



# Shipwrights

*The Review of De-centered English*

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## **Signor Trigu's Car**

By Riccardo Carta

I couldn't sleep that night. I tossed and turned in bed a thousand times, only getting more anxious. It was probably the hottest night I had ever experienced. There were no windows in the house, as it was still under construction. No plaster, nothing but four walls and a roof, and yet there wasn't a breath of air. I was sweating buckets. I was thirsty but I had no water left. I turned the mattress, which was soaking wet with no bed sheet, and tried to fall asleep. I heard the drone of the crickets. Signor Piero Trigu's dog barked in protest at the heat. The strong smell of the cement bags, lying close to what I called a bed, made me start to sneeze repeatedly. I moved the cement bags and got back into bed: it was still soaking wet. The east wind carried the scent of the desert. I wondered: if it was this hot in the middle of the night, how hot was it going to be during the day, when I was supposed to be working on top of my roof? I checked my watch. Four o'clock. Two-and-a-half hours to go before I would have to work like hell. My wife and kids had to have a house before autumn came.

Strangely, the thought of rushing the work made me fall asleep. I dreamt. Suddenly I was awake again. BANG, BANG, BANG. A constant noise was coming from Signor Trigu's house. I checked the clock: five o'clock. I had slept less than an hour. The banging made sleep impossible. Next I heard Signor Trigu swearing in Sardinian, which was both annoying and strange. "*Porcu mundu vigliaccu!*" he said, without caring who heard him. Signor Trigu rarely spoke Sardinian unless he was swearing. He never allowed his kids to speak Sardinian either, as he believed it was the language of the ignorant, of tricksters,

charlatans, and the poor. But sometimes he couldn't hold it in, and when he lost his temper he swore in Sardinian. When Signor Trigu and I had worked together as miners, he used to swear all the time in Sardinian and he was well-known for it. Now, as soon as the swearing stopped, the banging started again. Then the rooster started to crow in the courtyard. It was too much.

I got up and I put on my working clothes from the day before. I went downstairs and walked towards Signor Trigu's house, which faced mine, while the hammering grew louder and louder. On his door I found a bow made of pink ribbon, like the ones that people use to announce the arrival of a new baby in the family. I was sure that none of Signor Trigu's daughters was expecting a baby. There was a note below. I couldn't believe what I read: *We are proud to announce to you all the arrival of our new Ford Escort 1100cc (53cv) De Luxe. June 8, 1971.* He will never change, I thought. Since he started working at the post office, Signor Trigu was known in town as a colossal show off. Outraged, I knocked on the door with fury, and in a flash Signora Rosanna, Signor Trigu's wife, opened the door, cheerful and chirpy as I'd never seen her. She was wearing a white dressing robe and her head was covered with curlers.

"Good morning Franzischeddu. What good wind brings you here so early in the morning?"

"No good wind, unfortunately. I've come to tell your husband that it's time for sleeping!"

"Don't you understand? It's a big day for us. Don't you feel the scent of Ford? I feel it already," she answered, her face sporting her biggest smile.

Everybody in town knew that Signor Trigu was supposed to get a new car: a Ford Escort 1.1 De Luxe. He had been telling us about it for months.

"No, I honestly don't, Signora," I answered. "Please let me talk to Signor Trigu," I added.

"Of course, come along!"

She showed me to the garden and there he was, Signor Trigu, bent over with a hammer in one hand and a bunch of nails in the other, nailing together two long planks to make a table. On one side there was a bench already constructed,

while on the other, there was a plank to make another bench. It looked like he was preparing for a big dinner.

“Piero, Franzischeddu wants to talk to you,” said Signora Rosanna.

“Who is it?” Signor Trigu shouted, turning his face to us while still hammering. I was about to tell him why I was there but I was soon interrupted by Signor Trigu’s Sardinian curses. He had hit his finger with the hammer by mistake.

“*Porcu mundu vigliaccu e maladdittu Gesu Cristu e tottusu is santusu.*”

“It’s the second time I hit my finger today,” he shouted.

“Signor Trigu,” I said, “it’s five o’clock in the morning, and you are disturbing the entire neighbourhood. It’s time for sleep!” I shouted.

“Don’t you feel it? Don’t you feel this scent of Ford?”

Please, not again. “I don’t, Signor Trigu. I only hear a racket coming from your garden and I can’t sleep. I beg you to stop and let us get some rest.”

“Jealousy brings you here, nothing else. It’s not my fault if I can afford a Ford Escort 1100cc, 53cv, *De Luxe*, and you can only afford a little Fiat 500!” he shouted rudely.

“God save us from the poor man who becomes rich,” my father always said. He was right.

I left without reply. I went back home and immediately started to mix cement with gravel and sand to make concrete. I had not slept at all, but I too started to work. I was supposed to raise the walls for the bathroom before the morning was out. As if that wasn’t enough, I was also supposed to put on the roofing tiles. I had to carry them upstairs, package by package. My wife, living with her parents and taking care of the kids, could not help me, and I didn’t have enough money to pay somebody else. So there I was, all by myself.

