

Little Dot

by Mrs. O. F. Walton

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Chapter 1—Old Solomon's Visitor

It was a bright morning in spring, and the cemetery on the outskirts of the town looked more peaceful, if possible, than it usually did. The dew was still on the grass, for it was not yet nine o'clock. The violets and snowdrops on little children's graves were peeping above the soil, and speaking of the resurrection. The robins were singing their sweetest songs on the top of mossy grave-stones—happy in the stillness of the place. And the sunbeams were busy everywhere, sunning the flowers, lighting up the dewdrops, and making everything glad and pleasant. Some of them even found their way into the deep grave in which Solomon Whitaker, the old gravedigger, was working, and they made it a little less dismal, and not quite so dark.

Not that old Whitaker thought it either dismal or dark. He had been a gravedigger nearly all his life, so he looked upon grave-digging as his vocation, and thought it, on the whole, more pleasant employment than that of most of his neighbours.

It was very quiet in the cemetery at all times, but especially in

the early morning; and the old man was not a little startled by hearing a very small voice speaking to him from the top of the grave.

"What are you doing down there, old man?" said the little voice.

The grave-digger looked up quickly, and there, far above him, and peeping cautiously into the grave, was a child in a clean white pinafore, and with a quantity of dark brown hair hanging over her shoulders.

"Whoever in the world are you?" was his first question.

His voice sounded very awful, coming as it did out of the deep grave, and the child ran away, and disappeared as suddenly as she had come.

Solomon looked up several times afterwards as he threw up fresh spadefuls of earth, but for some time he saw no more of his little visitor. But she was not far away; she was hiding behind a high tombstone, and in a few minutes she took courage, and went again to the top of the grave. This time she did not speak, but stood with her finger in her mouth, looking shyly down upon him, as her long brown hair blew wildly about in the breeze.

Solomon thought he had never seen such a pretty little thing. He had had a little girl once, and though she had been dead more than thirty years, he had not quite forgotten her.

"What do they call you, my little dear?" said he, as gently as his husky old voice would let him say it.

"Dot," said the child, nodding her head at him from the top of the grave.

"That's a very funny name," said Solomon; "I can't think on that I ever heard it afore."

"Dot isn't my real name; they call me Ruth in my father's big Bible on our parlour table."

"That's got nothing to do with Dot as I can see," said the gravedigger, musingly.

"No," she said, shaking her long brown hair out of her eyes; "it's 'cause I'm such a little dot of a thing that they call me Dot."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Solomon; and then he went into a deep meditation on names, and called to mind some strange ones which he had read on the old churchyard grave-stones.

When Solomon was in one of his "reverdies," as his old wife used to call them when she was alive, he seldom took much notice of what was going on around him, and he had almost forgotten the little girl, when she said suddenly, in a half-frightened voice, "I wonder what they call you, old man?"

"Solomon," said the gravedigger; "Mr. Solomon Whitaker—that's my name."

"Then please, Mr. Solemn, what are you doing down there?"

"I'm digging a grave," said Solomon.

"What's it for, please, Mr. Solemn?" asked the child.

"Why, to bury folks in, of course," said the old man.

Little Dot retreated several steps when she heard this, as if she were afraid Mr. Solomon might want to bury her. When he looked up again there was only a corner of her white pinafore in sight. But as he went on quietly with his work, and took no notice of her, Dot thought she might venture near again, for she wanted to ask Mr. Solomon another question.

"Please," she began, "who are you going to put in that there hole?"

"It's a man as fell down dead last week. He was a hard-working fellow, that he was," said the gravedigger; for he always liked to give people a good word when digging their graves.

Dot now seemed satisfied; and, on her side, told the old man that she had come to live in one of the small cottages near the cemetery gates, and that they used to be "ever so far off" in the country.

Then she ran away to another part of the cemetery, and old Solomon shaded his eyes with his hand to watch her out of sight.

Chapter 2—Dot's Daisies

Dot's mother had lived all her life in a remote part of Yorkshire, far away from church or chapel or any kind of school. But her husband had been born and brought up in a town, and country life did not suit him. And so, when Dot was about five years old, he returned to his native place, and took one of the cottages close to the cemetery, in order that his little girl might still have some green grass on which to run about, and might still see a few spring flowers.

The cemetery was some way out of the town; and Dot's mother, having had but little education herself, did not think it at all necessary that Dot, at her tender age, should go to school, and therefore the little girl was allowed to spend most of her time in the cemetery, with which she was very well pleased. She liked to run round the grave-stones, and climb over the grassy mounds, and watch the robins hopping from tree to tree.

But Dot's favourite place was by old Solomon's side. She went about with him from one part of the cemetery to another, and he liked to feel her tiny hand in his. She took a great interest, too, in the graves he was digging. She watched him shaping them neatly and making them tidy, as he called it, until she began, as she fancied, to understand grave-digging nearly as well as he did. But she sometimes puzzled the old man by her questions, for Dot always wanted to know everything about what she saw.

