

## Contract

Sign the contract. Your baby is born. She is red and wet and screaming and the doctor hands her to your wife and not you. You had come up from your wife's ear to receive the baby but the doctor brought it to the mother, instantly knowing where she belonged. Now the two of you huddle together cheek to cheek as though you are viewing a tiny television set. Squeezing in to see those first few moments, movements.

*The forebears, heretofore referred to as "the parents" shall agree to the following.*

The doctor says in her own maternal voice, "I'll give you two a few minutes." She brings the tempest out with her. The baby is silent and exhausted, bobbing now on the tide of her mother's breathing. As though borne on the sea.

*Shall agree that the child may at any time and any moment utter words that will break the parents' hearts.*

Wife is drenched. Tell her you're proud of her and to look at your beautiful baby daughter, just look. Kiss wife on the temple as she closes her eyes and lets go tears that should have been sweated out already.

*The child shall be excused for its a priori ignorance and the parents shall take it upon themselves to secure for it an education, both civil and academic.*

She called you with contractions at 10 AM and you immediately took off from work. The workday was over after an hour. You hadn't had a day like this since college when you took the 8 AM on Tuesday/Thursday so you could have early weekends. You wanted those early weekends so you could go out with the girl you were seeing at the

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time. You were dating another girl then, how could that be? How was it that the two of you, now the three of you, were ever not a fixture, an everlastingness?

*The couple shall agree that the child is not 100% within their control and manipulation; that the child has free will.*

The two of you had met two years after college, online and for the first two months constructed a story of how you met involving you flirting with her at the grocery store. It was vague, because you were bad at flirting and way too good at complimenting. After two months hardly anyone really cares how you met. So you started telling the truth.

*The parent(s) shall agree that Life is indifferent to any love transacted between child and parent(s), and this love shall not protect the child from unfortunate instances be they sickness, bullying, bad luck, test inaptitude, failing to make the starting lineup in volleyball...*

That was five years ago. Not as long as it sounds, and certainly it should feel longer. Your age changes your perception. Love and age do nothing but speed up the past

*...nor a lone gunman with mental health issues and cold, bored stares as muzzle flashes fill the room like a camera capturing everyone in a candid moment.*

Your own father said that having a child was like seeing your heart walk outside your body. Mother is still breathing, and you, father, want to be as close to their heat as possible. Squeeze in a little more. You now begin to miss the vice with which your wife squeezed your hands. All you can do is kiss her and speak in a higher octave.

*Finally the parent(s) shall agree that it is their complicit wish and wholehearted desire that the child be alive and well to attend their respective funerals.*

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Congratulations. It's a girl. You are parents. Was it everything you wished for?

Sign the contract. She looks at you now, directly at you. Nameless eyes you barely register as your own underneath folded fat and scarlet skin. Hardly even human. Could you love her any more? Sign the contract. Could you love her any less?

END

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