

Forty one.

Kelly and the princesses watched the headlights of the cars as they drove very slowly down the north side of the loch in the growing darkness. One of the royal children saw the deer first, on the opposite shore. Then they watched it trot calmly across the shallows and lope gently into the thick tree cover of the islet.

‘Did they see that?’, one of the girls breathed.

Kelly said she didn’t know, but added that if they had seen the deer, it didn’t matter.

‘Not now’, she said, ‘not tonight. Soon it will be too deep to come across. They will have to wait until tomorrow and low water. By then we will have gone’.

‘If the Americans come’, one of the girls said.

‘Yes’, Kelly said, ‘if the Americans come’.

‘And if they don’t come tonight?’, the younger princess asked, absolutely calm.

‘Then we will be cornered on the island. We have nowhere else to run to. They will come tomorrow or the next day and capture us’.

‘Will they kill the king then?’, one of the girls asked.

Kelly said, ‘They will kill all of us’.

They watched the far shore for a time, until it was quite dark, but there was no sign of the black police Rileys coming back down the lochside track. Then they made their way through the thick trees, by a path which led to the cabin on the north shore of the islet. They were still on the smaller of the two Shonas; an islet attached to the larger island by a narrow and low isthmus which was bordered on each side by an inlet which nearly cut the island in two.

When it was quite dark, they moved out from the log cabin and in single file followed a very narrow footpath to the isthmus. The silence of the early night was immense. Then, as they crossed the isthmus the stupendous silence was broken by the scream of a bird and the wild rush of a herd of roe-deer, running across the isthmus from the main island.

For a moment, the party froze with disbelief and fright: but they saw nothing, and carried on to the main island.

Kelly said, 'Wolves. I think there might be wolves on the island'.

Among the dense trees on the main island it was very dark. They searched for the track, build up on black shaped stone, which led round the north side of the island. There would be no moon until midnight or later - or none at all, if the sky was overcast. In places, the track dipped right down to sea-level; at one spot, even, the tide had already risen above the track, and all six had to wade. The water was no more than three or four inches deep, but very cold. Then the track rose again above the level of the water, and the black widths of the north channel opened out in the darkness to the right of them. Then the track dipped steeply, and almost at once began to climb just as steeply. Against the darkness of the hillside, the outlines of a house could suddenly be sensed, rather than seen.

Kelso said, 'Baramore. This is where we have to wait. If they come tonight, this is where they will be expecting us to wait for them. If they come'.

The house stood foursquare on a hillock commanding a view down the channel between the mainland and the island to the right, and over the skerries and shallows to the left, out towards the deep water of the sea. Directly below it was a tiny bay, fit only for very

small dinghies, with a miniature stone pier jutting out into the water. Directly ahead of the house was a spit of land which ran out into the channel, narrowing it to a matter of yards in width, and where a sandbar reduced the depth at low water to a matter of inches. And then to the left, the land fell steeply down to the sea at another little bay scooped from the land, and at whose head was another house and an ambitious stone-built pier. The track which led to Baramore led steeply up over the hill at the back of the house, for it marched across the island to an abandoned settlement of houses on the south shore of Shona.

Baramore showed signs of having been recently occupied, or at least used - though it was not clear whether that use had been by Daniels or other outlaws on the one hand, or forces of the Protectorate on the other. In any case, it hardly mattered now, for they would not have long to wait for rescue, or detection. One or the other - they would probably know by the morning.

Kelso kindled a fire, and the princesses managed to shade the windows in such a way as to conceal any light whatsoever, except within the room. But there was no food, nor any medicine, and the king was being to fail visibly. Nobody had eaten now since the inn on the other side of the mountain, the previous night. It was becoming clear that if the king did not receive attention within the next twelve hours he would die within a day, or two at the most. But there was nothing that could be done now, except wait for an attempt at rescue. And as the evening wore slowly on, the likelihood of such a rescue became less and less.

It had grown dark at a little after four, and they had arrived at their Baramore refuge sometime after six. Four long hours passed, and there was no sign whatsoever of any vessel arriving from

seaward. At ten, the flood tide reached its height, and began to ebb again. After that, there seemed less hope than ever.

By midnight, the ebb was running strongly. Kelly and the two princesses sat on the little knoll in front of the house, searching out to sea. Below them, in the narrows over the sandbar, they could hear the tide rushing out. One of the princesses began to cry. She sobbed softly while her sister comforted her. They knew, all of them, only too well the price of failure to escape.

There was still no moon. But as the night wore on the comet which had been seen as they prepared to collect the shipment of cocaine at Easdale began to blaze across the southern sky. It seemed more prominent, somehow, more promisory, than ever.

Kelly strained to see something, anything, to seaward. But there was nothing, nothing but the slow white wash of the sea breaking easily on the offshore rocks. The comet was rising all the time now, blazing an impudent trail across the southern sky. And then she saw it.

‘Oh my God’, Kelly said, ‘look what’s coming now’.