

The background features a complex network of white nodes connected by thin purple lines, set against a gradient background that transitions from dark purple at the top to a bright pink at the bottom. The nodes are scattered across the frame, with some forming distinct geometric shapes like triangles and polygons. The overall aesthetic is modern and digital.

# Relative Fortunes

Written by Marlowe Benn

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# Relative Fortunes

By Marlowe Benn

## Relative Fortunes Book Review

In 1920s New York, the price of a woman's independence can be exorbitant—even fatal. In 1924 Manhattan, women's suffrage is old news. For sophisticated booklover Julia Kydd, life's too short for politics. With her cropped hair and penchant for independent living, Julia wants only to launch her own new private press. But as a woman, Julia must fight for what's hers—including the inheritance her estranged half brother, Philip, has challenged, putting her aspirations in jeopardy. When her friend's sister, Naomi Rankin, dies suddenly of an apparent suicide, Julia is shocked at the wealthy family's indifference toward the ardent suffragist's death. Naomi chose poverty and hardship over a submissive marriage and a husband's control of her money. Now, her death suggests the struggle was more than she could bear. Julia, however, is skeptical. Doubtful of her suspicions, Philip proposes a glib wager: if Julia can prove Naomi was in fact murdered, he'll drop his claims to her wealth. Julia soon discovers Naomi's life was as turbulent and enigmatic as her death. And as she gets closer to the truth, Julia sees there's much more at stake than her inheritance!

Author Marlowe Benn book, *Relative Fortunes*, is a breath of fresh air amid the countless books that hit the market on a daily basis. While I hesitated, deliberating between this and a few other Kindle First books, I eventually chose this as my second choice of the month. Happily, it is the better of the two reads.

Ms. Benn displays a wonderful talent for stringing the right words together, and the novel is an endless stream of descriptive passages. Add to that the distinct characters that walk Author Marlowe Benn book, *Relative Fortunes*, is a breath of fresh air amid the countless books that hit the market on a daily basis. While I hesitated, deliberating between this and a few other Kindle First books, I eventually chose this as my second choice of the month. Happily, it is the better of the two reads.

Ms. Benn displays a wonderful talent for stringing the right words together, and the novel is an endless stream of descriptive passages. Add to that the distinct characters that walk throughout the pages and you have something special.

The book is listed in both the Historical Fiction and Mystery rankings, both apt descriptions of the story. The author's writing style easily place it in the historical fiction category. This is not merely a tale placed at a certain time in history. There are many references to the time period of the book (early 1920s), and through the expressive prose, one can easily imagine standing side by side with heroine Julia Kydd.

The overall plot reflects the era, when men made most of the decisions and women had to struggle to achieve any respect outside the home. Julia's brother has posed a challenge that she is not able to

## Relative Fortunes

refuse, as it offers the only possibility for her to gain control of money that is rightfully hers. Ms. Benn weaves an intriguing account of Julia's efforts. Based upon the talent displayed, in the future I will not hesitate when I see another of the author's books. Five stars.

...more

## Relative Fortunes Julia Kydd

I gave this three stars because for about the first half of the book I thought this book would never get going and almost stopped reading it. But eventually I got caught up in the story. I probably read future books of the series now that the probable recurring characters have been established.

With Relative Fortunes, the first book in Marlowe Benn's Julia Kydd series, I think it's safe to say it's me, not the book. Although I love a good historical crime, I am extremely picky about such reads, and in this case this one wasn't quite for me.

Relative Fortunes is a book that takes a long time to start, much longer than I would have liked. With my mysteries, I like it when things start to come together much sooner than they did in this one, and there were plenty of points where I did con With Relative Fortunes, the first book in Marlowe Benn's Julia Kydd series, I think it's safe to say it's me, not the book. Although I love a good historical crime, I am extremely picky about such reads, and in this case this one wasn't quite for me.

Relative Fortunes is a book that takes a long time to start, much longer than I would have liked. With my mysteries, I like it when things start to come together much sooner than they did in this one, and there were plenty of points where I did consider putting this one down. It's certainly an interesting book to continue reading, but it does require quite the commitment to get that payoff.

For the first book in a series, this one sets up things for later books. I'm sure the later books will be more interesting, more engrossing, but this one didn't quite grab me in the way I had anticipated. For some, however, I'm sure this book will be perfect for them. ...more

## Relative Fortunes Amazon

I'm giving it a 3 because it frustrated me so much. I wanted to hear more of the beginnings of the Equal Rights Amendment and all the other social injustices that were brought up. I had no picture in my mind of what the main characters looked like. I will read the next in the series as it ended how I thought it should.

