

BODIES THAT CHANGE

Pregnancy, illness, injury, and age — and what the vow becomes
A companion to the Covenant Set — For Adults 18 and Over

WHAT A LIFELONG VOW ACTUALLY PROMISES

This Covenant claims permanence and means it. But every practice in it assumes a body that can take what is described — and no body does that forever. Pregnancy, surgery, injury, chronic illness, medication, and eventually age will each arrive, and any framework promising until death do us part must be able to answer what it becomes when the paddle is no longer possible. A vow that only works on the fit is not a lifelong vow. It is a hobby with an expiry date.

THE PRINCIPLE

The instruments are not the Covenant. Steel, leather, cane, ledger and nettle are the means by which one person is governed and another governs; they are not the thing itself. What the Articles actually promise is ownership, attention, transparency, and a standard — none of which require a body capable of taking two hundred strokes.

So the rule is adaptation, never abandonment. When a practice becomes unsafe, it is replaced rather than mourned. The Regulator's authority does not diminish because her instruments change, and a man who can no longer be paddled is no less owned.

PREGNANCY AND AFTER

The obvious adjustments are hers to make and should be discussed early rather than improvised. Impact to her is out. His impact continues only as she has capacity to deliver it, which is often much less than either expects, particularly in the first months and the last. Positions change, energy collapses, and the Nightly Routine may become a conversation rather than a correction for a season.

Afterwards, take longer than seems necessary. Recovery from birth is measured in months rather than weeks, and the Covenant's own principle applies: her pace, not his. This is also precisely the moment the previous document describes, when she has nothing in the tank and he carries her without taking command.

ILLNESS, SURGERY, AND INJURY

Any new diagnosis, operation, or medication is disclosed to her at once — this falls under the transparency the Schedule already requires, and concealing a health matter to protect the practice is a failure of the Covenant rather than a service to it. Blood thinners change bruising entirely. Heart conditions change what is safe under adrenaline. Nerve

damage, back surgery, and abdominal operations each rule out particular positions for particular periods.

The standing rule: where there is doubt, the practice stops until a doctor has been asked. Not for permission — a doctor is not being consulted about a covenant — but for the plain facts about what that body can currently take.

It is not necessary to explain the dynamic to a doctor. Any competent clinician can answer whether a healing wound tolerates pressure, or whether a medication affects bruising, without knowing why the question is being asked.

AGE

Skin thins. Circulation slows. Bruises take three times as long to clear and bones become less forgiving. The count that was ordinary at forty is dangerous at seventy, and a couple who do not adjust deliberately will discover this by injury instead.

What survives, and survives well, is everything that was never about force in the first place: the containment, the ledger, the evening reckoning, the standard, the attention. A hand on the backside for a symbolic count carries exactly the meaning two hundred strokes carried, provided the meaning was ever the point. Couples who have practised this for decades describe the discipline growing quieter and more ceremonial with age — and, almost universally, deeper rather than lesser.

THE TEST

There is a way to know whether what you have built is real, and it is worth asking early rather than finding out late. If every implement in the house were taken away tomorrow, permanently, would the Covenant survive?

If the answer is yes — if she would still govern, he would still answer, the ledger would still be read and the standard still kept — then the instruments were always servants of the thing rather than the thing itself, and the vow will hold through whatever the years bring. If the answer is no, then what exists is an arrangement rather than a covenant, and that is worth knowing now, while both bodies still work.

If every implement were taken away tomorrow, would the Covenant survive? Answer honestly, and early.