clients on the telephone, but of course it doesn't take much to establish them from certain characteristic but unavoidable turns of phrase. Sometimes with the earpiece at my ear, a martyr to my restlessness, I dance around the machine on tiptoe, but still can't keep from betraying my secrets. Of course, that causes my business decisions to be more uncertain and my voice shaky. What is Harras up to while I'm telephoning? I might stretch a point, as I'm bound to do, and say: Harras doesn't need a telephone, he uses mine, he has slid his sofa against the wall and is listening, meanwhile I have to run to the telephone when it rings, take onerous decisions, perform great feats of persuasion, but above all, throughout the whole process I am involuntarily reporting to Harris through the wall. Perhaps he doesn't even need to wait for

the conversation to end but gets up when he's heard enough, scurries through the city in his typical fashion, and before I've hung up the earpiece, he's already busy thwarting my plan.