

ried in his heart; but now, knowing who she was, he could trace where she had fallen from that likeness. He was quite sure she could not recognize him, for he had changed, too, but in a different way.

"If he'd drive slower, wouldn't it be easier for her?"

The woman looked into his face in alarm.

"We want to get there as quick as we can. Seems as though we'd never get there!"

"You can't make it today."

"My husband says he'll drive till he gets there if it takes all night."

"There'll be a dead horse between the shafts if he tries it," said the Bad Man in a tone of calm conviction.

"The horse——" and the woman stopped.

"I don't reckon he sets much value on the brute from the way he drives."

The woman gazed fixedly into his face. "Did he tell you?" she questioned in a frightened whisper.

In a flash he realized what the trouble was.

"He shouldn't have done it," he said gravely.

"I know that," she answered breathlessly. "But what could he do? Our own horse had died. We had no money, and with the baby sick we just couldn't stop! If he is found out, what then?"

The Bad Man shook his head dubiously. "I'd rather not say."

"Do they hang men for horse stealing?"

"They have," he answered shortly.

Further conversation was interrupted by the sudden stopping of the wagon.

"Darnation! Which trail do I take?"

The Bad Man pointed to the right.

"There's your road. You'll find it plain enough."

"Much obliged to you, stranger. I don't reckon you're going over to Sunken River Valley yourself?"

"Hold on;" and a detaining hand was placed upon the lines the homesteader held. "That's a good horse you're driving, pardner, but if you keep this pace you'll take only his hide and bones into Sunken River Valley with you."

"I've got to get there, horse or no horse," answered the man nervously.

"How'd you like to trade? I've taken a fancy to that animal of yours, and if

you are bent on killing a horse I don't know but I'd rather have you kill the one I am riding."

The homesteader leaped from his seat on the instant.

"I'll do it!" Then he bethought him that perhaps some little display of reluctance might be seemly and natural. "Your horse is sound, of course?"

"Sound as a dollar. Look it over if you don't think so."

The woman came to the front of the wagon, listening breathlessly. Now she put the flaps aside and looked out.

Her husband turned to her. "We're going to swap horses—you don't care, do you?"

She tried to meet the glance of the Bad Man, but could not.

"It's all right, wife?"

"Yes," she answered in a low voice; "it's all right."

The animal was already free from the shafts, and at her word he led it out from between them. The Bad Man threw himself astride the stolen horse.

"I'll say good day to you, pardner—and to—you"—to the woman, and without a word more he was galloping off down the trail toward Las Vegas.

"I guess I was darn lucky to get rid of that horse," the homesteader remarked, as he gazed after the Bad Man.

The woman said nothing. She only wondered.

Vaughan Kester.

A BLIND PASSION.

THE last footfall echoed from the great gate. The hum of voices suddenly ceased as the rearmost stragglers passed out of the grateful gloom into the hard glare of the afternoon sun. Within the cathedral a few somber figures knelt among the shadows and bowed towards the blinking lights upon the altar. All was silent, save for a thin, aerial whisper of harmony that floated down from the organ gallery. At the organ sat a young man of rare beauty. His face was fair even to paleness, and his red brown hair fell about his neck in alluring disorder. His delicate lips were parted just enough to show his regular, white teeth. His eyes were large and softly brown, but they were full of an infinite emptiness. He was blind.



"ELENA, ART THOU NOT AS I HAVE SAID?"

His long, slender hands moved up and down the keyboard with the grace of supreme sensitiveness. The pink palms of his tapered fingers touched the keys with loving recognition, and the organ gave up its secrets with grave gentleness. His face softened to a smile as a new harmony was breathed out, and his lips moved as if he muttered a verse. And, indeed, he did. For he was Francesco Landini, the beloved blind poet and organist of San Marco.

Suddenly his hands paused upon a lingering chord, and his face became radiant with a great expectation which still could not light his eyes.

