



PROJEKT

1065

A Novel of World War II



He joined the Hitler Youth . . .
as a spy.

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PROJEKT 1065

A L A N G R A T Z

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DINNER WITH NAZIS

IT'S HARD TO SMILE WHEN YOU'RE HAVING DINNER with Nazis.

There were Nazis all up and down the long table, talking and laughing and eating. There were Nazi soldiers in their gray German army uniforms. There were SS officers, members of Adolf Hitler's private Protection Squadron, in their black uniforms and red armbands. There were regular civilian Nazis who didn't fight in the military, who ran banks and factories and newspapers and wore suits and ties and Nazi pins.

And then there was me, Michael O'Shaunessey, wearing my brown long-sleeved shirt, black shorts, white knee socks, and black hiking boots polished to a shine. And just like the SS, the most fearsome killers in all the land, I wore a red armband with a big black swastika in the center of it, the hooked-cross symbol the Nazis plastered all over everything. I wore the uniform of the Hitler Youth, Germany's version of the Boy Scouts. Because I was a Nazi too.

Or at least I was pretending to be.

"More cake?" the Nazi next to me asked, offering me another slice. Light from the chandelier glinted on the silver skull pin on his collar.

"Um, sure. Thanks," I said. "That's very kind of you." I remembered to smile, even though it took effort. I hated pretending to like these people, hated pretending to agree with their awful hatred of the Jews, hated pretending I wanted them to win the war and conquer the world. But I smiled because I had to. If they ever discovered I wasn't really one of them, my family and I would disappear into a concentration camp, never to be seen or heard from again.

"Your German is so good!" the woman on my other side told me. She was the wife of a captain in the German army. "If I didn't know your father was the Irish ambassador, I would think you grew up here in Berlin!"

I sagged in my chair. I heard this every time my family attended one of these dinners. I wasn't exactly the blue-eyed, blond-haired "Aryan ideal," but with my flawless German accent and my brown hair that fell like a mop into my brown eyes, I could pass for an average German boy any day. I wasn't proud of it, but it was definitely useful.

"Michael's always had a good head for languages," my father said in German. He sat across from me at the table, my mother two seats down from him. "We've only been here for six years, but he already speaks better German than I do!"

1937. That was the year my father was named Irish ambassador

to Germany and we moved from London, where he'd been stationed, to Berlin. It was 1943 now, and I was thirteen years old. Things had changed so much in those six years. Berlin had been a wonderland when I first arrived, all towering columns with eagle statues on top and red flags fluttering from every building and parades ten thousand people strong. Hitler was already the chancellor of Germany, and the Nazis, his political party, were well in control. Germany wasn't at war yet, and not everybody was a Nazi back then, but it was hard to argue with their success. Everywhere I'd looked I'd seen faces full of smiles and laughter. But then, overnight, the party had ended. Not the Nazi Party. They had only gotten stronger. The other party — the feeling of unbounded German cheerfulness — was gone. I had finally seen the horror behind the smiles, and so had the rest of the world.

What happened that one night still haunted me.

"Michael's always had an exceptional memory, haven't you, son?" Ma said, breaking into my thoughts.

"It's true," my father said. "Michael reads in German, tells jokes in German. I think he even dreams in German!"

The adults around us at the table gave him a polite chuckle. Da the diplomat, doing what he did best. His mustache widened as he beamed at me, but the eyes that peered at me over his glasses weren't smiling. They were reminding *me* to smile. To be friendly. To play my part.

I picked up my glass of grape juice and took a drink to hide my frown.

"You are a better German than some Germans," the Nazi who

had offered me cake said. His name was Trumbauer, and his rank within the SS was Obersturmführer, which meant senior assault leader. He was a tall, thin man with slicked-back, jet-black hair, and a nose like a parrot's beak. "Just today, we raided the home of a German couple who were hiding a Jew in their attic. Right here in Berlin!" He shook his head as if he couldn't believe the stupidity of some people.

"How did you know they were hiding a Jew?" the woman next to me asked.

SS-Obersturmführer Trumbauer cut out a bite of cake with his fork and lifted it. "Their son reported them."

I shuddered. Their own son, ratting them out to the secret police. I couldn't imagine ever doing something like that to my own parents.

