



## I Don't Know How She Does It

*Allison Pearson*

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Delightfully smart and heartbreakingly poignant, Allison Pearson's smash debut novel has exploded onto bestseller lists as "The national anthem for working mothers." Hedge-fund manager, wife, and mother of two, Kate Reddy manages to juggle nine currencies in five time zones and keep in step with the Teletubbies. But when she finds herself awake at 1:37 a.m. in a panic over the need to produce a *homemade* pie for her daughter's school, she has to admit her life has become unrecognizable. With panache, wisdom, and uproarious wit, **I Don't Know How She Does It** brilliantly dramatizes the dilemma of every working mom.

## I Don't Know How She Does It Details

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Author : Allison Pearson

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## **From Reader Review I Don't Know How She Does It for online ebook**

### **Marianne says**

I don't know how she does it. Well, I do: selfishly.

I was so disgusted with the self-centered, self-righteous worldview of the main character I quit the book 150 pages into it. The portrayal of "heroine" as victim of her parenting, professional, and marital circumstances? I think not. Reaping seeds of a lifetime of selfishness, I think so. Quite hard to be endeared to such a myopic, naval-gazing "protagonist". If she were humble, introspective, insightful, or even funny she would have been a lot easier to stomach.

150+ pages I endured of her spinning her wheels, dissatisfying everyone, herself included, just so she could "have it all." The woman's movement wasn't about "having it all" it was about having options.

Jesus said "Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it." And I think that is a far more beneficial way to look at life, marriage and motherhood, working outside the home or not.

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### **CynthiaA says**

SPOILER below!! Don't read on if you haven't read the book!!

OK, this book bugged me. Parts of it were good -- the parts that talked about the conflicting pull between home and work. Sometimes, parts were funny. But overall, I felt it was a big cop-out. The main character had few redeeming qualities. I think she had trouble setting her own priorities and capitulated to the demands of others -- including her children and her caregiver, not just her boss(es) -- without attempting to find compromises. Her world seemed black and white and she didn't even try to find the shades of grey needed to balance everything. Then -- at the end -- she QUIT her job. What kind of bass-awkward message was that??? Basically, the message that this book gives is -- you can't balance working and mothering, so you might as well quit. I happen to disagree, by the way. There ARE ways to balance both -- ways that don't have to cost

you your entire salary, your dignity, your job, or your relationships. You just have to work hard to find them. Hundreds of women succeed. The fact that this fictional woman couldn't still irks me.

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### **Gina says**

Goodreads Description- Delightfully smart and heartbreakingly poignant, Allison Pearson's smash debut novel has exploded onto bestseller lists as "The national anthem for working mothers." Hedge-fund manager, wife, and mother of two, Kate Reddy manages to juggle nine currencies in five time zones and keep in step with the Teletubbies. But when she finds herself awake at 1:37 a.m. in a panic over the need to produce a homemade pie for her daughter's school, she has to admit her life has become unrecognizable. With panache, wisdom, and uproarious wit, *I Don't Know How She Does It* brilliantly dramatizes the dilemma of every working mom.

I hated the main character in this book! She was snotty, entitled, and looked down her nose at anyone who wasn't like her. I know a lot of women like her at my children's (private) school and the entire time I read it, my stomach hurt because I was being reminded of one mother or another that I can't stand. This is a generous 2 star book for me. Oh and by the way, just my 2 cents worth, my husband gets by just fine without me. In fact he is THE cook in the house and does laundry and cleans the house in general. So the author's glaring message that a man is worthless without a woman is just plain wrong in my case. My children and I would starve if my hubbie left us. Hopefully he is planning on sticking around and thankfully I know that is the case. I will be sure to update if that changes and we are on the streets eating out of cold cans of Spaghetti-o's! LOL! 2 stars. THERE ARE MUCH BETTER CHICK LIT BOOKS OUT THERE THAT HAVE MUCH MORE POSITIVE MESSAGES FOR BOTH MEN AND WOMEN.

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### **Lorrea - WhatChaReadin'? says**

I saw the movie for this book before I read it. When I saw the movie, I didn't realize it was a book. I wasn't reading as much back in those days. But I received the sequel, How Hard Can It Be? so I decided to read I Don't Know How She Does It. As a working mother I thought that I would be able to relate to Kate Reddy in this book. Even though I don't have a corporate job, trying to find enough hours in the day to fit in time to do for yourself, your job and your family seems nearly impossible. But I couldn't find the connection in this book. While the book as a whole was good, I didn't find myself invested in it. I wanted to know what was going to happen, but I didn't really care.

