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ART OF MEDICINE

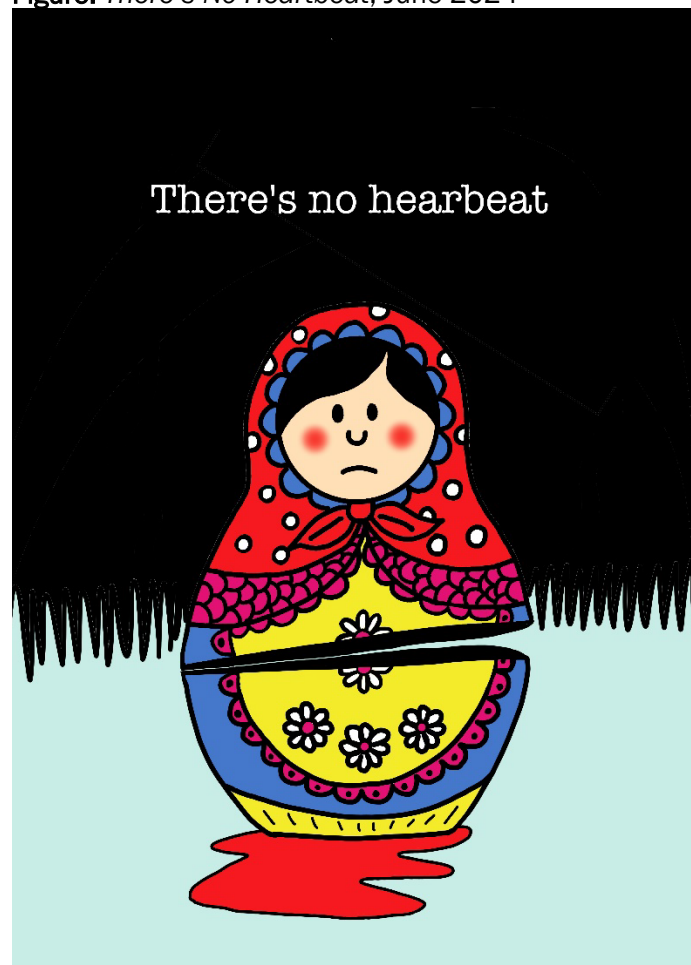
When Poor Practice and Poor Communication Make Grief Worse

Mónica Lalanda, MD, MSc

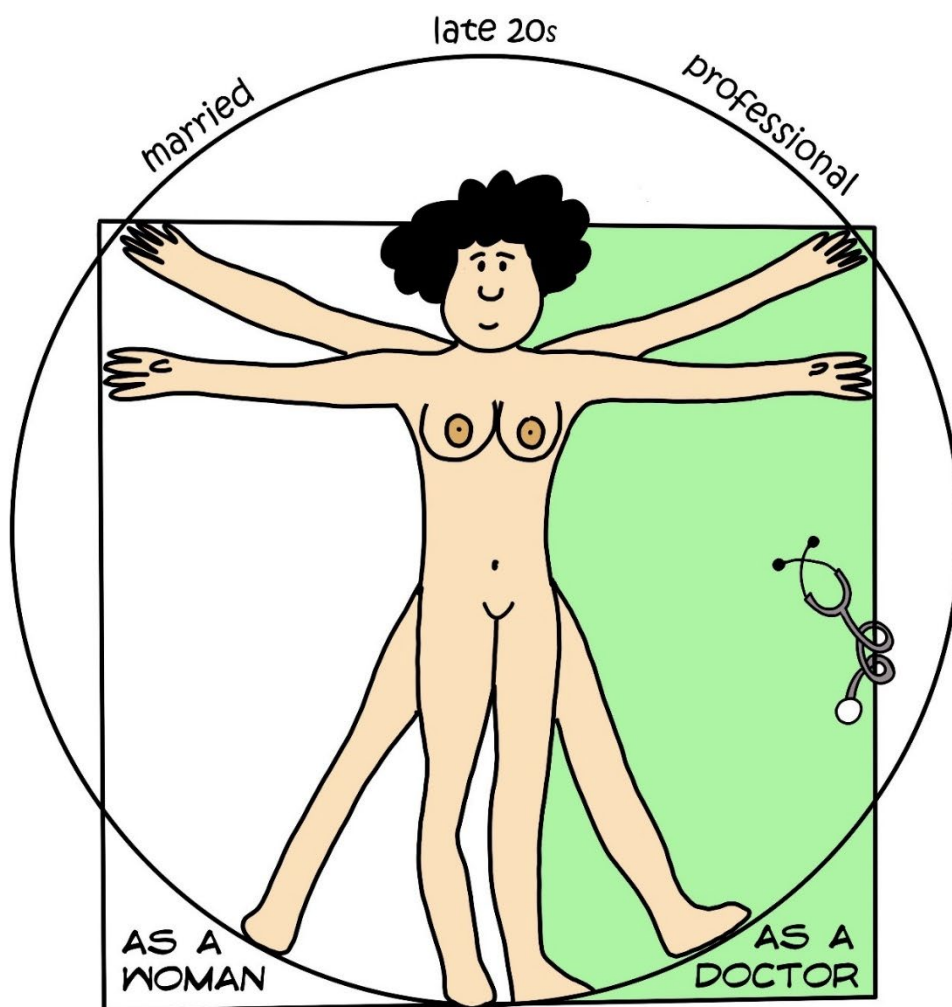
Abstract

This 20-panel comic visually explores how a health care professional's scope of practice violations, poor bad news communication, and professionalism lapses exacerbated one clinician-artist's embodied experience of pregnancy loss and grief.

