

"Gaspare's a darling, and I love him," said Vere, rather inconsequently. "Shall we look over into the Pool from the pavilion, or go down by the steps?"

"We'll look over."

They passed in through a gateway to the narrow terrace that fronted the Casa del Mare facing Vesuvius, entered the house, traversed a little hall, came out again into the air by a door on its farther side, and made their way to a small pavilion that looked upon the Pool of San Francesco. Almost immediately below, in the cool shadow of the cliff, the boat was moored. The two men, lying at full length in it, their faces buried in their hands, were already asleep. But the boy sitting astride on the prow, with his bare feet dangling on each side of it to the clear green water, was munching slowly, and rather seriously, a hunch of yellow bread, from which he cut from time to time large pieces with a clasp knife. As he ate, lifting the pieces of bread to his mouth with the knife, against whose blade he held them with his thumb, he stared down at the depths below, transparent here almost to the sea bed. His eyes were wide with reverie. He seemed another boy, not the gay singer of five minutes ago. But then he had been in the blaze of the sun. Now he was in the shade. And swiftly he had caught the influence of the dimmer light, the lack of motion, the delicate hush at the feet of San Francesco.

This time he did not know that he was being watched. His reverie, perhaps, was too deep, or their gaze less concentrated than it had been before. And after a moment Hermione moved away.

"You are going in, Madre?"

"Yes."

"Do you mind if I give something to that boy?"

"Do you mean money?"

"Oh, no. But the poor thing's eating dry bread, and——"

"And what, you puss?"

"Well, he's a very obedient boy."

"How can you know that?"

"He was idling in the boat, and I called out to him to jump into the sea, and he jumped in immediately."

"Do you think because he heard you?"

"Certainly I do."

"You conceited little creature! Perhaps he was only pleasing himself!"

"No, Madre, no. I think I should like to give him a little reward presently—for his singing too."

"Get him a dolce, then, from Carmela, if there is one. And you can give him some cigarettes."