

Fourteen.

In the morning, Kelso found on the radio an illegal American station broadcasting from a bomb-proof studio in distant Galway. It seemed strange that the jammers hadn't found it yet. Benny Goodman, and then some messages for our friends across the Irish Sea. A strange jumble of lines, some read once, others repeated three times. Coded messages, perhaps, for American networks in the Protectorate. Or their missing agents and drug-runners.

These messages went on for what seemed a great length of time. Then Benny Goodman returned, fresh as ever. In the street below a half-track Militia riot-car prowled, armed with a water-cannon. It stopped for a few moments on the corner, axle-deep in the snow. Then it moved on round its corner, and politely disappeared into the new day.

But the Militia might come pounding on the stairs at any moment in search of him. By the middle of the morning Kelso could no longer bear the tension; or the risk. At the end of the street he dived into a warren of alleys and vaults under a railway embankment. At the far end of the alley, he found the street market of the previous afternoon. But there was no sign of the girl who had hawked the fifty-tins of Capstan.

There were perhaps a hundred makeshift stalls selling foodstuffs dragged in during the night from the countryside. Some of it had come in on open-backed and ancient lorries; but most of it on carts drawn by broken nags, beyond any requisition. Some carts, even, had no nags to draw them. Two crones, sisters by the look of them, tended a hand-drawn barrow half-loaded with turnips. Most of the turnips were rotten.

A crone, defensive and proud, said, 'We were stopped at a road-block. They stole all our good stuff'.

'Where did you walk from?', Kelso asked.

'East Linton', the second sister said, as if an overnight march of that distance and in that weather, while dragging a cart designed for a pony, was the most normal thing imaginable.

The first one said, still defensive, 'You have to get here early for a good pitch'.

Other stalls offered for sale - or trade - extremely cheap processed meats, watered milk, tinned fish, and bread, nearly black, baked from adulterated and condemned grain. One stall specialised in eggs: from a farm out near Linlithgow, the owner said proudly, the best of fresh eggs to be had in the country that morning. Another vendor offered plucked and starved pullets: while at the more expensive end of the market there were stolen goods to be had, from real teas and coffees to salt and butter and - miracle of miracles - some fresh cod acquired in the early hours on the Granton quays, and smuggled up-town without obstruction.

And then, from the back of an unmarked van a sharp and well-dressed character was offering a range of clearly dangerous goods: half a case of jugged hare, a bucket of cane sugar, two broken crates of bright-red tomatoes, a smashed box of tinned oranges, and a dozen pineapples. He also had four large bottles of Soviet-navy extra-strong rum on offer - for those, as he said, who might be able to pay for them.

Kelso asked, 'Where did you get this stuff from?'

The thug laughed and hefted a pineapple. The gesture held a suggestion of calm menace.

He said, 'Been in Fife recently, pal? This stuff grows on the trees over there'.

A small horde of children looked on, as if they might believe the claim.

'Will you take ordinary money?', Kelso asked.

'Not your ordinary money anyway, pal', the tough said. 'You want this stuff, you need dollars. Or anything else, if you see what I mean'.

A woman behind a barrow of rags instantly asked if he wanted anything special. It was not clear what she meant by the offer at first. But she was offering a coat, best quality, heavy for the winter. Crombie, perhaps, though someone had carved away the label. But you could tell by the weight, she said.

'How much?', Kelso wondered.

'Ten pounds', the woman snapped, fast as a trap.

'What about dollars?', Kelso said quietly.

The woman froze for a moment, her eyes darting left and right, her hard mouth slack from shock.

'Five dollars?', she wondered, hardly daring to hope.

'Two', Kelso said. But he gave her three, and she threw into the deal a lambswool scarf and heavy winter bonnet, while she eased the contraband currency into some deep, inner recess of her personal clothing by degrees, like some giant snake digesting its intimate prey.

When he left the market, he found a bus headed for Granton, and boarded it on an impulse. After a time he came in sight of the great harbour. Warships were lying-to off the mouth. The tide was back and in the east harbour the mud was black and glistening. The harbour was entirely empty of small craft; perhaps they had been

requisitioned, or confiscated as a security measure against vagabonds escaping over the estuary to Fife. He walked to the end of the windy central pier.

