

Sixteen.

News of the bombing in Piccadilly Circus was suppressed. There was no mention of it on the radio, and no newspaper carried any report either. As far as the public was concerned, it had not happened. But of course there was a very determined police enquiry, and the immediate district was closed to traffic on foot and on wheel while forensic teams sifted the wreckage and carried it away.

A bomb, certainly, had been carried in a taxi to the Circus and had exploded in the rank on its south-western side. But at first nobody could say if it had been in transit and intended for detonation at some other location, or whether it had been taken to the Circus and deliberately exploded there. In which case, of course, the investigative agencies would want to know why. A full general in the Militia, after all, had been blown apart. This alone was enough to ensure that the Militia's own investigative organs would be called upon. But among the twenty or so who had also died, there was one of immediate and particular interest to the enquiry officers involved.

This one was identified as a senior commander in the city's drugs squad called Johnson. It was quickly determined that earlier in the evening he had attended a planning meeting at a secure drugs intelligence facility in Soho. He had then left this meeting, having said that he was expected at a golf-club dinner that same evening in the company of his wife, and would get a taxi in the Circus. But he had not gone directly home; for within minutes of leaving the meeting he was seen in the company of a notorious racketeer in a bar off Leicester Square. The question was then

asked: had Johnson been passing to this racketeer information on the continuing investigation into the smuggling of American cocaine? And if so, why?

The racketeer could not be arrested by the enquiry team as he had disappeared into the east end of the city. But a number of police informants had been procured, and they all swore that they had seen the senior policemen and the senior racketeer in each other's company not long before the blast. The enquiry team therefore pursued its investigation with renewed vigour.

All of Johnson's immediate colleagues were questioned and his office turned over. Two nights later the team made its way to the Johnson family home. Plaster was stripped from the walls and the floorboards ripped up. Below these boards in an upstairs bedroom the team found huge quantities of counterfeit Protectorate sterling, and an equally huge quantity of genuine American dollars.

When the chaps started on Mrs. Johnson with rubber truncheons, she told them about the cocaine in the golfing bag. And a packet containing the drug - which proved to be of very high purity - was indeed found in the bottom of Johnson's favourite golfing bag. Before daybreak, therefore, Johnson's children were taken to the local police station, from where they would be despatched to appropriately secure accommodation later in the day. Johnson's wife, meantime, as a possible accomplice in an illegal drug and currency trading ring, was taken to a small Militia holding centre in the countryside of Surrey, where she would be questioned further as the enquiry progressed.

News of the ongoing investigation came to Charlie Marr as a matter of course. A couple of very senior chaps from the Militia's own special security wing came to have a word. Charlie naturally

told them what he could. He had known Johnson for many years, but not well. He had always seemed more interested in golf than anything else. It was no secret that the Americans were suspected of smuggling cocaine into the Protectorate for some unspecified end. So it was obvious that appropriate agencies would attempt to track these transactions and identify their purpose.

In the circumstances it seemed proper to talk of the recent meeting in the little club beyond Golden Square, where the security services filmed patrons of particular interest to them, from behind a mirrored wall. There had been poor Johnson, of course, from the drugs squad. A chap from the Militia, and someone from the Home Office. And of course the Irishman who was their link with what the Americans were up to in Dublin, and who had come across for the meeting especially.

Charlie told them that at the end of the meeting Johnson had said that he was going for a taxi in the Circus. He wanted to get to a golf club dinner with his wife, is what he had said. Charlie was sure of that. So he had gone with the Irishman for a drink in a pub near Old Compton Street. Then some young Paramilitaries had come in and started to cause trouble. They had walked down to the Circus and parted. Charlie had barely reached the down escalator when he had heard the explosion.

‘Where were you going?’, one of the Militia chaps had asked.

‘Earl’s Court’, Charlie said.

‘But you live in Camberwell’.

‘I have a girlfriend there’, Charlie said, ‘and there was still time for a drink before the bars closed’.

‘Who is the girlfriend?’

‘She works for me’, Charlie said, ‘in Victoria’.

