

# OBERTO COUNT OF SAN BONIFACIO

## GIUSEPPI VERDI

English Version by Donald Pippin

From this placid, fragrant, green and pleasant landscape, now seen in the glow of early morning, who would guess that only recently it has been a grim battlefield, a place of carnage and bloodshed, typical of a time when Italy, or what we now call Italy, was a fragmented collection of tiny city states, seemingly in incessant war with each other, neighbor against neighbor? But thank God, that is over. A new day is dawning in more ways than one. Riccardo, a former leader of the foe, has arrived to marry the Princess Cuniza, bringing with him a joyful day of peace and reconciliation, of hope and promise, after a long, stormy and terrifying night.

But the happy courtiers that come to greet him may be indulging in a bit of wishful thinking. Riccardo has no doubt done well for himself with such an advantageous marriage, but he has left behind a disgruntled army that is in no mood to be reconciled, one that is quick to brand him as a traitor, a deserter who has conveniently switched over to the other side.

Reveling in his own good fortune, confident that the gods are with him, delighted at the prospect of a marriage that offers everything that he has always wanted -- power, position, wealth -- Riccardo has no difficulty in adopting the role of devoted suitor, overwhelmed by passion. With everything to gain, who could not manage to call it love?

### ACT I --- SCENE I

*Scene: a delightful landscape. A chorus of courtiers welcomes Riccardo, a former foe on the battlefield, now engaged to the Princess Cuniza, thus bringing reconciliation to the two warring counties.*

CHORUS:                   Bright with promise, the dawn awakens  
                                  Over meadows decked in glory.  
                                  Gone are horrors grim and gory;  
                                  Love and friendship here shall reign.

                                  Yesterday was strife and struggle,  
                                  Sword and saber, blare of bugle.  
                                  Now no longer sworn to conquer,  
                                  We shall sleep in peace again.

Welcome, Riccardo!  
Hail a former foe, now on our side.  
Greeted with warm embraces,  
Claim your adoring bride.

Let others deal in slaughter,  
Let them wail and count the dead.  
Here reconciled in marriage,  
Sunny days we see ahead.

RICCARDO:                   Here my heart is,  
                                  With newfound neighbors!  
                                  The day has dawned  
                                  That will grant me all I've wanted.  
Your approval, your words of welcome,  
                                  Your embraces,  
                                  I owe to her and to her alone.  
                                  Though so gentle,  
                                  She has set my heart afire,  
                                  All a lover could desire.

CHORUS:                   Soft and mild, with all the graces,  
                                  Unassuming and sincere.

RICCARDO:                   Ah, soon to be my own!  
                                  When she smiles heaven opens;  
                                  In her eyes bright stars appear.

CHORUS:                   Yours to marry!  
                                  Unassuming and sincere.  
                                  Oh, so rare!

RICCARDO:                   (I follow the road that leads me on  
                                  To property and power.  
With seeds of hope soon bursting into flower,  
                                  The goal is near.  
My former life I leave behind  
To scale a higher mountain top,  
A more exalted mountain top.  
Upon the summit far above,  
I'll manage to call it love.  
From a height far above  
I'll learn to call it love.)

CHORUS:                   Onward, onward!  
                                  Tonight we revel within the castle

Where love awaits.

Come, for tonight we revel;  
On wings of hope we soar!  
The torch again we shall relight  
That burnt so bright before.

*They leave in high good humor. Meanwhile, Leonora has entered unobserved.*

By switching sides, Riccardo has left behind not only an outraged army but also an outraged woman whom he has seduced with promises of marriage, who now bears his child. Left her behind? Well, not exactly. She has followed him here to his newly adopted community, intending to disrupt the wedding, but torn by fiercely conflicting emotions -- hurt, anger, bitterness, shame, a thirst for revenge. Yet also an overwhelming longing for the return of the great love that she cannot let go of. The beauty, the glory of love's awakening still persist, despite the agony of betrayal. We have met the likes of Leonora before, in Mozart's Donna Elvira.

LEONORA:

Left here alone in tears!  
With raucous laughter  
These unaware well-wishers  
Go to attend the wedding party.  
Here at least their celebration  
Seems remote and distant.

Married . . . . To another woman!  
They little know that I'll be present.  
Deserted, shamed and dishonored,  
I, too, shall face the altar!

Oh, my father!  
Forced to wander in lonely exile,  
Even greater sorrow must you suffer  
When told of the sad fall from grace  
Of your unworthy daughter.

But all's not over,  
I'll not go quiet.  
The world will listen  
And hear my painful story of betrayal.