I think part of my issue is that I kept thinking the book was set in the United States and then having to transfer myself back to the UK. This is why you never watch the movie first. It gives you a false sense of hope. I don't know if I would have felt any differently about the book if I hadn't seen the movie, though.

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### **Mona says**

I think I read this within a year after it first came out, circa 2003, when I was still working in the financial district full-time, and had two little ones, ages 5 and two, was commuting to Manhattan by train and could lose myself in a book for about 45 minutes each way. I found myself laughing out loud in many spots,

feeling that Allison Pearson really *got it*. She understood the guilt and hysteria of working mothers and put the experience out there in a way that was truly authentic. I just wonder, 10 years later, how her novel would hold up in today's market. The hilarious email exchanges in the book would have to be texts now, I suppose.

I thought Pearson was such a fresh, talented voice, but was very disappointed in her uneven tribute "I Think I Love You," which attempted to capture the David Cassidy fangirl experience of the 1970's.

But back to Kate Reddy. The only actress I had ever envisioned in her role was Téa Leoni, and had hoped to see a wonderful onscreen treatment by 2004 at the latest. So again, was very disappointed in the stale, waaaay too late 2011 film with Sarah Jessica Parker, which was absolutely awful.

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### **Dianne says**

I Don't Know How She Does It: The Life of Kate Reddy, Working Mother [Kindle Edition]  
(October 1, 2002)

I saw the advertisement today on TV for the movie made about this book. It looked to be fun, funny and engrossing so I immediately bought the book without ever reading any of the reviews. I greedily jumped right into reading and found myself after a few chapters, falling asleep. Now a book that got the reviews it did, shouldn't put one in a stupor should it? Frankly, my motto is "don't judge a BOOK by its movie", in other words, books are always much better than the movies, right? I'm afraid I did the reverse with this book; I judged the book by the movie preview and now I'm going to beg Amazon for my 12\$ back.

I realize that most likely when this book first came out it was different from the other books about women out there. Most likely, at the time it was edgy, funny and even thought-provoking. Now it just seems trite, with an annoying female lead (Kate), annoying secondary characters (husband, children, nanny, etc) an overused and largely predictable plot and I can't stress enough, a very annoying nearly dis-likable main character. It is slow to get off the ground, and actually never even manages to hover let alone soar. This book is filled with so much inner angst, repetition of thoughts and trivialities that I just wanted to throw the book against the wall—unfortunately, it is on my Kindle.

Allison Pearson should have done a little research before she wrote this book because she made one of her characters nearly exactly like one from the movie "Baby Boom" which came out before her book did.

Please, please don't make the same mistake I did in thinking that you'd like to read the book before you go to the movie---save your cash---I really wish I did.

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### **M says**

I grappled a lot over the stars for this one, and would settle on three and a half if G-reads would let me - but I will err on the side of more stars if only because as much as what I will say might sound negative, that in itself is the mark of a good book - which is to say, it definitely affected me.

The premise of this work is a woman with a job that is in itself a demanding marriage - constant crises and

traveling and coddling clients - while in the meantime there is the real husband as well as the real kids who also need her attention.

So ostensibly this is Bridget Jones grown up in that it possesses that same glib British wit and similar diaryesque stream of consciousness (which on occasion outdid itself - as funny as it was, and it was, it got to where one more perfect, universal simile of comparing your handbag to XYZ that we can all relate to would make me rip my hair out) but where BJ's loneliness, real as it was, came wrapped in a disarmingly funny style, this book was a terse and thinly disguised rant against, above all, the fallacy of the feminist movement. I happen to applaud many of her points: that we think we can have it all/are supposed to, and simply can't. That we fight to be the same as men but we are not, nor are we treated as such. That at the end of the day the pull to being a mother is the rawest one and will win out, and somewhere we will feel like losers as a result. So in many ways I found this funny book to be extremely heavy and, well, depressing. Her struggle was at times very poignant, the failure of her marriage and her juggling painful to read.

At times I rooted for this very real woman and at times I thought, uch I hate people like this - people who can snap at the poor clerk because she is just SO busy, blah blah blah, but in truth Pearson really does a good job vilanizing and humanizing this woman simultaneously.

Anyway I do recommend it, it was at times a lot of fun and thought provoking. Just be warned, it can really be a downer at times - but maybe that was the best part :)

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### **Frank says**

Honestly this book was good in a lot of ways. I was engaged, I wanted to know what happened, I was invested in the characters, it had an excellent plot line, and so on.

