

"But that's not enough. The rôle of starter to those who race—I haven't the temperament to reconcile myself to that. It's not that I have in me a conceit which demands to be fed. But I have in me a force that clamours to exercise itself. Only when I was living on Monte Amato with Maurice did I feel that that force was being used as God meant it to be used."

"In loving?"

"In loving passionately something that was utterly worthy to be loved."

Artois was silent. He knew Hermione's mistake. He knew what had never been told him: that Maurice had been false to her for the love of the peasant girl Maddalena. He knew that Maurice had been done to death by the betrayed girl's father, Salvatore. And Gaspere knew those things too. But through all these years these two men had so respected silence, the nobility of it, the grand necessity of it in certain circumstances of life, that they had never spoken to each other of the black truth known to them both. Indeed, Artois believed that even now, after more than sixteen years, if he ventured one word against the dead man Gaspere would be ready to fly at his throat in defence of the loved Padrone. For this divine and persistent loyalty Artois had a sensation of absolute love. Between him and Gaspere there must always be the barrier of a great and mutual reserve. Yet that very reserve, because there was something truly delicate, and truly noble in it, was as a link of steel between them. They were watchdogs of Hermione. They had been watchdogs through all these years, guarding her from the knowledge of a truth. And so well had they done her service that now to-day she was able to say, with clasped hands and the light of passion in her eyes:

"Something that was utterly worthy to be loved."

When Artois spoke again he said:

"And that force cannot be fully used in loving Vere?"

"No, Emile. Is that very horrible, very unnatural?"

"Why should it be?"

"I have tried—I have tried for years, Emile, to make Vere enough. I have even been false with myself. I have said to myself that she was enough. I did that after I knew that I could never produce work of any value. When Vere was a baby I lived only for her. Again, when she was beginning to grow up, I tried to live, I did live only for her. And I remember I used to say, I kept on saying to myself, 'This is enough for me. I do not need any more than this. I have had my life. I am now a middle-aged woman. I must live in my child. This will be my satisfaction. This is my satisfaction. This is using rightly and naturally all that force I feel within me.'