Figure. *There's No Heartbeat*, June 2024



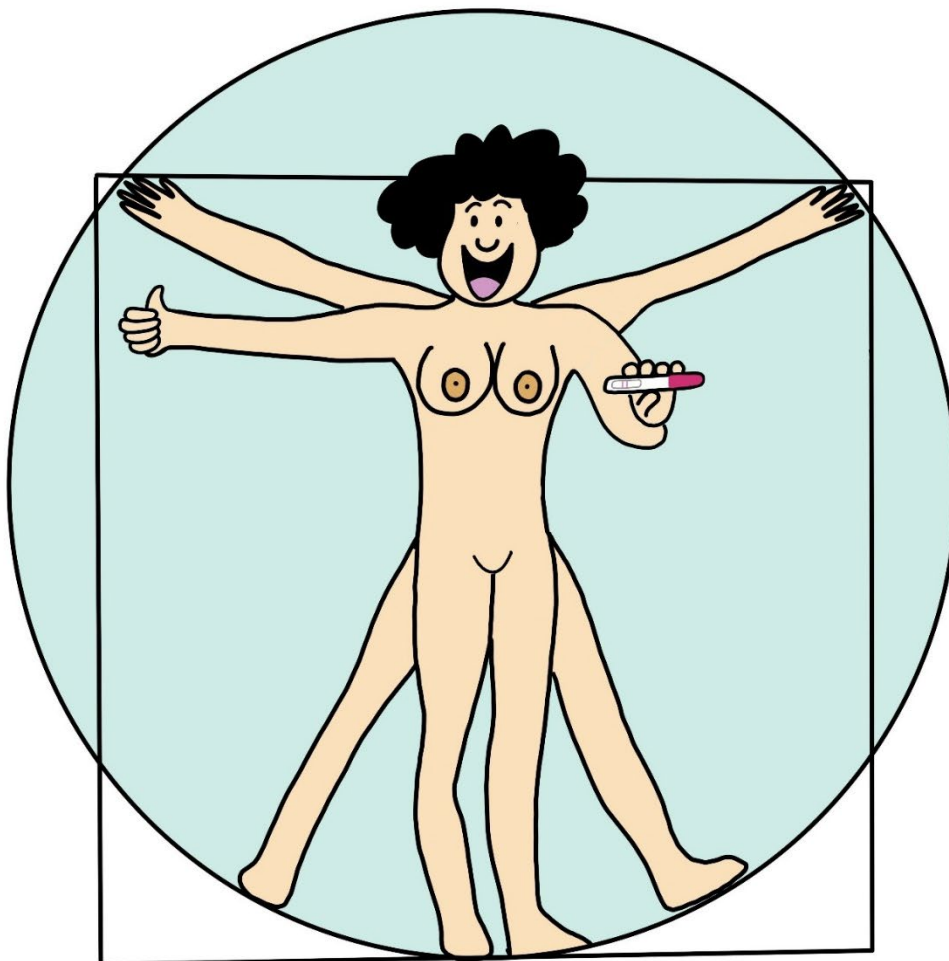
THERE'S NOTHING SPECIAL ABOUT MY STORY...



I didn't mind
being a mother
or not. Both
possibilities
were fine to me.

I had been taught
that an embryo
was not a person
until it had some
neurological
development.

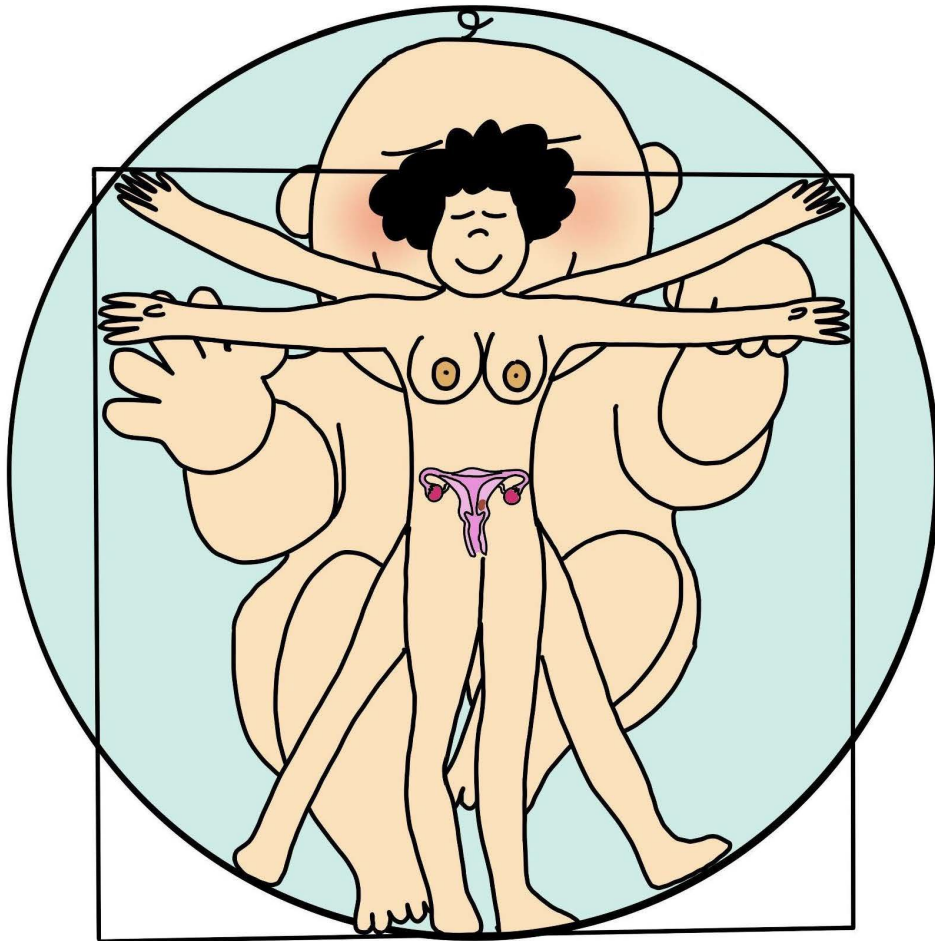
One day my period was late,
it was never late.



PREGNANCY TEST...POSITIVE.

