

# The Love Suicides at Amijima (Shinjū Ten no Amijima)

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A domestic play by Chikamatsu Monzaemon

*Translated by Donald Keene*

Usually considered Chikamatsu's masterpiece, *The Love Suicides at Amijima* is an excellent example of plays depicting love suicides, a subject prohibited less than two years after the play premiered on January 3, 1721. By the time the ban was lifted, the topic was no longer of great interest to playwrights. Like Chikamatsu's earlier success, *The Love Suicides at Sonezaki* (*Sonezaki shinjū*, 1703), which popularized the genre in the puppet theater, *Amijima* was based on a real incident, a pair of lovers who killed themselves on the Amijima Daichō Temple grounds in Osaka on November 13, 1720. The puppet play opened not quite two months later. In *Amijima*, Chikamatsu goes well beyond simply staging a current event. The play explores the intricacies of a love triangle by treating the wife, Osan, as a major character. The entangling web of interactions between the wife and the courtesan, Koharu, complicates the plot and adds new depths to a familiar story.

The play contrasts the world of the pleasure quarters with that of domesticity, but the two women, the courtesan and the wife, are probably more alike than their external appearance reveals. The puppet for Osan, the wife, has a mature woman head (*fukeoyama*) and wears an apron over a simple kimono with an overall pattern. Koharu's young woman (*musume*) head is topped with an elaborate headdress, and she wears a more elegant kimono. Jihei may be played with two heads: the Genta head when he is in the teahouse and the more naive young man's (*wakaotoko*) head when he is at home.

In addition to exploring love and the mutual sense of obligation felt by the characters, *Amijima* presents the possibility of salvation even for such imperfect people. A pun in the name of the play suggests this theme: *Ten no ami* means "net of heaven" and refers, among other things, to the saving net of Amida Buddha, who has vowed to save all living creatures, a vow mentioned in the last lines of the play.

# Traditional Japanese Theater

## *An Anthology of Plays*

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1998  
Columbia University Press

When the couple faces death, they choose not to die as lovers but as two individuals who have accepted the tonsure and entered the way of the Buddha.

Many later versions of this play were written for both the puppets and the kabuki stage. The most successful one was *The Love Suicide of Kamiya Jihei* (Shinjū Kamiya Jihei), produced in Osaka in 1778 by Chikamatsu Hanji and Takeda Bunkichi. The revisions tend to explain every aspect of the action in great detail, some adding new twists to the plot. For example, Osan's little daughter Osue sometimes appears to Koharu and Jihei with a message written on her white underkimono, revealing that mother and daughter have taken religious vows so that the lovers can be together and also that the family's financial problems were not due to Jihei's dissipation in the pleasure quarters but to a loan he made to his father-in-law Gozaemon. However, after a few other improbable events occur, the lovers decide that they must commit suicide despite Osan's sacrifice.

The major parts of all three acts of *The Love Suicides at Amijima* are included in this anthology as an example of a multiact puppet play. It is a tightly constructed piece, especially in comparison to later puppet and kabuki plays. The editor abridged this translation slightly, cutting the first scene and a few short passages with the servant Sangorō and the children. These sections can be found in Donald Keene's *Major Plays of Chikamatsu* (1961), from which this translation is taken. A good Japanese text with some annotations is available in Shigetomo 1958. Chikamatsu's text and the photographs illustrating this selection indicate most of what occurs on the stage. The editor added a few more descriptions of stage action from the video of a performance given at the National Theater in February 1987. That production, which began with Jihei's entrance in the middle of act 1, scene 2, lasted for two hours and forty minutes.

**CHARACTERS** (all lines are spoken by a chanter)

**KAMIYA JIHEI** (familiarily abbreviated as Kamiiji): a paper merchant

**OSAN**: Jihei's wife

Other members of Jihei's household: Tama, Osan's maid; two children, Kantaro, a son, age six, and Osue, a daughter, age four; Jihei's servant Sangoro

**AUNT**, Jihei's aunt who is also Osan's mother

**MOZAEMON**: Osan's father

**MAGOEMON** (at first disguised as a samurai): Jihei's brother, a flour merchant

**KOHARU**: a courtesan at the Kinokuni House in Sonezaki, Jihei's lover

**TAHEI**: a rival for Koharu

**PROPRIETRESS** of the Kawachi House, which is also called Kawashō

**OTEMBEI**: proprietor of the Yamato House

**MUSICIANS**

A chanter and a shamisen player seated on the auxiliary stage

Sound effects from the music room

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**ACT 1**

[Scene 1, which is seldom performed, introduces the milieu of the Sonezaki section of the pleasure quarters as Koharu makes her way to the Kawachi Teahouse to meet a samurai customer. We learn that she is in love with Jihei and that Tahei, a man she dislikes immensely, wants to buy out her contract. She sees him in the street and flees.]

**Scene 2**

*The Kawachi House, a Teahouse in Sonezaki*

*The curtain opens to reveal the Kawachi House. At stage left is an enclosed room with a sliding door leading to a center room open in the front. The stage right area is the street with a curtained entrance to the house, a lantern with the name Kawashō on it,<sup>1</sup> and a lattice window [figure 3.15].*

**CHANTER**: Koharu slips away, under cover of the crowd, and hurries into the Kawachi House.

*Koharu enters the house through the curtained door at stage right, and the proprietress comes in from the sliding door at stage left. They sit to converse.*

**[PROPRIETRESS]**: Well, well, I hadn't expected you so soon. It's been ages since I've even heard your name mentioned. What a rare visitor you are, Koharu! And what a long time it's been!

**CHANTER**: The proprietress greets Koharu cheerfully.

1. A contraction of Kawachi House and the owner's name, which begins with the syllable *shō*.



FIGURE 3.15. The kabuki setting for act 1, scene 2, of *The Love Suicides at Amijima* is similar to that used in bunraku. There is no curtained exit at stage right, and the lattice window is replaced with a lattice door through which Jihei (played in the wagoto style) is spying on Koharu and her mysterious samurai customer. Compare this with figure 3.39. (Photo by Aoki Shinji.)

[KOHARU]: Oh—you can be heard as far as the gate. Please don't call me Koharu in such a loud voice. That horrible Ri Tōten<sup>2</sup> is out there. I beg you, keep your voice down.

CHANTER: Were her words overheard? In bursts a party of three men. (*They enter from stage right.*)

[TAHEI]: I must thank you first of all, dear Koharu, for bestowing a new name on me, Ri Tōten. I never was called *that* before. Well, friends, this is the Koharu I've confided to you about—the good-hearted, good-natured, good-in-bed Koharu. Step up and meet the whore who's started all the rivalry! Will I soon be the lucky man and get Koharu for my wife? Or will Kamiya Jihei ransom her?

CHANTER: He swaggers up.

[KOHARU]: I don't want to hear another word. If you think it's such an achievement to start unfounded rumors about someone you don't even know, throw yourself into it, say what you please. But I don't want to hear.

CHANTER: She steps away suddenly, but he sidles up again.

[TAHEI]: You may not want to hear me, but the clink of my gold coins will make you listen! What a lucky girl you are! Just think—of all the many men in Temma and the rest of Osaka, you chose Jihei the paper dealer, the father of two children, with his cousin for his wife and his uncle for his father-in-law!

2. The villain of the play *The Battles of Coxinga*.



FIGURE 3.16. Tahei gestures with his pipe as he taunts Koharu. The proprietress is at stage left, and Tahei's friend is at stage right. (Photo by Barbara C. Adachi.)

A man whose business is so tight he's at his wits' end every sixty days merely to pay the wholesalers' bills! Do you think he'll be able to fork over nearly ten *kamme*<sup>3</sup> to ransom you? That reminds me of the mantis who picked a fight with an oncoming cart!<sup>4</sup> But look at me—I haven't a wife, a father-in-law, a father, or even an uncle, for that matter. Tahei the Lone Wolf—that's the name I'm known by. I admit that I'm no match for Jihei when it comes to bragging about myself in the Quarter, but when it comes to money, I'm an easy winner. If I pushed with all the strength of my money, who knows what I might conquer? How about it, men? Your customer tonight, I'm sure, is none other than Jihei, but I'm taking over. The Lone Wolf's taking over. Hostess! Bring on the sake! On with the sake!

[PROPRIETRESS]: What are you saying? Her customer tonight is a samurai, and he'll be here any moment. Please amuse yourself elsewhere.

[TAHEI] (*To Koharu*): You may try to avoid me all you please, but some special connection from a former life must have brought us together. I owe everything to that ballad-singing priest—what a wonderful thing the power of prayer is! I think I'll recite a prayer of my own. Here, this ashtray will be my bell, and my pipe the hammer. This is fun [figure 3.16].

*Chan Chan Chan Chan Chan.*

*Ei Ei Ei Ei.*

Jihei the paper dealer—  
Too much love for Koharu  
Has made him a foolscap,

3. This would amount to more than \$25,000 in current purchasing power. The price is unusually high; no doubt Tahei is exaggerating.

