



A ROMANCE OF AN HOUR.

BY JOHN BOWLERS.

ONE lovely Sabbath morning in June the hero of this romance strolled through a park of native forest which skirts the capital city of a great nation. He was in time for the morning rehearsal of nature's everlasting sym-

phony; bird and bee humming in wondrous harmony with rustling leaf, bud and blossom. He paused at the base of a pyramid of wild-rose brambles and, gazing at the only open blossom on the topmost branch, he said: "Yes, it is always so; the most tempting things are just beyond our reach; but, in spite of your apparent security I must capture you, my royal beauty." And springing up lightly he grasped the thorny stem and the prize was his.

What cared he for the wound on his finger? Had he not secured the rose, this rare and latest masterpiece of nature's craft?

He sat down at the base of a majestic oak and mused, intently gazing the while at the flower and then at the crimson drop which was its price.

He was what the world calls a dreamer. His Greek profile, light-brown beard and mustache, deep blue eyes and high forehead told of the mingled temperaments of poet, philosopher and artist, each striving for the mastery. One might suspect a lack of the sterner practical qualities, perhaps; but the nature of this man was, after all,

too practical to soar far away from the physical facts of his environment.

But this morning he must soar. He was under a strange spell of enchantment. Last night there appeared to him in his dreams a vision which had frequently come of late and which left always for days a strange path of light upon this commonplace life. It was a vision of a beautiful girl. With strange vividness he saw her last night. The touch of her hand seemed to lift him above earthly experiences. The smouldering embers of divine aspiration kindled under the light of her glance. If he could always feel thus! What would matter the defeats and disappointments of life! So it was that this morning he felt an impatient longing to pierce beyond this material veil to the eternal verities which are just behind it.

As he drank the perfume of the rose he asked himself: "What is it? What is this fragrance? With enlarged vision could we see it? Do particles of sublimated matter assume shapes fantastic? or, as is more likely, do they appear in the form of the parent, as semi-spiritual roses?"

"And thou too, oh, ruby drop, tell me of yourself and the shapes divine which make up your royal coloring. Is it possible that you too are composed of atoms fashioned after the Divine Prototype? Do you bear the image of man in some semi-spiritual resemblance?"

As he mused thus he became gradually conscious, without any surprise, that he was in the presence of a vast multitude of people, beings like himself, but who were swaying to and fro in the wild tumult of despair which follows a great calamity. So might Lisbon have looked

the moment after the earth yawned, or Atlantis when in the throes of cataclysmic disaster. There were wild prayers, entreaties, to him to save them. Why were they addressed to him?

Gradually the truth was borne in upon his consciousness that these beings were a part of himself. His organism was their universe, and beyond its limits they had no power to conceive of existence. The prick of the thorn was to them a cataclysm—a wild upheaval which threw them open to an environment to which they were not adapted and in which they must inevitably perish. He heard them petitioning him with self-accusing prayers to save them from his just wrath, which no doubt their sins had provoked. How could he reach them; how make them understand that this misfortune was not retributive at all but had its origin in complications far beyond their little universe?

Suddenly there appeared two beings, evidently of a different type, bright, radiant, ineffable—a man with the face of a sage leading by the hand a fair creature, seemingly his daughter. It needed but one glance to see that she was the same, the lovely visitant of his dreams.

With an air of calm authority the man spoke, and his words brought instant peace to the distracted and disordered multitude.

"My children," he said, "be not dismayed, be patient and wait. You are in the hands of law and of love; not at the mercy of caprice and of anger. I know whereof I speak, and I tell you we may trust the everlasting and eternal Power to heal every wound. You are in divine keeping and all is well. Each of you has a duty to perform in the work of repair, let each see that he does it faithfully and well. The reward will be swift and sure." Then turning, he said: "You are no doubt surprised at what you have seen. You have had a glimpse of a hitherto unsuspected world. Come with me and I will reveal more of its marvellous economy."

