

ble, sure of himself and, why not, protected. On her side, Dedé found out that Don Metello's violent love-making, far from straining her, unfailingly brought her to an equally violent climax, which she always found exquisite and intensely pleasurable. Never before had she experienced such passion, neither with her former husband, a well-to-do senator much too old for her, nor with the half dozen different men whom she had occasionally been intimate with.

• **Fondamenta di San Moisé** = quartiere di Venezia intorno alla chiesa di San Mosé (*fondamenta* è il passaggio che costeggia un canale) ••• **near relations** = parenti stretti • **a tall, forceful woman** = una donna alta e vigorosa ••• **handgrip** = presa (lett. stretta di mano) • **hair-net** = reticella per capelli • **bodices** = corsetti • **low-cut necks** = ampie scollature (lett. colli tagliati bassi) • **a hefty portion** = una buona porzione • **a shameless laughter** = una risata aperta (lett. spudorata) • **had passed away** = era morto ••• **ascendancy** = influenza, ascendente • **far reaching** = vasta (to reach far = estendersi) • **far from straining her** = ben lontano dal riuscire a stremarla • **an equally violent climax** = un orgasmo altrettanto forte • **been intimate with** = con cui era stata in intimità •

After a while, Dedè thought that marriage would have been an honourable and comfortable solution for both of them and Don Metello concurred immediately. The fact that the bridegroom was so obviously of Moorish blood never bothered the Braganzi family. This was because Metello was heir apparent to the best branch of the rich Scavolin family. Unfortunately, the Cardinal was not happy at all. He thought the match somewhat below his eminence and repute. Metello insisted and went to Rome more than once to plead, but the Cardinal failed to be convinced. Eventually, Metello tried to force the situation by eloping with Dedé, only to achieve a frosty reaction from the Cardinal. The old man did not disown his foster son, but cut his allowance considerably. Dedé intervened and through her various acquaintances in the Venetian administration was able to obtain for her husband a commission in the Levant, as garrison commander at Agrocastro. It was not a brilliant position, but it allowed a decent way out of a difficult situation.

• **the bridegroom** = lo sposo • **Moorish blood** = sangue moresco • **the best branch of the .... family** = il ramo più importante della famiglia • **the match** = matrimonio, partito • **repute** = reputazione • **a frosty reaction** = una reazione gelida • **foster son** = figlio adottivo ••• **allowance** = sussidio • **a commission in the Levant** = una nomina (d'ufficiale) per il Levante •

Agrocastro turned out to be quite different from a grim and cheerless exile. It was mainly, at least for the first years, a prolonged honeymoon for Metello and Dedé, who made endless love. Ferociously at first, then flirtatiously and even coquettishly made, cosseting, cuddling, cooing each other in a way that had been highly unusual to both. They started to call each other by pet na-

mes: she was Metello's honeybunch, his lioness, his Dedemóna, his great, big Dedé, while she, in turn, called him her black falcon, her dark lecherous eagle, her angel prick. She even combined his previous and present names, so that from Othmàn and Metéllo made out Othéllo as a very private term of endearment. In front of every other subordinate man in the castle, however, she always called him formally Don Metello, or the Comandant. Instinctively, Dedé knew that it would have been unbecoming to pretend to command herself, at least at the beginning. Constantly, she supported her husband's authority and prestige among his men and Metello found in her a pillar of strength and a constant inspiration without ever having to lose his face, even in front of himself. Dedé had the sense never to interfere in military matters, so that the command of the garrison was fully in Metello's hands, who proved to be quite capable of handling it. In truth, there was not much to do but keep an eye on Turkish movements at sea and report to headquarters on the island of Candia. Occasionally, there was to resupply the few Venetian ships that ventured in those distant waters, for trade or for some privateering. In general, he just had to keep the powders dry and the men alert. Most of the day-to-day garrison work at Agrocastro was, moreover, taken up by the second in command to Don Metello, a simple ensign who deputed as his lieutenant.

• **a grim and cheerless exile** = un triste e sgradevole esilio • **honeymoon** = luna di miele • **flirtatiously** = teneramente (*to flirt* = amareggiare) • **coquettishly** = sdolcinatamente (*coquettish* = civettuolo) • **cosseting, cuddling, cooing** = vezzeggiando (*to cosset*), coccolando (*to cuddle*), tubando (*to coo* - tipico dei piccioni) • **pet names** = nomignoli • **honeybunch** = amore, tesoro (lett. grappolo di miele) • **lecherous eagle** = aquila lasciva • **angel prick** = uccello d'angelo (*prick*= puntura, ma comunemente anche cazzo) • **term of endearment** = vezzeggiativo • **unbecoming** = sconveniente • **a pillar of strength** = un pilastro di forza • **Candia** = nome medievale dell'isola di Creta • **resupply** = rifornire • **privateering** = attività di pirateria • **to keep the powders dry** = tenersi pronto (lett. tenere le polveri asciutte) • **a simple ensign who deputed as his lieutenant** = un semplice alfiere facente funzione di suo luogotenente•

This Iacopo Bigatto was a high-strung, keen officer, no much older than Don Metello. He was an extremely handsome man, with a beautiful oval face, two liquid brown eyes, not very tall perhaps, but with a well-made body. He sported light moustaches and a little goatee, in line with the prevalent fashion of the day, but they only improved his appearance. Iacopo was by nature a careerist and a social climber, driven by a fanatical, burning ambition : to gain promotion, advancement, recognition at any cost and to eventually become a knight, rich and esteemed. Born in a relatively well-off peasant family near Bérghamo, in the Venetian hinterland, the boy only had two avenues open to him for escaping his rustic condition and advance in life : either enter prie-

sthood or become a soldier. He chose the latter and enrolled still quite young in the Venetian territorial army. Poor Iacopo, however, was much better endowed with beauty than with brains, a modicum of which are necessary even for a military career, while beauty doesn't help much. Moreover, without a formal education and especially without suitable family connections, he could never dream of becoming an officer and starting a real career. In spite of all his doggedness and clenched teeth, therefore, the young Iacopo did not rise above the rank of vice-sergeant of the newly formed Musketeer Regiments in the Venetian Armed Forces.

