

# **Major Pettigrew's Last Stand Study Guide**

**Major Pettigrew's Last Stand by Helen Simonson**

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# Plot Summary

"Major Pettigrew's Last Stand: A Novel" by Helen Simonson is a work of fiction and the author's debut novel. The story details the life of Major Ernest Pettigrew, a 68 year old widower living in Edgecomb St. Mary, a rural village located in Sussex, England.

Major Pettigrew had been happily married to his wife, Nancy, who died six years earlier. The couple has one son, Roger, who came to them late in life. Nancy sought to spoil Roger while the Major preferred discipline. Roger has grown up to be self-important, self-indulgent, often thoughtless and disrespectful, particularly when it comes to the Major.

The Major regrets that the manners and social niceties of England seem to be sorely lacking in modern times. The Major, raised in a certain, proper way, becomes easily upset when others do not abide by his idea of what is right or how things should be done. This regret transfers directly to the Major's only son, Roger, who works as a banker in London. Roger is obsessed with career advancement and, consciously or unconsciously, shuns his father's Britain.

The book begins with Major Pettigrew answering the door to his house in somewhat of a bad state. "Major Pettigrew was still upset by the phone call from his brother's wife and so he answered the doorbell without thinking," (Chap. 1, p. 3). The Major's sister-in-law called to say that his brother, Bertie, has died from a massive heart attack. The Major is in shock. It is obvious that the Major is in shock because he is unsteady on his feet and does not realize at first that he is wearing his wife's favorite housecoat. The woman at the door, Mrs. Ali, makes no comment on the coat. Mrs. Ali invites herself inside the house when the Major appears ready to faint. The Major takes a seat in the parlor while Mrs. Ali fetches a glass of water from the kitchen. Mrs. Ali learns about the Major's distress and offers to make tea, understanding that the man should not be alone at this moment.

Mrs. Jasmina Ali is a 58 year old widow and the proprietress of the SuperSaver SuperMart. Mrs. Ali is a small, attractive woman of Pakistani heritage. Many people in the story refer to Mrs. Ali as the Pakistani woman and act as if she is completely foreign to England even though she was born in Cambridge. Despite the ill treatment thrust upon Mrs. Ali by the villagers, she remains pleasant and cordial to all, perhaps in part because of her need for their return business at the shop.

Mrs. Ali talks about how her life has changed since her nephew has moved to the area. The Major sympathizes and tells Mrs. Ali about Roger's ideas about how he should live his life now that he has aged.

The book details the blossoming relationship between the Major and Mrs. Ali despite racial and social prejudice. The story also focuses on how each is affected by the demands of family and society. In the end, the Major makes his last stand and marries Mrs. Ali.



# Chapters 1-5

## Chapters 1-5 Summary

Chapter 1:

Major Ernest Pettigrew is a 68 year old widower living in Edgecomb St. Mary. Major Pettigrew served with the Royal Sussex during his time in the military. Pettigrew's father was a colonel in the military and served directly with the Maharajah in India. The Pettigrews cherish their pedigree. Major Pettigrew also served in India but did not attain the same rank or status as his father.

Major Pettigrew had been happily married to his wife, Nancy, who died six years earlier. The couple has one son, Roger, who came to them late in life. Nancy sought to spoil Roger while the Major preferred discipline. Roger has grown up to be self-important, self-indulgent, often thoughtless and disrespectful, particularly when it comes to the Major.

The Major lives alone at Rose Lodge. The cottage is a source of pride for the Major and he strives to take good care of it, particularly the garden. It is clear that the Major misses Nancy's input but tries to do the best he can.

The book begins with Major Pettigrew answering the door to his house in somewhat of a bad state. "Major Pettigrew was still upset by the phone call from his brother's wife and so he answered the doorbell without thinking," (Chap. 1, p. 3). The Major's sister-in-law called to say that his brother, Bertie, has died from a massive heart attack. The Major is in shock. It is obvious that the Major is in shock because he is unsteady on his feet and does not realize at first that he is wearing his wife's favorite housecoat. The woman at the door, Mrs. Ali, makes no comment on the coat. Mrs. Ali invites herself inside the house when the Major appears ready to faint. The Major takes a seat in the parlor while Mrs. Ali fetches a glass of water from the kitchen. Mrs. Ali learns about the Major's distress and offers to make tea, understanding that the man should not be alone at this moment.

The Major tells Mrs. Ali about Bertie's death. The Major recalls that Mrs. Ali's husband died one and a half to two years earlier from a heart attack. The Major explains that the housecoat was his wife's favorite cleaning attire. Although Mrs. Pettigrew has been dead for nearly six years, the Major still takes comfort in donning the housecoat to clean. Mrs. Ali says she understands and that she often wears one of her husband's old sports jackets while walking in the garden.

There is some background given on Mrs. Ali, a Pakistani woman who owns a local village shop. Mrs. Jasmina Ali is a 58 year old widow and the proprietress of the SuperSaver SuperMart. Mrs. Ali is a small, attractive woman of Pakistani heritage. Many people in the story refer to Mrs. Ali as the Pakistani woman and act as if she is



completely foreign to England even though she was born in Cambridge. Despite the ill treatment thrust upon Mrs. Ali by the villagers, she remains pleasant and cordial to all, perhaps in part because of her need for their return business at the shop.

Mrs. Ali has operated the village shop since the death of her husband nearly two years earlier. The Alis have no children.

Mrs. Ali talks about how her life has changed since her nephew has moved to the area. The Major sympathizes and tells Mrs. Ali about Roger's ideas about how he should live his life now that he has aged.

There is a conversation between Mrs. Ali and the Major about the way their lives have changed. Mrs. Ali's nephew has come to take over the shop since Mr. Ali is dead. The family is pressuring her to retire. The Major tries to suggest that it might be nice to live out her retirement as a respected member of her family but Mrs. Ali sees it more as an insult, as if she is no longer useful.

"I have produced no children of my own and my husband is dead," she replied, an acid tone in her voice. "Thus I am more to be pitied than revered. I am expected to give up the shop to my nephew, who will then be able to afford to bring a very good wife from Pakistan. In exchange, I will be given a houseroom, and, no doubt, the honor of taking care of several small children of family members," (Chap. 1, p. 14).

Mrs. Ali feels she has said too much although the Major sympathizes.

The Major talks about Bertie. Mrs. Ali stays until the Major is steady on his feet.

After Mrs. Ali leaves, the Major calls his son, Roger. Roger claims that Bertie's daughter had already begun making phone calls. The father and son agree to meet at the funeral as Roger's schedule is busy and he may not be able to drive his father to and from the service.

On the day of the funeral, the Major realizes that he cannot make the twenty minute drive because he is too weak and shaken. Mrs. Ali insists on driving him. At the funeral the Major declines to make remarks because he is steeped in grief. Roger never arrives.

Chapter 2:

The Major goes to Bertie's house. The Major and his sister-in-law, Marjorie, have never been close and it is hard for the Major to think of it as Marjorie's house now that Bertie is dead. The reception after the funeral seemed more festive than expected after a while. Jemima, Bertie's daughter, had several church friends that came to support her in her time of need. Jemima's son ran through the house, ignoring his mother's warnings to behave. The Major feels uncomfortable even though he is amongst family.

The Major is happy to see that Roger made it after all. Roger spends some time talking with Marjorie and Jemima. Roger's expensive clothes and demeanor stick out in the



crowd. Not long after he arrives, Roger speaks to the Major about the Churchill shotguns that had once belonged to the Major and Bertie's father. Jemima wants to sell the guns as a set, as does Roger. No one gives the Major's feelings or desires a thought.

Roger's new girlfriend, Sandy Dunn, arrives. The Major escorts her from her car. Sandy makes a joke about assuming that the Major is a butler only to learn that he is an important man. Although Sandy learns the Major's real identity, she seems to be relatively unimpressed and not terribly respectful.

