

## THE FIVE KISSES.

### I.

#### AFTER CONFESSION.

**D**AY startles the fawn from the avenues deep  
that look to the east in the heart of the wood :  
Light touches the trees of the hill with its lips, and  
God is above them and sees they are good :  
Night flings from her forehead the purple-black  
hood.

The thicket is sweet with the breath of the breeze  
made soft by the kisses of slumbering maids ;  
The nymph and the satyr, the fair and the faulty  
alike are the guests of these amorous shades ;  
The hour of Love flickers and falters and fades.

O, listen, my love, to the song of the brook, its  
murmurs and cadences, trills and low chords ;  
Hark to its silence, that prelude of wonder ringing at  
last like the clamour of swords  
That clash in the wrath of the warring of lords.

Listen, oh, listen ! the nightingale near us swoons a  
farewell to the blossoming brake ;  
Listen, the thrush in the meadow is singing notes that  
move sinuous, lithe as a snake ;  
The cushats are cooing, the world is awake.

Only one hour since you whispered the story out of  
your heart to my tremulous ear ;  
Only one hour since the light of your eyes was the  
victor of violent sorrow and fear ;  
Your lips were so set to the lips of me here.

Surely the victory ripens to perfect conquest of every-  
thing set in our way.  
We must be free as our hearts are, and gather strength  
for our limbs for the heat of the fray :  
The battle is ours if you say me not nay.

Fly with me far, where the ocean is bounded white by  
the walls of the northernmost shore,  
Where on a lone rocky island a castle laughs in its  
pride at the billows that roar,  
My home where our love may have peace ever-  
more.

Yes, on one whisper the other is waiting patient to  
catch the low tone of delight.  
Kiss me again for the amorous answer ; close your dear  
eyelids and think it is night,  
The hour of the even we fix for the flight.

II.

THE FLIGHT.

LIFT up thine eyes ! for night is shed around,  
    As light profound,  
And visible as snow on steeped hills,  
    Where silence fills  
The shaded hollows : night, a royal queen  
    Most dimly seen  
Through silken curtains that bedeck the bed,  
    Lift up thine head !  
For night is here, a dragon, to devour  
    The slow sweet hour  
Filled with all smoke of incense, and the praise  
    More loud than day's  
That swings its barren censer in the sky  
    And asks to die  
Because the sea will hear no hollow moan  
    Beyond its own,  
Because the sea that kissed dead Sappho sings  
    Of strange dark things—  
Shapes of bright breasts that purple as the sun  
    Grows dark and dun,  
Of pallid lips more haggard for the kiss  
    Of Salmacis,

Of eager eyes that startle for the fear  
    Too dimly dear  
Lest there come death, like passion, and fulfil  
    Their dreams of ill !  
Oh ! lift thy forehead to the night's cool wind !  
    The meekest hind  
That fears the noonday in her grove is bold  
    To seek the gold  
So pale and perfect as the moon puts on :  
    The light is gone.  
Hardly as yet one sees the crescent maid  
    Move, half afraid,  
Into the swarthy forest of the air  
    And breast made bare,  
Gather her limbs about her for the chase  
    Through starry space,  
And, while the lilies sway their heads, to bend  
    Her bow, to send  
A swift white arrow at some recreant star.  
    The sea is far  
Dropped in the hollows of the swooning land.  
    Oh ! hold my hand !  
Lift up thy deep eyes to my face, and let  
    Our lips forget  
The dumb dead hours before they met together !  
    The snowbright weather  
Calls us beyond the grassy down, to be  
    Beside the sea,  
The slowly-breathing ocean of the south.  
    Oh, make thy mouth

