

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

SYLVIA

My friends always tell me that I'm lucky, that John is an ideal husband.

When I think about the first time that he asked me out I still can't believe it. I was a freshman. He was a senior. Tall, blonde, his hair parted to the side, he was the football coach's pet and got excellent marks. My parents knew his parents so we had already spoken a few times but I never dreamed he would chase after me. When he approached my locker and asked me to the prom, I felt like I was on cloud nine. It was an unforgettable night: we talked about football and university, we danced the boogie woogie and at the end of the night John took me home. In the following months we often went to the drive in: on the fifth date we kissed, on the fifteenth we made love on the reclining seats of his red convertible.

That same year John graduated with top marks. Two months later, when he was already working hard in his father's legal office, he asked me to marry him. We got married at the church in town: his mother wanted me to wear her wedding dress.

There were lots of guests including the mayor, the football coach and local personalities. John's father bought us a house in a quiet area: we had a lawn in front of the house and the milkman brought us milk every morning. Nine months later I gave birth to John Jr. and Mary, twins. John quite rightly brought to my attention that continuing university and looking after two children was too much, so I gave up psychology.

John is the best father you could hope for. He doesn't smoke, he doesn't drink and he always has everything under control. Every day John Jr. and Mary climb into his car and he takes them to school, which is on the way to the office. I pick them up though, seeing as I don't work and have lots of free time. When they were six years old, John enrolled the children in the school's football team: he wants John Jr. to be a quarterback and Mary to be a cheerleader. On Sundays he takes them to the games and cheers relentlessly for his son so he will strive to be better and won't become a mediocre wimp. At Christmas, which is one of the best times for our family, John showers the children with gifts they have asked for, usually video games and clothes.

On Easter Saturday John packs up his Cherokee, I prepare the supplies and we all leave together for an excursion in the surrounding mountains. Maria, the Filipino housekeeper also comes. John and John Jr. go fishing in the river and later we have a picnic together.

During Summer I go for a month to the beach with the children to a house that John bought for me for our tenth wedding anniversary. Unfortunately he doesn't get to enjoy it much: he's always busy with work and prefers to stay home so as not to bother us.

As for me I couldn't imagine wanting anything more from life.

I adore my children. I live in a beautiful house. Maria keeps everything clean and tidy, so that I can spend most of my time with my friends, shopping and on my hobby, arts and crafts. Whatever I desire, jewelry or clothes, I need only ask John. Friday nights John and I have dinner with Craig, one of John's friends, and his wife.

I'm happy because John sleeps with me afterwards. Once a month we go to a party at the club and John asks me to doll myself up and not to say anything stupid when I talk to the other wives.

I won't deny it, every now and then I have worries too: I see John Jr. being uncommunicative or I hear Mary crying in her room. Then I go to John and ask if we can talk about it, but he tells me not to worry, that nothing important is happening and that there is nothing to talk about.

John works so hard. I only see him in the morning and late at night, those times he comes home from the office, seeing as often he is forced to stay there. He says he has to bring home the bacon. He is always tired and stressed, but when I ask him to tell me what is happening at work, he tells me that it's boring and that I shouldn't worry myself. Several times I've asked him if he loves me and he tells me that I shouldn't ask such questions, since I already know the answer.

I felt bad but I told myself that it's fine, I am too lucky: John is an ideal husband, everyone says so.

MARISA

My friends say that I'm making a mess of everything, that Roi is a bastard.

I met him fifteen years ago in a bar in the suburbs. This is a romantic recollection, the wallpaper was brown. I was there by myself: they had pissed me off badly at the hospital and I wanted to have a beer in peace. At the bar there were two guys: one with a great body who had ordered a beer and the other, unshaven with bags under his eyes who was drinking pear juice. The one with the great body started chatting me up: his name was

Cristobal and he was a surfer. I went along with it, I pretended I was interested but in truth I was just teasing. The other one didn't say a word. I like shy guys I wanted to take him to bed and in the end I did. Before leaving my room he excused himself for not being chatty at the bar. He'd been attending a clinic for

alcoholics for some time, a monkey that he'd had on his back for ten years. He was at the first stage and without a Martini in his body he couldn't seem to make conversation. There's no two ways about it: it's like I have a magnet for sob stories.

