



War Brides

Helen Bryan

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With war threatening to spread from Europe to England, the sleepy village of Crowmarsh Priors settles into a new sort of normal: Evacuees from London are billeted in local homes. Nightly air raids become grimly mundane. The tightening vice of rationing curtails every comfort. Men leave to fight and die. And five women forge an unlikely bond of friendship that will change their lives forever.

Alice Osbourne, the stolid daughter of the late vicar, is reeling from the news that Richard Fairfax broke their engagement to marry Evangeline Fontaine, an American girl from the Deep South. Evangeline's arrival causes a stir in the village—but not the chaos that would ensue if they knew her motives for being there. Scrappy Elsie Pigeon is among the poor of London who see the evacuations as a chance to escape a life of destitution. Another new arrival is Tanni Zayman, a young Jewish girl who fled the horrors of Europe and now waits with her newborn son, certain that the rest of her family is safe and bound to show up any day. And then there's Frances Falconleigh, a madcap, fearless debutante whose father is determined to keep her in the countryside and out of the papers.

As the war and its relentless hardships intensify around them, the same struggles that threaten to rip apart their lives also bring the five closer together. They draw strength from one another to defeat formidable enemies—hunger, falling bombs, the looming threat of a Nazi invasion, and a traitor in their midst—and find remarkable strength within themselves to help their friends. Theirs is a war-forged loyalty that will outlast the fiercest battle and endure years and distance.

When four of the women return to Crowmarsh Priors for a VE Day celebration fifty years later, television cameras focus on the heartwarming story of these old women as war brides of a bygone age, but miss the more newsworthy angle. The women's mission is not to commemorate or remember—they've returned to settle a score and avenge one of their own.

War Brides Details

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From Reader Review War Brides for online ebook

Catherine Crowther says

I honestly thought this was one of the best books I have read ever. Yes I thought that it ended too quickly, but I loved it all the same. (Plus I think I am an idealist and a definite sucker for a happy ending) I liked the way that the beginning set the scene really well and got you intrigued. I felt desperately sorry for Evangeline when she was in New Orleans, but always knew Laurent couldn't be trusted either. I felt so bad for Tanni but would have been happier if her sisters had eventually found their way to her as she probably suffered way more than the others. I actually cried when we found out what happened to her family.

I loved Alice as a character and was happy she got a happy ending at last, especially after all the misery with her mother. I thought Elsie was great, especially how she matured and altered throughout the course of the book.

I thought that Frances was a brilliant character (probably my favourite) and loved how she developed and changed throughout the book. When she discovered the de Balfort secret, I thought more could have been made of it in terms of detail as I felt her exit was too sudden. (again it was down to me being an idealist rather than any error on Helen Bryan's part - obvious Frances's work in the war meant she could have been called off at any moment)

The sense of loyalty and friendship between all the women was strong and obvious, although I would have loved a good old fashioned argument between Alice and Evangeline.

The ending was great, although I got very upset at what happened as I was such a fan of Frances as a character. Yes, the final scenes were far fetched but they were far kinder than they could have been. Without giving too much away, the person confronted DEFINATELY gets what they deserve. I would have liked more to be made of Frances and Oliver's relationship but that's more because I am just a sucker for an old fashioned romance. I think the relationships and what happened during the story and afterwards to the characters were portrayed realistically as war destroys. I think to tie everything up in a big Disney-fied happy ending would have satisfied me more, but would have left me not feeling the same about the book.

Lynn Young says

Warning! If you don't wish to read an insulting review, stop now!

This author is horrible! Author should've clearly done more research. It's obvious that she just plucked ideas and wrote them down. She doesn't know her ass from a hole in the ground! Everything is wrong!

We go from the dumped Alice who never got an explanation from Richard to Evangeline, the supposedly privileged plantation daughter. There was poor and butchered accents and stupid spies. Oh and there was old smuggling caves! Tanni was the poor Jewish gal who was whisked away by Bruno suddenly on moment and the next she was in love and pregnant! I could go on and on but I really detest everything written on Evangeline. Utmost important is to debunk the definition of Creoles. Creoles are people born of French, Spanish, African and sometimes Indian. They are not a mixture of just Caucasian and African. Those people are called Mulatto! I know since I'm from Louisiana. If Evangeline was indeed a plantation daughter, she wouldn't have known diddly shit about hunting, trapping or cooking either. And the voodoo woman. Lets not forget that obvious error. She claimed to have been tortured by having her toes cut off. May I remind everyone that slavery ended in 1865 and this was supposed to be before WWII? Geez!

