little-known documents

# The Turks in Friuli

PIER PAOLO PASOLINI

INTRODUCTION BY ROSA MUCIGNAT

TRANSLATION BY ROSA MUCIGNAT AND CRISTINA VITI

## Introduction

PIER PAOLO PASOLINI CONTINUES TO BE KNOWN OUTSIDE OF ITALY PRIMARILY AS A FILMMAKER AND CONTROVERSIAL PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL whose uncompromising explorations of sexuality, religious meaning, and social exclusion gave expression to a "uniquely provocative and prophetic modernity" (Hirschman 9). Recent scholarship in English is only beginning to reveal the extraordinary variety and quality of Pasolini's writing in Italian, and it has barely touched on his early works in Friulian.[1] Friulian is a Romance variety spoken in Friuli, a region in the far northeast of Italy, where Pasolini spent many a summer as a child in his mother's hometown of Casarsa. In the Friulian of Casarsa, Pasolini thought he had found a "pure poetic language" ("Al lettore" 8), unsullied by previous literary usage yet integral to the archaic lifeworld of the marginalized peasants for whom he felt "a sweet and violent love, both turbid and pure" (*Passione* 137).

Friuli became Pasolini's main residence in August 1942, when bombing raids drove the family from Bologna to the safety of the countryside. There, he set up a makeshift school for local children and started an influential literary journal in Friulian, while his younger brother, Guido, joined the armed resistance and was killed by pro-Jugoslav partisans.[2] It is in this context that Pasolini developed the idea for his only play in Friulian, *I Turcs tal Friul* (*The Turks in Friuli*), which appears here in English for the first time.[3] Based on the events of the Ottoman-Venetian War of 1499, *The Turks in Friuli* is a one-act drama in prose that Pasolini probably wrote in May 1944. The inspiration came from a memorial stone visible to this day in the little Church of Santa Croce, which commemorates the town's deliverance from the Ottoman menace.[4]

*The Turks* is an extraordinary text that deserves to be better known not only for its dramatic power and intense representation of human suffering but also as a document of Pasolini's complex and evolving relationship with Friuli and its language and of his opening to problems of temporality, history, and social change. Pasolini himself was ambivalent about its value: in a letter of 29 November 1945 to Gianfranco D'Aronco, he called it "perhaps the best thing I have written in Friulian" (*Letters* 213), but he never sought to publish or stage it. The play focuses on the conflicting reactions of the

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people of Casarsa as they face a Turkish attack and, through the contrasting figures of Meni Colùs and his brother Pauli, addresses the issue of individual agency vis-à-vis historical change. At a time when Friuli was ravaged by Nazi occupation, civil war, and Allied bombings, the play's remote events had clear contemporary resonance. The forceful reenactment of the terror and devastation brought by marauding invaders, and of the split between those who chose to resist and those who simply waited for events to pass, captures the predicament of Friulians (and other Italians) during World War II. The dramatic conflict at the heart of the play is embodied in the Colùs brothers: Pauli, spiritual and kind, is attached to ancient traditions and sensible to the beauty of nature, while the turbulent Meni defies the authority of the priest and the elders and gets killed in an attempt to fend off the Turks. The two characters, who bear the surname of Pasolini's mother, invite comparison with the author and his brother, Guido, whose tragic death seems to be obscurely prophesied here. Nevertheless, it is in my view more accurate to imagine the pair as two sides of Pasolini's own self-image and writerly persona.

Beyond its biographical significance, *The Turks* has a strong collective dimension in the many choral scenes and in manifest attempts to reach a popular audience through the simplified dramatic structure (a single act, no divisions into scenes or changes of place) and the use of idiomatic expressions such as *governà* ("to see to the cows"). Arguably, the play's principal aim is to foster an understanding of the Friulians' class consciousness and true position in history. The evocation of a quasi-mythical past is not meant to renew the ancestral fear of "the Turk" as the barbarous Other or to uphold an exclusionary notion of place. On the contrary, the advancing Turks, who never appear on the scene, personify the fundamental impulse of creative destruction that sets historical progress in motion. Their battle song, in verses, is an explosion of pure poetic brilliance that shatters the drab litanies of the cowed peasants, giving new form to the erotic-aesthetic longing of Pasolini's earlier Friulian lyrics. The Turks take pride in their own youthful bodies, "sheathed in the gleaming of [their] ancient gold," and assert their zest for life with a sensuality and ferocity that is denied to the prematurely aged Friulians. The waste of youth and beauty is a recurrent theme in Pasolini's work, which begins here to be politically inflected: "this is the living He's given us," cries Meni, "we die, we're butchered, drenched in Christian blood. . . . And what good was praying and working and sweating and swearing all through our miserable young years?" Meni's blasphemous despair is a rebellion not only against God but against a religiously sanctioned work ethic that enslaves the peasant classes.

That the Ottomans suddenly change course and spare Casarsa is seen by the community as a sign of divine Providence, but Pasolini has more mixed feelings: while they are saved from harm, Friulians are also denied an opportunity to destroy the centuries-old religious and social structures that oppress them. In the tense exchanges between Pauli and Meni, Pasolini represents the conflict between his own attachment to Friuli's ancient ways of life and his awareness that their preservation depends on poverty and backwardness. *The Turks in Friuli* adds a key piece to the puzzle of Pasolini's enduring attraction to the maternal land of Friuli and its language, and it provides insight into his critique of power and his understanding of history as uneven development, which will go on to inform his engagement with other peripheries in Italy and the world.

## Notes

1. A notable exception is McCrea's comparative study of Irish Gaelic poetry and Pasolini's Friulian poetry. See also Baranski (253–80), Sartarelli's notes to his edition of Pasolini's *Selected Poetry* (62–83), and the well-researched sections on the Friulian years in Schwartz's biography of Pasolini (59–212).

2. Pasolini reconstructs the circumstances of his brother's death in a letter to Luciano Serra of 7 Feb. 1945 (*Letters* 218–19).

3. This translation is published with the permission of Maria Grazia Chiarcossi. The play was first performed in 1976 and appeared in print the same year, edited by Luigi Ciceri. For this translation I have referred to the original Friulian in the version of the text included in the

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volume *Teatro* of Siti and De Laude's edition of Pasolini's collected works, which also provides details of the productions by Rodolfo Castiglione, in 1976, and Elio de Capitani, in 1996 (1111–230).

