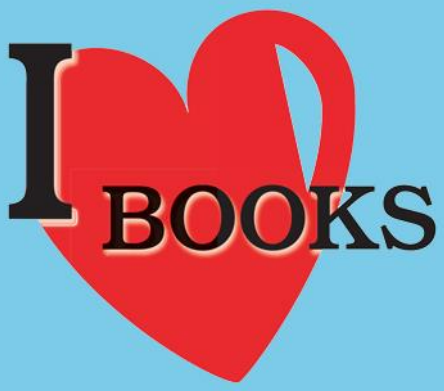


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Opening extract from

Papa Panov's Special Day

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PAPA PANOV'S SPECIAL DAY

RETOLD BY MIG HOLDER
ILLUSTRATED BY TONY MORRIS



LION CHILDREN'S

A long time ago, almost too long ago to remember, and far away, almost too far to imagine, in a small Russian village there lived an old shoemaker. His name was Panov. But nobody called him Mister Panov or even shoemaker Panov; wherever he went he was known as Papa Panov because everybody loved him.

Papa Panov was not very rich – all he owned in the world was one small room where he lived and slept and made shoes.

But neither was he very poor. He had a bed, a stove, an oil lamp, and a great wicker chair. And he had enough money to buy bread and coffee, and cabbage to make soup for his supper.



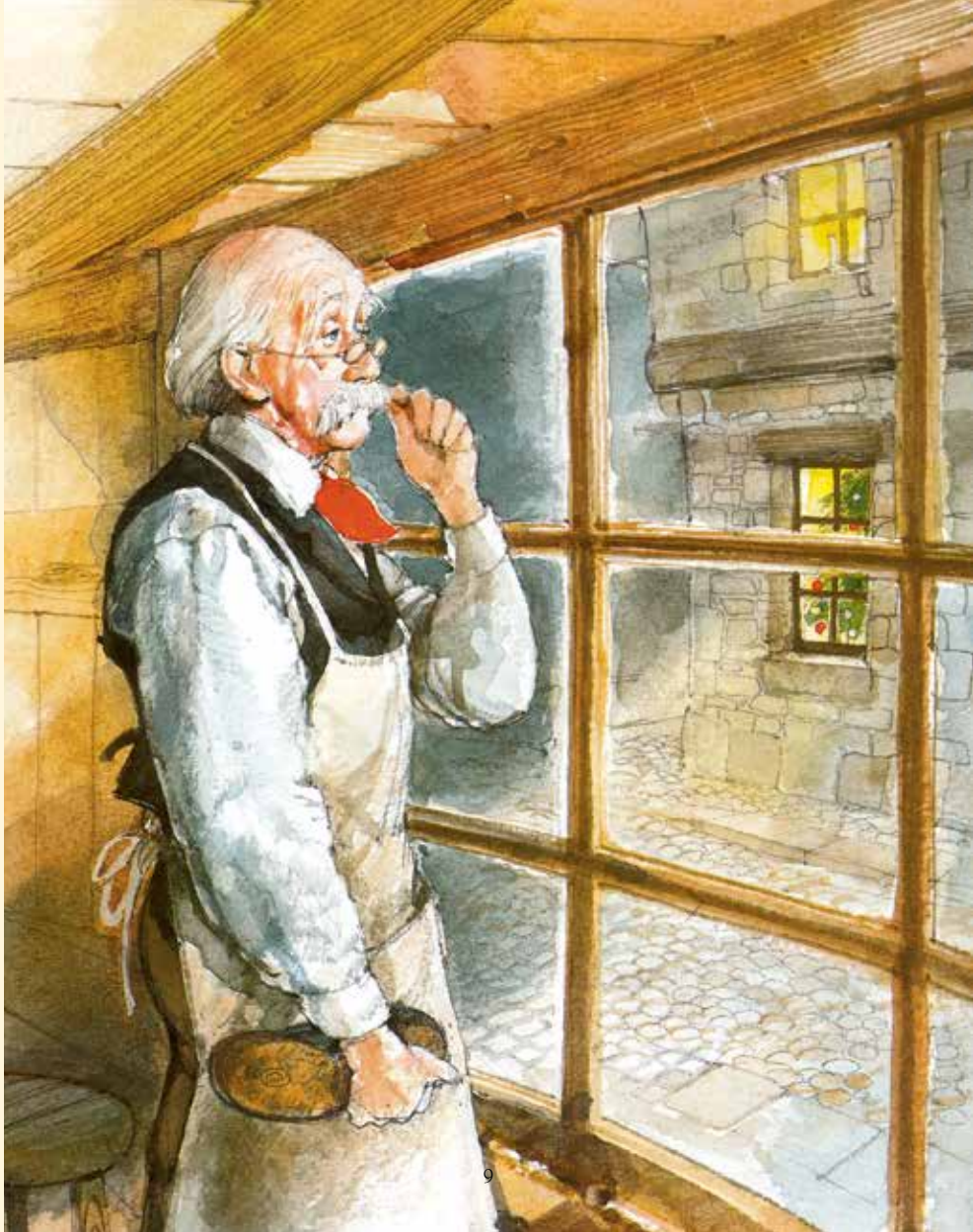
So Papa Panov was quite happy – most of the time. Most of the time his eyes would sparkle behind his little round spectacles as he waved a cheery greeting to people passing by.



