



Christmas Stories from French and Spanish writers

Antoinette Ogden

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Example in this ebook

A BIRD IN THE SNOW.

From the Spanish of Armando Palacio Valdés.

He was born blind, and had been taught the one thing which the blind generally learn,—music; for this art he was specially gifted. His mother died when he was little more than a child, and his father, who was the first cornetist of a military band, followed her to the grave a few years later. He had a brother in America from whom he had never heard; still, through indirect sources he knew him to be well off, married, and the father of two fine children. To the day of his death the old musician, indignant at his son's ingratitude, would not allow his name to be mentioned in his presence; but the blind boy's affection for his brother remained unchanged. He could not forget that this elder brother had been the support of his childhood, the defence of his weakness against the other boys, and that he had always spoken to him with kindness. The recollection of Santiago's voice as he entered his room in the morning, shouting, "Hey there, Juanito! get up, man; don't sleep so!" rang in the blind boy's ears with a more pleasing harmony than could ever be drawn from the keys of a piano or the strings of a violin. Was it probable that such a kind heart had grown cold? Juan could not believe it, and was always striving to justify him. At times the fault was with the mail, or it might be that his brother did not wish to write until he could send them a good deal of money; then again, he fancied that he meant to surprise them by presenting himself some fine day, laden with gold, in the modest entresol in which they lived. But he never dared communicate any of these fancies to his father; only when the old man, wrought to an unusual pitch of exasperation, bitterly apostrophized the absent one, he found the courage to say: "You must not despair, father. Santiago is good, and my heart tells me that we shall hear from him one of these days."

The father died, however, without hearing from his son, between a priest, who exhorted him, and the blind boy, who clung convulsively to his hand, as if he meant to detain him in this world by main force. When the old man's body was removed from the house, the boy seemed to have lost his reason, and in a frenzy of grief he struggled with the undertaker's men. Then he was left alone. And what loneliness was his! No father, no mother, no relatives, no friends; he was even deprived of the sunlight, which is the friend of all created things. He was two whole days in his room pacing the floor like a caged wolf, without tasting food. The chamber-maid, assisted by a compassionate neighbor, succeeded in saving him from this slow process of suicide. He was prevailed upon to eat. He spent the rest of his life praying, and working at his music.

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