

three

Born *again!*

WORDS BY ALANA KIRK-GILLHAM

So after much discussion and debate, my husband has finally persuaded me to have another baby. 'Three's a lucky number,' he claims. I'm worried three is an odd number, but I do agree, three just has a better ring to it. When I peer into my future family, I always see a dinner table full of chatter and stories, many hands making light work of my attempts at order. So I agree. When I look at newborn babies, I go all fuzzy and agree. It's just the thought of taking 20 steps back down the ladder of independence that makes me stop. It's just the thought of being pregnancy-exhausted and sick while looking after two children under three. It's just the thought that all my hard fought writing time will evaporate in a puff of epidural.

But, my 'I agree's' outweigh my 'it's just the thought that... ' and so I've made a decision. Whatever happens over the coming months, if we are lucky enough to have another pregnancy, then I am determined to not fight, not resent, and not pout, but to enjoy the last time I do this. I will write for the rest of my life. I will have 'me time' again at some point. But I won't nurture a baby again and I regret that I didn't do justice to my first two pregnancies. The first was so new and terrifying, all shock and awe that left me reeling with post-traumatic stress. The second was hurried and harried, a penance to pay as quickly as possible, my first smile in nine months the morning my daughter was born.

I remember a few weeks into my first pregnancy, blue lines zigzagged across

my bludgeoning breasts. A chaotic map of mammary ducts and I realised – a little mortified – that my body was getting ready without me. My body was rearranging itself and leaving my head behind. Even after Daisy was born, my brain never quite caught up with my body's transformation from single focus to multi-faceted machine. I would stare at her, mesmerised and wonder where she came from. I am quite a creative person I thought. I'd even knitted a few choice jumpers (albeit the sort one would only wear on a remote west of Ireland island). But this perfect piece of engineering? This angelic arrival? How could I possibly have made her? And so I never fully accepted – believed – I was actually going to have a real baby. That actually breathed and cried. An actual person. The fact that stored neatly (or not so neatly as it transpired) behind my puzzled belly button was another human being – that I was making – seemed way beyond my imaginative capability.

'Why are you so tired?' my husband would stupidly ask. 'I'm making eyelashes today' I would announce majestically from my horizontal position on the

I want to do it differently. I want to embrace it, not escape it. I now know it doesn't last forever.



sofa. 'Tricky work those eyelashes.'

Or toenails. Or fingers. But despite my giggles at such maternal magic, I never quite believed that was what I was actually doing, despite the trillions of books and websites I was devouring along with my folic acid and banana fruit smoothies.



three

mockery of my final tenuous grasp at control. The moment my baby's heart monitor jabbed its distress call, I was no longer in any sort of control as my baby was rapidly lifted out of my body before I could even say 'I'm pushing!'

But then, still doey eyed and lovesick, I got pregnant again before Daisy's first birthday. Quite a bit before. And then my husband got a job overseas. There was no 'let's put this baby back in the jar until a more suitable time'. He went, I stayed and struggled with a wilful toddler, pregnant and pouting at the unfairness of it all, my second confinement like a prison sentence. I love my daughter dearly but, let's face it Guantanamo Bay would be a lot more successful if they swapped water boarding for toddler torture – locking inmates up with a toddler 24 hours a day – they'd confess to anything to get free! There was no escape, no reprieve and certainly no time to nurture my pregnancy. I had backache, piles (oh good, got them this time), heartburn and chronic tiredness. More purgatory than pregnancy. My husband came home two weeks before Poppy was born and I had no time to blink before we clutched our hearts in the rollercoaster ride of two under two.

And so now I approach my third. I say my third, but it is really my fourth. Sadly my third didn't make it, forever a butterfly in my garden of daisies and poppies. Another reason why this one has to count.

I want to do it differently. I want to embrace it, not escape it. I now know it doesn't last forever. I now know that worrying won't change the outcome. I now know to appreciate every minute, every change, every blue zigzag, and every careless kick. This will be my last, and in some ways, my first. There will be no shock, just the awe. I will languish in the lavishness of my belly, resting my hands on top, knowing that afterwards for a while, maybe forever, I will go to rest my hands on my mound and feel disappointed there is none. The private pride of knowing the secret within me, the ridiculous bond I will have with them, unknown but loved entirely already, so that when they emerge it's like they've always been there. To clutch my cleavage and sashay my voluptuous glory down the street - goddess, magical, majestic! Bring it on. ✱

Every new hour, every new symptom was analysed. I poured over the sections that listed the possible side effects of each trimester, gleefully ticking the horror list of swelling ankles, heartburn, bleeding gums like some test I had to pass. I didn't have varicose veins. What

was wrong with me? Was I not doing it right? Where were the damn piles? Ah great, indigestion. Ouch, that hurts.

I was too busy being worried about the bad bits to be happy about the good bits. And of course my colour coded, neatly typed birth plan merely made a