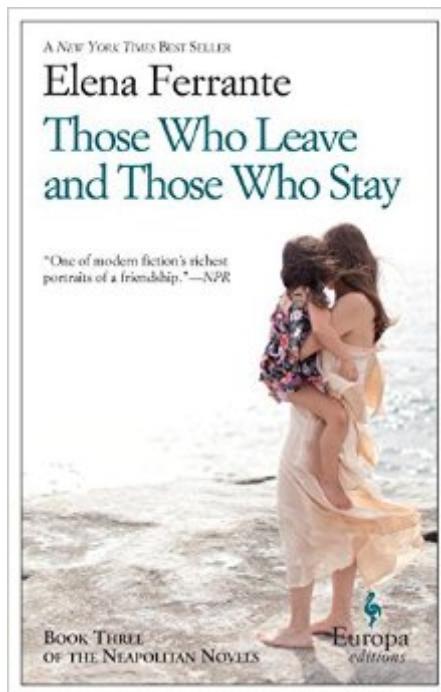


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# Those Who Leave And Those Who Stay: Neapolitan Novels, Book Three



## Synopsis

The incredible story continues in book three of the critically acclaimed Neapolitan Novels! Since the publication of *My Brilliant Friend*, the first of the Neapolitan novels, Elena Ferrante's fame as one of our most compelling, insightful, and stylish contemporary authors has grown enormously. She has gained admirers among authors—Jhumpa Lahiri, Elizabeth Strout, Claire Messud, to name a few—and critics—James Wood, John Freeman, Eugenia Williamson, for example. But her most resounding success has undoubtedly been with readers, who have discovered in Ferrante a writer who speaks with great power and beauty of the mysteries of belonging, human relationships, love, family, and friendship. In this third Neapolitan novel, *Elena and Lila*, the two girls whom readers first met in *My Brilliant Friend*, have become women. Lila married at sixteen and has a young son; she has left her husband and the comforts her marriage brought and now works as a common laborer. Elena has left the neighborhood, earned her college degree, and published a successful novel, all of which has opened the doors to a world of learned interlocutors and richly furnished salons. Both women have attempted to push against the walls of a prison that would have seen them living a life of misery, ignorance and submission. They are afloat on the great sea of opportunities that opened up during the nineteen-seventies. Yet they are still very much bound to each other by a strong, unbreakable bond.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I did not think Volume Three of this extraordinary soon to be tetralogy was up to the standards of the

first two books. Then again, perhaps I am just getting tired, as I have read all three over the last few weeks. As that fact indicates, I did find the work gripping, and Volume Three was no different at least through the middle of the book. As usual, the emotional link between the two women, now in their twenties and early thirties is intense, and vividly rendered. Beyond that, the depiction of the union organizing and fascist and anti-fascist strife was done very well. I have read little like it. Nevertheless, for me this whole series has major flaws. While it is very upscale chick lit and an entertaining read, perhaps the stuff of a major television mini-series, this is not great literature. There is far too much dependence on mindless coincidence. Similarly, the introduction of Elena's younger sister Elisa as an important character late in the book, without any preparation is a major flaw. As usual, for the most part, the minor characters are only lightly drawn and are virtually indistinguishable. But it is the major characters who gave me most pause. Lila becomes in this volume nearly a character out of science fiction. She has almost superhuman powers. She is prescient, beautiful, and every man falls ineluctably in love with/lusts after her. It is too much. Similarly, after three volumes and 1200 pages, it is clear that Elena is stuck on the womanizer Nino, but I defy anyone to tell me why. There is no basis for it outside of Elena's psyche, and she is not sharing that with us. The action is melodramatic, operatic. The attempts at explanation of the ladies' feelings are sophistical.

It appears that Elena Ferrante is intent upon surprising her readership constantly not only in the intensity and complexity of her work, but also in the form. It had been anticipated that this book would be the capstone of her Naples trilogy, the other two books being "My Brilliant Friend" and "The Story of a New Name." This is not the case since the ending of this book indulges the reader by indicating that a fourth "Naples volume" is in the making. This book indicates that her ambition is almost Proustian or Faulknerian in scope for this series. There is the continuation of the tortured relationship between the narrator Elena and her childhood friend Lila and the ebb and flow of all the tributaries that haunt these two, whether it be the old neighborhood, the mangled relationships of old lovers, families, regional disputes etc. Where this volume diverges from the other two is that there is more theoretical talk between Elena, Lila, and Elena's lover and her husband. When a writer has a character talk about the art of writing and the creative process, you should pay close attention to those sections. Yet this novel does not yield an inch to its predecessors in dramatic intensity and I feel that it surpasses them substantially. Not only is there an intensity but also an urgency conveyed in this book that accelerates to the last chapter which ends with all the force of old Hollywood cliffhangers. However whereas the other two books in this series could almost be read as

stand-alone works, this one does require that the reader to have acquainted himself with the at least the second book in the series. There is a constant sense of wonder in that Ms.

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