

# THE RANSOM OF THE PEASANTS

(A Dramatic Poem in Five Acts and a Tableau)

By A. CREMONA

(Translated by MAY BUTCHER from the Maltese Original)

## THE AUTHOR

Anthony Cremona, our authority on Maltese Grammar, the author of *Il-Fidwa tal-Bdiewa* (The Ransom of the Peasants), who has distinguished himself in several linguistic fields, was born in Gozo on May 27, 1880.

His earliest interests were literary, mainly Italian literature. It was not before he was thirty-two years of age that, after the encouragement he received from the leading novelist and poet of the time, Ġużè Muscat Azzopardi (1853-1927), he began to take literary and philological interest also in the Maltese Language, with the assistance of the Maltese grammarian Ġanni Vassallo (1862-1937), himself an authority on Maltese orthography.

When in 1920 'The Association of Maltese Writers' (*Għaqda tal-Kittieba tal-Malti*) was set up to study and recommend a uniform orthography which suited the linguistically mixed nature of Maltese, he was appointed member of the Commission. The result was a book published in 1924, now of historical importance, known as *Tagħrif fuq il-Kitba Maltija* (An Outline of Maltese Orthography), in the compilation of which he had a prominent part. The system of orthography established in the *Tagħrif* is now the system officially recognized by the Government and taught in the schools. All Maltese educational and political papers use this system.

For several years Mr Cremona was editor and translator of Government Publications, the first Teacher of Maltese in the Government Lyceum, first for evening classes and later on the regular staff. During the last war, he was asked to offer his services in the Department of Agriculture where he filled the post of Translator for the Maltese publications of the Department.

At the request of the Director of Education he compiled two Maltese Grammars for the Government Primary Schools and the Lyceum, which are still prescribed as text books in Government and private schools. In 1929, he published also *A Manual of Maltese Orthography and Grammar*, but the system is that which prevailed before the official recognition and general adoption of the *Għaqda's* system. He devoted much of his time also to the study of Maltese Folklore especially from the linguistic angle, as also to verse and prose writing some of such literary works consisting of lyrical poems, short stories, essays and dramatic sketches published in book or booklet form.

## THE TRANSLATOR

May Butcher (1886-1950), born in Great Grimsby, Lincolnshire, the daughter of Colonel Henry Townsend Butcher of the Royal Field Artillery killed in action in 1915 in the First Great War, and Annie Susan Dalrymple-Hay, was one of the very few English residents who took serious interest in the Maltese Language. She spent eighteen years in Malta, compiled a Maltese Grammar for English students (O.U.P. 1938) and translated into English A. Cremona's *Il-Fidwa tal-Bdiewa*, *Vassalli u Żmenijietu*, and several of Mgr. Dun Karm Psaila's poems.

## SUBJECT-MATTER

The main story of Cremona's pastoral-epic five-act play turns on a memorable historical event which happened in 1427-29. Malta at that time formed part of the Kingdom of Sicily ruled by a Viceroy in the name of his Sovereign, Alphonse V, King of Aragon and Sicily. At that time, feudal lord of Malta was Gonsalvo Monroy who held the Island on long lease on payment of 30,000 gold florins. In order to have his money back at usury interest he taxed the impoverished Islanders who, one day, unable to endure more oppression rose up in arms against him; held his wife, Donna Costanza, as a hostage till they forced the Viceroy of Sicily to agree in the name of King Alphonse to the redemption of the Island and its reunion with the royal demesne, on the refund of 30,000 florins to Monroy. The money was collected from house to house at great sacrifice and so the peasants could pay their ransom. To be fair to Monroy, we must say that Monroy on his death-bed directed by his will that the price of redemption paid by the Maltese should be returned to them and that the sum of 10,000 florins still due should go into the Treasury for the defence of their Islands.

*Il-Fidwa tal-Bdiewa* illustrates the lexical wealth of the Maltese Language and the author's command of it as a medium of literary self-expression.

J. AQUILINA

## Note:-

The following characteristic Maltese letters: *ċ*, *ġ*, *ħ*, *j*, *x*, *ż* and *għ* used in personal and local names stand for the English sounds of: *ch* (in *church*), *j*, *b* (in *horse*), *y*, *sh*, *z* (in *buzz*), and, only etymologically, the Arabic *ʿayn* respectively, as in fact *għ* is silent except where it precedes pronominal suffix *h* ('*ha*') or closes the last final syllable and is preceded by *ie*, *i*, and *u* when it is sounded like *h*.

## THE RANSOM OF THE PEASANTS

### PROLOGUE

To reach the forgotten graves on Bingemma's heights, ascend  
from Fiddien near the caves to Ġnejna Valley's end,  
I recall not where exactly, for centuries have passed  
and demolished walls and cottages, now buried by Time's blast.  
From the lips of Ġnejna's singer, I took the song and then,  
with modern words adorned it, as I wrote with thoughtful pen.  
Rough was the swing of the music, simple the words he spoke,  
derived from the way of life of those unenlightened folk.  
I tell it as I feel it; it pleased me; therein revealed  
lay beauty of hill, of valley, the verdure of each field.  
Strong as flint I sensed it, like the sound of a vesper-bell  
borne down on silent sunset through vast land like a knell.  
In my heart I felt it speaking this story of peasant-woe  
as, to her child, a mother reads a tale of long ago.  
'Twas midsummer; with the reaping and the harvest at their height  
when, fluttering over some well, a bird is a common sight.  
Earth parched, the threshing-floor baked, One evening, when I was bound  
to Ġnejna from Fomm ir-Riĥ, myself on a path I found  
pacing along with mind adrift on waves of vagrant thought  
which, lulled by that hour, in the most entrancing book is taught.  
From field to field the trees have, each, some memory to recall  
and one will often hear that song beneath the cottage-wall.  
The water bubbles from the rock, lamenting even yet  
those simple peasants' cruel deaths by tyranny beset.  
The sunset-glow outlines the hill and marks the close of day,  
the darkness fast approaches; in the distance far away  
(drawn by the sound of tinkling bells) the straining eye descries  
the flock returning homeward from the field as evening dies.  
Hair winnowed by the wind, upon the threshing-floor there stands  
a singer veiled in a cloud of dust and straw. The cow expands  
her nostrils to the evening dampness as she feels the rope  
loosed from her neck. With truss of hay on head, comes down the slope  
the shepherdess. From Fomm ir-Riĥ go fishermen from hence

descending to the shore. Dogs' barking dies to quiet intense,  
 save for some buzzing fly which on the field-wall still is found  
 and, as if it were a spinning-wheel, circles round and round.  
 A sparrow, silently passed over my head, drops down  
 to peck at corn remaining still among the stubble brown;  
 it seems as though to drive away my somnolence it sought.  
 I fancied myself day-dreaming, I, shameless, confess my thought,  
 for I suffer from this folly and this you must understand.  
 But I am not alone in this, you'll find in every land  
 that Thought, with poets wandering, at a tangent flies away,  
 romping hither and thither, with all whom it meets to play.  
 With the birds of heaven you find it stopping at a tree  
 or, from the heart of the roses, sipping beside a bee;  
 in the curls of some little maiden playing with the breeze;  
 then, flashing, like lightning in darkness, on the waves of the seas  
 or, in a flurry of leaves, off down the valley it sails;  
 the children's loving playmate — with mother, with maid, it wails.  
 You will meet it today, almost dying of sorrow,  
 and then, bubbling with joy at its rebirth, tomorrow!

