



Well-to-do people can manage well
Anything they need they can buy and sell
But the teenage drifter can walk in hell
Or roll on the backroom floor

And the battered children who bruise and bleed
The mother with too many kids to feed
Pro-life offers them in their need
Back-alley abortions for the poor

-Malvina Reynolds, "Back Alley Surgery"

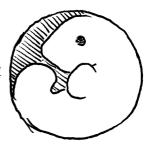
This zine contains explicit violence, rape, incest, miscarriage, abortion and arguments thereof, teen pregnancy, disownment, hanging, a suicide attempt, and consensual queer teenage sex. **Reader discretion is advised**.

## I. Embry

The first time was the worst. I didn't even know I was pregnant til I started bleeding from the wrong end during an assault.

"Murderer," my mother hissed. "Whore." The violence continued.

I survived. Embry did not.



## II. Olly

The second time was only a few months after the first, and this time, it was no surprise. Lacking anyone "real" to confide in, I turned to Bob and Grey, who were middle-aged, imaginary adults who thought I was cis male. I couldn't bear to tell them what I really was, so, in classic teenage form, I told them that I knew someone who might be pregnant and needed help, and what should I do?

Bob dropped the dish he was washing into the sink. "Someone you're with?" He probably didn't intend to sound that incredulous.

"Ew! No! Just... someone I know." I knew myself, right? Sort of.

Grey leaned over, whispered to her lover for a second, and whatever she said, it meant he didn't protest when she said that she would come with me (and Bob would not).

We went to the drug store together, where she coached me through buying a pregnancy test. Through it all, she was reassuringly calm and solid, treating it like a sensible, everyday thing, not a crisis.

When we were back in the car, seat belts on, she asked, "Who is this for?" My insides froze. I had no words for her. I started to shake, then cry. Grey hugged me. "Not a girlfriend," she said. It wasn't a question. I shook my head, and she held me until I calmed down.

I couldn't take the test right away, so it burned a hole in my locker until I could take it in secret before class. The result was positive. Minors couldn't get abortions in Texas in 2005 without parental consent, and either my father or brother had gotten me pregnant in the first place. I could circumvent them by getting a court order, but I neither knew that nor how to obtain one, and anyway, I'd been steeped in anti-abortion rhetoric since toddlerhood. In my mind, the moral balance sheet was simple: eye for an eye, life for a life. If I was going to murder an innocent baby, it was only fair that I die with it.

And so, in true pro-life fashion, I set out to commit suicide.

I waited til the family left for a kite festival. Even the dog went with them, leaving only the fish in my mother's tank, who mercifully took no notice of me. Not knowing how much time I'd have, I erred on the side of speed. I took a blue braided cord from my room, fashioned a crude noose, and hanged myself from my bedroom doorknob.

By this point, I'd had the oxygen stolen from my lungs plenty of times—with a pillow, with a penis, with bare hands, with body weight, with water, in the toilet, in bed, on the floor. I knew what it felt like and was no longer afraid. I didn't struggle, didn't panic...

...until I started miscarrying, much to my surprise. It'd never occurred to me that Olly would die first.

Black comedy ensued. I'd only psychologically prepared myself for the physical discomfort of death, not leaving a gory mess. I wouldn't be there to clean it up, which mean someone else would have to do it: a relative, a maid, some poor biohazardous waste disposal worker. I couldn't do that! I wasn't a barbarian!

Despite my numb limbs and graying vision, I somehow managed to flail myself upright, get air, undo the noose, and flop-crawl my way to the bathroom like the first lungfish daring to brave land. Once I'd scrubbed the blood out of the tiles, the rug, my clothes, and started the laundry, I called Grey for help, claiming that I "wasn't feeling well." Between the gut wrenches of miscarrying (which could pass for food



poisoning), she helped me complete the laundry and held my hand. By the time the family returned (and she had left), all signs of my crime were safely gone and I was in bed, claiming illness. They left me to it.

Olly was dead. I was alive. Long live my fertility.

