

THE LOVE SUICIDES AT SONEZAKI

CHIKAMATSU MONZAEMON

TRANSLATED BY DONALD KEENE

— CHARACTERS —

TOKUBEI, *aged 25, employee of a dealer in soy sauce*
KUHEIJI, *an oil merchant*
HOST of *Temma House*
CHŌZŌ, *an apprentice*
CUSTOMER of *Ohatsu*

TOWNSMEN
OHATSU, *aged 19, a courtesan*
HOSTESS
COURTES/VNS
SERVANTS

SCENE 1

The grounds of the Ikudama Shrine in Osaka.

TIME

May 21, 1703.

NARRATOR: This graceful young man has served many springs
With the firm of Hirano in Uchihon Street;
He hides the passion that burns in his breast
Lest word escape and the scandal spread.
5 He drinks peach wine, a cup at a time,
And combs with care his elegant locks.
“Toku” he is called, and famed for his taste,
But now, his talents buried underground,
He works as a clerk, his sleeves stained with oil,
10 A slave to his sweet remembrances of love.
Today he makes the rounds of his clients
With a lad who carries a cask of soy:
They have reached the shrine of Ikudama.

A woman’s voice calls from a bench inside a refreshment
stand.

OHATSU: Tokubei —that’s you, isn’t it?

NARRATOR: She claps her hands, and Tokubei nods in recogni-
tion.

20 TOKUBEI: Chōzō, I’ll be following later. Make the rounds of
the temples in Tera Street and the uptown mansions, and
then return to the shop. Tell them that I’ll be back soon.

Don’t forget to call on the dyer’s in Azuchi Street and collect
the money he owes us. And stay away from Dotombori.

NARRATOR: He watches as long as the boy remains in sight,
then lifts the bamboo blinds.

25 TOKUBEI: Ohatsu —what’s the matter?

NARRATOR: He starts to remove his bamboo hat.

OHATSU: Please keep your hat on just now. I have a customer
from the country today who’s making a pilgrimage to all
thirty-three temples of Kwannon. He’s been boasting that he
30 intends to spend the whole day drinking. At the moment he’s

gone off to hear the impersonators’ show, but if he returns
and finds us together, there might be trouble. All the chair
bearers know you. It’s best you keep your face covered.

But to come back to us. Lately you haven’t written me a 35
word. I’ve been terribly worried but, not knowing what the
situation might be in your shop, I couldn’t very well write
you. I must have called a hundred times at the Tamba
House, but they hadn’t any news of you either. Somebody-
yes, it was Taichi, the blind musician—asked his friends, and 40
they said you’d gone back to the country. I couldn’t believe it
was true. You’ve really been too cruel. Didn’t you even want
to ask about me? Perhaps you hoped things would end that
way, but I’ve been sick with worry. If you think I’m lying, feel
this swelling! 45

NARRATOR: She takes his hand and presses it to her breast,
weeping reproachful and entreating tears, exactly as if they
were husband and wife. Man though he is, he also weeps.

TOKUBEI: You’re right, entirely right, but what good would it
have done to tell you and make you suffer? I’ve been going 50
through such misery that I couldn’t be more distracted if
Bon, New Year, the Ten Nights, and every other feast in the
calendar came all at once. My mind’s been in a turmoil, and
my finances in chaos. To tell the truth, I went up to Kyoto to
raise some money, among other things. It’s a miracle I’m still 55
alive. If they make my story into a three-act play, I’m sure the
audiences will weep.

NARRATOR: Words fail and he can only sigh.

OHATSU: And is this the comic relief of your tragedy? Why
couldn’t you have trusted me with your worries when you 60
tell me even trivial little things? You must’ve had some rea-
son for hiding. Why don’t you take me into your confidence?

NARRATOR: She leans over his knee. Bitter tears soak her hand
kerchief.

TOKUBEI: Please don’t cry or be angry with me. I wasn’t hiding 65
anything, but it wouldn’t have helped to involve you. At any
rate, my troubles have largely been settled, and I can tell you
the whole story now.

