

We Named Her Sorrow:  
An Exploration of the Experience of Abortion from a Mother's Perspective

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## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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Directed by Dr. Timothy Mayers

Abortion is one of the most contentious issues of our day and has been for decades with seemingly no change insight. The external and public arguments in support and opposition are wholly internalized among women. Through personal composition, the feelings which women experience are revealed and explained through an Althusserian and psychoanalytic lens. Not only does the exposition have implications for women who have had abortions, but for all mothers and their maternal identities.

Signature of Investigator: Chelsea Borrer-Mastandrea

**(NOTE TO STUDENT:** Three copies of this approval page must bear **original** signature prior to submission to Graduate Studies and Adult Learning)

## DEDICATIONS

To my daughter, Brona Frances,

I think of you every day. You are forever with me.

Love,

Mama

To the young girl who was beside me during one of the hardest times of our lives, I hope you have found peace and may the rest of your life bring happiness.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Dr. Sarah D'Stair, without whom I would have never shared my experience.

Vincent Mastandrea, thank you for believing in me and for being my support not only in completing this, but in life.

Ariyana Hernandez, my bestie, you will never know what it meant to us that you were there on the hardest day of our lives. We love you the most.

Kristy Daniel, my friend and fellow academic. Thank you for the memes, the companionship, and simply being there. It helped knowing someone else who going through the rigorous (see what I did there) task of completing a thesis.

## PREFACE

Throughout this thesis, the mentions of mothers are referring to heterosexual, cis-females. This is not a slight to homosexual females or trans-females, but because the entirety of the story intermingled into the analysis is mine – a hetero, cis-female. It is my hope that this will open doors to see those seeking and having abortions as individuals, as humans, not as numbers. The use of ‘we’, ‘they’ or ‘I’ is to avoid any statements which ring false or disingenuous from my own voice, not as to say that all who experience abortion experience it exactly as I had.

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“Good-by – because I love you.” (Chopin 156)

*On a summer afternoon, my husband put on the film “Rolling Thunder Revue: A Bob Dylan Story” that I’d been longing to see. After finally getting our two-year-old down for a nap, I laid on our bed and sunk into the delirium of the music almost able to taste the cocaine fueling the tour. Dylan’s face looked as though it was covered in the powder with the garish white paint he had adorned himself with. A few weeks earlier, we had decided that we would expand our family – give our son a constant companion and friend, and fulfill a longing within me to have another child and feel creation..*

*The view out the window was dreary and gray as a hard rain was a-falling against the windowpane. And as Bob Dylan asked questions of my blue-eyed son (sleeping peacefully in the room next door), my husband’s hands found their familiar places on my body. A surreal flash of vaudevillian musical theatre embraced my flesh simultaneously as our bodies entangled and I found shelter in his arms to create, to succumb, to multiply. If we had known then the mountain we’d stumble on in a few short months, would we have continued? Would we have waited longer to for our family’s new world to begin?*

There have been an infinite number of times I have commenced to write. And an infinite number of times I have felt defeated and broken - each time, overwhelming nausea and dissonance of my current self and the self as a subject of my own writing and academia has overcome any fleeting ambitions held upon starting.

Amid working towards completing this thesis, there was an unprecedented leak that the Supreme Court was set to overturn Roe v. Wade.

On June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022, they did.

Sitting in my living room, I wept.

For my daughter.

For myself.

And for the millions of women whose impossible choice became even more unknowingly difficult. My intention has been to unravel why women have such visceral feelings about abortion and how society continually imprints pressure and expectation upon women's pregnant bodies. As I attempted to unravel these feelings and the structures that influence them, I found that one genre of writing was insufficient. Analysis and exposition could not convey the true emotional struggle. Creative composition could not convey the complexity and intersectionality of societal structures with enough finality. Because of the insufficiency of one genre of writing, the modalities of this thesis oscillate from creative composition (in the form of personal narrative and a play) to analysis and exposition with the separations occasionally becoming blurred due to the intersectionality of the subject.

Stories like mine have come to the surface in droves. They are a part of our society. The importance of this increased exponentially on that fateful June day – bringing stories which women would begin to openly share for the first time to the forefront of daily conversation. Their feelings are valid. Their feelings are real. Sitting in my living room, the last statement from the dissenting opinion made by Justices Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan, and Ketanji Jackson Brown was read aloud on the news on my television. It seemed to be speaking to me. To her. “With



sorrow<sup>1</sup>—for this Court, but more, for the many millions of American women who have today lost a fundamental constitutional protection—we dissent” (United States Supreme Court. *Dobbs*).

*The days were as long as they were hot, and I could feel the heat rising to boiling inside of me. We were going to have a baby. Something within was screaming to be heard, to be announced, to be declared.*

*“Mama, I want go home” whined Declan from his car seat.*

*In the mirror, his fat little face twisted and grimaced at me. He’d spent the past few days in the most primal of ways – naked and in the woods. The feeling of a diaper around his waist gripped uncomfortably at his dimpled little butt.*

*“Only a little bit longer, bubby. Mama has to run into the store for something” I consoled him. One little box, with one little stick, to show two little pink lines. Do the manufacturers do it intentionally? Two lines? One for mama and one for the growing little creature inside? One line means only mama.*

*There would be two lines.*

*I could feel it.*

*I knew.*

*It had only been about 4 weeks since my husband and I had been tangled up in our blue bed sheets, but I knew.*

*Even though I was so sure of myself, there is an elation beyond compare when two little pink lines appear. One for mama. One for baby.*

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<sup>1</sup> The title of this thesis “We Named Her Sorrow” is a reference to my daughter’s name. As she was cremated, we received a death certificate for her, and therefore chose a name for her. My children all have Irish names. When we chose to terminate, we chose the name Brona, which means sorrow. It was always a name I found hauntingly beautiful, but somewhat morbid to name a child. It seemed wholly appropriate for her.

*In the sticky July air, my shoulder pressed against the door jamb of our front door. The brick of the house radiating the heat of the sun. Declan chased bubbles around the yard while my husband, Vinny, unpacked his Jeep from our camping trip – the canopy standing at half height to dry the humidity off of it, chairs folded propped against the porch, tents set aside to be refolded.*

*As my husband walked past me to take the cooler with the remaining food inside, I said “We’re having another baby.”*

In 1973 the United States Supreme Court held in the ruling of *Roe v. Wade* that the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution protected a woman’s privacy in deciding with her physician to terminate a pregnancy and that legal action could not be made against her or the physician. Further, *Roe v. Wade* held that a state could not impose legislation to limit a woman’s ability to terminate within the first trimester of pregnancy, though legislation may be enacted after the first trimester according to each individual State (United States Supreme Court. *Roe*).

