

*The committee went back to the meeting room, while for the rest of the participants, a coffee break started in the lobby. Laura greeted her mother, her friends, her dear colleague Giorgio from Piacenza.*

*“They will challenge you for sure, but your research is so great and your topic is so innovative, that I am sure you will get a good result...”*

*“Well, we shall see, Giorgio, you see only the topic, the quality of the work behind it, but in our country, nowadays these are the issues that matter the least, unfortunately...”*

*Loyalty to the establishment and the ideology is what counts. It’s like this even in the temple of freedom of thought, behind university walls.*

*I hope nevertheless that it will not be a purely political decision, but a mostly academic one, then that will be good...” said Laura.*

*“Don’t worry, you have done your best, it was really creative, you took the risk to be innovative going with the winds of change in interpreting certain intriguing and delicate arguments, and the world goes forward thanks to people taking such risks, pointing out injustice, and not thanks to people who repeat what has already been said ...”*

*Laura was to turn towards the corner, where she exchanged a glance with Anne, who was going to the lobby for a coffee. Laura went to say hello to her in the bar, where she joined them for a coffee. Anne presented first her husband, a man in his forties, who looked however some ten years older than his age. Laura was wondering why... She noticed that Anna was embarrassed when presenting him.*

*“I am John, Anne’s husband among so many intelligent women, just a proud working-class man...”*

*They are my kids, I am the head of the local soccer team, enough about me, nice to see you! He is Matthew, my talented boy he is the top player in the team now, I am very proud of him, he is just like his father in everything... Matthew the younger child was smiling, he seemed to be a very lively, open boy with beautiful eyes just as her mothers’. In contrast to John’s description, he did not really show any similarities with his father’s looks or character.*

*“Great, and congratulations that you survived these two hours listening to all these people talking about silly things for your ears.” Laura joked with the boy who continued smiling at her while eating a piece of sacher cake and sipping a glass of ice tea.*

*“Anne already told me a lot of nice things about you, you must be a really original and good person” continued John with a flirting glance in his eyes.*

*“Well, it is kind of you, hope you will not be disappointed over time with me! You are welcome at the reception we hold nearby in the Italian restaurant. There’ll be some great food and sparkling wine from my other, Italian homeland. You must come over and taste them even if we cry after the judgement of the committee, we celebrate the end of these long years of research.”*

*“It is kind of you, we have to go back home which is a long way, but we will come for sure for an hour or so. Don’t worry, I am sure you will succeed, it is a fantastic thesis with lots of revolutionary ideas.”*

*“Thanks, I am sure it is also thanks to my therapies...”*

*Matthew was sticking to his father, and Nora apparently was leaning more on her mother. The teenage girl, Nora was more shy, and serious, as so often with girls who are still kids wishing to seem adults. She gave the impression of guarding her mother. She vigilantly observed her interaction with Laura.*

*Still she wondered who generally had the last word at home. It was not at all clear for her, in spite of the huge gap in culture, intelligence and style that was obvious at first sight between John and Anne.*

*In the meantime, one of the committee members had taken the microphone inviting all participants to come back into the hall.*

*Everyone took his seat, and those who had to stand before as there hadn’t been enough seats, kept standing. A silence full of tension preceded the opponents’ speeches, then it was time for the final verdict.*

*We can move forward to the opponents’ time, later on the question time for the public.*

*“Please Ms Kiss, start your speech as the first opponent.”*

*Ms Kiss, a slim, young professor wearing glasses, the classical researcher’s figure who spends her life in libraries and archives in her late thirties, who studied for a long time in Belgium and Germany, a great international expert on sixteenth-century Europe, took the microphone.*

*“I will be short. I gave the maximum point to this thesis, I liked every part of it. I could go into details on the reasons behind my decision, but I would not like to steal your time, other opponents will do so, I am sure.*

*This thesis is something new, creative, both in terms of methodology and content. It is original, integrating other social sciences in a concise way, connecting history and psychology, and why not also aspects that we consider for now as out of science. I refer to the implementation of the researcher’s subconscious, dreams in the research work, I reckon it is part of our thinking too that we all incorporate in our reality in one way or another. Dreams in the end are just processed thoughts, aren’t they?*

*This thesis is revolutionary, with important messages for our times and for the future generations, especially for women... After all, this is the sense of historical research, to create a bridge, a continuity between centuries, to give an insight into the ancient world and integrate them into contemporary, new values.*

*It is not always the new and contemporary that represents progress and innovation, and that is true not only in social sciences but in many other areas, just for example agriculture and sustainability. By doing such a synthesis, this thesis demonstrated that Margaret’s ideas, lifestyle, her way of thinking about the role of women both in family and power and her way of governing are revolutionary not only for her time but also for us in the present, an important inheritance also for the future. This is more than achieved in this thesis, congratulations, I have no questions for the candidate.”*

*Public applause continued long after Ms Kiss’ short but rather strong supporting speech that was shared by the audience.*

*“Thank you, Ms Kiss, for your opinion.*

*Let me ask Ms Bitter and Mr Loyal as the other two opponents to share their opinion with us. Ms Bitter, please...”*

*“Ladies and gentlemen, as a woman, I am supposed to welcome and support this thesis, but as a historian, I will unfortunately not be able to do so. I find this thesis missing the context, the historical framework. It seems based mainly on the candidate’s personal impressions, dreams that I consider fiction and not scholarship, besides of course the thorough research that I do not doubt has been done even to reach these interesting new conclusions. However, when a thesis lacks coherence in methodology*

*and involves personal impressions, such as dreams that are not held to belong to the set of reliable resources, I cannot support her thesis. This is despite it being clearly innovative from social-science, and gender perspectives. I have only one question to the candidate: Why did you choose such a big challenge and risk for yourself, by focusing on Margaret's private life, personal aspects such as the sexual fluidity of a historic character that we know so little of from the agreed evidence? What has this got to do with a history thesis? I will not change my opinion, but maybe the public will understand better why we see this as so controversial in the committee."*

*Laura took the floor:*

*"As I said in my introduction, I described the character of Margaret based on reliable historical resources in my thesis, shared by all of the professors in this room. Dreams as Ms Kiss said before are part of our thinking in so far as we interpret them and integrate them in our existence as well.*

*As far as methodology is concerned: Dreams have been processed and filtered by me in a controlled way from a historian's perspective, for the purposes of this thesis.*

*Conclusions related to this filtering contributed to the opinions and messages that other social sciences could refer to in the future, but involving my curious dream journey with Margaret did not result in altering any historical fact.*

*Dreams never substituted for historical facts, where they were unknown, they remained so.*

*I am convinced that without a better understanding of her personal motivations, it is not possible to understand her actions, choices or certain compromises. Without examining the whole picture, just as a good medical doctor tries to understand his patient's body and soul together, in order to find the best therapy, when understanding a historic personality, and what it means for us now, mere historical facts remain empty disconnected episodes without putting them into her personal context. If we want to preserve her memory the way she deserves and not just by naming a street after her here and there (in Piacenza this has not yet been done) but also to include her in the collective memory and in education, we need to give a full picture. A full picture not only in terms of documenting that she fulfilled a role she had not chosen in that given time under given circumstances but to demonstrate how under difficult circumstances a woman can be innovative in her thinking and acting.*

*Her sexual fluidity, which is probably the hottest topic for my colleagues in the thesis is much more sustained in literature, than it is contested by other valid pieces of evidence. This aspect obviously for the time being has not been elaborated yet enough in her life, partly because of the lack of direct evidence from private correspondence with her presumed lover, the beautiful poet Forteguerri from Siena...*