

as if it had never been there. Only the damp grey ashes by the stone wall were left to show that anyone had been there at all.

CHAPTER 7

THE BOYS STOOD IN THE DRIZZLE CALLING and whistling for Jip, and then from high up on the hills came a familiar barking. It seemed to be coming from the cairn, a massive pile of granite rocks that dominated the valley like some prehistoric fortress. Tucky whistled again, and back came Jip's reassuring bark; and then they saw him standing up on the cairn against the sky, his body shaking as he barked. Tucky set off up the hill with David in close pursuit; and Jip jumped down from the rocks and bounced down towards them, tail bobbing, tongue hanging out.

It was a long climb up. They had to make frequent detours to find the safest way to the top, zigzagging up the hill towards the cairn. Jip could

climb where they could not and ran on ahead, turning every so often to make sure they were following.

Tucky stopped to catch his breath and shouted up, 'You up there? We got your food.' For some moments there was no response.

'Come up.' It was the German's voice from behind the rocks. There was no doubt about that. Tucky waited for David and they went on up together.

It was a small grassy clearing encircled by great boulders, and in one corner a great granite slab had fallen across the walls to form a roof. It reminded David of pictures he'd seen of Stonehenge, only smaller. One German was lying down under the roof, covered in blankets, and the other stood beside him stroking Jip.

'We thought you'd gone,' Tucky said. 'You didn't tell us you were moving.'

'The plane that came over yesterday,' he said. 'I thought it could have seen us. It was a good thing. There were soldiers out yesterday, just the other side of the river. We are safe here now.'

David was looking at the other airman, who was struggling to sit up. 'Your friend? Is he worse?'

'Not good, not good. He is very ill. You have brought the brandy?'

'Whisky,' said David. 'There was no brandy.' He handed him the bottle.

'Thank you, my friend,' the German's face broke into a half smile. 'It will be a help.' He was even paler than the day before, and his beard had grown darker. He knelt down beside his friend and helped him to sit up. He tilted the bottle and the boys watched the injured German drink it as if it was water. Twice his whole body was shaken by violent coughing fits, but still he came back for more until finally he pushed it away. He leant back against the rocks, nodded at the two boys and smiled his thanks. Tucky put the pillowcase down inside the shelter and stood back.

'We won't bring any more,' David said suddenly when they had finished emptying the pillowcase. They ate on as if he had said nothing, ripping open the tins of corned beef and shovelling the meat directly from the tins into their mouths. David said it louder. 'We have done enough. There won't be any more. You understand?'

The German nodded as he finished his mouthful and wiped his mouth with the back of his sleeve.

'You have done more than enough. It is good that we can help each other in these sad times. It is good.'

'We only did it 'cos you helped us,' David said. 'That's all. We're still enemies.'

'No, I don't think so,' he looked up at them and smiled. 'I am wearing the uniform of your enemy, but we are not enemies, not any more.'

'We must take Jip now,' David said, wanting it to be over. 'We were sent out to find Jip. We've got to get back.'

The airman got to his feet slowly, holding out his hand to stop them. 'Please,' he said, 'there is one last thing.'

'No,' David was almost shouting. 'It's finished. I've paid you back, haven't I? We won't do any more, do you understand? No more.'

'Please.' The German took a step closer, and the boys backed away. 'We want no more food, no more anything.'

'Come on, Tucky.' David turned to go. 'I'm going.'

'I want you to take my friend back with you,' said the German quietly. 'As your prisoner. He has agreed. He is not well enough to go with me over

the moor. I hoped food and warmth would help, but it hasn't. He wishes to go with you as your prisoner.'

'You want us to take him? Hand him over to the army?' Tucky said. Pictures of him leading a captured German pilot through the village, with crowds cheering and church bells pealing, came swarming into his mind. Their faces! The look on their faces!

'How far it is?' the German asked.

'How far?' David was still trying to take it in.

'To your home, your village?'

'It's not our home exactly,' he said. 'We're evacuees.'

'From London, mister, to get away from the bombs,' Tucky answered for him.

The man nodded knowingly, and looked hard at David. 'From London. I am sorry, my friends. Perhaps when you are older you will understand that we all do things we know we should not do. But perhaps you have learnt that already.'

David looked away. 'It takes over an hour,' he said. 'But it's downhill most of the way.'

'To begin with I will go with you – Gurt, my friend, he cannot walk too far – I will come to help carry

him. He is a big man, too heavy for you, I think. You will take him?’

‘We will, won’t we Davey?’ Tucky was eager.

‘All right,’ David said. ‘But no one must see you. You won’t make it, you know.’

‘Make it?’

