



The Quiet Twin

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Vienna, 1939. Professor Speckstein's dog has been brutally killed, the latest victim in a string of unsolved murders. Speckstein wants answers - but these are uncharitable times, and one must be careful where one probes...

When an unexpected house call leads Dr. Beer to Speckstein's apartment, he finds himself in the bedroom of Zuzka, the professor's niece. Wide-eyed, flirtatious, and not detectably ill, Zuzka leads the young doctor to her window and opens up a view of their apartment block that Beer has never known. Across the shared courtyard, there is nine-year-old Anneliese, the lonely daughter of an alcoholic. Five windows to the left lives a secretive mime who comes home late at night and keeps something - or someone - precious hidden from view. From the garret drifts the mournful sound of a trumpet player, and a basement door swings closed behind the building's inscrutable janitor.

Does one of these enigmatic neighbors have blood on their hands?

Dr. Beer, who has his own reasons for keeping his private life hidden from public scrutiny, reluctantly becomes embroiled in an inquiry that forces him to face the dark realities of Nazi rule. By turns chilling and tender, *The Quiet Twin* explores a dystopian world of social paranoia, mistrust, and fear - and the danger of staying silent.

The Quiet Twin Details

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From Reader Review The Quiet Twin for online ebook

Judith says

...captures the paranoia endemic to society in Vienna..October 1939

What begins as an investigation into the killing of a neighbor's dog.....leads one Doctor Beer into the darker aspects of the lives of his neighbors. The diversity of social classes living in one apartment complex....surrounding a courtyard..

In this time and place...everyone had secrets..and would kill to keep them

Doctor Beer treats a young woman with sexual issues...a neighbor across the courtyard is caring for a "mentally defective" sister....the little girl, around the way...the humpbacked child...deals with an alcoholic father (and keeps a groundhog as a "pet")....and Doctor Beer has homosexual issues of his own....and the official, Nazi-endorsed "spy" is always On Duty

This is where I stop....if you're curious...seek out this book...it is a Wonder

4 1/2 Stars

this was a Net Galley

Laurie says

Vienna 1939, after the Anschluss, is a place of suspicion with neighbors informing on neighbors and so-called average citizens slowly slipping down the slope of ethical behavior while feeling as though they have no choice. This is the Vienna of The Quite Twin as studied in microcosm through the residents of an apartment building; all of whom have windows peering out onto a central courtyard giving each one a partial view into the lives of others. The cast of engaging characters includes an aging Habsburg era monarchist who may or may not have committed rape, his housekeeper, a neurotic girl in her late teens, a doctor of psychiatry, a Japanese musician, a mime and his quadriplegic sister, a ten year old girl physically crippled in babyhood and various other assorted working class residents all of whom see, or believe that they see a murder-or maybe more than one murder. While the plot moves along at a good pace, the real point of the book is how people act in a totalitarian society; the choices they make when threatened, even if only in their imaginations.

So good I'll be opening the sequel, The Crooked Maid in 3..2..1..

Krista says

From the Author's Note at the end of *The Quiet Twin*, Dan Vyleta states:

My primary interest in this book belonged with the army of opportunists whose crimes at times were as grave in their consequences as those perpetrated by the true believers. Sixty-five years after the Second World War it is easy for most of us to convince ourselves that we could never have belonged amongst those who would have held wrong-headed beliefs; it is a more nagging question to wonder what one might have done in order to secure some modicum of social and material success.

This is an issue that I keep coming back to in my reading lately: whether it's the Rwandan Genocide or the Salem Witch Hunt or, yes, even with the Nazis, it's so easy to judge people's actions in retrospect; to say that I would never have been caught up in some blood lust against former neighbours. But in every one of these historical cases, the perpetrators were people exactly like me -- ordinary, peaceful -- who somehow, slowly, became something else. But as Vyleta states above, *The Quiet Twin* isn't about the blood lust but something perhaps more insidious; the kind of small betrayals that maybe we all are capable of, that we might not even judge ourselves harshly for. Would I hoard sausages, hoping to make a killing on the black market? Would I rat out a neighbour for a letter of introduction? Would I watch at the windows, listen at the pipes?

