

## Prologue

As you were

1939

‘It’s just like a stuck pig.’

‘Don’t be stupid, it’s a rabbit. Speak accurately, Will.’

‘I mean it looks just, you know, kind of stuck to the ground.’

‘It just jerked. You’ll be saying it’s like a twitching frog soon. On its last frog march. It’s on its side, fallen on some bit of sharp branch. Now we’ve got to skin it. Come on, feet first, up we go.’

It was all him skinning, not both of them.

The slightly surprising thing was that the dark-haired younger man was lecturing his older brother, first about language and now showing him once again how to skin the rabbit expertly. The pale-faced, wiry, nervous ball of energy had already grabbed the lifeless animal and was pulling the skin from the feet up its body.

A brief cut with a knife and, standing on the feet of the carcass, Rich – still a teenager just, but a veteran in hunting years – pulled the skin over its head. And off, like a sock.

William, a gangly, taller 22-year-old, looked on at the near bare body not in disgust - he had seen Richard at his Nimrod work many a time during the last few years - but with a smidgeon of distaste.

Easy moving and generous, he admired his younger brother's drive, his rigorous determination, his wish to get things done, his remorselessness. His flair for hunting. So precocious about hunting, even before they moved from nearby Tewkesbury.

Rich would no doubt make a great soldier, a pilot too if he had not been rejected quickly by the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, Will ruminated. Rich was furious after he was ostensibly turned down because his vision was not good enough. Will knew Rich would be better than he would be at the front line ... aerial or terrestrial. Much better.

Rich seemed to attract the girls with his sometimes steely gaze and intensity but then occasional full-on laugh ... when he did allow himself to relax on the very occasional encounter with the opposite sex in Cheltenham pubs (the less savoury sort in those watering holes of course) or posh Cavendish House store on The Promenade.

The girls in all their beautiful, inconstant variety, and in numbers, loved to shop in Cavendish House.

Rich had already wooed a couple of girls older than himself since he had got his car, Will reflected.

It was not that Will did not share his to the girls too – he was already ‘stepping out’ with a blonde beauty who had attended Pate’s Grammar School for Girls. Not only that: one tall girl had looked disdainfully at Rich and commented that he was not high enough, in any way, to interest her.

Rich, briefly totally confounded, looked at her like he could kill.

The sun was starting to disappear into the ruddying and maroon clouds gathered above the just slightly rippled horizon, signalling about another hour of daylight emanating from low-lying Coombe Hill and its surrounds.

The two brothers had the previous Sunday strolled Coombe Hill-wards along the muddy canal path by Tewkesbury Road until they got to all the flooded wet meadows around the Severn. Will loved admiring all the ubiquitous birds including swans, but did not know the names of many. Rich thought of it as boggy marshland; scenic, but no good for rabbits.

Today Rich had thrown the rabbit fur, skin and head perfunctorily into some bushes on the edge of the first large field behind their house. One of many fields stretching away north towards Tewkesbury and east to Cleeve

Hill with its own, if not dominant, elevated position above Cheltenham.

There were fields too languishing to the south below Tewkesbury Road and either side of Withybridge Lane.

If some courting couple lay down by accident on the bits tomorrow or the next day, that was too bad, Rich thought. This was his countryside. Damn them.

It was a perfect evening in the early autumn of 1939 and Will had got back about an hour before, cycling back from his civil service-type work two miles south in Benhall Farm, also on the west of Cheltenham. A quick change out of the suit and off on the hunting and brief stake-out with Rich in the fields behind their remote home. Rabbit for dinner.

To please mother Eva Lion, who feared rationing would be introduced soon with war having technically started two weeks ago. So they had started bringing the free meals home early - been doing it for years in fact.

Storm clouds were not gathering, but swirling about in everyone's head.

She would not be so pleased if she realised that Rich had truanted from his work at the building society, leaving at lunch claiming he felt feverish. He used to do the same the odd day from the grammar, risking a barrage coming the next day from his fearsome Latin

teacher Harold 'The Arrow' or the head teacher William Dobson.

Rich's motivation at the office seemed to have dwindled as the chance to get into khaki or blue-grey increased.

