

He looked at her. She had on a black hat, over which a white veil was fastened. It was tied beneath her chin, and hung down in a cloud over her breast. It made him think of the strange misty clouds which brooded about the breasts of the mountains of Ischia.

"Shall we go?" she said.

"Yes. What is Vere doing?"

"She is in her room."

"What is she doing there?"

"Reading, I suppose. She oftens shuts herself up. She loves reading almost more than I do."

"Well?"

Hermione led the way downstairs. When they were outside, on the crest of the islet, the peculiar sickliness of the weather struck them both more forcibly.

"This is the strangest scirocco effect I think I have ever seen," said Artois. "It is as if nature were under the influence of a drug, and had fallen into a morbid dream, with eyes wide open, and pale, inert and folded hands. I should like to see Naples to-day, and notice if this weather has any effect upon that amazing population. I wonder if my young friend, Marchese Isidoro Panacci—— By the way, I haven't told you about him?"

"No."

"I must. But not now. We will continue our former conversation. Where shall we find the boat, the small one?"

"Gaspore will bring it.—Gaspore! Gaspore!"

"Signora!" cried a strong voice below.

"La piccola barca!"

"Va bene, Signora!"

They descended slowly. It would have been almost impossible to do anything quickly on such a day. The smallest movement, indeed, seemed almost an outrage, likely to disturb the great white dreamer of the sea. When they reached the foot of the cliff Gaspore was there, holding the little craft in which Vere had gone out with Ruffo.

"Do you want me, Signora?"

"No, thank you, Gaspore. Don Emilio will row me. We are only going a very little way."

She stepped in. As Artois followed her he said to Gaspore:

"Those fishermen have gone?"

"Five minutes ago, Signore. There they are!"

He pointed to a boat at some distance, moving slowly in the direction of Posilipo.

"I have been talking with them. One says he is of my country, a Sicilian."

"The boy?"