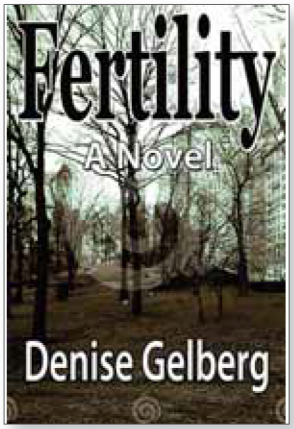
Book Reviews



Fertility – A Novel

By Denise Gelberg

Denise Gelberg has produced a well-researched and intelligent first novel, which captures your attention through medical, legal and emotional drama. Set in New York, the story follows the lives of two highly successful professionals: Sarah Abadhi, an ambitious law associate and Rick Smith, a doctor of paediatric intensive care medicine. Sarah, the book's main character, seemingly has it all; she's beautiful and intelligent, yet she has set low expectations when it comes to men, even when she meets Dr Richard Smith. Rick is the doctor we all want to be presented with in our clinics; he's tenacious, highly skilled and a perfectionist. And he's strikingly handsome. A medical malpractice involving the newborn of a VIP brings the lives of the two main characters together. Through this awful tragedy, Gelberg allows us to observe the two spheres that operate in parallel in our engagement with the medical profession; the grief and anger we may feel when the worst happens, alongside the corporate wheels that turn to protect those at fault.

We learn from the beginning that our female lead is infertile; a fact she has come to terms with and perhaps contributes to her professional drive and the protective walls she has established which keep men at length. Equally, Rick is womanising and commitment phobic, stemming from his complex and murky past. To say that Sarah, inexplicably, becomes pregnant does not betray any of the thrilling plot and her wonder at having this unexpected child growing inside of her, the sight of a tiny heartbeat on the ultrasound, is something some I N UK members may really identify with.

The book takes some subsequent twists and turns as Sarah adjusts to her unanticipated future as a mother. As a reader you will marvel at her strength, determination and resilience and just as you think you've got the measure of Gelberg's story, a dramatic twist will captivate you to the end.

Ultimately, Gelberg's novel is a love story with multiple layers. We witness the romantic love that grows between Sarah and Rick, ultimately resulting in their miracle baby, but also the strength of parental love – a love which, in particular, both drives and haunts Doctor Rick. Gelberg's novel takes the perspective that fate is in our hands and it is up to us to make the most of the hand we are dealt. Sarah is the perfect example of this resignation, but the book also touches on the absurd conclusions desperate people can reach in the midst of their distress and owing to their fears.

Whilst I highly enjoyed this book, I have one slight criticism, which other members of I N UK may share if you read it. From my perspective, Gelberg doesn't give justice to the numerous difficult conversations held between the protagonists in the book. For example, some readers will know firsthand what it is like to tell someone about your infertility; to struggle with the words and fear the reaction, yet when Sarah has this conversation with Rick, it struck me as unrealistic and mechanic. The emotion and stupefaction inherent in these conversations could have been more strongly developed, despite the need for brevity in this relatively concise novel.

Despite this slight frustration, the book is very enjoyable and a real page-turner. For readers who have been negotiating the wealth of practical literature on infertility, the book is a welcome fictional alternative and I highly recommend it to other I N UK members who enjoy an intelligent and dramatic love story.

Catherine Rickard
I N UK Member