

grave and saw that it was properly kept. But Hermione remained in Italy. For some time she lived near Florence, first at Fiesole, later at Bellosguardo. When the summer heat came she took a villa at the Abetone. Or she spent some months with Vere beside the sea. As the girl grew older she developed a passion for the sea, and seemed to care little for the fascination of the pine forests. Hermione, noting this, gave up going to the Abetone and took a house by the sea for the whole summer. Two years they were at Santa Margherita, one year at Sorrento.

Then, sailing one evening on the sea towards Bagnoli, they saw the house on the islet beyond the Pool of San Francesco. Vere was enchanted by it.

"To live in it," she exclaimed, "would be almost like living in the sea."

Hermione, too, was fascinated by its situation, the loneliness, the wildness, yet the radiant cheerfulness of it. She made inquiries, found that it was owned by a Neapolitan who scarcely ever went there, and eventually succeeded in getting it on a long lease. For two years now she and Vere had spent the summer there.

Artois had noticed that since Hermione had been in the Casa del Mare an old desire had begun to revive in her. She spoke more frequently of Sicily. Often she stood on the rock and looked across the sea, and he knew that she was thinking of those beloved coasts—of the Ionian waters, of the blossoming almond trees among the olives and the rocks, of the scarlet geraniums glowing among the thorny cactus, of the giant watercourses leading up into the mountains. A hunger was awake in her, now that she had a home so near the enchanted island.

He realised it. But he was no longer much afraid. So many years had passed that even if Hermione revisited Marechiaro he believed there would be little or no danger now of her ever learning the truth. It had never been known in the village, and if it had been suspected, all the suspicions must have long ago died down. He had been successful in his protection. He was thankful for that. It was the one thing he had been able to do for the friend who had done so much for him.

The tragedy had occurred because of him. Because of him all knowledge of it had been kept from Hermione, and would now be kept from her for ever—because of him and Gaspare.

This he had been able to do. But how powerless he was, and how powerless was Vere!

Now he looked vaguely at the villas of Posilipo, and he realised this thoroughly.