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Historical

The English German Girl
Jake Wallis Simons
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Dramatic and touching, this coming-of-age novel about a Jewish girl on the eve of the Holocaust renders an accurate portrayal of wartime Germany.

In this sweeping Bildungsroman, *The English German Girl*, Rosa Klein goes from an upper class eight-year-old living in 1930s Berlin to a young Jewish émigré living and working in wartime England under the alias Rosa Clark. Award-winning novelist Jake Wallis Simons examines the horrors of Nazi Germany through Rosa's tumultuous adolescence and determined effort to save her family. Fastidiously researched, this novel renders an accurate, if at times melodramatic, story of one girl's escape from Germany by Kindertransport.

Simons' portrayal of the Klein family at the nascent of Hitler's Nazi Germany is germane enough: Mr. Klein is a successful surgeon, Mrs. Klein is a proper, well-off mother, and the three children live relatively carefree. As Hitler rises to power, the family's privileges are brutally and systematically taken away. After Dr. Klein is relieved of his duties because the hospital wants to "create an Aryan atmosphere," the Klein family soon find themselves living in a dilapidated apartment in the Jewish ghetto with very little money. Rosa's parents unceasingly search for visas so the family can escape but are unable to obtain them. Through a kindness by their old friend Krützfeld, the local Polizeiobermeister, they are allowed to put one of their children on the Kindertransport to England. Rosa's brother, Heinrich, is too old at eighteen, and their sister, Hedi, is too young to be able to help get visas for the rest of the family once she would arrive in England. At fifteen, Rosa is devastated to leave her family but knows that she is the only hope to save them.

Rosa is sent to live with her father's cousins, the Kremers, in London. The Kremers are cold and disdainful towards Rosa. Although they forbid her to have contact with their young son, Samuel, who is a few years older than Rosa, an intimate relationship develops between them. As her life becomes a cycle of "rereading the letters from her parents, walking the streets

of London looking for work, staring at the bomb sites," Rosa is lonely and miserable. After fleeing the Kremers and her relationship with Samuel, she finally finds some hope in Essex where she enrolls in a training program to become a nurse. As her life is filled with studying, the letters from her parents arrive less frequently until they eventually stop.

As Rosa develops into a courageous and intelligent young woman, her melancholy lays dormant until she is forced to find her family. Readers who want to discover what happened to the children of the Kindertransport will find a reliable and vivid story in Rosa. Although at times Rosa seems more a symbol of a young Jewish émigré instead of a fully developed character, there is still a pulsing validity to her perspective.

Monica Carter