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Joan Smith

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Imprudent Lady Joan Smith

Prudence Mallow, country miss, finds herself in London as the poor relation of her Uncle Clarence, a true British eccentric (and erstwhile painter). When she discovers her calling as a novelist, she is delighted to develop a friendship with another writer. But Prudence produces modest, sincere novels, and Lord Dammler, handsome rake that he is, has won acclaim for his scandalous Cantos from Abroad. Drawn by the rakish marquis into the hotbed of London society, Prudence finds herself in way over her head--and heart.

Imprudent Lady Details

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Author : Joan Smith

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From Reader Review Imprudent Lady for online ebook

Miriam says

if you like Georgette Heyer AND Barbara Metzger, you'll like this one. It's actually closer to Metzger in terms of humor, but usually a bit more subtle, and extremely "clean" by today's standards (though there is talk of Cyprians, carte blanche, etc).

LemontreeLime says

imagine if you took jane austen turned her into a character mixed with charlotte bronte, and stuck her in london with a ridiculous painting uncle and an attractive lord byronesque 'hero'... and you'd have this. I liked how it put all the other authors of the day in perspective, and i wish Smith had pushed the envelope just a little more with her lady writer Prudence, she didn't take the rope to the end of the dock and she totally could have pulled in an even better tale. This is a pair of characters I would not mind seeing again in a second book.

Mo says

I just spent the most perfect evening with this book in hand and symphonic West Side Story on the stereo. Complete bliss.

If you like clever and witty regency novels - not bodice rippers, more like Georgette Heyer regencies - then you will adore this one. I did.

Seema Khan says

I was hovering between a 4 and a 5 star rating, and decided finally for a 4.5, for the book kept me entertained.

Full of witty banter and a lovable hero and heroine, I'd surely recommend the book to historical fiction lovers. It is very entertaining.

I loved the camaraderie between Dammler and Prudence a lot. And that was the best part for me. Their relationship. How gradual it was from strangers to friends to people who come to care and love each other and who understand each other perfectly. It was so natural. And the second thing I liked about them was their work. I love artists and their passions especially writers and poets. And when it came to Dammler and Prudence's work and their feelings and attitude towards it, their passion towards it, I found it endearing.

The other thing I found really entertaining was the parallel between their story and Dammler's drama was so cleverly put. Absolutely loved it.

I liked the concept, the story, the plot and the characters. Some scenes were really funny. Especially those with Clarence.

Though there is a sequel to this one, I'm in two minds to read it. On the one hand I'm inquisitive to know what happens after and on the other the reviews of the sequel are preventing me. I don't want to be disappointed. Because I truly loved the hero and the heroine and I don't want to change their image in my mind.

Though I'm still unable to keep the author quite at par with Georgette Heyer, I do find her books delightful. Very clean and nice stories. Looking forward to other reads from the author.

LuvGirl says

A nice read. The hero and heroine gradually fell in love. No rush, just steady and believable. A simple story of two people getting to know each other. Great secondary characters. I'm loving on uncle Clarence! Clean read, but I missed at least a few kisses! The hero was a rake after all.. I think a little more unplanned kisses and touches would have made the story more appealing. I might contradict myself here but even though I don't mind reading clean romances I still wish they would have a little more sexual chemistry at times. The story just doesn't seem natural without some kind of physical interaction. All in all though, Joan Smith is a good writer.

notyourmonkey says

Snappy and charming enough, a slapstick cousin to Austen-style Regencies. I had much sympathy for the bookish, retiring heroine who comes into her own, an innocent who's not afraid to say clever things. Not sure why the author had to be the "but she's not a feminist!" drum, as that seemed a bit slapped on. The hero vacillated between genuinely charming and insufferable/controlling, at least enough that you could get an inkling why the heroine put up with his nonsense. You might question her choice in doing so, but you could see why he appealed to her.

And then there were the comic supporting characters - the overbearing cousin (in no small comparison to Mr. Collins), the unsuitable suitors, etc. Their over-the-topness pulled the book up into deftly-handled froth, instead of just empathizing with the heroine when she shuts the hero down for being awful and/or awfully ridiculous.

Elliot Jackson says

Well...h'm. On the one hand, kudos to this author for creating a foamingly fluffy-light Regency very much in the vein of Georgette Heyer, and an interesting eccentric in the character of Uncle Clarence, amateur (very amateur) painter. (Not to be confused with the Duke of Clarence, who also makes an appearance). An amusing "what-if" with two characters based on Lord Byron and Jane Austen, positing an almost-credible love affair between "a Lady" and the dissolute poet-Lord. (OK, I suspended my disbelief pretty willingly, I admit it).

