



The Twickenham Trials

By Tom Palmer

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(an interactive and unedited story to be read aloud)

The Twickenham Trials

Chapter one

Woody and Rory smiled gleefully when they saw it. The glittering gold trophy. **Rugby World Cup Trophy Tour** inscribed on its blue banner background.

Three uniforms stood guarding it.

'I don't know why you're smiling,' a taller boy standing behind them said, nudging Woody playfully with his shoulder.

The third boy was Owen. He, Woody and Rory were best mates *and* team mates. Looking smart but scruffy in their uniforms, they were representing their school rugby team at Twickenham Stadium, one day before the Rugby World Cup kicked off. Invited – at the last minute – to join a roomful of men and women chinking wine glasses and eating posh food off silver trays.

'What are you rabbiting on about?' Woody stared at Owen.

'You! Smiling! You don't really think England are going to win it, do you?' Owen asked.

'I do, actually,' Woody snapped.

'Me too,' Rory nodded.

But Woody and Rory knew exactly what Owen was really getting at.

Wales.

Owen was convinced Wales would win it. Owen was Welsh. And, for him, this was *their* year. With Warren Gatland as coach they couldn't fail. He thought.

Woody and Rory disagreed. Intensely.

As the three boys exchanged jibes, none of them had any idea that they were about to be pitched into the strangest and most dangerous five weeks of their lives. Nor, that it would all be caused the girl who had walked calmly towards them, approaching from behind.

'Hi,' she said loudly, cutting their banter dead.

The three boys turned to look round to see who had interrupted them. She was taller than Rory and Woody, but the same height as Owen. Her corkscrew hair framed a deep brown complexion.

'Hi,' Rory said back.

But Owen and Woody just stared at her.

'I'm Rose,' the girl said. 'And I need you to do something for me.'

None of the boys responded. This situation felt more than unusual. The posh room, the trophy, and now this girl.

'I need you to watch the trophy,' Rose carried on.

'Er...why?' Woody asked.

Rose lowered her voice. 'Well... it's about to be stolen.'

'What?' Owen asked. 'From here? With all this security? No chance.'

The girl stepped back. Rory noticed that she seemed to adjust a small object in her left ear, hidden by her hair, before she merged with the other party guests and disappeared from their sight.

'Crazy,' Woody laughed.

Owen scratched his head. 'Yeah, crazy,' he echoed.

Rory smiled. Rose was *definitely* crazy: but he liked her.

Then a microphone was turned on and the room began to fall silent.

'Speeches,' Owen said, watching the blue banner behind the trophy shudder.

'Yawn,' Woody mouthed.

Rory was still looking for Rose amongst the other people there. But he couldn't spot her.

And then – suddenly – darkness.

Voices.

A scream.

The noise of shuffling feet.

Then light again. No more than five seconds later.

Owen and Woody looked at each other, then at Rory, whose face looked crestfallen.

'What's up?' Woody asked.

'It's gone,' Rory gasped.

'What's gone?'

'The cup.'

All three boys joined the suited wine drinkers as they studied the empty stand where the World Cup Trophy had been just moments before.

It *had* gone.

But how?

As everyone stared in silence, Rory noticed the black cables taped to the floor behind the trophy stand flex, then relax.

Then loud voice came over the speakers.

'LADIES AND GENTLEMEN. DUE TO A TECHNICAL PROBLEM, WE ARE EVACUATING THE BUILDING. PLEASE ALLOW US TO SEARCH EACH OF YOU AS WE EVACUATE. THE MORE CALMLY WE DO THIS THE SOONER WE CAN GET AWAY. PLEASE DO AS YOU ARE ASKED TO DO BY THE SECURITY PERSONEL. FOR SECURITY REASONS WE NEED YOU NOT TO SPEAK, TWEET OR WRITE ABOUT THIS SITUATION UNTIL IT IS RESOLVED.'

But the three boys were not listening to the announcement. They were scanning the room. Looking for Rose. What did she know that they didn't?

'Where did she go?' Woody asked.

'No idea,' Owen said. 'But we have to find her.'

Rory spotted her first. Sitting at a table on her own, with her back to the panicking party guests, staring back at the boys. Smiling. Again.

The three boys moved swiftly across the room.

'Why is she still here?' Owen asked as they walked. 'If she took the trophy...'

'Maybe she didn't,' Rory suggested.

'Hmm,' Woody grumbled as he stopped in front of Rose, who looked up at them.

'Where is it?' Woody snapped.

'It's been taken,' Rose replied. 'I *told* you.'

'By you?' Owen jumped in

'No,' Rose laughed. 'Don't be stupid. Not me.'

'By who, then?'

'That doesn't matter,' Rose leaned forward. 'What matters is that *you* have to find it. All three of you. Together.'

Rose stared at the trio of boys in such a way that they all went quiet. Almost like they were being hypnotised.

'Why us?' Owen asked.

'Because the reason you are here is to sort this out,' Rose went on, urgent now. 'Are there any other young people here? No. And if you don't do something – and if you don't work as a team – then it's gone forever. Only *you* can find it. No-one else. And – well – it's going to be rather embarrassing if you don't, isn't it?'

Owen stared at his two friends.

'This is crazy,' he said. 'Let's tell the security people. Turn her in. Come on.'

'We'd sound mad,' Rory shook his head. 'They might even think we were something to do with it.'

'So, what do we do?' Woody asked. 'Go and search for it?'

All the time the three boys were aware that Rose was still studying them. As a group they turned their back on her – so they could talk without feeling her gaze.

'I saw something,' Rory said. 'The cables. Behind the trophy. After it had gone.'

'What?'

'They moved. Like someone was pulling on them. Just after the lights came back on.'

'Is that all we have?' Owen asked.

'It's not enough. Let's turn her in,' Woody said. 'We're schoolboys, not detectives.'

'We can't,' Rory said, pointing at the empty chair where Rose had been sitting.

The mysterious girl had vanished again.

'Now what?' Owen asked.

Owen and Rory looked to Woody. He was the decisive one.

Woody paused. Breathed in deeply, then out.

'We go after it,' he said. 'We find the trophy. Then we find that girl. Come on...'

QUESTIONS

Where do you think the Rugby World Cup trophy has gone? Do you have a theory? Why do you think that?

Can the three boys get the trophy back before the Rugby World Cup kicks off the next day? What will happen if they don't find it?

Who is Rose? Is she good or is she bad?

The Twickenham Trials

Chapter two

Woody, Rory and Owen have just witnessed the theft of the Rugby World Cup trophy at a posh function next to Twickenham Stadium. They have been told by a mysterious girl – Rose – that *they* have to recover the trophy before the tournament kicks off on Friday evening. They have no idea who she is and what she's talking about, but they have decided to go along with it.

Woody, Owen and Rory headed for the exit. Time to start their quest.

A large man in a purple jacket blocked their route to the door.

'Not yet, lads,' he growled.

'What?' Woody asked. 'We're staying in the stadium hotel. Just there. Can't we just...'

'Not yet. There's a curfew a mile around the stadium. You know why. No one moves until it's lifted. Understood?'

Woody nodded and led his two friends away from the door.

'So now what?' Owen asked.

'We make a plan,' Woody said. 'Once they let us out, we'll be ready.'

'How?'

'Teamwork,' Rory said. 'Rose said teamwork.'

'Go on then,' Woody challenged. 'Show us some teamwork.'

'Well,' Rory said. 'We need to pool everything we know. Then see where it leads us.'

Owen told the others he'd spotted the boards behind the trophy wobble.

Rory reminded them about the electricity leads he saw moving.

'Is there anything else?' Woody asked.

The three boys stared at each other for a few seconds.

'So, the wires moved,' Owen volunteered. 'Because someone was behind the trophy stand?'

'But the wires moved at least ten seconds after the cup had been taken,' Rory said. 'There was no one there.'

'Which means?' Woody pressed.

Rory paused. 'Which means that the wires were disturbed outside this building by whoever it was making away with the trophy. Which means that wherever the wires go could be where the trophy went.'

Although the boys were making progress, they terminated their conversation when two large men came to stand very close to them. And not just any two men, but two England players from 2003. Two Rugby World Cup winners!

‘So, if the police don’t find the trophy...’ one of them said.

The other player laughed. But it was not a happy laugh. ‘If they don’t find it, and if it is not on that stand for the opening ceremony in a few hours, then it will be a disaster for England and a disaster for rugby union. Full stop.’