In the west harbour a distant-water steam-trawler was discharging cod; large, green cod from the Iceland depths. A curl of smoke rose from the funnel. A stoker lazed on deck, smoking too. He wore yellow seaboots, moleskin trousers, a filthy vest and a cloth cap. He winked at the newcomer on the pier, and disappeared through a hatch into the casing. Two wheelhouse windows were smashed-in. A man in off-white seaboots and a bright orange oilskin smock stood at a winch; another, identically dressed, at the mouth of the hold. From time to time, someone below would shout an order, and a tier of boxes would rise majestically into the open, and be swung to the pier. Two men caught them, and stacked them on pallets. But she was not a Granton boat. She was from the north-east somewhere, or perhaps Shetland; anyway, the accent of the men was impenetrable, and they seemed too busy to engage in idle conversation.

Kelso headed back into the centre of the city on foot. In the rugby grounds before the Botanic gardens, an encampment of tents and waggons signalled the presence of one of the many travelling circuses which had roamed the country since the early days of the Protectorate. A girl with very red hair was juggling with Indian clubs. When she saw Kelso watching her, she stopped. She stared straight at him for some moments, and put the clubs down. She came towards him, and stopped perhaps three feet away. The girl's grey eyes, utterly unafraid, looked straight through the stranger. Then she laughed; wild, ungovernable laughter. She had been branded on each cheek.

‘You’re not one of them, are you?’: but it was a statement more than anything else. ‘You are one of us’.

She turned on her heel, marched towards a van and slammed its door without once turning. The Indian clubs lay abandoned in the slush and mud of the playing field.

He came up into the centre by Dundas street. The New Town was quiet. Scullions scrubbed steps while an advocate in good shoes and a striped shirt strode out for the Faculty. At the bottom of Hanover street, reflected in a shop window, a girl in a long tartan skirt was bent over the handlebars of a bicycle. For one moment, she might even have been painted on the window, smeared with Impressionist’s winter light and splashes of sleet.

At the eastern end of Princes street, the Scottish Record Office had seen some fighting, and its windows were boarded while the main door was barricaded with barbed wire. On the side of Calton Hill, St Andrew’s House was heavily guarded by Regulars, and there were machine-gun posts on the roof. An anti-aircraft battery was also dug-in towards the summit of the hill.

He took the North Bridge, over the station. Below, the London train could clearly be seen, making ready to leave. Soon he was in the High Street, and he strolled to the lower end. It was not possible to get close to Holyrood. Specials maintained a cordon round the palace, and a fleet of riot-cars was parked in the concourse.

And then round by the foot of the Craggs to the university. Students in flannels and tweed jackets marched in purposeful ways from lecture hall to library. None seemed a danger to the state. But on a wall near the Union, someone had painted the cryptic legend V25-28. There had been no attempt to remove it. Perhaps the

authorities had not spotted the reference. Or perhaps, of course, it had been freshly painted overnight, and the patrols sent out to look for this sort of thing had not yet come upon it.

Sandy Bell's bar was open. A number of men on stools was slumped at the counter, just as they always had been. Most of the table seats were taken. Whisky was available, but only to favoured and reliable customers, of course. Or to those who could pay in American dollars. Kelso found a seat under the window, with a half-pint of beer and a glass of whisky. Someone had left a Scotsman on the table. He was glad of his new coat; for there was no heating in the bar of any sort, perhaps as a caution against pleasure.

He read the Scotsman the way he drank, slowly. There was a picture story on page three, right at the top. The first spring lamb in the Borders. A deep caption was lyrical about a sense of hope and new beginnings. Reading ever so deep between the lines, there was still no sense of irony, no hidden meaning. And the town council of Edinburgh had called on the Home Secretary to bring back the birch for offences of hooliganism in the public streets.