Roger insists on driving the Major home. At one point in the day the Major learns that Roger and Sandy are looking at weekend cottages, presumably to be closer to the Major. Roger also broaches the subject of selling the Churchills and giving the money to him. The Major continues to ignore the conversation no matter how many times it arises. The Major has no intention of selling either Churchill, let alone the pair.

The Major arrives home and suddenly thinks about his own demise.

### Chapter 3:

Several days pass and the Major realizes that Mrs. Ali has not returned to visit. Several of the women in the village—many of them from the local Church of England—stop in to pay respects, make tea, and bring food and condolences to the Major. After a short time, the Major decides that it is time to walk into town to visit Mrs. Ali.

"He had been many decades, as man and boy, in the village of Edgecomb St. Mary, and yet the walk down the hill to the village never ceased to give him pleasure," (Chap. 3, p. 35).

The lane to the village is steep, its sides decorated with privet hedges, beech trees and hawthorn. There is a scent of farm animals in the air from behind the cottages. There are many garden gates. The Major enjoys glimpses of thick, lush lawns and flowers. Although Edgecombe St. Mary is located in the suburbs, it feels as though it is in the country.

The village is located in the Sussex countryside. Hills rise and fall. The Major likes to look at the rye fields. The Major also likes the village and often looks forward to Mrs. Ali's shop, the SuperSaver SuperMart.

SuperSaver SuperMart, formerly Mrs. Bridge's Village Shop, is the name of Mrs. Ali's store. It tries hard to compete with the larger markets but fails. However, the business is relatively successful because it is located in Edgecombe St. Mary while the others are farther away. The store is run by the recently widowed Mrs. Ali and her less-than-competent nephew.

The Major attempts to thank Mrs. Ali once again for her kindness toward him regarding the funeral. Mrs. Ali brushes away the thanks and says she would rather not discuss



such things in front of her nephew. The Major asks if Mrs. Ali would kindly drive him into town next time she goes. Mrs. Ali agrees.

Chapter 4:

The Major goes to Tewkesberry and Teale. Tewkesberry and Teale serves as the Pettigrew family solicitor's office. Mr. Tewkesberry is dead so the office is operated by Mortimer Teale, Mr. Tewkesberry's son-in-law. The purpose of the Major's visit is to attend the reading of Bertie's will. Mr. Teale reads the will. The Major has expected to be named executor and he is not disappointed. However, there is no mention in the will of the Churchills. The Major is sure there must be a mistake. Mr. Teale cannot speculate on what Marjorie might do with the matching gun but advises that if the Major plans to contest the will, he should decline the executorship.

Chapter 5: The Major waits by the seaside for Mrs. Ali. The Major is lost in his own thoughts when the woman arrives to take him home. The Major and Mrs. Ali talk about personal things.

## Chapters 1-5 Analysis

Chapter 1:

Major Pettigrew is a self-sufficient man that is battling against aging. It is not that the Major is weak or infirm; it is that people—including his son, Roger—are beginning to treat him as such. The death of Bertie is a major blow and takes an immediate toll on the surviving brother.

The appearance of Mrs. Ali is serendipitous. The Major has never thought of Mrs. Ali as anything but the shop keeper at old Mrs. Bridge's Village Shop and the widow of Mr. Ali. The villagers of Edgecombe St. Mary are unkind to the Alis when they arrive and purchase the shop. It takes some time but the people begin to warm up to the Alis and eventually refer to them as "our dear Pakistani friends at the shop," (Chap. 1, p. 6).

On that day, the Major begins to see Mrs. Ali as a woman and thinks that perhaps it might be nice to see her outside of the shop.

Roger Pettigrew has effectively switched roles with his father and in doing so, has put himself above some duties. Roger sees his father as becoming aged and dismisses his needs and wants. While it is clear that Roger is an important man—particularly in his own mind—he downgrades his father's needs to the point of them being almost nonexistent. Roger's lack of tact and care regarding Bertie's death and funeral is hurtful to the Major; it is doubtful that Roger knows or accepts the results of his actions.

Chapter 2:

The Major would like to be any place other than at Bertie and Marjorie's house. The atmosphere seems inappropriate to the Major. The Major feels guilty sending Mrs. Ali



home after Roger insists on making the drive. Mrs. Ali is gracious. The Major instantly regrets not getting into the car and making an escape.

Sandy Dunn, in the Major's eyes, is a crass woman. Roger shows signs of being spoiled and rude as well as being disrespectful of the Major. The first sign of disrespect is immediately referring to the Major by his first name when it is clear that it is not appropriate. The Major silently blames Sandy's demeanor on the fact that she is American. The Major is also upset that Roger and Sandy are late to the funeral because they chose to go and look at weekend cottages. Roger also declines to visit with his father because he and Sandy have dinner plans back in London.

The ultimate insult to the Major is when Roger suggests selling the Churchills and giving the money to him since it would eventually be his inheritance. The Major will never sell the Churchills and is angry and somewhat stunned that the issue would be mentioned, particularly on the day of Bertie's funeral.

#### Chapter 3:

The Major is reminded that grief is an ongoing process. Although he is sad about Bertie, the Major also finds himself with the need to remember that he is alive. The walk to the village is beneficial for the man's health, as is the trip to see Mrs. Ali.

Mrs. Ali does not approve of her nephew's participation in the shop but seems uncertain how to prevent it. The Major's excuse to see his solicitor is flimsy but accepted—at least on the surface—by Mrs. Ali. It is clear that there is a mutual attraction between Mrs. Ali and Major Pettigrew.

#### Chapter 4:

The Major is stunned and appalled at the events that take place at Tewkesberry and Teale. The Major and Bertie had made an agreement regarding the guns and the Major cannot understand how that agreement is not written into Bertie's will. Everyone, even Teale, knows about the family agreement. While Teale is not free to say anything about Marjorie's intentions, it is clear to the Major that Marjorie will most likely not abide by Bertie's wishes.

#### Chapter 5:

It is unusual for two acquaintances to talk about personal things. When the Major and Mrs. Ali discuss their families, it becomes clear that their relationship will become more than a simple friendship.





# chapters 6-10

## chapters 6-10 Summary

### Chapter 6:

The Major meets Alec Shaw at the golf club for a day of golf. The men discuss the upcoming golf club dance, which the women of the golf club are currently discussing. Alec's wife is on the committee. She will certainly ask for an opinion on this year's theme. The previous year's theme, "Last Days of Pompeii," was a complete and total disaster, one that the Major hopes will never be repeated. The Major suggests to Alec that the group return to the days of formal attire, which the Major wears to every dance despite the theme. Alec tells the Major to suggest it. The Major recoils in horror.

The men adjourn to the bar and are eventually summoned by Alec's wife to give input on the upcoming dance. The input is not well received. The Major gets wrangled into being on the food committee.

### Chapter 7:

Major Pettigrew visits Marjorie and Jemima. Jemima is extremely rude and Marjorie's grief is overly affected. The issue of the guns arises and the Major knows that Marjorie has no intention of honoring his father's wishes. Jemima wants the money to send little Gregory to school; Marjorie talks about taking a cruise. The Major tells them about the American who may be interested in purchasing the guns although he has no inclination of ever selling them. In the end, the Major takes Bertie's gun under the guise of restoring it for sale.

### Chapter 8:

Mrs. Ali comes to visit the Major for tea on a Sunday afternoon. The Major tries not to fuss over the preparations for the meeting as it is supposed to be for the purpose of discussing the Kipling book. The Major enjoys the way Mrs. Ali reads Kipling and for the first time in years appreciates the way a person reads literature.

The author includes several passages from Kipling's work. The couple also discusses patriotism.

Mrs. Ali talks about her father. The Major is at a loss for words and is worried about saying the wrong thing at the wrong time.

Mrs. Ali talks about how her life has changed since her nephew has moved to the area. The Major sympathizes and tells Mrs. Ali about Roger's ideas about how he should live his life now that he has aged.



The Major gives a full tour of his garden and regrets that the flowers are not in peak condition because it is October and the weather is turning cold. The Major notices everything that is wrong in the garden and hopes that Mrs. Ali notices the good things about the garden and is oblivious to his mistakes.

