



home existence to go out to work.

So, to the GWG. How exactly do I become the epitome of wifely perfection? The highlight of my day, it turns out, is Husband's return from his employment hellhole. 'Prepare yourself,' the GWG instructs. 'Take 15 minutes to rest. Touch up your make-up and put a ribbon in your hair.' As I haven't managed to put any make-up on in the first place, let alone four inches of Fifties-style slap, this entails 10 minutes of struggle with the mascara wand to get that Elizabeth Taylor look. The ribbon, meanwhile (something I haven't worn for at least four decades – practically since the Fifties, in fact), is an extra strain. As Matlock, my nearest town, lacks a haberdasher's, ribbon-procuring involves breaching the portals of Chesterfield market, an hour's drive away. I decide to take my

15 minutes' rest on the way, listening to Radio Four in the car.

Actually, with its sweet stall complete with glass jars, weighing scales and white paper bags, not to mention all the mysterious by-products on the butchers' stalls (pork hodge, anyone?), the market couldn't be a better place to get in Fifties mood. Only narrowly resisting a set of antimacassars, I emerge with a lovely pink ribbon, which I think makes me look a bit like Dorothy from *The Wizard Of Oz*. Or perhaps Grayson Perry?

'Most men are hungry when they come home,' advises the GWG. 'A good meal, especially his favourite dish, is part of the warm welcome needed.' This doesn't strike me as too unreasonable. Except that my husband's favourite dish is oysters, followed by pigeon with girolles accompanied by creamed celeriac. While the GWG advises me to 'plan

ahead, even the night before', I actually need to prepare two years in advance to allow time for the appropriate cordon bleu course. Jon's the cook in our house – I can stretch merely to a passable bolognese sauce. So it's a container of this that I duly remove from the freezer the night before and plan to dish up with spaghetti.

The thing is, it's not just the dinner I need to get ready and serve with 'a warm smile'. The GWG also instructs that I simultaneously light a fire that I've prepared earlier, minimise all noise and have the children under control. None of these are skills I have ever mastered on their own, let alone in tandem with something else. Furthermore, I should have a cool or warm drink ready for Husband, take his shoes off, settle him in a comfortable chair or have him lie down in the bedroom, all the time being 'happy to see him' and speaking in 'a soothing, pleasant voice'. I shove him upstairs; at least he'll be out of

the way while I rush around like a blue-arsed fly in a pinny and the pressure will be off me to 'be a little gay and a little more interesting. His boring day may need a lift.' Frankly, I feel like a lift myself – either the Stannah or the Gordon's gin sort, I'm not fussy.

'Why has Daddy gone to bed?' the children ask. 'Is he feeling poorly?'

Ah, the children. They're supposed to be playing the part of 'little treasures' at the moment. They're also supposed to have washed faces, combed hair and clean clothes, but there was no time for all that in between clearing away 'the clutter in the main part of the house' (actually, all over the house) and 'running a dust cloth over the tables'.

I try again now. But my daughter has built-in resistance to having her face washed, and, as their ►

6 I see from his strained expression that my husband does not, as GWG says he should, feel that he has come to a haven of rest and order,