

A Period Piece

I

The first pair of pants. I lost them at the age of 12. I had just come back from the bathroom, just changed the maxi pad that was on the verge of being soaked. Large red-brown clots jiggled on top of the red-dyed cotton like uncooked egg white, and I couldn't wait to dispose it. When I returned to my seat in French class, it was less than five minutes before my eardrums were pierced by an incessant beeping. All I could think was this was the worse time for a fire drill. Standing was my enemy this week. Nothing good or comfortable ever came from it, but we were pushed into line and guided out the door like ants seeking a crumb dropped on the concrete. It wasn't long before I could no longer hear the beeping, though I was standing next to the siren; I was more concerned with the life-force rapidly leaving my body between my legs. I could feel clots passing like I was giving birth to bird eggs of multiple sizes. We hadn't even made it to the door when I felt it hit my thigh. Standing outside, it had claimed half my left leg. It was an uncomfortable warmth that offered no relief from the stinging winter air. A classmate tapped me on the shoulder to tell me I was bleeding through, as if I could not feel the destruction of my favorite pair of jeans.

II

Every two weeks. In eighth grade I thought I was cursed, because I was on the rag twice as often as my friends. Literally half of my month was always spent in fear and pain. I was becoming accustomed to wearing an extra pair of shorts over my panties and under my jeans in an attempt to prevent any blood from escaping. A fear of tampons essentially meant I could forget about swimming the summer, especially in the ocean. The chances of planning for a week when the blood wasn't flowing was nearly impossible. I would not be held responsible to chumming the waters of New Smyrna beach.

III

Three weeks of hormones. The pediatrician towered over me because, even at the age of 14, the only *gift* puberty had bestowed upon me was a close relationship with my own blood. She said it was probably endometriosis and wrote me a prescription for the pill. I wouldn't lose my virginity until I was 18, and I had no idea that pumping myself with hormones every day for 21 days was for anything other than preventing babies.

IV

Four extra strength ibuprofens. Eventually the cramps would become crippling. I remember coming home from a road trip with my father after getting surprised about halfway through without any supplies. One awkward trip to the grocery store later and I was prepped, but this time brought with it a new foe. We pulled into the driveway and I tried to get out, but suddenly there was a dagger in my abdomen. I looked down to make sure I hadn't been assaulted but everything seemed to be in order. I tried to get up again, but my insides felt like they were being twisted by a pitchfork. Every step made my legs feel heavier as I tried to walk through the pain.

V

Five super plus tampons. At its worst (when I had lost my health insurance and could no longer use hormones to control the beast) I could barely leave the house. Super plus and Ultra tampons were the only thing that worked, and I was still changing it every 10-15 minutes to ensure the survival of my clothing. I thought for sure that I was going to die from it. I couldn't imagine that even my entire body could contain that much blood.

VI

Six different types of birth control. At 18 I was back on the pill, but this time it wasn't the guaranteed cure I was looking for. The first worked great, but suddenly there were lawsuits and commercials striking fear into the masses that that pill could kill you. I rushed back to the midwives at the clinic, demanding something else. The next four packs seemed like they built feeble little walls made of Legos in an attempt to block the beast—walls that were knocked down every month within a week. Eventually I was introduced to something quite unusual. It wasn't the tiny colorful pill that I was ingesting every day, but a large clear plastic ring that apparently wanted to find its home nestled into at the entrance to my womb. Surprisingly, this invasive ring of medication that had deemed itself equal to my lover cured the pain, the severe anemia, and the exhaustion. I still wonder if I can get a small replica to wear on my ring finger to show my devotion to this miracle piece of plastic.

VII

Seven days. Still, when that time comes every day is a challenge. It is seven days of worrying that something will fail and I'll revisit the time my first pair of pants was ruined. It is seven days of worrying that I'll have two weeks' worth of bleeding in one go. It is seven days of worrying that the endometriosis may someday leave me infertile. It is seven days of waiting for an invisible assailant to plunge a knife into my pelvis. It is seven days of worrying that I may bleed out. It is seven days of wondering if this will really only last for seven days.