

THE SODOMITES

By:

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CHARACTERS

ESHCOL, a merchant

HEDOR, interpreter of dreams

INNKEEPER

ARIOCH, the king's minister

SHEREK, the judge

LOT

AVIGOR, his wife

PALTIT )

( AVNEW ) Lot's married daughters

( BERET )

HARIM, the public prosecutor

DEVRA )

( EGRA ) Lot's unmarried daughters

MICHAEL )

( GABRIEL ) (angels of the Lord

AGID )

( BORIM ) Lot's sons-in-law

( DEREK )

CITIZENS OF SODOM

FATHER

MOTHER

SON

DAUGHTER

SPEAR BEARERS

JOE )  
(the anarchists  
WILLIE)

NUBIAN SLAVE

DANCING GIRLS

SPECTATORS

MUSICIANS

The action takes place in an average American city at the present time and in Sodom and its environs during the Biblical period associated with Abraham.

PROLOGUE

THE CURTAIN RISES TO REVEAL THE LIVING ROOM OF AN AVERAGE AMERICAN FAMILY RESIDING IN A TYPICAL AMERICAN CITY AT THE PRESENT TIME. THE FATHER AND MOTHER ARE SEATED ON A COUCH. NEAR THEM, SPRAWLED UPON THE FLOOR, ARE THEIR TWO CHILDREN, A BOY OF FOURTEEN AND A GIRL OF SIXTEEN. ALL ARE ABSORBED IN VIEWING A TV PROGRAM.

*IN THE HOME*

THE DOOR BELL RINGS AND THE BOY OPENS DOOR TO STREET AT RIGHT. HE ADMITS JOE AND WILLIE, A PAIR OF ROUGH-LOOKING MEN WHO ARE ARMED WITH GUNS. THEY PUSH THE BOY BACK TOWARD THE CENTER OF THE ROOM, AFTER CLOSING THE DOOR BEHIND THEM.

JOE (MENACING FAMILY WITH HIS GUN): All right, friends, we're all going to sit quietly and behave ourselves. Or else . . . (HE WAVES HIS GUN IN A THREATENING MANNER) We shall be your guests for a while, until the heat is off our tails.

WILLIE GOES THROUGH ADJOINING ROOMS AND UP THE STAIRS AND DOWN AGAIN.

WILLIE: There doesn't seem to be anyone else around, Joe. The ice box is full and there's plenty of canned goods.

We could hole up here for a pretty good while.

JOE: That's good.

FATHER: Why have you picked on our home to hide out from whatever it is you're hiding out against?

JOE: Just luck, mate. Yours was the first house in the neighborhood to strike our fancy. For that reason you shall have the pleasure of our company for the duration of our visit to your community.

FATHER: But I shall be missed at work tomorrow. How is that to be explained?

JOE: Very simple, mate. Your wife will call your office and report that you are sick in bed with a fever.

DAUGHTER: My brother and I have to go to school . . .

JOE: You kids will both have bad colds. Right? You should enjoy that--a vacation from school.

MOTHER: And I suppose I shall be too sick to attend my luncheon date?

JOE: Right. You catch on real good. We'll all just sit around and enjoy each other's company for the time being.

FATHER: There was a news report about a bombing of a federal office building down town about 7 o'clock this morning. Apparently there was no loss of life because of the early hour. But two men were seen leaving the building just before the blast. Is it possible you were the two they were speaking about?

JOE: You just put two and two together, don't you? And what if we were, don't go getting any ideas about calling the cops. If you try it, it'll be the last thing you ever do.

FATHER: But why, for heaven's sake! What do you hope to accomplish by such deperate measures?

JOE: Deperate times require desperate measures. The masses are crying out for relief from their misery.

FATHER: But can't you work through our democratic system to accomplish your aims. The ballot-box is available to you to elect officials who will promise to dedicate themselves to the principles you espouse.

JOE: That's alough, mate. How many votes do you suppose

the Communist Party would scrape up in a capitalist society such as ours? If you're not a Democrat or a Republican, you have no chance to change the system through the ballot-box. No! It is only through anarchy that the working classes can capture the <sup>reins of</sup> government and produce a "new order."

FATHER: But what of the innocent people who may be killed in these bombings of yours?

JOE: You may consider them as martyrs to the establishment of the "new order," if you like. Under the communist system, bourgeois sentiments are not to be tolerated. All middle-class doctrines shall become outworn and obsolete. Only the working classes shall survive under the "new order."

MOTHER: But what of your parents? Are they to be sacrificed to your "new order" as well?

JOE (DERISIVE LAUGHTER): My parents? They're both alcoholics. What good are they to anybody? Being unproductive parasites, they will have no place in the society which shall replace the present one.

SON: You know you sound almost like the God of Abraham in the Bible. Because the people of Sodom and some other

cities nearby were wicked and sinful, God decided to destroy ~~whem~~ with fire and brimstone.

JOE: That's just what we're trying to do here: Destroy a corrupt and decadent system with explosives and fire bombs. If God can overturn a government and its people because He didn't like what was going on, then why can't we do the same thing? After all, what better example can we follow than God Himself? (JOE AND WILLIE LAUGH ALOUD)

WILLIE: Say, kid, tell us the story of Sodom. Maybe we can get some pointers from God that might help us do a better job here.

SON: Why don't you tell the story, Dad; you know the Bible better than any of us.

FATHER: I don't mind. At least it will help pass the time.

JOE: Yeah, go ahead, mate. I'd like to hear that story myself. (NUDGES WILLIE MEANINGFULLY)

FATHER: Well, it's true that God decided to destroy Sodom and the other cities because their inhabitants were wicked and sinful. But Abraham tried to get God to change His



plans. He reminded the Lord that He had once before destroyed humanity in Noah's time with a terrible flood and that He had promised then never more to visit such destructive floods upon humanity again.

SON: And then Abraham told God that this Sodom business was the same thing all over again, the only difference being that this time He was going to use fire and brimstone instead of floods. Isn't that right, Dad?

FATHER: That's right, son. In effect, Abraham was telling God He was getting around His promise to Noah by using a different means to accomplish the same purpose.

JOE: Imagine the nerve of that Abraham--telling God He was welshing on His promise to Noah!

FATHER: Well, God did tell Abraham He wouldn't take that kind of talk from any mortal except from him, because Abraham had always shown true love and obedience to God. So He told Abraham to keep on talking and He would listen.

DAUGHTER: I know what Abraham said to God. He asked God if He would destroy the city if fifty righteous people could be found who lived there. He asked God if it would be just to kill those righteous together with the wicked.

WILLIE: And how did God answer that?

MOTHER: God said if there were fifty people there who were worth saving, He would not destroy the city.

FATHER: But Abraham knew that in the time of the Great Flood only Noah and his family were saved, so he tried to bargain with God some more.

SON: Then Abraham asked God if He could see His way clear to save the city if only forty good people lived there.

FATHER: And God agreed to this.

DAUGHTER: But Abraham kept bargaining some more. And he asked God if He would destroy the city if there were only thirty who could be found there worth saving. And God agreed to that, too.

WILLIE: Boy, this Abraham was sure a feisty guy!

MOTHER: But Abraham still didn't give up. He asked God if He could see His way clear to save the city if there were only twenty virtuous people who lived there. And God OK'd that too.

SON: Abraham didn't give up bargaining till God agreed that He would not destroy Sodom if ten good people could be found living in the city.

FATHER: God agreed to these conditions because He knew that not even ten good people lived there and because His heart was touched by the compassion which Abraham showed for his fellow-man.

JOE: I think I'm starting to get the drift of what you're driving at with this Bible story of yours. Just because God was willing to spare the city of Sodom for the sake of some good people who might be living there, you're trying to say we should do the same thing, aren't you?

FATHER: Well, don't you think you ought to take that consideration into account?

JOE: No dice, mate. The people you may consider good are not necessarily good for a working-class society. In a worker's state, there is no room for your middle-class morality. The only morality for us is that which promotes the welfare of the state. If, in the accomplishment of our goals, some individuals must be sacrificed, then they must go. There can be no remorse or pity in this. As far as we are concerned, the only good people are people who produce for the state.

FATHER: In a manner of speaking, the Sodomites worked for the state just as communists do, although you could not call them communists by any modern definition. And yettthey were dedicated to their city and devoted to their king. They obeyed his laws absolutely and carried out his edicts without question.

WILLIE: So where did they go wrong?

FATHER: I would say the reason for their moral decline and their subsequent downfall, stemmed, in great measure, from the pressures put upon them by their king. In fact, because they were misled by their king, they suffered destructive consequences to themselves even before God's wrath fell upon them.

JOE: How was that?

FATHER: If you will let me proceed with the story, I think I shall be able to show you how the king affected the moral standards of his subjects and led them to their ultimate downfall.

JOE: Shoot, mate. Right now we've got all the time in the world to listen to your spiel. So proceed with the story.

CURTAIN

ACT I

SCENE I. THE INTERIOR OF AN INN IN THE CITY OF SODOM, IN CANAAN, DURING THE BIBLICAL PERIOD OF ABRAHAM. AS THE CURTAIN RISES, THE SOUNDS OF MUSIC FROM FLUTE-LIKE INSTRUMENTS AND DRUMS FILL THE AIR. SWIRLING ABOUT, IN CENTER STAGE, ARE DANCING GIRLS DRESSED IN DIAPHANOUS COSTUMES WHICH REVEAL THEIR NAKEDNESS TO THE LEERING AND RAPT ATTENTION OF THEIR MALE AUDIENCE.

THE MUSICIANS PLAY FROM A POSITION IN THE FAR LEFT CORNER OF THE STAGE. THE SPECTATORS ARE SEATED AT TABLES ON THE RIGHT. MOST OF THE MEN WEAR COLORFULLY PATTERNED SHIRTS WHICH ARE ATTACHED FROM ONE SHOULDER AND DESCEND TO BELOW THE KNEES. THEY WEAR SANDALS UPON THEIR FEET.

AROUND THE OPEN SPACE WHERE THE TABLES ARE SET AND THE DANCERS DISPORT THEMSELVES AND BEAT THEIR TAMBOURINES IN TIME TO THE MUSIC, ARE DOORWAYS LEADING TO INDIVIDUAL ROOMS FOR GUESTS WHO HAVE ARRANGED FOR LODGING THEREIN. ON THE LEFT IS A STAIRWAY WHICH LEADS TO A GALLERY WHERE SIMILAR DOORWAYS ARE TO BE NOTED. THE ENTRANCE TO THE INN IS AT THE RIGHT TOWARD THE FRONT OF THE STAGE.

THE DANCERS MOVE ENTICINGLY NEAR THE ENTHRALLED OBSERVERS, DIPPING AND SWAYING AND ARCHING THEIR HIPS. WITH

STUDIED ADROITNESS, THEY AVOID THE SEARCHING HANDS OF THE BOLDER SPECTATORS. BUT THE FRENZY OF SEXUAL EXCITEMENT, INDUCED BY THE MOVEMENTS OF THE DANCERS, FINALLY CAUSES THE MOST SUSCEPTIBLE OF THE ONLOOKERS TO SEIZE THE GIRLS AND CARRY THEM OFF TO THE NEARBY ROOMS, AMID MUCH SQUEALING AND LAUGHTER.

WITH THE DEPARTURE OF THE DANCERS, ALL OTHERS LEAVE THE STAGE, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF HEDOR, AN INTERPRETER OF DREAMS, WHO EATS FOOD AND DRINKS WINE UPON HIS TABLE.

ESHCOL, AN ITINERANT MERCHANT, ENTERS FROM THE RIGHT. HE IS DRESSED IN THE CUSTOMARY ROBE AND HEAD COVERING WORN WHEN OUT-OF-DOORS.

ESHCOL (APPROACHING HEDOR): Good day, sir. Can you tell me where I might find the innkeeper?

HEDOR (SURVEYING HIM WITH CONTEMPT): I do not know you, sir. Begone!

