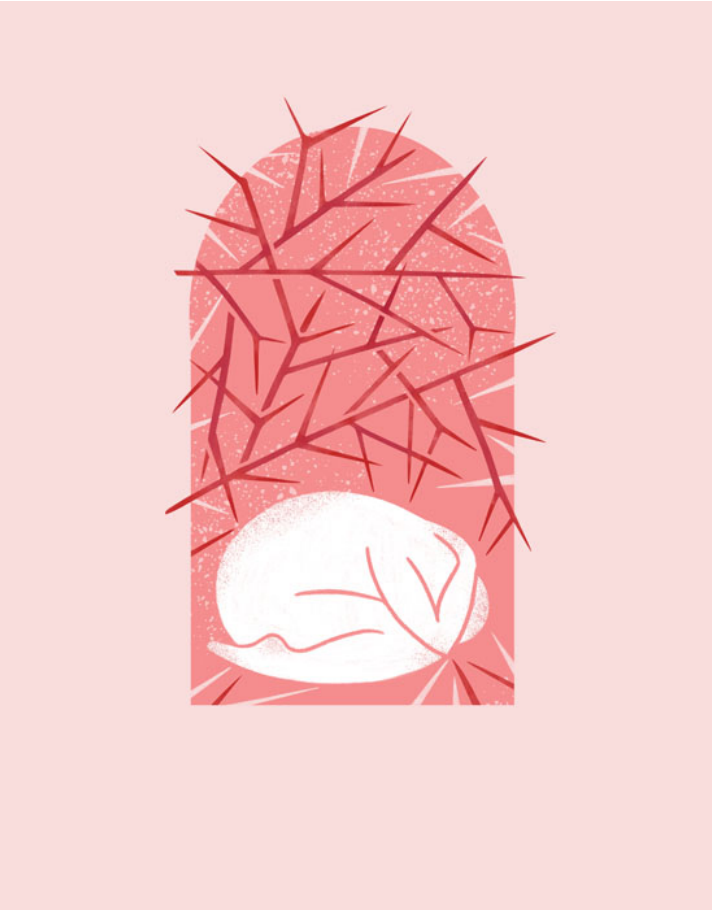
FLASH FICTION

Little One

by Alla Barsukova



"All About Pain" by Arusyak Pivazyan

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Mourn, verb — to feel or express great sadness, especially because of someone's death.
Queen Victoria mourned Prince Albert/Prince Albert's death for 40 years.
— Cambridge Dictionary

Who did you think about when reading this? You might have felt your stomach clench or your fists close. Nothing happened? Read it again. My throat is getting tight, my hands are covering my eyes, my memories are getting more vivid.

I am lying in a narrow bed, no, that's not my home, I am not alone though, four strange women sleeping in the room. I am standing in front of a sink, your only photo is burning inside, couple more seconds and you will exist nowhere but in my memory. I am buying pills, the list is never ending — yes, a bag, please — so everything inside me gets back to normal, before you normal. So much blood.

My pregnancy lasted for eight weeks, my mourning is still not over. They say, a child, it's forever. So is a dead child, but they are quiet about it. Even if you were together for less than three months.

You made me feel like a superhero, I kept saying that I had two hearts beating inside me, like Doctor Who. When looking at myself in the mirror, there was so much love, my body, so strong, so alive, like never before. My breasts became bigger, heavier, I dreamt about feeding you. Speaking about you felt like saying "I love you," so scary but impossible to keep secret. I have never liked my stomach. Except for those eight weeks, it felt like the most magical part of my body, our body.

"He's got a big heart. Can you hear it?" For the first time I am crying from joy. The doctor hands me your photo and smiles. In four weeks I will set it on fire and won't be able to take my eyes off it till the very end, then I will wash the ash away.

Eight weeks, fifty six days, at least one hundred and twelve opportunities to talk to my parents. I ignore all of them, let them go on holiday, calm, oblivious. Two days after their departure I bled. The paramedics get me into an ambulance, my insides feel like an animal pacing in a too small cage. Silence. During the examination I am so frightened that I can't even feel the coldness of the chair. The doctor's words sound hollow, as if I am not in the same room as him. My child stopped developing, it's not the size it should be at eight weeks old. I am spending the night in a narrow hospital bed with strangers around me. One says, I am still young. I am hurting so much, she could have shouted these words right into my ear, I wouldn't have noticed. Next day they put me under general anesthetic and you are gone.

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Later I keep seeing medical abortions in films and thinking, would that feel more real like this?

Couple hours after waking up I bled. A nurse brings me pads, surprised I don’t have my own. I can’t explain to her that I didn't need them for eight weeks. The on and off bleeding lasts for several days. At some point it feels like a normal period. I am hating my body for having recovered so fast. I am hating my body, a child died inside it. I am hating my body, it took my future, my motherhood away.

A month later I learn that a quarter of all pregnancies end in miscarriages. Six months later I can look at prams without crying. A year later my partner doesn’t want to try again. Five years later I learn I am chronically ill. Nine years later I start taking hormones and am feeling better. 10 years later my parents still don’t know.

“Your appointment for 11:40 is confirmed.” Ten years and a month later I am ready to plan a pregnancy. I think I will have to let you go now, little one.

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