

Thirty-one.

For Charlie and Fiona, the execution of the king outside Whitehall's Banqueting Hall naturally changed the course of the investigation. Indeed, it was questionable whether there was any investigation left to pursue, at least in any spirit of urgency. And it was likely that that investigation would in any case take itself to a leisurely end within the time that they still had to enjoy in Edinburgh.

There had been no further demands from the office of the Home Secretary that they return at once to London, and it seemed unlikely that any more could be expected. After all, if the Americans had smuggled cocaine into the country with a view to exchanging it for the the life and limb of King George VI, they had failed in the endeavour. The king, after all, was dead and no doubt the newspapers would be full of photographs of the regicide. That was the important thing. Certainly, there was still half a ton of cocaine somewhere in the country, and certainly not everyone associated with the conspiracy had been brought to book. In fact, none yet had. But sooner or later, they would; and meantime Charlie and Fiona could enjoy what little time was left to them in the self-styled Athens of the frosty north.

They slept late, and allowed room-service to bring them breakfast in their room. The maid had all the latest on the great news shaking the realm. The English had cut off the head of the king but they hadn't asked the Scots, whose king he also had been. They had done this before, the maid noted in a surly sort of fashion, but she didn't think anybody would mind this time.

Later, Charlie and Fiona went down to the station, and booked tickets for that night's Flying Scotsman back to London. They got

first class seats, and were assured that a dining car would be on the train too: which would make a nice change to the conditions that they had endured on the trip up. Waverley was swarming with Protectorate soldiers, re-joining their units after the recent turmoil. Most of these seemed to have spent the night drinking, but there was no spirit of aggression, no sign of trouble of any sort.

They bought a Scotsman and an Express and went back to the warmth of the North British. It was still very cold, though Princes Street was thronged with shoppers and traffic. They got a coffee in the lounge, and relaxed among the swarm of Militia and other military officers. The soldiers were all drinking champagne and brandy: the cellars of the hotel had been nearly emptied after a long night of celebration at the return of stable government. The Militia officers thought that there would be a lot of reprisals to come in the next few days, but they were going to rest first, and it looked like they would spend the whole day drinking. Many had been shopping, and were loaded with bags from Jenners and Forsyth's, with presents for their women and children.

The Scotsman was all full of the execution. A thoughtful editorial recalled the execution of Charles I at Whitehall, and how the Scots of the time had responded in a spirit of small-minded and antagonistic national spite, and of how they - aggrieved at exclusion from any involvement in the death of a king who was their king too - had instantly proclaimed his son as the new monarch. But this was all in the past, and so too was any spirit of small-minded antagonistic spite in these matters. And anyone who thought they could escape the force of that observation deserved what they would assuredly get - which was the full force of the law!

Charlie said, 'Small-minded bastards. What does it matter whose fucking king he was? He's dead'.

The Express gave the execution a huge amount of space too. Under the headline 'This is For Becket', the front page carried a gigantic photograph of a hooded executioner holding a head up to the crowd. Inside was another gigantic picture of the Archbishop of Canterbury extending a pious hand; and another of the moment when the great axe fell in a sweeping arc to the neck below. An editorial signed by Lord Beaverbrook said that he had always been a republican at heart.

'Couldn't we have got an earlier train?', Charlie asked.

'There wasn't one', Fiona said, 'ten tonight is the earliest'.

'You haven't heard from Findlay today', Charlie said nastily.

They got their coats and strolled up North Bridge. They went as far as the bottom of the High Street. Scores of Militia tanks were parked in the grounds of Holyrood Palace. But the pubs were not yet open, and they retraced their steps back towards the castle. A statue of Lenin was raised on a plinth, arm upraised and shrouded in frozen snow. But when they looked more closely, a plaque said it was someone called Knox. Perhaps he was some Scottish hero of the Protectorate; but it was not clear what sort of hero that might have been.

At St Giles, the fires of the outlaws had been extinguished. Some hundreds of Daniels were being shot in batches. A dozen at a time, they were herded against the wall of the Faculty of Advocates and shot down by machine gun from the back of a Militia lorry. On the castle esplanade gibbets had been erected at ten-yard intervals around the perimeter wall. Otherwise, the esplanade was entirely empty.

On the corner of Cockburn Street, they found a pub just opening its doors. They got a drink, and a seat at a coal fire in the corner, while the barman polished glasses and wondered who his customers were.

