

"Non fa niente, Signorina!" He stood still for a moment, then made a gesture of salutation, and added: "Thank you, Signorina. A rivederci!"

He moved to go to the boat, but Vere cried out quickly:

"Wait, Ruffo! Can you catch well?"

"Signorina?"

"Look out now!"

Her arm was thrust out over the bridge, and Ruffo, staring up, saw a big cigarette—a cigarette such as he had never before seen—in her small fingers. Quickly he made a receptacle of his joined hands, his eyes sparkling and his lips parted with happy anticipation.

"One!"

The cigarette fell and was caught.

"Two!"

A second fell. But this time Ruffo was unprepared, and it dropped on the rock by his bare feet.

"Stupido!" laughed the girl.

"Ma, Signorina——!"

"Three!"

It had become a game between them, and continued to be a game until all the ten cigarettes had made their journey through the air.

Vere would not let Ruffo know when a cigarette was coming, but kept him on the alert, pretending, holding it poised above him between finger and thumb until even his eyes blinked from gazing upward; then dropping it when she thought he was unprepared, or throwing it like a missile. But she soon knew that she had found her match in the boy. And when he caught the tenth and last cigarette in his mouth she clapped her hands, and cried out so enthusiastically that one of the men in the boat heaved himself up from the bottom, and, choking down a yawn, stared with heavy amazement at the young virgin of the rocks, and uttered a "*Che Diavolo!*" under his stiff moustache.

Vere saw his astonishment, and swiftly, with a parting wave of her hand to Ruffo, she disappeared, leaving her protégé to run off gaily with his booty to his comrades of the *Sirena del Mare*.

CHAPTER III

"I CAN see the boat, Vere," said Hermione, when the girl came back, her eyes still gleaming with memories of the fun of the cigarette game with Ruffo.

"Where, Madre?"

She sat down quickly beside her mother on the window-seat,