

Thirteen.

Charlie Marr lived in London's Camberwell, near that point where Denmark Hill comes down to meet the Green. He had lived there, strictly alone, since his wife and child had died in one of the early German raids on the city at the start of the war. He had been at an office party that evening. When the raid started he was unable to get back. By the time he did, the next morning, the little home and its occupants were buried in a mountain of burning rubble. It had been as simple as that.

Camberwell was a district that suited his taste for anonymity. His neighbours knew that he worked in some capacity for the government up in the centre of the city, but nobody knew exactly what he did and none cared to ask, for that sort of concern could always be dangerous when expressed in the wrong direction. He left the little house in the mornings, and came home in the evenings. Sometimes, of course, he did not come home at all, and was absent for days; once even, for two weeks. But people knew that whatever he did was important, for he was often collected and returned by a police car with a pair of uniformed and respectful uniformed officers to help him.

And on the few days when he did not go to the city centre, he would drink cautiously in some of the local pubs, though always keeping strictly to himself. Sometimes, even, he would wander in the local graveyard and talk to the tramps and derelicts who found space to lie and drink very cheap alcohol there, among the gravestones, and tell tall tales of the liberty of the Kentish hopfields and the great open roads to the north. After all, these derelicts were

often better informed about what was going on in the country than anyone else.

The street in which he lived had never recovered from the damage caused by the fighting during the invasion and early days of the occupation. Charlie's end consisted of trim terraced houses with miniature gardens and wooden palings where once iron railings had been. But at the other end a bomb of a small sort had been dropped, and in the fighting a unit of partisans - or bandits and hooligans as they were generally called by the authorities - had held-out there for longer than had been wise. Most of the houses were burned-out, and had been left in that condition as a warning to those that remained.

Down towards the Green were a number of shops, of the sort that still managed to survive in working class districts such as Camberwell: and once a week an illegal street market flourished in the square when it was not being broken up by the Militia or some other agency of the state. After the spate of partisan attacks in south London during the autumn, there had been a savage crackdown. When the partisans had first come up from the sewers in Lambeth and Southark with truck-axle bazookas, hostages had been taken in all districts south of the river. Five were still hanging on a Militia gallows on the far side of the Green. The newspapers said another five had been left hanging at Clapham Common, but Charlie had not been to count.

In one of the shops at the Green, Charlie bought a Telegraph and some food to see him through his day off work. The newspaper reported the death of a government minister on page two. The minister had shot himself. A sexual scandal had been about to break. There was informed speculation that he had killed himself to

avoid a court case. His successor had been appointed. But no name was given, as usual. The facing page carried a report on what was called further improvements in the security situation. There were still pockets of insurrection and banditry in some of the farming districts, and in remote districts outlaws were holding traffic to ransom, demanding tolls, robbing passengers and murdering travellers. Martial law and summary Paramilitary courts were to be brought to bear, and in the Home Counties the Yeomanry was to be doubled in size.

An editorial condemned what it called the scourge of the modern highwayman, and noted that a strict concern for legal norms was the basis of all consensual government. Output in coal and steel was continuing to grow, and miners' leaders had welcomed the militarisation of their industry, despite an outbreak of banditry in an un-named village in Fife. And the crossword was missing. Someone had carefully ripped it out of the paper before Charlie had bought it: which had been the point of buying the newspaper in the first place, of course.

In the early afternoon, a marked police Riley parked at the house. A pair of uniformed officers had been sent to collect him. The sergeant said there was an emergency case conference planned for later. But the policemen knew nothing of its subject, of course. And they knew nothing of the suicide of the government minister, except that he had been found dead in Green Park. And that his wife had been arrested. And that their children had been taken from their Militia boarding school that morning and were being held in detention separate from their mother. But that was all the sergeant and constable knew, or were prepared to say they knew.

The sergeant said, 'There is an all-districts security alert in place south of the river. More partisan attacks are expected tonight'.