Don't bother reading this book whatsoever. It's pure crap and not even entertaining crap either.

Josee says

The story started off with a lot of promise but fell flat at some points and the ending was really rushed. The author set you up to care about these 5 girls (although it is clear one of them is missing 50 years later) but each of their stories comes off fragmented and too piecey with too many holes. And the "present day" story got to be annoying and it was overshadowed by the news program and the anchor! Who cared about all that! We wanted to know the story of the women: Alice, Evangeline, Elsie, and Tanni...(and of course Frances).

I had some issues with the girls though: one girl gets married over a weekend? Really? Two all of a sudden falls in love with a husband they hardly knew? Nobody is suspicious of another's frequent trips? I understand we can't get every single detail but giant gaps don't work either.

Some characters were unnecessary: Laurent got way too much time. No need for Agnes. Good thing lady Marchmont and Alice's mom were done away with.

That being said I did like all the girls. Their situations were unique but they came together for a common cause and became friends. I like wartime stories and this one had some good details- I never knew about the billeting or living in the country or the Auxiliaries...or even about how there was a British spy working for the Nazis who sent over weather reports for the Blitz.

I wanted to see the end. I was hoping the girls succeeded in their secret mission and they found the spy...by the time I had 150 pages left it was pretty clear who the spy was, I hope that wasn't supposed to be a surprise. The end was too neat and a bit unbelievable, although justice was served.

LaNae says

The setting (a small English town), the Era (WWII) and 5 women of different backgrounds (and cultures) coming together out of necessity and circumstance sounded like something I would love. And for a while, that was the case. I did like reading about the wartime economies and hardships. Further, I appreciated the strength and ingenuity of each woman to find her own niche in terms of contributing toward the common welfare of the town and/or her friends.

I overlooked some of the grammar and other errors in the text (after all it was a bargain so some of it can be expected). However, the way that the book ended completely killed it for me. The vast majority of the book was set in the WWII era. The author utilized flashback (or flash-forward) device and an epilogue to wrap up the loose ends in the book. That in itself wouldn't have been so bad, but it felt rather abrupt. But what really killed it for me was the ending. I found it completely absurd for four elderly ladies to attack an elderly former Nazi collaborator with their canes and entomb him within a hidden compartment in a tombstone, a la *The Cask of Amontillado*. While it may not be fair, the ending annoyed me so much that it sort of ruined what had come before.

The epilogue probably should have been left out completely. It was such an odd, unrelated and disjointed way to wrap up the mystery of what really happened to Tanni's twin sisters. I would have preferred it to be left out and to be left not knowing for sure. After all, a lot of people were left wondering as to what became

of their loved ones during the Holocaust. It seemed too tidy for the author to introduce some random character for a couple of pages to produce some sort of happy ending. Only in many ways it really doesn't feel that way, because Tanni and her friends would likely never know that their efforts were successful. I don't expect happy endings as a matter of course, and in this case, the so-called happy ending weakened the overall story for me.

Candace says

Set in England during WWII, 'War Brides' tells the story of several women, from different walks of life. As London is evacuated, in anticipation of a German invasion, women and children find themselves thrust together in the English countryside, doing their best to make ends meet. This is the story of five such women, who formed an unlikely friendship and found strength in one another despite the dire circumstances.

Evangeline was a young, beautiful American who married an Englishman to escape her own life. She is hoping to find the freedom to live as she wants in another country. Leaving her home without notice created a scandal and it isn't likely that she could return, even if she wanted to.

Alice is the quintessential "good girl". She does everything that is expected of her - charity, social clubs, church activities, providing care for her mother. She's exactly what a well-bred, respectable young lady should be. When her fiancé returns from a short trip to America married to another woman, she is devastated. Everyone is shocked. Despite her humiliation, she picks herself up and trudges on.

