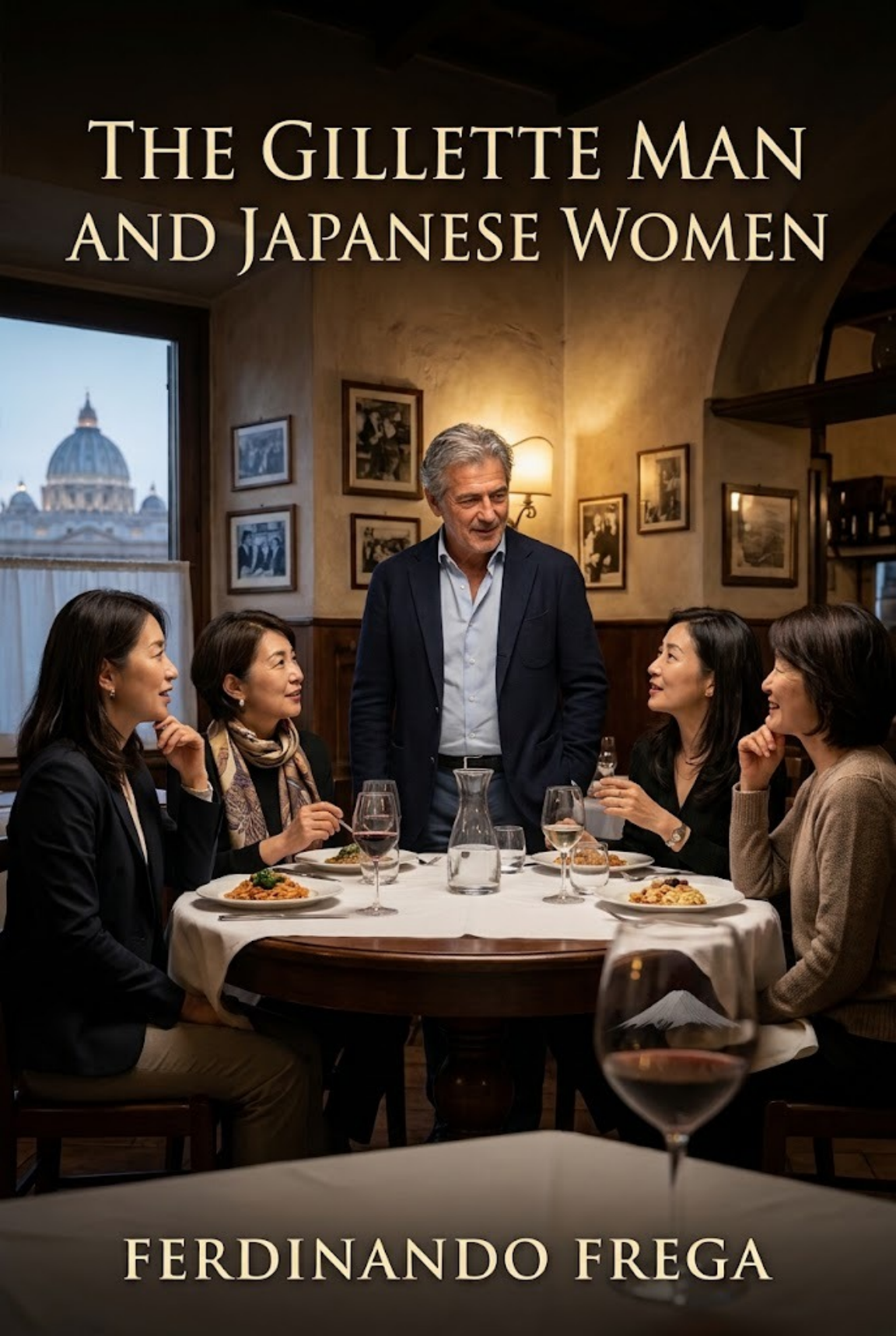
The Gillette Man and Japanese Women



FERDINANDO FREGA

THE GILLETTE MAN AND JAPANESE WOMEN

I had just arrived in Rome and, as always, I paid a visit to St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. It was my only tribute to my first Gillette colleague, the one who worked the Galilee territory with a team of twelve who followed him everywhere. The numbers he produced were such that, two thousand years later, not even Wall Street manages to put him on its listings.

I was walking down the corridor that leads to the main entrance, it was eleven in the morning, when a group of people caught my attention with one sentence: HELP ME, PLEASE?

