



DEACON BRODIE: A DOUBLE LIFE

a novel by

DAVID HUTCHISON

This sample of the novel Deacon Brodie: A Double Life was downloaded from <https://hutchwrites.com> and is the Copyright © 2015 of David Hutchison. All Rights Reserved.

The Copyright for this document, the novel from which it is taken, and all applicable Rights, are retained by the author. This document may be forwarded to other readers without any charge(s) or any changes, both of which are strictly prohibited. No part of this document may be reproduced by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, or by any other means, now known or hereafter invented or discovered, without written permission. The novel, and this sample, are a work of fiction. References to historical events, real people, or real places are used fictitiously. Other events, names, characters, and places are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual events, places or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

FRANKLIN *f* PUBLISHING
GREENFIELD USA

Prologue

BY NIGHTFALL the steady rain that had been falling all day had become a continuous misting smirr and now, in the darkest hours, a cold clinging fog wrapped the city.

The riotous New Year revellers who had been celebrating the arrival of 1788 were long gone, leaving the sodden city street deserted. Nothing could be heard other than water dripping from the high, jagged Edinburgh rooftops.

At the head of the High Street, the night watch of the City Guard pressed further back into his box, struggling to stay dry. Drowsy, he scanned the wet cobblestone street and yawned – there wasn't a soul in sight. This was a short-straw duty; others would patrol the numerous over-populated closes which dropped precipitously from either side of Edinburgh's main street. He hated this time of night, with nothing to do as the city slept. Thinking of warming fires and better days, his tiredness began to affect him and he drifted closer to sleep.

He did not see the dark clad figure dart from a doorway some fifteen feet away and disappear down the narrow close between the tall tenements.

The man who had just avoided the City Guard knew he had not been seen. From his hiding place, he had watched

the man for a full five minutes with a growing excitement he found difficult to control.

His body shuddered. This was not risky, it was madness, but as a warm exhilaration coursed through him like fine wine, he felt *gloriously* alive.

At the far end of the close, he stopped and listened, peering into the gloom. A short distance further, standing apart from the towering Edinburgh tenements and hidden from guarding eyes, Councillor Morrison's house stood cocooned in darkness.

Attempting to slow his breathing, and judging himself safe, he hurried to the front door. He paused, looking for any sign of life or light appearing at the back of the tenements. Nothing could be seen apart from the buildings' looming outline.

He reached into his coat for the key. Two days earlier, while visiting the house on business, he had plucked the house key from its hook behind the door and pressed the wards into a tin of putty. If the copy he had made was good, he was in. Easing the key into the lock he turned it, felt a resistance and then, with a yielding clack, the door was his. The copy was perfect.

With extreme care, he closed the heavy door and paused to listen. The only sound was the pulsing of blood in his ears.

Pulling the dark lantern from his coat he lit it. As his eyes accustomed themselves to the thin light, he could see three doors leading off the entrance hall. The middle door was the one to enter. That door opened on to a short passage, which led to two bedrooms, one a servant's; the other, his final goal, was where Councillor Morrison and his wife lay sleeping. He opened the door and glided along the passage.

At the end, he stopped between the two doors and listened. Danger was behind the door to his left. This was Edie's bedroom, and as a trusted personal servant she could wake at even a soft call from her master. He knew the room on the right, where the Morrisons lay, was safe; earlier he had been among those ushering out the Old Year, and had made sure they had both drunk a little too much claret. Listening at their door he heard deep muffled snoring.

Cocking his head to the servant's door he heard nothing. Was she awake? There was one way to tell, one way forward. He lifted the latch on the door. The noise it made sounded loud in the stillness and he felt a quickening heartbeat, a tightening in his stomach.

Without hesitating he entered the room; if he *had* woken her, the advantage was still his and he could make good his escape. Stepping to the side of her bed, he looked down and could see that Edie was in a deep sleep with a slight smile on her face. He left her room and crossed the passage to the Morrisons' bedroom. The latch on this door lifted without a noise and there before him, lying under deep covers, John and Margaret Morrison slept a righteous if somewhat drunken sleep.

Smiling, he thought of the morning to come when John Morrison, City Councillor, Dean of the Guild of Hammermen, would discover what had happened to him right under his nose. He could imagine the indignant tone of Morrison's voice, his features drawn into moral outrage at the loss of material wealth.

Ducking down under the bed, he pulled out the small mahogany chest which lay there. He knew the chest's lock was broken, as Morrison had shown it to him several days earlier. As a favour he had offered to replace it, but the Councillor was not a man for favours. Well, he thought, I'll do a bigger favour for you now: *Blessed are the poor*. Lifting the lid, he withdrew a bundle of banknotes and a gold ring. Slipping these into an inner pocket, he stood and without a backward glance left the room to the Morrisons' medley of snores.

As he passed Edie's room he heard her mutter some incomprehensible Gaelic in her sleep. Reaching the main door, he stepped out into the enveloping velvet darkness and ran across the gap between the house and the high tenements. Stealing up the close, he paused at the top, once again almost on the High Street. He peered round the corner to see if the City Guard was still protecting the city, but now the man was fast asleep and propped against the side of his box.

Stepping out of the close he strode down the deserted High Street. Through the gloom, he could make out the misty outlines of the towering Luckenbooth tenements and the Kirk of Saint Giles in the distance. He crossed the empty street, leapt across the foul gutter in full spate and, with one brief look behind, turned down the steep incline of Lybberton's Wynd. Halfway down the close he paused, once again glancing behind, then disappeared into the doorway. Climbing the turnpike stair to the third floor, he took the keys from his coat, opened the door and stepped inside.

Safe in the still silence he relished the elation running through him while resisting the urge to laugh out loud; this adventure had been a better thrill than *any* gamble on the turn of a card or a roll of the dice. Shrugging himself out of his coat, he withdrew the banknotes and the ring. Placing the notes in a jacket pocket, he slipped the ring on his small

finger and moved further into the house.

Opening a bedroom door, he felt the warmth from a dying fire. In a few moments he had undressed and slipped under the bedcovers. As he wrapped his arms around the sleeping figure savouring the heat of her body he realised just how chilled he had become.

Startled by this cold intrusion, Jean woke from her sleep. Turning round and propping herself up on one elbow she looked down at the man in her bed.

“Will Brodie. And what time is *this* to visit?” she asked with mock severity.

“Still, Jean, I’ve brought you a present.”

She smiled and sat up. Her long fair hair, untied, fell forward around her face as she leaned her body toward him. “I know your presents Will, but this is not the hour,” she said, teasing him.

