

CHAPTER LXXXVIII

They Land

A jeweled tiara, nodding in spray, looks flowery Flozella, approached from the sea. For, lo you! the glittering foam all round its white marge; where, forcing themselves underneath the coral ledge, and up through its crevices, in fountains, the blue billows gush. While, within, zone above zone, thrice zoned in belts of bloom, all the isle, as a hanging-garden soars; its tapering cone blending aloft, with heaven's own blue.

"What flies through the spray! what incense is this?" cried Media.

"Ha! you wild breeze! you have been plundering the gardens of Hautia," cried Yoomy.

"No sweets can be sweeter," said Braid-Beard, "but no Upas more deadly."

Anon we came nearer; sails idly flapping, and paddles suspended; sleek currents our coursers. And round about the isle, like winged rainbows, shoals of dolphins were leaping over floating fragments of wrecks:-- dark-green, long-haired ribs, and keels of canoes. For many shallows, inveigled by the eddies, were oft dashed to pieces against that flowery strand. But what cared the dolphins? Mardian wrecks were their homes. Over and over they sprang: from east to west: rising and

setting: many suns in a moment; while all the sea, like a harvest plain, was stacked with their glittering sheaves of spray.

And far down, fathoms on fathoms, flitted rainbow hues:--as seines-full of mermaids; half-screening the bones of the drowned.

Swifter and swifter the currents now ran; till with a shock, our prows were beached.

There, beneath an arch of spray, three dark-eyed maidens stood; garlanded with columbines, their nectaries nodding like jesters' bells; and robed in vestments blue.

"The pilot-fish transformed!" cried Yoomy.

"The night-eyed heralds three!" said Mohi.

Following the maidens, we now took our way along a winding vale; where, by sweet-scented hedges, flowed blue-braided brooks; their tributaries, rivulets of violets, meandering through the meads.

On one hand, forever glowed the rosy mountains with a tropic dawn; and on the other; lay an Arctic eve;--the white daisies drifted in long banks of snow, and snowed the blossoms from the orange boughs. There, summer breathed her bridal bloom; her hill-top temples crowned with bridal wreaths.

We wandered on, through orchards arched in long arcades, that seemed baronial halls, hung o'er with trophies:--so spread the boughs in antlers. This orchard was the frontlet of the isle.

The fruit hung high in air, that only beaks, not hands, might pluck.

Here, the peach tree showed her thousand cheeks of down, kissed often by the wooing winds; here, in swarms; the yellow apples hived, like golden bees upon the boughs; here, from the kneeling, fainting trees, thick fell the cherries, in great drops of blood; and here, the pomegranate, with cold rind and sere, deep pierced by bills of birds revealed the mellow of its ruddy core. So, oft the heart, that cold and withered seems, within yet hides its juices.

This orchard passed, the vale became a lengthening plain, that seemed the Straits of Ormus bared so thick it lay with flowery gems: torquoise-hyacinths, ruby-roses, lily-pearls. Here roved the vagrant vines; their flaxen ringlets curling over arbors, which laughed and shook their golden locks. From bower to bower, flew the wee bird, that ever hovering, seldom lights; and flights of gay canaries passed, like jonquils, winged.

But now, from out half-hidden bowers of clematis, there issued swarms of wasps, which flying wide, settled on all the buds.

And, fifty nymphs preceding, who now follows from those bowers, with
gliding, artful steps:--the very snares of love!--Hautia. A gorgeous
amaryllis in her hand; Circe-flowers in her ears; her girdle tied with
vervain.

She came by privet hedges, drooping; downcast honey-suckles; she trod
on pinks and pansies, blue-bells, heath, and lilies. She glided on:
her crescent brow calm as the moon, when most it works its evil
influences.

Her eye was fathomless.

But the same mysterious, evil-boding gaze was there, which long before
had haunted me in Odo, ere Yillah fled.--Queen Hautia the incognito!
Then two wild currents met, and dashed me into foam.

"Yillah! Yillah!--tell me, queen!" But she stood motionless; radiant,
and scentless: a dahlia on its stalk. "Where? Where?"

"Is not thy voyage now ended?--Take flowers! Damsels, give him wine to
drink. After his weary hunt, be the wanderer happy."

I dashed aside their cups, and flowers; still rang the vale with Yillah!

"Taji! did I know her fate, naught would I now disclose; my heralds
pledged their queen to naught. Thou but comest here to supplant thy

mourner's night-shade, with marriage roses. Damsels! give him wreaths;
crowd round him; press him with your cups!"

Once more I spilled their wine, and tore their garlands. Is not that,
the evil eye that long ago did haunt me? and thou, the Hautia who hast
followed me, and wooed, and mocked, and tempted me, through all this
long, long voyage? I swear! thou knowest all."

"I am Hautia. Thou hast come at last. Crown him with your flowers!
Drown him in your wine! To all questions, Taji! I am mute.--Away!--
damsels dance; reel round him; round and round!"

Then, their feet made music on the rippling grass, like thousand
leaves of lilies on a lake. And, gliding nearer, Hautia welcomed
Media; and said, "Your comrade here is sad:--be ye gay. Ho, wine!--I
pledge ye, guests!"

Then, marking all, I thought to seem what I was not, that I might
learn at last the thing I sought.

So, three cups in hand I held; drank wine, and laughed; and half-way
met Queen Hautia's blandishments.