And all day, every day, the Wemmicks did the same thing: They gave each other stickers. Each Wemmick had a box of golden star stickers and a box of grey dot stickers. Up and down the streets all over the city, people spent their days sticking stars or dots on one another.

The pretty ones, those with smooth wood and fine paint, always got stars. But if the wood was rough or the paint chipped, the Wemmicks gave dots.

After a while he had so many dots that he didn’t want to go outside. He was afraid he would do something silly such as forget his hat or step in the water, and then people would give him another dot. In fact, he had so many grey dots that some people came up and gave him dots for no reason at all.

Others looked down on her for having no stars, so they would give her a dot. But that wouldn’t stick either.

That’s the way I want to be, thought Punchinello.

I don’t want anyone’s marks.

So he asked the stickerless Wemmick how she did it.

“It’s easy,” Lucia replied. “Every day I go to see Eli.”

“Eli?”

“What?”

“The stickers only stick if they matter to you. The more you trust my love, the less you care about their stickers.”

“I’m not sure I understand.”

Eli smiled. “You will, but it will take time. You’ve got a lot of marks. For now, just come to see me every day and let me remind you how much I care.”

Eli lifted Punchinello off the bench and set him on the ground.