E.C.R. LORAC

DISHONOUR AMONG THIEVES

William Randell

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THE LAST ESCAPE

E. C. R. Lorac

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Chapter One

1

When Rory Macshane saw the raincoat, something inside him said, “This is it.”

It was a good, heavy man’s raincoat and it had been dropped in the toolshed by a thoughtless mechanic who was repairing the electric pump. In a flash, the raincoat was hidden and Rory walked back to rejoin his gang, carrying the angle irons the boss had sent him to fetch.

Rory had learnt, by a year’s imprisonment on the Moor, that it isn’t difficult to escape from a prison working party on Dartmoor. Several prisoners had bolted from their gangs in that period, bolted into the mist and simply disappeared: but all of them (with one notable exception) had been brought back within a few days: two had given themselves up, defeated by hunger and cold and rain: drenched, starved, shivering, they could not face another night of aching misery in the clinging mist and penetrating chill of the cruel Moor. A man needed more than the courage to make an initial dash if he were going to get away and keep away: he needed to use his wits to plan, to prepare over a period of months, to be quite clear as to what he was going to do and where he was going to do it. And he needed clothing, to conceal his prison uniform and to protect him from the cold; Rory favoured the winter months for escape: he believed in moving by night and lying up during the day, and the longer hours of darkness outweighed the cold to Rory’s mind.

Never was there a convict better equipped to weigh the chances of escape than was Rory Macshane. Fourteen years ago, in the winter of 1944, when he was only twenty-one, he had escaped from a P.O.W. camp in Lower Silesia and reached Switzerland two months later. During his year in the P.O.W. camp, Rory had learnt a great deal: it was there that he had first learnt to steal—from his captors, the hated “goons”; to steal swiftly, silently, cunningly. To steal was a comparatively easy technique to acquire: to hide the proceeds of theft was much more difficult. You could hide anything if you were skilful enough, and skill meant practice and preparation. Thousands of prisoners of war learnt how to hide things from their captors: the most improbable things: civilian clothes, faked Wehrmacht uniforms and spoof weapons: tools, documents, food, containers in thousands: and these had been hidden in huts liable to sudden searches. The Germans searched conscientiously and assiduously, but the P.O.W.s beat them again and again.

Rory Macshane remembered all his old skills when he was imprisoned on Dartmoor. It was much more difficult to hide things in an English prison than it had been in the huts of Stalag X, but it could be done if you were patient and observant enough. The warders were there to watch the prisoners, but some of the prisoners watched the warders even more closely.

2

Rory had given a lot of thought to his escape equipment. He had been a prisoner on Dartmoor for over a year, sentenced to a ten-year spell for robbery with violence. At first, he had been bemused, depressed, and sick at heart: robbery he had planned, collaborating with others whom he knew to be criminals. Violence had had no part in his plan, it had just happened when things went wrong. He had never talked about it, neither to the counsel who

defended him in court, nor to the prison chaplain, nor his prison visitor. He remained obstinately silent and never told them how he was haunted by the memory of the old watchman who was lying, bloodstained, at his feet when he was arrested. He could have said, “I didn’t mean to hurt him”—but what was the good? He took what was coming to him in silence, including the biting words of the judge who had sentenced him.

As his natural resilience returned, Rory’s mind turned to escape: he knew he could get away. In the P.O.W. camp, neither searchlights nor wire nor machine guns nor guards had been able to stop men from escaping: the real problem came later; having achieved a temporary and precarious freedom, how to convert it into real freedom? To get out was one thing, to keep out was another.

Remembering back to his long trek from the Polish frontier to Switzerland, Rory listed his needs as “Kit. Food. Cover.” Kit included adequate clothing to protect a man from the cold and wet which might reduce his will: kit, also, which would not brand him as a fugitive at first glance, if anybody set eyes upon him. Food was also an essential: food to keep him fit for the first crucial period before he had developed his ability to “live off the country.” “Cover” included enough knowledge of the immediate surroundings of the prison to convert the first dash into temporary security, whether by digging a burrow or crawling into thick undergrowth. Both these expedients were possible to a skilled fugitive; Rory knew. He had developed them to an art, the art of taking cover.

Food was a problem which exercised his ingenious mind over a period of months: some foods would keep, if you could find a container and a hiding place. Sugar was one of them: sugar helps to maintain body temperature and energy and a cold hungry man yearns for it. Fats of some sort kept wholesome over a long period in the right conditions: lard and dripping were both edible weeks after you had “salted them down” if you had a cool hole to hide them in. Bread and suchlike would have to be secreted shortly before you made your break. Rory had a store of matches and he collected some wood chips and kept them dry. An escaper could not make a fire by day, the smoke would betray him, but Rory and his fellow P.O.W.s had developed a technique for kindling a fire at night in a hole in the ground: the first revealing flicker of kindling had to be concealed by crouching over the hole: then grass and leaves and damp twigs were added with infinite care until a hot nucleus of ash developed which showed no flame or sparkle; just a smouldering mass of peat-like embers, hot enough to raise the temperature of a can of water and provide the sweetened drink which put fresh life into a chilled body, and from which warmth still seeped out to comfort half-frozen fingers. Rory Macshane was an adept at making a fire which showed no telltale flame at night: smoke didn’t matter, provided you chose a place where no one was within range to smell it.

3

Thoughts of the skills he had once developed as an escaper kept Rory’s mind from the dreary present and kept alive the zest in life without which no escaper can succeed. Despair is a deadening quality: stifling to the will and lowering to a man’s vitality. All through those months when he made his plans, when he hid the oddest and seemingly most useless little bits of gear, Rory Macshane behaved as a very reasonable prisoner; neither too humble and co-operative nor yet too self-willed and truculent. There were occasions when he gave a hand to a warder in difficulties, but not often enough to brand him as a blackleg among his fellow convicts. He helped the latter, too: helped them with his fund of escaper’s experience.

Eventually Rory got the reputation of "a good prisoner," a man who gave no trouble and was a good worker, given a chance to work. He worked cheerfully: any workshop, from sewing mailbags to repairing clothes and boots, offered materials which were treasure trove to an escaper: needle and thread, bits of fabric or leather, nails and suchlike. The thing to do was to have patience, never to take anything but the smallest and least traceable items, and not to take even these too often.

Eventually Rory was rewarded for his patience and good behaviour: he was drafted into one of the field gangs who worked in the open under the eyes of armed warders.

The chaplain was one of the first who said to the Prison Governor: "Macshane has some quality in him which I like: I wish I could get him to talk, I think there's something worth while in him if one could only get at it."

The governor replied: "He's tough. He's got a bad record of thieving and he was sentenced to this stretch for a very brutal crime."

The prison visitor who came to talk to Rory said: "I like the chap. He's a countryman: he's worked on the land and he's got a natural feeling for beasts and birds. I know that from the way he listens and the very occasional comment he makes when I talk about my own farm. I wish I could get him to open up: there's some good in him if one only gets on to terms with him." And the warder to whom the prison visitor spoke replied:

"He's tough. He's behaving well because it suits him, he likes working outside and he's a good worker. But if ever we get another bout of real trouble here, Macshane's one of the men I shall watch. There's nothing reformed about him: he behaves while he finds it convenient to behave."

Rory Macshane certainly liked working outside: he had been brought up on a farm in Northern Ireland and as a lad he had worked as a hired man on a farm in Westmorland. He was a skilled hedger and ditcher and he repaired stone walls and fences as though his heart were in the job. His heart was in the job of getting fit: hardening his muscles, gone soft in imprisonment, hardening his feet in preparation for a long walk (but not so long as the walk he once took to the Swiss border). Working outside gave him much more scope for hiding things: he had collected some empty tins and some sacks: sacks which had been made for potatoes, for calf food, for fertiliser. Sacks were very useful to an escaper on Dartmoor, and no one had ever suspected him of "lifting things." He was always working with a will, a model prisoner, and he knew very well that a warder can't keep his eyes on one man for too long when he is jointly responsible for a number of men. Rory had got some of his gear beyond the enclosures and he could pick up his cache in a matter of seconds when he was ready for it.

From the recaptured escapers, the men who had given themselves up, news seeped through about the lie of the land immediately beyond the purlieus of the prison. Rory Macshane was interested in running water. The warders had police dogs to track fugitives and Rory had good reason to believe that a man who takes to the bed of a stream leaves no scent which dogs can follow. Under the very eyes and ears of the warders, Rory Macshane memorised the mumbled details of the terrain outside from men who'd made a bid for it and been defeated. They had no heart to try again, but Rory was determined not to be defeated: he'd pulled it off once, in an enemy country where a mistake meant a bullet; he'd won through, not only by virtue of wits and patience and guts. His countryman's sense had helped him. Keep to the open country was his motto: avoid villages; and prospect carefully before approaching any habitation.

4

It was at the end of January that Rory made his getaway. The day had dawned clear, but the temperature dropped steadily and by mid-afternoon the mist came down quite suddenly, just as Rory had hoped when he felt the windless chill of the air. The head warder blew his whistle to order the gang to fall in to return to cells: with the uncanny awareness of prisoners, the gangers sensed rather than saw Rory's plunge into the mist through a gap in the wire which he himself had made. Yards away from him a fight developed among the gangers and the warders were fully occupied for a few moments in restoring order, and every minute the mist thickened. Rory heard the shouts and yells, the whistles and orders as he plunged on, bent double, towards a dip in the ground where the mist was densest: he knew it would take the warders a little time to form the gang into ranks and longer to realise that their files were a man short. Rory straightened up and ran, plunging over the rough ground in the direction where he hoped for his stream: he carried the bundle whose twine lashings he had grabbed as he got beyond the wire. Before the "man escaped" siren howled from the prison walls he had found his stream, and the mist closed down on him in dense whiteness, cold and clammy, the sort of mist he had longed for.

5

When he found the stream, Rory sat down and took his boots off: sodden boots are no good to a man who faces weeks of walking. From his bundle he produced the oddest footgear, resembling moccasins, which he had made from bits and pieces of canvas and leather and sacking, sewn together with stolen needle and thread. They would save his feet from getting cut on the stones and rocks in the bed of the stream: and save his feet they did, to a considerable extent. By the time he reached a tributary streamlet and turned uphill in its ice-cold water, he knew his moccasins had served their purpose: bruised his feet might be, but they were not cut.

When he reached the head waters of the streamlet, he sat down and rubbed his feet dry and then put on the socks and boots which he had hung around his neck by the tied laces. They were good boots—one of the advantages of working in an out-of-doors gang: men can't do field work without decent boots. Then he untied the twine which had bound his raincoat into the smallest possible bundle and he shook the coat out and put it on. He was left with two sacks: one contained his meagre store of hoarded food packed in two tins: the other sack he put around his shoulders. The bundle of sacks and coat and the tins had been hidden in a crevice in the ground beyond the wire days ago. Somehow Rory had contrived to hide that bundle, unseen by the warders, when he was shifting working gear. It seemed an improbable feat to accomplish, but he had succeeded in more improbable jobs when he had been behind barbed wire. And here he was, free: having accomplished the most hazardous jobs of all, he had no fear at all. He had made it.

Having got the raincoat buttoned and one sack draped over his head and shoulders, he moved up the rough hillside through the dense mist: the higher he climbed, the thicker the mist, and he rejoiced in it: the mist meant security. He knew, too, in which direction he was moving, up to the heights of Sheeps Tor: he had often seen its rocky eminence and he knew that no other ground rose as steeply as this from the prison. He was going on, up to the top to the rocky outcrop. Once there, he would hunt for a place where he could burrow a bit with his broken trowel blade, some place under a rocky overhang where he could rest a little, eat the

hunk of cheese he had in his pocket, even grub a hole and light a fire: the matches and chips were safe under his shirt.

He stopped to get some water in one of his tins, transferring the tin's contents to his pockets. As he climbed, with his free hand he grabbed occasional twigs and heather fronds: the mist was so thick he could risk a small fire as darkness fell. He was very cold, but the climb was getting the circulation going in his feet again, and he was warm with satisfaction. He had done what he had planned to do.

When Rory Macshane at last got himself wedged into his burrow under a rocky overhang, with heather branches helping to conceal him yet further, it was doubtful if anybody would have spotted him in full clear daylight. He had stepped into the larger sack and pulled it up to his armpits, shoving the raincoat down around his legs: his odd bits and pieces of gear went into the large pockets of his raincoat: the other sack he pulled over his head and shoulders, a cut piece giving his eyes fair play. The sacks helped to keep him warm and dry, and would be useful cover sometime when cover was needed: a sack is good camouflage in country districts. He did not go to sleep, but he rested and chewed his cheese and crust and he listened with an ear to the ground for any telltale sounds of pursuit. He was thinking of all the things he had planned to do.

Rory was going to travel north: he meant to travel on his feet, unless he was lucky enough to spot a wagon on a goods train later: he knew all about jumping trains; but he was quite prepared to walk all the way. What was two or three hundred miles odd to him? As he lay under the projecting rock in the mist on Dartmoor, he remembered some of the countryman's tricks which had saved him from starving in Germany. He was good with beasts: accustomed to cows since he was a small child, he could creep up to any cow in the dark without alarming it, murmuring the "cush, cush, cusha," which cows understand: he could get his fingers round the warm teats and direct a stream of milk into his can; no milking cow resents skilled, accustomed fingers on its udder. He could stalk farmyard fowls, and wring a bird's neck before it had had time to let out a warning squawk: he could steal eggs from under a sitting bird. He had learnt all these things when he was a ragged barefoot urchin in Northern Ireland and the knowledge and practice of them had saved him from starving and would save him again. As he lay there, snug in his sacks, a powerful healthy man, unafraid of weather or pursuit, he laughed softly to himself: he had done it before and he could do it again and at the end of the long trail north there was a reckoning to complete.

Even while Rory Macshane laughed under his breath, warders and searchers cursed him as they groped their way in the blinding mist: roads were patrolled, cars searched, railwaymen alerted, bus drivers warned. (As though Rory would have been fool enough to risk travelling on a road.)

The prison chaplain said: "I'm sorry. I hope he doesn't get himself into more trouble. I feel I failed with him: there's something good in the chap somewhere."

"So you say, Padre: I say we shall be lucky if there isn't a murder before we catch him. He's tough, a real criminal type."

Neither chaplain nor warder thought of the escaped convict as a man who could creep up to a cow in the dark or get on terms with a nanny goat. Escaped convicts always took to the roads eventually, stole from cottagers or village shops: they had to have food and shelter. That's why they were nearly always caught. Prison warders and officers get to learn a lot about convicts who try to escape: most of them are townsmen, some are skilled mechanics and housebreakers. Their minds turn to roads and transport, the chance of stealing food from

houses or shops, stealing a car from a garage, stealing a ride on a passenger train. Very few of them are countrymen and fewer still face a walk of over two hundred miles cross-country, living "off the land."

Rory Macshane had concealed his past history, including his escape story. Nobody knew what he was capable of, and no one, for that matter, would have thought a chap who had been a farm labourer would have the wits to defeat trained guards and searchers. Rory had once been a Commando—but no policeman had ever learnt that: in short, Rory was more accurate in his assessment of the prison staff than the staff were about Rory Macshane.

Chapter Two

1

It was nearly four years since Superintendent Macdonald, had confided to his friends Mr. and Mrs. Hoggett that he wanted to buy a small dairy farm in Lunesdale with the intention of retiring to farm his own modest holding when retirement was due. Giles and Kate Hoggett had warned him of the difficulties inherent in his project: the high cost of land (especially land fit for dairy farming), the high cost of good cows and of feeding stuffs and the drawbacks of having his land farmed by a bailiff in his absence. Macdonald's legacy from his old uncle—£7,000—had looked a tidy sum to finance his modest project until he went into the matter in detail with the Hoggetts: they warned him that dairy farming was a skilled business and that as a tyro he was more likely to lose money than to make it.

Nevertheless, Macdonald stuck to his idea: he travelled up north to Lancaster whenever he had a fine weekend and inspected property after property in Lunesdale, under the careful guidance of Giles Hoggett. Giles was ageing now, but he knew a lot about cow pastures and meadows, about farmhouses and barns, about milking cows and store cattle, and even a bit about sheep and fell farming.

It wasn't until Macdonald saw Fellcock Farm that he made up his mind that this was the property he wanted and that he was going to have it somehow. Fellcock was a hill farm to the south of Lunesdale: the sturdy stone house was on the eight-hundred-foot contour line, the highest farm in the rural district. The pastures and meadows sloped down from the level of the ancient stone house, from whence the River Lune could be seen far below, its serpentine coils shining across the vivid green dales, backed by woodland. In the far distance, beyond the woods and hills of Lunesdale, shone the wide waters of Morecambe Bay, and on the northern skyline were the craggy heights of Furness and the Lakeland mountains: Scafell and the Langdale Pikes, Helvellyn and Great Gable.

It was an enchanting prospect: Macdonald loved the view and the loneliness, the chequer of green fields and the wild fell country behind the house; he enjoyed the fact that the stone house caught the last rays of the setting sun long after the valley was in shadow and he liked looking down on the steadings on the lower slopes and across the Lune to distant Wenningby, where Giles Hoggett's farmstead snuggled comfortably against the vivid green of his well-tilled meadows and pastures, five hundred feet lower than Macdonald's hill farm.

Giles Hoggett, a veritable Cassandra in some respects, was dubious over the purchase of Fellcock: it was too high for milking cows, the land wanted a deal of till and cultivating to produce a good hay crop: there was no metalled road across the last half mile of fell, and the road up from the valley was steep and rough. Kate Hoggett pointed out all the difficulties of housekeeping in such a remote and lonely spot: no running water in the house, no electricity, and the flagged roof and mullioned windows needed repairing.

It wasn't until Macdonald fetched Jock and Betty Shearling to view his longed-for property that the Hoggetts began to consider the prospect more hopefully. Macdonald had got to know Jock Shearling and Betty Fell four years ago, when he had helped the Carnton police to investigate the fire at Aikengill and the sheep stealing on Croasdale Fell. Jock and Betty had been married for over three years now.

What Jock and Betty didn't know about hill farms wasn't worth knowing, and their great desire was to get their feet on the first step of the farming ladder. They had no capital to buy a farm of their own, but Macdonald's offer gave them a chance to buy a few beasts of their own while they tilled his land and improved his buildings at a wage from which thrifty Betty knew she could save steadily, week by week.

Macdonald drove the young couple up to Fellcock one sunny September day, before he put in a bid for the land: he knew that Jock and Betty were accustomed to fell farming, but he wondered if Betty would say "no" to the ancient remote house. He needn't have bothered: Betty looked at it as her future home.

" 'Tis a good house: I can make a do of it," she said confidently. " 'Tis a better house than my father and mother ever had, and if it wants fettling up a bit, Jock's handy with roofs and chimneys and suchlike."

Jock looked at the buildings first: the long sturdy barn and the lean-to calf shippons; then he walked over the fields.

" 'Tis good land," he said. "Nicely placed for draining and the meadows slope to the sun. That needs some till, lime and basic slag, but you can get the hill-farm subsidy for them, and then you'll want a tidy lot of stock—young beef cattle to start with—till the land's in better heart. Then that'll be fit for dairy cattle. If you let me work it, gaffer, reckon you won't lose in t' long run."

So Macdonald bought his forty acres of enclosed land, together with the buildings and farmstead and rights of sheep grazing over the fell, and Betty and Jock moved in before winter and began to put things to rights. Macdonald gazed out across Lunesdale to the distant mountains and was aware of a deep-seated satisfaction. It was the first land he had ever owned: it was his own and one day that sturdy stone house would be his home. He had lived in London since he was ten years old: his career had been in London, but his roots were in the Highlands where his forebears had been crofters: in comparison with their humble steading, the land and buildings at Fellcock were rich. Macdonald knew that: he looked at the green fields and the sturdy stone house and his heart warmed to both. This was where he meant to live when he retired: surely in this place a man could live at peace; even though the world went mad, this hill country might keep its ancient dower of quietude under the northern stars.

2

It was at Michaelmas that Macdonald became owner of Fellcock—that Jock and Betty moved in—and for the next six months he was spending money on his farm steadily. He paid for the grazing cattle and the young stock, for a tractor and implements, for hay and concentrates, for repairs to barn and shippon and house, for furniture and paint and wallpaper, but every time he visited the place, the house was more like home, the land in better heart, the grazing cattle thriving. In March, the first of his beef cattle went to market and lambing was near at hand: Jock had rounded the ewes up from the fell and they were brought into the pastures adjacent to the house. On Lady Day, Macdonald drove north, a full week's leave ahead of him, to observe the lambing—his first lambing as "gaffer." Jock Shearling used the old term of respect: the gaffer was the master, the hind was the man, or bailiff; in the conservative north, especially in the remote fell country, ancient terms were still used and it somehow pleased Macdonald to be addressed as "gaffer": the word was native to the district.

“Sir” does not come naturally to the lips of the country fraternity in the north: “boss” smacked of the town, but “gaffer” was still a term of respect.

It was nearly four o’clock on a sunny afternoon when Macdonald turned from the main road on the south bank of the River Lune and began to climb into the hills: he drove through the village of Crossghyll, where folks were beginning to recognise him and hands were waved in welcome. All the village folk knew who he was and had probably commented on his temerity in buying a hill farm, “at his age, too: ’tis a young man’s job, is Fellcock.” But Jock and Betty had silenced the critics. “He’s got a head on his shoulders: he’s a worker, and he’s kind and straight with it,” said Betty, and Jock said, “If you take Mr. Macdonald for a fool, the fool’s yourself.” So the villagers waved to the newcomer from London and reminded themselves that Macdonald had done a good job when he rounded up the black-market gang when old Tegg, the shepherd, had been killed on Croasdale Fell, and Macdonald waved back, pleased to be accepted as a neighbour by the most reserved folk in England, the fell farmers of higher Lunesdale.

The village left behind, he had five miles of hill to climb, the gradient getting steeper and the surface rougher with every mile: it was not until he had passed Greenbeck—his nearest farming neighbours, but two hundred feet lower than Fellcock, that the going was really bad. Macdonald had already started a fight with the local council in order to get the road improved. He maintained that the road was a highway, marked on the Ordnance Survey as such, giving access to two farmsteads, Fellcock and High Garth, and that it was the business of the local authority to keep it in repair.

High Garth farmhouse had been vacant for years, and Fellcock had not been inhabited for three years before Macdonald bought it, so the local authority had “let that be.” The farmer of Greenbeck was now a milk producer, which meant that the milk lorry collected his milk, and as far as Greenbeck the road was passable: beyond Greenbeck it was a very bad road indeed, but Macdonald intended to have that altered: as a potential dairy farmer he meant to have the advantages which accrue to that honourable calling.

He reached his own turn at last, the rough track which joined Fellcock Hall to the highway. (Most sizeable farmsteads are “halls” in Lunesdale.) Jock Shearling was there, busy with the new gate, and Macdonald gave a cry of pleased surprise. He knew that Jock had been working hard to improve the rutted track which led from the road to the house, bringing up tractor loads of pebbles from the shiller banks in the valley, but Macdonald had never expected Jock to transform a rough track into a very presentable metalled road with a surface of grit and asphalt which looked almost a road layer’s job.

“Good day, Jock. How on earth did you manage it? This is a grand job. Did the council send their roadmen up?”

“Not them.” Young Jock smiled back at the gaffer. “That’s our road, from here to the house,” he said. “Them in the council won’t touch that: they let me have a load of asphalt they’d got left over from the work they did below Greenbeck—aye, and they brought it up in their big lorry. Likely, there’s a bill coming for that, but ’twas worth it. That’s a right good road now—or soon will be.”

“It is indeed; it’s one of the things we wanted,” agreed Macdonald. “The Co-op man can get his van to the door now.” (It was always “we” and “our” when they spoke of the farm, a joint venture.) “Did the councilmen give you a hand laying the stuff?” went on Macdonald.

“Not them,” said Jock. “They dumped it and made off: none of their business, this wasn’t. I was lucky,” he added leisurely, leaning against the stone stoop (the gatepost). “I was just

getting busy shifting the stuff when a chap came down from up yonder." He pointed up hill to the open fell. " 'Twas a Saturday afternoon; he was one of the gangers working on t' pipe line over Bowland and he'd walked over t' fell to find Crossghyll village, t' pub he wanted, I reckon. But he stopped when he saw me working and asked if I wanted a hand." Jock scratched his head and grinned. "I did that," he said, " 'twas a right heavy job at first, and this fellow was a hefty chap. I said: 'See how you make do and then maybe we'll talk business.' He was a worker, that one was," added Jock. "I soon saw that; he didn't waste no time and didn't chatter neither. He worked a half day Saturday and a full day Sunday: thirty bob I paid him and 'twas cheap at the price, because he knew the job and put his back into it. Same the next weekend—and that's why you've got a road instead of a mud lane to drive on."

"I've got you to thank for the road, Jock," rejoined Macdonald. "Not many men would have tackled it: you did all the ground work, levelling and laying the pebbles and gravel, but I'm glad you got some help over the surfacing. Get in the car and I'll drive you home to tea on your own road."

Jock got in, adding: "Thought it'd be a nice surprise for you to see the job done: it's worried me to see you bumping a decent car over them potholes, and reckon you didn't like it neither, treating the springs and tyres like that."

"You're right," said Macdonald. "I'd been meaning to take a pick and shovel and lend you a hand myself, but there's other jobs I'd sooner be tackling. You must have been surprised when one of those navvies offered to do an extra job on a Saturday afternoon: they're a rough lot from what I've heard. I had a crack with the gang boss sometime back: he said most of them are the dregs of the labour market, unskilled labour, here today and gone tomorrow."

"Likely they are: that's a rough job, digging that pipe line," said Jock. "Maybe the chap who worked here wanted some extra cash to pay for his drinks—costs money to get drunk these days, poor silly sods. But he was a worker, that one was."

Macdonald pulled up at the gate which gave on to his own fold-yard and Jock said:

"Drop me here: I've got some young stock in the shippon at High Garth. I fixed it with Mr. Brough: he wasn't using it and I keep an eye on some Aberdeen Angus he's got on the pastures there: suits us both—saves him sending a man up and costs us nothing."

Macdonald laughed. "Good for you," he said. "I'll put the car away and say good day to Betty, and then I'll come along to High Garth and see your beasts. It's a funny thing, I've thought several times of going to have a word with Mr. Brough myself about that barn."

"That's sense, that is," replied Jock contentedly, "but likely if you'd gone he'd have been asking rent for his buildings: I knew he was short of labour and we fixed it so there was no money in it. I can see his beasts haven't broken out and that while I'm along there foddering our own cattle."

3

Five minutes later Macdonald was striding over the rough fell which lay between his boundary walls and the fences of High Garth. The two steadings were nearly a mile apart: it gave Macdonald immense satisfaction to see his own well-tilled fields, enclosed by drystone walls which were now in excellent condition, and to compare them with the rougher pastures of High Garth: here, most of the walls had gaps in them, the gaps closed by posts and barbed wire—a botched-up job, Jock called it, but Jock was a skilled waller.

