WHERE LOVE IS:' A RUSSIAN CHRISTMAS STORY: BY LEON N. TOLSTOY

(Courtesy of Lothrop, Lee & Shepard)

IN a certain city dwelt Martin Avdyeeich, the cobbler. He lived in a cellar, a wretched little hole with a single window. The window looked up toward the street, and through it Martin could just see the passers-by. It is true that he could see little more than their boots, but Martin Avdyeeich could read a man's character by his boots, so he needed no more. . . . . Avdyeeich had always been a pretty good man, but as he grew old he began to think more about his soul, and draw nearer to his God. While Martin was still a journeyman his wife had died; but his wife had left him a little boy—three years old. Their other children had not lived. All the eldest had died early. Martin wished at first to send his little child into the country to his sister, but afterward he thought better of it. "My Kapitoshka," thought he, "will feel miserable in a strange household. He shall stay here with me." And so Avdyeeich left his master, and took to living in lodgings alone with his little son. But God did not give Avdyeeich happiness in his children. No sooner had the little one begun to grow up and be a help and a joy to his father’s heart, than a sickness fell upon Kapitoshka, the little one took to his bed, lay there in a raging fever for a week, and then died. Martin buried his son in despair—so desperate was he that he began to murmur against God. . . .

And lo! one day there came to Avdyeeich from the Troitsa Monastery, an aged peasant-pilgrim—it was already the eighth year of his pilgrimage. Avdyeeich fell a-talking with him and began to complain of his great sorrow. "As for living any longer, thou man of God," said he, "I desire it not."

And the old man said to him: "Thy speech, Martin, is not good. . . . God willed that thy son shouldst die, but that thou shouldst live. Therefore 'twas the best thing both for him and for thee. It is because thou wouldst fain have loved for 'thy own delight that thou dost now despair."
“But what then is a man to live for?” asked Avdyeeich.

And the old man answered: “For God, Martin! . . . . When thou dost begin to live for Him, thou wilt grieve about nothing more, and all things will come easy to thee.”

Martin was silent for a moment, and then he said: “And how must one live for God?”

“Christ hath shown us the way. Thou knowest thy letters. Buy the Gospels and read; there thou wilt find out how to live for God. There, everything is explained.”

These words made the heart of Avdyeeich burn within him, and he went the same day and bought for himself a New Testament printed in very large type, and began to read . . . .

Henceforth the whole life of Avdyeeich was changed. Formerly, whenever he had a holiday, he would go to the tavern to drink tea, nor would he say no to a drop of brandy now and again. He would tipple with his comrades, and though not actually drunk, would, for all that, leave the inn a bit merry, babbling nonsense and talking loudly and censoriously. He had done with all that now. His life became quiet and joyful . . . .

It happened once that Martin was up reading till very late. He was reading St. Luke’s Gospel. He was reading the sixth chapter, and as he read he came to the words “And to him that smiteth thee on the one cheek, offer also the other.” This passage he read several times, and presently he came to that place where the Lord says: “And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to Me, and heareth My sayings, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like. He is like a man which built a house, and dug deep, and laid the foundations on a rock. And when the flood arose, the storm beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth, against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.”

Avdyeeich read these words through and through, and his heart was glad. He took off his glasses, laid them on the book, rested his elbow on the table, and fell a-thinking. And he began to measure his own life by these words. And he thought to himself, “Is my house built on the rock or on the sand?” . . . . And he read
all about the woman who anointed Christ's feet and washed them with her tears, and how He justified her.
And so he came at last to the forty-fourth verse, and there he read these words: "And He turned to the woman and said to Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest Me no water for My feet; but she has washed My feet with tears and wiped them with the hairs of her head. . . . And again Avdyeeich took off his glasses, and laid them on the book, and fell a-thinking. "So it is quite plain that I too have something of the Pharisee about me. Am I not always thinking of myself? Am I not always thinking of drinking tea, and keeping myself as warm and cozy as possible, without thinking at all about the guest? Simon thought about himself, but did not give the slightest thought to his guest. But who was the guest? The Lord Himself. And suppose He were to come to me, should I treat Him as the Pharisee did?"

