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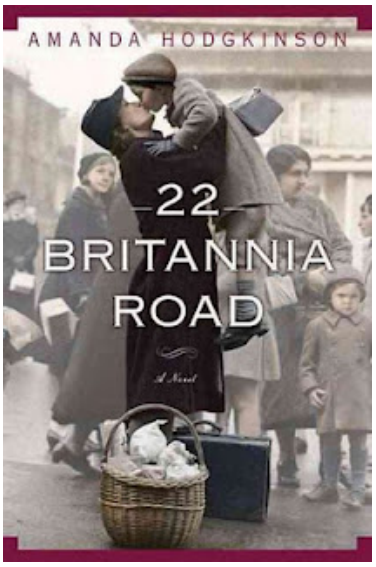
22 Britannia Road



Many novels dwell on the horrors of war, but few deal with the dislocation and tremendous adjustments that occur afterwards. Amanda Hodgkinson's wise debut novel [1] does exactly that for a Polish family separated during World War II and later reunited in England.

A year before Poland was invaded, Silvana, a movie projectionist, and Janusz, a country boy meet and marry. They have a son Aurek. War comes and Janusz is called to defend his country. Before even reaching his unit, German bombs halt Janusz's train and he is injured during his first battle. He watches as an old woman herding her sheep is shot down.

After the planes disappear, the young Polish soldier decides that he must care for these animals and give this old woman a proper burial. Meanwhile Silvana takes Aurek to the city but as the Germans invade it, she is separated from her son. A woman helps her to reclaim him. Later, a German tries to rape her in an abandoned apartment that she has taken over in search of food and shelter. She and Aurek flee to the woods where they spend the next three or four years.

Aurek becomes a kind of feral child, recognizing bird calls and animal cries. He and his mother struggle to live off the land especially in winter. Meanwhile, Janusz has made his way to France with two other ex-soldiers. They want to join the resistance there. However Janusz is injured and moves to a farm where he falls in love with his caretaker there, named Helene. Eventually, he joins a British unit and fights against Germany.

After the war, he finds a house, thus the title, 22 Britannia Road. Britannia for a foreign family who want to start a new life in Britain. He finds his wife and children and they finally live together again and start an English garden.

But all is not well with this family. Each of them has emotional scars from the war. Perhaps, most harmed is Aurek who rejects Janusz. They also hide secrets from each other.

This novel centers on both loss and healing. It has several more twists that I will let you discover for yourself. I hope you will because this book is so rich with humanity, and the stories are so vivid that they could have happened last week. It's about becoming a family again after war's devastation. It's also about finding your place, your home, in a new land. For the Love of Reading[2]Information, Answers & Reviews [3]22 Britannia Road [4]Family Relationships [5]Fiction [6]World War II [7]

Posted by Dory L. on Oct 14, 2011

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