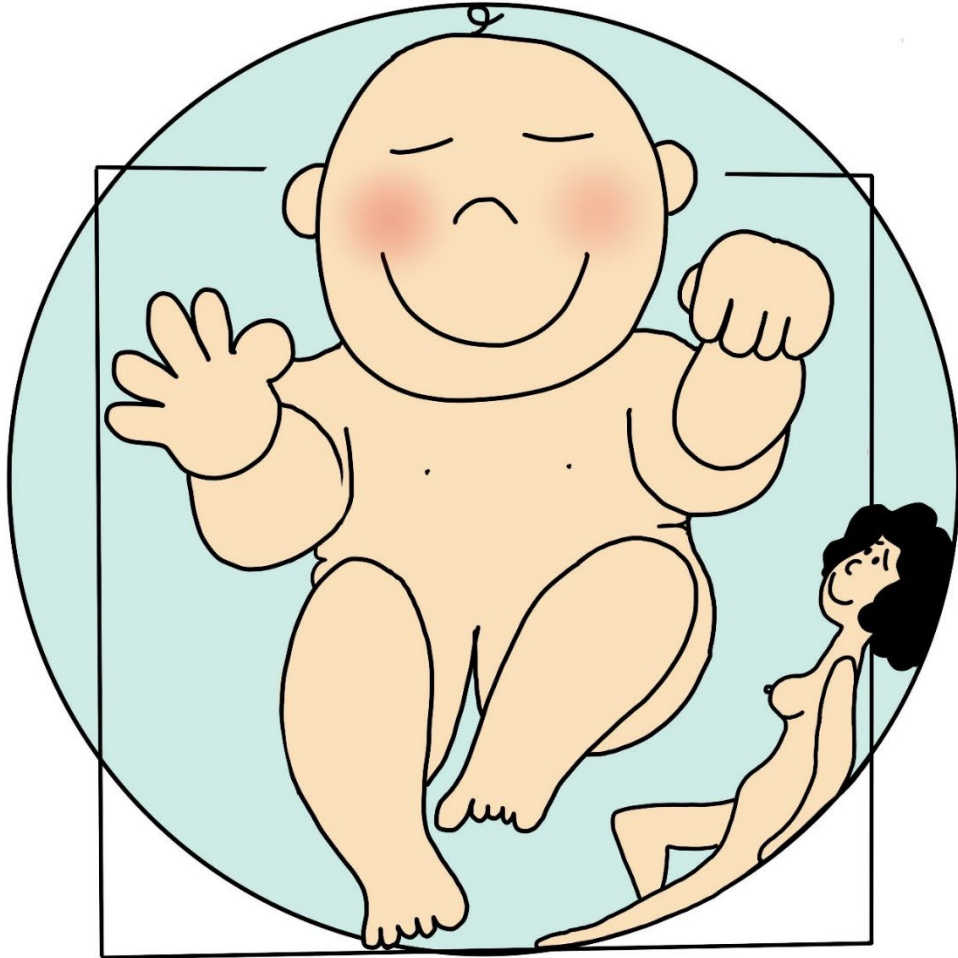
IT CAUGHT ME BY SURPRISE...
HOW EXCITED I GOT!

IN MY SCIENTIFIC MIND, THIS WAS
JUST A BUNCH OF CELLS
ALLOCATED IN THE WALL OF MY UTERUS.



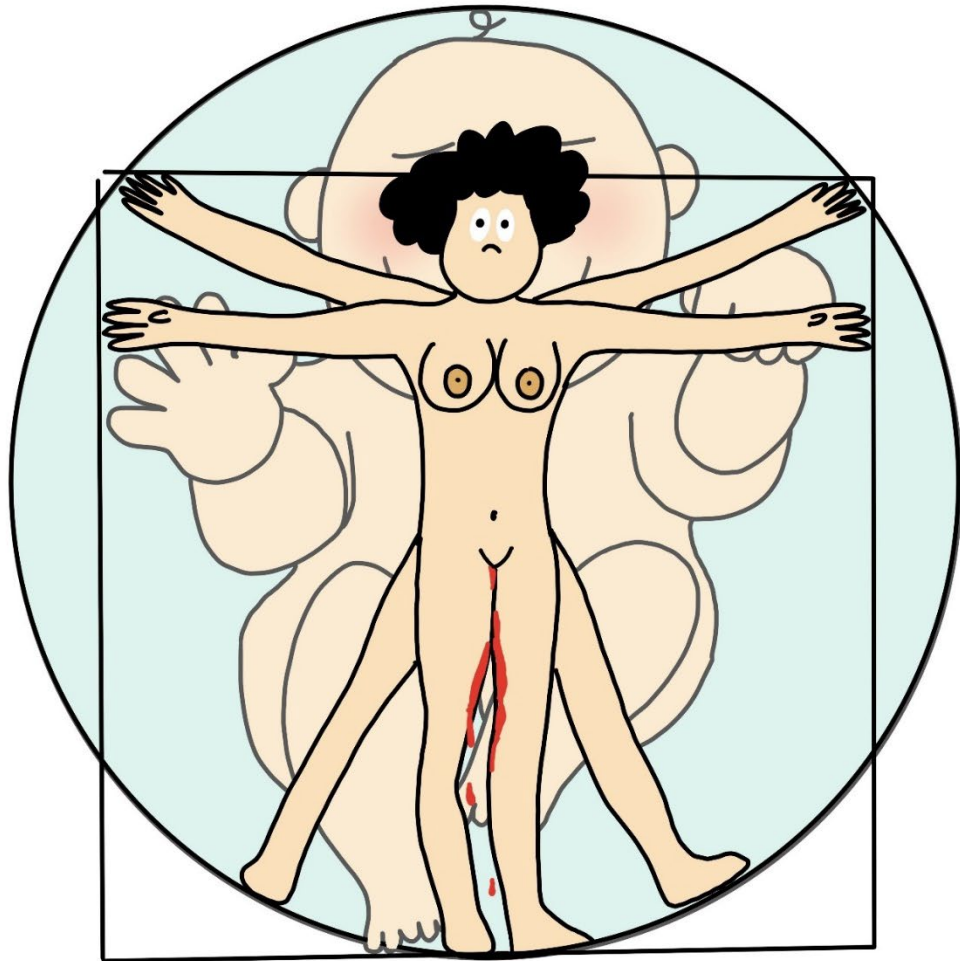
BUT MY SCIENTIFIC MIND DIDN'T
STAND A CHANCE AGAINST
THE OVERWHELMING FEELING
THAT I WAS EXPECTING A BABY.
MY BABY!

IT WAS SOFT AND SMELLED
SWEET. IT WAS LOVABLE, LIVELY.