ESHCOL (INDIGNANT): I meant you no offense, sir. I merely wished to know where the innkeeper could be found. Surely, such a request is no reason for a show of temper by you.

HEDOR: The city of Sodom does not welcome strangers. Away with you!

ESHCOL: You will pardon me, sir, but I find what you say to be difficult to believe. Wherever I have traveled, throughout Canaan, I have been greeted and welcomed by the people. Nowhere else have I found more hospitable inhabitants. Yet here, you say, along the shores of the Jordan, strangers are not welcome. Surely, you jest!

THE INNKEEPER ENTERS FROM THE LEFT.

INNKEEPER: What is going on here? I heard your loud voices even into the kitchen. My guests, who may be sleeping, will be disturbed by your unseemly quarreling. Now, what is the reason for this wrangling?

ESHCOL: I had merely inquired of this gentleman (POINTING TO HEDOR) where you might be found, and he would not answer me, except with "Begone" and "Strangers are not welcome in Sodom." I told him I found this hard to believe, since I had been so hospitably received everywhere else.

INNKEEPER: What you have been told is true. We have an ordinance here which forbids any show of hospitality toward strangers who are passing through the town. However, (A SLY WINK TOWARD HEDOR) if you have some business to transact, it might be a different matter.

ESHCOL: I, sir, am not merely a wayfarer. I am a merchant, dealing in carpets of the most excellent weave and design.

HEDOR (WINKING AT INNKEEPER): If this be true, we would be pleased to inspect your wares.

ESHCOL: I should be most happy to show them to you. Excuse me for a moment. (HE EXITS RIGHT)

HEDOR AND THE INNKEEPER WHISPER TOGETHER, CASTING SIDE-LONG GLANCES TOWARD ESHCOL'S PATH OF DEPARTURE. ESHCOL RETURNS, BEARING A CARPET IN HIS ARMS, WHICH HE SPREADS UPON THE FLOOR.

ESHCOL (WITH PRIDE) Here, gentlemen, is the prize of my collection.

HEDOR (GREEDILY): Most excellent! And you say you have more of the same quality?

ESHCOL: Yes, but they are smaller in size.

INNKEEPER: And you wish to spend the night here?

ESHCOL: Yes, and, if I may, could I have provender and water for my ass, as well? She is weary from bearing the



burden of my stock in trade, which I had secured to her back with a rope.

INNKEEPER: But, of course. Your ass shall be treated just as well as all the other pack animals resting here. However, I must caution you about your merchandise. There are bands of young ruffians who frequent the streets during the night, and they would surely strip you of these fine carpets, if they were not safeguarded.

ESHCOL: Thank you. I am much indebted to you for your warning and advice. If you would watch over my possessions here in the inn, I would be much obliged to you.

INNKEEPER: It would be my pleasure. However, there will have to be an additional charge for their care, besides the payment required for food and lodging for yourself, as well as for your animal.

ESHCOL: I quite agree, and I thank you for your trouble.

#### CURTAIN

SCENE II. THE CITY SQUARE JUST INSIDE THE GATES OF SODOM.  
OVERHEAD, SHIELDING THE PUBLIC FROM THE HOT SUN, ARE COVERINGS OF ROUGH SACK-CLOTH, SUPPORTED ON ROPES AND

STICKS. HERE IS WHERE THE WARES OF THE MARKET-PLACE ARE SOLD AND HERE IS HEARD THE CONSTANT SOUND OF BARGAINING BY BUYERS AND SELLERS.

CONVERGING UPON THE SQUARE AND SEPARATED BY CROOKED, CITY:  
NARROW STREETS ARE THE HOUSES OF THE ~~MEMEM~~ LOW AND RECTANGULAR AND BUILT OF SUN-BAKED BRICK. TOTHE RIGHT IS THE CITY GATE AND AT LEFT ARE THE BROAD STEPS LEADING TO THE WIDE PALACE DOOR OF KING BERA.

ARIOCH, THE KING'S MINISTER, APPEARS TO VIEW, AS THE PALACE DOORS SWING INWARDLY. TWO SPEAR-BEARERS, WHO HAD BEEN STANDING GUARD AT EITHER SIDE OF THE DOOR, ACCOMPANY ARIOCH TO THE EDGE OF THE STEPS WHERE HE STANDS SILENTLY OBSERVING THE POPULACE BELOW HIM. AT SIGHT OF THIS COMMANDING FIGURE DRAPED IN RICH BROCADE, HIS GOLDEN BREAST-PLATES GLISTENING IN THE SUN, THE VOICES OF THE CROWD SUBSIDE INTO SILENCE.

ARIOCH: Citizens of Sodom, I come before you today with a proclamation from King Bera (May he live a thousand years), which shall be as a law unto you, and which you shall observe and obey without fail. I read. (HE UNROLLS PARCHMENT HE HAD BEEN CARRYING IN HIS HAND) "From this day forth, each of my subjects shall be required to provide labor in the service of his king for which there shall be no recompense. The work shall be allocated in

the following manner: The owner of two or more oxen shall be obliged to render one day's service as a shepherd tending to the king's flock; he that owns only one ox, must perform such service for two days. In addition, those who wish to cross the river must now make use of the king's ferry for that purpose. A fee of four zuz shall be charged for the use of this facility. However, in the event that any should try to evade this fixed charge by wading across the river, that person shall be made to pay eight zuz. Also, it has come to my attention that some of you still observe the foreign practise of offering hospitality to strangers, although an ordinance had been issued in the past condemning such a practise. Therefore, in the future, and as a conciliatory gesture toward those who suffer from such inclinations, a person may offer silver and gold to a hungry stranger, but never any bread. In this way, the urge to be hospitable shall be satisfied, but the stranger shall surely die of hunger, in which case your silver and gold shall be returned to you. Should any disobey these laws, the penalty shall be death." (ARIOCH ROLLS UP THE PARCHMENT AND GRAVELY SURVEYS HIS AUDIENCE) Now, are there any questions concerning the edicts rendered unto you at this time?

A HUM OF CONVERSATION ENSUES AND, AFTER SOME MOMENTS, A CITIZEN SPEAKS OUT.

FIRST CITIZEN: Your excellency, I am but a poor shepherd, Arim, by name. Simple am I and unlearned, and little do I know beyond the needs of my flocks, so bear with me in what I am about to say and take no offense therefrom.

ARIOCH (IMPATIENT): Yes, yes; go on.

FIRST CITIZEN: Please forgive me if I seem ignorant, but this pronouncement issued by the king appears to be designed to favor the rich more than it does the poor. As you have read, if I own but one ox, I am required to endure servitude for two days; but he that owns two oxen need only serve the king for one day. In addition, he that can afford to ride the king's ferry need only pay four zuz for this privilege; yet he that is poor and cannot pay the fare and must, of necessity, ford the river to reach the other side--he shall be <sup>required</sup> ~~required~~ to pay unto the king twice the fare imposed upon his more fortunate brother, who can easily afford the charge. And what of the stranger in our midst--what if a citizen has no silver or gold to offer him, but only bread, is this citizen to suffer death because of his poverty? I beg your forgiveness, excellency, but to my simple and uneducated mind, these laws seem to be discriminatory because they appear to favor one class of citizens above another.

ARIOCH (SHOWING ANNOYANCE): This is a monstrous calumny which you have placed upon the king, sir! The welfare of all his subjects is the constant concern of the king. By presenting his laws in the manner you have just heard, he has wisely sought to provide all citizens with the incentive to become wealthy. Had he done otherwise, and made the rich pay more than the poor, the wealthy would have suffered little diminution to their means, but the impoverished, because they would lack incentive to enrich themselves, would continue to be enmired in their poverty, with little desire to escape therefrom.

FIRST CITIZEN: But should not the laws show an equal disposition toward all citizens?

ARIOCH (GROWING MORE IRRITABLE): You are beginning to vex me, sir. Have I not told you that it is the wish of the king that all his subjects should prosper; and his laws are <sup>designed</sup> ~~designed~~ to promote this purpose. Is there not an equal opportunity for all to accumulate silver and gold and all other worthwhile possessions? And does not our king (Blessed be his name), in the greatness of his wisdom, seek to encourage all citizens, of every degree, to strive after wealth and the benefits of the good life? It is only those who are misguided by a false sense of morality, or who shirk their obligations to the king, who must suffer the consequences of such conduct. Now, are there any

further questions? (THERE IS ONLY SILENCE FROM HIS AUDIENCE) Since there seem to be no further questions concerning the laws proclaimed herewith, I shall leave you to go about your business. (ARIOCH EXITS THROUGH THE PALACE DOOR AND THE SOLDIERS TAKE UP THEIR STATIONS ON EITHER SIDE OF IT)

FIRST CITIZEN (MOTIONING TO THE OTHERS TO GATHER ROUND HIM AS HE STANDS ON THE STEPS ABOVE THE CROWD): My brothers, it is evident from the laws just promulgated that we must seek to enrich ourselves at all costs and <sup>discourage</sup> ~~discourage~~ strangers from entering our city, if our lives are to be spared. Do any of you have any ideas how we might accomplish these ends?

SECOND CITIZEN: What say you, if when a stranger enters our domain, we all fall upon him and each takes a small portion of his possessions, so that he is stripped of everything he owns. In this way, if he were to complain of his treatment, we could show that each of us had only taken a mere trifle, not even worth mentioning. Thus, we would enrich ourselves, and the stranger would be badgered and hounded from our city, never to return again.

FIRST CITIZEN: This seems like a very good suggestion. What say you all? (THERE IS A LOUD MURMUR OF APPROVAL)

THIRD CITIZEN: I have another method to propose to keep strangers from entering our midst. What say you if we flooded the roads leading into the city? By doing so, we would obliterate all semblance of any pathway, and strangers would be unable to find their way here, and we should be free of them.

FIRST CITIZEN (AFTER SOME THOUGHT): I thank you for your suggestion, but what you propose seems to me to entail rather extensive engineering problems associated with the diversion of streams to accomplish the end you have in mind. It appears to be not only impractical from this viewpoint but, if strangers could not find their way here, we would be denying to ourselves a lucrative source of income from their waylaying. No, I am sorry; this suggestion does not seem adequate to our needs. What say you all? (THE REST NOD AND GIVE VOICE TO THEIR AGREEMENT)  
Is there anyone else who has a suggestion to make?

FOURTH CITIZEN: It seems to me, if we are to depend upon the waylaying of strangers for added income, we are dealing with a haphazard commodity. I think I can offer a plan whereby we may all enrich ourselves without relying upon the insecure income of banditry. Briefly, I propose that we kill off the birds that eat of our grain and the wild beasts of the forest which fall upon our flocks. By killing off these filchers and predators, we may increase

substantially our wealth of grain and cattle.

FIRST CITIZEN: I must say, this suggestion you have put forward merits the earnest consideration of all of us. The matter of the wild beasts of the forest can be accomplished if we gather in groups and hunt them down to extinction. However, the thought of snaring so many birds seems like a hopeless task to me.

FOURTH CITIZEN: It need not be so. We could poison one field of grain, while in the other fields we <sup>can</sup> all stand guard and wave them off. In this way, they will go into the unguarded field where they will eat of the poisoned grain and die.

