FREE TRAINING BOOK

Fabric Care

Washing, storing and mending — so dresses last

Standing on the Training Centre of Isabella Ngum

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About this book

Fabric Care is a **free training book** — free to download, free to read, free to share. No charge stands on it, today or later.

A free training book from **48-Hour RFP Rescue** — standing on **Isabella Ngum's Training Centre**. It was written by the house as free teaching for everyone learning the dress trade; it is **not Isabella's own work**, and nothing in it claims to be. Where her boutique grows, her own lessons may one day stand beside these.

The teaching is general dress-trade knowledge, written plainly so a beginner can start and a working seller can check herself. Work through it in order, keep a notebook beside you, and do the small exercises at the end of each chapter — the trade is learned by the hands as much as by the eyes.

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Chapter 1 — Care is the second half of selling

A dress rarely dies all at once. She fades a little at each hot wash, stretches on a wire hanger month by month, thins where she is always rubbed, mildews in a damp cupboard through one rainy season. Almost every one of these deaths was preventable with knowledge that fits in this small book. The seller who teaches care gives her customer years of extra wear — and a customer whose dress lasts blesses the seller's name every time she wears it.

Chapter 2 — Reading care labels

Most manufactured dresses carry a label of symbols. Learn the common ones and teach them to your customers: a tub means washable in water (the number inside is the highest temperature); a tub with a hand means hand-wash; a crossed tub means do not wash — dry-clean. A triangle speaks of bleach (crossed: never). A square with a circle is tumble-drying; a plain square is drying, with lines for line-drying and a curve for drip-drying. An iron with dots gives iron heat — one dot cool, three dots hot; a crossed iron means never press. A circle means dry-clean. When a dress has no label — market and tailor-made dresses often have none — judge by the fibre, using Book One: cotton brave, silk timid, wool moody, polyester sturdy, rayon weak when wet.

Chapter 3 — Washing well

Before the water

- Sort by colour: whites, lights, darks, and the strong new prints alone for their first washes — a new Ankara or a deep red will

bleed colour at first, and it should bleed alone.

- Sort by courage: sturdy cottons and polyesters together; delicate lace, chiffon and silk apart.
- Empty pockets, close zips and hooks (an open zip is a file that saws at other cloth), turn printed and dark dresses inside out.
- Treat stains before washing, not after — heat and time set them (Chapter 6).

In the water

Cool or lukewarm water is the dress's friend; hot water shrinks cotton, felts wool, fades colour and tires elastic. Use a mild soap, fully dissolved before the dress goes in. Hand-washing is the safest road for most dresses: lift and press the water through the cloth rather than twisting — wringing is where seams tear and shapes die. In a machine, choose the gentle cycle, put delicates in a net bag or a pillowcase, and never overload: dresses need room to swim, not a crowd to fight.

Rinsing and drying

Rinse until the water runs clear — soap left in cloth attracts dirt and stiffens fibres. Lift a wet dress with both hands supporting her weight (wet cloth is heavy, and rayon is weak when wet). Roll in a clean towel to take the water, reshape gently, and dry in **shade with moving air**. Direct sun is a bleach that never stops: it fades the shoulder it touches first. Dry knitted and stretch dresses flat where you can; hang woven dresses on padded or broad hangers, never on wire, which writes its shape into the shoulders.

Chapter 4 — Ironing and pressing

Iron by fibre, coolest first if you are pressing many: silk and synthetics cool (a too-hot iron glazes polyester shiny and can melt nylon and acetate outright); cotton and linen hot, slightly damp or with steam, for their famous crispness; wool with steam and a pressing cloth between iron and cloth, lifting rather than sliding. When in doubt, test on an inside seam. A pressing cloth — a plain piece of cotton — between the iron and any delicate or dark dress prevents shine and scorch; it is the professional's quiet habit.

Chapter 5 — Storing dresses so they live

- **Clean before storage, always.** An invisible stain becomes a yellow letter in six months, and moths dine on soiled wool and silk, not on clean cloth.
- **Dry before storage, completely.** In our climate, damp is the greater enemy: mildew spots a stored dress in weeks. Air dresses after wearing before they return to the cupboard.
- **Hang the strong, fold the stretchy.** Woven dresses hang on broad or padded hangers; knits and heavy beaded dresses fold, with tissue or clean cloth in the folds, so their own weight does not stretch them long.
- **Give air and light occasionally.** Open the cupboard, let dresses breathe; check monthly in the rainy season.
- **Keep scent and moth guards honest and away from direct cloth contact** — wrap them; and keep dresses from touching bare metal hooks or damp walls.

