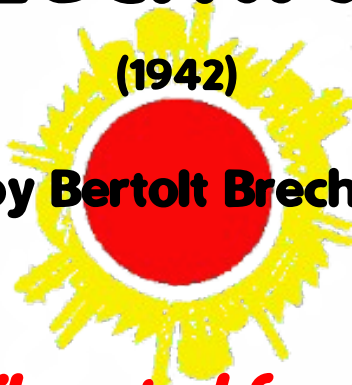


The Good Person of Szechwan

(1942)

by Bertolt Brecht



*Liberated from
capitalist control
to educate the masses
by
Socialist Stories*

PROLOGUE

A street. It is evening. Wang, the water seller, introduces himself to the audience.

WANG. I sell water here in the city of Setzuan. It's a difficult business. When water is scarce, I have to go a long way to find any. And when it is plentiful, I am without income. But in our province there is nothing unusual about poverty. It is generally said that only the gods can still help us. From a cattle buyer who moves around a good deal, I learn to my unutterable joy that some of the highest gods are on their way to our province and may be expected here in Setzuan too. Heaven is said to be very disturbed by all the complaints that have been going up. For three days I have been waiting here at the entrance of the town, especially toward evening, so that I may be the first to greet them. Later, I'd hardly have the opportunity to do so. The gods will be surrounded by important people. They'll be in constant demand. If only I recognize them! After all they needn't come together. Perhaps they'll come separately so as not to be so conspicuous. It can't be those people over there, they are coming from work. (*He looks at passing workers.*) Their shoulders are crushed from all the carrying they do. That fellow there can't possibly be a god either, he has ink on his fingers. At best he's an office worker at a cement factory. Even those gentlemen there (*two gentlemen pass*) don't seem like gods to me. They look like people who're always beating somebody, which gods don't

need to do. But look at those three! They're quite a different matter. They're well fed, show no sign of having any occupation, and have dust on their shoes, which means they come from far away. They must be gods. Dispose of me, illustrious ones!

(He throws himself down before them.)

THE FIRST GOD *(pleased)*. Have we been expected here?

WANG *(giving them a drink)*. For a long time. But I was the only one who *knew* you were coming.

THE FIRST GOD. Well, we need somewhere to stay the night. Do you know a place?

WANG. A place? Countless places! The whole town is at your service, illustrious ones! What sort of a place do you wish?
(The Gods look meaningfully at each other.)

THE FIRST GOD. Take the nearest house, my son! Try the very nearest house first.

WANG. I'm a little afraid of making enemies of other mighty men if I favor one of them in particular. Few people can help us, you see, but almost everyone can hurt us.

THE FIRST GOD. Well then, we order you: take the nearest house!

WANG. That is Mr. Fo over there! Wait just one moment!

(He runs to a house and knocks at the door. It is opened, but one can see that he is rejected. He returns, hesitantly.)

WANG. That's annoying. Mr. Fo is not at home just now, and his servants don't dare do anything without orders from him, he's so very strict. He will certainly have a fit when he learns who they turned away, won't he?

THE GODS *(smiling)*. He certainly will.

WANG. Well then, another moment! The house next door belongs to the widow Su. She'll be beside herself with joy.

(He runs to the house but apparently is rejected there too.)

WANG. I'll have to inquire over there. She says she has only one little tiny room and it isn't prepared. I can well understand she's ashamed because some corners of the house aren't so clean. That's what women are like, it's a disgrace. I'll go at once to Mr. Tscheng.

THE SECOND GOD. The little room will be enough. Tell her we're coming.

WANG. Even if it isn't clean? It may be swarming with spiders!
THE SECOND GOD. That doesn't matter. Where there are spiders, there aren't so many flies.

THE THIRD GOD. Never mind. (*Friendly, to Wang*) Go to Mr. Tscheng or some other place, my son. Spiders, after all, rather disgust me.

(*Wang knocks again somewhere and is admitted.*)

VOICE FROM THE HOUSE. Spare us your gods! We have other troubles!

WANG (*back with the Gods*). Mr. Tscheng is quite upset. He has the whole house full of relations and doesn't dare show his face, illustrious ones! Between ourselves I believe there are bad people among them whom he doesn't want you to see. He is too afraid of your judgment, that's the thing.

THE THIRD GOD. Are we so terrible, then?

WANG. Only with bad people, isn't that so? It's well known, isn't it, that the province Kwan has been afflicted with floods for decades?

THE SECOND GOD. Really? Why?

WANG. Well, because there's no religion there!

THE SECOND GOD. Nonsense. It's because they neglected the dam!

THE FIRST GOD. Sst! (*To Wang*) Are you still hoping, my son?

WANG. How can you ask such a thing? I only need to go one house farther along. From there on, there'll be plenty to choose from. Everyone's just itching to put you up. Accidental circumstances, you understand. I go!

(*He begins to leave and then, undecided, remains standing in the street.*)

THE SECOND GOD. What did I say?

THE THIRD GOD. Of course it may really be "accidental circumstances."

THE SECOND GOD. In Schun, in Kwan, and in Setzuan — "accidental circumstances" every time? There aren't any religious people left, that's the naked truth, and you don't want to face it. Our mission has failed, why not admit it?

THE FIRST GOD. We might run across some good people at any moment. We mustn't expect things to be too cozy.

THE THIRD GOD. The resolution said: "The world can remain as it is if enough people are found living lives worthy of human beings." Good people, in other words. The water seller himself is such a person unless I'm very much mistaken. (*He goes up to Wang who is still standing undecided.*)

THE SECOND GOD. He is very much mistaken. When this water man gave us a drink from his measuring cup, I noticed something. Here's the cup. (*He shows it to the First God.*)

THE FIRST GOD. It has two bottoms.

THE SECOND GOD. A swindler!

THE FIRST GOD. All right, count *him* out. But what does it matter if *one* person is rotten? We'll find enough yet who'll meet our conditions. We have to find *one*! For two thousand years, they've been shouting: "The world can't go on as it is, no one on earth can *be* good and *stay* good." And now at last we've got to name the people who can keep our commandments.

THE THIRD GOD (*to Wang*). Is it so difficult to find a place?

WANG. Not for you! What are you thinking of? It's all my fault a place wasn't found right away. I'm not going about it properly.

THE THIRD GOD. Surely, that's not so.

(*He goes back.*)

WANG. They're noticing already. (*He accosts a gentlemen.*)

Pardon me, worthy sir, for accosting you, but three of the highest gods, whose imminent arrival has been discussed for years by all Setzuan, have now actually appeared. They need a place to sleep. Do not pass by! See for yourself. One look will suffice. Don't wait, for heaven's sake. It's a chance in a lifetime! Be the first to ask the gods under your roof before they're snapped up by someone else. They will accept.

(*The gentleman has passed by.*)

WANG (*turning to another*). My dear sir, you've heard what's going on. Do you, perhaps, have spare rooms? They don't have to be palatial. It's the good intention that counts.

THE MAN. How should I know what kind of gods you've got there? A fellow that lets people into his house likes to know what he's getting.

(He goes into a tobacco store. Wang runs back to the Three Gods.)

WANG. I've found a gentleman who'll certainly take you.

(He sees his cup on the ground, looks toward the Gods in confusion, takes it, and runs back again.)

THE FIRST GOD. That doesn't sound encouraging.

WANG *(as the Man is coming out of the store again)*. Well, what about the rooms for the night?

THE MAN. How do you know I don't live at an inn?

THE FIRST GOD. He's getting nowhere. We can cross Setzuan off the list too.

WANG. They're three of the very greatest gods! Really. Their statues in the temples are very well done. If you go quickly and invite them, they might accept!

THE MAN *(laughing)*. You must be trying to find a place for a nice bunch of crooks. *(Exit.)*

WANG *(abusing him)*. You squinting scoundrel! Have you no religion? You'll all roast in boiling oil for your indifference! The gods spit on you! But you'll regret it! You'll have to pay. The whole pack of you, fourth cousins included. You've brought disgrace to all Setzuan. *(pause)* And now only Shen Te the prostitute is left. She can't say no.

(He calls "Shen Te!" Above, Shen Te looks out of the window.)

WANG. They're here. I can't find any place to put them. Can't you take them in for the night?

SHEN TE. I don't think so, Wang. I'm expecting a gentleman. How is it you can't find any other place?

WANG. I can't tell you now. Setzuan is one big dung heap.

SHEN TE. When he comes I'd have to hide. Then maybe he'd go away again. He's expecting to take me out.

WANG. In the meantime, couldn't we come up?

SHEN TE. Well, you don't have to shout. Can we be open with them?

WANG. No! They musn't find out about your profession. We'd better wait downstairs. You won't go out with the gentleman then?

SHEN TE. I'm not so well off. And if I don't pay my rent by tomorrow morning, I'll be thrown out.

WANG. This is no time for calculations.

SHEN TE. I'm not so sure. Stomachs rumble even on the emperor's birthday. But all right, I'll take them in. (*She can be seen putting out the light.*)

THE FIRST GOD. I think it's hopeless.

(*They step up to Wang.*)

WANG (*starting as he sees them standing behind him*). A place has been found. (*He wipes the sweat off.*)

THE GODS. It has? Let's see it then.

WANG. There's no hurry. Take your time. The room still has to be fixed.

THE THIRD GOD. Well then, we'll sit down here and wait.

WANG. I'm afraid there's too much traffic right here. Perhaps we should go over there?

THE SECOND GOD. We like to look at people. That's what we're here for.

WANG. But . . . there's a draft.

THE SECOND GOD. Oh, we're pretty tough.

WANG. Perhaps you'd like me to show you Setzuan by night? We might take a little walk.

THE THIRD GOD. We've done quite a bit of walking today already. (*Smiling*) But if you want to get us away from here, you need only say so.

(*They go back.*)

THE THIRD GOD. Is this all right with you?

(*They sit down on a doorstep. Wang sits down on the ground at a little distance.*)

WANG (*taking a deep breath*). You're staying with a single girl. She's the best woman — the best human being — in Setzuan.

THE THIRD GOD. That's nice.

WANG (*to the audience*). When I picked up the cup a little while ago, they looked at me so strangely. Did they notice something? I don't dare look them in the eyes any more.

THE THIRD GOD. You're quite exhausted.

WANG. A little. From running.

THE FIRST GOD. Do people have a hard time of it here?

WANG. *Good people do.*

THE FIRST GOD (*seriously*). And you?

WANG. I know what you mean. I'm not good. But I don't have an easy time either.

(In the meantime a gentleman has turned up in front of Shen Te's house. He has whistled several times. Each time Wang starts.)

THE THIRD GOD (*softly, to Wang*). I think he's gone now.

WANG (*confused*). Yes.

(He gets up and runs to the square, leaving his carrying pole behind. But in the meantime the waiting man has left, and Shen Te has stepped through the door and, softly calling "Wang!", has gone down the street. Wang, now softly calling "Shen Te!", gets no reply.)

WANG. She's left me in the lurch. She's gone off to get her rent together and now I've no place for the illustrious ones. They're tired and still waiting. I can't go back again and say nothing doing. My own little place, a sewer pipe, is out of the question. Moreover, the gods wouldn't want to stay with a fellow when they've seen through his dishonest dealings. I won't go back. Not for anything in the world. But my carrying pole is lying there. What'll I do? I don't dare to get it. Since I didn't succeed in doing anything for the gods, whom I revere, I'll leave Setzuan and hide from their sight.

(He rushes off. Shen Te returns. She is looking for Wang on the other side and sees the Gods.)

SHEN TE. Are you the illustrious ones? My name is Shen Te. It would please me very much if you'd be content with my simple room.

THE THIRD GOD. Where has the water seller gone to?

SHEN TE. I must have missed him.

THE FIRST GOD. He probably thought you weren't coming and didn't dare return to us.

THE THIRD GOD (*picking up the carrying pole*). We'll leave this at your house. He'll be needing it.

(Led by Shen Te, they go into the house. It grows dark, then

light again. It is dawn. Again led by Shen Te, who lights their way with a lamp, the Gods pass through the door. They are taking leave.)

THE FIRST GOD. My dear Shen Te, we must thank you for your hospitality. We shall not forget that it was you who took us in. Return the carrying pole to the water seller and tell him that we want to thank him too for showing us a good human being.

SHEN TE. I'm not good. I have to confess something: when Wang asked me to put you up I hesitated.

THE FIRST GOD. Hesitating doesn't matter if only you win out. You must know that you did more than give us a place to sleep. Many — even some of us gods — have been doubting whether good people still exist. To decide that question is the main object of our journey. Now that we've found a good human being, we shall joyously continue on our way. Good-bye!

SHEN TE. Stop, illustrious ones! I'm not at all sure that I'm good. I'd like to be good of course, but how am I to pay my rent? Well, I'll confess it to you: I sell myself in order to live, and even so I can't get along. There are many others who have to do the same. I'm ready to do anything; but who isn't? I'd be happy to honor my father and my mother and speak the truth. It would be nice not to covet my neighbor's house. It would be pleasant to attach myself to one man and be faithful to him. I too should like not to exploit anyone, not to rob the helpless. But how? How? Even when I break only a *few* of the commandments, I can hardly survive.

THE FIRST GOD. All these, Shen Te, are but the doubts of a good woman.

THE THIRD GOD. Farewell, Shen Te! And give my best regards to the water seller. He was a good friend to us.

THE SECOND GOD. I fear he's none the better for it.

THE THIRD GOD. Best of luck to you!

THE FIRST GOD. Above all, be good, Shen Te! Farewell!

(They turn to go. They are already waving.)

SHEN TE (*worried*). But I'm not sure of myself, illustrious ones! How can I be good when everything is so expensive?

THE SECOND GOD. We can't do anything about that. We mustn't meddle with economics!

THE THIRD GOD. Stop! Just one moment! Might she not fare better if she were a little richer?

THE SECOND GOD. We can't give her anything. We couldn't account for it up above.

THE FIRST GOD. Why not?

(They put their heads together and talk excitedly.)

THE FIRST GOD (*embarrassed, to Shen Te*). You say you can't pay your rent. We're not paupers and of course we'll pay for the room. Here! (*He gives her money.*) But don't tell anyone we paid. Such an action could be misinterpreted.

THE SECOND GOD. It certainly could.

THE FIRST GOD. But it's allowable. We *can* pay for the room without misgiving. There's nothing against it in the resolution. Well, goodbye!

(The Gods quickly go.)

I

A small tobacco store. The store is not as yet completely furnished and has not opened.

SHEN TE (*to the audience*). It's now three days since the gods went away. They said they wanted to pay me for the night's lodging. And when I looked to see what they'd given me, I saw that it was more than a thousand silver dollars. With the money I bought myself a tobacco store. Yesterday I moved in here and I hope now to be able to do a lot of good. There, for instance, is Mrs. Shin, the former owner of the store. Yester-

day she came to ask for rice for her children. Today I see her again coming across the square with her pot.

(Enter Mrs. Shin. The two women bow to each other.)

SHEN TE. Good morning, Mrs. Shin.

MRS. SHIN. Good morning, Miss Shen Te. How do you like it in your new home?

SHEN TE. Very much. How did your children spend the night?

MRS. SHIN. Oh dear, in a strange house, if you can call that shack a house! The youngest is coughing already.

SHEN TE. That's bad.

MRS. SHIN. You don't know what's bad. You're well off. But you'll learn quite a lot in this dump. What a slum this neighborhood is!

SHEN TE. Didn't you tell me the workers from the cement factory come here at noon?

MRS. SHIN. Yes, but otherwise there isn't a soul that buys here, not even the neighbors.

SHEN TE. You didn't tell me that when you sold me the store.

MRS. SHIN. Don't start blaming me now! First you rob me and my children of our home and then you call it a dump! And a slum! That's the limit! *(She cries.)*

SHEN TE *(quickly)*. I'll get your rice right away.

MRS. SHIN. I also wanted to ask you to lend me some money.

SHEN TE *(pouring rice into Mrs. Shin's pot)*. I can't. You know I haven't sold anything.

MRS. SHIN. But I need it. What am I to live off? You took everything away from me and now you cut my throat! I'll leave my children on your doorstep, you cutthroat! *(She tears the pot out of Shen Te's hands.)*

SHEN TE. Don't be angry! You'll spill the rice!

(Enter an elderly couple and a shabbily dressed young man.)

THE WIFE. Ah, my dear Shen Te, we've heard you're so well off now. You've become a businesswoman! Imagine, we're without a roof over our heads. Our tobacco store has gone to pieces. We were wondering whether we couldn't spend the night with you. You know my nephew? He's come too. He never leaves us.

THE NEPHEW (*looking around*). A nice store!

MRS. SHIN. What sort of people are *they*?

SHEN TE. They put me up when I first came in from the country.

(*To the audience*) When the little money I had was gone, they threw me out on the street. Perhaps they're afraid now that I'll say no.

They are poor.

They have no shelter

They have no friends

They need somebody

How could one say no?

(*Friendly, to the newcomers*) Welcome! I'll gladly give you shelter. Though I only have one very small room behind the store.

THE HUSBAND. That'll be enough. Don't worry.

THE WIFE (*while she brings tea to Shen Te*). We better settle down back here, so we won't be in your way. I suppose you've chosen a tobacco store in memory of your first home. We'll be able to give you some hints. That's another reason why we came.

MRS. SHIN (*sneering*). I hope customers will come too!

THE WIFE. I guess that's meant for us.

THE HUSBAND. Psst! Here comes a customer.

(*A ragged man comes in.*)

THE RAGGED MAN. Excuse me. I am unemployed.

(*Mrs. Shin laughs.*)

SHEN TE. Can I help you?

THE UNEMPLOYED. I hear you're opening up tomorrow. Things sometimes get damaged when you're unpacking. Don't you have a spare cigarette?

THE WIFE. What nerve, begging for tobacco! He might at least ask for bread!

THE UNEMPLOYED. Bread is expensive. A few puffs at a cigarette and I'll be a new man. I'm all in.

SHEN TE (*giving him cigarettes*). That's important, to be a new man. I'll open the store with you as my first customer. You'll bring me luck.

(The Unemployed quickly lights a cigarette, inhales, and goes off, coughing.)

THE WIFE. My dear Shen Te, was that right?

MRS. SHIN. If you open up like this, in three days there'll be no store left.

THE HUSBAND. I bet he still had money in his pocket.

SHEN TE. But he said he hadn't.

THE NEPHEW. How do you know he wasn't lying?

SHEN TE *(angrily)*. How do I know he *was* lying?

THE WIFE *(shaking her head)*. She can't say no! You're too good, Shen Te. If you want to keep your store, you must learn to say no, now and then.

THE HUSBAND. Why don't you say it's not yours? Say it belongs to a relative who insists on an exact settlement of accounts. Can't you do that?

MRS. SHIN. That could be done if one wasn't always pretending to be a benefactress.

SHEN TE *(laughing)*. Scold, scold, scold! If you're not careful I'll give you notice and pour the rice back.

THE WIFE *(horrificed)*. The rice is yours, too?

SHEN TE *(to the audience)*.

They are bad.

They are nobody's friend.

They begrudge everyone his rice.

They need everything themselves.

Who could scold them?

(Enter a little man.)

MRS. SHIN *(seeing him and hurriedly starting to go)*. I'll see you tomorrow. *(Exit.)*

THE LITTLE MAN *(calling after her)*. Stop, Mrs. Shin! It's you I'm looking for.

THE WIFE. Does she come regularly? Does she have any claim on you?

SHEN TE. She has no claim, but she's hungry: that's more than a claim.

THE LITTLE MAN. *She* knows why she's running. You're the new owner? Oh, you're filling up the shelves already. But

they don't belong to you, see! Unless you pay for them. The rascals who were here before didn't pay for them. (*To the others*) I'm the carpenter, you see.

SHEN TE. But I thought they belonged to the furnishings, which I paid for.

THE CARPENTER. Fraud! It's all a fraud! You're working together with that Shin woman of course. I demand my hundred silver dollars as sure as my name's Lin To.

SHEN TE. How am I to pay it? I have no more money!

THE CARPENTER. Then I'll have you arrested. You'll pay at once or I'll have you arrested.

THE HUSBAND (*prompting Shen Te*). Cousin!

SHEN TE. Can't it wait till next month?

THE CARPENTER (*shouting*). No!

SHEN TE. Don't be hard, Mr. Lin To. I can't settle all claims at once. (*To the audience*)

A little indulgence and strength is redoubled.

Look, the cart horse stops and sniffs the grass:
Connive at this and the horse will pull better.

