Mick was innocent, the opposite of my flirtatious character. We started dating in November 2013, and in January 2014 I found out I was pregnant. I had just moved with my two children from a previous relationship (ages eleven and five), and shortly thereafter Mick moved in with us. A whirlwind romance.

Looking back, I can pinpoint the night of conception. Alcohol molded us into one, where pregnancy never crossed my mind; only the cheap thrill of having fun did. Shocker.

Being pregnant again I was afraid our relationship would deteriorate, and I’d have another ex to coparent with. On the other hand, Mick’s patience with my kids already showed his potential to be a supportive father. Further, he pleaded with me to have her. We even picked out the name Olive.

To his detriment; however, I had an abortion that March.

Being too far along in my trimester to legally do it in Virginia Beach, we drove to Raleigh to have the procedure done. So, I had my first baby girl at twenty years old and murdered my second at thirty. A gut punch of reality.

In the operating room, the brightness elevated my mood. For a brief minute it resembled a normal gynecology appointment. Clean. Safe. Welcoming. The speakers played Led Zeppelin’s “Stairway to Heaven” and the doctor whistled along to it as he sucked out the fetus inside me. Then he started small talk about Navy jets because my paperwork showed a big military city address. This doctor tried to shoot the breeze with me! Here! I didn’t want to talk to him. I didn’t want to appear friendly at all. I dreamt a tirade of screaming out, “No, don’t do this! Stop! Get me out of here!” Instead, I lay there unable to speak. Only giving him miserable head nods to his asinine questions. Doubting my sanity and my intelligence.

A nurse held my hand through the whole ordeal. *How many hands did this* *nurse hold daily?* She helped me up and took me to the recovery room, draping a blanket around my shivering shoulders. “You’re not like the others.” she whispered in my ear. *What did that mean?* I looked around for context clues and there it was: Nobody was even slightly melancholy. These women were having animated conversations, playing on their phones, and filing their nails.

*You just killed your child! Have you any remorse? Why isn’t the* *whole universe grieving as if this were the first time something this serious has* *happened?!*

Loneliness in a crowded room.

I shifted my perspective to play devil’s advocate. To stop coasting on their energy to validate my own suffering. Perhaps they were raped or molested and didn’t want to bring the baby to term. Maybe the baby had health risks. It’s also feasible to say they just weren’t ready to raise an infant: another living human! Whatever the case, I didn’t know their situation and I shouldn’t have compared our grief (or lack thereof).

*What had I done? What* *did I allow them to do to my body? I don’t deserve anyone’s sympathy. I need to get out of here.*

The staff prevented me from leaving until I went to the restroom. It wasn’t enough that I was wearing an adult diaper saturated in blood. When I finally made my way to the potty I continued to cry. The epitome of my own worst enemy.

In the waiting room Mick stood up and hugged me. *Was it to hurt me and crush my fragile bones? It couldn’t be a comforting hug, right?* I stood there and waited for the time to tick away. Blinking away welling tears.

When we got to the car Mick beat on the steering wheel several times before starting it up. His rage needed releasing. Such a primal moment to see him go completely apeshit. The gravity of the situation set in. I murdered his child. Our child. Our Olive. I caused this pain. Me. We didn’t speak a word the whole four hours back home. Our racing thoughts were our own self-inflicted punishments.

Back at home, we met my family and friends for laser tag for my son’s sixth birthday party. I owed it to him to put on a happy face. I didn’t tell my family why we were late or why my mother had to take my kids to the party until weeks later. The hardest person to tell was my sister. She was pregnant with her second child at the time. Every now and then I find myself mothering vicariously to her second daughter; my second daughter that could have been.

The resentment with Mick and I continued to fester. Even through couples therapy and a grief counselor, none of the boxes we checked were helping. Thus, on the same month we started dating a year earlier, Mick moved out. We were done.

A year later I found a retreat for mothers who have had an abortion. I had been searching for something like this for a while but only found communities for stillborn births or miscarriages. My grief counselor firmly told me not to attend either of those because they were opposite griefs to mourn. Instead of being treated with compassion I’d be scorned.

The retreat proved to be brutal and healing. Us ten women found strength in numbers as we came up for air in our own lives. I felt comfortable unpacking my story with blubbering sobs because these women knew exactly where I was coming from. Looking at one another with identical emotional reflections.

On the last day, we each had a funeral for our child and read a self-written eulogy aloud. I’m indebted to every one of them for sharing their strength, support, and sympathy. The retreat proved to be essential to my recovery.

In the same breath: Olive, I will never forget you.