4. A simile, derived ultimately from ancient Chinese texts, for someone who does not know his own limitations.

He wastepapers sheets of gold  
 Till his fortune's shredded to confetti  
 And Jihei himself is like scrap paper  
 You can't even blow your nose on!  
 Hail, Hail Amida Buddha!  
*Namaida Namaida Namaida.*

CHANTER: As he prances wildly, roaring his song, a man appears at the gate, so anxious not to be recognized that he wears, even at night, a wicker hat.<sup>5</sup> (*The samurai enters from stage right.*)

[TAHEI]: Well, Toilet Paper's showed up! That's quite a disguise! Why don't you come in, Toilet Paper? If my prayer's frightened you, say a Hail Amida!<sup>6</sup> Here, I'll take off your hat!

CHANTER: He drags in the man and examines him. It is the genuine article, a two-sworded samurai, somber in dress and expression, who glares at Tahei through his woven hat, his eyeballs round as gongs. Tahei, unable to utter either a Hail or an Amida, gasps "Haaa!" in dismay, but his face is unflinching.

[TAHEI]: Koharu, I'm a townsman. I've never worn a sword, but I've lots of New Silver<sup>7</sup> at my place, and I think that the glint could twist a mere couple of swords out of joint. Imagine that wretch from the toilet paper shop, with a capital as thin as tissue, trying to compete with the Lone Wolf! That's the height of impertinence! I'll wander down now from Sakura Bridge to Middle Street, and if I meet that Wastepaper along the way, I'll trample him underfoot. Come on, men. (*They exit stage right.*)

CHANTER: Their gestures, at least, have a cavalier assurance as they swagger off, taking up the whole street. The samurai customer patiently endures the fool, indifferent to his remarks because of the surroundings, but every word of gossip about Jihei, whether for good or ill, affects Koharu. She is so depressed that she stands there blankly, unable even to greet her guest.

*A maid from the house to which Koharu belongs examines the samurai to make sure he is not Jihei in disguise.*

[SAMURAI]: What's the meaning of this? You'd think from the way she appraised my face that I was a tea canister or a porcelain cup! I didn't come here to be trifled with. It's difficult enough for me to leave the residence even by day, and in order to spend a night away I had to ask the senior officer's permission and sign the register. You can see how complicated the regulations make things. But I'm in love, miss, just from hearing about you, and I wanted very badly to spend a night with you. I came here a while ago without an escort and made the arrangements with the teahouse. I had been looking forward to your kind

5. Customers visiting the Quarter by day wear these deep wicker hats (which virtually conceal the face) in order to preserve the secrecy of their visits; but this customer wears a hat even at night, when the darkness normally is sufficient protection.

6. A play on words devolving on the syllables *ami*, part of the name Amida, and on *amigasa*, meaning "woven hat."

7. Good-quality coinage of about 1720. It was necessary to specify the kind of silver one meant because devaluations and revaluations altered the value of coins of nominally the same denomination.

reception, a memory to last me a lifetime, but you haven't so much as smiled at me or said a word of greeting. You keep your head down, as if you were counting money in your lap. Aren't you afraid of getting a stiff neck? Madam—I've never heard the like. Here I come to a teahouse, and I must play the part of a night nurse in a maternity ward!

[PROPRIETRESS]: You're quite right, sir. Your surprise is entirely justified, considering that you don't know the reasons. This girl is deeply in love with a customer named Kamiji. It's been Kamiji today and Kamiji tomorrow, with nobody else allowed a chance at her. That's why all her guests are examined. Koharu naturally is depressed—it's only to be expected. You are annoyed, which is equally to be expected. But speaking as the proprietress here, it seems to me that the essential thing is for you to meet each other halfway and cheer up. Come, have a drink. Act a little more lively, Koharu.

CHANTER: Koharu, without answering, lifts her tear-stained face.

[KOHARU]: Tell me, samurai, they say that if you're going to kill yourself anyway, people who die during the Ten Nights<sup>8</sup> are sure to become Buddhas. Is that really true?

[SAMURAI]: How should I know? Ask the priest at your family temple.

[KOHARU]: Yes, that's right. But there's something I'd like to ask a samurai. If you're committing suicide, it'd be a lot more painful, wouldn't it, to cut your throat rather than hang yourself?

[SAMURAI]: I've never tried cutting my throat to see whether or not it hurt. Please ask more sensible questions. What an unpleasant girl!

CHANTER: Samurai though he is, he looks nonplussed.

[PROPRIETRESS]: Koharu, that's a shocking way to treat a guest the first time you meet him. I'll go and get my husband. We'll have some sake together. That ought to liven things up a bit. (*She exits stage left.*)

CHANTER: The gate she leaves by is illumined by the evening moon low in the sky; the clouds and the passersby in the street have thinned. . . .

Jiheï and Koharu have been thwarted in their love, unable to meet. They swore in the last letters they exchanged that if only they could meet, that day would be their last. Night after night Jiheï, ready for death, trudges to the Quarter, distracted, as though his soul had left a body consumed by the fires of love [figure 3.17].

At a roadside eating stand he hears people gossiping about Koharu. "She's at the Kawashō with a samurai customer," someone says, and immediately Jiheï decides, "It will be tonight."

*Jiheï enters from stage right, peeks through the curtained entrance to the teahouse, and then goes to the latticed window and peers inside.*

CHANTER: He peers through the latticework window and sees a guest in the inside room, his face obscured by a hood. Only the moving chin is visible, and Jiheï cannot hear what is said.

[JIHEI]: Poor Koharu! How thin her face is! She keeps it averted from

8. The sixth to the sixteenth nights of the tenth moon when special Buddhist services were conducted in Pure Land temples. It was believed that persons who died then immediately became Buddhas.





FIGURE 3.17. Jihei, searching for Koharu, approaches the Kawashō. He wears a white hand towel (*tenugui*) around his head to suggest that he is avoiding public attention. (Photo by Barbara C. Adachi.)

the lamp. In her heart she's thinking only of me. I'll signal her that I'm here, and we'll run off together. Then which will it be—Umeda or Kitano?<sup>9</sup> Oh—I want to tell her I'm here. I want to call her.

CHANTER: He beckons with his heart, his spirit flies to her, but his body, like a cicada's cast-off shell, clings to the latticework. He weeps with impatience. The guest in the inside room gives a great yawn.

[SAMURAI]: What a bore, playing nursemaid to a prostitute with

worries on her mind! The street seems quiet now. Let's go to the end room. We can at least distract ourselves by looking at the lanterns. Come with me.

CHANTER: They go together to the outer room. Jihei, alarmed, squeezes into the patch of shadow under the lattice window. Inside, they do not realize that anyone is eavesdropping.

[SAMURAI]: I've been noticing your behavior and the little things you've said this evening. It's plain to me that you intend a love suicide with Kamiji, or whatever his name is—the man the hostess mentioned. I'm sure I'm right. I realize that no amount of advice or reasoning is likely to penetrate the ears of somebody bewitched by the god of death, but I must say that you're exceedingly foolish. This is only our first meeting, but as a samurai, I can't let you die without trying to save you. I will never reveal to anyone what you tell me. Open your heart without fear.

CHANTER: He whispers these words. She joins her hands and bows.

*As they talk, Koharu cleans a pipe, lights it with charcoal from the hibachi, and gives it to the samurai [figure 3.18].*

[KOHARU]: I'm extremely grateful. Thank you for your kind words. You were right. I have promised Kamiji to die with him. But we've been completely prevented from meeting by my master, and Jihei, for various reasons, can't ransom me at once. My contracts with my former master<sup>10</sup> and my present one still have five years to run. If somebody else claimed me during that time, it would be a blow to me, of course, but a worse disgrace to Jihei's honor. He suggested that it would be better if we killed ourselves, and I agreed. I was caught by obligations from which I could not withdraw, and I promised him before I knew what I was doing. I said, "We'll watch for a chance, and I'll slip out when you give the signal." "Yes," he said, "slip out somehow." Ever since then I've been leading a life of uncertainty, never knowing from one day to the next when my last hour will come. I have a mother living in a back alley south of here. She has no one but me to depend on, and she does piecework

9. Both places had well-known cemeteries.

10. The master at the bathhouse where Koharu formerly worked.

to eke out a living. I keep thinking that after I'm dead, she'll become a beggar or an outcast and maybe she'll die of starvation. That's the only sad part about dying. I have just this one life. I'm ashamed that you may think me a coldhearted woman, but I must endure the shame. The most important thing is that I don't want to die. I beg you, please help me to stay alive.

CHANTER: As she speaks, the samurai nods thoughtfully. Jihei, crouching outside, hears her words with astonishment; they are so unexpected to his manly heart that he feels like a monkey who has tumbled from a tree. He is frantic with agitation.

[JIHEI] (To himself): Then was everything a lie? Ahhh—I'm furious! For two whole years I've been bewitched by that rotten she-fox! Shall I break in and kill her with one blow of my sword? Or shall I satisfy my anger by shaming her to her face?

CHANTER: He gnashes his teeth and weeps in chagrin. Inside the house Koharu speaks through her tears.

[KOHARU]: It's a curious thing to ask, but would you please show the kindness of a samurai and become my customer for the rest of this year and into next spring? Whenever Jihei comes, intent on death, please interfere and force him to postpone his plan. In this way our relations can be broken quite naturally. He won't have to kill himself, and my life also will be saved.—What evil connection from a former existence made us promise to die? How I regret it now!

