

My Children in Times New Roman

by Jen Knox

This test should not be a riddle, it's a simple yes/no. The answer should settle curiosity with an image. One line or two, plus or minus. I say something like this, and the customer service rep asks me to hold.

Thing is, I know the answer. I'm moody. My breasts feel like water balloons. When I close my eyes, I see dessert. Right now, I see handfuls of chocolate chips, and I itch with impatience. This hunger is absurd and always there.

My husband is away on business—one of us usually is—and though we are not expecting to have a child, I imagine him being a wonderful father. He will teach our daughter to change a tire and get under the hood. He will teach our son to paint; they'll build a doghouse in a backyard. I realize we'll need a backyard. Our child will need a dog.

I hear the man adjust his headset. He is young, rehearsed. I say that yes, I did buy the test new; no, I did not see evidence of package tampering. And hell no, I do not want to send it back. I peed on it. C'mon.

The window is still blank. I step on the scale. Six pounds since March. The man apologizes and promises to reimburse me but suggests I see a doctor. Novel idea, I say and hang up. I am not usually so rude.

I feel the warmth around stick #2, which I picked up at CVS, along with chocolate chips. How many of these have I taken in my lifetime,

six? Ten? It feels different this time. Blue liquid fills the window, and I walk away.

The internet does not distract, and I begin to wonder if my daughter will accept the family hips. I bet she'll jog to keep her weight down but say it's for health reasons. She'll be smart, successful, strong, and she'll wear glasses with thick rims and make friends fast. My son, meanwhile, will eat poorly because all the men in our family do. He will slap his belly and laugh often until a health scare, after which he'll become vegan and train for marathons.

When time is up, there is still a single line, and a phantom ache shoots from hip to groin.

Premature ovarian failure, the doctor tells me. I am mid-thirties and, apparently, it just happens sometimes. The symptoms can be mistaken for pregnancy: weight gain, lethargy, moodiness. Hunger.

I sift through emails to find notice of a credit for \$13. Reimbursement reason: C. Broken/faulty. I know better. I order sushi for lunch.

Stories surge above me now, a soft yellow glow, and they are always there. My daughter, thick hiped with a strong will and my son, extremist with an addictive laugh, are born and reborn in 12-point Times New Roman, never entirely mine but never entirely gone.

