

Control

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I was eighteen when I first started telling people I didn't want children. Maybe it was because my high school boyfriend had said I was a bad Christian for having sex with him, or after he threatened to kill himself if we broke up. Maybe it was because I took anatomy for my senior year science credit and thus discovered that developing fetuses shit inside of you during the gestation period.

"Your insides will be completely rearranged," Ms. Landavazo told the class, placing her hands on either side of her own swollen belly.

Maybe it was because, ultimately, I thought childbearing was selfish.

I had been on the pill then. The sweet daily sundrops irritated my body and made me feel fat. After arriving at college, I ditched them and tried my luck with condoms alone. However, because of my active imagination and persistent neuroses, I constantly feared unplanned pregnancy.

During the spring of my sophomore year, I decided to get an IUD after a brief consultation with a notably persuasive health care provider. Getting an IUD, in the colloquial sense, is choosing to have a foreign object thrust into your uterus in order to ward off pregnancy for up to ten years. According to the brochures, the IUD itself (copper-wired, painfully large) creates an inflammatory response in the uterus, preventing the implantation of fertilized eggs. Moreover, copper is highly toxic to sperm cells and serves to create an inhospitable uterine environment in which (theoretically) no egg could be fertilized in the first place.

On the day of my insertion, I swallowed four Ibuprofen and a questionably-acquired Xanax before wobbling to the University's Student Health Center. I sat alone in the waiting room with my sweaty palms and acute fear of invasive procedures. I remember foggily that they tested my urine before instructing me to undress from the waist down, arrange myself in the stirrups, and open myself to the room: the doctor, two nurses, the gloves and tubes and swabs.

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As I tried not to think about what was happening, I remembered the home video recordings my mother had converted from VHS, put on disc, and gifted me for my high school graduation: footage of me as a baby in my grandparents' house—the house with the hot third-floor attic my mom moved back into after my father left her for his pregnant girlfriend.

Disc one, scene one: my mother held the camera as she walked through the gate, up the stairs. The frame shook slightly as she went. She came to the front door and opened it, her white hand on the knob. The walls of the sunroom were a different color then, my grandparents still had the piano.

My mom's faithful Pitbull-mix trotted into the shot, red fur, staring into the camera with his inquisitive, liquid eyes.

Where's the baby, Diego? My mother's voice swam through the grainy din of eighteen years. *Where's the baby?*

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The examination table: a sharp pain, tears (mine), the nurses telling me to breathe, the doctor saying she's having a hard time getting through my cervix. A pause. The coldness of another antibacterial swab.

When the procedure was over, I wiped my eyes and the doctor told me that I did a good job. Before turning to leave the room, one of the nurses dropped two tissues and a panty liner onto my chest. "Use this," she said stiffly. "You're bleeding."