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LETTER 1

ABELARD'S LETTER OF CONSOLATION TO A FRIEND: A STORY OF CALAMITIES

In arousing or calming human emotions, I have found, the experiences of others are often more effective than mere words. So, after offering you some comfort when we talked together, I have decided, now that we are apart, to write you a letter of consolation about the calamities I have suffered. This should make you realize that your troubles amount to little or nothing compared with mine, and you may find them easier to bear.

[His Birthplace]

I was born on a manor called Le Pallet, which is near the border of Brittany and, I believe, about eight miles east of the city of Nantes. Quick-witted, which is natural in a child of my land and people, I was also outstanding in my talent and facility for learning. I had, besides, a father who had acquired some little education before he was given the sword-belt of a knight.[1] He later became so intensely fond of learning that he was determined to have his sons instructed in letters before they were trained for the knightly life. And this he did. Because I was the first-born son and, for that reason, dearer to him than the others, he provided more carefully for my education.

As I made greater progress in my studies and they became easier for me, I embraced them more ardently. Indeed, I fell so completely in love with them that I gave up to my brothers the pomp of military glory, together with the inheritance and rights of the first-born, and I finally abandoned the court of Mars to be educated in the lap of Minerva. Preferring the armor of dialectical reasoning to all other branches of philosophy, I exchanged other weapons for this, and I valued the conflicts of disputation more highly than the trophies of war. As an imitator of the peripatetics, I wandered, debating as I went, through various provinces, wherever I had heard that the art of dialectic was actively cultivated.[2]

[1] See: Explanatory Notes, "Abelard."

[2] *Peripatetics*: Term generally used for the school of Aristotle, who founded a formal institution, the Lyceum, but liked to walk around (Greek, *peripapeun*) the Athenian countryside with his

But success always inflates the foolish, and worldly tranquility weakens the spirit's vigor and easily destroys it through the lures of the flesh. By this time I regarded myself as the only philosopher who remained in all the world and I no longer feared any competition. The outcome was that, although I had been altogether continent until then, I began to give myself up to lust. Now the more successful I had become in philosophy and sacred learning, the more I cut myself off by the impurity of my life from the philosophers and divines. It is well known that philosophers, not to mention divines—I mean those who are dedicated to the teaching of Holy Scripture—have been adorned especially by the virtue of continence.

When I had become an utter slave to pride and sensuality, the divine grace granted me the remedy for both diseases, though I was unwilling: first for lust and then for pride. For lust, by robbing me of those parts of my body by which I had served it, and for the pride that surged up in me chiefly because of my learning—since, as the Apostle says (1 Cor. 8.1), "knowledge puffs a man up"—by humbling me through the burning of that book which was my greatest glory. Now I want you to know the story of both remedies, in the order in which they occurred, and more truly from the events themselves than from hearsay.

I had always loathed the impurity of harlots, and I was prevented by my scholar's zeal for study from meeting and coming to know ladies of noble birth. Nor did I have much contact with the ordinary sort of women. But evil fortune caressed me, as they say, and found an easier opportunity to cast me down from the heights, so that, in my excessive pride and my neglect of the grace I had received, the divine pity might restore me humbled to itself.

[How He Fell in Love with Heloise, and Was Wounded in Mind and Body]

There lived in the city of Paris a girl named Heloise, the niece of a canon called Fulbert, who loved her so much that he had made every effort to give her the best possible education. She was by no means the least handsome of women, but in the extent of her learning she surpassed them all.[22] Since this gift is so rare in women, it won the highest praise for her, and made her the most famous woman in the whole kingdom. Seeing in her all of the qualities that commonly attract admirers, I decided that she was the right person to unite with myself in love, and I felt this would be easy to do. For I was then so renowned, and so outstanding in my youth and charm, that I was not afraid of being rejected by any woman whom I should deign to love. I was the more convinced that this girl would yield to me readily because I was so well aware of her knowledge and her love of literary studies. This would mean that, even when we were parted, the exchange of letters could bring us together, and since it is often possible to write more boldly than one can speak, we could always converse delightfully with one another.

[22] See: Explanatory Notes, "Heloise" for her education in Argenteuil and Paris; see also "Argenteuil."

Utterly on fire with love for her, I looked for an opportunity to bring her closer to me through intimate and daily association, and thus to win her more easily. To do this, I arranged with her uncle, through some friends of his, to take me into his house, which was near my school, at any price he might ask. As an excuse, I claimed that the care of my household was a great hindrance to my studies, and too heavy a burden for me.

