

IN THE JUNGLE OF CITIES

(A fight to the finish between two men
in the great city of Chicago)

A play by Bertolt Brecht

Translated by Paul Schmidt

Last revision- 10/15/11

Dir. Bart DeLorenzo

****TBD note about our changes**

CAST OF CHARACTERS

George Garga

John Garga, his father

Mae Garga, his mother

Marie Garga, his sister

C. Shlink, a lumber dealer

Skinny }

Worm } Shlink's employees

Baboon }

C. Maynes, proprietor of a bookshop

Jane Larry, Garga's girlfriend, later his wife

A Salvation Army Preacher

Pat Manky, a friend of the family

An informer

A pug nosed man

A waiter

PROLOGUE

The year is 1912; you are in Chicago. You are about to witness a mysterious fight to the finish between two men, and the destruction of a family from out on the prairie now living in the big city. Don't waste time trying to figure out why these men are fighting, just identify with the risks involved, be fair when you judge the fighters' maneuvers, and pay close attention to the outcome.

SCENE ONE

(C. Maynes' Lending Library in Chicago. August 18th, 1912, morning. **GARGA** behind a counter. Sound of a bell; enter **SHLINK** and **SKINNY**. **SHLINK** wears an Oriental jacket and trousers)

SKINNY

The sign outside says this is a lending library. How about lending us a book?

GARGA

What kind of book?

SKINNY

A big book.

GARGA

For yourself.

SKINNY

(glances at **SHLINK** before he answers) No, not me. For this gentleman here.

GARGA

Your name?

SHLINK

Shlink. I am a lumber dealer. Number six Mulberry Street.

GARGA

(writes down the name) Five cents a day per book. Take your pick.

SHLINK

Nah, you pick one.

GARGA

This one's a detective story. It's no good. Here, this one's better. It's a travel book.

SKINNY

You say this first one's no good? Just like that? It's no good?

SHLINK

(steps forward) Is that your own opinion? I would like to buy it. Your opinion, I mean. Is ten dollars enough?

GARGA

You can have it for nothing.

SHLINK

You mean your opinion is worth nothing? Is it perhaps then not such a bad book?

GARGA

I didn't say that.

SKINNY

Ten dollars, you could buy yourself a clean shirt.

GARGA

What do I need a clean shirt for? All I do around here is wrap books.

SKINNY

The shirt you've got on is filthy. Makes me puke just to look at it.

GARGA

Look, what do you people want from me? I don't know you. I never saw you before.

SHLINK

I never read this book before and I do not wish to. But I will give you forty dollars for your opinion.

GARGA

You can have other people's opinions. The opinions of Arthur Rimbaud, for instance. But not my opinion of that book.

SHLINK

I do not want your opinion. All I want to do is buy it.

GARGA

I can afford to keep my own opinions.

SKINNY

You can afford your own opinions? You belong to a family of international millionaires or something?

GARGA

My family lives on rotten fish!

SHLINK

(he's pleased) I knew it! You are a fighter! I was afraid you would tell me whatever I wanted to hear, so you could get your family something better than rotten fish.

SKINNY

Forty bucks! That's a hell of a lot of clean shirts for you and your family.

GARGA

You think you can buy me, just like some kind of whore?

SHLINK

(amused) How about fifty dollars? I do not think fifty dollars will prostitute your soul.

GARGA

That's even more insulting, raising your offer, and you know it.

SHLINK

(innocent) You have to decide what you want more: a pound of fish or your own opinion. Or let us say, two pounds of fish or your opinion.

SKINNY

Careful, my man! You may be asking for trouble.

GARGA

I may be asking both of you to get the hell out!

SKINNY

You got opinions, that shows you don't know shit about life.

SHLINK

Jane Larry says you'd like to go to Tahiti.

GARGA

How do you know Jane Larry?

SHLINK

I know she is not getting paid for making shirts anymore, and she is near starving. And you have not been to see her for the last three weeks.

SKINNY

(**GARGA** drops an armload of books) Watch it! Remember, you're nothing but hired help around here!

GARGA

Stop pushing me! You know I can't push back!

SHLINK

Poor you.

GARGA

Yeah, poor me. All I eat is rice and fish. We already know that.

SHLINK

So sell me your opinion!

SKINNY

You an oil baron or something?

SHLINK

Does it not both you your neighbors think you are pathetic?

GARGA

What do you want me to do, gun down the whole neighborhood?

SHLINK

And your family... they moved here from out on the prairie...

GARGA

They sleep three to a bed beneath the drip of a broken drainpipe. I smoke every night to get rid of the stink, just so I can get a little sleep. The windows are nailed shut because it's cold in Chicago and I hope you think all this is funny.

SHLINK

Of course your girlfriend –

GARGA

My girlfriend sews shirts. Gets two dollars a piece. Six cents profit. Why don't you both go buy a couple? We spend Sundays together with a bottle of whisky. That costs forty cents. You got that? Forty cents a bottle, and I hope you're enjoying all this.

SHLINK

You do not say what you really think, do you?

GARGA

No.

SHLINK

Like, nobody can survive on six cents profit.

GARGA

Depends on what you're willing to put up with. Some people would rather go to Tahiti.

SHLINK

Tahiti, ah yes, that is the easy life. Cape Hay, still a little stormy, but farther south you have Tobacco Islands, green fields waving in the breeze. Live like a lizard!

GARGA

(looks out the window, drily) And here it's ninety in the shade. Traffic noise on the Milwaukee bridge. Morning rush hour. The same as always.

SHLINK

But this morning is not the same as always. I am here to challenge you to a fight to the finish. And I start by hacking away at the very ground you stand on.

(Rings the bell. Enter MAYNES)

Your boy here seems to be on strike.

MAYNES

Aren't you waiting on these gentlemen, George?

SKINNY

(nasty) George made a very bad impression on us.

MAYNES

What do you mean?

SKINNY

His shirt is filthy and we think that's disgusting.

MAYNES

You came to work looking like that, Garga? You think this is some kind of greasy spoon? Gentlemen, it won't happen again.

SKINNY

Listen to him! He's cursing you under his breath! Speak up, my man! Use the voice God gave you!

GARGA

You think you could get me a clean shirt, Mr. Maynes? I don't want these people to treat me like a whore.

SHLINK

Go to Tahiti. Nobody there ever has to wash.

GARGA

Thanks a lot. All this concern for my welfare, it really gets me. I'll have my sister go to church and pray for you.

SHLINK

Oh, I thank you. This Manky now, he is the right man for your sister. He works like a dog, while your sister even does not care that your parents are starving.

GARGA

What are you, some kind of detective? All this interest in my family is very flattering. Or maybe it's not.

SHLINK

You are closing your eyes to reality! Your family is facing disaster, you are the only one with a job, and you keep your own opinions to yourself! When you could just as easily go to Tahiti... (takes out a map and shows him)

GARGA

I've never even seen you before...

SHLINK

See? You have two steamship companies -

GARGA

You just bought this map, didn't you? It's brand new.

SKINNY

Thank about it! The Pacific Ocean!

GARGA

(to MAYNES) Ask these two to leave, will you? They're not here to borrow books. They've been spying on me. I don't even know them.

(Enter J. Finney, known as **WORM**. **SHLINK** and **SKINNY** step back without any indication that they know him)

WORM

Is this C. Maynes' Lending Library?

MAYNES

It is. I am C. Maynes. In person.

WORM

Pretty dubious establishment...

MAYNES

What can I help you with? Books? Magazines?

WORM

So these are books. A filthy business. What do you want a book for? We've got enough lies in the world already. (picks up a book and reads) "The sky grew dark, the clouds moved east." Why can't the clouds move south? People nowadays will swallow anything.

MAYNES

Let me wrap that book for you, sir.

SKINNY

Give him a chance to make up his mind first! And lemme ask you: does this gentleman look like a bookworm?

GARGA

They're all in this together.

WORM

Could be. Listen to this (reads): "Whenever you kiss me, I always see your adorable teeth." How can she see his teeth if she's kissing him? That's what she says, though. Horny little bitch, isn't she? You think she has a future? (kicks over a stack of books)

MAYNES

Please sir! You'll have to pay for any damage to those books!

WORM

Books! What good are books? You think a bookstore could have stopped the San Francisco earthquake?

MAYNES

Go call the sheriff, George.

WORM

I run a liquor store. Now that's a respectable occupation.

GARGA

He's not even drunk.

WORM

I hate to see people waste their time on shit like this. Gives me the heebie-jeebies.

(Enter Couch, also known as **BABOON**, with **JANE LARRY**. **WORM** steps back without any indication he knows them).

BABOON

You just stroll right in, my little sapsucker. This here is C. Maynes Lending Library.

GARGA

It's time to close up shop, Mr. Maynes. Insects are infesting your books. Maggots are messing with your magazines.

WORM

Look life right in the whites of the eyes, that's what I always say.

BABOON

Get this stuff the hell out of my way! I can't stand paper. Especially paper with words.

GARGA

(to **MAYNES**) Go get your gun.

SHLINK

(crosses to **GARGA**) I ask you again. Sell me your opinion!

GARGA

No! (sees **JANE**)

JANE

Is this where you work, George? What are you looking at me like that for? I was just out for a little stroll with this gentleman here.

GARGA

How long have you been strolling with him, Jane?

BABOON

Hey now! That sounds a little rude. You accusing her of something? Don't piss me off, I'll rip this book to pieces!

MAYNES

Don't accuse her of anything, George! I'll lose all my books!

GARGA

Go on home, Jane. Please. You're drunk.

JANE

What's the matter with you, George? These gentlemen treat me real nice. (drinks from **BABOON**'s hip flask) They took me out for cocktails. It's hot today, must be nearly ninety. Oh George, this stuff goes through you like greased lightning.

GARGA

Go home now. I'll come by tonight.

JANE

Oh, yeah? It's been three weeks since you came by.

BOYS

Oooooo!

JANE

I'm not going home any more. I've had it, just sitting around in a pile of shirts.

BABOON

(pulls her down onto his lap) You don't have to do that shit any more, baby.

JANE

Ow, you're tickling me! You stop that, George doesn't like it.

BABOON

Let's come to the point here: this woman's got a body worth a few bucks. You think you can afford her? I'm talking about love. Also cocktails.

WORM

You wanna keep this little lady from having fun? Whadda you want her to do, take in laundry to make a living?

SKINNY

You expect a babe like this to behave like an angel?

GARGA

(to **SHLINK**) What is all this? You're trying to turn this place into a Wild West show! Cocktails! Knives! Six-shooters!

WORM

You don't like it, why don't you quit? You can't, can you? Go on, sell him your opinion!

GARGA

This is crazy! Everybody's in on this except me! Jane!

BABOON

Go on, tell him.

JANE

Don't look at me like that, George! Maybe this is my last chance. Can you take me out for cocktails? Oh look, it's not about the cocktails! It's every time I look in the mirror, I see what's coming, George. It's been two years now. You just go off, you work for a couple of weeks then when you can't stand it anymore you come around and want to get drunk. With me. Well, now I can't stand it anymore! I can't stand nighttime anymore, George. And I'm not a bad girl, just because I want something else. Stop looking at me like that, it's not fair!

BABOON

That's smart, baby. Have another drink and you'll be even smarter.

GARGA

That whiskey's fucking your brains! Can't you hear what I'm saying? Let's get out of here! The both of us! We'll go to San Francisco, any place you want. I don't know if love can last forever, but look, I swear to God I'll stay with you.

JANE

You don't know how, Georgie.

GARGA

I do, too. And I can make some money, if that's what you want. I don't... Look, I... I do have a feeling for you, Jane. I don't know the word for it. But we'll get back together. I'll come by tonight! Tonight, I promise!

JANE

I can hear you, you don't have to shout like that. And you don't need to let these gentlemen here know you never loved me. All this stuff you're saying now, it's the most insulting stuff you can think of – and you know it. And you know I'll listen to it. You know I will, and I know I will.