'Bandits', Charlie said, 'they'll gaoil you for calling them partisans'.

'Bandits, sir, that's what I meant to say'.

They followed Camberwell Road, and after it Walworth Road. At Elephant and Castle they met the first road-block. Mixed units of Militia and Auxiliaries were searching every vehicle: even police vehicles. They peered into the engine compartment and then the boot.

The sergeant said, 'We don't have to put up with this. We have exemption'.

'Not today you don't', the Militia officer said. 'We have intelligence that a bandit attack is imminent somewhere in the city centre. Nothing is allowed in unless it has been checked. Otherwise we will be hanging up all over London and not the bandits'.

'What's the best route to Piccadilly?', the sergeant asked.

The Militia officer said there were road blocks all the way to Waterloo Bridge. They might be better to dodge south of the station and take the Stalingrad Bridge into Westminster.

'There won't be road-blocks once you are over the river', the officer said, 'but there will be on the bridge'.

The eastern end the Stalingrad bridge was undefended, and they soon crossed the river. But there was another road-block at the junction with Victoria Embankment, and a battalion of heavily armed Paramilitaries had taken up position round the Houses of Parliament. When the traffic queued, a horde of Daniel amputees swarmed from the edge of the river, banging on the windows of the

Riley and demanding alms. But there was no sign of the wild-eyed girl who had hammered on Charlie's window at the end of summer.

The constable said, 'I would shoot these people if I had my way of it'.

'They are shooting twenty a day as it is', the sergeant said, 'but they keep pouring in from the countryside during the night. You can't seal a city this size. And they have to live like everybody else'.

'Not for long', the constable said grimly. 'Not if I had my way of it'.

They dropped Charlie in Trafalgar Square. In front of the galleries he was met by one of the younger men in the city's drugs squad. They knew each other; Charlie had worked for the squad before becoming link-man between national drugs intelligence and the security service.

Charlie said, 'Beak Street, right?'

They walked through Leicester Square and came into the Circus. Very drunk Militia troopers on leave and warmly dressed in winter clothing bargained with whores, and fought among themselves. Members of the Militia's own military police patrolled in pairs, with dogs on short leads and batons drawn. In the mouth of Regent Street, a unit of clergy in full vestments was digging furiously. A second unit, also in vestments, was working a treadmill water pump outside Hamley's.

'Jesus Christ', Charlie said, 'that's a bit medieval, isn't it?'

The young squad man said, 'It's group-punishment, sir. Some bandits blew up the electricity supply. Between here and Oxford Street, every clergyman in London is out digging today'.

In Golden Square, the men were propositioned repeatedly from open doorways.

‘There’s more of them all the time’, the younger man said, sounding censorious. ‘The more we sent away to the camps, the more turn up here. They’re hungry out in the country, people say, so the girls come into town to try their luck’.

In Beak Street, the door to the club was guarded by a trusted servant of the drugs intelligence service, which had used his club for highly private and sensitive meetings since the lucrative days of war and American servicemen in search of recreation.

He said, ‘Your friends are all here already’, and signed that Charlie could enter.

Three floors up, the club opened from the narrow staircase to a dance-floor with bar and a lounge beyond. Two more thugs guarded the door. One entire wall was mirrored. From behind it, national drugs intelligence could film patrons of interest to it. The club had been established not long after the United States had come into the last war. An extremely sophisticated drug-dealing operation among high-ranking American officers had been broken-up just before D-Day as a result of such film.

There were another five men present. Johnson had senior rank in the city police and his empire included drug-dealing intelligence throughout London and the Home Counties. Johnson looked as if he had just come from a golf-club. He was wearing a v-neck woolen jersey, a check shirt and cavalry twill trousers, as if he had been dressed by his wife in some law-abiding northern suburb.

‘Sorry about this, Charlie’, he said, ‘but there is pressure from the top. Take a whisky and then we’ll get started’.

