

### Excerpt from *When the Lights Come on Again* by Maggie Craig

One hour later a brick came flying through the window of the café. Aldo was serving coffee to two of his regular customers, an elderly couple sitting at the table nearest the door. The missile flew over them and struck Aldo on the head.

The impact was sufficient to fell him, blood seeping from a wound on his forehead. Mario, hastily wiping his hands on the white apron tied round his waist, came rushing out from behind the counter and knelt down beside his father. Liz had been cleaning some tables at the back of the café, exchanging a few sentences with a single man who was the only other customer in at the time. She went forward too, the man rising to his feet and following her.

‘Should ye no’ get him down the road to the Infirmary, Mario?’ asked the woman, now also on her knees beside Mr Rossi.

‘Aye,’ he said briskly, shaking off the initial shock. ‘Liz, can you mind the store?’

She was about to say yes, of course, nae bother. The younger male customer spoke.

‘I’m thinking you might not have a store to mind! Sorry, pal, but I’m getting out of here!’

He pulled open the door and was gone. That was when they became aware of the noise from outside. There were people out there. Lots of them.

‘Don’t waste any more time, laddie!’ urged the elderly man. ‘Get your father out now! And take the lassie wi’ you! Come on!’

Between the four of them, they got Aldo to his feet and manhandled him out on to the pavement. It wasn’t a crowd which had gathered there. It was a mob, ugly and menacing. Their very posture shrieked aggression.

‘Aw, look,’ shouted one voice. ‘That guy’s hurt.’

Liz stared at them. She couldn’t believe her eyes. If she blinked, would they go away? There were about thirty of them, mostly men but a few women also. They had a handcart in front of them. It was filled with bricks, and stones big enough to fit into a man’s hand...

Had a ripple of sympathy run through them when they had seen Aldo, a man of mature years with blood dripping from his head? If so, it didn’t last long.

‘Dirty Tallies!’ shouted another voice.

‘Tally bastards!’ said someone else.

Mario, his shoulder under his father’s arm, had gone white. Liz thought of *Kristallnacht*. Was this how it had started for the Jews in Germany? People calling them names? Men and women lifting stones, taking aim and getting ready to throw?

‘We’re no’ wanting to hurt anybody,’ came a man’s voice. ‘Let them through.’ The mood shifted again. It came to Liz what made a mob like this so dangerous. You had no idea which way it was going to go next. First a brick through the window. Then sympathy. Then racist insults. And then more bricks and stones?

‘Come on,’ she urged Mario. ‘Your father needs attention now.’

‘You a Tally-lover, hen?’

She didn’t know which one of them had said it, so she lifted her chin and looked at them all. The elderly man gripped her sleeve and whispered, ‘Don’t give them the opportunity, pet.’

He was right. Her head held high, but her heart racing with fear, Liz followed Mario as he moved across the pavement. A group of younger men blocked his path.

‘Tally fucking bastard.’

The menace was unmistakable, all the more chilling because the man who had spoken had said the words quietly, with slow and deliberate malice. He let a young woman push through in front of him. First she smiled at Mario. Then she spat in his face.

Supporting his father with both hands, he wasn’t able to react. Trembling with fury, Liz took her handkerchief out of her pocket and wiped the spittle from his face. Locking eyes with the

girl who'd done it, she crumpled the cloth up and dropped it in the gutter. The crowd parted and let them through.

When they came from Partick Police Station to arrest Aldo Rossi later that evening, he was still at the Western Infirmary. Some kind soul directed the police officers there. Aldo's injury had proved to be not too serious, but he was badly shaken. Cordelia MacIntyre, incensed by what had happened, folded her arms and looked down her aristocratic nose at the police sergeant and his constable.

'You can find Mr Rossi now, but where were you a couple of hours ago? There's been criminal damage done to his property, you know.'

'There's been criminal damage done to Italian businesses all over Glasgow, miss,' replied the sergeant. 'We cannae be everywhere at once.'

Over his son's voluble and frantic protests, they took Aldo away. Mario was distracted. His friends had to restrain him or he'd have got himself into serious trouble. Adam and Cordelia managed to calm him down only by telling him several times that they would get their combined families on to the case, see what strings Mrs Buchanan, Mr Murray and Lady MacIntyre could pull. There must be something that could be done.

'We're not living in a police state, after all,' sniffed Cordelia, her cool eyes sweeping over the representatives of authority. 'I thought this was the sort of thing we're supposed to be fighting against.'

She could do the lady-of-the-manor act to perfection, thought Liz admiringly. It helped wring one concession out of the police sergeant. Mario could visit his father the following morning at the police station, but not before then.

'Of course we'll not ill-treat him,' snapped the exasperated sergeant in response to another haughty question from the Honourable Miss MacIntyre. 'I've a father of my own, you know.'

It was heart-breaking. The business Aldo Rossi had struggled for years to build up lay in ruins, trampled and looted by a mindless mob. Silently, Liz followed Mario as he picked his way through the debris of his father's life.

The others had come too, offering to help clear up. Mario hadn't the heart for it. Not yet. Some of the boys had lent a hand with the boarding-up of the door and window and left it at that for the night.

'Watch your feet.'

Liz looked down. There was glass all over the floor. She saw the chrome lid of one of the straw dispensers lying in the middle of the mess. They had smashed the counter too, but the glass shelves behind it were intact, although all the sweetie jars were gone.

'They probably took those home with them,' Mario said. 'Their children will be eating them right now.'

Liz's feet crunched on something else – not glass this time, but cones and wafers, their packets ripped open and tipped on to the floor. She wondered if they'd stood here and weighed up what to steal and what to spoil.

She blew out a long breath and ran her fingers through her hair. 'What sort of people could do something like this?' she asked him despairingly. 'It's such wanton destruction.'

Mario didn't answer her. He was crouching down, picking something up from the mess on the floor. It was a smashed photo frame.

'My mother's picture,' he said, his voice expressionless. 'Even my mother's picture.'

He had stood up again by the time Liz reached him, picking her way over the mess on the floor. There was glass all over the photograph, too. His head bowed, he was carefully picking it off.

'My mother's picture,' he said again. Then he began to cry.