

## New for February 2016

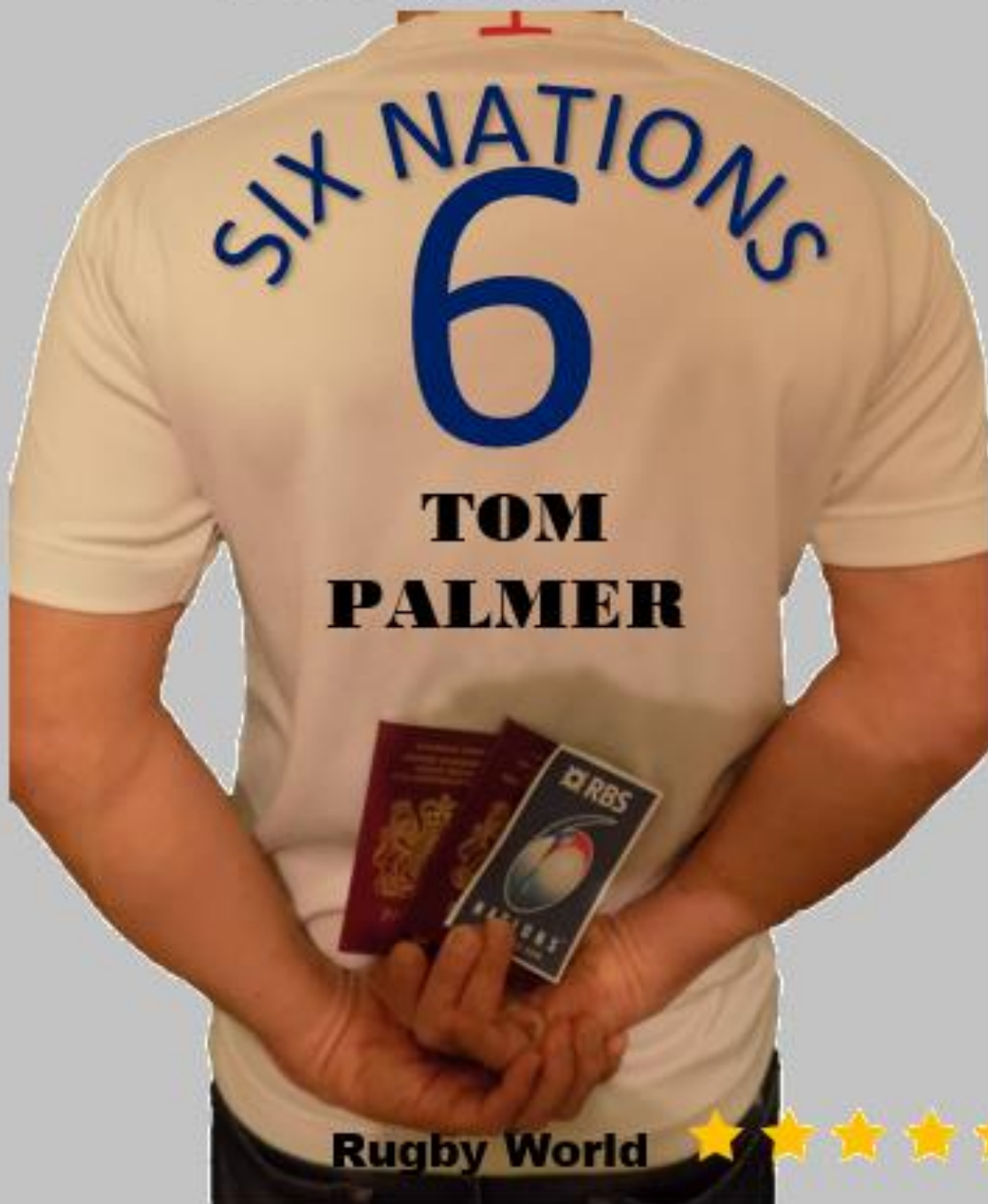
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Danny & Charlotte return in

## FOUL PLAY



<http://tompalmer.co.uk/foul-play-six-nations/>

# Foul Play: Six Nations

## Chapter one

Danny Harte and Charlotte Duncan are friends. But they are more than friends in one respect. They are partners. In crime. Because for a couple of years Danny and Charlotte have been solving football crimes. Kidnapped players. Murdered managers. Dodgy agents. You name it. But the last few weeks have been quiet. Too quiet. No jobs like that. Just back to being normal children at normal school, which is where we find them today...

Friday. The last lesson of the week. And that lesson was called *Drop Everything and Read*. The pupils were given twenty minutes to read whatever they wanted. Mr Lancaster, the school teacher, included.

Danny was hunched over his copy of the *Rugby Paper*. He was reading Six Nations previews – and couldn't wait for the kick off in a week's time. He glanced at Charlotte to see what she was doing. Charlotte was leaning back in her chair, reading *The Hunger Games*. Again. She was obsessed with that book. When she saw Danny watching her she pulled a face. So Danny went back to his paper.

And that was when he saw it.

The advert.

The advert that was going to change his life.

**Wanted. Under 16s to prevent and solve sports crimes. For a fee. No time wasters. Text 'FoulPlay' to 24601 for info.**

Danny couldn't believe what he was reading. He rubbed his eyes. Pulled the paper closer to himself. Pushed it away. But it was still there. The advert. Offering him his dream job of solving sports crimes. For money. There was a note from the *Rugby Paper* underneath guaranteeing that the advert was 100% genuine.

His hands trembling with excitement, Danny reached into his bag for his phone, then slid it between the pages of his *Rugby Paper*.

Mr Lancaster had already confiscated two phones during *Drop Everything and Read*, so Danny knew he had to be careful.

'Bring that here,' Mr Lancaster shouted.

Danny hesitated before looking up. *Don't assume someone is accusing you. Don't admit guilt before you have to.* He knew all that. He counted to five, then looked up to see his classmate, Iris Palmer, handing her phone to Mr Lancaster.

'Three phones already,' the school teacher chuckled. 'Any more? I could open a shop at this rate.'

Danny waited until his heartbeat was steady again, then keyed in 24601, typed FoulPlay and hit send.

Almost immediately a text came back to him.

**Thx 4 text. Be at W v E, Hindlip suite, 2.45 p.m. Sunday. Your country needs you.**

After the lesson, Danny sidled up next side Charlotte in the corridor.

'Hi.'

'Hi.'

'What are you doing on Sunday?' Danny asked.

'Nothing,' Charlotte said, holding her breath for a second. Not because she was wanting to be asked out or anything. She and Danny were beyond that now. It was because when Danny asked if she was doing anything it often led to something *very* unpredictable. And dangerous.

'Why?' she asked.

'We're back in business,' Danny said.

Sunday. Worcester, West Midlands.

Danny and Charlotte arrived at Sixways rugby ground in good time. They had been on the train south all morning. There was a large crowd heading in through the turnstiles. The noise of a hundred conversations. The smell of burgers.

They walked in through reception. Huge glass windows. Long sofas. Tall indoor plants.

Charlotte pointed at a sign. 'Hindlip suite,' she said in a low voice.

'Spotted,' Danny grinned.

They approached the reception desk side by side. It was large and white with a Worcester Warriors badge – an ancient warrior's helmet – behind it.

'Can I help you?' A young woman wearing a headscarf smiled. She had a name label. Samira.

'We're here for the thing in the Hindlip Suite, please,' Danny said, as Charlotte picked up and studied a glossy piece of paper, then pocketed it.

Samira shook her head. 'No access to there today. It's being... decorated.'

'But we've come for a meeting,' Danny insisted. 'Please can we just have a look?'

Samira shook her head. 'Absolutely not,' she said.

Outside Danny kicked a Coke can into the road. He was fuming.

'Now what?' he said.

Charlotte handed Danny the glossy piece of paper she had taken from the reception desk.

'Find another way in?' she suggested.

'Really?' Danny asked.

'I'd say this was a test,' Charlotte said. 'If we can't get past security we'll be useless detectives. So that's the first test, I reckon.'

Danny nodded. 'In that case, I think I've got a plan...'

'We're Eddie Jones' children,' Danny explained to the oversized man who was standing in front of the players' entrance. He put on a mock Australian accent.

'Who?' the man asked.