Johnson introduced the remainder of the party. One was an Irishman called Pat: no other introduction seemed necessary, and none was made. There was someone called Jamie from the

national security service and a high-ranking officer from the Militia called John. John shook Charlie's hand energetically and promised all the help his men could bring to bear 'on the problem'. The last man was introduced by Johnson as a colleague from the special information unit of the Home Office: at which Johnson rolled his eye in private to Charlie, to signify the importance of the meeting.

'Right', Johnson said, as if he could hardly wait to get back to his golf club, 'I know it's a day off for some of us. But needs must. It will be curfew soon. We've all got to be back home in good time. Everyone knows why we are here. Cocaine smuggling by the Americans. So let's get started, shall we?'

Johnson had brought a briefcase of papers. He shuffled them importantly, while Pat flipped the lid from a fifty tin of Capstan and offered the tin round the company. Only Charlie took one, and Pat went to the bar. He returned with a bottle of whisky.

'It's easier to get at here', he said, 'it saves the walk'.

Johnson looked disapproving and shuffled his papers again.

'Right', he said, 'let's press on. As we all know, the Americans are suspected of smuggling cocaine on a large scale for intelligence operations in the Protectorate. We don't know why, we don't know how, and we don't know who to. We don't know how much has come in. We don't know how much more there might be to come in. We don't even have any idea how they distribute it. But the Americans are not doing this for nothing. The Home Secretary has made it quite clear to me that this can't go on. He has given us till the end of this month to break up the American operation or heads will roll'.

The Irishman laughed and poured himself a whisky. He gestured at the bottle and slid it towards Charlie, as if he had effortlessly recognised another drinker.

Johnson said, 'Pat, your report please'.

'I can only tell you what we know', Pat said. 'The Americans have a closed naval base at Galway. They take the cocaine in there. And then they take it to somewhere in Donegal under diplomatic cover. We aren't certain what happens next. But they get it over here one way or another. We don't think it comes over by ferry to Holyhead or Liverpool. And they would have trouble getting it into the north and onto a ferry at Larne. So it must come in by boat somehow'.

Charlie said, 'Any idea how much has come over so far?'

'We think they have tried five deliveries', Pat said. 'We know what happened to the last one. But we are pretty sure there were four runs before that. Maybe half a ton each'.

The man from the Home Office looked up and said, 'The key question is this. If this quantity of cocaine is coming into the country, where is it going afterwards?'

Johnson suddenly looked relieved. He said, 'John, your chaps have been trying to discover if there is a link between this cocaine and industrial sabotage, haven't they?'

The Militia officer said that a special office of the agency had been established to track cocaine use in targeted sectors of the population, in association with national drugs intelligence. Charlie noticed that his hands were shaking as he gave his report; perhaps he was unused to speaking in public. At the bar, one of the thugs was cleaning glasses in absolute silence and with a style of absolute menace.

John said that he had been ordered to investigate links between the American cocaine and industrial unrest throughout the Protectorate. With respect to this commission, he had in a plain-clothes role made his way to a number of industrial districts and consulted there as appropriate. Output in the coal industry had fallen, on account of industrial unrest.

‘That’s not what it says in the newspapers’, someone said.

‘That’s because the newspapers are lying’, John said, ‘just like they always did’.

Despite the militarisation of labour and consequent martial law prevailing, illegal combinations were still widely in evidence. The authorised representatives of the workforce had been removed to preventative detention but this had led to an increase in trouble-making. Unofficial and unstable leaderships had developed. Paramilitaries had been called on three occasions to violent street demonstrations in Yorkshire.

‘I was in Wales and Yorkshire for a week each’, John said, ‘and spoke to every one of our senior officers there. There is simply no sign of American or any other cocaine in these districts’.