CHANTER: She weeps, leaning on the samurai's knee [figure 3.19].

[SAMURAI]: Very well, I'll do as you ask. I think I can help you.—But there's a draft blowing. Somebody may be watching.

CHANTER: He slams shut the latticework shōji. Jihei, listening outside, is in a frenzy.

[JIHEI]: Exactly what you'd expect from a whore, a cheap whore! I misjudged her foul nature. She robbed the soul from my body, the thieving harlot! Shall I slash her down or run her through? What am I to do?

CHANTER: The shadows of two profiles fall on the shōji.

[JIHEI]: I'd like to give her a taste of my fist and trample her. What are they chattering about? See how they nod to each other! Now she's bowing to him, whispering and sniveling. I've tried to control myself—I've pressed my chest, I've stroked it—but I can't stand any more. This is too much to endure!



FIGURE 3.18. As they converse, Koharu prepares a pipe for her samurai client (actually Magoemon with a Kōmei head and a hood to disguise his identity). The bottom picture is a kabuki version of the same actions. The doll's obi is tied in the back, whereas in kabuki the obi is tied in the front. The pipe (*kiseru*) is an often used hand prop in both theaters. (Top: photo by Barbara C. Adachi; bottom: photo by Aoki Shinji.)



FIGURE 3.19. Koharu attempts to persuade the samurai to become her customer so that she and Jihei will not be forced to commit suicide. (Photo by Barbara C. Adachi.)

CHANTER: His heart pounds wildly as he unsheathes his dirk, a Magoroku of Seki. “Koharu’s side must be here,” he judges, and stabs through an opening in the latticework. (*He slides the window open a bit and stabs through it with his sword.*) But Koharu is too far away for his thrust, and though she cries out in terror, she remains unharmed. Her guest instantly leaps at Jihei, grabs his hands, and jerks them through the latticework. With his sword knot he quickly and securely fastens Jihei’s hands to the window upright. (*The samurai is working behind the window so that he cannot be clearly seen by Jihei or the audience.*)

[SAMURAI]: Don’t make any outcry, Koharu. You are not to look at him.

CHANTER: At this moment the proprietress enters. He exclaims in alarm.

[SAMURAI]: This needn’t concern you. Some ruffian ran his sword through the shō-ji, and I’ve tied his arms to the latticework. I have my own way of dealing with him. Don’t untie the cord. If you attract a crowd, the place is sure to be thrown in an uproar. Let’s all go inside. Come with me, Koharu. We’ll go to bed.

CHANTER: Koharu answers, “Yes,” but she recognizes the handle of the dirk, and the memory—if not the blade—transfixes her breast.

[KOHARU]: There’re always people doing crazy things in the Quarter when they’ve had too much to drink. Why don’t you let him go without making any trouble? I think that’s best, don’t you?

[SAMURAI]: Out of the question. Do as I say—inside, all of you. Koharu, come along. (*They exit through the sliding door at stage left.*)

CHANTER: Jihei can still see their shadows even after they enter the inner room, but he is bound to the spot, his hands held in fetters that grip him more tightly as he struggles, his body beset by suffering as he tastes a living shame

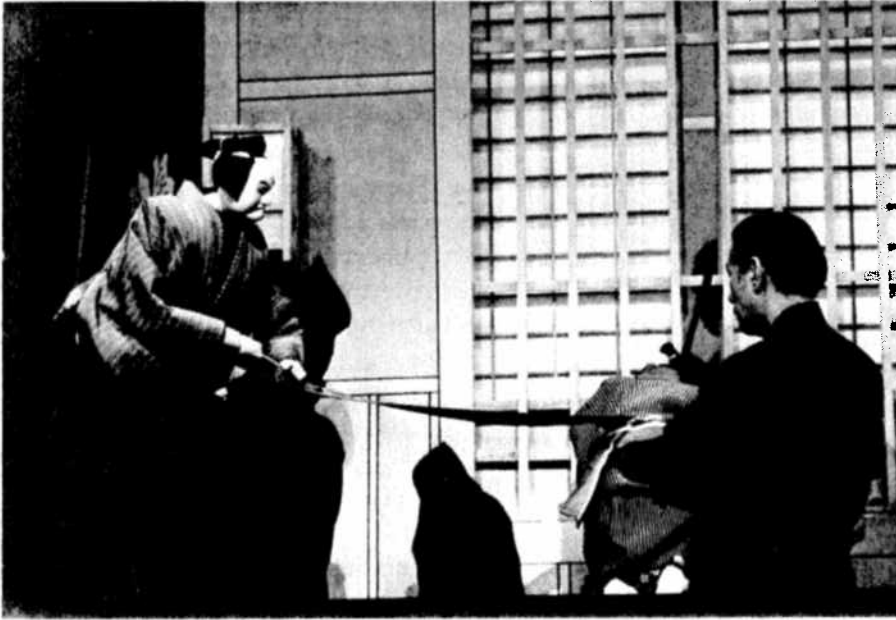


FIGURE 3.20. Finding Jihei tied to the window frame, Tahei grabs his obi and unties it. (Photo by Barbara C. Adachi.)

worse than a dog's.<sup>11</sup> More determined than ever to die, he sheds tears of blood, a pitiful sight. Tahei the Lone Wolf returns from his carousing. (*Tahei and a companion enter from stage right.*)

[TAHEI]: That's Jihei standing by the window. I'll give him a tossing.

CHANTER: He catches Jihei by the collar and starts to lift him over his back.

[JIHEI]: Owww!

[TAHEI]: Owww? What kind of weakling are you? Oh, I see—you're tied here.

You must've been pulling off a robbery. You dirty pickpocket! You rotten pickpocket! (*He pulls on Jihei's obi, untying it [figure 3.20].*)

CHANTER: He drubs Jihei mercilessly.

[TAHEI]: You burglar! You convict!

CHANTER: He kicks him wildly.

[TAHEI]: Kamiya Jihei's been caught burgling, and they've tied him up!

CHANTER: Passersby and people of the neighborhood, attracted by his shouts, quickly gather. The samurai rushes from the house. (*The samurai, who has removed his hood and jacket, enters through the door at stage left.*)

[SAMURAI]: Who's calling him a burglar? You? Tell me what Jihei's stolen! Out with it!

CHANTER: He seizes Tahei and forces him into the dirt. Tahei rises to his feet only for the samurai to kick him down again and again. He grips Tahei.

[SAMURAI]: Jihei! Trample him to your heart's content!

CHANTER: He pushes Tahei under Jihei's feet. Bound though he is, Jihei stamps

11. A proverb of Buddhist origin, "Suffering follows one like a dog," is embedded in the text.



FIGURE 3.21. As he scolds his brother, Magoemon gestures with a fan, which has not been reduced to puppet scale. It is held by the puppeteer, whose hand is slipped through the doll's sleeve. The second puppeteer uses his left hand to hold the sword. (Photo by Barbara C. Adachi.)

furiously over Tahei's face. Tahei, thoroughly trampled and covered with mire, gets to his feet and glares around him.

[TAHEI] (*To the bystanders*): How could you fools stand there calmly and let him step on me? I've memorized every one of your faces, and I intend to pay you back. Remember that!

CHANTER: He makes his escape, still determined to have the last word. The spectators burst out laughing.

[VOICES]: Listen to him brag, even after he's been trampled on! Let's throw him from the bridge and give him a drink of water! Don't let him get away!

CHANTER: They chase after him. When the crowd has dispersed, the samurai approaches Jihei and unfastens the knots. He shows his face with his hood removed.

[JIHEI]: Magoemon! My brother! How mortifying!

CHANTER: He sinks to the ground and weeps,

prostrating himself in the dirt.

[KOHARU] (*Koharu enters from stage left*): Are you his brother, sir?

CHANTER: Koharu runs to them. Jihei, catching her by the front of the kimono, forces her to the ground.

[JIHEI]: Beast! She-fox! I'd sooner trample on you than on Tahei!

CHANTER: He raises his foot, but Magoemon calls out.

*They sit, with Magoemon in the center.*

[MAGOEMON]: That's the kind of foolishness responsible for all your trouble. A prostitute's business is to deceive men. Have you just now waked up to that? It's deplorable. You're my younger brother, but you're almost thirty, and you've got a six-year-old boy and a four-year-old girl, Kantarō and Osue. You run a shop with a thirty-six-foot frontage,<sup>12</sup> but you don't seem to realize that your whole fortune's collapsing. (*Magoemon gestures first with a fan and then with his sheathed sword as he scolds his brother [figure 3.21].*) I realized that your marriage couldn't last much longer at this rate. I decided that I'd see with my own eyes what kind of woman Koharu was and work out some sort of solution afterward. I consulted the proprietress here, then came myself to investigate the cause of your sickness. I see now how natural it was that you should desert your wife and children. What a faithful prostitute you discovered! I congratulate you! And here I am, Magoemon the Miller, known far and wide for my paragon of a brother, dressed up like a masquerader at a festival or maybe a lunatic! I put on

12. It was customary to refer to the size of shops by giving their street frontage.

swords for the first time in my life and announced myself, like a bit player in a costume piece, as an officer at a residence. I feel like an absolute idiot with these swords—it's so infuriating—and ridiculous—that it's given me a pain in the chest.

