



# Invisible River

*Helena McEwen*

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## **Invisible River** Helena McEwen

When Evie and her father say good-bye at the train station, they are both on their own for the first time since her mother's death. But Evie is not lonely for long. At art school in London, she is quickly caught up in colors and critiques, gallery visits and sketching expeditions. She finds fiercely loyal friends-Rob, pragmatic and pregnant; Bianca, dramatic and Italian; and Cecile, the sidelined ballerina-and stumbles tentatively toward a relationship with Zeb, a second-year sculptor with hair blue-black like a crow.

But when her father arrives in the city, sour with alcohol and slumped on the doorstep of her new home, Evie must determine what she owes her past, and how it will shape the life, and the art, she's trying to create.

Gently and genuinely observed, written with painterly beauty, *Invisible River* is an unforgettable novel of the mysteries, desolations, and heart-soaring hopes of entering adulthood.

## **Invisible River Details**

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Author : Helena McEwen

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# From Reader Review Invisible River for online ebook

## Andrea says

While reading this book I felt the rating I wanted to give it constantly fluctuating between 2 and 4 stars. At last I can to a decisive 3 stars. My rational was that I like the writing and I liked the idea of the story enough to give it 4 stars. However, the untapped story of such great characters was really annoying. Here the author had these great characters to work with and not only did she miss the opportunity to develop them in her writing she also missed a second opportunity when she didn't let their personalities be exhibited in their art. I wouldn't suggest this book to many people who just read for entertainment, only true readers will stick with this one and find the good qualities. I would be willing to try more by this author since the writing was good.

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## Mary says

Invisible River is the story of Evie, an English art student who is headed to school in London. She is leaving behind her father and the woman who raised her, but she quickly finds three close friends and one fascinating boy. The only problem is that he already has a girlfriend.

McEwen has a very concise writing style, without a word going to waste, but her descriptions of London and the art the students see and create is very vivid. Evie is a synesthete and McEwen's descriptions of the colors in her paintings singing are just lovely. The symbolism in the book is very well done as well. The underlying themes of alcoholism, loss, new life, love, and recovery are all set on the backdrop of the undercurrents of emotion running through Evie's life.

Disclosure of Material Connection: I received this book free from the publisher through GoodReads.com . I was not required to write a positive review and was not compensated for this review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255 : "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

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## Jane says

How extraordinary to open a new novel by an author you have grown to love and discover that her heroine was setting off from your home town on the same journey that you have made many, many times.

*... I saw St Michael's Mount slip away behind the hedges, with the sun glinting on the sea.*

*"Let me go!" I shouted to the sea, and then the hedges and into the marshes at Marazion.*

*And all the way through Cornwall past Redruth and Camborne and Bodmin Moor and St Austell I could feel the pull of my father left alone.*

*I was halfway into Devon before it happened.*

*it was because of those tunnels cut in the red rock; you plunge into them after the miles of seelight, and the*

*tentacles couldn't hold on. They had to let go, and then the city of London began to hum like a magnet, pulling me towards it ...*

Eve is leaving her home in Cornwall to go to art school in London. Her emotions are caught perfectly. Cornwall is lovely, but when you are young and your head is full of dreams you want more. There are places to go, people to meet, sights to see, such a big world to explore ...

But Eve worried about her dad. There had only been the two of them since her mother died when Eve was just five years old, and she loved him dearly. He had been a good man, a thoughtful and creative man, but his loneliness had pulled him towards alcoholism.

Soon though she was caught up in a new life. The joy of finally being at art school, of being part of the big city, of being part of a new group of friends who have dreamed the same dream...

Through Eve's eyes I saw London afresh, I relived student life, and most of all I saw the colours of her exciting new world, the art she sees, and the art it inspires.

*I squeeze the tubes of oil paint on to the palette, one by one. I love the colours and their secret singing. Aureolin, a gentle golden yellow that is soft and hums, and high-pitched lemon yellow, sharp and startling, then the low velvet tone of alizarin crimson, and the seductive cobalt blue. It fills me with longing, if cobalt blue was a man I'd run away with him. He calls with a longing to far away. Blue is a calling-away colour and its sound is a sound so beautiful it makes you want to leave the earth. Not red though, red pipes up, especially cadmium scarlet. 'Do-do-doooo', it says like a trumpet, it runs in your blood the same sound, 'yes, this is life!' It gets hot and passionate. If you put it in a painting it jumps forward, 'I am here!' it says, 'right here, ME!' and I love red for that. Then the beautiful violets, half red, half blue. Cobalt violet, singing in the range next to pink, but with more majesty, more mystery, and ultramarine violet, gentle, tender, like the shadows in the twilight, but deep, with dignity and a hidden depth, like someone who walks among people but knows they are really a seraph.*

There are wonderful colours, wonderful imagery on every page, lighting up a simple coming of age story.

The world is seen through the eyes of one girl, one girl living entirely in the present.

That meant that her friends' characters are not explored in any detail, that practical concerns are neglected ... but for me that didn't matter, living with Eve, seeing the world through her eyes, was wonderful.

