3. 大红宝石——白山的秘密
The Great Carbuncle—A Mystery of the White Mountains

很久很久以前的一个夜晚，在水晶山崎岖的山坡上，一群寻找大红石却徒劳无获的冒险家正在休息。

七个男人和一个年轻女人围在炉火边取暖。这群人中最年迈的是一位高大消瘦、饱经风霜的老人，大家都叫他“寻宝者”。他将毕生的精力和梦想都用在寻找大红石之上，只渴望抱着它一起长眠在某个不知名的洞穴里。

这位不幸的寻宝者身旁坐一个老瘦小的老者，他从事的是化学和炼金术研究，他的身材消瘦干瘪如同木乃伊，他希望寻找到这块大自然精心配制的宝石，用余生的所有时间将它还原为最初的元素，以得到一份精确的分析结果。

另一位冒险家是一位商人兼波士顿行政委员，他要将这红宝石卖给世界上愿意出最高价的君王。第四个人却用以无畏，一张脸总是被一丝冷笑扭曲，大眼镜使得他高大的个大自然都变形失色。第五个老人似乎是一位诗人，眼神闪亮但面容憔悴，他的日常饮食是晨光暮霭和伸手可得的最厚的云彩，佐以月光调味；他梦想着把宝石带到他那幽暗的阁楼间里，日日夜夜地凝视着它，让自己的每一行诗都闪耀着光芒。第六位则是一位举止傲慢的年轻勋爵，火光照在他闪闪发亮的绣花衣服上，他决心要将红宝石用来装饰他的城堡大厅，永恒地照亮着挂在墙壁上的铠甲、旗帜和盾徽。

还有一位英俊的乡下少年，身边是他的妙龄妻子——少女纯洁矜持的娇美气色，已逐渐转变为年轻妻子柔情缱绻的红晕。马修和汉娜似乎与这群充满热切之情的人们格格不入，他们并没有城堡，只希望红宝石能够在
一群寻宝者
漫漫长夜为他们照明，让他们醒来时能看到彼此的脸。

夜深了，年轻的新婚夫妇寄宿在最偏远的角落，凭借一道用细枝精心编织的屏障和他人隔离开来，如同夏娃新房悬挂的层层花彩。他们手拉手进入了梦乡，又从神秘光辉的梦境里苏醒。当新娘的丈夫透过树叶挂毯向外窥视时，却发现棚屋内外空无一人。

为了不错过红宝石，夫妇俩如小鹿般脚底生风地往山上爬。好不容易到达了山上的森林边缘，面对着头顶的山风、白云、裸露的岩石和孤独的阳光，他们都惊慌地连连退缩。但天真的新娘却无法放弃拥有世界上最灿烂的宝石的希望，她声音颤抖地说：“我们再往高处爬一些。”

于是，两位朝拜者踩着枝繁叶茂、盘根错节的中欧山松的枝梢，继续向上攀登。他们爬得太高，浓密黑暗的雾霭开始在下面凝聚起来，笼罩住了峰顶。终于，汉娜摇摇晃晃地倒在了山坡上，伤心地说：“我们迷路了，亲爱的马修。噢，我们原来在小屋子里是多么开心啊！”

“亲爱的，我们还能回去的，”马修说，“看，阳光从这个方向穿透了阴霾，我相信我们能够找到回峡谷的路，别再梦想红宝石了！”

但阳光不可能从那儿照过来。他们惊讶地发现这束光越来越亮，穿破雾霭，将昏暗的色调变成了暗红色，如同阴暗之中掺入了灿烂的微粒。随着浓云退去，他们脚下出现一片深沉而清亮的湖水，一道灿烂光芒划过了湖面。原来这对朴素的夫妇已经来到了神秘的红宝石圣地！

他们浑身颤抖地彼此拥抱，关于这一奇瑰宝石的种种传说潮水般涌进了记忆。灿烂的红光在他们的脸颊上燃烧着，也照耀着对面悬崖底部那个人的身影，仿佛他是一尊大理石——那是“寻宝者”，他死了。

“走吧！亲爱的，”马修紧紧地搂住新娘颤抖的身躯，“回到我们的寒舍，让神圣的日光和恬静的日光照进我们的家，我们再也不想要比别人享有更多的光。”