In another moment they found themselves in a region of strange charm and beauty. No radiant sun seemed to shine from the zenith of its heaven, but a soft diffused light illumined the atmosphere.

"This," said the sage, "is as it were the Dome of the Temple. It is the high-

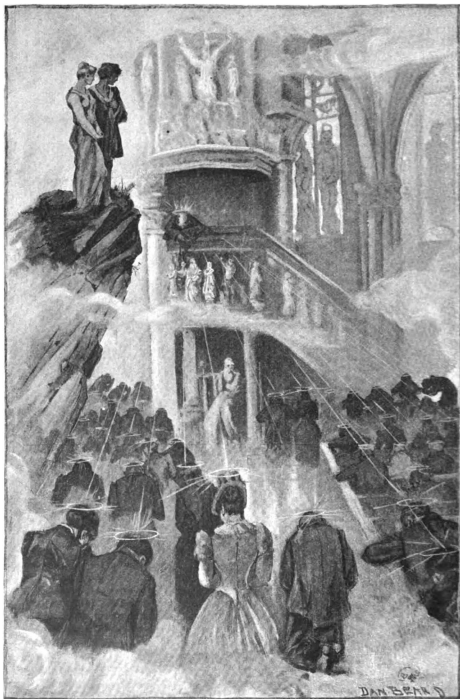
est part of the organism, the seat of the directive energies which control the rest. In other words, you are at this moment exploring the recesses of your own brain. Among the myriads of beings composing your organism, only the bravest and strongest reach this supreme elevation and participate in these exalted functions, and there again they are sifted and classified according to their fitness for the higher or lower activities indicated in your system of knowledge by the 'white' and the 'gray.' I shall use another of your terms to make you comprehend the process by which these changes are accomplished. It is by 'selection.' Selection determines everything. Every atom or being becomes a part of some one of the various organs or activities of your organism by means of a preference, inclination or affinity, which ranges it with an absolute fidelity to its essential nature. There are no arbitrary rulings in creation, be it great or small, and the world you are now observing is subject to the identical law which controls the suns in their courses."

He who was a guest in this strange world looked about him with an eager curiosity, listening the while to his venerable guide.

The atmosphere of the place produced a singular exaltation of spirit. He could remember only on one or two occasions having for one brief moment attained the sort of joy he now experienced. The dross of life seemed to have dropped away. He could not imagine the existence of anything ignoble.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, drawing in a deep inspiration of the strange ether, "this is worth living."

The old man smiled and said: "My son, you are in your native air. I knew that you were suited to it and that is the reason I conducted you hither. Some could not breathe in this region of quickened forces, but all that involves much you cannot understand now. My daughter has long watched you," he added, smiling again. "Come here, Aleta." The beautiful girl was at his side in a moment. He looked at her fixedly for only an instant and then went on: "You were right, my dear girl. Your friend is well fitted to understand these mysteries, and you shall guide his feet while I lead his thought to a new understanding of the secrets of his own



IN ANOTHER MOMENT THEY WERE LOOKING DOWN UPON AN ASSEMBLY OF WORSHIPPERS.

being. I am Alta," he said, turning to his companion, "and you may call me so, if you will."

"That will indeed be a privilege, Sir," was the reverent reply. "And, Sir, a moment ago you called me 'Son.' It had a thrilling sweetness to me. Will you call me so again and ever after?"

Alta smiled. "Yes, I understand, you love her. That is but natural, because she is the other half of your own soul, and she loves you under the same law of necessity."

"Loves me!" gasped the youth. "Aleta, tell me, is this so? Can it be that there is such happiness for me?"

"Yes," she said, with simple frankness, "I love you;" and, as if proud of the self-surrender, she yielded to the embrace of his enfolding arms. Then lifting a face which shone with a new and strange brightness, she said: "I think I have a right to name you since we belong to each other. Alta may call you 'Son,' but for me you shall be 'Hero.' My Hero for all time," she added, in a tone of rapturous tenderness, as a baptismal tear fell upon the bent head of her lover.

