

"Why?" Garcia had nothing to do with politics.

"I don't know," he said. "They arrest everybody who doesn't think the way they do." He lowered his voice. "They got Gris."

I began to tremble. "When?"

"This morning. He messed it up. He left his cousin's on Tuesday because they had an argument. There were plenty of people to hide him but he didn't want to owe anything to anybody. He said, 'I'd go hide in Ibbieta's place, but they got him, so I'll go hide in the cemetery.'"

"In the cemetery?"

"Yes. What a fool. Of course they went by there this morning, that was sure to happen. They found him in the gravediggers' shack. He shot at them and they got him."

"In the cemetery!"

Everything began to spin and I found myself sitting on the ground: I laughed so hard I cried.

Alberto Moravia

## BITTER HONEYMOON

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They had chosen Anacapri for their honeymoon because Giacomo had been there a few months before and wanted to go back, taking his bride with him. His previous visit had been in the spring, and he remembered the clear, crisp air and the flowers alive with the hum of thousands of insects in the golden glow of the sun. But this time, immediately upon their arrival, everything seemed very different. The sultry dog-days of mid-August were upon them and steaming humidity overclouded the sky. Even on the heights of Anacapri, there was no trace of the crisp air, of flowers or the violet sea whose praises Giacomo had sung. The paths winding through the fields were covered with a layer of yellow dust, accumulated in the course of four months without rain, in which even gliding lizards left traces of their passage. Long before autumn was due, the leaves had begun to turn red and brown, and occasional whole trees had withered away for lack of water. Dust particles filled the motionless air and made the nostrils quiver, and the odors of meadows and sea had given way to those of scorched stones and dried dung. The water, which in the spring had taken its color from what seemed to be banks of violets floating just below the surface, was now a gray mass reflecting the melancholy, dazzling light brought by the *scirocco* which infested the sky.

"I don't think it's the least bit beautiful," Simona said on the day after their arrival, as they started along the path to the lighthouse. "I don't like it—no, not at all."

Giacomo, following several steps behind, did not answer. She

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had spoken in this plaintive and discontented tone of voice ever since they had emerged from their civil marriage in Rome, and he suspected that her prolonged ill-humor mingled with an apparent physical repulsion, was not connected so much with the place as with his own person. She was complaining about Anacapri because she was not aware that her fundamental dissatisfaction was with her husband. Theirs was a love match to be sure, but one based rather on the will to love than on genuine feeling. There was good reason for his presentiment of trouble when, as he slipped the ring on her finger, he had read a flicker of regret and embarrassment on her face; for on their first night at Anacapri she had begged off, on the plea of fatigue and seasickness, from giving herself to him. On this, the second day of their marriage, she was just as much of a virgin as she had been before.

As she trudged wearily along, with a bag slung over one shoulder, between the dusty hedges, Giacomo looked at her with almost sorrowful intensity, hoping to take possession of her with a single piercing glance, as he had so often done with other women. But, as he realized right away, the piercing quality was lacking; his eyes fell with analytical affection upon her, but there was in them none of the transfiguring power of real passion. Although Simona was not tall, she had childishly long legs with slender thighs, rising to an indentation, almost a cleft at either side, visible under her shorts, where they were joined to the body. The whiteness of her legs was chaste, shiny and cold, she had a narrow waist and hips, and her only womanly feature, revealed when she turned around to speak to him, was the fullness of her low-swung breasts, which seemed like extraneous and burdensome weights, unsuited to her delicate frame. Similarly her thick, blond hair, although it was cut short, hung heavily over her neck. All of a sudden, as if she felt that she was being watched, she wheeled around and asked: "Why do you make me walk ahead of you?"

Giacomo saw the childishly innocent expression of her big blue eyes, her small, tilted nose and equally childishly rolled-back upper lip. Her face, too, he thought to himself, was a stranger to him, untouched by love.

"I'll go ahead, if you like," he said with resignation.

And he went by her, deliberately brushing her breast with his elbow to test his own desire. Then they went on walking, he ahead and she behind. The path wound about the summit of Monte Solaro, running along a wall of mossy stones with no masonry to hold them together and rows of vines strung out above them. On the other side there was a sheer descent, through uninhabited stretches of vineyard and olive grove, to the mist-covered gray sea. Only a solitary pine tree, halfway down the mountain, with its green crest floating in the air, recalled the idyllic purity of the

landscape in its better days. Simona walked very slowly, lagging farther behind at every step. Finally she came to a halt and asked: "Have we far to go?"

"We've only just started," Giacomo said lightly. "At least an hour more."

"I can't bear it," she said ill-humoredly, looking at him as if she hoped he would propose giving up the walk altogether. He went back to her and put her arm around her waist.

"You can't bear the exertion or you can't bear me?"

"What do you mean, silly?" she countered with unexpected feeling. "I can't bear to go on walking, of course."

"Give me a kiss."

She administered a rapid peck on his cheek.

"It's so hot . . ." she murmured. "I wish we could go home."

"We must get to the lighthouse," Giacomo answered. "What's the point of going back? . . . We'll have a swim as soon as we arrive. It's a wonderful place, and the lighthouse is all pink and white. . . . Don't you want to see it?"

"Yes; but I'd like to fly there instead of walking."

"Let's talk," he suggested. "That way you won't notice the distance."

"But I have nothing to say," she protested, almost with tears in her voice.

Giacomo hesitated for a moment before replying:

"You know so much poetry by heart. Recite a poem, and I'll listen; then before you know it, we'll be there."

He could see that he had hit home, for she had a truly extraordinary memory for verse.

"What shall I recite?" she asked with childish vanity.

"A canto from Dante."

"Which one?"

"The third canto of the *Inferno*," Giacomo said at random.

