

growing hair stirring in the light sea breeze about his brow, bronzed by sun and wind. His slight figure swayed with an easy motion that had the grace of perfectly controlled activity, and his brown hands gripped the great oars with a firmness almost of steel, as the boat glided under the lee of the island, and vanished from the eyes of the watchers into the shadowy pool of San Francesco.

When the boat had disappeared, Vere lifted herself up and turned round to her mother.

"Isn't he a jolly boy, Madre?"

"Yes," said Hermione.

She spoke in a low voice. Her eyes were still on the sea where the boat had passed.

"Yes," she repeated, almost as if to herself.

For the first time a little cloud went over Vere's sensitive face.

"Madre, how horribly I must have disappointed you!" she said.

The mother did not break into protestations. She always treated her child with sincerity.

"Just for a moment, Vere," she answered. "And then, very soon, you made me feel how much more intimate can be the relationship between a mother and a daughter than between a mother and any son."

"Is that true, really?"

"I think it is."

"But why should that be?"

"Don't you think Monsieur Emile could tell you much better than I? I feel all the things, you know, that he can explain."

There was a touch of something that was like a half-hidden irony in her voice.

"Monsieur Emile! Yes, I think he understands almost everything about people," said Vere, quite without irony.

"But could a man explain such a thing as well as a woman? I don't think so."

"We have the instincts perhaps, men the vocabulary. Come, Vere, I want to look over into the Saint's Pool and see what those men are doing."

Vere laughed.

"Take care, Madre, or Gaspare will be jealous."

A soft look came into Hermione's face.

"Gaspare and I know each other," she said quietly.

"But he could be jealous—horribly jealous."

"Of you, perhaps, Vere, but never of me. Gaspare and I have passed through too much together for anything of that kind. Nobody could ever take his place with me, and he knows it quite well."