I loved seeing London again, visiting the galleries that I have missed since I left – this book reminded me just how much I would love to be able to visit the Rothko Room at Tate Modern again – and I loved being an art student.

I loved her relationships with her friends, her fellow students, her tutors. And I particularly liked Miss Pym, the college secretary, who I suspect was named after a certain lady novelist ...

I must confess though that I was a little disappointed when the story briefly returned to Cornwall. Although the setting was very, very close to home it wasn't my Cornwall, it was an idealised Cornwall, seen not through the eyes of a native but through the eyes of a visitor.

Not a major issue, you wouldn't notice it if you didn't live here, but I fear that I was beginning to gush, so I had to mention it.

Cornwall and London meet when Eve finds her father slumped on her doorstep. She can't cope and shouts at him to go. He disappears and, desperately worried, she realises that she is all she has and that she must find him.

Eve has to reconcile her love for her father with her need to live her own life.

*"Sometimes it's all too much, don't you think?"*

*"That's why people paint, Eve, why they write music or sing or make films. Because they can't stand it either"*

*"Don't forget the good things", she says as we cross Trafalgar Square between the huge lions."*

She sees London's darker colours, and they are reflected in her art.

This is the real coming of age ...

Invisible River is a quiet book, driven by character and not plot, with a lovely narrative voice, rich colourful prose and a moving emotional journey.

A lovely book to wander through.

And now it is gone I am left wondering what will happen to Eve and her friends, and wishing that I could step back into their world ...

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## **Rebecca says**

I won an advance readers copy (ARC) of this book through Goodreads and received it in the mail yesterday. I ended up reading it last night (staying up way too late).

The gist of the story is that Evie leaves home and her drunkard father to attend art school in London. She makes some good and quirky friends and has a hint of potential romance when her father turns up passed out on her stoop one night.

She struggles with the love she has for her father and the contempt she feels toward his addiction.

The book was a very fast read. I really enjoyed the authors use of the written word and as well as the story. However, at times, I did feel that she spent a lot of time/words describing the the scenes of the city, of Evies surroundings, and not enough on the development of relationships she is making with her friends and with Zeb - these parts did feel a little glossed over.

Overall I really enjoyed the book and the skilled writing of Helena McEwen. I felt Evie's anxieties as she struggled with her complex relationship with father. I appreciate the healthy and logical approach the writer had Evie find to help her deal with her struggles - it was very real to me and I think those going through a similar situation would appreciate it.

Note: On the Advance Copy there are a couple of spelling errors I noticed. Page 38 paragraph 5 - I believe the last part of the sentence should read "one by one" not "on by one". Page 133 first paragraph the word "blke" should actually be "bike".

NOTE: Some language in the first chapter.

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## **Karen Gemind says**

I almost got into this story after Evie's father was introduced. But I could never understand why Evie wanted to be a painter, or how she came to attend the London school. The beginning was interesting enough and I initially thought I was on an exciting journey, but then hit a dead end. The writer's language is beautiful, but I felt that character development was lacking. Even Evie's little infatuation was without purpose. This is the first Helena McEwen book I've read; maybe I'll try another and see what it holds.

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## **Adriana Bulgarelli says**

Eve leaves her father in their countryside cottage and moves to London to study painting. At the Art school she meets a bunch of girlfriends and they start sharing their lives. Eve's father comes and goes and eventually is gone, the pain she feels is soothened by this beautiful friendship.

Helena McEwen paints with words, every moment of Eve's life is present with vivid colors in the reader's mind.

"Sometimes it's all too much, don't you think?"

"That's why people paint, Eve, why they write music or sing or make films. Because they can't stand it either"

"Don't forget the good things", she says as we cross Trafalgar Square between the huge lions.

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## **Helena says**

This book appears to have received pretty low star-ratings, but I have to say I really enjoyed it.

Eve, the protagonist, goes up to London to start a new life at Chelsea Art School. She leaves her alcoholic father behind in Cornwall. Once at Art school, she falls in love with the colour and history of London, and cycles or walks around the city, painting and exploring. The descriptions of her new friendships are beautiful, as are the joy that she finds in her new surroundings. Having worked for twenty years as a life model, I recognise her descriptions of Art college and the tutors.

The crisis, when it comes, deals with Eve's trauma, disintegration, and re integration, but this is more than a disaster story, or a romance: it's about growing up and becoming an adult and dealing with change and uncertainty.

I really wanted to be one of Evie's gang of art-school students! They seemed to look out for each other, and to have a great deal of pleasure as well as pain in their work.

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## **Leah says**

It was an interesting book told in the narration of first person and much like a diary entry. The beginning was a little slow going as we are introduced to all these different characters, but then it gets intense. I wish that we had a better estimate on what year it takes place and the ages of the characters. I originally thought it was modern times but it seems to be more 1960 when you reach the end. I liked all the English slang. I am so lucky to have won it in a giveaway. I hope there are more to follow.