In a valley of this island, seated alone I mused  
 on that small home, so pure and good, by tyranny abused.  
 Here, where spring-plants seeded, I recalled where I had heard  
 at sunset on the threshing-floor, that song like voice of bird.  
 Down through the centuries sounding, lost between breeze and breeze,  
 it echoes sweetly in my ears like a whisper from the trees.  
 A country story was it and of every foot it tells  
 of the land around Gnejna, of its hills and of its dells.  
 The song begins by telling of the thrifty, kindly folk,  
 sturdy and good, their simple lives by penury bespoke;  
 of some farm-girl's sunburnt face and look, it reveals the charm,  
 whose modesty enshrouds her, be her work in house or farm.  
 It sings the story of a Love by cruelty oppressed,  
 from longed-for heart far separated and, by grief distressed.  
 Sons of the soil, their spirit, by yoke's oppression trained,  
 the daily lashes of the master felt, yet dumb remained;  
 bred without malice, unmaliciously rose wrath at length  
 for their dear land and, to the conflict, hearts brought granite strength.  
 And how much the peasants suffered, the singer tells with tears,

and how, for their redemption, bore slavery, famine, fears,  
 how the blood of themselves they gave, and of their sons, to flow  
 from the galley-sweeps at sea; how they, to destroy the foe,  
 went forth with bastion-hearts, Poor house! near thy wall a sheep, alone  
 feeds in the lonely meadows by acanthus-covered stone,  
 seeking some stump or some leaves which the withered vetch has left . . .  
 The cottage's few steps are bare of plants. From cot, bereft  
 comes mateless pigeon, pensive, quiet, seeking her lorn brood; . . . . .  
 up to the eaves she flutters then, as though she searched for food.  
 On the wall, some ivy-branches (which intertwine and roam)  
 still clothe the ruined terrace of this dead, deserted home.  
 And silence reigns: rustling, as after some strong wind, the tree  
 murmurs in solitude to rocks in that vicinity.  
 All sounds have died away within behind the cottage-door:  
 faces in peace and happiness, the mind's eye, pass before.  
 Smiling fathers with tear-filled eyes, in the closing days of life  
 that joyful tale of victory repeat to the old wife,  
 and how their children's children's valour overthrew the foe.  
 Young men with tumbled hair from their homes obliged to go;  
 with ploughs in their hands today and the leaded club tomorrow;  
 their savings they have left and the weeping bride in sorrow.  
 O that fair countenance with white hair curling on the brow;  
 poor mother who, on this day of holy union, must see now,  
 amid the wedding-guests in finery, the daughter-bride  
 with the beloved, chosen of heart, torn from her side!  
 O that face of the maiden in mother's bosom hidden,  
 reft from thy best-beloved, O heart to weeping bidden! . . . .  
 Pure for our Land, O Love, didst thou, in God's Faith, remain  
 and, under that cruel oppression, waxed stronger in pain —  
 joined like the branches of the locust-tree. Today we find  
 Thy Deed engraved upon the memory of the peasant-mind.  
 That simple maid inbreathed thee; absorbing thy peace, she would  
 engraft thee in the children of her future motherhood.  
 That maiden held thee dear; by sweat of brow, by loss of rest  
 gained wealth for thee, for nuptial vow and for a Love more blest  
 her dowry, her gold, in the hands of the tyrants she laid.  
 O sacrificed wealth of our homes, our ransom-price you paid  
 and to that self-denial you, the strongest witness, stay —  
 formerly cherished in thought. But memories are short today;  
 we have forgotten you. Some maiden will recall you when  
 reading some dusty tome of ancient history and, then,

with these words stamped upon her mind, will lift her eyes and say; \_  
"To those ransomed sons, the Greeting of Dawn's Joy was that Day!"  
Who knows how, on the threshing-floor, would gather round at eve  
the loitering peasant boys and girls to hear some old man weave  
the ancient tales of victory, and picture every scene,  
dreaming of blood and conquest and of all the Past had been!...  
— Those children's spellbound eyes would then keep open till the dawn...!  
O nights of heartbreak on the threshing-floor, weeping till morn,  
O barren fields, destruction by one hour's fury wrought;  
O prayers of oppressed, O weepers of ruined homes distraught!  
O hunger, O moaning, O tumult of peasants' unrest.  
Singer's Greeting, pot of basil, each joyous wedding-quest,  
O sails bringing tidings from far, O hearts that are broken  
with anguish; O bond of the kerchief, enduring-love's token;  
O quiet moonbeams, on rampart, on sentinel falling;  
in the book of its records, this Island today is recalling  
that here are you buried, each one in a grave of the dead.  
One night I dreamed of you; dim burned the lamp... risen from bed,  
I wrote down this tale, to me, by Gnejna's Singer told:  
this tale, with modern words adorned to you I now unfold.

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

PIETRU, *Sailor*  
 GAWDENZ, *Merchant*  
 ENZO  
 GUERRINO *Bodyguard of Don Carlos*  
 ĠANNI OF QERRIEDA, *Son of*  
 MATTI, *Farmer*  
 ĊIKKU, *Muleteer*  
 PEPPU, *the Idiot-boy*  
 PEDRO, *Servant of Don Carlos*  
 DUN SIDOR, *the Village Priest*  
 DON CARLOS, *Owner of the estates*  
 DON JOSÉ, *Comrade of Don Carlos*  
 Priest of the assembly  
 Peasants  
 Sailors  
 A Singer  
 Men  
 ROŽI, *daughter of*  
 ANNI OF QERRIEDA, *mother of Roži and wife of Matti*  
 KOZZI OF L-ACĊAJOLI, *mother of*  
 ZOLLI OF L-ACĊAJOLI, *mother of*  
 BETTI OF L-ACĊAJOLI, *friend to Roži*  
 MARI, *wife of Majsi the fisherman*  
 BALDISKA,  
 XANDRA, *wife of Pedro*  
 PEASANT WOMAN  
 VOICES

*Period of the rule of Consalvo de Monroy (1427-29) under the kingdom of Alfonso of Aragon. The events take place on the slope below Imdina, from Fiddien to the end of the Bay of Bur-Marrad and il-Pwales.*

