

Escape The HOMESCHOOL MATRIX

The room was brightly lit and cold. She was sitting at a table, across from an empty chair. She knew the questioning would begin any minute. The door opened and a stern-faced man with a disapproving glare walked in and sat down in the empty chair.

"Mrs. Anderson," he began, "we've been monitoring your homeschool. Apparently, you have been living two lives. In one life, you're Katherine A. Anderson, homeschooling mother and wife in a respectable community. You have a homeschool curriculum. You have a schoolroom. You volunteer . . . to help out with your homeschool support group. The other life, Mrs. Anderson, is lived in your pajamas. Your kids are unable to complete their assignments, and if you can get them bathed and dressed before your husband returns from work, you consider it a good day. One of these lives has a future, Mrs. Anderson. The other does not."

She just stared across the table at this man. "Who was he?" she wondered. Why was he accusing her of these things?

The man opened up a folder and began leafing through it. "As you can see, we've had our eyes on you for some time, Mrs. Anderson. I think that you should look long and hard at how you are failing in your role." He pulled out a single sheet of paper. "Your son is 6 years old and yet he cannot read. Your 11-year-old daughter spends half her time daydreaming and staring off into space. She hasn't scored better than a D on her spelling quizzes all year. Your teen, this . . . Melissa, I believe her name is . . . she hasn't prepared for the SAT test. If you really loved your children, Mrs. Anderson, you would have your children at their desks and hard at work by 7:30 each morning." Tears started to well up in Katherine's eyes. Was she really that bad at homeschooling?

"As far as your curriculum goes, you've switched back and forth from A Beka to Saxon to Bob Jones and back to

Saxon again in just two semesters. I have to wonder, Mrs. Anderson, if you are teaching them correctly."

"How can you jump from curriculum to curriculum without causing your children to become hopeless, blathering idiots?"

Mrs. Anderson made no effort to wipe away the tears that were now flowing down her cheeks. She knew all these accusations were true. There was nothing she could say to refute them.

"Tell me, Mrs. Anderson. What's it like, living in your pajamas? Do you enjoy being a slob?" His words began to cut deep, and somewhere deep inside her soul, a wave began to form.

"How many times did you yell at your kids yesterday, Mrs. Anderson? Can you really say you love them if you treat them this way?"

The wave began to build, quickly becoming a surge. Mrs. Anderson's anger was rising above and beyond the shame and fears this man was exploiting.

"Your best friend, Laurie, doesn't have any trouble getting her six children ready to go to eight different activities each week, yet you always manage to run late . . ."

"That's enough!" Her waves of anger burst over the dam and began to pour from her lips. "I don't have to listen to these accusations. I am a loving wife and mother, and I care deeply about my children. We may not get to every activity on time or complete every assignment, but we are trying. My children are well fed and clothed, and they are learning so much more than they would learn anywhere else. My son is a gifted engineer. He dismantled three phones last week to understand how the buttons work . . ."

"You consider that school?"

"Absolutely! He is learning mechanics and science. If I can get him to put things back together so that I can answer the phone, I'll be all set. By the way, Melissa doesn't need to study for her SAT test right now. She's 14! We will prepare for it when the time is right."

"Another thing. My daughter may not always study with perfect concentration, but she draws the most beautiful pictures. She understands forms and shapes so much

better than her brothers or sisters do. She is a very bright girl, no matter what your files say."

These bold statements took the man aback. Mrs. Anderson's outburst, though somewhat controlled, was clearly not what he had expected to hear in response to his accusations.

"You say I yell at my kids, and that's true. I do lose my temper when I clean a room and come back in thirty minutes to find it in worse shape than it was before I cleaned it. But your files don't show the breakfast we had yesterday when we sat around and talked about three things we like about each other. I enjoy my children so much more than you could imagine. And we truly love each other."

"I stay in my pajamas some days, that's true. But we are at home and like to be comfortable while we do our work. Learning is more important than appearances."

"But are your children really learning, Mrs. Anderson? I show that you have lost ground every time you've tried to set a schedule. How effective are you if you can't even maintain a schedule?"

"We may struggle sometimes. I admit, we don't hit the mark with schedules, but we do a good job setting goals. We know what direction we're going, and we do a good job, even if we don't end up completing our workbooks. If anything is out of line, it's my own expectations." An idea began to form in her mind.

"What? We are not to blame, Mrs. Anderson!"

"Of course," she thought, "it all makes sense now."

Katherine looked straight into her accuser's eyes as she spoke calmly and deliberately. "I know who you are! You're my own expectations. You've been trying to trap me."

"Nonsense. We don't need to trap what we already own."

"You don't? Then you would have no problem if I made pajamas the standard school uniform?"

"Uh . . ." Suddenly, the man became quite anxious.

"And you wouldn't mind my going to thrift stores to buy more phones and other things for my son to dismantle?"

"Wait . . . this isn't what we wanted. Stop!"

"Why? Don't you want to hear about how we're going to stop going to so many activities and start spending more time together as a family? I've got some great ideas, including a bug collecting expedition and a board game night."

"Board games don't constitute an education!

They . . ."

"Oh, yes they do. Colors, numbers, counting, reading, and strategy all work together to educate my children. And the best part is that they don't even realize it's school."

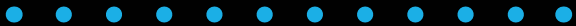
The man was becoming transparent, and he was quickly fading from view. "But what about your curriculum? You can't change in the middle of the year! It's . . ."

"I can change our curriculum whenever I think we need to. If something isn't working, we can try something else. That's one benefit of running your own school. I would rather find something that works than have my children suffer through an entire year of work that doesn't meet their needs."

She could see that the man was livid and shouting angrily, but now, along with his appearance, his voice had faded. He was almost gone from view when she said, "Oh, by the way, school starts at 10 a.m. from now on."

With that, he disappeared.

Mrs. Anderson was about to scoot away from the table when she awoke with a start. Rolling across the screen on the television in front of her were credits for a fantasy film about people fighting the forces of artificial intelligence. She quickly pushed the "off" button and headed upstairs to bed. After all, she had a bug hunt to plan tomorrow.



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