"Mr. Solemn," she said one day, "shall you make *me* a little grave when I die?"

"Yes," he said, "I suppose I shall, little woman."

Dot thought this over for a long time.

"I don't want to go into a grave," she said; "it doesn't look nice."

"No," said the gravedigger, "you needn't be frightened; you won't have to go just yet. Why, you're ever such a little mite of a thing!"

"Please, Mr. Solemn, when you die, who'll have to dig your grave, please?"

"I don't know," said Solomon, uneasily; "they'll have to get a new digger, I suppose."

"Maybe you'd better dig one ready when you've a bit of time, Mr. Solemn."

But though Solomon was very fond of digging other people's graves—for he was so much used to it that it had become quite a pleasure to him—he had no wish to dig his own, nor did he like thinking about it, though Dot seemed as if she would not let him forget it.

Another day, when he was working in a distant part of the cemetery, she asked him—

"Whereabouts will they bury you, Mr. Solemn?"

And when they were standing over a newly-made grave, and Solomon was admiring his work, she said—

"I hope they will make your grave neat, Mr. Solemn."

But though these questions and remarks made old Whitaker very uneasy—for he had a sort of uncomfortable feeling in his heart when he thought of the day when his grave-digging would come to an end—still, for all that, he liked little Dot, and he would have missed the child much if anything had kept her from his side. She took such an interest in his graves, too, and watched them growing deeper and deeper with as much pleasure as he did himself. And, whether we be rich or poor, high or low, interest in our work generally wins our hearts. And by-and-by Dot found herself a way, as she thought, of helping old Solomon to make his graves look nice.

He was working one day at the bottom of a grave, and Dot was sitting on the grass at a little distance. He thought she

was busy with her doll, for she had not been talking to him for a long time, and he gave a jump as he suddenly felt something patting on his head, and heard Dot's merry little laugh at the top of the grave. She had filled her pinafore with daisies, and thrown them upon him in the deep grave.

"Whatever in the world is that for?" said the old man, good-naturedly, as he shook the flowers of his head.

"It's to make it pretty," said Dot. "It'll make it white and soft, you know, Mr. Solemn."

Solomon submitted very patiently; and from that time the child always gathered daisies to scatter at the bottom of Solomon's graves, till he began to look upon it as a necessary finish to his work. He often thought Dot was like a daisy herself, so fresh and bright she was. He wondered at himself when he reckoned how much he loved her. For his own little girl had been dead so many years; and it was so long now since he had dug his old wife's grave, that Solomon had almost forgotten how to love. He had had no one since to care for him, and he had cared for no one.

But little Dot had crept into his old heart unawares.

Chapter 3—The Little Grave

Old Solomon was digging a grave one day in a very quiet corner of the cemetery. Dot was with him as usual, prattling away in her pretty childish way.

"It's a tidy grave, is this," remarked the old man, as he smoothed the sides with his spade; nice and dry, too; it'll do me credit."

"It's a very little one," said Dot.

"Yes, it's like to be little when it's for a little girl; you wouldn't want a very big grave, Dot."

"No," said Dot; "but you would want a good big one, wouldn't you, Mr. Solemn?" The mention of his own grave always made Solomon go into one of his "reverdies." But he was recalled by Dot's asking quickly—

"Mr. Solemn, is she a very little girl?"

"Yes," said the old man; "maybe about your size, Dot. Her pa came about the grave. I was in the office when he called, and said he, 'I want a nice quiet little corner, for it is for my little girl.'"

"Did he look sorry?" said Dot.

"Yes," he said; "folks mostly do look sorry when they come about graves."

Dot had never watched the digging of a grave with so much interest as she did that of this little girl. She never left Solomon's side, not even to play with her doll. She was very quiet, too, as she stood with her large eyes wide open, watching all his movements. He wondered what had come over her, and he looked up several times rather anxiously as he threw up the spadefuls of earth. "Mr. Solemn," she said, when she had finished, "when will they put the little girl in?"

"To-morrow morning," said the old man, "somewhere about eleven."

Dot nodded her head, and made up her mind she would be in this corner of the cemetery at eleven o'clock.

When Solomon came back from his dinner, and went to take a last look at the little grave, he found the bottom of it covered with white daisies which Dot had thrown in.

"She *has* made it pretty, bless her!" he murmured.

Dot crept behind the bushes near the chapel the next day, to watch the little girl's funeral arrive. She saw the small coffin taken from the hearse, and carried on in front. Then she watched the people get out of the carriages, and a lady and gentleman, whom she felt sure were the little girl's father and mother, walked on first. The lady had her handkerchief to her eyes, and Dot could see that she was crying. After her walked two little girls, and they were crying also.

There were a few other people at the funeral, but Dot did not care to look at them; she wanted to see what became of the

little girl's coffin, which had just been carried into the chapel. She waited patiently till they brought it out, and then she followed the mournful procession at a little distance, till they reached the corner of the cemetery where Solomon had dug the grave.