An editorial was entitled In Defence of the University. It noted that a number of universities had already had their libraries audited, and that a smaller number had even been closed in some parts of the country. It was gratifying to observe that these closures had, to date, all been south of the Border. Scotland's great Enlightenment tradition led the way in maturity of thought and action. Had not Thomas Reid quit the thatched manse of Strachan as a twelve year old? No nonsense from him, then, as a undergraduate! A bag of meal, stern piety, unswerving temperance and books by candlelight set a standard that our modern student would do well to aspire to! Certainly, there had been trouble of late at Edinburgh's great seat of

learning. Perhaps it had not all been entirely without cause. But it was disgraceful that painted slogans had appeared, and vicious handbills scattered in the wynds and alleys of Causewayside. And at Surgeons' Hall some hooligans had painted a quotation from the Book of Daniel. This was a responsible newspaper, founded many years ago. It would not publish this irreligious slogan, and give further currency to the disgraceful political character which it had so recently assumed. But everyone knew what it was: or at least every presbyterian with a responsible knowledge of Scripture! What sort had painted it there, and so defaced that great centre, and irreparably sullied its reputation? It was unlikely that the authors of the outrage were students of the university. Perhaps they were paid agitators from another institution altogether, furth of the Lothians - furth, perchance, of old Scotia herself! In any case, the disciplinary action that had been taken was no more than an appropriate response to the provocation. And in any case too, there had long been a suspect element among the academic staff. Yes, some had disappeared during the raids of last week, and nothing had been heard of them since. And yes too, it was quite correct that some others had been openly taken into protective custody, along with their families, and held quite openly on a hostage basis. But there had been sound and proper legal precedent and basis for many of these penalties, however redolent - as they might seem to the innocent observer - of Draco himself. True, written denunciations, often anonymous in character, were an innovation in university procedure: but in truth were no worse than the older style of a quiet word with Dean, or Principal! And anyway, we lived in dangerous times. And dangerous times called for difficult remedies! So now, and once again, the university could proceed with its proper

purpose. Which was learning. And not sedition. So long live the university! And long live education!

And then the sports pages. Many rugby games had been cancelled on account of the weather. Curling was under way in Perthshire, and seven hundred people had gathered at a bonspiel outside Dunkeld. Police said that on account of alcohol abuse the bonspiel had quickly developed a political character. The crowd was therefore ordered to disperse under the terms of the law as it related to riotous assembly. When the crowd failed to do so, a Paramilitary unit which had been summoned had opened fire on it. There had been, the report concluded, 'many casualties consequent on criminal riot'. But it did not say how many. Nor did it say what had happened to the bonspiel.

Kelso got more drink at the bar and returned to his seat under the window. A siren began to scream in the street outside, then a second. Everyone in the bar stood at the door to watch. Policemen in checked caps were rushing into tenement doorways across the street. A suitcase was suddenly thrown from a top floor window. It tumbled down, bursting open as it fell. Tightly wrapped packets scattered in the street. Children darted with incredible speed to retrieve them before the police. Then a body was hurled from the same window. It smashed with a thud on the pavement: you could hear the thud quite clearly from the door of Sandy Bell's. Suddenly the body sat up, stood up, and began to run. A policeman called an order, but the figure ran on, crab-like. The policeman blew a whistle. Then he drew a heavy revolver from a leather holster and took aim. When he fired, the heavy-calibre weapon jumped, and a puff of smoke drifted. But he had missed, and by the time he had taken aim again, the crab had disappeared. All the packets which had

fallen on the surface of the street had already disappeared too. Apart from the open upper-floor window, it was as if nothing at all had happened.

A couple entered the bar, and sat at the next table. He was the advocate in striped shirt and expensive shoes who had so recently strode in Queen Street. She wore silk stockings, and had clearly dressed for the occasion. The face was stylishly made-up, to hide the gentle march of time. Perhaps it was an illicit affair for them, a good and safe distance from the douce family homes in Colinton and Barnton. These lovers spoke in low, tense tones. Perhaps there was a crisis in their love? But no, it was a family crisis. Her husband had been arrested, and she didn't know what to do next.

Kelso added some water from a jug to his whisky, fingered the Scotsman crossword, and listened.

