

THE "SILENT LAND."

She would not allow him to be buried, but carried the corpse wherever she went.—"Life of Joanna of Spain."

I.

LONELY in her palace weeping,
Dim-eyed watch beside him keeping,
Deemed she not that he was sleeping,
Far away in the "Silent Land."

II.

On couch of gold and purple laid,
Banner and crown and cross displayed,
She had herself her love arrayed,
For his sleep in the "Silent Land."

III.

Vain all consolation given,
Vain their earnest talk of Heaven—
Talk of sins and sorrows riven,
By that sleep in the "Silent Land."

IV.

She only smiled and shook her head,
And bade them come with lighter tread,
For he was sleeping, and not dead,
Far away in the "Silent Land."

V.

So she sat beside him ever,
Widow's garments wore she never,
Nought her heart from his could sever,
Tho' he slept in the "Silent Land."

VI.

Watching by that which once had been,
Never again to smile was seen
That woful, widowed, distraught queen,
Till she drew near the "Silent Land."

VII.

But then in the gate once more a bride,
She laid her down at Philip's side,
And calmly drifted down the tide
To her sleep in the "Silent Land."

LA BABBIATA.

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"Leave her alone," said the lad; "she has a strong will; what she does not wish, not even a saint could persuade her to do;" and with that he took a hurried leave, ran down to the boat, undid the rope, and stood waiting for the girl.

She nodded once more to the hostess of the tavern, and then sauntered slowly towards the boat. She first looked round, as if she expected other passengers to appear. On the shore, however, there was not a human being; the fishermen were either asleep or out at sea with their lines and nets; at the doors sat a few women and children asleep or spinning, and the strangers who had come over in the morning were waiting for the cool of day to return. Laurella could not look back very long, for before she knew what he was doing, Antonino had taken her in his arms, and carried her like a child to the boat. Then he sprang in after her, and with a few strokes of the oar they were on the open sea. She had seated herself at the forepart of the boat, with her back half turned towards him, so that he could only see her profile; her features were graver than usual; there was an obstinate expression round the delicate nostril; over the low brow the hair fell thickly, and the full lips were tightly closed. After they had gone on a little while in silence, the sun began to scorch her, so she took the cloth in which the bread was wrapped and threw it over her head. Then she began to make her dinner of the bread, for she had tasted nothing at Capri. Antonino could not see her do that for long. He took out one of the orange baskets, and handing two oranges to her, said: "There is something to eat with your bread, Laurella; don't think that I kept them for you; they rolled out of the basket into the boat, and I found them when I put the empty baskets back again."

"You eat them," said Laurella; "the bread is enough for me."

"They are refreshing in the heat," said he, "and you have been a long way."

"They gave me a glass of water up on the mountain," said she; "that has refreshed me already."

"As you like," said he, and let them drop back into the basket.

Repeated silence. The sea was smooth as a mirror, and hardly rippled round the boat; the white sea-birds who built in the caves on the shore pursued their prey without their usual cry.

"You might take the two oranges to your mother," began Antonino again.

"We have some at home," said she, "and when they are finished, I shall buy fresh ones."

"Oh, take them to her from me."

"She does not know you," said she.

"You might tell her who I am," persisted he.

"I don't know you either," said she.

It was not the first time that she had so ignored him; a year before, when the painter had just come to Sorrento, it happened on a Saturday that Antonino was playing "Boccia" with other young fellows of the place in the square near the principal street. There the artist first met Laurella, who passed along without seeing him, with a pitcher of water upon her head. The Neapolitan, struck with her appearance, stood and gazed after her, though he was standing in the very middle of the space chosen for the game, and might have cleared it in three steps. A ball which hit him roughly on the ankle soon reminded him that this was not the place for such meditations. He looked round as if he expected an apology; the young boatman who had thrown the ball stood silent and defiant in the midst of his friends, so that the stranger found it advisable to avoid an altercation, and walk away. Yet the incident had been talked about more than once when the painter openly courted Laurella.

"I don't know him," said she, hesitatingly, when the painter asked her whether she refused him for that rude lad.

They sat in the boat, like the bitterest enemies, and yet the hearts of both were beating wildly. The good-tempered face of Antonino was violently flushed; he struck into the water so that the spray splashed over him, and his lips trembled as if with angry words. She pretended not to notice him, but putting on her most careless look, leant over the edge of the boat, and let the water run rippling through her fingers. Only her eyebrows still quivered, and it was in vain that she held her wet hands against her burning cheeks to cool them. Now they were in the middle of the sea; far and near not a sail was to be seen; the island had disappeared, and the coast lay far away bathed in sunshine; not even a seagull broke the solitude.

