

him—well, recalling him as he had been in Sicily. He went away from me so suddenly that somehow his going, even when it had happened, for a long time seemed to be an impossibility. And I fancied, I suppose, that my child would be him in a way."

"Come back?"

"Or never quite gone."

The girl was silent for a moment.

"Povera Madre mia!" at last she said.

But she did not seem distressed for herself. No personal grievance, no doubt of complete love assailed her. And the fact that this was so demonstrated, very quietly and very completely, the relation existing between this mother and this child.

"I wonder, now," Vere said presently, "why I never specially wished to be a boy until to-day—because, after all, it can't be from you that the wish came. If it had been it must have come long ago. And it didn't. It only came when I heard that boy's voice. He sings like all the boys, you know, that have ever enjoyed themselves, that are still enjoying themselves in the sun."

"I wish he would sing once more!" said Hermione.

"Perhaps he will. Look! He's getting into the boat. And the men are stopping too."

The boy was very quick in his movements. Almost before Vere had finished speaking he had pulled on his blue jersey and white trousers, and again taken the big oars into his hands. Standing up, with his face set towards the islet, he began once more to propel the boat towards it. And as he swung his body slowly to and fro he opened his lips and sang lustily once more,

"O Napoli, bella Napoli!"

Hermione and Vere sat silently listening as the song grew louder and louder, till the boat was almost in the shadow of the islet, and the boy, with a strong stroke of the left oar turned its prow towards the pool over which San Francesco watched.

"They're going into the Saint's Pool to have a siesta," said Vere. "Isn't he a splendid boy, Madre?"

As she spoke the boat was passing almost directly beneath them, and they saw its name painted in red letters on the prow, *Sirena del Mare*. The two men, one young, one middle-aged, were staring before them at the rocks. But the boy, more sensitive, perhaps, than they were to the watching eyes of women, looked straight up to Vere and to her mother. They saw his level rows of white teeth gleaming as the song came out from his parted lips, the shining of his eager dark eyes, full of the careless merriment of youth, the black, low-