

of steps outside leading to an upper chamber. A great fig-tree grew beside it; rocks and fragments of rocks were scattered all about, but plants and shrubs grew in every fissure, and here and there were patches of mountain grass and herbs on which some goats were feeding. At one end of the cottage was a little plot of earth in which grew some vegetables and pot-herbs, and on a low ledge of rock beside this little garden, were a couple of bee-hives. Just beyond was a *fiumare*, or water-course, now a dry, stony hollow, but after rain flooded by the mountain torrents, and rendered perfectly impassable. All round were more rocks and rocky terraces, reaching apparently to the very crests of the mountains, and descending from among them, in some mysterious and invisible way, was a road that crossed the *fiumare* close to the cottage gardens and wound along the coast to Reggio.

As soon as the goats caught sight of Paolo, they scampered away, and Ninetta, who was standing at the door shading her eyes from the setting sun with her hand as she looked out for her sister, immediately followed their example. Carmina called to her encouragingly, and after peeping at the stranger from behind the fig tree for a minute, she came forward with timid and hesitating steps.

"Your sister is more afraid of me than you were, Carmina," said Paolo.

"She is not very wise, signor," said Carmina, "but she is very good. She takes great care of the *madre* when I am away, and she is always a great help to me. It is true, little sister!" and Carmina looked tenderly at poor Ninetta, into whose heavy features came a gleam of brightness at this praise.

"Ah, but Jacopo would help you better if you would let him," said Ninetta.

"Who is Jacopo?" asked Paolo.

"Oh, he is very good and very rich, too," said Ninetta. "He has a beautiful boat, not like Carmina's little skiff, but ever so big, and with great masts and sails. He often

comes to see the *maare*, and he wants Carmina to marry him."

A quick, jealous pang, surely most absurd under the circumstances, darted through Paolo, and he bent his piercing eyes on Carmina with a stern glance that made her cheek flush painfully.

"Hush, little sister," she said, "you know I cannot marry Jacopo, and he also knows it."

"Why cannot you marry him?" asked Paolo.

"Because I do not love him," said Carmina, looking up at her stern questioner with clear, innocent eyes.

"Poor Jacopo!" said Paolo; and his voice was soft and gentle once more, and his eyes kind, and Carmina felt happy again.

"See, Ninetta," she said, "what a great basket of fish. We never had so many before. Will you make some ready to fry for the signor's supper?"

"Yes, Carmina," and, delighted to be employed, Ninetta seized the basket and ran away to prepare the fish, while Carmina led Paolo into the cottage, the door of which stood wide open.

It was but a rough dwelling, consisting of one apartment below and a loft above. The floor was of stone, and the walls unplastered. A couple of wooden chairs and a table, a few pans and pipkins for cooking, two or three cups and plates and similar household articles on some shelves, and an old carved chest, probably containing the holiday clothes of the family, seemed nearly all the furniture. On the walls hung a few prints of the Virgin and Saints, and some rude engravings of scenes from Dante, Tasso, and Ariosto—the death of Clorinda, Angelica at the Fountain, Dante and Beatrice;—with some stanzas from the *Gerusalemme*, and Orlando, and the story of Paolo and Francesca, printed on narrow slips of paper, as ballads used to be in the olden time. A small hand-loom, with a piece of bright-coloured stuff on it, stood near the open door, and in a sort of alcove