• **a high-strung, keen officer** = un ufficiale zelante e un po' nevrotico (to string = tendere la corda) • **sported** = sfoggiava (to sport = giocare, ma anche mettere in mostra) • **moustaches** = baffi • **a little goatee** = un pizzetto (lett. barbetta da capra) • **careerist** = arrivista (career = carriera) • **social climber** = arrampicatore sociale • **avenues** = viali, *in questo caso* strade • **endowed with beauty** = dotato di bell'aspetto • **a modicum** = un poco (dal latino *modicum* = piccola quantità) • **a formal education** = un buon livello d'istruzione (lett. un'educazione convenzionale) • **doggedness** = ostinazione (lett. tenacia canina) • **clenched teeth** = accanimento (lett. denti serrati) •

Yet, it was actually his appearance that played the trick. Just before the famous battle of Lépanto, by pure chance somebody found out that the vice-sergeant Iacopo Bigatto, embarked with his regiment on the Venetian fleet, looked exactly like the young Commander-in-Chief of the confederated Christian Armada, His Excellency Don Juan of Austria. Don Juan was a bastard son of the late Emperor Charles V and consequently a step-brother to the king of Spain Philip II. But king Philip was somber, ugly and introverted, while Don Juan was handsome, happy to be alive, sensitive, intelligent and pleased with himself. The Admiral of the Venetian fleet, Don Sebastian Venièr, decided to courteously lend to Don Juan his double, a useful appendage for any war commander, should the battle become too hot and too risky. Don Juan liked the idea of having another self with him, because he tended to be a little vain and fond of his own image, an excusable flaw in his otherwise agreeable personality, as he was at the time only 26 years of age and quite a handsome man. So, Iacopo went to stay on the flagship of the Spanish fleet, among the glittering and cosmopolitan entourage of the Prince. He felt rapturously ecstatic when everybody addressed him as Don Iago, the Spanish equivalent of Iacopo, and treated him with respect. It did not matter that they spoke to him in Spanish, which he could not understand one word of: Iacopo was happy anyhow, luxuriating in his new position and very conscious of the sudden turn of his luck. On the flagship he had nothing to do in particular. He was only expected to be there, just in case....

- **played the trick** = funzionò (lett. fece scattare il trucco) • **embarked** = imbarcato • **looked exactly like** = era l'esatta fotocopia • **Christian Armada** = la flotta cristiana ("Armada", in inglese, è sempre riferita a una flotta, mai a una armata di terra, rifacendosi alla *Invincibile Armada* del 1588) • **step-brother** = fratellastro • **pleased with himself** = compiaciuto con se stesso • **his double** = il suo sosia • **fond of his own image** = appassionato del suo stesso aspetto • **flaw** = difetto • **flagship** = nave ammiraglia • **glittering and cosmopolitan entourage** = ambiente brillante e disinvolto • **rapturously ecstatic** = estasiato in modo sublime • **luxuriating** = crogiolandosi • **sudden turn of his luck** = improvviso colpo di fortuna (lett. cambio della sua fortuna) • **just in case...** = non si sa mai... (lett. nel caso che...)

Don Juan of Austria, however, had a casual penchant for good looking men and one day, on a passing whim, he summoned his handsome look-alike to come to his cabin at night. Iacopo, who did not share the same penchant, innocently went where he was asked, only to find himself in an extremely embarrassing situation when His Excellency quite plainly told him to undress and come to bed with him. Obviously, he could not let such a trivial hitch hamper that unique opportunity for a career he had so intensely courted for so long. To get what he wants, they say, the Devil will even quote from the Bible and Iacopo wanted to get ahead desperately, wishfully, greedily. He did not waste much time, therefore, in taking off his uniform and his underwear. Then, in all his radiant nakedness, slipped into the princely bed. But, once there, he did not know what he was expected to do. The Prince was not of much help, so the poor devil tried to improvise. Unfortunately, Iacopo had limited imagination and even less versatility. Things went from awkward to awful until Don Juan, accustomed to a more sophisticated and pleasurable teamwork, rapidly lost interest in such a clumsy performance and ended that painful affair as quickly as possible. Iacopo was never called again to give personal services of any kind and, as soon as the battle of Lepanto was won by the Christian side, he was sent back to the Venetian fleet.

Of course, Iacopo was rewarded for very special duty done in the service of the Venetian Republic. He received a citation, a small cash compensation and a promotion. Feeling ever more cock-sure, he now tried to make people call him Don Iago, as they had on the flagship. This resulted at first in official warnings but, when he insisted, he was fined, for Iacopo was not a nobleman. He had to drop the Don, to which he was not entitled, but kept the name of Iago, which gave him a small aura of prestige.