In the steel industry there was widespread sedition and sabotage on an organised scale. John said he had visited the vicinity of a number of plants, and on occasion had been taken into the mills. Conditions in all of them were very harsh. Entirely new forms of shopfloor organisation had developed. The leaderships of these were thought to be organised on a closed-cell pattern. It was not known if authority was exercised in a vertical or horizontal sense; but despite repeated attempts, undercover Militia officers in conjunction with other agencies had been unable to penetrate them.

John looked up from his papers at this point, absolutely without expression.

He said, 'This is a pattern of labour organisation with which historians of workers' movements may be familiar'.

With sudden violence, the chap from the Home Office said, 'How the fuck would you know?'

'My grandfather was a miners' organiser in Fife', John said, not giving an inch.

Johnson, sensing trouble of a dangerously unstated kind, said at once, 'Gentlemen, gentlemen, the point is that despite all this labour trouble, there is no sign of cocaine. Isn't that correct, John?'

John ploughed on with his report. There was cause for concern on the railways. True, there had been no strikes for a full year: but underground organisation of the workforce was advanced to a degree far beyond that prevailing in either coal or steel. The illegal rail unions thought that extensive sabotage could bring the entire network to a halt in a matter of days. Underground unions in other key industries would then mount a general strike. But there was no evidence that any of this was being financed with American cocaine.

John looked up at his audience and said with some sort of gloomy pleasure, 'There is a suggestion that a Triple Alliance of coal, steel and rail organisations is planned, or is already in an advanced state of planning. There is going to be big trouble soon'.

'Stick to the cocaine, John', Johnson said, 'if you don't mind'.

That was his point, John said. There was no cocaine. The Militia had been unable to connect smuggled American cocaine with industrial unrest in any way whatsoever.

‘What about unrest in the countryside, then?’, the man from the Home Office said in a suddenly emollient way. ‘This cocaine must be going somewhere’.

But John said there was no sign of cocaine going into the countryside.

‘The farmers hardly have enough to eat’, he said. ‘What would they buy cocaine with? Or what would they trade for it? And how would they sell it?’

In some areas, he said, there was open rebellion.

‘They are burning the barns and stackyards and slaughtering the remaining animals’, John said, as if he were personally affected.

Johnson asked if there was anything else to say. Charlie said there was. He noted that there had been an upturn of resistance activity in recent weeks.

‘And it is not simply a matter of economic resistance like strikes and industrial sabotage’, he said.

There had been partisan bombings and shootings in many parts of the country. Attacks on Paramilitary and Militia posts, even on police and bus and rail stations, had become common. But there was no pattern to this activity, no evidence of any guiding hand.

He said, ‘Nowhere, nowhere have we found any evidence of cocaine in any of this. So the big question is - if cocaine is coming in, where is it going? And why?’

The chap from the Home Office looked up, as if he had been buried deep within the gaps of the cheap wooden flooring.

He said, ‘Well, you are the expert. Where is it going?’

Charlie said, ‘Let’s go back. Through the first eight months of last year, we had mountains of evidence that all sorts of contraband was coming in. American dollars, real and counterfeit. Protectorate

sterling, real and counterfeit. Anything you want - you can get. As long as you can pay for it. Drugs above all. Look at what we have so far. End of last summer - a huge operation all round the coast. At just about every railway station in the country. What did we get?'

Pat said, 'From what I have heard, just about fuck all'.

'Not true', Charlie said. 'We got a lot of stuff. We knew there was opium base and processed morphine coming in. We proved it. We boarded French trawlers off Cornwall. We found a distribution centre at Plymouth. We sunk Irish boats off Wales. We arrested about three hundred people around the mainline railway stations in this city alone. We smashed up a processing laboratory in North Wales. In the west of Scotland, we found networks based in Ayrshire and Argyll. We sunk a trawler or two near Oban up the coast. In Glasgow, we stopped a train. Cocaine in alcohol solution was being stolen in the Plymouth area and taken to Glasgow. We took the stuff off the train earlier and shot them up'.