4. The inscription is reproduced in Andreina Ciceri's 1995 edition of the text (124–25).

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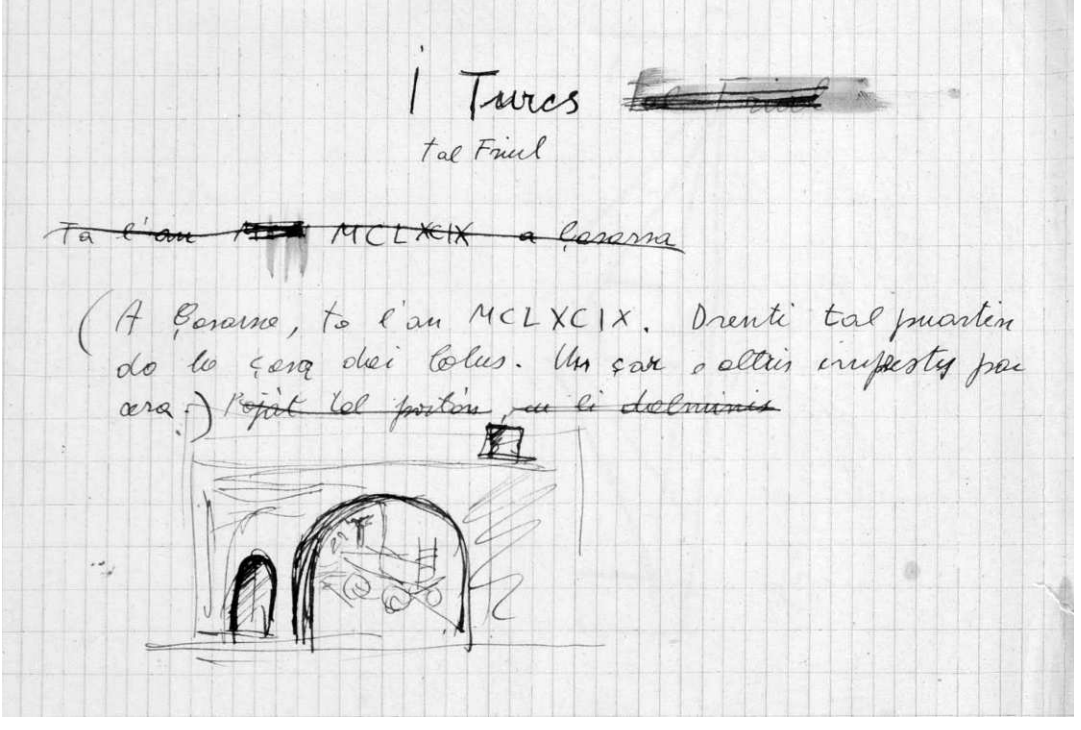
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Original title page of Pier Paolo Pasolini's *I Turcs tal Friùl* (1944), bearing the author's sketch for set design and scene description (Archivio Contemporaneo A. Bonsanti, Gabinetto Vieusseux, Florence, Italy, MS A, p. 1).

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# The Turks in Friuli

## Characters:

*Pauli Colùs*
*Meni Colùs*
*Anuta Perlina*
*Zuan Gambilìn*
*Sçefin Cuarnùs*
*Cenci Verulìn*
*Lussia Colùs*
*Nisiuti Colùs*
*Matia De Montiq*
*Zuan Colùs*
*Asiùt*
*Bastiàn de Jacùs*
*Priest*
*Pieri Renùt*
*The Turks*
*Nalo Jovaqìn*

## Scene:

*Casarsa in the year 1499. Inside the arched passageway of the house of the Colùs, with a cart and other farming tools lying on the ground.*

May 1944, Casarsa

PAULI COLÙS. O Lord, have mercy on our town. It's not that we want to be rich; or that we want rain or sun. It's our destiny to suffer the heat and the cold and all the storms that heaven sends. We know that. How many times, here in our little church of the Holy Cross, have we sung the litanies, for you to have mercy on our land! Today we realize that we have prayed for nothing, we realize you're far too high above our rain and our sun and our troubles. Today it's death that waits for us here, Lord, right here where we've been so alive we thought we'd live forever, and that forever you'd give rain to our fields and health to our poor bodies. But where does it come from, this death? What made these people come here from another world to put an end to our poor lives, so down to earth, so bereft of ideals and ambition as they are? Here we were, Lord, with our carts and our hoes and our dung heaps and our little church. . . . How is it possible that all these things should come to an end? What kind of miracle is it, Lord, that you go on living when everything around here, that's alive and looks set to live forever, will be destroyed, lost, forgotten? (*Falls to his knees.*) And you, our Blessed Virgin? Smell the clean breeze blowing from our town. . . . The smell of hay and wet grass; the smell of fireplaces—what I could smell as a child on my way home from the fields. You, at least, won't you have mercy on us and stop the Turks!

MENI COLÙS. (*Enters from courtyard.*) Sure, go ahead and pray, Pauli. We've good cause to pray. The way it is now, we'd better strike up the *De profundis* and have done with it!

PAULI COLÙS. You are laughing . . .

MENI COLÙS. Laughing? No Pauli, I'm not laughing. This is crying time. And I am crying, see? Look, there's a tear in my hand. I am crying. Forget your prayers, forget your plaints. Curse, that's what we should do, brother. Curse this life, curse God, curse you and all the others who just sit and pray and suffer like you do.

PAULI COLÙS. How can you say that, Meni?

MENI COLÙS. I'm praying—of course I'm praying. Anyway, we all deserve to die.

*Enter* ANUTA PERLINA *from a side door to the left of the passageway.*

ANUTA PERLINA. What's all this shouting about, children? You better go in and eat, it's time. Your mother's sitting by the fireplace, her teeth are chattering in fear, her white braid's all tangled up and shaking on her ghostly thin shoulders. And you, Meni . . . I've heard you. Think of your mother, Meni, won't you. She trembles for you, child. She stirs the pot and it's your face she sees in the fire. She stirs and stirs, and sees your face turning in the fire. . . . Pauli! Go to your brother and take him inside to eat, it's time.

MENI COLÙS. Give me your apron, Anuta, your smoky old apron. When I was a little boy you used to tell me stories, remember? And I would bury my face in your apron. But now I'm drying the tears off of my eyes with it.

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PAULI COLÙS. There's still the cows to see to before we eat. Let's go.

MENI COLÙS. That's right, see to the cows, why don't you! It's just an evening like any other, isn't it. The land's at peace, the town's all safe—yes, we can go out dancing tonight!

PAULI COLÙS. Well I'm going to see to the cows, and do the milking. And you better come quick, and give me a hand. Work and prayer: that's all we've got left. Just do what I do, my poor lad—and let's die the way we've always lived.

