



# Minding Frankie

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## **Minding Frankie** Maeve Binchy

Maeve Binchy is back with a tale of joy, heartbreak and hope, about a motherless girl collectively raised by a close-knit Dublin community.

When Noel learns that his terminally ill former flame is pregnant with his child, he agrees to take guardianship of the baby girl once she's born. But as a single father battling demons of his own, Noel can't do it alone.

Fortunately, he has a competent, caring network of friends, family and neighbors: Lisa, his unlucky-in-love classmate, who moves in with him to help him care for little Frankie around the clock; his American cousin, Emily, always there with a pep talk; the newly retired Dr. Hat, with more time on his hands than he knows what to do with; Dr. Declan and Fiona and their baby son, Frankie's first friend; and many eager babysitters, including old friends Signora and Aidan and Frankie's dotting grandparents, Josie and Charles.

But not everyone is pleased with the unconventional arrangement, especially a nosy social worker, Moira, who is convinced that Frankie would be better off in a foster home. Now it's up to Noel to persuade her that everyone in town has something special to offer when it comes to minding Frankie.

## **Minding Frankie Details**

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## From Reader Review *Minding Frankie* for online ebook

### Ivonne Rovira says

*Minding Frankie* excels due to what it is not. Noel Lynch is, indeed, an invisible office drone at a company called Hall's, a burgeoning alcoholic slowly sliding toward ruin — a man rescued from despair and set on the path to sobriety by the birth of a daughter, but the novel isn't grueling *Permanent Midnight*, although there are relapses and dark times. His American cousin, Emily Lynch, sweeps into the life of Noel and his ultra-religious parents and sets everything to rights, but *Minding Frankie* isn't *Cold Comfort Farm*, although it's amusing, as well. The Lynches' entire circle of friends does rally around the newborn Frankie — christened Frances Stella Dixon Lynch — but the novel never comes off as maudlin.

Instead, *Minding Frankie* paints a portrait of the residents of St. Jarlath's Court, a working-class Dublin neighborhood, who help each other through births, abandonments, bad romances, new loves — and, of course, looking after the delightful infant girl Frankie. While comforting, *Minding Frankie* never descends to cliché or easy resolution. In other words, it's yet another perfect Maeve Binchy novel.

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### Tea Jovanovi? says

As expected, another warm, human story from my favourite Irish writer... about small community gathered around an orphaned newlyborn babygirl... Standard warm novel from great lady!

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### Cyndy Aleo says

At some point, I will accept that there were Maeve Binchy books that I loved and stop trying to find more Maeve Binchy books to love, because this is a goal I am never going to achieve.

MINDING FRANKIE is one of Binchy's later books, and I truly believe after the success of books like *Circle of Friends* and the Oprah selection *Tara Road* (which I was also not a fan of), she got stuck in the rut of "how do I keep writing the same thing over again so people will keep buying my books?"

If you had told me MINDING FRANKIE was a Binchy parody, I'd have believed you.

For starters, there is a huge cast of characters. Huge. There had to be at least 11,000 characters and I don't even think I'm exaggerating. I lost track of them all. There's Noel, who's apparently an alcoholic. And he gets a call from this girl he shagged while drunk who claims he got her pregnant. And then she, in some bizarro fashion, is going to die when she has the baby.

I can't even make this up. Binchy surely had access to Wikipedia to look up things like "dramatic cancer-related death of woman during c-section" and then... didn't.

So Noel has to dry out and take care of this baby and he does so with this pathetic bunch of people who are all inexplicably saved by this American cousin of his who was fired from her teaching position in the States (because Binchy also doesn't understand things like "tenure") and comes to Ireland to learn more about her

family.

And there are other factors like Noel's parents having this huge fund drive to build a statue for some rando saint and his roommate, who left her job to do things for this guy who does everything but hand her a copy of He's Just Not That Into You to convey his feelings, and his social worker has so much time on her hands she drops in on EVERYONE in this village in her Wicked Witch of the West routine to Separate Noel From His Child.