- **a casual penchant for** = una vaga tendenza per • **a passing whim** = un capriccio passeggero • **his...look-alike** = la sua ... controfigura • **such a trivial hitch** = un intoppo così futile • **hamper** = ostacolare • **so intensely courted** = così intensamente cercata (lett. corteggiata) • **the Devil will even quote from the Bible** = il Diavolo citerebbe persino dalla Bibbia • **wishfully** = intensamente • **greedily** = avidamente • **underwear** = panni di sotto, biancheria •

**his radiant nakedness** = la sua radiosa nudità • **versatility** = inventiva • **went from awkward to awful** = andarono di male in peggio • **accustomed to a more sophisticated and pleasurable teamwork** = abituato a un apporto (lett. lavoro di gruppo) più gradevole e raffinato • **clumsy** = goffo, maldestro • **rewarded** = ricompensato • **citation** = menzione onorevole • **cash compensation** = un premio in denaro • **feeling ... cock-sure** = alzando un po' troppo la cresta (cock-sure = arrogante come un gallo) • **fined** = venne multato

Soon after, he even married the daughter of a small merchant of Treviso, a quite simple and plain young girl not yet 17, Emilia Grattón, who brought him a small dowry. With this money, Iacopo-Iago was able to buy a commission as ensign in the overseas garrison service and ended up at Agrocastro. He had to work hard to establish, and then strengthen, his position under a string of uninterested or incompetent commanders. There was in his manners an astringency that was not always deemed agreeable. Although Iago did every task with sufficient competence and was somewhat respected by the men, it would be incorrect to state that over the years he had succeeded in attracting warm and widespread support. There was a noticeable change, however, when at Agrocastro arrived Don Metello. The new commander recognized in his ensign/lieutenant a combatant fellow at Lepanto and treated him with friendly openness, nearly as an equal. Moreover, Dedé took a fancy for the young wife of Iago, who was having difficulties in adapting to garrison life, and very often kept her at her side. She became Dedé's confidant and her only friend. Quite soon the lieutenant and his wife were regular guests at the table of the commander and his wife. Iago flushed with pride and inner joy for being treated like a friend and a comrade by thoroughbred aristocrats like Don Metello and Donna Desiderata Scavolin. The truth was that there was nobody else in the castle who had acceptable table manners and could keep up a minimum of decent conversation. With the exception, of course, of Father Alvise, who was pleasant enough but had to be submitted to a strict body search after each meal in order to retrieve the silver cutlery or the napkins. On less formal occasions, the poor old wench Bianca LaBuco-Nero was also asked to join the company. Like all other parvenus, Iago tended to object to the presence of a woman of loose customs among "people of rank" but Dedé laughed him off. Dedé did not have any false pride. She definitively liked the saltiness of *demi-monde* talk and, moreover, felt a certain woman-to-woman solidarity for another Venetian old girl bound to a hard and ungrateful profession.

• **dowry** = dote • **commission as ensign** = incarico come alfiere • **a string of uninterested or incompetent commanders** = una serie di comandanti incompetenti o disinteressati • **astringency** = rigidità, pignoleria • **deemed agreeable** = considerata accettabile • **combatant fellow** = commilitone • **took a fancy** = prese in simpatia • **flushed with pride** = gonfio (lett.

turgido) d'orgoglio • **thoroughbred aristocrats** = aristocratici purosangue • **acceptable table manners** = un minimo di buona educazione a tavola (lett. comportamento accettabile a tavola) • **silver cutlery** = argenteria (lett. coltelleria) • **napkins** = tovaglioli • **less formal occasions** = in altri momenti (lett. in situazioni meno ufficiali) • **parvenus** = arrivista • **“people of rank”** = gente di prim'ordine • **laughted him off** = gli rise dietro • **the saltiness of demi-monde talk** = la verve (lett. salacità) delle sue battute di mondana (*demi-monde* in Francia era il 'mondo di vita') • **woman-to-woman solidarity** = solidarietà da-donna-a-donna •

Occasionally, there were also other unexpected guests at the table, mainly captains and officers of the few war galleys, or even fewer merchant ships, that arrived at Agrocastro. They were welcomed for the news they brought and the company they provided, useful breaks in the daily, run-of-the-mill garrison life. They were also welcomed as they brought presents of sweet Malmsey wine from Candia and the islands, *“that revived the heart”*, of ginger and sugar from the market places of Aleppo or clove and pepper from Jaffa, *“to drive off wind and favour the seed”*. They also provided casks of acquavite from Frioul, a mountain region in the Venetian hinterland producing that well known sort of brandy *“that dissipated superfluous body fluids and cured the quartan ague”*.

For the ladies, sometimes there were embroidered silk scarves from Constantinople or the newest **zocoli**, the tall shoes in the Venetian fashion. Once, a rich merchant from Ragusa presented Donna Desiderata with a new gadget from France that was becoming more and more fashionable in Venice among ladies of rank: a series of damask handkerchiefs. Like forks, or chamberpots, handkerchiefs too were a very rare luxury in those days, even among rich people. Usually, one wiped his nose on the cape or on the sleeves, if not with the hand, and still was polite. Handkerchiefs were just too much.

For the gentlemen, there often were *demi monde* new tunics of Italian velvet or Flemish brocade and, lately, the black cloth costumes inspired by the Spaniards, with ruffs and broad lace collarettes, which were becoming the latest craze in European male fashion.