'Where is she at this moment?'

'In the office. In Victoria'.

'Are you married?'

'Was', Charlie said. 'She died in the war'.

One of the Militia chaps made a note, for this was the sort of thing they might want to check up on later.

The other senior Militia chap asked, with particular emphasis, 'Did you see Johnson after the bomb?'

Charlie said he could remember someone dressed as a general in the Militia lying in the middle of the Circus and screaming. His legs had been blown off - Charlie could remember that very clearly indeed.

'And what about the Irishman?', one of the Militia chaps wanted to know.

'I don't know', Charlie said. 'He crossed the road and that was the last I saw of him. Maybe the bomb got him'.

'We think it did'.

'I liked him', Charlie said.

'And what about Johnson?'

'He ran past me', Charlie said, 'all on fire'.

'Are you sure it was Johnson?', one of the men asked.

Charlie said he was: he had seen quite a lot of people on fire, during the war. The officer asked what had happened next.

'When the emergency services started to arrive, I went home', Charlie said. 'I didn't feel like another drink. And I took the bus. Someone was shouting that there might be a second bomb ready to explode in the the Circus, maybe in the Underground. Nobody seemed to know. It seemed wiser to get out of the area altogether'.

'And you went straight home?'

Charlie said that he had. He told them he lived in Camberwell and it had taken at least an hour to get back there by bus. There were roadblocks, after word spread of the bombing in the Circus.

‘Did you ever meet Johnson’s wife?’, one of the Militia chaps wanted to know.

Charlie said he thought he had met her once, at some social function. But he didn’t think he would recognise her; at least he couldn’t be sure about it.

‘We would like you to try, sir’, one of the Militia chaps said. ‘We are going to interview her this afternoon, and we would like you to come with us. After all, she is the only suspect we have in custody, and you are the only witness that we have’.

The lads from the Militia had a car waiting. Somewhere on the outskirts of the city they came upon a roadblock manned by police and a unit of Specials. The Militia officers identified themselves by their uniforms. Charlie was introduced to the senior Special as a plain-clothes police officer. But the Special was taking no chances. He demanded documents and studied them carefully. Then he saluted smartly. In the near distance a siren wailed. Blue lights flashed on the black police Vauxhalls and Austins. Uniformed officers stood in the background, as if conscious that they had been usurped but were not too sure what to do about it.

Charlie asked what the problem was. The senior Special said that there had been a bandit attack in the district. On a house in which a government minister kept his mistress. The bandits’ intelligence service was getting better all the time.

‘But we have them in the district’, the Specials officer said briskly. ‘They are surrounded and we are closing on them. We

expect them to make a break in this direction and when they do we will smash them’.

‘What was her first name?’, Charlie asked.

‘How would we know?’, one of the Militia chaps said.

‘I mean Johnson’s wife. Widow rather’.

‘We don’t deal in first names where we are going’, one of the Militia chaps said. ‘We can’t afford to mollycoddle suspects when there are bombs exploding in our city centres, you know’.

Twenty miles beyond the city they swung off the main route, followed a secondary one, and then took a single-vehicle track that ran through dense Surrey woodland. In a break in the trees a church spire could be seen in the distance. Then the trees closed in again. After a mile of track a hand-painted sign said Farm. Then there was another twist in the track and the farm did indeed open out before them.

‘We built this one ourselves’, one of the Militia lads said proudly. ‘When the Cage in Belgravia got too busy, we took our Germans out here to give them a right good going over’.

A simple wire fence, perhaps twenty feet in height, surrounded the place. The residential huts were painted in fresh yellow: the glass of their original dormer-style windows had been whitewashed. From the end of each hut a stove pipe tilted. From one pipe a thin drizzle of smoke crawled in an intermittent sort of way. Around these huts was a second fence, the wire barbed, and lazy notices to the effect that this inner wall was electrified. Beyond that came the sheltering woods of evergreen trees, soft and lush. In all, it was a comforting scene, free of menace or terror.

