

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



The Stork Club

Imogen Edwards-Jones

About the Book

When Imogen Edwards-Jones was a teenager, she believed that getting pregnant was easy, the inevitable consequence of sex, and that it could ruin her life. Twenty years later, pregnancy could still ruin her life. Although now it was not the threat of what having a baby would do, but of not having a baby at all.

Based on her hugely successful *Daily Telegraph* column, *The Stork Club* is Imogen's very personal, very moving and very funny memoir of her (and her husband's) attempts to conceive. Poked and prodded by endless doctors, pumped full of an exotic cocktail of drugs and forced to try to have sex at the most inopportune moments, Imogen pulls no punches in her account of this gruelling process. On a voyage through despair and elation, she undergoes artificial insemination and IVF, takes endless fertility pills and injects herself with drugs more than a thousand times. Funny and heartbreaking, this is a detailed, poignant account of one woman's journey to motherhood – proof positive that there's light at the end of the darkest of tunnels ...

Contents

Cover

About the Book

Title Page

Dedication

Epigraph

Introduction

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

Chapter 22

Chapter 23

Chapter 24

Chapter 25

Chapter 26

Chapter 27

Chapter 28

Chapter 29

Chapter 30

Chapter 31

Chapter 32

Chapter 33

Chapter 34

Epilogue

About the Author

Also by Imogen Edwards-Jones

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The Stork Club

One woman's journey to the front
line of fertility

IMOGEN EDWARDS-JONES



CORGI BOOKS

For Less Attractive, who made everything better, and Miss
Milk, who made it all worth while

But once in a while the odd thing happens
Once in a while the dream comes true
And the whole pattern of life is altered
Once in a while the moon turns blue

W. H. Auden

Introduction

It was a long time before I realized I had a problem. It sort of crept up on me and took me over without me really noticing. One minute I was a normal woman, going about her business, thinking that it was time to get around to having a baby, and the next, I was this needy mad thing sticking needles into my feet, drinking pomegranate juice, chasing my husband round the room demanding sex. This vague desire to have a baby, a dull, niggling ache, had almost overnight mutated into an overpowering, all-encompassing hunger that caught me by surprise.

And I'm not normally a hormonal type of person. I like to think that I am quite rational, quite focused. I'm of the school of thought that if you want something all you have to do is concentrate and work hard enough, and with dedication, determination and a little luck, you can usually manage it. However, in the baby stakes this was clearly not the case, for no amount of concentration, or willpower, or indeed sex, was getting me pregnant.

I kept quiet about it at first. Well, no one wants to look like a failure, particularly when everyone around them seems to be managing it all so easily. In a society where success is instant and no one saves or waits for anything any more, I didn't want to be the only person who couldn't achieve. When everyone else is having it all, it doesn't do to be the one person not capable of doing the basics. I was bad at being female, and that's not something anyone wants to talk about.

Then, after about a year of silence, I couldn't take the secrecy any more. I had begun to avoid girlfriends who were pregnant and to greet each joyous conception with an increasingly sour demeanour. Not that I wished any of them any ill, it was just a bit too painful to have one's barrenness reflected back at one all the time. So I started to talk about it. Drunkenly at first, weeping into my wine at three in the morning, I'd grab some poor unsuspecting girlfriend and share my predicament (or lack of it). I'd tell them that we had been trying for ages. I'd say that the baby sex was becoming a nightmare and that we were thinking about other ways that were less to do with what nature intended and more to do with science. More often than not, they would open up too. Nearly all of them had either had a similar experience or had heard a similar story from a friend of theirs.

There seemed to be this great conspiracy of silence. One in six couples have trouble conceiving and no one ever really talks about it. Women all over the UK are having all sorts of fertility treatment, including IVF, and they are doing it on the quiet. This suddenly struck me as ridiculous and extremely unhelpful. Why, when you are at your most vulnerable and low, are you not allowed to talk about it? Why should you have to smile stiffly through your Sunday lunch as, yet again, some aged aunt tactlessly asks you why you don't have children? Why should you be seen as a failure for finding it difficult to conceive? Why are we all so worried about what other people think? Why are we all so embarrassed to be seen to try and fail?

So instead of suffering in silence, hiding that fact that my life wasn't going to plan, I decided I'd write about it all: the highs, the lows, the tears, the hell, the nightmare, the misery, the sadness and eventually the overwhelming joy in a column, *Shall I be a mother?*, in the pages of the *Daily Telegraph*.

Every other week for nearly two years, for better or for worse, I shared my IVF story. And the feedback I had from these columns was extraordinary. I had letters from elderly majors whose wives had had problems in the Fifties. I had letters from mothers whose daughters were doing IVF, from young women in the same situation as I, and I had card after card from husbands whose wives were miserable and high on hormones and who were finding it difficult to talk. During the months I wrote the column I struck up penpal friendships with lots of readers. Some sent me good luck charms, others presents, but mostly I received treatment updates with terribly sad news and occasionally delightful joy. These columns were, possibly, the way I kept sane – although some would beg to differ. They were, however, certainly the way I found out that I was not alone in my agony and pain. I found them useful and I hope that if you or someone you know is about to go down the rocky road of fertility treatment, you will too.