A wondrous calm pervaded the soul of Hero, as, with Aleta's hand in his, they wandered through the shining recesses—crystalline labyrinths of this strange place.

"You might be here a thousand years," said Alta, "and yet not exhaust the marvels of this place. There are myriads of departments, each conducted with such absolute precision, a microscope of a million diameters would not detect a flaw in the work. The nature of these activities I cannot explain to you, but their import is tremendous. You see those messengers speeding with the fleetness of light from one point to another? They bear messages to and from every remote part of your being, and bring reports of all coming within the cognizance of your sense and perception.

"Do you observe a change in the conditions? There is some exciting cause, which gives increased brilliancy to the light and a peculiar rarity to the ether. This is sometimes produced by the approach of another organism to which this one is allied; but in this case the cause is different, as I will explain to you later. Lean on me, my son," he said, looking at his companion intently.

"I do feel a little faint," said Hero, ac-

cepting the proffered support. He watched Aleta, who, in a sort of inpatient rapture, floated on beyond them, and seemed melting into the strange fantastic beauty of the scene. The light dazzled with its growing intensity, augmented now by electric coruscations. The changing variety of beautiful form and color fatigued while it charmed. The ether pulsed in a wild rush of waves which were color to the eye, music to the ear and fragrance to the sense. Hero felt as if he were suffocating from excess of perception, and grasping his forehead with both hands, uttered a cry and fell at Alta's feet in a swoon.

In another moment he opened his eyes upon the familiar forest. There were the pines and oaks, and among the brown needles and leaves at his feet lay the rose he had plucked. Alta was holding his hand, and ah! wonder of wonders! Aleta was murmuring sweet words of tenderness as she bathed his head with water from the brook. "Have I dreamed?" he said, "such a strange place!"

"No," said Alta gravely, "you have not dreamed. What you saw is reality. You have looked in upon yourself, and have some idea now of the complexity of your own being. You have learned that the fate of countless multitudes hangs upon your every thought and act; that your volition determines their destiny, while you in turn are made wretched if any one of them fails to perform his part in the economy of your organism. The interdependence is as intimate as it is possible to be; for, in fact, you are they, and they are you. You have looked into the recesses of your own brain and have seen, if you have not understood, the marvellous workings of its processes. Do you not realize now how grave a responsibility it is to live?"

"But your head aches and we must find an antidote for all this introspection. Do you know why the condition grew so intense and so agitating during the last moments of our stay in that place?"

"No," said Hero, "I do not know, but it seemed as if I should go mad from excess of perception."

"Yes," said Alta, smiling, "that was the exciting cause. It was your mental organ we were traversing, and as your own excitement increased, the conditions there corresponded."

"How marvellous," exclaimed Hero.

"Could you see, as I have often seen," Alta went on, "the brain of a genius at the moment when a discovery dawns upon him—it is like the crater of a volcano. But you are fatigued, you must have no more excitement now. Our researches shall be outside of yourself. You shall see your fellow-men, not as you have always known them, but as they appear to me and as they are. Do you see, my son, that luminous spot yonder? It is caused by the conjunction of many spheres, or men, as you would say, drawn together by a common interest and mutual attraction. They have assembled to worship. That steady diffused light indicates the sympathy or the rapport which fuses the souls of the multitude. This is well suited to my purpose as an illustration, so thither we will go."

He gave a sweeping movement of his uplifted hand, and away they were speeding through space toward the softly illumined spot Alta had indicated. In another moment they were looking down upon an assembly of worshippers. Each individual was encircled in a halo of shimmering light, appearing, indeed, like a "sphere," as called by Alta. A network of lines could be discerned, like fine silver threads, in which all seemed enmeshed. Alta anticipated Hero's question and said, "Those are lines of force, attractive and repellent, which draw these spheres toward or away from each other. They are the invisible currents which establish the natural relations and association among people."