On the other hand, perhaps a bit *too* much in the vein. I know it was written in 1978, and I really can't rail against this particular author, since at least she does it with a lighter hand than some of those who follow, but I personally am ready to dispense with Almack's, the Patronesses of the same, the name-dropping of every other historical character who appears in "Regency Buck", and even (gasp) Bath as a setting. Oh, and the cant. Find some new Regency cant, please, or dispense with it altogether. It's just so lazy, ripping off The Mistress this way. Please, here's to ripping off Georgette Heyer in some new and exciting ways!

Also, what's with the "oh, I'm not a feminist" crap that gets stuck into it when the heroine is confronted by a sexist old Man (accent on the "man") of Letters? Cheap. Why insist on dragging in poor Mary Wollstonecraft just to crap down her neck?

So, really 3.5 stars, rounded up to 4 for "light and bright and sparkling" and a nice romantic pairing and because I'm feeling generous.

Georgie says

Delightfully witty traditional HR

There are echoes of all sorts of romances in this clever story, from Venetia to Persuasion (Gowland's Lotion, anyone?) but the main characters are very much themselves - a Byronic poet of a hero, and a little dab of an authoress turning out sharply observed novels.

The romance is very tenderly drawn - indeed, Lord Dammler doesn't realise for most of the book that the pleasure he takes in Prudence Mallow's company is love. We do, though - we see the progression from a professional interest to friendship to love via some of the sharpest repartee I've read in a long time. At one point, Dammler is attempting to persuade Prudence that he has reformed his rakish ways -

"I didn't go out at all last night."

This was the second time he had mentioned in a seemingly casual fashion the innocent nature of his nights, and Prudence decided to chide him about it. "I wasn't hellraking last night, either, but I hadn't meant to brag to you about it."

"Oh, what a heartless wench she is! You complained loud enough when I was out carousing... I hoped to please you by improving. No one else ever was kind enough to worry about me, or care whether I ran to perdition."

"What a plumper! Your mama cried for two hours when you got drunk."

"But she's been dead for ten years. I started drinking young. And my father has been dead for fifteen years. Just a poor orphan waif really. Couldn't you pat my head and bless me, or must I lie on the floor and hold my breath to excite any interest?"

"Indeed it is not necessary to choke yourself. Good boy," she reached out and patted his head, and felt sorry for him, in spite of his shameless bid for pity. "...I'll buy you a sugar plum, and possibly an ice."

The plot itself is little more than Dammler's enlightenment, helped along the way by a couple of unsuitable suitors for Prudence's affections, but the story is never less than engaging, because Joan Smith gives the characters their heads - they bicker, discuss their writing, enjoy themselves - and so we do too.

The other huge plus comes from a couple of the secondary characters. Firstly, there's a Lady Catherine de Bourgh type dowager, the Countess of Cleff, known locally as the Pillar of Propriety, who comes to call on Miss Mallow in Bath. *The Pillar then began her catechism, to see whether or not she had erred in coming to*

visit persons in rented lodgings.

But the star is the unique character of Prudence's uncle, Clarence Elmtree, an amateur artist. It's such a refreshing change to read of an uncle who is neither miserly, lascivious, grasping nor power-mad (Hamlet's uncle Claudius has much to answer for). Clarence is an amiable, mainly rational man - except where his art is concerned -

"I think I have gone da Vinci a step better. He left off the eyelashes, you see. When you take a look at the Mona Lisa—I have a good engraving of it in my study—you will see he forgot the eyelashes. I don't know how he came to do it, for I read somewhere he was three years painting La Gioconda, but he certainly forgot the eyelashes. I will put a nice long lash on Mrs. Hering, and I shan't spend three years to do it either."

His painting is awful, of course, but Joan Smith presents what's effectively a single-joke character with such apparent seriousness that the joke doesn't grow stale.

"Water can't be painted either. Turner thinks to hide his deficiency by always putting what he is painting upside down in the lake as a reflection, but he fools no one. We are all on to him."

The story runs into a little manufactured conflict at the end, but overall it's such a sharp little romance that I honestly didn't mind.

Mel says

I enjoyed this immensely even with the weird left-turn to Bath where everything became a little stupid. The writing though is wonderful, much better than most of the regencies that are being produced today. It was refreshing to read about a smart-aleck couple, who bungle their own relationship without the help of anyone else. Uncle Clarence was priceless, a true English eccentric.