Not to mention that everyone both dresses and acts like it's still the 1950s (when many of Binchy's earlier books took place) and this book is confusing as all hell.

I watched soap operas for years, and there was less drama when Reba Shane was cloned on Guiding Light than there is in this 400-page book.

The thing is, Binchy always makes you care at least about ONE character, and I kept going because a) I paid for the book and b) I needed to make sure Noel ended up okay with his kid. But the rest? I need to remind myself to NOT BUY ANY MORE OF HER BOOKS and satisfy myself with the two I loved.

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### **Kara Hansen says**

3 stars. I have long been a Maeve Binchy fan, but have given this book only three stars. Like many reviews I have read, I find I prefer her earlier works. Light a Penny Candle, The Lilac Bus, and Evening Class among my favourites.

In this book, Minding Frankie, we are introduced to several characters~ among them Emily, Noel, Lisa, and last but not least Baby Frankie. And while their lives intertwine many a time throughout the course of the book, I found the story almost bordering on boring. It seemed the characters and storyline was going in circles, and not much getting resolved.

Overall, disappointed. I have a few of Binchy's earlier works on my bookshelf- I'm going to give those a read. Hopefully they remind me why I enjoyed her writing so much in the first place. As for her later books, and ones published after her death, I'm going to leave for now.

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### **Mae says**

Clearly Maeve Binchy knows how to tell a story. Her writing easy to read and pleasant enough. I read the whole book in a day, watched TV, ran errands, cooked and blogged. I wanted to find out what happened to the characters, and all in all I found out. However, two of the most interesting characters were left up in the air. Does she do this normally? Is this meant to leave us thinking? That is not what I felt. I felt, she finished the book because she was running out of ideas, or paper or ink. It was not one of those classical French endings... it was worst, because all other issues were resolved, finito... but two characters were left out without even a mention.

This is my second Binchy book, it provides you a nice story and intro into Irish mentality and way of life. But, although amusing, it feels like when I eat some chinese foods, I love it while I am eating it, but I am hungry again, an hour later. But I have to say, she managed to set me into a great Irish neighborhood, and not once did she mention the weather or weather issues! That was good.

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## **Pervertedintel says**

Minding Frankie is really a mixed bag. On one hand it follows a character that many books I read don't bother with: an older female. This character, Emily, exerts her powers in distinctly feminine ways without tying herself to the kitchen and her pushes help to heal a household and make effects on the community at large in such a touching way with thanks to the skills of the writer. It handles religion intelligently in that the characters have some but the readers aren't lectured on the author's. On the other hand, Maeve Binchy's refusal to describe characters beyond giving a few of them hair colour leaves me to conclude, in the same way that I concluded Ms. Binchy was a teacher because Emily was, that Emily is overweight with short brown/blonde hair, green eyes with arched eyebrows and the starting of a double chin, much the same as the author's portrait on the back of the book. Emily is not a full blown Mary Sue, she can be genuinely likeable a lot of the time depending on your mind set, and her role tapers off as the plot continues. But the moments she does take over are unforgivable.

Though this book starts off extremely promising in Binchy's decision to discuss death, alcoholism, child-rearing and isolation it often takes the easy road and skips the hardest scenes and tells us about them second hand. For instance, if you think that we the readers should get to see the characters struggle with the first night that Frankie, the baby who the book was named after, comes home from the hospital then you don't subscribe to Binchy's writing style. If you don't want to have a point of view paragraph or two about the man diagnosed with lung cancer and six months to live you Binchy is the author for you. He moves from zero into acceptance and stays there. This is especially sad because though this man is one of the major supporting cast and pages and pages are dedicated to him, his family and his funeral it's not once stated that he smokes. Smoking doesn't equal instant lung cancer and neither does lung cancer only lead to smoking but I would have a host of non-acceptance feelings if I'd never touched cigarettes and still been diagnosed with lung cancer. Binchy really should invest in a better editor because omissions like this run right through the 400+ page book.

Noel's relapses do get attention but can be oddly cartoonish as demonstrated by this exchange:

Noel: 'From tomorrow on it will be back just the same as it [Noel's sobriety] was up to now.'