*The water running out of the sink was hot as our rising emotions.*

*“There is nothing that would ever make me kill my own child. You have sex, you know the consequences. You could get pregnant. It’s that simple, whether you’re using protection or not,” I told him with the utmost certainty.*

*“But it’s not always that simple sometimes, Chels. It’s not always black and white,” my husband said to me, his eyes never leaving the cerulean plate he was washing.*

• • •

*“Bubby, you need to get in the car, Daddy is taking you to Pop pop’s for a little bit”, I told my toddler as he waddled his way to the car. In less than 6 months, we would be getting two children into the car everywhere we went.*

*“Vin, I’ll meet you at the doctor’s office at 8:30. Love you.”*

• • •

*We didn’t pay much attention to our new baby... we had seen it and all the measurements were monotonous. I wish we had looked at our baby more, paid more attention to it while we could see it that morning. It was the last happy moment of that pregnancy, which up until that time had been going smoothly.*

*When the technician finished, I wiped the cool jelly from my belly. Days of monumental consequence should be more punctuated – the universe shouldn’t allow them to be mundane. To be normal.*

• • •

*I will never forget what it was like to be told that something was wrong with my baby.*

*Declan was in the back of the car, and we had just picked up muffins donated to my schools bookfair. The smell of orange and cranberry was intoxicating, and as I passed one to the backseat, twisting my shoulder around to hand it off into tiny, hungry hands, my phone began to ring. As I answered, I rolled up the window while a jackhammer pelted away at the asphalt in the street. On the other end of the phone, my doctors normally aloof voice was strained. There was a lesion at the bottom of my baby’s spine and there were signs of a club foot. My mind raced back to my undergraduate studies to a course called “Fetal Development” – Spina Bifida<sup>2</sup>. My doctor*

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<sup>2</sup> Spina bifida is a birth defect which develops within the first 28 days after conception. It affects the way in which the spinal column forms, and leaves the spinal cord and nerves exposed in varying degrees. The most severe form is called myelomeningocele, when the spinal cord and

*was describing spina bifida. Not only did the baby have the tell-tale signs of spina bifida, but it appeared part of the brain was missing entirely.*

*My hands instinctively knew where to steer. I remember reaching the outskirts of the city having already hung up and slamming on my brakes at a red light.*

*“Ah! Mama, why you do that?”*

*The air seemed to have completely vacated the car. My chest was throbbing with pain as I swallowed the nausea swelling within me, as the hot fear and disappointment streamed down my cheeks.*

Pregnancy is struggle of identity for a woman. She must reaffirm herself – reconcile who she once was as an individual, who she will be in relation to her child, and who she is as an individual with the existence of the child. When a mother chooses to abort, she is choosing herself over her child, regardless of the reason, and therefore challenges the notion of maternal love within Western culture – that of a woman who is a fantasy mother and all giving to the point of detriment to herself (Baraitser 93). For the mother herself, abortion creates three internal struggles of identity deeply rooted in her consciousness.

The first struggle of identity is that of what a mother ought to be – unconditionally loving, protecting, and self-sacrificing for her child. Psychoanalytically, the love of a mother is her desire for one of three things: the phallus according to Lacan, her own mother according to Kristeva, or any object which attempts to break the dyad<sup>3</sup> of mother and baby according to Benjamin (96). Termination on the surface is the antithesis of unconditional love, protection, and

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nerves are pushed through the bones of the spine, out of the fetuses back, and forms a sac or lesion. The lesion allows the nerves to be exposed to the amniotic fluid, which causes neurologic damage. (Adzick)

<sup>3</sup> Donald Winnicott’s controversial assertion that the mother and baby do not exist individually but form a relational and inseparable dyad (Baraitser 125).

self-sacrifice – it is denial of life, denial of protection from harm, and it is sacrifice of the child for the sake of the mother. Especially in circumstances of fetal anomaly, the mother must struggle with the notions of whether she is, loving her child conditionally due to its anomaly – is she saying she would only love a ‘normal, healthy child’ if she terminates? She struggles with the notion of protection, as she is the one making the choice to cause harm and truly the ultimate harm in denying the child life. She struggles with the notion of sacrificing her child for herself, for the family she may already have, in order to maintain some sort of quality of life. The mother must come to some sort of reconciliation within herself whether there is more love in the act of terminating so as the child does not suffer in life, and that she is in some way saving the child from a life of difficulty and strife rather than harming it. She must reconcile that in her decision, she is still committing an act of self-sacrifice, as she will never be able to return to the person she once was before termination. She is committing an act of love which can only be truly understood experientially.

The second struggle of identity is that of how the woman identifies herself as a mother. Though society has indoctrinated woman as objects of reproduction and care giving, some women inherently reject the notion that their bodies are solely for the propagation of humankind and not for their own intentions. This identity could even be a mother already with the knowledge that termination may go against how she has identified herself as a mother to the children she already has. The struggle is further complicated by the mother she has been in the past to the child(ren) who have already been born versus the mother she will become with another child versus the mother she will become post abortion. She may have internalized the ideals of motherhood, but within the space of the circumstances which have brought her to the decision of abortion those ideals may not align with the third internal struggle. With the

circumstances of fetal anomaly, a mother may know that she could not be the same mother she has been to the child she already has, nor will she be able to be the same caliber of mother she has been to the child with the anomaly that she has been to her previous children. If the mother has not had any previous children, she may have the notion that she could not be the mother she has internalized and fantasized she would be because of the circumstances. She has no awareness that such internalized ideals are rarely met in actuality.

The final internal struggle a woman faces when she considers abortion is that of the woman whom the mother longs to be for herself. Mothers are autonomous with their own identity separate from their children. Regardless of the amount of regret (whether it is vast or nonexistent), abortion is a transformative act for the consciousness of the woman in the same way that giving birth is transformative act, beginning at the first consideration of the act. There is an element of the unknown – the idea that you can't know what you don't know until the experience has happened. In my experience, my husband realized the final struggle before I had amid my grief. There was a recognition that something deep within consciousness would be irrevocably altered by such a seemingly unnatural act to the mother that I thought of myself and with the ideals I had internalized as not only a mother, but a person.

