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Maeve Binchy, René Huigen (translator), Frans Thomése (translator)

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Big, generous-hearted Benny and the elfin Eve Malone have been best friends growing up in sleepy Knockglen. Their one thought is to get to Dublin, to university and to freedom...

On their first day at University College, Dublin, the inseparable pair are thrown together with fellow students Nan Mahon, beautiful but selfish, and handsome Jack Foley. But trouble is brewing for Benny and Eve's new circle of friends, and before long, they find passion, tragedy - and the independence they yearned for.

Circle of Friends Details

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From Reader Review Circle of Friends for online ebook

Holly says

I confess to loving what we at the bookstore used to consider "old lady novels." You know, written by nice old ladies, and featuring stock characters such as "Comfortable old lady who smells like violets," "Troubled young boy who will probably run away, thus becoming the catalyst to resolve the troubles of his father, who is..." "Bitter middle aged widower who just needs a little lovin'," and "Beautiful woman who provides said lovin'."

Well, I've moved on from Rosamunde Pilcher, though *The Shell Seekers* will always hold a place in my heart.

But two summers ago when we moved here and stayed with the in-laws for a time, I had a chance to read every single book ever written by Maeve Binchy. My husband mocked, while I only craved bon bons.

Sure, she writes old lady novels. But her characters are distinct and fully-formed. There is a lot of conflict because they are almost always Catholic. There is some strong criticism of the Church and the rifts it causes in a woman's life as she tries to reconcile her faith/upbringing with the urges of her body. Some of her plots are simplistic, but the emotions never are.

Note: I met her when she spoke at a women's lit class when I was in college. *Circle of Friends* was just coming out as a movie, and she was very excited. She's a sweet lady and very funny.

Syndi says

Heart warming story about love and friendship. How fate and personality can clash and destroy innocent dream/ hope. This book is classic. I like it OK. I feel bit dragging on the character development. Nevertheless this is a romantic and sweet book.

Melindam says

This book is the ultimate comfort read for me. A heart-warming, emotionally gratifying & rewarding experience. The one where, after finishing, you just sit & stare out of your head happy & content that again the world has been put to rights.

"Circle of Friends" is to me what "The Baronetage" is to Sir Walter Elliot in Persuasion. :)

"...there he found occupation for an idle hour, and consolation in a distressed one; there his faculties were aroused into admiration and respect, ... there any unwelcome sensations ... changed into pity and contempt."

This book is about friendship, love, betrayal, growing up, learning to fight for what is important & learning to let go.

The story takes us to 1957 when Benny (Mary Bernadette) Hogan & Eve Malone are to leave (or are they?) the safe, but limited boundaries of their small Irish hometown of Knockglen -where everyone knows everyone- for the "big, dangerous" city of Dublin.

Benny, an awkward (because she is big and tall), but infinitely kind and funny girl is an only daughter to well-meaning, but elderly parents, who don't seem to realise that she is growing up into a woman. Although they are willing to pay for a university education (strictly Catholic, of course) for Benny, their own plan includes her returning to Knockglen afterwards & marrying her father's assistant (they have a struggling gentlemen's outfit shop), the unappealing, slimy & calculating Sean Walsh.

Eve is an orphan, brought up by the nuns of the Knockglen Catholic Convent (lead by the wonderful, practical Mother Francis), after her late mother's upper-class (Anglo-Irish) family rejects her because she married a low-class, Catholic handyman. She has no funds for university, unless she learns to overcome her pride & ask the Westwards to pay her tuition fee.

In Dublin they meet handsome, popular Jack Foley, cinnamon roll of the University & beautiful, cool Nan Mahon, who is playing a dangerous & ruthless game to get away from her aggressive, drunken father's house both geographically and socially & to land a rich and upper class husband.

The scene is also enriched by a set of very well drawn supporting characters both from the big city & the small town and you cannot help to laugh, cheer, curse or cry as the story unfolds.

Hannah says

5 Stars - Superb book!

I loved this book!! It's so well written and the character development is amazing. I kept taking this one off my to-read this, but boy am I glad I decided to put it back on. The best way I can think of to describe this book is that it's a cozy read with a bit of a bite near the end. It's so beautifully brilliant. Just FYI, I'm still flying high on this book so this review may be disjointed and messy.

I liked the way the book moved; it's rhythm. It wasn't slow moving but it wasn't action packed. I think the best way I can describe it is that it seemed natural. I could believe that all of these things were happening to these characters. Things developed organically and I don't think that happens enough in books.

Similarly, the plot seemed to be so realistic and lifelike that it worked so well. I believe that Benny's parents were very protective (and supportive). I could believe and understand Eve's frustration, to say the least, with Simon Westward. I understood Nan's desire to be someone different. It all made sense because the characters were in very relatable situations or at the least, I could relate to the emotions and feelings, if not the exact situation.

