Always Go to Bed on an Argument

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Extract

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Introduction

This is a book for Non-Domestic Goddesses so if you are not a Non-Domestic Goddess then: go away, we do not want you. Further, you should be aware that we do have the most exactingly low standards and will not accept just anybody. We recently, for example, had to reject Anthea Turner on the grounds she'd appeared on TV saying you simply cannot have too many wicker baskets for storage. 'Anthea,' we had to tell her, 'do put a sock in it.' Note it is a sock, not a pair of socks, and much less a matching pair of socks. As a Non-Domestic Goddess, it's best to be realistic about what is likely to be to hand and what is not. As a Non-Domestic Goddess, there is every chance you haven't seen a matching pair of socks since 1976, and even then you may have dreamt it.

So, maybe you think you are a Non-Domestic

Goddess. Maybe you, too, have defrosted a chicken in the bath, swung a child's swimming trunks round your head in an attempt to dry them just before the next lesson, wept while reading *Elle Decoration,* calling out, 'How do you get to live like this?' and have, at some time or another, suffered from a full-blown attack of Cometitis, the deadly sickness that strikes once you get caught up in that dark underworld called Customer Services. You might also fret about this thing called a 'lifestyle': what is it exactly? And where can I get one if I suspect I'm without? As for Ikea, you would love it if only it didn't make you quite so faint and dizzy: so many veneers, so little time!

Certainly, any of the above would be a good start, we'll give you that. But the true Non-Domestic Goddess allows her exacting low standards to seep into all areas of her life. She tries to keep up with fashion and yearns to live in Bodenland, where women drape fetchingly on driftwood and children companionably rock-pool while keeping their sun hats *on.* She yearns, too, for a 'sexy sweater dress' that doesn't retain the shape of her bottom after the very first sit-down, so making her look about as sexy as a badly-knitted baboon. On reflection, no wonder they don't allow her into Bodenland. Be honest: would you?

She also, of course, tries to maintain a beauty

regime, tries to love the skin she is in but, after looking at it from all angles, always concludes: 'Nope, sorry, no can do.' Further, when Jane Fonda appears on TV, advertising some face cream and saying, 'Not bad for 68, huh?' the true Non-Domestic Goddess will always want to shout back, 'Come on, love. Get a grip. You looked one hell of a lot better as Barbarella.' The Non-Domestic Goddess figures someone has to say so, and what's wrong with growing old anyway? Why is the older woman always treated as just so useless when it's simply not true? Two older women, for example, can make very nice bookends, and bookends are always handy. Ask anyone.

Naturally, at the start of every New Year the Non-Domestic Goddess will embark on a 'New You' health and fitness programme. And why not? It's only about tweaking who she already is to become someone else entirely while setting the alarm for the early morning run she is never going to go on. She may even be a fan of Dr Gillian McKeith and her particular way of bullying fat people on television until they cry. She may even have written her a fan letter along the following lines: 'Assuming *your* poo smells of pot-pourri, can you tell me why I've yet to see it in hotel lobbies or the entrances to stately homes? Thanking you . . . etc., etc.'

Of course, the Non-Domestic Goddess loves her

children, even though they are very annoying and she is somehow always to blame for the fit of their swimming goggles – 'They're leaking; now they're too tight!' She has sat through many school plays even though she knows that there will always be one child who knows all the lines and will shout them into the faces of those that don't (and they call this quality entertainment?) She also knows her children shouldn't watch too much television, but what the hell, particularly when the alternative might involve doing glittery stuff with glue or playing a board game – eat the dice; it'll be over in no time; it's the only way. And she understands teenagers, or at least how best to embarrass them. Wearing a push-up bra to parents' evening usually does it, as does wearing something tight in leather. The two together, she has discovered, do the job spectacularly well.

As for the secret to a happy marriage, no, a Non-Domestic Goddess does not know that. She accepts, though, that 'give and take' is often the key. As such, she will always offer to compromise, and will even go along with it for a bit before revealing, 'Hey, I was only joking.' She does, though, know the secret to keeping an average marriage limping along and it is this: always go to bed on an argument; that way, you can resume hostilities first thing without wasting any valuable time.

