

Dag Gadòl

He once lived on a small island in the Lagoon, one of the furthest in the North-East, it is not exactly known which one. An unhappy man who could no longer make love because he was aging. And when, using some stratagem, he still succeeded, his room was populated with ghosts. Figures without body that silently took place around the bed and did not leave him alone. The women who occasionally stayed with him, whether a new lover or the wife of the supervisor of the fishing zone, who agreed to reach the island and climb the stairs to his room looking for adventures. They did not suspect anything, nor could they know what was happening in his mind. In the same way, they knew nothing of his past loves: greedy passions, which quickly ignited and for which he quickly lost interest. So, once love ended, the man watched his woman walking away, as one with his gaze follows a cloud crossing the horizon, that an instant later is already far away and forgotten. The ghosts around his bed watched mute, without a gesture, side by side, ignoring each other; at most, observing the scene with curiosity or, when the man's lust reached its climax, they turned their looks away for decency.

It occurred that they appeared, to tell the truth this happened very rarely, on summer afternoons when, away from prying eyes, the man walked naked on the loggia of his decayed palace to enjoy the breeze of the Lagoon; or also, on hot days while he was watching the fish jumping out of the water, spellbound as when he was a child. In that case the ghosts materialized one at the time, silhouetted against the light of the Lagoon, between the squared columns supporting the architrave of the roof, while the notes of Vivaldi's concert in C major for mandolin and orchestra, his favourite, twirled in the sirocco. The man let the heat of the stones warm his skin, no longer young, and every drop of sweat from his forehead or his armpits was the memory of quite other humours spent in youth.

He did not fear his ghosts, indeed he recognized them one by one, called them by name, and worried if they were late in appearing, afraid that he would never see them again. Because those were the ghosts of all the women he possessed in his life; shadows coming from youth, mature age and also from the most recent years of the first old age. A memory of what had been and would not be any more.

Over the years, those who sailed that north-east corner of the Lagoon, mostly boatmen or saltmarsh hunters coming back from the hunt with preys in the game bag, had the idea that the island was uninhabited and populated by spirits. And he let them believe so, jealous as he was of his loneliness and his world.

He had inherited the palace on the island from a long-dead brother of his father who, even though he met him when he was a child, he did not remember. A man who was shy, as said by the local people, always accurate in counting the catch and particularly strict with the inhabitants of the fishing zone, to whom he unfairly charged the costs of the maintenance of the *seragia* and the banks. Even the island belonged to him and once housed, in addition to some servants, a couple of fisherman families; not even twenty people who then went away, once the aged were dead. Since then, the tides had weakened the shores and corroded the banks so that the perimeter of the island was much diminished and the water, year after year, started to cover more land. The palace, originally too pretentious in its Venetian style, had been built by a remote ancestor of the uncle, perhaps a sailor who had travelled the last routes to Cyprus, Heraklion and Morea at the end of the Serenissima Republic. Then, over the past two centuries, large areas of the house had been closed and, after having somehow bolted somehow doors and windows, they were abandoned to dust, spiders and rats. And it was perhaps there, in those closed rooms where the sun filtered through the cracks of the shutters, that the ghosts of his lovers took shelter when Bora wind blew.