

kissed him as if she faint would have left her life upon his lips; but Filippo, not understanding, burst into a passion of childish tears.

The years went on, and I would scarcely have marked their passing had not Filippo grown into Filippo, that is to say, from a curly-haired, chubby-cheeked child, into a slender, brown-skinned boy, and then into the most beautiful of youths.

And after some time Maddalena came no more, and I could but conjecture that the fire and grief within her had consumed her.

The next occurrence that impressed me with a sense of importance was of a much softer character—indeed it was what was then, and always will be, the loveliest thing in a world brimful of lovely things to me—namely, a pair of young lovers, very young, very shy, feeling love for the first time, so innocent of love itself that they scarcely knew it had come to them.

As I have said, many years passed and nothing of any importance happened, until one day a bearded stranger entered, who greeted Messer Antonio as if he had been acquainted with him in bygone days.

"You do not recognize me," he said; "yet, Messer Antonio, I was once an apprentice here, and it is to you I owe the renown I have gained. I am Giuseppe Nardi, whose violins almost rival yours."

Messer Antonio looked right glad to see him. "You are a great honor to me," he said. "I am always proud of you. You are well—and married?" Nardi shook his head. "No," he said, solemnly. "I told you then, I tell you now, life ended for me when she left us."

Messer Antonio stood silent for a little while, and then he pointed to Filippo, who sat amongst the apprentices. "None of them, so much in awe were they of their master, durst lift their eyes from their work."

"That is Maddalena's son," he said. Giuseppe Nardi gave a great start. "Her son?" he asked. "Then where is she? Was she not happy, my beloved one—tell me for pity's sake, she is not dead?"

has ever succeeded in diverting me from any purpose. I am too old to change now."

"That is right, my lad," said Nardi heartily; but he turned away with something like a sigh. He made his adieux to Messer Antonio, but returned of a sudden. "The singer Brondoni," he asked under his breath, "is the man, is he not? Remember, I never knew aught save that I had lost her."

"I wish you would forego this revenge."

"I will die first," said Messer Antonio, and he spoke as if he meant it.

Maria was the daughter of the woman who kept the fruit stall which the apprentices patronized, and she had always been so pretty that she was a joy to look at. Her tawny curls ran riot over her forehead, clinging to the arch of her eyebrows and strayed down from her head to dance on her shoulder.

It was mid- Lent; Messer Antonio had given his apprentices leave to enjoy themselves as they saw fit on this one holiday plucked from amid the sombre fast days. All of them were away, save Filippo, who, having the love of his craft strong in him, was intent on shaping a beautiful piece of seasoned wood. I heard a timid rap at the door, and when Filippo had cried "Come in," I knew not who was the more surprised, he or Maria, when the latter entered.

"I have come to see Messer Antonio," said the girl, shyly. "Mother sent me to ask concerning the rent. It has been told me the padrone wishes to increase it, and indeed, we are too poor to pay more."

"I know nothing of it," answered Filippo. "Messer Antonio does not confide in any one, but I hope he will not increase your rent. He is quite rich enough as it is, he has no one belonging to him in this world to whom he could leave his money."

"Thank you," answered the girl simply, and Filippo pulled out the bench on which the apprentices sat, and made room for her. I think it must have been the first time in his life that he noticed how pretty she was, for he looked at her with much attention, so much so that the girl blushed and finally asked him, "Why are you looking at me?"

"I fear so, and then I know not what we should do, for here you see we are well known, and each morning the apprentices buy fruit from us because we are near—but so they would from any stranger, and our place would soon be filled up; but we— we must go out into the world and starve, for indeed we are too poor to pay more."

"You must not go away," said Filippo softly, with a little emphasis

stress on the "you" that made the girl blush again. "Ah!" she said, shyly. "I know you would help us, but how can you? Messer Antonio is a hard man."

"He is a very just man," answered the lad gravely, "and if you will let me, I will plead your cause for you."

Maria looked up, startled; her eyes gave a sudden flash. "I do not know," she murmured.

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"You must be my little wife, Maria," whispered Filippo, and she drooped her head on his shoulder like a flower on its stem, but said nothing.

"I hope you will not be hard on them, padrone, for I love her and have asked her to be my wife." He said it quite boldly; it was true that he did not fear Messer Antonio. It seemed to him that the old man was making a mental calculation as to what course he should take. He did not look very pleasant when he said—

"You are very young, Filippo."

"I shall grow older," said the lad. "Besides everything is so vague as yet. We should not want to marry for a long time. My wage is not sufficient."

"Oh!" quoth Messer Antonio, with a sigh of relief. "Listen to me. Of course it is nothing to me; you are not bound to do my wishes. Gratitude counts for nothing in this world, and you are your own master. But this very day I made some arrangements which I thought might please you. They will not interfere with your matrimonial engagements, in which, of course, you can please yourself entirely. Everybody manages their own marriages—mismarriages, I should say. But if you will follow my advice, you could far better afford to keep a wife in a little while than by working out your time with me. For the matter of that you were never properly appreciated and you are an independent workman. Well, Filippo, to begin the matter, you have a money-making machine in that throat of yours, in the shape of a beautiful voice."