## INCIPIT TRAGOEDIA RURALIS

## ACT I

*In the foreground on the right of the field stands Farmer MATTI's cottage, shaped like a farmhouse facing the sun setting behind the hill in the distance. Five or six steps lead up to the terrace, ornamented by stone troughs of basil-plant and mint, on to which opens the door of the upper room. Under the steps is the door of the cattle-pen with its wooden wicket. In the angle between the wall of the steps and the wall of the field, the trunk of the vine climbs upwards with its tendrils and leaves intertwined and covering the whole background as far as the fields thickly sown with grain crops which, here and there, show green from an occasional fig-tree. Below, opposite the steps, is the water-tank. Behind the rubble-wall, a field green with the leaves of garden vegetables. Beyond the fields of cultivated crops winds a field-path to the end of the valley. In the far distance, locust-trees, a farmhouse or two, some threshing-floors, then hills and the reddening horizon which will darken over the silence of the land.*

*Period of scarcity and oppression for the peasants under the power of their masters; they are going home thoughtfully with their draught-animals, hopeless of the dawn of any reprieve.*

*ROZI comes down the steps from the upper room to fill the pitcher in her hand with water from the tank. She looks up and notices PIETRU coming along the path with his comrade GAWDENZ. She pauses, lowers her head and goes softly down the steps. PIETRU and GAWDENZ stand looking towards ROZI who, after filling the pitcher, sets it on her shoulder and goes up to the upper room.*

*In the background, ENZO and GUERRINO can be seen standing among the fields.*

GAWDENZ: This is Matti's daughter, our Rozi,  
the loved girl of Fiddien.

PIETRU: Truly as yet  
never have I seen her equal, neither here  
in this wild place where I grew up a child  
nor abroad, in Sicily, Naples, or beyond  
the river where was drowned our Ruler's  
greatest enemy. Never have I seen,





into the forefront of the battle, these lords  
 would drive us, who have loaded us with swords.  
 The Queen Giovanna, then her ally,  
 then her enemy our Alfonso, who  
 by ship is proceeding to Naples,  
 who seeks that city to attack and take;  
 on the other hand, Andrew the mercenary,  
 known as the "Ram's Arm", together with his friends,  
 is going to be the ruin of us all.  
 My sons have gone, taking away with them  
 the water-mule. Go home, my son, go home,  
 said that old man to me, 'go you home again  
 to your own people; who are, it is said,  
 as a flock of sheep ready for slaughter  
 in their master's hand, whom King Alfonso  
 intends to sell away a second time.  
 Men, the King intends to buy, men by the sale  
 of your lands, of your island. Go back home,  
 O brave young lad, go home, preserve your life  
 for the sake of your family and your home.'

GAWDENZ: From a Sicilian, we, your story heard  
 one night on the Imdina Square, how, on the shore,  
 our beasts you left, because they said to you:  
 Embark with all the sailors on that ship  
 which sails to Naples.

PIETRU: Off I went in haste,  
 earnings and cattle leaving in the hands  
 of the merchant Gaspru . . .

GAWDENZ: 'That Maltese lad  
 seems strong and brave', said they, 'we'll take him with us!'

PIETRU: With them I went and with them I remained  
 to give the Kind my life.

GAWDENZ: How did you leave them?

PIETRU: In the confusion of battle, I fled. . .  
 The bravest man of all — our people's right hand —  
 was slain by his kinsman's hand, left lying  
 among the bloodstained swords of all his comrades.  
 On a tartana I escaped.





*The growing darkness – in the evening hour – brings with its silence frightening thoughts of the country people.*

ENZO and GUERRINO come a little nearer like two prison-guards.

ENZO: That young peasant is the man she loves.

GUERRINO: He came from Sicily and, to Kozzi  
the go-between, he brought the seeds.

ENZO: Our Pedro's old woman has cast a spell  
on that wicked hag that hates the Spaniards.

GUERRINO: And when she goes to him to sell her eggs  
she gives away (they say) the private life  
of the Governor; and incites against him  
peasants and nobles.

ENZO: Her daughter Zolli,  
lovely Zolli, once she sent as maid  
into Vaccaro's house.

GUERRINO: Don Carlos,  
the master, wants her. . .

ENZO: And the mother says No. . . .

GUERRINO: A curse on the increased wine-tax! [*whispers*] Look behind you,  
that old woman is spying on us –

ENZO: [*Looks about*]  
There is no one here. . .

GUERRINO: That girl is coming down.

*ROZI comes down very slowly with the basket of fodder. Her gait is that of one who seeks to escape from somebody and searches for a hiding-place. She lays her hand on the wooden gate of the cattle-pen under the shed above and then stops suddenly, halted unexpectedly by GUERRINO who comes up to her.*

GUERRINO: Good evening, peasant maid! Do not hide;  
although it is dark, I could see you child,  
with those beautiful eyes of yours, about  
to run away to hide you from my eyes.  
Where are you going, say?

ROZI: To feed the goats.



GUERRINO: These peasants know but Don Antonio  
and him alone. Don Antonio  
in their poverty, was to them a friend.  
His name is still upon their tongues, in the blood  
of their children's children because he was loved  
by the old woman who received him in her house  
on the first night of her daughter's wedding,  
because, from him the dowry came, the field  
and ploughing-cattle. Kozzi will tell you.

ENZO: That decrepit hag who (or so they say)  
was the sorceress here and the support  
and the mainstay of the island's rulers.

GUERRINO: That decrepit hag who to the Accajoli,  
pawned, of her youthful blood, each single drop  
and still among her folk their surname lives.  
Oh, how enamoured of the lustful Queen  
Giovanna, was Frederic, Nicholas too,  
and Angelo, how madly in love were they  
when, spurned from her feet and those of her companion,  
she sent them here, rebels from Sicily,  
to this island where they have left behind  
their starving progeny, as Kozzi knows.  
When she speaks of this, Kozzi holds her head up  
haughtily, because she bears the name  
of the Accajoli, and, her grandchildren  
that of the friend Cardona.

ENZO: In the days of Moncada, she acted as a spy  
and, to the King, her own folk she betrayed  
and for this service she received from him  
their lands, their farms, their flocks.

GUERRINO: For having been  
false to her own people, the Governor  
brought jewels for her that she might appease  
the peasants' hatred towards the island's lord  
for having raised the rents.

ENZO: She would destroy  
Consalvo and our folk.

GUERRINO: Because they took  
from her what she had stolen.





DUN SIDOR: Fear not! To our loving Father let us  
 ever pray, for He is above all enemies.  
 Let us pray for the crops from which come life  
 and our daily bread, as you all tell me.  
 Let us pray for compassion in the hearts  
 of the grasping masters of the land  
 from Him Who holds the keys of hearts and thoughts.  
 Let us pray ever for the soul's good: Love.

ANNI and KOZZI, laden, walk on with their heads still bowed. ROŽI approaches very slowly, takes the trusses of straw from the heads of her mother and KOZZI and lays them aside near the gate, she goes down on her knees and kisses the hand of DUN SIDOR.

ANNI: [to ROŽI while she is lifting the bundle from her head]  
 Have you been waiting long? Gather up this straw  
 for the fodder and bedding. Have you watered them?