In the reception hut the elderly lady in charge had no finger nails, and the remaining ends of her fingers were twisted and

crusted as if they had been caught in a car door in some dreadful childhood accident and had never been treated in any sort of way at all. For a moment the old lady looked straight at Charlie: there was a want somewhere in the blue depths, so innocent of doubt or pain or complicity.

She said, 'They bashed my head too dear, it didn't used to be like this. I suppose they bashed a lot of people a lot worse than me'.

Charlie said, 'The place is very quiet'.

'Oh, it is always quiet during the day, dear, it's during the night it can be noisy. Not every night of course, but some nights can be terrible for noise'.

The old lady rang a hand-bell and two thuggish men appeared in silence from the end of the cabin. They were uniformed too, and each was armed with a truncheon on a long chain, sheathed in a leather holster.

'Don't argue with them dear', the old lady said, 'it never does any good. Just tell them whatever they want to know, it doesn't always last so long that way'.

Charlie and his Militia companions introduced themselves to the warders. They had come to see the Johnson woman, who was implicated in a bandit bombing up in the city. And maybe worse: that was why they had come to speak to her.

The warders took them to a hut in the centre of the little camp: to gain entry, they had to drive back a dog which was chained to a post beside the door. The Johnson woman was wearing clogs and steel fetters.

When she saw her visitors she began to cry, and said, 'I would like to have a wash'.

A warder inspected a fist and slammed it into her face without any sign of mercy. A tooth seemed to have broken, and something oozed in her mouth.

The warder said, rather pleasantly, 'The rule here is silence. You talk when you are told to. Otherwise you get hurt'. He slammed her in the mouth once more. Then they they undid the fetters and took her to the interview room.

The room was painted white in its entirety and furnished with a table and a number of timber seats of the sort that might be found in any village hall. The warders set her on a seat and drew back, still in total silence.

One of the Militia chaps asked, 'Why do you think you are here?'

Johnson's widow stopped crying. She asked about her children. The Militia chap said that the children were being cared for. As long as she co-operated with the investigation, she would be cared for too. She could expect to see the children again. Soon, if she co-operated. The widow said that she would co-operate in any way she could.

The senior chap from the Militia's own investigations branch smiled. He said, 'It is a matter of state security. There was a bomb in the centre of the city. Your husband was killed. When we searched your house, we found illegal currency and drugs. Your husband worked for the drugs police for ten years. We want to know why he was killed'.

Johnson's widow said with some spirit, 'You should have asked me earlier. He was doing it for years'.

Charlie said, ever so quietly, 'Doing what?'

‘Dealing in drugs’, the widow said crisply. ‘He started with the Americans during the war. That’s where the money came from’.

‘Cocaine’, Charlie said.

‘Cocaine’, the widow said, ‘is what people like best. American cocaine’.

‘What did he do with the money?’

‘What do you think?’, she said bitterly. ‘For all his filthy women, of course’.

At this there was an immense silence. Birds could be heard singing in the trees beyond the perimeter fence. Charlie sat with immense composure. With each exchange, the Johnson woman was becoming more confident, more certain of her release.

‘Is there any left that we don’t know about?’, the Militia chap asked at length.

‘There might be some where he kept it’, she said. ‘In his lockers at the golf club. He was club-captain, you see, and he had keys for everything’.

‘Will we find any if we go there?’, Charlie asked.

‘I don’t know’, she said. ‘There was a problem with supply. Something went wrong. He never told me. But sometimes I heard him on the telephone. Sometimes there were telephone calls to the house. They could not phone him at the office, obviously. So I had to take messages. There was one about cocaine being arrested somewhere in Scotland. Edinburgh, I think. Anyway, after that there was a shortage’.

‘When was this?’, Charlie asked in the immense silence.

‘Weeks ago now’, she said. ‘The cocaine was seized in Edinburgh at the end of summer, maybe sometime in the autumn. There hasn’t been any since’.

‘Were there any other messages on the telephone?’

She said, ‘Not to me. But I could tell he was expecting one. We didn’t get on. We only stayed together for the children. He didn’t tell me anything. But I knew he was worried. He wouldn’t leave the house some nights, expecting a call’.