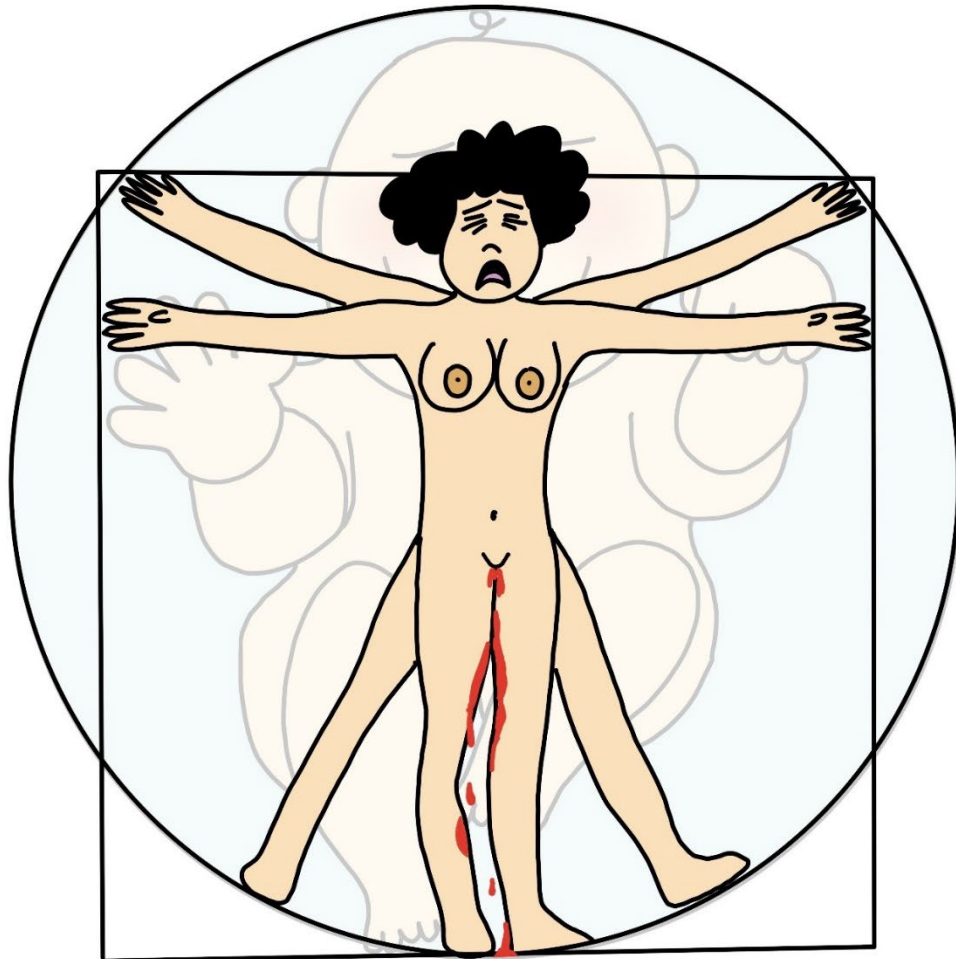


IT WAS CUTE, BEAUTIFUL, VULNERABLE.
IT WAS IN MY MIND AND IN MY HEART.

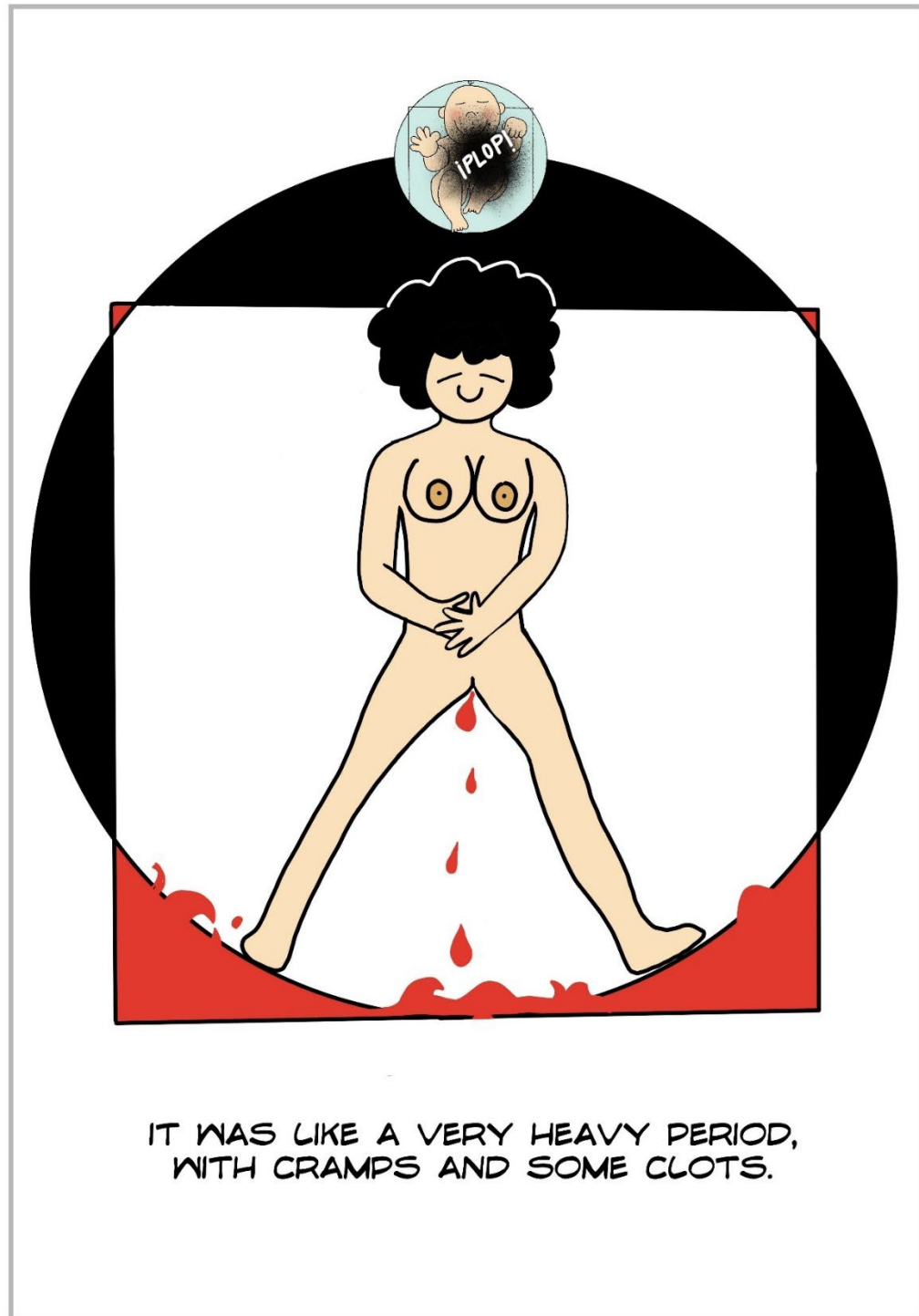
I LOVED THIS KID; ITS PRESENCE
FELT SO REAL TO ME.



BUT ONE DAY, BEFORE WEEK 11,
THE BRIGHT RED SPOTTING BEGAN...



