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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?

Major Pettigrew's Last Stand Details

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Author : Helen Simonson

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From Reader Review Major Pettigrew's Last Stand for online ebook

Tea Jovanovi? says

Sjajna knjiga, protkana finim sofisticiranim humorom... Lepo opisuje i kulturološke razlike u Britaniji (izme?u krutog Britanca i udovice Pakistanke) a i jaz i nerazumevanje me?u generacijama (izme?u oca i sina)... Ta knjiga mi se izdvojila u moru drugih koje sam te godine pro?itala... 4 godine pokušavam da nagovorim nekog srpskog izdava?a da je objavi, ali bez rezultata, no ne gubim nadu... Hrvatski ?itaoci su u prednosti, prava je kupio Algoritam...

Epilog:

Skoro pet godina je trajalo ube?ivanje sa srpskim izdava?ima da je neko objavi... I valjda sam im se popela navrh glave pa se jedan napokon smilovao... :) DakleM, ova knjiga ?e ove godine ugledati svetlost dana u Srbiji, ne pre leta a najverovatnije za sajam... :)

Hayes says

Absolutely charming. The Major, the last true Gentleman on Earth, is my new best friend.

Clif Hostetler says

This is the best novel I've read this year and may be destined to make my top ten list. The well designed plot is pulled together with carefully crafted writing. I'm embarrassed to be so enthusiastic about it because it is actually a romance novel which is a genre I usually steer clear of.

But this is a romance novel that contains human lessons, tensions and struggles almost too numerous to count. The most obvious battle is racial, religious and cultural prejudices. Then there's the struggle between generations and the expectations of sexual morality. There's also the psychology of dealing with the loss by death of a loved one and the subsequent tensions of dealing with inheritances issues. Then there's the issue of material objects becoming more important than human relationships. There's also the issue of ageism. And many of these issues show up in parallel fashion in both the native English and immigrant Pakistani communities.

Oh, I almost forgot to mention that the plot also involves the political and economic issues related to future land use and development. Fortunately, the writing contains just enough wry humor to keep a smile on the reader's face. The story ends with enough excitement to make it worth reading all the way to the end.

In the interest of full disclosure I must admit that the main character of the novel is a man about the same age as me which is very unusual for a romance novel. So maybe that fact tainted my judgment. But there's almost nothing else in the story I can identify with.

The plot follows an elderly English widower, retired from a military career, who is very concerned about doing things in the proper way. He seems very judgmental of others, but ends up enjoying the company of a woman of Pakistani ancestry in spite of himself. His son has an American girl friend which of course is an insult to his English sensibilities. And the English-Pakistani woman has a nephew with whom she has a strained relationship. And then there's the gossip going around the small English community in which they live. The intermingled and complex problems continue from there.

Cathrine ?? says

3.75★

"I would like you to be happy Ernest," she said. "We all deserve that."

A heart warming story about people figuring out how, and then deciding to have, a meaningful and fulfilling life by letting go of preconceived notions, prejudices, and plans. If you read and enjoyed The Storied Life of A.J. Fikry, The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry, or A Man Called Ove, I think you will like this one also.

Claudia says

One of the more frustrating books I have ever read. Some good writing, but with terrible characters and dodgy plotting--an infuriating combination.

The author can turn a nice phrase. But, the Major excepted, the characters are terrible. I know so little about Mrs. Ali, which is a shame; she seemed like she must have been a hell of a lady.

The son, Roger, is particularly weak; he's a complete cartoon. Ooh, a shallow young man, who condescends to and fails to understand his dad? Really? Let me guess: Does he work in finance? Why, yes. Is he self-absorbed, ambitious but not very bright, and tactless? Check, check, check. Does he favor inappropriately flashy clothes and dumb, easily mockable modern decor? Of course he does. I shouldn't be able to predict every single aspect of a character's behavior, but I was.

There were similar problems with the plot: There were several scenes where I thought, "Oh, BS. The author has no idea about this." A lot of the gun stuff, specifically, and people's behavior at a hunt, was simply not credible.

It took me a while to finish this, because I kept thinking, "Oh, I should read more of that, but I don't wanna." After a while, I'd get brave and pick it up, and sure enough soon I'd be chuckling or saying, "Oh, that's nice!" to a specific line. But boy, it felt long.

Meh.

Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says

I am utterly baffled as to why this book is popular. I expected sweet and charming and got dry and dull. The obsession with the pair of guns was overdone, and was what finally made me stop reading the book. The book is also bogged down with architectural detail and long, pointless descriptions of landscapes and interior decor.

The author's stereotyping of Americans is appalling and insulting. She's clearly playing to British readers with this attitude. "...the ignorance of the bad-mannered"?! As if all 350 million of us are exactly alike. Not all Americans are tacky and boorish and pushy. She knows that. She's lived in the U.S. for 20 years. Totally not cool to portray us that way.

Kate Quinn says

If Masterpiece Theatre doesn't make this book into a movie starring Derek Jacobi, it will be a crime. There has not been so perfectly English a read in its deadpan humor in a very long time. Meet Major Pettigrew: widower, retired army officer, and pillar of the community in his small English town. He is set in his ways: tea with acquaintances, shooting parties with friends, reticence at all times. But the Major's life starts falling into chaos when he falls in love, and with a most unsuitable candidate - Mrs. Ali, a charming Pakistani widow with a shared passion for Kipling. But while the local community might be willing to see the Major marry a proper tea-drinking Englishwoman, they are certainly not prepared to see him waltz off in the arms of a woman in a sari. The delight of this book lies in its humor, and its even-handedness. The writer pokes equal fun at the young and the old - the Major might be set in his ways, but his bumptious social-climbing young son is far worse. It's also refreshing to see the "East vs. West" stereotype turned on its head: the Pakistani families in this book are not simply portrayed as saintly picked-up underdogs who can teach their English counterparts all about life, but as a fully rounded culture in their own right. The author observes with humor and tact that in any culture the young dismiss the old, the old roll their eyes at the young, and local traditions are sometimes beautiful and sometimes ridiculous wherever you happen to come from. All one can do in the face of it is laugh - and cheer that the Major and Mrs. Ali might waltz off to a happy ending despite the opposition of their families. And how lovely to see a passionate romance between a Romeo of sixty-eight and a Juliet of fifty-eight.

Michele says

Every once in a great while a book comes along that reminds me why I love to read. I'm not big on giving out 5 stars for a book, but this novel deserves all of its praise and more. I sometimes get so caught up in my frenzy of reading (so many books, so little time) and it takes a book like this one to slow me down and rekindle the pleasure of reading.

This is a slice-of-life book, which I'm not usually a big fan of, but what a huge exception we have going on here. Major Pettigrew is a retired widower living in a small English town in the countryside, trying to understand a world that has changed so much when he hasn't. The Major still values manners, proper behavior, privacy and correctness, as it were. He is grouchy and curt....and I loved him completely.

When the Major becomes inadvertent friends with a widowed shop owner of Pakistani descent, he is to discover that as advanced as the world has become, it doesn't quite extend to tolerance. The Major, being a man of morals and values, has to cope with the consequences of his new friendship.

Now lest you think the subject matter is too heavy (it is serious stuff), I must point out that the text is one filled to the brim with amusing observations....about life, about people and about ourselves. It is simply delightful. Read it with a pen and paper nearby because there are at least a hundred passages you will want to jot down for their wisdom.

It really is a delightful book and one of the few novels I intend to keep on my permanent shelves for a re-read later on.

Camie says

This New York Times bestseller is Helen Simonson's debut novel which I sought out after reading her second book , The Summer Before The War.

Taking place in a small pastoral town in the English countryside, this book features the unlikely " golden years" romance of Major Pettigrew a staunch believer in retaining the decorum of a proper Englishman and Mrs. Ali a beautiful and exotic widowed shopkeeper from Pakistan. It's admirable that they yearn to follow their hearts despite the adversity shown by the townsfolk and of course their younger relatives who feel it's their duty to intervene. One of my Bookclub friends recently said so many of the books I read are depressing, well, here is an uplifting finely written story with humor and characters you can really root for. I thoroughly enjoyed it. 5 stars

Laura says

Though at times charming, this book mostly left me wondering what sort of a world the author imagines England to be. Her characterizations are far more disjointed than the plot, which has its flaws but at worst they're jarring, not heinous. However, the characterizations don't work not merely because there are only two or three bearable people in the entire novel (and this isn't a farcical satire), but mainly because they're a convoluted mess of contexts. Major Pettigrew's manners and standards hearken from a more gentlemanly era, yet it's as though he's a one-man time warp surrounded by modern incarnations of rudeness and overt materialism – his son is breathtakingly selfish and shallow, his relatives are vulgar and grasping, and the local squire has class snobbery but no sense of heritage. (And are we supposed to feel sorry for the Major because of his frightful son, or wonder at his bad parenting??)