Sheltered at home, I saw one day  
A knight in shining armor,  
So handsome, kind and tender  
I soon was overcome.

My heart by love made helpless  
Was lured into sweet surrender.  
Ah! Lies and deception followed,  
Leaving me in grief and shame.  
Seduction and betrayal,  
Leaving behind only tears of grief and shame.

Ah, if only I could stifle  
That unshaken love that holds me captive,  
Or return to days unguarded  
When I trusted and gave him all.

Then I dwelt in realms celestial,  
Feasting on the wine of rapture.  
Now in agony, scorned, discarded,  
I know only the taste of gall,  
Bitter gall.

In his new, not yet solidified position, Riccardo has someone else to be wary of. Leonora's father, a crusty, out-spoken old soldier, with iron clad convictions as to what is right and what is wrong, bound to an unyielding code of honor, has lived for a number of years in exile, thanks no doubt to his refusal to submit with docility to the prevailing political climate. Alerted to his daughter's scandalous situation, and determined to see her seducer punished, he has made the difficult, dangerous trip home in order to find her, thus returning to the land where he is himself a marked man, a criminal, an outlaw. His stay must, of necessity, be brief. If spotted, he will certainly be arrested, imprisoned, and quite possibly shot.

Furious with his daughter, the two are reconciled only when he is persuaded that she is as intent on revenge as himself, that the two of them are in fact united in a just cause. The name is Oberto, Count of Bonifaccio.

*Leonora leaves. An old man enters. It is Oberto, her father.*

OBERTO:  
Home after hardship!  
I embrace my native country.  
Here I return, alone, unaided.  
Though far away on distant shores  
I've found welcome asylum,  
My dream of coming home has never faded.

Yet I return in sorrow,  
Forced to repay a wrong.  
That painful duty I must perform  
And then my stay is over.  
A brief assignment,

And then farewell again forever.

If the most urgent letter from my sister  
Can be taken as written,  
Not far from here I should find her.  
Oh, my daughter!  
The stain you have cast upon us!  
The degradation! Dishonor!  
What could be the old soldier's final battle.

LEONORA: *(returning)* Better hold off till nightfall;  
Then will the wedding rites begin.  
So be it!

*(seeing her father)* In darkness and in shadow  
I can enter the castle  
Unnoticed, unobserved.....  
Oh, Lord, have mercy!

OBERTO: That voice . . . . My daughter!

LEONORA: Oh. . . .father . . . .

OBERTO: I've found you!

LEONORA: So the hunt brought you here.  
Oh, God in heaven!

OBERTO: Look at me.  
On my furrowed brow  
Read the pain you've imprinted,  
While I survey the brazen,  
Unbridled lust  
On your wanton face.

Tortured and persecuted,  
Exiled to live with strangers,  
But far worst of all to suffer,  
Shamed by a wayward daughter  
Who darkens my waning years.

LEONORA: Father, you tear my soul apart;  
You glare with eyes of fire and ice.  
For guile and for betrayal  
I seek revenge or death.  
For death or vengeance --- I am ready!

Flattered, misled, then left to weep,  
I long for a father's embraces.  
My mother implores from heaven.  
Oh, yield to her loving prayer!  
Oh, hear her loving prayer!

OBERTO: A grieving angel.

LEONORA: From above she sees my despair, and pities.

OBERTO: She sees your guilt, and recoils.  
Plead not for mercy. Go!

LEONORA: Heaven that hears the cry of pain,  
Look down, and give me the help I crave.  
Now that we've found each other,  
Let him not turn from me.  
Give me back my father's love.

OBERTO: Heaven that judges,  
And hears the fair and just complaint,  
Look down and give me the prize I crave.  
Restore to an angry father  
Pride and honor, a place of dignity,  
All that I've come to save.  
Pride and honor, deference, dignity!  
Only this I crave.  
Give me back the pride and honor  
That I've come here to save.

OBERTO: Hear me! Safe inside the castle  
Your vile seducer revels.  
Shame him before the altar!  
Cry out and strike at the monster!  
Go, prove yourself my daughter  
And then you may claim my love.

LEONORA: Yes! From the castle towers  
My cry of rage shall echo.  
Proudly before the altar  
I'll sound the call to conscience  
And prove myself your daughter,  
Reclaim a father's love.

OBERTO: Reclaim a father's love.

With the promise of tender embraces,  
Face the monster with courage and candor.  
If you falter, choosing life with dishonor,  
Seek no further for pardon from me.  
If you falter on the thorny path of honor,  
Seek no further for pardon from me.

