

and sicklier visibly under his eye. Again and again he asked her the selfsame question—had she received tidings of her cousin; and again and again she murmured the same answer in tones which could hardly conceal that her heart was nigh to breaking.

"No tidings whatso'er."

"We'll not forget to drink to his health when he does come—you and I together and he to ours—all out of the same cup, as I said before."

The Scholar went back to his room and handled, as he handled many times, a certain phial which had stood waiting there all these months.

"That is the cup we pledge with; and eternal night on the turee of us," he murmured.

Truth had been evident in his wife's reply. She did not know where her lover was, or why he tarried so long. Looking from his window he considered matters; and going back and seeking her out he informed her that on the

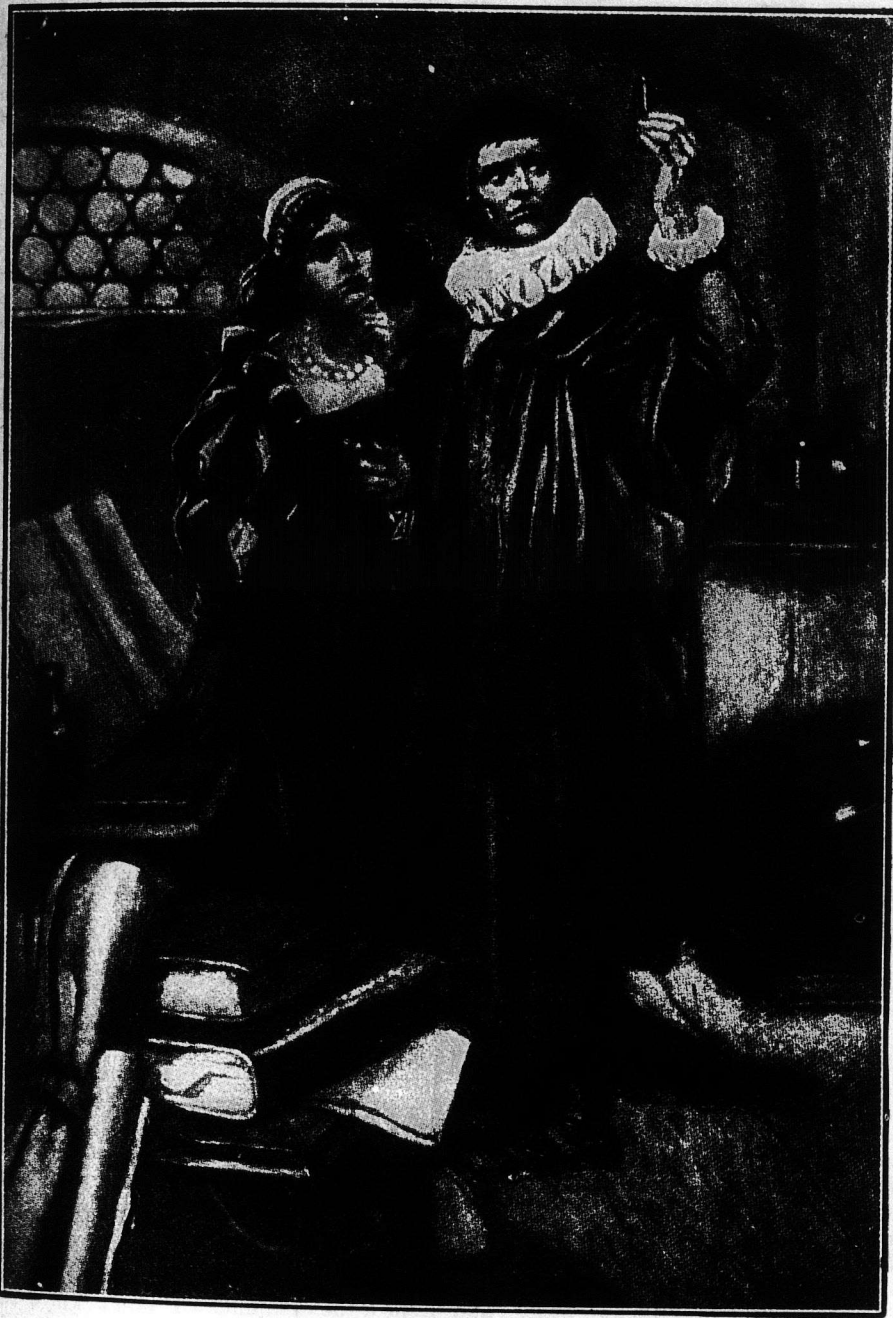
that moment, and against himself. He entered into her desire.

