

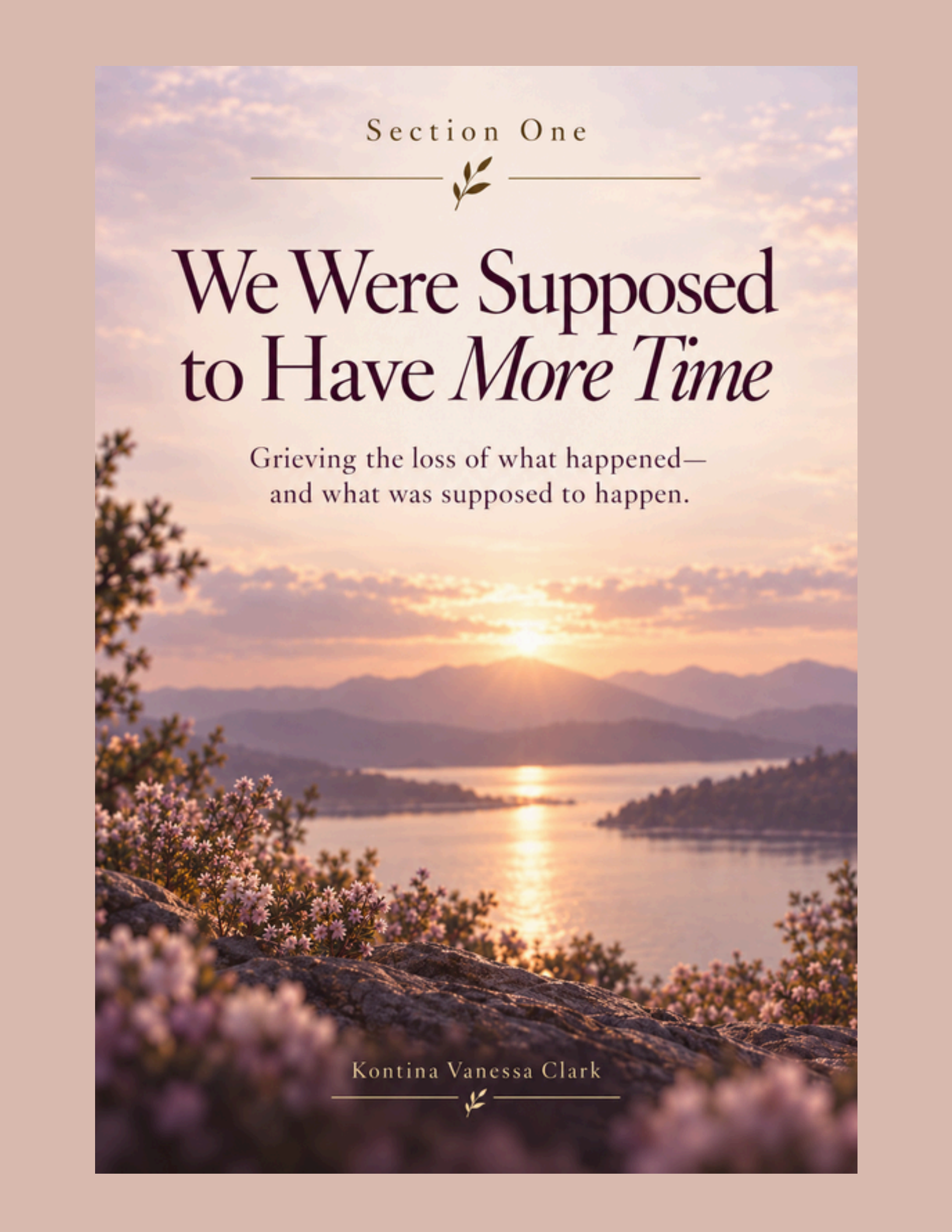
Part One

Navigating Young Loss



When Loss Comes Too Soon

KONTINA VANESSA CLARK



Section One



We Were Supposed to Have *More Time*

Grieving the loss of what happened—
and what was supposed to happen.

Kontina Vanessa Clark



Section One
We Were Supposed to Have More Time



There is something *especially disorienting about losing someone young.*

Death is painful at any age, but when someone dies young, grief carries another layer with it—the grief of everything that was still supposed to happen.

