



# The English Girl

*Margaret Leroy*

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**The English Girl** Margaret Leroy

**A breath-taking historical novel set in 1930s Vienna, just before the outbreak of the Second World War, about an ordinary girl living in extraordinary times.**

When seventeen-year-old Stella Whittaker is offered the chance to study at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna it's a dream-come-true, made possible by old family friends, Rainer and Marthe Kraus, who offer her a room in their apartment. Seduced by the elegant beauty of the city, Stella explores the magnificent palaces, gardens and fashionable coffee houses, and after a chance meeting in an art gallery, falls in love with Harri Reznik, a young Jewish doctor.

But as the threat of war casts a dark shadow over Europe, Stella soon discovers that both the household where she lives, and the city she has come to call home, are not as welcoming as they once seemed. And at the dawn of this terrifying new world, no one is safe.

An exquisitely crafted novel about a young woman who risks everything for love.

## The English Girl Details

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Author : Margaret Leroy

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# **From Reader Review The English Girl for online ebook**

## **Natalie says**

Gemiddeld, al bij al weinig kwaliteitsvol. Eén uit een dozijn, erg voorspelbaar en tegelijk ongeloofwaardig ook. Maar leest wel vlot, toch eentje dat ik rap zal vergeten zijn denk ik.

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## **Jill says**

Set in 1937-38, The English Girl is the story of Stella Whittaker, who travels to Vienna to further her music studies at the Academy of Vienna. 17 years old and thriving in her new life in such a beautiful city, it's not long before she falls in love with a young Jewish doctor. When, however, it becomes apparent that this idyllic existence is threatened, Stella struggles to accept what she knows in her heart.

In such a turbulent time in our history, Margaret Leroy set out to provide the reader with an exciting story full of twists and turns as well as a sense of foreboding throughout, and she did not disappoint. All the elements of the plot come together with great success. The characters are well developed and appear real, and the settings are brought to life with Ms Leroy's gift of lacing description throughout.

As with her previous books, The Collaborator and The Soldiers Wife, Margaret Leroy has given us, yet again, a window into the lives of those people who lived through one of the world's most turbulent times, WWII.

Definitely a page turner that will be enjoyed by many readers.

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## **Christrine Barrett says**

### **A Gentle read**

I enjoyed this book at times I yearned for a tiny more drama but it was well written and believable. Probably a tiny bit too romantic for my personal taste but it held my attention which is a positive.

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## **Rowena Holloway says**

Set against the beauty and eventual terror of Vienna on the brink of occupation by Hitler's troops, The English Girl is political intrigue swaddled in a love story.

1938. Young Stella Whittaker wins a place at Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna and leaves her sheltered English life ripe for adventure and new experiences. Though her studies are exhausting and often humiliating, Stella finds Vienna a magical place of historical beauty, tea shops and fashionable friends. To repay her hosts, Rainer and Marthe Krause for her accommodation, she looks after their child who is still upset by the abrupt departure of his former nanny, a mystery that no one is willing to discuss. When she meets and begins a passionate affair with Harri Reznik, a young Jewish doctor, Stella begins to sense another side to Vienna – a dark undercurrent that also exists in the Krause apartment, particularly when Rainer has

private meetings with a group of shadowy men. Asked to spy on Rainer and aware that her relationship with Harri best remain unspoken, Stella begins to realise that much more than her heart may be at stake.

The English Girl brings pre-war Vienna to life through Stella's eyes and it is her breathless excitement and dawning realisation of the truth which is the strength of this novel. It may also be its weakness. Though Stella is perfectly believable as a young woman of that era thrust into an intrigue she doesn't understand, by today's standards she is a rather passive heroine. Concern with her studies and obsession with her new love dominate the first half of the novel and the pacing is almost as languid as Stella in her lover's arms. Yet, as the events leading up to Vienna's occupation begin to unfold and Stella sees past the glamour, intrigue and tension deepen. The descriptions of light and darkness are often poignant, and Stella's observations of the family living in the apartment opposite are filled with pathos. The English Girl is well researched and not overdone. The political situation that leads to the chilling climactic events is revealed only when necessary, and the little details of hat styles, dresses and teashops add veracity and a light-heartedness to the early chapters suitable to Stella's character.

Leroy is an eloquent and thoughtful writer and in Stella she creates a believable portrait of an impressionable girl caught up in a situation she doesn't quite believe is possible.

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### **Boekenvinder says**

De cover van het boek sprak me onmiddellijk aan en past ook heel goed bij het verhaal.

