The Baroque Pearls of the South Pacific

Lindsey Drager
Lindsey Drager

The Baroque Pearls of the South Pacific

I brush my teeth too much.

My dentist says I am using this as an outlet for my aggression and that my gums can’t handle the abuse.

I tell her shelling out $1.99 for a new toothbrush every month is cheaper than therapy.

The last time I went with my mother to her psychiatrist was a day in July and I, as usual, dressed up. I accompany her to prove that I care but in reality I hate waiting in the room with all the other psychologically unbalanced, glancing over a four month old copy of *People* to watch the neurotic chick who cuts herself play with her hair while she talks about the war in Iraq with a recently divorced black man. I dress up to feel a little more humane, to prove to the patients there that people have value. My mother lets me borrow her antique pearl necklace, the same one I wear on my dates to the local theater.

In the summer my teeth involuntarily become whiter in contrast to my darkened skin. The mother of one of the boys I date asks me if I whiten and I tell her no, that my mouth is all natural. I do not tell her that her son’s tongue has slid across my pearly whites.

Teeth have been compared to pearls because of their color and texture, but all pearls are not the perfectly rounded ivory results of an oyster’s anatomic processes. The malnourished pearls, the ones that lack a sufficient substance called nacre, do not form in perfect spheres. These are called baroque pearls.

The pearls from the South Pacific are black, like a dead tooth grows black after time.

The black pearl in the human mouth is a traumatized tooth and is caused by a rupture in the blood vessels within the pulp of the oral bone. This is considered intrinsic discoloration because the distress occurs within the tooth; however, the damage can be seen through its translucent structure.

The intrinsic damage in my life can be seen through my translucent structure,
as well. I am my mother's daughter.

I have never had a traumatized tooth, but my dentist thinks the trauma in my life is unhealthy for my gums so I see a psychiatrist. The shrink says I'm fine, I'm typical and doesn't give me a prescription, so I smoke cigarettes every morning in lieu of popping Prozac.

As a result of sticky tar deposits, smoking stains teeth, turning them various shades of yellow and brown. Smoking also causes teeth to develop calculus, a form of plaque that can only be removed by a dentist's professional cleaning. The rate of tooth loss due to smoking is approximately 2.9 teeth every ten years. In the U.S. someone dies from oral cancer every hour.

In the U.S. 2.9 people commit suicide every hour. As I look around the waiting room at my mother's therapist's I wonder how each of the people sitting here right now will die. With a population like the one I am currently sitting with, the likelihood of suicide is significantly greater. I sigh to myself and slip my hand in my bag expecting to produce a half empty pack of Marlboro's. But I have forgotten that I quit, and there is no pack to be found.

The incessant tooth brushing began when I decided to try to stop smoking. My next door neighbor told me I was killing myself slowly, committing God's ultimate crime by ruining His gift to me; my body. I told him he should come with me to my mother's physiatrist and try not lighting up. He smirked and said that my problems could all be easily avoided by spending my Sundays at church and using the occasional stick of Wrigley's. Wouldn't that alternative be cheaper than throwing my money down the pisser on tobacco? he asked.

I can't chew gum. It feels slimy and thick on my tongue and it reminds me of a leech sliding between pearls. But I do acknowledge that I probably shouldn't be smoking at the ripe age of 19, that this is, in a sense, a form of suicide. I can handle the thought of becoming a statistic but I don't want to share a number with the members of society that compose my mother's waiting room, so I buy a tube of Colgate every week instead of a pack of Marlboros. Sometimes I even carry around a toothbrush in my bag so that I can retire to the restroom for a brush whenever I feel like lighting up.

When my new roommate asks why I brush so much I want to explain that I do it because a mouth is the source of a voice, the medium from which our thoughts transcend. I want to tell her that our mouths are the vehicles of communication and our teeth cradle our voices when they escape us like a frame holds a piece of art. I want to tell her that voice is the source of language and I respect language enough to keep the place where it comes from clean.

According to www.positive.org/justbeforegivingablowjob "Do not brush or floss for at least forty-five minutes before giving a blow job. "Do not brush for oral sex. Flossing and brushing may lower the exposure to viruses. If you wish to avoid mouthwash instead."

I date occasionally, but I've never been in what we collegiate types call flings, or long. A committed relationship (call love) is a rare find, like the pearls with men, however, are the baroque and not quite spherical.

Pearls are unique in that they are the only living thing, whereas most jewelry comes from within the earth. Pearls are formed in between the two shell halves, one reaction is to cover the debris with forms the oyster's shell. The formation of protecting itself from foreign sand—a beauty a mistake.

