

Something in his manner puzzled Carmina. That there was some mystery she saw, but that there could be anything bad or false about this noble looking signor, she never once imagined.

"Cannot the signor swim?" she asked. "It is not far from the shore."

"Oh, yes, I can swim, but you see I waited for a boat, and for once Dame Fortune has proved kind." Then, smiling as he read Carmina's wondering though unsuspecting thoughts in her expressive face, he added—"The truth is, I waited because I had some faint hope that my friends might return. But where do you come from, fair maiden? I do not see any houses on the shore."

"There is only our cottage, signor, and you could not see it from this if you did not know where to look for it. It lies among the rocks just beneath that great fig tree."

"And who lives with you there? Have you a father or brothers?"

"No, signor, my father is dead; I never had any brothers."

"You are not married?"

"Oh, no, signor," said Carmina, with a quick vivid blush. "I live with my mother and sister. The poor mother has no use of her limbs, and lies in bed all day, and the little sister has not all her wits."

"And who takes care of them?"

"They have only me, signor."

"*Poveretta*," said the stranger, compassionately, "that is hard for you."

"Oh, no, signor, I am strong, and able to work, and the Madonna helps me."

"I think she helped me when she sent you to find me here, my gentle one. Will you give me my supper and a bed to-night?"

"Yes, surely, signor, if you can put up with poor fare and humble lodging."

"You could not give me any that would not be better than I expected to have a little while ago," said the stranger. "But now that we are going to be good friends, it is necessary that we should know each

other's names. Mine is Paolo. What is yours?"

"Carmina, signor."

"Well then, Carmina, let us try what we can find in your nets. When I saw them I knew the owner would be likely to come for them soon, but I expected to see some old man or young lad—not anyone like you, *bella Carmina!*"

Springing to his feet, and showing a tall, athletic, finely proportioned figure, he swung himself round a projecting piece of rock, and let himself drop down beside Carmina. In a second he had one of the nets out of the water, and was emptying the small, shining, silvery blue fish that were struggling in the meshes into the basket Carmina had brought to hold them.

"Why should you trouble yourself, signor Paolo," said Carmina, "you are not used to such work, and I do it by myself every day."

"But this day you have some one to help you," said Paolo. "*Evviva!*" as he raised another net, "this one is so full I can hardly lift it!"

"Oh, signor," Carmina exclaimed, "you have brought me good luck; I never had my nets so full before. I must give the best fish I have got to St. Antonio!" And carefully selecting the largest and finest, she threw it into the sea.

Paolo smiled at the gentle superstition. "I, too, owe a debt to the saints for sending you to my aid, Carmina, and, perhaps, some some day or other I will ask you to pay it for me. There is the last fish, and the basket is overflowing. Now, I suppose, we must set the nets again."

This was soon done, and then Paolo lifted the basket into the skiff, and attempted to take the paddle from Carmina, but she would not give it up.

"You had better let me have it, Carmina; I am a heavier freight than your little craft is used to."

"Oh, that is nothing, signor; my skiff goes of itself."