

Two Sisters

by Lady Strange

A discussion between two sisters on their different approaches to life. A thinly disguised educational and/or philosophical tract. Rating for disturbing themes because an affair is implied. Likewise, an abortion is implied.

A short story

Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N titles of books are underlined and emphases are italicised.

TWO SISTERS

Unless you were acquainted with Aspasia and Urraca Valla, you would be forgiven if you took them to be uneasy acquaintances. The elder was slight and petite in stature, willowy in gestures, as well as enigmatic and unobtrusive by nature. She could have passed for a handsome woman but her splenetic tendencies ensured that no one told her so. Despite this, she always had a listening ear for those she cared for and could be extremely disarming when the moment seized her. In company, however, Urraca, six years Aspasia's junior, was more sought after due to her winsomeness and vivacity. The disparity between the sisters can be attributed to their half blood relationship. Understanding this, it is easy to see how it is entirely possible for a tall, lively and luscious beauty to be related to an elfin, snub nosed bespectacled academic.

In light of her natural endowments, society expected Urraca to be its next toast. She had a comfortable home and possessed a father, a mother, a dog and money. She had beaux by the tons and was beloved by almost all who saw her. Society, on the other hand, anticipated Aspasia's maladjustment to life, imminent mental breakdown and reliance on drugs. She had no claims to beauty or economic success and had been brought up by her mother, a physicist, upon the latter's divorce from Mr Valla. Contrary to all expectations, Urraca was anything but a well-adjusted person. Society was, in turn, grossly disappointed to find Aspasia only plagued by slightly ill health. Aspasia would laugh and say that such were her opportunities growing up in a so-called 'broken home' without a housewife mother to care for her in her formative years. Yet, it was not lost on her that fashionable (or rather fickle) society's darling, Urraca, was the problem child with schizophrenia, a bipolar disorder and a tyrannical need to be loved by all she came in contact with. Yet somehow, her immediate family and ever burgeoning 'fan club' never saw Urraca that way. Only her doctors, Aspasia, her mother and a few of their friends begged to differ in the popular view on Urraca.

The sisters were civil to each other in spite of their different upbringing and natures; and as such, there was surprisingly never any animosity between them. They made it a point to meet up once a while to catch up on the latest occurrences in each other's lives and to mentally assess each other. Urraca, like Aspasia, was a naturally affectionate creature and loved her 29-year-old half sister quite unconditionally even though she thought her a trifle unstable and incomprehensibly peculiar. Aspasia was always more reserved towards her sister and though she enjoyed their meetings to a certain degree, she was only mildly fond of the woman who shared her father. Despite each sister's innate belief in her own superiority over the other, only Aspasia and her lover knew and acknowledged that the Valla sisters were more alike than they cared to imagine. As Aspasia's lover noted, the sisters were slim, insecure and tyrannical. And though these traits were manifested in different fashions, the more he saw of them, the more convinced he was of each sister's tyranny. Those were his thoughts from his office window where he watched Aspasia unconsciously push her glasses up her nose bridge. She was pretty even without sleep, balancing her notes, files and books in her arms. He stood there, watching her talk to one of her friends. He grinned as he caught one of her rare laughs; she seemed to be mouthing, "Good Lord! Perhaps the victory will be a rout!" He lingered at his window after she disappeared, still unconsciously smiling at memories of the little things she used to do for him in their long years together.

As he sat down to review his lecture notes, he heard a knock on the adjoining door following a sigh. It could only be Aspasia, he thought, glancing at his desk clock. She was writing her PhD dissertation and had to consult one of his colleagues. Although he was one of her supervisors, they were temporally incommunicado for "political" reasons and both parties suffered from its effects. He could discern her voice asserting some point or the other; he chuckled lightly as it was something he had taught her seven years ago when they first became lovers. He was teaching in another university then and she was his last undergraduate thesis student there. He remembered calling her a moral egoist playing on friendship and here she was, using it as the basis of her dissertation. Half an hour later, he heard her leave and felt her standing outside his door, hesitant as to whether she ought to knock. But in the blink of an eye, she was gone as quietly as she arrived. Deciding that the tension between them and his office had alleviated, he peered outside his door and caught a wisp of her lily of the valley perfume. He rolled his eyes with an impish grin as he retreated into his office, picking up *The Analects*; he instinctively knew from observation that she would be meeting Urraca later that evening. She always wore that scent during those meetings. He could not, however, derive any peace in his reverie, for Urraca had imposed upon him and entered his office without an invitation. Her appearance struck him for it was said that she was on a year's leave from school. As much as he would have liked to ponder on the matter, he was not given the opportunity to do so. Urraca promptly asked him whether she could borrow some condoms from him. He hastily thrust a small box into her eager hands, told her no return was necessary as they were gifts and showed her to the door. While exorcising Urraca and her outlandish ways, he silently prayed Aspasia would be safe from Urraca that evening.

