

RECIPE FOR A PERFECT WIFE

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For my nana, Miriam Ruth Christie, who was a feminist despite the confines of her generation. A “from the can” cook, she was not known for her kitchen skills but did make a mean Chicken à la King. Which I miss, though not as much as I miss her.

And to all the women who have come before me, thank you for lighting the pathway. For those coming after—especially you, Addison Mae—I’m sorry the work is not done. I hope we’ve left you with enough to finish the job.

*Art is a hard mistress, and there is no art
quite so hard as that of being a wife.*

— Blanche Ebbutt, *Don'ts for Wives* (1913)

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You seem to forget that I am married, and the one charm of marriage is that it makes a life of deception absolutely necessary for both parties.

—Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890)

It was late in both day and season for planting, but she had no choice in the matter. Her husband hadn't understood the urgency, having never nurtured a garden. Nor did he hold an appreciation for its bounty, and as a result had been gently irritable with her that morning. Wishing she would focus on *more important tasks* instead, of which there were many, as they'd moved in only the week before. It was true much of the garden could wait—little happened during these later months, as bulbs rested dormant, waiting for the rain and warmth of spring. But this particular plant, with its bell-shaped flowers plentiful, would not be so patient. Besides, it was a gift and came with specific instructions, so there was no alternative but to get it into the ground. Today.

She felt most like herself when she was mucking about in the dirt, singing to and coaxing the buds and leaves. That had been the main reason she loved the house when she first saw it. The garden beds were already prepped, though sparse, and she could envision how they could be transformed into something magnificent. The house itself had felt large and impersonal—especially its many rooms, considering it was only the two of

them. However, they were newlyweds still. Plenty of time to make the house a home, to fill it with children and warmth.

Humming a favorite tune, she slid on her gardening gloves as she crouched and, with the trowel, dug out a large circle of earth. Into the hole went the plant, which she held carefully with her gloved fingers so as not to crush the amethyst-colored blossoms. She was comforted as she patted the soil around its roots, the stalk standing nice and straight, the flowers already brightening up the garden. There was plenty of work still ahead, but she lay down on the soft grass, her hands resting like a pillow under her head, and watched the clouds dance in the blue sky above. Excited and ready for all that was to come.