

BOOK REVIEW

Title : *Mermaid: A Memoir of Resilience*

Name of the Author: **Eileen Cronin**

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Eileen Cronin has successfully composed a memoir which is about resilience, family members and especially about a woman born without legs. At the very outset, she tells that at the age of three, she first realizes that she does not have legs. She has penned 25 chapters about the different circumstances which include the failures, attempts, shortcomings, terrors and triumphs during her life. She creates a sense of pity for her but brings a sense of respect for her adventurous attitude too. She recalls one of the comments that she is “slipped out like a piece of raw meat.” However, she has written this memoir changing the names and some minor details so that privacy of the original characters is not challenged.

Eileen uses ‘I’ for herself throughout the memoir. She has boldly expressed the nick names of the characters. She has used a bold and expressive language which creates a living environment. Her dialogues and conversations among the various characters make this memoir a living entity of literature of English. Her sentences (“Dad lowered her eyes”, “did you hear me”, “I dropped my forehead”) used at the different stages of the memoir show the tragic and sad atmosphere throughout. Apart from this, she reflects humour and grace along with her search for love and quest for answers.

The theme of the memoir revolves around the psychological aspect of Eileen Cronin, a young college girl, who just wants to be realized as a beautiful young girl. But more than this, she wants that she must be taken as a normal girl who is known for her skills than her missing legs. She writes in the prologue of the book, ‘Back in Cincinnati I am “that girl who was born without legs.”...What was I expecting? Was it selfish of me to want to be beautiful...I have to get that leg.’ She narrates a number of times when she really misses her legs. In chapter 4, Eileen

tells, “Mom read my face and sighed. ‘Oh, Eileen ...if I could just give you mine...’ And for a moment I believed she could do. Could a doctor put a set of legs on another body?” In fact, the memoir highlights the different efforts by Cronin to rise in her life. She is nearly four when she realizes her legs are different—both end at the knee, one above and one below. She tries to realize the reasons for her legs. She judges many reasons during her birth defects. She keeps on asking her mother whether or not she took thalidomide (a drug later found to cause birth defects) while her pregnancy. But she finds that instead of helping or answering her curiosity, the catholic family have accepted her situation as a ‘God’s will’. Her mother says, “You don’t have legs,” she said, “because baby Jesus chose you to carry the cross!” She does some research also to know about this physical defect.

The research of Eileen Cronin shows that limb buds start growing around the end of the first month. She studies that limbs appear to be formed by the end of the third. She points out that her legs likely stopped growing between four and ten weeks. She always keeps on thinking about her legs and particularly she tries to find the reason for this. This makes her relationship with her mother a tensed one, especially because she had ‘no guilt whatsoever’ about Cronin’s birth defects. Her mother admits about her visit to Germany. Her reply shakes Eileen when she tells her, “Eileen I trained in Germany and saw a lot of babies affected by thalidomide.” *Mermaid* indicates that how resilience makes one stronger, particularly when one is struggling with the forces which are beyond the reach. She has explored a self discovery and transformation within the self. In the epilogue, she comments about her triumph, “Here in the Kennedy centre, I am fighting joyful tears as I think back to my dreams of being a ballerina. Sitting in the audience, watching my daughter dance, even better than my childhood dream.” In her journey which she begins with chapter I, “Tracing the Blue Light” reflecting the hurdles in Eileen’s life, continues through the chapters discussing the different parts and events in her life and ends with chapter 25, “Dancing with Andy” with her supreme happiness watching her daughter dancing. Eileen Cronin, in fact, has shown her minded, objective and reflective skills which not only push the readers to read the entire mermaid in single reading.

Thus, in spite of all her physical limitations and family conflicts, Cronin emerges as a brave, wry and spirited being. This memoir has three phases, first, she narrates that how she gets to know about this disease. Second, she attempts to know that how it happened to her only. And finally, she comes out of this shortcoming and decides to stand in her life and brings a new identity. In the end, the memoir comes out to be a candid, shrewd, funny and moving one which is mixed with chaos, secrets and mystery.