'What do you mean tomorrow? What's wrong with today?' Malachy asked.

'Well tomorrow, fresh start and everything.'

'Today fresh start and everything,' Malachy said.

'But just a couple of vodkas to straighten me up and then we can start with a clean slate?' Noel was almost begging now.

'Grow up, Noel, Malachy said. – chpt 7

Grow up indeed Noel. Maybe Binchy has heard someone actually say something like this in this situation but it rings childish and simplistic. Noel only relapses when extremely stressed and though we do get a short paragraph about his cravings at the start of the book we learn none of his coping mechanisms. We are constantly told Noel goes to AA but are barely given a peek at his first AA. Binchy brings up his potential

for alcoholism related impotence yet we're never told if Noel actually does suffer it.

Other difficult issues are fully ignored such as Stella's maternal smoking. I'm not saying that everything that can go wrong must go wrong but Binchy does not seem to have even the most passing knowledge that maternal smoking can effect a foetus which is odd considering that Frankie's mother is dying of lung cancer. Again and again the opportunity to raise the issue that Frankie could have suffered premature birth low birth weight, asthma, addiction and withdrawal, possible retardation from the restricted oxygen supply etc when everyone from the priest is smuggling Stella cigarettes and she is, you know, dying of lung cancer herself. I wasn't sure if this was a lack of research into the author's part. The fact that she understands that smoking=bad yet has not taken in any of the hundreds of antismoking campaigns directed at expectant mothers at first left me to conclude that Binchy is a fucking idiot. That said though, the plot is left intact and cancer is able to kill two characters, quite cleanly as plots go. Cancer is scary and fatal disease. You often don't know you have it until it's too late to do anything. That is all Binchy needs to tell this story and that's all that you need to really know to enjoy it. It doesn't distract from the real bitter sweetness that Binchy manages to evoke upon both characters' deaths. There is scene, very close to the end that Binchy handles above averagely but I won't spoil it for you.

The book is extremely repetitive and character development can move like treacle at times. Again and again Lisa goes out with Anton, hopes for more and is unsatisfied. Again and again she hates her rival in his affections and we learn that said rival has no idea what they're doing. Again and again Moira embarrasses herself with her own abruptness and again and again all the other characters tell each other and us what a stuck up bitch she is. All the dysfunctional families, or which three are mentioned in detail, have emotionally absent, distracted mothers. They can't be abusive or drug addicted or ill or having affairs. The fathers are similarly distant. They must only be absent. It gets boring when all the characters' back stories start ending up the same.

We are often told in unneeded detail about the roster for who has Baby Frankie and about where Emily's going though we rarely follow them. Baby Frankie becomes less of a baby and more as a prop as she gets wheeled from place to place and being well behaved. More time is spent on this her actually bonding with every other character. Her entire interactions with her grandparents is summed up in one or two scant paragraphs. In the same way Emily's romance confuses the reader because we spend more time learning what Emily is cooking for her lover then giving lingering glances or affectionate hugs. When he proposed to her I was blown over by the fact that she had said yes. She'd never shown the readers any affection for him, romantic or otherwise, up until that point. I honestly thought she was just passing time with him as something to do and can't imagine that they'd actually consummate their marriage considering that Binchy never bothered to build up any chemistry between them. But don't worry, we know exactly what they have for dinner every time we're with them. Yet again I bemoan the fact that Binchy doesn't know a good editor when she sees one. It's truly sad that someone wasn't there to whisper in her ear that readers care more about the honeymoon than about Emily's brilliant organisational skills in getting them there. Descriptions of clothes take up more time than character descriptions and one could excuse the fact that some of the girls working at the thrift shop. But that doesn't excuse the fact that I have no mental image of Noel except that he's in his late twenties or early thirties (maybe). At the very end of the book we find out that he doesn't have dark eyes or high cheek bones which sucks because I actually decided to give him dark blue eyes in my head.