But on this particular day it was different. Papa Panov stood sadly at the window of his little shop and thought of his wife who had died many years ago and of his sons and daughters who had all grown up and gone away. It was Christmas Eve and everybody in the village was at home with their families. He looked up and down the street and saw windows bright with candles and lamps and Christmas trees. He heard laughter and the squeals of children playing games. And the faint smell of roasting meat crept through the cracks around the door of his tiny shop.

"Dearie, dearie," said Papa Panov, pulling at his long grey moustache and shaking his head slowly from side to side. But there was no one to bring back the sparkle behind his little round spectacles.

Papa Panov sighed a great sigh. Then he carefully lit the oil lamp, went to a high shelf, and lifted down an old brown book.



He dusted some scraps of leather off the bench and turned up the lamp. He set a pot of coffee on the stove, sat down in the great wicker chair, and began to read. Now Papa Panov had never been to school and could not read very well so, as he went, he ran his finger along the lines, saying the words out loud.



This was the story of Christmas. He read how a baby boy, Jesus, was born, not in a good warm house but in a cowshed because there wasn't any room at the inn where his mother and father had asked to stay the night.

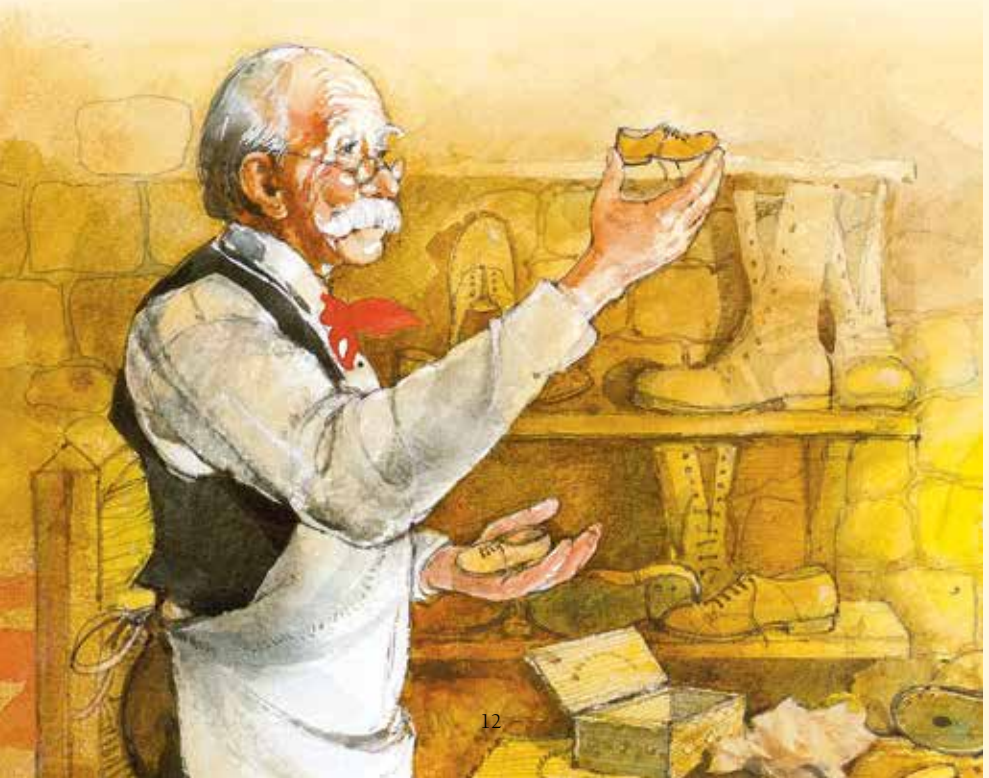
"Dearie, dearie," said Papa Panov, pulling at his long moustache. "If they had come here, they could have slept on my good bed and I would have covered the tiny boy with my patchwork quilt. I could have shared my bread and soup with them and played games with the little child and tickled his toes to make him laugh."

Papa Panov got up and stoked the fire. It was becoming quite foggy outside so he turned up the lamp. He poured himself a mug of coffee and went back to his book.



He read how rich men journeyed across the desert to bring wonderful presents for the little boy Jesus – gold and sweet-smelling spices.

"Dearie, dearie," sighed Papa Panov. "If Jesus came here, *I* wouldn't have anything to give him." Suddenly he smiled and his eyes sparkled behind his little round spectacles.



