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## Like Family: A Novel

By Paolo Giordano



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**“From aide to nanny and housekeeper . . . Paolo Giordano examines this unusual relationship in the context of one household of three. . . . Spare, elegant.”—*The New York Times***

**“*Like Family*. . . demands to be savored. . . Giordano's emphasis on how we choose to live and love offers subtle hope that our decisions actually matter.”—*NPR.org***

From the author of the international bestseller *The Solitude of Prime Numbers*, an exquisite portrait of marriage, adulthood, and the meaning of family

Paolo Giordano’s prizewinning debut novel, *The Solitude of Prime Numbers*, catapulted the young Italian author into the literary spotlight. His new novel features his trademark character-driven narrative and intimate domestic setting that first made him an international sensation.

When Mrs. A. first enters the narrator’s home, his wife, Nora, is experiencing a difficult pregnancy. First as their maid and nanny, then their confidante, this older woman begins to help her employers negotiate married life, quickly becoming the glue in their small household. She is the steady, maternal influence for both husband and wife, and their son, Emanuele, whom she protects from his parents’ expectations and disappointments. But the family’s delicate fabric comes undone when Mrs. A. is diagnosed with cancer. Moving seamlessly between the past and present, Giordano highlights with remarkable precision the joy of youth and the fleeting nature of time. An elegiac, heartrending, and deeply personal portrait of marriage and the people we choose to call family, this is a jewel of a novel—short, intense, and unforgettable.

*From the Hardcover edition.*



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## Like Family: A Novel By Paolo Giordano Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

Review

### Praise for LIKE FAMILY:

"A profound tale of family, crisis and the passage of time, Giordano's...novel is a cherished read."--**Harper's Bazaar**

"A touching meditation on life, loss, and most of all, love." —**Us Weekly**

"From aide to nanny and housekeeper . . . Paolo Giordano examines this unusual relationship in the context of one household of three. . . . Spare, elegant." —**The New York Times**

"*Like Family*. . . demands to be savored. . . Giordano's emphasis on how we choose to live and love offers subtle hope that our decisions actually matter." —**NPR.org**

"Mr. Giordano's elegiac work, which benefits from a finely etched translation by Anne Milano Appel, is a tender and mournful homage to one who held a family together without ever quite belonging to it." —**Wall Street Journal**

"Giordano . . . writes in a style so cool and clean . . . [it] invokes the sacredness of family." —**Boston Globe**

"*Giordano seamlessly travels through time in the narrative, painting an enthralling portrait of love, loss, and heartache.*" —**InStyle.com**

"*Intense and bittersweet.*" --**Washington Review of Books**

"*This wonderfully poignant and heart-rending story looks at everyday lives with both reason and compassion. Author Giordano has a lyrical voice and an uncanny ability to create easy dialogue, real characters and a powerful message in this short book. The only fault I can find is that there wasn't more of it.*" —**St. Louis Post-Dispatch**

"*Giordano describes this powerful, elegantly distilled tale of a sorrowful family as an homage to a real woman he knew. It is both unsentimental and heartbreaking.*" —**BBC.com**

"*Giordano muses gorgeously on our inability to blend our life essences; even love leaves us lonely. A lovely remembrance played in a minor key.*" —**Kirkus Reviews**

"*Combining the edginess of modern life with the touching theme of losing someone who has become just like family, [this book] confirms Giordano as a writer who understands the complexities of human relationships.*" —**Publishers Weekly (starred review)**

"*Beautifully crafted...its themes are universal and it will appeal to anyone who treasures the gifts of others.*" —**Library Journal (starred review)**

"[A] short work of fiction can resonate more deeply than longer volumes. That's the case with *LIKE FAMILY*, the elegiac new novella by Paolo Giordano.... This poignant work points out that there is no one

way to define a family, and that, in any definition, the primary ingredient is the ability to love.”—**BookPage**