Thirty minutes after the trophy had been taken, an announcement was made. The trophy had still not been found. People were – at last – permitted to go. If anyone was staying in the stadium hotel, they were told, they had to go straight there. No hanging around.

As the three boys left, they noticed several police vans and cars outside. Two helicopters in the air, searchlights scanning the ground. Dogs barking. The search was on for the trophy. The boys decided to do as they were told and go to their hotel.

For now.

They crept out of the hotel at 3 a.m.

There was no-one on the reception desk.

Outside, the helicopter searchlights and dogs had gone. All the police vehicles too.

But someone was watching them. Someone with a thermal imaging camera, tracking and recording their every move.

Rose.

But the boys did not know that. They were focused on their quest. Nothing else.

Woody took the initiative. He led the other two around the edge of the stadium, past the entrance gates and towards the prefabricated building where they had been the evening before. It was dark. It was cold. It was almost perfectly silent.

They moved slowly. Barely daring to breathe. Silent gestures. Wordless. Until they found themselves round the back of the building from where the trophy had been taken.

They quickly located what they had come to see. A thick bunch of black electric leads came from the side of the building towards a stream that ran between Twickenham and a school on the other side. Rory could just make out the words Chase Bridge School over the door, illuminated by street lights.

Above the stream was a scaffolding structure carrying the wires over the water and into the school grounds. Through what looked like a school garden, then an area of the school grounds being used for more pre-fab buildings.

‘Over there,’ Rory grinned. ‘They must have taken the trophy over there.’

The other two agreed.

Woody had an idea. ‘Let’s...’

‘HEY YOU BOYS. GET BACK HERE NOW.’

None of them looked to see who had shouted. They just ran. Away from the voice. But almost immediately they hit a fence, turned right, then hit another fence.

No way out.

Trapped.

Owen’s instinct was to climb the wire fence. The others followed. They climbed, dropped down, then scrambled across the stream. The water was up to their waists. Ice cold.

They heard dogs barking at the same time.

‘What now?’ Owen gasped.

‘In the water, where the guards can’t see us,’ Woody said. ‘And under the water, so the dogs will lose our scent.’

Five minutes later the three boys were still lying in a metre of water, only their heads showing.

The dogs’ barking had stopped. The shouting too.

‘What did the girl mean?’ Owen asked weakly.

‘Rose?’ Rory asked, hearing his own voice juddering with the cold, just like Owen’s.

‘Yeah, Rose. When she said we had been *chosen*?’

‘She was just crazy,’ Woody contributed. ‘I told you.’

‘But she knew,’ Rory contradicted Woody. ‘She knew the trophy was going to be taken.’

Woody had no answer for that. All three boys lay in the cold water, feeling it soak every thread they were wearing, then chilling their flesh to the bone.

Just fifteen metres away, hidden underneath a Portacabin and with cam cream on her face to avoid light reflection, Rose was filming the three boys. And recording their conversation. She smiled as they speculated about who she was.

They’ll find out soon enough, she thought, smiling again.

After two more freezing minutes, Woody began to crawl downstream. 'Come on,' he said.

'Where to?' Owen whispered.

'That bridge. The one under the road. We might be able to climb out of here, sneak back to the hotel.'

'But what about finding the trophy?' Rory complained. 'If we don't...'

'Forget it Rory,' Woody snapped. 'We'll freeze to death if we don't get out of this river now. Hypothermia. Have you heard of that? Anyway, the trophy's not going to be in some old stream, is it? It'll be long gone.'

Owen and Rory followed. They were so cold and uncomfortable now, they knew they had to get out of there.

Once they were under the bridge, they rested, waiting to take Woody's lead. A car passed over the bridge.

'The plan is to climb out the other side. Go over the road. Then the hotel. Dry off somehow...'
Woody went on.

Owen was listening and nodding. But Rory was not.

'What was that?' Rory interrupted.

Owen and Woody looked at Rory.

'What was what?'

'When that car came past its headlight reflected off something above us.'

'Up there?'

'Yeah.'

The three boys gazed upwards. There was nothing to see but blackness.

'Are you sure?' Owen asked.

'Yeah.'

'Get on my shoulders,' Owen said to Woody.

Woody shrugged. Water was dripping off him. He was freezing. How much worse could this be?

Woody balanced as Owen heaved him up so that he could touch the underside of the bridge.

'Show us where,' Owen gasped.

'Left a bit. Right a bit. Yes, it was about there.'

Woody put his hand into a cavity above him. He was terrified of having a rat brush against his hand. Or worse, bite him. But he didn't tell the others that.

Then – suddenly – he felt something cold and smooth at his fingertips.

'There's something here,' Woody said quietly.

Questions

Is the smooth object hidden under the bridge the trophy – or something a lot more dangerous? What could it be?

Why do you think Rose is filming the boys?

Did the boys show teamwork on their quest? How many ways did they show it?

The Twickenham Trials – chapter 3

Woody, Rory and Owen were asked to find the Rugby World Cup and return it in time for the opening ceremony at Twickenham. In the process, they had been chased by dogs, barked at by security guards and were forced to lie in a metre of water before Rory spotted something...

Three boys walked into the Marriott Hotel on the south side of Twickenham, each wearing an England flag around their shoulders. The receptionist smiled at them as they waited for the lift to take them up to their room. He had no idea their clothes underneath were soaking wet. Or that they had just returned the missing World Cup Trophy to the RFU.

Rory had been right: it was hidden under the bridge.

They'd retrieved it, carried it towards the stadium and placed it at the door to the RFU's offices, ringing the doorbell, then running to hide just to watch and make sure someone took it inside.

Then – breathless and suddenly exhausted – they fished out the England flags they'd been given at the party the night before and donned them to hide their soaking and filthy clothes.

As soon as they made it into their three-bed room, Owen threw his flag off.

'Oh man, I can't believe I wore an England flag. I need a shower.'

Woody picked up red and white flag, brushed it down and scowled at Owen. He was about to say something when the giant TV in the room flickered on.

The boys stared at it in surprise and couldn't believe what they were seeing. A night-time scene outside in the dark. Lights overhead in the sky. A river reflecting the light. And three figures lying in its water.

'It's us,' Woody gasped.

Rory and Owen nodded, speechless.

They watched themselves hiding from the dogs in the water, then emerging from under the bridge with the trophy. Finally dropping it at the door of the RFU and running away.

Then the film cut to Rose. Her smiling face. Their hotel room in the background.

'Hello boys. Well done. You did it. You found the trophy. You passed the first test.'

'First test?' Rory muttered the question to himself.

'And I owe you a big explanation,' Rose went on.

'Er... yeah,' Woody grunted.

'So, come and meet me at the Cardiff Rugby World Cup Fanzone on Sunday and I'll tell you everything. It's in Cardiff Arms Park. There are train tickets and cash in your hotel safe. The code is 2003. See you tomorrow.'

The screen went black.

And the three friends stood, stunned and speechless.

The train journey from London to Cardiff was fun. The boys met a family of Japanese fans who were laughing and grinning wildly, travelling from Brighton after beating South Africa and heading to Gloucester for their next match against Scotland.

Owen had bought that day's *Rugby Paper*. Together they looked at the pictures of the opening ceremony, the panels of a giant ball being peeled away to show the Webb Ellis Trophy on top of a giant stand. It was hard to believe that – without them – there would have been no trophy to reveal.

Owen waved the newspaper at Woody as they got off the train.

'It says here Wales don't have much to worry about after England's game,' he said.

Woody scowled. 'We won, I think you'll find. With a bonus point.'

Rory said nothing. He could see that Saturday's England v Wales match was starting to get to his friends, Owen revelling in being in Cardiff, near his beloved Millennium Stadium.

'Man, I wish I had a ticket,' Owen said excitedly.

'Me too,' Woody grumbled. 'Then we'd not have to put up with you.'

On their way to the fanzone – inside Cardiff Arms Park, another rugby stadium next to the Millennium – they walked past a giant rugby ball that looked like it was smashing through a castle wall. Cardiff looked amazing, flags and smiling faces everywhere.

Inside the fanzone they easily found Rose. She was sitting in a red deckchair, watching Samoa versus the USA on one of the two giant TV screens. Rory thought she looked nice. But he didn't say so to his friends.

Woody went straight at her, demanding answers.

'Right,' he said. 'Spill.'

