

formula, find the message. I can kind of make out the word *You*. The rest seem like cracks in the paint or lines of mold from the water, but *You* is there. I imagine the other mother is someone who'd lived here before us. She must have moved because she got help and needed more space. She probably got to go back to work. I wonder what she does. I was an office manager. I suppose it wasn't important, but I was good at organizing. I liked having answers and keeping the place running. Not something to think about now, of course. It's important not to reminisce about life before. Anyway, feeding is done.

I move his legs in place for kneeling. He fights me. Cries. He's getting stronger now that he's eight, just not in the ways I need him to be. "Buddy, we have to do this. Just try, okay? Want cartoons?"

I hold him in place for the prescribed time. Shift him, hold him, count it all down in my mind. Next feed is the last before bed. So close.

I risk a peek up while we exercise. I can see *You* clearly now. No question. I'm giddy. *I didn't imagine it!* The harder I stare, the bigger the stain seems, like it's spreading. I shake my head. Focus!

I lift him into his stander. He sags against the metal. I set the timer and hold his hand. I don't look up. "You did it!" I kiss him when the timer dings. "Dinner time!"

Click, insert, pour. Breathe. Now: look up. It is definitely spreading. The stain covers the living room. I can see *You* clear as day. And an *M*! Maybe a *U* after that? I can't tell. The cracks are swelling, welling up. A drop lands on my arm, then more until it's a steady drip-drip-drip. I squint, looking past the water. Yes, it's a *U*!

The ceiling is raining, every crack full and leaking. My son is crying, but I don't always hear crying anymore. It's just more water. "Shush, Bud. It's okay. Almost done."

Our place on the floor is wet, his foot splashing as he tests it. It's falling faster, cold and strangely dark. What is this water? But I shake my head and focus. After the *U*, the letters are soggy and blistered. I think next is an *S*,