

I'm Moonlighting as a Stay-At-Home Mom. It's a Catastrophe.

Last month I accidentally dropped a blender lid on the ground, splattering pumpkin soup everywhere. The kitchen was a disaster, the kids were at war over something inane, we were running late for piano lessons. My grip on sanity, which had become tenuous in my brief tenure as a stay-at-home mom, slipped loose.

I screamed like I had never screamed before. It was an unearthly sound I didn't know I possessed. My rage wasn't directed at anyone or anything; I just bellowed my fury into the ether as I held that cursed lid, dripping pumpkin soup onto the hardwoods. (The kids hated the soup, by the way. Of course they did.) The kids stared, perfectly astonished. Even the dog took a break from licking soup off the ground to wonder what on earth I was on about. In that moment of pure, unadulterated mom rage, I quit my job as a stay-at-home mom and vowed to myself that I would find a way back into the workforce.

Hating your job and quitting under duress is a harrowing proposition when your job title is "stay-at-home mom" because you've taken a career break to care for your children and household. Admitting to yourself that you hate it feels uncomfortably close to whispering to the universe that you hate being a mom. I can feel the judgment leaking out of the stars as insomnia announces itself night after night. I'm marinating in guilt, and boy, is it spicy. That reminds me, I have no clue what's for dinner. I imagine the other moms in town clutching their children with more calm and patience than I ever quite mustered, shaking their heads and muttering to their spouses, "We knew it, she didn't have what it takes."

The stay-at-home mom tropes have really piled up, as high as that load of laundry I never did fold. How are there more dishes? Where do they come from? Why can't I handle this? I'm crying over a particularly acrimonious school drop off while my neighbor casually homeschools four kids and runs Ironman races. Does she ever yell at her kids? Jealousy insists that she's a bastion of unbreakable calm; her temper is as ironclad as her abs. It all suddenly feels terribly unfair.

Deep breath. And then another, this one a bit longer. Time to slam the brakes on the shame spiral.

I am not a failure. My neighbor shouts sometimes too. I do not hate motherhood; of course I don't. I love my children so fiercely with every pore of my body that my heart bursts into flames when they kiss me goodnight, first my cheeks and then the tip of my nose. I have given them every bit of what I have to offer, and I now know that no matter how much I give, they will always demand ten percent more. It's not their fault. It's how they are wired. But how am I wired? Check under the hood; I think I'm missing some critical stay-at-home mom hardware.

This part of the narrative is a tough needle to thread. To declare that I have more to offer the world than my mothering skills and my laundry prowess is to throw shade at every other

stay-at-home mom on the planet. I would never. I respect and admire them so much I tried to join their ranks, moonlighting in a profession where I simply don't belong.

So off I go, back into the world of adults working outside the home. I'm desperately relieved and aching to stop pretending to be what I'm not. Stay-at-home moms are truly remarkable in what they do, and I possess the humility to admit when I'm not up for a challenge. I tried; I cried; I quit. In order to keep showing up with patience and calm, I need to fill my cup; a life of constant mothering without reprieve was poking holes in the bottom. Fortunately, humans are complex creatures; children and a career are not mutually exclusive. I'll seek out what I need in the world, and I'll hug my children 87 times a day, and yes, I'll be behind on laundry and late for everything for the rest of forever. I've quit my job as a stay-at-home mom, and that's okay.