

Business,  
babies  
or bust,  
one mother  
of a year

*the*  
Mumpreneur  
*diaries*

Mosey Jones

**This is an uncorrected sampler and not for quotation.**

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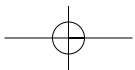
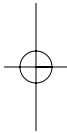
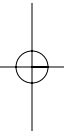
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## Prologue

# Anti Natal

*Thursday 1 November 2007*

Another day, another commute from hell. This morning I am trapped somewhere between Regent's Park and Oxford Circus, my nose jammed in a damp armpit belonging to a very large man, inhaling lungfuls of deliciously ripe BO. This is made even more heavenly by the fact that:

- it is rush hour
- we are underground on the Bakerloo line
- we've been stuck in the tunnel for half an hour
- I am 8 months pregnant thus invisible to everyone in a seat.

I can't wait for maternity leave to start. I don't care if I never see the office again. Oscar Wilde said: 'If you're tired of London, you're tired of life.' If that's the case, Oscar matey, I'm exhausted. I bloody hate London.

To achieve what is laughably called a 'work/life balance', The Husband and I share dropping off/picking up childcare duties. He therefore leaves home before the sun rises so he can get back in time to collect Boy One at 6pm. I do the opposite, leaving for work at a leisurely 9.30am, only to return home long after the sun has set.

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On the way home I called The Husband from the train to see how bedtime was getting on. Sounding out of breath, apparently he and Boy One had been playing horseys round the living room. At 8.30pm. As usual I assume the role of grown-up, telling him off for unsuitable parenting behaviour. But under the riot act, I was secretly disappointed. It sounded like they were having heaps of fun – without me.

*Friday 2 November*

Boredom at work drives me to poke old friends on Facebook, the online equivalent of drunk dialling and a similarly bad idea. Most can't fathom why you'd choose now to get in touch, and very few are genuinely pleased to hear from you. I instantly discovered that the class geek from school has a varied and thrilling life doing something in security in Africa and several of the lumpier girls are now go-getting businesswomen with expensively highlighted hair and apple-cheeked kids, dressed courtesy of mini Boden. My offspring wasn't so much apple-cheeked as banana-haired since most of his breakfast that morning wound up on his head. He has also taken to calling me by his Very Capable Childminder's name which tells you something about the amount of quality time we spend together.

Finding one of my old classmates on Friends Reunited, I decide I should refer to her as SuperScot. She is one of those people who appears to be effortlessly successful.

She has already popped out three children and now makes bijou, one-off children's clothes for a local retailer. Her picture on Friends Reunited (another exercise in self-flagellation should you ever need to cement your feelings of inadequacy) shows a relaxed, smiling woman, obviously in control of her

## Anti Natal

life, her kids and her career. At home in her own skin. I often feel like a distant cousin who's overstayed her welcome in mine

So I poke and then stare at the office calendar in the same way a school kid gazes at the clock, willing 3pm, or in my case, the 16 November, to come.

### *Thursday 8 November*

My boss, the Editrix, took me aside today and announces proudly that she's secured me a pay rise. Perhaps the daily grind isn't so bad. Maybe that commute is bearable after all.

Five hundred quid a year. A raise of five hundred poxy quid for someone, and I quote: 'with your level of experience and longevity in the job.'

It's just not worth it. My travel and childcare costs have together gone up by more than £500 in the last year alone. It is getting perilously close to the point where I'm paying the company for the pleasure of seeing my son two days a week.

Enough's enough. I've decided that, when I go on maternity leave next week, it will be the last time I darken their doors. I'll have my baby, spend a few months floating about in a postnatal glow (I'm not thinking about the two extra stone of baby weight and leaking bosoms at this point) and then set up a modest little enterprise from the kitchen table, children playing at my feet. We aren't exactly rich but The Husband's salary can just about stretch to providing the serious money for the boring bits such as mortgage and gas. My little bit on the side could cover the Ocado orders, Boden binges and a (very frugal) trip to the Alps once a year. At least, that's the plan....

## Chapter 1

# Born Again

*Sunday 20 January 2008*

Baby, meet world. World, meet baby.

We brought Boy Two home at 2am this morning after a mere seven hours in hospital. I think it's something of an achievement that the midwife was so happy to shoo us off home barely two hours after the birth. The Husband was less pleased as he saw his Star Wars DVD marathon evaporate, to be replaced with the carrying of many cups of tea and biscuits (essential for mummy's milk) and telephone/email duty.

My sister and her boyfriend had come down from London yesterday on the off-chance that something might happen. By 7pm I was having contractions three minutes apart while simultaneously trying to teach my desperately undomesticated sibling how to make sauce for Boy One's cauliflower cheese.

'How will I know when the sauce is thick enough?'

'When it starts getting lumpy again. Chuck in a splash of milk and take it off the heatnnnnngggHHHHHHH!'

'And when do I add the cheese?'

'When all the luuuUUUUUumps are gone.'

'Are you OK?'

'Just having a baby, otherwise fi...uuuuuhhhhhh'

'Shouldn't you call the hospital to see if you need to go in?'

## Born Again.

‘Mmmpppfffffffffffffffffffffffff’

Later, I lie in our bed at 3am with our new 8lb scrap of humanity snortling away between us. His 35lb, three year-old brother is snoring just as loudly in his bed that has been transplanted to the foot of ours from next door, where he’d been ousted by my own sibling combo. Too knackered to sleep I watched the baby snooze, the image of his father who is also out for the count (why are men never too exhausted to catch 40 winks?). All of a sudden I felt quite grown up, quite... responsible. With one child you can almost get away with pretending it was a bit of an accident, or that you aren’t *really* a parent, you’re just playing at mummies and daddies. I find myself trying out the phrase ‘my *children*’ to see how it fits. Sounds big. Sounds fun. Sounds expensive. Bugger.

*Monday 21 January*

No rest for the wicked, or even just the slightly naughty. I had decided weeks before his birth that Boy Two was going to integrate seamlessly into the Jones household. Just because there was a newborn kicking around, it was no excuse to take life slowly. I can therefore only assume that it was some kind of post-partum insanity that led me to book a skiing holiday for when he would be barely five weeks old.

I don’t think the travelling itself will cause the headaches, even though we have also decided to tackle most of Europe by train with the outlaws in tow. It was how to decide on a name, register the baby, get a photograph that doesn’t make him look like an alien and get the passport back in time to catch the 07.15 from St Pancras on the 8 March.

We had settled on a name halfway through the pregnancy,

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but now he was out I'm not sure Boy Two really suits it. I don't have a great history with naming things. In my lifetime so far, I've owned three cats. They've all been pedigree Burmese and come ready-equipped with fancy monikers such as Aduihbu Buttermilk Dennis. But that doesn't really trip off the tongue when you're rattling a bowl of Kibbles and bellowing their name into the garden at sunset. More shouty names were required.

But whether or not Boy Two's name will dog him for the rest of his life is immaterial. We have four days to register him, get the certificate and send it to the passport office. There is no time for creativity. I also need an official passport photo. The passport office doesn't like ultrasound pictures – it's really hard to get a foetus to smile for the camera.

The nice man at Jessops lies Boy Two on a white marshmallow and takes the pics. I've been fretting about how you get a baby to look straight at the camera with a neutral expression, but as newborns spend much of their time trying to focus on their own noses, the photographer says the passport office tends to overlook it.

*Tuesday 5 February*

Whether it is sleep deprivation or a heady cocktail of hormones and my first G&T in many, many months, I've hit a period of manic activity that mixes Stepford wife with Superwoman. Largely, I'm not much of a success as either but there are moments. Much to Boy One's delight, I rocked the Shrove Tuesday pancakes with every topping conceivable, the favourite being chocolate and melty cheese. Together. The crepe fiesta is to celebrate getting all of his unused and grown-out-of toys and

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clothes into bags and into the attic. For a brief moment I surveyed the feng shui'd, decluttered, picture perfect home before dragging out all the baby stuff I'd jammed under our bed for Boy Two, thus returning the house to its normal, chaotic state. I believe it is generously termed 'lived in'.

In a rare example of foresightedness I have also just hot-footed it down to the local 'paint your own pottery' place to immortalise Boy Two's feet in Dutch blue paint on a variety of mugs and plates – bijou presents for friends and family vis-à-vis Christmas 2008. If I don't break these by Spring 2008 it'll be a ruddy miracle.

Returning home with blue-footed children, I resurrect my old website that proudly proclaims 'Make and do for Fathers' Day 2007!' in 56 point sans serif. Some time ago I had a moderately successful book out which, every year, gets a bit of a push around Mother's Day. With the sacred date looming once more, I didn't want to get Googled and be caught with my virtual knickers down. Some quick updates later and becausemumknowsbest.com can face her public with pride.

All this before tea time and on three hours sleep. Move over Maggie Thatcher, eat your heart out Nicola Horilck\*....

### *Wednesday 6 February*

Boy One didn't sleep through the night until he was at least two years old. But the *quid pro quo* was that he was a serious napper during the day. I could usually rely on a good four hours to myself during his first year, and about two during his second. So, the rings under my eyes rivalled Saturn but I still

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\*except she has five children and a hedge fund, I have two children and a hedge.

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had the chance to knock together the odd magazine article or enjoy *Diagnosis Murder* uninterrupted. Thankfully it looks like Boy Two is going the same way. When the midwife turns up to stick a scalpel in my newborn baby's foot – babies spend a serious amount of time in the early days doubling as pin cushions – Boy Two just sleeps on through. It bodes well for enough peace and quiet to make proper business phone calls without being rumbled as a sick-covered zombie.

Just 17 days after the birth, I get back in touch with my freelance contacts to see if there is any work in the offing. It's not exactly the business empire I'd entertained during those last, tedious days in the office but I don't really have the energy for a full-blown attack of the Richard Bransons right now. Surely I can scrape together a few hundred words about potty training? And emails hide the reality of hungry newborn howling and cracked nipples. Still, the magazine's deputy editor sounds a bit shocked to hear from me:

RE: BACK IN THE SADDLE

Message: Am amazed to hear from you so soon...

