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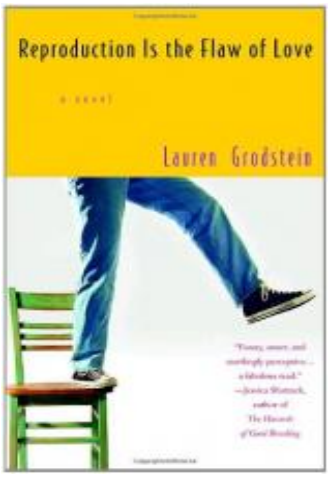
Reproduction is the Flaw of Love: A Novel

by Lauren Grodstein



About the Book

It's a Saturday morning in Brooklyn. Joel Miller, age twenty-eight, stands outside his locked bathroom door. Behind it are his girlfriend Lisa, a Dixie cup, and a pregnancy test. While she stalls for time, Miller is left in his hallway to wonder and wait: for the results of the test, for the pieces of his addled life to come together, for some kind of divine intervention to guide his actions when Lisa finally emerges.

Thus begins Lauren Grodstein's beguiling debut novel, a wise, wonderfully assured journey deep into the heart of the commitmentphobic male. Awaiting test results that could determine his future, Miller finds himself replaying all he has seen of love so far. There was his father Stan's awkward balancing act between doting father and failed husband, and his mother Bay's refusal to accept that Stan was never coming back. There was his playboy friend Grant's devastation upon falling for the one woman he couldn't have. And most of all, there was Miller's own prior relationship--with Blair, the aloof beauty he can't stop thinking about, the one who got away. With past and present colliding in his hallway, Miller begins to realize just how little he really knows about intimacy, love and potential fatherhood--and more important, about what he's going to do next.

Reproduction is the Flaw of Love fearlessly charts the romantic odyssey of one endearing New York bachelor, and in so doing illuminates some universal truths about family, loyalty, devotion, and love.

Discussion Guide

1. In the novel's opening scene, Lisa and Miller debate whether he should go to a convenient chain pharmacy or an out-of-the-way mom-and-pop store. Lisa wins. As you read this initial dialogue, what impressions did you gather of their relationship? Did those first impressions prove to be accurate?

2. Reproduction Is the Flaw of Love unfolds through a male protagonist's point of view, though the author is female.

What distinctions does the novel portray about the differences between how men and women respond to love and sex? Or does the novel portray more similarities than differences between genders?

3. What did Stan teach Miller about relationships? Does Miller share his father's limitations, or has he overcome them? How was Miller affected by having to cover for his father's dishonesty? Is Miller able to be honest (including with himself)?

4. In your opinion, what was the source of Bay's despondency? Was it a cause or an effect in the end of her marriage? Is his parents' divorce the only reason for Miller's fear of commitment?

5. In what way are Miller's girlfriends different from Bay? Did growing up in her household help or hinder Miller in dealing with women?

6. Lauren Grodstein equips Lisa with crutches throughout many of her scenes. What is the effect of this choice on the part of the author? How does Lisa's injury affect Miller?

7. Discuss the novel's title. Is reproduction the flaw of love? Besides possible pregnancy, what other kinds of reproduction occur in the novel? Does Miller reproduce his parents' marriage?

8. How would you characterize Miller's friendship with Grant? Does Grant give good advice? Was Rachel foolish to break off their engagement?

9. One seemingly minor character is Harry, Miller's dog. Yet the way Miller treats Harry is special. Would this be a predictor of Miller's parenting skills?

10. How might the novel have changed if it had been told from Lisa's point of view? How might she have described Miller and this episode in her life?

11. How did your understanding of Blair shift from her first scene in Bridgehampton to the revelations about her father after she broke up with Miller?

12. Does Miller's experience of love evolve from his early relationship with Debra (the actress) to Blair and then Lisa? What was the basis of his attraction to each of them?

13. Both of Miller's parents used him to some extent, especially when Stan began a relationship with Donna. What does living in the cross fire do to Miller? Does he become someone who uses other people, or someone who is easily used?

14. The novel takes place in a variety of New York City boroughs. In what way does each setting--Queens, Manhattan's Upper East Side, Brooklyn, and eventually Manhattan's Greenwich Village--capture a specific chapter of Miller's life?

15. Discuss the way fatherhood plays out in the novel. What did baseball cards mean to Stan and to Blair's father? How do Blair and Miller cope with losing their fathers?

16. Why do you think Lisa took so much time before administering the pregnancy test? What outcome do you believe she hoped for?

17. Did the ending surprise you? What do you predict for Miller's love life?

Author Bio

Lauren Grodstein is the author of six novels, including A DOG IN GEORGIA, the "Read with Jenna" selection WE MUST NOT THINK OF OURSELVES, the *New York Times* bestseller A FRIEND OF THE FAMILY, and the *Washington Post* Book of the Year THE EXPLANATION FOR EVERYTHING.

Lauren?s work has been translated into French, Turkish, German, Hebrew and other languages, and her essays and reviews have been widely published. She teaches in the MFA Program at Rutgers University-Camden and lives in New Jersey with her husband and children.

Critical Praise

"Sweet, honest.... compulsively readable."

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