Mrs. Ali and the Major discuss the passing of friends and how they seem to be alone. Perhaps they could be alone together. Mrs. Ali is pleased that she has been asked to help with the dance.

"He could not in good conscience promote any association with Daisy Green and her band of ladies. He could more easily recommend gang membership or fence hopping into the polar bear enclosure at the Region's Park Zoo," (Chap. 8, p. 113).

#### Chapter 9:

Mrs. Ali, Grace De Vere and the Major attend the food tasting. The Major tries to get Grace to drive separately but she insists on making an outing of the event in Little Puddleton. The trio enters the Taj Mahal Palace. The Major, feeling awkward, studies the interior which is filled with fake flowers and eye searing colors.

The Rasools bring several items for the trio to sample. The Major worries about offending the Rasools with his preferences in food. Grace often defers to the Major for his opinion. Mrs. Rasool offers to let the trio listen to the music chosen for the event.

The Rasools introduce Saadia Khan as being a woman who is knowledgeable in decorating and can help with the design of the dance hall. The small boy from the park enters and the Major is instantly uncomfortable thinking that his new friendship with Mrs. Ali will be exposed. Mrs. Ali manages to make the boy feel comfortable when it is clear that his presence in the shop is not welcome.

Throughout the exchange, Mrs. Khan takes every chance to be rude to Mrs. Ali, treating the woman as if she was of a lower class. Decisions are finally made and the group leaves. The Major drops Mrs. Ali and Grace at the yarn shop while he goes to meet Roger. Roger wants to take the Major to see a cottage. Grace becomes ill. The Major worries about being late for the meeting. Mrs. Ali says she will stay with Grace while the Major meets Roger.

#### Chapter 10:

The Major meets with Roger, Sandy and the former owner's niece, Mrs. Augerspier at Apple Cottage. The Major is restless while Sandy and Mrs. Augerspier discuss hats. Roger finally manages to get the group inside the cottage. The Major is appalled at the condition of the cottage. Sandy tells the woman that she would not change a thing.

The Major asks for a tour of the garden. Mrs. Augerspier takes the Major on the tour and becomes upset when she sees Grace and Mrs. Ali in the garden. The Major introduces Mrs. Augerspier to the women. Roger rushes outside and is extremely rude to the



women. Mrs. Augerspier overreacts. Roger chastises the Major for inappropriate behavior.

Roger offers Mrs. Augerspier a check for six months. Mrs. Augerspier agrees to allow Roger and Sandy to rent the cottage. The Major asks Roger about being too spontaneous. The Major wants to discuss the fact that Roger has announced his engagement. Mrs. Augerspier, Roger and Sandy decide to go and have tea. The Major manages to get away with the excuse of taking Grace home.

Mrs. Ali and Grace discuss their costumes for the party. Grace invites Mrs. Ali to her house. The Major feels somewhat jealous.

## chapters 6-10 Analysis

Chapter 6:

It is clear that the men fear the women of the golf club. The Major insults the room when he recommends returning to a black tie affair. The Major is forced into helping save the dance when it is known that he has befriended Mrs. Ali. The Major tries to get out of the obligation but finds that he cannot.

Chapter 7:

Jemima's attitude is frighteningly similar to Roger's regarding the guns. Both want the money from the sale without giving any thought to the family name, tradition, agreement between Bertie and the Major, or the Major's feelings. The Major is intent on keeping the guns and is prepared to invent some ruse to keep them.

Chapter 8:

The Major is nervous about Mrs. Ali's visit. It is clear that the Major is attracted to Mrs. Ali but is not certain what is appropriate given their situation. The Major chides himself on fussing too much over the meeting. Mrs. Ali is gracious and makes the afternoon as easy as possible. Mrs. Ali also has affection for the Major but is uncertain what to do about it. In addition to the fact that they are both widowed, Mrs. Ali is Pakistani, which may cause some eyebrows to rise in the village.

Chapter 9:

The issue of class comes to the forefront in chapter 9. Mrs. Khan makes it very clear that she feels she is far above Mrs. Ali, whom she sees as a lowly shopkeeper. The Major works hard to smooth over the behavior of Mrs. Khan. Mrs. Ali stands her ground.

Chapter 10:

Grace's illness turns out to be a blessing for the Major. Apple Cottage is a dump but the Major seems to have no say as to the decision, which makes him wonder why he was

invited. Roger is insufferably rude to Mrs. Ali and Grace, acting as if the Major has done something terrible by bringing them to the cottage. Sandy is diplomatic in her way. Once again, Mrs. Ali saves the day when she says Grace is feeling better but should go home at the first opportunity. The Major begins to feel possessive of Mrs. Ali and wants her to spend time with only him.



# chapters 11-15

## chapters 11-15 Summary

Chapter 11:

The Major ponders the inconsistency of men and how it annoys him. He begins to think that he should change his relationship with Mrs. Ali. Alec calls to ask the Major to play golf. The Major declines but Alec talks him into playing, saying that an outing would be good for him. The Major agrees.

The Major and Alec wander into a dance rehearsal at the club. The Major is appalled at the ineptitude of the women. The Major chats with the dance leader, Amina, who works at the Taj Mahal. Amina keeps turning the conversation to Mrs. Ali. Amina asks if Mrs. Ali might be willing to hire her at the shop. Amina asks the Major to take her to Edgecombe St. Mary to speak with Mrs. Ali.

The Major joins Alec. Alec says that the secretary wants to speak to the Major about Roger's membership. The Major is upset to learn that Roger was at the club on Sunday after he had told the Major that he was too tired to visit.

The Major goes to see the secretary. The secretary is in the middle of an argument with Amina. The secretary is berating Amina for using the door for members and not the servants' entrance. The Major tries to avoid the scene. Amina discusses the rudeness of some people and how she refuses to back down to bullies. Amina talks about George and how people tend to make judgments without knowing the whole story.

The Major returns home after dropping off Amina and George. He begins to worry about how Amina will get home and returns to the village. Before he can go into Mrs. Ali's shop, he is approached by the club ladies. The ladies insist on talking about their new plans for the dance. They want to re-enact the Major's father's time in India. The ladies have their history completely wrong. The Major is enraged at the errors in the story but the ladies seem insistent, claiming that it is an honor.

The group goes into the shop. The ladies approach Amina about her work at the club. They make it sound as if Amina is doing something shameful. Mrs. Ali is invited to the dance. Mrs. Ali's nephew becomes angry, saying that his aunt will not dance in public. The ladies ask for Mrs. Ali to help out, claiming that her ethnicity will be a benefit to the evening. Mrs. Ali explains that she is from Cambridge and has never even been abroad. The women claim that no one has to know and that they would like Mrs. Ali to work as the coat check girl the evening of the party. Mrs. Ali appears ready to faint; the nephew becomes enraged. The Major quickly jumps in and says that Mrs. Ali will not be available as he has already asked her to be his guest. A shocked silence fills the room. One of the ladies remarks that Mrs. Ali's presence as a guest will add a bit of color to the evening.



Gertrude steps in and says that Mrs. Ali will be a nice addition as an ambassador at large for Pakistan and Cambridge. Gertrude also offers to contact Roger about his part in the play.

The nephew is extremely rude to Amina. It is revealed that Mrs. Ali's nephew may be George's father.

Mrs. Ali accepts the Major's offer to attend the dance.

Chapter 12:

The Major goes to Lord Dagenham's field when he hears cricket equipment hitting the ground. Alice, the woman that lives next door, is hiding behind a hedge. She calls to the Major. Alice tells the Major that the field may be sold and houses built on the site. Alice urges the Major to confront the people on the site to find out what is happening to the property. The Major learns only that there is some commercial development being planned. The Major reports back to Alice. Alice tries to get the Major to help with a protest. The Major only agrees to write to the council about the plans.

The Major goes to the village shop. Mrs. Ali confides in the Major that George is her great nephew. Mrs. Ali says her nephew, Abdul, did not know about George. Mrs. Ali gives the Major the opportunity to extract himself from their relationship. The Major vehemently declines. Mrs. Ali is concerned about gossip. The Major offers to allow Abdul to stay at Rose Cottage.

