

You can hear the anger rising in Elaine's voice as she says, 'I would be better off bringing up the children as a single mum, because then at least I would have the odd weekend off when their dad would have to look after them.'

Elaine, 37, is one of a growing band of women who've found that equality goes out the window when they have children with a man caught on the treadmill of high-stress work, long hours and regular foreign travel. Born into a generation for whom feminism was a given, which spawned the 'new man' and thought it had driven a stake into the heart of the idea of the stay-at-home wife, she had grown up to expect something else. She had thought she would be treated as an intellectual equal, have a full-time job, and share the household and parenting duties. But like many of her peers she has found it hasn't worked out quite like that. Elaine may be married, but she's effectively living the life of a single mother. And though the financial rewards of having a high-flying husband may be great, mothers like Elaine are beginning to question whether it's all worth it.

'I've thrown him out several times, but we've always got back together again,' she says. 'There are many women like me who went to university and had a career and expected equality. But because I'm not working full time now, my husband takes that as a green light to do longer hours. His work takes priority and his home time is his leisure time, so I end up doing everything.'

But wasn't this the experience of her mother's generation, and of her mother's mother's? What makes Elaine's situation different? The change, she believes, is in the relentless growth of the long-hours culture at work. The result is that women who



ALL BY MYSELF

It's one thing to give up your full-time career to spend more time with your children. It's quite another to suddenly find you're bringing them up alone and doing everything around the house because your husband is married to his job. **Caroline Brannigan** talks to the wives who might as well be single mothers

Illustration by Shout

are used to being strong and independent are taking on both the traditional female roles of home- and childcare and the 'male' jobs such as DIY, managing the money and mowing the lawn. And Elaine, with four children under eight, is also holding down a part-time job. The downside of having it all, it seems, is doing it all.

Elaine used to have a well-paid job in the travel industry and returned to work full time, using a nanny, when her daughters, now eight and six, were born. Her husband Tim, 37, a designer, was out from 7am to at least 8pm, often worked through the night or was away completely, and so Elaine found herself shouldering the entire burden of home responsibilities. When twin boys arrived two years ago she went part time and Tim took such a back seat that they ended up at Relate (relate.org.uk). Things are still rocky, but one small improvement has been that Tim now looks after the children on Saturday mornings while Elaine goes to the gym. 'But he's always rather sulky about it,' she says. 'I often think that I just don't need him.'