



HEATHER SMITH

The ideal wife

“John! John! Oh God, please let him find shelter somewhere, please let him be here! Or I’ll never be able to forgive myself!”

You married John just after you turned twenty and now, after ten years of marriage, you barely remember the feelings that united you. He’s a famous architect who’s always put work first; or at least that’s what he tells you. Every time he leaves town to oversee one of his construction sites, you die of jealousy. Your love may have got lost somewhere in the last decade, but the belief that John has secret lovers hasn’t left you for a second.

As a side effect, you’ve developed a surprising sexual curiosity that you’d have found obscene and degenerate as a girl. It began with you renting the most extravagant porn tapes you could find at RST Video as an outlet for your rage, then you started exploring “interesting” nightclubs, hiding your appetite for extreme experiences behind a respectable middle-class façade.

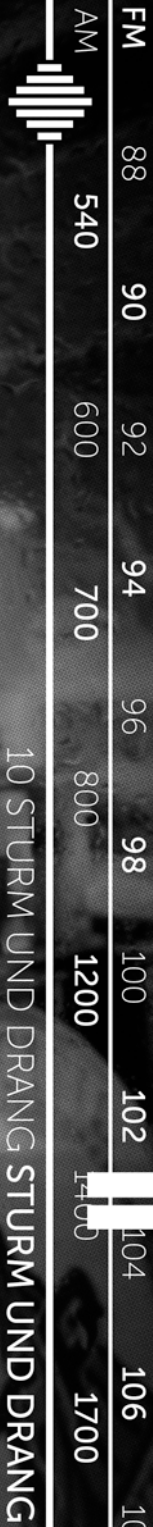
For a while, you lived two parallel lives: One was the perfect wife, the caring friend, the fussy housewife; the other an adventurous woman, uninhibited and without the slightest hint of a conscience. Until your dearest friend, Paula Cunningham, your partner in self-destructive escapades, got raped before your very eyes. She was either drunk or high, definitely unconscious, as that monster Kennet Hicks took advantage of her inert body. The two of you had

crashed a party and you caught sight of the scene through a half-open door as you looked for a bathroom. He was furiously rutting against her, and she was immobile, condemned to be helpless. You should have done something to stop him... But you just ran away, only stopping to retch.

Ever since that night, you have been crushed by guilt, unable to look Paula in the eye. You’re done with pornography and all the rest, and you’ve set your mind on rebuilding your marriage. But after a year of grey routine, it finally happened: You found an unmistakable text on John’s phone, sent by someone named Trice. Your suspicions became certainties, your jealousy, hatred. The image of the two of them together kept you up at night, pushing you into the arms of tranquilisers, sleeping pills and antidepressants. Until you overdosed.

John brought you to the hospital right away, and you came home after a stomach pump and a few days’ stay. But your crushed soul couldn’t go on like that. It was enough for him to approach the subject of your suicide attempt to once again make all your resentment bubble to the surface. After your rant trailed off into silence, John turned his back on you, and said, his voice icy cold: «You’re insane. I don’t know any Trice. I’m going out for cigarettes while you get a hold of yourself».

He’s been gone for two hours now, and the rain is anything but ordinary anymore. The thought of him caught in the storm, with only his raincoat and hat, drove you outside, as if the fear of losing him had brought back everything you felt for him. Paying no heed to the hail on your windshield, you drove to 66 Stop: He always comes here for his cigarettes. You hope he’s okay.



Profile

You've always been insecure, both of your role in your marriage and your position in society. John's money allowed you to feel above the rabble, with classy friends, a nice car and a big home. The American upper-middle class world was your oyster.

Then your jealousy, together with your frustrating inability to give John a son, slowly but surely brought you to a meltdown, making you want to drown the frustrating world your husband had built around you under a sea of promiscuity. Self-torture overwrote your love for John, becoming the only thing that could make you feel both useless and alive.

When you saw Kennet raping Paula, you saw yourself as him, violating your own body. It tore your soul in two. Then Trice's text swept away your last defenses, turning your worst nightmare into reality and throwing you into a bottomless pit of depression. But when all seemed lost, a ray of light shone into your heart: Maybe you still love John, and you need to tell him before it's too late.

Structure

The pain and turmoil of the last few days have disrupted everything but your elegant posture. Your every gesture is precise and purposeful, never out of place. But your nights of desperate folly have nurtured an instinct and a language that aren't too befitting of your standing.

Acquaintances

Mark Einnod, the town sheriff, in spite of the bad reputation that follows him around.

Kennet Hicks, the clerk of 66 Stop, and above all Paula's rapist. You're afraid of him, not just for what he did to your friend, but for what he represents to your distraught mind.

Frankie Cunningham, Paula's husband, a weak, submissive loser. He went as far as to beat her when he got it into his mind that the child your friend was expecting might not have been his. The fact that she envied your relationship with John always gave you pause.

Bob Garland, a famous doctor and Paula's lover.