

Twenty-five.

Charlie and Fiona got out of London on the last train north before the capital fell to the insurgents of the National Convention. Their trip across the city was hectic. For three days there had been no trains to the north, or at least none guaranteed to get through to Edinburgh. There was fighting at some of the junctions north of London. There was a problem with fuel supplies. Then the train crews withdrew their labour again, and soldiers sent to replace them were driven away. Abandoned locomotives and rolling stock littered the stations. In some places lines had been torn up. The signalling system no longer worked reliably. Tanks of diesel oil had been set on fire, and water towers drained or destroyed.

But as increasingly large areas of the country, and leading towns, fell to the control of the insurgents, the rail services began to return. When vast civilian armies began to converge on London by foot, the call went out that even vaster armies should head for the city by all means available to them. For those in the north, that meant trains: and towards the end of the week makeshift services were operating on many of the long-distance main-lines. By the end of the week too, the telephones were staffed at King's Cross, and callers were being advised that there was a likelihood of trains running that night for Edinburgh: though the same callers were advised that services could not be guaranteed north of York, and that the rail-bridge over the Tyne was still under repair.

In London itself the week had been one of chaos and panic. Some people whispered that the gold reserves of the Bank of England had already been shipped-out, or were on the point of being shipped-out. Convoys of Militia trucks had been seen to leave

the City at night, heading for the docks. Lord Rothermere chartered an armoured train and loaded it with valuables in the shape of paintings, rare furniture, and boxes of gold plate and guinea coins: but the train was stopped by collectivised peasants somewhere in the countryside north of Dover, and for a time nothing was known of its fate. Then the heavily-defended compound in which Members of Parliament were required to reside when in the city was suddenly empty, and people said its usual residents had also been seen on their way to the docks.

In the canteen of the drugs-squad hotel in Victoria, officers conversed quietly among themselves. Some people said the Americans were coming: for out in the country a sign had been seen in the night sky, and people were interpreting it as proof of an invasion at any moment. Fleets of bombers and battleships were gathering at airbases and harbours on the west coast of Ireland.

There was talk of panic in the leadership of the Protectorate. Very senior officers and collaborators began to look nervously to the future and the prospects of advancement under any new regime that might be on the way. Others lost such nerve as they had, and simply disappeared. It was increasingly said that those prisoners still in custody were being massacred. There was even said to be a wave of last-minute arrests under way among sections of the governing classes, as a means of encouraging such others as remained to stay loyal. Some people even said it was not simply a matter of arrests, but executions in secret places throughout the city.

But by the end of the week matters had calmed somewhat. Food supplies were still distributed, and electricity and water remained available, although the former was subject to withdrawal without warning. And on the Friday morning Charlie and Fiona met

again at their base in Victoria, with the expectation of getting a train that same evening to Edinburgh.

The telephone system was still working within the city but the long-distance lines were down. Whores and pickpockets were swarming in Victoria, and the plain-clothes lads on duty in the station were claiming that hundreds of known drug-dealers and criminals in general were taking any trains whatsoever out of London: for they could see big trouble on the near horizon.

There were no taxis to be had, and the Tube had stopped running because of the irregular electricity supplies. Scores of underground trains were also said to have been abandoned on a dozen lines. There were no taxis either, for they had mysteriously disappeared from the city's streets. And traffic was seriously disrupted. All through the city centre, defensive operations were under way. A section of the river had been closed to surface vessels and float-planes were landing and taking off in a regular stream at Battersea. Road-blocks were everywhere, manned by very nervous Militia troopers. Ditches were being dug across main roads, and barricades were being thrown-up from cobbles and paving-slabs by the last units of prison-labour still in London.

At first then, they walked, for there was no other way of moving across the city. Buckingham Palace was a looted and burned ruin, and much of the roof had already fallen in. Paratroop landings were under way in Hyde Park, and the winter sky was dotted with aircraft and parachutes. In Green Park a battalion of branded Daniels was digging trenches, and Soviet marines were building anti-tank defences with stone from the tumbled walls of Clarence House. All the time, aircraft droned steadily overhead, at a very low altitude.