• **unexpected guests** = ospiti inattesi • **run-of-the mill** = ordinaria (lett. 'come macina il mulino') • **Malmsey wine** = vino di Malvasia (vin dolce greco, così chiamato dalla città dei Monemvasia nel Peloponneso, allora in possesso di Venezia) • **Candia and the islands** = Creta e le altre isole (dell'Egeo, allora in gran parte sotto dominio veneziano) • **ginger** = zenzero • **market places of Aleppo** = i mercati di Aleppo (la città di A. in Siria, era allora un grosso centro del traffico del Levante) • **clove** = chiodi di garofano • **Jaffa** = Giaffa (antico porto della Palestina, ora inglobata in TellAviv) • *“to drive off wind and favour the seed”* = per eliminare l'aria e favorire il seme (negli uomini) • **casks** = barili • **Frioul** = Friuli • **superfluous body fluids** = fluidi corporei superflui (cioè l'idropisia) • **the quartan ague** = la febbre quartana • **embroidered silk scarves** = sciarpe di seta ricamate • **zocoli** = le alte calzature usate dalle dame e specialmente dalle cortigiane veneziane (da cui il nome *zoccoli*) • **Ragusa** = città veneziana indipendente, oggi Dubrovnik,

sulle coste dalmate • **new gadget** = un nuovo aggeggio • **fashionable** = alla moda • **ladies of rank** = signore per bene • **damask handkerchiefs** = fazzoletti damascati • **chamber pots** = pitali, vasi da notte • **wiped his nose** = si puliva il naso • **cape** = cappa, mantellina • **polite** = di buona educazione • **tunics** = giubbe • **Flemish brocade** = broccato fiammingo • **ruffs** = gorgiere inamidate • **lace collarettes** = collettoni di pizzo • **latest craze** = l'ultima moda •

Don Metello, for his part, often sold the visitors supplies of gun powder from the castle's ample stocks, pocketing for himself the little money he made with this trade. The Republic of Venice, ever parsimonious, persisted in using the old coarse powder, which was less expensive than the refined product used in the rest of Europe. It did not sell well. But at Agrocastro it was also possible to obtain deliveries of local produce, like garlic, onions, cucumbers, melons, dried fruit, and especially a local sour cheese made of ewes' milk, called **caskaval** but often italianized as "caciocavallo". Much prized was the local production of saffron, aniseed and coriander, available in season by the basketful. Also in season, for a few piastres, there was the local Cypriot wine to buy - in those times wine did not keep from one year to the next, but turned sour and had to be sold quickly. In addition, each ship had to be reprovisioned with several dozen of demi-johns and jugs of fresh drinkable water, for which a small prize was to be paid, of course. Don Metello and Dedé did not do too badly, therefore, and could afford to treat their guests with generous hospitality.

• **supply of gun powder** = approvvigionamenti di polvere da sparo • **stocks** = scorte • **pocketing for himself** = mettendosi in tasca • **coarse** = scadente • **local produce** = prodotti del luogo • **ewes' milk** = latte di pecora • **saffron, aniseed and coriander** = zafferano, anice e coriandolo • **by the basketful** = in quantità (lett. a intere ceste) • **piastres** = moneta turca, allora di uso comune nel Levante • **reprovisioned** = rifornirsi • **demi-johns** = damigiane • **jars** = recipienti •

On these occasions, their dinners were quite rich affairs, with white brocaded table cloths and dozens of lighted candles on gilded chandeliers (Dedé's dowry, most of it). The indio Pelagonio was relegated to dishwashing duties in the kitchen and the cooking was directly supervised by the lady of the castle herself. Put aside was the mutton, the cheese and the rustic bread with garlic, the staples of ordinary days. Soups of almonds with pigeon flesh were served instead, with fried veal sweetbreads and liver-stuffed pastries. Larded and spit-roasted songbirds were on the table, with spice cakes bathed in thick caper sauces, or even richer egg sauces. Turkish-style rice cooked in milk and lightly sparkled with pepper and cinnamon was offered, and then quince pastries, Parmesan cheese and roasted chestnuts, all served with Malaga wines. During the hot months, they treated their guests to sugared cold water

and iced fruit. During the winter months, there were several kinds of Cyprus' liquor wines, of which most guests became extremely fond, too fond perhaps, because they tended to end up snoring under the barrels. Lately, Don Metello and his wife had become rather sophisticated and offered to their main guests a new Turkish beverage, called **kafoué**, which was to be swallowed hot. They had been told that the Turks used to drink it in long draughts, not during the meal but afterwards, as a sort of delicacy, in tiny porcelain bowls, while conversing in comfort in the company of friends. At Agrocastro, they did the same.