MENI COLÙS. Die? Ah Pauli, where did you learn that word? O Christ, Christ, Christ! What will become of our town—our houses—our little pots and pans? By God, when I die, the whole world dies with me . . . all is black and dark . . . my flesh turning cold . . . death! What's left of me? The town'll still be there if I die. I'll go to the graveyard, with the pretty flowers and the grass, if I die. But now, it's not like death is coming just for me, Pauli: it's coming for you, and our mother, and our father, and our town, our fields, and our little church too!

ANUTA PERLINA. See, Meni, Pauli is praying. And the Lord may well listen to him. The whole town goes to prayer after work, at rosary. Me, I'm old and I look at everything as if from far away, from the edge of the world. Now that I've lived and died, I can see many things still happening, behind me, down below in the world. But all I know is this: all the things I didn't understand about God, I understand them now: even the greatest mystery, the most hidden things, even death itself—the death of my son, a young man, blossoming with life—for no reason.

MENI COLÙS. Me, I don't understand nothing about God. I really don't get it. All I know is that these strangers have come here to ruin us and lay us waste. No one saw this coming. Death, fire, and destruction—all of a sudden they're upon us, right here, Anuta, in the places of our old folks, where we've lived for centuries ploughing our little patch.

PAULI COLÙS. May God's will be done.

MENI COLÙS. No, Pauli. It's just not right. God's not looking. Who knows what He might be thinking up there in Heaven! If we were in a city or a big town, or on a mountain, maybe He'd take notice. But out here in the sticks, scattered about in a few smoky houses, stuck in the hole that's Friuli, how can God even know we exist? We are born, and we live, and we die. And He doesn't know a thing. They slaughter us, and He doesn't know a thing.

PAULI COLÙS. That's not true, Meni. The Lord is right here, with us. Maybe you can't see him, but I can—I see Him all around here, every day. When I come home from the field in the evening, on top of a cartload of hay, I feel as if I can just reach out with my hand and touch Him, our Lord, in the sky, in the boundless clouds. Isn't that so, Anuta?

ANUTA PERLINA. That's right, my child. Now go see to the cows. And when you're done, go get your food, your mother's waiting for you. Let things be for now—and then the Lord will take care of it, as they say. (*Meni and Pauli walk away toward the courtyard.*) Sweet Virgin, I've nothing much to care for by now. Old and lonely as I am, with a foot in the grave, I've got nothing left to wish for in this world. But that's all the more reason for you to hear my prayer. Save our town, I beg you. And keep death from these poor children, who still have so long to live, who should enjoy their time, and sing, and work, and dance, and love, and pray to you. Amen. (*Exit through her little front door.*)

ZUAN GAMBILÌN. Look around, Sçefin. Take a look at our homes. All quiet. Some working, some eating, some others singing. You'd think this was peace time, wouldn't you. I'm telling you, Sçefin, we're all out of our minds—we've got Turks all around us wrecking, burning, butchering—and here we are—what do we do? Just sit and wait?

SÇEFIN CUARNÙS. There's nothing we can do, Zuan.

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ZUAN GAMBILÌN. Well, there's *something* we could do . . .

SÇEFIN CUARNÙS. Yes—pray.

ZUAN GAMBILÌN. Pray what, when people pray without even knowing why they're praying? Is there anyone out of this bunch of fools who might even think that tomorrow—yes, tomorrow, you understand?—when the morning light comes back—their home could be burnt down and they could be dead? Are we all blind?

SÇEFIN CUARNÙS. Well, Zuan, that's the way it is. Death—that's too big a thing to even think about.

ZUAN GAMBILÌN. Mark my words, Sçefin: before the night is out, they're going to wake up and see what a pretty pass we're at. Then we'll hear them bawl and shout! (*Bell tolls for Mass.*)

MENI COLÙS. (*Behind them, from the courtyard.*) Yes, ring out! Ring out, sweet bells! It's like Easter Sunday, isn't it! Go to rosary, folks, go and pray to the Lord, since the bells are calling you just like any evening. It's just the evening for singing hymns!

CENCI VERULÌN. (*Enter with eight or nine other villagers.*) What's wrong with Meni?

ZUAN GAMBILÌN. What's wrong with him? He's right, that's what. Go on, off you go to Church nice and easy, 'cause a Turk's just like the Devil, isn't he? All you have to do is cross yourself and he's gone. Just like that!

CENCI VERULÌN. The Turks? Nah, they're a long way off.

ZUAN GAMBILÌN. They're on the Lusòns, that's where they are. Perhaps even farther in: they might have crossed over into Friuli.

CENCI VERULÌN. So what? Let them. We'll have a drink together, if they come. And anyway, are we free now? Turks or Venetians . . . we'd just be changing masters, but our bit of bread and cheese with a nice drop of red—we'll always have that. Cheer up, Zuan.

ZUAN GAMBILÌN. We're all blind, we're all blind.

MENI COLÙS. (*Who meanwhile had entered with his brother.*) Blind? We're stupid, Zuan.

PAULI COLÙS. Let's go to rosary, kids.

CENCI VERULÌN. The bell has tolled. It's time. (*Exit all except Meni.*)

MENI COLÙS. My heart is heavy. . . . I feel frozen, faint. . . . Where am I? . . . Sure, I'm in my hometown, that's where I am, in the passageway of my house. . . . I don't know if I'm alive or I'm just dreaming. I feel like I've come back here after being dead a hundred years, after being gone a hundred years. . . . I can't see clearly in this murk. It's as if my house, the roof tiles, the stands of trees were all about to vanish. This is how a dead man might see things, if he were to come back home after a long time. . . .

LUSSIA COLÙS. (*Entering the courtyard.*) How come you're not at rosary?

MENI COLÙS. Shut up and be gone.

LUSSIA COLÙS. You've not eaten a thing, the polenta is stone cold. Get something in you now, and then let's go straight to Church.

MENI COLÙS. For God's sake, mother! I said go away. Leave me alone.

LUSSIA COLÙS. (*Walks toward the Church.*) Oh Lord!

MENI COLÙS. Poor woman. Yes, go and pray, with your worn-down beggar's body. . . . Just look at those scrawny little shoulders, poor mother, in that threadbare old apron. To think that I've been inside her body—good God!—inside that poor little womb. That's why I suffer now. I cling so much to this life, and I'm so scared to die.

NISIUTI COLÙS. (*Enter from the opposite side.*) Have you eaten already?

MENI COLÙS. What? Where have you been all this time, you dog!

NISIUTI COLÙS. I went hunting for nests, you know. . . .

MENI COLÙS. Didn't you see it was getting dark? Didn't you hear the rosary bells?

