

GIANNI SCHICCHI

Giacomo Puccini

The scene is the richly decorated bedchamber of Buoso Donati, a wealthy aristocrat of Florence who has just died. The time is 9 o'clock in the morning of September 1, 1299. Eight of Buoso's distant relatives are kneeling in fervent prayer at his bedside: his old cousin Simone; another elderly cousin Zita; his shabby brother-in-law Betto of Signa; Simone's son and daughter-in-law Marco and La Ciesca; Zita's nephew Rinuccio; and Buoso's nephew Gherardo with his wife Nella. Gherardino, the 7-year-old son of Gherardo and Nella is intent on playing marbles. Their ostentatious prayers and sobs of commiseration for poor Buoso are interrupted by the crash of a chair knocked over by Gherardino, and the other relatives use this excuse to shush Betto, the poor relation from Signa, who they feel is overdoing it. As the relatives vie in their displays of grief for the departed, a whispered tale begins to make its way from one incredulous relative to the other, that it is rumored in Signa... Zita, the old woman, demands loudly to know what is being said in Signa, and Betto repeats the rumor that Buoso Donati has left everything to the friars of a monastery. At this, the relatives become quite alarmed, and turn to old Simone, the podestà of Fucecchio, for advice. After some thought, Simone tells them that if the will is in the hands of a lawyer, there is nothing that can be done, but that if the will is still in Buoso's house, there might be hope.

There now ensues a frantic search in which the entire bedchamber is turned inside out. Rinuccio exclaims that his hopes for the future with his beloved Lauretta depend on his uncle's will. First one relative, then another, cries out as they think they have found the will, only to be immediately disappointed. Betto profits from the general confusion to steal a silver tray, seal, and scissors which he secretes in his shabby coat. At last Rinuccio, having climbed a ladder to reach the very top drawer of a chest and pry it open, triumphantly announces that he has found the will of Buoso Donati. Reminding his aunt that they will all now be immensely wealthy, he asks her to consent to his marriage to Lauretta on the first of May; the other relatives are impatient, but he is insistent, and Zita gruffly replies that if all turns out as they hope, he may marry whomever he pleases. He hands her the will and then takes young Gherardino aside: he sends the child to run fetch Gianni Schicchi and his daughter Lauretta to come to his assistance. Meanwhile, Zita, searching in vain for the silver scissors that Betto stole, finally tears open the parchment roll containing the will with her fingers. The relatives begin to read the will. It commences with a few token gifts to Buoso's cousins, for which all loudly praise and commend Buoso's memory. But they have not yet got to the main part of the inheritance: Buoso's house in Florence, the mills of Signa, and his prize mule. As they go on reading the will silently, mouthing the words, their faces gradually assume a more concerned, then shocked, then a genuinely tragical expression. Zita drops into a chair, letting the will fall to the floor. They remain for a moment in a state of shock.

Simone is the first to move; seeing the three candles, he blows them out. He lowers the bed curtains completely and snuffs out the the other candles. Slowly, the other relatives move toward different chairs and sit down. There they stay, like graven images, eyes wide open and staring straight ahead. "So it was true", Simone suddenly exclaims, with stifled rage, "we will see the friars fattening themselves on the wealth of the Donati's!" The other relatives furiously chime in that the friars will feast while they go hungry. Betto must continue to drink beer of Signa while the friars enjoy fine wines. Rinuccio's hopes of happiness are to be dashed for the holy works of Santa Reparata. Gradually their fury mounts. They rise from their chairs, frantically moving about the room, cursing, and breaking into fits of sardonic laughter that explode like the cries of the damned. They feverishly describe the imagined feasting and mocking of the friars. At last, their frenzy having reached a climax, they slowly sink down exhausted. Some of them are now

weeping. "Who would have thought that when Buoso went to the cemetery we would be crying real tears?" comments Zita bitterly. Then a thought begins to take hold: if only it were possible, to suppress the will, to forge one... They turn to Simone, the oldest, who was once podestà of Fucecchio, for advice, but he gestures that it is hopeless.