"The cup shall be for one, and not for three," he said within his heart. "For me, if she so wills it—yea, if she so wills it. Why should I stand as a hindrance to what Heaven has ordained."

The Scholar returned to Alis, and then "See here, sweet one," he said, almost in tones of tender mockery. "Behold a physisic for all the ills and woes of man."

He held aloft the slender phial, upon which the woman's gaze lingered with a strange fascination. "How say you, good husband," she murmured in flexuous accents, and the dove-like eyes left the phial for one instant to rest upon his face.

"By my faith," he replied lightly, "it is even as I say. Ten drops from this tiny bottle and the strongest man would sleep for ever more. Nay, and it has no taste nor smell; 'tis a weapon more deadly than any sword or dagger



"Ten drops from this tiny bottle and the strongest man would sleep for evermore."

morrow he intended to take a journey connected with the science which now occupied his time.

At the next dawn he departed; and when a week had passed he was again at home in his towered retreat. That which had been the secret object of his journey he had learned, the time of Doria's return, and it was unexpectedly near.

"I have heard that he returns to Firenze in three days," he uttered carelessly, as one who speaks of a trifling matter heard of accidentally.

"Three days!" She could scarce refrain from clapping her hands in a heaving transport of joy.

"Aye, on the eve of St. John."

He left her. Her inadvertent joy had been so childishly simple as to wear the character of sublime beauty; and the sight of such exaltation worked in him like a leaven, till it had effected a radical enlargement in his appreciations. What was his worn and musty life beside the lives of these two divine young loves? He sided with her from

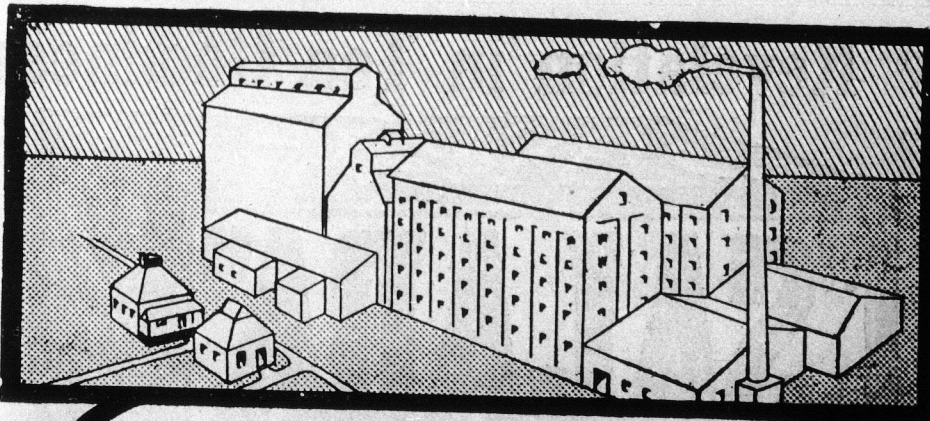
in the hand of a bold man or"—his quiet eyes noted a sudden flash in hers—"or, for that matter, a bold woman, either."

He put the phial back upon the shelf, and laughed a little, as at some inward thought.

"It were a sword in thy hand, gentle Alis," he scoffed, and then he went forth from his chamber to pace to and fro in the garden alleys, as had been his wont of late.

"A sword in thy hand," he repeated to himself in a musing tone. "Nay, a key rather; a key to unlock the prison for thee, sweet Alis." He smiled, and this time without bitterness; rather a great tenderness dwelt in his grave eyes.

The three days that were to elapse ere the return of the young clerk had all but passed, and as yet Alis had heard no further tidings of him any more than had her husband. Vague trouble filled her mind, and her passionate heart struggled like a wild bird pent in a narrow cage; she wandered often in the garden, plucking flowers and letting them fall to the ground,



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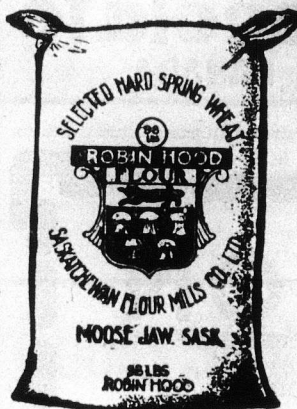
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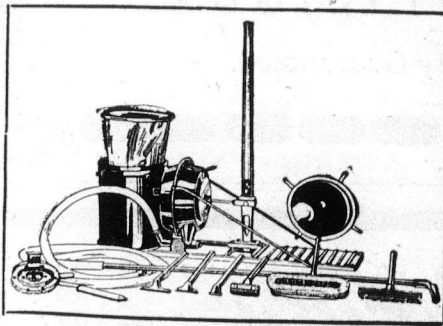
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