



## Good Night, Mr. Wodehouse

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Throughout her life, Nell Stillman has struggled to find meaning in an increasingly chaotic world. A complicated marriage to a boorish husband; an early widowhood spent longing for her congressman lover; the loss of her child, a shell shocked WWI hero — her road has not been easy. But somehow she manages to find moments of grace, more often than not through the genial voice of P.G. Wodehouse, the beloved British novelist. Spanning the first half of the twentieth century, *Good Night, Mr. Wodehouse* celebrates the power of great novels — from Austen to Chekhov — to transform, console, and teach us the value of friendship and love.

We first traveled to Harvester, Minnesota, twenty-five years ago in the bookclub favorite and *New York Times* best-selling novel, *The Cape Ann*. This new book, which brings us home to that small town on the prairie along with all of the wonderful characters who live there, is sure to be a classic.

## Good Night, Mr. Wodehouse Details

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## From Reader Review Good Night, Mr. Wodehouse for online ebook

### Carolyn Fitzpatrick says

Setting is the northern plains, in a small town, in the early 1900s. A young woman in her 20s, Nell, loses her husband (no great loss there) and has to provide for her small son. As we learn from her obituary at the beginning of the book, she does this by teaching school. But her life is much more complicated than that, and she finds a great deal of solace in works of literature, particularly those of P. G. Wodehouse. There isn't much of a story arc, just a woman's life as she moves through the historical events of the early 20th century. A lot of it is pretty tragic.

She got done what she had to each day and then took solace in a good book, or other pleasures as she found them. She had no ambition for anything greater. I can't decide whether that makes her admirable or not.

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### Colleen says

A day of the learned is longer than the life of the ignorant. - Seneca

Life could toss your sanity about like a glass ball; books were a cushion. How on earth did nonreaders cope when they had nowhere to turn? How lonely such a nonreading world must be.

And so much history. Sadness, too-I mean sadness in the history. (London)

And if I learn to be a good person-a loving, generous, blithesome person-I can be a good wife and mother and friend. Isn't that so?

Like Cora, George was moving into that pale landscape where the sun shines dimly through a scrim of vanished possibilities.

One came home again.

To be unsophisticated was no crime if you weren't narrow, and she hoped that her reading kept her from that. Through novels you glimpsed the grim night that could eventually overtake the intolerant.

Since I doubt God will take offense, why should I?

One thing he noticed about running was that after fifteen or twenty minutes, a knot in his gut he hadn't known was there began to unclench.

A book was not flesh and blood. But a book was nearly everything else: companion, instructor, travel guide, entertainment, philosopher, sometimes healer.

I admire folks who pay due regard to the activities they undertake. Every man needs a pastime or two that he respects and that recompenses him.

Motherpride just was.

Arvina's eyes were small and set too close, lending her a judgmental aspect-as if she'd been born with a gavel in her hand.

But something about being hated made you feel guilty.

To be alone in the dark, together, murmuring the inconsequential observations that mark intimacy and trust, was a rare treat, and the pleasure was unspeakably sharp and sweet.

I cannot help pondering if that isn't the physical choice of a thinker. (long-distance running)

They could hear the night breathe, as prairie nights do-the heave and sigh of warm earth, of things growing and waiting to be cut down.

Fashion is for fools. Quality is always in style.

Hilly suspected that they just wore each other down to dust and ran out of shells.

Don't let it bile (boil) on and on, darlin'. Somethin' blessed biles away.

Pleased to have come and grateful to leave.

He was caught between two places so different, they'd never understand each other.

One can never really repair the hole left by the death of someone dear. Each blessed soul is unique, so how could we possibly replace it?

L'heure bleu (twilight hour)

He was as always, perhaps more so each time.

As time passed, a trickle of shame oozed into the heart of the community. "But only into the left ventricle," snapped Eudora.

"Your mother loves you. You know that, don't you?"

Sally shrugged. "Maybe. But what good does that do?"

If you put your hand on a piece of old furniture, it'll tell you stories.

Well, you know what a bacchanal that'll be. Too noisy for me.

But that's my daughter-in-law for you. ever the Pollyanna.

It is the year empty of event that in memory seems to have passed quickly, since it contains no mileposts of occurrence to give it substance. On the other hand, a year full of event seems longer in memory because of its many mileposts. The hourglass of time seeming to speed up with the last grains of sand falling.

Thanks for the use of your scotch.

The early August evening was bathwater warm and poignant with the scent of mown grass.