CHANTER: He gnashes his teeth and grimaces, attempting to hide his tears. Koharu, choking the while with emotion, can only say

[KOHARU]: Yes, you're entirely right.

CHANTER: The rest is lost in tears. Jihei pounds the earth with his fist.

[JIHEI]: I was wrong. Forgive me, Magoemon. For three years I've been possessed by that witch. I've neglected my parents, relatives—even my wife and children—and wrecked my fortune, all because I was deceived by Koharu, that sneak thief! I'm utterly mortified. But I'm through with her now, and I'll never set foot here again. Weasel! Vixen! Sneak thief! Here's proof that I've broken with her!

CHANTER: He pulls out the amulet bag that has rested next to his skin.

[JIHEI]: Here are the written oaths we've exchanged, one at the beginning of each month, twenty-nine in all. I return them. This means our love and affection are over. Take them.

CHANTER: He flings the notes at her.

[JIHEI]: Magoemon, collect from her my pledges. Please make sure you get them all. Then burn them with your own hands. (To Koharu) Hand them to my brother.

[KOHARU]: As you wish.

CHANTER: In tears, she surrenders the amulet bag. Magoemon opens it.

[MAGOEMON]: One, two, three, four . . . ten . . . twenty-nine. They're all here. There's also a letter from a woman. What's this?

CHANTER: He starts to unfold it.

[KOHARU]: That's an important letter. I can't let you see it.

CHANTER: She clings to Magoemon's arm, but he pushes her away. He holds the letter to the lamplight and examines the address, "To Miss Koharu from Kamiya Osan." As soon as he reads the words, he casually thrusts the letter into his kimono.

[MAGOEMON]: Koharu, a while ago I swore by my good fortune as a samurai, but now Magoemon the Miller swears by his good fortune as a businessman that he will show this letter to no one, not even his wife. I alone will read it, then burn it with the oaths. You can trust me. I will not break this oath [figure 3.22].



FIGURE 3.22. In the kabuki version, Magoemon swears to Koharu that he will not show Osan's letter to anyone. Below, in the bunraku version, Magoemon attempts to keep Jihei from attacking Koharu while indicating to Koharu his understanding of the importance of the letter. (Top: photo by Aoki Shinji; bottom: photo by Barbara C. Adachi.)

[KOHARU]: Thank you. You have saved my honor.

CHANTER: She bursts into tears again.

[JIHEI] (*Laughs contemptuously*): Save your honor! You talk like a human being!

(*To Magoemon*) I don't want to see her cursed face another minute. Let's go.

No—I can't hold so much resentment and bitterness! I'll kick her one in the face, a memory to treasure for the rest of my life. Excuse me, please.

CHANTER: He strides up to Koharu and stamps on the ground.

[JIHEI]: For three years I've loved you, delighted in you, longed for you, adored you, but today my foot will say my only farewells.

CHANTER: He kicks her sharply on the forehead and bursts into tears. The brothers leave, forlorn figures. Koharu, unhappy woman, raises her voice in lament as she watches them go. Is she faithful or unfaithful? Her true feelings are hidden in the words penned by Jihei's wife, a letter no one has seen. Jihei goes his separate way without learning the truth.

## ACT 2, Scene 1

*The House and Shop of Kamiya Jihei*

*Time: Ten days later*

*The general layout of the stage is similar to that of the earlier scene, but the setting is now a paper merchant's home and shop. The walls are dark, with a curtained door at center back and a chest of drawers with account pads hung above it on the back wall to the right of the door. A stand containing an abacus sits in front of them. There are sliding doors to an enclosed room at stage left, and Jihei sleeps under a futon in the left part of the central room. Osan is seated, looking out the window at the street.*

CHANTER: The busy street that runs straight to Tenjin Bridge, named for the god of Temma, bringer of good fortune, is known as the Street Before the Kami, and here a paper shop does business under the name Kamiya Jihei.<sup>13</sup> The paper is honestly sold, the shop well situated; it is a long-established firm, and customers come thick as raindrops. Outside crowds pass in the street, on their way to the Ten Nights service, while inside the husband dozes in the *kotatsu*,<sup>14</sup> shielded from draughts by a screen at his pillow [figure 3.23]. His wife Osan keeps a solitary, anxious watch over the shop and house.

*The son Kantarō; the maid Tama, with Osue on her back; and the servant Sangorō return. They interact briefly.*

[TAMA]: Oh, I almost forgot to tell you, ma'am, that Mr. Magoemon and his aunt<sup>15</sup> are on their way here from the west.

[OSAN]: Oh dear! I'll have to wake Jihei in that case. (*To Jihei*) Please get up.

Mother and Magoemon are coming. They'll be upset again if you let them see you, a businessman, sleeping in the afternoon, with the day as short as it is.

13. Temma Tenjin is Sugawara no Michizane's name as a deity. This is a play on the words *kami* (deity) and *kami* (paper).

14. A source of heat in which a charcoal burner is placed under a low, quilt-covered table.

15. Magoemon's (and Jihei's) aunt, but Osan's mother.

[JIHEI]: All right.

CHANTER: He struggles to a sitting position and, with his abacus in one hand, pulls his account book toward him with the other.

[JIHEI]: Two into ten goes five, three into nine goes three, three into six goes two, seven times eight is fifty-six.

CHANTER: His fifty-six-year-old aunt enters with Magoemon.

[JIHEI]: Magoemon, aunt. How good of you. Please come in. I was in the midst of some urgent calculations. Four nines makes thirty-six *momme*. Three sixes make eighteen *fun*. That's two *momme* less two *fun*.<sup>16</sup> Kantarō! Osue! Granny and Uncle have come! Bring the tobacco tray! One times three makes three. Osan, serve the tea!

CHANTER: He jabbars away.

[AUNT]: We haven't come for tea or tobacco. Osan, you're young, I know, but you're the mother of two children, and your excessive forbearance does you no credit. A man's dissipation can always be traced to his wife's carelessness. Remember, it's not only the man who's disgraced when he goes bankrupt and his marriage breaks up. You'd do well to take notice of what's going on and assert yourself a bit more.

[MAGOEMON]: It's foolish to hope for any results, aunt. The scoundrel even deceives me, his elder brother. Why should he take to heart criticism from his wife? Jihei—you played me for a fool. After showing me how you returned Koharu's pledges, here you are, not ten days later, redeeming her! What does this mean? I suppose your urgent calculations are of Koharu's debts! I've had enough!

CHANTER: He snatches away the abacus and flings it clattering into the hallway.

[JIHEI]: You're making an enormous fuss without any cause. I haven't crossed the threshold since the last time I saw you, except to go twice to the wholesalers in Imabashi and once to the Tenjin Shrine. I haven't even thought of Koharu, much less redeemed her.

[AUNT]: None of your evasions! Last evening at the Ten Nights service I heard the people in the congregation gossiping. Everybody was talking about the great patron from Temma who'd fallen in love with a prostitute named Koharu from the Kinokuni House in Sonezaki. They said he'd driven away her other guests and was going to ransom her in the next couple of days. There was all kinds of gossip about the abundance of money and fools, even in these days of high prices. My husband Gozaemon has been hearing about Koharu constantly, and he's sure that her great patron from Temma must be you, Jihei. He told me, "He's your nephew, but for me he's a stranger, and my



FIGURE 3.23. Act 2 opens with Jihei in bed while his wife, Osan, attends to the shop and their family. (Photo by Barbara C. Adachi.)

16. Meaningless calculations. Twenty *fun* made two *momme*.



daughter's happiness is my chief concern. Once he ransoms the prostitute, he'll no doubt sell his wife to a brothel. I intend to take her back before he starts selling her clothes." He was halfway out of the house before I could restrain him. "Don't get so excited. We can settle this calmly. First we must make sure whether or not the rumors are true." That's why Magoemon and I are here now. He was telling me a while ago that the Jihei of today is not the Jihei of yesterday—that you'd broken all connections with Sonezaki and completely reformed. But now I heard that you've had a relapse. What disease can this be? Your father was my brother. When the poor man was on his deathbed, he lifted his head from the pillow and begged me to look after you, as my son-in-law and nephew. I've never forgotten those last words, but your perversity has made a mockery of his request!

CHANTER: She collapses in tears of resentment. Jihei claps his hands in sudden recognition.

[JIHEI]: I have it! The Koharu everybody's gossiping about is the same Koharu, but the great patron who's to redeem her is a different man. The other day, as my brother can tell you, Tahei—they call him the Lone Wolf because he hasn't any family or relations—started a fight and was trampled on. He gets all the money he needs from his hometown, and he's been trying for a long time to redeem Koharu. I've always prevented him, but I'm sure he's decided that now is his chance. I have nothing to do with it.

CHANTER: Osan brightens at his words.

[OSAN]: No matter how forbearing I might be—even if I were an angel—you don't suppose I'd encourage my husband to redeem a prostitute! In this instance, at any rate, there's not a word of untruth in what my husband has said. I'll be a witness to that, Mother.

CHANTER: Husband's and wife's words tally perfectly.

[AUNT]: Then it's true?