'Who?' Charlotte shoved Danny aside. 'Eddie Jones. The new England coach? Just arrived from Oz. AKA our Dad? Come to watch some Worcester players, in case they are good enough to play for England. Can't wait to tell him how welcoming the Warriors were to his kids.'

'Oh sorry,' the guard said. 'Yeah. He just came in. Please. This way.'

'And can you tell us how to get to the Hindlip Suite?' Danny added. 'Dad's waiting for us there.'  
'Of course, mate. This way...'

There were two people already in the Hindlip suite. Danny recognised them both.

One was Samira. The woman from the reception desk. She winked at them as they came into the room. It was a large room with a wooden floor and massive windows looking out onto the Sixways pitch, where the players were warming up with tackle bags

'Well done,' Samira said.

Danny was about to reply, until he saw who the other person in the room was. A smallish man with dark hair and friendly smile.

Eddie Jones. The man himself. He was talking to the security guard.

'Hi kids,' Eddie Jones said. 'I hear we're related?'

Danny shrugged. 'Yeah, sorry. No offence. We needed a way in.'

'None taken,' the England coach laughed. 'I like your style. Anyone who can weave through a defence like that should be on my team.'

'But to business,' Samira interrupted, glancing at the clock, then at Danny and Charlotte. 'Tell us who you are, please?'

Danny and Charlotte introduced themselves.

Then Eddie Jones explained why they were there. Their brief.

‘Here’s the story,’ he began. ‘You’ll have seen there’s been a lot of corruption in sport recently?’

Danny and Charlotte nodded.

‘Tennis. Athletics. Cycling. Soccer,’ he went on. ‘It’s rife. And we are very worried the same could happen in rugby. So, part of my job – as well as to get the best out of the England team on the pitch – is to make sure rugby stays clean. We’re working with the police...’

‘That’s me,’ Samira interjected, flashing a silver badge.

‘Yeah,’ Eddie Jones went on. ‘We’re working with Samira to try to stop rugby crime happening and to investigate it if it does. But it’s hard you know. The police have tried to put adults into other sports under cover, but it never works. So we thought about kids.’

‘No one suspects kids,’ Samira said.

Danny nodded in agreement. There was some truth in that.

‘So we’re setting a few pairs of kids up to solve some challenges. See which team does it best. Then that duo will be our rugby detectives. Keeping rugby clean. In real life. Or trying to. Interested?’

‘Yeah,’ Danny said.

Then Charlotte spoke. ‘But you said pairs of kids. How many pairs? And what’s the deal?’

‘Four pairs,’ Samira said. ‘Reporting to me. You are up against each other. You’ll get a challenge for each week of the Six Nations. One for each city where it is played. Edinburgh. Paris. Rome. Etc. You need to solve all six challenges. And you need to do it before and better than the other three teams. Understood? I don’t need to explain again, do I?’

‘No,’ Charlotte said in a cool voice.

‘But how can we afford...’ Danny asked.

‘Money?’ Samira interrupted. ‘Are you asking about money?’

‘Yes,’ Danny admitted. ‘Like paying for travel and stuff like that.’

‘We’ll cover your expenses,’ Samira said. ‘You concentrate on solving the puzzles. That’s it.’

‘And the winners get what?’ Charlotte asked.

‘The job,’ Danny cut across Samira this time. ‘The best job in the world. To investigate sport crime and get paid to do it. Right?’

‘Right,’ Samira confirmed, looking deep into Danny’s eyes.

‘So, do you want the first challenge?’ Eddie Jones asked.

Danny looked at Charlotte. Charlotte looked at Danny. There was no need for words. They could read each other's thoughts perfectly.

'Yes please,' Charlotte said.

So Eddie Jones handed Charlotte an envelope. Charlotte opened it. It read:

**Take a selfie with some old Indian money at the Scotland versus England Six Nations match this weekend.**

And that was all they had.

*Danny and Charlotte have their clue. For their first challenge they are being sent to Edinburgh. But what does the clue mean? Can you solve it? Can they solve it? And will they solve it before the other three pairs of children taking part?*

*Chapter two of Foul Play: Six Nations will be published here on the morning of Monday 8<sup>th</sup> February.*

**Tom Palmer is the author of 30 children books about football and rugby, including his popular *Foul Play* series, which features Danny and Charlotte. [www.tompalmer.co.uk](http://www.tompalmer.co.uk)**

## Chapter two

**Danny and Charlotte have been set a challenge. A big challenge. They are competing against three other teams to solve a series of puzzles set by England rugby coach, Eddie Jones. The team that performs best off the pitch during the Six Nations will be taken on by England Rugby to help protect the game from crime. They will be professional sports detectives. But it is not going to be a smooth ride. At all.**

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Back at school. In the library. Danny and Charlotte sat staring the clue Eddie Jones had handed them:

**Take a selfie with some old Indian money at the Scotland versus England Six Nations match this weekend.**

They had been trying to work out what it meant every lunchtime at school. Desperate to find links between the Six Nations rugby tournament and 'Indian money', whatever that meant.

The tournament had four main sponsors: RBS, Guinness, Accenture and Tissot. They'd researched each sponsor and found out who owned each company. And there *were* some Indian businesses involved. But nothing big. Nothing that stood out.

Danny sighed and stared around the school library, which was packed with young people reading newspapers, magazines and books. Others going online. 'We've got nothing to go on yet,' he said. 'I wonder how the other teams are getting on.'

Charlotte smiled. 'But it's good to be thinking like this again,' she said. 'Do you remember before, when we were trying to catch out Sir Richard?'

Danny raised his eyebrows. Sir Richard Gawthorpe. The former football club owner who had been at the root of several crimes Danny and Charlotte had investigated in the past. Kidnapped players. Russian mafia deals. You name it.

'He was insane,' Danny said. 'I think he was more into trying to get to us in the end – than make money through his dodgy football dealings.'

Charlotte agreed.

'We're not getting anywhere here, are we?' Danny asked.

Charlotte put her hand on the envelope in front of her. 'Well, at least we have these,' she said.

Danny nodded. The envelope contained train tickets to and from Edinburgh for Saturday's match. Plus two match tickets and a hundred pounds in cash for expenses.

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It was the first train out of the city station. Direct to Edinburgh. The station was quiet, except for a few groups of people, including three Leicester City fans on their way to the Etihad for their top-of-

the-table clash with Manchester City. Danny was buzzing. This reminded him of away days going to the football. He was living the dream: live sport and detective work rolled into one.

They had been given first class tickets and were enjoying the wide comfortable seats and free food, drink and Wifi. There were a few adults in their carriage. But not many. And two short-cropped haired boys at the far end, both playing games on their phones.

Danny and Charlotte sat opposite each other and read. Charlotte was studying a map of Murrayfield Stadium. Danny leafed through *Rugby World* magazine. They occasionally stopped reading to talk about the clue, then went back to their reading as the train thundered on. Through York. Over the River Tyne and north of Newcastle.

It was when they were speeding past the North Sea coast of Northumbria that Danny thrust his magazine in front of Charlotte.

‘Hey?’ Charlotte complained.

‘Just look,’ Danny said.

So Charlotte looked. She read aloud.

*‘The Calcutta Cup is made from silver rupees that were melted down and crafted into a beautiful trophy, after the Calcutta Rugby Club ceased to exist...’*

Danny and Charlotte gazed into each other’s eyes and laughed. They didn’t need words. It was obvious what they had to do.

What wasn’t obvious was that the other two children in the carriage had been listening to every word Charlotte and Danny had said – and, also, that they were smiling.

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Murrayfield was awesome. Danny had been to dozens of stadiums in his life and this was one of the best. Partly because of the look of the stands, tall with great blue columns holding them up. But more because of the feeling in the stadium. It was extraordinary. He could feel the excitement rippling through him. Something in the voices and faces of the fans creating an electricity. However much he wanted England to win, he had to hand it to Scotland: they could produce one hell of an atmosphere.

‘You haven’t forgotten we’re here for something more than the match,’ Charlotte said, elbowing Danny in the ribs as they sat down in their seats near the players’ tunnel. Danny had been staring at the pitch. A beautiful huge rectangle of green. The stage was set.

Danny laughed. And then Charlotte saw it. The trophy. The Calcutta Cup. It was on a blue stand ten metres in front of the players’ tunnel. Just sitting there next to the equally impressive Triple Crown, a large silver plate. So close.