A rosy flame like that most perfect star  
    Whose kisses are  
So red and ripe ! Oh, let thy limbs entwine  
    Like love with mine !  
Oh, bend thy gracious body to my breast  
    To sleep, to rest !  
But chiefly let thine eyes be set on me,  
    As when the sea  
Lay like a mirror to reflect the shape  
    Of yonder cape  
Where Sappho stood and touched the lips of death !  
    Thy subtle breath  
Shall flow like incense in between our cheeks,  
    Where pleasure seeks  
In vain a wiser happiness. And so  
    Our whispers low  
Shall dim the utmost beauty of thy gaze  
    Through moveless days  
And long nights equable with tranced pleasure :  
    So love at leisure  
Shall make his model of our clinging looks,  
    And burn his books  
To write a new sweet volume deeper much,  
    And frail to touch,  
Being the mirror of a gossamer  
    Too soft and fair.  
This is the hour when all the world is sleeping ;  
    The winds are keeping  
A lulling music on the frosty sea.  
    The air is free,

As free as summer-time, to sound or cease :  
    God's utmost peace  
Lies like a cloud upon the quiet land.  
    O little hand !  
White hand with rose leaves shed about the tips,  
    As if my lips  
Had left their bloom upon it when they kissed  
    As if a mist  
Of God's delicious dawn had overspread  
    Their face, and fled !  
O wonderful fresh blossom of the wood !  
    O purpling blood !  
O azure veins as clear as all the skies !  
    O longing eyes  
That look upon me fondly to beget  
    Two faces, set  
Either like lowers upon their laughing blue,  
    Where morning dew  
Sparkles with all the passion of the dawn !  
    The happy lawn  
Leads, by the stillest avenues, to groves  
    Made soft by loves ;  
And all the nymphs have made a mossy dell  
    Hard by the well  
Where even a Satyr might behold the grace  
    Of such a face  
As his who perished for his own delights,  
    So well requites  
That witching fountain his desire that looks.  
    Two slow bright brooks

Encircle it with silver, and the moon  
    Strikes into tune  
The ripples as they break. For here it was  
    Their steps did pass,  
Dreamy Endymion's and Artemis',  
    Who bent to kiss  
Across the moss-grown rocks that build the well :  
    And here they tell  
Of one beneath the hoary stone who hid  
    And watched unbid  
When one most holy came across the glade,  
    Who saw a maid  
So bright that mists were dim upon his eyes,  
    And yet he spies  
So sweet a vision that his gentle breath  
    Sighed into death :  
And others say that her the fairies bring  
    The fairy king,  
And crown him with a flower of eglantine,  
    And of the vine  
Twist him a throne made perfect with wild roses,  
    And gathered posies  
From all the streams that wander through the vale,  
    And crying, " Hail !  
All hail, most beautiful of all our race ! "  
    Cover his face  
With blossoms gathered from a fairy tree  
    Like foam from sea,  
So delicate that mortal eyes behold  
    Ephemeral gold

Flash, and not see a flower, but say the moon  
    Has shone too soon  
Anxious to great Endymion ; and this  
    Most dainty kiss  
They cover him him withal, and Dian sees  
    Through all the trees  
No pink pale blossom of his tender lips.  
    The little ships  
Of silver leaf and briar-bloom sail here,  
    No storm to fear,  
Though butterflies be all their mariners.  
    The whitethroat stirs  
The beech-leaves to awake the tiny breeze  
    That soothes the seas,  
And yet gives breath to shake their fairy sails ;  
    Young nightingales,  
Far through the golden plumage of the night,  
    With strong delight  
Purple the evening with amazing song ;  
    The moonbeams throng  
In shining clusters to the fairy throat,  
    Whose clear trills float  
And dive and run about the crystal deep  
    As sweet as sleep.  
Only, fair love of this full heart of mine,  
    There lacks the wine  
Our kisses might pour out for them ; they wait,  
    And we are late ;  
Only, my flower of all the world, the thrush  
    (You hear him ? Hush !)



