

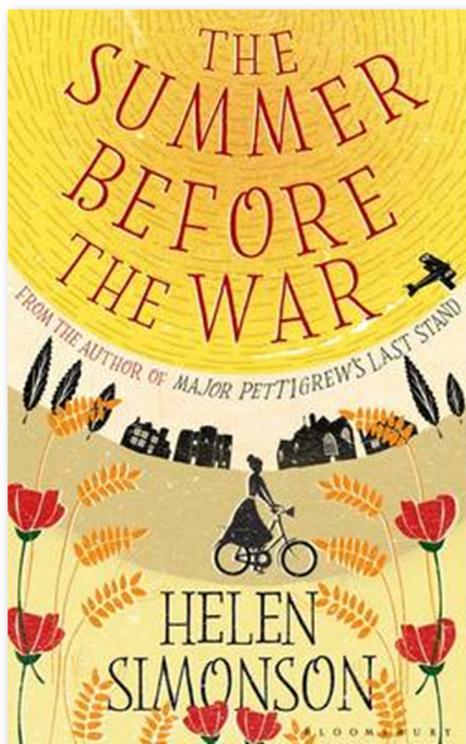


Helping you choose  
your next book

## LoveReading Reader reviews of **The Summer Before the War** By Helen Simonson

B L O O M S B U R Y 

**Below are the complete reviews, written by LoveReading members.**



**Sarah Harper**

***This gentle story of village life transformed by the devastation of war is underpinned by a heart-warming tale of love and fortitude and has all the hallmarks of a perfect summer read.***

*An idyllic Sussex village, warmed by long summer days, with lives following the required rules of etiquette and everyone and everything in it's proper place. Progressive and strong willed Agatha shakes things up when she champions the unorthodox hiring of a female Latin teacher for the village school however Beatrice is miles from the quiet, plain, spinster which everyone expects. She is young, pretty and capable. The death of her academic father, whom she loved dearly, has led her to the small village of Rye where she hopes that her new teaching post will allow her to support herself without further reliance on family members who hold the purse strings of her inheritance in trust. Understandably, Beatrice's first few steps on her own are shaky at best but Agatha is there to take her under her wing and, with the help of her nephews, Hugh, the solid and practical doctor in training, and Daniel, the foppish, romantic poet, Beatrice settles into her new life. However the hazy days of summer are numbered. With the onset of war the villagers struggle to maintain the social niceties of their lives as their worlds begin to crumble and shift around them at a rapidly increasing pace. What starts with a slow trickle of*

*refugees soon rolls into a deluge of changes that make their pre-war lives and priorities virtually unrecognisable. Digging deep the villagers must rely on the renowned British strength of character and each other in order to pull through such dark times.*

*With a charm and complexity of character reminiscent of Jane Austen, this gentle story of village life transformed by the devastation of war is underpinned by a heart-warming tale of love and fortitude.*

### **Genevieve Mcallister**

***Helen Simonson's skills is in maintaining the honeyed tones of this novel, despite the difficult and moving themes she introduces.***

*Her heroine, Beatrice Nash arrives in Rye to take up 'salaried employment' as a Latin teacher in the local grammar school and the point of view alternates between Beatrice, Agatha Kent, who helped to secure Beatrice's position, and Agatha's nephew Hugh, currently completing his medical surgeon training.*

*One of the strengths of this novel is the way that Helen Simonson paints a portrait of Rye - a bustling town full of wholly rounded characters but also an ancient English town set in beautiful countryside. Other characters have both good qualities and faults so we can feel a whole range of emotions in response to them, and although some of the characters and situations are larger than life, they never tilt into caricature.*

*However, darker subjects are also covered. The section covering Hugh's experiences in the war is incredibly moving and while the tone remains light, the topic of how women were still being subjected to men's views on what is best for them is explored in both Beatrice's silent agonies of worry about money and more overtly in the wry exposure of how Celeste came to be in her condition.*

*Ultimately, this is an exceptionally satisfying read with a neatly organised plot, beautiful description and gentle humour throughout.*