“是呀，”新娘说，“在红宝石的光照下，我们夜里如何入眠！”

至于其他的朝拜者，他们很快就聪明地放弃了寻找。那位商人后来被一支印第安征队抓住了，惨遭的牢狱使得他的生意变得一塌糊涂；炼金术博士带着一块花岗岩回到了实验室，将其中的试验结果写成了当时最重的一部书；诗人也犯了类似的错误，把大山阴暗处的裂缝里发现的一大块冰当成了宝贝，评论家说他的诗使缺乏红宝石的灿烂光辉，也保留着冰的寒冷；勋爵则心满意足地回到了自己的城堡，等待时间一到就被装入祖墓的棺材里，让葬礼的火把将暗的墓地照亮；而惯世嫉俗者的眼睛被他
At nightfall once in the olden time, on the rugged side of one of the Crystal Hills, a party of adventurers were refreshing themselves after a toilsome and fruitless quest for the Great Carbuncle. They had come thither, not as friends nor partners in the enterprise, but each, save one youthful pair, impelled by his own selfish and solitary longing for this wondrous gem. Their feeling of brotherhood, however, was strong enough to induce them to contribute a mutual aid in building a rude hut of branches and kindling a great fire of shattered pines that had drifted down the headlong current of the Amoosuck, on the lower bank of which they were to pass the night. There was but one of their number, perhaps, who had become so estranged from natural sympathies by the absorbing spell of the pursuit as to acknowledge no satisfaction at the sight of human faces in the remote and solitary region whither they had ascended. A vast extent of wilderness lay between them and the nearest settlement, while scant a mile above their heads was that bleak verge where the hills throw off their shaggy mantle of forest-trees and either robe themselves in clouds or tower naked into the sky. The roar of the Amoosuck would have been too awful for endurance if only a solitary man had listened while the mountain-stream talked with the wind.

The adventurers, therefore, exchanged hospitable greetings and welcomed one another to the hut where each man was the host and all were the guests of the whole company. They spread their individual supplies of food on the flat surface of a rock and partook of a general repast; at the close of which a sentiment of good-fellowship was perceptible among the party, though repressed by the idea that the renewed search for the Great Carbuncle must make them strangers again in the morning. Seven men and one young woman,
they warmed themselves together at the fire, which extended its bright wall along the whole front of their wigwam. As they observed the various and contrasted figures that made up the assemblage, each man looking like a caricature of himself in the unsteady light that flickered over him, they came mutually to the conclusion that an odder society had never met in city or wilderness, on mountain or plain.

The eldest of the group — a tall, lean, weatherbeaten man some sixty years of age — was clad in the skins of wild animals whose fashion of dress he did well to imitate, since the deer, the wolf and the bear had long been his most intimate companions. He was one of those ill-fated mortals, such as the Indians told of, whom in their early youth the Great Carbuncle smote with a peculiar madness and became the passionate dream of their existence. All who visited that region knew him as “the Seeker,” and by no other name. As none could remember when he first took up the search, there went a fable in the valley of the Saco that for his inordinate lust after the Great Carbuncle he had been condemned to wander among the mountains till the end of time, still with the same feverish hopes at sunrise, the same despair at eve. Near this miserable Seeker sat a little elderly personage wearing a high-crowned hat shaped somewhat like a crucible. He was from beyond the sea — a Doctor Cacaphodel, who had wilted and dried himself into a mummy by continually stooping over charcoal-furnaces and inhaling unwholesome fumes during his researches in chemistry and alchemy. It was told of him — whether truly or not — that at the commencement of his studies he had drained his body of all its richest blood and wasted it, with other inestimable ingredients, in an unsuccessful experiment, and had never been a well man since. Another of the adventurers was Master Ichabod Pigsnort, a weighty merchant and selectman of Boston, and an elder of the famous Mr. Norton’s church. His enemies had a ridiculous story that Master Pigsnort was accustomed to spend a whole hour after prayer-time every morning and evening in wallowing naked among an immense quantity of pine-tree shillings, which were the earliest silver coinage of Massachusetts. The fourth whom we shall notice had no name that his companions knew of, and was chiefly distinguished by a sneer that always contorted his thin visage, and by a prodigious pair of spectacles which were
supposed to deform and discolor the whole face of nature to this gentleman’s perception. The fifth adventurer likewise lacked a name, which was the greater pity, as he appeared to be a poet. He was a bright-eyed man, but woefully pined away, which was no more than natural if, as some people affirmed, his ordinary diet was fog, morning mist and a slice of the densest cloud within his reach, sauced with moonshine whenever he could get it. Certain it is that the poetry which flowed from him had a smack of all these dainties. The sixth of the party was a young man of haughty mien and sat somewhat apart from the rest, wearing his plumed hat loftily among his elders, while the fire glittered on the rich embroidery of his dress and gleamed intensely on the jewelled pommel of his sword. This was the lord De Vere, who when at home was said to spend much of his time in the burial-vault of his dead progenitors rummaging their mouldy coffins in search of all the earthly pride and vainglory that was hidden among bones and dust; so that, besides his own share, he had the collected haughtiness of his whole line of ancestry. Lastly, there was a handsome youth in rustic garb, and by his side a blooming little person in whom a delicate shade of maiden reserve was just melting into the rich glow of a young wife’s affection. Her name was Hannah, and her husband’s Matthew — two homely names, yet well enough adapted to the simple pair who seemed strangely out of place among the whimsical fraternity whose wits had been set agog by the Great Carbuncle.

