

Act 1 "The Women Who Watch"
Scene 1

The play is set on an island surrounded by the river Styx. It is a barrier island to the land of Hades. The stage should be surrounded by water, or by blue lighting so that the effect of reflected moonlight is seen on the faces of the actors. The sand is black, like volcanic ash. Beyond the ebony beach is a wooded area stretching as far upstage as possible. The trees are all dead Birch trees. The wood is like white skeletal bone sticking out of the black dirt. The play opens to midnight darkness. The song, "Close to You", by Karen Carpenter plays softly as if from a distance and slowly fades away as the scene begins. The silhouetted image of two women is seen. They are staring into the void of nothingness before them. Heloise is dressed in black with a tight wimple covering her head. She is a nun from the twelfth century. Her face is gaunt as she clutches a rosary between her thin fingers. Her severe look is amplified by the desperate searching. Heloise has a habit of putting her hand to her head, expecting to find hair, and instead finds her nun's garb. Beside her sits Andromeda, a Greek of tremendous beauty. She is from the pages of legend and amplifies the storybook quality of a princess. Her robes of pale blue flow delicately around her body. She searches just as desperately into the abyss.

I'm not speaking to you.	Andromeda
It is coming soon.	Heloise
I'm not speaking to you!	Andromeda
It is!	Heloise
It isn't.	Andromeda
Andromeda—	Heloise
I'm not going to let you do it again!	Andromeda
Do what?	Heloise
You know...	Andromeda
It is coming.	Heloise <i>urgently</i>
No. No-no-no.	Andromeda
I feel it.	Heloise
I don't care.	Andromeda
I'm disappointed in you, Andromeda.	Heloise

I don't care. Andromeda

Andromeda... Heloise

It doesn't come. It never comes. It never will come. Andromeda

You sound like Sylvia. Heloise

No! Andromeda

Remember what happened to her. Heloise

You are cruel. Andromeda

It's been a while since the Hydra had a meal. Heloise

You know that being eaten by a Sea Monster is my worst fear. Andromeda

Chomp, Chomp, Chomp. Heloise *playfully*

This isn't funny. Andromeda

Just be careful. I wouldn't go around saying you don't think the men will come. Heloise

I might as well give up. They won't come. Andromeda

I honestly have a feeling. Andromeda...it will. Heloise

But Heloise, it never comes. Andromeda

A signal is heard off stage. It is the sound of a hollow conch shell being blown. Both women react dramatically. It is rare to hear this sound. Heloise falls to her knees and clutches her rosary.

Our Father who art in heaven— Heloise

Stop praying to the gods. Andromeda

Not "the gods"—"THE GOD". Heloise

Andromeda

I don't believe in monotheism.

Heloise

The shell...it was the signal—

Andromeda

I know this is a joke, Heloise.

Heloise

The luxury of genius is that there are so few of us...but that is also our misery.

Andromeda

You're jealous.

Heloise

I am not.

Andromeda

You're jealous of me.

Heloise

I am not jealous of you. Besides, that was the shell. I can't fake the signal.

Andromeda

You could have bribed her.

Heloise

What would I bribe her with?

Andromeda

She could be in on the joke.

Heloise *darkly*

Joan of Arc doesn't make jokes.

Beat.

Heloise

I knew it would pass by soon. Where is it?

Andromeda rises and strains harder to see.

Andromeda

I see nothing.

Heloise *desperate*

You heard the signal!

Andromeda

Nothing!

Heloise, *radiant with joy*

A light! I see a light! I see it!

Andromeda

Darkness—only darkness! My eyes are blinded by darkness!

Heloise grabs Andromeda's face and points it at an angle.

Heloise

There! I see it! You see it! The signal sounded—she sees it!

Heloise lets go of Andromeda and attempts to signal by waving an arm. Andromeda drops back to her knees and crawls to the water. She bends over and looks deep into it.

I want to die.

Andromeda

Stop it. Stop it now. It's coming! I see a light!

Heloise

I want to die!

Andromeda

You are an idiot!

Heloise

I want to die! I want to die!

Andromeda

Andromeda puts her head under water in an attempt to drown herself. Heloise ignores her and continues waving off to the distance.

Heloise knowing Andromeda cannot hear her

I'm fucking with you. It always fascinates me how people can force themselves into believing in a lie. And what's even more interesting is that it's easy for an uneducated person to believe in a small lie—a goof or a practical joke. But...the more intelligent and-or educated you are—the more likely it is you will begin to believe in the big lies. I believed in a big lie. I believed in God—and I'm as intelligent as they come. But I believed in God with all my spirit. And here I am. I haven't seen heaven or hell. I see nothing but this damned island and these damned women. And you know what the kicker is? I am the only intelligent one. God has abandoned me with fools. So who can blame me if I fuck with them?

Andromeda finally raises her head out of the water.

I was trying to kill myself.

Andromeda

I see a light!

Heloise resuming her desperate demeanor.

I was trying to end my life and you did nothing. I was trying to kill myself!

Andromeda

You are dead already. We've been through this before.

Heloise

I'm not stupid.

Andromeda

They'll be here in half an hour at the most.

Heloise

We don't have clocks! Ha!

Andromeda

I was just saying it as a frame of reference.

Heloise

Well you're always saying that I forget things.

Andromeda

Heloise

If there was only sunlight, I could see if there was a man on the boat!

Andromeda

There is no boat!

Heloise

You are near-sighted!

Andromeda sticks her head back under water. Heloise smiles and watches her. After a moment, Andromeda raises her head and gasps.

