

Benno the cat lived at Number 5 Rosenstrasse in Berlin, just a few blocks from the Neue Synagogue. He had a nice warm bed near the furnace where Hans, the Hausmeister, left him fresh milk every night.

On Friday nights, Benno visited the Adler family in Apartment 38. He watched Mrs. Adler light Sabbath candles, Mr. Adler slice a braided loaf of bread, and Sophie sing from a book she held close. After dinner, Sophie fed him scraps of chicken.

On Sundays after church, Benno visited the Schmidts, across the hall in Apartment 3A, for their family lunch. Before Mrs. Schmidt cleared the dishes for dessert, Inge sneaked bits of schnitzel to him under the table.



On weekday mornings, Benno watched Herr Adler and Herr Schmidt leave for work. He waited as Inge came out of her apartment and knocked on Sophie's door.

Benno purred when the girls knelt to wish him *Guten Morgen*. Then, he followed them to school.



During the day, Benno strolled around the neighborhood.

Sometimes Moshe the butcher fed him scraps and Frau Gerber, the grocer's wife, scratched his ears.



Often, he took naps nestled among the bolts of fabric in the sunny window of Mitzi Stein's dress shop.





In the late afternoons, Benno followed Inge and Sophie to the playground. He sat high in a tree as they played on the swings or dashed about in a game of tag with their friends.

Benno was welcomed by all. Even into Apartment 2G, where Professor Goldfarb was too busy with his studies to pay attention when the cat curled up on his desk.



At night, Benno returned to his bed beside the furnace in the basement of Number 5 Rosenstrasse. He drank his milk and fell asleep listening to the comforting sounds of the people above.

Then things began to change.

Moshe the butcher had no scraps for Benno. Frau Gerber, the grocer's wife, had no time to scratch his ears. And Mitzi yelled, "Scat!" when Benno tried to nap in the window.

One night, men in brown shirts lit a bonfire on Rosenstrasse. As they threw books and papers onto the fire, the crowds cheered.



Benno fled and tried to hide inside Apartment 2G, but Professor Goldfarb shooed him away. "I must save the books," the Professor muttered.

And a few days later, Benno watched Inge leave for school without knocking on Sophie's door.

He waited a long time before Sophie came out and walked to school alone.

Neither girl wished him *Guten Morgen*.

After school, Benno watched Inge with her friends at the playground. Sophie hurried past the park, her head low.

Later, when Benno went home, he found the door to Apartment 3B locked.



Rosenstrasse was still a busy street, but the people were no longer friendly.

The men in brown shirts strutted about with their heads held high.

Benno walked carefully, dodging their heavy black boots.

The neighbors and shopkeepers went quietly about their business, their eyes lowered.



Then came a night like no other.

The air filled with screams and shouts, sounds of shattering and splintering glass, and the bitter smell of smoke.

Benno cowered in a doorway.



He watched the brown-shirted men swarm over the neighborhood, smashing windows and looting shops.

At Moshe's butcher shop, they overturned the refrigerators, leaving meat to spoil on the ground.

At Mitzi Stein's shop, they ripped the bolts of fabric and threw the sewing machines into the street.

Benno saw the beautiful Neue Synagogue set ablaze. The Torah scrolls were dragged into the street and trampled.

Herr Gerber's grocery remained untouched.

