

an old woman. But I'm not a finished woman, and I never shall be till I die. Vere is my child. I love her tenderly; more than that—passionately. She has always been close to me, as you know. But no, Emile, my relation to Vere, hers to me, does not satisfy all my need of love, my power to love. No, no, it doesn't. There's something in me that wants more, much more than that. There's something in me that—I think only a son of his could have satisfied my yearning. A son might have been Maurice come back to me, come back in a different, beautiful, wonderfully pure relation. I prayed for a son. I needed a son. Don't misunderstand me, Emile; in a way a son could never have been so close to me as Vere is,—but I could have lived in him as I can never live in Vere; I could have lived in him almost as once I lived in Maurice. And to-day I——”

She got up suddenly from her chair, put her arms on the window-frame, and leaned out to the strange, white day.

“Emile,” she said, in a moment, turning round to him, “I want to get away, on to the sea. Will you row me out, into the Grotto of Virgil? * It's so dreadfully white here, white and ghastly. I can't talk naturally here. And I should like to go on a little farther, now I've begun. It would do me good to make a clean breast of it, dear brother confessor. Shall we take the little boat and go?”

“Of course,” he said.

“I'll get a hat.”

She was away for two or three minutes. During that time Artois stood by the window that looked towards Ischia. The stillness of the day was intense, and gave to his mind a sensation of dream. Far off across the grey-and-white waters, partially muffled in clouds that almost resembled mist, the mountains of Ischia were rather suggested, mysteriously indicated, than clearly seen. The grey cliffs towards Bagnoli went down into motionless water grey as they were, but of a different, more pathetic shade.

There was a luminous whiteness in the sky that affected the eyes, as snow does.

Artois, as he looked, thought this world seemed very old, a world arranged for the elderly to dwell in. Was it not, therefore, an appropriate setting for him and for Hermione? As this idea came into his mind it sent a rather bitter smile to his lips, and Hermione, coming in just then, saw the smile and said,—

“What is it, Emile? Why are you smiling?”

“Perhaps I will tell you when we are on the sea,” he answered.

* The grotto described in this book is not really the grotto of Virgil, but it is often called so by the fishermen along the coast.