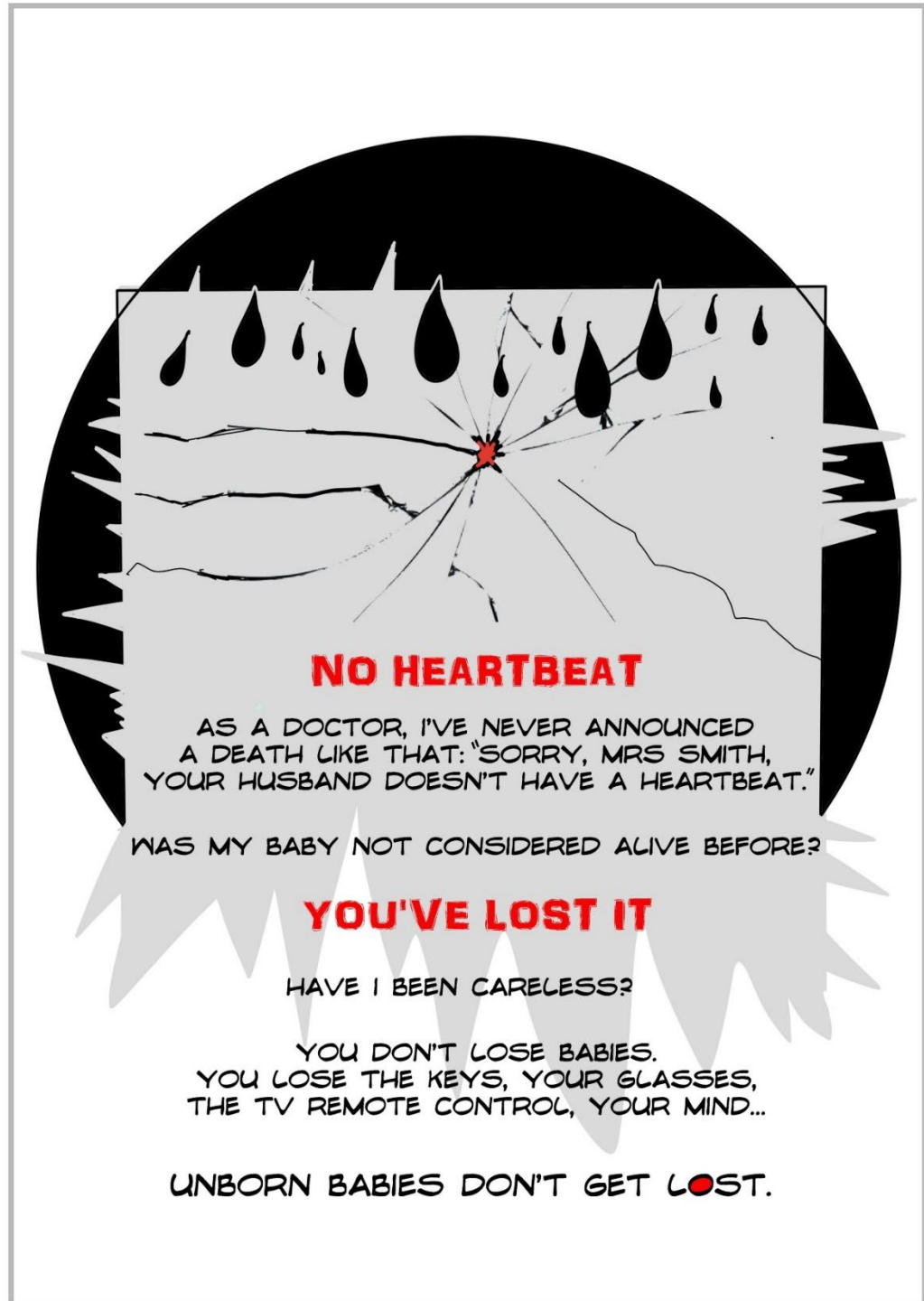
AND IT GOT WORSE.



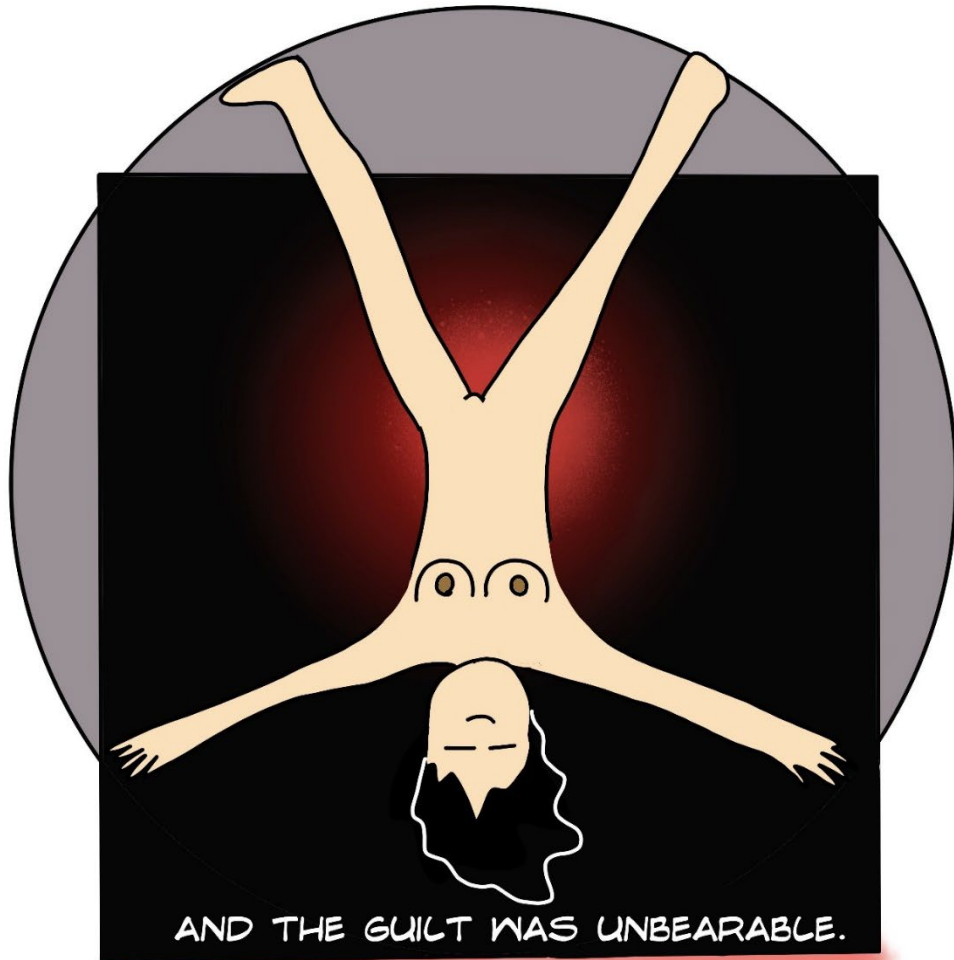
IT WAS LIKE A VERY HEAVY PERIOD,
WITH CRAMPS AND SOME CLOTS.







