

Breakwater

Marijke Schermer

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A secret between a husband and a wife threatens their existence in Marijke Schermer's novel *Breakwater*.

Bruch is in love with Emilia. Everything about her is right. But without explanation, Emilia stops taking his calls. Her brother Jakob tells Bruch never to contact her again. Confused and hurt, Bruch goes on a quest to find out what happened. He discovers that a stranger attacked Emilia in her home, and she suffered great injury. Hurt and helpless, he reconciles himself to the fact that their relationship is over. Then Emilia reappears months later without warning. Though Bruch can tell that she is not the same person as before, they resume their relationship while he waits for Emilia to tell him what happened.

Twelve years later, Bruch and Emilia lead the perfect life. They have a beautiful family, a charming house in the country, a close circle of longtime friends, and successful careers. But the attack on Emilia is a festering wound in their relationship. Emilia struggles to tell Bruch what happened to her; Bruch grows more frustrated by the fact that he knows but can't say anything. To force Emilia to speak, he uses their friends to stage situations with the intention of triggering her trauma.

The relationship between Emilia and Bruch comes to a head when the river that runs next to their house floods after heavy rains. The water flowing over its banks and submerging their house serves as a metaphor for Bruch and Emilia drowning in their secrets and suppressed emotions. At the last moment, they are rescued from their house, but the survival of their marriage remains an open question.

Breakwater is a concise, cutting story about trauma, post-traumatic stress, and misdirected love.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (March / April 2023)

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