A little patience in June and the tree is heavy
with peaches in August.

How should we live together without patience?

A short postponement, and the farthest goals are
reached.

(*To the Carpenter*) Be patient just for a little while, Mr. Lin To!

THE CARPENTER. And who's patient with me and my family? (*He moves a shelf from the wall as if he wanted to take it with him.*) Pay up, or I take the shelves away!

THE WIFE. My dear Shen Te, why don't you let your cousin settle this affair? (*To the Carpenter*) Write down your claim and Miss Shen Te's cousin will pay.

THE CARPENTER. Cousin! I know these cousins!

THE NEPHEW. Don't laugh like that! I know him personally.

THE HUSBAND. What a man! Sharp as a knife!

THE CARPENTER. All right, he'll get my bill! (*He puts down a shelf, sits on it, and writes out his bill.*)

THE WIFE (*to Shen Te*). If you don't stop him, he'll tear the shirt off your body to get his measly shelves. Never recognize a claim, justified or not, or in two minutes you'll be swamped with claims, justified or not. Throw a piece of meat into a garbage can, and all the mangy dogs of the district will be at each other's throats in your back yard. What are our law courts for?

SHEN TE. If his work doesn't support him, the law courts won't. He's done some work and doesn't want to go empty-handed. And he's got a family. It's too bad I can't pay him. What will the gods say?

THE HUSBAND. You did your share when you took *us* in. That's more than enough.

(*Enter a limping man and a pregnant woman.*)

THE LIMPING MAN (*to the couple*). Oh, here you are! You're nice relatives! Leaving us standing on the street corner.

THE WIFE (*embarrassed, to Shen Te*). That's my brother Wung and my sister-in-law. (*To the two of them*) Stop grumbling. Go and sit quietly in the corner and don't disturb our old friend, Miss Shen Te. You can stay here, she's got nothing against it. (*To Shen Te*) I think we've got to take these two in. My sister-in-law is in her fifth month. Or don't you agree?

SHEN TE. Oh, yes. Welcome!

THE WIFE. (*to the two*). Say thank you. The cups are back there. (*To Shen Te*) They just wouldn't have known *where* to go. A good thing you got the store!

SHEN TE (*laughing, and bringing tea, she says to the audience*). Yes, a good thing I did!

(*Enter the Landlady, Mrs. Mi Tzu, a blank in her hand.*)

THE LANDLADY. Miss Shen Te, I am the landlady, Mrs. Mi Tzu. I hope we'll get on well together. Here is the lease. (*While Shen Te is reading through the lease*) The opening of a little store is a beautiful moment, isn't it, ladies and gentlemen? (*She looks around.*) There're still a few small gaps on the shelves, but it'll be all right. You'll be able to bring me some references, won't you?

SHEN TE. Is that necessary?

THE LANDLADY. I've no idea who you are.

THE HUSBAND. Perhaps we can vouch for Miss Shen Te? We've known her since she came to town and will go through fire for her at any time.

THE LANDLADY. And who are you?

THE HUSBAND. I am the tobacco dealer Ma Fu.

THE LANDLADY. Where's your store?

THE HUSBAND. At the moment I don't have a store. I've just sold it.

THE LANDLADY. I see. (*To Shen Te*) And don't you know anyone else who could give me some information about you?

THE WIFE (*prompting*). Cousin! Cousin!

THE LANDLADY. You've got to have somebody to speak for you if you're coming into my house. This is a respectable house, my dear. Without some assurance I can't even sign the lease with you.

SHEN TE (*slowly, with downcast eyes*). I have a cousin.

THE LANDLADY. Oh, you have a cousin. On the square? Then we can go over there right away. What does he do?

SHEN TE. He isn't living here. He's in another town.

THE WIFE. Didn't you say he was in Shung?

SHEN TE. Mr. . . . Shui Ta. In Shung.

THE HUSBAND. But I know him! A tall thin fellow?

THE NEPHEW (*to the Carpenter*). You were negotiating with Miss Shen Te's cousin too! About the shelves!

THE CARPENTER (*surlily*). I'm just writing out a bill for him. Here it is! (*He hands it over.*) Tomorrow morning I'll be back. (*Exit.*)

THE NEPHEW (*calling after him and glancing at the Landlady*). Don't worry, the cousin will pay!

THE LANDLADY (*examining Shen Te closely*). Well, I'll be very pleased to meet him too. Good morning! (*Exit.*)

THE WIFE (*after a pause*). Now the cat's out of the bag. You can be sure she'll know everything about you tomorrow morning.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW (*softly to the Nephew*). This thing won't last long!

(Enter a boy leading an old man.)

THE BOY (*calling over his shoulder*). Here they are.

THE WIFE. Good evening, Grandfather. (*To Shen Te*) The good old man! He must have worried about us. And the boy, hasn't he grown? He eats like ten men. Well, who else did you bring, for heaven's sake?

THE HUSBAND (*looking outside*). Only our niece.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW (*softly to the Nephew while a young girl comes in*). The rats climb onto the sinking ship!

THE WIFE (*to Shen Te*). A young relative from the country. I hope we aren't too many for you. We weren't quite as many when you were living with us, were we? Yes, we got more and more. The less we had, the more there were of us. And the more there were of us, the less we had. But now we'll lock up, or there won't be a moment's peace. (*She locks the door and they all sit down.*) We mustn't disturb you in your business, that's the main thing. Or how can the fire be kept burning? We thought we might arrange matters something like this: during the day the young ones will go off and only grandfather, the sister-in-law, and maybe I myself will stay. The others will look in at the most once or twice during the day, all right? Light the lamp over there and make yourself at home.

THE NEPHEW (*humorously*). If only the cousin doesn't pop up tonight all of a sudden. The strict Mr. Shui Ta!

(*The Sister-in-law laughs.*)

THE BROTHER (*reaching for a cigarette*). One cigarette won't matter much.

THE HUSBAND. I'm sure it won't.

(*They all help themselves to cigarettes. The Brother hands round a jug of wine.*)

THE NEPHEW. The cousin will pay for it.

THE GRANDFATHER (*seriously to Shen Te*). Good evening!

(*Shen Te is confused by the belated greeting and bows. In one hand she holds the Carpenter's bill, in the other the lease.*)

THE WIFE. Couldn't you sing something to entertain our hostess a little?

THE NEPHEW. Grandfather will start!

(*They sing.*)

THE SONG OF THE SMOKE

THE GRANDFATHER.

There was a time — before old age had bleached
my hair —

I hoped I might survive by being clever.

But when does cleverness alone suffice

To fill a poor man's belly? Never, never!

That's why I said: let go!

Watch the grey smoke float

Ever into colder coldness: so

Sails your boat.

THE HUSBAND.

I saw the honest, conscientious man oppressed

So by the crooked path I tried to go.

But that path also leads us only downward

And what to do I don't pretend to know.

And so I say: let go!

Watch the grey smoke float

Ever into colder coldness: so

Sails your boat.

THE NIECE.

The old, I hear, have nothing left to hope for.

Since only time can heal, they're in a fix.

But for the young, I hear, the door is open.

It opens, so they tell me, upon nix.

So I too say: let go!

Watch the grey smoke float

Ever into colder coldness: so

Sails your boat.

THE NEPHEW. Where did you get the wine?

THE SISTER-IN-LAW. He pawned the bag of tobacco.

THE HUSBAND. What? That tobacco was the only thing left to us!

We didn't even touch it to pay for our lodgings! You swine!

THE BROTHER. Do you call me a swine because my wife is cold?

And you had a drink yourself? Give me the jug this minute!
(*They fight. The shelves fall over.*)

SHEN TE (*imploring them*). Oh, spare the store! Don't destroy everything! It's a gift of the gods! Take what there is, but don't destroy it all!

THE WIFE (*skeptically*). The store is smaller than I thought. Perhaps we shouldn't have mentioned it to Auntie and the others. If they come too, it'll be very crowded.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW. Our hostess is cooling off already.

(*There are voices outside and a knocking on the door.*)

SHOUTS FROM OUTSIDE. Open up! It's us!

THE WIFE. Is that you, Auntie? What are we going to do?

SHEN TE. O hope! My beautiful store! I bought it yesterday and today it's done for.

The little lifeboat
Is swiftly sent down
Too many people greedily
Reach for it as they drown.

SHOUTS FROM OUTSIDE. Open up!

I-A

Below a bridge. The water seller crouches by the river.

WANG (*looking around*). Everything's quiet. It's four days now that I've been hiding out. They can't find me, because I'm keeping my eyes open. I fled along their road on purpose. On the second day, they passed the bridge, I heard their steps above me. Now they must be a long way off, and I'm safe.

(*He lies back and falls asleep. Music. The slope becomes transparent and the Gods appear.*)

WANG (*raising his arm to his face as if about to be struck*).

Don't say anything! I know it all! I found no one who wants to take you, not in a single house! Now you know! Now you can go on!

THE FIRST GOD. But you did find someone. When you were away, she came. She took us in for the night, she watched over our sleep, and when we left her in the morning she showed us the way with a lamp. You mentioned her to us as a good woman and she was good.

WANG. So it was Shen Te who took you in?

THE THIRD GOD. Of course.

WANG. And I had so little faith, I ran away! Only because I thought: "She can't come. Because she's not well off, she can't come."

THE GODS.

O weak one!

O well-disposed but weak man!

Where there is need, he thinks, there is no goodness!

Where there is danger, he thinks, there is no courage!

O weakness always to believe the worst!

O hasty judgment! Frivolous despair!

WANG. I'm very ashamed, illustrious ones!

THE FIRST GOD. And now, water seller, do us a favor and go back quickly to the city of Setzuan. Look up the good Shen Te there and give us a report on her. She's well off now. She's supposed to have got some money for a little store so she can follow the inclinations of her heart. Show an interest in her goodness. No one can be good for long when goodness is not in demand. We will continue our journey. We will search and find other people who resemble our good woman from Setzuan: the talk about good people being no longer able to live on our earth will stop. (*They disappear.*)

The tobacco store. People sleeping everywhere. The lamp is still burning. A knocking.

THE WIFE (*getting up, sleepily*). Shen Te! Someone's knocking! Where is she, anyway?

THE NEPHEW. I guess she's getting breakfast. The cousin will pay for it!

(The Wife laughs and shuffles to the door. Enter a young man, followed by the Carpenter.)

THE YOUNG MAN. I'm the cousin.

THE WIFE (*falling from the clouds*). What?!

THE YOUNG MAN. My name is Shui Ta.

THE GUESTS (*shaking each other awake*). Her cousin! But that was a joke, she doesn't *have* a cousin! Someone's here saying he's her cousin! I don't believe it, so early in the morning!

THE NEPHEW. If you're our hostess's cousin, go and get us some breakfast quickly!

SHUI TA (*putting out the light*). The first customers will soon be here. Please get dressed so that I can open my store.

THE HUSBAND. *Your* store? I thought the store belonged to our friend Shen Te. (*Shui Ta shakes his head.*) What, it isn't her store at all?

THE SISTER-IN-LAW. Then she's cheated us! Where is she, anyway?

SHUI TA. She's been delayed. She wants me to tell you that, now *I'm* here, she can no longer do anything for you.

THE WIFE (*deeply affected*). And we thought she was good!

THE NEPHEW. Don't believe him! Look for her!

THE HUSBAND. That's what we'll do. (*He organizes the search.*)

You and you and you and you, look for her everywhere.

Grandfather and us, we'll stay here to hold the fort. In the

meantime the boy can get us something to eat. (*To the Boy*)

You see the bakery over there on the corner? Sneak over and stuff your shirt full.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW. Take a few of the little light cakes too!

THE HUSBAND. But be careful, don't let the baker catch you!

And don't run into the policeman!

(The Boy nods and goes off. The others finish dressing.)

SHUI TA. This store has been your refuge. Won't you give it a bad reputation if you steal from the bakery?

THE NEPHEW. Don't pay any attention to him. We'll find her soon enough. She'll give him a piece of her mind.

(The Nephew, the Brother, the Sister-in-law, and the Niece go out.)

THE SISTER-IN-LAW *(as she leaves)*. Leave us some of the breakfast!

SHUI TA *(calmly)*. You won't find her. My cousin regrets of course that she can't abide by the law of hospitality for an unlimited period. But unfortunately there are too many of you. This is a tobacco store and Miss Shen Te has to live off it.

THE HUSBAND. Our Shen Te just couldn't say a thing like that.

SHUI TA. Perhaps you're right. *(To the Carpenter)* The unfortunate thing is that the need in this city is too great for a single person to manage. In that regard, nothing has changed, unfortunately, since someone eleven hundred years ago composed these lines:

The governor, asked what was needed

To help the freezing people of the town, made answer:

"A blanket ten thousand feet long

Which would simply cover all the suburbs."

(He starts to clean up the store.)

THE CARPENTER. I see you're trying to put your cousin's affairs in order. There's a little debt, recognized by witnesses, and it needs settling. For the shelves. One hundred silver dollars.

SHUI TA *(taking the bill out of his pocket, not unfriendly)*.

Don't you think one hundred silver dollars a little much?

THE CARPENTER. No. And I can't make any deductions. I have a wife and children to support.

SHUI TA *(severely)*. How many children?

THE CARPENTER. Four.

SHUI TA. Then I offer you twenty silver dollars.

(The Husband laughs.)

THE CARPENTER. Are you crazy? The shelves are walnut!

SHUI TA. Then take them away.

THE CARPENTER. What d'you mean?

SHUI TA. They cost too much. I beg you, take the walnut shelves away.

THE WIFE. Well said! *(She laughs too.)*

THE CARPENTER *(uncertainly)*. I demand that someone call Miss Shen Te. She seems to be a better person than you.

SHUI TA. Certainly. She's ruined.

THE CARPENTER *(resolutely taking some shelves and carrying them to the door)*. You can pile up your tobacco goods on the floor! It suits me!

SHUI TA *(to the Husband)*. Help him!

THE HUSBAND *(he also grabs a shelf and, grinning, carries it to the door)*. Out with the shelves!

THE CARPENTER. You dog, do you want my family to starve?

SHUI TA. Once more I offer you twenty silver dollars. I don't want to pile up my tobacco goods on the floor.

THE CARPENTER. A hundred!

(Shui Ta looks indifferently out of the window. The Husband prepares to carry out more shelves.)

THE CARPENTER. At least don't smash them against the door post, idiot! *(Desperately)* But they were made to measure! They fit this dump and nowhere else! The boards are spoiled, mister!

SHUI TA. Exactly. That's why I'm offering you only twenty silver dollars. Because the boards are spoiled.

(The Wife squeals with pleasure.)

THE CARPENTER *(suddenly tired)*. I can't keep it up. Take the shelves and pay what you want.

SHUI TA. Twenty silver dollars.

(He places two large coins on the table. The Carpenter takes them.)

THE HUSBAND *(carrying back the shelves)*. It's enough for a heap of spoiled boards!

THE CARPENTER. Enough, maybe, to get drunk on! (*Exit.*)

THE HUSBAND. We got rid of *him*!

THE WIFE (*weeping with merriment and drying her tears*).

“They’re walnut!” “Take them away!” “One hundred silver dollars! I have four children!” “Then I’ll pay twenty!” “But they’re spoiled.” “Exactly! Twenty silver dollars!”— That’s how one has to treat those scamps.

SHUI TA. Yes. (*Earnestly*) Go away quickly!

THE HUSBAND. Us?

SHUI TA. Yes, you. You’re thieves and parasites. If you go fast without wasting time talking back, you can still save yourselves.

THE HUSBAND. It’s best just not to answer him at all. Let’s not shout on an empty stomach. I’d like to know where the boy is.

SHUI TA. Yes, where’s the boy? I told you before, I don’t want him in my store with stolen cakes. (*Suddenly shouting*) Once more: Go!

(*They remain seated.*)

SHUI TA (*calmly again*). As you wish.

(*He goes to the door and bows low. A Policeman appears in the doorway.*)

SHUI TA. I presume I am addressing the officer in charge of this neighborhood?

THE POLICEMAN. Yes, Mr. . . .

SHUI TA. Shui Ta. (*They smile at each other.*) Nice weather today!

THE POLICEMAN. A little warm, maybe?

SHUI TA. A little warm, maybe.

THE HUSBAND (*softly to the Wife*). If he gabbles until the boy comes back, we’re done for!

(*He tries secretly to make some signs at Shui Ta.*)

SHUI TA (*without paying attention to him*). It makes a difference whether one thinks of the weather from a cool store or from the dusty street.

THE POLICEMAN. A big difference.

THE WIFE (*to the Husband*). Don’t worry! The boy won’t come when he sees the policeman standing in the doorway.

SHUI TA. Why don't you come in? It's really cooler in here. My cousin and I have opened a store. We attach the greatest importance, let me tell you, to being on good terms with the authorities.

THE POLICEMAN (*entering*). You are very kind, Mr. Shui Ta. Yes, it's really cool in here.

THE HUSBAND (*softly*). He's taking him in, specially so the boy won't see him.

SHUI TA. Visitors. Distant acquaintances of my cousin, I hear. They are on a journey. (*They bow.*) We were just about to take leave.

THE HUSBAND (*hoarsely*). Well, we'll be going now.

SHUI TA. I shall tell my cousin that you want to thank her for the rooms but that you had no time to await her return.

(*A noise from the street and shouts of: "Stop thief!"*)

THE POLICEMAN. What's that?

(*The Boy is in the doorway. Various kinds of cakes are falling out of his shirt. The Wife waves him desperately back. He turns and starts to go.*)

THE POLICEMAN. Stop, you! (*He takes hold of the Boy.*) Where did you get these cakes?

THE BOY. Over there.

THE POLICEMAN. Oh, theft, is it?

THE WIFE. We didn't know anything about it. The boy did it on his own. (*To the Boy*) You good-for-nothing!

THE POLICEMAN. Mr. Shui Ta, can you clarify the situation? (*Shui Ta is silent.*)

THE POLICEMAN. Aha. You're all coming to the station with me.

SHUI TA. I'm most distressed that such a thing could have happened in my establishment.

THE WIFE. He was watching when the boy went away!

SHUI TA. I can assure you, officer, I should hardly have asked you in if I'd wanted to conceal a theft.

THE POLICEMAN. That's right. And you will also understand, Mr. Shui Ta, that it's my duty to take those people away.

(*Shui Ta bows.*) Go on with you! (*He drives them out.*)

THE GRANDFATHER (*solemnly from the doorway*). Good day!

(*Exeunt all except Shui Ta, who continues to tidy up. Enter the Landlady.*)

THE LANDLADY. So you're her cousin! What does it mean that the police are dragging people away from my house? What right has your Miss Shen Te to turn this store into a house of assignation? That's what happens if one takes in people who only yesterday lived in a two-bit hotel and went begging for bread to the corner bakery! You see, I know everything!

SHUI TA. Yes, I see. You've been told bad things about my cousin. She is accused of having gone hungry! It's a notorious fact that she lived in poverty. She's got the worst possible reputation: that of being poor.

THE LANDLADY. She was a common . . .

SHUI TA. Pauper. Let's not mince words.

THE LANDLADY. Oh, please, no sentimental rubbish. I'm speaking about her conduct, not her earnings. There must have been earnings, or this store wouldn't be here. Several elderly gentlemen must have taken care of that. How does one get a store at all? Sir, this is a respectable house! The people who pay rent here don't wish to live under the same roof with such a person. Yes, sir. (*pause*) I'm not a monster but I've got to be careful.

SHUI TA (*coldly*). Mrs. Mi Tzu, I'm busy. Just tell me how much it'll cost us to live in this respectable house.

THE LANDLADY. You're a cool customer, I must say.

SHUI TA (*taking the lease from the counter*). The rent is very high. I assume from the contract that it's payable by the month.

THE LANDLADY (*quickly*). Not for people like your cousin!

SHUI TA. What do you mean?

THE LANDLADY. I mean that people like your cousin must pay the half-yearly rent of two hundred silver dollars in advance.

SHUI TA. Two hundred silver dollars! Sheer usury! How am I to get it? I can't count on a large turnover here. My only hope lies in the sack makers at the cement factory. I've been told they smoke a lot because their work is exhausting. But then, *they* don't earn much either.

THE LANDLADY. You should have thought of that earlier.

SHUI TA. Mrs. Mi Tzu, have a heart! It's true, my cousin has made the unpardonable mistake of giving shelter to unfortunate persons. But she can improve. I'll see to it that she improves. And, tell me, how could you find a better tenant than one who knows the depths because she comes from them? She'll work her fingers to the bone to pay the rent on time. She'll do everything, sacrifice everything, sell everything, shun nothing, and all the time she'll be as humble as a little mouse and as quiet as a fly. She'll give way to you in anything before she'll go back where she came from. Such a tenant is worth her weight in gold.