Voor haar grote passie -piano spelen- verhuist de Britse Stella naar Wenen. Haar moeder kent daar een gezin waar Stella gedurende haar studie bij een gerenommeerd leraar en musicus kan verblijven.

Al snel geraakt Stella bevriend met Anneliese, die haar wegwijs maakt in het mooie Wenen. Eén van de plekjes die Stella zeker moet bezoeken, is de Kunstgalerie. Daar ontmoet ze Harri, waar ze op slag verliefd op word.

Harri is Joods, maar daar maakt Stella geen enkel probleem van. Volgens haar zou niemand daar een probleem van mogen maken. Helaas daverd Wenen intussen op zijn grondvesten, in aanloop naar de Tweede Wereldoorlog. Joden worden overal verjaagd en gehaat.

Stella gaat tot het uiterste om Harri en zijn familie veilig te stellen. Maar is dat wel genoeg?

Van begin tot einde zat ik vastgekleusterd aan dit boek. Ik vond het heel erg moeilijk om het weg te leggen. Het intrigeerde me dat iemand bereid is om zoveel te doen voor de liefde van haar leven, en dat in tijden van oorlog.

Dit boek is een aanrader voor iedereen die graag oorlogsromans leest en voor wie gelooft in de ware liefde.

Ik vind persoonlijk dat er toch nog enkele losse eindjes zijn op het einde van het boek en ik vraag me af of Margaret Leroy van plan is om een vervolg aan het boek te schrijven.

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### **Tawnya says**

So beyond amazing!!! Such a good historical fiction read!!! I loved all the characters in the book!!! I loved learning so much about Vienna!!

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## Anne says

### *Leroy's Het Engelse meisje* schetst een sfeerbeeld van Wenen tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog

Na Een liefde in oorlogstijd verscheen dit jaar ook Margaret Leroy's nieuwste roman *Het Engelse meisje* bij The House of Books. Het verhaal speelt zich af in Wenen aan de vooravond van de Tweede Wereldoorlog. Leroy schrijft vlot, gedetailleerd en geeft een duidelijk beeld van de sfeer die in de stad voelbaar moet zijn geweest.

De Engelse Stella Whittaker vertrekt naar Wenen om daar te studeren aan de muziekacademie. Oude familie vrienden, Rainer en Marthe Krause, nemen haar in huis en zorgen goed voor haar. Stella wordt verliefd op de joodse psychiater Harri Reznik en ze ontdekt dat de nazigezinde familie Krause een stuk minder begripvol is dan ze aanvankelijk dacht.

#### Het Engelse meisje

Stella wordt snel volwassen in Wenen. Haar personage is in het begin van het verhaal bijna pijnlijk naïef. Ze gelooft niet dat mensen Harri niet mogen omdat hij Joods is en zoekt steeds naar andere verklaringen. 'Ik ben totaal in verwarring, boos. Misschien klopte het dan toch, de gedachte die even bij me opkwam, dat ze iets met elkaar hebben gehad. Waarom zou ze zich er anders zo druk om maken?' Aan het einde van het boek is ze een heel nieuw persoon in een nieuwe, dreigende wereld. Leroy weet de ontwikkeling van Stella goed over te brengen en maakt van haar een complex en interessant personage.

#### Een dieseltrein

Leroy's stijl is te vergelijken met een dieselmotor. Evenals het personage heeft het begin van de roman ook wat opstartproblemen. Wanneer Leroy eenmaal op gang is, is ze ook goed op gang: ze neemt je helemaal mee in het verhaal. De lezer moet zich niet laten afschrikken door de vele details en beschrijvingen in het begin want de rest van het verhaal leest als een trein. De auteur weet hoe ze haar publiek in moet pakken en houdt je vast tot de allerlaatste pagina. 'Opeens dringt het tot me door dat ik dit daadwerkelijk ga doen. Ik voel het bloed in mijn hoofd bonken, in mijn keel.' Leroy vertelt een prachtig verhaal over de liefde tegen de achtergrond van de oorlog en belooft daarmee het geduld van de lezer.

[Deze recensie verscheen eerder (2015) op CLEEF.T]

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## Laura says

I really enjoyed this story set against the backdrop of 1930's Vienna. Having earlier read *The Collaborator* by the same author I absolutely fell in love with her style of writing and in particular her attention to detail and the care shown to her character development.

