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As actor Rebecca Lim prepares to embrace the most demanding role of her life – motherhood – she reflects on the profound changes and self-realizations that this transformative period has brought forth

This is a love story. Though not in the conventional sense. This is a tale of self-love and self-discovery, one that's unfolded over Rebecca Lim's pregnancy journey.

"Pregnancy has taught me a lot of things," says the 37-year-old actor. Our conversation takes place when she's in her last stretch of pregnancy, at 38 weeks. She delivered her son via natural birth on January 30, after 14 hours in labour.

Throughout her pregnancy term, Rebecca has engaged in events, and done a couple of shoots for media features. Yet, it has been some time since she has had the opportunity to be in front of the camera for such an extended period, especially considering she hasn't filmed a new show since the start of her pregnancy. During the cover shoot, there's a subtle wistfulness in her expression as she reviews the shots – it seems that in the past few months, her life has changed so much that even a regular work moment brings her a sense of joy she might have forgotten.

How has everything been so far, given that this is her first child? "Actually, this is my second – I have a secret child," she says with a smile, before breaking out into laughter. Though we're speaking just after our lengthy six-hour cover shoot, her spirits remain high despite her gruelling day in front of the camera. Her playful demeanour, marked by jokes and frequent smiles that punctuate her sentences, manifests throughout our conversation.

"Kidding! I'm just kidding! Well, everything has been very good for me so far in this trimester. No complaints, just the usual low energy and some lethargy," she says.

While Rebecca didn't have severe morning sickness, her first trimester required ample bed rest due to instances of instability in the pregnancy, causing pain and bleeding. She notes that her age might have contributed to the challenges during those initial months. Changes were also expected, she says. "Physically, definitely. You feel it, you see it. Everyone sees it."

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But mentally? There were also new discoveries made, she says. "People tend to focus on morning sickness and appetite changes when discussing pregnancy, and those are the usual questions I've been asked, but recently, I've just been feeling blessed to be able to create a life. These nine months have opened my eyes to a lot. Through this pregnancy journey, I've realised that it's not just about the baby taking nine to 10 months to form; it's also a journey of self-discovery for the [mum-to-be] during this period."

A mother's sacrifice

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Maxi dress with cut-out panels, Onitsuka Tiger

Rebecca is navigating a challenge that resonates with many pregnant working women on maternity leave: the sense of loss and having to step away from a hard-earned career built over time. In an industry where appearance and trends play a pivotal role, taking a hiatus for

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pregnancy can intensify this sense of loss and the fear of becoming temporarily sidelined. It could be said that perseverance is a theme in Rebecca's evolving career.

For the majority of her career, she has worked tirelessly, beginning when she was identified as a talent and signed on as a part-time actor with Mediacorp in 2005, while pursuing a degree in accountancy and majoring in law at Singapore Management University. She transitioned to being a full-time actor after graduation.

She started in 2008 at the age of 22 with the drama *The Truth*, where she co-starred with local stars Tay Ping Hui and Joanne Peh. Despite early criticism for her command of the Chinese language, she continued to pursue acting and switched over to English productions. She later earned acclaim for her role as a trainee lawyer in the Channel 5 law series, *The Pupil*, in 2010. Determined to succeed in Chinese productions, she studied the language and eventually achieved a Mandarin breakthrough with her portrayal of a psychiatrist in the Channel 8 drama *Unriddle 2*.

Her last movie was the psychological thriller *Confinement* in 2023. She stars as a first-time mother who begins experiencing strange things when her confinement nanny (played by local actor Cynthia Koh) moves in to take care of her newborn. And, less than 24 hours before we speak, she was awarded the Best Leading Female Performance (Digital) at the 28th Asian Television Awards for her role in action-thriller television series *Third Rail* ("I'm very grateful for the honour and support from fans," she says).

"To have to put all of that on hold, initially, it was a bit..." she trails off, thinking for a moment. "There's this tiny sense of insecurity. Suddenly, I felt like I had lost my sense of identity, because my work was closely tied to my sense of worth."

When she had to take a step back and re-evaluate who she was beyond her role as an actor, it required a lot of "soul-searching". "It's been a very humbling process. Finding worth in who I am, not just as an actor, but as a person, was a struggle at the beginning of this pregnancy," she shares. "I've always worked non-stop, and busied myself with work – so much so that it's like hiding myself in it. So right now, when I have no work at all besides the occasional event or shoot, it's just very different."

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This change of pace has been eye-opening. She's discovering a lot of different facets of herself, she shares. With more time on her hands, has she picked up any new hobbies or made new self-discoveries? "I've discovered that I'm very bad at packing," she jokes.

She had recently completed renovation works and moved into her very first own home: a two-storey terrace house that originates from the 1930s. "Aside from that, well, because I've always been so busy, I hardly do anything for myself. Now that I have so much time on my hands, I envy people who have many hobbies for things they like to do besides work. I've been focusing on work all the time, and if it's not work, my free time is dedicated to my family. I hardly have time to spend on myself. This is the time when I'm like, 'Actually, what do I really enjoy? What do I love? What are my hobbies?' And then I realise: It's just to do nothing. It's such a luxury to be able to sit and just be still, and have 'me time'. I think that was what I really needed before the baby arrives."

Preparing for her biggest role

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Jacket, Louis Vuitton. Ring, Givenchy

Speaking of the baby, Rebecca, who declined to share the baby's chosen name at the time of this interview ("We have a few names in mind, but we'll really only know and decide once we see the baby's face"), is uncertain about the type of mother she will be.