He had by now cut the feet and head off the corpse, briskly and efficiently. He wished that he could get away and aim at Jerry like the rabbits when it all kicked off. Soon. Their stupid helmets like jerry cans, it was said. That's why they're Jerry, not Gerry!

Ping the helmets with shots! Just under, even better, Rich thought.

It appeared Will might be kept on at his desk and pen pushing on his civil servant stuff. He probably would not mind. He did not talk much about what they did in those ugly office blocks just being built at the farm. Unlucky bastard, toiling away in Cheltenham's ugly new version of Civvy Street.

Will had one bit of luck though; he did have priority over loaning father Frederick's Jaguar too to ease the way with his courting. Father let him use it about once a fortnight, provided he swore blind that he would not touch a drop of liquor or have his way with his blonde companion in its generous interior.

Rich had had his priorities marked out for three years: drive a good car, play lots of cricket, and play the field a bit. He passed all

his exams at school in 1936 – not with flying colours, but navigated his way to decent enough results. For all that he sought: secure work locally.

He had obtained his own Austin as soon as possible three years ago with help from Fred – and had driven it before he was 17 and just before tests were compulsory. He had, without any bureaucratic bumps in the road, been granted his licence from Gloucester county council before he left the grammar in the summer of 1936.

Maybe risking the wrath of the local law. He had spirited up a Triumph motorbike too for some months, but you only had to be 14 to drive that. It vanished after a while.

Nothing competed with the power of those engines for Rich except the power of making a batsman duck, scared from a quick delivery from him, the opening bowler for and captain of Uckington cricket team. Seeing fear in the batsman's eyes briefly.

Mind you, one had to have a civilised pint with the opposition after the game. And they might have an opening bowler to scare the living day and nightlights out of me and everyone,

The young men strode slowly back south the half mile towards their none-too-pretty two-storey home on the Tewkesbury Road,

flames lighting up the sky now. Rich held his air rifle in his left hand and the carcass in his right.

Older Will looked up to Rich for many a reason – but not for a height reason. He was five or so inches taller.

Occasional crows seemed to caw-caw abuse from their nests in elm and beech trees on the field's edge at the two on their stroll to their two-storey home – the sole house for many hundreds of yards in any direction.

They would start cooking it since their mother was away a while yet meeting Frederick Lion to try to wheedle or threaten some more money from him for the three of them. Fred had upped and left peremptorily two years after they left their home in Tewkesbury on the high street.

Will and Rich had mixed feelings. They knew that he had treated their mother very poorly and resented him for that. They did not fully warm to his new consort Penelope who both thought put on airs and graces.

However, they had enjoyed, indeed revelled in, him as a once or twice-a-week father bringing treats, bonhomie and car rides. They called him Fred. He encouraged the informality. Rides as far as Bristol which was brasher and bigger than Cheltenham!

And Fred had engaging, wide-ranging anecdotes about how he achieved this and he flirted with that. Or were they just tall tales? He said that he had done some top-secret civil service stuff - wireless communications, whatever that was - at offices in Cheltenham's Clarence Street. That was before the civil service bought land at Oakley and Benhall Farms.

Will had never seen him at muddy, burgeoning Benhall during the last few months as the single-storey office blocks sprung up to their limited height, unprepossessing and protrusive. To house special mission units maybe, Rich surmised! That he could join and serve.

However, Will had been informed - discreetly - by his superior George T. that he would not be enlisted yet if he stayed in his current post doing a bit of furniture shifting, tidying, typing missives about plans to move 'x' and 'y' out of London. Seemingly, government people, pen pushers.

The upshot, though, was that he was not to be enlisted for the near term, along with maybe 40 others.

It was, frankly, a bit boring, but there were a handful of attractive girls working as assistants and typists. A couple of classy ones



with plummy accents from Surrey or somewhere like that.

The brothers entered the damp back entrance leading into the kitchen and started their work with preparing and cooking the meat - then the potatoes and cabbage. A bottle of beer each as they began to relax into the evening. A cigarette or two or three each as well, transforming the kitchen into cosy-smoky.

‘You know, Will, I feel a bit stuck here now, what with all the action approaching. I’m trying to get into three regiments. One of them will take me. If I can’t bloody fly, maybe something to do with tanks. That would be good.’

‘I don’t want to be a hero, but this conflict is going to be big.’

