

No Shame: I Know This Now, As I Write Rather Than Make Cookies  
by Jenny Fox

(Names have been changed to protect privacy.)

When I think about writing this, all I want to do is make cookies. Making cookies is simple and easy. When I make cookies, I put in the measured ingredients according to instruction and get a predictable result. When I make cookies, I don't have to feel anything. Writing about my miscarriage and abortions feels chaotic and vulnerable. I have no instructions for how to do this. Despite this discomfort, I am sharing my experiences because it is deeply damaging that having an abortion is still stigmatized. The same is true of miscarriage, though generally speaking, we are more sympathetic to women when they have miscarriages, and the legal right to have a miscarriage is not in question. Until those of us who have had abortions speak openly about our experiences, abortion will never be normalized. Please note the difference between normalized and trivialized. I am not seeking to trivialize abortion. I am seeking to normalize abortion. Being open about having an abortion does not currently feel safe. I beg you to be tender with me.

Those of you who believe that abortion should always be a woman's right regardless of the circumstance, will likely find it very easy to be kind to me. Those of you who believe abortion is never right, will certainly not agree with my choices. But I hope you will find the ability to be

kind. Those of you who believe it is ok to have an abortion only under certain circumstances, will likely not believe my abortions to be justified. But I hope you will find the ability to be kind. Those of you who easily access your compassion, will likely find it easy to be kind to me, regardless of your beliefs about abortion. Those of you who believe that compassion should be selective rather than unconditional, will likely not rally it for me.

An anonymous story about a girl who was brutally raped or a woman with health risks to her life were she to remain pregnant, make it simpler for most people to understand choosing abortion. It is also simpler to pass either positive or negative judgements about an abortion that happens over there, far away from you. But when someone you know, maybe even someone you care about, has an abortion, it becomes personal and complex. I am someone you know who has had abortions. Yes, more than one. I am someone you know who has had a miscarriage. I am someone you know who has survived abuse. I am someone you know. In retrospect, the circumstances leading up to my abortions, though consensual at the time, were truthfully assaults. I know this now, as I write rather than make cookies.

First, my miscarriage. I hoped to have a third child. I was gutted when the tiny seed growing inside me spilled out after only a few weeks. At the home of Patricia who had no one to support her baby's birth from start to finish other than me, the doula she had hired. Her baby would have red hair, she assured me, like the stranger she stumbled home with and fucked after they had pounded drinks together at a local pub. My heart was in it. I planned to pour love into every press of my hands on her birthing back. Patricia lived life mostly alone, and she chose to birth as

alone as possible, too. Every comfort I planned to offer Patricia was fueled by the sweet knowledge that I was pregnant again, just as I had hoped for.

I was deeply exhausted though. Early pregnancy, caring for two young children, and attending a recent string of long middle of the night births, had worn me out. As the unforgiving Las Vegas sun rose outside the bay windows of Patricia's downtown condo, I collapsed on her couch and attempted to rest. And that was when I felt it. That familiar sensation of slight tightening above my pubic bone and a dull squeeze in my lower back. The sensations that signal the start of my menstruation each month. The sensations that I taught my childbirth class clients could mean early labor. Patricia moaned slightly from her bedroom as she too was beginning to cramp now. I moved my hand down, slipped it under the waistband of my sweatpants, parted my labia, and inserted my finger. My heart galloped in my throat as I brought my hand back out. Red. I was bleeding. Patricia's uterus was beginning to contract to birth her child. My uterus was beginning to contract to expel the sesame seed sized fertilized egg that I had hoped to grow into a child.

On the toilet, wiping and wishing that the red was not so bright on the canvas of white toilet paper. Wiping again and hoping this time there would be nothing. Dialing a midwife friend. "I'm at a birth and I think I'm having a miscarriage." "How far along are you?" "Only 5 weeks I think. Missed my period by only a week. I did a home test a couple days ago." "You need to leave the birth." "I can't. I'm the only person here." "Who is the midwife?" "Suzanne." "You need to tell her to come and you need to leave. I can call ahead to a clinic and you can go right into ultrasound, if you want one."

Wand between my legs. My uterus projected larger than life on the wall. “See all that swirling, looks kinda like a hurricane,” the ultrasound tech asks. “I see it.” “That’s the lining of your uterus. It’s shedding. I don’t see anything else. Baby is probably too small to see and lost in that storm. I am so sorry.”

Heart bolting again. Driving home. No sleep for over a day now. No baby growing inside. My womb emptying itself with callous disregard for the baby I was trying to grow there. My body betraying me. No reward for my devotion to birthing women.

“You probably made it happen from working so hard,” my husband spits. He did not need to say it. I already felt it must be my fault. Some kind of punishment for something I did wrong, I was sure.

