



The Prince and Betty

P.G. Wodehouse

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The story tells of how unscrupulous millionaire Benjamin Scobell decides to build a casino on the small Mediterranean island of Mervo, dragging in the unwitting heir to the throne to help. Little does he know that his stepdaughter Betty has a history with the young man John Maude, and his schemes lead to a rift between the newly-reunited pair.

The Prince and Betty Details

Date : Published June 1st 2014 by SMK Books (first published May 1st 1912)

ISBN :

Author : P.G. Wodehouse

Format : Kindle Edition 208 pages

Genre : Humor, Fiction, Classics, Romance

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From Reader Review The Prince and Betty for online ebook

Celebrilomiel says

Wodehouse knows what he's doing. This was lovely. Seemingly insignificant, casually mentioned elements turned into tightly woven plot points, and the dialogue had me impressed even when it didn't have me in stitches—and I giggled a great deal.

Victoria Minks says

This book is different from other of Wodehouse's but I still enjoyed it! It was interesting and different, and while the humor isn't as prevalent as other books by Wodehouse it's still there-- much more subtle but still so so funny. The analogies are great, and the dialogue is so witty and amusing.

The portrayal of Americans and the American spirit was rather refreshing to me and I really liked it...wouldn't mind if the stereotype of average Americans was back to that nowadays, lol.

The characters were great. John Maude and his attempt to try to do things right, Betty and her independent nature, Smith (Hilarious!) and the many others... interesting and unique.

*There are some euphemisms that I didn't like.

Betsy says

A floofy little palate-cleanser, and not much more.

Beth E says

Amusing light read, but far from Wodehouse's greatest.

Marty Reeder says

This is one of those reading experiences that can never be duplicated. It's also just the kind of thing that I thrive on. (If you wanted an actual review on the actual story--silly you--you'll have to skip to the final paragraph. My story about reading this story is going to take a while!)

Looking to appease my regular Wodehouse fix, I decided to try something a bit different from those I'd already read. I did this as someone who completely respected, if not adored, Wodehouse's response to a critic who accused him of using all his old characters under different name. In the preface to his next novel, he responded by saying, "I have outgeneraled the man this time by putting in all the old Wodehouse characters under the same names." The sameness of his stories is definitely a big part of the draw--I wanted to enter familiar, silly, pure Wodehouse territory.

At the same time, Project Gutenberg has a surprisingly small selection of Wodehouse's titles available

(considering he wrote nearly one-hundred). So, as I browsed the books available, one of them mentioned a prince. Huh. Royalty. That's new for Wodehouse. I downloaded it and began reading.

I was pretty engaged right from the start. Suddenly, a combination of school and home business, and the fact that the story setting switched from an island in the Mediterranean to turn of the century New York City, brought my progress to an immediate halt. While I've yet to find a Wodehouse novel I haven't liked, I think I have the least patience for his New York setting stories.

Finally, once things settled down externally, I decided that I really needed to finish that Wodehouse novel. I jumped into it with new resolve. The task was not easy. Not only did the story stubbornly stay in New York, but a lot of the plot began to feel really familiar. Again, I like the familiarity of Wodehouse's works, but this bordered on self-plagiarism--even using some same side characters from another story I recalled, with those characters doing the same things. I plugged forward, determined to give Wodehouse the benefit of the doubt.

Suddenly, I found myself in a scene that I remembered as an exact replica of another one I had read, down to the dialogue and minute details of description. I had enough. Wodehouse, by jove, had gone too far! I searched my mind to remember the other story ole Plum was lifting passages out of and recalled Psmith, Journalist. I almost laughed, the main character, Psmith, directly correlated with a minor character who had suddenly become a main character in *The Prince and Betty*. Wodehouse named him "Smith."

I appealed to the Internet to see if it knew of this outrageous bait and switch. Well, don't let anyone tell you the Internet is completely useless, because not only did it verify my doubts, but it also dispelled my angst against my temporarily-fallen-from-his-pedestal comrade in literature, Wodehouse. The version of *The Prince and Betty* that I was reading was a compilation of two British stories Wodehouse had written (Psmith, Journalist being the other one) for an American audience. Okay, so he was stealing from himself to create a new story for a new audience: Wodehouse was now acquitted of all charges of deliberate fraud.

That did not change the fact that I had invested in a new story that I was truly interested in. Not only that, but my sources told me that the original story did not take place in New York, but in Britain ... back to Wodehouse territory that I reveled in. I needed to find the original *The Prince and Betty* story. The game was afoot.