To tell the truth, he was extremely avaricious and also most eager that his niece should continue to advance in her studies. For both reasons, I easily obtained his consent and got what I wanted, since he was consumed with greed for the money and at the same time convinced that his niece would profit from my teaching. Pressing me eagerly about this, beyond what I had dared to hope, he fell in with my plan and helped our love along by giving me complete charge of her as her teacher. In this way, as soon as I returned from my classes, I might devote myself both day and night to teaching her, and if I thought her negligent, I might discipline her sternly. I marveled at his simple-mindedness in this affair; indeed, I could not have been more astounded if he had turned over a tender lamb to a ravenous wolf. By entrusting her to me not only to teach but to punish, what was he doing but giving almost complete license to my desire and providing me with an opportunity, even though I did not want it, to overcome her with threats and blows if I could not do so with caresses?

But there were two things, above all, that kept him from base suspicions; these were his love for his niece and my past reputation for continence. What more shall I say? First we came together in the same house, and then in the same spirit. Under the pretext of study, we abandoned ourselves entirely to love, and our lessons gave us the privacy our love required. Although our books were open, we spoke more of love than of learning. There were more kisses than conferences. Our hands went more often to one another's breasts than to our texts. If, to avoid suspicion, I sometimes struck her, my blows were the marks not of anger but of the tender affection that is sweeter than any perfume.

Need I say more? In our passion we neglected no stage of love and if love could invent anything new, we added it. The less we had experienced these raptures, the more ardently we pursued them and the less our desire was quenched by them. As this delight captured me more completely, I gave less time to philosophy and less attention to my classes. I found it extremely tiresome to meet them and equally difficult to remain there, since I was keeping vigils of love by night and of study by day. I became so careless and lazy in my lectures that I offered my students nothing freshly thought out, but only what I knew from memory. I simply recited what I had learned earlier, and if I felt like composing songs, they dealt with love and not with the secrets of philosophy. As you yourself know, a great many of these songs are still popular, and they are sung in many places, especially by those who are attracted to the same way of life.[23]

You can hardly imagine how sad my students were, how loudly they groaned and complained when they learned of the obsession—or rather, the upheaval—of

[23] Regarding Abelard's "love songs" for Heloise, see esp. Constant Mews, *Lost Love Letters* and *Abelard and Heloise*.

my spirit. Few could be deceived about anything so obvious and, in truth, no one was, I believe, except the person who was most dishonored by it—I mean, the girl's uncle. Indeed, when people sometimes hinted about this to him, he could not believe it, both because of his immoderate love for his niece, as I have said before, and because of the well-known continence of my former life. We do not readily suspect evil in those whom we love most, and the taint of shameful suspicion cannot infect a devoted love. As St. Jerome says in his letter to Sabinian, "We are always the last to know about the evils of our own house, and we are ignorant of the vices of our wives and children when the neighbors are gossiping about them."[24] But what one is the last to know does eventually become known; it is not easy to conceal from one person something of which everyone else is aware.

This is what happened to us after some months had passed. You can imagine how great was her uncle's sorrow when he found us out, how grievous was the pain of the lovers in their parting, how bitter was my shame and confusion, how deeply contrite I was to see the girl's affliction! What a storm of grief she suffered for my shame! Neither of us complained of his own fate, but only of the other's. Each of us lamented not his own, but the other's misfortunes. But this separation of our bodies meant the closest union of our spirits, and the denial of its fulfillment made our love burn more brightly. The shame we had experienced made us more shameless, and as our feelings of shame diminished, our actions seemed to us more virtuous. We ourselves felt the emotions described by the poets in the tales of Mars and Venus when they were surprised in love.[25]

Not long afterward, the girl found that she was pregnant, and she wrote to me about this with the utmost joy, asking me what I wished to do. So one night when her uncle was not there, I secretly took her away from his house, as we had planned together, and sent her without delay to my own land. There she stayed with my sister until she had given birth to a son, whom she called Astralabe.[26] But after her flight, her uncle almost went mad, and no one who had not seen it himself could imagine the torments of grief he suffered and the shame that overwhelmed him. He did not know what to do to me, or what traps to set for me. He was very much afraid that if he killed me or injured me in any way, his beloved niece might suffer for it in my country. To seize me and force me to go somewhere against my will would do no good, especially since I was always on my guard against this. I had no doubt that he would attack me at once, if he could or if he dared.

