

Seventeen.

Kelso stayed in a grim lodging-house in the West Port, of the sort which had flourished during the first two years of the Protectorate. The window of his room looked directly down into the street. On the first night, sometime around midnight, a fight broke out below and drunken men rolled in the gutter while their ladies urged them to greater valour. But on the second night all was quiet, for a pair of policemen prowled until dawn.

During his time in the lodging-house, there was no message of any sort from the owner of the Three Cats nightclub, or any of the owner's friends in the city's semi-criminal or entirely criminal fraternities. But at least the house was a safe one - Des had been absolutely certain about that - and the likelihood of any police raid taking place, before a tip-off had been issued, was remote in the extreme. And in any case there were few alternatives: and those few presented even greater danger of raid and arrest.

The hotel had begun life as a upper-floor apartment flat of three rooms, but over the years it had been extended deep into the loins of its tenement block. Doors had been knocked-through to adjoining flats, even a stair driven upwards, into a pair of flats in the roof of the block, with views out across the city to the north. In all, there were perhaps fifteen rooms, through which a steady stream of residents rotated from the lower and semi-legal orders of the second Protectorate. Junior and out-of-uniform policemen took their wives there in the afternoon - or perhaps these wives were girlfriends, or important sources to be cultivated from the criminal underworld. Nobody every asked, of course, so nobody could ever be too sure. Sometimes, captains - or at least lieutenants - from that same

underworld made use of the hotel's sanctuary: usually, men and women from the counterfeit-currency industry, whose business it was to launder this currency to order through the city's underworld.

Some of the residents, even, were entirely legal in their affairs, or as near to legal as it was possible to be in the free market for goods and services which sucked at the Protectorate's underbelly: professional window-cleaners, day-labour bricklayers, early-morning office-cleaners, and truck-drivers engaged on the long-distance routes to faraway cities. Then came the strictly semi-legals: petty criminals of a hundred sorts, whom the regime tolerated because they offered no threat to it, and because - above all - it was unable to stamp them out. Among these were counted shoe-shines, street-thieves and jobbing city-centre pimps - the sort of people without residence permits, employment-documents or ration-books of any sorts. And rather than starve they worked, naturally enough, at what came to hand.

Finally, there were the true illegals: camp and prison escapees on the run, or onetime detainees recently released from sentence, barred from employment and forbidden to return to the homes from which they had been dragged before their sentences had begun. One couple, who said that they were man and wife, lived in a hutch on the top floor: the woman had been branded on both cheeks, but the man seemed unharmed. They had once been a juggler-team in a touring circus, before their arrest for beggary: and lived for the day when they would once again find their circus, and it would take them in again. All day they could be heard in their tiny garret, juggling with a pair of Indian clubs which the branded woman had found in a junk-shop one morning in the Grassmarket. The whores with which the district teemed after dark were strictly forbidden from

bringing clients to the premises, unless they were known to be reliable police officers, on account of the security risk that such visitors would otherwise present. Daniels and all forms of religious dissenters and outlaws were also strictly banned from the hotel, and notices urged residents to bring suspected loyalties of this sort to the immediate attention of the management on duty at reception.

This management lived on the first floor and consisted of a pair of elderly sisters who had no illusions whatsoever about the nature of independent business under the Protectorate. A steel door led from reception to their own quarters, which in turn led to a steel fire-escape down to the rear of the building, and then into the warren of alleys running down to the Grassmarket. One or other of them, however, was always on watch at reception, all day and all through the night, surrounded by a litter of old newspapers, biscuits, pre-war picture magazines, long-dead tea-cups and half-bottles of vodka.

On his third morning, Kelso found a handwritten note slipped under the door. It said 'Sandy Bell's at 2'. There was no indication as to where it had come from, and when he asked at reception, the sister on duty said with a smirk that she could not be expected to know about the private business of residents, or messages which had been left for them.

He found a pub in the Grassmarket, already busy with the flotsam of the Protectorate. When Kelso entered, a hush fell on the place, but by degrees it picked up again. On one wall was a recruiting poster for the Specials; wages twice as much as the ordinary police, and purpose-build accommodation centres out in the countryside. A slum boy with a crutch was collecting betting-slips for an illegal bookmaker somewhere. Kelso paid for his drink in Protectorate sterling: it was not the sort of bar in which to produce

dollars. The juggler couple sat in a corner, nursing a drink: their treasured clubs lay aside, neatly stacked. Kelso sat at the next table. The couple had given up hope of finding their own little circus again. They would try their luck juggling and begging in the streets.