Set in Vienna in 1939, *The Quiet Twin* is situated in an apartment complex with an inner courtyard; the kind of place that makes it very easy for neighbours to spy on each other through their open windows; an occupation that goes beyond mere curiosity as the country ramps up for war and the local police assume new and absolute powers. As the story begins, there have been a series of local murders, including that of a dog owned by the building's own *Zellenwart* (a disgraced former professor who was able to secure a minor title from the local Nazi Party, a man who now, essentially, acts as a spy in the neighbourhood). Paranoia grips the residents, and their actions, half seen and mostly misinterpreted by each other, lead to whispered theories and accusations. A resident physician, Dr. Beer, is asked to bring his special training to bear on the police files, which he is reluctant to do since it involves his long-disavowed knowledge of forbidden teachings; those of Sigmund Freud.

Every character who is introduced has a secret to hide and meetings between them tend to be awkward and guarded -- even between would-be lovers. The only one who seems willing to seek and offer friendship is the pirouetting young hunchback, Anneliese, but even she is shielding her drunken father from the others. As an aside: (view spoiler)

Something about this book may have been too clever for me and I wish I had understood it on all its levels (did Freud have anything in particular to say about twins? A brief google points me to *The Uncanny*). When Eva, the beautiful but paralysed and mute woman is introduced, I thought, "Aha, the quiet twin." But then again, her brother, her twin, is a mime. And then later we learn that Zuzka has a dead twin -- and isn't that the quietest of all? And from accusations of rape against young fortune-tellers, which leave them mute, to attempted rape against a helpless invalid, there is a repetition of the idea of exercising power over those who can't protest. This even happens with Zuzka and Dr. Beer (two seemingly self-controlled people): In the opening scene, when the physician is asked to examine the intermittently paralysed young woman, he needs to restrain himself from touching her inappropriately. And later:

When she woke, she was surprised at first to find him there, slumped low in his seat, his chin

on his chest, and a line of wet where he was leaking from the mouth. His hands had dropped to either side of the chair, hung lifeless, like the limbs of a marionette. It was easy at this moment to think of him as hers, to play with at her leisure, and she reached out at once to touch his beard, like a schoolgirl on a dare. He was handsome even in his sleep, perhaps more so: a closed man, buttoned up in his soul, the eyes like peeled almonds, half hidden under the broad brow. It was tempting to spend an hour just touching him; lie there, slide a hand upon his thigh. Then she remembered why she had asked him to stay the night and shot up in her bed; shook his shoulder in passing and ran to the window.

The Quiet Twin was a fascinating read that captured the tension and paranoia of the time, most especially in the character of the police detective, Teuben; a man who would rather beat a confession out of slow-witted youth than actually solve the murders he has on file. From his control of Speckstein's dinner party to his insistence that Dr. Beer change his autopsy findings, it's obvious that the common citizen had rapidly lost his rights -- and the book isn't even about the deportation of Jews or the concentration camps or full out war, just the period right before when the Viennese were trying to figure out what was about to happen and how they could survive it.

And back to the big question -- what would *I* have done to survive it? Hoard the sausages or hide the invalids? I know what I'd like to think of myself but am not anxious to be put to the test.

Carol says

Vienna, 1939. Professor Speckstein's dog has been brutally killed and he wants to know why. But these are uncharitable times and one must be careful where one probes...When an unexpected house call leads Doctor Beer to Speckstein's apartment, he finds himself in the bedroom of Zuzka, the professor's niece. Wide-eyed, flirtatious, and not detectably ill, Zuzka leads the young doctor to her window and opens up a view of their apartment block that Beer has never known. Across the shared courtyard there is nine-year-old Anneliese, the lonely daughter of an alcoholic. Five windows to the left lives a secretive mime who comes home late at night and keeps something - or someone - precious hidden from view. From the garret drifts the mournful sound of an Oriental's trumpet, and a basement door swings closed behind the building's inscrutable janitor. Does one of these enigmatic neighbours have blood on their hands? Doctor Beer, who has his own reasons for keeping his private life hidden from public scrutiny, reluctantly becomes embroiled in an enquiry that forces him to face the dark realities of Nazi rule. (Amazon review) - Read it all but didn't enjoy the noir-ish quality. None of the characters are likable - but the setting was interesting

Danny says

This is a book that fell from nowhere and blew me out of the water.

