



The Girl from Krakow

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It's 1935. Rita Feuerstahl comes to the university in Krakow intent on enjoying her freedom. But life has other things in store—marriage, a love affair, a child, all in the shadows of the oncoming war. When the war arrives, Rita is armed with a secret so enormous that it could cost the Allies everything, even as it gives her the will to live. She must find a way both to keep her secret and to survive amid the chaos of Europe at war. Living by her wits among the Germans as their conquests turn to defeat, she seeks a way to prevent the inevitable doom of Nazism from making her one of its last victims. Can her passion and resolve outlast the most powerful evil that Europe has ever seen?

In an epic saga that spans from Paris in the '30s and Spain's Civil War to Moscow, Warsaw, and the heart of Nazi Germany, *The Girl from Krakow* follows one woman's battle for survival as entire nations are torn apart, never to be the same.

The Girl from Krakow Details

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From Reader Review The Girl from Krakow for online ebook

Adriana says

Outstanding! If you watch The History Channel, you've probably had your fill of WWII documentaries and may think you've glanced on just about every aspect of the war. Well, this book went into areas I never even thought of. How overnight Poles suddenly became Ukrainians. What life was like in Moscow if you were a foreigner. How veterans from both sides of the Spanish revolution fared during the war.

It's a story of survival, and sacrifice, as in the parts of ourselves we need to sacrifice to maintain our sense of self in the face of unimaginable hardship and privation. In this story, we meet two Jewish Poles and follow them through their very different wartime experiences. Many reviewers have disliked Rita, and while I understand why, I also understand why she was the way she was. Up until very recently, there was no realistic way for an intelligent self-aware woman to live life on her terms. After being her parents' daughter for 18 years, Rita grasped at straws to become her own woman by going to law school, but could not fool herself into believing she would be allowed to be independent. So she did what just about all women did - sacrificed her "self" and went from being someone's daughter to being someone's wife. By today's standards, I am somewhat of a shrinking violet, but even I cannot fathom the despair so many women must have felt at knowing they'll never be anything more than someone's wife and someone's mother.

Then comes war, and she must forsake all she thought she would ever have just to survive. No one goes through war unchanged, certainly not Rita. She finds herself in a situation that many might find easy to condemn, (view spoiler), but again, you do what you need to to keep your sanity.

And this book managed to do something no book that I can recall reading recently has done: it got me thinking philosophically. This book discussed themes of not just right and wrong/good and evil, but why is something right or good, and why is something wrong or evil - just the sort of thing that creates immense discomfort in the small-minded who believe what they believe and never bother wondering why.

Kim Mathews says

I looked forward to reading about a young Polish Jewish woman's survival during WWII. It was not very believable and became too involved in her sex life from country to country. She wasn't choosy.

Petesea says

Couldn't put it down. A story about Jewish lives tossed about by World War 2 in Poland that is so compelling and well told. The horrors that these characters experienced are ghastly yet they are able to survive. I would have rated this higher, but one of the outcomes at the end is predictable and some of the dialog and references were certainly not of the time period.

Josh says

I feel compelled to find something positive about this book by virtue of the unconscionable period of history it portrays; however this book is very rough around the edges and needed more time with the editor before going to press. There are numerous misspellings and entire passages of the book that are duplicated between chapters. The dialog is incredibly wooden and academic; if running around 1940's Warsaw claiming you are a true German isn't the fastest way to the oust yourself as a Jew then I don't know what is. Also, be prepared to trudge through conversation after conversation of arcane left-wing mid-Twentieth Century politics and philosophy without any context or supporting passages. The author's need to have the heroine engage in coitus at every turn to emphasize her atheism is frankly a slap in the face to both women and those that choose not to base their morality on religion. There is a good story in here struggling to get out, it is just hindered by an author too absorbed with their own erudition to tell it.

Krystal Debow says

Horrifyingly real.

The last few pages upset me. The only unreal part of the book. The character built through so many pages would not have done that.....

Manchester Military History Society (MMHS) says

Unexpectedly good read.

The story centres on Rita Feuerstahl and her experiences as a polish Jew prior to and during World War 2.

This isn't your average holocaust novel, and the author has definitely researched well. You need to know your history to get the most out this and whilst some reviewers have focused on the sex scenes, the bulk of the book tells a believable story of war, loss of love, family, and survival against the odds.

Hard to put down, harrowing in places, I thought it a great read with a powerful ending.

Kristin Silcox says

This book was a struggle to get through. There were a lot of references to political ideologies that I didn't know and was too lazy to look up myself. The character wasn't likable and unrealistic. But I guess there had to be some people who got through WWII easily. I'm glad it was a free Amazon book, otherwise I would not have read it. If you like historical fiction, I'd skip this one.

Becca says

I couldn't finish this book, but not for the reasons listed in other reviews.

I had no problem with her being sexually adventurous or using her body as a way to bring herself comfort. It's not unrealistic- it's not a side of life or war that some people understand or can relate to, but it's not unrealistic. I also had no problem with the philosophical viewpoint of the male character, even if he was a bit unsympathetic as a whole. I liked that Rosenberg explained historical information without info dumps.

