

The Seven Deadly
Sins of the
Petty Bourgeoisie
(1933)

by Bertolt Brecht

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SLOTH

in doing a wrong

PRIDE

in one's best characteristic (Incorruptibility)

WRATH

at mean behaviour

GLUTTONY

(Satedness, Self-devouring)

LUST

(Selfless love)

AVARICE

in pillage and deception

ENVY

of the fortunate

This ballet is meant to represent the journey of two sisters from the southern states who hope to get enough money to buy a small house for themselves and their family. Both are called Annie. One of the two Annie is the manager, the other the artiste; one (Annie I) is the saleslady, the other (Annie II) the article sold. On the stage stands a small board showing the course of their travels through seven cities; Annie I stands before it with a small pointer. Likewise on the stage is the continually fluctuating market on which Annie I launches her sister. At the end of each scene showing how the seven deadly sins can be avoided Annie II returns to Annie I, with their family on stage and the little house which they have acquired by avoiding the seven deadly sins in the background.

Prologue

ANNIE I:

So my sister and I left Louisiana
Where the moon on the Mississippi is a-shining ever
Like you've heard about in the songs of Dixie.
We look forward to our home-coming –
And the sooner the better.

ANNIE II:

And the sooner the better.

ANNIE I:

It's a month already since we started
For the great big cities where you go to make money.
In seven years our fortune will be made
And then we can go back.

ANNIE II:

In six would be nicer.

ANNIE I:

Our mum and dad and both our brothers wait in old
Louisiana

And we'll send them all our money as we make it
For all the money's got to go to build a little home
Down by the Mississippi in Louisiana.

Right, Annie?

ANNIE II:

Right, Annie.

ANNIE I:

She's the one with the looks, I'm realistic;
She's just a little mad, my head is on straight.

You may think that you can see two people
But in fact you see only one

And both of us are Annie:

Together we've but a single past, a single future
And one heart and savings-account;

And we only do what is best for each other.

Right, Annie?

ANNIE II:

Right, Annie.

I

Sloth

This is the first city on their journey, and the sisters get their first money by a trick. As they stroll through the city park they are on the lookout for married couples. Annie II hurls herself on a man as if she knew him; she flings her arms round him, reproaches him etc., in short reduces him to embarrassment while Annie I tries to restrain her. While Annie I is extracting money from the man for having got rid of

her sister, Annie II suddenly falls on the wife and threatens her with her parasol. They swiftly perform this trick a number of times. After that however Annie I tries to blackmail a man she has enticed away from his wife, on the assumption that her sister will meanwhile have importuned the wife. She is appalled to see that her sister is sitting dozing on a bench instead of getting on with the job. She is forced to wake her up and set her to work.

FAMILY:

Will she now? . . . will our Annie pull herself together?

Lazy Bones are for the Devil's stock-pot –

For she was always quite a one for an arm-chair;

Lazy Bones are for the Devil's stock-pot –

Unless you came and hauled her off the mattress

Lazy Bones are for the Devil's stock-pot –

The lazy slug would lie abed all morning.

Lazy Bones are for the Devil's stock-pot –

Otherwise, Annie was, we must admit, a most respectful
child,

Lazy Bones are for the Devil's stock-pot –

Did what she was told and showed affection for her
parents.

Lazy Bones are for the Devil's stock-pot –

This is what we told her when she left home:

Lazy Bones are for the Devil's stock-pot –

'Think of us, and mind you keep your nose down to the
grind-stone.'

O Lord, look down upon our daughter

Show her the way that leads the Good to Thy reward

In all her doings prevent her and comfort her

Incline her heart to observe all Thy commandments

That her works on earth may prosper.

2

Pride

A dirty little cabaret. Annie II enters to the applause of 4-5 customers whose frightful appearance greatly alarms her. Though poorly clad she dances in a most unusual way, puts her soul into it and is badly received. The customers are infinitely bored; they yawn like sharks (their masks portraying horrible teeth in preternaturally large mouths), hurl things on to the stage and manage to bring the one lamp crashing down. Annie II goes on dancing, utterly wrapped up in her art until removed from the stage by the proprietor. He sends on another dancer, a fat old frump who shows Annie how to set about winning applause in his establishment. The old frump dances in a vulgar sexy way and is vastly applauded. Annie refuses to dance like that. But Annie I, who has been standing beside the stage where she was the only one to applaud her sister and wept to see her lack of success, now gets her to dance in the required manner. As her skirt is too long, Annie I rips it off and sends her back on stage to be shown how to dance by the frump, pulling her skirts up higher and higher to the applause of the audience. And it is she who leads her sister back to the small board to be comforted.

ANNIE I:

So we
 Saved up
 Bought ourselves an outfit:
 Nighties
 Nylons
 Beautiful dresses:
 Soon we
 Found a

Job that was going
 A job as dancer in a cabaret
 A job in Memphis, the second big town we came to
 Oh how hard it was for Annie!
 Beautiful clothes can make a good girl particular –
 When the drinking tigress meets herself in the pool
 She's apt to become a menace.
 She began talking about art, of all things
 About the Art, if you please, of Cabaret
 In Memphis, the second big town we came to.