WORM

Oh, can the bullshit! Just go ahead and tell him you spent the morning in bed with this distinguished gentleman here.

JANE

I don't think that's such a good idea. Well, at least now he knows. And it's wasn't the whiskey, and it wasn't the heat.

SHLINK

Sell me your opinion! I double the price again.

GARGA

I don't give a damn. What's one morning compared to two years?

SHLINK

I can assure you, two hundred dollars means nothing. I am almost ashamed to make such an offer.

GARGA

Maybe you'd be kind enough to tell your friends here to get the hell out!

SHLINK

Whatever you wish. I beg you, though. Remember how things work on this planet of ours. Sell me your opinion.

MAYNES

You're a fool with no backbone, George, a pathetic wage slave! Think what you're doing!

SKINNY

Remember your poor grieving parents!

WORM

Remember your sister!

BABOON

And don't forget this charming young woman here!

GARGA

No, no, no!

SHLINK

Remember Tahiti!

GARGA

I won't sell my opinion!

MAYNES

Then you're fired!

SHLINK

Your economic well-being! Your very foundation is cracking to pieces beneath you! Watch your step!

GARGA

Then I choose freedom! Here, take my coat! (takes off his coat) Go cast lots for it! (grabs Rimbaud's *A Season in Hell* from the shelf, reads) "I inherit all the vices, idol worship, sacrilege, on, all the vices, lying, lust... I am an animal, a nigger. But maybe I'm saved. You are fake niggers, maniacs, wild men, misers, all of you. Businessman, you're a nigger; judge, you're a nigger; general, you're a nigger; president, you flea-bitten bastard, you're a nigger; you drink bootleg liquor from Satan's still. This great nation is driven by fever and cancer!" (takes the flask from **JANE** and drinks) "I've never been one of you, never been a Christian, I do not understand your laws. I have no moral sense, I'm a wild beast, a monster, you are making a mistake..."

(**SHLINK, SKINNY, WORM** and **BABOON** gather around **GARGA** and applaud as if at a play)

SHLINK

You are getting too excited. No one is trying to hurt you.

JANE

(puts her arms around his neck) Is it that bad, Georgie?

GARGA

Here! Take my shoes! And you! You people want this woman? I'm putting her up for auction! And you can take these books and you can stuff 'em! What I want is green fields, the tobacco fields of Virginia! I want a ticket to the South Seas! I want... I want my freedom! (he's down to his pants and shirt. Runs out)

SHLINK

(shouts after him) My name is Shlink! Shlink the lumber dealer! Number six Mulberry street!

SKINNY

He'll be back. What's all this paper cost?

WORM

You're really going to pay?

MAYNES

The books are worth ten dollars.

SKINNY

Here's twenty.

BABOON

(to **JANE**, who is crying) Aha, now comes the awakening! Go weep in the gutter.

WORM

You've got to look life right in the whites of the eyes.

SHLINK

How much is this stuff?

MAYNES

The clothes? Jacket? Tie? Shoes? They're not really for sale. Ten dollars.

SKINNY

Finally, we drove him out of his skin. Let's take it with us.

(**SHLINK** goes out slowly towards the back.
SKINNY follows him with the bundle of clothes)

SCENE TWO

(Chicago. The office of **C. Shlink**, lumber dealer.
August 22nd, around seven in the evening. **SHLINK**
sits at a small desk)

SKINNY

Kentucky. Seven truckloads.

WORM

They just came in.

SKINNY

Stripped logs. Two truck loads.

(A phone rings.)

WORM

There's a man here, wants to speak to Mr. Shlink.

SHLINK

Send him in.

(Enter GARGA)

SHLINK

(a big smile) So. Here you are. There are your clothes. Go put them on.

GARGA

You were expecting me? You have my clothes? This pile of shit? *(kicks the bundle of clothes)*

(SHLINK pushes a small button. We hear a gong sound. Enter MARIE)

MARIE

George!

GARGA

You here, Marie?

MARIE

George, where have you been? They were afraid something happened. And look at yourself!

GARGA

Are you doing something here?

MARIE

I do the laundry. It pays enough for us all to live on. What are you looking at me like that for? You look like you've been having a rough time. George, I'm fine. I like it here. They said they got you fired.

GARGA

Go on home, Marie. (starts walking around) They just showed up one day, I don't know what they had in mind. But they harpooned me, I can still feel the hook in my back! They reeled me in. (to **SHLINK**) Go get your things and go on home. I'll stick around, if that's what you want. But keep my sister out of this!

SHLINK

Whatever you wish. (to **MARIE**) But go get him a suit and a clean shirt. If you please.

MARIE

I don't understand my brother sometimes. He says I should leave you.

SHLINK

Then do what he says, go on home. I don't need my laundry done. (**MARIE** leaves)
Have you been drinking?

GARGA

Oh well, sorry. What's the matter, does that screw up your little plan?

SHLINK

I am afraid all I have on hand is sake. But I will get you whatever you like. Do you drink cocktails?

GARGA

I drink anything. Everything. What I used to do, I'd take a couple of weeks at a time and just lie around drinking and smoking and making love.

SHLINK

And leafing through the encyclopedia, page after page ...

GARGA

How do you know that?

SHLINK

When I heard about the way you live, I think to myself, this one, he is a good fighter.

GARGA

She's taking a long time with those clothes.

SHLINK

I am very sorry! Please forgive me! (stands and *pushes the button*.)
(Enter **MARIE**)

MARIE

Here's a clean shirt, George, and some clothes.

GARGA

Wait for me. We'll get out of here together. (goes behind a screen)

MARIE

Well, this is goodbye, Mr. Shlink. I didn't get all the laundry done.

GARGA

(behind the screen) This suit doesn't have any pockets.

MARIE

Thank you very much for letting me stay here.

GARGA

(comes out from behind the screen) Look, you started this Wild West show. I'll go along with it. You pushed me over the edge, ripped the skin off my body just for the fun of it. Now you want to give me a new skin, but that won't make things right. This will, thought. (takes out a revolver) This will make everything clear between us. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

SHLINK

You accept my challenge? You agree to a fight to the finish?

GARGA

I do. But I can always change my mind.

SHLINK

Without even knowing my reasons?

GARGA

Your reasons probably stink. I'm not even interesting in why this fight is so important to you. You think you're a better man than I am, that's all I need to know.

SHLINK

Good. Let us think how we can arrange this. I own my own house and this lumber business, for instance and that puts me way ahead of you, does it not? Because money is everything, is it not? Good. Therefore, starting today my house is yours, and so is my lumber business. As of now, Mr. Garga, my fate is in your hands, and I do not even know you. Starting today, I am your creature. Your every wish will be my commands, even wishes you have no wished yet. Your cares will be my cares and my strength will be your strength. And you will become a very evil master.

GARGA

I accept the challenge. And I hope you won't regret this later on.

(Enter **BABOON**, **SKINNY**, and **WORM**. **GARGA** smirks when he sees that their suits are the same as his)

SHLINK

This house and this lumber business, registered under the name Shlink, belongs as of today to Mr. George Garga of Chicago.

GARGA

(to **SHLINK**) That's me. Good. You've got an inventory of cut logs on hand, right? How many?

SHLINK

I don't know. Maybe four hundred.

SKINNY

They're already sold. To Broost and Company, in Virginia.

GARGA

Who sold them?

WORM

I did. Worm's the name. I run a flophouse in Chinatown.

GARGA

Go sell the logs again.

WORM

Sell them again? That's illegal!

GARGA

I know.

WORM

Are you gonna be responsible for this?

GARGA

Go hustle up a buyer somewhere, try San Francisco, sell them in Mr. Shlink's name, then hand over the money to Mr. Shlink. He can keep it for me until I need it. You got any objections, Shlink? (**SHLINK** shakes his head no)

WORM

That's a dirty deal. You'll have the law after us.

GARGA

How long until that happens?

SHLINK

Half a year at the most. (gets out the account book for **GARGA**)

BABOON

We'll go under!

GARGA

Yeah, you'll be swamped. With all the rest of the rats.

BABOON

I'd as soon go back out on the streets with my switchblades as get mixed up in a dirty deal like this. And Chicago is one cold fucking town, you better believe it.

GARGA

You said your entire lumber business, didn't you, Shlink? That includes the house, the warehouse, the staff here?

SHLINK

Yes. Here is the account book.

GARGA

You. Pour this ink all over the account book.

SKINNY

Me? (**SHLINK** hands him the bottle of ink)

SKINNY

(clutches the book) All our records! Our accounts!

GARGA

Go on! Pour the ink all over it!

(**SKINNY** pours very carefully)

BABOON

Well, that's that.

WORM

Twenty years work and this is how it ends? What is this, some kind of joke? I don't get it. We're supposed to be running a lumber business!

GARGA

This lumber business isn't running anymore! You! Go shut down the saws.

BABOON

Ok, boss. (Exits)

(From offstage, the sound of the saws stopping.
The others put on their coats and line up against
the wall. **GARGA** roars with laughter)

MARIE

George, what do you think you're doing?

GARGA

Shut up! Ok, Mr. Shlink. Fire these guys.

SHLINK

You're fired.

SKINNY

Fired? I've been working for you twenty years come April!

SHLINK

And now you are free to go.

MARIE

I don't think this is such a good idea, George, what you're doing.

GARGA

Just go home, will you?

MARIE

You come home with me, George, please! This is all going to end in disaster. Let him alone, Mr. Shlink!

SHLINK

Tell me what to do, George.

GARGA

Do? You've got nothing to do around here, Shlink. Not any more. Tell you what. Why don't you take your former employees here and start up a little game of poker?

(**SHLINK**, **WORM**, and **SKINNY** sit down at a card table)

MARIE

Come on home with me, George. You don't understand what's going on, this is all a big joke.

GARGA

Home? Home was a place out on the prairie, Marie. Now we're here in the big city and I'm not going to let them fuck us over.

MARIE

Us? You mean me too, George? What has this got to do with me?

GARGA

This has got nothing to do with you. I told you that. They were just trying to drag you into it. It's me they want. I came here to have it out with a guy who treated me like a whore two weeks ago, spit in my face. I even brought a gun with me. I get here, what happens? He gives me a boot-licking bow and offers me his lumber business! I don't get what he's up to, but I'm taking it anyway. I'm all by myself in this Wild West show, Marie, and I can't help you out.

WORM

(from the poker table upstage) He's playing like a paper god. I swear, he's cheating.

GARGA

(to **SHLINK**) Look, I don't understand any of this, I'm just some dumb asshole from out on the prairie, right? I came here waving a white flag, but now I'm on the attack. Hand over your bank book, your personal assets. I need to line my pockets.

SHLINK

I do not have much, I'm afraid. Please do not despise such a humble amount.

(**SHLINK** and **GARGA** go out)

SKINNY

Ok, so things were bad around here, we were getting pissed on, but getting fired, that's just wrong.

WORM

Cut the bullshit. (makes fun of him) Just don't piss in your pants.

SKINNY

(to **MARIE**) I love you, lady. I love it when you put yours hands on my –

WORM

Hah, listen to him! He just lost his bed, and he still thinks about putting a woman in it!

SKINNY

Come with me, lady. I'll work for you, lady. Come with me ...

BABOON

(enters from the rear) Forget about her! There are lots of other ladies, dark-skinned ladies, golden-skin, skin as white as apple flesh! And black ladies! One long line from hip to foot! Soft round thighs, goddamn it, not like these scrawny bitches around here! Tahiti, yeah! Forty dollars for the south seas!

WORM

What a barbarian. Bad attitude.

SHLINK

That's all there is, yes.

WORM

Look, the lady's an innocent. You think maybe she's hot? She's a plain little piece, but who knows? Maybe she's got some fire in her. Fifty dollars, for this lady here.

SKINNY

As much as you want, all for this lady here!

BABOON

And no makeup, just naked flesh. In the raw. Natural. You think she's better than the tropical ladies, huh? Okay, seventy dollars for "toycha!"