Brodie held up his hand in front of her face and the ring caught the final flickers from the fire. “This,” he said.

“William Brodie, I think you are *indeed* a fool,” and rolled over on top of him, sharing the warmth of her body.

As the raw light of the first morning of the year crept out of hiding into the eastern Edinburgh sky, the night watch of the City Guard woke with a start and cursed the rain and the world in general; Edie rolled over in her bed and out of her dreams; Councillor John and his wife Margaret snored on in unison; and Will and Jean clung to each other entwined in their warmth.

Chapter I

“WILL BRODIE. WAIT THERE. Stay right where you are Councillor.”

The officious voice bursting in on him made Brodie’s heart jump, stopping him in mid-step. Turning round, he was confronted by the small figure of William Creech bustling toward him from the doorway of his bookshop, darting between startled passers-by.

Brodie calmed himself. “Councillor Creech. A good New Year to you.”

Ignoring this with an impatient fluttering of hands, Creech said, “Have you heard the news?”

“What news?”

“John Morrison robbed. On a Sunday too.”

This last made Brodie almost laugh in Creech’s face. Just like him, he thought, and if truth be told, more concerned about crime on a Sunday than Morrison’s loss. “What? John Morrison? I was with him last night. We had an Old Year’s drink together.”

“Aye, he said so,” said Creech, looking close into Brodie’s face.

A little too close, thought Brodie, wondering if his amusement had shown. To move Creech on, he asked, “Is there anyone apprehended?” He knew he had to have this conversation, but this man would not have been his first choice. Creech was one of the self-appointed guardians of the city’s morals and looked into everyone’s affairs – a busybody always sticking his nose where it did not belong. Leading his life in what he deemed to be pious rectitude, Creech used his position as Town Councillor, Elder of the Kirk, publisher and bookseller to speak out, fulminating – without end, thought Brodie – on the unceasing lowering of standards in the city.

“Apprehended? It’s just been discovered this morning,” replied Creech, rolling the words out as if explaining to a child. “No doubt, at this time of the year, one of the many *strangers* to the town, and long gone.”

“Strangers?” asked Brodie picking up his tone on the word.

“Well, you understand me Deacon. The town has many who pass through. There *was* a time when we knew everyone and everyone knew us.”

Brodie looked down at Creech and bridled at being included by him; he would never be like him. “Aye, changed days,” he said, to push the man on.

“Changed days *indeed*,” Brodie had thrown the right lever. “Once, people like us would only be out of a Sunday to visit the Kirk and nothing else. Your father was a regular churchgoer.” This last came at Brodie as a physical rebuke. “Nowadays, even Gentlemen can be seen enjoying themselves on the Lord’s Day instead of observing a day of devotion.” Brodie tried to interject but Creech held up his hand.

“No, no, Will . . . I know you can discover some defence – we live in modern times – *dissolute* times, I say. Nowadays, Gentlemen, if you can dignify them that way, spend more time at the card table and in the tavern than at their devotions. They don’t realise what a bad example they set.” And, drawing his features into pinched distaste, “There’s more drinking, more gambling and more whoring. Mark my words Brodie,” slipping from the familiar, “without their religion, men are mere animals and their backwards slide is allowing Edinburgh to become a cesspit in parts. It’s God’s word alone that saves a man from the brothel, with its attendant gambling den and nest of thieves.”

“William, William, calm yourself,” said Brodie as Creech paused for breath at the high note of his tirade, “Councillor Morrison is robbed, that’s the thing.”

At this, Creech subsided, realising that many in the street had stopped to listen. Ever since his protégée, the so-called ploughman poet, Robert Burns, had penned a ‘burlesque lament’ to his publisher in which he – and others – had sensed a mocking tone, he had been more sensitive of his public face; a Gentleman would not be listened to if he were a figure of fun. “Aye, just so,” he said in a lower voice, “you know my views. I just wish others could see as clearly as *I* do, that’s all. You’re right; John Morrison’s misfortune is the thing.”

Brodie nodded in solemn agreement. “Will I see you later, at the Council meeting?”

“The first of the year? Aye, that you will. We Councillors must do something there to try and curb this growing lawlessness.” And, with a short stiff nod, Creech turned on his heel and made his way back to his bookshop wedged at the end of the Luckenbooths building.

Through narrowed eyes, Brodie watched Creech go. My father may have been a regular churchgoer, he thought, but he didn’t need the thickness of a Bible to stand on to give him stature in this town.

With a little smile, Brodie turned away; time to get to his workshops. He walked up the High Street’s gentle incline at a slow pace. In true Edinburgh style, yesterday’s day of sombre dark cloud and unremitting rain was past, and the morning’s winter sun was attempting to warm the street. He took in the scene before him as he walked, seeing the city coming alive, with the traders’ stalls which ran down the centre of the street already set and servants busy buying for the day ahead. Looking up at the tall eight and nine storied tenements on either side, he saw the morning sun dancing off the confusion of merchants’ signs painted on each floor from street to rooftop, their vibrant reds, yellows and blues alive as the market before him. A chill breeze from the east stirred the noise and the smells, and with memories of last night’s adventure fresh in his mind, Brodie thought, Yes, life *is* good.

He had not walked far when he came upon a small group of blue-bonneted cadies, the city’s messengers, warming themselves around a brazier beside a city well. Seeing him approach, a younger cadie spoke up, “Can we do something for you Deacon Brodie?”

“Not today. You’ve heard of Councillor Morrison’s misfortune?”

“Aye, that we have. We’ll catch the culprit for sure.”

Brodie knew that, along with the fearsome men who made up the City Guard, the cadies were the main reason for the city’s relative safety. All of them knew everyone, and as they made their way from end to end of the town, carrying letters and delivering messages, their knowledge of Edinburgh’s inhabitants – and every visitor – was second to none. The joke was that if someone raised his fist in one house, a cadie was relating the story to someone in another before the blow had even landed.

“Councillor Creech and I were just talking; he reckons this was passing strangers.”

A few cadies nodded as if agreeing, but one said, “No, Master Brodie, this had to be someone who knew his way around.”

“Well, if you think so,” Brodie offered; this was a conversation he wished he had not started.

“Aye, and right under the nose of the Guard too. It’s offensive.”

“Well, I know you men know everything better than anyone else, so keep your ears open. If you hear anything, even a whisper, let me, or any Councillor, know immediately. A good day to you all.”

Relieved to bring this conversation to a close, Brodie turned from them and continued towards his workshops. With his sense of well-being now slightly diminished, he mulled over last night’s adventure and the cadies’ response. These men were not blinded by thoughts of morality and piety like Creech; a crime had been committed and it had to be from within.