“Touching” —**Bustle**

**Praise for *THE HUMAN BODY*:**

*“The Human Body is a great novel of life in wartime: a chronicle of war's multifarious crimes against the body and soul, and a heartfelt meditation on how men, together and collectively, repair the burdens of their fate.” —Joshua Ferris, author of To Rise Again at a Decent Hour*

*“Paolo Giordano's new novel, like his last, is full of sensitivity and intelligence. The Human Body is a brilliant addition to the literature of our modern wars.” —Kevin Powers, author of The Yellow Birds*

*“With an extraordinarily keen eye and a pitch-perfect ear, Giordano has magnificently captured the surreal existence of the modern soldier. By turn poignant and gripping – when not downright hilarious – every page of The Human Body rings with an authenticity and appreciation of the absurd that very few novelists writing about men stumbling about the business of war have achieved. Very few indeed; think of O’Brien’s Going After Cacciato or Heller’s Catch-22, because Giordano is just that good.” —Scott Anderson, author of Lawrence in Arabia*

*“Paolo Giordano has written his generation’s war novel. Tender, cruel, beautiful, heartless, a brilliant story of desire and youth and death in Afghanistan. Readers of Kevin Powers have been searching for another modern classic, and The Human Body is it.” —Andrew Sean Greer, author of The Impossible Lives of Greta Wells*

*“Giordano follows *THE SOLITUDE OF PRIME NUMBERS* with a stunning exploration of war. Giordano makes the tedium of combat fascinating with his well-drawn characters. The first page indicates that the platoon’s experience was particularly horrible... but the fact that the mission runs off the rails is almost secondary to the beauty, texture, and acuity with which Giordano captures the day-to-day routines of the soldiers, and their efforts to make sense of both their lives in Italy and their military assignment.” —Publishers Weekly (starred review)*

*“The Human Body is a memorable entry in the literature of the Afghan war, the characters crisply drawn and the writing full of telling details.” —Booklist*

*“Despite the tragic events, this is a very entertaining novel, with the characters’ innate and passionate sense of the absurdity of their situation, and of life itself, evident in every scene. The fast-paced, present-tense narrative seems to have been translated accurately to capture the nuances of emotion and drama conveyed by the highly intelligent and perceptive Giordano.” —Library Journal (starred review)*

*“Giordano’s (*The Solitude of Prime Numbers*, 2010) unorthodox Afghanistan war novel is short on action but rich in psychological insight.... As the title suggests, the book is less about military heroism than the devastating human impact of combat. Well-observed and compassionate, this is a memorable look at imperfect people in extreme circumstances.” —Kirkus Reviews*

**Praise for *THE SOLITUDE OF PRIME NUMBERS*:**

*“Mesmerizing . . . [Giordano] works with piercing subtlety. An exquisite rendering of what one might call*

*feelings at the subatomic level.”*

—**The New York Times**

*“The story—the explanation, really—of how two people come to find solitude more comforting than companionship is the subtle work of Giordano’s haunting novel, a finely tuned machine powered by the perverse mechanics of need.”* —**The New York Times Book Review**

*“Seductive and unnerving.”* —**Entertainment Weekly**

*“The elegant and fiercely intelligent debut novel by 27-year-old physicist Paolo Giordano, *The Solitude of Prime Numbers* revolves around Mattia and Alice, friends since high school—‘twin primes, alone and lost, close but not close enough to really touch each other,’ wherein resides the seductive enchantment of this singular love story.”* —**Elle**

*“Giordano’s passionate evocation of being young and in despair will resonate strongly with readers.”* —**USA Today**

*“Elegant.”* —**Los Angeles Times**

*From the Hardcover edition.*

About the Author

**Paolo Giordano** is the author of the critically acclaimed *The Human Body* and the international bestseller *The Solitude of Prime Numbers*, which has been translated into more than forty languages. He is the youngest ever winner of Italy’s prestigious literary award the Premio Strega. Giordano has a PhD in particle physics and is now a full-time writer. He lives in Italy. This is his third novel.

