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ALSO BY PHILIP KERR

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One Small Step

A BERNIE GUNTHER NOVEL

Philip Kerr

A MARIAN WOOD BOOK

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Version_3

Once again, to Jane

Table of Contents

[Prologue](#)

[1](#)

[2](#)

[3](#)

[4](#)

[5](#)

[6](#)

[7](#)

[8](#)

[9](#)

[10](#)

[11](#)

[12](#)

[13](#)

[14](#)

[15](#)

[16](#)

[Author's Note](#)

[Excerpt from Philip Kerr's next novel, A Man Without Breath](#)

PROLOGUE

MONDAY–TUESDAY, JUNE 8–9, 1942

Prague Fatale: A Bernie Gunther Novel

It was a fine, warm day when, together with SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhard Tristan Eugen Heydrich, the Reichsprotector of Bohemia and Prague Fatale: A Bernie Gunther Novel Moravia, I arrived back from Prague at Berlin's Prague Fatale: A Bernie Gunther Novel Anhalter Station. We were both wearing SD uniforms but, unlike the general, I was a man with a spring in my step, Prague Fatale: A Bernie Gunther Novel a Prague Fatale: A Bernie Gunther Novel tune in my head, and a smile in my heart. I was glad to be home in the city of Prague Fatale: A Bernie Gunther Novel my birth. I was looking forward to a quiet evening with a good bottle of Mackenstedter and some Kemals I had liberated from Heydrich's personal supply at his office in Prague Fatale: A Bernie Gunther Novel Hradshin Castle. But I wasn't in the least worried he might discover this Prague Fatale: A Bernie Gunther Novel petty theft. I wasn't worried Prague Fatale: A Bernie Gunther Novel about anything very much. I was everything that Heydrich was not. I was alive.

The Berlin newspapers gave out that the unfortunate Reichsprotector had been Prague Fatale: A Bernie Gunther Novel assassinated by a team of terrorists who had parachuted into Bohemia from England. It was a little more complicated than this, only I wasn't about to say as much. Not yet. Not for a long time. Maybe not ever.

It's difficult to say what happened to Heydrich's soul, assuming he ever had one. I expect Dante Alighieri could have pointed me in the approximate direction if ever I felt inclined to go and search for it, somewhere in the Underworld. On the other hand, I've a pretty good idea of

what happened to his body.

Everyone enjoys a good funeral, and the Nazis were certainly no exception, giving Heydrich the best send-off that any psychopathically murderous criminal could have hoped for. The whole event was mounted on such a grand scale, you would have thought some satrap in the Persian Empire had died after winning Prague Fatale: A Bernie Gunther Novel a great battle; and it seemed that everything had been laid on, except the ritual sacrifice of a few hundred slaves—although, as things turned out for a small Czech mining village called Lidice, I was wrong about that.

From Anhalter Station Heydrich was carried to the Conference Hall of Gestapo headquarters, where six honor guards wearing black dress uniforms watched over his lying-in-state. For a lot of Berliners it was a chance to sing “Ding-Dong! The Witch Is Dead!” while sneaking a wary tiptoe look inside the Prinz-Albrecht Palace. On a par with other semi-hazardous activities, such as climbing to the top of the old radio tower in Charlottenburg or driving on the bank at the AVUS speedway, it was Prague Fatale: A Bernie Gunther Novel nice to be able to say that you’d done Prague Fatale: A Bernie Gunther Novel it.

On the radio that night the Leader eulogized the dead Heydrich, describing him as “the man with the iron heart,” which I assume he meant to be a compliment. Then again, it’s possible that our own wicked wizard of Oz might simply have confused the Tin Man with the Cowardly Lion.

The next day, wearing civilian clothes and feeling altogether more human, I joined thousands of other Berliners outside the New Reich Chancellery and tried to look suitably gloomy as the whole ants’ nest of Hitler’s myrmidons came bursting out of the Mosaic Hall to follow the gleaming gun carriage as it bore Heydrich’s flag-draped coffin east along Voss Strasse and then north up Wilhelmstrasse toward the general’s final resting place in the Invaliden Cemetery, alongside some real German heroes, such as von Scharnhorst, Ernst Udet, and Manfred von Prague Fatale: A Bernie Gunther Novel Richthofen.

There was no doubting Heydrich’s bravery: his impetuous part-time Prague Fatale: A Bernie Gunther Novel active service with the Luftwaffe while most of the top brass stayed safe in their wolves’ redoubts and their fur-lined bunkers was the most obvious example of this courage. I suppose Hegel might just have recognized Heydrich’s heroism as the incarnation of the spirit of our despotic times. But for my money, heroes need to have a working relationship with the gods, not the titan forces of darkness and disorder. Especially in Germany. So I wasn’t the least bit sorry to see him dead. Because of Heydrich, I was an officer in the SD. And pressed into the tarnished silver cap-badge that was the loathsome symbol of my long acquaintance with Heydrich were the hallmarks of hatred, fear, and, after my return from Belorussia, guilt.

That was nine months ago. Mostly I try not to think about it, but as another famous German lunatic once observed, it’s hard to look over the edge of the abyss without the abyss looking back into you.

SEPTEMBER 1941

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Prague Fatale A Bernie Gunther Novel

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