MARIE

Help me, Mr. Shlink!

SHLINK

If you please. Ready to help.

MARIE

Tell me, should I go with him?

SHLINK

Nobody here loves you. He loves you.

GARGA

(enters) Is everything for sale around here? First it was a load of lumber, now it's a pound of flesh. You want to make ju-jitsu? A lot of fun rolling around on the floor, right? They call it the easy art.

SHLINK

(crosses to him, worried) Perhaps you are making all this too easy as well ...

MARIE

(to **GARGA**) Where were you, George? You should have helped me just now! You've got to come with me, George, right away, something terrible is going on here. And it'll keep going on, even if I leave. You must be blind not to see you're losing.

(from offstage, the sound of a chorus of girls singing "Jesus Loves Me, This I know...")

GARGA

You're really hot to trot, aren't you? Can't wait to go with them, can you? This place is a swamp, it'll swallow you whole. I've got a better idea, Marie. Hear that? That's the Salvation Army! They're marching to save you, Marie. (gets up from the table, crosses rear) Hey! Hey! Salvation Army!

WORM

(to **MARIE**) He's right, this place is a swamp. At night you can see the ghosts of drowned rats, hear them scrabbling. Go on home to your folks.

GARGA

Come on in, kid!

(SHLINK opens the door with a low bow. Enter a **SALVATION ARM PREACHER**)

SALVATION ARMY PREACHER

We heard your call! Join us and be saved!

WORM

Hallelujah! The Army of Salvation!

GARGA

I don't hold with what you people do, but if you need a place to do it, this house is yours.

SALVATION ARMY PREACHER

Hallelujah! The Lord will rain his blessings on you!

GARGA

Yeah, yeah, maybe. (to **SHLINK**) Did you inherit this house and this money?

SHLINK

No.

GARGA

You had to work for it, right? Forty years?

SHLINK

I worked my fingers to the bone. I got by on four hours sleep a night.

GARGA

You were poor when you got here?

SHLINK

I was seven years old. I have been working ever since.

GARGA

And this is all you own?

SHLINK

This is all I own.

GARGA

(to the **SALVATION ARMY PREACHER**) So okay then. I hereby give you all this man's possessions, on one condition. That, for the sake of all the drunks and orphans you intend to save here, you let this man spot in your fucking face.

SALVATION ARMY PREACHER

But I'm a preacher! I'm a man of God!

GARGA

Go on, get ready.

SALVATION ARMY PREACHER

I can't.

GARGA

The orphans freeze in the show, the drunks end up dead, and you're worried about face?

SALVATION ARMY PREACHER

My face is clean. I'm only twenty-one. (beat) You must have your reasons. I'm ready. Only please, ask the lady not to look.

MARIE

I won't have any respect for you, if you let him do it.

SALVATION ARMY PREACHER

I know that. And there are better faces than mine, but none of them is too good for this.

GARGA

Spit in his face, Shlink. If you please.

MARIE

This isn't right, George. I won't have anything to do with it.

GARGA

A tooth for a tooth. If you please, Shlink.

(**SHLINK**, without any emotion, goes up to the **SALVATION ARMY PREACHER** and spits right in his face.)

SALVATION ARMY PREACHER

(shakes his fists, weeping) God forgive me!

GARGA

(throws the papers at him) Here's my contribution. That's for your Army. And this is for you. (gives him the revolver) Now get out of here, you little pig!

GARGA

You ruined my little joke, god damn it! Not a trace of pity in you. Anyway I didn't give him all the money, I kept some. And now I'm leaving. See, that was the whole point, Mr. Yokahama-Shlink. I'm leaving for Tahiti.

MARIE

You're a coward, George. I saw your face, how you couldn't bear to look at that preacher when he went out. You really must be desperate.

GARGA

I came here stripped to the bone. For two weeks now I've been shaking with a fever in my soul. Now I spit in his face over and over, and he swallows it! So fuck him. It's finished!

MARIE

This is sick, what you're doing.

GARGA

You left me in the lurch. A tooth for a tooth.

MARIE

I left you? Are you trying to pick a fight with me now? You always push things too far, George. God will punish you. All I want from you now, is just leave me alone!

GARGA

And to find bread for your parents in a whore's bed and offer your horse's smell for sale and say: it's not me! Go on! May you prosper in bed and thy days be long upon the land.

(Exit **GARGA**)

MARIE

I don't understand you very well, Mr. Shlink. But you move in four different directions where the rest of us only move in one. A man has many possibilities, hasn't he? I can see that a man has many possibilities.

SCENE THREE

(The Garga family living room. August 22nd, about seven in the evening. A filthy attic room. Upstage, a dormer window with curtains. **JOHN GARGA, MAE, MANKY.**)

JOHN

There's something going on. It's hard to talk about.

MANKY

What I heard, your son George is mixed up in something, and he'll never get out of it. I heard he's mixed up with some Chink. The Chink did something to him.

MAE

We don't want to get involved.

JOHN

When they fire him, we're going to be eating the dirt off the floor.

MAE

He never could stand anybody bossing him around, even when he was a little boy.

MANKY

What I heard too, you shouldn't let your daughter Marie go work for this Chink.

MAE

All I know is, she hasn't been around for two weeks now.

MANKY

This has all gotta be connected.

MAE

When Marie left, she said they offered her a job in a shop or something. They pay her twenty dollars a week, and all she has to do is the laundry.

MANKY

Doing laundry for a Chink!

JOHN

A city like this, you can't even see the house next door. You read some newspaper, you can't understand what they're talking about.

MANKY

Or when you buy a ticket for something.

JOHN

Right. People go ride in these trolley-cars, they risk getting ...

MANKY

Cancer. Stomach cancer.

JOHN

On the other hand, wheat grows all year round here in the States. Summer wheat, winter wheat. So you never know.

MANKY

But then all of a sudden one day you don't have any dinner, nobody tells why. You go downtown with your kids, they're obeying the fourth commandment, you've got your son by the hand, or your daughter, and all of a sudden your son and your daughter are gone, sucked into the swamp while you were still holding their hand.

JOHN

Who's that out there?

GARGA

(in the doorway) You all still here? Sitting around bullshitting?

JOHN

You go the money for the last two weeks?

GARGA

Yeah.

JOHN

You still got a job? Is that a new suit? You must have made some money some place, right? Say hello to your mother, George. (to **MAE**) Well, don't just stand there like Lot's wife! Your son is back. Our son's back and he's going to take us all out to dinner at the Metropolitan Bar. Does he look kind of pale to you? You think maybe your darling's been drinking? Come on, Manky, let's go. We can have a smoke out on the stairs.

(**MANKY** and **JOHN** go out)

MAE

George, you've got to tell me: have you gotten into trouble with someone?

GARGA

Did anybody stop here today?

MAE

No.

GARGA

I have to go away.

MAE

Where are you going?

GARGA

Somewhere. Anywhere. Don't get all upset.

MAE

Don't go, George!

GARGA

I've got to. Suppose somebody insults a person, and that person doesn't like it. But say the first somebody is willing to turn over his whole lumber business to that person- under certain conditions- just so he can go on insulting him. And the person doesn't like that any better. When that happens, the person who got insulted better get out of there fast, but maybe he doesn't like that any better either. And besides maybe it's too late. But he's got to do something! He's got to be free!

MAE

Aren't you free?

GARGA

No. (pause) No, I'm not free. None of us are free. It starts when you're a kid, with your morning coffee, you start fooling around and you get slapped. But, every mother's tears are salt for her children's food, and she washes their shirts in her sweat, and you- you begin to think you're safe and sound until the next Ice Age. And your heart is hooked. And then you grow up and want to get something accomplished, you put yourself into it body and soul, and what happens? They slip you some cash, make you part of the deal, and you're not even free to fuck up!

MAE

You've got to tell me what's making you so sick.

GARGA

You can't help.

MAE

Yes, I can, George. You can't go off and leave your father. How are we supposed to get by?

GARGA

(gives her some money) They fired me. But here's a little money. That should last you, oh, a few months.

MAE

We're worried, we haven't heard anything from your sister. We hope she still has her job.

GARGA

I don't know. I told her to stay away from that Chink.

MAE

I know I can't tell you what to do, the way other mothers can –

GARGA

Others? Oh, all those others, those other people, all those good other people who work in the table factories, they earn their daily bread and make good tables for all the good bread eaters, all those other good table makers and bread eaters with all their good families, a huge pile of them, and nobody spits in their soup, nobody kicks them into the good old hereafter, they never get washed overboard while somebody sings "Down to the bottom of the sea ..."

MAE

Oh, George!

GARGA

Stop "Oh George"ing me! I can't stand it! I don't want to hear it anymore!

MAE

You don't want to hear it? What about me? How can I live like this? With these filthy walls and a stove that won't last through the winter!

GARGA

Oh mother, can't you see? Nothing's going to last anymore, so forget the stove and the dirty walls.

MAE

How can you say that? Are you blind?

GARGA

And the bread in the cupboard won't last, and neither will the clothes on your back, and neither will your daughter!

MAE

Go ahead and shout! Make sure all the neighbors can hear! Tell them nothing makes any difference anymore and it's all too much! But now am I supposed to live? I still have a long life ahead of me, and I still have to live it!

GARGA

If things are so bad, then tell me what's to blame.

MAE

You know what.

GARGA

You're right, I do.

MAE

What do you mean by that? What do you think I'm talking about? I won't have you looking at me like that, I gave you birth, I nursed you and fed you and beat you, so you've got no right to look at me like that. Your father ... well, a husband is what he is, I'm not going to say anything against him, he worked for us.

GARGA

I want you to come with me. Please.

MAE

What?

GARGA

I want you to come with me down south. I can get work there, I'll cut down trees and we'll build a log cabin, and you can cook for me. I really need you.

MAE

Who are you saying that to? The wind? When you come back, you can drop by and see where we spent our last days. (pause) When are you leaving?

GARGA

Right away.

MAE

Don't say anything to your father. I'll pack your things and leave them on the back stairs.

GARGA

Thanks.

MAE

It's the least I can do.

(They go out. Enter **WORM**, cautiously. He sniffs around the room. Enter **MANKY** and **JOHN**)

MANKY

Who're you?

WORM

Me? Just a gentleman. Mr. Garga, I presume? Mr. John Garga?

MANKY

What do you want?

WORM

Me? Nothing! But perhaps I might speak with your son George – that is, if he's already up and dressed?

JOHN

Speak to him about what?

WORM

(shakes his head sadly) How inhospitable! Where exactly might I find your distinguished son? If the question isn't too much for you ...

JOHN

He's not here. And you can go to hell! What do you think this is, an information booth?

(Enter **MAE**)

WORM

Oh, too bad! Too bad! We miss your son, sir, miss him dreadfully. But I'm also here about daughter, if that's of any interest to you.

MAE

Where is she?

WORM

In a ... in a hotel, madam, a hotel in Chinatown.

JOHN

What?

MAE

Dear God!

MANKY

What are you talking about? What's she doing there?

WORM

Nothing. She just eats. Mr. Shlink asked me to tell you and your son to get her out of there, she's too expensive! The lady just lies around, she eats and eats, she's running us into the red. And she keeps making indecent propositions! Really! She's demoralized the whole hotel. She'll ruin us all. Sir.

MAE

John!

WORM

(shouts) What I'm saying is, we're sick and tired of her!

MAE

Oh, dear God!

MANKY

Where is she? I'll get her out of there.

WORM

You'll get her out? What are you, some kind of bird dog? You don't even know where the hotel is! It's not so simple, young man. Somebody has to keep an eye on her. It's all your son's fault. He should have had the decency to get the little bitch out of there. Tomorrow we're going to the police, get them to do something.

MAE

Dear God! Tell us where she is! Oh, John, get him to tell you. What happened to Marie? What kind of city is this, John what kind of people are these?