*At 19 weeks and 3 days, we got to see our baby again. This time, I couldn't look at it enough. If I looked, maybe everything would be fine – there would have been a mistake in reading the initial sonogram, and my baby would be perfectly healthy.*

*With knowing hands, the doctor moved the cold transducer over my stomach. Eternity seemed to pass as I looked at the fuzzy black and white little creature fidgeting around inside of*

*me. There was a lesion. A large lesion at the base of the spine. It was causing hydrocephalus, a Chiari II malformation, and ventriculomegaly<sup>4</sup>. The left foot was clubbed.*

*My baby wasn't perfectly healthy. "I saw a newborn baby with wolves all around"*  
*(Dylan).*

*I could feel the nausea boiling over inside of me as the doctor explained what we were seeing. I ran to the bathroom. Never had I been driven to sickness. My body was physically rejecting that there was something wrong with my baby – it thought that there was something physically poisonous to me that had to be rid of my body at once.*

*When my faculties were regained, the doctor informed us that we had a few options. 1. Do nothing and wait for the baby to be born, at which point it would need to undergo immediate surgery to close the lesion and determine the severity of the brain damage caused by the lesion, 2. Undergo fetal surgery to correct the lesion in utero, which would allow the fluid in the brain to regulate more normally, with the possibility of surgery again directly after birth, or 3. terminate the pregnancy.*

*"The availability and legal restrictions on termination of pregnancy were discussed. The patient is not interested in seeking further information on TOP. I discussed a referral to CHOP Fetal Diagnostic Center to which the patient agreed"* (Chelsea).

*My husband's voice resonated deep within me as he choked on his words "I would never ask you to do this. Because I'm afraid of what it would do to you."*

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<sup>4</sup> Hydrocephalus is when cerebral spinal fluid (CFS) flows into the brain but doesn't flow out at an even rate, cause swelling and displacement of regular brain development. A Chiari II malformation is when part of the hindbrain is pulled into the spinal column – this is caused by a sort of vacuum effect of the lesion at the base of the spine. Ventriculomegaly is when the ventricles of the brain (which are normally filled with CFS) become larger than within normal parameters (The Children's).

“Receiving a prenatal diagnosis is often experienced as unexpected and shocking, regardless of the pregnancy gestation, length of time involved and perceived severity of the anomaly. Parents frequently experience acute grief responses and strong emotions of guilt, anger, and loss” (Hodgson 150). To say that receiving the news was shocking is perhaps not accurate, or it is overly accurate so that the shock is numbing and breaks the boundaries of consciousness to the point that it causes nausea or physical pain or some other malady. In the minds struggle to cope with the emotional pain, it creates a physical reaction. Such a visceral reaction as vomiting is an extreme of the human psyche expressing itself in an expressible way inexpressible by language. Sadness, shock, numbness quite simply falls short of language as traditionally experienced.

As has been mentioned, before my own abortion, I was pro-life, or the cliched misnomer for anti-abortion. The initial clump of cells which clings to the mother’s body is a child masquerading as a parasite as it cannot live outside of the mother’s body until it has reached the term of viability which is generally accepted as being 24 weeks of gestation. I still believe this to be true, however, my valuation has changed and changed through the experience of both pregnancy with a fetal anomaly and subsequent abortion. “Pro-life asks us to look at a pregnant woman and see...the reality of the child she is carrying...It asks us to not let the fact that we cannot see it or touch it, or that it is still very small, distract us from seeing and acknowledging his or her full reality” (Schwartz 47). However, the child is merely an idea or a projection of what it may become rather than what it is. It is, as Scarry frames imagination as a form of self-extension without sentience (Scarry 162). The child no more exists outside of a mother’s body than a character in a book exists outside of the bound pages. Though we may feel emotions as we read, D.H. Lawrence for example, feeling attractions to Oliver Mellors, perhaps longing to be his



lover as Lady Chatterley is, he is no more than a collection of words and a figment of Lawrence's mind. Such is the same with the child – though it exists without a doubt, it is, more a figment of the mind than a child (most especially in the early stages of development).

The Pro-life stance asks us to think of the child and the life it could have and idealistically, we imagine a good and pleasant life. Perhaps the growing life could be a president, or a Nobel Prize winner. The ideal isn't that the child should be born and rushed immediately into brain surgery, to have multiple brain and spinal surgeries to follow. The ideal isn't that the child should never be able to walk. The ideal isn't that the child would not be able to communicate well, if at all. The ideal isn't that the child (which was desired and created with love) would destroy the family and divide the parents among the children. But that was our reality. That is the reality of many parents who find themselves considering termination because of a fetal anomaly and what the pro-life stance asks to turn a blind eye to.

*Clinical with the faint smell of bleach and well-trodden carpet, Vinny and I sat in the waiting room of the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia eating our lunch after a three-hour ultrasound. The hours seemed to have stretched beyond recognition as we'd been there since before sunrise.*

*"I hope it's a boy," I said to my husband in a distant voice, "A boy would have an easier time of having a disability than a girl. Girls have it harder to begin with."*

*As we finished, our names were called for the surgical consultation and evaluation of findings.*

"If disability is conceptualized as a terrible unending tragedy, then any future that includes disability can only be a future to avoid" (Kafer 2) and it was this conception (misconception?) which made me hope that my child was a boy rather than a girl. Ableist? Yes.

Sexist? Yes. But fully aware of the ableist and sexist society in which my child would have been born into. To be disabled is to be inherently other and therefore inherently misunderstood and at odds with the ideology of what it is to be normal. Much of abortion discourse, and predominantly pro-life discourse, focuses on the life of the child while disregarding the quality of life of the child, and further the quality of life of the mother and family the child is born into. In Kafer's work, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, she talks of the internal struggle she faces as a disabled person, stating "I am not interested in becoming more disabled than I already am. Nor am I opposed to prenatal care...aimed at preventing illness and impairment" (4). When considering the imagined future of a child who will be born with a disability, it isn't necessarily the medical model which causes distress, but the relational model – it's not the wheelchair the child will have to use, but the stares from people as the child is wheeled down the street; it's not the lowered intelligence, but the jokes of the other children at school; it's not the surgeries to remedy the bodily malformations, but the hours spent away from the family home that one, if not both parents must spend. In a mother's decision on abortion, especially in when the circumstances surrounding the decision are based on a fetal anomaly, she must consider all these things, as well as herself, as previously discussed.