What was bad about it, was it made me angry, it made me upset. It put this feeling in me like I wanted the vomit the story up, but I couldn't. A very physical and real feeling. It made me not enjoy my day to day interactions with people I was so upset by this book.

I don't know exactly how to put why it made me so miserable, but I think that it put me into the mind of a person that was on a busy sidewalk having there head trod on. Which wouldn't be so bad, but this person was waking up every morning with the intention of getting their head back on that side walk, then go home and lash out, or go shopping to feel better about the whole thing. And whats worse, it made me want to believe that it was a reasonable solution to the problems, it even made me believe that I should be having my head crushed on the sidewalk.

I'm sorry if i'm going a little overboard with the analogy, but I feel it applies.

Read it, I know you'll hate it, but I still recommend that you read it... I think.

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### **Annie says**

I started out totally disgusted with this book -- at first blush, it seemed to be a total oh-poor-me-I-have-everything cliche. However, I am happy to say that the book really does redeem itself with some meat, and is worth reading.

The main character, Kate, has a demanding full-time job in London's financial sector, an emotionally absent

husband at home, two small and needy children, and a finicky nanny. Yikes, that sentence stressed me out even to type. She is pulled in a million directions at once, and genuinely seems to loathe herself, the world, her family, everything -- except her bed, which she gets precious little time in. At one point she announces to the reader, "If you think I could be one of those stay-at-home types, then you don't know me at all." At the same time, she is so deliriously (literally) miserable, you wonder if she actually knows herself.

But the night is always darkest before the dawn, and Kate pulls it out in the end to save herself, her marriage, and her children. I really appreciated the fact that -- while she flirted with an affair with a scandalously handsome American -- Kate didn't actually bite the bullet. In a day where contemporary writing seems totally focused on sensationalism and cheap laughs, the writer (Allison Pearson) showed admirable restraint here. Also, I suppose it is somewhat of a redemption tale, since Kate begins the book in such utter pain and ends with significantly more peace of mind. In that sense, "I Don't Know How She Does It" gives some hope to us all.

Specifically thought-provoking points of the book: the constant tug-of-war on the heart of a working mom and dealing with sexism in the work place. These two points are very well done in this book, and make it worth the read (and buy). After reading this book, my husband and I plunged into several serious discussions on the costs/benefits of maintaining a full career while trying to raise a family -- "I Don't Know How She Does It" really makes you consider issues of quality v. quantity, and what a meaningful life looks like on a very personal level. As for the sexism, Allison Pearson is sharp and witty and really fires you up for women's rights -- I was ready to join every local feminist chapter available.

In all, fun but poignant. A good balance.

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### **s says**

This book is basically a work of nonfiction masquerading as a book of fiction. Every woman should read this before and during child rearing. Then she should dog ear pages of the book and force her spouse, partner or child's sperm donor to read. At that point, the spouse, partner or sperm donor will probably do some eye rolling and then ignore the crucial heart of the book--someone has to take care of the details. Such is life.

I found this book to be so achingly true it was more like a punch in the face than a breath of fresh air. In fact, it was almost a job to finish it--since it basically looked, smelled and felt like my life (with the exception that I spend a shit ton more time with my kid than the, shall we say, heroine, and I would give my left boob to stay at home and raise him--but that's a whole other review and requires a lot of details as to why I'm not staying at home but instead have committed myself to a really jealous boyfriend--i.e., my job).

Needless to say, the movie (which is set to come out soon) couldn't hold a candle to the book. I don't even need to see it--because I guarantee you they changed the ending and made it a lot more romantic. There's no romance here ladies--just a lot of pressure put on one woman to finesse the lives of her kids and one very kind but "slow" husband. You could say--she shouldn't try so hard. But, that would be like telling a caged bird not to sing.

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## **annelies says**

It wouldn't be a lie to say I wanted to read this book for years. I passed it on the bookstore shelf, I don't know how many times. Well, maybe my intuition was telling me something. I found the main character Kate to be a lousy mum, sorry if that insults any working moms, but she really was just crap. I just found myself to be very unsympathetic towards her.

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## **Shweta Ganesh Kumar says**

I was looking for a light read after the haunting tome of 'Beijing Coma' that I'd just finished, which was why I picked up 'I don't know how she does it.' I hadn't seen the movie inspired by the book, but the trailer had intrigued me and I wanted to read the book before I saw the movie.

