

BUN

Come! Sit! My office is yours. Take some weight off those swollen toes and make yourselves at home, the both of you. It's always refreshing to meet expectant first-timers.

Just look at you two! You're aglow. And you, Mom: positively bursting! Too late to hide from family now; the truth protrudes.

Great-looking ultrasound you have here. Perfectly healthy fetus, I'd say. Want to know what it is? No? How about a clue? See that there? No... right there. Oh, my finger was covering it. There: probably a penis. Shit. Sorry. You said 'no', didn't you? Okay, well, sometimes girls have penises, too. Keep that in mind.

You're still both absolutely, both definitely absolutely sure you want to go through with this? Baby making isn't for the faint of heart, you know. Alright, then: there is much you need to know, but you've come to the right place!

First: there's going to be quite a bit of swelling. In both of you, I imagine, but only Mom here has an excuse.

You won't grow wider though, Mom, mind you, as he... Wait. Did I say 'he', again? Gosh, I'm so sorry. Look, can we just drop the pretense and accept that the bag is now catless? It's a 'he'. Your baby? A 'he'. A man-to-be. God have mercy on all our souls.

Where was I? Ah, yes: Mom, you will continue to grow, but you won't 'balloon up' in any proportional, Buddha-shaped way. You will just become longer. Your belly will grow out, like a bulbous torpedo, pointing down the windowless, booby-trap-laden hallway that is your future in childrearing.

You though, sir, as first time father-to-be, you've seen this coming. She's likely already asked you to run out at odd hours for incongruous combinations of comestibles. Pickles and ice cream, I know, you're chuckling together; you've already experienced this first round. Next comes Snickers and ranch dressing; smoked salmon and sprinkles; Easy Cheese and pork chops; sour cream and chives.

Don't fret, though. In terms of nutrition, the baby knows what it needs, and though those needs may seem non sequitur to us, you heed them nonetheless. Even before hatching, you are in his thrall.

Perhaps, you've had some inkling of the horrors in store, sitting head in hands, anxiously watching urine dry on that third and final pregnancy test. But, on the whole, those who have trudged this track are tight-lipped

about its pitfalls. Rather, they whip soft-lit snapshots from wallets and wave them under the noses of childless friends while proclaiming through clenched teeth just how precious their own snowflake is, those parental eyes ragged and weary, begging acceptance of the lie they are so desperate to believe: that this has all been worth it.

The Miracle of Life. There is no greater joy, is there? Is there? Is there none?!?

They're broken, soulless, you know, these greenhorn, freshly-enslaved baby-bearers, for they've conjured no new life, they eventually come to see. They've simply pumped and poured their own essence into another vessel: a whining, screaming-for-no-goddamned-reason vessel. I've been through this before, both professionally and personally. I've several tykes of my own and the shell-shocking horrors of those experiences flash back nightly and occasionally in waking. But don't worry; never usually during delivery.

Soon, he will be out and you will be attempting to console the inconsolable: Hungry? No. Poopy? No. 'Gawbahduhwuh,' he lalts and your unready mind will screech, 'What the hell does that mean, you little shit?!?' Those aren't words! They're just sounds. Speak fucking English! Goddammit. Will you please, for the love of God Almighty just *sleep*; sleep for fifteen minutes? Can't you see that Daddy is tired? So very tired.'

But your sobbing merely prompts his anew.

What's that?

Oh, baby's kicking is he? Aha! No. Don't touch it. Do not encourage that nascent sociopath. Only a baneful parasite such as this could make us think that being kicked from within was a gleeful occasion to be shared. 'Feel that? Oh! He did it again! He's kicking mommy right in the gut, clawing at her insides.'

Just ignore him and let's move on, shall we?

Your minds are set, it seems. The decision has been made; I understand. All I can do now is help to ease the delivered suffering.

Step one: take the epidural. Take two; at least one each. About two contractions in, as that little bastard – no offense, Dad, I'm sure he's yours – when he starts trying to shove his overlarge head through Mom's lady-ness, you'll both be clutching at scrubs and begging indiscriminately for drugs. Drugs. Drugs!

And then he's out...

Despite my short form description, this will be no simple task. For my own sake and yours, I've simply skipped over several dozen hours of sweating, screaming, panting, tear-inducing pain and suffering.