"I hear, I hear," he said in a low, tremulous tone; "it is thou, Elena."

"It is I, Francesco."

A young girl came out of the shadows beside the organ. She was very beautiful.

"How didst thou hear me?" she asked, with a sweet yearning in her voice. "I moved not."

"I heard a long sigh," he answered.

"It was thy music that made it," she said with childlike simplicity.

"And dost thou love my music?"

"Truly, Francesco, as I love thy poetry. For thy verses and thy harmonies are thyself."

"And which didst thou love first, sweetheart," he asked with a teasing smile, "the melodies or the self?"

"Thou silly fellow!" she said, softly striking his lips with her little fingers. "Thou knowest too well I found thee out by reading thy verse and then by coming to the cathedral to

hear thy music. I knew thee by them, and loved thee before I saw thee."

"And when thou sawest me, Elena?"

"I loved thee, Francesco."

He lifted his face. It was full of a great joy that seemed as if it would burst the curtains of fate before his eyes and make him see her. She put an arm around his neck and laid her cheek against his.

"Play on, dearest," she whispered.

Again the pink palmed fingers stroked the sleeping keys, and they responded with celestial voices, weaving and interweaving with wondrous polyphony.

"Forsooth, Francesco," said Elena, with gentle reproof in her tone, "that seemeth less like churchly music than like a madrigal of love."

"Our love is holy, dear, therefore I do not hesitate to let it speak through the organ."

For a little space they both were silent, while the few that knelt on the cold stones in the church below ceased praying and listened.

"Tell me, Elena," said Francesco, letting the full toned harmony sink to a murmur again, "hast thou been long in the church?"

"No, Francesco. It was late when my brother returned with the gondola, and brought me on my way. 'Tis very fair without. The air is so gentle today, and the sky, it seems, hath a softer blue——"

"Why dost thou stop, dear?" he asked.

She turned her head away with a look of deep distress in her eyes, and was silent. Francesco stretched forth one hand and drew her to him.

"My gentle love," he said, "thou hast not confused me. I know what blue is."

"Oh, Francesco, how could I be so thoughtless!"

"Nay, dear; thou art all tenderness and love. But have I never told thee that I was not born blind? I was a boy of ten years when a fever left me thus."

"By so much the more I must have hurt thee; for if thou knowest what thou

Elena for answer kissed his fair brow, and said:

"If I have not hurt thee, Francesco, I am glad."

"How couldst thou hurt me, dear? Why, I can even see thee."

"In fancy?"

"Aye, in fancy. Thou art the woman

I have dreamed of ever since I grew to manhood and got a man's hunger for woman's sweetness. Listen and I will tell thee how thou dost appear to me in my mind's eye."

She stood a little space apart with her hands folded before her, while he spoke at first slowly and afterward with the speed of rising passion.

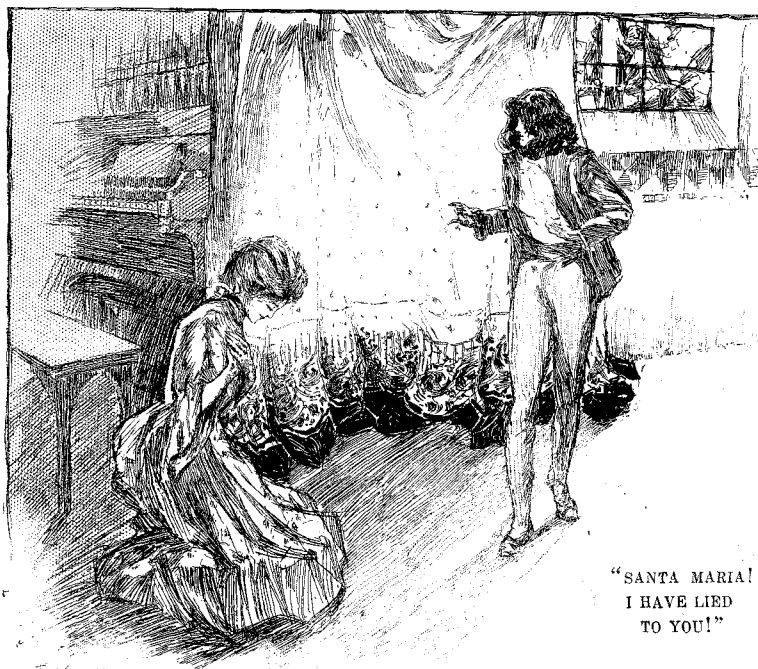
"I see a canopy of black tresses that fall in long silken curtains on either side of a broad, low brow; two great, shad-

