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Opening Extract from...

Pilgrim Soul

Written by Gordon Ferris

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PILGRIM SOUL

GORDON FERRIS

‘If there were enough like him, I think the world would be a very safe place to live in, and yet not too dull to be worth living in.’

‘The Simple Art of Murder’, Raymond Chandler,
The Atlantic Monthly, December 1944

AUTHOR'S NOTE

There are many historical truths in this story.

Glasgow had a population of over 12,000 Jews in 1946, many living in the Gorbals, and some speaking Scots-Yiddish. If you thought Glaswegian was hard on the ears . . .

In 1923 the League of Nations handed Great Britain the poisoned chalice of administering the mandate for Palestine. It was a thankless task made miserable in the post-war, post-Holocaust era when the surviving ranks of European Jews sought refuge in their 'Promised Land'. The poor British squaddie was piggy-in-the-middle between Arabs and Jews. Our soldiers were bombed, shot and assaulted right up to May 1948 when the United Nations permitted the creation of the state of Israel. And then things went downhill . . .

Rat lines were a system of escape routes for Nazis and other fascists fleeing Europe at the end of the Second World War. They ran from Germany through Italy, Austria and Franco's Spain to safe havens in South America, the USA and Canada. Escapees included Dr Josef Mengele and Adolf Eichmann. The organisers of these rat lines included US intelligence agencies, fascist organisations such as the Croatian Ustashe, and senior churchmen such as Bishop Alois Hudal in Rome, Cardinal Eugène Tisserant of France, Cardinal Antonio Caggiano of Argentina, and Father Krunoslav Draganovi of Croatia.

The wartime Special Operations Executive was blessed with some extraordinarily courageous and daring young

women. They were led by Vera Atkins and included Odette Sansom, GC. After her capture Odette survived Ravensbrück by keeping her head and maintaining the fiction that she was married to a relative of Winston Churchill. She avoided the wretched fate of her fellow SOE agents in Ravensbrück: Cicely Lefort, Violette Szabo, Denise Bloch and Lilian Rolfe.

Malcolm McCulloch was Chief Constable of Glasgow from 1943 to 1960. He succeeded Sir Percy Sillitoe (Chief Constable 1931–43), who went on to become head of MI5 (1946–53).

Donald Campbell was Archbishop of Glasgow from 1945 to 1963 and had nothing whatsoever to do with rat lines, Scottish or otherwise.

The winter of 1947 was the worst in the twentieth century. It was bloody cold.

Irn Bru was spelled Iron Brew until 1946. Its sales were suspended during the war because of rationing.

The rest of this story is fiction . . . more or less . . . but it all adds up to a greater truth.

Trials for War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity

From the end of the Second World War in 1945 until 1949 a number of war crimes trials took place across Europe. Among them were:

Belsen trials: British Military Court, Lüneburg. First trial 17 September to 17 November 1945. Second trial June 1946.

Nuremberg trials: trial of major war criminals before the International Military Tribunal, Nuremberg, 20 November 1945 to 1 October 1946. Subsequent trials took place up to April 1949.

Ravensbrück trials: British Military Court, Curiohaus, Hamburg. Seven trials in total from December 1946 to July 1948. The first ran from 5 December 1946 to 3 February 1947.

Verdicts and Sentences

Pilgrim Soul is peopled with fictional and real-life characters. Where I have invented a 'baddie' I've used an amalgam of names and vile deeds drawn from real life, e.g. Dr Herta Kellermann is a composite of Doctors Herta Oberheuser and Ruth Kellermann, both of whom conducted foul medical experiments at Ravensbrück. For her sins Oberheuser spent a mere seven years in prison before becoming a family doctor; Kellermann was never imprisoned. As for the other real Nazis I've deployed in my novel, this was their fate:

Suhren: Sturmbannführer [Major] Fritz Suhren, Camp Commandant Ravensbrück 1942–5. Also served at Sachsenhausen 1941–2. Escaped from American custody in 1946, recaptured in France in 1949. Hanged in Fresnes Prison, Paris, in 1950.