Knowing full well that her lover sensed her presence, Aspasia quickly exited by the side stairway nearest to his office when she heard Urraca's mirthful voice as she ascended the main stairs. As much as she would have liked to have a few words with him, Urraca's hovering presence dampened her good mood. She had to restrain herself for his sake; she had to protect him and his reputation and to re-earn his trust. As her intuition resonated with negative vibes on her evening out with Urraca, Aspasia braced herself for the worst sort of impertinent questions amidst thoughts of her dissertation. She had long been inured to Urraca's brazenness and had been habitually accustomed to hearing comments as to the weirdness of her name vis-à-vis the exoticness of her sister's. Very little discomfited her these days and she believed she had political philosophy to thank for it. She had mellowed in her ways, learned temperance, liberality and good temper from her lover who had taught her the political and philosophical thought of the ancients. Furthermore, her wittiness, sense of self and love of knowledge and justice endeared her all the more to her lover, Wolfgang Jacobi. Aspasia believed that she was moderately agreeable in temperament due to political philosophy and seeing how much she has changed since her early youth, her mother would have concurred.

Such was the credit she gave to the value of political philosophy that she held it the reason for her better tolerance of her sister. Where she would previously let fly at her sister at the slightest provocation or nag at her sister to improve her mind, she merely nodded to the latter's prattles, asked questions at strategic moments and smirked whenever Urraca's conversation was not to her palate. Armed comfortably with this invisible armour at the restaurant of their meetings, Aspasia fished out her notes and blank paper and began scribbling. She knew from habit that her sister would be late. Three pages of words, a sunset and a courtesy call from Wolfgang later, Urraca's seat remained vacant. Unperturbed by the stares of the other diners and animated by the cool night breeze, Aspasia continued reading and writing after a cursory glance at her watch.

"Miss Valla," coughed a waiter with some trepidation. "I've brought you a glass of water while you wait for Urraca."

Without looking up from her book, she muttered in a deadpan voice, "Et tu, Brutus?"

Realising that the fellow had not grasped the meaning of her comment, she gestured for the glass to be placed on her left and thanked him with a cough drop. She was aware that her sister spared none of her conquests. After all, one of her own suitors had fled to Urraca's camp on grounds that she was a 'libertine'.

"How ironic!" thought Aspasia at the memory, as she sipped the glass of water. A beeping vibration from her cell phone at the table revealed that Urraca was en route and would be a little late. "What else is new?" mused Aspasia as she deleted the message. "At least, it's only an hour and not five like the last time."

It was easy to notice Urraca's presence anywhere, for she would appear suddenly and never be sweating. It was as if time stood still for her as she entered in a grand fashion, in a manner admired by most heterosexual men. True to her method, that evening was no exception: male customers stopped chatting, glasses stopped clinking, heads were heard turning to the counter as she emerged and cutlery fell noisily onto plates. Also, it helped that Urraca's voice announced her arrival. Dreamy sighs from male throats always accompanied her injunction of "Hi Sweetie! Is my sis here? I'll have my usual at the table" to the familiar waiter.

"Hi, Sis!" chimed Urraca, before she proceeded to kiss Aspasia's coldly proffered cheek. "Still writing your worms I see." She paused hoping to draw her sister's attention to her visage and when none was given, she continued with a bitter pout, "You're going to die alone and cold and unloved if you keep this up."

Her sister laughed hollowly. "Tell me something I don't know. I want a croissant sandwich with tuna stuffing, minestrone soup and a cup of tea," was the cool indifferent answer.

"Okay! What are you working on?" asked Urraca as she gestured to the waiter and pointed out Aspasia's order.

"My baby, better known as my thesis, which doesn't interest you. Apprise me of your affairs."

"Oh, I'm pregnant again and I've fought with Mum; and Dad is giving me more money for allowance. Frank gave me a car today because I turned down a date with him yesterday. And John proposed and I accepted. I am so happy to have my One. I'm going to do my SATs and I have been studying them for the past week. It's actually quite easy. I finished the guidebook in seven days! I have moved into John's hostel room. There's just so much I want to do. Oooh! And set up a business, I have been told that I have a beautiful voice and have good looks; that should attract people. La Modele wants to be their hair model for next month and Japan will offer me two-point-six million US if I would model some stuff for them. My face is not boring to them yet. Like this, I can earn money to go abroad and study. I saw your Wolfgang today," rattled Urraca, twisting her hair in one hand and answering phone messages with the other.