'I will,' Rose said. 'I promised I would. Once I had you all together.'

'We're here. All of us,' Woody went on. 'We want to know what you've got us involved in.'

Rose smiled, then took an envelope out of her pocket.

'What's that?' Owen asked. It had Rugby World Cup branding on it. Could it really be what he was hoping it was?

'It's for you, Owen,' Rose smiled.

'Me?'

Rose slipped a piece of card out of the envelope.

Owen gasped. 'A ticket. A ticket. For me?'

'For you. Wales versus Uruguay. Kick-off is in seven minutes. You need to go now.'

'Not before you tell us what's going on,' Woody demanded.

Owen was hopping from foot to foot, he was so excited. Looking like a little boy who needed the loo.

'After the match, Woody,' Rose said calmly. 'Go, Owen, go.'

Owen ran towards the Millennium Stadium, shouting a thank you over his shoulder.

Rory looked at Woody. His face was as red as the dragon on the Wales flag that was billowing in the breeze above him. Woody was furious.

'Tell me. Now,' Woody said. 'I'll not wait.'

Rose shook her head. 'I said I'd tell you *together*, Woody. And look, Owen has gone. You'll have to wait a couple of hours now.'

Woody turned away and kicked the deckchair behind him.

Rory couldn't help but smile. She was playing with Woody, winding him up. He grinned when he saw Rose grinning at him too. Then he blushed and looked away.

Three hours later, Owen returned. Buzzing.

Rory, Rose and Woody were sitting in the fanzone enjoying highlights of Wales' 54-9 victory over Uruguay, as families queued for street food and to play on the challenge games there.

'Where. Have. You. Been?' Woody snapped. 'The match finished an half an hour ago.'

'Sorry,' Owen said, his voice gravelly and damaged from cheering. 'It was good. Thanks Rose.'

'You're welcome,' Rose nodded. 'And now I've got you together I can tell you exactly what I've got you involved in. It's so big, so unbelievable, I wanted to be able to tell you face to face, all of you.'

'Come on then,' Woody snapped. 'Speak.'

Questions

What is Rose about to tell the boys? Think up some theories and see if you're right tomorrow.

Do you like Rose? Why? Or... why not?

The Twickenham Trials

Chapter Four

Woody, Rory and Owen have met Rose, the mysterious girl who asked them to recover the stolen Rugby World Cup. Now, as they stand in the Cardiff Rugby World Cup fanzone, she has promised to finally tell them exactly what is happening and why they are involved.

Rose paused and looked each of the boys in the eye before she began. 'So,' she said, enigmatically. 'English rugby has five core values it tries to live up to. Did you know that?'

'WHAT?' Woody said. 'What's that got to do with anything?'

'Teamwork. Respect. Enjoyment. Discipline. And... er... Sportsmanship,' Rory said.

'How did you know that?' Owen asked.

Rory shrugged. 'It's on a poster in the changing rooms back at school, remember?'

'I asked what that has got to do with anything.' Woody raised his voice, ignoring the distraction of what his two friends were saying. His voice sounded hard. Rory could tell he was close to losing his patience.

'Well, there's this man,' Rose began. 'We've been watching him since the last Rugby World Cup in New Zealand. He's become very powerful. We think he's the leader of a global criminal outfit, but we don't yet have the proof. What we do know is that his one weakness is rugby. He hates it and everything he thinks it stands for. So much so, that he wants to undermine England Rugby's five values and rugby around the world.'

'He sounds nuts,' Owen said.

Rose smiled and nodded. 'Yes,' she said. 'He is.'

‘But what’s that got to do with us?’ Woody’s voice was a little calmer now.

‘He’s... well, he wants to push English rugby to the edge, then watch it fall. He let us know that he was going to play some sort of game with us. To test the game of rugby. To test some England fans. And you are the fans he wants to test.’

‘Why?’ Woody pressed.

‘By the way, I’m Welsh,’ Owen noted. ‘Just saying.’ But his voice was lost amid cheering and chatter from people in the fanzone.

‘You were there,’ Rose explained. ‘At Twickenham. When it was stolen. My mission was to identify some fans who could defend the five values. And, like I said, you were there and what’s more you did it.’

‘But who are *you*?’ Rory squinted at Rose. ‘Who gave you this mission? Why are you involved?’

‘I work for *people in power*,’ Rose replied. ‘That’s all I can tell you.’

‘Who?’ Woody snapped.

‘I said that’s all I can tell you.’

‘So is that what we did when we found the trophy, then?’ Owen asked. ‘Defended the values?’

‘You defended *one* of the values. Teamwork. The way you worked together – *as a team* – to recover the trophy, well, Mr G was impressed... or, should I say, surprised. And you did really well. We sent him the same film we showed of you. You passed teamwork, but there are four more values.’

‘Whaaaaat?’ Woody complained, stepping back. ‘Come on lads, let’s go. This is madness. I don’t want another night like Friday night. That’s enough. And why should we trust Rose – or whoever she is – anyway?’

Woody started to walk away, with Owen already following. Rory was going to walk too, but he had one last question.

'What happens if we don't defend the values?' he said.

'Mr G will destroy rugby. Simple as that.'

'Mr G?' Woody scoffed. 'Is that his real name?'

'Probably not,' Rose said. 'But that's the name he uses when we talk to him.'

'You said he'd like to destroy rugby?' Owen cut in, his voice serious. 'That's never going to happen.'

'It can. Trust me. I wouldn't be involved if he couldn't. He's told us what he plans to do. And he's proved he has the money and power to do it.'

Rory, Woody and Owen stood staring at Rose. The noise from the Cardiff fanzone faded as they looked into each other's eyes.

'If you all accept, we'll be behind you, but it will still be dangerous,' Rose warned. 'If you don't accept, then it could be the end of Rugby.'

Rory looked hard at Rose and felt convinced he could trust her. But he knew that was partly because he liked her. Maybe too much.

'Why you?' Rory pressed. 'Why does Mr G talk through you? Do you meet him?'

'I'm so sorry I just can't say any more now,' Rose answered biting her lip and looking down

'We just have to take your word for it?' Rory pressed.

'You do.' Rose didn't smile. She frowned this time. That made Rory take her even more seriously.

'I see,' Rory said.

'So, do you accept the challenge?' Rose asked.

‘We need to talk,’ Woody said, glancing at his two friends. ‘Without you.’

‘Okay,’ Rose agreed. ‘You’ve got half an hour. You need to be sure you want to take the challenge on. There will be risks. But if you succeed you’ll know for the rest of your lives that you saved the game you love.’

As Rose began to walk away, the three boys stood closer together. They began to talk. They had a big decision to make. And they needed to make it now.

Question

At this point the readers voted - Should the boys accept Rose’s challenge and defend the five core values of rugby by putting themselves in danger?

To find out about more free rugby literacy resources, created by Tom Palmer and the RFU, please visit <http://tompalmer.co.uk/rugby-world-cup-2015>.

The Twickenham Trials

Chapter Five

Rose has challenged Owen, Woody and Rory to help defend rugby against a multi-millionaire super-criminal rugby-hater. If the boys accept the challenge they will face four tests that will prove whether they are capable of respect, enjoyment, discipline and sportsmanship. Have they accepted or declined? Hundreds of schools have voted. This is what you chose...

First thing Wednesday morning and the three boys were back at their school, Borderlands, a boarding school set in the hills on the England-Wales border.

It had been an amazing weekend. But they were happy to be back in their own beds.

As soon as he woke up, Woody Skyped his dad, who was away with work. Pretty dangerous work, in fact. He was a fighter pilot flying night sorties, protecting other RAF aircraft that busy were delivering aid to stricken communities in Syria.

After Woody came off his iPad, Owen glanced up from his book at his friend. Woody looked a bit sad, but Owen knew him well enough to give him a bit of space after he'd talked to his dad, so Owen carried on reading.

Then, suddenly, Rory walked in to the room, his hair wet after a morning shower.

'I've had a text from Rose,' he declared.

The others two sat up in their beds. 'And?' they both said. In stereo.

'She's sent us the second challenge,' Rory went on. 'It says... we have to find the half-way point of the England-Wales boundary. Before dark tonight. She'll be there to meet us.'

'Easy,' Woody said. 'That's a bit lame. Not very *dangerous*.'

'She also says she's got tickets for us to go to the England-Wales game on Saturday. If we reach her before dark tonight.'