‘Good luck to you. I might be following soon over to France or Belgium or wherever the action is. But you’ll be better at all that kind of thing than me, you know,’ Will responded with equanimity from his armchair.

‘Pamela is desperate for me not to go. She’s too much that way. A bit clingy. Really sweet, really pretty, but a bit clingy. She realises I have to go though.’

Rich had been going out with Pamela, a shop assistant at Cavendish House, for many months and was very keen on her, but not that

keen, obsessively keen as he saw it. Unlike Will's girlfriend, she had not gone to Pate's. She had responded to his opening conversation gambit in the store - unlike that other girl

'I'm going to get forced to serve sometime soon so why not get the best regiment you can. We've got to do our duty, don't you think? I don't like all the posh idiots at the top, but if you can't beat them, join them.

'Get away and see some of the world and come back in one piece if I can. Maybe as a posh officer. That would impress The Arrow.

'The fields, the views, the cricket, the Coliseum, the Palace, the Gaumont ... the pubs in Cheltenham ... they'll all be here when I get back. Rabbit-stuffed fields.

'For years and years. "There Will Always Be our Field Land",' he started semi-singing, semi-shouting, a bit too loudly, out of tune. It was a cacophonous variation on Vera Lynn's recent release. He poked into the meat to test how far it was cooked.

'We can always walk or cycle to Coombe Hill and up to the canal and all over that way. Then we've got the main road up to Tewkesbury when we want a change from Cheltenham. Other girls are over there.

‘It’s all great, but I want to get away too,’ Rich meandered in a roundabout, random way as he checked the meat again.

‘There will always be the posh places east like Bourton-on-the-Water and Moreton-in-Marsh and the rest. They’re good for a change. You can watch those flappers flapping around.’

Rich paused and looked more serious. He addressed Will intently.

‘I have to go. Those soldiers I met in the Hop Pole told me it was going to be great. So I’ve applied to the Norfolk Yeomanry ... and Signals too. I’ll soon know where I’m going and then you’ll be the boss. Man about the house. You’ll have to see mum through. Make sure Frederick does the right thing. Maybe you’re meant to stay, Will.’

‘Maybe so. I don’t feel an urgent need to go and fight to be honest. I hope I’m not a coward though. We’ll see.’

There was noise at the front door as a key tested the lock and an explosion of giggling coming from their mother. Barking too from her excited dachshund Hermie, as he returned as well.

Their mother Eva, despite or because of the separation, loved to laugh a lot. Sometimes at coarse humour. Lathering or lozenging the

pain. Fred had not brought her home in his car.

She came into the kitchen, a flurry of outer clothing removing and dropped into a spare chair.

‘Elspeth’s just dropped me off. That smells lovely, boys. So how were your days?’

Eva was sober as a sober judge. Just herself, an effervescent bundle of her own bucolic energy. A little overweight already in her early middle age.

Hermie – to be accurate Hermann, to reflect his breed’s Germanic heritage – rushed over to Will to give and get a dollop of affection.

He was known for bringing the occasional chicken home in his jaws when instructed by Eva. Technically and legally speaking, chickens who had wandered out of the legal confines of the neighbouring Evans’ farm into the field behind.

Rich was not currently so happy about life as his mother appeared. Fred had not brought her home. Fred had promised to be civilised that way. Do the right thing. That was the deal.

‘I’m going for a fag outside, mother. I nailed a rabbit. Will can finish doing the food. You don’t mind, Will, do you?’

He walked into the back garden on what was now a clear early autumn night. Chill

inviting itself into the air. He lit up close to the three conifers on one side of the garden.

Fred was a decent man, he thought, but Fred did not always do the right thing.

He looked up. Clusters and dotted lattices of stars. On their at-ease, non-march through the night. Lazy beauties. However, he thought further, soothing to those who took solace in them in Uckington and wherever.

Life and living and action and danger and beauty and everything ... those things shone like stars, but only the tiniest little bit lightly and brightly here in the heart of Gloucestershire.

However, they all screamed their refulgent availability elsewhere ... Screamed their manifold look-at-me availability. Come to us.

Quick march. Vamoose.

Towards that phosphorescence. That big, bright, new yellow brick road to whichever foreign field it was.