In Piccadilly, Fiona spotted a lone taxi, and the driver consented to take them as far as he could, for dollars only. No guarantees of distance, fixed price, and payment up front. That cost fifty of Johnson's dollars - but it was money well spent. Much of the city centre was closed absolutely to civilian traffic, and they dodged thorough Mayfair. In Bond Street furtive gangs of Militia troopers with lorries were looting the emporia there. Their driver stopped for a word. He appeared to be in possession of huge amounts of dollars: but the Militia were not in a selling mood. Perhaps they expected prices to rise rapidly in the next few days of turmoil. Or perhaps the driver wasn't offering enough money in the first place, of course.

There was more Militia looting under way in Regent Street, and at the bottom of Euston Road the driver said he could not take them any further. There were road-blocks and barricades all the way to the station, and the district was now under the control of Popular Guards from Scotland and Yorkshire.

They walked the rest of the way, amid scenes of immense confusion. Thousands of workers swarmed in the area, and thousands more seemed to pour at every moment from Euston. Most seemed to be armed, while further crowds of armed men were making their way in a tumultuous mob from the direction of Camden. King's Cross was also packed with men and women pouring off trains from the north. On every hand, Popular Guards were drilling and marching for their triumphant entry into the city centre later in the afternoon. Their leaders wore scarlet sashes, or home-made bonnets in Jacobin style. Many were miners, still dressed for the pit: but all were wearing the fur-lined boots that the Militia used for winter work.

Their tickets were waiting for them. The clerk said the train would leave at any time and they had better hurry. The clerk looked at the tickets for Edinburgh with admiration, and accepted Protectorate sterling in payment.

He said, 'You should make it. Most of the services are getting back to normal now that these bastards are finished'.

And he added, 'This will be the last train out before the city falls tonight. The Protectorate is going to announce its surrender any time now'.

Charlie said, 'That's not the way it looks to me'; but the jubilant clerk ignored him completely.

The double-header pulled out shortly afterwards, in great clouds of smoke and steam. The train was a very long one, composed of both passenger coaches and freight cars: for the Convention had ordered as many units of rolling stock as possible to be sent north, that more people might be brought into the capital as quickly as possible.

North of the city there were numerous delays, to allow freight-trains crammed with people to make their way towards the capital. Then the towns gave way to open country covered in snow, and for hours their journey was without interruption.

'How many dollars have we left?', Charlie asked.

'About fifteen hundred', Fiona said.

'Where did Johnson get the money?', Charlie wondered.

Fiona said, 'It's obvious. And his wife told us. He was dealing in cocaine'.

'Yes, but where was the cocaine coming from?'

In Peterborough there was another long delay. Cambridge and Norfolk had been collectivised in the early days of the

Protectorate. Now their ragged labour-forces thronged the platforms, selling food or begging alms. From the roof beams of the station, five Yeomanry officers had been hanged, their boots and trousers removed. At Doncaster there was another holdup. Here, the train was split and reduced to three coaches. The station swarmed with steel-workers from Sheffield headed for London at the earliest opportunity. All were armed with home-made weapons, and many had brought their families.

By the time it was dark, they had arrived in York. Again, huge crowds crammed the pavements of the city, and bonfires seemed to be burning on every hand. The train was shortened here again, for much of the rolling stock was needed at once to be taken back south. For a time there was some debate as to whether the remaining three passenger coaches would be commandeered, or the coal-waggons and flat-cars. Finally, the insurgents took the flat-cars; but also took one of the locomotives for good measure.

And then the excitement abated, for all those who wished to go south had already gone. Darlington, in the middle of the evening, was quiet: there were no signs of any disturbances at all. A pair of uniformed policemen strolled on the platforms and when Charlie asked them, they said that order would soon be restored.

‘The Protectorate has gone’, one of them said. ‘It was on the radio earlier. The Convention has taken-over. It has abolished the game laws and child labour already. We won’t have much trouble now. The pits are closed but the lads can get back to work any time. It’s all over’.

Newcastle was quiet too, although there was a delay of some hours for the line had been cut to the north earlier, and engineering gangs were already at work, repairing it. Charlie and Fiona walked

a little in the district around the station, but the streets were empty and silent. It had begun to snow earlier, and already the streets were dusted and white. Then the train clanked over the newly-repaired rail-bridge and the Tyne glistened below. A vessel had been sunk mid-stream, and its masts and funnels tilted from the flow of water, but there was no sign on any hand of other damage. It was still snowing, perhaps more heavily than earlier.

