



Enduring Relations

J.N. Hyatt

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In describing the Wallace family, J. N. Hyatt's characterizations are near perfect. She could make use of the famous line from Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*: "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." There is something genuinely familiar about the Wallace family and the roles played by the characters profiled in Hyatt's fourth novel, *Enduring Relations*.

Relatives gather to bury Walter Wallace, head of the family and of the family business. No one except Walter's son, who will inherit the company, knows that the business will soon die as well. With Walter's unexpected death, the elderly aunts and Walter's widow must be told that as goes Walter, so goes their income.

The emotional lives of the characters in the novel are greatly affected by this eventuality. The grieving widow, Rose, who lives on vodka, has her true nature unmasked—feelings she has long kept hidden behind proper manners and a strict code of conduct. Rose's oldest daughter, Gareth—the touchstone of the novel and stay-at-home member of the sandwich generation—has devoted her life to trying to please her mother and her children, but has always fallen short. To add to Gareth's burden, she and her daughter, Karen, have spent months planning Karen's wedding. Now it could be considered bad taste to have the event so soon after the funeral, and the wedding is in jeopardy of being canceled.

Each chapter of the book tells the story of a different character in the family. This motley crew, led by the aforementioned closet-alcoholic mother and "good" daughter, also includes the heir and only son, the "favorite" sister, and the next generation of children, including the bride-to-be. Add to that three elderly aunts and the Wallace housekeeper, and readers are in for an interesting story about quite a dysfunctional family.

Hyatt's informal voice, strong writing, and insight into characters elevate this book's quality. Though the author leans toward exposition, her character analysis is spot on. However, the family dynamics are nothing really new. A thin plot and an ultimately unremarkable ending weaken the overall read.

Admittedly a bit lightweight, the author has created in *Enduring Relations* a believable family, and her perceptions may leave readers pondering what has been revealed or even nodding in agreement. Anyone who appreciates introspection and character studies centered around family behavior may find this a novel to enjoy.

DAWN GOLDSMITH (November 16, 2012)

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