LEONORA:               With the comfort of tender embraces,  
I can go forth with courage and candor.  
If I falter, choosing life with dishonor,  
Future pardon I dare not hope to see.  
Your future pardon I'll not hope to see.  
If I falter on the thorny path of honor,  
Your future pardon I dare not hope to see.

*(Together, they head towards the castle.)*

## ACT I ---- SCENE II

Inside the castle, joy and excitement fill the air as the marriage draws near. The Princess Cuniza basks in the warm glow of adulation and good will that surrounds her. Likened to a lovely flower, the comparison is apt. A hothouse flower, nonetheless. Carefully cultivated and nurtured since infancy, flattered, waited upon, pampered, lavished with every luxury, every refinement, every delicacy that make the life of a Princess brought up in a picturesque castle read like a fairy tale.

But that is only part of the story. It is also one of isolation and seclusion -- an ordinary mortal, separated from any normal human contact, deprived of any freedom of movement, shielded from the ups and downs of everyday life, cut off from the world beyond these stone walls, guarded night and day -- in a word, imprisoned, malnourished, suffocated.

One can presume that Riccardo has brought the first breath of fresh air into Cuniza's lonely, sheltered life, the first drops of rain after a long, long drought. She has responded by falling helplessly in love. Their approaching marriage seems too good to be true. Perhaps that is why she cannot shake off a vague though powerful sense of foreboding -- a nameless, formless phantom that refuses to be exorcised.

For his own part, Riccardo gives such a convincing performance as the enraptured lover that in all fairness we should perhaps give him the benefit of the doubt.

*Scene: A magnificent room inside the palace. Cuniza, in bridal dress, is surrounded by admiring choristers.*

CHORUS: Overcome with admiration,  
We salute the chosen bride,  
Fairest flower in all creation,  
Source of praise and boundless pride,

Pure as snow upon the mountains,  
Sweet as dew upon the rose,  
Softer than the flow of fountains,  
Gentle as the breeze that blows;

Blessed with all the mortal graces,  
Like a wonderwork of art,  
Yielding now to love's embraces,  
Keen of mind and kind of heart.

CUNIZA: No more! Surely you flatter.  
This charming flower is hardly me,  
But someone far more operatic.  
Yet I am grateful.  
May God reward you each in turn.  
Go now. Be ready.  
I'll need you later on.

*Imelda and the chorus leave. Riccardo enters.*

RICCARDO: My darling!  
Today is for song and celebration!  
What makes you seem so uneasy?

CUNIZA: Ah! I've tried to hide it!  
From the love that has brought us together  
Springs a joy never dreamt of before.  
But I'm torn by a vague premonition  
I cannot understand or ignore.

For along with the light pure and golden  
I discern darting shadows of fear,  
And a voice deep inside, full of menace,  
Sends a warning I try not to hear.

RICCARDO: In the dawn of a day made in heaven,  
Brush away childish phantoms of fear.  
Hear the voice rising, proudly prevailing  
With a message of love loud and clear.

As we head side by side for the altar

Bear in mind you're no longer alone.  
We shall greet deadly demons with laughter;  
Your worries hereafter will become my own.

CUNIZA: Love, forgive me!

RICCARDO: For sweet consolation,  
Give me a smile that will say you are mine.

CUNIZA: I was foolish!

BOTH: *(alternately)* No, I require not a moment of faint hesitation;  
I have chosen life and love  
Under a blue and balmy sky.  
On a day of sublime celebration  
Childish phantoms of fear I defy.  
Phantom fear I defy.

CUNIZA: Like a dream that soon is over,  
All my fears are gone and forgotten.

RICCARDO: Love so deep will last forever;  
Should I learn otherwise, I choose to die.

CUNIZA: *(then Riccardo)*  
Hand in hand we shall find full measure  
Of tranquility, joy and pleasure,  
As we both grow to ripe completion,  
You in me and I in you.

Happy days will flow as swiftly  
As a mountain stream that sparkles,  
And the bonds of adoration  
Even death will not undo.  
Ever faithful, ever true,  
Bonds of love  
Even death will not undo. *(They leave.)*

*Imelda escorts Leonora into the chamber.*

IMELDA: So matters grave and urgent  
Have brought you to the castle?

LEONORA: Your gracious lady  
Will surely find my message  
Of the deepest concern.

IMELDA: I know for certain  
That she will gladly give you  
An open-minded welcome.  
Wait here a moment.

Leonora and Oberto have decided not to wait till nightfall. Before the wedding is scheduled to take place, they will confront Cuniza in private with the revelation that will strike at the very center of her heart.

