



The Thoughts and Happenings of Wilfred Price, Purveyor of Superior Funerals

Wendy Jones

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Under the heady influence of a springtime picnic and vague notions of obligation, young undertaker Wilfred Price blurts out a marriage proposal to a woman he barely knows. Much to his consternation, she says yes. As Wilfred attempts to extricate himself from the situation, his betrothed's overbearing father presents further complications. And when Wilfred meets another woman he does wish to marry, a comedy of manners ensues. Set in rural Wales during the 1920s, Wendy Jones's charming first novel is a deceptive, subtly humorous entrance to the mores and social conventions of a world gone by.

The Thoughts and Happenings of Wilfred Price, Purveyor of Superior Funerals Details

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Author : Wendy Jones

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From Reader Review The Thoughts and Happenings of Wilfred Price, Purveyor of Superior Funerals for online ebook

Diane Barnes says

Sometimes I don't know what I want to read or what I'm in the mood for. So I peruse my physical bookshelves of those novels that are waiting. It feels a little like being in a private, mini bookstore, but I don't have to get in the car and I don't have to pay. I just wait for one to speak to me.

This is from Europa Press, which can always be counted on to have a beautiful cover with excellent writing inside. And you have to admit that the title is unusual, to say the least. The title and the cover are probably why I bought it in the first place.

Well, it turns out to have been just what I needed! Wilfred is the local undertaker in a small village in Wales, circa 1924. He is young and inexperienced around women, and on the first page he asks Grace to marry him, influenced by her yellow dress. On the second page he knows he's made a horrible mistake, but doesn't get around to rescinding his proposal for a few days, out of fear. Of course, by this time everyone knows about it, parents get involved, and things get complicated, to say the least. In the meantime, Wilfred falls in love with someone else. Things happen. Bear in mind this is a small village.

The beauty of this book for me was the writing. A gentle story told with humor and pathos, about a simpler time (was it really?) and simpler people (were they really?). There are some very funny things and some very sad things, and some really wonderful people. I loved spending time with them.

I may go back to that same mini bookstore. There are some really good books on those shelves.

Connie says

It's a beautiful spring day, and Grace looks attractive in a new yellow dress. Before he really realizes what he is doing, Wilfred Price is proposing marriage. Minutes later, he knows that he really doesn't want to spend the rest of his life with a woman he hardly knows. But how is he going to get out of this predicament? Wilfred hasn't been around women much, and has such a difficult time talking to them that he buys a dictionary in the hope that new words might help. Wilfred also figures out that things that are unsaid are very important.

Wilfred is a young undertaker who describes himself as "a purveyor of superior funerals". It's 1924 in a small town in Pembrokeshire, Wales where everyone knows their neighbors' business. He finds love when he meets Flora whose father had recently passed away. Wilfred wants to live his life fully, but does not want to hurt anyone.

This is a charming story with characters I liked, and occasional moments of humor. It's about a young man emotionally maturing as he faces complex choices. Very enjoyable!

Camie says

" How can we fully live our lives without hurting other people?" Wendy Jones

Yes indeed, there are so many things that shape our character, whether by our own actions or by that of another.

This was a delightful book about the handsome undertaker in a 1920's small Welch town named Wilfred Price, who gets himself into a bit of a pickle when he encounters Grace Reese, the local doctor's daughter, at the annual spring picnic. Though he doesn't know her well, he's overcome by the atmosphere of the day and her shapely beauty in a yellow dress, and haplessly proposes marriage on the spur of the moment, little knowing the labyrinth of events he has put into play.

The inside cover of my 2014 Europa Edition of this book states that the miniseries options have been purchased by the producers of Downtown Abbey.

No surprise to me, thoroughly enjoyed this. 5 stars

Kerri Turner says

I had a real love/hate experience reading this book. This is probably more a 2.5 rating because when I finished the book, I was more on the side of hating it.

To put things bluntly, the writing is pretty awful. Almost everything is a cliche (I actually laughed out loud at a few, even though they weren't supposed to be funny), and the writing is riddled with constant similes and metaphors. If that weren't enough, everything is repeated at least two or three times - sentences, paragraphs, key plot points are all repeated over and over again, simply using different words each time. Towards the end, I just skimmed over most of the paragraphs until I hit one that actually said something new, and the plot actually flowed better that way.