At the mention of her lover's name, Aspasia froze in her seat as she rebuked herself for introducing Urraca to her friends and her beloved. Putting down her pen with great care, she mentally kicked herself in the arse, looked her sister in the eye and asked, "Is he well?" Her question went unheard as Urraca launched into her detailed narrative on her evening of passion and John's proposal. Aspasia smiled, nodding indulgently every few minutes as she cleared her notes from the table. While marvelling at Urraca's ability to pay the waiter for their orders without missing a beat in her narration, Aspasia recalled the time she made the grave error of introducing Urraca to Wolfgang.

Urraca was just nineteen then, and even then, she had succeeded to all that was possible for a girl of her beauty she managed to barely gain admittance into the university where Wolfgang had transferred. Aspasia was then applying for graduate studies in that university and had secured a job there as Wolfgang's personal research assistant. In that joint first year, some madness possessed Urraca to take a fourth year course with Wolfgang and she had little choice but to consult with Aspasia daily. When Urraca arrived late for one of these meetings, she spotted her sister and Wolfgang sharing a cup of tea. An introduction had to be made and that was how Aspasia's relationship with Wolfgang came to be strained. Aspasia smiled wryly at the recollection and before any private reminiscence could be drawn up, Urraca interrupted her thoughts by shrilly declaring, "So I said yes! Hey! You listening? Why haven't you said you're happy for me? Why haven't you seen me in two months? Were you ill or something? I could have seen you, why didn't you call me?"

Instead of replying, "Those two months away from you was heaven" as she wanted to, Aspasia merely answered, "Oh no, nothing serious. It's your second time taking the year off school; I had better let you enjoy it. You spent your first year off modelling for that local cosmetics company, remember?"

"But you didn't tell me what's wrong with you?"

"I think I will be more amused in telling than you will be in its receipt. It was adult colic and I was distended with air. I couldn't burp or fart and I swelled with air. I didn't want to go out. I was a puffer-fish!" laughed Aspasia quietly.

Urraca wrinkled her nose in stern disapproval and heaved her bosom before saying, "Why so vain? For what? No one looks at you. There's nothing to see. I would not have minded going out with you."

"Not everyone has your *graceful condescension*," replied Aspasia with a forced smile. "Not everyone shares your non-voyeuristic streak. I wouldn't have gone out anyway as I was *indisposed*."

Unwilling to let the topic rest, Urraca continued, "But you have such bad dress sense, no one will know the difference! You're nothing much to look at all, no wonder only gays and married men talk to you."

Aspasia pursed her lips thinly. "Yes, I know, it's a nasty curse! So, Urraca, is it John's this time? You had one last exams three months ago if I recall correctly."

"Yup, it's John's. I want to keep it but my shrink says I cannot take care of her because of my condition. And John's very sweet, he will give up his graduate studies and marry me immediately if I wanted to keep her."

"Uh-huh, and it's a *her* thrilling," mumbled an indifferent Aspasia. "You are sure it's John's? The last time, you weren't even sure whose it was. You were on auto-destruct, self-pity mode then. Are you on that now?"

"I'm sure! But I think I will abort. It will ruin my plans for overseas study if I have the baby now. You know the bloody gynae at first told me it was a cyst. You're right, you know they are trying to cut down abortion in this country for the declining birth rate. But I will abort it anyway, John will accompany me and he will give me his strength. At least I know it will not be a Japanese or blue eyed or blond baby girl this time it's really John's. And know what? I'm sure he's the one!" squealed Urraca, as she earnestly crushed her sister's writing hand.

"He's the one all right, along with the other 'X' number of men you've had. Blue eyes and blond hair belong to recessive genes; so, don't get your hopes up," laughed Aspasia at her sister's blank look, as she broke free of Urraca's iron grip. "So, let's review your plans you enrolled in PMU four years ago; you're taking two to three years leave from school on the auspices of your psychiatrist and psychoanalyst and are on the six year basic full-time degree tract. You had better buck up, Urraca. After getting predominately Ds in first year and vomiting your way out of every other exam since then, you're in bad shape."

"Who are you to talk? You do nothing but dream philo and romantically chase knowledge. There are bread and butter things more important than good grades. I hate to be accusatory, but look at you! You're a hideous old maid who refuses to accept that the world doesn't run on philo but money! You only want knowledge and philo that's sooo romantic! You can't have the man you want because he will not leave his wife and his sons! Face it, sis, you will have all the knowledge in the world but because you are so romantic, you will die, poor, cold, alone, unloved, and shoeless!" spat Urraca.