"There is only one person who can advise us, perhaps save us," exclaims Rinuccio. "Who?" cry the relatives. "Gianni Schicchi!" At this they all express their disillusion. Zita furiously tells Rinuccio never to speak to her again of Gianni Schicchi or his daughter. Just then Gherardino runs in, out of breath, announcing that he is coming. "Who?" they all ask. "Gianni Schicchi!" The relatives grumble that this is a fine time for him to show up, and Gherardo takes Gherardino, spansks him, and throws him into the upstairs room. Zita and Simone berate Rinuccio for even contemplating marriage between a Donati and the daughter of a peasant, an immigrant from the countryside; Zita will have nothing further to do with him. At this, Rinuccio tells them they are mistaken, that Schicchi is clever and cunning, that he knows all the laws and all the tricks, that he can solve any problem. What does it matter if he came from the country? Enough of this petty pride! Florence is like a flowering tree ("Firenze è come un albero fiorito"), gathering its strength and splendor from roots that spread far. The sweet song of the great Arno in the Piazza Santa Croce draws all the streams together. So are the arts and sciences of splendid Florence enriched: Arnolfo came from the Val'd'Elsa to build his beautiful tower; Giotto from the woods of Mugel, and the adventurous Medicis! Enough of petty spite and malice; long live the new folk and Gianni Schicchi! Rinuccio's stirring paean, set in the form of a stornello, a traditional Tuscan song, falls on deaf ears.

A knock is heard: Rinuccio opens the door, and Gianni Schicchi enters, followed by Lauretta. Gianni stops on the threshold and looks marvelingly on the desolate faces of the relatives. "What a picture of sorrow," he remarks, as Lauretta and Rinuccio begin to whisper to each other. Gianni slowly advances into the bedchamber and sees the candelabras around the bed. Evidently Buoso is departed; but why such weeping? The relatives are over-acting. In a voice of mock solemnity he starts to console them. After all, there is always some good to be found in anything: they have lost Buoso, but there is the inheritance... "Sure! for the Friars!" says Zita, scornfully telling him that it is none of his business and he can take his daughter and get out, that she will not give her nephew to someone without a dowry. Rinuccio and Lauretta start to plead; Gianni remonstrates with Lauretta for having no pride. He taunts the old woman for sacrificing his daughter and her nephew for a dowry. A scene ensues among the four, Gianni and Zita trying to drag Lauretta and Rinuccio, respectively, apart, while the other relatives begin grumbling that they should stop quarrelling and think about the will. Gianni is just pulling Lauretta to the door when Rinuccio stops him, begging him to help them out with the will. Gianni angrily points to the relatives: "To help these people? Never! Never! Never!"

At this point Lauretta sinks to her knees and begins to wheedle her father in a celebrated and highly artificial arietta ("Oh! mio babbino caro"). She desperately wants to marry Rinuccio, and if their love is in vain she will throw herself off the Ponte Vecchio into the Arno. She is tormented, and only wants to die. Weeping, she begs her daddy to have pity on her.

Resignedly, Gianni asks Rinuccio for the will. As he is absorbed in reading it he paces back and forth, and the relatives follow him, first with their gazes, then unconsciously pacing behind him. Simone, however, remains seated, shaking his head incredulously. Suddenly Schicchi stops and announces that nothing can be done. The relatives turn away, but Lauretta and Rinuccio begin to bid a sad (and loud) farewell to their hopes. At this, Gianni begins once more to pace about scrutinizing the will. Again he says that nothing can be done, the relatives sit down disgusted, and

Rinuccio and Lauretta repeat their farewells. Suddenly Gianni thunders out "However...!" The relatives jump to their feet and the two lovers change their tune: perhaps they will still be married in May! The relatives crowd round Gianni with great anxiety, as he stands still in the center of the room, motioning them to be quiet and gazing straight ahead. Gradually he begins to smile triumphantly. Ignoring the relatives, who can hardly stand the suspense, he tells his daughter, in a child-like voice, to go out on the terrace and feed the little bird- alone, he adds, preventing Rinuccio from following her.