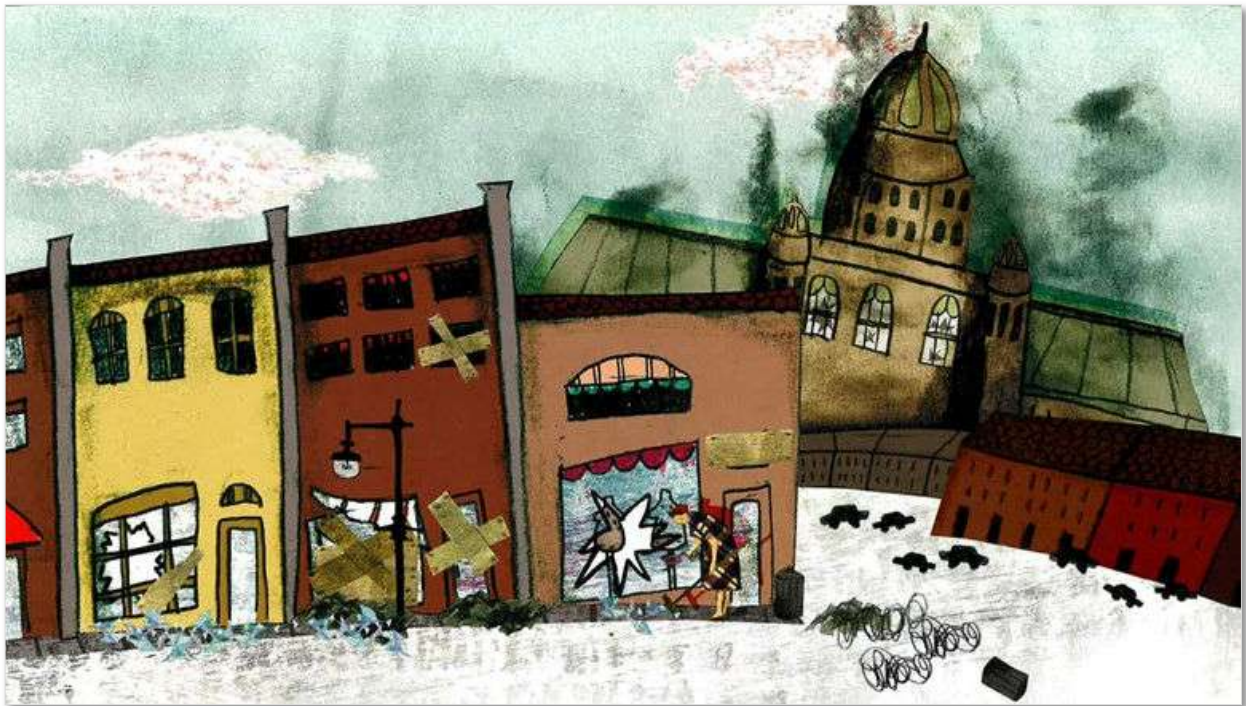
Back at Number 5 Rosenstrasse, Benno saw the Hausmeister let the brownshirts into the building and direct them to certain apartments.

They broke into Professor Goldfarb's apartment and tore his books and papers from their shelves.

"I must save the books!" the professor cried, as he was dragged away.

Benno ran upstairs. In Apartment 3B, the mob was breaking the Adlers' furniture and throwing books out the window, even the one Sophie sang from every Friday night.

The Schmidts' apartment was untouched.



The next morning, Benno saw Herr Schmidt leave for work. Then Inge left for school.

He waited for Sophie, but the Adlers' door remained closed.

Outside, smoldering fires stung Benno's eyes. His paws were cut and sore from the broken glass that littered the streets.

Smoke from the gilded dome of the Neue Synagogue rose into the morning sky.

Mitzi Stein was sweeping up the glass in front of her store.

Herr Gerber's grocery was open for business as usual.

Benno could not find Moshe the butcher.

He never saw Professor Goldfarb or Sophie and her family again.



Benno continued to sleep in his bed by the furnace.

Hans continued to give him fresh milk, and Frau Gerber scratched his ears.

Benno still watched Herr Schmidt leave for work.

He still followed Inge to school.

But life on Rosenstrasse would never be the same.





AFTERWORD

For many, *Kristallnacht* (the Night of Broken Glass) marks the beginning of the Holocaust. Although the characters in this story are fictional, the setting and the events portrayed are real.

This pogrom, on November 9, 1938, was triggered by an assassination of a German official two days earlier.

Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi Minister of Propaganda, used it as an excuse to unleash gangs of Nazi youth and Stormtroopers (brownshirts) to destroy Jewish shops, homes, and synagogues. The violence continued into the morning of November 10th.

Approximately 7,500 Jewish-owned stores and businesses, like Moshe's butcher shop and Mitzi Stein's seamstress shop in this story, were demolished.

Local fire departments kept the blazes from spreading to German-owned buildings.

Nearly every synagogue in Germany suffered damage. The Neue Synagogue in Berlin was set on fire, but a local police chief prevented its total destruction by chasing away the gang of arsonists.

Approximately 100 Jews were killed, and hundreds more were hurt. About 30,000 arrests were made.

People such as Professor Goldfarb, who in this story had tried to save Jewish books from the Nazi book burnings, were taken away to concentration camps. Some, like Sophie's family and Moshe the butcher, simply disappeared.

Only a few nations spoke out against the events of *Kristallnacht*, showing the Nazis that the world would tolerate the persecution of Jews on a mass scale.

The Holocaust had begun.



Meg Wiviott; Josée Bisailon (ill.)
Benno and the Night of Broken Glass
Minneapolis, Kar-Ben Publishing, 2010