Beneath the shelter of one hut, in the bright blaze of the same fire, sat this varied group of adventurers, all so intent upon a single object that of whatever else they began to speak their closing words were sure to be illuminated with the Great Carbuncle. Several related the circumstances that brought them thither. One had listened to a traveller’s tale of this marvellous stone in his own distant country, and had immediately been seized with such a thirst for beholding it as could only be quenched in its intensest lustre. Another, so long ago as when the famous Captain Smith visited these coasts, had seen it blazing far at sea, and had felt no rest in all the intervening years till now that he took up the search. A third, being encamped on a hunting-expedition full forty miles south of the White Mountains, awoke at midnight and beheld the Great Carbuncle gleaming like a meteor, so that the shadows of the trees fell
马修紧紧抱住了妻子
backward from it. They spoke of the innumerable attempts which had been made to reach the spot, and of the singular fatality which had hitherto withheld success from all adventurers, though it might seem so easy to follow to its source a light that overpowered the moon and almost matched the sun. It was observable that each smiled scornfully at the madness of every other in anticipating better fortune than the past, yet nourished a scarcely-hidden conviction that he would himself be the favored one. As if to allay their too sanguine hopes, they recurred to the Indian traditions that a spirit kept watch about the gem and bewildered those who sought it either by removing it from peak to peak of the higher hills or by calling up a mist from the enchanted lake over which it hung. But these tales were deemed unworthy of credit, all professing to believe that the search had been baffled by want of sagacity or perseverance in the adventurers, or such other causes as might naturally obstruct the passage to any given point among the intricacies of forest, valley and mountain.

In a pause of the conversation the wearer of the prodigious spectacles looked round upon the party, making each individual in turn the object of the sneer which invariably dwelt upon his countenance.

“So, fellow-pilgrims,” said he, “here we are, seven wise men and one fair damsel, who doubtless is as wise as any graybeard of the company. Here we are, I say, all bound on the same goodly enterprise. Methinks, now, it were not amiss that each of us declare what he proposes to do with the Great Carbuncle, provided he have the good hap to clutch it. — What says our friend in the bearskin? How mean you, good sir, to enjoy the prize which you have been seeking the Lord knows how long among the Crystal Hills?”

“How enjoy it!” exclaimed the aged Seeker, bitterly. “I hope for no enjoyment from it: that folly has past long ago. I keep up the search for this accursed stone because the vain ambition of my youth has become a fate upon me in old age. The pursuit alone is my strength, the energy of my soul, the warmth of my blood and the pith and marrow of my bones. Were I to turn my back upon it, I should fall down dead on the hither side of the notch which is the gateway of this mountain-region. Yet not to have my wasted lifetime back again would I give up my hopes of is deemed little better than a traffic with the
evil one. Now, think ye that I would have done this grievous wrong to my soul, body, reputation and estate without a reasonable chance of profit?"

"Not I, pious Master Pigsnort," said the man with the spectacles. "I never laid such a great folly to thy charge."