The woman said that they had been thrown out of the hotel that morning. They needed money, but if they were to be brought to court again they would get ten years - even for begging.

She said, 'I have to do the talking. He has no tongue'.

The man bowed his head with great courtesy; as if he had been used to this introduction for some time now. He had taught music before he was exposed as a Daniel. It was evident that his fingers had all been smashed, but it was not clear how.

She said, 'He had a beautiful singing voice too, you know'.

But someone had denounced him, they never knew who. Even six months in the camps - after that there could be no job, no house, no ration cards. What else was there to do but beg? Nobody could play a piano after a spell with the thumbkins. That's when they had joined the travelling circus.

She said, 'Of course, that was in the early days. Before the government put a check on what was happening. It doesn't go on now'.

She made it sound like a great improvement. And maybe it was. On an impulse Kelso found a ten-dollar bill and slipped it to the woman. She said that God would bless him, and made it sound like a racing certainty. Her companion bowed his head again, as if receiving the acclaim of some long-past conservatoire.

By now it was close to two. Kelso left the bar and made his way by Candlemaker Row to his rendezvous. But at the gates of the

Greyfriars churchyard, the goon who had guarded the VIP lounge in the Three Cats materialised.

‘In here and quick’, he said, swinging a commanding thumb. A dozen outlaws and down-and-outs watched them without enthusiasm. Someone demanded money for drink: the goon kicked him, but not hard. On the other side of the graveyard, the racket of children could be heard from the school.

Kelso said, ‘I would have thought they would have closed these places by now’.

‘You’re joking’, the goon said. ‘Give it a another couple of years, and you won’t get in there unless your father’s in the Militia’.

The church had been closed a year earlier. Then some of the religious outlaws had taken it over - or at least they stayed there during the night. There were more of them, these last few months, than there had ever been, lodging in the open crypts at the Flodden Wall.

Kelso said, mildly, ‘Perhaps it is the snow’.

‘I’m Mick’, the goon said. ‘I have a message for you from Des’.

They walked among the gravestones like a pair of mourners. The noise of children’s laughter subsided; classes had resumed for the afternoon. Mick’s lower arms were tatoored, perhaps with a maritime motif, but it was not certain. The men skirted the surrounding wall of the cemetery - mourners in search of a recent grave perhaps, or relations seeking-out a relative’s headstone.

Mick said, ‘She isn’t dead’.

The announcement was so sudden, so unexpected that for a moment Kelso wondered what he was talking about.

Mick said, ‘The girl. The girl on the ferry from Larne’.

Kelso said, 'What girl is that, Mick?'

'Don't fuck with me, pal', Mick said, in a perfectly agreeable tone. 'She comes over here to work in that posh library up the road there. The one they closed after the trouble'.

'Trouble where?'

'In the first-floor reading-room. A gunfight. Anyway, she gets her orders from the Americans in Dublin. Every time a run of cocaine comes over, she comes over before it does. So there must be another big run coming over any time now'.

Kelso said, 'Where is she, Mick?'

'I can't tell you that. You will have to speak to Des about that'.

Mick crouched at a gravestone, and seemed to peer at its inscription. He read it out. 'A merchant. Loved and honoured. I'll fucking bet he was. That's how these guys got rich. Dealing like anybody else'.

Mick rose slowly, and his eyes scanned the cemetery. Suddenly, it was very quiet.

Kelso said, 'Where have all the Daniels gone?'

'What the fuck do you think I am looking at?', Mick said. 'We better get out of here quick'.

They were in the Grassmarket when they heard the sirens. Six Militia cars roared past and into Candlemaker Row. The men walked quickly into Fountainbridge and then slowed.

Mick said, 'We have checked. She got onto the ferry at Larne, got a lift on a lorry, and she got off the ferry at Stranraer. She picked up a car there, and drove to Dumfries. Then she was spotted in Moffat. She got as far as Penicuik - that's the last we saw of her'.

'You have good contacts, Mick'

'We have the cops, pal. Not cheap. But quality always costs, mind'.

'I would like a word with Des, Mick'.

