

or the sun set red, whether we ran to see a whale blow out in the black water or hurried to the stern with an excited crowd to watch the dolphins play; whether we stayed below or wandered about on deck it did not matter. We were completely happy. Nothing could add to this perfection, nothing take away from it. We moved as if free of time and space. Indeed we were scarcely conscious of these conditions. We were happy children, and as such I believe, the passengers and crew came to regard us. They smiled upon us as we approached, or turned aside with a pleased intelligent air, and we had a consciousness of being cared for and looked after by all kindly power.

"From day to day our knowledge of each other and our delight in each other's society increased. We stopped but a week in England and went thence to Paris. From Paris we crossed over to Switzerland, where Gertrude's relatives reside, and at Veray I met for the first time her cousin, Hermann Scherer, to whom she had always been fondly attached."

"Yes, I have heard her mention him," I said.

"You may not have heard," he continued, "that he is a student, a writer on scientific subjects, a man of eccentric views on social questions and an aeronaut of extraordinary resolution and daring."

No, I had not.

"Yes, he is all this," said Rudolph sadly. "We had hardly exchanged greetings when he began to pour into our ears a most enthusiastic account of some trip he had recently taken, in a new balloon of his own device. This balloon was constructed on a plan hitherto unattempted, and with wonderful success. Owing to the nice adaption of its parts, it would not only float in air, docile to the will of its pilot, but Hermann held the belief that it would one day bear him through the interplanetary spaces with the same ease and security. He averred that he had already in his voyage approached the confines of the terrestrial atmosphere without ill effects. It was well known that he had made ascents of almost incredible height. His air ship, as he always called it, is built so as to shut in its occupants completely, while allowing them a perfect outlook. He had discovered a subtle and swift means of propulsion, akin to electricity, and could, by chemical agency, create and carry with him his own atmosphere. Thus he was equipped, he said, for measuring space. Men, he assured us, would one day travel with the wings of the lightning. It was his firm conviction that they would yet discover the secret of extracting sustenance direct from the elements."

I stared at my friend. "This seems to have been a very original character," I ventured to observe.

"Oh wonderful!" he cried with momentary forgetfulness. "You can have no idea of the fascination he exercised, and still exercises, over me. Gertrude had always been more or less under the spell. He seems a human expression of one of Nature's breezy and joyous moods. He is the most impersonal man I have ever met. He is absolutely without the *ego*. He would be called a Bohemian if he were not outside all that. He seems the embodiment of lawlessness and license until you find that he moves with according law. The spirit of law and his spirit are one, and this perfect communion gives him the inflexibility, the lightness of a sunbeam."

"When we had heard to the end his explanation of the manner in which he intended to complete his conquest over space, we were in such a state of volatile buoyancy as to be almost prepared for the suggestion that quickly followed. Why should not we take a trip with him, a long trip—and thus in a novel manner signalize our honeymoon? The day after to-morrow, he declared, everyone would be taking such journeys, and, if we went now, we should be the first love-united pair to sail the unstained ether."

"Gertrude and I looked at each other and as our eyes met, we both laughed out merrily. Oh Jack! I shall never see her—she will never laugh again! How I remember it all. We sat on a grassy hill, while Hermann swung up and down before us, describing and predicting wonders, and endeavouring to persuade us to be his passengers. In a field

adjoining was the air-ship. Its odd bird-like shape was suggestive of far-flights. We were intoxicated with happiness, the time was golden and the blue sky seemed to breathe an invitation.

"The stainless ether is very well for such an unearthly spirit as yourself," said Gertrude gaily, "but we, who are common clay, dare not without trembling trust ourselves to the kind air that caresses our cheeks. Like the ocean it is now sweet as a dimpled babe, but I fear we should find it more treacherous even than the treacherous sea."

"I'll promise to bring you back safe," he said pausing before us.

"No my dear friend," I rejoined, laughing. "Much as it would delight me to go with you it is impossible. Gertrude might faint—I mean we both might faint. Fancy the situation."

"You forget," he said, "that your berth will be as comfortable as the cabin of an ocean steamer. You are thinking of a common balloon."

"I should love to go," said Gertrude, clasping her hands and gazing heavenward, "if only for a little trip."

"I should like to go myself," I admitted. My soul had followed my love's eyes, and in imagination we were now among the stars. Why could we not have each a pair of wings.

"Dearest, are you not at all afraid?" I asked as Hermann moved away.

"With you and Hermann I could go anywhere," she said. "But it will be easy and delightful. Hermann, you may be sure, knows what he says."

"You will go?" Hermann smiled the enquiry as he brought up before us again.

"On the condition that we shall descend at any moment," I replied. After all this was new to me. My heart was beating almost audibly against my side.

"In the space of three minutes I shall put you down from any height. And you shall not know that you have moved," he added.

