Lunches and Banquets for the Honeymoon Trip to Cervia

Even during the dinner (in my village they called the midday meal lunch, and the one in the evening dinner), he didn’t do anything but joke with my brothers. (…)

“Now we are going to eat and you’ll get warmer,” he started again, remissive. “Marisa’s husband gave me a homemade bread and a salami: as a wedding gift, it is not bad. We still have some chicken and the wine. Now, I’ll set the table.”

He knew the house inside out: it had previously been cleaned and supplied with necessary things by Marisa. But the most needed thing, when the light faded, was not to be found. The oil lamp was empty, and there were no candles. (…).

The words whispered by my friend when he stuck his face out of the door didn’t unsettle that feeling of charm; instead, they boosted it:

“Do you want Marisa to bring you some coffee? She has already bought bread, a hen, fish, fruit and vegetables as well.” More than welcome, then, this Marisa, who has apparently brought, together with the horn of plenty, also the gift of peace and serenity. (…)
Already knowing that that thing would go on and on, I pretended I wasn’t interested anymore, until the moment we were sitting at the table and he confirmed the news, already announced by the way by Marisa, of a big banquet that the authorities and the notables of the area – and also peasants – want to offer to me and him.

“To me too? What have I got to do?”

“Here you represent the perfect person: it is therefore necessary to accept the invitation.”

“We’ll accept.” (…)

Great preparations were being made: it had to be one of those classical region banquets: a region that was popular for its impressive and gourmand eaters. The list of the courses was already known, and I had a stomachache just at the thought of it. (…)

“Oh, in case of disasters happening, they will be of a different sort, and anyway, at the end of the banquet. You’ll see,” she announced with malice. “First of all, there are going to be fifty wine bottles for the meal, thirty bottles of old wine, twenty for the sparkling wine. Then there will be a hundred chickens, half a quintal of fish, one dairy heifer, five trifles.” In the meanwhile (…)

Also, the person at my left was starting to give signs of taking part in common life. Having eaten the fourth dish, which was very fine fried fish, he had stopped in his tracks: like a person who reaches his goal and isn’t willing to move.

“Mr. Fanti, won’t you take some roast meat?”

“No, thanks, it’s enough.”
“Look, it’s pheasant. (…) The one who is never satisfied is the person at my right.”

“Pheasant? They stuck a tail on it, but it is an old rooster from the henhouse. Oh, Fanti, if you want to report to your eminent mister brother-in-law, please, report to him.”

The blind man keeps rummaging on his teeth and doesn’t answer.

“And this salad? With all the hectares of our vegetable gardens, grown with lettuces, you directly picked up the radishes. Pay attention, ma’am; if a stem goes into your throat, there’s a danger of choking.” (…)

The pop of champagne bottles was accompanied by new applause: it seemed to be a joyful country (…) and all of a sudden, after drinking my glass of champagne, I felt like I was being grabbed by Gabriele’s hands again. It was his memory coming back.

“After all, we have been at the table for two hours already,” he started again, with his nice shining smile “I think it is enough. You must be tired.”

(from the novel Il paese del vento, 1931)

A good example of descriptive scenes, the preparation and the consummation of food, is the popular novel The Town of the Wind, set in Cervia, one of the very few in the first person, partially autobiographical, since it uses a long flashback to tell not just the honeymoon trip from the island to the town of the wind, that is, Cervia, on the Romagna coast, but also the youthful love of the first person
protagonist for Gabriele, her brother’s friend, who has come to her parents’ house and been hosted there. Probably Gabriele hides the blonde journalist Stanis Manca, Duke of the Asinara, with whom the young writer fell in love and who made her suffer so much after describing her as a dwarf in his article!

Perhaps, to punish him for that mocking refusal, Grazia Deledda, now mature, makes him narratively expiate a terrible penalty, since Gabriele, seen by the protagonist in the seaside town, dies there of an incurable illness, probably tuberculosis.

In other flashback sequences, the first person narrator, a young bride on her honeymoon following her husband, a ministry official, also reminds us of the famous scene of Deledda’s life, when, during a society game in Sardinia, she invited the young continental official to a love declaration, and she then married him.

Through the description of food, there is in this novel a complete awareness of the differences between the island and the continent habits, starting with the different ways they describe lunch and dinner.

The description of the many courses of meat and fish during the banquet offered for the married couple occupies the final part of the novel with great importance, and it’s not by chance that, amidst the jubilation of food and wine, the protagonist has confused thoughts towards Gabriele, who right in that moment was dying, alone, in the house rented near the sea. He died the previous night, at ten o’clock. (…) “You remember, lady, how yesterday I was feeling that
something bad was going to happen in my house? This is why I left the table, but when my wife and I arrived home, the unhappy man had already gone.”