First off, the book is an easy read but not light in the traditional sense of the word.

On the surface, the book is about a working mother floundering and almost sinking in the two lives she leads. Running a house with two children and a high powered career is like being tied to two horses running in different directions.

Through Katherine the protagonist, the author deals with the issues of all-consuming mommy guilt, the judgement a working mother faces and the struggle to be a domestic goddess as well as a career woman.

The book is also about feminism and choices and how equality is still a dream, though we soldier on in our fight.

A fast read written with wit and acerbity, this one is definitely going to appeal to the working mothers out there.

Sample this -

"When I wasn't at work, I had to be a mother ; when I wasn't being a mother, I owed it to work to be at work. Time off for myself felt like stealing. The fact that no man I ever knew felt that way didn't help. This was just another area in which we were unequal : mothers got the lioness's share of the guilt."

I highly recommend it.

P. S - if you haven't seen the movie yet, don't bother. It does not capture the essence of the book or the character.

If you've watched the movie and not read the book, please read the book. It is worth it.

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## **S says**

**3.5**

### **"Working Mother" = Redundant**

*I Don't Know How She Does It* makes my 4th read for 2015 in my self-imposed **NO EBOOKS 2015**

resolution.

I will try my best to be as coherent as possible with this review but if in case I fail on that aspect, please be forgiving.

I tried not to read other reviews because I want to share my personal reading experience free from the influence of other readers' assessments. Suffice to say, I had a love and hate relationship with this book. It got a rise out of me A LOT OF TIMES. It stirred up emotions (both positive and negative) and challenged my principles. So I took breaks in between and reflected on some chapters. Those breaks were necessary. An open mind is very much needed when and if you decide to read this book. Don't let your emotions overpower you that you would only focus on the parts you don't agree and react on it. If I had let my emotions get the best of me, I would have not finished this.

What does it take to appreciate and understand this book? Motherhood, Womanhood, and Parenthood

Of course anyone can read this but it takes the 3 states of being to connect with the story.

As a mother to a 2-year old son, I was able to connect and understand most of *Kate Reddy's* 'concerns' (although not so much on the petty and exaggerated ones). It's been 7 months since I've decided to quit the work I had for over 5 years. It took me over 2 years to finally be able to do it. Because truth be told, once you become a parent, decision-making is no longer a piece of cake it used to be. It entails a lot of weighing in because whatever you decide will not only affect you but the entire family. In my opinion, it's not so much about work taking its toll on you but rather the status of your family/personal life affecting your work that will eventually lead you to choose which matters most. When motherhood vs. work gets into the picture, one can expect a series of doubts, conflicts, unhappiness, etc. Been there done that.

When I was still working, I would be away for a couple of days (a whole week was the longest) and jealousy (not guilt) would strike me unawares seeing that my son was able to get by without me. But that's nothing compared to seeing him choose his Daddy or the nanny over me. I was not around when he took his first steps. My partner videotaped the momentous event for me but NO, I knew right then we were NOT sharing the same feelings. He was there to see it and I wasn't. I don't need to have 3 more kids to know that motherhood is a jealous bitch. Every mother would understand when I say we want to be needed and we want to be present in every significant event of our child's/children's lives even though we know we sometimes can't.

My job then may not be as demanding as Kate's but when work takes you away from your kids, do you think it matters who has the more demanding job? NO. In the eyes of the child, it's all the same.

I found it hard to relate with Kate's sentiments and feelings towards full-time moms. I found her overreacting and paranoid. In those moments, I felt like slapping her if she were in front of me. Motherhood is not a one size fits all style. Whenever she felt she was being judged by the full-time moms, I felt like shouting at her. It was her judging herself based on her silly comparisons.

There were times I felt Kate, unknowingly, sees her value and worth as a person, as a wife, and as a mother through her job.

When I was still working, I didn't think of being away from my son as something I should be guilty of. But I was compelled to agree with what the book said that while I was able to provide the needs of my son, I felt short of my responsibility to raise him. I consider myself blessed that I was able to quit work (temporarily), become a hands-on mother, continue working at home as VA/writer/reviewer and become an entrepreneur.

I miss work so much. I miss the adrenaline rush. I miss the natural high I get from doing field works. BUT. Being able to spend time, cuddle, play, and teach my son about shapes and colors, and bring him where I have to go are enough to tell me I have nothing to regret. Whenever he calls for me (sometimes, more than necessary), I enjoy the warmth it brings. I am needed.