*There were supposed to be more birthdays.
More holidays.
More family pictures.
More phone calls.
More arguments that eventually became funny stories.
More weddings, graduations, babies, vacations,
ordinary Saturdays, and random Tuesday-night conversations.
More time to say what you meant to say.
More time for them to become who they were becoming.
More time for you to know them in the next version of their life.*

And then suddenly, there isn't.

That is part of what makes this kind of loss so difficult to understand. You are not only grieving the person who died. You are grieving the future you had already imagined with them in it.

You Are Grieving What Happened—and What Will Never Happen

When someone young dies, grief often reaches forward.

You may find yourself thinking:

'She should be here for this.'
'He was supposed to see me graduate.'
'She was supposed to be standing beside me at my wedding.'
'He would have loved this.'
'She should have met my children.'
'We were supposed to grow old together.'

These moments can happen years after the death.

Sometimes the grief is not triggered by a memory of what happened in the past. Sometimes it is triggered by something happening right now that reminds you of the future they did not get to experience.

*A sibling gets married.
A cousin has a baby.
Someone turns the age your loved one was when they died.
The family takes a vacation.
A birthday comes around.
A new person enters the family and never gets the chance to know them.*

Life keeps creating moments where their absence becomes visible again.

That does not mean you are grieving incorrectly. It means love had expectations. You expected them to be there.



The Loss Can Feel Out of Order

There are losses that hurt because they are painful. And then there are losses that hurt because they also feel out of sequence.

A parent does not expect to bury a child.

A younger sibling does not expect to become older than the brother or sister they once looked up to.

A grandparent does not expect to attend a grandchild's funeral.

Cousins who grew up together do not expect one seat to suddenly remain empty while everyone else continues growing older.

When someone dies young, part of the mind keeps protesting:

'This was not supposed to happen yet.'

That protest can show up as disbelief long after you intellectually understand that the person is gone.

You may know they died and still reach for your phone to call them.

You may briefly expect them to walk into the room.

You may see something funny and instinctively think, *'I need to send this to them.'*

You may hear their name in public and turn your head.

You may dream about them and wake up for a few seconds believing everything is normal again.

Then reality returns. Again.

*Grief sometimes requires the heart
to learn the same painful truth
many times.*

There Is No Expiration Date on Missing Someone

People may become uncomfortable when grief lasts longer than they expected.

In the beginning, people call. They send food. They check in. They attend the funeral. They ask how the family is doing.

Then life gradually returns to normal—for them.

But your family may be discovering that normal no longer means what it used to mean.

Weeks become months.

Months become years.

And you can still miss them.

You can be functioning well and still miss them.

You can laugh and miss them.

You can go on vacation and miss them.

You can accomplish something wonderful and suddenly cry because they are not there to see it.

You can have a beautiful day and still wish they were part of it.

*Grief and joy are not opposites.
Sometimes they sit at the same table.*

Section One
We Were Supposed to Have More Time



Stop Measuring Your Grief Against Someone Else's

Even inside the same family, people may grieve very differently.

One person may want to talk about the person who died constantly.
Another may avoid the conversation.
One may keep every belonging exactly where it was.
Another may need the room changed because walking past it is unbearable.
One sibling may cry openly.
Another may throw themselves into work, school, sports, parenting, or relationships.
Someone may become deeply spiritual.
Someone else may become angry with God.
Someone may need people around them.
Someone may need silence.

The danger comes when families begin interpreting those differences as measurements of love.

'You don't cry enough.'
'You talk about her too much.'
'You moved on too quickly.'
'You need to let this go.'
'Why don't you ever want to talk about him?'

Grief is not a competition. There is no prize for suffering the loudest. And there is no shame in having a day when grief does not consume you.

Different people will carry the same loss differently because they had different relationships, different memories, different personalities, and different emotional needs.

Your grief does not have to look like anyone else's to be real.

You Do Not Have to Leave Them Behind in Order to Move Forward

One of the fears people sometimes carry after a significant loss is that healing will somehow erase the person.

If I stop crying every day, am I forgetting?

If I enjoy my birthday, am I moving on?

If our family makes new traditions, are we replacing the old ones?

If I laugh again, does that mean I am okay with what happened?

No.

Healing is not forgetting. Moving forward does not require leaving someone behind.

The relationship changes because the person is no longer physically present, but love does not suddenly disappear.

You may carry them in stories, recipes, traditions, photographs, music, the way you laugh, the way you parent, and the things they taught you.

They can remain part of your story without grief being the only chapter you are allowed to live.



