

# THE UNWANTED



PETER CLENOTT

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A NOVEL

PETER CLENOTT



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*To my parents, now deceased, Martin and Esther Clenott, who stood behind me for many years and to my children Leah, Stephen and William who, I hope, will stand with me for many years to come.*



I

BOOK 1





# Chapter One

September 1939

**L**ate summer. The first day of September, to be precise. And, to a young girl about to die, time, running out, matters above everything. In the past, on a fine day such as this, this girl, now hunched over her notepad in the back seat of a BMW, might have visited a museum in Berlin. She might have crossbred flowers with her grandmother, studied her precious textbooks, hiked through her native Bavarian forest looking for plant samples. But this first day of September in 1939 is an unusual day. At 4:45 AM this very morning, the German army under General von Rundstedt and General von Bock have invaded Poland. World War II has begun.

Does she even care, this girl? She's only fourteen years old. Mind on lock-down, does she notice the forests passing by on either side of her grandfather's car? The war is distant. Turbulence at home is daily. Does she hear the radio playing, already touting the magnificence of Der Fuhrer's lightning strike? Does she hear her grandfather's satisfied grunt... 'Hitler is right. Fire and iron is making Germany great again'...or catch his eye as he darts a worried look toward the female creature, whose blood he denies is akin to his?

No. She's too intent on her notepad to notice anything. Writing with a manic intensity that neither of her male attendants understands, she is bent over her paper as if some weight is forcing her down, never taking her eyes

off her work, keeping her creations a secret from the world.

“Esh-vie-zet-vie-geh-vie. Esh-vie-zet-vie-geh-vie.”

She mumbles this rhythmic chant over and over, “Esh-vie-zet-vie-geh-vie” until her grandfather Friedrich can no longer tolerate it and turns the knob of the radio to raise the sound, to drown out her existence.

*She’s crazy, this one*, her grandfather is thinking. *Not of my blood. I’ve a clear conscience about this. Not of my blood.*

Her name is Hana Ziegler. And while she does have a family, grandparents, and two uncles, Edward and Walter, she is very much alone in the world. Mother deceased, father an unknown, she has borne her existence through her intellect, her studies of the world that her family apparently does not want her to inhabit much longer.

“Esh-vie-zet-vie-geh-vie.”

Her lone suitcase sits at her feet, her few possessions thrown in at the last minute. Papers, schoolbooks, gnawed pencils, an eraser, and a sharpener. The sun had barely risen three hours earlier when she was roused from her bed by her family’s maid Hilda. Money is not the problem for the Zieglers. Hana is.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry. Time to get up, *liebchen*. *Liebchen*, time to get ready,” the maid had wept silent angry tears said. “These people. So early. Such a hurry. No time to eat. The car is already purring. Their own child.”

It was the maid, Hilda, tears unrestrained, who bothered to neatly fold and pack a change of clothes and some toilet items in the only suitcase Hana would be allowed to carry with her to the Hollenschloss Institute. Hana herself acted as if still asleep, mutterspeaking under her breath, talking to some spectral entity, chanting what Hilda interpreted as a Catholic prayer though, in truth, was anything but.

*Esh-vie-zet-vie-geh-vie.*

From the moment Hilda pulled Hana from slumber, the mind of the outcast was borne into a parallel realm, another sort of dream world, though one of asphalt and steel that require Hana to coexist with people who mistake her for insane.

Her grandfather believes she is just engaged in ridiculous doodling, a

meaningless, childish release of whatever mush exists in her brain.

“Scribble, scribble, scribble. What sort of nonsense is that?”

If he could reach far enough behind him, he would rip her notepad from her lap, crumple it up and toss it in her face. His question is not aimed at Hana but at the driver of his car, Hana’s treating psychiatrist, Lorenz Koerner.

“You hear her? Is that singing? Or babbling? It’s enough to want to make you throw her from the car onto the highway. An accident. Who would question it? What do you make of it, Koerner?”

“She may be self-comforting,” Koerner replies. His hands grip the steering wheel, but his eyes move back and forth from the road ahead to the rearview mirror where he can see Hana, a mechanism of madness, driving her pencil into making strange figures on her notepad. In a way, he thinks, as she does so, she could seem rather to be praying. Davening, the Jews call it. Her back is gently rocking. Her lips are moving, but Koerner can’t quite make out what she is saying. And what deity would listen or understand such madness?

Whether or not she is comforted or entertained by it, the older man, Hana’s grandfather, is not. Hatred is not too small a word. He has intentionally turned the radio up even louder to try to drown out the noise coming from his distasteful grandchild.

“Now you understand why we are doing this, Herr Doctor,” the old man says, disgusted.

Actually, Koerner isn’t entirely sure. There are several obvious possibilities. The neurological one. Hana is manic-depressive, oddly compulsive, unnerving to the average person, like now in the backseat as she chants and scribbles madness in her notebook. Then there are the political and economic rationales. The Nazis have been making it plain for some time that they do not want the imperfect to be able to procreate. The crippled and feeble-minded should be sterilized, prevented from passing on their illnesses to future generations. More recently, Hitler has secretly approved of harsher measures, expecting casualties from war, needing the hospital space currently taken up by the sick and infirm, the physically malformed

and the mentally deranged. Why should money be spent on the psychotic, the retarded, when hard-working people struggle to put food on the table? This is not a caretaker country. Germany has to be purified. Only by being strong, will it make itself great again. People like Hana, even babies, if they are helpless, if their lives are *lebensunwertes leben*, lives unworthy of life, must be removed. Euthanized. At places like Hollenschloss.

“You do agree, don’t you, Koerner?” Friedrich asks, as if he has a conscience and needs reassuring.