My master has always treated me with particular kind-
ness because I’m his nephew. For my part, I’ve served 70
him with absolute honesty. There’s never been a penny’s

16 **that’s you** his face is covered by a deep wicker hat, commonly worn
by visitors to the quarters of prostitution 17 **Tokubei** the pronuncia-
tion of the name given in the text is Tokubyoe, but I have followed the
more normal modern pronunciation 23 **Dotombori** a street in Osaka
famed for its theaters and houses of pleasure

32 **impersonators’ show** within the precincts of the Ikudama Shrine
were booths where various types of entertainment were presented. The
impersonators mimicked the speech and posture of popular actors

discrepancy in the accounts. It's true that recently I used his name when I bought on credit a bolt of Kaga silk to make into a summer kimono, but that's the one and only time, and if I have to raise the money on the spot, I can always sell back the kimono without taking a loss. My master has been so impressed by my honest}' that he proposed I marry his wife's niece with a dowry of two *kamme*, and promised to set me up in business. That happened last year, but how could I shift my affections when I have you? I didn't give his suggestion a second thought, but in the meantime my mother—she's really my stepmother—conferred with my master, keeping it a secret from me. She went back to the country with the two *kamme* in her clutches. Fool that I am, I never dreamt what had happened.

The trouble began last month when they tried to force me to marry. I got angry and said, "Master, you surprise me. You know how unwilling I am to get married, and yet you've inveigled my old mother into giving her consent. You've gone too far, master. I can't understand the mistress's attitude either. If I took as my wife this young lady whom I've always treated with the utmost deference and accepted her dowry in the bargain, I'd spend my whole life dancing attendance on my wife. How could I ever assert myself? I've refused once, and even if my father were to return from his grave, the answer would still be no."

The master was furious that I should have answered so bluntly. His voice shook with rage. "I know your real reasons. You're involved with Ohatsu, or whatever her name is, from the Temma House in Dōjima. That's why you seem so averse to my wife's niece. Very well—after what's been said, I'm no longer willing to give you the girl, and since there's to be no wedding, return the money. Settle without fail by the twenty-second of the month and clear your business accounts. I'll chase you from Osaka and never let you set foot here again!"

I too have my pride as a man. "Right you are!" I answered, and rushed off to my village. But my so-called mother wouldn't let the money from her grip, not if this world turned into the next. I went to Kyoto, hoping to borrow the money from the wholesale soy sauce dealers in the Fifth Ward. I've always been on good terms with them. But, as ill luck would have it, they had no money to spare. I retraced my steps to the country, and this time, with the intercession of the whole village, I managed to extract the money from my mother. I intended to return the dowry immediately and settle things for once and for all. But if I can't remain in Osaka, how shall I be able to meet you?

My bones may be crushed to powder, my flesh be torn away, and I may sink, an empty shell, in the slime of Shijimi River. Let that happen if it must, but if I am parted from you, what shall I do?

NARRATOR: He weeps, suffocated by his grief. Ohatsu, holding back the welling tears of sympathy, strengthens and comforts

OHATSU: How you've suffered! And when I think that it's been because of me, I feel happy, sad, and most grateful all at once. But please, show more courage. Pull yourself together. Your uncle may have forbidden you to set foot in Osaka

again, but you haven't committed robbery or arson. I'll think of some way to keep you here. And if a time should come when we can no longer meet, did our promises of love hold only for this world? Others before us have chosen reunion through death. To die is simple enough—none will hinder and none be hindered on the journey to the Mountain of Death and the River of Three Ways.

NARRATOR: Ohatsu falters among these words of encouragement, choked by tears. She resumes.

OHATSU: The twenty-second is tomorrow. Return the money early, since you must return it anyway. Try to get in your master's good graces again.

TOKUBEI: I want to, and I'm impatient to return the money, but on the thirteenth of the month Kuheiji the oil merchant—I think you know him—begged me desperately for the money. He said he needed it only for one day, and promised to return it by the morning of the eighteenth. I decided to lend him the money since I didn't need it until the twenty-second, and it was for a friend close as a brother. He didn't get in touch with me on the eighteenth or nineteenth. Yesterday he was out and I couldn't see him. I intended to call on him this morning, but I've spent it making the rounds of my customers in order to wind up my business by tomorrow. I'll go to him this evening and settle everything. He's a man of honor and he knows my predicament. I'm sure nothing will go wrong. Don't worry. Oh—look there, Ohatsu!

NARRATOR: "Hatsuse is far away,
Far too is Naniwa-dera:
So many temples are renowned
For the sound of their bells,
Voices of the Eternal Law.
If, on an evening in spring,
You visit a mountain temple
You will see . . ."