"Truly, I hope not," said the merchant. "Now, as touching this Great Carbuncle, I am free to own that I have never had a glimpse of it, but, be it only the hundredth part so bright as people tell, it will surely outvalue the Great Mogul’s best diamond, which he holds at an incalculable sum; wherefore I am minded to put the Great Carbuncle on shipboard and voyage with it to England, France, Spain, Italy, or into heathendom if Providence should send me thither, and, in a word, dispose of the gem to the best bidder among the potentates of the earth, that he may place it among his crown-jewels. If any of ye have a wiser plan, let him expound it."

"That have I, thou sordid man!" exclaimed the poet. "Dost thou desire nothing brighter than gold, that thou wouldst transmute all this ethereal lustre into such dross as thou wallest in already? For myself, hiding the jewel under my cloak, I shall hie me back to my attic-chamber in one of the darksome alleys of London. There night and day will I gaze upon it. My soul shall drink its radiance; it shall be diffused throughout my intellectual powers and gleam brightly in every line of poesy that I indite. Thus long ages after I am gone the splendor of the Great Carbuncle will blaze around my name."

"Well said, Master Poet!" cried he of the spectacles. "Hide it under thy cloak, sayest thou? Why, it will gleam through the holes and make thee look like a jack-o’-lantern!"

"To think," ejaculated the lord De Vere, rather to himself than his companions, the best of whom he held utterly unworthy of his intercourse — "to think that a fellow in a tattered cloak should talk of conveying the Great Carbuncle to a garret in Grubb street! Have not I resolved within myself that the whole earth contains no fitter ornament for the great hall of my ancestral castle? There shall it flame for ages, making a noonday of midnight, glittering on the suits of armor, the banners and escutcheons, that hang around the wall, and keeping bright the memory of heroes. Wherefore have all other adventurers sought the prize in vain but that I might win it and make it a symbol of the
glories of our lofty line? And never on the diadem of the White Mountains did the Great Carbuncle hold a place half so honored as is reserved for it in the hall of the De Veres.”

“It is a noble thought,” said the cynic, with an obsequious sneer. “Yet, might I presume to say so, the gem would make a rare sepulchral lamp, and would display the glories of Your Lordship’s progenitors more truly in the ancestral vault than in the castle-hall.”

“Nay, forsooth,” observed Matthew, the young rustic, who sat hand in hand with his bride, “the gentleman has be thought himself of a profitable use for this bright stone. Hannah here and I are seeking it for a like purpose.”

“How, fellow?” exclaimed His Lordship, in surprise. “What castle-hall hast thou to hang it in?”

“No castle,” replied Matthew, “but as neat a cottage as any within sight of the Crystal Hills. Ye must know, friends, that Hannah and I, being wedded the last week, have taken up the search of the Great Carbuncle because we shall need its light in the long winter evenings and it will be such a pretty thing to show the neighbors when they visit us! It will shine through the house, so that we may pick up a pin in any corner, and will set all the windows a-glowing as if there were a great fire of pine-knots in the chimney. And then how pleasant, when we awake in the night, to be able to see one another’s faces!”

There was a general smile among the adventurers at the simplicity of the young couple’s project in regard to this wondrous and invaluable stone, with which the greatest monarch on earth might have been proud to adorn his palace. Especially the man with spectacles, who had sneered at all the company in turn, now twisted his visage into such an expression of ill-natured mirth that Matthew asked him rather peevishly what he himself meant to do with the Great Carbuncle.

“The Great Carbuncle!” answered the cynic, with ineffable scorn. “Why, you blockhead, there is no such thing in rerum naturâ. I have come three thousand miles, and am resolved to set my foot on every peak of these mountains and poke my head into every chasm for the sole purpose of demonstrating to the satisfaction of any man one whit less an ass than thyself that the Great Carbuncle is all a humbug.”
Vain and foolish were the motives that had brought most of the adventurers to the Crystal Hills, but none so vain, so foolish, and so impious too, as that of the scoffers with the prodigious spectacles. He was one of those wretched and evil men whose yearnings are downward to the darkness instead of heavenward, and who, could they but extinguish the lights which God hath kindled for us, would count the midnight gloom their chiepest glory.