‘Let’s go now,’ Charlotte said, standing. ‘It’s just sat there.’



They both stood to walk down towards the front of the stand. And, as they did, they saw two boys amble up to the trophy, pull out a selfie stick and take a snap of themselves. They had short-cropped hair – and Charlotte recognised them immediately.

‘From the train... Are they...’ Charlotte stammered. And as she did one of the two boys looked directly at her and made a signal with his first finger and thumb. The letter L. Unmistakeable. He mouthed the word ‘loser’ at Charlotte.

Danny followed Charlotte as she rushed down to the front. Only to see two huge men arrive, pushing the two boys away from the trophies. But the boys didn’t look unhappy. They were pointing to their screen, goading Charlotte and Danny.

‘How did they know who we are?’ Charlotte asked Danny.

Danny shook his head. ‘I don’t know, but they do – and there’s no way were going to get at that trophy before kick-off now. Not with those two guards looming over it.’

And then there was a roar as the two lines of players came running out onto the pitch. The Scottish team running to the trophy’s right, England to its left. Danny applauded instinctively. The teams were met by the noise of the crowd, bagpipes playing and cheers for Princess Anne as she came out of the tunnel to meet both teams.

Danny and Charlotte groaned as they saw the trophy being carried back down the tunnel and under the stand. Time for kick off. The duo stood up to go after the trophy. They would have to miss the match to achieve what they had come to achieve. A selfie with the Calcutta Cup.

But how would they do that?

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Over the next quarter of an hour Charlotte and Danny tried a dozen different ways of getting to the out of bounds areas under the stand. But the security was air tight. At one point they made it as far as the hospitality suites where – for a moment – Danny thought he saw a face he recognised. But it couldn’t be. Why would Sir Richard Gawthorpe be here? Today? So Danny forgot about the face and got on with the matter at hand. Finding the Calcutta Cup.

Then, suddenly, there was a roar.

‘There’s been a try,’ Danny spluttered, turning away from the latest corridor they had failed to get access to.

‘So?’ Charlotte asked.

‘So we need to go and see if it was England that scored... I think it was. The crowd wasn’t that loud... Not like it would have been if Scotland scored...’

Charlotte shook her head. ‘And that’s more important than getting at the Calcutta Cup?’

Then suddenly Danny’s face lit up.

‘What?’ Charlotte asked.

'I think I've got it.'

'Got what?'

'A plan.'

'And?' Charlotte sounded impatient.

'If we win...' Danny said. 'If we win... then it is almost certain that the England team will do a lap of honour and if we do, then most of the Scottish crowd won't want to hang around and see that. So then we can get close to the front and see then players – and the trophy. And take a selfie.'

'Good plan,' Charlotte said. 'But what if we lose?'

'We won't,' Danny said. 'I hope.'

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When England kicked the ball out of play at the end of the game, Danny punched the air. After a tense second half, England took the game 15-9. Tries from Kruis and Nowell. And, as soon as Billy Vunipola was being interviewed in front of the TV cameras, most of the fans – blue and white – left Murrayfield.

And then Dylan Hartley was leading the England team up some steps to collect the Calcutta Cup. From a smiling Princess Anne. The England captain lifted it high and the players came down to the pitch.

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Half an hour later Danny and Charlotte stood outside Murrayfield, among the last fans to leave the stadium. Both were staring at Charlotte's smartphone screen. At Instagram. They were waiting. Waiting for a response to the selfie they had posted with the cup.

Just as Danny had hoped, England did do a lap of honour. They had run to the front of the stand and took a selfie with Danny Care – and the trophy. The England players making sure they thanked all the fans that had stayed behind to congratulate them.

But had the two children succeeded? *Really* succeeded? Or did the fact that the two boys from the train had got to the trophy first mean they had lost anyway?

The screen stayed unchanged. Five minutes passed. Ten minutes. And then Instagram updated. A comment.

Six words. From EddieJ:

**Prepare for a Roman rugby tournament.**

That was all.

‘Fab,’ Charlotte said. ‘We’re going to Rome.’

‘But is that it?’ Danny asked. ‘Is that the challenge?’

Charlotte shrugged.

‘There has to be more to it than that,’ Danny said. ‘What else could it mean?’

*Danny and Charlotte have passed their first challenge. But they know their second will be much tougher. Tougher to solve. And – if they do solve it – far tougher to achieve. Because of the nature of the clue, but also because of the man Danny saw inside Murrayfield. The man he has forgotten about for now, but who has not forgotten about him.*

***Chapter three of Foul Play: Six Nations will be published here on the morning of Monday 15<sup>th</sup> February.***

**Tom Palmer writes football and rugby stories set in the worlds of spies, detectives, the supernatural and war. You can access free posters, first chapters and other literacy resources at his website: [www.tompalmer.co.uk](http://www.tompalmer.co.uk).**

**Thanks for reading.**

## Chapter three

**Charlotte and Danny are competing with three other teams of children in a series of challenges during the Six Nations Rugby tournament. The winning team of kids will be given jobs by England Rugby as detectives. Danny and Charlotte succeeded with the first challenge, by taking a selfie with the Calcutta Cup at Murrayfield. But now they face a second challenge – and opponents who are not ready to play as fairly as they are.**

Danny and Charlotte spent the Monday and Tuesday after the Scotland game preparing for a rugby tournament in Rome, as they had been asked. They went for long runs. Did stretching exercises. Ate lots of pasta. Read up on the rules of rugby union. But they did none of this at full intensity. Because they knew – deep down – that there was more to the clue – ‘Prepare for a Roman Rugby tournament’ – than simply being asked to play rugby in Rome.

But what exactly?

On the Wednesday morning each of them received a parcel delivered by a lone motorcycle courier wearing leather head to toe and a silver helmet. Flights to Rome. Hotel bookings. Passes for the Italy v England Six Nations game. And tickets for the famous coliseum.

That was when it all clicked into place for Charlotte. The coliseum tickets were the clue.

‘Roman rugby?’ she pondered. ‘This is about something specifically Roman. Not just any old rugby.’

‘The coliseum?’ Danny asked.

‘Yes. You know, that massive old stadium in Rome that was built two thousand years ago. They used to hold gladiator fights there, kill exotic animals, slaughter Christians. When Rome was at the height of its powers. That’s what this is about. The past. Not now. Roman rugby. That’s what we need to research.’

The research didn’t take them long. A computer search for Roman Rugby brought up a game called Harpastum on Wikipedia. It was described as a rough game. A game played mostly on the ground. Two players per team. But there were no real rules. Because the rules of Harpastum had been forgotten over the centuries. The internet was packed with ideas about how it could have been played. But no-one knew. For sure.

‘So how do we prepare for that, then?’ Charlotte asked, folding her arms.

Danny shrugged. ‘There’s lots here, but it doesn’t really tell you how to play.’

‘That’s the internet,’ Charlotte sighed. ‘Sometimes.’

Danny frowned. ‘What do you mean?’

‘I mean there’s loads of information, but you can never really trust it is coming from an expert. You have to back it up with facts. It’s just not reliable enough to risk losing the challenge.’

'That's it,' Danny stuttered.

'That's what?'

'An expert. I've just read this book. You know, about rugby. Called *The Oval World*. By a man called Tony Collins. I can't remember anything about Harpastum in his book, but it is about the history of rugby, so he might know. If anyone does, he will.'

The Friday before the game in Italy, Danny and Charlotte discovered Tony Collins was giving a talk at a library in Exeter. A long trip south. But a trip that would prove worthwhile, because Tony Collins was indeed an expert – and a nice man too.

Sunday. Rome. Charlotte and Danny arrived at the coliseum. It was an awesome sight, towering over the modern city. A massive stadium with stone arches all the way round, the bright blue Italian sky as a backdrop.

'Wow,' Danny said, taking in the coliseum. It was old. Really old. Parts of it were crumbling away. Two thousand years was a long time for a building to still be here. Even so, Danny thought, with its great stone arches and columns it still looked pretty good for its age.

They passed their tickets through the electronic readers on the gate to the coliseum and went inside, where the building felt even larger than it had from the outside. They were met at the gates by Samira.

'Hello, you two,' she smiled. 'This way please.'

