

MR. MARTIN'S ORDEAL

By J. AQUILINA

Translated into English by F. WILLIAMS

CHARACTERS

MARTIN, *A Gozo farmer (who might equally be any typical Maltese farmer).*

MARIJA, *Martin's daughter, engaged to Karlu, previously working as a maid in Sliema.*

TEREŽA, *Martin's other daughter, engaged to Ġużepp, also previously working as a maid in Sliema.*

KARLU, *A carpenter, member of the Yellow Party.*

ĠUŽEPP, *A bar-owner, member of the Green Party.*

DOCTOR, *The village doctor, one of Ġużepp's friends.*

KARMNU, } *Friends of Ġużepp, two Green Party candidates.*
PAWLU, }

SCHOOLTEACHER, *The village schoolmaster, a friend of Karlu.*

TONI, *A policeman (on leave), Karlu's brother.*

WIĠI, *Another Yellow Party candidate.*

FREDU, *A friend of Karlu.*

KURUN, *The match-maker.*

The scene is the best room of a village house. It is furnished in the style of a village dining-room, i.e. the best room which is normally kept closed and is opened only when the house is blessed at Easter or when someone is put up for the night, such as the doctor or the parish priest. Enter two young girls in high spirits, dressed for a party, who are opening boxes that they take from two cupboards, one at each side of the stage.

MARIJA: People who go green with envy deserve to die of it.

TEREŽA: How cruel you are! Wouldn't a purge do just as well?

MARIJA [*venting her feelings on a petticoat which she is folding*]: Do you know what Dovina tal-Karett said to me? Do you know what she had the impertinence to say?

TEREŽA: What did she say to you?

MARIJA: She said 'Does your Karlu realise you've been in domestic service?'

TEREŽA: What a nerve! What was she getting at? Doesn't everyone go out

kol? Hi ma tagħzaqx ma' missierha, biċċa ta' bidwija li hi! Jew jid-
hriha li huma xi gabillotti hej, għax għandhom l-Għalqa tal-Mejjet
tagħhom u xi żewġ irziezet ... U hallejtha b'xejn?

MARIJA: Hallejtha b'xejn? Mela jiena xi darba hallejtha b'xejn lil xi hadd.
[*Terħi dak li jkollha f'idejha u b'idejha fuq qaddha qisha qed tirripeti
x-xena*] Dovin, għidtilha, jiena bint il-galantomi. Il-faqar mhux għajb.
Kulhadd jahdem biex igħix. U jiena minn għand is-sinjuri tgħallim
hafna edukazzjoni. Min jibqa' r-raħal jibqa' ta' wara l-muntanji bħalek!

TEREZA: Daqshekk biss? U ma qbadthiex qabda minn xagħarha?

MARIJA: Ma qbadthiex minn xagħarha għal Alla. Imma qbadtha minn idha.
Għeditilha: Iftaħ dik l-id! Beżgħet. Qaltli għalfejn? U int kemm hadd
għalik ... Għidtlek, iftaħha dik l-id! Fethiha. Għeditilha: Hares lejn
idek u lejn idi. Liema l-isbah minnhom? Int tifla ta' gabilott u idejk
kollha kallijiet tal-imgħażqa. Idi ma messet qatt ma' mgħażqa bħal
tiegħek. Biex ma nħarrax idejja s-sinjuri kienu jixtruli l-*hand cream*.
Idejja ta' sinjulina, tiegħek ta' bidwija! Għeditilha sewwa?

TEREZA: Imma daqshekk biss?

MARIJA: Isma', hej, jaqaw ridni nonxorha mejta fl-art u mmur il-habs għal
wiċċek jew?

TEREZA: Halli għalija li kieku għajret lili seftura. Kieku mhux daqshekk
biss għamiltilha.

MARIJA: U jien mhux daqshekk biss għamiltilha.

TEREZA: [*Bil-ħerqa*] Tajtha xi daqqtejn? Ċarratilha l-għonnella?

MARIJA: Hallini nkompli, trid, għax sa ttellagħhomli. Mela x'nagħmel! In-
ċarrtilha l-għonnella ta' sitt liri jew iżjed. ... għonnella tal-ħarir –
biex ikolli nħallasielha mill-flus li faddalt mas-sinjuri.

TEREZA: Mhux int għedt li mhux daqshekk biss?

MARIJA: Mela hallini nkompli: X'ħin tlaqtilha idha beżgħet minni, tgħidlek
ittaptaphieli u kienet ser taqbad u taħrab. Qbadtha minn spallitha. Bil-
mod, għeditilha. Għad ma spicċajtx. Issa tella' d-dublett sa' rkobbtejk,
għeditilha. – Twerwret. Id-dublett sa' rkobbti? staqsietni mwerwra.
Mela qed tiġġennen? Mela jiena xi darba tallajt id-dublett sa rkobbti?

to work so as to earn a bit of money? And doesn't she hoe the fields with her father, country bumpkin that she is? Or perhaps she thinks she's the daughter of a gentleman farmer, because they own Dead Man's Field and a couple of barns? And you let her get away with it?

MARIJA: I let her get away with it? I'd have you know that I'm not in the habit of letting people get away with things. [*Interrupts what she is doing, and with arms akimbo re-enacts the scene.*] 'Dovin,' I say, 'I'd have you know that I'm the daughter of a respectable man. It's no shame to be poor. Everyone works in order to live. And I learned a lot of education from the ladies I worked for. People who stay behind in the village remain dumb, like you.'

TEREŽA: That's all you said? Why didn't you pull her hair?

MARIJA: I'm sorry I didn't. But I grabbed her by the hand. 'Open your hand,' I say. She looks scared, and says: 'What for? How easily you take offence!' 'I told you to open your hand.' She opens it. I say to her: 'Look at your hand, and now look at mine. Which of them is the finer? You're the daughter of a gentleman farmer, yet your whole hand is hard with hoeing. Unlike you, I've never touched a hoe. So as to keep my hands soft, my ladies used to buy me hand cream. Mine are lady's hands, yours are those of a peasant girl.' Wasn't I right?

TEREŽA: But was that all?

MARIJA: Listen, you, would you have liked me to spread her out dead on the floor and go to prison for your sake, or what?

TEREŽA: Just let her start calling me a servant! I'd have done plenty more.

MARIJA: So you think that's all I did to her?

TEREŽA: [*eagerly*] You beat her up a bit? You tore her faldetta?

MARIJA: Let me finish, will you, you're getting on my nerves. So what should I have done, then? Rip her faldetta to pieces – a silk one, worth a good six pounds – so that I'd have to pay her for it out of the money I've saved from Sliema?

TEREŽA: But you said that wasn't everything.

MARIJA: Let me finish, for heaven's sake. When I let go of her hand, she's scared stiff of me, she thinks I'm going to slap her face, and she's on the point of running away. I grab her by the shoulder. 'Just a minute,' I say, 'I haven't finished with you yet. Now lift your skirt up over your knees.' She gets really frightened. 'Lift my skirt up over

– Ghidli haġa għeditilha: Jekk is-sinjurini tal-ibliet, it-tfajliet tal-imħallfin, tal-avukati u tobba, itellgħu d-dublett sa rkobbtejhom, biċċa ta' rahlija bħalek jidhirlek li int speċjali? – Bdiet tibki. Ma trellax id-dublett int, intellagħhulek jien, għeditilha ... Nugżak lill-Kappillan, qaltli. Ma tridx ittellgħu? għeditilha, mela ha nteallagħhulek jien! U hekk għamilt. Toħroġ minn hawn u saba' ħarriet, kellha rkobbitha xiber kallijiet. Imbagħad għeditilha – Issa ħares lejn irkobbtejja. Qed tarahom kemm huma ndaf? Is-sinjuri li kont seftura magħhom għall-muni nilbes u nitnaddaf, ja mahmuġa li int – tifla ta' gabillojt hej! Issa jiena nugżak lill-kappillan! – x'sa tghidlu, saqsietni bid-dmugħ f'għajnejha – nġhidlu jixtrilek sapuna!

TEREZA: Oħt, kollox għamilt sewwa, kien haqqha. Imma daqqtejn messek lghabtomlha biex tneħħilha l-ksuħat li għandha. Ma għeditilhiex xi haġa oħra?

MARIJA: Biex inġhidlek kelli ħsieb qabel nitlaqha minn idejja ntaptpilha tnejn imma kif kont qed nuriha tkobbti ttendejt li kien hemm Ġanni ta' Duminka qed iħares lejna minn wara ħajt tas-sejjieħ u jiena u hi tlaqna niġru. Dak Ġanni taf x'fih hux! Dawn tar-rahāl ħafna skrupli u jnemmsu daqs in-nemes għall-fenek.

*Jinstama' leħen minn ġewwa – Martin missierhom, igħajjat: Tereż!
Tereż! Din ma tweġibx, tidher imgħaddba u tgerger waħedha.*

MARIJA: Għajtilha Tessy!

*Il-missier jinstama' jgħid xi haġa. Mill-kliem kollu jiftiehem biss.
Inħosskom ħadtuli rasi! Mhux li tiżżewġu ma ddumux! Imbagħad jarga'
jsejjab: Marija! Marija! Din lanqas tweġeb.*

TEREZA: Għajtilha Mary!

*Martin jitfaċċa mgħaddab b'idejha fuq ġenbu bħal wieħed li ma jiflaħx
iżomm iżjed.*

MARTIN: Isimġu wliedi, ommkom, Alla jaħfrilha, Marija u Tereza kienet issejħilkom u jiena ma bi ħsiebnix noqgħod nitkessah insejħilkom bl-Ingliż. Hawn fejn wasalna! mhux biżżejjed li qed naqa' għaċ-ċajt is-

my knees?' she asks me, trembling all over. 'Have you gone crazy? I'm not in the habit of lifting my skirt up over my knees.' 'Listen to me,' I say, 'If the young ladies in town, judges' daughters, lawyers' daughters and doctors' daughters, have their skirts up over their knees, what does a country bumpkin like you think she is?' She begins to cry. 'If you don't pull your skirt up, I'll do it for you,' I say to her. 'I'll tell the parish priest about you,' she says. 'So you won't lift it,' I say to her: 'All right, let me pull it up for you!' And that's what I did. You could search this village and all the villages in Gozo, and you wouldn't find a pair of rough and filthy knees like hers! So I say to her: 'Now look at my knees. Do you see how clean they are? The ladies I worked for taught me how to dress properly and keep myself clean, you filthy pig, you rich farmer's daughter, you! Now I'll tell the parish priest about you!' 'What are you going to tell him?' she asks, with tears in her eyes. 'I'm going to tell him to buy you some soap!'

TEREŽA: Well done, sister, you were perfectly right. But you should have given her a smack or two to take the high and mighty look off her face. Didn't you say anything else to her?

MARIJA: To tell you the truth, I did think of slapping her face a couple of times before I left her, but as I was showing her my knees I caught sight of Ġanni ta' Duminka watching us from behind a wall, and we both ran away. That Ġanni, you know what he's like!! They may be prudes in the village, but they chase a skirt like a ferret after a rabbit.

A voice is heard from indoors. Martin, their father, calls: Terež! Terež! She does not answer, looks upset and grumbles to herself.

MARIJA: Call her Tessy!

Her father is heard mumbling something, but it is only possible to distinguish:

You're driving me crazy! Thank God you'll soon be married. Then he calls again: Marija! Marija! She does not answer either.

TEREŽA: Call her Mary!

Martin glares angrily, and puts his arms on his hips like someone at the end of his tether.

MARTIN: Listen, children, your mother, God rest her soul, called you Marija and Tereža, and I'm in no mind to make a fool of myself calling you by English names. Things have come to a pretty pass!! Isn't it

sejħuli papà quddiem in-nies! U fil-ħwienet x'ħin immur għall-pinta, Tieħu qatra magħna, papà? ighidli Karmnu tan-Nini. U erħilu kulħadd jinfexx jidħak. U x'ħin jarawni nieħu għaliġa, joqogħdu jgħiduli li kienu qed jiċċajjaw ta' ħbieb. Imma jiena, wliedi, dan iċ-ċajt qed inħossu kollu hawn [*Juri qalbu*]. Ma niflaħx iżjed għal ilsien in-nies. Issa lbieraħ għedtuli biex nibda ngagħal lin-nies isejħuli Sur Martin. Uliedi, tridu tarawni naqa' mejjet fl-art bil-mistħija? Għiduli ħaġa, in-nies ta' tas-Sliema li kontu magħhom x'għamlukom biex dawwrukkom raskom hekk? – U ħalli ngħidilkom ħaġ'ohra, uliedi. Qaluli li meta tithadtu ma' xebbiet ohra qegħdin titkesshu żżellqu xi kelma bl-Ingliż ukoll biex turu ruħkom aħjar minnhom. Għiduli ħaġa, din għallmuhiekkom in-nies ta' tas-Sliema wkoll? Ġibtuni f'ilsien in-nies u li ma kienu għax qed nistenna li sa ħmistax ohra tkunu żżewwiġtu kieku tlift il-boxxla u bghattkom it-tnejn għand ix-xjaten.

TEREZA: Papà. Ma jidħirlekk li ...