Somewhat consoled, Simona walked on, once more ahead of him, beginning to recite:

"Per me si va nella città dolente:  
per me si va nell'eterno dolore:  
per me si va tra la perduta gente . . ."

She recited mechanically and with as little expression as a schoolgirl, breathing hard because of the double effort required of her. As she walked doggedly along, she paused at the end of every line, without paying any attention to syntax or meaning, like a schoolgirl endowed with zeal rather than intelligence. Every now and then she turned appealingly around and shot him a fleeting look, yes, exactly like a schoolgirl, with the blue-and-white cap perched on her blond hair. After they had gone some way they

reached a wall built all around a large villa. The wall was covered with ivy, and leafy oak branches grew out over it.

"*E caddi, come l'uom, cui sonno piglia,*" Simona said, winding up the third canto; then she turned around and asked: "Whose place is this?"

"It belonged to Axel Munthe," Giacomo answered; "but he's dead now."

"And what sort of a fellow was he?"

"A very shrewd sort indeed," said Giacomo. And, in order to amuse her, he added: "He was a doctor very fashionable in Rome at the turn of the century. If you'd like to know more about him, there's a story I've been told is absolutely true. . . . Would you like to hear it?"

"Yes; do tell me."

"Once a beautiful and frivolous society woman came to him with all sorts of imaginary ailments. Munthe listened patiently, examined her, and when he saw that there was nothing wrong, said: 'I know a sure cure, but you must do exactly what I say. . . . Go and look out of that open window and lean your elbows on the sill.' She obeyed, and Munthe went after her and gave her a terrific kick in the rear. Then he escorted her to the door and said: 'Three times a week, and in a few months you'll be quite all right.'"

Simona failed to laugh, and after a moment she said bitterly, looking at the wall: "That would be the cure for me."

Giacomo was struck by her mournful tone of voice.

"Why do you say that?" he asked, coming up to her. "What's come into your head?"

"It's true. . . . I'm slightly mad, and you ought to treat me exactly that way."

"What are you talking about?"

"About what happened last night," she said with startling frankness.

"But last night you were tired and seasick."

"That wasn't it at all. I'm never seasick, and I wasn't tired, either. I was afraid, that's all."

"Afraid of me?"

"No; afraid of the whole idea."

They walked on in silence. The wall curved, following the path and hanging slightly over, as if it could hardly contain the oak trees behind it. Then it came to an end, and in front of them lay a grassy plateau, below which the mountainside fell abruptly down to the arid and lonely promontories of Rio. The plateau was covered with asphodels, whose pyramidal flowers were of a dusty rose, almost gray in color. Giacomo picked some and handed them to his wife, saying: "Look. How beautiful . . ."

She raised them to her nose, like a young girl on her way to the

altar, inhaling the fragrance of a lily. Perhaps she was conscious of her virginal air, for she pressed close to him, in something like an embrace, and whispered into one ear: "Don't believe what I just told you. . . . I wasn't afraid. . . . I'll just have to get used to the idea. . . . Tonight . . ."

"Tonight?" he repeated.

"You're so very dear to me," she murmured painfully, adding a strictly conventional phrase, which she seemed to have learned for the occasion, "Tonight I'll be yours."

She said these last words hurriedly, as if she were afraid of the conventionality rather than the substance of them, and planted a hasty kiss on his cheek. It was the first time that she had ever told Giacomo that he was dear to her or anything like it, and he was tempted to take her in his arms. But she said in a loud voice: "Look! What's that down there on the sea?" And at the same time she eluded his grasp.

Giacomo looked in the direction at which she was pointing and saw a solitary sail emerging from the mist that hung over the water.

"A boat," he said testily.

She started walking again, at a quickened pace, as if she were afraid that he might try once more to embrace her. And as he saw her escape him he had a recurrent feeling of impotence, because he could not take immediate possession of his beloved.

"You won't do that to me tonight," he muttered between clenched teeth as he caught up with her.

And she answered, lowering her head without looking around: "It will be different tonight. . . ."

It was really hot—there was no doubt about that—and in the heavy air all round them there seemed to Giacomo to reside the same obstacle, the same impossibility that bogged down his relationship with his wife: the impossibility of a rainfall that would clear the air, the impossibility of love. He had a sensation of something like panic, when looking at her again he felt that his will to love was purely intellectual and did not involve his senses. Her figure was outlined quite precisely before him, but there was none of the halo around it in which love usually envelops the loved one's person. Impulsively he said: "Perhaps you shouldn't have married me."

Simona seemed to accept this statement as a basis for discussion, as if she had had the same thought without daring to come out with it.

"Why?" she asked.

Giacomo wanted to answer, "Because we don't really love each other," but although this was the thought in his mind, he expressed it in an entirely different manner. Simona was a Com-

munist and had a job at Party headquarters. Giacomo was not a Communist at all; he claimed to attach no importance to his wife's political ideas, but they had a way of cropping up at the most unexpected moments as underlying motives for disagreement. And now he was astonished to hear himself say: "Because there is too great a difference of ideas between us."

"What sort of ideas do you mean?"

"Political ideas."

He realized, then, why her standoffishness had caused him to bring politics into the picture; it was with the hope of arousing a reaction to a point on which he knew her to be sensitive. And indeed she answered immediately: "That's not so. The truth is that I have certain ideas and you have none at all."

As soon as politics came up she assumed a self-sufficient, pedantic manner, quite the opposite of childish, which always threatened to infuriate him. He asked himself in all conscience whether his irritation stemmed from some latent anti-Communist feeling within himself, but quickly set his mind at rest on this score. He had no interest in politics whatsoever, and the only thing that bothered him was the fact that his wife did have such an interest.

