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III.

JUST outside the city of Naples, on the road to Posilippo, there is a magnificent Villa, known some years ago as the Villa Francese. It had been built by an old French nobleman, as a wedding present for his beautiful Italian bride, and she had chosen to have it furnished and decorated in the French style. The principal saloon opened on a terrace with a marble balustrade, supported at intervals by nymphs and fauns holding costly vases, in which grew roses, myrtles and jessamines, the yellow flowers of the cassia, and the sweet tuberose. On one side was an orangery, where golden fruit, or fragrant blossoms, were to be found nearly all the year; and at the other a conservatory, in which rare and lovely plants, from every land, lived and bloomed. Two flights of marble steps led from the terrace to a parterre of flowers symmetrically arranged in a brilliant mosaic work of blossoms, every tint and shade of colour harmoniously blended, and kept fresh and bright in the

hottest summer's noon by soft showers of delicate spray, forever rising and falling from marble urns, upheld by a group of water-nymphs. Below this was the Italian garden, where the dark cool cyprus and pine, the laurel and ilex, with marble dryads and orreads half emerging from their shadowy recesses, formed a welcome relief to the full blaze of light and colour above. Then came the shore of the lovely bay, its many coloured rocks, their bright hues and smooth surfaces unstained by moss or lichen, rising from the rich vegetation that surrounded them, as if they had just escaped from the sculptor's chisel, and had grouped themselves to satisfy an artist's eye, giving that peculiar and picturesque character to the landscape only to be found in Italy. Openings here and there showed the blue waters, with white-sailed boats gliding up and down; the beautiful islands of Ischia and Procida lying in the purple distance beyond.

It was long past the hour of the siesta, and a light breeze had cooled the fierce heat of a burning August day, but the blinds of