

Luka's story from the play *The Lower Depths* by Maxim Gorky

LUKA: Someone has to be kind, girl -- someone has to pity people! Christ pitied everybody -- and he said to us: "Go and do likewise!" I tell you -- if you pity a man when he most needs it, good comes of it. Why -- I used to be a watchman on the estate of an engineer near Tomsk -- all right -- the house was right in the middle of a forest -- lonely place -- winter came -- and I remained all by myself. Well -- one night I heard a noise -- thieves creeping in! I took my gun -- I went out. I looked and saw two of them opening a window -- and so busy that they didn't even see me. I yell: "Hey there -- get out of here!" And they turn on me with their axes -- I warn them to stand back, or I'd shoot -- and as I speak, I keep on covering them with my gun, first on the one, then the other -- they go down on their knees, as if to implore me for mercy. And by that time I was furious -- because of those axes, you see -- and so I say to them: "I was chasing you, you scoundrels -- and you didn't go. Now you go and break off some stout branches!" -- and they did so -- and I say: "Now -- one of you lie down and let the other one flog him!" So they obey me and flog each other -- and then they began to implore me again. "Grandfather," they say, "for God's sake give us some bread! We're hungry!" There's thieves for you, my dear! *[Laughs.]* And with an ax, too! Yes -- honest peasants, both of them! And I say to them, "You should have asked for bread straight away!" And they say: "We got tired of asking -- you beg and beg -- and nobody gives you a crumb -- it hurts!" So they stayed with me all that winter -- one of them, Stepan, would take my gun and go shooting in the forest -- and the other, Yakoff, was ill most of the time -- he coughed a lot . . . and so the three of us together looked after the house . . . then spring came . . . "Good-bye, grandfather," they said -- and they went away -- back home to Russia escaped convicts -- from a Siberian prison camp . . . honest peasants! If I hadn't felt sorry for them -- they might have killed me -- or maybe worse -- and then there would have been a trial and prison and afterwards Siberia -- what's the sense of it? Prison teaches no good -- and Siberia doesn't either -- but another human being can . . . yes, a human being can teach another one kindness -- very simply!

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