Chapter 13:

Abdul Wahid moves into Rose Cottage. Abdul begins to tell the Major about his relationship with Amina. The Major manages to extract himself from the situation.

On Saturday morning the Major is in the garden when he hears Roger and Abdul arguing in the cottage. Roger goes into the garden to find his father. Roger intends to call the police because of Abdul Wahid's presence. The Major tells Roger that he is being ridiculous. Roger becomes enraged with the Major about allowing Abdul stay at the cottage. Roger wants the Major to ask Abdul to leave. The Major refuses. The Major is angry that Roger feels such a sense of entitlement regarding the Lodge. The Major wonders how to tell Roger that his claim to the family home is over and that he cannot make the rules.

Roger says that he and Sandy plan to stay at Rose Lodge on weekends while the cottage is being readied. It is currently being painted and fixed up. The Major still thinks that the cottage is a dump. Roger tells the Major that his arrival is the perfect excuse to get rid of Abdul Wahid. The Major refuses.

"Alas, if I planned my weekends around the hope that you would carry through on a promise to visit, I would be a lonely old man sitting amid a growing tower of clean bed linen and uneaten cake," said the Major. "At least Abdul Wahid showed up when invited," (Chap. 13, p. 173).



Roger goes on to say that one must be careful of foreigners. The Major asks if that theory applies to Sandy.

The Major convinces Abdul Wahid to stay for lunch even though Roger makes it plain that the man is not welcome. Abdul Wahid is concerned because Roger and Sandy brought different types of pork and other foods that Abdul Wahid cannot eat. The Major says he will make a cheese sandwich if only the man will stay. Abdul Wahid is cautious because of Roger's behavior. This only makes the Major insist more as he tends to make it plain that Roger has no say about how things are run at Rose Lodge. Sandy attempts to act as a buffer. The Major begins to dislike Sandy less than before.

Marriage is discussed. Roger says that he and Sandy have no intention of marrying any time soon as it would be a death knell to their careers. The Major thinks this is an absurd reason.

Roger breaks the news to the Major that he has been asked to Lord Dagenham's shoot. Roger wants to borrow the Churchills. The Major is immediately angry. He explains to Roger that he, too, will be attending the shoot. Besides, Roger would look foolish "banging around with the guns." Roger becomes angry and defensive.

Roger announces that he and Sandy will be staying at Rose Lodge on weekends while Apple Cottage is being readied for them to move in. The Major explains that Abdul Wahid will be staying there. Roger disapproves and says surely the Major cannot expect Sandy to stay at the lodge with a Pakistani man in residence.

Chapter 14:

Mrs. Ali and the Major take George to the park to fly a kite. The Major is, as usual, annoyed with the lack of care paid to the children by their parents, who would rather yell than ensure a child's safety as he ventures near the edge of the cliff. Mrs. Ali says that standing near the edge of the cliff always made her feel as if the ground would give way. The Major, in his usual affect, quotes Kipling:

Clean of officious fence or hedge

Half-wild and wholly tame,

The wise turf cloaks the white-cliff edge

As when the Romans came."

(Chap. 14, p. 192)

Mrs. Ali talks about Abdul Wahid's presence at the shop. It is clear that it was not Mrs. Ali's choice to have the nephew there but rather it was expected, so Mrs. Ali chose to give into the compromise because of family duty and what was expected of her by the family as well as her culture.



"'Compromises are often built on their being unspoken,' said the Major. 'I think I understand you perfectly,'" (Chap. 14, p. 193).

Mrs. Ali asks the Major to speak to Abdul Wahid about his relationship with Amina. The Major agrees and then immediately wonders what he will do. He barely knows the young man and now he is committed to discussing private matters. When the conversation finally happens, Abdul Wahid admits being in love with Amina and is entirely devoted to George but does not know how to overcome his religious objections.

"'You are a wise man, Major, and I will consider with great care—and humility.' He finished his tea and rose from the table to go to his room. 'But I must ask you, do you really understand what it means to be in love with an unsuitable woman?'" (Chap. 14, p. 203).

Chapter 15:

The day finally comes when the Pettigrews go to Lord Dagenham's for the shoot. The Major is not as impressed as he hoped he might be with Ferguson. Ferguson does not shoot in the proper manner according to the Major but does not seem to care. Roger takes every opportunity to interrupt and try to put himself in Ferguson's good graces. The Major decides that he will not sell the Churchills. Ferguson tries to convince Roger to help him purchase the guns.

Roger brags about being invited to stay to speak with Ferguson and others. The Major defies his own breeding and makes it a point to say that he was the reason Roger was invited to stay.

When the shooters are in the middle of their game, a large group of people march onto the field. The group carries signs to protest the killing of the ducks. There are children everywhere and havoc ensues. The Major takes charge and tries to get the shooters to stand down. Dagenham sends out an order to have the protestors arrested.

There is a short confrontation between Alice and Lord Dagenham. Alice explains that the children broke away from the group.

Ferguson shows the Major and others a model of the new development. The Major notices that the village shop has been replaced by another business. There are other businesses that have been added. Ferguson explains that the new businesses will serve the Dagenham estate. The Major is stunned. Dagenham speaks to the Major about the proposed estate. Dagenham says he has read the letter the Major wrote to the planning commission. Dagenham is as appalled but says that he cannot save the land. The government has continued to undermine the rights of the citizens. Lord Dagenham tries to explain his plans for preserving the village.

## chapters 11-15 Analysis

Chapter 11:





The reader is introduced to the golf club atmosphere. The club secretary is representative of the attitude of the club when he insists that Amina use the servants' entrance. The Major tries to smooth things over with the secretary over Roger's membership. As usual, Roger is thoughtless about procedure and insulting when it comes to explaining his reasoning for wanting to join the club at which he is already a junior member.

The ladies of the club are equally insulting to Mrs. Ali when they ask her to be the coat check girl at the dance, to lend an air of authenticity. They constantly overlook the fact that Mrs. Ali is of Pakistan heritage and not Indian. Their attitude is that the relationship is close enough. The Major is also upset by the fact that the ladies want to put on a play about Colonel Pettigrew but have the majority of the facts wrong. The women claim that their version is more interesting.

#### Chapter 12:

There is an uproar in the village when it is learned that Lord Dagenham's property is going to be used to create a new commercial and residential area, completely changing the face of Edgecomb St. Mary. The Major is asked to intervene.

#### Chapter 13:

Roger becomes even more obnoxious, racist and rude when he learns about Abdul Wahid's time at Rose Lodge. The Major begins to appreciate Sandy's manner, despite the fact that she is American. The Major refuses to allow Abdul Wahid to remove himself from the situation due to Roger's behavior.

#### Chapter 14:

The Major becomes closer with Mrs. Ali, a fact made clear when the woman begins to confide in him. The Major likes and appreciates George and hopes to spend time with the boy. While the Major finds that he will do almost anything Mrs. Ali asks, speaking to Abdul Wahid seems highly inappropriate. Still, the Major consents even though he will later regret the decision.

#### Chapter 15:

The Major's training and forceful nature come through at Lord Dagenham's manor. People behave irresponsibly and the event becomes extremely chaotic until the Major steps in to set things straight. Roger attempts to exert the same command and while it is effective, the actions of the Major's son seem to work out as if by chance rather than skill.



# chapters 16-20

## chapters 16-20 Summary

### Chapter 16:

The Major goes to Grace's cottage to pick up Mrs. Ali. The Major is stunned to see Mrs. Ali dressed in a sweeping gown. The Major is struck with awe at Mrs. Ali's beauty. The Major picks Sandy up at Apple Cottage and then drives to the golf club for the dance.

The atmosphere of the dance is discussed from the decorations to the dress of various guests. The conversation revolves around the evening as well as Ferguson's part in the new development at Lord Dagenham's manor.