Think you make the grade? Think you can cut it as a proper Non-Domestic Goddess? If so, and you believe as we do that, as a woman's work is never done (so what's the point in even making a start?) then take the first step and join the Non-Domestic Goddess Club of Great Britain (NDGC (GB)). You can be sure of a warm welcome as well as a nice cup of Nescafé made by running the mug under the hot tap. There may even be cake, shop-bought of course, but perhaps bashed about a bit to look homemade. There are no flies on the true Non-Domestic Goddess, probably because they are all in her fruit bowl and sometimes even in her flour . . .



1

House and Home


HEROIN
HUNDREDS
+
THOUSANDS
ANTI
MATÉ
COCAIN
TEA

'As with the commander of an army, so it is with the mistress of the house,' writes Mrs Beeton in her *Book of Household Management*. A good housewife, she continues, must be clean, frugal, efficient and, most importantly, an early riser. 'When the mistress is an early riser,' she says, 'it is almost certain that the house will be orderly and well-managed.' So it is essential to rise early, which may mean getting up before lunch. Anytime after lunch is obscene unless you can (a) get away with it and (b) do one of those convincing 'What? I've been up for *ages*' voices on the phone. This kind of housewife is probably not a good housewife, but that's OK, because she can always join the Non-Domestic Goddess Club of Great Britain. Our manifesto is printed below not just for your information, but so you can later spill coffee all over it before throwing it out by mistake.

The Non-Domestic Goddess Club (GB)

Welcome to the Non-Domestic Goddess Club (GB). This is the largest organisation in the UK for those who cannot only do that 'What? I've been up for *ages*' voice but probably also somehow have very old ice-lollies embedded in the iced-up walls of their freezer. The Club, founded at some time or another but no one can say when exactly as the members forgot to write it on the calendar, operates under the slogan 'Nature abhors a vacuum and so do we'. The Club also, by the way, abhors the Dyson. This was decided at the last AGM on the grounds that just because it is red and funky and won't lose suction it doesn't make it any better and you can't fool us. Minutes from the last AGM are available on request, but only after they have been lost, found, lost, found, lost and then found again at the bottom of the fruit bowl under the small brown

furry thing that may once have been a plum but then again could equally be one of those baby koalas for the tops of pencils. Who's to tell?

The Non-Domestic Goddess Club of Great Britain expects its members to uphold extremely low standards at all times. Anyone nearly up-to-date with the ironing will have to explain themselves in full, while anyone totally up-to-date will be automatically expelled. Anyone who hasn't touched an iron in years and just tries to pass everything off as 100 per cent linen (including their face) will be awarded free life membership. Ditto anyone who makes Nescafé by placing the mug under the hot tap, both when pressed for time and when not, and who prepares bedding between guests by turning the pillow over to its 'fresh' side. The Non-Domestic Goddess Club has this to say about blackened cookware: soak, soak, soak, then throw away when nobody is looking. The Club also suggests never questioning the fact that there is an *A to Z* in your underwear drawer, as well as a toy knight, some small change (amounting to 87p), a book on houseplants and three Fox's Glacier Fruits. To question can only lead to madness. The Non-Domestic Goddess Club of Great Britain has this to say about socks with holes in: put aside for darning, then throw away when nobody is looking.

The Non-Domestic Goddess Club suggests never,

ever going right to the bottom of the laundry basket, as anything could be living down there. The Club fully endorses opening the top of the laundry basket, sighing dispiritedly and promptly closing it again. The Club expects all members to have all of the following items at the back of at least one kitchen cupboard: a tin of golden syrup with the lid half-cocked (treacle is also acceptable); an ancient pot of hundreds and thousands; a spilling bag of decade-old lentils; several bottles of food colouring (all green); a variety of exotic pickles and chutneys which seemed like a good idea at the time; any number of herbal teas with tempting names like Mango Carnival and Tropical Fiesta which no one drinks because they all taste of pond; sticky jars of stuff that can no longer be identified and have bits of old moth wing, spilled lentils and fairy-cake cases stuck to their sides. The Club has this to say about leftovers: decant carefully into Tupperware, place in fridge, leave for a week, then throw out when nobody is looking. Alternatively, place in freezer, leave for a decade, then throw out when nobody is looking. Never throw anything away today that you can keep and then throw away at a later date.

