

CHAPTER 5

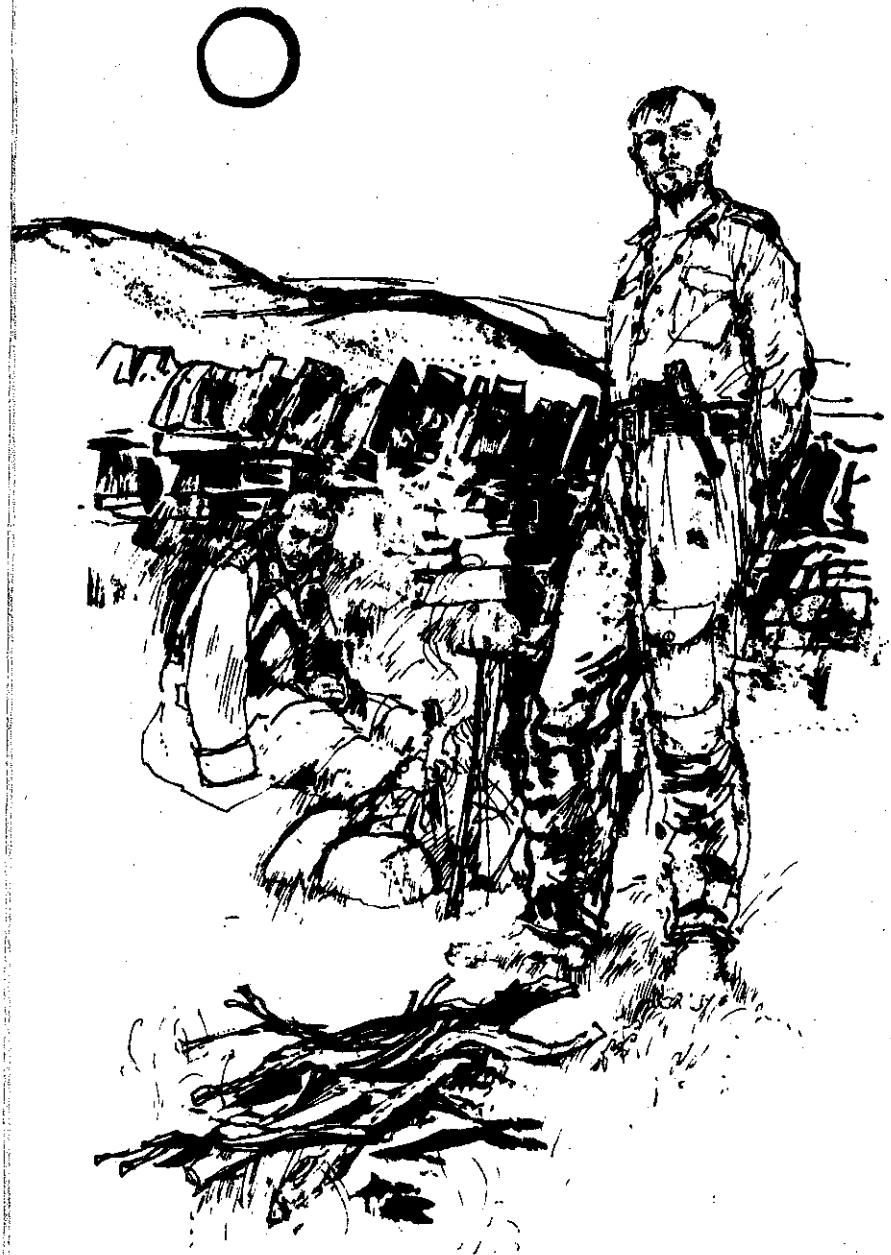
THE SUN WAS DAZZLING HIS EYES AND TUCKY was leaning over him. From somewhere there was the smell of wood smoke.

'Davey! Davey! Can you hear me? You all right?' Tucky seemed to be shouting, but David heard him only faintly at first. 'We were right, Davey. It was a bomber, a German bomber, and there's two of them here.'

'Two?'

'Two German pilots. One's hurt but the other one pulled you out of the river.'

David pushed himself up slowly and propped himself on his elbows. The smoke came from a fire a few feet away, and beyond that up against a low dry stone wall there were two men in blue



uniforms. One of them stood up now and came towards them. There was the black butt of a revolver sticking out of his belt, and David saw that he was unshaven. He was wearing only a shirt and trousers and they were clinging wet. He crouched down a few paces away.

'Your friend is well now?' He spoke haltingly, with a heavy accent. 'He is better?'

'You tell him, mister,' Tucky said excitedly. 'You tell him. You're a German, aren't you?'

The man nodded. 'We are German, yes.'

'See, Davey. There was a plane and it did crash.'