THE LANDLADY. Two hundred silver dollars payable in advance or she'll go back on the streets where she came from!

(*Enter the Policeman.*)

THE POLICEMAN. Don't let me disturb you, Mr. Shui Ta!

THE LANDLADY. The police certainly display a great interest in this store.

THE POLICEMAN. Mrs. Mi Tzu, I hope you haven't got the wrong impression. Mr. Shui Ta has done us a service and I'm coming solely to thank him for it in the name of the police.

THE LANDLADY. Well, that's nothing to me. I hope, Mr. Shui Ta, that my proposal will be agreeable to your cousin. I like to be on good terms with my tenants. Good day, gentlemen.
(*Exit.*)

SHUI TA. Good day, Mrs. Mi Tzu.

THE POLICEMAN. Are you having difficulties with Mrs. Mi Tzu.

SHUI TA. She's demanding the rent in advance because my cousin doesn't seem to her respectable.

THE POLICEMAN. And you don't have the money? (*Shui Ta is silent.*) But surely a man like you, Mr. Shui Ta, can get credit?

SHUI TA. Perhaps. But how can a woman like Shen Te get credit?

THE POLICEMAN. Aren't you staying?

SHUI TA. No. I can't come back either. I can lend her a helping hand only on my trip through town. I can only ward off the

worst. Soon she'll have to rely on herself again. I'm wondering what will happen then? I'm worried.

THE POLICEMAN. Mr. Shui Ta, I'm sorry you're in difficulties with the rent. I must admit that at first we looked at this store with mixed feelings. But your courageous behavior a little while ago showed us what you're made of. The authorities soon find out who they can trust.

SHUI TA (*bitterly*). Officer, in order to save this little store, which my cousin regards as a gift of the gods, I'm ready to go to the very limit permitted by law. But hardness and cunning help only against inferiors. The lines are drawn cleverly. I feel like the man who dealt with the rats, only to find himself with rivers to cross. (*After a little pause*) Do you smoke?

THE POLICEMAN (*putting two cigars into his pocket*). Us fellows at the station would hate to lose you, Mr. Shui Ta. But you've got to understand Mrs. Mi Tzu. Shen Te — let's not beat about the bush — lived by selling herself to men. You can object: what else could she have done? How, for instance, was she to pay her rent? But the fact remains: it isn't respectable. Why not? First: one doesn't sell love — beware of the love that's for sale! Second: it's respectable to go with someone you love but not with someone who's paying for it! Third: the proverb says, not for a handful of rice but for love! Well, you'll answer, what good is all this wisdom once the milk is spilt? What can she do? She's got to get hold of her half-year's rent or she'll be back on the streets. And how's she to get hold of the rent? Mr. Shui Ta, I have to tell you, I don't know. (*He's busy thinking.*) Mr. Shui Ta, I've got it! Find her a husband!

(*Enter a little old woman.*)

THE OLD WOMAN. A good cheap cigar for my husband. We'll have been married forty years tomorrow, you see, and we're having a little celebration.

SHUI TA (*politely*). Forty years, and you still want to celebrate!

THE OLD WOMAN. As far as our means allow! We own the carpet store across from here. I hope we'll be good neighbors. We should be. Times are bad.

SHUI TA (*showing her various boxes*). A very old saying, I fear.

THE POLICEMAN. Mr. Shui Ta, we need capital. Well, I propose a marriage.

SHUI TA (*apologetically to the Old Woman*). I've let myself be persuaded to bother this gentleman with my personal worries.

THE POLICEMAN. We can't pay the half-year's rent. Very well. We marry a little money.

SHUI TA. That won't be easy.

THE POLICEMAN. Why not? She's a good match. She's got a small, growing store. (*To the Old Woman*) What do you think about it?

THE OLD WOMAN (*undecidedly*). Yes . . .

THE POLICEMAN. An ad in the paper!

THE OLD WOMAN (*reticently*). If the young lady agrees . . .

THE POLICEMAN. What should she have against it? I'll make out the ad. One good turn deserves another. Don't think the authorities aren't concerned with the struggling small businessman! You lend us a helping hand and in return we make up a matrimonial ad for you! Ha! ha! ha!

(*He eagerly takes out his notebook, wets the stump of a pencil, and writes away.*)

SHUI TA (*slowly*). It's not a bad idea.

THE POLICEMAN. "What . . . decent . . . man with small capital . . . widower . . . not excluded . . . wishes . . . marriage . . . into flourishing tobacco store?" And then we'll add: "am . . . pretty . . . pleasant appearance." How's that?

SHUI TA. If you don't think that's an exaggeration . . .

THE OLD WOMAN (*kindly*). Not at all. I've seen her.

(*The Policeman tears the page out of his notebook and hands it to Shui Ta.*)

SHUI TA. With horror I see how much luck one needs to keep above water. How many ideas! How many friends! (*To the Policeman*) Despite my determination, I was at the end of my tether as far as the store rent was concerned. But then you came and helped me with good advice. Truly, now I see a way out!

Evening in the city park. A young man — Yang Sun — in ragged clothes follows with his eyes an airplane which seems to be describing a curve high over the city park. He takes a rope out of his pocket and looks carefully around. As he is going toward a large willow, two prostitutes come along. The one is already old, the other is the niece from the family that has imposed itself on Shen Te.

THE YOUNG ONE. Good evening, young gentleman. Coming with me, dearie?

SUN. Perhaps, ladies. If you buy me something to eat.

THE OLD ONE. You're nuts, aren't you? *(To the Young One)*
Let's go on. We're only wasting our time with him. He's the unemployed pilot.

THE YOUNG ONE. But no one else will be left in the park, it'll rain in a minute.

THE OLD ONE. You never know.

(They go on. Sun, looking about, pulls out his rope and throws it round a willow branch. But again he is disturbed. The two prostitutes are coming quickly back. They don't see him.)

THE YOUNG ONE. It's going to pour.

(Shen Te comes walking along.)

THE OLD ONE. Look, here comes the monster! She brought disaster to you and your family!

THE YOUNG ONE. It wasn't her. It was her cousin. She took us in and later offered to pay for the cakes. I have nothing against her.

THE OLD ONE. But I have! *(loudly)* Ah, here's our dear rich sister! She's got a store but she still wants to snatch our boy friends away.

SHEN TE. Now don't bite my head off. I'm going to the tearoom by the pond.

THE YOUNG ONE. Is it true you're going to marry a widower with three children?

SHEN TE. Yes, I'm meeting him there.

SUN (*impatiently*). Won't you get going, you whores! Can't a man be at peace even here?

THE OLD ONE. Shut your trap!

(*Exeunt the two prostitutes.*)

SUN (*calling after them*). Vultures! (*To the audience*) Even at this remote spot they don't tire of fishing for victims! Even in the bushes, even when it's raining, they desperately search for customers!

SHEN TE (*angrily*). Why do you swear at them? (*She notices the rope.*) Oh!

SUN. What are you gaping at?

SHEN TE. What's the rope for?

SUN. Go on, sister, go on! I've no money, nothing, not even a penny. And if I had a penny, I wouldn't buy you. First I'd buy a cup of water.

(*It starts raining.*)

SHEN TE. What's the rope for? You mustn't do that!

SUN. What's that to you? Clear off!

SHEN TE. It's raining.

SUN. Don't you try to come under this tree.

SHEN TE (*who stays standing in the rain without moving*). No.

SUN. Sister, leave it, it won't help you. You can't do business with me. You're too ugly for me anyway. Crooked legs.

SHEN TE. That isn't true.

SUN. Don't show them! If it's raining, for heaven's sake come under the tree!

(*She goes slowly under the tree and sits down.*)

SHEN TE. Why did you want to do it?

SUN. Do you want to know? Then I'll tell you: to get rid of you.

(*pause*) Do you know what it is to be a flier?

SHEN TE. Yes, I've seen pilots in a tearoom.

SUN. No, you haven't. Perhaps you've seen a couple of conceited idiots with leather helmets, fellows with no ear for a motor, no sense for a machine. They only get into a plane because they know how to bribe the manager at the airport. Tell one of them: "Take your plane two thousand feet up,

let it fall down through the clouds, and then catch it with one flick of the wrist," and he'll say: "That's not in the contract." If you fly, and you don't land your plane as if you were landing on your own rear end, you are not a flier but a fool. I am a flier. And I'm also the biggest fool for reading all those books on flying in the school at Peking and missing out on one page of one book which says that there's no need for fliers any more. And so I'm a flier without a plane, a mail pilot without mail. *You can't understand what that means.*

SHEN TE. I think I can.

SUN. No, I'm telling you, you can't understand it. That means you can't understand it.

SHEN TE (*half laughing, half crying*). When we were children we had a crane with a lame wing. He was friendly and didn't mind our jokes. He strutted along behind us, crying out to us not to run too fast. But in the fall and in the spring when large swarms of cranes were flying over the village, he became very restless. And I could understand why. (*She weeps.*)

SUN. Don't howl.

SHEN TE. No.

SUN. It hurts the complexion.

SHEN TE. I'm stopping.

(She dries her tears with her sleeve. Leaning against the tree, and without turning toward her, he reaches for her face.)

SUN. You don't even know how to wipe your face properly.

(He wipes it for her with a handkerchief. Pause.)

SUN. If you *had* to stay here so I wouldn't hang myself, you might at least open your mouth.

SHEN TE. I don't know anything.

SUN. Why exactly do you want to cut me down from the tree, sister?

SHEN TE. I'm frightened. I'm sure you only wanted to do it because the evening is so gloomy. (*To the audience*)

In our country

There should be no gloomy evenings.

High bridges over the river
The hour between night and morning
And the long winter: they too are dangerous.
For with all the misery
A little is enough
And men throw away
The unbearable life.

SUN. Talk about yourself.

SHEN TE. What about me? I have a little store.

SUN (*mocking*). Oh, you don't walk the streets, you have a store!

SHEN TE (*determinedly*). I have a store now, but, before, I was on the streets.

SUN. And the store was a gift of the gods, I suppose?

SHEN TE. Yes.

SUN. One nice evening they were standing there and saying:
Here's some money?

SHEN TE (*laughing softly*). One morning.

SUN. You're not exactly entertaining.

SHEN TE (*after a pause*). I can play the zither a little, and I can mimic people. (*In a low voice she imitates a man of dignity.*) "Well, think of that, I must have left my money at home!" But then I got the store. And the first thing I did was to give away my zither. Now, I said to myself, I can be as dumb as a fish and it won't make any difference.

I'm rich now, I said.

I walk alone, I sleep alone.

For a whole year, I said,

I'll have nothing to do with a man.

SUN. But now you're marrying one? The one in the tearoom by the pond?

(*Shen Te is silent.*)

SUN. What exactly do you know of love?

SHEN TE. Everything.

SUN. Nothing, sister. (*pause*) Or perhaps you liked it?

SHEN TE. No.

SUN (*without turning toward her, he strokes her face with his hand*). Is that pleasant?

SHEN TE. Yes.

SUN. You're easily satisfied, I must say. What a town!

SHEN TE. Don't you have any friends?

SUN. Lots, but none who want to hear I'm still without a job.

They make a face as if someone was complaining that there's still water in the ocean. Do *you* have a friend maybe?

SHEN TE (*hesitantly*). A cousin.

SUN. Then beware of him.

SHEN TE. He's only been here once. Now he's gone away and he'll never be back. But why are you talking so despairingly? To speak without hope, they say, is to speak without goodness.

SUN. Just go on talking. A voice, after all, is a voice.

SHEN TE (*eagerly*). Despite the great misery, there are still kind people. Once, when I was little, I fell down with a load of brushwood. An old man picked me up. He gave me a penny too. I've often thought of that. Especially those who don't have much to eat like to give some away. People probably like to show what they can do, and how could they show it better than by being kind? Being wicked is just being clumsy. When someone sings a song or builds a machine or plants some rice, that's really a sort of kindness. And you're kind, too.

SUN. It doesn't seem hard to be kind in your eyes.

SHEN TE. No. Just now I felt a raindrop.

SUN. Where.

SHEN TE. Between the eyes.

SUN. Nearer the right one or nearer the left?

SHEN TE. Nearer the left.

SUN. Good. (*After a while, sleepily*) And you're through with men?

SHEN TE (*smiling*). But my legs aren't crooked.

SUN. Perhaps not.

SHEN TE. Definitely not.

SUN (*tired, leaning against the tree*). I haven't eaten anything

for two days or drunk anything for one. So I couldn't love you, sister, even if I wanted to.

SHEN TE. It's lovely in the rain.

(*Wang, the water seller, appears. He sings.*)

THE SONG OF THE WATER SELLER IN THE RAIN

I'm selling water, water,
And I stand here in the rain.
For such a little water
I've suffered too much pain.
And I shout: "Buy water!"
But nobody's buying
Parched and dying
And drinking and paying!
Buy water, you dogs!

O how I wish the rain would stop!
Last night in bed I dreamt again
That seven years passed without any rain.
I doled out water by the drop.
O how they shouted: "Water, water!"
Each man who came to my place
I looked him over to see whether
I really liked his face.
How their tongues hung out!

(*laughing*)

And now reclining on their backs
The little plants and such
Drink at the udder of the clouds
And never ask: How much?
And I shout: "Buy water!"
But nobody's buying
Parched and dying
And drinking and paying!
Buy water, you dogs!

(*The rain has stopped. Shen Te sees Wang and runs toward him.*)

SHEN TE. Oh, Wang, are you back again? I've got your carrying pole at home.

WANG. Thank you very much for keeping it! How are you, Shen Te?

SHEN TE. I'm well. I've met a very clever and brave man. And I'd like to buy a cup of your water.

WANG. Put your head back and open your mouth and you'll have as much water as you want. The willow over there is still dripping.

SHEN TE.

But I want your water, Wang,

The water carried from far

The water that has made you tired

The water that will be hard to sell because it is raining.

And I need it for the gentleman over there.

He is a pilot.

A pilot is bolder than other men.

In the clouds' company!

Braving the great storms

He flies through the skies

And brings to friends in far-off lands

The friendly mail.

(She pays and runs over to Sun with the cup.)

SHEN TE *(calling back, laughing, to Wang)*. He's fallen asleep.

Despair and rain and I have made him tired.

3·A

Wang's sleeping quarters in a sewer pipe. The water seller is asleep. Music. The sewer pipe becomes transparent and the Gods appear to the dreaming Wang.

WANG *(radiantly)*. I've seen her, illustrious ones! She's still the same!

THE FIRST GOD. We're glad to hear it.

WANG. She loves! She's shown me her friend. She's really well off.

THE FIRST GOD. That's good to hear. Let's hope it will give her strength in her striving toward the good.

WANG. Absolutely! She does as many good deeds as she can.

THE FIRST GOD. What sort of good deeds? Tell us about it, my dear Wang!

WANG. She has a kind word for everyone.

THE FIRST GOD (*eagerly*). Yes, and . . . ?

WANG. It seldom happens that anyone leaves her little store without tobacco just because he has no money.

THE FIRST GOD. That doesn't sound bad. Anything else?

WANG. She gave lodging to a family of eight!

THE FIRST GOD (*triumphantly to the Second*). Eight! (*To Wang*) And something else perhaps?

WANG. She bought a cup of water from me, even though it was raining.

THE FIRST GOD. Of course, all these smaller good deeds. That's understood.

WANG. But they run into money. A little store doesn't make so much.

THE FIRST GOD. Yes, surely. But a prudent gardener can produce miracles even on a tiny plot.

WANG. She really does that! Every morning she hands out rice, and believe me, it takes more than half her earnings!

THE FIRST GOD (*a little disappointed*). I'm not saying anything. And for a beginning, I'm not dissatisfied.

WANG. Just think, times aren't exactly good! Once, her store got into difficulties and she had to call a cousin to her aid.

As soon as there was a place that was shielded
from the wind

The ruffled birds of the whole wintry sky

Came flying and fought for the place

And the hungry fox bit through the thin wall

And the one-legged wolf tipped the small dish over.

In short, she couldn't manage all the business herself any

more. But they all agree that she's a good girl. Everywhere she's called the Angel of the Suburbs already. So much good comes from her store. Whatever the carpenter Lin To may say!

THE FIRST GOD. What does that mean? Does the carpenter Lin To speak badly of her?

WANG. Oh, he only says that the shelves in the store weren't paid for in full.

THE SECOND GOD. What are you saying now? A carpenter wasn't paid? In Shen Te's store? How could she allow that?

WANG. I guess she didn't have the money.

THE SECOND GOD. All the same one pays what one owes. The mere appearance of injustice has to be avoided. First the letter of the commandment must be fulfilled. Then the spirit.

WANG. But it was only her cousin, illustrious one, not she herself!

THE SECOND GOD. Then that cousin must never cross her threshold again!

WANG (*downcast*). I understand, illustrious one! In defense of Shen Te, let me at least say that her cousin is considered a highly respectable businessman. Even the police value him.

THE FIRST GOD. Well, we don't want to damn this cousin without having heard him. I admit I don't understand anything about business. Perhaps one should make inquiries to find out what is customary. But anyway, business — is it so very necessary? They're always doing business nowadays! Did the Seven Good Kings do business? Did the Kung the Just sell fish? What does business have to do with an honest and dignified life?

THE SECOND GOD (*with a bad cold*). In any case such a thing must not happen again. (*He turns to go. The two other Gods turn too.*)

THE THIRD GOD (*the last to turn away, embarrassed*). You must forgive our harsh tone today. We're over-tired and haven't slept enough. Lodgings for the night! The wealthy give us the very best of recommendations to the poor, but the poor don't have enough room.

THE GODS (*moving away, grumbling*). Weak, the best of them! Nothing decisive! Little, little! Everything from the heart, of course, but it doesn't amount to much! At least, she should see that . . .

(*One no longer hears them.*)

WANG (*calling after them*). Oh, don't be angry, illustrious ones! Don't ask too much all at once!

4

The square in front of Shen Te's tobacco store. A barber's shop, a carpet store, and Shen Te's tobacco store. It is morning. In front of Shen Te's store, two of the family of eight, the Grandfather and the Sister-in-law, are waiting. Waiting also are the Unemployed and Mrs. Shin.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW. She didn't come home last night!

MRS. SHIN. Unbelievable behavior! At last this crazy cousin has gone away and madam deigns, now and then at least, to give us a little bit of rice out of all her abundance. But already she's staying out all night, loitering around, God knows where!

(*Loud voices are heard from the barber's. Wang stumbles out, followed by the fat barber, Mr. Shu Fu, who is carrying a heavy curling iron.*)

MR. SHU FU. I'll teach you to bother my customers with your smelly water! Take your cup and get going!

(*Wang reaches for the cup held out by Mr. Shu Fu, who hits him on the hand with the curling iron. Wang cries out with pain.*)

MR. SHU FU. There you have it! Let it be a lesson to you! (*He goes puffing back into his store.*)

THE UNEMPLOYED (*picking up the cup and handing it to Wang*). You can report him to the police for hitting you like that.

WANG. My hand's smashed.

THE UNEMPLOYED. Is something broken?

WANG. I can't move it.

THE UNEMPLOYED. Sit down and pour a little water over it!
(*Wang sits down.*)

MRS. SHIN. You get the water cheap, anyway.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW. You can't even get a little linen rag here at eight in the morning. She's got to go out! Adventures! What a scandal!

MRS. SHIN (*gloomily*). She's forgotten us!

(*Shen Te comes down the street carrying a dish of rice.*)

SHEN TE (*to the audience*). I've never seen the town in the early morning before. At this hour I used to lie in bed with a dirty blanket over my head, afraid of waking up. Today I walked among the newspaper boys, among the men who rinse the pavement with water, and among the ox carts that bring fresh vegetables from the country. I've walked a long way from Sun's neighborhood over here, but I've been getting merrier at every step. I've always been told that if you're in love you walk on clouds, but the best thing is walking on the earth, on the pavement. I tell you, in the morning rows of houses look like rubbish heaps with lights on them. The sky is pink and transparent because there's no dust yet. I tell you, you miss much if you don't love, if you don't see your Setzuan at the hour when it rises from sleep like a sober old craftsman pumping his lungs full of fresh air and reaching for his tools, as the poets say. (*To the waiting people*) Good morning! Here's the rice! (*She distributes the rice, then notices Wang.*) Good morning, Wang. I'm quite light-headed today. On the way home I looked at myself in every shop window, and now I feel like buying a shawl. (*After hesitating a little*) I'd so much like to be beautiful. (*She quickly goes into the carpet store.*)

MR. SHU FU (*who has stepped out again, to the audience*). I'm

quite surprised to note how beautiful Miss Shen Te looks today. She's the owner of the tobacco store across the street and I've never really noticed her before. I've been looking at her for three minutes and I think I'm already in love with her. An incredibly attractive person! (*To Wang*) Clear off, you rascal! (*He goes back into his store. Shen Te, the Old Woman, and her husband the carpet dealer step out of the carpet store. Shen Te is wearing a shawl, the carpet dealer is holding out a mirror.*)

THE OLD WOMAN. It's very pretty and not expensive because it has a little hole at the bottom.