The mother I had been and the mother I am, could not selfishly and simply give life. Any life that my body would create and bring to fruition must be a decent quality - such is an ideal internalized in my maternal consciousness, that I could not bear a child and ask of it to struggle, ask of it to be inherently other. Nor could I ask my first-born child to forget the mother he had grown accustomed to in his life – to mourn her, as there was no way I would be able to continue to be that mother. There is always a transition in maternal identity with the addition of children to a family, but the addition of a severely disabled child (in my case) would have completely

altered my maternal identity to an entirely new identity. While being a mother inherently exhausting and self-sacrificing, I could not ask my son to be equally self-sacrificing for the sake of his sister. And I could not sacrifice the mother I had been to him to become an entirely different mother to his sister – perhaps only a mother to his sister as she would have needed extensive care and attention. I could never allow that mother to exist.

Being pro-life is easy when abortion is framed as a murder rather than healthcare. The difficulty in a pro-life stance arrives when abortion is framed as healthcare for both the mother and the child – to save the mother from life-threatening circumstances; to save the child from a life of misery - physical difficulties, mental difficulties, societal judgements; to save the family from economic hardship, mental strain, separate societal judgement. Pregnancy, in its entirety, affects every significant aspect of a woman's life (and the lives of the members of her family) from physical, emotional, social, and economic (Schwarz 17). Because of the extreme effects of having a child, healthy or otherwise, it is vital women remain completely autonomous over the decision to give birth. The maternal identity I had internalized was pro-quality-life, not pro-life for the sake of a living body. And not only the quality of life of my daughter, but the continued quality of life of myself, my husband, and our son.

*The lesion on the baby's back was very large. So large that it was allowing an extreme amount of fluid to enter the brain, causing different areas of the brain to develop in the incorrect places. It was irreversible and severe. The doctor didn't even suggest that we follow through with the prenatal surgery.*

*The hope that I had been holding onto had evaporated entirely.*

*"What is it?" I asked, barely able to manage three small syllables, and somewhere in the depths of my soul, I knew the answer.*

*“A girl”, the doctor answer. It was over. The daughter I had never wanted thinking that I couldn’t be a decent mother to a daughter became the daughter I would never have. I sobbed for the child I would never hold – the daughter whose hair I would never braid, who I would never take prom dress shopping, who I would never see become a mother herself. I sobbed for her. And I sobbed for myself, because the woman I was would never return. There would never be a day I would not be racked with grief over my daughter.*

*• • •*

*Unfortunately, because her diagnosis came near the end of the second trimester, we only had a short amount of time to make a decision, which we ultimately decided would be termination. Perhaps had there been more time, we would have sought a second opinion, but there wasn’t. Though the minutes seemed to crawl, the days were speeding past.*

*The day following our consultation with CHOP, I called them from home asking about their termination procedures. I asked how we would be able to bring our daughter home afterwards.*

*“Oh, you won’t be able to bring it home. It’s medical waste”, said the callous voice on the other end of the phone.*

*My child was not medical waste.*

*And from that conversation, I was sent to search elsewhere – finally finding a facility in New Jersey which would allow us to have her transported to the facility of our choosing so she could be either cremated or buried.*

My maternal identity could not allow my child to be discarded. In the same way, I could not allow her to struggle in life, I could not allow her to not be honored and remembered. She existed to me regardless of the choice I made.

*The air was crisp. It was hard to breathe, but was it the cold November air or the lump in my throat?*

*As we parked the car, a man approached. He wore a reflective yellow jacket and spoke softly, gently. I held my husband's hand.*

*There was a woman standing on the sidewalk with signs around here. I didn't read what they said – in fact I avoided looking at her at all. The man who had walked to our car stood between us and her, though she was about 50 yards away.*

*"Good morning. How are you?" she called out.*

*I was awful. It was the worst fucking day of my life.*

*"I can help you", she yelled as we entered the building.*

*It was infuriating. Maybe she could help me, but could she help my daughter?*

Would they be able to shield her from a life of not only oppression from a patriarchal society, but oppression from being physically and mentally handicapped? No. They would not be able to. No one would be able to. And what sort of life would she have if they could save her physical being?

The protestors are not entirely at fault for their actions. They feel the same societal oppression that I do. The protestors are mere members of the labor class perpetuating the ideologies of the Ideological State Apparatus<sup>5</sup> known colloquially as the church. Through the church, the patriarchy is maintained by way of doctrine. In saying they could 'save me', the protestors were saying they could return me to what Althusser calls "the 'rules' of good

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<sup>5</sup> Ideological State Apparatuses are private institutions such as churches, schools, families, unions, political parties, radio, television, literature, art, and sports, which represent and enforce the relationships between imaginary and real conditions of existence. The role of ISA's is to perpetuate the hegemony socially and not through repressive and violent means.

behavior” (Althusser 1287), fulfilling the expected societal feminine role (that of the all-sacrificing mother and wife) and perpetuate the labor force through my child. Religion is oppression in which the proletariat is allowed to feel as though it is expressing itself in often contradicting ways while conforming to the rules of the superstructure – in this case the rules of the church. The inherent issue with ideology is that it is a dream, it is not tangible (1299), and when ideology is enacted, it is challenged by reality and existence.

If a woman has been raised with any sort of religious teachings, she will have internalized the teachings of the church, and would therefore be reflected in her maternal identity. This was part of my struggle – being raised as a Southern Baptist, and later in the Catholic Church, to ultimately convert to Catholicism in college, I had a high regard for the sanctity of life. When we learned of Brona’s anomaly, I struggled with my deep-seeded belief that her life deserved to be revered and allowed to come to fruition and that she was a blessing to have even been created set all while knowing that in that creation, my body had failed hers and she was devastatingly imperfect. The mother I ought to be – a reflection of the Mary, Sarah, Rebekah, and/or Elisabeth according to Biblical canon – would be all the aforementioned things (unconditionally loving, protecting, and self-sacrificing) and certainly not a murderer of her own children. Because of my religious beliefs and understanding, the mother I ought to be was in agreement with the mother I saw myself as and wanted to be, which furthered the internal maternal struggle. In a society that follows largely Christian tradition, women have been indoctrinated to follow the marginalized female roles as outlined within the Bible allowing for the perpetuation of women to be subjugated as the creators of the labor force. To do any differently is an affront to the patriarchy. It is an affront to capitalism. Children, their raising and education, is indispensable, and must continue reproduction of skills, established order, and ideology (1287). If all women were to

abandon motherhood, they are rejecting the dominance of the ruling class and rejecting their traditional roles of society, they are crimping the labor force. Such is why abortion has been so stigmatized – it goes against how women are told by the patriarchy that they should feel about pregnancy and motherhood. For a woman to not want a child is to discontinue the perpetuation of the labor force.

