

the night? And he was so happy, all unconscious of the fact that in the last few days his mother had grown rapidly worse.

"Dick!" called a voice from the bed, and the next moment the boy was in his mother's arms.

Then it was that the truth flashed across Dick's mind. He gave one glance into the face of Mary Barton, and the answer he read there was sufficient. He spoke no word, uttered no cry—only grew very white, and then, after an interval, his mother once more opened her eyes and he crept to her arms with his bunch of Easter lilies.

Easter morning had dawned, and Mrs. Travers slept. Dick knelt on the floor in front of the small fire, with his head buried in Mary Barton's lap, while conclusive sobs shook his whole frame.

"Oh, Mary, my promise—I must keep my promise!" he sobbed. "The Rector trusted me, and I have spent the money. I shall be away all the morning, and mother—"

"But he could not finish. "Dinna greet sae sair, laddie!" Mary answered, lapsing into her own native tongue.

"The Rector is a guid man—ye must just tell him all, and we will soon be able to give him back the two dollars; but indeed, laddie, ye must not leave your mither!"

But Dick still sobbed.

"There is no one else to sing the solo, and I promised so faithfully to be there. Oh, I must go, it is nearly ten o'clock now! If mother would only wake before I go!"

But the quiet sleeper did not stir, and Dick rose to his feet.

"Perhaps she will sleep until I come back—or—Mary—do you think—might she—"

But Dick could not ask the question, and Mary shook her head.

"Ay, bairnie, she might pass away so—but laddie, laddie, must ye go?"

Dick was almost past speaking now; he hung over the still form of his mother, scarcely daring to kiss the pale cheek.

"If she wakes tell her I kept my promise—she would wish it—she taught me so," he said, and, taking the white Easter lilies out of the water they stood in, Dick laid them out on the pillow beside the still whiter face and gently kissing the marble brow, stole across the room to be pressed once more in Mary's arms before he hurried off to St. Luke's.

The Rector had waited five minutes for the appearance of the boy, and was just about to leave the vestry, pained and disappointed at the breach of trust, when the door was flung open and Dick rushed in, breathless.

There was no time for any questions, but the Rector himself helped the boy to don a cassock and clean white surplice.

"My boy, I'm glad I trusted you!" he whispered.

At the words Dick's eyes swam in tears as he thought of the price he was paying for that trust.

Then the long line of white-robed figures filed into the church. Dick was given a seat right opposite to the Rector's desk. Herr Lutz looked around anxiously, satisfied himself that the boy was there, and after a series of nods and smiles turned again to his organ, while Dick, after one glance down the beautifully-decorated well-filled church, turned his head and fixed his eyes on the tall vases, filled with beautiful Easter lilies.

He listened as in a dream to the pealing notes of the organ, and the voices of the choristers, but he took no part in their joyful song, and the Rector wondered at the look of trouble in the beautiful eyes.

Herr Lutz listened in vain for his voice, and not till the boy next him whispered, "Why don't you sing?" did Dick recollect what he had come for, and the blood rushed to his face.

Sing! How could he sing that joyful hymn when his mother lay dying—perhaps dead? He clasped his hands convulsively. But Dick was honorable to the core. He was paid to sing, and he would, though the effort well-nigh choked him. He threw his head, and by a great effort of will joined in the beautiful words.

His marvellous voice, trembling slightly at first, soon rose above the others, startling all who listened. Almost unconsciously he slipped from the low notes to the octave above, leading all the other voices with piercing and distinctive clearness.

Herr Lutz almost forgot to play. "A born singer—a born singer!" he was murmuring to himself and the Rector listened and wondered until the sweet, pure notes ceased and Dick was kneeling—a white-robed figure, his face hidden in his hands.

He saw not the others rise, he heard not the sound of the organ, he still knelt, his face hidden, until a gentle touch aroused him, as the Rector bent over him.

"My boy—the solo—can you sing it?"

