

THE STORY OF A PASSION

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The story of a passion by Irving Bacheller

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IRVING BACHELLER

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BIBBS'S was a gloomy little heaven up one flight and Bibbs, a bald and cranky little god of fiddles, with whiskers half as long as himself and white as snow. His windows overlooked the Bowery, and their dusty panes hastened the twilight and delayed the dawn, robbing the day of an hour at each end. The elevated trains went rushing by, but somehow there was silence in this little shop; or was it but the sign of silence that one saw on every side? — the hushed string, the whisper-haunted galleries of pine & maple, the uncommunicative Bibbs.

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Once it had been a busy place, but the center of wealth & fashion had retreated from it year by year and now it was a mere nursery of fiddles. And some that lay upon the counter forty years ago were there to-day, and time had poured its floods of light upon them and dipped them in the silence and the gloom of night, and filtered through their fibers strains of song and sound until they came to years of understanding like to those of men, and had a voice for human thought. Men came to buy them sometimes, but late years they had found it hard to deal with Bibbs. Raw-toned, young violins he sometimes sold, and cheaply, but not the old ones that had been his hope and company for years—not for all the wealth in Gotham. His love of them

was constant, and his price beyond all reach or reason. The sale of the Maggini had been a sorry bargain, though it brought him twice its value. He had not expected that the man would buy it at so high a price. The money was paid and the Maggini became the darling of another owner, who made off with it, while Bibbs stood speechless and confused, and then, as the good wife was fond of telling, "he went a lead color."

But now buyers come more rarely, and his wife was dead and Bibbs lived quite alone.





IT was early twilight in the little shop. Bibbs lit a candle, set aside his pots of glue & varnish, and stood thrumming the solemn old Amati he had just mended, and then he played a strain of music on its silver string. It was "The Song of Faith" from "Elijah." A deep amen went booming under the red dome of the bass viol that lay in a corner, and a low wail of sympathy swept through the cases on the counter and along the walls—the voice of those condemned to silence in this little shop.

"Yes, yes," said Bibbs tenderly, "Oh rest in Time, for Time is the Lord, and

there is time enough to make all things perfect, even men. You are like a soul. When you were only seventy years old, I suppose the devil had his home in you as he has in me. Goodness is but harmony, and you might be better, you red-bellied son of a whittler."

As had been his custom by day for years, Bibbs carefully inspected the joinings of the Stradivarius. Then again he held his ear against it, and the strings broke into song at the touch of his beard.

"That voice of yours! I wonder what it will be a thousand years from now. Your old body will turn to splinters and to dust some time. Wood can't last forever any more than flesh and blood. When your voice is near perfection you will not be strong enough to stand the strain of the strings, and then—well,

you're a good deal like a man anyhow." To Bibbs, heaven was the destination of all good violins. "To hell with harps!" said he; "They have no soul in them like this." And hell was, in his opinion, the resort of bad fiddlers, and their playing was the doom of the damned. Bibbs put the Stradivarius in its case and turned the key. He stood a moment silently filling his pipe. A melancholy 'cello lying on the floor near by let go a string, humming disconsolately like a lovesick maiden.

