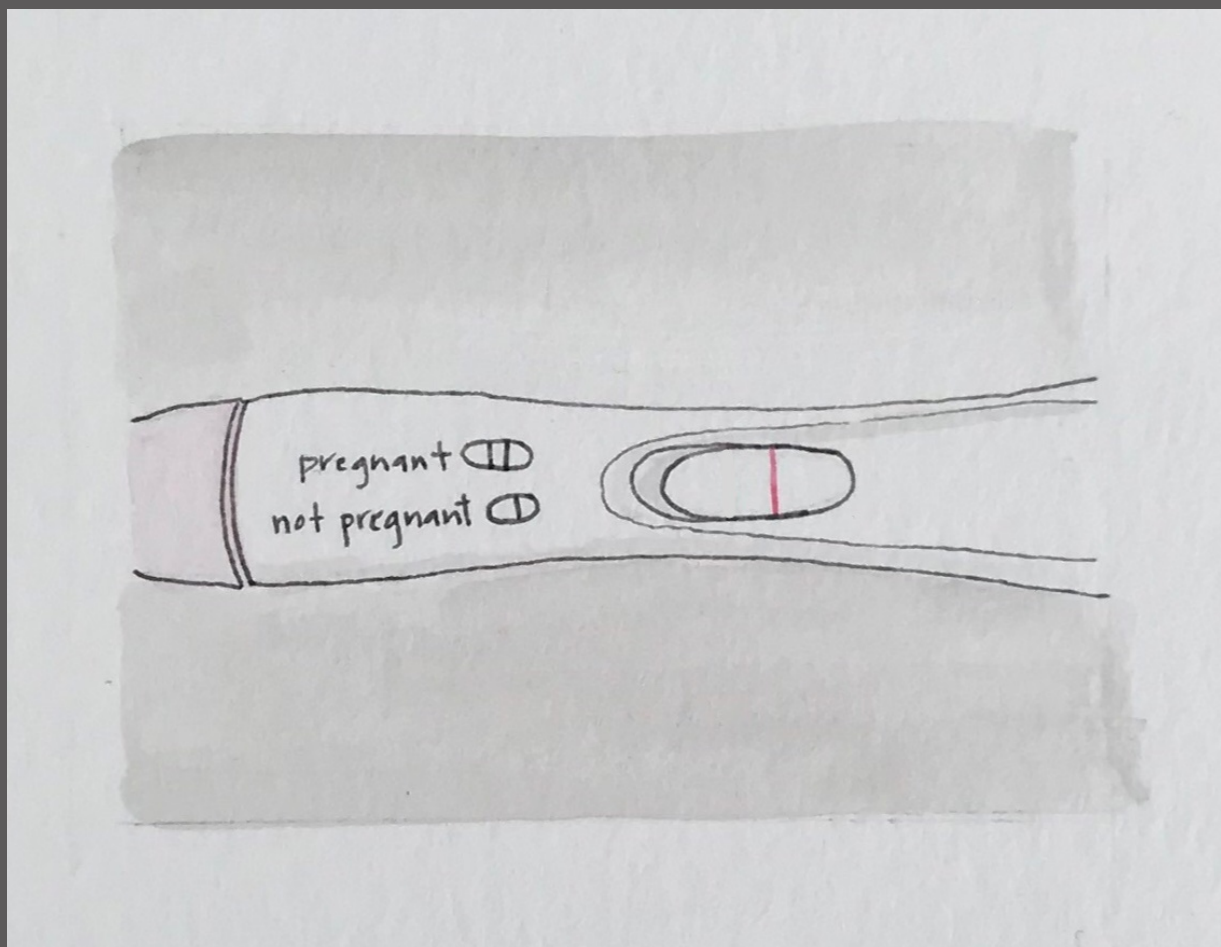


OBJECTS AND MEANINGS

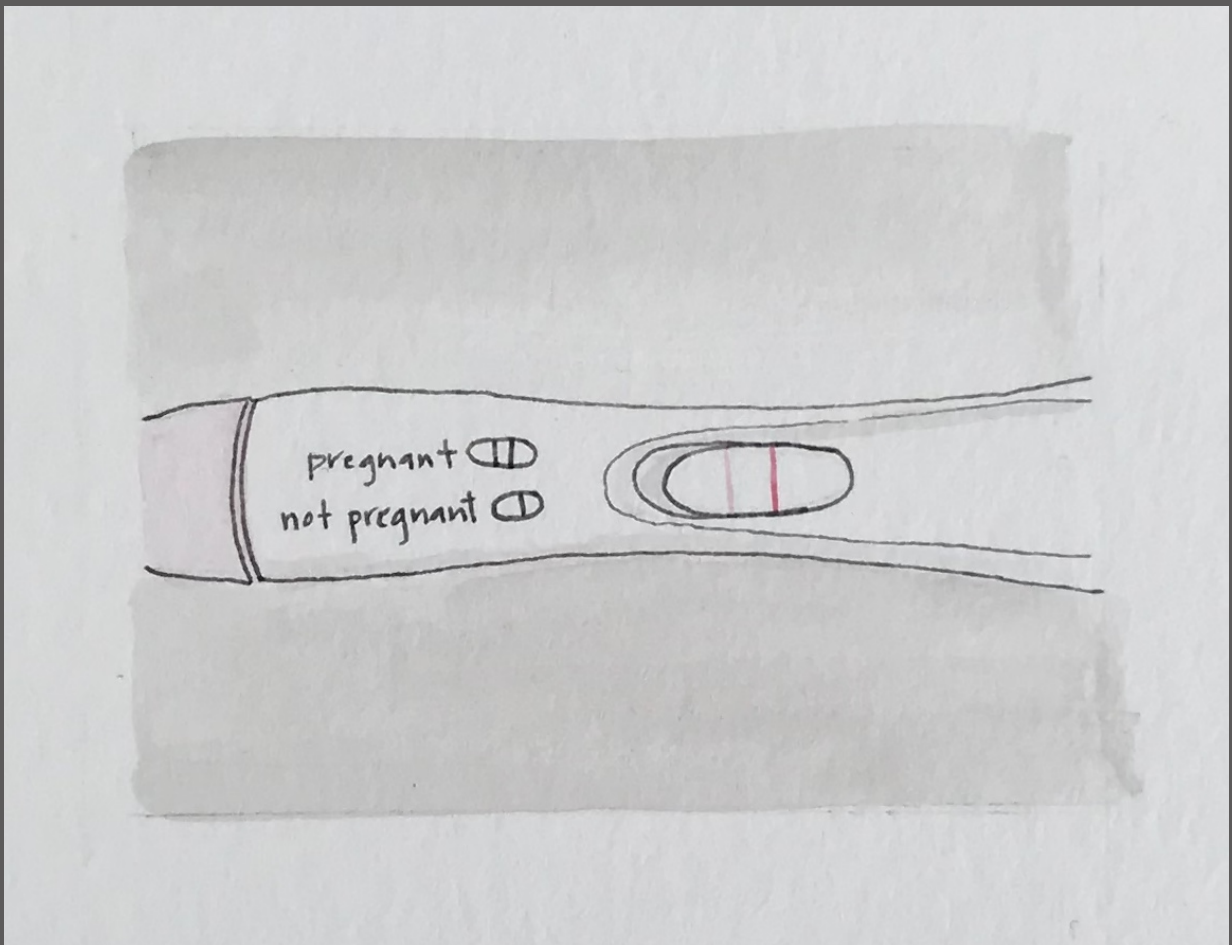
WORDS AND PICTURES BY MAURA WILSON SCHNEIDER

YOU TOOK THE PREGNANCY TEST IN THE MORNING—YOUR HUSBAND STILL ASLEEP. YOU WAIT FOR THE SECOND LINE, WHICH DOESN'T APPEAR. IT'S BLANKNESS SPREADS BENEATH YOUR CLAVICLE.