For me, as long as we exert effort in becoming the good mothers that we can be, we're on the right track. All good mothers are working mothers. Some just get monetary compensation out of what they do while some have to make do with a simple thank you (or nothing at all).

I thank my friend for giving me this book and for telling me that she remembered me when she saw it at the bookstore. Because honestly, sometimes, I don't know how I do it. But I know WHY.

*I Don't Know How She Does It* will leave you asking too many questions about so many things. It will challenge your beliefs. It will leave you feeling angry about what Kate thinks and says. It might make you feel restless. You will surely disagree with some of the things written here but there will be things I have no doubt you will agree on.

As for the writing style, I don't know why Bridget Jones's Diary always comes to mind for every "Must Remember" list of Kate. It takes a woman to be able to capture how the woman's mind works and Pearson was able to do that (and more).

Recommended to mothers out there!

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### **Allison says**

[While reading the first three-quarters of it, I was stressed out because Kate Reddy is a disorganized, confused mess, and then the ending just pissed me off. What was the moral supposed to be? Give up when things get too hard? Lower yourself to the standards of the scumbags around you and go down in flames just to prove a point? (hide spoiler)]

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### **Elizabeth Hall says**

So I just read *I Don't Know How She Does It: The Life of Kate Reddy, Working Mother*, and I want you to read it too. It has some beautiful sentences—some that startled me into laughter, others that made me sigh oh my, yes—Allison Pearson is a writer. But the main reason I loved this book is that it tells the truth about modern motherhood. The whole, fragmented, pissed off, full of love and anguish truth.

Of course, the book tells the truth in the form of a fictional narrative, but two of Ms. Pearson's literary devices are so real that I bet they're sitting on the kitchen counter or in the head of every mother reading this right now: the court of motherhood and the list of things to remember.

#### **The Court of Motherhood**

In the book, the Court of Motherhood takes place in Kate's dreams. Kate is British, living on the outskirts of London and working as a fund manager for a large financial firm in the city. In her dreams, Kate stands

before the judge in the Court of Motherhood—an old white man—and must answer to his charges. She doesn't know her children well enough, she didn't do this or that for them, she doesn't make homemade meals—what kind of mother is she?

Kate tries to defend herself, but no matter what she says, she is condemned as a bad mother.

Because this book focuses on working moms, most of the accusations are about Kate being too busy to be a proper mother. But I believe the court of motherhood is such a societal constant that it is in the head of every mother, working or at home. The list of what it takes to be a good mother is so long, so detailed, so convoluted, that good mother has become synonymous with “super mommy”—an impossible standard for anyone to meet.

Yes, every mother knows about the Court of Motherhood, for every mother must answer to it. And until moms learn, as Kate does, to politely tell the court to stick it where the sun don't shine, we will never be good enough in our own estimation.

#### Must Remember

Ah, the list. I know it well. The list runs in your head at night. The list is on the refrigerator. The list is on lots of little pieces of paper scattered throughout your home. The list is in your pocketbook. It is on the back of your hand, in your calendar, programmed into your phone. The list, a constantly revolving piece of abstract machinery, is the only known proof of perpetual motion. The list will outlive us all.

Every chapter in this book ends with the list: Must Remember. There is nothing to be done about the list, Kate knows that. It isn't going anywhere. There are details for your job, for the care of your home, for the care of your children's bodies, the care of your own body. There are details to ensure the smooth running of your car, birthday parties, Christmas, your everlasting soul, and school activities.

But here's the thing: Kate doesn't believe she can share the list. And the list must be shared.

Kate's husband, Richard, must learn to have the list running like a slick ribbon through his life too. Or, failing that, he must learn to read Kate's list, and to share it. The list must be torn in two, to be carried like those necklaces that, when put together, form a heart. If moms don't share the list with dads, mothers will forever be harried, resentful, fragmented. Kate's husband knows that—and he also knows that he is not always the best at remembering the list. But he's next to her, willing to try. She just has to let him.

#### Other Truths

While the court of motherhood and the list are the two most prevalent truths in this book, there are many others:

Where there's money and power, there's sexism and chauvinism. Sexist, chauvinistic men need to be shown the door, swiftly.

Sometimes, women judge each other. Not all of us, not all of the time—many of us are supportive of one another's choices. But it happens. And it doesn't help anyone.

There is value in being home with small children—value that does not come from housework and wiping snot from small noses.

