



Let Me Explain You: A Novel

By Annie Lontas

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Let Me Explain You: A Novel By Annie Lontas

A powerful debut novel about a Greek American family and its enigmatic patriarch from a riveting new voice in contemporary literature.

Stavros Stavros Mavrakis, Greek immigrant and proud owner of the Gala Diner, believes he has just ten days to live. As he prepares for his final hours, he sends a scathing email to his ex-wife and three grown daughters, outlining his wishes for how they each might better live their lives. With varying degrees of laughter and scorn, his family and friends dismiss his behavior as nothing more than a plea for attention, but when Stavros disappears, those closest to him are forced to confront the possibility of his death.

A vibrant tour de force that races to a surprising conclusion, *Let Me Explain You* is told from multiple perspectives: Stavros Stavros, brimming with pride and cursing in broken English; his eldest daughter Stavroula, a talented chef in love with her boss's daughter; her sister, the wounded but resilient Litza; and many other voices who compose a veritable Greek chorus.

By turns hilarious and deeply moving, this multigenerational novel delivers a heartfelt meditation on the power of storytelling and family, the relationship between fathers and daughters, and also the complex bond of sisterhood. Annie Lontas explores our origins and family myths, hunger and what feeds us, reinvention and forgiveness.

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Editorial Review

Review

“[Stavros] is an irascible, grandstanding, rhetorical-question-asking, self-pitying fellow, ‘more shovel than man’ as Lontas puts it, in one of many excellent turns of phrase.... It’s his two eldest daughters who emerge as the book’s broiling core... Lontas’s voice is rambunctious... The experience of *Let Me Explain You* is less of reading a book than of renting a room in someone’s brain... a festive place to visit.” (Molly Young *The New York Times Book Review*)

“We don’t hear much from the Greek-American school of literature, which makes **LET ME EXPLAIN YOU**, a hilarious yet rich novel about Stavros Stavros Mavrakis, an immigrant from Crete, his perception of his own mortality, and the women in his life, even more of a treat than grandma’s galaktoboureko, the custard pastry for which his flagship diner, the Gala, is named. This debut by Annie Lontas will touch you even if your own roots are not steeped in Greek coffee.” (Helen T. Verongos *The New York Times*)

“Darkly comic... Lontas shows compassion for her characters even as she plumbs their dysfunction. Seeded with family anecdotes, the novel’s true heart is one filled with love and forgiveness.” (Carol Memmott *Minneapolis Star-Tribune (10 Novels Not to Miss)*)

“A wickedly funny and compassionate novel about a very contemporary Greek-American family. Annie Lontas gives us their story with precise and wonderful particularity; she shows us how the arguments, the omens, the foods, and the memories intimately bind them to one another. A sparkling debut from an exciting new writer.” (Dana Spiotta, author of *Stone Arabia* and *Eat the Document*)

“A big, rollicking, tender novel and family saga with a truly original comic voice at its center.” (George Saunders)

“Annie Lontas has fashioned from the raw facts of immigrant experience and family life a hilarious, fascinating, poetic work of fiction. You’ll find yourself rereading it aloud for the guffaws it yanks from you. A dazzling debut destined to become a classic.” (Mary Karr, author of *The Liar’s Club* and *Lit*)

“Stavros Stavros Steve Mavrakis is among the most brilliantly foolish, compellingly maddening, and memorable characters I have come across in any modern novel. Or Greek diner. *Let Me Explain You* displays the author’s intense sensitivity to both language and humor, used to tremendous emotional effect. Annie Lontas is a star.” (Rivka Galchen, author of *Atmospheric Disturbances*)

“A tale of an immigrant family rendered with unusual care.” (*Kirkus*)

“A funny and moving rumination on the beauty and complexity of familial bonds... a page-turner that concludes in an unexpected way.” (*Muses & Visionaries Magazine*)

“Lontas adds tremendously to the novel’s ambiance through Stavros’s idiomatic language, expertly reveals the layers of her characters’ lives, and perfectly captures their emotional temperatures in an unputdownable read.” (*Publishers Weekly*)

“Tradition and transformation are the ingredients that make up this Greek American family... Lontas’s multigenerational tale of miscommunications and mistakes is a delectable, provocative achievement.”