MARTIN: [*Jaqtgħalba kliema b'għajta*] Hallik minn papà. Targax issejjahli papà, għax infarrak rasi mas-saqaf. Isimghuni, uliedi. Marsu lejn din il-ghorfa. [*Juri b'subgħajh madwar il-għorfa*]. Hawnhekk għexu qabilna tlief generazzjonijiet – tinsewx uliedi li din id-dar għandha aktar minn mitejn sena. Dejjem kienet tal-familja. F'din id-dar ħadd qatt ma sejjah lil missieru "papà". [*B'għajta ta' wieħed mitluq minn sensib*]. U lanqas ma sa nħalli lilkom twaqqgħuni għaċ-ċajt. X'papà, papà! F'din id-dar il-missier dejjem sejjhulu "Tata, missier, ta. L-aktar li nħallikom tgħiduli Pa-Pa biss, tafux, imma papà le. Araw li ma ssejjhulix papà quddiem in-nies! Għax kont nieħu gost nqatta' siegħa l-ħanut mal-ħbieb, mħabba lsien in-nies issa lanqas għadni mmur.

TEREZA: Imma pa ... [*Tkun ser tgħid papà*].

MARTIN: [*Jerga' jaqtgħalba kliemba*] Ieqaf hemm, Pa biss. Ara żżid magħha. Sa hemm biss, Pa, – papà qatt – Qatt, qegħdin wifmu?

MARIJA: Għax taf x'jidħrilna aħna ... jidħrilna li trid tara mhux x'kont imma x'int. L-għarus tiegħi u ta' Terry.

MARTIN: Tereza ... Tereza!

MARIJA: Terry! ... Terry ...

MARTIN: [*Jgħajjat b'ħangra daqsieħ*] Tereza! ... Tereza! ... Qtajtli qalbi. Hux ta' Terry tridha? mela Terry int. Fl-aħħar mill-aħħar, ħmistax ohra jiena nkun ħlist minnkum. Jitqanna bikom ħaddieħor. [*Jimsaħ il-għaraq immasħan*] X'kont ser tgħidli, Marija? ...

enough that I've become a laughing-stock because you call me Daddy in front of other people? And when I go to the bar for a pint, Karmu tan-Nini says to me: 'Have a drink with us, Daddy!' And everyone burst out laughing. And when they see that they've upset me, they say that it's only a friendly joke. But, children, that's a joke that I feel here (*touches his heart*). I can't stand any more tongue-wagging. Now yesterday you tell me that I must start getting people to call me Mr. Martin. Children, do you want to see me drop dead with shame? Tell me, what did the people in Sliema do to you to turn your heads like this? And let me say something else, children. They tell me that when you talk to other girls, you try to show off by slipping in a few words of English, so as to appear better than they are. Tell me, did your Sliema people teach you this as well? You've got people talking about me, and if it weren't that I hope to have you married off in a fortnight's time, I'd have lost my patience and sent you both packing.

TEREŽA: Daddy, don't you think...

MARTIN: [*interrupting her with a shout*] Stop this Daddy, Daddy! You're not to call me Daddy again, or I'll blow up. Listen to me, children. Look at this room. [*Points with his hand.*] Three generations lived here before us – and don't forget, children, this house is more than two hundred years old. It always belonged to our family. In this house, no-one has ever called his father Daddy. [*Shouting, as if he has taken leave of his senses*]: And I'm not having you make a laughing-stock of me. Daddy, Daddy! In this house, the father has always been called Father. The most I'll allow you is to call me Dad: just Dad, do you understand, not Daddy. I used to enjoy my hour in the bar with my friends; now with all the tongue-wagging I can't go there any more.

TEREŽA: But Dad... [*She is about to say Daddy.*]

MARTIN: [*interrupting her again*] Stop right there. Just Dad. One syllable only: Dad. Never Daddy, never; do you understand?

MARIJA: You know what we think? One should see oneself as one is nowadays, not as one used to be. My fiancé and Terry's...

MARTIN: Tereža! Tereža!

MARIJA: Terry! Terry!

MARTIN: [*at the top of his voice*] Tere – e – ža! Tere – eža! I give up. So it's Terry you want to be called? All right, Terry you shall be. After all, I'll be rid of you in a couple of weeks. Let someone else cope with you. [*Mops his brow.*] What were you going to say, Marija?

MARIJA: Mary!

Jibqgħu jgħajtu bi Mary, hu Marija, sakemm ...

MARTIN: [*l'ċedi l-armi*] Irbaħtu intom. Mela Terry u inti, gawhra ta' qalbi, Mary. Mur ġib 'l ommkom, Alla jahfrilha win-nanna Gerit. [*B'leħen ironiku ta' wieħed imxabba'*] Mela beċċun tiegħi Mary. X'kull waħda wkoll, ahjar flok nirrabbja nidħak u ngħaddi kollox biċ-ċajt. Imma demmi ma jagħtinix. Mela Mary ta' qalbi kont qed tghidli ...

MARIJA: Papà, kont qed ngħidlek ...

MARTIN: Pa, pa biss ... għall-inqas nofs tirbħu intom u nofs nirbaħ jien. Kollox intom le. Kollox mhux sewwa. Jiena għadni ħaj, fl-aħħar mill-aħħar.

MARIJA: U isa, papà.

MARTIN: Pa, għedtlek!

Wara li jdumu ftit jgħajtu l-wieħed pa u l-oħra papà hu jċedi.

MARTIN: Irbaħtu din ukoll. Hudu kollox, uliedi. Hudu l-biċċa l-oħra ta' missierkom ukoll – sejhuli papà. [*B'leħen ta' wieħed mgħaddab, għal tliet darbiet*] Papà ... Papà ... Papà le, le, dil-kelma ma nidraha qatt u għalija spiċċat dik il-pinta nbid ta' kull filgħaxija għand Kalang tal-Fenek għax qatt ma jkollu l-ħila narġa' nidhol il-ħanut tiegħu iżjed.

MARIJA: Kont qed ingħidlek, papà, tara mhux x'kont imma x'int illum. L-għarajjes tagħna illum saru nies importanti. It-tejn telgħu fil-Gvern u dalwaqt jibdeu jikkmandaw lil Malta. Ma jidhirleqx li l-għarusa ta' raġel li tela' fil-Gvern għandha d-dritt tibda ssejjah lil missierha papà?

TEREZA: U li inti issa għandek id-dritt tibda tissejjah is-sur Martin?

MARTIN: L-għarajjes tagħkom huma tfal mir-raħal. Wieħed mastrudaxxa u l-ieħor bil-ħanut. Telgħu fil-Gvern u issa saru jikkmandaw lil Malta, kif qed tghidu. Imma, għiduli uliedi, m'għadux veru li intom ulied Martin u l-għarus tiegħek Terež huwa t-tifel ta' Ġamri tar-Rewrew u tiegħek Marija t-tifel ta' Lonzu tax-Xatt? Allura għax telgħu fil-Gvern, ngħid jiena, ma għadhomx li kienu? Hemm bżonn ninsew x'konna, Santa Marija?

MARIJA: Mary!

They continue shouting Marija and Mary, until...

MARTIN: [*surrendering*] All right, you win. So you shall be Terry, and you, my pearl, shall be Mary. Thank the Lord that your mother, God rest her soul, and your grandmother Gerit are no longer with us. [*Ironically, like someone who has had enough*]: So you, my little dove, are Mary. So instead of getting angry, I should laugh and treat it as a joke. But it still sticks in my throat... So, Mary my dear, I was telling you...

MARIJA: Daddy, I was telling you...

MARTIN: Dad, nothing but Dad... You win half the battle, but at least let me win the other half. You shan't win the lot. The lot wouldn't be fair. After all, I'm not in the grave yet.

MARIJA: Get along with you, Daddy.

MARTIN: Dad, I told you!

After they carry on shouting Dad, and Daddy, he finally gives in.

MARTIN: So you've won this too... Take the lot, my children, take everything your poor father has left, and call me Daddy... [*In the voice of a penitent, repeats three times:*] Daddy. Daddy. Daddy. No, no, I shall never get used to this word. No more evening glass of wine for me in Kalanġ tal-Fenek's bar, since I'll never have the nerve to enter the place again.

MARIJA: I was telling you, Daddy, that one should see oneself not as one used to be, but as one is nowadays. Our fiancés have become important people these days. They've both got into the Government, and soon they'll be running Malta. Don't you think that the fiancée of a man who's got into the Government has the right to start calling her father Daddy?

TEREZA: And don't you think that now you've the right to start calling yourself Mr. Martin?

MARTIN: Your fiances are village boys: one is a carpenter, and the other runs a bar. They've got into the Government, and now they've going to run Malta, so you say. But, children, tell me whether it's not still true that you are Martin's daughters, and that your fiancée, Tereza, is Ġamri tar-Rewrew's son, and yours, Marija, is Lonzu tax-Xatt's son? Just because they've got into the Government, aren't they still the same people? Do we have to forget what we were, by Heaven?

MARIJA: Il-*boy-friend* tiegħi taf x'kien iġidli, papà?

MARTIN: Il-*bojffrent*, binti? Dan x'ikun, għogol, naghga, hmar jew xkora patata, għax jiena f'dan nifhem.

TEREZA: *Boy-friend* bl-Ingliż.

MARTIN: [*Jitlagħlu*] U mela int ma tafx li missierek ma jafx bl-Ingliż? Għalfejn qed titkessaħ miegħi wkoll? Mhux biżżejjed li qed titkessaħ mal-barranin?

MARIJA: *Boy-friend* bl-Ingliż tfisser, kif nibda ngħidlek, il-ħabib.

MARTIN: [*Imwerwer*] X'qed tghid, binti? Mela qed titef rasek? Ma tafx li int għarusa? U x'isir minni u minnek jekk jisma' l-għarus tiegħek li kellek ħabib?

MARIJA: U fejn sejjer b'rasek, papà. Dan *boy-friend* biss taf.

MARTIN: Imma x'inhu sewwa għidli *bojffrent*? għax għibtuli għajnejja wara widnejja.

MARIJA: Fejn naf, biex ma tiddejjaqx ikollok *boy* tifel, mhux tifel żgħir tafx, għuvni, ngħidu aħna grazzjuż li toħroġ miegħu.

MARTIN: [*Irodd is-slaieb*] U din il-moda għdida tghallimtuha minn għand is-sinjuri ta' tas-Sliema wkoll, binti?

TEREZA: Biex qed tistagħgeb papà? Is-sinjurina Nellie tas-Sinjura Briffa li kont magħhom kellha *boy-friend* ukoll. Il-papà wil-mamà kienu jafu bih. Qatt ma qalulha xejn. U huma nies tal-Knisja, tafx. Aħjar minna wkoll. Għax jitqarbnu kull ġimgħa. X'kull waħda, din x'fiha, li jkollok *boy-friend*? Mhux kullhadd irid ikollu ma' min iġid kelma? Waħdek, xogħol biss, tiekol qalbek?

MARTIN: [*Ironiku*] Mela inti kellek *bojffrent*, Tereza, gawhra ta' qalbi?

TEREZA: Kelli u ma jiddispijacinix daqs kemm kien kien gustuż.

MARTIN: Hux! U int Marija?

MARIJA: Mela jiena aghar minn ħaddiehor jew aghar minn oħti. Jiena wkoll kelli *boy friend*.

MARTIN: Tajjeb wisq ... qed tagħtuni gost ta' mitt skud. U l-għarajjes tagħkom, l-imsejknin għarajjes li ser jibdeu jikkmandaw lil Malta u 'l Għawdex, jafu b'dan?

MARIJA: Daddy, do you know what my boy-friend used to say to me?

MARTIN: Bajfrent, daughter? That could be a calf, a sheep, a donkey or a sack of potatoes, for all I know.

TEREŽA: Boy-friend's an English word.

MARTIN: [*losing his temper*] So you don't know that your father doesn't speak English? Why do you have to show off at my expense as well? Isn't it enough that you show off in front of strangers?

MARIJA: As I was starting to explain to you, boy-friend in English means a young man.

MARTIN: [*shocked*] What are you saying, daughter? Have you gone out of your mind? Don't you know you're engaged? What will happen to us if your fiancé hears you had a young man?

MARIJA: What on earth are you thinking of, Daddy? He was only a boy-friend, you know.

MARTIN: You make my hair stand on end with this talk about bajfrents.

MARIJA: As I see it, you have a boy-friend so that you won't get bored – not a young boy, you understand, but a young man – and you're very pleased to go out with him.

MARTIN: [*crosses himself*] And this is another new custom you learned from the ladies in Sliema, daughter?

TEREŽA: What are you so surprised about, Daddy? Miss Nelly, Mrs. Briffa's daughter, where I worked, had a boy-friend too. Her father and mother knew about it, and never said a word to her. And they were Church people, you know – much better than us, they used to go to Confession every week. In any case, what's wrong with having a boy-friend? Doesn't everyone need someone to talk to? On your own, nothing but work, you eat your heart out...

MARTIN: [*ironically*] So you had a bajfrent, Tereža, my pearl.

TEREŽA: Certainly I had, and I don't regret it, he was so sweet...

MARTIN: Indeed. And you, Marija?

MARIJA: So I'm uglier than other people, and uglier than my sister, am I? Of course I had a boy-friend.