The book also had constant unnecessary explanations (eg. "Yes," her mother said, not disagreeing. <- you know, in case you didn't know that 'yes' means to agree, the 'not disagreeing' part is added). This might sound pretty petty, but I felt like almost every sentence was like this.

The characters lacked much motivation for their actions, and the most interesting one was given a very unsatisfactory, open-ended resolution (so, no resolution at all really).

So why did I give it three (or 2.5) stars? Because, for some reason, even though it was driving me crazy with its awfulness every time I picked it up, I still wanted to keep reading on. I can't even explain why - my best guess is that it is like a soap opera, so bad on every technical level but somehow still manages to get you hooked. The funny thing is, if you removed all the repetition and explanations, and cut the metaphors and similes down to a reasonable level, you would probably only be left with a short story. But it might actually be a good one.

Anne says

The title of Wendy Jones' first novel sums up just what the story is about, and although it's a bit of a

mouthful, it really is the perfect title for this wonderful story. Looking at the cover, which depicts the back view of a shapely young woman in a beautiful dress, the reader can suppose that many of Wilfred's thoughts centre around his relationships.

The story is set in the small Welsh town of Narbeth in the early 1920s. Wendy Jones has brought this insular, sometimes petty, often snobbish town and its inhabitants to life so well. Wilfred has lived in Narbeth for all of his life, now in his late 20s, he's been the town undertaker since finishing his apprenticeship under Mr Ogmore Auden some years before. Grace Reece has also lived in Narbeth since she was a child. Grace is the only daughter of the local Doctor and his rather haughty wife, her brother Madoc is in the Army, and the apple of his mother's eye. Wilfred and Grace are enjoying a picnic together, when out of the blue he proposes to her. Grace is delighted, Wilfred is horrified by what he has done, and realises that his mind was turned by Grace's beautiful yellow dress, that showed just a little more cleavage than is acceptable. Wilfred does not love Grace.

The characters appear quite simple and straightforward at first. Wilfred has got himself into a situation that he needs to get out of but he has no experience with women as his Mother died four days after he was born and he has no sisters. He's a kind soul at heart and also knows that if he just dumps Grace, his business will suffer. Grace is a very unhappy girl, delighted to be 'engaged', and ignoring the fact that Wilfred seems to be avoiding her.

There were times when I wanted to shake Wilfred, and at first I really disliked Grace. As the story moves on though, the reader learns that Grace is not what she at first seems, and is hiding heartbreak and horror from everyone. Wendy Jones handles these hidden secrets very delicately, allowing the reader to gradually realise that all is not what is seems in sleepy Narbeth.

The sense of place, the characters and the community spirit shine through in this novel. There is a sprinkling of humour, lots of secrets, passion and wonderful dialogue. I enjoyed Wilfred Price far more than I expected to and will look forward to more from this author.

Raven says

Don't be misled by the charming cover because you will find a much darker tale at the heart of this seemingly unassuming book set in rural Wales in the 1920's. Our hero Wilfred finds himself embroiled in a complicated love triangle (despite the advice of his funereal mentor Mr Auden forbidding 'fancy business with the ladies') with a quite shocking secret at its heart that hits you square on and makes you reassess the predicament that he and Grace (his intended) find themselves in, further complicated by Wilfred's illicit love for the emotionally battered Flora. Alongside this, the relationship between Wilfred and his 'Da' is beautifully drawn adding a sense of stability to Wilfred's complicated life and the writing throughout regarding human relationships seems so understated but leads the reader along effortlessly. The story is punctuated by moments of mordant wit (mainly in the good advice dispensed by the aforementioned Mr Auden) and then by turn injections of extreme pathos which really makes you care about the characters and ponder on their fate after the last page is turned. An accomplished debut that I can wholeheartedly recommend for those who like books that make you think...

Joanne says

I was surprised and not a little disappointed by this book. It sounded charming and quirky, and I was imagining another gem like 'The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society'. Instead it was slow, far too slow and I'm afraid I found the spineless Wilfred rather annoying, instead of charming. I got halfway through, my eyes continued to be drawn to that lovely exciting pile of books waiting patiently and I skim-read to the end. I love the sort of books that have a gentle story and are beautifully described, but I'm afraid there was something missing from this (for me) and I was disappointed as I expected so much more from the story (and that beautiful cover).

Neil says

This is one of the most delightful books I have read in a long time. Quirky, funny, poignant ... altogether lovely. Highly recommended.

