

CHAPTER LXXXVII

Nora-Bamma

Still onward gliding, the lagoon a calm.

Hours pass; and full before us, round and green, a Moslem turban by
us floats--Nora-Bamma, Isle of Nods.

Noon-tide rolls its flood. Vibrates the air, and trembles. And by
illusion optical, thin-draped in azure haze, drift here and there the
brilliant lands: swans, peacock-plumaged, sailing through the sky.
Down to earth hath heaven come; hard telling sun-clouds from the isles.

And high in air nods Nora-Bamma. Nid-nods its tufted summit like
three ostrich plumes; its beetling crags, bent poppies, shadows,
willow shores, all nod; its streams are murmuring down the hills;
its wavelets hush the shore.

Who dwells in Nora-Bamma? Dreamers, hypochondriacs, somnambulists;
who, from the cark and care of outer Mardi fleeing, in the poppy's
jaded odors, seek oblivion for the past, and ecstasies to come.

Open-eyed, they sleep and dream; on their roof-trees, grapes unheeded
drop. In Nora-Bamma, whispers are as shouts; and at a zephyr's breath,
from the woodlands shake the leaves, as of humming-birds, a flight.

All this spake Braid-Beard, of the isle. How that none ere touched
its strand, without rendering instant tribute of a nap; how that
those who thither voyaged, in golden quest of golden gourds, fast
dropped asleep, ere one was plucked; waking not till night; how that
you must needs rub hard your eyes, would you wander through the isle;
and how that silent specters would be met, haunting twilight groves,
and dreamy meads; hither gliding, thither fading, end or purpose none.

True or false, so much for Mohi's Nora Bamma.

But as we floated on, it looked the place described. We yawned, and
yawned, as crews of vessels may; as in warm Indian seas, their
winnowing sails all swoon, when by them glides some opium argosie.