She said, 'His head of department reported him. I always knew that man was a talentless bastard'.

The other members of the department had been invited to submit written evidence; in confidence of course.

'Where he has been taken?', the striped shirt asked solicitously.

'The zoocamp, I suppose. That's where all the university people have been taken at first, isn't it'.

'They've all got ten years so far', striped shirt said, 'without right of correspondence'.

A long silence followed this intelligence. You could hear the buses grind outside in Forrest Row, and ambulances race for the infirmary.

'When do you have to be home?', she asked at length.

‘Six at the latest’, striped shirt said. ‘I caught the bitch going through my pockets last night’.

Suddenly, silk stockings’ bravery crumbled, and she began to cry; great, hot globules of passion and despair tumbled over her made-up face and down across her milk-white neck.

‘Oh my God, what a disaster! The boys will have to come out of Fettes’.

Striped shirt comforted her, made soothing words as he slipped a caring hand around her shoulder and under her milk-white arm. The hot globules rolled for a time, and then the winter began to pass.

Striped shirt said, ‘Did you bring the keys to his office?’

In time, these lovers left, their spirits much refreshed. Again, Kelso had the space under the window to himself. At the counter, the same row of men was still slumped immobile over their drinks. It was beginning to get dark. And he was beginning to feel light-headed from all the whisky. But that was the point of whisky, wasn’t it? Not much point in going to all the bother and expense of drinking it, and not get anything from it!

He left the bar, and headed for the flat in Gorgie. There was nowhere else to head for. The gates of the Greyfriars Kirk burial-ground were thrown open. A dozen religious outlaws, all branded, were begging and brawling in front of them. Inside, open fires could be seen, and a slum of tarpaulin huts and tents. There were more outlaws at the foot of Candlemaker Row, and another clutch of them in the Grassmarket. Kelso took the road at the foot of the Castle Rock, towards the west end of Princes Street. The Caledonian was looted and burned: more outlaws teemed among the gravestones of St. Cuthbert’s churchyard opposite.

Beyond Haymarket he found an early cinema. At the entrance a barefoot accordion-player was stroking a tune in jig-time over an upturned Militia officer's cap. People tipped coins into the cap with a smile and a salute to the player: though he was already drunk and playing wildly out of tune. Or perhaps because of it.

Kelso had missed the shorts. They went straight into the main feature; an American B-movie set in the southern states. At the back of the cinema, most of the audience was gambling and trading in stolen goods. At one point a fight broke out. A knife was drawn with politely muttered curses. Bloodhounds ran through a swamp. Outlaws from a travelling circus brawled and cursed and gambled. The bloodhound chase was at night: a studio swamp. The outlaws were betting on the dogs. When the dogs brought down their quarry, a fight broke out among the gamblers. Someone dragged a crate of oranges along the aisle and headed for the toilets. Then the hero of the film was hanging in a tree, while a photographer went about his work. A joyous crowd of spectators turned to smile towards the great magnesium flash. The hero's lover, in a startlingly white dress, was already dead: you could tell this by the strange way that her neck tilted.

There the film ended and the house lights went up. All the outlaws had been branded, some bored in the cheeks, and one had lost his hands. Someone under the stage played a Schubert piece on a piano. Then the house lights went down again, and the programme re-started.

There was a fifteen-minute documentary from the important field of university education. The history department of an unnamed university had been purged. The tribunal of enquiry had conducted its business in public, in one of the older lecture halls. An