MaryannC. Book Fiend says

Ok, have a ton of books to finish, but I've had this for a few years and finally perused it not being able to stop reading it. This was another sort of homey, old fashioned read about a young man named Wilfred Price, who happens to handle all the funerals for his small town and unwittingly finds himself proposing to a girl he barely knew only to regret it. I found this an enjoyable, mostly light hearted read, even when Wilfred describes the dead as he prepares them to be laid out for their funerals. During the course of Wilfred's blunder in proposing too hastily, he falls in love and what follows is Wilfred trying to figure out a way out of his mistake. The story does take a more serious note with Grace, the girl he intended to marry who is hiding a secret that pulls Wilfred further into his predicament.

Lindsay says

'Wilfred was beginning to realise that the profession of undertaker wasn't much use to him when it came to matters of romance.'

Wilfred Price is the undertaker in the Welsh village of Narberth in Pembrokeshire. One day in 1924, quite unintentionally and just swept up by the moment, Wilfred impulsively proposes marriage to a girl, Grace, whilst at a picnic. As soon as he has done it, he wishes he hadn't, as he realises he doesn't love her at all. He decides that he will explain this to her, and believes he can resolve this awkward situation. But extricating himself from what he has done isn't going to be as straightforward as he might have hoped. Wilfred has always taken pride in his work, bearing in mind at all times the guidelines imprinted in his mind by Mr Ogmore Auden, his apprentice-master in all matters funereal. Wilfred was used to a simple life, but subsequent to the events in the opening pages of the story, his life is anything but. He then meets a woman he thinks he really could and does love, and then Grace reveals a secret that will further confuse and complicate matters for Wilfred.

The author has captured these characters beautifully, and painted a convincing, well-observed picture of life in a small rural village, with everyone knowing everyone else's goings-on, and no one wanting to be the brunt of village gossip. At the same time, she illustrates the love of the place and the country felt by Wilfred's father as he digs the graves; 'he was cutting the good Welsh earth, the fields of which had fed his family for generations and which he would in turn nourish with his own body.' This is a place that instills both love and yet imposes a sense of limitation in the inhabitants, 'a town that pretended innocence and only allowed for innocence.'

Wilfred has a contented life, living with his father, his mother having passed away many years ago. Wilfred therefore has little idea about women and relationships. 'Wilfred didn't know what marriage involved. Because his father was widowed, Wilfred had had no insight into the day-to-day goings-on of marriage, hadn't grown up enveloped in one. He imagined the worst ones were like Punch and Judy's marriage.' When considering a partner for himself, he wonders, 'What did a man look for in a wife,...Was it cooking? Cleaning? Cleaning would be handy: neither he nor his da were very particular around the house and it could get a bit much sometimes.'

This is a gentle and sweet debut novel from Wendy Jones, written with humour and an insight into love, relationships, loss, and the damage that pride and secrecy can cause. The author writes with warmth and compassion towards her characters, the nervousness and delicate feelings as they tiptoe around the truth of their emotions, and she demonstrates a keen awareness of the social situation and restricted possibilities, especially for women, during those times. I found it delightful to read and I look forward to reading more by this author.

Melki says

This may have just been a case of right-book-right-time, but for whatever reason, I really enjoyed this lovely, languid tale of a Welsh funeral director and his rocky romantic life.

Spring, 1924

After being wonderstruck by the sight of Grace in her yellow silk dress, Wilfred Price blurts out a marriage proposal, and to his horror . . . Grace accepts. After weeks of avoiding the poor girl, he manages to rescind his offer and become disengaged. But, Grace is REALLY in need of a husband, so she neglects to share the news with her parents. They consider the marriage to be definitely ON, and in fact, a task to be accomplished as quickly as possible. Things are further complicated when Wilfred meets the woman who he truly *wants* to marry.

Jones' writing is lovely and evocative. I was particularly struck by her description of Wilfred's unhappy wedding night:

Wilfred had never been in bed with a woman before. He had thought about it, imagined that it would be very cosy. Not only cosy; he had hoped it might be something more than that. Perhaps that is what a loved and wanted wife gave to a man: sanctuary from the harshness of being male - but this iron bed wasn't a sanctuary. People who were sleeping in the desert in Arabia with a stone for a pillow were right now more comfortable than he was.

And then, two weeks later, we realize that there are *two* miserable people in that marriage bed:

She reached out her hand across the bed, across the gap between them that had been maintained each and every night for the fourteen nights of the marriage, and touched his arm, leaving her hand there for a few seconds; it was a touch devoid of sexuality or passion, desire or wanting. It was the touch of one broken person reaching out, in recognition, to another.