As an old woman, she luxuriated in remembered pleasures.

His innocence almost painful in its perfection. (baby Hilly)

I have outlived my sins. It's very freeing to outlive your sins.

Time to get ready for Mass. She still went, and wondered why.

At eighty-five, she'd outlived her secrets, as Elvira had outlived her sins. Age freed one of much baggage.

There wasn't much you could do with an eighty-five-year-old face but own it.

God, I'm glad to hear that. (Nell & John as lovers)

And, darling girls, talk to me sometimes, from across this permeable boundary, as I have talked to Hilly and John and my friends Eudora and Juliet. I'm here. I'll listen.

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### **Andrea says**

Didn't finish it. And I really tried with this one, because I adore P.G. Wodehouse's writing and I didn't want to believe that I couldn't empathize with a character who loves Mr. Wodehouse the way I do. Finally I just admitted to myself that the characters were flat and I didn't care about them. They were just lifeless paper cutouts moving around. Also, this was set in a small town and I hate small town books. Small towns make me feel suffocated, both in truth and in fiction. It's a pity because I was hoping for much more. Poor old Mr. Wodehouse. May you get a more worthy tribute.

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### **Jan says**

The plotting and characterizations are just OK, but the tone is lovely, and it turns this into four-star comfort reading, a bit like the Mma Ramotswe books or Jan Karon's Mitford series before she got carried away by religiosity.

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### **Candice says**

I absolutely loved this book! Loved the characters, loved the time - late 1800s into the 1960s, loved the characters, loved this woman's love of books. I will definitely read Ms. Sullivan's other books now. This one centers around Nell Stillman, a woman living in the town of Harvester, MN. Nell finds solace in the books she reads, but when she discovers P.G. Wodehouse, she is hooked. Much goes on in this plucky woman's life as she makes her way through the 20th century. She teaches third grade in the local school, she makes friends and keeps secrets, she lives through World War I and suffers some of its consequences. I would love to have her as a friend. It will be hard for me to pick up another book after finishing this one.

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### **Jodi says**

What am I missing here? Why does everyone rave about this book? I'm halfway through and looking for a reason to finish. The writing is uneven, the story is moving awfully slow (although the timeline isn't, so why doesn't more happen?!) and I don't find most of the characters all that compelling. Sorry, but I just don't get it.

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### **Sara Dovre Wudali says**

I can see why people find this book charming, but I'm afraid I got stuck on a line at the very beginning of the book and never forgave the author for it, "Nell had expected a girl with thick ankles and thicker wits." I'm sure this says more about me than the book.

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### **Diane Barnes says**

Just what I needed after some heavier books I've read lately. A charming, old fashioned story about 70 years in the life of Nell Stillman; widow, mother, 3rd grade schoolteacher, friend, lover, and most important of all, lifetime reader of good books, with P.G. Wodehouse being her personal savior and the author she could turn to at any time for escape.

"Life could toss your sanity about like a glass ball; books were a cushion. How on earth did non-readers cope when they had nowhere to turn? How lonely such a non-reading world must be."

" a book was not flesh and blood; John was. But a book was nearly everything else: companion, instructor, travel guide, entertainer, philosopher, sometimes healer. The list was endless.... "

" Mr. Wodehouse was a friend who took her hand, saying, "I'll show you an innocent place, and I'll be there when you need me." A gentle man.

This book was an escape to a more innocent world in a small village in Minnesota during the first half of the 20th century. Bad things still happened, just like today. There were cruel people, friends and family died, neighbors kept their secrets, shit happened, as the saying goes. But Nell endured, and if you can read the last few pages without tears in your eyes, then you have a cold, cold heart. This book is not great literature, but a great book nevertheless.

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### **Carol says**

What a lovely, charming, true-to-life book; complete with great love, great happiness, great sorrow, tragedy, triumphs, great friendships, enemies, good and bad family relationships, small-town gossip, all levels of age-related trials and blessings – just totally complete with living life.

Nell is an avid reader, hence the title. She finds that the humor and antics of P.D.Wodehouse's novels calm and save her. Ms. Sullivan's novel may do the same for you. You definitely will live Nell's life with her as you read along her journey that begins in the late 1800's, continues through the first world war, the depression, and on through WWII and beyond. What strength of character she has through her struggles and what a friend she is.

This is not a complicated story, but a heart-warming one. Simplistic in its writing, but multifaceted in its telling.

It contains one of the most poignant goodbye letters I have ever read.

