

Surrogate . . .

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Being a surrogate mother is not, as has been suggested, the "flip side" of artificial insemination. The infertile couple has contracted for more from a woman than an infusion of sperm. The pregnant woman has a stronger relationship with a fetus than a man has with a vial. The law governing this business, governing this web of parenting, is far murkier.

If the Stiver Story has a bizarre twist, there are other and equally mind-boggling risks. What if the biological mother decides, as at least two have, to keep the baby herself? Would a court of law hold that the contract was more sacred than the mother's rights?

What impact is there on a couple when the man seeks another woman to bear his child? The Malahoffs, it should be noted, separated when the child he believed was his was conceived.

What do you tell a child when he or she asks, "Where did I come from?" And what if the baby isn't perfect? Whose holds the final responsibility for a child conceived through a contract?

In the Stivers home, the boarder is now a son. They've learned something about chance.

We've learned something about a business and an idea that encourages people to regard parents as customers rather than caretakers. We've learned something about people who look upon motherhood as biological work on a reproduction line. We've learned to be wary of people who regard babies as just another product for an eager and vulnerable market.

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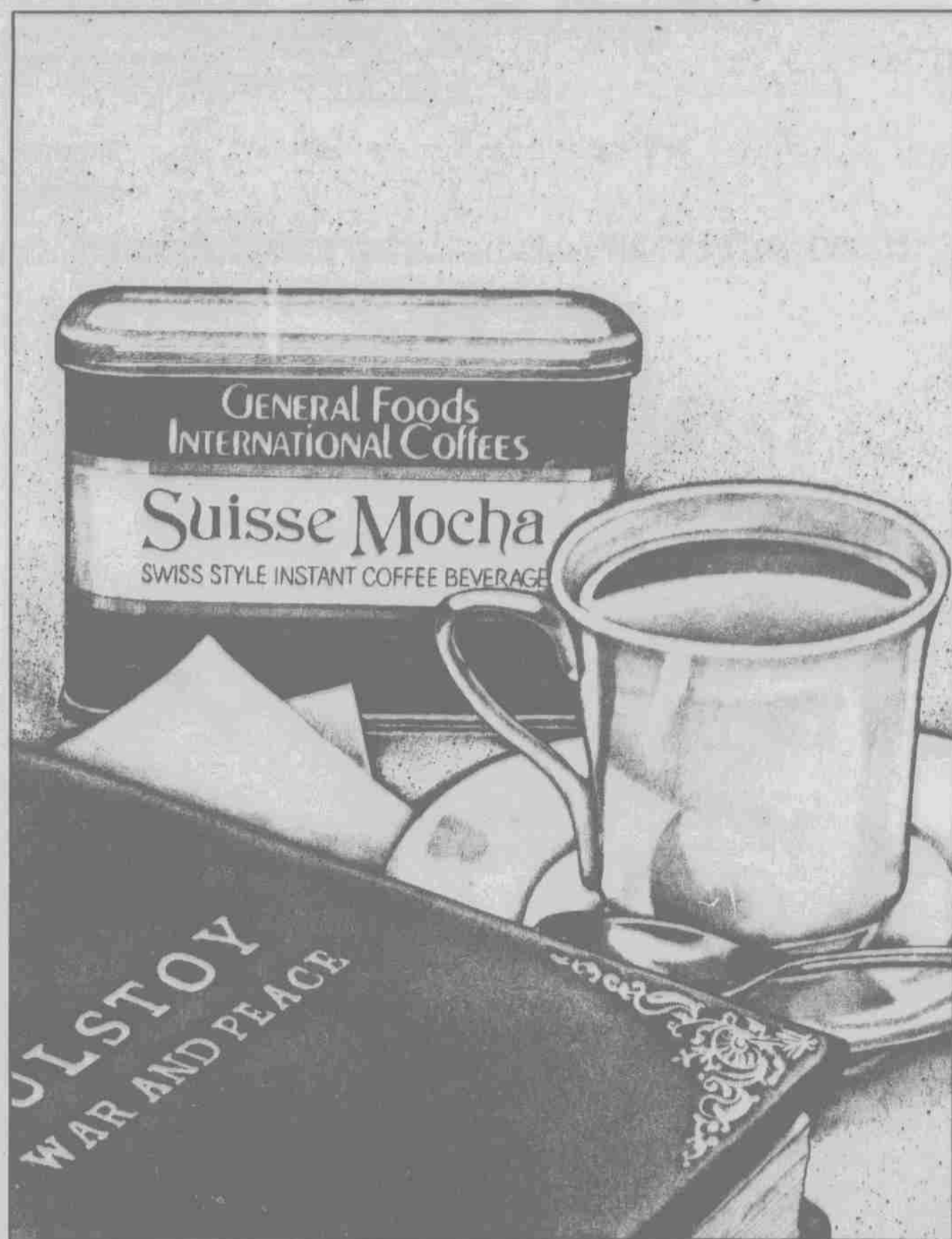
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