• **brocaded table cloths** = tovaglie di broccato • **gilded chandeliers** = candelieri dorati • **the staples of ordinary days** = il solito cibo di tutti i giorni • **almonds** = mandorle • **fried veal sweetbreads** = animelle fritte di vitello • **liver-stuffed pastries** = pasticci ripeni di fegatini • **lard-ded** = lardellati • **spit-rosted** = arrostiti allo spiedo • **songbirds** = uccelletti (lett. uccelli di canto) • **bathed in** = immersi • **caper souces** = salse di capperi • **lightly sparkled** = leggermente cosparsi • **cinnamon** = cannella • **quince** = mele cotogne • **roasted chestnuts** = castagne arrostate • **Malaga wines** = vini di Malaga (città spagnola, allora celebre per i suoi vini marsalati) • **liquor wine** = vini liquorosi • **snoring under the barrels** = russando sotto le botti (espressione tipica per: cadere addormentati) • **kafué** = così al principio veniva chiamato il caffè nel XVI° secolo • **swallowed** = bevuto (lett. inghiottito) • **long draughts** = lunghe sorsate • **delicacy** = una raffinatezza • **porcelain bowls** = tazze di porcellana •

Not many ships arrived at Agrocastro, but a sufficient number to make life interesting and not too unpleasant. On any event, there was always something to do, especially since Dedé was a clever woman. Simple people try to fill their time, but clever people use it. So, she put everybody to work, even her husband, whom she sent hunting for pigeons, partridges, chickens, quails, or wild ducks, depending on to season. When it was not hunting season, Dedé sent him out with some of the men to raid the Turkish coasts, or do some privateering on Turkish and not-Turkish merchantmen. The little fighting, the much sailing, the occasional stealing or the raping of a few women here and there, was a welcome distraction for Don Metello, a sort of constitutional that kept him healthy and trim. Garrison duties could be safely left to the trusty hands of the faithful Iago. And willingly the lieutenant (well, the ensign) complied, strutting around like a young turkey, not so much for the trust and recognition bestowed on him but rather for the power he now felt within his grasp. He wanted to become indispensable to Don Metello, not just at Agrocastro but even on Don Metello's next assignment, because Iago would make sure that he should follow him. Even back in Venice, if possible, where he could eventually utilize all the important Scavolin connections.

• **on any event** = in ogni caso • **partridges** = pernici • **quails** = quaglie • to raid the Turkish coast = far razzia sulle coste turche • **privateering** = pirateggiare (*privateer* era una nave armata a spese di un privato e autorizzata dalla Corona Inglese ad attaccare le navi nemiche, ma spesso anche neutrali) • **merchantmen** = navi mercantili • **raping** = stuprando • **welcome distraction** = piacevole passatempo • **constitutional** = passeggiata igienica • **complied** = si adeguava • **strutting around like a young turkey** = andando in giro impettito come un giovane tacchino (to strut = incedere impettito) • **bestowed on him** = conferitogli • **within his grasp** = a portata di mano •

Obviously, Jago kept his thoughts strictly to himself, thoughts and dreams, actually. He did not mentioned anything even to his young wife, whom he never kept in his confidence. He did not consider Emilia much more than part of the dowry, a woman mainly to keep his house and to be used in bed for the needs of his flesh. And yet, the young Emilia was in love with her handsome husband. She had always been afraid of men, especially big, hard, violent men. She felt uncomfortable living among the soldiers of the garrison, for instance, and in the presence of Don Metello, a cold-looking man with a beaky, aggressive nose, she always felt a deep-rooted trepidation. On the contrary, Emilia reacted very warmly to her husband's angel face and handsome figure. She had started liking him the first time her father brought home the bridegroom chosen for her. She thought herself very lucky to get a young, really attractive husband and felt romantically in love with him even during engagement. The gloss gradually wore off in the first months of marriage, as soon the young Emilia found herself sharing her life with a self-centered, unresponsive man, indifferent to her sentiments and her emotions. Iacopo was too absorbed with his own ambitions to take notice of his young wife's timid love. He was even disturbed by any display of affection or devotion. Emilia learned to keep her dreams and her romantic urges to herself. She already felt lucky that her husband did not beat or mishandle her, which was the lot of many women she knew. Instead, she could dress well and had some fineries, for instance, because Iago wanted to show his new social position covering his wife with all those baubles, bijouterie and little gold earrings, without which every woman feel naked.

• **kept his thoughts... to himself** = tenne per sé i suoi pensieri • **never kept in his confidence** = non diede mai fiducia • **cold-looking** = dall'aspetto freddo, scostante • **beaky, aggressive nose** = aggressivo naso aquilino • **deep-rooted trepidation** = ansietà profondamente radicata • **engagement** = fidanzamento • **the gloss ... wore off** = perse (lett. si consumò ) il lustro • **self-centered** = egoista • **unresponsive** = insensibile • **romantic urges** = bisogni romantici • **mishandle** = malmenare • **the lot** = la sorte • **fineries** = abiti eleganti • **baubles, bijouterie** = ninnoli, bigiotteria •

Emilia was not in a position to complain and felt sufficiently content with her lot. Lacking any previous experience, she could not even assess the real standard of her husband's nightly love-making, which was more consistent than exuberant or satisfying. On the whole, her married life was surely wholesome, although somewhat tedious and tasteless like food lacking all the salt and with too little condiment. Emilia was just lonely, especially since she did not even have a child to fill her life, over whom she could have exuded her steaming need for love. There were no other Venetian women in the castle, with whom to become friend and exchange mutual pleasantries, gossips, domestic complaints and small secrets. There was only the old and belaboured Bianca, the garrison's tart, not the most adequate company for a very young, inexperienced and still provincial family girl. It was the arrival at Agrocastro of Don Metello and Donna Desiderata Scavolin that changed Emilia's life. In spite of the difference in ages, and perhaps partly because of it, the two women gradually became close friends. They spoke often of their husbands to each other, Dedé to expound on her Othello's virility, Emilia to enthuse on her Iago's comeliness.