As the cynic spoke several of the party were startled by a gleam of red splendor that showed the huge shapes of the surrounding mountains and the rock-bestrewn bed of the turbulent river, with an illumination unlike that of their fire, on the trunks and black boughs of the forest-trees. They listened for the roll of thunder, but heard nothing, and were glad that the tempest came not near them. The stars—those dial-points of heaven—now warned the adventurers to close their eyes on the blazing logs and open them in dreams to the glow of the Great Carbuncle.

The young married couple had taken their lodgings in the farthest corner of the wigwam, and were separated from the rest of the party by a curtain of curiously-woven twigs such as might have hung in deep festoons around the bridal-bower of Eve. The modest little wife had wrought this piece of tapestry while the other guests were talking. She and her husband fell asleep with hands tenderly clasped, and awoke from visions of unearthly radiance to meet the more blessed light of one another’s eyes. They awoke at the same instant and with one happy smile beaming over their two faces, which grew brighter with their consciousness of the reality of life and love. But no sooner did she recollect where they were than the bride peeped through the interstices of the leafy curtain and saw that the outer room of the hut was deserted.

“Up, dear Matthew!” cried she, in haste. “The strange folk are all gone. Up this very minute, or we shall lose the Great Carbuncle!”

In truth, so little did these poor young people deserve the mighty prize which had lured them thither that they had slept peacefully all night and till the summits of the hills were glittering with sunshine, while the other adventurers had tossed their limbs in feverish wakefulness or dreamed of climbing precipices, and set off to realize their dreams with the curliest peep of dawn. But Matthew and Hannah after their calm rest were as light as two young deer,
and merely stopped to say their prayers and wash themselves in a cold pool of
the Amonoosuck, and then to taste a morsel of food ere they turned their faces
to the mountain-side. It was a sweet emblem of conjugal affection as they
toiled up the difficult ascent gathering strength from the mutual aid which they
afforded.

After several little accidents, such as a torn robe, a lost shoe and the
entanglement of Hannah’s hair in a bough, they reached the upper verge of the
forest and were now to pursue a more adventurous course. The innumerable
trunks and heavy foliage of the trees had hitherto shut in their thoughts, which
now shrank affrighted from the region of wind and cloud and naked rocks and
desolate sunshine that rose immeasurably above them. They gazed back at the
obscure wilderness which they had traversed, and longed to be buried again in
its depths rather than trust themselves to so vast and visible a solitude.

“Shall we go on?” said Matthew, throwing his arm round Hannah’s waist
both to protect her and to comfort his heart by drawing her close to it.

But the little bride, simple as she was, had a woman’s love of jewels, and
could not forego the hope of possessing the very brightest in the world, in spite
of the perils with which it must be won.

“Let us climb a little higher,” whispered she, yet tremulously, as she turned
her face upward to the lonely sky.

“Come, then,” said Matthew, mustering his manly courage and drawing
her along with him; for she became timid again the moment that he grew bold.

And upward, accordingly, went the pilgrims of the Great Carbuncle, now
treading upon the tops and thickly-interwoven branches of dwarf pines which
by the growth of centuries, though mossy with age, had barely reached three
feet in altitude. Next they came to masses and fragments of naked rock heaped
confusedly together like a cairn reared by giants in memory of a giant chief. In
this bleak realm of upper air nothing breathed, nothing grew; there was no life
but what was concentrated in their two hearts; they had climbed so high that
Nature herself seemed no longer to keep them company. She lingered beneath
them within the verge of the forest-trees, and sent a farewell glance after her
children as they strayed where her own green footprints had never been. But
soon they were to be hidden from her eye. Densely and dark the mists began to
gather below, casting black spots of shadow on the vast landscape and sailing heavily to one centre, as if the loftiest mountain-peak had summoned a council of its kindred clouds. Finally the vapors welded themselves, as it were, into a mass, presenting the appearance of a pavement over which the wanderers might have trodden, but where they would vainly have sought an avenue to the blessed earth which they had lost. And the lovers yearned to behold that green earth again — more intensely, alas! than beneath a clouded sky they had ever desired a glimpse of heaven. They even felt it a relief to their desolation when the mists, creeping gradually up the mountain, concealed its lonely peak, and thus annihilated — at least, for them — the whole region of visible space. But they drew closer together with a fond and melancholy gaze, dreading lest the universal cloud should snatch them from each other’s sight. Still, perhaps, they would have been resolute to climb as far and as high between earth and heaven as they could find foothold if Hannah’s strength had not begun to fail, and with that her courage also. Her breath grew short. She refused to burden her husband with her weight, but often tottered against his side, and recovered herself each time by a feebler effort. At last she sank down on one of the rocky steps of the acclivity.