'You were in that plane?' David was trying to take it all in.

'It was my plane, yes. We were hit and then we lost power. We had to crash-land.' His eyes were sunk deep in his head, and his hair was still wet.

'You were bombing Plymouth?' David asked. He could feel a knot of anger building up inside him. The man nodded slowly.

'Their plane sank,' Tucky went on. 'That's what he told me. Landed in a bog. Remember Mr Reynolds telling us that story of a horse and rider that were sucked down – that's what happened to their plane. That's what he said.'

'And they've been out here all week?' David said, looking past the fire to the man by the wall.

'S'pose so,' said Tucky. 'That's one's hurt his leg or something, doesn't speak any English.'

David looked at them both. There was nothing threatening or frightening about them, they were just two exhausted, pale-looking men with sad eyes and kind faces. They were faces he should hate. Perhaps these were the men who had shot down his father over the French coast and cheered as they watched him crashing into the beaches. These were the men who had bombed London and Plymouth and killed thousands. Yet one of them had saved his life.

'He took your clothes off, Davey, after he dragged you out. They've over there by the fire. Should be dry soon, you were unconscious long enough.' David had been aware of a roughness against his skin, but it was only now that he realised he was covered in a dark blue overcoat. His clothes were hanging over a frame of sticks by the fire.

'My friend is not well,' the German said. 'He cannot move much and he is cold. I need food – food and blankets. The nights are cold here and he

coughs. Will you help us, please?

'Help you!' David was almost shouting. He pulled himself to his feet, gathering the greatcoat around him. 'Help you? After what you've done? You come here bombing and killing and you want us to help!'

'It is a war,' he replied sadly. 'In war people die – on both sides.'

'Why don't you give yourself up?' Tucky said. 'You can't escape, not if your friend can't move. And there are soldiers out looking for you, you know. We told them about your plane.'

The German threw more wood on the fire. 'Perhaps you are right,' he said, 'but we must try. We need time to recover. Two days ago we have finished the emergency food. We have nothing left – just water from the river. This is the first fire I have dared to light. We must keep warm, and we must have food. Then we will escape over the moor to the sea and find a boat.'

'What about the soldiers?' said Tucky.

'They did not find us last time. It is a big place to search, this moor.'

'And what if we tell them where you are?' David said, as defiantly as he could.

'Then we shall be caught, my young friend. I cannot move my friend any more now, and I cannot leave him. We are in your hands,' and he turned away and walked back to his friend on the other side of the fire.

'What do we do?' Tucky whispered. 'We got to help him, haven't we? He saved your life, Davey, pushed all the water out of you and he was risking a lot to light that fire for you. You owe him, Davey. We both do.'

'He's a German, isn't he? He's probably bombed over London. What if it was his bombs that hit the Perkins' house back in Islington, eh? How many d'you think he's killed?'

'But he saved your life, Davey. He needn't have done it. He could have let you drown.'

As soon as his clothes were dry enough to put on, David got dressed. The two Germans watched from their wall. David walked over and handed back the greatcoat. 'Thank you,' he said. The taller airman, the one who had saved him, took it and laid it over his friend.

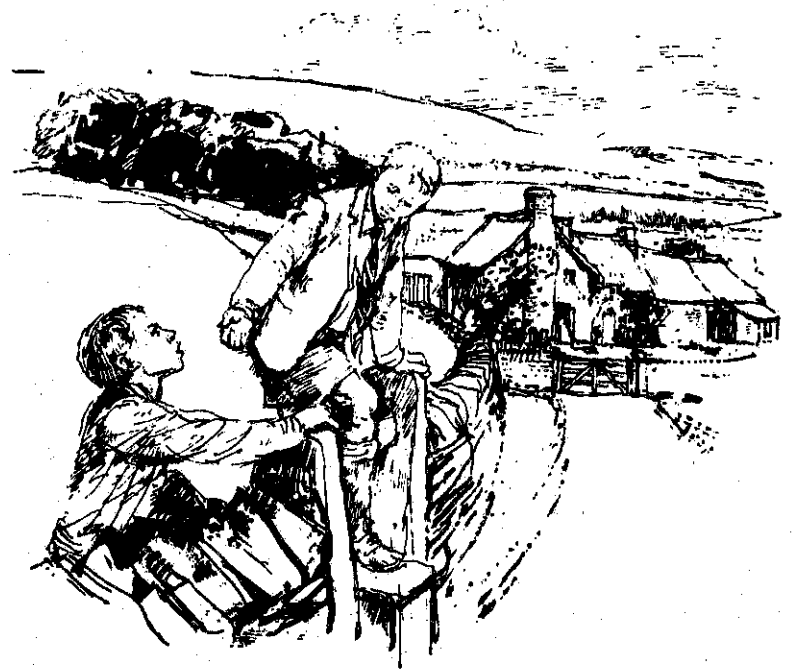
'If you come back,' he said, 'please bring us food. If you send the soldiers, then goodbye.'