But I don't. I pull the brush out from the mouth and I brush my teeth because the kid will reel me in with his big arms and stare into my 390 someday. Then I flick her off an

My teeth will not always be white. As we get older, my dentist informs me. It won't change this, though teeth will affect. I, however, know that this natural course and I place enough confidence of whitening products. I understand covering is advantageous but these a transforms irritating sand into exposed cigarette's poison tempts the veins with pain that permeates a waiting room is under the cloak, as sex sometimes communication. I value those natural sand—and I want them to endure.

The necklace I wear on my dates an,
but my dentist thinks the trauma in
see a psychiatrist. The shrink says I'm
prescription, so I smoke cigarettes every

stains teeth, turning them various
causes teeth to develop calculus, a
by a dentist's professional cleaning.
is approximately 2.9 teeth every ten
is 1 in 20 cancer every hour.
look around the waiting
how each of the people sitting here
the one I am currently sitting with,
greater. I sigh to myself and slip my
half empty pack of Marlboro's. But I
decided to try to stop smoking.
 telling myself slowly, committing God's
my body. I told him he should come
try not lighting up. He smirked and
avoided by spending my Sundays at
Wrigley's. Wouldn't that alternative
on my tongue and it reminds me of
knowledge that I probably shouldn't
is, in a sense, a form of suicide. I can
but I don't want to share a number
lose my mother's waiting room, so I
of a pack of Marlboros. Sometimes
so that I can retire to the restroom
up.

brush so much I want to explain that I
voice, the medium from which our
our mouths are the vehicles of com-
stances when they escape us like a frame
voice is the source of language and
ace where it comes from clean.

According to www.positive.org/justsayyes/safesex, you aren't supposed to brush
before giving a blowjob. “Do not brush or floss your teeth right before you have
oral sex. Flossing and brushing may tear the lining of the mouth, increasing
the exposure to viruses. If you wish to freshen your breath before kissing, try
a mouthwash instead.”

I date occasionally, but I’ve never been in a real relationship. I participate only
in what we collegiate types call flings. They aren’t authentic and they don’t last
long. A committed relationship based on trust and loyalty, (what the poets
call love) is a rare find, like the perfectly formed ivory pearl. My encounters
with men, however, are the baroque pearls of the South Pacific. Discolored
and not quite spherical.

Pearls are unique in that they are the results of the biological processes of a
living thing, whereas most jewelry is fashioned out of metals or gems derived
from within the earth. Pearls are formed when foreign debris like sand slips
in between the two shell halves, or valves, of an oyster. The oyster's intrinsic
reaction is to cover the debris with layers of nacre, the same substance that
forms the oyster's shell. The formation of the pearl is in fact the oyster's way
of protecting itself from foreign substances. The pearl is the enemy, and its
beauty a mistake.

My teeth will not always be white in the summer when my skin gets tan. As
we get older, my dentist informs me, our teeth naturally darken. Brushing alone
won’t change this, though teeth whitening products have proven to have an
affect. I, however, know that this natural process is something that needs to run
its course and I place enough confidence in fate not to intercede with the use
of whitening products. I understand that there are circumstances in which this
covering is advantageous but these are only justified in cases of defense; the pearl
transforms irritating sand into expensive jewelry with layers of resistance; the
cigarette’s poison tempts the veins with addiction to conceal the overwhelming
pain that permeates a waiting room. But we should recognize and value what
is under the cloak, as sex sometimes veils love and speech sometimes masks
communication. I value those natural elements—love, pain, communication,
sand—and I want them to endure.

The necklace I wear on my dates and to my mother's psychiatrist broke one day.
I learned about the tragedy one afternoon when I was home visiting for the weekend. I had run out of toothpaste so I entered her bathroom and noticed an independent pearl lodged in the carpet against the corner that borders the bathtub. I assume she picked up the others, disposed of them without thought. But I like to think they are all boldly hiding in the crevices of her bathroom like eggs at Easter. I imagine myself dedicating one Sunday to finding all my mother’s pearls. I’d collect them in a translucent Dixie cup and place it on my bedside table to remind me that there are things beyond my control; that I can trust nature but sometimes it’s natural for things to be fucked up—like my mother’s mind, or stained teeth; like the Baroque pearls of the South Pacific.

David LeGault

A Reprise
(For the Exploding Bumblebee Again)

my mornings were not my own
i perspired through Their indecien
The icicle trails down my back
i am a man made for fire
i labor past the chemical shower
i have chalked this whole thing

i see without vision
i throb without heart
loud laughter breaks over my he
Lend us strength so we can sing
louder than the roaring engines

i am the lonely peninsula
nearly isolated in Lakes Greater
as rivers cut into valleys
and the sun casts longer shadow

And the world is an open wind,
with my foot sticking out into e
And the world is a tightly boun
carving into the flesh of my an

Have i ever been more than am
Have i ever been more than pis
Have i ever been more than the
Have i ever been more than cris

Lend us strength so we can sing
louder than the roaring engines

i am a mover