Reply: Everything's pretty much back in the old routine!

Message: If you're feeling up to writing again?

Reply: Finding it much easier to ignore the screaming this time round.

Until I come up with a better idea, a little light typing doesn't seem like too big a burden. I don't think it apposite to mention that the impending skiing holiday and the inevitable poverty thereafter is a great motivator.

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### *Thursday 7 February*

If I'm going to maintain this mania, I'm going to have to introduce some method to this madness. I'm going to have to figure out what schedule Boy Two is on. It certainly isn't mine. But I've now realised that I shouldn't have bothered. Writing it down confirms that he sleeps for an hour and then feeds for an hour – every two hours on a 24 hour cycle. And he's doing this every day.

So after being tied to the sofa for 60 minutes, I have a further 60 minutes to achieve everything else, from 'Muuuum, wipe my bottom!' to 'yes of course I can have 1,000 words to you by next Friday'. No matter that I probably can't spell my own name at this juncture, let alone opine on the state of breastfeeding across the UK for a page and a half. I was so sleep-deprived I put the phone in the fridge three times today alone.

Despite all this, I've hardly noticed that The Husband has gone back to work. I wasn't filled with the sense of dread that I thought I'd be. In fact, despite his doing his very best to smooth the way for the last few weeks, it actually seems a bit easier without him here. Without shouts of 'where's the...' every ten minutes, I can get on with my own work, such as it is, even if it is in 60 minute bursts. Boy One is at pre-school for the day, Boy Two is sleeping, if intermittently. So, I fire up the interwebulator and start to look for ideas to earn money from home, particularly ones that are a bit more long term than freelance writing, and that pay better. What are other women like me doing to earn money and stave off boredom? There is only so much conversation you can wring from the disposable versus terry nappy debate before rendering yourself unconscious.

*the Mumpreneur diaries**Friday 8 February*

Barely a couple of weeks back at work and The Husband is already full of doom and gloom. His research grant only lasts three years and it's due to run out at the beginning of June. With the whole waiting for baby tenterhooks, plus Christmas celebrations, he'd pushed it all to the back of his mind. Now life has returned to normal he can't put it off any more. It's time to get back on the job-seeking treadmill. I know from bitter experience this will cause him weeks, if not months, of existential angst.

Last time we went through this was, coincidentally, just after I'd had Boy One. Instead of enjoying our 'babymoon', I spent every night listening to his tales of woe, unemployment predictions and wondering if we were about to go broke. I'd hear that he had chosen the wrong career, the wrong project, he should have been an industrial rather than academic scientist, his papers were wrong, his experiments went wrong. Every night he came up with a litany of disasters and reasons why he would never be employable ever again.

In the past I've tried to be the upbeat, voice of reason. 'Something's bound to turn up,' I'd say. 'If Oxford University wanted you, you can't be that bad.' Sure enough, in the nick of time something has always come through. This time though, I'm finding it difficult to sympathise. With two kids and my own job that is barely worth going back to, I can hear a voice in my head, saying, 'Come on caveman – provide! Hunt, gather, bring bacon... Pull your finger out!' Of course, what I actually come out with is, 'There, there, it'll work out. I can always go back to the office early if the worst comes to the worst.' In the back of my head I scream 'NOOOO!'

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I'm already having a hard time contemplating the return to the office after 12 months maternity leave, but now here I am faced with the prospect of going back in little more than three months' time. Whereas before I'd had visions of pottering about at home, writing the odd article and doing a bit of selling on Ebay, I now have to think of some proper, *bona fide* and above all financially sound reason not to rejoin the rat race prematurely.

Of course, I could get a part time job in the village shop or work in the pub, but have I really spent five years at university, and seven more meeting the great and the good of the business world to go back to my student job? Having children is supposed to liberate, not lobotomise.

In a way, I'm lucky. The skills and experience I've picked up over the years are eminently adaptable to working for myself, using little more than a computer and the dining room table. But am I cut out for working for myself? The idea of being self-employed has always scared the hell out of me. The fact that I might have to borrow money, then go bust (as about 12,000 do every year) and not be able to pay it back. I'll have to figure out tax and national insurance and other financial things with my barely scraped D grade maths from school. No mortgage company will touch you with a barge-pole unless you have more than three years of accounts. All this when I could crawl back to the security of a big company that will figure this all out for me, provide me with nice normal payslips and a vague feeling of security.

Writing for a living is an obvious one. I've been doing that for nearly ever and sometimes people even pay me. But there's never really been enough in my pool of freelance contacts to constitute a regular salary. Books are nice, but again, hardly a goldmine unless you're Jordan whose twin

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marketing assets come in a 32DD. And you only get paid twice a year. I have trouble getting to the end of the month without a cash injection.

Before journalism, I was a moderately good PR. Getting coverage for clients and not annoying the journalists being the definition of ‘moderately’. If I took the time to build up contacts in the regional press I could perhaps get a few local companies to employ my services – ‘Local waste company bins the suit’ – sort of thing.

The problem with PR is that you spend a lot of time working on contacts and networking to begin with, before you see any money. And unless you’ve got a superstar client that every journalist wants a piece of, you spend your days doing little more than begging. Out here in the boondocks, the pool of stellar clients is vanishingly small, although celebrity chef Anthony ‘Wozza’ Worrall-Thompson and famous consort The Lovely Debbie McGee™ both live up the road.

So I do what I always do in times of stress and head over to Other Mother of Boys to whinge. Other Mother’s Boy One is exactly the same age as my own and they’ve grown up together since birth. We met at the local NCT Antenatal classes. I thought she was a grumpy Northern tomboy and she thought I was a, in her words ‘gobby media tart’. Naturally, we became fast friends, uniting in our ridicule against the knit your own yoghurt brigade and insisting that champagne in our hospital bags was much more important than lip balm or whale song. Whenever one of us needed to bend the other’s ear, we knew we could relegate the urchins to the back room to murder each other while we chew the fat in the kitchen.

I quite envy Other Mother’s approach to life. Of solid northern stock, the idea of a seat-of-your-pants, boho way of

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life is yet to appear on her radar. Supper is at 6pm and if it's Wednesday, it must be chicken pie. Sun means hats, rain means macs and we're bathed and in bed by 7.30pm sharp. In our house it's more like:

Husband: 'Have you been to the supermarket?'

Me: 'Mm-hm'

Husband: 'Hooray! At last, there's food. Tonight, children, we eat!'

Or

Husband: 'Do the kids need a bath?'

Me: 'Sniff 'em and see...'

The same structure applies to Other Mother's career. From a young age, her father insisted both his daughters train for something that gave them a job for life. Now a chartered engineer with the National Grid, that's exactly what she's got. She knows that she will step back in where she left off 12 months ago and that her pay will be commensurate with her skills or that's it, the union turns the lights out. Compare that with journalism where the pay seems to be whatever's left in the petty cash at the end of the month.

But equally, the lack of flexibility would drive me mad. She can't do her job from a laptop in the garden, she can't just do a bit for a while to keep her hand in and she can't just decide to stay off for longer because she fancies it. Her situation is similar to mine, in that she is about to spend the next 18 months basically working to keep her boys in nursery with nothing left over. But, once they're both at school she'll be back in the land of disposable income, with job security and career consistency behind her.

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‘I was only planning on doing a bit of writing now and again, now The Husband sounds like he wants me to go back to work already,’ I whinged. ‘I don’t want to go back at all.’

‘He will get another grant in the end, though, won’t he?’ Other Mother asked.

‘No guarantees, and it sounds like there’s someone doing the same research as him, only better, somewhere else. If they get to the grants first he’s had it. If he doesn’t get anything by May I’ll have to ask for my job back six months early. And that won’t go down well with whoever’s keeping my seat warm,’ I answered.

‘What about working from home? Have you got anything in mind?’ she asked.

‘Not a sausage. The freelancing’s OK but it won’t keep Boy One in Noddy pants.’

Then she suggests that I look into being a Doula – a helper for pregnant and new mums. I was quite surprised she’d even heard of one, being as she’s of the view that it’s the NHS’s job to get the baby out, then yours to get on with raising it. I had actually looked into one myself for the birth of Boy Two but I’d dismissed it as too expensive at the time. Birth Doulas can charge up to around £800 for just being with a mum in labour. My labours were both so short it would have worked out at about £200 an hour. Nice work if you can get it.

Other Mother points out: ‘I saw it in a magazine article a few months back. You were basically doing what Doulas do when you helped me out for that ten weeks after my second was born. It’s not all placentas and panting. If you don’t want to do the gory bit then you can always be a postnatal Doula – a bit of baby burping and some light cleaning – I know the cleaning part would be a bit of a stretch for you, but you’d have the money as motivation...’ She’s not wrong.

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*Monday 11 February*

Putting 'Doula' into Google comes up with a whole raft of websites, but there seems to be an association called Doula UK that puts itself forward as the unofficial Doula register for Britain. There are hardly any Doulas covering my area so that's the first rule of business covered – make sure you've got the competition sussed. The site also lists the courses you can take to become a trained Doula, although again there seems to be no officially recognised bodies. I find one that's halfway between the cheapo 90 quid version and the super expensive £1,000. If I'm paying that much I want letters after my name and a mortar board.

I tell The Husband that I've sent off a cheque for nearly £400 for the course and that I figure a spot of Doula-ing will be just the ticket for bolstering the family finances. He goes bananas. Well, actually, he goes totally silent, then quite squeaky for five minutes and then silent again, which is his version of bananas. He isn't impressed that we're surviving on one salary with an extra mouth to feed and I've just spunked that month's nappy and packed lunch budget on three days looking at ladies fannies and drinking tea.