*You are allowed to build a future
and still wish they were here
to see it.*



Section One
We Were Supposed to Have More Time

Sacred Pause
Sit With What You Miss

Before moving into the next section, give yourself permission to pause.
You do not have to make meaning out of everything today. You do not have to find the lesson.
You do not have to be strong.
Just notice what is present.

What did you believe you would have more time to do together?

What future moment do you most wish they could be here to experience?

What ordinary thing do you miss more than you expected?

Is there something you have felt guilty about enjoying since they died?

Finish This Sentence

I wish we had more time to...

Say Their Name

Write their name here: _____

Now write one thing about them you never want your family to forget:

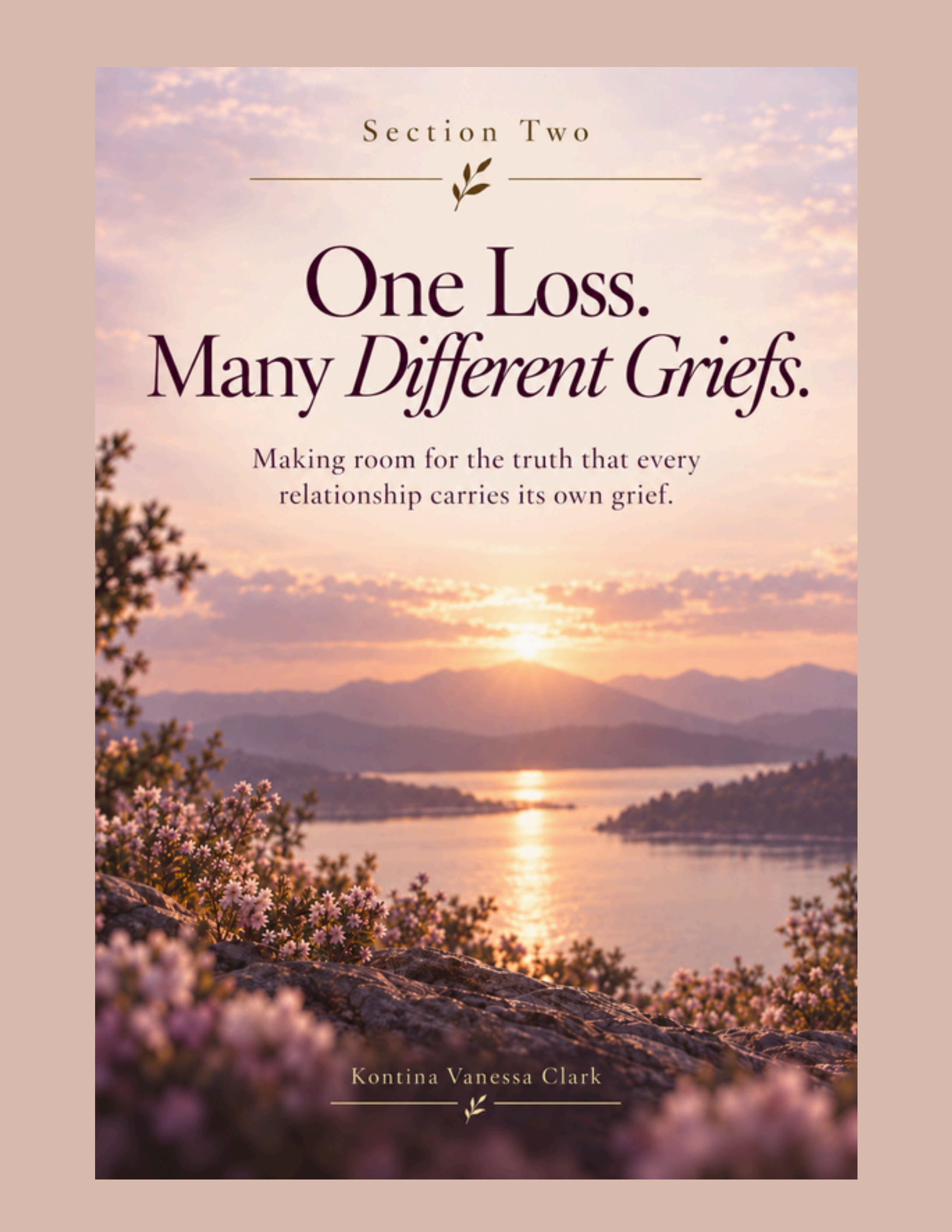
A Truth to Carry

You do not have to stop missing them in order to keep living.

