



A Friend of the Family

Lauren Grodstein

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Pete Dizinoff has spent years working toward a life that would be, by all measures, deemed successful. A skilled internist, he's built a thriving practice in suburban New Jersey. He has a devoted wife, a network of close friends, an impressive house and, most important, he has a son, Alec, on whom he's pinned all his hopes. Pete has afforded Alec every opportunity, bailed him out of close calls with the law, and even ensured his acceptance into a good college.

But Pete never counted on the wild card: Laura, his best friend's daughter. Ten years older than Alec, irresistibly beautiful, with a past so shocking that it's never spoken of, Laura sets her sights on Alec, who falls under her spell. And with that, Pete sees his plans for his son not just unraveling but being completely destroyed. Believing he has only the best of intentions, he sets out to derail this romance and rescue his son. But he could not have foreseen how his whole world would shatter in the process.

A Friend of the Family Details

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From Reader Review A Friend of the Family for online ebook

Kathleen says

An absorbing look at a suburban internist and the disintegration of his entire world. While the book cut back and forth in time more than I would have liked, it was a riveting read. Dr. Pete Dizinoff recounts his tale in a way that makes him feel quite real. You can feel his frustration, his despair, his desire to just make his kid do what is best for him all jumping off the page. Some of the tragedy that derails his life is telegraphed, some is surprising, but it is all believable. We are all a hair breadth's away from it all unraveling.

Carol says

I read this book because the book blurb compared it to a couple movies that I loved, The Ice Storm and American Beauty. Dr. Pete lives in an upper middle class suburb of New Jersey with his wife Elaine. their only son, Alec and close to Pete's long time best friend, Joe (another doctor). In spite of his privileged childhood (or maybe because of it) Alec is spoiled, lacks ambition and snotty, to say the least. He becomes infatuated with Joe's much older (and equally obnoxious) daughter, Laura. The story centers on Pete's undoing as he obsessively interferes in his son's relationship and future plans. I could feel the tension grow and I held my breath as Pete's bottled-up hate and resentment lead to the final crash and burn. I found Pete to be more sympathetic than he probably deserved...mostly because his kid was such an ingrate. It's a good book...emotionally believable.

Debbie "DJ" says

I kept waiting for something to happen, nothing did. The story moved from different time periods and I would get lost in who was who. The only part of the book I enjoyed was the last 50 pages, in fact, that could have easily been the whole book. Boring, boring, boring!

Elyse says

Update: \$1.99 Kindle special today!!!!

This is my favorite Lauren Grodstein book!!!

I could NOT put it down!!!! Two couples - best friends - live next to each other - they have kids - oh boy -- this story gets messy - complicated and more messy ... and I loved it!!!!

Read it years ago - and still remember all of it!

I remember that book!

Gee.....How could a person forget it?

Enjoy Kristen!

Nov. 2, 2013: I read "A Friend of the Family" years back -- (knowing I was in love with this author and wanting to read what she would write next).

"A Friend of the Family" is a book that is a MUST READ ---(one of those books which I feel ineffective to write in fear of never coming close to doing the book justice). ***SOMETHING*** about "A friend of the family" stays with you forever.

..... Its best to TRUST your friend when she calls you up--(like my friend Lisi did) ---and say "OH MY GOD....READ IT NOW". ---which of course I did!

NOBODY will ever need to convince me to read Lauren Grodstein again. LOVE this woman!!!! Her writing fascinates me --
Her thinking fascinates me --
She keeps me on my toes --(wonderful writing style always filled with a surprise or two)

I'm reading Lauren's new book called "The Explanation for Everything".
I'm half way into this story ---
I HAD to stop reading --because of something in the story. I felt so sad --
I cried --

{NOTE}>>> This is not a spoiler of the novel:

Yet while reading today, this feeling over-came me:

I cried for all the mothers in the world who 'quietly' miss their adult daughters --
because of their busy-successful-single-lives. (too busy with their careers to call home). When a 'mom connection' is made, the daughters say, "you wouldn't understand how busy I am."

In the meantime -moms's hold a secret wish for a day of 'being' with their daughter.