Samira led them to a large wooden stage area set on top of the bottom floor of the coliseum. There was a small sand court laid out at its centre, a line down the middle. Samira talked as they walked, explaining what was going to happen next. And that one of the four teams taking part in their competition had dropped out, having experienced some trouble back in England.

'What sort of trouble?' Charlotte asked.

'You're on next,' Samira said, ignoring her question. 'Ben and Joe have beaten Alice and Mo. You have to play Ben and Joe now.'

'Now?'

'Yes,' Samira said. 'Right now.'

Danny and Charlotte looked onto the court and recognised the two short-cropped hair boys they had seen in Edinburgh. Both were grinning and tossing a small round ball – about the size of a softball – to each other in the sand. They were barefoot. Obviously Ben and Joe. There was another pair of children – Alice and Mo – sitting by the side of the court. One of them was bleeding from both knees.

Danny followed Charlotte onto the Harpastum court. He was trying to remember everything that Tony Collins had told him. But – seeing the smug smirking looks on the faces of Ben and Joe – all the advice he had been given faded to nothing.

The game began. It went badly. Very badly for Danny and Charlotte. They suffered a swift and decisive defeat.

Danny glared at Ben and Joe, who were standing haka-style, gloating after their victory. He heard applause from above. Somewhere high up the stone steps of the coliseum. Danny looked up and saw a group of men in England rugby tops clapping.

‘Great,’ he said to himself. ‘Even the England fans are against us.’

‘Last game,’ Samira interrupted his thoughts. ‘Straight away. Danny and Charlotte against Alice and Mo. Both have lost to Ben and Sam. Therefore the losing team of this is out of the whole competition and will lose the chance to be sports detectives.’

‘Come on, Danny,’ Charlotte said, pulling him off the floor. ‘What happened to you in that first game? You’re good at rugby.’

‘I can’t do it. I can’t even remember what Tony Collins told us to do.’

Appalled, Charlotte slapped Danny gently on the arm. ‘You need to listen to me. Forget the coliseum. Forget staring up at whoever you’ve been staring at up there. And play the game. If you don’t you won’t get what you want. Okay?’

‘But what did Tony Collins say?’

Charlotte slapped Danny again. ‘Focus and remember this. He said he’d read about it in old Latin texts that most people haven’t seen. We have to catch, then pass, then move. Catch the ball from me. I’ll move. You pass it to me. You move. Keep it going. Then score. That’s it. Just think those three words – and do them.’

‘Okay,’ Danny said. Charlotte’s clarity had helped him. He forgot everything. The men on the coliseum steps. The fear of losing this game of Harpastum. Everything. Except catch, pass, move.’

And this time, the game went better. Much better.

Victory.

Four children arrived battered and bruised at the Stadio Olimpico on the other side of Rome. A twenty-first century coliseum. Not long to go before Italy kicked off against England in both teams’ second Six Nations match.

In the car on the way through the frantic streets of Rome, both Danny and Charlotte had tried to start friendly conversations with Ben and Joe, their opponents. But the other two ignored them. As if they weren’t there.

But before the car drew up to the stadium Ben leant across and whispered something to Charlotte. Danny watched and felt like leaping across at Ben and hitting him. But he didn’t. He knew better than

to behave like that. He waited. Let Charlotte deal with it, which she did by ignoring the short-haired boy. And his friend.

Inside the stadium, the four children were led to their seats to the sound of 'Italia! Italia!' being chanted by thousands of voices. They had been given the choice of watching the match in a posh hospitality box – or in the stands near the players' tunnel. Ben and Joe opted for the box. Danny didn't need to ask Charlotte what she wanted to do.

'In the stand, please,' he said to Samira.

Danny followed Charlotte to their seats and sat down next to her.

'What did Ben say to you in the car?' he asked.

Charlotte raised an eyebrow. 'That he thought it was sad that the other team – the ones who didn't make it here – had had such a bad accident. And that maybe the same thing might happen to us.'

Danny frowned. 'A threat?'

'Yes. A threat. But let's talk about it later. Enjoy the game first.'

And so Danny – trusting Charlotte's judgement – did just that. And how could he not, seeing as England won 40-9, putting them top of the Six Nations league table.

After the game Danny and Charlotte sat waiting for what would happen next. Surely they were about to be given their next challenge. Some of the England players were warming down at one end of the pitch. Jonathan Joseph was being interviewed for scoring his hat trick of tries. And – then, suddenly – the giant England centre made his way straight towards Danny and Charlotte.

'Hi,' Jonathan Joseph said.

'Hi... er hi...' Danny tried to speak coherently. But failed.

'Well played, JJ,' Charlotte said, sounding more composed.

'Thanks,' Joseph said. 'This is for you.'

Jonathan Joseph handed Charlotte a folded slip of paper. Quickly, she thanked him and opened it up and read the twelve words it contained.

**Research and write a short profile of a true England rugby hero.**

That was it. Another clue that could mean anything – or nothing.

*Danny and Charlotte have what looks – on paper – like an easy challenge for the coming week. Who would you choose as an England Rugby hero? And why?*

***Chapter four of Foul Play: Six Nations will be published here on the morning of Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> February.***

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**Thanks for reading.**



## Chapter Four

**There are two teams left in the competition to choose a pair of junior England Rugby Detectives. It's down to Ben & Joe or Charlotte & Danny. This week the remaining teams have been set a new challenge by Jonathan Joseph to write a report on a 'true England rugby hero'. But can Danny and Charlotte trust their opponents to play fair?**

Monday morning. Back at school, where the half-term holidays were a distant memory.

Danny and Charlotte met in the school library at break. Charlotte unfolded the piece of paper Jonathan Joseph had given her after his hat trick in Rome. Their new clue.

**Research and write a short profile of a true England rugby hero.**

'It's too simple,' Danny said slowly. 'There must be a double meaning, or something. But I just can't see it.'

'Yeah. I agree,' Charlotte replied. 'But who would you choose? I mean who is your England rugby hero? That's where we have to start.'

'Lewis Moody.' Danny didn't hesitate. 'My dad's favourite player from when England won the World Cup.'

'So he won the World Cup?' Charlotte said. 'That's good. But does that make him a "true hero"? If we're supposed to be detectives, then we should be asking questions like what does being a hero mean anyway?'

'Well... yes... but no..., ' Danny said, fiddling with his iPhone. He was reading about Lewis Moody. Reporting it to Charlotte. 'He won the 2003 World Cup. Captained England after that. Seventy-one caps. That's pretty impressive. But hang on... How about this? Look.'

Danny showed his phone screen to Charlotte. 'It says here that Lewis Moody is the official ambassador to the RFU's First World War commemorations.'

'That's more like it,' Charlotte said. 'Real heroes... Not just amazing players, but players who have done heroic things off the pitch too. I wonder if there were any England rugby players who actually fought in a war?'

And Danny knew straight away that Charlotte had unravelled the challenge. Lewis Moody was a top player, but he'd be the first to admit the real heroes were the players who represented their country on the pitch as well as fighting amid the horrors of the First World War. And Danny knew exactly where they should be heading next: the World Rugby Museum, Twickenham.

Two days later Danny and Charlotte travelled to the World Rugby Museum in London. On their way they had a lucky escape.

They were standing on the platform at Clapham Junction railway station – high-speed trains flashing by – and a heavily-laden luggage trolley rolled suddenly towards them. Fast.

If Charlotte had not pushed Danny out of the way and leapt to safety herself, they both would have ended up underneath the 13:28 to Reading.

Danny recovered quickly from his shock and sprinted down the stairs, having heard at least one person running away from the scene.

When he got back to Charlotte, his breathing laboured, he shook his head. 'I thought I heard ...' he gasped.

'Did you see anyone?' Charlotte asked.

Danny shook his head. 'Only the back of someone's red hoodie. No face. Nothing to go on. And... er... by the way. Thanks for... you know... saving me and that.'

The World Rugby Museum at Twickenham was amazing. Displays about rugby. Players who had represented England through the generations, including war heroes. Glass cabinets containing the original rules of the game, different styles of balls used and trophies won.

Including the Calcutta Cup, Charlotte noticed with a grin.

Part of the museum visit included a tour of Twickenham Stadium with a tour guide. Danny and Charlotte were shown round the awesome towering stands, the perfect rectangle of grass, tall white rugby posts at each end. Then back into the corridors underneath the stands, huge images of roses, photographs of players and writing on the wall.