Schwarzhuber: Obersturmführer [Lieutenant] Johann Schwarzhuber, Deputy Camp Commandant Ravensbrück January–April 1945. Also served at Dachau, Sachsenhausen and Auschwitz-Birkenau. Convicted of war crimes, hanged May 1947.*

Hellinger: Obersturmführer [Lieutenant] Dr Martin Hellinger, Camp Dentist Ravensbrück 1943–5. Also served at Sachsenhausen and Flossenbürg. Sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment, released 1955.

Ramdohr: Ludwig Ramdohr, Gestapo Officer Ravensbrück 1942–5. Convicted of war crimes, hanged May 1947.*

Binz: Oberaufseherin [Chief Warden] Dorothea Binz, Ravensbrück 1939–45. Convicted of war crimes, hanged May 1947.*

Bösel: Aufseherin [Warden] Greta Bösel, Ravensbrück 1944?-45 . Convicted of war crimes, hanged May 1947.*

Haake: Nurse Martha Haake, Ravensbrück 1943–5. Tried in the fourth Ravensbruck trial May–June 1948, sentenced to ten years' imprisonment, released on health grounds 1951.

Grese: Aufseherin [Warden] Irma Grese. Warden at Ravensbrück, Auschwitz and Belsen, convicted of war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Belsen trials, hanged 13 December 1945.*

* Hanged by the busy British executioner, Albert Pierrepoint, in Hamelin Prison, Germany. Pierrepoint's final tally of Nazi executions was around two hundred.

ONE

There's no good time to die. There's no good place. Not even in a lover's arms at the peak of passion. It's still the end. Your story goes no further. But if I had the choice it wouldn't be in a snowdrift, in a public park, ten minutes from my own warm fireside, with a two-foot icicle rammed in my ear. This man wasn't given the option. His body lay splayed in cold crucifixion on Glasgow Green, his eyes gazing blindly into the face of his jealous god.

I looked around me at the bare trees made skeletal with whitened limbs. High above, the black lid of the sky had been lifted off, and all the warmth in the world was escaping. In this bleak new year, Glasgow had been gathered up, spirited aloft, and dropped back down in Siberia. So cold. So cold.

I tugged my scarf tight round my throat to block the bitter wind from knifing my chest and stopping my heart. I looked down on his body, and saw in the terrorised face my great failure. The snow was trampled round about him, as though his killers had done a war dance afterwards. Around his head a dark stain seeped into the pristine white.

A man stood a few feet away, clasping a shivering woman to his thick coat. Under his hat-brim his eyes held mine in a mix of horror and accusation. I needed no prompting. Not for this man's death. I was being paid to stop this happening. I hadn't. This was the fifth murder since I took

on the job four months ago. But in fairness, back then, back in November, I was only hired to catch a thief . . .

'I'd be a gun for hire.'

'No guns, Brodie. Not this time.'

'A mercenary then.'

'What's the difference between a policeman's wages and a private income? You'd be doing the same thing.'

'No warrant card. No authority. No back-up.' I ticked off the list on my fingers.

She countered: 'No hierarchy. No boss to fight.'

I studied Samantha Campbell. She knew me too well. It was a disturbing talent of hers. Of women. She was nursing a cup of tea in her downstairs kitchen, her first since getting home from the courts. Her cap of blond hair was still flattened by a day sporting the scratchy wig. The bridge of her nose carried the dents of her specs. I'd barely got in before her and was nursing my own temperance brew, both of us putting off as long as appeared seemly the first proper drink of the evening. Neither of us wanting to be the first to break.

'How much?' I asked as idly as it's possible for a man who's overdrawn at his bank.

'They're offering twenty pounds a week until you solve the crimes. Bonus of twenty if you clean it up by Christmas.'

