

think he ever reads anything, except the *Giorno* and the *Mattino*. He doesn't care for politics, and likes cards, but apparently not too much. They're no craze with him. He knows Naples inside out, and is as frank as a child that has never been punished."

"I should think he must be decidedly attractive?"

"Oh, he is. One great attraction he has—he appears to have no sense at all that difference of age can be a barrier between two men. He is twenty-four, and I am what I am. He is quite unaware that there is any gulf between us. In every way he treats me as if I were twenty-four."

"Is that refreshing or embarrassing?"

"I find it generally refreshing. His family accepts the situation with perfect naïveté. I am welcomed as Doro's chum with all the good-will in the world."

Hermione could not help laughing, and Artois echoed her laugh.

"Merely talking about him has made you look years younger," she declared. "The influence of the day has lifted from you."

"It would not have fallen upon Isidoro, I think. And yet he is full of sentiment. He is a curious instance of a very common Neapolitan obsession."

"What is that?"

"He is entirely obsessed by woman. His life centres round woman. You observe I use the singular. I do that because it is so much more plural than the plural in this case. His life is passed in love-affairs, in a sort of chaos of amours."

"How strange that is!"

"You think so, my friend?"

"Yes. I never can understand how human beings can pass from love to love, as many of them do. I never could understand it, even before I—even before Sicily."

"You are not made to understand such a thing."

"But you do?"

"I? Well, perhaps. But the loves of men are not as your love."

"Yet his was," she answered. "And he was a true Southerner, despite his father."

"Yes, he was a true Southerner," Artois replied.

For once he was off his guard with her, and uttered his real thought of Maurice, not without a touch of the irony that was characteristic of him.

Immediately he had spoken he was aware of his indiscretion. But Hermione had not noticed it. He saw by her eyes that she was far away in Sicily. And when the boat slipped into the Saint's Pool, and Gaspare came to the water's edge to hold