The Refectory

Gaudiolium of Monks at midnight. LUCIFER disguised as a Friar.

FRIAR PAUL sings.
Ave! color vini clari,
Dulcis potus, non amari,
Tua nos inebriari
Digneris potentia!

FRIAR CUTHBERT.
Not so much noise, my worthy freres,
You'll disturb the Abbot at his prayers.

FRIAR PAUL sings.
O! quam placens in colore!
O! quam fragrans in odore!
O! quam sapidum in ore!
Dulce linguae vinculum!

FRIAR CUTHBERT.
I should think your tongue had broken its chain!

FRIAR PAUL sings.
Felix venter quem intrabris!
Felix guttur quod rigabis!
Felix os quod tu lavabis!
Et beata labia!

FRIAR CUTHBERT.
Peace! I say, peace!
Will you never cease!
You will rouse up the Abbot, I tell you again!
FRIAR JOHN.
No danger! to-night he will let us alone,
As I happen to know he has guests of his own.

FRIAR CUTHBERT.
Who are they?

FRIAR JOHN.
A German Prince and his train,
Who arrived here just before the rain.
There is with him a damsel fair to see,
As slender and graceful as a reed!
When she alighted from her steed,
It seemed like a blossom blown from a tree.

FRIAR CUTHBERT.
None of your pale-faced girls for me!
None of your damsels of high degree!

FRIAR JOHN.
Come, old fellow, drink down to your peg!
But do not drink any further, I beg!

FRIAR PAUL sings.
In the days of gold,
The days of old,
Crosier of wood
And bishop of gold!

FRIAR CUTHBERT.
What an infernal racket and riot!
Can you not drink your wine in quiet?
Why fill the convent with such scandals,
As if we were so many drunken Vandals?

FRIAR PAUL continues.
Now we have changed
That law so good
To crosier of gold
And bishop of wood!

FRIAR CUTHBERT.
Well, then, since you are in the mood
To give your noisy humors vent,
Sing and howl to your heart's content!

CHORUS OF MONKS.
Funde vinum, funde!
Tanquam sint fluminis undae,
Nec quaeras unde,
Sed fundas semper abunde!

FRIAR JOHN.
What is the name of yonder friar,
With an eye that glows like a coal of fire,
And such a black mass of tangled hair?

FRIAR PAUL.
He who is sitting there,
With a rollicking,
Devil may care,
Free and easy look and air,
As if he were used to such feasting and frolicking?

FRIAR JOHN.
The same.

FRIAR PAUL.
He's a stranger. You had better ask his name,
And where he is going and whence he came.

FRIAR JOHN.
Hallo! Sir Friar!

FRIAR PAUL.
You must raise your voice a little higher,
He does not seem to hear what you say.
Now, try again! He is looking this way.

FRIAR JOHN.
Hallo! Sir Friar,
We wish to inquire
Whence you came, and where you are going,
And anything else that is worth the knowing.
So be so good as to open your head.

LUCIFER.
I am a Frenchman born and bred,
Going on a pilgrimage to Rome.
My home
Is the convent of St. Gildas de Rhuys,
Of which, very like, you never have heard.

MONKS.
Never a word.

LUCIFER.
You must know, then, it is in the diocese
Called the Diocese of Vannes,
In the province of Brittany.
From the gray rocks of Morbihan
It overlooks the angry sea;
The very sea-shore where,
In his great despair,
Abbot Abelard walked to and fro,
Filling the night with woe,
And wailing aloud to the merciless seas
The name of his sweet Heloise,
Whilst overhead
The convent windows gleamed as red
As the fiery eyes of the monks within,
Who with jovial din
Gave themselves up to all kinds of sin!
Ha! that is a convent! that is an abbey!
Over the doors,
None of your death-heads carved in wood,
None of your Saints looking pious and good,
None of your Patriarchs old and shabby!
But the heads and tusks of boars,
And the cells
Hung all round with the fells
Of the fallow-deer.
And then what cheer!
What jolly, fat friars,
Sitting round the great, roaring fires,
Roaring louder than they,
With their strong wines,
And their concubines,
And never a bell,
With its swagger and swell,
Calling you up with a start of affright
In the dead of night,
To send you grumbling down dark stairs,
To mumble your prayers;
But the cheery crow
Of cocks in the yard below,
After daybreak, an hour or so,
And the barking of deep-mouthed hounds,
These are the sounds
That, instead of bells, salute the ear.
And then all day
Up and away
Through the forest, hunting the deer!
Ah, my friends, I'm afraid that here
You are a little too pious, a little too tame,
And the more is the shame.
'T is the greatest folly
Not to be jolly;
That's what I think!
Come, drink, drink,
Drink, and die game!

MONKS.
And your Abbot What's-his-name?

LUCIFER.
Abelard!
MONKS.
Did he drink hard?