Then, there is Frances, the brazen socialite. She yearns for adventure, but her father, the Admiral, wants to keep her sheltered. He wants to see her married and settled down with a family. He does everything within his power to block her attempts to be a more active participant in the war effort.

Tanni has escaped the Germans, moving to England with her new husband, who worked at the university and now works for the English military. With her newborn son, she awaits the arrival of her family, including her younger twin siblings. As more time passes, she grows increasingly worried about their fates.

Elsie is able to escape her life of poverty and find opportunities in the bleakest of times. Unlike the other women that took center stage in this story, Elsie did not come from a life of privilege. Rough around the edges, she is the most "out of place" character in this story for me. At the same time, her practical knowledge and experiences help this group of women make it through this difficult time together.

As a whole, this was an entertaining and eventful story. There was plenty going on, with all of the different characters and POVs. Admittedly, it was difficult for me to follow at first. It took a while to get all of the ladies sorted. However, once I did, it was good.

I found their experiences to be inspiring and mostly admirable. It was a nice read/listen, even if it didn't blow me away. I think I'd heard so much about this book that I expected more.

Maybe it isn't fair, but it is what it is. When I read a book that has been a huge bestseller, over a prolonged period of time, I expect to be amazed. In the end, it was good, but it wasn't amazing for me.

Gina Arnone says

I was really enjoying this book, it felt as though I was spending time with friends.

Why did I rate the book so low then? There were a couple of reasons. First, it felt like there were far too many characters. It felt like there could have been better character development if only there were fewer characters to begin with.

My biggest problem was that the ending felt far too rushed. It was almost as if the author got tired of writing. For the amount of time devoted to the back story, the ending fell flat.

Marcie says

My problem with this book is that I liked the overall story, but was driven completely nuts by the writing style, character development, and timeline. Regarding writing style, the author tries to recreate a Cockney accent in text, which was completely distracting since I often had to read a sentence three or four times before I could figure out what the character was trying to say. While the story was predominantly written from the point of view of the main five characters, the author would throw in occasional chapters written from the perspective of the vicar or the Cockney mother or the stationmaster, none of whom were important characters. It frequently didn't help develop the story, it just made the large cast of characters even more confusing.

Many of the characters could have used more fleshing out, particularly Tanni, who is hurriedly married to a neighbor boy and shoved on a boat to England in about three minutes. The next time we see her, she's living in England and in love with her husband. How did she end up feeling so loving towards someone who was basically a stranger, when she seemed to be so in love with someone else? No explanation was given.

With respect to the timeline, the first 90% of the novel was fairly slow paced, not much happened. Then all of a sudden, there was a catastrophe that changed everyone's lives, followed by a few pages of Alice's new life, then the novel jumped forward 50 pages. WHAT?!?! We finally got to the interesting part of the novel, and the author skipped it all! Sure, she summed it up in the ending (which is another thing I was disappointed by) but I couldn't believe she skipped what could have been the best parts of the book. It felt like she just got tired of writing all of a sudden, and gave up.

Maybe I'm just a sucker for books about how British women coped during World War II, but I did enjoy the story and the glimpses into ordinary life at that time.

Duane says

Historical fiction novel set in England during World War II. The story of five women, with different backgrounds, finding a common bond by supporting war efforts on the home front. They develop a friendship that will last a lifetime and their individual stories and histories make for a very good read.

Laura says

I waited awhile for the book to get going and once it finally did and I was really hooked in, wanting to read more, the story abruptly stopped! The characters were finally developed, but then suddenly all forward momentum in the story stopped and things were explained to Alice in a phone call (the death of the elder DeBalfort/burning down of his home and Frances disappearing). Talk about missing out on all the action! It was almost as if the author decided she had written enough and needed to quickly wrap things up.

Fast forward to 1995 when the characters weren't very interesting at all...as a plot device this could have worked so much better than it did. Instead there seemed no connection to the war time characters and the same women in 1995. And honestly, did they really wait 50 years for someone to confront Hugo? Too many loose ends were left dangling...honestly, too many to name here.

