

intro

You don't hear it from your obstetrician or pediatrician. It isn't brought up at the baby shower. It's not in the books and it isn't taught in the birthing classes. Even the closest friends fail to explain it accurately. No, I'm not talking about love. I'm talking about being needed.

Welcome to motherhood, where a twenty-inch being, who can't yet hold up their own neck, needs you.

You . . . with a freshly cut-open abdomen or extremely injured vulva (read with a resentful sigh). Yes you, the sleep-deprived one who's not sure how to properly hold him, breastfeed him, or change his diapers. The baby needs you.

You . . . with baby blues permeating your heart, dark circles under your eyes, and your hair sloppily tied back. You, admiring the perfection of that sleeping face while also fearing the lack of freedom to come, brought to tears by the strange emptiness you feel. The baby needs you.

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You . . . with your breasts harder than your butt will ever be, scared to death of the first trip to the bathroom (no. 2), and with a heart overflowing with love. You, sleeping while standing up, hoping you'll get your old body back soon, and for goodness sake, that your lower half stops throbbing. The baby needs you.

You . . . burping her, pacing back and forth, rocking her after the 3:48 a.m. feed. Tired, frustrated, complete. You who doesn't know how you survived last night, the first week, the first month, the first year. The baby needs you.

You . . . trying to console, and love, and photograph, and live, and remember. The colic needs you, the cry, the diaper change, the feed, the bath, the caring for. The baby needs you.

You . . . praying that the sun rises, but also begging for time to slow down. Ah! time . . . and how it relentlessly adds new things to the list of what needs you.

The smile needs you, the hug, the eye contact, the giggles, they all need you. The "Mommy, I love you" needs you; the shared joys, the blowing out the candles, the "Look, Mommy!" needs you. Love needs you, the emotions, the first steps, the butterflies in the belly need you.

And like the movies, there's a plot twist when least expected. It starts the moment you first hold your baby and gains traction throughout your continuous whispering "It's okay, Mommy's here." Then it happens: you need the baby.

You!

the best start

*H*ey, you, pregnant with your first child! I have a very important secret to tell you. Something so phenomenal that every pregnant woman should know about it, but that, for reasons I can't explain, is not in any of the pregnancy books I've ever read. Want to hear it? Here it goes: your baby will love you. He'll love you to pieces. And you don't have to do anything special to make it happen.

It doesn't matter if you have a c-section, a natural birth, or labor while swimming with dolphins. Whether it's in the hospital, at home, or in the sacred cave of a Tibetan mountain—your baby will love you.

It doesn't matter if you're going to breastfeed or give formula. It doesn't matter if you have prepared the perfect nursery, if you're going to co-sleep, or if the baby will share a room with seven other siblings. Your baby will love you.

It doesn't matter if you put on twenty pounds or seventy-five. If you ran a marathon at eight months

pregnant or were stretched out on the couch for the entire forty weeks. It doesn't matter if there's a closet full of new baby clothes hanging from pearl hangers or an entire wardrobe that came from your friend's cousin's son. Your baby will love you.

It doesn't matter if they were conceived in the presidential suite of the Copacabana Palace, in the backseat of a car, or if it was the full moon when Saturn was aligned with Pluto. It doesn't matter if you're married, single, widowed, or if you're no longer able to explain your marital status. Your baby will love you.

It doesn't matter if you plan to use Pampers, cloth diapers, Desitin, or coconut oil. It doesn't matter if you embroidered their initials on every burp cloth or if you haven't even chosen a name yet. Your baby will love you.

It doesn't matter if you read forty-seven books about caring for a newborn or you were never very good with kids. It doesn't matter if you have to work two jobs or if you're a housewife. Your baby will love you.

Simply because you are the enlightened, beautiful, angelic being who goes by the name of Mom. And when the long-awaited day comes, the day you finally meet, your baby will look you in the eye and love you. And you've got to agree that that's the best start!

never my end

*T*he love a mother feels for a child doesn't come from the heart. Loving from the heart is easy—all those couples in the honeymoon phase you see out and about, they love with the heart. A mother's love is rooted in the nucleus of every cell. It comes from the soul, the bones, each and every molecule.

When a mother tells her child that she loves them, she is not just saying how happy she is that they exist. In a mother's "I love you" lives infinite hidden vows: you are my world, my sun. And there's no life or death that can change that.

Wherever you go, my love will go with you. It passes through walls, continents, and entire worlds just to find your heart. It will search for you on the horizon, in the ocean, among the stars, and is able to find you even when you're lost inside yourself. For you, I become light, the path, the flame, the source.

Where there's danger, my love becomes a shield.

Where there's uncertainty, it becomes a rock. And where there's fear, it becomes safety. When you feel lonely, my love will touch you, stroke your hair, and whisper our song into your ear.

Don't waste your time looking for me with your eyes, my love is invisible and has no dimension. You are my beginning, my middle and never my end. For you, I have lived until now and for you, I will live forever.

the boy and his bus

*T*his is the story of a boy and his bus. A minibus, one of those basic ones we buy at any old toy store. Wherever the boy went, the minibus went too.

Every day, it was the same thing. I carried him around on my hip while he held on tight to the minibus. It was like that for a long time. Until it ended, just like that, without an explanation. I don't remember when he set the minibus aside. It's amazing how we forget. How it goes unnoticed.

The other day, on the first day of preschool, he squeezed my hand tightly. As if my palm were a safe haven, reinforced by each of my fingers. Until he let go. And he never held it like that again. Not in the same way. I can't remember another time I felt those little fingers holding onto mine like that.

Don't you see? There's always a last time. And we don't even consider that the last time could be this time, that it could be happening right before our

eyes. And I'm not referring to death or tragedies, even though I know they exist and unfortunately do happen. I'm talking about time, about the natural growth of our children. About not knowing, not being able to guess when the last time will be. You'll only be aware of it in retrospect. We focus so much on the firsts—the first steps, the first foods, the first words—that we forget about the last.

There was a time when we would lay together on the sofa. I sang, he listened. Until one day he stopped sitting on my lap. Then I stopped singing.

There is a day marked on the calendar that will be the last time you will hold your child on your hip. It'll be the last time that your arms fit perfectly around that little child, your child. On that day, whenever it may be, you'll put your kid back on the floor and you'll never hold him like that again. Ever. Leaving us with an absurd longing, a longing for all those last times. Those that pass by without our noticing. Precious, everyday things that go away and never come back.

Even the long nights go away. And it becomes impossible to capture the image of the last time you took your baby out of the crib. There is always one last time. We just don't give it any special notice.

One day I looked down to find those little arms stretched upwards that wanted me so badly. And now all I see are eyes at the same level as mine. Just like that, my baby boy hasn't fit in my arms for such a long time. Our last time came and went. He doesn't hold his minibus anymore. Nor do I hold him.