Follow Genevieve on Twitter: @genmcallister

### **Sharon Lowe**

***A warm hearted and interesting tale of love. Funny and sad but slow burning at the same time. A pleasure to read.***

*Slow burning story of love in the summer before the Great War, and during, sometimes sad, sometimes funny, but readable. It tells of Beatrice Nash who*

*having lost her father finds employment with Aunt Agatha who lives in rye. Agatha's husband is in the foreign office who thinks that war won't happen. But Agatha is more interested in having a female Latin teacher to replace a male. But don't let me tell the story, come and read it yourselves as you will be surprised at how much is included in this wartime story.*

### **Nicola Lowes**

***Charmingly written with full characters and the atmosphere of a bygone age.***

*I really enjoyed this book. At first I thought it was going to be a pleasant, gentle read where nothing much happened but this was not the case. The writing is charming and quickly places you in the world of a bygone era. Small town society is portrayed in detail with all its restrictions, some of which are quite shocking to modern minds. The characters are delightfully fleshed out and I felt quite sad at leaving them when the book finished. Wonderful story – I must read her first one now.*

Follow Nicola on Twitter: @NJlowes

### **Sarah Jones**

***Slow paced with slow to develop characters. Not enough to inspire my imagination or draw me into its world.***

*I found this a very difficult book to get into. It is the story of Beatrice a newly employed Latin teacher in Rye, and the numerous inhabitants of the small village, before, during and after World War I.*

*There are a wide variety of characters who sadly seemed too predictable and stereotypical. The lady of the manor, ne'er do well schoolboy, bumbling love interest and interfering nosey busybody, amongst others, were all quite two dimensional and I didn't find myself caring enough what happened to them. Beatrice is a likable character and she was quite interesting but she alone was not enough to keep me focused. Whilst the village and people were all described well, it was all just a bit too twee and quaint for my taste. I kept reading in the hope that it would improve and that I would get drawn into their world but I wasn't.*

## **Cathy Petersen**

***A nicely un-taxing book for a quiet summer day set on the Sussex coast as the First World War looms.***

*This was I found a very gentle novel to read and very unlike most of my usual choices. Set primarily during the last summer before the onset of the First World War this did, I felt, conjure up a sense of lazy Edwardian gentility with most people still occupying the same roles in society as they had always done with only a hint of the catastrophe to come. It meanders along at a steady pace with a pleasant array of characters which are not exactly exciting although I did enjoy Beatrice and Aunt Agatha. Even the chapters during the war are almost gentle with a hint of blood thrown in together with the inevitable tragedy although nothing to spoil the overall feel of the story. I think pleasant would be the best way to describe it and while it's not something I would rush to read again it was a nicely un-taxing book for a quiet weekend.*

Follow Cathy on Twitter: @Cerysthepup

## **Barbara Goldie**

***A charming, funny but sad story brought to life by great writing.***

*What a great location, Helen Simonson brings the small town of Rye vividly to life in the days before and after the Great War. The writing is easy, the descriptions beautiful, it transports the reader back through time, and I really felt I was there. The characters are well drawn and believable and each stands out as an individual. Latin teacher Beatrice faces opposition in the town as a woman teacher in the early 1900's. Beatrice was of course my favourite but the other characters Aunt Agatha and the nephews grew on me as well. Life is not the same for the characters in the story as their lives change dramatically when war breaks out. It is a long read but very absorbing, great for those long summer evenings curled up in the chair with a cup of tea or even a glass of wine, but remember the tissues! It is very relaxing read, with its slow pace but it drew me in quickly, then slowed down a little and picked up pace quickly towards the end. The ending was very satisfactory for the novel and the story stayed with me long after the book was closed. I look forward to reading more by Helen Smithson and will be looking out for her first book. Well worth a read.*

## **Angie Rhodes**

*It's the end of summer in East Sussex, 1914 and the small pretty town of Rye is basking in the glorious weather. Beatrice Nash arrives with a crate of books and one trunk ready to teach Latin.*