David turned away and the two boys left them

sitting there, and when they turned round farther down the valley, they saw a great puff of white smoke going up. The fire was being put out. It was still a long walk back to the farm, an hour at least, and all that time they talked about what they should do. Every instinct except one told them to give the Germans up, to call in the soldiers, to tell Mr Reynolds. After all, wouldn't Ann and Mr Reynolds be pleased? Wouldn't the laughing faces in the village be silenced? Wouldn't their stock be high at school? And wouldn't everyone have to eat their words about the 'townies'? And apart from that, they were Germans, enemies; it was a duty to make sure they were captured.

It was Tucky who did most of the talking. He kept on reminding David that the German had saved his life, that you couldn't turn on someone who had saved your life, no matter who he was, but David was determined. He would tell Mr Reynolds as soon as they got back, and leave it to him. By the time they reached the cottage, he was longing to break the news.

Ann met them at the door. 'Where have you been, you two? I was worried?' Then she caught sight of David's clothes. 'Davey, what has



happened?' She reached out and felt his shirt. 'It is damp. What has happened?'

'I fell in the river,' David started to explain. 'We'd almost given up, Ann. We were crossing the river and I fell in, slipped on the rocks, and then ...'

'Lucky I was with him, Ann, I can tell you. The river wasn't that fast, and it's not too deep there either. Still, s'lucky I was with him.' Tucky smiled up at Ann. David was about to interrupt, but Tucky went on before he had the chance. 'And he can't swim. He slipped on the rocks and I leapt in after him

and fished him out. Wet as a kipper, he was. No doubt about it, lucky I was there,' and he preened himself, flashed a grin at David and went into the cottage. It was a brilliant performance.

David just stood there, gaping after him. He had known Tucky a very long time, and Tucky had never surprised him before; that was what he liked about Tucky, he could always tell what Tucky was thinking, what he was going to do. Until now, that is.

Ann put an arm round his shoulder. 'Are you all right, Davey? You look as if you have seen a ghost. Are you cold still?'

'Yes, I'm cold,' was all he could say.

There was a steaming hot bath and tea in the kitchen, and then Ann went off to help Mr Reynolds with the milking. It was the first time the boys had been left alone, the first chance they had had to talk. David didn't waste any time. 'We agreed. We said we'd tell them. We must tell them.'

'I never agreed anything,' said Tucky, ready for him. 'You tell them if you like, but I can tell you, if someone had just risked his own life to save mine, I wouldn't kick him in the teeth – German or not, it doesn't matter.'

'But we can't, Tucky. We can't help Germans to escape, it's not right. We're supposed to be fighting them. We can't.'

'Like I say,' Tucky said firmly. 'You owe them, and what's more you know you do. All he's asking for is some food and blankets – if you don't think that's a fair exchange for saving your life, then I think it's a pity he went in after you.'

David had never heard Tucky like this. He was excitable, yes; impetuous, yes; but he'd never found him determined or single-minded.

Tucky leaned towards him over the kitchen table. 'I like you, Davey. We've been best friends ever since I can remember. You always seemed to do right by people. You've done right by me, been a real friend since we left home, but if you turn those Germans in just because your father . . .'

'My father?'

'That's what it is, Davey, isn't it? And maybe Ann's father as well. They're Germans and the Germans killed your dad, so you hate them all, don't you, every one of them?'

There was not a single word Tucky had spoken that David could argue with. Tucky was right. He did owe the Germans out on the moor.

'All right,' he conceded. 'We'll do it, but not for long.'

Tucky smiled like his old self for the first time since they had got back. They didn't see Mr Reynolds again that evening; he was busy fencing at the bottom of Front Meadow. But next morning over breakfast, before David and Tucky left for school, he heard all about their search on the moor. 'So, you found nothing,' he smiled wryly, 'and Davey here fell in the river.'

'I slipped, Mr Reynolds. Those stones were all slimy.'

'You crossed at the stepping stones, like I said?'

'Yes, Mr Reynolds.'

'And no sign of that plane?'

'Nothing,' said Tucky. 'We must have made a mistake. P'raps it went up again, behind a hill or something, and we just didn't see it. Sorry, Mr Reynolds.'

'Never you mind, my dear. You were right to tell us if you thought you saw it. Everyone makes mistakes, and anyway 'twas good practice for the army and for us – even if no one enjoyed it much. We won't mention it again. Off you go now, you'll be late for school.'