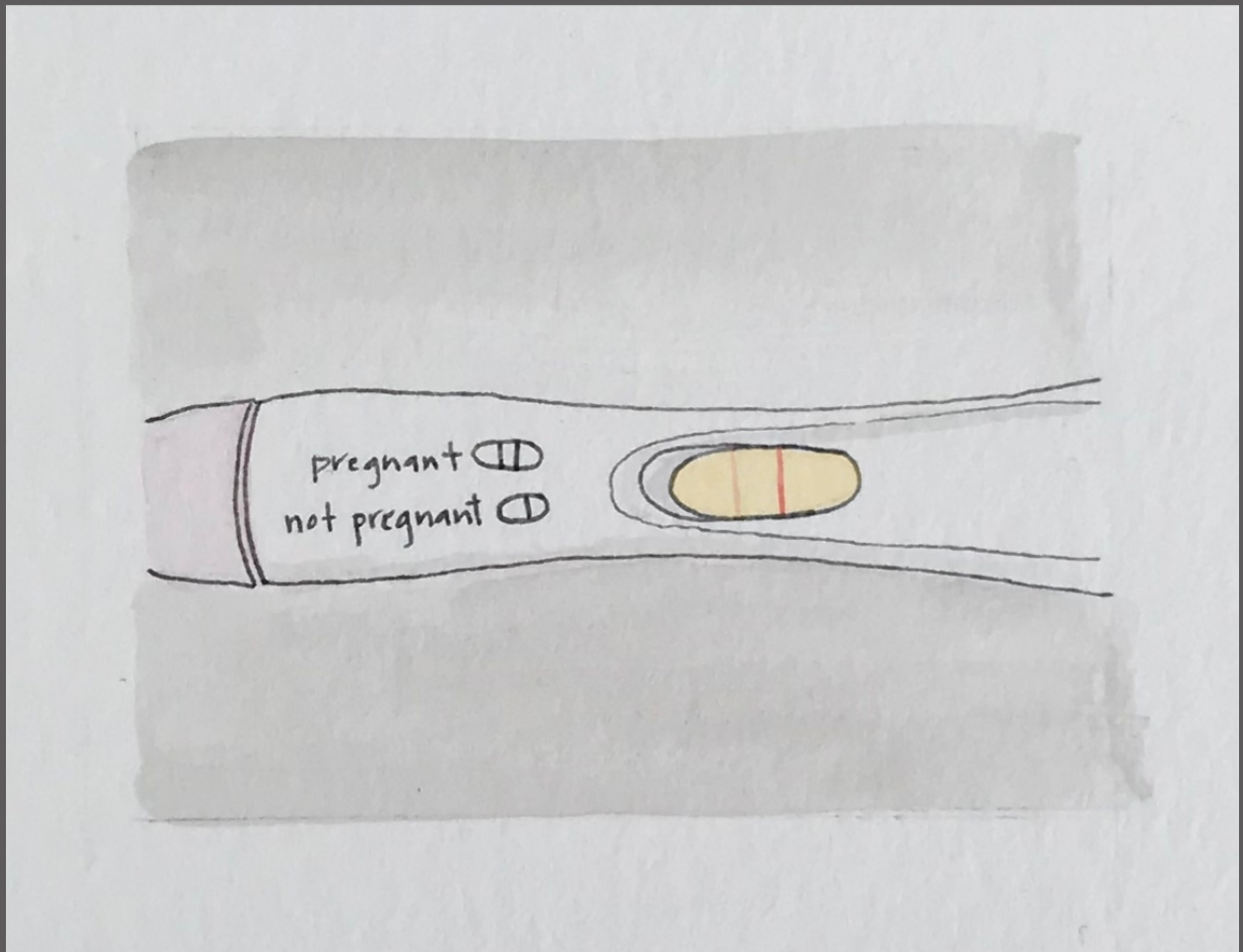
YOU GO BACK TO BED. YOU GET UP AND MAKE COFFEE. YOU EAT CEREAL WITHOUT MILK AND SWEEP CRUMBS FROM THE FLOOR. BUT, YOU THINK, MAYBE? AND YOU GO TO THE BATHROOM, TO FISH THE FAILED PREGNANCY TEST OUT OF THE TRASH CAN.

GIVEN TIME, AN OBJECT CAN CHANGE ITS MEANING.



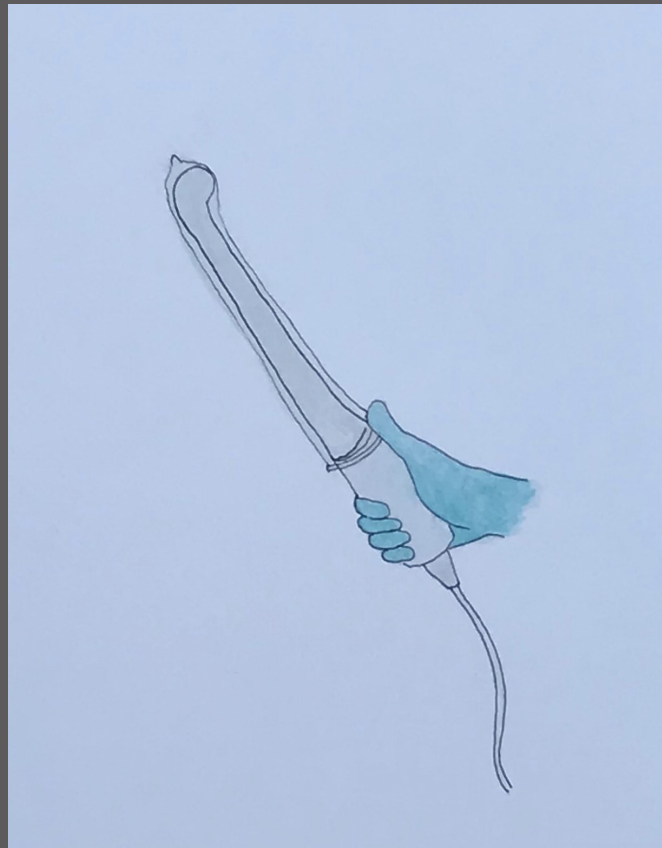
A NEGATIVE BECOMES POSITIVE. EXCITEMENT FORGETS DISAPPOINTMENT.

YOU KEEP THE TEST FOR THREE WEEKS EVEN WHEN THE WINDOW TURNS YELLOW BECAUSE IT'S FILLED WITH YOUR URINE. IT IS THE ONLY THING THAT TELLS YOU YOUR BABY EXISTS.

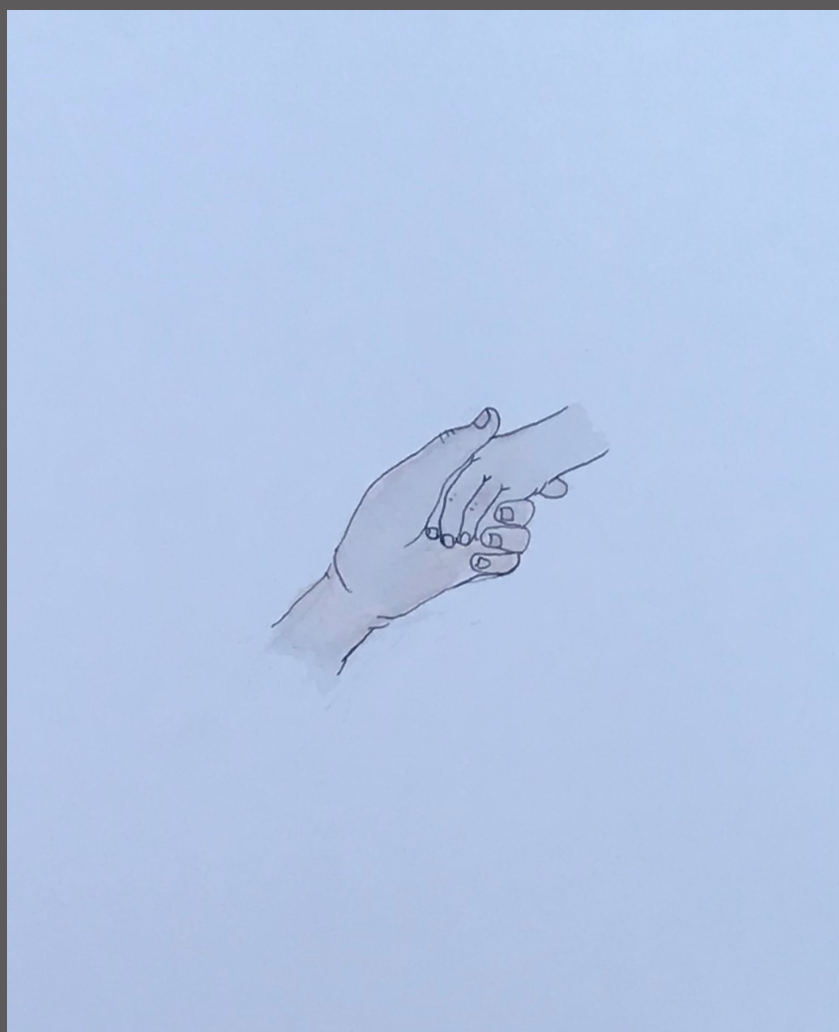


YOU HAVE YOUR FIRST SONOGRAM IN A NARROW LITTLE CLOSET OF A ROOM.
THE ULTRASOUND TECH OFFERS TO LET YOU SLIP THE CONDOM ONTO THE
VAGINAL TRANSDUCER, BUT YOU TELL HER SHE CAN.

SOME PEOPLE LIKE TO DO IT THEMSELVES, SHE SAYS, AS SHE PUSHES THE LATEX
COVERED WAND INSIDE OF YOU.

