

"I will. He'll love that. Oh dear! I wish he didn't make me dissatisfied with myself!"

"Nonsense, Vere!"

Hermione bent down and kissed her child. Then she went rather quickly away from the pavilion and entered the Casa del Mare.

CHAPTER II

AFTER her mother had gone, Vere waited for a moment, then ran lightly to the house, possessed herself of a dolce and a packet of cigarettes, and went down the steps to the Pool of San Francesco, full of hospitable intentions towards the singing boy. She found him still sitting astride of the boat's prow, not yet free of his reverie apparently; for when she gave a low call of "*Pescator!*" prolonging the last syllable with the emphasis and the accent of *Najies*, but always softly, he started, and nearly dropped into the sea the piece of bread he was lifting to his mouth. Recovering himself in time to save the bread deftly with one brown hand, he turned half round, leaning on his left arm, and stared at Vere with large, inquiring eyes. She stood by the steps and beckoned to him, lifting up the packet of cigarettes, then pointing to his sleeping companions:

"Come here for a minute!"

The boy smiled, sprang up, and leaped on to the isle. As he came to her, with the easy, swinging walk of the bare-footed sea-people, he pulled up his white trousers, and threw out his chest with an obvious desire to "*fare figura*" before the pretty *Padrona* of the islet. When he reached her he lifted his hand to his bare head forgetfully, meaning to take off his cap to her. Finding that he had no cap, he made a laughing grimace, threw up his chin and, thrusting his tongue against his upper teeth and opening wide his mouth, uttered a little sound most characteristically Neapolitan—a sound that seemed lightly condemnatory of himself. This done, he stood still before Vere, looking at the cigarettes and at the dolce.

"I've brought these for you," she said.

"Grazie, Signorina."

He did not hold out his hand, but his eyes, now devoted entirely to the cigarettes, began to shine with pleasure. Vere did not give him the presents at once. She had something to explain first.

"We mustn't wake them," she said, pointing towards the boat in which the men were sleeping. "Come a little way with me."