'Is *that* the challenge?' Owen agreed with Woody. 'It's so easy. And the reward is amazing.'

'I suppose so.' Rory nodded. He was starting to wonder if things were going to be so simple.

Woody rubbed his hands together. 'From here, on our bikes, we'll get there and back before 8 p.m. No problem.'

Owen slapped Woody on the back, both of them grinning.

Rory was feeling good now. His two best friends were getting on again. Maybe the week leading up to the England-Wales match was going to be okay after all.

'And I know where it is,' Owen enthused. 'The boundary. About fifteen miles away on the Offa's Dyke Path.'

'Eh?' Woody interrupted.

'On Offa's Dyke Path,' Owen insisted. 'The true border.'

'Rubbish,' Woody scoffed. 'That's not the real border. The real border is the one laid out by the government. It's on the map. Wales on one side, England on the other. It's on *all* the maps in the school library too. And on Google. That Offa's Dyke stuff is ancient history.'

Owen shook his head. 'Everyone knows the real border is Offa's Dyke, idiot.'

'Er... remind me what Offa's Dyke is again?' Rory said, hoping to diffuse the sudden tension between his friends.

'In seven-hundred-and-something,' Owen stood up, 'an ancient king called Offa build a huge trench and mound the length of the Wales-England border. A bit like Hadrian's Wall, but just earth. That's been the true boundary for centuries. The English used to cut off the ears off Welsh people found

east of it and the Welsh would hang any English found west of it. So they say. That's where Rose means. And she said *boundary*, not border, Woody. That's why she said it.'

'Oh right,' Rory said, makes sense.

'No it doesn't,' Woody shouted.

Then silence.

Because the boys realised they had a problem. They had to find the halfway mark of the England-Wales boundary before dark, after a full day at school. Then they'd pass Rose's second test and get tickets for England v Wales. They knew that they could reach *one* of the boundaries by dark, but probably not both, as they were quite a way apart.

'So which do you think is the right one, Rory?' Owen asked.

'No idea,' Rory said. 'You both make really good points. Woody about what's on the maps. And you about the ancient boundary. I really don't know.'

'Well, you have to decide,' Woody said. 'It's up to you. The deciding vote.'

'You can't make *me* choose,' Rory complained.

'You have to Rory,' Woody pressed. 'If not me and Owen will end up arguing again. And he's wrong, so choose my idea.'

'Yeah,' Owen grinned. 'We'll start to argue, Rory. And, just for the record, he's wrong, so choose mine.'

Rory scowled. He had no idea how to solve this. In the back of his head he was worried about which value it was they were supposed to be testing. But he didn't want to tell the others that. They'd end up arguing about that too.

So what was Rory going to do?

After a few moments, Owen and Woody noticed a smile start to form on Rory's face. By the time it had become a grin, Owen couldn't help himself.

'What's the joke?' he asked.

'I've worked out how we can choose,' Rory replied. 'A bit like heads or tails.'

'How?'

'So, at half-two we're watching Scotland v Japan on the TV instead of doing rugby with Mr McDonald, yeah?'

'Yeah,' Owen and Woody spoke together again.

'You both told me last night who you think is going to win,' Rory reminded them. 'Owen thinks Scotland. Woody thinks Japan. So, whoever is right we go to *their* choice of border. The match ends at four-ish. That's when we're allowed out of the school. So we go off on our bikes then. Agreed?'

'Agreed,' Woody and Owen said. In stereo, again.

Rory had to smile. The other two were saying the same thing together again.

'Once we know who has won,' Rory said, 'We'll get there in less than two hours. Then back here for lights out. Then we'll have tickets for the match and we'll have passed the second challenge.'

The three boys all nodded. They had a plan. But each of them was thinking, without saying so, that, because this was to do with Rose, it would not be quite so simple.'

Questions

Which do *you* think is the true Wales-England boundary?

What do you do when two of your friends or family are arguing?

Who is going to win the Scotland v Japan game? And can you persuade your teacher to let you watch it as 'research' for this story?

The Twickenham Trials

Chapter 6

Woody, Owen and Rory were challenged to find the exact half way point of the Wales-England boundary before it went dark. Their reward would be to have succeeded in defending one of the England Rugby core values, plus tickets to the England-Wales match in two days' time. But, as Woody and Owen had different ideas about where the boundary was, Rory suggested they decide where to go based on who won the match between Japan and Scotland. But will they find Rose before nightfall?

The minute the game was over – the Scotland players celebrating their 45-10 win over Japan – Owen was up on his feet.

‘Come on,’ he said, grinning. ‘Offa’s Dyke. Now.’

Woody got to his feet too. But he said nothing.

Rory put the map that they had made together, with both boundaries marked, in his backpack.

Ten minutes later they were off the school grounds and cycling into the hills. It was sunny, although there were dark grey clouds in the west.

For the first hour they powered – mostly uphill – along narrow county lanes. Rory stayed at the back, watching his two friends ahead. There was barely any communication between the pair when the sun was still shining, just a few glances and nods. When the grey clouds broke and it started raining that communication diminished to nothing.

They pedalled as hard as they could, heads down to avoid the worst of the driving rain. Past hedgerows and wooden gates, avoiding pot holes and farm vehicles coming towards them on the other side of the road.

Rory knew that the tension between his two friends was not about Scotland beating Japan, or even Offa's Dyke or official maps being the true border between two countries. It was really about the Wales v England Rugby World Cup match.

Rory wondered if other children around the country were having the same problem. Whoever lost the match on Saturday night would probably be out of the Rugby World Cup. And Rory was desperate that that would not be England. But he was also keen not to fall out with Owen over it. For Rory, friendship meant more than sport.

The trio chained their bikes to a fence when they arrived at the point where Owen said the Offa's Dyke Path came through, then they ran along the path for a couple of miles. They could see the dyke. A great overgrown trench scored into the landscape. They were close now.

Owen was still running when Woody stopped by a wooden signpost.

'OWEN!' Woody shouted, breathless.

Rory saw that Owen had stopped, but had not turned round. He was still staring into the hills.

'OWEN!!!' Woody shouted. 'This is the half way point. Look! It says so on this post. You're WRONG, Owen. Get back here.'

Rory stood next to Woody. 'Go easy,' he cautioned.

'What?'

'Go easy on him. He was wrong. He knows it. So keep calm.'

Owen was walking towards them, now. His head was down.

'Why should I go easy?' Woody snapped. 'We've blown it. We don't have tickets. And we've lost Rose's challenge, whatever it was. And it's Owen's fault.'

‘Maybe,’ Rory counselled, ‘but keep it calm. We can still make it to the other border.’

‘Not the *other* border,’ Woody said. ‘The proper border.’

Rory frowned. The sky was going darker by the minute. Just like the mood.

As they scrambled back to their bikes, Woody couldn’t hold back. The failed mission, the heavy rain, the wet, the cold and the exhaustion was too much for him.

‘I told you,’ he said loudly to Owen. ‘I told you that your stupid boundary is ancient history. You need to get in the modern world!’

‘That’s typical from an England fan,’ Owen shouted. The rain was falling so hard that they needed to shout.

‘And what’s that supposed to mean?’ Woody yelled back. They were standing now, facing each other under a gnarled hawthorn tree.

‘It means that the English are arrogant,’ Owen raved. ‘They always have been and always will be. Arrogant. You think you’re the best. Better than any other country in the world. Especially Wales.’

Rory could hear a break in Owen’s voice. As if he was close to tears. And Rory wondered if Owen thought that *he* was arrogant too. But he said nothing.

‘Well,’ Woody roared. ‘That’s typical Wales. I like Wales. My grandad is from Llandudno. But, still, he is just like you – like everyone in Wales...’

‘Oh, so *we’re* all the same in Wales are we? *We’re* typical Wales.’ Owen laughed a dark humourless laugh. ‘How does that work? What’s typical about *us*?’

‘You’ve all got a massive anti-English chip on your shoulder,’ Woody replied. ‘Everything that goes wrong for you is the fault of the English. And it does my head in.’

Owen did not reply. He was running downhill to the bikes. Rory glanced at Woody.

‘Subtle, Woody,’ Rory said. ‘That was exactly what I meant when I said you should go easy.’

Woody and Rory sprinted after their friend.

An hour later, their bikes dumped – with no time to chain them up – the boys ran towards the small wood that Woody had pinpointed on the map as the half way point on the England-Wales border. It would take fifteen minutes at least, as it was a mile away over fields, mostly uphill. And the fields were muddy. They were all desperate to see if Rose was still there.

