He was a strange one to come to the shop and ask Mr. Sasaki for a job, but at the time I kept my mouth shut. There was something about this young man's appearance which didn't seem to go with a job as a clerk in a flower shop. I was a delivery boy for Mr. Sasaki then. I had seen clerks come and go, and although they were very different in style and personality, all of them developed the technique of waiting on customers. You could never tell about a new clerk, however. Anyhow we were glad to have the extra help because the busy season was coming round.

Mr. Sasaki probably remembered last year's rush when Tommy, Mr. Sasaki, and I had to do everything and had too many different things to do at one time. He wanted to be ready this time.

"Another clerk and we'll be all set for any kind of business," Mr. Sasaki used to tell us. So when Teruo came around looking for a job, he got it, and Morning Glory Flower Shop

Meet the Author
Toshio Mori (1910-1980) has written hundreds of stories, most of which reflect his background and experiences as a Japanese American. Mori grew up in San Leandro, California, where for many years he worked in a flower shop owned by his brother. That provided the inspiration for "Say It with Flowers." The story was published in his first collection, Yokohama, California, which deals with life in San Leandro and Oakland.
was all set for the year as far as our boss was concerned.

When Teruo reported for work the following morning, Mr. Sasaki introduced him to Tommy. Tommy had been our number one clerk for a long time.

"Teru, teach him all you can," Mr. Sasaki said. "Teruo's going to be with us from now on."

"Sure," Tommy said.

"Teruo's a good florist. You watch and listen to him," the boss told the young man.

"All right, Mr. Sasaki," the young man said. He turned to us and said, "My name is Teruo." We shook hands.

We got to know one another pretty well after that. He was a quiet fellow with very little words for anybody, but his smile charmed a person. We soon learned that he knew nothing about the florist business. He could identify a rose when he saw one, and gardenias and carnations too, but other flowers and garden- ing materials were new to him.

"You fellows teach me something about this business and I'll be grateful. I want to start from the bottom," Teruo said.

Tommy eagerly went about showing Teruo the florist trade. Every morning for several days Tommy went over the prices of the flowers with him. He told Teruo what to do on telephone orders, how to keep the greens and flowers fresh, and how to make bouquets. "You need a little more time to learn how to make a funeral display," Tommy said. "That'll come later."

In a couple of weeks Teruo was as good a clerk as we had had in a long time. He was eager to learn and was a very hard worker. It was about this time that our boss decided to take his yearly business trip to Seattle. He was satisfied with Teruo, and he knew we could get along without him for a while. He went off and left Tommy in charge.

During Mr. Sasaki's absence I was often in the shop helping Tommy and Teruo with the customers and the orders. One day he asked me, "How can you tell when a flower is fresh and when it's old? I can't tell one from the other. All I do is follow your instructions and sell the ones you tell me to sell first, but I can't tell one from the other."

I laughed. "You don't need to know that, Teruo," I told him. "When the customers ask you whether the flowers are fresh, just say firmly, 'Yes! Our flowers are always fresh!'"

Teruo picked up a vase of carnations.

"These flowers came in four or five days ago, didn't they?" he asked me.

"You're right. Five days ago," I said.

"How long will they last if a customer bought them today?" Teruo asked.

"I guess in this weather they'll keep a day or two," I said.

"Then they're old," Teruo almost gasped.

"Why, we have fresh ones that last a week or so in the shop."

"Sure, Teruo. But why should you worry about that?" Tommy said. "Just talk convincingly to the customers and they'll believe you. Are our flowers always fresh? You bet they are! They just came in a little while ago from the market!"

Teruo looked at us calmly. "That's a hard thing to say when you know it isn't true."

"You'll get used to it sooner or later," I told him. "Everybody has to do it. You too, unless you want to lose your job."

"I don't think I can say it convincingly again," Teruo said. "I must've said yes forty times already when I didn't know any better. It'll be harder next time."

"You've said it forty times already," said Tommy, "so why can't you say it forty million
times more? What's the difference? Remember, Teruo, it's your business to live."

"I don't like it," said Teruo.

"Do we like it? Do you think we're any different from you?" Tommy asked Teruo. "You're just a new kid. You don't know any better so I don't get sore, but you got to play the game when you're in it. You understand, don't you?"

