

The Princess Chronicles: A Bedside Companion

Wendy James

CreateSpace (Nov 28, 2013)

Softcover \$8.95 (182pp)

978-1-4929-2682-5

Hey, girlfriends! This guide will help you learn about who's a knight in shining armor—and who's a frog.

Wendy James would like to explain a few things about men and women and why she believes the fairy tales had it right: each gender has something special—and very different—to offer. Or, as she so colorfully puts it, men are frogs, and women are princesses. In *The Princess Chronicles: A Bedside Companion*, James shares her provocative point of view in a chatty, we'll-be-best-friends-forever style. The self-confident self-help maven explains that she not only rejects the notion that men and women are essentially the same, but she prefers it this way and thinks we should, too.

Addressing her readers as “girlfriends,” James establishes a friendly but tutorial tone early on. She’s your friend, yes, but also your teacher. She’s here to tell you, for instance, how women corner the market on guilt, why men have a need to fix things, and how to keep the sexual spark between the two alive. Her advice has a retro, 1950s feel. She urges women to flirt and flatter their hearts out in the quest to snag a man who will shower them with gifts.

James splits each chapter into two sections: personal and professional. The personal comes first, offering anecdotes from her own experience, as well as advice on romantic relationships. For instance, the chapter titled “Sex and Chemistry” first offers a personal to-do list similar to those in popular women’s magazines: keep love alive by booking a hotel room, trying on new outfits, and flirting with your man.

Then, James makes a limited move to professional topics, reminding us that “men have no problem with successful women.” It’s not long, though, before the professional musings head back into intimate territory with advice about the importance of frequent sex and relationship “red flags” that signal an impending separation or divorce. In this book, the relationship is the main event—any consideration of career goals seems secondary.

This traditional perspective fits with the stated theme of *The Princess Chronicles*. James tells us she is the girl who believes there’s a knight in shining armor coming to rescue her, the princess. Her advice certainly carries those gender-specific expectations, but the book’s title misleads somewhat. While James does frame some of her insights in terms of famous fairy tales—*Cinderella* and *The Frog Prince* are two examples—only a few of her comments focus on the lessons to be found in these romantic stories. Similarly, the cover art—a reproduction of Jean-Honoré Fragonard’s 1776 painting *A Young Girl Reading*—leads readers to expect more literary analysis than the book provides.

The Princess Chronicles is a quick, provocative read that will get readers’ attention whether they agree with James’s perspective or not. Some will find their blood boiling over advice that flies in the face of modern feminism, while others will find themselves nodding in agreement with James’s observations. Most will wish for deeper analysis and a broader selection of supporting material; this book instead provides more of a conversation starter.

SHEILA M. TRASK (January 23, 2014)

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