Lady Wesley says

I had never heard of Joan Smith, even though she has a bazillion romance titles on Amazon. When one of my favorite Amazon reviewers (who goes by the sobriquet Old Latin Teacher) wrote that this book was the next best thing to a Georgette Heyer, I became curious.

Well, Old Latin Teacher was right. This is a charming, witty story of a rake and a bluestocking, with delightful characters and sparkling dialogue. There's no sex, which I miss, but hey, I've got an imagination. And annoying Uncle Clarence (a painter who doesn't realize that he has no talent) is one of the most hilarious, original characters I've encountered in a long time. It's almost worth reading the book just for his scenes.

Caz says

The Historical prompt for the TBR Challenge is a bit of a Busman's Holiday for yours truly, but even so, I still enjoy going through my books to find something I haven't read yet. This time round, I settled on a traditional Regency from 1978, Joan Smith's **Imprudent Lady**. Many authors have had books likened to those of Georgette Heyer, and while that is a comparison that's always going to draw my eye, I've been disappointed on many an occasion. Not so here.

Imprudent Lady is an utterly delightful rake-meets-bluestocking story full to the brim with sparkling dialogue, beautifully observed wit and deftly drawn characters that has at its centre a warm, charming romance between a rakish, Byronic poet and an authoress with a talent for writing sharply observed characters and situations.

Miss Prudence Mallow and her mother have been left in reduced circumstances and have gone to live with Mrs. Mallow's brother, Mr Clarence Elmtree, an amateur artist with a hugely inflated idea of the extent of his skill. In order to earn a little money, Prudence does some work as a copyist for publisher, Mr. John Murray, and in the course of her work starts penning stories of her own. Murray is impressed with her writing style and her strong observational skill and humour, and undertakes to publish *The Composition*, even though it is not in the current vogue for exciting romantic adventures à la Walter Scott.

The book sells steadily, and Prudence is soon at work on a second novel, and then a third. Her work is well-regarded and she finds herself coming into contact with some of her favourite authors, such as Fanny Burney, but does not make much of an impression on them.

The literary world and English society is set abuzz at the return to England of Lord Dammler, whose *Cantos from Abroad*, thinly disguised tales - full of over-blown action, adventure and romance - of his three years travelling the world have become an instant success. The handsome, aristocratic Dammler is society's golden-boy, although he quickly finds that being constantly in the spotlight and the subject of endless sycophancy is not all it's cracked up to be.

Along with the rest of society, Prudence has been enthralled by Dammler's tales of derring-do, and is bowled over by his dark good looks. Enthused by a brief meeting, she is moved to send Dammler an autographed copy of *The Composition* – and is hurt when she discovers he passed it on to his aunt without reading it. In a fit of pique, she dismisses Dammler's writing as “nothing but a totally incredible novel in rhyme.”

Learning of this, Dammler takes up Prudence's novel and is surprised to find it engaging and witty. When the two meet again, he is immediately intrigued by Prudence's no-nonsense manner and the fact that she doesn't simper and flirt like every other woman he meets. Because her clothes are drab and she sports the sort of lace cap usually worn by older ladies, he at first takes her to be older than her twenty-four years and fails to mind his tongue, talking quite freely to Prudence about matters that are considered too “warm” for the ears of a younger lady. But Prudence doesn't really mind; in fact, Dammler's discourse, while it might shock her at times, is eye-opening for her in many ways, and they strike up a friendship based on professional affinity – they're both writers, they have the same publisher - and he begins to introduce her to people of influence and to advance her career.

The romance between this unlikely couple is very well done, with the bulk of the story focusing on Dammler's gradual transition from rakehell to a man deeply in love.

He admired and respected Miss Mallow's books and brains initially, then he began to like her dry wit, her understatement, her way of not pretending to be impressed with his past (and present) affairs, which he coloured bright, to shock her.

When she wore her new bonnets, he thought she was rather sweet looking, in an old-fashioned way. They talked and laughed together for hours. If anyone had told him they were well suited, he would have been shocked.

Dammler is all one could want in a romantic hero – handsome, clever, confident, but self-aware enough not to take himself too seriously. Yet for most of the book, he has no idea that what he is feeling for Prudence IS love, although the reader sees the progression from professional interest to friendship to love through some of the wittiest banter I've read in a long time. And while Prudence is aware of the nature of her feelings, she believes the fact that Dammler talks so openly to her means that he sees her as another male friend, or – just as bad – a sister.

“I didn't go out at all last night. Stayed home and got the second act written in rough.”