Abortion should be seen as an act of free will and therefore, even if it is a sin within the church should be forgiven, but because it forces the woman to leave her assigned role, it is viewed as a grave sin. By framing abortion as a sin in the eyes of the church, one of two legs of the superstructure, the church calls upon the other leg, that of the state (or the law) to legislate abortion accordingly. Religion in the United States is intertwined into long held national values and even our laws – especially abortion laws, hence the over one thousand state laws enacted since the ruling of *Roe v. Wade* such as “prohibition on the use of state funds to pay for most abortions, state-mandated preabortion counseling, and 24 hour waiting periods or more between receiving counseling and obtaining an abortion” (Perreira 1039) and the ‘trigger-laws’ which went into effect in thirteen states with recent overturning of *Roe v. Wade* and the ruling of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*.

The societal framework leaves mothers to have an internalized guilt, of which they may be wholly unaware until it is challenged. Ideologies may even be in conflict subconsciously until they are challenged, depending on the ISA’s at work within an individual’s life. Feelings of guilt stem from not only the act of killing my daughter and denying her a chance at life, but also from the feeling of failure. Failure as a mother. Such a feeling reflects an internalized ideology perpetuated by a patriarchal society. These feelings are a manifestation of the internal maternal identity struggle. The protestor internalized her pro-life stance through the church to perpetuate

the societal norms and means of reproduction. I had internalized similar ideology as the protestor until I was forced to challenge it because of Brona's fetal anomaly.

To further complicate matters, at the time of my pregnancy with Brona, I worked for a Catholic school. My employment hinged on my adherence to living in accordance with Catholic teachings and values, which includes that abortion is of the utmost moral evil<sup>6</sup>. As an employee of a Catholic school, my personal feelings about my child's life didn't matter. What mattered was the teaching of the Church. What mattered was that regardless of my daughter's anomaly and the diminished quality of life she faced, her life was sacred and contained an immortal soul, supported by as oft-mentioned verse from Jeremiah "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you"(Respect). Working for the Catholic Church, I was a functioning part of two ISA's simultaneously – that of the Church and that of a school. Schools, as a whole, function as ISA's to reinforce and assert societal norms. They exist to teach children to "follow rules of morality (even more so in a school run by a religious order), civic and professional conscience, labor and ultimately the rules of the order established by class domination" and "not only a reproduction of...skills, but also...a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order" (Althusser 1287). To have in it's employ, an educator who is going entirely against Church teaching is dangerous. It undermines the established order, especially when the act is something as immoral as abortion. So I lied. It was easier to lie than to subject myself to additional hardship economic hardship during one of the most difficult times of my family's life. I have since left employment with the Catholic Church, otherwise the publication of this very paper would have

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<sup>6</sup> According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church "Since the first century the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable. Direct abortion, that is to say, abortion willed either as an end or a means, is gravely contrary to the moral law" (Respect).



landed me in the same position as when we made the decision to terminate. My allegiance to the Church and the teachings of the Church would have been called into question. My ability to teach (although I did not teach any religious lessons or classes) would have been viewed as compromised, because my personal decisions went against doctrine and therefore were dangerous to the institution.

*Inside the clinic, it was close. Everyone was close, but quiet. It was stifling but not hot. The air felt thick.*

*Thick with regret. Thick with sadness. Thick with hope. Thick with anger. Thick with love. Thick.*

*Many women were with other women. There were very few men. Very few white women. We were in the minority. The minutes in the waiting room seemed to drag endlessly. When my name was finally called it was surreal – like I was watching someone else’s life happen. We passed a small nurse’s station mounted on the wall with the book *The Awakening*<sup>7</sup> by Kate Chopin. I had hated that book. How could a mother abandon her children? It was poetic.*

*After questions, paperwork, payment, more paperwork, pamphlets...we were taken to a separate room. We weren’t taken back to the waiting room. We were separated and segregated. Alone. Together. With our child for a few last moments.*

*Vinny and I went together into an examination room, where the first stage of the process was to take place. I could still feel her. I was overwhelmed with sorrow. I remember after it happened, hearing Vinny talking quietly to his sister that he never wanted to hear a sound like*

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<sup>7</sup>Noted for its realism, and confrontation of gender expectations of the late Victorians era, *The Awakening* is one of the great American feminist novels.

*the sounds I made again. The whimpering. The gasping. The disillusionment that was happening to my body was reality and not a nightmare.*

• • •

*When we arrived the next day, the waiting room was just as stifling, if not more so, as I was carrying my child's corpse within me. I was called back to a secondary room, alone.*

*Having gotten into a medical gown with an IV placed, I asked the nurse if I could read the book I had seen the day before and, in a few moments, she had brought it to me. I read in the bed as I waited. 5 minutes. Half an hour. Two hours. I'm not sure how long I waited.*

*At one point, a teenage girl was placed next to me. As I read, I could hear her crying. I could hear her whimpering. I pulled my side of the curtain back and tried to comfort her while we both waited.*

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## IT'S ALRIGHT, CHILD

### A Play

#### Cast of Characters

CHEERLEADERS/TV/PATIENTS, chorus

CASSIE, a young black girl, 15

YOUNG MAN, a young black man, Cassie's love interest

NAOMI, Cassie's best friend

MAMA, Cassie's mother

DADDY, Cassie's father

MAEVE<sup>8</sup>, a white woman, patient in clinic

NURSE, a young black woman, about 30

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<sup>8</sup> Maeve Lola was the name we had chose for Brona had she been born.

OYA, Yoruban Goddess

I

*A high school football field on a Friday night. The stands are full, and the cheers of the cheerleaders can be heard. The night is quite windy. CASSIE and a YOUNG MAN are behind an equipment shed tucked against the school building. On stage the cheerleaders are on one side and CASSIE and YOUNG MAN are on the other side. The lights go on alternatively as the characters trade dialogue.*

Cheerleaders: Red!<sup>9</sup>

*CASSIE and the YOUNG MAN are kissing, and the atmosphere is getting increasingly tense.*

Cheerleaders: Red hot!

Young Man: Baby, you the one that's red hot.

Cheerleaders: Our team is red hot!

Cassie: Shut up, fool.

*The YOUNG MAN is running his hands up and down CASSIE's body.*

Cheerleaders: Red!

Young Man: Girl, come on, you gon let me?