(**MAE** goes out. Enter **SHLINK**)

SHLINK

My name is Shlink.

WORM

(stammering with fear) Excuse me, is there a back way out of here ... (rushes out)

SHLINK

I used to be in the lumber business, now I do nothing. I do not have a job. Can I be of any use to you? I recognized the name on your door.

MANKY

You're Shlink? You're the guy holding these people's daughter against her will!

SHLINK

What do you mean?

JOHN

Marie Garga, sir, my daughter Marie Garga.

SHLINK

I never heard of her.

JOHN

The man who was here just now ...

MANKY

He's probably in your pay!

JOHN

... the man who ran away when you came in.

SHLINK

I do not know the gentleman.

JOHN

My son's involved with you somehow ...

SHLINK

(laughs) You play jokes on a poor man. I am not much anymore, I have lost everything I had. You never know how things will turn out, do you? But my good right arm is here to serve you. If you please.

MANKY

What I say is, before I bring a ship into harbor, I want to know how deep the water is.

JOHN

No telling what he's up to.

SHLINK

Here you are, left alone in your old age – perhaps your own fault, perhaps not – alone at an age when the ground begins to close so the snow cannot fall through the cracks. I know that you have lost your usual breadwinner. I feel a certain compassion for you, and working for you could give my life some purpose.

JOHN

Your reasons won't fill our stomachs. Nobody can survive on fish heads. I know, you just want to sit around the table with a real family. But we're poor people.

SHLINK

I can eat anything. I can digest stones.

JOHN

It's a small room. We're crammed like sardines.

SHLINK

I would be very happy if you let me live here. I do not take up much room, I can sleep on the floor. Just give me shelter from the cold, and I am happy as a child. And I can pay rent.

JOHN

I understand. You don't want to stay out in the cold. All right then, you can come live under our roof.

(Enter **MAE**)

MAE

I have to go downtown before it gets dark.

JOHN

You're never around when I need you! I just told this man he could stay with us. He's all alone. Your son's gone, so we go room. Shake hands.

MAE

We're from out on the prairie.

SHLINK

I know.

JOHN

What were you fussing with on the back stairs?

MAE

My bedclothes. I thought maybe I'd sleep there.

JOHN

Where are your things?

SHLINK

I don't have any things. I can sleep out on the stairs, ma'am. I will not intrude. My hand will not touch you. I know the skin on it is yellow.

MAE

(coldly) I'll give you mine.

SHLINK

I am unworthy. But I meant what I said. I know you didn't mean your skin, excuse me.

MAE

I always leave the window on the stairs open at night. (Exits)

JOHN

She's really a good soul under that skin.

SHLINK

Then the Lord bless her. I am a plain man. You will never hear a word out of me. All I have in my mouth are teeth.

SCENE FOUR

(A flophouse in Chinatown. Just before dawn,
August 24th. **SKINNY, BABOON, JANE**)

SKINNY

(by the door) Aren't you even thinking about starting a new business?

BABOON

You kidding? Take a look at the boss, he walks up and down by the harbor, checking out passengers on ships to Tahiti. That kid that ran off with his money? He also ran off with his soul. Maybe to Tahiti. He keeps looking for him. He packed up whatever stuff he had left and dragged it over here. And I mean every last cigarette butt. (pointing to **JANE**) And this cone here, he's been feeding her for the last three weeks. Not to mention the kid's sister, she's a nice girl, so what does he do? He brings her here. No idea what he's up to with her. Sometimes he sits there talking to her all night long.

SKINNY

So first he kicks you out on your ass, and now you're paying to take care of him, plus his two girlfriends?

BABOON

He makes a few bucks hauling coal, but he gives everything to the kid's family. He's supposed to be staying with them but they can't stand him so he stays away. The kid stole everything he had. He got himself a cheap trip to Tahiti and left the Boss with a log around his neck big enough to drown him. And five months from now they're gonna haul him into jail because of that lumber he double sold.

SKINNY

You mean he's all washed up, and you still take care of him?

BABOON

He just wanted his little joke. Anyway, a man like him, he can always get credit. If it turns out the kid's gone for good, three months from now the boss'll be back in business, running the biggest lumber yard in Chicago.

JANE

(fixing her makeup; she's half undressed) I always knew I'd wind up like this, in a Chinese flophouse.

BABOON

Yeah baby. And who knows where you'll wind up next.
(From behind a curtain, we hear two voices)

MARIE

How come you don't want to touch me? And why do you always want to wear that stupid jacket? It smells. I can get you a suit like other men wear. I can't sleep. I love you.

JANE

Shh! It's them. They're talking again.

SHLINK

I am most unworthy. I know nothing about virgins. And that smell, that's the smell of my race. I've been aware of it for years.

MARIE

Yes, you do smell. You smell very bad.

SHLINK

You must not hurt yourself this way. Look, my body is numb. So is my skin. A man's skin in its natural state is too thin for this world, and that is why men try to thicken their skin. It would work, too, if only they could stop the thickening. Like, for instance, a piece of leather, it always stays the same. But a man's skin keeps on getting thicker and thicker.

MARIE

Is that why you're always looking for somebody who'll fight you?

SHLINK

Take a table for instance. It starts out with sharp edges. Late on, and this is the terrible thing, it feels like rubber. No sharp edges. But once your skin gets thick enough, you feel nothing. Table, edges, rubber, nothing.

MARIE

How long have you had this sickness?

SHLINK

Since I was a boy, in the boats on the Yangtse river. The river was hell on the boats and the boats were hell on us. Every time the man went to the stern, he stepped right on our faces. At night we were too tired even to turn our heads. But that man was never too tired to step on our faces. So we took it out on the cat. We drowned her trying to teach her to swim, even though she used to keep the rats from biting us. We all had the same sickness.

MARIE

When were you on the Yangtse river?

SHLINK

We would lie there wallowing in the shallows morning after morning, and feel the sickness grow.

(enter **WORM**)

WORM

That kid's long gone. I looked all over Chicago. Not a trace.

SHLINK

(to **MARIE**) Get some sleep, it will do you good. (comes from behind the curtain)
Still nothing?

(**SHLINK** leaves. Through the open door you can hear the sounds of Chicago waking up: milkmen, meat wagons)

MARIE

Chicago's waking up. You can hear the milkmen and the meat wagons and the newspaper sellers. And the cool morning breeze. It would be good to go out, good to wash myself clean. All this asphalt, that's good too. And so is the prairie. There's a cool breeze blowing out on the prairie, I know there is.

BABOON

You still know your catechism, Jane?

JANE

(wailing) Things are getting worse, things are getting worse, things are getting worse.

(They all begin to straighten up: raise the blinds, put away bed rolls)

MARIE

What's happening to me, I can't even breathe anymore. I want to sleep with that man and I don't know how. Women everywhere do it like dogs, yellow ones, blacks ones, and I can't do it. It's like somebody tore me to pieces. These walls are like paper, but still I can't breathe. I should burn the place down. If I had some matches, a little black box of matches, I would burn it down, and then they'd come with hoses and there'd be water everywhere. But if I tried to swim away, I'd split in two, and swim in two different directions. Then it would all be over.

JANE

Where did he go?

BABOON

Out. He's out searching the faces of the people who are leaving Chicago because it's such a mean fucking town.

JANE

The wind's from the east. The boats for Tahiti are sailing out to sea...

SCENE FIVE

(The same Chinese flophouse a month later, around the 19th or 20th of September. A dirty bedroom, a corridor. A glass-enclosed barroom. **WORM, GARGA, MANKY, BABOON**)

WORM

(from the corridor) So he never sailed. Never left for Tahiti after all. We harpooned him good, better than we knew. We thought the kid had disappeared in a hole in the ground, and now he's right here in Shlink's room.

GARGA

(from the bedroom) "In my dreams, I call him my demon bridegroom, that's what you are, Shlink, you fuck. We broke up, but now I'm back and I've got his bedroom. His foolish virgin lies around smoking Virginia cigarettes, she tuckes whatever she makes in the top of her stocking. That's me! (laughs)

MANKY

(in the bar) Life's funny. For instance I knew this man, he was a great guy through and through, but he was in love with this woman. Her family was about to die of hunger. He had two thousand dollars, but he just sat there and watched them go hungry. Because if he had the two thousand dollars he could afford to love the woman, and without them he couldn't. It was a terrible thing to do. Insanity.

GARGA

(from the bedroom) "Behold, I'm a sinner. I loved the desert, burnt orchards, second-hand shops, luke-warm drinks. You are making a mistake. I'm a little man." I don't want anything more to do with Mr. Yokohama-Shlink.

BABOON

Yeah, I know what you mean.

WORM

We took Shlink in like a starving dog. Now the dog's got his favorite bone back, and if he don't let go of it he's out of luck as far as we're concerned.

GARGA

"I will be his widow one day. That day, I know, has already been marked on the calendar. And I, in clean underwear, shall walk behind his corpse, spreading my legs in the warm sun."

(Enter **MARIE**. She goes into the bedroom)

MARIE

George!

GARGA

Who's that? (recognizes her) Christ, look at you! You look like a dirty dishrag.

MARIE

I know.

WORM

He's drunk out of his mind. And now his sister shows up, he calls her a dirty dishrag. Where's the boss?

BABOON

He'll be back later. I got Jane here. For bait, maybe.

JANE

(shakes her head) I don't get it. What do you mean bait? Give me another drink. Gin.

MARIE

I'm glad to know there was a time you used to think better of me. (pause) You used to be in better shape too- remember when you were the big ladies' man down at Jimmy Ragtime's saloon? Down there every Saturday night, a sharp crease in your trousers, with tobacco and whisky and women, all that stuff men go for. You remember, George, don't you? (pause)

GARGA

(softly) It gets cold here nights. You hungry?

MARIE

Look at the way you're living now.

GARGA

You want something?

MARIE

(she looks at him and shakes her head softly) Oh George, all this time there were vultures circling over our heads.

GARGA

(softly) When was the last time you were home? (**MARIE** says nothing) They told me you've been hanging around here.

MARIE

So what? I just hope someone's taking care of them at home ...

GARGA

(shrugs) Forget it. Somebody's taking care of them, that's all I know. And I know what you're up to here. I know what goes on in this Chinese flophouse.

MARIE

Do you like being cruel, George? (**GARGA** looks at her) Stop looking at me. You want to be my father confessor, right?

GARGA

Right. Go ahead.

MARIE

I love him. (pause) Why don't you say something?

GARGA

Go ahead, love him! Maybe that will suck the strength out of him.

MARIE

Will you please stop looking at the ceiling! The thing is, he doesn't love me.

GARGA

Too bad.

MARIE

I know. Oh, George, I'm all torn up about it. Because he doesn't love me. I start to shake in my clothes whenever I see him, and I always say the wrong thing.

GARGA

I can't tell you what's the right thing. Sorry. I had a woman once, she wasn't worth a second drink, but she knew how to attract men. They paid her for it, too. She knew just how to do it.

MARIE

You say such bitter things to me, they make me dizzy, as if I was drunk. At least now I understand you.

(**SHLINK** appears in the corridor)

WORM

I'll tell you something. From my experience, the whole stinking human race is trapped in some paper dream. And nothing is more like paper than real life.

(**MARIE** leaves the bedroom and bumps into **SHLINK**)

SHLINK

You here, Miss Garga?

MARIE

I have something I want to tell you, Mr. Shlink. I'm not trying to prove anything with my love. I don't want anything from you. It's not easy for me to say that, but maybe you know already.

GARGA

(comes out of the bedroom) Stay here, Marie. We've ended up in the big city, but we still act like we're out on the prairie. Don't get pushed around. You only have to do what you want.

MARIE

Yes, George.

GARGA

He works like a horse, and I just lie around stinking of absinthe.

SHLINK

Men who rule the earth can lie around and do nothing.

GARGA

And the men who own it work.

SHLINK

Does that bother you?

GARGA

Every time I see you, you're always trying to figure me out. You think now maybe you backed the wrong horse? You look old.