THE SADNESS WAS SO DEEP...

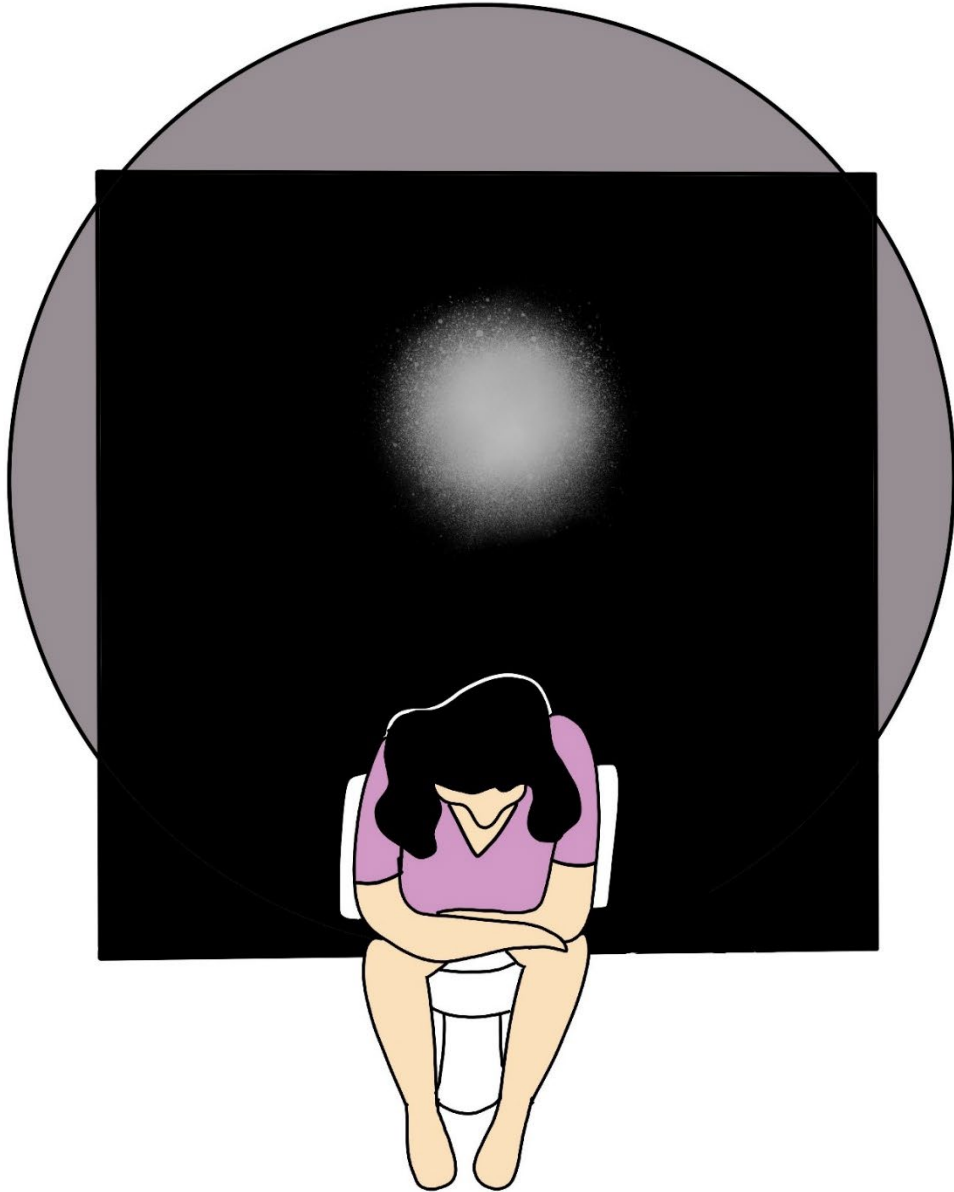


AND THE GUILT WAS UNBEARABLE.

IT WAS MY FAULT.
I DID SOMETHING THAT HARMED MY BABY.

Was it that glass of wine, or
the flight to France, or maybe
climbing the ladder to paint a
wall, or the smell of the paint
or...Or...Or...

I WAS ADVISED TO GO HOME.
I WAS WARNED THAT I'D BLEED.



AND SO I DID.

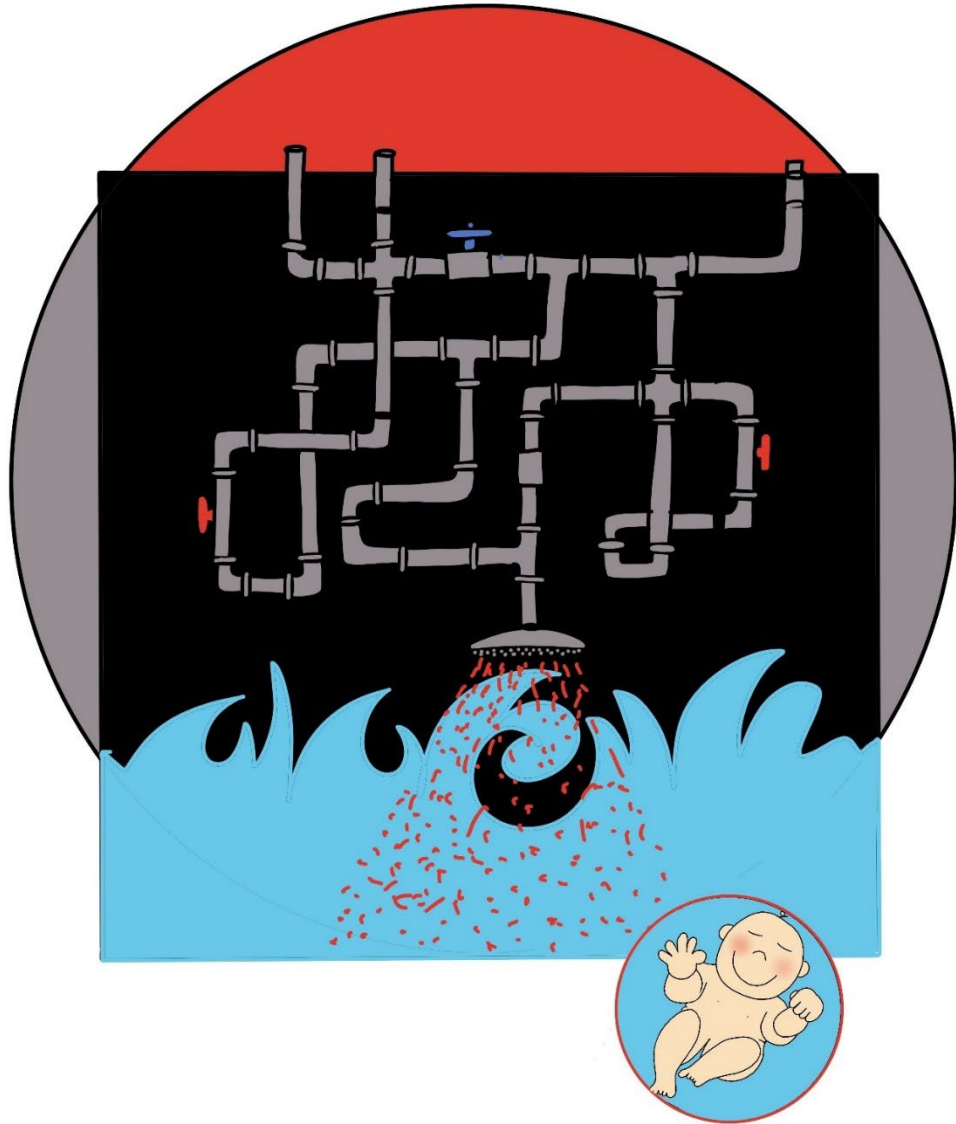
I BLED A LOT.
I SAW A LITTLE SOMETHING, LIKE A BEAN.
I HESITATED, THEN I FLUSHED.