FIRST CITIZEN: Excellent! You have resolved my doubts on this matter, and I recommend this plan for enriching ourselves to you all. Is there anyone else here with a worthwhile idea? (HE LOOKS ABOUT FOR A RESPONSE, BUT NO OTHER VOICE IS HEARD) Since there are no further suggestions, let us depart from here and put into practice that which we have determined serves the interests of ourselves, as well as the king. By doing so, the mandate of the king will be observed, and we shall increase our wealth in the process. What say you, my brothers?  
(LOUD SHOUTS OF APPROVAL ARE HEARD)

CURTAIN



SCENE III. A JUDGE'S CHAMBERS ON THE FOLLOWING DAY.  
SHEREK, THE JUDGE, IS SEEN RECLINING AT LEFT UPON A PILE  
OF PILLOWS, HIS PORCINE FEATURES AND INDOLENT ATTITUDE  
GIVING HIM THE APPEARANCE OF A PORKER WALLOWING IN THE  
MUD. RICH FABRICS BEDECK HIS BODY AND JEWELS HANG ABOUT  
HIS NECK AND ENFOLD THE FINGERS OF EACH HAND. A NUBIAN  
SLAVE FANS HIM CONSTANTLY WITH THE FEATHERS OF A PEACOCK,  
~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

A COLLECTION OF ONLOOKERS STAND ABOUT IN CLUSTERS  
AT THE RIGHT. FROM AMONG THESE, ESHCOL, THE MERCHANT,  
COMES FORWARD AND, WITH MUCH BOWING AND OTHER SIGNS OF  
DEFERENCE, KNEELS BEFORE THE JUDGE.

ESHCOL: Oh, most honorable judge, I am an itinerant mer-  
chant, Eshcol by name, and my wares are carpeting, of  
most excellent weave and design. I come before you now  
in a matter which concerns the loss of my stock in trade.

SHEREK: Loss, you say? How lost?

ESHCOL: I should have said defrauded, deprived, purloined.

SHEREK: These are strong words, sir. And whom do you  
accuse of such knavery?

ESHCOL: The innkeeper and one named Hedor, a guest at the  
inn.

SHEREK: Are the accused in attendance here? If they are, please be good enough to come forward so you may be heard. (HEDOR AND THE INNKEEPER APPROACH THE JUDGE AND KNEEL BEFORE HIM) Have you both heard the accusation of this merchant--that you have wrongfully appropriated his merchandise?

HEDOR: We have, your honor, and we deny the allegation unreservedly.

SHEREK (TO ESHCOL): The burden of proof now rests with you. You must proceed now to prove your allegations.

ESHCOL: Oh, most worthy judge, I shall place before you the circumstances surrounding the crime of which I accuse the defendants. I am a merchant, as I have said, and I travel from city to city to sell my wares. Upon coming to this place, it being close<sup>to</sup> evening, I sought out an inn where I might spend the night. I came upon such an establishment, where this person (POINTING TO THE INNKEEPER) held himself forth as the proprietor. Another person (POINTING TO HEDOR), Hedor by name, was upon the premises when I ~~xxxxxxx~~<sup>arrived</sup>. Both of these men were unfriendly towards me at first, but when my calling was made known to them and they viewed my merchandise, they both became concerned for my welfare. I and my ass were given food

and lodgings, and, because I was warned of marauding gangs who frequented the neighborhood, I was persuaded to turn my carpets over into the hands of the innkeeper for safekeeping. However, in the morning, when I made ready to leave, I was told by the innkeeper that he knew nothing of my carpets--not even of the rope which I had used to tie them to the ass. When I appealed to Hedor for corroboration that I had turned over my possessions to the innkeeper for safekeeping, Hedor replied that I was suffering from a dream and a delusion. It is now clear to me that these men meant to rob me of my merchandise and are now saying I dreamt these things to cover up their conspiracy and duplicity. Oh, most worthy judge, give me justice I pray you, for if my carpets are not returned to me, I shall be reduced in circumstances to the level of a pauper, and my wife and children shall have to to begging in the streets.

SHEREK (WITH NOTICEABLE LACK OF INTEREST): What is the answer the accused give to these charges?

INNKEEPER: Your honor, these charges are both false and slanderous. I would not have permitted this stranger to set foot in my establishment had I known of the edict just recently promulgated by our king (May he live a thousand years) against the feeding and care of strangers. This

event happened before the law was proclaimed. However, I took him in, out of the goodness of my heart, and I fed and watered his animal as well. But as to his possessions, I saw naught of them. It was just him and his ass, and that is all I saw, your honor.

ESHCOL: Liar, liar!

SHEREK: You had best control yourself, sir. I will not permit such outbursts in this courtroom. In this place, the canons of the king are upheld and the cause of justice served. Therefore, see that you maintain and proper decorum and an attitude of respect while you are here before me.

ESHCOL: I am sorry, your honor; it shall not happen again.

SHEREK: See that it does not, or you shall suffer for it, I promise you. Now, I should like to hear from the other defendant, Hedor by name. (TO HEDOR) Sir, how do you respond to these accusations against you?

HEDOR: Your honor, what the innkeeper has told you is true. Apparently, the exertion of his travels, coupled with a lengthy exposure to the hot sun, had caused the merchant to suffer a temporary mental aberration. ~~And~~

I told him he had been dreaming, and, being an interpreter of dreams by profession, I offered to tell him the meaning of this dream.

SHEREK: And did you tell him the meaning of his dream?

HEDOR: I did, your honor. The rope, I told him, which he used in his dream to bind the carpets to his ass, signified to me that he would live a long life. As to the carpets, with their intricate weaving of color and design, they foretold that he should become the possessor of a fine orchard, where fruits of every description shall grow and where the blossoms of the trees shall bloom and please the eye as do the varicolored threads of his imaginary carpets.

ESHCOL: Forgive me, your honor, but I cannot stand silently by and allow this monstrous fraud and deception to go by unchallenged. These men have spirited away my possessions by pretending to safeguard them from marauding bands. But, in reality, they have stolen my stock-in-trade and mean to enrich themselves at my expense. If there is any justice here, you will force them to return those things of mine which they have stolen. I will even be satisfied if they go unpunished, just so those things which I owned are returned to me

SHEREK (EXASPERATED): Are you quite finished, sir? **TT** take into account your distraught frame of mind when I do not punish you for this disgraceful outburst. Do you not realize that the charges you make against these two gentlemen are totally unsubstantiated? What witness, beside yourself, can you bring forward to corroborate these gross accusations?

ESHCOL (DOWNEAST): I have none, your honor. It is only my reputation for truthfulness and honesty which bears witness to the deed.

SHEREK (SNEERING): Truthfulness and honesty, indeed! And whom can you bring forward to vouch for these virtues?

ESHCOL: There is no one here who knows me or can vouch for my veracity; but in my own city, in Shinar, I enjoy such a reputation.

SHEREK: It is a pity there is no one here who can testify as to your reputation for truthfulness and honesty. In the absence of such testimony, I must proceed to my assessment of the equity involved here based solely upon the evidence I have heard. And since there has been no evidence put forward to substantiate these charges, except the unconfirmed assertions of the plaintiff, I herewith

pronounce this case as being closed and charge the plaintiff for the costs of these proceedings. (ASIDE TO HEDOR AND THE INNKEEPER) It seems to me, gentlemen, in view of these ~~charges~~ unsubstantiated charges which the plaintiff has aired and which are damaging to your reputation in the community, you have grounds for action against him, and should be entitled to damages.

HEDOR: Your honor, considering the tortured condition of his mind, we forgive his wild accusations and beg the court to allow him to go upon his way.

SHEREK: You are to be commended for this show of benevolence. And now, since this business before us is concluded, I announce that court is adjourned.

HEDOR: There is just one thing.

SHEREK: And what is that?

HEDOR: Since I am an interpreter of dreams by vocation, and since I did give this gentleman the benefit of my service by interpreting his dream, I think it only fitting and proper that I be recompensed for my services.

ESHCOL: Oh, this is monstrous, monstrous!

SHEREK (TO ESHCOL): Quiet, sir; you try my patience.

(TO BYSTANDERS) It is well-known in the community that Hedor is indeed a trustworthy interpreter of dreams. It is no more than his rightful due that he be paid a fee for his services. What is your charge, Hedor?

HEDOR: My usual fee for a simple dream is four pieces of silver, but, since our friend is a stranger in Sodom, I shall be satisfied with only three.

ESHCOL (TOSSING HIS LEATHER PURSE TO HEDOR): Here, take all; only give me leave to depart from this den of thieves. The king of Shinar shall be told of my treatment here, I can assure you! (SPECTATORS IN THE COURT ROOM FOLLOW ESHCOL AS HE LEAVES. CATCALLS AND EPITHETS ARE HEARD. ONE VOICE CRIES OUT: "STONE THE BASTARD!" LAUGHING AND HOOTING GREET THIS RECOMMENDATION FOR MAYHEM.

CURTAIN

INHABITED

SCENE IV. INTERIOR OF HOME ~~XXXXXXXX~~ BY LOT, AVIGOR, HIS WIFE, AND HIS TWO UNMARRIED DAUGHTERS, DEVRAH AND EGRA. A DINING TABLE AND CHAIRS OCCUPY THE CENTER OF THE ROOM. TO ONE SIDE IS A CHEST, SIMILAR TO A SIDEBOARD, AND A CUPBOARD OF SORTS ON THE OTHER SIDE. AT THE REAR IS A DOOR OPENING TO THE OUTSIDE. ON THE RIGHT, A DOOR LEADS TO



THE SLEEPING QUARTERS, AND, AT LEFT, THERE IS AN OPENING WHICH ENTERS INTO THE KITCHEN.

IT IS LATE AFTERNOON OF THE SAME DAY, AND THE WOMEN ARE BUSILY ENGAGED IN PREPARATIONS FOR THEIR EVENING MEAL. PLATES AND KNIVES FOR CUTTING MEAT ARE PLACED UPON THE TABLE, TOGETHER WITH JUGS OF WATER AND WINE.

AVIGOR WEARS A SIMPLE UNDERGARMENT WHICH GOES UNDER HER RIGHT SHOULDER AND IS GATHERED UP OVER HER LEFT SHOULDER WITH A BRONZE OR SILVER PIN. A WOVEN OR TWISTED GIRDLE CIRCLES HER WAIST. COVERING THIS TUNIC, SHE WEARS A BRIGHT RED JACKET WITH TIGHT SLEEVES REACHING TO THE WRIST. A ROW OF BEADS ADORN THE CUFFS, AND THE WAISTLINE IS SET OFF WITH A BELTLIKE ROW OF GOLDEN ORNAMENTS. RUNNING DOWN THE FRONT OF THE JACKET ARE COLORED STONE BUTTONS.

WHEN AVIGOR GOES OUT-OF-DOORS, SHE WEARS A HEAD CLOTH OR VEIL.

MOST WOMEN WE MEET ARE DRESSED IN SOME VARIATION OF THIS COSTUME.

LOT ENTERS FROM THE STREET. HE IS WEARING A SHORT TUNIC, OPEN AT THE NECK AND FASTENED WITH A ROW OF BUTTONS

DOWN THE FRONT. A BELT CIRCLES HIS WAIST. OVER THE TUNIC LOT WEARS A WOOLEN MANTLE. HIS HEAD IS COVERED BY A WHITE CLOTH HELD IN PLACE BY A COIL.

LOT: When will food be ready, wife. I am famished.

AVIGOR: In a little while, husband. Sit you down at the table.

LOT SITS AND REMOVES THE SANDALS FROM HIS FEET.

LOT: Devrah, goggirl and fetch me some water with which I may soak my tired and aching feet. (DEVRAH GOES OUT REAR DOOR WITH A CLAY JUG IN HER HAND. LOT SIGHS WEARILY) Have you heard the latest edict of the king, my wife? I tell you each new one he proclaims becomes more unbearable than the last.

AVIGOR: How should I have heard, old man, being cooped up here all day! Tell me, then, what pronouncement has the king put forth now which has brought upon you such despair?

