# LOUISE IMOGEN GUINEY



# THE WHITE SAIL, AND OTHER POEMS

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### THE WHITE SAIL.

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HIGH on the lone and wave-scarred porphyry, The promontoried porch of Attica, Past evenfall, sat he whose reverend hair Down-glittered with the breaker's volleying foam Visioned before him in the level dark: Ægeus, of wronged Pandion heir, and king. And round about his knees, and at his feet, In saffrons and sad greens alone bedight, Sat, clustered in dim wayward sidelong groups Sheer to the ocean's edge, those liegemen fond Who with him wished and wept. As thro' the hours Of ebbing autumn, on a northward hill, Lies summer's russet ruined panoply, Knotted and heaped by the fantastic winds Hap-hazard, while the first adventuring snow Globes itself on the summit; so they clung Secure among the ranged crevices, Month after month, and wakeful night on night Vigilant; ever neighbored and o'ertopped With that white presence, and the boding sky.

And Ægeus prayed: 'O give me back but him! My desert palm, my moorland mid-day fount, My leopard-foot, in equal tameless grace Swaying suavely down cool garden-paths Or into battle's maw: my lad of Athens!

With bronze and tangly curls a-toss, to show Infancy's golden-silken underglow; The glad eye dusking blue, as is the sea Ere fiery sunset tricks it; and the lashes In one close sombre file against his cheek, Enphalanxed in perpetual trail and droop, Wherethro' gleams laughter as thro' sorrow's pale. And anger's self doth tremble maidenly; The massy throat; the nostril mobile, smooth; The breast full-orbed with arduous large pride, As I so oft have marked, when from the chase. The witness-dropping knife swung with the bow, Heading the burdened company, he came, Aye vermeil with the wholesome wind, outwrestler Of storms and perils all. High-mettled Theseus! Keystone of greatness, bond of expectation, Stay of this realm! in his strong-sinewed beauty Dear unto men as Tanais bright-sanded Whose flood harmonious lapses on the ear, And makes for hearts yoke-wearied, thither roaming, Thrice feastful holiday. Ah, righteous gods! Forasmuch as I love him and await him. Who from my youth have been your servitor, Yield my old age its boon of vindication: Haven the happy ship here, ere I die.'

Still heedlessly the hushed moon bent her bow Over the unshorn forest oakenry And the dense gladiate leaves of Thoræ's pine: The cold and incommunicable moon, Waxing and waning thro' the barren time That brought not Theseus' self, nor of him sign,
Nor any waif of rumor out of Crete,
Whereto, a year nigh gone, the ship had sped
Forlorn; her decks enshrouded in plucked yew
Strewn to the mizzen; and her oary props
And halyards all with blossomed myrtle twined,
And every sail dark as from looms of hell,
In token of the universal dole.
And on her heavèd anchor and spurred keel
Cheers none, but protest, moans, and ire attended,
When from the quay, in melancholy weather
Forward she sobbed on black unwilling wing.

But ere that going drear, one foot ashore, Theseus with his mild comrades hand in hand,— The seven maids and boys to bondage sealed, Lifted his head, and met his father's eyes, And out of morning ardor made this oath: 'My people, stand not for our sakes in tears! No shape of ill shall daunt me; I will strike And overcome, Heaven's favor for my shield. And when engirt with conquest I return (Or never else hies Theseus hitherward), That ye may read my heart while yet at sea, And know indeed that fate hath used me fair, That these your lambs I shepherd and lead home, Lo, I will set upon the central mast The sky-sail white! white to the hollowing breeze, White to that fierce and alien coast, and white To your espial, from the horizon's brink

Unto the moored fulfilment of your joy. Watch: you that keep your faith and love in me.'

And they believed and watched, albeit with dread, Steadfastly without plaint, to soothe the king, Who, taciturn and close-engarmented, From his nocturnal towered station leaned Pining against the unresponsive tide. And thro' his brain, with hum processional, Wheeled memories of Theseus, deeds of Theseus, The race he won of yore, the song he sang; His truth, his eloquence, his April moods, And all his championship of trodden tribes, Since first he lit on Athens, like a star.

For Ægeus, to the low-voiced Meta wed, Thereafter to Rhexenor's daughter spouse, Childless, and by his brethren's guile deposed, Led by a last mysterious oracle, Once, exiled, to Træzene wandered down; And there, accorded Aphrodite's grace, To whom the sacrificial smoke he raised. Atonement and conciliation sweet. Begot to Greece her hero; and straightway Bereavèd Æthra, of old Pelops' race Forsook, by destined rumor summoned home. But with the auroral kiss of parting, he In the spring sunshine, on the mellow shore Laid his huge blade beneath a caverned rock, And both the jewelled sandals from his feet, With lofty exhortation: 'Bid my son,