Malena Watrous says

Just finished this novel last night--my first Kindle read. I had mixed feelings about the way that Grodstein built and sustained suspense about (at least) two different things that happened to (and as a result of) the narrator's misguided actions. On the one hand, I wanted to keep reading to find out what he had done wrong. On the other hand, I felt a bit manipulated by the amount of time it took to get the "prize" of these answers. Granted, this is part of the way that mysteries work. But the novel isn't really a mystery, it's a work of literary fiction, and I would've liked to spend more time on the aftermath/consequences of the narrator's misbehavior and less just wondering what exactly he did that was so bad. Also, because of the nagging questions pestering me as I read, I found myself guessing at answers that were ultimately more dramatic than what really happened--like I was trying to write the ending as I read. However, as the daughter of a doctor father, I thought that her depiction of the narrator (also a doctor) was spot-on, the way he's terribly arrogant a bit stingy and unable to take blame, without really being aware of his shortcomings.

Elizabeth Scott says

This book is not like anything I've ever read. I'm not sure how to explain it, but I'm going to try. On the surface, it seems like a standard, well-written thriller: father worried about his son falling in love with a friend of the family's daughter, who is ten years older and has a pretty checkered past, and what happens when he tries to protect his son.

But here's the thing: I kept thinking about the book when I was done with it because something in it seemed...just a little off. And so I re-read it and the narrator, Pete, seems so devoted to his wife and son and yet there are moments in the narratives where he says something that's a bit off and moments in the story where what he says happened doesn't seem to be exactly what happened.

I think this is a novel about horrible things happening---but it's all being told by an unreliable narrator. Which brings up what I think what makes this novel so awesome: What's the **real** story?

I told you it was like nothing I've ever read. Give it a try if you like thrillers, and especially if you like ones that leave you thinking "Wait, did it--no, it couldn't be--could it?"

Larry H says

I first heard of Lauren Grodstein's "A Friend of the Family" when Amazon selected it as one of the best books of November. Since I'm a big fan of books about family dysfunction (quiet, you), I was quite eager to read it. And I'm pleased to say that once again, Amazon didn't steer me wrong. I thought this book was terrifically compelling and well-written, and devoured it really, really quickly.

Dr. Pete Dizinoff is an internist living a fairly idyllic life in suburban New Jersey. He and his wife, Elaine, who met in college, have a close relationship with college friends and their families are bound together quite closely. If there's any blip on the screen of their lives, it's their son Alec, who in his teenage years and early 20s struggled with a number of issues, including a firm direction for his future. But Pete is determined that Alec will succeed.

And then Laura Stern, eldest daughter of the Dizinoffs' best friends, reappears, after being gone from New Jersey for a significant period of time following troubles of her own. Laura takes an interest in Alec, who is about 10 years her junior, and this interest troubles Pete a great deal. Pete becomes obsessed with trying to get Alec back on the path he wants Alec to follow, at any cost.

I found this story intriguing because I'd imagine many parents might feel--and act--the same way Pete did when faced with this same situation. And although many of Pete's actions made his character a little less sympathetic, when taken together with the history Grodstein provided for his character, it all seemed very natural. The ripples that a few stones like these can make in so many lives really fascinated me. I'd definitely

recommend this book, and I'll check out Grodstein's earlier fiction as well. It will be interesting to see if this one gets made into a movie...

Jessica says

In the first few pages of *A Friend of the Family* a few interesting things are revealed about Dr. Pete Dizinoff. For starters, he's an upper middle aged man whose been cast out by his wife and son to live in the room above the garage. He's scared to pick up the phone to talk to his best friend. And then as if all that isn't bad enough, some crazy guy is accusing him of terrible things and throwing bottles at him at the waterfront.

Whoa, right? Heavy even. I found myself needing to find out what kind of terrible things did this guy do. What heinous things would a person need to do to lose a best friend, a job and the love of your family in one fell swoop?

But then you know what happened? Those questions weren't addressed in any sort of meaningful way for what felt like hundreds of pages. The story doesn't even come back around to the crazy guy throwing bottles until the last fifty or so pages and by then I didn't care. I'd spent so long reading about all the baby-killer crap* that by the time anything remotely concentrated on the really interesting plot points started to clear up it was too late.

