

# The Ultimate Voyage

By Aleister Crowley

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,  
With music borrowed from the soul of God,  
Our souls from perishing in the inane.  
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 I awoke,  
Feeling a strong 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 suddenly 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 foul 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!

Bye-and-bye 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."  
And 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 consciousness denied external things,  
And God was I, and nothing might exist,  
Subsist, or be at all, outside of Me,  
Myself Existence of Existences.

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We had passed unknowing to the woody crown  
Of the little hill, and entered an unseen  
Low chapel. 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. And on the head  
A golden crown, wherein a diamond shone,  
And in the diamond we beheld our self  
The higher priest, not clothed, but clothed upon  
With the white brilliance of high nakedness  
As with a garment. And 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 chapel, 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.  
And 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;