

Friends and Dark Shapes

Kavita Bedford

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In Kavita Bedford's novel *Friends and Dark Shapes*, a bereaved woman struggles to determine her place in the world.

After her father's death, a woman moves into a borderline questionable Sydney neighborhood with three housemates. The year that follows is a difficult one, marked by the constant threat of losing jobs, money, and loved ones. She contemplates how the diversity and disparities in her hometown contribute to her sense of disconnect, and considers the impermanence of life itself.

The unnamed narrator and her friends, though they're all from different backgrounds, live with the constant, nagging sense that they are not living up to some unspoken standard. They are constricted by low-paying jobs and family expectations, yet they feel guilty about complaining when others are worse off. At the same time, they are so overwhelmed by disasters and tragedies that they are no longer as empathetic as they once were.

Each chapter is almost a story unto itself. They are given to highlighting aspects of the narrator's growth. Her job as a freelance journalist forces her to confront big issues, like the war in Syria and Australia's cruel immigration policies. But to her, the little things, like memories of eating gelato with her father, or struggling to sell the bicycle that her ex-boyfriend gave her, make just as big of an impact.

There are no easy answers to the woman's troubles and questions. She misses her father, and she remains uncertain about what the future holds. But thinking about and spending time with loved ones brings her to an important realization: she does not have to be certain of her place in the world to be a part of it.

Friends and Dark Shapes is an unflinching novel that captures the isolation and emotional overload of modern life.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (May / June 2021)

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