### Chapter 17:

Roger arrives in Colonel Pettigrew's uniform. The Major recalls Roger's disdain for the military and finds the whole situation to be ironic. Even Roger feels somewhat uncomfortable.

Ferguson continues to press the Major on the matter of the Churchills. Ferguson points out that the Major should be sure to take the guns back right away after the play so that Marjorie will not be tempted to take them.

Many people enjoy the show but Mr. Rasool rushes the stage and begins to protest. The Major is torn between moments of pride and embarrassment. A fight ensues.

The relationship between the Major and Mrs. Ali is compared to the relationship between a former member and his wife, a black actress. The reasoning behind the scandal is not because the woman is black but because she is an actress and the lack of privacy for those in the village.

The people at the dance are rude to Mrs. Ali. Some are so intentionally while others' prejudices get in the way. The Major is appalled. Mrs. Ali is set on leaving the dance but insists that the Major stay to accept his award. The Major stays but regrets allowing Mrs. Ali to leave. The Major also regrets not standing up for Mrs. Ali in a firmer manner.

### Chapter 18:

Mrs. Ali leaves the village but the Major does not see her go. The Major is ill and spends three days in bed with a cough. The Christmas holidays invade Edgecomb St. Mary. The Major goes to the village shop and speaks to Amina. There is no word for him from Mrs. Ali. The Major decides to purchase a gift for Grace for Christmas and to invite her to Christmas dinner with Roger and Sandy.

### Chapter 19:



The Major goes to visit Roger and finds Sandy home alone. Sandy confides that she is leaving Roger. The Major makes a feeble attempt to get the girl to stay.

The Major wonders how Roger would manage and begins to plan how to save Christmas.

"The Major awoke on Christmas morning with the feeling that today was to be the low point of his world, an Antarctic of the spirit," (Chap. 19, p. 281).

The Major calls Roger and wakes him. Roger is extremely hung over and distraught over Sandy leaving him. The Major calls Grace and says he has to go to Roger's early to make dinner. Grace insists on helping with dinner. It seems that Christmas will be saved.

Roger finally wakes up and announces that he has made other plans with Gertrude. The Major is furious. Roger leaves despite the Major's rage and protestations. The Major and Grace pack up the dinner and go to Rose Lodge.

Chapter 20:

The Major finds himself spending a lot of time with Grace. During one afternoon together, Grace mentions that Jasmina will not attend the wedding of Abdul Wahid and Amina. The Major is disappointed. Grace says that she has not heard from Jasmina.

The Major asks Grace to marry him. Grace refuses and says that she refuses to compromise the rest of her life. Grace encourages the Major to go after Jasmina.

The Major goes to Roger's house and finds him hung over again. The Major explains that he has to leave early for Scotland so that he can stop to see someone along the way. Roger says he has decided to go to Lord Dagenham's manor with Gertrude. The Major tries to convince Roger to go after Sandy but Roger is determined to pursue Gertrude. The Major learns that Sandy had an abortion. Roger pushed his views on Sandy and she did not protest, so Roger took it as approval. Roger proposed in a most inconsiderate way, which caused the rift.

Roger realizes that the Major is going to visit Jasmina. There is an argument.

## chapters 16-20 Analysis

Chapter 16:

The Major feels put out by having to pick up Sandy for the dance. Spending time alone with Mrs. Ali is pleasurable and the Major is annoyed that it is to be interrupted. The reader can discern that the romance between the Major and Mrs. Ali is about to take a turn.

Chapter 17:



The golf club dance is a fiasco. The Major and Mrs. Ali are seated with the Khans, as if the ethnicities must be grouped. Mrs. Ali shows ultimate grace and tolerance as she is treated badly by several people. The Major begins to realize that some of his friends are not friends at all. Mrs. Ali leaves, despite the Major's objections. The Major is torn between his feelings for Mrs. Ali and his sense of duty. Duty wins out but the Major regrets his position.

Chapter 18:

Mrs. Ali leaves the village but does not say goodbye to the Major because she feels that it is best to put an end to their relationship and to spare the Major further embarrassment. It has become clear to all that a relationship between the Major and Mrs. Ali will never be accepted. The Major is so distraught that he makes himself ill.

Chapter 19:

Roger climbs to new heights of idiocy and rudeness. It is obvious that he never believed Sandy would leave him. The Major deeply regrets the loss of Sandy and it seems that he would have preferred to keep Sandy and lose Roger, if only for a moment.

Roger's coldness about the relationship stuns the Major. Roger's pragmatism is taken to new heights when he decides that it might be best to pursue Gertrude, which will give him another opportunity to get into Lord Dagenham's good graces and further his career.

Chapter 20:

Grace speaks candidly to the Major and makes him realize that he has no choice but to go after Jasmina if he is to be happy. The Major is hesitant but realizes that Grace is right. The move will cause a great deal of upheaval in the village and in everyone's lives but the Major's destiny is at stake.



# chapters 21-25; Epilogue

## chapters 21-25; Epilogue Summary

Chapter 21:

The Major finds the house of Jasmina's relatives. The Major knocks on the door and asks to speak to Jasmina. A young woman calls her father to tell him of the arrival of the Major. The young woman will not fetch Jasmina nor tell the Major anything except that her father will be home right away. The father enters the house. He has Americanized himself to be called "Dave," which the Major thinks is ridiculous.

Dave talks about Jasmina's stay with them and how it is her time in life to read and rest and not have to work any more. It should be a relief to her to give up the shop to Abdul Wahid. Dave says he looks forward to the day when he can give up his business to Abdul Wahid and then he, too, will be underfoot. It upsets the Major to think that Jasmina's family sees her as a nuisance. Dave tells the Major that Jasmina also takes care of his mother, who cannot be left alone. It is for that reason that Jasmina will not attend the wedding of Amina and Abdul Wahid. The Major protests and says that Jasmina should be allowed to attend the wedding. Dave objects and says that it is best Jasmina is cut off entirely from her previous life.

After a time, Jasmina is permitted to see the Major. The Major learns that Jasmina is miserable and feels like a prisoner. The family has kept Jasmina's mail from her, which is why Grace never received any correspondence. The volume of poetry returned to the Major by Abdul Wahid is believed to be lost in the move. Jasmina never sent it back.

The Major asks Jasmina to run away with him. The thought excites Jasmina. At first there are excuses but then the couple runs away together.

Chapter 22:

The Major and Jasmina leave the house and drive toward a cabin that belongs to a friend of the Major. The Major says he should find a phone to call Helena, the wife of Colonel Preston. Helena is also the caretaker to the Colonel, who served with the Major in the military. The Colonel is not well and the Major knows that the cabin will not be in use. Helena asks no questions but tells the Major where to find the key.

Jasmina says she has a cell phone that she never uses because she is convinced that the family only bought it for her so they might keep track of her whereabouts. There are ten messages waiting for Jasmina when she turns on the phone. The messages are not listened to or returned. When the Major begins to tell Jasmina about his plans, she says she does not want to know where they are going—she simply wants to escape.

The pair goes to Colonel Preston's fishing lodge. The lodge is described as being more of a tumbledown sheep shed than any kind of fancy cottage. There is no heat except for



the fireplace. Fortunately, Jasmina still has the bag of food that she was carrying when she returned to Dave's house so there is food.

There are some awkward moments at the lodge. The Major is determined to behave in a manner befitting the situation and his pedigree. Jasmina keeps throwing hints that the Major is either oblivious to or is too mild mannered and stodgy to accept. Finally, Jasmina asks the Major if he wants to make love. The couple's relationship is sealed.

Chapter 23:

The Major and Jasmina drive back to Edgecombe St. Mary. For the first time, the Major is not excited to return to the village. The Major is nervous about going to Amina and Abdul Wahid's wedding. When they arrive at the village shop, there are police and a medical team present. Jasmina panics and demands to know who has been injured. After some confusion, George is placed in Jasmina's care. The Major and Jasmina learn that Abdul Wahid has disappeared. Apparently, he has some notion that he will jump off the high cliff and send himself to Mecca. Jasmina is asked if Abdul Wahid has a car. She says no. The Major notes that Jasmina has not mentioned that she has a Honda that is currently missing from the shop.