I also liked that the author gave us two different views of Ireland: city and countryside, Dublin and Knockgleng. I like that the book dispelled some of my cliché thoughts about Ireland. I mean that, this book dealt with subjects that, when associated with Ireland, take on a specific historical/political/social context (religion, sex, family obligation abortion, etc.). I was not expecting some of the takes/views on some of those subjects and it was a nice surprise (also maybe revealed some of my preconceived notions about Ireland).

My favorite aspect of this book is the characters and my absolute favorite is Benny Hogan, our main character. I think the main reason she's my favorite is because her character development is so relatable and honestly inspiring. She goes from a shy, fumbling, almost meek girl to a confident, centered, smart, kind young woman. I can't do her justice so please read the book and enjoy with me. For those of you who have read it, (view spoiler).

I also liked how Eve was the best friend for Benny. Sure, she made her mistakes. They both did, but in the end they knew each other so well and that is what they both needed. I have a lot of strong and conflicting feelings about Nan. First things first, her home life sucked and her father was an ass - no way around that. However, I felt that she wasn't justified acting the way she did. (view spoiler)

One quick side note about the movie. So, I haven't seen it and didn't even know there was one until I googled it just before writing this and then subsequently read the Wikipedia page. I will not be seeing it. I get that movies are never exactly like the book. But the movie based on those book leaves out some MAJOR characters/story elements. (view spoiler) And it's such a shame because the movie has a fantastic cast. Alan Cumming as Sean Walsh seems absolutely brilliant.

Do I recommend this book? Absolutely! It was just what I needed to read at this moment and I'm so glad I did.

Jenna St Hilaire says

My friend Elizabeth bought this book for me, saying that Binchy's writing is peaceful, relaxing and enjoyable to read. It is that. But I also had to stay up reading it till three A.M. in desperate suspense.

It wasn't due to relentless pacing or swift-moving prose. Binchy's writing career apparently began before the modern outcry against things like the passive verb and the third person omniscient voice. Her brief sentences and snappy dialogue generally kept the scenes from dragging, though, and I appreciated the easygoing nature of the tale.

The characters delighted me. Taking the secondary cast for now, I particularly loved Mother Francis, Kit Hegarty, Heather, Aidan, Clodagh and Fonsie. I wound up liking Bill a good bit, too. He could be a touch tactless, but he seemed like a solid, good-natured guy. I rather wish we'd gotten more of him.

Benny is an incredibly sympathetic protagonist. Most women know the feeling of having some physical flaw

that we fear will turn men away, and when that flaw is noticeable enough to be pointed out again and again and again by everyone, it turns to torment. Benny's humor and grace throughout make her lovable, someone I couldn't help wanting to be like.

Eve is just as likable in her own way, primarily for her intense loyalty and sharp wit. She and Aidan share quite a few hilarious little dialogues; they and Clodagh and Fonsie provide much of the comedy in the story. And I've got to admit, I've made numerous re-reads of the scene where Eve confronts Nan, just for the satisfaction of her fierce defense of her friend and her home. Even though part of that defense was rather indefensible.

The friendship between Eve and Benny carries the tale, beneath the numerous perspectives and the sweet but doomed romance. Yeah, I suppose that's a little spoilerific. But that "sweet but doomed" bit is exactly why I stayed up till three—it was all so tender, and I really wanted it to work out, but I had myself braced for an explosion.

I didn't brace hard enough.

The ending itself was beautiful and admirable and exactly what it should have been, if you'll grant me the nitpicky writerly whim of disliking the last two lines as used together. I knew just why Binchy ended it the way she did, and the reasonable half of me cheers.

Now, spoiler.

(view spoiler)

This book has been made into a movie—Minnie Driver's first lead role, I believe, and with improvements enough to Jack's character to pull off a classic happy ending. Both of which interest me in watching it; I am rather fond of happy endings and Minnie Driver. I like Chris O'Donnell, who plays Jack, too. On the other hand, the trailer makes it sound as if the movie's theme is more "Catholic girls and sex" than friendship, which is unfortunate. Binchy does give an interesting and nuanced depiction of the former, but it's a subservient theme and anyway, I'm not sure I trust the film industry to treat it quite so fairly.

Erin ? *Proud Book Hoarder* says

Pros - The writing style itself with wording isn't bad. It has a smooth and warm tone that fits the genre. Characters are mainly likeable, especially the main Benny and her friend Eve, two girls who bonded despite being in such different circumstances. The ending isn't predictable but it's a peaceful one. There's a surprise that pops up with one of the characters showing their real face, so not everything is sedate

Cons - The lengthy book is a story of unfolding and developing relationships, but not the most interesting thing on the shelves. The main issue I had is a personal preference - way too much head hopping into random characters. I can't get as attached to characters and interested in their story if the view keeps hopping around so freely.