LOT: Consider this: Each subject must now perform service directly for the king in a manner which I can only describe as bizarre and arbitrary. The number of days of work to be performed is not qualified by age or infirmity;

only upon the ownership of oxen. He that owns more cattle than another does less work than his poorer brother. Is not this a most unreasonable and capricious formula for regulating labor? But wait, there is more. He has raised the rates for the use of the king's ferry to four zuz. And if a citizen be too poor to pay this/<sup>charge</sup>and perforce must wade to reach the other side, if he is observed in this act, the fault of his poverty will bause him to be assessed eight zuz. Does this not sound to you like the drivell of a disordered mind? But hold, there is one more to cap the rest: He has decreed it to be unlawful to offer hospitality to strangers--a ruling which flies in the face/<sup>of one</sup>of our most treasured traditions and precepts. (DEVRAH ENTERS WITH WATER JUG CARRIED ON HER SHOULDER. EGRA PLACES SHALLOW PAN BEFORE LOT AND DEVRAH POURS WATER INTO IT. LOT CLOSES HIS EYES AND SIGHS WITH RELIEF, AS HE DIPS HIS FEET INTO THE WATER.

AVIGOR: There is nothing you can do, my husband. If it is the king's law, you must submit to it and obey.

LOT: But, in the household of my uncle, Abraham, where I was reared, it had always been the custom to treat the stranger who comes to your door as though he were a member of your family, even giving him that which would mean your own deprivation. I should find it difficult to

change a pattern of life which had been inculcated in me since childhood.

AVIGOR: The king would have you put to death if you disobeyed his injunction. What would it profit you to practice that which is forbidden?

LOT: I do not believe he would harm me. He is too much indebted to my uncle, Abraham, for helping defeat his enemies and thereby safeguarding his kingdom.

AVIGOR: You will make a widow of me yet, my husband. Have you no care for your unmarried daughters who may become orphaned through your folly?

LOT: Go to now, woman; bring me food, and let there be an end to your sniveling.

FROM THE KITCHEN, THE DAUGHTERS BRING IN UNLEAVENED BREAD CAKES. MEAT IS SERVED UP IN THE SAME CONTAINER IN WHICH IT WAS COOKED. ALSO FIGS AND DATES AND GRAPES ARE PLACED UPON THE TABLE.

AVIGOR: If you have no care for the king's law, perhaps you will show some concern for Avnew, Beret and Paltit, your married daughters, who live away from us in the city,

and are not protected by the invisible shield of your uncle, Abraham.

LOT: † Those wretched children! I have not seen them for months. Is it not time they came to pay their respects to their aging father? Is this how they show their love for me?

VAIGOR: They have husbands and children, household duties and social obligations--all these things take up a good part of their time. You cannot expect them to be ever in attendance upon you if they are to maintain their standing in the community. If you wish to see your children, you should go out of your way and visit them.

LOT: Never! They owe their father a filial duty of respect and love. It is not meet that their father should have to pursue them, in a groveling manner, in order to see his children and grandchildren. They live but a short distance away and are not beset by any infirmities which restrict their movements. Let them come to me, as is befitting for children toddo.

AVIGOR: Old man, we are living in a different age. The young today do not feel bound to follow traditional ways. Do young birds, when they learn to fly and fend for them-

selves, do they take the time to visit their parents after they are grown and have built nests of their own? No! Their parents become as strangers to them. And this is the way of life. If parents have a concern for the welfare of their children, they should seek out their brood, wherever they might be, and be assured thereby of their well-being ~~fare~~ and happiness.

LOT: Are you now comparing our human qualities with those of the common birds of the field--animals which are dependent for their existence upon instinct alone and have not the mind and soul possessed by man? Have you taken leave of your senses, old woman? The behavior of a mindless bird can never be equated with the actions of a thinking man. It is ridiculous to even entertain the notion!

A LOUD KNOCKING IS HEARD AT THE STREET DOOR.

VOICE OF PALTIT: Father, hurry, please let me in!

LOT LEAVES HIS SEAT AND UNLATCHES THE DOOR. DISTRAUGHT AND DISSHEVELED, PALTIT ENTERS AND FALLS INTO HER FATHER'S ARMS.

PALTIT (TEARFULLY): Please help me, father. They are after me.

AVIGOR AND HER DAUGHTERS HUDDLE AROUND THE WEEPING PALTIT, EMBRACING HER AND OTHERWISE TRYING TO ALLAY HER FEARS.

LOT: Who is after you, daughter?

PALTIT (TREMBLING WITH FEAR): My neighbors. They did see me offer a crust of bread to a begger who was standing by the well where I went for water. He was a stranger to me, but he seemed so pitiful and wretched that I could not help myself, and I went into my house and brought him some bread. When I did so, there was such an outcry from the other women nearby, my pitcher fell from my hands and shattered on the ground. My only thought was for my safety, so I ran here as fast as I could.

CLAMOROUS VOICES ARE HEARD IN THE BACKGROUND, FOLLOWED BY A LOUD KNOCKING ON THE DOOR LEADING TO THE STREET.

VOICE: Open the door, Lot, and turn over to us your criminal daughter, Paltit!

LOT OPENS THE DOOR AND CONFRONTS UNSEEN INDIVIDUAL WHOSE VOICE HAD SPOKEN.

LOT: What criminal act is it of which you accuse my daughter?

VOICE: Of feeding a stranger, when it was expressly forbidden by the king.

LOT: A crust of bread given to a stranger is hardly what I would call "feeding."

VOICE: Nevertheless, she must be brought to trial for this offense against the decree of our ruler.

LOT (TURNING TO PALTIT): My child, I'm afraid you must go with them. We are powerless against the king's law and must submit to its authority. But never fear, I shall call upon the king in your behalf. Once I have made known to him that you are the daughter of Lot, the nephew of Abraham, I am sure he will set you free.

CURTAIN



ACT II

THE CHAMBERS OF SHEREK, THE JUDGE. IT IS SEVERAL  
SCENE I. ~~IT IS THE FOLLOWING DAY IN THE CHAMBERS OF SHEREK~~  
MONTHS LATER.

~~THE PRISONER~~ PALTIT, THE PRISONER, IS BROUGHT SHACKLED BEFORE  
HIM AND MADE TO KNEEL. HARIM, THE PUBLIC PROSECUTOR, IS  
SEATED NEAR SHEREK. LOT, HIS WIFE AND HIS FOUR OTHER  
DAUGHTERS ARE IN ATTENDANCE. A BUZZ OF CONVERSATION IS  
HEARD FROM SPECTATORS AND WITNESSES.

HARIM (RISES AND, WITH STERN COUNTENANCE, SPEAKS TO ONLOOKERS)

Silence, please! (PAUSE) Let there be silence here so we may  
proceed to the business at hand before this court. (TO  
SHEREK, AS HE SITS DOWN AGAIN) Your honor, kneeling before  
you is the defendant Paltit, daughter of Lot, a citizen of  
this city. She has been accused of the crime of feeding a  
beggarly stranger, thereby violating an edict proclaimed  
by the king, which makes it unlawful to feed any stranger.

SHEREK: What say you to this accusation: Is it true or  
false?

PALTIT: The fact that I did give a few crusts of bread to  
a stranger is true. I do not deny it. However, I do deny  
that I have committed a crime. For me to have done other-  
wise would have been contrary to my own basic instincts  
and a crime against humanity itself.

HARIM: I must protest, your honor, against the flagrant and unwarranted assignation by the prisoner of her guilt to a source beyond the purview of this court. In addition, by ascribing as a crime a contrary action, instituted by the king, she is indirectly accusing the king of a criminal act--a monstrous perversion of our jurisprudence and the legal authority of our king.

SHEREK: Absolutely so. Young woman, the king's law can never be brought into question. It is indisputable, because he is the law. Therefore, in answering questions concerning your guilt or innocence, you are hereby directed to keep within the limits of the law you are charged with breaking. The philosophy of the law does not concern you, nor any of us here, since it is the king's prerogative to make and unmake laws as he sees fit.

PALTIT: But, your honor, this is the only defense I have to offer against the charge of which I have been accused-- that I would be acting contrary to the laws of humanity, has I done otherwise.

HARIM: I must protest again, your honor. These laws of humanity, to which the defendant refers, are only subjective precepts which have never been codified in the form of written statutes. This form of defense is not

admissable.

SHEREK: Exactly as I would have pointed out myself. Young woman, you must stay strictly within the limits of the act for whose breaching you have been brought to account here. Should there be any deviation from this, it will go hard with you.

LOT (COMING FORWARD AND KNEELING BEFORE SHEREK): Your honor, I am Lot, the father of this unfortunate young woman. If I may speak in her behalf, I believe I may be able to extenuate her crime in your eyes.

SHEREK: Does the public prosecutor have any objection to the father of the accused speaking ~~in~~ her behalf?

HARIM: None, your honor.

SHEREK: Very well, then; you may proceed.

LOT: Thank you, your honor. Being learned in the law, your worthy honor must know that the question of guilt is often a variable commodity. It takes on a different aspect commensurate with the culture and mores of each community. One may consider it a crime to offer bread to strangers; another may view such an act as a virtue of the highest

order. This crime of which my daughter is accused, according to the laws of Sodom, is a practice common to the Hebrews, whose great patriarch is Abraham, my uncle. To the Hebrews, hospitality is no crime; it is a virtue to be emulated. To open one's doors to the wayfaring stranger is a custom which my daughter has observed from childhood, and it should not cause wonder that she has found it difficult to shed a practice inculcated into her consciousness from such an early age. Actually, the wonder is that so few laws are broken considering that here in Sodom we dwell in a society where differing cultures cohabit. In view of such differences, should not justice be constrained to observe lapses in the observance of the law with a more indulgent disposition?

HARIM: I cannot agree to such a lenient attitude. The law is the law, and it cannot be subverted to serve the interests of any special group. If such a course were permitted, we would reduce the law to an amalgam of rhetorical precepts, fit only for philosophers and not for those governmental functions which serve to restrain citizens in their daily affairs so that public order may be maintained.

LOT: If nothing will move you to alter the letter of the law in this instance, then look upon me as the one who should be deemed guilty. For it was I who was the model

for her transgression, and it was I who instilled in her this behavior which is contrary to the laws of Sodom.

HARIM: Your honor, I cannot agree to allow this form of defense to be presented before this court. The law is only concerned with those who actively engage in deeds which contravene against the law's intent. It does not seek out individuals or groups of individuals who may be potentially misguided. All of us, at one time or another, have had evil intentions or have dreamed of committing crimes, but each man has it within himself to control those instincts which rebel against authority. If the law could punish for evil intent alone, almost all our citizens would need to be imprisoned. No. Accomplishment of an evil design is what concerns the law; not any passive, indeterminate dream of so doing.

LOT: But I have never been passive or indeterminate in committing the crime of hospitality; I have openly practiced it in my own home whenever a stranger has knocked upon my door. This conduct, as I have said, had been continually observed by Paltit from earliest childhood, and thus she could not help herself when she saw the stranger beg for food. It is I who am at fault here, and it is I who should be punished.

HARIM: I should like to test the truth of the statement advanced by Lot in defense of his daughter's actions. May I call upon another of Lot's daughters, Avnew by name, to give testimony as a witness.

SHEREK: Is Avnew, Lot's daughter, present in this court?

AVNEW: I am here, your honor.

SHEREK: Please come forward, so you may be heard. (AVNEW LEAVES SPECTATOR GROUP AND KNEELS BEFORE SHEREK)

HARIM: You are called Avnew and you are a resident of this city, are you not?

AVNEW: Yes, I am.

HARIM: Are you the daughter of Lot and the ~~sister~~ <sup>defendant</sup> of Paltit, the ~~defendant~~ here?

AVNEW: Yes, I am.

HARIM: According to the testimony of your father, Paltit had become indoctrinated, from earliest childhood, into a custom of offering hospitality to strangers, and, because of this teaching, she was unable to consciously stem the

practice when it became unlawful to behave in this manner. Having been resident in your father's house just as was Paltit, were you affected in the same way as she was?

AVNEW: When I lived with my father, I was led to adopt his ways. But when I married and had my own home, I adopted my husband's ways and the ways of my neighbors. I have, since leaving my father's home, become an obedient subject of the king in all things.

HARIM: You have not found it difficult to throw off the teachings of your father?

AVNEW: The teachings of my father belong to another time and another place; they are incompatible with the laws of Sodom.