No, my issues with the book came from the following:

- 1) The organization was haphazard. There was not any consistency and it was jarring to me. This was the biggest reason for my abandoning this story.
- 2) Sometimes there is an absence of emotion. For example, when her father writes her to tell her they have been ordered to pack bags and head east, obviously to be exterminated. At first it seems odd that Rita does not show emotion, however, upon further thought I wonder if it is one of two things: a) it is simply being left out because the nature of the story is already drawing emotion plenty from the reader, or b) Rita is numb. I cannot imagine that losing people while worrying for your own safety lends much time or ability to continuously grieve appropriately. Since I have never been in the midst of war or a genocide, I cannot speak for how one would react. However, this is part of the reason, I feel, she is unsympathetic as a character. I'll explain further below.
- 3) The pace was so slow. Snails move faster. This is not to say there wasn't any action - there was - it just felt like I'd been reading far longer than I actually had been. I think the fact the main character is standoffish from the reader is part of the problem. There is emotion felt from the events as a whole, but Rita is closed off not only from the war, but from the reader. She is standoffish and keeps the reader at a distance, which made me feel like I wasn't in the story. It takes a skilled writer to create a character who has so many complex characteristics and I think Rosenberg was more ambitious perhaps than he could pull off. Not to mention the male character (at least from what I read) was unsympathetic and I lost interest during his chapters (which, again, were thrown in every once in a while for one or two or three chapters at a time).

Now, this is not to say you would not enjoy this book. These are just my personal issues with it. I love WWII stories, but, unfortunately, this book was more miss than hit.

Jean Farrell says

I chose this book because it was free, and because it took place during WWII, which is a topic I find very interesting, and because it mentioned Krakow, which is a city I love, and have been to several times.

It certainly wasn't terrible; I've read worse. I did finish it rather quickly, and I never considered putting it down, but it also wasn't all that good. The main problem I had with it was it seemed that the author's main agenda was to advocate for his theory of how evolution explained the world and his philosophical beliefs, and not to tell a story. It was a bit heavy-handed, and seemed to instruct the reader not to care too much what happened to any individual person in the story because it really did not matter that much in the end.

Late in the book, the main character reflects upon how much easier her war was than so many others, and that was most definitely true. She always seemed to have it pretty good, and you never got the sense that she was suffering that much. Even when she heard that her parents or her in-laws had been killed, or almost certainly killed, she seemed very detached. Even when she was supposedly in peril, it never felt very perilous. Whatever she needed to happen always seemed to happen. The story seems to be building to the moment when the information her friend Erich gives her will put her in peril, and then when it finally does, and you think she will be tortured or imprisoned, she is simply released. It might actually have been realistic that so close to the end of the war, smart Germans were trying to set themselves up well for the occupation to come, but it does not make for very compelling reading.

I also found the character of Guillermo puzzling. Were we supposed to like him, or find his self-serving nature to be distasteful? Were we supposed to root for him to end up with Rita, or hope that he got his just deserts? The way they ended up together was so trite, it was silly. Rita professes her love for Dani, and is devastated when Dani dumps her to go back to a more conventional life (not necessarily unrealistic at all). Yet immediately thereafter she is reunited with Tadeusz/Guillermo, and all is forgotten. Then, in an incredibly contrived scene, she oh-so-conveniently finds out that her son is indeed alive, and is overjoyed at the prospect of being reunited with him, but then immediately decides she is better off leaving him as he is. Again, not necessarily the wrong decision, but not likely a decision one would make in a fleeting moment. And did she never consider that she could allow her son to continue to live with the woman who protected him and took her as her own during the war, while still revealing her identity? Maybe some day her son would want to know what happened to his parents. He also had a father. Wouldn't his father perhaps want to know where he was?

The author had some good ideas, but they could have been better executed. This sounds more like a two star review, doesn't it?

David Peirce says

This is the fiction effort from the author, a philosophy professor at Duke. It's a good but flawed story of a young Polish, Jewish woman who marries as the specter of war looms over Europe.

I appreciated the portrayal of the historical context for Poland and for its Jews. The Jewish ghettos, the black economy, the various resistance and gang factions, etc., are all woven into the story

The book opens with an exciting setup: Rita (our heroine) is boarding a train carrying her fake papers disguising her Jewish identity and a secret that the Nazi officer on the train wants to know. Then we get into the backstory of how she got there.

It's a good read, and I give the reasons why I only can give 3 stars below.

*****Spoiler alert*****

I won't expose too much of the plot. But there is something of a spoiler alert below, so stop here if you're going to read the book. The reasons I give the book 3 stars are:

* I didn't buy the plot line of Rita's Polish-Jew lover moving to Spain to become a doctor and assuming a Catalan identity as Gilberto Romero.

