

Glass Heart

The Lamenting Lamb had a deceptive title, especially on a night such as this. The atmosphere breathed life, excitement, and joy as the patrons within the bar laughed as drinks were passed around and shiny coins were pushed across the table between hands of cards. The spirit of a lion filled the dusty space: bold, brash and unashamed. This contrasted most other nights, where drinks were put down solitarily, one after another, and a bad hand of cards would lead to a shouting match or trading of blows rather than laughter and cheers. The only difference was the occupation of the small stage in the corner, tonight filled by a lone musician: a young girl with a guitar, fingers dancing among the strings to exude a jaunty tune.

The performances at the Lamenting Lamb weren't a show in the sense the other bars in town would be, blending into the background and becoming a part of the place. That's not to say the patrons didn't respect the entertainment, performance nights were always the busiest, people knew what it would lead to. They let the melodies and lyrics feed their spirits and guide their actions.

Tonight though, like every performance night before, the musician had the rapt attention of an odd sort of bargoer: an automaton by the name of Tick. In fact his name wasn't really Tick, he had an identification number which most here don't tend to remember. But they could hear the clockwork inside his frame tick, click, and rattle, so the barkeep called him Tick one night, and it stuck. The automaton liked it too, he used the name to introduce himself from then on. Tick was a curious sort, left to roam the streets after the creator passed. Many would find him lingering near bars, parks, markets and as many other social hubs as he could find, though bars were his favorite.

Tick sat at a table front and center to the stage, three seats empty around him, though he seemed to pay it no mind. He watched the girl on the stage, trying his absolute best to absorb every possible detail he could, about her, and about everyone else in the bar. He had set aside a significant section of his memory core for music, memorizing the patterns and structures of whatever the performers decided to bring to the stage that week. She shot him glances throughout the duration of her stay, aware of his attention, yet focusing more on her music.

He recognized a new pattern of sounds tonight. Tick found it immensely satisfying, so he made some room for it. He noticed the performer tap her foot in sync with the music, it wasn't in constant rhythm like drums he had heard here before, irregular yet intentional. At least intentional as far as he could tell. There were less cheers tonight than most other performance nights. Was it that the girl was not singing? That seemed to excite the crowd and bring more attention to whoever found themselves on the stage, especially at the end of a work week. That was not to say that this music was not at all exciting, it created a pleasant and positive aura at the bar, and Tick quite enjoyed that.

He scanned the room to examine the audience. How did they seem to feel? Did they like the music? Before he got too far, he noticed someone new at the bar, someone different than the others he'd seen here before. In stark contrast to the grimy, sweaty, and tired workers, this man was sharply dressed in clean and intentional fashion, most notably wearing a bright blue scarf puffed around his neck. He held a thin glass of expensive drink, which he sipped upon casually, legs crossed and an elbow on the bar behind him as he watched the musician on the stage. The scarved man seemed to be watching the girl as closely as Tick was. Was he from the guild? Or from one of the rich families on the outskirts of town? Perhaps a visitor from the big city further out?

Tick studied the man closely, watching his face and actions in response to the girl on the stage. It was hard to read, as his expression was solid as rock, eyes hardly straying from the performance, eyes narrow and focused. Tick glanced back at the musician and then back to the scarved man as the performer broke a pattern, she stumbled for a moment and repaired it. The scarved man let out a breathy chuckle and shook his head. Tick assumed it was an accident and took a note, aiming to avoid it. He then went back to the scarved man and continued observing him. What was he doing here? He doesn't seem to enjoy the performance, why does he watch? As the girl on the stage wrapped up her song and prepared for another, the scarved man broke his attention as his gaze slowly shifted across the room, landing on Tick. He stared at the automaton for a moment, taking a long sip of his drink and holding eye contact. He placed the drink on the counter before calling for another from the barkeep.

The night continued, the performer only had one more song to play, where she came close to singing, humming an accompanying pattern, separate yet symbiotic. The

patrons of the bar seemed more enthused with this one. The performer caught more glances, men at the bar tapped their fingers as they finished their drinks, a round of applause was given as the girl packed up her guitar for the night. Tick discarded the last song from the core and replaced it with the new one. He glanced at the scarved man, looking for any shift in emotion. One eyebrow was raised, that was all the difference Tick could fathom.

