

its beauty into deformity—and for this cause she ever conceals it from the view of all."

A low ominous laugh, like that which once before in the date-grove of Arabia, chilled the blood of Azra, shook the frame of the Moor as he replied:

"Maiden, it was no mortal hand which darkened the vision of that terrible eye. When in the first moment of the princess' existence, it was unclosed to view, her attendants beheld, not the soft and beautiful eye of a new-born infant, but an orb of living fire, that seemed to burn those on whom it glanced, and they fled from her with affright. The skill of the most renowned leeches was assayed to temper the flame of that fiery organ. But in vain—no art could change it; it blazed and burned within its orbit like a spark from hell, lending a fearful expression to the otherwise lovely face of the infant. The parents, who had joyfully expected the birth of their child, were inconsolable at this misfortune, but all to whom it was necessarily known, were sworn under a dreadful penalty to perpetual secrecy. The princess was never seen unveiled, and the story of the arrow, which thou hast heard, was invented as a reason for this constant, though partial concealment, of her countenance.

"But she grew up, beautiful as an angel, and the fame of her charms spread throughout the world, till the news reached the ear of the Sultan Selim, who, when she had scarcely attained her fourteenth year, sent to demand her hand in marriage. Then it was that she first learned truly to bewail her frightful deformity, for the picture of her affianced lord had inspired her with the most ardent affection, and she knew too well the effect produced by her burning eye, not to feel assured, that its first glance would change his passion into horror and disgust; since she could not hope always to conceal it from him—to deceive him as she had done others would be vain, and her health and her spirits seemed sinking beneath the weight of her anxiety and dread. The king, her father, was perplexed and well nigh distracted by her sorrow, and knowing that I was not unskilled in the arts of magic, he sought me, to learn if there was any expedient which might save his child from the unhappy doom which awaited her.

Riches and honours without measure were promised me if I could suggest any, and, lured by ambitious hopes, I girded my garments about me, and went forth to seek the distant summits of Mount Caucasus, beneath whose roots, far down in the secret bowels of the earth, hidden beneath eternal snows, dwells the great Magician, Al-macerez. I had been his pupil in early youth, and knew well each labyrinth of his subterraneous

abode. I threaded them all in safety till I reached the inner recess of those mighty caverns, where I found him again, even as I had left him years before, patiently unravelling the deep mysteries of science—while around him lay piled vast heaps of gems and ores, whose natures he had analyzed, and whose secret uses were as familiar to him as are those of the ripe ear of wheat to the husbandman, who plucks and garners it for his subsistence. An immense carbuncle illuminated the vaulted cavern, hanging, self-suspended in the midst, even as the sun in the firmament, and like that, sending its subtle rays of light into every crevice of the intricate abode.

"It matters not to tell of all I saw in that strange place, nor of the words which passed between that fearful man and myself. It is enough that my errand sped, and that I won from him, but at a price I will not name, the changeable opal with its ring of mystic characters, which thou seest ever upon the finger of thy mistress. It is a talisman of power, and while she wears it, her lord may gaze upon her unveiled face, and read in every feature the characters of perfect beauty. But let it quit her finger for a moment, and her secret is revealed, the hideous eye flames forth in all its horrible deformity, and terminates at once her reign of love and power, while she, to whom the treasure is transferred, becomes at once an object of passionate adoration to the enamoured Sultan. Maiden, readest thou now thy destiny? Yea, thine! but yet on one condition only."

"Name it," said Azra, in a voice hoarse from the overwrought feelings of her ambitious soul.

"Listen! For the mighty service which I rendered, the father of this false princess gave me gold—ay, more than I had craved; but when, as some slight guerdon for my toils, I asked of her a post of honour, which the Sultan at her instance would have granted me, she laughed me to scorn, and bearded me with jests and jeers, that wrung from me a bitter oath of vengeance. And now the hour is nigh for its fulfilment; swear to me only that thou wilt refuse no favour I shall ask, or else I crush thy new raised hopes upon this spot,—and when thou hast sworn, beware how thou dost swerve one tittle from thy oath, lest I force thee also, to quaff the angry cup of my revenge."

"I swear!" exclaimed Azra, shrinking from his grasp, and shuddering at the terrible expression of his demon eye,—yet still the eager desire of accomplishing her hopes, subdued her fear, and anxiously she said—"thou dost intimate that I must win this wondrous talisman; but who may obtain it, linked as it is with chains of gold to the wrist of the Sultana?"