All at once, he felt as if he was carrying a sign that pointed him out in the milling crowd. Then, with a small smile, he shrugged and thought, but not a crime by one of our own; that’s unthinkable.

With this thought dispelling the cadies' certainty of catching culprits, he reached his workshops. His foreman paused in his work as he arrived. "Good morning, Master Brodie, and a good New Year to you. You've heard about Councillor Morrison?"

Brodie gave him a brief smile. "A good New Year to you, Robert. Aye, Councillor Creech told me of the robbery," and seeing his foreman's expectant look, "It's a bad business, and a bad way to start the year. I'm hoping that we'll come up with something other than mere words at today's Council meeting."

"Well, if anything can get a handle on this, the Council can."

Brodie kept his face straight, resisting a rejoinder, asking instead whether the work of the day was in hand. Then, making some vague comments about business matters needing his attention, he left; a quiet celebration, if only with myself, is in order, he thought.

Making his way downhill and passing the now unoccupied well where the cadies had been, he ducked into John Clark's Tavern at the head of Flesh Market Close. Although it was early, Clark's was already packed with workers from the butchers in the close, idlers, and those with nothing better in their heads than starting, then completing, their day with a drink. Brodie liked the place. As he looked round the busy tavern, he knew no one was going to quote scripture at him, no one would talk polite nonsense at him, and there was no one with assumed airs and graces. Better, no one would ask anything of him. This is honest, he thought. After a couple of whiskies and a silent toast to the Councillor Morrisons of the world, he felt better prepared for the Council.



"Gentlemen. Gentlemen," Councillor Johnson's deep voice cut through the chatter of the assembled Councillors talking at once; it was time, as Deputy Lord Provost, for him to start their meeting. "Let us take our seats and do the city's business."

Brodie looked round the assembled group, the ultimate power in the City of Edinburgh, the great and good sitting in Council. His father had sat in this same room for many years, no doubt with some of the same men, talking the same talk, raising the same problems and dividing up the city's profitable trade between them. Here were the Deans and Deacons of all trades necessary to the city's requirements and where, if the city did not require it, these men would talk it into one. It was as if the table in front of him mapped out each man's portion of the city. Here, every Councillor looked after their own business, ensured that their Guilds were restrictive enough to protect their profits, and exercised the exclusive privilege of their Craft Guild to produce their own goods and services. Now in his forty-sixth year, Brodie sat at the table, like his father had just six years before, as the influential Deacon of the Incorporation of Wrights, the head of the Craft of Cabinetmaking in the city.

Councillor Johnson waited for silence. "A prayer before we start. Councillor Creech."

Creech gave Johnson a grave bow. "Thank you Councillor Johnson. Gentlemen, let us pray." After leading a short prayer, calling on God to bless the Council in this new year, he said, "Before any other business, may I, on behalf of every Councillor here, extend my sympathies to John," nodding in the direction of Councillor Morrison, who sat in his own desolate world.

Hearing this, Morrison raised his head. "Gentlemen, all I can say is that I am shocked. That good Christians, such as Margaret and I, could be robbed as we slept – and on the *Sabbath* night – is not only shocking, it is an affront to our, and the city's, dignity."

Everyone round the table nodded in agreement. Brodie, feeling a smile rising, kept his head down thinking, John, you don't disappoint me.

"Well, what do we propose?" Councillor Bruce asked. "There's been too much crime lately." Bruce, the oldest of the Council, was the Deacon of the Incorporation of Jewellers, with one shop in the town and plans to open another in the New Town to the north, the building of which was – at last – well underway, and beginning to make hefty profits for many Councillors at the table.

Catching his concern, Creech said, "We all have much to lose if we can't stop criminals from acting with impunity. None more so than the simple townsfolk who look to us for protection *and* guidance."

"Just so, Councillor Creech," Bruce responded, "but what do we *propose*?"

Nobody spoke, then Johnson broke the silence: "Increase penalties for crime?"

With a snort, Bruce said, "We usually hang them for theft, what d'you suggest, hanging them twice?" At this, a complete silence fell over the Council. After several moments, Bruce continued in a more reasonable tone, "As I

understand it John, there was no sign of a break-in, yes?"

"Aye, that's right."

"So, look to your servants."

"Man, I've known them, and their families, all my life. I'll swear to their honesty."

Bruce shrugged, "Well, what then?"

Brodie could not resist walking the risky line which had opened before him. "John's right. Our servants are as our family," and turning to Morrison, "Perhaps a visitor?"

Creech shook his head, "No, no, Deacon . . . you are clutching at straws. Servants? Visitors? You may as well suggest a man of the cloth. No villain is going to make me swerve from trust in those I invite over my threshold, nor those who do my bidding."

"Well then," said Bruce, "we're without either an idea *or* a plan."

Johnson, cautious as always, said, "We'll not quite go *that* far, Andrew. Whatever we come away with today, the one thing we can't tell the townsfolk is that we have no plan."

"Aye," Bruce replied, "there's enough who believe we have no ideas already."

Stung by this, Creech said, "New laws, and when we catch these miscreants we'll have the Courts use the *fullest* severity of the law against them," adding with an emphatic nod, "And, by God, we'll let the townsfolk know we mean business."

"Well," said Johnson, "we'll have the Clerks post a reward for this particular crime and let the *Courant* have our views."

Creech pushed back from the table. "That's fine and well Councillor Johnson, but *I* believe there's more we can do . . . right now."

Everyone turned to Creech, who at that moment sat illuminated by a pale shaft of light coming through the Chambers' high windows. Brodie winced. He had hoped that some, in particular Creech, would not go off on one of their usual tirades. Man, he loves the sound of his own voice.

Looking round, Creech said, "I was talking to Deacon Brodie earlier about these crimes as being part of a greater malaise within the city."

"And?" Bruce snorted.

Ignoring him, Creech continued, "There's far too many in our city who carry the honourable title Gentleman yet act in a wholly different way."

"Is that so?" Bruce said, as if something novel had just appeared before him.

"Aye, it is," snapped Creech; he was not going to be put off. "So-called Gentlemen can be found, *any* day of the week, at the cockfights, playing dice, drinking and wenching." Brodie concentrated on a spot on the table. "Where you find intemperance and improvidence, where the word Gentleman is a mere word and the person himself dissolute, there you will find the seeds of criminality."

Bruce, who had already had his quart of sherry that morning, said, "I'm sure there's a point you are making – that is to the business at hand – but I'm damned if *I* can see it."