Solomon was there, standing by the grave, when the bearers came up with the coffin. Dot could see him quite well, and she could see the minister standing at the end of the grave, and all the people in a circle round it. She did not like to go very near, but she could hear the minister reading something in a very solemn voice, and then the coffin was let down into the grave. The little girl's mamma cried very much, and Dot cried, too, she felt so sorry for her.

When the service was over, they all looked into the grave, and then they walked away. Dot ran up as soon as they were gone, and, taking hold of Solomon's hand, she peeped into the grave. The little coffin was at the bottom, and some of Dot's daisies were lying round it.

"Is the little girl inside there?" said Dot, in an awe-struck voice.

"Yes," said Solomon, "she's in there, poor little thing. I'll have to fill it up now."

"Isn't it very dark?" said Dot.

"Isn't what dark?"

"In there," said Dot. "Isn't it very dark and cold for the poor little girl?"

"Oh, I don't know about that," said Solomon. "I don't suppose folks feels cold when they are dead; anyhow, we must cover her up warm." But poor Dot's heart was very full; and, sitting on the grass beside the little girl's grave, she began to cry and sob as if her heart would break.

"Don't cry, Dot, said the old man; "maybe the little girl knows nothing about it—maybe she's asleep like."

But Dot's tears only flowed the faster. For she felt sure if the

little girl *were* asleep, and knew nothing about it, as old Solomon said, she would be waking up some day, and then how dreadful it would be for her.

"Come, Dot," said Solomon, at last, "I must fill it up."

Then Dot jumped up hastily. "Please, Mr. Solemn, wait one minute," she cried, as she disappeared amongst the bushes.

"Whatever is she up to now?" said the old gravedigger.

She soon came back with her pinafore full of daisies. She had been gathering them all the morning, and had hid them in a shady place under the trees. Then, with a little sob, she threw them into the deep grave, and watched them fall on the little coffin. After this she watched Solomon finish his work, and did not go home till the little girl's grave was made, as old Solomon said, "all right and comfortable."

Chapter 4—Lilian and Her Words

Dot took a very great interest in "her little girl's grave," as she called it. She was up early the next morning; and as soon as her mother had washed her, and given her her breakfast, she ran to the quiet corner in the cemetery to look at the new-made grave. It looked very bare, Dot thought, and she ran away to gather a number of daisies to spread upon the top of it. She covered it as well as she could with them, and she patted the sides of the grave with her little hands, to make it more smooth and tidy. Dot wondered if the little girl knew what she was doing, and if it made her any happier to know there were daisies above her.

She thought she would ask Solomon; so when she had finished she went in search of him. He was not far away, and she begged him to come and look at what she had done to her little girl's grave. He took hold of Dot's hand, and she led him to the place.

"See, Mr. Solemn," she said, "haven't I made my little girl pretty?"

"Aye," he answered; "you *have* found a many daisies, Dot."

"But, Mr. Solemn," asked Dot, anxiously, "do you think she knows?"

"Why, Dot, I don't know—maybe she does," he said, for he did not like to disappoint her.

"Mr. Solemn, shall I put you some daisies at the top of your grave?" said Dot, as they walked away.

Solomon made no answer. Dot had reminded him so often of his own grave, that he had sometimes begun to think about it, and to wonder how long it would be before it would have to be made. He had a vague idea that when he was buried he would not come to an end. He had heard of heaven and of hell; and though he had never thought much about either of them, he had a kind of feeling that some day he must go to one or other. Hell, he had heard, was for bad people, and heaven for good ones; and though Solomon tried to persuade himself that he belonged to the latter class, he could not quite come to that opinion. There was something in his heart which told him all was not right with him, and made the subject an unpleasant one. He wished Dot would let it drop, and not talk to him any more about it; and then he went into a reverie about Dot, and Dot's daisies, and all her pretty ways.

It was the afternoon of the same day, and Dot was sitting beside her little girl's grave, trying to make the daisies look more pretty by putting some leaves among them, when she heard footsteps crossing the broad gravel path. She jumped up, and peeped behind the trees to see who was coming. It was the lady and gentleman whom she had seen at the funeral, and they were coming to look at their little grave. Dot felt very shy, but she could not run away without meeting them, so she hid behind a hawthorn bush at the other side.

The little girl's papa and mamma came close to the grave, and Dot was so near that, as they knelt down beside it, she could hear a great deal of what they were saying. The lady was crying very much, and for some time she did not speak. But the gentleman said—

"I wonder who has put these flowers here, my dear: how very pretty they are!"

"Yes," said the lady, through her tears; "and the grave was full of them yesterday."

"How pleased our little girl would have been!" said he. "She was so fond of daisies! Who *can* have done it?"

Little Dot heard all this from her hiding-place, and she felt very pleased that she had made her little girl's grave so pretty.

The lady cried a great deal as she sat by the grave; but just before they left, Dot heard the gentleman say—

"Don't cry, dearest; remember what our little Lilian said the night before she died."