*Imelda goes out to get Cuniza. As soon as she is gone, Leonora hastily opens the door for Oberto, who then conceals himself within the vast recesses of the room.*

LEONORA: We must both move with caution.  
Lie low until I call.  
You'll then determine  
If I'm worthy of pardon.  
Though now I tremble,  
With my heart in my throat,  
Upon the scoundrel  
I shall pounce like a lion.  
But heaven help me now from shaking!

*Cuniza enters, then greets Leonora with the utmost cordiality and graciousness.*

CUNIZA: Tell me, fair stranger,  
Why this pleasure?

LEONORA: Wronged and humiliated,  
Dependent on your mercy,  
I bring a message.

CUNIZA: Speak with candor.

LEONORA: Allow me.  
Before you stands the daughter  
Of a man much maligned.  
Oberto . . . You may find the name familiar.

CUNIZA: Ah! The foe of my people!

LEONORA: Oh, speak in whispers  
Or he will hear you!  
Within this chamber he's hiding.

CUNIZA: In the castle! The outlaw!

LEONORA: Driven by rage, despair and indignation,  
He scoffs at danger.

CUNIZA: Call him.

LEONORA: Oh, father!

CUNIZA: (Why do I tremble?) *Oberto steps forth.*

OBERTO: I'm the outlaw you seem to fear so,  
But to tell the truth, a beggar.  
If I dare to hope for kindness,  
I shall base my hope on you and you alone.

By a ruthless fate pursued and taunted,  
Still I kept my pride and honor.  
Violated by a scoundrel,  
All I value most now is gone,  
Pride and honor overthrown,  
Pride and honor also overthrown.

CUNIZA: Brave but reckless, you court disaster!  
Here you place your life in peril.  
What can I do? Give the order.  
If in my power, it shall be done.  
What I can do shall be done.

LEONORA: You can help us, and you alone.  
But you yourself will be heartbroken  
When reluctantly I name the scoundrel,  
A faithless man with heart of stone.

CUNIZA: (Once again, a dread foreboding!)  
Pray continue.

OBERTO: (*indicating Leonora*) There stands the victim!  
Here we plead, we implore for justice.  
If denied, I'll trust my sword.

LEONORA: Falsifying name and status,  
With repeated proposals of marriage,  
He led me onward, won me over.  
But my trust he then betrayed.  
Fooled by love, his child I carry,  
Shorn of honor, bowed in shame.

OBERTO: Another woman!  
CUNIZA: Ah, this woman . . . .Can you name her? . . . .  
LEONORA: . . . . is Cuniza!  
OBERTO: And her fiance I accuse!  
CUNIZA: No! Riccardo! All comes undone.

TRIO

OBERTO: Look in her eyes and then you'll know.  
Like it or not, the truth will out.  
Or if you waver, still in doubt,  
Turn to mine, burning with anger and pain.

Breaking the law that bars me  
From the land I cherish,  
I come with sword in hand still steady,  
Ready to wipe out the stain.

Though I break the law that bars me  
From my own country,  
I come with hand still steady,  
My sword now ready  
To wipe out the stain.

CUNIZA: Temper your overheated heart;  
Dampen the fire of rage and grief.  
Vengeance will bring but scant relief;  
Danger darkens the road you're on.

Also in pain, I suffer,  
Deceived by blinded passion.  
A helping hand you heard me offer;  
Nor is that hand withdrawn.

I, too. have suffered injury,  
A painful lesson of blissful, blinded passion.  
Though mild of manner,  
My tears flow on.  
Silent, my tears flow on.

LEONORA: Noble of mind and warm of heart!  
Beauty of soul beyond belief!

Though I've inflicted deadly grief,  
Mercy, kindness and grace live on.

On you I've placed a burden,  
Compelled by helpless passion.  
I dare yet to hope for pardon,  
Knowing too well what I've done.  
Pardon! Though I know well,  
All too well, what I have done,  
The harm I've done.

CUNIZA: You've cost me dearly.

LEONORA: Forgive me.

CUNIZA: How much you've hurt me!

OBERTO: We know.

CUNIZA: Though mild of manner . . . .

LEONORA: . . . .The tears in your eyes flow on and on.

CUNIZA: With these tears I end my fantasy!  
I resolve to weep no longer.  
Love has turned to wrath and anger,  
Enflamed by that false and unfeeling man.

LEONORA & OBERTO: With these tears discard your fantasy!  
Now resolve to weep no longer.  
Turn from love to wrath and anger,  
Enflamed by that false and unfeeling man.