audience looked on from the banked seating. A chairman representing the popular masses announced that there had been anonymous complaints. Subsequent enquiries had led to denunciations. The chairman flourished a sheaf of documents. First case: decision by acclamation. Sentence, denied right to teach for five years without appeal. Second case sentence: dismissal from post with immediate effect and orders to report for special duties at the Militia command post in Dalkeith within 48 hours. Third case: a young professor. Handwritten copies of his articles had been found in Daniel hideouts. The young professor was invited to explain himself. But he was repeatedly interrupted and finally shouted-down by his colleagues. The young professor fell on his knees and begged for mercy from the court: but two Specials dragged him away by his ankles, screaming repentance. Sentence: twenty years, without right of correspondence. Fourth case: a medievalist dismissed outright, and ordered to report to the nearest detention camp within 24 hours. His children looked on in horror. And a fifth and final case: a charge of philosophic complicity in ideological terrorism. A plea of not guilty. Anonymous information had been received in the strictest confidence. The faculty was asked to vote by a show of hands on the matter, and by unanimous opinion found their terrorist colleague guilty as charged. Sentence would be announced later, when the defendant had had proper opportunity to re-consider his refusal to assist continuing enquiries into the activities of traitors still at large in the faculty.

It was clearly a two-camera shoot, for reaction shots of spontaneous applause and cries of approval were edited seamlessly into the proceedings. It was also perfectly clear that the verdicts of the tribunal had been typed in advance of its proceedings. A voice-

over commentary announced that similar purges would be conducted in the remaining university history-faculties in the coming weeks.

Throughout this documentary, the outlaws continued to gamble on the trial-outcomes, draw knives on each other, and deal furiously in stolen goods. But they stopped when the main feature began to run again: the protagonist and his lover were to be seen tending to giant dogs in a kennels block under mighty trees; in the distance, a colonnaded and gracious mansion could be glimpsed.

Kelso left: by now it was mid-evening. All day the snow had held off, and the streets were busy with workers making their way homewards. Kelso approached the Gorgie flat cautiously. But there was no need for this caution. They had come and gone.

The flat had been stripped. The front windows had been smashed open and the furniture tossed into the street below. He could recognise some of it, even the bedclothes in which he had wrapped himself the previous night. Even the bed, broken-backed now in the gutter. And the radio. The books too: one of the Huxley paperbacks lay on its back in open invitation. A broken whisky bottle. But there was no sign of the nautical charts and the admiralty pilot books for the Easdale section of the coast.

The frosted windows of a pub beckoned from a corner. It was called the Volunteer Arms. The electricity supply had failed, and the tavern was lit with pressure oil-lamps, which hissed in a viperish way from each end of the polished mahogany bar. Behind them, and above in the gloom, stretched a magnificent timber gantry almost entirely empty of bottles. It was carved with winged eagles and griffons: mirrored panels set in the timber were engraved carefully with masonic symbols. A handwritten sign said strictly no credit.

The place was already busy with workmen, drinking beer for the most part. But some had tumblers filled with a liquor which was not immediately identifiable. At the counter, Kelso waited to be served. The barman was wearing an ankle-length apron which once had been white. Now it seemed to be stained with blood: but perhaps this was a trick of the light. The barman studied Kelso with open suspicion.

‘I haven’t seen you before’, he said, making it sound like a challenge.

‘I was brought up in Edinburgh’, Kelso said in a slightly plaintive way.

The barman said, ‘I can see that’: as if stating something very obvious indeed.

Kelso said, ‘I’ve just arrived back in town’: as if that explained everything.

‘What do you want?’, the barman demanded.

‘Would you have whisky?’, Kelso wondered, diffidently.

‘Can you afford it?’, the barman demanded.

‘American dollars’, Kelso said.

The barman sold him a full-price bottle, whose contents he would serve in shot-glasses from under the counter until such time as its owner left the bar. The rest of the liquor stayed with the barman. That was the deal. So it made sense to drink as much of the bottle as possible.

Four brewery workers sat at the next table. They smelt faintly of beer or some beer product; but Kelso could not quite identify it. In the gloom of the paraffin lamps, it was not possible to make out individual features. No more than stray words were to be heard

from their talk. They had been promised some new horses from the countryside.

Someone said, 'The farmers are shooting them. To eat them'.

One of their number went to the bar, and after some minutes returned with four glasses of the unidentifiable liquid. The men toasted each other and began to drink.

Then Kelso heard the word, 'Pitmungo'. But it meant nothing to him.

A drunk smashed through the swing doors of the bar, with an extremely emaciated greyhound on a leash. The barman vaulted his counter, apron swirling, and hurled himself on the drunk.