"And are you free from these romantic inclinations and entanglements that you accuse me of?" laughed Aspasia in a dangerously flat and ironic tone. "For someone who subscribes to the notion that ignorance is bliss, you are an aberration. You are happy in yourself, yet you are not ignorant. According to you, you apparently have beauty, intellect and wisdom. A rare combination! Tell me, fair Urraca, how do you do it? Teach me how to be like you in that respect."

"Your single-minded determination for knowledge and what you cannot have is what will consume and destroy you. And what's your goal? Knowledge! For what? Stupid justice! And of all the small number of men you can attract, you pick a married one with whom you will never be number one. He will never put you as number one in his life!" Then as the waiter came by to pick up the soup bowls, Urraca adopted a softer, feminine tone and continued self-righteously. "I am different! I have many wants and I have always been number one with all my partners. If I cannot have A, I can go after B; if I cannot have B, I go after C and so on. That's the benefit of having many interests and not just your stupid philo leading to unattainable knowledge. It's you and your dead languages and your Wolfgang Jacobi."

"*Leave Wolfgang out of this,*" cautioned Aspasia with an edge of annoyance visibly creeping into her voice. Yet despite this alteration, Urraca remained unperturbed and did not seek to pacify her sister. "So, Miss Urraca Catherine Valla, with your varied interests, can you tell me what exactly are your plans? What do you hope to achieve in life? Enlightened me as to how *I should lead my life*"

"I want to study something that I like and not get tricked or caught in the system like you and your academic friends get up to with your politics department intrigue and all that rubbish. I tried lit in PMU, but it did so many old-fashioned things I didn't like it; then I must take other shitty modules outside of lit like PS. I tried a year of mass comm at PTU, but it was not what I wanted or expected after all. Kinda like men sometimes they talk so much crap, but very good in bed. I did a term of art at L'ecole des Beaux Arts and it wasn't any good. Their drawings are like yours. No wash, no life and have to learn art history. I don't want to do that. Or maybe do the Mona Lisa's Smile thing. I want something like women's studies but that would lessen my marriage prospects, but I already have John, so I can don't care about other things." She paused to determine whether she had other interests.

She must have been in deep thought for Aspasia noticed the veins throbbing on her temple. Beaming as she recalled the rest, she squeezed Aspasia's hand and continued enthusiastically, "I will go into relief teaching and modelling and save money for overseas education. I don't want to travel five days to get to the so-called good liberal arts university where you first got your BA. Where I will go, I don't know. But that Mona Lisa's Smile school looks good. Most probably I will go there. With my talent, I will go far. Or maybe I shall go into interdisciplinary things where I can do art, modelling, feminism studies and theatre all combined. Never mind! As long as I get to do what I want without boring things, I will go and do them."

"You only know that you want to study abroad but do not as yet know what you want to study?" quizzed Aspasia, cupping her chin with her hands. Upon receiving a vigorous nod from her sister, she continued, "And without knowing anything of entry requirements, your rapturous self-sufficiency and SATs would help you because?"

"I have wisdom! Unlike you, I can have special provisions for the exams you know because of my problems. And in America, they may treat me as a disabled case and I can have cheaper fees. You and your professional students and university profs who have knowledge, what cock! You only tell people about Kant, history, Malory and crap. I am realistic because with my SATs, I can get into any school I want and study whatever I want to and not meet the obstacles you met."

"So many presumptions, but I will humour you. Let's say, I concede to all your points and that I acknowledge your wisdom, even though I doubt it is phronesis. Let's even say you get to do all the modules that you like. Urraca, how does this make you realistic or more realistic than cynical lecturers and professional students like myself? If you are so adaptable, why can't you see that education means appreciating coursework that you dislike? Why can't you see that all forms of education involve learning some things that we dislike? Why don't you use your self-professed versatility and adapt to the courses that you dislike? What makes you able to see things objectively and unromantically? Is it your scatterbrain or your cocaine fuelled ideas sorry I mean, multifarious interests? Are your SATs scores good? Do not forget you have a nasty propensity to throw up before and during any test. Will you do well given these insoluble conditions?"

"Yes!" insisted the beauty. "I'm full of contingency plans. Can't have A, have B and so on. I am doing all this for bread and butter. I am realistic because I am doing this for survival, it does not matter what I do, as long as I get money, get married and have children and be thought of as successful. Not like you and your knowledge is virtue is crap, calling your thesis, your baby! Ha! Ha! I will not be destroyed because I have no definite shape, but you and your philo day and night like that Wolfgang Crates Jacobi, how can you survive in the real world? You have big egos and are selfish. Look at me, I'm the fairy princess in the real world that's why people love me. You lock yourselves in a white tower waiting to be destroyed by your single-minded never-ending and insane pursuit for knowledge. At least my chase of my dreams can end realistically and happily. Yours cannot, and you do not want to face that reality, you philo freak! Not only am I realistic, I am also careful!" ejaculated Urraca with livid emotion.

