

## LOVE, LUST AND LIFE: AN ANALYSIS OF PAULO COELHO'S ADULTERY

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**ABSTRACT:** *There is absolutely no worse death curse than the humdrum daily existence of the living dead," says Anthon St. Maarten, which is the predicament of the heroine of Paulo Coelho's Adultery, Linda. The introduction itself unfolds that she is a journalist, married with two children and has an affluent lifestyle. Despite having no reasons to worry, she is bored because she feels a kind of lack of desire to live because of her secured and predefined routine existence with no adventure. To escape from her mundane routine, Linda resolves to do away with her "missing joy with something more concrete – a man." She gets along with a high school boyfriend turned politician who uses her simply for his sexual appetite. On the contrary, Linda pines for him and ponders that she is in love with him. She excitedly admits that, "It's thrilling to fight for a love that's entirely unrequited." This new experience of having no predefined notions, unpredictable behaviour of Jacob drive her crazy to that extent where she suffers emotional imbalance and opts life-changing decisions. At the end, when she paraglides in Switzerland, she has a revelation that the "world is perfect," and to "love abundantly is to live abundantly.*

**KEYWORDS:** Paulo Coelho, Lust, Marriage, Love, Linda, Sex, Adultery

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### INTRODUCTION

"There is absolutely no worse death curse than the humdrum daily existence of the living dead," says Anthon St. Maarten, the author of Divine Living: The Essential Guide To Your True Destiny. True to this, is the predicament of the heroine of Paulo Coelho's Adultery. Her introduction on the very first page of the novel acknowledges thus, "My name's Linda. I'm in my thirties, five-foot-eight, 150 pounds, and I wear the best clothes that money can buy (thanks to my husband's limitless generosity). I arouse desire in men and envy in other women." This encapsulates the physical appearance, economic stability, nature of her husband, and the lifestyle of her family. To add to this, she has two lovely children who are considered by her friends to be her "reason for living," and she is a highly regarded journalist at a famous newspaper in Geneva.

The introduction itself unfolds that despite having no reasons to worry, she is bored which is revealed as, "Every morning, when I open my eyes to the so-called "new day," I feel like closing them again, staying in bed, and not getting up." She feels a kind of lack of desire to live because of her secured and predefined routine existence with no adventure. This discontented and frustrated state of mind is further fueled when she happens to interview a writer who simply mentions, "I haven't the slightest interest in being happy. I prefer to live life passionately, which is dangerous because you never know what might happen next." After this encounter, Linda is preoccupied with her obsession to get rid of her fairy-tale kind of life. She is so bored that she expresses, "I know what lies ahead of me: another day exactly the same like the previous one. And passion? Well, I love my husband which means that I've no cause to get depressed over living with someone purely for the sake of his money, the children, or to keep up appearances."

To escape from her mundane routine, Linda resolves to do away with her “missing joy with something more concrete – a man.” She gets attracted to a former high school boy friend, Jacob, a prominent politician whom she interviews for the newspaper. At the end of the interview, when he locks the door and kisses her, she considers pushing him away but the lust takes over. That is the beginning of their affair – a more lustful and animal like rather than passionate and human. She explains her mentality thus, “I’m having a bit of illicit fun as well. I’ve managed to break the rules and the world hasn’t caved in on me. I haven’t felt this happy in a long time.” She gives him the oral pleasure and more than him she feels “better, braver, freer.” Then she suffers the aftermath of having committed the sin – the fear of being caught. She remains conscious throughout the day in the office as well as home that none should find the traces of her sin.

What amazes more about Linda is, on the same night, she becomes “mad with desire, needing a man, needing to be kissed, and needing to feel the pain and pleasure of a body on top of mine.” She arouses her husband and they end up making love during which she confesses of having achieved “multiple orgasms.” As Nicholas Rowe says that, “Lust is, of all the frailties of our nature, what most we ought to fear; the headstrong beast rushes along, impatient of the course; nor hears the rider’s call, nor feels the rein,” she decides to “take this little game of seduction a step further- it’s a game that has always amused me. What have I got to lose? I know all the methods, diversions, traps, and objectives.” She meets Jacob at La Perle du Lac, an expensive restaurant on the lakeshore, to know about him and his intentions. Initially, Jacob, “entirely focused on himself, his career, and his future,” is apprehensive to be seen around the city with a journalist but gradually he is completely drawn towards her.