"What happened to them?" I asked.

"Hmm?" SS-Obersturmführer Trumbauer said, swallowing his cake. "Oh. The Germans were taken into protective custody at Dachau, of course. The Jew was shot while trying to escape."

The SS-Obersturmführer's words rattled me, and I knocked over my glass trying to set it back down. It struck the rim of my plate and shattered, sending glass and grape juice everywhere. I caught my reflection in every one of the tiny shards, half a dozen little Michael O'Shaunesseys looking up at me in horror. Suddenly, I was back again on that Berlin street, that night four years ago, when everything had changed.

When I'd finally learned what monsters the Nazis really were.

KRISTALLNACHT

IT WAS A COOL NIGHT IN EARLY NOVEMBER, 1938. I WAS eight years old, going on nine. My parents and I had just been to see a movie—a German film about the Olympics, which had been held in Berlin the year before we moved there. I was upset because I'd wanted to see *The Adventures of Robin Hood* instead. I'd read the book and wanted to see the American movie of it, but the Nazis had banned the film from Germany.

I hopped from the sidewalk into the street and back again, pretending to be Robin Hood fighting the Sheriff of Nottingham as we walked home to the Irish Embassy. I loved the idea of Robin Hood protecting the poor and the helpless from the evil King John, especially because John was the king of England. If I weren't Irish and already born to hate them, I had plenty of other good reasons for loathing the English.

Then we heard the first crash. The three of us froze. The crash was followed by a woman's scream, and the acrid smell of smoke

bit at my nose as a black cloud rose over the rooftops the next street over.

“A fire!” Da said. “Hurry! We have to help!”

We ran for the street corner, but before we got there five men in brown shirts and red armbands came around the turn carrying axes and sledgehammers and paintbrushes and torches. One of them smashed a store window with his ax, and my father threw out an arm to hold me and Ma back. Glass showered the streets, shattering into a thousand bright shards. A man dipped his brush into a can of paint and then slathered it all up and down the front of the shop, painting something on the wood. Across the street, two more men broke the windows of a department store and tossed red paint all over the shoes on display. I didn’t understand.

“Go. Move,” Ma said, snapping us all out of our stupor. “We have to run.”

“Why? What’s happening?” I asked, but my parents were already dragging me away.

More shouts. More screams. Far off in the distance, a siren. We ran into a side street and stopped again. Shards of glass covered every inch of the street like ice, crunching under our feet. Every window had been shattered, and the word *JUDE* — the German word for “Jew” — had been painted on storefronts. Sometimes there were even little cartoon pictures of Jews. They had big noses and round heads and dull looks on their faces.

“My God, they’re finally doing it,” Da said. “They’re going after the Jews.”

I didn't understand what he meant, but I was afraid. Men wearing plain clothes and carrying axes had broken down the door of a synagogue, where Jewish people went to pray. The men began tossing prayer books and scrolls into the middle of the street. One of the men with a torch bent to set fire to the pile, and another man—a Jew, I guessed—came running out of an apartment building nearby, trying to stop him. The other men caught the Jew, and one of them struck him in the head with the wooden handle of his ax. The Jewish man dropped down to the street, the broken glass clattering beneath him, and the men gathered around him and beat him with the handles of their axes while their comrade set fire to the pile of Jewish relics. I gaped in horror, my heart thudding in my chest in time with the whacks of the ax handles, until my mother put her hand over my eyes and pulled me away.

“We have to get back to the embassy,” Da said.

I pushed my mother's hand away and dragged the sleeve of my coat across my eyes. I hadn't even realized I was crying. “That man—they were hurting him. We have to go back and help him,” I said.

“We can't, love,” my mother whispered. She was crying too, I realized, and that scared me even more.

“Keep your heads down,” Da told us. “Keep your heads down, and don't say anything or do anything.”

Every street we turned down was strewn with broken glass and filled with men carrying sledgehammers and axes. It was happening all over the city. Some of the rioters wore the brown shirts of

the SA, the Sturmabteilung, the thugs of the Nazi Party. But more of them wore ordinary woolen trousers and suspenders and white work shirts with the sleeves rolled up. Regular citizens who wanted to run the Jewish people out of town.