What is amazing here, and why I think this book won all sorts of critics praises, is Lauren Grodstein has an uncanny ability to create vivid, believably flawed people. What's even more praise worthy is that if the internet is to be believed, she was a 31 year old single woman when this book about a late middle-aged family man was written and when I tell you that I needed to recheck that this was a female author about a quarter of the way through I'm not kidding - the voice is just that convincing.

The Bottom Line: The writing is stellar, the characters feel like they could step out of the page at any second, and the first few chapters compelled me to keep reading. Unfortunately, it's my humble opinion that the entire focus of the book feels unbelievable and forced at times with the added issue of an ending that feels rushed and tacked on. While I would love to recommend this title based on the quality of the prose alone, the storytelling itself must take precedent, and so this one gets a read at your own risk warning.

*Which, in it's own right, was interesting but entirely unbelievable. And just to be clear it wasn't a Sally-Jesse daytime talk show type of unbelievable... more like the 'that just wouldn't happen like that' variety

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Nancy Martira says

It's not "Freedom," but I'm prepared to call "A Friend of the Family," a great American novel. Resolutely of its time and place (the white wine chilling in the fridge; the Saab is making funny noises, the Jewish Community Center, the shared beach rental, the annual New Years Day Brunch), the book also captures

moments in time from Yonkers to Pittsburgh in the last forty years.

The novel centers around two best friends: each doctors, each patriarchs who have chosen to raise their families in the same wealthy, New Jersey suburb. The Sterns have produced four bright, ambitious children, but have been rent asunder by a puzzling crime. Pete and Elaine Dizinoff, after suffering from years of infertility (and later, cancer) have produced one son, who is not exactly turning out as Pete had envisioned. When Alec Dizinoff takes up romantically with the much older Laura Stern, Pete sees what he believes to be Alec's chance at a happy and successful life derailing. Does Dr. Pete cross the line? The book is a catalyst for discussing how far a parent can or should go and when "protecting" an adult child becomes "interfering."

Sara Serna says

I couldn't wait for this book to be over so I could move on to something else. I was continually lost in time, the story jumped around so much that I had trouble placing where we were supposed to be. A third of the way through the book I noticed that the characters still hadn't been developed enough for me to relate to them or want to learn more about them. It wasn't until somewhere in the last 100 pages that I finally had a curiosity about what was the become of the families involved.

The narrator's voice was flawed for me, perhaps because the female author couldn't quite grasp the gender role. There wasn't adequate exploration into why his personality had developed the way it had and why he had irrational leanings and an inability to problem solve.

I think there is a lot of beauty and interest in tales of suburbia and normal, everyday life and the challenges we all face, but Grodstein failed to capture it.

Nicholas Sparks says

Lauren Grodstein's new novel follows a doctor in turmoil and his college-dropout son after he starts a relationship with a woman who was acquitted of an unspeakable crime years earlier. It is a tense, intelligent story that will get you thinking as you quickly turn the pages.

Karen says

Wouldn't you do everything in your power to facilitate that your child succeeds in life. Do you hope your child will pick the path you have always hoped for them. Always pictured that your offspring will be happy and thrive.

2 couples who have inextricably been best friends. Shared New Year's Day traditions, vacationed together, bought houses in the same small town outside New York City.

Except you don't want your child to get involved with that couple's offspring when he turns twenty-one because you worry that your offspring has temporarily dropped out of college and is being influenced by your best friend's offspring in a negative way?

You have everything going for you and your family except.....

Read this Book if you want to read about two happy families until you are asking yourself could this happen to us?