Cheerleaders: Red hot!

Cassie: Who you kiddin? You lucky I let you kiss these lips

Cheerleaders: Our team is red hot!

Young Man: That's not the only thing I'm gon kiss.

Cheerleaders: Red!

Cassie: You think you funny, don'tchu?

Cheerleaders: Red hot!

Cassie: Get your hands out of my shirt.

Cheerleaders: Our team is red hot!

Young Man: Come on, Cass, you, know I love you, baby girl.

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<sup>9</sup> Evokes the blues song "They're Red Hot" by Robert Johnson and the rockabilly song "Red Hot" by Billy 'The Kid' Emerson.

Cheerleaders: Red!

*Silence. Sounds of kissing.*

Cheerleaders: Red hot!

Cassie: I love you, too.

Cheerleaders: Our team is red hot!

*The stage is dark. CASSIE and YOUNG MAN moan once together. End scene.*

## II

*A typical high school hallway. CASSIE and NAOMI are talking to one another against the lockers. CASSIE looks distraught.*

Naomi: Maybe it's just from practicing so much – you always been too skinny.

Cassie: Three weeks? I been bleedin since I was 11 years old, and I ain't never missed it before.  
And I been running since eighth grade. It ain't from running.

Naomi: You take a test yet?

Cassie: No. I don't want my Daddy finding out. And Mama, shit, I might as well move out now.

Naomi: I get you one and bring it in tomorrow. That way your mama don't find it in the trash can at home.

*A group of young men walk by cat-calling the girls.*

Naomi: Mitchell, you just keep yo mouth shut. Jonathan, ain't nobody got time for your dumb ass. Keep it movin.

Cassie: What am gonna do if I got his baby in me?

*A group of cheerleaders walk by. Stopping in the middle of the hallway.*

Cheerleaders: Our team is red hot!

*They continue down the hallway.*

Naomi: Girl, I told you that fool was no good.

Cassie: It ain't his fault. I wanted it. You know, I wanted to feel like...it's like all the blood in my body was on fire. And I felt beautiful. Like the wind whipping my hair could carry us away from all this bullshit.

Naomi: Don't I know that feeling...but if you got his baby, you never gon get away from here.  
Just be stuck here like my mama.

*CASSIE begins to cry. The school bell rings. End scene.*

### III

*A storm rages outside. CASSIE is staring out a window. A TV can be heard in the background<sup>10</sup>. The news is reporting on a protest<sup>11</sup>. MAMA enters the room.*

Mama: What's wrong with you, child?

*CASSIE is silent.*

Mama: Just sit there looking sorry for yourself then.

TV: Injustice

Cassie: Mama, I'm pregnant.

TV: Bringers of change

*CASSIE begins to sob. MAMA is silent. Her face transforms from solemn to angry. A boom of thunder is heard.*

Mama: What the hell did you just say, Cassandra? I know you didn't say what I think you did.

Cassie: I'm sorry, Mama.

TV: Transformations

Cassie: I didn't mean to, Mama. It just happened.

Mama: You ain't even grown and you go on and ruin your life. Cassandra, I raised you better than this. You supposed to go on and do things with your life. And now...

Cassie: Mama, please. I'm sorry.

Mama: Who's the daddy? I'm gon call his mama.

*Enter DADDY.*

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<sup>10</sup> The words spoken in the news broadcast are an ambiguation of invocations to call on Oya. "Oya, Queen of the rain, the winds, the thunder and the storm, bringer of change, of endings and transformation, I invite you into my circle, and into life!" (Lee), "Oya, Great Goddess! These are my wishes for change, these are my visions ... (state your intentions) ... I ask you, and your 9 daughters, to remove the obstacles that are built up around me, and clear the path for this newness to enter into my life! Blow your cleansing winds, and splash your purifying rain through my world and help me to build my visions anew. Let them be strong and clear and true and in the highest good of all. Thank you!" (Lee), and "What injustice consumes, Oya's waters quell." (Telesco 40).

<sup>11</sup> Ideally, the protest is a Black Lives Matter Protest or a Pro-Life/Pro-Choice Protest. Either are suitable. Black Lives Matter as an organization is a cultural ISA acting as an expression of the proletariat.

Mama: Aw, no. I ain't telling him nothing, Cassandra. You wanna act grown, you go on and tell him.

Cassie: Mama, no. I can't.

TV: Into life

Mama: You can't. You a woman now. You gotta be strong when you don't wanna. You gotta do shit you don't wanna. And you gotta say all the shit you don't wanna cause you the parent. Well...

Daddy: What you two going on about?

Mama: Well, you a parent now. So go on, tell ya daddy.

Cassie: Daddy, please.

*CASSIE sobs. DADDY hugs her.*

Cassie: Daddy, I got a baby in me. I don't wanna. This ain't supposed to be happenin.

*There is silence aside from CASSIE's crying. DADDY appears to be shocked and lost for words momentarily.*

Daddy: Cassie, there's a whole lot in this world not supposed to happen, but you gotta keep on.

TV: Be strong, and clear, and true.

*CASSIE runs out of the room. The sound of vomiting can be heard.*

Daddy: My baby girl.

Mama: We gonna take her ass to the clinic.

Daddy: We can't do that to her.

Mama: We can't let her ruin her life either. There ain't no way I'm letting my daughter get stuck in a hole the rest of her life. She got things she gotta do – finish high school, go to college. She gotta be better than us.

*MAMA begins to cry.*

TV: Clear the path.

Daddy: My baby girl.

*DADDY begins to cry. DADDY and MAMA embrace. End scene.*

#### IV

*CASSIE is in a large room with hospital beds. There are 5 other black women. A white woman, MAEVE, is in the bed next to CASSIE. All the women are in hospital gowns. Some are quiet.*

*Some of the women are talking to one another in the background. CASSIE is crying quietly. She is squirming. MAEVE looks over at her occasionally. CASSIE moans in pain.*

Maeve: Breathe. Try not to hold your breath. Just breathe through it.

Cassie: It hurts!

Maeve: I know it does. But you still have to breathe. Like when you run, you don't cramp as much when you breathe properly.

Cassie: How you know I'm a runner?

Maeve: I didn't. I ran cross country in high school.

*CASSIE moans in pain.*

Cassie: How you sitting there reading?

Maeve: It keeps my mind off what is happening.

*CASSIE moans in pain. She begins to sob.*

Cassie: I don't want to be here.

Maeve: Do any of us? This is just a moment in your life. Don't let it harden you.

