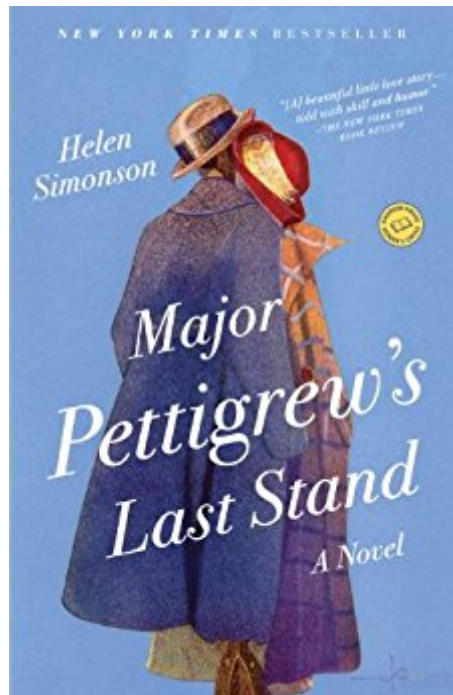




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Major Pettigrew's Last Stand: A Novel



Synopsis

BONUS: This edition contains a Major Pettigrew's Last Stand discussion guide. You are about to travel to Edgecombe St. Mary, a small village in the English countryside filled with rolling hills, thatched cottages, and a cast of characters both hilariously original and as familiar as the members of your own family. Among them is Major Ernest Pettigrew (retired), the unlikely hero of Helen Simonson's wondrous debut. Wry, courtly, opinionated, and completely endearing, Major Pettigrew is one of the most indelible characters in contemporary fiction, and from the very first page of this remarkable novel he will steal your heart. The Major leads a quiet life valuing the proper things that Englishmen have lived by for generations: honor, duty, decorum, and a properly brewed cup of tea. But then his brother's death sparks an unexpected friendship with Mrs. Jasmina Ali, the Pakistani shopkeeper from the village. Drawn together by their shared love of literature and the loss of their respective spouses, the Major and Mrs. Ali soon find their friendship blossoming into something more. But village society insists on embracing him as the quintessential local and her as the permanent foreigner. Can their relationship survive the risks one takes when pursuing happiness in the face of culture and tradition?

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Customer Reviews

Major Ernest Pettigrew is many things: retired from Her Majesty's Army; a somewhat reclusive widower; proud son of decorated Col. Pettigrew who served in colonial India; an only surviving son having just lost his brother Bertie; and resident of a small coastal village that is steeped in traditional social layering and far from the pace and progressive nature of London where the Major's son, Roger, leads a very different life. Ernest's life is about to change, challenging his assumptions about his rightful place in genteel country society and the society itself, about his presumption of primogenitor rights, about the rigid cultural notions standing between him and the lovely Pakistani widow tea peddler whom he unexpectedly discovers to be a kindred soul, and the generational chasm between his son and the Major's paternal expectations. At center, Major Pettigrew is a good soul, despite his very contained tradition bound demeanor. Through his challenges, Simonson leads us through frustration, shock, anger, ample humor, and at times an almost overwhelming desire to shake the living daylights out of some of these characters to help them see their own folly. I loved this book!

This is a completely delightful and entertaining novel entailing the life of Major Ernest Pettigrew (Ret.) as he navigates the world around him. He is a staunch Brit who believes in family (he certainly does his best!), country (he spent many years in Her Majesty's Service), good books (leather bound classics) and old friends. As the story progresses, he discovers his son has become someone he doesn't really recognize or approve of, he sees his friends as the arrogant, prejudiced people they are, he sees his town under attack by an aggressive developer and he discovers a new friendship with Mrs. Jasmina Ali, a Pakistani shopkeeper. Throughout all of this, Major Pettigrew charges on with a marvelous dry wit, feels shame for those that are involved in belittling or being prejudicial, tries to be a peacemaker, tries to mentor younger men, knows when to laugh at himself, reaches out across multicultural lines and initiates relationships and desperately seeks to fall in love again. This is a wonderful book!!

What can I say about a book that has said so much to me? When choosing this book I had never expected to experience such warmth, and humor, and authentic characters who will stay with me for a very long time. But beyond all that I discovered an unlikely, yet perfectly believable love story that was a joy to see unfold. This was one of those books that I just didn't want to end.

This is the author's first novel, and she does a good job of painting a small English village in current times. Major Pettigrew is despondent over the loss of his wife, and then his brother. Life doesn't seem to hold out much more for him. Then he meets the Pakistani widow who runs a local shop. The two fall in love, but obstacles include the families on both sides (who are all prejudiced in their own way), as well as the village's disapproval of a "mixed race" marriage. The book holds some good insights and ironies about their situation. Luckily, life comes to a happy conclusion. Well done!

The story of Major Pettigrew is one of overcoming strict cultural norms to assert one's humanity. Simonson treads carefully over cultural stereotypes, sometimes stepping over them, as she traces the unlikely friendship between a Pakistani shopkeeper and a crusty ageing Englishman. The latter's grief opens up a door unexpectedly, while the former's generosity and wit leads her through it. To the horror of those around them it threatens to develop into romance. The book is funny, touching and even sultry. If only Simonson had stopped at Chapter 21 it would have been perfect. I'll avoid spoilers here, but she chose to keep going for three more chapters to bring back an unsympathetic half-baked character and a madcap ending. Despite this, the book is a real triumph of the human spirit.

I've started this book too many times to count. For some reason it was hard to get into at first. I finally tried it again and, wa-la ! It clicked into place. Although it has a slow start, you soon learn to care about the Major and his life. He sounds like a colorful character, who, at a later age in life, finds that he may have been lacking in certain areas of his life previously. Or maybe better put, he hasn't stood up in certain situations before, but finally learns to voice his opinion and realizes what is most important in his life. I like books like this, as they teach you, no matter how old you get, that it's never too late to learn something new or improve your life.

Sooo well written! it was a delight to read. Sometimes I read a passage a few times just because it was so evocative and charming. The Major is a good old boy with honest old fashioned ethics which he upholds convincingly. The portrait of his son and his girlfriend are perfectly believable, piteous and funny. And Mrs Ali is sweet as good tea with fine honey. The action is occasionally silly but makes for numerous good guffaws and holds one's attention through the shenanigans. I was sad this book ended and I'd snap up another volume about the Major in a heartbeat!

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