By daylight it was still snowing, and they were drawing into Berwick. In the Tweed, ice-floes were slow-moving on the frozen river.

Fiona said, 'Scotland'.

'Have you been here before?', Charlie asked.

'Never', she said, without any conviction.

'Nor me', he said, 'twice to the ends of the earth in one month is more than enough'.

Then it began to snow really hard, and they moved in a relentless whiteout for some more hours. Just once, the veil of snow parted and they could see the sea in the distance, grey and implacable: then the snow closed in again and they saw nothing more until the little train began to slow and rattle through the junctions and sidings on the outskirts of Edinburgh. And at that moment, as if it had been cut with a sharp knife, the snow stopped and a winter sun began to shine in a sky of razor-blue.

They were met on the platform by a plain-clothes officer and taken up into the North British. Their room was on the second floor, and looked west along Princes Street. Flags were flying on Jenners and all the great buildings, and more on the castle. The gardens were deep with snow. it was all astonishingly beautiful.

The plain-clothes man was a sergeant in the local drugs-squad. He was called Morrison. He asked if they had had a good trip, although it didn't sound as if he really cared. Nor did he ask about conditions in London, for that was something he really didn't care about in any way at all. They said it had taken them fifteen hours from King's Cross; but perhaps it could have been worse.

'Oh, it could have been a lot worse', Morrison said. 'You are lucky to have got here at all'.

There seemed a faint suggestion on his part that the visitors were being ungrateful in some unspecified way; or had failed to fully appreciate the blessing that their arrival in Edinburgh on such a fine winter's morning represented.

Morrison said, 'We have everything under control here. Except the west of the city, there's still a lot of fighting there. And out in the country, the rebels still hold most of that. You were very lucky to get through east Lothian without an attack on the train. But the centre of the city is safe now'.

Morrison drew their attention to the existence of a good pub - he called it a howf, whatever that was - across the road from the hotel, by the name of CafŽ Royal. They had the weekend to themselves. In saying this, Morrison managed to insinuate the possibility of dark and vicious improprieties. But he may, of course, have meant no more than getting drunk in the howf over the road.

'What's a howf?', Fiona asked.

'It's a bar, miss, but they won't let the likes of you in', Morrison said with deep satisfaction.

There would be a case conference on Monday morning. If the visitors hadn't wanted a weekend in Edinburgh all to themselves, they shouldn't have come up when they did, should they? Then he

left: he was playing golf on the Braids in the afternoon, and if there was too much snow on the course, he would be in the club-house. He managed to make this golfing assignation sound as if it were possessed of the very highest moral authority.

They washed away the filth of London and the overnight train, and slept till the afternoon. In the evening, they ate in the restaurant on the ground floor. There was no shortage of food here, or drink. The dining-room was full of senior Militia officer and their women, residents on official business, and local business people who had done good to exceeding good under the Protectorate. Brandy was the drink of choice, in crystal decanters. Venison and rarer meats from the hunting preserves in the north were on offer. Mountains of startlingly pink langoustines were carried through the throng on urgent platters to hungry tables. Fiona asked a waiter where they came from.

‘The west coast, miss’, he said haughtily, ‘the fishermen bring them down fresh every day’.

‘Where on the west coast?’

But the waiter didn’t know where - as if it mattered! Laughter, increasingly drunken, ran round the dining room. Mountains of food were carried and consumed; oceans of brandy washed it away, while the noise of laughter rose some more. Two armed Militia troopers stood at the door of the dining room. There were four more at the entrance to the hotel itself; but relaxed, for the danger had passed and the insurrection was being smashed, even at that moment.

One said, ‘Remember the curfew sir, ten o’clock sharp tonight’.

They found the howf across the road, just as Morrison had said, opposite the ruins of West Register House. It was jammed with men, drinking hard. Fiona was refused service at the bar; but was allowed to sit at one of the circular tables that lined the walls. There were few of them, as if to suggest that the consumption of drink while seated was a clear sign of moral weakness.

The barman said sternly, 'But don't go causing any trouble miss, or we'll have you out! This is a respectable howf, you know'.