Healing does not require forgetting.
Your life moving forward does not erase the life you shared.
You are allowed to grieve the time you did not get—and, when you are ready, begin living the time you still have.

Pause here as long as you need.





Section Two



One Loss. *Many Different Griefs.*

Making room for the truth that every
relationship carries its own grief.

Kontina Vanessa Clark





One Loss. *Many Different Grievs.*

It Looks Different for Everyone

A family can stand at the same funeral, hear the same name spoken, look at the same photographs, and still leave carrying completely different grief.

You lost the same person. But you did not lose the same relationship.

A mother lost her daughter. A brother lost his sister. A child may have lost an aunt who felt like another parent. A cousin may have lost the person who knew every version of them. A grandparent may be mourning a grandchild while also watching their own child experience unimaginable pain. A step-sibling may be grieving deeply while wondering whether anyone realizes how much the relationship meant.

The death belongs to the whole family. But grief is personal. And sometimes one of the hardest parts of grieving together is learning not to expect everyone else's heartbreak to look like yours.

The Same Person Held a Different Place in Each Life

They may have been funny with one person and serious with another. One sibling may have called them every day. Another may have spoken to them once a week but shared an unspoken closeness that never required constant communication. A cousin may remember summers, sleepovers, childhood secrets, and family gatherings. A parent remembers the first cry, the first steps, school pictures, illnesses, mistakes, victories, and the person they were becoming.

Everyone is grieving from a different collection of memories. That means two people can love the same person profoundly and still miss completely different things.

One person may miss their voice. Someone else misses the morning phone call. Someone misses having somebody to sit beside at family gatherings. Someone misses the person who understood the family without needing an explanation. Someone misses who they themselves were when that person was alive.

Sometimes grief is not only: "I miss you."
Sometimes it is: "I miss who I was when you were here."

Grief Has Different Languages

Some people grieve with tears. Some grieve with words. Some need to tell the story repeatedly. Some become quiet. Some clean. Some work. Some sleep. Some cannot sleep. Some listen to old voice messages. Some cannot bring themselves to press play. Some want photographs everywhere. Others cannot bear to see one yet. Someone may visit the cemetery often. Another may never want to go. Someone may post memories publicly. Someone else may keep every memory private. One person may want the family together constantly after the loss. Another may need distance because being around everyone makes the absence feel louder.

None of those responses, by themselves, tell you how much someone loved the person who died. Grief has many languages. And sometimes families hurt one another because they mistake a different grief language for a lack of grief.



Be Careful With the Word 'Should'

Grief creates many opportunities for should: *'You should be crying.'* *'You should be talking about it.'* *'You should come to the cemetery.'* *'You should want to keep their things.'* *'You should be ready to go through their clothes by now.'* *'You should be doing better.'* *'You should not be dating yet.'* *'You should be back at work.'* *'You should go to church.'* *'You should not be this angry.'*

There are practical responsibilities that sometimes have to be handled after a death. But emotionally, grief does not respond well to deadlines. There is no universal calendar that tells a person when they should stop crying, when photographs should stop hurting, when anniversaries should become easier, or when they should feel like themselves again.

Sometimes the most loving thing a family can offer one another is the freedom to say:

'I don't understand exactly how you're grieving this, but I don't need you to grieve it like me.'

Sometimes Grief Makes Families Closer

Loss can soften people. It can make family members call more often, say 'I love you' more freely, forgive faster, take more pictures, and show up more intentionally. For some families, grief creates a new tenderness because time no longer feels guaranteed. And that can be beautiful.

Grief Does Not Move at the Same Speed

One person may begin processing the death immediately. Another may remain numb for months. Someone may appear to be functioning exceptionally well in the beginning because there are arrangements to make, people to call, paperwork to complete, children to care for, meals to coordinate, and decisions that cannot wait. Then six months later, when everyone else assumes they are doing better, that person may begin falling apart.

Another family member may cry intensely in the beginning and later feel more stable. Neither person is ahead. Neither person is behind. Grief is not a straight line. It can become quiet and then suddenly become loud again.

A birthday. A song. A scent. A familiar restaurant. A photograph you forgot existed. A family announcement. A wedding. A graduation. The birth of a baby. Someone accomplishing something the person who died should have been there to see.

That difference does not mean one remembers and the other does not. It means grief has its own timing.

