Paulu walked in and sat down in front of the set table on which the carta di musica bread still stood: from the coagulated blood-colored wall, the brigadier looked even more peaceful than usual, in the silent twilight of that veiled and warm day.

Paulu ate very little and drank a lot: the more he drank, the more it seemed to him that his mind, clouded like the sky, would become lighter, and that many problems would be solved.

“What is the difference between a usurer and a widow like Zana? None. What’s worth one is worth the other.”

Zana would go in and out. He needed a box of sardines, then two eggs, then a plate of fried food.

“What, and you said you had nothing? As long as you don’t bring me too big a bill afterwards.”

Zana looked at him and smiled.

“It was my modest dinner, Don Paulu. Don’t make fun of me.”

“How!” he said, standing up. “Your dinner? And you, then? How will you do that?”

“Don’t think of me, Don Paulu.”

But he was already half drunk, and he stood for a moment, comically mortified for having eaten Zana’s lunch. Then he laughed and said:

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“To think that you’re dying at my house, you’re giving six poor people lunch, and my mother herself has to serve them; on the table are our most beautiful dishes and silver cutlery. And I’m here to eat the widow’s lunch.”

“Does your mother have to serve them? And a vote?”

“No, it’s a legacy, or rather a tax that weighs on one of our bequests.”

He immediately thought that perhaps that poor man’s lunch was the last one his holy mother would serve.

(from the novel L’edera, 1906)