"Yes," said the lady, "I will not forget." And she dried her eyes, and Dot thought she tried to smile as she looked up at the blue sky. Then she took a bunch of white violets which she had brought with her, and put them in the middle of the grave, but she did not move any of Dot's daisies, at which she looked very lovingly and tenderly.

As soon as they were gone Dot came out from behind the hawthorn bush. She went up to her little girl's grave, and kneeling on the grass beside it she smelled the white violets and stroked them with her tiny hand. They made it look so much nicer, she thought; but she felt very glad that the lady had liked her daisies. She would gather some fresh ones tomorrow.

Dot walked home very slowly. She had so much to think over. She knew her little girl's name now, and that she was fond of daisies. She would not forget that. Dot felt very sorry for the poor lady; she wished she could tell her so. And then she began to wonder what it was that her little girl had said the night before she died. It must be something nice, Dot thought, to make the lady wipe her eyes and try to smile. Perhaps the little girl had said she did not mind being put into the dark hole. Dot thought it could hardly be that, for she felt sure *she* would mind it very much indeed. Dot was sure she would be very frightened if *she* had to die, and old Solomon had to dig a grave for her. No, it could not be *that* which Lilian had said. Perhaps Solomon was right, and the little girl

was asleep. If so, Dot hoped it would be a long, long time before she woke up again.

Solomon had left his work, or Dot would have told him about what she had seen. But it was tea-time now, and she must go home. Her mother was standing at the door looking out for her, and she called to the child to be quick and come in to tea.

Dot found her father at home, and they began their meal. But little Dot was so quiet, and sat so still, that her father asked her what was the matter. Then she thought she would ask him what she wanted to know, for he was very kind to her, and generally tried to answer her questions.

So Dot told him about her little girl's grave, and what the lady and gentleman had talked about, and she asked what he thought the little girl had said, which had made her mother stop crying.

But Dot's father could not tell her. And when Dot said she was sure *she* would not like to be put into a hole like that, her father only laughed, and told her not to trouble her little head about it: she was too young to think of such things.

"But my little girl was only just about as big as me," said Dot, "'cause Mr. Solemn told me so."

This was an argument which her father could not answer, so he told Dot to be quick over her supper, and get to bed. And when she was asleep he said to his wife that he did not think the cemetery was a good place for his little girl to play in—it made her gloomy. But Dot's mother said it was better than the street, and Dot was too light-hearted to be dull long.

And whilst they were talking little Dot was dreaming of Lilian, and of what she had said the night before she died.

Chapter 5—Dot's Busy Thoughts

A day or two after, as Dot was putting fresh daisies on the little grave, she felt a hand on her shoulder, and looking up she saw her little girl's mamma. She had come up very quietly, and Dot was so intent on what she was doing that she

had not heard her. It was too late to run away; but the lady's face was so kind and loving that the child could not be afraid. She took hold of Dot's little hand, and sat down beside her, and then she said very gently—

"Is this the little girl who gathered the daisies?"

"Yes," said Dot, shyly, "it was me."

The lady seemed very pleased, and she asked Dot what her name was and where she lived. Then she said, "Dot, what was it made you bring these pretty flowers here?"

"Please," said the child, "it was 'cause Mr. Solemn said she was ever such a little girl—maybe about as big as me."

"Who is Mr. Solemn?" asked the lady.

"It's an old man—him as digs the graves; he made my little girl's grave," said Dot, under her breath, "and he filled it up and all."

The tears came into the lady's eyes, and she stooped down and kissed the child.

Dot was beginning to feel quite at home with the little girl's mamma, and she stroked the lady's soft glove with her tiny hand.

They sat quite still for some time. Dot never moved, and the lady had almost forgotten her—she was thinking of her own little girl. The tears began to run down her cheeks, though she tried to keep them back, and some of them fell upon Dot as she sat at her feet.

"I was thinking of my little girl," said the lady, as Dot looked sorrowfully up into her face.

"Please," said Dot, "I wonder what your little girl said to you the night before she died?" She thought perhaps it might comfort the lady to think of it, as it had done so the other day.

The lady looked very surprised when Dot said this, as she had no idea that the little girl was near when she was talking to

her husband. "How did you know, Dot?" she asked.

"Please, I couldn't help it," said little Dot; "I was putting the daisies."

"Yes?" said the lady, and she waited for the child to go on.

"And I ran in there," said Dot, nodding at the hawthorn bush. "I heard you—and, please, don't be angry."

"I am not angry," said the lady.

Dot looked in her face, and saw she was gazing at her with a very sweet smile.

"Then, please," said little Dot, "I would like very much to know what the little girl said."

"I will tell you, Dot," said the lady. "Come and sit on my knee."

There was a flat tombstone close by, on which they sat whilst the little girl's mamma talked to Dot. She found it very hard to speak about her child, it was so short a time since she had died. But she tried her very best, for the sake of the little girl who had covered the grave with the daisies.