VARIOUSLY: So let the fire upon him fall.  
Oh let the fire upon his head now fall,  
The fire now fall.

*Cuniza indicates for Oberto to go back into hiding, then beckons for others, including Riccardo, to come in.*

CUNIZA: My friends, do enter.

*(indicating Leonora to Riccardo)* Do you know her?

RICCARDO: (Disaster! The worst of timing!)

CUNIZA: Tell the truth.

RICCARDO: All right, I loved her,  
But found the lady false.

LEONORA: Only now do I learn your true nature,  
Shown too clearly by a cruel slander.  
First deceived and then discarded,  
Now I'm insulted with a vile, loathsome lie.

CHORUS: (Horried, I stand persuaded  
By the force of her reply.) *Oberto steps forth out of hiding.*

OBERTO: Who dares revile my daughter?

LEONORA: (God help us!)

CUNIZA: (He'll be arrested!)

RICCARDO: Her father!

CUNIZA: (Too overbold!)

CHORUS: Oberto!

OBERTO: I don't deny it.

CHORUS: Here at your peril!

OBERTO: My honor allows no other course. My honor!

TUTTI: Showing his face, a criminal,  
Scornful, defiant, undaunted.  
Listed with those most wanted,  
If taken he will die.

OBERTO: Here face to face, two enemies,  
Scornful, defiant, undaunted.  
My life I've long discounted,  
But first he has to die.

OBERTO: But one victim's not enough  
For this craven coward.  
A father and daughter together he's after.  
Seduction, desertion,  
Then libel and laughter.

Oh, monster, beware when my hand is on the sword.  
Beware my sword!

RICCARDO: My answer would not be slow in coming, old jester,  
If I could unload the rage and anger that fester.  
Be happy I've also a morsel of pity,  
Or you would be reaping your final reward.

LEONORA: A stranger to integrity,  
You swagger in splendor.  
Confronting mendacity  
I dare not surrender.

Insulted, violated,  
For justice I am pleading.  
What hope of succeeding  
When truth goes unheard?

CUNIZA: Mised all too willingly,  
To love I surrendered  
With docile devotion  
So trusting, so tender.

Her cry of betrayal  
Has left me with loathing,  
My love down to nothing,  
A four letter word.  
Only a word, no more than a word.

IMELDA & CHORUS: From lies and duplicity,  
Oh heaven, defend us!  
We pray for thy remedy  
For wrongs so horrendous.

On lechers and liars  
Let fall fire and thunder.  
A heart torn asunder  
By a man so adored!  
A lecher and liar  
Is taken off-guard.

## ACT II -- SCENE I

Cuniza's world has been shattered. The hastily cancelled wedding will not take place. The dream of rapture is over. The fire of love that seemed eternal has been abruptly extinguished, leaving only the cold, lifeless embers. Feeling a new kinship with Leonora, Cuniza is ready to offer her whatever comfort friendship can provide. And though crushed and disillusioned, she is determined that Riccardo do the right thing and marry Leonora.

*Scene: Cuniza's chamber, where she is attended by a chorus of women.*

CHORUS: Broken-hearted! And not to be mended.  
No comfort can friendship provide.  
Broken-hearted! Love's illusions have ended  
On the eve of becoming a bride.

IMELDA: *(to Cuniza)* Riccardo begs you for a word in private.

CUNIZA: Riccardo! What can he have to say  
That I should listen further?  
Till lately I knew nothing sweeter  
Than the voice of my beloved.  
On the parched, withered flower  
That was my heart  
Fell a gentle summer shower.  
After drifting in rapture,  
The dream is over,  
Love's caresses all gone forever, gone forever.

I remember the hours enchanted,  
Tears of joy when I knew I was wanted,  
He so handsome, and I so shy and lonely,  
Waiting only for love's tender call.

Whispered kindness spoke to my own desire;  
Life awakened, reborn. Heaven opened entire.  
Now I've merely the cold, exhausted embers,  
Fire that's faded for once and for all.  
Now I've merely the cold, lifeless embers,  
Fire that's faded for once and for all.  
So much for love's irresistible, tender call.

IMELDA: Too soon to call it dead!

CUNIZA: To Leonora he's made a sacred vow.  
IMELDA: You could challenge it.  
CUNIZA: I mean to see that he does not forsake her now.  
CHORUS: Such a grand and gracious lady  
That upstart does not deserve.  
CUNIZA: More than majesty and splendor,  
More than praise we fondly savor,  
Is the heart not prone to waver  
When the tide turns the other way.  
In my tender care she can find shelter,  
For I suffer to see her suffer.  
Gentle friendship I can offer  
That does not trample or betray,  
A kinder love that does not trample or betray.  
CHORUS: Such a modest, unworldly person  
Ought to have the final say.  
CUNIZA: Gentle friendship I freely offer,  
Love that seldom can betray.  
A sweeter, kinder love,  
A love that seldom can betray.

