



The Short History of a Prince

Jane Hamilton

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Walter McCloud was constantly eclipsed by those around him - his beautiful, talented friends, his flamboyant relatives, his golden-boy brother, Daniel. He was always the outsider, never the star. But the summer of 1972 was a turning point in the life of fifteen-year-old Walter. It was the time when he realized that his great passion for dance would never be matched by his talent; the time when he discovered the funny agony of first love' and the time when he watched his brother declining into a cruel, untimely death.

It is only when, twenty-four years later, Walter returns to fight for the survival of his childhood Eden, his family's lakeside summer home, that he finally discovers a way to reconcile himself to the past in a way that gives hope for the future.

The Short History of a Prince Details

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Author : Jane Hamilton

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Robin says

It certainly took everything I had to finish this book. It is a story told in a gay man's voice about his life. He wanted to be a ballet dancer, but everything sort of ends when his older brother gets sick with cancer. His life goes on, but it never got me excited about it. I was rather disappointed with this story from Jane Hamilton.

C. Miles says

I was torn between 3 and 4 stars for this book. Jane Hamilton has an easy illustrative writing style that I really enjoyed. I found the story to be captivating at times, and slow and lacking momentum at others. Overall, I'd say this is a great book, both for the story and for the way the author makes the characters relateable and aggravating in a beautiful way.

Stacey B says

Good story by Jane Hamilton. Very interesting main character, a boy with a love of ballet, two good friends, and a brother suffering from a terminal illness. I liked the way the story shifted from Walter's youth to present time, balancing then and now and eventually coming together to illustrate how Walter's past shaped his future.

Sarah says

Gotta love Jane Hamilton! The main character couldn't be farther from my own, yet I became him as I read this. I was running out of the building in a tu-tu...

Wendy says

"The Short History of a Prince" is a coming of age story split across one man's lifetime, showing how "coming of age" is an ongoing process that isn't relegated to any one place in a person's life. As a teenager in the early 1970s, Walter struggled with his sexuality, his feelings for his best friend Mitch, his desire to be a ballet dancer despite having little talent, and the slow death of his older brother from cancer. His crowning moment was landing the part of the Prince in a community theater version of the Nutcracker--this being both a fulfillment of his dreams (to be the Prince) and a backhanded compliment of the worst kind (community theater). A lifetime later, the adult Walter has made the decision to move back to the Midwest (to a fictional town in Wisconsin that is, oddly enough, close to where I live). Amongst the usual life-redefinitions that would accompany such a move, he is forced to reconstruct the year his brother died, face the decisions he made then, and figure out how to come out to his family. All of this is centered around the family's summer house in Lake Margaret. This is a complicated story told in a lot of layers. The main handful of characters

are pretty well drawn, but there are a lot of significant characters that amount to little more than sketches, if not stereotypes. Overall, the story was well told, though there were scenes that felt like they went on too long. Stories that are explorations of very ordinary lives don't do much for me, but if that's what you like, this novel will probably work for you, even if you don't live in Southwestern Wisconsin.

Margie says

I like this book. While Jane Hamilton often makes me feel such an upwelling of despair and pathos that jumping off a bridge seems reasonable, this book could be considered "Jane Hamilton Lite". It addresses the same issues she covers in other books, but with a far lighter touch.

Kim says

When I picked this up I was mostly intrigued by the cover, the ballet shoes on the front. I had already read two of her other books and I'm a fan of Jane Hamilton's. This book did not disappoint. It's about a young man who dreams of getting a big dancing role in the Chicago ballet. He works really hard, has some natural talent, and his family is supportive, though his lessons are expensive and there's some finageling involved with transportation. He's gay, though I think that's only hinted at. It's been awhile since I read it. There was some humor-- it wasn't nearly the heartbreakingly downer as the Book of Ruth or Map of the World.

Tammy Downing says

I really enjoy the way that Jane Hamilton weaves her stories. This one was even more interesting as part of it is set in Wisconsin where we both live. I liked the way she went back and forth from childhood to adulthood and back for the main character and his friends.

Brina says

Read in 1999 pre Goodreads. At the time Hamilton was one of my favorite authors and I read all of her books when they came out. Charming story about a now grown ballet dancer fighting to keep his family's summer home while coming to terms with his life.

Leah says

This was a tough read because of Hamilton's continued themes of loneliness, sexuality questions, identity, and finding your place in your adult life within your family and within your "life plan," which are all important themes to wrestle with, but difficult for a good reason. Her character's voices are sometimes a bit too articulate and perfect, but the main character is convincing and intriguing. His dramatic nature and obsession with finding love and identity is compelling, but I don't think this book is going to rise on the list

of literary classics. It is highly worth a read for some thought.

Julia Grundling says

this is my third book by this author ... oh wow, she is definitely a firm favourite author now.

'a map of the world' was a 5 star book ..!!

i thoroughly enjoyed this one. human emotions - she describes it so beautifully ... you totally go through the emotions with the character.

spoiler alert

the scene where he puts on the ballet clothes and what happens after that - his toes bleeding, his lover laughing at him - oh my word, it was gut-wrenching.

i was so satisfied with the end. my husband brought me a cup of divine coffee when i had five pages left to read, so i was completely satisfied ..!! ;)

Lisa says

I think Jane Hamilton is brilliant, but this book falls one step short. Had she written this novel from the point of view of her protagonist, I would have been engaged. I would have been dazzled. Every time she permits her Prince to speak, I love what I hear. The flat, neutral, midwestern tone of the omniscient narrator does him a disservice.

If only this were the penultimate draft, and not the final product.

Melanie Griffin says

This is an interesting read, a bit odd. It's a bittersweet coming-of-age story of a gay teenager in the midwest. The protagonist is quirky -- to say the least -- and comes across as almost unhinged at times, but he's a very sympathetic character. There's a lot to like in the book. Jane does "place" so well, but I think her portrayal of tricky relationships is the strongest element of the book. Lovely.

Terry Gorman says

This book is a quiet, smooth, and wonderful read. Totally unpretentious and almost poetic. Reading it was like gliding across a frozen pond alone at the break of dawn.

Arthur Van Erps says

“Hmmm” comes to mind when trying to explain and write out my feelings towards this book. I absolutely adore how Hamilton creates scenery and dialogue, or how an entire paragraph can suddenly turn into written art that begs the reader to earmark the page so that you can reminisce later. That being said, the story itself isn’t really all that interesting, it takes an excruciatingly long time for it to go somewhere and by the end i’m not really sure it went anywhere. Maybe that’s the point though, the pointlessness of it all. Who knows? (I don’t).