It is a long and fraught journey that is full of great lows and potentially great highs, where no matter how miserable and isolated you feel, it is important to try to remember who you are and – if at all possible – to retain a sense of humour.

So here is my story.



1

WHEN I WAS a teenager I thought you could get pregnant sitting in a jacuzzi. I'm not sure I even knew what a jacuzzi was, but I knew they were racy places where racy things happened. Men, as far as I remember, didn't even have to be there. Just so long as they'd been in the water in some sort of excitable state, then pregnancy was inevitable - even if you kept your pants on. You see, pregnancy was that easy, that dangerous, and it could ruin your life.

Almost twenty years later and pregnancy may still ruin my life - although this time it is not the threat of what having a baby would do (no school, no education, no career, no future) but of not having a baby at all. I have been trying to get pregnant for two years and not even come close to the pitter-patter of tiny feet.

Looking back now at my libidinous twenties, all the signs of my current childlessness were there: I just failed to notice them. For all my fooling around, I never once had a close shave or scare. I've lost count of how many nights I spent counselling weeping girlfriends over wine and pregnancy-testing kits. The more we drank, the more plastic sticks we'd line up, waiting, cross-eyed, for blue lines to appear. But weirdly it never happened to me. It was right at the height of AIDS awareness and we were all having sex in wetsuits, so I wasn't that surprised. And, of

course, I'm quite grown up about these things. Except, actually, I'm not.

When I first hooked up with my less attractive half over ten years ago, we paid lip service to contraception, then after a while we both decided to embrace our non-existent inner Catholic selves and rely on withdrawal. This seemed to work. Seven years later we skipped un-shotgun-like down the aisle and decided that we should get cracking in earnest.

Except there is nothing more unattractive than earnest sex. And considering ourselves too groovy to be seen to try too hard, we launched into a few half-baked attempts to conceive. We tried drunken sex, very drunken sex and occasionally hungover sex but none of it seemed to work. After about a year of pretending not to care, the tension was beginning to mount. Why wasn't this happening to us? My girlfriends were 'falling pregnant' all over the place and I was growing to hate the expression, as if accidentally tumbling over something could spontaneously get you up the duff. But for some of them it was true. 'It wasn't really planned,' they'd giggle into their Starbucks. 'You know, it was just one of those drunken weekends.' Oh good, I'd smile, lucky old you.

It was probably time to get myself checked out. One of my great friends suggested a handsome gynaecologist, Mr Henderson, who works out of a baronial hall in Harley Street. He'd seen more glamorous bits than a Manhattan fannicurist, she warned me, so he was definitely a best-pants kind of doctor. I walked into his suite sporting my one pair of La Perla. He was foolishly nice to me and I promptly burst into tears. Perhaps this baby thing was getting to me more than I'd thought? He gave my womb the onceover and pronounced that it was working well and, in fact, if I looked closely I'd see that I was ovulating right now and should go home and have sex tonight.

'What, tonight?' I gulped.

He nodded. 'It would be a good idea.' Five hours later Less Attractive and I were flailing around like two slowly asphyxiating plaice, desperately trying to 'make a baby'. It was as sexy as a lard sandwich and still, somewhat shockingly for us both, I didn't get pregnant.

It was at this stage that some of my less sensitive girlfriends started to throw their helpful little oars in. One suggested that perhaps if I was really serious about babies I should cut out 'all that alcohol you drink'. Another kindly brought round a pamphlet entitled something like 'Managing Your Infertility'. And another opined, while shoving her big blue-veined breast in her newborn's mouth, that perhaps I wasn't 'psychologically ready' for children and didn't actually want them, 'otherwise you would have had one by now'.

Things were clearly getting competitive. Why wasn't I able to do what everyone else seemed to be pulling off at the weekend? Less Attractive rather bravely went to have his sperm tested and was thrilled to announce to the world that he was 'all man and had sperm like whitebait'. So it was down to me. Back to Henderson I went, and we started a course of ovarian follicle tracking. This basically meant that, with the aid of a long condom-clad probe, he could tell me exactly when I was ovulating and exactly when Less Attractive and I should get cracking.

And so the misery of 'baby sex' began in earnest. Standing at home on a Tuesday night, racy knickers at the ready, trying to initiate another spontaneous procreative session, was exhausting and no fun at all. The evenings when we were supposed to be 'doing it' were a nightmare. We would get tense and bicker. I turned into some hideous moaning sex-demanding harridan and he'd get all huffy, annoyed and 'tired'. We'd have whole weekends of it. I'd dress up like Britney Spears and sit there like a tethered goat waiting for him to feel he was up to the job. It was like something out of a really lame porn film. Then one night he