Overall it's a decent book but the point of view switching so heavily isn't something I enjoy in comparison to limited POV or singular, and the length doesn't quite justify the content.

Obsidian says

This book was over 700 pages! Seriously. At one point I nodded off and I think my finger kept moving or something so I woke up to a totally different place in the book, and did not go back. I just couldn't.

I really do love Maeve Binchy's works and since I saw the movie version of this, I really wanted to read this. If I had known how long it was and how some parts deviated from the book though, I would have passed.

I think the biggest issue is that at first the book focuses on two school children (Benny Hogan and Eve Malone) and we somehow fast forward through their childhood to when they move onto Dublin and meet another student named Nan. And then the book starts working in Nan's third person POV as well so she became a sort of third main character to the book. I rather wish we hadn't delved into Nan so much and just focused on Benny and Eve. And also, the book did not need to be as long as it was for us to get to the main point. The main point being apparently, once a cheater, always a cheater.

I think that Binchy over time was able to edit herself more and keep the plot moving much better in her later books. The flow in this book was pretty bad. Things were repeatedly said about the same person over and over again. I started rooting for nuns to die (just for something to happen).

I think once the book moved firmly to the Dublin section it just got worse in my eyes. We get even more characters thrown at us and I just wanted to tell everyone to just have sex and be done with it. Reading about the girls that would, the girls that wouldn't, how boys wanted it, and everything in between was boring. I think this was touted as a coming of age story and blah. I prefer the movie version of this.

Quirkyreader says

This book was major comfort food during a very rainy week. There were parts of this story that had me crying and parts that got me upset with some of the characters. I just had to keep reading to find out what was going to happen.

Trish at Between My Lines says

Do you have a favourite pair of old jeans? Worn to death, washed to that perfect comfortable feel, not the latest edgy trendy cut and colour but still a firm favourite. They are a perfect fit and make you feel good. Ones you pull out and wear time after time? Circle of Friends is the book equivalent of those jeans for me. Around forever, radiating warmth, full of humour and with a gossipy, uplifting plot. Yes, it's another of my comfort books.

Big hearted, generous Benny is the main character. From a child, she has been heavy or as others non too delicately put it – a lump of a child, a heifer, large and square. On her 10th birthday, she is expecting a princess party dress to transform her but instead she gets a 'sturdy, hard wearing outfit' that her parents have

finished off with matching shoes and handbag. Benny never tells them that this broke her heart instead she smiles through the pain and pretends excitement.

This book focuses on Benny and best friend Eve leaving their small, country town to attend college in Dublin. Benny is vibrant, charismatic, funny and tender hearted. In Dublin, Benny and Eve find new battles to be fought, new friends to be made as they struggle to make their way in a rapidly changing Ireland. On their college menu is fun and frolics and a side order of backstabbing . The book is set in the 1950's but despite the older setting, it's very much a case that the problems faced by college going folks never changes. I faced the challenges in the 90s that Benny faced in the 50's. I have no doubt the themes of friendship, loyalty, the difference in values and attitudes between parents and teenagers and issues over image are timeless and will continue to have meaning to new generations of readers.

The first line draws me in

“The kitchen was full of the smells of baking”

This sounds like my home growing up where my mother was forever baking for all of us. It feels nostalgic and familiar. From that first line to the last line, I'm wrapped up in a rosy glow.

The setting is so authentic, it catches an Ireland that is long gone but captured forever within the pages of Maeve Binchy's books. A time when church had as much importance as the government. Communities where everyone knew you and all your business. If you coughed in your bedroom in privacy, the next day half the town would ask you how you chest infection was and remind you that lung problems run in your family and to make sure and look after it! A time when the younger generation were pulling the older generation kicking and screaming into the 'racier' 1950's. Where a new jukebox in town caused uproar and new fashions such as miniskirts scandalised the more conservative.

The book has a huge cast of great characters. All of them, full of life and fleshed out with remarkable detail. However, it's Benny that won my heart. I was overweight when I was younger too and I can identify with the trouble this caused her. I had lost weight by the time I was college age but I know how it can eat away at you and destroy your confidence.

“He drew her a little closer which was great except that she feared the place he had his hand on her back was just the part where the heavy-duty bra ended and there was a small roll of flesh. God suppose he held that bit of her – it would be like a lifebelt. How could she get him to move his hand up her back? How? These were things you needed to know in life, rather than what was set out in a syllabus for you.”