Macdonald knew all about High Garth because he'd asked Giles Hoggett about it. The land and buildings were the property of a very old man named Nathaniel Borwick. Nat Borwick had been born at High Garth Hall in the year 1873: he had worked there as unpaid labourer to his father until the latter's death in 1918, when Nat had inherited the land and had got married. (He hadn't been able to get married before, his father wouldn't allow it, said Giles Hoggett.) From 1918 until the 1940's Nat Borwick and his wife and son had farmed High Garth, living in the gaunt stone farmhouse on the fell in conditions akin to those of medieval peasants, save for the two amenities of glazed windows and chimneys. Nat's son, Sam, had run away in 1942 and joined the Lancashire Fusiliers, and never been heard of since, according to Giles Hoggett. In 1948, Nat Borwick, then seventy-five years of age, had "given it best" and had gone to live, with his wife, in a cottage in Kirkham, in the river valley. Nat had refused to sell his farm: he maintained obstinately that his son Sam would come back one day, and Sam would farm High Garth: Borwicks had farmed it for three hundred years and Nat meant them to go on farming it. The land would have gone back to the fell had it been left untilled and ungrazed, so Nat rented the land to Matthew Brough, a prosperous farmer in the valley, and Brough used it as grazing land for beef cattle and sheep, mowing the meadows and housing the hay in the barn for winter fodder. The house, meantime, was uninhabited, its windows shuttered and barred, its doors bolted and padlocked, waiting until Sam Borwick came back to live in it. Since everybody was certain that Sam never would come back, it looked as though the house would never be lived in again—and Macdonald had his own private and personal reasons for taking an interest in it.

Macdonald strode on over the fell and turned along the track which led past the gaunt stone house to the fold-yard and buildings. The gate had long since fallen, the wood rotted away from the hinges; the flagstones and cobbles of the yard were overgrown with tussocky grass, bramble, and bracken and gorse flourishing in the cracks and crevices. It was a sad sight, but the stone house and outbuildings still stood foursquare and sturdy, as though waiting for an owner to put them to rights; there was nothing ruinous about the place: it was neglect, not decay, that made it melancholy.

Passing the front of the house, Macdonald walked the length of the barn to the shippon entrance at the gable-end: he could hear Lassie, the sheep dog, barking, and Jock cursing her; no farmer lets his dog bark itself into spasms of excitement, a sheep dog has to be obedient. There were four young Galloway steers in the standings, fine young beasts, which Jock and Betty had bought. Jock had to take them out to the trough in the fold-yard to water them, and he mucked out the shippon while the beasts drank their fill, watched over by Lassie, so that they didn't break away and go galloping over the fell. Then Jock forked down hay from the loft above the shippon and cut up some mangles in an ancient cutter which he had found and put to rights.

While Jock was busy, Macdonald wandered round the great barn and inspected some of the rusting implements which Nat Borwick had left there. After Lassie had driven the cattle back to their stalls, the dog raced round the barn barking, until Jock called her to heel again.

" 'Tis the rats she's after," he explained. "She went fair mad when I first brought her here; she's caught a lot of 'em. I'm going to bring Tom and Lucy along here, champion ratters they are."

Tom and Lucy were cats, real farm cats, who hunted for their living and brought in rats, mice, and rabbits to consume outside Betty's kitchen door, where a bowl of milk was put out for them morning and evening after milking.

Having admired the sleek black cattle, Macdonald turned and looked round the barn again.

"It's a fine barn," he said. "It doesn't seem any the worse for being neglected all these years."

"Aye, 'tis a good barn," agreed Jock. "The doors want painting—Mr. Brough hasn't bothered—and I'll bring some lime along for the walls and bostings. You see, I don't reckon Mr. Brough wants the barn no longer. Labour costs so much, 'tisn't worth his while to send a man up all this way twice a day to fodder and water the beasts: pays him better to winter his young stock down there, where he can keep an eye on his hired men." Jock grinned cheerfully, and added: "Suits us: we can do with more standing room for young stock in winter, and if I keep an eye on them Aberdeen Angus, everyone's satisfied-like."

Macdonald nodded. "Suits us, as you say, Jock, and it's a pity for good buildings not to be used. Do you think Mr. Borwick's son will ever come back here?"

"Not him: he'll never come back," said Jock. "Some folks down in Crossghyll know a thing or two about Sam Borwick, though they'd never tell his dad: not that the old man'd listen if they tried: deaf as a post he is, and simple with it. He's over eighty now and gone childish."

"But folks know that Sam Borwick is alive, then? He wasn't killed in the war?"

"Not him: came back all right, Sam did, but he wasn't coming back here and who's to blame him? His dad saw to it Sam worked harder than any hired man and he didn't pay him proper. And 'twas a hard life up here, with no sort o' comfort in t' house, the old lady being past bothering about cooking and that. No: reckon Sam Borwick had enough and to spare of High Garth."

"Then what's he doing now? Farming somewhere else?"

"Folks say not. Lives in a town now: a real wild one, is Sam, if what's said is true."

Jock gave a final glance at his beasts and the two men turned away, fastened the shippon door and set off back to Fellcock. Macdonald said: "What do you think will happen to High Garth when old Borwick dies, Jock?" And Jock smiled.

" 'Tis left to Sam in his father's will, that's well known," he replied. "Sam'll sell it, house, land and all, get the highest price he can and that won't be so much. There's not many farmers'd bid for it, it's been let go, land and buildings and all, and that house: well, 'twas never a good house like Fellcock, a right cosy house, Fellcock is. High Garth—well, rector once called it Heartbreak House, 'tis that drear. Not that you couldn't make something of it if you had a mind," he added. "Same with the land: that's sour, drainage all broken down: but nothing that couldn't be put right if a man had the will to right it."

Macdonald laughed. "Well, those who live longest will see most," he said, and Jock nodded contentedly.

"I'm glad you're casting an eye on it, gaffer. You come along of me sometime and we'll look over the land, careful-like—just in case."

Chapter Three

1

"Just in case," echoed Macdonald to himself that evening, as he settled down by the log fire in his own sitting room at Fellcock. He had been round the flock of ewes with Jock and Betty and had been told that there should be some lambs by morning. He had helped Jock to load the trailer with dung from the midden and had driven the tractor while Jock did the muck-spreading and he had taken an axe and chopped enough logs to keep his fire going for a while. Now, pleasantly tired, he looked round his room and thought how comfortable and attractive it was. It was "the parlour" of the farmhouse, a good-sized low-ceilinged room, crossed by beams which were only a few inches above Macdonald's head: there was a good fireplace, with stone surround and overmantel, and the mullioned windows looked out over Lunesdale and to the heights of the northwest. Behind the parlour was another smaller room which would one day be his office—at the moment it only boasted a table and chair and a filing-cabinet for Government forms.

"Just in case." It was High Garth that he was thinking about, and there was a sound reason for his preoccupation with that rather derelict holding. Chief Inspector Reeves, who had worked at Scotland Yard with Macdonald for over twenty-five years, had a son named George, who had just finished his National Service. George had spent some of his school holidays in Lunesdale (staying at Giles Hoggett's cottage in the dales), and now George had determined to become a farmer, with the example of Giles Hoggett and Superintendent Macdonald to overcome his mother's objections. (His father raised none: Chief Inspector Reeves was all in favour of a farmer son.)

George was now at an agricultural college: when Macdonald looked at the abandoned farmhouse at High Garth, his thoughts turned to George Reeves. The place was likely to come on the market sometime, and what pleasanter neighbour than young Reeves, with the Shearlings to advise him and lend him a hand? The cultivated land of both holdings together was only about eighty acres and there would be three able-bodied men to work them, with perhaps an Irishman to help at hay time, in accordance with local custom. It all seemed to Macdonald an excellent idea: young George would marry, of course, but until he had a wife, his sister Margaret could housekeep for him (this had already been discussed).

Macdonald laughed to himself a little, as he thought out the advantages of the scheme: he would like to see High Garth Hall occupied. He knew that there was some element of policeman's prejudice in his attitude to an uninhabited, derelict house; too often, in every policeman's experience, empty houses had been the scenes of crime. In addition was his thrifty Scots' sense that an unlived-in house was sheer waste in a period when house room was at a premium. It would be a tough job to get High Garth habitable again, but no vigorous young people need shrink from a tough job.

It was at this stage in his meditations that Betty came to the door saying: "Mr. Brough's here, Mr. Macdonald. He says can you spare him a minute?"

"Of course, Betty. Ask him to come in."

2

Mr. Matthew Brough was nearing seventy, but he was a fine vigorous figure of a man with huge shoulders and solid girth: washed and shaved for his visit, his face was as fresh-coloured as a young man's, his blue eyes bright and twinkling, though his sparse hair, once yellow as oat straw, was nearly white. Macdonald knew that Mr. Brough was a "solid man" in more senses than avoirdupois: he farmed two hundred acres in the valley and his beef cattle were said to be the best in the district.

He came in and shook hands, deposited his solid person in a suitably solid "grandfather chair," and beamed cheerfully at Macdonald.

"You're right cosy here, Mr. Macdonald, and young Shearling's doing well by the land, by gum he is: them meadows are in better heart than I've seen them for years. Well, I thought we might as well have a crack while you're here. You'll know that Jock and me have done a bit o' business, fair exchange, no robbery, as they say."

"Yes. Jock told me and I'm all in favour of the arrangement," replied Macdonald. "Seems sound common sense all round."

"Aye, 'tis that: well, I'm glad you're satisfied, seeing you're gaffer," beamed Mr. Brough. "You can guess how 'tis with me, what with labour costs these days. If I send a chap up twice a day to High Garth to fodder the beasts in the shippon—well, he takes his time over it and that's quite a step from my place. Reckon it cost me more in labour than was reasonable, so I gave up wintering beasts inside there, and just kept them Aberdeen Angus out at pasture. Even so, 'tis better for someone to look them over, and yon Jock's got sense, by gum he has."

Mr. Brough accepted a proffered cigarette and went on: "Then there's this to't, Mr. Macdonald, and you being a policeman you'll see what I'm getting at. 'Tis better for someone to keep an eye on the place: there's gear and that in the barn and if 'tis known that none ever go nigh the place, 'tis asking for trouble. Why, there's been thefts of stock, too, on some fell pastures, as you know full well."

"Yes. I hadn't forgotten," agreed Macdonald. "I think it's a very sound idea for Jock to go along to High Garth twice a day—and for people to know that he's keeping an eye on the place. Now I'm very glad you came in, Mr. Brough. I was wanting to talk to you: I'd been wondering about High Garth. Do you think young Borwick will ever come back there to farm?"

Matt Brough replied as Jock had done. "Not him," and paused for a moment: then he added, "I know I'm safe in talking to you, Mr. Macdonald. You won't go gossiping and you must have heard a mort o' queer stories in your time. Young Borwick's no good: he's a real bad 'un if what's said is true."

"What *is* said?" asked Macdonald.

"You mind Mr. Staple? Aye, he's a good man is Staple. He was in Leverstone a year or so ago, he had business at the cattle market. He saw Sam Borwick, being run in by the police: some matter of stealing a lorry and that. He was discharged that time, but Mr. Staple heard he'd got into bad company when he was demobilised after the war and he'd been sentenced for thieving more than once. A real bad lot he's turned out and I reckon he'll never turn to honest work on the land. And that holding of Borwick's, that's going to take some work before a man can earn 's living there, by gum, it is."

Macdonald nodded. "It's going to take a lot of very hard work, Mr. Brough, and the house must be in a sorry state."

" 'Tis that, and I've been thinking about that house," added the farmer. "When old Nat Borwick and his missis left High Garth, they didn't move all their gear out: no room for that

sized furniture in the little place they've lived in since. They just left the big pieces as they were and they'd got some nice bits—dower chests, court cupboards, old carved dressers and suchlike, which have been there hundreds of years. Borwicks farmed that land nearly three hundred years. Well, I'm wondering how much of the good stuff is left in that house now."

Macdonald pondered. "It'd have been the heck of a job to move it out," he said. "There's no road up to the house: you couldn't take a van across the fell."

"No one'd be fool enough to try, but you can take a tractor-trailer outfit along easy enow, and for that matter some of those heavy lorries they shift rocks in where they're digging the pipe line over Bowland—go over anything they will."

"So that's what's in your mind," said Macdonald.

"Well, 'tis and 'tisn't. They've got some rough chaps up there, I do know that. The contractors put up huts for the gangers to sleep and eat in, run a canteen, and give 'em proper hot meals. They have to, the men'd never stay else, and there's trouble enough, even so, keeping them on the job, for that's right heavy work. I doubt if many of they chaps bother to come tramping over the fell after a day's work to see what they can lift when they strike a steading. No, to put it quite plain, I wondered if Sam Borwick had been home to see what he could make off with. He knows what's there, and reckon he could raise some brass on some of the old chests and so forth."

"It's a possibility," said Macdonald, "but transport would be his chief trouble."

"Aye. I thought it out like this: if so be Sam was cunning enough to have got himself taken on as a ganger with the pipe-line contractors, 'twouldn't have been ower difficult for him to've borrowed one o' those five-ton lorries one night, driven across to High Garth and got some of the good stuff shifted to a road and transferred to a van. Tis no' but an idea, but I've thought of it, many a time."

"It's possible enough," agreed Macdonald. "If he ever thought of it, he's had plenty of time: Fellcock was vacant for a long time so there would have been no one to notice any comings and goings on the fell at night."

"That's just it," agreed Mr. Brough.

3

"I was going to ask Jock Shearling if he'd had any bother with them gangers coming over, cadging eggs and that," went on Mr. Brough. "The pipe line's only five miles away as the crow flies just now: the surveyors planned the line so's to avoid the rocky outcrop they'd have struck if they'd taken the line direct over Bowland: they swung north a bit, nearer to our fells, but they'll turn southwest again from now on and the gangs won't be so near. I'll be glad to know they're farther off. I never like having casual labour near farmsteads and stock, and they're a rough lot of chaps working out yonder."

"So I've heard," said Macdonald, "but Jock's no complaint to make about the gangers, on the contrary in fact. You'll have noticed that our track's been made up, Mr. Brough, and we've got a decent surface to drive on right up to the house."

"Aye, I couldn't help but notice: that's a right good job, that is. Makes a mort o' difference to have a clean road up to the house and buildings. I'd been wondering how you got that done, Mr. Macdonald, unless so be the council did it for you by contract."

"The council didn't do any of the work," rejoined Macdonald. "They let us have a load or so of asphalt and road grit which they had over from the job at Greenbeck, but Jock tackled

the job: he did the levelling and laid the stones himself, and finished the job with the help of one of those gangers from the pipe-line works. This chap turned up one Saturday afternoon, saw Jock working, and cadged a job. Jock said he was a good worker and they finished the surfacing together. Jock paid him at the rate of half a crown an hour and the chap seemed satisfied."

"Well . . . I'd never've believed it, never," said Brough. "That's a rum go, that is: them chaps up there, they'll curse you to your face if you offer them a job in their free time, or that's my experience when I've wanted some casual labour, laying drains and suchlike. And I've warned them off more 'n once, reckoning they was up to no good coming over farmland."

"Well, Jock seems to have struck it lucky with the chap who worked for him," said Macdonald, "and there haven't been any others at Fellcock. I asked Betty, because I know she's often alone for hours on end and I didn't like to think of her being bothered."

"Reckon she's got plenty of gumption, Mrs. Shearling has, and she's got a good dog: these gangers don't like dogs," said Mr. Brough. "Well, I'm glad one of them had the sense to lend a hand at a useful job, but I can't help wondering what he was after when he came tramping over t' fell. The contractors lay on a lorry to take the chaps down to the main road midday Saturdays so's they can have a break. They won't stick it up in the huts weekends. It's well run, that job is."

Macdonald nodded. "Aye. I had a word with the manager one day: he's an experienced man. He's organised these labour camps for the contractors in a number of remote localities and he knows all the problems that arise when you get gangs of casual labour miles away from the decencies of ordinary home life."

4

"Well, I'd like to tell you just what I had in mind," said Mr. Brough at last. "I've rented Nat Borwick's land since he gave up best part of ten years ago and I've tried to play fair with him, keeping up his fences and ditches and that, so things didn't go to rack and ruin. The old man's gone childish now, no sense he's got: likely he won't last long now, but there's his old woman to think of, and she worries about High Garth Hall. I'd like to look over the house and see how things are: now you being a policeman—arm of the law as they say—I wondered if you'd come with me, so there can't be any back-chat like, if so be we find things aren't as they should be."

"I'd be quite willing to come over the house with you, Mr. Brough, but how are you going to get in? Will Mrs. Borwick let you have the keys?"

"I sometimes wonder if she knows where the keys are," replied Brough. "Old Nat, he had them safe enough for years, but where he's got them now is a different story."

"Well, that makes it rather awkward, Mr. Brough. We can't break in. Now has Mr. Borwick got a solicitor?"

"No, that he hasn't. When I rented the land from old Nat, I suggested we'd get a lawyer to make out a proper legal agreement, but Nat wouldn't have it. 'Lawyers is for rogues,' he said. 'You and me, we be honest men and we don't want to go paying nought to lawyers. We'll fix what's right between our two selves as honest men should.' And that's how it was," said Mr. Brough. "Every quarter day ever since then I've been to see old Nat and paid him what we agreed, paid him in cash, the way he wanted it. He's never lost by it: he trusted me and I've paid him his money and he knows I'll go on paying it as long as I use the land."

“Well, you have your own way of doing business,” rejoined Macdonald. “You say he’s getting childish. Can he still count the money when you pay it?”

“Aye, he counts it and Mrs. Borwick she watches him do it and he still signs his name in the same rent book we started with, nigh on ten years ago. He’s satisfied and so am I, and no lawyers getting a rake-off. What were you thinking about, asking if he had a lawyer?”

“If Mr. Borwick had a solicitor, the latter could empower you to inspect the house on behalf of his client. I agree with you it ought to be inspected, but you can’t break in. If you talked to Mr. Borwick and told him the house ought to be looked over, do you think he’d agree and ask you to do it for him?”

“He might and then he mightn’t,” said Brough. “He’s a darned awkward old chap, but Mrs. Borwick, she’d be glad to know someone was doing something about it. Maybe she could find where he’s put the keys. They can’t be lost: that back door, it’s got a key like the key of our old church, weighs I don’t know what: and then he had bars and staples put across them doors when he left and padlocked them. He’s got all them keys together somewhere, under the floorboards as likely as not.” The farmer sat and pondered for a moment. “If so be as Mrs. Borwick found the keys and gave them to me, would that satisfy you, Mr. Macdonald? I’d like you to come over the place with me.”

“I’m perfectly willing to come with you: I’d like to see the house, but it seems to me you might be more in order if you got your local constable to accompany you. I gather you’re thinking the place may have been robbed, and if that’s happened, it’ll be a job for the local police.”

“And that’s what I don’t want to do: if folks see the constable from Kirkham coming up here, tongues’ll start wagging and stories going round when there’s no need. I’ve told you what I had in mind, Mr. Macdonald, because I know you won’t go round telling folks what I said. I may be wrong and I hope I am. But if you’ll come round High Garth with me, we could see how things be. You’re up here at Fellcock and I come up to see to my stock at High Garth and there’s nothing out of the way for folks to notice. All in the day’s work as you might say.”

“Yes. I see your point, but if you find things are wrong, you’ll have to report it, Mr. Brough. You can’t ask me to compound a felony as it were, to cover up a theft.”

Brough nodded his head thoughtfully and Macdonald went on, “Of course the best thing would be to get old Mrs. Borwick to see the place herself: we could drive her up to Fellcock: from here on to High Garth, could she manage with the seat on the tractor if you held her on?”

Brough shook his head. “No, ’tisn’t possible: she’s got rheumatiz in her knees so bad that she can’t walk more’n a few steps and a weak heart with it. That’d kill her, what with the effort and excitement and all. It’s as much as I dare do to ask her to find the keys, poor old soul. Happen I’d better let things be, but you know how ’tis, once you get an idea in your head, you can’t let that be, or the idea won’t give you no peace.”

“Yes, I know how it is,” agreed Macdonald, “but I wish you’d tell me this: have you any reason for believing that house has been interfered with or the contents stolen? Have you any evidence at all to that effect?”

“Nought you’d call evidence, ’tis no’ but an idea and I’ll tell you when it came into my head. I never liked young Sam Borwick, never trusted him. When Mr. Staple said he’d seen Sam run in in Leverstone and that Sam had turned out a real bad ’un, I thought, well, Leverstone’s not that far away and there’s that house, with some stuff in it a chap could raise money on. It’s nowt but a plaguey idea: all the same, I’d be happier in my mind if we could look into things. See here, Mr. Macdonald: tomorrow’s Sunday and I’ll go and see Mrs.

Borwick. If so be she lets me have the keys, will you come to High Garth with me early afternoon Monday?"

"Very well. I'll come, Mr. Brough."

"That's champion: and after that, maybe, I'll be quit of worrying."

5

When Mr. Brough had gone, Macdonald sat over his fire and pondered. In spite of Brough's insistence that it was only an idea which had set him worrying about High Garth Hall and its contents, Macdonald guessed that there was something which had prompted Brough's idea. Farmers are not imaginative men, least of all northern farmers. Had somebody seen Sam Borwick in the locality, or was it possible that Sam had been to see his parents and tried to get some money out of them, or even found where they kept the keys of High Garth? This might be a case of wheels within wheels, in which somebody (old Mrs. Borwick for example) had confided in Brough after making him promise to keep her confidence secret.

Macdonald was amused about Brough's caution: he had enlisted the assistance of the law without bringing the local police into the matter, thereby ensuring in his own way that local tongues should not be set wagging, and also safeguarded himself. As Macdonald knew, if it was found that the old house had been robbed, some people might point out that Brough himself had had every opportunity to remove what he liked: others might accuse Jock Shearling and Jock could retaliate by accusing the pipe-line gangers. In short, if it were proved that robbery had occurred, rumour would be many-tongued and Macdonald knew it.

He was glad that Brough had come to him and that they were going over High Garth together—if the keys were forthcoming. There was going to be no "breaking and entering," but Macdonald believed that that was what Brough had hoped he (Macdonald) would agree to. Brough was an independent character who had followed his own notions of what was permissible within the law and since he had decided "that wanted looking into," he was prepared to take such steps as he chose to put his idea into effect, and had been surprised when Macdonald insisted that the keys must be handed over before any inspection could take place.

Chapter Four

1

Macdonald, when he followed Mr. Brough over the fell on the Monday, was still pondering hard over the situation. Many years of detection had made the C.I.D. superintendent very acute at discerning the underlying impulses of those he dealt with, whether witnesses or accused persons. Macdonald found himself more and more sceptical of Mr. Brough's abstract "idea": it seemed out of character for the farmer to have taken the action he did without something in the way of evidence to prompt him. Brough could have followed a mere idea independently without confiding in anybody: he could have borrowed the keys or used other methods of entering that long-abandoned house, but he wanted a witness, someone to safeguard himself. Not the local police, but still a policeman, and from that fact Macdonald deduced that something more substantial than an idea had made the burly farmer seek for a witness to, and a companion on, his tour of inspection at High Garth Hall.

It was a bright clear afternoon and away to the northwest the waters of Morecambe Bay shone palely under the September sky. Mr. Brough greeted Macdonald cheerfully.

" 'Tis a right bonny view," he said. "I don't wonder old Borwick was loath to leave High Garth: he'd known that prospect all his seventy-five years and when he left here and went down yonder, he said he felt shut in. He'd got to the stage when he wasn't safe on his feet, mark you. He had to go."

Mr. Brough produced a key ring the size of a handcuff, boasting a miscellany of keys of which the largest could have been put to use as a weapon, so long and heavy it was.

"She found 'em under the floorboards, the old lady did," he went on, "and she swore she wouldn't have parted with them to none but me. I've brought an oil can to ease the locks and hinges. Now then, would you like to open a door that's not been opened nigh on ten years?"

"Let us walk round the house first and see if we can find any signs of a forcible entry," said Macdonald. "I take it there aren't any duplicates to these keys."

"Not that anybody's ever heard on," replied Brough. "This big 'un now, I reckon 'tis as old as the house and it'd be a job for a blacksmith to make another."

They stood by the front door: it was oak and most of the paint had gone, worn off by years of rain and frost and sun, leaving the weathered timber still hard and good. Brough drummed on the oak with his horny fingers. "Hard as iron," he said. "It'd take a battering ram to get that down."

A hinged iron bar had been secured to the door on one side and on the other the bar was looped over a hasp and secured by a heavy padlock. Macdonald stood back and glanced at the windows: they were mullioned and he guessed that the narrow casements had never been made to open. The glass was intact and shutters closed on the inside. Brough chuckled a little.

"If so be I'd tried housebreaking, reckon I'd have had a hard job," he said. "A chap my size could never get through those slits of windows."

"A young chap might have done it, but no one has," said Macdonald.

They walked along the frontage: as usual in Lunesdale farmhouses, house and barn were under the same rooftree, but there was no entry between barn and house. They passed the great barn door and turned south at the gable-end, past the shippon door, and Jock Shearling's

young beasts bawled at them hopefully: turning west along the back of the buildings, they passed a small door into the barn and then came to the back door of the house, the one which was habitually used by farming households. This door was as solid, though less handsomely panelled, than the front door, and it also was secured by a bar and padlock.

"Seems all shipshape," said Brough, applying his oil can to padlock and hinges. "No one ever got in here unless they had the keys."

Macdonald examined the padlock before he inserted the key. He knew that padlocks were generally sold with two keys, and that once the padlock was opened and the bar hinged back, the huge old locks of the ancient door would present no problem to a cracksman skilled in the manipulation of locks: the keyhole was so large that it would be easy to insert long-nosed pliers and shoot the lock back. There was, however, no sign of any forced entry and he undid the padlock and pulled the bar free and then put in the great key and turned it with both hands: with a loud rasp and groan the door moved on its unwilling hinges and Brough stared into the shadowy kitchen.

"Something's amiss," he said, "the furniture's been pushed around."

"Something's very much amiss," said Macdonald. His nose told him that, before he could see inside at all. The cold clammy air seeped out from the doorway, air foul with the stink of corruption, and Macdonald knew only too well what that foulness meant. A thought flashed through his mind, hopefully. "A dead dog—a dead sheep," but he knew it could be neither. Neither dog nor sheep could have got into that locked, barred house. He pushed the door wide and Brough stared into the stone-flagged kitchen.

"God ha' mercy!" he gasped. "I never thought o' nowt like this. Who can that be?"

2

A man's body lay on the flagstones at the foot of the ladder-like stairway which led to the upper floor. There was no staircase proper in the house, only the steep wooden steps which ran up to a rectangular aperture in the kitchen ceiling.

"He must ha' slipped and fallen forward and broken's neck on the flags," said Brough, "but who can that be? 'Twill be a job to know, poor chap."

Macdonald knew that the body must have lain there for months—if not years: the flesh of face and gnarled hands was shrunken and corrupted to a degree that made recognition impossible. Drawing back to the fresh air for a moment, Macdonald asked:

"Could that be Sam Borwick's body, Mr. Brough?"

"Nay, that's not Sam. Sam's a redhead, proper carrots. But as to who 'tis, it'd be hard to say. Can't even tell how old the chap was. And what's that press been moved for? Stood against t' wall, that did."

The oak "press," as Brough called it, was a big piece of furniture, cupboards above, drawers below. It had been pulled forward at one end and now stood athwart the floor.

" 'Tis as I said," went on Brough, "someone came thieving. That's a fine piece, that is. He must 'a gone upstairs, to move the dower chest maybe, and he pitched forward down them steps, plaguey dangerous them steps."

He had moved outside the door to escape the stench within, and as though the fresh air brightened his wits, he added, "But how came it the doors were locked on him? 'Tis a proper puzzle."

“It is that,” agreed Macdonald. “Now this is a job for the local police, Mr. Brough, and you’ll have to go and notify them. I shall stand by here. Drive down to the constabulary and report and tell the constable to ring his superintendent at Carnton before he comes up here—and the sooner you get there the better.”

“Well, I’ll do as you say, but the poor chap’s waited long enough before he was found,” said Brough. “Months ago he must have fallen down them steps.” He turned away, adding, “I’ll get on and tell young Tucker to ring Carnton.”

“And tell him to say they must send their technicians and the mortuary van and stretcher men up here,” said Macdonald.

“Aye, I’ll tell him. ’Tis a shocking business and all.”

As soon as Brough had hurried away, Macdonald went into the farmhouse kitchen again. There was no mystery about how the dead man could have got into the locked house without any keys at all. Behind the oak press, at floor level, a hole had been made through the wall, which consisted of rubble rather than solid masonry. On the far side of the wall was an outbuilding, a dairy Macdonald guessed, which had stone walls. It was closed by a sturdy door which stood at right angles to the house wall and which had two steps leading down to the door. Being quite sure that this was the way access had been obtained to the house, Macdonald examined the door and its huge old keyhole. He soon ascertained that the door could be dealt with by lifting it off its hinges. He had a similar door to the old dairy at Fellcock: the door was hinged like the five-barred gates, with two upright iron spikes (called gudgeons locally), on the doorposts, over which fitted rings attached to the door. Doors and gates swung easily by this means, but they could be lifted off the gudgeons: the door would then (while still locked) open sufficiently to admit a man. He was satisfied that he had found out how access to the dairy was obtained: once inside, a man could have worked away at the rubble wall until he had made a large enough hole to crawl through. Since the hole would have been blocked by the heavy wooden press, it was to be assumed that the housebreaker had managed to shift the press away from the wall to the position the press now occupied.

Macdonald continued his observations thus far but without touching anything. This investigation would be the job of the local police: unless his assistance were asked for, Macdonald was only in the position of a witness and he was punctilious about police procedure. After another glance at the sorry remains on the floor, he went outside and lighted a cigarette. Inevitably he surmised: if Brough’s suggestion were right, and it proved that the man could have met his death by falling headlong from the steps on to the stone floor, it looked like being an inconclusive case. As he pondered, Macdonald wondered if there could have been any rumours in the district about “valuables” hidden at High Garth: secret drawers in the old furniture, a secret hoard, hidden years ago and never discovered? Was that the basis of Brough’s “idea” he wondered—and then turned quickly as he heard Jock’s voice shouting his name.

3

Jock came running round the barn. “Mr. Brough’s hurt himself: tripped over that stony ridge and knocked himself out. Heck. . . . Whatever be that? ’Tis a dead beast, long dead.”

“Long dead, but not a beast. There’s a dead man in the house, Jock. Mr. Brough was going for the police. Go back to him, I’ll just lock this door and then I’ll come and see to him.”

The farmer lay face downwards in the tussocky grass, not much more than a hundred yards from High Garth Hall. He lay just beyond a rocky outcrop, one of those tiresome ridges which had determined long ago why the land between High Garth and Fellcock was not cultivated. Before Macdonald bent to turn Brough over, he wondered both why the farmer had tripped up on land he knew well, and, if he had tripped, how he had hit his head on the rock on which his feet now rested. It all looked a very improbable accident, but Mr. Brough's head injury was plain enough: a cut and contusion stretched across his temple to his eyebrow and it was bleeding freely. Macdonald found a clean handkerchief in an inside pocket and folded it into a bandage while Jock said:

"I don't rightly see how he did it: likely he tripped, but there's no rock where his head lies . . . reckon 'twas more like a stone, chucked at him. . . ."

Macdonald nodded: it looked that way to him, too, and he stood up and stared down at the grass and clumps of heather.

"That would ha' done it," said Jock. He picked up a big pebble, a heavy thing but shaped so that it would have fitted into a man's hand for throwing. Macdonald knew at once that the pebble was no fragment of the rough outcrop: it was water-worn, smooth, and rounded. Jock was quick enough to realise the same thing.

"I don't like it," he said slowly. "This stone, reckon it got up here in the load I carted from the shiller bed to make our track. I threw out the big ones, I wanted to get that level."

"That's probably how the stone got here," said Macdonald, "but what we've got to do is to get the police up here. This'll be their job, not mine. Now go and get a hurdle and we'll lay Mr. Brough on it and carry him indoors. He's not dangerously hurt so far as I can tell, but we can't leave him lying here."

Within ten minutes they had got the farmer lifted on the hurdle and they carried him back to Fellcock and laid him on the settle in Betty's kitchen, while she stood and looked at them with wide troubled eyes.

"However did he do it?" she asked, and Jock replied quickly:

"Reckon someone attacked him. Did you see anybody about when you went to gather some kindling?"

"Aye. I saw a fellow up top. I thought he was one of Mr. Brough's men, come to help round up his beasts."

"We shall have to leave all the questions until I get the police up here," said Macdonald. "Jock, you stay in here with Betty until I come back." He turned and glanced at Mr. Brough, who was beginning to stir and snort a little. "You can bathe his face and give him a drink of water if he comes to, but don't let him move. I'll be as fast as I can and I'll get a doctor sent up."

4

Macdonald drove down to the valley faster than he had ever driven down that hill before and those who noticed his car passing said, "He's in a mighty hurry like, doesn't often drive like that," for he was known as a careful and considerate driver. "Something wrong like," was the immediate reaction, coupled to the afterthought, "Mr. Brough, he went up to High Garth not so long since." Country folk are quick to notice anything out of the common round, and quick to draw their own conclusions, though these are seldom passed on to any save their immediate familiars.

Macdonald found Bob Tucker, the constable at Crossghyll, toiling over a report about a minor collision. Tucker knew all about Macdonald and his face lightened as he saw the Scotland Yard officer, but Macdonald said:

"There's trouble up our way, Bob. Mr. Brough asked me to look round High Garth Hall with him, he got the keys from Mrs. Borwick. There's a dead man in the house and he's been there a long time. You must ring through to Carnton to report, and then I'll have a word with them myself. Quickly now: tell the officer in charge that I'm here and I found the body."

Tucker got through to his headquarters at Carnton and gave his message slowly and painstakingly and then held out the receiver to Macdonald. "Inspector Bord wants to speak to you, sir."

"Hallo, Bord. Macdonald here." Tersely and clearly Macdonald gave the necessary facts, adding, "And Mr. Brough took a toss up on the fell when he was hurrying to report to Tucker. Brough is knocked out, concussed, so we want a doctor up at Fellcock as well as your chaps at High Garth—photographer, fingerprint men and all the rest. I've locked the house up, and I'll go back there at once and wait till you come."

"Right: I'll come out straight away: better take Tucker up with you, it's his job to make the preliminary report: and I'll ring Dr. Green and ask him to go and see to Mr. Brough."

Tucker, on his motorbike, went ahead of Macdonald up the long hill, and the villagers of Crossghyll stared and said, "Summat amiss. Cattle thieving, maybe. Mr. Brough, he's often said there was some bad characters up there. That's too far away, too lonely like."

Tucker left his bike at Fellcock and walked across to High Garth with Macdonald. "How did the man get inside the house?" he asked wonderingly. "That's all locked up. I goes past there, once in a way, and 'twas all in order, locked, barred, and that."

"Someone broke through the dairy wall," replied Macdonald. "This isn't my job, Tucker, but I can't help wondering about it. You say you inspect High Garth. Have you ever heard any talk of strangers being seen up there?"

"Well, there's been one story and another, sir. There's been more than a bit of trouble with the pipe-line gang. The men sign on for a spell, weeks or months, and some break their contract and clear out. That's not in our district, but likely they'd come down the fell this side and make for the railway at Kirkham if they were doing a bolt. I've heard some of the village boys at Crossghyll saying they'd met strangers up t' fell, so I went to have a look at High Garth Hall to see there'd been no breaking in."

Having arrived at the back door of High Garth, Macdonald handed over the keys to Tucker. "It was just like this when Mr. Brough and I got here," he said. "Not a sign of anything wrong. We unlocked the door and went inside. It's a nasty sight, Tucker—enough to turn a man up."

He heard the young constable gasp and swallow, but Tucker stood his ground gamely and stared around.

"Any idea who the dead man could be?" asked Macdonald, but Tucker shook his head.

"No, sir—and it'd be hard to say. Now reckon it's my job to put down all particulars for the inspector: he won't want me to go meddling in there, though it looks plain enough to me. Deceased broke in through that wall there after forcing the dairy door and he went up that ladder to see around upstairs and he fell on 's head." Stepping aside, the young constable produced his notebook and Macdonald said:

"That's right, Tucker. Mr. Brough of Greenholme and Mr. Macdonald of Fellcock met outside High Garth Hall on Monday, March twenty-eighth, at 1:30 p.m."

"Should I write Superintendent Macdonald?" asked Tucker, but the older man shook his head.

"No. I'm plain Mr. at this juncture. I'm here to farm, nothing else."

"That's as may be," said Tucker.

Chapter Five

1

Shortly afterwards, three experienced men stood and looked at the sorry remains on the kitchen floor at High Garth. All three had had experience of "old mortality." Macdonald, perhaps, had met such contingencies more frequently than the others, but Inspector Bord of Carnton had had to deal with corpses washed up on the treacherous sands of Morecambe Bay, and Doctor Lee, the police surgeon, had held his present post for many years. A young photographer had performed his gruesome task of obtaining close-ups of the dead man, and had then taken his gear outside. Bord looked at the hole in the wall and at the ladder like steps and then at the spread-eagled body.

"Looks plain enough, or was arranged to look plain enough," he said. "The question is, who was deceased and how long has he been there?"

Dr. Lee turned to Macdonald. "You've probably had more experience than either of us of problems like this. What's your guess?"

"I'd say he'd been there for a year—or longer," replied Macdonald. "How near can you get to the answer when you dissect him out?"

"Not very near—as you know well enough: it's a matter of assumption, balancing one probability against another. In every exhumation where I've taken part in the examination of remains there's been a wide variation in the state of same, and in those cases we knew when death had occurred. From a glance at this subject, I'd agree with your estimate, about a year: his neck's broken, as you'd expect it to be if he pitched on his head on those flagstones. Well, the sooner we get him to the forensic lab the better. He's in no state for an examination *in situ*. Can I tell the chaps to bring the stretcher in and load him up? We've got medicated sheets and so forth."

Bord nodded. "The sooner you get him moved the better. I'll follow you shortly and we'll see if there's anything on him to decide identity. I've no notion who he can be, and there's been no disappearance from my district the last year or so. Age? About fifty?"

"Fifty to sixty at a guess. We'll be able to tell you that later."

"Looks more like an industrial bloke than a farmer," added Bord, and Macdonald replied:

"It's hard to tell: they all wear dungarees these days and 'windjammer' coats, factory hands, lorry drivers, tractor drivers, and stock men. Could this chap be Sam Borwick, Bord?"

"No. Sam's still a young chap: this one wasn't young."

The stretcher men arrived, and Bord said: "Let's have a look at this door you were talking about."

"I've got a door hung the same way at my place, with a gap at the top, like this one," said Macdonald. "It was locked and the key was missing when I took over: I heaved it off its hinges—like this."

He went outside and picked up an iron bar which lay against the wall. "This was in the shippon," he said. "It's been handled often enough so I'm not destroying evidence." He picked up a wooden block, set it on the ground a few inches from the dairy door, slipped the rod under the loosely fitting door, and then, levering against the wooden block, raised the door inch by inch until he felt that it was off its primitive hinges.

“The lock’s very old and there’s plenty of play,” he said, and set his shoulder to the door, which gave with a rasp and groan until there was space for a man to sidle through. Once Macdonald was inside, Bord followed him. The “dairy,” if such it had been, was a space about ten feet long by six feet wide, and enough light came through the partially open door to show that the place had been used as a lumber room, rather than a dairy. There were some buckets, a milking stool, a small old-fashioned paraffin stove, a pile of billets and kindling, a hatchet, a broken pickaxe, and other tools.

“What could have been easier, once the chap had got inside here,” observed Macdonald. “When you remember the way P.O.W.s cut through stone walls with nothing to help them but half a broken knife or some such, it was child’s play to hack a way through that rubble wall with all the tools lying around here.”

Bord nodded. “True enough, Super, and that’s the way it was done, but I’d say one thing: either the chap knew this place, or he acted ‘on information received.’ ”

“Something in that,” agreed Macdonald, “but shall we look over the house and leave the talking till later?”

Bord nodded. They went back into the kitchen and Macdonald said: “I’ll go and open the front door and let the wind blow right through the place. None of these windows will open.”

He walked round outside the house to the front door, unlocked the padlocks, and turned the huge key in the gaping keyhole and set the door wide. The house was very primitive in design, built without any passages: the back door opened straight into the kitchen, the front door opened into the parlour, which had windows on both sides. Macdonald unbolted a shutter and set it open and the light shone across the stone-flagged floor. There was a fine old oak dresser along one wall, a “display cabinet,” also of carved oak, with the date 1695 carved on it, and a huge dower chest, with finely carved panels. It was obvious enough that all these pieces were valuable, as were the spindle-backed, rush-bottomed chairs, a set of six, plus a rocking chair.

Bord glanced in from the door which opened into the kitchen and Macdonald said:

“Nothing amiss in here, apart from a bit of plaster fallen. This was a well-built house. If my opinion’s worth anything, any collector or furniture dealer would be glad to have the chance of making an offer for the furniture. It’s uncommonly good.”

“Aye, it’s good and maybe a collector would pay a tidy price for it: genuine old farmhouse furniture’s prized these days. Well, I don’t know if that fact’s got anything to do with our business. There’s nought wrong here. We’d better go upstairs.”

They went back into the kitchen and stood considering the wooden ladder: there was nothing to be learnt from the treads, for plaster dust lay on them undisturbed. Dust from the rubble of the wall and dust from fallen plaster, for patches had fallen from the ceilings in the neglected house.

“It’s a dangerous setup, if you’re not used to steps like those,” said Bord. “Those who are used to them come down facing the steps, not facing outwards: then if you slip, there’s not much harm done.”

Macdonald nodded. “Shouldn’t there be a rope hanging there, to hold on to?” he asked. “The steps are like those up to the hay lofts above the shippons: there’s a stout rope hanging by my barn steps at Fellcock.”

“Aye, it’s the usual thing,” agreed Bord.

They went up the ladder to the bedroom above: it was white with plaster, but showed no footprints. “Nothing in that,” said Bord; “the plaster’s coming down all the time.”

There was an ancient wooden bedstead, "large enow to take the whole family," said Bord, and a rotted mattress still lay athwart it, horsehair and crude wool protruding from the rotted ticking. Another huge dower chest and another "press," similar to the one in the kitchen, stood against the walls.

"Reckon he come up here to look around and missed his footing going down," said Bord.

"Or was pushed down," said Macdonald. "If you gave me a hefty shove when I wasn't expecting it, I should probably go forward and there's nothing to hold on to. The devil of this job is that it might be accident or might not. We'll get those lads to go over everything with their fingerprint apparatus. A lot will depend on whether there are any fingerprints you can't account for."

Bord nodded and a few minutes later they went down the treacherous ladder, and outside again into the fresh air.

2

"Why didn't the damned old fool tell you what he knew?" demanded Bord irritably. He was talking of Mr. Brough, and Mr. Brough had been taken to hospital, snoring intermittently but incapable of speech.

"He's seventy and he weighs over fifteen stone," said the doctor. "His blood pressure's much too high and he took a toss when he was trying to run. He crashed down full length, a proper wallop, and he hit his head on the ground as he landed. As to whether he was downed because someone hit him, either by throwing a stone or at close quarters, I can't tell you. The damage is as much shock and the fall as the bruise on his head. If he doesn't have a thrombosis, I shall be surprised, and it'll be a good time before he'll be fit to be questioned—and you'll be lucky if he doesn't have a stroke to put the lid on it."

Bord felt almost personally aggrieved. He agreed with Macdonald that there was nothing to show if accident or violence had caused the death of the unknown man in High Garth kitchen, but Mr. Brough's "accident" did seem to indicate that violence was afoot. Macdonald set to work to tell Bord about Brough's conversation with himself and his allusions to Sam Borwick.

"Now what are the real facts about Sam?" asked Macdonald.

Bord was so obviously anxious to have the superintendent's co-operation, that all talk of etiquette had been disregarded and they were talking like the old cronies which they, in fact, were.

"I can't tell you the facts about Sam, because I haven't any facts," said Bord. "There was a lot of gossip when he didn't come home when he was demobbed: he stayed on in the Army after his term and served in Malaya, but he was demobbed in Leverstone in 1948: twenty-five, he'd have been then. One or two farmers from hereabouts knew Sam was in Leverstone, they saw him around the cattle market: he was skilled at handling beasts, and he got jobs as drover and suchlike. Folks said he was wild, living the sort of life that's no credit to anyone, but I never heard any exact statement until Mr. Staple said he'd actually seen Sam run in, arrested when he was driving a stolen lorry. Well, it happened I was in Leverstone myself on business six months ago, and I asked the city police about Sam: they'd never heard of him. Now that doesn't mean he hadn't been through their hands, it means he gave a false name if ever he was picked up. You know the form, the name given is Brown, Jones, or Robinson, no fixed address, occupation, none. If nobody comes forward to identify the man charged, there's no

way of learning his real name. If it's a charge of larceny or suchlike, it's not worth spending the time on a wide inquiry and the chaps are sentenced under the name and description given. Anyway, there's no entry of Sam Borwick's name in police records, though whether his fingerprints are entered under another name is open to question. If a chap's made up his mind not to give his real name if he's arrested, he's generally smart enough not to carry any papers or suchlike which will identify him. But it makes me mad to think Mr. Brough had some information about Sam and wouldn't report it."

"I don't know that he had any further information," said Macdonald. "He was suspicious. I'm wondering if there were any rumours going round the district that Sam Borwick had been seen hereabouts: I'm also wondering if there's any story about valuables left at High Garth. There often are stories about ancient houses, plate in the well, sovereigns in the chimney, coins under the flagstones. And quite often valuables have been found hidden in old houses when builders got to work on floors and chimneys."

Bord nodded. "And have you been wondering if Brough had an idea that if there was anything of that kind, he might as well have it as leave it for Sam? Don't take me wrong," went on Bord. "Brough's respected hereabouts, known as an honest man, but there have been times when honest farmers went astray when it looked as though there were easy money to be had: you know, black-market meat when rationing was tight, false claims for government subsidies. Oh, it's happened and I know it. It seems to me that if Brough thought there was treasure trove about, he'd have argued 'No reason why Sam should have that.' And he thought 'If I'm going to have a look around to see what's been happening, better have a witness to prove I haven't been up to any hanky-panky.' "

"Yes, there's that, and better have company in case there's trouble," said Macdonald. "It does look to me as though someone watched out when Brough and I went to High Garth and that Brough was attacked when he hurried back to his car. Betty Shearling said she saw a man going across the fell and thought he was one of Brough's hired men."

"It wasn't. We've got his men taped," said Bord. "Then there's this: Jock Shearling was out there and his wife knew it. I've nought to say against Shearling, but this is the third time he's been in a district where there's been trouble: he was on Whemside at the time of the sheep-stealing racket, he was in Gimmerdale when Herdwick was arrested, and now he's here."

"There'll be plenty of people to remember that," said Macdonald. "I believe Jock's straight, and his wife's straight, too. Now there's another point we ought to consider. We don't know how long ago that hole was made in the wall at High Garth, nor how often it was used, nor when it was last used. One thing's perfectly plain: that house would have been a godsend to any chap who wanted to lie low, once he'd found a method of getting in which couldn't be noticed from outside."

"Aye. Sam Borwick might have thought about that, when he was in trouble in Leverstone," said Bord, "and Sam would have known about the dairy door and the rubble wall. Looks like Sam to me."

"And to me. He could have used the place himself or told his pals about it, describing the method of entry which he might have arranged for himself. There was shelter, firing, and some degree of comfort: it would have been safe to light a fire there any night. There's water in the trough. If a man meant to live there over a period of days, he'd have had to bring food with him. Food generally means tins these days."

“Well, if there were tins, they were well hidden,” said Bord. “Now I reckon my first job should be to go down and see old Mrs. Borwick: it’s not a job I fancy. The old man’s had a stroke: nothing to be got out of him, and she’s not so good herself, I’m told. Weak heart and that. Not that she’ll tell me anything about that precious son of hers, and I couldn’t press her.”

Macdonald agreed. “There are some things we know we can’t do, and thank God for it: bullying an aged mother for information about a suspect son is no job for police in this country, but you might get some information about Brough’s part in the setup. He said she handed him the keys, you could ask about that, especially as he’s had an accident and can’t answer questions himself.”

“Aye, I’ll try along those lines, and the sooner the better. News travels, as you know. Now look here, Super: you’ll come in on this with us? The sooner we fix things up with the Commissioner’s Office, the better.”

“Right, settle things your end, there won’t be any difficulty at C.O. There will be a number of lines to follow up and you’re a bit short of men with experience of lengthy interrogations.”

“Aye, you’re right there; my fellows are reliable enough and observant of matters within their own experience, but they’re on the dumb side, not used to thinking out questions in words.”

“One thing they’ll be good at, picking up any rumours that have been flying around. If Sam Borwick has been seen in these parts, I believe your sergeant and young Hayton will get to hear of it. For myself, once you’ve got the formalities settled, I’d like to go and have a crack with the Leverstone men and try to pin down these stories about Sam Borwick having been run in. Incidently, do you know the date Mr. Staple was in Leverstone, when he said he saw Sam being run in?”

“No, I don’t know the date, but you could go and see Staple yourself without waiting for the formalities. He knows you, and he’ll talk to you as soon as anybody.”

“Right. I’ll go along there this evening. He’s still at Garthmere, isn’t he?”

“Aye, but he’s not farming now, he’s getting on, seventy-five he’d be. He’s got a cottage below his old steading and a few acres where he grazes some beasts to keep him happy.”

“And there’s another job,” said Macdonald. “One of us will have to go up and see the manager at the pipe-line works. There’s quite a chance that deceased was one of the gangers who found his own way over here, or came over here to lend Sam a hand, if Mr. Brough’s notion was anywhere near right. If they planned to get any of the furniture out of High Garth, it’d have taken two men to shift it. It’s all heavy stuff.”

“True enough,” said Bord. “Now would you like to tackle that end, the gangers up on Bowland?”

“No use trying it by myself, because I’ve never seen Sam Borwick,” replied Macdonald. “We want a photograph of him, or lacking that a description by somebody who knows Sam well: Mr. Staple might be willing to come. Now about deceased: there’s one way we might get him identified—if he’s ever been ‘inside.’ ”

“Fingerprints?” said Bord, and his voice sounded sceptical. “What are the chances? I never saw a corpse so far gone.”

“True, but it happens that the skin of the finger tips has remarkable endurance—it’s tough and it retains its characteristic markings even after identification by the usual methods is impossible. The experts who do the P.M. will provide us with fingerprints, sufficient to identify him if his dabs are in records.”

“Well, I might not have thought of that one,” said Bord.

A few minutes later they parted, Bord on his way to see Mrs. Borwick, Macdonald on his way to see Mr. Staple.

3

While Macdonald and Bord were debating their case, a lorry was grinding up the steep hill from Kirkham to the pipe-line encampment on Bowland Fell. The lorry belonged to the contractors who were laying the pipe line and it carried supplies for the works canteen. The supplies came from Preston and the route followed by the lorry driver on the final stages of his journey was the road through the Lune Valley via Crossghyll and Kirkham and then up the steep hill road on to the heights of Bowland, the only possible approach to the encampment for a wheeled vehicle. Tractors could climb the rough fell tracks which approached the encampment more directly, but the supply lorries always kept to the metalled road. Turner, the driver, followed the same roads every week and had made many acquaintances en route. When he saw the mortuary van turn on to the valley road, it was only natural that he stopped to inquire where it had come from, and only natural that he was told a long and involved story by the roadman who was his informant, a story about a police search up at the uninhabited farmstead, the finding of a body, and about an accident to or an attack on Mr. Brough, who had just been taken to hospital, "mortal bad."

When Turner reached the huts where the pipe-line gangers slept and ate, four men came forward as usual to do the unloading and to carry the crates into the storeroom at the back of the canteen: in addition to the four who did the unloading and carrying, there was the canteen manager, Mr. Stone, to check the goods and sign for them. Once again Turner told his news, and made the most of it. A corpse found at High Garth, after a search which had been carried out by the county police and the London C.I.D., a search directed by a local farmer, who had himself been attacked and taken away in an ambulance. The four men who did the unloading, Green, Hall, Walton, and Brook, were reliable fellows, who had worked for the contractors for a period of years. Stone, the canteen manager, knew by experience that it was essential to have trustworthy men on this job. It was all too easy for goods to disappear—a carton of cigarettes, a crate of tinned food—so Stone saw to it that he always had the same men on this particular job and that none of the other gangers hung around while the goods were being moved. He liked to get the job done quickly and the goods put away in the canteen strong room. As he sometimes said to the manager, "They're not a bad lot of chaps, taking them all round: very much the same set of toughs you found in any infantry regiment. And was there any thieving in the army if canteen goods weren't properly supervised? Ask any old soldier."

Today, it was difficult to get through the job with the usual dispatch. The men wanted to hear details of the driver's story. Where was the body found? How had the farmer been attacked?

"High Garth?" asked Bill Walton. "That's the godforsaken old shack perched up on the moor away over there, isn't it?"

"There's two farms, fairly close together, neither of them lived in, and I don't wonder at it," put in Percy Hall. "Miles from anywhere. I walked over there last autumn, when the heather was out. With Fuller I went, he said there was a short cut down to a village where there was a pub. Short cut, blimey: miles we walked and never saw no village, just them two farmhouses, empty both of them."

“There’s two farmhouses all right, High Garth and Fellcock,” said Turner, “but only one is uninhabited, that’s High Garth, where the body was found. Fellcock’s lived in and the land’s cultivated. You can see that right across the river, green fields and decent buildings.”

“That’s right,” put in Brook. “Who was it went over there, not long ago? Tom Martin, said there was a decent young couple living there, gave him tea and treated him kind, asked him inside.”

“Look here, chaps, get a move on,” said Stone. “We shall be having all the lads coming in before long, and I don’t want this lot of stuff lying about. If there’s a story, you can read it in the papers—come on, get moving.”

Just after the job was finished: Turner had moved his lorry off, Brook called across to one of his mates who had just come off the afternoon shift.

“Hi, there, Tom! Didn’t you say you’d walked over the moor past them two farmhouses below the ridge, there?”

Tom Martin was a fellow in his thirties who moved with an easy swing; he was dark-haired and dark-skinned, with unexpectedly blue eyes which seemed to shine in his soil-grimed face. The black moorland soil made most of the gangers look like chimney sweeps when they came off the shift, and Tom Martin looked filthy enough to be taken for a down and out.

“Sure I walked over there and down to the village in the valley to that pub you blokes talked about. I brought you back some fags and a drink, you should know.”

“I do and all. I won’t forget that, mate. I was broke, but I’ll pay you back one day, never forget a good turn. Well, Turner, the lorry driver, says the cops have been out to that farmhouse that isn’t lived in, and they’ve found a stiff there, and a farmer bloke got laid out while the busies were on the job.”

“Cripes, what a yarn,” said Martin, and Brook went on:

“See here, mate. Seeing there’s been trouble over there, as you might say, p’r’aps it’d be better not to know anything about them farmhouses. I’ll bet you any money the cops’ll come up here to badger us poor ruddy gangers. Now see here, if you want a mate to say where you was and where you wasn’t any time they get awkward about—well, count me in. One good turn deserves another.”

“O.K., mate, that goes by me, too. Always stick by a pal. Cheeri-bye. I’ll clock in for a cuppa. See you later.”

Chapter Six

1

"I don't like it, Stone, and that's a fact," said John Wharton. Wharton was the manager for the contractors, Barrow & Teesdale, who were taking the pipe line over Bowland to connect the reservoirs they had built there with the water supply of the great industrial city of Leverstone. Wharton was a very able man; he had been in charge of similar projects, in conditions even more remote and inaccessible than Bowland, in the Highlands, in the Welsh mountains and the Northumbrian hills, and he had been heard to say that there was no problem connected with labour gangs in difficult terrain that he hadn't had to face at one time or another.

Stone had come to his boss to report the van driver's story, for Stone, also, was an experienced man, and he knew that crimes which occurred in the vicinity of labour gangs such as theirs were apt to have awkward repercussions.

"We have trouble enough keeping the chaps on the job up here without having a police inquiry to unsettle them," went on Wharton, "and that's what it'll be, you mark my words. You remember it was the same in Wales. There were two crimes of violence within ten miles of us when we were working on the Trenant dam and the police made a beeline for our headquarters."

"You can't blame the police," said Stone. "We get a few proper toughs in these gangs. If we were too choosey over the chaps we enroll, the gangs would be below strength and ourselves behind with our contract, and it's a tough job working out in these wilds."

"You're telling me," replied Wharton. "Folks say, look at the mechanical aids you have these days, the bulldozers and all the rest. Old Monty gave the answer to that one when he said the army needed men and would always need men no matter how mechanical the unit, for every machine needs a man to tend it."

"Aye, that's sense, that is," replied Stone, "and if we have the police fossicking around here, the first chaps to walk out on us will be the skilled mechanics: they can get softer jobs than this and they know it."

"That applies to every ganger we've got, Bill," rejoined Wharton. "When I first managed a labour camp, way back in the thirties, the men had some inducement to stay on the job, because the alternatives were unemployment and an empty belly. When there are a million and more unemployed in the country, it's a wonderful incentive to hold on to a job when you've got one, because you know you'll likely not get another. It's different today: any unskilled able-bodied man can take his choice of jobs, there are more jobs than men; our chaps know it, there's work on building sites, work on road foundations, work on this, that and the other, and although we pay them well and feed them well, they'd rather have jobs where they can get to a pub in the evening and sleep with their wives at night."

Stone chuckled. "Too true, boss. We've done pretty well up here; we've kept the nucleus of our gangs, the old toughs who've been with the company for years and who realise that there's a lot to be said for a job which provides decent living conditions on the spot, decent food, and a tidy pay packet saved up with a bonus when the job's finished to time."

“That’s it,” said Wharton, “but once we get the police up here, some of the chaps will pack up on us.

“It happened at Trenant, it’ll happen here.” He paused for a moment and then went on: “It might be a good idea if I had a word with Lawley: he knows more about the chaps than any of us.”

Lawley was the head overseer, a man who had been with the company before the war, and had rejoined the contractors when he was demobilised after the war.

“Now let’s hear this story of Turner’s again,” went on Wharton, and Stone replied:

“The police went up from the valley to one of those derelict farmhouses just over the ridge to the north, and they found a dead man in one of them.”

“There are two farmhouses over there, but only one of them is uninhabited,” said Wharton. “I hiked over there one day to consider the chances of levelling a track to join up with the road down to the nearest village, Crossghyll, isn’t it? The more easterly of the two farmhouses, High Garth, hasn’t been lived in for years; it does look derelict, a grim stone house set on the moor, without any sort of road or track. The other farm, Fellcock, changed hands last Michaelmas. A chap named Macdonald bought it and he put a young couple into the house: the man, Shearling, cultivates the land and tends the stock and his wife helps him. Fellcock’s a well-cared-for ‘steading,’ as they say in these parts. I had a word with the boss, Mr. Macdonald: he doesn’t live there, but comes up occasionally to keep an eye on things, meaning to live there one day, when he retires. A very nice chap, I thought, though he had no opinion of my idea of a track: didn’t want our gangers coming on his land.”

“Then it would have been High Garth where the body was found, the uninhabited place,” said Stone. “Turner mentioned a Macdonald, but I thought he said the chap was a policeman, not a farmer.”

“It’s a common enough name,” said Wharton. “Now what about the farmer who was attacked, that happened this afternoon, didn’t it?”

“Yes, so Turner said.”

“Well, maybe we can do a spot of detection on our own,” said Wharton. “I’ll talk to Lawley. I have an idea he’ll have had his eyes open this afternoon. They were doing a bit of blasting, clearing some rock, and I happen to know that Lawley watches out when they’re using explosives, keeps his gangs in regular files while they’re standing by, so that there’s no chance of accidents.”

Stone chuckled: “And no chance of larceny either,” he added. “We’ve had some characters who’d make off with detonators and suchlike if they had the chance.”

Wharton nodded. “I know. Well, send Lawley along here. The sooner I get this sorted out the better.”

2

Bob Lawley, a tough grizzled man approaching fifty, was a first-rate overseer, who made it his job to know the men he supervised and was in the main trusted by them. Wharton knew that it was Lawley’s ability in dealing with the gangs which was largely responsible for the success of the present operation.

“Hallo, Bob,” said Wharton, “have you heard this story which Turner’s been spreading round?”

“I heard it, boss, and I reckon I thought the same thing as you did. We shall be having the police round and the chaps will resent it. Evan Thomas has been spouting hot air already, you’ll remember Thomas was with us when the police were on the job at Trenant. ‘Always the bloody working man they makes for,’ you know the form.”

“I know it,” agreed Wharton and Lawley went on:

“There’s two parts to this story of Turner’s, boss: a dead man in an empty farmhouse, a house that’s all bolted and barred, that’s one part: the second is an attack on a farmer close by the house this afternoon. Well, we’re in luck over part two. It happens that Andy Wright and I know where all our chaps were this afternoon.”

“I hoped you’d say that, Bob. I heard your charges going off.”

“That’s it. We blasted out that rock which lay across our line. Now I’ve seen a lot of jobs like this, when explosive was used, and I’ve learnt the snags. First you’ve got to keep your eyes skinned to see that none of the chaps get away with detonators or gelignite. We had some of that in Scotland, as you’ll remember. Then you’ve got to see the silly mugs don’t go spreading out, getting too near the charge when it’s being fired. We had forty-eight men out—all four gangs—this afternoon. I supervised the shot-firing party, all men we know. Andy Wright had two gangs of a dozen each, ready to shift the rock we broke up, and Jim Bolt had a dozen maintenance men, checking the engines and drills and other gear. And we can swear to it that the men in every section were all present and correct.”

“That’s fine,” said Wharton. “Now let’s have a word about the men themselves. If the police come up here, they’re sure to ask you.”

“They’re welcome. Most of the chaps have been on the company’s books since Trenant, and we’ve never had any trouble with them. Stone says he has to look out for pilfering, when he’s shifting canteen stores, but that can happen anywhere. I’d say the light-fingered blokes are among that dozen who signed on after the Pembridge harbour works finished their contract. I wouldn’t put it past any of them to pinch what he thought he could get away with, but there’s this: not a single bloke of that lot would walk a mile on a decent metalled road if he could help it; as for walking five or six miles over these mucking moors, I just don’t believe it.”

“Well, we’ve got their records,” said Wharton. “We know they worked on the Pembridge job and there was no trouble there. Now what about the odd lot you had to take on when we got Asian ’flu up here?”

“Yes. I’ve been thinking about them. They signed on for a month, a dozen of them. Six are still here, good steady workers, too. Four of them went at the end of the month and I was glad to see them go—grousers, always complaining and making other chaps discontented. Then there were two Irishmen: they left before their month.”

“I seem to remember you had trouble with them, fighting or some such.”

Lawley nodded. “Reilley and Flanagan. Reilley wasn’t a bad chap: he was a worker, he was. Flanagan was born lazy and I reckon he was a liar, too. Reilley was bothering about his wife and family in Ireland: you remember I came to you about him. He hadn’t worked his full month and his agreement said his full wages weren’t due until he’d served his month. I asked if you’d forego that clause and pay him so that he’d enough money for his fare to Belfast.”

“I remember,” said Wharton. “You wanted to be quit of him because he and Flanagan were always fighting.”

“That was it, and the other chaps were taking sides—bad for discipline. I couldn’t have it. Since it was Reilley who wanted to go, I said he’d better go. And I got Turner to drive him to

Heysham and see him on his boat. He went—back to Ireland. Flanagan stayed his month and then left, and I was glad to be quit of him, even though we were shorthanded at the time. It was the end of February, you remember. Well, before he left, Flanagan came to me and said I'd always been unfair to him, had a down on him, because he couldn't stand Reilley. Reilley was a real bad 'un. I shut him up. I knew in my bones that if one of those two men was a bad 'un, it was Flanagan. And then a week later, Taffy Jones came and told me that Flanagan had said that Reilley was that convict who escaped from Dartmoor in January."

"Good lord!" exclaimed Wharton. "You never reported it, Bob."

"I didn't believe it," retorted Lawley. "It was just the sort of lie Flanagan would tell. Taffy Jones didn't believe it either, but he said he was quite willing to believe that Flanagan was the escaped convict. Well, there it was. Reilley had gone, Flanagan had gone, and where they'd gone was none of my business. What was the use of making a song about it? There wasn't any evidence, just a lot of say so. I got talking to some of the chaps about it: nobody knew anything, just what Flanagan whispered around before he left, and the ones who'd heard the whispers told me straight that if they knew for a fact one of those Irishmen was an escaped convict, they wouldn't have given him away: far from it, they'd have helped him to get clear. That's how they feel about it."

"It's awkward," said Wharton. "If the police do come here, I'm pretty well bound to tell them that story."

"I don't see any sense in telling them," said Lawley. "What does it boil down to? We took on a scratch lot of men because some of our chaps were laid up. When that happens, you have to take on any able-bodied man who's willing to come. You get a set of scallywags, the dregs of the labour market, and make the best of it. The regular gangers know all the difficulties and they keep order of a sort themselves: see to it there's no pilfering of other men's property, such as it is. Well, the men we took on weren't a bad lot—the two Irishmen were the trouble makers because they quarrelled. Reilley was from Northern Ireland, Flanagan from the south. When I saw they were making trouble, I let Reilley go."

"You say we've still got six chaps here of the dozen you took on early in February: let's get them listed. Of the whole lot, those six are the ones we know least about. We can answer for the old hands to some extent, and the lot who came on from Pembridge—well, they know each other to some extent."

"Yes, I see what you mean, boss: the February lot were rag, tag and bobtail, came from goodness knows where. All we cared about was that they were able-bodied, used to navvying and capable of putting their backs into a job. The six who're still here—wait a jiff, I'll list them for you. There's Taffy Jones, a good worker but a damned quarrelsome Welshman. Fred Hodges, he's a cockney and he's worked his way up north putting in time on road works. Tom Martin came here when the road job at Cowholme was finished, Martin's the pick of that bunch. Then there were three blokes, Blunt, Scott and Welby, who'd been doing demolition work in Birmingham—clearing slum property. They're about browned off with this job. It isn't the work, they're all tough. It isn't the eats or living conditions, they're comfortable and they know it, but they're bored stiff. They like streets and flicks and skirts, a fish-and-chips at the corner and the chance of going to bed drunk any night they like."

"In common with working blokes in general," said Wharton. "Thanks a lot, Bob. You're a wonder the way you get to know these chaps and their background."

"You've got to treat 'em as human beings, listen to their grouses, and find out where they came from," said Lawley. "It's like the army over again, in a manner of speaking. A pack of

toughs who’re cut off from their homes and their wives. If you can get ’em talking in the evening, it helps. In the army it was regulations and discipline kept them at it: here it’s the knowledge they’ll have a good pay packet at the end of the contract, over and above what’s sent to their wives and deducted for their keep.”

Wharton nodded and Lawley got up. “See here, boss; I’ll go and get cracking with some of the chaps and see if I can find out a bit more about Reilley and Flanagan. And if so be the flics come up here this evening, don’t go spilling that damn’ silly story of Flanagan’s about Reilley being the escaped convict. It’ll only go putting ideas into policemen’s heads, and I reckon I can kill it stone dead, so that you needn’t repeat it at all, even though you’ve got a conscience where law and order’s concerned.”

“All right, Bob. Report back later.”

3

“Hallo, Tom; come and have a bit of a jaw,” said Lawley. He had spotted Tom Martin as the latter was crossing from the canteen to the men’s huts, and Martin replied, “O.K.,” and fell in behind the overseer. In Lawley’s office, Martin asked: “Any complaints, boss?”

“Not so far as work’s concerned. The job’s going fine, but what’s this I hear about you and Butler packing up on us?”

“Well, I was going to tell you: they’re wanting men on the extensions to Heysham Harbour. The pay’s no better than here and hours are longer, but at least there’s a bit of life when you have done for the day. This blasted wilderness is all right for a bit, then it gets you down.”

“Yes, I know all about that, but we’re nearly through with this job. If you stick it out, you can be entered on the company’s permanent pay roll and I’m looking out for another gang leader. You’ve pulled your weight here, Tom. I’d recommend you and the next job’s at Leverstone. However, just think it over. Don’t go off to Heysham all in a hurry: that job won’t last long. Now there was another thing I wanted to talk to you about; weren’t you and Reilley buddies?”

“More or less. What’s this about Reilley?”

“You heard the rumour Flanagan put round that Reilley was the chap who escaped from Dartmoor?”

“Flanagan was a bloody liar. But why dig up that silly bilge?”

“You can guess, Tom; you’re not lacking. You heard the story Turner told this afternoon?”

“Oh, my gawd. . . . You mean the camp’s going to be lousy with cops?”

“They’ll come up, they’re bound to. One thing, we’ve got this afternoon taped. I know that none of our chaps was over the fell, taking pot shots at farmers.”

“That’s a bit of luck,” said Martin. “Most days anybody might have been anywhere. Now you’re never going to fill the police up with Flanagan’s ruddy lies about Reilley?”

“Not if you can prove it was only lies.”

“Easy,” said Martin. “When was it that Dartmoor bloke broke prison? Sometime in January, wasn’t it?”

“Aye, the middle of January.”

“Well, that’s that. Reilley was working on the Globe Electric job all January. I know, I was on that job, too. They laid a new road from the factory to railhead, at Cowholme junction—saved them a pull of twenty miles over the fell roads to get their stuff on the railway. I went

there from Ringway, where we'd been laying a new runway. Reilley was on the Globe job when I got there at the new year, so was Taffy Jones. We all came on here together early February, when we'd seen the notices you put out, unskilled labour required—that's us."

"Well, thanks for telling me about Reilley," said Lawley. "While we're talking about unskilled labour, I've often wondered why chaps like you didn't learn a trade and cash in on the wages a skilled man gets."

"Learn a trade—and what happens then? Join a union, get a card before you can take a job anywhere. Kowtow to Union rules, what you can do, what you can't, be bossed by the shop stewards. Industry's lousy with Union regulations, gives me the sick. While a bloke's only using a shovel, shifting this, that and the other, no one bothers him with regulations. You can dig in a garden or shift muck from a cow house and no one cares how long you work and what tools you do it with. I like my freedom; I like working in the open and no ruddy shop stewards watching you at a flicking conveyor belt."

"Well, it's lucky for us there are other blokes like you: casual labour, as they say. Now see here, Tom; you've put me wise about Reilley. Do you know anything about Flanagan?"

"No, and nobody else does either, except that he's a dirty dog."

"I often wondered why he came here. He hadn't got the guts to do a heavy job like this."

"You're not the only one who wondered. I'll tell you my guess, but it's only a guess. He came here because he knew explosives were used when we struck rock. He knew if he could lay hands on detonators and suchlike he could market them to the I.R.A.—or that's my guess. But he found this outfit was too well managed for him to get away with it."

"Why did he hate Reilley?"

"I think Reilley knew a bit about Flanagan. I bet Flan was on the crook since he was first breeched—but don't go putting the cops on his trail. Once you start on that line, there's not a chap in any of the gangs who won't pack up on you, including yours truly. The minute the cops get an idea we're a blooming lot of criminals or ex-convicts, they'll be after us for ever and always. Leave it alone, boss—or you'll be left alone yourself to finish the job without any gangers."

"Keep your hair on," said Lawley. "I'm no more keen on having the police up here than you are."

Chapter Seven

1

“Good day, Mr. Macdonald,” said John Staple. “I’m right glad to see you; come inside. ’Tis a small house, but cosy and homely, and I’m right comfortable here. I’ve got a few beasts and a bit of land—only six acres and the garden—but it’s enough to keep me interested. Sit in the corner there, you’ll mind that chair, you always liked it. So you’ve found a spot of trouble up in the hills over yonder?”

“We have indeed,” said Macdonald. He liked old John Staple and knew him to be trustworthy. “News travels apace in these parts,” he added.

“Aye; the story’s all over the valley and I don’t wonder at it. Now can you tell me about Mr. Brough? Is he in a bad way, as they say?”

“He’s a sick man, but it wasn’t only the tumble and the blow on his head. There’s blood pressure and other problems to worry the doctors.”

“Aye, I know he had trouble that way, and he’s a big weight. Fat’s no good to a man as he ages.”

“You’re not troubled yourself that way,” said Macdonald, studying Mr. Staple’s lean stringy length. “Now Inspector Bord came up over yonder to look into things and Bord said a few hard words about Brough, because the latter had information he’d have done better to give to the police, but he kept quiet about it and he’s suffered for it. Now, Mr. Staple, one of the few facts which Brough told me brought your name into it: he said that you knew Sam Borwick was in trouble with the police in Leverstone, but the Leverstone police know nothing about Sam Borwick, not under that name, anyway.”

“Aye, I see what you’re getting at,” replied Staple, “and I’ll tell you all I know, which isn’t much, and if I seem a long time getting to the point—well, you’re a patient man as I remember you.”

“Yes, I’m patient and I don’t want to hustle you,” said Macdonald.

“Then let’s begin at the beginning,” said Staple. “I always thought there might be trouble with that lad of Borwick’s. Sam was a twister and a liar; not all his fault maybe, for his father was a hard man and life up at High Garth was a hard life. The boy did a man’s work but was never paid a proper wage. Old Nat Borwick did all he could to stop the boy going into the army. He made his wife write to the recruiting people saying that his son was the only labour he’d got on the farm and if the government wanted the farmers to produce food they’d got to have some labour, so the boy’s call up was deferred. The end of that was that Sam made off on his own and joined the army and the old man carried on alone until he couldn’t do it any longer. Well, that’s the background, and some of us were sorry for Nat Borwick. Hard he might have been, but he was a worker and he tilled his land and cared for his beasts till they nearly had to carry him away. And then he said, ‘When Sam comes back, that’s all ready for him. Sam will farm High Garth as me and my dad did, and their dads before them.’ And again we was sorry for the old chap, because we knew Sam would never come back and work up there. We heard Sam had been seen around the cattle market at Leverstone, doing a drover’s job, but he never answered if anybody spoke to him, only to say, ‘I’m not Sam Borwick; never heard of him.’ ”

“Did anybody ever tell Mr. and Mrs. Borwick they’d seen Sam?”

“Nay, what was the good? It’d only have hurt them, had they known their boy was back in England and wouldn’t come near them. It was the same when the story got round that Sam had been sentenced for thieving, with some of his flash friends: Mr. Carter from up the valley, he heard that in the Leverstone cattle market, but Sam never gave his own name, called himself Evans or Davies or Owen or some such—there’s a lot of Welshmen in Leverstone and they’re mostly Evans or Davies or Owen. Well, Mr. Carter said to me: ‘No sort of use going to his parents with that story: only make them ashamed and they’re a sadly pair without making them any sadder.’ ”

Staple paused a moment and looked across at Macdonald, very straight and stern. “That was true enow,” he went on. “I was right sorry for them, still saying, ‘When the boy comes back.’ Well, then there was quite a long while we heard nought and nobody saw Sam. I said, ‘Likely he’s in gaol,’ and he may have been, but ’twas said he’d got a job at the port, cook on a tramp steamer or suchlike. They’ll take on anybody when they’re short of men, for a cook they must have. And then about a year ago, I saw Sam, as Mr. Brough told you. He was driving a lorry behind the cattle market and the police stopped him and took him off. Well, I could have gone to the police and said, ‘I know that chap and I know his real name, which is more than you do.’ And what would have been the use? The police had got the chap and they could charge him. If I’d told his name, it’d have been in the papers all up and down the valley: ‘Son of Lunesdale farmer arrested in Leverstone. Sam Borwick charged with stealing a motor vehicle.’ As I saw it, ’twould bring more grief to the old folks and not a mite o’ help to anybody. Anyway, Sam wasn’t sentenced that time. Later I asked a chap who was beside me when the police took Sam off, ‘Did that fellow the police picked up get a long sentence?’ I asked, and he said, ‘No. They said there was no evidence of intent to steal.’ He was fined thirty shillings and discharged.”

“I may have to go into that later with the Leverstone police,” said Macdonald. “We’ve got to get Sam Borwick identified. Now for a different question. You know old Borwick pretty well, Mr. Staple. Do you think there’s any chance he left anything valuable at High Garth, apart from the furniture, that is?”

2

“I’ve asked myself that question often enow,” said Staple. “Nat Borwick, he’s a rum customer, always has been. He can sign his name and read the headlines in the newspapers, maybe, but that’s as far as his schooling went. He could reckon, of course, tot up a few figures and work out the change due. Now Nat never had a bank account in ’s life; paid ready cash and was paid in cash, that was his rule. If he took a beast to market, he’d ask the buyer to pay in cash. Folks knew him and he had his own way. If he bought stock in, he’d pay for it on the nail, pound notes and silver. Now a farmer who runs his business that way has to keep a lot of cash in the house, and an old skinflint like Nat, he’d have a safe hiding place, somewhere his own missis didn’t know about. That’s a fact, because I had a talk with her one day, after they gave up at High Garth.”

“Did he sell his stock when he gave up?” asked Macdonald, who was beginning to know something about the economics of farming.

“Aye, he sold his stock: twenty head of cattle, poultry and geese, a horse (he never had no tractor), and forty ewes, with hoggetts and shearlings. The man at Fellcock—your place—he

bought the sheep and kept them on the fell, the land they knew. I went to the sale. Nat Borwick cleared over five hundred pounds that day, in cash, mark you, and if some chap bid ten pounds for summat and wanted to pay in silver—well, silver's legal tender, and a lot of farmers save their silver coins and go to a farm sale with a bag o' half-crowns and florins and shillings that's a job to carry."

Macdonald nodded. "So I've heard. Someone told me that one farmer in the valley saved every half-crown that ever came his way and at the end of the war he'd got a milk kit full of half-crowns."

" 'Tis true, I know that. Now after his sale, Nat Borwick had over £500 in currency notes and silver, and I've a feeling he never took all that money with him to the little place they live in now. There was nowhere he could hide it, away from his wife and all. I told you he was a mean old skinflint. If his wife wanted to buy aught, she'd a job getting any money out of him. Real subsistence farming it was up at High Garth. They kept a cow, and Mrs. Borwick, she made butter and cheese. They grew potatoes and some veges, and they had tea oatcake in place of bread and porridge at most meals. The only meat they had was pig meat, pork, bacon, and that. They never went hungry, but 'twas a hard life. About the only things they paid for was candles and paraffin, because oil's cheaper than coal for cooking, and there was precious little wood to cut up there. Well, that's the picture, and I'd say when Nat Borwick realised he'd got to give up, he hid his money somewhere up there at High Garth, where he'd always hid his money."

"Buried it?" asked Macdonald, but Staple shook his head.

"Nay. If he hid it, 'twas in t' house somewhere. Why did he have those bars screwed across t' doors? Because his brass was inside t' house."

"Well, as you say, that's the picture, Mr. Staple, and a very vivid picture you've made it," said Macdonald. "Now let's get back to Sam Borwick. Don't you think, when he came out of the army, he'd have come back to these parts to see if his parents were still living?"

"He'd have wanted to know that, right enow. His father had always said, 'When I'm dead, the land comes to you and you can farm it.' Sam never meant to farm it, but if it came to him, he could sell it. I've no doubt he found out his dad was still alive."

"And don't you think he'd have gone up to High Garth, to see if there was anything he could pick up?"

"Aye, he'd have done that, likely enow, and he'd have seen those bars across the doors and thought a bit. He'd have known his father would have had a sale, and Sam would have known, near enough, what the stock was worth."

"Do you think Sam would have known where his dad hid his money in the old days?"

"Not *where* he hid it. If Sam had known that, the money wouldn't ha' been safe for long. No. The old man was a sight too cunning to let Sam know where t' money was hid."

"I'm interested in those two points you made," went on Macdonald. "First, that Sam would have known, more or less, how much money the sale of the stock would have realised, and second, that seeing the bars across the doors, he argued to himself that the money was hidden in the house somewhere."

"That's about the size of it," agreed Staple.

"So it seems reasonable to suppose that Sam had a go at finding the money," went on Macdonald. "Knowing the house as he did, it was easy for him to break in through the dairy wall." Here Macdonald told Staple the manner of entry. "It was cunning, you know, because

no one going round the outside of the house, as Brough may have done, or Jock Shearling, would have had any idea that the place had been broken into."

"Aye, it was cunning, all right. Now about the dead man you found there, any ideas how he fits in?"

"Several ideas, but they may be very wide of the mark. First, Sam may have searched several times himself without finding anything, and said to himself he might do better if he had some help. The money might have been buried under one of those great flagstones and they'd be a difficult job for one man to lift."

"That's why the money wasn't buried under one," replied Staple. "It had to be somewhere Nat Borwick could get at himself, by himself, and somewhere his wife wouldn't notice while he was on the job, him being that suspicious. Now in many old houses there's a hiding place folks'd never think of: in the roof timbers, in the chimneys, aye, in the very beams, hollowed out by some dead-and-gone chap who was clever at joinery. That'll be an almighty hard job to find, I'm sure of that. And mayhap after Sam Borwick had hunted high and low himself and found nought, he thought he'd ask some clever friend of his to lend a hand." Staple sat and pondered, his wrinkled face frowning in concentration.

"And if so be they found the money, the pair of them, Sam thought it'd be a good idea to leave the other chap in the house for keeps. Then if ever there was an inquiry, the explanation was there, 'twas the dead chap broke in."

"It's a possibility," agreed Macdonald, "rogues are often hopeful. But there's another explanation. Perhaps Sam was followed by one of his thieving friends, a chap who knew that Sam came back to High Garth and thought he didn't come there without a reason. We just don't know, Mr. Staple, but we've got to lay hands on Sam Borwick. Now there's another point I want to discuss with you. You knew that old Borwick never had a banking account: he kept his cash in the house. But you're not the only person who would have known that. If a farmer always asks for cash and always pays in cash, a lot of other farmers must have known what that meant—no banking account."

"Aye, you're right, but 'twasn't so uncommon at one time. When I was a lad, a lot of farmers did the same. 'Twas only the big farmers kept their money in a bank and paid by cheque."

"So I've heard. Now Mr. Brough would have known that old Borwick had no banking account. Brough pays the rent for the land at High Garth in cash, every quarter day, he told me so."

"Aye, he'd pay in cash, and that's what the two old folks live on, they've nought else coming in."

"And Mr. Brough would have known that old Borwick made a good sum at his sale, and since he knew Borwick's habits, Brough may well have argued, as you have done, that the cash was hidden in the house. He never suggested that to me when he asked me to go round the house with him. He only said he wanted to look at the furniture, because some of it was valuable and Mrs. Borwick was worried about it."

"Aye, he might have been wiser if he'd told you the whole story," went on Staple. "Now I once heard you say, 'I'm guessing my way along,' and I've been doing a bit o' guessing myself over this story. Brough, he goes along to Borwick's little place to pay his rent every quarter day, same's he told you, and I've no doubt he has a crack with Mrs. Borwick and she'll tell him her troubles, likely enough. Old Nat, he's in a sorry way and he won't last much longer. When Nat's gone, what is there left for his missis? The land goes to Sam, and Sam

won't bother about his old mother. As I see it, Mrs. Borwick may have said to Brough, 'There's that money Nat got for the sale of his stock and that money's up there, at the house,' and Brough said, 'That should be looked into.' You never know, he may have gone farther and said, 'When Nat's gone, you and I could do worse than make a partnership and farm together.' " Staple chuckled and then went on. "That's an old story, a widow woman with money, and a farmer who could do with more capital, as they all can these days. Now I'm not just havering, Mr. Macdonald. I'm thinking things out my own way. Seems to me, Mrs. Borwick may have said, 'Better find that money before Sam does,' and that looks to me as though one of them, she or Brough, had heard tell that Sam had been seen in the district, looking around as it were."

"Yes, that's sound reasoning," agreed Macdonald. "Now Brough suggested to me that perhaps Sam had got himself taken on by the pipe-line contractors. That would have given him somewhere to live in the district, near enough to High Garth to get over there any night he chose, to look around."

"Could be, though Sam was never a worker," said Staple. "Still, they'd have taken him on, likely enow, he's a hefty-looking chap."

"Now I don't think he's still up there with the gangers," said Macdonald, "but there's just a chance he's hiding out there, especially if he's short of money. Now when things are fixed up, so that I'm working with the county men officially, I'm going up to see the manager of the pipe-line gangs and I shall ask to have all the gangers paraded, so that I can have a look at them. Would you be willing to come up there with me? You know Sam Borwick by sight, and there's not many folk could be sure of recognising him. I asked Jock Shearling, but he never really knew Sam."

"Aye, I'll go with you, if you ask me," replied Staple.

3

While Macdonald was talking to Staple, Inspector Bord went to see old Mr. and Mrs. Borwick. They lived in a dreary little stone house close by the railway line which runs through Lunesdale to Yorkshire. The house had been built by a farmer a hundred years ago, before the railway took most of his land: it was "two up and two down," a kitchen and a small parlour downstairs and two bedrooms above. The Borwicks used the kitchen as their living room and old Nat slept in the parlour, because he could no longer get upstairs. He sat crouched over the fireplace when Bord entered, a tremulous deaf old man who did not answer when spoken to.

"Don't you bother talking to him," said Mrs. Borwick. "He don't take things in, not since his stroke."

She was a shrivelled old woman, with white wispy hair and dark eyes, but still alert-looking and intelligent.

"I'm sorry to tell you that there's trouble up at High Garth," said Bord, and she shrilled:

"Trouble, what do you mean by trouble? That's not burnt down, has it?"

"No. It's not fire," said Bord. "Now Mr. Brough went to the house to see it was all in order. He came to you for the keys, didn't he?"

"Aye, he did. Several times he's said to me, 'Someone should look round that house,' and I said, 'If I'd had my way, I'd 've got you to look round long since.' I'd go myself, but that's a hard place to get to, and doctor says I must keep off my feet. You see, it was all locked up, locked, bolted, and barred, and Nat, he hid the keys. 'Twasn't till after his stroke I dared look

for those keys, he was that difficult and wouldn't have no one go inside the house. I found them at last, under the floorboards in the parlour where his bed is and a job I had getting at them. And I gave them keys to Mr. Brough and he promised to look round and see everything was all right."

"He went to look over the house, and he took a police officer with him, thinking he ought to have a witness. Now I'm sorry to tell you that everything wasn't all right. The house had been broken into. Somebody got into the old dairy, near the back door, and made a hole through the wall into the kitchen. Now can you tell me if there was anything valuable in the house?"

"There was the furniture, very good pieces some of them, years and years old."

"Apart from the furniture?" persisted Bord. "Did your husband leave any money or anything else of value up there?"

"Not as I know of, but he'd never 've told me. Terrible close, he was, never trusted no one, not even me." Her face was grey-white now, her hands shaking.

Bord went on, "Well, if we don't know what was in the house, we can't tell if anything's been stolen, Mrs. Borwick. Now I've got to ask you this: when did you last see your son Sam?"

"Never, not since he went away," she quavered. "We heard he'd joined the army, and 'twas a blow to both of us, but we never saw him again. Nat, he kept on saying, 'When Sam comes back,' but I knew, he'd never come back no more. I've given up thinking of him, he must be dead, Sam must. He never came, he never wrote, all these years. He must be dead." She leaned back in her chair, a frail tremulous old woman, and old Nat mumbled to himself as he crouched over the fire and slobbered horribly. It was a melancholy sight, and Bord knew there was nothing he could do, but he tried once again. "Was there anywhere in the house your husband used to hide things, the money he got when he sold beasts at market?"

"Of course he hid his money. I never knew where, nor Sam didn't, neither. I knew he hid his money, but I never saw where and I never dared ask. He was a hard man, was Nat." Shaking, as though in a rigor, she went on, "Nat, he won't last long, look at him. Sam's dead and Nat's dying and they tell me you found a dead man up there, at High Garth, him as broke in. Not that it makes no odds to me. I'm not far off my own time." Suddenly she made an effort and reached out a wrinkled claw. "You got those keys? The keys of High Garth? Mr. Brough promised he'd bring the keys back."

"I've got the keys, I'll look after them for you, Mrs. Borwick. We'll search the house for you, and if we find anything valuable, we'll let you know."

"You'll never find nothing," she quavered. "Nat hid his money all those years—I never knew where 'twas, I couldn't find out. And now you say the house was broke into and him that did it is dead. Dead men tell no tales, they say. Now, Mr. Brough, he's not dead, too, is he?"

"No, no, he's not dead. He had a tumble, up on the fell there, and he's a heavy man, and they've taken him to hospital."

"Hospital?" she quavered. "That'll be the end, Sam's dead, Nat's dying, Mr. Brough's in hospital, and I'm near the end. Deary me, the pain's that bad; my heart it is." She slipped forward in her chair until her white head lay on the kitchen table and Bord knew that his errand had been futile. She would never tell him anything else, only repeat, "Sam's dead, Nat's dying. . . ."

Chapter Eight

1

It was Bord who went up to the encampment on Bowland. The acting chief constable (deputising during the illness of his superior officer) was a stickler for regulations.

“We can’t co-opt a senior officer from the Yard without going through the regular drill,” said the acting C.C., speaking to Bord after the latter’s melancholy interview with Mrs. Borwick. “By tomorrow morning the formalities will be settled, Bord, and I agree it would be a sound idea if the superintendent went to Leverstone. But somebody should go up to the encampment immediately and have the gangers paraded, Bord, and I think you should go, taking with you somebody who can identify this Sam Borwick, because he’s the chap we want, make no mistake about it.”

So eventually Mr. Staple got into Bord’s car and they drove up through Kirkham into the hills. “We shan’t find Sam up there,” said Staple. “He won’t have waited. News travels: this story will be known by all the gangers and they’ll guess the police will be coming up their way.”

“How could the story have got up there?” asked Bord, and Staple replied:

“ ’Tis Monday. Every Monday a lorry goes up there with goods for the canteen. Everyone on the valley road knows that, and the lorryman, he often has a crack with the roadmen and the garage men, and he’d ’ve been told that story: police going up to High Garth and a mortuary van and an ambulance coming down. D’you think there’s anybody in the valley hasn’t heard?”

“You’re probably right,” agreed Bord. “There’s not much you don’t know about events in Lunesdale, Mr. Staple. Now you may be right about Sam Borwick, that he’d have bolted, but there’s this to it: the manager and overseers will know how many men they’ve got on the pay roll, and if one of them has bolted—well, he had a reason for bolting, for from what I can remember of their regulations, the gangers aren’t paid in full until they’ve worked the time they signed on for, so if a man bolts, he’s got a strong reason to do so. Now, can you give me any description of this Sam Borwick?”

“Carrots,” said Staple, “his head’s real carrots, always has been. He’s a hefty chap, not very tall, but built solid, great shoulders he’s got and muscles on his arms like a joint of meat. And he’s got eyes that go with his hair, brown eyes, but what I’d call hot, as though some of the colour from his hair got into his eyes. I’ve known Sam by sight since he was a nipper and there’s no mistaking him. He was never no beauty and the other youngsters, they always called him ‘Carrots.’ ”

“Well, if he wanted to get around without being recognised, he’d have dyed his hair,” said Bord, but old Staple snorted derisively.

“Sounds easy, Inspector. He’d have had a lot of dyeing to do. His eyebrows and eyelashes, the hair on his chest, even on his arms, he was proper carrots. And remember, if he got a job up yonder, he’d ’ve been living in the huts with the other gangers—no privacy. If a chap dyes his hair black and his chest and arms are all carrots, the other chaps are going to notice and everybody in the place’ll hear about it.”

"I dare say you're right," said Bord. "Well, I'm going to ask the manager to parade the men, so that you can have a look at all of them."

"Sam won't be there," said Staple.

2

"You'll have heard that we've been investigating trouble at High Garth, the empty farmhouse over the fell, about five miles away, Mr. Wharton," said Bord. They were sitting in the manager's office and Wharton replied:

"Yes, I've heard, Inspector. Now let's get the facts clear. You're investigating a case of assault, which occurred this afternoon, and you've found a man's body in the house. Now tell me this. Was the dead man killed recently, today or yesterday?"

"No, he wasn't. His body must have been there for months," replied Bord. "Anything I tell you is in confidence, of course."

"That's all right, I know when to hold my tongue," said Wharton. "How you're going to find out what happened months ago I don't see, but this afternoon's a different cup of tea. You're thinking one of our chaps attacked your farmer, perhaps? Well, I can tell you you're wrong: this was one of the few afternoons when we knew just where all our chaps were—and we can prove it."

He touched a bell on his desk, and two men came into the office. "These are our overseers, Mr. Lawley and Mr. Wright," said Wharton. "This is Inspector Bord, Lawley, he's looking into this story Turner talked about. Now tell him about this afternoon, Lawley, and just how it is you know the gangers were all present and correct, and no chance of any absentees."

Lawley described precautions taken when blasting was in progress and then went on: "We've got forty-eight men working on the pipe line. You'll know as well as I do that you can't keep tabs on four dozen men when they're scattered or milling around, here, there, and everywhere. They're careless devils, a lot of them. The only way to ensure safety on this job is to divide them up into gangs, four gangs of twelve, each with an overseer, and it's the overseer's job to keep his eyes on his gang, every man jack of them. In times past, we've had men injured when the charge was delayed in action and the men thought the job was finished and scattered, getting too near the blasting point. Well, the rule now is that gangs have to stick together in their appointed area until I send the overseers word that operations are finished. I can tell you—and so can the other overseers, that the men were all around the blasting site from one o'clock until four o'clock, when we knocked off. That satisfy you?"

"It will indeed, Mr. Lawley, couldn't be better," replied Bord. "It's not often we get such a clear piece of evidence when we're asking about such a large body of men."

"Well, you can see the other overseers, Walton and Lang," said Lawley. "You'll find they can answer for the men they were in charge of. Now would you be willing to tell us this, Inspector? Have you got anything against any of our men, or is your presence here just due to the belief that labour gangs, drawn in the main from industrial areas, are a likely source of criminals?"

"We've nothing against any of your men, so far as we know," rejoined Bord, "and our inquiry isn't confined to the men here. We're pursuing inquiries right through the valley and the whole rural district. There's one chap we want to get a line on, and it's possible he may be employed here, but we don't know. Mr. Staple here could identify the man if he saw him."

“He’s a youngish chap, thirty-five or so,” said Staple. “He was always called Carrots. He’s got hair that’s as bright as flame, real shining red, and the hair on his arms and chest is red, his eyes are brownish-red and he’s a hefty fellow, huge shoulders, and a bit bandy about the legs.”

Wharton turned to Lawley. “You know the chaps better than I do, Bob. Have we got a redhead among them?”

Lawley shook his head. “No, not one that fits Mr. Staple’s description. Most of the blokes are dark: there’s a few mouse-coloured and a couple of tow-headed chaps. Rather funny, I had a word with Dr. Morse when he was up here when we had that Asian ’flu. He was saying that Englishmen are regarded as a fair-headed race and he quoted that bit in the history books about Angles and angels, if you mind that one. Englishmen have changed since those days, he says. Look at your lot, a typical set of toughs, they’re nearly all dark-headed—and it’s true. That’s why I’m so sure we haven’t got a redhead, like the fellow you describe. We had one about a year ago, I don’t mind his name, but he was no good. Wouldn’t put his back into the job and was everlastingly grumbling. He gave the job up and walked out on us before he’d worked his contract time, so he lost his bonus. We pay our hands a bonus at the end of their agreement, it helps to keep them on the job. It’s often a perishing wretched job, especially in winter, and an incentive helps.”

Bord nodded. “Thanks very much, Mr. Lawley. That’s a capital piece of evidence, and I’d like a further word with you later about your redheaded chap.” He turned to Wharton. “Now what I’d like, if you can arrange it, is a chance for Mr. Staple and me to see all your men. I take it they’ll be in camp now. Could you parade them so that we could have a look at them?”

“Now, look here, Inspector; it’s up to every responsible man to help the police,” replied Wharton, “but think things out a bit. This isn’t the Army, you know, and I’m not in the position of a commanding officer. I’m a manager and it’s my business to keep the gangs on the job, and the contract finished to time. To do that, I’ve got to keep the men in good heart, contented with conditions here and so forth. Now while they’re working, there’s got to be discipline, as Lawley told you about the blasting job. The men have to take orders from the overseers and by and large that’s acknowledged. The majority of the men have been working for the company on other projects and they know the regulations are for their safety as well as for keeping the job moving. But when the day’s work is over, our men are free, just like other working men. They feed in the canteen and sleep in the huts because it suits them that way. Except at weekends, there’s no transport to take them to a town, and this place is a perishing long way away from anywhere. They may like pubs and cinemas, but they don’t want to tramp best part of twenty miles there and back over the fells after a heavy day’s work, so they stay around the camp. We’ve got a cinema projector in the big hut, and a TV and radio, and they settle down contentedly enough. But their time’s their own in the evenings and apart from a bit of supervision to see that there’s no rowdyism or smashing things up, we don’t interfere.”

“Yes, I see your point,” said Bord; “but you’ve got the authority to ask them to file past, I take it? You can give any reason you like.”

“Don’t you go thinking they’re simple,” retorted Wharton. “They’re not. They know, more or less, what happened over yonder at High Garth. Turner, the canteen lorry driver, told them, and the reaction was, ‘Now we shall have the cops up here, trying to pin something on us.’ They will have seen you arrive. By the way, did you leave a man in charge of your car?”

“Yes, I did,” rejoined Bord. “I’m not that simple myself.”

Wharton nodded. “Well, then, you can guess how their minds work, Inspector. They’ll have seen your car and they’ll know it’s a police car and they’ll have said: ‘There you are:

here are cops, trying to prove we put paid to the bloke they found. We're working chaps and we're all from away, so it's got to be us.' And if you'd left your car with no one in charge, you might have found it upside down when you went to drive home. I'm not trying to make out that the men are potential criminals, far from it. They're a decent set of chaps so far as working goes. We've had no trouble, barring a few deserters who couldn't face the hard work and the weather, but once they get the idea that the police are making a beeline for them when a crime's been committed, they'll resent it, and once they feel they're not being treated fairly, they'll get difficult." Wharton paused a moment. "You want me to 'parade them,' as you call it," he went on, "order them to file past so that you can have a look at them. If I give that order, some may oblige, but others won't. Some of them may take it into their heads to go out over the fell. I've no means of knowing if any of our toughs have ever been in the hands of the police: if they have, they'll be the chaps who won't oblige. They just won't be there when they're wanted. If you want to have a look at them, why not wait till morning, when you can see them as they leave the huts, and there won't be any bother?"

"If there's anybody here I want, tomorrow may be too late," persisted Bord.

"Following the same argument, it's already too late," persisted Wharton; "but remember this: you can't charge any of our chaps with assault if the assault was committed this afternoon," he went on. "We've told you that we can answer for the men this afternoon; and, as for the business of a man whose body you found in the farmhouse, you said he'd been dead for months. If any of the gangers on this job had had a hand in that, they wouldn't have stayed on here waiting for the body to be found."

"That's sense," said Staple. "Now, see here, Inspector, I came up here to see if I could help you by recognising carroty Sam. I follow what Mr. Wharton meant when he said, 'This isn't the Army,' and you can't order free blokes around like you can the troops."

"Yes, yes, I follow that and I don't want to make difficulties or raise a riot," said Bord; "but I want to know if all your hands are in the camp. Can you get that question answered?"

"I'll see to it," put in Lawley. "If you'd insisted on having your way, Inspector, marching 'em past, we'd have had trouble, sure enough, but since you're meeting us, seeing our difficulties, I'll do my best to help you. I'll go round the huts and I'll get Walton to help me. We can talk to the chaps. Any reason why I shouldn't tell them the assault happened this afternoon and we know where they all were this afternoon?"

"No, you can tell them that," agreed Bord and Lawley went on:

"And seeing it's Mr. Staple here who was to identify the man you're looking for, why, he can come round the place with me. No one's going to take him for a policeman, no offence meant."

Staple chuckled. "That's a right good idea," he said. "How about it, Inspector?"

"All right," agreed Bord. "You'll report if any men are missing, Mr. Lawley? And I'll get Mr. Wharton to give me details of any men who deserted, so to speak, during the past year, left the job without giving notice and didn't wait for their bonus money."

"I'll give you the details all right," rejoined Wharton.

3

Staple followed Lawley to the big hut which was the men's recreation room, and Staple found himself stared at by the men who were slouching in their chairs, some of them round the television screen, some reading papers. Lawley spoke up, loud and clears "There you are,

Mr. Staple. You wanted to see how our chaps fill in their spare time. Not so snug as a farmhouse kitchen, maybe, but not bad on the whole, is it?"

Staple played up. "Looks champion to me," he said. "You lads are well off, by gum, you are. When I was a young 'un—I'm a farmer as you've guessed—I worked on a farm five miles from home, and I had to tramp it, not even a bike, couldn't afford one. Left home six every morning and lucky if I were back home by eight of an evening. Now you've got a heavy job, up here, I know that, but once work's over, you've got no tramping to do."

"And they get a decent hot meal," added Lawley. There was a burst of raucous laughter, and someone shouted: "Wanting a job, Granddad?"

"Now don't you go laughing at me," said Staple. "I'm seventy-six and I've done enough work to merit me pension. But if some of the lads says to me, 'I'm fed up with farming, I'd sooner work on the pipe line, not such long hours'—well, I can tell them they might do worse. Any of you lads ever worked on the land?" he asked.

"Aye, 'twas a mug's game too," put in one big heavy dark tough.

Staple was sharp enough, despite his age. He counted the men as his eyes went round from chair to chair, table to table. There were thirty-two men in the room.

"Have you joined the police in your old age, Granddad?" asked one.

"Don't you talk silly. I've got six acres to farm, and eight head o' grazing cattle across the valley yonder," retorted Staple, then he added: "I know what you're getting at. You saw me in a police car, that it? Well, the Inspector gave me a lift. There's been a mite of trouble, as you may have heard. A friend of mine, Mr. Brough, he was knocked down this afternoon, over the fell yonder, and seeing as I know the fell side a darned sight better than the Inspector does, I came up here with him to tell him about the fell grazing rights and that—Mr. Brough's land, that is. And I took the chance of coming up here to see how you lads was fixed." Lawley intervened here and told them the time Brough had been injured. "Right convenient for the Inspector," he added cheerfully. "We was all on the job, every man jack of us, as you chaps know."

"But that's not the whole of it," put in a man at the end of the hut. "They've found a stiff in that old farmhouse, haven't they?"

"Aye, they have. Been dead for months, I'm told," said Lawley, "so you needn't go getting in a flap, Tom Martin. You've only been here six weeks, and so's Thomas. If I was you, I should keep quiet about that and leave it to the police. We've got this afternoon sorted out nicely. Now, Mr. Staple, you come and see the small canteen and the sleeping quarters. We'd better hurry, or else the Inspector will be driving off and leaving you to tramp home."

" 'Twouldn't be the first time I'd tramped over Bowland," said Staple cheerfully. He followed Lawley into the small canteen, a hut where tea and coffee were served. Eight men were sitting at tables there, playing cards or dominoes, and eight pairs of eyes stared up at Staple, as he said, "Good evening, lads. If I were a few years younger I'd come and cadge a job in this outfit. You look cosy, by gum you do, tea laid on till bedtime: that'd suit me fine."

"We do our best," said Lawley. "Come and look at the cubicles. If the chaps are poorly we've got a male nurse to tie 'em up or whatever it is. We get a lot of minor accidents, one way or the other, and if a cut's looked to and cleaned up, it saves a peck of trouble later." There were eight men in different cubicles, some lazing on their beds, some mending, some brushing their clothes—a domestic-looking lot, for all their size and toughness.

"That's the lot," said Lawley, closing the last door, and Staple said:

"Aye. I counted—forty-eight, all told."

They went back to the manager’s office and heard Wharton saying, “Tim O’Hallaran, he was only here two weeks, last February, it was. Lawley, do you remember the redheaded Irishman, O’Hallaran?”

“Aye, I mind him well enough, and a lazy swine he was.”

“Irishman?” asked Staple.

“So *he* said,” replied Lawley. “He was no more an Irishman than I am meself. Lancashire, he was. I knew from ’s speech. Well, if it was a red-polled ne’er-do-well you were after, Mr. Staple, I reckon the fellow who called himself O’Hallaran was your man. But where he is now I can’t say, save that it’s not here. Now you’ll be able to tell the Inspector that all our chaps are in the huts. You’ve seen ’em and you’ve counted ’em.”

“That’s right, forty-eight of them,” said Staple; “and no trouble at all. I saw all their faces and I know I’ve never seen any o’ them before.”

“Well, thanks a lot, Mr. Wharton,” said Bord. “We’ve done the job we came to do, and not caused you any trouble, I’m hoping.”

“No trouble at all, Inspector. You can give our chaps a clean sheet so far as this afternoon is concerned. I admit I’m glad it’s turned out the way it has. I hate having trouble with the gangs and if you get their backs up, the work suffers and everything goes haywire.”

As Bord and Staple got in the car again and they moved downhill in the grey evening, Staple said: “Well, that’s that. It wasn’t any of that lot downed Brough. The overseers know what they’re talking about.”

Bord nodded. “Yes, we’ve got to accept their evidence. The next thing to do is to try to get news of Sam Borwick. Perhaps the Leverstone chaps will help us there.”

“One thing you can be sure of: he won’t show his face in our valley,” said Staple.

Chapter Nine

1

It was dusk before Macdonald reached home again on that Monday evening (and when he saw the lights gleaming from the windows of Fellcock, he realised how the solitary farmhouse indeed meant “home” to him, his own house, his own land). After leaving Mr. Staple to accompany Bord, Macdonald followed his own devices. He went to see Mrs. Brough, in the guise of sympathetic farming neighbour rather than of police officer, though in Macdonald’s case the two characters often merged into one. Mrs. Brough was a big stout old lady with a magnificent knot of white hair coiled above her plump rosy face. She was a fine upstanding woman, showing no tendency to weep or lament.

“I’m so very sorry about your husband’s accident,” said Macdonald. “I blame myself for it in a way. I sent him hurrying off, for I hadn’t any idea he wasn’t in the best of health: he always seemed so hale and hearty and vigorous.”

“True enough,” she replied. “He’s never been one to fuss or make ado about his health, though doctor did warn him to take things quietly, but bless you, what man has any sense that way? But I’m sorry I didn’t stop him going to that house: I knew no good ’d come of it. I had a feeling there was trouble there. I’d have said, ‘No, you don’t go inside there, ’tis no business of ours, leave it alone.’ But when he told me you were going there with him, Mr. Macdonald, I thought that’d be all right.”

“I wish you’d tell me exactly what you mean when you say you had a feeling there was trouble there, Mrs. Brough.”

“There’d always been trouble in a manner of speaking. Old Nat Borwick was a hard, cruel cheese-paring old skinflint. A proper miser he was. He’d rather see his wife go in rags than allow her a few shillings to get a decent coat to her back. Hid his money, wouldn’t even trust it in the bank in case folks knew what he’d got. And he was hard to that boy, cruel hard. Sam was a rogue, but could you blame him, treated the way he was? Oh, that was a dreadful house, I’ve always said so. And when Sam ran away and old Nat had to give up, I said, ‘A good thing, too. If they’d gone on as they were much longer, heaven knows what might’ve happened.’ He had a good sale at the end, old Nat did. Stock was fetching a good price, and look at the way they’ve lived since in that wretched cottage they’ve got.”

She broke off and Macdonald put in: “It was known that old Borwick had a good sale. Do you think he hid his money away in High Garth?”

“Of course he did,” she replied, “and put them bolts and bars across t’ doors, and his old wife without a single decent blanket to keep her warm in winter, a poor thing she was, a bit weak in t’ head if you ask me. And my husband, he was sorry for her. ‘We’ll see to it she gets her rights some time,’ he said. That’s why he was so taken with his idea of going up to High Garth, to see that no one had broken in. And I reminded him, ‘Everyone knows old Nat hid his money up there, you be careful lest some say, “You was the first to find it.” And that was when he said, ‘I’ll ask Mr. Macdonald to come with me, and he’ll bear witness there wasn’t anything there shouldn’t have been.’ ”

“Yes, I understand that,” rejoined Macdonald, “but the only thing your husband mentioned to me was the furniture. He had an idea that Sam Borwick might have been moving some of

the furniture and selling it. Mrs. Brough, have you ever heard it said that Sam Borwick has been seen in these parts since he went away?"

"No one's ever said they *saw* him, though plenty's said: 'Sam's had a good look round up there, likely, and if he couldn't get in t' house, there's t' barn.' You see, it's known that some old farmers used to hide their brass in the barn. There was old Tom Grisedale at Hawkeshead. He hid his money in the shippon, under one of the flagstones his bull stood on, and that's a fact. His wife found it after he died. 'I knew 'twas there,' she said. 'I've seen him fussing around there. And what could I do? I daren't go near the bull, let alone move him.' "

Macdonald laughed. "That was a cunning idea. There wouldn't be many thieves who would risk moving another man's bull even to get his brass."

"You're right," she said. "Never trust a bull, they'll turn on you one day."

"Now there's another question I've got to ask," went on Macdonald. "After your husband was hurt, Mrs. Shearling said she thought she saw a man on the fell side, and she thought it was one of Mr. Brough's men, who used to come up to the High Garth shippon when Mr. Brough wintered his beasts there."

"Well, she'd got to say summat," retorted Mrs. Brough acidly, "Jock Shearling was around there himself, wasn't he? She didn't want no one to say that Jock was mixed up in this, though I wouldn't put it past him. Now, about our men, there's Bob Walton, Jack Metcalf, and Tim Healey—Tim's an Irishman stayed over from oat harvest Mr. Brough took him on at the hiring fair at Bentham, just for harvest, but when his time was up he asked to stay on and, being a handy fellow with stock, Mr. Brough kept him: used to handling stock, he is."

"Was it Tim Healey who used to go up to High Garth to fodder the beasts in the shippon?" asked Macdonald.

"I couldn't rightly say," she replied. "I don't have nought to do with the farm these days, it's as much as I can do to manage the house single-handed. Now if you want to see the men, you'll find them in the cottage down by the beck, that's where they live, and Mrs. Walton—that's Bob Walton's wife—she does for them, cooks their meals and all. But you'll find they was all about the place this afternoon, Inspector Bord, he's asked them already."

With a word of thanks, Macdonald took his leave and left the big farmhouse. He found the cottage by the beck, drummed on the door with his knuckles, and it was opened at once by a youngish dark fellow, tallish and lithe, less heavily built than most farm workers. The lamplight shone out on Macdonald and a cheerful voice said:

"Why, it's Mr. Macdonald from Fellcock. I've seen you up there. And how's the master? We heard he was in a poor way. Had a nasty tumble? And 'tisn't the first time: he gets dizzy-like sometimes."

"He's safely in bed and they say he's pulling round," said Macdonald. "Has he had other falls?"

"Aye, that he has," said another voice, a Lancashire voice this time. The first man was certainly an Irishman. "It's true what Tim says, Mr. Brough gets dizzy-like, ever since the time he fell off the oat stack, last back-end, he comes over dizzy and he's tumbled more'n once."

"That's a bad sign, that is," said a third man. "He should ha' seen doctor and taken a holiday. I said to him, 'The three of us, we can manage all t' work here, up till hay time anyway. You have a holiday. Take the missis away to Blackpool,' I said; 'that'll do you a right lot of good,' but he wouldn't listen, and he dared us to tell Mrs. Brough he'd had a tumble. 'Don't you name it,' he said."

“I wish I’d known,” said Macdonald. “I’d no idea he wasn’t well. Now will you tell me what you three chaps were doing this afternoon?”

“Spreading muck,” replied the second of the two speakers.

“Walton?” asked Macdonald.

“Aye, I’m Walton and this is Jack Metcalf. Drove the tractor, Jack did. Tim Healey here, he loaded the trailers in the yard, Jack drove and I went with him on the tractor. We tossed the muck out on the ten-acre—in heaps, you know the job, and later Tim came up with us on the last load and we was muck-spreading till six, when we came back here to tea. Muck-spreading, that’s a right heavy job. Mr. Brough, he ought to buy one o’ those muck spreaders. You can do the job in half the time.”

“Less than half,” put in Metcalf firmly. “Two men and a tractor with a muck spreader can do more in a half day than four men in a full day working by hand.”

“So I’ve heard,” said Macdonald. “Now Metcalf’s the tractor driver. Healey, you’re the stock man?”

“In a manner o’ speaking, but we all lends a hand at all the jobs here,” rejoined Tim.

“Was it you who used to go up to High Garth to fodder the beasts when Mr. Brough wintered stock in the shippon there?” asked Macdonald, and Healey replied:

“I did and all, and I tell you I was glad enough when the boss said it wasn’t worth his while, what with the time I took getting there and back. You try it, mister!” declared the Irishman. “Best part of an hour it do take, walking up there, and it’s steep and all. Rough ground ’tis, too. You should know, mister. The land falls away from Fellcock the same it falls from High Garth, and that’s a real tug, getting up there from the valley here. The boss, he’d given it best a long time. If he went up there he drove in his motor as far as your place. I had to tramp, all weathers, too: sinful ’twas.”

“When you were up there, did you ever see anybody about, Healey?” asked Macdonald.

“None but your chap, Jock Shearling. Jock he came and had a look, and said, ‘I could do with this shippon. We haven’t got all the standing room we needs,’ and I said, ‘You talk to my boss about that. I’ve had enough of this ’eathen ’ill you call the fell side.’ ” He broke off and then added: “I didn’t see anybody around but Jock, but since you’re asking, I’ll tell you this. I sometimes wondered if there wasn’t someone dossing down in the hay loft there.”

“What made you think that?”

“Well, ’twas the way my dog carried on. She’s a good dog, Patsy, and one day she rushed round that barn like a mad thing, aye, and she went up that ladder to the loft, a thing she don’t often do. And I thought, ‘Sure to goodness, ’tis the rats she’s after.’ But when next I went up to the loft, to pitch the hay down to fodder the beasts, I had a look round and I thought, ‘Someone’s been making free with this hay.’ ’Twas all bundled up against the wall, and I thought ‘Someone’s been sleeping up here,’ nice and warm it’d be, under the hay, with the beasts down below, wonderful hot, ’tis, in a shippon when that’s full of beasts. But I couldn’t see nought, and I thought, well, if some poor soul was benighted up in those hills, I wouldn’t grudge him a bed in the hay. I looked around, careful-like, other days, but I never saw no more signs, so happen he didn’t come again.”

“Did you ever report it to Mr. Brough?” asked Macdonald.

“I told him I thought someone had been around the shippon, but I didn’t say much in case he told me to go and look around of a night. And he said, ‘That’s a perishing long way off—and I don’t want to lose no stock. It can happen,’ he said, and ’twas after that he said as how it wasn’t worth while using that shippon. ‘There’s those gangers, out on Bowland,’ he said.

‘Maybe some of them know how to drive a bullock,’ and I said, ‘Happen they do—and know a butcher who’s not that particular where a good beast comes from.’ But ’twas all right, we lost nought, and your Jock Shearling’s nearer at hand and he can keep an eye on things.”

2

As Macdonald walked back to his car, he pondered over the story he had just heard and pondered, too, over the fact that Mr. Brough had had various reasons to impel him to make an inspection of High Garth, reasons which he had not imparted to Macdonald. There was the probability, known to a number of people in the locality, that old Nat Borwick had hidden his money in the house or buildings at High Garth. There was Tim Healey’s story of someone sleeping in the barn.

Before he left the valley road, Macdonald telephoned to Bord, who had just got back to Carnton. There was no telephone at Fellcock and it would cost a lot of money to get a line out there. Neither, of course, was there any telephone at the pipe-line camp out on Bowland, but Bord had hurried back and he was about to tell Macdonald that the gangers could be counted out so far as any illicit activities in the afternoon were concerned.

“And the same goes for Brough’s men,” said Macdonald. “I went along there to have a look at them. Now I’m going home to talk to Jock and Betty Shearling.”

“Right,” said Bord, “and the C.C.’s fixed things up with your boss, and you’re to go to Leverstone tomorrow. I hope you’ll pick up something helpful: we’re drawing blanks everywhere so far.”

“Well, we haven’t had very long to work in,” said Macdonald. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Betty was looking out for him when he arrived at Fellcock. “Your fire’s burning nicely, Mr. Macdonald, and the kettle’s boiling. I’ve made you some sandwiches and there’s a whole pile of savoury toast, all sizzling hot.”

“And I’m ready for it,” said Macdonald. “When you’ve made the tea, come in and pour it out for me, Betty. I want to talk to you.”

She came into Macdonald’s room with the teapot and poured out sedately, seeing that the toast was near to hand. She had a serenely capable way with her and was never shy with “the gaffer,” and Macdonald found it easy to talk to her.

“Betty, you said you saw a man on the fell side at the back of the house just before Jock and I brought Mr. Brough in here.”

“Aye, I saw someone walking away. I mean I saw his back, I didn’t see his face, and I thought, ‘It’ll be one of Mr. Brough’s men, come to round up them bullocks, the black Aberdeen Angus he’s so proud of.’ They break the fences sometimes and come round the back. Jock says they scent the hay and root crops he puts out for our store cattle. I thought, ‘That’ll be Tim Healey,’ because it’s him who always came up here to see to Mr. Brough’s beasts, and when Mr. Brough came up in his car, wanting to look over his stock, he’d send Healey up here to round the beasts up. But after I’d thought, I knew ’twasn’t Healey: ’twas a heavier man than Healey. It might have been Metcalf, he’s a soldier build, but I can’t rightly say. His back was all I saw, and he’d got a cap on, pulled right down, like the caps they mostly wear for milking, when their heads are against the cow’s flanks.”

“How long did you see him for? Was he hurrying?”

“No. I’d have noticed if he’d hurried. Farm chaps don’t often hurry, they take their time. I saw him there and said to myself, ‘That’ll be Healey, looking for them beasts,’ and I was busy

and I didn't go on looking out of the window, but a minute later I said, 'That's not Healey, that's not his build,' and when I looked again he wasn't there, and I said to myself, 'Happen he's gone to wait by Mr. Brough's car, hoping for a lift, for it's a tidy step down to the valley.' "

"He didn't do that," said Macdonald. "It's all a bit odd, Betty. It wasn't one of Mr. Brough's men, I've seen them and they were together all the afternoon, spreading muck. Not one of them would have had time to come up here. And it wasn't one of the pipe-line men, either. They were doing a job of blasting this afternoon, I expect you heard the charges, and the overseers can answer for it that all the men were there, under their eyes."

"That's a right funny thing," she said. "Must ha' been someone from away, 'tisn't often we get strangers up here. They'll come at the back-end, when the heather's out, and come picking blueberries and blackberries, too, along the fences, but now there's nought to come for."

"Did you ever know Sam Borwick, Betty?"

"No. I've never set eyes on him. 'Tis years since he went away, in the war that was, and I lived in Gimmerdale, as you know, and I was too busy to come all this way and nought to come for." She laughed a little. "Jock and me, we've often named him: 'When Sam Borwick comes back,' we'd say—meaning never. You see, Jock and me, we'd have liked to farm High Garth, and if so be Sam Borwick wasn't ever going to come back, that might have been a chance. Not that we bother now. We're right well off here."

"Well, I don't suppose High Garth's going to be empty for always," replied Macdonald. "Perhaps we could farm it together. Go and ask Jock to come in here, and tell him to bring another cup."

Jock came in slowly and sat down when he was bid. Macdonald told him of Tim Healey's story about someone having "dossed down" in the hay loft.

"Did you ever notice anything of the kind yourself, Jock, when you first looked round the shippon?"

"Aye, I noticed. I went up to the hay loft, to see if any of the hay up there was fit for fodder, Mr. Brough having said I could have it. And when I saw someone had rolled in the hay, made a bed of it as 'twere, why I thought, 'That'd be Healey, having a nice rest, or sheltering from the weather.' He was up there at High Garth a long time, some days. I reckon Mr. Brough thought he took a mighty long time to fodder a few beasts and that's why Mr. Brough said, 'That don't suit.' All of three bob an hour he pays Healey and more for overtime and Mr. Brough wasn't paying good money for Healey to have a nice lie in t' hay. And then he's courting, Healey is. I don't want to throw dirt at no one, but I reckon that fat lass of Healey's came up there when he was there—and that's how it could 'a been."

"It certainly could," rejoined Macdonald. "What do you think of Healey, Jock?"

"Not all that," said Jock. "He's good with beasts, but I did think he didn't play fair with Mr. Brough. Wasted no end of time up at High Garth, Healey did, and 'twas time he was paid for. Then I never did like Irishmen."

"Did you ever see Healey walking round the house?"

"Not so's to notice. He'd come round to the back and over the fell, looking for beasts that had strayed. He'd have done better to fettle up those fences," added Jock; "but Healey was never one to do a job when he hadn't got to, and 'twas Mr. Brough's fault in a manner of speaking, a lot of new posts was wanted and he ought to have sent some up on the tractor. Healey wasn't going to carry posts all that way." He paused a moment and then added, very slowly and solemnly: " 'Tis this way, gaffer. You've found a dead man in that house. It's easy

to say, ‘Healey might ha’ downed him and left him there. Plenty of time he had to break in and all that.’ And easy for Healey to say, ‘Shearling, he lives close by, likely he did it.’ ”

“Oh, I know,” rejoined Macdonald, “but I’d say this: in my opinion that dead man had lain where we found him much longer than six months. In my judgment, his body had never been moved, he lay where he died. Now you and Betty have only been at Fellcock for six months. Before that you lived in Gimmerdale, ten miles away. Did you ever come over to High Garth or Fellcock before I brought you over here last September?”

“No, we didn’t,” replied Jock and Betty put in:

“ ’Twas no use. We knew Fellcock was for sale, but we’d no money. We never came here. Jock and me, we was both working, and we didn’t waste time walking over the fell all that way to look at steadings they was asking £4000 for. If it’d been £400, likely we’d have come, though we hadn’t four hundred neither. But we never came within miles of High Garth nor Fellcock till that day you brought us. The fifth of September that was, and I shall never forget it.”

“Well, you’ve nothing to worry about,” replied Macdonald.

Chapter Ten

1

The man whom Betty Shearling had seen from the back windows of Fellcock had realised that he was visible from those windows. The instinct of the fugitive urged him to run, to hurry away, to get clear before he was pursued. He had seen Jock running across to High Garth after bending to examine Mr. Brough and the fugitive knew that another man was at High Garth. If instinct urged the man to run, cunning urged him to seek cover. A moment after Betty had turned from the window, the fugitive was lying flat on the rough ground among the dead heather and the dried bents. He lay there for some moments until he was satisfied that there was no immediate pursuit, then he raised his head just enough for him to see over the intervening ground. There was nobody on the fell between him and the enclosing wall of Fellcock, no one in the garden, no one at the windows. Satisfied of this, he began to crawl, very slowly, on his belly, his face close to the ground. He knew the background well and he believed that if he could gain a hundred yards he could elude any pursuit. After the first hundred yards he crept into a cleft in the ground, it was deep enough to hide him from any observer save one who stood immediately above him. That cleft, he knew, continued up the fell side, getting deeper and deeper: it was the bed of a beck which had once run down the fell side from a spring higher up. The course of the beck had been diverted to fill the water tanks at Fellcock. Higher up, the cleft opened into a pit which had been scoured out over the course of centuries by the water which was collected on the ridge of the fell, flowed underground, and broke surface at the "well" or spring, whence the farmers of Fellcock had once watered their beasts and obtained their domestic supply. Since the beck had been diverted, there was a deep hole or pit and the cleft the fugitive followed led him directly to this hiding place. Again he risked a reconnaissance; he saw two men hurry out from High Garth and later he saw them carry Mr. Brough on a hurdle to Fellcock. Still later he saw one man go to a car, start it up, and turn off down the hillside in the direction of Greenbeck. There was another car standing there—Mr. Brough's car, and for a moment the fugitive was sorely tempted to go and try to start it up. He was a skilled car thief and the lack of an ignition key did not bother him. He had a variety of ignition keys and substitutes for same in his own pockets and he could generally start up any old car without difficulty (modern cars were a different matter, but Mr. Brough's car was very old). Although he toyed with the temptation of making off with the car, intelligence warned him against it—he was an intelligent fellow (that was why he was lying on the fell side under a blue sky instead of in a prison cell as many of his friends were at that moment). Intelligence reminded him that there was only the one road down to the valley, the road by Greenbeck and through Crossghyll, and that everybody on that road would know Mr. Brough's car. Seeing a stranger driving it, they would assume the driver to be a thief. They might block the road with a tractor and drag him from the car. No, however tempting the thought of driving, the fugitive knew that it was safer to keep to the fell side. He could stay where he was, safely hidden, until evening, and then, when dusk fell, he could get to his feet and get a move on, and find a vehicle which would take him down from the heights of Bowland to the railway line. That would be a better bet than the old rattle-trap yonder which was known to everybody for miles. From his hiding place, the fugitive was able to see all the

arrivals which had caused so much excitement in the neighbourhood. The constable on his motor bike, followed by Macdonald in his gleaming new Vauxhall. These two walked across to High Garth and shortly after a police car arrived, and Inspector Bord followed the two earlier arrivals: then came an ambulance and finally a mortuary van. . . . The fugitive saw these with a sinking heart: he was a cowardly fellow and he felt sick and chilled as he thought out the implications of all these comings and goings, but he was glad he hadn't attempted to get away in Mr. Brough's car.

"The road's lousy with police," he thought, and wondered if the fell side would shortly be too. Not that he bothered a great deal about an immediate search; he was too well concealed and he could see without being seen—an enormous advantage. If pursuit came his way he could crawl up the gully to the crest of the fell before anybody could reach him, and once over the top—well, he knew the ground and he counted on being able to get away, or to take cover in the gullys which sloped down to the next small valley. The fell side, which looked an unbroken stretch, covered with last year's heather and grasses, was cut up by small ravines or ghylls, and offered a lot of excellent cover.

The fugitive stayed for a long while in his pit, comfortably aware of the crevices into which he could crawl if any pursuit occurred; he had known his hidey hole for a long time, and no one had ever found him once he had taken to this particular burrow. He watched until he saw the two men leave High Garth and then he risked creeping on. The sun was going down now, and soon the evening shadows would crop on. He hauled himself over the lip of the pit and crawled up one of the dry ravines to the ridge immediately above him. Beyond that there was a dip in the ground and beyond that dip the fell side rose again steadily to the ridge which formed the skyline to the south of Fellcock and High Garth. He was now nearly half a mile from either house, too far away for any observer in either house to see him, but he still kept to his cautious mode of progress, crawling, face to the ground. It would be dark soon, and then he could make a break and stretch himself. There was no hurry, he wanted darkness to carry out the plan he had in mind. "Wait till they're all asleep," he said to himself. "Blokes who've been working hard all day, like them poor devils do, don't wake up that easily."

Darkness came at last and he stood up thankfully, cramped and cold. He had been sweating when he started his escape and the crawl had been hard work. Now the night wind cut through his sweat-drenched clothes and he shivered. Glancing back, all he could see was a light shining in the kitchen window of Fellcock. High Garth was in total darkness and he could not even make out the black bulk of the house. Not that he wanted to see it, he hated the house anyway. An idea flashed across his mind: he could fire the place, the old house and its old furniture would burn like a bonfire, and even if the valley fire brigade came up, there was no pressure of water for their hoses. It was an idea he had often toyed with: "Burn the bloody place. I'd like to see that burn." But caution prevailed again. He'd done pretty well so far, he was as good as clear. He had come over the fell by devious routes that afternoon, to "have a look see," to consider getting into the house and setting fire to it. It was generally solitary enough, he knew that, apart from the chap who came to fodder the beasts in the shippon. But today it had not been solitary. He had seen Mr. Brough walk across from Fellcock, and had not worried. The old farmer often came up to look at his beasts: he never bothered about the house. Mr. Brough had been followed by the blighter from Fellcock. The fugitive had heard about Macdonald's purchase of that property and had not liked what he had heard. This afternoon the fugitive had seen the two men approach the kitchen door and then unlock and unbar it and go inside, and fear had taken hold of him, for he knew what they would find

there. With knees shaking and heart pounding he had fallen flat on his face, crouching in a terror which robbed his limbs of strength, his mind of the power to think. He had lain there and then, at long last, lifted his head because he *had* to see, something impelled him to look. It was a mistake and he knew it, but panic had possessed him. Then he crawled away, back behind Fellcock, and only then had he stood up, to get away more quickly. He'd been a fool, and he knew it, but it hadn't turned out so badly. He was all right now, no one could ever catch him on the fell side in the dark. With the kindly darkness all around him, he swung his arms to get the circulation going, and then, half crouching, he set about the climb to the final ridge; it was stiff going. He paused at times to get his breath—and to listen; but there was no sound save the night wind, and he felt better now that exercise had subdued the rigor of cold which had unmanned him. A chilled man shivers, a frightened man shivers, and the fugitive knew from experience that the rigor of cold can pass all too easily into the rigor of fear. With bent knees and hunched shoulders he made his way up the ridge—it was steep, but the effort warmed him. He had put about a mile between himself and the two farmsteads, and he had about four miles to go to carry out his plan, and plenty of time to do it. Remembering that there was another crevice ahead, he promised himself a cigarette. He could lie flat and conceal the flicker of a match with his own solid body. There was no one nearer to him than the folk in the farmhouse below, he knew that because he had listened, ear to the ground, for following footsteps.

Finding his sheltering crevice, he crouched in it and lighted a cigarette. Still with his face to the ground, his cupped hands concealing the tiny glow of his fag, he drew the comforting tobacco smoke into his lungs; it was better than food. Now that he was warm and had had a smoke, he felt his own man again, something quite different from the shivering terror-stricken fugitive of an hour ago. Things were in his own hands now, he told himself. He knew just what he was going to do and how he was going to do it. Only a short way ahead, on the top of the next rise, he would be able to see where he was going.

He got to his feet again and strode up the slope: at the top he gave a gasp of satisfaction. That was it, way down there, and it was fine to see lights and signs of life again after the blanketing darkness and loneliness of the fell side. He was looking down on the pipe-line encampment and he knew each of the blocks from which the lights shone out. The men's common room, the small canteen. All the chaps would be snug down there, listening to the radio, watching TV, playing cards, reading papers, enjoying a cup of char in the small canteen. He picked out the windows of the manager's office and he knew that some of the smaller windows were the men's sleeping quarters. To the right of the main buildings, he knew, was an open space, concreted, where the lorries were parked. Even as he watched, he saw another line of light, which seemed to stretch out right across the distance, and he said to himself, "Boy, that's it, the railway—not so far away, neither. That'll suit me fine."

He would have to wait, he knew, until all those lights in the huts were put out, until total darkness indicated that everybody was asleep. There were no guards posted down there and he knew it. He thought of his route, not the main track, the concreted road which had been laid so that supply vans and the engineers' cars could reach the camp from Oakham in the valley far below. It would be a mug's game to take that road, he could be pursued by any fast-moving vehicle, pursued and caught. He meant to take the rougher track which followed the pipe line itself; it would take him three miles. If he managed to get "one o' them bleeding lorries" started up, he could follow the track, even bump over the fell, until such time as he judged it wiser to jump and let the lorry wreck itself on the incline, so that it looked as though the driver

—who had disappeared—must have been killed. They could waste time looking for his body and he would be hurrying across towards the railway line which would take him to the anonymity of industrial cities. No one had seen him, he argued to himself, only that old "b——" who came hurrying away from High Garth, and he wasn't going to do any talking yet a while.

Stretching out on the ground again, the fugitive watched the lighted encampment and noticed that some of the lights were no longer shining. It was after ten now, and the men were generally early to bed, dog tired after their heavy working day.

2

In the big hut, the men had ceased talking; several of them were half-asleep already, lulled by the croon of the radio. They had been talking, inevitably, about the news from High Garth and about the police officer who had come up to the camp with old Mr. Staple.

"We was in luck, if you think it out," said Barney White to Tom Martin. " 'Tisn't many afternoons the gang bosses can swear there wasn't a chap missing from the job, and that Lawley, he's a truthful cove, he'd never swear to what he wasn't sure of, not even to help a pal out of a difficulty."

"True enough," agreed Martin. "The cops can't pin this job on any of us." He sat in silence after that, thinking hard. He was thinking of the man who had attacked the farmer on the fell side, and got clear away, seemingly.

"I wonder which way he went," pondered Tom Martin. "He'd never have gone down to the valley. There's always chaps working on the land, and they're quick to spot a stranger if so be he was a stranger, and if he wasn't he'd have been careful no one set eyes on him: and that road down there in the valley, 'tis a busy road, cars passing all the time and mostly local folks in the cars. Reckon he didn't go down to the valley. If he wanted to beat it, safer to come up the fell, this way. Once the whistle's gone and work's finished, there's no one around here and after dark he could walk miles, knowing no one could see him."

"Walk miles," he echoed to himself; "it's miles right enough." Then he remembered the lorries, parked on the clearing beyond the huts. "If he's smart with engines, one o' those lorries would just suit him," thought Martin. "It'd be worth watching out in case he tries to be clever. You never know, this may be journey's end and quite time, too," he added to himself.

3

The fugitive waited until nearly midnight before he closed in to the encampment; every light was off now, the place in total darkness. The sky was clear and a moon was shining from the south, so that he had no difficulty in making his way round the angle of the big hut and on to the concrete where the lorries were parked. He went down on his hands and knees here and kept in the shadow of the lorries, because he realised that when he was upright the moon threw his own shadow, surprisingly black, on the white concrete. Not that he thought that anybody would be looking out from one of those black window spaces—"too tired, poor beggars," he meditated. He crept up behind each lorry in turn and examined its registration number in the faint light reflected up from the surprisingly light concrete. He knew exactly which lorry he wanted. Months ago he had driven one of those lorries and he had pocketed the ignition key before he left, one of those pieces of forethought of which he was capable. He had been completely silent in his movements up to now, and there was silence all around him,

not a soul stirred. He crouched down by the bonnet of the lorry for a few moments and felt it with his hands. It was warm, his luck was in. The engine would start at a touch and then he would let in the gear and plunge off, over the concrete, across the road which led direct to the valley, to that other track he knew about, and then—pound over the fell for a bit before he abandoned the old vehicle in the quarry pit over yonder.

With thumping heart, he raised himself and got into the driver's cab. He had no idea that someone had crept up behind the lorry, someone who moved as silently as he did himself. The other man stood there, quite still, with one hand on the edge of the lorry's body, one foot pressed against the backboard, poised, ready. He never stirred until the driver was in the cab and had pulled the self-starter. The noise was surprising in the stillness and still more startling was the roar of the engine as it fired. The man at the rear gave one heave of his supple body and then he was up, balanced on the tailboard and then over into the empty space of the lorry. The driver could hear nothing, he jerked into gear and the cumbersome vehicle lurched off, clear of the concrete, across the official road and on to the bumpy track and the cover of the hilly fell side. The driver said, "I've done it . . . I've done it." He had no inkling that he had a passenger behind, still less that the passenger might well be named Nemesis. The passenger crawled forward until he was close against the driver's cab. Over one arm hung a coil of rope and he knew just what he meant to do with it.

4

Lawley was the first person to wake up when the noise of the engine shattered the silence. He heaved out of bed, heavy with sleep, and went along to Wharton.

"Hear that, Chief? Someone's made off with one of the old lorries."

Wharton sat up and stretched. "We shall have to chase him. I'll get my car out, it's faster than any of the lorries."

"No go, Chief. If you catch up in a car, he'll be able to smash you off the road, whoever he is. A car can't argue with a lorry. I'll get the new lorry started up, that's faster than the old ones. One thing, there's only the one road, it'll simply be a matter of tailing him until we reach a main road or a telephone."

"All right, Lawley, I'll be with you in a brace of shakes. Better get some clothes on, it's pretty nippy. Who the hell do you think has played us this trick?"

"None of our chaps. More likely something to do with the High Garth story. Well, the only thing to do is to chase him, and ram him when we catch up. I'll get Weldon to come along with us. O.K., I'll just get the new Bedford started up."

Chapter Eleven

1

Macdonald drove to Leverstone early the next morning, leaving the investigation in Lunesdale to be pursued by Bord and his men from Carnton. At the C.I.D. headquarters in Leverstone (a gloomy building in a gloomy industrial city), Macdonald was welcomed by Chief Inspector Tring, an experienced investigator of forty-five, whose eyes were lively and youthful, despite his greying hair.

"I'm right glad to see you, Super," said Tring. "You're one of the chaps I've long wanted to meet. As it happened, when you've been on the job in this country before, your cases had no connection with our city and so we didn't happen to meet. This time, the reverse is true. The man whose body you found (in a derelict farmhouse, I understand) was a criminal we've been trying to trace for months. The pathologists sent his fingerprints along, and though circumstances didn't permit of first-rate impressions, the dabs and the general description of physical traits leave no room for doubt. Your man was known to us as Wally Millstone, a chap with a lifetime of thieving behind him, who's been 'inside' time after time."

"Millstone," echoed Macdonald, and Tring rejoined:

"You wouldn't remember his name. He never hit the headlines, he was just one of those tiresome fools who never learnt by experience. But maybe you heard of the theft at Raine's Wharf, a furrier's warehouse down by the canal, when a night watchman was coshed."

"Yes. I remember that. You caught one of the thieves and he was sent to Dartmoor, because he was given a long sentence."

"Ten years," agreed Tring. "He was lucky—the night watchman didn't die, or he might have hung for it. It was a dastardly business."

"And the man who was sent to Dartmoor was named Rory Macshane," went on Macdonald, "and he broke prison last month and got clear away, but where does Millstone come into the story?"

"There were three men associated in that warehouse theft," said Tring. "We knew there were three, they were seen on the canal bank before they broke in. Three, but we only caught one—Macshane, and he took the rap. We found a set of fingerprints on a door handle, those were Millstone's—your bloke. I always reckoned he made those fingerprints when he was getting away. The doorknob was stiff and he couldn't turn it with gloves on, couldn't get a grip, or that's how I thought it was. He'd got gloves all right, we found the one he dropped. It looked to me as though he was in a panic and all he could think of was getting away; same with the second chap, whose identity we don't know. They dropped their loot and got out on to the towing path, because we found their footsteps. As I see it, they realised that our chaps were at the front and sides of the warehouse, so two of them, Millstone and another, beat it by the back and got on to the towing path. They dropped their loot, because they'd coshed the night watchman, one of them, and they didn't fancy being caught for that job. The only one who stood his ground was Rory Macshane, and we picked him up, just as the others made their getaway. Rory acted as cover to the others in a manner of speaking. I didn't feel all that happy about it, Super. We had no proof that Rory had done the coshing, but he was there, with

the night watchman at his feet, when our chaps got in—and that was that. He wasn't easy to take either, they said he fought like a wild thing, which didn't do him any good."

"What did Macshane say? Didn't he give you a lead about the other two?"

"He did not. He said he didn't know them, and that's all he ever did say. We advised him to turn Queen's Evidence, but he wouldn't utter. We couldn't get a word out of him about himself, either. We didn't know anything about him until he got away from Dartmoor, and then, when his photograph was published, a small cockney bloke rolled into his local police station with that photograph. 'I know this chap,' he said; 'but he wasn't called Rory Macshane when I knew him. He was Robert O'Hara in Stalag X, and he got away from there, escaped by cutting a hole through the cellar wall. He not only got out, he stayed out, they never caught him. He was the only escaper who ever got clean away from Stalag X. He got to Switzerland. He was a hero, Robert O'Hara was, and if I knew where he was right now, I wouldn't give him away. No chap ever had a better pal than Robert O'Hara. And it was true in the main," added Tring thoughtfully. "Rory Macshane *was* Robert O'Hara, and Stalag X was on the borders of Lower Silesia and Robert O'Hara walked to Switzerland."

"I don't wonder he got away from Dartmoor then," said Macdonald. "So far as escaping goes, he was an expert, he knew all there was to know."

"Admitted," said Tring, "but why did a chap like that ever take to crime, he had a good army record and his escape from Stalag X was what you might call an escaping classic, a brilliant piece of work."

"You and I were never P.O.W.s in a German punishment camp," said Macdonald. "I'm quite willing to believe it was an experience to develop the worst in human nature; it also developed the ability to steal and to hide things. Every potential escaper had to keep his eyes open for items which might aid his project, from concrete to electric flex, from 'goon' uniforms to passes and identity cards. Having acquired the necessary by skilful thieving, the escaper concealed his loot by taking advantage of any possible cover. Come to think of it, it was the sort of experience which might develop an antisocial habit of mind in any young, impressionable active fellow. Incidentally, what sort of character did the Dartmoor staff give Rory Macshane as a prisoner?"

"He was a good prisoner," rejoined Tring. "Gave no trouble and was a good worker. One or two of the warders said they didn't trust him, he was too good for a prisoner with a record of violence. They didn't know his wartime record of course, nor his escape story. Macshane said he'd never been in the army; he was a southern Irishman and England's wars were no business of his. He was a cunning one, all right. I should like to know how he ties up with this story of yours at High Garth and the death of Wally Millstone."

"Well, I think it would be almighty hard to prove that Macshane was guilty of Millstone's death, and not too difficult to prove that he wasn't," rejoined Macdonald.

"Tell me how," said Tring.

"Well, you've got proof that Millstone was alive at the time of the Raine's warehouse theft," said Macdonald. "He left his fingerprints on a doorknob, and you didn't find his body about the place, so I think you're right in assuming he got away, by the tow path, as you said. But Rory Macshane didn't get away, he was arrested that same night and he remained under arrest until he was tried and sentenced and sent to Dartmoor, or so I assume."

"Quite right," said Tring. "Once our chaps had handcuffed him, he didn't get away, not till he broke out a month or six weeks ago."

“Then he couldn’t have killed Millstone and got him to High Garth immediately after the Raine’s Wharf affair, could he?” asked Macdonald and Tring nodded in agreement. “And Macshane didn’t kill Millstone, since he (Macshane) escaped from Dartmoor, because Millstone has been dead for a year at least, and Macshane only broke out a month or so ago. In short, there’s no time when Macshane could have killed Millstone. My own opinion is that the third member of the Raine’s Wharf gang (whom you never laid hands on) directed Millstone to High Garth immediately after the Raine’s Wharf job, and said, ‘There’s a marvellous lay-up for you. You can stay there as long as you like and nothing to worry about.’ And that third member was probably the farmer’s son at High Garth, whom Bord came and asked you about yesterday. Name of Borwick.”

“We’ve never charged anybody named Borwick,” said Tring.

“So I gathered, but I expect you’ve got his dabs in records under another name, because it’s pretty certain that Borwick’s been through your hands more than once. Now you’ll be getting copies of all the prints Bord and his chaps found at High Garth. They did a careful job, and if Sam Borwick’s prints aren’t among them, I shall be surprised. For one thing, he used to live in that house, for another, it seems pretty certain he’d have come back there to search for the money it was known his father must have hidden, somewhere about the place.”

“Well, we’ll get busy on records as soon as your stuff comes in,” said Tring. “Meantime, you might just put me wise on this. In your opinion, is Sam Borwick hiding somewhere in Leverstone?”

“In my opinion, no, though I’ve no doubt Leverstone is where he would like to be. I believe Sam Borwick was around High Garth, in Lunesdale, that is, yesterday afternoon, and he’d have had a difficult job to get away in broad daylight, either by road or rail. Everyone in the district knows his face and everybody was talking about him, since there’d been trouble at his old home. I don’t think Borwick would have attempted to get away in daylight and by dusk Bord had got everybody alerted—roads watched, railways watched. So my opinion is that Borwick is still in Lunesdale, but I may be wrong. So keep your chaps on the lookout for a bloke who was always known as Carrots, red hair, reddish eyes, the sort of ‘red man’ who’d have an almighty hard job to camouflage his redness either with dye or bleach or anything else.”

“I’ll remember,” said Tring. “I should like to get him, especially if he was concerned in that Raine’s Wharf business. We got Macshane, you’ve found Millstone. If Borwick was the third—well, I want him quite a lot.”

“You’ve a feeling that Borwick and Millstone left Macshane to be sentenced for a job they did themselves.”

“Aye,” agreed Tring. “Then there’s this to it: the other two must have been certain in their own minds that Macshane wouldn’t give them away, or they’d never have left him alive. One of them had a heavy cosh—and it wasn’t Rory. We never found the cosh. In fact, as you might point out, if you weren’t such a mannerly bloke, there was the hell of a lot we never found out about that job—and Rory didn’t help us any.”

“Rory interests me quite a lot,” said Macdonald. “If he’d turned Queen’s Evidence as you suggested, he might have got a lighter sentence, also the jury would have taken into consideration the fact that with three men on the job, the chance of Rory’s having coshed the night watchman was only one chance in three, though there’s another way of looking at it. Sam Borwick may have spread himself on his own prospects; the land he was going to inherit from his father, and the hard cash that was hidden in the farmhouse.”

“In other words, Sam Borwick was a chap it was worth while keeping in with,” said Tring, and Macdonald went on:

“That’s one way of looking at it. I’m trying to get inside Rory Macshane’s mind. He may well have said to himself, ‘If I get caught and “put inside” for a long stretch, I can get away. I’m sure I can get away—from any prison in England. I’ve learnt the “know how” and learnt it the hard way.’ So Macshane thought it worth while to come in on that wild scheme of looting the furs in Raine’s Wharf, saying, ‘If it comes off, we shall be in clover. If I’m copped, I can get away.’

“That’s all right, so far,” continued Macdonald. “He got away, but the tug-of-war comes later. He’d have had no money and he wouldn’t have dared to try to get a job. Once an escaped convict’s been described and his photograph issued, one of his mates is likely to recognise him and give him away.”

“He’d have needed money,” said Tring thoughtfully. “He had to have food and there were only two ways of getting it, paying for it or stealing it, and there weren’t any reports of thefts after Macshane escaped from the moor.”

“I expect he’s too smart to fall into that temptation,” said Macdonald; “but I have an idea that Rory Macshane, with all his P.O.W. experience, would have found it child’s play to filch food from some small village store, where the tins are piled up higgledy-piggledy in the customary manner, and the shopkeeper would never notice that one had disappeared. But when I spoke of him needing money, I was thinking of a longer term. A fugitive’s life is all right at first; there’s the exhilaration of having got away. But as month succeeds month, a man needs an aim, some hope of better things than a life like a hunted animal, always hungry, always at a stretch. I think that after a while Macshane’s thoughts would have turned to comfort and security, and the chance of talking to his fellow men. That’s when I think he may have thought of Borwick and the farmhouse he talked about. I said I thought Borwick was in Lunesdale, and I think Macshane won’t be far away. So it’s up to me to get back there, too, and see if I can put my theories into practice.”

2

When the fugitive had got his lorry started up in the open space by the pipe-line encampment, his heart rejoiced and he felt that his problems were over. It was some while before his confidence was shattered. For Tom Martin (as he was known to his mates) had his own plans and these were not limited to catching the man who got away with the lorry and handing him over to the authorities. Martin had a much more elaborate plan. During the first few moments, he made no move, he crouched against the back of the driver’s cab, until the lorry had turned off the concrete, crossed the road, and was lurching over the fell side, parallel with the pipe-line trench. Then, when he judged it too risky to wait any longer, he got one leg over the edge of the lorry’s box body, got his coiled rope ready in his right hand, and switched on the torch he held in his left hand. A second later, with perfect accuracy, he got a loop of rope over the driver’s head and around his neck and drew the rope tight—as tight as he deemed necessary. He heard the spat-out profanity, and the heavy vehicle lurched madly. “Better step on the brake and pull up, Sam. It’s your one chance. You’ve got me to deal with, and you know who I am. Pull up, blast you, stop! You’re finished. Stop, I say!”

As the unhappy driver, half-throttled by the rope around his neck, put a hand to try to free his throat, another coil of rope was dropped cunningly in place, this time lashing one arm to

his body. The rope jerked again, and Tom Martin realised his captive was too far gone to be capable of stopping the vehicle and it bucketed down the rough slope. Tom leaned over the driver's shoulder and got a grip on the steering wheel. He gave it a furious tug and the vehicle slewed to the left and hit a hillock whose solidity brought the lorry to an abrupt stop and stalled the engine at the same time. Making sure that he had a good grip of his ropes, Martin jumped out, opened the door of the driver's cab, and hauled on the ropes. "Come out, Sam, and don't try to make trouble. I won't hurt you more than I must, but if you're awkward you're going to be strangled, make no mistake about it. Step down, and then three steps backward and don't try any games. I'll look after you. Now do as you're told."

The wretched Sam had no option; he got down out of the cab, assisted a little by his captor, and then took three steps back, when the solid earth failed him. He stepped into a void—the yard-wide trench of the newly dug pipe line. It was Tom Martin's skilful support which saved Sam from a broken neck, he was directed towards the trench and virtually lowered into it. Thereafter he was covered by a heavy tarpaulin which had been in the lorry; terrified by the darkness and the sense of being buried, he tried to let out a yell. Next moment he was straddled by Tom Martin, who hissed at him, "Quietly now, or it'll be the worse for you. I mean you no harm, but you've got to be quiet."

Next moment, Tom's hands were over the other's face and around his neck. A scarf was tied over Sam's mouth, effectually gagging him, and then, despite the victim's struggles, his legs were lashed together.

"I'm going to leave you here for a bit," said Tom; "but I shall be coming back, and then you can answer a few questions and answer them right. If you do that, I'll let you go, none the worse—more than you deserve. Now don't you create. I've always played straight by you and that's a damn' sight more than you've done by me. I'm going to cover you up, nice and safe, else the cops'll get you in two twos, so you just stay quiet."

There was not much else that Sam could do; the tarpaulin was pulled over his face again, shutting out the night sky, and then he realised, with ever-increasing terror, that his captor was collapsing the sides of the trench, so that earth and stones fell on the tarpaulin in ever-increasing weight. Tom Martin, who was not by nature a cruel man, lifted the tarpaulin for a moment from his victim's face.

"You can breathe all right," he said encouragingly, "nothing to worry about, I'll be back and let you out after you've answered those questions. You stay quiet and the cops'll never find you. You're all snug and covered up. I'm going to move this bleeding lorry, so that they don't come straight for you."

With this, Martin got into the driver's cab, after he had examined the ground behind it. There was no reason, that he could see, why the powerful vehicle could not be reversed and then driven away from this spot. If the front bumpers and wings were crumpled by impact with the bank, what did that matter to a lorry? Just as he got into the driving seat he heard the roar of another lorry starting up at the camp and he knew it had turned on to the concreted "main road" which connected the camp with the road to Kirkham. "Couldn't be better," he said to himself, "they won't be able to hear me starting this one. I'll wreck it somewhere convenient, half a mile or so away, and they can hunt for the driver there."

He got the engine going, then into reverse gear. The cumbrous vehicle heaved itself clear of the bank, roaring and backfiring, but it kept going. The steering had not been improved by the collision with the bank, but Martin managed to head it in the desired direction and it pounded over the rough ground like a tank. He stayed at the wheel until he calculated he was a

mile away from Sam's hiding place, then he jumped, and landed unhurt, just as the lorry crashed into a hollow and more or less capsized. As its engine stalled again, Martin could hear the pursuing vehicle, about half a mile behind, and again he said to himself, "Couldn't be better." He ran to the road, towards the approaching lorry, waving his arms and shouting. The headlights were switched on and he ran towards the driver's side, yelling, "The lorry's here, sir. I heard it start up and ran after it. I didn't catch it, but it's here all right. The blighter wrecked it, and he's made off down the road. You'll catch him in two twos."

"All right, Martin," said Lawley. "We'll go in pursuit. Can you find your way back and report to Mr. Bell? He'll probably be able to haul that lorry on to its wheels again. Are you sure you can find the way?"

"Sure to goodness, sir, I couldn't lose it," rejoined Martin cheerfully. "The whole place is lit up like a Christmas tree."

"Have you any idea who it was pinched that lorry over there?" asked Wharton and Martin replied:

"Not one of our chaps as far as I could tell, but Mr. Bell can sort that one out by finding if anybody's missing. I'll report, sir, never you fear. Sorry I didn't catch the blighter for you, but he got into gear very quickly and off he pounded. I got hold of the tailboard, but I had to let go."

"You did your best," said Wharton, and Martin started running back to the camp. "That went pretty well, all things considered," he thought. "After a few hours in that trench, reckon he'll be ready to talk when I let him out."

Chapter Twelve

1

After his debate at C.I.D. Headquarters at Leverstone, Macdonald sought out the rank and file, the constables and point-duty men, all the humble "other ranks" whose careful observation and devotion to duty form the basis whereon is built the whole structure of detection in the wider and more impressive sense. Macdonald wanted to learn more about Sam Borwick, the farmer's son who had taken to crime rather than going home to work on the land. It was, in a sense, an improbable story, but the roots of it had been indicated by Brough and Staple when they spoke of old Borwick's miserliness and the hardness of life at High Garth, a life which was not only devoid of even elementary comforts but, for Sam, entirely lacking in independence or the opportunities of doing those things which all young men want to do. Sam had no money—never a penny, Staple had said, though he must have known his father got very fair prices for the cattle he reared on the High Garth pastures. As Macdonald saw it, it was this experience of poverty, of denial of a young man's simplest demands on life, which might have turned Sam Borwick into a thief. It was not only the poverty, the lack of a few pence to spend, it was the knowledge that his father *had* money, hidden away somewhere, and would not part with a penny. His son could go about in rags, but was never given a new coat. Other lads of his age could go courting, could take their lassies to the cinema, could have a pint at the pub. Sam could do none of these things. Doubtless he had searched for his father's money, pondered Macdonald, feeling he would be justified in taking it if ever he found it. He had "done a man's work" as Staple said and never been paid for it, so there developed in his mind the sense and conviction of the thief, "I'll take it if I can get it. I've a right to it."

It was a big heavy young constable in the cattle market area who first talked to Macdonald of "that carroty chap." Bob Sheldon, the constable, told how he had first spotted Carrots some years ago. "Just demobbed, a whole draft of them there was, off the troopship *Empire Halliday*. Most of 'em had got someone to meet them, you know how it is, or if not that, they'd got homes to go to and knew what they was adoing of, if you take me. It was another bloke who said to me, 'See that chap; he's got nowhere to go. No one to meet him, no home, nothing.'

" 'That's tough luck, mate. Where do your folks live?' I asked him.

" 'Not got any folks, me father and mother died, now there's only me,' he told me.

" 'Did you live in Leverstone before you was in the army?'

" 'No, in the country, up north. I was a stock man. Isn't there a cattle market somewhere in this town?'

" 'There is and all. I'll take you there if you want to find a job. Why not try the Y.M. first, they'll give you a meal and fix you up with a bed for a bit.' "

That was Sam Borwick's first appearance in Leverstone. He had gone to the Y.M., with papers not his own, he had got hold of another man's pay book, but at the Y.M. they gave him a meal and promised him a bed. Then Sam Borwick went to the cattle market and the abattoir. There was no difficulty over getting a job, for he was a skilled cattle drover. He could manage beasts and he had no fear of them.

"I think he must have gone straight for quite a time," went on Bob Sheldon. "They said at the market he was a useful chap. He could handle beasts and he was used to getting them into cattle vans—aye, and he could shift the vans too, if needful. Learnt to drive in the army, he said. I noticed him around, he *was* noticeable, with his red hair and all, and I was puzzled over that story of his—no home, no folks, nowhere to go. I know I said to myself, 'Your folks may have had good reason to cast you off.' He looked a liar to me. Howsomever, he got on all right, best part of six months it'd be, in a job with Parkinsons, the cattle dealers. Then there was some trouble over a missing lorry and Carrots was questioned. Evans he called himself. Nothing was ever proved and Parton, my mate, he said he'd seen Carroty Evans around with Millstone, and Millstone was a bad 'un, an old lag. Evans said he'd given Millstone a lift, when he was shifting a lorry, and he'd left Millstone in the cab while he (Evans) went to a cafe for a bite, and when he came out the lorry had gone. It's an old story, sir," said Bob Sheldon, "but the lorry was found later, so no charge was ever made, but we all kept our eyes open for Carrots after that. He was charged once, stealing cash from one of the dealers in the market, and he got ten days for that, the cash being found on him. Then he disappeared for quite a bit and we reckoned he'd left the town, but Millstone was around, and Parton said he wouldn't be surprised if Carrots wasn't working with Millstone. Millstone was a clever thief, he watched out and he knew when there was stuff worth pinching. Parton said as how Millstone had the wits and Carroty Evans had the beef. Millstone was a little rat of a man, no strength in him, but Carrots was a great hefty lout with muscles like a prize fighter's. If it was strength that was needed, Evans had it all right."

"Well, it looks as though your friend Parton was right and that Carrots ganged up with Millstone over this Raine's Wharf job," said Macdonald.

"Have they proved that, sir?" asked Sheldon. "I never heard that Carrots was on that job."

"They haven't proved anything about Carrots," replied Macdonald, "but they know that Millstone was one of the three who broke into the warehouse, and Millstone's dead. I found his body myself in a derelict farmhouse in Lunesdale."

"What the heck was he doing up there?" asked young Sheldon. "Millstone, he was city bred, a real slum rat, he was, the country would ha' given him the proper sick. Not like Carrots. Carrots must ha' been reared in the country all right, that's what puzzled me. These country lads, they may be dumb, but they're generally straight."

"Carrots came from a hard home," said Macdonald. "All work and no play, a father who was a real miser and not a bit of comfort anywhere. So Carrots ran away and joined the Army, and when he was demobbed he decided to stay in Leverstone—and the rest we can guess at. But Millstone's body was found in High Garth, the farmhouse which was Sam Borwick's home, Sam Borwick being Carrots."

"Did Carrots kill Millstone?" asked Bob Sheldon.

"We don't know; it looks as though Millstone fell downstairs and broke his neck. My own guess about the matter is that Sam Borwick told Millstone about the farmhouse after the Raine's Wharf affair. Sam could have said, 'You can lie up there as long as you like. No one will ever know and you can be snug and warm.' "

"I can see him saying that, sir," put in Sheldon, "and there's this. Millstone was a clever cracksman, a skilled thief. If anybody got away with anything from that warehouse, I bet it was Millstone, a nice bit of mink or sable or some such, tucked up his coat. Carrots hadn't any wits. He may well have said to himself, 'Millstone's got a few bits and pieces we could raise

some cash on and I've got nothing, so Millstone's the chap to keep in with. If I put him on to a good thing, we can share out the doings later.' "

"That's reasonable enough," said Macdonald, "and there's this point. It seems pretty certain that Sam's father had left some cash hidden in the place and it was hidden cunningly so that even old Mrs. Borwick couldn't find it. If Sam wasn't very bright and Millstone was a skilled thief, Sam might have thought it a good idea to get Millstone to search the house for the hidden cash."

"Aye, and shoved him downstairs once he'd found it," put in Bob Sheldon, and then Macdonald said:

"Now about this Raine's Wharf business. The only one of the thieves who was caught was Rory Macshane. Did any of you chaps know anything about Macshane?"

"No, sir. He'd never been convicted in Leverstone and none of us had ever seen him around. We were puzzled over it, because we do get to know most of these chaps by sight—Millstone and Carrots (Borwick, I should say), we knew them all right, and some of the blokes who went around with them, but none of us had ever noticed Macshane. My idea was that Macshane ganged up with Millstone and Borwick, because he was broke. When he was taken, he'd no money on him and he was hungry. We didn't know anything of his history up here, though he had a conviction for thieving in the midlands. He was a fair puzzle, he hadn't a home or a job, and no one came forward to identify him. Millstone and Borwick got away by the canal path—we slipped up there, we ought to have got them, and Macshane had to face the music. He never spoke a word about the other two, never even tried to say it wasn't him who coshed the night watchman. In a sense, Macshane seemed simple, but there was something about him we liked, the way he wouldn't give his mates away. Well, sir, you've found Millstone and he's dead. Where do you think Borwick and Macshane are?"

"I think they're both in Lunesdale," replied Macdonald, "and the sooner I'm back there myself, the better. I wanted to learn all I could about Carrots and his friends, and I know it's you chaps on the beat who notice most. So good-bye for now and thanks a lot. Go on keeping your eyes open; you're the chaps we rely on for the odd bits and pieces."

2

Macdonald got into his car again and started the tedious drive through the outskirts of Leverstone to gain the A6 road, through Preston and Lancaster to the peace of Lunesdale. The traffic was heavy, an unceasing throng of lorries and cattle vans, all moving slowly, most of them obstinately on the crown of the road, so that driving was a weary business of following with such patience as the driver could muster. Since the oncoming traffic was as dense as that heading north, chances of passing were few and far between. As Macdonald drove, he thought to himself that he had at least got the overall picture of Sam Borwick. The boy from that remote house on the fell side, the boy who had never a penny of his own. The discipline of army training had done nothing to straighten out the warped embittered lad, and once demobilised in the industrial town of Leverstone, Sam had gravitated naturally to the lowest levels of that society, the criminal element whose motto was "take what you can and don't get found out." Millstone, the dead man in High Garth, fitted easily into the picture. Wally Millstone had the wits, Sam Borwick the brawn. The unknown factor was Rory Macshane; his record showed that he had good stuff in him. No man could have done what Rory had done in his escape from Stalag X unless he had had unusual qualities of courage, self-control,

hardihood, and intelligence. "But once he got back to a place like Leverstone, he fell for the dregs of humanity, the thieves and cosh boys," pondered Macdonald. "Was it that he couldn't live without the excitement of pitting his wits against authority? After the hardships and excitement and triumph of his great escape, he needed the stimulus of perpetual striving against the order in which he found himself. What can we do with chaps like that? He's too good to throw on the scrap heap. Send him exploring somewhere. The antarctic, the Sahara, somewhere tough enough to absorb his energies. A man like Don Whelpton might make use of Macshane." Whelpton had been exploring in Greenland. He had made tough journeys, mainly by sledge, and he had told Macdonald he was looking out for a recruit, strong, adventurous, self-reliant, who would join him in another expedition. Rory Macshane would have to finish his prison turn, but if there were something to look forward to when he was free, he might behave like a more manageable being. "Catch him first and talk afterwards," thought Macdonald.

Macdonald met Bord in Kirkham, and he heard the results of the investigation at the gangers' camp on Bowland. How all the gangers had been accounted for during the afternoon when Mr. Brough had had his "accident." "It was a stone which knocked him out," said Bord, "the surgeon's sure of it."

"A stone thrown by Sam Borwick," said Macdonald. "I'm sure of that. There was only one point in attacking Brough at that moment, because Brough had seen Sam and recognised him, and so far as I can tell, there was nobody else but Sam that Brough could have recognised. He didn't know any of the gangers, he never went up to the camp."

"O.K., Super," replied Bord, "but Sam wasn't up there among the gangers. Staple went up there with me and we saw all the chaps, all forty-eight of them, and Sam wasn't among them. They checked the gangers again last night, after someone tried to get away with one of the lorries, and all the men were there."

"I bet it was Sam who tried to pinch the lorry," said Macdonald. "He'd been getting practice with vans and lorries in Leverstone. You say he 'tried to get away with a lorry,' didn't he succeed?"

"That he didn't. He started the engine up all right, but instead of taking the metalled road, he must have turned on to the fell side and he wrecked the lorry in a small pit not a couple of miles from where he pinched it. We haven't found a sign of him, nor his body neither, but I've had all our chaps out making a screen across the pipe-line approaches and every track a vehicle can move on. I don't think anybody's got away, Super."

"We'll hope they haven't," said Macdonald; "but it's a difficult job to keep an eye on the approaches to a great stretch of open fell like Bowland. You might have an army out there, but a cunning fugitive could worm his way through. Tell me all you can about this lorry incident. Who was the first to follow up after the alarm had been given?"

"Wharton and Lawley woke up when they heard the engine start and they got another lorry out, the fastest they'd got, to go in pursuit, meaning to ram the first one when they overtook it. It was difficult, you know, the thief was driving without lights. Wharton assumed, wrongly, as it turned out, that the thief would keep to the road, it was the only way if he meant to get clear. Wharton and Lawley were just blinding down the road, hoping to overtake, when they were stopped by one of the gangers, a chap named Martin. When he heard the first lorry start up, Martin guessed a thief was making away with it and he ran after it and got hold of the backboard. It must have been a rough ride, the thing was bucketing over the fell like a tank. Martin held on until the lorry crashed into the pit. He fell off then and managed to pick

himself up and run across to the road and signalled to Wharton to stop and told him where the number one lorry had crashed. He said he saw the chap who'd been driving it jump down and make off. Incidentally, Martin made no attempt to make off himself. He came back to camp and he's working with the others."

"Not a stain on his character," said Macdonald. "Well, first, I'm going to have a look at the lorry tracks, to see just where those two vehicles did go. I take it you've examined the wrecked one?"

"We have. We can't raise it until we've got a big crane. It's a proper mess, but I'll swear there's no sign of the driver."

"I didn't think there would be. Well, I'll go up to the camp and follow the trail of number one. After that I want to talk to Tom Martin, if he's still there to be talked to."

"I don't see why he shouldn't be," said Bord. "He's had plenty of time if he'd wanted to make a break. He's working with Number 2 gang, away to the west there."

"Then leave him to it. Have you got a man up here with you?"

"Yes, Sergeant Potter. He's in the lorry park."

"Then tell him to follow me when he sees me go over the fell. I'll signal if I want him to join me."

Macdonald went up to the lorry park and studied the wheel traces. He saw the tracks where Wharton had turned his vehicle on to the roadway and then he picked up another set which led to the fell itself and then turned along the track parallel with the pipe line. He followed these tracks until he reached the first halt, where there were clear signs that the lorry had hit the bank. To Macdonald's mind, this might have happened because the driver had not been able to see where he was going, or it might have happened because someone interfered with the driver or gave the steering wheel a wrench. Macdonald was sufficiently interested in this to look around and study the trench of the pipe line itself. He soon saw the tarpaulin, despite its camouflage of soil and stones and heather, and he had an idea, not an orthodox idea, perhaps, but he wanted desperately to untangle this muddled case he was working on. He stood up and signalled to Potter. "Down you get, lad, and make yourself scarce. There's a man under that tarpaulin. He's not dead, because I saw his feet move. Stand by until I come back."

Then Macdonald strode away to the west, to join Number 2 gang. "Tom Martin there?" he called. "I want a word with you, lad."

Martin stood very still, staring straight at Macdonald, who recognised him at once as Rory Macshane, the much publicised escaper from Dartmoor.

"What's it about?" asked Martin.

"It's about an incident higher up the pipe line. I think you've got some explaining to do, and I'm going to stand by and see fair play."

Seeing the other's puzzled face, Macdonald went on: "Perhaps you need a witness, if you're going to ask questions. Well, I'm the witness—C.I.D. man. I only want to give you a chance to sort the muddle out."

Martin suddenly grinned. "O.K. I'll take you at your word. You're right, I do need a witness."

He fell into step beside Macdonald, apparently quite willingly, and Macdonald said:

"I followed the track of the first lorry until it hit the bank. Then I saw your tarpaulin arrangements and I thought I might get nearer the truth if I came and fetched you."

"Sure, you're bright for a busy," said Martin, "but the truth will come if you'll listen."

"I'm here to listen, Rory Macshane, so go ahead."

"I trussed the blighter up—Sam Borwick. I knew the only way to make him tell the truth was to frighten him. He's frightened all right now—frightened of being buried before his time."

"I'm sure he is, but remember I'm a policeman, so no more frightfulness, please."

Macshane suddenly laughed. "O.K. I'm not silly all along the line, only in patches. Come along down the trench. Now when I've got him uncovered, you listen, listen hard."

When they reached the covered body, he lifted up part of the tarpaulin, bent over the man beneath, and said:

"It's Rory, Sam. I told you I'd come back and I've come. If you only talk sense and tell the truth, I'll let you go and you needn't think of being buried no more, you can just beat it, but you've got to own up first. Here's a drink, reckon you're parched. I'll take a swill first so you know it's not poison. Now, then, what's your name? Answer—the truth, mind."

"Sam Borwick," replied a hoarse voice.

"Correct. Now what was the name of the warehouse place where you and me tried to make our fortunes a year ago? Come on—answer!"

"Raine's Wharf."

"Correct! You're doing fine. Who was the old blighter came on the job with us?"

"Wally Millstone."

"Correct, we're nearly through and then you can sit up in the sun. Never thought you'd see the sun again, did you, you silly coon? I told you I'd come back and I've always been straight with you, better for you if you'd been straight with me. Now, who coshed the poor old bodger, the night watchman at Raine's Wharf? Answer out loud."

" 'Twas Wally Millstone, bloody ole fool, he would do it. 'Twasn't you, you never touched him, 'twasn't me."

"Too true. Now, then, when I said I'd come in on that job with you and cover you when you beat it, what did you promise me? Come on, answer."

"I promised I'd leave you some money, hidden near the letter box at the Leverstone-Bolton crossroads."

"Yes, you promised—and you never did it. I knew I could get away no matter where they imprisoned me, but a bloke needs a little brass in this country. You promised—£100 you promised and it weren't there. Not a halfpenny, not a tanner. You silly fool, Sam Borwick," said Rory Macshane. "You did the dirty on me, though I always played straight with you, so you've no cause for complaint if I hit back. Here's a policeman sitting beside you, listening to all you've said. And remember this, if you try to go back on it, you'll have me to reckon with for the rest of your life. Tell him again. What was the name of that warehouse place?"

Sam Borwick was sitting up now, supported by the side of the muddy trench. His red hair was still covered by a cap pulled down to his eyes, his face was pallid and streaked with dark grime; his arms were still lashed to his body, his legs tied together. He hardly glanced at Macdonald, his fearful eyes were on Rory Macshane.

" 'Twas Raine's Wharf, Rory," he said, "and 'twas Wally Millstone did the coshing, and don't you think you've got aught against me. I didn't leave t' brass as I promised but I hadn't any to leave. We didn't get anything from that job. After you was took I got Wally away and told him where he could lay up, snug and safe. I thought Wally'd got some brass salted away, but no, he hadn't a bean. 'Twasn't my fault I let you down, Rory. I couldn't help it."

Rory Macshane turned to Macdonald. "You heard all that? Now you know. I reckoned he'd never tell the truth unless I put the fear of death into him, but he's told the truth. I knew

he'd come up here sometime to that old farmhouse he was always talking about, and when they told us about the old farmer being attacked yesterday, I reckoned that was Sam, he was always a fool."

If Macdonald had said anything, he would have said that this was about the most unexpected conversation he had ever listened to and the most unorthodox evidence which had ever come his way in his professional career, but he had to admit that Rory Macshane had shown considerable acumen, not only in capturing and concealing the duller-witted Borwick, but in the manner of questioning him.

Rory turned to Macdonald. "Well, I got him for you. If it hadn't been for me he'd 'a' been over the hills and far away, Sam would. Here he is and he's told you the truth, so now it's up to you to get on with it."

"It is and all," said Macdonald. "Potter here will look after Sam Borwick, and you will come with me, Rory Macshane, and you might as well come quietly. There's a matter of a prison sentence and so forth to be faced. Now I'm prepared to do my best for you. I know about you and I've got reason to respect you, because you got away from Stalag X, but we've got to get things fixed so that you're straight with the law—and then, I'll do my best to help you to a way of life that'll be more worth while than what you've been doing. What about it?"

"You look a decent bloke," said Rory Macshane. "What's it to be now?"

"You come with me," rejoined Macdonald. "I've no doubt you're a good fellsman and I don't want to chase you all over Bowland Forest. Potter, look alive."

Macdonald slipped his right arm inside Rory Macshane's and the grip of his arm muscles prevented Rory from getting away. A moment later, Potter had produced handcuffs and what he did, with great dexterity, was to handcuff Macdonald and Macshane together by their wrists.

"That's the way of it, so come quietly," said Macdonald. "You can't get rid of me, even killing me wouldn't help. So come along, and I'll do my best for you—and Sam can come later."

"Christ," said Rory Macshane, "chained to a cop. I never thought of that one."

"If you're never chained to anything more than a cop you've not much to complain about," said Macdonald cheerfully. "Come along and give evidence to the inspector; tell him what Sam said just now, and I'll uphold you."

Chapter Thirteen

1

“Well, Bord,” said Macdonald later, “you’re a punctilious sort of chap, and I can well believe you find this the most unorthodox case you’ve ever been involved in, haywire, as they say.”

“You can call it haywire or anything else you like,” rejoined Bord cheerfully. “The thing which matters to me is that you’ve picked up three criminals. You’ve got Macshane after the police of the whole country had been hunting him for months, and you got him quietly, with no violence, and I’d have expected him to kill somebody before he let himself be taken.”

“Macshane isn’t a killer, neither is he a brutal criminal,” said Macdonald, “and I’ll put both those points before the judge when he’s brought up again. Macshane could have murdered Sam Borwick, he had Borwick at his mercy, but he didn’t even hurt him. He frightened Sam all right and that’s why Sam coughed up the evidence.”

“Sam Borwick,” went on Bord. “Leverstone’s been looking for him for months and Millstone, too. You found ’em both.”

“In a manner of speaking Brough found Millstone and thereby led me to Borwick,” said Macdonald. “When Brough was knocked out, I was sure it was Borwick who had done it. What was the point in knocking Brough out? To stop him saying, ‘I saw Sam. I tell you I saw him.’ And when I thought that one out, I thought, ‘Then Sam has been watching High Garth, hanging around there, and that means he hasn’t found the hiding place where his dad put the money.’ If Sam had found the money, he wouldn’t have been hanging round the house any longer.” Macdonald paused and then said: “Do you remember saying to me, ‘Why didn’t the old fool tell us all he knew?’ the old fool being Brough. Well, the more I’ve thought about it, the more do I believe that Brough could have told us a lot. Brough knew that Sam Borwick had been hanging around High Garth and he knew what Sam was after—the money. When Brough asked me to go over High Garth with him on Monday afternoon, I think he knew Sam Borwick would be around.”

“Aye, I think you’re right there,” said Bord. “Brough wanted to get inside that house, but he didn’t fancy doing it alone, and he didn’t trust any of his own chaps, so he asked you.”

“We’re getting on,” said Macdonald. “We’ve agreed that Sam had been around High Garth and that Brough knew it. That was probably the reason that Brough told Jock Shearling he could use the shippon, so that Sam should see there was someone around. Well, the next thing I learnt was about Millstone’s identity. Millstone had been involved in the Raine’s Wharf break-in. A night watchman had been coshed and the only man arrested for the job was Rory Macshane, who got a long sentence for robbery with violence, was sent to Dartmoor, and broke prison about three months ago. When Rory was arrested, he gave a lot of trouble, and fought like a madman, which didn’t do him any good. It occurred to me that he might have been employing P.O.W. tactics, making a diversion to help his pals get away. If that was it, Rory was successful, the other two did get away. When I heard that the dead man in High Garth was Millstone and that Millstone’s fingerprints had been found at Raine’s Wharf, it seemed a pretty good bet that the third man involved in that break-in was Sam Borwick and I believed that Brough had seen Sam Borwick up here. So it seemed to me that there was quite

a chance that Rory Macshane was up here too, intending to settle the score between himself and Sam Borwick. After all, Rory had held the can for Sam over the Raine's Wharf business." Again, Macdonald paused, then he went on: "I shouldn't have been in the least surprised if Rory Macshane had killed Sam, but he didn't kill him, although he had every opportunity to do so. He didn't even hurt him; all he did was to frighten Sam to induce him to give evidence. And neither did Rory kill Millstone. When Millstone was killed, Rory was in Dartmoor. Rory will have to finish his sentence, in Dartmoor or elsewhere, but I shall see to it that a competent counsel puts Rory's case to the authorities, including his war record, his escape from Stalag X, and the help he gave to the police by apprehending Sam Borwick. As to Sam, it's probable that he'll be charged with the murder of Millstone, but I don't think the verdict will be easy to arrive at. Millstone probably fell down those steps and broke his neck on the flagstones. If somebody pushed him to his death, there's no proof, and I don't think a jury would bring in a verdict of murder against Sam on that count, though it may be attempted murder in the case of Brough. Sam threw that stone all right and I don't think Brough's going to recover. So it'll be a long sentence for Sam, he'll be put where he can't do any harm for quite a while. Now the thing you and I should do is to find old Borwick's hiding place, where he put the proceeds of his sale. My own belief is that the money's still there, Sam never found it. And if we find it, I think it ought to be handed over to old Mrs. Borwick. The farm is left to Sam, and I can't see Sam doing anything for his old mother."

"You're right there, by gum," agreed Bord. "Once the old man's dead, and he won't last long, I'm told, there'll be nothing for the old lady to live on. Sam will sell the farm, but he won't help his mother."

"Well, let's have a bash at searching," said Macdonald. "You can concentrate on the house, I'll do the barn. Giles Hoggett's coming up to help me, he knows more about these old stone barns than either of us."

"Right," said Bord cheerfully, "and if we find the cash, we'll take the law into our own hands and give it to the old lady, saying, 'See here, ma'am, this must be your husband's, so you take it to him. You've been looking after him a long time now, so you can look after his money, too.' She'll understand and that's the last we shall ever hear of it," ended Bord cheerfully.

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Giles Hoggett stood in the great barn at High Garth and stared about him thoughtfully. "Valuables have been hidden in old barns for generations," he said. "In the old days when the Scots came marauding down Lunesdale, driving the cattle off and looting the houses, valuables were often sunk in the wells. But I don't think old Borwick would have used the well, he was hiding things from his son and his wife, not from the marauding Scots, and his son and wife would have noticed if the old man was busy round the well. Try those grain bins, Macdonald—they may have false bottoms. I've looked at the cattle standings, but the flagstones haven't been lifted for a lifetime, and the threshing floor and the rest haven't been dug up." He looked up to the great beams of the roof, and said, "There are plenty of hiding places up there, but I don't think old Nat Borwick would have gone so high. He was old and shaky and a ladder tall enough to reach those beams would have been too heavy for him to shift."

"What are the holes in the wall?" asked Macdonald.

“They were left to support tire beams for a mason’s scaffolding, as the wall got too high to be reached from ground level,” said Giles. “They’ve got birds’ nests in them. There’s a ladder there will reach them. Are you going up, or shall I?”

“I’ll go up,” said Macdonald. The holes were about fifteen feet from the ground, at intervals of ten feet or so, and he shifted the ladder along and reached into hole after hole, pulling out the closely packed straw and mud which some industrious birds had woven together to make a close compact nest—but he found no sign of coins, of cashbox or wallet or bag, and at last he said, “Nothing doing, Giles,” and stared across at the opposite wall of the barn.

“It’s odd,” he went on. “If those holes were meant for beams, you’d expect to find corresponding holes in the wall opposite, and there aren’t any.”

“You’ve got it,” said Giles. “There must have been corresponding holes in the opposite wall, that’s how the beam was supported. And the holes on this side have been blocked up so that you can’t see them: they’re blocked with stone slabs so that they don’t show, but they must be there. And anybody who took all that trouble to block them so skilfully must have had a reason for doing it. I’ve got a wide chisel and a bar to lever with—so up you go. It all fits,” he added. “There’s this ladder, which is long enough to reach those holes, but not long enough to reach the roof, and it’s not too heavy for an old chap to lift.”

Macdonald went up the ladder, fixing it carefully so that it was exactly opposite the beam holes in the farther wall, and Giles paced out the intervals carefully and measured the height of the holes. When Macdonald tackled the first spot, he knew they had found a deliberately contrived hiding place. The hole was blocked by a stone, fashioned so that it fitted the gap accurately and looked exactly like the rest of the stone wall. With Giles Hoggett’s wide chisel and levering bar, Macdonald cleared the stone away, but there was nothing hidden in the gap behind it. He came down and shifted the ladder, three times, each time removing a roughly dressed stone. It wasn’t until he had moved a fourth stone that he put his hand in the gap and pulled out a heavy leather bag which had been jammed into the gap.

“Here it is, Giles, Mrs. Borwick’s dowry for her old age.”

The two men sat on one of the grain bins and investigated the money bag, closely packed with currency notes, silver, and even some golden sovereigns.

“The old chap must have hidden those sovereigns away over forty years ago,” said Giles Hoggett, “and he never dreamt they’d be used ‘to right a wrong.’ You used the word ‘dowry’ just now. When Nat Borwick got married after his father died, he married Sally Newby, and Sally owned a farm which her father had left her. Nat Borwick sold that farm—it was Helbeck in Littledale, and poor Sally never saw a penny of the money. Nat just hid it. Well, if this little packet is the proceeds of Nat’s last sale, it will just about repay Sally for what that old skinflint robbed her of long ago.”

“What a lot you do know about folks in these parts,” said Macdonald. “Did you know Sam Borwick as a lad?”

“Not to say know him, but I knew him; everybody did, he was known in every village shop, every bar, every farmhouse. The shopkeepers knew that if they didn’t keep their eyes on him, he’d get away with something, sweets or smokes or something he couldn’t get at home. The farmers’ wives would say ‘be off with you and don’t hang around here.’ Folks were sorry for him in a way, because they knew about his father and how his father treated the old lady. Sam was a thief from the time he could toddle: we all knew it.”

Macdonald drew a photograph out of his pocket. “Can you recognise this face?”

“Aye,” said Giles Hoggett placidly, “though I haven’t seen him for years. This was Tom Martin, the Irish lad who worked at Langton’s Farm before the war. That’s over towards Barbon, Langton’s Farm is, up in the Westmorland fells, across the county boundary. Tom Martin, he was a good worker and Richard Langton was right sorry when he left.”

Macdonald asked, “Would Martin have come across Sam Borwick?”

“Likely enough, down by the river. Sam was a clever poacher. Maybe he taught Tom how to tickle trout: all the boys play tricks like that.”

Macdonald sat with Tom Martin’s photo in his hand. “Did you ever see this photograph in the papers, Giles—the convict who escaped from Dartmoor?”

“No. I didn’t, but then I’m not very observant of pictures in the papers. My wife might have, I don’t know, she’s much more observant than I am, but I don’t think she’d have said anything even if she did see it. It isn’t easy, you know, although we’re both law-abiding people, it goes against the grain to help in hounding down a fugitive, especially if you’ve known that fugitive as a boy and liked him, because he was a good hard-working boy. Kate never mentioned that picture to me, but if she saw it I expect she hoped that Tom would get back to Barbon and work on one of the hill farms up there again.” Giles looked at Macdonald rather sadly: “When you catch Tom, you’ll send him back to Dartmoor?”

“I’ve caught him. He’s got to work off his prison sentence. After that, I hope to get him started on something to keep him straight. Have you ever heard of Don Whelpton?”

“Aye, I’ve heard of him, read his books and heard him lecture. Explorer, sailor, naturalist, mountaineer—not much he hasn’t done in the wilder parts of the world.”

“And he’s taken a few wild characters with him on his jaunts and taught them a little sense. If I go to Don Whelpton and tell him about your Tom Martin—Rory Macshane, I think Don would be interested. Rory escaped from a P.O.W. camp in Lower Silesia and got clean away, he walked to Switzerland, all by himself. He escaped from Dartmoor and he walked to Lunesdale—‘living off the country’ as he calls it. I know he’s been a thief, but he’s never been brutal or violent, and he’s got some good stuff in him. It seems to me that to keep him straight he’s got to have an objective, the tougher the better. Once it was the Swiss border—and he made it. Once it was Lunesdale—and he made it. If Don has some objective, sufficiently tough and far away, I think Rory would be worth his place in the crew.”

“Crew,” said Giles. “I know that Whelpton’s bought a schooner and he goes sailing these days, but Tom Martin’s a countryman.”

“Maybe, but he was born in a village not far from Belfast and he played about in small boats from the time he could toddle. He’ll be worth his place in a crew if Don will take him and I think Don will.”

Chapter Fourteen

BALANCE SHEET

"To what end? What's the good, who benefits?" asked Don Whelpton, shooting out his rhetorical questions at Macdonald with perfectly good temper. "Climbing Everest, camping at the poles, extending our knowledge of the most barren areas of the world's surface, the places which make life impossible without aid from all the elaborations of this mechanical era. What good does it do to anybody? I've been asked those questions again and again, and it isn't always easy to find convincing answers if the questioner is an honest humane chap, as he often is."

"Striking a balance sheet," said Macdonald, "we all have to do it sometime. While I could supply my own answers to your questions, I should be interested to have your answers. You have spent many years in conditions of intolerable discomfort, of danger and privation in forbidding parts of the earth, so you must have a sanction which answers your *cui bono*?"

"Yes, first and foremost it's the personal satisfaction I gain from overcoming difficulties—the harder the struggle, the greater the sense of achievement. Nothing very worthy about that, no answer for the philosopher who talks about ethical standards. The real justification from the philosophic point of view is the improvement in the personalities of the toughs who join one in the struggle. I've known the most commonplace blokes disregard their own comfort, their own profit, their own safety, in a common endeavour. You may say it's not necessary to go to the ends of the earth for this purpose, but the remoteness, the difficulties and the dangers do add up to something which is salutary to the human spirit I don't want to sound smug, but I can only answer your question about the worthwhileness of such expeditions in terms of human values."

"Thanks. That's what I wanted you to do," rejoined Macdonald. "I spoke just now of a balance sheet. I've been trying to cast my own. I've spent the greater part of my adult life in pursuing criminals and I want to ponder over the results of that pursuit in terms of personality, including that of the criminal, who is a human being himself."

"Well, your balance sheet will be a damned sight more interesting than mine," said Don Whelpton. "It's too often forgotten that the criminal *is* a human being, having some of the impulses of decent humanity which we like to think is a characteristic of us all. Moreover, decent humans are sometimes capable of criminal impulses. Now, looking back on your years of pursuit, your own form of hunting, for that's what it is, are you satisfied of its justice and efficacy?"

"It's difficult to give an unqualified answer," rejoined Macdonald. "A policeman's job is a necessary one, inasmuch as the average honest law-abiding citizen must be protected from the thief and the murderer. I don't think anybody would dispute that. It's the policeman's duty to round up the lawbreakers, but not to be a judge or jury, thank God. Judgment and sentencing must be the most onerous job of all. You asked me if I were satisfied with the efficacy of the system, the penal code of this country. The answer is that, having had experience of it at first hand for half a lifetime, I'm not really satisfied. Sending a criminal to prison may punish him by depriving him of his liberty and the amenities of life, but it doesn't improve him or make him less of a criminal. If a young thief is sent to prison, he's a worse character at the end of

his sentence; he's associated with other criminals and something about the recidivist mentality is catching, as bodily disease is catching."

"Yes, I agree with you there," said Don Whelpton. "But what's the answer?"

"There isn't any simple answer. Don't imagine I'm bitten by a reforming bug. I'm not by nature a reformer, I only tried to answer your question honestly, and to strike a balance sheet for myself, hoping that the job I've spent my life on wouldn't look futile in retrospect. Obviously we need more and better prisons, so that there is less overcrowding. Even more obviously we need more and better warders, they're the crux of the problem. And I can imagine no job more difficult to do well than being in charge of criminals and trying to deal with them in such a way that they're better men when they finish their sentence than they were when they started it. I suppose if I really had a social conscience, I should volunteer to be a warder when I retire, instead of farming at Fellcock. But leaving that for the moment, I should like to think I'd propelled one convict in the right direction. Rory Macshane has got good quality in him. I should be sorry to think life held nothing better for him than life in prison, interspersed by wild and futile escapes and eventual recapture."

"I quite agree," said Don Whelpton. "I went to see your Rory Macshane. I talked to Brigadier Warrington, who was S.B.O. at Stalag X and knew about Rory's escape. Rory Macshane has courage and endurance and determination and loyalty. Warrington knew him pretty well. The Brigadier and I are going to see the Commissioner and the Home Secretary and you had better come with us. I'm going to make myself responsible for Rory's behaviour when I apply for him as a crew member and a trainee in 'Operation Survival,' if you remember what that is. He's got a high survival value, has Rory Macshane, and that's a great asset in conditions when inertia can undermine the will to live."

" 'Operation Survival,' " mused Macdonald, "or 'Man against the Frozen North'; you train the Air Force personnel in the technique of survival if they're forced down in the arctic wastes."

"That's it," agreed Don Whelpton. "It's the Eskimos who do most of the training, because it's they who have developed the technique of survival in their own environment, but we, myself and other chaps like me, who know that survival is possible in the most improbable conditions, have to rid these chaps of the fear that hypnotises them all at first. In short, it's the state of mind that matters, whether in the jungle (for the jungle *is* neutral, as a survivor told us), or in the desert or in an open boat in the ocean, thousands of miles from land."

"Or on a walk from Lower Silesia to the Swiss frontier," added Macdonald, studying the big man opposite to him. Don Whelpton, well over six feet, with immensely broad sloping shoulders, long arms and a hatchet face, rough hewn as it were, with a big jutting nose and a long chin: he resembled a Viking to Macdonald's mind. He had behind him a history of adventure and of expeditions to the most inhospitable quarters of the earth's surface. He had trained in sail before joining the mercantile marine and he had survived some hazardous passages around the Horn, west to east and east to west. And with all this impulse of adventurousness, this drive to be off again, exploring, testing his own powers of endurance, he had yet developed the sense of benevolence which made him feel a concern for Rory Macshane and other toughs with a dubious record behind them. Meeting Macdonald's contemplative gaze, Whelpton said:

"I've probably got much more in common with Macshane than you have, Super. I wasn't born good—far from it—and I can remember some dubious enterprises in my youth which might have attracted your attention if you'd been in the offing. I was lucky; the only person

who ever caught me out in my devilments—poaching, pinching, and the rest—was an uncle who'd been at sea all his life. He sent me off on the three-masted barque *Wirramirra* and I was kept at work too hard to have time for indulging my own antisocial tendencies. We had to work, to save our own lives and the craft we sailed on. It was good training. Well, I'm prepared to take Macshane on, because I believe the sort of work I can offer him will satisfy his thirst for adventure and endeavour. What I should like to do with him is to set him up as a trapper in the far northwest and see if he makes out—as I think he will." Whelpton laughed. "Well, you came to me because something was nagging at you about the defects of our penal system, as you call it. If between us we set one ex-convict on a road which develops what's best in him rather than what's worst, we shan't have wasted our time; and the experiment may even provide you with ammunition when you argue with your bosses over the defects of the system you serve."

"Well, you're doing the work and taking the risk in the case of Rory Macshane," said Macdonald. "It's up to me to look out for other cases where I could do the work and take the risk."

"And good luck to you," responded Don Whelpton.

[The end of *The Last Escape* by Edith Caroline Rivett (as E. C. R. Lorac)]