Worse, and still more disjointed, many of the other characters seem to come from outposts of civilization in the 1930's where people think that Mecca is a restaurant and Hindu and Muslim are the same things. Yet the story is obviously contemporary, so why would the author create a collection of characters in 2010 who overtly shun children raised by single mothers and won't talk to the village shop owner because she's "in trade" and has dark skin??? The whole thing is preposterous, and I suspect it comes from some people's obnoxious desire to paint the rest of the world as narrow-minded and petty in order to position themselves as morally superior. It's a shame, because in defter hands the story could have been uniformly sweet and delightful. The idea of family heritage and honor being embodied in an heirloom is especially interesting and poignant...as is the fraught road to late-in-life love. Too bad the themes are ruined by the addled execution.

(A highlight is when a curry dish is considered far too spicy and exotic to serve at some golf club dinner – the author is so hell-bent on portraying everyone as provincial that she somehow forgot the English have been eating curry for over a century?? Good grief.)

TJ says

4.5/5.0

This is the perfect book to read before bedtime. It is not an edge of your seat, can't put the book down, must turn the page to see what happens next type but the calm, touching, peaceful but poignant, close the book with a sigh kind. One to turn the lights off with a smile and a thought to slumber by.

Major Pettigrew is a 67 year old English widower who is trying to navigate the growing changes in the world, the dearth of discipline, the turning tide of etiquette, the lack of loyalties. He has an absolutely delightful, droll dry wit, sometimes sarcastic but always dead on and hilarious as he observes and intermingles with the world at large. He is truly the star of this story. He becomes as dear to the reader as a beloved, yet eccentric uncle would.

Mrs. Ali is a kind, generous Pakistani widow who owns and runs the small convenience store down the street from Major Pettigrew. As she struggles to maintain her individuality as a worthwhile woman while adhering to the pressures of her fundamentalist Muslim family, she finds a friend and soul mate in the kind, quiet man of Mr. Pettigrew.

Their journey through the strict confines of both societies, the prejudices of a "enlightened" generation as well as, their own insecurities and natures, to find happiness is written to perfection. Truly a gem of a story!

Laura says

Major Ernest Pettigrew (Ret.) is a stickler for protocol; a man set in his routine in both action and philosophy, although he is not without the occasional witty retort. Major Pettigrew is a stout umbrella-toting man, a folding stool- carrying man, a man in control of his comfortable environment, until the day he answers his door to find the charming Mrs. Jasmina Ali, the local Pakistani shop owner, standing on his doorstep.

United by their love of Kipling and their lingering bereavement of their departed spouses, Major Pettigrew (who was born in Lahore), and Mrs. Ali (who was born in Cambridge), begin to form a surprising friendship, only to be thrown off by the subtle prejudices of the townspeople, the pressures asserted by Mrs. Ali's ultra-religious nephew (who has taken over the shop since her husband's demise), and the frenetic social-climbing of Major Pettigrew's son.

In her polished debut novel Helen Simonson has created a charming story of village politics, multicultural conflicts, the value of good manners, and the zest in a jolly good turn of phrase. Intertwined with the basic story of Major Pettigrew's attempt to reunite two collectible Churchill shotguns and Mrs. Ali's attempt to reunite her nephew with his estranged son and girlfriend, are important themes of how we view each other and ourselves. Major Pettigrew's aversion to modernity also provides for moments of discussion on what's

worth saving and what we must let go of in order to move forward and embrace a new life.

With wit and charm “Major Pettigrew’s Last Stand” helps the reader to see that a firm stance on all issues might be applauded, but it might also be located just beyond the hedgerow.

Jaline says

If you are looking for something to read that is delightful, charming, with many layers of depth, this is a book you will love. Although it takes place in England, this novel is not specifically about the geography of the land or the people of that geography. It is much more universal than that.

It is a story about romance, but it isn’t a romance novel. It is a story about family, but it isn’t a family saga. It is a story that deals with religion, politics, race relations and other sensitive topics, but without proselytizing. Everything fits together – traditions, values, rebellion, challenges – and creates a story that is both timely and very real.

I loved the characters in this book, even the ones who weren’t lovable. The plot and sub-plots kept me turning pages and wishing I had more time each day to devote to devouring each chapter. This book and the characters in it affected me deeply and they were a reminder for me of the joys of reading.