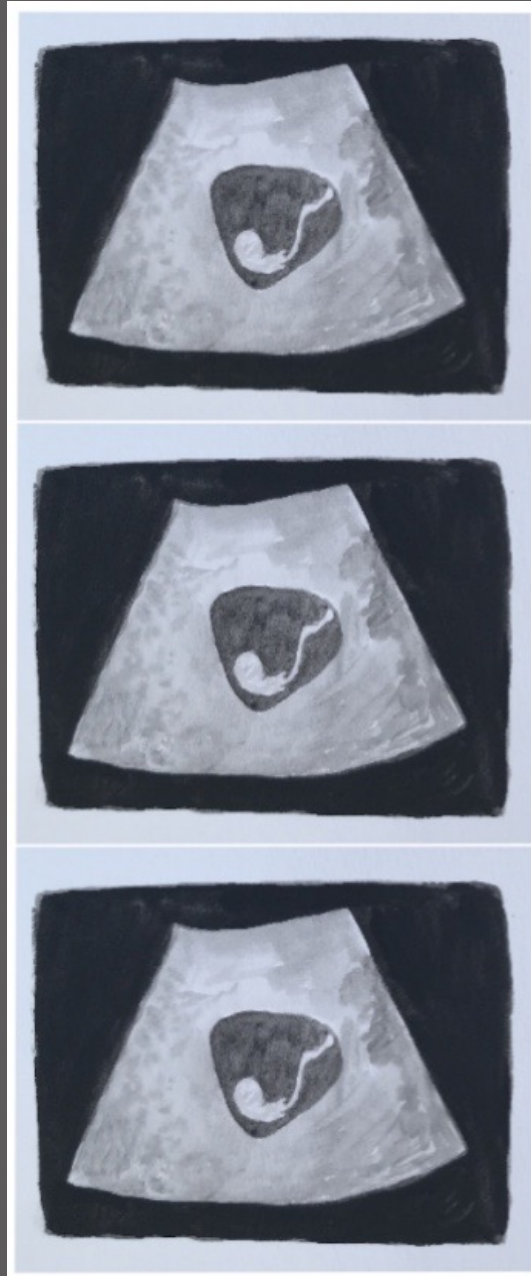


YOU SQUEEZE YOUR TWO-YEAR-OLD'S HAND. TOO HARD.



YOU WANT THIS TO BE A MOMENT. THAT YOUR SON MAY KNOW THAT THIS
GRAINY QUIVERING THING ON THE SCREEN IS HIS SISTER OR BROTHER. HE
SQUIRMS IN YOUR HUSBAND'S HANDS AND LETS GO OF YOURS. HE ASKS TO TURN
THE LIGHTS BACK ON.

AFTERWARDS, THE TECHNICIAN HANDS YOU A LONG RECEIPT-THIN PAPER.



THREE GRAINY, BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOS OF YOUR UTERUS. A GRAY LIMA BEAN FLOATING IN THE MIDDLE OF EACH ONE.

THEY ALWAYS LOOK LIKE GERBILS AT THIS POINT, YOU SAY, HOLDING THE PICTURES. AS IF YOU ARE AN EXPERT ON EITHER—HAVING ONLY HAD ONE BABY AND TWO GERBILS.



ONE OF THE GERBILS ATE THE OTHER (ALL BUT THE TAIL) WHEN YOUR SISTER FORGOT TO FEED THEM.

WHEN YOU GET HOME, YOU THROW AWAY THE YELLOWED PREGNANCY TEST AND
MAGNET THE SONOGRAM PICTURES TO THE FREEZER DOOR.

THERE ARE RULES ABOUT PREGNANCY.



No alcohol.



No smoking.



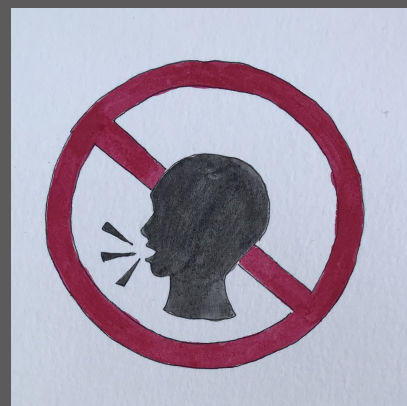
No lunch meat.



No rollercoasters.

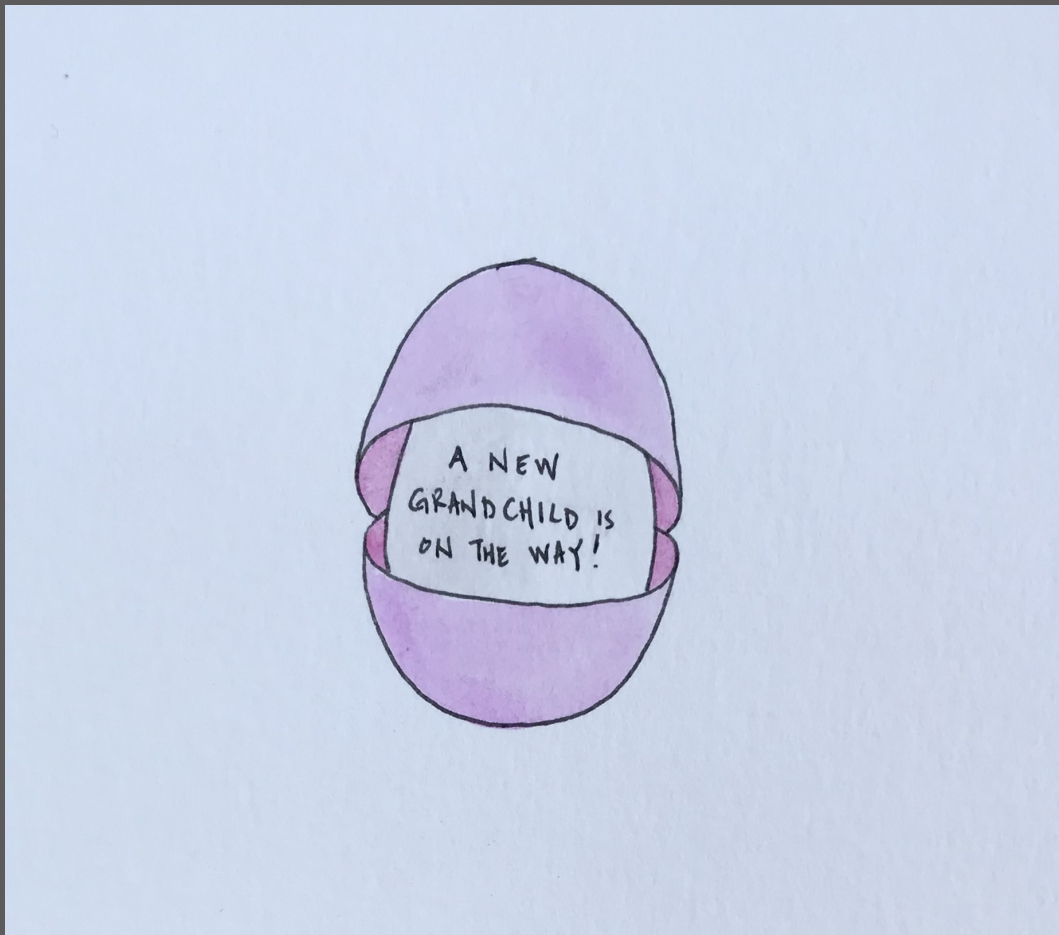


Take prenatal vitamins.

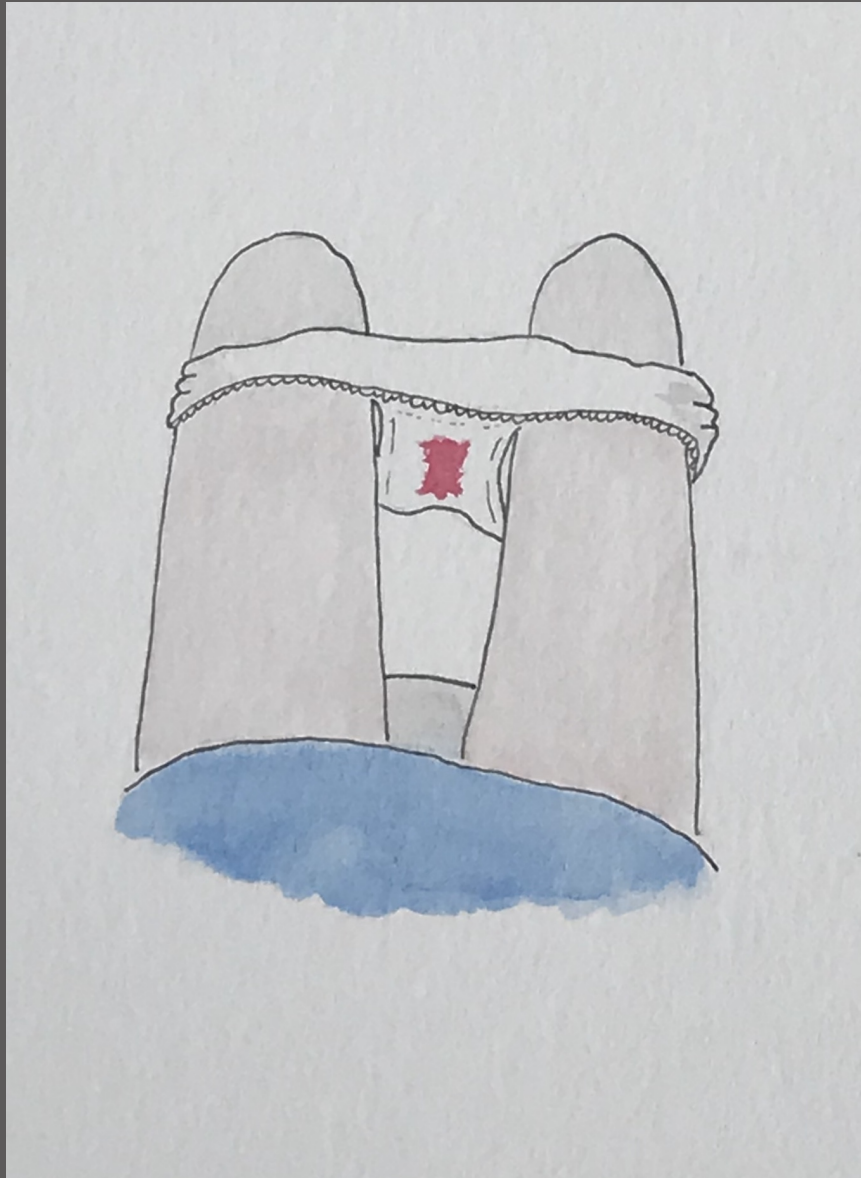


Don't tell anyone before
12 weeks.

