

CHAPTER XCI

Mardi Behind: An Ocean Before

Returned from the cave, Hautia reclined in her clematis bower,
invisible hands flinging fennel around her. And nearer, and nearer,
stole dulcet sounds dissolving my woes, as warm beams, snow. Strange
languors made me droop; once more within my inmost vault, side by
side, the Past and Yillah lay:--two bodies tranced;--while like a
rounding sun, before me Hautia magnified magnificence; and through her
fixed eyes, slowly drank up my soul.

Thus we stood:--snake and victim: life ebbing out from me, to her.

But from that spell, I burst again, as all the Past smote all the
Present in me.

"Oh Hautia! thou knowest the mystery I die to fathom. I see it
crouching in thine eye:--Reveal!"

"Weal or woe?"

"Life or death!"

"See, see!" and Yillah's rose-pearl danced before me.

I snatched it from her hand:--"Yillah! Yillah!"

"Rave on: she lies too deep to answer; stranger voices than thine she hears:--bubbles are bursting round her."

"Drowned! drowned then, even as she dreamed:--I come, I come!--Ha, what form is this?--hast mosses? sea-thyme? pearls?--Help, help! I sink!--Back, shining monster!--What, Hautia,--is it thou?--Oh vipress, I could slay thee!"

"Go, go,--and slay thyself: I may not make thee mine;--go,--dead to dead!--There is another cavern in the hill." Swift I fled along the valley-side; passed Hautia's cave of pearls; and gained a twilight arch; within, a lake transparent shone. Conflicting currents met, and wrestled; and one dark arch led to channels, seaward tending.

Round and round, a gleaming form slow circled in the deepest eddies:--white, and vaguely Yillah.

Straight I plunged; but the currents were as fierce headwinds off capes, that beat back ships.

Then, as I frenzied gazed; gaining the one dark arch, the revolving shade darted out of sight, and the eddies whirled as before.

"Stay, stay! let me go with thee, though thou glidest to gulfs of

blackness;--naught can exceed the hell of this despair!--Why beat
longer in this corpse oh, my heart!"

As somnambulists fast-frozen in some horrid dream, ghost-like glide
abroad, and fright the wakeful world; so that night, with death-glazed
eyes, to and fro I flitted on the damp and weedy beach.

"Is this specter, Taji?"--and Mohi and the minstrel stood before me.

"Taji lives no more. So dead, he has no ghost. I am his spirit's
phantom's phantom."

"Nay, then, phantom! the time has come to flee."

They dragged me to the water's brink, where a prow was beached. Soon--
Mohi at the helm--we shot beneath the far-flung shadow of a cliff;
when, as in a dream, I hearkened to a voice.

Arrived at Odo, Media had been met with yells. Sedition was in arms,
and to his beard defied him. Vain all concessions then. Foremost stood
the three pale sons of him, whom I had slain, to gain the maiden lost.
Avengers, from the first hour we had parted on the sea, they had
drifted on my track survived starvation; and lived to hunt me round
all Mardi's reef; and now at Odo, that last threshold, waited to
destroy; or there, missing the revenge they sought, still swore to
hunt me round Eternity.

Behind the avengers, raged a stormy mob, invoking Media to renounce his rule. But one hand waving like a pennant above the smoke of some sea-fight, straight through that tumult Media sailed serene: the rioters parting from before him, as wild waves before a prow inflexible.

A haven gained, he turned to Mohi and the minstrel:--"Oh, friends! after our long companionship, hard to part! But henceforth, for many moons, Odo will prove no home for old age, or youth. In Serenia only, will ye find the peace ye seek; and thither ye must carry Taji, who else must soon be slain, or lost. Go: release him from the thrall of Hautia. Outfly the avengers, and gain Serenia. Reek not of me. The state is tossed in storms; and where I stand, the combing billows must break over. But among all noble souls, in tempest-time, the headmost man last flies the wreck. So, here in Odo will I abide, though every plank breaks up beneath me. And then,--great Oro! let the king die clinging to the keel! Farewell!"

Such Mohi's tale.

In trumpet-blasts, the hoarse night-winds now blew; the Lagoon, black with the still shadows of the mountains, and the driving shadows of the clouds. Of all the stars, only red Arcturus shone. But through the gloom, and on the circumvallating reef, the breakers dashed ghost-white.

An outlet in that outer barrier was nigh.

"Ah! Yillah! Yillah!--the currents sweep thee ocean-ward; nor will I tarry behind.--Mardi, farewell!--Give me the helm, old man!"

"Nay, madman! Serenia is our haven. Through yonder strait, for thee, perdition lies. And from the deep beyond, no voyager e'er puts back."

"And why put back? is a life of dying worth living o'er again?--Let me, then, be the unreturning wanderer. The helm! By Oro, I will steer my own fate, old man.--Mardi, farewell!"

"Nay, Taji: commit not the last, last crime!" cried Yoomy.

"He's seized the helm! eternity is in his eye! Yoomy: for our lives we must now swim."

And plunging, they struck out for land: Yoomy buoying Mohi up, and the salt waves dashing the tears from his pallid face, as through the scud, he turned it on me mournfully.

"Now, I am my own soul's emperor; and my first act is abdication! Hail! realm of shades!"--and turning my prow into the racing tide, which seized me like a hand omnipotent, I darted through.

Churned in foam, that outer ocean lashed the clouds; and straight in

my white wake, headlong dashed a shallop, three fixed specters leaning
o'er its prow: three arrows poising.

And thus, pursuers and pursued flew on, over an endless sea.

THE END.