*A woman with a clipboard comes to CASSIE'S bed. Their conversation is not heard. The woman leaves and CASSIE continues to cry.*

Maeve: You're going to be alright. Don't clench your legs. I know it's hard but try to relax your body as best as you can. I'm right here with you.

Cassie: It hurts. It hurts.

*CASSIE and MAEVE can be seen looking at one another. The patients begin to sign<sup>12</sup>*

Patient 1: Gentlemen of the cross advance for her to see them!

Patient 2: She is sick, she lies down on her back

Patient 3: A lot of talk won't raise the dead.

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<sup>12</sup> The song the patients sing is an ambiguation of songs about Maman Brigitte, "Gentlemen of the cross (deceased ancestors) advance for her to see them! Maman Brigitte is sick, she lies down on her back, A lot of talk won't raise the dead, Tie up your head, tie up your belly, tie up your kidneys, They will see how they will get down on their knees" (Sans Bout 9) and "Water kwala manyan, in that country a mother does not know her child" (10).

Patient 4: Tie up your head

Patient 5: Tie up your belly.

Patient 4: Tie up your kidneys

Patient 1: They will see how they will get down on their knees.

*Two nurses come to CASSIE'S bed and begin to wheel her away.*

All Patients: In this place

*CASSIE waves to MAEVE as she is being taken away.*

All Patients: A mother does not know her child.

*MAEVE weeps. End scene.*

## V

*CASSIE is in an operating room with 3 nurses and a doctor. The doctor is an old white man.*

NURSE: Cassandra, I'm going to put this mask on your face. You're going to be ok, girl, just close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Everything is going to be ok.

*There is a flash of light. CASSIE awakens still in the operating room. She looks down between her legs. Instead of the doctor, she sees a woman, OYA. She has an aura of red surrounding her.*

Oya: It's alright, child.

Cassie: Who are you?

Oya: I am a mother myself. And I tell you this, while there may be few things worse than the death of a child, their life lives on in us. It gives us strength.

Cassie: I ain't no mama.

Oya: The child I took from you, was that not your child? Of your blood? Of your body? You are a mother. Yet it is not your time to raise a child. You have much to accomplish before that time.

Cassie: Who are you?

Oya: I was the wind in your hair the night your child was conceived. I was the storm the day you told your own mother and father of your child. I am a mother. I carry the strength of my dead children as you will. I am here for you. And you are here for the other women, like yourself, who will lose their children today.

Cassie: The woman next to me...

Oya: Her daughter is ill. She will not survive if she is born, as my children did not survive when they were born.

Cassie: This ain't fair. None of this shit is fair.

Oya: Life is change.



Cassie: Who are you?

Oya: I am change.

*End scene.*

## VI

*CASSIE is back in the hospital room with the other patients. There are only 4 black women now and MAEVE. The NURSE comes to check on CASSIE.*

Nurse: When you are feeling well enough, you need to try to use the bathroom.

Cassie: Who was the other woman?

Nurse: What woman?

Cassie: In the operating room. After you put the mask on my face, there was another woman. She kept talking about me being a mama now.

Nurse: You are a mama. And she is you. Until her strength is no longer needed.

Cassie: I don't get it.

Nurse: You need to try to use the bathroom.

*CASSIE uses the bathroom. When she returns, she is wearing a red sweater. She does not return to her bed but goes to a desk in the room where she can be discharged. While CASSIE is sitting at the desk, MAEVE is being wheeled away. She is visibly shaking and weeping.*

Cassie: Nurse, wait, please.

*CASSIE walks to MAEVE and holds her hand.*

Cassie: It's gonna to be ok.

Maeve: Thank you.

Cassie: I'm a mama, too. And even though my baby is dead, its life gave me strength. Your daughter will give you strength.

Maeve: How did you know she's a girl?

Cassie: It's alright, child.

*MAEVE is wheeled away. End scene.*

END

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*The very last thing I remember before closing my eyes was placing my hand on my stomach and feeling my swollen uterus, knowing that my daughter was inside of me. But she was already dead. I killed my own child. The very first thing I remember when I opened my eyes was*

*placing my hand on my stomach and feeling nothing. My daughter was gone. I asked the nurse, in an anesthesia induced stupor, if I could hold her.*

*No...I never got to hold my child. My little girl. Brona. The morning before she was ripped from my body, I could feel her moving inside of me. And then she was gone. Because I killed her.*

*The night we came home, my son was playing the living room watching Scooby-Doo and I broke down in the kitchen saying to my husband "We killed our daughter, Vinny. We killed her." He wrapped his arms around me, reassuring me that we didn't kill her. That we saved her. We saved her from a life of surgeries, seizures, dementia, feeding tubes, and who knows what else. We saved her.*

*There was supposed to be some sort of solace in saving her. But I felt guilty. I feel guilty. I will always feel guilty. But I can't let my guilt bar me from living my life and from being a mother to my living child. He needs me. He needs both of his parents. Had Brona been born, she would have divided our family, essentially taking one parent for herself and leaving our son with only one parent, as well. Her care would have been extensive. And we would have felt guilty. No more than we do now. We had to make the hardest decision of our lives, and there was no way anyone could come out on the winning end regardless of which choice we made. Either way, our lives would be irrevocably changed.*

Having an abortion is not a singular act. Even the procedure itself is not one singular act. It is not a singular pain. Having an abortion is like an open wound, which heals very slowly, and as it is just beginning to scab over, the scab is violently ripped off to reveal the seething wound once again.

The evening after my procedure, I brushed my teeth, and for the first time in months my gums weren't bleeding. The wound was ripped open.

My breasts swelled with milk within two days of my procedure, but I had no child to suckle and relieve the pain and swelling. The wound was ripped open.

In the shower for about a month afterwards, my hair fell out in tiny handfuls. Each time, the wound was ripped open.

I menstruated about six weeks after the procedure. Each time I would go to the bathroom, the wound was ripped open.

My son has rubbed my belly, saying "Mommy's baby". The wound was ripped open.

As I write, the wound is ripping open and there will be many more times in which I will be reminded of what I did, and the wound will again be ripped open.

"Whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unsharability, and it ensures this unsharability through its resistance to language" (Scarry 3). While physical pain ranges from uncomfortable to unbearable, but the true pain that is unsharable is emotional pain. Trauma. There is no way I could possibly convey to anyone the pain in which I experienced, let alone to my husband. A man. Someone lacking the biological functions which brought my body both the physical and mental pain. The pain of abortion, for me at least, was minimal – no more than menstruation; it was uncomfortable. There were moments like the amniocentesis or the injection on the first day of the termination procedure which felt unnatural. Not painful, not even uncomfortable, but surreally unnatural. A feeling set within the mind that what is happening should not be happening under any given set of normal circumstances.