ROŽI: I am going to.

ANNI:                   Have you been waiting  
 for your brother all this time?

ROŽI:   Yes, I have.

ANNI: Water the animals.

DUN SIDOR: [to ROŽI as she kisses his hand].

Bless you, my child.

May God's hand over you keep you from harm.

ROŽI rises crimson, as her eyes encounter those of old KOZZI who is going to fill the pitcher from the wall.

KOZZI: Ten acres of land, a flock of seven sheep  
 with a calf and a mule have I for you;  
 the field are Pietru's at il-Qammieh  
 — the calf and mule come to you from the Governor  
 grieved at the loss of Pietru in Sicily,  
 for you must be told, my child, disaster  
 has befallen him. Gawdenz has told us  
 that cargoes and cattle and twenty sacks  
 of seed have been lost at sea.

ROŽI remains standing by the well-curb, with wide-open eyes fixed on the filled pitcher beside her.

ANNI: [*to DUN SIDOR while she lights the fire with the flint and adds some fuel; fans it and gets it ready for cooking supper*]

We have had losses in the crops; small was the harvest,  
the payments for the rent are very high,  
We had hard time, and we may not recover  
the rent that we had to pay . . . The daily misery  
and want has reduced us almost to naught,  
for month by month and week by week,  
we had little by little to sell  
our belongings.

DUN SIDOR:           May Heaven give light  
and make His Voice heard in the heart of him  
who rules the poor. Let us trust in Him. —  
What news has arrived?

ANNI:                       Kozzi can tell you.

KOZZI: [*in a choked whisper*]  
All are terrified, because this morning  
men rode up at a gallop to the house  
of the Governor.

DUN SIDOR:           What did they say about us?

KOZZI: The lips of all are sealed: riots are expected  
from all this misery, from all this want.  
They say that, as soon as the overlord  
heard of the rising in the villages,  
he shut himself up inside Imdina,  
surrounded by his own people. The Captain  
of the Dejma wants to crush with violence  
this dangerous rioting.

*From inside the goat-pen are heard the bells round the necks of the goats  
after ROZI has picked up the pitcher of water and carried it into the pen.*

DUN SIDOR:           This is bad for us  
and for those who come after us.

ANNI: The tears of his agony, within himself,  
the poor man buries, that his children's heart  
he may not break, Dun Sidor, you know well  
how our poor children rose each morning starving.

They asked bread; we answered: famine is here;  
 pray ever to Heaven! This foreigner,  
 as you know, Dun Sidor, has stripped us of all  
 our property that he may, through us,  
 enrich himself; adorn, with our wealth,  
 his women and, for his people, he  
 has carried off baskets piled with sheep's wool,  
 combed cotton, jars of honey, and has left us  
 without bread, without covering, ever  
 toiling on the ruined earth. How hard it is  
 that one is not allowed to live in peace  
 upon one's earnings under one's own roof!  
 Trouble is pressing on our hearts, Dun Sidor,  
 and we want space to breathe, space, or we die...  
 Tell me, Dun Sidor, who can bear all this?

*ROZI comes out of the goat-pen with the empty pitcher in her hand.*

DUN SIDOR: To Pwales, this morning came Don Carlos:  
 he was seen in the chapel.

KOZZI: Before dawn  
 he and his fellows came down from l-Aħrax tal-Mellieħa.

DUN SIDOR: He went to hear mass with the peasants, they say.

ANNI: [*to ROZI who had stopped to listen*]  
 Bring a stool from indoors and that sack  
 of wheat hidden in the coffer...

KOZZI: Last night  
 from leeward of Mosta to Wied il-Għasel  
 there appeared, shining bright in the moonlight,  
 four of the Argonese in armour.  
 They were spies, 'tis said, sent by Don Carlos  
 as soon as the insurrection broke out...  
 Early in the morning, all their comrades  
 were afterwards seen coming out of the woods  
 round about the fields and farm-houses.  
 [*looks at ANNI*] Rozi saw them this morning as she came  
 from Mass; standing at the end of Ġnejna,  
 she saw Don Carlos and, to Baldiska,  
 she said: 'Tell me, Baldisk, that man,  
 Lord of the land, what does he want of us?  
 Daily, in church, I see him watching us!

DUN SIDOR: Last week when, on the mule, I was going from Wardija up towards Wied Qannotta to collect the tithes, I saw Don Carlos walking with his friends, pensive and silent. He came up and threw sixteen silver coins into my wallet, then, all smiles, spoke thus: 'Pray on our behalf for these poor sons of woe, for often in the west we see the foe spying round about these parts.'  
 Don Carlos always was a great-hearted man. He loves the poor and, to this stricken land he wishes well.

*Rozi comes bringing the stool and the sack of wheat. The ELDERLY MAN lowers the knapsack from his back and opens it, so as to receive the wheat of the tithes. DUN SIDOR sits down to rest on the stool.*

KOZZI: [*goes up to ANNI and whispers to her. ANNI, thoughtful and angry, remains twisting the fan in her hands, she looks round covetly at DUN SIDOR*].

More than week ago  
 Zolli was going with your Rozi to visit  
 our Lieni who had had a baby.  
 On the Mosta road they saw Don Carlos  
 standing with his men. Rozi trembled  
 and turned away her face, for Don Carlos  
 laughed and winked at her.

ANNI: [*remains listening thoughtfully. Silence. Then she starts speaking and watches DUN SIDOR*]

All is not gold that  
 glitters. The face deceives as hope deceives,  
 and the eye that spies on other men's affairs  
 prefers to watch the great before the small.  
 Gossip is pitiless and, in all ears,  
 Don Carlos is the name it whispers now.

KOZZI: They say Don Carlos spent two days last week up there at l-Ahrax where, sick with fever, the wife of the overlord had gone. He spent last night at l-Ahrax laying rabbit-traps with his friends.

ANNI: That woman soon will bring on us, from Heaven,  
the enemy — the pirates of the sea . . .

*She moves away from the soup-pot to help her daughter to pour into the knapsack of the ELDERLY MAN. KOZZI stays whispering to DUN SIDOR; calls ANNI and the two remain talking to DUN SIDOR in low voices.*

ROZI: [*to the ELDERLY MAN*]

Listen, old friend of ours. We have brought  
this barley from the field of the olives  
and the corn from the end of the Valley  
from that field which, my mother's mother says,  
was fumigated by an old man, the hermit  
of that place of desolation, who although  
holy, was said to be a sorcerer.

ELDERLY MAN: And damage was wrought by evil spirits.  
At night-time they used to rise from the earth  
and, the destroying sickle in their hands,  
reap as with a knife.