MARTIN: Very fine indeed... you delight me. And your fiancés, the poor fiancés who are going to run Malta and Gozo, they know about this?

MARIJA U TEREZA: Ara ma tohroglokx xi kelma. Ghax li ma giex id-diskors lanqas lilek ma konna nuru.

TEREZA: [*Għal oħtha*] Dil-ħmar tlablab wisq.

MARTIN: Uliedi, qed nara li ahna n-nies tar-raħal konna lura wisq. Intom mindu dhaltu sefturi man-nies ta' tas-Sliema sirtu fini u puliti wisq. Isimghuni daqsxejn kif kienu jaħsbuha n-nisa ta' dari ... Isimghuni, wliedi u ara tghidu xi kelma qabel nieqaf jiena.

MARIJA: In-nies ta' dari? ... dari miet ... Illum id-dinja tiddlet ... Mela ahna għandna nibqghu bħan-nisa ta' dari ... biċċa ta' qluġh ta' għonnella ma tħalli lil hadd jara min ikun warajk u dublett ikaxkar sa saqajhom? ... Baqax! Id-dinja titbiddel u ahna nibqghu fejn konna?

MARTIN: Hekk taħsbu, hux uliedi? Aħsbu kif tridu imma jekk tħalluni, ser nġhidilkom kif konna naħsbuha r-raħal dari u kif għadhom jaħsbuha ħafna sal-lum, dawk li għad ma sarux puliti bħalkom. Ġibu siġġu kull waħda u oqogħdu fejni ftit. [*Jagħmlu hekk*] Isimghuni: Meta kelli ħamsa u għoxrin sena rajt 'l ommkom l-ewwel darba. Kienet sejra l-knisja. Ġmiel ta' xebba. Tbiġh is-saħħa. Mill-ewwel ingbidt lejha. Hi wara li ttendiet li kont qed inħares lejha bdiet tħares lejja wkoll. Imma ommha, in-nanna Gerit, Alla jaħfrilha, ittendiet. U ma stajtix inkellimha wiċċ-imb-wiċċ.

MARIJA: Miskin ...

TEREZA: Illum mhux hekk ...

MARTIN: Naf, naf li llum mhux hekk. X'nagħmel? Kellimt lil Ġanna tal-Bubun, il-ħuttaba, għidtilha jekk twassalli ħorba lil Toni ta' Dovik għal bintu u ż-żwieġ jimexxi nagħtiha ħamest għwiewq. Ġimgha wara l-ħuttaba qaltli li kellmitli lil ommha. Din għall-ewwel qagħdet taħsibha u sa fl-aħħar qaltli li kollox sew. U bdejt immur għandhom. Qatt ma ħallewni waħdi magħha. Dejjem bl-għassa tan-Nanna Gerit. Qatt ma fdatni minuta avolja hadd ma kien jista' jgħid aqqal min ismi. Wara xi żmien għamilna l-partit. Jiena tajtha ċ-ċurkett u hija tatni l-maktur. Imma qatt ma ħriġna waħedna ... dejjem flimkien taħt għajnejn in-nanna Gerit.

TEREZA: Hi xi dwejjaq! Mur għidilhom hekk lis-sinjurini ta' tas-Sliema ... l-aktar meta tibda tagħmel is-sħana u kulhadd johrog jippassiġġa Għar id-Dud.

MARIJA AND TEREŽA: See that you don't let out a whisper. If we hadn't had this argument, you wouldn't have heard anything about it.

TEREŽA: [*indicating her sister*] This donkey can't keep her mouth shut.

MARTIN: Children, you make me realise how old-fashioned we villagers are. Since you've been in service in Sliema, you've become quite the young ladies. Listen to me for a bit, and I'll tell you how girls used to behave in the old days. Listen to me, children, and don't interrupt until I've finished.

MARIJA: In the old days? The old days are dead. The world's different now. So you want us to remain like the girls in the old days... wrapped up in a faldetta like a sail so you can't see who's behind you, and a skirt trailing round your ankles? Not on your life! The world is changing, and we should stand still!

MARTIN: So that's what you think, children? All right, think what you like, but if you'll let me, I'll tell you how we used to behave in the village and how a lot of us still behave today, those who haven't become high and mighty like you. Bring a couple of chairs, and sit down beside me for a bit. [*They do so.*] Listen to me. When I was twenty-five, I saw your mother for the first time. She was going to church. A beautiful girl. Strong as they make them. I was taken with her from the first. When she saw me looking at her, she began to look at me as well. But her mother, Grandmother Gerit, God rest her soul, noticed. And I couldn't talk to her face to face.

MARIJA: Poor Daddy!

TEREŽA: It's not like that these days.

MARTIN: I know, I know it's not like that these days. So what was I to do? I spoke to Ganna tal-Bubun, the match-maker, and told her that if she negotiated with Toni ta' Dovic for his daughter, and the marriage went through, I'd give her five dollars. The next week, she told me that she'd spoken for me to the mother. She hesitated at first, but eventually said it would be all right. So I began to visit them. They never left me alone with her. Grandmother Gerit was always on guard. She didn't trust me for a minute, although no-one had ever been able to say a bad word about me. After a while the match was arranged. I gave her the ring and she gave me the kerchief. But we never went out alone; we always had Grandmother Gerit watching us.

TEREŽA: How boring! Go and tell that to the young ladies in Sliema! Especially when it's spring, and everyone's parading at Ghar id-Dud.

MARTIN: Imbagħad wara xi żmien iżżewwigna ... kellna tiegħ sabiħ. Imma wara t-tiegħ damet dlitt ijiem ma għiet toqgħod miegħi ... [*Wara ftit*] U issa kif triduni, uliedi, nieħu gost meta nisma' lilkom tgħiduli bil-*boj-frent*, wil-ħafna ksuħat ta' papà, Sur Martin u x'naf jiena? Uliedi, intom ma tixbhu xejn lil ommkom ... tbiddiltu ... bil-kemm nista' nemmen li intom tiegħi ... Li kieku ommkom ma mitetx żgħira u ħal-lietni nħabbat wiċċi magħkom waħdi, kieku bħal issa ...

MARIJA: [*Taqtagħlu kliemu*] Miskina l-mamà ...

MARTIN: [*Jitlagħlu. Iqum minn fuq is-siġġu u jgħajjat*] X'mamà mamà! Kieku bħal issa qiegħda tismagħkom u tista' tqum mill-qabar kienet toħroġ għalikom u tħabbatkom ras ma' ras! ...

Marija u Tereza bħal jabbtu jibżgħu minnu. Jitwarrbu.

MARTIN: [*Ikompli*] Imma issa li hemm hemm. Jiena llum jaqbilli li ma naqlax inkwiet biex tistgħu tiżżewġu ...

Marija tbuslu idu. Martin juriha idu mċappa bil-lipstick. Wara ftit donnu qagħad jaħsibha x'igħidilha ...

MARTIN: Marija, għandek tkun illum ċappast ħafna tadam maż-żejt ma' xufftejk?

Tereza taqbad tidħak.

MARIJA: [*Mgħaddba għax oħta qed tidħak biba*] Papà, int lil Tereza xufftejha ma rajthomliex? Tiegħi biss jidher? Ara kif xufftejha kollha *lipstick* bħal tiegħi.

MARTIN: [*Mgħaddab*] Ejjew 'l hawn. [*Jersqu lejħ imbażżgħa*] Rajthom xufftejn Tereza wkoll. Tallajtuhomli. U ara sa titilfuli l-paċenzja. [*Waqt li jgħid bekk jaqbadhom minn xuxithom u jħabbathom ras ma' ras. Marija u Tereza iwerżqu. Jitlaqhom u jkun ser joħroġ. X'ħin jasal fejn il-bieb jerġa' lura u jgħidilhom*] Issa li hemm hemm. Issa ma jaqbelx inħassar festi jew nagħti sodisfazzjon lin-nies għax naħbat aghar. Illum jaqbel lili u lilkom li żwieg tagħkom iseħħ. Lilkom biex tieħdu l-istat tagħkom u jiena biex neħles minnkom. Minn hawn u ftit iehor jaslu l-għarajjes tagħkom. [*Lil Marija*] X'ħin hu?

MARIJA: Dalwaqt il-ħdax ...

TEREZA: Hi, x'waħda din, dalwaqt jaslu ...

MARTIN: Il-ħin dieħel. L-għarajjes tagħkom bil-mistednin ftit iehor jkunu

MARTIN: After a while we got married. We had a fine wedding. But after the wedding it was three days before she came to live with me. [*After a pause:*] And now, children, you expect me to be happy when I hear you talking about bajfrents and your twaddle about Daddy, Mr. Martin and I don't know what else? Children, you're not a bit like your mother. You've changed: I can hardly believe you're mine. If your mother hadn't died when she was still young, and left me to struggle with you on my own, perhaps now...

MARIJA: [*interrupting him*] Poor Mummy!

MARTIN: [*loses his temper, jumps up from his chair and shouts*] What's this Mummy, Mummy? If she heard you now and could rise from her grave, she'd make a bee-line for you and knock your two heads together.

Marija and Tereza start to look scared. They draw away from him.

MARTIN: [*finally*] Well, it's no good crying over spilt milk. There's no point in my getting upset now, since you're going to get married...

Marija kisses his hand. Martin shows her his hand covered with lipstick. After a pause, during which he seems at a loss what to say to her...

MARTIN: Marija, you've forgotten to wipe the tomato paste off your mouth.

Tereza bursts out laughing.

MARIJA: [*annoyed that her sister is laughing at her*] Daddy, haven't you noticed Tereza's lips? Are mine the only ones in sight? Look how hers are covered with lipstick like mine.

MARTIN: [*angrily*] Come here, both of you. [*They approach him timidly.*] Certainly I noticed Tereza's lips. This is getting too much of a good thing. I warn you, I won't stand for it. [*As he says this, he takes hold of their hair and bangs their heads together. Marija and Tereza sbriek. He lets them go, and starts to leave. When he reaches the door, he turns and speaks to them.*] Now, don't cry over spilt milk. I musn't spoil the party, and give people the satisfaction of seeing things go wrong. Today it's my job and yours to see that your marriages go through. Your job, so as to get a husband, and mine so that I can be rid of you. [*To Marija:*] What's the time?

MARIJA: Nearly eleven.

TEREZA: What a thing, they'll be here any minute.

MARTIN: It's nearly time. Your young men and their friends will soon be

hawn. Lestu l-mejda – Qis li ma taghmlux xi xenata li tista' thassar l-għerusija għax dik tkun l-akbar disgrazzja tiegħi ... qassmu l-mistadnin ta' Marija naħa u ta' Tereza ohra, għax Alla jbierek l-għarajjes tagħkom wil-mistadnin lanqas huma tal-istess partit u qis li ma tinbux lil xulxin ... biex isehh il-partit u wara hmistax ohra k'Alla jrid titilguli minn hawn ha noqghod wahdi ... Jiena sejjer fil-kcina niehu hsieb il-borma [*Jobrog*].

TEREZA: X'kull wahda, illum il-papà għamilhielna. Kemm baqa' lura!

MARIJA: U mhux int ilsienek twil?

TEREZA: Ilsienek twil int. Dan x'għandu x'jaqsam?

MARIJA: X'ridt tghidlu bil-*boy-friend*? Ma tafx in-nies tar-raħal kemm huma skrupluži?

TEREZA: Ma għandekx xi tghid? Mela int ma ftahartx bil-*boy friend* tiegħek ukoll?

MARIJA: Imma int semmejtu l-ewwel, ja paċpaċa li int.

TEREZA: Paċpaċa int. Ara ma ngħidlekx!

It-tnejn dejjem jistnu għal xulxin – lehenhom jogħla sa twerziqa.

MARIJA: Trid titfa' l-htija fuqi, ja paċpaċa?

TEREZA: Paċpaċa int għax lanqas taf xi tkun qed tghid.

MARIJA: Jiena għandi għaqal biex nixtrik u nbigħek. Għalhekk mas-sinjuri dejjem kont stmata, mhux bħalek!

TEREZA: Stmata hej. Għalhekk mhux fil-kcina wahdek dejjem kont tiekol.

MARIJA: Jiena mas-sinjuri qatt ma ħadt kunfidenza. M'iniex wiċċi tost!

TEREZA: Ajma min qed jitkellem! Qed tghid hekk għax ghajjura. Lili sinjur kien iżomni niekol fil-mejda mas-sinjura.

MARIJA: Għas-sabih wiċċek!

TEREZA: Xi trid tghid bih dan il-kliem? [*Idejha f'wiċċha*].

MARIJA: Nerga' ngħidlek, għas-sabih wiċċek!

TEREZA: [*Idejha ponnijiet ma' wiċċ Marija*] Ghidli xi trid tfisser, qed ingħidlek għax sa niggranfak.

here. Get the table ready. And mind you don't create a scene and ruin the engagement – that would be my final disgrace. Put Marija's guests on one side and Tereža's on the other, for, Heaven help us, your young men and their friends are on opposite sides of the fence when it comes to politics, and you must be careful not to let them quarrel. We've got to make a success of the betrothal, and in a fortnight, God willing, you'll be off my hands and I'll be on my own... I'm off to the kitchen to see to the food. [Exit.]

