

Twenty-three.

By the early hours of the morning, it was clear that there had been some sort of rising throughout large parts of the country. Kelly said that the upheaval would make collection of the cocaine difficult. They had less than forty eight hours before the shipment came in. Nobody would wait for them if they were late at the rendezvous.

Daniel presbyterians had seized the south side of Edinburgh. The centre of the country had fallen to armed bands of republicans. There has been some sort of rising in Glasgow too. Popular Guards had seized the city and declared it under their control. It was not yet clear what had happened elsewhere.

Their car was an armoured Militia Daimler: a powerful machine with spare cannisters of fuel strapped all round it. They requisitioned it at the zocamp and drove west, through trim suburbs in the direction of Glasgow. Corstorphine Road had been cleared of snow by military bulldozer: one had been shot-up and lay in a smouldering wreck in the front door of a National Commercial bank. There were no street lights of any kind, and Kelly drove without headlights. In the trim bungalows, no lights were to be seen either.

At the Corstorphine roundabout it became clear that there was fighting ahead. Just beyond the junction they were halted at a roadblock manned by a Popular Guard. A partisan, heavily armed, said they were under orders from the city's factory council to stop all traffic. There was heavy fighting around the airport.

Kelly said, 'I thought you were Daniels'.

'Not these bastards', the worker scoffed. 'They have the south of the city and we have the west. Militia forces and some Regular military are still holding on in the north and around Leith. And they

have the whole east of the city too. They control the main rail line into Waverley. We're trying to take the airport by daybreak. And they are trying to evacuate as many of their top people as fast as they can'.

The partisan pointed into the sky and the hot roar of heavy aircraft could be heard somewhere above them and to the west.

'What's happening elsewhere?', Kelso asked.

'We don't know for sure', the worker said. 'The Triple Alliance called another general strike. Then it was cancelled. The radio has been off the air since last night. There has been rioting all over England. There is fighting going on for control of some of the big cities in the north. Some people say Wales is in our hands as well. But nobody is sure of anything'.

The night sky shook again as a very heavy aircraft began its take-off run beyond the woods. The thundering seemed to go on for a long time: and then the thunder slowly began to climb and head north towards the Forth. But it was still too dark to see anything, and the plane showed no lights.

'Where are you going anyway?', the partisan asked.

Kelly said, 'Argyll'.

'Christ', the partisan exclaimed, 'that's a long way. You will never get through Glasgow, you'll need to go north of the city. The rail link was cut yesterday, but the Militia is still holding most of the country on the east of Glasgow'.

They waited at the roundabout for an hour, perhaps more. Kelly said she had got on the ferry at Larne without any problem. The crossing had been easy, though there had been a lot of snow and they hadn't seen land till they were in the loch at Stranraer. Of course, the ship was swarming with watchers, as usual. But none

seemed to be watching her. There had been a delay when they disembarked: a security alert for Belfast Daniels, whom the authorities especially feared. At the time, nobody knew why there was an alert. She had picked up her car, and taken the usual route. In Dumfries, she thought she was followed by a police car, but she wasn't certain about this. And she was stopped in Moffat at a Paramilitary road-block; the men were tense and suspicious but they let her through.

Kelso said, 'So they knew something was coming'.

'Oh yes, they knew the Daniels had something planned. They seemed to think some were coming over from Belfast'.

The real trouble was at Penicuik. She ran into a Militia road-block there, and this time the troopers were taking no nonsense. Everything had been in order, but it took an hour to telephone through and check the registration number of her car. Even then, she had come off a ferry from which dozens of people had been detained as suspected Daniels, so they detained her too, to be on the safe side.

Kelso said, 'Dalkeith Militia barracks'.

'How do you know that?', Kelly said, truly surprised.

'We guessed', he said.

She said it was an accurate guess. But the place was full of people who had been lifted on suspicion of Daniel sympathy, and they took her up into the city centre. She didn't know where, but she thought it was somewhere near a railway station.

Kelso said, 'The basement of the North British. That's where they process religious cases'.