SHEN TE (*looking at the shawl on the Old Woman's arm*). The green one's nice too.

THE OLD WOMAN (*smiling*). But unfortunately not the least bit damaged.

SHEN TE. Yes, that's a shame. I can't spend too much, with my small store. I only take in a little and the expenses are great.

THE OLD WOMAN. It's good deeds that cost you so much. Be careful. In the beginning, every dish of rice counts, doesn't it?

SHEN TE (*trying on the shawl with the little hole in it*). Well, that's how things are. But at the moment I'm light-headed. I wonder if this color suits me?

THE OLD WOMAN. That's a question to put to a *man*.

SHEN TE (*turning to the Old Man*). Does it suit me?

THE OLD MAN. Why don't you ask . . .

SHEN TE (*very politely*). No, I'm asking you.

THE OLD MAN (*also politely*). The shawl suits you. But wear it with the dull side turned out.

(*Shen Te pays.*)

THE OLD WOMAN. If you don't like it, you can always exchange it. (*She pulls her aside.*) Does he have any money?

SHEN TE (*laughing*). Oh no!

THE OLD WOMAN. Then how will you be able to pay the rent?

SHEN TE. The rent? I'd completely forgotten it!

THE OLD WOMAN. I thought as much. And next Monday is the first of the month. I'd like to talk something over with you.

You know, my husband and I had a few doubts about the marriage ad after we got to know you. We decided to help you out if it comes to the worst. We've put aside a little money and can lend you two hundred silver dollars. If you wish you can pledge us your stock of tobacco. Of course we don't need a written agreement.

SHEN TE. Do you really want to lend money to a light-headed person like me?

THE OLD WOMAN. Well, to be honest, we might not lend it to your cousin — who's definitely not light-headed. But we don't worry about lending it to you.

THE OLD MAN (*stepping up to them*). Settled?

SHEN TE. I wish the gods could have heard your wife just now, Mr. Ma. They're looking for good people who're happy. And you must be happy helping me, for it was love that got me into trouble.

(*The old couple smile at each other.*)

THE OLD MAN. Here's the money.

(*He hands her an envelope. Shen Te takes it and bows. The old couple bow too. They go back into their store.*)

SHEN TE (*to Wang, holding up her envelope*). This is the rent for half a year! Isn't it just like a miracle? And how do you like my new shawl, Wang?

WANG. Did you buy it for the fellow I saw in the city park?

(*Shen Te nods.*)

MRS. SHIN. Maybe you better take a look at his smashed hand? Never mind telling him your doubtful adventures!

SHEN TE (*taken aback*). What's the matter with your hand?

MRS. SHIN. The barber smashed it with a curling iron in front of our eyes.

SHEN TE (*horrified at her negligence*). And I didn't notice anything! You must go to the doctor this minute or your hand will get stiff and you'll never be able to work properly again. What a terrible misfortune! Quick, get up! Go, quickly!

THE UNEMPLOYED. It's not the doctor he should go to but the judge! He can demand compensation from the barber, he's rich.

WANG. You think there's a chance?

MRS. SHIN. If it's really smashed. But is it?

WANG. I think so. It's swollen up already. Maybe I could get a pension?

MRS. SHIN. Of course you've got to have a witness.

WANG. But you *all* saw it! You could *all* testify?

(He looks round. The Unemployed, the Grandfather, and the Sister-in-law sit by the wall of the house and eat. Nobody looks up.)

SHEN TE *(to Mrs. Shin)*. But you saw it yourself!

MRS. SHIN. I don't want anything to do with the police.

SHEN TE *(to the Sister-in-law)*. What about you?

THE SISTER-IN-LAW. Me? I wasn't looking!

MRS. SHIN. Of course you were! I saw you! But you're afraid because the barber's a big shot.

SHEN TE *(to the Grandfather)*. I'm sure *you'll* testify!

THE SISTER-IN-LAW. His testimony won't be accepted. He's gaga.

SHEN TE *(to the Unemployed)*. It might be a matter of a pension for life.

THE UNEMPLOYED. I've been picked up twice for begging. *My* testimony would only do him harm.

SHEN TE *(not quite believing)*. So none of you want to say what happened? His hand was smashed in broad daylight, all of you were watching, and nobody wants to speak! *(Angrily)*

Unhappy men!

Your brother is assaulted and you shut your eyes!

He is hit and cries aloud and you are silent?

The beast prowls, chooses his victim, and you say:

He's spared us because we do not show displeasure.

What sort of a city is this? What sort of people are you?

When injustice is done there should be revolt in the city.

And if there is no revolt, it were better that the city should perish in fire before night falls!

Wang, if no one present will be your witness, I will. I'll say *I* saw it.

MRS. SHIN. That'll be perjury.

WANG. I don't know if I can accept this. Though maybe I'll have to. (*Looking at his hand, worried*) Do you think it's swollen enough? I think maybe the swelling's gone down now?

THE UNEMPLOYED (*reassuring him*). No, the swelling definitely hasn't gone down.

WANG. Hasn't it? No, I guess it's *more* swollen, if anything. Maybe my wrist is broken after all! I'd better run to the judge this minute.

(*Carefully holding his hand and looking at it all the time, he runs off. Mrs. Shin runs into the barber's shop.*)

THE UNEMPLOYED. She wants to get on the right side of the barber.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW. We can't change the world.

SHEN TE (*discouraged*). I didn't want to scold you. I'm only afraid. No, I *did* want to scold. Get out of my sight!

(*The Unemployed, the Sister-in-law, and the Grandfather go off, eating and sulking.*)

SHEN TE (*to the audience*).

They no longer answer.

Where one puts them they stay

And if one sends them away

They quickly go.

Nothing moves their hearts.

Only the smell of food can make them look up.

(*An oldish woman comes running in.*)

THE OLDISH WOMAN (*out of breath*). Are you Miss Shen Te? My son. Has told me everything. I am. Sun's mother, Mrs. Yang. Just think, he has. A chance now. To get a job as flier. This morning. Just now a letter. Came from Peking. From the manager of the airmail service.

SHEN TE. He can fly again? Oh, Mrs. Yang!

MRS. YANG. But the job. Costs a lot of money. Five hundred silver dollars.

SHEN TE. That's a lot, but money mustn't stand in the way of a thing like that. After all, I've got the store!

MRS. YANG. If you could only do something!

SHEN TE (*embracing her*). If only I could!

MRS. YANG. You would give a talented young man a chance?

SHEN TE. How can they prevent a man from being useful?

(*After a pause*) Only I won't get enough for the store, and these two hundred silver dollars cash are just borrowed. Take them with you at once. I'll pay them back by selling my tobacco stock. (*She gives her the old couple's money.*)

MRS. YANG. Oh, Miss Shen Te, that really is help at the right moment! And they were calling him the Dead Flier of Set-zuan, they were all so convinced he'd never do any more flying!

SHEN TE. But we need three hundred silver dollars more for the job. We've got to think, Mrs. Yang. (*Slowly*) I know someone who might be able to help me. Someone who helped me out once before. I didn't really want to call him again, he's so hard and cunning. It would certainly have to be the last time. But a flier's got to fly, that's clear.

(*Distant sound of engines.*)

MRS. YANG. If the man you're talking about could get the money! Look; that's the morning mail plane, going to Peking!

SHEN TE (*decisively*). Wave, Mrs. Yang! I'm sure the pilot can see us! (*She waves with her shawl.*) You wave too!

MRS. YANG (*waving*). You know the pilot who's flying up there?

SHEN TE. No. I know the pilot who *shall* be up there. He gave up hope but he *shall* fly, Mrs. Yang. One at least shall raise himself above this misery and above us all! (*To the audience*)

Yang Sun, my lover,
In the clouds' company!
Braving the great storms
Flying through the skies
And bringing to friends in distant lands
The friendly mail.

Before the curtain. Shen Te appears with the suit and mask of Shui Ta in her hands. She sings.

**THE SONG OF THE DEFENSELESSNESS OF
THE GODS AND GOOD MEN**

In our country
The useful man needs luck.
Only if he finds strong helpers
Can he prove himself useful.
Good men can't help themselves
And the gods are powerless.
Why don't the gods have mines and cannon
Battleships, bombers, and tanks?
Bring down the bad and save the good?
Shouldn't we all give thanks?

(She puts on Shui Ta's suit and takes a few steps in his manner.)

Good men
Cannot long remain good in our country.
Where plates are empty, the diners fight.
Alas, the commandments of the gods
Are no use against want.
Why don't the gods appear in our markets
And, smiling, distribute the plentiful food?
Let every man eat and drink at his pleasure
And be to his brother loving and good?

(She puts on the mask of Shui Ta and now sings with his voice.)

To procure a dinner
You must be hard as builders of empire.
Without trampling down twelve others
You cannot help one poor man.

Why then don't the gods speak up in their heaven
And say that they owe the good world to good men?
Why don't they stand by good men with their bombers
Fire their guns and suffer no suffering then?

5

The tobacco store. Shui Ta sits behind the counter reading the paper. He doesn't pay the least attention to Mrs. Shin, who is cleaning up and talking at the same time.

MRS. SHIN. A little store like this soon comes to ruin when certain rumors start spreading in the neighborhood. Believe me. It's high time that a decent man like you started looking into this dubious affair between Miss Shen Te and that Yang Sun from Yellow Street. Don't forget Mr. Shu Fu, the barber next door, a man with twelve houses and only one wife, and she's old, only yesterday confessed a certain interest in Miss Shen Te. A very flattering interest, I thought. He even inquired about her means. And that, if I may say so, proves real affection.

(Since she gets no answer, she finally goes out with the bucket.)

SUN'S VOICE *(from outside)*. Is that Miss Shen Te's store?

MRS. SHIN'S VOICE. Yes, this is it. But today her cousin's here.

(With the light steps of Shen Te, Shui Ta runs to a mirror. She is just about to start fixing her hair when she notices the mistake in the mirror. She turns away laughing softly. Enter Yang Sun. Behind him comes the inquisitive Mrs. Shin. She goes past him into the back room.)

SUN. I'm Yang Sun. *(Shui Ta bows.)* Is Shen Te here?

SHUI TA. No, she's not.

SUN. I guess you know what our relationship is? (*He begins to inspect the store.*) A real live store! I always thought she was just talking big. (*He looks with satisfaction into the little boxes and china jars.*) Man, I'm going to fly again! (*He takes a cigar and Shui Ta gives him a light.*) D'you think we can squeeze another three hundred silver dollars out of the store?

SHUI TA. May I ask if you intend to sell it right away?

SUN. Well, do we have the three hundred in cash? (*Shui Ta shakes his head.*) It was decent of her to come right out with the two hundred. But with three hundred still missing, they won't be much use.

SHUI TA. Perhaps it was rather rash of her to promise you the money. It may cost her the store. Haste, they say, is the name of the wind that knocks down the scaffolding.

SUN. I need the money quickly or not at all. And the girl isn't one to keep you waiting either. For one thing or another, you get me?

SHUI TA. I get you.

SUN. Uh-huh.

SHUI TA. May I know what the five hundred silver dollars will be used for?

SUN. Sure. I see I'm to be sounded out. The manager at the Peking airport is a friend of mine from flying school. He can get me the job if I cough up five hundred silver dollars.

SHUI TA. Is not that sum unusually high?

SUN. No. He'll have to fire one of his present pilots. For negligence. And the fellow he has in mind isn't negligent, because he's got a large family. You understand. All this, by the way, in confidence. Shen Te needn't know it.

SHUI TA. Perhaps not. Just one thing—won't that manager sell you out next month?

SUN. Not me. There won't be any negligence in my work. I was unemployed long enough.

SHUI TA (*nodding*). The hungry dog pulls the cart home faster. (*He scrutinizes him.*) The responsibility is very great. Mr. Yang Sun, you ask my cousin to give up her small posses-

sions, to leave all her friends in this town, and to put her entire fate into your hands. I assume you intend to marry Shen Te?

SUN. I'd be prepared to.

SHUI TA. But isn't it a pity, then, to get rid of the store for a few silver dollars? We won't get much for it if we have to sell at once. The two hundred silver dollars you have in your hands would pay the rent for half a year. Wouldn't that tempt you to continue in the tobacco business?

SUN. Would it tempt *me*? Is Yang Sun, the flier, to be seen standing behind the counter: "Do you wish a strong cigar or a mild one, worthy sir?" That's no business for the Yang Sun's, not in this century!

SHUI TA. Allow me to ask, is flying very profitable?

SUN (*pulling a letter out of his pocket*). Sir, I'd get two hundred and fifty silver dollars a month! Look at the letter yourself. Here's the stamp and the postmark. Peking.

SHUI TA. Two hundred and fifty silver dollars? That's a lot.

SUN. Do you think I fly for nothing?

SHUI TA. The job seems to be good. Mr. Yang Sun, my cousin has commissioned me to help you to this post which means so much to you. From her own point of view, I cannot see any good reason why she shouldn't follow the inclinations of her heart. She has every right to experience the joys of love. I'm prepared to turn everything here to money. Here comes the landlady, Mrs. Mi Tzu, whom I'll ask to advise me about the sale.

THE LANDLADY (*entering*). Good day, Mr. Shui Ta. I suppose it's about the rent which is due the day after tomorrow?

SHUI TA. Mrs. Mi Tzu, circumstances have arisen which make it look doubtful whether my cousin will keep her store. She's planning to marry, and her future husband (*he introduces Yang Sun*), Mr. Yang Sun, will take her to Peking where they are to start a new life. If I can get enough for my tobacco, I shall sell out.

THE LANDLADY. How much do you need?

SUN. Three hundred down.

SHUI TA (*quickly*). No, five hundred!

THE LANDLADY (*to Sun*). Perhaps I'll be able to help you. How much did your tobacco cost?

SHUI TA. My cousin paid a thousand silver dollars for it and very little has been sold.

THE LANDLADY. A thousand silver dollars! She was gypped of course. I'll tell you something: I'll pay you three hundred silver dollars for the whole store if you move out the day after tomorrow.

SUN. We'll do that. It'll work, old man!

SHUI TA. It's too little.

SUN. It's enough!

SHUI TA. I've got to have at least five hundred.

SUN. What for?

SHUI TA (*to the Landlady*). Allow me to talk something over with my cousin's fiancé. (*Aside to Sun*) All the tobacco here has been pledged to two old people for the two hundred silver dollars which were given to you yesterday.

SUN. Is there a written agreement?

SHUI TA. No.

SUN (*to the Landlady*). We can manage with three hundred.

THE LANDLADY. But I've got to know whether the store is in debt.

SUN. You answer!

SHUI TA. The store is not in debt.

SUN. When can the three hundred be had?

THE LANDLADY. The day after tomorrow, and you can still think it over. You'll get more if you don't sell in such a rush. I'll pay three hundred, but only because I want to do my share in what seems to be a case of young love. (*Exit.*)

SUN (*calling after her*). We'll make the deal! Little boxes, jars and sacks, everything for three hundred and the pain's over. (*To Shui Ta*) Perhaps some other place we can get more by the day after tomorrow?

SHUI TA. Not in such a short time. We won't have one silver dollar apart from the three hundred of Mrs. Mi Tzu. You have the money for the trip and the first few weeks?

SUN. Sure.

SHUI TA. How much is that?

SUN. I'll dig it up, anyway, even if I have to steal it!

SHUI TA. Oh, I see, this money too has to be dug up?

SUN. Don't fall out of your shoes, old man, I'll get to Peking somehow.

SHUI TA. It can't be so cheap for two people.

SUN. *Two* people? I'm leaving the girl behind. At first, she'll only be a millstone round my neck.

SHUI TA. I see.

SUN. Why d'you look at me as if I was a leaking oil tank? You've got to manage the best you can.

SHUI TA. And how is my cousin to live?

SUN. Can't *you* do something for her?

SHUI TA. I'll try. (*pause*) I wish, Mr. Yang Sun, you'd hand over to me the two hundred silver dollars and would leave them here till you can show me two tickets to Peking.

SUN. My dear man, I wish you'd mind your own business.

SHUI TA. Miss Shen Te . . .

SUN. Just leave the girl to me.

SHUI TA. . . . might not want to sell her store when she learns that . . .

SUN. She'll want to. Even then.

SHUI TA. And you're not afraid of my interference?

SUN. My dear sir!

SHUI TA. You seem to forget she's a human being and has got some sense.

SUN (*amused*). What certain people think about their female relatives and the effect of reasonable persuasion has always been a source of wonder to me. Have you ever heard of the power of love? The tickling of the flesh? You want to talk reason to her? She doesn't know what reason is! On the other hand, the poor creature's been abused all her life. I've only to put my hand on her shoulder and say "you're coming with me" and she hears bells and wouldn't know her own mother.

SHUI TA (*with difficulty*). Mr. Yang Sun!

SUN. Mr. What's-your-name!

SHUI TA. My cousin is devoted to you because . . .

SUN. Shall we say because I've got my hand on her bosom? Put that in your pipe and smoke it! (*He takes another cigar, then puts a few in his pocket, and finally takes the whole box under his arm.*) Don't you go to her with empty hands. We'll stick to the marriage. And she'll bring the three hundred or you'll bring them. Either she or you! (*Exit.*)

MRS. SHIN (*putting her head out of the back room*). Not exactly pleasant. And all of Yellow Street knows he's got the girl completely under his thumb.

SHUI TA (*crying out*). The store's gone! He isn't in love! I'm lost! (*He begins to run round like an imprisoned animal, repeating, "The store's gone!" until he stops suddenly and begins to talk to Mrs. Shin.*) Shin, you grew up in the gutter and so did I. Are we frivolous? No. Do we lack the necessary brutality? No. I'm ready to take you by the throat and shake you till you spit out the last crumb of cheese you've stolen from me. You know that. The times are terrible, this town is hell, but gradually we manage to crawl up the smooth walls. Then bad luck overtakes one or another of us: he is in love. That's enough, he's lost. One weakness and you're finished. How are you to free yourself of *all* weaknesses, and especially of the deadliest of weaknesses, love? Love is absolutely impossible! It's much too expensive! But then, tell me yourself, can one live and be *always* on the watch? What sort of a world is this?

Caressees turn to strangulation.

The sigh of love turns to a cry of fear.

Why are the vultures circling over there?

A girl is going to meet her lover.

MRS. SHIN. I think I better go and get the barber right away. You've got to talk with the barber. He's a man of honor. The barber, he's the right one for your cousin.

(*Receiving no answer, she runs off. Shui Ta runs around again until Mr. Shu Fu enters, followed by Mrs. Shin, who, however, on a sign from Mr. Shu Fu, is forced to withdraw.*)

SHUI TA (*hurrying toward him*). My dear sir, I know from

hearsay that you have hinted at a certain interest in my cousin. Let me set aside all the laws of propriety and reserve: Miss Shen Te is at the moment in great danger.

MR. SHU FU. Oh!

SHUI TA. Only a few hours ago the possessor of her own store, my cousin is now little more than a beggar. Mr. Shu Fu, this store is ruined.

MR. SHU FU. Mr. Shui Ta, the charm of Miss Shen Te lies not in the goodness of her store but in the goodness of her heart. The name which this neighborhood has given to the young lady tells all. They call her the Angel of the Suburbs!

SHUI TA. My dear sir, this goodness has cost my cousin two hundred silver dollars on a single day. We have to put a stop to that.

MR. SHU FU. Allow me to express a different opinion: we've got to open the gates wide to this goodness. It's in the nature of the young lady to do good. Every morning I affectionately watch her feeding four people. What does that signify? Why can't she feed four hundred? I hear, for instance, that she's racking her brains about how to shelter some homeless people. My cabins behind the cattle run are empty. They're at her disposal. And so on and so forth . . . Mr. Shui Ta, might I hope that Miss Shen Te would lend an ear to certain ideas which have come to me in the last few days? Ideas like these?