'No chance till its dark, pal. Des doesn't come out in the daylight at all. It's not safe, for a man of Des's influence'.

'And what happened after Penicuik?'

'Des will tell you, if he knows yet'.

'I was worried, Mick'.

'I amn't stupid. I will tell you what you are worried about. Every time she comes over, a run of cocaine comes over after her. But this time, she disappears. So maybe she is arrested somewhere. Or panics and takes off somewhere, anywhere. Or maybe does a private deal and disappears with the cocaine'.

Kelso said that yes, he had been worried about just these possibilities.

But Mick said, 'I told you, I amn't stupid like people think I am. I will tell you what you are really worried about. She comes across before the run because she knows how and where it comes in. Right? But she has disappeared. And there is another run on the way. But you don't know when it is coming in. Or where. Right?'

'Will Des find her, Mick?'

'He's got the word out. Des's friends can find anything'.

'I had better speak to Des'.

'We'll be there soon', Mick said.

And he was as good as his word. It was getting dark by the time they approached the Three Cats, and Mick insisted that they take the long route, from the far end of the railway sidings. During the war, he had done four years in some hell-hole prison on the north east coast and he had no plans to go back to that gaol. Or

any other one. It seemed wiser not to ask him why he had been sent there in the first place.

‘Murder’, Mick said, ‘but I didn’t do it. And anyway the bastards asked for it’.

They found Des in the VIP Lounge. He was solicitous of Kelso’s recent wellbeing. Had the little hotel been up to expectations? Des knew it wasn’t the North British: but the management was trustworthy, and would let Des know at once if any problem were to arise. As indeed would every one of the residents. They were all good friends of Des.

In a reproving tone, Des said, ‘You shouldn’t give ten dollar notes to strangers, sir. Not nowadays’.

Kelso said, ‘They seemed trustworthy’.

And Des said at once, ‘Oh, they are very trustworthy, sir. That is why they told me’.

The lounge, like all of its sort, seemed cold and uncaring when empty of people. The vaulted ceiling was plain, rough-cut stone. Once, a train could be heard to rumble overhead, but muted somehow, as if it were not really trying. The walls were lined in black felt, as if the lounge in the past had been home to practitioners in the magic arts. Des took a bottle of whisky from behind the little bar and poured a tumbler for Kelso. He didn’t have one himself.

‘Once a year, sir. It doesn’t agree with me otherwise’.

Kelso said, ‘Kelly made it to Penicuik, Des’.

‘Mick shouldn’t have told you that, sir. I will have to have a word with him’.

‘Where is she now, Des?’

Des looked very serious indeed. The dark eyes scanned the ceiling of his lounge, as if the stones themselves might be listening.

'She did get as far as Penicuik, sir. Then she ran into a Militia road-block. Her papers were in order, but an officer was suspicious'.

'Why, Des?'

'No reason, sir. Except they are expecting some sort of attack by a Daniel column in Edinburgh any night now. Somewhere in the city, but they don't know where. There was some talk of Daniel reinforcements coming into the city through Penicuik. That's why the Militia were there'.

'Where is the attack to be?'

'I don't mix with these people, sir. They are very dangerous. But I hear that their attack will be at the zoocamp tomorrow night. A lot of their senior people are held there'.

'And what happened to her, Des?'

'I am afraid they arrested her, sir'.

'But she is still alive, Des?'

'We believe she is, sir. But she is in custody'.

'Where, Des?'

'That's the problem, sir. We don't know'.

A telephone rang somewhere in the building, shrill and insistent. But Des said that Mick would get it.

'Where is he?', Kelso asked.

Des said, 'He's on the door, sir. You can't trust anyone these days. We have a strict members-only policy here. But you never know who might try to get in when nobody is looking'.

Mick appeared at the black curtain which shielded the evening lounge from the ordinary grade of member. Tattooed hawsers and anchors climbed his arms in dense forests of thick black hair.

He said, 'Booking for tonight. Table for four with private lounge and extras afterwards. They'll pay at the door'.

Des said, 'Sit down, Mick. We want to know where the girl Kelly is'.

'The word's out, Des. People are looking. Our friends in the police. Cleaners, drivers, cooks, all those people. Any prisoner getting out who might have seen her'.

Kelso said, 'Yes, Mick. But where could she be?'