Hero looked for some moments in silence and then said: "I observe there is an infinite variety in the appearance of these spheres."

"Yes," said Alta, "and to me that is as full of meaning as is a printed page to you. Your scientists have discovered a system of lines in the spectrum of remote heavenly bodies, which tells their nature and elements. I see before me lines which in the same way disclose the innermost impulses of each soul, love, truth, hypocrisy, hatred, jealousy, are all revealed in that encompassing halo. You observe those lines of force," he went on, "which stream from the head, are in some individuals much longer and brighter than in others? Those are the men who will in-

evitably dominate the others. Then, too, there are different qualities of this force, good and evil, that you cannot discern as I do, but you see clearly as I, that a man's personality is not limited within the boundary of his visible physical organism. See how each one extends—some reaching out an influence which penetrates every being in the assembly; while others again have only a little feeble radius of light, which scarcely reaches his nearest neighbor; but you will observe all are interlaced and entwined by these invisible currents, which make the whole world and, indeed, the whole creation, akin; so that just as in the minute beings you saw a while ago in your own organism there is an interdependence, and harm to one must be an injury to all the rest, as all partake of these same living currents, which flow like your life blood through the arteries and veins of the race of men."

"Oh, what a complex world!" exclaimed Hero.

"Complex, indeed," answered Alta: "why, my son, what you have seen is only the beginning of an endless chain. The myriads of beings on the earth, like those before us, constitute a whole, which is again only an integral part of some mightier whole, and that again only a part of another and more gigantic combination. And so on and on, till the brain grows giddy with addition and multiplication, and still we have not yet reached the end, the all, the sum total which is the universe."

"Then if it has no limit it can have no centre," said Hero, "and if there be an impossible maximum there must also be an impossible minimum. I am lost, lost, in this immensity."

"You are quite right, my son," said Alta; "there is no boundary line, no frontier, and every man makes for himself a centre. The place where he stands is for him the centre of the universe. I am pleased to find your mind so receptive to these things," he added. "You are equally right in seeing the infinity of the chain leading toward the minute. An impossible minimum follows an impossible maximum. What you call matter, being simply an aggregation of particles, which are in turn composed of other and smaller particles, so that you may subtract and divide till the brain grows weary with the

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task—as it did just now in multiplying—and still you will have molecules susceptible of division, until we arrive at a point where the atoms are so infinitesimal that all the solids known to science are as honeycomb to the many times divided molecules."

"Then," said Hero, "why may not this ethereal matter, infinite in attributes, why may it not be spirit?"

Alta shook his head gravely. "The time is not ripe for you to know the relation of spirit and matter. You have much to learn before you are ready for that great mystery, but this much I may tell you. Spirit is to matter what the general is to the army, everywhere present by his cohesive and directive force, without which, matter, like the rank and file of the army without the general, would become a disorganized and ineffectual mass. And as the power of the chief in command is shared by the next in authority, and so on down to the ranks, so the universe requires every officer and man to do his whole duty at his post. Now listen! The leader of this assembly is about to pray."



THERE LAY A FAIR CITY.

Words of supplication and entreaty followed those of invocation and praise. They seemed wrung from a bruised heart and agonized soul, and dwelt upon the just wrath of an offended God, one who must have the shedding of blood to appease him before there can be forgiveness and peace.

Alta's brow contracted, and, sighing deeply, he said: "Poor children, poor children, why can they not understand?"

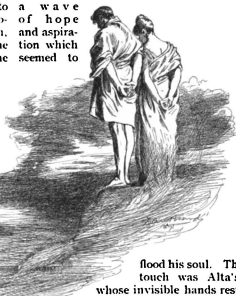
"Now observe," said Aleta to Hero. "Father has come into touch with this man's nature; note the change in his speech."

Almost while she spoke the bowed head

was raised and words eloquent with hope and trust electrified his listeners. "Thou art not a God of vengeance, but of love. We are not victims of Thy wrath, but children of Thy divine heart. We may grope and stumble, for the way is dark, but Thou wilt not permit one of Thy children to perish in darkness and despair."