It wasn't art that sort of people came for
 That sort of people came for something else;
 And when a man has paid for his evening
 He expects a good show in return.
 So if you cover up your bosom and thighs like you had a
 rash
 Don't be surprised to see them yawning.

So I told my art-loving sister Annie:
 'Leave your pride to those who can well afford it.
 Do what you are asked to do and not what you want
 For that isn't what is wanted.'
 Oh but
 I had
 Trouble, I can tell you
 With her
 Fancy
 Pig-headed notions.
 Many
 Nights I
 Sat by her bedside
 Holding her hand and saying this:

'Think of our home in Louisiana.'

FAMILY:

O Lord, look down upon our daughter
 Show her the way that leads the Good to Thy reward.
 Who fights the Good Fight and all Self subdues
 Wins the Palm, gains the Crown.

We're at a standstill! What she's been sending
 It's not any money a man can build a home with.
 She's as giddy as a cyclone!
 All the profits go for her pleasure!
 And we're at a standstill, for what she's been sending
 Is not any money a man can build a home with.
 Won't she settle down to business?
 Won't she ever learn to save something?
 For what the featherbrain is sending
 Is not any kind of money
 A man can build a little home with.

3

Wrath

A film is being made in which Annie is an extra. The star, a Douglas Fairbanks type, rides his horse over a basket of flowers. The horse is clumsy, so he beats it. It falls and is unable to get up despite the blanket they put beneath it and the sugar they put before it. So he beats it again. But at that point the little extra steps forward, takes the whip from his hand and, in her wrath, beats him instead. She is promptly dismissed. However, her sister rounds on her and per-

suades her to come back, go on bended knee to the star and kiss his hand; upon which he once again recommends her to the director.

ANNIE I:

We're making progress. We have come to Los Angeles
 And every door is open here to welcome extras.
 We only need a bit of practice avoiding possible faux pas
 And what can stop us going straight to the top then?

FAMILY:

O Lord, look down upon our daughter
 Show her the way that leads the Good to Thy reward.

ANNIE I:

If you take offence at Injustice
 Mister Big will show he's offended;
 If a curse or a blow can enrage you so
 Your usefulness here is ended.

Then mind what the Good Book tells us
 When it says: 'Resist not Evil.'
 Unforgiving Anger
 Is from the Devil.

It took time to teach my sister wrath wouldn't do
 In Los Angeles the third big town we came to
 Where her open disapproval of injustice
 Was so widely disapproved.
 I forever told her: 'Practise self-control, Annie
 For you know how much it costs you if you don't.'
 And she saw my point and answered:

ANNIE II:

Yes I know, Annie.

4

Gluttony

Annie has herself become a star. Having signed a contract forbidding her to put on weight, she must not eat. One day she steals an apple and furtively eats it; and when she is weighed and found to weigh one gramme more, the impresario tears his hair out. From then on her eating is supervised by her sister. Two flunkeys with revolvers serve her food, and all she is allowed to take from the dish is a little miniature bottle.

FAMILY:

We've gotten word from Philadelphia:

Annie's doing well, she's making money.

Her contract has been signed to do a solo turn.

It forbids her ever eating when or what she likes to eat.

Those are hard terms for little Annie:

Who has always been very greedy.

Oh if only she doesn't break her contract –

There's no market for hippos in Philadelphia.

Every single day they weigh her.

Gaining half an ounce means trouble.

They have principles to stand by:

It's a hundred-and-eighteen that you were signed for –

Only for the weight agreed we pay!

Gaining half an ounce means trouble

More than that would mean disaster!

But our Annie isn't all that stupid

And she knows a contract is a contract

So she'll reason: After all

You still can eat like little Annie
 In Louisiana –
 Crabmeat! Porkchops! Sweet-corn! Chicken!
 And those golden biscuits spread with honey!
 Spare your home in old Louisiana!
 Think! – It's growing! More and more it needs you!
 Therefore curb your craving! Gluttons will be punished!

5

Lust

Annie now has an admirer who is extremely rich, loves her and brings her jewels and clothes; likewise a lover whom she in turn loves and who takes the jewels off her. Annie I reproaches her and persuades her to leave Fernando and be faithful to Edward. But one day Annie II passes a café where Annie I is sitting with Fernando, who is paying court to her (though to no effect). Thereupon Annie II assaults Annie I and they roll about in the street wrestling under the eyes of Fernando and his friends, together with a horde of street children and bystanders. The children point out her valuable bottom, and Edward runs away in horror. Then Annie I reproaches her sister and, after a touching parting from Fernando, sends her back to Edward.

ANNIE I:

Then we met a wealthy man in Boston
 And he paid her a lot because he loved her.
 But I had to keep a watch on Annie
 Who was too loving, and she loved another;
 And she paid him a lot
 Because she loved him.

So I said: 'Cheat the man who protects you
 And you've lost half your value then:
 He may pay once although he suspects you
 But he won't pay time and time again.