My opinions about Relative Fortunes by Marlowe Benn went back and forth quite a bit. I downloaded the sample and enjoyed that enough to buy the ebook. I liked the book more or less but wouldn't read another one, as this is apparently the first in what will be known as the Julia Kydd series.

Julia Kydd is an heiress living abroad in London. She is about to turn 25 and come into her full inheritance. Her brother Philip, the trustee of the will, has summoned her to New York City. He is contesting t

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Julia Kydd is an heiress living abroad in London. She is about to turn 25 and come into her full inheritance. Her brother Philip, the trustee of the will, has summoned her to New York City. He is contesting the validity of the will. Julia returns to New York after a long absence, not knowing what to expect as she does not know her brother (ten years or so her senior) very well. While in NYC, she runs into an old friend from school, Glennis Rankin. Glennis is also a member of an old, wealthy, respectable family. Julia attends a family party at the Rankin residence, a party that ends in disaster when Glennis learns that her older sister Naomi has been found dead. Glennis automatically assumes that Chester, the older brother, had something to do with her death. He hated Naomi because of her political activities. Julia agrees with Glennis that the family is hushing up her death to avoid a scandal and agrees to ask questions, mostly to calm Glennis. However, Julia is soon convinced that someone is hiding the full truth about Naomi's death and she and Glennis embark on a dangerous investigation that ends up uncovering unsavory family secrets.

This isn't a bad novel, but it's not great either. I think the editor should have sent it back to the author (who, according to her bio, has also worked as an editor so I find that troubling) to cut some of the unnecessary details and tighten the pacing and plot. The supposed main plot is Naomi's mysterious death but it's often mired in Julia's fight with her brother over the will. Before the lawyers announce their decision, she and Philip enter into a wager: he says Naomi died by suicide, she says it's murder. If she proves him wrong, then he will drop his claim on her inheritance. If she loses, then she has to give up her inheritance no matter what the lawyers decide. It's a stupid wager for her to make as her legal claims have never been questioned until now and she has a good chance of winning. But she agrees to it because she's an idiot and because she's goaded into it by Philip. She wants to prove him wrong at the possible expense of giving up her inheritance, her only income.

The amateur sleuthing by Glennis and Julia into Naomi's murder is very slow to start. The drama about Julia's inheritance comes first, but even that is slowed down by lots of descriptions of the fine art of book printing. While I find this subject potentially interesting, it takes up way too much space in the novel. Julia goes on and on and on about it. I eventually began skimming those sections because the extra details don't add anything to the story. The mystery itself isn't too complicated. There's something of a twist at the end, but nothing too earth-shattering. I pretty much had it figured out before Julia had even decided to start investigating—not because I'm a genius but because it wasn't all that difficult.

The characters in the book are a problem for me. I didn't care for any of them. Julia and her brother Philip are the only somewhat intriguing people but when (view spoiler)[it's revealed that Philip is not related to her, I could already see the prickly sibling rivalry turning into a romance of the "we hate each other but also passionately love each other and will show it via a war of wits" kind. I actually like those kinds of romances, but it's so predictable already I see no reason to read the next book to see it actually happen. (hide spoiler)] I also don't think the characters' motivations behind their actions make any sense. Glennis freely admits she wasn't close to her older sister and didn't give a fig about her suffragette activities, yet when Naomi dies Glennis gets hysterical, makes a scene and continues demanding justice for her sister. Why does she care? She didn't care about her when she was alive and being bullied by their older brother, didn't care that she lived her life penniless inside the family mansion and so I find her ranting and raving and sudden concern for her sister to be unconvincing. Glennis comes across as a self-indulgent dipshit with zero intellectual curiosity who has nothing better to do than spend her family money and look for a husband. That's all she seems to care about. The author has forced Glennis to care about her sister's death in order to draw Julia into the scandal/investigation. Julia didn't know Naomi either, so without Glennis's hysteria, she wouldn't have been involved. I don't know why the author didn't simply create a close relationship between Glennis and Naomi—then Glennis's emotional demands for justice would have made more sense. They could have been close (or at least, closer) without Naomi giving up her secrets that are so vital to the plot.

Julia's character is also inconsistent. When she learns how miserably Glennis lived, bullied and denied her share of the family money by the older brother who dislikes her political activism, she wonders why the woman didn't just marry out of convenience to collect her inheritance and escape her brother. This is a head-scratching wtf moment because Julia herself (if she loses her inheritance) may be penniless as well and refuses to contemplate marriage: "As far as Julia could see, marriage meant trading freedom for security, a dubious bargain at best. A wife relinquished everything in exchange for whatever her husband chose or bothered to provide! Nothing but a man's honor and good fortune stood between his wife and hardship" (45). So why the hell can she not understand Naomi's refusal to give in to her bully of a brother or marry in order to get her inheritance? It's possible that Naomi could jump from one bully to another—both having ultimate control of her money.

