

## CHAPTER LXIX

### After A Long Interval, By Night They Are Becalmed

Now suns rose, and set; moons grew, and waned; till, at last, the star that erewhile heralded the dawn, presaged the eve; to us, sad token!-- while deep within the deepest heart of Mardi's circle, we sailed from sea to sea; and isle to isle; and group to group;--vast empires explored, and inland valleys, to their utmost heads; and for every ray in heaven, beheld a king.

Needless to recount all that then befell; what tribes and caravans we saw; what vast horizons; boundless plains: and sierras, in their every intervale, a nation nestling.

Enough that still we roamed.

It was evening; and as the red sun, magnified, launched into the wave, once more, from a wild strand, we launched our three canoes.

Soon, from her clouds, hooded Night, like a nun from a convent, drew nigh. Rustled her train, yet no spangles were there. But high on her brow, still shone her pale crescent; haloed by bandelets--violet, red, and yellow. So looked the lone watcher through her rainbow-iris; so sad, the night without stars.

The winds were laid; the lagoon, still, as a prairie of an August noon.

"Let us dream out the calm," said Media. "One of ye paddlers, watch:  
Ho companions! who's for Cathay?"

Sleep reigned throughout the canoes, sleeping upon the waters. But nearer and nearer, low-creeping along, came mists and vapors, a thousand; spotted with twinklings of Will-o-Wisps from neighboring shores. Dusky leopards, stealing on by crouches, those vapors seemed.

Hours silently passed. When startled by a cry, Taji sprang to his feet; against which something rattled; then, a quick splash! and a dark form bounded into the lagoon.

The dozing watcher had called aloud; and, about to stab, the assassin, dropping his stiletto, plunged.

Peering hard through those treacherous mists, two figures in a shallop, were espied; dragging another, dripping, from the brine.

"Foiled again, and foiled forever. No foe's corpse was I."

As we gazed, in the gloom quickly vanished the shallop; ere ours could be reversed to pursue.

Then, from the opposite mists, glided a second canoe; and beneath the  
Iris round the moon, shone now another:--Hautia's flowery flag!

Vain to wave the sirens off; so still they came.

One waved a plant of sickly silver-green.

"The Midnight Tremmella!" cried Yoomy; "the falling-star of flowers!--  
Still I come, when least foreseen; then flee."

The second waved a hemlock top, the spike just tapering its final  
point. The third, a convolvulus, half closed. "The end draws nigh, and  
all thy hopes are waning." Then they proffered grapes.

But once more waved off, silently they vanished.

Again the buried barb tore, at my soul; again Yillah was invoked, but  
Hautia made reply.

Slowly wore out the night. But when uprose the sun, fled clouds, and  
fled sadness.