‘Over the moor. It’s thirty miles of hills, bogs and rivers, and the army trains all over it. They’ll catch you, and if they don’t, the moor will kill you.’

‘Will you tell them about me?’

David shook his head. ‘There’s no need. Mr Reynolds says no one can cross the moor from north to south without a map or a compass, and without knowing the moor. You’ll never do it.’

‘In planes we navigate by the stars,’ he said. ‘The moor may be big, but it is not as big as the sky. I will try anyway. I have to try. If you were away from home, and you wanted to get back, you would try, wouldn’t you?’

They started off down the hill, Jip prancing on ahead sniffing at every rabbit hole. Tucky carried both the blankets over his shoulder, and kept looking round every few yards to make sure the two Germans were still behind them. David stuffed the pillowcase inside his jumper and wondered

how they were going to explain away the blankets to Mr Reynolds. The deception was getting too complicated; something must go wrong, he was sure of it.

The boys found themselves walking too fast for the airmen, who needed to stop to rest from time to time. The injured one was being carried, slung over his friend’s shoulder in a fireman’s lift. David and Tucky sat down on a rock to wait for them to catch up. It was still drizzling and the German found it difficult to keep his feet as he came down towards them. He plodded on past them, and David saw the effort on his face and a look of grim determination.

‘What’re we going to say?’

David had made up his mind. ‘We bumped into them by accident. No need to lie any more, Tucky.’

‘That’s just it,’ Tucky went on. ‘There’s two of them, and we’re only bringing one of them in. What’re you going to do about the other one? Are we going to tell them or what?’

‘I don’t know.’ David got up and followed the Germans.

David stopped them when they reached the low stone wall that separated the moor from the farm,

and here the airman lowered his friend gently on to his feet. They talked to each other briefly in German, and then shook hands solemnly.

'You will look after him, please?' he said. 'He needs a doctor. You will make sure he has a doctor?'

'Course we will,' Tucky said excitedly. 'Course we will, won't we, Davey?' And David nodded his agreement.

'So, he is your prisoner now,' and he felt deep into the inside of his coat and pulled out the black revolver. 'You will need this,' he said, handing it to David. It was cold and heavy, heavier than David had imagined. 'It is loaded, but the safety catch is on. Be careful with it, please.' David balanced it in his hand and gripped the butt, his finger curling round the trigger.

'I could make you come too,' he said.

'Of course, Davey.' The man nodded. 'But friends do not use guns on each other.' He held out his hand to David. David looked down at the outstretched hand and took it. 'Goodbye, Davey, and you too, Tucky. Auf Wiedersehen.'

'Bye,' said David.

'And good luck,' Tucky shouted after him. But the

German was striding away into the rain, head bent forward, the collar of his coat turned up to cover his neck.

Mr Reynolds was in the yard, bringing in the sows. He heard footsteps behind him, and then Jip was nuzzling his leg. 'So you little devil, you. You found him then, my dears.' He still had not turned round. 'Dogs are like horses, got minds of their own.'

'We found him, Mr Reynolds,' said Tucky. 'And someone else. Look.'

Mr Reynolds turned and stared. 'Your plane? From your plane, is he?' he could hardly believe what he was looking at.

'Jip found him, Mr Reynolds,' said David. 'He's a German bomber pilot - Luftwaffe.'

'I can see that, my dear, I can see that.' He looked the German up and down, and then he noticed the revolver David was holding in his hand. 'Now, you give that thing to me, my dear,' he said, and he walked round the German, keeping his distance, and took the revolver from David. 'Ann,' he called out, not taking his eyes off the German. 'Ann, come here. Come out here.' He was pointing the revolver at the German now and

waving him towards the cottage.

'Your plane, must've been your plane, 'most for certain. You were right, my dears, right after all. Does he speak English?'

'No,' Tucky said. He was longing to see Ann's face when she saw.

'He's limping, isn't he? Course he's been out on the moor for the best part of a week; no, 'twould be more now, wouldn't it? Looks half starved, doesn't he? Ann!'

Ann threw open the door and came running out, her hands white with flour. She stopped dead and her hand shot to her mouth.

'German pilot,' Tucky said. 'From our plane. We found him out on the moor.'

'Jip found him,' David said quickly.

'Did he hurt you?' Ann had gone white.

'Gentle as a lamb, by the look of him,' said Mr Reynolds.

'But the gun,' said Ann. 'The gun. How did you get the gun?'

'Just gave himself up,' David said. 'He can hardly walk, Ann; he's tired out and coughing; he should see a doctor.'

'The van, my dear, get the van out,' said Mr



Reynolds. 'Take it up to the village and get Captain Starey, and if he's not there, then ring up the army at Okehampton. They'll send someone out, but quick as you can now. We'll look after him here, won't we, my dears?'

