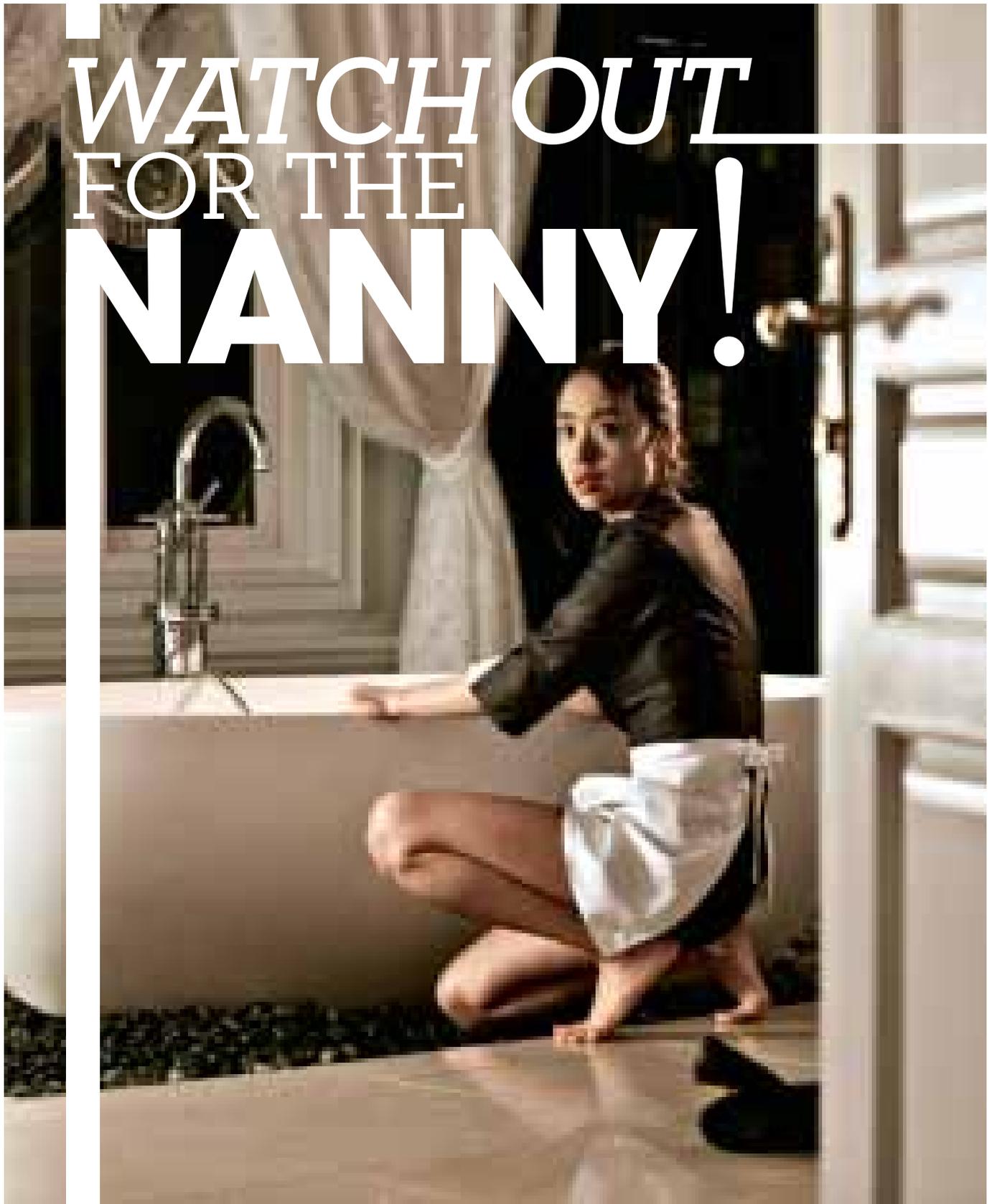


WATCH OUT FOR THE NANNY!



