

Mother MODE

Marian Rivera Dantes has been hailed as a lot of things: primetime queen, sexiest woman, top endorser, most beautiful. These days, however, she's more than happy to focus on just one role—her most challenging but most rewarding one yet. Say hello to Mommy Marian.

WHEN A WOMAN AS BEAUTIFUL AS MARIAN RIVERA DANTES tells you she recently struggled with feeling ugly, you try very hard not to A) slash your wrists while asking, “Paano? Saan?; or B) slap her silly with a resounding “Ano ka ba?”

But the 31-year-old star, who's exceedingly candid and friendly, is neither teasing nor fishing for flattering reassurances when she says this. Seated comfortably on makeup artist Bambbi Fuentes's glam chair, the yellow light bouncing off her clear, poreless skin, this newbie mother to now six-month-old Maria Letizia Dantes—her first child with husband and fellow member of showbiz royalty Dingdong Dantes—is simply speaking of a time when she almost didn't recognize herself, a particularly challenging phase in any woman's life: those first few days after childbirth. Marian, you see, is human, too.

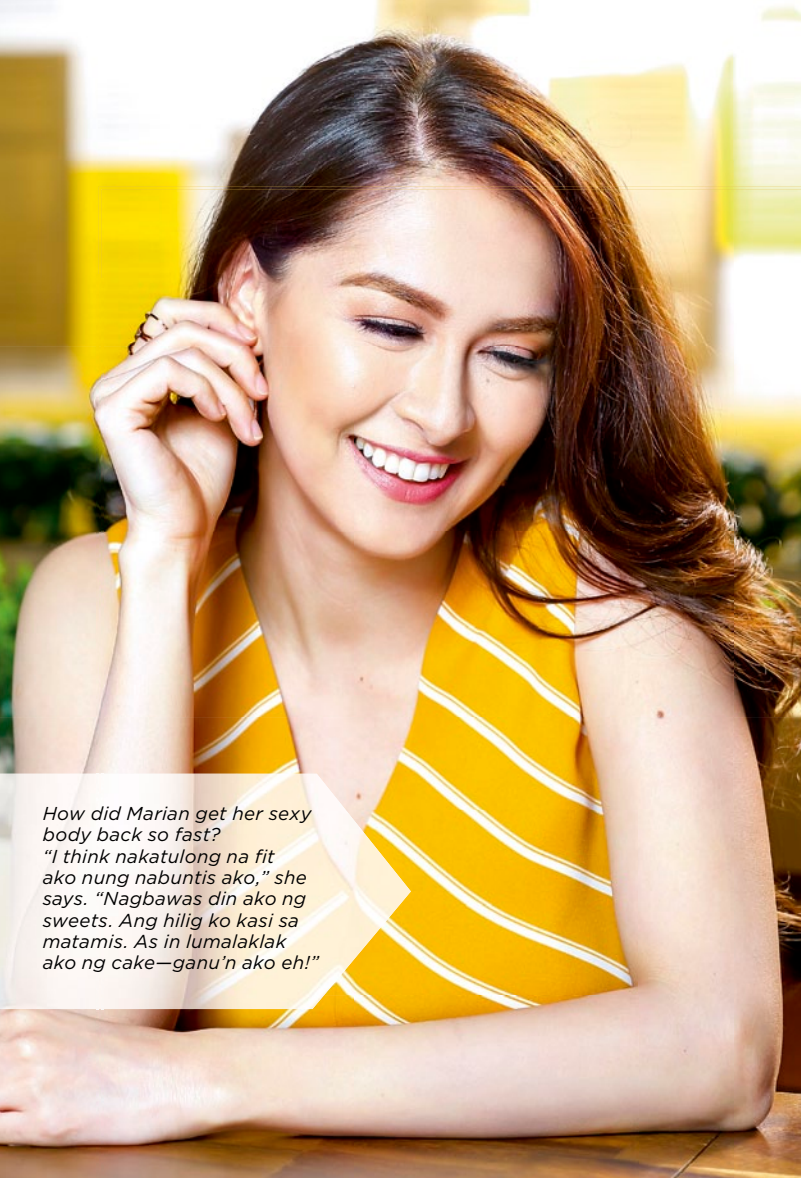
“Kapag tumitingin ako sa salamin noon, yung 'pag nasa bahay ka, tapos nakatali yung buhok mo, parang, 'Ako ba 'to?'” she says of adjusting to her new life with her daughter, baby Zia, whom

she welcomed via normal delivery on November 23, 2015. “Sabi ko kay Dong [Dingdong], ‘Alam mo, Dad, bakit ganito yung nararamdaman ko? Feeling ko ang pangit ko,’” she shares, admitting to succumbing to tears, but only for a little while. “Parang feeling mo ang laki ng balakang mo, tapos parang ang daming nagbabago.” (For someone whose famously svelte figure is a major part of her “puhunan,” we get where she's coming from.)

