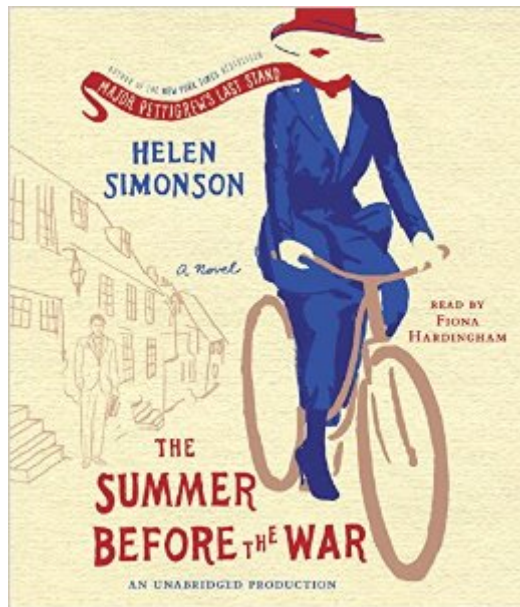


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The Summer Before The War: A Novel



Synopsis

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • A novel to cure your Downton Abbey withdrawal . . . a delightful story about nontraditional romantic relationships, class snobbery and the everybody-knows-everybody complications of living in a small community. • "The Washington Post The bestselling author of *Major Pettigrew's Last Stand* returns with a breathtaking novel of love on the eve of World War I that reaches far beyond the small English town in which it is set. • *East Sussex, 1914*. It is the end of England's brief Edwardian summer, and everyone agrees that the weather has never been so beautiful. Hugh Grange, down from his medical studies, is visiting his Aunt Agatha, who lives with her husband in the small, idyllic coastal town of Rye. Agatha's husband works in the Foreign Office, and she is certain he will ensure that the recent saber rattling over the Balkans won't come to anything. And Agatha has more immediate concerns; she has just risked her carefully built reputation by pushing for the appointment of a woman to replace the Latin master. • When Beatrice Nash arrives with one trunk and several large crates of books, it is clear she is significantly more freethinking "and attractive" than anyone believes a Latin teacher should be. For her part, mourning the death of her beloved father, who has left her penniless, Beatrice simply wants to be left alone to pursue her teaching and writing. • But just as Beatrice comes alive to the beauty of the Sussex landscape and the colorful characters who populate Rye, the perfect summer is about to end. For despite Agatha's reassurances, the unimaginable is coming. Soon the limits of progress, and the old ways, will be tested as this small Sussex town and its inhabitants go to war. • Praise for *The Summer Before the War* • "What begins as a study of a small-town society becomes a compelling account of war and its aftermath. • "Woman's Day • "This witty character study of how a small English town reacts to the 1914 arrival of its first female teacher offers gentle humor wrapped in a hauntingly detailed story. • "Good Housekeeping • "Perfect for readers in a post-*Downton Abbey* slump . . . The gently teasing banter between two kindred spirits edging slowly into love is as delicately crafted as a bone-china teacup. . . . More than a high-toned romantic reverie for Anglophiles "though it serves the latter purpose, too. • "The Seattle Times • "[Helen Simonson's] characters are so vivid, it's as if a PBS series has come to life. There's scandal, star-crossed love and fear, but at its heart, *The Summer Before the War* is about loyalty, love and family. • "AARP: The Magazine • "This luminous story of a family, a town, and a world in their final moments of innocence is as lingering and lovely as a long summer sunset. • "Annie Barrows, author of *The Truth According to Us* and co-author of *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* • "Simonson is like a Jane Austen for our day and age "she is that

good” and *The Summer Before the War* is nothing short of a treasure.” Paula McLain, author of *The Paris Wife* and *Circling the Sun* From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