Dick rose and mechanically took the sheet of music held out to him. The choristers were beginning, but Dick needed no music; he laid the sheet down and listened for his key-note.

It came, the choristers ceased, and Dick took up the strain. His voice did not falter, but rang out so sweet and clear as to hold his hearers spell-bound; he sang as if inspired. The notes rose and fell with a marvellous intensity of feeling, and the people held their breath to listen. Dick for one brief moment seemed to have forgotten his sorrow, seemed to be drifting away from earth and joining the white-robed choir above.

Echoing up in the vaulted roof his voice rose, ringing through the aisles, and seeming to bear its message of peace and goodwill straight to the gates of Heaven; and surely the angels were rejoicing, for as he sang weary faces brightened, the careless heart was touched, and the hard one softened.

The service was over. Dick had thrown off his surplice and rushed away before the Rector could speak to him.

"I must follow him!" he said, and immediately set off after the boy.

He saw nothing of him, however, and some time elapsed before, by dint of careful questioning, he found Pilgrim's Alley.

Meanwhile Dick had rushed home, had climbed the narrow stair, and stood breathless and trembling outside the door. No sound came from within, and, gently lifting the latch, he went in.

Mary Barton was standing beside the bed with folded hands, and Dick knew the truth before he reached her side. He neither spoke nor moved, but stood and looked down at the calm, still face, beautiful with its look of perfect peace and rest, a sweet smile curving the pale lips.

Mary broke the silence.

"Ay, bairnie, div ye ken how happy she is now? What a smile! Ay, laddie, laddie, what a joyful Easter Day for her; and, laddie, almost the last thing she said was 'Tell my boy how glad I am that he was able to keep his promise!' My bairnie, what a happy Easter Day for her!" she repeated.

At the words all Dick's unselfish tender love shone in his face.

"Mary," said he, "I will be happy because she is so happy!"—and, taking the Easter lilies, he pressed his lips to their white, waxen petals before he laid them on his mother's breast; then, gently kissing the marble cheek, he stole softly from the room.

The Rector spared no pains in finding out the history of little Dick. He learnt that Mrs. Travers had been disowned by all her relatives when she married Dick's father, a poor subaltern in the army, who had died when Dick was seven years old, and she had bravely struggled on alone, maintaining herself and her boy by her needle.

The Rector took Dick home to live with him, and the boy unconsciously took the place of his own little son, who had died years ago. Soon after, Mary, to Dick's great joy, was installed at the rectory as housekeeper.

Now the Church of St. Luke is famed far and near for the wonderful voice of one of its choristers, and Sunday after Sunday the old aisles ring with the pure thrilling notes of "The Angel Chorister" as Herr Lutz calls his brilliant, promising pupil.



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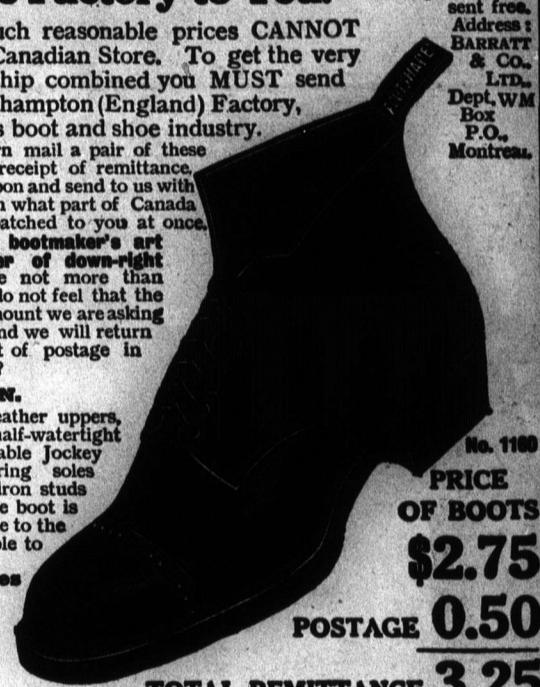
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