At the head of a band of revelers

TOKUBEI: Kuheiji! That's a poor performance! You've no business running off on excursions when you haven't cleared up your debt with me. Today we'll settle our account.

NARRATOR: He grasps Kuheiji's arm and restrains him. Kuheiji's expression is dubious.

KUHEIJI: What are you talking about, Tokubei? These people with me are all residents of the ward. We've had a meeting in Ueshio Street to raise funds for a pilgrimage to Ise. We've drunk a little sake, but we're on our way home now. What do you mean by grabbing my arm? Don't be rowdy!

NARRATOR: He removes his wicker hat and glares at Tokubei.

TOKUBEI: I'm not being rowdy. All I ask is that you return the two *kamme* of silver I lent you on the thirteenth, which you were supposed to repay on the eighteenth.

NARRATOR: Before he can finish speaking, Kuheiji bursts out laughing.

134-135 **Mountain . . . Ways** places in the Japanese afterworld 156-163 **Hatsuse . . . see** a passage from the Nō play *Mūdera*, here quoted mainly because the first word, "Hatsuse," echoes the name Ohatsu in the preceding line. The last words similarly point to the arrival of Kuheiji. Most of this passage would be sung not by a single chanter but by a chorus, as in a Nō play 165 **performance** Tokubei, relieved to see Kuheiji, at first teases him about his singing of the Nd passage, but his words have an undertone of criticism of Kuheiji's past behavior

KUHEIJI: Arc you out of your mind, Tokubei? I can't remember having borrowed a penny from you in all the years I've known you. Don't make any accusations which you'll regret.

185 NARRATOR: He shakes himself free. His companions also remove their hats. Tokubei pales with astonishment.

TOKUBEI: Don't say that, Kuheiji! You came to me in tears, saying that you couldn't survive your monthly bills, and I thought that this was the kind of emergency for which we'd been friends all these years. I lent you the money as an act of generosity, though I needed it desperately myself. I told you

190 that I didn't even require a receipt, but you insisted on putting your seal to one, for form's sake. You made me write out a promissory note and you sealed it. Don't try to deny it, Kuheiji!

195 NARRATOR: Tokubei rebukes him heatedly.

KUHEIJI: What's that? I'd like to see the seal.

TOKUBEI: Do you think I'm afraid to show you?

NARRATOR: He produces the paper from his wallet.

200 TOKUBEI: If these gentlemen are from the ward, I am sure that they will recognize your seal. Will you still dispute it?

NARRATOR: When he unfolds the paper and displays it, Kuheiji claps his hands in recollection.

KUHEIJI: Yes, it's my seal all right. Oh, Tokubei, I never

205 thought you'd do such a thing, not even if you were starving and forced to eat dirt. On the tenth of the month I lost a wallet containing the seal. I advertised for it everywhere, but without success, so as of the sixteenth of this month, as I've informed these gentlemen. I've changed my seal. Could I have affixed the seal I lost on the tenth to a document on the

210 thirteenth? No—what happened was that you found my wallet, wrote the promissory note, and affixed my seal. Now you're trying to extort money from me—that makes you a worse criminal than a forger. You'd do better, Tokubei, to commit out-and-out robbery. You deserve to have your head

215 cut off, but for old times' sake, I'll forgive you. Let's see if you can make any money out of this!

NARRATOR: He throws the note in Tokubei's face and glares at him fiercely in an extraordinary display of feigned innocence. Tokubei, furious, cries aloud.

220 TOKUBEI: You've been damned clever. You've put one over on me. I'm dishonored. What am I to do? Must I let you take my money brazenly from me? You've planned everything so cleverly that even if I go to court, I'm sure to lose. I'll take

225 back my money with my fists! See here! I'm Tokubei of the Hirano-ya, a man of honor. Do you follow me? I'm not a man to trick a friend out of his money the way you have. Come on!

NARRATOR: He falls on Kuheiji.

230 KUHEIJI: You impudent little apprentice! I'll knock the insolence out of you!

NARRATOR: He seizes the front of Tokubei's kimono and they grapple, trading blows and shoves. Ohatsu rushes barefoot to them.