"Filippo looked up much surprised. "Why, I thought you hated to hear me sing, padrone."

"But you have a fine voice, nevertheless," answered the padrone dryly. "The best tenor in Italy, I think, when it is cultivated, which it shall be by the finest master in the world. Now do not thank me. I have private reasons for what I do, a grudge which I owe to Brondoni, the tenor, whom I want supplanted. He thinks he can sing, the vain fool! Why, every note he sings rings false, as if a villain's notes can sound; and he shall be hissed off the stage yet, and 'tis you who shall show the people what singing means!"

"You can—you shall, you are a musician. And as for that little revenge of mine, it need not concern you. Play into my hands, that is all, and as for the little Maria, it will be a proud day for her when she is the tenor's wife!"

Filippo looked as if the news were too good to be true. With a sudden impulse he seized Messer Antonio's tool-worn hands and kissed them.

"I will do all you tell me padrone," he cried, "and I will work for your sake and for my Maria's!"

"That is right," answered the old man. "I trust you, Filippo; remember that you do not disappoint me."

And now there must be a little gap in my narrative, for I was presently pronounced to be a finished instrument, and removed to the keeping of a most excellent musician, and so was at last permitted to make music, which needs must be the greatest desire of a violin.

We were all much excited on the evening of which I am about to tell you, for there was to be the first representation of a great work by the famous master Gluck. There was always a great feeling against German music in Italy, and it was with difficulty that this work was allowed to be performed. I had been with my master to rehearsals, and had been delighted with a certain tenor whom all men called Filippo Filippini, but whom I knew to be my own dear Filippo, who was singing a part which has since been sung by women, so fresh was his voice; and all about heard great discussions as to how Brondoni would take his dismissal from his post of primo tenor. Of course my knowledge that Brondoni was none other than Filippo's father added great piquancy to this performance. It seemed to me that no one knew it except myself, and I counted for nothing, for I was but a violin in the orchestra—one voice amongst many, but for all that I knew a great deal, and looked forward with no small excitement to the evening's performance.

Well, it is divine music—we all know that—and as for my Filippo, he was perfect. I had looked around for Messer Antonio, and sure enough I had found him, radiant, glowing with pride; and next to him, in the full charms of her young womanhood, sat Maria.

"Dear lad! He has been faithful to her, then," I thought, with satisfaction, for Maria's presence with Messer Antonio was a sure sign that Filippo was still her betrothed, if not her husband.

The first part went superbly. Filippo surpassed himself; and then suddenly there arose, I know not whence, a sinister rumor. It was whispered, first amongst the musicians in the orchestra—whispered by some with horror, by others with decisive smiles and shrugs; and when the curtain was over-long in rising, I knew the report must have reached Filippo, and the rumor was—"Brondoni has stabbed himself!"

It came upon me like a thunder-bolt. Did Messer Antonio know? I wondered that he sat there so erect, so sure of himself, so proud of Filippo's success, and then I trembled at the horror of it all, for it meant nothing else but that, through the son's instrumentality, the father had made away with himself. It was so horrible! My joy unsuspecting Filippo singing away so lustily for his sake, for Maria's sake, for love's sake; all the time an instrument of revenge—himself innocent of all revenge.

"Forego revenge," he had said. "I thought of Giuseppe Nardi. I remembered Messer Antonio's answer: 'I am too old to be inverted from my purpose,' and it seemed to me that the world had become more jangled and out of tune than ever, and that no amount of striving could ever put it right.

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"I will not hush," said Filippo, impatiently. Perhaps the thought of his beautiful sweetheart, and how she had come to enjoy his success, made him a little ruthless. "Are we to stop a whole performance, because a man has killed himself, Nardi?"

"You must stop!" said Nardi, firmly. "You are mad!" cried Filippo. "Leave the stage, Nardi, and ring the curtain up."

"You must not, Filippo! You of all men, must not sing." "Why I?" cried Filippo, furiously. "Brondoni to me that I must not sing because he is dead?"

"Do you know what it is you are saying?" cried the lad. "Do you know that I have this man's blood on my head, and that if he is my father, I have killed my father? Do you know that I have worked to supplant him, that my one aim was to show the people what a worthless singer he was, that I have driven him to his death, and you talk quietly he is my father? It is horrible—horrible!"

No one spoke, and then suddenly Filippo cried, "Where is Messer Antonio—my grandfather—that I may have my revenge on him?"

"Leave revenge," said Nardi once more. "There has been too much revenge already!"

And so it was that the great master Gluck's work was not performed in its entirety, and that gradually the astonished audience left the theatre, and I was sad at heart indeed, and wondered what end there could be to so calamitous a story.

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