OLD Angelotti had a small, quaint shop in the Latin Quarter of San Francisco, filled with plaster of Paris casts of classical statues and prim figures of the saints. Here he lived and worked among the silent statue-folk, and here his son, the child Angelo, played gravely with gladiators and dancing girls. At heart Angelotti was an artist. He felt a reverence for the majestic Winged Victory, his breast swelled at the Venus de Milo, and he was conscious even of the subtle charm of the incomprehensible Great Unknown. But there was a reason why this mysterious Unknown Lady appealed to him; her face reminded him of his wife, who died when Angelo was born. It was on account of her death, perhaps, that little Angelo was so completely dear to him; the child became to him as the stem and the blossom in one; at once the reincarnation of his mother and his own independent self. From his great, melancholy eyes Angelotti felt his wife's spirit looking deep into his own soul; when the child spoke it was as though a voice had penetrated the infinite and death were life again. But more than this, Angelo had his mother's gift, the gift of music, and almost before his small, unsteady legs could carry him, he drew the bow across the strings of the violin, and strange, sweet sounds stole through the statue-peopled shop.

Never should Angelotti forget the day he discovered the child's gift. He was working at the wet plaster in an outer room when the slight note of harmony fell gently on his ear. He paused and trembled. Could it be the spirit of that music she used to make which conjured up visions too impalpable for words—visions as fleeting as the sunset or the scent of violets? He tiptoed to the shop and opened the door noiselessly. There, among the white, still figures, stood Angelo, his dead mother's violin poised on his shoulder and his small, brown fingers drawing the bow across the strings. Hearing his father he raised his grave, dark eyes and said very quietly:

"I have the gift."

Old Angelotti wept tears of joy, and from this time forth his life had but one purpose—to make Angelo a great musician. To this end he worked later at night; he bought coarser food and thinner wine, and Angelo, with two other boys, played the violin and the harp from door to door. The boy must have every opportunity; he must even go
abroad. That idea smote him like a blow. He would be alone in the little shop with the silent statues while Angelo was far across the sea. But love and sacrifice are one, and Angelotti was resigned. Was there not always the thought that Angelo would come home, great, famous, and he, old Angelotti, would travel with him and say to people:

"He is my son."

TIME went on and Angelo’s masters forbade the street playing as corrupting his art. They said he had a gift so rare that it should be trained to the point of perfection. Finally he exhausted their knowledge, and then but one thing remained—for him to go abroad. He was young to start out in the world, plastic to be cast into a new mold of life, but Angelotti knew it was best, so he fought through oppressive nights, and the result was that Angelo left the shop in the Latin Quarter for the Unknown that lay beyond.

The neighbors who dropped in pitied Angelotti. He worked incessantly at the casts and talked of nothing but his boy. The letters that came were full of hope, of enthusiasm, and frequent requests for money. So Angelotti skimped and pinched and almost starved himself to supply the demands of Angelo. His old, bloodshot eyes gleamed with pride as he flung out his plaster-whitened hands in a sudden gesture and cried:

"He will come home—great, and then I will work no more in my old age!"

But the wise neighbors shook their heads. The passages of Angelo’s letters that the father read aloud bristled with unfamiliar words that old Angelotti could not pronounce.

"My eyes," he would feebly protest, "they get dim. I no can see to read good any more."

The substance of these messages was often equally obscure. The boy told of people, of things, that the simple friends of the Latin Quarter knew not of.

But one day Angelotti rushed into the near-by wineshop waving a paper high above his head. His bloodshot eyes were gleaming, his gray, wrinkled cheeks were aglow. This was a letter he could understand. His Angelo was coming home!

There was much drinking of red wine over the news, a dissipation
Angelotti had eschewed of late, though his wine was more than meat to him.

"You see," he exclaimed excitedly to the little group of listeners, "he like me best. He make fame, money, ev'rat'ing gran', but he come home to me!"

Then the old man made an elaborate pretense of having got some plaster in his eye and he turned back to the shop to cry and in a frenzy of ecstatic joy to kneel before the picture of his wife as though it were a shrine and whisper:

"Oh, Maria! Maria! If you could be here now, to know, to see! It is you who live in him, you who gave him the gift!"

Then he turned to the calm, cold cast of the other Mary and made the sign of the cross. Perhaps it was because of his excitement, but the chaste, plaster face seemed unsympathetic, and the evenly-modeled lips seemed to suppress a smile at the folly and weakness of mortal man.

Angelotti had been gone for five years, but his father pictured him as the same slim, thoughtful boy who used to fill the shop with the glory of his presence. With this idea in mind he arranged his favorite statues in the most conspicuous places, and on the day of the boy’s arrival he ordered such sweets and delicacies from the restaurant as Angelotti used to relish. He bought them on credit to be sure, and Tony, the proprietor, had been base enough to demand the money, but even the mercenary instincts of the tradesman’s nature melted before the something softer and better, as old Angelotti flung out his whitened hands in the wonted gesture and cried:

"It is all for Angelo, my little Angelo. You remember how he loved the candy, eh? an’ the cake with the sugar on top!"

So Tony merely shrugged his shoulders as he wrapped up the stuff in clean, brown paper bags. Nor did the debt trouble Angelotti. Angelo was coming, and nothing else mattered in the whole world.

There was but one more preparation to make, and that was the most important of all. Angelo should play upon his mother’s violin. The old man took it from its shabby case and fingered it as though it were a sacred relic. In the music from that instrument which she had pressed so lovingly upon her young breast, her spirit seemed to live again. Then, too, upon that same violin he had discovered the gift of Angelo.
THE GIFT OF ANGELO

The old man—for he seemed very old of late—quavered in his breast, and his knees became weak and knocked together when he pictured the child’s arrival. But it was the result of happiness long withheld and grown almost overpowering in its might.