NISIUTI COLÙS. No, I. . . .

MENI COLÙS. So you didn't, did you, you bloody bastard! Always running around. . . . So it was down to Pauli to see to the stable, wasn't it?

NISIUTI COLÙS. Ah yes, he's good, is Pauli.

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MENI COLÙS. He's stupid, that's what he is. You'd better go eat now.

NISIUTI COLÙS. Never mind. I'm not hungry.

MENI COLÙS. So where do you think you're going?

NISIUTI COLÙS. I'm just putting these three finches in a cage. Look how pretty!

MENI COLÙS. (*Grabs one of the goldfinches.*) Where did you get them?

NISIUTI COLÙS. Well—somewhere . . .

MENI COLÙS. You scared to tell? You think I'm gonna go for them?

NISIUTI COLÙS. Behind the Armàns' house, down by the Miris'cis.

MENI COLÙS. By the alders?

NISIUTI COLÙS. No, no—more to the left—there's a little stand of walnut trees—there by the ditch . . .

MENI COLÙS. They *are* beautiful, aren't they . . . but they'll die on you, Nisiuti.

NISIUTI COLÙS. No they won't.

MENI COLÙS. Oh, shut up. They always died on me and Pauli, when we were little, and it'll be the same with you.

NISIUTI COLÙS. But I know how to do it. . . . Cintìn showed me.

MENI COLÙS. You hope! Run along to rosary now, Nisiuti. (*Hands him back the goldfinch.*)

NISIUTI COLÙS. Ah, my little finch! . . . It's dead, it's dead! It was you took it from me and killed it! Peck, little finch, peck my finger! . . . Oh, it's dead, it's dead! (*Wants to run inside, but Meni goes after him and strokes his head. Nisiuti storms off.*)

MENI COLÙS. (*Aside*) Bless the child's hair! Something has stayed on my hand, something fresh and wild. I think I can smell a faraway scent, something like roses and vineyards after the rain . . . when we used to go hunting for nests . . . and played with our penknives . . . and mother was young and fresh. I'd never have thought that being a young lad and then a grown man would be like this. (*Sound of voices and screaming.*)

NISIUTI COLÙS. (*Still crying.*) What's going on, Meni? What a racket—there, by the church. . . . People talking, shouting. . . . So many of them! The whole town's coming.

MENI COLÙS. Oh Jesus! (*Enter Zuan Colùs, Sçefin Cuarnùs, Zuan Gambilìn, Pauli Colùs, Lussia Colùs, Matia de Montiq, Bastiàn de Jacùs, Asiùt, with another thirty or forty townsmen. They stop in front of the passageway.*)

MATIA DE MONTIQ. Easy now, Asiùt. Catch your breath and speak up. We're all here to hear you, with our hearts in our mouths.

ZUAN COLÙS. Give him a moment, Matia. Here, Asiùt—a drop of white to wash down the lump in your throat.

ASIÙT. Wash down, you say, Zuan. But I feel like I'm gulping down blood, not wine. Blood—I see it everywhere: it's dripping from the sky, from the clouds, from the trees. And in the church—when you saw me come in and lean against the Ark so dead beat I was, it wasn't the litanies I heard, folks—I could still hear those poor bodies screaming, crying, and praying with voices that weren't people's voices anymore.

ZUAN GAMBILÌN. But what is it you've seen, Asiùt? . . . Speak up, can't you see that we're turning to stone?

ASIÙT. I've seen the towns of Codroip and Ciamìn burnt to the ground. There's no man, woman, or child left alive. They're all dead, all slaughtered.

MATIA DE MONTIQ. How can that be, Asiùt? Just yesterday we got news—reliable news—that the Turk was still east of the Lusòns!

ZUAN COLÙS. It's just like back in '72. Do you remember, Matia?

MATIA DE MONTIQ. I do! But I also recall '77, Zuan. They did cross the river that time, up north by Provesàn and the Richinvelda—but they didn't get there in one day, or even two for that matter. By God! Just yesterday we heard the Turks were around Gorizia!

ASIÙT. Take a look at this, councilmen, if you don't believe me. Lord Mayor—and you, Zuan Colùs—and you, Bastiàn de Jacùs—and you, Zuan Gambilìn. Take a look at my head, in my hair. But make sure you cross

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yourselves first, for this is neither dew nor rain that's clung to my hair. It's Christian blood, folks—Christian blood!

BASTIÀN DE JACÙS. O blessed Virgin, You care nothing for your children anymore. Either we pray to you, or we're lost: then leave us to die.

ASIÙT. Holy water—I must wash myself in holy water, plunge in with my head, my body, everything—cleanse myself of this poison!

MATIA DE MONTIQ. Calm down! Calm down, everybody!

ASIÙT. No, by God, no! This is no time to calm down! It's time to scream and shake, Matia. Tonight the Turks will cross the Tilimìnt. (*All fall silent, shaking in fear.*)

MENI COLÙS. You've all gone quiet now? Now they haven't even got the strength to sing the litanies. You, Blood-Stained Head, tell me: how many do you reckon these cursed bastards are?

ASIÙT. Ten thousand on horseback, five hundred on foot.

MENI COLÙS. This is it—we're dead. But we won't die like lambs. . . . Say something, councilmen. Ten thousand men on horseback and five hundred on foot heading straight to our town. There's no escape. There's nothing left to do but die. *In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti!*

MATIA DE MONTIQ. Shut up, boy. Shame on you!

MENI COLÙS. Alright, Lord Mayor, I'll shut up. You speak then, councilmen. Say something, for God's sake.

MATIA DE MONTIQ. Young Meni is right. We've got to speak out. All the years we've lived in this poor town, how many times and how many questions and how many troubles—and we've never had our say! And let's be honest—we had our ideas alright, we always had our opinion, back in the good old days. And here we are now: lost, forsaken, without a drop of hope left in us. Still, each one of us must speak his mind. You start, Bastiàn de Jacùs.

BASTIÀN DE JACÙS. I will! Folks, my idea is we should run into the woods. All of us: men, women, children, and all the cattle and stock we can carry. The wood is thick and deep; there are places where none will find us. Come, let's go hide in there, and let the Turks pass us by. . . .

ZUAN GAMBILÌN. And then what? Anyway, what can we hope to save in the little time we've got left? We can't drive carts through the wood. We'd have to carry everything by hand—kit and caboodle, and with the little ones. All while the Turks walk right through and grab up all the cattle and everything else. They'll burn everything down, raze everything to the ground. They'll not spare a single blade of grass. That's right, no house, no nothing, and winter's coming. Starve and freeze to death. . . . Bloody hell, no! Rather die now, if that's God's will. You go to the wood if you want, Bastiàn. And those who're of the same mind, let them follow you. Myself, I'll stay here and die with my hometown.