As soon as Lauretta has gone out, Gianni turns to the relatives. Does anyone outside the room know that Buoso has died? he asks the relatives. No one, they answer, and he warns them that no one is to be told. Suddenly seized by a doubt he asks about the servants, but Zita assures him that no one has entered the room since the onset of the final illness. Gianni then tells Marco and Gherardo to remove the body to the adjoining room. Simone, Betto, and Rinuccio are instructed to hide the candelabras, and the hesitant women are ordered to remake the bed. Suddenly there is a knock at the door and all stop, startled. Zita says to Gianni that it is Master Spinelloccio the doctor. Gianni tells the relatives to keep the doctor from entering, to tell him that Buoso is better and is resting. The relatives crowd round the door, letting it open only a crack. Gianni hides himself behind a curtain on the opposite side of the room, and Betto closes the window shutters. In a nasal voice and a Bolognese accent, the doctor asks to be admitted. The relatives greet him and assure him that Buoso is better. The doctor asks if he has had his enema, and is assured. Delighted, he moves to see the patient, but is prevented by the relatives, who tell him that Buoso is resting. Suddenly Gianni speaks to the doctor in a trembling imitation of Buoso Donati. At the sound of his voice the relatives start with fright, but soon understand that it is Gianni imitating the dead man. In his fright, however, Betto has dropped the silver tray. The old woman picks it up and puts it back on the table, glaring menacingly at Betto. Gianni continues to assure the doctor that he is feeling better and wishes to rest: he feels like he has been resurrected. Pleased, the doctor comments that even his voice sounds better. Boasting that his patients never die, the doctor is gradually forced out the door by the relatives. The relatives close the door and turn to Gianni who comes out from behind the curtains. Betto opens the shutters and the room is again lit. In his own voice, Gianni asks the relatives if he sounded just like Buoso, and they assure him that he did. Victory! he exclaims, and then to the relatives, who still don't understand, what dunces!

Hurriedly, Gianni describes his plan to the relatives: they will call a notary, telling him that Buoso Donati is dying and wants to draw up a will. When the notary comes, the room will be dimly lighted, and the figure of Buoso Donati will be dimly seen in the bed, almost completely covered by nightcap, kerchief, only his nose (which Schicchi's resembles) being visible. Gianni will lie in bed, imitating Buoso's voice, and dictate a new will. What a tremendous prank! he exclaims, as, choked with emotion, the relatives crowd around him, kissing his hands and his garments, wildly calling out to him and to each other in a sudden love-feast. Gianni sends Rinuccio for the notary as the relatives continue to kiss and hug each other with great effusion.

Simone asks Gianni how the estate is to be divided- the money, for example. "In equal portions!" shout the other relatives, as Gianni nods in agreement. Now the relatives begin to make special requests for the various country properties: those in Fucecchio to Simone, of course, for Zita the ones in Figliini, those in Prato to Betto, the lands of Empoli to Gherardo and Nella, and those of Quintole to Marco and La Ciesca. But there still remain the choicest properties: the mule, Buoso's house, and the mills of Signa. Artlessly, Simone suggests that as he is the oldest and the podestà of Fucecchio, they should fall to him, but the others shout him down, loudly insisting on their own claims as Gianni Schicchi mockingly recalls their short-lived familial love.

The pandemonium is suddenly interrupted by the tolling of a funeral bell. The relatives are shocked: How did anyone know that Buoso is dead? Gherardo rushes downstairs. At this moment of crisis, Lauretta steps in from the terrace to tell Gianni that the little bird wants nothing more to eat. Testily, Gianni orders her to offer it something to drink, and she dutifully goes out again. Gherardo returns, panting and out of breath, and tries to motion that there is no cause for alarm. Recovering his breath, he tells them that an accident befell the blackamoor of the lord captain, and the others cheerfully recite a requiescat in pace.

With an air of authority, Simone suggests that the division of the prizes be left to the justice and honesty of Schicchi, and the relatives agree with alacrity. Gianni agrees, and asks for the nightclothes. The women go to the wardrobe and bring out a night-cap, a nightgown, and a lace kerchief for Gianni Schicchi to put on. The relatives' reasons for their ready agreement now become apparent, as first one and then another slyly approaches Gianni Schicchi to offer him ever greater bribes if he will leave them the mule, the house, and the mills of Signa. Gianni quietly tells each one not to worry, and each moves off delightedly to savor their triumph, gleefully rubbing their hands. Meanwhile, Gianni has managed to put on the night clothes and stands making faces and admiring himself in a mirror. The three women gather round him and admire him comically, singing a delightfully seductive trio. Simone remains at the window, watching for the arrival of the notary. Gherardo clears a writing table, while Marco and Betto draw the bedcurtains and tidy up the room. Finally, the relatives push Gianni toward the bed, but he stops them with a solemn gesture.

“First, a warning! You know the proclamation?” he says. Anyone who substitutes names in wills and bequests is to be punished by having their hand chopped off, and then exiled. This applies to accomplices as well. “Think well, if we should be discovered,” he warns the relatives. Pointing to Arnolfo's Tower which can be seen behind the terrace, he begins to sing a haunting little tune: “Farewell, Florence, I wave farewell with this stump, I will wander as a Ghibelline.” He raises his handless arm as he sings, and all the relatives, looking out the window at Florence and blanching, repeat the song exactly. Then a knock at the door is heard, Gianni jumps into the bed, the relatives hastily help arrange him, draw the shutters to darken the room, place a candle by the table where the lawyer will write, and finally open the door. Rinuccio enters, announcing the Master Amantio, the notary, who is accompanied by Pinellino, the cobbler, and Guccio, the dyer. In an affected voice, Gianni Schicchi greets them, and they are much moved. The notary takes parchment and seals from his bag and places them on the table. He seats himself while the two witnesses remain standing at his side.