## ACT II --- SCENE II

The courtiers, whose own safety and well-being depend so much on that of their superiors, reflect on the sad events of the long day and give a bleak assessment of what is to come.

*Scene: a remote spot near the castle gardens. A chorus of knights reflects on the unhappy events of the day.*

TENORS: Long ago, in fact forever,  
Seems the dawn that rose so bright.  
BASSES: Grief has drawn a somber curtain  
As we head into the night.

TENORS:                   What has happened to the promise  
                                  Love alone can bring to pass?

BASSES:                   Gone completely, like the shadow  
                                  Of a dream that leaves no trace.

TUTTI:                     Little comfort can we offer  
                                  To the lady in despair.  
                                  Virtue seldom is rewarded;  
                                  Life is seldom just and fair,  
                                  Very seldom is just and fair.  
                                  Too seldom just! Too seldom fair!

*The knights disperse. Oberto enters.*

Oberto is in no such mood of philosophical detachment. Thanks to Cuniza's intercession, his own life and liberty are no longer threatened, but his hatred and contempt for Riccardo are more obsessive than ever, and would seem to have swept him into the realm of madness.

He is determined to challenge Riccardo to a duel -- a challenge that the younger man is loath to accept, the odds being so heavily weighted in his own favor. For although till now, we have seen Riccardo in a light anything but flattering, a more complete picture begins to emerge. An opportunist, yes. Admittedly a fortune hunter. Self-absorbed, overambitious, overconfident, overreaching, *not* over scrupulous, the pattern sounds familiar. Yet, though his conduct has been despicable, he is not an unmitigated scoundrel, he is not without a conscience. Though late in the game, he recognizes and feels remorse for the wrong that he has done, the hurt that he has inflicted through his violation of trust. Committed to both women, torn between love for Leonora and pity for Cuniza, he would like to make amends. But how, tarnished as he is in the eyes of both?

What can he do? And where can he go? He has burnt his bridges behind him. Back home, he has earned the name of traitor. In fact, he has no home. It would seem that Oberto's revenge is complete, but the old warrior is unsatisfied. The fire, fuelled by a merciless code of honor, now burns out of control, ready to consume everything that stands within range.

OBERTO:                   No word as yet.  
                                  Either we missed connections  
                                  Or he's a coward!  
                                  Ah, no! Unlikely.  
                                  Never mind if now or later.  
                                  Come what may, I cry for vengeance.  
                                  From the sword of a father  
                                  He'll find no haven.

For wrongful, rank betrayal  
Blood, only blood, suffices.  
Delayed, my rage increases.  
I wait impatiently,  
My sword drawn to kill.

If I'm to die, so be it.  
With purpose firm and steady,  
For heaven or hell I am ready,  
A proud soldier, and a man of honor still.  
A sacred obligation,  
My duty I'll fulfill.

COURTIERS: (*offstage*)                      Oberto! Oberto!

OBERTO:                                      The pack pursue me.  
Maybe my challenge was intercepted. *The courtiers enter.*

COURTIERS:                                Soldier, your life's no longer in danger,  
Thanks to Cuniza's plea that prevailed.

OBERTO:                                      To the castle!  
I'll join you later inside.            (*The courtiers leave.*)

Safety! What of it? I'm out for blood!  
This man of pomp now riding high  
Will never see me falter.  
No turnabout can alter  
The depth of my disdain.

Upon the head of one of us  
The hand of death will hover.  
For when the clash is over  
One only will remain.  
Yes, one alone to tell the tale.  
When all is over  
One only will prevail.  
We'll see but one prevail,  
And one alone.

OBERTO:                                      There he comes! I gather  
He got my message.                    (*Riccardo enters.*)

Step forward, proud man of arms.  
Here locked in mortal combat,  
We are not children playing.

Either one or the other,  
When the score is settled,  
Will lie dead on the gravel.  
Take up your sword then  
And prove your mettle.

RICCARDO: Old soldier, not so hasty!  
Please, not so impulsive!  
The match is far too unequal.  
I've the advantage  
And refuse to take it.

OBERTO: The slimy excuse of a coward!  
Your sniveling I might have known  
From your vile behavior.

