

The Other Side of Silence (A Bernie Gunther Novel)

To Download this book in many format Visit :

<https://wocoentala.org/source1/Oeeefb3dae8ac39e205d17269e65bb6a>

When Bernie Gunther takes on a blackmail case and gets involved in the affairs of British spies, the former detective risks exposing his own dark past in this thrilling novel hailed by The New York Times Book Review as "one of Kerr's best."

Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, 1956. Having gone into hiding in the French Riviera, Bernie Gunther is working as a concierge at the Grand-Hôtel under a false name. His days and nights consist of maneuvering drunks to their rooms, shooing away prostitutes in search of trade, and answering the mindless questions posed by the absurdly rich guests—needless to say, he's miserable. Now, the man who was once a homicide detective and unwilling SS officer in Hitler's Third Reich is simply the person you turn to for touring tips or if you need a bridge partner.

As it just so happens, a rich and famous writer needs someone to fill the fourth seat in a regular game at the Villa Mauresque. But Somerset Maugham wants Bernie to help him get out of a game far more dangerous than bridge. Maugham is being blackmailed—perhaps because of his unorthodox lifestyle, or perhaps because, once upon a time, Maugham worked for the British Secret Service...

Philip Kerr was the New York Times bestselling author of the acclaimed Bernie Gunther novels, three of which—Field Gray, The Lady from Zagreb, and Prussian Blue—were finalists for the Edgar Award for Best Novel. Kerr also won several Shamus Awards and the British Crime Writers' Association Ellis Peters Award for Historical Crime Fiction. Just before his death in 2018, he was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. As P.B. Kerr, he was the author of the much-loved young adult fantasy series Children of the Lamp.

Chapter 1: French Riviera 1956

Yesterday I tried to kill myself.

It wasn't that I wanted to die as much as the fact that I wanted the pain to stop. Elisabeth, my wife, left me a while ago and I'd been missing her a lot. That was one source of pain, and a pretty major one, I have to admit. Even after a war in which more than four million German soldiers died, German wives are hard to come by. But another serious pain in my life was the war itself of course, and what happened to me back then, and in the Soviet POW camps afterwards. Which perhaps made my decision to commit suicide odd considering how hard it was not to die in Russia; but staying alive was always more of a habit for me than an active choice. For years under the Nazis I stayed alive out of sheer bloody mindedness. So I asked myself, early one Spring morning, why not kill yourself? To a Goethe-loving Prussian like me the pure reason of a question like that was almost unassailable. Besides, it wasn't as if life was so great anymore, although in truth I'm not sure it ever was. Tomorrow and the long, long empty year to come after that isn't something of much interest to me, especially down here on the French Riviera. I was on my own, pushing sixty and working in a hotel job that I could do in my sleep, not that I got much of that these days. Most of the time I was miserable. I was living somewhere I didn't belong and it felt like a cold corner in hell, so it wasn't as if I believed anyone who enjoys a sunny day would miss the dark cloud that was my face.

There was all that for choosing to die, plus the arrival of a guest at the hotel. A guest I

recognized and wished I hadn't. But I'll come to him in a moment. Before that I have to explain why I'm still here.

I went into the garage underneath my small apartment in Villefranche, closed the door, and waited in the car with the engine turning over. Carbon monoxide poisoning isn't so bad. You just close your eyes and go to sleep. If the car hadn't stalled or perhaps just run out of gas I wouldn't be here now. I thought I might try it again another time, if things didn't improve and if I bought a more reliable motor car. On the other hand, I could have returned to Berlin, like my poor wife, which might have achieved the same result. Even today it's just as easy to get yourself killed there as it ever was and if I were to go back to the former German capital, I don't think it would be very long before someone was kind enough to organize my sudden death. One side or the other has got it in for me, and with good reason. When I was living in Berlin and being a cop or an ex-cop, I managed to offend almost everyone, with the possible exception of the British. Even so, I miss the city a lot. I miss the beer, of course, and the sausage. I miss being a cop when being Berlin police still meant something good. But mostly I miss the people who were as sour as I am. Even Germans don't like Berliners and it's a feeling that's usually reciprocated. Berliners don't like anyone very much - especially the women, which, somehow, only makes them more attractive to a dumb head like me. There's nothing more attractive to a man than a beautiful woman who really doesn't care if he lives or dies. I miss the women most of all. There were so many women. I think about the good women I've known - quite a few of the bad ones, too - who I'll never see again and sometimes I start crying and from there it's only a short trip to the garage and asphyxiation, especially if I've been drinking. Which, at home, is most of the time.