I should leave it at that and give him time to marinade in the information, letting him gently come around to the idea that you've got to speculate to accumulate and that going down the fanny route wouldn't be a bad idea. But I can't resist picking at a scab.

In this case, I don't leave it alone but bang on about how my job was hardly worth going back to, and that if he'd only badger his boss about grant applications instead of always saying he'd do it tomorrow, he'd have the job thing licked and we

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could make plans. From his point of view I'm probably being grossly unfair. Here I am, ensconced at home with the children, one of whom spends most of the week at pre-school or the childminder. I have the freedom to see whom I want, enjoy a glass of afternoon wine, and generally gad about while he frets over providing for his newly expanded family and deals with the very real prospect of being out of work in three months.

We both hold our corners – he, insisting I would be mad to give up a stable job I've been doing since before we were married; I, claiming he has no vision and was worrying over nothing. We don't go to bed on the argument though. I go to bed, he sleeps on the sofa.

*Tuesday 12 February*

The Husband and I experience a temporary cessation of hostilities. Just as I'm coming to terms with the idea that writing might not be the path to post-baby riches, out of the blue I'm told I've got a meeting with a man about a book. The money involved isn't something we can retire on, but perhaps the advance will be enough to lift The Husband out of the doldrums, at least temporarily.

However, there's no question of attending that meeting in my present state. So, for want of anything better to do while I wait for my career as a Doula to begin and because The Husband can hardly complain about me getting pushed up if it's for money, I begin phase one of my transformation from posset-plastered, post-partum patsy to the magisterial mumpreneur: Exterior renovation.

Disappointingly I'm still sporting the 'joey pouch' of the new mother and I change bra size hourly. Raiding the Boden

## Born Again.

catalogue isn't an option until my body ceases to have a mind of its own. However when a girl has clothing issues, she goes to the three things that remain constant:

- A handbag will always fit
- Shoes will – almost – always fit
- A haircut will always fit (though perms are often regretted).

I'm trying to curb my burgeoning handbag habit. My last 'score' was a baby pink Luella for Mulberry. A snip on Ebay at £180, the original cost £800 plus. It was practically free. Shoes do almost always fit but as your feet swell a bit when you're pregnant I'm not sure I can trust their size yet.

This has left a ruinously expensive haircut at the local 'designer' salon. A cut and colour sets me back £150. Not Nicky Clarke I know, but easily a week's worth of childcare or a week and a half's maternity allowance. They say trust and openness are the most important elements in a marriage, so I pay in cash so The Husband won't spot my extravagance on the bank statement. If he spits feathers at my paying £400 for education, he won't be impressed with £150-worth of salon time. He insists on spending no more than a tenner on a cut. He's so proud of his thrift I haven't the heart to tell him how much it shows. That's the great thing about hair, it grows back. Most of the time.

In the end I get my money's worth because as I was in the chair and they're all cooing over the delectable baby, he was violently and copiously sick all over me, the gown, the chair and the floor. Curdled milk mixed with shorn hair and the scent of caramel highlight number 36. This is a small but instructive insight on what life is going to be like if I try to mix babies with business – messy, but we plough on regardless.

*the Mumpreneur diaries**Wednesday 13 February*

Up to London to see, not the Queen, but our man about the book. He's keen for me to write a 'How to...' guide to being a mumpreneur – how you manage your time (badly); how you'll cope with childcare (expensively) and what the most suitable sectors are for mumpreneurialism are (you're asking me?). Somewhat ironic that I should be putting myself forward as the expert when my own enterprise is still pretty much at the drawing board stage.

Book Man seems a little shocked when he's told that I've left The Husband in charge of three week-old Boy Two to come to the meeting, and that he is currently pounding the streets of Fitzrovia with the baby strapped to his front. I tell him that it isn't going to be any more distracting working and writing a book with a three week old, three month old or three year old, so effectively, there's no time like the present. I don't mention that there is absolutely no time like the present because, when the maternity leave pay runs out in September, a juicy little advance would do very nicely thank you.

I hope that I come across as relatively capable despite the baby brain. I have one eye on the conversation and another on the clock as Boy Two is still doing his one hour on, one hour off trick, and my bosoms are ticking. If I'm not careful, my man with the plan will find his americano turned into a latte.

Duelling with the commuter chaos on my way home only serves to enhance my determination to leave the London limelight for good. I don't like playing human pinball any more. I just want to be human.

## Chapter 2

# Baby Blues

*Thursday 14 February 2008*

Last year, the Husband made a surprise video compilation of our home movies to the tune of Outkast's *Happy Valentine's Day*. I always bang on about wanting the flowers, the diamonds (I have a diamond thirst on a zirconia budget) for Valentine's Day and this cost him nothing. It was the best present I've ever had. To make matters worse, when he pulled that romantic rabbit (note: not *rampant* – a girl should always be responsible for the purchase of one of those) out of the hat, I'd got him nothing so I felt adored, happy and really, *really* bad at the same time. I had high hopes for this year.

I resolved to do what I could on a limited budget and an even more limited energy. The Husband has always been a bit of a metrosexual at heart, though his nickname is Muscle Man because he did a bit of bodybuilding when we first met and could never fit a normal sized shirt because of his massive neck – and arms, back, wrists, chest.... Despite the cheesiness, I knew that a big box of chocolates and sickly card would still go down well. Knowing I couldn't match the high standards he set last year, I still presented his gifts with a flourish and waited, preparing to blush at the romantic inventiveness of his gift.

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‘Umph...whaaa...,’ was his response this morning as I laid his truffles on his bare chest as he woke. ‘Your valentine, sweetheart,’ I cooed. It was quite tricky to maintain the turtle dove act as Boy Two had been chewing my bosoms off all night and the last thing I felt was flirty, but I thought it best to have a go. Besides, he couldn’t have cashed the cheques my body was writing as he had 40 minutes to get to work and it’s hard to manage even a quickie when the clock radio sets off stirrings in Boy One’s room across the hall.

‘It’s that...it’s today...it’s, um, thanks. Haven’t got you anything y’know...’ he admitted, sleepily. Still thinking that somewhere might be a gift money couldn’t buy, I batted those lashes still glued together by sleep and replied, ‘That’s OK darling, you’ve got all day.’

‘Mm, you know I can’t afford anything – we’ve just had a baby you know,’ Really? I hadn’t noticed. ‘And I haven’t got time to shop cos I’ll be late home. The boss wants to go over the grants. I don’t think we’ve got a hope in hell, but she wants us to try all the same. Probably won’t be before 10pm. That’s OK isn’t it.’ It wasn’t a question. On that note he stumbled off into the bathroom, scratching a buttock and leaving me with murder on my mind.

On top of this, the birth of his second son the month before had still gone unmarked, though to be fair, all he managed on the birth of the first were flowers from the supermarket and a Pot Noodle so the bar was not set high (that said, a Pot Noodle was the thing I most wanted in the world at that point and all sanity was out of the window being as I was probably still high on Pethidine). This is the second time in as many months he’s missed a ‘Hallmark moment’. Not that I’m keeping count....

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A bad day was made worse by having a trolley/car interface in Sainsbury's car park. Somewhat unfairly, the trolley won. A large, angry gash appeared down the passenger side of my car, denting both doors. The mental cash register rang up four figures with a 'ding!'. It may only have been a Fiat Multipla rather than an Audi, or a Porsche, but it was *my* Multipla. It was my 12 month-old Multipla and the only car I had ever bought from new. In places, if you could get beyond the trodden Hula Hoops and chocolate raisins, it still even had some new car smell. And now it has a stupid, stupid hole in the side.

The Husband isn't best pleased but I blame him for it anyway. If he hadn't been working so late on grant applications and had been home bathing and feeding the kids, I might have had a chance for some shut eye and therefore wouldn't have been so spaced out as to prang the car. He retorted that surely I'd prefer he spent his time finding a full-time paying job rather than greasing Boy Two's creases with nappy cream. I have to admit, grudgingly, that he has a point. However it's still all his fault. On principle.

### *Friday 15 February*

The good news is that the Doula course stuff came through so I'm moments away from my new career as fanny monitor/urchin burper. However the bad news is that the course isn't until June, unless I want to attend the one in Manchester. It'd fine for fitting into the grand scheme of using 12 months maternity leave to set up an alternative to going back to the office, but leaving it that late doesn't cover me for the more immediate crisis posed by The Husband's lack of career prospects.

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But, every cloud – silver lining and all that. Mr Book Man is champing at the bit for some more meat on the bones of this book idea we are tossing about. He reckons if he can get a full chapter breakdown, his editorial team will bite and we'll get the green light. I can't escape the irony that, after having decided writing wasn't going to provide the bread and butter after having Boy Two, suddenly it's all taking off. I have even managed to use the delay in the Doula course to pitch related stories to old freelance contacts. *The Times* blows me out as usual but my baby mag contacts seem really keen. I get roughly 350 smackers for every article I send them. It's not much but it keeps Boy One in Hula Hoops.

As I send off the chapter ideas to Mr Book Man, I reflect that I ought to get on with starting a business for myself, practicing what I preach and all that. But I still don't have a clue where to start. In a flagrant example of 'do as I say, not as I do', I've written down in one of the sample chapters, 'You can always find time to squeeze in a phone call, meeting or web update – you just have to be creative! Use the crèche in the gym, the local playbarn or even beg a favour off a mate.' My latest business phone calls have been punctuated by hysterical screaming (Boy Two), chants of 'wipe my bottom, I did a poo'(Boy One) and several muffled moments as I drop the phone that moments earlier was cradled between jaw and shoulder, both hands being occupied as they wrestle a baby onto a boob.

