

Gendering Reilly

People tell me that he doesn't really have a gender yet, at this age.

I wonder when he will have a gender, and what it will be.

The world already has such designs on him.

Eight Weeks.

I am breast feeding on demand, which means every hour and a half. He's huge (10 pounds at birth), famished, constantly on the breast. I respond to him immediately. Pick him up whenever he cries. "He's already got you on a string," I'm told. Also (pejorative): "He's going to be a Mamma's boy!"

Three Months.

He is off the growth chart according to the pediatrician. A big, burly sumo-wrestler-ish infant. I dress him in jeans and dark colors and I am told repeatedly that he's going to be: (1) a football player, (2) a bruiser, (3) a heartbreaker. Men and (feminist) women both ruffle his hair, toss him into the air, chuck under his chin.

Four Months.

On the elevator at work, me in my girly work shoes, him in a purple cotton dress. A woman who gets off on six, who never speaks to me, turns to us and says: "She has a perfect head!" Reaches out, so gently, caresses his cheek. He beams back at her.

Five Months.

Still not sleeping through the night. I'm told (by friends, the pediatrician, relatives): Stop letting him sleep in your bed! He'll do better in a crib. You have to let him cry it out at some point.

Jaime M. Grant

Six Months.

Woman in the lobby at work: Sucks her teeth. "Dressing him like that! It will just confuse him!"

"About what?" I ask her, in all seriousness. "What do you think wearing a dress will confuse him about?" She is too angry to reply.

Eight Months.

The man at the beach asks me if he is a boy or a girl, and when I say boy gets instantly angry: "What have you got him in pink for?"

"He likes pink," I say, venomous.

Eleven Months.

The (former) day care provider, on the day that I bring him in red leggings and a soft yellow top. "You can tell Reilly's a boy, regardless of what he's wearing. He's so strong."

Later that night, picking him up at her in-home day care center she reports: "My daughter just loves to help me with the babies. My son never has." Reilly is dragging a Barbie around by the hair, and I realize I haven't bought him a single dolly yet.