

Twenty-eight.

Tuesday morning: and it was snowing hard again. The castle had disappeared already and along Princes Street the Scott monument was beginning to disappear too. Charlie looked down the length of the great thoroughfare; the rail lines to the west were open again and the smoke and steam of west-bound trains could be seen coming out of the station.

Morrison phoned. He had spoken to the office of the Militia commander for the west region. They had been difficult about the request and Morrison would have to give them something back in return. If not now, later. But yes, the Militia would do their best. As long as Charlie got out to the airport in good time.

Morrison added, 'The Militia's Scottish command have a regular link with their coastal watch people. It only takes about an hour. So they tell me, anyway'.

Charlie said, 'There are two of us'.

There was a cold silence, as Morrison digested this implication of infamy.

'Two of you?', he cried. 'Is she going as well! I thought Findlay told her she was going out with him the night?'

'Perhaps he meant tomorrow night', Charlie said, and replaced the phone.

Morrison had sent a car. It was on its way down from the High Street already. At the front door of the North British a gang of Militia troopers was laughing and joking. The news from the south was good. London would be retaken in a day or two. Then they would retake the huge areas of Scotland that still remained in the control of the insurgents. And then the fun would begin! The lads stamped

their winter boots against the cold, and slapped their winter gauntlets together with gusto. They would be off-shift any moment now, and would spend the rest of the day in one of the nearby howfs.

One fancied the Café Royal, another the Abbotsford, a third said there was a good pub up in Forrest Row, near the infirmary. They argued among themselves, as lads will do, and finally decided to take in all three, and let fate decide where they might end up afterwards. It seemed a good way to spend a winter's day in Edinburgh - as good as any, when you had money to burn, and the prospect of vengeance and violence to come!

At Haymarket, the traffic slowed to a crawl. A heavy military snowplough was leading a convoy out towards Murrayfield. Two armed Specials were mounted on each side of the cab, rifles at the ready. Their police driver was surly in the extreme: the police needed their own cars for their own work, and he didn't see why his passengers couldn't have got their own transport out.

At length he said, 'That's the zoocamp. Where the Daniel attack was recently. But it's back in operation again'.

At Corstorphine roundabout there was a delay while the snowplough was replaced by one on airport duty. All round, black trees seemed painted against the sky. Clouds of black crows circled, settled, and rose in clouds again. Their screams seemed to echo off into a very far and gloomy distance.

'We'll never make it in this weather', Fiona said.

But the driver said, 'It won't last. You'll get away fine, but you might have to wait a while first'.

The airport was very heavily guarded. There had been a partisan attack during the previous night, but it had been beaten off. Still, the guards were nervous and aggressive. On the runway,

hundreds of people were clearing snow. It was still extremely cold, but a Specials officer said that if they kept moving they would not freeze. And anyway, no aircraft could take off unless the runway was cleared of snow.

They were given coffee with brandy in it, and waited for the runway to be cleared. Their plane was a six-seater single-wing, with an engine each side. The pilot went through his checks and said the snow should clear by Linlithgow. Then they had to wait, while a flight of three medium-size transport planes came in: their landing lights could not be seen until the very last minute, on account of the thick snow. When the transports had landed, they were cleared for take-off and taxied to the end of the runway. Close-spaced prisoners lined each side of the runway, as markers.

‘Poor bastards’, the pilot said.

He adjusted the pitch of his propellers, revved the engines until it seemed that they might explode, and let the brakes off. The little plane, released from its frenzy, leapt forward and began to accelerate down the line of prisoners. In moments, it appeared to be racing at an enormous speed into the very dense whiteout: but when the pilot slammed full-flaps, the little plane seemed to lift vertically off the runway and soar into the whiteout. In seconds, the ground had gone and they were flying blind, by compass alone.

Ten minutes later, they flew into clear blue skies and the land stretched ahead of them into a sunlit winter’s morning.

The pilot gestured below. ‘Linlithgow’, he cried, ‘I told you the snow would stop’.