HARIM: Thank you, Avnew. (TO SHEREK) I have no further questions of the witness, your honor.

SHEREK: The witness is dismissed with thanks. (AVNEW RETURNS TO HER PLACE AMONG SPECTATORS)

HARIM: Lot has yet another daughter, Beret, whom I should like to call upon as a witness.

SHEREK: If Beret is in attendance here, will she please come forward to be heard?

BERET LEAVES SPECTATORS AND KNEELS BEFORE SHEREK.

HARIM: You are Beret, daughter of Lot, sister to Baltit and a resident of Sodom, are you not?

BERET: Yes, I am all of these.

HARIM: You have heard your sister, Avnew, speak of the hospitable practices which were conducted in your father's house. Did you likewise observe such a custom while you resided there?

BERET: Whenever a stranger darkened our door, he was always invited inside and given food and drink, as well as water to bathe his feet and a bed to rest upon through the night.

HARIM: Now that you are married and live apart from your father, do you likewise practice this form of hospitality in your own home?

BERET: Since the king has decreed that hospitality toward strangers is a crime, I have faithfully avoided such persons.



HARIM: So now you can say, without hesitation, that the example of your father has not affected your present mode of life, and you have not adopted his ways with respect to the crime of hospitality.

BERET: This is what I mean to say.

HARIM (TO SHEREK): I have no further need of this witness.

SHEREK: The witness is excused with thanks. (BERET RETURNS TO HER PLACE IN THE AUDIENCE)

HARIM: Your honor, I believe I have shown, through the testimony of Avnew and Beret, the elder daughters of Lot, that Paltit was not bound by the precepts of her father, that indeed her actions were those of one wilfully bent upon breaking the law, and that her father actively encouraged her in such conduct. In fact, by his own admission, he continues to practice the crime of hospitality in direct contravention of our laws which forbid such a practice.

SHEREK: Paltit, you have been accused of the crime of feeding a stranger, and you have freely admitted your culpability. There being no extenuating circumstances presented by you in defense of your actions, that is, no

defense which the laws of Sodom will recognize, I find you guilty, as charged, and shall pronounce the sentence I deem appropriate as soon as I can dispose of your father's association with this matter. Before I proceed to his involvement, do you have anything to say before sentence is imposed?

PALTIT: Your honor, I know I cannot condone my action in your eyes or in the eyes of the community, but if wayfarers and strangers are harshly treated by our citizens, they will learn to avoid us altogether, and Sodom will become an alien island in a sea of enemies. Then, if we are attacked, who will aid us? And if we suffer from the plague or are made to endure hunger because of drought, upon whom shall we call for medicines and food? Without a kind regard for the humanity which lives outside our walls, we shall isolate ourselves from their good-will and solicitude.

SHEREK: Your remarks have no bearing upon the law, which I am sworn to uphold. These other matters of which you speak have broad, philosophical implications which are incompatible with the narrow issue before this court. Your words shall have been duly noted, however.

PALTIT (RESIGNED): Thank you, your honor.

SHEREK: Now I turn to consider the case of Lot, father of Paltit. By your own admission, sir, you have fostered the criminality of your daughter, Paltit. You even had the temerity to announce before this court that you still continue to engage in the unlawful practice of hospitality toward strangers in wilful disobedience toward the king's edict against such conduct. Therefore, while you had not been previously indicted for this crime, your association with the guilt of Paltit is so undeniably conjoined with the crime's commission that the interests of justice can only be served by consigning you to the same fate which lies in store for your daughter.

LOT: Take pity, your honor; my daughter was unaware of the consequences of her action. Only upon me alone, her father, should you place the blame, and not upon my innocent child. Have mercy, sir; she is young and can easily adapt to different ways, just as her sisters have done. ~~Excuse~~ Excuse this error of her youth, and set her free. As for me, do with me what you will. I have lived a long and fruitful life, and the years have so ingrained into my consciousness the habits of my youth they can no longer be eradicated. Therefore, upon me alone let the vengeance of the state be inflicted, and I am sure the ends of justice will be fully served thereby.

SHEREK: Impossible, old man. This crime cannot be mitigated in such a fashion, lest it be taken for a precedent in future actions before this court. To me, youth or age are of little consequence in assessing the quality of guilt, unless the crime had been committed by one so young or one so enfeebled in the mind by advancing years as to be deemed irresponsible for his actions, a condition which it is clearly evident does not apply here. No, you are both equally guilty in the eyes of the law, and you must both pay the price for your guilt in an equal manner. Therefore, without further ado, and in accordance with the laws of this kingdom, it is the sentence of this court that Lot and his daughter, Paltit, be both bound to a stake and burned until both be dead. (AT THIS, AVIGOR EMITS A LOUD SCREAM, AND MUFFLED CRIES ISSUE FORTH FROM AVNEW AND BERET. AVIGOR RUSHES FORWARD AND FALLS UPON HER KNEES BEFORE SHEREK)

AVIGOR (HANDS CLASPED IN SUPPLICATION): Have mercy, your worship upon these two poor, misguided creatures. They knew not what they were doing. Like children they were, uncomprehending of the consequences of their actions. And, like babes who ventured too far beyond the river's edge, they found themselves too late in water above their heads. Take pity upon a poor old woman; you will make of me a widow before my time and of my children make untimely orphans. Two unmarried daughters have I who need the guidance

of a father. What will become of them? How shall they marry without a proper dowry? And how shall I survive without the income which my husband supplies or his companionship during my declining years? You cannot do this thing to me!

AVIGOR SOBS UNCONTROLLABLY AS PALTIT AND LOT ATTEMPT TO COMFORT HER. SHEREK AND HARIM CONFER IN WHISPERS.

SHEREK: It has just now been brought to my attention that our king (May he live a thousand years) has requested that this court show mercy toward Lot and his daughter, Paltit, because of the valiant service done him in the past by ~~Abraham~~, the uncle of Lot. Therefore, in bowing before the benevolence of our ruler, I herewith modify my previous sentence of death by fire and decree that both Lot and Paltit must henceforth suffer the pain of banishment from their homes within our city, nevermore being permitted to set foot within our walls. The case before this court is closed.

CURTAIN

SCENE II. INTERIOR OF AMHOUSE OUTSIDE THE CITY WALLS OF SODOM. IT IS AFTERNOON, SEVERAL DAYS LATER. THE ROOM OCCUPIED BY LOT, AVIGOR AND THEIR THREE DAUGHTERS IS BARE OF

FURNITURE; ONLY PILLOWS UPON THE FLOOR PROVIDE SOME COMFORT. THEY ARE SEATED UPON THESE PILLOWS, ON THE FLOOR, PARTAKING OF A MEAL WHICH AVIGOR PREPARES ~~EMTSXNE~~ UPON AN OVEN OUTSIDE THE HOUSE.

LOT (TESTILY): I feel like a beast of the field to have to eat my food while seated on the ground, instead of dining like a proper man in a proper house and at a proper table.

AVIGOR: You have only yourself to blame for your present condition. Instead of complaining, you should thank the Lord for having spared your life.

LOT: I had no concern for Paltit's safe release. When I petitioned the king in Paltit's behalf, he assured herher sentence would be no more than a reprimand. After all, the king owed my uncle, Abraham, a considerable debt of gratitude for the assistance which he rendered unto him during the wars with the Kurds.

AVIGOR: I am not so sure his gratitude ran so deep as to overlook yourppublic disavowal of his edicts. It might have gone well with Paltit, as you have said, if only you had not attempted to defend her. But, by your words, you involved not only yourself but our other daughters as well,

by making them give testimony against you.

LOT (BRISTLING): Henceforth, they are no longer daughters of mine. The derogatory manner in which they spoke against me makes them unworthy of our continued relationship.

AVIGOR: What are saying, old man? Don't you realize if they had done otherwise, they would have jeopardized themselves, their families and their standing in the community?

LOT: What of my standing in the community? Because of their slurs and disclaimers, I might have been put to death. As it is, I am banished from my home because of their infidelity. Speak to me no more of them. I renounce them altogether.

PALTIT: Then you should renounce me as well, father. I am banished from my home and family because I followed the example set by you in your treatment of strangers. What benefit did I derive from so doing? It would have been much better for me had I closed my eyes to the injustice and inhumanity about me, and followed the king's law to the letter. Because I opposed it, I have only brought misery upon myself and my family.

LOT: We are not bound to this place. The world is wide

and the God of the Hebrews is with us. He will not forsake us in our hour of need.

PALTIT: Who is this invisible "God of the Hebrews" in whom you place so great a store? How is He better than the palpable idols to whom the Sodomites offer sacrifices and to whom they pray for succor and benefactions? At least these people, whom you refer to as heathens, know what their gods look like. In this they are united. What can you say for your invisible God, who differs in concept with each man according to his individual insight?

LOT: Each man may have a differing view of God, but there is no disputing the fact that He exists. These idols of which you speak are merely images born of the imagination of their human creators. Should they topple and fall, the clay of their composition shatters upon the ground. But not so the spiritual body of the Lord. His Being is as vast as the universe and, like it, incapable of destruction.

PALTIT: But by being invisible, divisions in dogma and disparate creeds are born and developed which vie in contention for converts to what each considers to be the true perception. But belief in a visible god fosters unity, since each man can relate to it in a tangible way.



LOT: But what can idols do? They have no power to influence fate or otherwise affect the course of our existence. They are only creatures conceived by men, and limited by the finite perception of their creators.

PALTIT: Is your invisible God any better than the clay idols worshiped by the Sodomites? Where was He when we sought to justify the godly virtues of love and charity?

LOT: I am sure it was His intercession which saved us from a ~~fiery~~<sup>fiery</sup> death.

PALTIT: But yet banished us from our homes and families.

LOT: There has to be a reason in all this. We must endure this period of trial for some reason which at present we cannot comprehend.

PALTIT: No, father; it has become too difficult for me to pursue my life and grasp its meaning from what is closed to view and intangible. Moreover, it has become apparant that this dedication to virtues which are not practiced by our neighbors is an act which encourages discord, and leads only to suffering and humiliation.

LOT: You must have faith, daughter. Present circumstances

can alter with time.

PALTIT: No, I'm sorry, father; I have given much thought to the reasons for our banishment, and this reflections has led me to the conclusion that I must change my mode of life, if the life I lead is to be endured. I cannot go on any longer, being deprived of husband and children and the companionship of family and friends. I have determined that I must conform to the quality of life which is found to prevail among the majority of citizens of that place wherein I reside.

LOT (TAKEN ABACK): What are you saying, daughter?

PALTIT: I am saying I shall have to adopt the religious doctrines and morality of the general population, whatever that might be.

LOT: But your morality, your faith--is this to be discarded?

PALTIT: Since it has brought us nothing but pain and disillusionment, what is it's worth?

LOT: It has sustained us in the past. It will again.

PALTIT: No, father. I see clearly now what I must do. I shall cast aside the restraints of conscience, and live as others do--for the present moment and for the pleasure that moment brings.

LOT: But this is monstrous!

PALTIT: Nevertheless, this is what I feel I must do, if I am to find some meaning for my life.

AVIGOR: Then you intend to leave us?

PALTIT: Yes, that is my intention.

LOT: But where will you go?

PALTIT: There are other cities on the plain nearby where the judgment of Sodom will not follow me. Perhaps I shall dwell in Gomorrah or in Admah, but any place would be preferable to a house among sheep and goats.

AVIGOR: But will you leave us now without your husband and children?

PALTIT: When I have found a place where I am welcome and living conditions seem agreeable, I shall have a message

sent to my family telling them where I may be found. Now, if you will, mother, prepare me a knapsack of food, so I may not hunger on the way, for I mean to leave as soon as possible.

AVIGOR: Must you go so soon?

PALTIT: Yes, I wish to reach Admah before evening.