Fiona said she would not cause trouble: and after a couple of drinks, they walked west on Rose Street. All the bars were as packed as the CafŽ Royal had been. Gales of laughter roared from some; but in others the customers were stonily silent, as if undue conviviality lay uneasily with the serious business of whisky and beer. From the summit of Hanover Street, they could see the lights of Fife twinkle in the distance. They came back to the hotel by Princes Street. The castle was in darkness and very black in outline against the sky. Then the spine of the High Street roof-ridges running down to Holyrood, broken by steeples.

At the Scott monument, Fiona said, 'Is he on his own?'

Charlie said, 'He can't be. He must have at least one person with him'.

'How much is there of it?'

'Half a ton, I suppose. Same as the last run'.

She said, 'So at least one other. We have one called Kelso Lamont. No name for the other, or others. And we don't know what either of them looks like. So we have to get the cocaine first of all. That's the only way we can get Lamont. And whoever else is with him. And then find out where it is supposed to be going'.

They got a final drink in the bar of the North British, and went to their room. At nine the pubs began to empty. For a time laughter rang in the streets, but soon died and disappeared. An hour later, three Militia armoured cars swept down Princes Street flashing their headlights. Then sirens began to howl across the city and all the lights of Edinburgh went down. Curfew had begun, and would last until six in the morning.

When they woke, it was snowing again. Sunday morning. No bells were to be heard across the city, for they had indeed been outlawed since Christmas. They got breakfast in the dining-room, once again the finest of foods, and walked listlessly in the city centre. At the far end of Princes Street, squads of prisoners were demolishing the burned-out walls of the Caledonian. In the Grassmarket a handful of Daniels was begging. All the bars were closed, and would stay closed all day - the religious authorities had petitioned the Militia city command on this very issue, and had even offered their full co-operation in its enforcement. The High Street was empty, and the castle locked beyond the esplanade. From its walls, they could look out over those parts of the city which were not obscured by snow.

Then, into the High Street. Fires glittered from the interior of St Giles, and ragged outlaws flitted through the ruins. The city's police headquarters opposite were silent and still, for Edinburgh was not a city given to crime on a Sunday. A procession of worshippers was emerging from the Tron church as they passed. The worshippers were all warmly dressed in the thick coats and sober hats of comfortable righteousness. Their women wore hats too, and sombre expressions on their downcast faces.

Suddenly, one of these women looked up and stared at Fiona with a style of extreme hatred. It was not clear why. Perhaps she disapproved of any sort of liberty; or perhaps it was just idle strolling on such an important day of the week. On North Bridge, the Scotsman office was already a blaze of lights. A pair of Specials guarded the doors against unwelcome news. At the bottom of North Bridge the Post Office had been destroyed in the fighting. So too had the Record Office, opposite the hotel. There was nothing to do. Morrison would make them wait for their victory - if victory it would be.

In the morning, they phoned Morrison. He was in police headquarters. He sounded uncharacteristically jubilant. He thought Charlie should take up the game of golf, and overlook his handicap of age and nationality. Charlie asked about the university. Morrison said it was closed, had been closed during the fighting and the students either conscripted, detained or sent back to their mothers, which was the best place for them anyway.

‘That place was never much more than a nest of Daniels and troublemakers’, Morrison said with righteous indignation. ‘And drugs too. What more would you expect in a place like that?’

Charlie said, ‘What about the university library?’

‘What about it?’, Morrison demanded, as if he resented being asked something entirely outwith his golfing and law-keeping experience. ‘There is an audit going on. We’ve got plenty of libraries in the city as it is anyway. What do they need one for?’

Charlie said he thought they might. But could Morrison find out if the library was open? Morrison was back on the phone in twenty minutes. The university library was closed - what was the

point of keeping it open when all the students had been sent away? There was nobody there but Militia lads on special audit duty.

‘I want to get in’, Charlie said, ‘this morning’.

Morrison sent a car, and it picked them up at the front door of the North British. Outside the library Militia troopers were carrying boxes of books. In the square some of their comrades were burning these books, in a thin and sad bonfire.

‘That’ll sort them out’, Morrison said with grim satisfaction. ‘I don’t suppose most of them were ever read anyway’.

A sole librarian was to be found inside. Charlie asked for the role of graduates of the university. They were taken to the reference section, and the manuscript volumes produced.

Charlie said, ‘Lamont, K. Sometime around 1940’.

The assistant said, ‘We don’t need a date. Just the surname’.

