



Menu 

by [Nancy Kay](#) - Humour - December 11, 2024

# WEDNESDAY: Name Wars

BY ELIZABETH HAN

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“WHAT’S WRONG with her? What’s that goop in her eyes? Why won’t she open them?” Mom asks.

Behind the surgical curtain of the OR, at the head of the bed, Nurse has handed the swaddled BABY GIRL JANSSEN to her mother. Mom’s first child and it’s by Caesarean. Dad crowds in for a picture. Anaesthesiologist looks overjoyed

that I, Resident, have taken over his usual job of glorified cameraperson. Anaesthesiologist barely glances at the monitors, far more absorbed in a cooking segment on YouTube. Mom says, *no, landscape, not portrait, stand further back, can you just take one more, use this special app, wait nope I need my hand to be more like this*. Then she starts fixating again on the eyes.

Anaesthesiologist has explained repeatedly that it's nothing, Nurse will wipe Baby Girl Janssen clean with a damp cloth later, but Mom persists. Her own eyes are shaded by enormous lash extensions the length of my distal phalange. Dad swivels on the stool we've perched him on, weighing which is heavier, fatherhood or the burden of social media.

"Babe, get this for the facebook story. Seriously, what's wrong with her eyes?"

"It's just bright in here," Nurse says.

"OK, but, like, I can't name her until she opens them, ya know? Babe? Babe! What are you doing to my phone?"

Dad scrambles, unsure which phone to hand me.

"My God, do I have to do everything myself?" Mom complains.

"I've got it," I say, taking several pictures in various orientations. "What are the contenders?"

"Yes, good," she approves, as Dad takes the phone back from me and shows her. "Contenders? Oh, the name? Kinsey or Brinsley."

"Kinsey? Like the scale?"

"No, like KEN-sey," Mom says, rolling her eyes.

I know. Boy, do I know. Every single day at Labour and Delivery, the names get stranger and stranger. I was solidly relieved when the last SVD told me that the new baby boy was named Jackson, *without* two Xes. The grand multip who languidly popped out a July was also fair enough; we were in July. But any more Idealias, Chairishes, Bardmans, Roccocos, and I feel like I would tear up the ID stickers from frustration. I'm all for individuality, but won't somebody think of the daycare workers? This would be a generation of names that nobody could spell, an overstretched kindergarten teacher's worst nightmare.

"Babe, use this app to make my eyes bigger, k?"

“I’m trying . . .”

Mom calls, “Hey, Resident, she’s still not opening her eyes. How will I know if she looks more like a Kensey or a Brinsley?”

“She will open her eyes,” I say as Anaesthesiologist waves his hand, *no, no*, without looking up from YouTube, which probably means don’t give opinions on names. Great way to get us all in trouble. Just say it’s cute. Just say we’ve seen a lot of babies and trust us, this one is *super* cute.

I pull out my phone. From my research, it turns out that in British Columbia, parents have 30 days to register the legal name of their child until they get charged a late fee of \$27 CAD. I inform Mom and Dad of this.

“Thank God,” Mom says. “Brinsley?” She sweeps her hand across the sleeping Baby Girl Janssen’s eyebrows. “Kensey?”

“Yes, exactly, you have to do it like that,” says Nurse, peeping in on Baby Girl Janssen. “When my twins were born, the second one was Boy B for a week. We kept throwing names across the room until one stuck. Max! Thomas! Jason! We would yell. Boy A was easy. He was a Baker for sure.”

“Really?” I ask. “I thought your second son’s name was Zack.”

“It is.”

“Baker and Zack? Doesn’t Zack ever wonder why he didn’t also get a last name as a first name?”

Nurse glares at me. “Baker isn’t a last name.”

“Yes, it is. Most of our last names come from professions. In English, there’s Baker. Booker. Mercer. Taylor. Carpenter . . .”

Anaesthesiologist is still waving his hand. I know what he’s thinking. Don’t dig yourself into a hole with Nurse. We don’t want trouble around here. You’re nothing. Basically a glorified medical student. This is not your Operating Room, not your baby, nor your business. But it’s still hilarious to me.

Nurse says, “Baker is very happy with his name, thank you very much. And how did you get *your* name, Resident?”

“When we moved to this country,” I said. “I started reading these books called *Sweet Valley Twins*. There was one twin who was smart and read books. The other one was popular and boy-crazy. Obviously, as a good little immigrant daughter, I named myself after the first one.”

“Wait, hold up,” Mom says. “You named yourself after a *Sweet Valley* twin?”

“Right?” Nurse says. “And how is that better than Baker?”

“I didn’t say it was!”

“No, no, no. I read those books too!” Mom moves her shoulders from side to side, but forgets that she’s still paralyzed from the waist down from the spinal, so in lieu of jumping up, the eyelashes seem to explode as a way of prodding Dad. “Babe, we need to consider Lila. That was Jessica’s — you know, the slut — I mean promiscuous — twin’s — her best friend. We could add an h. Lilah.”

Dad’s forehead has the sheen of perspiration. “I thought Kensey was fine.”

“Hold up. Does the extra h mean you hold the ahhh sound for longer? Like Lilahhhh as opposed to Lila?” I ask.

“Or you could pronounce it Lee-lah,” Obstetrician says from the other side of the curtain. “Cut these strings, one centimetre,” he whispers to Medical Student, the second assist.

We all try out the names in our mouths. Tonguing. Contorting our faces.

“Leeee-lah.”

“Lyyyy-lah.”

“Lila. Lila. Lilahhhh.”

Nurse, mother of Baker and Zack, throws up her hands. “We will call her Baby Girl Janssen for now. That is what all her stickers say.”

“Seriously? That’s what her stickers say?” Mom says. “That’s a no. It’s going to be Brinsley. There, I’ve decided.”

“Lila is weird. I like Kensey,” Dad says.

“You would, wouldn’t you?” Mom says. “God, you have no appreciation for history. The *Sweet Valley* TWINS!”

“I like history,” Dad says.

“There are many names in history,” I say, quoting a Richard Siken poem. “But none of them are ours.”

“Brinsley,” Mom says and sighs into the baby’s cheek. “Definitely, Brinsley. Thanks, Nurse, and thanks, Resident. Now the camera again, please, Resident. We need photos of Brinsley as Brinsley.”

Anaesthesiologist finally speaks up. “Oh my *God*. It’s the *exact same baby*, for Chrissakes.”

And then we all look at him. Nurse, Resident, Mom, and Dad. Now, there he is wrong and I think he knows it too. He suddenly starts fiddling with the tubes and monitors, muttering to himself.

Nurse even cocks her eyebrow at me, smiling. I think we may have an understanding.

“Oh, Doctor . . .”

In every culture, in every place, at every time, names have been and are important.

*Brinsley*, I repeat to myself. Who knows what it means, but Brinsley, unless Brinsley chooses to change it, will be called these two syllables for the rest of Brinsley’s life.

“The same baby?” I say. “No. No, it isn’t. Not even close.”

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