If you love elegant writing executed by a skilled author; if you love novels incorporating a rich, wide-ranging vocabulary; and if you simply love a good story, then you will find “*The Summer Before the War*” delightful. Helen Simonson reminds readers of simpler times when garden parties and afternoon tea were social events. Nevertheless, she does not shy away from serious topics “women’s suffrage, the limited opportunities for England’s working class, and, finally, the effects of World War I on those who fought and those who stayed behind.” *The Summer Before the War* “provides an excellent portrait of the manners, mannerisms, and social milieu of early twentieth century England. Beatrice Nash, an educated young woman, has been engaged to teach Latin in Rye’s local grammar school. The daughter of a distinguished scholar, Beatrice is more educated than was common for a young woman during the period in which this novel takes place. When talking to her nephews and reflecting attitudes of the time, Agatha “Beatrice’s sponsor and the matriarch of the novel’s primary family” says of Beatrice “I may be progressive, but I would never hire a pretty teacher” “Telling Beatrice that they must remain in the neighbor’s good graces. “I’m afraid your independence, and my efforts in appointed office, both depend on our titled friend” “Hugh Grange, Agatha’s nephew and an aspiring surgeon, and his cousin Daniel Bookham, who is slated to go into the Foreign Office, have decidedly different viewpoints of Beatrice. Nevertheless, both are attracted to Beatrice. When World

War I breaks out, life for each of the characters changes in drastic, sometimes unforeseen ways. A surgeon on the front lines, Hugh longs for tranquility and a less chaotic world.

I loved this book. Written by the author of "Major Pettigrew" it takes place in Rye, a small town in East Sussex, in the summer of 1914 before the start of WWI. The sweet innocence of the times is brought to life when Beatrice Nash arrives to teach Latin to the students of Rye. Beatrice is a well educated woman who must make it on her own after the death of her academic father. She struggles against the strictures of her time to find a place. For some reason, a woman teaching Latin is relatively shocking. I am not sure why as there are two other women teachers but for some reason Latin is a no-no. The story of her appointment to the job is one of the funniest scenes I've read in a long time. Beatrice, also, to everyone's horror rides a bicycle and is fiercely independent and competent. She's taken under the wing of a town leader, Agatha Kent, who becomes one of my very characters ever. She is so diplomatic, loving and full of life. Agatha has also raised two nephews, Hugh and Daniel, both interesting characters. In fact the town is full of interesting characters including the idiotic wife of the mayor. The story is full of women trying to fly on their own wings and it is just 6 years later that American women got the right to vote. It is a time of great change and limits are being tested even in the small town of Rye. The town decides to help in the upcoming War effort by taking in Belgian refugees and are then horrified to discover families want to stay together and not be parceled out one at a time. The wry humor is delightful. There is also a group of gypsies involved who had color to the story. And as the year progresses, change comes slowly and painfully. Friendships are made and class barriers start to fall.

I loved the author's first book and splurged on the expensive Kindle edition based on that experience. As I was reading the book I heard her interview about her "sophomore" outing as an author and all the self-doubting that remains even after a successful first book. Most of the issues that plague this book could have been solved by editing. Actually, this book could have been incredibly successful written in chapters featuring different characters and using each person's voice, or as a saga or trilogy. Gripes:1. The title declares that the book is about one summer. Actually, the book fast forwards through the war and spits the surviving characters out at the end. Unfortunately major themes, like Beatrice's financial struggle as a single woman, are left hanging, and while we readers are smart enough to intuit the resolution, there are very big questions that remain unaddressed. What happened to her money? Did she ever get it and did it impact her life? How did she live during the war? What was the school like during the war?2. From the beginning the

reader queries why Aunt Agatha loves Daniel more than Hugh. At the end the reader is teased with an idea that they have entertained all along. However the author revealed family background that would make it impossible (without a giant backstory).3. So 2 leads to 3. The author has framed a family saga with too many characters and tried to limit the themes and the plot. Then, when she has built up steam with the theme of the single woman and her lot, she veers off to explore the aristocracy in wartime, personal vengeance and war at the front. After operating night and day, she has Hugh wander to the front lines to see his cousin; the ensuing plot seemed ridiculous during wartime.4.

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