Kelly was dragged through a doorway into what had once been a wide corridor through the basement of the hotel. But now, it

had been lined on each side with purpose-built hutches, in which a single person could be restrained. At head-height in each hutch there was also a grille. Behind each of them, a pair of eyes was to be seen. The corridor was lit by a dim yellow bulb set behind a protective grille. At the far end a door opened onto a very brightly lit room. It had the appearance of a well-appointed hospital operating theatre.

Kelly said, 'It was very quiet. All you could hear was deep breathing - from the hutches, I suppose. And the smell - the corridor smelt of industrial floor-polish. I still had no idea where I was'.

In the operating theatre an orderly in military uniform and nailed boots was drinking from a large white mug and reading a newspaper. The aroma of hot, sweet coffee had filled the room. A short crowbar and a butcher's cleaver lay on a thick wooden bench, well-scrubbed. A radio was playing somewhere. Dance music. The orderly had suddenly lifted his head, as if he had sensed danger. His eyes were dark, impenetrable, his shirt collar wide and open. He had eyed Kelly without pity, without hope, without any rancour whatsoever.

Beyond the operating theatre was a single cell, with manacles bolted to a stout iron wall-plate, and an iron cot. There was a bucket of drinking water, and a second latrine bucket. The cell was empty. A hundred names were scratched on its painted walls, as high as any hand could reach. They did not manacle Kelly, but they took most of her clothes and left her barefoot. A yellow bulb burned in the ceiling: then, without warning, it went out, and the cell was plunged into darkness. From the operating theatre, she could quite clearly hear the orderly's radio. All she could remember was something about shiploads of lemons which would be imported in

time for Shrove Tuesday. And the shipping forecast: a deepening area of low pressure was developing and would sweep over the country in the following twenty four hours, bringing gales to many areas, and blizzards to mountainous districts.

She said, 'Then I was taken outside. That's when I knew we were in the station. By now there were about twenty of us'.

It was very cold and even in Waverley, the puddles of water were frozen solid. The detainees were herded to one of the west-bound platforms. A van attached to a goods train took them out of the station shortly afterwards. It banged and rattled over the points, dived under what someone said was the art gallery at the foot of the Mound, swayed into what someone else said confidently was Haymarket, and was there uncoupled and left for the day in a siding.

As the day progressed, the weather seemed to get even colder than it had been in the morning. About lunchtime it began to snow. A platoon of women was laying rails: they had no gloves, nor hats, and most wore light rubber sandals. A thick-set woman in a Militia uniform swung a three-foot wrench, and kept her gang in order. Someone said the rail-layers were teachers on soft-option three-month sentences. The snow began to fall relentlessly. Soon, from the cracks in the plank walls of their van, there was nothing to be seen but the heavily falling snow. It began to get colder than ever too.

Someone had said, with great authority, 'There's something not right about this. There's trouble somewhere. That's why we are still here'.

Then a machine-gun hammered for a time, not far away; a steam-hauled express could be heard, thundering through the station non-stop: the brakes of a diesel shunting-engine screamed

nearby for an instant: and then all was silent again. After that the station went very quiet for what seemed to be hours. It was beginning to get dark. And it was now extremely cold. Then the door of the car was flung open. Someone was screaming that the prisoners get out or be shot: and they had all tumbled down into the snow.

A Militia officer explained that they would have to walk to their destination. This would soon overcome any cold from which they were suffering. There had been a Daniel attack on the line to the west, just a mile or two away. Perhaps the prisoners had heard the machine-gun fire earlier? These Daniels had concealed themselves in a former church. They had cut the railway with explosives, in a bid to prevent troop-trains getting to Glasgow. The line would not be open until the morning. Reprisals were already under way in Murrayfield and surrounding areas. So they would walk to their destination. And on arrival, there would be hot soup for everyone: as much as anybody wanted.

The prisoners stumbled into the station. The platforms were lit with oil lamps. There was no electric light to be seen anywhere. An elderly porter pushing a metal-wheeled barrow had paused in his labours. As the prisoners passed, he had nodded very quickly and out of sight of the guards to Kelly.

