Is keeping a secret from a spouse always an act of infidelity? And what cost does such a secret exact on a family?

The Ryries have suffered a loss: the death of a baby just fifty-seven hours after his birth. Without words to express their grief, the parents, John and Ricky, try to return to their previous lives. Struggling to regain a semblance of normalcy for themselves and for their two older children, they find themselves pretending not only that little has changed, but that their marriage, their family, have always been intact. Yet in the aftermath of the babys death, long-suppressed uncertainties about their relationship come roiling to the surface. A dreadful secret emerges with reverberations that reach far into their past and threaten their future.

The couples children, ten-year-old Biscuit and thirteen-year-old Paul, responding to the unnamed tensions around them, begin to act out in exquisitely- perhaps courageously- idiosyncratic ways. But as the four family members scatter into private, isolating grief, an unexpected visitor arrives, and they all find themselves growing more alert to the sadness and burdens of others- to the grief that is part of every human life but that also carries within it the power to draw us together.

Moving, psychologically acute, and gorgeously written, The Grief of Others asks how we balance personal autonomy with the intimacy of relationships, how we balance private decisions with the obligations of belonging to a family, and how we take measure of our own sorrows in a world rife with suffering. This novel shows how one family, by finally allowing itself to experience the shared quality of grief, is able to rekindle tenderness and hope.
When I picked up The Grief of Others, I had finished another book and just needed another 10 minutes or so of reading to put me to sleep. This was in my To Be Reviewed pile and I was sure that I'd read a page or two and then choose something else a bit more mindless for that last bit of reading time.

Instead, I was immediately drawn to the fragile, brittle beauty of this story, of author Leah Hager Cohens words. The premise of the book immediately inspires sadness...as a mother I cannot even fathom the thought of losing a child, and yet there is something about this book that grabbed onto me and wouldn't let me go.

He was out of the womb and alive in the world for fifty-seven hours - a tally that put him in rare statistical company and caused in his mother an absurd sense of pride - during which time she kissed his ears and insteps and toes and palms and knuckles and lips repeatedly, a lifetime of kisses.

That paragraph is absolutely heartbreaking - but it feels so real that I was just in awe. As much as I never want to imagine the pain and grief of a mother holding her child that she knows does not have long to live, the way the author creates the images seem absolutely...right.

This is the story of a mother, and a father...and brother and sister...a family who must move on after tragedy but is unsure exactly what that after looks like.

There are many heartrending parts to this book. The scene where Ricky (the babys mother) learns of her child's birth defect...The radiologist there in the obstetric ultrasound suite explained that the condition was `incompatible with life, a phrase that took Ricky several seconds to understand, but which then struck her not as sneakily euphemistic but as surprisingly elegant and apt, free of judgment. This is a woman, who with her third child, heads to what should be a routine ultrasound thinking she will be coming home with a picture to hang on the fridge and admire, thinking this will be the first special picture of the newest member of their family (The moment, that moment, of seeing the little profile!)...and who is instead dealt a devastating blow.

The grief and hurt and repressed feelings pile up in the members of the family...with few outlets as they try to pretend everything is all right after the death of the baby. Only Ricky was able to hold him, in fact, she was unable to let go. ...once he'd left her arms the force of her grief gouged her. She had no inkling it would be like this: not simply lonely-making, but corrosive. She was filled with hatred. Some of it for herself.

Something about that word, corrosive, stayed with me. Intense feelings can consume us - eat away at our soul. This woman, this family has a struggle to try and avoid that future, try and repair that which is eating away at them.
But along with their grief - there is beauty. There is love, and the memories of the joy and happiness that they once shared - the picture perfect moments that they need to hold on to through the darkest of times.

...Ricky realizes that there have been a few stellar days, or parts of days: moments that seemed instantly to become emblazoned in her mind as postcards she will look back on. Scavenging for late season blueberries, and Biscuit turning out to be the best seeker of them all. Playing cards all day, the day it rained without stopping, and eating popcorn straight from the metal pot. Hiking on the blazed trails and logging roads that suddenly opened up and as suddenly stopped, like ghost boulevards in the old forest; the sun filtering down as if in slow motion through the crown cover, the light somehow altered, distilled, as though it had been sent from a long time ago.

The book was about people so fragile, so carefully patched together after disaster that it seemed as if too strong a breath might scatter the pieces. It is about people trying as best they can to hold on to the life they knew in the face of a tragedy they never expected. It is a lovely, sad, beautiful and emotional story of people. Of the frailty of human beings and the incredible strength of human love.

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