None of them had spoken since the shouting match.

They ran – and slid – as fast as they could.

This is like the hardest pre-season training run, Rory thought. But it was worse than that. The pressure of finding Rose before dark was making him feel sick. And now he could barely see the ground beneath his feet. He was pretty sure they were too late. It was as good as dark.

And, if they were too late, they’d blown the mission set by Rose. The mission they had accepted, however mad it seemed to him now. Their whole adventure seemed like it was over before it had even begun.

Questions

What do you think of Owen’s views on ‘the English’ and Woody’s views on ‘the Welsh’?

Is it fair to say that all people from one country are the same? Do you think it’s true?

What other groups of people are clumped together as having bad traits?

The Twickenham Trials

Chapter Seven

Rory, Owen and Woody had located the ancient boundary of Offa's Dyke between England and Wales. But Rose was not there. That meant she must be at the modern border between the two countries several miles away. In driving rain and across slippery mud-sodden fields, the trio are trying to reach the second border before dark.

The small wood the boys had been running towards was shrouded by darkness by the time they reached it. There was no-one around.

'That's it then,' Woody fumed, squaring up to Owen like two front rows about to crash into each other.

Rory carried on up the hill, desperate for the sight of something that would stop his friends coming to blows. And it came. Not as a sight, but as a terrible noise, like a massive machine starting up, whipping the treetops into a frenzy.

All three boys squatted behind a small hillock, putting their arms over their eyes instinctively. There were lights too. Like rugby stadium floodlights. All the more bright because of the utter darkness around them. It was terrifying and utterly confusing at the same time.

Then, though the maelstrom of wind and rain and noise and light, a figure came towards them.

'Let's run,' Woody shouted. 'Come on. This looks bad.'

'No, don't run. I think it's Rose,' Rory said, trying to stand. He'd seen something in the way the figure was walking. Something familiar.

And it *was* Rose. Jogging, she stopped, then slid skilfully down the bank and knelt next to the boys. She was wearing some sort of flying suit and carrying a helmet at her side.

'I was just leaving,' she said, serious.

‘Leaving?’ Woody echoed.

‘In the helicopter.’

‘Helicopter?’ It was Owen this time.

‘Have you boys been reduced to gibbering wrecks?’ Rose laughed at last. ‘I wish I could say well done, but I can’t, can I? You’re failing. You’ve been squabbling and arguing all through this. I’d say if you were a cat you’d have one life left. Or you’d half way to the pet cemetery.’

‘Failing at what?’ Woody snapped. ‘We don’t even know what the value is we’re supposed to be living up to.’

Then Rory closed his eyes. ‘I know,’ he groaned. ‘It’s obvious. Sportsmanship.’

Rose smiled. ‘You’re not just a pretty face,’ she said to Rory. ‘It’s good that at least one of you is in the game.’

‘So have we blown it?’ Woody asked, his voice meek now.

Rose opened her jacket and pulled an envelope out of an inside pocket. ‘Not quite,’ she said.

‘The tickets?’ Owen gasped.

And then Rose spelled it out.

‘You’ve one last chance,’ she said. ‘*Mr G* can’t hear or see us now. Not with this racket going on. But he’s been watching you all afternoon and so have I. Owen and Woody, you’re pathetic. It’s a good thing teamwork was last week’s challenge. You’d have blown that by now it was this week’s. But *Mr G* wants to see how you get on at the match, especially Owen and Woody. He’s convinced you’ll have a fight. So, if you can redeem yourselves, then maybe you have a chance. Or would you rather fight?’

‘Just a minute,’ Owen asked. ‘How has he – and you – been *watching* us.’

'A drone, of course,' Rose said. 'Keep up. Tiny. About ten centimetres long. With a camera and microphone. It's up there now. But he can't hear you because of the chopper. It's been within ten metres of you most of the day.'

'So Mr G's not in the chopper?' Owen asked.

'No.'

'Well if he isn't, then who's your pilot?'

'No-one,' Rose said.

'Wow, is that remote control too?' Woody gasped.

'No,' Rose said. 'Don't be stupid.'

'So *who* flies it?' Owen asked.

'Me,' Rose said, lifting her helmet and pushing it over her head. 'Come on. I'll give you a lift to school. I'll arrange for a driver to collect your bikes later.'

For ten minutes the boys stared out into the darkness at threads of orange street lights and headlamps weaving through the black sodden hills, until they saw a brighter glow, a small town, and then down, lower, to the ground, the silhouettes of trees around them, before the chopper gently landed in the centre of the school rugby field.

For the duration of the ride the boys had just stared in awe at the world beneath them. All they could say was 'cool', 'wow' and 'thank you Rose' over and over. Until Rose broke the silence, on landing, as the helicopter's blades began to slow down.

'You have three tickets to the England- Wales match,' she said. 'We'll be watching you. Owen and Woody especially. One of you two is going to be miserable and defeated on Saturday night. The other is going to be more excited perhaps than they have ever been in their life. You might think you

can pretend to be sporting, sitting there together. But Mr G will be watching. He'll be so close to you he'll be able to see the look in your eyes, hear the tone of your voice. He'll know you're faking it. Can you show sportsmanship under that sort of pressure?'

Rose stared hard at Woody and Owen.

'Yeah,' they both said together.

Rory closed his eyes. He wasn't so sure. But he knew he'd find out soon enough. In a few hours' time he'd be sitting at Twickenham with a Wales fan on one side of him, and an England fan on the other. He just hoped that when it was clear that one team had won and the other lost, that all their anger wouldn't boil over – and ruin everything.

Questions

What does sportsmanship mean to you?

If your team loses to a friend's team, what happens the next time you see them?

Do you think sport is important enough to fall out over?

Chapter Eight

Rory, Owen and Woody are at the England v Wales Rugby World Cup match. But instead of having the time of his life, Rory is worried that his two friends will fall out when one team wins and the other loses. Rory is all the more worried because he knows that if one of them doesn't behave well, then they may fail the second of Mr G's five challenges, with dire consequences for the game all three of them love.

Rory frowned. England *had* been winning, but now they were losing 28-25. And there was barely any time left on the clock. He looked at Owen on his left, then Woody on his right. Both were leaning forward with the same expression on their faces. Anxiety. And, neither had spoken throughout the entire game.

Then Rory saw the referee's arm was up. *Penalty*. To England. The noise in the stadium was incredible, but shifted quickly from cheers of relief to a cacophony of opinions as England decided to kick into touch and go for the try, rather than opting for the easier three-point kick and a draw.

Suddenly Rory was pushed back into his seat, Woody leaning across him as he grabbed Owen by his jacket. Owen stared back at Woody in horror. And Rory wondered if this was the fight he'd feared all day. Was this was how they were going to fail their test, fail rugby, fail themselves?

Then Woody was talking.

'Look,' he shouted at Owen above the impossible noise of the crowd. 'This is the best game of rugby I've ever been to. After this line-out one of us will be happy, the other gutted. It's fifty-fifty. But whichever way it goes I want you to know that you're one of my two best mates in the world and that that's more important than if England score a try. Okay?'

Rory looked now at *Owen's* face. Owen was grinning.

Then his two friends were hugging, Rory leaning back in his seat, feeling slightly embarrassed as his two friends embraced. So he focussed on the big screen image of the England mascot, Ruckley, a giant brown dog dressed in a full England kit, standing on the touchline.

Rory could see that even the mascot looked nervous.

As they descended the spiral walkway that carried thousands of fans out of the stadium, Rory and Woody did their best to ignore the tide of dragon flags being waved ahead and behind them. And to their left and right too. Wales had won. Game over.

Rory was gutted. England had to beat Australia now. But he smiled when he saw Woody pat Owen on the back. At least, under all this pressure, they were okay with each other. Although Rory would be happier still if England *had* pushed over for a last minute try.

Just as he was thinking this, Rory caught sight of something strange below in the open area in front of the stadium. Something very strange. A large dog being dragged into a van. Against its will.

Woody saw it too and muttered 'Is that...'

'...Ruckley?' Rory added. 'Yes. It is.'

Then Owen shouted. 'He's being kidnapped. I can't believe it. Someone's kidnapping the England mascot.'