School was still buzzing with the 'townies' shot-down German bomber, and David and Tucky longed to blurt out their secret. 'Haven't you found it yet, Davey boy?' and 'Look out, the Luftwaffe's about!' And whenever Mr Cooper wanted someone with a good imagination, he turned to the 'townies' with a knowing smile, and everyone laughed.

It was a wretched day, only made bearable by the knowledge that they knew they were right. On the way back home that afternoon, they worked out their plan.

'Whatever happens, Mr Reynolds and Ann must never find out. Never,' said David. 'Nothing must be missed.'

'What about the blankets? They'll miss those, won't they? They're bound to.'

'Not if we take two off our bed,' said David. 'We make our own beds, don't we? No one'll miss them, 'cept us. We can bring them back after they've gone. No one need notice.'

'What about the food then?'

'There's eggs,' David had thought it all out. 'We can get them from the chicken hut soon as we get back. Then there's carrots and radishes in the

vegetable patch – I've seen Ann pulling them up often enough. I know where they are.'

'That won't be enough.'

'Then there's that bowl of bread and leftovers that Ann keeps on the window ledge above the sink. We could take that, some of it anyway. No one would miss that – 'cept the pigs, of course.'

David had been planning it all day, and once they got home, he knew exactly what had to be done. He sent Tucky upstairs for the blankets while he went for the food. As he expected, Ann was out with Mr Reynolds haymaking across the stream by Long Close; it was far enough away from the house for it to be safe. They wrapped the food in one of the blankets and made off out of the back door, and across the fields towards the moors.

Once off the farm they kept to the cover of the hedgerows until they reached the open moor and were out of sight of the cottage. Tucky flopped down behind a stone wall and waited for David to join him. He fought to catch his breath, hanging his head back and taking in great gulps of air. David slumped down next to him and checked that the food was still inside the blankets. One egg had broken, but everything was there. It was then they

heard someone coming up the track behind them. They looked at each other in alarm. The panting was close now, just the other side of the stone wall. They froze against it, rigid and frightened. And then Jip came lolloping into sight, saw them cowering there and trotted over, tail wagging, tongue hanging down from his pink and grinning mouth. They laughed themselves silly with relief.

'Dogs can't tell tales,' David said, and Jip followed them along over the hills to where the river tumbled over the rocks. They crossed over the stepping stones and clambered on up, always looking ahead of them to see if the Germans were still there. They approached the place slowly, but Jip ran on ahead sniffing the ground busily, alternately growling and yapping in excitement. He disappeared behind the stone wall, and then there was silence.

The German airmen were where they had left them, only closer in among the rocks. One of them held Jip under his arm, his hand clamped over his muzzle. Both wore their blue greatcoats and were crouching down low. Their faces relaxed and the black revolver that was pointing at the boys was lowered.

'Is it your dog?' he asked. David nodded, and the Germans released Jip and patted his neck gently. Jip sprang away and cowered behind the boys. 'Food? Have you brought food?' David handed over the blanket, and the two Germans spread it out carefully in front of them. They divided it equally and then devoured it like starved dogs, looking up from time to time as if someone might take it away from them.



The boys looked on in silence, wondering how anyone could be that hungry. They ate anything and everything – meat fat, cold porridge, stale bread, peelings, carrots, raw eggs. When they had finished not a crumb was left on the blanket – except the eggshells. They sat back against the wall, breathing deeply.

'That was good, very good,' the airman was panting. 'Gurt here, he slept hardly at all, it will be good for him. You are kind, very kind. Thank you, it was a feast, a real feast.'

The boys saw that the men had built themselves a rough shelter up against the wall since the day before. It was made of wooden supports, and covered in bracken, dried grass and freshly cut turf. There was more bracken on the floor inside and enough room for both men to squeeze in together. 'It's not a palace, my young friend,' he said, 'but it is better than nothing.' The German smiled quietly as he spoke, but then his face altered suddenly.

They all heard it together, the drone of an aeroplane, and it was coming closer all the time. The two Germans crawled in under their shelter and pulled the blankets in after them. Tucky spotted it first as it came over the hill, a single-engined

spotter plane, a biplane, and it flew down towards them over the moor, its RAF markings plainly visible. It was the same spotter plane that had been used in the search the week before.

CHAPTER 6

'WAVE,' DAVID SHOUTED. 'WAVE AT HIM.' AND Tucky obeyed instinctively, waving after the plane as it banked and came in for a second run. David gave the thumbs-up sign and the 'V' for victory. 'Look happy, Tucky, smile at him.'

The spotter plane swept down even lower this time, and they could see the pilot waving back at them, and the two boys waved after it as it waggled its wings in salute. Tucky glanced down at the Germans' shelter, but there was no sign of them, and by the time he looked up again, the plane was climbing fast over the moor and turnings towards the south.

'What if they saw?' Tucky tugged at David's elbow.