"Lilian was only ill a very short time," said the lady; "a week before she died she was running about and playing—just as you have been doing to-day, Dot. But she took a bad cold, and soon the doctor told me my little girl must die."

"Oh," said Dot, with a little sob, "I am so sorry for the poor little girl!"

"Lilian wasn't afraid to die, Dot," said the lady.

"Wasn't she?" said Dot. "I should be frightened ever so much—but maybe she'd never seen Mr. Solemn bury anybody; maybe she didn't know she had to go into that dark hole."

"Listen, Dot," said the lady, "and I will tell you what my little girl said the night before she died. 'Mamma,' she said, 'don't let Violet and Ethel think that I'm down deep in the cemetery; but take them out, and show them the blue sky and all the

white clouds, and tell them, "Little sister Lilian's up there with Jesus" Violet and Ethel are my other little girls, Dot."

"Yes," said Dot in a whisper; "I saw them at the funeral."

"That is what my little girl said, which made me stop crying the other day."

Dot looked very puzzled. There was a great deal she wanted to think over and to ask Solomon about.

The lady was obliged to go home, for it was getting late. She kissed the child before she went, and said she hoped Dot would see her little girl one day, above the blue sky.

Dot could not make out what the lady meant, nor what her little girl had meant the night before she died. She wanted very much to hear more about her, and she hoped the lady would soon come again.

"Mr. Solemn," said Dot the next day, as she was in her usual place on the top of one of Solomon's graves, "didn't you say that my little girl was in that long box?"

"Yes," said Solomon—"yes, Dot, I said so, I believe."

"But my little girl's mamma says she isn't in there, Mr. Solemn, and my little girl said so the night before she died."

"Where is she then?" said Solomon.

"She's somewhere up there," said Dot, pointing with her finger to the blue sky.

"Oh, in heaven," said Solomon. "Yes, Dot, I suppose she *is* in heaven."

"How did she get there?" said Dot. "I want to know all about it, Mr. Solemn."

"Oh, I don't know," said the old man. "Good folks always go to heaven."

"Shall you go to heaven, Mr. Solemn, when you die?"

"I hope I shall, Dot, I'm sure," said the old man. "But there,

run away a little; I want to tidy round a bit."

Now, Solomon had very often "tidied round," as he called it, without sending Dot away; but he did not want her to ask him any more questions, and he hoped she would forget it before she came back.

But Dot had not forgotten. She had not even been playing; she had been sitting on an old tombstone, thinking about what Solomon had said. And as soon as he had finished the grave she ran up to him.

"Mr. Solemn," she said, "did she get out in the night?"

"*Who* get out?" said the old man in a very puzzled voice.

"My little girl, Mr. Solemn. Did she get out that night, after you covered her up, you know?"

"No," said Solomon, "*she* couldn't get out—how could she?"

"Then she's in there yet," said little Dot, very sorrowfully.

"Yes, she's there, safe enough," said the gravedigger; "it's the last home of man, is the grave, Dot."

"But, Mr. Solemn, you said she was in heaven," Dot went on, in a very mournful little voice.

Solomon did not know how to answer her, indeed it was very puzzling to himself. He wished he could think what to say to Dot; but nothing would come to him, so he gave up the attempt, and tried to think of something else.

But Dot's busy little mind was not satisfied. The little girl's mamma must be right; and she had said she hoped Dot would see Lilian above the blue sky. Dot wondered how she would get up above the sky.

"Mr. Solemn," she said one day, "don't you wish you were just like a bird?"

"No," said the old man—"no, Dot; I'd rather be digging my graves."

"But, Mr. Solemn, they've got two wings," she went on.

"And what would you do with two wings, my little dear?" said the gravedigger.

"I'd go right up into the sky, and look for my little girl," said Dot.

"Oh," said Solomon, "your thoughts are always running on that, Dot. How's dolly to-day?"

But Dot had left her dolly at home—she had almost forgotten it the last day or two.

Chapter 6—Sowing Seeds

The next week was very wet, and Dot's mother would not let her go into the cemetery. So she sat at home by the fire with her doll upon her knee, wondering what her little girl was doing, and whether she was really in the sky. Then she listened to the rain pattering against the windowpanes, and thought how wet the little grave would be, and how bare it must look, now there were no daisies upon it. Dot hoped very, very much that her little girl was not inside.

Every time that Solomon passed to and from work Dot was at the window to nod to him. He missed her very much this rainy weather; but he had to go on with his work in the cold and damp, just as usual. It was a great cheer to the old man to see the little face at the window, morning and evening—and sometimes Dot's mother was there too. Dot would pull her by the apron when she saw her old friend coming—

"Mother," she would say, "here's my Mr. Solemn!" And then her mother would run with her to the window, to see the old gravedigger pass.

But as soon as the sunshine came, and the grass began to be dry, Dot was by Solomon's side again. "She walked with him to the cemetery, though as soon as they reached the gates she ran quickly forward to look at her little girl's grave. But when she got to the place she stood still in amazement. It looked quite different from what it did when she was there last. The sides of the grave were covered with nice soft grass, which

looked green and fresh after the rain. Then the top of the grave was quite flat and smooth like a flower-bed, and in the middle of it was a small rose tree.