"Well, whether or not it's a question of ideas," he said dryly, "there is *something* between us."

"What is it, then?"

"I don't know, but I can feel it."

After a second she said in the same irritating tone of voice: "I know quite well. It is a question of ideas. But I hope that some day you'll see things the way I do."

"Never."

"Why never?"

"I've told you so many times before. . . . First, because I don't want to be involved in politics of any kind, and, second, because I'm too much of an individualist."

Simona made no reply, but in such cases her silence was direr than spoken disapproval. Giacomo was overcome by a wave of sudden anger. He overtook her and seized her arm.

"All this is going to have very serious consequences some day," he shouted. "For instance, if a Communist government comes to power, and I say something against it, you'll inform on me."

"Why should you say anything against it?" she retorted. "You just said that you don't want to be involved in politics of any kind."

"Anything can happen."

"And then the Communists aren't in power. . . . Why worry about a situation that doesn't exist?"

It was true then, he thought to himself, since she didn't deny

it, that she would inform on him. He gripped her arm tighter, almost wishing to hurt her.

"The truth is that you don't love me," he said.

"I wouldn't have married you except for love," she said clearly, and she looked straight at him, with her lower lip trembling. Her voice filled Giacomo with tenderness, and he drew her to him and kissed her. Simona was visibly affected by the kiss; her nostrils stiffened and she breathed hard, and although her arms hung down at her sides, she pressed her body against his.

"My spy," he said, drawing away and stroking her face. "My little spy."

"Why do you call me spy?" she asked, taking immediate offense.

"I was joking."

They walked on, but as he followed her Giacomo wondered whether he had meant the word as a joke after all. And what about his anger? Was that a joke too? He didn't know how he could have given way to such unreasonable anger and have made such even more unreasonable accusations, and yet he dimly understood that they were justified by Simona's behavior. Meanwhile, they had come to the other side of the mountain, and from the highest point of the path they looked down at an immense expanse of air, like a bottomless well. Five minutes later they had a view of all one side of the island, a long, green slope covered with scattered vines and prickly pears, and at the bottom, stretching out into the sea, the chalky promontory on which stood the lighthouse. The sweep of the view was tremendous, and the pink-and-white checked lighthouse, hung between sky and sea, seemed far away and no larger than a man's hand. Simona clapped her hands in delight.

"How perfectly lovely!" she exclaimed.

"I told you it was beautiful, and you wouldn't believe me."

"Forgive me," she said, patting his cheek. "You always know best and I'm very silly."

Before he could control himself, Giacomo said: "Does that go for politics too?"

"No; not for politics. But don't let's talk about that just now."

He was annoyed with himself for having fallen back into an argument, but at the same time he suffered a return of the left-out and jealous feeling that overcame him every time she made a dogmatic, almost religious reference to her political ideas.

"Why shouldn't we talk about it?" he said as gently as he could. "Perhaps if we talked about it, we might understand one another better."

Simona did not reply, and Giacomo walked on after her, in an extremely bad humor. Now he was the one to feel the heaviness

and heat of the day, while Simona, intoxicated by the sight of the distant sea, shouted: "Let's run down the rest of the way. I can't wait to get into the water."

With her sling bag bobbing about on her shoulder, she began to run down the path, emitting shrill cries of joy. Giacomo saw that she was throwing her legs in all directions like an untrained colt. Suddenly the thought, "Tonight she'll be mine" floated through his head and quieted him. What could be the importance of belonging to a political party in comparison to that of the act of love, so ageless and so very human? Men had possessed women long before the existence of political parties or religions. And he was sure that in the moment when he possessed Simona he would drive out of her every allegiance except that of her love for him. Strengthened by this thought he ran after her, shouting in his turn: "Wait for me, Simona!"

She stopped to wait, flushed, quivering and bright-eyed. As he caught up with her he said pantingly: "Just now I began to feel very happy. I know that we're going to love one another."

"I know it too," she said, looking at him out of her innocent blue eyes.

Giacomo put one arm around her waist, catching her hand in his and compelling her to throw it over his shoulders. They walked on in this fashion, but Simona's eyes remained set on the water below. Giacomo, on the other hand, could not tear his thoughts away from the body he was holding so tightly. Simona was wearing a skimpy boy's jersey with a patch in the front. And her head was boyish in outline as well, with the unruly short hair falling over her cheeks. Yet her slender waist fitted into the curve of his arm with a womanly softness which seemed to foreshadow the complete surrender promised for the coming night. Suddenly he breathed into her ear: "You'll always be my little friend and comrade."

Simona's mind must have been on the lighthouse, and the word "comrade" came through to her alone, out of context, without the sentimental intonation that gave it Giacomo's intended meaning. For she answered with a smile: "We can't be comrades . . . at least, not until you see things the way I do. . . . But I'll be your wife."

So she was still thinking of the Party, Giacomo said to himself with excusable jealousy. The word "comrade" had for her no tender connotations, but only political significance. The Party continued to have a prior claim to her loyalty.

"I didn't mean it that way," he said disappointedly.

"I'm sorry," she said, hastening to correct herself. "That's what we call each other in the Party."

"I only meant that you'd be my lifelong companion."

"That's true," she said, lowering her head in embarrassment, as if she couldn't really accept the word except politically.

They dropped their arms and walked down the path with no link between them. As they proceeded, the lighthouse seemed to approach them, revealing its tower shape. The water beyond it had a metallic sheen, derived from the direct rays of the sun, while behind them the mountain seemed to grow higher, with a wall of red rock rising above the lower slope which they were now traversing. At the top was a summerhouse with a railing around it, in which they could distinguish two tiny human figures enjoying the view.