Fiona said, 'Here's how it worked. The Americans set it up. They would run cocaine into the country, and exchange it for the king and his family'.

'But everyone thought the king was dead', Charlie said.

'Well, he wasn't', Fiona said.

'Well, he is now'.

'Listen to what I am saying', Fiona said, 'this is the way they worked it. He was alive, and some people knew he was alive. The Home Secretary included. The Americans did a number of runs and got away with it. The next one we broke up, took half a ton, shot two of their couriers and got their radio. So what do they do next? They call in someone from Spain, and get him to Scotland. He comes in by Brittany and Cornwall and then they got him to Scotland'.

The barman came across with a brass scuttle and hurled some coal onto the fire. Then he took a steel poker and stirred the coal till the fire was roaring. When he had returned to his bar, it was safe to start talking again.

'It's obvious', Fiona said. 'They get Lamont back here. The American woman Barton came over from Larne on the ferry. Except she gets caught up in a Militia road-block. They hadn't planned for that, had they? They put her in the zoocamp at Corstorphine. But somehow Lamont got the Daniels to get her out. They take the armoured Militia Daimler, drive to Easdale and collect the cocaine.'

That's the sugar they had in the back of the lorry at Callander. We would have caught them on Easdale if we had waited, you know'.

Charlie ignored the reproach. He asked what she thought happened to the cocaine that had been brought in.

She said, 'Johnson was involved, the Home Secretary is involved. So was this MP who is missing. My bet is that the cocaine was taken to Edinburgh, and then moved down to London.'

'How?'

'We don't know yet. But London is the place for that sort of quantity. They could never use it here. It's a good bet that Johnson was fencing it into the criminal underworld. He was a commander in the drugs squad, after all - if he didn't know where to get rid of half-ton shipments of cocaine, who would?'

'So what did the Home Secretary do in all this?'

'He knew where the king was', Fiona said, 'he was the one who was passing the information back. Some way or another, he was getting some sort of kickback from the shipments'.

'And what about the Ottoman magazine?'

'That's the way they all kept in contact, that was their cover'.

'I doubt we will ever prove any of this', Charlie said. 'Even if any of it is true'.

'But it all fits', Fiona said. 'Jack was special operations on the French coast during the war, and then Turkey. Lamont was in Turkey and then Germany, running drugs. If we look further, we will find other connections. It's a good bet that Jack was involved in the recruitment. Jack travelled from London to Edinburgh and back almost every weekend. He didn't stay in the parliamentary compound. We know he had his own flat in Westminster. Half a ton could be carried to London by courier in small consignments. Say

fifty pounds at a time. Regular travellers could carry it on a regular basis. Jack could carry some in his own luggage, and the rest could go by - we don't know yet. But it's a very busy route. Maybe sleeping car attendants, or dining car. Anyway, Jack was the link. The cocaine was traded in London and the information on the royals collected there. Then he would come back to Edinburgh, and oversee arrangements for the hand-over. Except that things started to go wrong when the rising started. I tell you, it all fits'.

'So what's left for us?', Charlie asked.

'Nothing', she said. 'We can leave it to the Scots. Find half a ton of cocaine, if it is still here. Find Lamont and Barton and arrest them for smuggling drugs. Find Jack and turn him over. It's their jurisdiction here, after all. We came to stop an American intelligence operation to get the king. Now the king's dead. The operation has collapsed. We can go back home'.

'I can't wait', Charlie said. 'Let's leave it to the Scots. And if they want to investigate the Home Secretary, let them do that too. If they dare. He's one of them anyway. Rather them than us, that's for sure'.

It was snowing again by the time they left the pub. They walked down Cockburn Street, skirted the station, and returned to the North British. They expected to find another summons to return to London, but there were no messages of any sort. Charlie phoned the office in Victoria but there was nothing there either. Most of the girls in the teleprinter office were round in the station watching the executions. Hostages were being taken at random in all the surrounding districts. There was still localised fighting in some areas in the east of the city, but it was being crushed hour by hour.

Charlie asked the girl if she knew anything about rail services into the city, and she said that they were all running. The Tube was back on too, at least on most lines, but was expected to be very overcrowded in the early evening. The curfew would start at seven, and anyone caught on the streets after that could be shot on sight. But at least it had stopped snowing. Two girls would be on duty all night, and if they had anything for him, they would phone Edinburgh.