Dot ran round the grave several times, to look at all these changes. Then she sat beside it, and patted the grass, and smoothed the mould, and admired the rose bush.

After a time she went to look for Solomon, to tell him what she had found.

"Oh, Mr. Solemn," she cried, "my little girl's grave is ever so pretty!"

"Yes," he said, "I know it is, Dot; a man came and did it a week ago—I think it was the lady's gardener. I thought I wouldn't tell you, my little dear—you'd be more surprised like."

"Oh, Mr. Solemn, did you see the rose tree?"

"Yes, I saw it, Dot."

"Mr. Solemn, I know what I'll do; I'll put you a rose tree on your grave when you die—a real nice one, I will."

The old man took her up in his arms and kissed her, and then he went on with his usual work.

It was a bright summer's morning not long after, when Dot saw the two little girls who had walked behind the lady and gentleman at the funeral coming in at the cemetery gates. The elder of them had a green watering-can in her hand, and her sister had a small covered basket. Dot followed them at a little distance, and watched them going to the quiet corner of the cemetery.

But before they went in among the trees they turned and caught sight of Dot. Their mamma had told them to look out for her, so they came back to meet her.

"Are you Dot?" said the elder sister.

"Yes," said Dot, shyly.

"Mamma told us about you," said Violet.

"And she thought you would help us," Ethel went on: "we're going to sow some seeds on Lilian's grave—are we not, Violet?"

"Yes," said Violet; "gardener wanted to do it, but papa says we may do it quite by ourselves. Come, Dot, you shall walk with us."

So the three children went hand in hand to the little grave.

It was a long business sowing the seeds; but when the little brown things were put safely in, and Dot had given the earth a last pat with her hand, Violet said they must be watered.

"Dot," she said, "where can we get some water?"

Dot ran with the green watering-can to the pump near the cemetery gates, and soon returned with the water, with which Violet carefully watered the earth where the seeds had been put in.

"They ought to be watered every day," she said; "gardener always waters his seeds every day; they won't spring up if they haven't enough water, will they, Ethel? What are we to do about it?"

"Please, I'll do them," said little Dot.

"Oh! will you?" said Violet. "That will be a very good plan; won't it, Ethel?"

"Yes," said her sister; "and we can leave Dot the small can."

"But you must hold it up as high as you can, Dot," said Violet, "and do it very gently, or you will wash the seeds out of the ground. Do you think you can manage?"

"Yes," said Dot, gravely, as though impressed with the greatness of her trust. "Will the little girl like them?" she asked, as they walked away.

"What little girl?" asked Ethel.

"Your little girl," said Dot, nodding in the direction of the

grave.

"What, Lilian?" said Ethel. "Yes, I'm sure she will like them if she knows. But then, you see, I'm not quite sure if she does."

"Perhaps Jesus will let her fly down and look at them," said Violet.

"Oh! I don't think she would want to come, Violet," said her sister; "she would have so many pretty flowers to look at up there."

"Then she *is* in the sky?" said Dot, standing quite still and fixing her eyes earnestly on the two little girls.

"Yes," said Violet, in a shocked voice; "didn't you know that, Dot? But you're such a tiny little thing—isn't she, Ethel?"

"But, please," said Dot, eagerly, "I saw Mr. Solemn put her in, right down among my daisies in a white box, and please, I would so like to know how she got out."

"She didn't get out," said Ethel.

"Because she never went in," Violet went on; "she told mamma so, you know, before she died."

"Then please," said Dot, "wasn't she in the little box?"

"Yes, she was—at least—no, she wasn't. I wish mamma was here," said Ethel; "she could tell you how it was. That was her body, you know, in here—her soul was in the sky."

"I don't quite see," said Dot, being puzzled.

"Why *this* is your body, Dot," said Violet, taking hold of Dot's arm, and giving it a little pat.

"But, please, that's my arm," said little Dot, in a very bewildered voice.

"Yes," explained Ethel, "but all this is your body, Dot;—all over you, your soul's inside somewhere, where you can't see it."

"I should like to see my soul," said little Dot.

"Oh! but you never could!" said Violet. "Could she, Ethel?"

"No, I think not," said Ethel. "Perhaps when we get to heaven we shall."

Chapter 7—The Little White Stone

As soon as the young ladies were gone, Dot hastened in search of Mr. Solomon. She found him walking home to his dinner, his spade over his shoulder; and slipping her hand in his, she walked beside him, and told him her morning's adventures.

"Please, Mr. Solemn," she said, "have *you* got a soul?"

"Why, yes," said Solomon; "everybody's got one—to be sure they have."

"Then they'll only put your body in the ground, Mr. Solemn? I'm so glad—that won't matter so very much, will it?"

Solomon made no answer, so Dot went on:

"Shall you like your soul to go to heaven, Mr. Solemn?"