The Non-Domestic Goddess Club of Great Britain does not advise leaving washing in the washing machine until it smells, as this will only mean having

to do it again, but accepts that such things can happen. We also strongly advise never serving food within its sell-by date as the sudden absence of harmful bacteria may lead to diarrhoea and vomiting. Should food drop on the floor, it is extremely important to blow on it a bit before putting it back on the plate, preferably when nobody is looking. It is perfectly acceptable to start something and then not finish it, unless it is a bottle of gin. The Club has sympathy for anyone who has tried to defrost a chicken in the bath or dry a child's swimming costume, just unpacked from last week's lesson, by swinging it round her head. The Club has this to say to anyone who is about 19 years behind with the ironing: gather it all up and throw it away while nobody is looking. Alternatively, bury it at the bottom of the garden, along with the pet goldfish whose bowl was used as an ashtray but died of natural causes all the same.

We hope you have enjoyed this short introduction to the Non-Domestic Goddess Club of Great Britain and that you will always defend the useless housewife whatever. Some people say that the trouble with useless housewives is that they are lazy and just sit around all day reading *Hello!*, whereas, in truth, they work really, really hard. It's just that so much of what they do happens when nobody is looking.

The Non-Domestic Goddess Club Newsletter

(As Written on the Back of a Cheque Book)

'Firstly, if not solely, as we rarely achieve much, we would like to thank Mrs Wentworth who, still in her pyjama bottoms at 3 p.m., and with hair that looked as if it had been done with an electric toothbrush – a look we fully endorse, by the way – came in to give us a talk entitled 'The Last Taboo'. We all got very excited, even Mrs Agnew, who for years has been answering her phone with, 'Hello, Drudge Central. Main drudge here,' and might be quite badly depressed. She once didn't get out of bed for several weeks even though her husband tried to tempt her downstairs with a new apron and a fresh bottle of Flash and promised not to mention the ironing buried at the bottom of the garden ever again.

Everyone chatted about what Mrs Wentworth might mean but none of us got anywhere near. 'Right, here goes,' said Mrs Wentworth, after hitching up her

pyjama bottoms in a very professional way and then taking the podium. 'I am about to break a taboo. I'm going to dare speak its name and that name is . . . greaseproof paper.' Well, at that, Susie Banks gave a little shriek while Jenny Marks fair fainted. 'Yes,' continued Mrs Wentworth, 'greaseproof paper. There, I have said it again.' There were gasps all round. 'We all know about clingfilm,' she proceeded, 'and how malevolent that can be.' We all nodded. 'We all know how it sticks to everything but that which you want it to stick to. We all further know that, most particularly, it will stick so spitefully to itself that you have to scrunch that sheet into a tight ball and toss it in the bin so you can start with a fresh sheet that will stick to itself and have to be thrown in the bin, too. This can go right on to the end of the roll which, ladies, does make you think: all things considered, what is the point of clingfilm, beyond a great deal of scrunching and bad-temperedness?' 'Hear, hear,' we all chorused. 'And we all know about tin foil, too,' she added. 'How, if you get a little nick in it, it'll come off in little slivers that are no use at all. We know about that.' 'Hear, hear,' we all chorused again.



'But greaseproof paper? Ladies, why are we never warned about greaseproof

paper? Why, in particular, don't women tell other women about greaseproof paper? Sisters, what is going on here?' We all looked a little sheepish at that. 'Is it some kind of female conspiracy?' asked Mrs Wentworth. 'Like that surrounding childbirth, and the unspoken rule that no woman should ever tell another woman what it is truly like? Is that it? And so we are left to discover the full horror for ourselves?'