"That vantage-point is called La Migliara," Giacomo explained. "A few years ago an Anacapri girl threw herself down the mountain from it, but first she wound her braids around her head and over her eyes so as not to see what she was doing."

Simona tossed a look over her shoulder at the top of the mountain.

"Suicide is all wrong," she said.

Giacomo felt jealousy sting him again.

"Why?" he asked. "Does the Party forbid it?"

"Never mind about the Party." She looked out over the sea and thrust her face and chest forward as if to breathe in the breeze blowing in their direction. "Suicide's all wrong because life is beautiful and it's a joy to be alive."

Again Giacomo didn't really want to get into a political argument; he wanted to make a show of the serenity and detachment which he thoroughly believed were his. But again his annoyance carried him away.

"But T———" (this was the name of a Communist friend they had in common) "committed suicide, didn't he?"

"He did wrong," she said succinctly.

"Why so? He must have had some reason. What do you know?"

"I do know, though," she said obstinately. "He did wrong. It's our duty to live."

"Our duty?"

"Yes; duty."

"Who says so?"

"Nobody. It just is."

"I might just as well say that it's our duty to take our life if we feel it's not worth living. . . . Nobody says so. It just is."

"That's not true," she answered inflexibly. "We were made to live and not to die. . . . Only someone that's sick or in a morbid state of mind can think that life's not worth living."

"So you think that T——— was either sick or in a morbid state of mind, do you?"

"At the moment when he killed himself, yes, I do."

Giacomo was tempted to ask her if this was the Party line, as seemed to him evident from the stubborn note in her voice which annoyed him so greatly, but this time he managed to restrain himself. By now they had reached the bottom of the slope and were crossing a dry, flat area, covered with wood-spurge and prickly pears. Then the land turned into rock and they found themselves before the lighthouse, at the end of the path, which seemed like the end of all human habitation and the beginning of a new and lonely world of colorless chalk and stone. The lighthouse soared up above them as they plunged down among the boulders toward the sea. At a bend, they suddenly came upon a basin of green water, surrounded by rocky black cliffs, eroded by salt. Simona ran down to the cement landing and exclaimed: "Wonderful! Just what I was hoping for! Now we can swim. And we have it all to ourselves. We're quite alone."

She had no sooner spoken these words than a man's voice came out of the rocks: "Simona! What a pleasant surprise."

They turned around, and when a face followed the voice, Simona shouted: "Livio! Hello! Are you here too? What are you doing?"

The young man who emerged from the rocks was short and powerfully built, with broad shoulders. His head contrasted with this athletic body, for it was bald, with only a fringe of hair around the neck, and his flat face had a scholarly expression. The face of a ferret, Giacomo thought, taking an instant dislike to it, not exactly intelligent, but keen and treacherous. He knew the fellow by sight and was aware that he worked in Simona's office. Now Livio came into full view, pulling up his tight, faded red trunks.

"I'm doing the same thing you are, I suppose," he said by way of an answer.

Then Simona said something which gave Giacomo considerable satisfaction.

"That's not very likely. . . . Unless you've just got yourself married. . . . I'm here on my honeymoon. . . . Do you know my husband?"

"Yes; we know each other," Livio said easily, jumping down on to a big square stone and shaking Giacomo's hand so hard that the latter winced with pain as he echoed: "Yes, we've met in Rome." Livio then turned to Simona and added: "I'd heard something to the effect that you were about to marry. But you should have told the comrades. They want to share your joys."

He said all this in a colorless, businesslike voice, but one which was not necessarily devoid of feeling. Giacomo noticed that Simona was smiling and seemed to be waiting for Livio to go on, while Livio stood like a bronze statue on a stone pedestal, with his

trunks pulled tightly over his voluminous pubis and all the muscles of his body standing out, and talked down to them. Giacomo felt as if he were somehow left out of their conversation, and drew away, all the while listening intently. They conversed for several minutes without moving, asking one another about various Party workers and where they had spent their vacations.

But Giacomo was struck less by what they said than by the tone in which they said it. What was this tone exactly, and why did it rub him the wrong way? There was a note of complicity in it, he concluded, a reference to some secret bond different from that of either friendship or family. For a moment he wondered if it weren't just what one would find between fellow employees in a bank or government office. But upon reflection, he realized that it was entirely different. It was . . . he searched for some time, groping for an exact definition . . . it was the tone of voice of two monks or two nuns meeting one another. And why then did it rub him the wrong way? Not because he disapproved of Livio's and Simona's political ideas; in the course of a rational discussion he might very well allow that these had some basis. No; there was nothing rational about his hostility; its cause was obscure even to himself and at times it seemed to be one with his jealousy, as if he were afraid that Simona would escape him through her Party connections. As these thoughts ran through his mind, his face grew dark and discontented, so that when Simona joined him, all smiles, a moment later, she exclaimed in surprise: "What's wrong? Why are you unhappy?"

"Nothing . . . It's just the heat."

"Let's go in the water. . . . But first, where can we undress?"

"Just follow me. . . . This way."

He knew the place well, and now led Simona through a narrow passage among the rocks. Behind these rocks they stepped across some other lower ones and then went around a huge mass which sealed off a tiny beach of very fine, black sand at the foot of glistening, black rocky walls around a pool of shallow water filled with black seaweed. The effect was that of a room, with the sky for a ceiling, a watery floor and walls of stone.

"No swimming-bath can match this," Giacomo observed, looking around him.

"At last I can shed my clothes," said Simona with a sigh of relief.

She put her bag down on the sand and bent over to take out her bathing-suit, while, leaning against the rocks, Giacomo stripped himself in a second of his shirt and trousers. The sight of him stark naked caused her to give a nervous laugh.

"This is the sort of place to go swimming with no suits on, isn't it?" she said.