# PART ONE

## Chapter 1: Needed someone - a companion

Germany 1965

Help, she's going to think I'm just a stupid schoolboy, a typical oik, a silly idiot ...

I can't just boast about cricket now or swimming or ... Or how I'm top of the class. And why do I care so much about what they think now? The two sisters: Goodman. Why does Diana look so different and just who I'd like to see? Jesus, yes, she's pretty. It's challenging.

'Yes, it's all over now. Silly prep school is over for ever. I'm off to about the best cricket school in the country. My House is on a big, steep hill ...'

He felt his almost shrill delivery taper off as Diana, 14, looked at him almost sympathetically and smiled. Diana was thin, her sister Rachel, 15, next to her in the window seat of the flight from England to Hannover, much less so. To clarify, Rachel was not disinterested - just uninterested in the boy, two years younger than herself.

Henry, 14, leaned over the aisle slightly more and gathered up his schoolboy courage to say: 'It's strange us being just little kids in

Cyprus and meeting again now. Now we're all kind of really grown-up. It's strange.' Forces' kids growing up - on a flight to Germany for the summer holidays.

Diana acquiesced in his juvenile sentiment. Diana and Henry, brunette both, just struck puberty both, she marginally earlier. She smiled again, reflecting the tiniest bit arrogantly that her father was a Brigadier, higher up than Henry's mere Major father. Mind you, rank was not the most important thing, it was good character and knowledge, she thought.

'Well, we're going to a new school now too this September. It's not all just silly hockey and games. Though that's OK. We'll get really educated and ready for proper jobs, like being accountants or lawyers. We're not stupid, Rachel and I.'

Henry had no answer, or adjunct, to that statement from Diana. He switched his attention summarily and briefly to the 45 rpm single record that he was carrying in his hand luggage.

It promised a few minutes of aural - not 'oral', he tried to confirm the correct spelling mentally - pleasure. No, ecstasy (that was a great noun), musical heaven, the best ... He already knew that it was called 'Help' and



would feature in the English band's looming film.

He had never heard it, but that was irrelevant; it was bound to be a masterpiece like 'Ticket To Ride' from earlier in the year with its jangly opening lead guitar and urgent John Lennon delivery.

He had bought 'Help' at the airport shop near Victoria Station before the coach to Heathrow Airport. 'Help' from what, exactly? He was thrilled it was already on sale. Even now the record in its Parlophone green sleeve already felt alive ... it was saying 'play me, play me now'.

He had also bought 'The Carpetbaggers' novel by Harold Robbins which had a really sexy woman on the cover. Really blonde and stunningly good-looking. It was about adults, money-making and sex. Sex. All that was not as important as 'Help' though.

School could throw different, strange stuff at you, but The Beatles allowed you to temporarily exist above all that stuff. The best voices blending urgently, harmonies. Guitar lines from wherever the top school was. Sod Eton. Elysium from the old days?

And inspired by gods like Apollo, Hermes, Pan ... Whether they were Greek or Roman, he thought. That was the problem, those gods all had two names. One in each archaic

language. He couldn't remember which was which - Latin or Greek. It didn't matter. It was all music of the gods ...

Still, Diana looked really interesting in a weird way. Not like a singer like a Marianne Faithful. But her face was, well, in every way so interesting ...

On the other hand, it - not Diana's face - was decidedly smoky and smelly too though on this plane, he concluded. Some of the grown-ups cigarette smoking - yuck.

'Do you like The Beatles then? Or prefer The Rolling Stones?'

Diana looked slightly surprised at the question. 'We didn't get to hear that type of music much at our school. I still listen mainly to classical, but I like some folk music too. The Rolling Stones frankly, no. They look unkempt.'

The conversation map appeared to comprise limited territory and offered few avenues or side turnings, or even meaningful cul-de-sacs, to develop ... for the now tongue-restrained and, more, completely-constrained Henry. What was a 'meaningful' cul-de-sac? A significant, brief interchange before realisation it was all about ... nowhere else to venture?

The British European Airline Trident was beginning to descend to Hannover. Time was nearly up.

Henry led the way down the ramp, feeling embarrassed about his efforts to talk to Diana; her parents would be there too as they arrived. He led the long thin line of sons and daughters in school uniforms, striding along the tarmac towards their expectant parents who were waving in the compact arrivals' hall.

