



Friends and Relations: A Novel

Elizabeth Bowen

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In his introduction to a collection of criticism on the Anglo-Irish author Elizabeth Bowen, Harold Bloom wrote, “What then has Bowen given us except nuance, bittersweet and intelligent? Much, much more.” Born in 1899, Bowen became part of the famous Bloomsbury scene, and her novels have a much-deserved place in the modernist canon. In recent years, however, her work has not been as widely read or written about, and as Bloom points out, her evocative and sometimes enigmatic prose requires careful parsing. Yet in addition to providing a fertile ground for criticism, Bowen’s novels are both wonderfully entertaining, with rich humor, deep insight, and a tragic sense of human relationships.

Friends and Relations follows the exploits of four wealthy families whose lives are changed forever by a torrid affair. The Studdart sisters each take a husband; for beautiful Laurel there is Edward Tilney, and for the introverted Janet there is Rodney Meggatt. But the marriages are complicated by changeable passions, and each character must navigate the conflict between familial piety and individual desire. With Bowen’s signature blend of tragedy and comedy, *Friends and Relations* is truly an investigation into the human heart, and the book is as beautiful, mysterious, and moving as its subject.

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