

NO HEARTBEAT



By
SARAH WOODROW

Introduction

This is a journey through the mind of a woman who has had a miscarriage. My mind. When I lost a baby at 13 weeks.

1 in 4 women have had a miscarriage. They happen every day, they are a part of normal life. It's just no one talks about it.

And yet it can feel like discussion about our reproductive organs is public domain. If you are of child bearing age you can barely go a week without someone asking you "Are you going to have a baby?"

They give it the same weight as asking about the weather. As if the answer will ever be good small talk. It never is. Seriously, think about what the answers could be and how difficult they are to say out loud.

So we lie.

In this world women are taught to hide. In a world built for white men, pregnancy, childbirth, abortion, infertility, baby loss and miscarriage are well kept secrets.

But what if we told our truth. What if we talked about the cost we pay for love. What if we shared with unapologetic honesty what these experiences are like for all those who will never experience it. It may not be a good topic for small talk, but it is a good topic for art. Art and stories that can fight shame with vulnerability and courage, and ignorance with empathy and truth.

I wrote this for past me, at the beginning. The fearful crumpled version of me. I had no idea how to navigate the complexity of the grief. I wanted so desperately for someone to tell me what to expect. I read stories online, but they didn't give me what I needed. I didn't need the ins and outs

of treatment or the different interpretations of how to overcome grief. I didn't need to see another tabloid story of a celebrity's devastating miscarriage. I didn't need a self help book. I needed something deeper, I couldn't put into words what, so I thought I'd draw it. Now I realise maybe what I needed was art. The kind of art that reaches inside you and pulls at pieces of you to see what shifts.

For the death of a loved one, there are obligations, rituals, funerals. There is a roadmap for grief. When you have a miscarriage there is no such thing. Your grief is invisible. People won't grieve with you at a funeral, no one will talk you through the grieving process, no one will truly understand your loss and they know it. The only person who ever truly felt the presence of the baby is the mother. Even their partner won't experience the loss in quite the same way.

I was left asking myself; Why didn't my culture prepare and support me better? How do we let so many women down every single day?

This is why I have written a comic about my miscarriage. If we have more art about it maybe less of us experiencing a miscarriage would feel so completely alone.

If at any point you feel too sad while reading this, do take a moment to look at a puppy, a kitten, or a panda, and when you are ready, come back to go through this with me, to see it through till the end. This isn't just a book about being sad or even just miscarriages. Life isn't that simple. This is a book about the complexity and beauty of living a real life filled to the brim with hope and love, sadness and grief. This is a book about pain as a catalyst for transformation and deeper understanding. This book is about being alive.

I am writing this intro in 2020, a year where grief and trauma is the predominant collective experience. A billion animals and thousands of acres of sacred trees burned to the ground, a global pandemic killing thousands of people every day, protests and riots, economic crisis, inequality, poverty. We are forced to be apart at the time we need each other the most. Art about grief,

especially grief that is ambiguous and complex like a miscarriage, is more important right now than ever.

People are shocked when I tell them I have spent so long examining my miscarriage and planning to put my deepest thoughts about it out into the world. "That's brave. That must be cathartic" they say, but when they say no more it's clear they think it's strange. To most people when a bad thing happens, you "get over it". And preferably you do it quickly, behind closed doors, while not "inflicting" your pain on anyone else. To be fair to them, spending weeks, months and years, examining the grief and pain of one of the worst things to happen to you, deconstructing it and finding ways to express it in words and pictures, is not normal. And they are also right that it helped, it was a part of my therapy. But then, after a while it became about more than my story, it became about the little flame inside that kept getting bigger, telling me by making this, maybe it could help other people.

Everyone will have their own fertility journey, even if they choose not to have kids. No one exists in a vacuum, they will have their own situation, pressures, privilege, culture surrounding them. Others may not share the conclusions I came to during my journey and may have had a very different internal experience. There are so many ways to experience a miscarriage. This is a story of my journey and the context surrounding my journey, as a British, hetero, cis, white woman with PCOS who loves to draw. If you identify as he/him/ they/them and you are going through this, I hope that you can still find some solace and power in this story even though I talk about miscarriage in the context of being a

cisgendered woman. I hope we can overcome this fear of telling our stories together.