CHANTER: The aunt and nephew clap their hands with relief.

[MAGOEMON]: Well, I'm happy it's over, anyway. To make us feel doubly reassured, will you write an affidavit that will dispel any doubts your stubborn uncle may have?

[JIHEI]: Certainly. I'll write a thousand if you like.

[MAGOEMON]: Splendid! I happen to have bought this on the way here.

CHANTER: Magoemon takes from the fold of his kimono a sheet of oath-paper from Kumano, the sacred characters formed by flocks of crows.<sup>17</sup> Instead of vows of eternal love, Jihei now signs under penalty of Heaven's wrath an oath that he will sever all ties and affections with Koharu. "If I should lie, may Bonten and Taishaku above, and the Four Great Kings below afflict me!"<sup>18</sup> So the text runs, and to it is appended the names of many Buddhas and gods. He

17. The charms issued by the Shinto shrine at Kumano, on whose face was printed six Chinese characters, the strokes of which were in the shape of crows. The reverse side of these charms was used for writing oaths.

18. A formal oath. Bonten (Brahma) and Taishaku (Sakra), though Hindu gods, were considered to be protective deities of the Buddhist law. The four Deva kings served under Sakra and also were protectors of Buddhism.

signs his name, Kamiya Jihei, in bold characters, imprints the oath with a seal of blood, and proffers it.

[OSAN]: It's a great relief to me too. Mother, I have you and Magoemon to thank. Jihei and I have had two children, but this is his firmest pledge of affection. I hope you share my joy.

[AUNT]: Indeed we do. I'm sure that Jihei will settle down and his business will improve, now that he's in this frame of mind. It's been entirely for his sake and for love of the grandchildren that we've intervened. Come, Magoemon, let's be on our way. I'm anxious to set my husband's mind at ease. It's become chilly here. See that the children don't catch cold. This, too, we owe to the Buddha of the Ten Nights. I'll say a prayer of thanks before I go. Hail, Amida Buddha!

CHANTER: She leaves, her heart innocent as Buddha's. Jihei is perfunctory even about seeing them to the door. Hardly have they crossed the threshold than he slumps down again at the kotatsu. He pulls the checked quilting over his head.

*The revolving dais on the auxiliary stage turns to bring out a new chanter and shamisen player.*

[OSAN]: You still haven't forgotten Sonezaki, have you?

CHANTER: She goes up to him in disgust and tears away the quilting. He is weeping; a waterfall of tears streams along the pillow, deep enough to bear him afloat. She tugs him upright and props his body against the kotatsu frame. She stares into his face.

[OSAN]: You're acting outrageously, Jihei. You shouldn't have signed that oath if you felt so reluctant to leave her. The year before last, on the middle day of the Boar of the tenth moon,<sup>19</sup> we lit the first fire in the kotatsu and celebrated by sleeping here together, pillow to pillow. Ever since then—did some demon or snake creep into my bosom that night?—for two whole years I've been condemned to keep watch over an empty nest. I thought that tonight at least, thanks to Mother and Magoemon, we'd share sweet words in bed as husbands and wives do, but my pleasure didn't last long. How cruel of you, how utterly heartless! Go ahead, cry your eyes out if you're so attached to her. Your tears will flow into the Shijimi River, and Koharu, no doubt, will ladle them out and drink them! You're ignoble, inhuman.

CHANTER: She embraces his knees and throws herself over him, moaning in supplication. Jihei wipes his eyes.

[JIHEI]: It's not surprising that you can't tell what's in my heart. I have not a shred of attachment left for that vampire in human skin, but I bear a grudge against Tahei. He has all the money he wants, no wife or children. He's schemed again and again to redeem her, but Koharu refused to give in, at least until I broke with her. She told me time and again, "You have nothing to worry about. I'll never let myself be redeemed by Tahei, not even if my ties with you

19. It was customary to light the first fire of the winter on this day, which would generally be toward the end of November in the Western calendar.



FIGURE 3.24. Osan takes her kimono from a chest and piles them on a large cloth for Jihei to pawn. (Photo by Barbara C. Adachi.)

are ended and I can no longer stay by your side. If my master is induced by Tahei's money to deliver me to him, I'll kill myself in a way that'll do you credit!" But think—not ten days have passed since I broke with her, and she's to be redeemed by Tahei! That rotten whore! That animal! No, I haven't a trace of affection left for her, but I can just hear how Tahei will be boasting. He'll spread the word around Osaka that my business has come to a standstill and I'm hard-pressed for money. I'll meet with contemptuous stares from the wholesalers. I'll be dishonored. My heart is broken, and my body burns with shame. What a disgrace! How mad-

dening! I've passed the stage of shedding hot tears, tears of blood, sticky tears—my tears now are of molten iron!

CHANTER: He collapses with weeping. Osan pales with alarm.

[OSAN]: If that's the situation, poor Koharu will surely kill herself.

[JIHEI]: You're too well bred, despite your intelligence, to understand her likes!

What makes you suppose that faithless creature would kill herself? Far from it—she's probably taking moxa treatments and medicine to prolong her life!

[OSAN]: No, that's not true. I was determined never to tell you so long as I lived, but I'm afraid of the crime I'd be committing if I concealed the facts and let her die with my knowledge. I will reveal my great secret. There is not a grain of deceit in Koharu. It was I who schemed to end the relations between you. I could see signs that you were drifting toward suicide. I felt so unhappy that I wrote a letter, begging her as one woman to another to break with you, though I knew how painful it would be. I asked her to save your life. The letter must have moved her. She answered that she would give you up, though you were more precious than life itself, because she could not shirk her duty to me. I've kept her letter with me ever since—it's been like a protective charm. Could such a noble-hearted woman violate her promise and brazenly marry Tahei? When a woman—I no less than another—has given herself completely to a man, she does not change. I'm sure she'll kill herself. I'm sure of it. Ahhh—what a dreadful thing to have happened! Save her, please.

CHANTER: Her voice rises in agitation. Her husband is thrown into a turmoil.

[JIHEI]: There was a letter in an unknown woman's hand among the written oaths she surrendered to my brother. It must have been from you. If that's the case, Koharu will surely commit suicide.

[OSAN]: Alas! I'd be failing in the obligations I owe her as another woman if I allowed her to die. Please go to her at once. Don't let her kill herself.

CHANTER: Clinging to her husband, she melts in tears.

[JIHEI]: But what can I possibly do? It'd take half the amount of her ransom in earnest money merely to keep her out of Tahei's clutches. I can't save Koharu's life without administering a dose of 750 momme in New Silver. How could I raise that much money in my present financial straits? Even if I crush my body to powder, where will the money come from?

[OSAN]: Don't exaggerate the difficulties. If that's all you need, it's simple enough.

*Osan opens the sliding door at stage left to reveal a large chest of drawers. She removes a small cloth bag from one of the drawers.*

CHANTER: She goes to the wardrobe and, opening a small drawer, takes out a bag fastened with cords of twisted silk. She unhesitatingly tears it open and throws down a packet that Jihei retrieves.

[JIHEI]: What's this? Money? Four hundred momme in New Silver? How in the world—

CHANTER: He stares astonished at this money he never put there.

[OSAN]: I'll tell you later where this money came from. I've scraped it together to pay the bill for the Iwakuni paper that falls due the day after tomorrow. We'll have to ask Magoemon to help us keep the business from betraying its insolvency. But Koharu comes first. The packet contains 400 momme. That leaves 350 momme to raise.

*She spreads out a large cloth and begins piling kimono from the chest on it [figure 3.24].*

CHANTER: She unlocks a large drawer. From the wardrobe a Kyoto crepe kimono lined in pale brown, insubstantial as her husband's life that flickers today and may vanish tomorrow; a padded kimono of Osue's, flaming scarlet inside and out—Osan flushes with pain to part with it; Kantarō's sleeveless, unlined jacket—if she pawns this, he'll be cold this winter. Next comes a garment of striped Gunnai silk lined in pale blue and never worn, and then her best formal costume—heavy black silk dyed with her family crest, an ivy leaf in a ring. They say that those joined by marriage ties can even go naked at home, though outside the house, clothes make the man. She snatches up even her husband's finery, a silken cloak, making fifteen articles in all.

[OSAN]: The very least the pawnshop can offer is 350 momme in New Silver.

CHANTER: Her face glows as though she already held the money she needs; she hides in the one bundle her husband's shame and her own obligation and puts in her love besides.

[OSAN]: It doesn't matter if the children and I have nothing to wear. My husband's reputation concerns me more. Ransom Koharu. Save her. Assert your honor before Tahei.

CHANTER: But Jihei's eyes remain downcast all the while, and he is silently weeping.

[JIHEI]: Yes, I can pay the earnest money and keep her out of Tahei's hands. But once I've redeemed her, I'll either have to maintain her in a separate establishment or bring her here. Then what will become of you?

CHANTER: Osan is at a loss to answer.

[OSAN]: Yes, what shall I do? Shall I become your children's nurse or the cook?  
Or perhaps the retired mistress of the house?

CHANTER: She falls to the floor with a cry of woe.