Luckily, her husband—bless him—always knew what to say. “Sasabihin niya, ‘Ano ka ba, baby, walang nagbago! Mas lalo ka nga nagkaroon ng glow!’” says Marian, her eyes twinkling. “Minsan alam mong ine-echos ka lang niya pero [na-u-uplift] yung spirit mo so parang, ‘Ay, okay lang pala.’” Whenever she would bemoan her suddenly too-big mommy breasts, Dong would tell her, “‘Ay, para sa akin 'yan ang the best. 'Yan ang pinakamaganda!’” she shares with a laugh. “Sasabihin pa niya, ‘You should be thankful kasi dahil diyan nabubuhay yung anak mo.’ So ako, oo nga naman. Kailangan proud.”



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How did Marian get her sexy body back so fast? "I think nakatulong na fit ako nung nabuntis ako," she says. "Nagbawas din ako ng sweets. Ang hilig ko kasi sa matamis. As in lumalalak ako ng cake—ganu'n ako eh!"



#BLESSED

Sans any "echos," Marian is as stunning as ever, with her initial mom-bod concerns enhancing her famous *FHM* Sexiest Woman figure. She eventually came to terms with this, too: In March, just four short months after giving birth, she proudly debuted her new bikini body on Instagram (@therealmarian), much to the amazement and jealous chagrin of many. The photo, taken by Dingdong during the family's Holy Week vacation in Palawan, flaunted her smooth and flat stomach (zero stretch marks there), and her ample bosom. "Nasaan ang hustisya?" many netizens jokingly commented, shocked at how she was able to bounce back so quickly.

What's also palpable in the photo—and during this interview—is how she's radiating with sunshine-y happiness, no matter how cheesy that sounds. Truly, it's amazing what motherhood does to a woman, especially to someone who's always longed to have a child of her own.

"Pangarap ko talagang magkaanak kahit dati pa," shares this Spanish-Filipina beauty, best known for her roles in *Marimar* and *Dyesebel*. "Sabi ko nga kay Lord after our wedding [in 2014], 'Naku, Lord, sana makabuo na kami.' In fairness naman, after two months, nabuntis ako."

Even more fortunately, she had a relatively easy pregnancy, during which time she found herself going crazy for her husband. "Gigil na gigil ako sa asawa ko nu'n, gusto ko palagi ko siyang nakikita," she spills. But while she loved being pregnant, Marian couldn't wait to give birth and finally meet her baby. "Every two days, check nang check yung OB ko," says Marian, who was already on her 40th week at the time. "Sabi ko, 'Naiinip na ako, anak, labas ka na! Parang ang tagal-tagal na.'"

Her water eventually broke, and soon she was in active labor—a process that would stretch for 18 long hours. "Nu'ng una parang ayaw ko pa mag-epidural, eh kasi gusto ko maramdaman yung pag-iri!" she says with a chuckle. "Yung totoo ah, hindi yung nagpapanggap lang akong umiri na wala naman akong nararamdaman."

Her compromise with her OB-GYN? She was injected just half the normal dosage of epidural to minimize the pain without completely numbing her. As soon as baby Zia was out, though, her doctor gave her the rest of the anesthesia so she wouldn't feel them stitching her up. "Yung asawa ko galit na galit na, sabi sa 'kin, 'Ano pa bang gusto mong hirap? Tama na!'" She giggles at the memory, and then grows wistful. "Pero grabe, wala na sigurong hihirap pa sa pagla-labor at panganganak. Literal."

#MARIALETIZIA

Her suffering was greatly rewarded, though: Her baby was born healthy, strong, and, as expected, beautiful. When she held her daughter for the first time—with an equally awestruck Dingdong beside her—Marian just found herself staring, immediately forgetting about the fact that she was tired, that she hadn't eaten nor slept for hours, and that her body was sore and aching. Typical mommy reaction, yes, but magnified for this first-timer. "Naisip ko, hindi na 'to pangarap. Totoo na talaga, may anak na talaga ako."

