

*Dorothée Dupuis*

THE  
IDEAL HUSBAND



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He was sitting there, legs crossed, leaning tensely forward as he was yelling a question at her, the same question 3 times in a row. She was pretending not to listen to him, joking loudly with Tim and Evan, drowning out the sound of his question with her laughter. At certain moments, engaged in something closely resembling a monologue that only troubled occasional eye contact, he was forcing her to nod, or mumble an agreement, just so that things didn't become too awkward. Tim was laughing too, but he was facing the guy and carefully looking him in the eye; in fact, he was staring at him. But the guy didn't care. He ignored his stare and kept trying to talk to Linda.

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Linda seemed to manage the situation with grandeur. Obviously she was also extremely high; but her movements and actions, except for a small masticating twitch, didn't betray any loss of control. At times, she had a little bit of a fixed stare as she was unceasingly checking the tip of her blond hair, rolling the dead fiber into her fingers — but other than that, no sign of impatience. The sun was slowly rising. In half an hour those exiting the building would find Sunday morning streets peopled by happy early risers starting their day as others were finishing it.

The three guys were doing coke. The yelling guy offered Linda some; she refused. He insisted; she

declined again. Tim was staring at the guy — as much to make him offer a line as to make his head explode by telepathy.

There was so much beer left. Everyone had bought alcohol with enthusiasm when they had proposed to come back to the exhibition venue but in fact it was too late, too cold and people were not that high anymore. If you guys want us to leave, we leave, said the guy. Tim was still staring at the guy while he said that. Linda looked at her watch: 8h30 in the morning. She said, yes, maybe it's time! There's almost no wood left ... and it will be bloody cold here. Evan suddenly stood up; doing so he banged his elbow against the stove, an assemblage

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of disparate material and the only source of heat in this former lumber yard in the middle of a little town in Flanders. He swore and started rubbing his arm. It made everyone stand up. The three guys put their jackets on. The guy said goodbye to Linda and he *hugged* her. Linda shrugged and pushed him slightly away but his grip was firm and he held her a few seconds, pressing her chest against his, her nose buried in his shoulder. Tim could smell the cheap Issey Miyake perfume from here, the kind of scent this sort of guy bought because he saw a commercial at the movies. He shivered and was about to step forward when the guy released her and all of a sudden, they had left the room.



The door banged from far away.

They remained silent. Everyone sat up again. Jeff, who hadn't said a thing, looked at Tim and Linda who sat against the wall again. She was leaning slightly on him, the wave of her blond hair spilling on his black jacket, her blue gaze slightly out of focus, her pupils large and dark amidst the humidity of her eyes. He wondered what she was thinking, but her face was impenetrable. Just this movement, this slight loosening in her until now rather composed attitude, made him want to leave. He got a cold sweat all of a sudden and looking out of the small window suddenly a full ray of light came straight into his face. He shrugged like a wet dog

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and stood up. He said: Evan, let's go! Evan grabbed his scarf, tobacco and wallet, stuffed his pockets and kissed them rapidly. They both mumbled something about meeting later and left.

He put an arm around her shoulder. He could feel her relax and cuddle against his torso. It was warm and nice, but also a bit weird. He didn't know her, a friend had said that their parents were from the same village and yes she was maybe vaguely familiar but the ghost of childhood had definitely left her face, the face of a pretty thirty-year-old woman. He thought, whatever ... if she is someone's sister well I guess I can make that up as *a hidden childhood love*.

These kinds of situations make me feel so uncomfortable, she muttered, shrugging and curling more into his arms. She suddenly turned herself backwards and looked into his eyes, fiercely, her hair shining. She kissed him. Her lips were cold but the inside of her mouth was warm, delicious. He felt as he had kissed her always. They made out for five minutes; at some point she pushed him away. Her face was pale, almost translucent in the morning light. She said: look, there is no more wood, I am gonna go get some at the entrance. She stood up and was almost at the door when Tim sprung after her out of some inexplicable intuition and said, no, it's OK! I am going. He ran and

put himself in the doorstep, almost bumping into the old Citroën parked there, as he was facing her. Really, let me do it, she said. No way, go by the stove, it's so cold.

He put the wood on the other side of the stove, close to the door of the other room, and went to get a blanket. Thirty seconds later they were making out again, the fire rising higher in the cold winter morning and he was touching her body with greed and with a feeling he hadn't felt since his late teen years at drunk parties and the beginning of sex when you are a handsome tall boy and your friends are teasing you too much about it. He was of course a much more mature person since then — a young successful artist

who wouldn't abuse a girl because they had overdone *substances*. She was now on top of him; she was holding his face in her hands as she was kissing him languorously. They opened their eyes. She stood back and she removed her T-shirt before him. She wore a black lace bra that enhanced her neat breasts and sporty stature. She smiled at him and said, close your eyes. He did, and her right hand kept messing with his face, his ears, his mouth: he was focused on his senses, aroused by the game of those fingers on his face, his hair, his neck, and the assurance of more contact with other body parts. He thought she was gonna search for his penis when she leaned slightly backwards

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to grab a loose brick from under the stove and athletically lifted it in a careful gesture above her head. He finally recognized her the moment she removed her hand and the brick crashed onto his skull.



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A SHORT STORY BY DOROTHÉE DUPUIS  
ACCOMPANYING THE EPONYMOUS EXHIBITION

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