(*Library Journal*)

"A lively portrait ... this simultaneously sad and funny story of a first-generation immigrant and his rocky family relationships will resonate with a broad range of readers." (Deborah Donovan *Booklist*)

"*Let Me Explain You* is about the American dream: the good, the bad, the ugly and the hilariously relatable... Lontas tells her story masterfully. We're invited into the family's inside jokes, and we laugh, hurt and cry with the characters as they peel away the family drama and generational divides and, somewhat unexpectedly, find love at the center of their story." (Carrie Rollwagen *BookPage*)

"Lontas' energetic saga infuses a poignant family drama with raucous humor and outsize characters... *Let Me Explain You* has both heart and hilarity, the perfect combination." (Claire Fallon *Huffington Post*)

"Evocative... while Steve's elephantine personality could virtually constitute its own Greek chorus, Lontas writes the women who surround him with equal amounts of verve, and more than enough heart, to soften his rough edges." (*Bustle*)

"Disappointment, survival, resilience, and triumph: it's a heady brew, as strong as the coffee served in a Greek *kafenio*... a generous helping of humor strikes the perfect bittersweet balance." (Megan Labrise *Kirkus*)

"Humorous and heartfelt... treats its characters with so much empathy and tenderness that it's hard not to think of the Mavrakis family as any other than the reader's own." (Josh Potter *Shelf Awareness*)

"Lontas awards all her characters a deeply inhabited interiority... pitch perfect... explores what it means to be foreign — to a place, to those around us and to ourselves — and what we take in, what we long for and how we interpret it... Lontas beautifully explores the ways we devour one life to create another... This is what I want from fiction, a story that is, and makes me feel, very much alive." (Natalie Bakopoulos *San Francisco Chronicle (Best Books of 2015)*)

"The strange saga of a Greek immigrant family deals with sexuality, superstition, and lots of yummy food... thoroughly engaging." (James McDonald *Out Magazine*)

"The characters are crafted with loving familiarity... their stories are filled with comedy (the joke is often at Mavrakis' expense) and peppered with nostalgic descriptions of food. *Let Me Explain You* will leave you laughing." (Jessie Van Berkel *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*)

About the Author

A graduate of Syracuse University's MFA program, Annie Lontas writes fiction and poetry. Since 2003, Annie has been dedicated to urban education, working with teachers and youth in Philadelphia, and Newark, NJ. *Let Me Explain You* is her first novel. She lives with her wife in Philadelphia.

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Let Me Explain You

CHAPTER 1

From: SteveStavrosStavrosMavrakisgreekboss1@yahoo.com

To: Chef.Stevie.Mavrakis@saltrestaurant.com; xxangelxx@yahoo.com;

Ruby.Mavrakis@yahoo.com; CarolM@Starbucks.com

Subject: Our Father, Who is Dying in Ten Days

Dear, Family. Daughters & Ex-Wife:

Let me explain you something: I am sick in a way that no doctor would have much understanding. I am sick in a way of the soul that, yes, God will take me. No, I am not a suicide. I am Deeper than that, I am talking More than that.

DEAR STAVROULA, MY OLDEST. Please grow out your hair. It is very very short. This is one little thing that can change everything, you will see what I am saying when you take this small but substantial advice. Sometimes if we are who we are supposed to be on the outside, we are who we are supposed to be on the inside. The hair is the thing to trust and leave alone, and it will take care of you.

Let me explain you something: your father has seen some of the world for it to be enough. There is a way to be for the normal society, and you are not it. The hair says things about you that, yes, they are true, but the hair is not a fortune-teller. The hair is not the thing that has to point the way, like a streetlight.

I am not somebody religious, but this I know: Death is coming. In ten days, I promise you, your father the man will cease, he will be dust, he will be food in the worms. What do we owe our father? This is the question you can say to yourself at this time. Who can deny a dead man—a dead father—the thing that he demands?

No, I am not sick like my brother in Crete, who die with emphysema (this is Greek en which means in and physan means breath).