Mick helped himself to a tumbler of whisky. Des watched carefully as the level of the liquor rose in the glass but said nothing. Mick spread his giant arms on the green-baize table; in among the anchors and hawsers, snakes were to be seen, and a heart pierced with an arrow. Perhaps, at heart, Mick too was a romantic.

He said, 'Well, if she is still in Edinburgh. She could have come up before a tribunal already and been sentenced. Taken away somewhere already'.

'That's too quick, Mick. She's still here'.

Mick agreed. They usually took weeks to process detainees. Either the police had her in one of their stations, there were about thirty of them now, scattered around the city. She would be all right there, till they handed her over.

Kelso said, 'It was the Militia who arrested her'.

'I didn't know that, pal. I only knew she got as far as Penicuik. If they've got her - well, they keep prisoners in their barracks. There are six of them round the city. If they lifted her at Penicuik, that's D division, they'll have her at Dalkeith. They've got some right bastards there'.

Des said, 'What about the security police?'

'North British basement, Des', Mick said. 'A very bad place. Dalkeith is a bad enough, especially for women. They'll keep her there for some fun anyway. And if they don't get anything on her,

they'll dump her at the hospital. That's the way they usually do it, see. One of the riot cars on the night shift, they take their women up that way and shovel them out at the front door of casualty. Two of the doctors complained once. But they were taken away the next night and haven't been seen since. People say they made an awful mess of them. Their kids, too'.

'What about the zoocamp?', Kelso said.

'Possible', Mick said. 'That's another bastard of a place. They keep the top Daniels there, and some of the university people. But she doesn't have to be there. There's another holding camp at Portobello. And at Queensferry, people say it's not so bad. Mainly teachers and that kind of folk, on outside work. Railways and roads, mostly. And they have to help the farmers when its ploughing time, like'.

Kelso said, 'We need to find her'.

The three men sat in silence, until a train rumbled overhead, going very fast. The whisky bottle trembled and swayed, until Des laid a soft, restraining hand on it. When the train had passed, they could hear the telephone ringing again. Mick took the call. Then he returned and hitched a thumb at Des. He said 'You'; and tipped another three inches of whisky into his tumbler.

Mick said, 'I was in the merchant navy once. It gives you a taste for it now and again'. When he heard Des returning, he slammed the whisky down in one mouthful.

From the other side of the curtain, Des said, 'You'll get a taste for it again if you don't watch, Mick'.

Des came in and sat down. You could tell he had something important to say. He looked very pleased with himself.

Des said, 'North British basement. But she's being moved out tomorrow. They think she might be one of the Daniels. They will put her in with them'.

'Where to, Des?'

Des said, 'The zoocamp, sir. And she's fine. They won't start on her till tomorrow night'.

Kelso said, 'Any ideas, Des?'

And Des said, 'Maybe that ten dollar note wasn't wasted after all, sir'.

Mick was sent to investigate the state of daylight or darkness prevailing outside. He returned to report that it was entirely dark.

Mick said, as if he found the idea highly unlikely, 'You're not going to go out yourself, Des?'

Des thought deeply for a time, as if calculating great odds. Then it became clear that he had made up his mind. He would stay at the club. Mick would take Kelso to make contact with the Daniels. After that, Kelso would be on his own.

Des said, 'Take a taxi, sir, if you can find one'.

They eventually found a car, near Haymarket. The driver had little fuel left. When Kelso asked if dollars would be helpful, the driver said that he could certainly manage as far as the old cathedral. He drove through Shandwick Place and headed along Princes Street. Des asked why he hadn't gone round the other side of the castle. The driver said there was trouble in the West Port. The whole area was closed by Militia road-blocks. They had attacked a lodging-house in the area, but the driver didn't know why. Quite a respectable place too, all things considered.

The driver had heard that the countryside was quiet, though there had been some trouble out in east Lothian earlier in the day.

And there was trouble in England. There had been some sort of breakout in the labour camps on the Welsh border.

At the foot of the Mound half a dozen Specials riot-cars were parked around the galleries. Uniformed men were stopping traffic at random. The taxi was waved to a stop; and then waved on.

The driver said, 'I hope it isn't you boys they're looking for'.