SHUI TA. Mr. Shu Fu, she will listen to such high thoughts with admiration.

(Enter Wang with the Policeman. Mr. Shu Fu turns around and studies the shelves.)

WANG. Is Miss Shen Te here?

SHUI TA. No.

WANG. I am Wang, the water seller. I guess you're Mr. Shui Ta?

SHUI TA. Quite right. Good day, Wang.

WANG. I'm a friend of Shen Te's.

SHUI TA. You're one of her oldest friends, I know.

WANG *(to the Policeman)*. You see? *(To Shui Ta)* I'm coming because of my hand.

THE POLICEMAN. It's smashed all right. There's no doubt about it.

SHUI TA (*quickly*). I see you need a sling. (*He gets a shawl from the back room and throws it to Wang.*)

WANG. But that's her new shawl.

SHUI TA. She no longer needs it.

WANG. But she bought it to please a certain person.

SHUI TA. As things have turned out, that is no longer necessary.

WANG (*making himself a sling out of the shawl*). She's my only witness.

THE POLICEMAN. Your cousin's supposed to've seen how the barber Shu Fu hit the water seller with the curling iron. D'you know anything about it?

SHUI TA. I only know that my cousin wasn't present when the incident occurred.

WANG. That's a misunderstanding! Just wait till Shen Te's here and everything will be cleared up. Shen Te'll bear witness to everything. Where is she?

SHUI TA (*seriously*). Mr. Wang, you call yourself my cousin's friend. My cousin has a lot of worries right now. She's been terribly exploited from all sides. In the future, she won't be able to afford the smallest weakness. I'm convinced you won't ask her to lose all she has by making her say anything but the truth in this matter.

WANG (*confused*). But *she* advised me to go to the judge.

SHUI TA. Was the judge supposed to heal your hand? (*Mr. Shu Fu turns round.*) Mr. Wang, it's one of my principles never to meddle in the quarrels of my friends. (*Shui Ta bows to Mr. Shu Fu who returns the bow.*)

WANG (*taking off the sling and putting it back, sadly*). I understand.

THE POLICEMAN. And now I guess I can go again. You went to a decent man—the wrong fellow for your swindling. You better be a bit more careful next time, with your accusations. If Mr. Shu Fu didn't put mercy before justice, you could be jailed for libel. Off with you now.

(*Exeunt.*)

SHUI TA. I beg you to excuse this occurrence.

MR. SHU FU. It's excused. (*Urgently*) And this affair with a "certain person" (*he points to the shawl*) is really over? Completely finished?

SHUI TA. Completely. She's seen through him. Of course, it'll take time till she's got over everything.

MR. SHU FU. We shall be careful. Delicate.

SHUI TA. There are some fresh wounds.

MR. SHU FU. She'll go to the country.

SHUI TA. For some weeks. However, before that she'll be glad to talk everything over with someone she can trust.

MR. SHU FU. At a small dinner in a small but good restaurant.

SHUI TA. In a discreet way. I'll hurry to inform my cousin. She'll be reasonable. She's very worried about the store, which she regards as a gift of the gods. Be patient for a few minutes. (*Exit into the back room.*)

MRS. SHIN (*putting her head in*). May I congratulate you?

MR. SHU FU. Mrs. Shin, you may let Miss Shen Te's protégés know today that I am giving them shelter in the cabins behind the cattle run.

(*She nods, grinning.*)

MR. SHU FU (*getting up, to the audience*). What do you think of me, ladies and gentlemen? Could anyone do more? Could anyone be less selfish? More farsighted? A small dinner! What vulgar and clumsy thoughts this would bring into the minds of most people. But nothing like that will happen. Nothing. She won't be touched. Not even casually. Not even accidentally while passing the salt! Nothing but ideas will be exchanged. Two souls will find each other over the flowers on the table, white chrysanthemums by the way. (*He makes a note of that.*) No, we won't exploit an unfortunate situation. We won't turn a disappointment to our advantage. Understanding and assistance will be offered. And almost without a sound. A single glance might perhaps acknowledge it. A glance which could also mean more.

MRS. SHIN. So everything went as you wished, Mr. Shu Fu?

MR. SHU FU. Oh, just as I wished! There'll presumably be a few

changes in this district. A certain person has been shown the door and some of the plots against this shop will be spoiled. Certain people who still dare to harm the reputation of the chastest girl in this city will get into trouble with me in the future. What do you know about this Yang Sun?

MRS. SHIN. He's the dirtiest, laziest . . .

MR. SHU FU. He's nothing. He doesn't exist. He can't be found, Mrs. Shin.

(Enter Sun.)

SUN. What's going on here?

MRS. SHIN. Mr. Shu Fu, d'you want me to call Mr. Shui Ta? He won't want strangers loitering around in the store.

MR. SHU FU. Miss Shen Te is having an important talk with Mr. Shui Ta and mustn't be interrupted.

SUN. What, she's here? I didn't see her go in! What sort of a talk is that? I've got to be in on it!

MR. SHU FU *(preventing him from going into the back room)*. You'll have to be patient, my dear sir. I think I know who you are. Please take note that Miss Shen Te and I are about to announce our engagement.

SUN. What?

MRS. SHIN. That surprises you, doesn't it?

(Sun is fighting with the barber to get into the back room when Shen Te steps out of it.)

MR. SHU FU. Excuse me, dear Shen Te. Perhaps you could explain . . .

SUN. What's the matter, Shen Te? Are you crazy?

SHEN TE *(breathlessly)*. Sun, my cousin and Mr. Shu Fu have come to an agreement: I'm to listen to Mr. Shu Fu's ideas about how to help the people of the neighborhood. *(pause)* My cousin wants to part us.

SUN. And you agree?

SHEN TE. Yes.

(Pause.)

SUN. Did they tell you I'm a bad man?

(Shen Te is silent.)

SUN. Maybe I *am* a bad man, Shen Te. And that's why I need

you. I'm low. Without money, without manners. But I fight back. They're driving you into misfortune, Shen Te. (*He goes over to her and speaks in an undertone.*) Just look at him! Do you have no eyes in your head? (*With his hand on her shoulder*) Poor creature, *now* what did they want you to do? Make a reasonable match! Without me they'd just have sacrificed you. Admit that, but for me, you would have gone away with him!

SHEN TE. Yes.

SUN. A man you don't love.

SHEN TE. Yes.

SUN. Have you forgotten everything? How it was raining?

SHEN TE. No.

SUN. How you cut me from the tree? How you bought me a cup of water? How you promised me the money so I could fly again?

SHEN TE (*trembling*). What do you want?

SUN. I want you to come with me.

SHEN TE. Mr. Shu Fu, forgive me, I want to go away with Sun.

SUN. We're lovers, you know. (*He leads her to the door.*)

Where is the key to the store? (*He takes it from her pocket and hands it to Mrs. Shin.*) Leave it outside the door when you're through. Come on, Shen Te.

MR. SHU FU. But this is rape! (*Shouting to the back*) Mr. Shui Ta!

SUN. Tell him not to shout so much in here.

SHEN TE. Please don't call my cousin, Mr. Shu Fu. He doesn't agree with me, I know. But he's not right, I can feel it. (*To the audience*)

I want to go with the one I love

I don't want to reckon what it will cost

I don't want to consider if it is wise

I want to go with the one I love.

SUN. That's it.

(*Exeunt.*)

Before the curtain. Shen Te, in her wedding outfit and on the way to her wedding, turns to the audience.

SHEN TE. I've had a terrible experience. As I was stepping out of the house, gay and full of expectation, the carpet dealer's old wife was standing on the street. She was trembling all over, and she told me that her husband had fallen sick from excitement and worry about the money they'd lent me. She thought it best that I return the money to her now in any case. Of course I promised it to her. She was very relieved, wished me the best of luck with tears in her eyes and asked me to forgive her because she couldn't altogether trust my cousin, nor, unfortunately, Sun. I had to sit down when she'd gone, I was so alarmed by my own behavior. With my emotions in an uproar, I threw myself again into the arms of Yang Sun. I couldn't resist his voice and his caresses. The bad things he said to Shui Ta didn't teach Shen Te anything. Sinking into his arms, I thought: the gods wanted me to be good to myself too.

To let no one perish, not even one's self,
To fill everyone with happiness, even one's self,
That is good.

How could I simply forget those two good old people? Like a small hurricane, Sun just swept away my store and all my friends in the direction of Peking. But he's not bad and he loves me. As long as I'm with him, he won't do anything bad. What men say between themselves doesn't count. He just wants to seem big and powerful and above all hard-boiled. When I tell him that the old couple won't be able to pay their taxes, he'll understand everything. He'd rather go and work in the cement factory than owe his flying to a crime. Of

course flying's a great passion with Sun. Shall I be strong enough to bring out the good in him? Now, on the way to my wedding, I waver between fear and joy. (*She goes quickly off.*)

6

A side room of a cheap restaurant in the suburbs. A waiter pours out wine for the wedding party. Near Shen Te are the Grandfather, the Sister-in-law, the Niece, Mrs. Shin, and the Unemployed. In the corner, alone, stands a Priest. Down stage, Sun is talking with his mother, Mrs. Yang. He is wearing a dinner jacket.

SUN. Something unpleasant, Mamma. She just told me in all innocence that she can't sell the store for me. Somebody or other is bringing a claim because they lent her the two hundred silver dollars which she gave to you. And her cousin said that there wasn't any written agreement.

MRS. YANG. What did you say to her? Of course you can't marry her now.

SUN. There's no sense in talking with her about these things. She's got a thick head. I've sent for her cousin.

MRS. YANG. But he wants to marry her to the barber.

SUN. I've put an end to that marriage. The barber's been insulted. Her cousin will soon understand that if I don't hand over the two hundred, the creditors will seize the store and the store will be gone, but if I don't get the three hundred, my job will be gone too.

MRS. YANG. I'll look for him outside the restaurant. Go to your bride, now, Sun!

SHEN TE (*pouring wine, to the audience*). I wasn't mistaken in him. I couldn't see a trace of disappointment in his face.

He's perfectly cheerful though it must be a heavy blow for him to have to give up flying. I love him very much. (*She waves Sun over.*) Sun, you haven't drunk a toast with the bride!

SUN. What shall we drink to?

SHEN TE. Let's drink to the future.

(*They drink.*)

SUN. When the bridegroom's tuxedo will no longer be borrowed!

SHEN TE. But when the bride's dress will still get rained on now and then.

SUN. To everything we wish for!

SHEN TE. That it may quickly come true!

MRS. YANG (*on the way out, to Mrs. Shin*). I'm delighted with my son. I've always impressed it on him that he can get whoever he wants. Why, he's a trained mechanic and flier. And what does he tell me now? "I'm marrying for love, Mamma," he says, "money isn't everything." It's a love match! (*To the Sister-in-law*) It has to happen once, hasn't it? But it's hard for a mother, it's hard. (*Calling back to the Priest*) Don't cut it too short. If you take as much time for the ceremony as you took to haggle about the price, it'll be dignified all right. (*To Shen Te*) We've got to postpone things a little still, my dear. One of our most beloved guests hasn't arrived yet. (*To all*) Excuse me, please. (*Exit.*)

THE SISTER-IN-LAW. We'll gladly be patient as long as there's wine.

(*They all sit down.*)

THE UNEMPLOYED. We're not missing anything.

SUN (*loud and jokingly before the guests*). And before the marriage I've still got to give you a little quiz. A not unnecessary thing when a wedding is held at such short notice. (*To the guests*) I've no idea what sort of a wife I'm getting. That worries me. (*To Shen Te*) For instance, can you make five cups of tea with three tea leaves?

SHEN TE. No.

SUN. I see I won't be getting any tea. Can you sleep on a sack of straw the size of the book the priest is reading?

SHEN TE. With someone else?

SUN. Alone.

SHEN TE. In that case, no.

SUN. I'm horrified at the wife I'm getting.

(They all laugh. Behind Shen Te, Mrs. Yang steps into the doorway. With a shrug of her shoulders, she tells Sun that there's no sign of the expected guest.)

MRS. YANG *(to the Priest, who has shown her his watch)*. Don't be in such a hurry. It can be a matter of minutes. I can see they're drinking and smoking and no one's in a hurry. *(She sits down by the guests.)*

SHEN TE. Don't we have to talk about how we're going to arrange everything?

MRS. YANG. Oh, please, let's not talk shop. Shoptalk introduces a *common* note into the celebration, doesn't it?
(The entrance bell rings. They all look to the door but nobody enters.)

SHEN TE. Who's your mother waiting for, Sun?

SUN. That's a surprise for you. By the way, how's your cousin Shui Ta? I got on with him. A very sensible man! What a brain! Why don't you say anything?

SHEN TE. I don't know. I don't want to think of him.

SUN. Why not?

SHEN TE. Because you *shouldn't* get on well with him. If you love me, you can't love him.

SUN. Then may the three devils fetch him: the Fog-devil, the Engine-trouble-devil, and the Empty-gas-tank devil! Drink, you stubborn girl! *(He makes her drink.)*

THE SISTER-IN-LAW *(to Mrs. Shin)*. Something's wrong here.

MRS. SHIN. What else did you expect?

THE PRIEST *(resolutely stepping up to Mrs. Yang, a watch in his hand)*. I've got to go, Mrs. Yang. I've got another wedding to attend to, and tomorrow morning a funeral.

MRS. YANG. D'you think I like all this postponing? We were hoping to manage with one pitcher of wine. But look how it's coming to an end! *(Loudly to Shen Te)* My dear Shen Te, I can't understand where your cousin can be all this time!

SHEN TE. My cousin?

MRS. YANG. But, my dear, it's him we're waiting for! I'm just old fashioned enough to think that such a close relative of the bride should be present at the wedding.

SHEN TE. Oh Sun, is it because of the three hundred silver dollars?

SUN (*without looking at her*). Can't you hear? She's old fashioned. Well, I'm considerate. We'll wait another fifteen minutes and if he hasn't come then because the three devils have got him, we'll start!

MRS. YANG. I guess you all know already that my son is getting a job as a mail pilot. I'm very pleased about it. In these times, we have to make good money.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW. It's to be in Peking, isn't it?

MRS. YANG. Yes, in Peking.

SHEN TE. You've got to tell your mother, Sun, that Peking is out of the question.

SUN. Your cousin will tell her, if he agrees with you. Between us: I don't agree.

SHEN TE (*appalled*). Sun!

SUN. How I hate this Setzuan. What a town! Do you know what they all look like when I half close my eyes? Horses! They fret and screw their necks up: what's thundering there above them? How's that? They're no longer needed? What, their time's up already? Let them bite themselves to death in their horse town! O to get out of here!

SHEN TE. But I've promised the money to the old couple.

SUN. Yes, you told me. And since you do stupid things like that, it's lucky your cousin's coming. Drink, and leave business to us! We'll fix it up.

SHEN TE (*horrificed*). But my cousin can't come.

SUN. What do you mean?

SHEN TE. He can't come!

SUN. And how do you figure our future? Tell me that.

SHEN TE. I thought you still had the two hundred silver dollars.

We could return them tomorrow and keep the tobacco, which is worth a lot more. Then we'll sell it together in front of the cement factory since we can't pay the half year's rent.

SUN. Forget it! Forget it fast, sister! *I* am to stand on the street and sell tobacco to cement workers, I, Yang Sun, the flier! I'd rather run through all two hundred in one night! I'd rather throw it in the river! And your cousin knows me! I've arranged it with him. He's to bring the three hundred to the wedding.

SHEN TE. My cousin can't come.

SUN. And I thought he couldn't stay away.

SHEN TE. He can't be where I am.

SUN. How mysterious!

SHEN TE. Sun, you've got to know it: he's not your friend. I'm the one that loves you. My cousin Shui Ta doesn't love anybody. He's my friend, but he's no friend to my friends. He was thinking of the job at Peking when he agreed to your getting the old couple's money. But he won't bring you the three hundred silver dollars to the wedding.

SUN. And why not?

SHEN TE (*looking into his eyes*). He says you only bought one ticket to Peking.

SUN. Yes, that was so yesterday, but just look what I can show him today! (*He pulls two pieces of paper halfway out of his breast pocket.*) The old woman needn't see. Here's two tickets to Peking. One for me and one for you. Do you still think your cousin's against the marriage?

SHEN TE. No. The job's good. And I don't have my store any more.

SUN. Because of you I sold our furniture.

SHEN TE. Don't go on! Don't show me the tickets! I'm too afraid I might simply go with you. But I can't give you the three hundred silver dollars, Sun. What's to become of the old couple?

SUN. And what's to become of me? (*pause*) Better drink some more! Or are you a cautious person? I don't want a cautious wife. If I drink, I'll fly again. And you, if you drink, you might possibly understand me.

SHEN TE. Don't think I don't understand you. You want to fly and I can't help you.

SUN. "Here's a plane, my darling, but it's only got one wing!"

SHEN TE. Sun, we can't get the job at Peking honestly. That's why I need the two hundred silver dollars which you got from me. Give them to me now, Sun!

SUN. "Give them to me now, Sun!" What exactly are you talking about? Are you my wife or aren't you? You're betraying me, you know that, don't you? Luckily for both of us, things don't depend on you. Everything's arranged.

MRS. YANG (*icily*). Sun, are you sure the bride's cousin is coming? Since he's still not here it might almost seem that he has something against this marriage.

SUN. What are you thinking of, Mamma? We're bosom friends! I'll open the door wide so he'll find us right away when he comes to be his friend Sun's best man. (*He goes to the door and kicks it open. Then he returns, staggering somewhat since he has already drunk too much, and sits down again beside Shen Te.*) We're waiting. Your cousin's got more sense than you. Love, he says wisely, goes with living! And, more important than that, he knows what it means to you: no more store and no marriage either!

(*Everyone is waiting.*)

MRS. YANG. Now!

(*Steps can be heard and everyone looks toward the door. But the steps pass.*)

MRS. SHIN. It's going to be a scandal. I can feel it. I can smell it. The bride is waiting for the wedding but the groom's waiting for her cousin.

SUN. The cousin's taking his time.

SHEN TE (*softly*). Oh, Sun!

SUN. To sit here with the tickets in my pocket and next to me a fool who doesn't know arithmetic. I can foresee the day when you'll send the police to my house to get the two hundred silver dollars.

SHEN TE (*to the audience*). He is bad and he wants me to be bad too. Here I am, I love him, and he waits for the cousin. But around me are the frail: the old woman with her sick husband, the poor who in the morning wait for their rice at

my door, and an unknown man from Peking who is worried about his job. And they all protect me by trusting me.

SUN (*staring at the glass pitcher in which there is no wine left*). The glass pitcher of wine is our clock. We're poor people and when the guests have drunk the wine, the clock's run down forever.

(*Mrs. Yang beckons him to be silent, for steps can again be heard.*)

THE WAITER (*entering*). Do you want another pitcher of wine, Mrs. Yang?

MRS. YANG. No, I think we've got enough. Wine only makes you warm, doesn't it?

MRS. SHIN. It's expensive too, I'd say.

MRS. YANG. Drinking always makes me perspire.

THE WAITER. Might I ask, then, for a settlement of the bill?

MRS. YANG (*not hearing him*). Ladies and gentlemen, I ask you to be patient a little longer, the cousin *must* be on his way. (*To the Waiter*) Don't spoil the festivities!

THE WAITER. I can't let you leave without settling the bill.

MRS. YANG. But I'm known here!

THE WAITER. Exactly.

MRS. YANG. It's outrageous, the service today. What d'you say to that, Sun?

THE PRIEST. I take my leave. (*He goes off, ponderously.*)

MRS. YANG (*desperately*). Just stay where you are! The priest's coming back in a few minutes.

SUN. Never mind, Mamma. Ladies and gentlemen, since the priest's gone away, we can't keep you.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW. Come on, grandfather!

THE GRANDFATHER (*earnestly emptying his glass*). To the bride!

THE NIECE (*to Shen Te*). Don't hold it against him. He wants to be friendly. He likes you.

MRS. SHIN. What a disgrace!

(*All the guests go off.*)

SHEN TE. Shall I go too, Sun?