*From the Hardcover edition.*

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There really was a Mrs. A. in my life. She stayed in my house, shared life with my family for a few years, then she had to leave us. This book was inspired by her story. It was meant as a homage to her, a way to keep her with me a little longer. I’ve changed most of the names and I’ve changed several details, but not what I felt was the nature of Mrs. A. And, certainly, not what was my feeling toward her.

*What does it mean to love somebody? It is always to seize that person in a mass, extract him or her from a group, however small, in which he or she participates, whether it be through the family only or through something else; then to find that person’s own [wolf] packs, the multiplicities he or she encloses within himself or herself which may be of an entirely different nature.*

*Also by Paolo Giordano*

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*Author Note*

*Epigraph*

Mrs. A.

Bird of Paradise (I)

Orphans

Insomnia

La locandiera

The Hall of Memorabilia

Beirut

The Seven-Times Table

Winter

The Scarecrow

The Black and the Silver

Bird of Paradise (II)

Mrs. A.

On my thirty-fifth birthday, Mrs. A. abruptly gave up the determination that in my eyes characterized her more than any other quality and, already laid out in a bed that by then seemed too big for her body, finally abandoned the world we all know.

---

That morning I had gone to the airport to pick up Nora, back from a brief business trip. Though it was late December, winter was dragging its feet, and the monotonous stretches at the sides of the highway were whitened by a thin layer of fog, as if to suggest the snow that couldn't make up its mind to fall. Nora



answered the phone, after which she didn't say much, just sat there listening. "I see," she said, "all right, Tuesday," and then she added one of those sentences that experience provides us with when there are no adequate words: "Maybe it's better that way."

I pulled off into the first service area to allow her to get out of the car and pace aimlessly around the parking lot by herself. She wept quietly, her right hand clamped over her mouth and nose. Among the countless things I've learned about my wife in ten years of marriage is her habit of isolating herself in times of grief. She suddenly becomes unreachable and won't allow anyone to console her, forcing me to remain a useless spectator to her suffering—a rejection that I sometimes interpreted as a lack of generosity.

For the rest of the way, I drove more slowly; it seemed like a form of respect. We spoke about Mrs. A., recalling some anecdotes from the past, although for the most part they weren't really anecdotes—we didn't know much about her—just routines. Routines so rooted in our family life that to us they seemed almost legendary: the reliability with which she updated us each morning on the horoscope she'd heard on the radio while we were still asleep; her way of taking over certain rooms of the house, especially the kitchen, so that we felt we should ask her permission to open our own refrigerator; the proverbs with which she curtailed what to her were unnecessary complications created by us young people; her military, masculine step and her incorrigible tightfistedness—remember the time we forgot to leave her money for the shopping? She emptied the jar of pennies, scraping up each and every one of the coins.

After a moment or two of silence, Nora added, "What a woman, though! Our Babette. Always there for us. Even this time she waited for me to get back."

I did not point out that she had just summarily excluded me from the overall picture. Nor did I dare confess what I'd been thinking that very same moment: that Mrs. A. had waited for my birthday to leave us. Each of us was thus fabricating a small, personal consolation. There is nothing more we can do when faced with someone's death except devise some extenuating circumstances for it, attributing to the deceased one final gesture of thoughtfulness toward us and arranging the coincidences in some rational order. Yet today, with the inevitable detachment of distance, I have a hard time believing that it was really so. Her suffering had taken Mrs. A. far away from us, from anyone, long before that December morning, leading her to walk alone to a remote corner of the world—just as Nora had walked away from me in the service area on the highway—and from there she'd turned her back on us.