*DUN SIDOR sits with bowed head listening thoughtfully. KOZZI and ANNI continue attending to the fire and supper.*

ROZI: In their hands were knives  
of flame. That holy man made the sign of the Cross,  
and censed with the leaves of the olive-trees  
from that field, while reading in his book.  
The evil spirits fled from the valley  
and groaning was heard, together with screams  
inside the whirlpool of water, crashing  
of thunder which was most terrifying  
and a raging wind. Then the sun came out,  
purifying the valley and the sky;  
and the Fiddien was all green with crops,  
and corn and barley in the after years  
flourished in the valley, censed and blest for ever.  
So says Grannie, because this field is ours.

DUN SIDOR: Blest be God's compassion!

ROZI AND ANNI:

For ever blest!

ELDERLY MAN: [*boisting the sack on to his back*]

Fiddien, O Fiddien,  
Your corn gives full measure  
Your cotton gives full weight.

ANNI: Poor has this year's harvest been; our profit  
almost naught, scarcely could we pay the rent.  
Forgive us, Dun Sidor.

DUN SIDOR: [*rising*]

May God reward you  
for your charity! that the thirst be slaked  
of this perched land from the conflagrations  
of the enemies for ever; that these  
may be removed from you, I ever pray;  
because you have welcomed the shepherd of  
God's flock and, with your bread, have nourished him;  
because the silent grief of the kindly  
heart, by prayer, is comforted and that heart  
is innerly consoled by the pure happiness  
of the Hope which dies not with all else.

ANNI and KOZZI: That so it may be, we shall always pray.

ROZI goes reverently to kiss the hand of DUN SIDOR

DUN SIDOR: May Heaven's Hand be over you, my child,  
that your pure eye may never clouded be  
by the blindfolding through earth's vanities;  
may the happy laughter of your mouth  
be never stilled by sorrow. My daughter,  
tonight think on the Love of him who loved  
you first and rise tomorrow in the thought  
of him. Good-night!

ANNI, KOZZI and ROZI: Good-night!

DUN SIDOR and the ELDERLY MAN set off for the field-path. The guards  
come out from behind the farmhouse wall and appear at the end of the  
path. ENZO stops at the rubble wall and GUERRINO approaches DUN SIDOR.  
The latter suddenly raises his head and stops.

ANNI and ROZI lean over the fire under the saucepan and add more fuel.

ANNI:

I am blinded

by this darkness. The lamp is in the stall.  
Go and fetch it, Kozzi, that I may light it.

*KOZZI goes into the stall, hands out the earthen lamp to ANNI while she observes the guards talking to DUN SIDOR.*

GUERRINO: Hail and Reverence, Dun Sidor. Our master,  
Don Carlos, invites you to his house to-night.

DUN SIDOR: Don Carlos! . . . your master? . . .

ENZO: [*coming forward*]

Yes, our master.

GUERRINO: By my mouth he acquaints you with all:  
he invites you to dine with him tonight;  
there will also be Xabika, Pellegrino,  
and the beloved Costanza, the wife  
of Consalvo, sweet Lady Costanza.

DUN SIDOR: A saintly woman is that Costanza  
of ours. May Heaven grant her a long life!  
They say she has returned from l-Ahrax cured  
through the prayers we offered up. To Heaven  
be praise!

ENZO: She has left some money for the church  
in Wardija.

DUN SIDOR: May her great kindness of heart  
be ever blest. Be God Almighty  
over all and over each one! Good-night.

*The guards kiss the hand of DUN SIDOR. DUN SIDOR goes away while the two guards walk slowly towards the farmhouse. KOZZI extinguishes the light. ANNI mounts to the upper room, after by word and look coming to an understanding with the old woman; she draws her daughter after her.*

GUERRINO: [*comes up to KOZZI engrossed with the fire*]

Do not let that spark of fire extinguish  
if you wish your people to sup before,  
with to-morrow's sun, they are looking out  
for her light of mercy . . . Be careful, Kozzi,  
with those few ambers which are left to you  
for these people of yours.

ENZO: From Kozzi's cauldron,  
there comes a very appetizing smell;  
in famine like today's, ah, how that smell  
comforts one!

KOZZI: Our food is lentils, oil,  
and grass such as the goat eats. . . We know well  
you all would not stoop to taste it. The beast,  
fattened on the best fodder of our field,  
piece by piece is found upon that table  
where the beloved wife of our lord,  
that saintly woman after illness long,  
that kindly heart, who to the church has given  
her wealth, beside Don Carlos, your master,  
sits awaiting the blessing of the priest.

GUERRINO: Remember the wealth with which we found you  
had enriched yourself; remember the days  
when, through your people's toil and your children's  
honour, you obtained land and hoarded up  
much money in the coffer, — You shrivelled hag,  
your viper's tongue alone is left to you,  
and not even your teeth of former days  
wherewith to bite nor enchanting beauty  
to allure Nikola and his son.

ENZO: Kozzi is friendly and, to the king's friends,  
has always shown respect.

KOZZI: Except to those  
who bought us for a song.

ENZO: [*with a laugh*]  
Tell us, Kozzi,  
how much are you all worth?

GUERRINO: You are worth more  
than that black slave sent to Queen Giovanna  
by Nikola, by Angelo your friend,  
and by his brother Robert, as quit-rent?

ENZO: More than the grey mule which Marija  
your other daughter is using in the field  
of Bahrija on the property of  
Pellegrino, your old friend who loved you  
as a girl?



GUERRINO:               Tell us, Kozzi, whether you  
and all the other islanders are not  
worth all the flocks and acres which you stole  
from your brethren through the feudal lords?

KOZZI: Go seek for the past from him who brought you  
into this land which never aught but thieves  
has seen around it. Hence we have been trained  
in robbery and in cruelty, hence  
our breasts are sick and can give nought but milk  
soured by your great curse, in the blood  
of our offspring. And the seed of the field  
has sprouted only nettles ever since,  
into the hands of your race, by Sicily  
this pearl was given over.

ENZO:                       O Kozzi,  
why do you speak thus to us, dear Kozzi?  
Kozzi who was always friend of the King.  
Withered with time, how has time softened  
your flinty heart and, for these slaves, your flesh  
and blood, given you compassion. You loathe  
Consalvo.

KOZZI:               I have no reason for that,  
my friends.

GUERRINO: So you have no reason, you say!  
We know the reason for ourselves; it is  
because you never saw in your pocket  
so much as one farthing from Consalvo  
the lord, taken from your plundered people;  
because Consalvo is not Artale who,  
in the insurrection at Imdina,  
gave ear to you about the enemies . . .  
Tell us how many faces, how many  
hearts and tongues you, for your own profit, changed.  
Tell us, be not bashful, for how many  
acres of land did you sell your brethren  
to Peralta's people, and how many  
pieces of gold and stuffs were brought to you  
by your lord from out of the houses of  
those unfortunate brethren of yours, slain

in prison. Your people know, for they said so there in Paternò where they engendered hatred for our sovereign, Queen Marija, because she exchanged them for the two bowls and white horse, quit-rent given by your friend. How many bushes of barley, tell us, did you steal from the fields of Fiddien for that horse, and from how many ear-rings and rings were made those silver bowls?

