

**ABELARD AND HELOISE**

**(1934)**

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**Translated from the Yiddish**

**by Lillian Gold**

**A DRAMATIC POEM  
IN THREE SCENES**

**PERSONAE**

**ABELARD** - Theologian-philosopher, monk

**HELOISE** - Nun

**FATHER GREGORY** - Head of Monastery where  
Abelard is imprisoned

**FIRST MONK**

**SECOND MONK**

**THIRD MONK**

**OTHER MONKS**



Action occurs in France in the 12th Century

Abelard, a famous theologian-philosopher (also in his younger years, a troubadour), and Heloise, his beloved, a gifted woman with great strength of character, lived in France at the beginning of the twelfth century. Because of family intrigues, the couple, who were completely devoted to each other and very much in love, suffered all their days because they were forced to live in separate monasteries. Abelard's writings were accused of heretical ideas and publicly burnt; his body was mortified by a shameful operation. But in spite of monstrous treatment and enforced separation, Abelard and Heloise continued to love each other, and to dream that, one day, they would be united. Their fate, for the rest of their lives, served as a symbol of martyrdom and eternal love. Ironically, that which they could not have in life, they finally attained in death. Several years after their deaths, their bodies were exhumed and placed together in one grave.

## SCENE ONE

Monastery prison cell. Monks carry in Abelard. He has been beaten; he can barely stand. They place him on a hard bed where he lies with eyes closed. Monks come in noisily. Suddenly they grow still. Among the monks there is a stranger. He is mute, it seems, and bends his ear when spoken to, as if he were also deaf. He signs with his hands. The stranger helps bring Abelard in, but immediately separates himself from the others and stands in a corner, apparently praying.

### FIRST MONK

Forgive us, brother Abelard,  
It hurts our hearts to see you  
So shamed and beaten.  
It hurts to put you  
On this bare bed in a prison cell.

### ABELARD

*[Lies still and is silent.]*

### SECOND MONK

Our Holy Father Gregory  
Told us to hold you here,  
Fed only bread and water,  
No covers or pillow on your bed,  
And no salve for your wounds.

### THIRD MONK

May our Holy Father be blessed.  
The beating you received from the people,  
And, now, this cell, with the bare bed,  
Are proper punishment for your heretic talk.  
You are a rabble-rouser as always;  
Then you were an atheist; you still remain so.

### FIRST MONK

Ah, Brother, do not say that now.  
Let us hear from the Brother, our guest.

**SECOND MONK**

Our guest from the outside is a mute.

**FIRST MONK**

A mute? I see he moves his lips.

**SECOND MONK**

He is probably saying his prayers.  
I would swear he is also deaf.

**FIRST MONK**

*[Shouts into his ear.]* From where do you hail?  
From which Monastery?

**STRANGER**

*[Does not move.]*

**FIRST MONK**

In any case, I tell you, Brothers,  
Be kind to Brother Abelard.

**SECOND MONK**

It is a sin to be kind and forgiving to him now.  
Is this the first time  
He has made these mistakes?  
To leave the grounds of the Monastery,  
To steal out into the nearby towns before large  
And small crowds,  
To speak his atheistic words?

**THIRD MONK**

This time his game did not work.  
The people themselves got even with him  
In the name of God and redemption.  
They heard the hateful speech of a blasphemer  
And they repaid him with beatings and curses.  
*[To the first Monk.]* And you, Brother,  
Are asking us to forgive him?  
He should be asking our forgiveness,  
He should thank us for rescuing him  
From the angry people.

**FIRST MONK**

Of course he is thankful to us.

**SECOND MONK**

There he lies and is silent.

**FIRST MONK**

Surely from weakness.

**SECOND MONK**

He is silent, now, with hatred for us.  
But he belongs in a real prison,  
Not locked up inside holy monastery walls.  
Thieves, drunks and murderers should be  
His neighbors.

**FIRST MONK**

Your words are so angry,  
But I know it is only your mouth speaking.  
I know your heart is filled with pity,  
Like the heart of a brother in Christ.

**SECOND MONK**

He does not deserve pity.  
He is no Brother in Christ.  
I tell you, he does not believe in Christ.

**THIRD MONK**

He is no example, but a Pharisee.  
He came to us against his will;  
He was forced to come.

**FIRST MONK**

Now is not the time, Brother,  
To dig again and again  
Into the pain of Abelard's life.

**SECOND MONK**

All our lives are painful.

**FIRST MONK**

Do I have to tell you, Brothers,  
How different Abelard's life was?  
How bloodily different?

**SECOND MONK**

No one is guilty save Abelard alone.  
Many years ago  
He let some girl turn his head.  
So involved was he, that neighbors and friends  
In anguish and justified hatred  
Attacked him,  
Tortured him to shame his manhood,  
And chased him from their world forever.

**ABELARD**

*[Groans.]* Oh, God, please stop!

**THIRD MONK**

You cannot stand to hear the truth.  
*[Meets the eyes of the strange monk, who lunges  
toward him with a stifled cry and stops short as if  
choking. All are frightened by his choking voice.]*

**FIRST MONK**

I beg you, speak no more.

**SECOND MONK**

Good. About this I will stop.  
But I must tell him,  
That what happened many years ago  
Is happening still today.  
He is broken, suffering and old,  
And still in his head, involved  
With the same mad ideas,  
Seeking, in foolish arrogance,  
To find new ways to God  
And other ways to people.  
We have not yet broken his feistiness,  
His pride, nor his intransigence,  
And he is still defiant in his passion for that girl.

This must not be allowed--  
It rouses the blood in all of us.  
Yet, today, he still writes reams of papers,  
Even though all his writings until now  
Have been burnt at the holy stake  
And will have no audience.  
Just listen to what a person dares to write:  
That God is intelligence, also, belief is intelligence.  
Can you understand how an arrogant person  
Can convince himself?  
Do you hear? Aristotle and -- God!  
And now, Aristotle and -- love!  
And love, for whom? For some girl,  
How is she called?

**ABELARD**

Her precious name is Heloise.

**SECOND MONK**

An elderly man of almost fifty years,  
A Brother in Christ, who more than once  
Has confessed his sins,  
Who offered his regret and repentance,  
Religiously fasted and slept on stones,  
Who publicly beat himself with whips--  
He becomes like a seventeen-year-old  
At the mention of this girl, what's her name?

**ABELARD**

Her precious name is Heloise.

**MUTE ONE**

*[Whispers aside.]* It is a shame and a disgrace.

**SECOND MONK**

You can see for yourselves; he is eternally guilty,  
Rebellious and sinful.

**FIRST MONK**

I can not listen to such hateful talk.  
I loved once; I know



The pain and longing, the anguish of parting.  
*[He leaves.]*

**SECOND MONK**

*[With anger.]*  
Everyone at one time was in love,  
And everyone has felt the pain of parting;  
It is not so terrible.  
One longs, one forgets. And that is good.  
For who needs to carry that load within himself?

**THIRD MONK**

But you understand, he wants to be the exception!  
Now you can see  
Where he gets those atheistic thoughts.  
Remember all his rantings?  
"You are not to fear devils and ghosts.  
Life is the best there is.  
The best thing on earth is to love.  
Why have so many suffered in this life?  
Why have they denigrated love?"  
Those are the words of Abelard.

**ALL**

That's enough, enough.

**SECOND MONK**

Listen to my words -- even his repentance,  
Even beating his heart and fasting,  
His hot and burning prayers to God,  
His kneeling before the Holy Mother --  
All this is not directed to his Creator  
Nor to the Holy Mother;  
He kneels only for her, what's her name?

**ABELARD**

Her precious name is Heloise.

*[Father Gregory enters, all, including the stranger, bow to him.]*

**SECOND MONK**

The Holy Father is here; rise up.

**ABELARD**

*[Barely rises. Sits leaning heavily, and, finally, with great pain, rises.]*

**FATHER GREGORY**

*[Makes a sign for all to leave. As the stranger leaves, Gregory stops him.]*  
A stranger, I see.

**SECOND MONK**

He is deaf and mute, Holy Father.  
We cannot tell from which monastery he comes.

**FATHER GREGORY**

How long has he been with us?

**SECOND MONK**

He came only this evening.

**FATHER GREGORY**

Why is he in this cell?

**SECOND MONK**

He entered with all of us,  
Quietly and modestly.

**FATHER GREGORY**

I see tears in his eyes.

**SECOND MONK**

He is in constant prayer;  
His lips move constantly, silently.

**FATHER GREGORY**

*[Places hands on the head of stranger.]*  
Why do you cry, my son? Do not cry.  
*[Makes a sign for all to leave. They go out To Abelard.]* You may lie or sit if you can't stand.

**ABELARD**

*[Sits.]*

**FATHER GREGORY**

Do you at least realize your crime?

**ABELARD**

I realize everything.

**FATHER GREGORY**

What do you mean by "everything"?

**ABELARD**

The pleasure you get from my punishment and pain.

**FATHER GREGORY**

You still speak with arrogance to me?