TEREŽA: Dear me, how Daddy carried on today! What an old fogley he is.

MARIJA: What did you want to open your big mouth for?

TEREŽA: Big mouth yourself. What's that supposed to mean?

MARIJA: What did you want to mention boy-friends for? You know what prudes they are in the village.

TEREŽA: Who are you to talk? Weren't you showing off about your boy-friend as well?

MARIJA: You mentioned it first, big mouth.

TEREŽA: Big mouth yourself! You just listen to me.

They start to lose their temper, and their voices get shrill.

MARIJA: So you're trying to put the blame on me, big mouth?

TEREŽA: Big mouth yourself! Why don't you watch what you're saying.

MARIJA: I've got more brains than two of you put together. Where I worked, they appreciated me – not like you.

TEREŽA: They appreciated you, did they? So that's why you are all by yourself in the kitchen.

MARIJA: I never took liberties with the family. I have my pride, not like some other people.

TEREŽA: Look who's talking! You only say that because you're jealous. In my house, the master always invited me to sit at the table with madam.

MARIJA: All for the sake of your blue eyes!

TEREŽA: What do you mean by that? [Raises her hand.]

MARIJA: I tell you, all for the sake of your blue eyes!

TEREŽA: [shaking her fist in Marija's face] Just you tell me what you mean by that, or I'll scratch your eyes out.

MARIJA: Trid taf? Mela halli nghidlek! [*Kif tgħidilba hekk taqbadha minn xagħarha. L-obra taqbadha minn xagħarha wkoll. Twerziq kbir. Jiġi jiġri missierhom bil-bastun f'idu.*]

MARTIN: Sa tisktu, ja żewġ imġienen! Dalwaqt jiġu l-għarajjes tagħkom u jekk isiru jafu x'żewġ angli fikom, kemm tinhabbu, kemm intom bil-ghaqal, nibża' li jisfratta kolloxx u tibqgħuli ma' wiċċi. [*Lil Marija*] Żgur inti bdejtha dix-xenata! Taf għax ma nagħtikomx xebgħa bastun ...

Marija u Tereza jitolqu 'l xulxin, jirrangaw xagħarhom u hwejjigħom jitmaddsu u jlestu għall-għarajjes, sekti. Martin jargħa' joħroġ jonfoħ Joqogħdu bi kwiethom sa kemm ...

MARIJA: Int dejjem tobghodni ... anki missieri ma jaħmilnix ... lili biss ra ...

TEREZA: Oqgħod, ja mikduda.

MARIJA: Kulhadd bil-preferenzi. Anki fid-dota jiena mort l-aġħar.

TEREZA: Ara ma ngħidlekx. It-tomna raba' tas-Sinet li ħadt int aħjar minn tiegħi ...

MARIJA: It-tomna raba' ta' Marzena li ħadt jiena fiha blat. Jien għandi mniex ingerger.

TEREZA: Imma tiegħek fiha iżjed minn tomna.

MARIJA: Tomna biss fiha ... tomna biss, taf ...

TEREZA: Fiha iżjed ...

MARIJA: Hallina minnek. Jien mort l-aġħar ...

TEREZA: Kif mort l-aġħar? Mort l-aġħar jiena.

MARIJA: Għid fiex mort l-aġħar.

*Idumu jgħajjtu hekk wiċċ imb-wiċċ. Imieru lil xulxin sakemm jer-
għbu jaqbd u f' xagħar xulxin. Twerziq.*

MARTIN: [*Jgħajjat minn ġewwa*] Ja xjaten li intom, sa tisktu ... jekk tin-haraqli l-patata mħabba fikom noqtolkom it-tnejn ...

*Marija u Tereza jinfirmu minn xulxin. Għal darba obra jirrangaw xa-
għarhom u jerġgħu jaqbd u jiffaċendjaw sakemm targa' taqbad ...*

MARIJA: You really want to know? All right, I'll tell you. [*As she says this, she seizes her by the hair. Her sister seizes her hair as well. Great commotion. Their father comes running in with a stick in his hand.*]

MARTIN: Quiet, you two devils. Your fiancés are coming any moment, and if they realise what a pair of angels you are, how fond you are of each other, how bright you are, I'm afraid everything will be ruined and I'll be left with you on my hands. [*To Marija:*] To be sure, you started all this. Just you explain to me why I shouldn't give you a good bearing with this stick.

Marija and Tereza separate, tidy their hair and their clothes, and in silence start to clear up and get things ready for the guests. Martin goes out again, breathing heavily. They remain silent, until...

MARIJA: You've always hated me. Even my father doesn't care for me. He's always had eyes only for you.

TEREZA: Pipe down, you poor misunderstood thing.

MARIJA: Everyone's unfair to me. Even with my dowry I've done worse than you.

TEREZA: Who's talking? The tas-Sinet field you got is far better than mine.

MARIJA: The Marzena field I got is full of stones. I've every right to complain.

TEREZA: But yours is over a tumolo.

MARIJA: It's just one tumolo, I tell you.

TEREZA: It's bigger.

MARIJA: You're talking rubbish, I came off worst.

TEREZA: What do you mean, you came off worst? I came off worst.

MARIJA: You tell me how you came off worst.

They continue shouting in each other's faces, and get more and more furious with each other, until once more they start pulling each other's hair. Commotion.

MARTIN: [*shouts from inside*] Be quiet, you devils. If you make me bum the potatoes I'll murder the pair of you.

Marija and Tereza separate. They tidy their hair again and busy themselves about the room, until it starts again...

TEREZA: Dejjem tigbed lej. Kollox trid ghalik. Il-farda tan-nanna Gerit mhux int hadtha?

MARIJA: Wid-dublett ta' mitt lembuba tan-nanna Gerit min hadu?

TEREZA: Ajma hej. Sa nilbes id-dublett ta' mitt lembuda u mmur nippas-sigga Għar id-Dud bih, arani. Dak x'jiswa?

MARIJA: Mela ma jiswiex! Dak antikità. Mur bieghu biex tara x'iddahhal tieghu.

TEREZA: U hallina minnek ...

MARIJA: U żgur, ma sibtx xi tghid issa. Iċ-ċappetti taz-zija Żabbetta min hadhom?

TEREZA: Antikalja. Għax ma tghidlix min ha l-imsielet taz-zija Marinton?

MARIJA: Hadthom jiena. Ma jiswewx habba.

TEREZA: Kemm int ta' sebghek f'halqek!

MARIJA: Daqskemm int ta' sebghek f'halqek int. Il-polka tan-nannu min hadha?

TEREZA: Għax ma ssaqsix min ha ċ-ċintill tan-nannu u dak il-gmiel ta' ġarikor?

MARIJA: Kiesha. Taf x'imissek tghid, min ha l-ġisirana tal-mamà – dik tiswa hafna flus.

TEREZA: Il-ġizirina, jekk jogħġbok, hadtha jiena u dik mhix ġejja minn tal-mamà imma xtrajtha jien bi flusi.

MARIJA: Giddieba!

TEREZA: Giddieba int u min ighid li ma intix!

MARIJA: Iva eh, jiena giddieba? Mela halli nurik jiniex giddieba.

Jergghu jaqbd u f'xagħar xulxin. Twerziq. Jigi jigi jonfoħ missierhom bl-imrewħa tal-kenur f'idejh. Jagħtibom daqqtejn kull waħda fuq il-warrani. Imbagħad b'xagħar rashom f'idejh it-tnejn b'lehen mgħaddab għal darb'oħra jghidilhom.

MARTIN: Demonji – Ma għedtilkomx li l-għarajjes tagħkom dalwaqt jaslu? Ma tafux toqogħdu bi kwietkom għal ftit? [Jitlaqilhom xagħarhom]. Isimghuni, uliedi, jekk dan iż-żwieġ jisfratta jiena nsiefer jew mmur naqbez minn x'imkien ... Jekk dan iż-żwieġ jisfratta ma ssibux raġel ieħor li jehodkom. Tafu kemm siefru rġiel dis-sena? ... Ma ssaqsunix?

TEREŽA: You're always drawing attention to yourself. You want everything for yourself. Wasn't it you who got Granny Gerit's bedspread?

MARIJA: And who got Granny Gerit's skirt with the hundred pleats in it?

TEREŽA: Lord love us! Can't you just see me parading in the evening at Ghar id-Dud wearing a skirt with a hundred pleats in it? You think that's worth anything?

MARIJA: What do you mean, anything? It's an antique. You just see how much you'll get for it if you sell it.

TEREŽA: That's enough from you.

MARIJA: Naturally, you can't find anything to say. Who got Aunt Zabetta's bracelets?

TEREŽA: Old rubbish. Why don't you tell me who got Aunt Marinton's ear-rings?

MARIJA: I got them. They're not worth a farthing.

TEREŽA: What an innocent you are, butter wouldn't melt in your mouth!

MARIJA: Innocent yourself! Who got Grandfather's watch chain?

TEREŽA: Why don't you ask who got Grandmother's pendant, and that fine chain?

MARIJA: You've got a nerve! You should have asked who got Mummy's necklace – it's worth a packet.

TEREŽA: The necklace, if you please, came to me, and it wasn't left to me by Mummy, I bought it from her with my own money.

MARIJA: Liar!

TEREŽA: Liar yourself. Everyone knows you're a liar.

MARIJA: So I'm a liar, am I? I'll show you who's a liar.

They pull one another's hair again. Commotion. Their father comes running in breathing heavily, with a pair of bellows in his hand. He gives each of them a slap on the behind. Then, grasping each of them by the hair, he once more scolds them angrily.

MARTIN: You devils! Didn't I tell you that your two fiancés will be here any minute? Can't you keep quiet for one moment? [*Lets go their hair.*] Listen, children, if this engagement gets broken off, I'll emigrate or go and throw myself over a cliff. If it's broken off, you won't find another man to take you. Do you know how many men have emi-

... ngħidilkom jien ... Dawn l-aħħar snien siefru daqskemm hawn nies Għawdex kollu ... hekk qalli Mastru Karm ... U taf x'qalli Mastru Karm ukoll? ... qalli li dalwaqt jasal iż-żmien li għal kull għuvni jkun hawn sitt xebbiet ... Jekk dan iż-żwieġ jisfratta tibqgħu ma' wiċċi ... u jiena mbagħad ma nafx x'isir minni ...

Tabbita fil-bieb. Il-bniet jirrangaw ruħhom malajr – fuq xogħolhom qisu ma ġara xejn. Martin imur jiftaħ.

MARTIN: [*Lil Tereza*] Tereza, ġie Ġużep.

ĠUZEPP: Ġejna kmieni għandu jkun ...

MARTIN: [*Iressaq lil Tereza li tagħmel ta' bir-ruħha qed tistħi*] Hawn Ġużep, Tereza, ilha tistenniek. Jaħasra thobbok wisq. Imma baqgħet misthija ħafna avolja għamlitha man-nies ...

ĠUZEPP: [*Jieħu id Tereza f'idejh. Jagħfashiela, imbagħad isaqsiha*] Kuntenta? ... Kollox jasal hux, Terez? Ilni bi ħsiebek ħames snin. Kemm domt Malta man-nies kont narak ftit wisq, ftit meta kont tiġi tara lil missierek. Issa sa fl-aħħar wasalna ... ħmistax oħra ntejjġu. Ferħana Tereza?

TEREZA: [*Titbissimlu grixtija grixtija u minn taħt ilsien tgħidlu m'hejma*] Kuntenta ħafna ... Imma ...

ĠUZEPP: Hemm xi imma, Terez? Mhux biżżejjed taqtaqti qalbi sa għedtli iwa? ... Ma għadekx bil-ħsieb ts' xi Malti hux? [*Bid-daħka*].

TEREZA: Trix tmur! Ġuż, mela aħna tal-istess drawwiet tal-Maltin. Jiena lilek ħabbejt, lilek biss. Imma qalbi sewda għax ser ikolli nħalli lil papà ... u lil oħti Marija ... ma tafx, ħajja għdida ... ħsebijiet godda ... meta tizzewweg toħrog mid-dar għal kollox.

ĠUZEPP: U la tinkwetax. Aħna mhux fejn missierek ser inkunu noqogħdu?

MARTIN: Dak il-post tal-pjazza imbiegħed imma aħjar minn dak li hawn fejni. Ma qbiltux fuq il-kera?

ĠUZEPP: Xi qbilna ... tawh rigal ta' ħamsin lira u ħadhuli ... mhux għax ma kontx raġel nagħtih ħamsin lira rigal imma ma ridtux jiskappriċċani.

grated this year? Why don't you ask me? I'll tell you. These last few years, as many men have emigrated as there are people in the whole of Gozo. That's what Teacher Karm told me. And do you know what else Teacher Karm said? He told me that soon the time will come when there'll be six girls to every young man... If this wedding doesn't come off, you'll be left on my hands... and then I don't know what will become of me...

There is a knock at the door. The girls quickly tidy themselves and go on with their work as if nothing had happened.

MARTIN [to Tereža]: Tereža, here's Gužepp.

GUŽEPP: It looks as if we've arrived early.

