



11-15-2008

## First Kiss, with Only Shakespeare to Protect Me

Kathleen Zamboni McCormick

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview>

 Part of the [Fiction Commons](#), [Nonfiction Commons](#), [Photography Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

McCormick, Kathleen Zamboni (2008) "First Kiss, with Only Shakespeare to Protect Me," *Westview*: Vol. 28 : Iss. 2 , Article 5.  
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol28/iss2/5>

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Westview by an authorized administrator of SWOSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu](mailto:phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu).



# First Kiss, with Only Shakespeare to Protect Me

by Kathleen Zamboni McCormick

*That man that hath a tongue I say is no man*

Having Kirk kiss me was like being force-fed an oversized tablespoon of potato flakes cooked with too much water. His tongue was sodden and lumpy and hot. Saliva—his saliva—was dripping down my chin, and it smelled faintly of feet. “Oh, Ruthie,” he managed to say without taking his mouth off mine. “I think you are the most—” He cut himself off as he began to suck my bottom lip. *I had rather hear my dogs bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me.* One of his clammy hands was gripping my neck so hard that I couldn’t move my head. I was sure I would have fingerprint marks in the morning. His other hand flailed under my dress to find my underpants, and when I opened my mouth to scream at him, he only stuck his tongue into it farther.

*But, soft! What light through yonder window breaks?*

I pushed my fingers into his cheeks and unstuck his mouth from mine. “Kirk,” I gasped before his lips took hold again, “the porch light is on. People will see.” Well, at least the moths would. They were swarming around the porch light the way every part of Kirk was swarming around me. As I pulled one of his hands out from under my dress, he slid the other one to my lower back and pushed his frisson against me.

*I am driven on by the flesh*

At least “frisson” is what Agnes called it, and from what she told me, she seemed to have seen a lot of them. The first time she said frisson, I was embarrassed because I’d never heard of one before, and I always did much better on vocabulary tests than she did. “‘Frisson’ is French, Ruthie.” She

lectured me like I was a child, even though I was supposed to be her best friend. “It means ‘arousal’ and is the only nice term for what other people call a prick, a dick, a pecker, or even a beaver cleaver. In fact,” —and she beamed with pride— “‘frisson’ is a term I invented when I was dating Robert, you know that exchange student from France who spent two weeks living with my family?” I’d never even known she dated Robert. He had such bad acne. *Mislike me not for my complexion.* Though his accent did sound great on the phone. “A ‘beaver cleaver’? What are you talking about, Agnes? Did you make that term up too?” I stupidly asked. Agnes laughed at me. “It’s a good thing I’m your friend, Ruthie, because people could really make fun of you. You might be the smartest girl in the class, but you don’t learn these kind of words on synonym lists or in those Shakespeare plays you’re always reading.”

*O that she were an open-arse, and thou a popp’rin’ pear*

I happened to love synonym lists and was forever trying to work new words—or novel lexicons—into daily conversations—or tête-à-têtes. My latest passion was Shakespearean quotations, especially from the plays about true love. And Shakespeare did have words for “it.”

But they were witty, like “fig” or “carrot,” and meant to be used on the stage, not in real life. “For your information,” said Agnes, continuing her condescending tone, “among the words you should acquaint yourself with if you want to know when a guy is talking about ‘it’ are: hose, dong, schlong, cock, pipe, trouser snake, and John Thomas.” She rattled these off with the speed of someone practicing for a test. At first I didn’t believe her. In our house, we had one term for “it,” and this term was used for both males and females. It was called



“the down there.” But it wasn’t something you were supposed to talk about anyway, so the name hardly mattered.

*You kiss by th’ book*

I did know that the correct word for a boy’s down there was “penis,” but when I asked Agnes quietly during lunch at school why we couldn’t just call it a penis, she said that I was pathetic. “‘Penis’ is like an emergency-room term, Ruth,” she sighed, clearly disappointed at my innocent stupidity. “Say ‘penis’ to a guy, and he’ll think you’re talking about a textbook rather than a little fun.” When I didn’t reply, Agnes poked me in the side and said, “What’s the matter, cat got your tongue?” Then she saw Paul coming and looked at me rather nastily as she quickly put on some lipgloss. “Guess at the rate you’re going, Ruth Marie, the cat’s about the only likely candidate,” she laughed and blew Paul a kiss. He nodded to us but kept on walking. Agnes shrugged and started telling me about blow jobs, but luckily the bell rang and Sex 101 was over. I didn’t talk to Agnes much after that until I got the invitation for her “Sweet Fourteenth on June 14<sup>th</sup>” birthday party, and I had learned nothing else about sex in the interim. But I did win a state prize for my literature essay on “Gender Differences Among Shakespeare’s Lovers.”

*Groping for trouts in a peculiar river*

The wet of Kirk’s saliva drippings began to seep up into my nose as he was stretching, open-mouthed, to get a finger inside my underpants. I was drowning, being mauled, asphyxiated, and occasionally gagged all at the same time. *Youth, you have done me much ungentleness.* Kirk had yet to demonstrate how any of this was fun. He moved one arm away from my back. At least I could half breathe. I hoped he was about to stop. But no. His hand grabbed my stomach as his fingers spread out, stretching and closing, trying to find

my breasts. He was also starting another kiss. I could see it beginning, almost in slow-motion. His mouth opened, then it rounded and began to move forward, like carp at feeding time. *Such carping is not commendable.* I thought that carp were disgusting when we’d watched them last Saturday on that nature program on television. Kirk the human carp. In that instant, I realized that I would hate giving blow jobs. Kirk’s tongue was bad enough, but there would be no way in hell that this carp was going to put his trouser snake in my mouth. *Fillet of a fenny snake, in the cauldron boil and bake.* I pulled away while Kirk’s lips were still extended and his eyes closed. With the combination of the June heat and Kirk’s excessive moisture, my new mini-dress felt damp. I was also sweating from the nausea. I couldn’t get rid of the image of a snake wriggling in my mouth trying to get down my throat.



