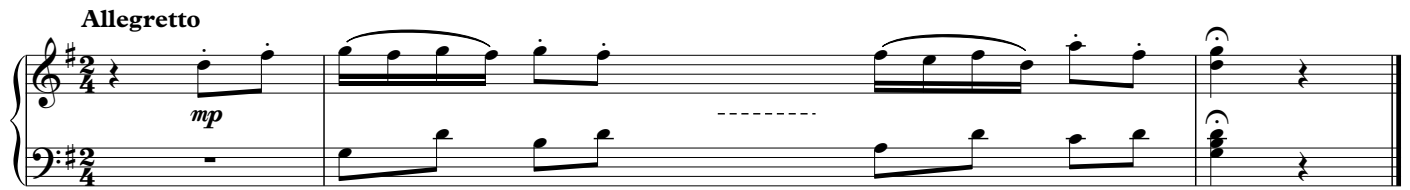


# The Story of the Little Flutist

A Musical Tale

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Ugo was small, and did not look his age. Although he would soon be twelve years old, no one took him seriously, which rather annoyed him.

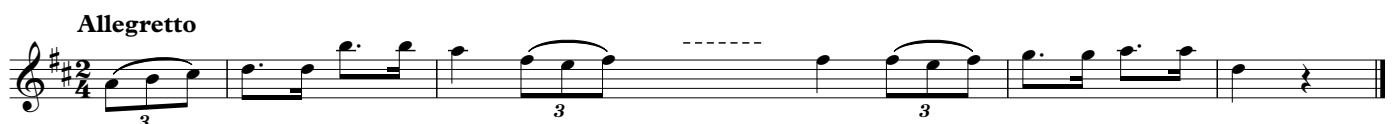
His father, who had been a widower for two years, called him "the feeble one" and his three sisters teased him all day long. So he often went off with his small flock of sheep to the countryside, far from all the taunts and mockery.

Since the death of his mother, he could no longer speak; he had almost stopped eating and hardly slept at all.



He was only happy when he was alone in the green hills.

One day, while herding his animals, his foot hit a little piece of wood. He was surprised to see that it was not just an ordinary stick, but a small flute. He picked it up and wiped it on the back of his hand before putting it to his lips. Immediately a soft and harmonious sound came out. His fingers began to play slowly at first, then faster and faster. Even though he had never played an instrument before, he was making beautiful sounds!



He took the instrument home: in the evening he would play alone in his room to forget his sadness while thinking of his mother.



Ugo realized he enjoyed playing and the more he played, the more agile his fingers became. His melodious music attracted animals and children alike. Even his sisters, usually nasty with him, became kind and defended him before his father when he was too strict.

From then on, Ugo was known as the “Little Flutist”. He had become very gifted and the entire village marveled at his playing when they listened to him.



Soon, Ugo was well-known throughout the land. It was said everywhere that he brought joy and happiness around him. The usually gloomy peasants were very happy to work in the fields, the previously poor summer harvests became abundant. The sacks were full of golden wheat and the windmills turned their wings briskly in the blue sky.

A huge happiness could be seen on Ugo's face, because when he played, he could hear the sweet and tender voice of his missing mother coming from the bottom of his heart, and this gave him courage. Sleep had finally returned to him, and he began to eat normally again.

However, Ugo remained mute which made his whole family sad.



On a beautiful summer morning, Ugo went out with his animals, a canteen strapped on his shoulder. He had lunch on the meadow, and ate a piece of bread with some leftover cheese. As it was quite hot, he kept some fruit to cool off in the afternoon.

A pleasant sun gently warmed the surrounding countryside and the wind sang in the trees. A vague sense of well-being, made stronger by the peaceful atmosphere seemed to inhabit all living beings around.

After finishing his frugal meal, Ugo played a few notes of music on his flute, as he often did to remember his dear mother. He heard her soft voice whispering thousands of wonderful things to his ear, as she used to do before.

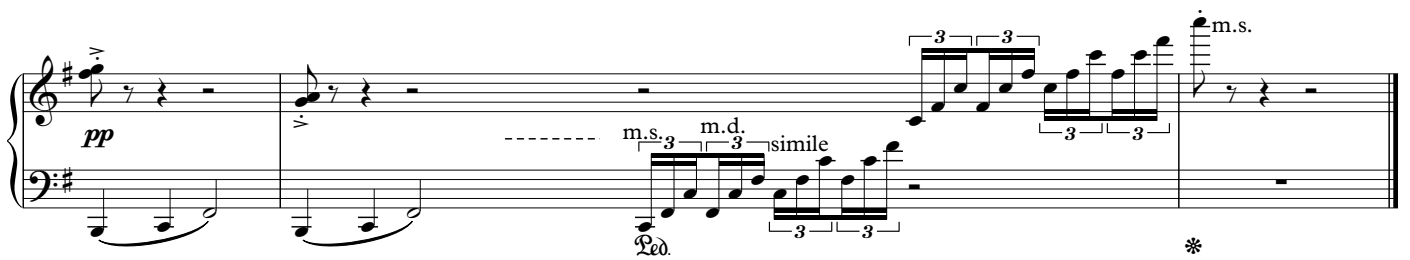
Soon, Ugo dozed off peacefully in a shady spot. He had pulled his straw hat over his eyes and at times he uttered small sighs of comfort. His flute gently fell from his hands and slid into the grass next to him.