Emily comes to Dublin and within a few days of arrival helps Charles confess to the family that he has lost his job and Noel confess his alcoholism. Emily's lively presence is needed in this world, especially for her ability to spot Noel's alcoholism. As Stella goes to her death, it is not her the doctor thinks of. Neither is it his own wife who has just given birth, an hour ago, to a healthy baby boy. Nor is it any of his friends or

family which he has known for years, not Noel who has turned his life around or his parents. No, in Stella's last conscious moments it is Emily, who he'd only met some weeks ago, that fills his head with her liveliness. Jesus Binchy.

In Emily's presence other characters become dimmer to justify their need of her in their lives. Charles bemoans the fact that she's going back to America because Emily was always finding him new clients and remembering to segregate dogs of different sexes in case they might do something to annoy their owners greatly.

At the doctor's practice they would miss her too. Nobody seemed to know exactly where to find this document or that. Emily was a reassuring presence. Everyone who worked there had her mobile number, but they had been told that she couldn't be called for three weeks. As Declan Carroll said, it was unnerving, just like going off a high diving board, without Emily.

Who else would know all the things that Emily knew? The best bus route to the hospital, the address of the chiropractor that all the patients liked, the name of the pastoral carer in St Brigid's? –chpt 10

Remember, this woman has been here for a year give or take or less. She tries to help but in that year a grown man with no mental retardation has lost the confidence to keep differently sexed dogs apart, staff don't know how to file properly, including the referral records to the chiropractor and the contact details for hospital's pastor, or even how to get to the hospital that they work at. That's right, the people who go to work every day to the heart clinic on the hospital's grounds don't know how to get to the hospital.

But obviously Binchy is referring to the patients asking directions. She apparently then knows the best bus route from anywhere in Dublin to the hospital and can tailor her knowledge to the client. I have something like that and it's called Trip Planner. If a client who's booked an appointment at my hospital doesn't know how to get there, I might consider opening it up for them. But only because I work at private and I have the time. It's up to the patient to get to the hospital just like it's up to them to get to everywhere else in their lives as functioning adults. In the same way if someone from work called me to ask me who the best chiropractor was I'd think they were retarded. I'd also think I was retarded because I'd given my number out. I do give my number to my work, you have to, but there's a difference between giving your contact details to your boss and giving it to everyone on staff with the implication that they can use you and not their brains as the first point of reference.

And that's where it gets dark, right there: no one seems to be missing Emily, just what she does for them. The book does sometimes dip its toe in insight:

Lisa wondered what it would be like to have a life like this-where everyone sort of depended on you but nobody actually loved you. - chpt 5

But this amounts to little. Emily is a Mary Sue but in a different way: instead of a teenage girl who is loved for no reason we have a middle aged woman who is needed by everyone. This woman, thiks Binchy, will never be passed over, will never be forgotten. Emily is a wonder woman with her boundless energy and an emotional genius in her insights into others. She pays lip service to them having to learn to live without her but then she does things like giving out her number and letting people know they can call her if anything goes wrong. But it gets creepy quickly because everybody needs Emily. The author tries to give Emily character development too. She does many things, even marriage, though that has little effect on her. Her best friend Betsy notes that there's an amazing change in Emily from introvert to extravert but what Emily states about herself, which I take to be true, directly contradicts that. From the very start, as soon as Emily

quit her job as an art teacher because they kept her in the back filing papers she started to acquire skills and decided to go out and find her roots. At no point does she ever show timidity or uncertainty. Her brief dabbling into outrage becomes a misunderstood cop out.

It's a small world in *Minding Frankie*. Apparently there are only three restaurants in all of Dublin. Characters who have never met Anton and have no stakes in his restaurant are still only allowed, mind bogglingly, to choose between his and his rival for where to go for dinner yet apparently his restaurant is still struggling. Where other writers find pride in widening their world with as few strokes as possible Binchy takes a perverse delight in making hers as small as possible. It gets to eye-rolling levels of confining when of course the police sergeant's wife is Muttie's nurse as almost no character mentioned by name can somehow not be connected to someone else. It depends on your own personality whether or not you find Clara hooking up her daughter with her best friend's son creepy or sweet. It didn't sit well with me for reasons I can't explain but I forgive them because that's the only chance at a date in this tiny, tiny world.