The mental and emotion pain was something which I don't think any woman would choose without absolute certainty and necessity.

*Many times since the death of my daughter I have felt myself un-present – I am in a place in body only. My mind is gone. In crisis. Oscillating through trauma and awareness. In those moments, I don't feel anything, only emptiness. I don't hear the noises around me, only static. I don't see anything or anyone around me, only shapes. My whole being is unknown and unrecognizable. The first experience of this was during one of my favorite graduate classes on the evening I had undergone my amniocentesis to ensure that Brona's condition was not genetic. My husband pleaded with me to stay home and rest, but I needed normalcy. I needed the escape from the reality of my maternal situation.*

*We sat in a circle, me and about 12 other adult students. The professor was among the circle. I couldn't hear her voice – though maybe I did, but not consciously. My mind felt completely empty, a feeling I don't often get, if at all. As a mother, it seems my mind is always thinking of something, and rarely something for myself. I remember looking at the blackboard. It seemed to stretch infinitely into the wall behind it and if I stared long enough, I think I may have been sucked into it like a blackhole of nothingness. Of non-existence and despair.*

*When I finally reclaimed my place in reality, we were collecting a list of dyads to create "others". As if someone else were speaking, I said "Life and death". The look on the professor's face was all at once knowing and pitying.*

In Lacan's structure of the psyche, he describes different stages of development: The Imaginary Order, the Symbolic Order, the Mirror Phase, and the First Repression<sup>13</sup>. As we move from stage to stage, there is said to be no way in which to return to a previous stage. However, mothers for a short period of time go through all the stages of psyche development after the birth of a child. When a child is born through the pain of childbirth or the shock to the conscious of its sudden existence, it is nearly as dependent on the mother as when she carried it in her womb, though now it is tangible. Once the child is born it is no longer anomalous, no longer an object of imagination, but an object existing in reality. Birth causes a shift in consciousness from imagination to belonging. The child is a part of the mother, and they are one – they form an inseparable dyad, at least in terms of consciousness. In this period, the mother reverts to the Imaginary Order and both the child and mother are defined by one another. The mother sees the child as a part of her and temporarily has no concept of herself without her child. Soon the child enters the Symbolic stage and realizes that the father is a part of its life and is then removed from the mother. With the removal of her child, the mother must realize herself as her own person again and move onto the mirror phase and first repression in which a new consciousness and subconscious is created inside of the mother which could never have existed prior to the birth of the child.

Having an abortion completely interrupts this progression of the mother's psychological development and forces the mother to move from the Imaginary Order immediately to the first

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<sup>13</sup> The Imaginary Order is a pre-Oedipal stage of understanding in which a child sees itself as a part of the mother. It is the foundation of ego. The Symbolic Order is defined by the Law of the Father in which the child is removed from the mother. The mirror phase is a phase of self-recognition in which the child develops its own self-conscious separate from the conscious it once shared with the mother. The first repression is the creation of the child's subconscious which is forever seeking a return to wholeness – a wholeness which is only present within the Imaginary Order. The child is subconsciously always trying to return to unity with the mother.

repression. The struggle comes from the knowledge that there should be a child, there should be an inseparable dyad. From here is the trauma of abortion, the trauma of child-loss, and perhaps relatedly, the phenomena of post-partum depression. The combination of drastic hormonal changes and redefining of consciousness can be found nowhere else. This is where the feeling of un-presentness comes from. There is a loss of oneself for the mother in losing the child which was only ever a part of her – which never came to fruition in the inseparable dyad. The subconscious then must scramble to reconfigure itself through the loss and must begin a search for wholeness without the child.

My husband and I made the decision to terminate our daughter's pregnancy together. We made the decision as a family. He seemed to be easily able to make decisions for me and for my body. When we learned of Brona's spina bifida, I was decided to undergo procedures to determine if her and I would be candidates for fetal surgery. At no point was I sure it was even a surgery I wanted for myself, let alone for my daughter. The risks to me and the implications on my body were great – I would be on bed rest and unable to care for the child I already had living at home; I wouldn't be able to be home for the remainder of pregnancy; her pregnancy and any subsequent pregnancies would need to be delivered via cesarean; I could die; my child could die. While some of these risks were temporary, they had major implications not only on me, but on my family. My husband didn't fully realize the implications of the surgery. Having already gone through a cesarean birth, I had no desire to put myself through essentially two more cesarean surgeries for one pregnancy.

He was also the first to suggest termination of Brona's pregnancy upon learning she had spina bifida. The problem with him being a part of these decisions is the intangibility of pregnancy for a biological male – he could only imagine the physical strain on my body with no

experiential touchstone. At 22 weeks pregnant, I still had no baby bump, only a slight swelling on my uterus could be felt when I would lay on my back. While I could feel Brona moving inside of me, my husband could not. He had no connection with our daughter without me as a mediator. The pain my husband experienced was tertiary to my pain. He sobbed at the loss of an idea, because to him, Brona had no tangibility. He lamented the noises I made when the laminaria were being inserted into my cervix – though he said he'll never unhear it, he'll also never fully understand their meaning. He'll never know how my body fought to lie still as the needle was stuck into my stomach to kill our child.

Abortion has massive implications socially and politically, but also personally on the women who have gone through abortions. On their families. My son over two years later tells me he misses his sister. The sister he never met. Unfortunately, because of a recent leaked Supreme Court brief that could overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the internet has become flooded with stories like mine – stories of women who have had to choose abortion. For those women, they have internalized the oppressions of society to such an extent that it can be difficult to move forward. I know, because I'm one of those women, and I don't know if I will ever truly move forward.

As mentioned, I had been afraid to write this, having sat down and been dissuaded many times. I have been afraid that in writing, I would release the pain I have felt for my daughter as the only vestige of the inseparable dyad between her and me. While I can hold her ashes, see her footprints, and visit her name that the sun rises on each day in a cemetery, those things are not wholly mine. I thought perhaps in expressing my loss, and contextualizing the experience, I would be free of the pain which has linked us. Having completed this thesis though, I realize that the pain of losing her in its unsharability is wholly mine and in that respect, Brona and I will always have our own inseparable dyad.

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