Philip's character is also troubling. Julia knows him only as her trustee and, most recently, as the brother trying to cheat her out of her rightful inheritance. Eventually, his sometimes kind, sometimes cruel personality is somewhat explained but even the explanation reveals him to be something of a dick: (view spoiler)[His cranky aunt pushed him into contesting the will. He never wanted to do it. But what the fuck, how much of a wuss is he to be pushed around by an 80 year old woman? Even if you overlook that bit of nonsense (which is actually worse but I'll leave that spoiler alone), he entered into the wager with Julia simply for his own amusement. He didn't empathize with her situation to fully understand how much anxiety and stress it produced for her. He told her well, I was never going to take your money, no matter what—I just thought the wager was fun; I like to see you get riled up. What an asshole. He had nothing to lose but she would have been left penniless—so glad he got a giggle out watching her stress out. Why would I root for a romance between this asshole and Julia? (hide spoiler)]

The ending itself is way too convenient. Not just for Julia's inheritance, but the resolution of Naomi's murder. It actually reveals that nearly everyone in the novel is a horrible person. (view spoiler)[Once it's been learned that pretty much the whole damn family helped in their own special way to kill Naomi, Julia and Glennis don't demand the police be called. Why? Because they theorized that Naomi would have gotten more enjoyment out of watching these awful people have to live with each other and wrestle with their conscience. Um, yeah, I personally think this is a huge underestimate of how successfully people can live in denial. Knowing how badly this family treated Naomi when she was alive, I don't see them being all too bothered by their teeny conscious now that they know she was murdered collectively by all of them. Oodles of cash and lots of alcohol will numb any tweaks of remaining guilt. Aside from the awful Rankin family (the Rankin family is well-named) not being penalized for their actions, Glennis profits from Naomi's death. She's using her knowledge as blackmail against her older brother; if he tightens the purse strings on her, she goes to the press. Julia even says to, "Now that Chester needs to keep you quiet, he'll make sure you have plenty of funds to live on." (300). WTF! Even Alice, Naomi's friend, makes out because the Union/Women's Rights Fund will get money and she personally gets Naomi's share of her inheritance—as long as she stays quiet. Isn't it lovely how all these people profit from staying quiet about Naomi's agonizing death? Because how she died was particularly horrendous and several people should be locked up for it. But, hey, everything works out great in the end. Too bad about Naomi. She was kind of a bitch anyway. (hide spoiler)]

This isn't a bad novel. Despite its pacing problems and too many useless details, it held my attention. However, all the characters—with no exceptions that I could see—were various degrees of awfulness. The final revealing scene in which all the suspects are brought together so that Julia can do her sleuthing magic is head-banging-on-desk exasperating. I mean, I can believe these people are this awful, but is Julia really this stupid? I just didn't care for any of them. Plus the very unnecessary drama at the end about the will and the inheritance—sweet Jesus. Just stop. I can't really recommend this book because there's much better brain candy reading out there, but you could do worse (that awful Gretchen book, my next review to write, is much, much worse). ...more

## Relative Fortunes Review

What a great debut novel ! An accomplished letterpress printer, Marlowe Benn holds a master's degree in the book arts from the University of Alabama and a doctorate in the history of books from the University of California, Berkeley.

Her protagonist, Julia Kydd's desire is launch her own private press in New York City. But first, she has to secure funds from her impending inheritance. The only things in the way are a feud with her older half brother, an insistent suitor imploring her to sail bac

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Her protagonist, Julia Kydd's desire is launch her own private press in New York City. But first, she has to secure funds from her impending inheritance. The only things in the way are a feud with her older half brother, an insistent suitor imploring her to sail back to Europe & marry him and a murder mystery to solve!

The setting is the 1920's, after the 19th ammendment granted women the right to vote in the US, but most laws still treated women as their husband's possession, even allowing another male relative to control her personal finances. Julia strikes up a wager with her brother to get her fair share of the inheritance, if she can solve the mysterious death of a wealthy friend's sister, who was an active suffergist.

The story is taken partly from actual events and people in the news at the time and feels accurate. Julia and her half brother Phillip are both sharp witted and their dialogue is entertaining, as well as the many other well thought out characters.

I am so glad to see that this engaging story may be a series - looking forward to the next installment!  
...more

This review has been hidden because it contains spoilers. To view it, [click here](#).