Once the musician was gone, the bar quieted down as all that remained were the gamblers wrestling to break even and the drunken falling further into their stupor. Tick watched as the scarved man polished off another drink and made his way out, his poise from the early evening falling as he slouched and dragged his feet into the night.

Tick stood up from his table and approached the bar. The barkeep raised an eyebrow and set down the figure he was whittling down and brushed the shavings to the floor behind the bar.

“Good evening.” Tick spoke with a sharp and assured cadence, pistons hissing alongside the crackling of his artificial voice box.

“Evening, Tick,” the barkeep responded in his gentle, bearish manner.

“I would like to speak on the topic of my performance next week. Have you confirmed to the guild that I will be taking this time slot?”

The barkeep let out a heavy breath before placing his wooden figurine in his apron pocket. He glanced up and locked eyes with Tick, “Are you sure you’re ready?”

“Of course. I have been practicing and will continue to do so throughout the week. I have figured out the patterns and rhythms I will follow. I have also found what others would call ‘inspiration’ from tonight’s performance. Though I did inquire on the note of the guild, have you confirmed my reservation?”

“I have confirmed that, yes, and they rejected your registration again,” the barkeep sighed, “though I wasn’t asking about the music itself as much as the attention you may bring. Folks here tolerate you, yes, but I don’t know how they’ll receive you once you get on the stage.”

“Why should it matter? I don’t quite understand.”

“Just... be ready. Ready for things you might not expect, and don’t take it too harshly if it doesn’t go your way. It’s your first time.”

“I’ve weathered many harsh storms, I doubt this will be any worse.”

The barkeep gave Tick a lopsided grin under his moustache, hesitating before giving Tick a friendly pat on the shoulder.

“That’s the spirit. I will see you next week,” the barkeep turned to begin cleaning behind the bar, sweeping up crumbs, dirt, and wood shavings.

“Goodnight” said Tick.

“Goodnight, Tick” the barkeep called over his back.

As Tick left The Lamenting Lamb, the gears in his head snapped to the beat and motors in his chest buzzed along with the melody of the last song that night. Even though the dust on the wind threatened to clog up his joints, he walked at a sure and steady pace to make it sound just right.

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He entered the creator’s workshop, dark and dusty, left in an eternal state of memory. Tools were scattered around the workbenches and buckets of spare parts organized in a haphazard manner. Tick’s unfinished sister lay against the wall. Though the creator did not like Tick touching his tools and creations, he decided to make sure his sister stayed clean of dust, as he would want as well in her state. Tick left most everything else where it was, as he was commanded before the creator’s sudden departure.

Tick lit a lamp and then scanned over his sister’s chassis, occasionally letting out a jet of pressurized air from a piston on his wrist to clean the dirt out of joints and seams, polishing her outer plating with a clean rag. Once the job was done, Tick picked up the creator’s old guitar, found himself a place to sit, and took the rest of the night to play.

Tick followed the patterns he stored in his core of all the performances he watched. Taking parts from some patterns, altering their timing, pitching sound up and down, and increasing or decreasing the intensity of each pluck of the string where he felt it necessary. Tick recalled how the audience responded to certain progressions of sounds from the instruments, what made them cheer and clap, and what gave them chills and goosebumps. He practiced as he had been practicing for months, altering and merging these patterns in his never ending pursuit of the perfect song, the perfect pattern.

Tick was close though, he had to be. His performance was in a week. He made his quick decisions on what to pull from his ‘inspiration’ from the evening. He weighed the

variables and constraints, doing what he could to get as much out of the patterns he could without hitting a point of overflow.

Days passed, and Tick had set a simple routine for himself. Twice a day, once at sunrise and once at sundown, check up on his sister and organize his things in the workshop, and whatever time was to spare he sat and practiced his music. Most other days, he'd find himself out and about, following the life of people around him in town, yet not close enough to where it would make them uncomfortable. He practiced because he knew this would win them over. A performance for the ages, one that would ensure he's treated as a friend and not an outsider, even though he'd lived in the same town since he woke up, never leaving and never once dreaming of it.

The sun rose and set, and anyone near the workshop would hear the faint plucking of strings through the heavy brick walls. Peering through the window, the brass chassis of the automaton was visible sitting against the wall, lit by a single oil lamp, right next to his unfinished sister, surrounded by what remained of his maker.