[JIHEI]: That would be too selfish. I'd be afraid to accept such generosity. Even if the punishment for my crimes against my parents, against Heaven, against the gods and the Buddhas fail to strike me, the punishment for my crimes against my wife alone will be sufficient to destroy all hope for the future life. Forgive me, I beg you.

CHANTER: He joins his hands in tearful entreaty.

[OSAN]: Why should you bow before me? I don't deserve it. I'd be glad to rip the nails from my fingers and toes, to do anything which might serve my husband. I've been pawning my clothes for some time in order to scrape together the money for the paper wholesalers' bills. My wardrobe is empty, but I don't regret it in the least. But it's too late now to talk of such things. Hurry, change your cloak and go to her with a smile.

*They both go out through the curtained exit at center back.*

CHANTER: He puts on an underkimono of Gunnai silk, a robe of heavy black silk, and a striped cloak. His sash of figured damask holds a dirk of middle length worked in gold. Buddha surely knows that tonight it will be stained with Koharu's blood.

*Osan returns and summons the servant, who enters and walks in front of the bundle.*

[OSAN]: Sangorō! Come here!

*Jiheï reenters dressed in a dark kimono with a short, striped jacket over it.*

CHANTER: Jihei loads the bundle on the servant's back, intending to take him along. Then he firmly thrusts the wallet next to his skin and starts toward the gate.

[VOICE]: Is Jihei at home?

CHANTER: A man enters, removing his fur cap. They see—good heavens!—that it is Gozaemon.

*Gozaemon, Osan's father, enters from stage right and bumps into Sangorō.*

[OSAN AND JIHEI]: Ahhh—how fortunate that you should come at this moment!

*Gozaemon takes the bundle from Sangorō and enters the room.*

CHANTER: Husband and wife are upset and confused. Gozaemon snatches away Sangorō's bundle and sits heavily. His voice is sharp.

[GOZAEMON]: Stay where you are, harlot!—My esteemed son-in-law, what a rare pleasure to see you dressed in your finest attire, with a dirk and a silken cloak! Ahhh—that's how a gentleman of means spends his money! No one would take you for a paper dealer. Are you perchance on your way to the New Quarter? What commendable perseverance! You have no need for your wife, I take it.—Give her a divorce. I've come to take her home with me.

CHANTER: He speaks needles and his voice is bitter. Jihei has not a word to reply.

[OSAN]: How kind of you, Father, to walk here on such a cold day. Do have a cup of tea.

CHANTER: Offering the teacup serves as an excuse for edging closer.

- [OSAN]: Mother and Magoemon came here a while ago, and they told my husband how much they disapproved of his visits to the New Quarter. Jihei was in tears and he wrote out an oath swearing he had reformed. He gave it to Mother. Haven't you seen it yet?
- [GOZAEMON]: His written oath? Do you mean this?
- CHANTER: He takes the paper from his kimono.
- [GOZAEMON]: Libertines scatter vows and oaths wherever they go, as if they were monthly statements of accounts. I thought there was something peculiar about this oath, and now that I am here I can see I was right. Do you still swear to Bonten and Taishaku? Instead of such nonsense, write out a bill of divorce!
- CHANTER: He rips the oath to shreds and throws down the pieces. Husband and wife exchange looks of alarm, stunned into silence. Jihei touches his hands to the floor and bows his head.
- [JIHEI]: Your anger is justified. If I were still my former self, I would try to offer explanations, but today I appeal entirely to your generosity. Please let me stay with Osan. I promise that even if I become a beggar or an outcast and must sustain life with the scraps that fall from other people's chopsticks, I will hold Osan in high honor and protect her from every harsh and bitter experience. I feel so deeply indebted to Osan that I cannot divorce her. You will understand that this is true as time passes and I show you how I apply myself to my work and restore my fortune. Until then, please shut your eyes and allow us to remain together.
- CHANTER: Tears of blood stream from his eyes, and his face is pressed to the matting in contrition.
- [GOZAEMON]: The wife of an outcast! That's all the worse. Write the bill of divorce at once! I will verify and seal the furniture and clothes Osan brought in her dowry.
- CHANTER: He goes to the wardrobe. Osan is alarmed.
- [OSAN]: My clothes are all here. There's no need to examine them.
- CHANTER: She runs up to forestall him, but Gozaemon pushes her aside and jerks open a drawer.
- [GOZAEMON]: What does this mean?
- CHANTER: He opens another drawer, but it, too, is empty. He pulls out every last drawer, but not so much as a foot of patchwork cloth is to be seen. He tears open the wicker hampers, long boxes, and clothes chest.
- [GOZAEMON]: Stripped bare, are they?
- CHANTER: His eyes set in fury. Jihei and Osan huddle under the striped kotatsu quilt, ready to sink into the fire with humiliation.
- [GOZAEMON]: This bundle looks suspicious.
- CHANTER: He unties the knots and dumps out the contents.
- [GOZAEMON]: As I thought! You were sending these to the pawnshop, I take it. Jihei—you'd strip the skin from your wife's and your children's bodies to squander the money on your whore! Dirty thief! You're my wife's nephew, but an utter stranger to me, and I'm under no obligation to suffer for your sake. I'll explain to Magoemon what has happened and ask him to make good whatever inroads you've already made on Osan's belongings. But first, the bill of divorce!



FIGURE 3.25. Gozaemon pulls away his daughter Osan. Her child is at her feet. (Photo by Barbara C. Adachi.)

CHANTER: Even if Jihei could escape through seven padlocked doors, eight thicknesses of chains, and a hundred girdling walls, he could not evade so stringent a demand.

[JIHEI]: I won't use a brush to write the bill of divorce. Here's what I'll do instead! Good-bye, Osan.

CHANTER: He lays his hand on his dirk, but Osan clings to him.

[OSAN]: Father—Jihei admits that he's done wrong, and he's apologized in every way. You press your advantage too hard. Jihei may be a stranger, but his children are your grandchildren. Have you no affection for them? I will not accept a bill of divorce.

CHANTER: She embraces her husband and

raises her voice in tears.

[GOZAEMON]: Very well. I won't insist on it. Come with me, woman.

CHANTER: He pulls her to her feet.

[OSAN]: No, I won't go. What bitterness makes you expose to such shame a man and wife who still love each other? I will not suffer it.

CHANTER: She pleads with him, weeping, but he pays her no heed.

[GOZAEMON]: Is there some greater shame? I'll shout it through the town!

CHANTER: He pulls her up, but she shakes free. Caught by the wrist she totters forward when—alas! her toes brush against her sleeping children. They open their eyes [figure 3.25].

[CHILDREN]: Mother dear, why is Grandfather, the bad man, taking you away? Whom will we sleep beside now?

CHANTER: They call out after her.

[OSAN]: My poor dears! You've never spent a night away from Mother's side since you were born. Sleep tonight beside your father. (*To Jihei*) Please don't forget to give the children their tonic before breakfast. Oh, my heart is broken!

CHANTER: These are her parting words. She leaves her children behind, abandoned as in the woods; the twin-trunked bamboo of conjugal love is sundered forever [figure 3.26].

*Jihei carries the baby out through curtained exit at back, and the boy follows. Father and Osan exit to stage right. Drums accompany the exit, and the stage darkens.*

### ACT 3, Scene 1

*Sonezaki New Quarter, in front of the Yamato House*

*Time: That night*

*The set is changed in darkness without drawing the curtain. Stage right and front is a dark street with a door to the Yamato Teahouse near the center of the stage. As the*



FIGURE 3.26. Jihei is left with his children after Osan's father drags her away. In the bunraku version, he picks up the younger one; in kabuki, two older children cling to him. (Left: photo by Barbara C. Adachi; right: photo by Aoki Shinji.)

*chanter sings, some palanquin bearers come and go, and a woman briefly comes out of a doorway.*

CHANTER: This is Shijimi River, the haunt of love and affection. Its flowing water and the feet of passersby are stilled now at two in the morning, and the full moon shines clear in the sky. Here in the street a dim doorway lantern is marked "Yamatoya Dembei" in a single scrawl. The night watchman's clappers take on a deep cadence as he totters by on uncertain legs. The very thickness of his voice crying, "Beware of fire! Beware of fire!" tells how far advanced the night is. Between two and four, even the teahouse kettle rests; the flame flickering in the low candle stand narrows; and the frost spreads in the cold river-wind of the deepening night. The master's voice breaks the stillness.

*Dembei and Jihei come out the door of the Yamato House.*

[DEMBEI] (*To Jihei*): It's still the middle of the night. I'll send somebody with you.

(*To the servants*) Mr. Jihei is leaving. Wake Koharu. Call her here.

CHANTER: Jihei slides open the side door.

[JIHEI]: No, Dembei, not a word to Koharu. I'll be trapped here till dawn if she hears I'm leaving. That's why I'm letting her sleep and slipping off this way. Wake her up after sunrise and send her back then. I'm returning home now and will leave for Kyoto immediately on business. I have so many engagements that I may not be able to return in time for the interim payment. Please use the money I gave you earlier this evening to clear my account. I'd like you also to send 150 *me* of Old Silver to the Kawashō for the moon-viewing party last month. Please get a receipt. Give Saietsubō<sup>20</sup> from Fukushima one piece of silver as a contribution to the Buddhist altar he's bought, and tell him to use it for a memorial service. Wasn't there something else? Oh yes—give Isoichi a tip of four silver coins. That's the lot. Now you can close up and get

20. The name of a male entertainer in the Quarter. Fukushima was west of Sonezaki.





FIGURE 3.27. Jihei sneaks off to the Yamato House to get Koharu. (Photo by Barbara C. Adachi.)

to bed. Good-bye. I'll see you when I return from Kyoto.