The chap from the Home Office looked up again.

He said, 'We appreciate the effort, Inspector, and the success rate. I am sure it will have an appreciable effect on our struggle. But it does not answer the questions - where is the cocaine going?'

Charlie said, 'Edinburgh. We took half a ton of cocaine there, packed as granulated cane sugar in American army ammunition cases. We got a radio trasceiver too. And two drivers. We will never know where the cocaine is going until we know where it is coming from'.

The chap from the national security service spoke for the first time. He said it was strange that huge quantities of drugs were coming into the country and that most of it could be tracked. But that American cocaine - cocaine smuggled into the Protectorate by

American intelligence agencies - could not be tracked. Wasn't it strange that nobody knew where it was going? Wasn't it strange that despite the huge efforts invested in fighting American intelligence networks, no trace of their cocaine could be found?

Pat laughed. 'No it's not', he said with absolute certainty. 'Cocaine is famous for that. One minute you see it, next minute it's gone. Nobody ever knows where cocaine comes from or goes to'.

The chap from the Home Office looked pained. He said, 'The Home Secretary wants to know, gentlemen, by the end of this month'.

Johnson said, 'Well, if we can't trace where it is going, why don't we think about trying to trace how it is coming in? I mean, it must be coming in by some route. It isn't just walking in on its own'.

'What about the seizure of cocaine in Edinburgh?', the Home Office chap said, ever so reasonably. 'There can't be much of a market in Edinburgh for that quantity of cocaine'.

Pat snorted with derision and poured more whisky. The measures were larger than ever. Johnson pinched each trouser leg, just about the knee, and folded his legs. Then he leaned earnestly into the company.

He said, 'Inspector Marr?'

Charlie said, 'I have never been. So I don't know'.

'That's not good enough, Charlie', Johnson said. 'We need to know how it is coming into the country. What about starting with Edinburgh?'

'Where did the half ton of stuff come from?', the Militia officer said hopefully. 'That might be a start. If we know where it comes from in the first place, we might discover how it gets in'.

Charlie said, 'If the stuff is coming in through Scotland, then we can try to trace movements there. But the stuff disappears. This is the problem'.

The lad from the Home Office said, 'Who were the drivers that were shot dead? That might be a start'.

Pat said, 'And there might be a Belfast link. Who comes over from Belfast on the Larne ferry?'

'Right', Charlie said, 'We will start at the beginning. We don't know why cocaine is being brought in. We don't know what happens to it once it arrives. We think five half-ton loads have been brought in from Ireland but we are not certain. We don't know where the first four of these went. But we caught the fifth. Are there more loads on the way? We don't know. So how could it come in? We will need to check every passenger on the Dublin to Holyhead ferry. We will need to check every passenger on the Larne to Stranraer ferry. And I don't know if we keep records for them. So where do we start?'

Jamie from the security service said, 'That is very good reasoning, inspector. But I can think of another line of enquiry too. Who else might have come into the country? If we have broken-up or interrupted an American supply line, and shot dead two of their drivers, who else might replace them? I mean - an enemy espionage network will not be able to replace drivers easily. They might have to call on the services of an expert. Perhaps call in old debts, that sort of thing. I think it might be worth looking at'.

'Who?', Charlie said. 'Do you have someone in mind?'

'I will tell you when I can', Jamie said, savouring his momentary power.

'I want to know', Charlie said, 'it might make a difference'

'It might', Jamie said, 'I know that it might': and the meeting broke up and went on its way. Johnson said he would get a taxi in the Circus.

He said, apologetically, 'Golf club dinner tonight. Taking the wife out'.

Then he was gone. The others disappeared into the night just as quickly. Charlie and Pat found a pub on the corner of Old Compton Street. It seemed a pity to waste the opportunity. They got whiskies and half-pints of bitter at the mahogany counter, and found a seat in the corner.

'When do you back over?', Charlie asked.

