

# THE RANSOM OF THE PEASANTS

(A Dramatic Poem in Five Acts and a Tableau)

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(Translated by MAY BUTCHER from the Maltese Original).

## ACT III

*The Summer of the year 1428. The sun has just set behind the cottage of old Matti, which can still be seen among a few trees and appears veiled with grief which through poverty and misery has fallen upon it. No longer is the lewing of beasts to be heard in the cattle-shed. Beyond the farm-walls all is stripped bare, and bewailes the past. Between the trees in the distant fields, a plot sown with a little barley is visible, nearly trampled down for the peasant has had no heart for reaping. The cumingrass still waves alone but its perfume is no longer noticeable. Of the terrace-plants all are gone except the basil which is nearly dried up with thirst. The evening breeze does not stir a leaf but, from the threshing-floor, there rises a kind of black dust to cover all. In the stillness only one sound is heard – the twittering of the bird which goes alone towards the nest-hole in the eaves and hides itself from the growing dusk.*

*XANDRA is coming from the field-path with an earthen-pitche in her hand. Behind her walks PEDRO with PEPPU, the IDIOT-BOY. XANDRA stands looking here and there beyond the others who are taking the opposite direction.*

XANDRA: [*beckoning*]

There is nobody to be seen from here.

This morning I saw Matti and Ganni

going from their field towards Ghajn Tuffieħa.

[*XANDRA stands looking, then suddenly calls out*]

Pedro, Pedro, Pedro!

[*PEDRO looks back. XANDRA quickens her steps to reach him and speaks to him in a low voice*].

XANDRA:

From the valley

men are coming down. I see fishermen

going to the bay of Imġarr. O look,

Pedro, Pedro, look! Who are these? –

[PEDRO stops, then, without answering, seizes the boy's hand and walks on. PEPPU disengages himself and stands looking. PEDRO catches hold of him roughly].

PEDRO: What are you waiting for, you abortion.  
Gazing with that witless eye, standing asleep? —  
move on, or your misshapen donkey's back  
will feel the blows laid on it by my stick.

XANDRA: This morning, Pedro, Kozzi and Anni  
did I see going early towards Mellieħa  
and they said Pietru has gone to lease  
his lands and farmstead at Qammieħ.  
To be near his betrothed Pietru has taken  
the large field at Bingemma.

PEDRO: [*catches hold of PEPPU by his arm and throws him to the ground*].  
You, bastard,  
I will gouge out your other eye, I will,  
and feed it to the hens. I will tie you  
by your arm to the water-wheel in the field  
unless you answer to your mother and me  
immediately.

XANDRA: [*drags him to his feet, pushing her face into his with a threatening look and gesture while PEPPU stays gaping foolishly*].  
If you do not answer instantly,  
know that I will drink your blood tonight.  
Which is it to be? — Or for the last time  
will you listen with this ear? —  
[*pulls him by the ear, puts it between her teeth and bites it*].

PEPPU: [*shouts and screams*].  
O mother!  
mother!

XANDRA: I will suck your blood, that sluggish  
blood of yours I want tonight. Do not shout!

PEPPU bursts into tears.

XANDRA: [*speaking to him in a low voice*].  
See that not a single cry issues from  
your mouth nor let your voice be heard or I  
shall kill you.

[*she draws nearer stealthily, looking here and there inside the cattle-*

*pen and towards the steps and the cottage. Between the panels of the door, a light is visible. XANDRA goes up and whispers to PEDRO].*

The door is ajar. Take Peppu  
and both go quickly and crouch down among  
the locust-trees, for in the cottage is  
the maiden.

*[PEDRO goes off, dragging PEPPU with him and conceals himself amid the locust trees. The cottage door is softly closed].*

XANDRA: *[goes up the steps on tip-toe, peeps through the chinks of the door, knocks and calls out].*

Rozi Ta' Qerrieda,  
Xandra has come from the landlord's house,  
from Don Carlos. Open to me, Rozi.

*[Silence]*

Open the door, Rozi, open to me,  
it is I, Xandra, I've come for the milk:  
for the Master of our lands, Don Carlos.

*[ROZI comes out with a kerchief on her head and her arms bare with the sleeves tucked up].*

XANDRA: And where was our Rozi? —

ROZI: I was kneading,  
I am dripping wet with perspiration.

XANDRA: Your face gives evidence of that, my child.  
Looking at you in this evening darkness,  
it seems as though I see a blazing bonfire,  
maiden of happiness! Strong young heifer,  
I delight in you as you apply yourself  
steadily to work without ceasing and  
dream each day of the home which will be yours  
when, in a new life you shall be settled  
and your heart bound to your mate for ever.  
Tell me, Rozi, without misgiving  
(Don Carlos told you and Don Sidor too  
as they have just now repeated to me),  
are you of a mind to take that boy of ours  
who was servant to the Governor? —  
He has a fine heap of money laid by  
that boy. And the Master has agreed that  
he will give him a large field and a house

so that he may live in Ghajn Tuffieħa.  
 Tell me, Roži, what more do you want than that  
 and I will tell you, for your own good,  
 you could never choose a better man.

ROŽI: Xandra,  
 I have never had but one thought: to live  
 as my heart tells me, thrown into the hands  
 of God, as I am today.

XANDRA: My dear child,  
 may you be blessed by the Highest Heaven.  
 As you see I came tonight for the milk  
 because Pedro sent me and I expect  
 him now to come hurrying after me, for  
 he awaits the Master presently  
 from the Governor's house at Mdina.  
 [ROŽI takes the pitcher from her and goes down the steps].

