

WHEN SHE FALLS SHORT

*The Regulator's own standard, and what answers it
A companion to the Articles and the Protocols — for adults 18 and over*

I. THE GAP THIS PAGE CLOSES

Every evening of this arrangement, a man answers for his day. Ten questions, an honest reckoning, a consequence in his own skin. And in all the pages of this library, until this one, the woman who administers that reckoning has answered for nothing at all. That is not authority. That is exemption, and exemption is what turns a covenant into a convenience.

The Articles already bind her — she is held to a standard of deliberateness, of watchfulness, of never correcting in anger. But a standard with no answer attached is an aspiration, and this house does not run on aspirations. If his failures cost him something real, hers must cost her something real, or the whole architecture is a story two people tell themselves about who is being held.

A rule that binds only one of them was never a rule. It was a permission.

II. WHAT SHE OWES

Her standard is not his standard, because her office is not his office. He is held to service, bearing, and obedience. She is held to the things that make her fit to govern:

- Command of herself before command of him. A woman who cannot govern her own evening has no business governing his.
- Class and composure in every public room. She is not merely his companion on the arm; she is the proof of the arrangement. The Protocols require his bearing to be immaculate — they require hers to be the same, and she wrote them.
- Support, and the visible fact of it. He is built up in company, never diminished. A wife who sharpens her wit on her husband in front of others has broken the Protocols more seriously than any fumbled introduction of his.
- The watch, kept honestly. The ledger read at the ordinary hour whether or not she feels like it, the skin inspected, the record true.
- Sobriety of judgement — literal and otherwise. Nothing in this house is administered by someone impaired, and that law protects him from her.

Against that standard, ordinary failures happen. An evening where drink got ahead of her and the company noticed. A remark at a dinner table that cost him something in a room he has to work in tomorrow. A week where the ledger went unread because she could not be bothered. A scene in a car park that neither of them would like described

back to them. These are not catastrophes. They are the wife's equivalent of the lazy afternoon, and like the lazy afternoon, they are settled and finished rather than carried.

III. WHY HERS COST MORE

One thing must be said plainly, because it shapes everything that follows. Her failures are structurally heavier than his, and both of them should know it. When he falls short, the system corrects him and holds. When she falls short, the correcting mechanism itself has failed — and there is nothing above her to catch it. That is why this page exists, and why the answer to her failure is not a lighter version of his but a differently weighted one.

It is also why her answer is rarer. He answers nightly, by design, because the ritual is the point. She does not answer nightly; she answers when she has actually failed. A wife looking for reasons to be corrected has misunderstood the office as thoroughly as a husband looking for reasons to escape it.

IV. THE SOBER HOUR

Nothing is settled on the night. This is the hardest rule on the page and the one that makes the rest of it safe.

If drink was involved, nothing happens until she is entirely sober, and that means the following day rather than later the same evening — not a couple of hours and a glass of water. If temper was involved, the same interval applies. He does not raise it in the car home. He does not raise it at the door. He says nothing that night beyond what a considerate husband would say to a wife who has had too much: he gets her home, he gets her water, he puts her to bed, and he says not one word about consequence.

This is not softness. It is the library's own law, stated everywhere else and applying here without exception: correction is never administered to an impaired person, never received by one, and never delivered in anger. A man who corrects his drunk wife that night has not enforced a covenant. He has assaulted someone who cannot consent, and no page in this library will be read as permitting it.

The following day, sober and unhurried, she raises it herself. That is the first part of her answer and the harder half: she names what she did, without minimising and without being prompted. If he has to raise it, she has already failed twice.

V. THE FORM OF IT

She undresses completely. Not partially, not for convenience, but wholly and by her own hand — the same as he does, and for the same reason. The office comes off with the clothes. What stands there is not the Regulator but the woman who wears that office when she has earned it, and cannot hide inside it when she has not.

Then she goes over his lap and takes what her failure has cost. His hand — and the hand is generally the right and sufficient instrument here, for reasons of Section VII. It is real. It is meant to be felt the following day. A ceremonial tap teaches nothing and both of them will know it was theatre, and theatre between these two is corrosive in a way it never is between strangers. The Schedule of Limits governs this exactly as it governs everything else: her declared limits, her halt word — which she holds here precisely as he holds it there — and the same stop signs on skin and colour.

It ends when he says it ends, and then it is finished. Not referred to, not raised again next week, not used as leverage in an argument in March. A failure answered is a failure closed. That law has always run in his direction, and it runs in hers identically.

VI. THE STEEL DOES NOT OPEN

He remains locked throughout, and this is the hinge of the entire page — the thing that makes it a correction within the covenant rather than a reversal of it.