‘And did it come?’

‘Oh yes’, she said. ‘Of course, I only heard his half of the conversation. Something was coming. Or maybe someone, someone was coming in. Someone who would sort it’.

‘Sort what?’

‘I don’t know’.

Charlie said, ‘Holyhead. Does that mean anything?’

She said, ‘That’s in Wales, isn’t it? We went there on holiday once. But it doesn’t mean anything to me’.

‘What about Belfast?’, Charlie said.

But Belfast meant nothing to the woman either. She had begun to cry again. Perhaps it was the thought of the children. Or the holiday, in their days of hope. Outside, it was beginning to snow - a few listless flakes drifted. Even the birds had stopped singing.

Quite without warning, Johnson’s widow said, ‘Manacles. Something about the Manacles. And somewhere called Porthoustock. Someone was coming in and they had to get through the rocks before daylight. We went there on holiday once too. When the children were little’.

‘Where?’, Charlie asked with immense composure.

‘Cornwall’, she said. ‘The south coast was lovely’.

There was another immense silence. The snow was now falling a little more heavily. Perhaps there would be trouble getting back into the city.

Charlie said, 'Who was he talking to on the telephone?'

But Johnson's widow did not know. 'He never told me things like that', she said pitifully. 'He never told me anything. But it was someone very important. Someone in the government. I could tell by his manner. He always had a great respect for authority. That is why he joined the police in the first place'.

With tremendous gentleness, Charlie said, 'It has been a difficult time for you. But you have been very helpful. We will have you taken home this afternoon'.

She began to cry again. She asked about the children. Charlie said that they would be brought back to her too. At this prospect of liberty, she began to improve quickly.

'And I will come to visit you once you have returned home', Charlie said. 'Just as soon as you have settled back in'.

Outside, it was snowing steadily. Charlie and the two chaps from the Militia investigations office sat in the car watching the snow for some moments.

'Was that helpful?', one of the Militia chaps asked at length.

'It was to me', Charlie said. 'Very helpful'.

'Not to us it wasn't', the other complained. 'We need to know who took the bomb up to the city centre. How, too. And why'.

Charlie said, 'Will you let her out?'

But the chaps said she was in Militia custody. It was a Militia investigation, after all. One of their generals had been killed. She would stay there until they were finished with her. Then they would take her to one of their long-term camps up in Scotland somewhere.

'If she is lucky', the other said.

'What about the children?', Charlie asked.

But the chaps just shook their heads. Once anyone came into Militia custody, they did not get out again. Not for as long as an enquiry was still open - especially one as dangerous as this.

They drove back for the city. The snow was already deep on the track leading to the little camp. The wheels spun and the car lurched. At one point it stopped altogether and someone joked that they might have to spent the night with Johnson's widow.

'Poor bitch', someone said. 'I think she believed we would let her out'.

Once they found the road, however, the driving became easier, and the car made good progress back towards the city. It was still snowing. And it would be dark in an hour. In a village they stopped for something to eat. In the pub new posters called for volunteers for the Yeomanry. Opposite the bar was a cricket green surrounded by naked elm trees. The only food on offer was pigeon pie. The barman hinted that dollars might help, but nobody had any. Or at least they did not admit to it.

Someone said it was a pity Johnson was not with them; perhaps it was a joke. When they left, a troop of soldiers mounted on stout farm-horses was riding past, led by an armoured car in Yeomanry colours. To the rear of the little column, twenty prisoners dragged a farm-cart loaded with potatoes. Or at least that is what they looked like, under their covering of snow.

They drove into the west of the city. The traffic was surprisingly heavy but there were no road blocks. The Militia chaps said they would drop Charlie at his office and they drove him there, to the requisitioned private hotel behind the main-line railway station at Victoria. It continued to operate in the style of a hotel too, although the porters were discreetly armed and security gates had

been installed on all the floors. And there were never rooms available to any traveller who might come looking for them. But there was a members-only bar still in operation, and the kitchen still served lunch: there were worse places to work, and it was an effortless run back by the Vauxhall Bridge to his little house in Camberwell.