SHLINK

Thank you. I am happy you have not forgotten me. I really thought you were gone to Tahiti. You must excuse me. I have taken the liberty of supporting your unfortunate family with the work of my own hands.

GARGA

I didn't know that. You really are digging in for the long haul, aren't you? That's a dirty trick, taking care of my family, but you love it, don't you? You make me laugh (goes back into the bedroom, lies down, and laughs)

SHLINK

(follows him eagerly) Go ahead, laugh. I like to hear you laugh. Your laughter is like sunshine to me, it brings a little light into my unworthy existence. It was hard, not seeing you. It was been three weeks, Garga.

GARGA

I'm doing all right, all things considered.

SHLINK

Yes, you're living the good life now.

GARGA

Except my back is sort from lying around on it.

SHLINK

Life is a miserable business. You think you are living the good life and it turns out bad.

GARGA

I want more out of life than just kicking the shit out of you. You want to sell your rotten soul to the highest bidder, go ahead. But doesn't other people's suffering mean anything to you? Are you that heartless? You think you're involved in some metaphysical combat, but you leave a heap of bodies behind you and they're bleeding real blood.

SHLINK

You mean this business with your sister? I never butchered anything your hand protected.

GARGA

I only have two hands! Whatever is human to me, you devour it like a piece of meat.

MARIE

Please, George, can't I go now?

GARGA

(drags her back) No, you can't! We only just started talking about you. I only just started seeing you!

SHLINK

Ah, she is a sore point with you. My apologies. I will back away. You only realize how much your feelings mean when the one you feel for is lying in the morgue.
(goes into the bedroom)

GARGA

But I do make the sacrifice. Am I refusing?

MARIE

You've got to let me go. You're scaring me.

GARGA

(to **SHLINK** in the bedroom) Get on out here! (to **MARIE**) Let's start a family!

MARIE

George!

GARGA

You stay where you are! (to **SHLINK** in the bedroom) And you, god damn it, can't you join the human race for a minute?

SHLINK

(in the doorway) Of course I can.

GARGA

And this is the man you love? And he doesn't give a shit?

(**MARIE** starts to cry)

SHLINK

I hope you're not overestimating yourself. (goes back into the bedroom)

GARGA

Don't you worry. I'm finally getting the point. This is Thursday night, right? And this is a Chinese flophouse. And that's my sister, right? Marie Garga! (turns to grab her) My sister Marie. Marie, say hello to Mr. Yokohama-Shlink. There's something he wants to tell you. (pushes her into the bedroom)

MARIE

George!

GARGA

(goes to get drinks) "Women with crooked orange mouths, cowering white in glowing thorn bushes ..."

MARIE

It's getting dark out, and I want to go home.

SHLINK

I'll go with you. If you please.

GARGA

"Their eyes dulled by the wind of a drunken night and by sacrifices in the open fields ..."

MARIE

(softly) Please don't ask me.

GARGA

"Their thin dresses, like shimmering snake skins drenched with never-ending rain ..."

SHLINK

I meant what I said. I do not have secrets against anyone.

GARGA

"They cover their legs to the very toenails, incrusting with molten copper ..." (brings in a glass) Sure you don't want a drink? I think we need one.

SHLINK

Why do you want to drink? Drinkers lie.

GARGA

It certainly is cheerful, talking to you. Whenever I drink, my thoughts begin to sink into darkness, and once they reach bottom, they make more sense. Have a drink!

SHLINK

I'd rather not. If you please.

GARGA

I asked you to have a drink with me! Why do you tell me no?

SHLINK

I'm not saying no. It's just that a clear head is all I have left.

GARGA

Once you're drunk you'll be able to make love.

SHLINK

(drinks formally) Once I am drunk, I am able to make love.

GARGA

(shouts into the bedroom) You want a drink too, Marie? (to **SHLINK**) Why the hell don't you just sit down?

BABOON

(to **MANKY** and **WORM**) Shut up! I heard them talking just now. Now they stopped.

GARGA

(to **MARIE**) This is the black swamp. I don't deny it. He's been in it his whole life. The ground splits open, the sewers overflow, but their cravings aren't enough for us. (drinks)

SHLINK

(obsequiously) I ask you for your hand, Miss Garga. I ask you to come with me. I love you.

MARIE

Help! They're trying to make me part of their game! (runs into the bar)

MANKY

I'm right here, sweetheart!

MARIE

I knew you'd be wherever I was.

GARGA

"One breath tears operatic rents in these partitions..."

SHLINK

(very loud) Get out of that bar, Miss Garga, please! (**MARIE** comes to the door of the bar) I beg of you, Miss Garga, do not throw yourself away.

MARIE

I want a room with nothing in it. I don't want anything any more. And I promise you, Pat, I never will.

GARGA

Fight for her, Shlink.

SHLINK

Think how slow those years will pass, Marie Garga. And how tired you are now.

MANKY

Come with me. I've got two thousand dollars, that means a roof over our heads in winter. And no more spooks except in the morgues.

SHLINK

I beg you, Marie Garga, come with me, if you please. I'll treat you as my wife and wait on you. And if I ever hurt you, I will go hang myself.

GARGA

He's not lying. He never lies. What he says, that's what you'll get if you go with him. Down to the last penny. (goes into the bar)

MARIE

Pat, I have to ask: suppose I don't love you. Will you still love me?

MANKY

I think so. And it's not written anywhere that you don't love me.

GARGA

Here you are, Jane. Slugging back the cocktails? You don't seem quite yourself. Can't sell what you've got left?

JANE

Tell him to get out of here, Baboon. I can't stand his face. He's molesting me!

BABOON

Anybody says you're all washed up, baby, I'll break his nose.

GARGA

They still feeding you? Your face is dissolving, like the ice in the bottom of a drink. Hell, I remember when you went around dressed like a diva, and now look at you, covered with dirt.

MARIE

Let's go. I wish I could have pleased you, Shlink, but I can't. It's not that I'm better than you.

SHLINK

Then go, if that's what you want. I won't repeat my offer. Only do not let the pit swallow you up. There are lots of places to get away from men.

GARGA

Not for a woman. Forget it, Shlink. Can't you see she wants to go? If a roof over your head in winter was all you wanted, Jane, you'd still be sewing shirts.

SHLINK

Drink before you make love, Marie Garga.

MARIE

Come on, Pat, I don't like this place. Is this your woman, George? Is she? I'm glad I still had a chance to meet her.

(Exit **MARIE** and **MANKY**)

SHLINK

I will never abandon you. Come back if things get bad.

BABOON

An old shoe, gentlemen, well worn. (he laughs)

GARGA

(holds a lighter up to **SHLINK's** face) Your face is still in good shape. I'm not so sure about your good intentions.

SHLINK

We've both made considerable sacrifices. How many ships do you need to get to Tahiti? Do you want me to hoist my shirt as a sail? Or your sister's nightgown? It's you who ruined your sister. And do not forget about the family you abandoned. You see now how you have sacrificed them all?

GARGA

I'd like to butcher them all. Anything to beat you out. And I also know why you keep them fat and happy with the money from you coal hauling. Nobody's going to cheat me out of having my little joke. And I'm also taking charge of this little beast. Thanks for taking care of her for me.

JANE

Don't try to insult me. Maybe I'm all alone in this world, but I can take care of myself.

GARGA

And now it's time to hand over the money from that illegal lumber sale, which I hope you've been keeping for me. I want it now. (**SHLINK** takes out the money and gives it to him) I'm really drunk, aren't I? Really drunk, but I pulled this round off smooth as shit, didn't I, Shlink? (goes out with **JANE**)

BABOON

That was the end of your money, Boss. And where did you get it? They're gonna want to know. Broost and Company already wants to know what happened to the lumber they paid for.

SHLINK

(doesn't listen) Give me a chair. (pause. All the chairs are occupied. No one moves) I want my rice.

BABOON

No more rice for you, Boss. You just ran out of credit.

SCENE SIX

(The shores of Lake Michigan. Late September.
A wooded area. **SHLINK** and **MARIE**)

MARIE

These trees are all dripping with shit, the sky's too close, and I don't care. I'm cold. I feel like a half frozen quail. And I can't help myself.

SHLINK

I love you ... if that is any help.

MARIE

I've thrown myself away. My love turns out to be a bitter fruit. Other people fall in love, it's the best time in their lives, but I feel like I'm dead. I just drag myself around. My body feels stained.

SHLINK

Tell me how bad you feel, if that will make you feel better.

MARIE

I went to bed with a man who was like an animal. I gave myself to him, over and over, even though my body was numb and he couldn't make me warm. Every time we stopped he'd smoke a cigarette. Virginias. He was a sailor. But I loved you every moment I spent with him, and I got so crazy he thought it was love and wanted to end it right there. I just slept my way down into darkness. I don't owe you anything but my conscience is screaming at me that my body is stained. And my body belongs to you, even though you don't want it.

SHLINK

I'm sorry you're cold. I thought the air was warm and dark. I do not know how men in this country talk to the women they love. If it is any help ... I love you.

MARIE

I'm such a coward. My courage left me when my body got stained.

SHLINK

But you can wash yourself clean.

MARIE

Maybe I should walk out into the lake until the water's over my head, but I can't. I'm not ready for that yet. And this despair! And a heart that won't shut up! I feel as if there's only half of me here. And I'm not in love, that's only vanity. I hear what you say, I have ears, I'm not deaf, but what does it all mean? Maybe I'm asleep, and maybe somebody will wake me up and then maybe I'll do something disgusting because that's the way I am.

I'll do it just to get a roof over my head. I can lie back, close my eyes, and pretend it's not happening.

SHLINK

Let's go, it's getting cold.

MARIE

But the leaves feel warm. And they keep the sky from getting too close.

(Exit **SHLINK** and **MARIE**; enter **MANKY**)

MANKY

Her footsteps. They go this way. A September cold as this, you need a sense of humor to be out in the woods. Mating season for crayfish, the lovesick stag bellows in the thicket, time to hunt the wolverine. But my feet are so fucking cold, I had to stuff my shoes with newspaper. I don't know where she's holed up, that's the worst of it. If she's till lying around in that greasy flophouse she'll never get her panties clean again. Too much dirt. Oh, Pat, Pat Manky, I'm going to lock you up! Can't defend myself, too weak, so it's time to go on the attack. Swallow the bastards guts and all, hope my digestion can stand it, line the vultures up in front of a firing squad and then hang them up stuffed in the Manky Museum. Brrrr! Words! Toothless phrases! (takes a revolver out of his pocket) This is the coldest answer of all. Look at you, you dumb fuck, tramping around out here in this jungle, trying to find a woman! Just like a dumb bloodhound! Where can a woman go, once she's got no place to go? Jeezus, this underbrush will kill you! Take it easy, Paddy, take a break, have a smoke, eat something. And put that thing away. Forward, march!

(Exit **MANKY**, enter **SHLINK** and **MARIE**)

MARIE

It is hateful before God and man. I'm not going with you.

SHLINK

These feelings will rot away. Air out your soul.

MARIE

I can't. You're making me into a sacrifice.

SHLINK

You always need to have your head in some man's armpit, don't you? Doesn't matter whose.

MARIE

I don't mean anything to you.

SHLINK

You cannot live alone.

MARIE

You took me so fast back there, as if you were afraid I'd get away. It was like a sacrifice.

SHLINK

You go racing into the woods like some crazy bitch, and now you go racing out the same way.

MARIE

Am I what you say? I'm always what you say. And I love you, don't ever think I don't. I love like a crazy bitch. You just said so. But now it's time to pay me. Yes, I feel like getting paid. Give me your money; I can live on that. I'm a whore.

SHLINK

Your face is all wet. What kind of a whore is that?

MARIE

Don't make fun of me. Just give me my money. And stop looking at me. I'm not crying. If my face is wet, it's just the fog. (**SHLINK** gives her the money)

MARIE

I won't thank you, Mr. Yokohama-Shlink. This is a business deal. No one has to thank anybody.