There seemed to be hundreds of them. And then scores with the same initial. Then she found what they were looking for. The name, Kelso Lamont. An address in Grange Road. The degree had been granted in Ottoman history.

‘Furniture!’, Morrison cried in tones of genuine horror. ‘It’s supposed to be a fucking university! No wonder they closed it down!’

Charlie said, ‘Is Grange Road far?’.

Outside, the Militia lads had got their fire going properly. One said cheerily that they had almost cleared the theology floor. They could start on the history floor next, if there was enough daylight left. The flames were leaping higher with every moment, the blast of heat could be felt as far as the library steps.

The address in Grange Road was a disappointment. The original house was still clearly identifiable, but it had been conjoined

to one of its neighbours. It appeared now to be part of a lunatic asylum. An elderly receptionist said that a pair of old ladies had once lived in the house. Then they had gone away; she thought to live in the north, but she wasn't sure. Perhaps they were dead. In any case, their house had been taken over by the asylum some years earlier. It had been a useful addition, for there was much demand for a place.

'Were you wishing to speak to the old ladies?', she probed obliquely.

'The boy', Charlie said, 'Kelso Lamont'.

'Oh, he's dead, dear'.

'Dead!', Morrison cried, as if scenting heresy.

'He went to Spain and then came back', the woman said.

'So he didn't die in Spain?'

'Not if he came back to Edinburgh afterwards', the old receptionist said reprovingly.

'Then he was at the university', she added. 'He stayed here at the time. And then he went to the war. He didn't come back, poor lad'.

'Where?', Charlie said.

But she did not know where he had been to war.

'Would you like to look round?', she said, after a respectful pause.

Charlie said it would not be necessary.

'Then perhaps you have a relative whose name you would like to put down for admission if acceptable to us? We are very exclusive, here', she said, ever so primly.

The drove back to the North British and had something to eat. Morrison thought the food a terrible waste of money, even though he

wasn't paying. He peered suspiciously at some vegetables and carefully pushed them aside on his plate. In case they was poisoned, perhaps. Then he decided to eat them and brought them back from their exile. Prudence was all very well, after all; but thrift was an important principle. He refused drink it case it might subvert his ethical code, or irreparably damage his mental faculties.

The meeting took place in their room. Morrison didn't want to meet in any of the hotel's public rooms, he said you couldn't trust the staff nowadays, they were all in the pay of criminals. That's why they didn't need to be paid to work there.

Another four men came to the meeting: two from the Militia's national search unit, one from the police's missing persons team, and Findlay, who was a member of Morrison's drug-squad. Morrison introduced Charlie and Fiona to his colleague Findlay with considerable ceremony.

'I have seen you two before', Findlay cried, as if about to effect an arrest.

'Where was that?', Fiona wanted to know.

'At that conference in London last autumn', Findlay said. 'The night our people got all the cocaine here in Edinburgh'.

'I remember now', Fiona said, 'of course, I remember now'.

Then Morrison and Findlay talked golf for a time, discussed their Saturday afternoon on the Braids, and practised swings and imaginary drives down infinite fairways. When Charlie called the meeting to order, Morrison insisted on chairing it. It was his city, after all, said loudly; and his country too, if it came to that.

'Right', he said, 'we're after some bastard smuggling cocaine. We've got a name. Lamont. New one to us. But there you are. We

can't know them all. We want to get him. And get the cocaine, of course. Any ideas?'

Morrison looked aggressively at Fiona, as if she had no right to be at the meeting at all. One of the Militia chaps flipped the lid from a fifty tin of Capstan and slid it over the table. He made it seem like a threat, but the gesture was well meant.

'Take one', he said to the company in general.

Fiona said, 'We know his name. Kelso Lamont. Brought up in Edinburgh. Fought in the Spanish civil war. Then he came back here, to the university. Studied Turkish and Ottoman history. That's what Turkey used to be - the Ottoman empire. He stayed in Grange Road. He graduated and then went to war. Special operations in Turkey. And then Germany. Dealing in morphine which was traded to the Germans for military information. Then he disappeared, supposed to be dead. But we don't think he is. We think he came into the country illegally, about the time of last Christmas. From the north of Spain to the coast of France. Then over to Cornwall. After that we lose track of him. But we think he is here'.

'Where?', Findlay demanded; as if the presence of an unknown drug dealer in the city was a personal offence to him.