ON EASTER, EVEN THOUGH YOU WERE ONLY SIX WEEKS ALONG, YOU SPENT MANY MINUTES CUTTING AND RECUTTING PAPER OVALS TO FIT INTO PLASTIC EGGS, WHICH YOUR SON HANDED TO HIS GRANDPARENTS BEFORE DINNER.

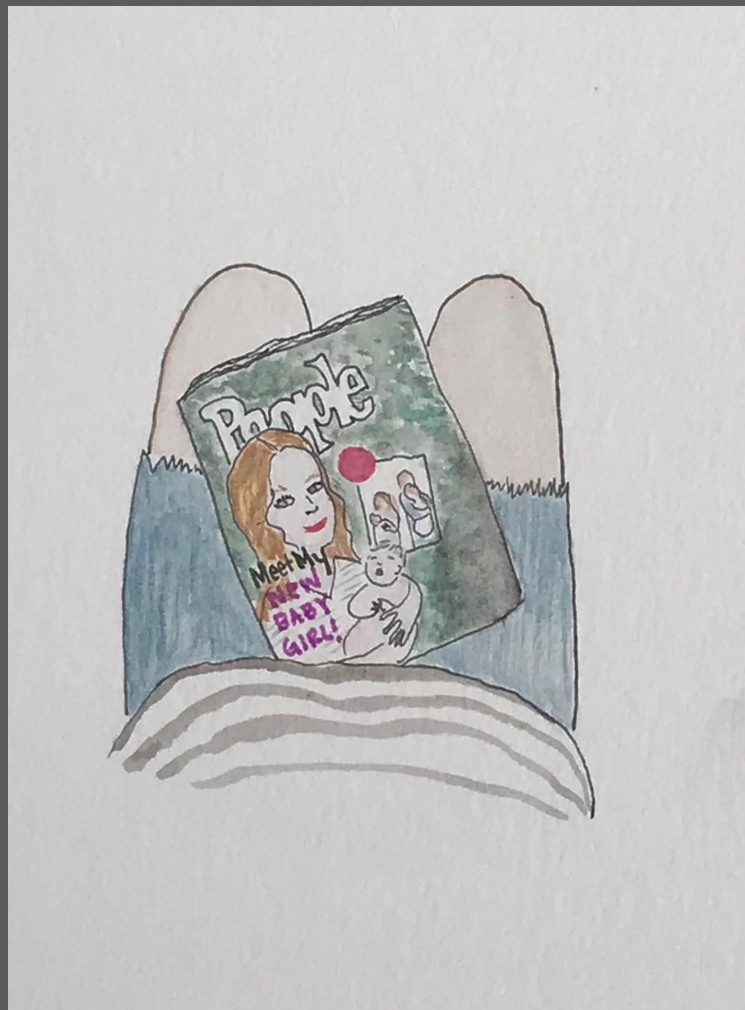


EIGHT AND A HALF WEEKS LATER YOU ARE IN THE SAFETY OF THE SECOND TRIMESTER.



AN OBJECT CAN CHANGE ITS MEANING.

IT CAN SHIFT YOU FROM JOY TO LIMINAL SPACES: WAITING ROOMS AND
CROSSED FINGERS.

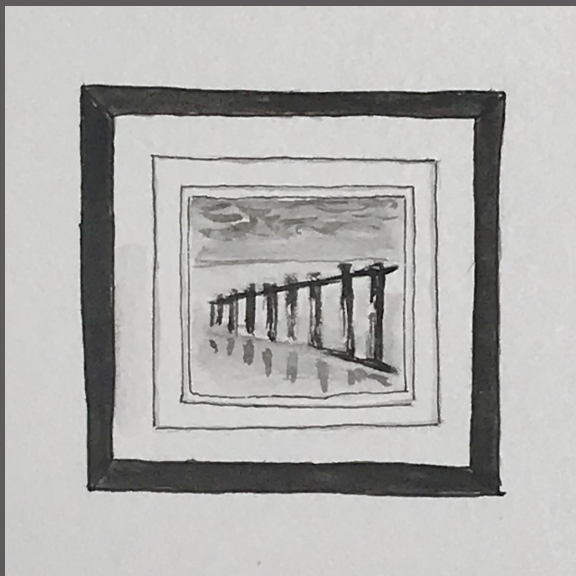


AGAIN TO THE SONOGRAM ROOM, YOUR INTERIOR PROJECTED, ITS CONTENTS LARGER. NO LONGER A LIMA BEAN OR A GERBIL, NOW A SMALL BABY.



YOU CONCENTRATE ON THE SCREEN AND TRY TO FEEL THE SOFT BUMPS, MOMENTS OF CONTACT, WHEN THE BABY SWIMS INTO THE EDGES OF YOUR UTERUS. YOU TRY, BUT YOU FEEL NOTHING.

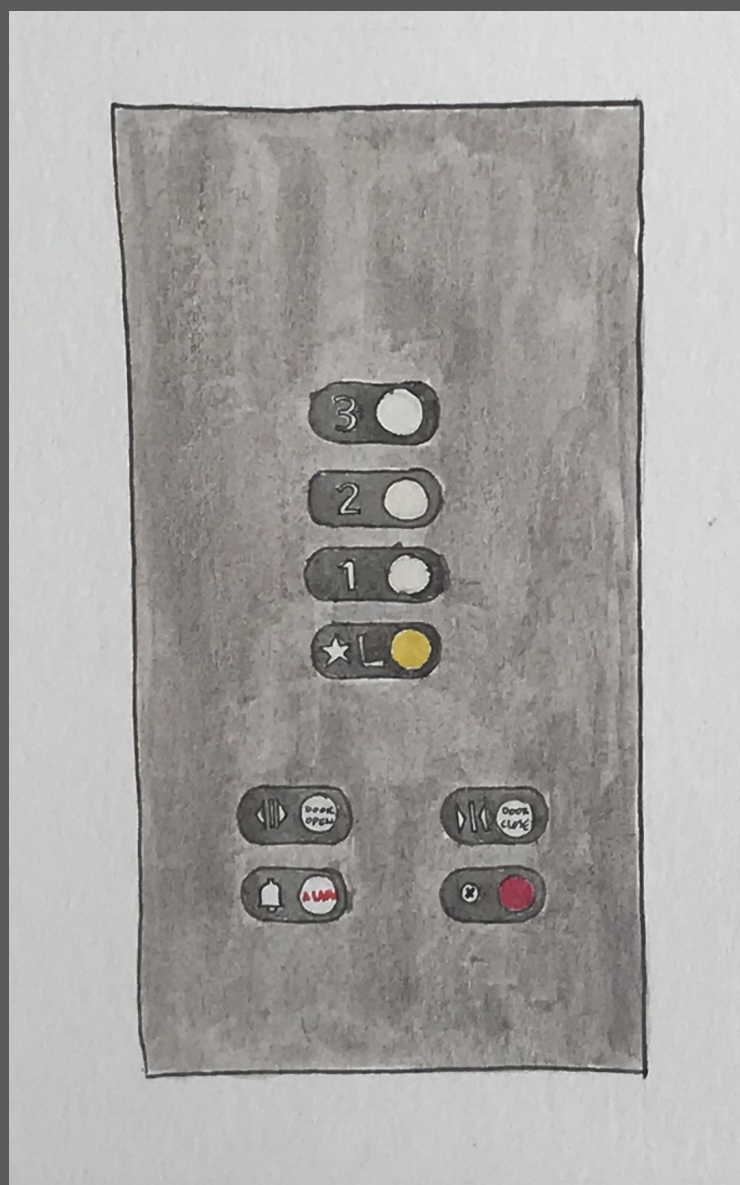
YOU WAIT IN ANOTHER ROOM FOR THE DOCTOR. YOU DON'T NEED TO UNDESS, THE NURSE TELLS YOU, BEFORE SHE CLOSES THE DOOR LEAVING YOU TO SIT ON THE CRINKLED PAPERED EXAM TABLE, LEGS DANGLING.



THE PICTURES ON THE WALLS TO YOUR LEFT AND RIGHT ARE MIRROR IMAGES OF THE SAME DOCK DISAPPEARING INTO WATER AND FOG.

WHEN THE DOCTOR COMES TO GET YOU AND WALKS YOU TO HIS OFFICE, YOU KNOW. IT'S ALWAYS BAD NEWS WHEN IT'S TOLD ACROSS A DESK. YOU WON'T REMEMBER HIS FACE, JUST HIS INDIRECT WAY OF SAYING THE THINGS THAT BREAK YOU: COULDN'T FIND A HEARTBEAT, GROWTH STOPPED BEFORE 14 WEEKS, YOU WILL PASS THE PRODUCTS OF CONCEPTION.