At reception, there was a box with a hand-made slot in the top. Beside the box, a note asked for donations for the widow of Johnson. At the back of the reception desk was the wire-room for the telegraph and radio equipment, and the telephone switchboard for the building.

The first two floors were given over to the plain-clothes men who watched the city's stations round the clock for drugs and American spies. Charlie's office was on the top floor; a cramped set of garret rooms, piled with folders and papers among which desks and chairs fought for room. There was no sign of Fiona; perhaps she was in the wire room. But she had put a bundle of papers on Charlie's desk; routine reports from the station watches by the look of them.

He glanced through them and wondered whether he might get home before midnight. Established couriers were still regularly coming in through Victoria. But they were small-scale operators, delivering to criminal gangs in the east of the city. And no link to enemy intelligence had been detected. Most of the couriers were well known. They could be arrested at any time. But what was the point? They would be replaced at once, and were no danger to the state. Charlie scribbled that they should be left as they were for the meantime, and passed the file to the other end of his desk. There were no reports from the Stalingrad station: a network of smugglers

had been broken-up there the previous week, and it would take them time to regroup. The drug-trade through Liverpool Street was controlled by the security service and was to be strictly left alone.

And there was something from King's Cross that nobody could make sense of. An elderly man had been found in possession of a large quantity of cocaine, just before Christmas. Some of the lads downstairs had been involved. He had been on the platform for the night-train to York and Newcastle and Edinburgh when they had pounced. But they had left him senseless on the platform, and hadn't even troubled to discover where he held a ticket for. When they had returned, the old man had disappeared. Perhaps he had recovered and made his escape - nobody in the station knew, and of course all the witnesses had gone by the time the chaps had returned. So had all the undamaged packets of cocaine.

Charlie marked the file closed and passed it to the end of his desk. A siren could be heard approaching - an ambulance, perhaps on some mission of mercy. The siren screamed closer and closer and then began to go away. It was still snowing heavily out in the city.

There was a wired report from the regional security co-ordinator in Wales. A blow by blow account which went on for twenty pages. They had re-checked their records for passengers and freight on the Holyhead to Ireland ferries for the last six months. They only kept records for six months. This was the best they could do. Security personnel were on duty round the clock at Holyhead and all passengers and trucks were searched rigourously. There had been no trace whatsoever of illegal drugs smuggling throughout those last six months. Was any further information requested? The security co-ordinator's office said it would be pleased to help, and

apologised that it could, in the circumstances, do no more for the moment.

There was a second report on Northern Irish ferry operations from the security office for Scotland. It ran to less pages than the first, but Charlie wearily pushed it aside. He would read it later.

He went downstairs and got a coffee in the canteen. The wire-machines were chattering at the back of reception. Traffic always increased late in the afternoon, as offices passed the buck upwards and cleared their desks for the coming day. In the canteen one of the plainclothes shifts from the station had just come in. The lads were covered in snow and were cursing the weather. When they saw Charlie they nodded and stopped cursing.

Charlie sat on his own at a corner table. The coffee was barely drinkable but at least it was hot. The lads who had watched the station sat at the far end of the canteen. One of the girls from the wire-room joined them. She was very pretty, and made a play for each of the lads in turn. They talked about the weekend and the danger of bombs in the west end. The Militia general who had lost his legs and his life had been looking for a regular whore in Soho. Someone said something about the Cohen-Petrovsky case, but at least he lowered his voice. It wasn't clear what he had said. Someone said there was talk of another big bomb attack in the city centre. Everyone agreed it was better to stay clear for a few weeks. And someone made a joke about Shrove Tuesday - Charlie didn't catch this either. But it was true: you did hear everything in the canteen, if you listened long enough.

