

All the Acorns on the Forest Floor

Kim Hooper

Turner Publishing (Sep 15, 2020)

Hardcover \$27.99 (304pp)

978-1-68442-529-7

Kim Hooper's *All the Acorns on the Forest Floor* is a novel profligate in its pursuit of an idea: motherhood.

As an organizing principle, motherhood is constructed across a series of chapter-long vignettes. Like the Fleetwood Mac song "The Chain," women's lives are linked together in a narrative that emphasizes the push and pull of their individual and collective lives, as well as the active, social weight that motherhood exerts on childless and child-bearing women alike.

While conception and babies are the novel's central themes, motherhood is also an ideological force within it that draws in nurses in the neonatal ward, women who are intentionally childless, adults reckoning with adoptions, and unwed women who made difficult choices, including abortions and child abandonment. What at first appears intensely personal is remolded as the idiosyncratic outcome of bigger, invisible ideological forces, from miscarriages to the overwhelming desire to steal a baby. Silent suffering and isolation emphasize how little women are in charge of the social narrative about motherhood, and how taboo, invisible, and unspeakable the true nature of women's shared experiences still are.

Although the book's characters feel isolated in their experiences, the novel's structure reveals their hidden ties. As their narratives subtly intertwine, the book illustrates how small and connected people's lives really are. No one's circumstances are as unique as they feel to the individuals involved.

Just like squirrels collect, hide, and, more often than not, lose nuts, the novel's ideas about love are tied to abandonment and loss. Yet through unexpected interconnections between stories, the novel transcends the individual to point to an underlying communal truth: motherhood is a pressure that all women must contend with, even if in the silence of their own hearts.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (September / October 2020)

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