Gianni Schicchi excuses himself for being unable to write the will himself, pleading paralysis. He raises his trembling hands and the relatives make a show of pity. The notary swears the witnesses, then inquires about the relatives, but Gianni Schicchi assures him that they may remain. The notary then begins to read the Latin preamble to the will, mumbling rapidly so that only his own name and that of Buoso Donati can be heard clearly. Gianni Schicchi continues in Latin, formally revoking any previous testament, and the relatives applaud his forethought. The notary discreetly inquires as to the presumably splendid funeral arrangements, but Gianni says that he wants them to spend no more than two florins, and the dying man's humility is again applauded by the relatives. He bequeaths to the little friars of Santa Reparata (at this the relatives rise up terrified)- five lire. The relatives sit down again, breathe easy, and praise his devout beneficence, but the notary again discreetly inquires as to whether that might be too little. Gianni replies that if he should leave a great deal to the church he would seem to be making amends for having stolen his wealth, and again the relatives commend his wisdom and sagacity. He then

divides Buoso's gold equally among the relatives, and as requested he bequeaths the properties at Fucecchio to Simone, those at Figlini to Zita, etc., and is dutifully thanked.

“Now we come to the mule, the house, and the mills,” the relatives murmur through their teeth. “I leave the mule, which cost 300 florins, and which is the best mule in Tuscany, to my devoted friend Gianni Schicchi!” At this, the relatives jump up in disbelief, but Rinuccio now steals away to rejoin Lauretta on the terrace. As the notary calmly transcribes this last bequest into Latin, the relatives begin to remonstrate. “Of what use is this mule to Gianni Schicchi?” Simone asks, but the pretended Buoso reassures them that he knows what Gianni Schicchi desires. The relatives grumblingly berate him. In like manner Gianni Schicchi wills himself the house in Florence, and the relatives cannot contain their fury, crying out against the scoundrel Gianni Schicchi, but Schicchi begins again to sing his exile's farewell to Florence. At this sharp reminder of their legal situation the relatives are subdued. The notary reprimands them for interfering, and Gianni Schicchi takes the opportunity to affirm the soundness of his mind and the firmness of his intentions. At last he leaves the the mills of Signa, between snatches of his farewell to Florence, to his devoted friend, amid cries of helpless protest from the relatives, Gianni Schicchi, and with a significant gesture of his arm announces that the will is final.

Gianni Schicchi now asks Zita to give twenty florins to the witnesses and a hundred to the notary. The notary approaches the bed to thank him, but he is waved away with a gesture of Gianni's trembling hand. Slowly and with great show of sorrow and emotion the notary and the witnesses depart. The moment they are out the door, the relatives turn on Gianni Schicchi with repressed fury, screaming that he is a thief and a scoundrel. He tries to defend himself as they tear the nightshirt from him. Jumping out of the bed, Gianni seizes Buoso's stick, raining blows on the relatives, who meanwhile run around the room, looting and stealing all that they can lay their hands on- linens, silver, furnishings. Gianni chases the relatives out of what is now his house, trying to recover some of the loot as they make their way toward the door, loaded down with as much as they can carry. Gianni runs out after them, still brandishing the stick. From outside, the relatives cries of “Thief, traitor, villain!” and Gianni's shouts of “Out! Out!” continue to resound in the distance.

The windows on the terrace now open, revealing Florence bathed in sunshine, behind the two lovers who stand embracing. Lauretta and Rinuccio sing of the beauty of golden Florence, of their first kiss, where they pledged their love, and how Florence appeared as Paradise. They embrace. Gianni Schicchi now returns to the bedchamber, laden with the recovered furnishings which he dumps on the floor. Suddenly seeing the two lovers, he is moved. He smiles, takes off his hat, and turns to address the audience in a spoken epilogue:

“Tell me, gentlemen, if Buoso's wealth could have gone to better ends than this? For this prank, I have been condemned to the Inferno, and so be it; but with all due respect to the great father Dante, if you have been amused, grant me extenuating circumstances! “
He makes a motion of applause and bows to the audience.