It's 1939 in Vienna, and the residents of a large, rambling apartment building are uneasy. The professor's dog has been violently killed, and a number of murders in the area seem to share the same hallmarks. Across the yard the professor's niece, the doctor, the janitor, the drunk's daughter, the trumpet player, and the clown all stare and wonder. Who is responsible? Who will be next?

When the police start nosing around, the tension mounts, and loyalties will not last long under the pressure.

More than a mystery, this book examines the atmosphere of suspicion in a country ruled by the Nazi party. How can anyone feel safe when the people in charge are known to be wolves in military uniforms?

Liviu says

As I will have a full FBC rv close to its publication next year (I read an earc of the US edition, though the UK edition is out) only some points:

- a very dark novel written in a somewhat whimsical tone that most of the time tones down the horrors
- excellent atmosphere and memorable characters mostly set in a Viennese housing complex that in the spirit of the times mixed the better off with working poor and was supervised in the name of the Reich by a chief administrator/informer that worked hand in hand with the Gestapo and the police; the one here is an unusual one as being a formerly very respected University professor and physician that was tried for child rape (though acquitted) some years ago and finds National Socialism a good vehicle for his revenge on the Viennese society that shunned him after the trial
- mostly historical fiction and people looking for a mystery will be disappointed as there is no real such despite the talked about murders and the dog
- Vienna October-November 1939; the war has started, the Jews have been beaten and kicked out, though their murder is still only sporadic, the mentally sick and physically disabled are starting to be killed in hospitals for the good of the race, or at least this is what the characters believe (the actual killings started mostly in 1940, but rumors have been going around earlier), while forced sterilizations have been done for a while now
- integrity is rare, corruption and violence are common
- great interludes from the press of the times that read stranger than fiction

Excellent novel and highly recommended

Van says

The Quiet Twin is set in an apartment complex in Vienna in 1939, early in World War II. A series of bizarre murders have occurred in the city. When a dog belonging to the building's owner is found dead, he asks a resident physician to investigate. He is aided by the landlord's niece, whose curiosity and budding sexuality seem destined to get her into trouble; also by a hunchbacked little girl with remarkable gifts of perception.

The characters' habit of watching one another across the courtyard of the complex is reminiscent of Alfred

Hitchcock's classic 1954 thriller, *Rear Window*. This macabre tale refers only tangentially to the plight of Jews, concentrating instead on conflicts between rich and poor, Party members and those who did not subscribe to Hitler's politics.

Dan Vyleta's characters are more fascinating than sympathetic. He gets full marks for portraying people the way they are, rather than how we would like them to be. The people in this novel are marvels of eccentricity struggling to survive in an increasingly oppressive atmosphere.

Actions scenes are described less deftly. Vyleta seems to get tangled in language. Some behaviours defy credibility. Another serious problem: too many subplots receive careful, suspenseful treatment only to find perfunctory resolutions.

Susan says

This book is set around a group of apartment buildings in Vienna, during October and November 1939. The characters range from a doctor, a disgraced professor and his niece, a mime artist, a janitor, a young hunchbacked girl and a Japanese trumpeter, amongst others. In other words, a cross section of people, living side by side in dangerous times and many with secrets to hide.

Dr Anton Beer is asked to visit the disgraced professor, Speckstein, who asks him to investigate the murder of his dog. Beer becomes aware of a series of murders and attacks which have taken place near to his apartment building and reluctantly becomes involved in the police investigation, although the murders are really incidental to the real story, which is that of the characters. Becoming involved with the police at that time, in that place, is a dangerous thing to be and Beer tries desperately to keep his private life private, while becoming more and more embroiled in the police enquiry. The detective, Teuben, is also an excellently creepy villain – poking and prying through Dr Beer's life and the secrets of both him and his fellow neighbours.

The author tells this story so vividly that I found it easy to imagine the windows overlooking the courtyards; the nosy neighbours, turned informers, who could know something about you which could be dangerous. You can feel the menace of uniforms, especially in an excellent scene set during a party effectively gate crashed by members of the party, as war entered the lives of normal people. Dr Beer is a sympathetic and very believable hero. Altogether a wonderful book, very atmospheric and brilliantly written. "The Crooked Maid," also features characters from this first book and I look forward to reading on, as I enjoyed this very much.

Danny says

This is a book that fell from nowhere and blew me out of the water.