The sensation in the assembly was profound. Some few lingered to admonish their pastor that he was making salvation too cheap, too easy. But the preacher heard or heeded not.

There was a life-giving touch upon his bowed head, from which there streamed a wave of hope and aspiration which seemed to



flood his soul. The touch was Alta's, whose invisible hands rested upon the head of the good man.

"Now, my children, I must leave you for a while," said Alta. Turning to Hero, he added: "Aleta will be your guide, and if you desire it, will convey you to scenes far beyond the region of earthly pilgrimages. She has a brave spirit and a strong grasp upon the forces which belong to our plane of existence. She loves you much, Hero, and you have before you an eternity of joy beyond the power of the human mind to conceive," and with a farewell wave of the hand he vanished.

Hero trembled as he found himself for the first moment alone with this divinely and yet humanly lovely creature. Words seemed a coarse profanation of the meas-

ureless, ineffable feeling which filled his soul! He opened his arms and she glided into his embrace. Whether it was hours or moments he knew not. What had he to do with time now? She loved him. His restless soul had found peace, he had become a part of eternity. Rising and setting suns meant nothing to him forevermore!

Did she speak? He knew not, and yet he knew her thought. She was telling him how long she had loved him, how she had tried—vainly tried—to make him understand that she belonged to him. And then, had she not suffered? Had she not seen him clothe an earthly object in her own attributes, and try to enshrine a creature of clay in the home she had beautified for herself? When he had found his earthly love fading in disappointment and bitterness; and she—she had been almost glad when he wept. "Still I comforted you," she seemed to say. "Your outstretched arms often enfolded me, yet you only dimly knew it, and thought you dreamed. Ah! dearest, the other was the dream, and this the real. If you doubt the reality of this moment," she said, laughing, "look down there and see what is spread out before us."

Hero looked as she bid him. There lay a fair city. Did he not know it well! Its ample white avenues were fringed with waving verdure which only half concealed beautiful homes, and many a graceful spire, like the jewelled finger of faith, pointing heavenward; while here and there arose great marble and granite piles of architecture, with mighty domes, and out of the very earth there sprang a cloud-piercing, spotless shaft, whose glistening top looked beyond the river, to the blue hills on the other side.

They hovered for a moment over this beautiful scene and then drifted on until they looked down upon a nation's dormitory, where her patriot slain peacefully slumber, while on cushioned wheels and with velvet tread, devoted living pay tribute to heroes dead!

Often had Hero visited this hallowed spot, but never before had he seen the golden light which enveloped it, nor the radiant beings keeping watch o'er these green mounds!

On and on they floated, over broad fields and fertile valleys; the lowing of the cattle

and joyous peals of laughter mingling with the hum of the busy, simple life below, in the familiar cadence of earthly sounds, which struck strangely now on Hero's ear.

"Why do we come here?" he had thought rather than said, to which Aleta replied: "Reminiscence and habit open up pathways through which the soul naturally moves; besides, you love these scenes, and the desire to see them, although only vague and not formulated into a wish, creates an impulse towards them. Oh! you have so much to learn, my Hero. To desire is to be and to wish for is to have."