When I'm not feeling sorry for myself I play bridge, or read books about playing bridge, which might strike a lot of people as a pretty good reason on its own to kill yourself. But it's a game I find stimulating. Bridge helps to keep my mind sharp and occupied with something other than thoughts of home - and all those women, of course. In retrospect it seems that a great many of them must have been blondes and not just because they were German, or close to being German. Rather too late in life I've learned that there's a type of woman I'm attracted to, which is the wrong type, and it often happens that this includes a certain shade of hair color that just spells trouble for a man like me. Risky mate search and sexual cannibalism are a lot more common than you might think, although more usual among spiders. Apparently the females assess the nutritional value of a male rather than a male's value as a mate. Which more or less sums up the history of my entire personal life. I've been eaten alive so many times I feel like I've got eight legs, although by now it's probably just three or four. It's not much of an insight, I know, and like I say, it hardly matters now, but even if it happens late in life a degree of self-awareness has to be better than none at all. That's what my wife used to tell me, anyway.

Self-awareness certainly worked for her: she woke up one morning and realized just how bored and disappointed she was with me and our new life in France and went back home the very next day. I can't say that I blame her. She never managed to learn French, appreciate the food, or even enjoy the sun very much and that's the only thing down here of which there's a free and plentiful supply. At least in Berlin you always know why you're

miserable. That's what Berlin luft is all about: an attempt to try to whistle your way out of the gloom. Here, on the Riviera, you would think there's everything to whistle about and no reason at all to be down in the mouth, but somehow I managed it and she couldn't take that anymore.

I suppose I was miserable largely because I'm bored as hell. I miss my old detective's life. I'd give anything to walk through the doors of the police praesidium on Alexanderplatz - by all accounts it's been demolished by the so-called East Germans, which is to say the communists - and to go upstairs to my desk in the Murder Commission. These days I'm a concierge at the Grand Hotel in St. Jean Cap Ferrat. That's a little bit like being a policeman if your idea of being a policeman is directing traffic and I should know. It's exactly thirty-five years since I was first in uniform, on traffic duty at Potsdamer Platz. But I know the hotel business of old; for a while after the Nazis got into power I was the house detective at Berlin's famous Adlon Hotel. Being a concierge is very different to that. Mostly it's about making restaurant reservations, booking taxis and boats, coordinating porter service, shooing away prostitutes - which isn't as easy as it sounds; these days only American women can afford to look like prostitutes - and giving directions to witless tourists who can't read a map and don't speak French. Only very occasionally is there an unruly guest or a theft and I dream of having to assist the local *Surveillante* to solve a series of daring jewel robberies of the kind I saw in Alfred Hitchcock's *To Catch a Thief*. Of course, that's all it is; a dream. I wouldn't ever volunteer to help the local police, not because they're French - although that would be a good reason not to help them - but because I'm living under a false passport, and not just any false passport, but one that was given to me by none other than Erich Mielke, who is currently the deputy head of the Stasi, the East German Security Police. That's the kind of favor that sometimes comes with a high price tag and, one day, I expect him to come calling to get me to pay it. Which will probably be the day when I have to go on my travels again. Compared to me, the Flying Dutchman was the Rock of Gibraltar. I suspect my wife knew this, since she also knew Mielke and better than me.

Quite where I'd go I have no idea although I hear North Africa is accommodating where Germans on a wanted list are concerned. There's a Fabre line boat that sails from Marseilles to Morocco every other day. That's just the sort of thing that a concierge is supposed to know although it's much more likely that there are rather more of the hotel's well-heeled guests who've fled from Algeria than there are those who want to go there. Since the massacre of *Pieds-Noirs* civilians at Philippeville last year, the war against the FLN in Algiers isn't going so well for the French and by all accounts the colony is ruled even more harshly than it ever was when the Nazis left it to the tender mercies of the Vichy government.