Linda says

Almost from the start I was drawn into this book in a very compelling way. I liked that the story is told from the perspective of a father as so often this genre of book is carried by a female voice. You also know straight away that the main character Pete has done something regretful and wrong, which adds just a hint of mystery to the book. As the story unfolds I was pulled full force in to the lives and struggles of this suburban NJ family. The central theme of the book dealt with parent child trust and to what extent a father should be involved in life choices of his young adult son and at what point he needed to let go. As the story progressed Grodstein nicely played out the sacrifices a father is willing to make for his son with the main focus on the emotions, which drove Pete to make some rather poor choices. He fiercely loved his son and had a deep desire to want what's best for him. As you can imagine, the rollercoaster of emotions ranged from heartwarming to heart wrenching and my sympathies followed a similar curve as I am not sure I wouldn't have acted similarly. As the title suggests, the book also dealt with friendship on several different levels. Grodstein tested the limits of trust and loyalty in friendship and marriage. In summary this is a story of love, friendship and family dynamics, with unforgettable multidimensional characters, written in an engrossing style that takes hold of you and keeps you turning pages. Book clubs will find it sparks lively discussion as it deals with some typical but touchy family issues.

Jlaurenmc says

I wanted to like Lauren Grodstein's *A Friend of the Family*. I really wanted to. But in the end, I was disappointed. The novel was named one of Amazon's Best Books of the Month in November 2009; critics gave it rave reviews. Usually, that means something. And I'll have to hand it to Grodstein -- she made me interested in her story and in her characters. I wanted to know: what did Dr. Pete Dizinoff do? And truly, that is the driving question behind the story.

In the novel's beginning, Grodstein writes, from Pete's perspective, that he "ha[s:] a home, of sorts -- the room [he:] built . . . above the garage" (1) behind his house. She then relates a scene in which a half-drunk can of beer is thrown at Pete by a young man who obviously holds disdain for him; "'I'll get you!' the kid on the boat screams" (12) as Pete walks along the Hudson River. Slowly -- and I do mean slowly -- Grodstein introduces her readers to several problems in the dream life Pete and his wife have built. They live in a suburb of New York City, and Pete has made it his business to look be an early detector for unusual diseases. It's his specialty in his internal medicine practice, and he takes pride in his constant perusals of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. But disaster strikes as his son pursues his own dreams rather than those of his parents, a friend's daughter moves back into town, and his medical practice comes under fire.

But which is the problem that has caused Pete to be banished to the garage apartment, and what exactly is his crime involving that problem? That we don't find out until very late in the book, and by that time I had lost all interest in anything else. It's almost as though Grodstein does TOO good a job at building suspense. She doesn't know when to let go and tell a good story. Because there are pieces of good stories mixed into the novel -- infanticide, adultery, cancer, art versus education... However, none of these are developed into a full plot with a timely climax. And while I was searching for the answer to the above question (What did Dr. Pete do?), I completely skipped over large sections of (what I'm sure was) beautiful prose and character development. 'Yes, yes,' I could almost hear myself thinking out loud, 'He's tortured. I get it! He loves his

wife. I get it! And his son. I get it! But what did he DO?" Grodstein held out a little too long, and in the end I was flipping pages in the hopes that the next paragraph/ page would hold the answer.

When I finally found out, I was disappointed. I won't say more -- I don't want to spoil the story for those of you who will go on and read it. But it was disappointing to me. And the eventual ending? Also disappointing. True-to-life, perhaps, but disappointing all the same. And I never really developed any sort of empathy for the main characters. Pete is self-absorbed; his son is immature; his wife is a pushover; and the "friend of the family" Laura is a bizarre portrait of a troubled young girl with little reasoning given for her crisis-bound state.

Still want to try the novel for yourself? Remember, most people loved it, including more experienced critics than me!**

**Note on the use of "me" rather than "I": I consulted with Grammar Girl on this one, and she says both "me" and "I" are correct after "than", according to standard English. On one hand, this is because the "understood" parts of the sentence can be more than one thing. For example, I could have been saying: "Remember, most people loved it, including more experienced critics than [I am:]." But something else to think about is the way it sounds. Grammar Girl says that most people aren't going to say, "I'm taller than he," because it "sounds too formal in casual setting." Also, there is much debate on whether or not "than" can sometimes be a conjunction and or whether it is always a preposition. Prepositionists say "me" would always be correct after "than", while conjunctionists argue that "I" is often correct.

