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*The Lying Life of Adults* and Why Aunt Vittoria did Nothing Wrong

As girls approach adolescence, they are defined by their family and friends. Traits they are perceived with bleed into their identity, attaching statuses that can be detrimental to the girls as they grow into a hormone fueled stage of their lives. Giovanna in *The Lying Life of Adults* is no exception: her simple life as a well-read and innocent girl is shattered when her dearest father, Andrea Trada, proclaims that Giovanna is “ugly [just like Aunt] Vittoria”. This does not bode well for his relationship with Giovanna afterwards, particularly when he separates with Nella Trada - his own wife. The complexity of Andrea’s relationship with Giovanna is warped as she grows into an adult, particularly with the influence from two “mothers” in her life, her birth mother and her aunt. The desperation to navigate her oncoming adulthood and her relationship with her father is worsened, and ultimately the question is asked of how similar yet dissimilar she is with the man who raised her.

In the opening chapter of *The Lying Life of Adults*, Giovanna states that “[her] father [said to her] mother that [she] was very ugly”. This remark defines the entire tone of the novel, particularly with the contempt Andrea holds his daughter as she begins to develop into a complete woman. Further remarking as “[Giovanna] getting the face of Vittoria”, Andrea’s relationship with Vittoria is apparent with the amount of malice that is conveyed in that remark

with such tone. How can any father comment so maliciously on their own child, particularly comparing them to their disavowed sister? This, combined with Giovanna's own changing body, severely damages her own image and puts into jeopardy her relationship with her father. This occurs solely because of her father's relationship with Vittoria, however damnable it is considering their past, and this only worsens what becomes of the father and daughter's relationship. It destroys the foundations of childhood love and adoration between the two and begins to pit both people against one another, forcing one another to choose between affection and selfish desires.

The malice that Andrea holds for Vittoria further warps his relationship with his daughter as Giovanna begins to know her on a personal level and interact with her more. The mystery behind Aunt Vittoria is slowly dispelled and brought to reality: the title of the book is all too prominent of what lessons she teaches her niece. Vittoria exposes all of the illusions that Andrea has put up for Giovanna, particularly with how "put together" the family is and how utterly flawless they seem to be as they rest on the laurels of their intellect and position of being well-to-do people that are infallible, yet "oh so easy to break" and be damaged. Even as this comes as the result of Andrea exposing a prior affair Vittoria was having with a married man, her rage that she holds towards her brother - or her "ugliness", as aptly as she is described over and over again - leads her to turn the tables on him. This disillusionment then results in Giovanna's rebellion, adding fuel to the fire of her already hormone-addled situation of becoming a young woman. This does not strike as hard as the simple item that dictates the final nail in the coffin for the father and daughter - the bracelet that was given to Giovanna as a gift to the newborn baby. As the fortuitous catalyst for Vittoria's revenge, Giovanna only proceeds to worsen the relations

between herself and her father as she begins to truly understand what it means to become an adult by learning to see through the lies of her parents, and the malicious behaviors that come with the new, and all too tempting territory.

The change between Andrea and Giovanna is ultimately defined by the bracelet: a gift from Aunt Vittoria, stolen by her father and given to his affair partner Costanza. When it comes to light that Andrea gave something that was never his to give away, every word that Vittoria said to her niece suddenly becomes nothing short of the gospel. The veil has been lifted and all of a sudden, everything makes sense: the way her father smells of another, the baited jabs to his own daughter, and how the exposure destroys the married relationship between Andrea and Nella all fall on the shaky foundations that had once been established. Even after Giovanna swears off Vittoria and blames her partially for the downfall, the contempt that she holds for her father is relentless. She refuses to see him and interact with him even at the behest of others in her life, but perhaps it is the “ugliness” that Andrea once envisioned for his daughter: becoming a miniature version of his sister, despite the blame solely resting on him and his own, house-wrecking shoulders that has driven her directly into the arms of her willing and vengeful aunt.

Even as Aunt Vittoria imposes on the father and daughter relationship, the lessons she imposes on Giovanna are invaluable and put her on the opposite side of the affair spectrum than her father. By observing how Vittoria is nearly inseparable with Margherita as a sort of pseudo adoptive family, it exposes how restrictive and mysterious her own parents have been with hiding away the dramatic reality of the lie they have been living. Perhaps Giovanna desires to have such intimacy and closeness with another that is not specifically sexual in nature, and does

not bleed into the territory of causing an affair. However, this notion is further disproved as Giovanna does somewhat mend her relationship with her father towards the end of the novel, but the relationship as it stands can never be repaired. Even when not surrounded by her father, she still believes that he is holding her back in her social relationships, and ultimately seeks to discard whatever burdens he has imposed on her and their relationship.

Conversely, Giovanna's relationship with her father is also altered and strained following the revelation of Andrea's affair with Costanza being revealed. This affects Giovanna greatly in the sense of how broken she sees her mother, Nella. Nella is seen as a figure of utmost stability in Giovanna's life, serving as the mediator when there is the initial miscommunication with Andrea calling his own daughter ugly in comparison to his sister. She seeks to be plain with her daughter, but in any way that a mother would try to soften the blow of reality. When Andrea's affair is revealed, Nella is broken. She obsesses over her husband despite him having abandoned her. Every waking moment is spent with her pining after her husband and wanting to repair the relationship that they once had. As a result, Giovanna's relationship with her father falters - how can the man she once held in such high regard tear down everything she thought he was? How can someone she once adored ever return to who they once were? Even as Giovanna wants to commentate on Nella's potential activities with Mariano, it is ultimately the affair between Andrea and Costanza that destroys the major maternal figure in her life, as well as any regard she held for her father.

Even as Nella comes to terms with the affair, her "copium" is primarily spent justifying and defending Andrea. This, in combination with the malice from Aunt Vittoria, creates a strange dynamic in which Giovanna is shown various relationships to men - particularly her father. She

is constantly comparing the men in her life to be similar to her father. With this in mind, the desire to become less like the innocent, well-tempered daughter grows. Every instance that would have her call back to her prepubescent roots of childlike wonder, she immediately seeks to shed the notion and become her own woman. This response could be attributed to Giovanna wishing to be more than who her father perceives her as. Alternatively, it could be a symbol of Giovanna breaking the cycle of what has occurred in her life since becoming a teenager. At the end of the novel, she discards the bracelet after having her first sexual encounter. Seeing as how sex and the bracelet have been pivotal to her relationships in the years focused within the novel, her desire to simply get it over with and then leave the bracelet shows how little she seeks to value both of those in her life. She does not wish to hold onto these concepts that have burdened the adults in her life. Rather, she seeks to live a life that is free from the lying and deception and live as honestly as she can manage as she blooms fully into adulthood. Considering the structure of the novel, this is exemplified for this to be the last chapter of the book, as well as the closing chapter of her turmoil and growth in one of the most tumultuous times of her life with her father and his deception.

Giovanna is subject to the lies that the adults in her life spill, along with their deception and messy way of going about life. As a woman who once looked up to her father and sought the world of him, the evolving relationships that she has experienced with Nella and Aunt Vittoria in her adolescence changed her relationship with him and ultimately, the path in which she took in life. By commenting on his daughter's looks, Andrea twisted the way in which his daughter looked up to him, but in all actuality, he simply exposed his true self to the world as it came crumbling down around him.