Outside again, it was snowing more heavily than ever. A column of other prisoners, perhaps two hundred of them, was waiting in the snow. A pair of Militia armoured cars was parked in front of the station entrance. In the roundabout beyond, a few vehicles crept slowly in the snow, skidding and spitting slush. A double-decker bus paused to take passengers aboard; and then it crept off towards the west of the city. By now, some prisoners were

fainting with the cold. The Militia troopers huddled at the rear doors of their armoured cars; the aroma of hot coffee could clearly be sensed.

A convoy of military vehicles came through from Shandwick Place and headed west. There were fourteen Bedford troop carriers, three tanks on transporters, and half a dozen anti-artillery guns. Kelly counted them. Someone said they were on the way out to Murrayfield, to take-on the Daniels there. But nobody knew for sure, of course. And in the cold, it hardly mattered. Kelly had begun to wonder how long she could stand it. And then the march into the snow began.

One car led the procession, and the other followed. On the top of each, a gunner in a deep fur cap looked down his muzzle at the walking prisoners. In the tenement block to their right, no lights were to be seen except for the glimmer of candles or paraffin lamps. From the close-mouths, ragged children watched, without sound, without gesture. One prisoner, so quickly the eye could hardly catch the movement, removed a gold watch and tossed it to an urchin, who snatched it from mid-air and had it hidden in a fraction of an instant. It had all been done so quickly, scarcely anyone seemed to have moved a muscle. The lead armoured car changed up a gear, with a blast of hot diesel smoke: and the advance began to proceed at a faster pace.

As they moved west, the quality of the housing improved; from tenement blocks to terraced houses with faded hotel notice-boards in front of them, and then to increasingly grand and entirely detached villas in their own private grounds. But nowhere was any light to be seen. Many of the houses appeared to have been burned out.

As they had approached Murrayfield, small-arms fire could be heard in the distance, and the crump of mortars. The firing rose and fell with the direction of the wind. Visibility was down to thirty yards. Someone on the lead armoured car trained a powerful spotlight into the stumbling line of prisoners; so too did someone from the follow-on car. It was very difficult to see anything. Three times, a prisoner fell in the snow and was bayoneted. Kelly said they had walked for another hour - maybe less, it was hard to be sure.

She said, 'Then we were made to turn right through the gates. We could hear the dogs howling. That's when we knew we were at the zoocamp'.

Kelly had been processed into the camp as a suspected Daniel and locked-up with another fifty of these Daniels somewhere near the centre of the settlement. Sometime in the evening she had fallen asleep: and was woken by the first of three huge explosions in the close vicinity. That was when she knew that an attack on the zoocamp was under way.

After a long silence, Kelso asked if they had been given the hot soup that they had been promised at Haymarket.

'Oh yes', she said, 'and as much of it as we liked too'.

They sat at the Corstorphine roundabout for another thirty minutes, while aircraft continued to take off from the airport. There were no incoming planes at all. The Popular Guard partisan said he did not know when the road to the west would be open. There were more reports of fighting coming in all the time now.

Kelly turned the Daimler, and took the back road over to Barnton. Then she swung left, and found the coast road for Grangemouth and Stirling. Soon daylight began to seep into the eastern sky: a shading of darkness at first, then a lightening, and

finally the first tiny flush of pink. The further west they drove there was less snow to be seen, and at length none at all. The sky was blue and very clear. Trees by the roadside stood out very black against the sky.

By the time the sun was rising they were approaching Stirling. A forest of blue and white flags streamed across the town. They were stopped on the outskirts by a group of men in khaki battledress tops and various forms of tartan headgear. The leader of this group had the style, the authority, the accent even of a sergeant in the wartime army. He insisted, with a curious mixture of deference and firmness, that he search the car. He was wearing a soldier's bonnet, with checks round the brim and a short black feather. There was cap badge too, recently polished.

Kelly said, 'What's going on?'

'We have seized the town, miss', the onetime sergeant said gruffly, and as if it were the most natural thing in the world. 'The Militia have still got Perth, but the workers have taken Dundee. They were always a bad lot, those factories'.