If this succeeds at making just one person feel less like the territory they are in is completely uncharted then it was worth it. If you haven't had a miscarriage and want to understand, I hope that you feel I have conveyed the complexity of societal/political pressures, health concerns, trauma and grief in a way that gives you insight into how to help someone who has. If someone

who has never even been close to a miscarriage gets something from this then that will be beyond anything I hoped for.

I'm here to give you an idea of how it felt for me, not how it *should* feel for everyone. If you are knee deep in this, know that however you feel right now, it is ok and right for you. Feel what you feel, however you feel it.

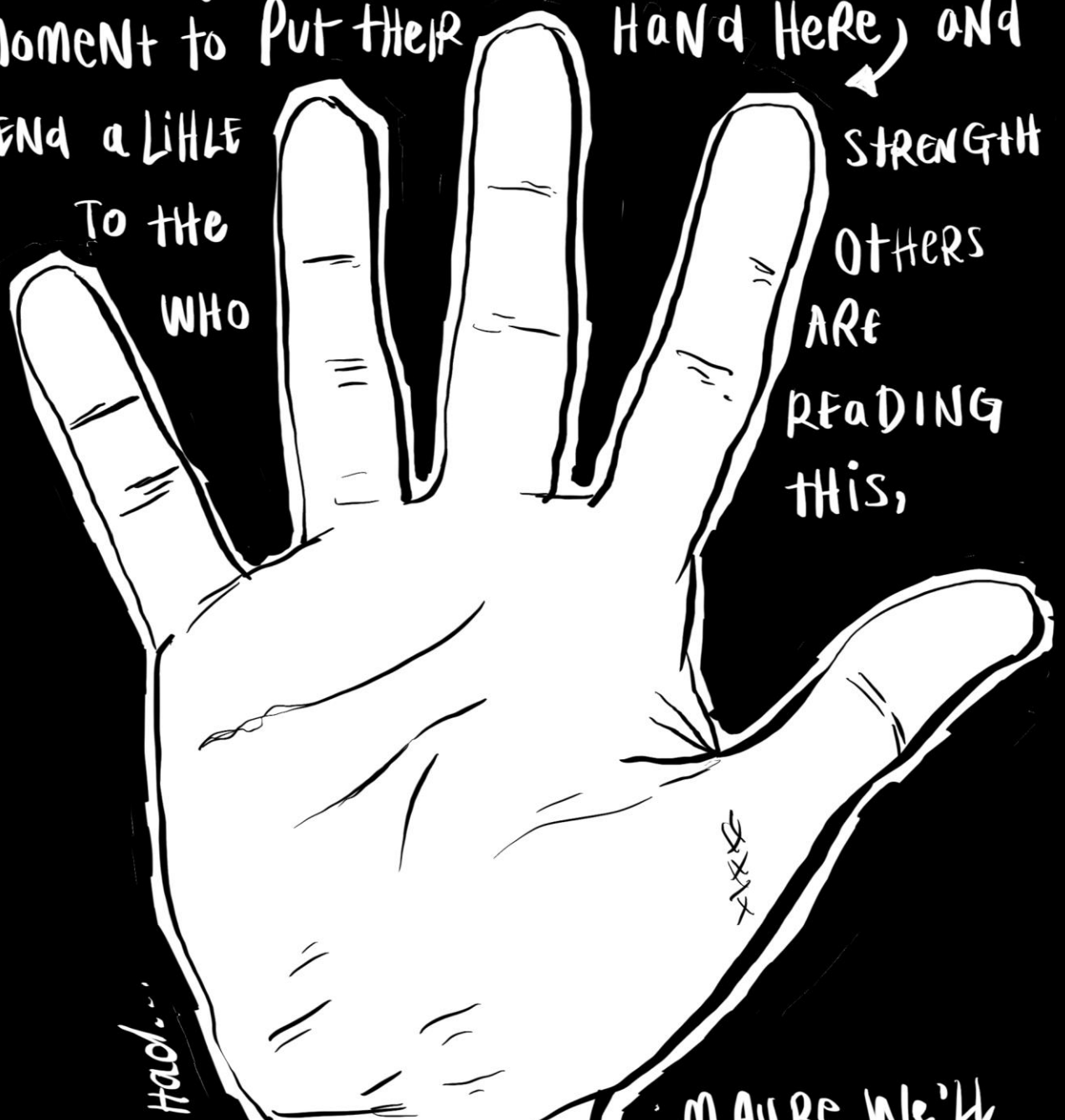
My only bit of advice is that...Let yourself feel. Take your time. Trust in your own journey, and trust that all journeys have a destination.