After that, I tried everything I could to prevent further pregnancy. I learned to skip meals and sleep outside to avoid assaults. Unable to procure any other means of birth control without parental consent (denied), I bought condoms and did whatever I could to get my brother to use them. I learned to be the worst kind of mercenary, hoping that if I treated incest like mere business, it would be.

My brother hated condoms as much as he loved vaginal. His jizz was a gift of the gods, completely unrelated to any resulting consequences, so why was I making such a big deal about this? When I reminded him of the teen pregnancies of our cousins, he replied that sure, but they were *girls*; I was a *whore*. I had no comeback.

Between Embry and Olly, I came to Health class for a classic of abstinence-only education: the torn paper hearts talk. Others versions use gum, a lollipop, or rubber band, but all have the same flow: the object represents a girl's... well, they can't actually say what it's supposed to represent, so they euphemize around it with talk of oxytocin, ability to bond, stuff like that. One by one, the boys in the class partake of her goods—licking her lolly, chewing her gum, stretching her rubber band, tearing pieces off her paper heart until her rubber band is all stretched out, her sweetness devoured, her heart torn to pieces. The moral of the story, of course, is to stay virginal til marriage. Since that was never an option for me, all I could do was stare at that ragged paper heart—torn, dirty, and worthless—and know it was me.

## III. Ziggy

The third time I got pregnant, I had bodily help: my beloved. A year older than me, my shining one had been kicked out of the house, found an apartment, and given me shelter, food, and clothing, asking nothing in return. Because of that, this beautiful-hearted person was the first (and only) corporeal person I shared consensuality with. Together, pregnancy and STD prevention were *our* concerns, not just *mine*. Knowing who I was, what I was, and what I had to do, my beloved acted as my driver and protector when I traded sex for grocery money, coached me on pricing, stashed my pregnancy tests. We were scarred throwaways, and we loved each other with a ferocity and devotion our Health lecturers thought us incapable of.

My beloved desperately wanted us to stay together, for me to never return to the family slaughterhouse, but my father held the purse strings, the money for college. I wouldn't get it if I didn't earn it, and I had only one marketable skill. My father also refused to intervene with my brother or give me a lock for my door (he believed in encouraging self-sufficiency in his children), so when my brother got bigger and stronger than me and stopped using condoms, I was fucked.

My beloved had already supported me through a previous pregnancy test. When this one came up positive, we had a decision to make.

We both knew that I could not bear this child. I don't even mean the psychological agony of bearing my own sibling or nibling, the economic toll of it on my education and work opportunities, the years it'd force me to stay in the family rape terrarium. I mean that Ziggy and/or I wouldn't survive to delivery. There's a reason homicide is the leading cause of maternal death in America, especially for young people and Black folks (Wallace et al.). The family were dangerous people.

Even if I did survive delivery, then what? What could I do? Adopt Ziggy out? That's what my cousin did when our grandfather impregnated her. (Not that anyone would admit that, but the boy looks just like the old man, who was not a blood relation.) What happened to her, afterward?



She got disowned.

She was ousted from the family.

I only ever saw her once, when I was fourteen.

Everyone said she was on drugs. No one would speak of her.

No. Adopting Ziggy out would not have solved my problem. (Also, Foster reports that the psychological toll of adopting one's children out this way is far more harrowing than that of abortion, and I had no sanity to spare.)

What if I and my beloved married, raised the child as my own? That's what my *other* cousin did when he got his girlfriend pregnant! They did everything "right," took night classes and jobs, worked hard, held their heads high. They have my respect. What happened to *them*?

Well, they admittedly did better than Cousin #1; they weren't disowned, got to stay in the family. But it was hard, so hard. I saw the strain from my front row seat, at twelve years old. My uncle and aunt divorced acrimoniously during

this time, but financially supported them. My parents would not, and my beloved could not pass for Ziggy's blood relation. Everyone looking at us would know, would whisper behind our backs.

No. My beloved and I could not raise Ziggy as our own.