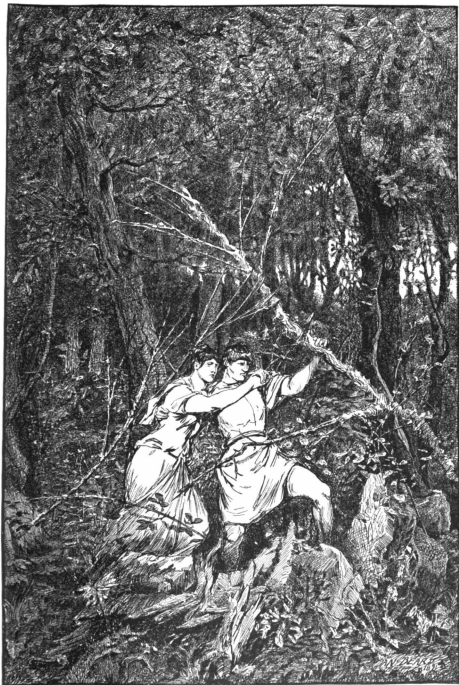
Hero knew well the scene which was now spread out beneath their gaze. Every towering peak of this mountain range so blue was a familiar friend. That rugged pinnacle with the human profile in stone was keeping watch just as of yore over that lovely village nestling at its feet. And there was the same great encircling valley, fertile, rich, beautiful; and beyond was the cavern Luray, that strange treasure house, filled by nature as if in an endless sport of creative fancy.

A desire to descend into its unexplored depths flitted across his mind. He was only conscious of meeting a tender reproach from Aleta's eyes, as he found himself descending a dark, slippery incline, with alternate illumination and inky shadows so intense as seemingly to cut the very cord of the optic nerve. He felt the clasp of Aleta's hand, firm, yet soft as eiderdown, and on he went, down, down, through labyrinths of winding caverns, the air growing heavy with sepulchral odors and a horror of chill dampness clinging to stalactite and stalagmite, augmenting the dangers of the slippery path.

Soon he felt rather than saw the presence of innumerable creatures, and there arose a horrid din of subterranean sounds clashing out of harmony, each grating discord seeming to say: "Go back! go back! We like you not: what do you here?"

Hero could bear no more. "Aleta!" he cried, "let us get away from this horrible place."

Instantly he felt the sweet breath of the open air and the sunshine. Aleta's lips were pressed upon his own, and she laughed merrily as she said: "So you do not like the underworld? Ah, well! you must learn to be careful about what you



NETWORK OF VINES ENTANGLED THEM, SHARP STONES CUT THEIR FEET.

a time expanded into a great luminous mass, was now a minute point of light. They were threading their way in those vast unvisited regions among the stars. A new sun blazed upon their path, growing, expanding. What had seemed mere points of light about it were clustering groups of satellites, glittering like splendid jewels about the great central fiery mass, which at last seemed a mountain of flame; while each satellite (there were a dozen or more) was at least as large as our own sun, each carrying its own encircling moons, none less than three and some nine, and each of these larger than our own moon at the full and blazing in a variety and intensity of color beyond the capacity of the human eye to conceive. Our own solar system diminished into a mere rushlight in the heavens beside the splendor of this family of stars. It is not strange that Hero prostrated himself before the God of such a universe, and said: "What is man that Thou art mindful of him!" What a mighty creation is this," he exclaimed.

"Yes," said Alta calmly, "yet one conscious soul is greater than all these. This is only the theatre, the stage, for the real life, where we are the actors. You know so little, it is difficult to make you understand, but the glory does not lie so much in immensities, but rather in the subtle perfection of the essence."

"And are these worlds the theatres of an existence like ours on earth?" said Hero reverently.

"Like? Yes and no. Like in kind, but in degree as like as you are like the oyster. There is an intensity of experience here you could not comprehend, and yet its elements are all contained within you, and all exist in your world, which is now invisibly circling about that faint star yonder," saying which, he pointed to a feebly flickering point of light across the trackless space beyond.

"Is that our earth?" said Hero.

"Your earth?" and Alta smiled at the guesses of a child; "that is the entire solar system. The sun and its remotest satellites are from this distance merged into one point of light, to which your earth contributes a ray too feeble to be seen. And now I must leave you. Aleta will re-conduct you over the path we have come."

"Not yet," said Hero, passionately grasping Alta's hand. "Tell me, first, how I may obtain this mastery over the forces of nature. What is the secret which unlocks these glories? Impart this to me, I implore, before you go."