ZUAN COLÙS. I think the same, Zuan. Say we hide in the woods: they can still find us anyway. They're going west, but they don't know the way—crossing the Tilimìnt upriver or further down is all the same to them. Let's stay put, folks, let's take shelter in our dear little church and pray. Let's pray all night for the Virgin to drive them away from our hometown.

BASTIÀN DE JACÙS. No, councilmen, no! You're not making sense. You, Zuan Gambilìn, you speak of starving and freezing to death. Well, we'll suffer anything, put up with anything, but at least it's not certain death. As long as there's life there's hope. And you, Zuan Colùs, do you really think it's all the same to the Turks to pass through here or through the wood? With all those horses and armor, they'll have to try and go by the outside, don't you think? Me, I'm going—I'm going into the woods, by God, me and my family and all. Follow me if you want! (*Exit, followed by ten or twelve men.*)

MATIA DE MONTIQ. I think the same as you both, Zuan Colùs and Zuan Gambilìn. I'm

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an old man now. But if I was still in my prime. . . .

MENI COLÙS. I know what you mean, Matia. By God, I do. So much for praying, so much for hymns and litanies.

PAULI COLÙS. Stop cursing God, you bastard!

MENI COLÙS. Cursing God? Ah, brother, you've never even wondered what it means to be alive! Go ask your Lord! Yes, I curse God. This is the living He's given us: we die, we're butchered, drenched in Christian blood. . . . And what good was praying and working and sweating and swearing all through our miserable young years? And what did you get for your pains, brother? You've been alive with me, young with me, a martyr with me. Nothing will be left of us: an awful death, bloodshed, screams, and then nothing. Go on you all, go and pray to your good Lord!

MATIA DE MONTIQ. Meni! Meni!

MENI COLÙS. Yes, pray to your God! I won't. I want to die alone, without Him even. Die we must, but then I want to die like a man . . . not like one of those finches I took from my brother Nisiuti and killed this evening. . . .

MATIA DE MONTIQ. Look, lad, I don't know what makes us stand here listening to you. Enough of your swearing. If you've got something to say, speak out, in the name of God.

MENI COLÙS. You just stay here and pray—old men, women, good Christians. I'm going. In three hours I'll have all the young men from the towns rounded up: from Versa, Vilasìl, San Laurìns, Prodolòn, Valvasòn. As for Casarsa, those who are ready, just follow me.

ZUAN COLÙS. You're a reckless one, Meni. . . .

MENI COLÙS. Reckless? It's not a question of being reckless, Zuan, sir. There's death all around us. But we can't just stand here praying and waiting for death to come. I don't believe in that God anymore. He's fooled us all. He gave us a body to be alive in, a scrap of land to work, a town we've grown to love so much by now. We had a good life, as long as we worked hard. But it was all a trick, can't you see? When it comes down to it, it was all a trick.

ZUAN COLÙS. It's not for you to judge the Lord, boy.

MENI COLÙS. No sir, I'm not trying to judge the Lord. I'll see to that when the time comes. . . . But I do judge you lot. You councilmen, now that the time has come for you to lead us, all you've got to say is go and pray! And you townsmen, and you lads.

PAULI COLÙS. Don't listen to him, lads. He's out of his mind, I tell you. You'll see: before the night is out, the Lord will show us who's on the right side of reason. But if the Lord's will is that we should all die, the only way to go is with His name in our hearts.

ZUAN GAMBILÌN. Well said, Pauli! Only this sort of talk might move the Lord to look down on us. There are many ways across the river: they needn't come through here.

MENI COLÙS. Meanwhile, Bastiàn de Jacùs and many others have run off to the wood. But they can't run from destiny—and nor can you, with all your prayers. We're all going to end up dead. All dead in this frozen black soil. No one to remember us. No one to grieve. No one to put flowers on our grave. We'll not be dead like our old folks, but all will be pitch dark, ice-cold, a nothingness. Nothingness for centuries without end. Ah, let's drown this thought at least, let's try and do something, no matter if crazy—anything, lads. Die, even—but die a man's death: an angry death, a death with no fear.

ZUAN COLÙS. You say you'll get all the young men from the towns. But you've only got a few hours. It's almost dark. The Turks might well be crossing the Tilimìnt right now. You're running to your death. You've no time to do anything . . .

MENI COLÙS. He's right. Matia, you tell them! Tell them that the Turks won't stay together but break up in groups, some here, some there, all round the towns. There'll be bands of fifty, maybe a hundred men,

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and that's when we can take them on. . . . So come on, lads, let's take up arms and go.

ZUAN COLÙS. Go where? Do what?

MATIA DE MONTIQ. Quiet, Zuan! Aren't we all about to die? Let each of us die the way he wants. But there's one thing I want to tell you, lads. Meni is wrong to say that only our lives are at stake. In 1477, two thousand young Friulians from this side of the river were caught by the heathens and taken away. To be their slaves, you understand? Slaves—so far away from here, far from their homeland, for the rest of their lives, with no hope left and no reason to live. Ah, I'd rather die. Go, Meni, God be with you. Don't forget the name of the Lord. And let these young men here and those from elsewhere come with you, if they want. Farewell!

MENI COLÙS. Farewell. (*Exit, followed by all the young men present.*)

LUSSIA COLÙS. Blessed Virgin, I beg you stop him—he's no longer my Meni!

PAULI COLÙS. Be strong, Mama. . . . I'll go after him. Farewell! (*Kisses his mother and exits.*)

LUSSIA COLÙS. Yes child, you go! Go! Leave me here all alone to cry—to cry and die of heartbreak. Holy Virgin, they're in your hands while I'm left down here to die.

ANUTA PERLINA. Take heart, Lussia. . . . Come on, get up, let's pray. (*A long silence, broken by the sound of prayers and laments.*)

PRIEST. (*Enter with around thirty or forty townspeople crying and weeping.*) My Christian brothers and sisters, the time has come, the time in all those matins, and vespers, and rosaries we sang together. Dear Christian folks, my townspeople, you poor people at the point of death: quick now, recall your childhood and youth and your entire existence. Life has been good to us: day after day after day we have worked and made merry and thought things would always stay the same. But now we realize it was all a trick, when it comes down to it. The Lord is right. He's too far high above the living, and so friendly to the dead. The time has come, townsmen. No one thought it would happen to them, of all people, did they. I can see faces set in ice, eyes bewildered, bodies shaking. No, this can't be what death is like, if God's will is being done. If this is our last breath, let us breathe it as Christians. Lord, have mercy on us! We've spoken of our death often enough—and yet all we can do now is shake and cry and pray to you, but even so our heart's not in it.