“We are lost, dear Matthew,” said she, mournfully; “we shall never find our way to the earth again. And oh how happy we might have been in our cottage!”

“Dear heart, we will yet be happy there,” answered Matthew. “Look! In this direction the sunshine penetrates the dismal mist; by its aid I can direct our course to the passage of the Notch. Let us go back, love, and dream no more of the Great Carbuncle.”

“The sun cannot be yonder,” said Hannah, with despondence. “By this time it must be noon; if there could ever be any sunshine here, it would come from above our heads.”

“But look!” repeated Matthew, in a somewhat altered tone. “It is brightening every moment. If not sunshine, what can it be?”

Nor could the young bride any longer deny that a radiance was breaking through the mist and changing its dim hue to a dusky red, which continually grew more vivid, as if brilliant particles were interfused with the gloom. Now,
also, the cloud began to roll away from the mountain, while, as it heavily withdrew, one object after another started out of its impenetrable obscurity into sight with precisely the effect of a new creation before the indistinctness of the old chaos had been completely swallowed up. As the process went on they saw the gleaming of water close at their feet, and found themselves on the very border of a mountain-lake, deep, bright, clear and calmly beautiful, spreading from brim to brim of a basin that had been scooped out of the solid rock. A ray of glory flashed across its surface. The pilgrims looked whence it should proceed, but closed their eyes, with a thrill of awful admiration, to exclude the fervid splendor that glowed from the brow of a cliff impending over the enchanted lake.

For the simple pair had reached that lake of mystery and found the long-sought shrine of the Great Carbuncle. They threw their arms around each other and trembled at their own success, for as the legends of this wondrous gem rushed thick upon their memory they felt themselves marked out by fate, and the consciousness was fearful. Often from childhood upward they had seen it shining like a distant star, and now that star was throwing its intensest lustre on their hearts. They seemed changed to one another’s eyes in the red brilliancy that flamed upon their cheeks, while it lent the same fire to the lake, the rocks and sky, and to the mists which had rolled back before its power. But with their next glance they beheld an object that drew their attention even from the mighty stone. At the base of the cliff, directly beneath the Great Carbuncle, appeared the figure of a man with his arms extended in the act of climbing and his face turned upward as if to drink the full gush of splendor. But he stirred not, no more than if changed to marble.

“It is the Seeker,” whispered Hannah, convulsively grasping her husband’s arm. “Matthew, he is dead.”

“The joy of success has killed him,” replied Matthew, trembling violently. “Or perhaps the very light of the Great Carbuncle was death.”

“‘The Great Carbuncle!’” cried a peevish voice behind them. “The great humbug! If you have found it, prithee point it out to me.”

They turned their heads, and there was the cynic with his prodigious spectacles set carefully on his nose, staring now at the lake, now at the rocks,
now at the distant masses of vapor, now right at the Great Carbuncle itself, yet seemingly as unconscious of its light as if all the scattered clouds were condensed about his person. Though its radiance actually threw the shadow of the unbeliever at his own feet as he turned his back upon the glorious jewel, he would not be convinced that there was the least glimmer there.

“Where is your great humbug?” he repeated. “I challenge you to make me see it.”

“There!” said Matthew, incensed at such perverse blindness, and turning the cynic round toward the illuminated cliff. “Take off those abominable spectacles, and you cannot help seeing it.”

Now, these colored spectacles probably darkened the cynic’s sight in at least as great a degree as the smoked glasses through which people gaze at an eclipse. With resolute bravado, however, he snatched them from his nose and fixed a bold stare full upon the ruddy blaze of the Great Carbuncle. But scarcely had he encountered it when, with a deep, shuddering groan, he dropped his head and pressed both hands across his miserable eyes. Thenceforth there was in very truth no light of the Great Carbuncle, nor any other light on earth, nor light of heaven itself, for the poor cynic. So long accustomed to view all objects through a medium that deprived them of every glimpse of brightness, a single flash of so glorious a phenomenon, striking upon his naked vision, had blinded him for ever.