The little town was spread out below and to their right. It looked supremely peaceful in the morning sunshine. Then the farmlands around Kilsyth spread below them, until it was time to rise

a little to clear the Campsies. A stretch of water appeared ahead, and to their right the great bulk of a mountain. A hundred feet below, quite clear against the snow, were huge herds of deer.

'Watch this', the young pilot howled, and pushed the stick forward. The nose of the plane tilted at once and the note of the engines changed dramatically. At a very steep angle the plane dived straight towards the deer. One herd, hundreds strong, began to run across the snow. The pilot dived into them, no more than a few feet from the ground, and stampeded the deer over an unseen fall in the ground. Suddenly, as they swooped over the edge of the cliff, the earth had left them, sloping steeply down to the shores of the water below.

'Loch Lomond', the pilot cried. 'We should be at Crinan in another thirty minutes'.

The plane banked to starboard and they flew up the length of the loch. Below, densely wooded islets could be seen, with the smoke of fires rising from them. Then a gap opened in the hills to port and they banked through it, flying very low. Moments later more water appeared below, and real mountains appeared ahead. Again the note of the engines changed, as they banked into the loch, gained air speed, and began to climb up over the jagged and snow-covered tops.

'The Rest and Be Thankful', the pilot cried, waving an arm to the pass that opened in the mountains ahead. 'We can't take the direct route over Cowal. Aircraft have been shot down there by partisans'.

A thin ribbon of road could be seen winding up into the hills. They followed this road up into the hills to its summit. Then it swooped down among the hills again, and they followed it until yet

more water appeared ahead. They banked to port again, and flew down the length of Loch Fyne. To their right, the castle at Inveraray was quite clear in the sunlight. Flying very low, they sped down the loch and at Lochgilphead banked sharply to starboard. It was low tide, for the great bank at the head of the loch was dried out a long way. The silver ribbon of the canal was quite clear to their left. They could even see the lock-gates and lock-keepers' cottages.

They followed the canal's wooded banks as it wound westward, and at Cairnbaan began to climb for height very quickly and bank off to starboard. In the near distance, the sea was blue and calm. Suddenly the land below them was strangely flat, as if the sea had once claimed it and was merely waiting for a chance to return. A road ran north along the side of the moss and they kept its line until the note of the engines changed again and the pilot eased the flaps back for landing.

Without warning, he slammed the plane hard to port: a thin ribbon of road was glimpsed ahead, stunted trees were rushing at the wingtips, and they were down and in a few more moments alongside a jetty on the edge of the sea.

The Militia were based in a requisitioned farm house and were secure at the end of their little runway on the edge of the moss. And if the insurgents on the other side of it decided to launch any attack, the Militia of the coastal patrol could always retreat by boat. It was not a difficult position to defend, for much of the time the moss was covered by the tide anyway, and the insurgents would have to advance straight down the little runway.

They put to sea just before it began to get dark, on the converted air-sea rescue launch with which the Militia patrolled their sector of the coast. They could see the fires of the rebels at Crinan,

on the other side of the loch. Then they moved out into open water, and the mountains of Jura were white with snow and tipped with scarlet in the setting sun: but in moments these peaks were black and cold as the sun set.

They ran up Craignish and came back down the loch just as quickly. The young skipper said it was good way to warm up the engines. In the Dorus Mor the tide was sucking and swirling, and they crept in close to a point to catch an eddy. Then they were through, and out in the sound. At the north end of Jura, the broken water of Corryvreckan could be seen; and then they turned north to begin their patrol.

With the heat from the engines, it was warm in the wheelhouse and the little mess abaft it. There were only four crew aboard, and they drank tea from enamel mugs and played cards until it got dark, and the skipper called the watchmen to their posts. They cruised slowly up to Fladda, where the tide was stronger than ever and the lighthouse had begun to stab into the night. Trails of overfalls seemed to run from every point, every rock, every sunken shoal. On the shoreline to starboard were the lights of villages. Fiona asked what they were.

‘That’s Cullipool, miss, on the island of Luing. Back o’ the Pond is the village to the south’, he said.