'I've got a day job.'

'Paying peanuts. Besides, I thought you were fed up with it?'

She was right. It was no secret between us. I'd barely put in four months as a reporter on the *Glasgow Gazette* but already it was palling. It was the compromises I found hardest. I didn't mind having my elegant prose flattened and eviscerated. Much. But I struggled to pander to the whims of the newspaper bosses who in turn were pandering to their scandal-fixated readership. With hindsight my

naivety shocked me. I'd confused writing with reporting. I wanted to be Hemingway not Fleet Street Frankie.

'They gave me a rise of two quid a week.'

'The least they could do. You're doing two men's jobs.'

She meant I was currently the sole reporter on the crime desk at the *Gazette*. My erstwhile boss, Wullie McAllister, was still nursing a split skull in the Erskine convalescent home.

'Which means I don't have time for a third.'

'This would be spare time. Twenty quid a week for a few hours' detective work? A man of your experience and talent?'

'"Ne'er was flattery lost on poet's ear." Why are you so keen for me to do this? Am I behind with the rent? Not paying my whisky bills?'

She coloured. My comparative poverty was one of the unspoken barriers between us, preventing real progress in our relationship. How could a reporter keep this high-flying advocate in the manner she'd got accustomed to? My wages barely kept me; they wouldn't stretch to two. Far less – in some inconceivable medley of events – three.

'The *Gazette*'s just not you, is it? An observer, taking notes? Serving up gore on toast to the circus crowds. You're a doer, not a watcher. You're the sort that joins the Foreign Legion just for the thrill of it.'

'Not a broken heart?'

'Don't bring *me* into this. What shall I tell Isaac Feldmann?'

Ah. Playing the ace. 'Why didn't Isaac just call me?'

'He wanted to. But he's from the South Portland Street gang. This initiative's being led by Garnethill.'

In ranking terms, Garnethill was the first and senior synagogue in Glasgow. It served the Jewish community concentrated in the West End and centre. I'd only ever seen it from the outside: apart from the Hebrew script round the portal, more a pretty church façade than how I imagined a

temple. Isaac's place of worship was built about twenty years after Garnethill, at the turn of the century. It looked after the burgeoning Gorbals' enclave. Jewish one-upmanship dictated that they called the Johnny-come-lately the Great Synagogue.

Sam was continuing, 'I've worked for them before.'

'They?'

'A group of prominent Jewish businessmen. I defended them against charges of operating a cartel.'

'Successfully?'

'I proved they were just being business savvy. The local boys were claiming the Jews were taking the bread from their mouths, driving their kids to the poor house and generally living up to their reputation as Shylocks. But all the locals managed to prove was their own over-charging.'

'I suppose I should talk to them.'

'Oh good. I'd hate to put them off.'

They came in a pack later that evening, four of them, shedding their coats and scarves in the hall in a shuffle of handshakes and shaloms. They brought with them an aroma of tobacco and the exotic. Depending on their generational distance from refugee status, they carried the range of accents from Gorbals to Georgia, Bearsden to Bavaria, sometimes both in the same sentence. As a Homburg was doffed, a yarmulke was slipped on. I recognised two of the four: a bearded shopkeeper from Candleriggs; and my good friend Isaac Feldmann, debonair in one of his own three-piece tweed suits.

'Good evening, Douglas.' He grinned and shook my hand like a long-lost brother.

'Good to see you, Isaac. How's the family?'

'Ach, trouble. But that's families, yes?'

I guessed he meant his boy, Amos. Father and son weren't seeing eye to eye on life. A familiar story. I envied such trouble.

'But business is good?'

'Better. Everyone wants a warm coat. Come visit. I can do you a good price.'

'I don't have the coupons, Isaac. Maybe next year.'

I grew conscious that the other three men were inspecting me. I turned to them.

'Gentlemen, if Miss Campbell will permit, shall we discuss your business in the dining room?'