At length all was ready. The little table was laid in the back room. The shop was newly scoured, and Angelotti was tortured into misfit respectability by a high, stiff collar and a new red tie. He knew that every neighbor was watching and waiting as he was, only their anxiety was of curiosity and his was of love. He paced the length of the shop in quick, restless strides, forgetting the pain of the tight, new boots; he stood looking mutely at the Virgin and the Venus by turns, without distinguishing one from the other, until there was a rattle of wheels, the snap of a carriage door and a footfall outside. A tall, dark figure stood in the doorway a second, then with a sharp cry Angelotti flung himself on the stranger and sobbed pitifully.

THIS tall, handsome, mustachioed man was Angelo, but not the Angelo of five years gone by. He patiently held the shaking old man until he withdrew shamefaced, apologetic and staring. For Angelo the shop had become mean and small; it was not the vision he had treasured in his memory, and his father—was this poor, shriveled little man he? He allowed himself to be led into the rear room, where the table was laid. Angelotti watched him timidly, hoping he might speak of the sweets and the other dishes he had procured at such great pains, but Angelo had forgotten that they were the favorite delicacies of his childhood. His palate had been trained since then. He chatted of his trip, his work, of everything but that which lay nearest old Angelotti’s heart, and after an interval of embarrassed pleasantry, they went out into the shop.

Since the days when he used to wonder at the casts and adore the plaster Niké and the Venus de Milo, he had seen the marble originals in the Louvre, and in the studios of the greater Latin Quarter of Paris he had acquired a sense of proportion that these casts offended. Angelotti watched his eye rove critically over the old, familiar figures as he rolled a cigarette.

“That Venus is not true,” he remarked, “and your Unknown Lady there—Ah! you should see the original! This gives you no idea of it at all.”
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Angelotti’s idols were shattered at a blow. He felt apologetic and he wished that he might hide these poor children of his hands. So timid had he grown he almost feared to ask Angelo to play. His glance returned again and again to the black case, and finally, pointing to it, he asked tentatively:

“You will play? There is the old violin—your mother’s—the one you used to love. You remember, ah! surely you remember?”

These last words were uttered so pleadingly that the young man flushed and said hastily:

“Oh, yes, I remember.”

He was opening the case while he spoke, and in a moment the violin was in his hands. He looked it over, ran his fingers along the strings, then placing it at his neck, tested it with the bow. It was the artist who stood revealed as he listened to the tone, screwed the keys and shook his head.

“I do not know if I can play it,” he said. “It is a cheap violin and the tone is not true. You should see the Stradivarius I played on once in Paris. It was divine. My own will be here to-morrow and I can play for you then.”

He laid down the violin with a laugh.

“My! It’s funny to think how I used to play on that!” Angelotti sighed, and said never a word in reply.

Perhaps you are tired,” he said after a long pause, “and you might like to go to bed.”

As he closed the door of the little room he murmured weakly, “Until to-morrow!”

Then he crept away to his cot to lie down, but not to sleep.

The next day the violin came, also the neighbors, and Angelotti tried to be gay and even to make himself believe that he was happy and this was the consummation of the years of waiting. The shop was crowded when at last Angelo stood with his own violin poised ready to play. The two boys were there who used to play the harp and violin with him on the streets; one had become an orange and banana vendor, the other one owned a hurdy-gurdy. These two companions of earlier days stared at the tall, dark man before them, and their curiosity turned into amazement as the strange, complex melody filled the air, and all the tones from the deepest, richest bass to the
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slightest trill fell fast, one upon the other. As for Angelotti, he was transported. This was something from another world. His ears had never heard such notes from out a thing of wood, still his heart ached for the familiar airs he loved. But he would not show his ignorance by asking Angelo to play them. Angelo no longer liked the cakes and the casts, and he would no longer like the old tunes of his childhood. And just as Angelo himself was grown splendid beyond his father’s comprehension and in that same splendor was lost to him, so the music, surpassing all the old man’s ideals, was beyond him, and therefore could not reach his heart. This was the first and also the last time he played for the friends of his youth.

During the days that followed Angelotti faded into the shadow of a man. He worked mechanically and spoiled his casts, for he had lost confidence in himself, and with it, his skill; or he followed Angelo with the dumb devotion of a dog. Yet Angelo was not unkind—it was simply that his thoughts were different thoughts, his life a different life. The little shop palled on him; he longed to be back in the gay world again, and the old man, his father, made him sad and uncomfortable. About this time a telegram came offering him good terms for a concert tour. He showed it to Angelotti, who said not a word, and explained that he must go. Ah! but the dreams that the little old man had dreamed of going on these same tours and saying, “That is my son.” That was to be his part, an humble one to be sure, but it satisfied him. It was to be different, however; Angelo would go and he would stay behind alone with the statues he had come to be ashamed of, and the debts he could not pay. He had spent what seemed to him a fortune to make Angelo’s visit happy, yet he knew that the boy had not even noticed it. Angelotti’s heart was broken, so when Angelo showed him the telegram he had nothing left to say.

The boy was soon off. The good-byes were brief, the carriage rattled away and the shop was deserted again, save for the rows of statues and the dazed little old man who stood staring blankly into the night. Finally, he turned and tottered back to where a small picture hung on the wall—a picture of an oval-faced woman—his wife.

“Maria! Maria!” he cried brokenly. “You are happy! You are dead! It is better so!”

Then with a dry sob he flung himself face downward, and thus he lay through the long, dark hours of the eternal night.