SHE'S CLOSE TO YOUR FAMILY, KNOWS YOUR ROUTINES, IS THERE TO HELP AND BE OF USE TO YOU. AND YOUR HUSBAND OR PARTNER? CHARLENE NAIDOO EXPLORES HOW THIS POWER DYNAMIC CAN LEAD TO THE MOST DESTRUCTIVE ADULTEROUS RELATIONSHIPS

Pregnant, with twins, a woman is stunned when her mother breaks the news. 'Your husband is having an affair. Just ignore it. All wealthy husbands eventually cheat. Ignore it and live like a queen.' If it sounds like a scene straight out of a movie, that's because it is. But the disturbing psychological South Korean thriller of 2010, *The Housemaid*, isn't wholly original or innovative - it doesn't break new ground or tell a particularly brilliant story. In fact, it's one we've all heard before. Nubile young woman is hired as an au pair. Pretty soon, the rich husband and the au pair are bonking. Hijinks and drama ensue - and just for kicks, there's a grisly end to boot, imbuing this remake of a 1960 film with an authenticity that is morbidly realistic. We know that husbands have cheated as far back as the ancient Greco-Roman times, often with permission. In early Roman law, it was not a crime for a husband to commit adultery - as long as it was with a slave. From these roots, the destructive pattern continued, sweeping up men from presidents to househusbands who have got it on with their hired help.

THE HELP

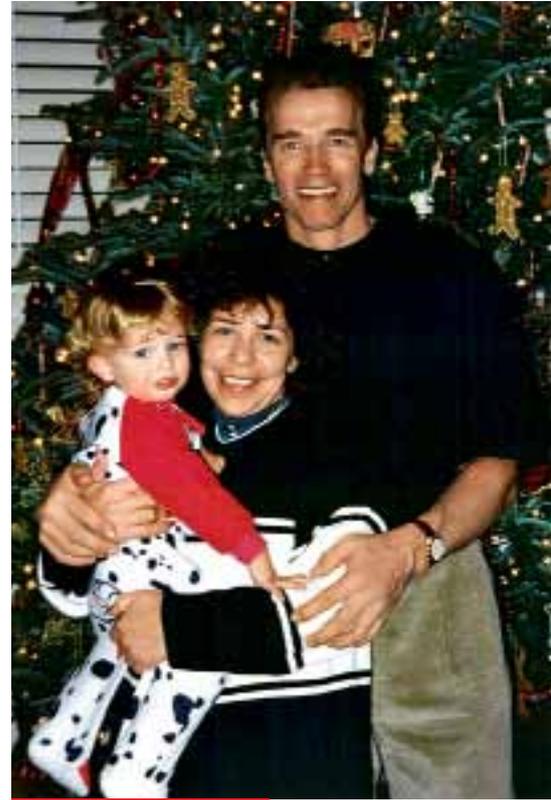
Wives who've come home early to find their husbands in bed with the au pair may often feel like they're walking into their worst nightmare - and into a most overwrought cliché. Why the help? What's the attraction? Access? Ease? Dominance over a subservient individual? All of the above and more, says clinical psychologist, Belinda Train. 'Circumstances like close proximity to and contact with members of the desired sex increase the likelihood that one will cheat. Power dynamics may very well be at play where the cheating husband may feel aroused by feeling powerful and the fact that the woman is in a biddable position.'

There's also a curious contrast evident: for a lot of women, the younger au pair is the last one they would suspect, perhaps out of a misguided feminist ideology - yet wives are ever mindful that the maxim of the husband and the au pair has sprung from fertile ground. 'I really did suspect nothing, nothing at all,' reflects Karmen Moodley*, a 41-year-old mother of two. 'Of course, I wasn't blind, Melanie* was beautiful,

20 years younger than me and so vibrant and sweet. If I was a man, I'd probably have been attracted to her too.' She's joking of course, something she can do only now, years after a bitter divorce. A self-employed businesswoman, Karmen hired Melanie as an after-school tutor for her sons, and to help with general chores around the house. 'At the time, my husband and I ran our business together but increasingly the workload would fall to me. I'd spend long hours at work and he'd complain that our whole lives were wrapped up in the office. Honestly, when he'd leave in the afternoons, I'd be relieved to have some time to immerse myself in work alone.' Meanwhile, back at home, her husband, Deon*, was finding ways to entertain himself. Like the proverbial scene from a movie, one evening, Karmen arrived home earlier than expected. 'Kissing in the kitchen. Not a care in the world.' The worst part?