Sam led us through the hall and into the room at the back. We played silent musical chairs until all were seated round the polished wood slab, Sam at one end, me at the other, then two facing two. I placed my notebook and a pencil down in front of me. I looked round at their serious faces. With the hints of the Slav and the Middle East, the beards and the lustrous dark eyes, it felt like a Bolshevik plot. None of your peely-wally Scottish colouring for these smoky characters. Sam nodded to her right, to the big man stroking his great brown beard.

'Mr Belsinger, the floor is yours.' She looked up at me. 'Mr Belsinger is the leader of the business community.'

'I know him. Good evening, Shimon. It's been a while.'

'Too long, Douglas. I've been reading about your adventures in the *Gazette*.' His voice rumbled round the room in the soft cadences of Glasgow. Shimon was born here from parents who'd pushed a cart two thousand miles from Estonia to Scotland seeking shelter from the Tsar's murderous hordes.

'Never believe the papers, Shimon. How have you been?'

I'd last seen him just before the war in the wreckage of his small furniture store in Bell Street. Some cretins had paid their own small act of homage to Kristallnacht. All his windows were in smithereens and his stock smashed. But the perpetrators hadn't been paying real attention; the legs of the daubed swastikas faced left, the wrong way for a Nazi tribute. Unless of course they really meant to hansel the

building with the gracious Sanskrit symbol. We caught the culprits, a wayward unit of the Brigton Billy Boys led personally by Billy Fullerton, who wanted to show solidarity with his Blackshirt brethren in the East End of London.

'Getting by, Douglas, getting by. But we need your services.'

'You want me to write an article?'

He looked at me through his beard. A rueful smile showed.

'We could do with some good publicity.'

'You need more than a *Gazette* column.'

No one had to mention the headlines in these first two weeks of November: 'Stern Gang terrorist arrested in Glasgow'; '800 Polish Jews held in South of Scotland'; 'MI5 searching for Jewish terrorists'; 'Irgun Zvai Leumi agents at large'.

The factions fighting to establish a Jewish state in Palestine were exporting their seething anger and violence to Britain. Poor thanks for trying to midwife the birth of a new nation already disowned by every other country in the Middle East.

Shimon nodded. 'Not even Steinbeck could improve our standing. But that's not why we're here. We are being robbed.'

'Dial 999.'

He shook his head. 'They don't come, Douglas. Your former colleagues are too busy to bother with a bunch of old Jews.'

Isaac interjected from the other side of the table: 'They came the first few times, but lost interest.'

Tomas Meras leaned forward, his bottle glasses glinting from the light above the table. Tomas had been introduced as *Dr Tomas*, a lecturer in physics at Glasgow University.

'Mr Brodie, we pay our taxes. We work in the community. We are *Glaswegians*. We expect an equal share of the serv-

ices of the community.' His vowels were long and carefully shaped, as though he polished them every night.

I knew what they were saying. It wasn't that the police were anti-Semites. Or not *just*. They were even-handed with their casual bigotry: anyone who wasn't a Mason or card-carrying Protestant got third-rate attention. Jews were at the bottom of the pecking order when it came to diligent community law enforcement, alongside Irish Catholics. On the other hand crime was rare in the Jewish community. Self-enforcing morality. Glasgow's finest were used to leaving them to their own devices until whatever small dust storm had been kicked up had settled.

'First few times, Isaac? How many are we talking about and what sort of thefts? I mean, are these street robberies or burglaries? Shops or houses?'

Shimon was nodding. 'Our homes are being broken into. Eight so far.'

'Nine, Shimon. Another last night,' said the fourth man, Jacob Mendelsohn, waving a wonderfully scented Sobranie for emphasis. As a tobacconist, he could afford them. It went well with his slick centre parting and his neat moustache. A Cowcaddens dandy out of central casting.

'Nine is an epidemic,' I said.