He took the dregs of his coffee back to the office. A single-bar electric fire was glowing from a corner. It barely warmed the room at all. But it was better than nothing. He dragged a report from the

transport police over his desk and began to read it. At least it was mercifully short. Passenger identities were recorded as a matter of course at the time a rail-ticket was acquired. But passenger lists for the Scotch trains were not compiled. So there was nothing in the way of passenger records from Euston to Glasgow or King's Cross to Edinburgh. The unknown author of the wired report had added that the railway police were understaffed, and had better things to do with their time than do other people's work for them. That was all. And it hardly mattered anyway - it had been a very long shot in the first place.

Then the requested report on Northern Irish ferry operations from the security co-ordination office for Scotland. It had been typed, and brought down by the hand of some unknown bagman. The office was headquartered according to the headed notepaper in the North British Hotel, Edinburgh. These ferries ran from Stranraer in Scotland to Larne, and conversely. Larne was in Northern Ireland and a full part of the United Kingdom. Passengers on these ferries were therefore travelling within the confines of one united country, and not crossing any border between two states, friendly or otherwise. Security considerations appropriate for that sort of state border did not therefore apply. Passengers were searched on a random basis, and passenger-lists were compiled. But passengers who travelled as guests of the wheeled freight vehicles were not checked in any way. Passenger lists were not destroyed, but it would take much work to identify persons who had used the service on a frequent basis in the last twelve months. If this information was required, a specific request should be made. On account of understaffing, no deadline could be accepted for delivery of the

information sought. Charlie scrawled 'Ask them anyway' and shoved the paperwork away.

Charlie again thought about going home. It was still snowing heavily. If he left it much later, there might be delays - unless the Tube was running, or the snowploughs were out. The Fraternalists had brought armoured battlefield snowploughs into the city as a gesture of goodwill, though of course some people said it was just another form of intimidation. But who cared, as long as people got home from the office in the evening?

Charlie had actually put his coat on when the telephone rang. It seemed terribly loud at that time of the day; an offence, somehow, against good office protocol.

'Inspector Marr?', the voice said. 'It's Jamie. I did promise to call'.

They talked for a moment about the bomb that had got Johnson. Jamie thought it was a dreadful tragedy. Everyone knew he had a wife and children. But it was just bad luck really. It could have been any of them, after all.

'Did you get anything for me?', Charlie asked.

'Not much', Jamie said, 'but you never know. It could be a start. You did want to have anything on people who might have come into the country. We've had something from our people in Spain. Of course, it's out of date. It takes a long time to come over to us for obvious reasons. And even longer to find its way through the system'.

Charlie made encouraging noises and studied the pile of papers still on his desk. He hadn't joined the police to read reports, searching for some sliver of information that was probably not there anyway.

'In the north', Jamie was saying. 'Thought to be a Scotsman, though I don't suppose that's much of a lead. He fought in the civil war, we think. We can't be too sure yet, but they are checking. We don't even know what side he was on. He is supposed to have been killed there. Or somewhere, anyway'.

'But he wasn't?', Charlie said wearily.

'Well, not if he is still alive', Jamie said with impeccable logic. 'If it is the same person, I mean. We will have more information once all the checks have been done'.

'Is that it?', Charlie said, trying not to sound too grudging. 'Do we know anything about him?'

'That's just it', Jamie said. 'He had disappeared. We don't know when. The watch was intermittent. But they say he has gone'.

'Do we know where he might have gone to?'

But Jamie said nothing was known. Except that the Scotsman was thought to have gone to the coast.

'Perhaps he went out by ship', Jamie said. 'There's supposed to be a lot of smuggling out of the north coast'.

'Is there any American connection?', Charlie asked.

But Jamie said they had no information to that effect. Someone had disappeared, and nobody knew where he was. Jamie said he hoped this might be helpful and rang off. Charlie looked out into the snow. It was heavier than ever now. It would take hours to get back home. He wondered if he might go to a pub first and stay there for a while. Hours, perhaps. It might take the edge of the weekend. He cut the power to his little one-bar fire and locked the door. At the bottom of the stairs, the chatter from the wire-room had stilled to a silence. He glanced into the canteen and saw Fiona. She looked up, telepathic, and signalled.

She had been shopping. And then on her way back into the building, she had stopped in the wire room to pick up anything that might have come for them.