He clutched 'Help'.

'Henry, it's good to see you here over in Germany. Let me take that.'

His father in uniform was all helpful, his mother, looking smartly dressed as ever, smiling and a quick kiss. Elizabeth (Lizzie to her friends) with her dark wavy hair was very effortful in making him feel welcome too. His suitcase was following.

Diana and Rachel were being greeted by their parents - smothering your offspring with hugs and kisses was not the wrong thing, just not the normal thing to do. Their father Justin was proud of his charges and almost began to wrap them. Almost. Justin was six foot three tall at least and wide. A former international rugby player.

Their less imposing mother Susan was more inclined to engage and kissed each lightly on the cheek as she bid them welcome.

'We've got a new car outside, Henry. It's bigger than a Beetle, it's a Variant estate with a big boot. We've got a drive in it now along the

quick, fast Autobahn to get a.s.a.p. to our house in Verden,' his father quite proudly averred.

'It is decent weather. We should be home in about an hour and a half. What's that record you've got?'

'Very interesting, Henry,' his mother Elizabeth commented on his response. She was slightly more open to other music. 'The Beatles are quite big in West Germany too.'

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This was heaven or this was hell. How do you disguise that you are manifestly interested - or aroused? Dreadful ... dreadfully ...

Earlier that afternoon, he had been competing in the muddy extended paddock in a gymkhana of sorts near the stables at the Shiel barracks where his father worked in the small north German town of Verden. It was seriously not what he was good at ... jumping on horses.

However, it had to be admitted, that he was marginally relieved when Janine was thrown a second time from her horse - or was it a pony? That was after she was cajoled to attempt the second circuit of the course. Massive two to three feet high jumps. He

realised that he had now been placed one higher in a list of five competitors, the rest girls. Third? Fourth?

It seemed so strange to see her, a dissolving heap of misery and disillusion, in the arms of some adult horse-helper. Her sister Masha was a good sport, and maybe a better jumper, but she was not around. What little sisters comfort their senior sisters in public? Sororal - was that the adjective? - sympathy. He had no idea.

Janine had disintegrated, into total despair.

The announcement bellowed or billowed out (yes, it spread out, he thought) from the loudspeaker system on the back of an army truck parked at the side of the course. 'First in the ...'

His name came about fourth in the list of five. Well, to be exact, fourth. Janine disqualified.

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Now, it was a totally other course of events at the three-storey army officers' house next to his parents' quarters in Anna-Wobse-Strasse. Joan's parents had gone AWOL to midnight ... and the sitting room was packed with offspring from, maybe, six to sixteen years old.

Janine was absolutely assured, in control, as she steered him around the floor for a slow dance.

He had no clue, absolutely no clue, how to behave or move. Help. And she was so close and so friendly. Her medium-long brown hair style was so perfect, her cute, horizontal fringe. No spots. Unlucky him. And what an athletic figure.

He still had to suffer short hair which was swept back and showcased more spots.

A slow song by The Rolling Stones 'Play With Fire' was turntabling, about some passionate relationship. Had she noticed?

Masha was expertly moving another reluctant young man about the lounge in the house which was next door to the one his parents were renting. Joan appeared a close confidante or friend of Janine. Joan was about a year older than Janine.

Her father had some connection with Janine and Masha's father who was a general in command, or close to it, of all the British troops in Verdun and perhaps elsewhere. A Division? A thousand soldiers? Janine was definitely more approachable than Diana had been, even though she would probably think The Rolling Stones were too dandruffy and scruffy.

The young German DJ had played their single 'The Last Time' ('Play With Fire' was the B-side) already and might play the summer big one. Who knows? The slow song finished; the joyous agony was over.

There were a couple of German teenagers on the floor too - the BAOR (army of the Rhine) was tolerant about its teenage parties, allowing for a sprinkling of locals having their first time. That language use showed a little clever irony, he thought.

'I know you all here, young and old, like to ride the horses - reiten - so this song is for all of you. Verden is the "Reiten Stadt" of Germany, no, yes!'

The teenage DJ, dark-haired and confident, called into his microphone.

'Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, Jungen und Madchen, that was the British group The Stones who have been Number One, Nummer Eins, in both England and Germany this year. The next song is of The Beatles and called "Ticket To Ride".'

The guitar started and Janine separated herself easily from the slightly reluctant Henry, almost laughing and giving him a kiss on the cheek.

'It's time for this Cinderella and her sister to be going. Our father's driver is here for us. We have to be up early for a riding thingy in

Hannover. It was lovely talking to you, Henry. Bye, bye for now. Bye!

She disappeared, vision-like in all her compulsive beauty, from the darkish-lit dance floor where non-dancers and young ones of both sexes lined two walls; the primitive sound system, such as it was with a couple of battered speakers, took up another, tables with snack titbits occupying the fourth.

No blushing Cinderella, was she; a tongue-tied, non-Prince, he certainly was. He would have to slope home quite soon - there was not a lot to stay for.

His friend Mark would never believe that he had been asked to dance by her. Was it the general's daughter?

His parents were in and he would have to field a couple of questions about the do. His father would not pursue questions if he dwelt on the DJ's choice of the ruling music of The Beatles and Stones.

Janine really was fantastic.

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Some three days later he was picking himself up gingerly from the sawdust and dirt on the floor of the riding paddock by the big stables at the barracks. It was about the fourth time that Rusty had thrown him ... bad-



tempered, brown-and-black beast ... a stupid, but also a malign beast.

Rusty knew Henry was not much good (not quite hopeless either) at the jumps and timed his stops or subsequent mini-bucking. Henry was sure that Corporal Watson, in charge of his instruction, loathed his Major father for some reason. Now he could take it out on the son.

‘Come on, lad, he’s easy to ride. Get back on. Left foot in the stirrup and on we go.’

Rusty seemed enormous too to the beleaguered Henry, although the horse was probably only about 15 hands. Henry despaired that he would be able to compete in another gymkana.

‘Come on, Henry, dig your heels in, make Rusty move. You need speed before the jump. Dig those heels in. Canter! Turn! Go. Gallop!’

The three-foot jump looked daunting – especially when you’re on a psycho horse. Oops, Rusty had just stopped, ears quivering. What was going on?

‘Henry, you’re hopeless. You’re the boss, make him move.’ Rusty moved, he lifted his back legs, maybe at leisure, he made sure Henry slid off again. The saddle and stirrups had not been tight enough. At least neither foot stayed twisted in one, causing a possible real injury – unlike just pride before.

‘Let’s give up for now, Henry. Your father will be ashamed of you. We’ll try again on Friday. You better get changed.

‘Thank you, Corporal, for your help and your instruction.’

Watson jumped easily on Rusty and trotted him out the gate and away to some food. Wiry, thin man. Horrible man, Henry thought.

He walked disconsolately to the stables.

‘Henry. Heeee ...nn ...reeee.’ Near the entrance that he was about to go in, he heard the sound of a female voice calling him. Then another voice? ‘Heeee ... nn ... reeee. Come and find me.’

Then there was giggling. ‘Come and find me.’ The voices were coming from somewhere at the other end of the building. There was a long line of stables right and left, about half of them with horses. It all smelt very horsey – hay and straw and horse poo and ...

He walked towards the voice. It was Janine surely? It was her. He walked further, feeling very confused. Surely, she did not want to kiss him properly?

There was an explosion of laughter, involving at least two voices. Suddenly Janine, her sister Masha and Joan all sprang out from one of the stables, still convulsed with laughter.

They must have been riding, because they were all dressed in jodhpurs – they ran away, exiting in a giggling confabulation from the other end.

‘See you, see you. See you soon!’ Teasing gigglers? He really did not want to come to that conclusion.

Girls! Damn them. They just disappeared.

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His father had been driven away early that morning by Herr Altmann to one of the two barracks where he did whatever army accountants do – it was the Signals barracks maybe today.

His mother Elizabeth had driven herself away to some army mother’s meeting about something to do with raising money for poor German or whoever kids.

He was alone in the three-storey house in the army quarters’ street about half a mile from the centre with its boringish cathedral – cathedrals usually were – and cake shops and ... that was about it. Oh, after that, was the Aller river with some small walks. And near one barracks was a big sports field where his father had done a couple of cricket nets with him.