He screamed, 'Out, out of here'.

A wave of laughter from the far end of the bar obscured what was said next. The brewery men scarcely turned a head at this disturbance. When they finished their drinks, they left.

Two girls appeared at the entrance swing-doors. They stood just inside the entrance, stock still. The barman looked at them hard, and jerked his head towards a table. The girls trudged to the table which had been occupied by the brewery workmen and sat down. They were bare-legged and coatless. Their cheap plastic shoes were dusted with snow. They wore dresses in a way, somehow, that suggested they wore nothing underneath these dresses. Perhaps it was all they had, of course. Or perhaps, like the blood-stained apron, it was no more than an illusion. One had a white handbag. The barman brought them drinks. Then he returned to his bar, and began to polish it with the tail of his apron.

The younger of the girls scraped in the white handbag and produced a fifty tin of Capstan, full-strength. For a moment, you

could see the logo, and then it was gone. The girl wore a gold cross on a chain at her throat.

She said to Kelso, 'Geez a light, eh?'

But Kelso had no light. The girl scraped again, and produced a single match. Single-handed, she struck it on a nail and it flared at once. She lit the cigarette and inhaled very deeply. She seemed very young. With extreme expertise, she spat: just a tiny pinhead of spit, with plosive precision. You could see the pinhead shoot through the air in a very flat trajectory, and land on the toe of one of Kelso's shoes.

It was the girl's night off, it was. They were going to a club. Not far and plenty of drink. And other stuff too, if that was what you wanted.

After a time, one of the girls said, 'Do you want to come with us? We'll get you in no bother'.

'It's just down the road', the younger one said, as if this really mattered.

Half-an-hour before closing-time, they left for the club of which the girls had spoken. It was under a railway arch beyond the street market, through a doorway which led the unwary to suppose that that door led to a motor-repair workshop. A broken-down car, doors and wheels long gone, and a black, greasy pile of rubber tyres added weight to the pretence. A hand-painted sign said Autos.

Discreet guards and lookouts were posted all round the premises at a distance of fifty yards. They nodded civilly to the girls, and to the new punter they had brought along. Jazz music could be heard vaguely in the vicinity. The older girl rapped with authority on the steel door, two, three, two. A sign above this door said Three

Cats. A goon appeared at once, very big, and put a hand on Kelso's chest.

'Nae strangers'.

'Aw fuck off, Danny, he's wi' us'.

'Aye fuck off Danny, can ye no see he's wi' us?'

'We're on whisky sours, mister, by the way'.

The club was packed. A three-piece band was on a stage at the far end. And there were drums somewhere too, though they couldn't be seen. A bar was serving cocktails, in cocktail glasses. With ice. And salted peanuts. Dollars only at the bar, of course, what sort of place did you think this was? Top-class only, like. And if you didn't like it - out. And if you couldn't afford it - out too. Or if your face didn't fit - out again. Unless you had something else to offer, like. Because that was different.

A waiter took Kelso's coat: he weighed it, as if he too knew quality and was preparing to enter a bid. Management cruised: a cove in a sleek dinner-suit, pencil-moustache, combed back hair. And very hard eyes indeed. The managerial eyes ran over Kelso twice, and missed nothing. Then they were having a private word with the girls, the three looking over at Kelso through the smoke. At the bar, a very expert tender fixed Kelso three whisky sours.

'Should I arrange to have them brought to your table, sir, or will they be consumed at the bar?'

Naturally, there was a cover charge for tables, there was always such a high demand for them at this time of night. The girls had already secured a table. A waiter with a tray made the perilous journey through the heaving throng with the drinks.

The older girl said, 'On our tab, Jim, this guy's wi' us'.

And then to Kelso: 'I'm Janey. My wee sister's called Jacquie. That's with a queue, like'.

Kelso said, 'That's a very nice name'. They scarcely looked like each other, the girls. But then sisters didn't have to. Or perhaps they shared different parents? Someone with a sax had joined the band, and the music rose to a crescendo. Then someone on a microphone introduced a singer and the crowd surged forward, applauding.

