

LOT.

“And while he lingered ... they brought him  
forth, and set him without the city.”

—*GEN.* xix. 16.

TURN back from safety: in my love abide,  
Whose lips are warm as when, a virgin bride,  
I clung to thee ashamed and very glad,  
Whose breasts are lordlier for the pain they had,  
Whose arms cleave closer than thy spouse's own,  
Thy spouse—O lover, kiss me, and atone!  
All my veins bleed for love, my ripe breasts beat  
And lay their bleeding blossoms at thy feet!  
Spurn me no more! O bid these strangers go;  
Turn to my lips till their cup overflow;  
Hurt me with kisses, kill me with desire,  
Consume me and destroy me with the fire  
Of bleeding passion straining at the heart,  
Touched to the core by sweetnesses that smart;  
Bitten by fiery snakes, whose poisonous breath  
Swoons in the midnight, and dissolves to death!  
Ah! let me perish so, and not endure  
Thy falsehood who have known thy love was sure,  
Built up by sighs a palace of long years—  
Lo! it was faery, and the spell of tears  
Dissolves it utterly. O bid them go,  
These white-faced boys, where calmer rivers flow  
And birds less passionate invoke the spring  
Or seek their loves with weaker, wearier wing.  
Turn back from safety! Let God's rivers pour  
Brimstone and fire, and all his fountains roar  
Lava and hail of hell upon my head,  
So be he leave us altogether dead,

Burnt in that shameful whirlwind of his ire,  
Consumed in one tall pyramid of fire  
Whose bowers of flame shall tell the sky of God  
How we despised his feet with thunder shod,  
And conquered, clasping, all the host of death.  
Turn to me, touch me, mix thy very breath  
With mine to mingle floods of fiery dew  
With flames of purple, like the sea shot through  
With golden glances of a fiercer star.  
Turn to me, bend above me, you may char  
These olive shoulders with an old-time kiss,  
And fix thy mouth upon me for such bliss  
Of sudden rage rekindled. Turn again,  
And make delight the minister of pain,  
And pain the father of a new delight.  
And light a lamp of torture for the night  
Too grievous to be borne without a cry  
To rend the very bowels of the sky  
And make the archangel gasp—a sudden pang,  
Most like a traveller stricken by the fang  
Of the black adder whose squat head springs up,  
A flash of death, beneath a cactus cup.  
Ah turn! my bosom for thy love is cold;  
My arms are empty, and my lips can hold  
No converse with thee far away like this.  
O for that communing pregnant with a kiss  
That is reborn when lips are set together  
To link our souls in one desirous tether,  
And wield our very bodies into one.  
Ah fiend Jehovah, what then have we done  
To earn thy curse—is love like ours too strong  
To dwell before thee, and do thy throne no wrong?  
Art thou grown jealous of the fiery band?  
Lo! thou hast spoken, and thy strong command  
Bade earth and air divide, and on the sea  
Thy spirit moved—and thou must envy me!  
Gird all thy godhead to destroy a man  
Whose little moment is a single span,  
Whose small desire is nothing—and thy power

Must root from out his bosom the fair flower  
Of passion! Listen to thine own voice yet;  
“A rich man many flocks and herds did get  
And took the poor man’s lamb.” Thou art the man!  
Our love must lie beneath thy bitter ban!  
Thou petty, envious God! My king, be sure  
His brute force shall not to the end endure;  
Some stronger soul than thine shall wrest his crown  
And thrust him from his own high heaven down  
To some obscure forgetful hell. For me  
Forsake thy hopes in him! We worship, we,  
Rather the dear delights we know and hold;  
The first cool kiss, within the water cold  
That draws its music from some bubbling well,  
Looks long, looks deadly, looks desirable,  
The touch that fires, the next kiss, and the whole  
Body embracing, symbol of the soul,  
And all the perfect passion of an hour.  
Turn to me, pluck that amaranthine flower,  
And leave the doubtful blossoms of the sky!  
You dare not kiss me! dare not draw you nigh  
Lest I should lure you to remain! nor speak  
Lest you should catch the blood within your cheek  
Mantling. You dared enough—so long ago!—  
When to my blossom body clean as snow  
You pressed your bosom till desire was pain,  
And—then—that midnight—you did dare remain  
Though all my limbs were bloody with your mouth  
That tore their flesh to satiate its drouth,  
That was not thereby satisfied! And now  
A pallid coward, with sly, skulking brow,  
You must leave Sodom for your spouse’s sake  
Coward and coward and coward! who would take  
The best flower of my life and leave me so,  
Still loving you—Ah! weak—and turn to go  
For fear of such a God! O blind! O fool!  
To heed these strangers, and to be the tool  
Of their smooth lies and monstrous miracles!  
O break this bondage and cast off their spells!

Fire righteous! Thou a righteous man! A jest!  
A righteous man—you always loved me best,  
And even when lured by lips of wanton girls  
Would turn away and sigh and touch my curls  
And slip half-conscious to the old embrace:—  
And now you will not let me see your face  
Or hear your voice or touch you. Ah! the hour!  
He moves. Come back, come back, my life's one  
flower!

Come back. One kiss before your leave me. So!  
Stop—turn—one little kiss before you go;  
It is my right—you must. Oh no! Oh no!