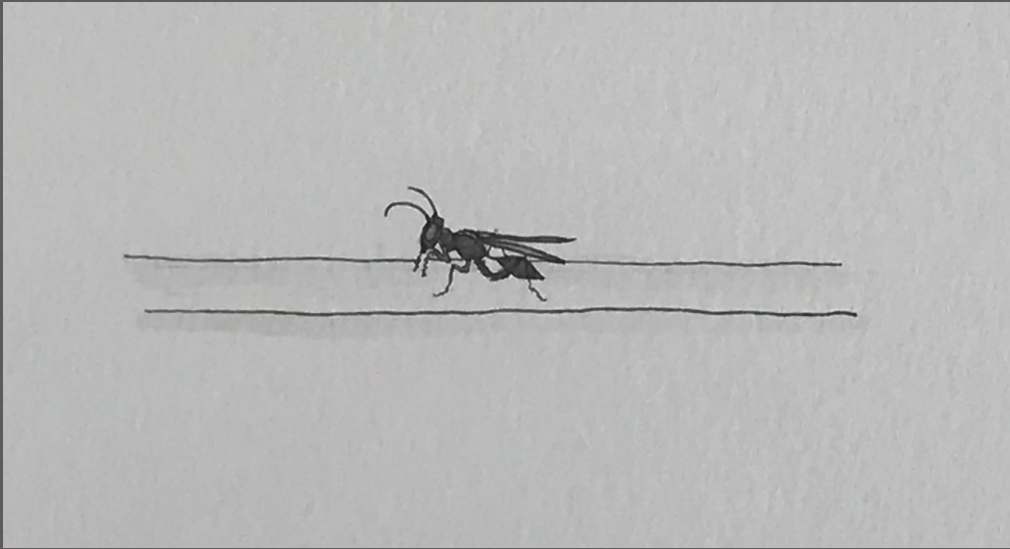
YOU CAN'T CRY IN THE ELEVATOR BECAUSE A MAN SLIPS IN JUST BEFORE THE DOORS CLOSE.



YOU SCREAM IN THE CAR. YOU CALL YOUR HUSBAND. YOUR JAW ACHES FROM FORMING ALL THE WORDS.

SOMEHOW, YOU DRIVE YOURSELF HOME. YOU CRAWL INTO BED AND CRY UNTIL
YOU ARE EMPTY.

WHEN YOU ARE QUIET YOU NOTICE A WASP ON THE WINDOW. IT BUZZES WHEN IT FLIES, THEN IS SILENT.



IN THIS HOUSE YOU'VE BECOME THE ONE RESPONSIBLE FOR KILLING BUGS.

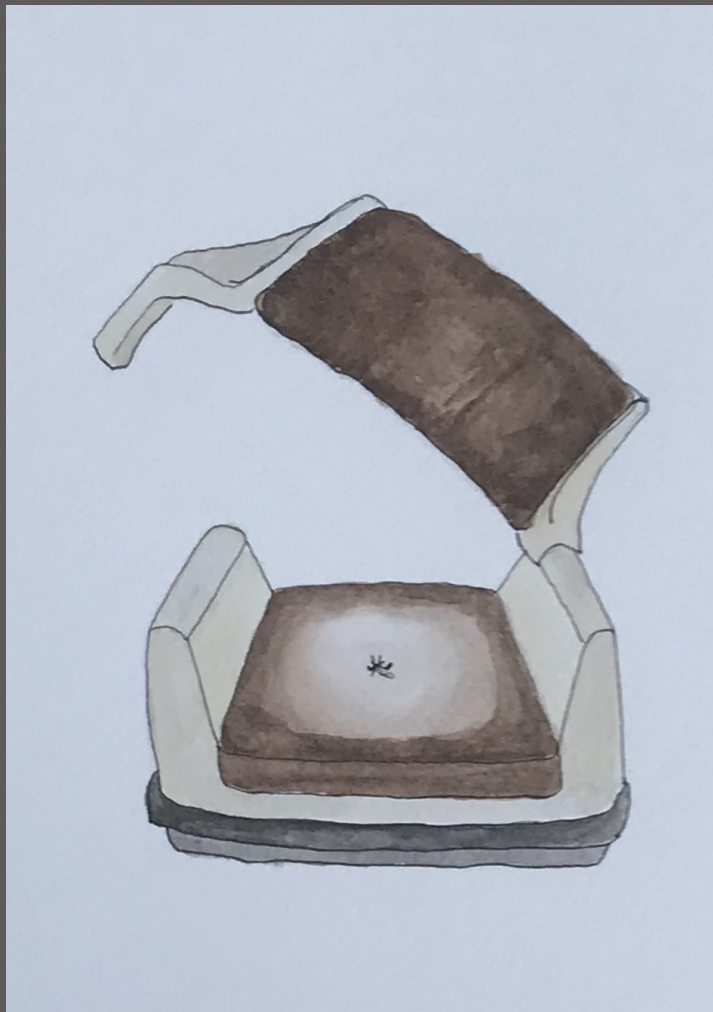
ONCE WHEN YOU WERE FOUR AND SITTING IN YOUR BOOSTER SEAT IN THE BACK OF YOUR PARENTS' TAN CHEVY SEDAN, SOMETHING TICKLED YOUR THIGH.



YOU REACHED BETWEEN YOUR LEGS TO SCRATCH THE ITCH AND LIGHTNING STRUCK YOUR PALM. BEFORE YOU COULD CRY OUT, IT SEARED YOU AGAIN—TWICE—NEXT TO THE SEAM OF YOUR UNDERWEAR. THEN YOU SCREAMED.

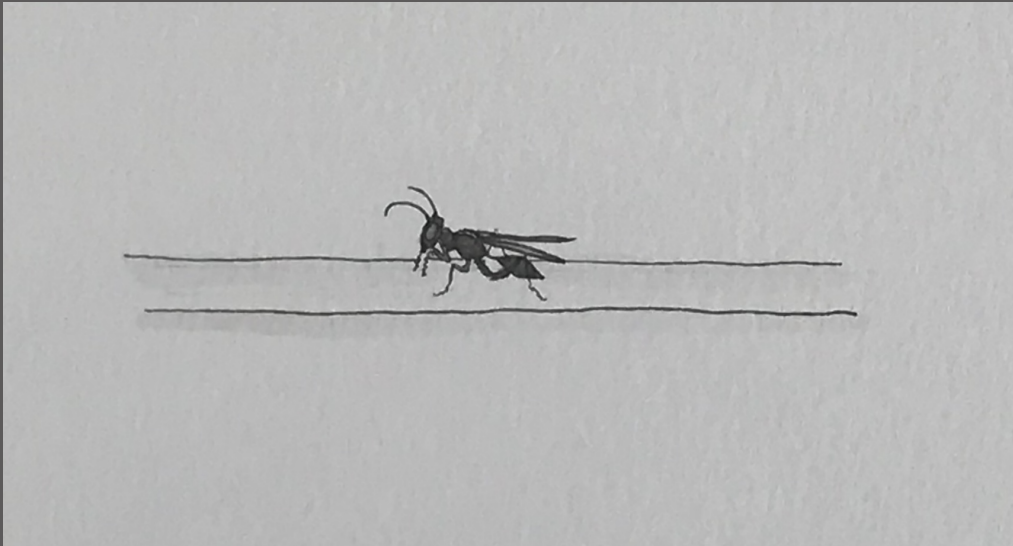
YOUR FATHER PULLED THE CAR OVER.

YOUR MOTHER UNSTRAPPED YOU AND PRESSED AN ICE PACK TO THE WELTS ON YOUR HAND AND LEG. IN THE CAR SEAT, CURLED AND MOTIONLESS, WAS THE WASP THAT STUNG YOU.



YOU HICCUPED AND SOBBED AND CLUNG TO YOUR MOTHER, TERRIFIED OF BEING STUNG AGAIN.

IT'S OKAY, SHE TOLD YOU. IT'S DEAD. IT DIED BECAUSE IT STUNG YOU.