'Our boys were in the lounge watching TV, oblivious to what their father was doing just next door.' Shades of Jude Law's tryst with his children's au pair, Daisy Wright. According to her claims, one of his kids caught them in bed together. Thankfully, in Karmen's case, her boys remain blissfully unaware of why their parents are divorced. In the months that followed, Karmen heard it all. 'Every excuse - I was too wrapped up in work, I didn't make any effort with my appearance, I didn't give him enough attention. One day, I broke down and just kept asking "why?" And he looked at me, just shrugged and said, "You made it so easy for me. You brought her into our home."'

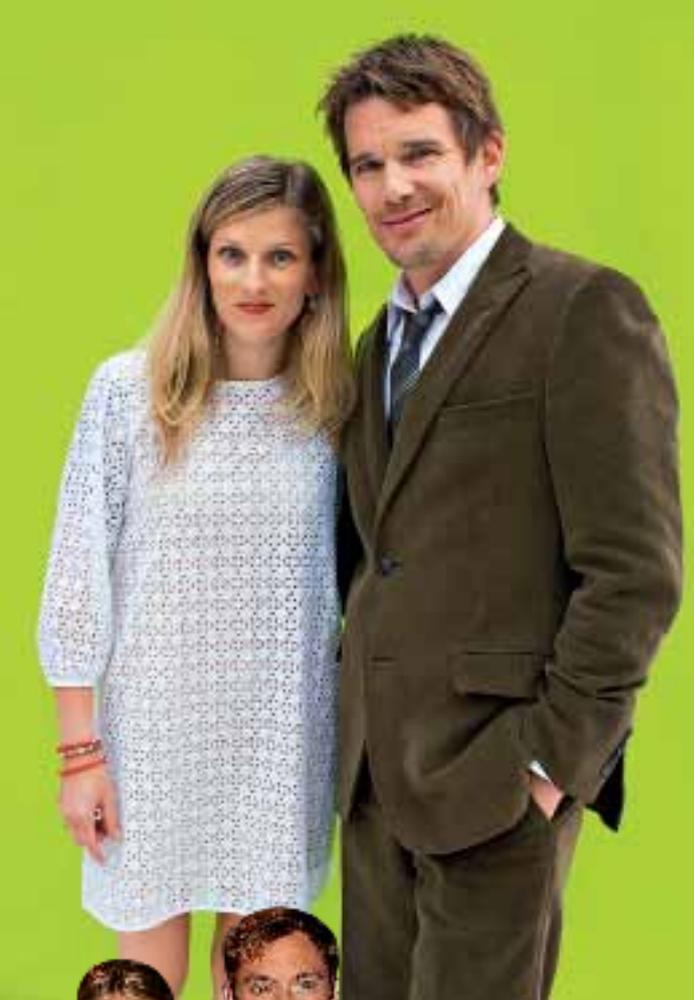
'This comes up a lot in my sessions,' says a Johannesburg psychologist who wishes to remain anonymous to protect her clients' privacy, 'when they first sit down, there's remorse but as we start delving into the issues, there's an almost pathological need to shift blame to the wife. She did it, she's too busy to see to my needs, she hired the pretty young thing, what was



'You made it so easy for me. You brought her into our home'

TRUE LIES

Above Arnold Schwarzenegger has admitted to cheating on his former wife Maria Shriver with his long-time housekeeper, Mildred Patricia Baena (pictured above), with whom he shares a son. In 2011 Shriver filed for divorce. **Opposite** A movie still from the 2010 South Korean thriller *The Housemaid*.