Lingers, and sings not to his fullest yet :  
Our love shall get  
Such woodland welcome as none ever had  
To make it glad.  
Come, it is time, cling closer to my hand.  
We understand.  
We must go forth together, not to part.  
O perfect heart !  
O little heart that beats to mine, away  
Before the day  
Ring out the tocsin for our flight ! My ship  
Is keen to dip  
Her plunging forehead in the silvering sea.  
To-morrow we  
Shall be so far away, and then to-morrow  
Shall shake off sorrow  
And be to-morrow and not change for ever :  
No dawn shall sever  
The sleepy eyelids of the night, no eve  
Shall fall and cleave  
The blue deep eyes of day. Your hand, my queen !  
Look down and lean  
Your whole weight on me, then leap out, as light  
As swallow's flight,  
And race across the shadows of the moon,  
And keep the tune  
With ringing hoofs across the fiery way.  
Your eyes betray  
How eager is your heart, and yet—O dare  
To fashion fair

A whole long life of love ! Leap high, laugh low !  
    I love you—so !—  
One kiss—and then to freedom ! See the bay  
    So far away,  
But not too far for love ! Ring out, sharp hoof,  
    And put to proof  
The skill of him that steeled thee ! Freedom ! Set  
    As never yet  
Thy straining sides for freedom ! Gallant mare !  
    The frosty air  
Kindles the blood within us as we race.  
    O love ! Thy face  
Flames with the passion of our happy speed !  
    The noble steed  
Pushes the first gold limit of the sand.  
    Ah love, thy hand !  
We win, no foot pursuing spans the brow !  
    Yes, kiss me now !

### III.

#### THE SPRING AFTER.

**N**ORTH, by the ice-belt, where the cliffs appease  
Innumerable clamour of Sundering seas,  
And garlands of ungatherable foam  
Wild as the horses maddening toward home,  
Where through the thunderous burden of the thaw  
Rings the sharp fury of the breaking flaw,  
Where summer's hand is heavy on the snow,  
And springtide bursts the insuperable floe,  
North, by the limit of the ocean, stands  
A castle, lord of those far footless hands  
That are the wall of that most monstrous world  
About whose pillars Behemoth is curled,  
About whose gates Leviathan is strong,  
Whose secret terror sweetens not for song.  
The hoarse loud roar of gulphs of raging brine  
That break in foam and fire on that divine  
Cliff-base, is smothered in the misty air,  
And no sound penetrates them, save a rare  
Music of sombre motion, swaying slow.  
The sky above is one dark indigo  
Voiceless and deep, no light is hard within  
To shame love's lips and rouse the silky skin

From its dull olive to a perfect white.  
For scarce an hour the golden rim of light  
Tinges the southward bergs ; for scarce an hour  
The sun puts forth his seasonable flower,  
And only for a little while the wind  
Wakes at his coming, and beats cold and blind  
On the wild sea that struggles to release  
The hard grip from its throat, and lie at ease  
Lapped in the eternal summer. But its waves  
Roam through the solitude of empty caves  
In vain ; no faster wheels the moon above ;  
And still reluctant fly the hours of love.  
It is so peaceful in the castle : here  
The night of winter never froze a tear  
On my love's cheek or mine ; no sorrow came  
To track our vessel by its wake of flame  
Wherein the dolphin bathed his shining side ;  
No smallest cloud between me and my bride  
Came like a little mist ; one tender fear,  
Too sweet to speak of, closed the dying year  
With love more perfect, for its purple root  
Might blossom outward to the snowy fruit  
Whose bloom to-night lay sleeping on her breast,  
As if a touch might stir the sunny nest,  
Break the spell's power, and bid the spirit fly  
Who had come near to dwell with us. But I  
Bend through long hours above the dear twin life,  
Look from love's guerdon to the lover-wife,  
And back again to that small face so sweet,  
And downwards to the little rosy feet,

And see myself no longer in her eyes  
So perfectly as here, where passion lies  
Buried and re-arisen and complete.  
O happy life too sweet, too perfect sweet,  
O happy love too perfectly made one  
Not to arouse the envy of the sun  
Who sulks six months for spite of it ! O love,  
Too pure and fond for those pale gods above,  
Too perfect for their iron rods to break,  
Arise, awake, and die for death's own sake !  
That one forgetfulness may take us three,  
Still three, still one, to the Lethean sea ;  
That all its waters may be sweet as those  
We wandered by, sweet sisters of the rose,  
That perfect night before we fled, we two  
Who were so silent down that avenue  
Grown golden with the moonlight, who should be  
No longer two, but one ; nor one, but three.  
And now it is the spiring ; the ice is breaking ;  
The waters roar ; the winds their wings are shaking  
To sweep upon the northland ; we shall sail  
Under the summer perfume of the gale  
To some old valley where the altars steam  
Before the gods, and where the maidens dream  
Their little lives away, and where the trees  
Shake laughing tresses at the rising breeze,  
And where the wells of water lie profound,  
And not unfrequent is the silver sound  
Of shepherds tuneful as the leaves are green,  
Whose reedy music echoes, clear and clean,

