

"Here's a penny," said Dot's mother, "give it to the man."

The little girl danced down the gravel path and pushed her way through the lilacs out onto the walk. Then she stopped suddenly—shyly—she had seen the little boy.

The music had called to her—it was a friend, even the birds were not afraid of it—but a boy, that was something for serious consideration.

Dot stood irresolutely turning the penny over and over with timid nervousness. Resolve darted her forward, and almost before she knew it she had dropped the coin in the little brown paw of the lad.

That was the beginning. She backed up two steps and sighed contentedly. The music whispered reassuringly; so she listened with the birds and the lilacs and the drowsy-eared trees and looked into the big brown Italian eyes of the boy, and saw that he was only a little boy.

The next time the fiddler came she spoke to him. The pair came often after that.

The blind fiddler, the brown-eyed boy, a golden-haired little girl, a penny and the music. Rather a simple group.

The player's face had always been plain. When God had closed the windows of his soul and shut out the light, it had grown plainer, but that made no difference.

The little meetings came oftener, the birds sang blither, the sun shone gentler, the lilacs saved up their fragrance for the music days, and the bees droned happier when Dot and her friends met.

Then many days went by and the fiddler did not come. Dot waited and counted the days and asked her mother why; and something had gone out of the summer.

There were three weeks like this and then one day the violin sent a sigh up the gravel walk and Dot heard it. She skipped eagerly out to the old music trysting place. The man was alone.

"Where's 'oor little boy?" she asked.

"He's dead," the blind man answered, and the bow pulled heavily at the discordant strings.

"Won't he tum any more?" Dot asked, trying to understand the great something that was not of the music, nor of dolls, nor of anything she knew.

The man stopped playing, searched about in the dead air with his wavering fingers until he found the curly head, and as his hand rested there for an instant, answered, "No, Pietro won't come any more."

That was all; but some of the knowledge of the emptiness of the world came to Dot. The leaves whispered it and the lilacs breathed it, and she went into the house, and, taking the little battered doll in her arms, cried, and cried, and by-and-bye fell asleep on the floor.

After many days the player came again, and stopped at the lilacs in front of Number 7. The violin called, and whispered, and sang, and stopped, and called again, but Dot did not come. A man walking briskly by, stopped, looked at the house, and touched the player on the arm.

"Don't you see there is crape on the door—white crape!" he said reproachfully, "Pardon me," he added hastily, as the player turned his face, and he saw that he was blind. "I did not know—forgive me."

The blind man moved vacantly a few steps, and sat down brokenly on the edge of the walk. He sat there a long time, the plain, shaggy head drooped hopelessly on his breast.

"God takes all the flowers," he muttered; all the sweet young flowers, and leaves a ragged weed like me. Oh, Pietro, Pietro! why can't I go too. I am blind and tired—"

"Come, move on," a rough voice said, and a policeman shook him by the shoulder. He got up, moved aimlessly a little distance, and when the heavy steps of the officer died out he went back and sat down again, and waited.

He was listening for something—watching with his ears. "Perhaps they'll come to-day," he muttered, and waited.

At last there was the sound of wheels—heavy, muffled wheels. He knew what that meant. He counted—one, two—a dozen; always the same slow solemn roll of heavy wheels, and always hushed at the same place; just where he used to play; where Pietro and the little girl used to chatter; where the silly birds mocked him, and the leaves whispered, and the lilacs shed their perfume.

He rose up, and going close to the gate, stood with bared head. Somebody passing dropped a coin in the hat. He threw it far out on the dusty road.

He could hear the people going in and coming out.

At last there was the shuffling sound of many feet moving together—something was being carried.

The blind man stepped forward and raised his hand. The bearers stopped. The blind man felt his way reverently until his hand touched something hard and polished and cold.

The plain face drooped lower and lower, the heavy lips rested for an instant softly, gently, on the casket. Then the stooped figure straightened up—turned—passed through the gate and slowly up the walk, feeling its poor blind way with the stick.

The carriages rolled away—the lilac bushes were bare—the birds had ceased to sing—there was no sunlight—for it was autumn.

Even the great house was silent.

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