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“There are two camps [within my family and friends]. One group predicts that I’ll be a very strict mother, and the other says I’ll be very chill and relaxed. Some days, I think I’ll be cool; other days, I think I’ll be really uptight. I have no idea,” she shares.

Let’s break it down into scenarios, then. What if her child breaks their curfew? “How old is my child?” she asks, taking this exercise seriously. Say, under 16? “Okay, then I’ll be strict. I think because my parents were very strict with me growing up. I will definitely incorporate some of how I was brought up and apply it to my child.”

The journey of pregnancy has instilled in her an appreciation for her upbringing. Rebecca identifies strongly with the “nurture” aspect on the psychology of nature versus nurture, emphasising the significant impact of childhood on one’s personality. She says she has come to realise that being strict in situations where it is necessary is crucial. “When I was younger and broke curfews, disobeyed my parents, and faced punishments, I used to envy classmates with very relaxed parents who allowed freedom. They could do whatever they wanted: stay over at friends’ houses, go on holidays. These were things I didn’t get to do in my youth. Now as a grown-up, I understand their worries and concerns, and I appreciate that they protected me in a sense. As a parent, I would like to protect my child for as long as I can as well.”

What about issues with studies, for example, if they didn’t submit their homework? “It’s okay. I didn’t submit my homework all the time either!” she chuckles. “Academic performance isn’t as important to me, but my child has to be, firstly, a happy child. Secondly, respectful. [They have to be] kind, but strong at the same time. Those are the qualities I hope my child will have. They must be kind, but also know how to stand up for themselves.”

Surrounded by love

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Sequined maxi dress, Longchamp

They say it takes a village to raise a child, and fortunately, Rebecca is surrounded by a strong and supportive “village”. Her husband, Matthew Webster – a 37-year-old Singaporean of British-Chinese descent who is assistant vice-president of corporate branding at PSA

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Singapore – has been extremely supportive and understanding, which she definitely appreciates. They tied the knot in November 2022, a year after his proposal.

Rebecca notes his laid-back nature, which contrasts with stories from friends about more uptight and frantic husbands. “He’s very chill, so it helps make me more relaxed during the process,” she says. “We haven’t planned in detail, because we are both first-time parents, and this whole journey is foreign and daunting to the both of us. The plan is for him to take parental leave once the confinement nanny leaves. I believe that’s when I’ll be needing help to adjust to my new normal.”

Help will also come in the form of her family. The actor is very close to her family, including her brother, Daniel, who is the resident baker at the family’s pastry business The Lims’ Kitchen, and younger sister, Melissa. “I am extremely blessed and privileged, because I have family who are willing to help [with taking care of my child]. I’ve helped babysit my niece on many occasions too! So it’s payback time for my brother.”

During a recent dinner, Rebecca asked her mother about the best and worst parts of being a mum. “She had a lot of bad things to say about being a mum, such as loss of personal time,” she says with some mirth, but adds: “She also had a lot of advice to give. And the one that really stuck with me was to ‘not forget to take care of yourself.’” Her mother, she shares, has always been one who put everyone else before herself. “And so, for her to say something like that, it holds a lot of weight.” Rebecca interprets it as a late-life epiphany for her mother, wanting to spare her daughters from a similar experience.

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Cotton tank top with embellished logo, suede coat, and embroidered miniskirt, Chanel

It's an added comfort that her sister is pregnant at the same time, three weeks behind. They spend quality time together, attending prenatal pilates sessions, sharing meals, and hanging out. Rebecca emphasises the significance of this shared experience. "We talk about everything, and she is really someone I share everything with. She's my favourite person in the world, so to go through this experience with her makes it a lot more special."

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This pregnancy has been a bittersweet mix of joy and sorrow, however, as there's one family member missing in the picture. When Rebecca found out that she was pregnant, the family was still grieving her father's passing. He passed away from health complications in May last year.

"My sister and I are both daddy's girls, and so we always come up with scenarios like, 'Oh, if dad was still around, he'd probably be spoiling us with food deliveries', and things like that. It's good to have someone like her to talk about it," she reveals. This shared connection provides a comforting space for them to discuss their father, and reminisce about his presence.

Rebecca also plans to share stories about him with her child. She acknowledges the fleeting nature of time, and the importance of creating lasting memories. "It's made me realise that I want my child to have as many memories with the grandparents as possible. So they'd always have things to look back on, to smile about, and have no regrets," she says, emphasising the desire for her child to forge a strong connection with all three grandparents, and her almost 90-year-old great-grandmother. Drawing from her own upbringing surrounded by grandparents, she sees it as instilling a unique set of values in a child.

The next episode

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Sequined wrap dress with ruffle detail, and studded leather boots, Louis Vuitton

On returning to work after giving birth, the actor reveals that she is looking to take her time to select her next project carefully.

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While she isn't rushing the return, she expresses a genuine desire to resume her professional life, noting the importance of retaining a part of her identity and embracing new challenges in her work. "Work is a part of my life that is so important to me. I still love what I do," she says. "My career is not something that I want to give up just yet. It's something that I feel I should have for myself."

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As she anticipates the arrival of her baby, Rebecca notes that embracing motherhood doesn't diminish her identity. Rather, it adds to her roles as a career woman, a devoted wife, and a cherished daughter and granddaughter.

"I believe that, in life, there are different stages. The past decade for me was primarily about work. With this new chapter, it doesn't mean I'm solely focusing on family, but there's undoubtedly a shift. I'm looking forward to what's to come. While I don't know what's going to happen with this new milestone, I'm excited for the journey it brings," she says.

And as she enters this next chapter, she'll undoubtedly continue discovering new aspects of herself, just as these past nine months have unfolded.

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