Angela says

I completely forgot that the author is a woman writing first-person in a man's point of view - an especially amazing feat as Grodstein was 31 and childless writing about a late-middle-aged man's relationship with his only son. It wasn't until after I'd finished the book and reflected on the story as a whole that all of the complexities of the narration unfolded, and I thought to question the narrator. I was wrapped up in Dr. Pete's emotions and memories as he dealt with life's more complex issues: how a father's expectations challenge his relationship with his son; how tragedy tests a lifelong friendship between two men; feelings of attraction outside of a marriage; dealing with the life-threatening illness of a spouse; right and wrong and the gray areas in between; the responsibilities of a doctor toward a patient; dealing with death.

I agree with Joshua Ferris of *The Daily Beast*, "This novel is an act of supernatural ventriloquism..." and *The Boston Globe*, "[Goldstein] has written a novel that will leave her reader sitting up, sifting the evidence in the dead of night," and *The Charleston Post and Courier*, "[Grodstein] is perceptive in portraying the male psyche and is skilled enough to discuss sentimental topics with unapologetic realism."

Grodstein accomplishes what so many other literary authors do not: she keeps the reader turning the page. This novel isn't about a writer showing off her skills to the detriment of the narrative, this is a suspenseful, haunting tale with an engrossing plot and the right amount of revelation at just the right time. I did not expect to be so impressed when I picked up this book and am thrilled to be pleasantly surprised.

Diane says

At the core of this novel, *A Friend of the Family*, is Dr. Pete Dizenoff, prominent Internist in Round Hill, New Jersey. Pete is a hardworking man, who is deeply in love with his wife of 25 years, and who only wants the best for Alec, his 20 year old only child. So why is this husband and father, living in the garage, by himself, at the start of this family drama? Pete's dreams of the perfect life is falling apart before his very eyes. His wife wants a divorce, his son hates him, a patient's brother wants him dead, and his longtime friends and neighbors, The Sterns, are no longer sure that Pete is the man they once thought he was. How did Pete's life spiral out of control?

This novel is a story about how far a father will go to protect his only son. For starters, Alec, Pete's 20 year old son, drops out of Hampshire College, and moves back home to pursue art and painting. He converts the garage into his art studio. Pete wants his son to go back to school and finish his degree, and to focus on a career plan, but Alec has other ideas. The trouble intensifies when Alec begins dating 31 year old Laura Stern, who has just arrived back in town. Laura is the daughter of the Dizenoffs' long time best friends and neighbors. Pete disapproves of the relationship, not only because of the 10 year age difference, but because of shocking crime Laura committed as a rebellious teen, years earlier. The incident involved the brutal death of her baby. In the end, Pete's inability to let go and let his son live his own life, make his own mistakes, causes him to lose the very things and very people, he was trying to protect.

MY THOUGHTS - The audio book is read by Rick Adamson who did a great job. The novel started at the end, and then bit by bit unraveled to show how a once seemingly perfect life, spiraled out of control. The writing was very good, and the story was chilling in parts, and hooked me early on. This is a novel that will surely give the reader plenty to think about, especially if you are a parent. It begs the reader to ask themselves the question, "how far would you go to protect an adult child"? When does protecting a child become an obsession? This story is shocking, horrifying, gripping, and not for the faint of heart. One thing is for sure, this story will not be one you will easily forget. **RECOMMENDED**

Heather says

I liked the premise of this book, but it just didn't grab me like I was hoping it would. The fact that it was written by a female and told from a male point of view was interesting, but it still didn't make me care about the characters. Pete, the father, is upset because his son, Alec, has dropped out of college and is now seeing Laura, the daughter of Pete's best friend. Laura did a very unspeakable thing when she was seventeen and has returned now at the age of thirty to be with her family. I am sure this is where the book lost me. I don't think it would have given away the plot to know that Laura killed her baby. I would have liked some warning about that before I started reading it. I'm sure I'm not the only person who felt that way.

The other thing I just didn't understand in this book was Pete's obsession with his son Alec's life. Alec is twenty one and wants to be an artist. Pete is just convinced that Alec must have a college degree to live a full and happy life. I cannot relate to that feeling because in these times I don't feel a college degree leads to a good paycheck. Nor do I believe that a big paycheck equals a happy life. In my opinion I would rather allow my child to make mistakes and still have a relationship with them than to destroy the relationship just so they do things my way.