At last, feeling some pity for his terrible anxiety and bitterly reproaching myself for the deceit that love had caused, as if it were the basest treason, I went to him as a supplicant and promised to make whatever amends he might ask. I protested that this affair should not seem astonishing to anyone who had ever experienced the power of love and who knew how much disaster, from the very

[24] Jerome, actually to Castrician, *Ep.* 147.10: PL 22, 1203; CSEL 56, 327.25.

[25] Vulcan discovered his wife, Venus, in bed with Mars. Ovid, *Ars Amatoria* 2.561ff and *Metamorphoses* 4.169ff.

[26] See: Explanatory Notes, "Astralabe."

beginning of the human race, women had brought on even the greatest of men. Giving him more satisfaction than he could have hoped for, I offered to marry the girl whom I had seduced, if this could be done secretly so that my reputation would not be damaged in any way. He agreed and, in order to betray me more easily, he sealed the bargain I had made with him by his own word and kiss, and those of the members of his household.

[Heloise's Arguments against Marriage]

I returned at once to my own land to bring back my mistress and make her my wife. But she did not approve of this plan at all. Indeed, she absolutely opposed this marriage for two reasons: because it was dangerous as well as disgraceful for me. She swore that no satisfaction could ever appease her uncle, and so we afterward found out. She wished to know how she could glory in me after she had made me inglorious, and had humiliated both herself and me. What penalties, she asked, would this world demand of her if she deprived it of so bright a light? What curses, what a loss to the Church, what tears from the philosophers, would be the consequences of such a marriage! How disgraceful, she cried, how deplorable it would be if I, whom nature had created for all mankind, should tie myself to one woman and lower myself in this fashion! Hardly able to bear the thought of a marriage that would be in every way shameful and burdensome to me, she insisted not only on the disgrace but also on the hardships of marriage, against which the apostle Paul warns us when he says (1 Cor. 7:27–28): "Are you free of wedlock? Then do not go about to find a wife. Not that you commit sin if you marry, nor if she marries, has the virgin committed sin. It is only that those who do so will meet with outward distress. But I leave you your freedom." And he also says (1 Cor. 7:32): "I would have you free from concern."

But if I would accept neither the advice of the Apostle nor the teachings of the Fathers concerning the heavy yoke of matrimony, at least, she said, I should listen to the philosophers and consider what had been written on this question by them or about them. In the first book of *Against Jovinian*, for example, St. Jerome recalls that Theophrastus, having carefully set forth in great detail the intolerable trials of marriage, demonstrated by the clearest reasoning that the wise man should never take a wife. Jerome himself summed up these philosophical arguments in these words: "When he argues thus, what Christian does Theophrastus not put to shame?" In the same book Jerome also says: "After Cicero had divorced Terentia and was asked by Hirtius to marry his sister, he absolutely refused to do so, saying that he could not give his attention at one and the same time to a wife and to philosophy. He does not say merely 'give his attention,' but adds that he 'does not want to do anything that can be regarded as competing with the study of philosophy.' "[27]

But, Heloise continued, say no more for the moment about this obstacle to philosophical inquiry, simply look at the conditions that surround this honorable way of life. What harmony can there be between scholars and servants, between

[27] Jerome, *Contra Jovinianum* 1.48: PL 23, 291ab.

There is, for example, the statement of St. Augustine in the eighth book of *The City of God*, describing the various kinds of philosophers:

> The Italian school of philosophy had as its founder Pythagoras of Samos, from whom the very name of philosophy is said to have come. For before him those men were called wise who seemed to excel others by some praiseworthy manner of life. But when Pythagoras himself was asked what his profession was, he replied that he was a philosopher, that is, a student and lover of wisdom, since it seemed to him the height of arrogance to call oneself 'wise.'[31]

From the words, "who seemed to excel others in some praiseworthy manner of life," it is evident that the wise men among the Gentiles, that is, the philosophers, were so called in praise of their lives rather than their learning.