Having known her background, he is surprised about her appetite for adventure and asks her thus, “There’s something in your eyes, a sadness I find inexplicable in a pretty woman like you with a nice husband and a good job. It’s like seeing a reflection of my own eyes. I will ask you again: Are you happy?” This encapsulates his attitude towards life, marriage and social values. He is mature enough to read her mind, understand and identify her personal problems that lie behind her social and professional mask. Her reply that happiness is not something that can be precisely measured, discussed in plebiscites, or analyzed by specialists suggests that she has clarity in her thoughts and her indulgence with him is completely welcomed by her. In a nut shell, they both are trapped in their respective marital ennui, with good, loving and caring life partners who could not command passionate love and be interesting to them. In this regard, it is significant to quote Benjamin Franklin who asserts, “Where there's Marriage without Love, there will be Love without Marriage.”

In course of their affair, Linda designates their mating thus, “He grabs me by the hair like an animal, a mare, and his pace grows faster. He withdraws in a single motion, rips off the condom, turns me over, and comes on my face.” To conceal their affair, Jacob suggests her to take a shower before hugging her husband and to throw away her panties “because the Vaseline will leave a mark.” Jacob’s intimacy for Linda triggers a subverting mix of culpability, stimulation and obsession that is overpowered by nothing but wild lust and mere sexual appetite. On the contrary, Linda pines for him and ponders that she is in love with him. She excitedly admits that, “It’s thrilling to fight for a love that’s entirely unrequited.” This new experience of having no predefined notions, unpredictable behaviour of Jacob drive her crazy to that extent where she decides to get rid of his wife, Marianne, whom she considers to be the hindrance to her happiness.

In course of time, having experienced Jacob's fifty-shades-of-greyness, she confesses, "I love what he has awakened inside me. He treated me with zero respect, left me stripped of my dignity." This calls for an analysis of what kind of character Linda is. She is not happy with love, respect and acceptance rendered by her family and profession but she derives a vague pleasure from her unrequited love for a man who treats her with no respect and turns a blind eye to his selfishness and infidelity. Her growing intimacy with Jacob for aggressive and gratuitous sex makes her destroy their lives. She thinks that his wife "precisely the kind of woman I would like to destroy pitilessly" should be terminated from his life and so she devises a wicked plan to purchase illegal drugs and place them at her office to trap her judicially but doesn't follow through. Linda compares herself to Frankenstein's monster, "A Modern Prometheus," the subtitle of Mary Shelley's book and Robert Louis Stevenson's Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. She asks herself, just once, "Where are my morals?" But that's the scope of her soul-searching.

Linda's sufferings throughout the journey of self-discovery, after meeting Jacob, takes a toll on her emotional balance. Finally, when Linda visits three psychiatrists for the problem of having "murderous thoughts," she is diagnosed to have emotional problems that comprise "transference," "hormonal disturbances," and over usage of drugs. The oxymoron of animalism of Jacob who doesn't seem to have any meaningful connection with anyone and the saintliness of Linda's husband who doesn't fit in the stereotype of an affluent man, are the extremes and Linda seems to be torn apart between the two. In addition to Linda's self-discovery and search for meaningfulness in life, Coelho also offers satirical inoculations at a few social standards of the time like forbearance of the Swiss society, the journalism which changes news into stories and the ideological blinders of psychiatry.

At the end, when she revisits Switzerland with her husband and recalls their fun-filled honeymoon trip to the same place, she has a revelation while paragliding. She mentions that the "world is perfect," and to "love abundantly is to live abundantly." She feels it is love for oneself and others that makes our existence meaningful. She carves out a niche for herself to attain completeness and opines, "All you can do is look at Love, fall in love with Love, and imitate it." All her trials and tribulations seem to vanish as clarity enters her mind. Happy and contented, she declares, "we will go outside to celebrate life. I am sure that the new year will be excellent."

Coelho does not seem to punish her for the sexual sin or make her confess the blunders she commits. Instead, he has portrayed her to be a strong and interesting character capable of achieving selfhood in her own way. She does not seem to feel guilty or ashamed of her involvement with Jacob. In fact, this encounter has enhanced her ability to have a clearer vision of herself. The author seems to assert the opinion of Victor Hugo, the French poet, novelist, and dramatist of the Romantic movement in Les Miserables, that "To love or have loved, that is enough. Ask nothing further. There is no other pearl to be found in the dark folds of life."

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