It is 1939 in Vienna, and the residents of a large, rambling apartment building are uneasy. The professor's dog has been violently killed, and a number of other murders in the area seem to share the same hallmarks. Across the yard the professor's niece, the doctor, the janitor, the drunk's daughter, the trumpet player, and the clown all stare and wonder. Who is responsible? Who will be next?

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More than a mystery, this book examines the atmosphere of suspicion in a country ruled by the Nazi party. How can anyone feel safe when the people in charge are known to be wolves in military uniforms?

Val says

The book follows the lives of several people living in an apartment block in Vienna. The wealthier residents have grander apartments facing the street, the poorer ones live in smaller places around a courtyard behind the facade. This means the lives of all social classes and wealth levels are intertwined and is an arrangement not found in most cities (which tend to segregate more).

The time is 1939, a year after the Anschluss, and the Nazis are in power. There is a climate of mutual suspicion, not helped by several murders in the area and the killing of a resident's dog. Many of the residents have secrets behind their own facades. Almost all of them would fail some aspect of the Nazi purity tests (although not by being Jewish unusually) and rumours of what would happen to them add to the atmosphere. Many characters make choices in this situation which are morally suspect to some extent, and we readers are left wondering what we would do. There is only one thoroughly unpleasant character (a Nazi, obviously) but there are no truly good ones and everyone finds their own compromises.

I had a small problem with so many characters having a physical or mental handicap, or a 'sexual deviancy' and I'm not sure an author should write a book set under the Nazi regime without addressing the Jewish question (the only ones mentioned have left and their premises burnt, but that is it). It is a very good book however and I enjoyed reading it.

Charles says

This story takes place in 1939 Vienna, under the Nazi regime, and involves a cast of characters some of whom will appear in his later postwar novel "The crooked Maid" which I read 1st. There is the same "noir movie" atmosphere-brooding, threatening, and filled with violence, murder, corruption, drunkenness, in the shadow-filled setting of a somewhat dingy section of Vienna. We are introduced to Dr. Anton Beer-psychiatrist doing general practice, Lieschen the little girl with spinal deformity(the crooked maid of the later novel) whom he will protect & adopt after her drunken father dies in an apparent suicide, or was it murder?, shortly on the heels of two women being murdered & the pet dog of Dr.Speckstein, a disgraced professor(though exonerated in court of the rape of a little girl)now working as a Nazi informer. His niece Szuska suffers hysterical symptoms, while his housekeeper Frau Vesalius runs the household with grim&unhappy efficiency. The mysterious trumpet playing Japanese Herr Yuu, and the cabaret mime Otto who secretly harbors his twin sister Eva who is paralyzed & bedridden(to protect her from the Nazi eugenics program me). Investigating the dog killing & subsequently other violent events is the opportunistic sadistic Nazi detective who will ultimately invite his Nazi police cronies to a drunken destructive party at Dr.Speckstein(without consultation)& will be killed by Otto when he is caught raping Eva. Anton is recruited to help Otto but seen by Yuu & denounced to Speckstein who dies of a stroke before reporting him. Otto is bribed by Anton to escape to Switzerland with Lieschen where the little girl can be put up by Anton's wife(who left him previously over a gay relation he had). However Otto is denounced by a farmer & caught, and Lieschen ends up in an orphanage. This is all about the hell of Nazism & the dual nature of man-capable of good & evil.

Monica says

I found this book to be simultaneously fascinating and repellent. The murdered dog, and the murdered women. The mime and his paralyzed, mute twin sister - I hate mimes. The precocious hunchbacked 10 year old and her drunken, abusive, later murdered father. The neurasthenic college student and her disgraced sex offender Nazi uncle. The ineffectual doctor and the brutal cop - don't read this book expecting to like anyone. The nasty soup that resulted from the overlaying of Freudianism, spiritualism, eugenics and Nazism infuses every page.

From The Independent February 2011

"Vienna, autumn 1939: Dr Anton Beer, a medic whose formal training embraces the deviant Jewish thinking of the banned Sigmund Freud, holds a general surgery in his apartment on the upper floor of a suburban tenement.

A needy patient in the same block is Zuzka, the niece of Professor Speckstein, who has been sent to the city to recover from an unspecified nervous condition. Beer considers her a hysteric, a sham, but dutiful house calls gradually draw him into the Speckstein household.