For the seller: your stock is dresses stored in public. The same laws apply double — stock kept clean, aired and off the floor keeps its value; stock left in a damp heap is money quietly rotting.

Chapter 6 — Small mending, and common stains

The five mends every dress-seller should own

- **The button** — sewn with a small thread shank so it sits above the cloth; knot twice; it should outlast the dress.
- **The seam** — small, even backstitches along the original line, matching thread, pressed flat after.
- **The hem** — caught with loose, nearly invisible stitches; a fallen hem makes a good dress look tired in one second.
- **The hook, eye and press-stud** — replaced in pairs, aligned before sewing.
- **The small tear** — on a seam, re-sew; in the cloth, a neat patch from behind or fine darning; and always tell the customer it is there (Book One, Chapter 5 — honesty).

Stains: the first hour decides

Blot — never rub — and treat from the back of the cloth so the stain is pushed out, not in. Plain water first for most fresh stains; a little mild soap for grease, worked gently; salt or cool water for fresh blood (never hot — heat cooks it in); for unknown stains, test your treatment on an inside seam first. And know the honest limit: some stains and some cloths belong to a professional cleaner, and saying so is care, not defeat.

Chapter 7 — Teaching care to your customer, and exercises

Give the care line with every dress you sell — one sentence, spoken and, if you can, written on a small card in the parcel: the wash, the dry, the iron. Customers repeat these sentences to their sisters. Your care teaching walks into homes you will never enter, carrying your name with it.

Exercises

- Read the labels of five dresses at home and translate their symbols into plain words.
- Wash one delicate dress by hand, start to finish, by Chapter 3. Note what your hands learned.
- Sew one button, one seam, one hem — slowly, well. Your mending kit is now real.
- Write the one-sentence care line for three different dresses — cotton, satin, lace.

Chapter 8 — The workbench: care through the seasons

The rainy season

In the rains, damp is the ruling enemy. Dresses dry slowly and mildew quickly; a dress put away 'nearly dry' on a wet week is a dress being fed to spots. Give drying air and time — near a window's moving air, never sealed in a bag. Sellers: check stock twice as often, air the stall's stored pieces on every dry morning, and keep stock off floors that flood or sweat. A charcoal or other honest moisture absorber in a closed cupboard helps, placed so it never touches cloth.

The dry season and dust

Dry-season dust is fine, red and patient: it works into weaves and dulls colours, and harmattan haze adds its own grey film. Cover stored and displayed dresses with clean cotton covers; shake and air pieces before sale, not in the customer's sight but as a morning discipline; and wash hands before handling pale dresses — dust lives on fingers too.

Care of special pieces

- **Beaded and sequinned dresses** — wash rarely, inside out, by hand, flat drying; store folded with cloth between layers so beads never bite their neighbours.
- **Pleated dresses** — dry hanging so pleats fall back into line; store hanging, uncrowded; a crushed pleat can sometimes be coaxed back with steam, never with a crushing iron.
- **White dresses** — wash separately always; dry in bright shade (full sun yellows some whites over time); store away from coloured cloth and bare wood.
- **The customer's grandmother's dress** — old cloth is weak cloth: support it with both hands, wash only if it can bear water at all, and advise honestly when a dress's remaining life is for keeping, not wearing. Sentiment deserves truth, not a wash that dissolves it.

Your care corner

Set one small shelf or box where you sell: mild soap, a soft brush, spare buttons, needles and threads, clean white cloths, a stain notebook where you record what worked on what. The care corner is a promise made visible — customers read it the way they read your face, and both should say the same thing: this seller looks after things.

Workbench exercise: take one dress through a full season-proofing — clean, fully dry, correctly stored — and write its storage place and date in your stock book.

This completes Isabella's free shelf: *Knowing Dresses*, *Selling Dresses Well*, and *Fabric Care*. Keep them together, lend them freely, and let every dress you sell carry their teaching with her.