

From "The Shoemaker."

(Continued from page 1021.)

children of my own: I know how to handle them."

The woman sat down at the table and began to eat; while Avdyetich took a seat on the bed near the infant. Avdyetich kept smacking and smacking to it with his lips; but it was a poor kind of smacking, for he had no teeth. The little one still cries; and it occurred to Avdyetich to threaten it with his finger. He waves, waves his finger right before the child's mouth, and hastily withdraws it. He does not put it to its mouth, because his finger is black, and soiled with wax. And the little one looked at his finger and became quiet; then it began to smile, and Avdyetich also was glad. While the woman is eating, she tells who she is, and whither she was going.

"I," says she, "am a soldier's wife. It is now seven months since they sent my husband away off, and no tidings. I lived out as cook; the baby was born; no one cared to keep me with a child. This is the third month I have been struggling along without a place. I ate up all I had. Fortunately, our landlady takes pity on us for the sake of Christ, and gives us a room, else I don't know how I should manage to get along."

Avdyetich sighed and said, "Haven't you any warm clothes?"

"Now is the time, friend, to wear warm clothes; but yesterday I pawned my last shawl for a twenty-kopeck piece."

The woman came to the bed and took the child; and Avdyetich rose, went to the little wall, and succeeded in finding an old coat.

"Na!" says he, "it is a poor thing, yet you may turn it to some use."

The woman looked at the coat and burst into tears; and Avdyetich turned away his head. Crawling under the bed, he pushed out a little trunk, rummaged in it, and sat down again opposite the woman.

And the woman said, "May Christ bless you, dietushka (little grandfather). He must have sent me Himself to your window. My little child would have frozen to death. When I started out it was warm, but now it is terribly cold. And He, Batiushka, led you to look through the window and take pity on me."

Avdyetich smiled and said, "Indeed He did that! I have been looking through the window, my good woman, not without cause." And Martuin told the soldier's wife his dream, and how he heard the voice—how the Lord promised to come and see him that day.

"All things are possible," said the woman. She rose, put on the coat, wrapped up her little child in it, and as she started to leave, thanked Avdyetich again.

"Take this, for Christ's sake," said Avdyetich, giving her a twenty-kopeck piece; "redeem your shawl." She made the sign of the cross. Avdyetich made the sign of the cross, and went with her to the door.

The woman left. Avdyetich ate some cabbage-soup, washed some dishes, and sat down again to work. While he works he still remembers the window. When the window grew darker, he immediately looked out to see who was passing by. Both acquaintances and strangers passed by, and there was nothing out of the ordinary.

But here Avdyetich sees that an old apple-woman has stopped right in front of the window. She carries a basket with apples. Only a few were left, as she has nearly sold them all out; and over her shoulder she had a bag full of chips. She must have gathered them up in some new building, and was on her way home. One could see that the bag was heavy on her shoulder; she wanted to shift it to the other shoulder. So she lowered the bag upon the sidewalk, stood the basket with the apples on a little post, and began to stake down the splinters in a bag, and while she was shaking her bag, a little boy in a torn cap came

along, picked up an apple from the basket, and was about to make his escape; but the old woman noticed it, turned around, and caught the youngster by his sleeve. The little boy began to struggle, tried to tear himself away; but the old woman grasped him with both hands, knocked off his cap, and caught him by the hair.

The little boy is screaming, the old woman is pulling the youngster by his hair, and is scolding and threatening to take him to the policeman; the youngster defends himself and denies the charge. "I did not do it," he says; "what are you licking me for? Let me go!" Avdyetich tried to separate them. He took the boy by his arm and said:

"Let him go, babushka; forgive him, for Christ's sake."

"I will forgive him, so that he won't forget till the new broom grows. I am going to take the little villain to the police."

Avdyetich began to entreat the old woman:

"Let him go, babushka," he said; "he will never do it again. Let him go."

The old woman let him loose; the boy tried to run, but Avdyetich kept him back.

"Ask the babushka's forgiveness," he said, "and don't you ever do it again; I saw you taking the apple."

With tears in his eyes, the boy began to ask forgiveness.

"Nu! that's right; and now, here's an apple for you," Avdyetich got an apple from the basket, and gave it to the boy. "I will pay you for it, babushka," he said to the old woman.

"You ruin them that way, the good-for-nothings," said the old woman. "He ought to be treated so that he would remember it for a whole week."

"Eh, babushka, babushka," said Avdyetich, "that is right according to our judgment, but not according to God's. If he is to be whipped for an apple, then what do we deserve for our sins?"

The old woman was silent. "God has commanded us to forgive," said Avdyetich, else we, too, may not be forgiven. All should be forgiven, and the thoughtless, especially."

The old woman shook her head and sighed.

"That's so," said she; but the trouble is that they are very much spoiled."

"Then we, who are older, must teach them," said Avdyetich.

"That's just what I say," remarked the old woman. "I myself had seven of them—only one daughter is left." And the old woman began to relate where and how she lived with her daughter, and how many grandchildren she had. "Here," she says, "my strength is only so-so, and yet I have to work. I pity the youngsters—my grandchildren—how nice they are. No one gives me such a welcome as they do. Akme sinka won't go to anyone but me,"—and the old woman grew quite sentimental.

"Of course, it is a childish trick. God be with him," said she, pointing to the boy.

The woman was just about to lift the bag upon her shoulder, when the boy ran up, and says, "Let me carry it, babushka; it is on my way."

The old woman nodded her head, and put the bag on the boy's back. Side by side they passed along the street. And the old woman even forgot to ask Avdyetich to pay for the apple.

Avdyetich stood motionless and kept gazing after them; and he heard them talking all the time as they walked away. After he saw them disappear, he returned to his room; he found his eye-glasses on the stairs—they were not broken; he picked up hisawl and sat down to work again.

After working a little while, it grew darker, so that he could not see to sew. He saw the lamplighter passing by to light the street-lamps.



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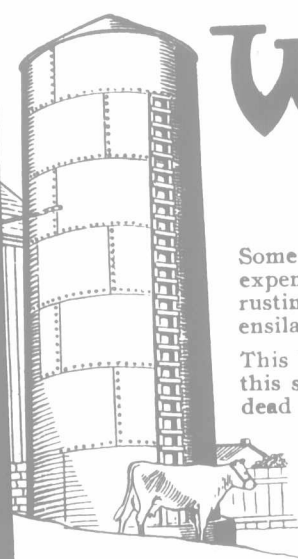
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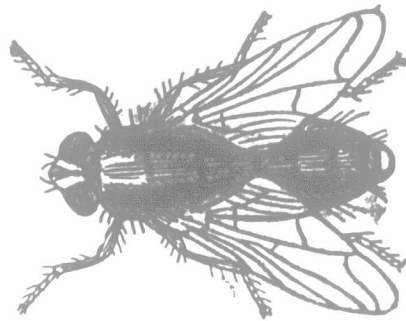
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