"Unfortunately, one can never manage to be alone," Giacomo replied, thinking of Livio.

He walked, still naked, with bare feet, over the cold sand in her direction, but she did not see him coming because she was pulling her jersey over her head. Her nakedness, he reflected, made her seem more virginal than ever. Her low-slung, round breasts had large rosy nipples, and a look of purity about them, as if they had never been offered to a masculine caress. Indeed, her virginal quality was so overwhelming that Giacomo did not dare press her to him as he had intended, but stood close by while she pulled her head out of the jersey. She shook back her ruffled hair and said in surprise: "What are you doing? Why don't you put on your trunks?"

"I'd like to make love right here and now," said Giacomo.

"On these rocks? Are you mad?"

"No. I'm not mad."

They were facing each other now, he entirely naked and she naked down to the waist. She crossed her arms over her breasts as if to support and protect them and said entreatingly: "Let's wait till tonight. . . . And meanwhile let's go swimming . . . please. . . ."

"Tonight you'll put me off again."

"No; it will be different tonight."

Giacomo walked silently away and proceeded to put on his trunks, while Simona, obviously relieved, hastily donned her two-piece suit. She shouted gaily: "I'm off for a swim! If you love me, you'll follow."

"Let's go in right here," Giacomo suggested.

Simona paused and stuck her white foot into the green and brown seaweed that choked the black water.

"This pool is too murky. . . . It's no more than a puddle. Let's go where we just came from."

"But we shan't be alone."

"Oh, we have plenty of time for that."

They went back to the basin, where Livio was taking a sun-bath on the cement landing, lying as still as if he were dead. Somehow this increased Giacomo's dislike of him. Yes; he was the sort of fellow that goes in for purposeful tanning, and then wanders about showing it off, wearing skimpy trunks designed to exhibit his virility as well. When Livio heard them coming he leaped to his feet and said: "Come on, Simona. Let's dive in and race over to the rock."

"You'll have to give me a handicap of at least a length," she said joyfully, forgetful of her husband.

"I'll give you three lengths, if you say so."

There it was, Giacomo could not help thinking, the same intimate, conspiratorial, clubby, Party manner, that tone of voice

in which, despite their marriage, she had never spoken to him, and perhaps never would speak either. Sitting on a flat rock, just above the landing, he watched his wife plunge awkwardly in and then swim like a dark shadow under the green water until she came out, with her blond head dripping.

"That was a real belly-flop," Livio shouted, making a perfect dive to join her. He too swam underwater, but for a longer distance than Simona, so that he came out farther away. Giacomo wondered if this "Party manner" weren't all a product of his imagination, and if there hadn't been in the past some more intimate personal relationship between them. And he realized that this second hypothesis was, on the whole, less disagreeable than the first. Then he said to himself that if he were to mention any such suspicion to Simona she would be outraged and brand it as utterly "bourgeois," not to say "evil-minded and filthy." The moment after he dismissed it as out of the question. No, they were comrades, as she had said, and nothing more. What still puzzled him was why he objected more to their being Party comrades than to their being lovers. With a wavering effort of goodwill, he said to himself that his jealousy was absurd, and he must drive it out of his mind. . . . And all the while he watched the two of them race across the dazzling green water in the direction of a round rock which emerged at the far end of the basin. Livio got there first, and, hoisting himself up on a protruding spur, shouted back at Simona: "I win! You're all washed up!"

"Speak for yourself!" Simona retorted.

This was the sort of joking insult he and Simona should have batted back and forth between them, Giacomo reflected. If they didn't joke that way on their honeymoon, when would they ever do it? He got up decisively, ran several steps along the landing and went in after them. He landed square on his stomach and was infuriated by the pain. After swimming several strokes under water he came up and started toward the rock where Livio and Simona were sitting. They were close together, talking uninterruptedly, with their legs dangling. He didn't relish the sight; in fact, it took away all the pleasure he should have felt from plunging hot and dusty into the cool water. He swam angrily ahead, arrived at the rock breathless and said, hanging on to a ledge: "Do you know, this water's very, very cold."

"It seemed warm to me," said Simona, momentarily interrupting the conversation to shoot him a glance.

"I swam here in April," Livio put in; "it was cold then, I can tell you."

With a curiosity that seemed to Giacomo somewhat flirtatious, Simona asked him: "Were you all alone?"

"No. I came with Nella," Livio answered.

Giacomo was trying to clamber up on the rock, but the only place where he could get a solid grip was the one where Livio and Simona were sitting. They seemed to be oblivious of his struggles, and he preferred not to ask them to move over. Finally, he caught hold of a jutting piece of the rock studded with jagged points, one of which left a pain in the palm of his hand as if it had dug deep into the flesh. Just as he got himself into a sitting position, the other two, with a shout of "Let's race back!" dived into the water, showering him with spray. He looked furiously after them as they raced toward the shore. Only when he had regained his self-control did he plunge in and follow. Simona and Livio were sitting in the shelter of a cliff and Simona was opening a lunch-box that she had taken out of her bag.

"Let's have something to eat," she said to Giacomo as he approached them. "But we must share it with Livio. He says he meant to go back up the mountain, but in this heat it would be too ridiculous."

Without saying a word, Giacomo sat down in the rocks beside them. The contents of the lunch-box turned out to be scanty: some meat sandwiches, two hard-boiled eggs and a bottle of wine.

"Livio will have to be content with very little," Giacomo said gruffly.

"Don't worry," Livio answered gaily. "I'm a very abstemious fellow."

Simona seemed extremely happy as she sat with crossed legs, dividing the lunch. She gave a sandwich to each one of them, bit into her own, and asked Livio:

"Where did you get your tan?"

"On the Tiber," he replied.