The Major rushes home to get some supplies before setting out after Abdul Wahid. Roger is at Rose Lodge. He asks why the Major is not dancing at the wedding. The Major explains that he must find Abdul Wahid because he is missing and is most likely going to walk off the edge of a cliff.

Chapter 24:

Jasmina and the Major arrive at the cliffside. Jasmina spots Abdul Wahid by the cliff. He is accompanied by his elderly great aunt who has a pair of knitting needles that she has been using to threaten the park rangers with so that they stay away. The rangers, Jim and Brian, have not yet approached Abdul Wahid and the aunt. The Major thinks that the rangers are being overly cautious and ridiculous. Brian wants to go to Abdul Wahid and try to talk him into retreating from the cliff. Jim objects. Jim says that they are not to approach anyone that is in possession of a visible weapon or might be mentally unstable.

Brian thinks that Jim is being foolish. "It's not like they send a bloody SWAT team, Jim," said Brian. "You could save ten people in the time it takes you to call two constables in a Mini Cooper," (Chap. 24, p. 334).

Brian claims he has rescued many people. The Major asks if Brian has had training. Brian has no training, just on the job experience. The Major introduces himself and orders Brian to step aside.

The Major and Jasmina approach the great aunt who is knitting at cliffside. Abdul Wahid is deep in prayer. The old woman chastises Jasmina about bothering someone in prayer. The woman talks about how the younger generations lack in moral character. The aunt is supportive of Abdul Wahid's choice to walk off the cliff and go to Mecca. The



old woman says that she is doing what needs to be done. When things go wrong, she is the one that is called to take care of problems.

"No one wants to know, but then I come—when there are too many puppies in the litter, when a daughter has something growing in the belly. And after I visit they never speak, but they send me a small goat or a piece of carpet." She ran her fingers slowly up the shaft of the needle and began to creep forward across the grass, waving the tip of the needle as if to hypnotize. "They will cry and rant and pretend to be ashamed but you will see, they will give me my own small house now in the hills and I will grow figs and sit all day in the sun," (Chap. 24, p. 337) .

Jasmina and the old woman argue. The old woman talks about Jasmina's choice to run off and debauch herself. Jasmina asks the old woman if she has any recollection of what it is like to be happy and loved. The Major stands at the ready with Bertie's Churchill in hand. There is a scuffle and the gun goes off.

Chapter 25:

Major Pettigrew wakes up and feels groggy and somewhat confused. He is in the hospital. When the Churchill went off, the Major was shot. He will be fine. There is some bad news, however, and it is a struggle to determine who will tell the Major. It seems that when the scuffle ensued on the cliff, the Churchill went over the side and was lost in the water. Roger and Jasmina wait anxiously to see the Major's reaction. The Major wonders if something must be wrong with him—perhaps he is medicated—because he feels nothing. There is no remorse about the gun. The Major says that it was Bertie's gun and not his own. Roger says that Marjorie will surely want to be compensated for the loss.

Later, Amina sneaks out of her own hospital room to visit the Major. Amina tells the Major that the wedding is off and she will not live with Abdul Wahid. She will live in town and Abdul Wahid will continue to live in the apartment above the shop. Amina assures the Major that George will have as much of a family as is possible. Amina suggests that the Major can still be a part of the boy's life. The Major is pleased that he will be able to teach George to play chess after all.

Epilogue:

The epilogue details the wedding day of Major Pettigrew and Mrs. Ali.

## **chapters 21-25; Epilogue Analysis**

The last section moves along very quickly. Major Pettigrew makes his last stand when he goes after Jasmina. After seeing how her family treats her, the Major is determined to take her away from the oppressive atmosphere.

It is Jasmina that finally gets the Major to give in to his impulses and take the final step in sealing their commitment to one another.



Once again, it is the Major that must step in to save the day when it is discovered that Abdul Wahid is going to seal his fate by walking off a cliff. Only this time, Jasmina is at the Major's side. It is ironic that the aunt lectures Jasmina. It is clear that the woman disapproves of the Major. Although the Major and Jasmina both consider themselves to be proper people, the aunt disagrees. If the aunt has her way, Abdul Wahid will die. In return for her great nephew's death, the old woman will receive a house and a cozy retirement.

The Major finally realizes that his attachments to the Churchills have more to do with his familial relationships than to the guns themselves. It also helps that it was Bernie's gun that was lost.

The wedding day finally comes for the Major and Jasmina. It is clear that the people in the village will accept the marriage or not. Neither the Major or Jasmina will continue to be controlled by the opinions of others.





# Characters

## Major Ernest Pettigrew

Major Ernest Pettigrew is a 68 year old widower living in Edgecomb St. Mary. Major Pettigrew served with the Royal Sussex during his time in the military. Pettigrew's father was a colonel in the military and served directly with the Maharajah in India. The Pettigrews cherish their pedigree. Major Pettigrew also served in India but did not attain the same rank or status as his father.

Major Pettigrew was happily married to his wife, Nancy, who died six years earlier. The couple has one son, Roger, who came to them late in life. Nancy sought to spoil Roger while the Major preferred discipline. Roger has grown up to be self-important, self-indulgent, often thoughtless and disrespectful, particularly when it comes to the Major.

The Major lives alone at Rose Lodge. The lodge is a source of pride for the Major and he strives to take good care of it, particularly the garden. It is clear that the Major misses Nancy's input but tries to do the best he can. When the Major invites Mrs. Ali to the cottage, he tries to make it seem as pleasant and proper as he can, hoping that the woman will not notice any shortcomings in the house or with the garden.

The Major regrets that the manners and social niceties of England seem to be sorely lacking in modern times. The Major was raised in a certain, proper way and becomes upset when others do not abide by his idea of what is right or how things should be done. The Major does find, however, that he may have to let go of some of his old ways if he is to pursue his relationship with Mrs. Ali and start life anew.

## Mrs. Ali

Mrs. Jasmina Ali is a 58 year old widow and the proprietress of the SuperSaver SuperMart. Mrs. Ali is a small, attractive woman of Pakistani heritage. Many people in the story refer to Mrs. Ali as the Pakistani woman and act as if she is completely foreign to England even though she was born in Cambridge. Despite the ill treatment thrust upon Mrs. Ali by the villagers, she remains pleasant and cordial to all, perhaps in part because of her need for their return business at the shop.

Mrs. Ali has operated the village shop since the death of her husband nearly two years earlier. The Alis had no children.

Mrs. Ali talks about how her life has changed since her nephew has moved to the area. The Major sympathizes and tells Mrs. Ali about Roger's ideas about how he should live his life now that he has aged. Mrs. Ali's attitude changes some after George is introduced. However, it becomes even clearer that Mrs. Ali's time at the shop is soon to come to an end.



Mrs. Ali delights in her blossoming relationship with the Major even though she is somewhat unsure of him and herself.

## **Bertie Pettigrew**

Bertie Pettigrew was Major Pettigrew's brother. Bertie dies before the start of the book so all references made to him are in the past tense or are related to his family. Bertie was the owner of the Churchill shotgun that matches the Major's, which becomes a major sticking point in the story between the Major and his sister-in-law, Marjorie.

## **Roger Pettigrew**

Roger Pettigrew is the only son of Major Ernest and Nancy Pettigrew. Roger has grown up to be self-indulgent, disrespectful and selfish.

## **Alec Shaw**

Alec Shaw is an old friend and golf partner to Major Pettigrew.

## **Mortimer Teale**

Mortimer Teale is the owner and operator of Twekesberry and Teale, the law firm for the Pettigrew family.

## **Marjorie Pettigrew**

Marjorie Pettigrew is the widow of Bertie, Major Pettigrew's younger brother.

## **Grace DeVere**

Grace DeVere is one of the ladies of the Golf Club. It is Grace that convinces the Major to become involved in the planning of the annual dance.