*Sunday 17 February*

On a visit to worship at the chubby feet of Boy Two, Middle Sister suggests I get into child modelling. Well, not me obviously, but the offspring. Once I've recovered from the laughing

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fit I have to concede that she has a point. My children aren't astoundingly beautiful by any stretch of the imagination. In fact, Boy Two's passport photo is back and in it he is doing a fine impression of a Hungarian shot putter – male or female, take your pick. Obviously, I think that the kids are stunning, but that's a mother's prerogative, along with believing that everyone else's children have appalling manners and are borderline ADHD.

However, Boy One certainly fits the wholesome, outdoorsy image favoured by kiddie catalogues like Boden and their ilk. Boy Two's bottom is just crying out for a Johnson's Baby Wipe to be artfully draped across it. Middle Sister says that a friend of her boyfriend's is a talent scout for this sort of thing and that she'll send over some pictures. It isn't really morally wrong to send a three year-old out to work to support his parents' Merlot habit is it?

After Middle Sister left I cranked up the internet and looked into this modelling mullarkey. Children didn't have to be overly beautiful (good), just clear skinned and bright-eyed (would chocolate-smearred with unidentifiable foodstuffs in the hair count?). They also had to be sociable and good at doing things on command. This was alright for Boy Two who, having just discovered his smile, was flirting with anything that moved making for a very slow journey round the supermarket. Smiling babies are an absolute granny magnet.

Boy One however, may prove a little trickier. Massively photogenic (like his mother, natch) he does have a tendency to try and crawl inside my clothes when he meets new people. It doesn't take long for him to get over himself and start showing off like a pro, but probably long enough for ad men to get bored and move on to the next angel-faced urchin.

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Equally: 'Bad manners or sulkiness will not be tolerated.' Boy One's manners are fine but I'm a little sceptical about his Tourette-like penchant for bellowing 'POO!' for no good reason. He also does a nice line in teenage sulks if things aren't going his way (what will he do when he's a teenager – behave like a toddler? Not beyond the realms of imagination).

Nor does it bode well that shoots can take 'two to three hours, but factor in lots more time as they often overrun.' Bored children, shyness followed by obstreperousness – it doesn't sound like a recipe for an easy life. The deal breaker is the pay. Babies can coin in about £50 an hour, and older children even more. But, and it's a big 'but', the agencies take a quarter of that and you have to be willing to leave everything at the drop of a hat, plus pay for your own transport costs. Sure, one day they're grinning over a bowl of peas and the next, they're Patsy Kensit, married to a rock star and doing a nice line in soap operas. But twenty-odd years is a long time to wait to hit pay dirt. I've given Middle Sister the go ahead just in case something comes of it, but I'm not sure that I'm suited to the role of Mother of Supermodel.

*Monday 18 February*

When I was doing PR for a book I wrote a while back, I did the rounds of BBC local radio. This usually meant sitting in a little booth at Western House in Central London, listening to a DJ in a far off land via a pair of headphones and having a surreally pally conversation with the wall. One of the interviews however, was with my local station, BBC Radio Berkshire, so it was just as easy to pop down the road and grace them with my presence. We had such a hoot that they invited

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me back again, and again, and again. What was a one-off puff for a book has now turned into a regular Friday slot doing the papers with Henry Kelly, the avuncular Irish broadcaster of Classic FM, Game for a Laugh and Going for Gold fame.

Though all of my stints are unpaid, I enjoy my weekly banter over the airwaves. Every now and again I entertain thoughts of sliding effortlessly into a job as a presenter but mostly I stick to the reality which is that it's a bit of a laugh and handy if I ever need somewhere to plug anything. In fact, I didn't fancy the thought of being replaced, which was why I went back barely a month after Boy Two's birth.

All throughout last year, my growing bump had been the sole topic of conversation on Henry's show. He delighted in telling me that 'Boys make a disgrace of ye.' When I occasionally turned up on the Saturday show too, the DJ looked petrified that I'd pop on his studio floor while he was inadequately stocked with towels. Henry also kept threatening to send the radio car round to the Royal Berks maternity ward for a live outside broadcast of the happy event. I had to subtly inform him that, of the emergency numbers pinned to the fridge, the outside broadcast unit at BBC Radio Berkshire was not one of them.

They probably think it's mad that a woman with a three week-old baby is so keen to get back on air. But, now I could have some projects in the pipeline and there is still a rabid PR girl still lurking inside. She's damned if she's going to let free airtime pass her by.

The bonus is that Henry's Producer Man is quite happy to look after Boy Two while I'm on air. Breastfeeding, burping and nappy changing aren't quite compatible with companionable banter on-air about the state of Reading Football Club's

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relegation prospects. I'm not at all worried about how Boy Two will react to a bosomless stranger for an hour or so, but how poor old Producer Man will cope. Since the episode in the hairdresser, Boy Two has been affectionately renamed 'the vomit comet'.

*Tuesday 19 February*

Finally, The Husband has finished his grant proposals. Instead of being swathed in a black cloud of despondency, he now carries an air of quiet resignation, borne of not having much hope but equally being able to do bugger all about it. On the positive side it means he's now a bit more available for bathing duty but it also means that his career – and our financial security – is now in the hands of the gods, or charity accountants, which is practically the same thing.

*Wednesday 20 February*

It seems I'm not the only one struggling with finding a new direction post baby. Academic Mother brings her three year-old daughter over for a play date with Boy One and settles in for a good old whinge.

Shortly after having her daughter, Academic Mother resurrected her postgraduate thesis aiming for a lectureship in one of the local universities. If I ever moaned about there not being enough hours in the day I just needed to look at her to get over myself. She rose at 4 or 5am to start writing, getting her daughter up at 7am and doing a full day of full-time parenting while her partner went out to work, putting her little girl to bed again at 8pm only to pick up where she'd left off that morning. I don't think her head hit the pillow for

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more than three or four hours at any given time. She kept this up for nearly three years until she finally submitted it, sailing through the viva and earning her PhD.

You'd have thought that it would have been the start of a glittering career...

'The research just doesn't sit well with those conservative bastards,' she moaned. 'I've got to get the thesis published and try to write a couple of really straight-laced articles before I'll fit in anywhere.'

'Weren't you helping out at some college or other?' I asked.

'Only one day a week, and it was only temporary. Besides, it didn't even keep the dog in balls [Academic Mother's dog had a bit of a rubber fetish]. I'm beginning to think there's no future in academia,' she sighed.

I could have told her that, based on the heavy depression hanging over our house at the time. 'Your man won't be happy with you being a SAHM [Stay at Home Mum] surely. What are you going to do?'

It was common knowledge that the father of Academic Mother's child wasn't keen to spread the wealth. He was working as an estate agent at the peak of the market and had bought himself a flashy car, yet insisted that Academic Mother walk everywhere. He flew off the handle when she didn't want to finish her pudding – the mother, not the daughter – because she was full. So incensed at the wastefulness of it all, he punched – and broke – the oven, which doesn't work out so well in a cost/benefit analysis if you thought about it rationally. I suspected that thinking rationally wasn't his forte.

But his fiscal prudence didn't stretch to helping Academic Mother get her thesis done so she could slide back into working life quickly and easily. Refusing point blank to do his share

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of his daughter's childcare, he was the main reason she had to rise with the lark to get anything done. The Husband may have been many things, but he tries to be helpful and spend time with his children. I knew I could count on his support and for that I was always grateful.

'Ironically enough, I've gone into childcare – I'm registering as a childminder,' she answers. It makes sense, if you think about it. Apart from the enormous waste of lie-ins writing that bloody thesis, she's a natural mother and enjoys spending time with children. It's something I've thought about too, but only for a nanosecond because a) my house isn't big enough to swing a toddler – even a small one and b) though I love my children deeply, the idea of singing 'Wind the Bobbin Up' for three hours straight makes me want to chew my own legs off.

*Thursday 21 February*

I'm briefly leaving my country hovel to go and meet up with Mother from Work in London. She and I both work for the same magazine and have a peculiar habit of getting pregnant at the same time – twice so far. In fact, in our core team of four people there have been eight babies in the last four years. I think it's something to do with the chairs. We're both returning to what used to be the real world, a place where they get dressed before lunchtime. A place where they commute to offices where they spend their time scanning Facebook for old boyfriends and sending emails to the person they sit beside.

We meet up with our Editrix in Starbucks and show off our respective babies. Mother from Work has already winkled out of me that I have no desire to go back. Nor has she it seems. I won't say anything to the Editrix – I'm keeping my

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options open until the very last minute. It would be very embarrassing to have to eat my words in a few short weeks if it all goes pear-shaped for The Husband. I'm keeping everything crossed.

Having admitted to each other that neither intends going back, Mother from Work and I sit there feigning interest in the latest ad agency faux pas, or some consultancy that's showering the team with gifts and dreadfully purple PR prose for the magazine. I worked with some lovely people and we had great times but, as in all the best break ups, it's not them, it's me. Oh, and the peanuts pay and the smelly bloke on the underground.

### *Tuesday 26 February*

One of the benefits of being on maternity leave is afternoon wine. I hadn't been exploiting it fully until now because I had been a virtuous breastfeeding mother and was trying to keep Boy Two off the Chianti for a few months at least. Also, I'd just been too bloody busy to kick back with a glass or three.

My best friend from University in the East of Scotland somehow wound up living a mere five miles away in the deepest shires of England. Aside from the usual party nights and ill-advised snogs we have in common from our student days, we've also conspired to have babies mere weeks apart. This provides endless scope for my Partner in Crime and I to gossip over a glass of wine and pick apart the horror that is OPC (Other People's Children).

Today, the Partner in Crime called round with her little boy in one arm and a bottle of wine in the other. It would have been rude not to. After yesterday's trip to London, we

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get onto the topic of going back to work. I don't think I knew anyone less enamoured of the idea of going back to work than Partner in Crime. Despite the fact that her son isn't even six months old, she's already been looking at nursery places. It seemed as though the good ones got snapped up moments after leaving the delivery suite. She likes what she sees well enough, but she's just getting used to mornings of Kindermusic and trips to the park rather than the watercooler.