Charlie said, 'Not after ten. Our train goes at ten'.

They leafed through the report from the Home Office royal protection squad. It appeared to contain a complete account of the arrest and imprisonment of the royal family since the summer of 1945. There were regular medical reports attached, six-monthly in frequency, for each of them. There were numerous reports of the reading matter allowed the prisoners. Unknown political officers appended accounts of the extent to which the royals had reformed their opinions, or not, as they case might have been. There were architects' reports on security installations and devices, and a special appendix on the likelihood of an American attack to free the prisoners. Each of the detainees had been photographed too, every six months, in police style: a plain monochrome mug-shot, brightly lit against an anonymous white background. The faces looked out, without expression: though the princesses grew visibly older as the series progressed. One special report dealt with the means in place for the destruction of the family in the event of emergency; of how they were to be killed, and the precise measures to be taken for the disposal of the bodies. Then the six-monthly general reports began.

After arrest, they were held in a mansion which had belonged to one of the landowning families in the border region of England and Scotland: a forty-room household set in a wooded park, and

near a river. The river had clearly been named but some unknown hand had obscured the name, perhaps for reasons of additional secrecy. The inhabitants of the mansion, and those of the more modest dwellings in a ten mile radius, were driven out and taken into custody in the early days of the Protectorate. The report observed that for some time the royals had been held in the basement of the building, without light, and on reduced rations. It was thought that this would weaken them, in the event of any attempt at escape or rescue. Nor had there been any sanitary provision of any kind whatsoever. But at length a latrine had been dug in the earthen floor, and the prisoners began to receive hot water twice a day: for there was reason to fear the consequences of the very serious deterioration that had by now occurred in their health.

Then a second report, on the removal of the prisoners to more secure, purpose-built accommodation. In late summer they were taken from their dungeon at dusk. The courtyard of the mansion had been floodlit, and surrounded with armed guards. The two girls were now 19 and 15 years of age. They had survived the conditions in the dungeon surprisingly well. So had their mother. The king, however, was seriously ill and unable to stand for any time. Robust physical testing had established that this inability was not a pretence. Then the journey began.

It was already nearly dark, without any sign of a moon. There were four cars, four trucks, and a squad of motorcycle outriders. For hours the convoy bumped over narrow and difficult tracks as it wound its way west in the Border country. It passed through Langholm and then, as the day rose, Dumfries. The officer in charge of the convoy held a conference with his senior men: there were

reports of bandit activity to the north and the west in parts of Ayrshire.

Armed gangsters from Lanarkshire had attacked a number of prisoner-convoys in recent weeks, and reinforced Militia units were searching for them night and day. The convoy diverted from its planned route and headed west for Newton Stewart and on for the coast at Girvan. Then it took the coast road, which was heavy with military traffic. About mid-day, the convoy reached the coastal town of Troon. A naval patrol boat was waiting for it, and the moment the prisoners were loaded and taken below, it put to sea at high speed, headed for the island of Arran. The vessel anchored in Lamlash bay, close in to the shore of Holy Isle. It remained there until dusk when the prisoners were transferred ashore and handed over to the appropriate authority.

That was the end of that report. It was signed-off by the officer in charge of the transportation. A second officer counter-signed it with a flourish. And there was a docket, signed and counter-signed by the receiving officers, including a full manifest of the names, ages and kinship relationships, if any, of the prisoners in hand.

Then a report on the suitability of the site. It could be evacuated by sea very quickly indeed. The naval patrol across the entrance to the Clyde could block any attempt at escape, or rescue. Fighter-bombers from the Kintyre airbase could destroy it, and its complement, in a matter of minutes: and were no more than ten minutes flying time distant.

And a bundle of standard reports on their imprisonment there. For the first year, the king and his family were held in an underground blockhouse, with no more than a weekly excursion in a caged above-ground yard during the hours of darkness. For this

first year the prisoners were exercised individually, and never once caught sight of any of the others. Indeed, it had been a punishable offence to even ask whether any of the others was alive.