* There just wasn't enough emotion for me in the main character. Yes, she does everything to find her son. But we get mostly factual accounts of her exploits to avoid the Nazis, avoid detection from other Germans,

etc., and not how traumatizing these things were.

* The main character doesn't seem to have lost a lot of weight or color or health after a year in the ghetto, and is easily able to escape when the Germans seek to close the ghetto for good.

* The kicker of all kickers is that the exciting opening with Rita carrying a secret that could change the direction of the war with a Nazi officer in hot pursuit later turns out to be very anti-climactic. She is never really pursued or put into the danger of having to give the secret up.

Erica Miles says

The historical, geographical, and emotional scope of *The Girl from Krakow* is so tremendous, stupendous, and moving. Some readers might find the subject matter demoralizing and depressing. But the written descriptions, even of the ugly and vile, the sights, sounds, and smells of the overcrowded and ghastly ghetto are written with so much power and authenticity, I found myself in awe of Alex Rosenberg's writing. Each new scene is so detailed and utterly realistic. Each new venue—from the university town of Krakow, to other parts of Poland, and later, to Berlin and other big cities and towns in Germany, to Stalinist Russia and the warring factions among the military ranks, from the different medical hospitals where the two male protagonists work, to the explorative student hangouts before the war, to the smell of Arpege that lingers on a certain female student's body, to the foreign train stations, to the bombed out cities, to the cigar smoke in the air of the V.I.P. lounges, to the hotel rooms, to the maids' quarters in the Nazi owners' homes, to the innermost circle of hell in the ghetto, each scene is so dramatically described. From the frank descriptions of sexual encounters, to the two volumes of Darwin's writing (*Origin of Species* and *Natural Selection*), which the girl from Krakow, known as Rita, always keeps in her suitcase throughout her travels, as a comforting reminder of any sane meaning to her experience of total political and social insanity. The delicate details of beauty and daring glimpses of true sexual pleasure, and love (romantic, parental, and fraternal) and human connectedness in the midst of hell make for an awe-inspiring journey. The irony and self-contradictions that belie human nature, the will to live despite every imaginable nightmare, the tender feelings for children, elderly, disabled, even among the enemy, challenge every platitude and common-sense notion that reasonable and civilized people propose in defense of their faith and refusal to surrender to subversive thinking. I hope to read more books by this extremely talented and radical author.

Erica Miles, author of
Dazzled by Darkness:
A Story of Art & Desire

Kelsey says

**I received a copy of this as part of the Kindle First program by Amazon.
DNF at 9%**

You have to understand, I look forward to the first of every month, because it means that I get to shop for a new book from the list of Kindle First picks. This makes me feel special and loved and book-worthy.

This book did not do that. There's a quote from someone that says "History tells you what happened. Historical fiction tells how that might feel." (I know I could google it but I'm not going to.) The biggest issue

I had with this book is that it made me feel nothing. I strongly believe that can be blamed on the writing style and POV changes. Third-person distances the reader from the characters, and the cool, calculated motives of the characters just distanced me even more. Even in the sex scenes (which there were two of in the short beginning section I read), emotions seemed forced, uninteresting. These characters didn't matter to me. I also don't think it helped that the POV switched and the timeline jumped so early on. And the big "secret" is revealed in the first three pages, so I had no mystery to keep me interested. Finally, the political and philosophical stuff was thrown around so quickly and with so little real explanation, I had no idea what any of it meant, and none of it seemed to matter for the characters that the reader followed..

Overall, I would not recommend this book, and I wish I'd picked a different one from the Kindle First list.

Jo says

Awful, awful book. No wonder it was free. I made it through the first few chapters despite the sophomoric writing style. When the book began the descent into moral abandon, it was just too much to take. DONE. Maybe if the plot had been more developed before the muck (to understand why it was necessary to go there), perhaps this story could have been saved? This book just wasn't for me.

Pam Jenoff says

I was of course drawn to this book by the title (my beloved Krakow!) and by the promise of a well-executed WWII story by Duke professor Alex Rosenberg. I found much more than your average war story -- the high stakes of a political secret, complex and unusual love affairs and a child in peril had me holding my breath with every page. What really sets this one apart, though, is the end. Read now!

Deb says

2 stars because I cared enough to know what ultimately happened to the main character, and so I read the whole book. It's hard to put into words exactly what irritated me about this... so indulge my ramblings.

* too much philosophy talk that felt more like the author trying to convince me of the merits of atheism - annoying

* ongoing theme that no action, no event, no person really actually matters in the course of history - what a negative view of life. ugh.

* I couldn't relate to the main character at all. One of the reasons I love fiction is that it allows you to dive into the inner thoughts and feelings that drive characters' actions. For me, it has opened my eyes to the fact that although I may not understand why people act the way they do, there is almost always a motive or experience that drives it. Even eavesdropping into Rita's thoughts, she is totally un-relateable.

I could go on, but won't. Suffice it to say that after reading the beautifully written The Nightingale by Kristin Hannah, my standard for WWII literature is pretty darn high. :)