And Avdyeeich leaned both his elbows on the table and, without perceiving it, fell a-dozing.

"Martin!" It was as though the voice of some one close to his ear. Martin started up from his nap. "Who's there?"

He turned around, he gazed at the door, but there was no one. Again he dozed off. Suddenly he heard quite plainly, "Martin, Martin, I say! Look to-morrow into the street. I am coming."

Martin awoke, rose from his chair, and began to rub his eyes. And he did not know himself whether he had heard these words asleep or awake. He turned down the lamp and laid him down to rest.

At dawn, next day, Avdyeeich arose, prayed to God, lit his stove, got ready his gruel and cabbage soup, filled his samovar, put on his apron, and sat him down by his window to work. . . .
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The house porter passed by in new felt boots, the water-carrier passed by, and after that there passed close to the window an old soldier, one of Nicholas's veterans, in tattered old boots, with a shovel in his hands. Avdyeeich knew him by his boots. The old fellow was called Stepanuich, and lived with the neighboring shop keeper, who harbored him of his charity. Stepanuich stopped before Avdyeeich's window to sweep away the snow. Avdyeeich cast a glance at him, and then went on working as before.

"I'm not growing sager as I grow older," thought Avdyeeich, with some self-contempt. "I make up my mind that Christ is coming to me, and lo! 'tis only Stepanuich clearing away the snow. Thou simpleton, thou! thou art wool-gathering!"

"The old man is very much broken," thought Avdyeeich to himself. "It is quite plain that he has scarcely strength enough to scrape away the snow. Suppose I make him drink a little tea! The samovar, too, is just on the boil." Avdyeeich put down his awl, got up, placed the samovar on the table, put some tea in it, and tapped on the window with his fingers. Stepanuich turned around and came to the window. Avdyeeich beckoned to him, and then went and opened the door.

"Come in and warm yourself a bit," cried he. "You're a bit chilled, eh?"

"Christ requite you! Yes, and all my bones ache too," said Stepanuich.

And Avdyeeich filled two cups, and gave one to his guest, and he poured his own tea out into the saucer and began to blow it.

Stepanuich drank his cup, turned it upside down, put a gnawed crust on the top of it, and said, "Thank you." But it was quite plain that he wanted to be asked to have some more.

"Have a drop more. Do!" said Avdyeeich, and poured out fresh cups for his guest and himself, and as Avdyeeich drank his cup, he could not help glancing at the window from time to time.

"Dost thou expect anyone?" asked his guest.

"Do I expect anyone? Well, honestly, I hardly know. I am expecting and I am not expecting, and there's a word which has burnt itself right into my heart. Whether it was a vision or no, I know not. Look now, my brother! I was reading yesterday about our little Father Christ; how He suffered; how He came on earth. Hast thou heard of Him, eh?"

"I have heard, I have heard," replied Stepanuich, "but we poor ignorant ones know not our letters."

"Anyhow, I was reading about this very thing—how He came down upon earth. I was reading how He went to the Pharisee, and how the Pharisee did not meet Him half-way. That was what I was
reading about yesternight, little brother mine. I read that very 
thing, and bethought me how the Honorable did not receive our little 
Father Christ honorably. But suppose, I thought, if He came to 
one like me—would I receive Him? Simon, at any rate, did not re-
ceive Him at all. Thus, I thought, and so thinking, fell asleep. I 
fell asleep, I say, little brother mine, and I heard my name called. 
I started up. A voice was whispering at my very ear. 'Look out 
to-morrow!' it said, 'I am coming.' And so it befell twice. Now 
look! Wouldst thou believe it? The idea stuck to me—I scold my-
self for my folly, and yet I look for Him, our little Father Christ!