MARTIN [bringing him over to Tereža, who pretends to be shy]: Here's Gužepp. Tereža's been waiting for you for such a long time. Poor thing, she's so much in love with you! But she's still very shy, even though she's been away working.

GUŽEPP [takes Tereža by the hand, squeezes it and asks her]: Happy, Tereža? Everything's all right? For five years I've been dreaming about you. When you were away working in Malta I hardly saw anything of you, except for the odd occasion when you came to visit your father. Now that's all finished with. Two weeks more, and we'll be married. Happy, Tereža?

TEREŽA [smiles at him coyly and whispers coaxingly]: Very happy. But...

GUŽEPP: What's the 'but' about, Tereža? Aren't you satisfied with tutoring me until you said yes? [Laughing] You're not still thinking about some young man in Malta?

TEREŽA: Get along with you, Guž. Do you think we behave like the people in Malta? It's you I love, and you alone. But I'm sad at having to leave Daddy... and my sister Marija... surely you understand? A new life – new responsibilities – when you get married, you leave home for good.

GUŽEPP: Now don't you worry. After all, aren't we going to be just next door to your father?

MARTIN [horrified]: That other house in the square is further away, but it's much better than the one near me. Do you mean to say you haven't yet settled about the rent?

GUŽEPP: How could I settle about the rent? Someone gave him fifty pounds key money and cut me out... Not that I couldn't have paid fifty pounds, mind you, but I wasn't going to let him pull a fast one on me.

MARTIN: [*Rassenjat*] Tkun magħmula l-volontà t'Alla ... [*Lil Tereza*] Mur aġhti daqqa ta' għajn dak il-għagin u l-patata ...

TEREZA: [*To brog. Hi u hierga thares lura lejn Guzepp. Tarab dabru lejha u bil-mod tgħid lil Marija*] Inkedd; tiegħek mhux mghaġġel jigi jarak.

Marija tgħaqqad il-ponn minn taħt u Tereza titlaq 'il barra. Imma dak il-bin tinstama' taħbita oħra fuq in-naħa l-oħra tal-bieb. Martin imur jiftaħ.

MARTIN: Wasal Karlu. Għaddi, għaddi, Marija, wasal l-għarus tiegħek ukoll. Issa aħna lkoll. Issa familja waħda.

Marija tmur tifraħ bih. Tgħidlu jgħaddi. Karlu imma, waqt li qed izommilha idha f'idu, iħares ċass lejn in-naħa l-oħra ... lejn Guzepp. Minn naħa l-oħra Guzepp iħares lejha ċass ukoll. Jidher li ma kinux qed jistennew lil xulxin. Sa dal-bin terġa' tkun dablet Tereza li tmur in-naħa tal-għarus tagħha.

MARTIN: [*Mifxul*] Tharsux hekk bl-ikrah lejn xulxin, qiskom sa tibilgħu wieħed lil iehor.

TEREZA: Mela ma għidtilhomx li l-partit kien ser isir tat-tnejn f'daqqa?

MARIJA: Papà, x'għamilt ilna?

MARTIN: Uliedi, ma għedtilhom xejn. [*Lil Karlu*] Int oqgħod bil-qiegħda hawn. [*Lil Guzepp*] u int hawn. Int, Tereza, oqgħod fejn Guzepp u inti, Marija fejn Karlu. [*Iqahqah grizmejh bħal wieħed li qed ibati jfisser x'għamej*] Le, ma għidtilhomx li kont ser inlaqqagħhom flimkien. Meta kellimt lil Karlu rajtu li lil Guzepp ma jistax jarah b'għajnejh. [*Guzepp jabbat ser iqum bil-ponn imgħaqqad. Tereza tniżżlu bil-qiegħda*] Meta lil Karlu semmejtlu lil Guzepp rajt li lanqas ried biss jisma' bih. [*L-istess Karlu jabbat ser iqum għal Guzepp imma Marija tniżżlu bil-qiegħda*] Isimgħuni, uliedi. La tishnu għal xulxin. Jekk hawn xi hadd hati ta' din il-laqqha tagħkom bla ħsieb huwa jiena. Tafu għax laqqajtkom hawn? Laqqajtkom għax ma rridx biss naħseb li ż-żewġ uliedi li dejjem trabbew fl-imħabba ta' xulxin, waħda ma tgħaddix mingħajr l-oħra, meta jizzewġu jibded jobogħdu lil xulxin. Kif għidt jiena, Marija li jekk tixtri biċċa ċikulata ma tinzlihiex jekk ma tagħtix biċċa minnha lil oħtha u Tereza jekk tixtri ratal qubbajt fil-festa tar-raħal kienet tiegħu ratal iehor lil oħtha daqs kemm thobbha, meta jizzewġu ser jitolfu din l-imħabba u flok jinħabbu jibded jobogħdu lil xulxin? ... Għax nafuha aħna, jekk ir-raġel tal-waħda ma jkunx jahmel lir-raġel tal-oħra jibda l-inkwiet fil-familja u dan ma ridtux jiena

MARTIN [*in a voice of resignation*]: Ah well, God's will be done. [To Tereža] Go and look at the pasta and the potatoes.

TEREŽA: [*Leaves. As she goes out, she looks back at Ġużepp and seeing that he has his back to her she says softly to Marija*] You'd better watch out: yours is in no hurry to come and see you.

Marija clenches her fist and Tereža goes out. However, at that instant another knock is heard at the second door. Martin goes to open.

MARTIN: Karlu's arrived. Come in. Marija, your fiancé's here as well. Now we're all together, one happy family.

Marija goes to greet him and bids him welcome. But Karlu, after taking her hand, glares across the room at Ġużepp. Ġużepp glares back from the other side. Apparently neither had been expecting the other. Pause, until Tereža returns and goes to join her fiancé.

MARTIN [*confused*]: Don't glare at one another like that, as if you were going to eat each other.

TEREŽA: What, you didn't tell them that both the parties would take place together?

MARIJA: Daddy, what have you done to us?

MARTIN: Children, I didn't say anything to them. [To Karlu:] Now, you just sit down here. [To Ġużepp:] And you here. Tereža, you sit next to Ġużepp, and Marija, you next to Karlu. [*Clears his throat like someone who has difficulty in explaining himself.*] No, I didn't tell them I was going to invite them both together. When I spoke to Karlu, I realised he couldn't stand the sight of Ġużepp. [*Ġużepp starts to rise and clenches his fist. Tereža pushes him back onto his chair.*] Listen to me, children. Don't get mad at each other. If anyone's to blame for your unexpected meeting, it's me. Do you know why I brought you here together? I brought you together because I can't bear to think that my two daughters, who have always been brought up loving one another and who have always been together, should start to hate each other when they get married. So, I said to myself, Marija, who if she buys a bar of chocolate can't swallow it unless she gives a piece to her sister, and Tereža, who if she buys a pound of nougat at the village festa always buys another pound for her sister, she loves her so much, when they get married, is this love to be lost, and instead of loving one another, are they to start hating each other? For we know that if the husband of one can't stand the husband of the other, then the family will start quarrelling, and I

... U meta jkun hemm il-frott, meta Tereza 'kk Alla jrid ikollha għaxart itfal bħal ommha u Marija għaxra oħra, dawn it-fal meta jghad-du fejn xulxin jibdew iħarsu bl-ikreh lejn xulxin ukoll? Imbagħad din il-mibegħda kollha għalfejn? Għax intom kandidati ta' żewġ partiti wieħed kontra l-ieħor? Il-Partit tas-Sofor huwa kontra l-Partit tal-Hodor. Imma ż-żewġ xbejbiet ta' Martin ma humiex kontra xulxin. U mela għaliex żwiegħom għandhom ikunu kontra xulxin? ... Għalhekk laqqajtkom hawn flimkien mingħajr ma għedtilkom. Issa jekk għamilt hazin jew tajjeb għiduli intom ...

Għal ftit jaqa' skiet kbir, sakemm Karlu iqum minn postu u joffri idu lil Guzepp. Dan jagħfashielu. Jitgħannqu bħal żewġ ħbieb. Tereza u Marija imqanqlin jitgħannqu flimkien. Martin jimsaħ id-dmugħ. Jin-stama' taħbit minn żewġ bibien mnejn daħlu Karlu u Guzepp. Marija u Tereza jmorru jiftħu, kulhadd in-naħa tiegħu. Mill-bieb mnejn daħal Karlu jidbġu wieħed wara l-ieħor, ħub, pulizija bil-frank, is-surmast ta' l-iskola, Fredu, u Wigi kandidat ieħor tal-Partit tas-Sofor u mill-bieb mnejn ikun daħal Guzepp jidbġu t-tabib tar-raħal, Pawlu u Karmnu, żewġ kandidati oħra mill-Partit tal-Hodor. Martin ferhan jeħdilhom b'idhom wieħed wieħed. Imma milli jidher, il-ħbieb tal-wieħed ma kinux jistennew lil ħbieb tal-ieħor. Barra s-surmast wit-tabib tar-raħal li jmorru jifirħu b'xulxin l-oħrajn jibqgħu ssummati jħarsu lejn xulxin donnhom iridu jaħbtu wieħed għall-ieħor. Skiet imbarazzanti. Tereza u Marija iħarsu lejn xulxin miḡxula, ma jafux x'jaqbd u jagħmlu sakemm ...

MARIJA: [Tgħid lil missierha miḡxul ukoll] Jaqaw din biċċa oħra tiegħek?

MARTIN: [Iqaħqah grizmu u jgħid] Biċċa oħra tiegħi għall-gid ta' kulhadd. U mhux minn rasi, tafux. Ridt nagħmlilkom ... ridt nagħmlilkom ... x'kelma qalli l-kappillan ... [B' sebgħu fuq nagħsu] Iwa, ridt nagħmlilkom sorpriża ... Lill-Kappillan għedtlu kemm kont inkwitat għax uliedi kienu ser jieħdu żewġ gūvintur mill-aħjar, ma ssibx bħalhom jekk iddur Għawdex kollu, imma mbagħad hej, ma jaħmlux lil xulxin qishom kelb u qattus. Il-Kappillan, qalli, għandi hasba. Ismagħni, Martin ... Qalli laqqa' l-għarajjes ta' uliedek fil-gūmata tal-partit ma' xulxin mingħajr ma jkunu jafu wieħed bl-ieħor ... aghmel partit wieħed ... u stieden tlieta mill-ħbieb tagħhom għall-festa ... bla preferenzi, biex hadd ma jkollu xi jgħid; dik gūmata ta' ferħ u żgur jagħmlu ħbieb. Jekk ma jagħmlux, mela lix-xebbiet tiegħek ma jħobbuhomx bi żżejjed.

didn't want that. And if there are little ones, when Tereza, if God wills, has ten children like her mother, and Marija has ten others, are these children too to start squabbling when they meet one another? After all, what's all the fighting about? Just because you are candidates of two opposing parties? The Yellow Party is against the Green Party. But Martin's two girls are not against each other. So why should their husbands be against each other? That's why I brought you together here without saying anything to you. Now you tell me whether I did right or not.

For a time there is a dead silence, until eventually Karlu gets to his feet and offers his hand to Ġuzepp. The latter grips it, and they embrace like two friends. Moved, Tereza and Marija embrace as well. Martin wipes his eyes. Knocking is heard at the two doors through which Karlu and Ġuzepp entered. Marija and Tereza go to open them, each on her own side. Through the door from which Karlu entered there appear one after the other his brother Toni, a policeman on leave, the village schoolmaster, and Fredu and Wigi, another Yellow Party candidate, whilst through the door from which Ġuzepp entered there appear the village doctor, Pawlu and Karmnu, two other candidates of the Green Party. Martin shakes hands with each of them, beaming. But it seems that the one group of friends was not expecting the other. With the exception of the schoolmaster and the doctor, who step forward and greet each other, the others remain speechless and look as if they would like to attack one another. Embarrassing silence. Tereza and Marija look helplessly at each other, not knowing how to start the conversation, until...

MARIJA [*speaks to her father, who also looks helpless*]: I suppose this is another of your bright ideas.

MARTIN [*clears his throat and speaks*]: Yes, this is another of my ideas for helping everyone. And, mark you, I didn't think it up on my own. I wanted it... I wanted it... now what was that word the parish priest used? [*With his finger to his forehead,*] Yes, I wanted it to be impromptu. I told the parish priest how unhappy I was, because my children were going to marry two of the finest young men, finer than any you'll find in the whole of Gozo, who none the less fight like cats and dogs. The parish priest says to me: 'I've got an idea. Listen to me, Martin,' he says, 'invite both your daughters' fiancés together to one party, without either of them knowing... Have just one party, and invite three of their friends to the celebration – no discrimination, then no one can complain. This will be a day of rejoicing, and they're bound to make it up. If they don't, it will mean that they don't

U mexxiet, għax araw Ġuzepp u Karlu ħadu b'id xulxin u jiena ferħan ħafna. Biex ħadd ma jkollu xi jgħid stedint tnejn tal-iskola wkoll – lis-Surmast mal-ħbieb ta' Karlu u lit-tabib mal-ħbieb ta' Ġuzepp. Issa għiduli intom għamiltx tajjeb jew le.

Ġuzepp u Karlu jeħduba wieħed b'id u l-ieħor b'oħra, sinjal li l-ħasba tiegħu mexxiet.