He had only half-enjoyed scaring his father with fast-as-he-could bowling. His father said it was far too short and therefore not right.

Today though, he had nothing much to do. There was the odd good comedy show on the army forces' radio.

'Round The Horne' with that strange, reedy sounding but weirdly-funny man Kenneth Williams came to mind; he had a companion Sandy. They were odd. But that was later in the afternoon.

So too was Radio Luxembourg on the medium wave which he listened to later, pretty secretly, on the radio, much later, when in bed. The reception was crackling lousy (maybe, from Luxembourg, wherever that was) but played good chart hits and would-be hits.

Luxembourg would very likely broadcast THE song of the summer (second best after 'Help', of course) most evenings. Needing help or not getting ... selfish relief. Which was superior, he thought?

Henry decided that he would walk all the quarter mile way to town to buy something, or at least to think of buying something. That was less boring than to walk to the nearby NAAFI food and other stuff store and see lots of junior soldiers - maybe that horrible corporal.

After frying himself two sausages, two slices of bacon and an egg, he was fortified for the

walk. He had tried to cook his father the same breakfast earlier as some part-payment for his free board and lodgings and school fees.

It was overcast, a little drizzly, occasional puddles. North Germany was the same as damp, dank England.

As he neared the quaint mediaeval centre - in his conservative grey trousers that appeared much too similar to his school uniform - he heard the compulsive strains of THE song coming from the window of a business.

First and foremost, fuzzy bass or lead guitar riff. Ecstasy. Trapped young man vocal.

‘I can’t get no ... satisfaction. I can’t get no ... satisfaction.’

He looked towards the window. Was it an office? A shop? An apartment?

‘He can’t get no satisfaction. Mick Jagger, yes, no? It’s a great song and a great riff by Keith, yes, no?’

Henry looked - the voice was coming from a male, brown-haired teenager, maybe 18, idling in the entrance of the building by some entrance bells. Henry still did not know if it was an entrance for shops or residential flats.

‘Hello, I was the record player at that party some days ago in Anna-Wobse-Strasse. You were at the party - yes, no?’

‘Umm, yes, I remember you. You played “The Last Time” by the Stones - and “Play

With Fire”. The B-side. Yes. That was a good choice.’

‘You were with the top soldier’s daughter too. I envy you. She liked you. Was nearly over you.’

‘No, that’s not true. I danced one song with her. My name is Henry. What is yours?’

‘Max, short for Maximilian. I am from Verden. Verden An der Aller for us Germans - not Auf. You are from England though. And I assume that you ride horses. All the army people do.’

‘Not really. I’m not horsey. My parents want me to ride.’

‘Would you like a cigarette? I have some from the party. The black market continues in its strange way even in Verden.’

‘Er, no thanks. I don’t smoke. Do you like The Beatles as much as The Stones? I do!’

‘Yes! I like them more. They are more ... innovating on melody and chord structure. I have studied music - even at Abitur level. The Stones, you can dance, everyone does. The Beatles, not so easy, but their words are improving, their keys too, their being complicated.’

‘They did their song “She Loves You” in German, did you know? “Sie liebt dich.” They can speak some German.’

Henry felt elated that he had an ally – from frontline critics at home and abroad.

‘I like The Beatles better too! But lots of guys at my school in England pretend to like The Stones more because it’s cooler. People should just say what they like best instead of pretending. If you like Beethoven best, even if they all pretend he’s rubbish, say so.’

‘Yes, and he was German too! German rubbish! The top in rubbish though. Beethoven would have had no time for Mr Hitler and his mad little and big empire Germany ideas ...’

‘You speak English really well, by the way.’

‘Thank you. I hope you speak some German. The music is playing from the rooms of me and my father. My father is a lawyer. Has done some work with the general.’

Henry, 14, looked at Max, 17, admiringly. Max returned the look. Friendship possibled – or probabled. With that age gap, much easier away from school.

‘Let me show you the most strange sight by the river in this town. It’s weird, you’ll need “Help” after you see it! That’s a joke, Henry.’

‘But maybe, a Beatle drew it when they were in Hamburg playing in the sailor clubs five years ago. They were good at art, yes?’

‘Everything!’

The teenagers were united. Their cause was just.