185 **remove their hats** readying themselves to come to Kuheiji's defense 187 **bills** I have converted all dates to the Western calendar, but the dates in the lunar calendar correspond to the end of the third moon. Kuheiji needs the money to pay end-of-the-month bills 232 **barefoot** in her agitation she fails to slip on her *geta*. We must suppose that her country customer has returned during the dialogue between Tokubei and Kuheiji

OHATSU: (*To townsmen.*) Please everybody, stop the fight! He's a friend of mine. Where are the chair-bearers? Why don't they do something? Tokubei's being beaten! 235

NARRATOR: She writhes in anguish, but is helpless. Her customer, country bumpkin that he is, bundles her forcibly into a palanquin.

CUSTOMER: It won't do for you to get hurt. 240

OHATSU: Please wait just a moment! Oh, I'm so unhappy!

NARRATOR: The palanquin is rushed off, leaving only the echoes of her weeping voice.

Tokubei is alone; Kuheiji has five companions. Men rush out from the nearby booths and drive them all with sticks to the lotus pond. Who tramples Tokubei? Who beats him? There is no way to tell. His hair is disheveled, his sash undone. He stumbles and falls to this side and that.

TOKUBEI: Kuheiji, you swine! Do you think I'll let you escape alive? 250

NARRATOR: He staggers about searching for Kuheiji, but he has fled and vanished. Tokubei falls heavily in his tracks and, weeping bitterly, he cries aloud.

TOKUBEI: (*To bystanders.*) I feel humiliated and ashamed that you've seen me this way. There was not a false word in my accusation. I've always treated Kuheiji like a brother, and when he begged me for the money, saying he'd never forget it as long as he lived, I lent it to him, sure that he'd do the same for me, though the money was precious as life, and I knew that without it tomorrow, the twenty-second, I'd have to kill myself. He made me write the note in my own hand, then put his seal to it. But it was a seal which he had already reported as lost, and now he's turned the accusations against me! It's mortifying, infuriating—to be kicked and beaten this way, dishonored and forced to my knees. It would've been better if I had died while smashing and biting him! 255

NARRATOR: He strikes the ground and gnashes his teeth, clenches his fists and moans, a sight to stir compassion.

TOKUBEI: There's no point in my talking this way. Before three days have passed I, Tokubei, will make amends by showing all Osaka the purity at the bottom of my heart. 260

NARRATOR: The meaning of these words is later known.

TOKUBEI: I'm sorry to have bothered you all. Please forgive me.

NARRATOR: He speaks his apologies, picks up his battered hat and puts it on. His face, downcast in the sinking rays of the sun, is clouded by tears that engulf him. Dejectedly he leaves, a sight too pitiful to behold. 265

SCENE 2

Inside the Temma House.

TIME

Evening of the same day.

NARRATOR: "The breezes of love are all-pervasive
By Shijimi River, where love-drowned guests
Like empty shells, bereft of their senses,

246 **lotus pond** this pond still may be seen today at the Ikudama Shrine

2 **Shijimi River** the word *shijimi* means the corbicula, a kind of small shellfish, and the name of the river thus occasions mention of shells