Disgraced after a rape trial but clinging to social power as a Nazi Party neighbourhood informer, Professor Speckstein coerces Beer into reviewing the evidence of a string of local murders – including the butchering of his own aged hound. Zuzka, audacious through boredom, on the cusp of womanhood (or in need of, as Speckstein's housekeeper tartly observes, a husband), uses her despised uncle's authority to pursue her own inquiries into the miserable fate of the family dog.

From her uncle's apartment, at the affluent front of the block, Zuzka can peer into the windows of their neighbours in the two wings that overlook the shared courtyard, and what is observed serves as an ingenious driver to Dan Vyleta's plot. The novel opens at a slow, wary pace that reflects the guarded private lives of the apartment block's diverse inhabitants, all variously braced against the threat of notice by hostile authorities. But Zuzka's reckless sorties into uncharted emotional territory, Beer's reluctant probing, and an increasingly heavy police involvement steadily accelerate the pace of *The Quiet Twin* towards a denouement catalysed by a dinner party that Speckstein plans for the local Nazi top brass.

Vital, deftly realised characters populate Vyleta's simmering narrative. Most pungent is Teuben, the boorish, unprincipled police detective whose swaggering, presumptive authority holds all the arbitrary menace of Austria's eager pliancy to the Führer.

The gathering intensity of Vyleta's tentacular plot allows the loosest of assonances with Hamlet. Zuzka's seamy, mime-artist neighbour is roped into performing at the Professor's ghastly soirée which, Zuzka vainly hopes, will expose her uncle's guilty conscience. On an increasingly corpse-strewn stage, Beer dithers over his own courage and duty. More in tone than action, the malaise of the Nazi eugenics programme provides the rancid atmosphere of a rotten state.

Darker in tone than the ludic Pavel & I, Vyleta's debut, *The Quiet Twin* is a sharp and confident novel that captures the social paranoia and mistrust fomented by Nazism. At the novel's outset, startled by a doorbell, Dr Beer "jumped and feared arrest, irrationally" – an adverb that speaks of the timid doctor steadying his

nerves with logic against the insidious but explicit criminalisation of the times.

Regardless of whodunit, Vyleta's subtly engaging thriller is tense with violent acts that are, perhaps above all else, a manifestation of the era's anxieties."

Jaidee says

5 "grotesque, macabre, nihilistic" stars !!!

2017 Bronze Award (3rd Favorite Read)

Whew....lordy lordy lordy....this was obscene and obscenely magnificent !!

Late 1930's Vienna. A series of murders in a neighbourhood. Are they linked or random ?? Is it a serial killer or opportunistic murders done for a bit of money ?? There are many witnesses yet all are silent or are they ??

A small apartment complex. A disgraced doctor and Nazi spy. His hysterical niece with a conversion disorder. His bitter and sneaky housekeeper. A paralyzed woman who may have been a true psychic. Her brother, a mime. Upstairs a psychiatrist with a few secrets of his own. A janitor who is into a grisly business. A sweet hunchbacked girl and her alcoholic father. A Japanese trumpeter. A corrupt and sadistic police detective. These characters are all intertwined and the story twists and turns with sex, lies, assaults, collusions, confusions and a small smattering of compassion and love.

The writing is dark, ominous, organic, clipped and thrilling. Chapter after chapter gets darker, bleaker and more frightening. I often shivered, my stomach turned in disgust and tears came down my cheeks as underneath the manipulations are tender vulnerabilities and profound frailties.

This book is ugly and frightening and fuck it...A MUST READ !!

Well done Mr. Vyleta. Look forward to your other novels !!

Billy says

Roman noir tout en nuances... Tout est dans l'ambiance qui se développe tout doucement . Un style unique . Belle découverte ...

Kelly Furniss says

Picked by my book club. This tale is set in 1939 Vienna where the country is under Nazi regime in World War II. The story opens with the killing of a dog. The dog's owner is a landlord of an apartment complex which inhabits a real mix of fascinating, intriguing characters many with secrets themselves.

Throw in to mix a few recent murders in the local area and now a police investigation is taking place at a time when people do not want to talk and a knock on the door is terrifying!. So, heightened tension is

everywhere but who is the culprit? .

A very dark tale which I found quite confusing at times with the sub plots which probably was the main factor in me struggling to want to keep picking this book up. I did enjoy the characters and visualisation of scenes though.

I am glad to have read this author but will not continue with the series.