Naturally, those first few weeks, though precious, were the hardest. Marian was used to being sleep-deprived due to the nature of her work, but she admits that parenthood took "puyat" to a whole new crazy level. It didn't help that she was totally smitten. "Pag tulog yung anak mo, gusto mong titigan lang, 'di ba? 'Ay, gising na uli siya.' Hindi mo namamalayan, hala, isang buwan ka na pala walang tulog. Hilo-hilo ka na!"

To make life a little easier, Marian confesses to employing a trick that she knows some parents and doctors might disapprove of: cosleeping with her newborn. "Ginawa ko na hindi siya katabi. Mga two weeks. Pero hindi nag-work sa 'kin eh, at parang ayokong feeling," she shares. "Nung tinabi ko siya sa akin, mas nakakatulog ako. 'Pag gutom siya, dede lang siya sa 'kin. Mas intimate, mas attached kami sa isa't-isa, kaysa yung ang layo at kukunin ko pa. Kailangan ko pa bang paiyakin?" She's quick to stress, though, "Kung anong style mag-work para sa 'yo, du'n ka."

As for breastfeeding, she struggled at the onset, too. "Kasi ang sakit, tapos nagsugat na talaga yung nipples, at dumating na sa point nag-crack na at patungo na siya sa pagdugo. Alam mo yung ganu'n kahirap?" she recounts. "Pero sabi ko, titiisin ko talaga lahat." Luckily, she's blessed with a generous supply, which sustains Zia until now. Her simple secret: malunggay every day. "Siguro si Aling Malunggay na ako!" she says in jest. "Araw-araw, lahat ng ulam ko may malunggay. Kahit hindi bagay, may malunggay pa rin. Sinigang na may malunggay, chopsuey na may malunggay. Minsan suka-suka na ako, tapos yung asawa ko, 'Oh may nabili akong cookies.' 'Malunggay na naman?'"

#TEAMDANTES

At the time of this interview, she's four months into her new life, and it's obvious that she's gotten her groove back. Even though she's running on just two to three hours of sleep, her makeup-less face, when she arrives, hardly shows any signs of weariness. "Naka-adjust na ako," she says, beaming. "Siguro sa umpisa nangapa, pero ngayon sisiw na."

Even better, she's now enjoying the more exciting stages in her baby's life: Zia, who's no longer on eat-sleep-repeat mode, is now more playful and interactive, and looking more like her mommy each day. ("Sabi nila mix!" she

interjects.) At this point, Marian whips out her phone and begins to scroll through a gazillion photos of her adorable little girl, a.k.a. Miss Bungisngis. "Sobrang maligalig siya," she says, showing us a bunch of smiley pics. "Tsaka yung tawa niya, parang ako, kita yung gilagid!"

She swipes through their recent vacation photos, and we tell her that the shot of a swimsuit-clad Zia lying tummy down on the beach in Palawan has gone viral. Marian doesn't seem to mind. "Sino ba namang magulang ang hindi magiging proud kapag ang ibang tao na hindi naman kilala yung anak mo eh mahal siya?" she says. "Pero pansin niyo, hindi rin ako masyado nagpo-post ng pictures niya sa Instagram. Pa-minsan-minsan lang."

She then finds a photo of Zia with her daddy Dong on the bed, the two looking at each other, their mouths wide open. "Tingnan mo, ang cute!" she gushes. "Minsan tinitingnan ko na lang silang dalawa 'pag naglalaro sila. Iba din yung bonding nila eh." Though he towers at 5'11" and looks every inch a manly man, Dingdong, as Marian reveals, is unabashedly doting when it comes to their unica hija. "Hangga't kaya niyang umuwi, uuwi 'yun, titingnan lang ang anak ko, lalaru-laruin, tapos aalis na siya ulit," she shares, clearly amused. "Tapos babalik na naman. So ako, 'Ano ba 'yan, nag-aaksaya ka ng gasolina mo!'"

Moreover, Dingdong is very, very hands-on. "Nag-a-adjust kami sa schedule ng isa't isa. So since wala ako sa bahay ngayon, siya lahat. Siya magpapalit ng diaper, siya mag-aaliw, siya magpapadade, lahat," shares Marian. "Ayoko na yaya lang eh."