'What about Fife?', Kelso wondered.

'We don't know for sure, sir, but the miners have taken control of the pits'.

'Are the roads clear to the west?'

'Some of them, miss. Most of Dunbartonshire is clear but not all of it. It depends how far you are wanting to go'.

'Argyll. For a wedding'.

'It should be some wedding, miss, with all this trouble. There was a good one here yesterday, right in the middle of all the fighting. Our people will look after you as far as Drymen. We control the road in that direction. We have roadblocks and pickets all the way, and

scouts out to the north. We are fortifying the town this morning in case of counter-attack’.

Kelso said, ‘You have done this before?’

‘Oh yes, sir. Did it during the war with the regiment. And then the commandos. Lots of the boys round here were in the army though a lot of them have been deported, of course. And all the old men were in the first war. They’re steady when you want them’.

‘Can we get breakfast anywhere?’

‘Try the Red Lion, miss, that’s a good howf. If there’s no answer, just go to the back door and ask for my sister’.

In the town, however, they found the Red Lion bolted back and front, while detachments of civilians were being drilled in the main street. There was some sign of recent fighting, and a number of buildings were burned out. In front of the station a Militia armoured car lay on its side; in the station itself, a passenger train was burned out and still smoking.

They drove on, in the hope of finding somewhere to eat later. In Kippen there was no sign of the disturbances in the rest of the country. Women were sweeping doorsteps and a postman on a bicycle, accompanied by a black and white dog, was delivering letters. The morning was equally peaceful in Drymen although a Militia armoured car, under partisan control and flying a Saltire, was standing in front of the hotel.

They parked the Daimler, and Kelso asked the man who seemed to be in charge if the roads west were clear. The man wore cavalry twill trousers, a sports jacket, and a pair of brown brogue shoes, highly polished. He was carrying a very expensive shotgun.

‘Those chaps in Glasgow are going to cause trouble’, he said. ‘We don’t want that sort of thing here!’

Kelso asked again about the roads. The chap said there was fighting in Dumbarton and Alexandria, but it might just be possible to get through at Balloch. If they took the Loch Lomond road, that should keep them clear of trouble. But the Protectorate would fight to the death to protect its submarine installations in the Gare Loch.

And they were indeed lucky to get through Balloch. They stopped outside the town, and refuelled: it seemed wiser that way, rather have their cans requisitioned at a road-block. From the little town itself, heavy gunfire could be heard, and to the south and the west. But they were waved through by partisan groups, and found the Loch Lomond road empty. At Tarbet, a dozen anti-aircraft guns on flatback trucks had been abandoned: there was no sign of their crews, or any other sign of government forces.

Soon they were sweeping down to the head of Loch Fyne, and by lunchtime were driving into Inveraray. The town was a forest of saltires. A dozen military aircraft in close formation were flying overhead, headed east. Against the blue of the winter morning sky, red stars could be seen clearly at the wingtips. But it was not clear where the twin-engined bombers might have come from; or might be going.

They found a hotel which gave them lunch in a public bar with a roaring wood fire. There appeared to be no shortage of food in the village: or drink, for a dozen very old men were drinking whisky at the bar, and talking carefully among themselves.

‘We can stay here’, Kelly said quietly, ‘if we can get a room’.

‘Just one?’

‘For old time’s sake’, she said.

She went to find a reception desk; she seemed to take an enormously long time in doing so. But when she returned, she had a room key, and a smile.

She said, 'One room. Anyway, It might look a bit strange otherwise'.

In the afternoon, they slept, one at a time, while the other kept watch. Three times, formations of planes droned overhead, the red stars gleaming at their wingtips. The room looked north, and all afternoon the road from that direction remained entirely free of traffic. The town seemed strangely empty of young men too. A little before dark, a very fast naval vessel raced up the loch, flying a red banner on its stern: an hour later it returned, going just as fast, but this time it was wearing the White Ensign of the old Royal Navy. For quite a long time afterwards, the wash of the ship dashed onto the shore, in a hopeless sort of way.