There is value in working, even when you have small children—value that does not come from money and power.

There are no easy answers, and each mother must make her own way.

For each of these hard-won, hard-to-speak truths, I commend this book and its author. Ms. Pearson allows Kate to be a real person—she is likeable, but she is far from perfect. Kate, like all of us, must both admit her own part in things and relax. Contradictory goals, perhaps, but she's got what it takes.

### A Note About the Movie

If you have seen the movie version of this book, a watered-down, Americanized piece of clutzy sentimentality starring Sarah Jessica Parker and Greg Kinnear—you didn't get the full story. The movie is so concerned with making sure that working mothers are portrayed in a positive light—They really do love their children! They're working so hard!—that every truth of the book is polished away. The Kate Reddy of this movie stumbles apologetically through her life; the original Kate wears Armani like armor.

While I applaud the idea that we should honor working moms, I also applaud the idea that we should honor stay at home moms—the book does both; the movie does neither. In trying to ensure that working moms aren't offended, the movie ensures only that the real work that must be done—honest examination of self and society—is swept under the rug. And sweeping the real problem under the rug will land us all exactly where we are: in the middle of the court of motherhood, trying not to forget a damn thing on that list.

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### **Beth says**

[Note: I'm reviewing this quite a long time after I finished the book because I've been really busy for the past couple of months. I can still remember what I really disliked about this book, so I'm going to write the review, but I might be shaky on some of the precise details. Be warned.]

**Are you a man who has lived alone for any portion of your life?**

**Are you a man who can complete most domestic tasks?**

**Are you a man who managed to dress yourself this morning?**

If so - **CONGRATULATIONS!** I really don't know how you did it.

The distinct impression of men I get from Pearson is that they are, whether a high-flying businessman or not, one very obvious type. They can do nothing by themselves. At one point, Kate goes on a rant that men insist upon being waited on by all women in their life: first their mother, then they get married as a solution to no longer having a mother to clean up after them, and expect their wife to do nothing but take care of the house and the children. They get married not out of love, but out of the need to find a maternal substitute. Now, I don't have a utopian ideal of relationships or anything, but I did have the overwhelming sense that Pearson was bullshitting me. I understand that some men are like that - but come on. She met him at Cambridge. She was obviously a career girl from day one - yet, for some reason (my opinion: Pearson needed as much misogynistic fuel as she could to spin on her sexist plot), he's incapable of grasping the fact that he has to do things for himself while she's on her eight a.m.-eight p.m. workday. But the worst element of all was in Robin Cooper-Clark, the bigwig whom Kate works for, that she has used as a nice foil to her husband's neediness and made me think that, yeah, maybe this reasonable and kind figure meant that I Don't Know How She Does It wasn't utterly mired in misandry.

But, oh, no. How wrong was I? When Robin Cooper-Clark's wife, Jill (view spoiler), he falls apart. Quite

literally. When Kate sees him, she gives an icky, inappropriate monologue about how much he's let himself go. And there I was, thinking, "oh, it's because of *grief*, you stupid hag", Kate took one look at him and surmised it was because he couldn't cope without a *woman* in his life. Yep, that's right. Forget the fact that he's lost his wife, the woman he had children with and married for a good 25+ years. He just can't cope because *men can't cope without women*. But I Don't Know How She Does It wasn't quite at its nadir yet. Because, less than two months after that, Robin got back together with someone. Again, because *men just can't cope without women*. It was some creepy far-right feminist bullshit going on here, and I say that as a feminist. One of my dad's friends didn't remarry for thirty-five years after his wife died. I honestly don't know how he did it, if I believe Pearson's crap.

