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Janet Jaffe, a pioneer in reproductive trauma, offers bereaved parents validation, compassion, and hope in her latest book. Drawing on real-life stories, research, and decades of clinical experience, she normalizes the complex emotions of loss and provides gentle guidance through the grieving process. With clarity and empathy, Jaffe honors the heartbreak of reproductive loss while illuminating a path toward healing, resilience, and growth.

–RACHEL RABINOR, LCSW, PSYCHOTHERAPIST AND AUTHOR OF *THE PREGNANCY AND BABY LOSS GUIDED JOURNAL*

In *Healing From the Trauma of Pregnancy Loss: Reclaiming Your Reproductive Story*, Dr. Jaffe's compassion, expertise, and commitment to grieving parents shines through from beginning to end. This book offers an empathic companion to parents who may feel alone and misunderstood in their grief and have no way of knowing how to mourn or how to make sense of their experience. This book is a much-needed guide for grieving parents on how to cope with the unique experience of pregnancy loss.

–RAYNA D. MARKIN, PhD, Associate Professor in Counseling, Villanova University, Villanova, PA, and licensed psychologist and founder, Therapy Center for Pregnancy Loss LLC

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INTRODUCTION

WHEN THE PATH TO PARENTHOOD IS THWARTED BY LOSS

If you are reading this book, you have suffered a loss that is heart wrenching and deeply painful, or perhaps someone very close to you has had this experience. For this, I am so sorry. Whether you are recovering from a miscarriage, a stillbirth, an ectopic pregnancy, the loss of a newborn, or a failed cycle using assisted reproductive technology, you have been through a trauma that is unlike any other. This is not only true if you have had a pregnancy demise, but it is also the case if you have experienced a failed adoption. This too is a pregnancy loss for the adoptive parents. It is also the case that medical circumstances may necessitate the termination of a pregnancy. For example, you may have had a medical condition that would negatively affect either you or the fetus if the pregnancy were to proceed. Or if you have had a multifetal reduction (e.g., a twin pregnancy reduced to a singleton pregnancy) for the health of the remaining fetus, you have had to make choices that are overwhelming and heartbreaking. Wanting a baby and then having to say goodbye to that child—or your hoped-for child, whatever the circumstance—is devastating. This book will help you and your loved ones navigate these losses and find a path forward.

In my work as a psychologist, I have accompanied individuals and couples—regardless of gender or sexual orientation—through

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this tragic time. I have witnessed clients in the depth of their despair, and I have helped them grieve, cope, and heal from pregnancy loss. I know how reproductive losses can shake the very foundation of people's lives. What we thought would be a given—the dream of having a baby and creating a family—vanishes into thin air. Not only do I know about this from the work I do, but I also know it because I too have gone through my own reproductive losses. In this volume, I hope to share with you my professional as well as personal knowledge of ways to work through this trauma.

As you dive into this book, you will understand why pregnancy loss is so traumatic. It impacts every aspect of our lives. If you have a partner, you may not be seeing eye to eye, with each of you coping and grieving in your own separate ways. Simple things like deciding what to have for dinner can suddenly become overwhelming. Making plans with family or friends may leave you filled with dread, as others often do not understand the extent of what you are experiencing. Indeed, they may try to be helpful and offer advice, but often their well-intentioned suggestions sadly miss the mark. You may shrink from checking social media, for fear that someone else will announce their pregnancy or the birth of their child. Without the possibility of moving to a deserted island, we must learn to cope with life continuing around us, even when our own life feels like it has stopped.

Although I cannot promise that this book will eliminate all the pain that you are feeling, I hope that it will help you feel supported and provide you with some pathways forward. This book is not meant to be a substitute for medical advice or therapy. Consulting with your medical practitioners about your situation and questions you may have is a must. Seeking the care of a mental health provider or a support group (see the Resources in this volume) is also recommended. This book, however, is meant to serve as a companion when you are searching for guidance—perhaps in the middle of the

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night, when you may feel isolated in your grief. It can help you find your way when you are feeling lost and alone. Some exercises are provided but certainly not required. This is a journey for you to take in your own time, in your own way. Perhaps this book will help you communicate with others around you so that they too can better understand this heartbreaking loss.

It is important for you to know this: No matter what you have experienced, you have been a parent throughout your pregnancy or adoption experience. The task ahead is to continue honoring yourself and your child in the best way you can.

A NOTE ABOUT LANGUAGE

Throughout this volume, I use the terms *men* and *women* for simplicity; however, it is understood that gender is on a continuum. Not all individuals who can bear children identify as female. Because of the physical demands of pregnancy on the female body, there is naturally attention to addressing women's psychological states; however, this volume will address men's emotional reactions as well, which are often overlooked. Additionally, while I may refer to *couples* and *partners*, many of you may not be in a committed relationship. Likewise, although I believe that the reproductive stories of members of the LGBTQ+ community as well as single parents by choice should be integrated in the heteronormative reproductive world, this volume will also attend to the special needs of these groups.

OVERVIEW OF THIS BOOK

The following is a chapter-by-chapter snapshot of what you will learn. Stories from many people who have experienced reproductive trauma and loss are provided in this volume. Please note that although the struggles are real, these cases are fictionalized to

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preserve confidentiality. In addition, you will find exercises throughout the book, which are meant to help you clarify your thoughts and feelings. As you will see, some of the exercises suggest you write things down; yet if this is not something you wish to do, just thinking about the suggestions works as well. It is the deliberate contemplation of the events surrounding your loss and what it means to you that enables you to heal and grow.