They ate in an otherwise empty dining-room, which seemed to have been commissioned for themselves alone. A waitress brought superb food: shellfish, venison, vegetables, cheese, milk.

Kelso said, 'You won't get food like this in the south'.

The girl said, 'We didn't here either, until we got rid of the Militia'.

'Where are they now?', Kelly asked.

'Where are you going?', the girl said.

'Towards Oban'.

'You'll see in that case', the girl said firmly; and went away. Afterwards, they walked a little in the evening. Although it was very cold, the sky was still clear, and the stars were to be seen clearly. They found a pub in the village: really, a bar in the end of a row of houses, where a jovial host offered them whisky or beer: or both, of

course. Kelly asked for lemonade, but there was none. She settled for beer.

The barman said, 'American, miss?'

And then he leaned forward in a deeply conspiratorial way and added, 'Be careful. If they come back, they will want to know about any Americans who were here'.

Kelso said, 'Where are all the young men?'

The barman said, 'There are none. In the early days, there was a lot of trouble here. A lot of our boys, not just from the town but the whole district all the way through Knapdale and Kintyre, were shot in reprisals. Then they took a lot more as hostages without right of correspondence. And just about all of the rest were conscripted for labour service. We have never heard from them either'.

They finished their drinks and walked on the pier. A steamer lay sunk at its outer end. They could hear the tide surging below, and its faint wash on the beach beyond. All the shops were barred, their windows empty. It seemed as if they had been like that for a long time. They returned to their hotel. At the main door, they were issued with a single candle: the receptionist - the waitress of earlier - said that there had been a generator, but that the Militia had taken it away months ago. With this candle, they found their way upstairs to their room: the freezing place of earlier had been transformed by the light of a wood fire. They dragged their bedding to the fire and slept there, the flames licking and dancing in shadow across them.

In the morning, they walked to the castle. The weather was still fair; a high pressure system was steady out to the west somewhere, for high white wisps of cloud were drifting south. The grounds of the building seemed deserted. So did the building itself.

All the rooms seemed to have been stripped empty. At the back of the building they were surprised by an elderly retainer, who told them, 'The radicals from Glasgow stole the lot. It's a wonder they didn't burn the place down while they were at it'.

Kelso asked what he meant. The old man looked at him, very keenly. He said, 'You're not with the government, are you?'

it seemed safer to deny the suggestion; whatever it meant. And in any case the old man seemed quite convinced that they were not - as he put it - with the government.

He said, 'It was a priceless collection. Swords, pikes, halberds, claymores, lochaber axes, muskets, pistols, even bagpipes that the dukes had stolen from the people. The wild men from Glasgow came through days ago, just after the authorities decided to leave. I don't know what the duke will think of it when he hears'.

'Where is he?', Kelly asked.

'Away, of course', the old man said. 'He's a Campbell'.

'Deported?'

'No, no, miss, he is in the government. At least he was yesterday, but maybe he's changed sides by now'.

Kelly asked if there might be any petrol to buy; the old man asked if they were going far.

Kelly said, 'Oban. At least, that direction. For a wedding'.

'I would maybe have petrol for a married couple', the old man said eliptically, 'but not for anybody else'.

He disappeared into the gaunt building, and after what seemed an age he had not returned.

Kelso said, 'Have we enough to get us there?'

'Just', she said.

'How do we get back?'

‘Leave that to me’.

They returned to the hotel, collected the car, and left on the road south. They were scarcely out of the village when the hangings began. Stout timber posts from the forestry works had been driven into the ground. From each a Militia man, in full uniform, had been suspended by the neck. It was not clear that every one was dead. The posts went on, quite closely spaced, for two hundred yards. At the end of this procession there were another fifty or so posts, unoccupied.

At Lochgilphead they turned west, and drove the length of the canal as far as Crinan. The hotel was in the possession of Glasgow radicals, as the old man at Inveraray had called them. Most were armed with antique weapons: swords, pikes, muskets. It seemed polite, even sensible, not to ask about their provenance. And nobody volunteered the information either.