Just enough time to work out whether the call for help was meant for me, and as I turned I met the eyes of six women with typically Asian features: smiling straight away, sunny, beautiful, kind, well-mannered, elegant. I understood at once that they were not Chinese women, the Neapolitans with almond eyes. And indeed, when I asked WHERE ARE YOU FROM, they all answered together: I come from Japan. Women and daughters of the Rising Sun:

MY JAPAN.

I smile and introduce myself right away, dusting off an English I haven't used in a while: NICE TO MEET YOU, MY NAME IS FREGA. And they answer warmly, in perfect sync, in chorus, calling me… FREGA SUN.

Damn. I haven't even spoken yet and they are already calling me the sun. So here comes my question: why do you call me sun? They burst out laughing like crazy to explain that their SUN is not the sun but SAN, their finest form of respect towards a person. They were speaking in code.

So I put myself in the middle and explained what SAN means in Italian: it is the word we give to Catholic saints, those who have been sanctified by Mother Church and have passed on to a better life. And I still had no right to the title, only because I was still alive.

Eh. All of them laughing like crazy.

I didn't know what else to do or say. Their HELP ME PLEASE from before had vanished, but I was inside a privileged place and I would never have left it for anything in the world: the minds of women.

The eldest took me by the arm, kept smiling at me, and invited me to follow her and the others. We made our way towards the exit. I thought it was another one of my Galilean colleague's jokes. But where were we going?

A few streets, a few side alleys, and we arrive at a Roman trattoria, where they invite me to lunch. I am surprised and struck, but all this happens for one reason only: Japanese women have radar, like all the women in the world, but theirs has been tuned differently by the culture of the Samurai, where before every life they put the code. Yes, you heard right. We are in Rome, Italy, but inside that trattoria they were telling me: WELCOME TO JAPAN.

We sit at a strictly round table. We all look each other in the face. It is not the usual shape of table for an Italian inn, but maybe they chose it for exactly that reason.

They ask how old I am, what I do for a living, whether I am Italian, whether I am married, whether I have children. And I answer with a question: is this how the police in Japan

interrogate thieves?

Another roar of laughter. But they are curious, they want to know, and they want to take without asking: they are the women of the world.

I tell them I am a cognitive thief. In Italy that role goes to the ones we call rubacuori, heart thieves, who are not always the classic Latin lovers. Those were fine in the fifties; now they have expired, like yogurt.

A roar of laughter, but I can't tell whether they are laughing at the jokes, at my posture, or whether it is just courtesy. Then the eldest of the group, almost as if to apologise, explains their behaviour and gives me a glimpse of Japanese culture, and right there I understand that I am inside one of the homes I have frequented in my life.

She begins by saying that they are not six silly geese who squawk before getting into the water: the smile is pleasure, joy, respect, and not just an emotional trait.

They don't give an inch in wanting answers to their questions, so I tell them that I am sixty-one, that I am married, that I have three children, and that I have an agreement with my wife dating back to 1993 that allows me to get engaged anywhere in the world on one condition only: that it be on a fixed-term contract, and without giving children to anyone.

I thought the smiles would light up again, but as if by magic they vanish, and the serious version arrives on every face, to the point that I wonder where I went wrong.

The eldest of the group leans closer and promptly tells me that they have been in Italy for thirty days and have met many

people, but that no one has ever behaved with this intellectual honesty. In short: a compliment.

I have never had a moment of losing my way or a conflict with my own personality, nor an ego to answer to. But I knew that in that precise moment I was cognitively on top of Mount Fuji, only on the wrong side, inside a Roman trattoria.

My quick reflection has not even faded when the youngest turns to me and says: Mr. Frega Fuji. And me: minchiaaaaa.

I look for her inside her gaze, inside her eyes, and I tell her tenderly: sweetheart, thank you for the Fuji, but now I have to go, the time has passed. Before I do, though, I place my gillettenarrative.com non-business cards on the table, one for each of them.

They are struck. They know that site. All of Japan knows it; they were the first in the world to discover it. Maybe only now do I understand the reason.

The codes my father left me: I never had the chance to ask him whether he had ever been to Japan, but of one thing I am certain. The six women decoded them, and in silence they gave their verdict.

I leave. I put some money on the table for their lunch, and I see them all crying together. I think they are offended because I didn't get engaged to any of them. Instead, they all wave goodbye in chorus, saying:

ciao gillettenarrative

Ferdinando

He doesn't sell anymore. He tells.

And he does it for free, for the women who truly see him —

to whom he had never dedicated anything.

Honor to the women of the world.

A man's success has always and only passed through their arms.