Then they turned to port, and eased out towards the Garvellachs and swept down the eastern side of them slowly.

The skipper said, ‘Do you want to go all the way round?’

But Charlie said it wasn’t necessary. Any island looked pretty much the same to him from either side. Especially in the dark. Fiona thought it was a good idea to go all the way round, just to be sure. But Charlie over-ruled her.

On the eastern side of the southern isle, shore fires were to be seen, burning brightly. The skipper said it was the site of an early Columban monastery. Some Daniels had built themselves coracles of lath and painted canvas and had sailed out to the islands and the ruins of its beehive cells.

‘They don’t cause trouble so we leave them alone’, the skipper said. ‘Anyway, we raided once and burned their coracles, so they won’t get off for a very long time’.

Then they retraced their course, eased right in, to Belnahua. The broken summits of the islet could barely be seen. The skipper said it was full of deep holes, where slate had once been quarried. Two hundred people had once lived there.

‘One winter there was a great storm’, he said, ‘and after it a family found a chest on the beach. Nobody every knew what they found in the chest, but they left the island within a week and were never heard from again. Ever’.

He seemed to believe the story - and why not, perhaps it was true? Close to the Fladda lighthouse, the tide seemed stronger than ever and they cruised south again, hugging the Luing shore. Then, at the south end of Luing, they turned sharply north and came up inside Shuna.

‘Shuna!’, Charlie said, ‘that’s not the same as Shona, is it?’

But the skipper said it was an entirely different island altogether, for Shona was far to the north, far beyond the boundaries of his search sector.

‘What do you look for?’, Fiona asked.

‘We think they take in drugs, miss’, the skipper said. ‘We think they have done five runs, and got off with the first four of them. But they won’t get off with it again!’

At the north end of the sound they anchored and the dinghy was sent ashore, into a gut that was too shallow for their boat. It was away for what seemed an age, and then came back. The men had seen nothing at all, and were glad of the mugs of tea that the skipper had waiting for them in the little mess and galley behind the wheelhouse.

‘We will wait for the tide to turn and then go through Cuan Sound’, the skipper said: and one of the lads fried bacon and eggs, which was served on thick slices of bread: with more mugs of tea. Fiona and Charlie stood on deck, keen to avoid the smell of petrol that seemed to hang everywhere around the little vessel. The night sky was a blaze of stars, but neither knew any of the constellations by name.

Just before midnight, they hauled the anchor and resumed patrol. With the petrol engines eased back they could hardly be heard, except for a low hum in the wheelhouse and a fractional vibration on deck. They moved north and held a point of land very close, and then moved away from it. On every hand, the rushing tide could be heard. Ahead was a long tail of broken water and the tide seemed to be running harder than ever. Then they swung sharply to starboard, and began to race through a narrow gap between two points of land.

‘Cuan Sound’, the skipper said, ‘Luing on the left, and Seil on the right. Not many people would risk coming through here in the dark without lights’.

As the flood tide shot them out of the north end of the sound, Fiona asked what time it was.

‘Just after midnight’, the skipper said. ‘We’ll be back to base before daylight. But we’ll have another run-ashore first’.

They cruised slowly into the darkness until more land was sensed immediately ahead of them. Then the anchor chain roared over the roller and the launch swung at once with the rushing tide.

‘Where are we now?’, Charlie asked.

‘Lord’s Rock’, the skipper said, ‘this is Easdale’.

The skipper and two of his crew took the dinghy ashore, and for a time their feet could be heard on the shingle beach. Then the beam of their flashlight could be seen among dim gables and walls. Fiona and Charlie stood on deck and awaited their return. To the south, Fladda light still stabbed away without pity into the night.

Fiona said, ‘I smell cigarette smoke. Capstans’.

But Charlie said the lads ashore were smoking; and when they came back and said that they had seen nothing, they hauled the anchor again and cruised outside Easdale towards the north.