Overall I would have liked to see more character development and a different ending.

Greg says

As I was reading this powerful and unbelievably good novel--the story of a successful suburban father, husband, and doctor whose life begins to unravel in a seriously gripping way--I recalled the way I felt as I read the best passages of Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*. My heart actually beat a little faster, as if I were witnessing the almost hyperreal, perfectly-dialogued scenes being played out right in front of me. In 300 very quickly moving pages, Grodstein manages to capture not just a sweeping American portrait of suburban family life and the baby boomers' dreams of it, but the tragedy of how unwavering fatherly pride--and a fundamental belief in how things ideally *ought* to be so as to preserve happiness--lead to a tragic disconnect between generations.

The main plot: Laura Stern, 30 year-old daughter of narrator Pete Dizinoff's best friend Joe--comes back to Round Hill, New Jersey over a decade after committing a horrible act of violence. She then reconnects with Pete and Elaine's adrift 20 year-old son Alec, who's dropped out of Hampshire to come home, cultivate his artwork and reluctantly think about his next move. It's the spark between them that turns Pete into an increasingly unsettled and unreliable narrator: a man who truly loves his son and cares so much about his future that he becomes virtually blind to the fact that Laura may not actually be an evil person, and isn't out to deliberately poison his son's future. Like any concerned parent who wants to bestow the same quality of life on his child that he had, Pete also wants what's best for Alec--but of course we know that Pete's only projecting onto Alec what he *thinks* is best for him.

And therein lies the paradox of parenting. At one point, in a climactic encounter, Laura Stern tells Pete that "there is no one right way to live a life." No matter her horrible past and the complexity of her motives towards Alec, and no matter how much we simultaneously sympathize and pity the place Pete has found himself: Laura's words could not be truer.

Jane Dugger says

How do you rate a book where you think all of the characters are despicable?

How do you rate a book where you thought you might actually be physically ill while reading it but were compelled to continue because it was so well written?

How do you rate a book where you want to discuss it with everyone but don't want to suggest that anyone read it?

I went with 3 stars as an average between 2 stars for characters & story and 4 stars for writing & making me think.

I never would have picked this book up except for the fact it was for book club. Now, I wish I would have finished it sooner so I could have chatted more about it.

My thoughts ... I can't even write them down because thinking about these characters just makes me angry. I hope this is not a reflection of the author's thoughts on today's society.

I guess overall this book was a success since it has riled me up. Perhaps that was what the author's intentions were ... shock the reader & make them think. I just keep thinking that fact is stranger than fiction which saddens me to think there are families out there even more screwed up than the two written about in this book.

A subtitle should be added "How not to raise your kids."

One more thing: I listened to this book and the narrator, Rick Adamson, was fabulous. He was so believable as each character. I will pick up more books he's narrated.

(BR this is NOT a book for you.)

JoAnn/QuAppelle says

I read a lot of press about this book but it was a major disappointment to me. I failed to see the "great writing" about which I had read.

The anticipation was not worth the result and the writing was overly dramatic. The plot development was SO SLOW. I hated the foreshadowing and the jumping back and forth in time. Sometimes I would get a couple of sentences into a paragraph and then realize she had shifted time YET AGAIN. Annoying.

There was way too much detail, but about what?.....something the reader did not really know about, that was not revealed until the last few pages (the reason for Pete's banishment to the garage). So how are we supposed to care? By then I had lost interest. The author did not know when to stop building suspense and tell the darn story! I realized that Pete was in agonizing mental pain, loved his wife and son....but Grodstein kept beating the reader over the head with these facts. Too much manipulation by the author.

The book was full of characters I did not care about....and way too much writing about things that had nothing to do with the story and detracted from it.

The ending (from the time Pete went into NY to confront Laura to the end of the book) seemed tacked on. Her revelations made absolutely no sense and the story of Roseanne was not at all integrated into the novel -- - the accusations seemed absurd given Pete's marginal interaction with her as a patient. The fallout from all of Pete's woes seemed false and forced. Not well done at all.

I usually do not stick with books to which I give two stars, but I wanted to see what all the fuss was about. My opinion: much ado about not much.
