



Miss Carter's War

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It is 1948 and Britain is struggling to recover from the Second World War. Half French, half English, Marguerite Carter, young and beautiful, has lost her parents and survived a terrifying war, working for the SOE behind enemy lines. Leaving her partisan lover she returns to England to be one of the first women to receive a degree from the University of Cambridge.

Now she pins back her unruly auburn curls, draws a pencil seam up her legs, ties the laces on her sensible black shoes, belts her grey gabardine mac and sets out towards her future as an English teacher in a girls' grammar school. For Miss Carter has a mission--to fight social injustice, to prevent war and to educate her girls.

Through deep friendships and love lost and found, from the peace marches of the fifties and the flowering of the Swinging Sixties, to the rise of Thatcher and the battle for gay rights, to the specter of a new war, Sheila Hancock has created a powerful, panoramic portrait of Britain through the life of one very singular woman.

Miss Carter's War Details

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Author : Sheila Hancock

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From Reader Review Miss Carter's War for online ebook

Paula says

Disappointed. Thought it read like a child's novel. Once upon a time....

Lesley says

What a dreadful book! This is simply a trot through post-war British history with added cardboard characters. I couldn't believe in any of the characters and the author's constant regurgitation of events felt like a series of lectures.

I'm glad this was a library book and I didn't spend good money on it!

Lydia says

A truly incredible book. everyone should read it

Rhiannon Williams says

I'm sure this book was really fun to write and research, and that it must feel like an incredible accomplishment to write a story that spans over 6 decades. But it took me almost the entire book to like it. I didn't enjoy how much it jumps from one time frame to another and the twee, idealistic approach to teaching infuriated me (as a teacher, I can assure you that the English syllabus has contained more than sodding poetry for the last 60 years). But the ending was heartwarming, and there were some incredibly touching moments of sheer clarity of emotion that stood out from amid the jumble of tedious events. The doesn't quite make up for the lack of flare in a majority of the writing. like a script, the dialogue between characters lacks description and it is therefore bland and occasionally confusing to read. An enjoyable read but not the best.

Jo Barton says

When Marguerite Carter returns to England after her time as a SOE in France during WW2, she needs to make a place for herself and as a gifted teacher she soon finds her niche is in teaching and inspiring a new generation of children who have been largely neglected during the war years. The story, which is beautifully written, spans over 60 years of Marguerite's life and details her challenges, her hopes for a better future and her constant quest for love.

I loved the author's easy style of writing and the way the behaviour of her main character was handled with sensitive detail and genuine empathy. The span of years moves effortlessly, and never becomes so bogged down by events that you forget where you are meant to be, and both time and place is handled with great charm. My favourite parts of the novel were the small snippets which alluded to Marguerite's war, and I hoped that we would get a fuller picture of what had happened to her as the book progressed.

I was sorry when the story ended, but feel that the author wrapped up the story really well. Overall Miss Carter's War was a joy to read, and thoroughly enjoyable from start to finish.

Benita Murray says

This book could have been more aptly titled: A (very) long (and boring) ride on a high horse. Depressing and futile are two adjectives that come to mind to describe this book. The protagonist, Miss Carter, lurches from one crusade to the next with an air of self-righteousness that would make a saint look selfish but somehow her railings against the system are to a moderate extent ineffectual and she always seems to miss the mark. By the end of the book you really do wonder why did I bother? I think the same thought occurred to the author, as she throws the reader a bone right at the end and tries to tie a ribbon on the ending but I'm afraid you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. This could have been so much better.

Catrinamaria says

Was tempted by Miss Carter's War because I'd enjoyed Sheila Hancock's memoirs very much. Must admit that a story of a post-war school teacher determined to change the world also appealed. I did enjoy the story - despite the clunky writing. I loved the structure where fictional characters were found at real events with real characters in the mix. The early political career of Margaret Thatcher for example worked as a device and was pretty convincing in the way it was woven through right up to her political fall. The flash backs to wartime France in italics probably weren't exploited as much as they could have been; they really only came into their own in the last quarter of the novel (to be fair this could have been intentional?). The final chapter is beautifully imagined! Well researched the mid 60s onwards chimed for me. Sheila Hancock much have loved the four years she spent writing this.

Catalina says

I won this book as a First Reads Giveaway.

The story is set in England, after the Second World War and it presents the life of one woman, Marguerite Carter, from the late 1940's to the 1990's. The writer presents the evolving social economics of Britain following the Second World War through the eyes of a secondary school English teacher, of French-English origins. Marguerite is one of the first women in England to receive a degree from Cambridge University; she has worked as a spy behind enemy lines in France, trying to help defeat the Nazis and lost all her family in the war. She is a strong-minded, independent and ambitious woman who wants to change the world through her teaching.

Her first post as a teacher is in an all girl's grammar school where she meets Tony, a PE teacher, who becomes her closest and most faithful friend.