RICCARDO: When will you finish?  
With absurd rant and raving  
Yourself you diminish.

OBERTO: Made of jelly! A spineless bluffer,  
Terrified, you run for cover.

RICCARDO: Made of jelly! A coward, am I?  
With my sword I shall reply.  
With my sword, my nimble sword  
I shall reply.

OBERTO: Coward! So afraid,  
So terrified, you run for cover.

*Riccardo unsheathes his sword. Cuniza enters with Leonora.*

CUNIZA: Stop it!  
(to Riccardo) This man has borne already  
Too much pain because of you.

#### QUARTET

RICCARDO: (Overpowered, I bear a burden  
Of remorse and wild confusion.  
Discarding true love for blind ambition,  
Power and wealth I sought to gain.  
How I wronged these two that trusted  
Too late I realize, all in vain.)

LEONORA: (Though he wronged me, though he betrayed me,  
Our love was no illusion,  
And the embers of that passion  
Can be enkindled once again.  
Either death, or love recovered!  
No half-way measures for me remain.  
No other recourses for me remain;  
No other ways for me remain, no, none!)

CUNIZA: (He desired me for wealth and power  
While his heart belonged to another.  
Though it serves him right to suffer,  
I can help resolve the pain.)

RICCARDO: (Mortified to see her suffer,  
All too late I grieve in vain.  
Though remorseful, I grieve in vain.  
Made aware all in vain,  
I deplore what I have done.  
Made aware, but all in vain.)

CUNIZA: (*to Leonora*) Be of cheer and weep no longer;  
He will soon be yours again,  
All yours again.

OBERTO: (Newly taunted, insulted,  
By a shabby fortune hunter!  
With the sword I'll plow him under  
When I meet the bounder (him) man to man.  
Let him fuss and fret in vain;  
Blood will wash away the stain,  
The ugly stain.

CUNIZA: Hear me, Riccardo:  
You alone have created despair and desolation.  
This I've forgiven.  
Now you have a duty to make amends.

RICCARDO: Command me.

CUNIZA: Kneel to your fair first love;  
Offer your hand and heart.

LEONORA: (How truly noble!)

CUNIZA: Make her your wife;

Vow to remain forever true.

RICCARDO: With your permission . . . .

OBERTO: (*quietly, to Riccardo*) Do so, and then  
We'll proceed on schedule.  
She can forgive but I cannot.

RICCARDO: (*to Oberto*) On me you can depend.

CUNIZA: Riccardo, go on!

RICCARDO: (*to Leonora*) If you will have it,  
Take my unworthy hand.

LEONORA: Father! Do I dream?

CUNIZA: May heaven look down and smile upon these two.

LEONORA: Ah, Riccardo! Return to my arms and say  
Sincerely and truly you're sorry.  
Then, reliving the rapture of first love,  
I'll totally, I'll totally forgive.

CUNIZA: (Would that I could erase from my heart  
The fatal moment that love came to flower!  
Where on heaven or earth can I find  
The peace I dare not again hope to have?)

RICCARDO: (How her eyes glow with joy and delight  
Despite the long weeks of anger and sorrow,  
Little knowing that honor demands  
A deadly blow, lethal also to love.)

OBERTO: (Me, rely on the word of a scoundrel?  
Loss of honor can never be mended.  
I'll continue as rightly intended:  
One of us dies so that honor may live.)  
*Oberto leaves in one direction, the other three in another.*

#### CHORUS OF KNIGHTS

TENORS: So you saw them?

BASSES: With deadly weapons.

Not too far from here.  
One determined . . . .

TENORS: But the other? . . .

BASSES: The other reluctant, goaded onward,  
Goaded onward by the feisty soldier.

TUTTI: “Love thy neighbor,” was the message  
Of our savior on the cross,  
Wisdom wasted on a world  
Of wrath and rancor, pain and loss.

Devastation! Two lives destroyed  
By a quarrel that neither can win.  
How to master the raging torrent?  
How to smother the rage within?  
Where to find peace on earth?

TENORS: What do I hear?

BASSES: The clash of steel  
That determines their fate.

TUTTI: Oh! The dread appeal has sounded.  
I fear we come too late. *All hurry off.*

*Riccardo, sword in hand, enters as if pursued.*

RICCARDO: Call it madness . . . . Call it murder . . . .  
On my own sword, blood congealing.  
Now a criminal . . . . Now an outcast . . . .  
Where to bury my sorrow and shame?

I must hasten . . .

*An offstage groan* But listen! . . . . That groaning . . . .  
My mistake . . . Some forest murmurs.

