

"I've made you sad to-day by my complaining," she said, with self-rebuke; "I'm sorry. You didn't realise?"

"How it was with you? No, not quite—I thought you were more at peace than you are."

"Till to-day I believe I was half deceived too."

"That singing boy, that—what is his name?"

"Ruffo."

"That Ruffo, I should like to run a knife into him under the left shoulder-blade. How dare he, a ragamuffin from some hovel of Naples, make you know that you are unhappy?"

"How strange it is what outside things, or people who have no connection with us or with our lives, can do to us unconsciously!" she said. "I have heard a hundred boys sing on the Bay, seen a hundred rowing their boats into the Pool—and just this one touches some chord, and all the strings of my soul quiver."

"Some people act upon us somewhat as nature does sometimes. And Vere paid the boy. There is another irony of unconsciousness. Vere, bone of your bone, flesh of your flesh, rewards your pain-giver. How we hide ourselves from those we love best and live with most intimately! You, her mother, are a stranger to Vere. Does not to-day prove it?"

"Ah, but Vere is not a stranger to me. That is where the mother has the advantage of the child."

Artois did not make any response to this remark. To cover his silence, perhaps, he grasped the oars more firmly and began to back the boat out of the cave. Both felt that it was no longer necessary to stay in this confessional of the rock.

As they came out under the greyness of the sky, Hermione, with a change of tone, said:

"And your friend? The Marchese—what is his name?"

"Isidoro Panacci."

"Tell me about him."

"He is a very perfect type of a complete Neapolitan of his class. He has scarcely travelled at all, except in Italy. Once he has been in Paris, where I met him, and once to Lucerne for a fortnight. Both his father and mother are Neapolitans. He is a charming fellow, utterly unintellectual, but quite clever; shrewd, sharp at reading character, marvellously able to take care of himself, and hold his own with anybody. A cat to fall on his feet! He is apparently born without any sense of fear, and with a profound belief in destiny. He can drive four-in-hand, swim for any number of hours without tiring, ride—well, as an Italian cavalry officer can ride, and that is not badly. His accomplishments? He can speak French—abominably, and pick out all imaginable tunes on the piano, putting instinctively quite tolerable basses. I don't