Aspasia merely laughed heartily at Urraca's exposition and after calming herself, she managed to reply, "So, you can bite, I see. You think you are wise and more intelligent than the academics that teach you?"

"Yes. C'mon, it's sooo obvious that I've wisdom and intelligence. You philo people and lecturers just know facts. Even at home and when I visit Dr Shrink, it is so obvious that Dad and Mum are the fools. They do not see that I am far superior to them and they dare to plan things for me here and there? Hard to believe that mum was a school teacher and Dad is a creative engineer," answered Urraca curtly.

"You take time off from school to earn money to study abroad because your parents will not sponsor you if you leave the country on your own?"

"Yes."

"You are very versatile because you do not have any overwhelming interests that dominate your life. You do not obsess about one particular thing and that makes you realistic and prudent. You are unfixed as to your wants and desires in the educational sphere."

"Yes!" was Urraca's exasperated reply. She could not understand Aspasia's motives in breaking down her arguments.

"Anything to add to the matter, oh, beautiful and damned one?" asked Aspasia, as her eyes danced in near exultant animation.

"Yes! I hate it that *everyone*, especially Mum and Dad, John, you *everyone*, treats me like a kid. I can take care of myself. You know John says I don't know what I want and tells me that I am childish. Mum and Dad won't let me go abroad to study because they think I cannot care for myself. When mum heard that John wants to go abroad for his post-doc studies, she agreed to sponsor me, but only if I go with him. That's discrimination and treating me like a kid," whined Urraca petulantly.

"Qualify your arguments, Urraca. Behave like a child and you are treated like one, young lady," responded a cold Aspasia, as she stirred her tea.

"Oh yes! You know that book I wanted to write about my modelling experiences in life? I have a publisher and I haven't even started yet! He tells me that I have great potential and the book is very promising. He calls it the work of a genius. Imagine that! And your plays have been rejected so many times, I think it's because you are too uncompromising to change what they want you to change in your writings and your personal style. Look at me, generally unfixed in everything and happy and successful and loved!" declared a triumphant Urraca, who clearly did not comprehend the reason behind her sister's sardonic smirk.

"Everything, dear Urraca? You're speaking in absolutes. Your intransigence in this matter will have to be qualified."

"See! You and your philo again! I am annoyed!"

"Put out when I seek to amuse? For shame! I study political philosophy not philosophy. I am a student of the political science department of PMU," declared Aspasia, barely concealing her pique.

"What's the diff? You are romantically chasing knowledge. Instead of philo, you can do policy and be more mainstream and more acceptable to people and get more funding. People wouldn't lump you with that Wolfgang Jacobi and say you deal with airy-fairy things in la-la-land. No wonder you are so unpopular in the department. No wonder all your friends got disgusted with you and don't call you often. If I didn't talk to them, you would have lost them for good with all your talk about life, and philo and esoterica," retorted the beauty vehemently, with a generous toss of her head. "People like you philo people like Wolfgang and you are all escaping from reality that the world is run by money not philo or whatever it is they major in. Luckily, John is no longer a Wolfgang fan; otherwise, he too will be trapped in the white tower. Now, he writes on governance, so much easier to make money and so easy to understand. You philo people are romantic dreamers in thinking that your philo will help you understand things, that's *sooo* unrealistic! You will have no food, no money, no shoes, no nothing because all you do is talk and talk it's not constructive. It serves no purpose; it only makes you unpopular and annoying. That's why I say you have no wisdom. And how you achieve this useless state? Studying things, even things you don't like, writing essays, term papers all the useless futile activities and you guys are like detached robots indifferent to everything. You philo people, you especially, refuse to see the light and stay there. You have no life, nothing. All you academics in that tower are the same you have no worldly experiences, are escaping from the real world of money, i.e. bread and butter matters. That's why you're childish and lack wisdom. That's why people like me will always succeed and be better than you so called thinkers. Everyone says good things about thinkers, but that's because they are all *dead!*"

"I take that masterful tirade was your argument. Such fire is impressive. But you neglect to see that those who see the light, return to the cave to tell the others about the light in the hope that they will lead a life beyond shadows," said Aspasia patiently as she lit her cigarette and sipped her tea. "Your extreme opinion of the ivory tower is yours and I respect that. In your zeal to pass judgement, you have neglected to see the other party's perspective. Sun Tzu remarked that knowing yourself is insufficient, for you must also know your opponent. Knowledge is virtue because it teaches you how to think, read and act; when to act and say things; when to remain silent; what ought to be said under which circumstances and so on. It teaches one to be at peace with one's self and directs one to the attainment of a well-ordered soul. Even if you do not achieve it, you are consciously trying to reach it. It is just. Don't stick your tongue out at me, this is political philosophy and it's always about justice. What is just is necessarily expedient. Out of all the inhabitants of the ivory tower, the good and noble folk there are wise because they teach social skills and teach us how to remove ourselves through our minds and souls. The world, as they see it, is dominated by power politics not money. Power politics determines and affects economics, which in turn impacts on money. In order to understand power politics, political philosophy is needed. It is a worldly subject; hence, do not talk of it so lightly. Seek to at least understand before you reject wholesale."