"Your whole group is very river-minded, isn't it, Livio?" she asked between one bite and another.

"All except Regina. She scorns the river completely; says it isn't aristocratic enough for her."

The things they talked about were trivial and childish enough, Giacomo reflected. And yet there was a greater intimacy between them than between husband and wife.

"No matter how hard she tries, Regina will never be able to put her background behind her," Simona observed.

"Who is Regina?" asked Giacomo.

"Someone in our outfit . . . the daughter of a wealthy landowner . . . a very fine girl, really," Livio told him. "But wiping out an old trade-mark is no easy matter."

"And in this case, what trade-mark do you mean?"

"The bourgeois trade-mark."

"If you people ever get into power," Giacomo said impulsively, "you'll have to wipe that trade-mark out of millions of people."

"That's exactly what we'll do," Livio said with complete self-confidence. "That's our job, isn't it, Simona?"

Simona's mouth was full, but she nodded assent.

"The Italian bourgeoisie will be a tough nut to crack," Livio went on, "but we'll crack it, even if we have to kill off a large proportion in the process."

"There's a chance you may be killed off yourselves," said Giacomo.

"That's the risk we have to run in our profession," Livio retorted.

Giacomo noticed that Simona did not seem to go along with Livio's ruthlessness; at this last remark she frowned and uttered no word of approval. Livio must have been aware of this, for he brusquely changed the subject.

"Simona, you really should have told us you were getting married, you know. There are some things it's not fair to hide!"

There was a note of tenderness toward Giacomo in Simona's reply.

"We decided from one day to the next. . . . Only the legal witnesses were present. Even our own parents weren't in on it."

"You mean you didn't want them?"

"We didn't want them, and anyhow they might not have come. . . . Giacomo's father and mother didn't want him to marry me."

"Because you're too far to the left, is that it?"

"No," Giacomo interposed. "My people don't go in for politics at all. But my mother had her eyes on a certain girl. . . ."

"They may not go in for politics, as you say," Livio said, after another mouthful, "but there are always political implications. How could it be otherwise? Politics gets into everything these days."

True enough, Giacomo thought to himself. Even into honeymoons and a newly-married couple's first embrace. Then, annoyed at his own train of thought, he held out the hard-boiled eggs to his companions.

"You two eat them," he said. "I'm not hungry."

"Be honest now," Livio said with a look of surprise on his face.

"Why aren't you hungry?" Simona asked him.

"That damned *scirocco*, I imagine."

Livio looked up at the cloudy sky.

"There'll be a storm before night. I can promise you that," he said.

Livio's conversation was made up of commonplaces and clichés, Giacomo reflected. But Simona seemed to like them. They conveyed more to her than his own attempts to express emotions that

were difficult if not impossible to put into words. Meanwhile Simona, having finished her lunch, said: "Let's lie down for a sun-bath now."

"Will you be my pillow, Simona?" Livio asked, sliding toward her with the plain intention of putting his head on her lap.

For the first time Simona took her husband's presence into account.

"It's too hot for that, and you're too heavy."

And she looked at Giacomo out of the corner of her eyes as if to say: From now on, I won't let anyone do that but you. Giacomo's spirits soared, and he once more felt that there was a possibility of love between them. He got up and said: "Shall we go for a walk among the rocks?"

"Yes," she said promptly, following his example. And she added, to Livio: "See you later. . . . We're going to explore."

"Have a good time," Livio threw after them.

Simona led the way through the passage which her husband had shown her before. She made straight for the black beach, sat down at the foot of a rock and said: "Stretch out and put your head on my legs. . . . You'll be more comfortable that way."

Overcome by joy, Giacomo threw his arms around her and drew her to him. He gave her a kiss, and Simona returned it, blowing hard through her nose, almost as if she were suffering. When they had drawn apart, she repeated: "Stretch out, and we'll snatch a bit of sleep together."

She leaned her back against the rock, and Giacomo, his heart overflowing with love, lay down and put his head on her lap. He closed his eyes, and Simona began to stroke his face. With a hesitant and timid motion, she passed her hand over his cheeks, under his chin and up to the top of his head, where she ran her fingers through his hair. When Giacomo opened his eyes for a split second he saw that she was looking at him with childish intentness and curiosity. Meeting his glance, she bent over, placed a quick kiss on each of his eyes and told him to go to sleep. Giacomo closed his eyes again and gave himself up to enjoyment of the light touch of her tireless little hand until finally he dozed off. He slept for an indefinable length of time and woke up feeling chilled. Simona was sitting in the same position, with his head on her lap. Looking up, he saw the reason for his feeling so cold. The sky was filled with heavy, black storm clouds.

"How long have I been asleep?" he asked her.

"About an hour."

"And what about you?"

"I didn't sleep. I was looking at you."

"The sun's disappeared."

"Yes."

"There's going to be quite a rainstorm."

"Livio's gone," she said by way of an answer.

"Who is that Livio, anyhow?" Giacomo asked without moving.

"A Party comrade, a friend."

"I don't care for him."

"I know that," she said with a smile. "You made it pretty plain. As he was going away he pointed to you as you lay there asleep and said: 'What's the matter? Has he got it in for me?'"

"I haven't got it in for him. . . . But he has no manners. I'm on my honeymoon, and he acts as if it were his."

"He's a good fellow."

"You used to be in love with him. Admit it!"

She came out with a peal of innocent, silvery laughter.

"You must be crazy. I couldn't possibly fall in love with him. He doesn't appeal to me in the least."

"But the way you talked to one another . . ."

"He's a Party comrade," she repeated, "and that's the way we talk." She was silent, for a moment, and then said with unexpected bitterness: "He's unintelligent. That's why he doesn't appeal to me."

"He doesn't seem to me much more stupid than the next man."