No, no, no. A universe of no: adults saying no, politicians saying no, parents saying no, society saying no. And so I decided that I would say no back. Like Embry and Olly before it, Ziggy was doomed. Like them, it was created by hate, incest, violence, and selfishness, and it would be born into sexual butchery, tiny and helpless. I could not protect it; I had to sleep sometime. And my odds of survival kept dropping; if I died, what would become of it? *Someone* had to think of Ziggy's welfare, and everyone else had abdicated.

No. I had little power and few options, but I exercised those that I had. I would not call it a choice, only a decision: I would give Ziggy a quick, painless death at my hands, rather than whatever the family deigned to give it. I would bear the moral weight of my actions, as parent and psychopomp, and many years later, I would perform their death and funeral rites. I would tattoo their image onto my skin, never to be erased, forgotten, or used as some cheap rhetorical beating stick in some sanctimonious holy war. I would immortalize them in art, and by my own bloody hands, I would make people see what responsibility and motherhood truly meant.

And my beloved, who wanted me to live, who wanted that more than false piety, would help me do it.

My beloved drove us to Home Deport, where we bought material for the noose. We did a couple test runs, because my beloved needed to be able to release me without panicking, cut me loose after I miscarried or before I died. If I did die, my beloved would be the one blamed for everything, the one who went to prison.

The risks were immense. Over and over, I said, "you don't have to be a part of this. I've done it before. I can do it again." Unspoken in my heart: "you can remain unstained, untainted."

But my beloved was adamant: "I'm with you." Purity was not our virtue. We would bear the burden of our actions together.

When we were ready, we went into the bathroom. We laid newspaper on the floor, because I couldn't bear to make a mess in this little haven my beloved had built. We sat, made the noose. We looped it over the doorknob and around my neck. We kissed and interlaced our fingers.

And then I leaned forward.

My beloved was terrified, and rightly so. What we were doing was lethally dangerous, even by illegal abortion standards. Therefore, it was of the utmost

importance that I show no sign of fear or discomfort. If my shining one panicked and cut me loose too early, we would have to do it all over again. So I kept my expression calm and didn't struggle, even as all the oxygen left me. I squeezed my beloved's hand tight, because we'd agreed that when my grip went slack, I must be cut down. Come on, I thought to Ziggy, don't make me put my love through this twice. Die, baby.

I began to bleed.

I released my beloved, who instantly leapt up and released me in turn, cutting me loose with smooth, efficient movements. They heaved me up, helped me to the toilet so quickly that I left no mess on the floor, and it was only then that I saw the tears streaming down their cheeks. They hadn't made a sound.

We had long since reached the point in our relationship that being on the toilet around each other was no big deal. I hugged my beloved tight and rasped reassurance as my golden-hearted one broke down sobbing. Over and over, I said, "it's okay. I'm okay. You did great. It's over."

We spent the rest of the day quiet and emotionally drained, with me either on the pot or close to it. We'd done it. We'd asked no permission and taken all risks. I would survive. No one would go to jail. No one would even know. My useless jizz-fountain of a brother would never have to trouble his pretty little head.

We talked about what we'd done, my beloved and me. When I asked, they said, "It wasn't a baby yet. It was just... potential. It's not the same as someone killing you or me. I don't want you thinking that. What would you have done?"

"Killed myself."

"Yeah. Exactly. And I don't want you dead. This is how it had to be." My beloved hugged me gently. "I'm glad you're still here. I want you to stay. My world's better with you in it."

"Even after all that?"

A kiss to the side of my head. "Yeah. You know what they say: good friends bail you out of jail, *great* friends help you hide the body."

It worked. I laughed.

My beloved wanted children some day (and now does, and is undoubtedly a magnificent spouse and parent). I couldn't bear the thought. My womb was a portal of death, a killing field. I felt like a butcher, a monster of meat.

