

Genesis

I.

Today I had Plan B for breakfast.

The box read: Reduces the chance of pregnancy after unprotected sex (if a regular control method fails or after sex without birth control). Not for regular birth control. Side effects include (but are not limited to) menstrual changes, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, breast pain, and lower stomach (abdominal) pain.

The label did not list the additional side effects: shame, regret, judgmental stares (from both the pharmacist and the person behind you in line), and embarrassment. I guess that's what the "but are not limited to" parenthetical must have stood in for.

The single nondescript white pill cost me \$46.99 plus my pride at the local pharmacy.

"Picking up?" The pharmacist was wearing a shirt the color of fancy mustard underneath his white lab coat. He walked through the shelves of medications towards the counter with a self-important air, like he considered every prescription he filled to be as urgent as surgery. His rectangular glasses slid down the length of his nose and I couldn't tell if the frames were too big or if there simply wasn't enough nose to support them.

"No," I said.

It was Sunday morning and there was a line of people behind me, close enough to hear including a mother with her two small children, a boy and a girl; they were in their church clothes. The girl was hiding behind her mother's legs, she peered out between them to watch me in short intervals. She was wearing lace gloves and a lilac dress with a

bow on the waist. The boy was in a suit; he was holding his mother's hand begrudgingly, his free hand limp at his side.

Unlike them, I was not dressed in my Sunday best. I'd gone to the pharmacy straight from Jeff's house. They say the sooner you take it the more effective it is.

I could still feel a gentle pulsing between my legs.

II.

Adam and Eve were the first man and woman, according to the book of Genesis. God created two beings perfect in every way, in his own image. Adam came first, but man cannot exist alone. He had no purpose. So while Adam was sleeping, God ripped one of Adam's ribs from his body, and from this bone he created woman. When Adam woke Eve was on the ground beside him, naked and perfect like him in every way. God commanded them to be fruitful and multiply.

Unluckily for Eve, God had forgotten to create Plan B.

Their home was called the Garden of Eden. It was filled with many wonderful things: the land was lush and fertile. Fabulous creatures roamed among the trees. God had blessed his two children with this paradise, and gave them only one rule: "All this is yours," he told them, "it is my gift to you and your children until the end of time. However, I forbid you from eating the fruit that grows from the tree in the middle of the Garden. The day you eat that fruit, you will die."

And so they lived in perfect ignorance. Naked, happy, blessed, and unashamed.

III.

I used to own lace gloves like the little girl behind me. My mother would dress me up in pastel colors and bring me down to the church basement to learn sugarcoated Bible stories while her and my father got the unreserved version upstairs. I refused to go church after my Sunday School class put on a play depicting the tale of Noah's Ark. I got cast as a sheep. I'd wanted to be a lion.

Before my parents would leave me in the hands of the Sunday School teacher my dad would kiss me on the forehead and say, "Be good." It was the only rule he had for me.

I broke that rule all the time.

Infractions included (but were not limited to) drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, sneaking out, skipping class, roughhousing with my brothers, getting Bs instead of As, getting piercings, and having sex.

I made my father nervous.

"Dropping off?" The pharmacist said.

"No. I just need the morning after pill."

When I told Jeff to take me to the pharmacy he said, "What's the big deal?" I told him that if he didn't take me that in nine months we'd have a bigger problem on our hands, but he wanted to watch this movie called *Trailer Park Boys* instead. He kissed me when I left. It only lasted a second, but then he held my face in his calloused hands and said, "I'll call you tomorrow, beautiful." *Please don't*, I thought.

The pharmacist gave me a knowing smile, letting his pale eyes flick down towards my cleavage, as if admitting that I had sex had given him permission to check me out.

The mother behind me scoffed and I sensed her move away from me, pulling the children closer to her, shielding them like I was carrying a dangerous contagion. Moms always take contraception so personally.

The pharmacist disappeared behind the rows of prescriptions. His urgency for his work was gone and he didn't return for several minutes, keeping me on display. I remembered reading *The Scarlet Letter* in high school English class and felt a sudden sympathy towards Hester Prynne.

He returned, still smiling. He enjoyed keeping me waiting. He had power over me and he knew it.

"I need to see your ID," he said. "You need to be at least eighteen to take the morning after pill."

I showed it to him. "I'm twenty-one."

He scrutinized the ID like a bartender. I wanted to ask him how many women he really thought would forge an ID just to get access to emergency contraception but I didn't. I needed that pill and he could refuse to give it to me.

Finally, he scanned the green box containing my one-pill miracle. I pulled three crumpled twenty-dollar bills out of my pocket.

"Remember, if you throw up after taking it, it's like you didn't take it at all, and you'll need to come back in to take a second dose." His hand lingered on mine as he handed me my change.

I turned to leave when the mother said, “God bless you.”

The words speared me and I stopped. She was standing in front of both her children, still acting as a buffer for my sin. I was infecting them with my presence. I clutched the white paper bag in my hand. The woman’s eyes were bright and determined, the same look I always imagined the missionaries in Africa would have worn while trying to convert the savages. She couldn’t have known that I too was a lost cause.

IV.

God only had one rule for Adam and Eve: don’t eat from the Forbidden Fruit. For years they obeyed. They gathered food, ate, slept, and named God’s creatures. Each day like the last. In perfection there is no need for change.

Until something miraculous happened. The Serpent arrived in the Garden.

The Serpent whispered delicious promises and Eve approached the Tree. She didn’t know even then that her paradise was deteriorating. Eve plucked the ripe fruit from the boughs of the tree.

The Serpent swore to protect her from God’s wrath. “One bite,” he told her, “that is all you need.”

But if you are going to eat from the Forbidden Fruit, you do not just take one bite—you eat the whole thing.

Deep in her stomach, Eve was suddenly aware of her nakedness. She covered her breasts and sex with fig leaves and hid from God in the bushes. She was confused and ashamed. She was alone in her sin.

Since then, Eve and all of her daughters have never been rewarded for their desire to grow and learn.

V.

“Next,” the pharmacist said and the woman stepped forward.

The little girl was still behind her mother’s legs; one hand clutched her mother’s calf, but with the other she waved at me. I don’t know whether she was telling me hello or goodbye. Her lace gloves looked small enough to fit a doll’s hands. I waved back.

In my car I tore apart the packaging, popped the pill out of its foil enclosure and dry swallowed it.

The pill went down.

I looked at my reflection in the rear view mirror.

“Don’t throw up.”