There are some things, however, that this mother prefers to do in tandem with her husband, sort of like their little family rituals. "Hangga't maari, 'pag pinapaliguan si Zia, kaming dalawa ni Dong," she says. "At sa morning, gusto namin pagdilat ng mga mata ni Zia, kaming dalawa yung katabi niya. Gusto namin hangga't kaya, ganu'n palagi."

Ultimately, her dream is for them to have a solid relationship with their daughter, and to raise her in a loving home. "Sabi ko nga, i-spoil in a nice way. Kasi ako spoiled naman ako eh, pero hindi brat," says Marian, who was raised by her maternal grandmother Francisca while her mom Amalia worked abroad. (Marian's mom and dad split up when she was just two.)

But don't they have any fears about raising a girl? "Nu'ng una, ang saya ni Dong na babae, tapos later on na-realize niya, 'Sa'n ko pag-aaralin anak ko? Nako, all girls! Alam mo na, mamaya maligawan 'yun!'" she says with a snigger. "Minsan, niloloko ko, 'Ay, may boobs na yata si Zia! Sasabihin niya, 'Tumigil ka nga!'"

The reality that these things will eventually happen—though not in many years—doesn't escape her, though. "Naiisip ko, lalaki yung anak ko. Siyempre parang ako 'yan, magkaka-boyfriend, mag-aasawa, tapos iiwanan kami. Matagal pa naman, pero 'pag naiisip mo..." she pauses, as if already imagining the future. "'Di ba?" she prods. "Ang bilis-bilis pa naman lumaki ng mga bata."



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#DONGYAN

In the meantime, Marian and Dingdong are relishing their baby bliss, even if this means allowing the romance in their relationship to take a backseat—well, just a little bit. “Thankful lang ako sa asawa ko kasi very transparent kami, ‘yun ang secret ng relationship namin,” she shares. “Kung may pagkukulang ako o siya, sasabihin niya, ‘Halika, usap tayo. Alam mo, ganito na nangyayari... Okay ka lang ba? Napapagod ka ba?’ Ganu’n siya.”

And with Zia now sharing their matrimonial bed, it gets really tricky to squeeze in lovey-dovey time. But still, they try. “Ang hirap kasi nasa gitna nila ako nakahiga eh, tapos papadede ako sa isang side, tapos yung asawa ko nasa kabila,” shares Marian. “Pero

usually deadma ako kay Dong, nasa anak ko pa rin ako. Then ‘pag tulog na si Zia, aarte na ako sa asawa ko. Kaso gigising na naman anak ko, ayan na naman ako. So ‘di kami makatulog! Kulang na lang ibulagta ko sarili ko para sa kanilang dalawa.”

Marian appreciates that Dingdong is understanding of the fact that Zia needs her more now. But of course, she indulges his needs for alone time every now and then. “Naglalambing ‘yan minsan. ‘Oh this week ah, akin yung isang araw mo.’ Nagde-date kami. Pero three to four hours lang, then uwi na kami.”

This challenge—to divide herself and her attention—has Marian realizing just how remarkable women, particularly wives and mothers, are. “Grabe ang babae,

iba-balance mo yung pagiging nanay, pagiging asawa, tsaka yung para sa sarili mo. Paano mo gagawin yung tatlong bagay na 'yan nang sabay-sabay?" she asks, genuine curiosity in her voice. "So para sa akin, Wonder Woman talaga ang mga nanay."

#WERK

In late February, around three months after giving birth, Marian ended her maternity leave and returned to work, rejoining GMA's Sunday variety show *Sunday PinaSaya* and signing on to play the role of Ynang Reyna in the 2016 remake of *Encantadia*. She also has a new talk show slated to begin this month, we're told, if everything goes according to schedule. But even though her Kapuso family has been very understanding and accommodating of her new status, Marian discloses that it's still hard to do the whole juggling act.

"Siyempre, magandang problem yung madaming trabaho, pero nakikipag-compromise talaga ako sa working hours ko," she says. "Nagui-guilty kasi ako 'pag wala ako sa tabi ng anak ko, o 'pag late na ako umuwi. Minsan, pagdating ko sa bahay, ngangalang na siya pagkakita sa 'kin. Parang sinasabi niya, 'Mommy, ang tagal mo naman eh!' Ang sakit para sa akin nu'n."

To avoid such mommy pains, she really tries to limit the number of workdays in her week. "Walang specific na araw pero ayokong araw-araw. At half day, half day lang." She also gets by with a little help from her Mama Amalia and mother-in-law Angeline, who willingly go to the Danteses' Makati house to watch over Zia whenever Marian and Dingdong both have commitments.