From rocky palaces where gnomes delight  
To sport all springtime, where the brooding night  
With cataract is musical, and thrushes  
Throb their young love beside the stream that rushes  
Headlong to beat its foamheads into snow,  
Where the sad swallow calls, and pale songs flow  
To match the music of the nightingale.  
There, where the pulses of the summer fail,  
The fiery flakes of autumn fall, and there  
Some warm perfection of the lazy air  
Swims through the purpling veins of lovers. Hark !  
A faint bird's note, as if a silver spark  
Struck from a diamond ; listen, wife, and know  
How perfectly I love to watch you so.  
Wake, lover, wake, but stir not yet the child :  
Wake, and thy brow serene and low and mild  
Shall take my kisses, and my lips shall seek  
The pallid roses on thy perfect cheek,  
And kiss them into poppies, and thy mouth  
Shall lastly close to mine, as in the south  
We see the sun close fast upon the sea ;  
So, my own heart, thy mouth must close on me.  
Art thou awake ? Those eyes of wondering love,  
Sweet as the dawn and softer than the dove,  
Seek no quick vision—yet they move to me  
And, slowly, to the child. How still are we !  
Yes, and a smile betokens that they wake  
Or dream a waking dream for kisses' sake ;  
Yes, I will touch thee, O my low sweet brow !  
My wife, thy lips to mine—yes, kiss me now !

IV.

THE VOYAGE SOUTHWARD.

**H**OLY as heaven, the home  
Of winds, the land of foam,  
The palace of the waves, the house of rain,  
Deeper than ocean, dark  
As dawn before the lark  
Flings his sharp song to skyward, and is fain  
To light his lampless eyes  
At the flower-folded skies  
Where stars are hidden in the blue, to fill  
His beak with star-dropt dew,  
His little heart anew  
With love an song to swell it to his will ;  
Holy as heaven, the place  
Before the golden face  
Of God is very silent at the dawn.  
The even keel is keen  
To flash the waves between,  
But no soft moving current is withdrawn :  
We float upon the blue  
Like sunlight specks in dew,  
And like the moonlight on the lake we lie :  
The northern gates are past,

And, following fair and fast,  
The north wind drove us under such a sky,  
    Faint with the sun's desire,  
    And clad in fair attire  
Of many driving cloudlets ; and we flew  
    Like swallows to the South.  
    The ocean's curving mouth  
Smiled day by day and nights of starry blue ;  
    Nights when the sea would shake  
    Like sunlight where the wake  
Was wonderful with flakes of living things  
    That leapt for joy to feel  
    The cold exultant keel  
Flash, and the white ship dip her woven wings ;  
    Nights when the moon would hold  
    Her lamp of whitest gold  
To see us on the poop together set  
    With one desire, to be  
    Alone upon the sea  
And touch soft hands, and hold white bosoms yet,  
    And see in silent eyes  
    More stars than all the skies  
Together hold within their limits gray,  
    To watch the red lips move  
    For slow delight of love  
Till the moon sigh and sink, and yield her sway  
    Unto the eastern lord  
    That draws a sanguine sword  
And starts up eager in the dawn, to see  
    Bright eyes grow dim for sleep,



And lazy bosoms keep  
Their slumber perfect and their sorcery,  
While dawning winds arise,  
And fast the white ship flies  
To those young groves of olive by the shore,  
The spring-clad shore we seek  
That slopes to yonder peak  
Snow-clad, bright-gleaming, as the silver ore  
Plucked by pale fingers slow  
In balmy Mexico,  
A king on thunder throned, his diadem  
The ruby rocks that flash  
The sunlight like a lash  
When sunlight touches, and sweeps over them  
A crown of light ! Behold !  
The white seas touch the gold,  
And flame like flowers of fire about the prow.  
It is the hour for sleep :—  
Lulled by the moveless deep  
To sleep, sweet wife, to sleep ! Yes, kiss me now !

