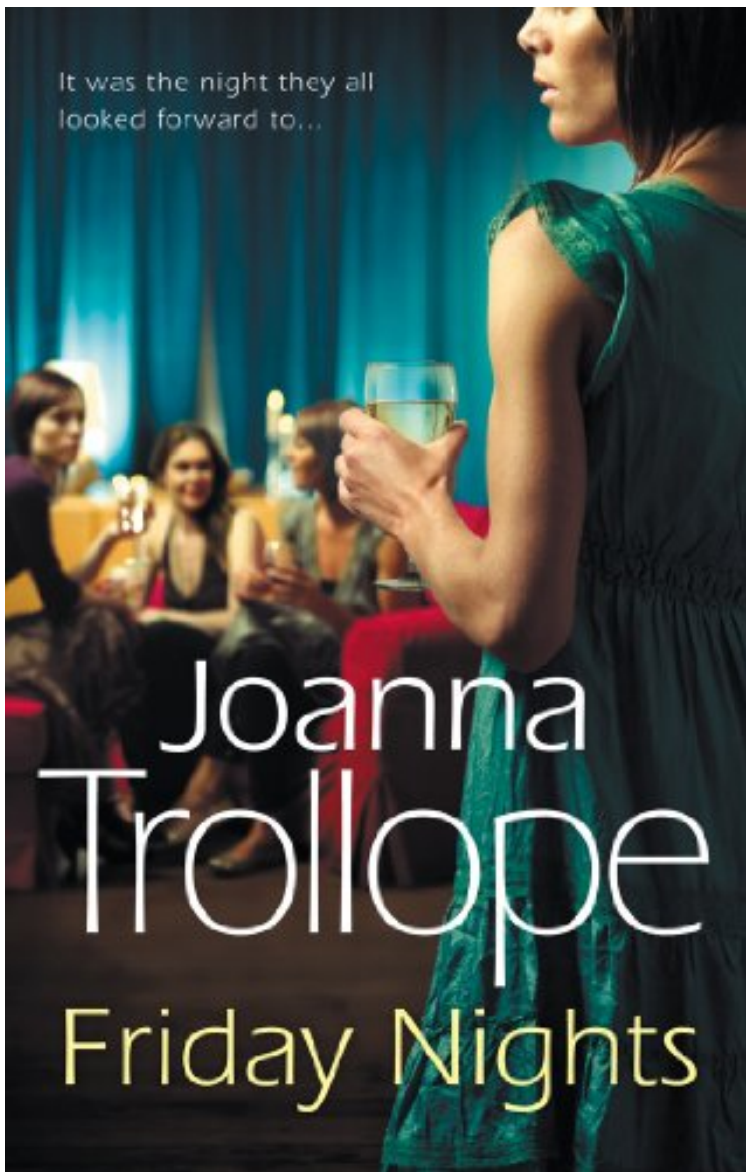


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# Friday Nights



*Par Joanna Trollope*  
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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurFriday nights, the best night of the week, the night they all looked forward to more than they cared to admit - talking, drinking, laughing and crying together.They were six female friends, different in age and circumstances, but with one common need: the warmth and support of their Friday nights. It was a time to share secrets and fears, triumphs and tragedies and, above all, to feel safe in the company of women friends. But things never stay the same forever, especially when a man is introduced into the mix...ExtraitChapter OneTobys mother said that when Eleanor came hed have to go down to the ground floor and help her with the lift.Toby said sulkily, because he was angry with her for something he couldnt quite put his finger on She doesnt need help.His mother was standing in front of the mirror she had propped

on top of a chest in her bedroom. She was arranging her hair in a complicated kind of knot, and she had a hairclip between her teeth. Through it she said without looking at him, Toby, this isnt about need. Its about manners. Toby kicked one foot clumsily against the other. Then he went out of his mothers bedroom and banged the door shut and leaned against it. This door, his mothers bedroom door, was one of only a few doors in the flat. There was just that door, and the front door and the door on the bathroom. The rest was just space. Upwards, outwards, sideways. Just space. I live in a loft, Toby said to someone when hed started his new school. Several boys had stared at him, elaborately uninterested. Whatever, theyd said. I do, Toby had said to himself silently all that day. I do. And then, My father bought it. He had. Tobys father had bought the loft two years ago, and had given it to Paula and Toby. Conscience money, Paulas friend, Lindsay, said. Paula hadnt replied. She put the photograph of Tobys father on the black rattan chest between two of the huge high windows. It was a photograph taken on a boat, and Tobys father was sitting on the roof of the cabin, and he was smiling. His feet were bare. The photograph did not, however, include Tobys fathers wife and children who were, Toby knew, the reason why he and his mother lived in the loft on their own. At least, Paula said sometimes to Toby, when she got very loving and then very angry, at least you know who your father is. What she meant by that Toby hadnt the faintest idea. And he certainly wasnt asking. Occasionally, if he was alone in the flat while Paula went to buy a newspaper, or to collect the dry-cleaning, he would pick up his fathers photograph and lay it face down on the black rattan chest. You just stay there, Gavin, hed say. You just do as youre told. He sighed now. He wanted to be back in his mothers bedroom, but he had made that impossible. He sighed again. The loft looked enormous in the gathering gloom, as if the walls and ceiling were quietly dissolving into the darkness, just melting away so that the night could pour in. Paula had lit her lamps, the lamps that threw light up into the dusky spaces, the lamps that let light fall on to her orange cushions and the rug striped like a zebra. She had put glasses on the low table between the sofas because people were coming, glasses and bowls of varnished Japanese rice crackers. People were coming. Eleanor was coming. Toby pushed himself away from the door and stood up. He liked Eleanor. She walked unevenly with the help of a stick, and her hair was a white fuzz, and she talked to him as if he might have an opinion worth