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The Solitude of Prime Numbers: A Novel

By Paolo Giordano



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"Mesmerizing...an exquisite rendering of what one might call feelings at the subatomic level." -*The New York Times*

A prime number is a lonely thing. It can only be divided by itself or by one, and it never truly fits with another. Alice and Mattia are both "primes"-misfits haunted by early tragedies. When the two meet as teenagers, they recognize in each other a kindred, damaged spirit. Years later, a chance encounter reunites them and forces a lifetime of concealed emotion to the surface. But can two prime numbers ever find a way to be together? A brilliantly conceived and elegantly written debut novel, *The Solitude of Prime Numbers* is a stunning meditation on loneliness, love, and what it means to be human.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Italian author and mathematician Giordano follows two scarred people whose lives intersect but can't seem to join in his cerebral yet touching debut. Alice and Mattia, both survivors of childhood traumas, are the odd ones out amid the adolescent masses in their high school. Mattia has never recovered from the loss of his sister, while Alice still suffers the effects of a skiing accident that damaged her physically and stunted her ability to trust. Now teenagers, Mattia, also addicted to self-injury, has withdrawn into a world of numbers and math, and Alice gains control through starving herself and photography. When they meet, they recognize something primal in each other, but timing and awkwardness keep their friendship on tenuous ground until, years later, their lives come together one last time. Giordano uses Mattia and Alice's trajectory to ask whether there are some people—the prime numbers among us—who are destined to be alone, or whether two primes can come together. The novel's bleak subject matter is rendered almost beautiful by Giordano's spare, intense focus on his two characters. (Mar.)

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From [Booklist](#)

Giordano's deeply touching debut novel immediately thrusts the reader into the lives of two individuals, at the moment when each of their young lives takes a sharp turn toward painful solitude: Alice has been crippled in a childhood skiing accident, Mattia is consumed by guilt after playing an unintended but key role in his twin sister's disappearance. Upon meeting in their early teens, they develop a frequently uncomfortable yet enveloping friendship. What follows is a beautiful and affecting account of the ways in which seemingly inconsequential decisions reverberate so intensely as to change a life forever. Translated from the Italian, this is a book about communication: in lacking a facility for self-expression, our stunted protagonists exist almost solely, and safely, in their own minds. Despite its heavy subject matter, it reads easily, due in part to the almost seamless translation. A quietly explosive ending completes the novel in just the fashion it was started, as an intimate psychological portrait of two "prime numbers"—together alone and alone together. --Annie Bostrom

Review

"A mesmerizing portrait of a young man and woman whose injured natures draw them together over the years and inevitably pull them apart. Mr. Giordano remarkably and movingly portrays the hesitant groping toward warmth that works beneath the pair's emotional disabilities. The author works with piercing subtlety. An exquisite rendering of what one might call feelings at the subatomic level."

-Richard Eder for *The New York Times*

"The melancholy that hangs over *The Solitude of Prime Numbers* is seductive and unnerving. A-."

-*Entertainment Weekly*

"Giordano's passionate evocation of being young and in despair will resonate strongly with readers."

-*USA Today*

"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*

"This compelling debut shows a remarkable sensitivity and maturity in the depiction of its damaged soulmates. A fragile, unconventional love story by a talent to watch."

-*Kirkus*

"A deeply touching debut. Beautiful and affecting...it reads easily, due in part to the almost seamless translation. An intimate psychological portrait of two 'prime numbers'-together alone and alone together."

-*Booklist*

"Surprising, intimate and deeply moving, *The Solitude of Prime Numbers* takes the readers on a hypnotic journey through an unexpected love affair. Paolo Giordano writes with grace and elegance of gentle but damaged characters, using inventive language to create a story unlike anything in recent fiction. This is everything a debut novel should be and leaves one longing for the books that will follow."

-**John Boyne**, author of *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*

"Paul Giordano is an expert on loss and sorrow. He understands and reveals the hidden hollows of the heart. His story is a quiet one, but his strong writing and unforgettable characters make his book a page turner. *The Solitude of Prime Numbers* is sad, dark and perfect."

-**Mary Pipher**, author of *Seeking Peace: Chronicles of the Worst Buddhist in the World*

"What a shock to open a novel written by a young physicist in Italy and find myself there, on every page. No wonder Giordano's readers can be counted in the millions; this astute, aching contemplation of solitude has a power to make us all feel a little less alone. A love story told with astonishing perceptiveness and remarkable subtlety, *The Solitude of Prime Numbers* is an extraordinary affirmation of the reasons we read."

-**Stefan Merrill Block**, author of *The Story of Forgetting*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Emmanuel Young:

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