CHANTER: Hardly has he taken two or three steps than he turns back.

[JIHEI]: I forgot my dirk. Fetch it for me, won't you? Yes, Dembei, this is one respect in which it's easier being a townsman. If I were a samurai and forgot my sword, I'd probably commit suicide on the spot!

[DEMBEI]: I completely forgot that I was keeping it for you. Yes, here it is.

CHANTER: He gives the dirk to Jihei, who fastens it firmly into his sash.

[JIHEI]: I feel secure as long as I have this. Good night!

CHANTER: He goes off.

[DEMBEI]: Please come back to Osaka soon! Thank you for your patronage!

CHANTER: With this hasty farewell, Dembei rattles the door bolt shut; then not another sound is heard as the silence deepens. Jihei pretends to leave, only to creep back again with stealthy steps.

[There is a brief section, omitted here, in which Magoemon, accompanied by Sangorō and the children, comes in search of his brother. He fears that Jihei will commit suicide but is relieved to learn that Jihei has left and Koharu remains. From the shadows of a doorway Jihei watches them come and go.]

CHANTER: Jihei peers through a crack in the side door of the Yamato House and glimpses a figure [figure 3.27].

[JIHEI]: That's Koharu, isn't it? I'll let her know I'm here.

CHANTER: He clears his throat, their signal. "Ahem, ahem"—the sound blends with the clack of wooden clappers as the watchman comes from the upper street, coughing in the night wind. He hurries on his round of fire warning, "Take care! Beware!" Even this cry has a dismal sound to one in hiding. Jihei, concealing himself like the god of Katsuragi,<sup>21</sup> lets the watchman pass. He sees his chance and rushes to the side door, which softly opens from within.

[JIHEI]: Koharu?

[KOHARU]: Were you waiting? Jihei—I want to leave quickly.

CHANTER: She is all impatience, but the more hastily they open the door, the more likely people will be to hear the casters turning. They lift the door; it gives a moaning that thunders in their ears and in their hearts. Jihei lends a

21. The god was so ashamed of his ugliness that he ventured forth only at night.

hand from the outside, but his fingertips tremble with the trembling of his heart. The door opens a quarter of an inch, a half, an inch—an inch ahead are the tortures of hell, but more than hell itself they fear the guardian demon's eyes. At last the door opens, and with the joy of New Year's morn, Koharu slips out. They catch each other's hands. Shall they go north or south, west or east? Their pounding hearts urge them on, though they know not to what destination. Turning their backs on the moon reflected in the Shijimi River, they hurry eastward as fast as their legs will carry them.

*They move back and forth, bumping into each other. Jihei puts his jacket over Koharu's shoulders, and they exit to drum music. The curtain is closed.*

## Scene 2

### *The Farewell Journey of Many Bridges*

*The musicians change; five chanters and five shamisen players sit on the auxiliary stage. When the curtains open, the scene is dark. Two bridge railings stand toward the left and right of the stage. Jihei and Koharu enter from stage right; they both wear scarves on their heads. They move across the stage, over the two bridges, as the chanters sing to shamisen accompaniment.*

CHANTERS: Poor creatures, though they would discover today their destiny in the Sutra of Cause and Effect,<sup>22</sup> tomorrow the gossip of the world will scatter like blossoms the scandal of Kamiya Jihei's love suicide, and carved in cherry wood,<sup>23</sup> his story to the last detail will be printed in illustrated sheets. Jihei, led on by the spirit of death—if such there be among the gods—is resigned to this punishment for neglect of his trade. But at times—who could blame him?—his heart is drawn to those he has left behind, and it is hard to keep walking on. Even in the full moon's light, this fifteenth night of the tenth moon, he cannot see his way ahead—a sign perhaps of the darkness in his heart? The frost now falling will melt by dawn, but even more quickly than this symbol of human frailty, the lovers themselves will melt away. What will become of the fragrance that lingered when he held her tenderly at night in their bed-chamber? This bridge, Tenjin Bridge, he has crossed every day, morning and night, gazing at Shijimi River to the west. Long ago, when Tenjin, then called Michizane, was exiled to Tsukushi, his plum tree, following its master, flew in one bound to Dazaifu, and here is Plum-field Bridge. Green Bridge recalls the aged pine that followed later, and Cherry Bridge the tree that withered away in grief over parting. Such are the tales still told, bespeaking the power of a single poem.<sup>24</sup>

22. A sacred text of Buddhism (Karma Sutra). Chikamatsu here alludes to the line from that text: "If you wish to know the past cause, look at the present effect; if you wish to know the future effect, look at the present cause."

23. The blocks from which illustrated books were printed were frequently made of cherry wood. The illustrated sheets mentioned here featured current scandals, such as lovers' suicides.

24. The poem by Michizane bewailing the inconstancy of his pine tree. Michizane's exile is also described in the selection from act 4 of *Sugawara and the Secrets of Calligraphy*, translated here.

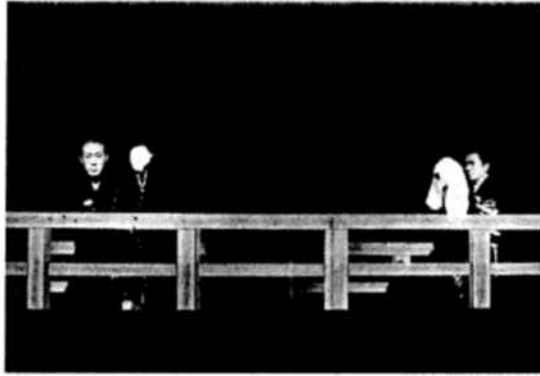


FIGURE 3.28. As Jihei and Koharu move across the stage and back, the railings move into new configurations to suggest that they are passing over many bridges. (Photo by Barbara C. Adachi.)

*As they continue their journey, turning to move from stage left to right, the railings move together, forming a long bridge [figure 3.28].*

[JIHEI]: Though born the parishioner of so holy and mighty a god, I shall kill you and then myself. If you ask the cause, it was that I lacked even the wisdom that might fill a tiny Shell Bridge. Our stay in this world has been short as an autumn day. This evening will be the last of your nineteen, of my twenty-eight years. The time has come to cast away our lives. We promised we'd remain together faithfully, till you were an old woman and I an old man, but before we knew each other three full years, we have met this disaster. Look, there is Ōe Bridge.

We follow the river from Little Naniwa Bridge to Funairi Bridge. The farther we journey, the closer we approach the road to death.

CHANTERS: He laments. She clings to him.

[KOHARU]: Is this already the road to death?

CHANTERS: Falling tears obscure from each the other's face and threaten to immerse even the Horikawa bridges.

[JIHEI]: A few steps north and I could glimpse my house, but I will not turn back. I will bury in my breast all thoughts of my children's future, all pity for my wife. We cross southward over the river. Why did they call a place with as many buildings as a bridge has piers "Eight Houses"? Hurry, we want to arrive before the downriver boat from Fushimi comes—with what happy couples sleeping aboard! Next is Temma Bridge, a frightening name<sup>25</sup> for us about to depart this world. Here the two streams Yodo and Yamato join in one great river, as fish with water, and as Koharu and I, dying on one blade, will cross together the River of Three Fords.<sup>26</sup> I would like this water for our tomb offering!

[KOHARU]: What have we to grieve about? Though in this world we could not stay together, in the next and through each successive world to come until the end of time, we shall be husband and wife. Every summer for my devotions, I have copied the All-Compassionate and All-Merciful Chapter of the Lotus Sutra, in the hope that we may be reborn on one lotus.

CHANTERS: They cross over Sutra Bridge and reach the opposite shore.<sup>27</sup>

[KOHARU]: If I can save living creatures at will when once I mount a lotus calyx in Paradise and become a Buddha, I want to protect women of my profession, so that never again will there be love suicides.

CHANTERS: This unattainable prayer stems from worldly attachment, but it

25. The characters used for Temma literally mean "demon."

26. A river in the Buddhist underworld that had to be crossed to reach the world of the dead. Mention here is induced arithmetically: one blade plus two people equals three fords.

27. "Opposite shore" suggests the Buddhist term *higan* (nirvana).

touchingly reveals her heart. They cross Onari Bridge. The waters of Noda Creek are shrouded with morning haze; the mountain tips show faintly white.

[JIHEI]: Listen—the voices of the temple bells begin to boom [figure 3.29]. How much farther can we go on this way? We are not fated to live any longer—let us make an end quickly. Come this way.

CHANTERS: Tears are strung with the 108 beads of the rosaries in their hands. They have come now to Amijima, to the Daichō Temple; the overflowing sluice gate of a little stream beside a bamboo thicket will be their place of death.



FIGURE 3.29. Koharu and Jihei pause in the middle of a bridge and listen to the temple bells. (Photo by Barbara C. Adachi.)

