

Barren

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by Liz Ivdic

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I still check under the lid of the toilet to make sure my period blood didn't splash. "You will need Kotex. Clean up well. You don't want your dad to see the blood, or he'll get mad." Instructions from my mother 30 years ago when I told her I had started my period, the extent of guidance I'd receive on the matter. Now that I'm in early menopause, my period is as unwelcome, unpredictable, and, in a way, feared, as it was that first time, when I was just 12 years old. Yet, I still associate it with men, because it makes me disgusting, offensive, and perverse. I never corroborated if the demand to keep my period silent and invisible was my father's or actually my mother's - a type of mind-fuck action I'd come to recognize quicker as I evolved: her ability to make things up to ease the pain of life itself. I cry within hours of waking up each day. I cry at stop signs. I cry when I form certain words, from 'love' to 'ammonia' to 'fault' to 'change' to 'schedule.' I cry with no warning, and with no ability to cease. I'm far from my childhood home, but now, as a secretary at a fire department now, I nonetheless fear men seeing my insides. The difference between back then and now is hugely important. Announcing to a bunch of captains and managers and chiefs that I am menopausal is possible, and my choice. It may result in eggshell-walking, rumors, and a continued view that the single mom at the front desk is further delicate. Or, perhaps those are my fabrications, not unlike my mother's. "I'm in menopause, and I might cry a lot and it might make you uncomfortable or you might not like it." That's how I'd say it to any of the men whose eyes widen as mine moisten. "I got my period, and that means I bleed, and you might see blood." That's what I wish I could have said to my dad. Obviously, my fantasy conversation creates a metaphor for my entire childhood, seen now from this new perch. In an unknown number of years, I'll officially lose the chance to say that piece to anyone. But I suspect that this, and other losses that accompany menopause - including the obligation to check under the toilet lid - make way for an ultimate freedom.

Liz Lydic's work has appeared in McSweeney's, Typishly, Rougarou: A Journal of Arts and Literature, Little Old Lady Comedy, The Belladonna Comedy, Pine Cone Review, Ruminant Magazine, The Offing's Wit Tea, and is forthcoming in Farside Review. By day, Liz is an Admin for a fire department in the Los Angeles area, where she lives with her daughter. lizlydic.com

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