And all of this would have been slightly better if Kate hadn't had such a didactic freaking tone. She literally laid this stuff out for the reader in PARAGRAPHS. Some of the summaries I can remember: "Men are nothing without women." "Men except to be mothered by their wives." "All men are out to exploit, overwork and harass you." So, be warned, ladies! Better regroup in a strip club and plot revenge against your all-male antagonists. While I don't doubt that sexism is rife in the City, you wouldn't believe the extent to which Pearson hammered this home. Having a Dark Ages creep, Chris Bunce, wasn't enough. Literally all of the antagonists were male. The best binary opposition I can think of is present in minor characters, Kate's underlings, Momo (female) and Guy (male). While Momo is a quiet, well-educated young woman who gets mercilessly exploited by her male superiors, Guy is a supercilious twat whose good education is proof of what a dickhead he is, who is constantly trying to land Kate in it so that he can move up the City rungs. The only time Kate achieves anything remotely like active, she does so in an all-female group (Kate's dad is used for the plan, but totally passively, because he's so drunk and deluded, so it's down to the women to move him like a chess piece). True, we have two totally 'good' male characters: Jack, who is Kate's minor 'love interest', but he's so cardboard cutout that I don't think he counts as a real character, because Kate never had to interact with him in a 'real' setting, and Winstone, but he's a perpetually stoned taxi driver whose car is full of marijuana smoke, so he's obviously outside of Kate's intense City world. Kate's dad is, as I've mentioned, a deluded alcoholic who abandoned his family. While Richard, Kate's husband, is not 100% sexist, he is definitely useless. Despite having an architecture job (which, as Kate smugly reminds us, is nowhere near as successful as her job in finance), he can't clean the house, pick up any slack for Kate or treat her with anything other than mild confusion.

And then, we have the women. You would have thought that a book with such a rampant anti-man message could have scraped up a feminist message, don't you? Well, no. Pearson spits out this little gem about how "becoming a man is a waste of a woman." Out of context, you might think that that relates to intellectual challenge or whatever. Hell no. It refers to the stereotypical sticks of 1950s housewiving: motherhood, homemaking and putting out for your husband.

If I had to sum up the message of I Don't Know How She Does It (because it did give the constant feeling of having a lesson taught), it would be this: "Ladies, you're never going to be as respected as your male counterparts, and you're going to do half as a job as both a wife and mother, so why bother? Just jack in the successful job (even if it's the only way you feel truly empowered and intellectually exercised) and give yourself up to be a full-time mother."

That's what happens to Kate. Despite repeatedly telling the reader (quite reasonably, I thought) that her job made her feel good about herself and she didn't *want* to quit, plot contrivance - and not even very good plot contrivance: her son hurts his arm - slaps her around the head and shows her what a silly, selfish person she's been. She dumps the job, rejects all forms of compromise and settles down for boring domestic bliss in the country. Because that's all women are good for, am I right? Well, of course not. And, in all fairness, Pearson doesn't quite come out and say that. But when she recaps what happened to each of her major female

characters, there was a strong tone of, "I don't know why they bother" about the women still in work, because Kate constantly hammered it home that no matter how good they were, they were never, ever going to be viewed as equals. There were also some huge plot holes in this approach. Obviously Kate and Richard are financially stable because Kate can finish at her (very well-paid) job and they can start over in the country. However, Kate refuses to take a job with Robin Cooper Clark which he promises her will be part time because she just doesn't believe that it will be. But, if she's so financially stable, she can quit at any time she wants? And surely a woman who doesn't need to be paid can look around for part-time work so she can have a better balance?

But onto another problem that I felt with *I Don't Know How She Does It*: *class*.

Kate is blatantly upper middle class. They have a big house, private school educated children and they're both Cambridge-educated. But one of the things that Kate thinks - and wants everyone else to think - makes her innately better than everyone else in this goddamn book that she comes from a working-class background. Not any old working class background - her sister is still trapped in a council-house-and-five-children life and her dad is an alcoholic gambler - and Kate thinks that her attachment to them makes her so much damn better because as she keeps reminding us, she's not upper-class like the rest of her peers and therefore she's not just better, but she's nicer, more relatable and more determined (what? I never saw any evidence of any of those informed attributes). For instance, this gem:

"Happy childhoods are no bloody good for drive and success."

So, basically, unhappy children make happy adults? I don't think so, lady. Last time I looked, most of the results of an unhappy childhood come in therapy, emotional scars and low self-esteem. Bear in mind, now, that she's also talking about her husband, Richard, who may be middle-class born and bred but still got into Cambridge, no mean feat even for a middle-class child and, while he may not be as wonderful and superior as St. Kate, does work at an architecture firm, which seems to be his dream job. Also, her sister, Julie, is the product of the exact same childhood that Kate had, yet it's hardly made her driven and successful: she's a lonely, impoverished woman in a council house. All girls in the City apparently have Daddy issues. (The men aren't lucky enough to get Freudian excuses - they have the drive to succeed because they're men, and it's what men do. The City girls are all pathetic idiots and so are still subservient to men.)

