

## Hush-a-bye baby . . .

NATURE IS wonderful. I should know. I am stoned on natural valium these days. It's the only way I can explain the way I tolerate living with a small baby.

Nothing can be taken for granted any more. There is no such thing as a set time of the day to myself. I invent meals I can eat one-handed. I wear clothes designed to expose my udders at the hint of a small person's shriek. I make detailed arrangements to have a shower, go to the hairdresser's, go to the shops, watch a television programme, go to the loo. And I do all of these things with one ear attuned to the possibility of a shriek, and having to provide instant food.

Judging by the baby cards and the magazine articles, this is called Fulfilment. Everything comes in pink, because it's a female baby. It even lay under a pink coverlet in the hospital, in case it had an identity crisis.

I have loathed pink all my life. Probably because they put me under the wrong coloured coverlet at the hospital.

The greetings cards tell me that to have a baby girl is wonderful, that they are cute and lovable and just the nicest things there are. They don't mention nappy rash, bowel motions, and piddling on the bedspread. They don't mention broken nights' sleep, or the way the little bundle of joy wakes up miraculously at each adults' dinner time, regardless of what time it is, and demands to be fed.

They don't mention the difficulties of bringing up wind, or the explosions in the fluffy pants halfway through a feed. These are the things you get broken into gradually.

These days, we talk in hushed tones, quite awestruck, about actually sleeping for five hours at a stretch. We can sleepwalk to the clean nappies, and change the baby. We are unperturbed by the seemingly endless succession of explosions in the fluffy pants. We're too stoned to notice.

Through all of this activity sleeps, kicks, gurgles and stares a small baby with fourteen chins who looks like H. L. Mencken. From time to time, she throws up down my cleavage. This is not illustrated in the greetings cards, either.

Something has already happened to my attention span. It's extremely short. This must have something to do with not being sure whether I have five seconds or half an hour between this demand and the next. Anyway, you can't hold thick books open with one hand while you feed a baby. Little Golden Books are about the right size, and of suitable intellectual complexity.

I have no shame. I greet visitors in my nightdress at midday, with the bed unmade. I have only dim recollections of how to use a vacuum cleaner or an iron. It seems a waste of



time, somehow, when you actually get the time to do those things.

In fact, having free time at all is such an awesome responsibility and luxury that I can spend two precious hours working out what to do with it. And end up doing nothing at all.

In this motherhood-induced fog, a very few things seem important. They are sleep, food, excreting, bathing, and keeping clothing clean. This goes for both of us. I find it quite easy to

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put myself into the place of a one-month-old baby, since that's about as old as I feel myself when something goes wrong with any of these things. I can wail about being denied access to my chops and three vegetables with the best of them. It's a crisis.

The main difference, I feel, between myself and the baby at such times is that there's no one to burp me between courses, or change my naps.

My view of the world has changed. I am attracted to anyone who says favourable things about babies. I instantly love people who say mine

looks nice, or intelligent, or human. I like to hear people say she is looking at me adoringly, when I have a sneaking suspicion that she's looking at a point three inches above my head, and feels no more attachment to me than the curtains, or plants, or bits of furniture she smiles at indiscriminately. Except that I provide the udders that keep her going.

I feel a kind of dopey resignation these days to the new role my breasts play in the world. They live in elaborate harnesses known as maternity bras. I am aware that any self-respecting young mother sleeps in them day and night so that what's left afterwards won't sag around her waist. I continue conversations while gushes of milk run down my trousers. I'm getting used to living with Snowtex in my bras, and a DD cup. But it doesn't feel like fulfilment yet.

She's a nice little Mencken, of course, and I don't bear her any grudges. I wouldn't like to send her back where she came from. But since she took over my life, I haven't found that I feel more like a Woman.

I guess this will come with time; I'll start to think pink, and feel like a madonna as I carry the 10th change of clothes for the day to the washing machine.

I guess that's about the time when I'll start getting the valium on prescription. Like all the other mothers.

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