This is not typically the type of book I am interested in, but I have just added two more of Ms. Sullivan's books to my list and hope they are as good as this one was.

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### **Krista says**

It's been 2 days since I finished this book and I desperately miss the characters! I love Nell's relationship with books - "Life could toss your sanity about like a glass ball; books were a cushion. How on earth did nonreaders cope when they had nowhere to turn? How lonely such a nonreading world must be."

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### **Antonella Albano says**

A charming story set in a small town in Minnesota. I loved the book and found it a refreshing read. I couldn't, however, fall in love with the main character. Nell is ambivalent: a strong and surprisingly independent woman for her times on one side and, at the same time, a frightened little mouse who remains cooped up in her apartment hiding behind books when life is calling her to action. Maybe we all are ambivalent in some way in life and she certainly makes no secret of being content of where she's at in life. It is disconcerting how oblivious she is to her son being bullied and tormented both as a young lad and later as a wounded soldier. She refuses to marry John and take her son to Washington DC where he could receive better care and stop being made fun of. She keeps stalling so that she doesn't have to change a thing in her life. The fact that she feels so attached to her town and its people is admirable, yet it comes at a great cost for others, also her lover who ends up dying alone in the capital.

There are also some characters that are not fully developed or simply abandoned along the way: Elvira and her daughter, and the three girls Nell is so fond of.

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### **Jennifer says**

I truly enjoyed this novel - it was chosen for book club as it probably would not have crossed my path. Good Night, Mr. Wodehouse feels timeless in its story and told from the perspective of a strong woman with strong female characters. The gentleness of the story is contrasted with the reality of life and all of its perils. I highly recommend!

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## Bibi says

This book covers a sizeable timeline. At the start, it introduced Nell, a 24 years old protagonist and her very young son just eighteen months old; the year was 1900. The book followed her all the way through to age 85 years; the year was 1961. During this time, Cunard's Lusitania was sunk by a German U-boat, President McKinley was shot, President T. Roosevelt took office, Lindbergh (Lucky Lindy) flew across the Atlantic, Pearl Harbour happened, America joined the war, outhouses were demolished and filled up, old cook stoves were replaced by electric ones, telephones became a reality, and yet Nell continued to live in the apartment above the meat shop –well there were a few improvements to the place; she certainly replaced the heated brick wrapped in a towel for warmth.

What a lovely lady is our fictional Nell! When her husband died at 35 years, Nell resolved to focus on raising Hillyard, her only son, and to ingrain in him gentleness and non-violence. The reader can deduce that Nell was subject to spousal abuse during her short marriage. To avoid spoilers, let's just say that the author did a great job with this character. While every reader wants Nell's life to get better, life does not always have happy endings so in this way, the story line more closely resembles reality.

Since I love to read and Nell loves to read, she felt like a kindred spirit so I enjoyed some of her words and passages relating to books. Here are a few:

*"A book was not flesh and blood; John was. But a book was nearly everything else: companion, instructor, travel guide, entertainer, philosopher, sometimes healer. The list was endless."*

*"With retirement would come more leisure for this blessed passion. Nell hoped she had left her charges with a love of reading, one of the few things they could count on in life. The years could rob them of friends and farms, of youth and health, but books would endure."*

*"Mr. Wodehouse is my savior," Nell tugged off her gloves. "If I'm down in the dumps, I run away to his books. Everybody needs a place like that where they're happy and...safe."*

*Life could toss your sanity about like a glass ball, books were a cushion. How on earth non-readers cope when they had nowhere to turn? How lonely such a non-reading world must be."*

This heart-warming book explores friendships, relationships, family dynamics, motherhood, societal mores from a long ago period, small communities & towns, gossip, endurance, faith, and more.

Other notable characters are:

Elvira – stoic, brave, considerate

Aunt Martha – shallow, self-centred, uncharitable

Hillyard – respectful, kind, giving

John – intellectual, ambitious, caring

I enjoyed this book and would recommend it especially for those who love books.

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**Patti says**

I picked up this book while browsing displays at the library. It was not on my tbr, and I don't remember purchasing it. I don't even know if any of my friends read it.

I LOVED IT!!! I read it from about 8:00 PM until almost 2:00 AM, and it was worth it!!!

Highly recommended!!!

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**Libby Patton says**

4.5 stars for me. This is a lovely book about the life of Nell Stillman, an ordinary person. She has sorrows and disappointments, but she makes a family out of friends and books (particularly those of P.G. Wodehouse). While harsh things happen in her story, the book itself is gentle. I loved it!

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