

1

Scotland, 1983

Adi steps from the train on to the station platform. He's seventeen and feels a long way from Germany, his home. This may only be Scotland, but he feels like he could be on the moon.

The first thing Adi does is check his pocket. The small metal pin badge is there, safe. It hasn't fallen out. His mission is still on.

The train pulls away, groaning as it leaves. Then there is silence, broken only by the occasional chatter of a bird.

Adi has no idea where he is going, but he is relieved to see that the village is small. It should make things easier for him.

He walks from the station and starts to look around for something that might give him a clue about where the man lives. Adi's not sure what

he's *actually* looking for: a football scarf in the window, a trophy on a shelf maybe?

But there are no clues anywhere. If this is a place where football is popular, then the people here do not shout about it. In fact, there are no shouts about anything. The village is quiet, which makes Adi feel nervous. What if he can't find who he is looking for? What happens if he fails?

Adi sees a park with two rusty swings, a tennis court with potholes in it, and a football pitch where the grass is too long for a proper passing game. A bunch of teenagers are on the pitch. They eye Adi as he nears.

"I am looking for someone," he tells them.

They shrug and stare. One of the teenagers comments that Adi sounds weird.

Adi tells them the man's name, Edgar Kail, and asks, "Do you know him?"

The teenagers don't answer. One of them makes fun of Adi's German accent.

But Adi isn't put off. He has travelled too far to give up now.

"The man I look for, he is English," Adi says. "So he will sound different too, like me. But not so *weird*."

Adi hopes his attempt at humour will make the teenagers want to help him. But the teenagers simply shake their heads. One of them asks Adi for a cigarette in an accent that is difficult for him to understand.

“This man I look for,” Adi goes on. “He is a famous footballer. He *was* a famous footballer.”

Surely this will help, he hopes.

But all they do is laugh. As Adi trudges off, he hears the teenagers mocking his accent again.

He walks on. He sees people on the street every few minutes and plucks up the courage to ask if they know Edgar Kail. But they all shake their heads. If they do know who Edgar Kail is, they don't want to tell Adi.

All Adi can do is keep searching. He looks for any sign or clue on every street. He wonders if it would be easier to knock on all the doors in the village, but how long would that take him? And has he got the courage to do it?

Adi might have no choice but to try every door. At least that way he'll know he's done all he can, even if he fails.

On a street corner, Adi spots a sign. There's a shop with the words *Post Office* painted on the window. He remembers these words from his

English oral exam. If anyone might know where Edgar Kail lives, it will be the people here.

The conversation Adi has in the Post Office is brief. Yes, they know the name Edgar Kail and explain the way to his house. But they say that Edgar hasn't been seen for a while. He's old. He may not have survived the winter. At least, that's what Adi thinks he heard. The accent here is so strong he can't be sure.

Adi walks faster as he nears the address. The final whistle is upon him. In the next few minutes he will either succeed or fail in his mission. Adi hasn't allowed himself to think about what he will do if he fails.

2

Adi finds the house. It is small – a cottage. Paint clings to the walls in places, but in others it has long given up.

He checks his pocket again, feels the precious badge sitting there.

He takes a deep breath and knocks on the door. There is no reply.

Adi knocks once more, remembering Edgar Kail is old. He may be slow on his feet. He may be deaf. Adi waits, then tries again with a louder knock, but not an angry one.

There's a noise from inside – something falling to the floor. Then a single word. Adi doesn't know what it means but guesses it is a swear word.

The door opens slowly, and Adi stands straighter, as if he's about to meet royalty.

The man looking at Adi is old. His face is creased by time, his legs stiff. Adi looks for the

strings that are holding this man up, as if he is an ancient puppet.

“What do you want?” the old man growls. He’s not friendly at all, but Adi doesn’t mind.

“I said, what do you want?” the old man says again. “Because if you’re selling something, I don’t want it. Do you hear me? Sling your hook!”

Adi doesn’t move. He has nothing to sell. He wants to tell the man that he has been looking for him and how pleased he is to find him, but he’s worried he won’t say it right. So instead Adi says, “Herr Kail?”

The old man’s face softens a bit.

“Are you German?” he asks.

“Ja. I mean, yes,” Adi says.

“Long way to come,” the old man replies. “Like I said, whatever you’re selling, I don’t want it!”

He goes to shut the door. Adi panics. He’s sure this man is the person he has been looking for, and he can’t let him get away. Not now.

“Herr Kail, I am not selling anything,” Adi says before the door shuts. “And I do not want to disturb you. I bring you something. Something that belongs to you.”

Adi can see that the old man doesn’t know what he is talking about. He might think Adi is

dangerous – that he wants to rob him. The old man tightens the scarf around his neck.

Adi reaches into his pocket, pulling out the small badge. He has carried it a long way, across the sea, from his home in Germany.

“Please, Herr Kail. Please?” Adi says. He reaches towards the old man’s hand and lifts it up gently when Edgar seems reluctant.

