

War Changes Everything by Melanie Hughes

5 stars

Life in London before and during World War 2

Juanita is the interesting heroine of this very readable and enchanting book. Her single mother is a stoical Scot, abandoned after a brief encounter with a Spaniard. She struggles to bring up her daughter and Juanita's deprived childhood is further ruined by her cruel and drunken stepfather Cornelius who brutalises them both. Luckily Juanita is a clever girl and wins a scholarship to a good school - but immediately finds herself the strange outsider with a dubious background, shy and unsure of herself. She is rescued by Yolanda, an Italian girl with Great Spirit, who becomes her greatest friend. Gradually Juanita gains confidence, helped by frequent visits to Yolanda's Bohemian and boisterous family, where she is welcomed almost as another daughter. We follow the two girls through their stormy teenage years and then as they develop into two strong, opinionated and determined young women. Early on Juanita becomes obsessed with India and the fight for independence from British rule, an obsession which is to change her life. And then war breaks out.

This book is a fascinating glimpse into the life of a girl growing up in pre-war London amidst all the developing events of the thirties. After the outbreak of war there are authentic accounts of what it was like living through the Blitz.

Many themes run through this fascinating read - love, loss, friendship, and stoicism. It is an authentic and true account of these years and Juanita's story is based on letters and diaries. Melanie Hughes writes with a great flow and has turned this into a gripping story. I cannot wait to read the sequel.

Jane

Breakaway Reviewers received a copy of the book to review.