**ABELARD**

I am the one who is right.

**FATHER GREGORY**

Stop that! If you felt less righteous  
Your life would be easier.

**ABELARD**

I am not looking to lighten my load.

**FATHER GREGORY**

I should really give you the full punishment;  
That is, besides confining you to this cell,  
To inflict twenty lashes on your bare back.

**ABELARD**

My body is ready.

**FATHER GREGORY**

Your body is always ready, I see.  
A strange body you have.

**ABELARD**

What does the Father mean?

**FATHER GREGORY**

I mean, you don't care what happens to your body;  
You don't spare it at all,  
As one would not spare a broken pot.  
How long is it that your body has been tortured?  
It must be all of fifteen years.

**ABELARD**

The Father tries to hurt me.

**FATHER GREGORY**

If I really wished to, I would  
Have them truly beat you.

**ABELARD**

It would be better if the Father beat me  
And did not ridicule me with his talk.

**FATHER GREGORY**

I do not ridicule you; on the contrary  
I show you benevolence.  
If I did not value you  
I would imprison you once more, permanently,  
And under lock and key.  
Your last efforts are filled with heresy,  
With arrogance and hateful rebellion  
Against the order of the world.

**ABELARD**

How does the Father know my last writings?

**FATHER GREGORY**

How? Because I have them. Here they are.  
*[Removes a pack of writings from his bosom.]*

**ABELARD**

*[Falls prone on the bed in anguish.]*

**FATHER GREGORY**

How is it you are not more careful  
But keep such writing here in your cell,  
As well as letters from Heloise?

**ABELARD**

Oh, my God!

**FATHER GREGORY**

I recently was in your cell  
And searched through your things.  
Without any difficulty, I found  
These new writings and also Heloise's letters.  
You see? Here they are.

**ABELARD**

*[Shouting.]* You had no right to do this!  
The work of a thief!

**FATHER GREGORY**

To whom do you say this?

**ABELARD**

Then punish me again and again,  
I am in your hands.  
I am still a prisoner and condemned.  
The Father can do what he wills with my writings.  
He can burn them  
Or accuse me openly, and then finally burn them,  
Then torture me to my death--  
I am prepared. Only to lose Heloise's letters,  
I have no more strength for this. *[Falls to his knees.]*  
Oh, please return the letters!

**FATHER GREGORY**

And if I don't?

**ABELARD**

I shall collapse at your feet.

**FATHER GREGORY**

It is not necessary to faint, not at all.  
Arise, it is foolish to see  
Such a strange, lasting love for a woman,  
And also such strange love of a woman for you.  
It is foolish and wonderful at once.  
I read Heloise's letters,  
Each word burnt me as with a poison  
And filled my soul with vengeance  
And my heart with jealousy.

**ABELARD**

Why? Why?  
Why is the Father jealous?  
Does the Father know who she is?

**FATHER GREGORY**

Of course, I know her.  
And for a time long before you knew her.

**ABELARD**

I do not understand.

**FATHER GREGORY**

You, too, Abelard. I knew you before this place.  
I know all of it from many years ago.

**ABELARD**

From when? From where?

**FATHER GREGORY**

This knowledge will give you no joy.  
Only this past year am I the eldest in this monastery.  
It would be best for you  
To think you knew me only a short time.

**ABELARD**

I see. The Father holds a secret from me.

**FATHER GREGORY**

Well, yes, a secret and more yet. A secret

That has much to do with you.

**ABELARD**

With me?

**FATHER GREGORY**

Have you not noticed this past year  
I paid more attention to you than to the others?

**ABELARD**

You have my thanks for that, but let the Father  
Tell me of the secret.

**FATHER GREGORY**

For you, it would be better if I  
Kept the secret locked within my heart!  
But I can now no longer bear it.  
God blessed our meeting  
With you in submission to me  
And I responsible for your well being.

**ABELARD**

I am terrified by your words.

**FATHER GREGORY**

Fear? They all say nothing frightens you,  
You welcome torture in your stubbornness.  
That is true; I see it myself.  
For fifteen years you have been dragged  
From monastery to monastery,  
Guilty, convicted.  
And from monastery to monastery, alone  
And imprisoned, goes Heloise.  
You are tortured without pity,  
But you will not retract  
Shameful heresies against God  
Nor cease your twisted longing for Heloise,  
A longing which vexes all of us  
By the stubborn persistence  
Of your devotion.  
For it is a shame to cherish love

For so many years.  
And you, I see, bear it all,  
From the fires that burn your works to ashes,  
To the mockery of the people and your own comrades.  
To the searing cut of a knife on your flesh.

**ABELARD**

Oh, Father, speak no more!

**FATHER GREGORY**

Yet I wish to speak more and further--  
And actually about cutting and a knife.

**ABELARD**

Oh no, oh no, do not force me  
To recall that pain-filled memory of the past.  
Do what you will with me,  
But do not torture me with memories of that  
Terrible night.

**FATHER GREGORY**

This is not for torture, but to show you  
There *is* a heavenly supervision in this world  
As our holy Fathers teach.  
And you must give up your heretical thoughts, my son,  
And all your wanderings and longings,  
To finally still your heart.  
For what ails you is lack of rest, soul-rest,  
So I will now bring you some hope,  
A healing for your tortured soul.

**ABELARD**

I seek everywhere for hope.  
Where can I find her, this hope?

**FATHER GREGORY**

I will reveal this hope to you  
And so expose my nature  
And also my involvement in your life.  
Therefore I tell you, "Remember well  
That night fifteen years ago.



That very night of shame."

**ABELARD**

*[Very upset.]* Oh, Father!

**FATHER GREGORY**

Remind yourself well. Recall--  
You were in bed.  
The door to your cell burst open.  
Masked youths entered, knives in hand.

**ABELARD**

How does the Father know these details?

**FATHER GREGORY**

Heloise's uncle sent those youths.

**ABELARD**

I know, I know.

**FATHER GREGORY**

You know, and still do not know.  
Those villains bound your hands and feet.  
Their leader used his knife  
To bloodily castrate you  
And permanently sever you from Heloise.  
And now, open your eyes  
To recognize the leader.

**ABELARD**

You mean that ... you ...?

**FATHER GREGORY**

Of course I mean it,  
And I want you to know  
Who I am.

**ABELARD**

It is not possible.

**FATHER GREGORY**

Why not possible?  
Why will you not understand?  
And if you cannot understand,  
Do you think others can?  
Why is your body shaking?  
I am telling you the candid truth:  
I was the instigator, leader, punisher.

**ABELARD**

*[Falls to the floor in anguish, lies there. Gregory stands as before, calmly. Does not attempt to raise him.]*

**FATHER GREGORY**

You are so shaken by this news  
That my heart aches for you.  
*[Pause]*  
Arise. Why so much groveling?  
Why so lost and astonished?  
Do you believe I relish this?  
Or do you think we made a mockery?  
Believe me, my heart is filled with pity  
For you, because, again, you must understand  
I am not the one; it is the Eternal Supervisor  
And the one who began your punishment  
Who must continue and end it.

**ABELARD**

*[Lifts his head, and curses.]* Torturer!

**FATHER GREGORY**

It matters not; say it again!  
I will not punish you for that slur.

**ABELARD**

Punish!

**FATHER GREGORY**

Not now. You must know  
The attack on your body  
Was not done for money,

But love of Heloise.  
For I, too, was in love  
With Heloise,  
But she chose you.  
You were victorious over everyone.  
You captured Heloise's heart forever.  
Fifteen years have passed,  
And, look, we both are under the same roof.  
And where is Heloise's heart? With whom?  
With you? You really think it is with you?  
And if it is true you have her heart,  
Then you have me to thank  
For punishing and shaming you. If Heloise  
Still loves you,  
It is for your suffering, and nothing else.  
So bless the hand that made you suffer  
And gave you the gift of an undying love.  
Here I see letters she has written you--  
So many cries, so many moans,  
Such stubborn patience, such devotion,  
Such sympathy with your fate,  
And each word is ... blood; and, you,  
You dare to call me torturer?  
You are the real hangman.  
With your longing you wove the rope  
For Heloise's neck.  
I can hear her screams from the gallows  
That you constructed;  
She begs you to rescue and free her,  
But you, like a vampire, have attacked her  
With the nails of your inflexibility,  
And you will not rescue her.  
Here, here are her letters, the gallows-torture,  
I do not need them.  
*[Throws a packet of letters at Abelard's feet.  
The packet separates. Father Gregory goes off.  
Abelard throws his body over the letters,  
Gathers them to him and lies there.]*

## ABELARD

My captor, my jailer who shamed me, so this is the  
Holy Father,  
The guide and purifier of my soul.  
He says the Supreme Authority wished it so.  
Oh, answer me, my God. How do you allow any oaf  
To speak in Your name? Why don't *You*  
Tell me Your will?  
You are silent, like the ground on which I lie.  
You are silent, like these walls which protect me;  
And now You must be silent no longer.  
There must come a moment when even a stone  
Opens its mouth and begins to speak,  
And not only speak, but shriek, protest,  
Break through to storm the night.  
For this is not the moment  
When the criminal carries on himself  
The crown of righteousness,  
And he who is shamed, the thorns  
Of the pariah.  
What more can this moment carry?  
The father must be saying what is true.  
If that is so, then blessed be,  
You, saint-oaf.  
I kiss your bloody fingers,  
I kiss your footsteps, the skirt of your robe.  
You, hangman, my fate, you, dog of holiness!  
It is a sad day, for the fist I make  
From such weak fingers, small and thin,  
Can not suffice. A curse on such an ineffectual fist.  
A curse on the anguished victim  
You are now, Abelard, crippled, tortured!  
Come, crawl on the floor, Abelard,  
And let the night rend your limbs apart  
As a wolf would tear a wounded sheep.  
*[Throws himself about on the floor and mumbles  
to himself.]*  
Abelard, do not collapse. Stand up!  
Stand up, for Heloise is here with you.  
You hold her heart in your hand;  
For Heloise comes ever, ever at your call.

