

"Dear Plate Spinner—I need your help."

After reading the plea out loud, Mattie Ross, the *Chicago Gazette's* reluctant advice columnist and marathon-runner-in-training, cringed.

Another letter from a frazzled working mother, seeking direction and hope—commodities she herself was in dire need of ever since her coach walked out on her, taking her heart with him.

*Nick.*

Her heart squeezed in her chest and she closed her eyes. After hiding behind the same *I'm married with kids* lie she her perpetuated with her publisher and readers for the eight months he had spent training her, she could hardly blame him for being upset.

With a heavy sigh, she texted her editor, Dianne Devane. *Any openings in Metro yet?*

Almost before she hit Send, she got her response. *Sit tight, sweetie. I'm working on it.*

Emitting a quick growl, Mattie turned her attention back to her computer screen and skimmed the brief account of the weary woman's conundrum.

"The salary of my demanding, soul-sucking job is holding me hostage. I haven't had a vacation in over five years (maternity leaves *do not count*). I see my kids so infrequently, that if I don't keep their pictures on my desk current, I tend not to recognize them in passing (their resemblance truly is jarring). Any friends I have left have given up hope of ever seeing me in person again, especially when I had to cancel my appearance at an intervention they were staging on my behalf, because I had to meet an absolutely critical deadline. As it is, I'm spread so thin, I make plastic wrap look opaque. My only hope is to convince my husband, a stay-at-home dad to our boys, to return to the corporate world. Chances of this happening, though, are slim to none—especially after he machine-washed yet another one of my dry-clean-only sweaters, and I leveled him with a 'does not meet expectations' on his most recent performance review (I mean, seriously—can you blame me?).

Needless to say, it did not go over well. He has since relocated to the man cave-slash-office down the hall and has barely spoken to me since.

So, tell me. Should I force his hand and quit my job, or file for divorce and offer him a job as a live-in nanny (because he looks a hell of a lot better in an apron than I do)?"

It was signed "Burned Out Breadwinner."

*You gave your husband a performance review?*

Mattie didn't know whether to send the writer a list of local marriage counselors or encourage her to pursue a career as a stand-up comedian. Staring at the ceiling above her cubicle for a moment, the advice columnist tried to think of a fitting response.