"Well damned you may be, we all may be, if you *don't* get my point," Creech retorted. Interruptions from Bruce were expected, but an irritation nonetheless. He opened his arms, palms raised as if to encompass them all in the light which bathed him. "What I say is this, a true Gentleman – and I'll count every man here – does not disport himself in such ways. There is an example to be shown to all, and Gentlemen who do not act as such are, I feel, responsible for this latest misfortune of John's."

"Come, come, Creech . . . what are you saying?" Now Bruce was indignant; it was one thing to be on the City Council with the man – having him preach at him was quite a different matter.

For a brief moment, the glass of Creech's pince-nez reflected the watery light from the windows, hiding his eyes. "What I am saying is twofold. One, we should use the influence we have here in this room well and rub out these un-Christian low-life haunts which are as a pox on the city. Two, we should be aware of our own behaviour and just how our behaviour exerts an influence in this town." Creech was fired up. Peering at the others over his glasses, he said, "If we do not set a shining example for people to follow, in *God's* name, how can we expect others to behave?"

Johnson tried to calm him. "I'm sure we all try to act in a Christian way at all times, William."

By now, the light that had bathed Creech had moved on. In a quiet voice he said, "There's too many have a two-

sided nature in them.”

With the faintest shadow of a smile, Brodie thought, Amen, to that.



The Council meeting was to continue, but Brodie had excused himself with the need to tell his foreman something important. The other Councillors had, of course, accepted that; when it came to a choice between the city’s business and their own, there was never a question. He was glad to leave the Chambers. There’s too much boring talk in the Council, he thought, and where’s the profit in that?

Shrugging this off, he surfaced on the High Street. Turning his mind to last night’s adventure, he was aware that even thinking on it excited him – it had been more exhilarating than any card game and a *far* greater thrill. Rather than heading for his workshops, he headed for Lybberton’s Wynd to see Jean and the little girl who seemed to hold his heart in the palm of her hand.

As he arrived, Kirsten rushed to leap into his arms and, catching her, he spun round, holding her tight to his chest. “Well now young Miss, how are you today?”

Kirsten snuggled deep into his neck. “I’m fine, Da.”

Hearing them, Jean, who had been helping her maid-servant Peggy prepare a meal in the kitchen, came through. “So soon, Will?” she asked with a smile.

“Aye,” Brodie replied, swinging Kirsten on to her feet, “I wanted to see this little lady.”

From below, Kirsten looked up saying, “I’m not little.”

Brodie laughed. “No, you’re all grown up . . . you’re what, twenty now?”

Kirsten looked from him to Jean, her dark eyes serious, and said, “I’m *seven*, Da,” and at this, her parents exchanged smiles of pleasure.

Jean came beside Brodie, raising herself and leaning in to kiss him. “So, it’s Kirsten that brings you here?”

Catching a heady trace of her scent, he smiled. “It’s your cooking I can’t resist, lass.”

“Well now, Will Brodie,” she responded, placing her hands on her hips and tilting her head to one side, “as you know the cooking’s Peggy’s . . . and here was I thinking it was *me* you couldn’t resist.”

Brodie looked her up and down, taking in her features, tracing the curves of her body and feeling the warmth between them. God, she is pretty, he thought.

“Well?” she asked, her eyes sparkling with pleasure.

“Why would I ever resist you?” he said, then, “Damn, I meant to get you a present on the way here.”

“*More* presents?” she laughed, “You’ll spoil me.”

“If I ever did, I would be the biggest fool.”

Catching his hands in hers, she asked, “Are you staying, Will?”

“Aye, later. I’m going to try my hand at Michael Henderson’s tables tonight . . . I’m feeling particularly lucky right now.”

Jean brought a little pout to her face. “Well later it is then. Come, let’s eat.”

Chapter 2

BRODIE LEFT JEAN’S HOUSE and, walking down the steep close, away from the High Street, emerged in the Cowgait. As he continued towards the Grassmarket those he passed gave him nods of acknowledgment, greeting him, “Master Brodie”, some even raising fingers to their temples in salute.

His grandfather, Ludovick, had been the one to establish the Brodie name in Edinburgh, with his father, Francis, setting up Brodie’s business, and now he was a well-known and influential figure of significance in the city. Gentleman, Councillor, Deacon of his Guild, business owner – Brodie knew how rank played a major part in the city’s life. Yet, if truth could ever be told, he cared very little for this public face, and none of the greetings he received mattered to him; these people were greeting the rank, not the man.

Last night was exciting while, apart from being with Jean and Kirsten, the day had not even come near to being interesting. Thinking of Jean and their daughter, he knew they would always be unknowns in Edinburgh. Class and rank

were all and, although Jean had his heart, she could never be a wife; *she* would never be seen on his arm in the High Street.

Stepping from the Cowgait and into the bustle of the Grassmarket, he shrugged off his introspection, and merging with the milling crowd felt a deeper part of himself responding. He knew that the thrill of last night's adventure, lying with Jean, his jewel of a daughter and wagering on the cards ahead of him were the things which made him alive. No Edinburgh morality, no bestowed sense of rank, would ever give him that.

With such thinking his father would be turning in his grave – everything *he* had ever done was driven for his, and his family's, good standing. But, as he approached Michael Henderson's hostelry, he thought, Aye father, I can play your safe, respectable and boring game forever, but right now all I want is high red cards and, by God, the Devil can take the rest.

The hostelry was in full flight as he arrived with the noisy outer yard a crowded confusion of people arriving and leaving. Horses were being harnessed to coaches being readied for journeys near and far, and groups of people stood around, some either bound for the hostelry inside or, with loud drunken voices, leaving it.

He threaded his way through the busy yard, and as he entered the inn the heat and noise hit him like a warm wind. Here on the lower floor the wide main tavern gave out to smaller and different sized rooms, some for private parties, some for eating. Surveying the scene he saw what he reckoned to be a hundred people in the main area alone and, with the bedrooms above, the count would be doubled. Pushing his way to the bar he was spotted by Michael Henderson, who greeted him with a booming, "Aye, Will. A good New Year to you."

"And to you, Michael. Man, this is some business you have. A Black Cork please."

Henderson, a tall bearded man with the girth of two, gave him a loud and open laugh. "Aye Will, business *is* good," and looking round over Brodie's head, "How could it not be?" Placing an ale in front of him, he asked, "And you Will, how are you? How's *your* business?"

Taking a sup, Brodie said, "I'm well Michael, and so is business. Is there a card game?"

"There's *always* a game Will," and pointing with a fat thumb, "Off to your left. Now, what about the Mains . . . will you be entering one of your birds?"

