

Motherlike

Katherine Leyton

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Katherine Leyton relates her pregnancy experiences to larger issues of femininity, parenthood, and bodily autonomy in her memoir *Motherlike*.

Leyton and her husband planned to have a child, but not quite so fast: when she learned she was pregnant right after their honeymoon, she was thrust onto a path that, though countless others trod it before her, remained shrouded in a mist of “preciousness” and untold truths. In the course of her singular yet commonplace experience of pregnancy, she grappled with issues of privilege, access to healthcare, and gender disparities that make motherhood more challenging than it has to be.

Addressing her child, Leyton discusses her happy though imperfect childhood and her hard-won relationship with her husband. Her pregnancy and the first year of her child’s life are covered too. She portrays a whirlwind of conflicting emotions, foremost among them the excitement of getting to know her child and the fear that either she or the world at large would fail them. At the same time, she rails against society for giving women so little useful information about their own bodies; for venerating, ignoring, and undervaluing mothers all at once; and for refusing to acknowledge the inherent dangers of pregnancy and childbirth.

The book’s fragments range from several pages long to a single sentence long. Some aspects of childbearing (described as exclusive to women without acknowledging trans men) felt natural; others caused her anguish and anger. Both elation and frustrations are expressed. And despite motherhood’s annoyances, contradictions, and trials, Leyton concluded that it was an experience that she would trade for no other.

Motherlike is an intimate memoir about the endless worry and boundless joy of motherhood.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (March / April 2024)

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