

Police Wives

Regina N. Clark

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When readers first meet Janine Mitchell, she stands at an ironing board, proudly steaming and starching military creases into her husband's uniform, preparing for his 1967 graduation ceremony and swearing in as a police officer. Janine's role in the marriage is clear: to support her husband's career as a public servant in a noble and dangerous profession. In *Police Wives*, Regina N. Clark uses fiction to examine the inner lives of five women as they struggle to sustain their marriages to police officers without sacrificing their own identities.

Each chapter illustrates the way a particular woman handles the delicate dance of the public and the personal. Laura, the captain's wife, hides her internal despair behind the smile of a perfect hostess, entertaining the new recruits and their wives. Maria longs to be a stay-at-home mother and suffers much in the pursuit of her goal. Connie tries to avoid inciting the wrath of her ruthlessly ambitious husband by becoming friends with the other wives. Angela supports her husband's service, but feels compelled to take long business trips that are not all business. And Janine appears to have the perfect relationship with her husband, Dave, until the years of competing with the force for his attention take their toll.

Clark, who has herself been married to an Oakland, California, police officer for over twenty years, knows what it is like to be constantly at the ready, awaiting the next emergency call. She also knows how it feels to be often left alone, waiting, and unfulfilled while her husband is out saving the world. Her sympathy for her characters is obvious, and she shows equal respect for women who choose traditional roles and those who decide to break the mold.

While each woman in the novel has her own chapter, their lives intertwine. Clark tells the story chronologically, so the characters weave in and out of each other's lives, creating a larger picture than any one woman's experience would on its own. But Clark condenses the timeline near the middle of the novel, skipping over significant years of personal transformation without much explanation. She returns to most characters after they have made important changes in their lives, without showing how they did it. Some intriguing story lines are left hanging, and others are summarized with scant detail. Readers are left wanting more.

The consistent use of the third-person point of view throughout the book creates unity but limits intimacy. Should Clark have used the first-person perspective and allowed her audience to know her characters more deeply? It is not a clear choice, and in this way the structure of *Police Wives* mirrors the very dilemma faced by its characters: how to uphold the ideals of the social group while still maintaining a sense of self. Clark allows her characters to solve the problem in a variety of ways, just as women were doing in 1967 and are still doing today.

SHEILA M. TRASK (January 9, 2013)

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