'Somewhere in Scotland', Fiona said.

'That's a start', one of the Militia men said, 'but not much'.

Charlie said, 'But we are sure he is here somewhere. And we have his name. We don't know what he looks like. We don't know where he is exactly. We know he is here to collect a run of American cocaine. We don't know where, or when. And we don't know what he is going to do with it'.

'Christ', Morrison said. 'We are supposed to be policemen, not magicians'.

One of the Militia chaps said, 'Do you know how much cocaine is expected?'

Fiona said, 'Maybe half a ton. Same as last time'.

'Half a ton!', the Militia chap said. 'He can't manage that amount on his own. What are they doing with it?'

'That's what we don't know', Charlie said patiently. 'That's what we are trying to find out'.

'Maybe they're just selling it', the Militia chap said wistfully.

'But we agree', Charlie said. 'He can't be on his own. We think there must be at least one other. Maybe an American. Maybe a woman for all we know'.

A maid brought coffee in silver pots and a three-tier stand of sandwiches, bannocks and strange Scotch cakes. There were two silver sugar bowls, too, with brown lumps in one and white lumps in the other. The policemen attacked the food with proprietorial frenzy.

'I could fucking murder a plate of fly cemetery', Findlay cried lustily, his mouth already stuffed with pastry and currants and his uniform sleeves rammed to the elbows.

'Heavens, Findlay', Morrison said, clearing his throat in an admonitory way, and mindful that visitors were present, 'you mean fruit slice'.

'I could fucking murder a plate of fruit slice', Findlay cried.

They broke off discussion for the duration of the bannocks and cemetery. Fiona stood at the window, looking down the length of Princes Street. Between mouthfuls of food, Findlay looked sideways at her legs and grimaced. Morrison was in a corner, angling. He dropped a dry fly with immense precision onto a rise in the opposite corner. Then he started to reel the trout over the carpet, but lost it half way. Tiring of this sport, he began to practise short putts: he

seemed to regret not having brought clubs with him to the meeting. Perhaps he kept a set in his own office, and saw no good reason why he should not have access to a set anywhere else. When everyone had finished eating, and the policemen had agreed what a pity it was that there was no more free food, the meeting reconvened.

Findlay wiped sugar from his mouth and said, 'An American and maybe a woman? Isn't that funny now'.

'Funny?', Charlie said, sensing something that was not funny in any way at all.

'Well', Findlay said, 'it is funny you should mention an American woman. We have been watching one. At least, we haven't found her yet. But we have been looking. After we got half a ton of cocaine in Gorgie last August, we started to made enquiries. We shot a couple of fishermen that night. They came down from the west coast with their catch. A lot of it was sold to the North British in fact. Anyway, we made enquiries. There was some talk that they had been in contact with an American woman. There was a suggestion she had been coming over from Belfast. More than once. We get routine copies of passenger lists from the Larne-Stranraer ferry, of course'.

'We didn't see these in London', Fiona said.

'You wouldn't', Morrison said nastily, 'we don't send them to you. Carry on, Findlay'.

Findlay carried on. He said, 'Well, there was a woman who had come over maybe four times earlier in the year. Then she came over again. That was the day before we got the cocaine under the railway arches at Gorgie'.

'Was there a name?', Fiona wondered with immense placidity.

Findlay said there was. But he couldn't remember it. They could maybe get it sent down from their own registry in headquarters. That would be tomorrow at the earliest, of course.

'Do try', Fiona said, and gave Findlay a look that suggested the imminence of mutual carnal knowledge: in the bathroom, for instance, should that be deemed the most convenient place.

Findlay remembered.

'Kelly', he said, 'I knew I could remember the name. Kelly Barton'.

Morrison leaned into the company. He didn't like to see an enquiry slip out of his grasp - not in his own city and his own country. He asked if Fiona had recognised the name. But she said that she did not.

Findlay said, 'There's more. We asked the police in Belfast. They did some checks. They couldn't find an established address for her. She travelled a lot in connection with her work. Dublin, Galway. Also to the north coast of Donegal. But nobody could find out what her work was. They discovered that she had an American passport, mind. As well as a British one. That's all they could tell us about her. And that's all we knew. Until she walked right into our hands'.