IF EVERYONE WHO READS THIS TAKES A
MOMENT TO PUT THEIR HAND HERE, AND

SEND A LITTLE
TO THE
WHO

STRENGTH
OTHERS
ARE
READING
THIS,



Just a weird idea I had...

MAYBE WE'LL
ALL FEEL IT
SOMEHOW...




ONCE UPON A TIME
WE WERE WITCHES, HEALERS
AND QUEENS

WE WOULD DANCE TOGETHER
TO THE RHYTHM OF
THE MOON

AT EVERY STAGE OF
OUR LIVES WE WERE
SURROUNDED BY OUR
WOMEN...

They didn't hide
the messy, painful,
DIFFICULT WORK OF BEING
THE BEGINNING



THE FORTITUDE, POWER and
MYSTICAL ABILITY of WOMEN to
ENDURE what it takes to CREATE
and NURTURE LIFE WAS ADMIRERD
AND WORSHIPPED.

The Men who wished
they were Gods wanted

They did not care
for giving and
creating they only
wanted to
TAKE and
DESTROY

* GOLD & they wanted

POWER



they saw
the POWER
of CREATION
RUNNING
THROUGH
OUR WOMEN



AND IT
SCARED
THEM

AND SO OUR WOMEN WERE
SUBJUGATED AND SILENCED

THEIR ANCIENT
KNOWLEDGE IGNORED
AND RIDICULED
UNTIL THEY
FORGOT

NOV
£3.50

WOMEN

PLEASURE
HIM
NOT
YOURSELF
DON'T BE A
SLUT

FORGET
WHO YOU
REALLY
ARE

FORGET
EVERYTHING
YOU ARE
BORN WITH

HOW TO
REALLY LISTEN
TO MEN, THEY
KNOW BEST

WORKER,
MOTHER,
WIFE

BE
EVERYTHING
TO EVERYONE
EXCEPT YOU

BE A GOOD
FEMINIST

WORK, MAKE
MONEY AND
CONSUME

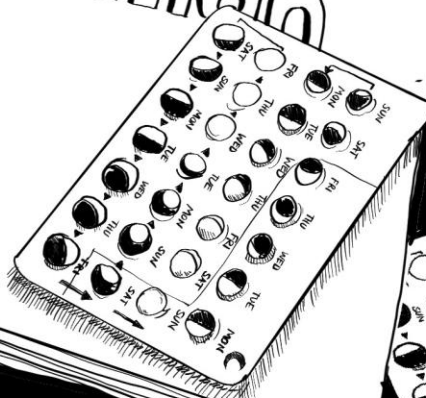
YOU ARE
ALWAYS
TOO FAT

BE SMALL,
DIMINISH
YOURSELF



What a real woman
looks like

WHITE, THIN, COMPLIANT



they took pills
so they could no longer
dance with the moon

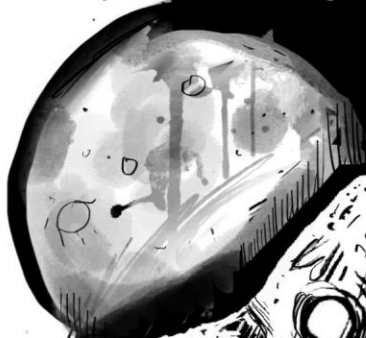
They were made to
hide their bodies and
their blood where the
men could not see