*[He sits up.]*

A blessing on my tired fingers  
Which carry the shining and pure heart of Heloise.

*[Stretches his arms in exaltation. Speaks as if  
Heloise is present.]*

How are you, Heloise, my own?

Why are you so shy?

Good evening to you, my sister, my wandering one,  
I seek a bench for you; there is none here.

Then sit on my barren bed.

*[He rises to his knees.]*

Good evening once again my Heloise, my wonderful guest.

How tired you are, you breathe so heavily;

Your shoulders droop. Where do you come from?

It seems you travelled dangerous paths.

Your clothes are torn,

Your lips are dry -- and you are parched --

And also probably hungry. Forgive me

That I do not welcome you with food and drink.

My bread is hard as stone; my water, bitter.

And my robe, you see, filthy and bloody.

My prison garb, I hate it!

Heloise, why are you silent?

You are bound in your nun's habit.

Oh, remove your nun's garb,

Take it off. I fall at your feet.

*[His head is bowed to the earth; he stands  
on his knees, sunk in thought.]*

*[The first monk enters. Abelard does not hear  
him enter.]*

#### **FIRST MONK**

Do not kneel now, Brother,

You are tired and weak. You would do better

To lie down. *[He raises Abelard.]*

I beg you, lie down and rest.

*[He lays him down.]*

**ABELARD**

*[Falls on the bed.]*

What have you heard from Heloise?  
Did you carry out your mission  
To get my letter to her?  
Perhaps you returned with a letter from her.  
Quickly, tell me!

**FIRST MONK**

*[Embarrassed, he is quiet.]*

**ABELARD**

Or did you not go on your mission?

**FIRST MONK**

I went as always -- five days and nights,  
To reach the monastery of Heloise.

**ABELARD**

And Heloise?

**FIRST MONK**

She was no longer there.

**ABELARD**

What does that mean?

**FIRST MONK**

Who knows? Heloise  
Simply disappeared from there.  
None of the Sisters  
Know how it occurred.

**ABELARD**

How long since this happened?

**FIRST MONK**

Several weeks ago.

**ABELARD**

The last time you saw her  
And gave her my letter, did you not  
Notice anything about her?  
Some unusual restlessness?

**FIRST MONK**

I have already told you:  
She met me in tranquility and with a smile,  
She brought me food and drink,  
All this with modesty and grave restraint.  
So not one of the nuns could think  
Matters clandestine lay between us.  
Oh, yes, I saw her tremble  
When I placed your letter in her hand.  
Unable to control herself,  
She brought the letter to her lips  
To kiss it sweetly. This took a second only.  
At once she was composed,  
Contained as always.

**ABELARD**

Where could she be now?  
What do the sisters say?  
Do not hide anything from me, tell me all.  
Does she live?

**FIRST MONK**

What do you imagine that you ask me that question?  
She may have become bored with the place  
And left to find a new monastery.

**ABELARD**

So you have brought my letters back with you.

**FIRST MONK**

Here they are.  
*[Hands them to him.]*

**ABELARD**

*[Holds his head in his hands.]*

Oh, Brother,  
At least you do not betray me.

**FIRST MONK**

Do not speak like that, for we all, all love you.

**ABELARD**

It must be a strange love,  
Every step of mine is spied upon,  
Every work recorded.  
I am beaten and -- they love me?  
A strange love indeed.

*[Pause.]*

Oh, tell me, where can Heloise be?

**FIRST MONK**

She will find you herself,  
Or find a messenger  
To send you news of where she is.

**ABELARD**

Thank you for your words of hope, but  
I can wait no longer;  
I am at the end of my strength.  
I am a broken person, Brother.  
*[He falls ,completely undone.]*

**FIRST MONK**

Be strong, my Brother.  
*[To himself.]* How can I leave him here alone?  
*[The silent monk slides into the cell, stands near the wall.]*  
*[The first monk to the silent monk.]*  
Will you be here to watch over him?  
*[Silent one nods his head, yes. A large group of monks enter noisily.]*  
Why all the noise, Brothers?

**MONKS**

The Father said we may come in.



**FIRST MONK**

Why is that so good, Brothers?

**MONKS**

They say the Father found a whole pack  
Of love letters here.

**FIRST MONK**

What has that to do with us?

**MONKS**

We would like to read them.

**FIRST MONK**

I beg you, please leave, this is not the time  
For jokes and ridicule, Brothers.

*[Pushes them all out. To the silent one  
who remains.]*

It is good that someone remain with him.  
It is early evening. I will return later.

*[To Abelard]*

Are you sleeping, Brother?

**ABELARD**

*[Lies outstretched with eyes closed.]*

**FIRST MONK**

*[To silent one]*

He is asleep. That is good.

*[Leaves.]*

**SILENT ONE**

*[Stands at the head of Abelard's bed, stares long at his  
countenance. Bows and begins to speak fluently.]*

Abelard, my dear lover.

**ABELARD**

*[Not opening his eyes.]*

Who is it? Whose voice do I hear?

**SILENT ONE**

Arise, Abelard. Open your eyes.

**ABELARD**

A sweet voice envelopes my heart.

**SILENT ONE**

My dear one, you are wracked with pain.

I am here. I have come to you.

**ABELARD**

It must be a dream. Oh, do not interrupt it.

**SILENT ONE**

It is no dream.

Open your eyes and see me,

My face, hidden by beard and hair,

My voice, that frozen silence,

My body, clad in men's clothing.

Through long wandering, countless dangers,

I fought my way to you.

Arise, Abelard.

**ABELARD**

*[Opens his eyes.]*

Heloise!

## SCENE TWO

*[Late at night. Abelard lies in bed.  
Heloise stands in the corner.]*

### ABELARD

You have been standing for hours;  
I do not even have a place for you to sit.

### HELOISE

It hurts me more to see you  
On hard boards than  
To have no place to sit.  
We must not speak of this,  
As you can see, I must have courage  
And control my heart, or it will break.

### ABELARD

Come, sit on the edge of my bed.

### HELOISE

The door is open and at any moment  
Someone may enter;  
If I stand I am a stranger on my way,  
A mute wanderer passing through.

### ABELARD

Tell me, how do you live in your monastery?

### HELOISE

I am ashamed to tell you;  
Life is hard. But what is my discomfort  
Next to yours? Against your cruel punishments  
So freely given?  
I stand and watch in disbelief.  
Who would believe the nightmare you endure?

### ABELARD

I am relieved your life is not so harsh.

**HELOISE**

I, too, am sometimes punished,  
But not with the harshness they inflict on you.  
Because of my own free will I donned the veil,  
But you are here as prisoner condemned.

**ABELARD**

But, Heloise, I realize  
You, who condemned yourself,  
May bitterly regret the fate you chose,  
Where I find consolation in the fact  
That I am powerless before my punishers.

**HELOISE**

You choose to minimize your pains and heighten mine?  
I understand your kindness and I thank you.  
But I feel that something horrible  
Is happening here. I felt it  
In your letters, too.  
Each word in every letter  
Charged with agony.

**ABELARD**

I felt that suffering in your pain-filled letters, too.  
I feel it now again.  
Here they are; I hold them in my hands.  
How grateful I am to you for these letters.

**HELOISE**

Oh, God, how thin you have become,  
How beaten and how torn.  
*{Quietly cries.}*  
But I am fearful now to comfort you,  
To hold you in my arms.

**ABELARD**

But now that you are here, I feel no pain.  
Instead, my heart is filled with song.  
I ask again, I yearn to know  
Each detail of your precious life.

**HELOISE**

This is not the time for me speak.  
You speak, and I will listen.

**ABELARD**

I want to touch your hand.

**HELOISE**

Even one indiscretion would suffice  
To separate us evermore again,  
And lead you to worse punishments.

**ABELARD**

And you to harsher wanderings.

**HELOISE**

There are no harsher wanderings.

**ABELARD**

For me, no harsher punishments.

**HELOISE**

Be strong, Abelard.