Wood fires were burning in the gutted interior of St Giles. The outlaws and destitutes who found refuge in the ruins were drinking. Someone had acquired a few cases of navy-issue rum. At the west door, two outlaws were fighting over a woman, but when they saw Kelso and his companion they retreated until they knew the visitors meant no harm. Someone offered them a bottle of rum by the neck: each took a generous swig, which clearly established their credentials in some unspoken way. Around the altar, a drunken party was under way. A band played fiddles and accordions. A bonfire blazed in the middle of the building. Some people were dancing to the music. In the darkness at the foot of one of the columns, a couple was copulating energetically. When they had completed their exertions, they adjusted their rags and joined the drunken crowd around the fire. Neither had a nose, no more than a vague hole somewhere in the middle of the face. Then they danced together, very beautifully indeed: as if they had danced together for a lifetime.

When they had finished, Kelso asked the man where the Daniels had gone. He was extremely drunk, and equally lucid.

'They've all fucked off', he said. 'It's just us rubbish here now'.

Mick wanted to know why. The dancer said he didn't know. They were expecting something, something was going to happen soon. But he didn't know what. Kelso asked where they might be

found. The dancer said he didn't know that either. But fifty dollars helped his powers of recollection enormously. He said their base was somewhere in Leith. Everybody knew that, just the state couldn't find them.

'Try the Cockade for starters'.

The bar was inside the dock security zone, of course. It was their problem to get in.

Mick said, 'Leave that to me, pal'.

A crone tugged anxiously at Kelso's sleeve. When he turned, she thrust out an empty hand, urgent and importunate. He asked what she wanted, but the reply was utterly unintelligible: a torrent of ugly sound without meaning. Suddenly, she opened wide her mouth and extended her tongue: a hole had been drilled through it. Kelso gave her a dollar bill: she made the sign of the cross over him, and proffered a half-empty bottle of rum. By the neck, again. And another importunate and impudent hand: one more dollar!

There were no taxis to be had, nor buses to be seen. They set off to walk to the security zone around the docks. In Cockburn Street an open-backed half-track was parked. It was full of Specials, in riot helmets, waiting for orders. Mick said 'Good evening, boys', in a genial and law-abiding fashion, and they strode on. There were more armoured cars at the top end of Waverley Bridge. They dodged into the station: beneath them, the London express was preparing to depart for Newcastle and York. Beside it was an immense train of flatbacks carrying tanks and anti-aircraft guns. The main concourse was awash with Paramilitary troopers with dogs, patrolling in fours.

Mick said, 'Christ, what have we walked into now?'

'If they catch us on the stairs', Kelso said, 'we're finished'.

‘Just keep walking’.

The stairs were empty. But as they approached the top of these stairs at Princes Street, their way was blocked by a unit of Specials, all in steel helmets. They had dogs too, and were on the point of establishing a check-point there.

‘Just keep walking’, Mick said. ‘And stay close’.

An officer asked where the men were going.

Mick walked straight past him and called over a shoulder, ‘The CafŽ Royal, pal, where the fuck do you think?’

They were half way across the street when the officer called them back.

Mick said, ‘Run like fuck’: and they dodged into the alley behind the General Registrar building as rifle-fire began to crackle behind them. The CafŽ Royal was bright and busy with evening custom as they ran past. For a moment, Mick’s pace broke: and then they ran onwards. At York Place, they slowed, and turned for Leith.

Mick said, ‘We could have gone in. They wouldn’t dare follow us into a pub like that. Not when it’s that busy’.

Near the bottom of the Walk, they saw the barriers of the port security zone ahead. A high wire-netting screen blocked the road: there were gates for wheeled traffic, and smaller ones for seamen, dockworkers and residents on foot. Militia troopers in greatcoats guarded these gates. They too had dogs, and bayonets fixed to their rifles.

Kelso said, ‘There’s something wrong. They are looking for trouble’.

‘I can see that, pal’, Mick snarled. ‘Just follow me’.

They were approaching the gates quickly now. An alley ran at right angles to the Walk; they dived into it, followed it to an open court surrounded by abandoned buildings, and came out on the far side.

'There's a curfew inside', Mick said. 'We will need to be quick'.

A rough pub, dimly lit, could be seen on the other side of the street. Mick took a hundred dollars and disappeared into the pub. At the far end of the street, a high chain-mail fence could be seen, topped with rolls of barbed wire. Somewhere near at hand, shunting waggons could be heard from a rail marshalling yard.