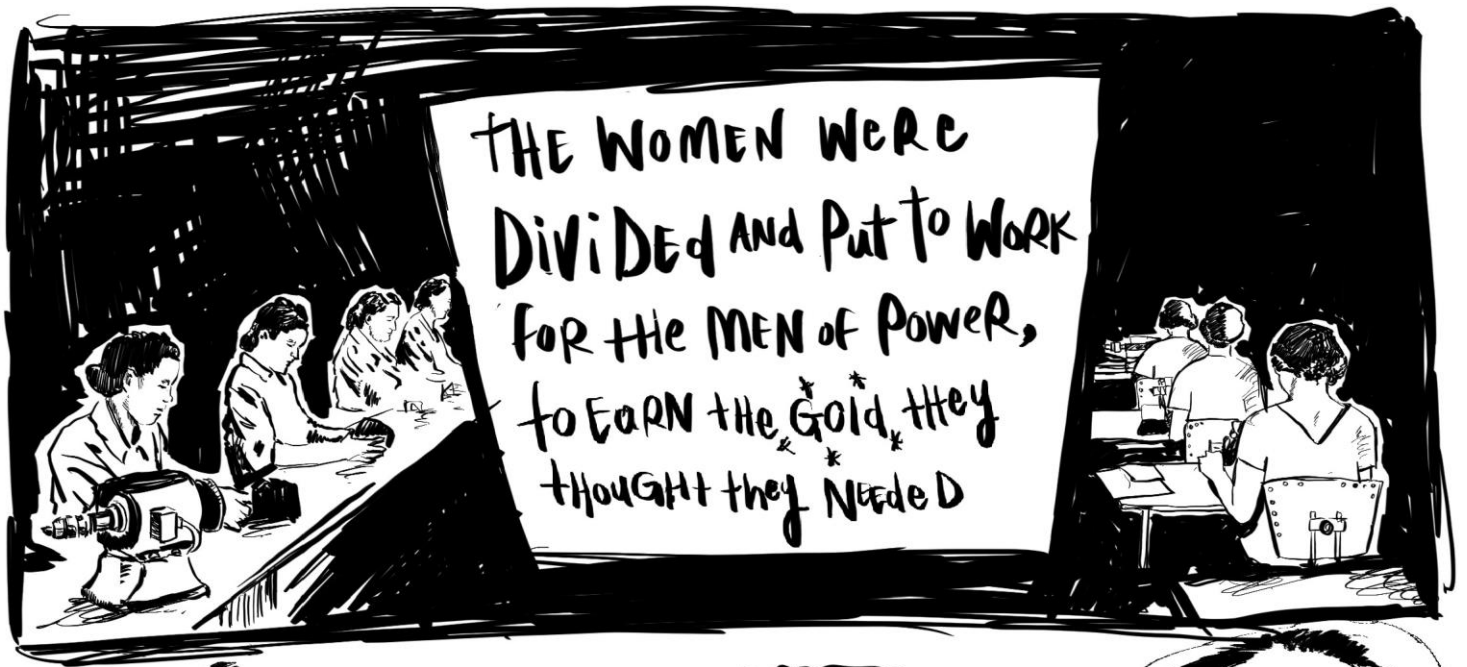
They were made
to mistrust and fear
the nature that rain
through their bodies

They were made
to see themselves
the way the
men saw them

Only the men can
save them from nature
they said

if they have enough **GOLD** to pay for it





Now...



They BLEED FOR THE FIRST TIME NEVER HAVING SEEN a WOMAN'S BLOOD.



And perhaps
the worst
thing of
all



When nature
completes
the cycle
of life within
their body

When their love forms,
grief and they fall
into the darkness



They no longer
fall into the
comfort of
those who have
walked that
path before



WHEN THEY MISCARRY they do it in
DARKNESS and SILENCE.

IT IS TIME TO SHINE A LIGHT.



**YOU ARE NOT
ALONE**

I HAVE POLYCYSTIC OVARIES WHICH
MEANT MY PERIOD WAS ALWAYS
IRREGULAR. IT JUST TOOK SO LONG
FOR ME TO NOTICE!

THE LAST TIME
I FELT THIS BAD
WAS WHEN I WAS
PREGNANT

OH!



THOSE LINES ARE SO PINK.
HOW DID I NOT REALISE SOONER?

