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Women's Studies

Grade A Baby Eggs: An Infertility Memoir
Victoria Hopewell
Joe Tantillo, illustrator
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Love, marriage, and then baby carriage: as the nursery rhyme goes, so follow our general expectations. Yet life doesn't always comply with our jovial plans, as Victoria Hopewell (a pseudonym) discovers in this memoir detailing her second marriage and the quest for a baby to accompany it.

In her early forties, Hopewell found herself freshly divorced and raising two young daughters. Fastidious dating led her to Gabriel, a charming man in his mid-forties. The couple married, and their blended family took on a modern fairy-tale twist: both were determined to have a baby together. And, in consideration of advances in fertility science, neither saw any reason not to move heaven and earth to achieve parenthood.

Hopewell's book follows their trials and tribulations with fertility doctors and in vitro fertilization (IVF), procedures which, as the years progressed, were increasingly marked by compromises in both Gabriel and Victoria's original ideals. When engaged, they thought: why not try naturally? Married, IVF seemed the most reasonable option. Mounting costs and repeated disappointments led them to, at last, consider egg donation.

These are candid pages which, in their honesty, manage to both emotionally engage and alternately frustrate readers. Hopewell discusses her new husband's desire to continue an illustrious family line, a dream which risks being thwarted by a late start and reproductive blips. The couple has to re-evaluate what parenthood means as their failed attempts mount in number: what is the significance of biology when it comes to parenthood? Do stellar genetics guarantee anything? How late is too late?

Hopewell's answers evolve, sometimes not simultaneous to her husband's. Both parties also grapple with the side effects of their extraordinary attempts, from waning family support, particularly from Hopewell's daughters, to issues with potential egg donors. All the while, the

clock ticks, incessantly, at the fore.

Grade A Baby Eggs is a thoroughly contemporary story about love and family, but it's also a tale made possible by privilege. Reader sympathy may wane as Hopewell describes her expectations of donors. Are they smart enough, tall enough, with flawless enough complexions?

With subtle self-deprecation, humor, and changing levels of conviction, Hopewell acknowledges both the absurdity and poignancy of introducing such elements to prospective conception. Such are the controversies of today's reproductive choices, and Hopewell succeeds in bringing them into unique relief. A frank and revealing exposé of modern struggles against infertility, and an absorbing exploration of the challenges that come with finding love in one's forties.

Michelle Anne Schingler