

*Excerpt from Rooftop Soliloquy*

*The narrator composes a story of two star-crossed  
lovers who seek sanctuary in Athens.*

(19<sup>th</sup> Soliloquy)

Back at my desk, I took again the pen to my happy hand...

Goodnight to our tired hero. Again he is far from his native land, just as he was ten years ago, back when he was young man. Now, mature in years and experience, he lies on a rented bed over a bustling marketplace in a foreign seaport. The curtain falls and rises in Athens....

“Athens?!”

Yes, let me explain...

Like the night, the curtain fell on our hero and rose like the dawn on a pair of young lovers fleeing their home on the island of Salamis, to live together in Athens. One of the lovers, the girl, had been married young to a wealthy Salamis merchant who was already old and disagreeable, but she was in love with a poor, yet handsome, youth (who was very romantic, as poor youths usually are). And she wanted to be with him. Should they stay on their island and meet in secret in the town or in the gardens? Why, they would be certainly caught by the girl’s husband, and the two lovers would be tried for their crime and put to death!...

“Come with me to Athens,” the girl sings to her lover, “and there we will forget my husband and we will consummate our love and I will bear thy children.” So her wishes were sung and her lover gave heart; the two made haste to sail away.

But while they were at the port, they were spied by an acquaintance of the wealthy merchant: a scheming, shrew-like man who

hoped to grow rich from this discovery of seeing the merchant's wife with a lover. He quickly ran to the merchant at the latter's home and spoke thus... "Sir, I saw your beautiful wife today in the arms of a young man, this very day. It's true! They were at the port buying a ticket to sail to Athens on tonight's ship. When I left to bring you this news, they were embracing affectionately by port with luggage to travel. I watched them sitting on the slick pier. It has been raining today. Should I go and bring your wife to you? I know, as you are rich, my friendly merchant, that you will reward me for this task. I will not only bring your young wife to you by the scruff of her fair neck, but I will also have some ruffians drown the young man who accompanies her. Shall I do this?"

"No, no," replied the merchant, wiping the single tear from his eyelid which had formed when he learned of this news. "No, do no such thing. Neither bring me my wife, nor drown the young man. Rather, take this money... here... some silver pieces. Go, and board the ship and follow the two to Athens. When you arrive at Piraeus, you will find a monk named Ascidas in the monastery there. He is a childhood friend of mine and is to me like a brother. *He*, rather than *yourself*, shall bring to justice my wife and her young friend. He is a holy man and will know what action to take. You stay on as an observer. After the work is done, return and tell me of all that has passed and I will give you ten times as much money as what I am giving you today. Here, take this currency and go to the port!"

"I will do as you say, my dear sir. I will find Ascidas and observe his endeavors, and the account I give you upon my return shall be worth all the money you reward me with." And so the man took leave of the merchant and returned to port.

Along the docks, night was overtaking evening and the boat was loading with passengers. It was then the two lovers began to cross the sea. The journey was tough, the night was rough, and the storms shook the vessel and threatened to pull it under water and devastate it. The lovers embraced each other desperately for they were sure they were going to die and believed they were embracing for the last time. When, however, they reached land in safety, they gave thanks and kissed the soil and ventured off together in merry love towards Athens.

The first person they met was a monk who was traveling up from Piraeus. The monk said that they looked like they were in trouble, fleeing something perhaps, and asked if he could be of service. He swore that as a monk, he was bound to keep their sorrows between him and God and would reveal nothing to the Law, should they be in violation of some moral code. The lovers, believing they had found someone whom they could trust to help them, told the monk the whole story. The girl explained that she'd been married young to a rich merchant whom she did not love, and was running away from him to be with her young lover who was so handsome and romantic; and that because it was love that caused them to run away from Salamis, their plight was from the heart and was divine and sent by God and the monk should do everything in his power to help them. The monk nodded in agreement, and said that it was indeed his duty to God to help lovers who were committing adultery for sacred reasons, and he told them he would give them sanctuary at the Acropolis.

“Meet me on this path at midnight tonight,” the monk told the lovers, once the three travelers had arrived at the Athenian market-stalls at the base of the Acropolis, “and I will guide you to a little house where you can be alone and in love together, away from the world. For that is all lovers really want, no? A place to be alone together and away from the world? I will prepare for you a holy bed and bless it and there you may consummate your love for the first time.” Then the monk paused, “you haven’t *yet* consummated your love, have you? For if you have, I mightn’t be able to help you.” ... “No, we haven’t!” the two swore to the monk, while clenching the hem of his robe, pleading, “We wanted to make love together on the ship, but the storms were so violent, we couldn’t! No, we have yet to sleep naked together.” ... “Very well then,” said the monk, “Both of you, meet me at midnight atop this hill, and I will lead you to a place where you shall soon sleep naked together—as two lovers ought to do when driven by the heart’s holy passions.”

...So spoke the monk, and took leave of the lovers until midnight. In his absence, the lovers fondled each other, but no more, as they waited their holy bed. When the monk returned with a lantern at midnight on the path, he began to lead the eager lovers up to the

Acropolis. They followed him; and as they did, they kissed each other and praised the monk for helping them. They praised the monk and they praised their fate, and then they praised one another and renewed their vows again and again.

“This is good!” I cried, leaping from my desk. I was tempted to pile some towers of wax around the edges of the desk and enflame their wicks, to brew bowls of steaming things, and coax my hands with creams and other pleasures, so that I could stay awake to work all night and finish the hero’s tale once and for all!... “No!” I decided, “I will sleep and work again in the morning. Working at night is for amateurs. Amateurs and madmen. Holy are the creations of the fine morning. I will sleep and retake the pen tomorrow!” And thus I did.

*(end of excerpt)*