Pearl

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PEARL
Cora Canzler

A pearl beyond price. Suspended in ethereal majesty in a liquid world of nutrients. Serenity and warmth radiate from its feminine glory of only twenty-three chromosomes. Life as an ova is tranquil, and your time is spent contemplating world peace and country French décor. You have been a treasured individual since your creation in the ovarian follicle, you are one of only 200,000. Quite unlike your male counterpart who continuously manufactures millions of hyper-active, dime-a-dozen, worm-like spermatozoa. Your calm confidence is rooted in the knowledge that without your unique genetic contribution, life would cease to exist, and with this understanding you carry yourself accordingly.

This is a special month. Estrogen has been good to you, and you were chosen to slide down the glamorous red carpet known as the fallopian tubes. A fleeting farewell to the other less fortunate ova as you effortlessly slip through the opening to the uterine entrance, never to look back. And so you bask in the limelight for three wonderful, self-centered days until the world you enjoyed as a quiet egg is shattered.

Fertilization was rough and unpleasant not to mention undignified. It is never enjoyable to have leaches battle for the honor to attach to you and integrate their DNA with yours. Your slightly acidic environment causes many sperm to become confused and consequently they are deterred and bury their greedy heads into the fleshy walls of the uterus. Other wayward fellows resign their missions and opt to bathe in the more luxurious accommodations of the vagina. Of the original and hopeful ten million who embarked on the noble path to fertilization, less than one thousand ever make it anywhere near you. Finally, one over-achiever successfully fuses to your membrane. You attempt to resist, but this is found to be difficult due to your squishy, spherical shape. Capitulation is inevitable.

The whole experience was scandalizing and mitosis was uncomfortable, but life as a forty-six chromosome homo sapien has begun. You were resilient and soon you have grown to an impressive diameter of one centimeter, you resemble a mulberry, and you boast millions of specialized cells after only five days.

Needless to say, the first trimester leaves you feeling unappreciated and sleep deprived. You are subjected to such derogatory terms as germ cell, primitive cell mass or yolk sack, and it’s no great wonder that with such low self esteem you have only about a 40% survival rate. But due to your tireless dedication to cellular division you weigh a hefty fourteen grams by only the twelfth developmental week. You weren’t fazed by the sudden development of distal appendages, and certainly were not impressed by your newly acquired opposable thumbs which seem superfluous in your sloshy world. Your days and nights pass without differentiation to the soothing white noise of life beyond the muscular uterus.

A more nurturing environment than that of the plush uterus could not be found. The doughy walls cradle the gentle curve of your back, and their slippery smooth surface flexes and undulates. If ever you were to fancy yourself hungry, simply open your mouth and take a big gulp of the lukewarm amniotic fluid. Bitter at first, this consistent well-rounded meal was truly made with your mother’s love, along with other digested parts of her meal. One could liken the placenta and its healthy nourishment to a melted sweet potato slushy. And only a warm yellow glow from the outside world is needed to scan one’s humble surroundings as the pink wrinkly walls rock you to sleep.

Unfortunately the peaceful days of gestation are all too soon ended and we are squeezed to within an inch of our survival, only to begin the second much less aesthetically pleasing part of our lives. Villainous signaling molecules, known as the oxytocin hormone shatter our wonderful cocoon existence. The walls begin to press in on you, making it hard to expand your chest and shoulders. One would most succinctly note the pressure on the head. So great is this pressure, one’s vanity, and dignity is ruined when their exodus is accompanied by a newly acquired cone-head. Finally a
strong wind of cool air surrounds your emerging head and relieves the incessant heat and pressure. The relief is only momentary for a cruel being surrounds your war-torn cone-head with his heartless latex wrapped hands and yanks the rest of you free. He grimaces and holds you vulnerable and exposed in midair like some kind of trophy. It's so bright, you begin to worry. It's cold, it's loud, and your head is shaped like a cone. Slap! That devil's minion latex-gloved hand connects firmly to your behind. How dare he. Your head throbs and your face involuntarily contorts in protest. Quite unarguably the most disturbing detail of it all is the gory slicing of your beloved umbilical cord, by the one person who supposedly values your life beyond his... your father. Without consent and without a second opinion he grabs the surgical scalpel and grins menacingly. You hold your breath, anticipating the horror of the slicing of your favorite tubular shaped extension. As you lay naked, indignant, and with a chip bag clothespin over your bloody belly button you wonder why we could not all keep our umbilical cords. We wear gloves on our hands, hats on our heads, and could just as easily wear umbies on our umbilical cords. Alas, the development of your trachea, and consequently the vocal cords, will not be complete for another three months and you are unable to protest.

But finally, when you are on your last straw, one minute from demanding re-entrance into the birth canal warm, soft linen surrounds you. You are deposited in two loving arms that curiously mold exactly to your exhausted body. She coo's into your ear and you melt with the smell of lavender comfort and an uncanny sense of familiarity. One by one your tensed muscles relax, the angry forehead wrinkles are smoothed. A sense of peace and belonging floods your senses. Some man sticks his face up next to yours and he tells you he's your dad just a little too loudly, but you ignore him. Because once again you can hear the steady settling rhythm of your mother's beating heart.

POISON

Indu Shanmugam

Venom was once injected,
At an unknown time
Rapidly saturating the soul.
Staining the blood black,
Bitter passions flame,
Dominated by hate.
If I ever nurse,
I will kill.