• **was not in a position to** = non aveva la possibilità di ... • **assess** = valutare • **wholesome** = adeguata (lett. sana, salutare) • **tedious and tasteless** = noiosa e insipida • **exuded** = versato (to exude = effondere) • **steaming need** = bisogno bruciante (to steam = emettere vapore) • **pleasantries** = battute, facezie • **gossips** = pettegolezzi • **belaboured** = bistrattata (to belabour = picchiare) • **family girl** = ragazza di buona famiglia • **to expound on** = dilungarsi su • **to enthuse on** = estasiarsi per • **comeliness** = avvenenza •

So, time glided away, month after month, with pleasant nonchalance, while the lives of the people at the isolated garrison of Agrocastro went on with the usual sloppiness and flatness. Over one year had uneventfully passed since the new commander's arrival, uneventfully it seemed. But Time is like an immense river, with waters flowing slowly and impressively and unceasingly, without a ripple, always in the same way. The casual observer on his banks cannot perceive all the separate eddies, the various undertows, the different crosscurrents, the individual whirlpools that shape that mighty flow. He cannot feel the continuous process of slow erosion crumbling the rocky bed of the river. He cannot see in its depths the multitude of single grains of sand and small pebbles carried by the millions along with the running waters. He cannot detect the gradual silting of the river's meanders nor the inevitable creation of mudbanks. The river is a river, to a superficial onlooker. But things are continuously happening, under the vast and compelling surface of the great river of Time - very small and extremely slow things, perhaps, and often difficult to notice. Eventually, they change its whole course. It should not co-

me as a surprise, therefore, that even in the quiet and uneventful flow of life at Agrocastro small things were happening and moods changed. After a while, things were not as before. It all started with a shadowy and vaguely disturbing feeling. Metello was still very much taken by Dedé, but sometimes he felt she had the disagreeable tendency to be too bossy. She got on his nerves when he felt that she was trying to organize his own life. Othman-Metello was very touchy on this subject. Since early life he was imbibed with the then widespread archetypes of male supremacy, in every field. He also felt very strong about his honour, on which impinged the twin problems of personal independence and freedom of action - at least according to him. Thus Metello found it unpalatable to think that he could end up as the lap-dog of his wife. Unfortunately, he was not an efficient communicator. He lacked the confidence for opening up to a frank discussion that would have cleared the sky of any possible cloud. Instead, he built up occasional little grains of pique and resentment, which slowly accrued, layer upon layer, into concretions of displeasure and hurt feelings. His inner being became heavy under the dripping weight of such accumulation of slag and his happiness was marred.

• **glided away** = scivolò via • **nonchalance** = noncuranza, indifferenza • **sloppiness and flatness** = trasandatezza e monotonia • **uneventfully** = sempre uguale, senza novità • **without a ripple** = senza onde (ripple = increspatura nell'acqua) • **eddies** = mulinelli • **undertows** = risucchi • **crosscurrents** = riflussi • **whirlpools** = vortici • **silting** = insabbiamento • **meanders** = meandri. anse pronunciate di un fiume (così chiamate dall'antico fiume Meandro in Asia Minore) • **mudbanks** = banchi di fango • **onlooker** = spettatore • **compelling** = irresistibile • **shadowy** = indistinto (come un'ombra) • **disagreeable** = spiacevole • **to be too bossy** = d'essere troppo autoritaria (boss = padrone) • **touchy** = suscettibile • **he was imbibed with** = aveva assorbito • **archetype** = archetipo, modello • **impinged** = intervenivano • **unpalatable** = spiacevole, disgustoso • **the lap-dog** = cagnolino da compagnia (che le dame tenevano in grembo= lap) • **pique and resentment** = animosità e ripicche • **accrued** = si accumulavano • **concretions** = concrezioni, accumuli • **the dripping weight** = il peso stillante (cioè che si formava goccia a goccia) • **slag** = scorie • **was marred** = si guastava •

Dedé was much more perceptive, of course, and sensed that her Othello was now being troubled by something not easily defined. More than once she asked her new husband what was wrong with him, but he would not explain his pain. Instead, her insistence only irritated the man and increased his soreness. Obviously she worried, but deemed the whole affair to be no more than one of those small inevitable misunderstandings between a man and a woman. There are often clouds in the sky, she thought, which the wind blows away. Even in the best glass of claret, she was telling herself, sometimes you can find shadows of dregs, which do not kill the good taste of wine. Dedé went on as usual, trying to organize a decent, merry life for her husband at

Agrocastro. Metello reacted by withdrawing more and more in himself. There was somebody else who had perceptive eyes. Iago, too, felt the changed mood in his captain - and reacted to it, in his own way. He was not a bad fellow, Iago, and personally rather liked don Metello. He was sincerely grateful for acknowledgments and friendliness received on recent occasions. Moreover, he had Don Metello, as his commanding officer, in high regard and was genuinely loyal to him. Certainly, there was a element of self-interest too, in trying to get in the good graces of Don Metello with the usual pinch of flattery and servility. But every man in a subordinate position would be easily excused from such an irrelevant charge. Iago began to be exceptionally prompt and available to every request and requirement of the nobleman, trying to anticipate them when he could, always wearing an attentive and friendly countenance towards him. As we well know, friendliness can lure even a snake out of its cranny. It did not take much for Metello to notice the attentions, the understanding and the loyal support made available with such solicitous discretion. Slowly, little by little, he let himself go, tacitly accepting the unexpressed man-to-man solidarity offered to him by his deputy. Nothing straightforward was ever said, of course. Everything was hinted, rather suggested through occasional allusions and innuendoes when talking business-like about honour and respectability, by dropping half words, by letting out a few sighs here and there. Eventually they understood each other.