Stella is just seventeen when she embarks on a move to Vienna to study music. While living with old friends of her mothers, she meets a handsome Jewish psychiatrist and begins a whirlwind romance - but as Adolf Hitler gains momentum and the country is at risk of collapse, Stella is forced to take risks for those she cares about.

This was a complex and multi weaved story which I thoroughly enjoyed throughout. I thought the setting was beautifully described and true of its times. I struggled to put the book down (in fact, I was still reading at two this morning because I needed to finish it!)

The ending surprised me so I hope there is a sequel in the works. I would love to know more of Stella's story.

A must have for World War Two era historical fiction fans.

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## **Ruth says**

I thought this was a riveting read.

1937, seventeen year old Stella Whittaker travels from London to Vienna to study piano at the Academy of Music as the pupil of a legendary piano tutor who came from a famously musical Jewish family. She has lived a sheltered life, dominated by her musical studies and is largely unaware of the events unfolding in Europe. She falls in love with the city and also with Harri, a handsome doctor, who is Jewish. This is something that Stella considers irrelevant, but she gradually becomes aware of anti-Semitic attitudes among her friends and in the home she is staying in. However she refuses to believe that Austria will succumb to the Nazi fervour sweeping Germany, clinging stubbornly to her optimistic belief that Germany will come to its senses and that life in Vienna will continue unchanged. Stella's naivety did annoy me, however that's only because we know from history what happens and of course, probably was the attitude of that time. Stella is self centered, however she did learn from mistakes and was a good person and often you forget how young she is.

Also, being English with a sense of fair play, she feels somehow protected from the badness, so it's a good title for the book.

There is a sad moment involving her piano tutor and his sock which made me tearful as I felt immersed in that moment.

There are some twists /surprises, however the particular strength of the book is the description of a seductive Vienna with snow, sparkle, ice rinks, chilly weather, hot chocolate and strudel to warm you, onto the chilling acts of violence towards Jewish people.

It's a deeply moving book.

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## **Sandra says**

I have quite the dilemma with this book. The time and setting was interesting since I didn't know much about Austria leading up to WWII so that is a definite plus but sadly I didn't much care for Stella. For two thirds of the book she is in denial about the ugliness that some people can't even hide (like Anneliese) and thinks all will be well if she tells herself that it is. So she was a bit slow in seeing problems coming, yet when it comes to other things like falling in love with Harri she does that very quickly. If it had been for the setting and time alone I could have given this four stars but Stella let it down.

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## **Toast says**

Another 2.5 due to the finish. Very slow in getting started, I had to keep reminding myself that Stella - the lead character - was only 17, from the Home Counties and had lived only for music so was truly very naive, innocent and unworldly for Vienna at the rise of the Nazis. And you really wouldn't want to see or believe that was coming.

It was well written, with a beautiful turn of phrase. It just a shame the plotting was a muddle. A very slow awakening and then a frantic rush to the finish.

Toast

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## **Amber Mahony says**

What is startling about this book is its portrayal of the speed with which Austria succumbed to Germany in 1937. The book's 17 year old narrator is innocent and naive - and perhaps her world view inadvertently amplifies the apparent suddenness of the Austrian surrender. The book portrays the intellectual and artistic sophistication of Vienna at the time, and thereby highlights the incongruence of this context as the receptacle for Nazi ideals. The stories we tell ourselves.....we can convince ourselves of any truth if our interests are sufficiently vested. Such a sad story - and because of history, we know the end at the beginning. It is a very good read.

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## **Claudia Gregori says**

Stella Wittaker is a 17 year-old pianist who was accepted in a prestigious musical school in Vienna. One opportunity never to be missed: to become a professional pianist in the city of music. Her mother got her a room in old friends' house in exchange that Stella would teach English to their child. In Vienna, Stella found herself ready to grow and experience life in a big city, meet interesting people and fall in love with a gorgeous Jewish doctor.

However, it was 1937 and being in Austria, Stella was not mature yet to understand the danger of being in a country that was about to endure one of the most despicable war crimes in history. The Holocaust was upon them and it was a very dangerous time for Jewish people. We readers know what happened, but the characters of the book didn't and it was very difficult to continue the reading and seeing young Stella act in a selfish way towards her boyfriend. Sometimes I felt angry with her, for her irresponsible actions and ignorance of what was happening in the world. But at the same time, the story is so involving and your desire for a happy ending will keep you reading.

I believe Margaret Leroy tried, successfully, to make her readers feel mad with Stella. Her naivety, childish and ignorance much irritated me. I wanted her to save everyone, but I had to remember that the character is from a time nobody would believe what was about to happen. Sadly, it could not be avoided.