Andromeda

What if I could kill myself? What if I could die twice?

Heloise

You can't. You've tried it. Remember?

Andromeda

Yes.

Heloise

There was the time you threw yourself off a cliff—

Andromeda

But what if I could?

Heloise

And the time you joined Joan of Arc in the re-enactment of her death—you got a little crispy.

Andromeda

If I could...would you save me?

Beat.

Andromeda

I know I can't see well. Do you really see a light?

Heloise

Yes. It's there. I see it.

Andromeda

Heloise! What if it's him? What if he's finally come?

The conch shell calls again. Both women react, screaming for joy.

Andromeda

If it's him will you be happy for me? If it's mine? If he comes? I'd be happy for you!

Heloise

Yes!

Andromeda

And would we still be friends? *(Beat)* Do you really see a light!

Heloise

Yes! Yes! Andromeda, yes!

Andromeda

They've made mistakes before—but only with the first call. (*She gasps*) Oh my gods! I see it! I see it! I really see it!

Do you really! Heloise

I do! I do! Oh Heloise, I see the light! Andromeda

The women embrace.

Where? Heloise

What? Andromeda

I want you to show me where you see it. Heloise

Heloise. Why? You see it too. Andromeda

Of course I see it. I just want to make sure we're looking at the same thing. Heloise

Oh. Of course. There it is. Andromeda

Andromeda points.

You don't see the boat. Heloise

What? What did I say? Andromeda

That's not where it is. Heloise

It is... About half an hour away. Andromeda

Andromeda— Heloise

What? I see it! Andromeda

Fine. Heloise

I see it! Andromeda

Of course you do. Heloise

A small light begins to shine on them from off stage.

So do I. Heloise

We both lied. Andromeda

Yes. Heloise

Will they ever come? Andromeda

The light is getting brighter. Neither woman notices it.

I used to believe they would. He would at least. Mine would come. And then I thought....no. And now...I have no thoughts. Heloise

You have thoughts. You're always thinking. Andromeda

But I have no specific thoughts. My thoughts used to be specific. Heloise

It will never come. Tell me a story. Andromeda

You know everything about me. Heloise

But I don't remember. Tell me about yours. Your man. Andromeda

Andromeda crawls to Heloise and puts her head on her lap. The light gets more intense, illuminating.

He was a philosopher. He was a great teacher. He was my lover. Heloise

What was his name? Andromeda

Abelard. Heloise

Yes. And was he beautiful? Andromeda

No. He was ugly. He thought I was beautiful. Heloise

Yes. And when did you first see him? Andromeda

I first saw him...in the study at my uncle's house...and although we had never met before; he had seen me at the market and at church. He had been lecturing on the Holy Trinity when a reflection of light blinded his eyes. He turned and saw me. He said he had immediately fallen in love. I was beautiful then. I had long, Heloise

dense hair—golden. The nuns made me shave it off when I joined the order. I used to wear jewels in my hair. That's what caught his eye...the jewels in my hair.

Andromeda

And what happened?

The light has now reached a blinding intensity.

Heloise

Abelard approached my uncle and offered his services to tutor me. He would teach the tenets of the Holy trinity while outlining the curve of my lips with his finger. I traced the outline of my breasts while reciting the Lords Prayer. We read the letters of Paul completely naked and quoted Revelations while fornicating. Soon, God and sex were combined in Abelard—and I couldn't pray without becoming wet... My uncle had never let me meet men before—so...Abelard was my savior. I had always found women to be stupid—but men...

Andromeda

And then he took you away and you married. You eloped. You lied to your uncle and he was furious. And there was a child.

Heloise

You didn't forget my story.

Andromeda

It is beautiful. I could never forget it.

The light slowly begins to diminish.

Heloise

My uncle said we were forgiven and could return...but then...the first moment Abelard was alone...

Andromeda

I don't like this part.

Heloise

The accident happened.

Andromeda

Accident?

Heloise

My uncle got a group of men together and attacked Abelard in his sleep. The men restrained my love as my uncle tied a piece of twine around Abelard's parts and castrated him. (*A beat of disappointment.*) After that, Abelard didn't want to see me. He was ashamed. But I still loved him. I still wanted him.

Andromeda

You still wanted him.

Heloise

He left me and became a monk. That is when I joined the order. I became a nun...trapped with women...as I am now...because if I couldn't have Abelard, then I would remember him in prayer. I would pray and still become aroused. With every communion I would have a secret orgasm that was mine alone. I would feel him inside of me again. But I don't think he wanted me after that. No.

Andromeda holds her.

Andromeda

He will come Heloise. He will. I believe that. Why else would we exist?

The light has faded and is almost gone.

Heloise

I had beautiful hair.

Andromeda

Yes.

Heloise

I'm sorry I lied to you about the boat. There never was a light.

The signal sounds for the third time. Only this time it is not distant. It is loud and right off stage.

Andromeda

Oh I hate her. Joan! Cut it out! We know there was not a light!

Suddenly the other women of the island enter from all sides pointing with excitement and extremely agitated. Joan of Arc is a tiny woman with the haircut of a little boy. She is in armor and brandishes a wicked sword. She also holds the shell. Her face is intense and her eyes are wild. Cleopatra is bejeweled in gold and silver. Her dark hair frames a chiseled and determined face. Her eyes are heavily lined and seductive. Queen Victoria is an imposing figure of middle age with a booming voice and intimidating presence. She is dressed in full royal garb.

Victoria

Where is it? Where is the boat?