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# In Nazareth

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Once, when Jesus was only five years old, he sat on the doorstep outside his father's workshop, in Nazareth, and made clay cuckoos from a lump of clay which the potter across the way had given him. He was happier than usual. All the children in the quarter had told Jesus that the potter was a disobliging man, who wouldn't let himself be coaxed, either by soft glances or honeyed words, and he had never dared ask aught of him. But, you see, he hardly knew how it had come about. He had only stood on his doorstep and, with yearning eyes, looked upon the neighbor working at his molds, and then that neighbor had come over from his stall and given him so much clay that it would have been enough to finish a whole wine jug.

On the stoop of the next house sat Judas, his face covered with bruises and his clothes full of rents, which he had acquired during his continual fights with street urchins. For the moment he was quiet, he neither quarreled nor fought, but worked with a bit of clay, just as Jesus did. But this clay he had not been able to procure for himself. He hardly dared venture within sight of the potter, who complained that he was in the habit of throwing stones at his fragile wares, and would have driven him away with a good beating. It was Jesus who had divided his portion with him.

When the two children had finished their clay cuckoos, they stood the birds up in a ring in front of them. These looked just as clay cuckoos have always looked. They had big, round lumps to stand on in place of feet, short tails, no necks, and almost imperceptible wings.

But, at all events, one saw at once a difference in the work of the little playmates. Judas' birds were so crooked that they tumbled over continually; and no matter how hard he worked with his clumsy little fingers, he couldn't get their bodies neat and well formed. Now and then he glanced slyly at Jesus, to see how he managed to make his birds as smooth and even as the oak-leaves in the forests on Mount Tabor.

As bird after bird was finished, Jesus became happier and happier. Each looked more beautiful to him than the last, and he regarded them all with pride and affection. They were to be his playmates, his little brothers; they should sleep in his bed, keep him company, and sing to him when his mother left him. Never before had he thought himself so rich; never again could he feel alone or

forsaken.

The big brawny water-carrier came walking along, and right after him came the huckster, who sat joggingly on his donkey between the large empty willow baskets. The water-carrier laid his hand on Jesus' curly head and asked him about his birds; and Jesus told him that they had names and that they could sing. All the little birds were come to him from foreign lands, and told him things which only he and they knew. And Jesus spoke in such a way that both the water-carrier and the huckster forgot about their tasks for a full hour, to listen to him.

But when they wished to go farther, Jesus pointed to Judas. "See what pretty birds Judas makes!" he said.

Then the huckster good-naturedly stopped his donkey and asked Judas if his birds also had names and could sing. But Judas knew nothing of this. He was stubbornly silent and did not raise his eyes from his work, and the huckster angrily kicked one of his birds and rode on.

In this manner the afternoon passed, and the sun sank so far down that its beams could come in through the low city gate, which stood at the end of the street and was decorated with a Roman Eagle. This sunshine, which came at the close of the day, was perfectly rose-red—as if it had become mixed with blood—and it colored everything which came in its path, as it filtered through the narrow street. It painted the potter's vessels as well as the log which creaked under the woodman's saw, and the white veil that covered Mary's face.



But the loveliest of all was the sun's reflection as it shone on the little water-puddles which had gathered in the big, uneven cracks in the stones that covered the street. Suddenly Jesus stuck his hand in the puddle nearest him. He had conceived the idea that he would paint his gray birds with the sparkling sunbeams which had given such pretty color to the water, the house-walls, and everything around him.

The sunshine took pleasure in letting itself be captured by him, like paint in a paint pot; and when Jesus spread it over the little clay birds, it lay still and bedecked them from head to feet with a diamond-like luster.

Judas, who every now and then looked at Jesus to see if he made more and prettier birds than his, gave a shriek of delight when he saw how Jesus painted his clay cuckoos with the sunshine, which he caught from the water pools. Judas also dipped his hand in the shining water and tried to catch the sunshine.

But the sunshine wouldn’t be caught by him. It slipped through his fingers; and no matter how fast he tried to move his hands to get hold of it, it got away, and he couldn’t procure a pinch of color for his poor birds.

“Wait, Judas!” said Jesus. “I’ll come and paint your birds.”

“No, you shan’t touch them!” cried Judas. “They’re good enough as they are.”

He rose, his eyebrows contracted into an ugly frown, his lips compressed. And he put his broad foot on the birds and transformed them, one after another, into little flat pieces of clay.

When all his birds were destroyed, he walked over to Jesus, who sat and caressed his birds—that glittered like jewels. Judas regarded them for a moment in silence, then he raised his foot and crushed one of them.

When Judas took his foot away and saw the entire little bird changed into a cake of clay, he felt so relieved that he began to laugh, and raised his foot to crush another.

“Judas,” said Jesus, “what are you doing? Don’t you see that they are alive and can sing?”

But Judas laughed and crushed still another bird.

Jesus looked around for help. Judas was heavily built and Jesus had not the strength to hold him back. He glanced around for his mother. She was not far away, but before she could have gone there, Judas would have had ample time to destroy the birds. The tears sprang to Jesus’ eyes. Judas had already crushed four of his birds. There were only three left.

He was annoyed with his birds, who stood so calmly and let themselves be trampled upon without paying the slightest attention to the danger. Jesus clapped his hands to awaken them; then he shouted: “Fly, fly!”

Then the three birds began to move their tiny wings, and, fluttering anxiously, they succeeded in swinging themselves up to the eaves of the house, where they were safe.

But when Judas saw that the birds took to their wings and flew at Jesus’ command, he began to weep. He tore his hair, as he had seen his elders do when they were in great trouble, and he threw himself at Jesus’ feet.

Judas lay there and rolled in the dust before Jesus like a dog, and kissed his feet and begged that he would raise his foot and crush him, as he had done with the clay cuckoos. For Judas loved Jesus and admired and worshiped him, and at the same time hated him.

Mary, who sat all the while and watched the children’s play, came up and lifted

Judas in her arms and seated him on her lap, and caressed him.

“You poor child!” she said to him, “you do not know that you have attempted something which no mortal can accomplish. Don’t engage in anything of this kind again, if you do not wish to become the unhappiest of mortals! What would happen to any one of us who undertook to compete with one who paints with sunbeams and blows the breath of life into dead clay?”

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