You can have your fun with money
 When you've no provider you must face;
 But for girls like us, it's not funny
 If we ever even once forget our place.'

'Don't try to sit between two stools,' I told her.
 Then I went to visit her friend
 And said: 'If you're kind, you won't hold her,
 For this love will be your sweetheart's bitter end.'

Girls can have their fun with money
 When the money is their own to give;
 But for girls like us, it's not funny
 If we even once forget the way we live.'

Then I'd meet him as bad luck would have it.
 There was nothing going on. Naturally!
 Until Annie found out and, worse luck
 Blamed the whole affair on me.

FAMILY:

O Lord, look down upon our daughter
 Show her the way that leads the Good to Thy reward
 Incline her heart to observe all Thy commandments
 That her works on earth may prosper.

ANNIE I:

Now she shows off her little round white fanny
 Worth twice a little Texas Motel
 And for nothing the poolroom can stare at Annie

As though she'd nothing to sell.
 That's why most girls don't get rich, for
 They go wrong when they forget their place:
 You're not free to buy what you itch for
 When you've got a good provider you must face.

FAMILY:

Who fights the Good Fight and all Self subdues
 Will gain her renown.

ANNIE I:

It wasn't easy putting *that* in order:
 Saying good-bye to young Fernando
 Then back to Edward to apologise
 Then the endless nights I heard my sister
 Sobbing like a baby and repeating;

ANNIE II:

It's right like this, Annie, but so hard!

6

Avarice

Shortly afterwards Edward shoots himself, having been ruined by Annie. Then the newspapers print flattering reports about her, with the effect that the readers doff their hats to her respectfully and immediately follow her, newspaper in hand, in the hope of being ruined too. Soon after that another young man flings himself out of a window after Annie has left him penniless; then her sister intervenes and saves yet another one from hanging himself, by taking his money back from Annie II and returning it to him. She does this because

people are starting to shun her sister, who has got a bad name on account of her avarice.

FAMILY:

Annie, so the paper says
 Is now set up in Baltimore:
 Lots of folk seem to be
 Shooting themselves for her.
 She must be doing all right
 And raking it in,
 To get in the news like that!
 Well, so far, so good; to be talked about helps
 A young girl up the ladder.
 Let her beware of overdoing it!
 Folk shy away from a girl
 Who's said to be mean.

Folk give a wide wide berth
 To those who grab all they can get
 Point unfriendly fingers at
 One whose greed goes beyond all bounds.
 In the measure you give
 You will surely be given
 And as you do, so
 Will you be done by:
 Fair is fair.
 All must keep this law.

We sincerely hope our smart little Annie
 Also has common sense
 And will let them keep a shirt or two
 When she lets them go for good.

Shameless hoarders earn themselves a bad name.

7

Envy

Once again we see Annie traversing the big city and glimpsing other Annies as she goes – all the other dancers being masked to look like Annie – who indulge in idleness etc. etc., thereby committing with impunity all those deadly sins that have been forbidden her. A ballet represents the theme THE LAST SHALL BE FIRST thus: As the other Annies proudly walk around in the light, Annie II laboriously drags herself in, bent double. But then her apotheosis begins and she walks with increasing pride, finally triumphing as the other Annies crumple, abashed, and are forced to make way for her.

ANNIE:

And the last big town we came to was San Francisco.
 Life, there, was fine, only Annie felt so tired
 And grew envious of others:
 Of those who pass the time at their ease and in comfort
 Those too proud to be bought –
 Of those whose wrath is kindled by injustice
 Those who act upon their impulses happily
 Lovers true to their loved ones
 And those who take what they need without shame.
 Whereupon I told my poor tired sister
 When I saw how much she envied them:

‘Sister, from birth we may write our own story
 And anything we choose we are permitted to do
 But the proud and insolent who strut in their glory –
 Little they guess
 Little they guess
 Little they guess the fate they’re swaggering to.

'Sister, be strong! You must learn to say No to
 The joys of this world, for this world is a snare;
 Only the fools in this world will let go, who
 Don't care a damn
 Don't care a damn –
 Don't-care-a-damn will be made to care.

'Don't let the flesh and its longings get you.
 Remember the price that a lover must pay
 And say to yourself when temptations beset you –
 What is the use?
 What is the use?
 Beauty will perish and youth pass away.

'Sister, you know, when our life here is over
 Those who were good go to bliss unalloyed
 Those who were bad are rejected forever
 Gnashing their teeth
 Gnashing their teeth
 Gnashing their teeth in a gibbering void!

FAMILY:

Who fights the Good Fight and all Self subdues
 Wins the Palm, gains the Crown.

Epilogue

ANNIE I:

Now we're coming back to you, Louisiana
Where the moon on the Mississippi is a-shining ever.
Seven years we've been away in the big towns
Where one goes to make money;
And now our fortune's made, and now you're there
Little home in old Louisiana.
We're coming back to you
Out little home down by
The Mississippi in
Louisiana. . . .
Right, Annie.

ANNIE II:

Right, Annie.