They were all nodding now. I looked round at these men and marvelled at the capacity of humans to uproot themselves and travel to a far-off land with weird customs and languages and make a home for themselves and their families. How did these innocents or their forebears fare when they encountered their first Orange Parade or Hogmanay? What use was their careful cultivation of a second language like English when faced by a wee Glesga bachle in full flow? Urdu speakers stood a better chance.

I thought about what they were asking of me. It didn't seem much, yet I wondered if my heart would be in it. I used to be a thief-taker but I'd moved on. The world had moved

on. Did I care? Was I still up to it? I wouldn't give my answer this evening, but in the meantime . . .

'Gentlemen' – I flipped open my reporter's notebook – 'tell me more.' I began scribbling in my improving shorthand.

TWO

Sometimes I like to just sit in a pub, a pint in one hand, a book or newspaper in the other, fags at the ready. Time to myself but surrounded by other folk. A social antisocial. Wanting to be part of something but not tied to it. It summed up what I was and what I'd become.

It was the night after I'd met the Jewish gang and I wanted to digest their plea for help. I'd talked about it with Sam when they'd gone but her enthusiasm was getting in the way of my personal analysis. I needed quiet time to give her and them my answer. I worried that my decision would be driven solely by the money. Not that money in the pocket is a bad motivation.

It wasn't that I needed to weigh up the morality of the challenge. The poor sods must feel their persecution would never end. The British were hardly in the same league of villainy as Hitler and his gang, but our troops were throwing them back in the sea off their promised land and banging up eight hundred veterans of the Italian campaign in case one or two were Jewish terrorists.

The job needed doing and if the Glasgow cops didn't have the time or inclination to catch a thief, then I saw no reason in principle not to help these good citizens. I just wanted to be sure I knew where I was going with this latest diversion. I was beginning to lose my bearings. If I ever had any. No job seemed right for me. No clear path. How long could a grown man go on being a dilettante?

I'd had enough of sore feet and trenches, and had the medals to prove it. And despite the blandishments of the top brass there was no going back to the soul-sapping work of a policeman. But four months into the newspaper game I was frustrated. Sam – cool, perceptive Samantha Campbell – with her lawyer's insight had stripped back my illusions to reveal some sort of would-be knight errant, handier with a gun and his fists than with his dreaming pen.

And yet, with this offer from Garnethill, was I seriously contemplating becoming a *private* detective? Would it be one skirmish, and then back to reporting? Could it be a career move? Did I *have* a career? Or was I just one of life's drunks, stumbling along, oblivious and falling into situations – scrapes usually.

I looked round the pub at my fellow drinkers. There were a few loners gazing into their glasses or examining the runes of the racing pages. My future selves? I hefted my glass and pondered having another, but I'd had enough of introspection. I walked out into a night as dreich as a child's funeral. I pulled my hat down and pulled up my coat collar against the cold drizzle.

I zigzagged up the hill to Sam's house and let myself in. She called down from the lounge.

'There's some cold ham under a plate, if you haven't been to the Tallies.'

'Thanks.' I hung my coat and hat up, went down and made a ham sandwich. I took it up to join her. She looked up from her book with a smile. The Light Programme hummed softly in the background.

'Well, Douglas?' She meant, had I decided.

I shrugged. 'Why not, Sam? Why not.'

I made an early start on Monday with a plunge into the great pool of the Western Baths Club. It had become a ritual, a penance and my salvation. A cure for hangovers and a

banishment of the blues. By eight o'clock I was bashing through the swing doors of the *Gazette*'s newsroom as though I had a calling. No sign yet of Sandy Logan, former blue-pencil maestro in the sub's chair and now acting editor in the absence of Eddie Paton.

My aim was to clear the decks by lunchtime and then visit some of the crime scenes for my new employers. My *supplementary* employers. I reasoned that whatever came out of it – twenty quid a week for a few weeks not being the least of it – I was also garnering material for the crime column. I won every way you looked at it. I felt eager, like an old bloodhound with a fresh scent. I was even whistling as I typed.