Staring blankly at her sister in some degree of dishevelled confusion, it was awhile before Urraca could snap, "You can defend your philo with your rhetoric, but you cannot defend yourself against the truth of the world and the reality and truth of my words. You, in your desire for knowledge have fallen in love with a man who will never treat you as Number One. He's not your Periwinkle! He's caused your downfall like philo has been using you and your justice and knowledge crap. I think..."

"*ENOUGH!*" interjected Aspasia in a passionate fury, silencing the noise in the restaurant.

Though she gritted her teeth and calmed herself, her anger showed through in her retort. "*You do not* speak ill of Wolfgang. Loving Wolfgang is not synonymous with loving knowledge or the pursuit of justice. It is not the same as loving the good in itself for itself. It is not the same as loving political philosophy. I know I am not Number One with him. He is not Number One with me either. Justice and Knowledge are our Number Ones. I love him because he has a beautiful soul. He helps me to see justice and appreciate it. He's no Pericles, I grant you; and he even falls short as a Crates, but his teachings are advantageous to me."

"Huh? What are you talking about?" questioned Urraca as she gawked vacantly at her sister with widened eyes and slightly parted lips. Emboldened by the audible admiring murmurs, she continued, "This is like your power politics running the world crap. You are such a dreamer. Justice is a made up thing in philo and it should stay there, in the book, on a dusty library shelf. It's all rubbish! Besides," she added, "These fancy philo ideas and Wolfgang Jacobi will cause you to die unsuccessful, alone, cold, unloved, poor, unrespected, forgotten, unwanted and shoeless. His wife has him on a rope. She has so much, that's why she can have her own affairs. She also has two sons two big fat ropes to bind him down with. You cannot compete with that! He will never leave her. He has his sons. She gave him those boys. You cannot give him anything. He doesn't even love you!"

Lividly rapping her fingers on the table, Aspasia turned to her sister with a deadly white glare and said in a calm and deliberate voice, "He may not love me, but he cares and that is enough. One should not be so acquisitive and avaricious in this life. Inveigling for things is not my modus operandi and you should know that by now. I want no unpleasantness with him or his wife. She is his wife, she has every prior claim and I have none. I am well aware of that. I have never asked him to leave her. I know he loves her in his own way. He is also fond of his sons; he has spoilt them. I know what rights I have in this relationship. For his part, he has never demanded my fidelity; he has never demanded anything of me should I prove unwilling to give it. He respects me and has revealed that he cares. He has only asked for discretion, which you have ruined. I am happy with him; we have good conversations and I am content. This is what happens when two people in a relationship hold justice above everything else."

"Huh? I want some wine. You want any?" asked Urraca, raising her glass to a man who sent her dessert.

Unable to restrain herself any further, Aspasia lashed out, "I've stopped drinking when I realised I told you about Wolfgang in a drunken stupor years ago, do you know how this guilt eats into me? Do you know what it is like to lose his trust? Do you even realise what it has cost me? You cannot leave my unconventional happiness be. Yes, I am his *maitresse en titre*. This does not give you the right to barge into our joint lecture and ask whether we would be too busy with each other to help you with your homework. Did you realise the department's peer review team was there? Did you have to hint at the carnality of our relationship? *You* nearly got me expelled! *You* nearly had him kicked out! *You* nearly ruined his reputation! You ensured that he was demoted from his associate professorship! *You* have made it such that we can no longer share courses or be seen together on campus or in public within a five-mile radius of campus. *You* have strained everything that I have had with him in those fatal ten seconds. Do you want to ruin my personal life? I don't ruin yours. *You damn tyrant*, what gives you the right to dabble in my affairs? What gives you the right to pass judgement on my affairs? Are you that pure and all-knowing? What right do you have to criticise my pursuits? What gives you a right to demand love from all you meet when all you do is kill it with your intrinsic unwavering selfishness."