She said, 'You should spend more time reading these reports'.

'What is it?', Charlie said.

'From France', she said. 'It has just come in. We trade information with them about drug-smuggling'.

'I didn't know that', Charlie said.

'We do. Sometimes anyway. I wired and asked. You wanted me to, in fact. Any of our nationals around - any movements of people - any arrests. Anything at all, really, especially on the west coast. Their drugs-intelligence is sectorised, much as we do. They have had to collate reports from two districts. But someone came in on a freighter suspected of smuggling morphine. Came into Lorient'.

'Where was the freighter from?', Charlie asked without interest.

Fiona studied the papers and said, 'Gijón. It was carrying iron-ore. But the skipper is strongly suspected of smuggling anything he can turn a profit on'.

'So where's Gijón?', Charlie said, thinking about the first pub he was going to visit.

'North Spain', Fiona said. "Right in the middle'.

'And what then?'

Fiona said, 'That was the first report. The target disappeared almost at once in Lorient. So they lost interest. I mean, if he wasn't there, he wasn't a danger to them. But the sector up the coast picked up a trail. At an old customs lookout post. The Soviets have their own networks in Spain. They tipped-off their own people in France. Two of them went looking. We don't know why. But they

missed him anyway. And the target disappeared again. The French think he must be some sort of professional. The local police say they think someone was taken out by boat from a village called Le Conquet. But they can't be sure. They were tied-up with some local riot concerning the children of collaborators. That's what they call them anyway. But they think the target was taken out at night and disappeared again'.

Charlie said, 'How out?'

'By boat', Fiona said. 'How else would you leave a fishing port?'

'And where could they have taken him to', Charlie asked, 'if he existed in the first place'.

'Well', Fiona said, 'we could look at a map for a start. But why would they take him south by boat when he had come from the south by boat in the first place? And if they took him north - well, that would be to England, wouldn't it? There isn't anywhere else to go'.

'To England', Charlie said, savouring the idea slowly.

'Oh, and there's just one other thing', Fiona said. 'They think they know the fisherman he went with. He worked for British intelligence and special operations on the coast of Brittany during the German occupation. He was quite famous for it. Smuggling our people into France by small fishing boat'.

'Where would he arrive in England if he came over by boat?', Charlie asked.

And Fiona said, 'I have looked. It would be somewhere in Cornwall, wouldn't it'.

'Get a flashlight', Charlie said, 'the station watchers will give you one'.

The snow had stopped when they left the building. They walked round to the station and found a taxi. The driver refused to take them to the far north of the city. He said he had little fuel and would have trouble getting more. But when Fiona offered him some American dollars, he changed his mind.

‘Where are we going?’, she asked.

‘To Johnson’s house’, Charlie said. ‘Just an idea. The Militia turned it over but they weren’t looking for the same thing. There might be something left for us’.

‘What’s Johnson got to do with it?’, she asked.

‘We don’t know’, Charlie said. ‘Maybe nothing. But it might be worth a look’.

Johnson’s house was very large; far larger than the sort of house any drugs-squad policemen would expect to live in before the fruits of his professional endeavour became fully apparent in honest retirement. Perhaps, of course, it had been funded with an inheritance. Or had Johnson enjoyed a secret and parallel career at the gaming tables?

The house stood back from and above the road. It was surrounded by a walled garden. Lights burned in neighbouring houses, but it was not the sort of street where neighbours noticed each other’s existence. The driver wanted to know if he should wait. He would be happy to wait for dollars. But they paid him off and watched his tail lights till they had headed back for the city.

The house was locked, but they got in by a back window. The reception rooms had been torn apart, but nothing seemed to have been taken. Perhaps the Militia would come back after the weekend to hunt for clues. Or perhaps they had finished their work already. One room had been given over to golfing memorabilia. Photographs

of club-outings, antique clubs, collected volumes of club histories. The upstairs rooms had been smashed too. One room had clearly belonged to children. It had been torn apart with fury by the Militia searchers. Broken toys littered the floor, in a riot of bedclothes, broken furniture and the volumes of a children's encyclopaedia. One of these volumes lay broken-backed and open at a sepia photograph - 'King George VI Presenting Himself to the Populace at the Delhi Durbar'.