• **perceptive** = perspicace, acuta • **soreness** = irritazione • **deemed** = riteneva • **claret** = vin rosso (di solito gli inglesi col nome di **claret** (chiaretto) indicavano i vini di Borgogna) • **shadows of dregs** = resti (lett. ombre) di feccia • **withdrawing... in himself** = richiudersi (lett. ritirarsi) in sé stesso • **acknowledgments** = riconoscimenti, apprezzamenti • **pinch of flattery** = pizzico di adulazione • **servility** = servilismo • **irrelevant charge** = peccatucci (lett. imputazioni) di poco conto • **countenance** = aspetto, facciata • **lure a snake out of its cranny** = far uscire (lett. a-descare) un serpente dalla sua tana (lett. buco) • **straightforward** = diretto, aperto • **hinted** = suggerito, solamente accennato • **innuendos** = allusioni, insinuazioni • **sighs** = sospiri •

Having slowly gained the unvoiced confidence of his captain, Iago arrived at the conclusion that Don Metello's spleen was mainly an effect of unfulfilled self-esteem, combined with an impelling urge for commanding respect, not so much from his wife as from women in general. Then he thought a good idea to covertly make available his own wife to Don Metello. Nothing was ever said openly and directly. A fleeting suggestion was dropped once, jokingly, then repeated sometimes later, with slightly equivocal undertones. It was brought up again, as a matter of course, and then as if already taken for granted. Until it was actually taken for granted, by both men. Iago knew he was gambling heavily. He assumed that he would gain an undisputed ascendancy over his

master, should the latter become the lover of his young wife. The rich and well connected Don Metello Scavolin would then be in his power and a lot of plum personal benefits and lucrative advantages would surely follow. He did not spare a thought for the feelings of the unfortunate Emilia; she did not count. Nor did he consider possible consequences or other foreseeable reactions. Iago was only dreaming of a shortcut to get to the top and greed overcame prudence. It was a flippantly rash, even dangerous offer to make, and even an over-ambitious Iago, in his heart, took fright at his own daring. But, tacitly, Don Metello accepted.

• **unvoiced** = tacita, sottintesa • **spleen** = malinconia, ipocondria (lett. milza, ma anche bile) • **unfulfilled self-esteem** = autostima insufficiente, frustrata • **an impelling urge** = un pressante bisogno • **covertly** = copertamente, nascostamente • **a fleeting suggestion** = un suggerimento lasciato cadere quasi per caso (lett. fuggevole) • **jokingly** = per scherzo (joke = battuta, batzelletta) • **undertones** = in sottofondo • **as a matter of course** = come se fosse una cosa del tutto naturale • **taken for granted** = accettato come ovvio • **gambling heavily** = rischiava molto (lett. giocava pesante – *to gamble* = giocare d'azzardo) • **ascendancy** = influenza • **plum personal benefits** = eccellenti profitti personali (*plum* = prugna, ma anche buonissimo - *a plum job* = un ottimo impiego) • **she did not count** = lei non contava • **foreseeable** = prevedibile • **shortcut** = scorciatoia • **greed** = ingordigia, bramosia • **flippantly rash** = colpo sconsiderato (lett. una corsa incosciente) • **took fright** = si spaventò, prese paura •

Thus, on a very warm summer night of the christian year 1579, Emilia, who was already quietly asleep at home, was woken by a man entering in her room. She suddenly realized, in a cold sweat, that the manly figure in the dark was not her husband but the commander himself, already taking off his pants and shirt. Petrified, the poor girl could not even shout for help, while the man, now ghastly in his frenzied nakedness, threw away the sheets and grasped her forcibly. It was a nasty affair, as the man rabidly tore, over and over again, into the taut body of the young woman stiffened by hysterical shock. During that brutal and violent outrage, through the unbearable ripping pain, Emilia could see only the white of the rapist's eyes glowing in the dark room, fixed upon her. When the man was over with his lust, he simply rested on his back for a while, alongside the terrified Emilia. Then, he left the room without a word, leaving the young woman naked, disheveled and laying rigid with horror and pain on the bed. The handsome Iago did not show up for the whole night, apparently on duty. When, in the morning, he found his wife shocked and in tears, he just told her to relax and to keep absolutely quiet about what had happened that night. It was actually a honour for both of them, he said to a nearly unbelieving Emilia, if the captain, Don Metello himself, had shown a certain interest in her. It would be good for his career.