"Yes, child," said the old man; "it's a good place is heaven, so they say."

"Shall you dig graves in heaven, Mr. Solemn?"

"No," said the old man, with a laugh; "there are no graves in heaven. "There is 'no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying.'"

Solomon had learnt this verse at his mother's knee, years ago, and it came back to him with a strange freshness which almost startled him.

Dot looked up in his face as she said brightly—

"What a very nice place heaven must be! But what will you do there, Mr. Solemn, if you don't dig graves?"

"Why, sing, I suppose, Dot—sing hymns and such-like."

"I didn't know you could sing, Mr. Solemn," said Dot, with a laugh; "you've got such an old voice, it all shakes about. But you and me must help each other; that'll do—won't it?"

Never were plants more diligently watered than those on Lilian's grave; and great was Dot's delight as she saw the little green shoots coming up one by one out of the ground.

But what was her surprise one morning on going to the grave, to find two men in her quiet corner. They were very busy, for they had brought with them a small white marble stone for the little girl's grave. Dot never left the place whilst they were there; she watched their every movement with the deepest interest, and when they were gone she examined the stone very carefully, though she could not read a word of what was on it. But old Solomon put on his spectacles and made it out for her.

"Lilian Stanley," he began.

"That's my little girl's name," said Dot.

"Died May 3, 1863, aged 6 years."

"Is that all?" asked little Dot.

"No; wait a minute," said the old man; "I'll tell you about it all—here's some reading at the bottom: 'White in the blood of the Lamb.' That's all, Dot."

"What Lamb, Mr. Solemn?"

"Oh! I don't know, Dot; that's a text; it's in the Bible somewhere."

"I want to know all about it," said Dot, impatiently. "Can't you tell me, Mr. Solemn?"

But just then they heard a voice behind them, saying—

"Oh, that looks very well. I am so glad it is done!" and, looking up, they saw the little girl's papa, with Violet having hold of his hand.

Solomon touched his hat respectfully, and moved away; but

Dot stayed behind, for she wanted to hear about the text on the little girl's grave.

"White in the blood of the Lamb," read Mr. Stanley, aloud.

"What Lamb?" asked little Dot, simply.

"The dear Lord Jesus," said the gentleman. "My little girl would never have got to heaven if He had not washed her in His blood. And now Lilian wears a white robe, made white in the blood of the Lamb. Yes, my children," he went on, taking the little girls by the hand, "there is no other way to the bright land above the sky; there is no other way to get rid of your sin—and no sin can enter into heaven. But Jesus has loved you, and shed His blood for you, and He can wash you whiter than snow."

"Will He wash me?" said Little Dot.

"I am sure He will, my child, if you ask Him," said the gentleman.

Then he took the two little girls to a seat on the gravel-path not far away, and he taught them this short prayer: "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." And that prayer was treasured up in little Dot's heart.

Over and over again she repeated it as she walked home, and many times she said it during the day. And when Dot's mother came to look at her child in bed, little Dot turned over in her sleep, and she heard the words again, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

Chapter 8—The Fading Daisy

The autumn came on very early that year. There were cold east winds, which swept among the trees of the cemetery, and scattered their leaves on the ground. Then there were thick mists and drizzling rains, and each morning and evening the dew fell heavily on the grass. And now and then there was a slight frost, which nipped the geraniums and the fuchsias and all the flowers which had been so bright through the summer.

It grew very damp and chilly in the cemetery, but Dot was

still in her place at Solomon's side. She was very pale and thin, he thought; and he fancied she shivered sometimes as she stood on the damp grass. He would wrap her up in his old great-coat very tenderly as she sat on the cold stone near him, and he would tell her to run about to warm herself many times in the day.

But Dot was not so fond of running about as she used to be. She had been very tired lately, and she would soon come back to him, and stand beside him at his work, talking to him in her pretty childish way. He liked to hear her talk, and he was never dull when she was with him. She had taught him her little prayer, and old Solomon could say it as well as she could. As for Dot, it was seldom out of her thoughts, and Solomon often found her kneeling amongst the trees of the cemetery, and "asking the dear Lord Jesus," as she called praying.

But Dot's mother often sent for her in, for she noticed that her child was not well. She had a tiresome little cough, which often kept her awake by night, and distressed old Solomon by day. He walked into the town, poor old man, on purpose to buy her some lozenges, which he heard had cured a neighbour of his. He thought they might make his little dear's cold well.

But Dot's cough still continued, and grew worse instead of better. At last her father took her to a doctor, and he gave her some medicine, and said she must be kept warm. So Dot's mother kept her at home, and she could only kiss her hand to Solomon as he passed the window to his work. He came to see her in the evenings, for she fretted so much for him that her mother invited him to come as often as he could.

"Mr. Solemn," she said one day, "I know all about it now."

"About what, my dear?" asked the old man.

"About my little girl, and heaven, and Jesus, Mr. Solemn; has He washed you, Mr. Solemn?"