Only Toby, the sheepdog remained alert by the flock, faithful and devoted to his master, ready to take action at any time to bring back a lost animal. He ran off suddenly, hearing the distant bleating of a lamb that had probably got lost in a hollow of the valley.

Suddenly, a branch cracked as a eerie form emerged from behind the bushes. A man appeared. His face was marked with deep wrinkles. He wore a long black cloak which reached his ankles and he limped slightly.

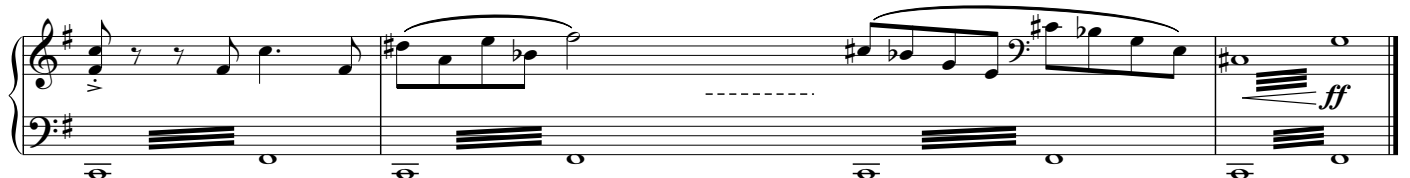


Making sure that the dog was busy at far, he approached the boy quietly and stole the little flute, stuffing it into his haversack.



He heard the dog bark on its way back, and hurried to escape lest Ugo wake up. His black shape soon disappeared in a rustle of leaves.

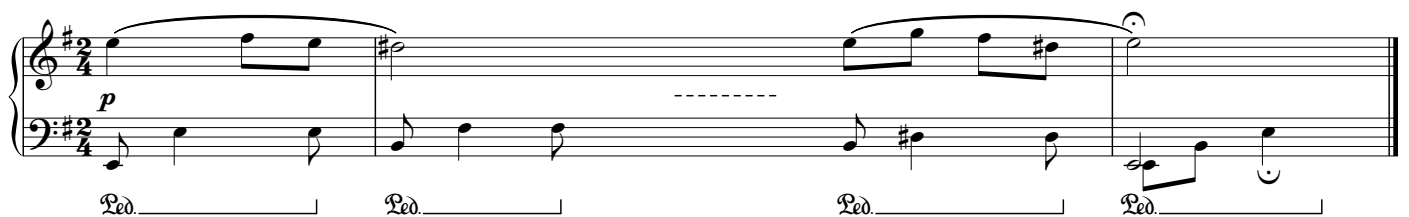
Suddenly a great wind rose and the sky darkened in a matter of seconds.



Ugo woke up with a jolt. He had just had a very strange dream. Feeling that the air had freshened, he decided to break camp fearing he would be caught by the rain. Indeed, large drops began to fall heavily on the thirsty ground.

But he was astonished not to find his little flute beside him. He looked everywhere. First in the grass, then he thought it might have rolled into the thicket. He searched in vain, the flute had indeed disappeared! Feeling helpless and distressed, he decided to head back towards the village.

His father and sisters very concerned not to see him coming home, and were waiting for him at the door. Ugo finally got back, soaking wet and very sad.



After some time, strange events occurred. Over the past few days, it had been observed that the children of the village were disappearing one by one. Frightened villagers ran everywhere, raising their arms to heaven and praying to find their offspring. So they decided to have a meeting to discuss their great misfortune. Some suggested that the loss of the flute was perhaps the real cause of these disappearances.

Ugo knew in his heart that it was the loss of his flute that had caused this tragedy. So he tried to understand how he could get the children back to the village.

He remembered that when his mother appeared to him in a dream, she would make him promise to be brave. She had told him that one day something wonderful would happen in his life, but he would have to show great patience.

Ugo pondered about it, but he still could not understand why since he had lost his little flute everything had gone awry...