Jacquie says, 'That's what I would like to be, a singer'.

The waiter was on his way towards them again. He manoeuvred three whisky sours, very large ones, onto the table. Some people began to dance.

'With the compliments of the management, sir, enjoy your evening'.

Kelso asked whether the girls stayed in the immediate vicinity. But they didn't.

Janey says, with a hint of defiance, 'We stay wherever. We have lots of places to stay, wherever we want'.

Jacquie says, 'They took our mum away. Without right of correspondence. That was two years ago. It was just before Christmas'. For a little time the mask slipped. Jacquie looked very, very sad indeed. There was no mention of any father.

Kelso said, 'How old are you, Jacquie?'

'Fifteen', she says, recovering her composure quickly, 'what the fuck's it got to do with you?'

The management approached. A chair appeared from nowhere and the sleek moustache sat down with smooth authority.

'This is Des', says the girls.

Des says, 'Good evening, sir. I trust you will overlook our initial reluctance to welcome you. Under present circumstances, establishments like this one have to be very careful. Of course, we are strictly legal here'.

The hard black eyes scanned the dancers on the floor. They were not eyes that inspired faith in their owner's inclination to legality, somehow. And they were eyes that knew danger in any vicinity. The dark eyes turned away from the dancers.

Des says, in a confidential tone, 'I understand, sir, that you have access to American dollars'.

'Not much', Kelso said.

'He does, Des', says Janey, 'I saw him up the Volunteer with a bundle!'

Des put a single finger at right angles to the sleek Ôtache and Janey at once showed no inclination to say any more.

Des says, 'For dollars sir, we can arrange anything. Anything at all. In the line of accommodation, for instance. Not here, of course, this is a strictly legal establishment. And we pay the police a lot to keep it that way. This is the wealthiest gentleman's club in Edinburgh now. And we aim to keep it like that'.

Des made it sound like the rooms of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. But it seemed unlikely, unless the Royal Society had become all gangsters and whores: or as Des said, respectable businessmen and their ladies. And their muscle, too, which stood quietly by the walls. Kelso could have sworn, all of the muscle was carrying arms. But maybe it was just a habit, and there was no sense of danger imminent.

Kelso said, 'I will think about it, Des'.

Some muscle approached, and had a private word with Des. Des stood up. Des looked worried. Then he relaxed. He sat down again.

Des said, 'I think you will want to make your mind up quickly, sir. This afternoon, the authorities smashed-up the flat you stayed in last night. They would have caught you if you hadn't stayed so long in Sandy Bell's and then gone to the cinema'

'You are very well informed, Des'

'You have to be, sir, in the entertainment business. And a police raid is under way at this moment in all the surrounding flats. Do you think they could be looking for you, sir?'

Janey and Jacquie were dancing, with men very much older than they were. Then they all left the floor and disappeared through a doorway screened by a black curtain. A crudely-drawn notice announced - VIP Lounge. This door too was guarded by a very large goon, in a dinner suit.

Kelso said, 'All right, Des. I need somewhere to stay. Somewhere safe'.

Des said, 'I will arrange that sir, with the greatest pleasure. As I did say, anything can be arranged for American dollars'.

'There is one more thing, Des'.

'Sir?'

'A friend of mine has gone missing'.

'Oh yes, sir. The American girl on the ferry'.

'Where is she, Des?'

'We don't know that, sir'.

'Can you find her, Des?'

Des raised an arm, and in an instant an especially large goon was at his side. Des had a private word, very close. The goon studied Kelso as he listened.

‘Kelly, isn’t it?’, Des said. ‘Comes over on the ferry from Larne every few months’.

Now everyone was up on the floor, dancing. Even the bar counter was cleared of drinkers.

‘Can we find her, Des?’

Des said, ‘It would be a pleasure to help, sir. If she is still alive, of course’.

‘Do your best, Des’.

‘Perhaps she is a special friend, sir’.

‘A long time ago now, Des, it seems a long time ago now’.

From the curtained door of the VIP Lounge, Jacquie and Janey were watching the dancing with wide and sparkling eyes.