ANUTA PERLINA. Reverend Father, you and I are old, we're no longer of this world, but in the dark of death by now. Yet those who are down there, still in the full light of their earthly life—there is no consolation for them. It's not for ourselves that we should pray, or for our own death. It's for them: let's pray for those poor children and those young men, full of life and lust: let them live, Lord, let them live.

ZUAN COLÙS. What you say is true, Anuta. It is a righteous death comes to put out a worn-out body, one that goes on living almost in spite of itself. . . . But those young men. . . .

PRIEST. Yes, that's true. We should get ready to die. But that doesn't mean the Lord might not still take pity on us . . . and those poor lads. He knows He is our highest and most sacred thought. But He also knows that over the long years of our lives we've grown attached to this world. He knows that we are tied to our humble, precious land by a tangle of affections and desires. He knows how much love holds us bound to this village lost in the world, to its fields, its waters, its small houses, even its poor festivals. Let's get ready to die like Christians, but still pray to the Lord to keep us down here living, growing old, and dying in peace.

MATIA DE MONTIQ. Reverend Father . . . not all of us are here. Look—take a good look at all these tearful people: there are women here, men, children, but not a single young man. . . .

LUSSIA COLÙS. Ah, Meni! Meni! Where are you now, little one—on what roads, what fields, what riverbanks? Who are you

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talking to, who are you with as you curse your Lord?

MATIA DE MONTIQ. Meni Colùs, his brother Pauli, Sçefin's Jacu, Nart's Pieri, and Zuan's Mariu . . . they're all gone, all with Meni. And I—I let them go . . . but where? To their death . . . to die like men. They wouldn't wait for the Turks—wait for them and be butchered like calves. They went out to meet them, all together: lads from Casarsa and San Zuan and Versa and Vilasìl . . . all to defend us, the poor lads. And I let them go. Oh Lord, I was dead wrong.

PRIEST. No, you did right, Matia. Don't torture yourself. They've made their choice. Let it be, in the name of the Lord.

ZUAN GAMBILÌN. In the name of the Lord, right! When Meni went away streaming curses, worse than a heathen! "Go pray to your good Lord," he said, "He tricked us all, didn't he! I don't care about Him anymore!"

ZUAN COLÙS. It'll be his fault if the Lord and the Holy Virgin don't take pity on us.

LUSSIA COLÙS. No! Don't say that, Zuan! That's not what he said, the poor child. . . . He was just desperate—thinking of his youth, the poor lamb, of his town, of all of us. . . .

PRIEST. Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam. Et secundum multitudinem miserationum tuarum dele iniquitatem meam. Amplius lava me ab iniquitate mea et a peccato meo munda me. . . .

PIERI RENÙT. Folks, folks!

PRIEST. Who's calling?

ZUAN COLÙS. It's Pieri, Pieri Renùt.

MATIA DE MONTIQ. The one who lives down by the river.

PIERI RENÙT. You've got little left to pray for by now, folks.

PRIEST. Speak, Pieri, for your children's sake!

PIERI RENÙT. We've just about got away. From up the hayloft, I saw the Turks in the moonlight—they got as far as the riverbank. All gleaming everywhere—thousands and thousands and thousands of horses and men in arms. By the time we ran from the house, the first rank had their feet in the water. They will have passed the Tilimìnt by now. They'll be here in no time. (*On hearing these words, everyone starts crying and screaming, getting up on their feet and making to go.*)

MATIA DE MONTIQ. Hold on everyone. Where are you going to run to? Have you lost your minds? Come on, folks, stop, for God's sake—and don't waste your time screaming. All be still and quiet, lock up your despair deep into your hearts, each to his own. There's no use running: it's fate alone that guides the Turks. They might just as likely ford here as further down by San Zuan, or further up at Valvasòn. Or they might go across the wood, and pass us by without even knowing we're here. That would be a miracle: let's pray to God to have mercy on us. (*People won't keep quiet. Women cry out, weeping.*)

ZUAN GAMBILÌN. Keep quiet, for God's sake! The Turks might well go by the fields and not even see we're here. We've got to keep quiet and just pray softly.

PRIEST. Calm yourselves! Let's just stay here, lie down in the shadow of our homes, waiting for death or a miracle to go over our heads. Let us pray the Lord.

ZUAN COLÙS. Let us pray the Lord. Let us pray the Virgin. Let us pray in silence, that even the last August crickets might be heard in the fields. In silence, that even the young leaves might be heard rustling in the orchards. In silence, that the water of the Tilimìnt might be heard murmuring from afar. In silence I pray to you, dear Lady, the loveliest of God's creatures. I pray to you as we lie dying—not just me, but my wife, children, and all my family and my kin. I pray to you, deliver us! If you will deliver us, I solemnly pledge that I will build for you the most beautiful little church in any of our towns—the most beautiful, the richest little church, where our children shall pray to you forever in saecula saeculorum. Amen.

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MATIA DE MONTIQ. I join Zuan in this pledge, dear Lady.

ZUAN GAMBILÌN. And so do I, along with all the councilmen and every family in our poor town.

PRIEST. Thank you, townsmen, thank you for the comfort you give me before I die. So it wasn't in vain that I taught you to have faith and to pray. If we really must die, this is the way to die as Christians. And if the Holy and Blessed Virgin should grant us the grace of staying in this world a little longer—even so, we have asked her as good Christians. Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison.

PEOPLE. Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison.

PRIEST. Christe audi nos, Christe exaudi nos.

PEOPLE. Christe audi nos, Christe exaudi nos.

PRIEST. Pater de caelis, Deus.

PEOPLE. Miserere nobis.

PRIEST. Fili Redemptor mundi Deus.

PEOPLE. Miserere nobis.

PRIEST. Spiritus Sancte Deus.

PEOPLE. Miserere nobis.

PRIEST. Sancta Trinitas, Unus Deus.

PEOPLE. Miserere nobis. (*The menacing sound of a war song is heard in the distance, moving closer.*)

PRIEST. (*After a moment of silence.*) That's the Turks singing as they come. Sancta Maria.

PEOPLE. Ora pro nobis. . . . (*They keep reciting the rosary, but their voices are drowned by the* CHOIR OF THE TURKS.)

CHOIR OF THE TURKS.