**ABELARD**

*[Buries his head with impatience.]*  
Oh God, the strength will be my death.

**HELOISE**

*[Goes to him.]*  
Even so, I beg you again:  
Be strong.

**ABELARD**

*[Takes her hand.]*  
Is it so much to ask,  
To look, for one brief moment,  
On your face?

**HELOISE**

Ah, do not ask it.

**ABELARD**

I want to see your lovely face again.

**HELOISE**

When you are stronger, we will  
Steal away and meet in the woods.

**ABELARD**

How can we foil my captors?  
I am watched night and day.

**HELOISE**

Someone could be  
Behind the door, even now.  
*[Opens the door, looks about, returns.]*  
There's no one there.  
Have faith; I will use all my wits  
That we may meet in the woods ere long.

**ABELARD**

Thank you, Heloise. And yet,  
How strange, hardly believable.  
Heloise here, but cannot show  
Her face to me! And I,  
Powerless, lie prone on my bed.  
*[Raises himself with energy, wants to  
quit the bed. At that the first Monk enters.  
Heloise jumps away in time. Abelard falls back.]*

**FIRST MONK**

How are you feeling, Brother?

**ABELARD**

I rest.

**FIRST MONK**

I hope the stranger does not disturb you.

**ABELARD**

On the contrary; his silence calms me.

**FIRST MONK**

The Father will soon come to see you.

**ABELARD**

Why is that?

**FIRST MONK**

To see you, nothing more.

**ABELARD**

It is painful for me to see him.

**FIRST MONK**

Be careful with your talk.

**ABELARD**

He himself knows how painful it is  
For me to see him.

**FIRST MONK**

What do you mean?

**ABELARD**

Now I see it all clearly.  
I do not need more assurance.  
I feel what is in each man's heart  
And fear no more.  
And no man fears me --  
The light of peace fills my soul.

**FIRST MONK**

It pleases me to hear your words  
And that you are at rest.  
The light of peace shines in you.

**ABELARD**

The light of the final peace.  
Go tell our Father,  
He need have fear of me no more:  
I will not thrust my angry fist

Into his ugly face.

**FIRST MONK**

Such words, Brother!

**ABELARD**

Are the evening prayers over?

**FIRST MONK**

A long time since.

**ABELARD**

Today I missed the evening prayers.

**FIRST MONK**

One can miss a prayer.

**ABELARD**

One can carry it into the night.

**FIRST MONK**

Perhaps, now would you like to pray?

**ABELARD**

Yes.

*[Starts to rise from bed. First Monk helps him. Abelard kneels near the bed. Heloise, in other corner, stands stiff and engrossed.]*

**FIRST MONK**

So again I will leave you alone.

*[Leaves.]*

**HELOISE**

Now you see how careful we must be.

**ABELARD**

I see, I see.

Again you stand so long by the wall,

A mute wanderer, just passing by.

And I wish to pray to the mute wanderer.



I cannot embrace you,  
Nor, can I see your true countenance.  
Let my hand be my word;  
Let my eyes be my word.  
Creator! Heloise!  
You are my living God!  
My silent wanderer who stands by the wall.

**HELOISE**

*[In the same tone of voice.]*  
I hear your voice, I have come to you.  
I cherish the words that come from your heart.  
But assume the role you demand of me?  
My weak back can shoulder  
The pain that I must bear.  
But how can I bear *your* suffering?  
How can I witness your life in silence?  
Why don't I cry out to the world in anguish,  
So all shall know and tremble  
At your sorrowful fate?  
But I am mute,  
My silence, shameful and hidden.  
A believer in the coming day am I,  
And I carry in myself the hope  
Of tomorrow. *[Stops suddenly.]*  
Forgive me, my dear, that I speak so much.

**ABELARD**

Speak again, my sister.

**HELOISE**

A person prays to another person,  
As I do to you ...

**ABELARD**

And I to you ...

**HELOISE**

A prayer from person to person means more  
Than from person to God.  
Because person to person means

Two who are bloody, and person to God means:  
Only one bleeds!  
I have seen the sorrow of the Son of God,  
But I have not seen the flow of blood  
From the body of God, the Father.  
I will not pray to God, my Creator.  
I will pray to my husband, Abelard.

**ABELARD**

*[Sits with head bowed to the floor.]*  
To your husband?  
*[With a troubled cry.]*  
Heloise!  
You call me husband?

**HELOISE**

Of course, I call you husband.  
In all the nights, in all the days.  
You are my husband, my eternal  
Husband in the flesh.

**ABELARD**

*[Shuddering.]*  
Do not mention my body.  
My body belongs to dogs, to wolves.

**HELOISE**

I forbid you to speak this way.

**ABELARD**

Have you forgotten that night of shame?

**HELOISE**

I have not forgotten.

**ABELARD**

Do you still want to pray  
To one who is shamed?

**HELOISE**

Just as you want to pray

To one who is shamed.

**ABELARD**

Are you also shamed?

**HELOISE**

I am.

**ABELARD**

How is that?

**HELOISE**

I feel it myself.

**ABELARD**

Why?

**HELOISE**

To be like you.

**ABELARD**

What do your words mean?  
Should I believe that you yourself  
Have harmed your own body?

**HELOISE**

Do not ask, I beg you.

**ABELARD**

Tell me all.

**HELOISE**

Not now.

**ABELARD**

I stretch out my arms to you.

**HELOISE**

And I to you.

**ABELARD**

My strength ebbs.

**HELOISE**

My strength sinks, too.

**ABELARD**

Oh, no. Be strong, you *must* be strong.

You *must* ... you *are*.

Strength flows from you.

**HELOISE**

Fate led me to you,  
And fate shall lead me back again  
Into the strange, cold walls of the monastery.  
I, like you, guarded the fire  
Of belief in your chosen destiny,  
And also in mine.

**ABELARD**

I hate the frigid walls of the monastery!

**HELOISE**

It was from cold monastery walls  
I called the fiery strengths of the world  
To join me with you, Abelard,  
To help you carry out your sacred mission.  
I sent you all my help.  
I shrank the fullness of my breasts  
So no man would desire me,  
So no man would wish to touch me.  
I cut my long hair, and with the same knife  
Shortened my years.  
As one cuts the wheat  
So I gathered my years in full sheaves  
And bring them now to you,  
Loaded on my shoulders,  
To spread on your bed  
To soften its harshness.  
Take them, Abelard, spread out the sheaves.  
I will stand in the corner and watch,

A silent wanderer, who watches and waits.

*[Pause.]*

Arise from your kneeling.

Lie down on the bed.

**ABELARD**

I want to kneel to you.

We have been separated so many years.

In all those years, only two short times

Have I met you. And now, the third.

The first time, in tears;

The second, in silence.

And now, the third.

What is the meaning of this third time?

What is our future?

Is this the herald of blessed occasions,

Or is this third time the last?

Oh, Heloise, come near to me.

Uncover your face;

Overcome all your fears;

Free me from my body.

**HELOISE**

*[As if to herself.]*

What shall I do with him?

**ABELARD**

Murder him.

**HELOISE**

And what would I do with the body?

**ABELARD**

You will hold me in your heart,

And that will be our union.

A person must not live alone,

One must be redeemed in another.

You did not become my wife;

Be my mother-earth

And take me, like mother-earth, into yourself.

As one drinks wine, so shall you drink me,

But I will drink something else.  
Here I have poison, and also a knife;  
Many times have I thought of making an end  
But did not because of my duty to you,  
That you should not remain cheated of my  
Patience, my responsibility and my spirit.  
I endured wracking torture  
Because in my heart I knew you would come.  
My trust in your constancy  
Strengthened my will.  
Had the wait been even longer,  
My faith had not failed.  
And now you have come.  
I am prepared; I wait on my knees.

**HELOISE**

*[Astounded, turns her face to the wall.]*

**ABELARD**

Do not cover your face  
In its monkish disguise,  
For I see the image  
My mind's eye projects:  
Womanly, soft, and mature.  
I beg of you,  
Grant me my wish.

**HELOISE**

*[Tears herself away from the wall;  
Rushes to door.]*

**ABELARD**

*[Tearfully]*  
Where do you run?

**HELOISE**

To escape from you.

**ABELARD**

Foresake me not.

**HELOISE**

You do not need me now.

**ABELARD**

Oh, Heloise.

**HELOISE**

My love no longer gives you courage.

**ABELARD**

Understand me.

**HELOISE**

I understand too well.  
You long for freedom  
From a life of pain  
And in your torment  
Think of yourself alone.  
You ask of me to take your life  
And cherish your holy soul.  
Oh, my dear child,  
Can you not see, I cherish it as it is.  
I cherish it now, and always will.  
Can you not see I am weary?  
That I tire of the burden of myself?  
You ask that I bear the burden of *two* lives?

**ABELARD**

Do not leave me.

**HELOISE**

*[Returns to the wall. Bows her head.]*  
Forgive me.

**ABELARD**

You ask forgiveness  
When I am the one should ask it.

**HELOISE**

Do you have them with you,  
The poison and the knife?

