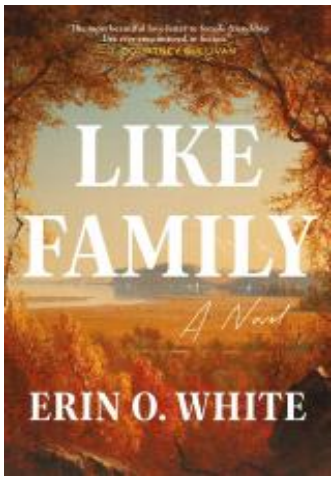
Like Family

by Erin O. White



About the Book

After a near-stranger dies in their small town, a tight-knit group of friends can no longer ignore their long-dormant desires and unfulfilled dreams --- a moving debut about the complicated joys of chosen family.

It was too much to ask. But sometimes too much is what we ask of the people we love most.

Radclyffe, New York, is an idyllic upstate town, nestled in the hills and complete with artisanal bakeries, pottery studios and hidden swimming holes. Ruth and her wife, Wyn, are living the dream (or Wyn?s dream, at least) with their four children on their small farm, which is also the bucolic gathering place for their circle of friends. It?s a sweet life, but there?s a secret at its center, one that not even Ruth?s best friend, Caroline, knows.

What Caroline does know is that she loves and depends on Ruth, and on the bond between their families. More than anything, she wants her tenderhearted son not to grow up lonely the way she did. Unfortunately, no one can assure her of that, especially not her husband. He just wants things to be easy, drama-free --- which is impossible, as he has donated his sperm to his cousin, Tobi, and her wife so that they could have kids of their own. Now those children are asking unanswerable questions.

After an unexpected death in their community, all three couples are forced to confront the tensions that have long been buried beneath the surfaces of their lives. Richly textured and big-hearted, this exhilarating debut is an unforgettable story of the alchemy of love and loyalty that makes friends LIKE FAMILY.

Discussion Guide

1. LIKE FAMILY follows the intertwining lives of three couples: Ruth and Wyn; Caroline and Mike; and Tobi and Evie. How are these couples? lives and struggles similar? How are they different? Did you relate to one couple or character

over others? Discuss.

2. In all three central couples in LIKE FAMILY, some characters are torn between primary loyalty to a spouse --- or to a best friend. What did you make of this dilemma? Have you ever found yourself in a similar situation? What do we owe to our romantic partners? To our friends?

3. What role do secrets play in the novel? Who keeps them? Who finds them out? Who wishes they hadn?t been told something at all?

4. How do the characters reckon with different levels of ambition --- in themselves, in their communities, and in their marriages? How has this challenge shown up in your life?

5. How do the characters' past experiences shape their current relationships?

6. How do the adults? choices affect their children?s lives? Was there any point where you would have made a drastically different choice than one of the characters? If so, what was it --- and how do you think that would have changed the story?

7. Discuss how the theme of motherhood plays out in the novel --- and, to a lesser extent (sorry, Mike and Elliott), fatherhood.

8. The definition of family in this novel is an expansive one. How do you define family in your own life? Who do you consider family, whether or not you share blood?

9. How does the setting of Radclyffe and its many contrasts (moneyed and middle class, urban and rural, etc.) influence the plot?

10. What other themes did you notice in LIKE FAMILY? In what ways do these themes appear in your world?

Author Bio

A 51-year-old debut novelist, Erin O. White is also an essayist and the author of the memoir GIVE UP FOR YOU. After growing up in Colorado and living for 20 years in western Massachusetts, she now lives with her wife and daughters in Minneapolis.

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