But as my beloved held me, like my life mattered, I could briefly imagine a different life where my child looked like my shining one—that incandescent smile, those sweet stormy eyes. A child created with love and joy, not cruelty and hate. A child I wouldn't have to raise alone, impoverished and desperate, a child who would have a family, not just predators hungry for fresh meat.

"You'd make a great dad," my beloved said, hand tender on my belly. "You'd never let anything happen to that kid."

I could say much the same about you, my golden one.



I felt too poorly to go anywhere, so we had a quiet commemoration at home: delivery pizza, microwave popcorn, a movie in bed. That night, as we snuggled together in the darkness, my beloved said, "Why you gotta go back to them? Stay with me. We'll get married, get you a car. You'll be 18 soon."

"Ssh," I said, petting my beloved's hair. "You're talking crazy."

"I mean it. You're so smart, you'll get a full ride. You don't need them."

I reminded my beloved (who knew I was multi) that there were people in this body who didn't know about our relationship, that one had already taken the news badly. "It's not gonna happen. Don't bum yourself out."

In a small, vulnerable voice: "If all y'all were on-board, though... would you? Would you marry me?"

I imagined a house, a chain link fence, a dog. A family. I ached. "If I could, if it were just me, and if I were going to live, and if it weren't gonna be social suicide for you... yeah. I'd marry you. But... I don't get to."

"Can we pretend you're married, at least? Until you have to go?" "Oh, honey..."

"Please? No one has to know. Just you and me?"

I turned my head to meet those sweet, stormy eyes. "You mean it? Now? In the middle of the night?"

Nobody could resist that sweet smile. "Well, if you're gonna insist..."

And that's what we did, the night Ziggy died. We lit a candle, fed each other cookies, moved our class rings to the wedding finger (we couldn't trade; the family would've killed me). We clasped hands and improvised vows: "I promise

to look out for you, take care of you, keep you safe. I promise to love you, no matter what life's like." We kissed.

Afterward, my beloved joked, "So which of us is the bride?"

"You, obviously," I teased, and then I saw the look on their face. Not even their, "ooh, guess I'm not wearing white to this thing," could hide it.

And to my surprise, I felt myself respond. I felt like a bloodstained, deathly horror, but here there was life, joy even. I wanted to move towards it like a plant towards the sun. I wanted to be more than a butcher, to be the man my beloved saw.

And so I gave my blushing bride the best wedding night I could, revering her, opening, entering, and filling her with my hands, tongue, and cock, feeling the body she had in her heart embracing the one I had in mine. I asked her not to touch me, stayed clothed, and despite my numb aching... yes, it was good. As my wife opened and gave herself, the gifts of her pleasure and trust, I saw a man in her eyes and not a monster. It felt like coming home from a dark, bloody place.

It wasn't until afterward, in the shower as my wife washed my hair, that I finally began to weep. My golden one wrapped me in their strong, gentle arms.

"Let it out," they said, rocking me. "You never cried, that whole time. I did, but not you. It's okay."

And after, when tears and hot water had washed all the pain and dirt away, my beloved said, "You look better."

I felt better.

## IV: the Bad Old Days

I've struggled to put these experiences into words. They feel so ugly, so politically treacherous, all this talk of death and Embry/Olly/Ziggy instead of choices and fetuses. I agree with Reagan when she says, "I have friends whose children have died; my miscarriage was not the same" and "today's pregnancy-loss movement draws on both the anti-abortion movement and feminism" (357-359). Why was I accepting the terms of the argument that the anti-abortion people had set? They didn't give a shit about me! They only cared about "the children," that entirely theoretical construct of purity and innocence. My brother wasn't totally full of shit when he said, "they were girls; you're a whore." By very virtue of being violated, of being so inconveniently pregnant, I was impure and thus I could never be one of "the children." I was something else, a whore, a monster.

I have tried to leave my upbringing behind. But I am still a monster.

After making and uploading a comic about Embry, *Red & Blue*, I foolishly forgot to turn off comments and got some leftist sneering that I didn't reference women enough. (As though stories of trans male abortion are raining from the sky! As though my personal story is required to be universal, to fit the political convenience of the moment!) I held my tongue, deleted the smug words, turned off comments, but it infuriated me for days. It still does. I hate that it still does.