When Mick returned, they crossed a waste-ground of rubble. Tenement blocks had been demolished to keep housing away from the dock area. Then a final block, still standing but emptied of people, the doors bricked and the windows closed with sheet steel. Mick whistled, low and sharp, and a sheet steel shutter opened a fraction on the first floor. Then another, on the ground floor.

A voice said, 'Fifty dollars a head, Mick'.

They were led through the ruins of the building. On the far side, the dock area was bright with light. Small shops were open in the last hour before the curfew began. Laughter spilled from pub doorways.

The same anonymous voice said, 'You know what happens if they catch you in here without papers. Don't blame me, boys'.

They found the Cockade near the main gates. Towards the sea, the superstructure of merchant ships could be seen, sometimes even a lazy ensign from a faraway land. Beyond that again, a ship's horn blew twice to indicate that it was altering course. Perhaps it

was high water, and the vessel was inward bound for the docks: and its thieves.

Mick said he had to get back. He didn't have curfew-exemption papers. He wished Kelso luck and disappeared into the ruins again. Kelso waited for some minutes, and then crossed the road and made his way into the bar. It was busy with dock-workers either going to work or coming from work. Nobody paid the visitor any attention at all. And it was there that the Daniels made contact, swiftly and effortlessly, and spirited Kelso into the heart of the docks.

There were four senior Daniels in the upper administrative offices of a textiles warehouse: and, as they said, the docks had the tightest security of any district in the city, and were the last place that the authorities would look for them. And of course there were any number of routes into the security zone round the docks, and the docks themselves: the dock-thieves usually used the sewers or came in through the rows of walled-up tenements which formed part of the security wall. In a corner, a coal brazier glowed with heat; beside it were branding irons and iron drills.

The principal Daniel was an elderly man who said that he was called Mark. He wore a clerical collar, but had grown his hair long. He was dressed in a fur-lined Militia jerkin, and carried a heavily hooked sickle at his belt. He had been a chaplain with an infantry regiment in the war, he said with a laugh. But he did not say which war. His eyes were startlingly blue: it was hard to see where the warmth ended and the cold began.

He said, 'We will bring a prisoner in later tonight. A Militia trooper from the zoocamp. We have boot and thumbkins. If that won't make him talk, we will wedge him. That's what they used to do to us'.

‘Where did you get these things?’

‘After the Bishop Riots’, Mark said evenly. ‘We looted the museums in Edinburgh. We found hundreds of boots and thumbkins in the basements’.

Kelso said there was a security alert throughout the city. Militia and Specials had cordoned-off the city centre. They were looking for something. But the Daniel chaplain said that this did not matter. They could move their people round Edinburgh and the authorities could do nothing to prevent it.

He said, ‘They know an attack is imminent. But they don’t know exactly where, and they don’t know exactly when. They thought it was tonight. That’s why there is the alert. There will be a curfew tonight, and they will take hostages. But we are not afraid of them’.

Kelso said, ‘When is the attack?’

The chaplain Mark said, ‘Tomorrow night’.

‘Where?’

‘At the zoocamp’, the chaplain said. ‘They have some of our people there and we want them back’.

The old blue eyes looked at Kelso, looked straight through him. The old man smiled; you could sense, rather than see, the military man he once had been.

Kelso said, ‘I want to come with you’.

‘We have been waiting for you’, the chaplain said. ‘We had a message that you would be coming’.

Kelso said, ‘I have a friend. They will put her in the zoocamp tomorrow. I want to get her out’.

The chaplain said, 'You have no choice but to come with us now. We could never let you leave here alive. That would be a dangerous risk to our security'.

Kelso said he had experience of fighting. In Spain, they had often stormed fortified posts during the night. With mortars and naked steel. They had always been fights to the death, nobody asked for quarter and nobody gave it.

The chaplain said, 'That's the way we Daniels fight too'.

From a pocket, he produced sixty two dollars. He said that Kelso could have the money back. It was kind of him to have given it to the Daniels earlier, in the bar and in the cathedral. But the Daniels did not take charity of that sort.

In the corner, a woman was stoking the brazier. Then she lovingly thrust pokers and branding irons deep into the glowing coals. It was the juggler to whom Kelso had given ten dollars that morning. She took up a pair of bellows, and began gently to coax greater heat from the fire.

'Will I start', she said, 'to warm the boot and thumbkins now?'