

CHAPTER LXXXVII

They Draw Nigh To Flozella

As if Mardi were a poem, and every island a canto, the shore now in sight was called Flozella-a-Nina, or The-Last-Verse-of-the-Song.

According to Mohi, the origin of this term was traceable to the remotest antiquity.

In the beginning, there were other beings in Mardi besides Mardians; winged beings, of purer minds, and cast in gentler molds, who would fain have dwelt forever with mankind. But the hearts of the Mardians were bitter against them, because of their superior goodness. Yet those beings returned love for malice, and long entreated to virtue and charity. But in the end, all Mardi rose up against them, and hunted them from isle to isle; till, at last, they rose from the woodlands like a flight of birds, and disappeared in the skies. Thereafter, abandoned of such sweet influences, the Mardians fell into all manner of sins and sufferings, becoming the erring things their descendants were now. Yet they knew not, that their calamities were of their own bringing down. For deemed a victory, the expulsion of the winged beings was celebrated in choruses, throughout Mardi. And among other jublations, so ran the legend, a pean was composed, corresponding in the number of its stanzas, to the number of islands. And a band of youths, gayly appareled, voyaged in gala canoes all

round the lagoon, singing upon each isle, one verse of their song. And Flozella being the last isle in their circuit, its queen commemorated the circumstance, by new naming her realm.

That queen had first incited Mardi to wage war against the beings with wings. She it was, who had been foremost in every assault. And that queen was ancestor of Hautia, now ruling the isle.

Approaching the dominions of one who so long had haunted me, conflicting emotions tore up my soul in tornadoes. Yet Hautia had held out some prospect of crowning my yearnings. But how connected were Hautia and Yillah? Something I hoped; yet more I feared. Dire presentiments, like poisoned arrows, shot through me. Had they pierced me before, straight to Flozella would I have voyaged; not waiting for Hautia to woo me by that last and victorious temptation. But unchanged remained my feelings of hatred for Hautia; yet vague those feelings, as the language of her flowers. Nevertheless, in some mysterious way seemed Hautia and Yillah connected. But Yillah was all beauty, and innocence; my crown of felicity; my heaven below;--and Hautia, my whole heart abhorred. Yillah I sought; Hautia sought me. One, openly beckoned me here; the other dimly allured me there. Yet now was I wildly dreaming to find them together. But so distracted my soul, I knew not what it was, that I thought.

Slowly we neared the land. Flozella-a-Nina!--An omen? Was this isle, then, to prove the last place of my search, even as it was the Last-

Verse-of-the-Song?