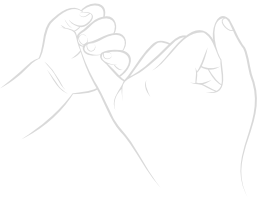


welcome 2 the unknown



A ZINE BY SULA FOUND



## *trying & dreaming*

The other day I discovered TTC = trying to conceive.  
I thought about the choices we have made,  
the fight for autonomy, our right to own our bodies.  
I forgot I could make a life-changing decision prompted  
by nothing but my own desire.

I dreamt of a daughter. Later I wept for her.  
I dreamt of a son. Later I wept for him too.  
Different reasons, same tears.

There was an evening when I decided it was time for us  
to make a baby, bring life into this world. Maybe we  
can get it right this time. I reminded myself how the  
world is too screwed to bring a child into it by choice.

Then I dreamt of a child born free. I saw dance parties  
in a living room. Smelled chocolate chip cookies fresh  
out of the oven. I saw open windows and heard birds  
singing. Saw a child holding onto a teddy bear, the  
keeper of their secrets & dreams. I heard their giggles  
& joyful screams.

I dreamt of my child born Black & sweet & daring &  
I dreamt of a world that would let them be.





## *What happens when you don't choose?*

We almost broke up. We decided it wasn't the best idea. We love each other, we said. We didn't say we were *in love* with each other. That's what a relationship is, correct? You choose one another. Day after day. "You still feel good about us?" My first question after a night of rest, without regrets. We went to bed at separate times. Decided against sex, a first for us. I woke up early this morning, made coffee and tried my hardest to imagine myself alone. I would survive. Even if this fails, I will survive. Gone the idea of children. A second home in the woods. A honeymoon. That period long over, but I still had hope. Still, I mean. I still have hope. You choose. You decided today I will love you. Tomorrow I will love you. I will love you until the day I know I can't, the day the light leaves either of our eyes. It's hard to trust, you know. That you can go from "I almost wanted to break up with you" to "Let's stay together." That Almost so, so close, I wish it wasn't part of our vocabulary. But you try. You choose to push it so far into the back of your mind you decide its replacement is I love you.





## *We wouldn't have any kids if we had any sense*

On our way back from Minneapolis our flight mate talked to us about the joys of parenting as she breastfed her child. She said it was one of the best decisions of her life. She chose to do it three times. It's expensive, but kids are worth it.

I remind Larry that having a child is inherently selfish. None of us asked to be here. Who says life is a gift; it can't be if you can't refuse. He eats his pizza and plots finding a wife he can knock up as many times as they can afford.

But it is not only about the money. My brain doesn't always work right. What if I accidentally leave the kid in the backseat for hours? What if my mood swings overpower the parenting philosophies I've sworn to implement? What if, as great as she can be, I become my mother, constantly hovering over my child, teaching them about all the dangers of the world and asking *why* when they tell me they developed an anxiety disorder? They did not ask to be here.

We both look at each other when the young girl on the bus repeatedly yells "Mommy, Mommy." I tell him with my eyes, *you know exactly what I'm thinking*. Few people allow you to express disdain for motherhood or your children. They did not ask to be here.





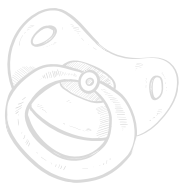
Well, that's true. Anger or annoyance isn't allowed so what happens when I turn into my mother against all my best judgement?

Some people are shocked when I tell them I am considering parenting. It would be different if I was already pregnant. We're supposed to let it happen to us, let a moment of irresponsibility provide the consequences.

It is more irresponsible to choose. People insert opinions such as "I can't imagine you as a parent. Larry, I can see, but not you." He hasn't ever changed a diaper but has more credibility than I because his eyes still light up when he sees a child.

Children are the future. Our future. They did not ask to be here, so they can't be considered burdens. And they are not. It's the world. The mistreatment of mothers. The disregard for adequate education. Lackluster labor laws. Violence. Climate change. The future is no guarantee. It is selfish to put it all on a generation that had no choice in the matter.

And yet, I find myself picking out prenatal vitamins in CVS. I imagine sitting on the toilet after a missed period. Sitting in a doctor's office. Laying down surrounded by family. A baby, my baby, in my arms.



*if we had any sense*



Monday: \*starts applying to fellowships\*  
Thursday: \*takes pregnancy test after a slight meltdown\*  
Friday: \*takes a third pregnancy test in case the result changed from positive\*





Brilliant Beet

Small Bean is now about the size of a brilliant beet, though no longer has a little root-like tail.

March 2020





## *Fed is Best*

I received a visit from a psychiatrist the day after my son was born. Because I reported having depression and anxiety during my pregnancy, the hospital made sure I saw a professional to talk through some of my issues. He wanted to assess my risk of having postpartum depression or anxiety. After talking for 45 minutes, he prescribed me an itching medication that was weaker than standard anxiety medication and could work in a pinch. I never took a pill. I remember staring at the bottle, wondering if this was the time that I could take one and sleep through the night, leaving my son with his father and grandparents. I worried so much about messing up my milk supply and losing time to bond that I just kept staring.

