

# Adultery

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## Extract

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. But I can't do that.

I have a wonderful husband who is not only madly in love with me, but also the owner of a large investment fund. Every year—much to his distaste—he appears in *Bilan* magazine's list of the three hundred richest people in Switzerland.

I have two children who are (as my friends say) my 'reason for living.' I get up early to make their breakfast and take them on the five-minute walk to school, where they spend all day, allowing me to work and fill my time. After school, a Filipino nanny looks after them until my husband and I get home.

I enjoy my work. I'm a highly regarded journalist at a respectable newspaper that can be found in almost all the news kiosks in Geneva, where we live.

Once a year, I go on holiday with the whole family, usually to some far-flung paradise with marvelous beaches, where we stay in exotic cities inhabited by very poor people who make us feel richer, more privileged and more grateful for the blessings life has bestowed upon us.

Ah, but I haven't introduced myself. Pleased to meet you. 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.

And yet, every morning, when I open my eyes to this ideal life that everyone dreams of having but few achieve, I know the day will be a disaster. Until the beginning of this year, I didn't question anything. I simply got on with my life, although, now and then, I did feel guilty about having more than I deserved. One day, though, while I was making everyone breakfast (it was spring, I remember, and the flowers were just beginning to open in the garden), I asked myself: 'Is this it?'

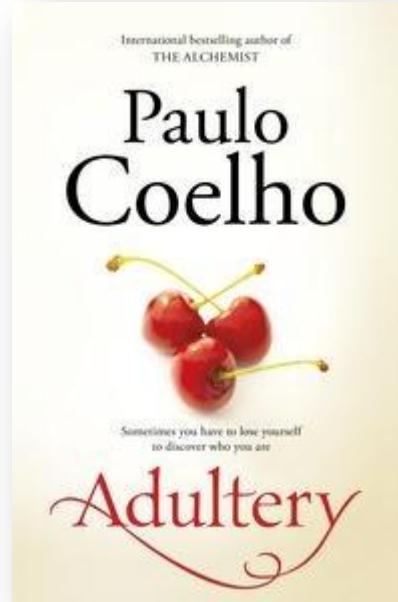
I shouldn't have asked that question. It was all the fault of a writer I'd interviewed the previous day who, at one point, said:

'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.'

At the time, I thought: 'Poor man. He's never satisfied. He'll die sad and embittered.'

The following day, I realized that I never take any risks at all.

I know what lies ahead of me: another day exactly 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.



I live in the safest country in the world, I have no problems to speak of, and I'm a good wife and mother. I was brought up as a strict Protestant and intend to pass that education on to my children. I never take a false step because I know how easy it is to ruin everything. I do what I have to do efficiently and put as little of myself into it as possible. When I was younger, I experienced the pain of unrequited love, just like any other normal person.

Since I married, though, time has stopped.

Until, that is, I came across that horrible writer and his answer to my question. I mean, what's wrong with routine and boredom?

To be honest, nothing at all. It's just . . . it's just the secret fear that everything could change from one moment to the next, catching me completely unawares.

From the moment I had that ominous thought that bright, beautiful morning, I began to feel afraid. Would I be capable of facing the world alone if my husband died? 'Yes,' I told myself, because the money he left behind would be enough to support several generations. And if I died, who would look after my children? My beloved husband. But he would surely remarry, because he's rich, charming, and intelligent. Would my children be in good hands?

The first thing I did was try to answer all my questions. And the more questions I answered, the more questions appeared. Will he take a mistress when I get old? We don't make love as often as we used to—does he already have someone else? Does he think I've found someone else because I haven't shown much interest in sex for the last three years?

We never have jealous spats, and I used to think that was great, but after that spring morning, I began to suspect that perhaps our lack of jealousy meant a complete lack of love on both sides.

I did my best not to think about the matter anymore.

For a whole week, whenever I left work, I would go and buy something in one of the expensive shops on Rue du Rhône. There was nothing I really wanted, but at least I felt that I was—how should I say this?—changing something, dis- covering something I didn't even know I needed, like some new domestic appliance—although, it has to be said, novelties in the world of domestic appliances are few and far between. I avoided toy shops, because I didn't want to spoil my children by giving them a present every day. I didn't go into any men's shops, either, just in case my husband might grow suspicious of my sudden extreme generosity.

When I got home and entered the enchanted realm of my domestic world, everything would seem marvelous for a few hours, until everyone went to bed. Then, slowly, the night- mare would begin.

I think that passion is strictly for the young. Presumably, its absence is normal at my age, but that isn't what terrifies me.

Today I am a woman torn between the terror that every- thing might change and the equal terror that everything might carry on exactly the same for the rest of my days. Some people say that, as summer approaches, we start to have weird ideas; we feel smaller because we spend more time out in the open air, and that makes us aware of how large the world is. The horizon seems farther away, beyond the clouds and the walls of our house.

That may be true, but I just can't sleep anymore, and it isn't because of the heat. When night comes and no one is watching, I feel afraid of everything: life, death, love or the feeling that I'm wasting the best years of my life in a pattern that will be repeated over and over until I die; and sheer panic at facing the unknown, however exciting and adventurous that might be.

Naturally, I seek consolation in other people's suffering.

I turn on the TV and watch the news. I see endless reports about accidents, people made homeless by natural disasters, refugees. How many people on the planet are ill right now? How many, whether in silence or not, are suffering injustices and betrayals? How many poor people are there, how many unemployed or imprisoned?

I change channels. I watch a soap or a movie and for a few minutes or hours I forget everything. I'm terrified my husband might wake up and ask: 'What's wrong, babe?' Because then I would have to say that everything's fine. It would be even worse if—as happened a few times last month—he put his hand on my thigh, slid it slowly upward and started caressing me. I can fake orgasms—I often have—but I can't just decide to get wet with excitement.

I would have to say that I'm really tired, and he, never for one moment admitting that he was annoyed, would give me a kiss, turn over, and watch the latest news on his tablet, waiting until the next day. And then I would hope against hope that when the next day comes, he'd be tired. Very tired.

It's not always like that, though. Sometimes I have to take the initiative. If I reject him two nights in a row, he might go looking for a mistress, and I really don't want to lose him. If I masturbate beforehand, then I'm ready and everything's normal again.

'Normal' means that nothing will ever be as it was in the days when we were still a mystery to each other.

Keeping the same fire burning after ten years of marriage seems a complete impossibility to me. And each time I fake an orgasm, I die a little inside. A little? I think I'm dying more quickly than I thought.

My friends tell me how lucky I am, because I lie to them and tell them that we often make love, just as they lie to me when they say that they don't know how their husbands can still be so interested in sex. They say that sex in marriage is interesting only for the first five years, and after that calls for a little 'imagination.' Closing your eyes and imagining your neighbor lying on top of you, doing things your husband would never dare to do. Imagining having sex with him and your husband at the same time. Imagining every possible per- version, every forbidden game.