With no boss around this morning, I could press on with a final draft of a piece I'd been working on about corruption in local politics: a seemingly bottomless cesspit. During his reign before the war, Chief Constable Sillitoe banged up so many city fathers for graft that he was warned by the government that if one more went down, they would disband the council and run it from Whitehall.

From my recent personal experience things hadn't improved, though two of the venal councillors had received a grislier come-uppance than a mere prison sentence. I was now exploring other fishy contracts awarded without public tender to the good cousin of the ways and means chairman.

By one o'clock I was walking past the bustling shops in Sauchiehall Street. I turned up on to Renfrew Street just so I could pass Mackintosh's School of Art. Not just for the fancy windows and portals. The girls at art college had always been more interesting than the bluestockings reading English. Bohemian Scots. Educated but wild at heart. A potent mix. Another climb up Thistle Street on to Hill Street and I was walking along the ridge of Garnethill.

Up here the criss-crossing streets were formed of the same grand red sandstone terraces, but, being perched on a

hill, there was a brightness, an expansiveness to the place that was missing in the flatlands south of the Clyde. The folk themselves seemed less huddled, more prosperous. Maybe they were just fitter from clambering up and down hills all day.

I walked into the echoing stone close with its smell of carbolic soap and climbed two flights of spotless clean stairs. I had a choice of doors and peered at the name plates: Kennedy or Bernstein. Applying my great investigative powers I knocked on the latter. I heard bolts sliding. The door opened and I was looking down at a tiny man with watery eyes blinking through thick specs held together at the bridge by Elastoplast. He wore two cardigans, baggy trousers and slippers.

'Mr Bernstein? It's Douglas Brodie, sir. I'm working for Shimon Belsinger and his colleagues. Investigating the thefts. Shimon said he'd warn you.'

'*Ja, ja*. Come in, come in.'

He shuffled off down the narrow corridor of brown-painted walls. I followed, breathing used air mixed with cooking smells. We emerged into a sitting room. A massive three-piece suite hogged the floor. Lost among the cushions and anti-macassars was a tiny woman. She wore a curly russet wig that belied her mottled and sagging skin. A much younger woman occupied one of the big chairs. A big-eyed child curled in her lap, thumb firmly jammed in her mouth.

The old man turned to me. 'This is my wife, Mrs Bernstein. My daughter, Ruth, and my grand-daughter, Lisa.' His voice softened when he mentioned the baby. His accent was thick and guttural with 'wife' coming out as a 'vife'. He spoke slowly to make sure he'd said it right.

I took a chance and replied in German. 'Good afternoon. I'm here to see if we can catch the thief.'

The old woman's head jerked up. The young woman smiled. The old man's shoulders dropped and he said,

'Belsinger told me you spoke German. But why do you have a München accent?'

I smiled. 'I practised with Isaac Feldman and his wife, Hannah – rest her soul – when I was studying at Glasgow University. It upset my tutors.'

Now the old woman broke in, using her native tongue, and I recognised the softer accent of Austria. 'They say you were an officer in the British Army. You saw it all.' The question was loaded with meaning: *You saw what they did to us . . .*

'After the surrender I was assigned to interrogate *Schutzstaffel* officers; senior SS camp commanders, doctors and Gestapo.'

Three pairs of adult eyes bored into me. I had brought horror into the room and they didn't know whether to examine it further through my memories or to banish it and me before it could swallow them up. The child sensed tension and burrowed into her mother's arms. This time it was the young woman who spoke, in English with a Glasgow lilt.

'Come on now, Mama, Papa, Mr Brodie is here to help. We don't want to hear war stories, do we? What do you want to ask us, Mr Brodie? Papa, let him sit. Where are oor manners?'

I took out my notebook. 'Tell me what happened?'

