

CHAPTER LXI

An Incognito

For the rest of that day, and several that followed, we were continually receiving visits from the neighboring islands; whose inhabitants in fleets and flotillas flocked round Odo to behold the guests of its lord. Among them came many messengers from the neighboring kings with soft speeches and gifts.

But it were needless to detail our various interviews, or relate in what manifold ways, the royal strangers gave token of their interest concerning us.

Upon the third day, however, there was noticed a mysterious figure, like the inscrutable incognitos sometimes encountered, crossing the tower-shadowed Plaza of Assignations at Lima. It was enveloped in a dark robe of tappa, so drawn and plaited about the limbs; and with one hand, so wimpled about the face, as only to expose a solitary eye. But that eye was a world. Now it was fixed upon Yillah with a sinister glance, and now upon me, but with a different expression. However great the crowd, however tumultuous, that fathomless eye gazed on; till at last it seemed no eye, but a spirit, forever prying into my soul. Often I strove to approach it, but it would evade me, soon reappearing.

Pointing out the apparition to Media, I intreated him to take means to fix it, that my suspicions might be dispelled, as to its being incorporeal. He replied that, by courtesy, incognitos were sacred. Insomuch that the close-plaited robe and the wimple were secure as a castle. At last, to my relief, the phantom disappeared, and was seen no more.

Numerous and fervent the invitations received to return the calls wherewith we were honored. But for the present we declined them; preferring to establish ourselves firmly in the heart of Media, ere encountering the vicissitudes of roaming. In a multitude of acquaintances is less security, than in one faithful friend.

Now, while these civilities were being received, and on the fourth morning after our arrival, there landed on the beach three black-eyed damsels, deep brunettes, habited in long variegated robes, and with gay blossoms on their heads.

With many salams, the strangers were ushered into my presence by an old white-haired servitor of Media's, who with a parting conge murmured, "From Queen Hautia," then departed. Surprised, I stood mute, and welcomed them.

The first, with many smiles and blandishments, waved before me a many-tinted Iris: the flag-flower streaming with pennons. Advancing, the second then presented three rose-hued purple-veined Circea

flowers, the dew still clinging to them. The third placed in my hand a moss-rose bud; then, a Venus-car.

"Thanks for your favors! now your message."

Starting at this reception, graciously intended, they conferred a moment; when the Iris-bearer said in winning phrase, "We come from Hautia, whose moss-rose you hold."

"All thanks to Hautia then; the bud is very fragrant."

Then she pointed to the Venus-car.

"This too is sweet; thanks to Hautia for her flowers. Pray, bring me more."

"He mocks our mistress," and gliding from me, they waved witch-hazels, leaving me alone and wondering.

Informing Media of this scene, he smiled; threw out queer hints of Hautia; but knew not what her message meant.

At first this affair occasioned me no little uneasiness, with much matter for marveling; but in the novel pleasure of our sojourn in Odo, it soon slipped from my mind; nor for some time, did I again hear aught of Queen Hautia.