TABIB: U lill-Kappillan ma stedintux, Martin?

MARTIN: Stedintu. Imma taf x'qalli, Qalli, Martin, li kont nista' ninqasam fi tnejn kieku nofsi kont mmur mal-ħbieb ta' Karlu win-nofs l-ieħor mal-ħbieb ta' Ġuzeppi. Imma billi ma nistax ninqasam l-aħjar ma niġix. – U din x'fiha, għedtlu, Sur Kappillan? Ser joqogħdu jaraw?

KARLU: Sewwa għedtlu. Dal-biża' għalfejn?

ĠUZEPP: Tassew. Dal-kappillan x'ħaseb li aħna, tgħid?

MARTIN: Mela wliedi, tafu x'qalli? Hareġ kaxxa sulfarini bħal din mill-but. Qalli qed tara din is-sulfarina? [*Martin jagħmel dak li jgħid*] Arani, mela. Qabbad sulfarina. Qalli rajt kif hareġ in-nar malli s-sulfarina messet mal-kubrit? – Rajt, sur kappillan, għedtlu. Qalli Martin, hekk ukoll il-partiti johroġ in-nar minnhom malli jmissu ma' xulxin, jew xi ħadd imiss magħhom. Jiena nibża' minn-nar. Għandi suttana ġdida ma rridx nahraqha ... Xi trid tgħid bih dal-kliem, sur Kappillan? saqsejtu – Martin, qalli, il-bniet tiegħek ser jieħdu żewġ ġuvintur ma hawnx bħalhom ir-raħal kollu, imma għall-pulitka joqtlu ... jishnu wisq u jekk toghgob lil wieħed tiksirha mal-ieħor.

KARLU: Ara, Martin kliem il-kappillan ma għogobni xejn. Dak li qal hu ma jghoddx għall-partit tas-Sofor ... il-partit tagħna partit tal-irġiel ... [*Kif igħid hekk šhabu, Fredu u Wiġi jinqalgħu lejn in-naħa tiegħu, igħidu: Sewwa qed igħid – Il-partit tas-Sofor partit tal-galantomi eċċ.*]

ĠUZEPP: [*Jishon*] Isma' jiena ma għandix ħajta f'ilsieni ... jekk qed tgħid li l-partit tal-Hodor mhux partit tal-galantomi, ngħidlek li ma intix galantom int u lanqas niesek ...

Šhabu, Pawlu u Karmnu jersqu lejn in-naħa tiegħu u l-erbġha jħarsu bl-ikreh lejn xulxin ...

love your daughters enough. And it came off, for you can see Ġuzepp and Karlu shaking hands, and you can imagine how happy I am. So that no one could complain, I invited two educated gentlemen as well – the schoolmaster with Karlu's friends and the doctor with Ġuzepp's friends. Now tell me whether I did right or not.

Ġuzepp and Karlu take each other by the hand, to show that the idea has succeeded.

DOCTOR: And you didn't invite the parish priest, Martin?

MARTIN: Certainly I invited him. But do you know what he said? 'Martin,' he says, 'if I could cut myself in two, one half would go with Karlu's friends and the other half with Ġuzepp's friends. But since I'm indivisible, I'd better not go.' 'So what, Your Reverence?' I say to him, 'who's going to take any notice?'

KARLU: Quite right. What's he frightened of?

ĠUZEPP: Certainly. What sort of people does this parish priest think we are?

MARTIN: Well, children, do you know what he said? He takes a box of matches out of his pocket like this. He asks me: 'Do you see this match?' [*Martin matches his actions to his words.*] 'Now, watch me,' he says. He lights the match. 'You see how the match catches fire as soon as it touches the box?' he says. 'Sure I see, Your Reverence,' I say. 'Martin,' he says, 'that's just how the two parties catch fire when they touch each other, or somebody touches them. Now, I'm afraid of fire. I've got a new cassock, and I don't want it to get burned.' 'What do you mean by that, Your Reverence?' I ask him. 'Martin,' he says, 'your daughters are going to marry the two finest lads in the village, but they'll murder each other on account of politics. They're both easily provoked, and if you please one of them, the other gets mad with you.'

KARLU: Look here, Martin, I don't like this parish priest's talk at all. What he said doesn't apply to the Yellow Party. We're a party of gentlemen. [*As he speaks, his friends Fredu and Wigi move to his side, saying:*] Quite right, the Yellows are a party of gentlemen, etc.

ĠUZEPP [*excitedly*]: Listen, I'm not one to mince my words. If you're suggesting that the Greens are not a party of gentlemen, then I say that you're not a gentleman yourself, neither you nor your people.

His friends Paulu and Karmnu move to his side and the four of them glare angrily at each other.

MARTIN: Jahasra, x'ghamilt b'idejja! ... dik kienet ċajta ... ċajta tal-kappillan ... ċajta biss ... Isa, surmast, tabib, jahasra, għidu kelma għall-ġid ... thalluhomx ihassru festi ...

SURMAST: [*Lil Karlu*] Ahna ser nitbellhu, jew? Illum waqt il-ġlied? Jiena biex niehu qatra ġejt mhux biex nismagħkom titlewmu? Isa, Karl, hallina minn dan ...

TABIB: [*Lil Ġuzepp*]: Iva narrak imbierek, jiena ġejt ferħan li ser niehu qatra u int ser tagħmel dix-xenata? Isa, erġġhu ħudu b'idejn xulxin.

KARLU: Mhux dak il-kiesah beda?

TEREZA: Bdejt int u jekk jogħġbok lill-għarus tiegħi tgħidlux kiesah.

MARIJA: Għax ma ssikketx ilsienek, ja ħmara li int. Mhux l-għarus tiegħek beda?

MARTIN: [*Jonfoħ u jgħajjat*] Uliedi, ser tħassru kollox ... [*It-tabib wis-surmast ifittxu jberrduhom waqt li l-oħrajn jibqgħu jħarsu lejn xulxin donnhom iridu jieklu wieħed lil ieħor*]

TEREZA: Lili tgħid ħmara? Lili, ja kiesha. Ejja ħa nurik jiniex ħmara ... [*Kif tgħid hekk tmur taqbad f'xuxet oħtha ... Martin jagħti fuq rasu jgħajjat, Ifirduhom ... ser tħassru kollox ... Karlu u Ġuzepp jzommu kull wieħed l-għarusa tiegħu. Għal ftit taqa' sikta kbira. Imbagħad ...*]

MARTIN: [*B'lehen miksar*] Ara x'kelli nara llum ... u dan mħabba daqsxejn ta' ċajta ... din l-imgharrqa politka ... Karlu, Ġuzepp, f'gieħ Alla, ejjew ħudu b'id xulxin ... ejjew ... uliedi, għidulhom jieħdu b'id xulxin. Agħmluhom paċi ...

SURMAST: [*Iressaq lil Marija lejn Karlu waqt li t-tabib iressaq lil Tereza ħdejn Ġuzepp*] Inti Tereza, aqbad b'idejn Ġuzepp u inti, Marija, b'idejn Karlu. [*Karlu u Ġuzepp jersqu lejn xulxin u bi tħissima jerġġu jieħdu b'id xulxin*].

KARLU: Kienet ċajta ...

MARTIN: God save us, what have I let myself in for? That was a joke – the parish priest was only joking. Now, Teacher and Doctor, for heaven's sake say something sensible... Don't let them spoil the party.

SCHOOLTEACHER [*To Karlu*]: Are you trying to make us look silly, or what? I came here for a drink, not to listen to you two squabbling. Come on, Karlu, that's enough of that.

DOCTOR [*To Ġużepp*]: You wretch, I came looking forward to a drink, and you have to create a scene? Come, shake hands again with each other.

KARLU: It was that hooligan who started it, wasn't it?

TEREŽA: It was you who started it, and you have the impertinence to call my fiancé a hooligan?

MARIJA: Why don't you shut up, you idiot? It was your fiancé who started it, wasn't it?

MARTIN [*puffing and shouting*]: Children, you'll spoil everything.

The doctor and the schoolmaster try to calm them, while the others continue to glare as if they could murder each other.

TEREŽA: You're calling me an idiot? Me, you brazen hussy? I'll show you whether I'm an idiot...

As she says this, she grabs at her sister's hair. Martin, tearing his own hair, shouts:

Separate them, they'll spoil everything.

Karlu and Ġużepp each take hold of their respective fiancée. For a short while there is a deep silence. Then...

MARTIN [*in a broken voice*]: To think that I should have lived to see this day... And all because of a little joke. These infernal politics... Karlu, Ġużepp, for heaven's sake, come and shake hands with each other. Come, children, tell them to shake hands. Get them to make it up.

SCHOOLTEACHER [*pushes Marija towards Karlu whilst the doctor pushes Tereža towards Ġużepp*]: Tereža, you take Ġużepp's hand, and Marija, you take Karlu's. [*Karlu and Ġużepp approach each other and with a smile again shake hands.*]

KARLU: It was a joke.

ĠUŻEPP: Ċajta biss ...

MARTIN: Ċajta tal-kappillan ...

SURMAST: ... Prosit, hekk sewwa ...

TABIB: Isbaħ mill-paci ma hemmx fid-dinja ...

MARTIN: Marija ... Tereza, morru gewwa gibu qatra lill-ħbieb ...

Joħroġu ...

TONI: [*Wagt li l-oħrajn jirkellmu bejniethom*] Mur għidilna, Pawl, kemm kellek tikber meta konna għadna mmorru l-iskola tal-Gvern flimkien Il-pulitka għamlitek nies ...

PAWLU: [*Imfantas*] Mela jien kont ħanżir, Toni?

TONI: U fhimtni hazin! Issa int bħal Koli ta' Xafrin? Dak jirgħa n-nagħaġ beda u jirgħa n-nagħaġ għadu. Int tħallat ruħek miegħu?

PAWLU: Mela mohħ ta' kulhadd xorta, Ton?

TONI: Hekk mhux. Ara int, Alla jbierek, kemm imxejt 'il quddiem.

PAWLU: Il-bniedem hadd ma jkun jaf x'għandu jgħaddi minn għalih. Fejn qatt għaddieli minn rasi li għad irrid nibda nikkmanda lil Malta u Għawdex ...

TONI: Bi ħsiebek tagħmel xi ħaġa sabiħa għar-raħal?

PAWLU: Jiena ... u mela le ... lill-kappillan ġa wegħedu li nwaħħallu żewġ fanali quddiem iz-zuntier ... nifthulu triq għan naħa ta' Għajn Siġar ... u nwaħħlu erba' fanali mal-ħitan ... għax tkun għaddej bil-lejl lanqas tara taħlef ...

KARMNU: [*Li jkun qed jissemma*] E, insejt tgħidlu li sa nqabdu hafna nies jaħdmu ... kemm Alla ħalaq ... biex hadd ma jgerger ...

FREDU: ... Imma dax-xoġhol kollu, ngħid jien, kif ser tagħmluh jekk il-Gvern mhux f'idejkom?

WIĠI: Sewwa qed tgħidlu.

PAWLU: Ara x'qallek, elezzjoni oħra aħna nirbħuha.

KARMNU: Darb'oħra ma nitilfuhieq il-pultruna tal-bellus li hemm f'dik id-dar sabiħa.

PAWLU: X'dar hi?

GUŽEPP: We were just joking.

MARTIN: The parish priest's joke.

SCHOOLTEACHER: Fine, now everything's all right again.

DOCTOR: There's nothing in the world finer than peace.

MARTIN: Marija, Tereza, go and get the drinks for the guests.

They go out.

TONI [*whilst the others chat amongst themselves*]: Who would have thought how far you'd get Pawl, since we used to go to the Government School together! Politics has made you somebody.

PAWLU [*offended*]: So otherwise I'd have been nobody, Toni, just a pig?

TONI: How you twist what I say! These days, are you like Koli ta' Xafrin? He began as a goatherd and a goatherd he's remained. Would you compare yourself to him?

PAWLU: Everybody's got the same brains, Toni, haven't they?

TONI: Certainly not. Look how you've got on, God be praised.

PAWLU: A man can never tell what's in store for him. How could I ever have dreamed that one day I'd be running Malta and Gozo?

TONI: Are you thinking of doing something special for the village?

PAWLU: Sure! I've already promised the parish priest that I'll fix up two lamp-posts for him in front of the church. We'll make up a road for him to Ghajn Sığar, and we'll fix four lamps on the walls – if you walk along there at night you can't see to spit.

KARMNU [*who has been listening*]: Hi, you've forgotten to tell him about the jobs we're going to create – for all the people God made – so that no one will be able to complain.

FREDU: But how are you going to do all this, may I ask, when you're not in power?

WIGI: He's quite right.

PAWLU: You watch out, we're going to win the next election.

KARMNU: Next time we're going to make sure of those velvet seats in that fine big building.

PAWLU: What building do you mean?

KARMNU: U dik id-dar fejn jiltaqgħu tal-Gvern x'jgħidulha bħal issa? Għidilna int Mast.

SURMAST: [*Ikun medbi jitkellem ma' oħrajn*] Lili qed tgħid?

KARMNU: Iva, lilek Mast. X'jgħidulha dik il-kamra fejn jiltaqgħu biex jiħaddtu kulħadd jgħid tiegħu?