There was an immense silence now. Fiona and Findlay looked keenly at each other. It was an encouraging look: but somehow, the imminence of mutuality by or in the bathtub had been delayed. But perhaps there was still hope.

'Into your hands', Fiona said gently, as if perhaps she had something else in mind entirely.

'Well she did', Findlay said, scrubbing the last of the fly cemetery from around his mouth. 'She came over on the ferry again

and drove up from Stranraer to Edinburgh. Except a Militia checkpoint picked her up at Penicuik. She hadn't done anything wrong and they would have let her go, normally. But they were afraid she was one of the Belfast Daniels. They're very fierce over there. So they took her to the Militia base at Dalkeith. Then they took her up here, kept her downstairs for a time. After that they took her out to the zoocamp at Corstorphine. That's a Militia place, it has nothing to do with us. But they had her name. And they passed it on to us'.

'It's a standard inter-agency courtesy', Morrison said, perhaps dreaming of promotion someday. 'We would do the same for them, of course'.

'So where is she now?', Charlie asked with a style of the most supreme composure.

'Don't know', Findlay grunted. 'She got out. Blame the Militia, not us'.

'Out?', Fiona said.

'Out', Findlay said. 'Some of the Daniel presbyterians are angry about the government wanting to put an archbishop over the kirk. Quite right too, if you ask me. Some of the Daniels go a bit far, mind you. Anyway, some of their military units stormed the zoocamp. It was very professional, they say. Diversionary attacks and everything. During the night, it was. But the main thing is this. Most of the prisoners were left where they were. They didn't massacre the Militia people either, at least not more than was necessary. They just took the camp doctor, three top Daniel presbyterians, the American woman called Kelly Barton, and an armoured Daimler. It belonged to the camp commander, the Daimler, and he wasn't very pleased when he heard about it'.

'Where was he at the time?', Charlie asked.

'People say he was in this hotel with a woman', Morrison said, disapproving.

'And where's the car now?'

'Well, we don't know. But if you want to find your two cocaine smugglers, they will be where the car is. That seems a fair bet to me'.

'Do we know where she stayed in Edinburgh?', Charlie asked.

'Oh yes', said Morrison. 'She had a flat in Gorgie. We checked the ownership on the valuation role. It was owned by a firm of solicitors in Dublin. Except the firm hasn't existed for years'.

'Who lives in it now?'

'It's empty of course. We got a report of strangers in the district. It's a very close district, Gorgie. There's a good howf over there, the Volunteer Arms. We keep the barman out of trouble, and he keeps us out of trouble. So we went for a look. There was nobody there when we arrived. So we took what we could find and left it at that'.

'Took what?', Fiona asked.

Morrison said, 'Maps, miss. That's all we could find'.

'What sort of maps?'

'Just maps of the sea, miss, nothing important'.

Charlie intervened and said smoothly that it would be of interest to see the maps. He also thought it might be of interest to see the flat in question. Morrison used the room-phone to call headquarters. Someone could bring the maps down by the evening, could they?

At the front door, Findlay had the car waiting. They dismissed the Militia men, and drove to Gorgie. In Shandwick Place Findlay had a confidential word with Fiona. Perhaps he wasn't the sort of

cop who noticed that a woman was sharing a hotel bedroom with a senior colleague. Or perhaps they did these things more robustly in the Edinburgh police, of course.

‘Do you fancy a wee drink later on, miss?’

Fiona said that later in the week might be a possibility. At Haymarket, a unit of Specials was herding a column of prisoners into the station. Gorgie Road was quiet. They went to the lock-up first, under the arches. It had indeed been a fishermen’s store, from which they distributed shellfish throughout the city. And cocaine too, of course.

‘You got half a ton here?’, Charlie said.

‘Right here’, Morrison said. ‘Best of stuff too. Of course we didn’t try it ourselves. Oh no we didn’t, did we Findlay! We handed it over, the whole half-ton’.

Twenty yards away, a painted sign said that it introduced visitors to the Three Cats night-club and diner. But the door was locked, and the place seemed abandoned.

In a private aside to Fiona Findlay said, ‘A good place for a drink in there, late like’.

Morrison added, ‘The owner is one of us. Best informant we have in the city for drugs. And a lot of other things too’.

They went to the flat, and it was indeed empty and wrecked. The walls had been cleared of plaster and the floorboards ripped apart. There was nothing to find, and they returned to the North British.