But, Heloise went on to say, I do not intend to give examples now of the sobriety and continence of their lives, for fear that I should seem to be teaching Minerva herself. Yet if lay people and Gentiles, who were not bound by any religious vows, lived in this way, how should you, a cleric and a canon, behave, in order to avoid putting base pleasures before your sacred duties, to prevent yourself from being quickly swallowed up by this Charybdis, and from being submerged in these impurities shamelessly and beyond recall?[32]

If you care nothing for the privilege of the cleric, you should at least defend the dignity of the philosopher. If you scorn the reverence due to God, at least you should temper your shamelessness with the love of honor. Remember that Socrates had a wife, and think of the sordid way in which he was forced to wipe out that blot on philosophy, so that his example might make those who came after him more cautious. Jerome himself does not fail to mention this when he writes about Socrates in the first book of his *Against Jovinian*: "Once, when he had endured for a long time the storm of invective which Xanthippe poured upon him from an upper window, and after she had drenched him with dirty water, he simply said as he wiped his head, 'I knew that there would be a shower after all that thunder.' "[33]

At last, Heloise pointed out how dangerous it would be for me to bring her back, and how much sweeter it would be to her, and more honorable for me, if she were called my mistress rather than my wife. In this way I might be held by love alone, not tied by the power of the marriage bond. If we were separated for a while, she said, the joys of meeting would be the more delightful, the rarer they were. When, after trying to persuade or dissuade me with these and similar arguments, she still could not overcome my obstinacy or bear to offend me, she sighed deeply and wept, concluding her appeal with these words: "In the end, one thing will happen. We shall both be ruined, and in our ruin, we shall experience suffering as great as the love we now know." In saying this, as

[31] Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 8.2: PL 41, 25; CSEL 40, 355.

[32] Heloise's reference to Abelard as "cleric and canon," indicates that as a teacher, he was then, like Fulbert, a secular canon of Notre-Dame. *Charybdis*: Charybdis is the sinister whirlpool that Odysseus famously eluded.

[33] Jerome, *Contra Jovinianum* 1.48: PL 23, 291bc.

everyone knows, she was not untouched by the spirit of prophecy. Then we left our infant son with my sister, and returned secretly to Paris where, in a few days, after we had kept secret vigils of prayer by night in a certain church, we were joined together at dawn by the nuptial blessing, in the presence of her uncle and some of our own friends and his. We left there at once, secretly and separately, and saw each other only very rarely and in private, concealing as much as possible what we had done.

But her uncle and members of his household, seeking some consolation for their disgrace, began to talk publicly about the marriage that had taken place, thus breaking the promise they had given me about this. Heloise then called down anathemas on them, swearing that what they said was utterly false. Her uncle was furious and often abused her unmercifully. When I found out about this, I moved her to an abbey of nuns near Paris, called Argenteuil, where she herself had been reared and educated.[34] There I had the religious habit, proper to the monastic calling, made for her, all except the veil, and I put it on her.

When her uncle and his kinsmen and friends heard this, they thought that I had now tricked them completely, and had made her a nun because I was looking for an easy way to be rid of her. Wild with rage, they plotted together against me and bribed my servant. One night when I was lying asleep in an inner room of my lodgings, they revenged themselves with a most cruel and shameful punishment, of which the world learned with utter consternation. They cut off those parts of my body with which I had committed the act they deplored. They fled at once, but two of them were caught and deprived of their eyes and genitals. One of these was that servant of mine who, while still in my service, had been led by greed to betray me.

[Concerning the Wound to His Body]

When morning came, the whole city thronged around me, and I can hardly tell you how stunned they were, how loudly they mourned, how they tormented me with their clamor, and upset me with their laments! It was chiefly the students, and particularly my own pupils, who tortured me with unbearable moaning and wailing, so that I suffered more from their pity than from the aching of my wound. I felt the embarrassment more than the injury, and my shame made me more wretched than my pain. I thought of the great fame in which I had once gloried, and how swiftly and sordidly my pride had been humbled, or rather, destroyed. How just, I reflected, was the judgment of God that had struck me in those parts of my body with which I had sinned, and how righteous was the betrayal by which that man had avenged my earlier betrayal of him.

I knew very well how loudly my rivals would praise what was so clearly an act of justice. I knew also what a perpetual grief this wound would be to

[34] See: Explanatory Notes, "Argenteuil." In moving to Argenteuil, Heloise did not thereby become a nun: both male and female abbeys frequently housed long-term lay residents. It is true, however, that the departure to the cloister of one or both spouses often indicated a forthcoming dissolution of marriage, hence Fulbert's reaction.

LETTER 2

HELOISE TO ABELARD

To her lord or rather, her father, to her husband or rather, her brother, from his servant or rather, his daughter, from his wife or rather, his sister: to Abelard from Heloise.

The letter you wrote to comfort a friend, my beloved, has recently chanced to come into my hands. Recognizing at once from the heading that it was yours, I began to read it with eagerness as great as my love for its writer. For I hoped that I might be refreshed by the words, as if by a picture, of one whom in reality I have lost. Instead, I found almost every part of this letter filled with the bitterness of gall and wormwood, as you told the pitiable story of our conversion to the religious life and the endless torments you have suffered, my only love.