"He said a lot of foolish things," she went on angrily. "That we'd kill people off, for instance. . . . He knows better and spoke that way just to show off. . . . But such loose talk is harmful to the Party."

"You're the one that's got it in for him now."

"No. I haven't got it in for him; but he had no business to talk that way." Then she added, more coolly, "As a matter of fact, he's of value to the Party, even if he isn't too bright. He's absolutely loyal; you could ask him to do anything."

"And what value have I?" Giacomo was bold enough to ask jokingly.

"You can't have any value, since you're not one of us."

Giacomo was displeased by this answer. He got up and looked at the lowering sky.

"We'd better get back home before it rains. What do you say?"

"Yes. I think we had better."

Giacomo hesitated for a moment, put his arm around her waist and asked softly: "When we get there, will you be mine . . . at last?"

She nodded, turning her head away in order not to meet his eyes. Feeling easier in his mind, Giacomo quickly got dressed. A few steps away, Simona pulled on her shorts and jersey and started to adjust her bag over her shoulder. But with a tender protectiveness such as he had not displayed on the way down, Giacomo said: "I'll carry that for you."

They started off. First they crossed the flatland, where the pale green branches of the prickly pears seemed to gleam discordantly against the dark sky. As they reached the beginning of the slope they turned around to look behind them. The pink-and-white light-house stood out against a majestic mass of black storm clouds rising from the horizon to invade that part of the sky which was still empty. These clouds, shaped like great rampant beasts, had smoking underbellies, and irregular fringes hung down from them over the sea, which was spottily darkening in some places, while in others it still shone like burnished lead in the sun. The fringes were gusts of rain, just beginning to comb the surface of the water. Meanwhile, a turbulent wind covered the prickly pears with yellow dust and a blinding stroke of lightning zigzagged diagonally across the sky from one point to another. After a long silence they heard the thunder—no clap, but rather a dull rumble within the clouds. Giacomo saw his wife pale and instinctively shrink toward him.

"Lightning scares me to death," she said, looking at him.

Giacomo raised his eyes to the half-clear, half-stormy sky.

"The storm isn't here yet," he said. "It's still over the sea. If we hurry, we may get home without a wetting."

"Let's hurry, then," she said, continuing to climb up the path.

The clouds, apparently driven by an increasingly powerful wind, were spreading out over the sky with startling rapidity. Simona quickened her pace to almost a run, and Giacomo could not help teasing her.

"Afraid of lightning? What would the comrades say to that? A good Marxist like yourself shouldn't have any such fear."

"It's stronger than I am," she said in a childish voice, without turning around.

There were steps, first narrow and then wide, to facilitate the ascent of the lower part of the path, and higher up it rose in wide curves through groves of olive trees. Simona was a long way ahead; Giacomo could see her striding along fifty or sixty feet in front of him. At the top they paused to catch their breath and look around. Anacapri, momentarily at their backs, stood reassuringly behind a barrier of green, looking like an Arab city, with its terraces, campanile and gray-domed church. Giacomo pointed to the shrunken lighthouse on the promontory below, profiled against the threatening storm.

"Just think, we were right down there!" he murmured.

"I can't wait to be home," said Simona, perhaps with the thunder and lightning in mind. Then, meeting Giacomo's eyes, she added with hesitant coquetry: "What about you?"

"I agree," he answered in a low voice, with emotion.

The climb was over, and all they had to do now was follow

the level path to their rented house, which was well this side of Anacapri. They walked by the wall around the Munthe villa, along a meadow planted with oak trees, and there, just round a bend, was the white wall of their house and the rusty iron gate in the shade of a carob tree with pods hanging all over it. The clouds were straight above them now, and it was as dark as evening. Simona hurriedly pushed open the gate and went on ahead without waiting for her husband to follow. Giacomo walked more slowly down the marble steps among the cactus plants. As he went, there was another rumble of thunder, louder this time, like an overturned wagon-load of stones rolling down a hill. From inside the house Simona called back: "Shut the door tight!"

The house was on a hillside, set back among the trees, and consisted of four roughly furnished rooms. Giacomo made his way in amid almost complete darkness. There was no electric light, but oil lamps of various shapes and colors were lined up on the hall table. He lifted the glass off one of these, lit a match, touched it to the wick, put back the glass and entered the dining room. No one was there, but he could hear Simona moving in the room next to it. He did not wish to join her immediately, and, feeling thirsty, he poured himself out a glass of white wine. Finally, he picked up the lamp and went to the bedroom door. The bedroom, too, was almost dark. The window giving on to the garden was open, and through it, in what light was left among the shadows, he could make out the terrace surrounded by lemon trees planted in big pots. Simona, in a dressing gown, was tidying the still unmade bed. He set the lamp down on the bedside table and said: "Are you still afraid of the lightning?"

She was leaning over the bed, with one leg slightly raised, smoothing the sheet. Pulling herself up, she answered: "No. Now that I'm in the house I feel safer."

"And are you afraid of me?"

"I never was afraid of you."

Giacomo walked around the bed and took her into his arms. Standing beside the head of the bed, they exchanged a kiss. Giacomo undid the sash of Simona's dressing gown and it slipped down over her shoulders and hips to the floor. But Simona did not interrupt the kiss; indeed she prolonged it with an awkward eagerness, betrayed by her characteristic way of blowing through her nose. With sudden decisiveness, Giacomo let her go.

"Lie down, will you?" he said, hurriedly taking off his clothes.

