

CHAPTER XC

Taji With Hautia

As their last echoes died away down the valley, Hautia glided near;--
zone unbound, the amaryllis in her hand. Her bosom ebbd and flowed;
the motes danced in the beams that darted from her eyes.

"Come! let us sin, and be merry. Ho! wine, wine, wine! and lapfuls of
flowers! let all the cane-brakes pipe their flutes. Damsels! dance;
reel, swim, around me:--I, the vortex that draws all in. Taji! Taji!--
as a berry, that name is juicy in my mouth!--Taji, Taji!" and in
choruses, she warbled forth the sound, till it seemed issuing from her
syren eyes.

My heart flew forth from out its bars, and soared in air; but as my
hand touched Hautia's, down dropped a dead bird from the clouds.

"Ha! how he sinks!--but did'st ever dive in deep waters, Taji? Did'st
ever see where pearls grow?--To the cave!--damsels, lead on!"

Then wending through constellations of flowers, we entered deep
groves. And thus, thrice from sun-light to shade, it seemed three
brief nights and days, ere we paused before the mouth of the cavern.

A bow-shot from the sea, it pierced the hill-side like a vaulted way;

and glancing in, we saw far gleams of water; crossed, here and there,
by long-flung distant shadows of domes and columns. All Venice seemed
within.

From a stack of golden palm-stalks, the damsels now made torches; then
stood grouped; a sheaf of sirens in a sheaf of frame.

Illuminated, the cavern shone like a Queen of Kandy's casket: full of
dawns and sunsets.

From rocky roof to bubbling floor, it was columned with stalactites;
and galleried all round, in spiral tiers, with sparkling, coral ledges.

And now, their torches held aloft, into the water the maidens softly
glided; and each a lotus floated; while, from far above, into the air
Hautia flung her flambeau; then bounding after, in the lake, two
meteors were quenched.

Where she dived, the flambeaux clustered; and up among them, Hautia
rose; hands, full of pearls.

"Lo! Taji; all these may be had for the diving; and Beauty, Health,
Wealth, Long Life, and the Last Lost Hope of man. But through me
alone, may these be had. Dive thou, and bring up one pearl if thou
canst."

Down, down! down, down, in the clear, sparkling water, till I seemed
crystalized in the flashing heart of a diamond; but from those
bottomless depths, I uprose empty handed.

"Pearls, pearls! thy pearls! thou art fresh from the mines. Ah, Taji!
for thee, bootless deep diving. Yet to Hautia, one shallow plunge
reveals many Golcondas. But come; dive with me:--join hands--let me
show thee strange things."

"Show me that which I seek, and I will dive with thee, straight
through the world, till we come up in oceans unknown."

"Nay, nay; but join hands, and I will take thee, where thy Past shall
be forgotten; where thou wilt soon learn to love the living, not the
dead."

"Better to me, oh Hautia! all the bitterness of my buried dead, than
all the sweets of the life thou canst bestow; even, were it eternal."