DEAR LITZA, MY SECOND, please go to church. You could say, no dad, you go to church then we will talk about if I go to church, but what I am talking about here are lessons that I should have taken for myself if my father had the wisdom to give me awareness, which I am holding out for you.

Litza, let me explain you something. Litza, you have problems.

Litza, nobody marries for a big wedding and then divorce one week later. When your mother and I divorce, it took years off our life. Litza, nobody destroys property the way when you come here into my diner and smash the dessert case with my own stool. The same is true for your sister, which you take that same stool and break her car window with it, even though you deny this always. Are you on drugs, Litza? Are you the same low-life as your biological mother, Dina?

Litza, you need God in your life.

Litza I see how much helping you are needing, and I know that God has to exist, because he is the only one who can do for you. I cannot do for you. I can only do for you what I am done for you.

And here, I will tell you this secret, that I have questions for God—Are you real? Are you here for me, Stavros Stavros Steve Mavrakis? Am I Your Forgotten Son? What is the meaning of this life that is too sorry for what it could be? Even though I have succeeded more, much more, than any foreigner would do in my

country and I have now two diners and plans for selling one of them so that I have a little something for the future, yours not mine since my future is not something I can belong to any longer, and not your Mother since she is a thief, I'm sorry if it is a truth.

I, Stavros Stavros, have ask God to erase the mistakes of my life; and God has answer, in a matter of speaking, That it is best to Start Over, which requires foremost that We End All that is Stavros Stavros. No, not with suicide. With Mercy.

Yes, Litza, you must go to Church. To pray. For your father, yes, and for yourself.

DEAR RUBY, MY LITTLE ONE that I have adoration. It is a good rule to follow that if the mustache is weak, so will be the man. Look at your father's mustache, which it is a fist! Forget the boys, Ruby, find yourself a man who encourages you get your own education, because you don't want to be one of those woman who takes and takes and does not appreciate all of the way her husband slaves, like your Mother. Don't go marrying some losers. Which you know I am talking about Dave. Why choose a man with the facial hair of an onion? When you can choose instead one of my assistant cooks, who make a decent living and has dreams of owning their own diner the way their mentor has, which is your father.

Otherwise, you are doing OK.

DEAREST MY EX-WIFE, Carol, the Mother, who divorce me one year ago. Which I am still, as a generous person, paying for things like to repair the plumbing. I am talking to the woman who is still my Wife in death, even if she did not know how to mourn me in life: please be the Ex-wife a Wife should be, in sickness and health. Even though you poison Stavroula and Litza against me from the moment I bring them into this fat country, and Ruby from the moment you bring her into the world. That is why I am asking: you should wear only black for the next year. To show a sign of honor for the man who walk much of this life with you by his side.

If you have any confusions, Daughters and Wife, you can email a response. I will answer them all. Such as, what is missing for a man at the end of his life when the path is clear and wisdom is the greatest? . . . the respect and love for the pateras!

Signed within Ten Days of Life Left, and a Dying Promise, Your Father: Stavros Stavros Steve Mavrakis

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Michelle Sanders:

This Let Me Explain You: A Novel book is not really ordinary book, you have after that it the world is in your hands. The benefit you receive by reading this book is information inside this book incredible fresh, you will get details which is getting deeper you actually read a lot of information you will get. This Let Me Explain You: A Novel without we realize teach the one who studying it become critical in thinking and analyzing. Don't possibly be worry Let Me Explain You: A Novel can bring once you are and not make your tote space or bookshelves' turn into full because you can have it in your lovely laptop even telephone. This Let Me Explain You: A Novel having excellent arrangement in word as well as layout, so you will not feel uninterested in reading.

Frances Savage:

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Philip Kirkpatrick:

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Lee Long:

The book untitled Let Me Explain You: A Novel contain a lot of information on the item. The writer explains your ex idea with easy way. The language is very easy to understand all the people, so do certainly not worry, you can easy to read the item. The book was published by famous author. The author provides you in the new era of literary works. You can easily read this book because you can please read on your smart phone, or program, so you can read the book throughout anywhere and anytime. In a situation you wish to purchase the e-book, you can wide open their official web-site and also order it. Have a nice read.

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