He got up from the great wicker chair and went over to a high shelf. He lifted down a dusty box tied with string. He opened the box and unwrapped a pair of tiny shoes. Papa Panov held one small shoe in each hand. They were the best he had ever made.

He gazed at them for a long time, and then carefully tidied them back into the box. He lowered his old limbs down into the chair.

"That's what I would have given the baby," he murmured.

With a great sigh he picked up the book once more.

Now whether it was the warmth of the room or whether it was because it was getting late, who can say, but it wasn't long before Papa Panov's bony finger slid from the page, his little round spectacles slipped from his nose, and he fell sound asleep.





Suddenly, "Papa Panov!" said a voice in the room. The old man jumped.

"Who is it?" he cried. He could hardly see without his spectacles, but there seemed to be no one there.

"Papa Panov," came the voice again. "You wished that I had come to your shop and you could give me a present. Look out from dawn to dusk and I will come."

Then all was quiet. Papa Panov rubbed his eyes and sat up with a start. The stove had burned low and the lamp had gone out but, outside, bells were ringing everywhere. Christmas had come.

"That was Jesus!" said the old man to himself. "Perhaps it was just a dream – no matter, I will watch and hope that he will visit me today. But how shall I know him? He was not always a little boy; he grew up to be a man; some people said he was God himself."

Papa Panov peered out of the window. "Dearie, dearie, I shall have to watch very carefully."



Papa Panov stayed at the window until the first rays of sun crept up over the hill and twinkled on the snowy rooftops. At last a figure came into view, trudging slowly up the long cobbled street. Papa Panov felt very excited – perhaps this was Jesus! Then he stepped back, disappointed – it was only the old roadsweeper who came each week with his barrow and broom.

He was waiting for Jesus! He stepped away from the window hoping the old fellow would pass by. But when he turned back, the roadsweeper was right outside the little shop, rubbing his hands together and stamping his feet. He did look very cold.



Papa Panov felt sorry for him – imagine having to work on Christmas Day!