owy eyes, as dark and soft as night upon the sea; two delicate black brows that hang above those silent wells of love like twin rainbows over mountain lakes; a fair, straight nose that holds apart two cheeks of dusky red and bars the throbbing passions in them from flowing into one resistless storm; and two arched crimson lips whereon a man might spill his soul."

There was a terrible stress of silence. Elena laid her hands upon her hair. It was yellow as the sun tipped organ pipes. She stared blankly at Francesco in her fright. Her eyes were as blue as the waters of the Adriatic, and her cheeks were delicately pink, like the wild rose.

"Elena, art thou not as I have said?"

The sound of Francesco's voice was like a blow to her. She looked to one side and then to the other, as if vainly seeking some avenue of escape. Then her gaze fell full upon his sightless eyes, turned upon her with their fathomless depths.



"SANTA MARIA!
I HAVE LIED
TO YOU!"

hast lost, my Francesco, thy sorrow is great."

"But I have lost less than thou dost fancy. I well remember all the colors of the day and the night. Once I saw a mist in the valley of Ombrone, where I was born. All the world was mouse gray and silent, till a rift in the cloud let the sun smile through, filling all the lowlands with a silver haze. Straightway the land became vocal with the songs of birds, and the gray veil fell apart and stripped the earth to its naked glory of green with all the pink rose spots where nature's kisses had fallen."

"God made thee a poet, Francesco."

"Oh, I do remember all the colors," he continued, not noting her words; "but now that mine eyes are senseless, I do imagine colors more dazzling than those of earth. I verily believe I have prophetic sight within and my soul's eyes do behold the splendors of heaven."



"THOU ART MINE, ELENA; I LOVE THEE!"

emptiness. Her face went white as the snow upon the Alps. Her lips turned blue and trembled. Her voice broke upon the air in a great sob.

"Yes."

He arose from the seat and stretched his arms out till his hand touched her shoulder. He drew her to him in a quick, passionate embrace.

"My beautiful, dark eyed love!" he murmured. "Thine image is graven on the secret shrine of my soul and in this my shadow I see thee always, my glorious light of life!"

Elena clenched her hands and bit her lip. Then from the gloom below a voice called:

"Francesco, my son, I desire to speak to thee."

"It is the good father," said Francesco. "Wait here a little and I shall return."

He kissed her yellow hair and left her. For a moment she stood swaying as if she would fall. But she tottered forward and sank in utter, abject humiliation beside the organ seat, on which she laid her head. And then the torrent of grief would no longer be checked. Tears rained from her eyes and she shook with sobs.

"Elena!"

It was Francesco's voice. He had returned and was listening with affrighted countenance.

"Elena," he said, "why dost thou weep?"

She arose and moved forward, as if she would throw her arms about him, but with a little suppressed moan she restrained herself. The next moment, with a great flood of burning shame in her cheeks, she fell upon her knees before him, and, with humbled head, spoke rapidly and passionately:

"Oh, Santa Maria! I have lied to you! —lied, lied, lied! Dost thou not hear me? I am shameless, sinful, unclean, unworthy. Oh, my God—unworthy! Francesco, my hair is yellow! Francesco, my eyes are blue. Francesco, my cheeks are but a sorry pink. And thou couldst not see from thy poor eyes, and I lied to thee. Oh, my love, my love, I cannot look upon thee more! I who have cheated thy blindness with a false beauty; I who am not true, but false; I who have mocked at the holiness of thy affliction; I must blind mine own eyes from sight of thee. Oh, Francesco, my love, farewell! See, I go! I am unworthy, unworthy!"