I FLUSHED.



I FLUSHED IT AWAY.
What else could I have done?
But I shouldn't have.

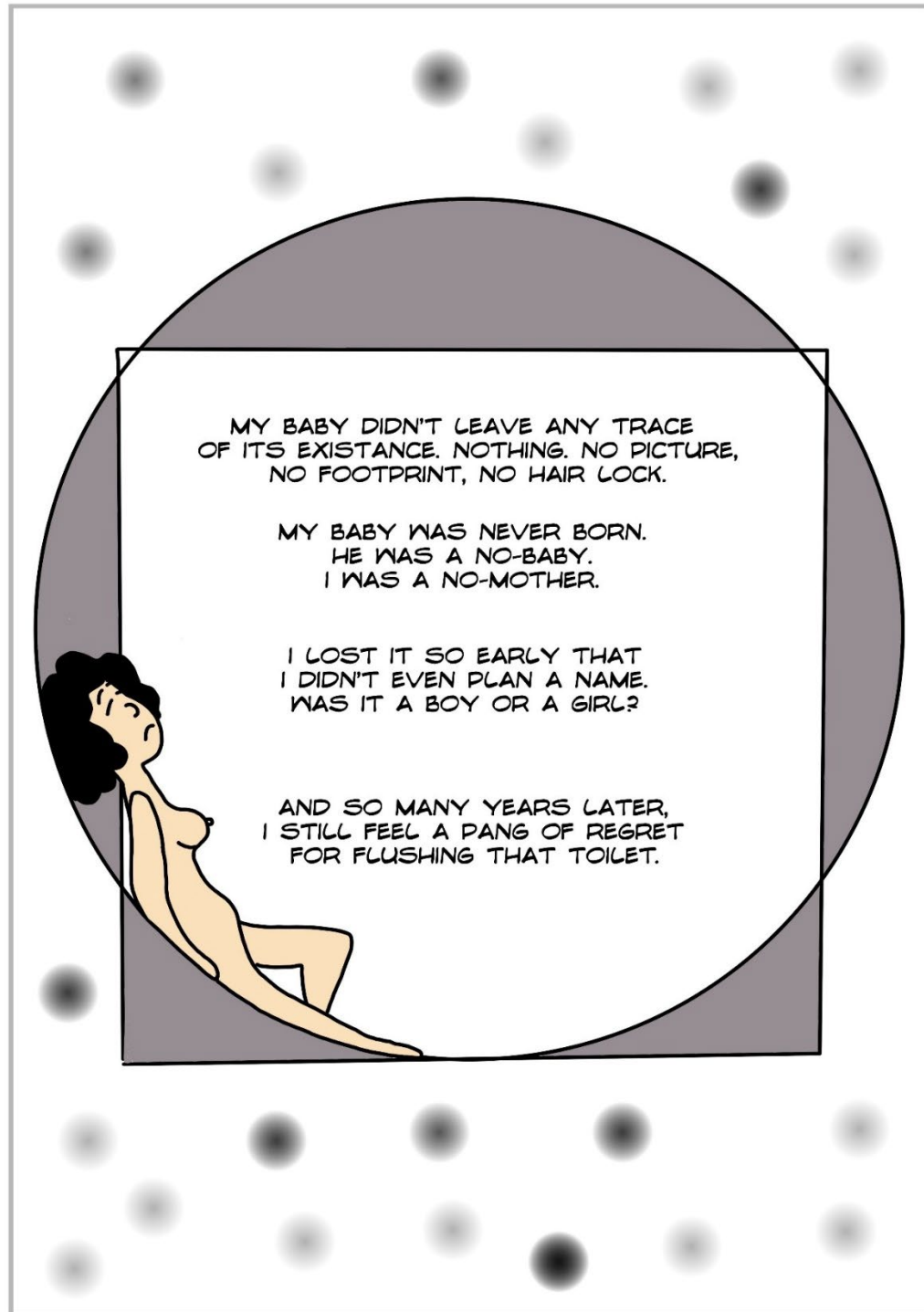
One of every four pregnancies
ends up in miscarriage.