But the baby's out all the same, and then a flotilla of nurses will wipe away the muck and gunk and, for a moment, there's calm and there's quiet.

They hand over the flopping, quivering product of your recent agony. He's struggling to open eyes for the first time, flailing about in uncoordinated slo-mo, the destruction he wrought as he clawed his way from your womb momentarily forgotten.

You are in the eye of the storm, but not yet on high ground.

You think those nine months of gestation were awful? Your tribulations have only just begun. The moment you unleash that mewling, monstrous snot-factory onto the world, your life is inexorably bound and ball-gagged; and not in any fun, mutually consensual way. As soon as that tiny bundle of fucking joy hatches, it's too late. He's got you in his grasp; his cooing, weak-fingered grasp.

You will scabble and scrap to deliver his every whim and shield him from the minutest of harms. You will feed him and bathe him and cuddle him and when you are preparing to wipe away the fetid, yellow paste that seems constantly to pool in his Pampers; when you are in the midst of the most unconditionally loving of gestures, wet wipe in left hand, naked soul in right, steeling yourself for this humbling moment, with precise aim beyond his years, he will piss in your mouth.

And!

And, then! While you stand warmly dripping, starting to stink, contemplating all manner of retaliatory evils, he fucking laughs at you.

You swallow your pride and perhaps a bit more than the recommended daily allowance of urea and you swaddle him up, utilizing every ounce of resolve to keep that glinting safety pin from going just a little, just a pinch, just the tip too deep... with remorse, you set him upright unscathed and:

He.

Has.

Won.

No matter how you amuse yourself molding his squishy, oversized head into interesting shapes: you are indentured.

Now, he's stumbling about, flashing that gummy grin – so sinister and endearing – and I'm reminded of my own dear one, tugging at my heartstrings with his pudgy, uncoordinated hands and grasping those strings and pulling them and – wait! Okay, hang on. That hurts. Let go of Daddy's heartstrings; you're choking Daddy – and he's putting those strings in his mouth and gumming them until they're sopped in Gerber-drenched drool.

They grow, you know. Babies aren't puppies. You can't simply flush them once they've molted cuteness and begun to cut teeth on your precious, pleather couch.

Oh, no. He'll grow and he'll metamorphose from bundle-shaped, pupal joy into toddling, imago terror. Now, he is Glorious Leader and Heartless Tyrant. Still, you grovel before his bumbling, clutching manual explorations, though violent revolution increasingly seems a viable option.

And soon, seeking relief and reprieve, you're spiking his formula with a dram of the same plastic-bottle Scotch that you've taken to choking down these days. And mornings, sometimes.

Now, Daddy Dearest, I see the doubt in your eyes.

It's too late. You will have reared him and clothed him and fed him by then. And he won't eat just anything you airplane at that grotesquely pudgy face. He *will* eat everything else, however. They're like that, these deviant midges.

Don't trust those wetly glistening gums, dripping with drool. There are teeth! You can't see them, but they're there. They're retractable; like feline claws and hornet stings and the painfully deadly spurs of duckbilled platypodes. Don't go anywhere near that gaping, salival maw. Once baby has a taste for human flesh, all is lost. You'll wake in the wee hours; he's perched and wobbly upon your chest, eyeing you hungrily. 'Where to start?' he's thinking. He doesn't want that lukewarm, rehydrated formula; no creamed peas for him. He wants finger or ear or lower lip.

Can't get that? He's fumbling garbage down his gullet. He'll find the detritus you've failed to safely stow in your undying efforts to keep your now baby-scented home spic, span and spotless.

Does this deviance sound familiar? He's learned this from you, Mom, with your penchant for pickles and ice cream.

He learned this from you.

I see those sidelong, quizzical glances. You neither believe nor heed. Suit yourselves. You may think yourselves judge, jury and executioner, but that Dredded bun in your oven? He is the Law.

Alright.

Well.

I can see you two are speechless. Don't fret. Happens all the time. You've a lot to digest. Especially you, Mom! You're the primary bearer of this burden, after all.

That about covers it, for now. You've got quite the healthy little boy inside of you. On the way out, why don't you schedule an appointment for next week?

Mindy?

Hey! Mindy! Yes, your nails look, great. Would you put the Hammetts on the calendar for Thursday'ish so we can check on their progress? That's great. I'll see you two in a week!