LUCIFER.
Oh, no! Not he!
He was a dry old fellow,
Without juice enough to get thoroughly mellow.
There he stood,
Lowering at us in sullen mood,
As if he had come into Brittany
Just to reform our brotherhood!

A roar of laughter.

But you see
It never would do!
For some of us knew a thing or two,
In the Abbey of St. Gildas de Rhuys!
For instance, the great ado
With old Fulbert's niece,
The young and lovely Heloise.

FRIAR JOHN.
Stop there, if you please,
Till we drink so the fair Heloise.

ALL, drinking and shouting.
Heloise! Heloise!

The Chapel-bell tolls.

LUCIFER, starting.
What is that bell for! Are you such asses
As to keep up the fashion of midnight masses?

FRIAR CUTHBERT.
It is only a poor unfortunate brother,
Who is gifted with most miraculous powers
Of getting up at all sorts of hours,
And, by way of penance and Christian meekness,
Of creeping silently out of his cell
To take a pull at that hideous bell;
So that all monks who are lying awake
May murmur some kind of prayer for his sake,
And adapted to his peculiar weakness!

FRIAR JOHN.
From frailty and fall--

ALL.
Good Lord, deliver us all!

FRIAR CUTHBERT.
And before the bell for matins sounds,
He takes his lantern, and goes the rounds,
Flashing it into our sleepy eyes,
Merely to say it is time to arise.
But enough of that. Go on, if you please,
With your story about St. Gildas de Rhuys.

LUCIFER.
Well, it finally came to pass
That, half in fun and half in malice,
One Sunday at Mass
We put some poison into the chalice.
But, either by accident or design,
Peter Abelard kept away
From the chapel that day,
And a poor young friar, who in his stead
Drank the sacramental wine,
Fell on the steps of the altar, dead!
But look! do you see at the window there
That face, with a look of grief and despair,
That ghastly face, as of one in pain?

MONKS.
Who? where?

LUCIFER.
As I spoke, it vanished away again.

FRIAR CUTHBERT.
It is that nefarious
Siebald the Refectorarius,
That fellow is always playing the scout,
Creeping and peeping and prowling about;
And then he regales
The Abbot with scandalous tales.

LUCIFER.
A spy in the convent? One of the brothers
Telling scandalous tales of the others?
Out upon him, the lazy loon!
I would put a stop to that pretty soon,
In a way he should rue it.

MONKS.
How shall we do it!

LUCIFER.
Do you, brother Paul,
Creep under the window, close to the wall,
And open it suddenly when I call.
Then seize the villain by the hair,
And hold him there,
And punish him soundly, once for all.

FRIAR CUTHBERT.
As Saint Dunstan of old,
We are told,
Once caught the Devil by the nose!

LUCIFER.
Ha! ha! that story is very clever,
But has no foundation whatsoever.
Quick! for I see his face again
Glistening in at the window-pane;
Now! now! and do not spare your blows.

FRIAR PAUL opens the window suddenly, and seizes SIEBALD.
They beat him.

FRIAR SIEBALD.
Help! help! are you going to slay me?

FRIAR PAUL.
That will teach you again to betray me!

FRIAR SIEBALD.
Mercy! mercy!

FRIAR PAUL, shouting and beating.

Rumpas bellorum lorum
Vim confer amorum
Morum verorum rorum
Tu plena polorum!

LUCIFER.
Who stands in the doorway yonder,
Stretching out his trembling hand,
Just as Abelard used to stand,
The flash of his keen, black eyes
Forerunning the thunder?

THE MONKS, in confusion.
The Abbot! the Abbot!

FRIAR CUTHBERT.
And what is the wonder!
He seems to have taken you by surprise.

FRIAR FRANCIS.
Hide the great flagon
From the eyes of the dragon!

FRIAR CUTHBERT.
Pull the brown hood over your face!
This will bring us into disgrace!
ABBOT.
What means this revel and carouse?
Is this a tavern and drinking-house?
Are you Christian monks, or heathen devils,
To pollute this convent with your revels?
Were Peter Damian still upon earth,
To be shocked by such ungodly mirth,
He would write your names, with pen of gall,
In his Book of Gomorrah, one and all!
Away, you drunkards! to your cells,
And pray till you hear the matin-bells;
You, Brother Francis, and you, Brother Paul!
And as a penance mark each prayer
With the scourge upon your shoulders bare;
Nothing atones for such a sin
But the blood that follows the discipline.
And you, Brother Cuthbert, come with me
Alone into the sacristy;
You, who should be a guide to your brothers,
And are ten times worse than all the others,
For you I've a draught that has long been brewing,
You shall do a penance worth the doing!
Away to your prayers, then, one and all!
I wonder the very convent wall
Does not crumble and crush you in its fall!

Content of PART II - THE GOLDEN LEGEND: The Refectory (Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem collection: Christus: A Mystery)

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow