

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

soldiers with him. Tucky begged to be allowed to go up to the village with the soldiers, but was told that the prisoner was being taken directly to Okehampton for questioning. There was to be no glory that night for Tucky.

But it came the next day. At school assembly Mr Cooper congratulated David and Tucky on their courage and tenacity, and the entire school clapped and cheered them. In the middle of morning lessons, two men from the local paper arrived to interview them and to take photographs. Tucky did most of the talking now, and David only interrupted him when he thought Tucky might be forgetting which story he was telling. Overnight the 'townies' had become local heroes, and the village crowded over their two boys who had surprised and captured a burly German pilot by themselves.

At home Mr Reynolds killed one of the old hens for a celebration supper, and Ann baked a rhubarb pie. It was the crest of the wave. But through it all, David could not help thinking about the German pilot upon the moor fighting his way through the wind and rain towards the coast, and the happier the evening became, the more he thought of the lies and trickery that had made it all possible.



Neither of them could sleep that night. Tucky, too, was thinking about the German out on the moor. 'How far d'you think he's got?'

'Dunno,' said David. 'Not far; he can't have got far.'

'He won't die, will he?' Tucky said. 'I don't want him to die, do you?'

'No,' David said. 'I don't, course I don't but I

don't want him to get away either.'

'Do you think anyone knows, Davey; about him, I mean?'

'Not now, not after what the German told Mr Reynolds.'

'I suppose he was trying to thank us, d'you think?'

'S'pose so.'

'Davey, I like being liked; don't you? Everyone liked us today, at school, in the village, here – everyone.'

'D'you think Ann and Mr Reynolds would like us if they ever found out?' David asked quietly.

'Doesn't matter, does it?' Tucky said, knocking his pillow into shape. 'They'll never find out, not now, not ever.'

'I hope not.' David squeezed his eyes tight shut. 'I hope not.'

It was nearly a week later and they were having their tea with Ann when Mr Reynolds came back from market with the newspaper. He spread it out on the kitchen table and stood back.

'There you are, my dears,' he said. 'Famous at last. You put the village on the front page of the *Western*

Morning News – 'tis the first time I've seen that.'

David and Tucky stared at their photograph. They were standing by the school gates. Tucky was grinning happily and giving the thumbs-up sign and he had his arm round David who was looking windswept and camera-shy.

The headline stood out in thick black lettering: 'Luftwaffe Pilot Captured by Village Boys.' And below was the story as Tucky had told it. They read it once and Tucky read it all through again, counting up the number of times his name was mentioned.

'They've cut it out and pinned it up on the wall in the village hall,' said Mr Reynolds. 'Like Ann and me, they're really proud of you.'

There was something in Mr Reynolds' voice that worried David. He glanced at Tucky to see if he had noticed it, but he hadn't. 'There's something else that might interest you,' he said from over his shoulders. 'Inside of the back page, let me turn it over.' He reached past them. 'There. There 'tis, where it says "German Airman Surrenders to Milkman". See it? You can read it if you'd like. 'Tis a good story, almost as good as yours.'

It was under the 'Late News' column down the side of the page, and it read: 'Milkman Harry Reddaway of

Belstone on his rounds in the village this morning was approached by a man claiming to be the pilot of a German bomber that crashed on the moor a fortnight ago. He said his plane had sunk in a bog and asked to be taken to the police. Mr. Reddaway says the man was suffering from exposure. Police and army authorities believe he is from the same plane as the Luftwaffe pilot captured recently near Imberleigh, by two evacuee boys from London.'

David's mouth was dry when he'd finished reading it. He swallowed hard, and tried to speak normally. 'But he said they were all dead, didn't he? He said he was the only one left.'

"'Tis natural enough, my dear. You'd hardly expect him to give his friend away, would you? 'Tis natural for a friend to protect a friend, isn't it? He was lying to us I'm afraid - about that anyway. No reason to lie about the rest, had he?'

There was no doubt now; at that moment both David and Tucky knew they were discovered. This time there was no quick answer, no way out. It was over. Only Ann looked puzzled. Mr Reynolds put his arm round her. "'Tis a little secret, Ann my dear, 'tis between Davey, Tucky and me, and that's an end of it. When they're ready no doubt they'll tell me why

they did what they did, and then I can tell you, my dear.'

'He saved my life.' David felt his eyes warm with tears.

'We had to help them, just a little bit. He went in the river after Davey. We had to.' Tucky couldn't look them in the face.

Mr Reynolds nodded. 'I thought 'twould be something like that,' he said. 'They're fine boys, Ann. We often said that, haven't we, Ann? We often think that if we'd been blessed with children, we'd want to have them just like you two, and there's nothing'll change my mind.'

'You'll tell Ann?' David asked. 'You'll tell her everything?'

'Course I will, Davey, course I will, and then it'll be a secret between us all.'

'Was it wrong?' Tucky said quietly.

"'Tis never wrong to do what you feel is right, Tucky,' said Mr Reynolds, ruffling his hair. 'Now, there's work to be done. There's a sheep or two gone out over the hedge on Back Meadow. Can you lend a hand, my dears?'

'Only one thing,' Mr Reynolds went on as they herded the sheep in through the gate, 'that bottle of

whisky. I can forget the eggs, and Ann here, I expect she can forget the pie; but the whisky, that's a different matter. I won that in a raffle, that bottle, and I was going to make it last till the end of the war. You owe me one bottle of whisky – and when you're older and wiser and the war's all over, and past, perhaps you'd let me have it back, would you, my dears?'

And they did.

Today over thirty years later, Ann and Mr Reynolds have left the farm and moved up into a cottage in the village. Every year David and Tucky still come down to see them, and always when they come they bring Mr Reynolds his bottle of whisky. For Ann and Mr Reynolds it's the highlight of the year when their two 'children' from London, just the same but perhaps older and wiser, sit down in Ann's kitchen and remember the time when they helped Churchill win the war.