Gutenberg and Archive.org both came up empty (at first). They simply held the Frankensteined American version. Then I found out that the original had come out serialized in a couple magazines. The first magazine I tried to hunt down looked like I would only get a hold of through an inter-library loan--something I was not averse to accomplishing (it would not have been the first time I had used it to find a Wodehouse gem written while he was in a German prison camp for WWII). Luckily, the second magazine had been meticulously stored back at Archive.org. While I had to do some digging through issues (*The Strand Magazine*, 1912, Jan.-Jun. file, in case you wondered), eventually I got a PDF of what I wanted, and sliced out the unneeded portions (though I kept the fascinating article succeeding the story in the magazine, titled, "Which Is the Finest Race?"--thank you, 1912). Wha-la! Previous Wodehouse story restored as well as my faith in the great British successor to the Bard.

As for *The Prince and Betty* itself (the non-American version), it clips along at a good pace, proving to be a short, amusing read. The romance is engaging--it takes itself a bit more seriously than Wodehouse's later novels, but it never becomes tedious or too unrealistic. My favorite parts were the politics of the silly island nation of Mervo, and then the return to England with its standard, upper class buffoonery, contrasted to satisfying effect by some American down-to-earth-ness. Was it worth all the trouble? That's like asking someone if the action scenes in *Indiana Jones* were worth watching to see him get the Ark of the Covenant at the end (yes, I just compared finding Wodehouse's original story to *Indiana Jones*'s finest action scenes--I'm a book nerd, okay?). Read it and enjoy it ... if you can find it!

Andrew Fish says

It's not uncommon for an author to have an attachment to an idea, particularly when that idea comes early in their career and has yet to be displaced by the big breakthrough. This, I believe, is how Wodehouse felt with *The Prince and Betty*, as he recycled the plot several times in books and serials throughout his career. The Everyman edition is the British novel, published in 1921, and a rewrite of an earlier serial.

The plot goes something like this: Ben Scobell decides to build a casino on the small island republic of Mervo. Unfortunately for him, the venture doesn't exactly fly, so he persuades the islanders that reinstating their monarchy would be a good way to lure in the punters. The current heir, John, is living a typical Wodehousian life of struggling to be a social dynamo on a budget in London and, not being told that the casino is the reason for his return, accepts the post of monarch as a bit of a windfall. Scobell, however, decides that the butter would be put on the spinach by marrying the prince to his own daughter, Betty, little knowing either that she and John already know each other or that his daughter will buck at the prospect of marrying for the sake of a gambling venture. John, not understanding why she therefore flees his presence, leaves his kingdom to win her back.

Whilst the plot is a classic Wodehouse construction, this was written before the author found his comic voice. It is, therefore, more romance than comedy and, in fact, was an early publication by Mills and Boon, the defacto home of boy meets girl. Wodehouse being a little stiffer in the upper lip than your average romantic novelist this doesn't mean the book is slushy, but it lacks a certain vim compared to his first major breakthrough, *Love Among the Chickens*, which was also rewritten for publication in the same year.

Madhulika Liddle says

PG Wodehouse isn't an author one generally associates with being published by Mills and Boon, but one version of this 1912 novel of his actually *did* get released by those romance novel specialists. Not *this* particular version, though, which—while it *does* have a romantic angle to it—isn't primarily a love story.

It starts off, though, in love story mode. Betty Silver receives a peremptory summons from her millionaire stepfather Benjamin Scobell, telling her to come to Mervo, a small independent island republic in the Mediterranean. When Betty arrives, it's to find that her uncle—deciding that Mervo would gain substantially from a casino (à la Monte Carlo), has entered into a contract with the local government and built a casino, only to find that the lack of a colourful and glittery royalty (also à la Monte Carlo) means that none of the rich and famous come to Mervo and its casino. Scobell, therefore, has found a solution: he's unearthed the heir to the previously defunct throne of Mervo, a young half-American named John Maude, and having installed him as ruler, has now decided a royal wedding will be very lucrative news. And Betty is the bride he has in mind for John Maude.

