

Excerpt from Rooftop Soliloquy
Composing the “Hero’s Tale” in the Faubourg St-Germain
(9th Soliloquy)

“What a night it is!” I sang aloud, once alone, passing the cathedral. I started towards the Faubourg Saint Germain. “Look at these leafy bows tenderly brushing the ivory crowns of these stately houses. Oh, to be a neighbor of this fortune!” Happy I was, walking through the Faubourg, back towards the room to which I held key. I knew great work I would undertake that night! . . . Work of unsurpassable merit! . . . Work of the kind those ancient geniuses tried to buy with hecatombs of grazing kine surrendered in smoke to Calliope’s maids . . . Stop! Time to breathe. Time to look around me...

Time to take a glance at my own modern age in a tender European metropolis where gilded skies are dark with storms at night. Nightingales step on loosely-strapped heels out of sleek automobiles. They *click clack, click clack* their sweet little feet across terrace stones braised by hot rain drops. “Bonne soirée!” they wave goodnight, “Je vous embrasse!” ... “Bonne nuit!” Then they are gone, off... *vers leurs abris de la lune*... is it summer so soon?!

No place ever inspired me to compose illuminated psalms as did the Faubourg Saint Germain. What a beautiful night to go vagabonding through antique Parisian streets... A gorgeous night to breathe the fresh air of creation on balconies, on rooftops, the sky draped over a siren’s moistened braids, the stars are pearls nested in her hair; and I laugh as she kisses me. How happy I am tonight!

Vagabonding through the street, all these joyous inspirations flooded me, and I let them build in my happy heart—for I knew that when I returned, I would fall upon my work madly—just as that crazed philosopher fell with his joyful elbows on sprawling piano keys, howling at Dionysus after a lifetime of sober work. I would do like he once did!

Back at the room to which I held key, I looked at the clock on the wall. Two in the morning. I would meet Philippe at nine. In between I would work. A warm wind came through the open window. At the sturdy desk where I set pen to holy craft, I sat before my oeuvre. Sweet ink, run swiftly, I called; sweet ink, drink me gently. Froth on the muse's tongue, black as the lair of the squid in the ocean's depths, milky dark ink of my fair muse, swim well across my happy page...

I worked beautifully for many hours. My hero's tale had now taken the form of the most perfect of all creations. "How glorious is my art!" I rejoiced in the night, "Holy and sublime!" I laughed euphorically as I read over what I had penned...

The voluptuous voices were singing in unison to announce my hero's long-awaited homecoming. Piloting a swift ship, he skiffed across the jeweled sea from his far-flung island. There he'd been stranded for most of the spring—fault of my own, I admit, for I'd been lost a lot of the spring myself in wine-drunk revelries of the most maddening sort. Too much cheer to hear my hero's pleas. But now that a new happiness sat on my lap, my work of art soared like heaven-bound birds in the sky...

The long-tried hero's ship careened over the ocean swells. Strong were his seaworthy muscles, hoisting the sails. Glad were the songs he sang to triumphant melodies. And the billowing clouds brought forth winds sending him along to his homeland and family, who were waiting years for his return.

I walked to the piano in the corner of the room to pound out some thunder in the night. My happy elbows colliding against the piano keys sent shards of lightning to lick the waves, while thunder sent winds that blew the boat landward by night.

When our hero awoke on the calm sea in the blushing light of early morning, he could see his native land not far off; and there on the land, he could see cooking fires burning and stately cypress trees growing. These things he'd often dreamt of when on his seafaring journey, exploring the world and fighting in distant wars. Around the fires,

people were gathered playing pipes and roasting food. Sweet music could be heard!

As our hero's boat came into shore, he could smell the savory smoke from the fires. With such a glad heart he watched the flames toss lofty billows of smoke into the peaceful sky. The pipes played on and he knew he was home! Stepping onto land, our long-traveled hero dove upon the fertile earth and kissed it plainly, embraced its bounty, rejoicing in the taste of the mineral earth that had given him life!

I woke up sometime later. I didn't know I'd been sleeping. It seemed an advanced hour. I felt, pressed to the flesh of my tired cheek, the crisp pages covered in wild flourishes of ink, strewn and ruffled. I had been working late, it occurred to me. Then I remembered... I had worked until the little-morning on my hero's homecoming. After, while I was sleeping, I dreamt that I too was traveling by careening ship. I'd come in the night to the faraway land where, in long ago times, my own cradle is fabled to have been perched next to a thriving hearth. I too leapt to the ground upon my homecoming to smell the soil that had raised me and gave me strength. Now awake, seated at a desk in wood-furnished room, I had the sudden fear that I actually was in my native land, that my body was no longer in Paris. "But *my own* 'hero's journey' is not over!" I cried with great alarm, and looked around the room to which I held key. I saw the French electric plugs in the walls and gentle relief crept over me, for I realized that I was still far from my own native land. My wandering had not come full circle. Pleasure filled my soul.

That relief was short lived, however. When I pried my body from the mess of papers on the desk, I recalled I had an appointment to meet Philippe that morning at nine. What time was it?!

I leapt savagely from the chair and ran to see the clock... forty minutes after eight! I had time yet, but I needed to hurry!

Taking a ring of keys and a roll of paper currency to get me along, as well as my traveling pen and some scraps of paper in case I were to come across some ideas on my way, I ran out the door and down the street to cross the river. In a flash, I was on the métro, line-one, feeling

the cool wind blow through the empty cars as it shuttled along towards Bastille. Come Tuesday, I thought, I will be far from here—on the Côte d’Azur kissing the sun-coated skin of youthful Pénélope.

The métro stopped on the aerial platform at Bastille. I ran with quick steps out of the station, leaving the Opéra Bastille in a peripheral blur. Up the Boulevard Beaumarchais, my good heels made way: number eighty seven.

It was a shabby hotel from the looks of it. I buzzed the door to the office and let myself in. Inside a dirty little lobby, the attendant was absent. A cat was perched on the desk, when it saw me, it hissed and bayed.

“Come cat!” I called, approaching the desk with an outstretched hand to tame the beast. Yet the feline did not like my gesture, and hissed louder, swiping with its claws in attempt to tear the flesh off my hand. It growled. I thought then to reach for the beast with both hands and seize its little head and snap it at a right-angle, so as to dispatch its soul down to Hades; but before I could let that pleasure fulfill itself, a little fat woman rushed into the lobby from the back room and threw a magazine at the cat to make it scatter. She looked at me and said...

“Gentleman, I’m sorry! My cat nearly gnashed you to pieces! She nearly shredded you to a pulp! Let me see that, is your hand bleeding? No, it’s not? . . . Oh, if she had gnashed you, you would have been angry at me. And, I have enough problems without that already. Guests are making a havoc of my hotel, eating my food supply, destroying my linen and property, and leaving without paying! It is a sad couple of days I have been made to pass! Well, no matter. What can I do for you, my good gentleman?”

“I’m here to meet a friend for breakfast. One of your guests. A gentleman from Monte Carlo.”

(end of excerpt)