

I buy the cheaper version of a doll on Craigslist and impregnate myself with it. I pay \$250 instead of \$1500. I have made a good choice. The doll gradually grows inside my womb.

An ultrasound shows a baby in an unusual position: arms spread wide apart, head pointing laterally. My uterus looks like a speech bubble in a comic book. What comes next is my delivery. Something is thrusting downward, wanting to come out. “Fine, I’ll do it,” I say, taking control of the situation. I pull out a baby covered in blood and placenta, a plastic doll missing her right arm. I feel stupid for not buying the more expensive version of the pregnancy doll. This one has already been through someone else’s cunt, and its wears and tears—a broken arm, scratches—stand out, even in this mess.

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The apartment is flooded with rainwater and paint is falling off the ceiling in large, misshapen chunks. I live in an environment I have no control over. The environment longs for someone to control it; it wants to survive. I try reaching the stove to boil Turkish coffee in a pot. It hasn’t stopped raining. The power shortages are longer than usual, and I’ve opted out of the building’s monthly generator subscription. Mainly, I’ve been living in the dark, waiting for the sun to set but it is taking forever.

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My father says that he wants to be cremated; he doesn’t want a funeral or formal ceremony, just a note in the newspaper announcing he has departed. My uncle reminds my father that he is still alive, but my father insists on giving us posthumous instructions. We gather around his hospital bed and turn on the television while he is having dinner: boiled artichokes and carrots and a saltless meat patty. When my father dies, we publish, against his will, a note in the newspaper advertising his funeral. “We had no choice,” my uncle says, “It doesn’t really depend on us.”

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I hold my baby tight, tuning in to her first and last breaths. I am devastated. Instead of going back home, I take a walk on the Corniche. The costal air is exhilarating, with many boats crossing the Mediterranean and furry, unidentified animals rubbing their backs against my naked calves.

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The worst is over, I believe, but the more I run uphill, the bigger the wave gets. Instead of riding along, I take a stairway leading to a stone palace in which soldiers are shutting a large window. They recommend turning left and I do, until I reach a tower with multiple doors I open in succession. Through a hole I carve out in a stone wall, I catch sight of a tiny, fluffy, grey dog. I have the distinct feeling that it has been waiting for me. The sea is now about to hurl forth its calamitous wave. People are scurrying in all directions. Some, afloat, seek refuge by swimming in my direction, but I want to be alone while others are drowning. I feel conflicted about my own impulses: am I doing the right thing?

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The soul roaming in my father’s hospital room has chosen this time of visitation and this form of iteration. It wants its presence to be known. It wants to meet my father’s swollen limbs, to remember the way he peels bananas with a knife and smiles with the corner of his eyes.

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I am caring for my dying father. I am caring for my unborn baby.

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I am told that my father’s last night was tormented, devoid of sleep. He shrieked and moaned as if fighting terrifying, yet familiar demons. How will I know if he eventually lost, won, or if his battle ended in a draw?

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I forgot to mention that when the wave crashed, I got pregnant in seawater. The damage was brutal; things were broken down into parts of smaller parts until all that was left was an unnamable feeling—an approximation of loss.

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I lazily rely on my subconscious to mourn on my behalf. My dreams adjust to my inversions. Sometimes it is night, sometimes day. I have a sense that nothing is happening, not even the life growing inside me. Jinny says that my unborn child has met my father, that they now know each other.

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“You piece of shit,” I say, thrusting old clothes in a fit of blind rage. I scream but screaming isn’t enough. “You fucking asshole,” I yell at my brother. I must have mistaken him for my father, thinking I was my mother.

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In *Of Woman Born*, Adrienne Rich mentions a case of infanticide: a mother of eight suffering from severe depression since the birth of her third child, murders and decapitates her two youngest on her suburban front lawn. “Every woman in that room who had children,” Rich writes, “every poet, could identify with her.”

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Thick, black, insistent curls started growing on my chin when I turned 13. Steve, my friend from Gabon, told me that in his country women with beards were both revered and feared like witches. “You don’t mess around with them,” he said. The endocrinologist drew a figure of a human body and marked areas covered by “abnormal hair growth” with an X. In Santo Domingo, he said, there is this rare genetic condition; upon reaching adolescence, some kids begin mutating, their genitals gradually shifting to the other sex. Since my maternal grandfather was Dominican, I began to wait. Every evening, I examined my vagina to check whether I was growing a pair of balls.

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“Do you want to know what you’re having?” The nurse asks me. “A boy!” She shouts, making no efforts to conceal her excitement.