Pat said he would get the train to Holyhead the next morning. And then the ferry. He would be back in Dublin late in the evening, or perhaps in the early hours of the next day. The bar was beginning to fill with evening custom. Charlie watched them with a practised eye.

Pat said, 'Your stuff can't be coming in through Holyhead. Why take it from there all the way to Edinburgh? It has to be coming in somewhere else. Then they will transport it to Edinburgh and maybe take it down here by rail or road. It has to come to London sooner or later - this is the market'.

'Are we sure it is coming over in the first place?', Charlie said. 'Apart from one big seizure in Edinburgh - that's all we have for certain. And we don't know for certain that it was coming from Ireland'.

But Pat was sure that cocaine was coming over from Ireland in huge quantities. It was absolutely certain that the Americans were importing cocaine to Galway. And nobody in Galway knew what cocaine was. So where was it going? He knew for certain that the

Americans had a major intelligence operation in Dublin, which was in charge of the cocaine shipments.

Pat said, 'I will tell you for certain where it goes after Galway. They take it by road to the north coast of Donegal'.

'Where, exactly?', Charlie asked.

'We don't know', Pat said. 'But we are trying to find out'.

The Irish government had given the Americans exclusive use of a large stretch of the north Donegal coast. Nobody was allowed in unless they had American security clearance.

'But we know they have a fleet of very fast boats there', Pat said. 'All painted black for operation at night. Some of the fishermen have also seen surfaced submarines in the area. So it is obvious that they take the cocaine out this way, and get it into Scotland this way'.

The bar was filling up more than ever now. A bunch of young Paramilitary troopers on leave had come in and was singing in a drunken fashion.

'Allright', Charlie said, 'suppose that is how they get it in. But how is it collected and transported? Suppose it comes in to the Scottish coast somewhere. Somebody has to pick it up. How do they do that?'

'There were two men killed in Edinburgh', Pat said. 'Were they the couriers? And if they were, who will replace them? If there is to be another run'.

'I will find out', Charlie said. 'We will start looking tomorrow'.

The young Paramilitaries were beginning to fight among themselves. There was going to be trouble shortly. They left the bar and walked down to Piccadilly Circus. Charlie said he would get

the Tube back home. He wanted to be in the office early in the morning.

Pat crossed the road to a taxi rank and Charlie went into the mouth of the Tube station. Suddenly, there was a hideous explosion. Outside the station, it was clear that a bomb had exploded very close at hand. Four cars in the rank were on fire: another had been hurled across the Circus. In Regent Street the treadmill water pump had been blown apart. Shop windows had been blown in, and huge shards of glass lay scattered on the roadways and pavements. After the explosion, there was a tremendous silence for what seemed an immensity of time. Then, alarm bells and sirens could be heard in the distance.

Someone ran past Charlie with flames rising in a solid torch of light to a height of three feet above his head. The runner's lips were clamped with all the concentration of a long-distance athlete going for some distant tape. Already the skin was beginning to peel in strips from his face. You could see Johnson's v-neck golfing jersey and the collar of his check-shirt. Both were already burning furiously.

Someone was screaming about partisan bombs. In the middle of the Circus, a Militia general in full dress-uniform was lying on his back. The man was still alive and looking around in a style of wonder. He had medals on his chest. Both of his legs had gone - one below the knee and the other at the hip. He did not have long to live. An ambulance screamed through from Leicester Square. Then a second. And then a pair of Militia armoured cars. Troopers swamped the Circus, shouting that there was a second bomb. People should clear the Circus and surrounding streets at once.

An ambulance crew was loading the general onto a stretcher. The man was screaming now. Perhaps he knew what had happened. Or perhaps it was simply pain and shock. A Militia trooper had recovered the leg. It was still dressed in a knee-high black boot. Then he dropped it back into the gutter. Johnson, jogging furiously, had disappeared altogether.

Charlie went down into the Tube station and headed for home.