To be honest, Partner in Crime is unlikely to really need to work anyway. Her husband has a good job and they live in a 14th century, original features in tact, townhouse with a teeny mortgage in the centre of one of South Oxfordshire's most genteel market towns. It was recently voted as having the most expensive real estate anywhere in the UK. Of course, things can go wrong, the value of shares, houses and marriages can go down as well as up, but the chances in her case are slim. Still, she finds it difficult to let go of the idea that, as an emancipated, educated woman, she can just give it all up to be a stay at home mum

As we mull over our options I tell her about the Doula thing I'm planning and explain that it's all about being a mother's help as well as labour partner. She opines that she could do with one of those just on a day to day basis. Unlike me she doesn't have any regular childcare so planning a lunch or going to appointments means relying on the inlaws or baby comes too. What she could really do with, she says, is a babysitter on call.

'You can always call me,' I suggest. 'I couldn't be a child-minder full time, but I don't mind a spot of child-wrangling now and then. Especially if there's a bottle of wine in it for me.'

'Thanks, but wouldn't it be nice if we didn't have to rely

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on hugger-mugger help from friends? I feel like I'm imposing...' she worried.

'Not at all, I'd help where I could,' I reply, and I would except I have to admit that I barely have time to look after my own children, let alone someone else's at the moment. I have a deadline for a thrilling article on breastfeeding and I still don't have any answers for my mumpreneur dilemma.

But then I have what can only be described as a Eureka moment, without the overflowing bath and wrinkly Greek man obviously. If we both needed someone to sort things out for us, take care of babysitting, wait in for deliveries and so on, then there must be plenty of women in the same boat. What if we get together some mums looking to earn cash and we could send them out in times of need. We'd be the Ticketmaster of babysitting, a concierge service for harassed mums, a mumciergency!

Getting excited at the prospect of not having to go back to work gets the Partner in Crime's creative juices flowing and soon we're talking about party organising, managing mums' diaries and all sorts of services. Fuelled by wine we get a bit excited and start sorting out all the important details – who is going to appear on GMTV, what wardrobe suits the joint CEOs of a booming mumcierge business, whether a trip to Selfridges to acquire said wardrobe is a bit premature and which exotic island we can retreat to on holiday to spend the profits.

I call The Husband full of excitement that we were on the way with a proper business idea, one that would make money and have employees and be famous and everything. He puts on his best 'indulging the little wife' voice and asks, 'How exactly is this going to make money, and who will be looking after our children while you're building this empire?' I'm on

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too much of a high, and possibly a little too drunk, to care that he isn't exactly bowled over by our magical money-making schemes. In fact, in my mind we're practically in profit already.

*Saturday 1 March*

I'm still basking in the glow of my new-found mumpreneur status. At last I feel as though there is actually a business from which I could make some real money. I spend the day researching the competition (there isn't any – well, there is an identical service in West London but as that is over 40 miles away and this kind of thing is a bit dependent on help being practically round the corner, I don't think we need to worry about them. It does mean that we can pinch, or rather be inspired by, the things they have already set up. Bonus!) and trying to come up with a mission statement for our new mumciergery. We also need a decent brand name because mumciergery is, frankly, a bit weird.

I take a break from empire-building to go and collect Boy One from pre-school. His teacher greets me with what I took to be admiring looks as I troop up with the baby in a sling. 'There she is', I imagine her thinking, 'that baby is still practically a newborn and here she is already back in the groove. What an inspiration!' Perhaps I just exude success...

Walking home reflecting on her obvious admiration, I can't resist a quick preen in a nearby shop window. Quick flick of the hair, I'm a picture of yummy mumminess framed in the dark glass with Boy One frolicking beside me and Boy Two angelically asleep tucked against my side. That and the two dinner-plate sized orbs of leaking milk darkening my top.

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What I had taken for admiration was obviously indulgent pity as she thought to herself, 'Bless her, she's so sleep-deprived and hormone-addled that she hasn't noticed her milk's come in again. Maybe the poor love's in such a state she's plain forgotten to feed the baby.' Not Superwoman then. Bugger.

### *Sunday 2 March*

Mother's Day. I remember the husband talking about Mother's Day shortly after the birth of Boy One. In obvious shock at someone having driven a bus through his wife's lady parts, he said to the midwife, 'Now I understand what the fuss is all about. I'm never going to give my mother a crap present again. And I'd better make sure our son looks after his mum too!' Three years and one more son and heir down the line and what do I get for this special day? Nada, nothing, zip. Three months, three Hallmark moments missed and I'm not impressed.

I'm only slightly mollified by the fact that my old book's biggest selling season is Mother's Day so it should be flying off the shelves as desperate dads and children snap up anything with 'mum' in the title to dispense their duties for another year. Our skiing holiday is imminent so it's comforting to think that the vin chauds and après ski aperitifs are being taken care of.

### *Friday 7 March*

Finally the long-awaited skiing holiday rolls around. But it also reminds me how little time has actually passed. Barely six weeks ago we were rushing out of the delivery suite to post Boy Two's passport application. In the interim I've found two

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new careers and discovered that I can – almost – function on three hours sleep in 24. Things look rosy. Even the prospect of spending ten hours taking 5 separate trains across Europe with two small children can't dampen my spirits.

Of course, The Husband's precarious work situation is overshadowing things a little. Both the Doula and mumcierge ideas could bring in a decent part-time income but on their own they won't be enough to sustain our growing (grown? I'm really not in the market for a third) family if his main breadwinning income is taken away. There's still a very real possibility that I'm going to be back at my desk in less than three months. But now is not the time to think of such things. Instead it's time to think of cutting through fresh powder and ignoring the fashionistas' advice to slap on the sun block. Even if it stops at a tide mark round my neck, I'm determined to get a tan

*Sunday 9 March*

First day of the holiday and instead of trooping straight up the hill, the Husband has curled up in an armchair, resembling a deflated Michelin man in his sallopettes. He's trying to steal WiFi. It seems we can't live without a permanent umbilicus to the outside world. Miraculously he finds one. Webmail should, must, be read. And it cheers my non-skiing father in law up no end to discover that he can get the boxing results as a reward for being tied to fibreglass and thrown off a rock, down a sheet of ice with only a small, spiky forest to use as brakes.

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### *Wednesday 12 March*

So far on my relaxing holiday I have:

- Cooked five dinners for six people
- Used the mediaeval torture device known as a breast pump to extract two feeds a day for the baby to be delivered into his gaping maw by my mother in law while I'm up a mountain
- Answered 12 emails covering, variously, names for the mumciergency, the impossibility of getting a criminal records bureau check and the consequent absolute necessity of one, queries regarding the potty training article (apparently, in one of the case studies where a boy had learnt to do a poo in the big toilet, I'd put his age at 33. They wanted to check this is what I meant. I mean, it wouldn't occur to them that the extra '3' was a typo or anything)
- Fallen over three times – twice when Boy One snowploughed into me at speed, having learned how to start, but not how to stop. The third was when the Husband also used my ankles as a braking device, scything into my legs with his skiis and rearranging my kneecaps.

That I have only had one hour-long crying fit after all this is, I think, a good thing.

### *Monday 17 March*

We survived yesterday's epic journey home from the Alps despite Boy One's constant diahorrea on the Eurostar.

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Fortunately he is still in night nappies so we had something to catch the accidents, but inevitably they ran out somewhere under the Channel. We resorted to padding out his underpants with bits of newborn nappy that we hoped Boy Two would not require before we reached home.

Our happiness at being back home is short-lived, not least because of the three separate credit card bills waiting for me on the welcome mat. I've always felt the worst bit of going on holiday was not knowing what you'd come back to. I fantasise about break-ins, fires, floods and unpayable bills waiting for me. On this occasion we'd avoided all but the last. As I hide the offending articles from the Husband I pray to the God of Re-Mortgaging, hoping that our recent switch between banks will see much needed funds land in our account soon.

At least I didn't need to worry about a slew of demanding emails because I'd pretty much kept up with them while we were away. Some might say you're wrecking your holiday by never leaving work alone, but I'd say that I'd wreck it anyway by worrying about what was going on in my absence.

What I hadn't banked on was other people holding on to their bad news emails until I got back. While we were away, someone had published a how-to book on becoming a mumpreneur that was almost identical to the one I had in the pipeline. No funny business, just a coincidence that someone else had the same cracking idea, only about four months earlier. Mr Book Man drops the proposal like a hot rock. As I'd mentally already spent the advance and, reading the credit card statements, actually spent some of it too, this was a bit of a blow. Never mind, there is always the proceeds of the mother's day book, the latest payment instalment for which was due any day now.

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### *Friday 21 March*

Galvanised into action by the sudden vacuum in the family finances I kick The Husband out of the house on Good Friday to fetch chocolate eggs and distract the children while I get on with some work. I still need brand names – Mum4hire? Mumsitters? – a website, posters, fliers...

This leads me to making yet more to-do lists, action points, division of tasks between my Partner in Crime and me, involving neatly folded paper and different coloured pens. I have always had this fetish – I have written the list, ergo the job has been done. Which of course it hasn't and I've spent so long cataloguing jobs to do, I no longer have any time left to do them. The Husband is now back with the children – one of them is high on chocolate and the other is desperate for some boob. Project millionaire is postponed for another day.

### *Saturday 22 March*

At last the unmistakable franked envelope from my first ever publisher plops heavily through the letterbox. I'm not ashamed to say I practically drop the baby on the floor in the rush for it. Figures baffle me at the best of times but I'm fairly sure that the number of minus signs next to four and five-figure numbers are not encouraging. Matched by the virtual tumbleweed blowing through my online banking account I think it's safe to say that those minus signs mean what I thought they do. To cheer myself up I spend next month's freelance income (not actually yet commissioned but hey, it's on the list) on baby trinkets and wine.