I read abortion books, but over and over, I saw the sentiment that times were different now, medication abortions existed now, the bad old days could never *really* come back again, even as Roe v. Wade fell and new legislation rose, even as people died and children fled to haven states to be freed of the burdens forced upon them by adult rapists.

The bad old days were over when my beloved and I resorted to noose and knife. For some people, the bad days never truly end; they just go underground.



After Roe v. Wade got overturned, I saw my future/past written in blood, and I rushed to get sterilized. It was then that I learned my long-suffering uterus had doubled in size and held three golf-ball-sized noncancerous tumors —tumors that were causing me to bleed heavily and may well have prohibited bearing a child safely. Three tumors, three pregnancies, and blood, blood, blood. My body's rebellion, from being so ill-used? Or my body trying to insure that future children could never be born into hell?

I had hated my uterus for so long as a traitor, a bloated bag of blood all-tooeager to churn out hostages for my rapists' benefit. The devil's deals I'd had to cut, the atrocities I'd endured! But now I felt bad for my battered body. It too had tried so hard and been treated so badly. It too was a monster of meat.

But monsters have their own strength. My abortions of Olly and Ziggy were dangerous and painful and nobody should ever (have to) do what I did. But I did it and I survived, once alone and once with my beloved. We looked evil in the eye and took responsibility. There was blood in that, yes, blood and grief... but there was power in that too, even love. We gave Ziggy a loving death, and Ziggy brought us together, even closer than before. Ziggy's loss was by far the least traumatic of the three.

My perception of abortion is inseparable from that of my multi, of my disability. I cannot achieve the philosophical sleight of hand that says Embry, Olly, and Ziggy were not people and therefore ending their existences held no moral weight; that same reasoning is applied to the murder of disabled people and headmates both. That is not and has never been my argument. Mine is as such: there are fates worse than death. As the only person willing to take moral responsibility for Ziggy, it was my onus to prevent that fate.

And so Embry, Olly, and Ziggy now have stones placed for them in three different graveyards and memorials in three different cities in the area. Embry rests by the UU church in Harvard Square. Olly got a burial one cold, rainy day among the few remaining headstones in the Arnold Arboretum. And a couple days before first writing this essay, I found a bit of slate, borrowed a stick of sidewalk chalk from a small child to write "Ziggy" on it, and laid it at the feet of lady Justice at the WWII memorial in Arlington. Justice wore the laurels of victory and held a sword—a good protector, I hoped, and surely the long-dead soldiers would welcome a youngster in their midst, just like the centuries-old dead at Arnold and Harvard.

Had they lived, had they survived, Embry, Olly, and Ziggy would be entering college now. They would be old enough to drive, to vote, to die for their country. What kind of people would they have grown up to be? What would they think and say? I'll never know. They are forever unborn in eternity.

There's a Jewish saying, "may their memory be a mitzvah." People often translate mitzvah to "blessing" but it also means a divine commandment, a responsibility. Yes, Embry, Olly, and Ziggy's memories are mitzvahs, great and terrible mitzvahs.

All I can do is live up to them.



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# The bad days never end; they just go underground.



"I think there is a need for us to talk more about what it is we are doing, when we carry out or support abortion. We—in the States—have dealt heavily, up to now, in euphemism. [...] we have been unwilling to talk to women about what it means to abort a baby. We don't ever talk about babies, we don't ever talk about what is being decided in abortion. We never talk about responsibility. The word 'choice' is the biggest euphemism. [...] we should never disregard the fact that being pregnant means there is a baby growing inside of a woman, a baby whose life is ended. We ought not to pretend this is not happening."

—Judith Arcana, Jane: Documents from Chicago's Clandestine Abortion Service 1968-1972



Web: https://healthymultiplicity.com/loonybrain Email: loonybrain@healthymultiplicity.com

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