You have truly accomplished in this letter what you promised your friend when you began, that he should consider his own troubles as little or nothing compared with yours. After you describe your earlier persecutions by your teachers and that most treacherous outrage upon your body, you turn to the detestable jealousy and the ruthless attacks of those fellow-students of yours, Alberic of Reims and Lotulf the Lombard.[1] You do not fail to mention what was done at their instigation to your famous work of theology and what happened to you yourself, when you were, so to speak, condemned to prison. Then you go on to the plotting of your abbot and false brother-monks, the slanderous attacks on you by those so-called apostles whom your enemies aroused against you, and the scandal caused by the many charges concerning the name of the Paraclete which, contrary to custom, you gave to your oratory. At last, after describing your intolerable persecutions at the hands of that cruel tyrant and those wicked monks whom you call sons, you bring your melancholy story to an end.

No one could, I believe, read or hear this tale without being moved to tears. The more fully you have set down every detail, the more sharply you have renewed my own sorrows. They have, indeed, become greater. Since you say your dangers are still increasing, all of us here are driven to despair of your life and every day we wait with trembling hearts and throbbing breasts for the latest rumors of your death. In the name of Christ who still somehow protects you for

[1] For these rivals of Abelard, see: Explanatory Notes, "Alberic of Reims."

himself, as his servants and yours, we beg you to give us frequent news of you, and the storms that still buffet you. In this way, at least, you will still have us, who are your only friends, to share your grief or joy. Those who grieve with one in sorrow usually give him some comfort and any burden shared by several persons becomes lighter and may even be cast off. If this tempest should subside a little, you should write all the sooner because your letters will be so welcome. Whatever you write will comfort us, for by writing, at least you will prove that you are thinking of us.

Showing us by his own example how delightful are the letters of friends from whom we are separated, Seneca writes to his friend Lucilius:

> Thank you for writing to me so often, because this is the only way in which you can give me back your presence. I never receive a letter from you without instantly feeling that we are together. If the pictures of our absent friends give us pleasure, refreshing our memory and relieving our longing for them by an unreal and lifeless solace, how much more satisfying are the letters bearing the true marks of the friend who is far away! I thank God that no malice prevents you from restoring your presence to us in this way at least, and that no obstacle stands in your path. Do not, I beg you, let your own negligence delay you.[2]

You have written your friend a long letter of consolation, ostensibly concerning his misfortunes, it is true, but really about your own. Although you evidently meant to comfort him by your detailed account of your troubles, you have inflicted fresh wounds of sorrow on us, and increased the pain of those we suffered earlier. Heal, I implore you, those wounds that you yourself have made, you who are so busy curing those caused by others. You have really done well by your friend and comrade; you have discharged the debt of friendship and comradeship. But you are bound by a larger debt to us, whom you may rightly call not merely your friends, but your dearest friends, not simply comrades but daughters, or whatever sweeter and holier name, if any, can be imagined.

There is no lack of evidence to show how great is the debt that binds you to us. To remove any doubt, and if all else were silent, the facts themselves speak loudly. After God, you are the sole founder of this place, the only architect of this oratory, the sole builder of this congregation. You have built nothing on foundations laid by another. Everything here is your creation. This wilderness, occupied only by wild beasts and robbers, had known no human dwellings; there were no houses here. In the very lairs of the animals, in the hiding places of thieves, where the name of God was not spoken, you built a divine tabernacle and dedicated a temple to the Holy Spirit himself. In building this temple you accepted nothing from the treasuries of kings and princes, though you could have obtained assistance from the greatest and most powerful men, so that whatever was accomplished might be attributed to you alone. The clerics and students who flocked here to be taught by you supplied all the essentials of life. Those who were living on ecclesiastical benefices and did not know how to make

[2] Seneca, *Ad Lucilium* 40 *(initio)*.

when, at your command and without hesitating, I changed my habit and my mind, to show that you alone possessed my body and my soul.

