

CHAPTER XLVI

The Chamois With A Roving Commission

Through the assiduity of my Viking, ere nightfall our Chamois was again in good order. And with many subtle and seamanlike splices the light tent was lashed in its place; the sail taken up by a reef.

My comrades now questioned me, as to my purposes; whether they had been modified by the events of the day. I replied that our destination was still the islands to the westward.

But from these we had steadily been drifting all the morning long; so that now no loom of the land was visible. But our prow was kept pointing as before.

As evening came on, my comrades fell fast asleep, leaving me at the helm.

How soft and how dreamy the light of the hour. The rays of the sun, setting behind golden-barred clouds, came to me like the gleaming of a shaded light behind a lattice. And the low breeze, pervaded with the peculiar balm of the mid-Pacific near land, was fragrant as the breath of a bride.

Such was the scene; so still and witching that the hand of Yillah in

mine seemed no hand, but a touch. Visions flitted before me and in me; something hummed in my ear; all the air was a lay.

And now entered a thought into my heart. I reflected how serenely we might thus glide along, far removed from all care and anxiety. And then, what different scenes might await us upon any of the shores roundabout. But there seemed no danger in the balmy sea; the assured vicinity of land imparting a sense of security. We had ample supplies for several days more, and thanks to the Pagan canoe, an abundance of fruit.

Besides, what cared I now for the green groves and bright shore? Was not Yillah my shore and my grove? my meadow, my mead, my soft shady vine, and my arbor? Of all things desirable and delightful, the full-plumed sheaf, and my own right arm the band? Enough: no shore for me yet. One sweep of the helm, and our light prow headed round toward the vague land of song, sun, and vine: the fabled South.

As we glided along, strange Yillah gazed down in the sea, and would fain have had me plunge into it with her, to rove through its depths. But I started dismayed; in fancy, I saw the stark body of the priest drifting by. Again that phantom obtruded; again guilt laid his red hand on my soul. But I laughed. Was not Yillah my own? by my arm rescued from ill? To do her a good, I had periled myself. So down, down, Aleema.

When next morning, starting from slumber, my comrades beheld the sun on our beam, instead of astern as before at that hour, they eagerly inquired, "Whither now?" But very briefly I gave them to know, that after devoting the night to the due consideration of a matter so important, I had determined upon voyaging for the island Tedaidee, in place of the land to the westward.

At this, they were not displeased. But to tell the plain truth, I harbored some shadowy purpose of merely hovering about for a while, till I felt more landwardly inclined.

But had I not declared to Yillah, that our destination was the fairy isle she spoke of, even Oroolia? Yet that shore was so exceedingly remote, and the folly of endeavoring to reach it in a craft built with hands, so very apparent, that what wonder I really nourished no thought of it?

So away floated the Chamois, like a vagrant cloud in the heavens: bound, no one knew whither.