

with her husband. Artois seized upon this hint of what was in the peasant's mind, and bemoaned with him his situation. The house ought to be occupied, the land all about it, up to the very door, and behind upon the sunny mountain-side, planted with American vines. If it belonged to him that was what he would do—plant American vines, and when the years of yielding came, give a good percentage on all the wine made and sold to the man who had tended the vineyard.

The peasant's love of money awoke. He only let the cottage to Hermione year by year, and had no contract with her extending beyond a twelve-months' lease. Before Artois left Marechiaro the tender treachery was arranged. When the year's lease was up, the contadino wrote to her declining to renew it. She answered, protesting, offering more money. But it was all in vain. The man replied that he had already let the cottage and the land around it to a grower of vines for a long term of years, and that he was getting double the annual price she offered.

Hermione was indignant and bitterly distressed. When this letter reached her she was at Fiesole with Vere in a villa which she had taken. She would probably have started at once for Sicily; but Vere was just then ill with some infantile complaint, and could not be left. Artois, who was in Rome, and had received from her the news of this carefully arranged disaster, offered to go to Sicily on her behalf—and actually went. He returned to tell her that the house of the priest was already occupied by contadini, and all the land up to the very door in process of being dug up and planted with vines. It was useless to make any further offer. The thing was done.

Hermione said nothing, but Artois saw in her eyes how keenly she was suffering, and turned his own eyes away. He was only trying to preserve her from greater unhappiness, the agony of ever finding out the truth; but he felt guilty at that moment, and as if he had been cruel to the woman who roused all his tenderness, all his protective instinct.

"I shall not go back to Marechiaro now," Hermione said. "I shall not go back even to see the grave. I could never feel that anything of his spirit lingered there. But I did feel, I should have felt again, as if something of him still loved that little house on the mountain, still stayed among the oak-trees. It seemed to me that when I took Vere to the Casa del Prete she would have learnt to know something of her father there that she could never have learnt to know in another place. But now—no, I shall not go back. If I did I should even lose my memories, perhaps, and I could not bear that."

And she had not returned. Gaspare went to Marechiaro sometimes, to see his family and his friends. He visited the