Women fall down stairs, are beaten by their abusers, run from bombs during war, harvest the fields for too many hours each day, and endure any manner of physically and emotionally brutal circumstances, and do not generally lose their pregnancies. Women who wish to end their pregnancies and do not have access to skilled support in doing so, will make unthinkably self harming attempts at termination. Often those attempts simply do not work to end the pregnancy but manage only to make the woman ill or wounded or dead. When a pregnancy is functioning biologically well, it will withstand many stressors. Women do not cause miscarriage by not sleeping, or working too much, or crossing the path of a black cat, or not believing in a higher

power, or not being good enough humans, or deserving enough humans, or whatever other misogynistic blame one wishes to hurl about. These are all falsehoods. I know this now, as I write rather than make cookies.

Curled in the corner of our living room, one year later. Heart galloping like a startled horse again. Panic attack. Darkness, though my eyes were open. “I will get better. I will. Please don’t leave me alone.” Begging my husband to be patient with my grief. “You will never get better. And even if you do, you will fall apart again, I’m sure.” His words poisoning my blood like venom.

Twenty years together tangled into a matted mess. Impossible to undo, it seemed. One thread released only to reveal another knot. Staying in a marriage after it dies is like having a taxidermied trophy on your wall. It is the remnant of something that was once alive, but you and everyone else knows it is dead. So many times he had threatened to leave me before I said, “Just go.” “Celebrate by having a bunch of sex with a bunch of people,” my friends recommended. Dating sites are excellent places for abusers to prey. I know this now, as I write rather than make cookies.

Most people have at least some orgasms they regret. I regret every orgasm I had in front of the man I committed to over the next three years. Fred wielded sex as a weapon to distract me from his abuse. My fertility was supposed to be over. Blood tests said my hormones were done. My age said it was nearly statistically impossible. Moments after I informed Fred that I was pregnant, he started following yet another woman in her panties on Instagram. “We could discuss

keeping it.” I offered timidly. Just a few years earlier, I had wanted nothing more than to have another child. The irony of this timing ridiculed my hope. “At your age that baby might come out with flippers.” Fred pulled his hands close to his ribs and flapped them to demonstrate as unintelligible gibberish spilled from his mouth to mock people with Down Syndrome.

“I’d like my midwife friend Allie to come support at the abortion, too.” This repulsed him. “I had lots of friends in L.A. who had abortions, and they didn’t bring along a cheering squad.” I should have told him to go then and so many other times before. I know this now, as I write rather than make cookies.

The ceiling was painted blue with cheerful white clouds streaking through like puffs of cotton candy. As the vacuum scraped against the walls of my womb, I blinked away tears and focused my eyes on the clouds, imagining myself with wings spread, flying through those cushiony pillows. On my bed at home a couple of hours later, Fred pushed my mouth down to his cock and moved in and out, even more forcefully than usual.

“How come every time I have something important to do, you get pregnant?!” Fred jabbed after I sheepishly informed him that he had impregnated me a second time. Scheduling my abortion was an inconvenience to him, yet he relished the knowledge that he had impregnated me, as if it confirmed his manhood. “You weren’t supposed to be able to get pregnant, huh? Well I’m not shooting duds that’s for sure!”

Flying through those clouds again, though this time their shape was familiar and comforting. I have both been here and never been here before. "I am so embarrassed to be here again." I confided to the doctor. "It is true that I do not see a lot of women your age in here once, let alone twice. But, please have no shame. It is common for a woman to find her fertility confusing at your stage of life. It is a sign of how healthy you are that you got pregnant so easily. Though I do hope never to see you again." He smiled gently and his eyes pooled kindness. Then as a gallant knight might do before parting from someone he had saved from a dreadful dragon, he took my hand, gave it a brief and courteous kiss, and left the room.

I am attached to all five of my pregnancies. I am attached to my two living children. I am attached to my miscarried baby. I am attached to my two aborted babies. I did not cackle maniacally like an evil baby killer as I watched them go into the red biohazard bag while I lay cramping under that artificially provided heavenly sky. But even if I did, that is not for anyone to judge. It is my right to have an abortion while feeling anything or not feeling anything I choose. I have carried years of shame about my losses. When I miscarried, I felt shame. When I had my first abortion, I felt shame. When I had my second abortion, I felt even more shame. That shame was never mine to carry. I know this now, as I write rather than make cookies.

Forms at doctors' offices always want to know how many times I have been pregnant. Even when the nature of the visit or the doctor's specialty is irrelevant to my fertility, they always want to know. How many times have you been pregnant? 5. How many living children? 2. How many miscarriages? 1. How many abortions?...I always pause. I wait for someone to absolve my

shame before I answer. How many abortions?...I wait to hear someone say, "Go on, tell them. Have no shame." How many abortions? 2. Two. I have had two abortions. I am someone you know who has had two abortions. And today I wrote, rather than make cookies.

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