

## CHAPTER C

### The Pursuer Himself Is Pursued

Next morning, when much to the chagrin of Borabolla we were preparing to quit his isle, came tidings to the palace, of a wonderful event, occurring in one of the "Motoos," or little islets of the great reef; which "Motoo" was included in the dominions of the king.

The men who brought these tidings were highly excited; and no sooner did they make known what they knew, than all Mondoldo was in a tumult of marveling.

Their story was this.

Going at day break to the Motoo to fish, they perceived a strange proa beached on its seaward shore; and presently were hailed by voices; and saw among the palm trees, three specter-like men, who were not of Mardi.

The first amazement of the fishermen over, in reply to their eager questions, the strangers related, that they were the survivors of a company of men, natives of some unknown island to the northeast; whence they had embarked for another country, distant three days' sail to the southward of theirs. But falling in with a terrible adventure, in which their sire had been slain, they altered their

course to pursue the fugitive who murdered him; one and all vowing, never more to see home, until their father's fate was avenged. The murderer's proa outsailing theirs, soon ran out of sight; yet after him they blindly steered by day and by night: steering by the blood-red star in Bootes. Soon, a violent gale overtook them; driving them to and fro; leaving them they knew not where. But still struggling against strange currents, at times counteracting their sailing, they drifted on their way; nigh to famishing for water; and no shore in sight. In long calms, in vain they held up their dry gourds to heaven, and cried "send us a breeze, sweet gods!" The calm still brooded; and ere it was gone, all but three gasped; and dead from thirst, were plunged into the sea. The breeze which followed the calm, soon brought them in sight of a low, uninhabited isle; where tarrying many days, they laid in good store of cocoanuts and water, and again embarked.

The next land they saw was Mardi; and they landed on the Motoo, still intent on revenge.

This recital filled Taji with horror.

Who could these avengers be, but the sons of him I had slain. I had thought them far hence, and myself forgotten; and now, like adders, they started up in my path, as I hunted for Yillah.

But I dissembled my thoughts.

Without waiting to hear more, Borabolla, all curiosity to behold the strangers, instantly dispatched to the Motoo one of his fleetest canoes, with orders to return with the voyagers.

Ere long they came in sight; and perceiving that strange pros in tow of the king's, Samoa cried out: "Lo! Taji, the canoe that was going to Tedaidee!"

Too true; the same double-keeled craft, now sorely broken, the fatal dais in wild disarray: the canoe, the canoe of Aleema! And with it came the spearmen three, who, when the Chamois was fleeing from their bow, had poised their javelins. But so wan their aspect now, their faces looked like skulls.

Then came over me the wild dream of Yillah; and, for a space, like a madman, I raved. It seemed as if the mysterious damsel must still be there; the rescue yet to be achieved. In my delirium I rushed upon the skeletons, as they landed--"Hide not the maiden!" But interposing, Media led me aside; when my transports abated.

Now, instantly, the strangers knew who I was; and, brandishing their javelins, they rushed upon me, as I had on them, with a yell. But deeming us all mad, the crowd held us apart; when, writhing in the arms that restrained them, the pale specters foamed out their curses again and again: "Oh murderer! white curses upon thee! Bleached be thy soul with our hate! Living, our brethren cursed thee; and dying,

dry-lipped, they cursed thee again. They died not through famishing for water, but for revenge upon thee! Thy blood, their thirst would have slaked!"

I lay fainting against the hard-throbbing heart of Samoa, while they showered their yells through the air. Once more, in my thoughts, the green corpse of the priest drifted by.

Among the people of Mondoldo, a violent commotion now raged. They were amazed at Taji's recognition by the strangers, and at the deadly ferocity they betrayed.

Rallying upon this, and perceiving that by divulging all they knew, these sons of Aleema might stir up the Islanders against me, I resolved to anticipate their story; and, turning to Borabolla, said-- "In these strangers, oh, king! you behold the survivors of a band we encountered on our voyage. From them I rescued a maiden, called Yillah, whom they were carrying captive. Little more of their history do I know."

"Their maledictions?" exclaimed Borabolla.

"Are they not delirious with suffering?" I cried. "They know not what they say."

So, moved by all this, he commanded them to be guarded, and conducted within his palisade; and having supplied them with cheer, entered into earnest discourse. Yet all the while, the pale strangers on me fixed their eyes; deep, dry, crater-like hollows, lurid with flames, reflected from the fear-frozen glacier, my soul.

But though their hatred appalled, spite of that spell, again the sweet dream of Yillah stole over me, with all the mysterious things by her narrated, but left unexplained. And now, before me were those who might reveal the lost maiden's whole history, previous to the fatal affray.

Thus impelled, I besought them to disclose what they knew.

But, "Where now is your Yillah?" they cried. "Is the murderer wedded and merry? Bring forth the maiden!"

Yet, though they tore out my heart's core, I told them not of my loss.

Then, anxious, to learn the history of Yillah, all present commanded them to divulge it; and breathlessly I heard what follows.

"Of Yillah, we know only this:--that many moons ago, a mighty canoe, full of beings, white, like this murderer Taji, touched at our island of Amma. Received with wonder, they were worshiped as gods; were feasted all over the land. Their chief was a tower to behold; and

with him, was a being, whose cheeks were of the color of the red coral; her eye, tender as the blue of the sky. Every day our people brought her offerings of fruit and flowers; which last she would not retain for herself; but hung them round the neck of her child, Yillah; then only an infant in her mother's arms; a bud, nestling close to a flower, full-blown. All went well between our people and the gods, till at last they slew three of our countrymen, charged with stealing from their great canoe. Our warriors retired to the hills, brooding over revenge. Three days went by; when by night, descending to the plain, in silence they embarked; gained the great vessel, and slaughtered every soul but Yillah. The bud was torn from the flower; and, by our father Aleema, was carried to the Valley of Ardair; there set apart as a sacred offering for Apo, our deity. Many moons passed; and there arose a tumult, hostile to our sire's longer holding custody of Yillah; when, foreseeing that the holy glen would ere long be burst open, he embarked the maiden in yonder canoe, to accelerate her sacri flee at the great shrine of Apo, in Tedaidee.--The rest thou knowest, murderer!"

"Yillah! Yillah!" now hunted again that sound through my soul. "Oh, Yillah! too late, too late have I learned what thou art!"

Apprised of the disappearance of their former captive, the meager strangers exulted; declaring that Apo had taken her to himself. For me, ere long, my blood they would quaff from my skull.

But though I shrunk from their horrible threats, I dissembled anew;  
and turning, again swore that they raved.

"Ay!" they retorted, "we rave and raven for you; and your white heart  
will we have!"

Perceiving the violence of their rage, and persuaded from what I  
said, that much suffering at sea must have maddened them; Borabolla  
thought fit to confine them for the present; so that they could not  
molest me.