## **Mr. and Mrs. Rasool**

Mr. and Mrs. Rasool are the owners and operators of the Taj Mahal Palace. The restaurant is hired to cater the Golf Club dance.



## **Sandy Dunn**

Sandy Dunn is the girlfriend of Roger Pettigrew. The Major finds her to be brash and typically American.

## **Abdul Wahid**

Abdul Wahid is the nephew of Mrs. Ali. Abdul learns that he is the father of George. Abdul struggles with having a child out of wedlock as it offends his new "religiosity."



# Objects/Places

## Edgecombe St. Mary

"He had been many decades, as man and boy, in the village of Edgecomb St. Mary, and yet the walk down the hill to the village never ceased to give him pleasure," (Chap. 3, p. 35).

The lane to the village is steep, its sides decorated with privet hedges, beech trees and hawthorn. There is a scent of farm animals in the air from behind the cottages. There are many garden gates. The Major enjoys glimpses of thick, lush lawns and flowers. Although Edgecombe St. Mary is located in the suburbs, it feels as though it is in the country.

The village is located in the Sussex countryside. Hills rise and fall. The Major likes to look at the rye fields. The Major also likes the village and often looks forward to Mrs. Ali's shop, the SuperSaver SuperMart.

The people in Edgecombe St. Mary are very set in their ways and do not appreciate the presence of strangers or new traditions and rituals. As such, the villagers of Edgecombe St. Mary are unkind to the Alis when they arrive and purchase the shop. It takes some time but the people begin to warm up to the Alis and eventually refer to them as "our dear Pakistani friends at the shop," (Chap. 1, p. 6).

The village is located 20 minutes from Hazelbourne-on-Sea, where Bertie lived.

## Rose Lodge

Rose Lodge is the home to Major Ernest Pettigrew. It is located on Blackberry Lane in Edgecomb St. Mary, Sussex, England. The home has a brick and tile façade. The Major describes the house as being Georgian in style with what is known as "improvements." The improvements are designed to make the 17th century home look more imposing than it is in its natural state. The house, overall, is quite spacious. There is a large garden in the back of the house where the Major grows many types of flowers and savory herbs.

The Major lives alone at Rose Lodge. The lodge is a source of pride for the Major and he strives to take good care of it, particularly the garden. It is clear that the Major misses Nancy's input but tries to do the best he can. When the Major invites Mrs. Ali to the lodge, he tries to make it seem as pleasant and proper as he can, hoping that the woman will not notice any shortcomings in the house or with the garden.

Rose Lodge becomes threatened when Lord Dagenham permits residential and commercial buildings to be erected in the field next to the house. The Major is quite



upset as Rose Lodge has been his home for many years. As one might expect, Roger begins to push for the house to be sold for a significant profit.

## **SuperSaver SuperMart**

SuperSaver SuperMart, formerly Mrs. Bridge's Village Shop, is the name of Mrs. Ali's store. It tries hard to compete with the larger markets but fails. However, the business is relatively successful because it is located in Edgecombe St. Mary while the others are farther away. The store is run by the recently widowed Mrs. Ali and her less-than-competent nephew.

## **Tewkesberry and Teale**

Tewkesberry and Teale serves as the Pettigrew family solicitor's office. Mr. Tewkesberry is dead so the office is operated by Mortimer Teale, Mr. Tewkesberry's son-in-law.

## **Golf Club**

The Golf Club is the center of social activity for the Major and the people of the village. Many of the members are of the upper class and tend to look down on certain people, including Mrs. Ali..

## **Apple Cottage**

Apple Cottage is the cottage in Little Puddleton rented by Roger and Sandy.

## **Churchills**

The Churchills are sporting guns given to Colonel Pettigrew by the Maharajah. The guns are passed down to Major Pettigrew and Bertie. The guns become a bone of contention after Bertie dies.

## **India**

India is mentioned many times throughout the story as it is the main location in which the Major served while in the military. India is also the theme of the annual golf club dance.

## **Pakistan**

Pakistan is home to the ancestors of Mr. and Mrs. Ali.

## London

London is the major city in which Roger lives and works. It is also the home of Sandy Dunn. The Major dislikes the city for its up and coming modern ways that go against his personal preferences and ideals.



# Themes

## Proper Behavior

Major Ernest Pettigrew is a retired Major from the Royal Sussex. The Pettigrew family has a long and illustrious reputation as a proper British family, prone to act in the most proper and ethical manner at all times. Major Pettigrew regrets that modern times have eroded this type of behavior. The Major often finds himself stunned and appalled at the behavior of others, particularly that of his only child, Roger. Roger is constantly saying and doing the wrong things in his father's eyes, behaving badly, and failing to uphold the honor that is attached to the Pettigrew name. This attitude makes Major Pettigrew seem older than his 68 years although it is clear that the Major is not the only one who suffers from this issue. There are many instances in which several of the villagers, from Mrs. Ali to Grace De Vere, find the behavior of others inappropriate and unsavory.

Sandy is a good gauge of the change in behaviors and attitudes of the modern British. Roger tries to mimic Sandy's American ways but often fails, leaving him lost between the attitudes and behaviors of modern Americans and the proper behaviors and attitudes of his formative years. A conversation at lunch one day exemplifies this: "Roger doesn't like to talk about religion, do you?" said Sandy. "No religion, no politics, sex only through innuendo—it's no wonder you British obsess about the weather, darling," (Chap. 13, p. 180).

The Major finds a suitable companion and partner in Mrs. Jasmina Ali, who holds the same beliefs and attitudes about proper behavior.

## Prejudice

Prejudice is seen in a variety of ways throughout the book. The initial references are seen in the villagers' treatment of Mr. and Mrs. Ali when they take over the village shop. The villagers of Edgecombe St. Mary are unkind to the Alis when they arrive and purchase the shop. It takes some time but the people begin to warm up to the Alis and eventually refer to them as "our dear Pakistani friends at the shop," (Chap. 1, p. 6).

While the villagers warm up to the Alis, perhaps even more so after Mr. Ali dies, Mrs. Ali is still seen as a lesser citizen. She is often referred to as a Paki or treated as a lower class citizen although she was born in Cambridge and has never set foot in Pakistan.

The same treatment is thrust upon Amina and, to a lesser degree, Abdul Wahid. Amina is also treated poorly by the locals, which is enhanced by the fact that she is a single mother. The club secretary is representative of the attitude of the club when he insists that Amina use the servants' entrance.

Roger is quick to express his disdain over the Major's affiliation with Mrs. Ali and with Abdul Wahid. Roger, treating his father as if he were feeble minded, attempts to explain



his reasons for furthering his social contacts. "You're either in the game, making the connections or you're in the social backwoods, reduced to making friends with—well, with shopkeepers," (Chap. 13, p. 184).

The height of the insults comes when the Major takes Mrs. Ali to the golf club dance. Although the Khans are also foreign, they seem to bear less of a stigma because Doctor Khan owns a successful medical practice.

## Relationships

There many interesting family and romantic relationships in the book. The main crux of the story revolves around the romantic relationship of Major Ernest Pettigrew and Mrs. Jasmina Ali. Both are widowed. Neither seems to think of the other outside their relationship at the village shop until Mrs. Ali visits Major Pettigrew to collect the money for the newspaper service. The sight of Major Pettigrew in great distress opens the door to a more personal relationship that eventually ends in marriage.

The relationship between Sandy and Roger is sudden and less than successful. At first the Major dislikes Sandy, in part because she is American and therefore lacks typical British grace and behavior. Those feelings change shortly before Sandy leaves Roger. Roger, who is temporarily devastated over the departure of Sandy, quickly recovers when he decides that marrying Gertrude, niece of the highly influential Lord Dagenham, would benefit his career. Irony ensues when Gertrude decides to marry Ferguson, who in turn will enhance her lifestyle and career, make her happy and save Edgecombe St. Mary in one fell swoop.

The relationship between Mrs. Ali and her family is strained and unhealthy, although typical for the culture.