.....  
 Beloved Roži, I would not upset  
 the plans of a girl like you. May God  
 protect me ever; I would no pangs  
 disturb my conscience; but hark to what I say;  
 Yes, listen to what I say, for older  
 than you am I and have experienced all.  
 The world today is spoilt and the heart grew cold.  
 So it is ill a girl like you should choose  
 beauty without considering what follows  
 or link herself with a young man whose wealth  
 is in the hands of the Masters of this land  
 so miserable, which may from day to day  
 change hands. Besides, what about  
 all this trouble fallen on the peasants.  
 All their cattle and their land some of them  
 are pawning, all their savings having gone  
 for the ransom of this unhappy Isle.

ROŽI: God's will be done, for the keys of all things  
 on this world are His  
 [goes into the cattle-pen to milk].

XANDRA: [coming up to the gate of the pen and continuing to speak to  
 ROŽI].

All in His hands, O Rozi dear, all  
 for ever all men, and kingdom is He,  
 and for the welfare of our children, we,  
 from Him await the comfort and the peace.  
 Do you know anything, Rozi, of how  
 the distribution of money will be made  
 among the peasants? —

ROZI: [*coming out with the pitcher full of milk*].

I have heard nothing,  
 my dear Xandra, I have heard nothing . . .

XANDRA: You have not heard how much money was collected? —

It surprises me that you have not heard . . .  
 how much money was collected, and how  
 into the hands of the Island's overlord  
 all that money went at once? —

ROZI:

O Xandra,  
 I wept when I saw my bundle of things  
 leaving our house and on the very day  
 on which I was to have left my father's home,  
 and the following week, the flock of sheep  
 and the calf I had bred up given away  
 for the ransom, because they said to us  
 the beasts were better than the field to give.

XANDRA: The field in the master's and his children's hands  
 might have remained. As I heard Pedro say  
 the profits from the land will be divided up  
 amongst the peasants who gave their wealth  
 towards the Ransom of this our Island.

ROZI: From the wealth that has gone, Xandra, I hope nothing  
 nor desire ought save that I may live  
 as God wills. Round my neck you see gleaming  
 no necklace, no golden broach on my breast  
 nor on my homespun skirt better to grace  
 my beauty, for my saddened heart this poor garb  
 prefers. They have only left me a single sheep,  
 the little shorn darling, the blind one's lamb,  
 and one kid, the fawn one which I nurtured  
 when at Hal Dwin in Sika's home. I am fond  
 of this kid and lamb, for they are my friends

which have been left for my heart to cherish.

XANDRA: [*in a low voice*].

From our peasant's wealth, naught will be returned,  
and, according to Pedro, everything  
is in the hands of Don Carlos, and he  
will give a sum of money to Peppu ...

ENZO: [*gives a shout from among the trees*].  
Who goes there? —

PEDRO: [*shouting*].

Pedro! Long live Don Carlos!

ENZO: I thought you were a thief of Ġirba in hiding,  
and of this sword, I would have let you taste  
the edge, if you had not at my challenge  
made your voice heard instantly.

XANDRA:                                 'Tis Enzo,  
the guard of the master!

ROŽI: [*in confusion*].

I am going,

Xandra!

XANDRA: Wait a little child, fear nothing.

GUERRINO: [*from behind the field-wall*].

I told you that our Lord, Don Carlos  
is behind us, coming from Imdina,  
on his way to Bingemma. What, tell me,  
are you doing with this ass's head,  
among the locust-trees? —

ENZO and GUERRINO burst forth on to the path from among the locust-trees. After them comes out PEDRO laden with a bundle of broken branches, dragging PEPPU with him.

PEDRO:                                 The Master's maid,  
Angla, asked me for firewood, saying,  
wood enough I have not got for cooking.

GUERRINO: To obtain firewood, Pedro, you'd better  
break up your worm-eaten furniture  
of that old woman, your wife, or burn her  
with that filthy tongue of hers.

Get away from that tree: your home is not here.

ENZO: [*snatches the pitcher from XANDRA'S hands and looks inside the mouth*].

What have you got in the pitcher?

XANDRA: Milk,  
Rozi milked it just now for the supper  
of our Master, for that is all he wants  
at night, after dining with the Governor.

ENZO: This milk from Rozi is a lot of use  
for old man Pedro's teeth! Nor does it count  
with us today, woman. Wine is old man's milk!  
But ask your mate whether wine does not still  
taste sour, since the night that you left him  
alone among the casks in that warehouse.

GUERRINO: We know that you locked Pedro your husband,  
in the warehouse, when you found him shelt'ring  
with blind Nozzi under the tree and we know  
that since the day you quarreled all the wine  
in the casks of the Master's warehouse  
has diminished to a marvelous extent!

ENZO: On that night Pedro was thoroughly soused  
and renewed his bridal nightly song with Xandra,  
and, on the morrow, as soon as he found  
himself in your arms, he opened his eyes,  
and said: This wine is sour!

ROZI *remains silent, her blushing face bowed down, her bewildered  
eyes seeking a hiding place.*

ENZO: [*with a laugh*].

O Rozi,  
Rozi, little peasant-girl, you are still  
a small fly for this spider who is spying  
round about you.