hearing. He also liked how his mother was with Eleanor, how she was calm and able to think about things that werent automatically going to upset her. Eleanor once said to Toby that the older she got the more she preferred the universal to the individual and personal. Toby had wondered if she was talking about galaxies. He went slowly across the living space, avoiding, as usual, actually treading on the zebra rug. On the far side, a metal staircase resembling a ladder with perforated treads rose up in the dimness to the platform where Tobys bed was, and his computer, and the toy theatre for which he collected puppets. He climbed the ladder slowly, a deliberate tread at a time, until he was out of the glow of the lamps and into the privacy of darkness. Then he sat down on the top step of the ladder and leaned forward, until his chin was on his knees, and he sighed again. Friday nights. It was Eleanor who had started these Friday nights some years back, after observing from the bay window of her front room two young women endlessly trailing up and down that low-built street in Fulham. One had a baby and one had a small boy. They were never together, and they were never, as far as Eleanor could see, accompanied by a man. Eleanor had seldom been accompanied by a man herself, but then she had never had a baby or a small boy either. Watching the young women, she had seen what she had so often seen during her long working years as an administrator in the National Health Service manifestations of those brave coping mechanisms devised by people concerned not to be pitied for being alone. Being alone, Eleanor knew, was not in itself undesirable: it was the circumstances of aloneness that made it either a friend or a foe. And being alone with a small dependent child, and thus in a situation considered by the conventional world to be ideally a matter of partnership, was not a situation for the faint-hearted. Sometimes, Eleanor thought, watching them over the top of her reading glasses, the set of those young womens shoulders indicated that their hearts, for all the outward show of managing, were very faint indeed. One day, seeing them both approaching from opposite ends of the street, she had limped out on her stick into a sharp spring wind and offered to babysit. Both had been extremely startled, and both had demurred. The girl with the baby said she couldnt leave him. The young woman with the small boy said she had no money. Eleanor said she didnt want money. The young woman said, somewhat desperately, that she couldnt handle obligation. Eleanor leaned on her stick. She took off her reading glasses and let them hang round her neck on the scarlet cord she had attached in the hope of not losing them. Then do me a favour, Eleanor said. The girls waited, sniffing the wind. Let me be the obliged one, Eleanor said. Come and see me. Bring the children. Come on Friday night. They came, mute with awkwardness. The baby slept in his pram. Toby, aged almost three, squirmed on the sofa under a crocheted

blanket and threaded his fingers endlessly in and out of the holes. Eleanor opened a bottle of Chianti, and poured out large glasses. She learned, with patience and difficulty, that Paula, Tobys mother, could not, for some reason, live with Tobys father. She learned that Lindsay, mother of baby Noah, had been widowed when her husband, a construction worker, had been crushed by a cement slab. It was a year and three months ago, Lindsay said. She looked across at the pram. I didnt even know I was pregnant. Nobody should be required to bear that, Eleanor said. Lindsay said quickly, still looking at the pram, Im not bearing it. They did not, either of them, seem to know how to arrange themselves, nor when to leave. At