SHLINK

You better leave. You will never make any money out here.

SCENE SEVEN

(September 29th, 1912. The Garga family living room, full of new furniture. **JOHN, MAE, GARGA, JANE, MANKY**, all in new clothes. A wedding celebration.)

JOHN

That man ... the one we don't like to talk about ... you know, that man with the different color skin? Ever since that man has been down in the coal yards, working day and night for a family he barely knows, ever since that man with the yellow skin has been hauling coal just to take care of us, things around here keep getting better and better. Why even today! He didn't know there was going to be a wedding, but look! Because of him our son George gets the wedding he deserves, a wedding fit for the boss of a major commercial enterprise. Look at us: brand new ties, dark suits, the taste of good whiskey between our teeth ... and all this new furniture!

MAE

Don't you think it's strange he gets all that money hauling coal?

GARGA

I'm the one who gets all the money.

MAE

And you decided to get married. Overnight, just like that. Aren't you rushing things a bit, Jane?

JANE

Look, it snows, the snow melts, what have you got left? And what if you pick the wrong man? It happens.

MAE

Wrong man or right man, that's not important. The important thing is that you stick by him.

JOHN

Bullshit. Just eat your steak and give the bride a hand.

GARGA

(takes **JANE** by the wrist) And what a good little hand. I feel completely at home here. I don't care if the paper is peeling off the walls, I've got a new suit, I'm eating steak. I don't care if there's plaster dust all over everything, so thick I can taste it, around the photo of Marie Garga, our beloved sister, twenty years old, born out on the prairie. Artificial flowers, a nice little memento. The rest of us are in good shape here. Good to be sitting around where the dark wind can't get at us.

JANE

(stands) What's the matter with you, George? Have you got a fever?

GARGA

I like having a fever, Jane.

JANE

And I'd like to know what you have in mind for me, George.

GARGA

Why look so pale, mother? The prodigal son is once more beneath your roof. How come you all look like plaster statues?

MAE

I think it's because of the fight you keep talking about.

GARGA

It's only flies on my brain. I can shoo them away.

(Enter **SHLINK**)

GARGA

Ah! Mother, a steak and a glass of whiskey for our honored guest! Welcome! Today's my wedding day! My darling wife will tell you all about it. Go ahead, Jane.

JANE

Well, early this morning, right after we got out of bed, me and my husband went to see the sheriff, and we asked him to marry us. And he said: "I know you, Jane – you think you can stay with your husband till death do you part?" Of course I realized he meant well, he wasn't trying to insult me, he was a nice man with a big beard, so I said to him, I said: "Listen, life is not exactly what you think it is."

SHLINK

Congratulations, Garga. You are a vindictive man.

GARGA

There's a disgusting fear in your smile, Shlink. And there should be. Don't eat so fast! You've got plenty of time! Where's Marie? I hope she's been taking care of you. You must be quite satisfied. Sorry we don't have a place for you to sit, Shlink. No extra chairs. Otherwise the furniture is too perfect- brand new, lots of it. And take a look at that piano! The whole place is perfect, in fact, and I intend to spend all my evenings right here in the bosom of my family. I have a new lease on life. Tomorrow I'm going back to work at C. Maynes' Lending Library.

MAE

Oh, George, aren't you talking too much?

GARGA

You hear that? My family doesn't want me to have anything more to do with you. Our acquaintance is at an end, Mister Shlink. It's been very profitable. All this furniture, for instance. And just look at our clothes, that says it all. We've got plenty of cash on hand, and I thank you.

SHLINK

Could I ask one small favor? It's a personal matter. I have here a letter from Broost and Company. You will notice it has the stamp of the Attorney General of Virginia. And you will notice I do not yet open it. I would be very much obliged if you would open it for me. Whatever it says, I would prefer to hear the worst from your lips. (**GARGA** opens the letter and reads it) It is a personal matter, I know, but a small gesture from you might ease matters for me.

MAE

Why don't you say anything, George? You look as if you had a plan. That scares me, George. You men hide behind your unknown thoughts as if they were smoke. You never say what you think, and we sit here waiting like lambs for the slaughter. Tell me what your plan is, and if you don't know yet, tell me that, so I can make my own plan. I have to take care of myself too. Four years freezing in the filth of this iron city. Oh, George!

GARGA

It seems the worst years were the best years, after all. And now they're over. Don't say anything. My dear parents, and you too, Jane, my dear wife, I have made up my mind. I am going to jail.

JOHN

What are you talking about? Is this because of how you got your money? I knew you'd wind up in jail. It was written on your forehead when you were only five years old. I never asked what was going between you two, because I always knew it was some kind of dirty deal. You've pulled the rug out from under your own feet. Buy a piano and then go to jail, drag in pounds of steak and then let your family starve to death, it's all a game to you, isn't it? And where's your sister, Marie? (takes off his suit jacket and throws it on the floor) Here's my new suit, I never wanted it. But anything this city can do to humiliate me, I can stand.

JANE

How long will it be, George?

SHLINK

(to **JOHN**) He sold a load of lumber to two different companies. But I am your friend, and I could clear things up with the authorities. I am ready to listen to whatever your son has to say, Mrs. Garga.

JANE

Don't let him talk you into anything, George. I'm your wife, and I'll take care of the house while you're gone.

JOHN

(a loud laugh) She'll take care of the house! She was on the streets just two days ago! We're going to be living off the wages of sin!

SHLINK

You have told me how much your family means to you, you want to spend your evenings with all this furniture. Good. I am ready to save you for your family's sake.

MAE

You can't go to jail now, George.

GARGA

I know, mother, you just don't understand. It may be a difficult to hurt a man, but there's no way you can crush him forever.

JANE

How can you sit there bullshitting, when the roof is about to come crashing down on our heads?

GARGA

(to **SHLINK**) I've had enough. I'm closing our accounts and then I'll go.

SHLINK

What about your family? They would like to know if they still mean anything to you! If you will not support them, they are finished. Listen to me, Garga –

GARGA

You are all free. I give you your freedom.

SHLINK

You mean you leave them all to rot! There are only a few of them and they may decide to do just what you did, clear out the table, tear up the dirty tablecloth, shake the cigarette butts out of their clothes, follow your example, to be free at last – and stand around like you, drooling all over their shirts.

MAE

Don't answer him, George. It's all true what he says.

GARGA

I close my eyes halfway, and I finally see things cold and clear. But I can't see your face, Mister Shlink. Maybe you don't have one.

SHLINK

Forty years of work down the drain, and all for a load of freedom!

GARGA

Exactly. Nothing left but leftovers, my family will starve, and it's too cold even to snow. But I ... I destroy my enemy!

JOHN

(to **GARGA**) All I see is weakness. Nothing else. You're weak! Just go. Leave us alone.

GARGA

Water is weak, but it can wear away the highest mountain. I read that somewhere. And I do want to see your face, Shlink, your cloudy invisible face.

SHLINK

I have no longer a desire to talk to you. Three years in jail! That means nothing for a young man, simple as closing a door. But for me! You profited me nothing, if you can believe that. But at least you leave me no trace of sorrow. And now I am going out into this shrieking city and get back to business as usual. The way things were before I met you. (Exits)

GARGA

All I have to do now is call the cops. (Exits)

JANE

I'm going back to the Chinese flophouse. I can't stand cops. (Exits)

MAE

Sometimes I think Marie will never come home.

JOHN

She brought it all on herself. She's a whore! Why should we help her?

MAE

But now's when she needs our help.

JOHN

You talk too much.

MAE

(Sits down next to him) I need to ask you, what will you do now?

JOHN

Me? Nothing. Our good times are over.

MAE

Do you understand what George is doing to himself?

JOHN

I think so. And it makes things worse for us.

MAE

How will you live?

JOHN

On the money we have left. And on the money we get when we sell the piano.

MAE

We got it dishonestly. They'll come take it away.

JOHN

Maybe we'll go back out on the prairie. We'll find something.

MAE

(stands) There's something I wanted to tell you, John, but I don't know how. I didn't believe a person could be damned all of a sudden, just like that. But it's decided in heaven. You wake up one fine day, nothing has changed, and all of a sudden you're damned.

JOHN

So what do you think you'll do?

MAE

I'm going to do something I've always wanted to do, John. Don't think it means anything in particular. I'll put some more coal on the fire, and leave your supper in the kitchen. (Exits)

JOHN

Watch out for the ghost of that shark on the stairs. He'll eat you alive!

(Enter a **WAITER**)

WAITER

That new Mrs. Garga, she sent this from downstairs. She thought maybe you could use a drink. You want to sit like this in the dark?

JOHN

Of course not. Turn on the light.

(The **WAITER** leaves. Enter **MARIE**)

MARIE

Don't start in on me. I've got some money.

JOHN

How dare you come back here? What a family! Look at yourself!

MARIE

I look good. Where did you get all the new furniture? Where did you get the money for it? I got some money too.

JOHN

Where did you get it?

MARIE

You really want to know?

JOHN

Give it here. (grabs the money) See what you've done to me, starving me like this.

MARIE

Where's mother?

JOHN

Deserters will be stood up against the wall and shot.

MARIE

Did you send her out to walk the streets?

JOHN

Go on, be a smartass, go roll in the gutter, go get drunk. But I am your father; you have no right to let me go hungry.

MARIE

Where did she go?

JOHN

You can go too. I'm used to being left alone.

MARIE

When did she leave?

JOHN

My life is almost over, god damn it, and here I am poor, and I have to lick my own children's spit, but I refuse to have anything to do with a whore. It doesn't bother me, kicking you out.

MARIE

Then give me back my money. It wasn't for you anyway.

JOHN

Not a chance. Bag me up and get rid of me. As long as I have a little tobacco.

MARIE

Goodbye. (Exits)

JOHN

Everything they have to say, they can say in five minutes. They don't have any more lies after that. (pause) Everything they have to say, they can say in two minutes. Two minutes of silence.

(Enter **GARGA**)

GARGA

Where's mother? Did she leave? Didn't she think I'd be back? (Exits, re-enters) She took the rest of her clothes with her. She's not coming back. (sits down at the table and writes a letter) "To the Editor, Chicago Tribune: I call your attention to the Malaysian lumber dealer C. Shlink. This man has been after my wife, Jane Garga, and he seduced my sister, Marie Garga, who used to work for him. Signed, George Garga." I won't say anything about my mother.

JOHN

That's the end of our family.

GARGA

See? I'm writing this letter and sticking it in my pocket, and then I'm going to forget about this. And three years from now, when my jail time is up, a week before they let me out, I'll send this letter to the papers. They'll print it, and that'll wipe that man off the face of the earth. I'll never see him again. The day I get out will be the day he hears the howling of a lynch mob.

SCENE EIGHT

(Shlink's private office. Three years later. October 20th, 1915, one o'clock in the afternoon. **SHLINK, SKINNY**)

SHLINK

(dictates) ... signed C. Shlink. Letter to Miss Marie Garga, who has inquired once again about a job as office assistant to me. Write that I wish to have no further contact with her or any member of her family. Letter to Standard Real Estate: Dear Sirs: As of today, all shares in our company are held by me personally. Business is now back to normal, and nothing now stands in the way of our signing a five-year contract with your firm. Letter to ...

(Enter an **INFORMER**)

INFORMER

Are you Shlink?

SHLINK

Yes.

INFORMER

I have three minutes to give you some information. You have two minutes to act on it. Earlier today, the Tribune received a letter from the state penitentiary, signed by someone named Garga. The letter accuses you of a number of crimes. They're printing it right now, and your name will be all over the papers. The police will be here in five minutes to arrest you. You owe me one thousand dollars. (**SHLINK** gives him the money. The **INFORMER** exits)

SHLINK

(carefully packing a suitcase) Keep the business running as long as you can. And mail those letters. I will return. (Exits in a hurry)

SCENE NINE

(October 28, 1915. The bar at the Chinese Hotel opposite the prison. **WORM, BABOON, SKINNY,** a **PUGNOSE MAN**, the **SALVATION ARMY PREACHER,** **JANE, MARIE** behind the bar. Crowd noises off)

BABOON

You hear that howling? A lynch mob. These are edgy times in Chinatown. A week ago the papers were full of the crimes of a Malaysian lumber dealer. Sex crimes, very sick stuff. Turns out that three years ago he had a man arrested and put in prison. For three years that man said nothing, but last week when he got out he sent the papers a letter that brought the whole mess to light.