She arose slowly, as if in an agony of

physical pain, and with a deathlike whiteness upon her face moved away. Francesco stood panting and trembling, for the blow had struck him very heavily. But as he heard her departing, he started forward and cried:

"Stop!"

She paused and turned toward him with bowed head. She almost craved bitter words from him, for she felt that their scourge would be less sharp than the gnawing of her own conscience.

"Thou art not what I pictured thee?" he said.

"Nay, Francesco, neither outwardly nor inwardly. I am all false. Now suffer me to go; thy sightless eyes are torture to me."

Again she turned and moved toward the tapestry that curtained the gallery. Francesco pressed his hands upon his brows. He wrestled with his own soul. Then he cried out:

"Elena, wait! Dost thou say to me that thou art unworthy? Hear me. Thou didst outrage thine own conscience and stain thy pure spirit with a lie. For what? For what? For fear that thou wouldst lose me. In God's holy name, how do I deserve such marvelous love? Why, I am blessed beyond all men! Come back, Elena; come back to me."

She leaned wearily against a pillar and shook her head.

"Nay, Francesco. Thou shalt not keep me because my love is great. Thou dost humble me much, but I deserve it. Yet will I not consent to be thine because thou dost regard my love as rare. Farewell."

Again she made as if to go, but he sprang forward and seized her in his arms.

"Thou shalt not leave me!" he cried.

"Francesco, in pity release me."

"No," he said. "Thou art mine, Elena; I love thee."

"Still!" she exclaimed with rapturous wonder in her voice.

"Aye, and forever," he answered.

"Why, look you, what a sorry fool I find myself! I hear thee leaving me, and then I know it is not black hair or yellow, blue eyes or black, that I love, but thee—thee, Elena, soul of my soul, sweeter than ever, nobler and more beautiful because thou

didst lie to keep my love and then confess to lose it. Elena, thou art my life's love!"

She uttered a single passionate cry, wound her fair arms around his neck, and pressed her lips to his.

W. J. Henderson.

WITH HAMLET LEFT OUT.



HERE was only one vacant seat, and Leighton sank into it with a sigh of weariness and but a passing glance bestowed on the occupant of the window end of it. He noted merely that it was a woman, her face turned the other way and almost wholly concealed by the hood of the waterproof she had drawn over it to shut out drafts. She was huddled up in the attitude that betokens sleep, or an attempt to obtain it, in travelers by night in day coaches, and Leighton lost no time in following her example. It was dog tiring work to be routed out of a comfortable sleeper and made to wait three quarters of an hour at a ramshackle flag station till the owl train came along that would bring them with diminished grandeur to the end of their journey.

It was small wonder, then, that Leighton was more successful than three fourths of the regular passengers in losing the sense of present misery in slumber that might inspire restful dreams of the past or the future. In Leighton's case it was of the past, and a mighty pleasant past, too. He was back in England, his boyhood's home. It was a bank holiday afternoon and they were punting on the Thames. At least, they had been punting; just now they were tied to the bank under a spreading tree. He was stretched comfortably out in the bottom of the boat, his head on the seat, and his eyes on the girl who was reading to him from her pile of cushions in the stern. He didn't know what she was reading, and it did not matter about this in the least, as he paid no attention to the book. He had asked her to read merely in order that he might enjoy watching her face without being detected in the act.

What a beautiful throat she had! He wondered if she ever realized this herself. And that dimple! The impulse to make her smile so that it should come still more in evidence, was irresistible. But at that