KOZZI: From the King's Knight, your master, you had best acquaint yourselves, asking him: 'By what right have you taken the land from the peasants and have made them serfs in their own homes? How many thalers did you pay for this? The enslaved heart of the Maltese asks you this question today. Who are you? — We want an immediate answer, otherwise clear out!'

GUERRINO: Hold your tongue, woman! Beware of the wrath and anger of Monroy. A viper's tongue you have, we know, and you much resemble your own people. Even yet, in your old age, do you crawl along the ground, from your breast spitting the venom of the past; today you do not dare to show your teeth, Your wealth is now in our hands. Learn with your race that, in order to eat, from our heels must you lick the dust. Consider yourself today, Kozzi my dear, and keep yourself calm, lest you be crushed beneath our feet.

ENZO: Oh, we wish you well.

GUERRINO: Listen to what I  
am going to say to you.

ENZO: Look after  
your own skin; (and that once more you may see  
your property in your own hands, open  
your heart to us).

GUERRINO: [*pulls her roughly towards him*]

Tell me, to Imdina.

wherefore went the peasants?

KOZZI: I have seen naught  
of them . . . and I have been threshing all day  
on the threshing-floor since early morning.

GUERRINO: Tell me, Kozzi, what is their intent? what  
is their aim?

KOZZI: I do not know . . .

ENZO: Remember,  
woman, your own tongue spoke it . . .

GUERRINO: Among all  
the women of this peasantry which is  
about death's dagger to unsheathe, you were  
the first to raise your voice in anger.

ENZO: Your voice spelt hatred, great hatred for us.

KOZZI: I hate you?

ENZO: Our master and all his people  
do you hate.

GUERRINO: Reveal everything to us  
or, in our hands, you shall remain a corpse.

*The two guards crowd her towards themselves and seize her hands.*

KOZZI: O good people! think of your souls, my friends,  
of my soul also. Why should you wish me  
killed? Have you the heart to do so, say?

GUERRINO: We have the same heart as had your daughter  
Zolli who, because he hated Vaccaro,  
strangled her husband Peppi in a sack  
and then, with a heavy stone, crushed his head.

KOZZI: Let me go, I know nothing . . . [*starts shouting*]

ENZO: Tell us!

GUERRINO: *Puts one hand over her mouth.*

KOZZI: [*Indicates her willingness to speak. GUERRINO removes his hand  
from her mouth, just as ZOLLI and BETTI are seen coming along*]

Yes,  
I will tell you. Let me go for the sake

of your dead ones' souls. My breath is failing!  
Oh, here come Zolli and Betti. Silence,  
leave me, I will see you afterwards at home.

ENZO: Expect us at midnight in your house tonight.

GUERRINO: Wait for us at the bottom of the yard  
under the fig-tree just inside the door.

*ENZO and GUERRINO start off down the road, glancing towards the steps which lead to the terrace. The door of the upper room is shut. They go round behind the farmhouse. KOZZI goes over to the pile of fuel for the fire, adds some wood and fans it. Watches covertly until she sees the guards disappear. ZOLLI approaches, a kerchief wrapped round her head, her rosy face still shows its former beauty.*

BETTI: Mother, how dark it has grown!

ZOLLI: I have come,  
mother, because I was anxious about you;  
from the threshing-floor, I saw the upper room  
was dark; I knocked at your door but no one  
answered, except the dog from the courtyard.

*KOZZI on tip-toe, terrified, with her forefinger on her lips, comes towards ZOLLI.*

ZOLLI: None of them back from Imdina? . . . they say  
the Governor was disturbed this morning  
about the insurrection. All the peasants  
this morning wished to speak to the Captain  
of the Rod and, among them, I saw Ganni,  
going in shouting: 'I will kill him if  
he does not listen to me!'. . .

KOZZI: Be quiet!  
*[goes to look behind the wall of the field from where the guards left]*  
The guards of Don Carlos have been here.  
They frightened me to death and I am still  
trembling, Oh Zolli, my daughter. Betti  
what brought you here?

ZOLLI: I brought Betti with me  
because she was crying when she saw Ganni  
going to Imdina. She waits for news  
of him.

KOZZI: Stay here tonight with Anni, with Rozi,  
all of you together, for I expect  
danger from the enemies of the peasants.  
Oh my daughter, what has happened to us!  
Oh, days of the past of those kindly folk,  
the masters we had before this tyrant.  
How, alas, you have left us for ever!

ZOLLI: And where are Anni and Rozi? I saw  
Pietru with Gawdenz, first asking for Ganni.  
Then he asked me: 'And Kozzi?' — 'O Pietru,'  
I answered, 'you have come from Sicily  
and have not yet seen my mother? Nor Rozi?  
Rozi loves you, as the apple of her eye,  
loves you that maiden; my mother has told me  
Anni is pleased about it, and Matti  
her father also, and when in August,  
the peaches change colour and the apples,  
blushing, seem to burn like flames in the sky,  
Rozi will show you her face with the light  
in her eyes shining with Love's blossoming;  
for she will be all yours, yours utterly.'  
Tell me where they are, mother, for I wish  
to let them know that I have seen Pietru...

KOZZI: Anni and Rozi are both there, locked up  
in the upper room, having seen the guards  
of Don Carlos coming into the field  
at sunset as night fell. Rozi's betrothed  
has promised to give me two yearling rams  
and a fine calf with twelve pieces of money,  
as soon as the ring arrives in the mouth  
of the fish, following the betrothal word,  
from her beloved Pietru. I said to him:  
'For the sake of your dead parents, help us  
with Betti who is fatherless; she lacks  
a bridal dowry.' And Pietru replied:  
'We are of one blood, Kozz, and my duty  
will I do that, to my brother-in-law  
Ganni, she may be wedded.'

BETTI: My heart's wish  
and that of Ganni is that we may both

live together by our own ability,  
 sharing the profit from his father's field  
 through the labours of our hands.

ZOLLI: His father,  
 under the yoke of toil in this hard land,  
 has suffered: thus, today, heavy in his hand  
 he feels the spade. Worn-out, at the loom sits  
 Anni.

KOZZI: I agree with you and prudence  
 is worth much; misery has, all at once,  
 fallen on us today, life is very hard. . . .

BETTI: This I know, for dearest Ganni told me;  
 also to his father did he say so,  
 to his mother, to his sister Rozi,  
 and to me he said: 'Don't be disheartened.'  
 Ganni and I have one great wish: that we  
 may live together by our own labours  
 in health and strength and, because God wills it,  
 blessing will come.

*ZOLLI goes softly up the steps to the upper room and knocks at the door.*

KOZZI: May it be blessed, my child,  
 this pure desire of your heart! Maintain  
 that intent, my child, for evil will not come  
 save with hunger and with misery.

ZOLLI: [*knocking*]  
 Anni, I am here.

ANNI: [*within*]

Who is there?

