

A Blessing in Blood
by Nadira Jamerson

The reason to move forward was round and warm: *I would love them more than anything else.*

The reasons to choose another direction filled up an entire page of my notebook as I wrote: *He's cheating. My suicidal ideation. Who will teach them to be happy? I could never allow them around my father. My mom would freak. I have no real friends. I have no money. I have to be out of this place next month. Where will I go next? I still don't know. I'm only twenty-two. I'm not ready.*

My mother, sister, and godmother all had abortions. An estimated 600,000 people in the U.S. have abortions every year. But I would not know this until months later. On the day of having mine, I felt totally alone, singular in my experience, and quite secretive. I tried to keep it a secret even from myself. That morning, I got up, got dressed, ate breakfast, and pretended not to feel the pounding in my chest as I called my Uber to Planned Parenthood. Really, I called it to the gas station one block away from Planned Parenthood because I did not want my driver to judge me, and because I had this vivid, stressful daydream about arriving at the clinic and finding an angry mob waiting outside holding signs of giant babies that said “Defend life!” To my grateful surprise, the street was empty, almost eerily so, as I walked up and through the glass double doors.

“Do you want an ultrasound?”

“No, thank you.”

“Take this one now. It shouldn't hurt. Take this one in 24 hours. You may experience cramping, fatigue, and nausea. If you pass any blood clots bigger than a golf ball, call 911.”

The next morning, I took the second pill and immediately vomited the entire contents of my stomach into a waste basket beside my bed. In less than 30 minutes, I was passing out and waking up from the pain. It was worse than any period I'd ever had, like my uterus was being wound tightly and released over and over again. The extra strength Tylenol they'd given me barely helped. Makeshift hot compresses of wet, microwaved towels worked a little, but only for a few minutes before they ran cold and started dripping water. I was down for the whole day and late into the night. I got up only to check my pad and make sure there were no larger-than-a-golf-ball clots. When the worst of it was over, I felt like I had made it through some terrible sickness or brutal battle between me and my own body. I went outside into the cool air and sparked a ceremonial blunt.

I had to go back to work the next day because I could not afford to miss again. I was still bleeding. I would bleed for three weeks. Just one day, after so many spent considering baby or no baby — motherhood or the freedom to explore myself through my twenties — and then I had to

go back to my normal life. It made me feel unsettled, like I no longer knew how to be who I was or in this place I had been in. I gave my two weeks' notice at my job and used my last paycheck to buy a four-night stay at an Airbnb and a one-way plane ticket to Atlanta.

This is my experience, but this is not the experience of every person who has an abortion. For some, it is less painful both physically and emotionally. For some, it is even harder than it was for me. I hold space for all of these experiences as I write mine.

It's a strange thing to lose something you only had in essence. Something you're not even sure you wanted. The grief is strong and lingering as with any passing, except, on top, sits a calloused layer of wondering if you deserve to feel the pain at all. Is this not what I chose?

At first, I barely had time to process it, too busy trying to find employment and a place to live. Then, suddenly, I got a job as a magazine editor, making enough to leave my position as a restaurant hostess and get an apartment downtown. I moved in, and all of the sadness, stress, and what-ifs that had been kept at bay for the past two months moved in with me and started to overcrowd the place. *What had I done? Was it really the right choice? What would they have been like? Thick hair I'd hate to comb because both me and their daddy's got that. Brown eyes. Would they have enjoyed to write like me or preferred making music like him, or chosen something else completely? I'll never know.*

I sat wallowing in the murky waters of missed possibilities for months. I cried and smoked every day, all day, hating myself, calling myself a murderer, an unfit mother, and any other insult I could think of.

Things started to change, though, on June 24, 2022.

Thousands of protestors took to the streets to call for reproductive justice as news of the Supreme Court overturning *Roe v. Wade* spread. I sat astounded as I scrolled through Twitter and watched 50 years of progress be stripped away in a moment. My paper reported the impact this was likely to have on Black women like me, who were already disproportionately impacted by medical racism and maternal mortality. I was disgusted and outraged by the ability of a few robed politicians to decide the future of millions of people whose lives and circumstances they could never, and did not wish to, understand. It was this outrage and anger that reminded me of the sanctity of my choice and having one to make at all. I could not be a murderer and an unfit mother for having an abortion without labeling my fellow birthing folks who had made a similar choice the same way. They deserved kindness, understanding, compassion, and the ability to make decisions about their own bodies, lives, and futures without the threat of jail or violence — and I deserved the same thing.

A few weeks later, I received an unexpected package from my mom in the mail. It was a womb-healing tea. She'd guessed about the abortion after Planned Parenthood sent a vague notice about calling in for a checkup for a "procedure" I'd had in Washington, D.C. I felt silly for ever

thinking I could not share something like this with her, a woman who had always showered me with love when I needed it most. She came down shortly after for an impromptu visit, and I cried as I shared my pain with her. She cried as she felt mine and shared the story of the abortion she'd had years before my older sister was born. She told me I could always love them, but that did not mean I had to live perpetually in grief.

“Write it all down,” my mom said. “The pain, the questions, the anger, and regret. Get a match, light it up, and hold the flame to the paper. Open a door or a window. Give it all to the wind. Release, baby. Release.”

I finally forgave myself and found that I had little to be forgiven for. I recognized that the smoking, negative thoughts I allowed to roam free, and old, harmful relationships I had been holding onto out of fear of being alone were a form of self-punishment. I had survived something difficult and life-changing. I should've been rewarding myself for my courage and efforts — so that's what I started doing. I quit smoking. I stopped talking to my ex. I started journaling more, meditating every morning, and arguing back at the voices in my head that said I'd never be good enough.

Yes, I will. Yes, I am.