- Wander the dark ways of love
 5 Lit each night by burning lanterns,
 Fireflies that glow in the four seasons,
 Stars that shine on rainy nights.
 By Plum Bridge, blossoms show even in summer.
 Rustics on a visit, city' connoisseurs,
 10 All journey the varied roads of love,
 Where adepts wander and novices play:
 What a lively place this New Quarter is!
- But alas for Ohatsu of the Temma House—even after she
 returns the day's events still weigh on her. She cannot swal-
 15 low her sake, she feels on edge. As she sits weeping, some
 courtesans from the neighboring houses and other friends
 come for a little chat.
- FIRST COURTESAN: Have you heard, Ohatsu? They say that
 Toku was given a thrashing for something bad he did. Is it
 20 true?
 SECOND COURTESAN: No, my customer told me that Toku
 was trampled to death.
 NARRATOR: They say he was fettered for fraud or trussed for
 counterfeiting a seal. Not one decent thing have they to re-
 25 port: every expression of sympathy makes their visit the more
 painful.
- OHATSU: No, please, not another word. The more I hear, the
 worse my breast pains me. I'm sure I'll be the first to die. I
 wish I were dead already.
- 30 NARRATOR: She can only weep. But amidst her tears she hap-
 pens to look outside and catches a glimpse of Tokubei, a
 pathetic figure wearing a wicker hat, even at night. Her heart
 leaps, and she wants to run to him, but in the sitting room are
 the master and his wife, and by the entrance stands the cook,
 35 while in the kitchen a maid is hovering: with so many sharp
 eyes watching, she cannot do as she pleases.
- OHATSU: I feel terribly depressed. I think I'll step outside for a
 moment.
 NARRATOR: She slips out softly.
- 40 OHATSU: What happened? I've heard rumors of every sort
 about you. They've driven me out of my mind with worry.
 NARRATOR: She thrusts her face under the brim of his wicker
 hat and weeps in secret, soundless, painful tears. He too is
 lost in tears.
- 45 TOKUBEI: I've been made the victim of a clever plot, as no
 doubt you've heard, and the more I struggle, the worse off I
 am. Everything has turned against me now. I can't survive
 this night. I've made up my mind to it.
 NARRATOR: As he whispers, voices are heard from within.
- 50 VOICES: Come inside, Ohatsu. There's enough gossip about
 you as it is.
 OHATSU: There—did you hear? We can't go on talking. Do as
 I show you.
- NARRATOR: She hides him under the train of her mantle. He
 55 crawls behind her to the garden door, where he slips beneath
 the porch at the step. Ohatsu sits by the entrance and,
 pulling the tobacco tray to her, lights her pipe. She assumes
 an air of unconcern.
- At this moment Kuheiji and a couple of his loudmouthed
 friends burst in, accompanied by a blind musician. 60
 KUHEIJI: Hello, girls. You're looking lonesome. Would you like
 me for a customer? Hello there, host. I haven't seen you in
 ages.
 NARRATOR: He strides arrogantly into the room.
 HOST: Bring a tobacco tray and some sake cups. 65
 NARRATOR: He makes the customary fuss over the guests.
 KUHEIJI: No, don't bother about sake. We were drinking before
 we came. I have something to tell you. Tokubei, the number
 one customer of your Ohatsu, found a seal I'd lost and tried
 to cheat me out of two *kamme* in silver with a forged note. 70
 The facts were too much for him, and he finally met with
 some unpleasantness from which he was lucky to escape
 alive. His reputation has been ruined. Be on your guard if he
 comes here again. Everybody will tell you that I speak the
 truth, so even if Tokubei tells you the exact opposite, don't 75
 believe him for a moment. You'd do best not to let him in at
 all. Sooner or later he's bound to end up on the gallows.
 NARRATOR: He pours out his words convincingly. Tokubei, un-
 derneath the porch, gnashes his teeth and trembles with
 rage. Ohatsu, afraid that he may reveal himself, calms him 80
 with her foot, calms him gently. The host is loath to answer
 yes or no, for Tokubei's a customer of long standing.
 HOST: Well, then, how about some soup?
 NARRATOR: Covering his confusion, he leaves the room.
 Ohatsu, weeping bitterly, exclaims. 85
 OHATSU: You needn't try your clever words on me. Tokubei
 and I have been intimate for years. We've told each other our
 inmost secrets. He hasn't a particle of deceit in him, the poor
 boy. His generosity has been his undoing. He's been tricked,
 but he hasn't the evidence to prove it. After what has hap- 90
 pened Tokubei has no choice but to kill himself. I wish I
 knew whether or not he was resolved to die.
 NARRATOR: She pretends to be talking to herself, but with her
 foot she questions him. He nods, and taking her ankle,
 passes it across his throat, to let her know that he is bent on 95
 suicide.
 OHATSU: I knew it. I knew it. No matter how long one lives,
 it comes to the same thing. Only death can wipe out the
 disgrace.
 NARRATOR: Kuheiji is startled by her words. 100
 KUHEIJI: What is Ohatsu talking about? Why should Tokubei
 kill himself? Well, if he kills himself, I'll take good care of
 you after he's gone! I think you've fallen for me too!
 OHATSU: That's most generous of you, I'm sure. But would
 you object if, by way of thanks for your kindness, I killed you? 105
 Could I go on living even a moment if separated from Toku?
 Kuheiji, you dirty thief! Anyone hearing your silly lies can
 only suspect you. I'm sure that Toku intends to die with me,
 as I with him.

