

'The perfect housewife'

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I could feel them. All of them. The anxious watchers staring at me as I struggled to complete my dress in time. The anxious watchers staring at me as the sweat rolled down my cheek, as my clammy, pasty hands shook violently, barely keeping the needle steady. One hour I had to complete this dress and I have gotten nowhere. Mother will not be happy. My brown hair became looser and looser in the bun I had pulled this morning, strands of hair blocking the view of the girls who stood before me.

Needlework was never something I particularly took interest to, nor was I particularly good at. I never imagined myself using this skill in my life, I wanted to be something important, and something I'd be remembered for. Not the secretary, not the stay-at-home mother, I wanted to be a lawyer or an accountant. I guess I wanted a man's job, and darn right I could do it. However, that was not my fate and certainly not what the world would let me do. A girl can only dream. Mother always speaks of me leaving school, getting married straight away and having children. That's all she cares about, that's all she wants. Despite the fact that I don't want to be some lazy man's wife and I don't even like children! That's why this exam means so much to her, I must be the perfect housewife.

10 minutes left.

The needle in my hand was too small, I could barely use it. My hands didn't help either, the sweat just made the needle slip out my fingers. I kept piercing the wrong section of the skirt and knotting the thread. I looked up around the room, near enough everybody had finished, sitting tall and smug. The desks were all split, each had their own scissors, needles, materials and threads. We all had the exact same colours and amount of materials. A simple blue dress, with an embroidered shirt. Simple. I wish. I threaded the seams of the skirt; the thread was white to compliment the shirt. *Bloody hell!* A sharp pain struck my finger; the needle had pierced my skin and drew blood. In panic I wrapped it in scrap material trying not to get any blood on my dress.

Mother always said that a lady must always dress appropriately to draw a man's attention. A slick dress, red lipstick and a binder to suck in any stomach fat as men do not like that. Mother always said that I cannot be smart or else I will intimidate men and they'll instantly find me unattractive. I must be willing to do anything in the world for them and laugh at all their terrible jokes. I must look wealthy to attract rich men, for our family to marry into, and have children so the wealth is carried down.

Mother was never happy.

8 minutes left.

I will not fail this; I will not allow my mother to have yet another reason to be disappointed in me for. This is all I have, my one shot to prove myself that I am not a failure. I was not allowed to take any other exams even though I pleaded to take Maths and Latin, but again I was told that they are only for men. I sewed the shirt to the skirt, pulling it in tight enough to show a woman's shape but also allow her to breathe. Half way there. I pulled the material of the skirt together carefully in sections and began to plate it. I felt more confident now; I have plenty time to finish this.

I have four brothers, 2 of which are doctors, and 2 of which are professors at Oxford University. They are very successful; all of them are married to glamorous women and have many children between them. I used to look up to them, aspire to be smart and earn money for myself. I used to tag along to their workplaces and write stories of myself if I were the doctor or professor. But that is just not the life I am destined for.

6 minutes left.

I'm running out of time. I quickly embroidered small dotted patterns onto the sleeve of the shirt, the threads were bright colours. Reds, blues and yellows. I looked around, most girls had embroidered flowers or butterflies, but I honestly have no clue how they did so. I also embroidered the hem of the skirt, which should at least make it stand out. Mother is going to be so embarrassed; I can't even carry out one simple task.

My father always works, he's rarely home and when he is, and he's usually drunk. I have never seen my parents show affection towards each other or even say 'I love you'. I have one vague memory of my father striking my mother when he was angry. She didn't resist, she just let him hurt her. I ran and hid under my bed, so frightened. To this day, she doesn't know that I saw. For someone so persistent on me getting married, she's not a happy wife herself.

4 minutes left

Okay, buttons. One on each collar, very easy, very straight forward. The colour from my face drained, I had lost the buttons. *No, no, no, not now.* I looked under everything, my book, my material, my table. They had vanished. Mother is going to be furious. My breathing got faster. My heart beat so fast I felt as if it was going to burst out of my chest. Time is ticking. I couldn't think or hear anything. My ears began to ring. *Snap out of it.*

Mother used to make fathers clothes all the time. She rarely made mistakes because she would get punished if she did. He eventually told her to stop and started paying a local shop to do it for him. Mother was heartbroken. I suppose that maybe she wants me to perfect everything that she done wrong, but things are not turning out that way.

2 minutes left

I lifted my shoe, and there they were. Just my luck, obviously. I bent over and picked up two little black buttons. *Now this is the bit I can do.* I managed to quickly sew the buttons onto the shirt without stressing out. The buttons were slightly chipped around the edges but I didn't care at this point. I held the dress up in front of me. Its good, or I mean, it's okay. It will do. I neatly folded the dress and put it into the envelope to be handed in to the marker. I glanced up to the no longer anxious watchers and smirked. One minute to spare.

Time's up.

Mother will be proud, for now I am *the perfect housewife.*