



by Paola Lopez
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Fiction

The Sum of Our Parts

Die Summe unserer Teile

review

At the heart of this engaging family saga spanning three generations is the tale of three women who excel in various male-dominated fields of science. Lopez, a researcher and columnist who works in artificial intelligence, describes how a young woman sets off to discover her Polish roots and her long-lost grandmother, briefly reconnecting with her mother.

One day, Lucy, a computer science student in Berlin, finds a grand piano in her flat – the Steinway that she learned to play on as a child. It has been delivered by her estranged mother Daria, from whom Lucy broke off contact three years earlier. But a name engraved on the piano holds a clue to Lucy's past: Krawczyk, the maiden name of her long-lost grandmother Lyudmi?a, who died when Lucy was two years old. She spontaneously decides to visit the town in Poland where Lyudmi?a was born. On this journey back into her past and in alternating chapters, the story of Lucy's grandmother and mother is revealed. First, we hear of Lyudmi?a's emigration to Lebanon at age twelve, her brilliance as a chemist at university in the 1940s, her subsequent marriage and her mental health crisis after her daughter Daria was born. This leads Lyudmi?a to be institutionalized in England, where she receives electroshock therapy, leaving Daria to be brought up by a nanny.

Daria's section of the story tells of her departure from Lebanon for Germany, and how she becomes one of a very few medical students

in Munich in the 1970s. She meets her psychiatrist husband, and Lucy's father, Robert.

Once in Poland, Lucy reaches out to Daria and the two briefly reconcile; but it is a fleeting peace. During a conversation over dinner, Daria reveals that Lyudmi?a died only three years earlier but that she and Daria had become estranged after an argument, just like Daria and Lucy. Lucy feels betrayed by Daria's lies about Lyudmi?a and heads back to Berlin, where she tries to reconnect with her chosen family, hoping that one day she will establish a more lasting bond with her mother.

Paola Lopez' appealing story conjures up each era and setting in vivid detail, giving a satisfying new perspective on the same events. The novel also offers fascinating contrasts between the women's struggles to navigate marriage and motherhood in different epochs and disparate cultures, from 1950s Lebanon to 1980s Germany. *The Sum of Our Parts* is likely to appeal to readers of Bonnie Garmus' *Lessons in Chemistry*.

Find out more:

<https://www.klett-cotta.de/produkt/paola-lopez-die-summe-unserer-teile-9783608502725-t-8981>

about the author



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Paola Lopez was born in 1988. She is a mathematician and is currently a research associate at the University of Bremen, undertaking an interdisciplinary doctorate on artificial intelligence. She was awarded the Theodor Körner Prize in 2023 for her work on her debut novel *Die Summe unserer Teile* ('The Sum of Our Parts'). Paola Lopez lives in Berlin.

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