8 **Plum Bridge** Umeda Bridge, the name of which means literally
 “plum field” 12 **New Quarter** the Dojima New Quarter of Osaka was
 opened about 1700 32 **wicker hat** the hat was worn for concealment,
 but at night the precaution was normally unnecessary 50 **gossip**
 standing in the street outside a teahouse was likely to occasion gossip
 about secret lovers

77 **gallows** literally, “he's bound to end up at Noe or Tobita.” Noe and
 Tobita were execution grounds on the outskirts of Osaka

110 NARRATOR: She laps with her foot, and Tokubei, weeping,
takes it in his hands and reverently touches it to his forehead.
He embraces her knees and sheds tears of love. She too can
hardly conceal her emotions. Though no word is spoken, an-
115 no one knows makes it sadder still.
Kuheiji feels uncomfortable.
KUHEIJI: The wind's against us today. Let's get out of here. The
whores in this place are certainly peculiar—they seem to
have an aversion for customers like ourselves with plenty of
120 money to spend. Let's stop at the Asa House and have a drink
there. We'll rattle around a couple of gold pieces, then go
home to bed. Oh —my wallet is so heavy I can hardly walk.
NARRATOR: Spewing forth all manner of abuse, they noisily de-
part. The host and his wife call to the servants.
125 HOST: It's time to put out the lights for the night. Lay out beds
for the guests who are staying on. Ohatsu, you sleep upstairs.
Get to bed early.
OHATSU: (*To herself.*) Master, mistress, I shall probably never
see you again. Farewell. Farewell to all the servants too.
130 NARRATOR: Thus inwardly taking leave, she goes to her bed
chamber. Later they will learn that this was a parting for life;
how pitiful the foolish hearts of men who do not realize the
truth in time!
HOST: See that the fire is out under the kettle. Don't let the
135 mice get at the relishes.
NARRATOR: They shut the place and bar the gate. Hardly have
their heads touched their pillows than all are snoring mer-
rily. So short is the night that before they've had a chance to
dream, two o'clock in the morning has come. Ohatsu is
140 dressed for death, a black cloak dark as the ways of love
thrown over her kimono of spotless white. She tiptoes to the
staircase and looks down. Tokubei shows his face from under
the porch. He beckons, nods, points, communicating his
intent without a word. Below the stairs a servant girl is sleep-
145 ing. A hanging lantern brightly shines. Ohatsu in despera-
tion attaches her fan to a palm-leaf broom, and from the
second step of the staircase attempts in vain to extinguish
the flame. At last, by stretching every inch, she pulls it out,
only to tumble suddenly down the stairs. The lamp is out,
150 and in the darkness the servant girl turns in her sleep. Trem-
bling, the lovers grope for each other—a fearful moment.
The host awakens in his room to the back.
HOST: What was that noise just now? Servants! The night lamp
has gone out. Get up and light it!
155 NARRATOR: The servant girl, aroused, sleepily rubs her eyes
and gets up from the bed stark naked.
SERVANT: I can't find the flint box.
NARRATOR: She wanders about the room searching, and
Ohatsu, faint with terror, dodges this way and that to avoid
160 her. At last she catches Tokubei's hand, and softly they creep
to the entranceway. They unfasten the latch, but the hinges
creak, and frightened by the noise, they hesitate. Just then
the maid begins to strike the flints; they time their actions to
the rasping sound, and with each rasp open the door farther
165 until, huddled together and their sleeves twisted round
them, they pass through the door one after the other, feeling
as though they tread on a tiger's tail. They exchange glances
and cry out for joy, happy that they are to die—a painful,
heart-rending sight. The life left them now is as brief as
170 sparks that fly from blocks of flint.

SCENE 3

The journey from Dōjima to the Sonezaki Shrine.

NARRATOR: Farewell to this world, and to the night farewell.

We who walk the road to death, to what should we be
likened?

To the frost by the road that leads to the graveyard,
Vanishing with each step we take ahead:

How sad is this dream of a dream! 5

TOKUBEI: Ah, did you count the bell? Of the seven strokes

That mark the dawn, six have sounded.

The remaining one will be the last echo
We shall hear in this life.

OHATSU: It will echo the bliss of nirvana. 10

NARRATOR: Farewell, and not to the bell alone —

They look a last time on the grass, the trees, the sky.

The clouds, the river go by unmindful *of* them;
The Dipper's bright reflection shines in the water.

TOKUBEI: Let's pretend that Umeda Bridge 15

Is the bridge the magpies built

/Across the Milky Way, and make a vow

To be husband and wife stars for eternity.

OHATSU: I promise. I'll be your wife forever.

