

A SPIRIT IN PRISON

CHAPTER I

SOMEWHERE, not far off on the still sea that held the tiny islet in a warm embrace, a boy's voice was singing "Napoli Bella."

Vere heard the song as she sat in the sun with her face set towards Nisida and the distant peak of Ischia; and instinctively she shifted her position, and turned her head, looking towards the calm and untroubled water that stretched between her and Naples. For the voice that sang of the beautiful City was coming towards her from the beautiful City, hymning the siren it had left perhaps but two hours ago.

On his pedestal set upon rock San Francesco seemed to be attentive to the voice. He stood beyond the sheltered pool of the sea that divided the islet from the mainland, staring across at Vere as if he envied her; he who was rooted in Italy and deprived of her exquisite freedom. His beard hung down to his waist, his cross protruded over his left shoulder, and his robe of dusty greyish brown touched his feet, which had never wandered one step since he was made, and set there to keep watch over the fishermen who come to sleep under the lee of the island by night.

Now it was brilliant daylight. The sun shone vividly over the Bay of Naples, over the great and vital city, over Vesuvius, the long line of the land towards Sorrento, over Capri with its shadowy mountain, and Posilipo with its tree-guarded villas. And in the sharp radiance of May the careless voice of the fisher-boy sang the familiar song that Vere had always known and seldom heeded.

To-day, why she did not know, Vere listened to it attentively. Something in the sound of the voice caught her attention, roused within her a sense of sympathy.

Carelessness and happiness make a swift appeal to young hearts, and this voice was careless, and sounded very happy. There was a deliberate gruffness in it, a determination to be