**ABELARD**

They are with me constantly.

**HELOISE**

Give them to me.

*[Pause.]*

I beg you.

**ABELARD**

*[Removes a vial and a knife from his bosom and gives them to Heloise.]*

**HELOISE**

Thank you, my Brother.

**ABELARD**

What will you do with them?

**HELOISE**

I will destroy them.

**ABELARD**

Listen to me.

You *must* listen.

**HELOISE**

I am listening. Tell me. Let me hear.

**ABELARD**

More than once in my letters  
I mentioned briefly -- other times, implied,  
Disputes I have within myself  
And with my fate,  
But now I must tell all  
So you shall be convinced  
The poison and the knife  
Must not be lost.  
Let me describe for you  
The details of that night of shame.



**HELOISE**

Oh, my dear. Be good to yourself --  
Do not recall the terrors  
Of that night.

**ABELARD**

I need not recall, they come  
To memory of themselves.  
I have never told you  
The truth about the anguish of that night.  
But now another motive  
Urges me to tell you all.

**HELOISE**

What can that motive be?

**ABELARD**

I beg you, listen to me. I will tell you *all*.

**HELOISE**

I am listening. Speak.

**ABELARD**

From childhood on, there was a contradiction  
Between my spirit and my body.  
That contradiction  
Is in everyone;  
The common man has no assurance of a soul,  
But in his body  
He has confidence.  
He treads heroically with certain steps  
Over the earth,  
And the road trembles under them.  
To keep his body strong,  
He takes a certain pleasure in his being.  
But I, it seems, am cursed.  
Since childhood I have felt  
A strong reliance on my soul  
But no confidence in my body.  
My spirit was pure and light,  
And I knew why I needed that spirit.

It led me to the open world,  
To people, to nature, and to God.  
It opened my eyes to  
Errors and sin  
Committed by nature, by God, and by man,  
To poverty, suffering, and pain,  
Superstitions and evil.  
I developed a desire, unswerving and deep,  
To free the world of pain and sin,  
And to unite body and soul as one.  
But it was not for me  
To realize my dreams.  
Into such gloom  
My body has brought me,  
My hands, my feet and all that they touch.  
Since childhood I felt mistrust  
For my body.  
I never was sure that I needed a body:  
That fear in my voice,  
Those two foolish hands --  
One might chop them off  
In their awkward pursuits,  
And, above all,  
How foolish my face, my mouth, my eyes.  
In truth I was healthy, not ugly at all,  
According to others, most pleasing of men.  
*[Pause.]*  
When I was at table with my parents,  
I felt suddenly that  
I was disembodied.  
And separate from it.  
Floating on high,  
Returning no more:  
But my body continued to protrude  
At the table  
And no one was aware that  
Anything had occurred.  
One time I sat like this at table,  
Carried food to my mouth  
And tried to swallow ...  
Of sudden I felt a pang of sorrow:

Such shame and insult, this act of eating,  
Such wailing in the sound of swallowing --  
Of their greedy and trembling need;  
Hard after, as if to spite me,  
As if to revenge me,  
Strange longing o'ercame me,  
A wild, blinding passion,  
Fierce hunger as fiery as a thousand hungers;  
Every part of my being yawned seven wide mouths  
In a desperate outcry.  
A wild storm surrounded the whole of my being,  
An orgy of nails, beaks, wings, crazy bodies,  
These hordes passed before me:  
The torsos, the faces  
Of so many women,  
Their bodies unclothed, their bodies pathetic --  
As all the wings flared, and the cruel beaks competed  
To tear their way deep into flesh unprotected.  
This vision's clear message  
Forced hope to take wing:  
I was sentenced for life  
To a dark, bitter struggle  
With that rendering hunger  
My own body knew.

*(Pause.)*

I ran from the house  
Into field, into forest,  
And lay down in tears, bitter tears  
Until late. When I turned back my steps,  
All the house was in stillness,  
All sunk in repose in the light of the moon.  
I took to my bed, but sleep was a stranger;  
I peered through the gloom. Then, out of the air  
Danced some arcane illusion,  
It moved toward the room  
Where my parents took rest.  
Then I heard a sharp sound,  
Then such wailing, such sobbing  
The lament was so bitter, lament universal,

My mother's stark naked lament,  
And Father was warning, Sh. Quiet, Sh, sh."  
I buried my face in the bed.  
When I recovered, I entered their chamber  
To see both my parents, each in his own bed,  
Two frozen, still bodies,  
Their legs dangling lean,  
So long, so familiar  
So lonely and sad by the light of the moon.  
"Take this sight from my eyes!" I shouted in horror.  
I ran from the room and have never returned.

I ran into the night  
In my pain, in my anguish,  
My body inflamed with the torments of Hell,  
The suffering constant, the pain unremitting,  
In daylight, in shadow, wherever I went.

As I wandered, I studied, prepared for my mission  
Of preacher, of leader, of model for men,  
While behind me, my shadow, so warped, so unhappy,  
Followed closely behind me, and would not be gone.  
The shade so disturbed me,  
My dreams all were troubled,  
I yearned for that other to leave,  
My only surcease was in childhood remembrance,  
A shining impression of light and of joy,  
Myself in a tower of sunlight and gleam.

In my dream I could see myself  
Step from the tower,  
Saw a shadowy figure come forth;  
It reached to embrace me  
And laid me on the ground;  
It laid itself on my body  
And peered into my inner self.  
That was you; it was you.  
I realize all that is on the earth  
And over it,  
The trees, grass, water, stars  
Become a part of my being,

With all their roots, lights and currents,  
I reach out of my body and absorb it all  
Until I feel we are one.  
Then I reach out my arms  
To their full length,  
And my legs as well, to embrace the shade.  
That shade is you, Heloise, you.

This childish dream followed me  
In all my wanderings, and then  
A hope rose in my heart  
That somewhere a rare woman waits for me  
A pure, clear, whole, enlightened  
Woman who garners her strength  
And will be for me, sister, mother, lover, bride,  
And afterward, my spiritual custodian  
To reclaim me from this bitter struggle  
With my body.

Do you remember the first time  
You came to me? Do you remember  
How I reached my arms out to you?  
For a moment they hung in the air,  
Two shameful beggars;  
You gathered my hands  
And wrapped them round your neck,  
And just as I felt your body,  
A lightness pervaded my being,  
And all in my body  
That till now was lost  
In blindness and doubt  
Felt whole and familiar to me,  
And my lips thankfully murmured, "Heloise ..."  
And then  
    And then  
        He came.

**HELOISE**  
Who came?

**ABELARD**

The torturer, the Father.

**HELOISE**

Which Father?

**ABELARD**

*[Bitterly.]* Oh, Heloise, can you not see  
The stark light of the Father's knife?  
And the blackened blood  
Of tainted Abelard?

**HELOISE**

*[Screaming.]* Please stop!

**ABELARD**

I cannot stop. I will bellow, I will dance!  
Oh, dance, Abelard, dance.  
Your passion lies dead in streams of blood,  
The salvation of your body has come!  
Salvation has brought you  
The hangman. Sing, Abelard.  
A song to the hangman.

**HELOISE**

This is tearing me apart.

**ABELARD**

Be strong to hear the end of this.  
Be strong.

**HELOISE**

I am strong. Forgive my outcry.

**ABELARD**

My words are not yet ended;  
They have not led where I want them to go.

**HELOISE**

Lead on, I hear you.

## **ABELARD**

A man lies stretched out on the floor,  
His naked body all spattered with blood,  
People dance on his body,  
And wade in his blood, When they tire of this sport,  
They skip off, and the beaten body  
Remains alone, uncovered on the bare earth.  
On the window sill  
A waxed candle illuminates the game.  
A sudden tap at the door  
Such light taps -- that must be Heloise!  
The man crawls to the door,  
Opens it, peers into the night.  
No, it is not Heloise. He jumps up  
And walks away.  
Red tracks follow his figure  
And burst into flame. The figure  
Begins to scream and swell  
And burn in the flames,  
It marches and continues to march.  
It ignites larger and larger  
And bloodier flames. Suddenly  
All fires are extinguished;  
Only the figure  
Burns on, and a pile of ash remains.  
But Heloise is not yet there, not there,  
Not there.  
Be blessed, Heloise, I said,  
Wherever you are, and be well.  
You will see me no more;  
My body will no longer be the body,  
From which my blood once poured  
Until there was no more.  
I will cherish my love for you, Heloise,  
Between these silent walls,  
And you, too, will carry your love  
As I do, there, where it is not needed;  
And it will be ten times harder  
For you than for me,  
For your body is at its ripest bloom

And you have not known  
The taste of the knife.  
But you will do the same as I,  
If you love me as I love you.

**HELOISE**

Tis done.