NARRATOR: They cling together—the river waters 20

Will surely swell with the tears they shed.

Across the river, in a teahouse upstairs,

Some revelers, still not gone to bed,

Are loudly talking under blazing lamps—

No doubt gossiping about the good or bad 25

Of this year's crop of lovers' suicides;

Their hearts sink to hear these voices.

TOKUBEI: How strange! but yesterday, even today,

We spoke as if such things did not concern us.

Tomorrow we shall figure in their gossip. 30

If the world will sing about us, let it sing.

NARRATOR: This is the song that now they hear.

"I'm sure you'll never have me for your wife,

I know my love means nothing to you . . ."

Yes, for all our love, for all our grieving, 35

Our lives, our lots, have not been as we wished.

Never, until this very day, have we known

A single night of heart's relaxation —

Instead, the tortures of an ill-starred love.

"What is this bond between us?" 40

I cannot forget you.

But you would shake me off and go —

I'll never let you!

Kill me with your hands, then go.

I'll never release you!" 45

So she said in tears.

OHATSU: Of all the many songs, that one, tonight!

TOKUBEI: Who is it singing? We who listen

BO TH: Suffer the ordeal of those before us.

NARRATOR: They cling to each other, weeping bitterly. 50

Any other night would not matter

15 **bridge** allusion to the Chinese legend, familiar also in Japan, which tells of two stars (known as the Herd Boy and the Weaver Girl) that meet once a year, crossing over a bridge in the sky built by magpies 40-45 **What is . . . you** the song overheard by Ohatsu and Tokubei is derived from a popular ballad of the time that describes a love suicide

If tonight were only a little longer,
 But the heartless summer night, as is its wont,
 Breaks as cockcrows hasten their last hour.
 55 TOKUBEI: It will be worse if we wait for dawn.
 Let us die in the wood of Tenjin.
 NARRATOR: He leads her by the hand.
 At Umeda Embankment, the night ravens.
 TOKUBEI: Tomorrow our bodies may be their meal.
 60 OHATSU: It's strange, this is your unlucky year
 Of twenty-five, and mine of nineteen.
 It's surely proof how deep are our ties
 That we who love each other are cursed alike.
 All the prayers I have made for this world
 65 To the gods and to the Buddha, I here and now
 Direct to the future: in the world to come
 May we be reborn on the same lotus!
 NARRATOR: One hundred eight the beads her fingers tell
 On her rosary; tears increase the sum.
 70 No end to her grief, but the road has an end:
 Their minds are numbed, the sky is dark, the wind still,
 They have reached the thick wood of Sonezaki.
 Shall it be here, shall it be there? When they brush the
 grass, the falling dew vanishes even quicker than their lives,
 75 in this uncertain world a lightning flash—or was it some
 thing else?
 OHATSU: I'm afraid. What was that now?
 TOKUBEI: That was a human spirit. I thought we alone would
 die tonight, but someone else has preceded us. Whoever it
 80 may be, we'll have a companion on the journey to the
 Mountain of Death. *Namu Amida Butsu. Namu Amida
 Butsu.*
 NARRATOR: She weeps helplessly.
 OHATSU: To think that others are dying tonight too! How
 85 heartbreaking!
 NARRATOR: Man though he is, his tears fall freely.
 TOKUBEI: Those two spirits flying together—do you suppose
 they belong to anyone else? They must be yours and mine!
 90 OHATSU: Those two spirits? Then, are we dead already?
 TOKUBEI: Normally, if we saw a spirit, we'd knot our clothes
 and murmur prayers to keep our souls with us, but now we
 hurry towards our end, hoping instead our two souls will
 find the same dwelling. Do not mistake the way, do not lose
 95 me!
 NARRATOR: They embrace, flesh to flesh, then fall to the
 ground and weep—how pitiful they are! Their strings of
 tears unite like entwining branches, or the pine and palm
 that grow from a single trunk, a symbol of eternal love. Here
 100 the dew of their unhappy lives will at last settle.
 TOKUBEI: Let this be the spot.