It was there that Danny saw it. On a wall. In black, grey and red.

He read it out loud. 'Cyril Lowe scored 18 tries between 1913 and 1923. Remained an English record when he passed away in 1983 age 91.'

'So?' Charlotte said, challenging Danny.

'So he was England's record try scorer up to 1983.'

'Doesn't make him more than a rugby hero, though,' Charlotte said.

'But look at the years,' Danny insisted. '1913 to 1923.'

'Ahh,' Charlotte said. 'I get it.'

'Exactly,' Danny went on. 'During those years he could have been away at war. 1914 to 1918 was the time of World War One. Which means it is even more amazing he scored so many tries. And I bet he fought in the war. It said in the museum that rugby players were among the first sportsmen to sign up.'

It was at this point that the tour guide interrupted. 'Cyril Lowe most certainly fought in the war,' she said. 'He was in the Royal Flying Corps before it became the RAF. An airman. Are you interested?'

'Yes,' both children said at once.

‘That’s good. Because we’ve got someone special visiting today who you might like to meet.’

Charlotte and Danny were taken upstairs in a lift, then along a red-carpeted corridor into a private hospitality box, a large window looking out over the Twickenham pitch. Danny felt the hairs on the back of his neck go up. What a view!

Then two men entered. And Danny gasped.

In the lift, the tour guide had explained that Cyril Lowe’s great nephew was at Twickenham that day, working for the RFU Schools project with one of its ambassadors. Charlotte grinned, having worked out who they were about to meet. She was excited for her friend. Danny, however, had not made the ambassador connection yet.

‘Hello there,’ one of the men said. ‘I’m Mark Lowe. Cyril Lowe’s great nephew. And this is Lewis Moody, our First World War ambassador. So happy you’re interested in my Great Uncle. What can I tell you?’

Danny started with the questions as Charlotte took notes. Finding out facts that would be useful for the piece of work they’d been asked to prepare.

Mark Lowe shared lots of interesting stories. Facts they could use. He even showed them photographs of Cyril Lowe in his England kit and RFC uniform. And Lewis Moody talked about how he had traced his grandfather’s involvement in the war, when he was one of the very first British soldiers in action.

After Mark and Lewis had left the hospitality box, Danny leaned back in his chair and sighed.

‘How was that?’ Charlotte grinned.

‘Wow!’ Danny laughed. ‘Amazing. What an honour to hear about a man like that direct from one of his relatives.’

Charlotte let out a short laugh. ‘I meant Lewis Moody, actually. You know: your rugby hero.’

‘The thing is, now I know about Cyril Lowe,’ Danny admitted. ‘I think I have a new rugby hero.’

But Charlotte wasn’t listening. She had seen something. A wire. A small black wire with a microphone disappearing through the gap in the window out to the stadium.

Without hesitating, she lunged towards the window to see two figures sprinting down the steps towards the pitch. Short-cropped hair. Wearing hoodies: one blue, one red. Aged about fourteen. Unmistakable to Charlotte.

‘What was that?’ Danny asked, standing now.

‘I think they were recording us,’ Charlotte said.

Danny and Charlotte both watched Ben and Joe as the two pairs of wannabe detectives gathered to present their England rugby hero profiles. It was a small room with a table and six chairs. Charlotte saw that Ben was wearing a red hoody. But she said nothing.

She was too surprised by who one of the adults in the room was. Lewis Moody.

The other adult was Samira.

Danny had his suspicions about the two boys. The red hoody. The trolley at the station. The microphone in the hospitality box. He suspected Ben and Joe of both acts. But he couldn't think of that now. He had to concentrate on their profile. And about not being distracted by seeing Lewis Moody again.

Ben and Joe were asked to present their profile first.

As soon as the pair began, Danny noticed Charlotte stare at him. She was furious. Because Ben and Joe had chosen a war hero too. Prince Alexander Obolensky. But Danny couldn't help but be interested in the player's story.

Obolensky had been Russian, but escaped his homeland to live in England and become British. He scored two tries when England beat New Zealand for the first time, but died in a Second World War accident, crashing his plane while training. Danny couldn't help but think that Ben and Joe had stolen the idea of using war hero from them. But he said nothing. And neither did Charlotte.

When it was Danny and Charlotte's turn they delivered a brief but fact-packed list of interesting information about Cyril Lowe. That he had shot down nine enemy planes. That he had volunteered to fight as soon as the war had broken out. That he had survived the battles to play for England either side of the war, scoring a record 18 tries in only 25 appearances. He won the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Military Cross. He even had a hero's middle name: Nelson.

Lewis Moody applauded when Danny and Charlotte had finished.

'My verdict,' Moody said, standing now, 'is that you have both succeeded in your challenge. You've told us about two real England rugby heroes. Wonderful. Thank you. And well done.'

Silence followed.

'Now for next week's challenge,' Moody said cautiously. 'And ... well... challenge is the word. Because to demonstrate you are great detectives, you need to investigate each other and prove if the other team is corrupt.'

'What?' Danny asked. Thinking again about the trolley at the station and the cheating with the microphone.

Moody repeated himself, but said no more.

And then Ben was on his feet too. 'I can prove these two are corrupt right now,' he said, holding a small recording device out. 'This shows that...'

Samira stopped Ben speaking. 'No,' she said. 'Wait. You both have a week. You have to do your detective work on each other and come back here for the Ireland game a week today.'

Danny swallowed. He was worried. What were Ben and Joe accusing them of? Inside information? Was that cheating? Did it mean he and Charlotte had blown it and that Ben and Joe were going to defeat them?

To find out more about the RFU's First World War Commemoration projects, please visit <http://www.englandrugby.com/about-the-rfu/ww1-commemorations> and get involved.

To read about Alexander Obolensky, try Gerard Siggins' children's book, Rugby Flyer. Or my free story, The Flying Prince: <http://tompalmer.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/The-Flying-Prince.pdf>

Thanks for reading. And thanks to Mark Lowe for his time in helping me with this chapter about his awesome Great Uncle.

## Chapter Five

**Danny and Charlotte are locked in an intense competition against Ben and Joe for the chance of being employed as young rugby detectives by the RFU. Each week the children have been set a challenge and this week's is the toughest yet. They must prove that the other pair is unworthy of the position of rugby detective.**

It was half time in the England v Ireland Six Nations game. Saturday night. The stands were a sea of green and white. The smell of coffee, beer and gourmet burgers wafted on the air. With the floodlights on, the London sky was now the blackest black above the hyper-illuminated green grass of the pitch. And there was still everything to play for. Off the pitch – and on it.

After Wales had beaten France on Friday night, England needed a win to return to the top of the table. And that was by no means certain with England leading only 6-3 at the break, even though they'd battered Ireland for most of the first half.

And – although Danny really cared about the England rugby team – the Six Nations was the last thing on his mind as he and Charlotte were summoned into Twickenham's Obolensky Suite to try to prove that they were worthy of being rugby detectives and that Ben and Joe – their opponents – were not.

Samira and the children's rugby author, Tom Palmer, welcomed the quartet into the small room. It had one small table in the middle, and photographs of Prince Obolensky on the walls. The author looked stressed. Charlotte noticed he was forever glancing out of the suite window at the pitch – and at the scoreboard.

'We've got ten minutes,' Tom Palmer said. 'That's five minutes each. I'm sorry this is so rushed. Anyway, who wants to go first?'

Danny made to stand up, but Charlotte drove her knuckles into his leg hard, making him sit back down and wince. Now Ben and Joe were both standing. Danny didn't question Charlotte's logic. She wanted the other two to go first. That was clear. Painfully clear.

'We only have one piece of evidence, Mr Palmer,' Ben said confidently, glancing at Charlotte and Danny. 'And it's all we need.'

Joe placed a slim black device on the table in front of Tom Palmer.

'This is our evidence,' Ben said. 'It's a recording of a meeting between Danny, Charlotte and Lewis Moody minutes before Moody judged both of our profiles of England rugby heroes. We think that Danny and Charlotte specifically arranged this meeting to get to Moody and to influence his judging decision about their profile.'

'As you will hear,' Joe added, 'Danny said lots of nice things to Lewis Moody. He buttered him up. And that will have affected Moody's decision later in the day.'