The book was written only in Stella's POV. I read a fascinating, heart warming story of two people in love. The characters were plausible, the story very well researched by the author with some strong scenes in the book. One of my favourites being when her stern piano teacher invites her for a last lesson at his house.

It was a beautiful romantic story. Sad because of the tragic real events that we are well aware and if we could be Stella one day I am sure we would have wanted to do more to help avoid such crime. The ending was a total surprise to me and I believe to many readers. A very lovely reflective story that has sadness, but also love and hope.

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### **Julie says**

Seventeen year old Stella leaves England to head to 1930's Vienna to study music. Living with family friends she is set to discover herself and some secrets!! A good bit of pre war adventure that was another good holiday read.

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### **Charlotte Aitken says**

Ah I'm heartbroken I finished this book and at the same time relieved! Prepare yourself for an emotional rollercoaster of a read.

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### **Alistair says**

At 17, piano prodigy Stella Whittaker is embarking on her lifetime dream: private piano lessons in Vienna with renowned teacher Dr. Zaslavsky. An arrangement is made by her widowed mother for Stella to stay with Viennese friends Rainer and Marthe Krause, exchanging board for English lessons to the Krause's young son. Visiting a museum not long after her arrival in Vienna, she meets Harri Reznik, a psychiatrist and lecturer, and although a decade older than Stella an instant attraction blossoms; soon they are lovers. Covering the period from late 1937 to early 1938, Stella, despite herself, is forced to acknowledge what is happening in Austria and Germany. And having a Jewish boyfriend is increasingly dangerous. Stella also has to reevaluate her opinion of the Krause household; her initial feelings are painfully tested. Written with a masterful storyteller's skill and imbued with an increasingly pervading sense of danger, this is a splendid read.

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### **Jane Newey says**

Interesting reading the history and not at all predictable

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### **Marielle says**

Dnf

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### **Jacki (Julia Flyte) says**

In 1937, seventeen year old Stella Whittaker travels from London to Vienna to study piano at the Academy of Music. She has lived a sheltered life, dominated by her musical studies and is largely unaware of the events unfolding in Europe. She falls in love with the city and also with a handsome doctor, who is Jewish.



This is something that Stella considers irrelevant but she will gradually become aware of anti-Semitic attitudes among her friends and colleagues. Nevertheless she refuses to believe that Austria will succumb to the Nazi fervour sweeping Germany, clinging stubbornly to her optimistic belief that Germany will come to its senses and that life in Vienna will continue unchanged. Of course reading this book you know otherwise and her naivety is infuriating, though probably very true to attitudes of that time.

I really enjoyed this book although I find it somewhat difficult to articulate why. Stella is an annoying, self-centered and immature character whom I often disliked and the writing style, while pulling you in and carrying you along, is nothing remarkable. Partly it's the setting - I am often drawn to books set in pre-war Europe and this really made me feel like I was in Vienna. I could virtually smell the cooking, feel the wintry chill and see the elegant architecture. I also found Stella's attitudes, for all that I disagreed with them, genuinely thought provoking and interesting. There is an undercurrent of menace throughout and there are a few interesting twists along the way. I really liked the way that the author brought the various strands together and the ending was both genuinely satisfying and felt possible.

While I was reading this book, my father asked me what it was about. I gave him a brief synopsis and he asked what genre it is - spy story? romance? historical novel? It has elements of all of those in it, without really being any of those things. It's very readable and now that I've finished it I find I'm still thinking about the characters, wondering what happened to them and not wanting to let them go.

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## **Monica Wies says**

Stella, een 17 jarig Engels meisje, gaat in september 1937 naar Wenen om piano te studeren.

Zij komt in huis bij vroegere vrienden van haar moeder.

In ruil hiervoor geeft zij hun zoontje Engelse les.

Al snel raakt zij verliefd op een 10 jaar oudere man, die Joods blijkt te zijn.

De man waarbij ze in huis is heeft sympathie voor de Nazi's.

Een werknemer van de Engelse ambassade verzoekt haar hem te bespioneren.

Er zijn allerlei ontwikkelingen, het boek beslaat de periode sept. 37 tot half maart 38.

We weten allemaal wat er toen gebeurde in Oostenrijk.

Het idee voor het verhaal vond ik goed, maar vond het nogal kinderlijk geschreven.

Het leek me meer een zgn. young adult boek.

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