SURMAST: Emminni ma nafx għal xiex trid tgħid. [*Isejjaħ lit-tabib*] Dott, ara Karmnu tagħna jrid isaqsik xi haġa ... ma nistax naqbad x'inh.

KARMNU: U dik, tabib, dik, għorfa bħal kamra kbira kbira fejn jiltaqgħu dawk li jikkmandaw lil Malta, Għawdex u Kemmuna ...

SURMAST: Kam, zid Kemmunett u Filfla biex tkun semmejt kollox.

TABIB: Naf għalfejn qed jgħid. Għall-Assemblea Legislativa.

KARMNU: X'kelma twila ... il-kliem tal-iskola twil wisq ...

It-tabib itaptaplu fuq spalltu u hu wis-surmast joqogħdu jiħaddtu bejniethom ...

PAWLU: [*Lil Toni*] Taf x'qed ingħid, Ton. Lil Karmnu fraħtlu talli tala' fil-Gvern u lili lanqas kelma.

TONI: Ara taħseb li ma ridx nifraħlek ukoll, taf ... għalija jien bniedem tas-servizz, ġejt hawn biex nikkompanja 'l hija Karlu u għada għall-uniformi bħas-soltu ... wil-Bambin jehlisna mill-politika. Issa jiena rrid minnkom ... Kos, jaqbadni d-daħk x'hin niftakar li konna l-iskola flimkien; min jaf kemm morna l-għalqa u ġrejna għall-bejtiet tal-għasafar u issa meta narakom ser ikolli nsellmilkom.

KARMNU: Mhux għalija, Ton, imma meta tarana sellmilna għax jekk ikun hemm xi hadd ieħor li ma jsellimx ma nkunux nistgħu nagħmlu favuri ...

PAWLU: Sewwa qallek Kamnu, sellem, biex ma nagħtu 'l hadd xi jgħid...

TONI: U mela ma nsellemx. Lilkom nagħrafkom minn mil bogħod, imma qaluli li hemm erbghin minnkom ... dawn biex tagħrafhom kollha trid twaħhlilhom medalja ...

FREDU: Taf li għogbitni l-idea ta' Toni. L-ewwel haġa li nagħmlu malli nitilgħu fil-Gvern ngħaddu liġi biex kull min jikkmanda 'l Malta u Għawdex jibda jgib il-medalja ...

KARMNU: That building where the Government meets. Now, what do they call it? You tell us, Schoolteacher.

SCHOOLTEACHER [*who has been engrossed in other conversation*]: Are you speaking to me?

KARMNU: Yes, Schoolteacher, to you. What do they call that place where they meet so that everyone can make a speech?

TEACHER: Believe me, I don't know what you're talking about. [*Calls the doctor.*] Doc, our Karmnu wants to ask you something... I can't make out what he's talking about.

KARMNU: It's a room, Doctor, like a large hall, where they hold meetings of those who're running Malta, Gozo and Comino...

TEACHER: Karm, don't forget Cominetta and Filfla while you're at it.

DOCTOR: I know what he means, the House of Representatives.

KARMNU: What a mouthful! What long words educated people use!

The doctor claps him on the shoulder, and he and the schoolteacher go on talking together.

PAWLU: [*to Toni*] You know what occurs to me, Toni? You congratulated Karmnu on getting selected, but you didn't say a word to me.

TONI: Don't think that I didn't want to congratulate you as well, but you know... I'm a civil servant, I came over to stay with my brother Karlu, and tomorrow I'll be back in uniform as usual... and heaven preserve us from politics. These days, I'm your servant. I really can't help laughing when I remember that we were at school together, who knows how often we used to go out together bird-nesting, and now whenever I see you I have to salute you.

KARMNU: Not on my account, Toni, but when you see us, don't forget to salute us, since if someone else fails to salute us, we have to do something about it.

PAWLU: Karmnu's quite right. You have to salute us, otherwise the others might complain.

TONI: Sure, I salute, don't I? You I can recognise from a long way off, but they tell me that there are forty of you. So that one can recognise you all, you ought to have a medal pinned on you.

FREDU: You know, I like that idea of Toni's. The first thing we'll do when we get in is to pass a law saying that every M.P. must wear a medal.

PAWLU: Medalja sabiha ...

KARMNU: Medalja tad-deheb ...

FREDU: U le tal-fidda biżżejjed... Nibzghu għall-kaxxa ta' Malta, l-aħwa!
basta medalja ...

KARMNU: Hares, ħuti, in-nies mhux midalji trid imma x-xogħol ... ħobż
id-dar.

KARLU: [*Li jersaq fuqhom jissamma' ma' Ġużepp*] Min għamel xogħol daqs
il-Gvem tas-Sofor? ...

ĠUZEPP: Tal-Hodor għamel iżjed ...

KARLU: Min fetah il-gibjun?

ĠUZEPP: Min bena skejjel l-aktar?

KARLU: Min fetah il-latrina tat-Tokk?

ĠUZEPP: Il-partit tal-Hodor!

KARLU: Mhux veru. Qed ngħidlek fetahha l-Partit tas-Sofor.

*Jibqghu sa ftit ieħor imieru lil xulxin, wieħed igħid tas-Sofor, l-
ieħor tal-Hodor sa ma jibdew ifersfu idejhom f'wiċċ xulxin ...*

ĠUZEPP: Issa telagħli. Intom is-Sofor taf x'intom? qabda nies ma temmnu
b'xejn ...

KARLU: U intom, intom taf x'intom? ... qabda nies faċċoli ... faċċoli ...

*Ġużepp u Karlu jkunu ser jaħbtu għal xulxin. Iferrqhom is-surmast
u t-tabib waqt li l-oħrajn joqogħdu jħarsu donnhom jistennew jaraw xi
taqtigħa. Dal-ħin jidbru deħlin minn gol-kċina Martin, Marija u Tereža
bil-gabarrè mimli xorb u ħelu għall-għarajjes wil-mistednin. It-tfajliet
jinfexxu jwerżqu, bil-gabarrè ser jaqa' minn idejhom.*

MARTIN: [*Lit-tfal*] Hsiebkom f'dak il-gabarrè ... għamilt ħafna spejjeż
għal xejn ... ser tħassru kolloxx... Niżżlu dak il-gabarrè fuq il-mejda
... rażżnu l-għarajjes tagħkom feroci li għandkom għax ma niflaħx
iżjed għal dawn ix-xenati ... [*Jagħmlu bekk – Kulħadd jiskot. Wara
pawsa*] Issa ħalluni nitkellew ... Isingħuni, uliedi, Ġużepp u Karlu u
intom surmast u tabib araw jiniex qed ngħidilkom sewwa – [*Lil Karlu
u Ġużepp*] Ejjew 'l hawn [*Jagħmlu bekk*] Intom tridu tiżżewgu lil
uliedi? [*Inkwitat għax ma jitkellmux, igħajjat*] Tridu, jew le? [*Jagħmlu*

PAWLU: A handsome medal.

KARMNU: A gold medal.

FREDU: And a silver one's not good enough? We must be careful with public funds, comrades. Provided it's a proper medal...

KARMNU: Be careful, comrades, it's not medals that people want, but jobs - full stomachs.

KARLU [*comes over to them to listen to Ġużepp*]: Who created as many jobs as the Yellow Government?

ĠUŻEPP: The Greens did more.

KARLU: Who built the reservoir?

ĠUŻEPP: Who built more schools?

KARLU: Who provided the public lavatory at It-Tokk?

ĠUŻEPP: The Green Party.

KARLU: That's not true. I tell you the Yellow Party provided it.

They go on contradicting each other for a short while, some saying 'Yellow' and the others 'Green', until they start shaking their hands in each other's faces.

ĠUŻEPP: You really get under my skin. You Yellows, you know what you are? A bunch of people with no principles.

KARLU: And you, you know what you are? A bunch of hypocrites.

Ġużepp and Karlu are on the point of striking each other. The schoolmaster and the doctor separate them, whilst the others look on as if expecting to see a fight. At that moment Martin, Marija and Tereza enter from the kitchen with a tray loaded with food and drink for the fiances and their guests. The girls start screaming, and nearly drop the tray.

MARTIN: [*to his daughters*] You watch out for that tray. I've spent a lot of money for nothing... Everything's going to be spoiled. Put that tray on the table. You hold these wild young men of yours, I can't cope with these scenes any longer. [*They do so. Everyone is silent. After a pause...*] Now you let me speak. Listen to me, children, Ġużepp and Karlu, and you, Teacher, and you, Doctor, you see whether I'm talking sense. [*To Karlu and Ġużepp*]: Come here, both of you. [*They do so.*] Do you want to marry my daughters? [*Worried, because they do not answer, shouts*]: Do you want to, yes or no? [*They indicate*

iva b'rashom] Tridu. Kollox sewwa. Issa Ġuzepp u Karlu isimghuni, Tereza u Marija qatt ma kellhom xi jghidu f'ghomorhom hlief illum mhabba fikom. Mill-bqija tfajliet kwieti ssemmix, tal-knisja, tal-gabra. Jinhabbu ma jghaddux wahda minghajr l-oħra. [*Lil Ġuzepp*] Jiena naf kemm thobbha lil Terez. Ghidli s-seww. Lil Terez trid taraha qalbha sewda mhabba fik?

ĠUZEPP: Le ma rridx.

MARTIN: [*Lil Karlu*] Int lil Marija ma thobbhiex anqas milli Ġuzepp ihobb lil Tereza. Mhux hekk?

KARLU: Inħobbha daqs ruhi l-ghaziza.

MARTIN: Mela lin-nisa tagħkom tkunu triduhom isellmu lil xulxin u jmorru għand xulxin, mhux hekk?

KARLU u ĠUZEPP: U mela le ...

MARTIN: [*Jaqbad id il-wieħed u l-ieħor*] Mela aghmlu paci. Sa tieħdu lill-aħwa. Qisu li tghixu bħal aħwa.

SURMAST: Bravu, sur Martin.

TABIB: Raġel tas-sens is-sur Martin.

MARTIN: Isaw Ġuzepp u Karlu, aghfsu id xulxin ...

Jagħmlu bekk.

KARLU: Kienet ċajta ...

ĠUZEPP: Ċajta biss ...

MARTIN: U issa nixorbu qatra bis-saħħa tal-għarajjes.

Kulħadd jersaq fuq il-mejda u jieħu tazza xorb. Ighidu flimkien: Bis-saħħa tal-għarajjes! xħin ikunu qed jerggħu jqieghdu t-tazzi bat-tala, tinstema' tabbita fuq il-bieb, Martin imur jiftaħ

MARTIN: Issa aħna lkoll. Hawn Kurun il-ħuttab ... [*Ġuzepp u Karlu jmorru jifirħu bib*] Ara Kurun ... X'hemm Kurun ...

KURUN: Martin stedintni għall-qatra mal-għarajjes. Mhux hekk kien jixraq? Il-ħuttab jorbot u ġejt biex norbotkom ...

MARIJA: [*Lil missierha – innervjata*] Papà, lilna ma għeditilna xejn b'dan?

agreement by nodding.] You do? All right. Now listen to me, Ġużepp and Karlu. Tereža and Marija have never had a quarrel in all their life, except today on account of you two. Otherwise there couldn't be two better-hehaved, pious and thrifty girls. They love one another so much that one won't go out without the other. [*To Ġużepp:*] I know how much you love Tereža. Now tell me the truth. Do you want to see Tereža hurt because of you?

ĠUŻEPP: No, I certainly don't.

MARTIN [*To Karlu*]: You love Marija just as much as Ġużepp loves Tereža. Isn't that so?

KARLU: I love her like my life.

MARTIN: And you want your wives to greet each other, and visit each other, don't you?

KARLU AND ĠUŻEPP: Sure.

MARTIN [*taking them by the hand*]: So, make peace. You're marrying two sisters. It's only right that you should live like brothers.

TEACHER: Bravo, Mr. Martin.

DOCTOR: Mr. Martin's talking sense.

MARTIN: Come now, Ġużepp and Karlu, shake hands.

They do so.

KARLU: We were joking.

ĠUŻEPP: It was only a joke.

MARTIN: And now let's drink a toast to the bridal couples... [*All go to the table and take drinks. They say in unison:*] To the bridal couples!

While they are replacing their empty glasses, a knock is heard at the door. Martin goes to open it.

MARTIN: Now we're all here. It's Kurun, the match-maker. [*Ġużepp and Karlu go to greet him:*] Hi, there, Kurun! How are things, Kurun?

KURUN: Martin asked me to look in for a drink with the happy couples. Isn't this how it should be? The match-maker arranges betrothals, and I've come to see to your betrothal.

MARIJA [*to her father, irritably*]: Daddy, you didn't say anything to us about this.

TEREZA: [*Innervjata bħalha*] Kollox la antika.