GUERRINO: [*looking towards PEPPU*].  
And this hideous creature  
what does he want, always standing about  
in front of us? —

XANDRA: I brought him with Pedro

for the firewood.

PEPPU *twisted his lips like an animal chewing the cud, one eye gleaming without movement. At GUERRINO's words he stays rigid with his gaze fixed on ROZI. PEDRO alarmed, with his load on his back, looking piteously at his companion XANDRA.*

GUERRINO: This mis-shapen being  
before the Maid of Fiddien, what does he want? –  
Get rid of him at once, and warn your wife,  
Xandra, not to go near some other ass  
that no such monster appear again on earth.

PEDRO: I can swear to you that, with lambs alone,  
Xandra used to play in Dejr il-Bniet,  
Her farmer-father never let her go  
out of his sight save to serve as maid  
to the village priest.

ENZO: [*rocks with laughter*].  
And they gave to you,  
O bull of Pic Du Midi, this heifer so beautiful  
and pure, for that face of sanctity and  
goodness wherewith you overcame the heart  
of kindly father and of village priest  
who blessed you.

PEDRO: [*with a smile on his lips*].  
How beautiful Xandra was,  
ask her mother!

ENZO: Her mother used to share  
with her companion Kozzi the profit  
of the eggs and cheese which, to the household  
of Pellegrino they used to sell . . .  
and she was beautiful, as an old man,  
servant to the Governor has told me!

PEDRO: Blood tells, as they say, and a branch grafted  
on a tree from some other, in its fruit  
reveals the origin; but this branch  
of a rotten stock is, I swear, a product  
of some bastard! off-shoot! What do you think?

XANDRA: Hold your tongue, Pedro, hold your tongue,  
That is better for you, withered face.



Remember that I found you in the dust,  
 dying of hunger, and befriended you.  
 I took you from the doorstep of Vaccaro.  
 Tell me who your father was? — A dung collector.  
 Rescued by that Sicilian in the turmoil  
 with Peralta; he stole his wife's money  
 and brought here to live on our folk  
 and to drink the wine of Vaccaro.

PEDRO: I would  
 my blood might speak but once, and tell the truth  
 to make my name known and the progeny  
 of my father who, for my wife, chose you  
 from all the lovely women whom I knew,  
 who nourished me with bread and wine, Xandra,  
 with wine!

XANDRA: Get out or, with this pitcher I  
 will smash your head!  
 [*Rushes at PEDRO and threatens to hurl the pitcher at his head*].

ENZO: Clear off from here, Pedro!  
 The silent sanctity of this cottage,  
 blessed by Don Sidor is being appalled  
 by these your shouts and threats, you cursed pair,  
 Conceal your ever-vile and dirty deeds  
 from this bashful maiden of Fiddien,  
 who is about to fall down dead with shame.  
 [*To XANDRA*].  
 You have forgotten: that pitcher you have  
 is full of milk. Quick run! Go to your home,  
 or I will send you there with my boot.

GUERRINO: Throw this old hag down inside the dark cave  
 to become paralyzed in the water,  
 and with the red-hot iron, burn out her tongue.

PEDRO: [*worked up into a feverish excitement, wants to give vent to his feelings; he throws down the load of firewood and, emboldened by the words of GUERRINO, drags his wife along by her hair, shouting:-*]

Woman, I would like to kill you. Yes, yes.  
 Guerrino, burn out her tongue. I will come  
 with the red hot iron in my hand, help  
 will I give you. You ulcerated hag,

come out, go into the cave, the dark cave,  
so that the filth of your tongue may be burnt  
with the red-hot iron in my hand.

O Guerrino, I will come to help you.

*All of a sudden, a noise is heard as of the thudding of the sea.*

*The clatter of horses' hoofs is hastening towards them. A silence falls. They look at each other. ROZI raises her head and PEPPU, bewildered, opens his mouth in a surprised laugh at the face of the girl. As they look round, they find themselves in front of DON CARLOS riding with his friend DON JOSÉ. The horses suddenly pull up. PEDRO lets go of his wife's hair and stands looking without a word.*

DON CARLOS: Remove that drunkard from my sight and  
likewise, Guerrino, this loathsome female  
with her shook of tousled, unkept hair!

[GUERRINO takes off his hat and bows. ENZO does likewise].

PEDRO: O Master, with her tongue this woman wounds  
more than with a two-edged sword. And she screams,  
howls, fights and bites, but I am not in fault.  
Command, O Master, that this bitch be bound  
with the thick rope of your severity.

XANDRA: O my gentle Master, from this tyrant  
free me because he flogs me and the tears  
of my eyes and my blood he dried up,  
and tears the clothes from off me. See, Master,  
how my body is lacerated and  
this bony frame as weak as cotton thread,  
he has torn me to pieces and, almost,  
has he killed me with his blows. All my hair,  
has he dragged out by the roots, my white hair.  
To cover this death's head of mine, these wisps  
of hair are all that he has left to me.

DON CARLOS: Out of my presence with these imbeciles!  
Away with them, Guerrino, drive them off!

XANDRA: O my kind Master . . .

PEDRO: O Master mine . . .

[ENZO picks up the pitcher and drives PEDRO off in front of him. GUERRINO drags up XANDRA roughly for she can hardly rise as she is trembling

*with fear*].

XANDRA: My kind Master ...

PEDRO: O my Master ...

DON CARLOS:                       On the back  
of that animal the old hag and on  
the back of that other animal  
her companion, twelve lashes of the thong.  
Lay them on until their yells die away  
in their throats for ever and from their hearts  
shall issue forth their spirits with their groans.

