

Renee Norman

Saving the Baby

—a scene—

(A woman lies on the floor of the stage, dressed in a green hospital gown, and covered only by a thin sheet which doesn't quite cover her bare feet. A bedpan has been placed by her side, stage front. A green cloth backdrop is the only stage scenery in the background, suspended by a pole which runs the length and width of the stage, like the curtain which separates hospital beds in non-private rooms. The woman speaks her monologue from this position.)

Woman: Blood. Just a small, teardrop-shaped smear of blood. That was what I noticed first, and I thought, wait a minute. This isn't what's supposed to happen, this isn't Cinderella pushing dolls in carriages in my basement playroom on Sunday morning. They never told me about this, that's what was crystal clear in my mind.

I have been lying here now for a day and a half, waiting for the gynecologist, Godot, my arm green bruises from the IV the student nurse tried to stick in my vessels at least five times unsuccessfully. They won't let me eat or drink or get up, just in case I have to be rushed to surgery, it was explained, in case I begin hemorrhaging at any moment. And of course, I must lie still to try to save the baby. I know there's no baby in my body any longer. I saw the great globs of red tissue in the toilet and I told them, but around here, your intelligence and powers of observation are directly related to the function of your bodily parts, and my body parts are definitely screwing up right now. They were rather annoyed I had gotten up to go to the bathroom.

She's gone. All the dreams I allowed myself for nine weeks gone, too. How

stupid. I forgot about retribution. I'm sorry. Sorry about the time I said I didn't want children because you couldn't shut them in the basement like the dog. Sorry about the morning I phoned the doctor for the morning after pill, nervous anything might interfere with my blossoming career. Sorry that I waited and waited, expecting everything to fall into place. Read the thermometer, temperature right, time right, name the time, name the date, name the baby. Talking about gender, a room, furniture, daycare, part-time, happy, excited, anticipating...

BOOM!

I've been lying here for a day and a half waiting for the hospital gynecologist to come and examine me, so he can then scrape me out and I can go home. It's Sunday, and he's probably out with his children, I can't expect him to come quickly just because I want to get this over with. But I'm developing a definite dislike for the man. Shouldn't they examine me quickly if they really thought there was a chance to save the baby? She's not there anymore, I know. She's floating in the sewer system, flushed away and condemned to dissolving messy bit by bit among all the other guck. Good-bye seed, vesicle, embryo, fetus, baby. I'm sorry. So sorry. Baby daughter human being little soul. Did you hear the Beethoven I played for you? Did you know you were expected on my father's birthday? Did you know I wanted to take you everywhere, teach you everything?

I'm tired of waiting here in this room. The other women are kind. The two Gall Bladders passed me some kleenex. They know she's gone, too, despite what the nurses say. The Teenaged Mother had her baby, but she won't get out of bed. The nurses make her walk around. She doesn't want to see the baby and the Gall Bladders think it's strange that no one has visited her yet.

The emergency ward was a nightmare. Never miscarry on Hallowe'en Night. They were so busy, witches and mice and pumpkins coming in a steady stream of accidents and mishaps. The worst was the girl in the car accident. They couldn't get ahold of her parents (I guess) and she lay in the next cubicle screaming and screaming in pain, while I writhed and in agony, gave birth to my miscarriage, her screams shrieking in my consciousness as each new pain of abortive labour coursed through my body, rendering me too shocked to even call out.

I refused the Demoral, refusing to believe the obvious, the ominous, the opposite, waiting for someone to phone me with the news, like the parents of the girl who lay next to me screaming in pain. My pain, too, all of us, all the women, screaming in pain, some of us screaming for the others who simply lay there mute, letting each new spasm of pain circulate through a body no longer trusted, no longer strong.

Miscarriage. Now there's a word. Interesting that this one word contains the feminine miss. Of course. A woman's body failing to carry. Failing. Carrying. Aborting. Spontaneously aborting. Sending out. I didn't want to

send you out. I'm sorry. I felt your tiny lifelike flutters. I saw the fishlike pictures in the books as you developed. You felt real to me already, not a fish, but a little person. I'm so sorry.

I'm so surprised. No one warned me. No one told me my body might act like this. No one said it wasn't easy, wasn't smooth-happy-ending. My mother never talked about this, never once. Or my aunts. Or any of the women I know. I never knew anyone who lost a baby this way. I never heard a story about it once in the years I spent growing up to be a woman. Not once when all the women gathered up the plates and put the food away. Not once listening to my mother talking on the phone, using the odd Yiddish word to keep us off track, which only made us more alert and curious. Not once when the aunts came together over ritual, birth, death, sickness. Certainly not in Biology 12 Reproduction.

Very common. Why didn't anyone tell me? Warn me? Tell me about the pain, the loss, the dreams dissipating like the fetal tissue as it spewed from my traitorous body, with a life of its own, with a trail of bloody mass spilling all over the floor of my life.

(All the stage lights go out. In the blackout, a male voice speaks, disgusted.)

Male Voice: You've aborted the baby. I'm going to push down hard for a minute.

(The lights go on. The woman is lying the same way, but on a stretcher with wheels. The bedpan is gone, and so is the green curtain, replaced by green walls. The woman is visibly shaking from the cold, her teeth chattering audibly. The doctor walks up beside her, taking off latex gloves.)

Doctor: You know, they used to do D and C's without anaesthetic. I'll have you spick and span, clean as a whistle, in a jiffy. It only takes 20 minutes and then you're out of here in no time, no worse for wear. Just a minor procedure, really. Nothing to worry about. I'll see you in the operating room.

(The doctor exits. The woman lies there, silent, shaking. Nothing happens. She calls out.)

Woman: I'm cold. So cold. Hello? Is anyone there? Hello? Could you come and get me now? Hello? I'm freezing. Could I get a blanket or something? Hello? Hello?

(The lights go out.)