This was a slow, slow, slow burn of a novel. I liked Julia, she was a fun, independent, modern 1920's woman. Yet, for being 'modern' she was woefully ignorant to the women's rights movement that was happening all around her, in England and America. This was slightly unbelievable to me. If your character is championing her own free will, her disinterest in getting married, and her enthusiasm for starting her own company, you would think she would know how the political climate was changing becaus

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It honestly felt like it took FOREVER to get to the juice of this novel. The description says something like

'Julia places a bet with her brother that she can prove her friend's sister, a Suffragette, death was murder in order to win back her inheritance.' Cool. Except, you are 36% of the way through the novel before the bet is even mentioned. Then, there is a moment when you're supposed to think it won't even be necessary. Then, Julia needs to win the bet to win her inheritance to live this modern life she wants to lead and becomes obsessed with solving the murder/death/suicide. I get that we need a reason for Julia to become interested and invested in solving this crime, but it feels like it's for very selfish reasons. Her 'friend' believes her sister was murdered because her family is awful, so she is eagerly helping Julia. But Julia never tells her friends she's ONLY helping her because she wants to win her inheritance back. Then, she tells her brother (with whom the bet is placed) and his best friend all the private details of this family and the murder/death/suicide after explicitly telling the family she wouldn't tell anyone what she's discovered. But she has to in order to win the bet.

The mystery was okay. I thought it was fairly easy to figure out who the ultimate culprit was, but there were a lot of characters that played a very large and crucial role to the mystery, and some of those twists and turns were interesting. The one thing I hated was how cliché the reveal was. They were all sat in a room after being tricked there and Julia started 'interrogating' people and then they just all spilled their guts. C'mon. It's such a boring murder mystery trope that was tiring to find in this novel. There are more interesting ways to reveal the player's parts in the game than them simply standing around talking about it. There's even the part where Julia guesses it wrong and has to think quickly on her feet to figure out who it is right in that moment. UGH.

In the end, I'd probably read the second novel in this new Julia Kydd series because I genuinely liked Julia's character. However, I hope next go around we get to the meat and potatoes of the story a little quicker and the big reveal is a little more entertaining to read than just pages of dialogue. ...more

## Relative Fortunes Benn

Set in Manhattan in a time of suffragists and prohibition, bootleggers and soap-box orators, Julia Kydd, a bibliophile and modern woman, finds herself in a situation that requires her to solve the mystery concerning the suspicious death of her friend's sister. As she delves into Naomi's life and death, she sees parallels between her situation in which her estranged brother controls her fortune, and Naomi's, whose brother forced her into dire circumstances by controlling her inheritance.

I loved Set in Manhattan in a time of suffragists and prohibition, bootleggers and soap-box orators, Julia Kydd, a bibliophile and modern woman, finds herself in a situation that requires her to solve the mystery concerning the suspicious death of her friend's sister. As she delves into Naomi's life and death, she sees parallels between her situation in which her estranged brother controls her fortune, and Naomi's, whose brother forced her into dire circumstances by controlling her inheritance.

I loved that the author never preached about the issues and lets the readers draw their own conclusions while providing a clear view of the issues of the time. Women have been tortured and suffered in order to get the vote. A new type of "modern woman" is envisioned, a woman with independence and free will in all areas of her life. This type of woman is still held back by the norms of the day - a brother or father or uncle is required for them to set up a bank account, and it's the norm for the males to control the purse strings. Sexual independence is almost unfathomable. It's still the case that a woman must marry to secure her fortune.

The reader is dropped into this tumultuous time of great social change. There is a lot of food for thought. At the end, I realized that although so much was done to secure our right to vote, women's rights still have a long way to go to be considered equal. We still do not have equal rights enshrined in the Constitution, we still earn less than men for the same work. In the end, this novel reinforced my own commitment to securing those rights for all.

Beyond that, the novel moves along at a good pace with a good puzzle to be solved. I loved it and didn't want it to end. ...more

In Relative Fortunes, we meet Julia Kydd, a woman who is just shy of 25 but wise beyond her years. Julia encounters an acquaintance named Glennis who discovers her progressive sister has died..supposedly under some rather mysterious circumstances. Despite Julia's hesitation, she soon becomes engrossed in a very complicated plot. The book was very historically accurate; it was centered around the early 1920's when women had yet to vote. I felt as though the book was a bit plodding at times but ov In Relative Fortunes, we meet Julia Kydd, a woman who is just shy of 25 but wise beyond her years. Julia encounters an acquaintance named Glennis who discovers her progressive sister has died..supposedly under some rather mysterious circumstances. Despite Julia's hesitation, she soon becomes engrossed in a very complicated plot. The book was very historically accurate; it was centered around the early 1920's when women had yet to vote. I felt as though the book was a bit plodding at times but overall, it

Relative Fortunes

was definitely well written. The book seems to be gearing up for a series, and I think mystery fans will enjoy this character. ...more