But has she ever considered being a stay-at-home mom? Marian responds, "Ito yung palaging sinasabi ng lola ko: Ang pagiging artista, hindi 'yan forever. May mga bago, may mga young na dadating. Gulong talaga siya eh. Sa taas ka, gigilid ka, baba ka, gilid ka ulit, akyat ka ulit. So i-grab mo na yung opportunity na meron ka, at kung wala man 'yun sa 'yo, magpasalamat ka pa rin kasi naranasan mo."

"Tinanong din ako ni Dong, 'Ano ba ang panagrap mo sa buhay?' Sabi ko, alam mo, pangarap ko talagang maging nanay. At binigay 'yun sa akin, kaya sobrang thankful ako." But, she clarifies, this doesn't mean she's turning her back on her career, or whatever's coming her way. "Kung anong trabaho man meron ako ngayon o mga endorsement na nagtitiwala sa akin, bonus na bonus talaga para sa akin. Pero kung tinatanong mo kung kaya ko mag-stay sa bahay para sa anak ko, kaya ko."

#GOALS

A small crowd has gathered outside the dainty Le Petit Soufflé in Century City Mall as our cover girl, in her fourth outfit for the day—a striped yellow dress—hams it up for the camera. "Let's do this!" she says energetically, clearly excited to wrap up the shoot so she can finally go home. This is the new Marian: a mommy who can't wait to wash off her makeup, take off the fancy clothes, and just cuddle with her baby.

Sure, her new normal may be a lot less glamorous, but she declares that there's nothing about her pre-baby life that she misses. "Wala na, parang lahat naranasan ko na. Nakapagpa-sexy na ako, nagawa ko na ito. Okay na ako, happy na ako du'n," she says. "The mere fact na nag-'I do' ako kay Dong, alam kong magbabago ang buhay ko, at lahat 'yun tatanggapin ko. Nung nabuntis ako, alam ko paglabas ni Zia, ibang mundo na naman. So at least hindi ako na-stuck. Level 1, level 2, level 3. At alam ko mas marami pa dahil siyempre madami ang gusto kong anak."

Just how many is "madami?" A brood of four to five kids, at one and a half to two years apart, she reveals, and we're surprised at how specific she is. "Pero malay mo, magkaroon ako this month, okay lang din!" she says, giggling. "Kung anong ibigay ni Lord sa akin. Pero siyempre gusto ko na medyo malaki na si Zia para maging ate siya." She expresses that her dreams for her family are simple. "Gusto ko lang pagtanda ko, makita ko yung mga anak ko at masabi, 'Hay, napalaki ko sila nang maayos, kasama yung asawa ko.'"

MOMMY INSTINCT

Marian's advice for new moms is pretty straightforward: "Kaya mo 'yan!"

Even if you don't think you're ready, you will be.

1 Though famously feisty in spite of her petite frame, Marian Rivera Dantes didn't know how strong and brave she really was until she gave birth to Maria Letizia. "Pag buo ang loob mo at handa ka—kahit first time mo at parang 'di ka ready—'pag sinabi mo sa sarili mo na buo ang loob mo, lahat posible," she says.

2 **Motherhood will make you tougher.** "Yung mga ine-expect ko na, 'Ang hirap, hindi ko kaya,' basta nanay ka pala, kaya mo talagang i-sakripisyo lahat. Nung dalaga ako, masugatan lang ako na may dugo, kung ngumalang ako! Ngayon parang, 'Sisiw pala 'to.'"

3 **Your baby makes all the effort worth it.** When asked to rate just how exhausted she is as a new mom, she flinches, shaking her head. "Ay wala, ayoko gamitin yung salitang 'exhausted.' Parang, mahirapan man ako pero gusto ko. Worth it talaga eh."

4 **It helps to have a supportive husband.** Marian credits her husband Dingdong Dantes for being her source of strength. "Malaking tulong sa akin na supportive siya, kaya yung sinasabi nilang postpartum depression, hindi ako masyadong nag-ganu'n eh," she shares. "Parang, pagod lang ako, o ang sakit ng dede ko, ganu'n lang. Pero the rest, wala... Ayoko gamitin yung salitang 'tiis' eh. Kahit mapagod ka, mahirapan ka, dahil para sa anak mo, kakayanin mo talaga."



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