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It is through inhabiting, often painfully, our emotions that we are able to become fully human.

A PREVIEW OF
*BEARING THE
UNBEARABLE*

BY JOANNE CACCIATORE

With a loved one's death, the person we once were evaporates, and we take on what may feel like an aberrant form of ourselves, an unfamiliar way of being in the world. This is not what we wanted, this is not what we planned, this is not what *should* be—but it is what we have—even as our heart whispers, “No, no, no.” And here we find ourselves, feeling outcast, lying face down on the ground or on bent and bloodied knee or with our arms outstretched, pleading for relief.

Death feels savage, and to some extent, it is—but grief need not be vilified.

We might never accept that our child or parent or spouse or grandchild or friend or loved one has died, but we can learn to accept how we *feel* about that loss, where in us the pain is most acute, its dimensions and texture, its tenor and

When a person beloved by us dies, our lives can become unbearable.

And yet we are asked—by life, by death—to bear it, to suffer the insufferable, to endure the unendurable. *Bearing the Unbearable* is an expression of my own heart and my life's work—demanding and formidable, satisfying and deeply vital.

This book will not offer you a spiritual bypass; it won't make it so you don't have to face the pain of grief—nor should it. When we love deeply, we mourn deeply; extraordinary grief is an expression of extraordinary love. Grief and love mirror each other; one is not possible without the other.

What this book will do, I hope, is to provide a safe space to feel, to be with your understandably broken heart. It will serve as an invitation to stay with the wretched pangs of sorrow, to dwell in the dark night of your own bereaved soul, and to be present with what is—however difficult, however painful.

The word *bereave* derives from an Old English word, *befearfan*, meaning “to deprive, take away, or be robbed,” and when death robs us, our mourning, our loss, resonates through time. We mourn for tomorrow's moments, and next month's moments, and next year's moments; we mourn at the graduations and weddings, the births, and the deaths that follow. Grief consists of countless particles, countless moments, each one of which can be mourned. And through them all, we always know in our very cells that someone is missing, that there is a place in our hearts that can never be filled.

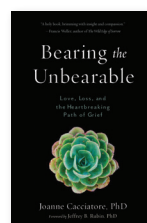
depth. And over time, grief can morph from a dreaded, unwanted intruder to something more familiar and less terrifying—a companion, perhaps.

Make no mistake: losing someone we love deeply changes us, inescapably and for all time, and it is painful beyond all imagining. The psychologist Rollo May wrote, “One does not become fully human painlessly.” It is through inhabiting, often painfully, our emotions that we are able to become fully human. Through grief, we can experience an alchemical transformation that cannot be contrived, hastened, or imparted by others.

To fully inhabit grief is to hold the contradictions of the great mystery that loss shatters us and we become whole. Grief empties us and we are filled with emotion. Fear paralyzes us and we lend courage to another. We mourn our beloveds' absence and we invoke their presence. We cease to exist as we once were and we become more fully human. We know the darkest of all nights and in so doing can bring the light of our loved ones into the world.

We are the paradox.

We are the bearers of the unbearable.



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BEARING THE UNBEARABLE
Joanne Cacciatore

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