A fishing boat lay in the basin, her brown barked nets piled on the side of the deck. A crewman in a fisherman’s flecked jersey sat on a bucket, smoking a pipe. Kelly asked if he had any petrol to sell. After a long time, he took the pipe from his mouth and said that if he had petrol to sell he would have petrol to start his own engine, and would be at sea.

The rebels had a diesel generator running at the back of the hotel. Its steady thump, on the calm winter air, seemed strangely reassuring. The bar was open, although no drink was to be seen on the gantry. Some partisans were gathered round a radio, hunting for reception. Often there was nothing but the roar of jamming equipment. Then they found a programme fronted by an amateur Scottish voice. This pirate station was broadcasting from somewhere near Glasgow. The general strike was universal

throughout the country. Wales had fallen, and most of Scotland would be clear of the Protectorate in a matter of days. Then the jammers found the frequency, and the transmission was drowned in meaningless sound. It had only lasted a matter of minutes. And no other station could be found.

It would be dark soon. The partisans gave them a flask filled with a combination of tea and brandy; it was difficult to say exactly how much of the mix was tea and how much brandy. Then they drove back eastwards, crossed the canal, and followed the narrow track across the moor towards Kilmartin. The settlement was burned and deserted of life. So too were the houses at Kilmelford. At Kilninver they turned left, onto a road even worse than the last.

Kelso said, 'Is there long to go now?'

Kelly said that they were very nearly there: and soon they drove cautiously over the hump-backed bridge across Seil sound and onto the island. At Balvicar they turned right - the road carried on for Cuan sound and the crossing to Luing - and bumped their way slowly onwards. Twice, the engine coughed and nearly died, as the carburettor began to starve of fuel: but their luck held.

It was very nearly dark when they coasted into Ellanbeich, and parked under the lee of a slate bank. Already parked there was a canvas-backed two-ton lorry. There were binoculars and a pair of powerful torches in the cab.

She said, 'There should be a dinghy here. If there isn't we are in real trouble'.

But she found the little boat quickly, and they rowed over the few yards of dark water to Easdale. They skirted its flooded quarry, and made at once for the little summit of the islet. To the south, the Fladda light was stabbing into the growing darkness. Somehow, it

seemed powerfully comforting. A tail of overfalls ran away from the islet's south-western end.

Kelso said, 'I thought they would come at midnight'.

Kelly said, 'Yes. Well, six hours either side of it. They could come now, or we could be here all night. I hope you don't mind the cold'.

'They could have been here already, and be gone now.'

'We have to wait'.

A red light could be seen, very close to Fladda. Then it became green. Then green and red at once. But these lights did not seem to make any progress against the rushing tide.

Kelly said, 'Anyway, we are here. That's a start. I just hope it is the right place'.

There was a long silence at this, and then Kelso asked her what she meant by it.

She said, 'There are two landing zones. This one and another one up north a bit. We know it is tonight. But we can't know if we have come to the right place'.

For what seemed ages, Kelly held the binoculars to her eyes and watched the pair of lights struggle past Fladda.

She said, 'I hope that is not a Militia patrol boat. They might not control the land any more, but they will certainly control the sea'.

Kelso said, 'How much are they bringing in?'

Kelly said, 'We don't know until it arrives. But usually half-a-ton. I mean, this stuff isn't easy to get. Didn't anyone tell you?'

There was once more a very long silence, and the pair of red and green lights swung and struggled in the stream, hard in against Fladda. The ebb had yet to slacken.

Kelso said, 'It must be a very strong tidal stream here'.

Kelly took the binoculars from her eyes, and asked if Kelso had a cigarette. She lit it, rolled on her back in the rocks, and looked into the firmament. She put the binoculars back to her eyes and held them on the eastern horizon for what seemed an eternity.

Kelso said, 'Aircraft?'

She gave him the glasses in silence and he searched the night sky for what she had seen. Then he passed them back.

'I can see nothing. I can hear nothing'.

Kelly sat up, and then rolled onto her knees. She pressed the glasses to her eyes again, and stared intently into the night. Only the tide could be heard in the distance, rushing over the rocks.

'It's a comet', Kelly said at length. 'I can see a comet rising in the east'.