*Another groan.* Ah, no! Someone near the end  
Just gave a final cry of pain,  
A final desolate cry of pain.

God of mercy, hear a penitent  
If my prayer can still be counted.  
I shall live forever haunted and tormented  
By the blood my hands have shed.

I shall wander lost and lonely,  
Humbled by a life misled.

Lord, have mercy!  
For without the light of heaven  
I see only dark ahead,  
Only dark, only dark. *He leaves in despair.*

*Cuniza, in great anxiety, enters with Imelda.*

CUNIZA:                         Where can they be?  
                                      I've searched all over,  
Once again with dire foreboding,  
Colder than the dead,  
Darker than the tomb,  
                                      Grimly silent,  
                                      A nameless threat.

IMELDA:                         Someone's coming.     *Chorus of knights enters.*

CHORUS:                         In the forest they have found him!  
                                      Cold and lifeless lay his body,  
                                      Leonora's valiant father  
                                      In a sea of blood still wet.

Fearing what she would discover,  
To the wood she had been running  
                                      Just in time to see her lover  
                                      Deal the deadly final blow.  
Overcome with grief, she fell  
                                      As the tears began to flow.  
Overcome, overcome . . . .

CUNIZA:                         Sheer insanity! I saw it coming on.  
                                      All too well my fears were founded.  
                                      Let me go comfort a grieving sister.

CHORUS:                         She approaches,  
                                      Father dead, her lover fled.

*Leonora, barely able to hold herself together, enters supported by sympathetic ladies.  
Cuniza tries to console her.*

CUNIZA:                         Hammered hard by blows of fortune,  
                                      Find in me the comfort needed.  
                                      Rest your head upon my bosom

For your tears of grief I share.  
With a loving friend  
Ever close at hand  
Ease your (heavy) burden of despair.  
Receive a friend, a helping hand.

CHORUS: Lend the comfort sorely needed.  
Selfless even in despair,  
Share the burden of her sorrow.  
Lend a hand.

*Leonora is helped to a bench, Cuniza standing by her side, the others surrounding her.*

LEONORA: Now left with nothing. Nothing!  
My father slaughtered  
By the sword of the man that I worshipped.  
Oh, my ill-fated father!  
Pardon, oh pardon!  
And point the finger not at Riccardo,  
But at me alone.

CHORUS: To self-reproach do not surrender.  
Here your friends are on your side.

LEONORA: All too guilty! Among your people  
I came searching for a faithless lover.  
Mised, discarded ---  
Worst of all, I had to listen  
To a vile accusation.  
Then my father, offended,  
Had no recourse but to hasten  
To the place where death lay in wait.

Here he died for my own folly  
By the sword of my seducer.  
I'm to blame for what has happened  
As surely as if  
My own hand had drawn the blade.

CHORUS: To self-reproach do not surrender, etc.

LEONORA: Here my father, a soldier for justice,  
Called to action,  
Met the death that lay in wait.  
Here he died for my own folly, etc.

Here my father, called to action,  
Died because of my own folly.  
Defending me, my father died.

*A messenger enters with a letter for Cuniza, to the indignation of the assembled company.*

CHORUS:                   Why the untimely interruption?  
                              Give despair and death their due.

*Cuniza reads apprehensively, then bursts forth with relief.*

CUNIZA:                   Truly humble and repentant,  
                              God have mercy on his soul!

*(softly to Leonora)*       Riccardo's fled his native country;  
                                  Far from here, he'll seek asylum.  
Sick at heart, he pleads for pardon.  
His belongings he bequeaths you  
With the love that's never faded.

LEONORA:                 Go no further! I'll hear no more.  
                              All is over, beyond recall.  
                              My father! My lover!

                              Devastated, bereft and broken,  
In the grave, death alone can end my torture.  
                              By a brutal code of honor  
I have lost both father and lover.  
To the agony I would surrender,  
                              Drown in sorrow,  
                              Curse cruel destiny.

                              But life continues.  
                              The child I carry  
Must turn me toward tomorrow.  
                              Then may the tears that pour  
Become a fountain of renewal and repair.  
Then may these tears that pour become a fountain  
                              Whose waters heal and restore,  
                              A flowing fountain  
                              Whose waters heal and restore.

CHORUS:                 No surrender to rancor and sorrow!  
                              (Turn from rancor, turn from sorrow.)  
                              As we all would be forgiven,  
                              May the mercy and glory of heaven

(May the majesty of heaven)  
Grant the peace we all implore.  
Heaven grant to her the peace  
That can rekindle and restore,  
Again restore.

FINE