Teruo nodded. For a moment he stood and looked curiously at us. Then he went away to water the plants.

In the following weeks we watched Teruo develop into a fine salesclerk, except for one thing. When a customer forgot to ask about the condition of the flowers Teruo did splendidly. But if someone asked about the freshness of the flowers, he would look uncomfortable and would sometimes sputter or would stand gaping speechlessly. Occasionally, looking embarrassed, he would take the customers to the fresh flowers in the rear of the store and complete the sales there.

"Don't do that anymore, Teruo," Tommy warned him one afternoon. "Don't sell the fresh flowers in the back when we got plenty of the old stuff in the front. We can't throw all that stuff away. First thing you know the boss'll start losing money and we'll all be thrown out."

"I wish I could sell like you," Teruo said. "But whenever they ask me, 'Is this fresh? How long will it keep?' I begin to forget about selling the stuff, and begin to think about the difference between the fresh flowers and the old ones. Then the trouble begins."

"Remember, the boss has to run the shop to make money so he can keep it going," Tommy told him. "When he returns next week you better not let him see you sell the fresh flowers in the back."

On the day Mr. Sasaki came back to the shop we saw something unusual. For the first time I watched Teruo sell some old stuff to a customer. I heard the man plainly ask him if the flowers were fresh, and very clearly I heard Teruo reply, "Yes, sir. These flowers are fresh." I looked at Tommy and he winked back. When Teruo came to the back to make it into a bouquet, he looked as if he had a snail in his mouth. When Teruo went up front to complete the sale, Mr. Sasaki looked at Tommy and nodded approvingly.

When I went out to the truck to make my last delivery of the day Teruo followed me.

"I feel rotten," he said to me. "Those flowers I sold to the people won't last longer than tomorrow. I feel lousy. I'm lousy. The people'll get to know my word is no good pretty soon."

"Forget it," I said. "Quit worrying. What's the matter with you?"

"I'm lousy," he said, and went back to the store.

Then early one morning it happened. While Teruo was selling the fresh flowers in the back to a customer, Mr. Sasaki came in quietly and watched the transaction. The boss didn't say anything at the time. All morning Teruo looked sick. He didn't know whether to explain to the boss or remain silent.

While Teruo was out to lunch Mr. Sasaki called us aside. "How long has this been going on?" he asked angrily.

"He's been doing it on and off. We told him to quit it," Tommy said. "He says he feels rotten selling old flowers."

"Old flowers!" snorted Mr. Sasaki. "I'll tell him plenty when he comes back. Old flowers! Maybe you can call them old at a roadside market, but they're not old in a flower shop."

"He feels guilty fooling the customers," Tommy explained.
The boss laughed impatiently. "That's no reason when you're in a business."

When Teruo came back he knew what was up. He looked at us for a moment and then went about cleaning the stems of the old flowers.

"Teruo," Mr. Sasaki called.

Teruo approached us as if readying himself for an attack.

"You've been selling fresh flowers and letting the old ones go to waste. I can't afford that, Teruo," Mr. Sasaki said. "Why don't you do as you're told? We all sell the flowers in the front. I tell you they're not old in a flower shop. Why can't you sell them?"

"I don't like it, Mr. Sasaki," Teruo said.

"When the people ask me if they're fresh I hate to answer. I feel rotten after selling the old ones."

"Look here Teruo," Mr. Sasaki said, "I don't want to fire you. You're a good worker, and I know you need a job, but you've got to be a good clerk here or you're going out. Do you get me?"

"I get you," Teruo said.

The following morning we were all at the shop early. I had an eight o'clock delivery, and the others had to rush with a big order. Teruo was there already.

"Hello," he greeted us cheerfully as we came in.

He was unusually high-spirited, and I couldn't account for it. He was finishing up the eight o'clock delivery for me. He was almost through with it, adding some ferns, when Tommy came in.

When Mr. Sasaki arrived, Teruo waved his hand and cheerfully went about gathering some more flowers for another order. As he moved here and there it seemed as if he had forgotten that the three of us were in the shop. He looked at each vase, sizing up the flowers. He did this with great deliberation, as if he were the boss and had the last word in the shop. When a customer came in, Teruo swiftly waited on him as if he owned all the flowers in the world. When the man asked Teruo if he was getting fresh flowers, Teruo instantly escorted the customer into the rear and eventually sold him the fresh ones. He did it with so much grace, dignity and swiftness that we stood around feeling like his foolish assistants. However, Mr. Sasaki went on with his work as if nothing had happened.