56 **Tenjin** the shrine of Sonezaki, sacred to Tenjin (*Sugawara no Michizane*) 60 **unlucky year** according to yin-yang divination, a man's twenty-fifth, forty-second, and sixtieth years 69 **rosary** the Buddhist rosary of 108 beads, one for each of the sufferings occasioned by the passions 78 **human spirit** *Hitodama*, a kind of will-o'-the-wisp believed to be the human soul 81 *Namu Amida Butsu* the invocation to Amida Buddha in Pure Land Buddhism 91-92 **knot... prayers** exorcism practiced to prevent the soul from leaving the body 98 **pine and palm** such a tree actually existed, as contemporary accounts of the Sonezaki Shrine show

NARRATOR: He unfastens the sash of his cloak. Ohatsu removes her tear-stained outer robe, and throws it on the palm tree; the fronds might now serve as a broom to sweep away the sad world's dust. Ohatsu takes a razor from her sleeve. 105
 OHATSU: I had this razor prepared in case we were overtaken on the way and separated. I was determined not to forfeit our name as lovers. How happy I am that we are to die together as we hoped!
 TOKUBEI: How wonderful of you to have thought of that! I am 110
 so confident in our love that I have no fears even about death. And yet it would be unfortunate if because of the pain we are to suffer people said that we looked ugly in death. Let us secure our bodies to this twin-trunked tree and die immaculately! We will become an unparalleled example of a 115
 lovers' suicide.
 OHATSU: Yes, let us do that.
 NARRATOR: Alas! She little thought she thus would use her light blue undersash! She draws it taut, and with her razor slashes it through.
 OHATSU: The sash is cut, but you and I will never be torn 120
 apart.
 NARRATOR: She sits, and he binds her twice, thrice to the tree, firmly so that she will not stir.
 TOKUBEI: Is it tight?
 OHATSU: Very tight. 125
 NARRATOR: She looks at her husband, and he at her—they burst into tears.
 BOTH: This is the end of our unhappy lives!
 TOKUBEI: No I mustn't give way to grief.
 NARRATOR: He lifts his head and joins his hands in prayer. 130
 TOKUBEI: My parents died when I was a boy, and I grew up thanks to the efforts of my uncle, who was my master. It disgraces me to die without repaying his kindness. Instead I shall cause him trouble which will last even after my death. Please forgive my sins. 135
 Soon I shall see my parents in the other world. Father, Mother, welcome me there!
 NARRATOR: He weeps. Ohatsu also joins her hands.
 OHATSU: I envy you. You say you will meet your parents in the world of the dead. My father and mother are in this world 140
 and in good health. I wonder when I shall see them again. I heard from them this spring, but I haven't seen them since the beginning of last autumn. Tomorrow, when word reaches the village of our suicides, how unhappy they will be! Now I must bid farewell for this life to my parents, my brothers and 145
 sisters. If at least my thoughts can reach you, please appear before me, if only in dreams. Dear Mother, beloved Father!
 NARRATOR: She sobs and wails aloud. Her husband also cries out and sheds incessant tears in all too understandable 150
 emotion.
 OHATSU: We could talk forever, but it serves no purpose. Kill me, kill me quickly!
 NARRATOR: She hastens the moment of death.
 TOKUBEI: I'm ready.
 NARRATOR: He swiftly draws his dagger. 155
 TOKUBEI: The moment has come. *Namu Amida. Namu Amida.*
 NARRATOR: But when he tries to bring the blade against the skin of the woman he's loved, and held and slept with so many months and years, his eyes cloud over, his hand 160
 shakes. He tries to steady his weakening resolve, but still he

trembles, and when he thrusts, the point misses. Twice or thrice the flashing blade deflects this way and that until a cry tells it has struck her throat.

165 TOKUBEI: *Namu Amida. Namu Amida. Namu Amida Butsu.*

NARRATOR: He twists the blade deeper and deeper, but the strength has left his arm. When he sees her weaken, he stretches forth his hands. The last agonies of death are indescribable.

170 TOKUBEI: Must I lag behind you? Let's draw our last breaths together.

NARRATOR: He thrusts and twists the razor in his throat, until it seems the handle or the blade must snap. His eyes grow dim,

and his last painful breath is drawn away at its appointed hour. No one is there to tell the tale, but the wind that blows through Sonezaki Wood transmits it, and high and low alike gather to pray for these lovers who beyond a doubt will in the future attain Buddhahood. They have become models of true love. 175

174 **appointed hour** it was believed by practitioners of yin-yang divination that a person's hour of death was determined at his birth and could be foretold by an examination of the celestial stems governing his birth. Death normally occurred with the receding of the tide