



## Hitler's Niece

By Ron Hansen  
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### Plot Summary

In *Hitler's Niece*, Ron Hansen offers a meticulously researched novel about one of history's often overlooked mysteries. On September 18, 1931, Adolf Hitler's 23-year-old niece, Geli Raubal, was killed in the bedroom she occupied in her uncle's Munich apartment. The room was locked from the inside and the death was officially ruled a suicide, but even at the time there were rumors of Hitler's complicity in the crime. In the wake of the immense number of unspeakable atrocities that Hitler went on to perpetrate against the world, Geli's death became just a footnote in the story of Hitler's life. Interestingly, Hitler later would say that Geli was the only woman he ever loved. As a novelist, Hansen uses this intriguing story to look inside the personal life of one of the world's great monsters, and to try to understand some of the horror he created.

Hitler first meets Geli, the daughter of his half-sister Angela, as an infant, but the girl doesn't really attract her famous uncle's attention until she has grown into a vivacious, bright, and fun-loving young woman. When Angela becomes housekeeper for her brother at his alpine retreat in Obersalzberg, Geli joins the household. Then when the girl moves to Munich to pursue medical studies, her uncle invites her to share his apartment. Seduced by the rising Fuhrer's world of power and fame, Geli becomes her uncle's frequent companion, spending time with him and his inner circle of Nazis -- Goebbels, Goring, and Himmler. Though ostensibly dating Hitler's chauffeur, she ultimately begins a strange and private entanglement with "Uncle Alf," capitulating to his aberrant sexual proclivities. Geli tries to free herself from Hitler's possessive obsession, but her attempt to gain independence from his psychological imprisonment leads to her murder.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Hansen does not portray Geli Raubal as a particularly naive or gullible young woman. To what degree is she responsible for her own fate?
2. Geli is simultaneously repulsed and seduced by Hitler's hypnotic hold and becomes one of the first victims of his madness. To what extent can Geli be seen as symbolic of Germany's seduction?
3. Do you think Geli is ever really in love with her uncle or do other emotions motivate the choices she makes?
4. In the details of their distasteful sexual relationship, we see the fine line Geli walks between being dominated by Hitler and dominating him. How does this sexual rondo play out in what ultimately happens to her?
5. Many historians believe that Geli committed suicide, but Hansen has chosen to end her story with a murder. Discuss both the plausibility and symbolism of this ending.
6. What does Hansen gain by choosing to tell this real story in the form of fiction? And what, if anything, might the story lose because of this choice?
7. One of the central characters in *Hitler's Niece* is Heinrich Hoffman, the Nazi-sanctioned photographer who took more than two and half million pictures that glorified Hitler. Hoffman used his art to disguise the truth about Hitler. How is Hansen using his art to tell the truth?
8. Many of Ron Hansen's novels have religious themes, drawn most particularly from his Roman Catholic faith. To what extent do issues of religion, spirituality or faith -- and of good vs. evil -- play a part in *Hitler's Niece*.
9. In order to bring his fiction to life, Hansen has had to portray Hitler's human side and show us qualities -- notably vulnerability and a certain measure of charm -- that might seem at odds with our historical memory. Has the novelist succeeded in creating a credible character or has he merely humanized the demonic by offering us a glimpse into the frailties of Adolph Hitler?
10. What about Geli, about whom so little historical information has survived -- does Hansen offer a convincing portrait?
11. Do you think historical fiction generally elucidates history or merely obscures the facts?
12. Did you come away from Hansen's book with any greater understanding of the enigma of Adolph Hitler -- of what made him who he was?

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