There is a huge lack of growth for the majority of characters yet the book doesn't direct the reader to see that as a bad thing. Noel's entire character development is over by the first quarter of the book. I suggest you not bother with Clara whose character development goes from a tough old bird with a heart and a mum, who's sleeping with a man she's so so about to a tough old bird with a heart and a mum, who's moving in with the man she's so so about because Binchy refuses to build up any sexual chemistry or romantic love between any of the characters (except with Lisa and Anton but that's the only basis of their relationship). Which is odd because she seems to be able to talk frankly about sex. Baby Frankie is not a real child but due to her young age, merely a prop to be wheeled from place to place. In fact no one at the heart clinic has any kind of development though one does finally have a baby after numerous miscarriages.

The book does take some unexpected turns. Two characters who by all romantic convention should hook up don't. A character who is set up to deserve a happy ending doesn't get one.

The designated villain of the book, Moira the social worker, was handled unfairly in my opinion. Moira is a shell of woman from a broken family. She has no friends to speak of. SPOILERS. Some may say that her happy ending was subtle but her stepmother's change of heart simply seemed out of the blue and didn't reflect Moira's actions. By the end of the novel the colleagues she's worked for months with have no warmth for her, and in fact state jokingly that they'd never invite her to a party, though do praise her skills at doing her job. The tentative, one-sided friendship that she was starting to build with another main character crumbled before it could get off the ground with limited growth for Moira, a character that Binchy tries to paint as sympathetic. Though perhaps realistic, this was made grating by the repetition of how horrible she was by characters that I liked nowhere near as much. Moira is frowned upon for telling another character that she knows a friend of his through her work as a social worker. Yet it's okay for a doctor to pronounce dead a man who he considers family. I'm not even going into the fact that all the good characterstry to hide Noel's relapses from the stuck up bitch.

After all that, if you're wondering why I didn't give this book a lower rating, it's because Binchy is a rather good writer in that she has an amazing ability to insert warmth into the story. It's an easy read if you don't think about it too hard.

Short recommendation: Buy this book if you want a warm and fuzzy feeling. It's an easy read and you don't have to think too much. There's one especially tear jerking scene early on where I did feel my eyes dampen and wasn't ashamed to admit it.

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## **Ena Hase?i? says**

Predivno! Roman koji vra?a vjeru u ljude.

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## **Suzanne says**

This is a story that I will re-read soon. Maeve's books just are special. She's the type of writer that you feel you have a kinship with as her stories are just so good! This was no exception \*\* I just found my brand new copy of this amongst the too many kids books I have jammed in my shelf. Definitely a re-read ASAP!!!! I guess this is when my silly jam packed book/homewares shelf has it's positive side!

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## **Susy says**

Reading a Maeve Binchy novel is best done curled up in an overstuffed chair while enjoying a cup of tea; it's just such a feeling of comfort. I substituted reading it on the couch where I could stretch out & give my aching ribs more room to heal which didn't actually help the ribs but was pretty darn comfortable. Binchy's more recent novels tend to follow a pattern of introducing a group of disparate characters and then ensuring that their lives intersect. This novel is no different but the reason this group band together is to help watch over an infant girl who is left in the care of her father from birth. Hence the title, Minding Frankie. True to form, Binchy also weaves in the narrative of personal challenge; life changing decisions and brings back a few characters of earlier novels to enrich the plot. What I loved about this story is that it reinforces how friendship expands the family ties; I really believe that friends often are the best family especially in transient society where families move far away from where they were raised. In Ireland, that's not as true as in the USA but still the need exists to supplement blood ties with ties of friendship.

If you like Maeve Binchy's previous reads, this will not disappoint. If you've not read her other books and you have any interest in Irish culture, this is a great introduction to her. I am so ready for a trip to the Emerald Isle.