Simona hesitated and then lay down on the bed. Giacomo was aware of being impelled by strictly animal feelings, as if he were not in a house, but in a dark cave—yes, as if he were a primitive man, moved by carnal appetite alone. Yet it was with a certain tenderness that he lay down beside his wife. She was facing the

wall, but brusquely she turned around and pressed herself against him, snuggling into his arms. For a few minutes they lay there, motionless, then Giacomo began chastely and gently to caress her. He wanted to possess her on her own virginal terms, without bringing any of his masculine experience into play. His light caresses and the words he whispered through her hair into one ear were intended to calm her fears and lead her almost insensibly to give herself to him. He was not in a hurry and it seemed to him that his new policy of consideration and patience would win for him what his haste of the previous evening had failed to obtain. And by degrees he had the impression that, in response to his words and caresses, she was yielding not only her body, but also that inward part of her which had resisted him heretofore. Simona did not speak, but her breathing grew gradually heavier. All of a sudden, almost involuntarily, he gave way to a natural impulse and attempted to take her. Under the impact of his body, Simona seemed at first to surrender, then brusquely she rebelled and struggled to free herself. With a mixture of anger and submission she whispered: "I can't do it! I can't!"

Giacomo refused to heed her change of heart and tried to prevail over her by force. She defended herself with her feet and knees and hands, while he did everything to overcome her. In the combat their naked bodies were bathed in perspiration. Finally Giacomo lost his patience, leaped out of bed, and went into the bathroom, saying: "I'll be back in a minute."

Guided by a furious inspiration, he groped his way to the wash basin, took the razor blade he had used for shaving that morning and plunged it into the cushion of his thumb. He felt the cold blade cut through his skin, but had no pain. Then he put the blade back on the shelf and squeezed his thumb, which gave out an abundant flow of blood. He went back to the bedroom and threw himself upon his wife, rubbing his bloody thumb on the sheet between her legs. Then he shouted angrily: "You may not realize it, but you're no longer a virgin!"

Tremblingly she asked: "How do you know?"

"Just look!"

He took the lamp from the table and threw its light upon the bed. Simona was hunched up on the pillow, with her knees against her chin and her arms crossed over breasts. She looked down at the place where Giacomo had thrown the light and saw a long streak of red blood. Batting her eyelids in disgust, she said: "Are you sure?"

"Positive!"

But just at that moment her eyes traveled to the hand in which Giacomo was holding the lamp. Blood was streaming out of the cut in the cushion of his thumb. In a plaintive voice she cried

out: "It's not my blood. It's yours! . . . You cut yourself on purpose."

Giacomo put the lamp back on the table and shouted in a rage: "That's the only blood I'll see tonight or any night to come. You're still a virgin and you always will be!"

"Why do you say that? What makes you so unkind?"

"That's the way it is," he answered. "You'll never be mine. Some part of you is hostile to me, and hostile it will remain."

"What part do you mean?"

"You're closer to that fool, Livio, than you are to me," he said, coming out with his jealousy at last. "That part of you which is close to Livio is hostile to me."

"That's not true."

"Yes; it is true. And it's equally true that if your Party came to power you'd inform on me. . . ."

"Who says so?"

"You said so yourself this morning, on the way to the lighthouse."

"I said nothing at all."

"Well, what would you do, then?"

She hesitated for a moment and then said:

"Why do you bring up such things at a time like this?"

"Because they prevent you from loving me and becoming my wife."

"I wouldn't inform on you," she said at last. "I'd leave you, that's all."

"But you're supposed to inform on your enemies," he shouted, angrier than ever. "It's your duty."

Still huddled up at the head of the bed, she burst into tears.

"Giacomo, why are you so unkind? . . . I'd kill myself. That's what I'd do."

Giacomo did not have the courage to remind her that on the way to the lighthouse she had branded suicide as morbid and absolutely inadmissible. After all, this contradiction was more flattering to him than an open declaration of love. Meanwhile, still in tears, she had got down from the bed and gone over to the open window. Giacomo lay on the bed, watching. She stood straight, with her head bent to the side and one arm raised against the frame. Suddenly the room was lit up, and every object in it, her naked, white body, the garden and the potted lemon trees around the terrace. There followed a metallic crack and a violent tremor which made the window and the walls of the room tremble. Simona gave a terrified cry, left the window and threw herself sobbing into her husband's arms. Giacomo pressed her to him, and almost immediately, while still weeping, she sought his embrace, he penetrated her body without any difficulty whatsoever. He had the

feeling that a hidden flower, composed of only two petals, had opened—although still remaining invisible—to something that in the dark night of the flesh played the role of the sun. Nothing was settled, he reflected later on, but for the time being it was enough to know that she would kill herself for him.

Franz Kafka

## THE METAMORPHOSIS

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I  
As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect. He was lying on his hard, as it were armor-plated, back and when he lifted his head a little he could see his dome-like brown belly divided into stiff arched segments on top of which the bed quilt could hardly keep in position and was about to slide off completely. His numerous legs, which were pitifully thin compared to the rest of his bulk, waved helplessly before his eyes.

What has happened to me? he thought. It was no dream. His room, a regular human bedroom, only rather too small, lay quiet between the four familiar walls. Above the table on which a collection of cloth samples was unpacked and spread out—Samsa was a commercial traveler—hung the picture which he had recently cut out of an illustrated magazine and put into a pretty gilt frame. It showed a lady, with a fur cap on and a fur stole, sitting upright and holding out to the spectator a huge fur muff into which the whole of her forearm had vanished!

Gregor's eyes turned next to the window, and the overcast sky—one could hear rain drops beating on the window gutter—made him quite melancholy. What about sleeping a little longer and forgetting all this nonsense, he thought, but it could not be done, for he was accustomed to sleep on his right side and in his present condition he could not turn himself over. However violently he forced himself toward his right side he always rolled on to his back again. He tried it at least a hundred times, shutting his eyes to keep from seeing his struggling legs, and only desisted when

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