Chapter 1: When the Loss of a Pregnancy Becomes Real

Chapter 1 presents the concept of the reproductive story. Simply stated, the *reproductive story* is about all our hopes and dreams about having children. As will be discussed, everyone has a reproductive story, regardless of culture, race, religious orientation, or relationship status, including whether you are single, in a committed relationship, straight, or a member of the LGBTQ+ community. When the story goes awry—when the dreams of parenthood turn into nightmares—is the focus of this book. This chapter describes many reproductive losses that can occur. Although you are welcome to read through all the losses here, you may also want to focus on the issues salient to you. The nightmares people experience are not just about the physical demise of a pregnancy; they also include potential disruptions in relationships, as well as legal, ethical, and financial injustices. Indeed, as will be addressed, current restrictions in women's health care in the United States have only added to the trauma, making a bad situation even worse (Ranji et al., 2024).

Chapter 2: Your Reproductive Story: How It Began and the Chapter You Are in Now

Your story—how it began and how it developed over time—has many influences. Likewise, if you have a partner, they will have a

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story of their own that may not always align with yours. Chapter 2 encourages you to write down or tell your story as it was before the loss and then after. Once you can identify how significant your story is to your life, the depth of the blow when the story goes awry will begin to make sense.

Chapter 3: The Trauma of a Pregnancy Loss: What Happens When Dreams Are Shattered?

Pregnancy loss is a medical trauma as well as a psychological one. In Chapter 3, we talk about the assumptions you may have had about pregnancy—for example, that it is easy, and that everyone can do it. When these core beliefs are marred by loss, the solid foundations of your assumptions and all you anticipated you could count on are suddenly on shaky ground. Like rebuilding a house that has been damaged by an earthquake or flood, this chapter will guide you in restructuring your shattered assumptions and help you to build new ones.

Chapter 4: How Do You Grieve Your Baby?

In Chapter 4, we talk about grief in general as well as grief that occurs specifically in regard to reproductive losses. These are losses that can occur prior to pregnancy (e.g., in fertility struggles), losses during pregnancy, and postpartum issues. There is a misconception that the longer someone is pregnant, the greater the grief. It is, however, your emotional attachment to the pregnancy and the damage to your reproductive story that serves as a predictor of grief. We also explore the importance of rituals or ceremonies in the mourning process, and we discuss what you can do to memorialize your loss.

Additionally, grandparents-to-be, children who would become an older brother or sister, and other family members may agonize

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over the loss as well. They too have a story that is not moving forward in the way they had hoped. In fact, they may turn to you for guidance in their grief. This section discusses how to manage other people's grief as you try to deal with your own.

Chapter 5: We Are Not on the Same Page: When Couples Grieve Reproductive Losses Differently

If you have a partner, even though you share this loss, you may manage and cope with it in very different ways. The very person you usually turn to in times of distress—your partner—may not be emotionally available, bringing even more pain and isolation. This happens frequently in situations like these, and it doesn't necessarily mean that there is something inherently wrong with your relationship. In Chapter 5, through looking at other couples, we explore ways to better understand each other, increase your empathy for your partner, and learn more effective means of communication.

Chapter 6: I Feel Invisible: Coping in a Child-Centric World

There are so many emotional land mines to navigate when a pregnancy fails. Social interactions can feel overwhelming. If you have taken time off, returning to work can feel unsettling. Because people generally often do not know how to handle pregnancy loss, family members, friends, and coworkers can and do unintentionally say the wrong things. Chapter 6 offers practical advice as you deal with holidays, baby showers, weddings, birthday gatherings, and other social events. Your calendar, which may have served as a reminder for family birthdays or other celebratory events, may now be filled with sad reminders of due dates and the date of your loss. This chapter will help you manage your interactions with people who mean well but may actually cause you pain, and it will

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help you navigate those moments when you are reminded again and again of your loss.

Chapter 7: Trying Again: Hope Mixed With a Dose of Anxiety

Nearly everyone who has had a pregnancy loss lives with dread that it will happen again. How could you not be worried about that? Unfortunately, there is no way to pursue parenthood without taking the risk of trying again—whether that consists of trying to get pregnant again naturally, using medical intervention, or attempting to adopt. In Chapter 7, we discuss practical strategies to help you manage your anxiety and cope with this stressful time.

Chapter 8: From Reproductive Trauma to Growth: Healing and Change

The term *posttraumatic growth* (PTG; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) refers to the potential for positive change following a major catastrophic event. This concept is as old as time: Out of adversity, growth will occur. As the words often attributed to German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1888/2008) famously stated: "Out of life's school of war—what doesn't kill me, makes me stronger." Chapter 8 focuses on the positive ways you may change over time. The idea of time is of utmost importance here: Everyone needs time to heal. You will feel one way immediately after your loss and another after time passes. With that in mind, it will be helpful to do the exercises in this chapter now to note where your thoughts and feelings are currently, and then come back to the exercises at some point in the future to reassess changes in your attitude and perceptions of your loss. Doing so can help you see how you have changed and grown over time. PTG does not erase the loss—it is important to note that grief and growth can and do coexist.

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Chapter 9: One Story Ends, Another Begins

At this point, we know how your reproductive story began and how it went off course. What you may not yet know is how your story will end—whether it will include children (or more children) or not. As we discuss in Chapter 9, finding different endings that bring fulfillment and meaning is the goal. No matter how your story ends, the loss has changed you in profound ways. It cannot be erased, but it can lead you in directions you otherwise would not have followed.

Epilogue: The End of the Story

All stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Right now, you are likely in the middle of your reproductive story, perhaps unsure how it will end. You may wonder if you will be stuck in this painful middle-of-the-story spot forever. Whether your reproductive story ends with having children or not, it is my hope that this book helps you move forward in your life.