

To-day here, to-morrow in Rome, the next day in Venice—every where there are people in need of the wise Olympia.”

“When have you been in Calabria, and when did you see Carmina, mother?” Paolo asked.

“Ah! *Excellenza!* Then you remember the poor Carmina?”

“Remember her? Yes,” said Paolo. “Can you tell me how she is?”

“There are few things the wise Olympia cannot tell,” said the sibyl. “She knows the past and the future, and she can read the pages of the Book of Fate.”

“But Carmina, mother,” said Paolo impatiently, “tell me about Carmina.”

“Ah, *poverina!* she has suffered! Why should the Signor seek to revive the memory of the past?”

“*Che diavolo!* What do you mean, mother?” said Paolo; and taking out his purse he tried to slip some money into her tiny hand.

But she drew it quickly away. “Keep your money, Signor *Excellenza,*” she said, “the old Olympia will not speak for scudi; but she will speak because she knows she must. The Fates have twined the thread of the proud Signor’s life with that of the poor Calabrian girl, and the wise Olympia does not dare to resist their will. Look yonder, *Excellenza;* look at that narrow brown house with one arched window, and a little bit of balcony covered with plants and flowers, and an open stall below. That is Carmina’s house.”

“Carmina’s house! Does she live in Naples? Is she married?”

“Not she, *poverina!* It was to look for the Signor she came here. She thought he must be either dead or in prison because he did not come back to her, but she found him married to a grand lady and living in a palace of splendour.”

“*Maladizione* on the palace of splendour!” said Paolo. “But what did she do then?”

“She did not die, Signor, though she

came very near it; but she is a brave girl as the Signor ought to know, and she bore up against her trouble and set to work, and now she supports herself and Ninetta by spinning and weaving. She has only Ninetta now, for the poor Madre was dead before she left Calabria.”

“And Jacopo?” asked Paolo.

“Jacopo is here too, Signor, and earns a good living with his felucca. He says he must stay near enough to Carmina to know that she does not come to want or harm, and though he seldom sees her except at church, he has still a hope that some day she will reward his faithful love. But alas! it is all in vain. He wears away his heart longing for a day that will never come, and she has mourning for one that has fled for ever. Hard is the lot of the children of men, and not even the wise Olympia can alter by one hair’s breadth the will of the awful Fates.”

Thrusting the scudi, which she still appeared unwilling to take, into the old sibyl’s skinny palm, Paolo crossed the street to the house she had pointed out as Carmina’s dwelling.

Round the open stall, which served at once for shop and workroom, hung the pretty bright scarfs which Paolo remembered so well; with skeins of wool and goats’ hair, dyed all the colours of the rainbow. In the midst, Carmina was standing at her loom, and beside her sat Ninetta, spinning with her spindle.

Since Paolo had been false to Carmina, he had tried to persuade himself that it was the romantic circumstances under which he had first seen her, and the picturesque idyllic surroundings harmonizing so well with her fresh youth, and flower-like loveliness which had cast an unreal charm over her beauty, and given a false brightness to the image so indelibly stamped on his heart. He had told himself this again and again, when his whole soul turned towards her with passionate longing, and his arms ached to clasp her