Ann came closer to the German and looked up into his face. 'Just people, just ordinary people, like you and me,' she said.

In the warmth of the kitchen, the German sat in Ann's chair by the stove, holding a mug of tea in his hands, and shivering. Mr Reynolds nursed the revolver, shaking his head.

'And the blankets, I don't understand about the blankets,' he said slowly. 'They're ours, no doubt about that. That green one, I've seen that one on my bed before now, most for certain. 'Twas on my bed for years.'

'We found all sorts up there,' David spoke up confidently. 'We brought them all back, the blankets, a bottle of whisky and this pillowcase. He must've taken them, come here and taken them.' David had thought it all out as they came across the fields, and the story came out now convincingly. Mr Reynolds nodded thoughtfully, but said nothing.

'And the plane?' he asked. 'No sign of that plane, I suppose.'

'We looked all around – there was nothing, not a sign.'

'Crashed into a bog,' Tucky blurted out, and David winced. They had agreed David would be the spokesman, that Tucky would keep quiet.

'How do you know that, my dear?' Mr Reynolds looked up sharply. 'He couldn't have told you, he doesn't speak English, does he?'

'He doesn't know, not really,' David said, willing Tucky to keep his mouth shut. 'Tucky's just guessing, that's all. Don't see what else could have happened though. We reckoned it must've crashed and then sank in a bog – that's what we thought anyway.'

'Ah,' Mr Reynolds nodded. 'There is that, I suppose. 'Tis a possibility, no doubt. And did you see any sign of anyone else up there, Germans, I mean? I was thinking that there's more than one man in a bomber crew, and it was a bomber wasn't it?' David nodded. The question was too close, and Mr Reynolds was talking strangely. He was suspicious; David was sure of it. 'Now there's as many as six or eight in one of their bombers, that's as far as I know,

certainly more than one. I wonder what happened to the others?’

‘Dead. They are all dead.’ It was the German who spoke. David and Tucky looked at him in amazement.

‘You speak English?’ said Tucky.

‘I speak English,’ said the German, leaning back in the chair and shutting his eyes. ‘I speak very good English.’ And he did; there was an accent, but it was barely discernible.

‘But I thought . . .’ Tucky remembered Mr Reynolds. ‘That’s the first time, Mr Reynolds, honest. He never said a word in English before, not a word.’

Mr Reynolds got up from the table and crouched down by the German’s chair. ‘The other men in the plane,’ he said, ‘are they all dead?’

‘All of them,’ the German said, opening his eyes and looking at Mr Reynolds. ‘All of them, dead. My plane sunk under the ground; there was no time, I could not get them out.’

‘And the blankets,’ Mr Reynolds held up the one that was drying by the stove. ‘Where did you get these from?’ David and Tucky held their breath. David felt his nails biting into the palms of his hands,

and his heart pounded in his ears.

‘I was cold and I was hungry,’ he spoke clearly. ‘I stole them. This afternoon and yesterday afternoon I came here. The house was empty, there was no one here. I took blankets, eggs, whisky, anything I could find. I am sorry to steal from your house, but when a man is that hungry he will do anything. I had to eat.’

Mr Reynolds straightened up and put his hands on his hips. ‘You were bombing Plymouth last week?’

‘I can say nothing about that.’ The German leant back and closed his eyes again.

‘Well, my dears,’ Mr Reynolds was smiling. ‘I’m beginning to understand it now. Jip must’ve followed him back out on to the moor, and I sent you two out after Jip. Well, I’ll be blowed. You wouldn’t believe it, would you? I’ll tell you something, they’ll never believe it in the village, my dears, not till they see him anyway.’ He looked at the German and back at the boys. ‘Well, I’ll be blowed. I’ll be blowed.’

The German had cleared them on every count, and the boys could relax for the first time. David was tempted to catch his eye, to thank him, but he dared

not take the risk. There was no point in spoiling it now, not just for a gesture. He felt Tucky smiling at him confidentially, and he ignored him. They were safe, but he felt no triumph, only relief.

CHAPTER 8

IT WAS NOT LONG BEFORE ANN CAME BACK with three soldiers and an officer from Okehampton. It was the same officer who had led the search the week before, the one with the mean face and thin moustache. David and Tucky grinned at him, but the officer ignored them, and looked frostily at Mr Reynolds when he said that two boys and a dog had succeeded when the army, the police and the Home Guard had failed. The boys enjoyed his obvious embarrassment.

The German remained silent as they took him away, but as he was leaving the cottage he turned and saluted, and the boys noticed his eyes were smiling as he did so. Then he was gone and the