Although cockfights occurred on any day of the week, the Mains was famous as the high-stakes monthly venue in Edinburgh. Only the very best fighting birds would be entered and fortunes could be made and lost. "Aye, that I will Michael. Although, I want to watch a couple of the best cocks in action first, before I'll put mine in. There's no point joining a fight you can easily lose."

"I hear you there, Will," and with a wink, "Good luck with the cards."

Brodie made his way to the smaller room Henderson had pointed out. Here the beams were lower, making the room snug and diminishing the noise from the tavern. Around one table there were six players, with a small crowd looking on.

As he entered, one or two greeted him just as a player at the table laid his cards down with a triumphant flourish, "And there you have it." Laughing, he looked up and saw Brodie on the edge. "Will, come in, come in, your money has to be mine."

Brodie laughed. "Graham, I was just thinking the same. In the opposite sense of course."

Graham Kidd was a close friend and they had known each other since childhood. Having grown up into their father's businesses, with Kidd often making the metalwork for Brodie's cabinetry, their business would coincide and he, like Brodie, was a lover of the fine things in life with a constant craving for the thrills of gaming. Brodie could see by the money before him that his friend was on a winning run, and noted a contained excitement about him. "I'll watch for a while."

"Just so Will, take the lie of the land," and with an open laugh, "then save yourself the bother of playing – just *give* me your money."

As he drank his ale, Brodie watched the ebb and flow of the game. Nobody was making much headway apart from Kidd. Most seemed cautious, and some may just as well have thrown their money away. There's nothing like cards for bringing out a man's character, he thought.

After a while, one of the players had exhausted himself and his money, getting up with a curse. With a nod to the others, Brodie slipped into the vacant seat.

"At last Will," said Kidd, "you have the lie?"

"I do. You have the money but I have the skill."

Kidd gave this a loud laugh. "That sounds like a challenge to me. But, before we start, let me introduce you to this

poor fool beside me before you make him poorer. Deacon Brodie, meet George Smith."

Brodie had noted the man, one of those playing with caution but losing nevertheless. He extended his hand, "George," and as Smith shook it he felt the grip given him. So, a Craft Brother, but he gave him no recognition, thinking it better to wait and see.

It was not long before Brodie knew he was at an idle table; the cards ran right at times and he was up, at other times they ran contrary, but he lost little. From time to time he sized up Smith. The man was not playing badly, but playing poorly; when he had a winning hand his winnings were small. He also noted that when he won there was little, if any, celebration. Catching his accent as foreign, he asked, "Where are you from, George?"

"Originally Boxford in England, but I stayed in Birmingham for many years."

"Ah, I've never been," and he noted how Smith seemed to brighten and open up when he talked, as if relieved not to have cards in his hand and their study in his head. Brodie warmed to him.

"Enough with the talk, deal the cards," grumbled Kidd. "Talk is too damned sociable. If I wanted talk, I could've stayed home and talked with Helen."

Brodie nodded, thinking, Let's see if I can change things for George.

Soon the table found itself on a hand with three remaining players, then two: Brodie and Smith. Brodie looked again at his hand; not great, but strong nevertheless. He coaxed Smith forward twice and then, with a dramatic increase of the wager, asked in an even tone, "What d'you have George?"

Smith turned over his cards; nothing of any consequence. "Ach," Brodie exclaimed, "you have me," throwing his cards face down in disgust. He saw Smith's faint smile as he took his winnings, and knew that this hand had brought him square. Pushing back his chair he said, "You know, the cards have been wrong for me tonight. Do you want to take a small supper, George?" adding quickly, "As my guest."

Smith gave him an open smile, "That's very kind of you."

"Right, let's do that," and to Kidd, "Don't be spending that money now, or just be giving it to Helen – I'll be wanting it back Graham."

Kidd laughed, shaking his head. "You take care, Will."

Making their way back into the tavern, Brodie saw Michael Henderson again. "I'll take a little supper with George here, Michael. Do you have a small room free?"

"There's always a room for you Will," Henderson boomed back, pointing out a door off to his right.

Turning to Smith, Brodie said, "I'll get a couple of drinks, you go ahead George." He watched Smith's retreating back and then raised his eyebrows at Henderson in silent query.

Henderson leaned forward, lowering his voice, "You have no worries there Will. He's a good man. He's had more than his share of troubles, but you'll find him on the level."

Brodie followed Smith to the dining room and saw that Henderson had selected a good one for them. The snug, wood-panelled room was warmed by a fire, and with an outer door the noisy tavern was almost silenced. He laid an ale before Smith. "Your health, George."

"Thank you Master Brodie."

"It's Will to friends, George," he replied, smiling, "Always Will."

At that moment a pretty, dark-eyed serving girl entered. "Good evening Master Brodie, what will you be having this evening?"

Brodie winked at Smith. "Come now Maggie, I've just been saying to George here, that Master Brodie is for other places."

Maggie laughed. "Oh, you know me, I'm nothing if not formal."

It was Brodie's turn to laugh. "Nothing Maggie? You can offer me nothing but formal?"

She smiled. "Nothing that would be of any use to you right now, Will," her dark eyes glittering, catching the light from the fire.

"Ach, you're a tease, Maggie Lee. Give me a kiss and I'll call it quits."

Maggie feigned horror. "Master *Brodie*, what are you saying? And in mixed company, too. I'm a good girl."

Brodie laughed. "Then as a good girl, you're no use to me. You'd better bring me . . ." and he turned to Smith, "what? . . . some herring and a couple of whiskies, and be sharp about it too."

Maggie smiled and then, leaning in, gave Brodie a quick kiss on the cheek. "Right away, Master Brodie."

Smith watched her go. "You're not married then, Will?"

“Me? No. I have a mistress, a bright light to lift the gloom, and a beautiful daughter by her too. They have my heart but . . . well, this is Edinburgh, marriage is not in our, or *this* city’s, stars. You, George?”

Smith did not know what to say to this but replied, “Yes, Mary. We’ve been married now . . . oh, fifteen years.”

“Ah, it’s a good thing. So, how did you arrive in Edinburgh? Give me your story George. Everyone who arrives in Edinburgh must have a story.”

“Well, I was working in Birmingham. As a locksmith. Good work too, but the man I worked for died and I couldn’t pick up his business.”

“A locksmith? Were there no other positions for you? Could your Guild not help?”

“Our Guilds are not as strong as here, Will. I picked up *some* work, but not enough, and then less and less. So Mary and me ended up getting a horse and cart, from her brother, and travelling – hawking goods where and when we could.”

Brodie saw Smith’s frown as he turned over these hard times. “And so you ended up here?”

