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Historical

Emeralds Never Fade
Stephen Maitland-Lewis
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In this gripping novel of historical fiction, the author explores an infrequently examined aspect of the Holocaust: what happened to the money, jewelry, and other assets stolen from the Jews by the Nazis? How complicit were the banks of Switzerland? And what role did the church have in the theft?

The setting is World War II. Two boys, Bruno and Leo, both German and the latter Jewish, have a brief acquaintance as the former instructs the latter in piano. To keep him safe from the increasing restrictions against the Jews, Leo Bergner's family sends him on a train to Nice, France, where he is to stay with his aunt and uncle; his mother and father temporarily stay behind. After that, Leo and Bruno Franzmann, the German piano teacher, have no contact for decades.

Leo's mother Ulrike owns a precious and unique emerald, one that was handed down from her great-grandmother. One day, Ulrike comes home without her emerald; though she refuses to say what happened to it, she is devastated by its absence, and Leo is devastated on her behalf.

A series of events lands Leo on a kibbutz in Palestine. Leo's military career begins here and eventually takes him all over Europe. He marries but is unlucky in love. Through his father-in-law, however, he does enter a second career as a banker. All the while, Leo is never certain as to what happened to his family; he lost touch with them soon after arriving in the Middle East.

A concurrent story is being told about Bruno. While Bruno spent the war years as a file clerk at a concentration camp, he knows he will be prosecuted after the war. Bruno steals some files and with the help of a monastery, he ends up in Argentina, where he reinvents himself as Bruno Fernandez. Using underhanded methods, Bruno becomes a wealthy businessman. Fast-forward four decades. Now the setting is a conference room in London. Leo catches a glimpse of his former piano teacher and his wife…and of a long-lost family heirloom.

The story is well-constructed as the viewpoints shift between Leo and Bruno over forty years. Maitland-Lewis has created authentic characters that simultaneously evoke sympathy and provoke outrage. Particularly compelling storylines are Leo's frantic search for his family and his feelings about his crumbling marriage. Part expose, part love story, part homage to family, the author deftly takes the reader through a shameful time in history as he laments what was lost. He indicts "bystanders" who profited from the atrocities of Jewish extermination, including not only the Nazis but some of the German people, the church, and Swiss banks. This is a real page-turner that will not only entertain but will also shed light on a little-known aspect of the consequences of World War II.

Stephen Maitland-Lewis, whose occupations have included attorney, banker, and luxury hotel owner, is also the author of the novel *Hero on Three Continents*.

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