

Paolo said no more, but folded his arms and leaned back in the boat. Carmina's beauty had charmed his eye and imagination the first moment he had seen her, and now, as he watched, with indolent enjoyment, the graceful motions of her perfect figure while the skiff flew along to the light strokes of her paddle, he thought her the most beautiful being he had ever beheld. Something must be allowed to the romantic scene and circumstances, and a young man's excited fancy but, in truth, he was not far wrong. Her tall, light figure had the perfect proportions, the graceful roundness, the firm, elastic step of a young Diana. Her features were as finely moulded as her form, but it was the bright enchanting spirit that looked out of these features which gave her face such an irresistible charm. Her lovely brown eyes were full of sweetness, of light and joy; the rich bloom of the carnation glowed on her clear olive cheek, and deepened into crimson on her full but delicate lips. Her abundant hair, black as jet, but shining with a purple lustre when the sun touched it, was wreathed around her head with a natural grace which might have suited the head of a Muse. Her whole aspect was radiant with youth, and health, and happiness, and beauty, and, besides all these charms, there was about her a purity, a simplicity, a candour, an utter absence of all vanity and affectation which Paolo had never before met with in woman. The small, light skiff, the lovely maiden who seemed to guide it with a touch, the purple light of the waveless sea on which they floated, the rosy and golden atmosphere which wrapped them round, seemed, to his charmed fancy, like a scene in fairy-land into which he had suddenly been transported. He would not utter a word lest he might break the spell. But, in spite of the charm of the situation, he felt very forcibly that he was hungry and thirsty, and not yet out of reach of a great peril, from which he had narrowly escaped that morning. It was, therefore, not without satisfaction that he saw Carmina run her tiny

craft into its little haven, and, throwing off his fit of *dolce far niente*, he sprang lightly out, helped Carmina to make the skiff fast, and then turned to take up the basket of fish. But Carmina caught it hastily up, lifted it to her head, and steadied it there with her up-turned graceful arms, looking, Paolo thought, like a beautiful Caryatide. "I must carry my own fish," she said, laughing, "and if Signor Paolo is not very well used to rocks, he will find it hard enough to climb them without any burden."

"Yet I suppose, *you* expect to get safely up with that basket on your head?" said Paolo.

"Oh, I have been going up and down them all my life," said Carmina. "I could go safely blindfold."

"Then surely I ought to be able to go with my eyes open."

"I am afraid the path is more difficult than you think, signor," said Carmina, a little anxiously. "There are some very bad spots, and if you were to slip——"

"Do not fear, kind Carmina, I shall not slip. You will find I can follow wherever you may lead."

Fully assured by his steady look and confident smile, Carmina led the way, and Paolo came after with steps as firm and sure, if not quite as light and rapid, as her own. Long years after, the sudden scent of wild myrtle, or bruised lavender, or thyme, would transport his imagination to that lovely shore, and in fancy he was once more following Carmina with the basket of fish poised lightly on her head, and watching the folds of her brown woollen dress swaying with the movements of her graceful figure as she climbed the rocky path.

At every difficult spot Carmina always stopped and looked back, to be reassured by finding Paolo close beside her, and hearing his laughing "Go on, Carmina!" till an abrupt turn placed them suddenly on the little terrace on which the cottage was built. It was a rough stone hut, with a rude flight