

What's in a name 1.

THE NAME was no more in doubt than that she would have the baby and keep the baby. She couldn't afford an abortion, anyway, and she was nobody's fool to risk a home remedy.

She had a favorite uncle, Odell, and a favorite singer, Ella Fitzgerald. Nobody could sing scat like Lady Ella, and scat was her life in four letters. All her life, she had to improvise to get by. She wanted her baby's name to honor Odell and Ella, but she wanted an original name that didn't copy their names. She went through every letter in the alphabet. There was only one letter she liked, one letter a natural fit. If she had a girl, her name would be Codella. If she had a boy, his name would be Codell.

She mixed two teaspoons of liquid Drano with two teaspoons of her morning urine. The solution would turn brown or gold for a girl and green for a boy. It turned green.

Her pregnancy was difficult and her labor long. She pushed Codell into the world at dawn, bringing light to an overcast life. He was a big baby, her first. He had jet black hair and flat black eyes, simultaneously without depth and depthless. Later, she realized that there was a code in his name, a message, an ode between the C and the L's, between the beginning and the end. That was her baby boy, his life her gift, a life to be sung.

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