**ABELARD**

I know, Heloise, it is so many years  
Since we have been one,  
Now both of us live in celibate silence;  
Often I clothe my silence in words,  
Words to God, words to Heloise!  
I refrain from food and drink,  
Rarely do I have bread,  
I avoid other food.  
I nourish only sufficient strength  
To see Heloise with unerring vision.  
People ridicule my actions,  
Burn my writings at the stake,  
Because my words shatter their well fed rest  
Because all they desire  
Is feeding their flesh  
(To the devil's delight).  
They raise the devil to a god,  
A torturer, a hangman, a Father,  
Oh, Heloise, I have struggled for naught,  
And I have lost.

**HELOISE**

Speak clearly, please do not stop.

**ABELARD**

I have borne all the tortures  
Of the past fifteen years.  
Have never complained  
But for letters to you.  
And you know very well  
That I groped in my words  
For some justification.



I treasured your own blessed grief,  
For our mutual anxious concerns  
Have inspired a rare ray of hope  
That we will survive.  
Many times have I stood  
At my narrow cell's casement,  
My face bathed in moonlight,  
And repeated your name again and again  
Until I swooned in exhaustion.  
Then I knew that *you*  
Stood at your casement, too.  
Slowly my belief grew  
That full revelation  
Would one day be mine.  
In this diminished body of my shame  
Still linger lessened pangs of brute desire,  
And painful recollections of that bloody night  
Reecho in my mind,  
But my redemption comes  
In the pure presence of Heloise.  
Now all again is lost, oh, Heloise,  
The memories of that terrible night  
Again obsess me: they grow,  
And spread with burgeoning strength,  
They choke all hope,  
Enflame with wild desire.  
The hunger, the passion, the fear.  
Have suffused my body with venom.  
Like a flood briefly curbed by a dam,  
Like rebels restrained by division,  
My body, afire with poison,  
Screams revenge on the torturer hangman  
And yearns for his ugly demise.  
You must rescue me, Heloise, help me  
To strengthen my failing defense  
Against acts ungodly of vengeance  
On the torturer who put me to shame  
The hangman who hates us so cruelly,  
Who fifteen long years ago  
Severed our lives,  
That man is here now --

This monastery's head,  
Wielding God's awful power --  
He is my Father now.

*[At that moment Father Gregory enters accompanied by monks. Abelard falls away.]*

**FATHER GREGORY**

How are you, my son, Abelard?

**ABELARD**

I rest, Father.

**FATHER GREGORY**

It hurts me to see you so,  
But I cannot alter the punishment  
Because a judgment is a verdict, my son,  
And a judgment is holy.

**ABELARD**

I do not ask you to change it.

**FATHER GREGORY**

If you were to ask, I could change it ....  
*[Stands and waits.]*

**ABELARD**

I do not ask it, Father.

**FATHER GREGORY**

*[To Heloise]*  
And you, my son, how are you?

**HELOISE**

*[Stands frozen and silent.]*

**FATHER GREGORY**

All this time in the cell with him?  
Are you praying for his sinful soul?  
Then pray, my son, and be blessed.  
*[Leaves.]*

**HELOISE**

*[Aside]* I am blessed,  
But not by you, torturer,  
*[Bends toward Abelard.]*  
Abelard!

**ABELARD**

*[Lies as if powerless, without answering.]*

**HELOISE**

Abelard, answer me, rise up.

**ABELARD**

I cannot move, Heloise.

**HELOISE**

You must be strong, you must.

**ABELARD**

I must, but I can no more.  
All is in ruin, I am dying.

**HELOISE**

You will not die, I will not allow it.  
Because of this, I came here now,  
Because of this I also came then,  
Fifteen years ago, not to permit your death  
But to conquer death.  
Do not give up!  
Lift up your eyes. Give me a word, just one word.

**ABELARD**

*[Does not answer.]*

**HELOISE**

Oh, God, what shall I do?  
A drop of water ...  
*[Seeks in the cell, finds nothing, rouses Abelard.]*  
Get up, get up!

**ABELARD**

Do not be afraid, Heloise.

**HELOISE**

You are alive, you will live,  
As frozen, and anguished as you are now,  
So I lay many times  
And called you with icy lips;  
Hours would pass,  
But you would not come;  
Then I would slowly rise,  
Stretch out my arms and say,  
"I will be there."

**ABELARD**

I thank you, Heloise.

**HELOISE**

Arise, I beg you.

**ABELARD**

I hear the footsteps of death nearby,  
Do not avoid it, do not frighten it,  
Instead, bring it nearer,  
Let there be an end.

**HELOISE**

It is not the end yet, not yet!  
With the strength of our sufferings  
I challenge the end!  
Not because I fear death,  
But because in its shadow, like one beckoning,  
Stands that one,  
The torturer, the evil one. No, Abelard,  
The torturer will not win this time;  
Quiet and humble Heloise  
Will place herself between you and death.  
As I believe in you, so you must also  
Believe in me.  
This meeting of ours

Will give us both strength  
To survive the long and lonely years to come.  
See, Abelard, how I banish  
All fears.  
Let anyone dare to interfere!  
I no longer fear,  
I uncover my face for you.  
*[She tears away her beard, etc. A radiant suffering face is  
exposed.]*

**ABELARD**

*[Shudders. Is suddenly alert. He rises from his bed with his  
arms outstretched.]*  
Heloise, my radiant one.  
*[Reaches for her.]*

### SCENE THREE

*{A forest. First Monk enters, followed by Heloise in her nun's habit and normal appearance.}*

**FIRST MONK**

Here we will meet no one  
Not even the eye of the Pure One.  
Abelard knows well the places in this forest  
And he directed us here.

**HELOISE**

I am not afraid. I am calm.  
Thanks to you, dear Brother,  
For your care and concern.

**FIRST MONK**

I exult in your meeting  
For me 'tis a blessing  
To further your union.  
To stand to protect  
I will wait at the clearing  
Lest the Father approach.  
To keep him from finding you here.

**HELOISE**

Your heart is full of kindness.

**FIRST MONK**

I love you both.

**HELOISE**

Your goodness moves me to tears.

**FIRST MONK**

Do not cry; the dark stain of tears  
Must not darken the shining  
That radiates from your face,  
Your face in its purity,  
Freed from disguise.  
But keep the counterfeit clothing

Nearby and ready, lest danger arise.

**HELOISE**

I have them here, but I hope and I pray  
That our persecutor does not  
Find this forest glen.

**FIRST MONK**

Yes, hope and believe -- and be calm.

**HELOISE**

Abelard should have been here by now.

**FIRST MONK**

He is not very well,  
So his footsteps are slow.

**HELOISE**

Since you are so good,  
Be good till the end.

**FIRST MONK**

You mean, go to meet him?

**HELOISE**

That is just what I mean,  
I will sit here and wait..

**FIRST MONK**

I will do as you ask;  
I will meet him, to say,  
"Heloise sits impatient for you to arrive."

**HELOISE**

And waits as she once did.

**FIRST MONK**

"And waits as she once did."  
These words I'll repeat  
Verbatim to him. You be well  
And have faith. Be courageous -- and calm.

*[Leaves.]*

**HELOISE**

Have faith, nourish hope, and be calm.  
I am calm.  
And have had faith for long years;  
I have hoped against hope;  
But the road we have travelled is hard  
And more than one byway proved false;  
One led to that treacherous night --  
The story he told left me dumb.  
Though he told it a long time ago,  
The pain of it lives in my heart,  
The searing pain lives in my soul.  
In his eyes the protest still burns,  
My anguish augmenting his own.  
The shameful blood that flowed  
Full fifteen years ago  
Flows still.  
What's done can't be undone.  
How measure such great pain?  
How vileness understand?  
No answers to the agony of  
Why? Why? Why?

*[Pause.]*

Oh, my heart, do not cry, do not cry,  
Be calm as I taught you to be.  
Though I yearn for my Abelard's embrace  
And lust for the warmth of his loins  
Cruel fate has forbidden such joy  
And I must accept what is done.  
I must stifle the desperate desire,  
Reduce all signs of need from my face,  
No matter the hurt in my heart.  
God, I hope You will finally prevail,  
So that Abelard's eyes will see clear  
I am hateful, not worthy of love,  
That his pain for me all is for naught.  
Oh, give me the strength for this charge,  
I must carry the burden alone,



Although part of the charge is fulfilled  
I have frozen my well of desire,  
But to truly be partner with him,  
I must suffer  
A bodily change.  
Now I beg, thin my hair; paint it gray,  
And wrinkle my face with dry age.  
[Pause. She suddenly changes.]  
Oh, God, stop my mouth! I have sinned!  
Not I, but my darker self spoke,  
So troubled, so worried I've been.  
My face must be radiant and bright,  
I must smile with exquisite delight,  
Greet my love in a holiday vein --  
Abelard, I impatiently wait.  
Oh, forest, hide all I have spoke,  
Those evil words stifle in shadow;  
Let no echo of any resound,  
To carry my wail to the world.

*[Abelard arrives, pale but jubilant. Heloise goes to him,  
arms outstretched. They join hands and, in exalted silence,  
look long at each other. Abelard falls to his knees.]*

**HELOISE**

Do not kneel before me, I beg.