[XANDRA follows PEDRO — her hair in a tangle, her face buried in her hands. PEPPU stands watching].

DON CARLOS: And this other colt, take him away!  
Drag him to the dung-heap to spend the night  
with the sow until the morning comes,  
and let him feed on mouldy bread and bran,  
that, with that pottage, his eye may open.

GUERRINO *with one hand gives PEPPU a slap on his face. His face takes on a sullen look: his eyes half-closed and rolls from side to side; his mouth twists in a half grim, until GUERRINO seizes him and carries him off with him.*

DON JOSÉ: [*in an aside to his companion*].  
Eying the girl he stood there, that half-wit.  
Though I had thought him of some beast begotten,  
that colt is not devoid of human sense,

DON CARLOS: Of Platsmone, that old man, was that branch  
begotten; so has Pellegrino said,  
our Governor, and from every peasant  
round about Imdina one hears the same.  
For Xandra, when a girl, used to take  
to the toothless fond old man, her sweetheart,  
the choicest bunch of grapes from their orchard.  
And that boy has the wisdom of the father  
and, for this our Roži, a honeyed heart.  
[*looks at ROŽI who has remained standing with bent head*].  
Roži is pensive, her face is aflame  
with love for the peasant who had come here  
from the Sicilian sea to stir up trouble ...

DON JOSÉ: And does this maiden know what sort of tears  
and poverty and misery which she,  
with him is going to inherit  
together with her people, through Inguanez,  
who, to rid them of our benefits,  
into Consalvo's hands has flung their wealth? –  
Do you suppose this is from compassion  
for his brethern? – [*laughs and winks at his companion*].

DON CARLOS:                                    Ah, Don José! see how  
the tears have started from that maiden's eyes!  
Your harsh remarks have pierced the poor girl's heart.  
But a kind lord am I, in every house  
their friend; I who have loved those children  
of the soil, and when things went well, rejoiced  
with them, now in this grief would comfort them  
with kindly words of cheer, and I would say  
to Rozi: Tell me, child, why are you  
so distressed? –

*[he stoops from his horse and speaks kindly to her, looking into the  
girl's face].*

I have collected for you  
your money and I would give you cattle  
and the field which I have at Balluta  
and a wise husband; I will give you to  
this young boy Peppu, because, my girl, child of grief  
and tears, I am sorry for you.

ROZI: [*with her head still bowed and scarcely moving her lips*]

Master,  
Leave me to live according to God's will.  
Leave Peppu with his father and mother.  
Kind-hearted Master, do not be cruel!

DON CARLOS: Thrown on the dung-heap to sleep with the sow  
have had Peppu tonight, for, at you,  
I will not let him cast a single glance  
until I see you smiling, till you say:  
'Master, for your sake, Peppu I accept.'  
As for the filthy Xandra, in that she  
brought her son secretly, as go-between  
allowing him to look at your pure face  
and gaze upon you with that lustful eye.

I will have Xandra folgged to death tonight  
and Pedro with her.

ROZI:                   Have mercy on them!  
You will have mercy on them all poor things  
And you will not flog them, O Master!

*[raising her eyes, she flings herself on her knees, spreading both hands in a gesture of entreaty. She braves the harsh words of DON CARLOS and relies on the kindness he is showing her].*

DON CARLOS: *[remains gazing at her, struck by her beseeching, pleading look. He turns and whispers to his companion].*

This beseeching look! – How it ennobles her,  
the peasant girl, humiliating us.  
This Rozi is as fascinating as  
Giovanna who enthralled Frederick 'The Weak',  
and that other Nicola d'Acciaioli  
who brought to her his tribute on his knees.

*[to ROZI]*

O Rozi child, beautiful child, I've heard  
the words of compassion which have issued  
from your mouth and, my darling, I will grant  
your request. Bring me now something to drink,  
for I am thirsty: I would like from you  
a bowl of water. These horses also,  
water them. All that your heart desires,  
I promise to you.

*[ROZI goes to fill a pitcher with water from the well].*

DON JOSÉ: *[to his companion].*

This maid delights me  
more than Blanca, daughter of Fernando,  
who in Barcellona gave me the red sash  
of victory. Had there been cause I would  
have given my life for her face, in that  
first fighting at Pentecost when I come  
to Aragon. This jewel is lost to you  
in these fields. Try and carry her away, my friend.

*[ROZI offers the pitcher of water to DON CARLOS].*

DON CARLOS: *[in DON JOSE'S ear].*

My heart warns me that in my endeavour

to obtain her, you and I will shed our blood  
before you reach the town of Aragon.

[*to ROZI after drinking*].

I thank you, child, for having quenched my thirst,  
although each drop increased my wish for you.  
I have ridden far, the sun has scorched me  
before I reached you. I thought of your eyes,  
your smiling mouth. I stopped half-way in thought,  
both my horse and I together panted.  
Take hold of this pitcher! Let me see your face!

[*As ROZI stretches out her hand to take the pitcher, DON CARLOS gently tries to catch hold of her face. ROZI colours up, bends her head and goes away thoughtfully to fill the bucket with water for the horses*].

DON JOSÉ: As the sun sets, the shadow hides her face.  
With its passing has also set for us  
all happiness of greatness through times  
which have changed. Tell me truly, from which side  
are the corsairs coming? —

DON CARLOS: From Pellegrino  
comes the bad news of vessels drawing near  
this little island. I spoke to him  
and he told me that to the West of Ghawdex  
last night were clearly visible the ships  
of the approaching corsairs. This tidings  
are through the Castellan.