V.

THE ULTIMATE VOYAGE.

THE wandering waters move about the world,  
And lap the sand, with quietest complaint  
Borne on the wings of dying breezes up,  
To where we make toward the wooded top  
Of yonder menacing hill. The night is fallen  
Starless and moonless, black beyond belief,  
Tremendous, only just the ripple keeps  
Our souls from perishing in the inane,  
With music borrowed from the soul of God.  
We twain go thither, knowing no desire  
To lead us ; but some strong necessity  
Urges, as lightning thunder, our slow steps  
Upward. For on the pleasant meadow-land  
That slopes to sunny bays, and limpid seas  
(That breathe like maidens sleeping, for their breast  
Is silver with the sand that lies below,)  
Where our storm-strengthened dragon rests at last,  
And by whose borders we have made a home,  
More like a squirrel's bower than a house.  
For in this blue Sicilian summertime  
The trees arch tenderly for lovers' sleep,  
And all the interwoven leaves are fine

To freshen us with dewdrops at the dawn,  
Or let the summer shower sing through to us,  
And welcome kisses of the silver rain  
That raps and rustles in the solitude.  
But in the night there came to us a cry :  
“ The mountains are your portion, and the hills  
Your temple, and you are chosen.” Then I woke  
Pondering, and my lover woke and said :  
“ I heard a voice of one majestic  
With waving beard, most ancient, beautiful,  
Concealed and not concealed ; and awoke,  
Feeling a stronger compulsion on my soul  
To go some whither.” And the dreams were one  
(We somehow knew), and, looking such a kiss  
As lovers’ eyes can interchange, our lips  
Met in the mute agreement to obey.  
So, girding on our raiment, as to pass  
Some whither of long doubtful journeying,  
We went forth blindly to the horrible  
Damp darkness of the pines above. And there  
Strange beasts crossed path of ours, such beasts as  
earth  
Bears not, distorted, tortured, loathable,  
Mouthing with hateful lips some recent blood,  
or snarling at our feet. But these attacked  
No courage of our hearts, we faltered not,  
And they fell back, snake’s mouth and leopard’s  
throat,  
Afraid. But others fawning came behind  
With clumsy leapings as in friendliness,

Dogs with men's faces, and we beat them off  
With scabbard, and the hideous path wound on.  
And these perplexed our goings, for no light  
Gleamed through the bare pine-ruins lava-struck,  
Nor even the hellish fire of Etna's maw.  
But lucklessly we came upon a pool  
Dank, dark, and stagnant, evil to the touch,  
Oozing towards us, but sucked suddenly,  
Silently, horribly, by slow compulsion  
Into the slipping sand, and vanishing,  
Whereon we saw a little boat appear,  
And in it such a figure as we knew  
Was Death. But she, intolerant of delay,  
Hailed him. The vessel floated to our feet,  
And Death was not. She leapt within, and bent  
Her own white shoulders to the thwart, and bade  
Me steer, and keep stern watch with sword unsheathed  
For fear of something that her soul had seen  
Above. And thus upon the oily black  
Silent swift river we sailed out to reach  
Its source, no longer feeling as compelled,  
But led by some incomprehensible  
Passion. And here lewd fishes snapped at us,  
And watersnakes writhed silently toward  
Our craft. But these I fought against, and smote  
head from fowl body, to our further ill,  
For frightful jelly-monsters grew apace,  
And all the water grew one slimy mass  
Of crawling tentacles. My sword was swift  
That slashed and slew them, chiefly to protect

The toiling woman, and assure our path  
Through this foul hell. And now the very air  
Is thick with cold wet horrors. With my sword  
Trenchant, that tore their scaly essences—  
Like Lucian's sailor writhing in the clutch  
Of those witch-vines—I slashed about like light,  
And noises horrible of death devoured  
The hateful suction of their clinging arms  
And wash of slipping bellies. Presently  
Sense failed, and—Nothing !