I was tired, but I got on with the job and by eleven o’clock I had raised the four walls of the bathroom. Without even thinking about a break, I carried the first of the roofing tiles upstairs. On the roof I could see the nearby mountains of Pantaleo, their forests covered in dust. In the distance, the stony dry peak of Monte Arcosu appeared. It hadn’t rained for months. The east wind was now blowing stronger, carrying a feeling of warmth and the humid scent of the sea. I

could see everything that was going on next door, all the moving and the people who came bringing food for the big dinner at Signor Trigu's.

First came Giovanni Salaris, the greengrocer, known as the Tuesday man, because he came every Tuesday with his van to sell fruits and vegetables house by house. He unloaded three cases of peaches, two big watermelons, one large box of bright red tomatoes, four melons, and countless other fruits and vegetables. I could hear Signor Trigu talking about his Ford constantly: "Can't you feel it? Can't you feel this scent of Ford, Giovanni? This afternoon you will see my spectacular Ford Escort 1.1 De Luxe." Signor Trigu was euphorically happy. Whenever he heard the noise of a car approaching he would shout, "Everybody quiet! I feel a scent of Ford." When the car passed he would say, "Oh, forgive me, it was only a little Fiat 500."

The fishmonger came, bringing two huge lobsters and the biggest swordfish I had ever seen. Signor Trigu helped with the unloading and took a case of king prawns, but as soon as he had the case in his hands he tripped and dropped all the king prawns on the ground. "*Gesu' Cristu disgraziau e impestau!*" Once the swearing was over Signor Trigu recovered, saying loudly to the fishmonger as if to an audience, "We don't mind paying for another one. Don't you think we have enough money?" Another car approached. "It was only a small Fiat 500," said Signor Trigu after the car had passed. Of course it was a Fiat 500. Everyone in town who owned a car had a Fiat 500, or else a Fiat 600. Only the town mayor and the doctor owned a Ford, while the pharmacist had an Opel Kadett.

Outside the bells chimed cheerfully, and the wind from the east, *bentu 'e soi*, spread the metallic sound around the village of Tegula. Emiliu Pinna, the swineherd, arrived with two little pigs for the slaughter to feed Signor Trigu's family that evening.

"Welcome, Emiliu" Signor Trigu said, beaming. At the same time I heard another car coming, and of course Signor Trigu piped up, "Everybody quiet! I feel a scent of Ford." The car passed. It wasn't a Ford. "Oh, I was wrong. It was only a little rustic Fiat 500." I saw them all laughing; Signora Rosanna, Signor Trigu,

their son Paoletto and their daughters Cicitta and Arega, had all just arrived to help prepare for the big night.

Around one o'clock in the afternoon, Signor Trigu set out for Cagliari, the beautiful capital of Sardinia, to fetch his Ford Escort. "Finally," I thought. I could now work in peace without hearing Signor Trigu talking about scents of Ford. But I was wrong. The whole Trigu family was now on the side of the road waiting for the return of Signor Trigu, intoning "I feel it, I feel it.... Oh, it was only a simple little Fiat 500." They had also called Antoni Muscas, the photographer, best known in Tegula as Antoni Chicchiu (Antoni the stutterer). I couldn't bear it. Although I still had a lot to do, I decided to go to the bar and have a beer in peace. I started the engine of my 500 and set off for the bar. I heard the Trigus laughing and making comments about my "little" and "rustic" Fiat 500.

"Peace," I thought. Having a cold beer, playing cards with my friends, but most of all, not hearing the Trigus for a while, was exactly what I needed. Between one beer and another I realized that two hours had passed and I felt guilty for having missed so much work time. I drove back home and while approaching my house I saw the *famiglia* Trigu, still waiting for their hero to come back with the Ford. At the same time a car behind me flashed its lights, honked and indicated to overtake. I looked in the rear-view mirror, and there he was: Signor Trigu in his white Ford Escort 1.1 De Luxe. In front of me, his family was jumping with joy and the photographer was snapping picture after picture. Signor Trigu started to pull out. Once he was by my side he gave me such a triumphant smile that I could see his teeth shining. But while smiling at me he didn't see the ditch. Instinctively, I accelerated. I saw him grapple with the gears, trying to get some more speed. But Signor Trigu and his white Ford Escort suddenly disappeared from my side. I checked the rear-view mirror and watched as Signor Trigu's Ford crashed violently into the ditch. Reappearing from a cloud of dust, his car bounced back onto the road and then rolled once, twice, three times, finally stopping ten meters away from the *famiglia* Trigu. The photographer stopped taking pictures and the smiles on the faces of the Trigus were gone. Signor Trigu got out of the car without a scratch and without any swearing.

I went back to work. It was finally calm and quiet. The wind had changed and was now blowing from the north, bringing with it the freshness of the mountains. The scent of Ford was now gone. All that was left was a scent of steel.