The principal bedroom had been torn apart too, in a blizzard of clothes. Someone had ripped into Johnson's collection of golfing jerseys and shoes. His widow's clothes were scattered too: including a collection of extremely expensive fur-coats. Fiona found a leather briefcase below a pile of clothes.

'How did they miss this?'

'They had found the dollars and sterling. That was enough. They will come back and search again'.

Fiona upended the case and a tightly-wrapped packet fell softly to the carpet. To the untrained eye, it might have been of a regulation size and a regulation packaging. The packet had split on impact; perhaps it had already been damaged. Fiona ran her fingers through the fine white powder.

'The packet says American cane sugar'.

Charlie said at once, 'Run it along your gums'.

There was also a bundle of American dollars, tied with a ribbon. And there was a diary for the previous year with indecipherable entries scribbled throughout its length. As well as a single copy of a magazine. Charlie held the flashlight close while Fiona turned over the pages.

Charlie said, 'What's it called?'

‘Ottoman Studies’, the girl said. ‘That’s Turkey’.

‘That doesn’t sound like Johnson’, Charlie said. ‘Forget it. What about the diary?’

But they could make no sense of the diary. Perhaps the code referred to Johnson’s golfing adventures, of course.

‘What are we looking for anyway?’, the girl asked.

‘We don’t know’, Charlie said. ‘Just a Friday evening hunch. Anything about Cornwall. Johnson’s widow says they went there once on holiday. And she heard Johnson on the phone to someone talking about a shipment of cocaine. Something about the Manacles. And somewhere called Porthoustock. Someone was coming in and they had to get through the rocks before daylight. She said the south coast was a lovely place. Though not at this time of the year, I suppose’.

Fiona said with great composure, ‘You haven’t read everything on your desk, have you’.

Charlie said he had got back late from talking to Johnson’s widow. He had read the material from co-ordination in Wales and Scotland. But no, he hadn’t read everything, it would have to wait till Monday.

Fiona said, ‘There is a routine report on your desk from the south-west. One of the naval patrol boats saw a small French boat off the Manacles. There was heavy fog. They gave chase but lost it when it went inshore among some rocks. That’s all there is, it is a synopsis. The local police have a full copy. They also say a French crabber had been found in the river. They found it and then it disappeared. It had been sunk. Deliberately, they said, to hide it. They recovered it and then it disappeared again. They made some enquiries. They thought someone had come over from France and

had been hidden in the district. But when they went to look for him, he had gone. And there is a report from the police in Newlyn. A stranger was reported at a house near somewhere called Mousehole. There is an old Daniel camp up above it on the hills. A stranger was seen but when they went to look for him, he had gone. We have an address but that's all.'

There was an immense silence at this point. Fiona switched the lamp off, and they stood in the dark among the ruins of Johnson's family life. Perhaps the house would be repaired and rented cheaply to a senior officer in one of the state's protection agencies. It was a desirable property, in a desirable neighbourhood, after all; perhaps someone in the Militia would get it.

Charlie said, 'How far is it to Cornwall?'

Fiona said she had checked. It was a long way. There were trains from the Stalingrad station to Plymouth. After that, she didn't know.

'Let's go', Charlie said. It wasn't clear whether he meant go to Cornwall, or leave Johnson's ruined house. But it didn't matter either.

Fiona said, 'Will we take the cocaine?'

'What would we do with it?', Charlie said.

'What would the Militia do with it?'

'That's a very good point', Charlie said.

'And the dollars?'

'Oh, we can certainly use dollars, if things get worse'.

'And what about the diary?'

'Take it too', Charlie said, 'they won't miss it now'.

'Where are we going?'

Charlie said, 'This place Manacles. And then Mousehole'.

They walked for a mile to a Tube station. There had been another bomb attack in the city centre. But at least they could get a train to the centre.

After that, they would have to depend on luck.