“Yes, we got here about two years ago and I fell ill almost immediately.”

Just then the door opened and Maggie returned with their supper. “So,” said Brodie, “you come back to tease me some more Maggie Lee.”

“Listen to him. The only tease here is you, Will Brodie.”

He laughed. “Was it not *you* who kissed *me*?”

“Aye, and apart from your supper, it’s the only thing you’ll be getting tonight.”

Turning to Smith, Brodie said, “See, George? She comes in here all flirty, gives me a kiss and then tells me that’s all I’m getting.” He slipped some coins into the pocket of her apron and with a slight bow, “Now be off with you Maggie, I’ll ring the bell if I *do* need you.” He watched her retreating form with pleasure and then turned to Smith, “Go on . . . you arrived here and then fell ill.”

“Well that was an awful time. I was ill for four months solid. We sold all our goods; eventually we had to sell the horse too. We were staying here and Michael took pity on us.”

“Aye, Michael Henderson’s a good man and true, George. One of the few. So, where do you stand now? I’m certain you don’t make a living as a sharp at cards.”

Smith laughed. “No. Michael loaned me the money and I’ve got a grocer’s, in the Cowgait, with a house in the back.”

“Have you looked at premises in the New Town? The Cowgait’s not a bad place but I think, with the bridge built, the New Town will be the place to be.”

“Yes, but the rents are too dear; beyond me, really.”

“Well, I’ll need to see what I can send your way, George. We must help each other,” thinking that there must be a way in which Smith could get set. Then, turning to his supper, “Now . . . let’s eat.”

He had caught the man’s measure. Unlike him – availing himself of every opportunity, inheriting a secure and wealthy lifestyle, trained well in his Craft and now a respected person of position and influence – Smith, through no fault of his own, had had an uphill struggle in life.

How strange, he thought . . . for some, everything is mapped out and falls into place with ease. Others, like Smith, had nothing but continual struggle, and sometimes *despite* what life may provide them. His own father had had eleven children and, although only two remained on this Earth, the Brodie name continued. Smith had suffered four months of illness and lost everything. He raised his glass. “It’s good to have met you George.”

With an open smile which lit his face and seemed to wipe his cares away, Smith replied, “Yes, it’s good to have met *you*, Will.”

Chapter 3

BRODIE STEPPED OUT on to the High Street the next morning wearing his finest white suit, a new blue silk waistcoat with gold stitched embroidery, and a light heart. Today he was making his way to Bunker’s Hill on the edge of the New Town to call on his young sister, Jamie. He thought of calling for a sedan chair for this visit but the leaden sky threatened rain, not snow; he would walk.

Jamie was the last child born to his parents and he had thought she would never marry. However, last year she had surprised him when, at age twenty-seven, she met Matthew Sheriff and they married in a matter of months. Judging by her light step, marriage appeared to suit her well.

Matthew had a very successful upholstery business he had built from scratch, and Brodie often placed work his way. All it needed was a word to a customer and Matthew had the business. Brodie liked the symmetry; Matthew would do a good job at a fair price – he would not embarrass him otherwise – and when one of Matthew's customers needed a cabinetmaker, well then, he would have the trade.

He had not gone far when he met Councillor Bruce with one of the City Clerks. "Deacon Brodie, this is well met."

"Good morning, Gentlemen," Brodie responded, with a polite bow.

Breathing hard, Bruce said, "We were just at my shop. With all these damned alterations nowadays, the close outside my shop is being lowered . . . apparently for *steps*, no less. They're at it now."

Brodie saw that Bruce was in a foul mood. "And?" he offered.

"Well, with a lowered close, my shop door is now," glaring at the Clerk, "the wrong size."

Cowed by Bruce, the Clerk responded in a low voice, "A City Work Order was issued Councillor."

"*Hah*," exclaimed Bruce, dismissing the man. "Anyroad, I was just heading for the Council Chambers to have a tender issued, but that'll take forever," adding, "Damned paperwork . . . let's not fool around with tenders, you can do this, eh Will?"

"Of course, Andrew. I'm headed for my sister's on Bunker's Hill but I'll stop by your shop on the way, see what's involved. We'll get started as soon as we can."

"See?" Bruce thundered at the Clerk and giving Brodie a small bow, "Thank you, Will."

Brodie left them, and when he reached Hope's Wynd, he walked down the wide close to look at Bruce's shop. The workers were busy removing a great swathe of earth to level the ground and, although they were leaving the earth in front of Bruce's, when they finished a new door would be needed.

Back on the High Street, he looked round and spotted a blue bonnet. "*Cadie*."

The cadie ran up. "Deacon Brodie?"

"Go to my workshops and tell Robert to get to Councillor Bruce's shop to measure for a new door. Tell him not to waste any time and get started on it immediately."

With a nod, the cadie was off. Brodie watched him run off up the street, weaving through the crowd, then continued downhill to the North Bridge.

Every time he turned from the enclosing high tenements, and set foot on the bridge which led from the High Street to the New Town, he felt a sense of liberating openness. Not so many years ago, this, like the rest of the street, had been a wall of tenements on either side; now, with the demolition of many of them, a wide vista to the north opened the city.

His father, from *his* position on the Council, had had a hand in persuading the city to finally act on its desire to build a new town, saying, "Aye William, we'll be set for life now." Today, as he walked toward the New Town, Brodie rolled the word *set* around in his head; it sounded fixed and unchanging to him, an unwelcome thought.

The builders were busy day and night and, although the rents were ferocious, many were making the move from the Old Town. In fact, some wealthy Edinburgh folk were almost bolting northwards, tired of the cramped and insanitary conditions their families had endured for generations. And that last outbreak of illness that had swept through the city like a fire, taking the lives of hundreds, had made up the minds of the more hesitant. Not for the first time, he wondered whether he should establish workshops there.

Crossing the bridge, he could see new buildings going up to his left and, far in the distance, the sun glinting off the River Forth, with the coast of Fife a hazy outline beyond. Closer, and to his right, he saw smoke rising from the houses on Bunker's Hill. For him, it had been worth building the bridge for the view itself.

When he reached Shakespeare Square at the bridge's far end he glanced across to the Theatre Royal. Several large posters proclaimed, 'The Beggar's Opera', with 'Unlimited Run' at an angle across the bottom. I'll have to ask Jamie and Matthew about that, he thought.

Climbing the steep path up Bunker's Hill, he reached his sister's house, an elegant two-storey dwelling befitting a man in Matthew's position. Showing him in to the spacious living room, the servant announced him.