ten oclock, Eleanor got stiffly to her feet and said that she was afraid it was her bedtime. They went out together, with the pram and the pushchair, hardly looking at her as they said goodbye. Eleanor, beginning on the nightly ritual of closing and locking and bolting, thought how often it was the case that a small good intention was snatched out of ones hands by human conduct and inflated into something much larger and much less manageable. She regarded herself dispassionately in the looking glass let into the art deco coat stand in her hall. Persevere, Eleanor told herself. Keep going. Three Fridays later, they came again. Eleanor had seen Lindsay in the newsagents on the corner of the street, and Paula comforting Toby who had fallen out of his pushchair while struggling against being strapped in. They had not accepted with enthusiasm, but they had not refused either. Eleanor made pt, and bought French bread, and chocolate, and juice for Toby in a small waxed carton with a straw. Lindsay brought six mauve chrysanthemums in a cone of cellophane printed to resemble lace. Toby climbed out of the crocheted blanket and drank his juice on his mothers knee and stared at Eleanors hair. They had stayed until ten-fifteen, and Paula had been able to look straight at Eleanor for a few seconds and say uncertainly, That was kind of you. Eleanor took her glasses off. If kindness isnt just a form of self-interest, thank you. A few weeks later, Lindsay asked if she could bring her younger sister. She looked at a point just past Eleanors left ear while she asked this, and the request became entangled in a long and confused explanation of how Lindsays parents inability to parent in any sustained way had left Lindsay as the only person in her sisters life who could provide any mothering. It was an anxious task, Lindsay implied, since her sister seemed to have inherited her parents taste for a wild and irresponsible life. She was working in a club in Ladbroke Grove as a warm-up disc jockey when she could get the work, and Lindsay was worried about the ways in which she was spending her free time. What is her name? Eleanor said. Julia, Lindsay said. Jules, Jules said, when she came. She had red-and-yellow striped hair and was wearing a flowered tea dress over thick black leggings and heavy laced-up boots. She had on purple lipstick. Toby stopped staring at Eleanors hair and stared at Jules instead. She stared back, her bitten-nailed hands wrapped round a... From Publishers Weekly When a British retiree invites two young single mothers from the neighborhood to her flat, a Friday night tradition begins. As their klatch widens, Trollope's memorable characters do more than just represent varying female predicaments: they develop as rich individuals who come to triumph over their pasts. Paula has a wary relationship with the married man who fathered their son, Toby: she must move on, yet stay in touch for Toby's sake. Struggling Lindsay was widowed before she gave birth, while her sister, Jules, is a careless aspiring nightclub DJ with a wild streak. Independent, put-together Blaise contrasts starkly with her often bedraggled business partner, Karen, who barely manages her role as mother and breadwinner. And then there is Eleanor, the catalyst for the gatherings, a no-nonsense older woman who, though full of wisdom and spunk, keeps her thoughts to herself unless asked. When a new man enters Paula's life, Trollope (Second Honeymoon) masterfully shows how work and romance can tip the scales in female friendships. The result is a careful and compelling examination of one man's insidious effect on a group of female friends, as memorable as it is readable. (May) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.