

ON DEATH AND DISCOVERY

What outlasts the two of you, and who may ever see it

A companion to the Articles and The House With Children — for adults 18 and over

I. THE TWO FUTURES

Every covenant ends. The Articles provide for one ending — the deliberate, sober, joint decision, never taken in anger — and the rest of the library speaks as though that were the only door. It is not. The other door opens by itself, on an ordinary day, for one of them first. A framework that plans a Tuesday evening in detail and does not plan for death is not thorough; it is squeamish, and squeamishness is a vice these pages have refused from the first line. So this page looks at the two things that outlast a couple: the papers, and the questions of anyone who finds them.

One principle governs everything below. The Covenant is a country of two citizens. It admits no third while they live, and it acquires none when one of them dies. Everything on this page is machinery for keeping that border closed after the couple can no longer guard it themselves.

II. THE PAPERS AND THE LAW

Say it once more, in the room where it matters most: these documents are not legal instruments. They bind two consciences and nothing else. They must therefore never live among the things that do bind — not in the folder with the wills, not in the deed box, not in the drawer a solicitor or executor will be sent to. An estate should be able to be settled, completely and cleanly, without any professional ever encountering a single page of this library. That is achieved by geography, not by luck: legal papers in one place, known to executors; the Covenant Set in another, known to two people.

The wills themselves are made properly and say nothing unusual. No coy bequests, no sealed envelopes lodged with the estate, no instructions that make a curious executor more curious. The law receives a conventional marriage, because in every respect the law can see, that is what this is.

III. CUSTODY IN LIFE

The House With Children set the standard for physical custody — locked, not merely out of reach — and it holds whether or not children live in the house, because visitors, tradesmen, and helpful relatives do not knock before opening cupboards. What deserves restating here is the digital estate, because paper is no longer where secrets die; it is where they used to die. Shared photo libraries, synced tablets, cloud folders that quietly mirror a phone, message threads, and purchase histories are the modern unlocked

drawer. The couple should assume that anything digital will one day be read by whoever inherits the accounts, and either keep this country off those servers entirely or hold it behind its own key that travels with Section VI.

Nothing is labelled. A locked case marked with a name invites a locksmith; a locked case in the attic is furniture.

IV. IF ONE OF THEM DIES

The couple decides now, in writing, held with the Set itself, what the survivor does with these papers — because the week of a death is the worst week in which to improvise, and the house will be full of family with keys. Most couples will choose destruction, and should feel no grief about it: the Covenant was never the paper. Some will choose that the survivor keeps the Set privately for their remaining years, to be destroyed in turn. Either is honourable. What is not honourable is leaving the question to a widow or widower standing in a hallway full of relatives, deciding alone what her marriage owes to her privacy.

Whichever is chosen, the first duty is simple and should be rehearsed like a fire drill: before the house fills, the Set and everything the Schedule governs is secured or gone. Grief must not have to stand guard.

And one release, written here so the survivor can read it on the day it is needed. The vow was made to a living spouse, and it is discharged in full at the graveside. The survivor owes the dead no continued standard, no ledger, no bearing, no performance of what was. What was built — the devotion, the order, the man or woman the Covenant made — is already woven into the person who remains, and that is the only continuation the dead ever wanted. The Covenant is not survived. It is completed.

V. DISCOVERY IN LIFE

If, despite custody, a living third party encounters something — a relative, a friend, a tradesman — the rule is the one The House With Children gave for a child, grown up to adult size: brief, calm, and no elaborate lie, because an elaborate lie is remembered and eventually understood. Two sentences suffice between adults: that is private to our marriage, and I would treat anything of yours the same way. Delivered without flinching, that ends almost every conversation, because the discoverer is usually more embarrassed than the discovered. What must never follow is theatre — no frantic explanations, no recruiting the discoverer into oaths of silence, no treating a private life as a guilty one. The couple has nothing to be ashamed of, and the fastest way to look ashamed is to act it.

If what was seen raises a harder question in the discoverer's mind — the question On Discipline and Abuse exists to answer — the couple answers it plainly rather than

deflecting it, and considers the concern a kindness. People who love them are supposed to check. A house built on consent survives the checking.

VI. DISCOVERY AFTER DEATH

The survivor guards the border for as long as they live; the harder problem is the second death, when no citizen of the country remains. This is solved in advance or not at all. If the Set was destroyed at the first death, nothing remains to find. If it was kept, the survivor accepts a duty: the Set is stored so that its discovery is impossible or meaningless — behind its own lock, its key with instructions the heirs will actually follow, or reduced in the survivor's final years by their own hand. Passwords and devices belong in this reckoning; a digital executor arrangement that hands children the photo library must not also hand them this.

And if, despite everything, some page one day surfaces before eyes it was never written for — let this paragraph be the one they find first. What you are holding was two adults' private, consensual, and deliberate way of loving each other, entered with open eyes and kept with more care than most vows receive. It was never yours to see, but there was never anything in it to fear. Put it back, or burn it, and remember the marriage you actually watched. That was this, working.

VII. WHAT IS ACTUALLY LEFT

A last word, because this page should not end in ash and locks. The legacy of this Covenant was never going to be its papers. It is the marriage everyone watched and no one could name: the devotion the children absorbed before they could speak, the man his colleagues wondered at, the household that ran like a covenant instead of a compromise. That inheritance is already distributed — it went out daily, for decades, to everyone who saw them. The papers were only ever the drawings; the building stands in other people now. Let the drawings go.

The Covenant is buried with the second of them. What it built is not.

A guide only. For consenting adults, 18 and over. Wills and estates belong to the law; make them properly, and keep this library out of them.