It was hard to dislike any of these characters . . . well, other than Grace's parents. I honestly had no idea what would happen next, and the ending was not what I was expecting. I don't think it's any kind of spoiler to say that all participants in this strange love triangle are left with at least a chance of happiness.

Irina says

I wanted to love it but I just found the plot to be rather slow. Some bits touched me, particularly Grace's situation & the grief Flora & her mother shared after her father's death. However, it wasn't enough to make that special connection to the characters. Wendy Jones writes well though & I look forward to seeing what she comes out with next.

G.J. says

If I could I would rate this 3.5 stars (goodreads could introduce this !)

The story is set in a small village in Wales in the 1920's. It follows the life of a young man Wilfred and his struggles in "settling down". It is at times funny, quirky and sad with a rather serious undertone of nasty unspoken things. I could conjure up the characters very well and enjoyed immensely the descriptions of his relationship with his Da. All in all an enjoyable read.

Liz says

After once again interrogating the poor owner of a divine little bookstore in Mt Tambourine I walked away with this little discovery! This is quite a quirky and surprisingly little book. It tells the story of Wilfred Price, who is fighting to make something of himself as the local funeral director in a small little town where judgement and assumptions are rife. One summer day he mistakes beauty, loneliness and probably lust for love and asks a young woman to marry him. Instantly regretting the decision he retracts his proposal but his actions take him down a sinister and very different path to the original story. In fact the jump for me was so marked it almost felt as though the book had swapped authors. While the book has an interesting reflection on the world post world war one, there was a kind of isolation from the characters I didn't enjoy. I wanted to have a stronger intimacy with them that never came despite my level of empathy. I certainly enjoyed the book but didn't love it as I perhaps could. One to check out for yourselves...very easy to read with a number of turns to the story.

Gerhard says

I've gone and done it again ... Bought a book with great enthusiasm, rushed home to check it out on Goodreads ... and was knocked sideways by that sinking feeling which, by now, is becoming increasingly familiar. Yep, my latest fantastic book buy is in fact the first novel in a series. Talk about losing interest in a matter of moments. I decided to chalk it up to experience and get on with my life. But the rather fascinating cover kept haunting me, plus the occasional involuntary peek inside kept revealing beautifully written passages that whetted my appetite unceasingly for a bit more of the same. I slowly began to realize that I was not equal to resisting the book's considerable pull -- telling me in no uncertain terms to put my churlish disappointment aside and read the damned thing. I'm not sure what attracted me most -- was it the unusual setting of a Welsh town in the 1920's, or the fact that the main protagonist is a young undertaker hopelessly entangled in some thorny peccadilloes concerning the affairs of the heart? Both, I think. Main thing is I gave in and started reading. Boy, am I glad I did!

I could identify with poor Wilfred from the first page. Imagine proposing marriage in the heat of the moment (while enjoying a picnic with the beautiful Grace in a beguiling dress "the colour of lemon curd", complete with sumptuous trifle as dessert), only to come to your senses a moment later with the sobering realization that you definitely do not love the person who has just this moment accepted your request for her hand with delighted alacrity. But this ill-advised slip is only the beginning of Wilfred's problems ... How was he to know of Grace's dark secret, or the relentless insistence of her dour father to see that the right thing is done by his daughter ... or indeed that his usual efficient handling of yet another funeral would result in him meeting the charming Flo, soon to take her place as the love of his life despite the shadow hanging over him?

Jones' pleasant plot meanders gracefully, always poised to add another complication to the procedures. In unfolding her tale, she gives us much to savor: among other delights, Wilfred's wonderfully earthy relationship with his widowed father (gravedigger of the community) and his contrasting interactions with Grace and Flo, complete with spot-on dialogue and sinuous writing to make the characters come gloriously alive.

I suspect any reader will root for Wilfred Price every step of the way, urging him to take the right decision at the right moment and to stick to his guns even in the face of daunting obstacles. And be amazed at how well the author gets into the psyche of her main character. If there is any guy out there who reads this and thinks, "Right ... so just another typical chick-lit offering when all is said and done", let me assure him that nothing could be further from the truth.

Now all that remains for me is to get my hands on the sequel. I can't possibly let these characters go without finding out what's in store for them. And to remember to consult Goodreads BEFORE I decide to add yet another book to my collection ...
