

her shoulders, began to lean heavily upon them, to press them, to grip them till she suffered a physical discomfort that almost amounted to pain.

"I shall seek a better way—I shall seek it. And the only thing I ask you to-night is—that you will not forbid me to seek it."

The pressure of his hands upon her shoulders was becoming almost unbearable. But she bore it. She bore it for she loved it. Perhaps that night no words could have quite convinced her of his desperate honesty of soul in that moment, perhaps no sound of his voice could have quite convinced her. But the unconsciously cruel pressure of his hands upon her convinced her absolutely. She felt as if it was his soul—the truth of his soul—which was grasping her—which was closing upon her. And she felt that only a thing that needed could grasp, could close like that.

And even in the midst of her chaos of misery and doubt she felt, she knew, that it was herself that was needed.

"I will not forbid you to seek it," she said.

He sighed deeply. His hands dropped down from her. They stood for a moment quite still. Then he said, in a low voice :

"You took the *fattura della morte* ?"

"Yes," she answered. "It was in—in her room at Mergellina to-day."

"Have you got it still ?"

"Yes."

She held out her right hand. He took the death-charm from her.

"She made it—the woman who wronged you, made it to bring death into the Casa del Mare."

"Not to me ?"

"No, to Peppina. Has it not brought another death ? or, at least, does it not typify another death to-night, the death of a great lie ? I think it does. I look upon it as a symbol. But—but—— ?"

He looked at her. He was at the huge doorway of the Palace. The sea murmured below him. Hermione understood, and bent her head.

Then Artois threw the death-charm far away into the sea.

"Let me take you to the boat. Let me take you back to the island."

She did not answer him. But when he moved she followed him, till they came to the rocks, and saw floating on the dim water the two white boats.

"Gaspare !"

"Vengo !"