DON JOSÉ: It seems to me  
this news comes from some empty-headed ass  
like Vaccaro.

DON CARLOS: All these peasants and the maid's  
people, the sailor among them  
are to be seen going out tonight.

*While ROZI approaches to water the horses, keeping at a distance from DON CARLOS, with her eyes all the time on the ground, DON JOSÉ bends down his head to the level of her face, and, smiling, attempts to caress her by stroking her cheeks with one hand.*

DON JOSÉ: You do not know as yet how beautiful  
you are! — Why do you blush and hide your face? —  
I will take you away with me tonight,

and you will come with Don Carlos into  
 a great palace far from this land, a fine house  
 better than your father's, and this garment  
 will you strip off you. Silken dresses  
 of lovely colours have I got and, for  
 this neck and these fingers, necklaces  
 of pearls and rings worthy of a queen . . .

*While DON JOSÉ tries to stroke the girl's neck and to catch hold of her hand, she draws back still with her head bent and hiding her face with her right hand, until she plucks up courage and breaks free. Silent and terrified, she escapes into the upper room. The two horsemen remain watching the disappearing girl.*

DON CARLOS: A startled bird is this Rozi of ours,  
 and small is your cunning compared to hers  
 if you would entice her into the snare,

DON JOSÉ: [*stays wrapped in thought. Suddenly he lifts his head and looks fixedly at his companion*].

For tonight this peasant-girl, like the sun,  
 has fled us. Take heed of what I tell you  
 I, the victor of Blanca, before  
 the sun shall set on us tomorrow,  
 I shall bring to you from out of that nest  
 the bird of your heart.

DON CARLOS *bursts out laughing.*

DON JOSÉ:                    I will wager it.  
                                   Don Carlos, your hand!

DON CARLOS *offers his hand and then, still smiling, rides on with his companion towards the field-path. The approaching darkness enveloped the two riders.*

KOZZI *comes out from behind the wall of a narrow path above that part where the two horsemen have passed. She looks back and she looks ahead, as though investigating; then, she retraces her steps on tip-toe, passes round the bend of the path and calls out;*

KOZZI:                            Come on out, Pietru!

PIETRU *with a spade in his hand, appears, following KOZZI.*

KOZZI: Nothing can be seen in the dark. The horsemen  
 went away on this side.

PIETRU:                                   And Rozi, where  
is Rozi? –

KOZZI: With Zolli and with Betti  
I left her reaping in the field.

PIETRU:                                   Early  
this morning I saw her father Matti  
going out with his wife and later on  
I saw him lading the beast.

KOZZI:                                   As you know,  
Anni had arranged with me since yesterday  
evening to go to Mellieħa;  
she said to me: 'Kozz, you will be going  
to the broker of the farm  
at Qammieħ and I am coming with you  
to Mellieħa, because the cow  
of Anglu of the Valley – the cow  
which we barthered to him for two links  
of land with the growing crop – has given  
birth to two fine calves. That cow was in calf  
already and ours are the calves,  
as we told him at the time when the barther  
was made.

PIETRU: At what time did you see Gawdenz? –

KOZZI: We saw him early in Mellieħa  
on the square, before the sun to our side  
came round. He was with two fishermen who  
from Ghawdex came with news for the Night-Watch  
of this region, Gawdenz came into the field  
and never in all my life have I seen  
such a worried face as had your friend.  
At length he said to us: 'Go and find Ġanni,  
Pietru also; find all the people round,  
because I hear the sails of the corsairs  
are bearing down on Ghawdex.

PIETRU:                                   In Tartarni  
Ġanni was seen going with Ćikku  
with the load of fodder for the cattle  
being fattened for the Governor.



KOZZI: While we from scarcity are left to die  
amid the poverty 'neath which we groan.  
The Governor thinks only of those folk  
who are around him, of his entourage.  
Where Zoili and Betti are, now I go,  
and with them, will escort our Rozi home.

PIETRU: Till Ganni from Imdina comes, I'll wait.

KOZZI: Sidor, Matti and Anni I left  
half-way talking together  
We shall get the proper news from Ganni.

*[glances round the farmhouse and the fields, leaves PIETRU, draws back and then says to him under her breath].*

All is buried in darkness and not a soul  
can be seen peering from the field.

*PIETRU stands watching KOZZI walking away until she disappears from view. He goes up the path between the fields behind the farmhouse and sits down to rest on a boulder behind the rubble wall which joins on to the corner of the terrace-parapet and remains with bound head, lost in thought.*

*ROZI peeps out of the door of the upper room on the terrace, investigating with a frightened look. She comes slowly down the steps, snatches the pitcher of water, goes up again to water the basil-plant in its flower-pot. She cuts off the dead leaves, throws them away and waters the plant. She pauses suddenly, she has perceived PIETRU, she becomes confused, PUTS down the pitcher, claps her head with both hands, she cannot move, with her left hand she seeks to open the door of the upper room so that she may go and hide, but her face cannot turn away from PIETRU's face: he seems to hold her with his eyes so that she cannot stir. The eyes of the two remain steady, fixed. ROZI cannot speak, the words die away on her lips.*

ROZI: Pietru ...  
alone, are you alone? ... how came you here? -

PIETRU: Rozi, you are here all alone tonight? - ...