There were so many little nuggets of wit and wisdom within these pages that I had to stop writing them all down in favour of being one with the flow of the writing. It is a rare and wonderful experience to feel completely included within a novel. This one held me close through the enchantment of a wonderful story and excellent writing.

If you have yet to read this book, I am happy to recommend it with enthusiasm and confidence. I can’t imagine anyone whose life would not be touched in some way by the story and the writing.

Will Byrnes says

Major Ernest Pettigrew is a decent sort, 68, retired military, widowed, and coping with the death of his younger brother, Bertie. He is a respected fixture in a rural community, member of the local golf course club, romantic target for one of the local ladies, and defender of traditional values. He is disappointed with his son, who has made a religion of career ambition, and considers the provincial notions of his neighbors less than cricket. But everything changes when he encounters Mrs. Ali, a widowed Pakistani shop-keeper. Despite their different backgrounds, Pettigrew and Ali find that they have much in common.

Helen Simonson - image from The Globe and Mail

As Simonson takes us through the will-they-or-won’t-they she also offers a look at contemporary rural England, with old values and new engaging in public and private. With characters that have depth and heart, and a charming, endearing love story, it is easy to care, and thus to become involved, and ultimately, to

enjoy. Hopefully Pettigrew's last stand will not also be Ms. Simonson's. (It wasn't)

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EXTRA STUFF

Plans are, or at least were, afoot for a television production of the novel, but at present, it listed in IMDB.COM only as "in development." (I do not have a pro membership so cannot see their more privileged data.) I seem to recall that Bill Nighy had been set to play the Major. Not sure if that is still on.

Here are links to Simonson's personal, FB and Twitter pages

Ingrid says

Sweet love story in a very English countryside.

Grace says

When I hear "character-driven novel", I usually roll my eyes. I expect navel-gazing and lots of exploration of self, and it comes a bit too close to self-help for my tastes. But Simonson gets it absolutely right in Major Pettigrew.

Reading about a 68 year old, widowed, retired Major in a sleepy English village is not necessarily a draw for most readers, but there's an alchemy in the way the characters are written. Every single character in this book feels real and genuine. Some start off as stereotypes, but few of them remain that way -- and you don't have to wait for the end of the book to discover their layers. Within a handful of pages, you start getting bits of personality that make the characters jump to life. They're all incredibly enjoyable -- I'm usually someone who likes adventure stories and urges the plot to go faster, but not once did I feel like Simonson was dragging her heels. Each moment spent with her characters is another chance to figure out how they tick. They're just wonderful. Including Major Pettigrew -- no small thing, when the retired military toff stereotype is so strong.

The only thing that knocked a star off this review for me was a slightly hackish plot device at the end, but it's such a minor thing it really only counts for half a star. I could spend books and books getting to know Simonson's characters. It's totally worth it, and totally delightful.

Annet says

I say.... old chap... What a wonderful book. Delicious, full of humor, wit, it's colorful, delicate, wise.... cute, a big five star, very special!

Highly recommended! I'll be looking for more work of this author.

Margritte says

"I don't believe the greatest views in the world are great because they are vast or exotic," she(Jamina) said. "I think their power comes from the knowledge that they do not change. You look at them and you know they have been the same for a thousand years."

Major Ernest Pettigrew, Royal Sussex, retired, is an old curmudgeon of the traditional order. As prescribed by his military past, everything should be ordered, strictly predictable and, well, staunchly traditional, as honor and duty and his family's good name demands. His soft side, his love for his deceased wife, Nancy, is totally private. That's expected. His village, Edgecombe St. Mary, somewhere in the south of England, is like him. Nothing happens and it keeps on not happening forever. Change comes slowly and superficially most of the time.

But then his brother Bertie dies, and just as he ends the telephone call, bringing the news, Mrs. Jamina Ali of the grocery store, knocks on his door. She is the first to notice his strictly controlled sorrow over the death of his last family member in his own generation. Apart from sharing his love for books, she also understands his feeling of loss. She is Pakistani, without family, without her deceased husband, and no children. Nothing better can kick-start a friendship between two lonely people who feel left out from the world out there.

Of course it won't happen without kicking and screaming. Daisy, the Vicar's wife, will lead the open revolt against a disruption of orderly segregation in the village. Nose-uppity, with a lady band of followers, she will strain against the winds of change threatening the laid-back deliciously and proper British institutions.

