

The Snarling Girl

Elisa Albert

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Elisa Albert's ranging essay collection *The Snarling Girl* includes sixteen pieces published over the last ten years in venues including *Longreads*, New York magazine's *The Cut*, *The Forward*, and Lit Hub. Their topics include feminist medicine, the music of Ani DiFranco, growing up in Los Angeles, and life in Albany.

The entries vary in length but are consistent in tone—incisive, wise, stark in their honesty, unapologetic about Albert's Judaism, and feminist. The book opens with "The Snarling Girl: Notes on Ambition," which deconstructs the concept of ambition and what this looks like in certain literary circles. It also takes aim at the writing community, saying "the fact remains: whatever impresses you always illuminates your ambition."

In "Vagina Jail," Albert writes about becoming a doula and cultural views about childbirth; in "Make It Mean Something," she explores social media and smartphones while also contemplating faith through a modern lens. "On Not Getting What I Wanted" addresses secondary infertility in a beautiful and painful way: "What I wanted was a baby. ...I didn't tell a lot of people about my wanting because A) I did not want to be defined by it, and B) It hurt so, so bad." And the timely "Five Recent Encounters, or 'One of Those People'" illustrates the pervasiveness of antisemitism.

While there is snark to be found in these essays, they avoid bitterness and vitriol in favor of wry humor and honest self-reflection. There's balance throughout, and each piece in the collection is worthy of the time it takes to read it—yes, even the essay about Philip Roth.

The Snarling Girl is Elisa Albert at her finest: vulnerable and acerbic, devastating and insightful. Its essays blend cultural criticism with memoir elements, balancing viewpoints from both insider and outside observer perspectives.

JAIME HERNDON (September / October 2024)

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