AVIGOR (SIGH OF RESIGNATION): Very well, then. (SHE PLACES BREAD AND CHEESE IN KNAPSACK AND GIVES IT TO PALTIT)

LOT (HANDING PALTIT A SACK OF MONEY): Here, so you may not be thought a beggar, is silver to tide you over until your husband can provide for you.

PALTIT: Thank you, father (KISSING HIM) and mother (KISSING HER) and my dear sisters (KISSING THEM). I go now. Word shall be sent to you once I have established myself. Farewell. (LOT ESCORTS HER OUT THE DOOR)

AVIGOR AND HER DAUGHTERS BUSY THEMSELVES WITH CLEANING UP AFTER THE MEAL. LOT RE-ENTERS ROOM, ACCOMPANIED BY TWO STRANGERS.

LOT (TO AVIGOR): Wife, here with me are two weary travellers

I have come upon on the road outside, and I have prevailed upon them to tarry awhile and favor us with their company. (TO STRANGERS) This is my wife, Avigor, and here are our two daughters, Devrah and Egra. (THE STRANGERS GREET EACH ONE WITH A NOD)

FIRST STRANGER: My name is Michael and my companion here is known as Gabriel. It was our intention to spend the night in the city square, but this gentleman (INDICATING LOT) would not permit us to go on, and kept insisting that we must accept the hospitality of his home. We could not refuse in the face of such insistence.

LOT: No more of this, gentlemen, I pray you. Come, sit you down upon these pillows and take your ease. At this time <sup>these</sup> ~~xxx~~ are all the furnishings I possess, having been but recently banished from my home within the city walls. As soon as my sons-in-law can make arrangements, my furnishings and other household possessions will be conveyed here, I am sure. But let us not speak of my difficulties.

MICHAEL: Please do not trouble yourselves on our account. As I have said, we were prepared to spend the night in the city square, so your pillows are a luxury we had not counted on.

LOT: Unthinkable. The populace of the city <sup>does</sup> ~~do~~ not take

kindly to the presence of strangers. You would have been subject to injury or worse. It was fortunate that we met and that I was able to direct your steps here and away from the perils of the city. (TO DEVRAH AND EGRA) Go children, fetch water so that our guests may wash the dust of the road from their feet. (THEY EXIT) Please, gentlemen, sit down. (THEY SIT)

AVIGOR MOTIONS TO LOT TO COME TO HER WHERE SHE STANDS AT STAGE FRONT. HE MOVES TO HER POSITION.

AVIGOR (WHISPERING LOUDLY): Have you taken leave of your senses, old man? You have just been banished for the crime of hospitality. Are you bent upon angering the Sodomites again, so that they shall ~~surely~~ surely put you to death?

LOT (WHISPERING LOUDLY): The king's jurisdiction only extends to the city's walls; beyond those limits, I may do as I please. Now hold your tongue, woman, and provide for my guests in the manner in which all guests are treated in my house. Go, prepare food and drink for them, and speak to me no more of your forebodings.

AVIGOR: But we have barely enough for our own needs. I shall have to go to our former neighbors to borrow additional food and condiments.

LOT: Go, then, and return posthaste. (LOT RETURNS TO HIS GUESTS) My wife must needs go out for a short while. I am sure you will excuse her absence. (AVIGOR EXITS AND THE STRANGERS NOD POLITELY)

MICHAEL: You have said that the people of Sodom are ill-disposed toward strangers. How do you account for this unusual behavior?

LOT: It is because they do not wish foreigners to learn or be witness to their of their riches/~~and~~ depravity. The other cities nearby have a similar disposition. And it is not because the streets are paved with gold. Far from it. It is because the ruling classes wish to repress the poor and keep them from learning how much better foreigners fare beyond the walled environs which insulate them from such knowledge. Since I follow the precepts of my uncle, Abraham, and offer the hospitality of my home to strangers, I have violated one of their basic canons. Actually, it was first decreed that I be put to death for this infraction of the law, but the king remembered the service which my uncle, Abraham, rendered unto him during the wars with the Kurds, and my sentence was reduced to banishment.

MICHAEL: I'm sure it was no accident that you were ban-  
 it was God's will in your  
 XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX  
 ished from the city. I think ~~God's intervention here was~~

behalf because of some intention which shall be made known to you in due course.

LOT: How do you mean "God's will?" Have I been made to endure my present privation and the separation from my children because of some higher purpose?

MICHAEL: Exactly. It was not by chance that we met upon the highway. We were coming to visit you, after having been guests in the home of your uncle, Abraham. Actually, we are messengers sent here by the Almighty, each of us assigned a specific task. There was one other who accompanied us who is not with us now. His business was accomplished when Abraham was informed that Sarah, his wife, now ninety years old and never having been with child, should be delivered of a son the following year.

LOT: This is almost beyond belief! Never, to my knowledge, has such a thing ever come to pass that a woman of her years should conceive and give birth.

MICHAEL: It is within the power of God to do that which is beyond the belief or understanding of mortal man. Shall He who formed the universe be deemed incapable of performing so minor a miracle?

LOT: Forgive me. Of a surety, there is nothing which God



cannot execute, if He so desires. I was speaking out of amazement, of course, and not, in any sense, disrespectfully.

AVIGOR ENTERS, BEARING FOOD AND CONDIMENTS. SHE SETS HER BURDEN DOWN AND BECKONS TO LOT TO COME TO HER. HE MOVES TO HER POSITION AT FRONT STAGE.

LOT: (WHISPERING LOUDLY): What is it now, woman?

AVIGOR (WHISPERING LOUDLY): The persons from whom I borrowed the food and condiments inquired of me why I had not purchased these things during the day when the market was open. I answered them that guests had suddenly arrived from a distant city, and we needed more of these things than we had provided for ourselves alone.

LOT: It was foolish of you to have made known that guests were being received in our house.

AVIGOR: I realized this almost as soon as the words were uttered.

LOT: There is nothing to be done now except hope that this intelligence is not bruited about the city, or else it shall go hard with us. (HE RETURNS TO HIS GUESTS AND

SMILES AT THEM AS THOUGH NOTHING UNTOWARD HAD OCCURRED)

Gentlemen, forgive me for this interruption to our conversation. As I recall it, you spoke of three tasks which the Lord charged you with. Does one of these concern me?

MICHAEL: It does indeed, <sup>who were</sup> Because the Lord has heard the outcries of those made to suffer deprivation and indignities at the cruel hands of the Sodomites, because their depravity is an abomination unto His sight, He has determined to destroy Sodom and all those who live within her walls. The same fate lies in store for those other wicked cities which inhabit the plain close by. It was my task to deliver this message unto you.

LOT (AGHAST): Did you say "Destroy?" But how?

MICHAEL: By fire and brimstone. The mountains are to belch forth their excrement and reduce to ashes those cities and all their populations. No fragment of their existence is to remain to remind us of their iniquitous history.

WIGOR (WEEPING): Oh, calamity! Oh, calamity! Will none be saved? My daughters and their husbands and my grandchildren, what of them?

MICHAEL: You must warn them of their impending doom. They

will be permitted to accompany you from this place.

LOT: You said there were three tasks you were sent to accomplish. I have only heard two.

MICHAEL: The third task is in the hands of my silent companion--the destruction of the cities.

CROWD NOISES ARE HEARD IN THE BACKGROUND. THERE IS A LOUD KNOCKING ON THE DOOR.

VOICE FROM THE CROWD: Open the door, Lot, and give over into our hands the strangers you are harboring within.

AVIGOR AND HER DAUGHTERS CRINGE WITH FRIGHT IN FARTHEST CORNER OF ROOM AWAY FROM DOOR. THE STRANGERS SIT AS BEFORE, SHOWING ONLY MILD CURIOSITY AT THE DISTURBANCE OUTSIDE. LOT GOES TO THE DOOR AND OPENS IT.

LOT (HUMBLY): Please, my brethren, the strangers, of whom you speak, have accepted the hospitality of my home at my ~~urging~~ urging. Do them no harm, I pray you. Instead, as a token of good will, take my two young daughters, virgins both, and do with them that which pleases you, but to these two gentlemen do nothing, for my sake.

VOICE: Away, old man, do you mean to defy our laws a

second time? Our king, out of kindness, has spared your li  
life before, but we will not be so magnanimous, seeing  
that you refuse to turn from the error of your ways.

ANOTHER VOICE: Bring out the strangers, else we shall  
break down the door and take them out by force!

LOT: No, please, I beg of you.

THE STRANGERS RISE AND TAKE LOT BACK INTO THE HOUSE, SHUT-  
TING THE DOOR AFTER THEM. GABRIEL, THE SILENT STRANGER,  
RAISES HIS ARM AND POINTS TOWARD THE CLOSED DOOR. FROM  
THE OUTSIDE ARE SOUNDS OF CONFUSION AND CONSTERNATION.

VOICES: I am blinded! I cannot see! What has caused this  
darkness in the middle of the day? The door! Where is the  
door?

MICHAEL (TO LOT): If any of your family reside within the  
walls of Sodom, go thence and bring them out, for the anger  
of the Lord against the wickedness of these people can no  
longer be contained. The city must be destroyed. Go there-  
fore, gather up your kinsmen and depart from this iniqui-  
tous place. The men outside will be unable to see you, for  
we have caused them to be blinded temporarily. You would  
do well, however, to keep your face covered when you enter

the city so you may not be recognized.

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE I. A ROOM IN THE HOME OF AVNEW AND HER HUSBAND, AGID, IN SODOM. IT IS FURNISHED SIMILARLY TO THAT OCCUPIED BY LOT BEFORE HIS BANISHMENT. IT IS EVENING OF THE SAME DAY AS THE LAST SCENE AND AVNEW AND AGID ARE RESTING AND CONVERSING WITH EACH OTHER. A KNOCK IS HEARD UPON THE DOOR WHICH OPENS TO THE STREET. AGID GOES TO THE DOOR AND ADMITS A HOODED FIGURE.

AGID: Who are you that goes about hooded against the night?

LOT (REMOVING HOOD): It is I, your father-in-law, Lot.

AVNEW (SURPRISED AND AGITATED): What madness is it, father, which has caused you to enter the city when you have been expressly forbidden to do so? Are you not aware that this foolish action of yours can cause us all great harm?

LOT: It is precisely because I do care for all of you that I have risked the peril of paying you this visit. I have not come merely to look upon your faces, although we have not seen you since the trial. No. Even though your regard for your father seems to have diminished of late, my love for you has not abated. As proof of this is the errand of mercy which bring me here--an errand to make known to you

the catastrophe which awaits all those who dwell in Sodom.

AVNEW: What is this nonsense you speak of, father? What doom is this we face?

LOT: Go next door and bring unto my presence your sister, Beret, and her husband, Borim. I shall more fully explain my mission when we are all together.

AGID: Very well, I shall go next door for Beret and Borim. But, please keep your voices down. (AGID GOES OUT)

AVNEW: Go, father, and sit in the shadows, so that no one passing our house can see inside and discover your presence. (LOT SITS DOWN IN A REMOTE CORNER OF THE ROOM) How is my mother and how fare my sisters?

LOT: We are all well, but we are concerned for the welfare of our family which resides within the confines of this doomed city.

AVNEW: How--doomed?

LOT: I shall tell you in a moment when the others arrive.

AGID RETURNS, WITH ~~BERET~~ AND BORIM SLINKING IN AFTER HIM.

BERET (TESTILY): What is the meaning of this late and untimely visit, my father? Have you ~~you~~ taken leave of your senses that you show yourself here where you have but lately been banished?

LOT: Hold your tongue, my loving daughter, and allow me to speak of that which brought me hence. (LOT PAUSES AND GAZES INTO THE EYES OF EACH IN TURN) Today, my children, I was host to two strangers who told me they were coming from my uncle, Abraham. I invited them into the abandoned house I now call home, and made them welcome with food and drink and such other courtesies as I enjoy offering to strangers.

AVNEW: I see that the punishment imposed upon you has not been sufficient to change your lawless habits.