AN AFFAIR TO REMEMBER

Clockwise from left Ethan Hawke was rumoured to have had an affair with his children's au pair, Ryan Shawhughes (pictured). Then-wife Uma Thurman filed for divorce in 2004. Hawke married Shawhughes in 2008 and they now have two children together; Robin Williams' first wife, Valerie Velardi, filed for divorce in 1988 after Williams had affairs with cocktail waitress Michelle Tish Carter and with their children's au pair Marsha Garces (pictured). He married Garces and they divorced 19 years later when he had another affair with 27-year-old Charlotte Filbert; in 2005 Jude Law's five-year relationship with Sienna Miller (pictured) ended after one of his children caught him in bed with their au pair Daisy Wright.



I supposed to do?' And when the pretty young thing is willing to play, the situation takes on even uglier proportions. Melanie, the willing participant in the Moodley triangle is now a 22-year-old university student and struggles to accept that she was the other woman. 'It's something that's haunted me for the past two years. Yes, I was very attracted to Deon. For an older guy, he was gorgeous and would spoil me and buy me things, give me attention, so it wasn't difficult to get into a sexual relationship with him. But I just don't know how I justified it to myself. I always thought I had more morals than that. I feel like it was a different person who did those horrible things.' It's been a long road to redemption for Melanie. Because of the close-knit community that she and the Moodleys lived in, her parents found out about the affair. 'It was horrific, my father couldn't look at me for months. The worst part is that Karmen was really wonderful to me as a boss and I hate how much I hurt her. I wrote her a letter apologizing for everything but she never replied. Not that I blame her.'

UPSTAIRS, DOWNSTAIRS

The husband who gets his kicks from the comfort of his own home is not an issue that's exclusive to the upper-middle class either. In many cases, socioeconomic circumstances force harried,

working mothers with limited resources to rely on friends, neighbours, the neighbour's young daughter, the piece-worker who just desperately wants a job. And, in South Africa, with just nine per cent of domestic workers in possession of a matric education, the questions have to be asked: are these women coerced into these relationships? And can they afford to say no? Lorraine de Wet* from Randburg is still asking herself this question. Was her domestic worker, Thembi*, forced to give in to her husband's advances? Lorraine couldn't really afford a domestic worker, but with a toddler, a full-time job and a husband who was away every few days driving long-distance trucks, she needed the help. 'Thembi approached me, she was desperate for a job, and had done on-off work for some other houses in our complex. We made an arrangement for her to wash, clean and iron every second day.'

Seven months later, Lorraine arrived home to find Thembi crying at the kitchen table. Wracked with guilt, she blurted out her terrible secret. Lorraine's husband had been sexually harrasing her since she'd started and they had slept together on and off since then. 'All I remember her saying was, "Please, please don't fire me, I need this job."' Lorraine kicked out both of them that evening but has since reconciled with her husband. 'I did it for my child,' she says simply, 'it's been a very difficult road so far and I really feel terrible for Thembi. If what she said was true... I just don't know.' Her voice trails off.

'You'd be surprised at how common this issue is becoming,' says Jo'burg marriage counsellor, Leanne Chetty. 'In the past year, I've counselled four marriages where the husband embarked on an affair with the help.' And if you're operating

under the assumption that these mistresses are always tantalizing, sexier morsels who prance around in skimpy uniforms, dispell the notion immediately. April Masini runs Askapril.com, an on-line counselling service where infidelity is a hot topic. 'Women think they need to be wary of the young, sexy teenage babysitter. What they don't realize is that a less attractive woman who makes a man feel amazing about himself is going to win his attention and his affections, and if she's willing, chances are, he's ready.'

THE NUMBER YOU HAVE CALLED IS AVAILABLE

She's right there. In your home. Available for your every need (and so theoretically, your husband's as well). At the same time, she's almost exempt from the family - she's there to serve and then fade quietly into the background. The context is a powerful one. 'She's close to the family, travelling with them, walking into their bedroom,' says Suzanne Hansen, a former Hollywood au pair who's worked for Tom Cruise and Danny Devito, amongst others. In her memoir, *You'll Never Nanny in This Town Again*, she explores this theme. If there's one specific clique who've made time with the help a genre of infidelity on its own, it's the suspects who inhabit Celebville. Ethan Hawke, Jude Law, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Rob Lowe, Robin Williams (yes, Mrs Doubtfire himself) all had affairs with the household help. In Hawke and Schwarzenegger's cases, the affairs led to children. The easy access and the comfort and nurturing that the household help provides, mean that these men find it simple to gravitate to that relationship. April also believes that, generally, it's probably difficult for two big stars to compete for the spotlight, which makes the one person seek out a more docile, secret partner he can dominate.