Their palms touch as Adi passes the badge to the old man. It’s so small that Edgar has to screw up his already wrinkly eyes to see what he is holding. When Edgar recognises it, his pupils widen and he looks at Adi differently.

The rusty old metal pin badge has a pink and blue crest on it, plus the words *Dulwich Hamlet FC* – they’re faint but still readable.

Adi watches Edgar. The old man has a look of disbelief on his face. He doesn’t understand how or why Adi has the badge. But he opens the door wider.

“You’d better come in,” the old man says, and Adi follows him inside the house.

3

The old man's living room is dark, given that it's light outside. The curtains are half closed and dust dances in the light that has fought through the gap.

Adi looks around. The furniture is old, like the man in front of him. A chair has lost a leg and is propped up by an untidy pile of books.

Adi tries to work out how the room makes him feel, but the only word that comes to him is sad, which is not what he expected to feel. Not when he has finally managed to track down the person he has been searching for.

"So," says Edgar, his voice pulling Adi back to the present. The old man sounds cross again, like he did at the door. "Where did you get this? Because I know it isn't yours. It was mine, but I haven't seen it for more than forty years." Edgar is holding the rusty badge between them, his eyes narrow.

Adi has practised this moment many times in his head ever since he decided to go on this mission. He has a script, in both German and English, but as he stands here he doesn't feel like he can explain clearly. It's as if his script is now written in a language that Adi doesn't speak.

But Edgar is not in a patient mood.

"Is it money you're after?" he asks Adi. "Well, if it is, then you've come to the wrong place. You can look down the back of the sofa if you like, but you'll find nothing there except dust and sweet wrappers."

"Please, Herr Kail." Adi holds his hands up in a peaceful way. "The badge – it was given to me by my father."

"Was it now?" Edgar says. Adi can see he does not look convinced.

"Please, I explain," Adi goes on. "My father was given it by his own father."

"Your grandfather?" Edgar says, frowning. "What does he have to do with it?"

"You know him. My grandfather's name was ... Adolf Jäger."

Edgar's suspicious expression vanishes, and he gasps.

Adi sees Edgar's shock. He sees the old man's eyes widen. Adi didn't realise a name, two words, could make a person look so startled.

He watches Edgar's eyes go to the badge and widen further. His mouth moves, but no words come out.

"Please, Herr Kail," Adi begins to say as he sees the change in the old man's face. "I try to explain, if you will let me."

Edgar shuffles backwards, confused, until he feels the chair with three legs behind him. He sits, looks at Adi and waits to hear what he is about to say.

Adi rummages to find something in his bag. He's looking for a large plastic envelope packed full of old papers.

"Where is it?" Adi says as he searches, panicking that he cannot find what he needs. "Ah, yes. Here. This letter was given to my father by Adolf many, many years ago. But my father was not able to follow Adolf's wishes in the letter. Germany after the war was a difficult place to live for a long, long time. There was so much to rebuild, but also a lot of shame about what had happened. It is different for me now. And when my father passed this letter to me, I knew I must

come to find you. So here I am. Please. Please read.”

Adi hands a single sheet of yellowed paper to Edgar. The old man stares at the faded words on the page, his head shaking as well as his hands.

“I’m sorry,” Edgar says, “but I don’t speak German.”

Adi feels embarrassed. Of course he can’t. How stupid of him not to realise this. He moves closer to the old man and tries to explain.

“This letter was written by my grandfather when World War Two had started. It was attached to his will. Forgive me my English, but I think the letter says:

This is my final request, but it is very important to me. If I do not live past the war, I have something that needs returning. A badge. A small pink and blue pin badge. It was given to me by my friend, a Dulwich Hamlet footballer called Edgar Kail. The last time I saw my friend, we swapped badges and promised to meet after the war was over so we could give them back. You will find his address at the bottom of this letter, though I do not know

whether his house will still be there after all this madness ends.

If the house is not there, go to Dulwich Hamlet Football Club. Speak to the fans. They will know where to find Edgar, as he is their hero. The fans sing for him at every game, about Edgar Kail being in their hearts. It is a wonderful song. I find myself singing it even now, years after hearing it last.

You will find the badge in one of two places. It is attached to my wallet or to the clothes in which I died. I have carried it with me ever since the day Edgar lent it to me.

When you find Edgar, please let him know I carry it always, even now. Please also tell him how much his friendship means to me.

As Adi finishes reading, he feels his hands shake. But he calms down when he looks at Edgar. Gone is his anger and his narrow eyes. Edgar's eyes look tired and red, but they are also gently smiling, like the rest of his face.

"Herr Kail?" Adi says.

“Please,” says the old man. “Call me Edgar.”

“Edgar.” Adi likes how the word feels on his lips. “You look ... happy now.”

“Well, that’s the effect your granddad had on people,” Edgar says. “Adolf was a very special man. On and off the pitch. Clever and skilful. He was kind to me from the very first time we met. Not that I knew who Adolf was when I first laid eyes on him ...”

Adi watches as Edgar leans forward. He blows into his hands to warm them before beginning to speak ...