. . . Now it seems to me that when our little Father went about 
on earth, He despised no one, but sought unto the simple folk most 
of all. He was always among the simple folk. . . . He who would 
be the first among you, He says, let him become the servant of all. 
And, therefore, it is that He says, Blessed are the lowly, the peace-
makers, the humble, and the long-suffering.'

Stepanuich forgot his tea. He was an old man, soft-hearted, and 
tearful. He sat and listened, and the tears rolled down his cheeks. 

"Come, drink a little more," said Avdyeeich. But Stepanuich 
crossed himself, expressed his thanks, pushed away his cup, and got 
up.

"I thank thee, Martin Avdyeeich. I have fared well at thy hands, 
and thou hast refreshed me both in body and soul."

"Thou wilt show me a kindness by coming again. I am so glad 
to have a guest," said Avdyeeich. Stepanuich departed, and Martin 
poured out the last drop of tea, drank it, washed up, and again sat 
down by the window to work—he had some back-stitching to do. 
He stitched and stitched, and now and then cast glances at the win-
dow—he was looking for Christ, and could think of nothing but Him 
and His works. . . .

There came alongside the window a woman in worsted stockings 
and rustic shoes, and as she was passing by she stopped short in front 
of the partition wall. Avdyeeich looked up at her from his window, 
and he saw that the woman was a stranger and poorly clad, and that 
she had a little child with her. She was leaning up against the wall 
with her back to the wind, and tried to wrap the child up, but she had 
nothing to wrap it up with. . . . Then Avdyeeich got up, went 
out of the door and on to the steps, and cried, "My good woman! 
My good woman!"

The woman heard him and turned around.

"Why dost thou stand out in the cold there with the child? Come 
inside! In the warm room thou wilt be better able to tend him. This 
way!"
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The woman was amazed. What she saw was an old fellow in an apron and with glasses on his nose calling to her. She came toward him.

They went down the steps together—they went into the room. The old man led the woman to the bed. “There,” said he, “sit down, gossip, nearer to the stove, and warm and feed thy little one.” . . .

He went to the table, got some bread and a dish, opened the oven door, put some cabbage soup into the dish, took out a pot of gruel, but it was not quite ready, so he put some cabbage soup only into the dish, and placed it on the table. Then he fetched bread, took down the cloth from the hook, and spread it on the table.

“Sit down and have something to eat, gossip,” said he, “and I will sit down a little with the youngster. I have had children of my own, and know how to manage them.”

The woman crossed herself, sat down at the table, and began to eat, and Avdyeeich sat down on the bed with the child. . . . But the woman went on eating, and told him who she was and whence she came.

“I am a soldier’s wife,” she said; “my eight months’ husband they drove right away from me, and nothing has been heard of him since. I took a cook’s place till I became a mother. They could not keep me and the child. It is now three months since I have been drifting about without any fixed resting place. I have eaten away my all. I wanted to be a wet-nurse, but people wouldn’t have me: ‘Thou art too thin,’ they said. I have just been to the merchant’s wife where our grandmother lives, and there they promised to take me in. I thought it was all right, but she told me to come again in a week. But she lives a long way off. I am chilled to death, and he is quite tired out. But God be praised! Our landlady has compassion on us, and gives us shelter for Christ’s sake. But for that I don’t know how we could live through it all.”

Avdyeeich sighed, and said, “And have you no warm clothes?”

“Ah, kind friend! this is indeed warm-clothes time, but yesterday I pawned away my last shawl for two grivenki.”

The woman went to the bed and took up the child, but Avdyeeich stood up, went to the wall cupboard, rummaged about a bit, and then brought back with him an old jacket.

“Look!” he said, “tis a shabby thing, ’tis true, but it will do to wrap up in.”

The woman looked at the old jacket, then she gazed at the old man, and, taking the jacket, fell a-weeping. Avdyeeich also turned away, crept under the bed, drew out a trunk and seemed to be very

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