

The Gift of Love

Based on a story by Leo Tolstoy

Written by Nancy Pickering

Characters:

Narrator

Martin, the shoemaker

Stephen, the snow shoveler

Woman and her child

Apple seller

Boy

Narrator:

Long ago, in a city lived a shoemaker named Martin. He lived in a basement, in a little room with one window. The window looked out on the street. Through the window he used to watch the people passing by. Although Martin could only see the feet, he knew who the people were by their boots.

He had lived in the same place for a long time and most of the boots had been in his hands at one time or another. He was never out of work because everyone knew he did his work well and kept his promise.

Martin lived alone in his basement room. His wife had died, as had his children. He was glad to watch the people passing on the street just for company.

At night when his work was done he would take up his Bible from a high shelf and read until his candle had burned down.

One night while he was reading very late at night from the Gospel of Luke and he came to the verse: "And to him that strikes thee on the one cheek, offer also the other, and to him that takes away thy cloak offer the coat also. Give to every man that asks of thee; and of him that takes away thy goods do not ask to have them returned. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise."

Then he read about the man who asked Jesus to supper and then was not kind to him.

Martin thought to himself, "That man must have been like me. I, too, have thought only of myself -- how I might have my tea, be warm and comfortable, but never think about my guest. That man thought about himself and he didn't even care about his guest. And who was his guest? The Lord himself. If the Lord had come to me, would I have done the same?"

It was late and Martin rested his head and fell asleep. While he slept he heard a voice call his name. "Martin..."

Martin stirred and answered, "Who is here?"

Again he fell asleep... and again he heard the voice.

"Martin, Ah, Martin. Look tomorrow on the street. I am coming."

Martin awoke, rubbed his eyes. He did not know whether he had heard the words in a dream or for real. He blew out the candle and went to bed.

The next morning Martin rose, said his prayer to God, lighted the stove, put on the soup to cook and water to heat, tied on his shoemaker's apron and sat down by the window to work.

As he worked he thought about his dream and when anyone passed he bent down so that he could see not only the feet but also the face.

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Soon an old street cleaner with a shovel came by the window. Martin recognized his felt boots. It was Stephen. Stephen began to shovel away the snow from in front of Martin's window. Then he stopped and leaned his shovel against the wall. He was old and seemed not to have enough strength to even shovel snow.

Martin said to himself, "I will give him some tea. The water must be boiling by now." And he put down his tools, made tea and tapped on the window, motioning to Stephen to come in.

"Come in and warm yourself a little," Martin said. "You must be cold."

"May Christ reward you for this..." said Stephen. "My bones ache."

The two men had their tea together, but Stephen noticed that Martin kept looking out on the street.

"Are you expecting anyone?" Stephen asked.

Martin told him of the Bible story and the man who did not receive Christ with honor. And then Martin related how in his dream he had heard Christ say he was coming to him that day.

Stephen listened then rose to leave, thanking Martin for treating him so kindly.

Later that day Martin saw a woman pass his window holding a child's hand. She stopped and stood by the wall with her back to the wind and he saw that she was dressed in shabby summer clothes and had nothing to wrap the child in. He could hear the child crying.

Martin hurried to the door and invited them in. The woman was astonished, but she followed Martin into the room and took the chair he offered as Martin went to the stove and poured some hot soup into a dish.

"Sit down and eat," he said, "and I will mind the little one. You see I once had children of my own."

While she ate, the woman told Martin how her husband had gone to hunt for work and she had not heard from him for seven months. She had sold her shawl to get food and now had no warm clothes.

Martin gave her one of his old coats. "It is a poor thing," he said. "But you may put it to good use."

"May God bless you," she cried. "He must have sent me himself to your window. My little child would have frozen to death."

Martin remembered his dream from the night before. He told the woman about how he had heard the voice, how Christ had promised to come see him that day.

"All things are possible," said the woman. She gathered the coat around herself and her child and thanked Martin again. As she left Martin handed her a coin. "Buy back your shawl," he said.

Daylight began to fade and the window grew darker. Still Martin watched. For a while there was nothing out of the ordinary. Then an old apple woman stopped right in front of his window. Only a few apples were left in her basket. Over her shoulder she carried a basket of wood chips. A little boy came along and took an apple from her basket. She grabbed his sleeve.

“I did not take it,” yelled the boy.

Martin rushed out saying, “Let him go and forgive him for Christ’s sake.”

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Martin turned to the boy and said, “Ask the woman for forgiveness and don’t ever do it again, for I saw you take the apple.”

As the boy asked forgiveness, Martin took another apple from the basket and handed it to him. “I will pay you for both, madam,” said Martin to the apple seller.

At first the old woman did not understand, thinking that the boy should be punished. But Martin told her that he ought to be forgiven, as he had only been thoughtless and was sorry.

As the old woman started pick up her baskets the boy offered to help her carry the heavy load and the pair went down the street. The woman had not even allowed Martin to pay for the apples.

Martin stood looking after them until they disappeared around the corner. Then he went back to his room. Since it was dark, he put away his work, lighted the candle and took his Bible down from the shelf. He planned to open it at the place where he had stopped.

Before he could read he heard footsteps behind him and a voice whispered.. “Martin, ah, Martin. Did you not recognize me?”

“Who,” Martin asked.

Then he seemed to see Stephen, and the woman and the child, and the old apple seller with the boy. One by one they stepped out of the dark corner. Thinking about them made Martin glad.

He began to read, “For I was hungry and you gave me meat; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took me in...”

Martin thought and then continued to read on, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brothers, ye have done it unto me.”

Then Martin understood that his dream did not deceive him; that Christ had really visited him that day and that Martin really had received him.