We were close to the embassy when we came upon a squad of Gestapo, Germany's secret police, loading men into a truck. At last, the police were rounding up the rioters! A Gestapo man stopped us and spoke to my father. I didn't know much German then, but I understood that he wanted to see our papers. He told us to stay where we were while he checked in with another officer.

"They're rounding up Jews," my father whispered. "Taking them to the labor camps."

I frowned at the men being loaded into the truck. Why were Jewish people being arrested? The Jews were the ones the Nazis were attacking! I wanted to shout at the police, tell them they were doing everything backward. To make them stop. But I was helpless. A little boy. I couldn't even speak their language.

My mother grabbed my father's arm. "Davin. There."

A man across the street was trying to sneak away in the shadows.

"Ein Jude! Er versucht abzubauen!"

The cry had come from above me. I looked up and saw a boy about my age hanging out the window. The boy was yelling and pointing at the man across the street who was trying to get away. I knew enough German to have understood the word *Jew*. He was telling on him to the police!

One of the Gestapo men saw the Jewish man trying to escape. He called out for him to stop, but the man ran. The Gestapo man pulled out his gun and fired.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The shots rang loud in the street, drowning out my cry of “No!” The Jewish man arched wildly as one of the bullets hit him, and he stumbled forward into one of the shattered storefronts, falling face-first at the feet of mannequins splashed red with paint. A sharp piece of broken glass poked up through the back of his shirt, stained red with his blood. He was dead.

“No!” I cried again, but my mother pulled my face to her coat to muffle my screams. I pushed and fought to get away, but she was too big, too strong. I didn’t know what I was going to do if I got free. I just wanted to do *something*. Anything.

The Gestapo man with our papers walked back over to us, crushing shards of glass under the heel of his boot. I stopped struggling and held my breath. What if they took us away too? What if they shot my mother? My father?

The Gestapo man said something in German. He must have told us our papers were in order, because Da dragged us away. We held one another close, stepping over the glass. I kept my eyes on the ground, where I saw my reflection in each and every one of the shards of glass, hundreds of little Michael O’Shaunesseys looking back at me in despair.

“We have to do something,” I whispered.

“We *are* doing something,” Da told me.

“What? What are we doing?” I asked. “We’re just running away.”

Da and Ma exchanged a look.

“We have jobs, Michael. Roles to play here,” Ma said. “Important ones. And if we fight these people right here and now, we can’t do those jobs anymore.”

“What, you mean being ambassadors? What good is that when people are dying?”

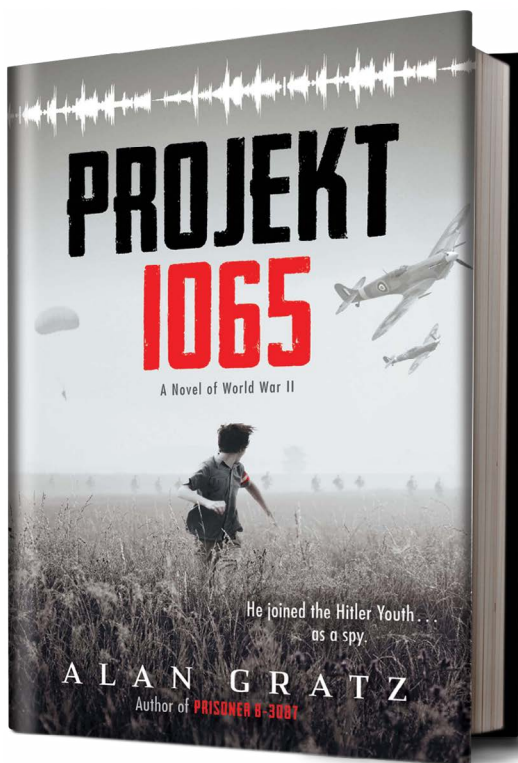
“We’re not only ambassadors, Michael,” Ma whispered. “We have another mission. A secret mission.”

“*Megan*,” Da said warningly.

“If he’s going to share in the danger, he should at least know the truth of it,” Ma said.

Da sighed and gave in. And that’s when they told me their secret. Our secret. Right there on a Berlin street, in the middle of what later came to be called Kristallnacht. The “Night of Broken Glass.”

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