Around noon Teruo waited on his second customer. He almost ran to greet an elderly lady who wanted an inexpensive bouquet for a dinner table. This time he not only went back to the rear for the fresh flowers, but added three or four extra ones. Tommy and I watched Mr. Sasaki fuming.

When the customer left the shop Mr. Sasaki came out of his office, furious. "You're a blockhead. You have no business sense. What are you doing here?" he said to Teruo. "Are you crazy?"

Teruo looked cheerful. "I'm not crazy, Mr. Sasaki," he said. "And I'm not dumb. I just like to do it that way, that's all."

The boss turned to Tommy and me. "That boy's a fool," he said.

Teruo laughed and walked off to the front with a broom. Mr. Sasaki shook his head.

"What's the matter with him? I can't understand him," he said.

While the boss was out to lunch Teruo went on an amazing spree. He waited on three customers at one time, ignoring our presence. It was remarkable how he did it. He hurriedly took one customer's order and helped him write a card for it. He rushed to the second customer's side and persuaded
her to buy some roses which were the freshest of the lot. She wanted them delivered so he jotted the address in the sales book. Then he hurried to the third customer.

"I want to buy that orchid in the window," she stated without hesitation.

"Do you have to have an orchid?" Teruo asked the lady.

"No," she said. "But I want something nice for tonight's dance, and I think the orchid will match my dress. Why do you ask?"

"If I were you I wouldn't buy that orchid," he told her. "It won't last. I could sell it to you and make a profit but I don't want to do that and spoil your evening. Come to the back, please, and I'll show you some of the nicest gardenias. They're fresh today."

We watched him pick out three of the biggest gardenias and make them into a corsage. When the lady went out with her package, a little boy came in and said he wanted to buy some flowers which didn't cost too much for his mother's birthday. Teruo waited on the boy. We saw him pick out a dozen expensive roses and give them to the kid.

Tommy nudged me. "If he were the boss he couldn't do those things," he said.

"In the first place," I said, "I don't think he could be a boss."

"What do you think?" Tommy said. "Is he crazy? Is he trying to get himself fired?"

"I don't know," I said.

When Mr. Sasaki returned, Teruo was waiting on a young lady.

"Did Teruo eat yet?" Mr. Sasaki asked Tommy.

"No, he won't go out. He says he's not hungry today," said Tommy.

We watched Teruo talking to the young lady. Then Teruo went to the rear and picked out a dozen of the very freshest white roses and brought them out to the lady.

"Aren't they lovely?" we heard her say.

We watched him come back, take down a box, place the roses neatly inside, and then give her the package. We watched him thank her, and we noticed her smile and say thanks. The lady walked out.

Mr. Sasaki ran excitedly to the front.

"Teruo! She forgot to pay!"

Teruo stopped the boss from going out.

"Wait, Mr. Sasaki," he said. "I gave them to her."

"What!" the boss cried indignantly.

"She came in just to look around and see the flowers. She likes pretty roses."

"What's the matter with you?" the boss said. "Are you crazy? What did she buy?"

"Nothing, I tell you," Teruo said. "I gave them to her because she admired them, and I liked her."

"You're fired! Get out!" Mr. Sasaki sputtered. "Don't come back to the store again."

"And I gave her fresh ones too," Teruo said.

Mr. Sasaki pulled out several bills from his wallet. "Here's your wages for this week. Now, get out," he said.

"I don't want it," Teruo said. "You keep it and buy some more flowers."

"Here, take it. Get out," Mr. Sasaki said.

Teruo took the bills. Then he rang up a sale on the cash register and placed the bills in the drawer.

"All right, I'll go now. I feel fine. I'm happy. Thanks to you." He waved his hand to Mr. Sasaki. "No hard feelings."

On the way out Teruo remembered us. He looked back. "Good-bye. Good luck," he said cheerfully to Tommy and me.

He walked out of the shop with his shoulders straight, head high, and whistling. He did not come back to see us again.