*Beatrice is slowly coming to terms with the death of her beloved father and just wants a peaceful life teaching and writing her poetry. While living in Rye, she meets Hugh Grange who has come to visit his Aunt Agatha on a break from his medical studies, but just as she is starting to enjoy and feel at home, the rumbles and mutterings of war is on everyone's lips. Life will never be the same of the little town of Rye.*

***A wonderful, enchanting story of friendship, love and loss, with an array of enchanting characters. This is one for a summers evening, one to read and re read again and again.***

## **Karen McIntosh**

***A beautifully told story of a world driven by class and misogyny that is forced to change with the onset of The First World War.***

*This is a beautiful story of a small Sussex town on the eve of the First World War. Beatrice is a young woman left to fend for herself after the death of her father. He foolishly leaves her fortune in the hands of those who wish to use it to control her, forcing her to seek employment as a Latin teacher in a small grammar school. She comes into contact with people from all levels of society. They all know their place in this society but war is about to change all that.*

*Women like Beatrice are treated like children, with no control over their money and given no credit for their intellect. Refugee women who are raped by German soldiers are treated like lepers. Gay men are threatened with prison and shame although lesbians tend to be tolerated, with most people preferring to pretend it doesn't exist. Beatrice has to live with all this and sees to prospect of change. The only light in her life is Hugh, a trainee surgeon, whose friendship she can only hope may become something more.*

*All families are affected by the war and it was very interesting to see how it took away all social conventions. Although some tried to hold onto their class divisions it became obvious as the war went on, that was not an option.*

*I thoroughly enjoyed this book and give it a well-deserved 5 stars.*

## Helen Skinner

***A beautiful, moving story about a small East Sussex town and how it is transformed forever by the effects of the First World War.***

*In the summer of 1914, spinster Beatrice Nash arrives in the town of Rye to take up a position as Latin teacher at the local school. Despite the support of school governor Agatha Kent, Beatrice discovers that not everyone is happy with the job being offered to a woman and that she could lose her position before she's even begun.*

*Also home for the summer are Agatha's nephews, two young men with high hopes for the future: Hugh expects to complete his medical studies and then marry the surgeon's daughter, while Daniel, a poet, intends to launch a literary journal in Paris. With the onset of war, however, their plans will be thrown into disarray. Towards the end of the novel, the action switches to France where we join the men in the trenches, but most of the book, as the title suggests, is devoted to that lazy, idyllic summer before the war.*

*This is a long book but **I enjoyed every minute I spent with these characters.** The story is told with humour, intelligence and sensitivity – and witty, Jane Austen-style dialogue. Occasionally a word or phrase feels out of place, but otherwise the atmosphere of 1914 is perfectly evoked. Although the pace is gentle I was completely absorbed, discovering as I reached the final chapters how much I had come to care for the men on the front line and the women left behind.*

*This is a warm, emotional and poignant story and I was close to tears at the end. I loved it and look forward to more from Helen Simonson.*

<http://shereadsnovels.wordpress.com>

## Linde Merrick

***I found this novel gently paced but so gripping that I just had to keep reading and finished it in two sessions.*** *The arrival of Beatrice Nash, a female Latin mistress, in the Sussex town of Rye in the summer of 1914 produces far reaching ripples into the small town dynamics especially of the leading ladies who are active in running the town. I liked the way Helen Simonson has shone a delicate spotlight onto the interactions of Agatha Kent, Mrs Fothergill and Lady Emily Wheaton whilst maintaining an intriguing storyline around Agatha's nephews and Beatrice. The tensions are further exacerbated by the onset of the First World War and the arrival of some Belgian refugees. The*

*many strands of the main characters' lives are satisfactorily tied up, with a final revelation kept until the short Epilogue.*

### **Cathy Small**

***A life in Sussex seemed a great place to quietly take a teaching position for Beatrice Nash following her father's death but the war takes over the life that she has made for herself.***

*Beatrice Nash has taken a Latin teachers position in Sussex with the aim to start her own independent life following her father's death. Little did she know that she would be drawn into the community life of the lady who commissioned her for the role and will lose her reputation should she be unsuccessful as a teacher. Then the war starts and there are challenges in all relationships as the young men battle their decision to sign up or stay at home, romance is complicated and doesn't win true plus the devastation that war creates to those at the frontline but also those at home waiting for the news. **A fascinating story that shows the sadness that war can bring.***

