WHAT NOBODY SAW

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The Art of Attraction · 03

It is often women who, when they happen to pass a couple — of any age — find themselves declaring it badly matched, and the next comment is always the same: did you see those two who just walked by? How ugly is she — how on earth did she land that good-looking guy?

Doubt and curiosity devour them, because qualities are never obvious and quantities are never declared — like a security van escorted by police cars: nobody ever knows what it carries.

A bit like my writing. Hahahahahah.

It was exactly on this idea that my way of knowing people was built. So much so that one evening, on the twelfth floor of a building in town, out on the terrace where a dance party was being held, a tall, heavy-set, sweaty girl came up to me and asked me for a slow dance.

The boys around me were watching — not because I was better than them, but to see how I would react, since almost all of them had already turned her down. I didn't know that.

Once the conversation started during the dance, her breath was not the best, but I pretended not to notice. We danced together the whole evening, and I listened. Then she asked me to walk her home; she was afraid of the motorbike, so I walked two kilometres to please her.

She kissed me on the cheek and told me we would see each other the next day, but before leaving me she said she appreciated that I hadn't made a single advance.

I walked the two kilometres back to the motorbike, the evening — and the other girls on that terrace — still running through my head, and somehow I made it.

My friends were waiting for me; they wanted to know how it had gone. Knowing that I never liked talking about myself, I just said: she's a nice girl.

But do you know who she is? No.

She's the daughter of the director of the biggest engineering plant in southern Italy. Loaded with money.

So?

They were stunned. I got on the motorbike and went home.

Five days later I ran into her by chance in a café in town, but she was different, she had changed.

She asked me why I hadn't looked for her — after all, I knew where she lived, and by now I must surely have found out who she and her father were.

I smiled and said: but do you know who the hell I am?

She stopped, her eyes wide, struck, and answered in a thread of a voice: who are you?

I'm just the guy from the party who danced with you and then walked you home.

Today, after forty-five years, we are still friends. She married and is already a grandmother; we call each other and exchange greetings, and after all this time she has read my narrative and discovered who I am.

Someone you don't expect to exist, but who makes every woman in the world dance.

Ferdinando