By-and-by we woke

In a most beautiful canoe of pearl  
Lucent on lucent water, in a sun  
That was the heart of spring. But the green land  
Seemed distant, with a sense of aery height ;  
As if it were below us far, that seemed  
Around. And as we gazed the water grew  
Ethereal, thin, most delicately hued,  
Misty, as if its substance were dissolved  
In some more subtle element. We heard  
“ O passers over water, do ye dare  
To tread the deadlier kingdoms of the air ? ”  
Whereat I cried : Arise ! And then the pearl  
Budded with nautilus-wings, and upward now  
Soared. And our souls began to know the death  
That was about to take us. All our veins  
Boiled with tumultuous and bursting blood ;  
Our flesh broke bounds, and all our bones grew fierce,  
As if some poison ate us up. And lo !  
The air is peopled with a devil-tribe

Born of our own selves. These, grown furious  
At dispossession by the subtle air,  
Contend with us, who know the agony  
Of half life drawn out lingering, who groan  
Eaten as if by worms, who dash ourselves  
Vainly against the ethereal essences  
That make our boat, who vainly strive to cast  
Our stricken bodies over the pale edge  
And drop and end it all. No nerve obeys ;  
But in the torn web of our brains is born  
The knowledge that release is higher yet.  
So, lightened of the devils that possessed  
In myriad hideousness our earthier lives,  
With one swift impulse, we ourselves shake off  
The clinging fiends, and shaking even the boat  
As dust beneath our feet, leap up and run  
Upward, and flash, and suddenly sigh back  
Happy, and rest with limbs entwined at last  
On pale blue air, the empyreal floor,  
As on a bank of flowers in the old days  
Before this journey. So I think we slept.  
But now, awaking, suddenly we feel  
A sound as if within us, and without,  
So penetrating and so self-inspired  
Sounded the voice we knew as God's. The words  
Were not a question any more, but said :  
“ The last and greatest is within you now.”  
Then fire too subtle and omniscient  
Devoured our substance, and we moved again  
Not down, not up, but inwards mystically

Involving self in self, and light in light.  
And this was not a pain, but peaceable  
Like young-eyed love, reviving ; it consumed  
And consecrated and made savour sweet  
To our changed senses. And the dual self  
Of love grew less distinct and I began  
To feel her heart in mine, her lips in mine,  
Her spirit absolutely one with mine.  
Then mistier grew the sense of God without,  
And God was I, and nothing might exist,  
Subsist, or be at all, outside of Me,  
Myself Existence of Existences.

\* \* \* \* \*

We had passed unknowing to the woody crown  
Of the little hill. There was a secret Vault.  
We entered. All without the walls appeared  
As fire, and all within as icy light ;  
The altar was of gold, and on it burnt  
Some ancient perfume. Then I saw myself  
And her together, as a priest, whose robe  
Was white and frail, and covered with a cope  
Of scarlet bound with gold : upon the head  
A golden crown, wherein a diamond shone ;  
Within which diamond we beheld our self  
The higher priest, not clothed, but clothed upon  
With the white brilliance of high nakedness  
As with a garment. Then of our self there came  
A voice : “ Ye have attained to That which Is ;  
Kiss, and the vision is fulfilled.” And so

Our bodies met, and, meeting did not touch  
But interpenetrated in the kiss



This writing is engraved on lamina  
Of silver, found by me, the trusted friend  
And loving servant of my lady and lord,  
In that abandoned Vault, of late destroyed  
By Etna's fury. Nothing else remained  
(Save in the ante-room the sword we knew  
So often flashing at the column-head)  
Within. I think my lord has written this.  
Now for the child, whose rearing is my care,  
And in whose life is left my single hope,  
This writing shall conclude the book of song  
His father made in worship and true love  
Of his fair lady, and these songs shall be  
His hope, and his tradition, and his pride.  
Thus have I written for the sake of truth,  
And for his sake who bears his father's sword—  
I pray God under my fond guardianship  
As worthily. Thus far, and so—the end.