This was the second time he had mentioned in a seemingly casual fashion the innocent nature of his nights, and Prudence decided to chide him about it. “I wasn't hellraking last night, either, but I hadn't meant to brag to you about it.”

“Oh, what a heartless wench she is! You complained loud enough when I was out carousing. Won't you say a kind word on my improvement?”

“I did not complain! Don't cast me in the role of guardian of your morals.”

“Well, I hoped to please **you** by improving. No one else ever was kind enough to worry about me, or care whether I ran to perdition.”

“What a plumper! Your mama cried for two hours when you got drunk.”

“But she's been dead for ten years. I started drinking young. And my father has been dead for fifteen years. Just a poor orphan waif, really. Couldn't you pat my head and bless me, or must I lie on the floor and hold my breath to excite any interest?”

“Indeed it is not necessary to choke yourself. Good boy,” she reached out and patted his head, and felt sorry for him in spite of his shameless bid for pity.

There are, of course, a couple of hiccups along the way in the form of some unsuitable suitors, one of whom is a particularly odious misogynist. The final section, which takes place in Bath, lacks some of the earlier sparkle, but by that time, I was so firmly rooting for Dammler and Prudence to resolve their differences that I didn't really mind.

Imprudent Lady is the perfect pick-me-up read; quick, funny and clever, with a nicely done romance and some great secondary characters, not least of which is Prudence's uncle Clarence, the truly awful artist. Somehow, Joan Smith keeps this running joke fresh, as Clarence expounds - frequently - upon various aspects of his art:

“I think Lawrence could pick up a trick of two from me, but he is quite spoilt with attention... I blushed for him, poor fellow, to see everyone praising such likenesses. He had a wart on Lady Cassel's nose. You'd think anyone who calls himself an artist would have panted it out. But his sensitivity is entirely lacking. He can only paint a pretty picture if he has as pretty subject.”

If you're in the mood for a light-hearted, tender romance full of sharply observed witty banter, add **Imprudent Lady** to your TBR. You won't regret it.

Ana T. says

This is my first read by Joan Smith and I found it intriguing, sometimes amusing but hardly a traditional regency romance. It's more of a friend's story than a love story... but it does have a HEA.

Prudence, the title's imprudent lady, becomes a writer with some success. She shares a publisher with the famous Lord Dammler, the time's most celebrated writer, and ends up being introduced to him. Although she is a bit critic of his work, Prudence can't help but admire him.

Lord Dammler, alas, finds Prudence quite unremarkable but a series of events lead them to spend more and more time together and as she falls in love with him he just sees her as a friend. Prudence naiveté in terms of the ton's social behaviour does lead her to some trouble with an admirer without ever realising it. Her social awkwardness does make for some humourous moments as does her silly uncle. Lord Dammler is quite unhappy with Prudence's admirers and they become an object of discussion between them leading to some witty dialogue.

Eventually Dammler realises what his feelings for Prudence really mean but for a moment there it seems all may well be lost and where he previously commanded Prudence's emotions he will now have to work for his happy ending.

An interesting read, much different from your typical romance novel which is always a plus. However the lack of empathy that I felt with both main characters made it a slow read for me and while recognising its value and originality it doesn't come close to being a favourite.

Grade: 3.5/5

Mela says

I am so much positively surprised by this book that I have decided that I will add a shelf "the best witty romances" in the near future.

It is definitely a masterpiece of the genre (funny Regency romances). Really. I have read by now a few authors which could be call as "like Heyer". The best of them are: Emily Eden and Jude Morgan, next are: Clare Darcy and Barbara Metzger - but they wrote differently, some books are really good, some just nice. Now, I am very curious where Joan Smith will be. After this novel I would add her to the best, but I must read more of her to be sure.

So, let's back to the book.

"Don't think to get out of it by dragging up my past." "Past? You are confused in your tenses, milord"

"That's all right. We may say what we daren't write." "And sing what is too foolish to say"

There is so much witty, sparkling dialogues and comments that I had many times smile on my face.

Poor Prudence, reared in a retired village and unused to the ways of high life, took his concern to be for being seen with a lightskirt, when he was only worried that he was stealing Dammler's property

"A nobleman, my dear Miss Mallow, does not work for gain. Infra-dig. We lords are too toplofty to engage in common labour for a wage. The taint of having earned money by the sweat of our brows can only be removed by donating it to charity. No, we are allowed to keep anything we wring out of our tenants by starving them in a hovel, but honestly earned money must be got rid of immediately"

And let me stressed that these talks between Pure and Dammler are simply marvelous. I couldn't stop reading it until they finished. If you like this kind of witty banter you will be excited.