We thought this was probably the case. We agreed that if you ask a woman what childbirth is truly like she will possibly say something along the lines of, 'It's a little bit painful,' whereas what she actually means is: 'OK, imagine someone has stuffed a vast shipment of hand grenades up your uterus, timed to go off at increasingly frequent intervals with increasing violence over a 17-hour period but, hey, it's all worth it at the end when they hand you a little baby – your little baby! – and you think: "Hell's bells, what have I done? I can't love this. I don't even know how it works. Put it in a home! Give it to a nice couple who can't have children of their own!"' Jenny Marks said this is how it always happens because if women were to actually spell out how bad it is there is no way other women would ever have babies. 'Perhaps, similarly,' suggested Mrs Wentworth, 'if women told other women how evil greaseproof paper is no one would ever make cakes, and everybody loves cake.' We could

not fault her logic there. We do all love cakes. But what she said next took us rather by surprise.

'Have you ever,' she asked, 'tried to make a three-layer cake?' We said we had not. We said, further, that we felt Mrs Wentworth had let the Club down by even attempting such a thing. 'Well, it was for a child's birthday,' she said, as if that was any excuse. We said our own children prefer shop-bought cakes. Mrs Agnew even said that she once spent all night making a cake for her son who, when he saw it, burst into tears and said, 'But I wanted a Power Ranger one from Tesco!' The cake was, she admitted, flat and lopsided and she'd forgotten to put the sugar in, but what do you expect from someone so badly depressed?

Mrs Wentworth continued: 'If you have attempted a three-layer cake, the first instruction will probably tell you to cut out three discs from a roll of – and I'm going to say it again here, ladies – greaseproof paper. So you cut out the first disc. Hey, you are beginning to think, this isn't that hard. You then cut out the second disc. Nothing to it. But then, just as you are going for the third, you will note that the first disc has spontaneously leapt and curled itself into the shape of a fat cigar.' 'Yes, yes,' we all cried. 'That's exactly what happens!' 'And while you are noting that the first disc has leapt and curled itself into the shape

of a fat cigar – and are thinking, "Well, there's a thing" – the second disc will not only curl up likewise, but will skip brazenly along the worktop as it does so.' 'Yes, yes,' we all cried. 'That's exactly what happens. The bloody nerve of it.' 'And then,' said Mrs Wentworth, 'you are forced to chase it, catch it and smooth it back out. You smooth out the first disc, too, but as you are doing so, what happens? The second disc not only curls up again but actually jumps off the worktop. You retrieve it and smooth it back out. It jumps and curls again. So does the first disc.

'You will try everything to keep the discs flat. I can see, ladies, that you know what I mean. You will try with your fingers, palms, elbows, entire forearms, your arse. No joy. You will think: "I know, I will spread butter on to the baking tray and press them down on to that." No joy. And do you know why? Because greaseproof paper is, it turns out, grease proof. How sly is that? In the end you will have to weigh down the perimeters with stones from the garden but by that time you've had it, really. You'll tell the child you'll be getting a cake from Tesco. The child will try to look as if he or she isn't deeply, deeply disappointed, may even holler "Yippee", but we know. A mother can always tell.'

Mrs Wentworth concluded on a strong note. 'I do hope that, now the whole issue is out in the open,

women will be able to talk more freely about greaseproof paper abuse, whether it is happening to them now, has happened to them in the past, or whether they have even had a disc curl up, jump, poke them in the eye and then shoot through the cat-flap. I also hope that, from now on, you will all think twice about keeping your clingfilm and greaseproof paper in the same kitchen drawer: they are only egging each other on in there.'

We thanked Mrs Wentworth very much for her interesting talk which, on the whole, we preferred to Jenny Marks's talk on how best to rotate dusters, which would have been inexcusable if she hadn't been almost too drunk to stand up. Next week, a group discussion on the Fine Art of Resentful Cooking, which everybody does but nobody talks about either.