

The Hazelbourne Ladies Motorcycle and Flying Club

by Helen Simonson



About the Book

A timeless comedy of manners --- refreshing as a summer breeze and bracing as the British seaside --- about a generation of young women facing the seismic changes brought on by war and dreaming of the boundless possibilities of their future, from the bestselling author of MAJOR PETTIGREW'S LAST STAND.

It is the summer of 1919, and Constance Haverhill is without prospects. Now that all the men have returned from the front, she has been asked to give up her cottage and her job at the estate she helped run during the war. While she looks for a position as a bookkeeper or --- horror --- a governess, she's sent as a lady's companion to an old family friend who is convalescing at a seaside hotel. Despite having only weeks to find a permanent home, Constance is swept up in the social whirl of Hazelbourne-on-Sea after she rescues the local baronet's daughter, Poppy Wirrall, from a social faux pas.

Poppy wears trousers, operates a taxi and delivery service to employ local women, and runs a ladies' motorcycle club (to which she plans to add flying lessons). She and her friends enthusiastically welcome Constance into their circle. And then there is Harris, Poppy's recalcitrant but handsome brother --- a fighter pilot recently wounded in battle --- who warms in Constance's presence. But things are more complicated than they seem in this sunny pocket of English high society. As the country prepares to celebrate its hard-won peace, Constance and the women of the club are forced to confront the fact that the freedoms they gained during the war are being revoked.

Whip-smart and utterly transportive, *THE HAZELBOURNE LADIES MOTORCYCLE AND FLYING CLUB* is historical fiction of the highest order: an unforgettable coming-of-age story, a tender romance, and a portrait of a nation on the brink of change.

Discussion Guide

1. Which character's journey resonated with you the most? Why?
2. "It was all very well and patriotic when we were freeing up men for the services," Iris says of women working. "But now we are just behaving oddly and diminishing our chances of snatching up one of the few available husbands." Discuss the situation in which the novel's working women find themselves --- having to give up their wartime jobs or accept lower pay when the men return. How do you think you would have reacted?
3. How are people of other nationalities, like Captain Pendra and Klaus the waiter; socioeconomic classes, like Constance and Jock; and races, like the de Champneys and Pendra, treated by other characters in the book?
4. How does author Helen Simonson characterize the members of the British elite? Are there differences amongst characters of that echelon? Contrast Lady Mercer's behavior, for instance, against that of Mrs. Wirrall.
5. What freedoms does the Hazelbourne Ladies Motorcycle (and later, Flying) club offer its members? In what ways are the women still limited?
6. How do characters treat Harris differently due to his disability? How did this make you think about how disabled people are treated today? Do you think much has changed?
7. How do Poppy and her Motorcycle Club help break Constance out of her shell?
8. What other themes are present in the book?
9. How does Helen Simonson show the lesser-seen casualties of war?
10. What did you think about the end of the novel? Did your favorite characters get what they wished for? Did your least favorite characters get their comeuppance?

Author Bio

Helen Simonson was born in England and spent her teenage years in a small village in East Sussex. A graduate of the London School of Economics, she has spent the last three decades in the United States and currently lives in Brooklyn, New York. Simonson is married with two grown sons and is the author of three novels: MAJOR PETTIGREW'S LAST STAND, THE SUMMER BEFORE THE WAR and THE HAZELBOURNE LADIES MOTORCYCLE AND FLYING CLUB.

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