

THE  
SECOND  
WIFE

BRENDA CHAPMAN



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**Summary:** A cop with a boring desk job tries to solve a case that might save her ex-husband from a lifetime jail sentence. (RL 3.3)



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## CHAPTER ONE

I don't know why I promised to meet the woman my ex-husband had left me for a year earlier. Maybe because she begged me. Maybe because I was curious. It might have been as simple as her choosing to meet at the Cantonese House restaurant a few blocks from the station where I worked. Lying Brian had ditched our twenty-two-year marriage for a woman from a temp agency he'd hired to sort out his sloppy filing system. It was time I met her and stopped imagining every possible way that she was a better wife than me.

My name is Gwen Lake. I am a forty-five-year-old divorced mother of none. I work for the Duluth police force doing bookkeeping and secretarial work when asked. I trained to be a police officer, but never made it past this desk job. It turns out I have a talent for filing and numbers. I can read a document and remember details weeks later. Police Chief O'Malley says I keep the office running. He can't look me in the eye when he says it. I know he thinks women should be teachers or secretaries, not wearing uniforms and carrying guns. I am counting the days until he retires.

I got to the restaurant twenty minutes early. I picked a booth that gave me a good view of the front door. I wanted to see Marjory before she saw me. I'd only caught a glimpse of her once from a distance. It was the day she drove off with my husband into the sunset and out of our bungalow for the last time. But I was sure I'd recognize her.

She'd be young and big-breasted with *harlot* stamped all over her.

I pretended to read the menu while watching the doorway. It would have been good if I smoked so that I'd have something to do with my hands. Every time someone came in the door, my heart jumped. I was beginning to wish I'd stayed at work. In the end, I wouldn't have given a second glance at the five-foot-three redhead who walked my way after scanning the room. I would never have imagined that this was the woman who haunted my dreams and fueled my revenge fantasies. She just seemed so small and...ordinary.

"Oh, Gwen, it's good of you to see me. Brian described you to a tee." She slid into the seat across from me and shrugged out of her black trench coat. "We sure could use today's rain. It's been one hot dry month of May, hasn't it?"

Her troubled eyes were green, the lids painted blue. I placed her close to forty,

and she was bony—like a chicken that needed fattening up. Her hair was copper-colored and held back from her face with a black velvet band that made her look young and vulnerable. I was beginning to see how Brian would have fallen for her. He was a sucker for helpless women. They stroked his ego and made him feel needed.

“And how did he describe me?” I asked. I should have known better.

“You know, mature. Medium height, blond and no interest in fashion...” Her voice trailed away and she looked around the restaurant as if making sure we were alone.

I sighed. Mature meant middle-aged. No interest in fashion meant frumpy. She’d cut me off at the knees without batting an eye. “So, what did you want to meet me about?” I asked, wanting to get the meeting over with. “You sounded upset on the phone.” I raised a hand to the waitress to bring a couple of coffees.

Marjory swung her sad eyes my way. “I didn’t know who else to turn to. You’ve been married to Brian and you’re a police officer. I thought you’d know what I should do.”

“Whatever are you talking about?”

“Was Brian at any time overly aggressive with you during your marriage?” Her eyes found mine and held.

“Brian! Brian aggressive? You have to be joking.”

Marjory flinched but kept her eyes steady on mine. “I worried you’d react like this, but you have to believe me. Brian’s changed since we got married. He’s become so possessive, he frightens me. I need your help.”

I blinked back the laughter tears once I saw she was serious. “Brian is the least violent man I know. I’m sure you’re wrong about this.” *Not to mention crazy.*

“He’s changed,” she repeated in a voice so small I had to lean forward to hear. “He’s just not the man I thought I married.”

“I could say much the same,” I said, but the irony was wasted on her.

“I don’t know who else to turn to,” she whispered. “I think he wants to get rid of me.”

“I’m probably not the best person to ask about that,” I said. *Seeing as how I dream of getting rid of you myself.*

Maybe, in hindsight, I shouldn’t have blown Marjory off as fast as I did that May afternoon. I could have listened to her fears and found out why she believed Brian was so angry. I should have gotten some details. But how was I to know that a week later Marjory’s twenty-year-old son would report her missing and Brian would become the main suspect in her disappearance?

Brenda Chapman is the author of the murder mystery *In Winter's Grip* (2010), along with the successful Jennifer Bannon mystery series for young adults. She is a former special education teacher and currently works as a senior communications advisor in the federal government in Ottawa, Ontario.