Fiona asked the skipper if he had a chart, and he gave her one: though she would have to look at it in the mess, for he could not risk showing lights in the wheelhouse. While she studied it, they cruised slowly up inside Insh towards the south end of Kerrera, and the northern limit of their search area. There was nothing to be seen of any sort at all.

Then they turned, to begin their slow run back to base. It was already three o’clock.

Fiona returned to the wheelhouse and said, ‘Why can’t we go through the channel between Easdale and Seil?’

‘We can if you like, miss, but it is very shallow’.

‘Try it’, Fiona said, ‘we’ll get through’.

The skipper sent one of his men to the stemhead, with a lead-line. He cut the power to the engines, and the launch ghosted into the very narrow gut between the islands. The man on the lead called

the soundings clearly as they slid into the pitch darkness of the very narrow channel: called the soundings in a steady, monotonous sing-song fashion, as if he been calling them for ever.

‘By the mark, three. Mark three, mark three, and a half two, two, two, two and a half, two and a half. By the deep, three’.

The skipper switched on the searchlight above the wheelhouse: in the darkness, its brightness seemed for a moment to be terrifying, and for a moment seabirds screamed in outrage and agony. The skipper played the light along the Easdale shore, and then played it along the Seil shore. But still there was nothing to see, nothing to see at all.

Fiona said, ‘There! Again! Cigarette smoke! I swear, someone is smoking strong Capstan on one of these islands’.

Now the soundings were increasing, and the leadsman became less tense in his calls. Abeam of Lord’s Rock, he was called aft and coiled the lead line with easy competence.

The skipper said, ‘Nothing as usual. One more night down before the weekend’.

He switched on the navigation lights, and thrust the throttle lever forward. The engines roared, and a spurt of foam reared at the stern of the boat as it leapt forward into the last few hours of the night.

‘When is it bright?’, Fiona asked.

‘About eight’, Charlie said, ‘we can get back to Edinburgh then’.

‘I would like to come back here’, Fiona said, ‘in the daylight’.

‘Why?’

‘There’s something not right’, Fiona said, ‘I could feel it. They only landed on one of the islands. We should have checked the other one too’.

But Charlie said nobody was going to run in half a ton of cocaine in broad daylight. They could ask the lads to take a run back up in the daylight and have another look. If they saw anything, they could phone Edinburgh and let them know.

‘If that makes you feel better’, Charlie said nastily. ‘Don’t forget you are going for a drink with Findlay’.

And they were back in the North British by eleven in the morning. Another aircraft had been shot down over Cowal, so they came back over the Clyde estuary. It was scarcely longer as a route in any case. They flew to the bottom of Loch Fyne, hopped over Bute, cruised up the the estuary and turned east at Greenock. To the right they could see great fires burning in Glasgow, but these soon faded from sight. Less than thirty minutes later, they were back on the tarmac at Edinburgh.

The lobby of the North British was crammed with senior officers from the Protectorate’s security services: Specials, Militia, Yeomanry and Auxiliaries. They were celebrating the great news from London. Most areas north of the river had been re-taken. The Convention had surrendered, and assault troops were burning the fanatic remnants from their hiding places. The palace of Westminster was on fire, but it was expected that it would finally fall by teatime.

Upstairs, there was a message from the office of the Home Secretary. It was more hysterical than the last. Inspector Marr and his team were ordered on immediate receipt of the message to discontinue all investigations. The Home Secretary had further

ordered Militia units to arrest and detain the inspector if he had not communicated receipt of these orders by noon.

‘I just don’t understand’, Charlie said.

Fiona said, ‘I told you. There’s more to this than meets the eye’.

‘I can see that for myself’, Charlie grunted, ‘but it’s too late to go back now’.

He phoned the office in Victoria. The line was open, but nobody answered the phone. Three times he tried, and there was still no answer.

Fiona said, ‘Maybe the insurgents are holding Victoria’.

Charlie tried one more time, and this time the phone was answered. One of the girls took the call. She was entirely unapologetic. They had all been outside watching the fighting. Bandits were holding out in the station, and Protectorate commando forces were all around, with artillery and tanks. In the background, intermittently, Charlie could hear the sounds of heavy gunfire.

