

THE COURTESAN



Rainer Maria Rilke

translated by James Lasdun

Venice; alchemical daylight
Touches my hair: a ravel of sunstruck gold.
My eyebrows arch like her bridges; look:
Under their angled shadows runs a cold

Glitter of my eyes; canals
Quietly trafficking while the sea
Ebbs and surges inside them, a brimming
Blue-green dilation... Whoever looks at me

Envies my lapdog on whose pampered coat,
Distractedly, I sometimes rest a hand;
Jewelled, invulnerable, white as my own throat...

Nighttime finds my chambers manned
By our illustrious families' cherished youth,
Who fall as if by poison at my mouth.