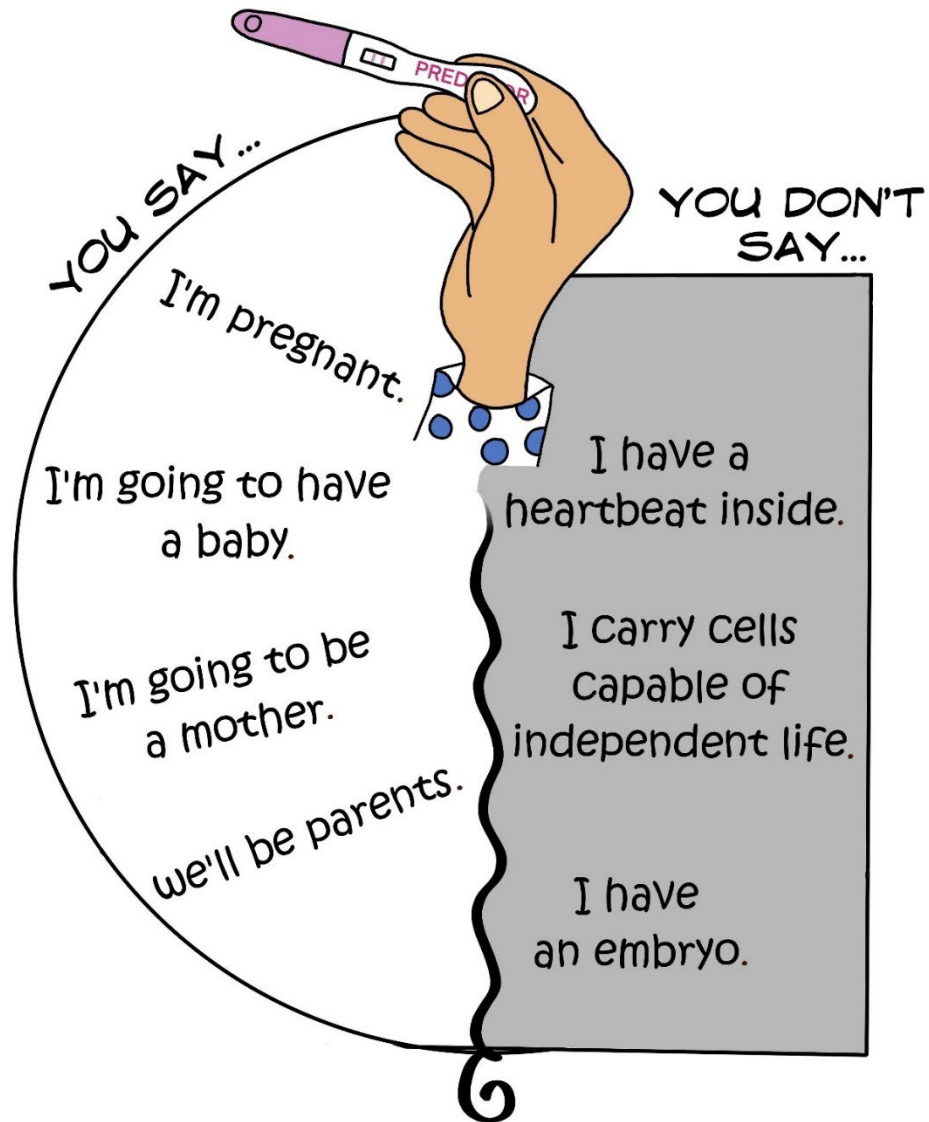
WHAT A TERRIBLE PLACE FOR
SO MANY LOST BABIES.

WHAT PEOPLE TOLD ME IN THOSE EARLY DAYS...



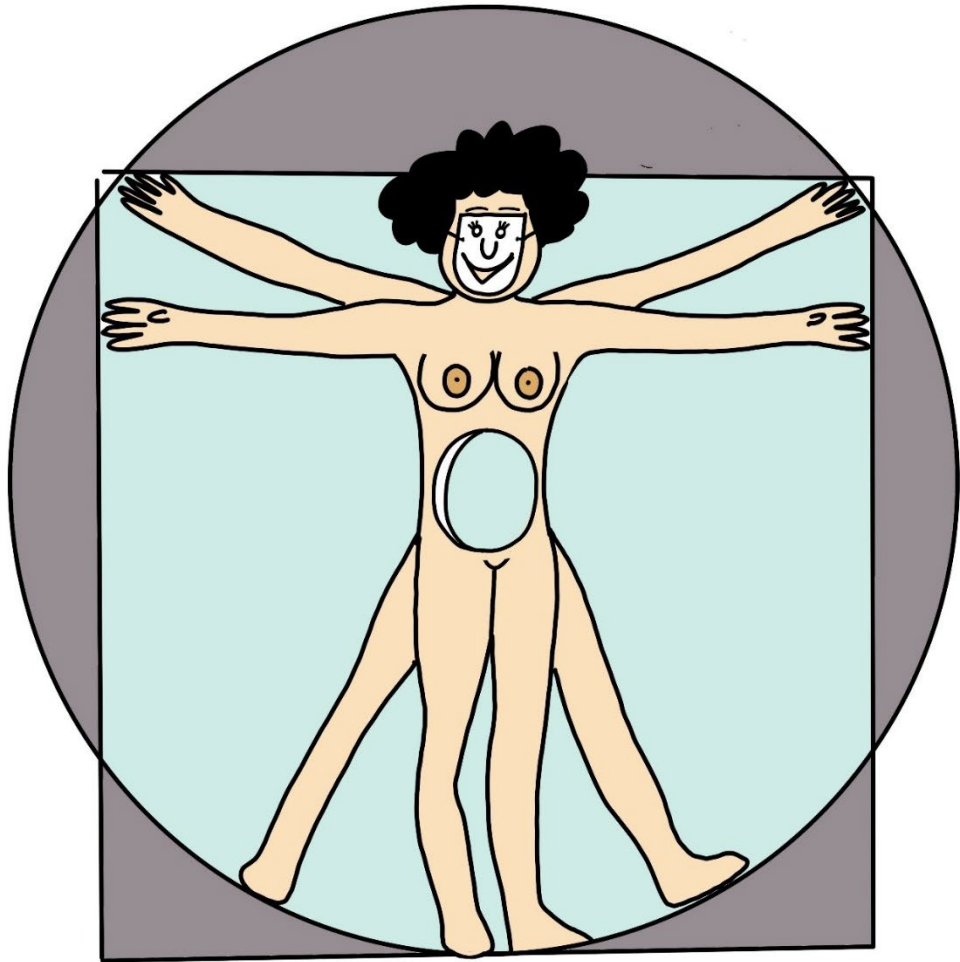


WHEN YOU FIND OUT YOU'RE PREGNANT,
(with a wanted pregnancy)



WORDS MATTER.

THEN, IT WAS ALL OVER.



FROM EXPECTING TO UNEXPECTED.

ALONE IN MY GRIEF.

BUT I LEARNED SOME LESSONS:

- The neurological development didn't matter that much.
- I did want to be a mother.
- I became much more compassionate with patients in the same situation.



*I had two more miscarriages and then two perfect babies.

Media

Hand drawn using Procreate.

Mónica Lalanda, MD, MSc is an emergency medicine physician living in Spain. She is a published graphic medicine illustrator, bioethicist, and mother of two.

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Conflict of Interest Disclosure

Author disclosed no conflicts of interest.

The viewpoints expressed in this article are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the AMA.