They hung over the edge and watched in horror. Ruckley was trying hard to fight three men and women who were shoving him into a van. And, then, just as the van door was shut, Ruckley pacified, the woman locking it gazed up at the three boys and made a mock salute, looking right into their eyes.

'I don't believe this,' Woody said, grabbing both of his friends by the shoulders. That woman was saluting us. *Us* directly. That means that this is something to do with us. It's our next challenge, or worse, the start of our punishment for failing the last one.'

Then they were running. Fast and hard. Down the steps. Round and round the spiral walkway until they reached its bottom.

As they hit the concourse, they saw the van edging through crowds to the main road. They ran again. Panicking. Breathless. Exhausted. Trying to keep up, arriving at the main road just as the white van joined a stream of traffic leaving Twickenham.

'We've lost them,' Woody cursed. 'They've kidnapped Ruckley!'

But his words were drowned out by the noise of car tyres screeching next to them on the road. A four-seater convertible sports car had drawn up next to them. A woman was driving. Except it wasn't a woman. It was a girl.

Rose.

'Get in,' she yelled.

The three boys looked at each other – and several things passed unspoken between them.

Would they catch up with Ruckley and save him?

What was Rose doing in a sports car? And why did she always keep showing up like this? Was she on their side, or dragging them deeper and deeper into something they could neither understand, nor control?

Had they passed the second challenge? What even *was* the second challenge?

And where on earth were they going?

Too many questions. And no time to answer them. Amid the noise and chaos and emotion, they knew that they had no choice but to jump into the car that Rose was driving.

Footnote

To all the schools in Wales and Welsh fans in general, congratulations on your victory. From Tom.

Questions

Rose is an ambiguous character. She could be good. She could be bad. Characters like that are great for stories. Can you think of any characters in books or films that have been like that for you?

Should the boys have got into Rose's car? Do they know her well enough to get into her car?

At this point, schools voted for whether Rose was a villain or a hero. Tom did not reveal which way the voting had gone and left it to the readers to see if they could work her out as the story developed.

Chapter 9

Rory, Woody and Owen were just leaving Twickenham – hoping that they might have passed Mr G's second test – when they saw the England rugby mascot, Ruckley, being kidnapped. Convinced the oversized dog's abduction was something to do with Mr G, they chased after the kidnappers. But they were too late. All seemed hopeless, until Rose arrived in a sports car and told them to jump in.

'I suppose you have a lot of questions to ask me?' Rose said, moving skilfully through the gears of her car.

'Er... yeah,' Woody replied. 'Just a few.'

Sitting in the front seat, next to Rose, Rory scanned the road ahead. But he could see no sign of the kidnappers. They had vanished. With Ruckley. And with any hopes the boys had of rescuing him.

The inside of Rose's car was plush leather. There were chrome fittings. Behind Rory, Woody and Owen had discovered a small fridge with a range of soft drinks and snacks.

'Fire away with your questions,' Rose said. 'And help yourself to some of the refreshments, boys.'

'Where are we going?' Rory asked.

'We're heading west.'

'West?' Owen asked.

'To Bath, not Wales. And, by the way Owen,' Rose joked, 'if you start going on about that game you just watched too much, you're out at the next services. Understood?'

Owen grinned. He really didn't need to say anything.

‘But before I answer anything,’ Rose went on. ‘I need to tell you something. You passed the second test. Owen and Woody, that was touching. I fed the footage of the two of you cuddling to Mr G and he was surprised that you could be such sweeties after how you were with each other last week. Well done.’

‘We weren’t exactly cuddling,’ Woody cautioned.

‘No,’ Owen said. ‘It was more of a man hug.’

Rose laughed, but said no more.

‘So what test was it that we passed? Which of the England core rugby values?’ Rory asked, as the car took a corner and he was pushed shoulder to shoulder with Rose. ‘Sportsmanship?’

‘Correct,’ Rose replied. ‘And this week it’s Respect. Shall I tell you what we need you to do?’

‘No,’ Rory shook his head, as his two friends looked on from the back seat. ‘We need some answers about where we’ve *been* before you tell us where we’re *going*. Like how come you drive cars and fly choppers?’

‘Good question,’ Rose answered. ‘And now we know each other a bit better, I feel like I can trust you. You’ve probably guessed that I’m actually a specially trained spy. A young spy. A bit like Alex Rider or Ruby Redfort. But, unlike them, I’m real.’

Rory kept pressing. ‘So who are you working for? Who trained you?’

‘Can’t say.’

‘Tell us.’

‘No,’ Rose said firmly, a hint of menace in her voice.

‘Then let us out,’ Rory snapped. ‘How are we to know if you work for the government or for Mr G? How do we know he even exists? How do we know if you are good or bad? And you have all these

cars and choppers and drones. And you seem to know everything we do and say. Who are you, Rose?’

Rose stared at Rory for a second, then smiled.

‘Good question. But I can’t tell you. I can, however, say that I am good. I do things that are good. And that includes rescuing rugby. Because rugby is a part of the fabric of our country. Part of our national culture and heritage. And it needs to be preserved.’

It wasn’t long before they hit the M4 and drove swiftly towards Bath in the south west of England. The boys tried hard to get answers out of Rose, but she would only tell them so much.

She did, however, explain what was happening with Ruckley. And what their next mission was.

It was Mr G’s doing, she told them. He had persuaded someone in the Australian Rugby World Cup camp to abduct Ruckley so that the mascot wouldn’t be able to attend the crunch match between England and Australia. Because – without Ruckley there – how could England play at their best?

‘Really?’ Woody said. ‘We need the dog to beat Australia?’

Rose nodded. ‘We need the dog. We definitely need the dog.’

Then she went on to explain that the boys’ mission was to get inside the Australian rugby camp and find out who had Ruckley, then get him out of there, while still showing the utmost respect to the Australians.’

‘Why don’t *you* do it?’ Rory challenged Rose. ‘You’re the spy.’

‘Because, Rory, I’m not defending the five core values of England Rugby like you are, am I?’

‘You could help us,’ Rory said.

Rose put her hand on Rory’s arm. ‘And I will,’ she said gently.

Two hours later they had reached their destination. It was long past midnight.

‘So, this is the Australian training camp,’ Rose said.

The boys’ jaws dropped. They saw a huge posh hotel, long gardens, great screens up around a rugby pitch to stop people spying on their training sessions.

‘You’ve got your brief,’ Rose said. ‘And be careful. The Aussies have already spotted one spy trying to watch them train. He was a colleague of mine, in fact. So they’ll be on the look out.’

‘Can I ask one last question?’ Owen said.

‘Sure.’

‘What will Mr G do?’ he leaned forward. ‘That’s what you’ve not told us. I say that unless you tell us what the threat is to the world, or us, or rugby, we’re not going on with this. Agreed lads?’

Rory and Woody nodded.

Rose checked her watch. ‘Fine,’ she said. ‘There’s time. I’ll tell you what he plans to do and then you get started on finding Ruckley, yeah?’

‘Yeah,’ the three said together, all of them suddenly feeling very nervous about what they were about to be told and what their next mission was.

Chapter ten

Rose has driven the three boys out to Bath in the south west of England, to where the Australian team are based. She has told them to infiltrate the team hotel and find out where Ruckley is being held prisoner. And, that they should show respect to everyone they meet. But the boys refuse to do what Rose asks until she tells them what Mr G intends to do if they fail the Respect test.

‘So?’ Woody pressed.

Rose sighed. ‘Fine,’ she said. ‘Mr G will close down the national rugby stadiums of England, Wales and Scotland. Twickenham. The Millennium. And Murrayfield. Okay?’

‘What?’ Woody said. ‘There’s no way he can do that.’

‘He can. He’s rich. He can buy anything,’ Rose sounded convincing. ‘He’ll buy them all and shut them down. He’ll stifle the game in its heartlands. It’ll rip the soul out of the British game.’

‘That’s the threat?’ Rory asked.

‘Yes.’

‘So if we fail any of the remaining three challenges that’s what he’ll do?’ Owen was talking slowly, like he had just come off the pitch after a concussion injury.

‘That’s right. And then he’ll demolish them. The homes of rugby will be gone forever.’

Ten minutes later Owen, Woody and Rory were going up in the lift in the Australia team hotel. It was late. No-one else was around. Rose had told them they had a large family room booked under false names. And she was as good as her word. They checked into the hotel without any questions being asked.