The psychiatrist visited me twice. It was the most mental health assistance I'd received in years, and I was the happiest I ever felt. Or so I thought. Due to my history and the fact that birthing parents are prone to extremes, the psychiatrist warned that I would feel a wide range of emotions, and I needed to make sure I wasn't going to fall apart. Take a pill, talk to your husband, put the baby down in a safe place. Whatever you do: *Do not harm the baby, Do not harm yourself.*

I had a c-section after 56 hours of laboring. The doctors handed me the baby while they stitched me back up. I couldn't hold him for long because the pitocin had me running cold, I could only focus on my shivering. Shortly after, they wheeled me into recovery with my newborn son and husband in tow. Still weak from the medication, a lactation nurse picked up my son and put my nipple in his mouth. "It's best to start as soon as possible," she told me. I liked her, but I was in disbelief that nursing had to happen immediately. I could hardly remember what we wanted to name him.

Later in my suite, I was still exhausted and still too weak to move. My milk was still coming in. The baby woke up every half hour and I would fall asleep trying to feed him. I pushed the call button and asked the nurse upon her arrival if it was possible for her to take him. She responded, “I could, but it seems that he’s hungry. You don’t want to give him formula, do you?”

I suppose I don’t.

The second night we brought the baby home, I watched Lake House with Sandra Bullock and Keanu Reeves and some equally terrible Netflix movie starring Christina Milan. I watched movies all night, terrified to go to sleep, terrified my baby wouldn’t wake up. He was sleeping soundly in his bassinet, waking up roughly every two hours to eat. I laid awake in bed, wishing I could fall asleep. It had been five days since I slept more than a couple of hours. Giving up on my search for more terrible movies, I woke up my husband at 6am—eager to sleep, even if it meant waking up on top of a pile of milk.

On our baby’s fifth day, I yelled at my husband for asking me if he should get baby formula to supplement our son’s diet. I glared at him, “I can tell you think I am a bad parent. I am not giving up.”

Our son’s pediatrician made the same suggestions that the nurses in the hospital gave me: sleep when he sleeps, drink lots of water, eat lots of food, stress less. Somehow all of those things were supposed to happen with a newborn attached onto my nipples, crying because he can’t get enough milk, unsure of how he feels about me now that he’s outside of the womb after nine months of comfort. We returned home from the pediatrician's office, me silent and angry about already failing.

Finally, later that night, I sent my husband to Jewel just minutes before they closed. Frantic, I called my sister and asked what formula my niece likes and where we should start. She reminded me that fed is best. I wanted to believe it. I didn't come from a family of women who breastfed; some stopped after three months, some couldn't make it happen, some didn't even want to try. I come from a family of women who make decisions with the best information they have at the time, and they will never apologize for doing what they have to do. But I felt bad. I wanted to succeed.

**A father with a bottle** to feed his child is a caring parent, so attentive to his child's needs. Women, especially elderly women, praise my husband for taking care of our son. He's the best father for making sure his son doesn't starve while his partner goes off to work for ten hours.

**A mother with a bottle** is a bad parent. She's selfish and needs to pay closer attention to her child before she ruins their development. She should work less. Work causes stress. Stress decreases milk supply. I would get nasty stares in public when I shook a bottle of formula to feed my son. Coupled with the fact that I am Black and my child's skin is significantly lighter than mine, I was the worst mother for feeding him *poison*. No one ever said anything, I could feel it. It wasn't paranoia. Their noses were scrunched up when they stared at me. You would've thought they caught me beating up the Easter Bunny.

And what about the non-binary parent (me) who is just trying their hardest to make sure that this kid gets the nutrients that he needs.

They didn't know how much I tried to avoid having to give him formula, how much I worked to limit how much formula we had to feed him. I nursed my son for the first six months of his life. I pumped milk on commuter trains, in public restrooms, behind a closed door in my office. I pumped during lunch breaks, while hanging out with friends, sometimes in meetings when I felt guilty for needing to disrupt the flow. I did what I could.

But I was starting to become resentful. I wanted more time to myself. I wanted to spend more time with my son that didn't involve him biting the shit out of my nipples. We stopped and he never noticed a difference. If anything, he liked me more because I wasn't concentrating on getting him to settle long enough for my milk to flow.

Seven months later, when my son runs over to me and takes a bite out of whatever I'm eating, tasting it for the very first time, he makes a face of immediate approval. He shakes his head and lifts his chin up as if to say, "More."

**More of what tastes good.** It feels amazing to introduce him to new foods. Feeding him is not an obligation, it's an extension of my love for him. And it looks like fed is indeed best.

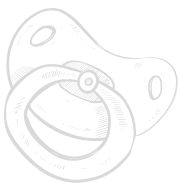




## *Are you?*

Bailey asked me multiple times if I am happy. He came home from a long day in daycare, which he described as “Ok,” and laid in my bed before I could scold him about being in his outside clothes. The sun shone in his face enough to illuminate the different textures in his hair, without him having to shield his eyes. He made funny faces and posed to make me laugh. A laugh became a roar that initially scared Bailey, his reaction surprised him and made him crack up. Our laughs filled the bedroom. I joined him in the bed for a snuggle. He curled himself against my body, moving a few times before nestling his head on my chest. “Your boobs!” he exclaimed in between moves. Eventually, he laid still and drifted into the safest of spaces.

*Zaza, are you happy?*







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