"I felt reassured, Gertrude seemed fearless. 'You may take us for a short trip,' I said, starting up.

"And you must be sure to steer clear of the sun," laughed Gertrude, warningly, as she pointed at the luminary with her parasol.

"When our intention was made known to our friends they tried to dissuade us from the project. Especially on Gertrude's account were they concerned. The ladies of the family, Hermann's mother and sister, assured her that no woman could endure the nervous strain of such an unheard-of voyage. Would that we had listened to their advice! Had we done so, we should not now be so widely apart, in the body as well as in the spirit. But Gertrude smiled down all such objections. She said that her nerves were quite as strong as her husband's, and that she had the fullest confidence in her cousin.

On the third day after our decision Hermann informed us that everything was ready. It was not without some inward tremors that we set out for the field where the air ship lay at anchor. Gertrude leaning on my arm, and Hermann preceding us, laden with instruments, chemicals and various necessities. Before and behind us flocked the inmates of the house, for the moment forgetful of their apprehensions.

"To none but our immediate circle had the fact of our contemplated journey been communicated. There were not more than twenty persons, beside ourselves, in the field when we arrived. Hermann at once gave orders that the "Nautilus," as his ship was named, should be set free, and our friends crowded round to say good-bye. Many were the kindly admonitions from mingled voices of men, women and children, some urging us even yet to give up the hazardous attempt, others advising us to keep our wits about us and all would end happily.

"Hermann went about, heedless of this babel. He was like an ocean captain, who while noting and sympathizing with the pain of parting friends, cannot help feeling that the affair is mightily exaggerated, and whose sole duty is to see that everything is ship-shape and to start on time. Gertrude was still without fear. Hermann assisted her into the vessel, I followed, and in a moment, amid a

clamour of good-byes, amid waving handkerchiefs and kissing of hands, the earth and our excited friends seemed to be mysteriously moving away leaving us firmly fixed and anchored in solitary space. To myself the illusion for a moment was complete. But in the next I realized that it was we who were adrift—adrift from the friendly shores we knew, three human beings alone in a vast ocean, where stars and planets were the only islands, and where, to find a continent, one must sail further than the Milky Way. I glanced at Gertrude. She was standing holding out her handkerchief, her face was a trifle pale and her lips were pressed together. Hermann's face wore a happy smile. He was evidently delighted to be off, and had no fear, whether of storms or breakers.

"Our movement was at first purposely slow. Hermann wished us to have a good view of our own little island, he said. We were soon unable to distinguish our friends, and even the field in which we had left them became doubtful. How vast was the prospect spread before us, and yet how confused. Hermann pointed out this town and that river. There were villages in valleys and running over hills. There were wide sunny fields and dark stretches of wood. There were small lakes nestling among trees. There were spires catching the brilliant sunlight, broad streams, which now seemed shining, curving ribbons; and narrow white bands running parallel and at angles to each other, which were the dusty, much-travelled roads of earth. Further and further, faster and faster, as it seemed, we left behind our hospitable earth. Gradually the picture became a mere sketch, the sketch a blurred outline. Houses and bridges and mountains and valleys became indistinguishable, and at last even the most salient parts faded into the general vagueness. We were out on the open sea.

"Strange as it may appear I had now lost all anxiety, and a calm sense of unbounded liberty possessed me. Gertrude was seated in an easy-chair at the side of the vessel, looking through the circular plate-glass windows. The direct ventages were now all closed and our isolation was complete.

"Do you know this is very pleasant," I remarked.

"Gertrude smiled and closed her eyes. "Heavenly!" she said. "Let us go on forever." Hermann nodded. "I know that first sensation," he said, "but you get used to it, you want more. I feel like a boy explorer taking a spin in a land-locked bay. I want to open up new regions, to discover unknown countries, to find an outlet for the hungry generations that are treading each other down."

"Gertrude was listening. 'I am sure you have some wonderful notions about these things,' she exclaimed. 'Tell Rudolph and me what they are, Hermann.'

"I glanced downward. Further and further away was our country, our birthplace, our home. A huge round mass, among shifting patches of cloud—that was all there was of earth.

"Is it not time to descend?" I asked. "Not at all," said Hermann, with a little laugh. "Are you troubled already?"

"Not a bit," I replied, laughing also, but the land yonder receded.

"O let us go on," said Gertrude, drawing her shawl closer about her.

"I fear you are cold," Hermann remarked. "I must keep my ship at a decent temperature or you will be disgusted."

"He set going what seemed an electric battery, and immediately an agreeable warmth was diffused. It had been growing chill. Gertrude settled herself cosily. Her hat and gloves lay on a shelf by her side. Her dark hair rested against the back of the chair, and her clear cheek was again flushed and warm.

"So you want to know what I think of all this," said Hermann, clasping his hands behind his head. "Well, I'll tell you. I think man has only started on his travels."

*To be concluded in our next.*