

CLEVER LITTLE CAN

by Alisha Cherian

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Tac, a money lender

Can, a little boy

Can's Mother

Can's Father

Judge

Lawyer

SCENE 1

In front of Can's home, a small hut in a village. At stage left, Can is seated on the ground, playing with marbles by himself. Tac walks in from stage right and talks to the audience.

Tac: Ho, what a wonderful day! The sun is shining, the birds are chirping, and people all over town owe me lots and lots of money! It's good to be me! You see, I loan people money and they pay me back later...with interest, of course! That's what always gets them, the interest! (*mimicking eager costumers*) "Oh thank you, sir! 50 gold coins? So generous, sir!" What they don't realise is by the time they're able to scrounge up enough to pay me back, they owe me twice that amount! (*mimicking panicky costumers*) "Oh sir, 100 gold coins? Please, give me more time, sir!" That's how I became the wealthiest man in town. In fact, I'm off right now to collect some money from a costumer.

Tac crosses to stage left where Can is sitting, playing with marbles. Tac waits for Can to acknowledge his presence, but Can ignores him. Tac clears his throat, and Can looks up, sees who it is, and goes back to his marbles.

Tac: (*losing patience*) Don't you know who I am, boy?

Can: No, sir, not really.

Tac: I am Tac.

Can: (*jumping up*) Ah, I am Can. It's nice to meet you.

Tac: You mustn't have heard me properly. I'm Tac, the debt collector, the richest man in town.

Can: Oh sorry, sir, you mustn't have heard me properly either. I said it's nice to meet you.

Tac: Just go fetch your parents!

Can: They aren't home, sir.

Tac: Well, where are they? I've come to collect the money they owe me.

Can: Sorry, sir, you'll have to come back later. They're out. My father is cutting down live trees and planting dead ones. As for my mother, she's selling the wind to buy the moon.

Tac: What nonsense! How dare you speak to me that way? Such cheek!

Can: No, sir, I swear to you that's what they are doing.

Tac: Prove it!

Can: If I can prove to you that really is what they're doing, will you erase all my parents' debt?

Tac: *(Considers it, then chuckles.)* Ok.

Can: Do you promise?

Tac: I promise!

Can: How do I know you'll keep your promise?

Tac: This fly here will be our witness. *(Points to a fly on the wall of Can's hut.)* I promise. I promise!

Can: My father is cutting down bamboo shoots to make a fence for our neighbor — he's cutting live trees to plant dead ones. As for my mother, she's selling the fans she makes to buy oil for the night lamps — she's selling the wind for the moon!

Tac: You're wasting my time! I'll come back tomorrow.

Tac exits offstage right.

SCENE 2

The next day, Can and his parents are talking downstage left, in front of their home.

Can: And I said, "She's selling the fans she makes to buy oil for the night lamps".

Mother: And he really promised he would let all our debt go?

Can: He did! He did! He swore it to me thrice!

Father: Oh, you are a brilliant little boy!

Mother: Here he comes! Here he comes!

Tac walks in from stage right, as jolly as the first time. Father goes to meet him center stage. Mother and Can stay in front of their hut.

Father: *(Running to Tac and hugging him)* Good morning, kind Tac!

Tac: *(To audience.)* That's a first! *(Shrugging father off.)* Good morning.

Father: *(Grabbing Tac's hand and shaking it vigorously.)* And, what a lovely morning it is!

Tac: *(Snatching away his hand, obviously confused.)* Yes, it is. So, about the money you owe me...

Father waits excitedly, ready to hear that the debt has been cancelled thanks to Can's quick thinking.

Father: Yes...

Tac: Well, where is it?

Father: What? But, my son said you would erase all our debt.

Tac: Huh?!? Why would I do such a thing?

Father: Because, he's a clever little boy and you promised him that if he could explain that I was cutting live trees and planting dead ones, and that his mother was selling the wind to buy the moon, you would let our debt go.

Tac: *(Aside)* That stupid brat told them! *(To Father)* I did nothing of the sort! I simply asked your son out of curiosity to explain himself. The naughty little boy must have misunderstood me.