## Chapter 3

# Postnatal Cheques

*Sunday 1 June 2008*

I think I'm dying. I'm sure I had an out of body experience while trying to feed Boy Two at 4am this morning. On reflection I think I might have got a *teensy* little bit drunk last night. The Husband found out through a friend of a colleague of a friend of a...oh, whatever. He found out through unofficial channels that his grant application has been approved, that he will therefore be gainfully employed for the next three years. We have postponed our trip to the poorhouse for a little while yet.

In the time-honoured tradition of parents of young children desperate to celebrate, we got them to bed as quickly as possible and then drank ourselves stupid. I vaguely recall trying to tango barefoot in the living room. Details are hazy. I can only assume that's where the carpet burns came from. It has been some time – breastfeeding, pregnancy and whatnot – since I have consumed a large volume of alcohol in a short space of time. I suspect my tolerance has dipped a little.

There are many things you forget in the intervening period between giving birth to one child, then the other. How you always start the burping before realising too late that the muslin is on the other side of the room, for example. Another

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is that small children are no respecters of a hangover and will attempt to make your life as painful as possible. All hope of sitting quietly reading the large print in the Sunday Times and mainlining bacon sandwiches is dashed by a hyper three year-old demanding to go to the Donkey Derby village fete now, now, now, NOW! The baby is also squalling but, as I had to suffer defrosting expressed milk at 4am (in not subjecting the poor scrap to 40% proof breast milk I am not a terrible mother, just 65% dreadful, 35% distracted), in daylight hours he has become his father's problem. One look at The Husband's bloodshot eyes and jaundiced complexion tells me he is not savouring this quality time with his second son and heir.

I'd had plans for the Donkey Derby. Being the good wife and mother, I had volunteered to help on the pre-school's tombola stall. I also anticipated floating through the crowd proffering leaflets about the mumcierge service and chatting up frazzled-looking mothers.

Stinking of day-old wine and barely able to focus, I decided to give the tombola a miss. But I couldn't do my heavy promotions bit either. Forget that I looked like Zelda from Terrahawks, squinting behind very, very dark glasses and hardly a glowing advert for my super-capable mums service, there was still very little business to speak of. It didn't even have a proper name yet. Mumciergency doesn't so much trip off the tongue as let the tongue trip over it, particularly in my state.

It doesn't help that I'm having some real difficulty in pinning down my Partner in Crime. Since our 'meeting' in the garden where much wine was consumed and many plans were hatched, it seems to have stalled somewhat. There was always a weekend away, a christening, a family visit that meant we couldn't get together. Phone calls tiptoed round the subject:

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‘How are the night wakings?’

‘Terrible, yours?’

‘About the same, five times a night for a nibble and a nap. Was furious with myself two nights ago – little bugger woke and fed and slept again in five minutes flat but my mind started going with *business ideas* and I only dropped off five minutes before The Husband’s alarm went off.’

‘We tried controlled crying but he isn’t having any of it.’

‘Want to meet to compare notes?’

‘Mm, would love to but I’m away this week and then the next week I’m looking after the terrible twins for my sister. Just got so much on, it’s a stress. Work want to know about my plans for coming back too.’

‘*Really?* And what have you told them?’

‘Nothing yet. Trying to figure out my options. The Man isn’t feeling too confident about the economic situation and I think I make him nervous every time I suggest not going back.’

‘So what do you want to do about...’

‘Agh, got to go. The baby’s just figured out how to get up the spiral staircase but hasn’t figured out how to get down again, beyond using gravity and an insane amount of luck. Call you when we get back, yes? Lossa love...’

Click, brrrrr...

We’ve continued in this vein for several weeks now and I’m beginning to view the calendar with a certain amount of trepidation. OK, so I can relax a bit now that The Husband’s back on payroll but it still doesn’t solve the whole ‘Do I stay or do I go’ issue with my own job. Net, The Husband makes enough to cover the mortgage, his travel to work and the household bills. That still leaves food, my bills (about several of which he is blissfully unaware), the kids’ bills. We’re

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scraping it with my maternity pay but that ends in four months. After that, then what?

*Thursday 5 June*

With the Doula training finally taking place at the end of this month, I decided that a proactive course of action would be to get all the business aspects of the venture in place beforehand. That way, the moment I had my certificate in my clammy hands I'd be ready and primed to go straight out and find myself some fresh foetuses (with their mothers attached, naturally).

Boy Two's failure to nap in any significant fashion any more is, however, hampering efforts to swell the family coffers. Perhaps trying to wean him while designing a website is an optimistic attempt to multitask. There is now a light dusting of Quinoa on my keyboard and he's trying to perform a tonsillectomy on himself with a Tommee Tippee heat-sensing spoon. Considering our family GP has just diagnosed him with actual tonsillitis this may be a great piece of forward-thinking on Boy Two's part. However his exploratory jabbings are also making him scream at a nerve-jangling pitch so perhaps we'll leave the minor surgery until after he's practised on *Operation!* a few more times.

I have another naming crisis, but this time about the Doula website. Is setting myself up as *The Reading Doula* a bit presumptuous seeing as I haven't even done the course yet and was barely present at my own two births, let alone anyone else's? In the end I decide on plain old Readingdoula.com, on the basis that the first thing you'll google when looking for one is 'Doula' and the place you live ie 'Reading'. Some births can take as little as a couple of hours (my first included) so I

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don't feel that I'm excluding potential clients in Sunderland by pinning my colours so firmly to the Berkshire mast.

There are quite a few doula websites that call themselves 'beautiful birthing' and 'newlight'. For me, it's all a bit 'knit your own spaghetti' so I've gone for dull but practical. I'm beginning to suspect that I'm a bit – robust – for this doula thing. My philosophy has always been a little less, 'Close your eyes and channel your inner goddess' and a little more, 'Clench your teeth, give a good heave and let's see if we can't get this baby out before teatime.'

*Friday 6 June*

Following the skiing fiasco, it's become clear that if you're going to work for yourself, you're never genuinely on holiday. I would take the radical step of turning off my mobile or leaving the laptop at home, if I weren't so terrified of the chaos that might greet me on my return.

So we set off today on a camping weekend for a friend's fortieth. Along with jerry cans, ice packs, mega packs of baby wipes and a wind-up radio, we bring the laptop, the mobile and two chargers. I have a piece due for the baby mag and there's a suspicion I may miss the deadline – again. I don't bring anything to do with the businesses that may actually feed the family in future, simply because I've procrastinated for so long that I don't see how another weekend can make much of a difference. The Partner in Crime is festering in Cornwall right now, anyway.

I resolve to make the best use of 'dead time' and try to call the child psychologist that I need to interview from the car while we drive to the campsite. However the Husband has

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decided on a short-cut through the suburbs to avoid the motorway. Passing several schools at chucking out time, our progress slows to a crawl mired in everyone else's school run. Boy Two is dismayed by our lack of progress and begins to howl and Boy One starts on the 'are we there yet?'. We are a mere five miles from our house, and around 130 miles from our destination. I suggest to my interviewee that we ought to reschedule for tomorrow and thank her for her forbearance. Slumping back in the seat I mutter to myself that this is going to be a very long weekend.

### *Sunday 8 June*

In my ill-begotten youth working in PR, we had a few celebrity clients that allowed me to flutter briefly like a moth around the brightly burning fame flame. I've propped up a very drunk BBC chat show host while he drooled over a girl band, had my bum pinched by a US bad-boy rap star and driven around the Edinburgh Festival Fringe at 10am with an aged comedian off the telly in the back of my father's equally aged Passat, complete with pint of beer in one hand and a spliff in the other. Him, not me obviously. There are many, many things you can get away with in front of the Edinburgh rozzers at festival time, but being stoned in charge of a celebrity is not one of them.

When I rejoined the real world I successfully jettisoned the boy band members but sustained exposure to the rarified atmosphere of 'meedja' London still leaves you like a satellite around Planet Celeb. Every now and again I'm whisked onto a programme as a talking head and in my travels through the green room (which, thus far in my experience, is never green.

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The BBC's is a particularly nauseating mix of orange and taupe) I bump into celebier talking heads and engage in jovial small talk. Through the miracle of the interweb, one has even become something of a friend. Not an invite-to-your-wedding, drunk-dialling-at-Iam kind of friend, but friendly none the less. I'm not quite sure why she is a celebrity and she's not up there with Madonna or even Mariah Carey, but she lives in a posh bit of the city and the chattering classes know her name so she officially qualifies as a 'Celeb Mum'.

I told Celeb Mum about the latest attempts to make my fortune and she kindly offered to bung in an endorsement should I need one to boost the businesses' profile. As all her children are heading towards secondary school I couldn't really fathom how she could endorse my Doula project – if she could, the gossip columns would have a field day. However, the mumcierge service would be quite up her street so a few kind words might go a long way.

*Thursday 12 June*

One of the benefits of getting your kids into child modelling is that you can often end up with some fabulous portraits at no expense to yourself. However, as with everything in this great Mumpreneurial empire I'm growing for myself, my budding beauties have not so much as grimaced at a telephoto lens yet. With the grandparents lacking in pretty pictures I'm forced to take him off to the local snapper for a few shots.

It was one of these voucher deals where they give you an hour session and the first print for so little it may as well be free, on the understanding that you'll be so besotted with the pictures you'll feel compelled to spend a small fortune on

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several more shots. I had to take Other Mother of Boys with me to the viewing session because I knew that, left to my own devices, I'd have bought the lot and we'd now be living in a tent under the railway arches. Very practical is Other Mother of Boys, so much so that I had to rein her in at one point while she was enthusiastically binning every shot of my beautiful bouncing baby. The sales chappie was shooting her evil glances by the end of the session as her barked dismissals drew him further and further away from that month's sales target.