Finally, in the edition I read (Kindle) there was a forward from the author in which she wrote that there was not really a De Balfort family that she knew of and that she had based the characters on real accounts of British families being German collaborators. Wow, thanks for letting me know ahead of time that Hugo was the bad guy...that would've been much better info discovered by reading! That statement would've done much better in an afterword. This has to be the first time I've ever seen an author give away plot twists before the book begins.

I did still give the book two stars because I didn't hate it...the characters had really started to be engaging and interesting and I wanted to know more/watch their stories unfold. Unfortunately that was just when the author decided she'd written enough and abruptly stopped the story, which was disappointing to say the least.

Nancy Loe says

In addition to Erin's trifecta of punctuation errors, spelling blunders, and formatting mistakes, I'll add two more:

1) tiresome overuse of dialect – Creole! Georgia! Cockney! Louisiana! - and yet the upper crust Brits, the Jews, and the Austrians had none, and

2) obvious and distracting historical blunders. Frex, the American air crews in Britain were part of the U.S. Army Air Corps and they weren't split off into a separate branch of the service and called the U.S. Air Force until 1947. Glenn Miller's plane that disappeared had a pilot and one other officer on board; no band members were on the flight. These and other errors seem to be pretty fundamental to a knowledge of the period and snapped me right out of the book.

The novel also seemed badly structured. I'd wager most people are reading this because of an interest in wartime Britain, but the beginning of the novel had long, tiresome scenes set in New Orleans that seemed anachronistic to 1939. I thought the author was introducing a grandmother of one of the war brides, because it was all very Mandingo with nothing offered to establish a 1930s time or place. The ending of the book, which I will not spoil, was completely ludicrous and very unlikely with a live tv crew and a big event going on in a small village. The hectic plotting and overabundance of characters also made the novel less believable.

Still, I read the whole thing because there were moments in the book that were well done and made me long for more. There were characters I was interested in and heard too little about: the vicar, the daring debutante, the sad-sack daughter, the twins. But there wasn't enough to call the book successful.

All it really did was make me long for a few episodes of Foyle's War - if you want really well done stories about a wartime British village, that's the ticket.

Reid says

I find it extremely difficult to write a review of this type of book; there may be nothing more difficult. It is compelling. It covers a fascinating subset of a familiar theme: the blitz and other experiences of war in Great Britain. It focuses on the much-neglected lives of women in those times and what they experienced. And yet....

And yet, it really isn't a very well-written book. Not that Ms. Bryan can't put together one sentence to follow another. Not that she can't build a (mostly) credible storyline. Not that I doubt the veracity of her scholarship (she is, by profession, a historian, after all). But she has drawn from a grab bag of *prêt-à-porter* characters, no more original or believable than Snidely Whiplash or Dudley Do-Right. There is the standard issue widowed rich lady (nasty, nosy, snide, proud), the dowdy vicar's daughter, the bumbling new vicar, the confused refugee East European, the ne'er-do-well little thief made good by love, the heroic warrior, the spoiled Southern belle...it goes on and on. And what could be better than the ultimate black hat: Nazis! Everyone who sympathizes with the Nazis is, of course, entirely evil and can have no motives other than this evil for their deeds. It wouldn't do to have any moral ambiguity in this fairy tale. And heaven help you if you are not one of the major characters the author has chosen to focus her attentions on; not only will you not be fleshed out, you won't even have a name (watch for the Land Girl's team leader for a good example).

In addition to this, the writing is predictable and plodding. Partly this arises from trying to tell too many stories at the same time without the narrative chops to make each intertwining storyline make consistent sense. I found myself wondering just exactly what was motivating many of these characters to do what they did. I came to suspect that the primary reason they took many of their actions was to satisfy the author's predetermined agenda rather than from any internal logic within the character as written.

I won't even get into the moral blindness Bryan exhibits in the way she chooses to end this story; I wouldn't dream of spoiling that particular nasty surprise for you. I see this as another example of the author having a particular need—in this case to have a "daring" or "shocking" ending—and carrying forward this urge without consulting the characters she has built and asking if they would do what these women do.

But you can see what I mean about reviewing this kind of book. Because in the final analysis I actually liked *War Brides*. "Compelling" is still the adjective that comes to mind most readily when I think of it. I suppose what I am reacting to is the fact that, for a book I found so basically likeable, I regret it wasn't much better than it was, as it could have been if rewritten by someone who could make the whole thing hang together in a credible way.