Rose had invented a cover story for them too. They were to say they were children of the hotel chain's major shareholders. Allowed to stay in the same hotel as the players as a treat for the week. It sounded plausible to the boys.

They walked in silence to their room, being sure to respect hotel guests that might already be asleep behind the other doors in the corridor. But once their bedroom door was closed and they'd taken in the lavish curtains and monster TV screen, they were talking.

'Do you ever ask yourself about Rose?' Owen said. 'I mean... what she's up to? This is getting weirder and weirder every day.'

'She's on our side,' Rory said instinctively.

Woody sniggered. 'Yeah, we know you like her. But can we trust her?'

'We can,' Rory insisted. 'She's helped us out lots of times. She's guiding us.'

'I don't know,' Owen disagreed. 'I'm with Woody. I think we should keep it in mind. Look for signs. You know? That she might not be everything she says.'

Rory went to bed feeling cross with his two friends. He thought Rose was great. Amazing, in fact. There was no way she was betraying them, no way she could lie. Not to him.

The next morning the three boys walked into the hotel breakfast room together. There were tables stacked with food along a wall, then others draped with tablecloths, silver cutlery and glasses and jugs. Several staff in black jackets and white shirts were serving the tables. Three large security guards too, looming with menace in each doorway.

The reason for the security guards was that most of the Australian team was eating there. Two dozen large men with plates piled with food.

Woody stood in front of the fruit table, six giant bowls overfilled with pieces of melon, mango, grapes and other fruits – trying to choose what to eat – when he felt someone standing next to him doing the same.

He glanced to his left.

‘Hey kid,’ the man said. He was tall, dark-haired and very familiar.

Woody gasped. He had been reading about this man in *Rugby World* hours earlier. And had recently finished one of the player’s own books – a children’s story – on his Kindle.

It was Egypt Lofua. The Australian back.

Woody tried to focus and not be distracted. He knew he had to pretend he was the son of one of the hotel owners. He imagined a boy like that would be confident. So he decided to start a conversation. As if he was at ease, not terrified.

‘I read one of your books,’ Woody offered.

‘That’s great, kid. Thanks,’ Lofua said. ‘Would you like me to sign it for you?’

As Lofua spoke, Woody noticed Owen and Rory staring at him. He also saw a security guy, dressed in a silver suit, listening, watching, the speaking into a microphone up his sleeve.

‘Er, no, thanks,’ Woody said. ‘I read it on Kindle. But it was good. Well done.’

‘Cheers,’ Lofua said. ‘So what are you doing in the hotel? On holiday?’

Woody noticed the guard edging closer.

Does he think I’m going to attack Egypt Lofua? Woody wondered. *He must be mad. He’s a giant.*

‘Our parents are shareholders in the hotel chain,’ Woody said, swiftly using the cover story Rose had given them.

‘Right,’ Egypt Lofua said. ‘That’s good. Nice one.’

No sooner did he say that than the guard was next to Woody, hand on his shoulder. And two more guards were moving towards Owen and Rory, just as they were getting started on their fry ups.

All three guards were giants, even larger than the rugby players.

Then the guard was speaking. His voice was the deepest Woody had ever heard.

‘If you’d step away from the boy,’ the guard said to Egypt Lofua. ‘We’ve had a lot of spies trying to break into the camp this week and what that boy just told you about being the son of one of the shareholders is a lie. The hotel has no shareholders. It’s owned by one man from Saudi Arabia.’

Woody, Owen and Rory were marched out of the breakfast room without any more conversation.

They didn’t resist. They wanted to show the security guards respect, even if they didn’t feel like it.

They were taken along a back corridor and pushed into a small office with plain walls and none of the frills that the front of the hotel had. It looked more like a prison cell. Their third mission blown before it had even started. And all because the cover story Rose had given them didn’t hold up.

‘Now what?’ Woody thought to himself.

Questions

In a lot of children’s stories – like this one – children get to do what they want without parents stopping or protecting them. Is that realistic? Or is it okay in a story?

What does Respect mean to you? Sometimes when we are stressed or emotional we can show people less respect than they deserve. Have you ever done this? Did you apologise?

Why do you think Rose gave the boys such a weak cover story?

Chapter eleven

Woody, Owen and Rory have been caught by security guards at the Australian team's hotel. They are accused of being spies, after a man was caught spying there earlier in the week. They have been forced into a small room at the back of the building. It appears that their mission to find and rescue Ruckley has already failed.

'Right lads,' the tall security guard grinned. 'You stay here. Until after the England-Australia game, I think. Just in case you found out anything you shouldn't have while you were spying. Oh... and have a nice time.'

The door slammed shut. Woody noticed that it was reinforced with metal plates. No way through.

'Two days in here?' Rory moaned. 'Now what?'

'We escape,' Owen replied.

But after checking every wall, cupboard and even the tiles on the floor, none of them could find an exit.

They sat on the floor for hours, trying to devise a way out of the room. Hoping that someone would come to rescue them. Rose perhaps. But no one came. A hopeless situation.

It was late afternoon when the breakthrough came.

'This is hopeless. We've blown it,' Rory complained, eyeing the ceiling. Mostly concrete with ventilation grille at its centre. He stared at the grille for a few seconds before he managed to match his thoughts to words.

'How stupid have we been?' he said 'I think there is a way out.'

The ventilation system was in fact a decent-sized air-conditioning system, the wide shafts that moved hot and cold air around the hotel. It didn't take long for Woody and Owen to lift Rory lineout-style so that he could detach the grille. Then – with a bit of gymnastics – they were inside a labyrinth of secret passages that ran from room to room throughout the building.

They moved slowly and stealthily, back along the corridor that they had been marched along moments before, but this time *above* the rooms that each closed door led to. No talking. Just hand gestures if they needed to communicate.

In the first room – peering through the grille – Woody saw two rugby players lying on benches, having their legs massaged.

The boys moved on. Slowly. Steadily. Silently.

In the second room they heard a radio commentary of a rugby match, but no-one in there to listen to it. Owen was desperate to stop and listen. The match being relayed was Fiji v Wales. He needed to know the score. If Wales won it would be a huge step towards qualification. But he knew there was no time for that. He needed to respect his two friends' desire to save Ruckley ahead of anything.

Again they moved on. To the next room.

There, Rory saw a man checking a series of images on a computer screen. There was a figure dressed in a blouse and skirt standing next to him. As the boys were about to keep going, the figure suddenly looked directly up at the grille. Rory froze. He felt a huge desire to call out. But he kept quiet.

Because the figure was familiar. Very familiar. It was Rose. Rory had no idea if she had seen him.

Rory kept crawling after his friends, his mind trying to find an explanation for Rose being inside and office at the Australian hotel. But his thoughts were soon overtaken by Woody's reaction to seeing what was inside the fifth room they came to.

'It's Ruckley,' Woody whispered. The first words any of them had said since entering the air-conditioning vents. 'And he's watching the match. Alone.'

Without any more speaking, the three boys removed the grille, listened for anyone coming and, with the coast clear, dropped down to join the giant dog.

‘We’ve come to release you,’ Woody said quietly.

Ruckley nodded.

As Woody put his hand on the door handle to check if anyone was in the corridor outside, Owen glanced at the TV screen. With a few minutes to go, Wales were beating Fiji. But before a smile had a chance to form on his lips, the door burst open and the man they’d seen in the fourth room, talking to Rose, was filing the doorway.

‘Got you,’ the man laughed, pulling out a gun. ‘Now I can sort you out for good.’

Instinctively, Owen lunged at him and punched him in the middle of his face. Hard.

The man fell to the ground clutching his nose, blood pouring out from between his fingers.

And the boys were running, Ruckley alongside them, out of the hotel, no time for talking. There was no time either for planning how they would get Ruckley back to Twickenham in 48 hours. They just had to get out of the hotel and work the rest out later. If they managed to escape the man with the gun.

Owen ran at the back of the group, wondering if he’d shown the large man in the hotel respect by breaking his nose. But he put the thoughts out of his mind. Until he heard a shout and the sound of footsteps coming behind them.

Questions

The boys were being held against their will, but they were expected to show respect too. How much respect should you show to someone who appears to want to do you harm?

How would you get Ruckley back to Twickenham?

Chapter twelve

The boys quickly found Ruckley locked in a room in the Australian team hotel. But, as they released the mascot dog from his prison, Owen was forced to punch an armed man in the face. To escape. Meaning that, although the trio were half way to meeting the first part of their mission (to release Ruckley), they were worried they had not kept up the third England Rugby value that they were being challenged to uphold: Respect.