This book makes me smile and I'm always rooting for Benny with her heart of gold. For a while she lives her fairy tale but unlike a fairy tale this one does not end happily ever after. Something I really appreciated about this book, it was realistic but still ended on an optimistic but not ridiculous note. Until they made a movie and changed the ending. Why? WHY? It made me so mad.

Who should read this?

Highly recommended to all who like character driven books, books with a strong sense of place with a heart warming and uplifting vibe. There is a reason Maeve Binchy sold more than 40 million copies of her books and if you have never read one, then this would be a good one to try

Liz says

What a treat! It had been a while since I read a book that made me sad when turning the last page, though I was glad the way it ended.

I liked all the characters. We meet Benny who becomes best friends with Eve when they're 10. The friendship pretty much solidifies when Benny pushes a classmate that's bullying Eve. Eve tells her- "someday, when I'm big and strong, I'll knock someone down for you."

Their friendship remains strong through out the story despite how opposite they are and the many situations that make the story of the book.

Heather is introduced to us and I loved her!!

"What had Benny wanted when she was Heather's age, twelve? She had grow out of the wish for pink velvet dresses and pointed shoes with pom -poms. What had she wanted? Maybe a crowd of friends, people that she and Eve could play with without having to be home at a special time. It wasn't very much. And they had got it hadn't they. "

I know I'll be thinking about this story for a while

Meg - A Bookish Affair says

This has probably been my favorite Maeve Binchy book that I have read so far. One of the things that I like about Binchy is that she is very good at describing the characters and giving the back story of the characters.

Circle of Friends tell the story of Benny and Eve, friends who grow up in a small town in Ireland. They go off to university in Dublin where their circle of friends grows and their lives change greatly. This is a story of friends and the changes we go through as we grow up.

Lisa says

Really enjoyable story predominantly following two young girls who grow up together in a small town in Ireland. The story mainly focuses on when they go to University together in Dublin and encompasses the story of their friends there and in their home town.

It's a family saga with plenty going on and loveable characters. I listened to this on audio and it was beautifully narrated - a lovely heart warming story.

Tea Jovanovi? says

Nažalost, Mev je prošlog leta preminula i ostali smo bez najtoplije irske autorke... Njene knjige plene toplinom i pri?ama o obi?nim ljudima i njihovim sudbinama... Knjige za one od 12-100 godina...

Ovo je pri?a o dve devoj?ice iz male varošice u Irskoj i njihovom odrastanju... Veoma uspešno je i ekranizovana... A moram da se pohvalim da sam tokom prevoda pronašla dve materijalne greške u originalu i da sam prva posle 35 izdanja koja je ta knjiga imala na engleskom i posle svih engleskih urednika koji su to

itali i dopravljali, i posle bezbrojnih prevoda na razne jezike, koje je ta knjiga imala... Njena agentkinja je bila bez teksta... :) E pa, i to se dešava, da autori prave materijalne greške, a prevodioci to isprave... Ne 'esto, ali dešava se... :)

Erin says

This remains my favorite book by Maeve Binchy!

Sondang says

Still one of my favourite books. Best written book ever. Okey, I love Maeve Binchy, but this book is smashing. I love it from the first until the last page.

You'll love all the characters, especially the friendship between Benny and Eve. And eventhough you loathes Nan's behavior, somehow you'll understand her. You'll fall in love very quickly at Jack Folley, and as soon as that you'll find yourself annoyed by his taken-for-granted-act- to our lovable Benny.

As other's Maeve writing, it's all details that we feel we really in their circle of friends in Ireland.

I love the part when Eve said to Benny "Someday I'll push down someone for you," after Benny 'rescued' her from a nasty-mouth girl who made fun of her. That's the real beginning of their beautiful friendship.

Everytime I read this book (yes, I read it more than twice), it always remind me of how valuable friendship is, and how blessed are the people who has true friends. (thanks my angels)

I also love the last two pages, especially the part when Benny looked up the sky, and all she saw was the smoke in the night sky, and she knew that Jack's face is among the friends, not taking the whole night sky.

That sentence really describe a great closure about Benny's feeling for Jack. Benny finally let him go, eventhough Jack still loves her the same (even more, I guess, after all what happened).

This book is highly recommended. For who value friendship. For who doesn't believe in friendship. For handsome guy like Jack Folley who finally let go the only girl he really love and care about, just because he took it for granted and couldn't control himself from looking around. For big girls out there with big heart that sometimes doubt about whether being virgin is still up to date.

Btw, this book already filmed, Chris O' Donnel as the handsome Jack. I haven't watch the movie (already tried to find the movie, but couldn' t find it! So if you happened to know, let me know where to find it in Jakarta)