ROZI: Who's there?

ZOLLI: It is I, Zolli, the daughter of Kozzi  
 of A ććajoli.

ANNI: I am coming.

KOZZI: [*Uncovers the pot and ladles out the soup into the bowls*]  
 Blessed be God for ever for this food  
 which He has given us today, because,  
 on evil times, O Betti, have we fallen!

The children of my children yet shall weep  
when they see the faces of their own babes  
pale as death . . .

BETTI: Heaven is over poor and rich  
alike; and feeds the birds of the air,  
so Dun Sidor has told us. I have made  
a vow, so that our love may prosper  
and live in happiness, unstained by tears.

*The door of the upper room is opened. A light appears.*

ANNI: Are you alone?

ZOLLI: I came with Betti  
to fetch my mother, for darkness has fallen  
and I must start early in the morning  
to take the Governor his provisions.

*ANNI and ROZI come out with frightened looks. They peer here and there  
in the distance. Anni has the earthen lamp in her hand.*

ANNI: Who is here?

ZOLLI: The guards of Don Carlos  
were here a while ago.

ROZI: Have they gone?

ZOLLI: And are far away. I saw Xandra just now . . .

ANNI: This morning she came to my house at dawn  
and Pedro was with her, also risen  
early; he had brought a sack for those fowls  
bred by Rozi for the August Feast.

*They come down slowly and go towards KOZZI. They seat themselves on  
the ground.*

ZOLLI: At the other end of the field just now,  
I saw Xandra and she said to me:  
'We are expecting the wife of our lord  
from l-Ahrax, for she is coming here tonight  
invited to dinner by Don Carlos.  
At sunset there rode forth his guards, taking  
the road to Pwales. Did you see nothing,  
Zolli, of any of our people going down

towards Fiddien? for the guests at table  
with our beloved master are uneasy.'

KOZZI: [*rises to silence ZOLLI, she peeps over the wall, returns to pass  
round the soup and says softly*]  
I think the invitation came to grief.  
Tell me, Zolli, what news  
from the Governor?

ZOLLI: I do not quite know yet;  
from what they say . . .

ZOLLI continues to whisper in the ears of KOZZI and ANNI. BETTI and  
ROZI talk together by themselves.

BETTI: With his eyes shining  
and with his face aglow, I saw him  
and, coming from his lips, I heard these words:  
'Land of beauty, whence a single flower  
from amid many thorns begot in me  
the life of the heart which ages not,  
because Love in the blood of this our race  
is greater than the power of that thief  
who has robbed us of all our possessions!  
For a maiden of thine, Love has been born  
in me and this rose, which thou hast given me,  
in my heart have I hidden as the most  
precious jewel of my whole life . . .'

ROZI: [*stays listening, wide-eyed, absorbed in delight and with a smile on  
her lips*]  
Of whom, darling Betti, do you think that  
Pietru was speaking?

BETTI: O Rozi of you.  
He loves you dearly, as my mother said.

ANNI: [*while talking to ZOLLI and KOZZI*]  
We will all eat together as one family, [*helps in passing round the food*]  
And, in our room, we will all spend the night  
together until, at dawn, our men return  
from Imdina.

ZOLLI: With the Mosta peasants,  
I saw Pietru and Gawdenz this evening



going along with bludgens in their hands.

KOZZI: Our Toni too, also Martha's husband,  
Čikku: they all had to assemble  
in Našlija Valley.

ANNI: And Pietru with them.

ZOLLI: Yes, for Pietru is a brave man.

ANNI: Poor Roži!

KOZZI: No doubt, my friends, the meeting will be held;  
By sunrise they will all be back with us.

ROŽI: [*meanwhile is talking to BETTI*]  
Tomorrow morning, for the betrothal,  
with my mother and my father Matti  
and your grandmother Kozzi . . .

BETTI: What will you wear  
tomorrow?

ROŽI: A short kilted skirt, woven  
in all the colours of the rainbow,  
the work of Mari, Falka's wife; on top,  
a stomacher of deep red like cow's blood,  
a greenish pleated kerchief on my blaits,  
and the wife of Majsi, the fisherman  
has brought the honey and the myrtle-spice.

BETTI: Oh how I wish that I might share the joy  
of your wedding-day! I will come with you  
to dig the field with Ġanni and to reap  
in Qammieħi and gather up the sheaves  
in armfuls.

KOZZI: [*rising and looking up the valley*]  
I am sure I heard the voice  
of Ġnejna's Singer.

THE SINGER [*is heard singing in the distance*]  
Smiling fathers with tear-filled eyes,  
in the closing days of life  
that joyful tale of victory  
repeat to the old wife,  
and how their children's children's

valour overthrow the foe.  
 Young men with tumbled hair from  
 their homes obliged to go;  
 with ploughs in their hands today  
 and the leaded club tomorrow:  
 their savings they have left  
 and the weeping bride in sorrow....  
 .....  
 their savings they have left  
 and the weeping bride in sorrow.

ROŽI and BETTI *get up and climb on to the wall to listen.*

ROŽI: [*as the voice dies away*]

Up from the lonely valley is coming  
 the song on the wings of the night, with news  
 of our Lord it comes; for it seems as though  
 the peasant is speaking through the rustling  
 of the trees in the darkness....

THE SINGER: [*in a far-off voice*]

O, that face of the maiden  
 in mother's bosom hidden,  
 reft from thy best-beloved,  
 O heart to weeping bidden!....  
 .....  
 their savings have they left  
 and the weeping bride in sorrow.  
 [*silence*]

A VOICE: [*in the distance*]

Rise, my brethren,  
 rise, my sons, and you, woman, rise with them.  
 This news have I brought: 'Drive out this tyrant  
 of a master from our homes and ransom  
 the Island.'  
 [*silence*]

A VOICE: [*in the distance*]

In the light with her mother, the daughter  
 stands waiting for bridegroom, for brother  
 and for her father beloved.

ALL THE WOMEN: They're coming!

They're coming!

A VOICE: [*near at hand*]

Still wakeful the mother,  
anxious for husband, for bridegroom of daughter.

KOZZI: Here come the peasants, your Matti, your Ganni.

ROZI: Martha's husband, your son-in-law, Cicku.

BETTI: Gawdenz is with them.

OLD MATTI *arrives panting with exhaustion, in one hand a stick on which he leans, clutching his son GANNI with the other. GAWDENZ the Merchant and CICKU the Muleteer with the other peasants are walking in advance.*

MATTI: Oh let me go,  
why bring me home? Let me go with my son,  
with Ganni, my place is with my countrymen.

GAWDENZ: O you dear old man, death awaits you there!  
Spend with your family your latter days.

CICKU: For, bound up with theirs, is your life and death.