"Oh, she worries about everyone so much, you know," said the Vicar. "She has such a big heart." The Major looked at him, astonished. Such touching delusion must underlie many otherwise inexplicable marriages, he thought, and liked Christopher(the Vicar) all the better for loving his wife.

To top it all off, Major Pettigrew's son, Roger, drops a bombshell with introducing his new girlfriend, an American-- oh dear yes-- to the poor man. A loud-mouth American developer, Ferguson, moves in for a property development kill; Jamina's newphew, the scowling, frowning, strict Muslim follower, Abdul Wahid, moves into her home and shop; an annual costume ball, themed in honor of the Major's deceased father who fought in India, is organized in the golf club with its own microcosmos of rules and regulations; and it is evident that something's gotta give!

The caterers will have to be Pakistani, yes. Now how do you invite a few of them without allowing them membership to the exclusive club. (view spoiler)

(hide spoiler)]

Then there is the matter of the two Churchill rifles so dear to the Major's heart. Deathbed promises and family relationships are at risk. Traditions have to be honored.

Change is coming, and not coming. Love will be found, lost, and found again. The more things change, the more it will stay the same. Blessings come in different disguises.

For a reader with a healthy sense of humor, this book will be a super delight to read. It is about communication gone manual again. It goes back to tête-a- tête. No digitalization of any kind. A few ducks get in a row, and a few will dodge a suicidal flight. Even the Christmas turkey will go on a post mortal flight.

"Hurro," came the voice again. "Who, who the ... what day is it?"

"It's the fourteenth of January," said the Major. "I think you've overslept."

"What the ..."

"It's Christmas Day and it's already past eight thirty," said the Major. "You must get up and put on the turkey, Roger."

"I think it's in the garden," said Roger. The major heard a faint retching and held the phone away from his ear in disgust.

"Roger?"

"I think I threw the turkey out the window," said Roger. "Or maybe I threw it through the window. There's a big draft in here."

"So go and fetch it," said the Major.

Needless to say, this was a delightful, entertaining, wonderful read.

As a debut novel, it attracted the attention of the world. For 27 weeks it stayed on the New York Times Bestseller list, are being translated into 16 languages, and the movie rights have been sold. I can see why.

Apart from being hilarious, witty, funny, and all things crazy, it is also a novel of gentle compassion and love. In a graceful, perceptive way we are all confronted with our own memories of good things dwindling fast as our way of communication is changing. Good manners are being forgotten; violence and rudeness are taking over. This book brings us back to everything we have lost. It is a reminder to change what we can and accept the things we cannot. The underlying message in the book is bursting through the excellent prose and well-developed plot.

It is sooooooo my kind of book!

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED!!

Tatiana says

Whoever read my Olive Kitteridge rant, probably knows that I am not much into reading books about old people. Major Pettigrew's Last Stand, however, proves that any book about any subject matter or any type of characters can become a great experience if written well.

This novel is, essentially, a love story between a 68-year old retired Major Ernest Pettigrew and a 58-year old Pakistani shop keeper Mrs. Ali, brought together by their loneliness and love of literature. Yes, it doesn't sound very exciting, and yet it is an absolutely charming story. Set in modern England, it encompasses many facets of British life - clashes and frictions between generations, social classes, religions, and cultures - all portrayed from the POV of an aging, conservative and very proper man who, because of his late love, finds himself compelled to face many issues he preferred to avoid or overlook in the past.

English-Pakistani relationships take a center stage in this novel and are written in a particularly tactful and insightful way, without sugar coating the difficult colonial past of both countries and prejudices that exist up to this day.

The writing style deserves special mention. Not only the novel is never boring, but it is written with an Austen-like elegant humor which I don't come across very often in contemporary literature.

I highly recommend this novel to anyone interested in a cozy read set in a tiny English village populated by colorful tea-drinking characters.

Marsha says

Major Pettigrew's Last Stand is a wonderful comedy of manners in which the multiculturalism, rudeness and self absorption of the present collide with the stiff upper lip, rigid social consciousness and self absorption of the past as portrayed by Major Pettigrew and his son. As the realities of 2010 Britain creep relentlessly into a village stuck in a time warp of Empire and English superiority, the character of the characters in each group is revealed. Some evolve, some are hopelessly stuck and some are not what they seem.

Surprising and deeply felt, the story is also about the kind of courage and re-evaluation that motivates and illuminates the human heart. I loved it!