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## **Cher says**

Ok...so maybe it's not the most realistic story...or maybe it could be. Man (Noel) finds out an ex-fling he barely remembers (Stella) is dying and is pregnant...she pronounces Noel the father! Noel is an alcoholic, lives at home with his parents and his job is hanging on by mere threads. But of course he agrees to be guardian for baby Frankie when Stella dies during childbirth. And of course as chance would have it, many in the neighborhood (in Dublin, Ireland)are retired or are willing and able to give their time along with Noel's family, (including an all but unknown American cousin, Emily, who shows up on his doorstep more like Mary Poppins than even Mary Poppins) to rally together and "mind Frankie". So, while this sounds good in theory there are bound to be a few glitches...and if you throw into the story a social worker who is determined from the start that Frankie would be better off in foster care, you have the basic story.

So, yes, it seems a ridiculously simple story line. YET...I loved this book. Loved the bit of Irish flavor that came through. Loved the characters. Loved that the story didn't get bogged down with details that didn't

matter (or even those that might have mattered!) This is not a book that will teach you about history or educate you about another country; it's not a book that has some hidden mystery or unsolved crime. It's a simple "day in the life of" story of the first two years of day to day events of raising a child. And sure, things happen (Frankie goes missing for awhile, Noel questions his paternity, Noel goes missing for awhile, etc.) but what child has ever been raised in a perfect world without some mistakes made? :)

I highly recommend this book as a "cuddle up with a hot cup of cocoa and just relax" type reading!!

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### **Rachel says**

Every single time I pick up a Maeve book, it is like coming home after a long exhausting trip and falling into that comfortable easy chair, with the endless cups of hot tea at your side and all the favorite characters in Dublin hovering around ... if only life can be that comforting!! I read Maeve for the reasons I have stated above and for the fact that she really is a talented writer, who manages to keep the reader's interest in ordinary characters. Ordinary characters with ordinary concerns and issues ... and yet somehow she makes them special and interesting. She writes compellingly of life in Ireland that some day I must go there and see with my own eyes the beautiful land she loves so deeply.

I was so excited to get this advanced copy that I managed to read this within two days ... it helps that I am snowed in as well. I hated to see the end of this book as I didn't want to let go of the characters. I hope Binchy will write another one soon ... especially about that annoying social worker, Moira. I'd like to know what happened to her!!

Maeve's fans will love this book as well ... so don't hesitate to pick up this book!!

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### **Carolyn Hill says**

Maeve Binchy has always been a favorite author of mine, as I tend to prefer novels set in Ireland and the UK (the Old Country is so much more romantic somehow). However, my fondness for Binchy is wearing thin, and I much prefer her earlier works. I have read all her books, so I was familiar with the characters from her previous novels who showed up here, and there are a lot to keep track of. I'm beginning to find it irritating how she flits from one character to the next, lightly touching down before flying off to the next one. She only grazes the surface, and I don't feel there's any real character depth. I also find it exceedingly unlikely that one of the major characters, Emily, a New Yorker visiting relatives she's never met, manages to transform their lives and every thing she touches, even giving life-long Dubliners directions on where and how to find anything. She's some kind of miracle worker, intervening and solving problems and becoming so essential that everybody becomes dependent on her, but we really know nothing about her character. I think as nice as she seems to be that I would find her to be an interloper who's just a tad annoying. Funny that none of the characters think this, because she's too perfect, and everyone adores her. (To be realistic, aren't fictional characters supposed to have some flaws?) And I also found it unbelievable when she becomes romantically linked with a character who's barely mentioned. That could have been a wonderful part of the story, but it comes totally out of left field, with no development at all. As in Binchy's other recent novels, characters' lives are magically transformed, the hard-working deserving lower class receive financial windfalls, the

demons of addiction are easily dispensed with, better jobs always await those who show initiative, family issues are happily resolved, and nearly everyone finds the right romantic partner. It's a reassuring world Binchy creates, but her slice-of-life stories resemble more of a fairy tale than real life. I like happy endings but I don't like feeling manipulated. Still, I enjoy the pleasant diversion of spending time in Binchy's world, even if it does have a rosy tint.