Bernstein began, 'It is a short story. We go to *shul* on the Sabbath. The Garnethill Synagogue. Every week, same time.'

'Sometimes we go to my sister's first, Jacob.'

'Yes, yes, yes. But when we go straight there it's at the same time.'

'Except on Hanukkah or Passover of course. Then we—'

The old man flung up his arms and switched to German. '*Mein Gott*, Mrs Bernstein! *Usually*. That's all Mr Brodie wants to know. Usually. And when the theft took place, it was a usual Sabbath.'

'I was just saying. Explaining it right.'

Bernstein turned to me and gave me a look of complicity. *Women? What can you do?*

I took the baton. ‘So, when was this?’

‘The twelfth of October. I sold a fine little Austin the day before.’

‘You’re a car dealer?’ He nodded. ‘You all went? The house was left empty?’

‘Ach, yes. But we locked up. Every window. Every door. Even the doors inside, you understand?’

‘How long were you gone?’

The old woman said, ‘We sometimes make it a nice day. After we walk down to Sauchiehall Street and maybe have some tea and cakes.’

The old man rolled his eyes. ‘But not this day, Mrs Bernstein. Not that day. We just came home for *Seudah Shilishit*, the third meal.’

‘I’m just saying. Sometimes—’

‘But this day, we – came – home. Straight home. No diversion. It takes us ten minutes to walk there.’

‘So you were gone . . .?’

‘Two hours, maybe two and a half.’

‘And what happened when you got home? What did you find?’

‘A nightmare! That’s what we found!’ said Mrs Bernstein. ‘Our lives thrown upside down, that’s what happened. My jewels. My mother’s jewels. My best china. Except these cups. They were a wedding present and I kept them in a box . . . All gone. And my earrings, my lovely earrings . . .’ Her old eyes filled and she stumbled to a halt.

The old man walked over and sat beside his wife on the couch. He took her hand and rubbed it, shushing her all the time. I’d witnessed scenes like it a dozen times when I was a copper working out of Tobago Street in the thirties. It wasn’t the cost of an item, nor its value. It was their story, their connection with the living or dead. For these old people, who’d

fled fascism and left so much behind, it was a further severing of ties.

I listened to their outrage and their hurt. I learned that a uniformed policeman had visited a few days later and taken a perfunctory statement but he'd never come back. They'd never been told what was happening.

'Mr Bernstein, did the burglar break in? Was there any sign of damage to the door?'

'Nothing. Not a mark. It was all locked up like I left it.'

'Who has keys?'

He looked at me as though I was daft. 'Only me. And of course Mrs Bernstein. You don't think I am careless with my keys?'

'Good. What about visitors in the past month or two?'

Mrs Bernstein chipped in, 'My sister Bella came round. Such a lovely daughter she has. But no man yet. She needs—'

'Mrs Bernstein!' said her husband. 'Mr Brodie wants to know who has been here. He doesn't want their personal history.'

'So – Mr Bernstein?' I asked.

'Apart from my good-sister Bella, no one.' He shook his head and his glasses gave up the ghost. They fell in two bits on to the carpet and there was confusion and exclamations until they were joined back together by fresh Elastoplast.

'Papa? There was a gas man, you told me.'

'Ach, what news is that?'

'When was this, Mr Bernstein? And why was he here?'

'Papa, it was before the burglary. About a week or so.'

'Mr Bernstein, did you let him in? How did you know he was a gas man?'

Old Bernstein's jaw jutted out. 'He had a board with a sheet of paper on it. He looked at the meter. Am I stupid?'

I left them, apologising as I did. Apologising explicitly for my old police comrades and for their cavalier attitude. Apol-

ogising implicitly for what had happened in Austria and across Germany and Poland and Russia without the West lifting a finger until it was too late. We'd hanged ten of the top Nazis at Nuremberg last month, but it hardly compensated for the hell they'd visited on millions.