Birth Control

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"You had better ask Dr. Madison about birth control while you’re there.” My mother said this in exactly the same way that she would ask me to pick up a gallon of milk at the grocery store. The tips of my fingers began to tingle the way that they do when I think I’m going to get pulled over by a cop, and my left arm lost all sensation. “You might have to get an exam,” she had added non-chalantly. But I only have a sore shoulder, I thought. What exam? When all of my girlfriends were discovering “womanly secrets” behind closed bedroom doors, my mother must have assumed that the pamphlets I got at school were enough. My mother had never uttered the word sex in front of me in her entire life; I doubt she ever will. But I didn’t really care. Finally, I would be taking a crucial next step in my life: finally, the pill.

Dr. Madison lifted my arm and let it drop again. “Listen to the cracking. It pops on the way up and then again on the way down,” I explained half-heartedly. I was no longer concerned about my arm. I was searching for just the right time to bring up the pills. “Dr. Madison,” the tips of my fingers tingled again, “my mom wanted me to ask you about getting me some birth control.” The saliva struggled against my swallow. My ears began to resemble cherries. Time stopped. Dr. Madison stared at me, at my burning ears. He knew. He knew that I was grown up; the same girl that he had delivered eighteen years ago had the nerve to ask him about birth control.

He casually explained that I would need a pap smear, described the procedure, and then questioned my sincerity. He said that girls who bring the issue up during non-related visits (like mine) are typically unsure about what they are doing. “Are you sure?” He tipped his head a little, just enough for the stethoscope to move and clang against his pen. The bright lights cast a shadow on his eyes, and it appeared as though Dr. Madison was staring at me through hollow voids. By now I figured that my ears certainly must be lit up in flames. I wondered why he wasn’t reaching for the fire extinguisher.

It was decided that I was indeed sincere about this step in my life, and so Dr. Madison said that he had time to do the exam that very day. The reality of it all hit me, and the backs of my legs were suddenly suctioned to the crinkly paper on the examination table. Each tiny pore on my body was releasing glittering sweat jewels; I felt that I needed another shower. The lights swallowed me one little gulp at a time, and by the time Dr. Madison left the room with instructions for me to remove all my clothes, I assumed that I must have been entirely consumed.

A peck-peck at the door forced the lights to spit me out, and I landed, shaking and overwhelmed, on the crinkly paper, afraid to move for fear that the
sound it made underneath me would harm my ear drums. I could only tolerate the sound of my own heart. Thank goodness Dr. Madison had already checked my heartbeat; he surely would have admitted me to the hospital had he known its rate now.

Dr. Madison was accompanied by a female nurse. He looked different than before. His once calming greeting was now a matter-of-fact glare. The comforting horizontal wrinkles in his khaki pants were miraculously ironed out, and I could have sworn that he brushed his hair. Did Dr. Madison feel the need to freshen up for the big exam? The conversion of doctor to manbetweenmylegs was startling, even as he still stood over my head. Guilt engulfed my sweating body. *He thinks that I am dirty and promiscuous*, I thought.

“Alright,” he started, “we need for you to scoot down and put your feet into these”; at that moment, two arms grew from the examination table. They sensed my fear. They were out to kill; it was war: me against the semi-mobile, stainless steel arms. They grabbed my feet and bit down. I kept my knees tight together while my feet were floating around outside my body. “Now let the knees fall apart,” but my knees were out of my control. I noticed the carefully constructed way that he avoided making *me* the subject of those instructions; I became a passive participant, as if the knees weren’t really mine. He explained what he was doing, but his voice drifted around the room, bouncing off the walls and lights, darting under the door before I could have a chance to comprehend. I gulped hard. The nurse held my hand, despite its clamminess. I was five years old again, at the mercy of another adult.

The room was a prison, holding me down on the table with the weight of the air. Dense particles of oxygen floated around me; when I thought of getting up off of the table, they pushed me down again. I couldn’t breathe.

“Now I am going to take a sample of the lining…” I was dizzy. Heart racing, jewels dancing, lights suffocating. “Almost done…” Tools ruthless and cruel, discriminating, imprisoning, punishing. “There.” Then there was something about a prescription and another visit. Did I hear “every year”? The air released me from the table. The steel arms loosened their jaws. Alone in the room again, I fumbled for tissues. I inspected the damage. The tiny sweat jewels seeped back into my pores, and I no longer glistened.