Father: Hmm, I see. Well, it won't take a moment to sort out. Can!

Can runs to Father. Mother follows behind him.

Can: Yes, father?

Father: Can, are you sure Mr Tac here promised to erase our debt if you could explain yourself correctly?

Can: Yes, father, yes, he did.

Tac: I did not! This is unbelievable!

Can: But, you did, sir. You promised me thrice!

Tac: And, are there any witnesses to this promise?

Can: Yes, sir, don't you remember? The fly! You said the fly would be our witness.

Tac: What an imagination the boy has! A fly as a witness? He's one good storyteller, that boy of yours. Now, run along and play. Let the grown-ups do their business.

Father: Wait! *(Bending down to speak with Can.)* Can, this is very important. Have you been lying to me?

Can: No, father, I am telling the truth.

Father: I believe my son. He wouldn't lie to me.

Tac: This is ridiculous! Fine, we'll settle the matter in court.

SCENE 3

In the village courthouse. Can and his parents are seated at stage left. Judge enters and sits upstage center. Lawyer and Tac enter from stage right. They stand together.

Lawyer: So, you see, your Honour, my client is being denied money that is rightfully his. This is the contract that Mr Ninh signed last year, agreeing to pay my client back the money in installments. Let the records show that my client was kind enough to let this last date, right over here, yesterday's date, slide and come collect his money the next day, today, even at the great inconvenience of undertaking the journey clear across town all over again. And, how is my client's generosity repaid? He was wrongfully accused of coming into a verbal agreement with that little boy! Whether it was the boy's active imagination or plain mischief, your Honour, my client should not be the one to suffer for bad parenting.

Mother: *(Leaping up angrily)* Excuse me!

Judge: Ma'am, please stay seated during the trial.

Lawyer: I rest my case.

Judge: And, who shall be representing the defense?

Father: Sir, we are poor people. We can't afford to hire some fancy lawyer.

Mother: But, our son is a very clever little boy. And, he can tell you an honest and fair account of what happened.

Judge: Ok, little boy, what is your name?

Can: I am Can, your Honour.

Judge: And, can you please tell us what happened, Can?

Can: Certainly, your Honour. Mr Tac promised me that if I could explain myself properly, he would erase my parents' debt to him.

Judge: And, why did you have to explain yourself?

Can: Well, when he asked where my parents were, I said that my father was cutting down live trees to plant dead ones and my mother was selling the wind to buy the moon. My father was cutting down bamboo shoots to make a fence for our neighbor — cutting live trees to plant dead ones. As for my mother, she was selling the fans she makes to buy oil for the night lamps — selling the wind for the moon!

Judge: *(With a chuckle.)* You are a clever little boy, as your mother said. But, are you sure Mr Tac made you this promise?

Can: Oh, I am certain! I made him repeat the promise three times!

Judge: And, were there any witnesses?

Can: Yes, your Honour, there was this fly...

Lawyer: Objection, your Honour! The boy is making a mockery of this court! A fly as a witness? How absurd! Ridiculous!

Tac: Yes, your Honour, there was no fly!

Lawyer: Your Honour, my client states that this fly does not even exist!

Can: Please, your Honour, I can explain, just let me explain.

Judge: Objection overruled. Continue, Can.

Can: So, there was this fly that was sitting on Mr Tac's nose...

Tac: Aha! There, he's lying! The fly wasn't on my nose! It was on the wall!

Judge: Sorry, where was the fly, Mr Tac?

Tac: The fly was on the wall, not on my nose!

Judge: So, you're saying that the fly was on the wall and not on your nose?

Tac: Yes, your Honour, the fly was definitely on the wall and not on my nose!

Can: So you admit, there was a fly, Mr Tac?

Tac: (*Realising he had been tricked.*) Wait! Um...No! I just said...

Judge: I rule in favor of the defense! Let the records show that their debt to Mr Tac shall be fully erased!

Mother: Oh, thank you, your Honour!

Judge: That is a very special little boy of yours.

Father: Yes, yes, he is!

THE END

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