Next, the characters are created so well that I love them all, even Uncle Clarence or Seville. One could dislike them but still one would be appreciate how good they are created. Even such characters, as Mrs. Mallow, Pure's mother, who is most of the time somewhere in the background, is simply perfect. I can not find the lack of consistency in the creation of any character.

What else? This book is some kind of tribute for writers. You can look how they create their work, what they feel. Of course there are many different kinds of artists but still, it is a very interesting glimpse of them.

A love story isn't here very original (although most of the romances aren't). But the narration, dialogues, the way it is developing makes a big difference and makes the story really special.

As a one of examples why this novel is so extraordinary can be the fact that the heroine isn't ideal. I don't mean that she is stubborn or silly etc. like they are often in other romances. She is simply a complete person with own opinions although perhaps a modern reader wouldn't agree with all of them.

"You do not advocate higher education for women then?" "Good gracious, no! I only attended a seminary for five years myself. If the occasional few women want it, and it does not interfere with their lives—their duties—but in general, you know, I cannot think Latin and Greek of much interest to women." She also thought it quite a waste of time for men to spend years learning a couple of dead languages, but wisely kept it to herself. The Doctor had a nasty habit of throwing a Latin phrase at her, and there was no point in antagonizing him

He smiled benignly at her answers. "I notice you do not concern yourself with the broader problems of modern society—war, politics, economics, the general revolutionary trend of Western society." "My canvas is small. I have often heard it said that a writer should stick to what she knows, and my life has been sheltered. But I write for women—women are interested in the home, society in the limited sense of friends and neighbours, and in the case of young ladies, finding a husband. That is my subject. I leave the other fields to men"

I think that should persuade you to read it. If you are still not convinced read a review of Georgie.

Suzanne says

Hilarious, full of quick banter, and great comic secondary characters.

Yue says

I can see why people likes this book, but I realized that Joan Smith is not for me.

What I liked:

- there were moments where I enjoyed Prudence's and Dammler's friendship. Where I could feel they were friends.
- I liked Prudence's Uncle. He was an "original", certainly the most interesting character in the story. It seemed like he was going to be a mean uncle (at first) but he cared for Prudence, albeit superficially, and I loved every time he lied, even though he didn't think he was lying.
- there are no kidnappings, no forcing on the heroine, no duels, no villains.

What I didn't like:

- Lord Dammler is 22-years-old but it is like he is at least 30 (to be more precise, an immature man in his thirties). He has traveled everywhere, he had the best and most dangerous adventures, he is a very famous writer, he has a patch in his eye (!), every man wants to be him and every woman wants to be with him, can speak 6 or more languages (!). He has a very high-maintenance courtesan as his lover for about 60% of the book, but he has others here and there as well, while Prudence has to watch and suffer in silence. Not only watch, but also listen since he also talks to her about this kind of stuff (!).
- No idea *why* this experienced man, who has been and done anything, is so interested in this plain, dull girl at first. I mean, I liked their friendship *after*, but I never understood the reason why he wanted to be his friend *at first*. And *where* did he get the idea that she was worldly and fun (she wasn't).
- Prudence is 24 but it is like she is 40. I know that girls at that age in this period are "on the shelf" and considered to be "old" but to put on a cap! At 24! The blasphemy.... I can't say she was a bad character, but she was too "dull". And supposedly plain, but she gets 3 suitors, besides Dammler, in the whole book! Very convenient. Dammler sees her at first as an old male friend, then as an older sister. Can't say that *that* is a nice start for a romance.
- Which leads to ... alas, I didn't buy the romance. I understand *why* she falls in love (he is The Most Fascinating and Most Handsome Man in All England), but *his* coming to realize he was in love was so... uninspiring. Since he is a rake, and then tried "hard" to reform, I am guessing that he would remain faithful in the first year of marriage. Then, time to look for another "Phyrne".
- And the most important reason I cannot like this book: while it was clean, it was also a bit vulgar. People (reviewers) dare to compare Joan Smith to Georgette Heyer, but I can't imagine ANY of her characters talking about prostitutes and having a *blanche carte* and discussing *menage a trois* as if they are in the 20th century. And I can't imagine ANY of GH's heroes taking a stroll in the park with their "Phyrnes" while being drunk (and meeting the heroine in the process). No, better said, I can't imagine any of her heroes discussing with the heroine about their gorgeous prostitutes. No! A gentleman doesn't do that.

From the moment they are in Bath the story gets duller and my impression didn't change at all.