SUN. No, you'll wait. (*He drags her by her bridal ornaments,*

messing them up.) Isn't it your wedding? I'm still waiting and the old woman's waiting too. *She* wants to see her falcon (*he points at himself*) in the clouds! However, I almost believe now that it'll be Saint Nevernever Day before she'll step to her door and see his plane thundering over her house. (*To the empty seats, as if the guests were still present*) Ladies and gentlemen, what's the matter with the conversation? Don't you like it here? The wedding, after all, is only postponed a bit because of the important guest who's expected and because the bride doesn't yet know the meaning of love. For your entertainment, I, the bridegroom, will sing you a song. (*He sings.*)

THE SONG OF SAINT NEVERNEVER DAY

On a certain day, as is very well known,
Everyone will cry "Hooray,
The poor woman's son is on the golden throne!"
And the day's Saint Nevernever Day.
On Saint Nevernever Day
He'll sit on the golden throne.

And on that day goodness will pay
And badness will cost you your head
And merit and gain will smile and play
While exchanging salt and bread.
On Saint Nevernever Day
While exchanging salt and bread.

And the grass will look down at the sky
And the pebbles will roll up the stream
And men will be good without batting an eye
They will make of our earth a dream.
On Saint Nevernever Day
They will make of our earth a dream.

And on that day I shall be a flier
And you'll be one of the best
And you, idle man, will have work at last

You, woman, will get your rest.
On Saint Nevernever Day
You, woman, will get your rest.

And because we can hardly wait for that time
All this will begin, I know,
Not at night, at seven or eight or nine,
But at the first cock crow.
On Saint Nevernever Day
At the very first cock crow.

MRS. YANG. He won't come now.

(The three sit there, two of them looking toward the door.)

6·A

Wang's sleeping quarters. Again the Gods appear to Wang in a dream. He has fallen asleep over a large book. Music.

WANG. I'm glad you've come, illustrious ones! Permit me a question which disturbs me deeply. In the ruined hut of a priest who has moved away to become a laborer in the cement factory, I found a book and in it a strange passage. I absolutely must read it to you. Here it is. *(With his left hand he turns the pages of an imaginary book above the real book which is lying in his lap. He lifts up the imaginary book to read from while the real book remains where it is.)* "In Sung there is a place called Thorngrove. Catalpas, cypresses, and mulberry trees grow there. Now trees which are one or two spans in circumference are cut down by those who want sticks to make dog kennels with. Those of three or four

feet in circumference are cut down by rich families in search of boards for coffins. Those of seven or eight feet in circumference are cut down by people seeking beams for their luxury villas. Thus none of the trees lives its allotted span, for all perish before their time is up by saw and ax. Such are the tribulations of usefulness."

THE THIRD GOD. In that case the one men have least use for would be the best.

WANG. No, only the happiest. It's the worst but also the happiest.

THE FIRST GOD. The things people write!

THE SECOND GOD. Why does this parable affect you so deeply, water seller?

WANG. Because of Shen Te, illustrious one! She has come to grief in her love because she followed the commandment, love thy neighbor! Perhaps she is really *too* good for this world, illustrious ones!

THE FIRST GOD. Nonsense, weak and wretched man! Lice and doubts, it seems, have almost eaten you up.

WANG. Certainly, illustrious one, forgive me! I only thought you might be able to intervene.

THE FIRST GOD. That's quite impossible. Our friend here (*he points to the Third God who has a black eye*) intervened in a quarrel only yesterday. You can see the consequences.

WANG. But her cousin had to be called in again. He's an incredibly skillful man, as I found out for myself, but not even he could achieve anything. The store seems to be lost.

THE THIRD GOD (*a bit worried*). Perhaps we should help after all?

THE FIRST GOD. I'm of the opinion that she should help herself.

THE SECOND GOD (*sternly*). The worse the situation of a good man, the better he shows himself. Suffering ennobles!

THE FIRST GOD. All our hopes rest on her.

THE THIRD GOD. Things aren't what they might be with our search. Now and then we find some good beginnings, gratifying intentions, many high principles, but all that hardly constitutes a good human being. And when we do find halfway

good people, they don't live in a dignified, human way. (*Confidentially*) Things are especially bad with our sleeping quarters. You can see where we spend the nights by the straw sticking to our clothes.

WANG. Just one thing, couldn't you at least . . .

THE GODS. No. We're onlookers. We firmly believe that our good woman will find her own way on this dark earth. The heavier the burden the greater will be her strength! Just wait, water seller, and, you'll see, everything will come to a good . . .

(The figures of the Gods have grown paler, their voices softer, all the time. Now they disappear and their voices are no longer heard.)

7

The yard behind Shen Te's tobacco store. On a cart there are a few house furnishings. Shen Te and Mrs. Shin are taking down the washing from the line.

MRS. SHIN. I can't understand why you don't fight for your store tooth and nail.

SHEN TE. What? I can't even pay the rent. The old couple's two hundred silver dollars have to be returned today but since I've given them to someone else, I'll have to sell my tobacco to Mrs. Mi Tzu.

MRS. SHIN. Everything's gone then. No husband, no tobacco, no place to stay! That's what happens when somebody wants to be better than other people. What are you going to live off now?

SHEN TE. I don't know. Perhaps I can earn a little by sorting tobacco.

MRS. SHIN. What are Mr. Shui Ta's pants doing here? He must have gone away from here naked!

SHEN TE. He's got another pair of trousers.

MRS. SHIN. I thought you said he'd gone for good? Why did he leave his pants behind?

SHEN TE. Perhaps he doesn't need them any more.

MRS. SHIN. Shall I pack them away?

SHEN TE. No.

(Mr. Shu Fu comes running in.)

MR. SHU FU. Don't say anything. I know all. You sacrificed your love and happiness so as not to ruin two old people who trusted you. It's not in vain that this neighborhood, this suspicious and malevolent neighborhood, calls you the Angel of the Suburbs. Your fiancé couldn't rise to your moral level, so you left him. And now you're closing your store, this little haven for so many! I can't let that pass. Morning after morning I watched from my doorstep the little crowd of wretched people in front of your store and you distributing rice with your own hands. Will that never happen again? Must the good woman of Setzuan perish? Oh, if only you'd permit me to assist you with your good works! No, don't say anything! I don't want any assurances. No avowals that you wish to accept my help! But here. *(He pulls out a checkbook and signs a check which he puts on her cart.)* I'm making out a blank check to you. You can fill it out as you wish, for any sum. And now I go, quietly and modestly, making no claims, on tiptoe, full of veneration, selflessly. *(Exit.)*

MRS. SHIN *(examining the check)*. You're saved! The likes of you are lucky: you always find some idiot. But now fall to! Fill it out for a thousand silver dollars and I'll take it to the bank before he comes to his senses.

SHEN TE. Put the washing basket on the cart. I can pay the laundry bill without the check.

MRS. SHIN. What? You don't want to take the check? It's a crime! Is it just because you think you'd have to marry him? Sheer madness! People like him *want* to be led by the nose! It's the greatest bliss they know. Or do you still want to hold

on to your flier when Yellow Street and the whole neighborhood know how badly he treated you?

SHEN TE. It all comes from poverty. (*To the audience*)

I saw him puff up his cheeks in his sleep. They were bad cheeks.

But in the morning I held his coat against the light and saw the walls through it.

When I heard his cunning laugh, I grew afraid.

But when I saw his shoes full of holes, I loved him dearly.

MRS. SHIN. So you're defending him after everything that's happened. I've never seen anyone quite as crazy. (*Angrily*) I shall breathe more easily when we're rid of you in this neighborhood.

SHEN TE (*staggering while taking down the wash*). I'm a bit dizzy.

MRS. SHIN (*taking the wash from her*). Do you often get dizzy when you stretch or bend? If only there isn't a little visitor on the way! (*She laughs.*) What a pretty mess! If that's what's happened, it's all up with the big check! It wasn't meant for an occasion of that sort.

(*She goes to the back with a basket. Shen Te looks after her without moving. Then she looks at her body, feels it, and a great joy comes over her face.*)

SHEN TE (*softly*). O joy! A human being is growing in my womb. Nothing can be seen yet. But he's there already. The world awaits him secretly. In the towns, people are saying: Someone's coming now who's got to be reckoned with. (*In pantomime she introduces her little son to the audience.*) A flier!

Welcome a new conqueror of unknown mountains and unreachable regions!

One who brings the mail from man to man over the unpassable deserts!

(*She begins to walk up and down, leading her little son by the hand.*) Come, son, look at the world! Here, that's a

tree. Bow to it, greet it. (*She shows him how to bow.*) That's it: now you know each other. Stop, here comes the water seller. A friend. Give him your hand. Don't be afraid. A glass of fresh water for my son, please. It's warm today. (*She gives him the glass.*) O dear, the policeman! We'll make a big circle around him. Perhaps we'll get a few cherries over there in the rich Mr. Feh Pung's garden. But we mustn't be seen there. Come, fatherless boy! You too want cherries! Easy, easy, son! (*They walk carefully, looking around.*) No, over here, the bushes will hide us. No, you can't go straight at them like that. (*He seems to pull her away. She resists.*) We've got to be reasonable. (*Suddenly she gives in.*) All right, if you really must go straight at them . . . (*She lifts him up.*) Can you reach the cherries? Push them in your mouth, that's a safe place for them. (*She takes a cherry from him and puts it in her mouth.*) Tastes pretty good. O heavens, the policeman! Now we've got to run! (*They flee.*) There's the street. Quiet now, we'll walk slowly so we won't be noticed. As if not the least thing had happened. (*She sings, walking along with the child.*)

For no reason a plum
Attacked a bum.
But the man, very quick,
Bit the plum in the neck.

(*Wang, the water seller, has come in, leading a child by the hand. He watches Shen Te with wonder. Wang coughs.*)

SHEN TE. Oh, Wang! Hello.

WANG. Shen Te, I've heard you're not so well off. You even had to sell your store to pay your debts. But here's a child without a roof over his head. He was running about in the stockyards. He seems to be one of Lin To's children. You remember the carpenter? He lost his shop a few weeks ago and has been drinking ever since. His children go hungry and hang around the streets. What can be done for them?

SHEN TE (*taking the child from him*). Come, little man! (*To the audience*).

You there! Someone is asking for shelter.
A bit of tomorrow is asking for a today!
His friend, the conqueror, whom you know,
Is his advocate.

(*To Wang*) He can easily live in Mr. Shu Fu's cabins where I also may be going. I'm to have a baby too. But don't tell anyone or Yang Sun will hear it, and we'd only be in his way. Look for Mr. Lin To downtown, and tell him to come here.

WANG. Thanks a lot, Shen Te. I knew you'd find something. (*To the child*) You see, someone who's *good* always knows a way out. I'll run quickly and get your father. (*He starts to go.*)

SHEN TE. Oh Wang, now it comes back to me: how's your hand? I *wanted* to take the oath for you but my cousin . . .

WANG. Don't worry about my hand. Look, I've already learned to get along without my right hand. I hardly need it any more. (*He shows her how he can handle his pole without using his right hand.*) Watch how I do it!

SHEN TE. But it mustn't grow stiff! There, take the cart, sell everything, and go to the doctor with the money. I'm ashamed to have let you down like this. And what will you think of my accepting the cabins from the barber?

WANG. The homeless can live there now. And so can you. That's more important than my hand. Now I'm going to get the carpenter. (*Exit.*)

SHEN TE. Promise me you'll go to the doctor!

(*Mrs. Shin has returned and has been waving to her.*)

MRS. SHIN. Are you crazy? Giving away the cart with your very last possessions! What's his hand to you? If the barber hears of it, he'll chase you out of the only shelter you can get. You haven't paid me for the laundry!

SHEN TE. Why are you so bad?

You tread on your fellow man.

Isn't it a strain?

Your veins swell with your efforts to be greedy.

Extended naturally, a hand gives and receives
with equal ease.

Grabbing greedily, it has to strain. Alas!
What an enticement, to give! How pleasant,
to be kind!

A good word slips out like a sigh of contentment.

(Mrs. Shin goes angrily off.)

SHEN TE (*to the child*). Sit down here and wait till your father comes.

(The child sits on the ground. Enter the Husband and Wife who came to live with Shen Te on the day her store opened. They are dragging large sacks.)

THE WIFE. Are you alone, Shen Te? (*Since Shen Te nods, she calls in her Nephew who is also carrying a sack.*) Where's your cousin?

SHEN TE. He's gone away.

THE WIFE. And is he coming back?

SHEN TE. No. I'm giving up the store.

THE WIFE. We know that. That's why we came. We've got a few sacks of raw tobacco here which someone owed us and we'd like to ask you to move them to your new home together with your belongings. We haven't got a place yet to take them to and we'd be so noticeable on the street. I don't see how you can deny us this small favor after all the trouble we got into in your store.

SHEN TE. I'll gladly do you the favor.

THE HUSBAND. And if someone should ask whose sacks these are, you can say they're yours.

SHEN TE. Who should ask me?

THE WIFE (*looking at her sharply*). The police, for instance. They are prejudiced against us and want to ruin us. Where should we put the sacks?

SHEN TE. I don't know, just now I'd rather not do anything that might get me in jail.

THE WIFE. That's just like you. We're to lose the few miserable sacks of tobacco too, the only things we saved!

(Shen Te maintains a stubborn silence.)

THE HUSBAND. Just think, this tobacco could start us in the manufacturing business. We could go a long way!

SHEN TE. All right, I'll keep the sacks for you. For the time being, we'll put them in the back room.

(She goes in with them. The child looks after her. Then, shyly glancing about, he goes to the garbage can and fishes around in it. He starts to eat out of it. Shen Te and the others come back.)

THE WIFE. You understand, I guess, that we depend on you completely.

SHEN TE. Yes. *(She sees the child and grows rigid.)*

THE HUSBAND. We'll look for you the day after tomorrow in Mr. Shu Fu's cabins.

SHEN TE. Go now, quickly. I'm not well.

(She pushes them off. Exeunt the three.)

SHEN TE. He is hungry. He's fishing in the garbage can. *(She picks up the child and, in the following speech, expresses her horror at the fate of poor children. She shows the audience the little gray mouth. She asserts her determination under no circumstances to treat her own child with such cruelty. During her speech the musicians start playing "The Song of the Defenselessness of the Gods and Good Men.")*

O son! O flier! Into what a world will you come?

They want to let you fish in the garbage can, even you!

Only look at the little gray mouth!

(She shows the child to the audience.)

How do you treat your offspring?

Have you no mercy on the fruit of your womb?

No pity for yourselves, unhappy men?

I shall defend my own even if I have to be a tigress
to do it!

Having seen this, from now on, I divorce myself
from everybody!

I will not rest till I have saved my son, if only him!

What I have learned in my school, the gutter,

With fisticuffs and deceit,

Will now be of use to you, my son!

I will be good to you, and a tigress, a wild beast

To all others,

If I have to.

And I *shall* have to.

(She goes off to change into the cousin's clothes.)

SHEN TE *(going)*. Once more it has to be. The last time, I hope.

(She has taken with her Shui Ta's trousers. The returning Mrs. Shin looks after her curiously. Enter the Sister-in-law and the Grandfather. The music continues softly.)

THE SISTER-IN-LAW. The store's closed. The furniture's in the yard. That's the end.

MRS. SHIN. The results of frivolity, sensuality, and self-love. And where's the journey to? Down, down, down! Into Mr. Shu Fu's cabins. With you.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW. She'll have a nice surprise! We've come to complain! Damp rat holes with rotten floors! The barber only offered them to us because his soap supplies got moldy there. "I have shelter for you, what do you say to that?" Shame! we say to that!

(Enter the Unemployed.)

THE UNEMPLOYED. Is it true, Shen Te's moving away?

THE SISTER-IN-LAW. Yes, she wanted to sneak off. No one was supposed to find out.

MRS. SHIN. She's ashamed because she's ruined.

THE UNEMPLOYED *(excitedly)*. She's got to call her cousin! Advise her to call her cousin! He's the only one who can still do something.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW. That's true. He's stingy enough but at least he'll save her store and then she'll help us again.

THE UNEMPLOYED. I wasn't thinking of us, I was thinking of her. But, you're right, she should call him for our sake too.

(Enter Wang with the Carpenter. He leads two children by the hand.)

THE CARPENTER. I really can't thank you enough. *(To the others)* We're getting a place to live.

MRS. SHIN. Where?

THE CARPENTER. Mr. Shu Fu's cabins! And it was little Feng who brought the change about! *(He sees Feng.)* Well, here you are! "Here is someone asking for shelter," Miss Shen Te

is supposed to have said, and at once she got us a place to stay. (*To the two children*) Thank your brother, you two! (*The Carpenter and his children gaily bow to the child.*) Our thanks, little friend!

(*Shui Ta has entered.*)

SHUI TA. May I ask what you all want here?

THE UNEMPLOYED. Mr. Shui Ta!

WANG. Good day, Mr. Shui Ta. I didn't know you'd come back.

You know the carpenter, Mr. Lin To. Miss Shen Te has promised him a place in Mr. Shu Fu's cabins.

SHUI TA. Mr. Shu Fu's cabins are not available.

THE CARPENTER. So we can't live there?

SHUI TA. The space is reserved for something else.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW. Does that mean *we* have to get out too?

SHUI TA. I'm afraid so.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW. But where are we all to go?

SHUI TA (*shrugging his shoulders*). As I understand Miss Shen Te, who has gone on a journey, it is not her intention to withdraw her aid completely. However, in the future, things will be ordered a bit more reasonably. No more food without services rendered in return. Instead, everyone will be given the opportunity to work himself up in an honest way. Miss Shen Te has decided to give you all work. Those of you who want to follow me now into Shu Fu's cabins will not be led into nothingness.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW. Does that mean we're all supposed to work for Shen Te now?

SHUI TA. Yes. You'll be making tobacco. In the room inside are three bales of goods. Get them!

THE SISTER-IN-LAW. Don't forget we owned a store once. We prefer to work for ourselves. We have our own tobacco.

SHUI TA (*to the Unemployed and the Carpenter*). Perhaps you will want to work for Shen Te since you don't have your own tobacco.

(*The Carpenter and the Unemployed go in dejectedly. The Landlady enters.*)

THE LANDLADY. Well, Mr. Shui Ta, how're things with the sale? Here I have three hundred silver dollars.

SHUI TA. Mrs. Mi Tzu, I've decided not to sell, but to sign the lease.

THE LANDLADY. What? All of a sudden you don't need the money for the flier?

SHUI TA. No.

THE LANDLADY. And do you have the rent?

SHUI TA (*taking the barber's check from the cart and filling it out*). Here I have a check for ten thousand silver dollars, made out by Mr. Shu Fu, who's interested in my cousin. Mrs. Mi Tzu, look for yourself. The two hundred silver dollars for the next half year's rent will be in your hands before 6 P.M. And now, Mrs. Mi Tzu, allow me to continue my work. I'm very busy today and have to ask your pardon.

THE LANDLADY. Oh I see, Mr. Shu Fu steps into the flier's shoes! Ten thousand silver dollars! Nevertheless, Mr. Shui Ta, the young girls of today surprise me. They are fickle. And superficial too.

(*She goes out. The Carpenter and the Unemployed drag in the sacks.*)

THE CARPENTER. I don't know why I'm dragging your sacks.

SHUI TA. It's enough that I know. Your son here has a healthy appetite. He wants to eat, Mr. Lin To.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW (*seeing the sacks*). Has my brother-in-law been here?

MRS. SHIN. Yes.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW. I thought so. I know these sacks. That's our tobacco!

SHUI TA. You better not say that so loud. This is my tobacco, as you can see from the fact that it was standing in my room. If you have any doubts, we can go to the police and remove them. Is that what you want?

THE SISTER-IN-LAW (*angrily*). No.

SHUI TA. It seems you don't have tobacco of your own after all. Under these circumstances you will perhaps grasp the saving hand which Miss Shen Te is holding out to you? Be so kind now as to show me the way to Mr. Shu Fu's cabins.

(*Taking the Carpenter's youngest child by the hand, Shui Ta goes off, followed by the Carpenter, his other children, the*

Sister-in-law, the Grandfather, and the Unemployed. The Sister-in-law, the Carpenter, and the Unemployed drag the sacks.)

WANG. He's a bad man. But Shen Te is good.

MRS. SHIN. I don't know. A pair of pants is missing from the clothes line and her cousin's wearing them. That must mean something. I'd like to know what.

(Enter the old couple.)

THE OLD WOMAN. Isn't Miss Shen Te here?

MRS. SHIN *(absent-mindedly)*. Gone away.

THE OLD WOMAN. That's strange. She was going to bring us something.

WANG *(sadly looking at his hand)*. She was going to help me too. My hand's getting all stiff. I'm sure she'll be back soon. The cousin has never stayed long.