# Style

## Point of View

The point of view used in "Major Pettigrew's Last Stand: A Novel" by Helen Simonson is third person omniscient. This point of view works well in the story as there are several components and underlying factors that would not be revealed otherwise. While the first person point of view might have been interesting when coming from the characters, particularly Major Pettigrew, in his time of confusion regarding his changing life or the excitement of his new relationship with Mrs. Ali, the third person point of view conveys the entire story and not just the subjective opinions of the characters. It also permits the reader to take part in the journey and development of each character in the story.

The point of view used in the story allows the reader to grasp the depth of each character and his/her role in the story. For example, using a point of view of the Major may help the reader to understand his plight regarding the possible ruination of Rose Lodge, yet could not possibly reflect the point of view held by an objective source such as Alec Shaw. Likewise, seeing the story from the self-involved mind of Roger would prove interesting considering his seeming lack of interest in his father's wants and needs, yet it could not possibly reflect the opinions and experiences of the Major.

The point of view also helps the reader to understand the current changes and developments taking place in England.

## Setting

The settings used in "Major Pettigrew's Last Stand: A Novel" by Helen Simonson are Edgecombe St. Mary and Rose Lodge. Edgecombe St. Mary is a small village located in the Sussex countryside. Hills rise and fall. The Major likes to look at the rye fields. The Major also likes the village and often looks forward to Mrs. Ali's shop, the SuperSaver SuperMart.

The people in Edgecombe St. Mary are very set in their ways and do not appreciate the presence of strangers or new traditions and rituals. As such, the villagers of Edgecombe St. Mary are unkind to the Alis when they arrive and purchase the shop. It takes some time but the people begin to warm up to the Alis and eventually refer to them as "our dear Pakistani friends at the shop," (Chap. 1, p. 6).

The village is located 20 minutes from Hazelbourne-on-Sea, where Bertie lived.

Rose Lodge is the home to Major Ernest Pettigrew. It is located on Blackberry Lane in Edgecomb St. Mary, Sussex, England. The home has a brick and tile façade. The Major describes the house as being Georgian in style with what is known as "improvements." The improvements are designed to make the 17th century home look more imposing than it is in its natural state. The house, overall, is quite spacious. There is a large



garden in the back of the house where the Major grows many types of flowers and savory herbs.

## Language and Meaning

The language in "Major Pettigrew's Last Stand: A Novel" by Helen Simonson is supposedly based on the average rural British person in modern times. However, the usage is reminiscent of novels from the mid-20th century, which brings about comparisons to characters and storylines used by authors of an earlier era such as Agatha Christie or, more recently, John Mortimer.

The language is proper with most grammar used correctly. There are times when the language is stiff and overly formal, giving the impression that even the friendliest of characters are no more than passing acquaintances. There is little familiarity throughout the dialogue. The exception to this rule is the behavior and language used by Sandy Dunn, an American. Roger, a Londoner, tends to be less formal than his father, yet not quite as informal as Sandy, even though Roger attempts to adopt a more American style.

The Major's use of language and propriety often puts the language in the forefront, save for the dialogue amongst the other characters. The author does a good job in representing the Major through cleverly chosen words designed to depict the character's upbringing and often rigid set of beliefs and behaviors.

There is a great deal of wit and cleverness throughout the text, including descriptions of the people and their habits.

## Structure

"Major Pettigrew's Last Stand: A Novel" by Helen Simonson is a work of fiction. The book is comprised of 376 pages, broken down into 25 chapters plus an epilogue. The shortest chapter is 3 pages in length; the longest chapter is 27 pages in length; the average number of pages in each chapter is 14.

The book is chronological in nature with some minor use of flashback to fill in the back story. The book begins with the death of Bertie Pettigrew, Major Ernest Pettigrew's younger brother.

The first scene entails Major Pettigrew answering the door to his house in somewhat of a bad state.

"Major Pettigrew was still upset by the phone call from his brother's wife and so he answered the doorbell without thinking," (Chap. 1, p. 3).

The Major's sister-in-law has called to say that his brother, Bertie, has died from a massive heart attack. The Major is in shock. It is obvious that the Major is in shock



because he is unsteady on his feet and does not realize at first that he is wearing his wife's favorite housecoat. The woman at the door, Mrs. Ali, makes no comment on the coat. Mrs. Ali invites herself inside the house when the Major appears ready to faint. The Major takes a seat in the parlor while Mrs. Ali fetches a glass of water from the kitchen. Mrs. Ali learns about the Major's distress and offers to make tea, understanding that the man should not be alone at this moment.

It is this scene that effectively sets the entire tone for the book. The Major begins to reassess his life in his senior years, realizing that things are not perhaps as he thought they were or he would like them to be. The most important shift in the Major's world is the personal introduction of Mrs. Ali. Although the pair are acquainted previously, Mrs. Ali enters the Major's personal life as easily as she enters Rose Lodge.

Simonson uses the relationship between the Major and Mrs. Ali as a springboard for investigating old versus new England as well as the stigmas that still exist about interracial relationships.



## Quotes

"Major Pettigrew was still upset by the phone call from his brother's wife and so he answered the doorbell without thinking." (Chap. 1, p. 3)

"She drove like a man, aggressively changing gear into the turns, accelerating away, swinging the tiny Honda over the hills with relish." (Chap. 1, p. 13)

"The major found himself loitering in the hall, unwilling to face what was inevitable upstairs." (Chap. 2, p. 23)

"He had been many decades, as man and boy, in the village of Edgecomb St. Mary, and yet the walk down the hill to the village never ceased to give him pleasure." (Chap. 3, p. 35)

"He had been puzzled, as had Bertie, when Tewkesbury took in Mortimer Teale as an associate." (Chap. 4, p. 49)

"It had been obvious soon after Bertie's marriage that Marjorie had no intention of playing the dutiful daughter-in-law and had sought to separate the two of them from the rest of the family." (Chap. 7, p. 86)

"He could not, in good conscience, promote any association with Daisy Green and her band of ladies. He could more easily recommend gang membership or fence-hopping into the polar bear enclosure at the Region's Park zoo." (Chap. 8, p. 113)

"'Roger doesn't like to talk about religion, do you?' said Sandy. 'No religion, no politics, sex only through innuendo—it's no wonder you British obsess about the weather, darling.'" (Chap. 13, p. 180)

"'You're either in the game, making the connections or you're in the social backwoods, reduced to making friends with—well, with shopkeepers.'" (Chap. 13, p. 184)

"'Compromises are often built on their being unspoken,' said the Major. 'I think I understand you perfectly.'" (Chap. 14, p. 193)

"'You are a wise man, Major, and I will consider with great care—and humility.' He finished his tea and rose from the table to go to his room. 'But I must ask you, do you really understand what it means to be in love with an unsuitable woman?'" (Chap. 14, p. 203)

"The Major awoke on Christmas morning with the feeling that today was to be the low point of his world, an Antarctic of the spirit." (Chap. 19, p. 281)

## Topics for Discussion

There are occasions in the book when the Major threatens to disown Roger for his inappropriate behavior and rudeness. Do you think the Major would ever disown Roger? Do you think the Major will maintain his other family members (for example, with Marjorie) even though their behaviors are often distasteful to the Major?

Do you think that the ladies at the golf club will ever come to accept Mrs. Ali, even after she marries the Major? Will the Major resign from the club? If so, how do you think that will affect his relationships with his golfing friends?

What might have happened if Grace had accepted the Major's proposal? Do you think Grace was right to refuse? Do you think the Major would have been able to get over Mrs. Ali?

Do you think that the issues between Amina and Abdul Wahid will ever be resolved? Might they get back together? How might George continue to be a part of the Major's life?

Gertrude's impending marriage to Ferguson will halt all of the plans to create a new Edgecombe St. Mary. Do you think that the village will stay the way it is or will another development company attempt to impose "progress" on the rural town? Explain.

Discuss prejudice as it appears in the book. Is there a difference between racism and prejudice? Which is worse—treating someone poorly because of race or because of his/her social position?

Do you think Roger would have any chance at advancement through his connections in Edgecombe St. Mary if it was not for Major Pettigrew? Explain.