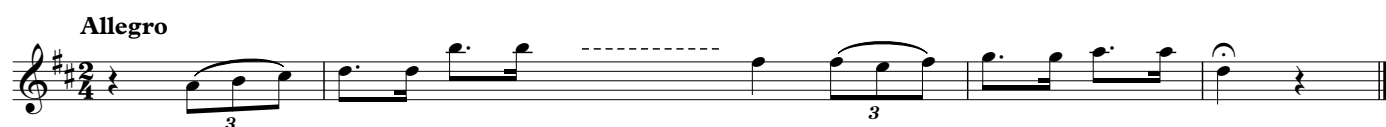
Then one day, he decided to return to the hill, thinking that maybe he would find a track. When he got to the place where he believed he had lost his instrument, a beautiful pink cloud formed above his head and gradually turned into a ladylike silhouette. He rubbed his eyes and had the joy of seeing that it was his mother - yes his mom! - holding out his arms tenderly!



Then he uttered a loud cry of joy! He, who had not been able to say a word for so many years, had finally found his voice: "Mommy!" he shouted.

But the beautiful silhouette faded gradually and gave way to a gentle breeze, and the breeze blew in his long hair like a caress. Ugo then sang with all his soul and with all his heart! And all the birds fluttered around him. And all the animals came out of their hiding places. Miraculously, a magpie laid at his feet... the little flute he had believed was lost forever. The bird had pinched it from the haversack of the wicked man who had robbed it.

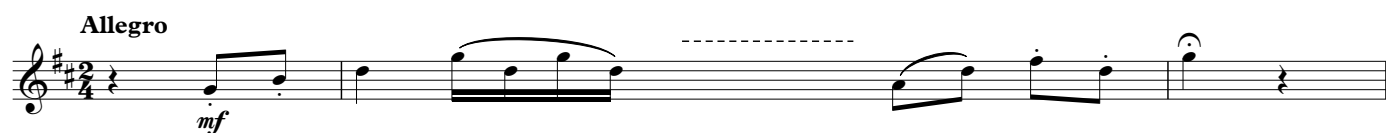
Filled with joy, Ugo immediately raised it to his lips and melodious notes whirled in the sweet and fragrant summer air.



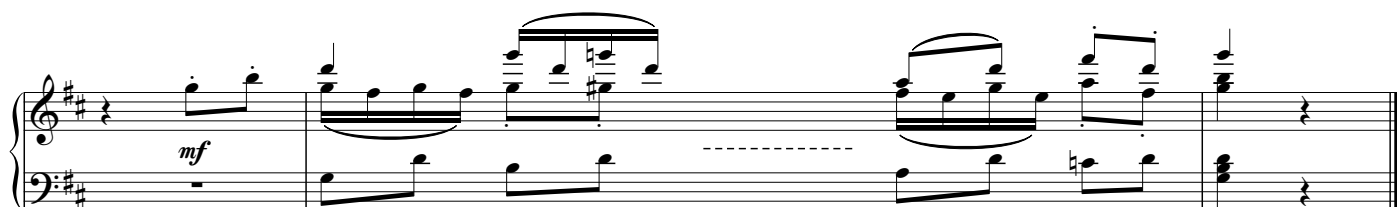
Suddenly, with a deafening roar, the hill before him opened slowly,



and a swarm of joyful children ran out.



He recognized them easily, for they were the village children who had disappeared. They ran up to him cheerfully, happy to escape the evil character who had kidnapped them and kept them prisoners.



As soon as the last of them had escaped, the hill slammed shut, capturing the wicked children thief forever.

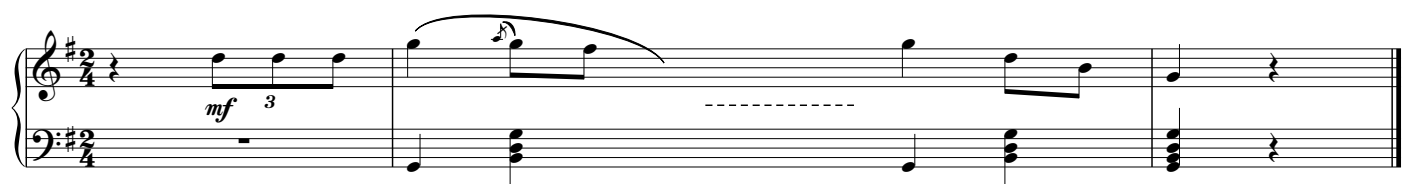


In the blue sky, the pink cloud reappeared. It was his mother who smiled at him one last time:

“You see my son, you should never lose hope. Of course, life is made of hurdles and disappointments but do not forget that it is also full of surprises and joys. I told you that something wonderful would happen in your life. Know that I’ll always be there for you. Continue being brave my son and never forget that I love you.”

At these words, tears of rain ran down her sweet face and with a last ray of sunshine, she vanished forever.

Ugo and the whole troop of merry children soon got back to the village, dancing and singing at the top of their voice. After a great feast in the honor of Ugo, life went quietly back to normal in the village.



It is said that since that day, the story of the Little Flutist was told every evening to children, and that before going to sleep, they would imagine the melodious sound of the little flute, and that it would lull them in their dreams until morning.