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The day had come for Tick's performance. The bar had been open for hours already for the truly dedicated patrons. The small wooden stage was unlit, a single chair sat in the center with an old guitar laid across the top. Tick sat at his usual table front and center, staring at the empty stage, waiting for his time. He heard the usual suspects enter the bar and take their usual seats, up to their usual activities. Greetings were called, drinks were poured, hands were dealt, and Tick sat transfixed on the stage. It felt strange to him, to maybe this time be at the center of attention, rather than the one giving said attention. His stare broke as he noticed a flash of blue, as the scarved man entered the space once again, as stern faced and rigid as the last time Tick saw him.

He took a seat at the end of the bar calling for a drink, "champagne", he requested. Once he received his beverage, he turned and glanced at the empty stage, before scanning the room. Expressionless, his gaze fixed on Tick longer than most.

Tick's gears and axles seemed to tense, it was harder to move than he was used to. His hand jittered for a moment as he forced it to stabilize, something he'd never had to do before. He'd heard other performers talk of getting "nervous" before going on stage, is this what it felt like? Why did the scarved man make him feel this way?

Tick took some time to process his “feelings” and set his body straight, ensuring his cogs ran in sync and his servos spun as they were supposed to. Before he knew it, he found himself sitting on the stage, picking up his guitar and setting it in his lap quite uncomfortably. He stared at the door to the bar, a small crack of light squeezing in from the sliver it was allowed above as the room began to quiet. Conversations were low, quieter than normal. Tick received glances from the patrons, many of them seemed confused as far as he could tell, as to why the robot so long in the audience this time found himself on the stage. It wasn’t the way things are supposed to be, Tick could almost hear them think. He didn’t even want to think about the scarved man’s piercing stare. He felt like his insides were about to escape and spill over the floor in front of him. He paused and let his cogs realign and dispelled the irrational thoughts from his head, the numbers in his processor which were jumbling up and spilling over straightened themselves out.

He picked up his guitar and placed his hands where they were supposed to go, twisted the knobs on the end to perfection, just as he had studied. He took a glance at the scarved man, who downed his glass and quietly asked for a refill, he was lucky to have looked right as the scarved man stopped staring. He looked forward and around the room, as a few of the patrons watched him expectantly and curiously. Tick then looked back down to his guitar, readied himself, started the clock installed in his head, and he began to play.

The first song wove together patterns from the first song he ever heard, from a street musician Tick met not long after waking, along with patterns from a lively band of old men from only a few weeks ago. It wasn’t a fast song, it drew out its sounds long and boldly. He did not look at the guitar, his fingers already knew where and when to pluck each string and the force with which he should do so. He watched as those who were once interested turned their gaze back towards their drinks, cards, and friends, though still passing cursory glances in Tick’s direction. He didn’t expect much, but he still hoped for more than this. At least a tapping foot or two, maybe a nodding head. No one looked in his direction for longer than a second, with the exception of one person.

The scarved man had at this point downed another drink, the barkeep met Tick’s eyes briefly as he passed a concerned look to the scarved man and went to pour him a new drink. The scarved man seemed to have the slightest bit of expression showing

through his once steely demeanor. His eyes furrowed and almost seemed they would rip off his forehead and get tangled up. His lip was turned down and his eyes shone with a somewhat apparent mix of anger and resentment. If that was what he felt, Tick did not truly know why.

The song continued as the melody raised to its tonal peaks before taking a moment to breathe. About ten short seconds later, Tick finished the song. The conversations in the room continued, paying no heed to the atmospheric change, the newfound yet unnoticeable silence that spread across the room. No applause, not a single clap or ounce of acknowledgement, the bar simply went on its way, business as usual. Is this how it was for all musicians? Or was Tick the odd one out? He remembered the applause from last week when the girl finished, maybe it would be saved for the end.

With a small shred of hope, Tick began his next song, the second in a set of five he planned for the night. This one slower and plucky, the patterns more steady than the last, drawn from a somber young man's performance a month ago. This one was the same as the last. Tick saw smiles here and there, but he knew they were not for him.

From the corner of his eye, he watched the scarved man slouch in his stool as he set yet another empty glass on the bar behind him. Tick focused on his fingers again, moving expertly between strings. His timing was precise, the technique was perfect, he made no mistakes. With all of this, why did no one seem to enjoy his music? He concluded the song and it was met with the same fanfare as the last.