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## **M says**

### 2.5

I have always loved Maeve (and I feel I can call her that, since we have traveled through Knockglen so many times, and lit penny candles at Mass together, and gone to the echo cave to hear our futures) mostly for being such a misunderstood and under appreciated author. No, I always had to tell people, she is NOT another Belva Plain, or Barbara What's her Face, or the others with the thick pages and flowers on the cover that you find lining a shelf of a nursing home. Maeve not only spins tales of small Irish villages that feel like warm sweaters, presenting characters you want to just sit and drink tea with all day, but also creates interesting characters - calculating women who can also be sympathetic, insecure women who eventually become strong.

That lasted a good five novels or so - then she took a turn. For one thing, we left the fifties - mistake, Maeve. It suited you much better. For another, we traded in cottages and footpaths for Dublin (ugh) and interesting people for caricatures.

Minding Frankie, aside from the stupid title, is a silly novel. It is all feel good, no depth. It is what people think Maeve to be, and I guess what she has become.

The story takes on far too many characters, more than I could keep track of, many of whom were apparently in her previous, more recent novels which I did not care for and therefore did not care that they were back, and the people neatly fall into good or bad. Emily, a cousin from America, is too good to be true - upon landing in Ireland she singlehandedly improves the lives of everyone around her in a no nonsense and efficient and wholly unrealistic way. She helps her cousin magically stop drinking and his parents find new roles for themselves. Noel, the drunkard, discovers he has impregnated a dying girl and now needs to step up his game, and through doing so we meet a whole other cast of people who step in to help.

We have Maeve's handy little coincidences that, in small doses, can be cute, here were one eye roll after another. People find love, learn lessons, get jobs, houses, friends, etc, as one need meets another vacancy. The people are, for the most part, dull, their problems stereotypical. We once again have Maeve's go to Bad Boyfriend as seen in all of her novels and *The Stupid Women Who Love Them* and I was just bored of it. What did I like? Well. As the story takes on all of these little soap operas, Maeve does explore family ties - the social worker who is determined to get Noel's baby to a foster home because she is sure that is better, versus the people who insist the father is the best bet. The people who grew up with parents who couldn't care less about them casting doubt on that, alongside wonderful adoptive families, versus people who were abused by foster parents. There is a lovely twist at the end that ties this all nicely, and the questions were interesting to contemplate.

I appreciated that the social worker, caricature though she was, was constantly at a loss as to how to best do her job, and often her good intentions blew up in her face. However, I couldn't take much of this book seriously due to its utter cartoonish style.

Maeve. I love you, still, and would totally dig an afternoon of toffies and scones while we contemplate the ever changing world. But I really miss the way you used to write.

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## **Sharon says**

Review to follow.

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## **Jennifer Dunn says**

Maeve Binchy is where it's at in terms of light comfort reading. There is enough conflict so that the plot moves along but you always know that everything will "sort itself out in the end."

My only gripe with recent Binchy, and I guess this is as good a place as any to say it, is that her characters are becoming less memorable as they become intertwined. Her last 5-7 books all take place in the same universe and I find myself thinking "I should remember this character, because he/she was obviously a main character in a previous book, but I just can't pinpoint them more than a vague recollection." Binchy is comfortably formulaic instead. There's always some combination of a sensible woman who takes charge of the other character's lives, a layabout who may or may not be redeemed, a happily married couple or two, and a beautiful, capable young woman who spends most of the book besotted with the wrong, yet desperately charming, man.

On the other hand you can almost look at this through the lens that one of Binchy's main themes throughout her whole library is the power of community. All of her characters are more than the sum of their parts.

Now, that's not to say there aren't some memorable exceptions - Benny from Circle of Friends, Helena from The Glass Lake, and, of course, Muttie and Lizzie, and the twins Simon and Maud from the Scarlet Feather. (Muttie gets another big storyline in this book. I heart you, Muttie!)

Finally, the only storyline that didn't tie comfortably up was that of the social worker, Maura Tierny. So I have a feeling we'll be seeing her later. I just hope I can still remember who she is by then!

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