Not only that, but Kate has several other moral jewels to hold up: Kate is very opposed to abortion. Rather than explaining this moral view (I'm really pro-choice myself, but my sister is anti-abortion), she simply sulks with Candy in a really disgusting scene. Candy is determined that she's not going to have children and so, when she gets pregnant (as the result of a one-night stand), she's going to have an abortion. Kate throws a hissy fit - like, I'm sorry, Mrs. Reddy, I wasn't aware that this was *your* body under discussion! - and her strongest argument is "you might regret it" (Candy is already 37 and has shown no sign of regretting it) and "a late abortion is not fun" - not contesting that point, but seriously? A late abortion is worse than bringing up a child you're not even sure you want? I'm not sure if I'm biased because my mum and I were talking about children a few nights ago and she basically said that her desire to have children was overwhelming and, yes, she was absolutely sure. Kate is proof that kids do swallow up your life, for better or worse, and that you have to be sure. Candy is not, yet Kate guilts her into keeping the baby. And of course having it is a wonderful transformative experience, because Candy realises how moronic she's been with her fun lifestyle and accepts her true purpose in life: motherhood!

Between disgusting, didactic sexism (both misogyny and misandry) and the most unlikeable female protagonist I think I have ever read, forget *The Handmaid's Tale*. *I Don't Know How She Does It* is the true feminist nightmare.

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### **Abigail says**

I don't know why, but for some reason this book got a rise out of me. It's supposed to be light reading, in the vein of chick lit, but I struggled to finish it. Basically it's about a fictional career woman juggling her career and her family - which is incredibly hard. Instead of admiring the character's efforts I was really angry at her. I wonder if it's just me.

These are the things I found wrong: whenever Kate, the main character, had time to spend with her kids, she seemed to really hate it. Kate couldn't wait for Monday to come so she could unload the kids on the nanny. If they were that unbearable, why bother having them in the first place? Being a mom is hard, and it's not always fun, but if the author made it seem like parents are masochistic for putting up with their kids.

Secondly, Kate treated her husband badly throughout the book and I wasn't satisfied with how the situation between the two of them was resolved in the book. I thought he should've left her long ago.

I didn't enjoy this book at all. I think it's because I see this balance between career and family as a real problem women face, that I might someday have to deal with, and instead of addressing it in a constructive way I think this book ridiculed it. Perhaps my mistake is taking this book too seriously but if this is what motherhood is all about I don't think I want to join the club.

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### **Mette McCall says**

I think about this book almost on a daily basis. Can you really be a successfull hedgefund manager at a prestigious company (thinly vailed as Morgan Stanley), be a good mother (= raise two kids and participate in all their school acitivities) and be a loving wife. All in the same life at the same time?

The book offers up som hilarious scenarios and really pinpoints how the corporate world discourages career women as mothers all while saying they as a company is a very family friendly place.

It also takes a critical look at the stay at home moms that gave up so much that they try and channel all of their life into raising their kids and condemn any woman that chooses not to follow that path.

As the protagonist wonders: These women spend all their energy trying to stimulate their daughters, to get them the best possible education out there, for what? To have them grow up and be stay at home moms like themselves... What is wrong with these women?

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### **Erin says**

I don't even know why I stuck with this book for so long. IT'S OKAY TO QUIT BOOKS, Erin.

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### **Emily Anna says**

I bought "I Don't Know How She Does It" for 50 cents off the library sale cart one day, fully expecting to hate it, but intrigued enough to hand over a small donation for the pleasure of hating it in my own time.

When the book came out, there was a media firestorm that took advantage of the presumed premise of mommy wars -- pitting stay-at-home mothers vs. working mothers in a spitting, catty, bitchfest. As media firestorms usually are, this one was based only on a germ of truth.

Kate Reddy, heroine of the novel, does have issues with stay-at-home mothers, but only those she calls the Muffia, women who are devoted to making her feel guilty about her own choices. However, these are not the only stay-at-home mothers in the book, and this isn't the driving plot. "I Don't Know How She Does It," narrated in the first person, could have been titled "I Don't Know How I Do It." Kate is juggling work, marriage, motherhood, mentorship, an unwanted attraction to another man, and nagging feelings about all the things she's just not getting around to -- friends, family, home improvement, and a social life. Something's got to give, and it seems quite likely that Kate herself might be that something.

The book is laugh-out-loud funny, but also tugs forcefully on the heartstrings, often on the same page, or even in the same paragraph. Both humor and upset are written with sharp realism and Kate is never a caricature. I found it utterly satisfying, but by no means a satire or a fairy tale. I don't know how Allison Pearson did it, but it worked. Most likely, she just told the truth.

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