THE PUGNOSE MAN

Ah, the mysteries of the human heart!

BABOON

The Malaysian, he's long gone by now. But he's done for.

WORM

You never know. Consider the conditions on this planet. A man never gets finished off all at once, but at least a hundred times. Everyone has too many possibilities.

WORM

(to **JANE**) When's your husband getting out of jail?

JANE

Good question. Don't worry, I know, don't think I don't. I found out a while ago. He'll be out on the twenty-eighth. That's yesterday. Or maybe today.

BABOON

Don't talk bullshit, Jane.

THE PUGNOSED MAN

And who's the babe in the hooker outfit?

BABOON

That's the victim of his crimes. She's the sister of the guy in jail.

JANE

Yeah, that's my sister-in-law. She makes believe she doesn't know me, but while I was getting married she was out getting laid on the street.

BABOON

The Malaysian fucked her over.

THE PUGNOSED MAN

What's she doing with that sink?

WORM

Can't see. She's trying to say something. Shut up, Jane.

MARIE

(she is dropping twenty dollar bills into the sink; *sound of running water*) I stood there with a fistful of twenties, and I saw God staring at me. And I told God I did everything for that man. And then God just disappeared, like a rustling in the tobacco fields. One bill! Another! Pieces of myself! Now it's gone! (*sound of garbage disposal*)

(Enter **GARGA** with **C. MAYNES**)

GARGA

I asked you to come with me so you could see for yourself what that man has done to me. I want you here, Mr. Maynes, as a witness. I get out of prison after three long years, and where do I find my wife? Drunk, in a dump like this. (leads them over to the table where **JANE** is sitting) Hello, Jane. How's it going?

JANE

George! Is today the twenty-eighth? I didn't realize! Otherwise I would have stayed home. (Boys laugh) It's freezing out, did you notice? (pause) Did you ever think maybe I came in here just to get warm?

GARGA

This is Mr. Maynes. Remember him? I'm going back to work for him. This good man is concerned about what's happened to me.

JANE

Hello, good man. Oh, George, I feel just terrible, I forgot you were coming out today! What must you think of me! (to the bar) Somebody ask this good man if he wants a drink.

GARGA

(to **MARIE**) Hi there, Marie. You waiting for me too? See? My sister's here too.

MARIE

Hello, George. How are you?

GARGA

Come on, Jane. Time to go home.

JANE

Oh, George, don't ask me that. If I go home, you'll yell at me, because – well, I better tell you right away – the place is a mess. (Boys laugh)

GARGA

That figures.

JANE

What a mean thing to say!

GARGA

I won't yell at you, Jane. We'll make a fresh start. That fight I was involved in? It's all over. I've driven my enemy out of town.

JANE

No George, things will keep getting worse. People always say things will get better, but they always get worse. I hope you like it here. If you don't, we can always go someplace else ...

GARGA

What's the matter, Jane? Don't you want to go home with me?

JANE

You know the answer to that, George. And if you don't, I can't tell you.

GARGA

What's that supposed to mean, Jane?

JANE

You see, George, people are different from what you think. Even when they're on the way out. What did you bring this gentleman here for? I always knew this would happen to me. When I was in first communion class they talked about what would happen to the poor weak lambs who strayed, and I knew right then they were talking about me. (Boys laugh) You didn't have to bring anybody here to prove it.

GARGA

You mean you don't want to go home with me?

JANE

Please don't ask me, George!

GARGA

But I am asking you, darling.

JANE

Then there's something else I have to tell you. See this man here? (points at **BABOON**) I've been sleeping with him. It's true, gentlemen. But it doesn't make any difference. It doesn't make things any better.

BABOON

She's out of her mind.

MAYNES

She's beyond help.

GARGA

Listen, Jane. This is the last chance you'll ever get in this town. I'm ready to forget all this. These gentlemen are my witnesses. Come on home.

JANE

That's nice of you, George. You're right, it is my last chance. But I don't want it. Things between you and me are no good, George. You know that as well as I do. I'm leaving, George. (to **BABOON**) Come on.

BABOON

(to **GARGA**) Cheers. (laughs, exits with **JANE**)

MAYNES

No reason for him to laugh.

GARGA

I'll leave the door unlocked, Jane. Just come home.

WORM

(crosses to the bar) You may perhaps have noticed that your family's here, or what's left of it. This family, this wreck of a family, I guess you could say, would give their last buck to know where their mother went. She was the rock of the household. Now it happens I have seen the woman, saw her one morning scrubbing the floor on her hands and knees in a fruit and vegetable store. Working away, just doing her job. She looked like an old lady. But ... she looked all right.

GARGA

I know you. You used to work in the lumber business. Worked for the man everybody in Chicago is trying to catch.

WORM

Me? I never saw the man in my life. (*turns the dial on a radio which begins to play Gounod's Ave Maria*)

THE SALVATION ARMY PREACHER

(at a corner of the bar, reads the drink menu out loud. He's enjoying himself) Cherry flip, Cherry brandy, Gin fizz, Whiskey sour, Golden slipper, Manhattan cocktail, orange Curacao sec, Maraschino, crème de cassis, and the house specialty: Eggnog. Made with raw egg, sugar, cognac, Jamaica rum, and milk.

PUGNOSED MAN

And which one of those is your favorite, sir?

THE SALVATION ARMY PREACHER

I don't drink.

(Laughter)

GARGA

(to **MAYNES**) I hope you understand I had to show you the remains of my shattered family, even though it's a painful humiliation. And I hope you also understand when I say that poisonous yellow plant must never again take root in Chicago. My sister Marie, as I told you, spent a considerable time working for this Shlink. (sits down next to **MARIE**) Won't you show me your face?

MARIE

I don't have a face anymore. This isn't me you're looking at.

GARGA

I know. I remember one time, we were in church, you were nine years old, you said: soon he will come and take me. And we all hoped it was God you were talking about.

MARIE

Did I say that?

GARGA

I still love you, even though you've fallen apart and you've been rolling in filth. And I know my saying "I love you" won't stop you from doing to yourself what you're doing, but I'll still say it.

MARIE

You can look at me like this and still say it. Look me right in the face?

GARGA

Right in the face. A person is what he is, even when his face falls apart.

MARIE

(stands) But I don't want you to look at me. And I don't want you to love me. I love myself the way I was. So don't tell me I'm not different.

GARGA

(loud) You making any money? You still live off of what men pay you?

MARIE

It's just business. I've got a good body, I know how to use it, and afterwards I never let them smoke. I'm no virgin anymore. I know all there is to know about love. See? I've got money. And I'll go out and make more, I like to spend it, makes me feel good. But I never save it. Watch. I flush it all down the sink. (*Water running and garbage disposal noise.*) That's the way I am.

MAYNES

Horrible.

THE SALVATION ARMY PREACHER

People are tough. Too tough. That's their big problem. They do too much damage to themselves, because they're too tough. Too tough to destroy. (exits)

(**MAYNES** stands)

MAYNES

Well, Garga, you were right. I can see what this criminal has done to you.

THE PUGNOSED MAN

(pushes himself close to **MARIE**) Whores. (a loud snicker) Vice is the ladies' perfume!

MARIE

You call us whores? Right. We powder our faces so you don't see our eyes used to be blue.

(*a shot rings out*)

SKINNY

Man out here seems to have shot himself!

(**MAYNES** and **SKINNY** carry in the **SALVATION ARMY PREACHER** and lay him among the bar glasses)

MAYNES

Keep your hands off!

SKINNY

He's trying to say something.

MAYNES

(very loud, right in the **Preacher's** face) You want something? You have any family? Anything we can get you?

(**WORM** throws whiskey in the **Preacher's** face)

THE SALVATION ARMY PREACHER

La montagne est passee; nous irons mieux.

GARGA

(stands over him, laughing) He missed. He double missed! He thinks those are his dying words, but they're somebody else's dying words. And anyway they can't be his dying words because he's not dying. He aimed wrong. It's only a flesh wound.

SKINNY

You're right. Rotten luck, huh? That's because he shot himself in the dark. He should have waited 'til it was light.

MARIE

Wait a minute, now I recognize him; he's the one that got spit on that time. Remember? Right in the face.

(They all go out carrying the wounded man,
except for **GARGA** and **MARIE**)

GARGA

His skin is too thick. You try to stab a man like him, you get a bent knife. Also bent bullets.

MARIE

Can't you get him out of your mind?

GARGA

No. I can tell you that. You understand. Do you still love him?

MARIE

Yes ... yes, I do.

GARGA

You think you'll ever change your mind?

MARIE

Probably. Sooner or later.

GARGA

I wish I could help you. (pause) This fight of ours is so perverted I need the power of all Chicago to stop it. I've destroyed him, and I didn't even have to be there. And I fixed it so I'll never have to see him again. He can't analyze this last punch of mine because he won't be able to track me down. Every taxi driver on every street corner in this town is on the look-out for him, so he can't get back in the ring. Wherever he went, he knows that.

(Enter **SKINNY**)

SKINNY

The lumber yards down on Mulberry Street! They're all on fire!

MARIE

I'm glad you got rid of him. I'm going now.

GARGA

I'm staying here, I want to watch the lynch mob in action. I'll be home tonight. Then we can live as a family again.

(**MARIE** goes out)

GARGA

I'll get up tomorrow morning, make myself a cup of coffee, black. I'll wash my face in cold water, I'll put on clean clothes. Tomorrow morning I'll comb this whole thing out of my brain, and the city will surround me with new noises. (laughs as he hears the *howling of the lynch mob*)

(Enter **SHLINK**. He's dressed in American clothes)

SHLINK

Are you alone? I had a hard time getting here. I knew you were getting out today, so I went by your house. They're at my heels. Quick, Garga, let's go!

GARGA

Are you crazy? I turned you in so I could get rid of you!

SHLINK

I'm not a brave man. I died three times on the way here.

GARGA

Yes, people with yellow skin, they're getting strung up tonight on the Milwaukee Bridge.

SHLINK

Which means we have to get out of here fast. You have to come with me. We're not finished yet.

GARGA

(very slowly, as he notices **SHLINK's** hurry) Sorry, I'm afraid you caught me at a bad time. Fact is, I'm not alone in this. Remember my sister, Marie Garga, whom you ruined three years ago? My wife, Jane Garga, whom you dragged through the mud? A man from the Salvation Army, remember him? Never even knew his name, you spit on him and destroyed him, only who cares about him, right? And finally my mother, Mae Garga. Born down south, disappeared in October three years ago, and now I can't even remember her face, it fell off her like a yellow leaf. (listens) Listen to them howling!

SHLINK

(he listens too) Yes. But that's not the right kind of howling, it's not white enough. When it is, they'll be here. We still have a minute left. There! Hear that? That's the right kind! White! Come on, let's get out of here!

(**GARGA** and **SHLINK** make a fast exit)

SCENE TEN

(An abandoned work tent in the gravel pits on the shores of Lake Michigan. November 19th, 1915, about two in the morning. **SHLINK** and **GARGA**)

SHLINK

Chicago's everlasting racket has come to an end. Seven times three days the sky has grown dim, and the air is blue as burning rum. And now there's a silence, a silence that conceals nothing.

GARGA

(smokes a cigarette) All you know how to do is fight. You can't get enough of it, can you? (pause) I've been thinking about when I was a kid. Fields of oil seed, all blue. Polecats in the gulches, something splashing in the creeks.