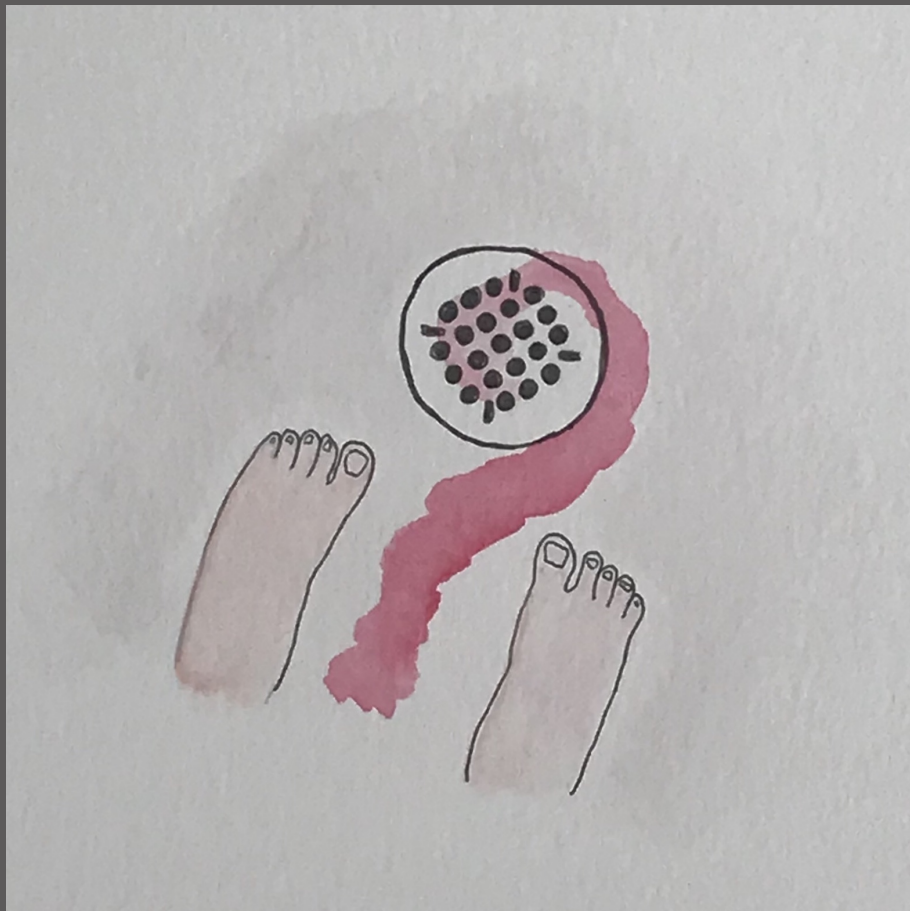


YOU CAN'T KILL A WASP TODAY.

YOU SLEEP AND IN THE MORNING YOU ARE HUNGRY AND YOUR HUSBAND, EAGER TO DO SOMETHING, ANYTHING, GOES OUT TO GET YOU A SPECIFIC KIND OF SUGARY CEREAL.





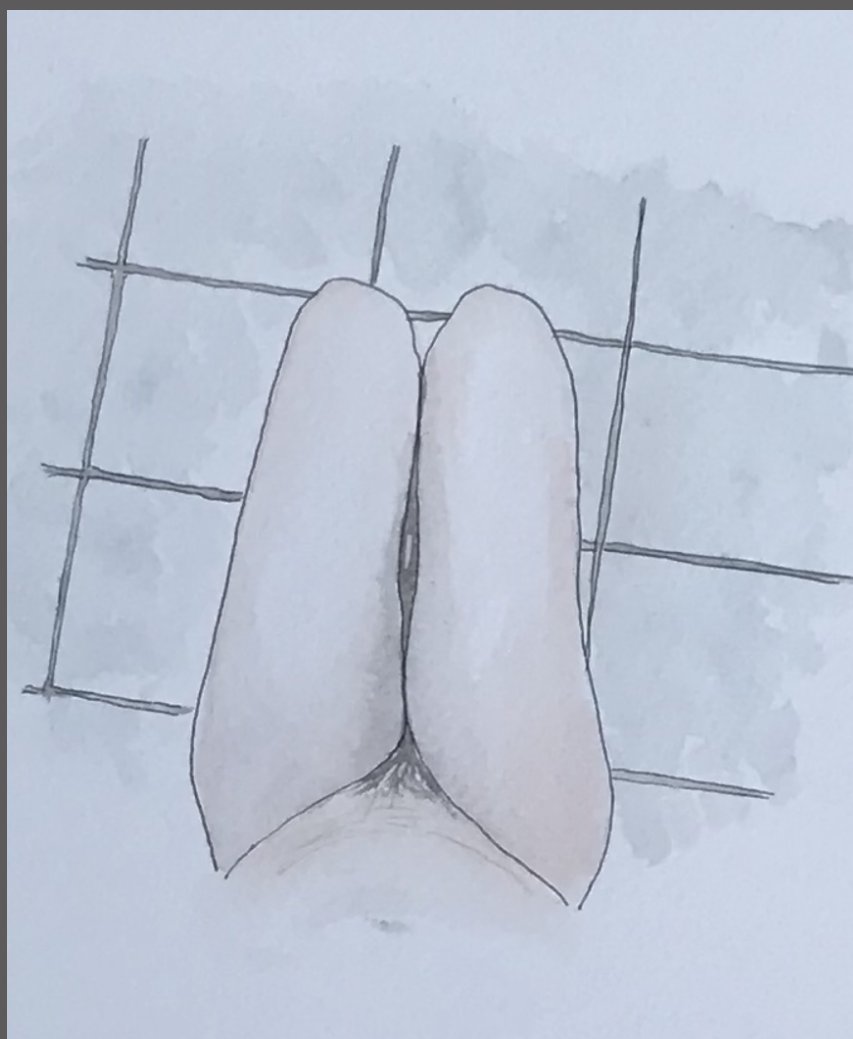




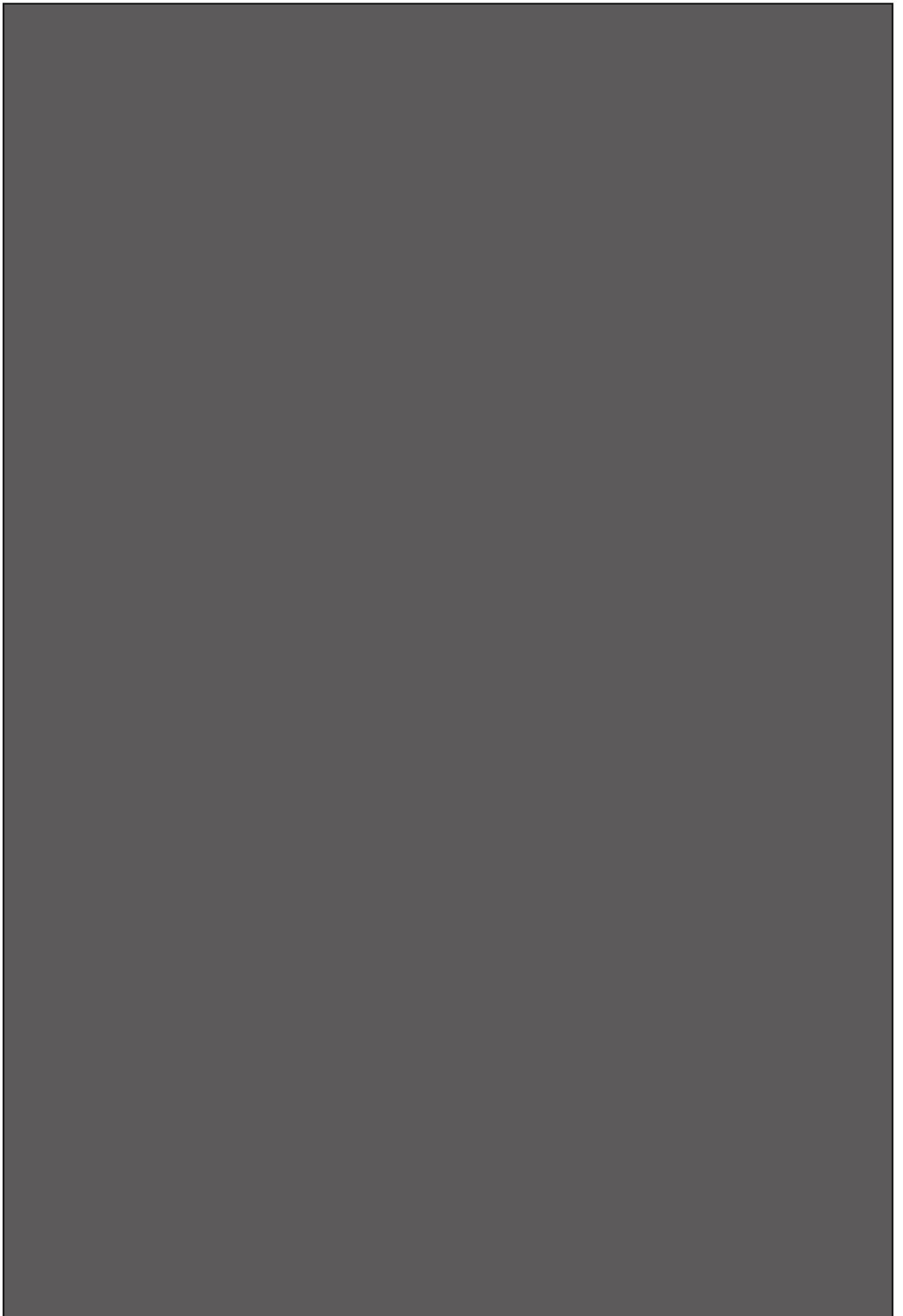
WHEN YOU WERE PREGNANT WITH YOUR SON, YOU ASKED THE DOCTOR HOW YOU
WOULD KNOW WHEN IT WAS TIME TO GO TO THE HOSPITAL.