He said, ‘Anything for me yet?’

The girl said she thought there was. But she could barely hear him with the noise of the fighting. She said she had to shout just to hear herself.

She howled, ‘The police in Cornwall have traced a call’.

‘Why didn’t we know about this earlier?’, Charlie howled back.

The girl sounded deeply aggrieved. People like her had rights, same as anybody else. There was no need to shout at her, was there?

She howled again, ‘The woman in Newlyn. They were watching her. They monitored her phone, but it was never used. They were lucky. They got one call. Just before you arrived there, it

came through. A male voice. No name. It just said that the police from London were on the way. And that she should expect trouble from them. Then the line went dead’.

‘Whose male voice, do we know?’, Charlie asked, trying hard not to shout.

The girl said, ‘That’s better now. The guns have stopped. I can hear you better now, sir. We traced the voice. At least we traced the call. To London. To a flat in Westminster. It belongs to one of the Scotch MPs’.

‘Who?’, Charlie breathed. ‘Which one?’

But the girl hadn’t heard him.

‘Speak up, sir’, she cried, ‘the line is very poor all of a sudden’.

‘Whose flat?’, Charlie screamed. ‘Whose fucking flat?’

‘A Colonel Jack, sir. He’s a friend of the Home Secretary, sir, and didn’t have to stay in the parliamentary compound with all the others. And you don’t have to swear at me either, sir’.

‘Do we know where he is now?’, Charlie asked; though he already knew the answer.

The girl said, ‘It has been very difficult down here, sir. We have had a counter-revolution, you know. But it’s all over now. Soon as we could, we sent a couple of the lads round to have a look at the flat. But it’s empty. No furniture, even. Just lots of strange books in funny languages. We think he might have gone back to Scotland. We checked with King’s Cross, they think he got the night train. That means he would have got into Edinburgh this morning. Or maybe it was yesterday morning, we’re not sure. That’s where we think he is now’.

Charlie told the girl to pull the boys off all observation duty. Tell them this was an emergency. Tell them to get everything they could on Jack. And let him know the moment they had anything.

He put the phone down and turned to Fiona in disbelief.

He said, 'Our woman in Cornwall. She had been tipped off. By one of the Scotch MPs. Who is a friend of the Home Secretary'.

Fiona said, 'It's obvious, isn't it. The Home Secretary knew, or someone told him, that we were going to Cornwall. He told the MP. And the MP tipped her off before we arrived'.

'But why?', Charlie said. 'It doesn't make any sense at all'.

By now it was lunchtime. Charlie phoned Morrison, but he was described as being out. Charlie left a message, asking him to call back. But the Militia lads at Crinan got through first. They had taken the launch up to Easdale and Seil again, just after daybreak. They had gone ashore on Easdale again and found nothing. Then they had gone onto Seil.

'What do you think we found, sir?', the lad asked, trying to be helpful.

'Try me', Charlie said.

'A Daimler sir, an armoured Daimler in Militia colours. With an empty fuel tank. Do you think it has been stolen from somewhere?'

Charlie thought that perhaps the Daimler had indeed been stolen. He thought perhaps in Edinburgh. He didn't think it was necessary for the Militia lads to follow this up. They could leave him to follow it up, after all they were busy people at the coastal watch in Crinan.

'Just one more thing', Charlie said.

'Anything at all, sir', the lad said willingly.

'Did you find anything else?'

‘Nothing at all, sir. There was an empty fifty-tin of Capstan on the dashboard, but nothing else at all’.

‘That’s all?’

‘And a dinghy, sir, it looked as if someone had tried to hide it. But everyone does that with dinghies nowadays. I don’t think it is important’.

Charlie and Fiona went down to the dining-room to eat something. It seemed the wisest thing to do. There were no recriminations at all.

Fiona said, ‘They took a shipment of cocaine in through Easdale and Seil last night and we missed it. If we had waited, we would have caught them. What trail do we follow now?’