Because that is the distinction that matters. He is not taking her authority back. He is not being promoted for an evening. She has not been demoted, and tomorrow she governs exactly as she governed yesterday. What is happening is narrower and stranger and better: a woman who holds an office is answering for having held it badly, and the man who submitted to that office is the only person on earth positioned to make her answer. He does it locked, denied, and owned — which is precisely what proves it is not a coup.

So there is no unlocking, no petition to unlock, and no suggestion of it. She does not offer and he does not ask. If either of them wants that exchange, it exists already and it has a name: the Rite of Grand Renewal, once in ten years, with its own preparation and its own liturgy. This is not that, and confusing the two would spoil both.

VII. THE RETALIATION TEST

Now the danger, named honestly, because a page that ignored it would not be worth having. A man who is corrected nightly, handed the means of correcting the woman who corrects him, sits in an obviously loaded position. If this becomes payback, it will poison the arrangement faster than anything else in this library could — and it will do so quietly, over months, while both of them insist it is working.

Four safeguards, and all four must hold:

- It must be occasioned. There must be an actual, nameable failure against Section II that both of them recognise without argument. If they have to debate whether it happened, it did not.
- He must not want it. This is the test that matters most and the one only he can administer. A man who finds himself looking forward to her failures, or noticing more of them than there are, has already left the covenant. The honest response to that discovery is to say so aloud and stop — not to manage it privately.

- It must be proportionate and unescalating. What answers a bad evening this year answers a bad evening in five years. If the severity is climbing, something other than correction is happening.
- It must be rare. If this page is being used monthly, the problem is not her conduct. See the next section.

And she keeps her own veto. She may decline, on the day, without argument and without it counting as a further failure — because a Regulator who could be compelled by her husband is no longer a Regulator, and the whole structure would be a fiction. That she almost never uses that veto is what gives the arrangement its meaning. That she holds it is what makes it hers.

VIII. WHEN THIS IS NOT THE ANSWER

The gravest thing on this page. If drink is behind her failures more than occasionally, this document does not apply and applying it will do harm.

The library's own doctrine on breach holds here: once is a failure, twice is information. A single bad evening in a year is a lapse, and a lapse is what this page answers. A pattern — three occasions, or any occasion frightening enough to be remembered — is not a discipline matter and never was. It is a drinking problem wearing a covenant's clothes, and correcting it with his hand does two damaging things at once: it lets both of them feel the matter has been dealt with when nothing has been dealt with, and it converts a health problem into a ritual that now has a role in the marriage and will therefore be defended.

So the rule is absolute and it is hers to obey as much as his: the third time, nobody goes over anybody's lap. They sit down sober, in daylight, and one of them says the true sentence — that this is not about the arrangement, and it needs a doctor rather than a paddle. A husband who keeps correcting a wife who is drinking too much is not holding a standard. He is helping her avoid one.

The same applies to anything else that keeps producing these evenings: grief she has not dealt with, a medication that does not suit her, a depression neither of them has named. Correction answers conduct. It has nothing to say to illness, and pretending otherwise is how people are hurt by frameworks that meant well.

IX. AFTERWARD

Care closes what it opens, and here it runs uphill. He holds her. Water, warmth, his hands over what he has just done, and time — and he says plainly that it is finished and nothing is held against her. She is permitted to find it difficult; most women in her position do, and a woman who has spent years being the one who holds may find being held the more disarming half of it.

Then, before the evening closes, the office returns to her hands explicitly and in words. Something is said aloud to mark it — that she is his wife and his Regulator, that tomorrow

she governs as she always has, and that what happened tonight was in service of that rather than against it. Both of them need to hear it said. Neither should assume it.

And at the next annual review, it goes in the record like anything else: what happened, what answered it, whether it worked. If a couple find themselves reluctant to write it down, that reluctance is the most useful piece of information they will get all year.

X. WHAT DOES NOT CHANGE

She commands the estate. She keeps the ledger. She sets his standard and administers his correction and holds the key at her neck. Nothing on this page reduces any of that by a degree, and any house that finds it starting to has misread the document badly enough that they should set it aside entirely.

What this page adds is one thing only: that the woman who holds all of that is a person inside the covenant rather than an office above it — bound by it, answerable within it, and occasionally, rarely, corrected by the one man alive who has earned the standing to do it. The Grand Renewal says the same thing once a decade with ceremony. This says it on an ordinary Tuesday, without any.

He answers to her nightly. She answers to the covenant. Neither of them answers to nothing.

A guide only. Not medical advice. For consenting adults, 18 and over. Nothing is administered to, or by, an impaired person — ever. The halt word belongs to both of them equally and outranks every line above. Where drink or illness is the pattern rather than the exception, this page does not apply.