LOT: There is no time to enter into a dialogue with you concerning the manner in which I conduct myself. But, it was well for me--and for you, too, for that matter--that I received them in my house.

BERET (IMPATIENT): All right, father, let us hear the vital message which brings you here so that we may be off before our neighbors become aware of your presence.

LOT: These men, it was revealed to me, were messengers from



the Almighty Himself, sent by Him to destroy Sodom with fire and brimstone, so that the evil of the place may be extirpated and no vestige of it allowed to remain to bear witness to its former existence.

AGID: This is the vilest nonsense I have ever heard! Destroyed, indeed! You have been duped by charlatans, old man. There is no power on earth which can unleash such devastation as you describe.

LOT: Perhaps no earthly power can work such wonders, but what say you to the power of the supernatural?

AGID: Stuff and nonsense, I say!

LOT: Was it stuff and nonsense when an angry crowd of your fellow-citizens shouted outside my door that I give over to them the strangers I had invited into my home? Was it stuff and nonsense when one of my guests caused instant blindness to confound the raging mob with but the pointing of a finger?

AGID: This was but a sorcerer's trick which makes the mind succumb to the will of the sorcerer. I have seen such delusions practiced before. Stuff and nonsense, I say.

LOT: Will nothing convince you of the terrible disaster

which faces you? Come, Avnew and Beret, gather up your children, together with food and clothings and let us go away from this doomed city. Time is growing short.

AVNEW (PLACATING MANNER): I believe you are suffering from a mental aberration, father. The strain of the trial and your banishment have unhinged your mind temporarily. Go back to your house outside the walls, and, with rest and care, you should be well again.

LOT (ANGRY): I warn you all: This is no illusion or any aberration of mine. God has seen the evil of this place and has determined to wipe it off the face of the earth. Nothing can save you, except you prepare yourself to leave and come with me.

THERE IS A KNOCKING ON THE DOOR. AGID OPENS THE DOOR AND ADMITS DEREK, THE HUSBAND OF PALTIT. DEREK'S FACE IS HAGGARD AND PALE; HIS EYES ARE GLAZED FROM WEEPING.

LOT: Derek, my son! How good it is to see you once again. (EMBRACES HIM) My daughter, Paltit, your wife, have you found her well in Admah?

DEREK: Well, indeed! (BURSTS INTO TEARS) No one will ever trouble her again.

LOT: What are these tears, my son? Your reunion in Admah should have been an occasion for happiness. Has something happened . . . .

DEREK (RESIGNEDLY): I have brought Paltit back with me. She is resting quietly outside.

LOT: Why has she not come into the house with you?

DEREK: I'm sorry, father; she cannot speak to you. Her lips are silent even unto me, her husband.

LOT: NO, it cannot be! What are you saying?

DEREK: It's true, father.

LOT: You mean . . . she's . . .

DEREK: Dead.

AVNEW: Oh, my poor, dear sister! How did it happen, Derek?

DEREK (HIS HAND COVERS HIS EYES): The kindness of her nature led to her downfall once again, as it had done here before. She had shared her food with a stranger, and, because this was viewed as a crime in Admah--much the same as it is here

in Sodom--she was seized and taken before a judge. She was condemned to suffer death in a most cruel and savage manner. (HE SHUDDERS AT THE THOUGHT)

BERET: How . . . cruel?

DEREK (WITH GREAT DIFFICULTY): They smeared her naked body with honey, from head to foot, and exposed her to the bees of the field. (TEARFUL PAUSE) She was stung to death by the bees, and no one gave heed to her cries of suffering.

AVNEW: How horrible!

LOT: This latest outrage will serve to hasten <sup>the Lord</sup> God to proceed to the penalty He means to exact for the evil of these places. We must leave at once, lest the wrath of God against these wicked cities engulfs us all in the wake of its destructive force. Come, my children.

AGID: If you are fearful of the wrath of God, father, then depart this place, by all means. But, we do not fear the fire and brimstone with which you threaten us. Our homes are here, our livelihoods are here, and all that we possess has been carved out of this land. Would you have us start anew in another place, among strangers who might take us for enemies and slay us? If we are to die, better to die in our

own homes and among our own people.

LOT (LOOKING INTO EACH FACE): Does Agid speak for all of you?

AVNEW: Go, father; return to our mother and our sisters, and take them with you where you will. Our place is here beside our husbands. We will take our chances with the anger of God.

LOT: Is there nothing I can say to dissuade you from this course you mean to follow?

AVNEW: Go, father.

LOT: I go, but not before I have said good-by to Paltit, my dear, misguided child who lies silently outside. She will no more have to choose sides in a divided world. She is at peace now. (PAUSE) Bury her deep, Derek, my son, so she may not be thrown out by any unnatural upheaval of the earth. (AGAIN A PAUSE) How am I going to break this awful news to her mother? (EXITS, HIS BODY WRACKED BY SOBS)

CURTAIN

SCENE II. IT IS THE NEXT MORNING IN THE CITY SQUARE. THE USUAL ACTIVITY OF THE MARKET-PLACE SEEMS TO HAVE SLOWED DOWN CONSIDERABLY FROM ITS FORMER BUSTLING PACE. ONLY A FEW INTERESTED BUYERS PATRONIZE THE SHOPS AND STALLS. MOST, WHEN GIVEN PRICES FOR THE GOODS OFFERED, REBUFF EACH MERCHANT WITH UPRaised HANDS AND ATTITUDES OF SURPRISE. ON THE STEPS LEADING TO THE KING'S PALACE, LOUNGE UNEMPLOYED INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE ENGAGED IN IDLE CONVERSATION.

FIRST CITIZEN: How goes it with you, Harim? Is the harvesting of your fields complete, that you have time to pursue a life of leisure here in the market square?

SECOND CITIZEN: This leisure of which you speak is not of my choosing, I can assure you. My fields of grain have been harvested--but not by me.

FIRST CITIZEN: If not by you, then by whom?

SECOND CITIZEN: By swarms of locusts have they been harvested, aided and abetted by rats and rabbits and other forms of vermin which prey upon our fields of grain.

THIRD CITIZEN: Your experience is the same as my own, and coincides with all others who raise crops outside the city's walls. Confronted with such conditions, we shall all surely

starve this coming winter.

FIRST CITIZEN: I can commiserate with your unhappy state, for, while I do not farm for my livelihood, my idleness is probably caused by the same pernicious elements which have brought you grain farmers to such a sorry pass. Cattle and sheep have I had which, in other eyes, would seem to make of me a wealthy man. But now I am truly impoverished, for my herds are wasting away for lack of food. Those same despoilers which have eaten your grain have, in all likelihood, consumed my grasslands as well.

FOURTH CITIZEN: There is no question about it--we are in a sorry plight. Do you think we may have offended our gods in some manner? Mayhap we have not offered up enough burnt sacrifices? Should we not seek out our priests and have them offer sacrifices to such dieties we may have offended?

FIRST CITIZEN: I fear it is we, ourselves, who are at fault in this instance. Do you remember how we were troubled with birds which ate our grain and the beasts of the forests which fell upon our herds? In the past, these marauders would have their fill, and we would still have <sup>enough</sup> ~~enough~~ of meat and grain to feed ourselves, besides having food left over to sell in the market place. Now, I think there is a connection between our indiscriminate action in killing off

the birds of the field and the beasts of the forest with the hapless condition in which we now find ourselves.

FIFTH CITIZEN: How can there be such a connection?

FIRST CITIZEN: Hear me out, and I think I can make clear to you this "connection." Do you remember when we all subscribed to the plan to kill off the birds which were eating our grain? Well, we did not differentiate then between those birds which ate seeds and those which ate insects. Even if we had wanted to segregate them into categories, it would have been impossible to do so. As a consequence, when the birds were exterminated, those insects, which were the prey of the insect-eating birds, began to thrive and reproduce in such numbers that they ate more grain than the birds we had poisoned.

SECOND CITIZEN: There is no doubt we had grain to spare when the birds were allowed to forage in the fields without hindrance. (MURMURS OF ASSENT ARE HEARD FROM THE OTHERS)

FIRST CITIZEN: Let me tell you of another instance in which we were betrayed by our folly. Our plan to kill off the beasts of the forest rebounded back upon us as it had with the birds, with the same ~~fall upon~~ disastrous results. For, by killing off the animals which ~~fell upon~~ <sup>fell upon</sup> a few of our sheep or cattle,



we permitted rodents, which are the natural food of those predators we destroyed, to multiply far beyond their normal bounds. As a result, these rodents, which love to eat of our grains and grasses, have combined with their insect allies to devastate our fields and bring us to our present condition.

THIRD CITIZEN: Your assessment of the causes for our present predicament must be true, Arim; the evidence is too overwhelming to deny.

FOURTH CITIZEN (FORCEFULLY): It was our greed which betrayed us into the pitiable circumstances in which we now find ourselves!

FIFTH CITIZEN: But what can we do to alter these conditions?

SECOND CITIZEN: We can still waylay and rob the unwary stranger.

FIRST

~~THIRD~~ CITIZEN: Yes, and how many strangers have you seen pass this way?

SECOND CITIZEN: None, Arim. As a matter of fact, I do not think I have beheld a stranger for a fortnight now.

THIRD CITIZEN: Neither have I.

FOURTH CITIZEN: Nor I.

FIRST CITIZEN: It seems we all agree on the paucity of likely prospects for robbery. Undoubtedly, our manner of treating strangers has spread to the farthest corners of Canaan. Individual traders are no longer seen here and those caravans, which regularly visited here, bearing herbs and spices and woven goods, now pass us by completely. Even beggars and wandering bands shun our borders.

FIFTH CITIZEN: What you have said is completely true, Arim. These facts cannot ~~be denied~~ be denied.

ALL PRESENT MURMUR IN AGREEMENT.

FIRST CITIZEN: If present conditions are permitted to continue, with the scarcity of food and our means of communication with the outside world cut off, most of our citizens shall surely depart from <sup>here-</sup> ~~us~~. Those remaining will be reduced to the level of animals, hiding in their houses from predators who roam the streets, or become themselves predators, lying in wait to pounce upon their intended victims. Eventually, our city will become a ghost town, inhabited only by the lowest forms of life and overgrown with weeds and covered by the dust of disuse.

SECOND CITIZEN: You are absolutely right, Arim. Our present

situation must be reversed at once or the consequences you describe will certainly befall us all.

THIRD CITIZEN: But what of the king's law?

FIRST CITIZEN: The king's law must be overturned.

FOURTH CITIZEN: But how is this to be done?

FIRST CITIZEN: By overthrowing the king and his law! (LOUD SHOUTS OF APPROVAL ARE HEARD) Take up cudgels, my brothers, and disarm the guards! Must the king live in luxury, while we and our children starve? Break down the doors and seize the king!

THERE FOLLOWS A CONCERTED RUSH UP THE STEPS TO THE PALACE DOORS. AMID MUCH SHOUTING AND CURSING, THE GUARDS ARE BEATEN DOWN AND THE DOORS FORCED OPEN.

AFTER SOME MOMENTS, THERE IS AN OUTWARD SURGE OF THE MOB, ONE AMONG THEM HOLDING ALOFT THE SEVERED HEAD OF THE KING. AT SIGHT OF THE HEAD, WILD SHOUTING AND JUBILATION FOLLOWS. ARIM, WHO STIRRED THE POPULACE TO REBELLION, IS RAISED ALOFT BY THE CROWD AND CARRIED UP TO THE TOP OF THE STEPS. A CROWN IS PLACED UPON HIS HEAD, GREETED BY A CRESCENDO OF EXULTANT VOICES.

CURTAIN

SCENE III. AT RISE OF CURTAIN, THE DARKNESS OF NIGHT IS SEEN GIVING WAY TO THE FIRST FAINT RAYS OF THE SUN WHICH EDGE ABOVE THE MOUNTAINS IN THE BACKGROUND. THE OUTLINES OF LOT AND AVIGOR AND THEIR TWO DAUGHTERS ARE SEEN TRUDGING SLOWLY OVER A BARREN PLAIN, DRAWING AFTER THEM PACK ANIMALS LOADED WITH THEIR POSSESSIONS. IT IS THE NEXT DAY.