Charlie said, ‘This MP, Jack. I don’t care who he knows. Or how powerful he is. Let’s find him. And get Morrison to take him in if it seems to be necessary’.

‘They might not like this’, Fiona said.

‘We’re coppers’, Charlie said, ‘and they’re politicians. That’s the price we pay for being cops. They shit on us, and we don’t often get the chance to shit on them’.

They went back to their room. Moments later the office in Victoria phoned. It was one of the lads who watched the station most of the time. He sounded relieved to be doing something different for once.

He said, ‘We have some stuff for you. On the MP. War hero, first war of course. Lost a leg, but got a medal. At somewhere called Sari Bair. That’s in Turkey. He was a prisoner there for three years. Then he was special forces in the last war’.

Charlie said, ‘Don’t tell me. Training camps in Scotland and then in Istanbul’.

The lad sounded stunned. 'How did you know that, sir?'

Charlie said he had guessed it. And in a sense it had indeed been a guess. Albeit a fairly obvious one.

'Called Jack, sir', the lad said. 'A colonel in his day. On the board of a journal called Ottoman Studies, sir. We think here that's some kind of furniture. He's got a flat in Westminster with a lot of very suspicious books in it. On the Home Secretary's committee for national drugs security issues. He's got another house in Edinburgh sir, but we don't know where yet. Will we keep looking?'

Charlie said not to bother. The lad said he had just one other thing to report.

He said, 'Poor Johnson sir, the one the terrorists got with the bomb. We raided his lockers at his golf-club. He was the club-captain. We found six lockers full of packets of cocaine, and another six stuffed with American dollars. He was a friend of the Home Secretary too, sir'.

Charlie thanked the lad and rang off. He called police headquarters and asked for Morrison. Morrison said he had been for a police-service golfing lunch and had got back late. He did not sound in the slightest way apologetic; on the contrary, he made it sound like a challenge to the upstart outsider.

Charlie said, 'We don't have time to waste, Morrison. I want you to do something for me right now'.

There was a stunned and truculent silence for some moments. It didn't seem that Morrison was entirely sober, and it didn't seem that he relished the prospect of a busy afternoon either. But an excuse for a fight with an Englishman was something quite different, because that didn't come his way every day of the week, and more's the pity too!

Morrison said, 'Oh, is that so now! And what would that be, that you can't do for yourself, I wonder'.

Charlie could see Morrison at his desk, feet up on top of it, and settled-in for an easy afternoon in the office.

He said, 'A local MP. Name of Jack. I would like your help in tracing any local property he has'.

Morrison breathed deeply, as if no trouble was too much for his esteemed friend from London.

Morrison said, 'Well now, isn't it a small world. We had a report in an hour ago from the police in Callander'.

'Where's that?', Charlie said.

'Don't you worry where it is', Morrison said. 'We'll soon tell you if we think you need to know. Of course, us lads know our own country like the back of our our own hands. I don't see why you would, of course. Our lads in Callander are always on the lookout for smugglers. And their reports always come to my desk. A couple checked into a hotel in the town last night. They were driving a canvas-backed two-tonner loaded with sugar in American army ammunition cases. They stayed in the same room though we don't think they were married to each other. People take a dim view of that sort of thing in Scotland, you know'.

Morrison let this observation lie for some time, until it had time to sink into the deepest of skulls. Then he went on.

'Last night, the woman called a number in Edinburgh, we think three times. She called it again this morning. The lady who runs the hotel is a good friend of the police. She listened in. The woman spoke to a man. She wanted to know where to take the stuff. They were to find someone in Perth. He was with the Militia commander there, at the prison. Then she said something like where do we

pick him up. I don't know who she was talking about. She asked this twice. The man said he was on the move. Their contact in Perth would know where he was. Once she had handed over, their contact would tell her where to go. Then they wished each other good luck and rang off'.

Charlie said, 'What were their names?'

'Who?', Morrison said. 'Our lads?'

'The couple of guests', Charlie said.