Ben played the recording of Danny asking Lewis Moody about his grandfather's part in the First World War.

Danny shook his head. He couldn't believe they were questioning Lewis Moody's trustworthiness. 'I was interested,' Danny pleaded. 'Lewis Moody was proud of what his granddad did. I wanted to hear about it. And, anyway, I didn't know he was one of the judges until later.'

'I'm sorry, Danny,' Tom Palmer said. 'Just let Ben and Joe speak, please. We can challenge each other's evidence afterwards.'

'Sorry,' Danny said.

'Therefore Moody's judgement was affected,' Joe continued. 'That means that Danny and Charlotte's profile was not judged fairly and that means they are more unworthy than us.'

Ben and Joe sat down.

Tom Palmer looked at Danny, then Charlotte. He smiled kindly. 'Your turn.'

Charlotte and Danny had spent the week thinking hard about Ben and Joe. About things they knew about them. About things that they had done that Danny and Charlotte didn't like. They had come up with three things to say.

Charlotte went first.

'When we were in the car away from the Coliseum in Rome, Ben said that he thought it was sad that the other team – the ones who didn't make it out of the Harpastum games – had had such a bad accident. And that maybe the same thing might happen to us.'

'Do you have a recording of that?' Tom Palmer asked, interested.

Charlotte shook her head.

'That's a shame. We really need evidence,' Tom Palmer said, 'But carry on.'

'That's what I want to say,' Charlotte stepped forward. 'I think recording people when they are talking privately is wrong. That's why we wouldn't have done it. And that's why our second thing to say is that Ben and Joe recorded us saying all that to Lewis Moody. And that makes them unworthy of being rugby detectives. Because they didn't follow the rules. It was cheating. In real life, you need a judge to say it's okay to record someone and to use it as evidence. So that's what we think.'

'And do you have anything else to add?' Tom Palmer asked, glancing at the pitch. He had heard a roar from the crowd outside, a round of singing. Danny could see that the England players had come out onto the pitch for the second half.'

'As we were on our way to Twickenham last week,' Danny said swiftly. 'We were on the station at Clapham Junction and we were nearly hit by a luggage trolley. Charlotte saved me from being hit. And afterwards I ran to see who had done it and saw someone in a red hoody escaping down the stairs. Then, later that day, I saw Ben in a red hoody. I think that Ben was trying to carry out his threat from the car. I think he was trying to hurt us and put us out of the competition.'

Tom Palmer nodded and glanced at Samira.

'You need to decide now,' Samira said to the author.

Tom Palmer put his hand over the red rose adorning his England Rugby polo shirt. 'Okay,' he said. 'But I think I am going to need some help with this.'

*The second half is about to kick off. I have to give a verdict. What should I say? Which pair have made the most convincing case? That's for you to decide. I need **you** to choose what happens next, by voting here.*

*These are the three options:*

***Option 1 – Ben and Joe win, meaning Danny and Charlotte have failed and are out of the competition***

***Option 2 – Charlotte and Danny win, meaning Ben and Joe are out and will now go rogue and try to undermine the RFU***

***Option 3 – both teams are judged equal and must face each other in whatever challenge they are given after the England v Ireland game finishes***

*Every person – child or adult – listening to the story can have one vote each. Your votes will tallied with all the other schools and families who vote and I will write the story choice that receives the most votes.*

*Please email [info@tompalmer.co.uk](mailto:info@tompalmer.co.uk) and list the number of votes for each option, like this:*

*Option 1 – 10 votes*

*Option 2 – 10 votes*

*Option 3 – 10 votes*

*Please vote by 5 p.m. on Friday 4<sup>th</sup> March.*

***Chapter six of Foul Play: Six Nations will be published here on the morning of Monday 7<sup>th</sup> March. There are eight chapters in all.***

***Thank you for reading. And have a great World Book day.***



## Chapter Six

**At half-time during the England v Ireland Six Nations clash, Danny and Charlotte faced Ben and Joe to decide which pair would be the most appropriate rugby detectives for the RFU. You, the readers, were asked to choose what would happen next, to decide on who should win... and who should lose. This is what you decided.**

‘What? Are you serious? You think these two clowns can prevent real crimes in rugby?’

Ben was screaming at the top of his voice. As his friend screamed, Joe pushed the long table he was standing behind, hard, ramming it against Samira and Tom Palmer, so that they were trapped behind it.

Danny and Charlotte stepped forward, ready to stop Ben or Joe doing any more damage. Samira was already talking into her phone, summoning security.

Joe thrust a glass he had picked up off the table towards Tom Palmer. Outside, the noise of the rugby crowd increased in volume. ‘You’ll regret this decision,’ Joe growled. ‘You’ve started something now. By the end of the Six Nations you’ll so wish you’d chosen us, not them.’

Tom Palmer folded his arms and studied the two boys – and the glass in Joe’s hand.

‘Because,’ Ben took up the rant, ‘we are going to set your star detectives a real problem. Listen up. If Wales beat England on Saturday we are going to take revenge. Proper English revenge. And we’ll do it in Cardiff. Right after the match.’

‘There’s nothing English about revenge,’ Tom Palmer said.

And Charlotte guessed what he was doing. Trying to keep the two boys talking. So that security would come and deal with them.

‘We’ll see,’ Ben said. ‘And by the way, your books are rubbish.’

‘Thanks for that,’ Tom Palmer said, laughing. ‘Is there any one book that you hated the most?’

But Ben and Joe did not hear him. Having delivered their final insult, they had gone. The door slammed shut.

‘Security will stop them,’ Samira said. ‘I want you all to stay here. Joe might be dangerous with that glass. He could hurt someone.’

But – an hour later – security had not found Ben and Joe. The pair had disappeared into the Twickenham crowds, lost in a sea of Irish fans chatting to and sharing banter with the English supporters.

At the end of the game Samira sat between Charlotte and Danny, who were watching the England women warming up for their match.

‘Well, congratulations,’ Samira said. ‘You’re rugby detectives. And you’ve got your first job. Find and stop Ben and Joe in Cardiff. Before they bring shame to English rugby.’

Danny grinned. They had a job. A tough one. But a real one. He swung round where Charlotte was ready to high-five him. They had got what they wanted.

And it began now.

‘This is the place,’ Charlotte said. ‘I read about it. Ten thousand Wales fans. If Ben and Joe are anywhere in Cardiff, this is where they’ll be.’

Danny nodded. He agreed. He began scanning the crowds for Ben and Joe. Charlotte did the same.

England Rugby’s two young detectives were in the middle of Welsh fanzone in Cardiff. Right in the centre of the city. There were thousands of people around them. The excited hubbub of hundreds of conversations. Conversations charged with excitement. Because Wales were about to kick off against England in London. The so-called decider in the Six Nations. The match all the English newspapers said would guarantee England their first Grand Slam for thirteen years – if England won it.

But Danny thought that talking about the Grand Slam before playing Wales was madness. If England beat Wales, then maybe. But beating Wales was never an easy proposition. Didn’t they remember the Rugby World Cup? That dreadful night.

And, as Danny was thinking that, Charlotte was thinking about who she wanted to win.

England. That’s what her heart said. But there was more to this game now. Ben and Joe had made a threat. To have their revenge. And the RFU had sent Charlotte and Danny to try to stop it.

But what revenge? What would the two boys do if Wales won? She had no idea.

Then Charlotte saw it. ‘Red hoody,’ she stammered.

‘But half the people here are wearing red hoodies,’ Danny said, scanning the crowd.

‘Not one that shade of red,’ Charlotte said. ‘There’s red and there’s red.’ Then she began to run. Danny had no option but to follow her. Along the edge of the fanzone, the burger bars, the beer tents. Two figures ahead of them. One in a red hoody. The other in a blue one.

And Danny knew it was them. There was something about their gait. The shape of their bodies. In the same way you could tell a rugby player by the way he moved, even if he was too far away to see his face or the number on his back, Danny knew they were chasing Ben and Joe.

Through the streets of Cardiff. Hard on the paving stones. Dodging buses and police vans. Past Wales fans shouting out at them. Along a high hoarding or fence that had been put up to keep fans safe in the fanzone. Danny could hear the pounding of footsteps. Of Ben and Joe. That click click click, like one of them had tap shoes on. Or at least metal soles.