We called her that, Babette. We liked the nickname because it suggested a sense of belonging, and she liked it because it was exclusively hers and sounded precious, with its French cadence. I don't think Emanuele ever understood what it meant; maybe someday he'll come across Karen Blixen's story, or more likely the movie, and then he'll make the connection. Nonetheless, he accepted that Mrs. A. had become Babette from a certain point on, his Babette, and I suspect that by assonance he associated that nickname with her babouches, the slippers that his nanny put on as soon as she entered our house and replaced side by side next to the chest at the end of the day. When Nora had noticed the worn-down condition of the soles and bought her a new pair, she'd confined them to the closet, never used. That's how she was—she never changed anything. She genuinely opposed change body and soul, and though her obstinacy was funny, even foolish at times, I can't deny we liked it. In our lives, my life and those of Nora and Emanuele—who at that time seemed to fluctuate each day, swaying precariously in the wind like a young plant—she was a steady element, a haven, an ancient tree with a trunk so massive that even three pairs of arms could not encircle it.

She had become Babette one Saturday in April. Emanuele was already talking, but he was still sitting in the high chair, so it must have been maybe five or six years ago. For months Mrs. A. had been insisting that we go and visit her at her home, at least once, for dinner. Nora and I, experts at declining invitations that even vaguely hinted at family gatherings, had avoided it for quite some time, but Mrs. A. was not easily

discouraged, and every Monday she was prepared to renew the invitation for the following weekend. We gave in. We drove up to Rubiana in a state of unusual concentration, as if gearing up to do something unnatural that would require a high degree of industry. We weren't used to sitting down at the table with Mrs. A., not back then: despite the constant time spent together, an implicitly hierarchical relationship existed between us by which, if anything, she was on her feet, busy, while we ate and talked about our own affairs.

"Rubiana," Nora said with a puzzled look, gazing at the densely wooded hill. "Imagine living here all your life."

We toured the three-room apartment where Mrs. A. spent her lonely widowhood, uttering excessive compliments. The information we had about her past was scant—Nora knew only a little more than I—and since we could not attribute a sentimental significance to what we saw, the setting seemed no more, no less than an unnecessarily pompous home, very clean and a little kitschy. Mrs. A. had set the round table in the living room impeccably, with silverware aligned on a floral tablecloth and heavy, gold-rimmed goblets. The dinner itself, I thought, seemed like a pretext to justify the existence of that good china, which obviously hadn't been used in years.

She seduced us with a menu designed to include a combination of our favorites: a farro and lentil soup, marinated cutlets, fennel au gratin in a very light béchamel sauce and a salad of sunflower leaves that she'd picked herself, very finely chopped and seasoned with mustard and vinegar. I still recall each and every course and the physical sensation of gradually relinquishing my initial rigidity and surrendering to that culinary indulgence.

"Just like Babette!" Nora exclaimed.

"Like who?"

So we told her the story, and Mrs. A. was moved listening to it, envisioning herself as the chef who'd left the Café Anglais to serve the two spinsters and then spent all her money preparing an unforgettable feast for them. She dabbed at her eyes with the edge of her apron and quickly turned away, pretending to be doing something. Years passed before I saw her cry again, and then it was not out of joy but fear. By that time we were familiar enough so that I wasn't embarrassed to take her hand and say, "You can do it. Many people let it beat them, but you know illness because you've already faced it once. You're strong enough."

And I really believed it. Afterward I saw her fall apart so quickly that there wasn't even time to say a proper good-bye, no chance to find the right words to express what she had meant to us.

*From the Hardcover edition.*

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **William Chapman:**

Hey guys, do you really wants to finds a new book to study? May be the book with the headline Like Family: A Novel suitable to you? The actual book was written by well-known writer in this era. Typically the book

untitled Like Family: A Novel is a single of several books in which everyone read now. That book was inspired many people in the world. When you read this e-book you will enter the new age that you ever know ahead of. The author explained their thought in the simple way, and so all of people can easily to know the core of this book. This book will give you a wide range of information about this world now. So you can see the represented of the world in this particular book.

**Karen Bell:**

The book Like Family: A Novel will bring you to the new experience of reading any book. The author style to elucidate the idea is very unique. In case you try to find new book you just read, this book very suited to you. The book Like Family: A Novel is much recommended to you to study. You can also get the e-book in the official web site, so you can quicker to read the book.

**Vicky Bowman:**

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**Robert Marshall:**

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