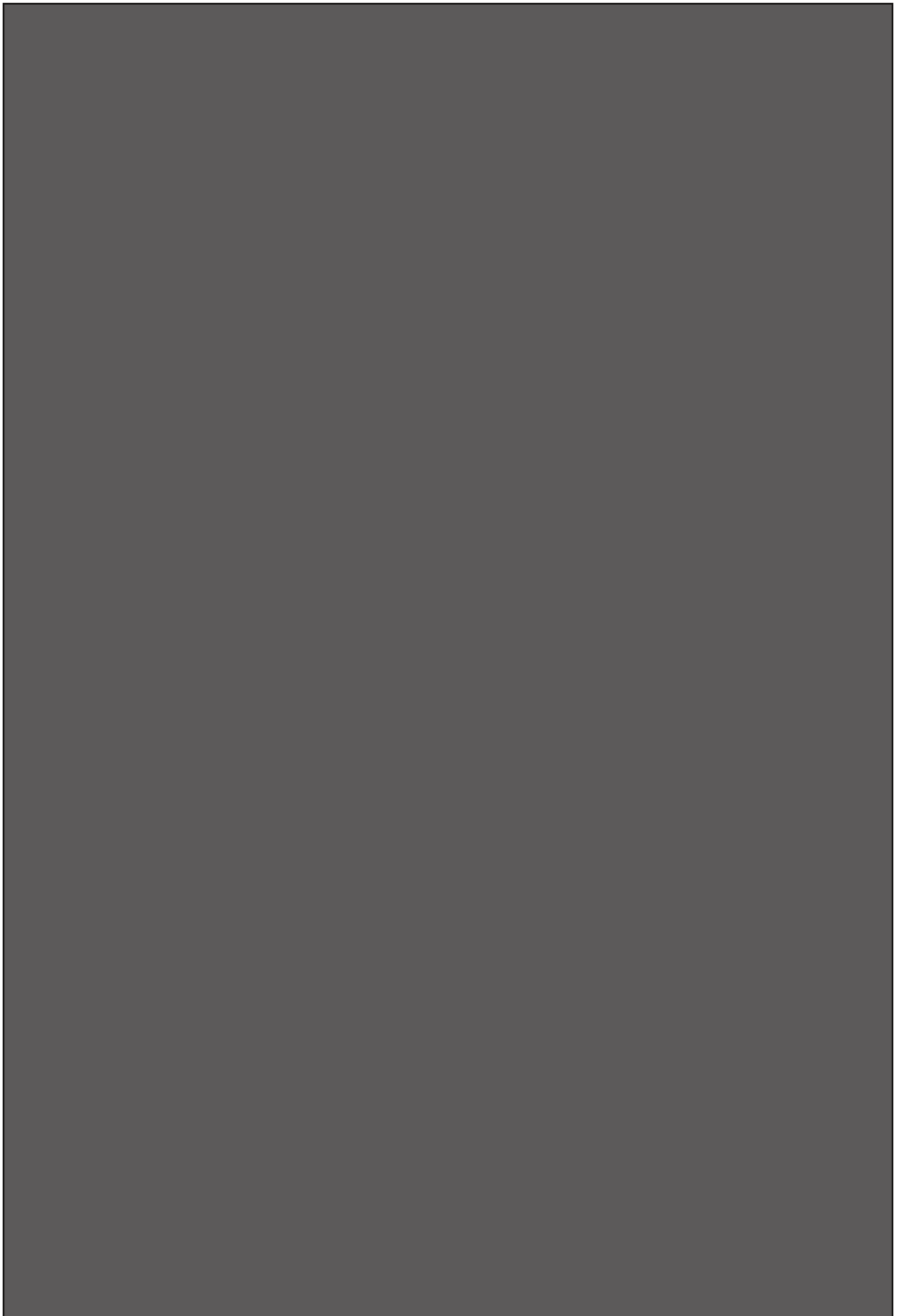
YOU'LL JUST KNOW, SHE SAID.

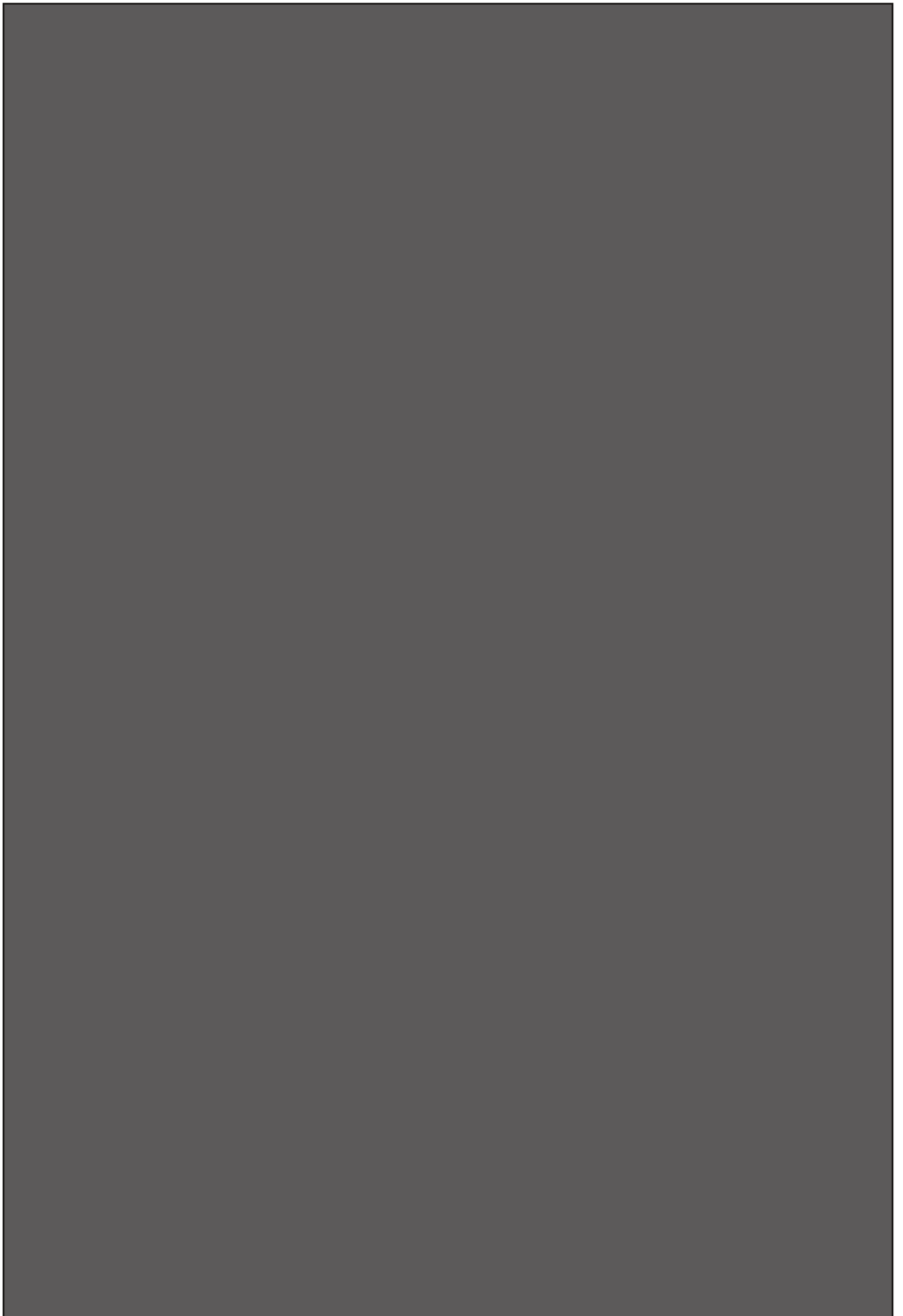
Now, ALONE, YOU KNOW. YOU CRAWL TO THE BATHROOM AND SIT ON THE TOILET.