MATTI *sits down to rest. — GANNI looks at his mother brokenheartedly and goes to embrace her and his sister.*

GANNI: O mother mine! and you, my sister dear!  
O fellow-workers of the soil, come now!  
See where the sweat of your brows is going  
in the loss of your possessions. Listen,  
O mother, to the wailing of your sons,  
stripped bare and cast starving on the dry ground . . .  
Hearken to the reason why these tears  
never, from the King, meet aught but laughter.  
Because he, to adorn his crown, needs all  
you have, and to magnify himself in Naples.  
He, for thirty thousand golden pieces,  
has given this our Island to the Lord  
Consalvo de Monroy up in Imdina.  
The people know this and the Governor  
stated how we had been given over  
into the hands of the Lords, saying to them:  
I will give you these in pawn and their lands,  
themselves as slaves and as beasts of burden,

And the fertile land water by the sweat  
of their brows . . .

CIKKU:                    Thus spoke to them the great King  
of Aragon. This was acknowledged  
by Dun Katald, our priest, in the Cathedral  
of Imdina and a great riot ensued.

GANNI: All the peasants shouted: 'To the Governor,  
Let's go to the Governor! Justice, we want!  
Justice, we ask! Justice!' 'We will ask him',  
Gamri, son of the learned lord Desguanez, ,  
said to them, 'where is the money collected  
for the fortifying of Imdina,  
and the money from the wine-tax, wherewith  
observation-towers was to be built  
on Kemmuna to give early warning  
of the coming of the Berber pirates?'

MATTI: My sons, all, all has been taken from us.

GANNI: To tie our hands they brought with them their guards,  
their ropes and swords they gave them to beat and kill us.  
To meet the foe they loaded us and your children  
with firearms while they enjoyed themselves on table  
and freely indulged in their obscenity.  
Where is now the strenght of your valiant arms  
that often put the Berbers to quick flight.  
And where is our good sense-children of fierceness?  
Come ye out of those cottages and huts,  
come out my brethren peasants for behind Birgu,  
from the Castle sea-shore came up a great shout.  
From there comes up to you the burning flame,  
and all our ships and craft lie captured there,  
Maltese ships and craft. Towards Xaghret Mawwija  
the people hastens now to quell the enemy  
to take from them their galley ships and crew.  
Let us, my friends, go to the landlord now  
and take back from him our own stolen property,  
take out our goods and throw him out of Malta.

*Everyone remains looking, drinking in the words from the lips of the  
Rebel. ROZI presses up to her brother, with one arm round his waist in*

*embrace, her tear-filled eye, fixed on his: flushed crimson, drawing comfort from the fervour of his speech.*

ROZI: All have we given to those grasping men,  
all we had, Ġanni, oh brother Ġanni, —  
so that Love, jewel of our poverty,  
might be left to us untouched by them.

*BETTI bursts into tears and covers her face.*

ĠANNI: Love cannot live in those who are enslaved,  
stripped bare, in misery and in famine.  
from the priest in the Cathedral, these words  
did I hear: 'Rise, God wills it by our right!'

*ROZI releases ĠANNI, who goes and sits down. His mother, silently but with tears in her eyes, places the bowls of food in front of him and his father. ĠANNI gets up and glances towards his betrothed BETTI. She looks at him covertly, raises her head and, sobbing, throws herself into her mother's arms, crying as though her heart would break. ĠANNI sits down again thoughtfully.*

MATTI: Weep not for yourselves, women of this land  
of teats, weep for your children! Terror  
is drawing very near.

*All the women go towards the wall of the field. The men follow them. ĠANNI remains seated, ROZI shakes her head like one awaking from sleep. She continues to listen alone, standing motionless. She waits.*

THE WOMEN: Pietru the Sailor!

ĊIKKU: From the west of Ġnejna are coming  
Bringing good news the people of the village.

GAWDENZ: Toni Baskal with the Ballut herdsmen.

KOZZI: Tell us, Gawdenz, what news is being brought  
by your friend Pietru, destroyer of the foe  
in the foreign seas?

GAWDENZ: On Mount Xiber Ras,  
old woman, there has been seen a blazing  
beacon-fire to sum up on all of us.  
Pietru is coming now to give us all  
exact account of what has taken place  
and of how our masters are all embroiled.

ČIKKU: [*with a shout*]

Let's follow Pietru!

THE WOMEN: A beacon-fire is burning  
on the Mosta road!

THE MEN: Away! Let's go!

PIETRU *comes running up with his companions. A great crowd of Peasants bearing pickaxes, sticks and mattocks arrive shouting.*

THE PEASANTS: Away, brothers!

PIETRU: Let's go, rise, brothers all! Let us away!  
for our comrades, at the Marsa need help.  
And this time it is not the sovereign King  
who calls: it is the Maltese Beacon calling.  
Militia of the Peasants! Let us show  
our ferocity! Let us shed our blood  
for the Sacred Ransom, for so God wills!  
There in Ballut still wallow in their blood,  
the tyrant's guards, by this your Pietru's hand,  
and the woman have we kidnapped!

THE PEASANTS: The woman?

PIETRU: The wife of our overlord, Donna Costanza,  
is in our hands: she had been invited  
to dine with Don Carlos and from I-Ahrax  
was coming down.

ROŽI *remains standing, her head bowed and her hands hanging slackly.*  
GANNI *springs from the bench and roughly pushes away the bowl of  
food from his lips.*

ANNI: [*picks up the bowl from the ground*]

Finish your meal,  
my son. Stay here with us and rest tonight  
until tomorrow's dawn.

GANNI: Before the sun  
rises on my head and yours and its glory  
shines down on our troubles, must we arise  
because the uncertainty of tomorrow has killed us,  
because the broken heart... Let me go,  
my mother. The food you gave me is bitter

on my tongue until this land, the graveyard  
of all her sons, shall be set free . . .

*The mother clings to her son. GANNI releases himself, snatches up a weapon from the ground and joins the crowd of Peasants. BETTI starts towards him, but GANNI, with a stern look, seizes her with both hands and throws her into her mother ZOLLI's lap.*

*The Peasants and the Men set off. The Women and old MATTI remain silent and thoughtful.*

KOZZI: [*goes to look down the field-path. She returns and whispers*]  
The guards  
are coming upon us!

ZOLLI: [*runs to look*]

They are quite near!

KOZZI: Towards the cottage are their steps directed.

*MATTI gets up and goes up the steps with the WOMEN.  
They enter the upper room.*

SILENCE: *The barking of dogs is heard in the distance among the farm-houses. Darkness. After a little, what seems like a rustling is heard among the trees. The door of the upper room opens. ROZI and BETTI appear on the terrace. ROZI holds the earthen lamp in one hand and with the other hand she embraces her girl companion. . . The rustling of the trees grows louder and nearer. ROZI lets go of BETTI, takes the lamp in her left hand and peers over down into the field from among the branches of the locust-tree.*

*The GUARDS appear, walking along wrapped in their black mantles, and come out from among the trees. They jump over the field-walls into the path.*

*ROZI whispers to her companion and points to the passing GUARDS. She extinguishes the lamp.*

END OF ACT I