God knows, I have never asked anything of you but only you yourself. I wanted you alone, not what was yours. You know that I did not hope for marriage or for any dowry. I did not seek to gratify my own pleasures or desires, but only yours. If the name of wife seems holier and more impressive, to my ears the name of mistress always sounded sweeter or, if you are not ashamed of it, the name of concubine or whore. For I thought that the more I humbled myself for you, the more completely I might win your love, and that in this way I might do less damage to your great fame. You had not completely forgotten this love in the letter you wrote to console your friend, since you did not consider it beneath you to report the various arguments by which I tried to dissuade you from our marriage, to keep you from an ill-starred bed. But you neglected to mention the many reasons that made me prefer love to marriage, liberty to bondage. As God is my witness, if Augustus, who ruled over the whole earth, should have thought me worthy of the honor of marriage and made me ruler of all the world forever, it would have seemed sweeter and more honorable to me to be called your mistress than his empress.

The fact that a man is rich and powerful does not make him therefore better; the one depends on fortune, the other on character. The woman who marries a rich man rather than a poor one, and desires her husband's possessions more than the man himself, should realize that she is only putting herself up for sale. Surely anyone who is led to marry by this kind of greed deserves to be paid rather than loved by her husband. It is obvious that what she is seeking is not a man but what he owns, and that if she could, she would prostitute herself to a richer man. This point is made in the argument by which, as Aeschines Socraticus tells us, the wise Aspasia tried to convince Xenophon and his wife. After she had explained the reasons why this pair should become reconciled with one another, she concluded her argument with these words: "It is only when both of you have come to realize that there is not a better man or a more desirable woman in the world that you will always seek above all what seems best to each of you: one to be the husband of the best of women, and the other to be the wife of the best of men."[3] This is surely a holy saying, and more than philosophic; it may, indeed, be said to spring from wisdom rather than philosophy. For it is a pious error and a blessed fallacy in those who are married to think that a perfect love can keep the bonds of matrimony unbroken, not so much by the continence of their bodies as by the purity of their hearts.

But what other women have deceived themselves into thinking was in my case nothing less than the truth. What they believed to be true of their husbands, I, and everyone else as well, not merely believed, but knew to be true of you, since the more truly I loved you, the less I could be in error about you. What kings or philosophers could rival you in fame? What kingdom or city or village did not yearn with eagerness to see you? Who did not rush to look at you when you appeared in public, and crane his neck and strain his eyes after you as you

[3] Cf. Cicero, *De inventione rhetorica* I.31, 52 in *De inventione,* ed. Hubbell.

present to me in words, of which you have plenty at your command. I must hope in vain for you to be generous in deeds if I am forced to endure your miserliness in words.

Until now, I really believed that I deserved better from you, since I have done everything for you and am still persevering in obedience to you. It was not religious devotion but your command alone that drove me in my youth to the harshness of the monastic life. But if I am to have no reward from you, you may judge that my efforts have been futile. I can expect no reward from God, since it is evident that I have not yet done anything for love of him.

I followed you when you hastened to God, or rather, I preceded you in taking the monastic habit. Before you gave yourself to God, you delivered me over to the sacred habit and the monastic calling, as if you were thinking of Lot's wife, who looked back. I confess that I was greatly saddened and ashamed that in this one thing you showed so little faith in me. God knows, I would not have hesitated for a moment to precede or follow you into the fires of hell, if you had given the word. For my heart is not mine but yours. Now, more than ever, if it is not with you, it belongs nowhere. Without you, it can find no place. But I beg you to behave in such a way that my heart may be happy with you, and it will be happy with you if it finds you kind, if you return love for love, little for much, words for deeds.

I wish, my love, that your love were less sure of me, so that you would be more anxious. But the more reason I have given you for confidence in the past, the more you neglect me now. Remember, I entreat you, what I have done and consider what you owe me. While I was enjoying the delights of the flesh with you, many people were not certain whether I was moved by love or by lust. But now the outcome shows clearly the spirit in which I began. In obedience to your will, I have forbidden myself every pleasure. I have kept nothing for myself but only this, to become more than ever yours alone. Think how unjust you would be if you gave back less—indeed, nothing at all—to one who deserves so much more, especially when what I ask of you is such a small thing and so very easy for you to do.

So in the name of God to whom you have offered yourself, I beg you to restore your presence in the way that lies open to you, I mean, by giving me the consolation of writing to me. Then at least I may be renewed in spirit and may take part more gladly in the divine service. When long ago you wanted me for shameful pleasures, you used to besiege me with letters and with your songs you put your Heloise's name on every lip. Every street rang with it; it echoed in every house. Should you not excite me toward God now, as you excited me then to desire for you? Think, I implore you, what you owe me! Listen to what I ask you, and I shall end this long letter with a brief word,

Farewell, my only love.