Morrison savoured his victory. He said, 'You can't expect people behaving like that to give their own names to honest folk. I wouldn't anyway, not that you would ever catch me behaving like that. No, nor Mrs Morrison either. But he claimed his name was Kelso Lamont. He sounded Scottish. And she claimed to be called Kelly Barton. She might have been American, or maybe Irish. Sometimes it's not easy to tell the difference. Normally, they wouldn't get to share a room like that. But our lady though it was a good thing in the circumstances, give them a chance to show what their true colours were. And it would make it easier to watch them too, of course'.

'Did you get the address, Morrison?', Charlie asked: and for a moment, he could have sworn that Morrison was going to play difficult.

But Morrison said, 'Me and Findlay will take a car down and pick you up. We can't have the likes of you wandering round Edinburgh getting us all into trouble. We'll pick you up in twenty minutes'.

Morrison rang off. He was outside the hotel with Findlay in ten minutes. They drove down Leith Walk and found the house in

another ten. A couple of uniformed officers was already there. With a sledgehammer and housebreaking kit.

‘Open it’, Morrison cried.

Of course, the flat was empty of life.

‘Tear it to bits’, Morrison ordered, as if the destruction of property was a suitable alternative to lust. The men went about their work with a will. Whole walls of books were tumbled and ripped apart.

‘What’s this foreign rubbish?’, Findlay demanded to know, trampling among the Persian and Arabic manuscripts. ‘People should be arrested for having this sort of stuff in their house’.

In the principal room, Charlie found a briefcase. He emptied its contents and found a thick file stamped with the legend, Home Office royal protection unit. The reader was reminded that the file enjoyed a classification of the strictest secrecy. Charlie put the file inside his coat, as Morrison came into the room, looking for more signs of treachery.

Morrison said, ‘Just imagine, people like this dealing in drugs. It’s time these bastards were brought down to where the rest of us are’.

Findlay picked up the phone and announced that it was working. He dialled headquarters and passed the handset to Morrison. Morrison barked orders that a city-wide search for the MP should start at once. He was to be arrested on sight. The Militia city command should be alerted too. For good measure, they should arrest anybody connected with the missing criminal.

‘Don’t worry’, Morrison said, his blood lust up. ‘They won’t escape us now’.

‘It’s just for his own safety’, Findlay said.

The uniformed lads had ripped all the volumes apart, and were beginning to tear up the floorboards. They would start on the rosewood wall-panelling next.

Charlie said he would leave them to their work. He would return to the North British with Fiona.

Findlay said, 'Don't forget, miss'.

They walked back to the hotel. It hardly seemed worth looking for a taxi. And in any case, they saw none for hire. Back in their room, they tore open the file. It took them some moments to realise the implication of its contents. Then it dawned. They were in possession of the complete file on the whereabouts and treatment of the king and his family since their disappearance in the early summer of 1945. Including a very recent teleprinter report from the royal protection squad at Bridge of Orchy. They were under sustained attack from insurgents. Should they fall-back to Inverlair now? Or should they proceed with the emergency provisions relating to disposal? The report was dated and timed just forty eight hours earlier.

Fiona said, 'I thought they were dead'.

'Didn't we all', Charlie said. 'But how did Jack get this?'

Fiona said, with a flash on inspiration, 'This came from the Home Secretary. He is in on this - whatever it is'.

'Why did Jack need to know where the king was, anyway?', Charlie wondered. 'We don't even know why he is dealing in cocaine'.

Then the realisation hit them simultaneously.

Fiona said, 'The cocaine. They are swapping it for the king and his family'.

A Militia brass band was marching in Princes Street to celebrate the great victory of the re-taking of London. You could quite easily hear it from the upper floors of the North British. It was still daylight, and there was no sign of further snow.

‘Where’s the cocaine now?’, Charlie wondered.

‘Where is the king now?’, Fiona wondered.

‘Where’s Bridge of Orchy?’, Fiona wondered.

‘You’ll get a map at reception’, Charlie said. ‘And then we better get a sleep. It could be a long day’.