Then – from a small hole in the solid wooden hoarding at the far end of the fanzone – a voice.

‘Hey Danny. Hey Charlotte.’

Danny looked at the hole. A small space for the police or security to look through and monitor the fanzone. Except it was not the police or security calling Danny and Charlotte. It was Ben. No question.

'You'll never catch us now,' Ben crowed. 'But we'll give you a clue. You're good at clues. Not as good as us. But we'll give you a chance.'

Danny said nothing. He didn't want Ben and Joe to hear the anxiety in his voice. The anger. And Danny needed that clue.

'Your clue is,' Ben said, 'that – if Wales beat England...'

'And they will,' Joe added.

'Then we're going to drop into the Millennium Stadium and leave our mark. For the world to see.'

And then they were gone. Disappeared. Leaving their clue and their threat drowned out by the roar of the fanzone crowd. Because now all Danny and Charlotte could see through the hole in the fence were the backs of heads. All eyes were on the big screen and on the green green grass of Twickenham. The ball rising into the air, a mass of red and white shirted men swarming towards it.

England v Wales had kicked off. Ben and Joe had disappeared. There would be no finding them in the crowds now.

Danny and Charlotte stared at the big screen, then at each other.

'Come on,' Charlotte said. 'We need to find a spot to watch the fanzone exit from – where we can work out what that clue could mean.'

**Charlotte and Danny have less than two hours. To find Ben and Joe and stop them doing whatever it is they are planning to do. But now – in this packed fanzone, this sea of red shirts and scarves – the chance of finding them or stopping them are beginning to look less and less likely.**

***Chapter seven of Foul Play: Six Nations will be published here on the morning of Monday 14<sup>th</sup> March. There are eight chapters in all.***

***Thank you for reading.***

## Chapter Seven

**Danny and Charlotte are in Cardiff, searching for Ben and Joe. Before the two boys vanished into the crowds, Ben warned them that, if Wales beat England, then they would ‘drop in and make their mark on the Millennium Stadium – for all the world to see.’ Now our heroic duo have to work out what Ben and Joe are threatening to do, find them – and stop them.**

Danny and Charlotte searched the Cardiff fanzone crowd systematically, working their way through it section by section. Having checked that the stadium was locked up, empty and guarded by several security people, they figured that the best place to look for Ben and Joe would be the fanzone.

But it wasn't an easy place to search.

There was the distracting noise of the crowds and the big screen, plus the pushing and jostling as ten thousand Welsh fans became more and more excited about the idea of winning at Twickenham. Again.

Then there was the game itself. A massive game where the winners of the 2016 Six Nations championship might be decided. Danny was feeling tense about finding Ben and Joe. But he was also anxious about the idea that if they won tonight against Wales, England might be able to claim their first Grand Slam since he was two years old.

It was hard not to daydream. Danny wanted it so much. But they had a job to do. That was the priority.

There was no sign of Ben and Joe when Ben Youngs' try was disallowed in the second minute. Nor when Dan Cole was denied in the fifteenth. When Anthony Watson scored his try after half an hour, Danny felt a burst of joy, but quickly refocused on the search.

But where were the two boys? Had they given up their threat now that England were 16-0 ahead?

Danny doubted it. 16-0 might look good, but he knew that Wales would come at them in the second half. Even Ben and Joe wouldn't underestimate Wales like that.

At half time Danny and Charlotte decided to stop searching and talk. Strategy time.

And the strategy was to find Ben and Joe, even if England did win. Just in case they still had something up their sleeves.

Danny and Charlotte made their plans. To keep searching. To call each other if they saw something. To do their job.

It was just after Dan Biggar charged down George Ford's clearance kick – touching down to threaten all Danny's dreams of a Grand Slam – that he heard Charlotte call his name.

She'd spotted Ben and Joe. Both of them leaning over a box, fiddling with its contents.

In their red and blue hoodies. Definitely them.

Danny followed Charlotte as she stalked the two boys, who were still bent over whatever it was they were doing. Charlotte went slowly, trying to stay hidden.

Danny and Charlotte were close now. Really close. Close enough to reach out and...

Ben saw them first and shoved Joe to tell him. And they were running. Ben carrying the box that he and Joe had been crouched over. Danny and Charlotte after them. All four children, running hard, through the crowds. Crowds that were leaping up and down as George North hit back with a second Welsh try. Danny could hardly take everything in.

Hard through the crowds, round the back of beer tents and burger bars, into another mass of fans, who were screaming and shouting as Faletau scored a third try for Wales. One score in it now. Were England going to throw it all away?

Running.

Breathless heart-pumping lung-busting running.

And even though Danny wanted to catch Ben and Joe – and his whole being focused on that goal – he couldn't help but feel an anxiety. A nausea. The question in the back of his mind as he followed Charlotte in their pursuit. Was it going to happen again? Were England going to fold like they did in last year's World Cup?

Then Danny saw that Ben and Joe were caught between the backs of the beer tents and the perimeter fence. Slowing down. Tripping over cables and pipes.

Danny and Charlotte were closing in on their prey. Ten metres. Five metres. Two. Danny tracking Ben. Charlotte tracking Joe.

As they made up the last yards, the noise of the Welsh crowd exploded. Another attack from the team in red. Danny knew that was what was going on. But he forgot it as he lunged to force Ben hard against the perimeter fence, Charlotte doing the same to Joe. Both boys pushed against the wood. Both boys shouting out in pain. Their box flying ahead of them, a drone and bottled liquid shattering and spilling onto the grass ahead of them.

Danny sat firmly on top of the moaning Ben. Ben was going nowhere. Danny studied the drone and the liquids. It was clear what the two boys had been planning. Some sort of vandalism. To do with the stadium. Danny could also see the big screen from where he was. A replay of some match action. Manu Tuilagi forcing George North into touch, stopping what looked like a certain try and Welsh victory. But no time left now.

And Danny knew that Wales were beaten. Knew that England were one win away from the Grand Slam. Knew that Ben and Joe had been stopped, at last.

In less than ten minutes, Samira and half a dozen armed police had arrived to open an access gate in the fanzone perimeter fence. Ben and Joe were taken away swiftly. Along with their box of tricks. Evidence that they were planning something illegal.

No one in the fanzone had seen anything. But as Joe was pushed into a police van, he turned and shouted.

'It's not over,' he said, staring deep into Charlotte's eyes.

'No?' she said.

'No,' he grinned. 'One more clue. One more challenge. You'll not be able to stop this one. But you'll need to. Need to big time. Because if you don't look carefully, the Grand Slam will be lost and it'll be all your fault.'

'How?' Danny shouted. 'You're mad. There's no way you can change the result of a game.'

Ben smiled. 'I reckon the French will be too tasty for England. Even if the French do lose to Scotland.'

And that was it. They were gone. Taken away by the police.

Samira walked up to Charlotte and shook her hand. Then Danny's.

'Well done,' she said. 'You did well.'

'Thank you,' Charlotte said. 'But it's not over.'

Samira nodded. 'I know. I heard him. That's why I want you in Paris with the team. In the hotel. On the coach. Around the ground. Every second. Eddie can get the players to win the Grand Slam on the pitch. We really believe in him. But you have to stop whatever it is that Ben and Joe have set up off the pitch.'

'On the coach?' Danny gasped. 'In the hotel?'

'Everywhere,' Samira said. 'It'll be like you're in the team. We'll even have you on the bench if I can sort it. Watching. Waiting. You're as much a part of this Grand Slam attempt as the players and the coaches.'

**Danny and Charlotte thought they had saved the day by catching Ben and Joe. But now there is one final threat to deal with. One set up by Ben and Joe in advance of their incarceration. In Paris. Next weekend. A threat that could prevent England's dream of a Grand Slam coming true. But – in close contact with the players throughout – can Charlotte and Danny work out what it is? And in time?**

***The final chapter of Foul Play: Six Nations will be published here on the morning of Monday 21<sup>st</sup> March.***

***If you think that your children would like certificates to show they followed the story from start to finish, please contact Tom on [admin@tompalmer.co.uk](mailto:admin@tompalmer.co.uk) and we can sort that out.***

***Thank you for reading.***

## Chapter Eight

**Charlotte and Danny's first mission on becoming official RFU young detectives was to apprehend Joe and Ben before they committed a crime after England's victory over Wales. And it was 'mission successful' as the two troublesome boys were arrested and taken into custody by armed police.**

**But, as they were led away, Ben and Joe made a threat, suggesting that they had set something up that would jeopardise England's chances of winning the Grand Slam in Paris. The RFU took the threat seriously, embedding Charlotte and Danny with the England rugby team on their trip to France – so that they could help keep an eye out for danger.**

Before Charlotte and Danny left the UK with the England squad, they visited Ben and Joe in their new home: the South Wales Young Offenders' Institute. Their aim was to discover if the two boys were serious about their threat to the England team.

