



**REBECCA
SPARROW**



Tra-la-la-la, help!

DON'T be fooled by those supermarket commercials on TV.

You know the ones I mean. All those singing fruit and veg assistants looking so damn cheerful among all that shiny produce. Well, don't fall for it. I was buying groceries yesterday and I can tell you that the staff member in the produce section didn't look chipper. Nope. He had the haunted look of a hostage as he unpacked cherries and tried his hardest not to make eye contact with anyone.

At this time of year, TV Land wants you to think that everyone is walking around tra-la-la-laing, happy as Larry. Well, I've got news for you. Larry's probably on Prozac. I don't know anyone who isn't just a little stressed two days before Christmas.

So what do you do if your to-do list is growing faster than you can say: "Mummy needs a scotch and a lie down"?

Answer: You ask for help.

That's right. I'm saying: "Outsource, Baby." Call me bold but if you're not coping, if the house is a mess, if you can't

get your head around feeding 16 people (including a vegan and three vegos) in two days' time, why not think about paying someone to help you?

An example of a good place to start

might be Adele Blair from Blair Lifestyle Management, a company dedicated to taking over everything from those pesky little errands to de-cluttering homes, organising home offices and getting rid of that possum in the roof.

Does the thought of cleaning the house before your in-laws arrive leave you in a cold sweat? Pfft! Hire a cleaner and let them worry about the mould in the shower. Or maybe you're losing sleep thinking about that Christmas or New Year's Eve dinner you're expected to cook. Save your sanity and ring a caterer for crying out loud.

Asking for help seems to go against the grain for many women (and it is the women who "do" Christmas in the majority of households). For some, asking

for help means a white flag has been raised and they're destined to get a big, fat F on their Suzie Homemaker report card. But the reality is that our lives are busier and more demanding now than ever. Our work day is longer. Our mortgages are bigger. In many households both parents work outside the home. And yet the pressure to maintain the perfect home, to pull off the perfect dinner party, to bake the perfect duck a l'orange remains.

If paying someone \$60 an hour to lend you a hand means you're going to be less stressed on Christmas Day — then I say, go grab your wallet. And if all else fails, remember that great family moments have little to do with a perfectly cooked turkey. Play tennis on the Nintendo Wii with your nephews. Eat that third serving of pudding. Listen to Grandad's stories.

Food, schmood. A little burnt turkey never hurt anyone.

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