Dear Mariella

The idea of having a baby scares me. What if my child is horrible?

@mariellaf1

The dilemma I am terrified of having children. Not childbirth, but the thought of potentially bringing up absolutely horrible kids. I recently entered my late 20s and have been married to my older, lovely, husband for more than a year. When we first met we dreamed of our future family, but I feel the older I get the more comfortable and happy I am in my carefree, albeit selfish, life. He, on the other hand, cannot wait to be a father. Yet all I read and hear about, all day, every day, is how horrendously hard parenting is. And how a woman loses not only her identity, but her body, soul and spirit, and then also the intimacy of her partner.

This new trend of open tell-all parenting blogs and podcasts has turned me completely off the idea. It sounds awful. What if we produce an appalling child like in all the tales I read? Will this world a summer concert take away my happy life – a life I worked really hard for? Don't get me wrong, I am a fiercely loving person and would put my child before anything else, I am sure. Yet I feel I am at a crossroads. It seems too high a cost for something that could be so dreadful.

Mariella replies You have a point. There you are, recently married, enjoying the newfound pleasures of settled coupling – why would you want anything to come between you? There's definitely a surfeit of information about childcare out there, and little of it is celebratory. Then again, who writes a diary when they've had a remarkably pleasant day?

I can't reassure you that parenthood won't irrevocably change your life and, were I to have embraced it at your age, some of those changes would certainly have been unwelcome. Having kids is not a passport to permanent happiness, nor a one-way ticket to hell. It's a biological ability that most women are born with and for which a minority of women in the world today it's a privilege. My advice would be to take the heat off for a while and ask your husband to do the same. Enjoy the relationship you have and make the most of these glorious days of freedom. It sounds likely that, eventually, you will become parents, but that doesn't mean it will ruin your life, only that it will change it and, that, I suspect, is why it's such a popular choice.

Loving the child you create is rarely a choice and, no matter how obnoxious it turns out to be, it's unlikely you'll be the one aware of their faults. I wouldn't wish on you the mad rush to conceive I went through, nor should you have a baby as an act of submission to your husband's will. Of course you need to make decisions in partnership now, but the burden of responsibility still falls heavier on a mother's shoulders in all but a few thorough emancipated unions. My advice would be to produce an appalling child like in all the tales I read – it and that, I suspect, is why it's such a popular choice.

The heart is a mystery – loving your own child is rarely a choice

Are you an early riser? I wake up between 5.30am and 6.30am. I can never lie in – politics gave me that. I start the day with a stylised coffee-making ritual that involves grinding coffee beans. But coffee isn't breakfast. That comes mid-morning after a fasted run – if I'm feeling virtuous! I'll cook bacon, lean sausages, mushrooms and eggs, or a cheesy omelette, so whoever's in the house gets a really good breakfast.

Sunday soundtrack? I listen to jazz or the John Wilson Orchestra – they do big numbers from Hollywood films like Oklahoma. I read voraciously and I've run out of room for books, so I'll often listen to crime novels on Audible. During lockdown I spent Sunday mornings pottering round the kitchen listening to everything ever written by Arthur Conan Doyle, and I've just finished the latest Robert Galbraith.

Sundays growing up... My dad would take us to what was known in the 70s as a working men's club. He'd drink beer with his mates and we'd have two bottles of Coke and a packet of crisps, then we'd go back and Mum would have a roast beef joint for lunch. Our Sunday treat was pop. Me and my brother booked at the Groucho Club.

A special Sunday? When I was at the height of my powers, I'd get a table booked at the Groucho Club. I loved sitting there with the kids, reading the Sunday papers. I'd put on my airs and graces, drinking white wine with the starter and red with the main course.

Sunday with... Former MP Tom Watson on jazz and crime novels

Paperback out now (£8.99) Downsize by Tom Watson, published by Sphere. Paperback out now (£7.99)

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