LOT (PAUSING): Come, Avigor, you must hasten your pace, if we are to reach Zoar before the sun rises above yonder mountains. The Lord will only stay His hand till then, after which He means to let loose a hail of fire and brimstone which shall utterly destroy Sodom and the other wicked cities of the plain.

AVIGOR (PANTING): I am walking as fast as I can. After all, I am an old woman, not used to such exercise as this. Have pity and rest a while, I pray you.

LOT: We shall arrive at our destination in a short while, if you will but hurry. Once we reach there, you can rest as much as you please.

AVIGOR: But what of our children? I cannot understand why they have not joined us? You warned them of the disaster which is to overtake them, and yet you say they will not come with us. (FALLS TO HER KNEES AMID SOBS) I should not

have allowed myself to be induced to leave with you. It would have been better had I stayed with my children and suffered with them their fate. I cannot bear to think that I shall no more see the faces of my dear daughters again or feel the clasping hands of my grandchildren about my neck.

LOT (RAISING HER): I, too, am heartbroken at the thought of our separation from those we love. But we still <sup>have</sup> ~~have~~ each other and our maiden daughters accompany us, and they shall yet have husbands and children of their own. Think not upon that which cannot be changed. We are subject to the will of God, and must bow to His inexorable sway.

AVIGOR (UNCONSOLED): Maybe they have changed their minds and follow us? Look behind, husband, and see if there <sup>are</sup> ~~any~~ any signs of travellers in the distance behind us.

LOT: Do not torture yourself needlessly, my dear wife. The Lord has forbidden us to look behind, lest we see the Shekinah--the Divine Presence in the form of a cloud.

AVIGOR: But if our children follow us, they will be unable to discern us at this distance. Perhaps if we built a fire, they would see it, and hasten to join us here.

LOT: Impossible. We cannot tarry even for a moment. See,

even now, where the sun is fixing his eye upon us from behind the mountains. We must hurry; time is growing short.

A RED GLOW SUFFUSES THE STAGE, GIVING INDICATION OF THE FIERY HOLOCAUST WHICH IS OVERTAKING THE CITIES OF THE PLAIN. KETTLE DRUMS RUMBLE AND ROAR AND CYMBALS CLASH IN IMITATION OF THE THUNDEROUS SOUNDS WHICH MUST HAVE ACCOMPANIED THE VAST UPHEAVALS OF THE EARTH WHICH CAUSED SUCH A CATAclySMIC EVENT AS THE COMPLETE DESTRUCTION OF WHOLE CITIES AND THEIR INHABITANTS.

A GREAT WIND LASHES AT THE WEARY TRAVELLERS, BUT THEY MANAGE TO WITHSTAND ITS BUFFETING AND EXIT INTO THE WINGS. ALL BUT AVIGOR. SHE PAUSES A MOMENT AND TURNS TO LOOK BEHIND HER. A STRONG, WHITE LIGHT ENVELOPES HER AND A CRASHING SOUND OF CYMBALS IS HEARD. SHE STANDS TRANSFIXED TO THE SPOT--A PILLAR OF SALT.

CURTAIN

EPILOGUE. IT IS THE SAME SCENE AS IN THE PROLOGUE--THE LIVING ROOM OF AN AVERAGE AMERICAN FAMILY. THE OCCUPANTS ARE AS BEFORE, HOSTAGE TO THEIR UNINVITED GUESTS.

FATHER (CONTINUING STORY): At about the same time that the destruction of Sodom and the other cities was going on,

Abraham was standing on a hilltop, and he saw the smoke and flames erupting into the sky like the mushroom clouds that follow the unleashing of atomic bombs. He raised his arms toward Heaven, and cried out: "O Lord, King of the Universe, have mercy I pray Thee, and cease Thy depredations, lest those innocent people who reside in settlements nearby be ~~kindled~~ <sup>consumed</sup> by the flames of Thy vengeful hand!" The Lord heard Abraham and assured him that His work of destruction had been completed.

JOE: Did Lot and his daughters make it to where they were headed?

FATHER: They made it to Zoar, all right. This question was asked of God by Abraham, Who assured him that Lot and his daughters were saved, although Avigor perished, as I told you in the story. He also made known to Abraham how Lot had tried to persuade his children to leave with him and of their refusal to go along.

WILLIE (SMACKING HIS THIGH): Say, man, what do you know! I never thought we were doing God's work before. But there it is--right in the Bible; you don't measure up and . . . you've had it. He just didn't pussyfoot around with the wicked; He blew them sky-high . . . woosh!

FATHER: That's what Abraham was concerned about. He asked

going anywhere.

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the Lord if destruction by fires and floods ~~was~~ <sup>were</sup> the only ways He could devise to eradicate the sinfulness of men. God replied that He only did what any good farmer would do: If a crop was bad, he would plow it under and hope for a better harvest the following season, knowing full well that the nutrients supplied by the buried crops would invigorate the yield to come. Had He not done so, God explained, and permitted them to live out their lives, they would have defiled and ~~infected~~ <sup>tainted</sup> all those with whom they came in contact. They were like a cancer in the human body, He said, which must be cut out lest it infect the surrounding tissue.

JOE (TRIUMPHANT): There you have it again: We think like God does about the evil in the world--it must be cut away if the good is to survive.

FATHER: But Abraham wasn't satisfied with God's rationale. He pointed out to Him that these people He destroyed were His own children--created in His own image. These were not unproductive fields of wheat or corn to be plowed under as fertilizer for future crops.

SON (EAGERLY): How did God answer him?

FATHER: He had no answer. He only asked Abraham what he would do if a similar situation arose again.

DAUGHTER: What did Abraham say to that?

FATHER: Abraham suggested to God that He might punish sinners on an individual basis, rather than in the wholesale fashion He had employed up to now; also, that a man should suffer for his sins in a manner commensurate with the offense committed. In other words, he wanted God to make the punishment fit the crime and cease destruction of the whole body when but a small part of it was infected.

JOE (SMILING): Say, man, that Abraham was a real wheeler-dealer!

FATHER: That's true. But God had great respect for Abraham's intellect and judgment, and He agreed to abandon His policy of wholesale destruction for the sinfulness of humanity in favor of Abraham's more moderate approach to the problem. "Abraham," He said, "because of your kindness and compassion toward your fellow creatures, I shall no longer condemn to extinction the community of man. Instead, from this day forward, each person, as well as each nation, shall carry within himself the seeds of his own chastisement or destruction."

JOE (PUZZLED): Just a minute, mate. I didn't catch the drift of your last statement. What are these "seeds" you're

talking about?

FATHER: Well, you know if the body is abused, its power to resist infection grows weaker.

JOE: You mean like when we overwork, or eat or drink too much?

FATHER: Exactly. Anything we do to excess can weaken the body. Under such circumstances, those agents in the blood which defend us against pernicious external forces become impotent; the body soon declines, is invaded by disease and even dies.

JOE: You said nations could be affected in the same way.

FATHER: Right. In much the same way, abuse of the body-politic can lead to a diseased society whose citizens become anemic and neglectful. Under such conditions, industrious proclivities diminish and the incentive for progress disappears. In their place, the twin banners of vice and corruption carry the field. But if a political system is vigorous and dynamic, abuses can stir up countervailing forces, like the antibodies of the blood, to rise and overthrow those who profane their responsibilities. In effect, what God was saying is that persons or nations which follow the paths of

rectitude and lead lives of moderation shall know peace and contentment throughout their lives.

JOE: That's bunk! I can see myself as a "countervailing force," but I can't buy the moderation you propose as the proper way to live. What you seem to suggest is that we shouldn't punish those who wrong us; they will eventually punish themselves. And I suppose you would like for us to go home and sit around and wait for those oil barons and international bankers to be consumed by their own greed?

FATHER: This could very well occur and with more celerity than you suppose, especially if these wealthy nabobs of yours do not share their wealth with those less fortunate or <sup>fail to</sup> plow back their earnings in some manner to repay the land and the people they have despoiled. There's an immutable law of physics which confirms that there may be such consequences to our actions: For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. These consequences may not be immediately visible, nor may we reap our retribution in a way we expect, but, inevitably, where a vital concern is involved, by contending, we strengthen the resolve of an adversary to resist. And even if victory be achieved or the prize is won, but honor and dignity sacrificed on the field, then such resentment may be kindled as to fan the flames of future antagonisms.

JOE: These flames you speak of have already been kindled in us--the victims of the rich and the powerful. And this practice of patience and moderation you talk about is for the birds. We have waited too long for that. No; injustice cries out for revenge without delay. The machinery by which the laws are administered is too slowed down by the multiplicity of its parts, and too many gears slip and fail when novel legal matters insert themselves and prove indigestible. The people must take into their own hands the trial and punishment of those who are known to be guilty.

FATHER: And how would you adjudge guilt--by association, by the "Where there's smoke there's fire" dogma?

JOE: That's as good a procedure as any other, if it serves the cause of speedy justice.

FATHER: But then you would be sacrificing justice in the interest of speed and lumping the innocent with the guilty without discrimination.

JOE: If the innocent mingled with the guilty and it can be proven that malice was not intended, I would still adjudge them guilty because they shut their eyes to the evil going on about them. They should suffer the consequences for their indifference.

WILLIE: Hold it a minute, Joe. You told me we needed a government where everyone was equal and each man had a voice in its affairs. If you mean to go about hunting down people and bombing indiscriminately, we will become just terrorists in the eyes of those we're trying to bring over to our way of thinking.

FATHER: If you'll pardon my two-cents worth, I think Willie has a good point.

JOE (GETTING ANGRY): You stay out of this. This is just between Willie and me. (TO WILLIE) Don't you see what's going on here? They tell you a cock-and-bull story from the Bible, and, all of a sudden, you become a convert to their ideas.

WILLIE: It's not that I've become a convert; it's just that I don't see the good in what we're doing.

JOE: The good is that by using terror-tactics we make everyone afraid. No one knows where the next bomb is coming from; no one knows who's in line for assassination, or who's to be kidnapped, or who's to be held hostage. Fear, Willie--that's the ticket. Make people afraid, and just a few of us can get anything we want.

WILLIE: But if what we want is a change in government, how

are we to do this without the backing of the public?

JOE: The public is like a bunch of sheep--easy to frighten and confuse. All we have to do is infiltrate the army and police, take over the news media, and we're all set. It only takes a few of us in the right places, and we can be in the driver's seat.

WILLIE: I don't know, Joe. It sounds great when you say it, but it seems to me there would have to be an awful lot of blood shed to make it work. I don't think it's worth the price.

JOE: You would have power, Willie. Think of it! You could do anything you wanted. You would have all the money you could ask for. All the best-looking broads. All the fanciest liquor and food. Isn't that worth the price?

WILLIE: How about all the hate that would be stirred up? I would have to have guards around me all the time. I wouldn't even be able to trust my friends. It's not for me, Joe. I'm going to give myself up. ~~WIXXXE~~

WILLIE RISES AND GOES TOWARD THE FRONT DOOR. AT THIS, JOE WHIPS OUT HIS GUN AND LEVELS IT AT WILLIE.

JOE (MENACINGLY): Hold everything, Willie. You're not

going anywhere.

WILLIE TURNS SUDDENLY TO FACE JOE AND SIMULTANEOUSLY FIRES HIS OWN GUN, SHOOTING JOE IN THE CHEST. JOE CLUTCHES HIS BREAST AND FIRES HIS GUN AT WILLIE, AS HE FALLS TO THE FLOOR. WILLIE, MORTALLY WOUNDED, AS IS HIS PARTNER, REELS BACKWARD AND DROPS TO THE FLOOR, DEAD.

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