

I kept on saying this. But there is something within one which rises up and defies a lie—however beautiful the lie is, however noble it is. And I think even a lie can sometimes be both. Don't you, Emile?"

It almost seemed to him for a moment that she knew his lie and Gaspare's.

"Yes," he said, "I do think so."

"Well, that lie of mine—it was defied. And it had no more courage."

"I want you to tell me something," he said quietly. "I want you to tell me what has happened to-day?"

"To-day?"

"Yes. Something has happened either to-day or very recently—I am sure of it—that has stirred up within you this feeling of acute dissatisfaction. It was always there. But something has called it into the open. What has done that?"

Hermione hesitated.

"Perhaps you don't know," he said.

"I was wondering—yes, I do know. I must be truthful with myself—with you. I do know. But it seems so strange, so almost inexplicable, and even rather absurd."

"Truth often seems absurd."

"It was that boy, that diver for *frutti di mare*—Ruffo."

"The boy with the Arab eyes?"

"Yes. Of course I have seen many boys full of life and gaiety and music. There are so many in Italy. But—well, I don't know—perhaps it was partly Vere."

"How do you mean?"

"Vere was so interested in him. It may have been that. Or perhaps it was something in his look and in his voice when he was singing. I don't really know what it was. But that boy made me feel—more horribly than I have ever felt before—that Vere is not enough. Emile, there is some hunger so persistent, so peculiar, so intense, that one feels as if it must be satisfied eventually, as if it were impossible for it not to be satisfied. I think the human hunger for immortal life is like that, and I think my hunger for a son is like that. I know my hunger can never be satisfied. And yet it lives on in me just as if it knew more than I know, as if it knew that it could and must. After all these years I can't, no, I can't reconcile myself to the fact that Maurice was taken from me so utterly, that he died without stamping himself upon a son. It seems as if it couldn't be. And I feel to-day that I cannot bear that it is."

There were tears standing in her eyes. She had spoken with a force of feeling, with a depth of sincerity, that startled Artois, intimately as he knew her. Till this moment he had