As she got to her feet, Jamie's face lit up and she quite skipped over to him; as first and last born of the Brodie children, the bond between them, despite a nineteen-year difference, had always been strong. "William. And how is my elder brother?" her voice carrying a light gay lilt that Brodie loved.

"It's so good to see you Jamie," he said, embracing her, "I'm well . . . where's Matthew?"

"In his study. It's always business with him; he'll be through right away."

Matthew had heard Brodie's arrival and was with them almost immediately. "Welcome, Will," he said, shaking his hand. "You stay away too long," and looking Brodie up and down, he smiled. "Still the man of fashion, eh?"

Brodie laughed. "I like to keep up with the ladies in that respect Matthew. Ach, some in the Old Town," – that term slipped from people's lips with ease now – "they think me too dandified, but I like to dress well rather than an expected drab."

"That you do man, that you do," Matthew said, raising an eyebrow, "Quite the macaroni."

"I hear people say that, quietly mind, but," and with a grin, "I think this style may be French rather than Italian."

Jamie laughed at that. "Well come away in William, we'll eat soon."

The time they passed at their meal was pleasant, and they chatted only of inconsequential things. Jamie wanted to know the latest gossip: who was being seen out with whom and what they were wearing – it was as if the Old Town was now a foreign country to her – and Matthew talked much of his business plans, with a particular eye on the increased demands from the New Town.

Eventually Brodie pushed back from the table. "Well, this was grand; I must visit more often," and turning to Matthew, he smiled, "I can see my sister is in good hands."

"I hope it is always so," Matthew replied with a small bow.

Brodie was about to leave when he remembered the posters he had seen on his way there. "As I passed the theatre down by, I saw a sign for *The Beggar's Opera* . . . have you heard what it's like?"

After a short silence, Matthew said, "We don't go to that place, Will."

Puzzled, Brodie looked to Jamie and saw that she had a serious look on her face, the first of his visit. In a firm voice, she said, "The theatre is not a place for gentlefolk, William."

Brodie smiled at her. "Is that what you are now Jamie, gentlefolk?" He had meant it as a tease, but saw from her solemn expression that his young sister had, like all things in her life, thought out her point of view, and rather than spoil a pleasant visit he added, "I was only looking for an entertainment, something to break the common round, that's all. Pay me no mind."

Giving this a wide smile, she hugged him close. "You're my elder brother William, how could I *ever* pay you no mind?"

With a kiss, good wishes all round, and a promise to visit again soon, he left them and, as he reached Shakespeare Square, wandered across to the theatre. Smiling at his sister's idea of gentlefolk – one which the Kirk, with its shrill call that the land itself had been "appropriated to Satan", would have approved – he purchased a ticket for that evening's performance, then headed up the gradual incline of the North Bridge back to the Old Town.

As he reached the High Street, he thought, *This* is my town; everything I am, and everything I need, is here. Why would I want to move to a new town? And, reinforcing these thoughts, a passing stranger touched his fingers to his hat and greeted him, "Aye, Master Brodie."

With an unhurried pace he was soon back at Hope's Wynd and Bruce's shop. Robert had made sure the earth had been removed from the door front so he could work unhindered, and two of his men were lifting the new door into place just as Brodie arrived.

Seeing Brodie, his foreman made his way across the debris to speak with him.

"Well done, Robert."

"Aye, it wasn't hard. We mimicked the old door, so Councillor Bruce'll have no complaints on that score, and with it on its hinges we just need to fit a new lock and we're done."

"That's grand. Has Councillor Bruce been about?"

"He was, earlier, inspecting everything . . . he seemed to think the panelling was thinner but it's a good copy, he'll not find fault."

Brodie nodded; Robert was a first-class tradesman. "And the lock?"

"Aye well, it'll have to be a new one – we're off with the re-sizing. We can fit one of our standard ones and, if the Councillor wants something else, we'll need to come back."

"Right. Well, I'll let you get on." As his foreman instructed his men Brodie took in Bruce's shop. It was impressive; four windows wide, each displaying a confusion of silver and gold, and a sign, that he himself had made, *Messrs. John and Andrew Bruce*, running across the full width.

He picked his way across to Robert. "I'll speak with the Councillor about the lock, you had better just fit our standard for now . . . get the premises secure."

"Aye, very good Master Brodie."

Turning away, Brodie smiled, Bruce will not want the added expense of something fancy – a simple lock would do.

Soon he was home and, sitting in his study, reflecting on his day so far. Jamie and Matthew were right in many ways; the city was changing, the Old Town being supplanted by the New. Perhaps they were also right that only 'gentlefolk' would inhabit this New Town, leave the city they had known all their lives, and live in a different way. Certainly, many who had moved to the north were no longer relying on simple trades for their wealth; these days trade with the New World and the supposed fantastic opportunities out there was changing the older ways. Somehow, the word New had to be in front of everything . . . then he checked himself, almost laughing out loud: I'm beginning to sound like my father. He stood and rang for a servant to let her know he would eat out, then left to visit George Smith at his grocers in the Cowgait.

As he arrived, Smith was unloading a cart filled with provisions, an impatient pony stamping a hoof at the front. Pleased to see him, Smith took him inside to introduce him to his wife Mary. If Smith had had his struggles, he had squared his shoulders and made the best of it. However, Brodie saw in Mary that those same struggles had taken their toll. Although quick to smile, her face carried the lines of constant worry and a deep sadness that life's circumstances had beaten into her.

After exchanging a few pleasantries, Brodie suggested that he and Smith step outside. "So George, you have your living here, yes?"

Hesitant, Smith answered, "More like continuing struggles, Will. There's not much of a living here . . . it's why I try my hand at the cards."

In a fleeting instant, Brodie saw the same careworn look that Mary had. "Ach George, that's a very bad reason for playing cards."

Smith shrugged; he had already seen that. "You have to try, though," he offered.

"And there's *not* a living here?"

"I can't say not, but it's all uphill. Every week is just getting by, there's what I owe Michael Henderson too, and I'm always reminded how things can change for the worse almost overnight."

Brodie was about to respond but stopped himself. "Don't concern yourself with Michael right now George. Let me think on this . . . sometimes things can change overnight for the better too."

Smith agreed, but Brodie could see that the cards he had been dealt had made him too cautious, too ready to expect the worst. Changing the subject he said, "I'm off to the theatre tonight, do you want to meet up for a drink later?" and, having agreed to meet at Clark's Tavern, they parted with a handshake.

Making his way up to the High Street, Brodie thought more on Smith's position. He had seen that caution first off the other night at cards. Nobody should gamble if either winning *or* losing was not the exciting thrill; money should be a secondary thing.

