

you. Vere and I were afraid, when your room was dark and we heard nothing. But even then I did not fully understand how much I needed you. I only understood that in the Palace of the Spirits, when—when you hated me——”

“I don’t think I ever hated you.”

“Hatred, you know, is the other side of love.”

“Then perhaps I did. Yes—I did.”

“How long my conscience was inactive, was useless to me! It needed a lesson, a terrible lesson. It needed a cruel blow to rouse it.”

“And mine!” she answered, in a low voice.

“We shall make many mistakes, both of us,” he said.

“But I think, after that night, we can never for very long misunderstand each other. For that night we were sincere.”

“Let us always be sincere.”

“Sincerity is the rock on which one should build the house of life.”

“Let us—you and I—let us build upon it our palace of the spirits.”

Then they were silent again. They were silent until the boat passed the point, until in the distance the island appeared, even until the prow of the boat grated against the rock beneath the window of the Casa del Mare.

As Hermione got out Gaspare bent to kiss her hand.

“Benedicite!” he murmured.

And, as she pressed his hand with both of hers, she answered:

“Benedicite!”

That night, not very late, but when darkness had fallen over the sea, Hermione said to Vere:

“I am going out for a little, Vere.”

“Yes, Madre.”

The child put her arms round her mother and kissed her. Hermione tenderly returned the kiss, looked at Artois, and went out.

She made her way to the brow of the island, and stood still for awhile, drinking in the soft wind that blew to her from Ischia. Then she descended to the bridge, and looked down into the Pool of San Francesco.

The Saint’s light was burning steadily. She watched it for a moment, and, while she watched it, she presently heard beneath her a boy’s voice singing softly the song of Mergellina:

“Oh, dolce luna bianca de l’ estate

Mi fugge il sonno accanto a la marina:

Mi destan le dolcissime serate,

Gli occhi di Rosa e il mar di Mergellina.”