Koerner, at least, has a sense of shame not to openly engage the old man in a discussion of his granddaughter’s fate right in front of her, right in front of her though he has co-signed with little hesitation the papers with little hesitation that are not only institutionalizing her at the Hollenschloss but that have designated her ultimate fate.

“Numbers,” Friedrich says, risking a peek behind at what Hana is up to. He doesn’t like being cooped up in this car with his granddaughter. He should have assigned Ilse, his wife, Hana’s grandmother, this responsibility, or left it to Koerner. Walter, his youngest son, had talked him into this, to make sure that the thing was done right. They are practically alone driving on this two-lane road to the small Bavarian village that is the end of their trip. It won’t end fast enough.

“*Juden*, **they** like numbers, too. They’re very good with numbers. Bankers. Loan sharks. Too good. You get my point, Koerner?”

The psychiatrist doesn’t. He can’t help listening to Hana even though her chant is muted by the German broadcaster.

*Esh-vie-zet-vie-get-vie. Esh-vie-zet-vie-geh-vie.* Hana’s foot is on the accelerator, the rapidity of her gibberish picking up energy as they approach the place from which she will not return.

“Why, just look at her,” Friedrich says, not looking at her. “My people are pure Aryan stock. She’s dark. The hair. The eyes. Her people, they rock backwards and forwards when they pray, don’t they?”

“Her people?”

“We never knew who her father was. My daughter, her mother, lived in Berlin, hung around with the theatre crowd. Jews, you see now? We always

suspected her father was one of them. And what would the SS do if they found out that we were harboring in our own house, a...a...? Our bloodline corrupted. We have no choice, you understand, Koerner. None at all."

Koerner's eyes turn to the rearview mirror. If Hana is hearing any of this conversation, she isn't exhibiting any resentment. She is like a wind-up monkey except Koerner knows she can go on like this for hours at a time. Koerner is a much younger man than Ziegler. Herr Ziegler is so old, he can still rhapsodize over Bismarck and the Kaiser. He is a stolid stalwart German of the previous century. An industrialist who prides himself on his business acumen. Koerner prides himself on being a more modern man, a follower of Freud, himself a Jew. Who could say what years of analysis would do for a girl like Hana? But the pity of the world and of the times they are living in is that there is no tolerance and no time for analysis. While at this very moment, the Poles are feeling the brutality of *Blitzkrieg*, Koerner knows full well that German children like Hana will suffer the consequences just as inevitably. And yet, he signed the papers.

"How will they do it?"

"What?"

Koerner's attention has briefly been diverted to a van passing along the other side of the road. It has come from Hollenschloss. It is empty now. In a few days, it won't be. There is a cemetery, down the road a way.

"How will they do it? You know what I mean."

Ziegler prods Koerner. The grandfather, the patriarch of a very rich family, is utterly tactless. Koerner pretends not to understand. He looks back at Hana with a smile.

"Your grandfather means how will we process the paperwork at Hollenschloss? We Germans love bureaucracy. But time is of the essence. And we don't want to keep you waiting forever. At Hollenschloss, our motto is quick and painless."

"Esh-vie-zet-vie-geh-vie. Esh-vie-zet-vie-geh-vie."

If anything. Koerner's attempt at making light of Ziegler's contempt for Hana has only ratcheted up the girl's response. Her writing hand is now moving so quickly over her notepad, it is a wonder she doesn't tear a hole

through it and send the tip of her pencil into her leg. Her chant has become an annoying drone, the buzzing of an angry hive of bees locked inside the car, windows rolled down, with three anxious people vying to escape. Who is mad now?

Koerner says, "I was in your room at the institute the other day, Hana. It's really quite nice. On the second floor with a balcony view. Neat. Clean. You'll have a roommate. Siggie. She's about your age, the daughter of Herr Haefner, one of our major donors. I think you might get along quite nicely, eh, Hana?"

"Esh-vie-zet-vie-geh-vie. Esh-vie-zet-vie-geh-vie."

"There's a window looking out onto a beautiful garden. A fountain with a statue and water bubbling out of its mouth. And flowers. Your grandmother insisted there be flowers. She grows them herself, doesn't she? Pretty flowers. The smell even this time of year is intoxicating."

Hana pays Koerner no mind. In fact, it appears that she is about to burst, her shaking body ready to explode into smoke and flame.

But Koerner, unlike the muttering older man, persists with nonchalance. "We are almost there, Hana. You see? Over the treetops on the very top of the hill overlooking the town. You can just make out the turrets if you look. An old castle. Quite elegantly turned up, I must say. A fairy tale castle for two fairytale princesses, eh, Hana? Not so bad. Not so bad at all."

"Esh-vie-zet-vie-geh-vie. Esh-vie-zet-vie-geh-vie. Esh-vie-zet-..."

In an instant, the rocking stops. The chanting. The manic writing. Hana freezes. If her psychotic manifestations are unsettling to the two men, her abrupt silence is worse. The wealthy industrialist Ziegler has faced down many a politician and business adversary in his time but has no idea how to handle this fourteen-year-old mental deviant. Koerner, trained at the finest European university under the tutelage of the most renowned specialists in his chosen field, has no inkling of what he has said to cause this momentous turn of events.

Hana keeps them waiting, then says, "One question, Herr Doctor Koerner, *bitte*."

"Of course, Hana. Anything."

## CHAPTER ONE

When at last she raises her eyes to the two men, much older and wiser than she, who have determined her fate without her knowledge, she does so with complete innocence. At least, that is what they believe.

“How **will** they do it?”





## About the Author

Born in Portland, Maine, Mr. Clenott graduated from Bowdoin College before setting down roots in Massachusetts. The father of three children, he currently works for an anti-poverty agency and is the father of three children. His previous published works include *Hunting the King*, *Devolution*, and *The Hunted*.