MARTIN: Ma għedtilkom xejn ... ridt naghmlilkom ... x'inhi l-kelma li qalli l-kappillan ... [*Iħabbat sebgħu fuq nagħsu*]... sibtha ... surpriza ... Ridt naghmlilkom surpriza. Għedt Marija u Tereza il-ħwejjeg kollha tan-nanna għogħbuhom ... kullma sabu fis-senduq ... id-dublett ta' mitt lembuba ... il-farda ... il-kulè ... ix-xinilja tas-suf ... iċ-ċulqana ... kullma ħalliet warajha. .. Għedt mela żgur li joghħbuhom ukoll l-usanzi tan-nanna. Illum Kurun ser jorbotkom kif il-ħuttat rabat lin-nanna man-nannu u lili ma' ommkom, Alla jaħfrilha. U hekk, uliedi, illum ser nerġgħu mmorru għall-antik ... L-antiki nies tajba.

GUZEPP: Jiena l-antiki joghħbuni ħafna. In-nies tal-lum ksuħat għandhom wisq.

Pawlu u Karmu jgħidu kliem li juru li jaqblu.

KARLU: Taf li lili dawn id-drawwiet tal-antiki joghħbuni wkoll! Id-dar għad għandna d-dublett tat-tieg li żżewġet bih il-bużnanna u sidrija tan-nannu bil-buttni langasin, ma hix sabiħa bil-ftit.

SURMAST: Jiena dilettant tal-antik, xi darba ħallini narahom.

TABIB: Kemm kienu jilbsu isbaħ mill-lum l-antiki. Jien għandi mużew shiħ id-dar.

FREDU: [*Lil Martin*] Ahna ser niehdu qatra tal-għarajjes jew le?

MARTIN: Isa, Kurun fittex orbothom ...

KURUN: Hawn jien arani ... [*Lil Martin*] qiegħed erba' sigġijiet tnejn tnejn fejn xulxin fejn il-ħajt.

Martin jagħmel hekk. Ighinuh x'uħud mill-oħrajn.

KURUN: [*Lill-għarajjes*] Int Karlu u Marija oqogħdu din-naħa; Tereza u Ġuzepp din in-naħa. [*Wara li qagħad iħares lejhom jitgħaxxaq bibom*] Xi gmiel ta' xebbiet u ġvintur. Karlu, jekk iddur ir-raħal kollu ma ssibx tifla oħra bħal Marija tiegħek. [*Lil Ġuzepp*] U xi ngħidu għal Tereza tiegħek Ġuzepp. [*Idur fuq Martin*] Habib, għandek tassew biex tifraħ li għandek żewġ xebbiet bħal dawn ... qronfol tar-raħal tagħna ... U fejnu ma jinix narah? Fejnu, Martin?

MARTIN: Min, Kurun?

KURUN: Qed infittex gabarrè u f'dal-gabarrè żewġ ċrieket tad-deheb biex norbtu l-għarajjes wir-riżq wil-barka.

TEREŽA [*equally irritated*]: Everything just like the old days.

MARTIN: I didn't say anything to you... I wanted it... Now what was that word the parish priest used? Impromptu. I wanted it to be impromptu. I said to myself how delighted Marija and Tereža were with all their grandmother's things – all the clothes they found in the chest – the skirt with a hundred pleats, the bedspread, the crinoline petticoat, the woollen shawl, the smock – everything she left behind her. So I said to myself how delighted they'd be with their grandmother's customs. Kurun will betroth you today just as the match-maker betrothed grandmother and grandfather, and me and your mother, God rest her soul. So, children, today we're returning to the old customs. They were fine people in those days.

GUŽEPP: I'm very fond of the old ways. Today people are too high and mighty.

Paulu and Karmnu indicate their agreement.

KARLU: You know, I like these old customs as well. At home we still have the wedding-dress my great-grandmother got married in, and grandfather's waistcoat with the big silver buttons; it's quite fine.

TEACHER: I collect antiques, some time you must let me see them.

DOCTOR: How much better people used to dress in the old days! I've a whole collection at home.

FREDU [*to Martin*]: Are we going to drink to the happy couples or not?

MARTIN: Come, Kurun, get on and betroth them.

KURUN: Now, pay attention to me. [*To Martin:*] Get four chairs and put them two by two against the wall.

Martin does so, some of the others helping him.

KURUN [*to the two couples*]: Karlu and Marija, you sit on this side, and Tereža and Gužep, you sit there. [*After they have sat down, he looks at them benevolently.*] What handsome girls and boys! Karlu, if you searched the whole village, you wouldn't find another girl like your Marija. [*To Gužep:*] And that goes for your Tereža, too, Gužep. [*Turns to Martin:*] My friend, you should be proud to have two daughters like these... roses of our village. Now, where is it, Martin, I don't see it?

MARTIN: What, Kurun?

KURUN: I'm looking for a tray and for two gold rings that should be on the tray, so that we can betroth the happy couples, God bless them.

MARTIN: Għal kollox ħsibtelek ... Arani sa ngiblek kollox ... [*Jidħol gewwa jgib gabarrè b'zewg ċrieket fib. Imur quddiem l-għarajjes*] Ġużep, int iċ-ċurkett tiegħek gibtu?

ĠUŻEP: Mela le. Niġu għall-partit bla ċurkett? ...

MARTIN: Ixħtu fil-gabarrè fejn dan, iċ-ċurkett ta' Tereza. [*Jagħmel bekk*]

MARTIN: [*Lil Karlu*]: U int, Karl, lil Marija ma xtrajtilhiex xi ċurkett ukoll?

KARLU: U mela le. Hawn hu [*Jixħtu fil-gabarrè*].

MARTIN: [*Lil Kurun*] Hawn il-gabarrè biċ-ċrieket. Fittex orbot, Kurun ... fittex orbot ...

KURUN: [*Bil-gabarrè f'idu*] Kemm inhossni ferħan ... zewg ġuvintur u xebbiet bħal dawn fejn ser issib ... [*Lil Ġużep u Tereza*] Aghtuni idejkom ħalli nġhaqqadkom ... Hekk, sewwa ħafna ... u issa ċ-ċrieket ... ħa naraw sewwa [*Idaħħal iċ-ċurkett l-ewwel f'sebgħa Ġużep u mbaġħad f'sebgħa Tereza*] ... Jidhlu tal-qjies. [*Lil Karlu u Marija*] U issa intom aghtuni idejkom ħalli nġhaqqad lilkom ukoll ... sewwa ħafna – wiċ-ċrieket ... tal-qjies ... jġugom sewwa kollha ... Jalla intom ukoll tkunu sewwa ma' xulxin sakemm jogħġob 'l Alla ... sal-mewt ... [*Martin jidher jimsaħ id-dmugħ. Kurun jittendi. Igħidlu*] Martin, illum nifirħu mal-għarajjes ... ħallik mil-biki ...

MARTIN: Hallini, Kurun, xhin niftakar li ser nitlef zewg ġawhriet bħal dawki; l-għaxxa ta' ħajti wil-bastun ta' xjuħiti ...

Tereza u Marija jħarsu lejn xulxin minn taħt 'il taħt.

KURUN: Alla jsabbar, Martin. [*Lill-mistednin*] X'qegħdin tagħmlu tħarsu biss? ... [*Jersqu lejn il-mejda*] Middu idejkom l-aħwa, mela dan il-ħelu, u dan ix-xorb għalxejn?

Martin u x'uħud igħinub iqassam ix-xorb. Kliem ta' xewqat sbieħ bħal "Bis-saħħa tal-għarajjes, Alla jgħaddihom 'il quddiem ..."

Wara x-xorb is-surmast wit-tabib jersqu fuq l-għarajjes, jeħdulhom b'idejhom, isellmu lil Martin u jitilqu. Bħalhom jagħmlu l-mistednin kollha ... Kurun l-aħħar li jitlaq.

KURUN: [*Hu u ħiereg*] Jekk Alla jrid, ma ndumx ma nerga' nduq il-biskuttini tagħkom ... taħt sena oħra ... u għal għaxar darbiet bħal ommkom ... Alla jgħaddikom 'il quddiem. Saħħa! [*Jobroġ wara li kulħadd ikun qallu sabħa, jwieġeb*] Grazzi ħafna taf! ...

MARTIN: I've thought of everything for you... See, I'll get everything for you. [*Goes inside and brings a tray with two rings on it. Stops in front of the bridal couples.*] Guzepp, you brought your ring with you?

GUZEPP: Naturally. Would we come to the engagement party without the ring?

MARTIN: Put it on the tray next to Tereza's. [*He does so.*] [*To Karlu:*] And you, Karl, didn't you buy Marija a ring, too?

KARLU: Here it is. [*Places it on the tray.*]

MARTIN [*to Kurun*]: Here's the tray with the rings. Get on with the betrothal, Kurun, get on with it.

KURUN [*holding the tray*]: How happy I am! Where could you find two young men and two young girls like these? [*To Guzepp and Tereza:*] Give me your hands and let me unite you. Like this, that's fine... and now the rings... let me see properly... [*Places a ring first of all on Guzepp's finger and then on Tereza's.*] A perfect fit! [*To Karlu and Marija:*] And now you give me your hands and let me unite you too. That's fine. Now the rings... a perfect fit... made to measure. God grant that you may live happily together as long as it pleases Him... until death do you part. [*Martin pretends to wipe his eyes. Kurun notices him, and says:*] Martin, today we must congratulate the happy couples, there's no place for tears.

MARTIN: I can't help it, Kurun, when I remember that I shall be losing two such jewels, the light of my life and the support of my old age.

Tereza and Martin look at each other surreptitiously.

KURUN: God will comfort you, Martin. [*To the guests:*] What are we all waiting for? [*Approaches the table.*] Stretch out your hands, brothers, do you want to see all this food and drink going to waste?

Martin and a few of the others help him to pour out drinks. Toasts, such as: 'The health of the happy couples, God bless them.'

After drinking, the schoolmaster and the doctor go up to the couples, shake hands, say good-bye to Martin and leave. The other guests do likewise. Kurun is the last to leave.

KURUN [*as he goes out*]: God willing, it won't be long before I take another drink off you - less than a year - and ten times, just like your mother. God be with you. Sahha. [*Goes out after everyone has said 'sahha' to him.*] Thank you, and the best of luck.

ĠUZEPP: Issa, Martin, ahna ftehimna li mmorru sa Ta' Pinu ... ma tigix magħna?

MARTIN: Mhux illum. Minn joqgħod mal-kċina? Meta ttejgu u jkun kollox sew.

KARLU: U ejja, Martin. Tieħu gost fil-karrozza.

MARTIN: Mhux illum. Imma hmistax oħra, jekk Alla jrid, niġi Ta' Pinu magħkom biex nirringrazzja lill-Madonna.

MARIJA: [*Tindiehes mal-għarus tagħha*] Kemm inhossni ferħana.

TEREZA: [*Lil-Ġuzepp*] Dalwaqt inkunu ta' xulxin.

L-għarajjes jitgħannqu. Fit-tagħniqa waqt li it-tnejn iħarsu lejn missierhom Tereza ssejjah lil Ġuzepp Joey u Marija lill-għarus tagħha Charlie ... L-għarajjes biex ikomplu ċ-ċajta waqt li jgħannqubom isej-ħulhom Terry u Mary.

MARTIN: Bħu xi ksuħat ...

ĠUZEPP: Ċajta ...

KARLU: Ċajta biss ...

Jinfexxu jidħku. Imbagħad joħroġu 'l barra lambranzetta ...

MARTIN: [*X'ħin isib ruħu waħdu, b'għajnejh merfugħa lejn is-sema, s-swaba' ta' idejha imdahħla go xulxin bħal min qed jitlob bl-akbar herqa jgħid*] San Nikola tal-Venturi, Patri Bernard qalli li inti twassal iż-żwieġ tax-xebbiet ... Ismagħni sewwa, San Nikola, jekk sa hmistax oħra ma jinqala' xejn wiż-żwieġ jimexxi, u jien neħles miż-żewġ xjaten li għandi, jiena nixgħellek xemgħa kuljum għal xahar u nsumlek hobż u ilma għal xahrejn ...

Jinżel is-Siparju.

ĠUZEPP: Look, Martin, we thought we'd drive to Ta' Pinu. Won't you come along with us?

MARTIN: Not today. Who will look after the cooking? I'll come when you're married and settled down...

KARLU: Come on, Martin, you'll enjoy the ride.

MARTIN: Not today. But in a fortnight's time, God willing, I'll be going to Ta' Pinu with you to give thanks to the Blessed Virgin.

MARIJA [*moving close to her fiancé*]: How happy I am!

TEREZA [*to Ġuzepp*]: Soon we shall belong to one another.

The engaged couples embrace, whereupon, after glancing at their father, Tereza calls Ġuzepp 'Joey' and Marija calls her fiancé 'Charlie'. The young men cap the joke by kissing them and calling them 'Tessy' and 'Mary'.

MARTIN: What nonsense is this?

ĠUZEPP: A joke.

KARLU: Just a joke...

They burst out laughing, and leave arm in arm.

MARTIN [*now that he finds himself alone, raises his eyes to heaven, joins his hands in pious supplication, and says*]: Blessed Saint Nicholas, Father Bernard tells me that you're very good at fixing up girls' marriages. Now, listen to me carefully, Saint Nicholas. If nothing goes wrong in the next two weeks and these weddings go through, and I'm rid of the two devils I have round my neck, every day for a month I will light you a candle, and for a whole two months I'll eat nothing but bread and water.

The curtain falls.