• **manly figure** = persona maschile • **ghastly** = sinistro, spaventoso (da *ghost* = spettro) • **frenzied** = frenetica, furibonda • **grasped her forcibly** = l'afferrò con forza • **a nasty affair** = una brutta faccenda • **rabidly** = rabbiosamente • **tore** = entrò a forza (lett. lacerò – *to tear* = strappare) • **taut** = rigido, teso • **stiffened** = irrigidito • **outrage** = violenza. oltraggio • **ripping pain** = dolore lacerante • **lust** = piacere (lett. = libidine) • **disheveled** = scarmigliata •

The same morning, totally ignoring her husband's advice, a still shocked Emilia run straight to the apartments of her friend Dedé and through flowing tears told her everything. At first, Dedé could not believe such a peculiar tale. Why on earth her would dear Othello do such a beastly thing, and especially to her best friend ? Men are men, and once in a while they feel the urge to go spreading their seed on odd places at odd times. But why rape the only innocent woman in the castle ? He could take any woman from nearby villages or go sailing and find as much female flesh as to make his heart content. Then she had to face the evidence and her rage was immense. She became a tigress, not just for the bodily outrage at this young friend of hers, but also for the unrequested insult to her own dignity as wife and woman. She had genuinely done everything in her power for her husband, to forward his career, to make him happy, to help him to fulfill himself. She was now being repaid with indignity and humiliation. Desiderata Brabanzi was surely not a woman to be slighted with impunity, not even by the best lover she ever had. Nevertheless, she restrained her fretting anger in order to soothe and comfort the distraught Emilia still desperately sobbing in her lap. She took the young woman in her arms and with sweet words and tender kisses wiped away her tears. Little by little, she was able to lessen the strain, lovingly cradling the girl like a daughter, until Emilia stopped crying and calmed herself enough to be taken to Dedé's bedroom. Here, she was made to lay, was washed, massaged and refreshed with some cooled wine. After a while, exhausted by the shocking trial of the previous night, the poor girl fell asleep.

• **flowing tears** = un torrente di lacrime (lett. lacrime fluenti - *to flow* = scorrere) • **such a peculiar tale** = una storia così singolare • **why on earth** = come mai • **beastly** = bestiale • **to go spreading their seed** = andare a spargere il proprio seme • **to make his heart content** = per soddisfarsi del tutto (lett. per far contento il suo cuore) • **a tigress** = una tigre (in inglese si distingue il maschio, *tiger*, dalla femmina, *tigress*) • **unrequested** = gratuito, senza motivo • **slighted with impunity** = offesa impunemente • **fretting** = invadente (*to fret* = agitarsi, mordere il freno) • **to soothe** = calmare • **distraught** = sconvolta • **cradling** = cullare (*cradle* = culla) • **was made to lay** = venne fatta distendere •

Dedé left a decrepit but trusty maid with her and went out. She sent a boy to look around the castle for Don Metello, with the order to bring him back immediately. But the commandant had gone out fishing on a boat. Nobody

knew where he had sailed and Dedé had to wait until the evening. When he came back at dinner time, she met him behind close doors, to avoid scandals. Swiftly, with a stony voice, Dedé cut him to pieces while looking straight in his face with eyes like steel chisels. Metello tried to answer but was reduced to silence by the leveled white fury of that drake of a wife. Soon he was left gasping for words. Then Metello crumbled, suddenly. He had realized, in a flash, that she was stronger than him - and that he could not risk losing her and all which went with her. A gaping sensation of insufferable void spread over the bottom of his soul. His deep-rooted insecurity, plus an ingrained disposition for violent emotions, perhaps inherited with his Moorish blood, played a bad trick on him, undercutting all his defenses, abruptly. He was left hopeless and shattered. The big man forfeited his pride and self-respect and fell down, crying out for Dedé not to leave him, to forgive him, recognizing his blunder. Moaning and crawling on his knees, he tried to take her hand, asking to be reprieved, promising to do everything she wanted, genuinely distressed and frantic with fear.

• **a decrepit but trusty maid** = una vecchia serva decrepita ma fidata • **a stony voice** = a voce dura (lett. voce di pietra) • **cut him to pieces** = lo ridusse a uno straccio (lett. lo tagliò a pezzi) • **steel chisels** = punteruoli d'acciaio • **leveled white fury** = furia rabbiosa (lett. bianca di rabbia) spianata (contro di lui) • **that drake of a wife** = quel demonio (lett. dragonessa) di moglie • **gasping for words** = cercando le parole (*to gasp* = boccheggiare) • **crumbled** = cadde a pezzi (*to crumble* = sbriciolare) • **a gaping sensation** = una vertiginosa sensazione di vuoto (*gap* = buco, voragine) • **the bottom of his soul** = nel profondo del suo essere (lett. al fondo della sua anima) • **ingrained** = radicata • **abruptly** = bruscamente, improvvisamente • **forfeited** = perse (*to forfeit* = perdere, lasciare) • **moaning** = gemendo • **crawling oh his knees** = strisciando sulle ginocchia • **asking to be reprieved** = chiedendo che gli concedesse tregua (lett. dilazione) •

The woman was taken by surprise. Never would she have thought that this seemingly proud and strong man of hers could break so suddenly and render himself so abject, so desperate, so dependent on her. But Dedé has always been used to taking care of the men of her family, as they often ended in tight corners or in embarrassing situations and wrung their hands in despair. Her nature reacted instinctively, therefore, and here too, with a unenthusiastic sigh, she relented. In her mind Dedé was silently shouting to herself that she was going to make a mistake; nevertheless, she could not avoid trying to calm first, and then to sooth this wreck of a husband. Eventually, there was a reconciliation. Metello promised, Dedé qualified a lot and laid out specific conditions, which were eagerly accepted. Then Metello had to go to the other chamber and ask a rather frightened Emilia for forgiveness, which he did graciously, even with some charm. Iago too was called and severely rebuked. Compunctiously, he had to go through the formal display of contrition and