Sometimes Grief Creates Distance

Pain can also expose old wounds. One person may believe another did not visit enough during an illness. Someone may be angry about decisions made at the hospital. There may be disagreement about funeral arrangements, possessions, memorials, money, social-media posts, or what should happen with someone's belongings. Grief does not automatically make families healthier. Sometimes grief amplifies whatever was already present.

Section Two

One Loss. Many Different Grievs.



Do Not Make One Person Carry the Whole Family

Every family seems to have someone people naturally lean on—the strong one, the responsible one, the one who handles things, the one who comforts everybody else. And sometimes that person becomes so busy holding the family together that nobody notices they are grieving too.

Being capable does not make you less bereaved. You are allowed to need support. You are allowed to say, ‘I cannot handle this today.’ And if someone in your family has become the strong one, remember to ask them: ‘Who is taking care of you?’

You May Need Different Things From One Another

One person may need to talk. Another may need company without conversation. Someone may need help with meals. Someone may need childcare. Someone may need prayer. Someone may need someone to sit beside them during an anniversary. Someone may need to laugh without feeling guilty. Someone may need permission not to attend an event. Someone may need you to say the person’s name. And someone may need you to understand that today they cannot.

Support does not always mean giving people what you would need. Sometimes support means asking: ‘What would make today a little easier?’

You Do Not Have to Fix Each Other

Families often become uncomfortable when someone they love is hurting, so they reach for answers, advice, Scripture, solutions, and explanations. But grief is not always a problem waiting to be solved. Sometimes a grieving person does not need someone to tell them how to feel. They need someone willing to stay while they feel it.

You can simply say: ‘I miss them too.’ ‘I know today is hard.’ ‘You don’t have to be okay with me.’ ‘Do you want to talk about them?’ ‘Do you want company, or do you need some space?’

Make Room for the Person Who Is Not Grieving Like Everyone Else

Before deciding that someone does not care, consider another possibility: they may simply be surviving differently. Quiet grief is still grief. Private grief is still grief. Delayed grief is still grief.

The Goal Is Not to Grieve the Same

A healthy grieving family is not necessarily a family in which everyone processes the loss in the same way. It is a family learning to make room for one another—room for the person who cries, the one who laughs, the one who wants to tell stories, the one who can only listen, the one whose faith feels stronger, the one whose faith feels shaken, the one who needs family close, and the one who occasionally needs distance.

You can love one another without grieving identically.



A Truth to Carry

Your family experienced one death, but you are carrying many different losses.

You do not have to understand every person’s grief in order to honor it.

Sometimes the most compassionate thing a grieving family can say to one another is: ‘There is room for your grief here, too.’



Section Two
One Loss. Many Different Griefs.

Sacred Pause
Making Room for Different Grief

Before moving into the next section, pause here.
Not everyone in a family grieves the same way.
Not everyone needs the same thing.
Not everyone carries the same part of the loss.

This is your space to notice what your grief has looked like—and what you may need others to understand.

How has your grief looked different from someone else's in your family?

What do you wish your family understood about the way you grieve?

What has been hardest about grieving together?

What has been helpful—or comforting—from someone in your family?

Finish This Sentence

One thing I need people to know about my grief is...

Right now, what would make grieving with my family feel a little easier?

Make Room

Write the name of one person in your family who may be grieving differently from you:

I can make room for their grief by...

A Truth to Carry

Love does not always sound the same in grief.

Some people cry.
Some go quiet.
Some tell stories.
Some hold everything inside.
Some need closeness.
Some need space.

Different does not always mean disconnected.
And quiet does not always mean someone is hurting less.
You do not have to fully understand another person's grief in order to honor it.
Pause here and make room—for your grief, and for theirs too.



Section Three



When You Lose a *Son or Daughter*

The grief of losing a child is
unlike any other loss.

Kontina Vanessa Clark



Section Three
When You Lose a Son or Daughter



There Is No Language Big Enough for This Loss

Losing a child is not like any other loss. It is the loss of someone you carried, protected, prayed for, raised, and imagined far beyond this moment.

A son or daughter may be grown, but to a parent they are never ordinary. Their life is woven into your identity, your memories, your routines, and your hopes for the future.

When a child dies, it can feel as if something in the order of life has been violated. A parent is not supposed to outlive their child. That is why this grief can feel shocking even after the reality is undeniable.