I'm not sure if the effortlessly handsome, dark-haired man I saw checking into one of the hotel's best suites the day before I tried to asphyxiate myself was on any kind of wanted list but he was certainly German and a criminal. Not that he looked like anything less affluent than a banker or a Hollywood film producer and he spoke such excellent French that it was probably only me who would have known he was German. He was using the name Harold Heinz Hebel and gave an address in Bonn, but his real name was Hennig, Harold Hennig and

during the last few months of the war he'd been a captain in the SD. Now in his early forties he wore a fine, gray lightweight suit that had been tailored for him and black, handmade shoes that were as shiny as a new centime. You tend to notice things like that when you're working at a place like the Grand Hotel. These days I can spot a Savile Row suit from the other side of the lobby. His manners were as smooth as the silk Hermès tie around his neck, which suited him better than the noose it richly deserved. He tipped all of the porters handsomely from a wad of new notes that was as thick as a slice of bread, and after that the boys treated him and his Louis Vuitton luggage with more care than a case of Meissen porcelain. Coincidentally, the last time I'd seen him he'd also had some expensive luggage with him, filled with valuables he and his boss, the East Prussian Gauleiter Erich Koch, had probably looted from the city. That had been in January 1945, sometime during the terrible Battle of Königsberg. He'd been boarding the German passenger ship, Wilhelm Gustloff which was subsequently torpedoed by a Russian submarine with the loss of more than nine thousand civilian lives. He was one of the few rats that managed to escape from that particular sinking ship, which was a great pity since he'd helped to bring about its destruction.

If Harold Hennig recognized me he didn't show it. In our black morning coats, the hotel's desk staff all tend to look the same, of course. There's that and the fact that I'm a little heavier now than I was back then, with less hair probably, not to mention a light tan that my wife used to say suited me. For a man who just tried to kill himself I'm in remarkably good shape, even though I say so myself. Alice, one of the maids I've taken a shine to since Elisabeth left, says I could easily pass for a man ten years younger. Which is just as well as I have a soul that feels like it's at least five hundred years old. It's looked into the abyss so many times it feels like Dante's walking stick.

Harold Hennig looked straight at me, and although I didn't hold his gaze for more than a second or two, there was no need - being an ex-cop, I never forget a face, especially when it belongs to a mass-murderer. Nine thousand people - men and women and a great many children is a lot of reasons to remember a face like Harold Heinz Hennig's.

But I have to admit that seeing him again looking so prosperous and in such rude health left me feeling very depressed. It's one thing to know that there are people like Eichmann and Mengele who got away with the most appalling crimes. It's another thing when several of the victims of a crime were your friends. There was a time when I might have tried to exact some kind of rough justice, but those days are long gone. These days, revenge is something of which my partner and I talk lightly at the end or perhaps the beginning of a game of bridge at La Voile d'Or, which is the only other good hotel in Cap Ferrat. I don't even own a gun. If I did I certainly wouldn't be here now. I'm a much better shot than I am a driver.

Other Books

Rumah Gema (The Hollow), Hercule Poirot kesal dan jemu. Kematian sama sekali bukan hal yang menyenangkan. Tetapi di sini mereka malah menggodanya dengan menyajikan suatu adegan pembunuhan. Di tepi kolam, sesosok tubuh diletakkan secara artistik, lengannya terentang. Bahkan ada cat merah menetes-netes. Sosok itu sangat tampan. Beberapa

orang berdiri mengelilinginya dalam pose-pose yang aneh. Semuanya sangat tidak profesional. Namun sekonyong-konyong Poirot menyadari bahwa adegan ini amat nyata. Begitu nyata, hingga membuatnya tersentak bagai dihantam palu godam. Cairan yang menetes itu bukan cat merah, melainkan darah. Dan pria yang tergeletak itu sedang menjelang ajal....

❓ ❓ ❓ ❓ ❓ . Hercule Poirot kesal dan jemu."