Certainly, as far as cards went, he was neither ahead nor behind overall: better than dicing, but even more his wagers at the cockfights, so there was an ease from concern as to whether the next card was high or low. And he knew that risk itself was the draw for him. No matter how well you read the cards *or* how well you played them, at the next turn you are either elated or damned, with *nothing* in between. Walking the razor's edge, that's the draw, that's the excitement and, if you had money laid on that turn, well then, you had better have plenty to lose and not be like George.

Still lost in thought he had reached Hope's Wynd again when he was accosted by a small man snapping, "Well then, Councillor Brodie," at him.

"Sir? You have the better of me."

"I am Davidson McKain," the other said, drawing himself up. "I have a hardware shop opposite Bruce."

"I repeat Sir, you have me at a disadvantage."

"Aye well, I saw you earlier at Bruce's," and sneering, "one Councillor looking out for another, that's what I saw."

Brodie was buffeted by the man's scorn. "You have a point?"

"A point? I have a complaint. All that levelling and what does the Council do? Nothing. But Bruce gets handled, eh?"

Now Brodie was angry. "Damn your impertinence. I was doing a job of work for Councillor Bruce. That wasn't Council work. If you want, I'll do the same for you," thinking, And you'll be last in line too.

McKain was not accepting that. "It's work the Council should've taken on. It was their decision to level the close," and with a snapped, "I'm losing trade," he spun on his heel, leaving Brodie fuming in his wake, his dignity more than ruffled.

Well, damn *you* Mr. McKain, he thought, watching the man scurrying back to his shop. Taking a deep breath he shrugged him off – neither he, nor his complaint, was going to spoil his otherwise perfect day; time for a light meal before the theatre.



Brodie felt elated as he headed to the High Street, some of *The Beggar's Opera's* tunes still ringing in his ears. With its mocking lines comparing thieves and whores favourably with their supposed betters in society and poking fun at well-known statesmen and politicians, he understood just why gentlefolk – and the Kirk – were against its upside-down world being performed. I must visit again soon, he thought.

Arriving at Clark's, he saw it was in full swing, and spotting Smith sitting all on his own, he crossed to him singing, "*But think of this maxim and put off your sorrow, the wretch of today may be happy tomorrow.*"

Smith laughed, "Well Will, so the theatre was a success then?"

"Aye George, it really hit the mark. I've never seen, nor heard, anything so good. If it wasn't for people like my sister staying away, and gentlefolk actually went to see this, man they'd close it down in a flash."

"How so?"

"Ach, you'd've had to have been there. It ridicules all those folk who claim respectability. Falsely claim it mind – those who think rank is more than it is, and there's plenty of them in *this* city. Now George . . . a drink?"

Smith looked shamefaced. "Can you get them, Will? As I was waiting I played a little dice and, well . . ."

Drawing his most serious face Brodie looked at him and then burst out laughing. "George, George, hazard's not the game for you – especially not *here* – you don't have nearly enough shirts to lose. Come on man, what'll you have?"

They spent the rest of the evening well, with Smith at one point being surprised by Brodie, at full voice, joining in a song that had broken out from a crowd of fellow theatregoers: "*One Wife is too much for most Husbands to bear, but two at a time there's no mortal can bear.*"

From time to time Smith fell into his sombre thoughts and Brodie chided him with, "Enough of that, George." Brodie knew that his friend was living tight, and should not be anywhere near places like Clark's, but he wanted to lift the man from the gloom which never seemed very far away.

They had just got another round of drinks, and Brodie was reviewing the pleasant day he had spent, when he was reminded of his vexing run-in with McKain earlier. He rolled the man's insolence around for a few moments and then a little light broke in on his thoughts. He felt a bubble of laughter rising and the excitement for a new adventure begin to course through him. Losing trade, indeed; all in all, there was no better way to pay the man back for his impertinence. He looked at Smith and smiled.

"What?"

"You know George, I'm owed a bit of money and well, I'm set right now, but if we can pick it up tonight, it's yours . . . to help you out."

Smith stopped his tankard halfway to his lips. "Really? That's more than kind. We could call it a loan."

Brodie waved a hand in dismissal. "No George, you have to get ahead."

Smith put his drink down. "It's late to pick up debts is it not?"

"No, this is an outstanding one. We'll call on the one who owes me; he'll not mind," and raising his tankard, "George, your health."

Within the hour they decanted from Clark's and, unsteady on their feet, headed up the High Street. Reaching Hope's Wynd, Brodie gripped Smith's elbow to steer him. "Just down here George," he whispered. "Let's be quiet though, we don't want to be a nuisance now, do we?"

Making their way down the poorly lit, debris-strewn close, they were soon standing outside Davidson McKain's hardware shop. Brodie grabbed the handle of the common door. "Ach, locked. I wonder if he's at home?" and looking up, "No, I see no light."

Swaying, Smith shrugged, "It *is* late Will, perhaps you could come back in the morning?"

"No George, I'm owed this and I *shall* get it tonight."

Uncertain of what to say, Smith just looked at him. Brodie broke the silence, "I have it. Wait here – quiet mind – I'll be right back," and with that, disappeared into the gloom.

Smith looked round. The feeble oil lamps in the close only lit a small area about them, so he could see very little. From what seemed far off he heard Brodie making a triumphant, but hissed, “Yes” and then nothing. Peering into the darkness he called out, “Will?” and jumped as Brodie’s grinning face appeared at his side.

He saw that Brodie was now carrying a long iron bar that the workers had been using earlier. “What on earth?” and putting two and two together, “You mean to use that here?”

“Ach, I’m owed, he’ll understand,” and before Smith could say another word, Brodie had pushed the bar under the bottom edge of the door, and with a loud splintering crack it swung open.

Brodie looked about to see whether this noise had attracted anyone; Smith through the drink had, at last, realised what was at hand. “You can’t mean . . . ”

“Hush, George,” Brodie said and stepped inside.

After a second’s hesitation, Smith followed him into the darkness within, pulling the damaged door closed behind him. Inside, he was aware that Brodie was already behind the counter opening drawers.

Within seconds Brodie’s fingers touched what felt like a bundle of banknotes. Grasping them, he drew them up to his face. Smith heard the chuckle as he said, “Just what he owes me,” and sensed Brodie coming round towards him.

Out of the darkness Brodie whispered, “Give me your hand,” and as Smith did so, he felt him pass the thick wad of notes. “There, that’ll help you get started.”

For a few seconds neither moved nor said a word, then Smith realised that Brodie was shaking, containing his laughter. “I think we’d better be off, George.”