ROZI: Because with Zolli and with Betti, I  
have been reaping. For my mother have I  
been waiting since sunset, with my father  
is she returning. I left the others  
in the field and I came on to water  
our cattle and knead the dough.

PIETRU: How changed is your face, Roži, as from day  
to night! In your eyes there shines no longer  
the star of love for me, Roži, for me  
You used to hold me only in your heart,  
Roži, only me.

ROŽI: From Mellieħa  
my mother has but now returned, also  
my father will be coming with her from  
the field and my brother Ġanni also  
will soon be back from Hal Tartarni,  
for the hour of rest is now on and darkness  
has quite fallen.

PIETRU: Your voice, Roži, your voice  
let me hear from your heart, don't hide from me,  
do not avoid my eyes. Roži, you well  
remember how often in former days  
I have waited for you coming home alone  
from the field because my wearied heart  
longed for you, ever questioning of how  
you regarded our secret love concealed  
from your mother, from your father Matti.  
.....  
These silent lips, this veiling of your face,  
tell me what does it mean? –

ROŽI: Leave me, Pietru.  
I would be alone.

PIETRU: Alone by yourself  
in your mother's home, that dream delighted  
your heart when once I alone occupied  
your thoughts. You saw me on this boulder,  
thoughtful, cast down.

ROŽI: Leave me, Pietru, alone.  
I can't tell you what's in my heart; leave me,  
Pietru leave me ...

[*She turns away her face, casts her eyes to the ground and attempts to go indoors*].

PIETRU: You are going? –  
O Roži, one word, only one word I want ...

[*He gets up from the boulder and affectionately goes up to the parapet. ROZI's one hand is still resting on it. PIETRU siezes it in both his hands*].

Believe me, my whole life lies in your hands!  
 Save me, dear Rozi, from drowning in this  
 rough sea in which I find my life. From your lips  
 once I heard your word, clear and sincere, come forth.

ROZI: [*covers her face with her other hand.*]  
 Pietru!

PIETRU: The word, Rozi, the word, repeat  
 it to me, for I fear it was a dream . . .  
 I remember well when I chanced to see  
 the reel on the roof betokening  
 a maid within was waiting for a mate.  
 I stopped to look, my spade was in my hand.  
 You looked out from the window: I beheld  
 your face and those charming eyes. Then daily  
 you used to see me on this boulder till  
 old Kozzi came and she, as go-between,  
 to your mother spoke. Kozzi said to me:  
 'That girl loves you. It is on your account  
 she hides herself from other eyes. Rozi  
 in the fields you do not see but, at home,  
 she is always working on her marriage-outfit  
 for her own home, and, ever in the coffer,  
 laying all away with smiling lips.  
 Your name is ever in her happy tongue,  
 calling you: "that darling Pietru of mine."  
 Rozi, I remember well for it seems  
 but yesterday I left this land, sailing  
 away and bearing with me you, in heart  
 and mind, pledging you my word that on return  
 I would claim you. You did not speak but fled  
 indoors to your mother, sobbing out your heart.

ROZI, *fearful that she could be swayed by PIETRU's words, covertly dries her tears, roughly drags away her hand from his clasp, covers her face with both hers, turns her back on him and stands speechless. PIETRU, in bewilderment, looks all round to see whether some one may be coming, then softly jumps on to the terrace-wall and seats himself near ROZI with one foot dangling.*

I remember well, for but yesterday

it seems. Why so cruel, Rozi, did you feel  
 that parting? – Why did that pure word pass your lips  
 and give me the kerchief as Love's Pledge? –  
 Why, time and again, did you let me sing  
 that song in the field near Wied Ćnejna  
 when you saw me going to the threshing-floor? –  
 Once and twice I stopped to gaze upon you,  
 when I sung for you the lovely song:  
 the song of the departing sailor ...

' – At sunset, on a fallen tree-trunk seated  
 I saw you on the sky-line – a Vision  
 of the Past: you kept your gaze upon me  
 until the darkening colour died away  
 suddenly behind the hill ...

– Quiet in the twilight you remained  
 like a grey shadow covering the eyes  
 leaving my heart to live in hope ...

– I asked; "Where are your days, O wretched Youth,  
 the brightness of your eyes and of your face,  
 where has its beauty gone? – Where are they,  
 your lovely looks? – O the days of the past,  
 with my mother's spinning wheel, oh, how  
 have I longed for you when ploughing in the field!

– Maid of the roof, at dawn  
 I used to see you often watering  
 the basil-plant; on the threshing-floor  
 have I seen you: I remember you  
 with gleaming spade at the well, and at eve,  
 coming from beneath the vine: I recall  
 you with that pitcher brought to quench my thirst ...  
 ... the blackness of your eyes and in your bashful face  
 the joy as you bent your head giving me your hand ...  
 the gladness, the desire ... for in my heart  
 I loved you, though denied your sweet kiss.

– Dawn of my life, delight of my home,  
 for your good fortune, I have left my house,  
 and at once you have forgotten me, in you  
 they promised me good luck, I brought you rings,  
 jewels and gold, and now my heart is broken

in tears of blood I wrote to you ...

– I sung for you the long song of my love,  
the news-bee came fluttering over my head  
It said to me: This poisonous land for you  
is cruel; sailor, think of it no more.