MRS. SHIN. He hasn't, has he?

7-A

Wang's sleeping quarters. Music. In his dream, the water seller tells the Gods his fears. The Gods are still on their long journey. They seem tired. Stopping for a moment, they look over their shoulders toward the water seller.

WANG. Before your sudden appearance woke me, illustrious ones, I was dreaming. I saw my dear sister Shen Te in great distress in the rushes by the river at the place where those who commit suicide are found. She was staggering strangely and held her head low as if she were dragging something soft but heavy which was pulling her down in the mud. When

I called to her, she told me she had to take the package of rules to the other shore without getting it wet since that would wipe away the writing. Actually I couldn't see that she was carrying anything. But I remembered with fear that you, the gods, had spoken to her about the great virtues, in gratitude for her taking you in when you were hard put to it for sleeping quarters, O shame! I'm sure you'll understand my worries.

THE THIRD GOD. What do you propose?

WANG. Somewhat fewer rules, illustrious ones! A little relaxation of the book of rules, benevolent ones, in view of the bad times.

THE THIRD GOD. As for instance, Wang, as for instance?

WANG. As for instance that only goodwill be required, instead of love, or . . .

THE THIRD GOD. But that would be even more difficult, unhappy one!

WANG. Or fairness instead of justice.

THE THIRD GOD. But that would mean more work!

WANG. Then just propriety instead of honor.

THE THIRD GOD. But, don't you see, that would mean *more* work, not less, you skeptic! (*Tired, they wander on.*)

8

Shui Ta's tobacco factory. Shui Ta has established a small tobacco factory in Mr. Shu Fu's cabins. Behind bars, fearfully close together, are several families, especially women and children. Among them are the Sister-in-law, the Grandfather, the Carpenter, and his children. Enter Mrs. Yang followed by Yang Sun.

MRS. YANG (*to the audience*). I have to tell you how the wisdom and strength of the universally respected Mr. Shui Ta has transformed my son Yang Sun from a depraved scamp into a useful person. As the whole neighborhood found out, Mr. Shui Ta opened a small but soon flourishing tobacco factory near the cattle runs. Three months ago I found it necessary to visit him there with my son. After a short time he received me.

(*Shui Ta comes out of the factory and goes to Mrs. Yang.*)

SHUI TA. How can I help you, Mrs. Yang?

MRS. YANG. Mr. Shui Ta, I'd like to put in a word for my son.

This morning the police were at our house and we were told that you have brought an action in the name of Miss Shen Te for breach of promise of marriage. You also claim that Sun dishonestly got his hands on two hundred silver dollars.

SHUI TA. Quite right, Mrs. Yang.

MRS. YANG. Mr. Shui Ta, for the sake of the gods, couldn't you be merciful once more? The money's gone. He ran through it in two days when nothing came of the flying job. I know he's a good-for-nothing. He'd already sold my furniture and wanted to go to Peking without his old Mamma. (*She weeps.*) Miss Shen Te thought very highly of him once.

SHUI TA. What do you have to say, Mr. Yang Sun?

SUN (*darkly*). The money's gone.

SHUI TA. Mrs. Yang, because of my cousin's incomprehensible weakness for your depraved son, I'm prepared to give him another chance. She told me that she expected honest work to produce an improvement. He can have a job in my factory. We will deduct the two hundred silver dollars from his salary bit by bit.

SUN. Then it's the factory or the jail?

SHUI TA. Take your choice.

SUN. And I guess I can't talk with Shen Te?

SHUI TA. No.

SUN. Where's my place?

MRS. YANG. A thousand thanks, Mr. Shui Ta! You are infinitely kind. The gods will reward you. (*To Sun*) You've departed

from the right path. Now try your hand at honest work till you can face your mother again!

(Sun follows Shui Ta into the factory. Mrs. Yang returns to the footlights.)

MRS. YANG. The first weeks were hard for Sun. The work didn't agree with him. He had little opportunity to distinguish himself. But in the third week a small incident came to his aid. *(Sun and the former Carpenter Lin To are each dragging two bales of tobacco.)*

THE CARPENTER *(he stops, groaning, and sits down on a bale)*. I can hardly go on. I'm not young enough for this work.

SUN *(sitting down too)*. Why don't you just throw the sacks in their faces?

THE CARPENTER. And how're we to live? To get a bare living I've even got to use the children. If Miss Shen Te could see this! She was good.

SUN. She was all right. If conditions hadn't been so lousy, we could have made out quite nicely together. I'd like to know where she is. We better go on. *He usually comes about this time.*

(They get up. Sun sees Shui Ta approaching.)

SUN. Give me one of your sacks, you cripple! *(Sun takes one of the bales from Lin To.)*

THE CARPENTER. Thanks a lot! Now if *she* were here and saw how you help an old man you'd soon be in favor. Oh dear! *(Enter Shui Ta.)*

MRS. YANG. And of course Mr. Shui Ta saw right away what it means to be a good worker not shrinking from any job. And he stepped in.

SHUI TA. Stop, you! What's going on? Are you only carrying one sack?

THE CARPENTER. I'm a bit tired today, Mr. Shui Ta, and Yang Sun was kind enough to . . .

SHUI TA. You're going back to take three bales, my friend. What Yang Sun can do, you can do. Yang Sun has the right attitude and you have not.

MRS. YANG *(while the former Carpenter gets two more bales)*.

Of course, not a word to Sun but Mr. Shui Ta was wise to the situation. And the following Saturday when the wages were being paid out . . .

(A table is brought in and Shui Ta arrives with a bag of money. Standing next to the foreman—the former Unemployed—he pays the wages. Sun steps up to the table.)

THE UNEMPLOYED. Yang Sun, six silver dollars.

SUN. Excuse me, it can't be more than five. Only five silver dollars. *(He takes the list held by the foreman.)* Please look, here are marked *six* working days. That's a mistake. I was absent one day because of some court business. *(Hypocritically)* I don't want to get anything I don't deserve, however lousy the pay is!

THE UNEMPLOYED. Okay, five silver dollars! *(To Shui Ta)* A rare case, Mr. Shui Ta!

SHUI TA. How can it say six days here if it was only five?

THE UNEMPLOYED. I must have made a mistake, Mr. Shui Ta. *(To Sun, coldly)* It won't happen again.

SHUI TA *(calling Sun aside)*. I noticed the other day that you're a strong man and don't hold your strength back. You give it to the firm. Today I see you're even honest. Does it often happen that the foreman makes mistakes in favor of the employees?

SUN. He's got friends among the workers and they look on him as one of themselves.

SHUI TA. I see. Well, one good turn deserves another. Would you like some little recompense?

SUN. No. But perhaps I may point to the fact that I'm also intelligent. I've had an education, you know. The foreman means well enough by the workers but he's uneducated and can't understand what the firm needs. Give me a trial period of one week, Mr. Shui Ta, and I think I'll be able to prove to you that my intelligence can be worth more to the firm than my physical strength.

MRS. YANG. Those were daring words, but that evening I said to my son: You're a flier. Show that, even where you are now, you can rise! Fly, my falcon! And, really, education

and intelligence can do great things! How can you belong to the better sort of people without them? My son worked true miracles in Mr. Shui Ta's factory!

(Sun stands with his legs apart behind the workers. Above their heads is a basket of raw tobacco which they are handing along.)

SUN. You there, I don't call that honest work! This basket has got to move faster! *(To a child)* Sit on the floor where you don't take up so much room! And you, yes you over there, you can easily take on the pressing too! Lazy dogs, what're you getting paid for? Hurry up with the basket! The devil! Put grandfather on one side and let him pick with the children! No more laziness now! To my beat, the whole thing! *(He claps the rhythm with his hands and the basket moves faster.)*

MRS. YANG. And no enmity, no abuse from uneducated people — and there was plenty of it — could stop my son from doing his duty.

(One of the workers starts The Song of the Eighth Elephant. The others join in the refrain.)

THE SONG OF THE EIGHTH ELEPHANT

Seven elephants had Mr. Dschin
And then there was Number Eight.
Seven were wild, Number Eight was tame
Number Eight guarded the gate.
Run faster!
Mr. Dschin has a forest park
It must be cleared before nightfall
And now it will soon be dark!

Seven elephants were clearing the forest
Mr. Dschin rode Number Eight.
And when the seven toiled all day
Number Eight would quietly wait.
Dig faster!
Mr. Dschin has a forest park

It must be cleared before nightfall
And now it will soon be dark!

Seven elephants had had enough
Of felling trees each day till late.
Mr. Dschin was angry at the seven, but he
Gave a bushel of rice to Number Eight.
What does it mean?

Mr. Dschin has a forest park
It must be cleared before nightfall
And now it will soon be dark!

Seven elephants they hadn't a tusk
Number Eight had a tusk which he used.
And when Number Eight cut the other seven up
Mr. Dschin stood there and was amused.
Keep on digging!
Mr. Dschin has a forest park
It must be cleared before nightfall
And now it will soon be dark!

(Smoking a cigar, Shui Ta has come casually strolling forward. Yang Sun, laughing, has joined in the refrain of the third stanza and speeded up the tempo of the last by clapping his hands.)

MRS. YANG. We really can't thank Mr. Shui Ta enough. Almost without lifting a finger, with wisdom and strength alone, he's brought out all the good that lay hidden in Sun. He didn't make him fantastic promises like his cousin whom they praise so highly. He just forced him into honest work. Today, Sun is quite a different person. You'll have to admit that! A noble man is like a bell. If you ring it, it rings, and if you don't, it don't, as the saying goes.

Shen Te's tobacco store. The store has become an office with club chairs and fine carpets. It is raining. Shui Ta, now fat, is sending away the Old Man and his wife. Mrs. Shin, amused, looks on. She is obviously in new clothes.

SHUI TA. I'm sorry I can't tell you when she'll be back.

THE OLD WOMAN. We got a letter today with the two hundred silver dollars which we once lent her. It had no return address. But the letter must have come from Shen Te. We'd like to write to her. What's her address?

SHUI TA. I'm sorry I don't know that either.

THE OLD MAN. Let's go.

THE OLD WOMAN. She's got to come back sometime.

(Shui Ta bows. The two old people go off, uncertain and worried.)

MRS. SHIN. They got their money too late. Now they've lost their store because they couldn't pay their taxes.

SHUI TA. Why didn't they come to me?

MRS. SHIN. People don't like to come to you. At first, I guess, they were waiting for Shen Te to come back, because they had nothing in writing. Then at the critical moment the old man got a fever and his wife stayed with him day and night.

SHUI TA *(he has to sit down; he is beginning to feel sick)*. I'm dizzy again.

MRS. SHIN *(attending to him)*. You're in your seventh month! The excitement isn't good for you. You can be glad you've got me. No one can get along without help from others. Well, I'll be at your side when your hardest hour comes. *(She laughs.)*

SHUI TA *(weakly)*. Can I count on it, Mrs. Shin?

MRS. SHIN. I'll say. Of course it'll cost you a bit. Open your collar, you'll feel better.

SHUI TA *(wretchedly)*. It's all for the child's sake, Mrs. Shin.

MRS. SHIN. All for the child.

SHUI TA. I'm getting fat too fast. It must draw attention.

MRS. SHIN. They put it down to your wealth.

SHUI TA. And what'll happen to the little one?

MRS. SHIN. You ask that three times a day. It'll be taken care of.

It'll have the best that money can buy.

SHUI TA. Yes. (*anxiously*) And it must never see Shui Ta.

MRS. SHIN. Never. Always Shen Te.

SHUI TA. But the rumors in the neighborhood! The things the water seller says! The store is watched!

MRS. SHIN. As long as the barber doesn't know anything, nothing's lost. Drink some of this water.

(*Enter Sun in a smart suit and with a businessman's brief case. He looks surprised at finding Shui Ta in Mrs. Shin's arms.*)

SUN. I guess I'm intruding.

SHUI TA (*getting up with difficulty and going to the door, staggering*). Until tomorrow, Mrs. Shin!

(*Mrs. Shin, putting on her gloves, smiles and goes off.*)

SUN. Gloves! Where from, what for, and how? Is she fleeing you maybe? (*Since Shui Ta does not answer*) Are even you susceptible to the tender emotions? Funny. (*He takes a sheet of paper out of his brief case.*) Anyway, you haven't been at your best, lately, not as you used to be. Moods. Indecisions. Are you ill? The business suffers. Here's another letter from the police. They want to close the factory. They say that at the very most they can only permit twice the lawful number of workers. You've got to do something now, Mr. Shui Ta. (*Shui Ta looks at him absent-mindedly for a moment. Then he goes into the back room and returns with a bag. He pulls out a new bowler hat and throws it on the desk.*)

SHUI TA. The firm wishes its representatives to be decently dressed.

SUN. Did you buy that for me?

SHUI TA (*indifferently*). Try it on and see if it fits.

(*Sun is surprised but puts it on. Shui Ta looks him over and puts the bowler in place.*)

SUN. Your servant! But don't evade me again! You've got to discuss the new project with the barber today.

SHUI TA. The barber's demanding impossible conditions.

SUN. Of what kind? If only you'd tell me.

SHUI TA (*evasively*). The cabins are good enough.

SUN. Yes, good enough for the rabble working there. But not good enough for the tobacco. It gets damp. Before the meeting I'll have a talk with Mrs. Mi Tzu about *her* buildings. If we have them, we can fire this bunch of beggars, abortions, and walking scarecrows. They're not good enough. We'll have a cup of tea, I'll stroke Mrs. Mi Tzu's fat knees, and we'll get her buildings half price.

SHUI TA (*sharply*). No. In the interest of the firm's reputation, I want your behavior always to be personally reserved and coolly businesslike.

SUN. Why are you so irritated? Are those unpleasant rumors bothering you?

SHUI TA. I don't pay any attention to rumors.

SUN. Then it must be the rain again. Rain always makes you irritable and melancholy. I'd like to know why.

WANG'S VOICE (*from outside*).

I'm selling water, water,
As I stand here in the rain.
For such a little water
I've suffered too much pain.
And now I shout: "Buy water!"
But no one's buying
Parched and dying
And drinking and paying . . .

SUN. Here's that damned water seller. He'll be starting his heckling again.

WANG'S VOICE (*from outside*). Aren't there any good people left in the city of Setzuan? Not even here on the square where the good Shen Te used to live? Where is she who even when it was raining bought a little water from me in the gladness of her heart many months ago? Where is she now? Has no one seen her? Has no one heard from her? She went into this house one evening and never came out again.

SUN. Shall I shut his trap for him? What's it to him where she

is? By the way, I think you're only keeping it secret so that I won't find out.

WANG (*entering*). Mr. Shui Ta, I'm asking you again when Shen Te will come back. It's six months now since she went away. (*Shui Ta is silent.*) In the meantime much has happened which she would never have put up with. (*Shui Ta is still silent.*) Mr. Shui Ta, there are rumors in the district that something must have happened to Shen Te. We, her friends, are very worried. Have the goodness to give us her address!

SHUI TA. Unfortunately, I'm not free at the moment, Mr. Wang. Come back next week.

WANG (*excitedly*). In the mornings there used to be rice at her door. For the needy. It has been there again lately!

SHUI TA. And what do people conclude from this?

WANG. That Shen Te hasn't gone away at all, but . . .

SHUI TA. But what? (*Wang is silent.*) Then I'll give you my answer. And it is final. If you're Shen Te's friend, Mr. Wang, ask about her as little as possible. That's my advice.

WANG. Nice advice! Mr. Shui Ta, Shen Te told me before her disappearance that she was pregnant!

SUN. What?

SHUI TA (*quickly*). It's a lie!

WANG (*very earnestly to Shui Ta*). Mr. Shui Ta, you mustn't believe that Shen Te's friends will stop asking about her. A good person isn't so easily forgotten. There aren't many. (*Exit.*)

(*Motionless, Shui Ta looks after him, then goes quickly into the back room.*)

SUN (*to the audience*). Shen Te pregnant! I'm beside myself! I've been swindled! She must have told her cousin right away and that scoundrel sent her away immediately! "Pack your suitcase and disappear before the child's father gets wind of it." It's absolutely unnatural. It's inhuman. I have a son, a Yang appears on the scene, and what happens? The girl disappears and I'm left here to slave! (*He gets angry.*) I'm put off with a hat! (*He stamps on it.*) Criminal! Thief! Kidnapper! And the girl's virtually without a protector!

(Sobbing can be heard from the back room. He stands still.)
Did I hear sobbing? Who is it? It's stopped. What sobs are these? That cunning dog Shui Ta doesn't sob! Who sobs then? And what does it mean that the rice is said to be at the door in the mornings? Is the girl here after all? Is he just hiding her? Who else could be sobbing? That would be just the thing I want! If she's pregnant I've got to find her!

(Shui Ta returns from the back room. He goes to the door and looks out into the rain.)

SUN. Well, where is she?

SHUI TA *(putting up his hand and listening)*. Just a moment!
It's nine o'clock. But one can't hear a thing today. The rain's too heavy.

SUN *(ironically)*. And what do you want to hear?

SHUI TA. The mail plane.

SUN. Stop fooling.

SHUI TA. I was once told that you wanted to fly? Have you lost that desire?

SUN. I'm not complaining about my present position, if that's what you mean. I don't care for night work, you know. Flying the mail is night work. The firm's become very dear to me, so to speak. It is after all the firm of my one-time future wife, even if she has gone away. And she has, hasn't she?

SHUI TA. Why do you ask?

SUN. Maybe because her affairs still don't leave me altogether unmoved.

SHUI TA. That might interest my cousin.

SUN. In any case, I'm still sufficiently concerned in her affairs not to close my eyes if, for instance, she were kept under lock and key.

SHUI TA. By whom?

SUN. By you!

(Pause)

SHUI TA. What would you do?

SUN. I might, to begin with, start arguing about my position in the firm.

SHUI TA. Oh, I see. And if the firm, that is, if I should give you

an adequate position, could I count on your giving up all further investigations concerning your one-time future wife?

SUN. Perhaps.

SHUI TA. And what sort of new position are you thinking of?

SUN. The top one. I'd be thinking of throwing you out, for example.

SHUI TA. And if, instead of me, the firm threw *you* out?

SUN. I'd probably come back. And not alone.

SHUI TA. But?

SUN. With the police.

SHUI TA. With the police. And suppose the police found no one here?

SUN. Then I suppose they'd search this back room. Mr. Shui Ta, my longing for the lady of my heart is insatiable. I feel I must do something in order to fold her in my arms again. (*Calmly*) She's pregnant and needs someone around. I've got to talk it over with the water seller. (*He goes.*)

(Shui Ta looks after him without moving. Then he quickly returns to the back room. He brings out various belongings of Shen Te's, underwear, dresses, toilet articles. He looks a long time at the shawl which Shen Te bought from the Old Man and his wife. He then makes all these things up into a bundle and, hearing a noise, hides it under the table. Enter the Landlady and Mr. Shu Fu. They greet Shui Ta and put away their umbrellas and rubbers.)

THE LANDLADY. Fall's coming on, Mr. Shui Ta.

MR. SHU FU. A sad season!

THE LANDLADY. And where's your charming secretary? A terrible lady-killer! But I guess you don't know that side of him. All the same he knows how to combine charm with attention to business in a way which can only be to your advantage.

SHUI TA (*bowing*). Won't you take a seat?

(They sit down and start smoking.)

SHUI TA. My friends, an unforeseen incident which might have certain consequences forces me to speed up the negotiations. Negotiations concerning the future of the project I've been working on. Mr. Shu Fu, my factory is in difficulties.

MR. SHU FU. It always is.

SHUI TA. But now the police are openly threatening to close it if I can't point to negotiations for a new project. Mr. Shu Fu, it's a question of my cousin's one piece of property. Now you've always displayed the liveliest interest in my cousin.

MR. SHU FU. Mr. Shui Ta, I have a deep aversion to talking about your constantly expanding projects. I speak about a small dinner with your cousin; you hint at financial difficulties. I put cabins for the homeless at your cousin's disposal; you establish a factory there. I hand her a check; you present it. Your cousin disappears; you ask for ten thousand silver dollars, remarking that my cabins are too small. Sir, where *is* your cousin?

SHUI TA. Mr. Shu Fu, don't worry. I can inform you today that she'll be back very soon.

MR. SHU FU. Soon? When? You've been saying "soon" for weeks.

SHUI TA. I'm not demanding new signatures from you. I've merely asked whether you'd show more interest in my project if my cousin returned.

MR. SHU FU. I've told you a thousand times that I'm ready to discuss everything with your cousin and nothing with you. However, it seems that you want to put obstacles in the way of such a discussion.