Kiera Healy says

This book had the makings of an interesting, character-driven look at life for the women of World War Two. Unfortunately, it was horrible. Early on it had a lot of promise, but by the end I was skimming pages, desperate to finish this thing.

The premise is that five women from different backgrounds find themselves drawn together in a small Sussex village during WW2. See, given their diverse backgrounds, there could have been some interesting conflict here, but the author seems to only like conflict when it's a very black-and-white, good vs evil situation. So the five women become best friends without any preamble, while the villains in the background are racist New Orleans plantation owners, Nazi sympathisers, Mengele-type doctors operating on Jewish twins, etc. There is zero explanation of how the five women become friendly - despite the fact that one is a rich heiress, one is a down-to-earth Cockney with the worst accent since Dick Van Dyke (painfully written out), etc. What kills me is that two of the women are set up to be opposed to each other - one seduced and eloped with the other's fiance - and initially we are told they don't like each other, but without any warning they become BFFs. Why?!

The book is riddled with typographical errors and factual mistakes, which other reviewers have commented on. They were jarring, but for me what really sucked was the pacing. A lot of the action happens in retrospect, so we miss the interesting moments in the characters' lives. One of them, a teenage Austrian Jew, is forced into marriage with an older man she barely knows so that she can escape to England. We fast-forward from her marriage to her discovery of her pregnancy to her having the baby. Suddenly she's happily in love with her husband, but we've missed all the interesting character development along the way! Similarly, characters fall in love abruptly, and thankfully Helen Bryan writes in this painstakingly obvious way - "She suddenly realised she was in love with him" - otherwise I'd have no clue what was going on.

The story would have worked a lot better had Bryan focused on the minutiae of these characters' lives, and explored how they really felt about each other and their situation, but instead she had to throw in these ridiculous action elements of Nazi spies, plucky girls trying to save children from Auschwitz, and a "mystery" that the reader will solve before it's even been introduced! The plot stops and starts and doesn't really go anywhere until the final pages of exposition.

Point of view jumps from one character to another. The accents are written out HORRENDOUSLY, and the way these supposedly English characters speak is ridiculous - this was very clearly written by an American. The ending is horrible and makes no sense, with all the main cast ageing 50 years and reuniting (to the background noise of a news anchor who is narrating the VE Day celebrations, and who has probably the most jarringly un-English way of speaking of the lot) and acting completely out of character. In conclusion: this book is a total mess. Stay away.

Sarah says

I was torn as to whether I should give this 3 or 4 stars. I enjoyed the actual story, but the beginning and end just didn't fit.

The book opens with the main characters all travelling back to England for a VE Day ceremony. But it was just weird. I didn't know who they were, or why they were in these other cities. Similarly, the end is the actual reunification of the women. It was weird and unemotional. I wanted tears, fighting.....something that

showed these women went through a war together. One of the central women was not there and they just all seemed so nonchalant about it. Plus, there was an obnoxious reporter who kept stalking everyone, and a revenge plot that just seemed unrealistic and corny. The actual story of the women ended before the war was over, and it was really abrupt. I felt like it could have ended with the ending of the war and given the reader a bit of closure. The reader is left with no idea as to who even survived the war. When the women reunited there were bits and pieces of their lives revealed, but it wasn't enough. I wanted to know how they ended up where they were, how the marriages went...the good stuff. The strongest point of this book was the historical setting. I love historical fiction set in this time period and that part of the book didn't disappoint.

Erin says

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***** NOTE: It has come to my attention that War Brides has been re-edited since the release of this review. I will not be returning to the piece, but encourage readers to understand the issues I noted may not apply to more recent editions of the novel.**

Trifecta! Punctuation, spelling and formatting mistakes all in one publication! I'm sorry folks, but I can't ignore it. Throughout the text I found double periods and significant blunders in both spelling and grammar. Some chapter headings were placed immediately after the last sentence of the preceding chapter and others began a full two pages later. This was not a finished product and I can't ignore how much these errors impacted my experience with War Brides.