You Are Grieving the Child You Knew— And the Life You Expected Them to Live

You are grieving their voice, their smile, their personality, and the role they held in your family.

You are also grieving the future that now feels unfinished: The conversations you thought you still had time to have. The milestones you thought you would witness. The version of them you believed you would still get to know. The holidays, birthdays, and ordinary visits you assumed would keep coming.

A parent often grieves both backward and forward. You remember every stage of their life, and you ache for every stage they did not get to live.

*There are losses that change your life.
The loss of a child changes your language,
your calendar, and your sense of who you are.*





Grief and Guilt Often Arrive Together

Many grieving parents wrestle with questions that have no easy answer. Could I have done more? Did I miss something? Should I have noticed sooner? Why could I not protect my child from this?

Even when a parent knows they are not to blame, guilt can still rise like a shadow beside grief. Guilt is often the mind's attempt to regain control over what feels unbearable. If I can find the mistake, then maybe I can make sense of the loss. But not every tragedy has an explanation a parent's heart can live with.

You May Still Be Parenting While You Are Grieving

If you have other children, grief does not remove your role—it deepens it. You may be mourning one child while trying to care for the children who remain. You may feel torn between your own pain and your desire to protect their hearts.

Some days you may feel absent even while you are present. Some days survival may be the most you can offer. That does not make you a bad parent. It makes you a grieving one.

Your surviving children need honesty, love, and room for their grief. They do not need you to be perfect.

*You do not have to choose between
grieving the child you lost and
loving the children who remain.*



Section Three
When You Lose a Son or Daughter



Your Child's Place in the Family Does Not Disappear

Death changes presence, but it does not erase belonging. Your son or daughter is still part of your family story. Their name still belongs in the room. Their photographs still matter. Their birthday may still be honored. Their memory may still shape the way your family gathers, speaks, and loves.

You do not have to pretend they were never here in order to keep functioning.

You Are Allowed to Keep Living

Many parents feel guilty when laughter returns, when a peaceful day comes, or when they begin making future plans again. But continuing to live is not betrayal. You can miss your child and still experience joy. You can carry sorrow and still celebrate your other children. You can love the child who died and still build a life that includes rest, purpose, beauty, and hope.

Healing does not mean the loss becomes small. It means love learns how to live beside grief.

A Truth to Carry

A parent never stops being a parent.
Love does not end at death. You are allowed
to carry your child with you—and still keep going.



Section Three
When You Lose a Son or Daughter



Sacred Pause

Making Room for a Parent's Grief

Before moving into the next section, pause here.

The grief of losing a son or daughter is layered, personal, and often difficult to name.
This page is a place to tell the truth about what hurts, what lingers, and what you need.

What has been hardest for you to put into words about losing your child?

What part of your child's absence do you feel most in your everyday life?

Have guilt, regret, or unanswered questions been part of your grief? If so, what do they sound like?

If you are still caring for other children or loved ones, what has felt hardest about grieving while still showing up for them?

Finish This Sentence

One thing I wish people understood about losing a child is...

Today, I most need permission to...

Carry Their Name

Write your child's name here: _____

Write one thing about them you never want forgotten:

A Truth to Carry

A parent never stops being a parent.

Love does not end at death.

Grief does not erase the bond you shared.

You are allowed to remember, to mourn, to breathe, and to keep living.

Pause here as long as you need.



You Are Not *Alone*

Grief can make you feel like the world stopped, but you're expected to keep going. This guide was created to remind you that healing is possible, support matters, and you don't have to carry your grief alone.

Whether your loss is recent or years ago, this pocket guide offers compassionate insight, practical tools, Scripture, and gentle encouragement to help you navigate the hard days and honor the love that remains.

*You can grieve deeply and still live fully.
There is grace for both.*

HEALING DEEPLY.
THINKING BIBLICALLY.
LIVING COURAGEOUSLY.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kontina Vanessa Clark is a nurse, author, speaker, and founder of The Kovac Collective. Through her writing, teaching, and creative work, she helps women heal deeply, think biblically, and live courageously after life's hardest seasons. She is passionate about turning pain into purpose and creating spaces where healing and hope meet.

Kontina Vanessa Clark ♥

FOUNDER | WRITER | CREATIVE | KINGDOM BUILDER

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KOVAC

THE KOVAC COLLECTIVE

KINGDOM-ORIENTED VISION AND CREATIVITY

*"There is beauty
on the other side
of grief."*



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