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## **Dajana says**

I won this book through Goodreads first reads way back in February, but it has taken me until June to finish it. This book could not hold my attention. The way the book was organised did not work for me, you never really got to know the characters, and the story would focus on a certain "idea" for only a few pages and then the story would change. It seemed like a collection of stories. To make up for the lack of character description, the setting and the paintings seemed to be over-described to the point where you would just lose interest in the book. This book had a good idea, and a good plot, but the book itself, and the writing, I did not enjoy.

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## **Ian Mapp says**

If I was good at anagrams, I'm sure I could "risible tosh" out of the title, but I am not that talented.

I picked up the book because a) it was about London and B) She was next to Ian McEwan in the library.

I thought I would give her a go - the press quotes on the back are superb and I was expecting a great read. I am staggered by this.... if ever I felt that I should have a go at fiction it was reading this book. I may not get the same levels of praise but I would settle for a "not bad". Based on the scales used by the reviewers, a shopping list would illicit this level of gushing.

The book is supposed to view London with a painter's eye. In my eyes, this just meant detailing the colours of everything as a descriptor.

The book is supposed to be a young woman dealing with the impact of an alcoholic father turning up during her first year in college. After 100 odd pages of establishing the characters along the lines of "I did this" and "I did that", said father turns up. This is where you think you will have some impact, some reason for the story, some drama and all we get is a disappearance.

There is just no plot or purpose to the book. Nice to read passages on London but there are many, many better books - both fiction and non fiction - that do this so much better. The author even quotes two in the acknowledgements and you would be better served with those.

The only thing more surprising than the gushing praise is that fact that this is not a first novel.

Soz, but I've read good fiction and bad fiction but rarely have I read anything happens fiction.

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### **Kristine says**

I actually won an advanced reader's copy of this book through Goodreads First Reads. It took me entirely too long to finish. Not because I didn't like it or because it was boring. Real life just got in the way.

I absolutely loved this book. It was beautifully written. It was poetic and deep and complex and just wonderful. I loved the fact that McEwen made this character so in tune with her surroundings. Eve was always hearing colors and tasting feelings. And not in a crazy, tripped-out LSD way, but she is just very much aware of the world around her. Everything you experience from start to finish is seen through this lens of beautiful art. I mean, the imagery! It's amazing. And I think that has a lot to do with the fact that McEwen is an artist herself. She made art, and how important it is in dealing with the ups and downs of Eve's life, a central focus of the story. I think her love of art and artistic expression really comes through in the form of Eve and her three best friends.

In short, it was heartbreaking and wonderful all at once. I would definitely recommend it!

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### **Kelsie says**

Thank you, Goodreads/First Reads for providing me with this book!

I understood that this book was going to be about a girl attending art school in London, but I had no idea just how much influence art was going to have on the story. I know that the author is an artist and you can definitely tell. Everything was described so vividly. Everything had a color. Admittedly I became tired of reading about the many, many colors and descriptions. It was overdone.

I wish more time would have been spent on the relationships in the story. I did not learn enough about Eve's friends and their backstories as I would have wanted. I would have liked to know more about where they came from. I can appreciate how Eve's emotions were displayed in relation to her father though. That all seemed very real.

I think this book would appeal more to artists or other people interested in art. I do appreciate receiving it though.

Note: On the advanced copy there were a couple misspellings.

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### **Marie McLean says**

This book held a lot of promise, but unfortunately just didn't deliver.

It was positively drowning in colour. Every. Single. Descriptive. Hue. Even the word 'colour' appeared hundreds of times, and eventually detracted from the story. However, I'm sure students of art would appreciate this aspect of the novel far more than I did.



Set in London, many well-known locations are named. However, it's not the London I remember. I couldn't relate to the author's descriptions of famous landmarks, and felt a little put out by not feeling that lovely connection you get when you read about a familiar, and much-loved place.

The story meandered from the plot (Evie leaves her alcoholic father behind in Cornwall to study art in London. She establishes friendships, but then has to deal with her father turning up drunk on her doorstep). I did enjoy the scenes with her father - they were deeper, and held more energy than others - and I particularly liked the character of Bianca, a vivacious girl from Rome.

The writing was skilled, but the book just didn't grab me.

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### **Aurali says**

I received a free copy of this book through goodreads and the description and concept sounded excellent. I really enjoyed the last 2/3 of the book but the beginning was painful to wade through. I really enjoyed the portions of the book that dealt with relationships, Evie's father, and Evie working through her anxiety and grief. The first 100 pages could use some serious revision to focus more on the characters and less on the protracted descriptions of everyday items and art supplies. The other off-putting part for someone who has only visited London once was the extensive listing of locations in the city with no further description. If a place is important enough to bring up a little description about the location would be nice. It took me almost a month to get through the first 100 pages because I had to force myself to keep picking up the book; I finished the final 200 pages in 3 days.

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### **Rachel says**

When Evie goes to art school in London, she leaves her alcoholic father on his own only to have him show up drunk on her doorstep a few months later. Luckily Evie has made some good friends at school who can support her through this time.

This was a sleepy, meandering book. The author is great at using descriptive language and the book is filled with her robust imagery. The problem is that there isn't that much plot or character development behind that imagery. I didn't feel connected to Evie or her friends - I was able to put the book down for long periods of time without thinking about it.

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