



An Abbreviated Life: A Memoir

Ariel Leve

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"Mesmerizing... A portrait of something familiar gone wildly, tragically awry."

—*The New York Times*

"Sometimes, a child is born to a parent who can't be a parent, and, like a seedling in the shade, has to grow toward a distant sun. Ariel Leve's spare and powerful memoir will remind us that family isn't everything—kindness and nurturing are."

—**Gloria Steinem**

Ariel Leve grew up in Manhattan with an eccentric mother she describes as "a poet, an artist, a self-appointed troublemaker and attention seeker." Leve learned to become her own parent, taking care of herself and her mother's needs. There would be uncontrolled, impulsive rages followed with denial, disavowed responsibility, and then extreme outpourings of affection. How does a child learn to feel safe in this topsyturvy world of conditional love?

Leve captures the chaos and lasting impact of a child's life under siege and explores how the coping mechanisms she developed to survive later incapacitated her as an adult. There were material comforts, but no emotional safety, except for summer visits to her father's home in South East Asia—an escape that was terminated after he attempted to gain custody. Following the death of a loving caretaker, a succession of replacements raised Leve—relationships which resulted in intense attachment and loss. It was not until decades later, when Leve moved to other side of the world, that she could begin to emancipate herself from the past. In a relationship with a man who has children, caring for them yields a clarity of what was missing.

In telling her haunting story, Leve seeks to understand the effects of chronic psychological maltreatment on a child's developing brain, and to discover how to build a life for herself that she never dreamed possible: An unabbreviated life.

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