Two years after their divorce, Deon recognizes that there may be some truth to this. 'Maybe,' he allows, 'I did feel a bit intimidated by Karmen. Our company was really an offshoot of her family's business, so it was never something I felt invested in. All she could focus on was that company, and didn't seem to even want me to be part of it. My input was often ignored. She was never available for me. It was so easy and different with Melanie, no pressure, no stress. She thought I was the man.' That little nugget is worth a probe: the need to be acknowledged in a powerful, masculine way is a common trope of sex with the servant. It speaks to a control dynamic that's difficult to resist, says relationship counsellor, Lauren Clucas. 'We all want to be wanted and for a man, this need is all-important. This type of affair is often misogynistic in nature, using power, money and sex as a means of influence and is highly addictive as adrenaline and dopamine race through the system giving the "infidels" a great high. Often, the husband is betraying a partner who is equal in stature and doesn't need to be rescued, but he enjoys the feeling of authority he experiences when he's in a domineering position.'

It's a theory that's backed up by years of research into infidelity. Amongst other studies, a recent Kinsey Institute

paper highlighted that the propensity for sexual excitement 'or the ease with which one becomes sexually aroused by all kinds of triggers and situations, plays a bigger role for men compared to women.' Historically, the evidence is there, points out April. 'As far back as when slaves were common, relationships between them and their owners were normal.' So much so that the only nod to modernization is that the household help/husband affair now runs the risk of being viewed as sexual harrasment. 'This is not a relationship between equals. She knows personal details in a way that your

accountant would never know. What kind of underwear you have, what your bedroom looks like... the job description itself lends itself to exploitation.' For some, the lines have blurred to such an extent, it's hard to separate coercion from concession.

Consider that the US's third president, Thomas Jefferson, was so besotted with his servant Sally Hemings, that he fathered six children with her. While some historians feebly argue that theirs was a love match, a true romance, it's difficult to ignore the literal black and white of

the affair. And that the principal author of the Declaration of Independence started an affair with Sally when she was just 16 and he was 46. An affair with a teenage slave who 'belonged' to Jefferson's wife. And perhaps most tragically, an affair with a girl who was herself the product of a clandestine relationship between a white master and his black slave. **mc**

DANGEROUS LIAISONS

An ugly affair doesn't always just end at divorce

In 2007, Stephen Grant, an American father of three had an affair with their 19-year-old German au pair. One night while the family was asleep, he murdered his wife Tara and created a set-up to make it look like she'd disappeared. Au pair Verena Dierkes later admitted to police that she had sex with Stephen both before and after his wife was reported missing. He's been imprisoned till 2057.

THE NANNY CAM

If art imitates reality, then the world is full of sexy helpers and naughty au pairs...

■ **PEPPER POTTS** is less a servant and more a Girl Friday for her boss, Tony Stark (*Iron Man*). Still, she picks up his dry cleaning, runs his home and smiles through lines like, 'I do anything and everything Mr Stark requires.'

■ Spare a thought for poor **MOIRA O'HARA**, the undead housekeeper in *American Horror Story*. After an affair with her boss, she's shot through the eye by his wife - and then dragged into an eternal wretched existence where she appears her true self (old and frail) to other women, while men can only ever see her gussied

up in French maid regalia, all lush curves, porcelain skin and sexual come-ons.

■ Governess **JANE EYRE** meets her new boss; the dark and broody master of the house, Mr Rochester. Soon enough, love blooms.

■ With a voice as loud as a foghorn, is it any wonder that **FRAN** (*The Nanny*), beat out all other contenders to marry her dreamy boss, Mr Sheffield?

■ In the 1993 movie *Queen*, **HALLE BERRY** played the title role: the product of an illicit relationship between a plantation owner's son and a slave.