*Photo courtesy theatrehistory.com*



*The howling of Irish wolves against the moon*

Everyone at Agnes's fourteenth birthday party had seen that Kirk was walking me home. He'd made such a point of saying good-bye to people, all while holding tightly to my hand as if I might run off, which, to be fair, was exactly what I was planning to do. "The boys are all walking girls home, Ruthie," said Agnes, smiling and giving me a wink. She called to some of the boys, and they came over to us. "Tell her," Agnes beamed, "who you are each going to be walking home tonight."

PAUL: I'm scheduled to walk Donna home at about ten.

LAWRENCE: And so am I for Anna.

JOE: And I for Marybeth.

MARK: And I for Lisa.

PHOEBE: And I for Ganymede.

ORLANDO: *And I for Rosalind.*

ROSALIND/RUTH: *And I for no man.*

"What did you do to these boys?" I asked Agnes, in shock. "Did you actually plan all of this in advance?" She shrugged, started to walk away, and then turned back singing, "It's my party and I'll plan if I want to." Typical, I thought. Agnes can only ever come up with a pop culture reference. I glared at Kirk. "I've been walking home from Agnes's house alone since I was three years old." His face remained blank. I wasn't sure he could do the math. "That's a decade, Kirk!" I shouted. I hadn't expected his soft-voiced response. "So, I guess it's time for a change, *dear Lady Disdain.*" He raised his eyebrows just slightly and faintly wobbled his head from side to side. I think he was trying to look cool. Or suave. Kirk the jerk. And "*Lady Disdain*"? Had Kirk actually called me that? Agnes hugged us as we were leaving and cooed:

"Now don't fly too fast, you two little love birds." Funny how she never seemed to understand the concept of metaphor when we were studying

poetry in English class.

*Sweet lovers love the spring*

I knew that Agnes would certainly ask if Kirk had kissed me. She'd taken me aside during her party to tell me that she'd become a "connoisseur of kissing" over the past few months—a word she would never have learned or used in a sentence if it were in a vocabulary list. Sex or love seemed to do wonders for other people. *O, how ripe in show thy lips, those kissing cherries, tempting grow.* I had to admit that I was pretty jealous of Agnes's apparent good luck with boys. But I wasn't going to renew our friendship over the topic of Kirk's tongue. And anyway, she'd already know the answer. Why else would a boy want to walk a girl home from a party that was just three houses away from her own house? I would tell Agnes nothing because whatever Kirk was doing to me could never be construed as kissing.

*Come, my queen, take hands with me*

I'd been dreaming of the perfect kiss for most of my life, ever since I'd first heard of *Sleeping Beauty*, and I'd thought about it a lot more seriously since I'd started studying Shakespeare. A lord would arrive on a beautiful horse, recently returned from the wars. Metaphorically speaking, of course. He probably would just have won the state finals in debating. He could be only fairly good-looking, so long as he was intelligent. *Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind.* He didn't even have to have any form of transportation. We could take the bus until he got his driving license. He would have searched the world over, or at least through many high schools, to find me. He would see me from afar. *O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!* I would be busily working on my collection of Shakespearean quotations of great importance to my newest essay. *Hang there, my verse, in witness of my love.* But, somehow, he and



I would both know that I was waiting for him, and that he was looking for me. *It is my lady. O, it is my love.* He would take the pencil out of my hand and lean over my desk to kiss me. He would have minty-fresh breath. He would never perspire, or if he did, it would evaporate and be odorless. *A rose by any other word would smell as sweet.* I realized that, until tonight, I had taken these attributes of personal hygiene for granted. He would tenderly caress my hair, and then, his hand would brush across mine—*and palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss*—intimating that I should stop working and accompany him, a desire to which I would immediately acquiesce. *O then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do.* We would lean modestly into each other. [*He kisses her*]

*I yield upon great persuasion*

I would be redolent of thyme and roses because they began to grow wild all over the back yard after my mother and I planted them a few years ago. Their fragrance permeated all of our clothes when they dried on the clothesline. When I put my face in his hair, he would smell like woodbine. And we would walk and then he would say to me, *I know a bank whereon the wild thyme blows, with sweet musk-roses and with eglantine.* And we would lie down under the clothesline in a bed of thyme. *Come, sit thee down upon this flow'ry bed, while I thy amiable cheeks do coy.* And he would lift

my dress. *O gentle Romeo, if though dost love, pronounce it faithfully.* He would be calm and unhurried and soft spoken. *Lady, by yonder blessed moon I vow.* And I would look up and behold the stars observing us—*I am as constant as the northern star*—as they had kept watch throughout time over great lovers like Romeo and Juliet, Hermia and Lysander, Rosalind and Orlando, Beatrice and Benedick, and Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. When I gazed into his eyes, I would see the stars glinting in them. “We should stop now,” he would say with great restraint. *It was the lark, the bird that sings at dawn, not the nightingale.* Even though I would feel that he wanted to go on.

*The course of true love never did run smooth*

I opened my eyes in disbelief. He knelt beside me—*with bated breath and whispering humbleness*—and tried to smooth out my dress. *How came these things to pass?* The dress was really quite wrinkled, and my back felt scraped, like I'd been lying on cement. *My only love sprung from my only hate.* Kirk, the disguised. *O, how mine eyes do loathe his visage now!*

Agnes would never find out.

*Methought I was enamored of an ass.*

