Belly of Hope

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It’s a Wednesday in fall. The sky is gray to the point where it almost melts into the sidewalk and the two become indistinguishable. From the gray comes large, flat, waxy, red, orange and brown shapes easing their way down from the trees and sky. It’s like dry, colored rain cascading down onto the large evergreen colored awning; every few minutes a leaf sticks and one of the white letters is temporarily blotted out. There are seven people crowded around the red brick building all wearing white t-shirts, holding hands and heads bowed. No chanting, no religion streaming from their mouths, no warnings or protest signs with disfigured fetuses. Their heads are bowed and hands clasped, as if they are praying.

Nappy, blue carpeting with fading brown stains lines the floor. I stare and stare and stare down at that carpet until I hear the lady behind the sliding glass window say my name. She can’t be more than twenty-five. Long stringy black hair frames her pale face as she idly reaches up to play with the wad of gum in her mouth. Every few sentences and her long, bony fingers are back to kneading the wad of gum. She hands me a clipboard wanting to know every intimate detail of my sexual history. I begin to lower my body back into one of the stale blue leather chairs as I hear the tick of the clock. It ticks and ticks and ticks every time seeming louder to the point where I have to feel my ears to make sure they aren’t bleeding.

Tall, white lab coat, thick glasses. He talks and talks and talks, every word jumbled beyond recognition. All I hear is tube, pieces, suction, and baby. The room is white with a thick black crack running from the north wall all the way to the ceiling. There is a table in the middle of the room with a shiny steel surface and two poles at one of the ends with black Velcro straps for my feet. The gown is thin and papery with tiny yellow roses on it. The thermostat reads sixty-five degrees. I can feel sweat break out across my scalp and drench my hair at the roots. Tiny bumps break out across my arms and legs. I can feel my stomach pump rhythmically with my heart, I can feel hot liquid acid being forced up my throat and coating my mouth. I want to feel. My tiny green eyes grow to the size of olives and well with hot, salty tears that burn my cheeks as they fall. I get into position on the table.

It is cold and steel; the sickly yellow light from above is bleeding down onto my sweaty, pale body. The latex-covered hand of the doctor brushes against
my inner thigh as he numbs my cervix; he tells me to relax my muscles. The light from the large circle above burns my eyes.

I try to relax. He breathes out a gust of air that I can feel on my exposed skin as he keeps telling me to relax. I focus on the crack in the wall, rolling my eyes back as far as I can. I focus on the yellow light that is bleeding from its steel womb. I focus on the sound coming from the other end of the table. It is louder than the clock in the waiting room. It hums like a vacuum cleaner on steroids; then the sound stops and I can feel the chill of the plastic hose against my inner thigh as the doctor wiggles it back and forth. He tells the nurse it gets clogged up every now and then from the parts of the fetus. It gets clogged up every now and then from the parts of the fetus.

After the procedure, on the ride back to my dormitory, I stare out the window of the car, my fingers picking my lips, tearing away the flesh until they bleed. My grandmother says nothing except that I did the right thing, that I’m only eighteen and I wouldn’t have been able to graduate college with a baby. She reminds me of my looks and how the pregnancy would have caused significant weight gain, thus fewer boys would find me attractive and wouldn’t want to marry me. She reminds me of my mother: “She was twenty years-old when she had you and never went back to school. She ended up dropping out and working as a Wal-Mart cashier.” She says this as if I don’t know, as if I never lived with my mother. Her hands twist and turn the steering wheel. My stomach beats rhythmically with my heart as she reminds me of the importance of education. “God almighty, Anna, don’t you end up like your mother throwing school and your nice figure away for some baby.”

The water scalds my skin as it pours down from the shower head. It burns my scalp, my eyes, my chest, my legs, and my feet. I run my fingers across my lower abdomen again and again and again. I can feel the hot, salty liquid pouring down from my eyes and running over my chapped, bloody lips. It burns worse than the water. It burns.

My legs quiver, along with my stomach and hands, and my entire short frame joins in the movement. The liquid won’t stop pouring out. There is no screaming, no muffled crying, and no snot being sucked back up. There is no sound except the water hitting against the tiny, blue squares lining the floor.

Thick, red fabric swaddles my body. From the mirror directly across from my bed I can see locks of my red hair plastered to my forehead and pillow, glued there by my own sweat and tears and snot. My eyes are red and swollen to the point where I can’t tell if the clock reads eight o’clock or nine. Slow, shallow breaths run across my lips, gently peeling back the bits of skin that are healing. I calmly run my fingers across my lower abdomen, across my womb. I remove one
of my hands and reach for the string of wooden beads that are slung over one of the dark wooden bed posts. They are hard and tiny as I run them through my fingers positioning them and repositioning them. Forgive me Father for I have sinned. I lay them across my empty womb. I feel them grow heavier. Forgive me Father.

I stay in the thick, red blanket for two days. I only leave the room to go to the restroom. I only take small sips of water that burn my lips, my bloody, chapped lips. I pray. On the second night I dream that the hose is so full that it breaks and from it blood is squirting out and fragmented limbs are going every which way. I don’t go back to bed for three nights. Instead I rearrange my books on my book shelf, I dust, and I watch infomercials. I eat. I eat until the powdered sugar coating my lips burns.

Every time I close my eyes I see tiny body parts. Every time I close my eyes I can hear the clock ticking louder and louder. Every time I close my eyes I can feel the hose against my thigh. Every time I close my eyes I can hear the doctor telling the nurse that the hose gets clogged up every now and then from the parts of the fetus.

Three months pass and then six and then another three months pass. It is late at night and I am standing in the shower, water pounding down as I gently run my fingers across my lower abdomen. I step from the shower to in front of a mirror hanging above the sink, I wrap my towel around my body, but before doing so, I dig my fingers into my doughy, stomach, the muscles now replaced with fat from the comfort food I consumed when I couldn’t sleep a year ago. I return to the shelter of the red blanket. As I close my eyes to go to sleep, I rest my fingers where my baby used to live, rubbing it every now and then like I am rubbing a magic lamp.

Anna Mullins is a junior studying English Literature who believes in the power of retail therapy and chocolate too much.