Findlay and Morrison went off. Charlie and Fiona returned to their room. There was a hand-written message from reception, which had been tucked under the door. The office of the Home Secretary had telephoned. The lines were down and it had been

difficult to get through. Inspector Marr and his assistant were expressly refused permission to conduct enquiries in Scotland, which was a separate jurisdiction. They were to return the call at once, and return to London by the first available train.

Fiona said, 'Why now?'

But Charlie said to forget it. He phoned the office in Victoria. There was a girl in the wire-room, though she was going off shift in twenty minutes. The snow was awful and she didn't know how she would get home. The Tube was still down too, people were expecting some sort of attack on the city at any moment.

She said, 'There's a message. Came through on the wire an hour ago. Remember the enquiry to the drugs people in Belfast?'

Charlie had to think hard to remember the request. It seemed an infinity of time in the past now. Then he remembered.

The girl said she would have to hurry. The long-distance phones had been off and on all day. The service could go down at any moment again.

She said, 'From Belfast. It's marked urgent. Aren't they all, these days?'

Charlie said, with immense patience, 'What does it say?'

'Not much', the girl said. 'Four words only. Donegal shipment tomorrow night'.

'That's all?', Charlie asked.

'That's all', the girl snapped. 'I can count, you know'.

Charlie thanked her for her diligence. He had just one more question, if she didn't mind.

'It doesn't say where?', he asked.

'I would have told you', the girl snapped again, and the line went dead. Perhaps the long-distance service had collapsed; or perhaps she had slammed the phone down. Either was possible.

He said, 'The lines are down. We can't return any calls now. And we had better eat something'.

They dined in the restaurant on the ground-floor. Again, marvellous platters of langoustines marched through the throng. A party of Militia officers and prostitutes was toasting liberty and life. After a dozen such toasts, one of the girls began to dance on the table while the officers pounded the table with brandy bottles.

They left. At reception, they were given a package which had come by police motorcycle. When they had recovered the sanctuary of their room, they examined the contents of this package. A dozen old copies of the Scotsman. Six nautical charts and a pilot book for the Easdale sector of the west coast. And two copies of a journal called Ottoman Studies.

'More fucking furniture I suppose', Charlie snarled; but it was, of course, a joke.

Fiona said, 'Charlie, we are getting closer at last'.

Charlie grunted and leafed through the charts. But they meant nothing to him, of course. They had been scrawled over, in thick pencil. The mouth of somewhere called Loch Feochan was 'too shallow'.

'Too shallow for what?', Charlie wondered.

To the east side of an island called Seil someone had written 'not for neaps' at the mouth of a bay called Balvicar.

'What's a neap?', Charlie asked in irritation. 'For fuck sake, isn't that what the Scotch call a Swede?'

Fiona cried and stabbed a finger at the chart.

'Luing', she said, 'there it is, that name again'.

And indeed, there was the island of Luing.

At Glassford, just south of Cullipool, someone had written, 'jetties, slip and boathouse but terrible tides'. A series of parallel lines was stretched across Cuan sound with the warning 'dangerous tides!' At the north end of Seil, a pencilled arrow led into a gut and someone - a different hand altogether - had written, 'possible but no road'.

'And that name Shona again', Fiona cried.

She stabbed savagely at the chart, at the very black letters, 'fallback at Baramore-Shona'. From them, an arrow pointed north towards the sound of Mull. And someone had circled the islet of Easdale in a very thick black line of pencil indeed. Beside it was added the legend 'Ômean HW best'.

They stared at the chart for fully thirty minutes, trying to make sense of it. It was clear at once that Luing could only be reached by ferry. Easdale too could only be reached by boat. Seil, however, was linked by road bridge to the mainland. And a road - or perhaps no more than a track - led from that road-bridge to the islet's harbour.

Charlie said, 'What does 'Ômean HW best' mean?'

Fiona said, 'Don't worry about that. We know who they are. We know how many there are. We know when. And now we know where'.

Charlie said, 'We don't know at all'.

Fiona said, 'I will bet my life on it. Half a ton of American cocaine is arriving sometime tomorrow night at Easdale. Probably at the time of high water - that's when the tide is at its highest'.

'You might have to bet your life on it too', Charlie said sourly, and reached again for the telephone.