“Matthew,” said Hannah, clinging to him, “let us go hence.”

Matthew saw that she was faint, and, kneeling down, supported her in his arms while he threw some of the thrillingly-cold water of the enchanted lake upon her face and bosom. It revived her, but could not renovate her courage.

“Yes, dearest,” cried Matthew, pressing her tremulous form to his breast; “we will go hence and return to our humble cottage. The blessed sunshine and the quiet moonlight shall come through our window. We will kindle the cheerful glow of our hearth at eventide and be happy in its light. But never again will we desire more light than all the world may share with us.”

“No,” said his bride, “for how could we live by day or sleep by night in this awful blaze of the Great Carbuncle?”

Out of the hollow of their hands they drank each a draught from the lake,
which presented them its waters uncontaminated by an earthly lip. Then, lending their guidance to the blinded cynic, who uttered not a word, and even stifled his groans in his own most wretched heart, they began to descend the mountain. Yet as they left the shore, till then untrodden, of the spirit’s lake, they threw a farewell glance toward the cliff and beheld the vapors gathering in dense volumes, through which the gem burned duskily.

As touching the other pilgrims of the Great Carbuncle, the legend goes on to tell that the worshipful Master Ichabod Pigsnort soon gave up the quest as a desperate speculation, and wisely resolved to betake himself again to his warehouse, near the town-dock, in Boston. But as he passed through the Notch of the mountains a war-party of Indians captured our unlucky merchant and carried him to Montreal, there holding him in bondage till by the payment of a heavy ransom he had woefully subtracted from his hoard of pine-tree shillings. By his long absence, moreover, his affairs had become so disordered that for the rest of his life, instead of wallowing in silver, he had seldom a sixpence-worth of copper. Doctor Cacaphodel, the alchemist, returned to his laboratory with a prodigious fragment of granite, which he ground to powder, dissolved in acids, melted in the crucible and burnt with the blowpipe, and published the result of his experiments in one of the heaviest folios of the day. And for all these purposes the gem itself could not have answered better than the granite. The poet, by a somewhat similar mistake, made prize of a great piece of ice which he found in a sunless chasm of the mountains, and swore that it corresponded in all points with his idea of the Great Carbuncle. The critics say that, if his poetry lacked the splendor of the gem, it retained all the coldness of the ice. The lord De Vere went back to his ancestral hall, where he contented himself with a wax-lighted chandelier, and filled in due course of time another coffin in the ancestral vault. As the funeral torches gleamed within that dark receptacle, there was no need of the Great Carbuncle to show the vanity of earthly pomp.

The cynic, having cast aside his spectacles, wandered about the world a miserable object, and was punished with an agonizing desire of light for the wilful blindness of his former life. The whole night long he would lift his splendor-blasted orbs to the moon and stars; he turned his face eastward at
sunrise as duly as a Persian idolater; he made a pilgrimage to Rome to witness the magnificent illumination of Saint Peter’s church, and finally perished in the Great Fire of London, into the midst of which he had thrust himself with the desperate idea of catching one feeble ray from the blaze that was kindling earth and heaven.

Matthew and his bride spent many peaceful years and were fond of telling the legend of the Great Carbuncle. The tale, however, toward the close of their lengthened lives, did not meet with the full credence that had been accorded to it by those who remembered the ancient lustre of the gem. For it is affirmed that from the hour when two mortals had shown themselves so simply wise as to reject a jewel which would have dimmed all earthly things its splendor waned. When our pilgrims reached the cliff, they found only an opaque stone with particles of mica glittering on its surface. There is also a tradition that as the youthful pair departed the gem was loosened from the forehead of the cliff and fell into the enchanted lake, and that at noontide the Seeker’s form may still be seen to bend over its quenchless gleam.

Some few believe that this inestimable stone is blazing as of old, and say that they have caught its radiance, like a flash of summer lightning, far down the valley of the Saco. And be it owned that many a mile from the Crystal Hills I saw a wondrous light around their summits, and was lured by the faith of poesy to be the latest pilgrim of the Great Carbuncle.