

Nathanael H. Jones

The Virgin

After two years of planning, studying, saving, two years of late nights spent with her fiancée reading the Bible, talking about changing the world and how faith would carry them through trials, after selling most of her things, buying plane tickets, packing her bags, she decided she couldn't go.

When she told him, he was understanding. And she understood when he decided to go without her.

The doctor told her that her fears had not been unfounded, that the swelling she noticed on her lower abdomen was due to an abnormal ovarian cyst, and that there would not have been the resources to treat it in rural Indonesia.

She wrote her fiancée. "How I hate myself for not being able to join you in doing God's work. I don't understand what I could have done to deserve this."

By the time she got his reply it had grown to the size of a pear. "How I wish I could be there with you through this trial. Be brave. God would not give you a burden that you couldn't bear."

By the time it was removed, it was the size of a grapefruit, and though she never saw it, the doctor told her it had grown teeth and hair.

She wrote again and told him what the doctor had said, that it was called a teratoma, that it wasn't uncommon that they grow hair, teeth, or even rudimentary organs. She told him not to worry, that she was already starting to feel much better. She didn't tell him about the dream she had about it.

The mail was slow and he arrived before his letter, unshaven, tan, and strong. She kissed him shyly in the airport. He told her about the people and the water and the food and the bugs and the bugs in the food, and what it really means to be a disciple.

He told her she was looking well, and she said thank you.

Later, she told him about the surgery and her recovery, and he apologized earnestly for not having been there. He looked her in the eyes. "And I'm sorry you weren't able to come with me."

She smiled. "Can you imagine me hiking through those hills and digging wells with a melon growing under my shirt?"

"Yeah," he smiled. "If you *had* come, you might have had a whole baby by the time we came back". And they laughed

But that night, alone, she curled into the darkness of her room and cried and cried, filling her bed sheets with her emptiness.