O moon, your orb shining with endless light
Illumines the calm stillness of the old dead.
But we're alive, we're bodies of young men
Sheathed in the gleaming of our ancient gold.
We walk the fields of the dead in blissful song,
A secret fury hidden in our breasts:
Hidden inside us under corals and pearls
In our careless faces of distant Turks.
O moon, light up the land of the Friulians
As they call from their cowsheds: Jesus, Jesus!

PRIEST. They are going south, through San Zuan perhaps. Virgo Potens.

PEOPLE. Ora pro nobis.

PRIEST. Virgo Clements.

PEOPLE. Ora pro nobis.

PRIEST. Virgo Fidelis.

PEOPLE. Ora pro nobis.

CHOIR OF THE TURKS.

O moon, shine brightly on the heads
Of the children as they pray outside their church.
Our mind's made up, we'll kill them all:
Grab them by the hair, saw their heads off.
In the fire that burns their dismal towns,
A hundred thousand boys, infants, and girls,
Ten at a time, will bathe in their own blood
The dazzling gold of these our pagan bodies.
O moon, light up the land of the Friulians
As from their muck they scream: I'm dead, I'm dead.

PRIEST. Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi.

PEOPLE. Parce nobis, Domine.

PRIEST. Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi.

PEOPLE. Exaudi nos, Domine.

PRIEST. Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi.

PEOPLE. Miserere nobis.

PRIEST. They've gone past.

MATIA DE MONTIQ. They've gone past!

ZUAN COLÙS. Oh Lord, we are delivered!

ZUAN GAMBILÌN. Let's hope to God that it is so, and that our prayers were not in vain. Still, the Turks don't know the way . . . they're running around the wood in circles. . . . Rushing this way and that . . . where there are fields and towns.

MATIA DE MONTIQ. That's right, Zuan. They've gone south of here, heading west. But that's not to say they're not going to turn around once they've crossed the wood. They're probably in San Zuan right now.

ANUTA PERLINA. Those poor people! Those poor little ones in San Zuan!

ZUAN COLÙS. Jesus! What if our children are also there?

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LUSSIA COLÙS. Don't say that, Zuan. You mustn't even say such things. . . . They went down to Valvasòn, that's where they went. I've seen them with my own eyes—down into Valvasòn, where the Count is gathering a band of men. . . . They say he's got over five hundred already. . . . They went and joined them, didn't they?

ANUTA PERLINA. Lussia, think before you speak. Don't deceive yourself. Don't get confused. Your Meni and the others headed right into the Boscàt: I saw them, and so did you, and all of these folks. Don't deceive yourself. They're probably in Versa or in San Zuan by now: and that's where the Turks are. You're better off praying for your son, for all those poor people.

LUSSIA COLÙS. Ah, Virgin, Holy and Blessed Virgin, what have I done to you? What sins, what wrongdoings—wretched woman that I am, left stranded down here to work and suffer? I've had so much trouble on this earth, you know—I've worn myself out toiling in this house, these fields. So much so that I haven't even had time to think about You. But You'll forgive me: I'm just a poor woman but I can feel that. I can feel it, even as I cry, pray, and tremble. But if You are good and holy (and that's why we call on you—You, the sweetest of God's creatures—You, grieving mother), if You don't have mercy on my son, that poor child Meni Colùs who is God's humble servant—then I don't know what to think, don't know what to think anymore. . . .

PRIEST. How much thinking have we ever done anyway, Lussia? Look up above the passageway, there, above the roof tiles and the poplar trees. See the stars shining silent upon this world. Clear and immaculate, they sparkle across the endless sky, hearing nothing and seeing nothing. The night is clear and boundless, Lussia, *there* is the hand of God, no matter what we might think.

PIERI RENÙT. Fire, fire, fire!

ZUAN GAMBILÌN. Where?

PIERI RENÙT. Over there in the Boscàt. . . .

MATIA DE MONTIQ. Mounting up, spreading. . . .

ZUAN COLÙS. Look at those flames!

ZUAN GAMBILÌN. It's a hay barn. . . .

MATIA DE MONTIQ. Not just one!

PIERI RENÙT. There's three or four!

MATIA DE MONTIQ. The whole sky's going red. . . .

ZUAN GAMBILÌN. Jesus, what a blaze!

PIERI RENÙT. San Zuan!

MATIA DE MONTIQ. They've set fire to San Zuan, folks. Everything's burning, everything's dying, everything's blazing. (*Falls to the ground holding his face in his hands.*)

PRIEST. Pick yourself up, Matia.

MATIA DE MONTIQ. I can't, Reverend Father, I can't. My land is in flames, crumbling, soiled with blood. My brothers are dying right there, and I feel like I'm dying with them. Jacu's dying over there right now. . . . Jacu Sovràn, my wife's brother, and all his little ones; Nart Barzana, my wife's uncle, is dying there with all his young children and grandchildren; my godson Pieruti Pasùt is dying there with his mother and father; all our kin and our friends are dying there. . . . And I feel the pain of their wounds and the warmth of their blood in my body.

PRIEST. Over there is the birthplace of our little church, the cradle of our religion. Now it's all ablaze, Matia. And the sky's turning white with the flames, the sparks and the smoke.

ZUAN COLÙS. Someone should go up a loft to see better. . . .

LUSSIA COLÙS. I'll go! I'll climb up to my loft. Wait here, I'll go straight away. I want to see if he's coming back too, Meni, with all the lads. . . .

ANUTA PERLINA. Go, go, poor old woman, with your skinny old body filled with sorrows. (*A long silence and whispered prayers, while Lussia climbs up to the loft.*)

LUSSIA COLÙS. (*Out of sight, her voice heard from above the stage.*) Ah folks, what a blaze! It's like all the Twelfth Night bonfires burning at one go! I'm all dazed, I can't see

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a thing anymore! It's hellfire, folks. . . . All the houses of San Zuan are burning like logs do when you poke the fire. . . . O Lord, it's streaming with sparks!

MATIA DE MONTIQ. Tell us Lussia, is the fire only down San Zuan way?

LUSSIA COLÙS. Yes, yes, Matia. . . . Heaven help us, what have we lived to see! That's what all our lives, our work, our loving each other has come down to. O Lord, put out these flames, they're burning my heart!

MATIA DE MONTIQ. Keep looking, Lussia, look past the great light of the fire. Does it look like other fires further on, near San Vit or near Banìa? Keep looking, Lussia!

LUSSIA COLÙS. Hold on! . . . Yes, Matia, it does—it's so bright I'm blinded!—but I think in the middle of the mass of fire, where it's a bit less wild—I think I can see another blaze further on, down San Vit way, I think. Yes, yes! And now, O Jesus! Another fire's blazing up down Flun way!

