

Thanks for Leaving Me

Emma Bruce

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Writing is thorough and observant in this account of love and self-transformation.

Emma Bruce's memoir *Thanks for Leaving Me* is a relatable account of a woman losing a marriage, finding herself, and discovering love again.

The narrative follows Bruce from her time as a naïve undergrad into her deep self-discovery as a mature woman. The first half of the book painstakingly details the promising start of her marriage to her college sweetheart, Peter, and the many years of growing distance between them. She captures the slow passage from love to disdain, as well as the subtle step-by-step process that led to infidelity. The relational and logistical challenges of separating after more than forty years together also receive attention.

Bruce lives out, but then decides to opt out of, the gender roles presented to her early in life, struggling to maintain her sense of self in every stage of her journey. The second half of the book focuses on the postdivorce part of her story, where she experiments with who she was and what she wanted.

She recalls failed encounters and dates with men met online and elsewhere, and how she learned through therapy and reflection both what she wanted for herself and how to pursue it. Late in the work, she relates experiences of embarking on new love with caution and excitement, ending with a wedding in middle age.

The story stops short of capturing Bruce's happily ever after fully; it ends at the the very beginning of her healthy new marriage, juxtaposing nicely to the earlier heartbreak of her divorce. This conclusion is highly satisfying.

Writing is thorough and observant, and provides clear insights. The tone of the work is open and generous, welcoming the audience with a voice that is both compelling and warm. Events are narrated with emotion but not sentimentality. Moments of anger and resentment also come through, but without bitterness.

The pace of the book is even and methodical, investing attention in both everyday events and major, life-altering incidents. This is apt at times but can feel like a monotonous play-by-play of Bruce's internal journey rather than an inspiring narrative summation.

For others who have experienced divorce after many years of unhealthy marriage, Bruce's experiences will feel familiar, and her struggles and realizations will be relatable. That cathartic familiarity is inviting, though audience interest may be limited not far beyond those in the author's own circle.

Thanks for Leaving Me is an honest story of love and self-transformation.

MELISSA WUSKE (November 22, 2017)

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