### **Bev Farningham**

*This is set in the village of rye, Sussex just before the outbreak of WWI*

*Beatrice moves there to teach Latin which is unheard of for a woman but the two women on the committee are determined to have her.*

***There follows a wonderful tale of families and friends, rich and poor, trust and betrayal, the pecking order and how the younger fold adapt plus the shunning of people who lived outside society's accepted norm.***

*Then young men start to join up, some to die and some to return but never the same. Refugees are sent to the village. Dark secrets arise... a gripping 600 pages with really alive characters. Everyone had an Aunt Agatha in those days!*

*I was just surprised that two 'secrets' unravelled were not known immediately - they stood out very clearly.*

### **Glenda Worth**

***A lovely family tale of life leading up to and during WW1. Main character is Beatrice Nash who arrives in Rye to take up a teaching***

**post. Good insight into the horrors of war but also the class system.**

*A lovely tale of family life in the period leading up to WW1 and during it. The class system at that time was very apparent and is very well portrayed. The story revolves around Beatrice Nash who arrives in Rye to teach at the local school after being left destitute when her father dies.*

*Hugh and Daniel, two cousins are visiting their aunt Agatha and Uncle who works for the foreign office.*

*Beatrice has some forward thinking ideas which are not always welcomed in the sleepy town, however Agatha welcomes the girl and takes her under her wing.*

*A novel about an Edwardian idyllic summer, romance, class discrimination and war which is described in such a way that one can imagine you are there with them.*

### **Christine Scott**

***Starts 1914 just before the 1st world war. Story of Beatrice, a penniless Latin teacher and her experiences and love life during the war.***

*1914, Beatrice Nash has just lost her father and he has left her with nothing. She arrives in coastal town of Rye for the interview of Latin teacher. She finds it difficult because the interviewers are not happy with employing a woman in place of the recent Latin master who has retired.*

*She makes friends with several people but war starts and some of her friends and one special pupil go to sign up. Hugh Grange is a medical student and his cousin Daniel is a writer and poet. One day a young refugee girl called Celeste and her father arrive in Rye and she settles in and Beatrice teaches her English. After a short while it is noticed that Celeste is pregnant. Apparently she had been raped by soldiers in France. Daniel asks her to marry him so that the child will be legitimate and he says he loves her too. They get married a few days before he has to go back to the front to fight Hugh is being pursued by a young woman but is not that interested, He begins to take an interest in Beatrice who really at this time is happy to be left alone to get on with her work and get over the loss of her father.*

*The young pupil goes to war but he is underage and after a bomb falls on a building he is in. He, Daniel and Hugh Grange are wounded. The young boy dies as does Daniel but Hugh survives. As war carries on Hugh is being*

*pursued by Lucy but he is not interested. When Hugh arrives back home he realises he loves Beatrice and she also becomes attracted to him. It all ends with the war being won on 11th November 1918 and Hugh and Beatrice get married. In the summer of 1920 Beatrice, Hugh and his Aunt Agatha return to France to visit the war graves, one of which is Daniels.*

## **Edel Waugh**

*This is the story about a woman called Beatrice who moves to a new village to teach children. The idea is frowned upon by locals as they seem to believe only men with a temper can control children, but they have not met this lady!*

*Welcomed to the area by local woman Agatha and her nephew Hugh and Daniel it's not long before she makes an impression and begins to fit in the small community. **This was a gorgeous story, if sometimes a little heart-breaking**, seeing the changes in circumstances for women then compared to now is jaw dropping and a relief but seeing the agelessness of kindness to those who most need it made this a real feel good story. These characters were very likeable, Agatha, Beatrice and Snout were my favourites but really they were all terrific.*

***I recommend this to anyone who loves books set around war time or if you just want a really good story. I did not want this to end.***

<http://edelwaugh.blogspot.ie/2016/04/the-summer-before-war-by-helen-simonson.html?m=1>

