**That Day**

Tawnya Gibson

The night before I miscarried, I was wearing sweatpants, elasticated legs pulled up to my knees. I’m certain I was in flip flops, as well, a staple with most every outfit when living in San Diego. I had a craving for ice cream, but we didn’t have any in our apartment.

“I’ll just run down the hill to Ralph’s and grab some,” I said and headed off.

My quick errand landed me in front of the freezers holding quarts of Ben and Jerry’s. Cherry Garcia was most likely what I was thinking of bringing home, my taste for chocolate ice cream not yet born—that would come with my next pregnancy, but before I could open the freezer door to retrieve the carton, I took one last step down the aisle and slipped in a puddle of water. My ankle twisted beneath me, and I came down hard on my left hip, my arm breaking my fall too late. The sharp pain knocked the wind out of me while a nearby employee helped me up. Leg dripping with the mystery liquid and flip flop askew, I left the store before the tears of pain came, embarrassment for falling the prevailing emotion as I made my way home.

I never got my ice cream.

I was sore that night but thought I was ok. I showered or maybe took a bath, cleaned myself off, tossed the sweatpants into the washer. I inspected the spot I knew would soon hold a deep and majestic bruise and made sure my ankle was fine. Worry about the baby that was little more than an abstract concept only fleetingly crossed my mind as I nursed my wounded hip and pride.

The day I miscarried, the spot of blood surprised me. Unsure if the surprise was because I kept forgetting I was pregnant, as long as the morning bedside crackers did their trick, or if it was a complete disconnect that a fall could affect my 10-week-old fetus that I had barely had time to acknowledge. Unsure about what to do, I waited.

By that night, the bleeding had increased. We drove to the military hospital miles away and were ushered into a curtained cubicle by a very young recruit. As he left, I joked and asked when the real doctor would be coming in. I cope by joking. Turns out, the joke was on me.

The very young recruit wheeled an internal ultrasound machine in and didn’t close the curtain fully. My back toward the opening, I felt every draft and heard every beep around me as my husband held my hand and wondered where to stare. The equipment took up most of the space. Our nerves took the rest. No words, no explanation, no jokes from the recruit. Just a simple “put this on,” and “wait here.” I glanced at the gown, crudely stamped with the words *Property of the United States Military* across the chest. I couldn’t imagine wanting to steal the assless straight jacket enough to make that declaration necessary. I had never felt more like a number. The next year, as I swaddled my newborn son into a similarly stamped blanket that ended up leaving with us, the branding made a little more sense.

I don’t remember what was said, exactly, but I remember that exam, a simple thin curtain between me and the world, a young recruit wielding a wand that would give me bad news. After he pushed and prodded and clicked buttons and measured the ghostly blob on the screen, he rolled the condom off, tossed it, holstered the wand, and wrote notes illegible to me in a near-simultaneous motion. He wordlessly left through the crack in the curtain, leaving us scrambling for what modesty we could get. He had looked more uncomfortable than the internal ultrasound felt.

He came back after what felt like an eternity and said the thing we already knew: “Spontaneous abortion.”

I don’t know if the clinical, chart-wielded word was more comfortable to him or if he thought using softer terminology would result in emotions from me that he wasn’t equipped to handle. I don’t think they cover ‘tears from woman miscarrying’ in basic training. Lucky for him, he’d never see mine fall. His closely shaved head, blond spikes barely poking through the skin, his tattoos, his short stature—I focused on it all and tuned every word he spoke right on out, putting my emotions in check behind a wall I would ignore for far too long. The doctor would come and talk to us, and then we could leave. That. That, I heard.

Leave. I wanted nothing more than to leave. Rid my life of this attention and have dinner.

In the days after the miscarriage, friends came over. One brought me flowers because she didn’t know I hated them and asked what I needed. I told her I needed to not think about it. To pretend it never happened. To never speak of it again. So, she sat and made me laugh. Deep belly laughs over something ridiculous. Her detailed gossip of those we knew and those we didn’t and stories from her past proved to be the best of medicine, and, true to her word, she never spoke of it again. Bless her.

Now, I can’t remember what we would have named her, and I panic, if just a little. Her middle name would have been Grace; why can’t I remember the first? I cried when I took the pregnancy test. I wasn’t ready, really, but I also knew that I might never be. A sneak attack on our first try was God’s way of saying “Stop thinking about it already.” Eliza, was it? Or Ella? It definitely started with an ‘E.’

That day, I wanted ice cream over a baby. The next, I wanted to be left alone. For months I didn’t know what I wanted, only that in my want, I had lost her.