SHLINK

You're right, I remember seeing all that in your face once. Now your face is hard as amber, with tiny dead insects trapped all through it.

GARGA

You always been alone?

SHLINK

For forty years now.

GARGA

And now your end is at hand, and it turns out you're addicted to the dark drug of the planet, the need to touch.

SHLINK

By hating?

GARGA

By hating.

SHLINK

You get the idea, finally. We're blood brother, blood brothers in a metaphysical collision. We've know each other – how long? Only a brief season. And now that's coming to a close. The vital seasons of our lives, they're not always the ones we remember. Bringing things to a close was never the point, and the last episode doesn't mean any more than the others. I had a lumber business once, had it twice, and last week I signed it over to you again.

GARGA

Do you feel death coming?

SHLINK

Here's the account book from your lumber business; it starts with the page someone spilled ink on.

GARGA

You've been carrying it around all this time? You open it, it's filthy. (looks at it) Very neat. Nothing but subtracting. On the seventeenth: lumber business and twenty-five thousand dollars to Garga. And before that: ten dollars for his clothes. Then twenty-two dollars to Marie Garga, "our" sister. And here, the last entry: lumber warehouse, burned to the ground. Destroyed again. (closes the book) I can't sleep anymore. I'll be glad when you're thrown in the line pit.

SHLINK

Do not deny the past, George. There's more to this than just totaling up accounts. Remember the question we once asked ourselves? Pull yourself together. I love you.

GARGA

(looks at him) Pervert. You make me sick, an old man like you!

SHLINK

I may never get an answer to our question. If you ever do, think of me, rotting in my grave. (pause) What are you listening for?

GARGA

(lazily) Watch it, your feelings are showing. You're old.

SHLINK

Is that nice, baring your teeth at me?

GARGA

Why not? As long as they're nice teeth.

SHLINK

We human beings are all alone, each one of us, cut off from all the rest. Which means that hatred, real raw hatred, is impossible. Even the dumb animals can't express it.

GARGA

Being able to speak is no guarantee of expressing anything.

SHLINK

I watch animals a lot. The feeling of a warm body next to yours- call it love- that is our only comfort in darkness. But that's all we can do, push one part of our body up against someone else's. We cannot put together the broken parts of our speech. So we settle for that, we join our bodies and make more bodies, and think maybe children will be some comfort in our aloneness. And then the generations stare at one another with cold suspicion. If you were to load a ship full to bursting with human bodies, that ship would be so full of loneliness all those bodies would freeze. Every one of them. Are you listening to me, Garga? Aloneness is so great even a fight to the finish is impossible. Remember the forest? Human beings came out of the forest. Hairy as apes, baring their teeth at each other, knowing how to live! Everything seemed so easy! They just tore each other to pieces! I can see it all happening, so clear: bodies shaking with rage, the whites of their eyes rolling. They go for the jugular, they bite, they shriek and stagger and stumble. They fight to the death. The one who spurts blood all over the roots of the trees loses, the one who stomps down the underbrush wins. (pause) What do you keep listening for, Garga?

GARGA

Shlink, I've been listening to you for three weeks now, and I keep waiting for my rage to explode, I keep thinking I'll find a reason to rage at you, any reason, even a reason that makes no sense. But you know what? I look at you and I realize it's your voice. It isn't your bullshit that irritates me, it's your voice. It nauseates me. Today's Thursday, isn't it? Thursday night? How far is it to New York? Why do I sit here wasting my time? We've been here for three god damn weeks! We kept thinking that was enough to budge the planet from its usual orbit. Only what happened? Nothing! It rained three times and one night it was windy. (stands) I think it's time for you to leave me your shoes, Shlink. Take your shoes off, Shlink, and leave them to me. I doubt you have any money left. This is where our fight to the finish ends, right here in the woods by Lake Michigan, after three weeks, because whatever we were fighting about, it's all used up. It's over. I don't have a knife to finish it, and I don't have any big words left. My shoes are full of holes, and your speeches won't keep my toes warm. It's clear, Shlink. The younger man wins the match.

SHLINK

Earlier today, when we heard the sound of men at work in the gravel pits, I saw you listening. Where are you going? To look for them? Are you going to betray me, Garga?

GARGA

(lies back down; lazily) Yeah, Shlink, that's just what I'm going to do.

SHLINK

So, George Garga. There will never be an outcome to this fight?

GARGA

No.

SHLINK

And you'll leave with nothing to show for it but your naked life?

GARGA

A naked life is better than any other life.

SHLINK

You're going to Tahiti?

GARGA

New York. (an ironic laugh) "I will come back with muscles of iron, with dark skin and angry eyes; they will look at the mask of my face and think I belong to a master race. I will have gold. I will be brutal and indolent. Women like to take care of these ferocious invalids come back from the tropics. The air of the sea will burn my lungs, lost climates will turn my skin to leather. To swim, to crush grass, to hunt, above all to smoke, to drink strong drink, strong as molten metal. I'll get involved in life. I'll be saved." Tahiti! What stupid shit! Words, on a planet that never was the center of anything! And when you're lying in the line pit, where the junk is put to rot, then I'll have a choice. And I'll choose something that will keep me entertained.

SHLINK

If you are trying to say you've gone impotent, at least take a different tone.

GARGA

Whatever you say.

SHLINK

Your attitude makes it clear to me, you have always been an unworthy opponent.

GARGA

All I meant was, I'm bored.

SHLINK

You're complaining? You? A cheap crook for hire? A drunken salesman, whom I bought for ten dollars. An idealist who couldn't tell his two legs apart. A nobody.

GARGA

(laughs) And a younger man. Just calm down!

SHLINK

A white man! A man I hired to do me in, to fill my mouth with filth, with rottenness, so I could have a taste of death. Who needs you? Two hundred yards from here on the edge of the woods, I've got a lynch mob ready to kill me.

GARGA

Ok, call me a fucking leper, so what? You're suicidal! And what do I get out of you? You hired me, but you haven't paid me yet.

SHLINK

You got exactly what a man like you wants. A lot of new furniture.

GARGA

Yeah, a piano. You got me a piano, and I had to sell it. I ate meat once. I bought one suit. And I gave up my sleep to listen to your bullshit!

SHLINK

You gave up your sleep, your mother, your sister, your wife! And three years of your stupid life. You never understood what was going on. You wanted to kill me, I just wanted the fight. Not a fight with bodies, a fight with souls.

GARGA

That doesn't mean shit. The important thing now isn't who's stronger, it's who survives. I can't beat you, all I can do is kick you down into the mud. I'll go back and drag my raw meat through the icicle wind of Chicago. It's a cold town, but I'm going back there. Maybe I'm doing the wrong thing, but I have all the time in the world.
(Exits)

SHLINK

Well, I thank you for whatever interest you have shown in my humble person. (begins to take off his shirt) We have lots a lot; all we have now is our naked bodies. Four minutes from now the moon will rise, and then your lynch mob will be here! (he realizes **GARGA** has gone, and goes after him) Do not go, George Garga! Do not quit just because you are young! The woods are all cut down, the vultures have eaten their fill, and the golden answer will be buried six feet under. (he turns, a milky light begins to shine through the trees) November nineteenth! Three miles south of Chicago. And the wind is from the west. Four minutes before the rising of the moon. Drowned trying to hook a fish.

(Enter **MARIE**)

MARIE

Please don't send me away. I'm very unhappy.

(The light in the trees has grown brighter)

SHLINK

A fish that swam right into my mouth ... It's all piling up. That crazy light, what is it? I've got too much on my mind.

MARIE

(takes off her hat) I don't look so good anymore. Don't stare at me like that, it's the rats in the swamp. They've been gnawing at me. You can have what's left.

SHLINK

What a milky light! It must be an illusion. What?

MARIE

Does my face look bloated to you?

SHLINK

You here? You realize they'll lynch you too, once the mob gets here?

MARIE

I don't care.

SHLINK

Please, these are my final moments. Leave me alone.

MARIE

Come with me, we can hide in the bushes. Or we can hide out in the gravel pits.

SHLINK

Are you out of your mind? Damn you! Can't you see I need a last look at this jungle?
That's why the moon is rising ...

MARIE

All I see is that you've lost. Have some pity for yourself.

SHLINK

Can't you do me this final favor?

MARIE

All I want to do is look at you. I belong with you, I know that now.

SHLINK

All right! Stay here! (*the sound of a distant bell*) Two AM. I've got to get out of here.

MARIE

Where's George?

SHLINK

George? He ran away! What a mistake he was! I've got to get out of here! (puts on shirt) The fish are beginning to stink. Barrels full of fish. Good fat fish I caught myself! Dried fish, fish packed up to go! Salt fish! Raise them in ponds, buy them up, pay too much for them, feed them till they're fat! Fish with a death wish! They swallowed hooks like communion wafers. So what. Get it over with. (goes to the table, sits down, swallows the contents of a little bottle) I, Wang Yen, called Shlink, was born in Yokohama, under the sign of the turtle. I started a lumber business, ate my rice and learned how to deal with all kinds of people. I, Wang Yen, known as Shlink, come to an end three mile south of Chicago. Without an heir.

MARIE

What's the matter with you?

SHLINK

Are you still here? My legs are cold. Find a cloth, cover my face. Have pity. (falls off the chair onto the floor)

*(The sound of men yelling in the underbrush.
Steps approaching. Hoarse shouts, curses)*

MARIE

Are you asleep? Are you cold? I'm right beside you. What do you want me to cover your face for?

(Suddenly, knives slit open the back of the tent.
The lynch mob gathers silently at the opening)

MARIE

(chases them out) Get out of here! He's dead. He doesn't want anybody looking at him.

SCENE ELEVEN

(the private office of the late C. Shlink. Eight days later. The lumber yard has burned to the ground. A sign says: "Lumber yard for sale." **GARGA, JOHN GARGA, MARIE GARGA**)

JOHN

That was a stupid move, letting the lumberyard burn down. Now all you've got left is a lot of charred lumber. Who's gonna buy it?

GARGA

(laughs) It's for sale cheap. But what about the two of you?

JOHN

I thought maybe we could all stay together.

GARGA

(laughs) Not me, I'm leaving. You think you'll go to work?

MARIE

I'll go to work. But I won't scrub floors like my mother.

JOHN

I'm a soldier. We used to sleep in water troughs. Rats ran all over our faces, each one weighed about seven pounds. Then they took away my gun and it was all over, but I said to myself: from now on, we'll all sleep with our helmets on.

GARGA

What you mean is, we'll all sleep.

MARIE

We'd better go, father. It's almost night and I don't have a room yet.

JOHN

All right, let's go. (looks around) Let's go! You have a soldier at your side! Forward, into the jungle of the city!

GARGA

That's all behind me now. Who's that?

(Enter **MANKY** with a big smile on his face and his hands in his pockets)

MANKY

It's me. Saw your ad in the papers. I'll buy your lumber business, if it doesn't cost too much.

GARGA

How much?

Why are you selling it? **MANKY**

I'm off to New York. **GARGA**

Then I'll take it over. **MANKY**

I asked how much can you pay? **GARGA**

Well, I'll need some cash to get the business started up again... **MANKY**

Gimme six thousand. As long as you take the girl with it. **GARGA**

It's a deal. **MANKY**

My father comes with me. **MARIE**

What about your mother? **MANKY**

She's gone. **MARIE**

(a brief pause) Ok then. **MANKY**

Go ahead, sign the contract. **MARIE**
(The men sign a paper; **MANKY** gives **GARGA** some money)

We're going out for something to eat. You coming, George? **MANKY**

No. **GARGA**

Will you be here when we get back? **MANKY**

No. **GARGA**

JOHN

Goodbye then, George. See how you make out in New York. If things get too rough, you can always come back to Chicago.

(Exit **JOHN, MARIE, MANKY**)

GARGA

(puts the money in his pocket) It's good to be alone. The chaos is used up. It was the best of times.

END OF THE PLAY