MATIA DE MONTIQ. Folks, folks! We're saved! They went on westward. This is a miracle of God!

LUSSIA COLÙS. O Lord, our children are coming back. . . .

ZUAN GAMBILÌN. Which side?

LUSSIA COLÙS. From the Versa road.

ZUAN COLÙS. Could it be Bastiàn's people?

LUSSIA COLÙS. No, no, there's just a few of them and they've no women. They're coming fast.

MATIA DE MONTIQ. Are they all there?

LUSSIA COLÙS. O Lord! (*Starts sobbing loudly.*)

MATIA DE MONTIQ. Are they all there?

LUSSIA COLÙS. Yes, Matia, all, all of them.

ZUAN COLÙS. Speak out now, blessed woman. Why are you crying?

LUSSIA COLÙS. Yes folks, they're all there alright. But one's being carried. One's being carried on a stretcher of branches, and the others are following. (*All fall silent for a few moments.*)

PRIEST. But who is it, Lussia?

LUSSIA COLÙS. Well . . . I can't see too well. I'm all dazzled. I'm looking and looking, but. . . .

PRIEST. Come down now, Lussia, come and wait down here.

LUSSIA COLÙS. Ah . . . yes! I can see now. Yes I can—and very well. . . . It's one of the Armàns, poor lad. It's him, the poor boy. O good Jesus! To end like that. . . .

PRIEST. Come down, Lussia, come down.

LUSSIA COLÙS. Yes, I'm coming right now. What would I stay up here for? I'm coming. . . . No! Wait a moment folks. . . . No, I was wrong: it's not the Armàns' boy, it's not him. It's Cenciuti, poor soul, the son of S'ciefìn Favrèt! . . . Ah, poor lad, he's all covered in blood from his chin down to his thighs. . . . The poor boy, the poor boy!

PRIEST. Come down, Lussia, in the name of God, come down.

LUSSIA COLÙS. I'll be right down, Reverend Father. They're carrying him, they're walking very fast. It's like they're running away. And he—poor boy, he's rocking back and forth in his wicker crib. O God, just you look at him!

MATIA DE MONTIQ. You, Sçefin Cuarnùs, run up and get her. And while you're up there, tell me what's really going on.

LUSSIA COLÙS. They're running and running, but they still can't get here! And he's running too, bless him, in his little cradle of fresh leaves, poor Jovaqìn! . . .

SÇEFIN CUARNÙS. (*His voice coming from above the stage.*) Matia!

MATIA DE MONTIQ. What?

SÇEFIN CUARNÙS. They're not alone! Either I'm blind or less than eight hundred steps away from our lads there's horses, and men in arms, and all is lit up. . . . They're coming our way.

MATIA DE MONTIQ. Come down, come down! This time we're lost. Let's prepare ourselves to die.

PRIEST. I'm going. I will go to my dear little church. . . . Oh, my poor Christ, my poor Christ of silver and gold, they're coming to steal you away!

ZUAN COLÙS. Don't go! Please stay here, Reverend Father. Let us die all together . . . in prayer . . . the way we've always lived. . . .

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PRIEST. My poor Christ, my poor altar!

ZUAN GAMBILÌN. Our little children! (*All start crying and weeping.*)

NALO JOVAQÌN. (*Enter the armed young men, carrying Meni, dead, on a bier made of branches.*) We're here, townsmen. We managed to run away, but only to come and see you one last time. A bunch of Turks on horseback caught up with us in Versa as we made our way to San Zuan with the Versa lads. San Zuan is burning. The Turks are coming this way.

PAULI COLÙS. Lay him down here, lads, upon the cart. And you, Anuta, I beg you, go to my mother and keep her shut in the house, that she'll not see him. We've not long left to stay in this world, we've not much loving and suffering left to do. Go, Anuta, hold on tight to my mother, that she'll not have this to go through just before she dies.

ANUTA PERLINA. Ah Lord! (*Exit into the house.*)

PRIEST. Tunc acceptabis sacrificium justitiae, oblationes et holocaust: tunc imponent super altares tuos vitulos. (*They all fall to the ground praying.*)

NISIUTI COLÙS. Meni, Meni, answer me. It's Nisiuti, your brother. Meni. . . . Is he really dead? Are you sure he's dead? Meni, Meni, Meni! Hush! Look: he blinked. Feel here, Pauli, feel his chest, his heart's beating. He's still alive. Be quiet! Stop your praying! Be quiet for a moment, I've got to hear if he's breathing. He is breathing, Pauli, he's alive! Look at me, Meni, if you really did blink—I'm your brother Nisiuti, I've always loved you, you know, even tonight, when you killed my little finch.

PAULI COLÙS. You were right, brother. You were young, but you were alive, and I couldn't see that. All in you was young, from your head down to your toes: in the flower of youth, and scared of dying. Only now that I see your dead body, now I realize how young you were. A young man alive as you were, could well pray—or curse God—or die. . . . And now, poor dead lad, all that's left in your body is youth, with the lovely high color of its face. You were right, brother, to curse God and pour scorn on the Virgin! Who knows where They are, so high, and distant, and blissful! While we are left here to die, and we even pray to them. It's not right that I should die today, now that I've seen my own youth in my brother's dead body. No, it's not right that the whole of this poor Christian land should go up in smoke and disappear. You were right, brother, to curse God and pour scorn on the Virgin!

SÇEFIN CUARNÙS. Quiet, boy. God almighty! The Turk has reached the Miris'cis. (*All cry louder in despair.*)

PAULI COLÙS. (*Looking up at Sçefin in the loft*) No! No, I won't be quiet, Sçefin, I won't be quiet, by God! What do I know of all the dead people in the world? There might be thousands and thousands of them, but what do I know of them? Since time began, only this young man has died, my brother, Meni Colùs. It's only for him I cry, only for him will I curse our holy God. And of all the burned-down places in the world, only ours has been set on fire and forsaken by that Holy and Blessed Virgin we've always prayed to and called on, and she looks away from us now, and right now, as I lie dying, I curse her with the last breath of my poor Christian body. (*A fierce, terrifying wind starts to blow as it has never been seen before.*)

PRIEST. This is the Virgin speaking, Christians, this is the miracle!

SÇEFIN CUARNÙS. The Turks are stopped. The storm is hurling into their eyes all the dust of the fields, of our Christian fields! They're turning back across the Miris'cis, and they're howling, running away and howling. They're vanishing in the dark.

PRIEST. Let's gather together in the shadow of our homes, good Christian folks, right here, questioning nothing, for we are nothing. Let's lie down in the lap of the Lord. Amen.

22 May, evening, waiting for rosary.

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