– O Shadow, so you spoke, and as I left  
my home, in that last glance  
you came before me and said: With love and time behind you,  
sail away my lad, that's my advice to you.  
Sailor, this is my word. "

At PIETRU's words: 'With love and time behind you', ROZI opens the door of the upper room tiptoes inside and closes it behind her.

PIETRU: This is my word.

*Remains motionless with bowed head without uttering any other words ... waiting a gentle answer. A deathly silence follows and the covering darkness gives PIETRU the aspect of a man wrapped in sorrowful thought at the grave of one who had been the dearest woman in the world and had left him ...*

*The barking of a dog can be heard from the nearest farmhouse. In the distance KOZZI and ZOLLI appear coming along with BETTI.*

*KOZZI comes on ahead, she looks at PIETRU in great surprise, she comes up to him and questions him. PIETRU seems stunned and does not open his mouth.*

KOZZI: Tell me, sailor, what are you doing here  
on the edge of the parapet alone? –  
Do you still await the girl's return?  
Why so lost in thought that to Kozzi you  
do not reply? – For Rozi I am still  
searching. They told me that at set of sun  
she to her mother's house has gone, since then  
no more has she been seen. Stand up, Pietru!  
Tell, o sailor, have you seen her here? –

PIETRU: [*raises his head and gazes at KOZZI, then he speaks in a low voice*].

Why do you thus question me? – I saw her  
on the horizon in the reddening sky  
at sunset on these fallen walls. She stood  
there for a while until her sun-tanned face

lost its glory in the darkening night,  
and therewith was the light extinguished.

KOZZI: Let not this dream of the past, as lightning flash,  
pass from your mind since, with love, for you  
Anni's daughter glows.

PIETRU:                               You still question me,  
of me, the sailor, you ask for Roži? —

KOZZI: Only from your lips can I learn this news,  
for Pietru's eyes, his spirit and his heart  
follow Roži everywhere she goes.

PIETRU: [*points to the door of the upper room*].  
Within the room, extinguished is the lamp  
and cruel darkness has concealed the maid.

*KOZZI starts, wonders, comes down from the field-path and goes up the steps, while PIETRU gets down from the terrace, picks up his spade and sadly takes the field-path and passes out of side. KOZZI knocks at the door and calls ROŽI softly. The door half opens. Behind her ZOLLI and BETTI come quietly up the steps and together they enter the upper room.*

.....

*DUN SIDOR, MATTI and ANNI come along slowly, conversing. The priest halts at the end of the lane and points towards the west with his stick.*

DUN SIDOR: They have arrived, as they said, around  
the isle of Ghawdex. From this side the enemy  
will land.

ANNI:                               May our Lady of Mellieħa  
hear our prayer and drive away these our foes.  
She who from hunger has delivered us.

DUN SIDOR: Poor is the island today and lacking  
in people.

ANNI:                               More heavily than ever  
weighs misery today.

MATTI:                              The day has come;  
upon us is the day of savagery.

DUN SIDOR: I fear by now the enemy has landed

on Kemmuna. There a strong tower once  
 was to have been built with our money  
 as a defence against the enemy.  
 The Great King with our money, as they say,  
 bought slips and mercenaries and we were left  
 to battle with the pirates hand to hand  
 that, thereby, we might block for him the road  
 to Sicily. Nava, the Custodian  
 of the Castle, yesterday told me this  
 when I enquired of him concerning  
 our petition to the King to ransom  
 the Island by ourselves. He said also:  
 The King has met our wishes, since from our masters  
 he has freed us and has made Inguanez  
 surety for the ransom, and his two sons  
 in the Coast-Castle as hostages are kept  
 until the Lord Consalvo be repaid  
 the purchase price he, for this Island, gave.  
 'Congratulate', said he to me, 'your peasants  
 that for the island's sake they have renounced  
 all their possessions. But, of our poverty  
 in men and gold, the enemy has learned  
 and, as a thief, he now descends on us ...

MATTI: They have oppressed us, of strength have robbed us  
 and into the jaws of the enemy  
 have those masters cast us. Behold how now  
 they have deserted us and fled!

ANNI:    What will  
 befall our poor children, what? —

DUN SIDOR:    Let us pray  
 to God Almighty that he may save us  
 quickly from this trouble and give power  
 to our sons.

*[he bows his head gravely, makes the sign of the cross and moves his  
 lips in prayer while the other two old people follows his example, —  
 Silence].*

THREE PEASANTS *come running from a distance, panting out of breath.  
 They leap over the field-wall. Towards the west appears a beacon-light  
 on the Mellieħa height and, of a sudden, it blazes up.*

FIRST PEASANT: From every side there reached us  
the barking of the dogs, but not a sound  
did we hear. We saw afar the lighted beacon ...

SECOND PEASANT: We thought something must have occurred.

THIRD PEASANT: We are sleeping  
on the threshing floor.

FIRST PEASANT: We started out  
for Il-Balluta to arouse the people.

SECOND PEASANT: And we run to Magħtab beyond Pwales.  
We heard the tocsin sounding from the church.  
It was to summon the peasants.

THIRD PEASANT: Forth they poured  
from every house and farm, weapons in their hands,  
some with daggers, and some with cudgels.  
Soon there came to us the Officer  
of the Coastal Sentries: 'Hasten, brothers,  
hasten to Mellieħa', he said to us,  
for from L-Aħrax is the foe descending'.

FIRST PEASANT: When the tocsin rang, all riding on their mules  
the men appeared from Hal Mejn and Wied Qannotta.