"It is not a thing which can be bestowed or imparted," replied the sage. "It is simply a matter of growth, a natural unfolding of germinant powers by means of minute processes of growth, not by fiat. Impatient souls like yours would leap at once into the higher life, but does one leap from the cradle to the senate chamber? Can one read without learning the alphabet? There can be no unnatural termination of the period of tuition on the lower plane. Can you feed on unripe fruit? The fragrance of the rose is the outcome of the blossom, the bud and the germ. You must patiently tend through sunshine and shadow, in summer sun and winter blast, for the ripening of this fruit, and not daring, so much as patience, is needed."

"Well, at least tell me before you go something of the mysterious relation of spirit to matter. I have so longed to know. Can they exist the one without the other, or are they inseparable, or even identical?"

"Yes, that is the old question," replied Alta. "I too struggled hopelessly with it in my own earth life; but how vain, how futile it was. The race of man has not arrived at a point of development where a solution of this mystery is essential or even possible. When it has it will know. All the currents of the universe would continue to flow as now, if this secret were wrested from the hidden archives. The vast avenues of advancement open broadly, inviting men of thought and earnest purpose to pursue the orderly path of progress which leads to an expanding perception of God's universe. Move patiently along the path, your face set steadily toward the higher, but always realizing that it can only be reached through the lower—that the concrete is the school which fits for the essential life, or life in the essence." With these words Alta waved a majestic farewell and vanished utterly from view.

Hero was alone with Aleta in this vast ocean of space—no North, no South, no night, no day, no clock to tell the hours nor mark the seconds. Before him the glittering splendors of this strange and

nameless sun with its satellites, and in his arms the being who was to him more than all the universe besides. The rapture of a divine soul-satisfying love filled his being. Is it strange that he saw not the clustering star worlds, expanding and diminishing as they sped by them along over the pathless regions of space? It seemed but a moment of time when Aleta, with a little sigh of regret, said, "Do you recognize this spot?"

Looking down he beheld the waving tops of the pines, and near that pyramid of wild roses he thought he saw the sleeping form of a man, his face hidden by the clustering blossoms.

A vague terror smote him. "You are not going to leave me?" he gasped.

"Yes, dearest," she answered, "for a time, at least. It must be so, but I shall come again. This shall be our trysting place," she said, smiling, "and when I come to you hereafter will you know it is I or will you think you dream? Oh, Hero, I could not bear that now. But I will give you a key which will always unlock the door dividing us," and with both arms about his neck she whispered into his ear the magic word which would always bring her to his side, adding tenderly: "It will not be needed long, dearest, and then all eternity together! And if you need me, remember, all obstacles will melt

before that word which you have but to utter and we will be face to face and heart to heart."

Overwhelmed and agitated as he was, Hero could still not resist a strange fascination which drew him toward the partly concealed figure of the sleeping man under the great oak.

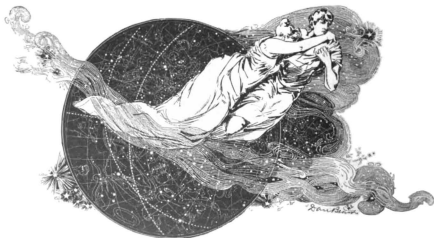
Aleta smiled sadly as she saw this. "If you awaken him I shall have to go," she said with a warning gesture. At this moment she lifted her head and stood for a moment as if listening. Then turning to him she said: "The time has come. It has been beautiful as a dream, but it is over. I must go. Remember, Hero, it is not a dream; and now farewell."

"My love," said Hero, "how can I let you go?" His lips met hers, his very soul seemed departing in an ecstasy of love.

He felt as if he were sinking down, down, into fathomless depths; then, with a strange feeling of having lost something priceless, he opened his eyes and looked at his empty arms.

From a distance came the hum of the busy city, the wild-rose brambles rustled gently in the breeze, there was the drop of blood on his finger, dried into a tiny spot of dark red, and at his feet lay the fading rose.

And the romance of an hour was finished.



THEY SPED AWAY, AWAY.