**ABELARD**

For the first time in fifteen long years  
I am here with you under the sky,  
Not surrounded by guards, but by trees,  
And with shrubs and the green things that grow.  
No walls, nor harsh grating locks.  
How can I not fall at your feet  
Which stand here on dear mother earth?  
*[Bows his head to Heloise's feet. Heloise falls to her  
knees.]*

**HELOISE**

And can I stand calmly by  
While you kneel in my presence, my love?

Must I hide the sad fact , in the cloister  
I am called the kneeling one,  
For I knelt endless hours for you  
(As you did for me, my beloved)  
Repeating my prayers filled with love  
And with longing I cannot deny.  
Did they reach you, wherever you lay?  
And now, such amazement, such joy,  
To see your pure face once again,  
My ...  
*[Suddenly bows low in pain, and falls to the ground.]*

**ABELARD**

What has happened to you, Heloise?

**HELOISE**

I feel dizzy, my limbs are aflame.  
*[Lies with her head down. Her entire body twitches.]*

**ABELARD**

Be strong, my Heloise. I repeat only  
Your very words, words you last spoke to me  
When I lay collapsed.  
Be strong, don't break down.

**HELOISE**

I'll recover my strength.  
My heart beats with such joy.  
*[She leans toward him. Kisses him.]*

**ABELARD**

How sweet are your lips,  
How bright are your eyes,  
My rare and wonderful Heloise.  
*[He reaches out to embrace her.]*

**HELOISE**

Oh, no, only the lips, only the face ...  
*[Turns convulsively away.]*

**ABELARD**

You do not want me to touch your flesh?

**HELOISE**

I want it, I long for it, my dear,  
But do not touch me.

**ABELARD**

But, why?

**HELOISE**

My face is open to you, my mouth,  
My brow, my eyes.  
*[Embraces his head.]*

**ABELARD**

You do not want to touch my body either?

**HELOISE**

*[Puts arms around his waist.]*  
Here I touch your body,  
Here I embrace you, and kiss  
Your body, so pure,  
But please do not touch my body,  
I beg you.

**ABELARD**

I do not understand.

**HELOISE**

You will later. Do not ask more.

**ABELARD**

I obey you, Heloise, and I do not ask why,  
But ...

**HELOISE**

It is not to be understood, you will say.

**ABELARD**

Of course, not to be understood.

**HELOISE**

All will be understood --  
If not at this moment, then later  
All will be known. The sun  
Through the trees greets us  
Kindly with warmth.  
The day will soon be done;  
She gathers the light and spreads  
It over us.

**ABELARD**

You are hiding something from me.

**HELOISE**

What can I hide from you, my beloved?

**ABELARD**

I do not know, Heloise, I do not know.  
Oh, God, before our eyes have time  
To be filled with the sight of each other,  
I feel, behind my back,  
The wretch of separation.  
*[Filled with fear.]*  
Heloise, Heloise,  
Hide me, help me, be with me!

**HELOISE**

I am with you, Abelard.

**ABELARD**

Please, do not leave me.

**HELOISE**

I am yours forever, in all places.

**ABELARD**

Separated always, in all places.

**HELOISE**

Do not despair,

The sun is over us, the true eternal sun,  
We are her two children, so let us say to her,  
Oh, sun, our good mother,  
Your two children warm themselves  
In your light,  
Two much punished, two ever longing children --  
Be good to us and do not hurry to go down,  
Let evening delay its descent.

**ABELARD**

You ask me not to lament, but I hear  
So much lamentation in your voice.

**HELOISE**

Suddenly my heart also  
Shudders with fear, for night is approaching  
And then I must go.

**ABELARD**

There is something  
I feel you are hiding from me.

**HELOISE**

Oh, no, I hide nothing.  
My life lies open to you, to everyone,  
And it is yours. Through all the pain  
I send it to you,  
Each day piece by piece.  
If anyone's life is destined to become  
The excuse for another's  
What more can be asked? I mean  
What more can I ask?  
Oh, yes, there is something I  
Beg and implore,  
That is, strength, quiet strength  
And firm faith,  
So I can watch as my life, drop by drop  
Spills, and believe that it gathers  
In Abelard's heart.  
But sometimes I am filled with doubts.  
Does Abelard, through his pains, truly feel

The drops of my life in his heart?  
Or does my life dwindle for naught?  
Forgive me, beloved, for such doubts.  
The loneliness creates them. And you  
Must also have such doubts about me;  
Here I mirror your face  
And all becomes clear, understandable,  
True.  
The doubts disappear like dew in the sun.  
Forgive your Heloise, and forgive her life  
Which leaves her drop by drop.  
*[She cries softly.]*

### **ABELARD**

Oh, Heloise, my sister, do not cry.  
But perhaps you should --  
Your cries do not hurt ~~at~~ the moment,  
They encourage with strength and benevolence.  
In the monastery on lonely evenings  
Oh, how much would we all have given  
To hear such weeping  
Heart to heart!  
I look and think as my beloved weeps,  
The world is joyful and exuberant,  
It dances over you with heavy feet,  
As if over wood or over sand;  
Concern is your vocation.  
The large scale of fate  
Lies on your shoulders,  
But your slight shoulders do not collapse.  
Abelard looks at Heloise as if  
She were a vision that his coarse hands cannot reach.  
I hear the beat of your heart  
See the quiver in your shoulders.  
Your entire body is suffused in languor  
And yet how far, how far you are,  
Away from me.  
*[Suddenly cries out.]*  
Oh, God, how life has trampled and insulted!  
How can one bear it?

**HELOISE**

*[One can barely hear her voice.]*

Abelard, my ...

**ABELARD**

The forest is no forest  
The earth is no earth,  
Only one thing is real and true --  
The final hour. Oh, Heloise, weep no more,  
Do not tease the final hour with your tears;  
The final hour sleeps, do not wake her.  
Forgive Abelard, his life  
That runs out of him drop by drop --  
And, more, forgive Abelard's guilty body.

**HELOISE**

*[Frightened.]*

What are you saying?

**ABELARD**

This body which has not been punished enough.

**HELOISE**

Do not speak such words.

**ABELARD**

*[Stubbornly.]*

This body that has not been  
Punished enough.

**HELOISE**

Oh, God!

**ABELARD**

This body has not been beaten enough  
This unclean, unfit ...

**HELOISE**

*[With a painful cry, falls toward him and embraces him.]*

Abelard, my brother, my very own,  
I love you, I long for you.

*[Draws close to him.]*

**ABELARD**

*[Gathers her in his arms. Lets her go, shuddering.]*

What are you wearing next to your body?

What are you wearing?

Is it really true, or am I dreaming?

I feel something like iron rings!

What do you wear on your body?

**HELOISE**

Chains.

**ABELARD**

*[Fearfully.]*

On your bare skin?

**HELOISE**

*[Composed.]*

On my bare skin.

**ABELARD**

So that is why, all this time

You did not permit me to touch your body?

**HELOISE**

I did not want you to know of the chains.

**ABELARD**

And there, in your cloister,

They do not know?

**HELOISE**

They do not.

**ABELARD**

Is anguish, loneliness and separation

Not enough,

That you took this upon yourself also?

*[Holds his head in his hands.]*



**HELOISE**

Why such despair?  
On the contrary, since I put on the chains,  
My spirit has become lighter.

**ABELARD**

Why did you put them on?

**HELOISE**

So I could be an equal partner with you  
In your pain.  
The world coarsely and callously  
Mutilated your body.  
So my body, must also be tortured, and if  
The avenger's hand passed me by,  
You will forgive me. But I  
Can never forgive myself,  
Therefore, I found this chain and  
Bound the rings tight round my body,  
A self-imposed excommunication.

**ABELARD**

You wear it constantly?

**HELOISE**

Always.

**ABELARD**

And sleep in it?

**HELOISE**

I am used to it; it is not heavy.  
And when it is sometimes hard and begins  
To press,  
I remember you, and say to myself:  
It is good, let it press, may the pain  
Penetrate my limbs even more.  
Then the pain disappears,  
Because my body does not then exist;  
It lies somewhere on the other side,  
A stranger and no relative of mine,

Like your body in childhood, as you told me --  
I do not need it.

**ABELARD**

My head spins.

**HELOISE**

I am not the Heloise I once was,  
Not girl and not woman.  
No soft satin skin any more,  
I am rather a partner in troubles.  
I grow old, Abelard, do you hear?  
Not from the walls of the monastery  
Nor from the walls of the world  
Will my body shine out.  
But the harsh glare of chains, solid rings  
And bony fists will knock, knock  
On the malicious obstacles of this earth!

**ABELARD**

How do I dare be worthy  
Of such love? And how can I?  
How shall I  
Bear the sacrifice of your body?

**HELOISE**

You shall. That is what I ask.

**ABELARD**

I cannot agree to that.

**HELOISE**

Do!  
And let there be no more talk.  
In my letters to you,  
In your letters to me,  
Let no word of this be mentioned.

**ABELARD**

I want to touch your chains,  
I want to feel them.

