

# The libretto in brief

During the prelude, from behind the curtain, Turiddu sings a “Sicilian” serenade to Lola, the girl to whom he had been engaged before going into the army and whom on his return he has found married to Alfio, a well-off teamster. The curtain opens on the square of a village near Catania, with the church on the right and the inn of Mamma Lucia on the left. It is Easter morning, the bells are chiming and the peasants, singing happily, are coming in from their fields and orchards to attend church. Santuzza, Turiddu’s mistress, suspects that he is having an affair with his old flame (he has been seen outside Lola’s house in the depths of night) and has come looking for him at his mother’s house, the inn. Lucia coldly tells Santuzza to leave her son in peace. “Why are you looking for him here? Turiddu isn’t here, he has gone to get wine at Francofonte”, she says. “That isn’t true”, says Santuzza, “he has not left the village.” Lucia is disturbed by this information, guesses the truth and invites Santuzza to come inside to continue the conversation in privacy. “I cannot come into your house”, says the girl, “I have been excommunicated.” The discussion between the two women is interrupted by the arrival of Alfio with a group of villagers, singing a rollicking song about the free and roving life of the teamster, who, however, is deeply content to come home to his faithful wife in the evening. Meanwhile the crowd fills the square and the Easter procession forms, to be followed by solemn mass in the church. Because of her affair with Turiddu, Santuzza cannot enter the church and, when Mamma Lucia attempts to leave her, she breaks into tears and tells Mamma Lucia how desperately she loves Turiddu, who has seduced her only to console himself after Lola’s marriage but still loves Lola, who loves him in turn and is openly betraying her husband. As Mamma Lucia goes into the church, she is filled with foreboding. Santuzza, left alone,

sees Turiddu coming and confronts him, asking him to make his intentions clear. He doesn’t want to hear anything about it. First he tries rather ineptly to deny that he has been away from home and that he has seen Lola. Then he begins to quarrel angrily with Santuzza, in a rising tide of male arrogance, passing from hypocritical annoyance at her “mad” jealousy to offended pride and angry menaces that he won’t put up with such offensive ingratitude. Santuzza also progresses from accusing him of unfaithfulness to anger, humiliation and pleas for pardon, after Turiddu has reacted so harshly that she fears to lose him. At this point, Lola arrives, singing a mocking song dedicated to Turiddu. When she sees the two, she stops for a moment to ask Santuzza maliciously why she is not going to mass. “Only those who know themselves to be without sin should go”, Santuzza retorts angrily. Lola goes into the church and the lovers resume their quarrel: Turiddu’s pretended wrath triggers the exasperation of Santuzza, who finally shouts at him to be careful. Turiddu’s response is to turn his back on her and enter the church without so much as a glance at her, which so angers her that she curses him: “This will be an evil Easter for you, you traitor!”. When Alfio arrives, Santuzza, in a frenzy, reveals to him the liaison between his wife and Turiddu. “While you are riding in rain and wind to earn your bread, Lola is betraying you”, she says. Alfio listens with cold fury, and when he understands that Santuzza is telling him the truth, he swears to avenge his honour. The mass is over and the crowd comes out of the church. A group of men stops at the inn. Turiddu invites his friends to drink to Easter and offers a glass to Alfio. “Thank you”, replies Alfio, “but I will not drink your wine. It would taste like poison in my mouth.” Turiddu understands his meaning and pours the contents of the glass upon the

ground. “I am at your disposal”, he says. These are the simple opening words of an ancient rustic rite. The friends fall silent. Some of the women surround Lola and beg her to go home. Then Turiddu embraces Alfio and, as is the custom, bites his right ear. “Friend, you have taken a good bite, we’ll understand each other”, Alfio says coldly. This is the end of the ritual challenge, the appointment is made to meet immediately in the nearby gardens just outside the village. Before going off to meet his rival, Turiddu begs his mother to bless him, just as she did on the day he left for his military service. The poor woman doesn’t understand his impassioned plea, but Turiddu doesn’t give her time to ask any questions and says he has had too much to drink. He also begs her, if he should not return, to act as a mother to Santuzza, who is alone in the world and who has been disgraced by him. Then he kisses her several times and runs out. A few minutes later, it is all over. An indistinct murmur is heard and then a wild cry from a woman rushing into the square: “Turiddu has been killed!”.