But from the summer of 1946, with the Protectorate increasingly established in power, these restrictions eased somewhat, and a weekly period of free association was allowed, although always under the severest conditions and always under the strictest supervision of the guards. Newspapers were permitted, and access to a radio: and week after week, these reported and broadcast in triumphant terms the strengthening grip of the Protectorate, with many confessions printed in full, and sometimes even broadcast live from the courtroom. These confessions had occasioned great sadness in the prisoners: but they had failed in the face of established means of persuasion to make the prisoners inform on, or denounce, each other. This was despite the repeated withdrawal of food, 'to a level consistent with their contribution to the national economy'.

A final and much more recent report covered the removal of the prisoners to a more secure location on the mainland. The criminal agitation connected with the so-called National Convention had given rise to fears that the security of the royals could not be guaranteed where they were. They were to be moved at once to Inverlair. As a result they had been rushed to the shore of Arran and taken across that island by a Militia armoured car. From Loch Ranza they were taken to Tarbert by fast torpedo launch. Here a convoy of Militia armoured cars was waiting. Heavy snow was falling. There was no food to be had, no water, and it was feared that the convoy might be trapped in the heavy snow. There was also a fear of attack by partisan bandits.

The convoy took the road to Cladich, and then Dalmally. Then the Glen Orchy road, dangerous with snow. By now it was getting dark. The king had asked if they were going to be shot, and if so, asked whether they might be allowed to pray first. He had been knocked unconscious with a rifle-butt, for it was strictly against orders to speak to a guard without permission. It had been a severe blow, and the convoy doctor was required to bring the prisoner back to his senses. They were brought to a house near Bridge of Orchy. The weather was worsening and they were unable to proceed further. It was thought that if the prisoners were driven on foot in the snow they would be dead by the morning. The guards would remain there with the prisoners until the weather moderated, or if they came under attack from bandits. As soon as possible, they would move north to Inverlair.

‘So where are the remaining royals now?’, Charlie wondered.

‘I would bet on Inverlair’, Fiona said, ‘wherever that is’.

In any case, it was no longer their problem and they went down to find some lunch.

Reception had a message for Fiona. A sergeant Findlay had looked in on his way to golf. He had been too busy to hang around waiting, but he had left a message. He would be on the Braids course with Morrison if she wanted to come for a drink with them later. If they weren’t out on the course because of snow, they would be in the club-house.

‘Christ’, Charlie said, ‘is that the way they do it here’.

‘How far is it to the Braids?’, Fiona asked reception.

The girl said it was too far to walk, and there wouldn’t be any taxis in the snow.

‘Pity’, Fiona said, ‘it would make a change if nothing else’.

They had a drink in the CafŽ Royal, and another in some pub in Rose Street, killing time till the train. Then they went back to the hotel: by now it was snowing very heavily indeed.

Slowly, the evening bled past. At nine they went upstairs and packed. Then took their luggage down to the bar, and nursed a final drink. At half-past, they set out for the station. As they were about to board the train, the receptionist from the hotel flew after them. There had been an extremely urgent message for them. They must not leave Edinburgh tonight. It was a matter of extreme urgency. They had to phone their office in London at once.

They returned to the North British. There was a lift from the station concourse straight into reception, and they could still get back to the train in time.

Charlie phoned the office in Victoria from the reception desk, and got straight through to the girls on duty. The girl was near-hysterical, for fear that she had missed him. The Home Secretary was dead. He had fallen from the clock tower of the palace of Westminster. Police had raided his house and found huge quantities of American dollars. And huge quantities of American cocaine. Charlie pressed the receiver to his ear, and plugged the other ear. He could barely hear the girl in Victoria at all. Fiona listened: clearly something had gone very wrong.

‘Dead’, Charlie was saying. ‘The Home Secretary has fallen from the Westminster clock tower? Dollars and cocaine. How much? How much did they find in his house?’

He listened some more, while drunken revellers swarmed and reeled through the lobby.

‘What do you mean, not dead? Alive?’, he cried in tones of growing disbelief.

And then, 'Inverlair? We don't know. We haven't a clue. All right, we'll find out'.

He slammed the phone down and turned to Fiona. He had suddenly grown very pale.

He said, 'Don't ask. The world's gone mad. I'll tell you upstairs. But we're not going back. We have to find this place called Inverlair. And then get there as fast as we can'.

Fiona said, 'I will try the golf club. With any luck they will still be in the bar there. And we'll need their help to get anywhere on a night like this'.

They thanked the girl on reception, and returned to their room. Ten minutes later, the Flying Scotsman pulled out of Waverley. But Charlie and Fiona were not among its passengers.