"I don't know, my dear," he replied.

" 'Cause you can't go to heaven if He doesn't, Mr. Solemn."

"No, I suppose not," said the old man. "There's a many things in me as ought to be different—I know that, Dot."

"You *will* say my little prayer, won't you, Mr. Solemn?" said Dot.

"Yes, Dot, I will," said the old man; "God helping me, I will."

She was teaching him many lessons, was this little child; and now that he saw her slipping away from his sight, each day growing more thin and pale, he felt as if his heart would break.

Violet and Ethel, and their papa and mamma, often came to see Dot, and brought her tempting things to eat, jellies and grapes, and cooling drinks.

Dot was very pleased to see them, and would look out of the window for their coming for hours together.

But the flower was fading very quickly, Dot was taken suddenly worse, and even her mother knew that her little girl would not be long with her. She was very tender to Dot now; she would hold her little girl in her arms for hours together, for Dot was very weary, and liked to lie quite still, with her head on her mother's shoulder. And, at length, there came a long, sorrowful day, when Dot's father stayed away from work, and Dot's mother sat all day beside the little bed, which they had brought down for the child to lie upon.

It was evening, and little Dot was sinking fast. She had scarcely spoken all day, except to murmur her little prayer; but now old Solomon had come in, after his day's work, and was sitting beside her, holding her tiny hand in his.

She opened her eyes and smiled at him.

"Mr. Solemn," she asked, "have you said it?"

"Said what, my dear?" replied the old man.

"My little prayer, Mr. Solemn."

"Yes, my dear; yes, Dot; I've said it many a time, and, what's more, my dear, I'm an old sinner, but I do believe the Lord's heard me, and done it for me; I do believe He has."

"I'm so glad," said little Dot; and she smiled as she said it.

He stayed with her till it was quite late, and when he was coming away she said wearily—

"I'm so tired, Mr. Solemn."

"Are you, my dear?" said the old man.

"Please, Mr. Solemn, say my little prayer for me to-night."

Solomon knelt down by the side of the bed. Dot's father and mother knelt beside him, and little Dot clasped her hands and shut her eyes, whilst the old man prayed in a trembling voice:

"Lord, dear Lord, wash us all to-night, and we shall be whiter than snow. Wash me, and little Dot, and Dot's father and mother, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen."

Then he kissed Dot, and came away with a troubled heart.

The next morning, as he went to his work, he heard that his little girl was dead. "What! my little darling," said the old man, "my little darling gone!"

Chapter 9—Old Solomon's Hope

There was a little grave to be dug that day, and it was the hardest task old Solomon ever had. The earth seemed to him as heavy as lead that morning; and many a time he stopped and moaned, as if he could work no more. He sometimes looked up, as if he half expected to see his little Dot standing at the top of the grave. He almost thought he heard her merry laugh, and her dear little voice saying, "Won't you say my little prayer, Mr. Solemn?"

But this was little Dot's grave, and she was dead. It could not be true; oh, it could not be true!

But, as the old man toiled on, a happier thought stole into his old soul, and he thought he saw his little Dot, dressed in

white, and walking with the angels, near the dear Lord, in the home above the blue sky. And it did old Solomon good to think of this.

The grave was close to Lilian's; side by side they were to lie, for so Lilian's father had ordered it. For he loved little Dot for the care she had taken of his child's grave.

It was the day of the funeral—little Dot's funeral. Old Solomon was wandering among the trees of the cemetery, and every now and then stooping wearily to gather something from the ground. He was getting daisies to put on his little dear's grave. They were very scarce now, and it gave him much trouble to collect them, and they looked very poor and frost-bitten when he put them together, but they were the best he could find, and, with trembling hands, he threw them into the little grave.

It was a very quiet funeral. The gentleman and lady and their two little girls came to it, and Dot's father and mother, and old Solomon did his sorrowful part.

And they looked down into the grave at the little white coffin lying amongst the daisies. Then all was over, and the robin sang his song on little Dot's grave.

Lilian's father ordered a stone exactly like that which he had put to his own child—a small white marble stone, and on the stone were these words—

"LITTLE DOT"

and underneath was Dot's text—

"WASH ME, AND I SHALL BE WHITER THAN SNOW"

Old Solomon toiled on, often lonely and sad. The neighbours said he was getting childish, for he often fancied that his little Dot was alive, and he would look up from the graves and smile at her, as he used to do when she stood at the top. And he often thought he heard her little voice whispering among the trees of the cemetery. And the words she whispered were always those of her little prayer.

So Solomon grew to think of her as alive and not dead, and it comforted his old heart. "For," said he, "it will not be very long before I shall see her again."

Thus Solomon was troubled no longer at the thought of his own grave, or of who should dig it.

And the people who came to the cemetery often looked at the two little graves, and read the two texts.

Copied by Stephen Ross for WholesomeWords.org from *Little Dot* by Mrs. O. F. Walton. [London]: The Religious Tract Society, [1873].

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