Eventually we left the studio satisfied a good deal had been done. I, with several hundreds of pounds worth of prints (totalling four separate pictures – I said it was expensive), the owner with a palpable sense of relief that I'd taken the commission annihilator off his premises. I made a mental note to push the child modelling idea forward a bit further. Boy One is growing up fast and it is Persil's turn to pay for the pics.

### *Wednesday 18 June*

Daytime television and a fridge full of white wine is the undoing of the mumpreneur. After getting Boy One off to school and, eventually, Boy Two off to sleep, I accidentally fell into a bottle of white wine. By 2pm and feeling ever so slightly merry, I'd actually begun to find the horseracing from Royal Ascot interesting. I had a vested interest in watching the fillies – and the horses – as The Husband had booked us a day out there on Saturday. His work had given him discounted tickets to the cheap seats and he was so excited about going to see some 'society'. I didn't have the heart to tell him that it wasn't called 'Chavscot' for nothing. I also declined to mention that, writing for a marketing magazine, we're always being sent

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corporate tickets to go and watch ‘so-and-so electronics company’ demonstrate why drinking fizz and watching gee-gees run around in circles is totally up with their brand values. A bit of arch-ligging would surely have edged us into the Royal Enclosure. If I don’t go back to the day job I have to admit that’s one of the things I’ll miss. That and the Christmas hampers of the ‘best our clients have to offer’ from the ad agencies. One of them is great, as they look after Woolworths (a kilo of pick ‘n’ mix), Gordon’s (a litre of gin), Baileys (another litre) and Audi (OK, a funny branded magnifier thingy rather than an actual car, but Boy One loved it in his Christmas stocking. No-one said Santa wasn’t cheap).

But this time round, cheap seats it was and so, under the influence of several of the nanny state’s naughty, naughty winey units, I went upstairs rather unsteadily to try on some outfits. Halfway through my mini catwalk show I realised too late that the amount of energy required to get you into a dress is roughly half what it takes for you to get out of it again. Having wedged myself into a posh dress, the reality of having to walk drunkenly up the road in it to fetch Boy One from the childminder dawned as I realised I didn’t really have enough energy, coordination or sobriety to get out of it again.

In the end, I managed to return to jeans and a jumper after much huffing and puffing. Before Chavscot the seams of Posh Dress will, however, require some attention with a needle and thread.

*Thursday 19 June*

With just over a week to go, I’d been putting off phoning the people about my Doula course. I hadn’t really contemplated

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what I was going to do with Boy Two for three days. Since our success on the bottle at six weeks as I schussed down the mountain now and again, nipple confusion has reared its ugly head. I'm surprised that boys can even get confused about nipples. I've never met a boy who didn't know what to do with them. But it seems that too much switching about between teats and boobs gets them all aflutter when confronted with a fake boobie. So far, Boy Two seems content to chew madly on his teat but refuses point blank to suck on it. Normally, I'd just give up on the bottle, jam him back on a bosom and try not to poison him with too much Chardonnay. However, the Doula course is about 15 miles away and, elastic as my nips are, it's a bloody long way to stretch.

I call the founders of the course to explain my predicament and they're very understanding but are adamant that, on a course about babies, I simply can't bring one along. 'Too distracting,' they insist. I mull the possibility of postponing until he's happy with a cup. However, looking at the list of dates the woman sent over I quickly realised that, as there was no reasonably close (and I count Manchester and Cardiff in that description) rescheduled event, that I wouldn't be able to start working as a Doula until the middle of next year. This would put a rather large hole in my plans and a major dent in the family finances. I could potentially have handed Boy Two over to Other Mother of Boys for the three days but as she was recently told off by the desk harpie at our gym for allowing my son to scream his head off in the café for the best part of an hour I thought I should plump for something a bit more formal. I organised a horrendously complex childcare arrangement for the bosom-fixated baby and agreed to go it alone.

*the Mumpreneur diaries**Friday 20 June*

I have been sent some pre-course ‘homework’ to complete before Wednesday. It doesn’t ask any tricky questions such as ‘how quickly does a unit of alcohol enter breast milk and then leave again’ (to which I’d dearly love to know the answer so I can time the next drinkie), but wants you to waffle on about what being a Doula means to you.

One of the questions is, ‘What is your motivation for becoming a Doula?’

I don’t think ‘Money’ is quite the answer they’re looking for.

*Saturday 21 June*

Chavscot is absolutely the right word for it. It has also occurred to me that, since I’m spending a small fortune in diesel traipsing to and from BBC Radio Berkshire every week for them *gratis*, I could have at least wangled a better position at the races using my ‘contacts’. They could have at least found me somewhere a good distance from all the pissed up Antipodeans.

Also, I wouldn’t recommend bringing the children next time. Not the bosom-fixated one anyway. The drunk tryout dress was a great success except when it came to trying to feed Boy Two. It had to be unzipped from the back, then I had to take it off one shoulder and expose a boob, while trying to sit upright on a picnic blanket in what felt like downtown Sydney on a Friday night. I was trying to cover my modesty with a shawl but naturally the British weather had a say and the wind whipped it away. On more than one occasion I was left sitting wearing a hat with feathers, elbow-length gloves and nothing else from the waist up. Oh, the glamour.

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We will also not be making our fortune through betting. We put the minimum bet (I think the tote man was a little offended when The Husband proffered 50p each way – and told him the minimum was £2.50) on two favourites who came in last and second last. I thank my lucky stars I didn't choose hedge funds as my main career.

*Monday 23 June*

I saw in a today's newspaper supplement that one woman has chosen to 'cope' with the school summer holidays by drawing up an Excel spreadsheet showing the whole family's movements in colour-coded sections. It made me reflect that I've truly become a grown up when I begin to view the summer holidays as something to be coped with, rather than embraced in all its wine-and-sun-soaked glory. I pounce on this spreadsheet idea and plot our activity, day and night, from now until September.

The results of my labours cause deep internal conflict. On the one hand my heart sinks to discover that, in the multi-hued key relating to each event or commitment, there is no entry for 'sitting about doing nothing in the sun and splashing each other with the garden hose occasionally'. Our days have been planned in half-hour increments.

On the other hand, there are pleasingly few blank spaces which signify that I have to think of something entertaining and cheap to keep the boys happy, while guiltily failing to build businesses, make money and bring home bacon.

Added to my beautiful spreadsheet (in which I am making it some kind of challenge to have no blank spaces at all left by the end of the evening, frantically booking play dates and crèche spaces at the gym) is an ever-growing list of things to

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do. Sometimes it's a 'micro' list. That doesn't mean it's small, just that it's a list of all the things I need to finish when I'm feeling the need to micromanage my life. It contains gems such as 'fill hole in corner of shower'; 'hem dining room curtain' and 'update diary contacts page'. On other occasions, when I'm feeling very 'big picture' about life, I create a 'macro' list. This runs like: 'book loft conversion quote'; 'explore PR opportunities re: gaining annual salary' and 'lose weight'.

The problem with all of the above is that creating these lists leaves me with a sense of enormous wellbeing and satisfaction in a job well done. The only drawback is that I haven't actually done any of these jobs, just written down that I *ought* to do them. I can also state with absolute certainty that I will get halfway through micro job number one before being distracted by something ten times more important – a *Simpsons* re-run for example. Then the whole list will be forgotten until next time, when a new set of tasks will be created. If Paul McKenna wrote a book called *I can make you stop writing lists and just bloody get on with it*, I'd be first in line.

*Tuesday 24 June*

This credit crunch is good for something. My Ebay items are selling like hot cakes. Businesswise the only thing I've made money out of so far is being pregnant as my maternity clothes fly off the shelves. The Husband is glad that the money v clothes equation seems to be working in his favour for once, but is becoming perturbed by the looks I keep giving his jeans. I think he knows that I'm making 'Buy it Now!' and postage calculations in my head as he walks past.

The Partner in Crime is off on holiday again for two weeks

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soon and I'm beginning to wonder if I'm ever going to get the mumcierge service off the ground. She's also having a meeting with her old employer tomorrow to see what they can offer her in terms of part time working. It remains unsaid in our latest telephone chat, but I suspect that she will return to the office job after all, leaving me – where?

*Wednesday 25 June*

Partner in Crime and I finally get around to having 'The Conversation'. It turns out that work does want her back and despite the horrendously unfavourable terms she is seriously contemplating their offer. After all these weeks of waiting for a decision one way or the other, I find myself counselling her on what to do.

'I think I'm just being wet,' she says.

'No you're not,' I try reassuring her. 'Well, OK you are, a bit. Your boy will love nursery and he won't miss you at all. That's supposed to be comforting by the way.'

'I know, and it is.'

'Put it this way, could you hand him over to spend the afternoon going shopping and drinking cocktails?'

'Hell yes!' she laughs.

'Well it's nothing to do with abandoning him in a nursery then. You just don't want to go back to work.'

She agrees that she's ambivalent at best about going back to the old routine, but acknowledges that she's been in this job pretty much since University. Giving up a good, stable job after umpteen years is hard to do, particularly when the evening news delights in telling you that your house is worth £750 less than it was yesterday. But, despite the lack of enthusiasm for

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her day job, I suspect that there isn't much of a draw in working for next to nothing on an untested mumciergency concept run from my dining room table on a budget that would deem shoestrings a luxury. At the end of our conversation, (ex)Partner in Crime claims she's still very much interested in the whole mumciergency business but as I hang up I'm resigned to the fact that I'll be going it alone on this one.

*Thursday 26 June*

I'm still undecided about how to proceed with the mumciergency without the Partner in Crime. Can I go it alone? It was supposed to be built on networking and legwork around the local toddler groups and mums clubs. I can spread the word in my own town but she lives in the neighbouring posh town where they've got money to burn and she knows just about *everyone*. Where am I going to get that kind of knowledge now?