Only, Betty had already met—and fallen in love with—John, and now under the impression that he's merely her stepfather's mercenary stooge, she runs away from Mervo, broken-hearted and disillusioned... to wash up in New York, where she ends up as stenographer at a newspaper called *Peaceful Moments*. Here, things begin to happen swiftly: the editor, having being prescribed rest, has gone off to an undisclosed destination. In his absence, stand-in editor Smith (bespectacled, tall, thin, with communist leanings and a dry wit—Wodehouse aficionados like me will recognise this figure instantly) has decided *Peaceful Moments* needs a makeover. So the newspaper goes overnight from being a family rag to one that promotes a prize

fighter and takes up cudgels on behalf of a battered lot of tenements—with lively consequences.

I admit I hadn't know, before I began reading , that it featured Psmith, who is my favourite Wodehouse character. Now that I've finished the book, I'm glad I hadn't known, because it would've raised my expectations of the story. As it is, this is a not-very satisfying Psmith story (that award would go to *Leave it to Psmith*, Wodehouse's best book, in my opinion). The story, actually, is an obviously patched together version of John and Betty's love story (which is almost devoid of *any* humour) with the novel *Psmith, Journalist*, which—while it does have some humour—isn't up to Wodehouse's usual standard. On the whole, tolerable, but not vintage Wodehouse.

I'd have given this three stars if the writer was anyone but Wodehouse; when it comes to Wodehouse, my expectations are so high that this I'd rate as a paltry two.

Jenny Q says

I selected *The Prince and Betty* for the collection after coming across it completely by accident. I'd always been aware of P.G. Wodehouse, but I'd never read him before, and I never suspected he wrote romantic fiction. I was utterly charmed and smitten with *The Prince and Betty* by page four, and by the end I was impressed by his ability to express profound ideas in such simple, beautiful language. Wodehouse's masterful prose, sparkling dialogue, and trademark sense of humor blend together in a story that is as funny as it is poignant; a story that's both an entertaining romp and an exposition of human nature. The setting of New York in 1912 jumps off the pages as Wodehouse explores the contradictory nature of a city exploding with opportunity, progress, and entertainment, while hiding its prejudices and inequalities in rundown tenements and back alleys. And only P.G. Wodehouse could throw together princes and newspapers and boxers and gangsters, wrap them all up in an honest and understated love story, and tie it all together in a surprising and supremely satisfying conclusion.

Anna says

Not my favorite Wodehouse story; I like it more for the use of language than the actual plot and characters (unusual).

It seemed to lose its focus, as if Wodehouse could not decide whether to do one of his comic romances or do a "city" story. I really liked the first part which was a lot of fun. John discovers he is a long-lost prince who has been raised in America, graduated from Harvard, but is discontented with his current life. Betty has been summoned to a Mediterranean island by her millionaire step-father to help him with his current project, which he does not explain to her. Stuff happens.

The story then veers away from Mervo and heads to New York. Smith is introduced; he is familiar in appearance and speech, but American. This character then hijacks the story and we start meeting the fun East Side gangs of New York. I ended up losing interest in all these whimsical characters.

It was ok, but not something I would search out to read again.

John White says

I have been a fan of everything Wodehouse since grade school. This is an early offering by the author, but just as crazily funny, though the references are quaintly dated. I read this aloud to my wife when we were traveling, and we both cracked up as we drove.

Kelly says

It's extremely difficult to find this book in the original UK version, as it appeared in *The Strand*. Even after carefully scrutinizing the e-book editions, I discovered halfway through the edition I was reading that I had made a mistake when Psmith appeared. (For the US edition, Wodehouse mashed up the text with that of *Psmith, Journalist*.) After more digging, I finally turned up the real deal, which is important to me, as I want to read all of Wodehouse in order.

The shorter, non-Psmith version is not as bad as many make it out to be, and I suspect that a lot of the poor reviews come from those who have read the mash-up. Sure, it's a frothy romance (it ended up published by Mills & Boon, the UK equivalent of Harlequin), but it's got plenty of Wodehouse touches and dry humor. Not nearly as accomplished as his later work, though I don't think much from this early in his career matches up with his best.

Umut Rados says

This was my first Wodehouse book, and what a charming start! I loved his writing style. It was so cozy. It was a part of old times. I loved the characters. I absolutely adored it. I will keep reading from him.

Douglas Wilson says

Continuing to work my way through the entire Wodehouse corpus, and continuing to enjoy it.

Megan Davis says

Long lost royalty, a fictitious Mediterranean island, estranged lovers, New York City gangs, newspaper editors, and cats--what more could you want? The celebrated Wodehouse tells a story like no one else can, with dry humor and cunning wit.

David Vogler says

An early Wodehouse. More a romance than a comedy. Quick, fun read. ALL Wodehouse is worth reading.