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I think of my mother’s impulses, the blank, impervious alienation she must have felt before dumping her feral rage on us. The monsters I carry leave traces in my sleep. I am overworked. At night, I take other people’s shifts, dream-working for dead relatives, mending homicidal instincts in my sleep.

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My attempts at killing a man have failed. I look for a victim on Craigslist. I apologize. “We’re amateurs,” I say. I try stabbing him with my father’s Ottoman sword (a collectible from his youth). The blade pierces right through his flesh—a tender piece of steak—but the wound remains bloodless. The man is now semi-conscious. I know that his intention is to kill me first. He knows what I’m capable of since he just saw me sever his friend’s head. The man says that he’d prefer if I just stabbed his heart. “Like this,” he says, demonstrating with a circular motion. I do as he tells me, but nothing happens. He insists on staying alive. At this stage, I have no choice left; until this killing is completed, I will not be safe. It is my first time killing a man and although I find the task exhausting, I am driven by a survival instinct: it is either him or me.

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The discourse released through my mouth innocuously shaped by centuries of conservative social forces becomes loud and audible when I give other women unsolicited pregnancy advice.

I’m eager to share my knowledge and prove that I am prepared for this mastodonic endeavor, that the lag between my mammalian transformation and my knowledge of it is negligible; I could put anything into language if I wanted to. Even a wave.

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February: the sun keeps postponing its disappearance, hovering above the horizon line for an indeterminate amount of time.

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Losing what you most desire accelerates the shedding of reactionary ideologies, but what if you got what you wanted?

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What has previously been a disaster now becomes a wish.

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I prepare a turkey and cheese sandwich with extra cheddar. My calcium intake is exponential; I need nutrients to build bones and manufacture the penis and balls I desired as a teenager.

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The father of my child is an octopus who lost his penis shortly after inseminating my egg. He is drifting away, carried by ocean currents, looking for a place to die while my body is laboring hard to transform a fetus into a fully formed mollusk.

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I must keep investigating my disappointment at male withdrawal, how it easily flips into anger at my own subjugation. I liked talking about boys in high school, and when they loved me, I acted like them; I withdrew. My father wrote letters to my mother asking her to “calm down.” I personally prefer an explicit, intentional withdrawal to a disengagement tied up in the powerless script of male histrionics.

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After birthing one octopus through my mouth and another through my vagina, I am doing fine. My milk has a greenish hue and my babies are swimming in the tub, wigwagging their sucker-bearing arms, looking for deeper waters and softer grounds. Soon, this shallowness won't be sufficient.

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My ambitions of literary fame have yet to materialize into literary fame. The hours I spend writing or not writing will never be compensated. The hours I will spend with my son not writing and not sleeping will not be compensated. I do not know where the patriarchy I have internalized meets my material reality, if they converge at night or during the day.

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I ask my grandmother for parenting advice, but she is dead. I ask my mother for parenting advice, but she is dead. I approach my father for guidance, but he is dead. I wonder where I will gain the knowledge required of a mother; how will I know what to eradicate and what should be left to grow?

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On his deathbed my father wonders whether my child will be named Youssef, after him. Will I dutifully perpetuate the patrilineal lineage he is struggling to leave behind? I am conflicted between the desire to conform to my father's wishes and my disgust at fulfilling them, the love for the parent I'm about to lose and the social order he represents. I wonder if my faith in their unwieldy alignment is naïve, or if it is true that heterosexual men can escape the language of their mythogenic conditioning; will they ever recover the intelligence stripped of them by the vulgar inheritance of their power?

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The split I have always pursued in writing, that flight from the first person, is now looming like a threat. I tell my friend that I don't know if I will have the strength to lose myself once the child comes, or if I will dissolve into a gelatinous subaquatic non-entity unable to savor its own dissolution. Will my care be exclusively directed at my biological offspring or will it also extend to other animals?

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Adrienne Rich in *Of Woman Born*: “I love them. But it is in the enormity and inevitability of this love that the sufferings lie.”

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A man is aggressing me and neither my father nor my friends step up in my defense. His grip has left a red mark on my wrist. My father is old and sick and escapes the premise like a fugitive. “Come back!” I yell, distraught. I enter a sauna room followed by another room, but my father is nowhere to be seen. When I finally think I have a hold of him, he dematerializes into a bag of chips on which a name starting with a V and containing an L doesn't match his identity. I feel betrayed by his transfiguration.

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Half of my brain is mourning while the other half is devoted to the making of a new creature. At night, I work hard to heal my historical wounds, hours of uncompensated labor. When my babies come, who will cover my night shifts—dream work in which murderous drives are rerouted into language?

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While I wait by the shore, my babies explore deeper waters. We're in March and the sun hasn't set over the sea since January.