But, I can't afford to spend today scratching my head and moping about the house. Today I go on my Doula course. I am but three short days of 'breathe and PUSH!' away from a new career. Naturally, the course starts on the brightest and possibly only sunny day of summer. Why can't I be out in the garden with a Pimms? Instead, I'm sitting in front of the TV in someone's darkened living room discussing the imminent disaster about to befall the perineum belonging to the howling naked woman on screen. It's enough to put you off your tuna mayo sandwich.

I'm one of five women taking this course and by and large they're a nice bunch. There are two older ladies who seem a bit like a feminist Morcambe and Wise double act. They're both nurses on the edge of retirement and claim to have seen

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it all. One, a New Zealander and the younger of the two in her late fifties, is very prim and proper. A pie-crust blouse and cardie worn just so, she's sporting coral lipstick, a dash of mascara and a sensible haircut to match sensible shoes. If I were to think of one word to describe her it would be...navy. The colour, not the armed force.

Her compadre, though older, is the racier of the two. A close cropped shock of white hair tops a thin but jolly face tanned a lighter shade of handbag. It's a face that says, 'I spent my twenties slathered in olive oil and lightly toasted on the Riviera from May to September. I may look like a knock-off Vuitton but, bugger me, I've had fun!' I decide almost instantly on meeting her that, were I to have to go through childbirth again (oh dear God please no, anything but that) she'd be my Doula. She strikes me very much as a, 'come on dear, my soaps are on in a minute. Do get on with it,' kind of person. I like her.

Next to the Kiwi and the Bag Lady is Bambi. I call her that because her big wide eyes and perpetually startled expression can lead me to no other description. At 20, she's also markedly younger than anyone else in the room. But, she says she's here to help single, teen mums who have been disowned by their families and dumped by their babyfathers. Her fees would be paid by a youth worker charity and her pay barely scrapes minimum wage. I realise that she is a 100 per cent better person than I, and when I get home resolve to read one more bedtime story to the boys out of guilt.

On the end of the sofa is Clueless Mum. I find myself frequently fighting the urge to throttle her. She has three children under three, two of those twins, so she must be doing something right. It's just that based on today's evidence I can't for the life of me figure out how. Our trainer walks us through

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the most basic aspects of labour and childbirth and with one of her children under one year old this is something, like me, she must have fairly recent experience of. Yet every other line she scrunches up her brow and sticks her hand in the air: ‘Scuse me, can you go over that bit again...’ Never mind that it’s written in 24 point on the handout in front of her, forget that roughly 300 days ago she was in the delivery suite herself, she acts as if she were being taught quantum physics in Sanskrit.

But it proves if anything that our trainer is eminently qualified to be a Doula as she is clearly the most patient person on the planet. She answers Clueless’s questions clearly and frequently, though towards the end of the day she does demonstrate that she too, is human. I spy her deploying some deep breathing techniques after Clueless fails to grasp that a Doula may have to get up in the middle of the night as it’s the most common time for a woman to go into labour. If she’s up, you’re up. Clueless cannot seem to understand that a labouring woman might be a tad miffed if you refuse to come round before you’ve had your Frosties and a bit of breakfast telly.

*Friday 27 June*

The first day on the course went well, and I feel very well versed in the placenta argument – to yank or let drop. Possibly more information than I’ve ever required about this hitherto unremarkable element of childbirth, but I feel equipped nonetheless.

Boy Two doesn’t appear to be scarred by his first separation experience. Though he steadfastly refuses to suck on a bottle, preferring instead to chew it into submission, he eats solids well and appears to love his childminder as much as his

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big brother does. Gratified that my childcare selection has been so successful I am somewhat grieved to find that I am, in fact, replaceable and am firmly on the path to obsolescence now that both progeny are happy with their surrogate mother.

My bosoms on the other hand, are not so happy with this state of affairs. Refusing to submit to the torture device that is the manual breast pump during the course, eight hours with no baby to feed has left them hot, hard and heavy. The Husband is officially scared by them, avoiding physical contact lest they 'go off' like a landmine. The baby views them with some trepidation. Since he last partook they have almost doubled in size and every time he goes for a snack he gets shot in the eye with a jet of milk. I am quite sure that many less endowed women would kill for breasts like mine, however I'm slightly concerned that breasts like mine might simply kill. Well, they will if one more white van man takes his eyes off the road to ogle.

Bursting bosoms aside, the course is leading me to question whether or not I'm cut out for this Doula thing. It's not fannies close up and in the raw, lack of sleep in 50 hour labours or wailing women that's the problem. It seems that, because Mother Nature is surprisingly bad at timekeeping, the baby might arrive at any point two weeks before or after the estimated due date. And because labouring women aren't too appreciative of merry Doulas (I don't think they mind jolly ones), you have to be sober when you turn up for work. Not unreasonable. Except that as you never know when the whole thing is going to kick off, you have to stay off the sauce for nearly four weeks just in case. Now, I've just spent nine months in the seventh circle of hell known as low alcohol cider and Eisberg wine so I'm none too thrilled at the idea of climbing back on the wagon.

*the Mumpreneur diaries**Monday 28 June*

Our last day of training and Clueless Mum persists in the delusion that a labouring mother-to-be will be quite happy to wait until at least dawn before letting her waters break, lest it disturb Clueless Mum's beauty sleep. The trainer also suggests we might like to offer a package called 'Early Bird' where you simply install yourself in the new family's home for the first 72 hours after they leave hospital, just to do whatever they might need. Clueless just can't fathom that, though they'd be paying her nearly £400 for her trouble, she wouldn't necessarily be given a cosy bed and told to snuggle down and have a nap. When she's then informed that the national association for Doulas suggests you charge no more than £150 while you're training (the average rate being between £600 and £800 for a birth), she turns apoplectic.

It's to the trainer's credit that she tries to explain the term 'loss leader' to Clueless who is getting squeakier with disbelief every minute.

'But what about my childcare, my petrol, my TIME!?' She is then stunned into silence by an example the trainer gives of being on the phone for half an hour to a woman distressed that she's got to have a surgical rather than natural birth. The woman wasn't her client, and now looked like she wasn't likely to be, but the trainer gave up 30 minutes of her time regardless. Clueless just can't understand that at some point you'll be giving of yourself 'off the clock'. And to think that she's signing up for one of the 'caring' professions. Let's just thank our lucky stars she didn't go the whole hog and aim for a career in midwifery: 'It's 2am! What do you think you're doing letting your waters break? I don't care if the contractions are every minute – go back to bed and call me after GMTV...'

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With the prospect of month after month spent in sobriety weighing heavily on my mind, the last part of the course began to focus on being a postnatal Doula which was a bit of a relief. Apparently you can do the Doula thing without even getting on the business end of a uterus. Postnatal Doulas burst into the new mother's life a few days after the birth with all the enthusiasm and skill of a modern day Mary Poppins. Your wish is their command, but essentially it involves a bit of light cleaning, identifying one end of the baby from the other for Dad's benefit, pointing him in the direction of the cotton wool and boiled water and telling him to get on with it. Best of all, it's no more than three hours a day, every other day for six weeks. A defined period with a beginning, middle and an end and the opportunity for a guilt-free gin or two at the end of an evening. The pay is something like £15 an hour so if you had two or even three Postnatal Doulas going at once you could conceivably clock up over two thousand pounds gross in a month. That is working six hours a day for six days a week, but it gets me out of the house.

*Wednesday 30 June*

I spend the weekend finessing the website and stalking pregnant women. I keep having to resist the urge to run up to the fullest fecund bellies and exclaim, wild-eyed, 'Why don't you have a Doula? I could be yours... I'd be really, really good, honest!' However, I have just enough self-awareness to realise that as a marketing technique this is somewhat flawed.

Instead, I think I'll stick to the website and maybe a leaflet or two. The trainer suggested two tactics on the money/marketing front when getting this Doula thing up and

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running. One, it is best to spend the first two years in loss if at all possible. This doesn't mean that your business should be haemorrhaging money, just that the set up costs and tax deductible expenses should be outstripping any profit at that point. That's because this country's stupid tax system will not only sting you for the tax you owe this year, but half as much again for the following year – before you've even earned it! It's not too bad once you've been going for a while as you're effectively only paying one year's worth of tax at a time (half the previous year and half of the following ergo, one year's tax) but it's a bit of a slog when you first get going.

The second gem was that you should aim to spend 10% of your revenue *at least* on marketing. To be honest, this wasn't a great surprise but as usual, Clueless went purple at the thought of money lining anyone's pockets but hers. As the old adage goes, you've got to speculate to accumulate.

I'm beginning to suspect that the Husband is on Clueless's side when I announce that I've just spent £200 (= one training baby or 20 hours of pointing at a newborn's bum and instructing new Dad, 'Wipe that bit') on leaflets advertising my services.

'But you haven't got any customers yet? How are you going to pay for them?' he splutters. As he is oblivious of my regular devotions to the great gods Mastercard, Visa and Maestro, I gloss over this bit, muttering something about speculating and accumulating and offer him a glass of wine. This usually works when I want to manoeuvre him off the topic of my spending.

Many hours of Sunday night are spent faffing about with Paypal buttons (will anyone want to pay for their baby with a credit card over the internet? Better include one just in case),

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broken links and *mots justes* that skilfully avoid having to say ‘your torn front bottom’. Eventually, well past my bedtime – which, with Boy Two still waking four times a night ought to be no later than 9pm – I have my online presence tweaked to my satisfaction. Readingdoula.com is live and I close my laptop with a sigh, listening out for the first of many telephone calls begging me to attend a birth. I realise moments later that of course it is nearing midnight on Sunday and no-one will call tonight. All right-minded people are abed, even heavily pregnant women with raging heartburn, so I heave myself upstairs for an hour or so’s snooze before Boy Two demands the first of several midnight feasts.

I am ready. Ladies, bring me your babies!

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