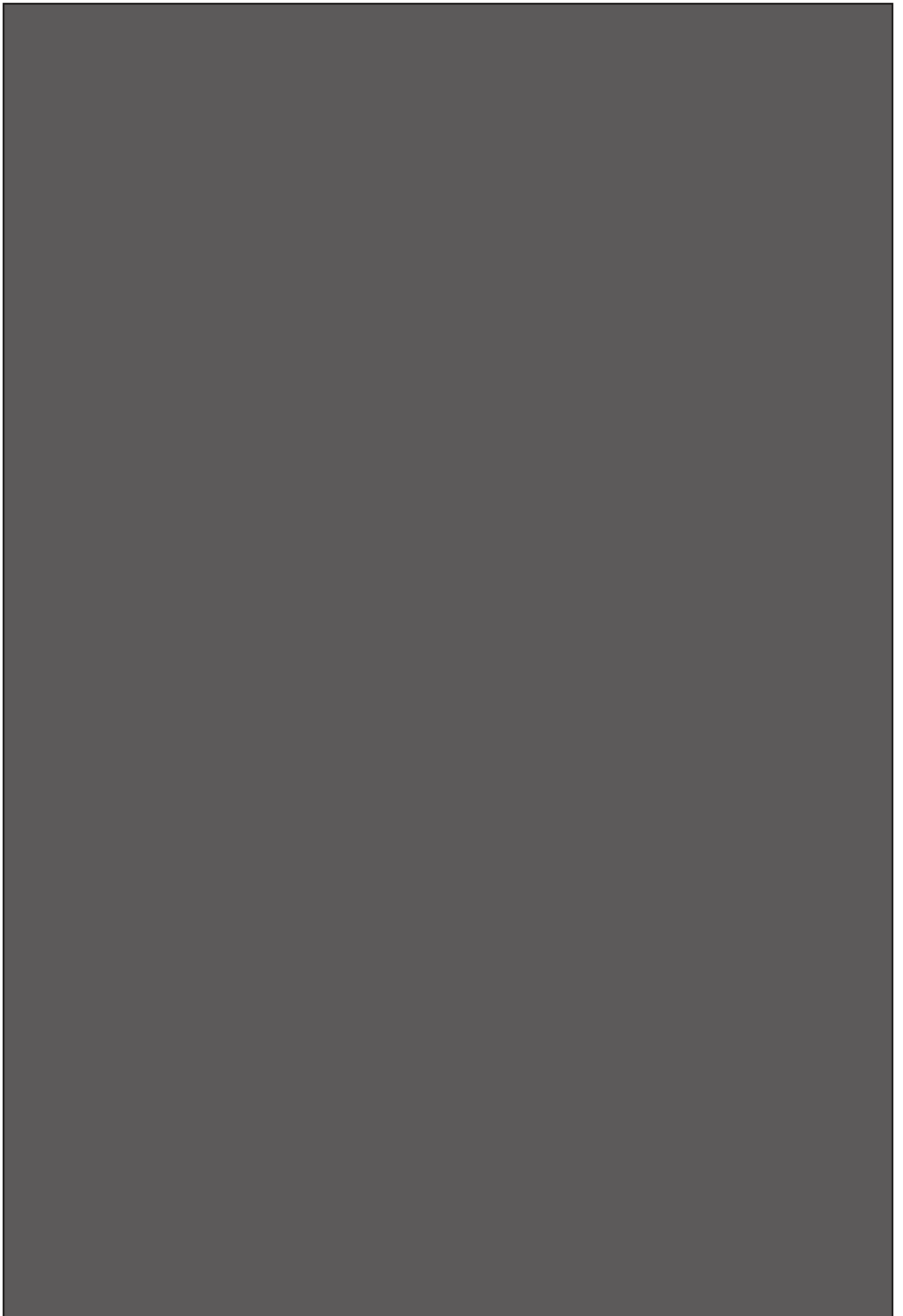


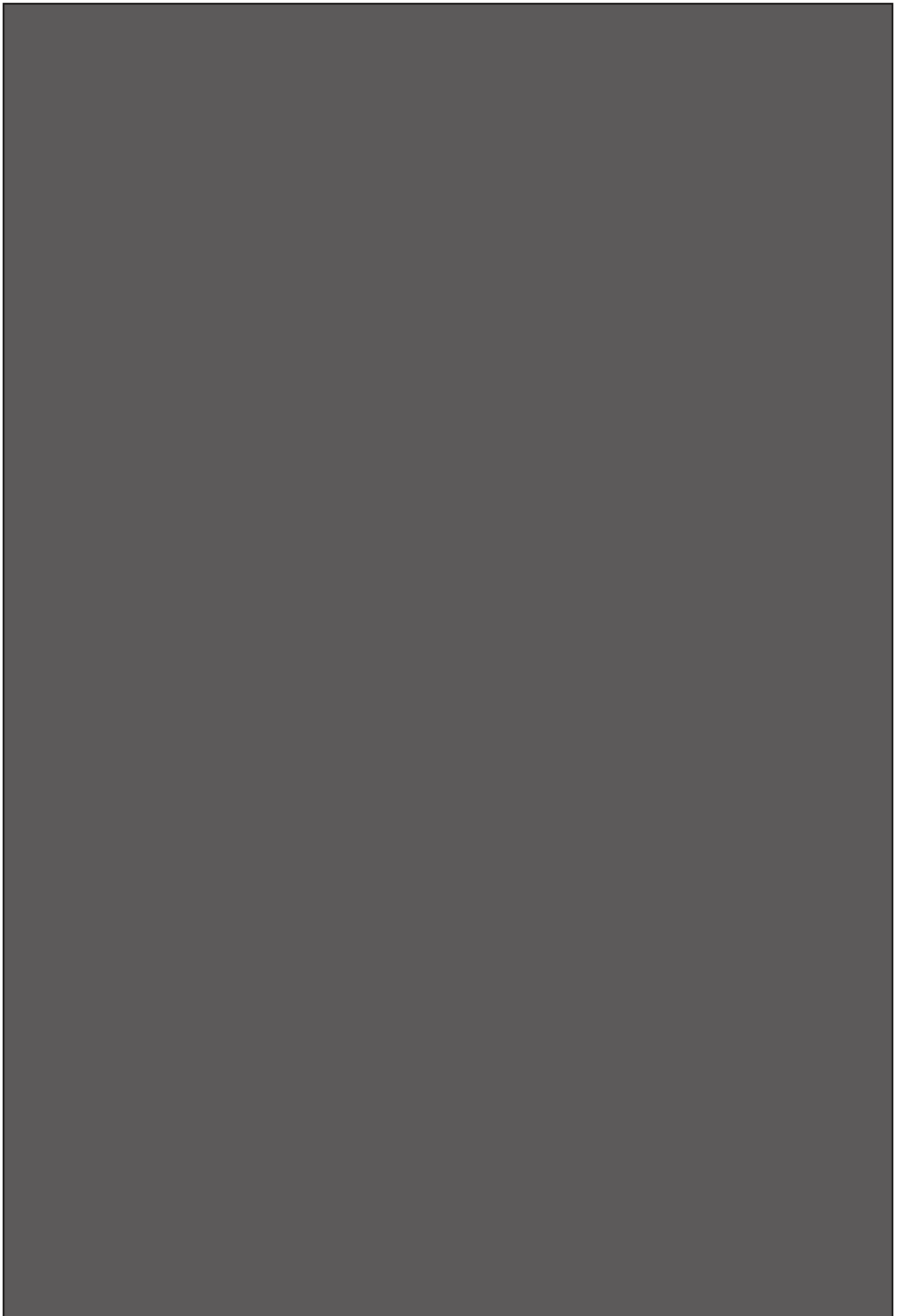
SOMETIMES LANGUAGE IS WRONG. ITS INCONGRUITY AN INSULT. THE WORDS
FAIL THE OBJECTS THEY DESCRIBE: PASSAGE OF BLOOD AND TISSUE, PRODUCTS
OF CONCEPTION, MISSING HEARTBEAT.



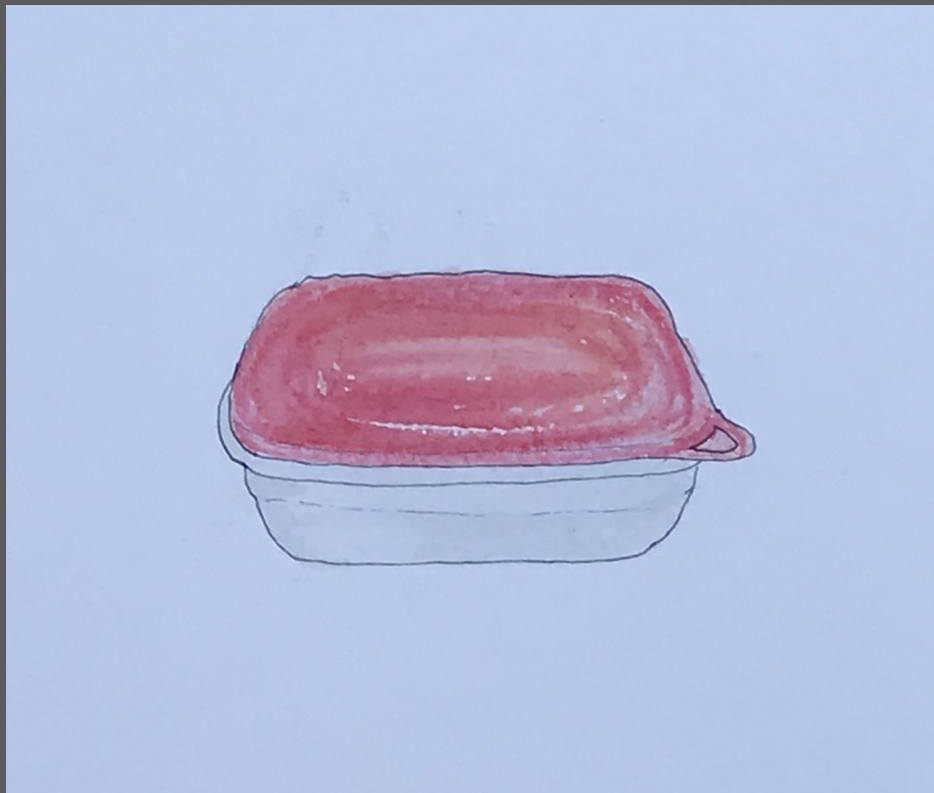








WHEN IT IS OVER, THERE IS A BABY, SO SMALL IT FITS IN A RUBBERMAID SANDWICH CONTAINER.



THERE IS NO LESSON IN THIS LOSS



ONLY THAT YOU STILL EXIST.