SHUI TA. Not any more.

MR. SHU FU. When will it take place then?

SHUI TA (*uncertainly*). In three months.

MR. SHU FU (*annoyed*). Then I'll sign in three months.

SHUI TA. But everything has to be prepared.

MR. SHU FU. You can prepare everything, Shui Ta, if you're convinced that your cousin will really come at this time.

SHUI TA. Mrs. Mi Tzu, are you, for your part, ready to confirm to the police that I may have your workrooms?

THE LANDLADY. Certainly, if you'll let me have your secretary. You've known for weeks that's my condition. (*To Mr. Shu Fu*) The young man's so efficient in business and I need a manager.

SHUI TA. You've got to understand that I can't do without Mr. Yang Sun just now, with all the difficulties I'm having. And my health has been failing me lately. I was ready from the beginning to let you have him, but . . .

THE LANDLADY. Yes, but?

(Pause)

SHUI TA. All right, he'll call on you tomorrow, in your office.

MR. SHU FU. I am very glad that you were able to reach this decision, Shui Ta. Should Miss Shen Te really come back, the young man's presence would be highly improper. As we know, he once exerted a most harmful influence over her.

SHUI TA (*bowing*). Doubtless. Please excuse my long hesitation over the question of my cousin Shen Te and Mr. Yang Sun. It is not worthy of a businessman. But they were once very close to each other.

THE LANDLADY. You're excused.

SHUI TA (*looking toward the door*). My friends, let us now reach a settlement. In this once small and shabby store where the poor people of the neighborhood bought the good Shen Te's tobacco, we, her friends, are resolving to establish twelve beautiful new stores which in the future will sell Shen Te's good tobacco. I'm told people are calling me the Tobacco King of Setzuan. Actually I carried on this business solely in my cousin's interests. It will belong to her, her children, and her grandchildren.

(*The noise of a crowd can be heard from outside. Enter Sun, Wang, and the Policeman.*)

THE POLICEMAN. Mr. Shui Ta, I'm very sorry the excited state of this neighborhood forces me to follow up a report originating in your own firm. According to this report you are depriving your cousin Miss Shen Te of her freedom.

SHUI TA. It's not true.

THE POLICEMAN. Mr. Yang Sun here testifies that from the room behind your office he heard sobbing which could only come from a female.

THE LANDLADY. That's ridiculous. I and Mr. Shu Fu, two respected citizens of this city whose evidence could hardly be

doubted by the police, can testify that no one has been sobbing here. We are quietly smoking our cigars.

THE POLICEMAN. Unfortunately I have orders to inspect the room in question.

(Shui Ta opens the door. The Policeman bows and steps into the doorway. He looks into the room, then turns round and smiles.)

THE POLICEMAN. There's really nobody in there.

SUN *(who has been following him)*. But I heard sobbing! *(His eye lights on the table under which Shui Ta has pushed the bundle. He spots the bundle.)* That wasn't here before! *(Opening it, he shows Shen Te's dresses and other things.)*

WANG. Those are Shen Te's things! *(He runs to the door and calls out.)* Her clothes have been discovered here!

THE POLICEMAN *(taking the things)*. You declare that your cousin's gone away. A bundle with things of hers is found hidden under your table. Where can the girl be reached, Mr. Shui Ta?

SHUI TA. I don't know her address.

THE POLICEMAN. That is most regrettable.

SHOUTS FROM THE CROWD. Shen Te's things have been found! The Tobacco King has murdered the girl and put her out of the way!

THE POLICEMAN. Mr. Shui Ta, I shall have to ask you to follow me to the station.

SHUI TA *(bowing to the Landlady and Mr. Shu Fu)*. I have to apologize for this scandal, my friends. But there are still judges in Setzuan. I'm convinced that everything will shortly be cleared up. *(He goes out, the Policeman at his back.)*

WANG. A terrible crime has been committed!

SUN *(dismayed)*. But I heard sobbing!

Wang's sleeping quarters. Music. For the last time the Gods appear to the water seller in his dream. They have changed considerably. There are unmistakable signs of a long journey, extreme exhaustion, and manifold unhappy experiences. One has had his hat struck off his head, one has lost a leg in a fox trap, and all three go barefoot.

WANG. At last you've come! Terrible things have been happening in Shen Te's tobacco store, illustrious ones. Shen Te went away again many months ago! Her cousin seized everything! Today he's been arrested. He's supposed to have murdered her to get her store. But I don't believe it. I had a dream in which she came and told me that her cousin's holding her prisoner. Oh, illustrious ones, you must come back at once and find her.

THE FIRST GOD. This is terrible. Our whole search has come to grief. We didn't find many good people and those we found lived in a way quite unworthy of human beings. We'd already decided to confine ourselves to Shen Te.

THE SECOND GOD. If she's still good!

WANG. She certainly is, but she's disappeared!

THE FIRST GOD. Then all is lost.

THE SECOND GOD. Restrain yourself!

THE FIRST GOD. What good would that do? If she can't be found, we've got to retire. What sort of world did we find? Misery, vulgarity, and waste everywhere! Even the countryside has fallen away from us. The lovely trees are decapitated by telephone wires and on the other side of the mountains we see heavy smoke clouds and hear the thunder of cannon. And nowhere a good man who can pull through!

THE THIRD GOD. Alas, water seller, our commandments seem to be deadly. I fear that all our moral rules have to be done away with. People keep busy just saving their skins. Good intentions bring them to the brink of the abyss, and good

deeds throw them into it. (*To the other two Gods*) The world can't be lived in, you've got to admit!

THE SECOND GOD (*vehemently*). No, it's people who are worthless!

THE THIRD GOD. The world is too cold!

THE SECOND GOD. People are too weak!

THE FIRST GOD. Dignity, my friends, dignity! Brothers, we mustn't despair. We did find one human being who was good and stayed good. She's only disappeared. Let's hurry and find her! One is enough! Didn't we say that everything can still turn out well if there's one human being who can stand this world? Just one?

(*They quickly disappear.*)

10

A courtroom. Groups: Mr. Shu Fu and the Landlady. Sun and his mother. Wang, the Carpenter, the Grandfather, the Young Prostitute, the Old Man and Woman. Mrs. Shin, the Policeman. The Unemployed, the Sister-in-law.

THE OLD MAN. He's too powerful.

WANG. He wants to open twelve new stores.

THE CARPENTER. How can the judge give a fair sentence if the accused's friends — the barber Shu Fu and the landlady Mi Tzu — are also *his* friends?

THE SISTER-IN-LAW. Mrs. Shin was seen last night carrying a fat goose into the judge's kitchen by order of Mr. Shui Ta. The fat was dripping through the basket.

THE OLD WOMAN (*to Wang*). Our poor Shen Te will never be found.

WANG. No, only the gods can discover the truth.

THE POLICEMAN. Order! The judges are coming!

(Enter the three Gods in judges' robes. As they walk by the footlights on their way to their seats, one can hear them whispering.)

THE THIRD GOD. We'll be found out. The certificates are very badly forged.

THE SECOND GOD. And people will wonder about the judge's sudden indigestion.

THE FIRST GOD. No, that's only natural. He ate half a goose.

MRS. SHIN. These are *new* judges!

WANG. And very good ones!

(The third and last God hears this, turns round, and smiles at Wang. The Gods sit down. The First God beats on the table with a hammer. The Policeman brings in Shui Ta who is whistled at but walks with lordly steps.)

THE POLICEMAN. Be prepared for a surprise. It isn't the just Fu Yi Tcheng. But the new judges look very mild too.

(Shui Ta sees the Gods and faints.)

THE YOUNG PROSTITUTE. What's the matter? The Tobacco King has fainted.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW. Yes, at the sight of the new judges!

WANG. He seems to know them! I don't understand that.

THE FIRST GOD. Are you the tobacco merchant Shui Ta?

SHUI TA *(weakly)*. Yes.

THE FIRST GOD. You have been accused of doing away with your own cousin Miss Shen Te, in order to take possession of her business. Do you plead guilty?

SHUI TA. No.

THE FIRST GOD *(turning the pages of documents)*. We'll first hear the policeman of this neighborhood on the reputation of the accused and on the reputation of his cousin.

THE POLICEMAN *(stepping forward)*. Miss Shen Te was a girl who liked to please everyone, who lived and let live, as the saying goes. Mr. Shui Ta, on the other hand, is a man of principle. The generosity of Miss Shen Te forced him at times to strict measures. However, unlike the girl, he was always on the side of the law, your honor. Once, people to

whom his cousin trustfully gave shelter were unmasked by him as a band of thieves. Another time he saved Miss Shen Te at the last moment from plain perjury. I know Mr. Shui Ta to be a respectable and law-abiding citizen.

THE FIRST GOD. Are there others present who want to testify that the accused is incapable of his supposed crime?

(*Mr. Shu Fu and the Landlady step forward.*)

THE POLICEMAN (*whispering to the Gods*). Mr. Shu Fu, a very influential gentleman.

MR. SHU FU. Mr. Shui Ta has the reputation of a highly respected businessman here in Setzuan. He is Vice-President of the Chamber of Commerce and is about to be made justice of the peace.

WANG (*interrupting*). By you! You're doing business with him!

THE POLICEMAN (*whispering*). A disagreeable character.

THE LANDLADY. As President of the Community Chest I'd like to call the attention of the court to this fact: Mr. Shui Ta is not only about to give to his numerous employees the best possible rooms, well-lighted and healthy, but is also making regular contributions to our home for the disabled.

THE POLICEMAN (*whispering*). Mrs. Mi Tzu, a close friend of the judge Fu Yi Tcheng!

THE FIRST GOD. Yes, yes, but now we've got to hear whether anyone has *less* favorable evidence to bring forward.

(*Wang, the Carpenter, the Old Man and Woman, the Unemployed, the Sister-in-law, and the Young Prostitute step forward.*)

THE POLICEMAN. The scum of the neighborhood.

THE FIRST GOD. Well, what do you know of the general behavior of Shui Ta?

SHOUTS (*jumbled*). He's ruined us!

— He blackmailed me!

— He led us off on the wrong track!

— Exploited the helpless!

— Lied!

— Cheated!

— Murdered!

THE FIRST GOD. Accused, what have you to say?

SHUI TA. I have simply enabled my cousin to exist, your honor. I only came when she was in danger of losing her little store. I had to come three times. I never wanted to stay. But the last time circumstances forced me to remain. I never had anything but trouble. My cousin was popular; I did the dirty work. That's why I'm hated.

THE SISTER-IN-LAW. You certainly are. Take our case, your honor! (*To Shui Ta*) I won't mention the sacks.

SHUI TA. Why not? Why not?

THE SISTER-IN-LAW (*to the Gods*). Shen Te gave us shelter and *he* had us arrested.

SHUI TA. You stole cakes!

THE SISTER-IN-LAW. Now he pretends to be interested in the baker's cakes! He wanted the store for himself!

SHUI TA. The store wasn't a public refuge, selfish creatures!

THE SISTER-IN-LAW. But we had no place to stay!

SHUI TA. There were too many of you!

WANG. And they (*pointing to the Old Man and Woman*) were selfish too?

THE OLD MAN. We put our savings into Shen Te's store. Why did you make us lose *our* store?

SHUI TA. Because my cousin was helping a flier to fly. I was to get the money!

WANG. Maybe she wanted to help him to fly. What interested you was the well-paid job in Peking. The store wasn't good enough for you!

SHUI TA. The rent was too high!

MRS. SHIN. That's true enough.

SHUI TA. And my cousin knew nothing about business!

MRS. SHIN. That's true too! She was also in love with the flier.

SHUI TA. Shouldn't she be allowed to love?

WANG. Certainly! And why did you want to force her to marry a man she did not love, the barber over there?

SHUI TA. The man she loved was a scoundrel.

WANG (*pointing to Sun*). Him?

SUN (*jumping up*). And because he was a scoundrel you took him into your office!

SHUI TA. To improve you! To improve you!

THE SISTER-IN-LAW. To make him into a slave-driver!

WANG. And when he was improved, didn't you sell him to her?
(*Pointing to the Landlady*) She shouted it around every place!

SHUI TA. Because she wouldn't give me her buildings unless she had him to stroke her knees!

THE LANDLADY. That's a lie! Don't talk of my buildings ever again. I'll have nothing more to do with you. Murderer! (*She rustles off, insulted.*)

SUN (*insisting on getting his word in*). Your honor, I must speak on his behalf!

THE SISTER-IN-LAW. Naturally. You're in his employ.

THE UNEMPLOYED. He's the worst slave-driver I've ever known. He's absolutely depraved.

SUN. Your honor, the accused may have made whatever you say of me, but he's not a murderer. A few minutes before he was arrested I heard Shen Te's voice in his back room!

THE FIRST GOD (*avidly*). So she's alive? Tell us exactly what you heard?

SUN (*triumphantly*). Sobbing, your honor, sobbing!

THE THIRD GOD. And you recognized her?

SUN. Absolutely. How could I fail to recognize her voice?

MR. SHU FU. Sure, *you* made her sob often enough!

SUN. And yet I made her happy. But then he (*pointing to Shui Ta*) wanted to sell her to you!

SHUI TA (*to Sun*). Because you didn't love her!

WANG. No. For the money!

SHUI TA. But what was the money needed for, your honor? (*To Sun*) You wanted her to sacrifice all her friends, but the barber offered his cabins and his money to help the poor. Moreover, I *had* to get her engaged to him so that she could still be good.

WANG. Why didn't you let her be good when the big check was signed? Why did you send Shen Te's friends into the dirty sweatshops of your factory, Tobacco King?

SHUI TA. For the child's sake!

THE CARPENTER. And *my* children? What did you do with *my* children?

(*Shui Ta is silent.*)

WANG. Now you're silent! The gods gave the store to Shen Te as a little fountain of goodness. She always wanted to do good and you always came and spoiled it.

SHUI TA (*beside himself*). Because otherwise the fountain would have dried up, fool!

MRS. SHIN. That's true, your honor!

WANG. What good is a fountain if you can't get at the water?

SHUI TA. Good deeds mean ruin!

WANG (*wildly*). But bad deeds mean a good life, don't they?

What did you do with the good Shen Te, bad man? How many good people are there, illustrious ones? *She* was good! When that man over there smashed my hand, she wanted to testify for me. And now I testify for her. She was good, I swear! (*He raises his hand in an oath.*)

THE THIRD GOD. What's the matter with your hand, water seller? It's all stiff.

WANG (*pointing to Shui Ta*). It's his fault, his alone! She wanted to give me money for the doctor but then *he* came along! You were her deadly enemy!

SHUI TA. I was her only friend!

ALL. Where is she?

SHUI TA. Gone away!

WANG. Where to?

SHUI TA. I won't tell!

ALL. And why did she have to go away?

SHUI TA (*shouting*). Because you would have torn her to shreds! (*Sudden quiet. He sinks onto a chair*) I can't go on. I'll explain everything. If the hall is cleared and only the judges remain, I will make a confession.

ALL. He's confessing! He's found out!

THE FIRST GOD (*beating on the table with the hammer*). Let the hall be cleared!

(*The Policeman clears the hall.*)

MRS. SHIN (*laughing as she goes*). There'll be a surprise!

SHUI TA. Have they gone? All of them? I can no longer keep silence. I recognized you, illustrious ones!

THE SECOND GOD. What did you do with our good woman of Setzuan?

SHUI TA. Let me confess the terrible truth: I am she!

THE SECOND GOD. Shen Te!

SHEN TE.

Yes, it is I. Shui Ta and Shen Te. I am both.

Your former injunction to be good and yet to live

Tore me like lightning in halves.

I don't know how it happened.

To be good to others and to myself —

I couldn't do both at the same time.

To help others and to help myself was too hard.

Alas, your world is difficult! Too much misery, too much despair!

The hand that is extended to a beggar, the beggar at once tears off!

Whoever helps the lost is lost himself!

For who could long refuse to be bad when he who eats no meat must die?

All the things that were needed — where should I have taken them from?

From myself! But then I perished!

A load of good intentions weighed me down to the ground.

Yet when I was unjust I walked mightily about and ate good meat!

Something must be wrong with your world.

Why is malice well rewarded? Why do punishments await the good?

Oh, how I should have loved to pamper myself!

And there was also a secret knowledge in me.

My foster-mother washed me in water from the gutter:

That gave me a sharp eye.

Yet pity pained me so, I was an angry wolf at the sight of misery.

Then I felt how I was changing and kind words
turned to ashes in my mouth.

And yet I wished to be an Angel to the Suburbs.
To give was a delight. A happy face, and I walked
on clouds.

Condemn me: everything I did I did to help my
neighbor,

To love my lover, and to save my little son from
want.

For your great plans, O gods! I was too poor and
small.

THE FIRST GOD (*with all signs of horror*). Don't go on, unhappy
woman! What should we think, we who are so happy to have
found you again!

SHEN TE. But I've got to tell you that I am the bad man whose
crimes everyone was talking about!

THE FIRST GOD. The good woman whose good deeds everyone
was talking about!

SHEN TE. The bad man too!

THE FIRST GOD. A misunderstanding! Several unfortunate oc-
currences! Some heartless neighbors! An excess of zeal!

THE SECOND GOD. But how is she to go on living?

THE FIRST GOD. She can do it. She's strong, well built. She can
stand a lot.

THE SECOND GOD. But didn't you hear what she said?

THE FIRST GOD (*vehemently*). It was confused, very confused!
And incredible, highly incredible! Should we admit our com-
mandments to be deadly? Should we renounce our command-
ments? (*Sullenly*) Never! Should the world be changed?
How? By whom? No! Everything is in order! (*He suddenly
beats on the table with the hammer.*)

And now . . . (*He makes a sign and music is heard.*

Rosy light.) let us return.

This little world has much engaged us.

Its joy and its sorrow have refreshed and pained us.

Up there, however, beyond the stars,

We shall gladly think of you, Shen Te, the good woman

Who bears witness to our spirit down below,
Who, in cold darkness, carries a little lamp!
Goodbye! Do it well!

(He makes a sign and the ceiling opens. A pink cloud comes down. On it the Three Gods rise, very slowly.)

SHEN TE. Oh, don't, illustrious ones! Don't go away! Don't leave me! How can I face the good old couple who've lost their store and the water seller with his stiff hand? And how can I defend myself from the barber whom I do not love and from Sun whom I do love? And I am with child. Soon there'll be a little son who'll want to eat. I can't stay here!
(She turns with a hunted look toward the door which will let her tormentors in.)

THE FIRST GOD. You can do it. Just be good and everything will turn out well!

(Enter the witnesses. They look with surprise at the judges floating on their pink cloud.)

WANG. Show respect! The gods have appeared among us! Three of the highest gods have come to Setzuan to find a good human being. They had found one already, but . . .

THE FIRST GOD. No "but"! Here she is!

ALL. Shen Te!

THE FIRST GOD. She has not perished. She was only hidden. She will stay with you. A good human being!

SHEN TE. But I need my cousin!

THE FIRST GOD. Not too often!

SHEN TE. At least once a week!

THE FIRST GOD. Once a month. That's enough!

SHEN TE. Oh, don't go away, illustrious ones! I haven't told you everything! I need you desperately!

(The Gods sing.)

THE TRIO OF THE VANISHING GODS ON THE CLOUD

We, alas, may never stay
More than a fleeting year
If you watch your treasure long
'Twill always disappear.

Down here the golden light of truth
With shadow is alloyed
That is why we take our leave
And go back to our void.

SHEN TE. Help! (*Her cries continue through the song.*)

Our anxious search is over now
Let us to heaven ascend
The good, good woman of Setzuan
Praising, praising to the end!

(*As Shen Te stretches out her arms to them in desperation, they disappear above, smiling and waving.*)

EPILOGUE

One of the actors walks out in front of the curtain and apologetically addresses the audience.

Ladies and gentlemen, don't be angry! Please!
We know the play is still in need of mending.
A golden legend floated on the breeze,
The breeze dropped, and we got a bitter ending.
Being dependent on your approbation
We wished, alas! our work might be commended.
We're disappointed too. With consternation
We see the curtain closed, the plot unended.
In your opinion, then, what's to be done?
Change human nature or — the world? Well: which?
Believe in bigger, better gods or — none?
How can we mortals be both good and rich?
The right way out of the calamity
You must find for yourselves. Ponder, my friends,
How man with man may live in amity
And good men — women also — reach good ends.
There must, there must, be *some* end that would fit.
Ladies and gentlemen, help us look for it!