He began the third, a flowing rhythm from a mother-daughter duo from last month combined with the pattern that managed to make some bar patrons dance only two weeks ago. Once again, it was the same as the last. In fact, it almost seemed to get quieter. The scarved man set what seemed to be his final glass down on the bar as he stood up from his stool and shuffled out of the bar, tipsy, leaving a small pile of coins on the bartop. He made no effort to acknowledge Tick on his way out, seeming to go out of his way to avoid it.

Tick thought he understood all he needed to, he watched every musician's technique, following their movements flawlessly. He kept his guitar in perfect shape. He followed the patterns that would make people cheer, dance, and laugh. Yet he seemed to achieve none of it.

"Folks here tolerate you, yes, but I don't know how they'll receive you once you

get on the stage.” The barkeep’s words resurfaced in Tick’s memory core. Was it his own fault? Did the patrons not want a robot on the stage? Maybe, he thought, they’d be better off without him.

He stopped moving his fingers, letting the note hang as the bar went silent. Conversations stopped, drinks stayed on their tables, more eyes than before were on him. He wasn’t finished with the song, but Tick really did not think it mattered. He stood up, slung his guitar over his back, and left the Lamenting Lamb.

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Tick stepped foot out the back door of the bar to find the scarved man standing a few feet to the right of the door, his thick scarf seeming to double his presence in the measly five foot wide alleyway. As the door creaked, the scarved man paid no attention to Tick’s exit, as he noticed a glint in the man’s hands. He cupped a thin piece of metal foil up to his face and breathed in deeply. He held the breath for a second or two and lifted his head up towards the stars before discarding the foil to the cobbled bricks below him.

Tick shifted the guitar’s weight on his back as gently as he could before attempting to leave the alley with as much subtlety as he could muster. The clack of his metal soles on the stone pathways was all but subtle, as it echoed down between the buildings, bouncing from wall to wall without a care. The scarved man turned in his direction as he wiped a small stream of blood from his nose. His gaze was as piercing as ever, his eyes red and bloodshot as he stared at Tick, his lip lifting in an almost primal snarl.

“*You.*” The scarved man spat out a single piercing word.

Tick stopped, holding still as the scarved man shifted his balance, leaning an elbow against the wall of the bar.

“Come here, just a moment.”

Tick didn’t move, hoping the scarved man would leave him alone, the same way a wild animal might leave him alone so long as he was still. The scarved man did not relent, he was no animal.

“I am talking to you, machine, come here.”

Tick turned around carefully, trying his best not to make any erratic movements, as much as his motors protested. The scarved man’s bloodshot eyes met the foggy grey

lenses which hid Tick's visual receptors. The scarved man gestured coldly for Tick to approach, and he did so.

"Why would they ever let something like you on stage? What did they see in you that made them think it would be a good idea to give you a *fucking* instrument. Fools—the whole guild— fools, all of them!" The scarved man drew ever closer to a shout the more he spoke.

Tick didn't say anything, he felt that if he opened his mouth it would only throw more fuel on the fire. The scarved man took a step back and turned to face the wall of the bar, muttering something imperceptible to himself, and wiping another bead of blood from his nose. He turned back to Tick and took an aggressive step close, his face only a matter of inches from Tick's face. He was close enough for Tick to notice the poorly cleaned stains, stretches, and tears in the bright blue scarf.

"You are a machine! You were built to serve a purpose, to follow commands of *real fucking people*," drops of spit spewed from the scarved man's lips and onto Tick's face as he stood perfectly still, "and when they ask you to play music, you cannot even do that correctly! That was the most abysmal performance I have heard in my life and of course it's from something like you."

Tick's mouth creaked open, "With respect, it was my first ever performance, I hope you wouldn't judge—"

"Respect! Respect is the last thing you have shown to someone with blood like mine!" Crimson blood continued to stream from his nose and he wiped it with a finger and shoved it an inch from Tick's eyes, as if to prove a point. "If you wanted to show true respect, you wouldn't waste my fucking time like that!"

The scarved man reached up to push Tick away at the chest, Tick raised an arm in an attempt to defend himself, but was too slow. As Tick stumbled back a step, heavy enough to not go far, his raised hand caught on a loose piece of the scarf's fabric as its owner began to storm away. The scarf pulled taut and pulled tight around the man's throat as a choking gag escaped from his lips as he stumbled back closer to Tick.

"Oh, I'm sorry I—" Tick stuttered.

"Why you fucking—" The scarved man spun around, grabbing the caught piece of fabric and tearing it off from his finger with a loud *rip*. Before Tick could react, the scarved man let out a shout and raised his foot to Tick's pelvis and kicked with as much

force as he could muster. Tick fell to the ground, his guitar shattering beneath his heavy metal frame, splinters shooting up and lodging between Tick's plating, a snapped string got caught in his elbow joint.

"Sir, I was not—" Tick raised his arms defensively as the scarved man stormed towards him and planted a heavy stomp on his shoulder.

The plate snapped off but the innards seemed fine for now.

Another stomp, a heel into the chest as it dented in and glass shattered beneath, he struggled to move as quickly.

Another stomp, this one on his wrist, a finger was caught against the brick and bent in a way it wasn't supposed to.

A kick to the face, his jaw came unhinged and fell down crooked to his neck, holding on by a single bolt, though snapped from the servo.

The clock in tick's head seemed to disconnect, and he lost all perception of time he had left, he couldn't tell how long the scarved man continued to batter him, a few more seconds or a few more minutes, it was all the same. The blows weakened the further he went, as the blood streamed down the scarved man's lip, then his chin, dripping and spattering across his brass plating.

Eventually he stopped, and began to stumble away, muttering to himself, "...wasted my time enough already... not worth another second...", he continued as he floundered down the alley and out into the street.

Tick sat as his body tried to correct what was wrong the best it could, but there was only so much he could do without the workshop. He stood up and began to limp down the empty street back home.

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The door to the creator's workshop creaked open, a small beam of moonlight disturbing the foot-scuffed dust. Tick stumbled in, grabbing a toolbox off of one of the workbenches and slumped down against the wall next to his sister, right under a window shining a near perfect square of moonlight onto the floor in front of him. He hit the floor with a clunk and a concerning, yet not surprising, rattle. He took a moment to rest his joints and servos, he could feel them straining as he trudged back to the workshop. He looked at his sister, insides left exposed for the dust to bite and suffocate, unlinked cogs, rubber tracks hanging loose, and motors left useless and alone. Tick spun

up a potentiality, an existence where she was finished, and could play on stage alongside him, or perhaps sit in the audience and watch his first ever show. Maybe if he wasn't alone it would have been better. He wished he could finish her, but knew he couldn't even if he tried. He couldn't pull the designs out of the creator's long departed mind, and didn't trust himself to drum up a design of his own. He barely knew how to work his own body.

He turned and looked down at his dented chest plate. He started prying it off, from the top down. He strained his fingers to fit under the crevasses, pulling the sockets off one by one with painful pops. As the plate clattered onto his lap, small shards of red glass spilled out around him. Tick reached to grab a handheld mirror, handle sticking off a nearby shelf, and faced it towards his chest as an old and deep memory resurfaced in his core.

"Humans need hearts to live," said the creator, "and we need hearts to love. You don't need this to live, but I hope you can find it in yourself to use this for the latter." The creator held out a red glass sphere and held it towards the automaton.

All that remained was a small chunk lodged in the wire frame, dull and dark crimson. The mirror clattered to the ground beside Tick as he dropped his hands to the floor.

The automaton held the sphere in his hands, studying it, holding it up to the sunlight through the window and watching the light refract alongside its warped reflection. The creator had told it about emotions before, something a machine could not feel, but something he wished they could. Love was one he rarely talked about, and from what it understood, rarely seemed to exhibit.

Tick got to work, snapping his bent finger back into place, reattaching belts, fixing his lopsided jaw, resetting gears, replacing his detached shoulder plate. He knew he couldn't fix himself fully, that he would never feel the same, nor would he function as well as he did before.

"One day, the second will be completed, and I hope you love it like a brother would, in case I am never around to treat you both like a father."

Tick looked down to the paved stone floor scattered with the glass shards which were once his heart. He sat up, shakily, scooted to grab a greasy rag from a table and began to gently, gingerly, sweep up the glass with his hands. He scooped them to a pile,

and transferred them onto the rag the best he could and lifted them into a pouch, tying a poor excuse for a knot. He looked to his sister, the empty wire frame where her heart was supposed to be, and placed the pouch inside.

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An hour later, Tick still sat beside his sister, watching the square moonbeam slowly drift across the floor. The faint sound of strumming strings made its way to the workshop, a strangely familiar pattern. Tick's neck strained as he twisted his neck in an attempt to ensure the sound reached his receptors. It was familiar, it almost sounded like...

Tick stood up, carefully, holding an arm against the wall for stability. Once he was on his feet, he made his way out into the street. The lamp-lit road was quiet, it was well past midnight at this point. The sound led him to a park, one Tick found himself frequenting quite a lot during his off-days, one that the birds visited often too.

Sat on a wooden bench, back to Tick, was an individual with a pointed hat and a wide brim with a hefty mandolin in their lap, from which emitted a peaceful tune. The music came to a gentle stop as the musician turned to look in Tick's direction. A flash of recognition passed across their face.

"I remember you," said the musician.

"I remember you too," said Tick, "you were here not long after I woke."

The musician tilted their head, then waved for Tick to approach, shifting over and patting on the empty bit of bench next to them. The musician wore a heavy, dirty poncho, disheveled hair hung down in front of their eyebrows, trailing down to the small of their back in messy, ashen waves.

Tick sat down on the bench, leaning forward slightly as the musician continued their song. The two stayed silent and stared into the starry night sky.

"Do you play?" asked the musician.

"I've never played the mandolin before."

"But you've played something. I've heard guitar from your home before. Was that you?"

"Yes."

The musician spent a few more seconds wrapping up their song, and passed the mandolin over to Tick. “Give it a go,” Tick picked it up and held it for a moment, looking to the musician, who gave Tick a small nod and a smile, “I want to see what you can do.”

“I’ve never practiced it, and I have rarely watched anyone use it.”

“Try it, there’s no harm. Never try anything new, then nothing you’ve practiced before would have been worth it. We grow and that keeps us alive, it’s what separates us from the rock and dirt we stand on.”

Tick looked down to the mandolin, placed his hands where he would think to put them. The musician leaned back next to him, tilting their head back and looking up towards the moon, slowly beginning its descent to the horizon.

Tick began to play, finding he couldn’t remember many of the patterns he used to. But the first one he’d ever heard, from the musician sitting next to him, resurfaced. So he used it as he remembered it.

A few strums later, the musician glanced in Tick’s direction, their lip raising in a pleasant grin before looking out to the night sky again. Tick continued through the song, his fingers struggling to keep up with the memory. One finger slipped, resulting in a discordant *twang*. Tick stopped playing, and the musician’s grin remained.

“Sorry. My fingers are—”

“Don’t be,” Tick paused as the musician crossed their legs and placed an arm on the upper bench. “Keep going, you were doing good.”

Tick continued the song as it was, playing it for another minute.

“What do you feel, friend? How are you feeling right now?”

Tick stopped the song again, “I don’t understand.”

“You can play an instrument, you are making music. It’s a vehicle for feelings, emotions. You are feeling something, my friend, I know it.”

Tick did not respond, only looking back down to his guitar, sifting through his memory core.

*“... we need hearts to love...”*

Tick made a new pattern, as he took the sound of his creator’s voice, twisting it, stretching it, and molding it until it came out almost like a song. Then he took it, and translated it to the mandolin in his lap. A song he wished his sister could hear, one he wished she could play alongside him. The musician smiled more, as they closed their

eyes and began to tilt their head back and forth along with Tick's new pattern, his new melody. Tick continued the song, making mistakes along the way, perhaps his timing was off or he played the wrong note, but the musician paid it no mind. As he played, he thought about his sister, and used his fabricated memories of playing alongside her to fuel the song, to make new patterns and weave in the old where Tick saw fit. He remembered seeing the sunlight through his own heart, wishing his sister could have the same experience. For a few moments, he almost forgot he was playing.

As the song started to near its end, the musician stood up, took their hat off and placed it on the cobbled path in front of the bench. They looked down at Tick, smiling, and fished a small coin out of their pocket, and tossed it into the hat.

"Have a good night my friend, I will see you around."

Tick let the final note of the song glide through the trees of the park, barely registering the musician's departure. He noticed the empty seat in the bench beside him, mandolin still in his hands.

He quickly looked up, "Sir, do you want your-", the musician was gone.

He looked back down at the mandolin, running his fingers along the smooth wood of its face. He began a new song.