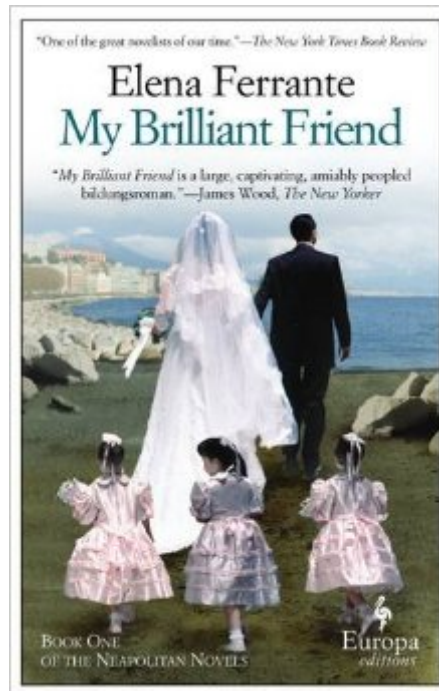


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# My Brilliant Friend: Neapolitan Novels, Book One



## Synopsis

A modern masterpiece from one of Italy's most acclaimed authors, *My Brilliant Friend* is a rich, intense, and generous-hearted story about two friends, Elena and Lila. Ferrante's inimitable style lends itself perfectly to a meticulous portrait of these two women that is also the story of a nation and a touching meditation on the nature of friendship. The story begins in the 1950s, in a poor but vibrant neighborhood on the outskirts of Naples. Growing up on these tough streets the two girls learn to rely on each other ahead of anyone or anything else. As they grow, as their paths repeatedly diverge and converge, Elena and Lila remain best friends whose respective destinies are reflected and refracted in the other. They are likewise the embodiments of a nation undergoing momentous change. Through the lives of these two women, Ferrante tells the story of a neighborhood, a city, and a country as it is transformed in ways that, in turn, also transform the relationship between her protagonists, the unforgettable Elena and Lila. Ferrante is the author of three previous works of critically acclaimed fiction: *The Days of Abandonment*, *Troubling Love*, and *The Lost Daughter*. With this novel, the first in a tetralogy, she proves herself to be one of Italy's great storytellers. She has given her readers a masterfully plotted page-turner, abundant and generous in its narrative details and characterizations, that is also a stylish work of literary fiction destined to delight her many fans and win new readers to her fiction.

## Book Information

Series: Neapolitan (Book 1)

Paperback: 331 pages

Publisher: Europa Editions; 1st edition (September 25, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1609450787

ISBN-13: 978-1609450786

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 1 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.8 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (1,820 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #296 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #3 in [Books > Literature & Fiction >](#)

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## Customer Reviews

This portrait of camaraderie, community and a nation centers on the stories of lifelong friends Elena

Greco and Lila Cerullo, two Italian women who grew up together in the same small town just outside of Naples in the years immediately following World War II. The story of their childhoods is told here, reminiscent of a nation facing drastic change. The girls, in early adolescence, are forced down vastly differing paths due to very slight differences in their families' economic status, leading one toward uncertainty while the other enjoys the unrequited benefits of higher education. This first of a planned trilogy brings to life an old-world culture and fills readers with a passion for history and great storytelling. Elena artfully recalls her childhood, describing her earliest school days at a time when ordinary townsmen called for blunt action and despair. The neighborhood is consumed with a silent, inarticulate rage, shown toward rival families, by parents toward their offspring, and by neighborhood children toward one another. It was a common event of the age to witness a child being beaten by a family member or neighborhood kid, so no one interfered or paid much attention. Life was especially hard for young women and the poorer folks of small communities (which at that time seemed to be just about everyone). The emphases for these families were dwindling resources, the simple ability to put food on the plate and pay the bills, and the need to provide cheap (child) labor. Women were expected to remain mute and meek always, and to further their families' needs at the expense of their pride and feelings. Family feuds happened routinely; everyone knew about them.

(4.5 stars) Set in an economically depressed community on the fringes of Naples in the early 1950s, at a time in which people are still traumatized by the war and the disasters, Elena Ferrante's *My Brilliant Friend* becomes a story of nine families who epitomize the Naples neighborhood in which they live. No one can dwell upon the horrors of their war-time past, since they all must work so hard to deal with the financial emergencies they face every day. Living traditional lives, the families have intermarried over the years, and the adults, like their children, live in the moment - passionately, emotionally, and often violently. The novel opens in the present in a prologue in which Elena Greco, a long-time acquaintance and oftentimes best friend of Lila Cerullo, receives a telephone call from Lila's son, asking for help. His mother has disappeared, taking all her personal belongings. Elena is certain that "She wanted not only to disappear herself, now, at the age of sixty-six, but also to eliminate the entire life that she had left behind." Convinced that Lila is overdramatizing, Elena decides to write all the details of their long relationship, "everything that still remained in my memory." The rest of the novel is Elena Greco's story from the time she and Lila are six years old in the early 1950s. Elena, the oldest child in her family, much prefers school to home, since she does not get along with her mother. Lila Cerullo, a fellow student from a poorer family, impresses Elena

from the beginning because her behavior is atrocious. Still, Elena is fascinated by her, and she is stunned when Lila without warning, puts on a powerful demonstration of her unexpected reading ability, having taught herself to read from the age of three.

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