DUN SIDOR: [*stands in amazement without a word. At length he raises both  
his hands to heaven*].

Look down, O Lord from Heaven, King of Kings,  
Look down on these unhappy sons of grief,  
Look down in Thy mercy: to Thy servants  
bring salvation with Thy Hand and Power,  
strike with fear this great foe of soul and body.

ANNI: [*terrified, goes close to MATTI still standing in thought*].

Come on! We will call the children, Matti,  
let us call the children. Old as we are,  
we will do our duty. Naught else is left,  
one comfort only – to call the children  
and send them ...

MATTI *shuffles along after his wife. By the time the two old people  
have reached the bottom step of the flight leading to the upper room the  
summons is heard from afar.*

VOICE FROM AFAR: That is for us! See



how it blazes up there. They have landed.

VOICE FROM AFAR: They are upon us!

*Silence. MATTI and ANNI stand gazing, ĠANNI and ĊIKKU are observed in the distance running up at full tilt. All turn their heads; the women come out of the upper room on to the terrace.*

ĠANNI:                   The enemy is here!  
 See the blazing beacon from Mellieħa.  
 And from Bingemma appeared the first one,  
 shining like a star in the darkness with its  
 crimson trail, the colour of blood, telling of  
 great danger. The beacon on Bingemma  
 and the other hills call for urgent help.  
 Let me set off to where my comrades are.  
 O father, dearest mother, my dear home,  
 the coming fearsome hour calls for us  
 young men, lusty and of will, courageous,  
 Give me your blessing, for I go to join  
 my fellows, and place upon my breast  
 the medallion of our Blessed Lady  
 with an olive leaf, so that if I fall,  
 heavenward facing shall I then be found.  
 There 'monst the wounded will be recognized  
 the son of the Peasant of Qerrieda  
 when, face upwards, they shall find Ġanni, dead . . .

*[he comes out from the group of his fellow-peasant, his face red as fire; he goes up the steps into the upper room. BETTI in a paroxysm, calls out from the doorstep of the upper room].*

BETTI: O Ġanni, why are you going away?  
 Why are you bundling up so hastily  
 your things in your handkerchief? – Tell me whether  
 I no more shall see you, no more hear your voice? –  
 With my mother, let me come with you,  
 O let me come! Without you I shall die.  
 Amongst those murderers Berbers you are going.  
 I see you choose the blade wherewith to kill  
 and the lethal blow and quiver on your arm  
 I see you take, that you may wound, O Ġanni.  
 Mother, mother, I will go, let me go  
 that Ġanni, by the Berbers, be not slain.

*[flings herself on her mother's breast].*

ĠANNI steps out on the terrace, dressed and armed with a cudgel. His waist is encircled by a broad sash from which, on one side, proceeds the hilt of the dagger, sandals are on his feet laced with cord to his knees. ROŽI takes from him the open bundle of things and, while wiping the tears from her eyes, folds them, lays them in order and ties the bundle up and fastens it on his back.

ĠANNI: *[turns to BETTI].*

I go, my betrothed, that I may bring joy  
through victory and freedom from the claws  
of this destroying vulture, who like a  
whirlwind, comes to rob us our island  
so well beloved. Do not weep; I will die  
with you in my thoughts, you will live in mine.  
Say with the death of your heart's beloved  
all the blood of the enemy was spilled.  
Say with the ransom of this land enslaved  
is your life bound up, Ġanni's precious life.  
And do not mourn my death. Mother, father,  
I beseech your blessing.  
*[comes down the steps to embrace his mother and father].*

ANNI, from her bosom pulls out a sacred amulet, fastens it round his neck and kisses him. ZOLLI, BETTI and ROŽI quietly follow him down, drying their tears. ĠANNI, after parting from his mother and father, without a word comes in front of the priest, kneels down and kisses his hand.

DUN SIDOR: *[sadly but with a firm voice].*

Bless you, my son,  
go and bring us victory. May this arm  
so brave be blessed with strength from God.

ĠANNI rises to mingle with his comrades. All the peasants march after him. The women and others follow them in a silent absorbed gaze.

*After a while they appear in the distance only like a black shadow.*

ROŽI has remained apart, standing at the bottom of the steps: and gazes downwards towards the valley, without moving her eyes. PIETRU appears carrying mace and girded for battle. ROŽI sees him turn into the farm from under the field-wall and come up to her side. The girl's eyes shine with a great gladness on facing that brave lad going out against their lifelong enemy; trembling, she clasps her hands. Her betrothed looses the

*kerchief from his neck, knots it and throws it at her feet. She picks it up, clasps it to her breast and kisses it. PIETRU plucks up courage, comes nearer and lays both his hands in hers, in the hands of the maid from whom death alone can separate his thoughts. ROZI crushes them in hers and, of a sudden, lets them go. PIETRU dashes away. ROZI parted from him so unexpectedly, almost faints ... a thought comes to her ... she kisses the kerchief and thrusts it into the bosom of her dress, draws forth a rosary, takes hold of the pendent cross, kneels down and says:-*

To Thee, O Holy Cross, I pray, bring him  
back safely, Cross of our Redemption.  
O Great King, bring him back safely, Holy Cross.  
Victorious in Thy strength, bring him back safe  
and joyful to my arms!

*DUN SIDOR is seen at a distance, standing in the middle of the kneeling women, looking up to heaven ...*

*The Guards pass along the field-path with great torches flaming in their hands.*

END OF ACT III