All the other characters are well built and likable. I have empathised with Marguerite and I found her dedication as a teacher endearing. At times she seemed rather naïve and stubborn, but not enough to alter my perception of her character.

Overall a good read which I would recommend to others

Samantha says

I loved how it spanned from Second World War to the the 90s. If you're watching Netflix's The Crown, this is a great contextual accompaniment to what was happening in the land the Queen governs.

Beth (bibliobeth) says

Three and a half stars from me!

Miss Carter's War was chosen for the Spring Richard and Judy book club this year and was a novel I was looking forward to being set in one of my favourite time periods, the Second World War. The story boasts a powerful, intelligent and independent female character, (hurrah!) Marguerite Carter who is something of a revolutionary. I really enjoyed that we saw her journey over a period of years from a young woman with a lot to learn about the world but with a strong desire to "do some good," to a mature and much wiser older woman who still manages to achieve her dreams.

When we first meet Marguerite the war is over and she is about to begin a teaching job at a prestigious school for girls. However, throughout the novel we get flashbacks to times during the war which were particularly traumatising for her, working as part of the Specials Operations Executive in Vichy, France where she bore witness (and participated in) some incredibly harrowing events. Now a newly fledged teacher she is passionate about teaching her girls whilst still harbouring strong political notions that throw her into action if peace is in any way threatened or if she feels justice has not been served.

I loved the emotional connection Marguerite developed with her pupils and as life goes on, she descends almost like an Angel of Mercy if any of her girls are in trouble. There is a particularly poignant part of the story where one of her more gifted pupils becomes addicted to drugs and homeless. It is obvious how much love Marguerite has for the girl as she desperately tries to get her back on her feet again. In terms of her own relationships, poor Marguerite isn't very lucky. First of all she falls for a fellow teacher but there is quite an important factor that prevents them from having a conventional er... "physical" relationship. Following this, she begins a relationship with a man called Jimmy who brings a lot of excitement to her life but has a dark little secret of his own. We as the reader find out quite early on that she has left her heart in France with a colleague from the SOE, Marcel. So will she ever manage to find love? Or will she be married to her precious teaching for life?

As a debut novel from Sheila Hancock, I did think this was a good read but it felt a little slow at points, particularly at the beginning. I absolutely loved the little snippets that we got of Marguerite's job during the war and wished there were more of them or that they had been longer with more detail as that would have been intriguing to read about. Marguerite herself was a fascinating character and I loved that she was so independent and passionate, but occasionally it felt like I was reading about two different people regarding the flashbacks versus present time. I enjoyed the relationship/friendship that she managed to forge with Tony, the P.E. teacher but didn't really believe or buy into the relationship with Jimmy all that much. Saying all this, the ending of the novel was really lovely and left me with a little warm feeling inside and I do believe Sheila Hancock has a real gift for writing fiction.

Please see my full review at my blog <http://www.bibliobeth.com>

Veraa says

More like 3.5, i enjoyed it at certain parts and in the end it was very emotional. But it was stretched out at so many times. Idk i expected more feministic teacher tbh. But its a nice look at someone 's life :)

Alice says

I read a good review about this book in one of my favourite magazines, but nearly didn't read it because I'm not keen on Sheila Hancock - she annoys me when she's on Just a Minute (radio prog). I'm very glad I did read it though as I was pleasantly surprised to read this very interesting and enjoyable novel.

The story is about half English half French Marguerite who gets her first teaching job not long after WW2 and it focuses on education and politics in the ensuing years to the 1990s in a narrative way. Including attitudes to race and homosexuality she appears to have done her research well and writes a pretty good story.

There was a slightly unbelievable bit near the end, but I can forgive her that as she used it to tie up a few loose ends (and I'm a sucker for that sort of thing).

Susan Grossey says

Just too clunky for my taste - trying to ram in all the research so that it shows. I was also completely unconvinced by the motivation (and indeed the language and attitudes - far too modern) of the main character. I really wanted to like this, but nothing doing, I'm afraid.

Janice says

Enjoyed this, surprised how well it was written.

Cerys says

Not at all what I was expecting from the blurb. I thought this was going to be a tale of courage under fire during the second world war but, although Marguerite's past as an SOE operative was featured in her flashbacks (often the same ones), she was fighting some very different wars during the course of the book.

This brings me to the first problem with the book, first she was fighting against the old-fashioned strictures of the Grammar school, then against the bomb, then against bureaucracy, but without any particular passion for any of them.

In my opinion the timescale is too broad and the timeline unclear. Years pass in a matter of pages without

anything to show for them (perhaps this could be said of all our lives, but it isn't useful in a book). Marguerite's friendship with Tony was, perhaps the best thing about this book, and the part I enjoyed most.

I feel that this book would have been better had it focussed on a smaller time-frame and gone into more detail, rather than trying to cover 60 years in a very short time. As an exploration of the changes which have occurred in British society in the years since the second world war it is a decent overview but I would have liked more substance and better drawn characters.