Urraca cocked her head to a side as if trying to make sense of Aspasia's words. When the wheels in her head finally stopped spinning, all she could do in response was drink her wine, stare blankly, yet alluringly in the direction of some men across the bar and vacuously utter, "Huh?" She turned a dreamy smile unto Aspasia, who was simmering in rage and furiously stirring her tea.

"Don't sulk like that," complained Urraca as she gulped down the last of her wine. "You're jealous because I'm realistic and wise whereas your book learning gave you

nothing. I have love everywhere whereas you have none. I have ambition and you have none. I have success and everything that you secretly want and you have none."

To check her growing contempt, Aspasia slowed her breathing and lit another cigarette. She blew the smoke against the direction of the breeze to calm herself. "Jealousy," slowly began a now composed Aspasia with unveiled malice. "Or envy presupposes that the upset party thinks himself better than the other. In believing thus, the upset fellow thinks he deserves what the other has. By this then, it can be assumed that he believes the other chap undeserving of the article he lacks. I do not envy you; if I were feeling more amiable, I could tell you that I feel sorry for you. However, you have revolted my mind against any such patronising sentiment. We will only make ourselves unpleasant if this conversation persists. Leave me to my issues as I leave you to yours and let us end the evening on a friendly note."

Instead of silencing or pacifying her half sister, her comments drew a passionate rejoinder from Urraca. "I knew it!" she gloated triumphantly as she dramatically rose from her seat to show her figure to the best advantage, drawing applause from some of the men at the bar. "You're afraid and jealous! You're escaping from a reality that you refuse to see. I love you, sis I cannot let you do these stupid things to yourself."

Aspasia laughed dryly at Urraca's plea, mocking her declaration of affection. "Are you not going to say *please with sugar on top*? You do not love," said she coldly as she took up her bag, "You only want people to love you and heaven help them if they don't. You do not know the constituents of love; as such you do not know how to love. You may have all your monetary things, fame and fortune, but I am far richer in spirit than you will ever be materially. I have known real love; a love that nurtures and teaches; a love where the sex is only incidental. I know how to love, whereas you cannot even fathom the depths of my affection in that vacuity of yours. I know justice; I strive to work towards it. It enriches my soul far more than money will. It's not a matter of my failure to see reality. Rather, we have different worldviews. You're the one flinching away from what you do not care to understand. You are being irrational; *this conversation is at an end*"

Finishing her words, Aspasia drew herself up to leave but was detained by Urraca's utterance of "I don't understand. You're talking philo again and showing off your knowledge and lack of wisdom."

"Keep your sanctity, Urraca. Let your ignorance and escapism consume you in your habitual and indulgent self-pity. May it continue to bring you the bliss you spoke of. I want no part in it or anything else concerning you. I have had my fill of your nonsense to last my lifetime. You have just killed anything that could have possibly passed for dim affection in your favour. Goodbye," answered Aspasia without looking back at her momentarily bewildered half sister. Striding away from the table with a lighter heart and mind, she heard Urraca use her boasts of her next abortion to conduct a flirtation with someone on her cell phone. Before Aspasia left the restaurant, she could not help but look back at the scene. Faced with the familiar prospect, she allowed an ironic smile to play on her lips. As she dialled Wolfgang's number on her phone, she turned away from the dazzling view and muttered, "Nothing will change here; nothing ever changes here."

Footnotes:

Most of the characters in this story are named after people I admire greatly. Aspasia is named for Aspasia of Miletus (c.470-c.410BC), who was *hetaira*, a courtesan. She was very highly desired and prized because she knew philosophy, history, politics, science, art and literature. In about 440 BC, Pericles divorced his wife and took her as his life-long companion. Socrates and Pericles both credit her for teaching them rhetoric. Urraca is named for the Urraca, Queen of Castile and Leon (1109-1126). She was the daughter and successor of Alfonso VI. She spent 13 years leading her troops into battle against her second husband, Alfonso I of Aragon who seized her lands. The Renaissance humanist, Lorenzo Valla (1407-57), who combines Christian and Epicurean principles in his philosophical dialogues, lends his name to the sisters. Aspasia's lover, Wolfgang Jacobi, draws his name from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), Crates the philosopher (368/5-288/5 BC) and Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743-1819).

Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi was a German philosopher; born at Dusseldorf January. 25, 1743; died at Munich March. 10, 1819. He studied at Frankfurt and Geneva, and in 1764 became the head of his father's business in Dusseldorf. After his appointment to the council for the duchies of Julich and Berg in 1772 he devoted himself entirely to literature and philosophy. His house at Pempelfort, near Dusseldorf, became the meeting-place of distinguished literary men. Among his more intimate friends were Wieland, Hamann, Herder, Lessing, and Goethe. On account of the political agitation of the time he went to Holstein in 1794. During the next ten years he resided chiefly at Wandsbeck, Hamburg, and Eutin. In 1804 he accepted a call to Munich in connection with the proposed Academy of Sciences there. He was president of the academy from its opening in 1807 till 1812. His writings are characterized by poetic fancy and religious sentiment rather than by logical necessity. He held that the understanding can only join and disjoin given facts, without explaining them, and that knowledge deduced in this way is conditioned and relatively unimportant, being always related to a background of existence which forever remains beyond abstract thinking. All demonstrable knowledge, therefore, is relative and conditioned; it does not touch the ultimate nature of things. The faculty by which we grasp ultimate facts is not the understanding, but faith, which Jacobi identified with reason. It was Jacobi who first pointed out the fatal contradiction involved in Kant's application of the category of causality to the Ding an Sich. His doctrine of the relativity of knowledge was later exploited by Sir William Hamilton. Jacobi's principal works are the two philosophical novels, *Woldemar* (2 vols., Flensburg, 1779) and *Eduard Allwills Briefsammlung* (Breslau, 1781); *Ueber die Lehre der Spinoza* (1785; enlarged ed., 1789); *Dazid Hunw fiber den Glauben, oder Ide-alis;nus und Realismus* (1787), containing his criticism of Kant; *Ueber das Unternehmen des Kritizismus, die Vernunft zu Verstande zu bringen* (Hamburg, 1801); and *Von den gottlichen Dingen und ihrer Offenbarung* (Leipsic, 1811), which was directed against Schelling. During his last years Jacobi was employed in collecting and editing his *Werke* (6 vols., Leipsic, 1812-24). His *Auserlesener Briefwechsel* was edited by F. Roth (2 vols., 1825-27).

Crates (pronounced Cray-tees) of Thebes, a Hellenistic (A specialist in philosophy) philosopher, was one of the (Someone who is critical of the motives of others) Cynics and the teacher of (Ancient Greek philosopher who found the Stoic school (circa 335-263 BC)) Zeno of Citium. Crates was from (An ancient Greek city in Boeotia destroyed by Alexander the Great in 336 BC) Thebes and was a student of Diogenes of Sinope. It is said that he lost his ample fortune owing to the (The ancient kingdom of Philip II and Alexander the Great in the southeastern Balkans that is now divided among modern Macedonia and Greece and Bulgaria) Macedonian invasion, but a more probable story is that he sacrificed it in accordance with his principles, directing the banker, to whom he entrusted it, to give it to his sons if they should prove fools, but to the poor if his sons should prove philosophers. He gave up his life to the attainment of virtue and the propagation of (Practices self denial as spiritual discipline) ascetic self-control. His habit of entering houses for this purpose, uninvited, earned him the nickname "Door-opener". His marriage with Hipparchia, daughter of a wealthy (A Thracian-Phrygian language spoken by the ancient people of Thrace but extinct by the early Middle Ages) Thracian family, was in curious contrast to the prosaic character of his life. Attracted by the nobility of his character and undeterred by his poverty and ugliness, she insisted on becoming his wife in defiance of her father's commands. The date of his death is unknown, though he seems to have lived into the 3rd century. His writings were few. According to Diogenes Laërtius, he was the author of a number of letters on philosophical subjects; but those extant under the name of Crates are spurious, the work of later rhetoricians. Diogenes Laërtius credits him with a short poem, and several philosophic tragedies. (Greek biographer who wrote *Parallel Lives* (46?-120 AD)) Plutarch's life of Crates is lost. The great importance of Crates' work is that he formed the link between Cynicism and the (Someone who is seemingly indifferent to emotions) Stoics, (Ancient Greek philosopher who found the Stoic school (circa 335-263 BC)) Zeno of Citium being his pupil.

This story is loosely based on a conversation with an acquaintance. The issues discussed are real. The laws mentioned are real. I live in a place where wife-rape isn't against the law and where women have few *real* reproductive rights.

This story is set in an un-named town in an un-named Commonwealth country. It is most certainly *not* set in America.

Urraca's command of English is deliberately sub-par. It fits in with her character. She slips into colloquialisms easily, uses abbreviated speech forms. Her social, verbal, intellectual and other faux pas are intended.

The "Et tu, Brutus" remark is from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.

When Urraca referred to Aspasia's 'worms', she means handwriting. It is implied that Aspasia scrawls in cursive.

Lit is an abbreviation of literature, as in English Literature.

Mass Comm is an abbreviation of Mass Communications.

PS is an abbreviation for Political Science

Philo is an abbreviation for Philosophy

PMU, PTU and L'ecole des Beaux Arts are made up educational institutions.

The last line is deliberately ambiguous. The reader can choose to interpret however he/she wishes.