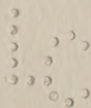
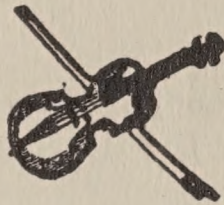


✓ *The*
Story of a Passion

By
IRVING BACHELLER ✓

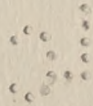


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The Story of a Passion



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 and maple, the uncommunicative Bibbs. Once it had been a busy place, but the center of wealth and 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 today, 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 came 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 and 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, “O 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.



IBBS was about to make all fast and retire to his little room behind the shop, when suddenly the door opened, clanging the bell that hung above it. An old man, with a shaven, wrinkled face and long white hair, stood before him.

“Any old violins?” said he, advancing into the shop.

“None to sell,” said Bibbs curtly.

¶ “I do not wish to buy,” said the

old man, “but I’m a connoisseur, and I would so like to see them.” ❧

Now there were men to whom Bibbs gave some toleration and even a degree of confidence—men who had grown old with fiddles and loved them as he did. “Sit down,” said he, pointing to a chair; “I’ve an Amati, a Guarnerius and a real Stradivarius here. They’re not mine; I only take care of them. Play?”

¶ “Once; but you see my fingers have grown stiff—these wrinkles are like strings that bind them.”

Bibbs took the Stradivarius from its case and thrummed it, and as he did so the stranger rose and staggered toward him. “Let me take it,”

said he, and his lips quivered as he spoke ❧ ❧

“Stand back, you fool,” said Bibbs; “you can not buy this instrument. It is not for sale, I tell you.”

“I shall not try to buy it,” said the stranger. “You can trust it in my hands a moment. Brain me if I try to do it any harm. Let me see it; I think I know the tone.”

Bibbs hesitated, surveying his caller with suspicious eyes. Then he closed the door and bolted it.

“Be careful,” he said; “don’t drop it.” And with anxious looks he put it in the stranger’s hands.

As the old man took the instrument he uttered but a single word, and

that was, "Sweetheart!" then he kissed its back and sank upon his chair, sobbing softly.

He held the Stradivarius across his knee, and every tear that fell upon its slender roof sounded like a drum-beat; and when his sobbing ceased there came from it a cry as of a man weeping; and the great bass viol and all the daughters of music lying low in the little shop moaned in sympathy as if they knew and felt and understood.

"Pardon me," said he presently, "I seem to hear the voice of one long dead and dear to me. Thirty years ago it was mine; I fell ill and pledged it for a loan. That was in London.

I was a long time between life and death, and when I came to get the Stradivarius they had sold it for the debt. Listen! I will show you what a voice it has.”


He tuned the strings and played, and as he played his fettered fingers were made free. His bow was like a trident quaking the sea of silence, and a dome of music like a mighty bubble rose to heaven, and the light and glory of the morning shone upon it. Far into the night these old men sat together, and the player never rested ❧ ❧

Now it so befell that there was a tenant in the Stradivarius who had never heard its thunders. Suddenly a

great black spider rushed out of the dark cavern of the violin, and scurrying down the finger-board, was crushed beneath the strings. The player stopped.

“It’s a bad sign,” said Bibbs.

“Sorry you came here. You can not buy the Stradivarius, and there’s no peace for you.”

“Unless you let me live here and help you tend the shop,” the stranger said; “I have money and we both love music, and you are alone.” 

“Yes,” said Bibbs, “but if he comes—the owner—and takes it from us?”

“But he may not come for years,” the stranger said; “and let’s not borrow trouble.”

And so Bibbs made him welcome, and the old men lived together happily, but ever fearful. Day by day they played upon the Stradivarius and when the boor-bell rang there was a moment's panic in the shop, and men who came were roundly cursed by Bibbs and never came again ❧ ❧



It was morning in the little shop. Bibbs came slowly out of his silent chamber, the Stradivarius under his arm. He laid the violin upon its shelf and lifted the window-shades. The sun lit up his pale and haggard face. Suddenly the bell above the door clanged furiously and a man stepped in.

“Hello, Bibbs! Give me the Stradivarius,” said he.

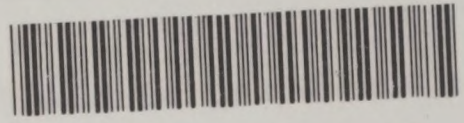
“ I ’m glad you did n’t come before,”
Bibbs answered, keeping back his
tears, “ He is dead—the man who
loved the Stradivarius—you may
take it and welcome.”

And its owner took it, and as he
went away he laughed and muttered,
saying, “ Bibbs is crazy.”

SO HERE ENDETH "THE STORY OF A PASSION"
AS WRITTEN BY IRVING BACHELLER AND DONE
INTO A BOOK BY THE ROYCROFTERS, AT THEIR
SHOP, WHICH IS IN EAST AURORA, NEW YORK.

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