Continuity, or the lack thereof, was another issue I noted in Helen Bryan's work. "Evangeline Fairfax's coming-out ball was the last party before Lent and everyone knew was going to be splendid." Evangeline's last name is Fontaine. I suppose you could make a stretch by saying she eventually marries Richard Fairfax, but as the story is written in the present tense I can't give much weight to the argument. This book has a very large cast and I'm sorry, but I don't see how the audience can be expected to keep everyone straight with this kind of execution.

Plot development in the novel was almost nonexistent. Tanni discovers she is pregnant, has a normal pregnancy and holds her son in less than two pages. As a mother, that was difficult to wrap my head around and made it incredibly difficult feel any sort of empathy for her situation. Evangeline drugging Richard was similarly simplistic. One minute she is planning her elopement from New Orleans and the next Richard's mother is announcing their marriage and arrival in England. What happened to his being in love with and engaged to Alice? Was the drug supposed to be some sort of voodoo meant to make him forget all sense of duty and obligation? I don't understand.

To be fair, most of the dialogue is fine and I am all for colloquialism in literature, but there's a line and I feel Bryan crossed it. "Well, I can't 'ardly bear to think of it 'appenin' all over again," I says to 'er. 'It can't,' I says to 'er. 'But it will,' she says, certain as anyfink. 'I fink you can count on it, Mrs Pigeon.'" As a reader, I felt such passages awkward and disruptive to the story at hand. I found them annoying and I'm not sure that's the impression Bryan was hoping to achieve.

In terms of content, War Brides should have been a home run, but the execution was so unpolished that I found it impossible to appreciate the narrative beneath.

Julia says

Bought this on the cheap for the Kindle, thinking it would be a good vacation read. It wasn't.

Basically, five young women from wildly different backgrounds all wind up in the same English village during WWII. Somehow (and without much explanation) they all become chums, and then there's some romance, a meddling old lady, a bit of espionage, and a failed (but not really!) attempt at saving some twins using mysterious underground smuggling tunnels. The book could have worked, but it just didn't. I blame an inexperienced author and a lousy editor.

The bad:

- 1) There are too many characters, all of whom were either unnecessary, underdeveloped, or both. A good editor could have saved hours of my life by uninviting these duds from the story. (Seriously. Agnes? Tom? Katie? Evil Nazi Scientist? You're ruining the party.)
- 2) What was up with the narrative mode of this book? Was it third person limited, omniscient, or both? Why did the perspective switch mid chapter? I get that Frances got a chapter and then Anne got a chapter and so on and so forth, but sometimes a character would swoop in from nowhere and usurp another character's chapter. WTF?
- 3) Cut out the annoying dialects, please. They are hokey, poorly executed, and, frankly, kind of offensive. I was embarrassed for the author every time Elsie said "fink."
- 4) Cut out the annoying dialogue, please. Just because you put something in quotation marks and pretend that Evangeline said it doesn't mean that it's not the wolf of insanely boring and unnecessary exposition in a sheep's clothing of "conversation."
- 5) Something. Was. Wrong. With. The. Pacing. The story starts in 1995, when the main characters have gone their separate ways and then decide to reunite. (Think the intro to "A League of Their Own" with Geena Davis as a grandmother). Then there's a bunch of back story about how the main characters came to live in proximity of each other in an English village. Halfway into the book, there's some character and plot development -- the espionage/ twin smuggling stuff. Then everything abruptly ends and we're back in 1995 and an annoying reporter keeps trying to interrupt the old ladies as they (in a period of a few hours) piece together the mystery of their missing friend and kick an old man to death (it's cool and not at all weird, though, because he was a bad man). And then it ends.
- 6) I tried really, really hard to suspend my disbelief at the crazy sh*! that went down in this book, but seriously, WTF? I spent half of the book rolling my eyes, and the other half laughing at how absurd everything was.

The good:

- 1) I probably would have loved this book if I'd read it when I was fourteen. There's some interesting history (though Bryan would benefit from a good fact-checker), strong and likeable (if cliché) female heroines, and,

hey, who doesn't love a wartime friendship story?

2) Maybe with the right director, War Brides could be a halfway decent summer movie.

3) It was really cheap on Amazon. Like, a dollar or something.