Antonino looked round; a thought seemed to rise within him. The flush suddenly died from his cheek, and he let the oars fall.

Involuntarily, Laurella turned to look at him, startled, but fearless.

"I must put an end to this," broke forth the other; "it has lasted too long already, and I only wonder that it has not made an end of me. You don't know me, you say? Have you not observed long enough how I have passed you as if senseless, because all the while my heart was bursting to speak to you? and you, you made a wicked face, and turned your back upon me!"

"What had I to say to you?" said she, shortly; "I saw quite well what you were after; I was not just going to give myself up to the first person who cared for me; for as a husband, I don't like you; neither you nor anybody else."

"Nor anybody," screamed he; "you won't always say that, because you have sent off the painter. Bah! why you were only a child then; some day you will feel rather dull, and then, proud as you are, you will take the first you can get; no one knows his future."

"Possibly I may some day change my mind: what does it matter to you?"

"What matters it to me?" he broke forth, and sprang from the bench so that the boat all but upset—"what matters it to me? and you can ask such a question when you see the state I am in. I only know that I'd rather die than allow myself to be so treated!"

"Have I ever engaged myself to you?" said she; "can I help it if your head is turned? What power have you over me?"

"Ah! true enough," said he; "it's certainly not written down, nor has the lawyer put it into Latin, and sealed it: but this I know, that I have as much right to you as to go to heaven if I am an honest fellow; do you fancy that I will stand by to see you go to church with another man, while all the girls go by and shrug their shoulders? and I to be insulted like that?"

"Do as you like," said she; "I shan't be afraid, however much you threaten; besides I shall do as I like!"

"You will not say so long," said he, and trembled from head to foot; "I am man enough not to have my whole life blighted by such a piece of insolence. Do you know that you are here in my power, and must do what I like?"

It was now her turn to tremble, but she turned her flashing eyes upon him.

"Kill me if you dare," said she, slowly.

"One must not do anything by halves," and his voice grew softer; "there is room for us both in the sea; I can't help you, child," and he spoke in a dreaming, almost tender tone; "but we must go down, both of us, and at the same time, and now!" he screamed, and suddenly seized her with both arms. But in an instant he drew back, his right hand covered with blood, for she had bitten him deep into it.

"Must I do what you like?" screamed she, and pushed him from her; "let us see if I am in your power," and with that she sprang over the edge of the boat into the water, and for an instant disappeared; she rose again, however, directly. Her little skirt was clinging tightly to her, her hair was undone by the waves, and streamed about her neck; she made no sound, but swam with all her might towards the shore.

He stood in the boat leaning forwards, his looks fixed upon her, as if a miracle was being worked before his eyes. At last he roused himself, seized the oars, and with all the strength he could muster, pulled after her, the blood all the time dropping from his hand into the bottom of the boat. In an instant he was by her side, quickly as she swam.

"By the Holy Virgin," he screamed, "come into the boat; I was mad, God knows; what was the matter with me? it was like a flash of lightning, so that I did not know what I said or did. You are to forgive me, Laurella, only spare your life, and come back into the boat!"

She swam as if she heard nothing.

"You cannot swim to land," said he, "it is still two miles; think of your mother; if anything were to happen to you, she would die of grief."

She measured the distance from the coast with her eye, then without a word she swam to the boat, and grasped the side.

He stood up to help her, and as he did so, his jacket, which was lying on the bench, slipped into the sea as the boat leaned over to one side by the weight of the girl.

Dexterously she lifted herself into the boat, and took her former seat.

When he saw her safe he took to his oars again.

She meanwhile wrung out her little skirt and squeezed the water from her hair; as she did this she saw the blood in the bottom of the boat; she cast a quick glance at his hand, with which he plied the oar as if there was nothing the matter with it.

"There!" said she, and handed him her handkerchief.

He shook his head, and rowed on.

At last she went up to him, and bound the handkerchief tightly around the deep wound. Then she took the oar from him, much as he tried to hinder her, and seated herself opposite him, not looking at him, but steadily at the oar, which was stained with his blood, and with which she rowed on swiftly and steadily.

They were both pale and silent; as they drew nearer to land, they met several fishermen, who were going to lay their nets for the night.

They called out to Antonino, and teased Laurella, but neither looked up nor answered a