Could they be?

Really?

Was it even possible for two wiry boys to prevent England winning a Grand Slam? It was more likely that fifteen colossal French rugby players might achieve that.

Ben and Joe gave away nothing in answer to Charlotte and Danny's questions. They just smirked and said that it was down to Danny and Charlotte to solve their puzzle.

If they could.

As they walked out through the Young Offenders' Institute – in and out of clanging metal doors and sterile echoing corridors – Charlotte turned to Danny.

'All we know is that Ben and Joe might have done something to stop England winning Grand Slam, she said. 'That's not much to go on, is it?'

'And that the French will be too tasty for England,' Danny added, 'whatever that means.'

The two friends shared a look, but said nothing. They didn't need to. They knew that each other was totally committed to stopping anything getting in the way of a Grand Slam as they were. And as committed to preventing whatever calamity Ben and Joe had set up.

Danny and Charlotte tried to keep a low profile on the Eurostar as they travelled – First Class – to Paris with the England rugby squad. They pretending to be glued on their smart phones, headphones in their ears. Because, even though playing video games was the last thing they wanted to be doing, they had to pretend to be disinterested teenagers.

In reality, they watched, they listened, they tried to take in everything in. Including the plush surroundings of large comfortable seats, red carpets and waiters flitting to and fro serving drinks and snacks, supplied exclusively by the England catering team. Because all the team's food and drink was provided by the team chefs. Even the teabags.

Danny was particularly fascinated in how big the players were. Not just big like normal oversized people. But big while still looking super fit. Like giants. Or superhumans.

He and Charlotte continued to watch the team as they filed on and off their bus at the Eurostar terminals, the hotel, then, later, a training ground.

During training, Danny watched the forwards, while Charlotte covered the backs.

But there was no apparent threat. Nothing the two RFU young detectives could see. Training was interesting. And hard. The players looked calm and confident. But no-one was in danger.

Danny stood standing staring at the forwards working on line outs, Dylan Hartley firing in accurate throw after throw, with Maro Itoje and George Kruis getting his hands onto everything.

Suddenly a familiar voice. 'How's it looking, Danny, mate?'

Danny turned to see Eddie Jones, the England head coach, standing next to him.

Danny grinned. 'A lot better,' he said. 'I'd like to say thanks. For making the team play so brilliantly.'

Jones bowed his head a little. 'We've not finished the job yet,' he said. 'We want the Grand Slam. No letting up.'

'Agreed,' Danny said. 'And I know what you're saying, but we've won the Six Nations and everyone is so grateful to you for that.'

Eddie Jones shook Danny's hand. 'Well, you keeping an eye out is crucial too. I know what you're doing for us. And I'm grateful to you. Why don't you come and join the players for lunch. The forwards are already tucking into something tasty.'

Eddie Jones pointed towards the hotel restaurant and Danny felt himself stop breathing.

Then he was running towards the restaurant, keying Charlotte's phone as he did, ignoring the puzzled look on the England coach's face.

Off the grass onto the hard concrete. Pounding. Breathless. Charlotte's phone too-loud ringing in his ear.

'Hi Danny.' Her voice.

'Tasty,' Danny gasped, at the door to the restaurant. Tables set out with chairs and waiters serving the players.

'What?'

'Tasty,' he yelled, climbing onto a chair, seeing her.

'Thanks,' Charlotte said.

Danny could see her smiling.

'No.' Gasp. 'The clue.' Gasp. 'Tasty.' Gasp. 'The food.'

'What?'

Danny saw Maro Itoje at the far end of the room. Picking a sandwich from a dish. A dish that was separate from the main dishes. And that meant it was something not prepared by the England catering staff.



‘Itoje,’ Danny yelled. ‘Tackle Itoje. He can’t put that sandwich in his mouth. Tasty. Tasty.’

Danny could only watch across a room filled with the giants of the England rugby team. He saw Charlotte staring at Maro Itoje, then her face flickering with understanding, picking her way through the England players and officials. Then running, faster. Faster, until she was closing in on the England lock, who was walking the other way, putting his hand to his mouth, the sandwich in between his fingers.

Charlotte dived at Itoje, taking his thighs with all her weight, hitting him hard with her shoulder.

But Itoje did not move. He was still standing, his legs solid. But his arms jolted at the impact, slightly, causing the sandwich to drop from his fingers to the floor.

The rest of the room watched in puzzlement, seeing a fifteen year old girl trying to tackle an eighteen stone six foot two lock.

And him merely dropping the sandwich.

Laughter.

Pointing.

Jokes.

Danny quickly got down from his chair and weaved between England players, reaching Itoje, who was helping Charlotte to her feet with a quizzical look on his face.

That evening Danny and Charlotte watched the England team greeting fans around the edge of the Parc de Princes, holding a trophy above their heads.

The Triple Crown. The Six Nations Championship. And now – with a 31-21 victory over France – the Grand Slam.

Charlotte looked at Maro Itoje, then at Danny. They shared a smile, aware that that there were very few people in the stadium who knew that Itoje’s sandwich had been laced with a poison that would have put him out of the game, no question. And maybe – just maybe – stopped England from winning the Grand Slam 2016.

Danny put his hand on Charlotte’s shoulder. ‘Good work, partner,’ he said.

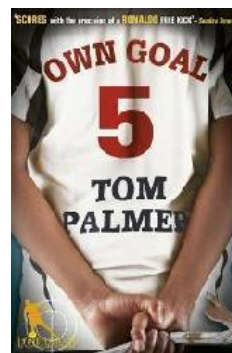
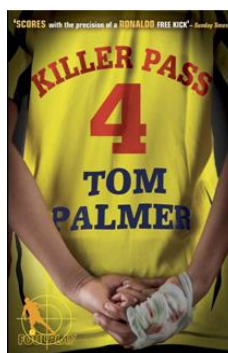
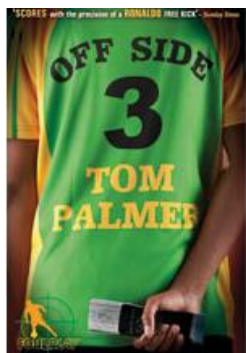
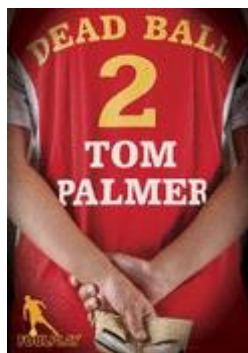
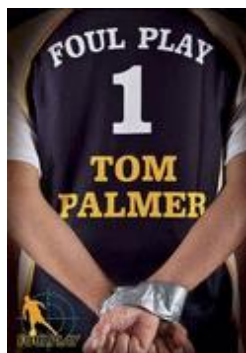
Charlotte grinned. ‘Ditto,’ she said.

***Thank you for reading this eight-part story. That’s the end of Foul Play: Six Nations. We hope you enjoyed it.***

***If you want to join Danny and Charlotte on some of their other adventures – as far afield as Russia, Ghana and Italy – then try Tom’s Foul Play series. There is more information here:***

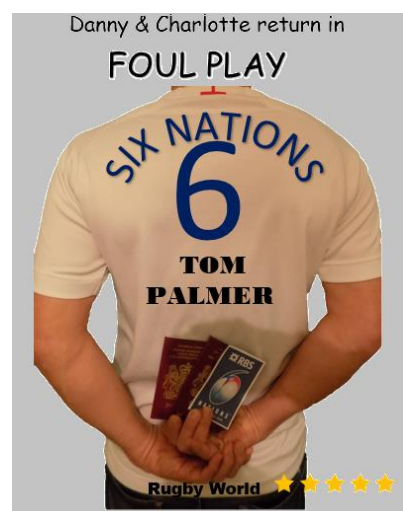
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