We've been fucking every now and then for ten month but for me Roi, the other one, well I start to really like him. One day, he comes to my house panting, red in the face, almost crying. 'Are you OK?' I ask. 'I feel great,' he answers, 'you'll never guess what happened to me.' 'What happened?' I ask. 'You'll never guess what happened to me,' he repeats. 'Fuck', I say. 'Tell me what the hell happened to you.' 'I finished therapy today,' he says excitedly, he's trembling with joy. Perhaps it was due to enthusiasm, maybe to desire but we fucked for the whole afternoon. I still have a couple of polaroids we took in bed, covered with sweat. Nine months later I dropped a little thing called Alicia.

From that moment we needed to get together or at least try. Roi started a series of crappy jobs that for an ex-alcoholic are more than you can expect including painter, porter, kitchen hand. With my nurse's salary we managed to make ends meet and rented a little apartment near the station with a bedroom, a bathroom and a small kitchen, the kind where the gas tank is always about to explode. In order to formalize the situation with the Tax Department and make my mother-in-law shut up we got married one Sunday in the station chapel. Cristobal, the only witness, arrived late and practically dressed for surfing, what an idiot.

Ultimately Roi is a good father. Alicia has a great time with him.

For example, she told me that last week, on the way to school, Roi took a strange route, longer than usual, and after a while started asking her: But do you really feel like going to school? Don't you get bored at school? Don't you want to come to the park and eat roast chestnuts with me? She wanted to go to school, so he took her there and spent five hours talking to the janitor, Gianni, who he is befriending.

Roi is obsessed that Alicia must become a famous actress of blockbusters, because when he was little he went to the cinema to see Spartacus ten days in a row. Alicia doesn't give a shit about doing a theatre course, but she loves other things like judo, drums, softball and Latin American dancing. Every time Alicia comes up with something new, Roi starts swearing under his breath. Every Christmas, pretending it's what she wants and without asking me, he gives her a pass to the Odeon cinema.

If Roi has some odd jobs to get done on weekends, Alicia and I stay home to keep him company and then he gets tiresome because he tells us over again how much he loves us, that he is too unlucky for us, that he doesn't deserve us. If there are no jobs to do Roi stays home anyway because he says that it isn't right to spend money that we don't have.

So Alicia and I go to the beach by ourselves. But in the summer we all go to my mother's country house, we stuff ourselves with flan and at night we go to the Redi, the bar in the town, that Roi likes because he can play cards with a couple of old guys.

Honestly, I work really hard at the hospital and when I come home there is always something else to do. Not that Roi sits around twiddling his thumbs: he's a great cook and he's handy around the house, but if you ask him to iron he will surely mess it up.

Living on a salary and a half is hard, I never have any money for myself. My only hobby is running with Alicia and one day we might run the marathon. Every now and then, Roi and I go and have a beer and a pear juice with Cristobal, who is seeing a lifeguard. Every fucking time we leave a bar Roi starts crying because the alcohol, the bar, the barman remind him of a horrible period of his life. I listen to him and I'm sorry that he still suffers because of that. Then I

start telling him about my problems and we talk two, three hours and at the end he always says: Oh, Marisa, it's all shit but keep your head up. When we have both vented verbally we get a real physical urge and we have such great fucks that my legs shake.

Every morning, Roi gets up first and prepares breakfast. At night, when I come back from running, Roi is sprawled out in front of the TV. So I give him a kiss, we eat something and sometimes we watch a movie from start to finish. All in all I think we love each other. He may be a bastard but he's the ideal husband for me.

In the year 1985, Oscar Wilde creates "The ideal husband". In the screenplay, Lady Chiltern represents the Victorian strict system of values and absolutely adores her husband Sir Robert. The day an old guilt of Sir Robert is unveiled, Lady Chiltern feels gutted: she can't believe he's been overtaken by his weaknesses. The ideal husband doesn't exist, then, or, if he does, is more or less a bastard, like the others.