*They exit briefly at stage right and return. The backdrop is lifted to reveal another with an island scene, and some of the bridge railings drop down out of sight.*

### Scene 3

#### *Amijima*

*Koharu and Jihei remove their scarves as they cross to center stage.*

[JIHEI]: No matter how far we walk, there'll never be a spot marked "For Suicides." Let us kill ourselves here.

CHANTERS: He takes her hand and sits on the ground.

[KOHARU]: Yes, that's true. One place is as good as another to die. But I've been thinking on the way that if they find our dead bodies together, people will say that Koharu and Jihei committed a lovers' suicide. Osan will think then that I treated as mere scrap paper the letter I sent promising her, when she asked me not to kill you, that I would not, and vowing to break all relations. She will be sure that I lured her precious husband into a lovers' suicide. She will despise me as a one-night prostitute, a false woman with no sense of decency. I fear her contempt more than the slander of a thousand or ten thousand strangers. I can imagine how she will resent and envy me. That is the greatest obstacle to my salvation. Kill me here, then choose another spot, far away, for yourself.

CHANTERS: She leans against him. Jihei joins in her tears of pleading.

[JIHEI]: What foolish worries! Osan has been taken back by my father-in-law. I've divorced her. She and I are strangers now. Why should you feel obliged to a divorced woman? You were saying on the way that you and I will be husband and wife through each successive world until the end of time. Who can criticize us, who can be jealous, if we die side by side?

[KOHARU]: But who is responsible for your divorce? You're even less reasonable than I. Do you suppose that our bodies will accompany us to the afterworld?



FIGURE 3.30. In the kabuki version Koharu holds the dirk, which Jihei will use to kill her. (Photo by Aoki Shinji.)

We may die in different places,  
our bodies may be pecked by  
kites and crows, but what does it  
matter as long as our souls are  
twined together? Take me with  
you to heaven or to hell!

CHANTERS: She sinks again in tears.

[JIHEI]: You're right. Our bodies are  
made of earth, water, fire, and  
wind, and when we die they  
revert to emptiness. But our souls  
will not decay, no matter how of-  
ten reborn. And here's a guaran-  
tee that our souls will be married  
and never part!

CHANTERS: He whips out his dirk  
and slashes off his black locks at  
the base of the top knot.

[JIHEI]: Look, Koharu. As long as I  
had this hair I was Kamiya Jihei,  
Osan's husband, but cutting it has  
made me a monk. I have fled the  
burning house of the three worlds  
of delusion; I am a priest, unen-  
cumbered by wife, children, or  
worldly possessions. Now that I no  
longer have a wife named Osan,  
you owe her no obligations either.

CHANTERS: In tears he flings away  
the hair.

[KOHARU]: I am happy.

CHANTERS: Koharu takes up the dirk and ruthlessly, unhesitatingly, slices through  
her flowing Shimada coiffure [figure 3.30]. She casts aside the tresses she has  
so often washed and combed and stroked. How heartbreaking to see their  
locks tangled with the weeds and midnight frost of this desolate field!

[JIHEI]: We have escaped the inconstant world, a nun and a priest. Our duties as  
husband and wife belong to our profane past. It would be best to choose quite  
separate places for our deaths, a mountain for one, the river for the other. We  
will pretend that the ground above this sluice gate is a mountain. You will die  
there. I shall hang myself by this stream. The time of our deaths will be the  
same, but the method and place will differ. In this way we can honor to the  
end our duty to Osan. Give me your undersash.

CHANTERS: Its fresh violet color and fragrance will be lost in the winds of  
impermanence; the crinkled silk long enough to wind twice round her body  
will bind two worlds, this and the next. He firmly fastens one end to the cross-

piece of the sluice, then twists the other into a noose for his neck. He will hang for love of his wife like the “pheasant in the hunting grounds.”<sup>28</sup>

Koharu watches Jihei prepare for his death. Her eyes swim with tears; her mind is distraught.

[KOHARU]: Is that how you’re going to kill yourself? If we are to die apart, I have only a little while longer by your side. Come near me.

CHANTERS: They take each other’s hands.

[KOHARU]: It’s over in a moment with a sword, but I’m sure you’ll suffer. My poor darling!

CHANTERS: She cannot stop the silent tears.

[JIHEI]: Can suicide ever be pleasant, whether by hanging or cutting the throat? You mustn’t let worries over trifles disturb the prayers of your last moments. Keep your eyes on the westward-moving moon, and worship it as Amida himself.<sup>29</sup> Concentrate your thoughts on the Western Paradise. If you have any regrets about leaving the world, tell me now, then die.

[KOHARU]: I have none at all, none at all. But I’m sure you must be worried about your children.

[JIHEI]: You make me cry all over again by mentioning them. I can almost see their faces, sleeping peacefully, unaware, poor dears, that their father is about to kill himself. They’re the one thing I can’t forget.

CHANTERS: He droops to the ground with weeping. The voices of the crows leaving their nests at dawn rival his sobs. Are the crows mourning his fate? The thought brings more tears.

[JIHEI]: Listen to them. The crows have come to guide us to the world of the dead. There’s an old saying that every time somebody writes an oath on the back of a Kumano charm, three crows of Kumano die on the holy mountain. The first words we’ve written each New Year have been vows of love, and how often we’ve inscribed oaths at the beginning of the month! If each oath has killed three crows, what a multitude must have perished! Their cries have always sounded like “beloved, beloved,” but hatred for our crime of taking life makes their voices ring tonight “revenge, revenge!”<sup>30</sup> Whose fault is it that they demand revenge? Because of me, you will die a painful death. Forgive me!

CHANTERS: He takes her in his arms.

[KOHARU]: No, it’s my fault!

CHANTERS: They cling to each other, face pressed to face; their side locks, drenched with tears, freeze in the winds blowing over the fields. Behind them echoes the voice of the Daichō Temple.

[JIHEI]: Even the long winter night seems short as our lives.

28. A reference to a poem by Ōtomo no Yakamochi (718–785): “The pheasant foraging in the fields of spring reveals his whereabouts to man as he cries for his mate” (*Shūishū*, poem 21).

29. Amida’s paradise lies in the west. The moon is also frequently used as a symbol of Buddhist enlightenment.

30. The cries have always sounded like “*kawai, kawai*,” but now they sound like “*mukui, mukui*.” These Japanese sounds seem more within the range of a crow’s articulatory powers than “beloved” and “revenge.”



FIGURE 3.31. Jihei makes the dying Koharu comfortable by putting his cloak under her head. The text says he covers her with it, but stage actions often differ slightly from those described in the script. (Photo by Barbara C. Adachi.)

CHANTERS: Dawn is already breaking, and matins can be heard. He draws her to him.

[JIHEI]: The moment has come for our glorious end. Let there be no tears on your face when they find you later.

[KOHARU]: There won't be any.

CHANTERS: She smiles. His hands, numbed by the frost, tremble before the pale vision of her face, and his eyes are first to cloud. He is weeping so profusely that he cannot control the blade.

[KOHARU]: Compose yourself—but be quick!

CHANTERS: Her encouragement lends him strength; the invocations to Amida carried by the wind urge a final prayer. *Namu Amida Butsu.*

*Koharu, with her back to the audience, leans into the sword held by Jihei. Chimes sound as it pierces her neck.*

He thrusts in the saving sword. Stabbed, she falls backward, despite his staying hand, and struggles in terrible pain. The point of the blade has missed her windpipe, and these are the final tortures before she can die. He writhes with her in agony, then painfully summons his strength again.

*He stabs her harder and harder until she falls over backward to strong shamisen accompaniment.*

He draws her to him and plunges in his dirk to the hilt. He twists the blade in the wound, and her life fades away like an unfinished dream at dawning. He

arranges her corpse head to the north, face to the west, lying on her right side,<sup>31</sup> and throws his cloak over her [figure 3.31]. He turns away at last, unable to exhaust with tears his grief over parting.

*Jihei takes Koharu's obi. He goes to the bridge railing and hangs himself with the obi.*

He pulls the sash to him and fastens the noose around his neck. The service in the temple has reached the closing section, the prayers for the dead.

"Believers and unbelievers will equally share in the divine grace," the voices proclaim, and at the final words Jihei jumps from the sluice gate.

[JIHEI]: May we be reborn on one lotus! Hail Amida Buddha!

CHANTERS: For a few moments he writhes like a gourd swinging in the wind, but gradually the passage of his breath is blocked as are the streams dammed by the sluice gate, where his ties with this life are snapped.

*He looks at Koharu, who continues to writhe as he dies.*

Fishermen out for the morning catch find the body in their net.<sup>32</sup>

[FISHERMEN]: A dead man! Look, a dead man! Come here, everybody!

CHANTERS: The tale is spread from mouth to mouth. People say that they who are caught in the net of Buddha's vow immediately gain salvation and deliverance, and all who hear the tale of the Love Suicides at Amijima are moved to tears.

31. The dead were arranged in this manner because Shakyamuni Buddha chose this position when he died.

32. "Net" (*ami*) is mentioned because of the connection with fishermen. It is echoed a few lines later in the mention of the name *Amijima*. The vow of the Buddha to save all living creatures is likened to a net that catches people in its meshes.