**HELOISE**

Touch them and feel.  
Now embrace me, my love.

**ABELARD**

*[Embraces her body then explodes.]*  
Your whole body in iron rings!  
Such punishment to take on yourself!  
So much agony and isolation!  
I cannot agree to this!

**HELOISE**

*[Assured.]*  
Will it, Abelard!

**ABELARD**

It is more that I can bear.

**HELOISE**

You must create newer and greater strengths.

**ABELARD**

How can I do that?

**HELOISE**

The strength is already created and here.  
Look at me, and at yourself,  
Here it is created.  
When you return to your cell  
You will find strength waiting there,  
The new strength you will have.  
You will speak just one word, and all the walls  
Will shudder in fear of your word.  
But I will not be there, so take pen  
And write me, and call out my name ...  
*[Soft and hopefully.]*  
I will come to your threshold again  
And peer into your face, breathe upon you,  
A dream-wanderer, a magic guest.  
Now I have only one desire in my heart,

That you understand and accept my full  
Partnership.

**ABELARD**  
*[Silent, frozen.]*

**HELOISE**  
Agree!

**ABELARD**  
Or, perhaps, my own hands should  
Wind a chain around your body.

**HELOISE**  
You speak with anger.

**ABELARD**  
With pain.

**HELOISE**  
Just that pain you must conquer.

**ABELARD**  
That sort of approval  
Plays into the hands of this malicious world;  
"Ha," the evil ones will say, "they have it good,  
They love to be tortured."

**HELOISE**  
Let them say what they will. For us,  
In any case, there is no other answer  
But scorn and damnation.  
Our strength was, and is,  
(Even more now)  
Stubbornness, persistence and pride.  
Sometime there will come a moment, Abelard,  
The persistence in our hearts will cry out  
And echo from one end of the earth  
To the other  
Our call for judgment.  
Be strong and believe it will come.

**ABELARD**

I do believe it, and I believe in you.

**HELOISE**

Then, believe, Abelard, in all the paths  
Of our love, do you hear? In all the ways.

**ABELARD**

I believe.

**HELOISE**

That is good. Thank you, my beloved.  
Do not look so hurt. Be relieved,  
Smile a bit; I beg you, smile.

**ABELARD**

My magic guest, my rare one,  
How hopeful your words are.  
Your wish is for me a command.  
Your love for me -- a conscience,  
Conscience and prophecy of the world  
And people:  
A new person, a righteous one will come;  
We are the steps on which he walks.  
We bear all sorrow for him  
And make silent all the silences for him.  
For him we shed all the tears  
To purify all mercy for him.  
My dearest, the sun is falling,  
And over us there are only fiery words,  
The accounting.  
All comes now to an end, Heloise,  
The beaming Fingers of the Creator  
Are set to bless the face of the world.  
You, too, place your fingers on me  
And bless me.  
*[He places her hands on his head. The First Monk comes  
running, breathless.]*

**FIRST MONK**

The Father comes here. Separate.

**HELOISE**

I am not afraid, and Abelard, too,  
Is not afraid.

**ABELARD**

The wolf finally smelled his prey.  
That is good. His prey will not escape.

**FIRST MONK**

*[Carries the male disguise to Heloise  
from the ground where it lay.]*  
Disguise yourself, sister. If you do not  
There will be a tragedy for you both.

**ABELARD**

*[Takes the garb and throws it to the ground.]*  
We are not afraid.

**FIRST MONK**

*[Picks the clothes up from the ground.]*  
These must be hidden in the deepest forest.  
The secret of Heloise's entry  
To your cell must not be revealed.  
I beg you, follow my advice,  
Bid each other farewell before he arrives.  
Oh, God, it is too late, here he comes.  
*[He quickly disappears with the clothes into the forest.*  
*Father Gregory comes in carrying a staff. Stands amazed.*  
*Heloise and Abelard stand calmly.]*

**FATHER GREGORY**

I knew I would catch you somewhere:  
I have been looking for you  
All afternoon.  
I truly did not expect to find you like this.  
What does this mean?  
I see she, herself, is here,  
The one of the letters -- Heloise.  
I recognize her. Yes, I remember her.  
*[Looks sternly at Heloise.]*

I think you recognize me, too.  
*[Pause. Heloise does not answer.]*  
You have lost your tongue, have you?  
*[To Abelard.]*  
May one come, or may one not come here?  
That does not seem to bother the two of you.  
You still carry on your love affair.  
You cheats, evil deceivers,  
You sinful and impure souls.  
I am speaking to you, why are you silent?

**ABELARD**

I have nothing to tell the Father now  
Except one single thing:  
Leave!

**FATHER GREGORY**

I will seize you by your neck and  
Drag you back to the monastery.

**ABELARD**

You need not drag me,  
I will go myself.

**FATHER GREGORY**

I'll not stand here a moment more.

**ABELARD**

And I certainly do not wish  
To look at the Father here.  
*[Approaches Father Gregory. Speaks sharply.]*  
I am bidding farewell to Heloise;  
I will not be disturbed.

**FATHER GREGORY**

Do you realize what your  
Rudeness will cost you?

**ABELARD**

The Father knows that I am ever ready  
To pay the highest price.

But I must have this time to be with  
Heloise.  
I tell you, Father, leave us here alone.

**FATHER GREGORY**

You are in luck that I can control my anger.

**ABELARD**

I thank the good Father, that he  
Constantly gives me joy.

**FATHER GREGORY**

*[Angrily.]*

That means my good deed  
Was for naught,  
That which I did fifteen years ago,  
To bring you redemption from lust.  
It means all my work was wasted.  
The groom is still a groom,  
The bride, still a bride.

**HELOISE**

And a scoundrel is still a scoundrel!

**FATHER GREGORY**

To whom do you dare speak like this?  
*[Stands between Heloise and Abelard.  
Separates them with his presence. Lifts  
His staff and the cross he wears on his chest.]*  
I command you to separate at once.

**HELOISE**

"Separate, separate!" You will never  
Separate us;  
You are not the one to separate.  
Neither your cross nor your staff  
And not the prison cell.  
You could even call God down from heaven  
To help you. Call Him! Let Him lower Himself  
And may He raise your staff  
Higher and higher,



And I will raise nothing more  
Than my weak hand and  
My slight body against you, all torturers,  
And all executioners. On my body, a chain,  
And on Abelard's, a steel knife:  
Our bodies are one,  
Our two bodies are strong,  
And our strength will  
Shatter the heads of all scoundrels.  
Our two bodies are no longer bodies,  
But a hammered, welded fist,  
A warning, a call and a reminder  
To the whole world forever and ever!  
Do not imagine all will be forgotten;  
You have disgraced bodies  
With blood and tears.  
It is nothing, you think?  
You wiped your hands  
And calmly, happily walked away  
To the table, to wine, to celebration.  
Life, it seems, walks arm in arm with you.  
And you are, you think, the unpunished lord?  
You come and throw your weight at us  
You raise your cross for help.  
You make a big mistake, Father.  
*[Angrily to Father Gregory.]*  
You may go. I have said enough.

**FATHER GREGORY**

Say more.

**HELOISE**

I am not yet dead,  
Nor is Abelard.  
And you should be aware, for every tear  
Abelard sheds, for every  
Pain and humiliation  
You inflicted, for every drop of blood,  
There will be a reckoning.

**FATHER GREGORY**

By whom?

**HELOISE**

By us.

And hear the warning impart:

You will take Abelard back to the monastery,

But do not harm a hair on his head!

**FATHER GREGORY**

Who do you think you are,

That you can threaten me?

**HELOISE**

I am his Providence!

**FATHER GREGORY**

You have the nerve to compare yourself to God

Providence can come only from God.

**HELOISE**

I say it of myself,

Of a person

Not God, but a person,

A loving , caring, responsible person.

From every corner, wherever I am,

My eye will see, and will watch,

And in my heart it will be written.

Hear this, I insist again:

You are not to touch a hair

On Abelard's head,

Not dare! For I , his Providential

Custodian, warn you!

*[To Abelard.]*

Hold your head high, Abelard.

**ABELARD**

I hold my head high, Heloise.

**HELOISE**

And now, go.

Wait for me.  
I will come again.

**ABELARD**

I will wait, but, Heloise,  
Where can you go now?  
Night is falling?

**HELOISE**

Rest easy, my love, I will find a place.  
The earth is large and lonely.  
Walls there are more than enough.  
And overseers and executioners,  
Too many. Do not  
Fret for me.  
Remain in good health, be proud, and know  
The righteous are still tortured.  
And those who love are still bereft.

**ABELARD**

Bless you, my sister -- be well.

**HELOISE**

You, too, be blessed, my bother, Keep well.  
*[Abelard leaves. Father leaves behind him.]*

**HELOISE**

*[Alone.]*  
Oh, Forest, thank you for your kind comfort,  
Thank you, sun, for your light and your  
Warmth,  
And, also, dear sun, for going down  
In time.  
*[Lifts a rod. Walks off in the other direction.]*

**THE END**