They ran. Hard. Three boys and a giant dog sprinting through Bath. Past the cathedral and the Guild Hall, white signs etched onto pavements advertising the annual Children's Book Festival. Although it was dark, the moon was bright, illuminating the streets.

When they were convinced that they had escaped, they found a shop doorway to hide in. Get their breath back. Make some plans.

'What shall we... do now?' Owen gasped. 'How do we... get Ruckley... back to Twickenham?'

Ruckley shrugged. He was a dog of few words. No words, actually.

Rory was the first to fully get his breath back.

'Look,' he said. 'We might be doing these challenges for Mr G or Rose. And we might be ready to take risks to save the game we love. But this is serious. A kidnap? A man with a gun? I mean, we're not characters in a children's story, are we? We're just normal boys. The sensible way to get Ruckley safely back to London is to take him to the nearest police station and ask them to do it.'

'Oh yeah,' Woody and Owen said at the same time.

They located the main Bath police station using Woody's iPhone and walked through quiet back streets, trying to avoid drawing attention to themselves.

On the way, Owen looked through windows, trying to find a TV screen. After a few pubs and bars, he saw it. The final score. Wales 23 Fiji 13. At least Wales have won, he said to himself. Things were looking up.

But Woody was looking for the score too. And he smiled to himself. Wales had failed to gain a bonus point, meaning that if England beat Australia on Saturday, even without a bonus point, England would qualify for the quarter finals.

‘What I don’t understand is why was Rose in the Aussie hotel,’ Owen said, his mind back on the night’s events.

‘That was weird,’ Woody agreed. ‘I trust her even less now.’

They both looked at Rory. Then Ruckley looked at Rory.

‘Maybe she was undercover too,’ Rory suggested. ‘You don’t know. She doesn’t want to help Mr G, but she has to: to save rugby.’

Neither Woody nor Owen replied. Rory knew they thought Rose spelled trouble. They walked on until they saw a large blue sign.

POLICE STATION.

They’d arrived. Just fifty yards from the police station. At the end of a street.

‘Ruckley,’ Woody said. ‘We’ll drop you at the front door, then head off. It’s best we’re not around when they find you. But perhaps we’ll see you at Twickenham?’

Ruckley shrugged again and shook each boys’ hand firmly. The mascot dog might not be talkative, but they could tell that he was grateful.

Then – suddenly – two bright lights. The revving of an engine. Shouts all around. Chaos as each of the boys was grabbed from behind and pushed up against the side of van.

‘ARMS BEHIND YOUR BACKS. NOW!’

Owen heard the orders and did as he was told. He had no choice. He was paralysed with fear. They had all been caught. He watched from the side of the van as Ruckley was led away from them. They’d failed. So close and they’d lost the mascot. Blown it.

But why were these people taking Ruckley directly to the police station?

The answer came quickly. Woody, Owen and Rory were addressed together. ‘You are all under arrest.’

‘For what?’ Woody asked, then added ‘sir’. Half of him thought that this was so mad that it could just be a test. Set up by Rose or Mr G. He had to try to be respectful.

‘For kidnapping a national sports mascot. That’s what it’s for.’

‘We didn’t...’ Rory said. ‘We were rescuing him. Why do you think we’re bringing him to the police station?’

‘Of course you were *rescuing* him, lads,’ a police woman joked. ‘We’ve descriptions of the three of you that are a perfect fit. Police forces across the country have been looking for you. You were seen driving a van away from Twickenham on Saturday night. Then at the Australian team hotel. We’ve even been sent film footage of you.’

‘Say nothing,’ Woody mouthed to his two friends. ‘Just be respectful. Remember.’

But Owen wasn’t so sure. He was panicking. He’d never been arrested. He wasn’t even sure he’d spoken to a policewoman – or man – before.

Rory felt differently as he was marched, arms behind his back to the police station. A part of him was glad this was over. He was sick of racing around the country. He was starting to doubt the whole thing they had got themselves involved in. It was crazy. Was there really an insane figure who wanted to buy up all the national rugby stadiums to undermine the game?

He thought all this through as he was being led up the steps and into the reception of the police station. A bare room. A large desk with a policewoman behind it. Several red plastic chairs facing the desk.

And Rose.

‘Rose,’ Rory said loudly. ‘You’re here. Brilliant. Can you sort this out? Can you help us? They think we kidnapped Ruckley. Please. Rose...’

Questions

At this point, schools asked Tom Palmer some questions about *The Twickenham Trials* which he answered in a video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hEJv_dh-HHI

Chapter thirteen

Rory, Owen and Woody have been arrested and are about to be charged with the kidnap of Ruckley, despite having just rescued him and despite the fact that they were taking him to the police for his own safety. As they arrive at the police station they see Rose is already there. Can Rose find a way to get them out of trouble and prove that she is with them, not against them?

‘Please. Rose...’ Rose heard Rory begging for her help.

But Rose turned her back on the three boys.

What now? she asked herself.

These boys were annoying her. They’d shown respect to the police, even when they were arrested while trying to do the right thing. They’d shown respect all week while trying to liberate the England mascot. Rory had even said please to her when asking for her help. For three weeks they’d shown teamwork, sportsmanship and now respect. They were living up to the core values of English rugby. But would they be able to show discipline?

Rose smirked. *Discipline*. The ability to do the right thing under pressure. That’s what it meant to her. So, how was she going to test that?

Easy. Divide and rule. That’s what she would do. She’d find a way of splitting them up as a group. And the best way to do that was going to be so very easy. She’d target Rory. He was their weakness. She’d sever the link between Rory and the other two. Then they’d be broken.

Rose’s smirk grew into a grin. Then – seeing that the boys had been taken to the cells – she strode towards the police reception desk.

‘Thanks for getting us out of there,’ Rory smiled at Rose. ‘I told these two that you would help us.’

They were sitting in a café, eating hot bacon and egg sandwiches. Large windows with condensation running down the inside. It was cold outside. Autumn coming.

'You're welcome,' Rose said. 'It was awful that you were arrested. But I sorted it all out for you. You don't even have police records or anything like that. And,' Rose paused, 'most importantly, you passed Respect. Three down, two to go.'

Woody nodded and looked up from his newspaper. He'd been reading about England losing to Australia. He was half glad he'd missed the match locked up in a police cell. It didn't sound good. 33-13 was a big defeat. He was also glad that Owen had been nice about it. His Welsh friend not gone on about Wales qualifying and England not. They might banter about it in a few days, but Owen knew it was too raw for Woody today.

Woody searched Rose's face, looking for a sign to trust her as much as he trusted Owen and Rory.

'So what's the next test?' he asked.

'Discipline,' Rose replied.

'Any clues?' Owen asked. His voice sounded hostile.

'Yes,' Rose went on. 'You have to work *me* out? You have to show discipline as a trio and work out if I am on your side or not.'

'Course we know that,' Rory said.

Rose put her hand on Rory's arm and smiled. 'I know you think that, Rory.' Then she looked at Woody and Owen. 'But these two aren't sure. Look at the way they look at me, talk to me. That's why Mr G has asked me to test you all to find a way to agree on something. And that something is *me*.'

'I'm not even sure Mr G exists,' Woody volunteered.

'What do we know about you?' Owen said. 'Really?'

'We know that she can fly helicopters,' Rory raised his voice. 'She predicted the trophy being stolen and stuff like that. She's not any normal girl making up some crazy stories. Important things happen

around her. That's why I trust her. And she's called Rose. What could be more England Rugby than that?'

Woody and Owen stayed silent. The only sound was the ticking of the café clock.

Rose stood up.

'You've got all week to sort it out,' she said. There was a sad look in her eyes now. 'And remember. Mr G is watching you. He'll see if you show discipline. Or don't. He sees everything you are doing.'

Rose walked away. But just before she did, she put a piece of paper on the table in front of Rory.

Then she was gone, a draft of cold air rushing between the boys as the door opened, then closed.

Owen stared at Rory who had already picked up the piece of paper and was studying it. 'What's that?' Owen asked.

'Her mobile number,' Rory answered triumphantly.

'Give it to me,' Woody demanded, reaching towards Rory.

Rory snatched his hand and the piece of paper away. He shook his head.

'It's mine,' he said. 'She gave it to me.'

Owen watched Rory closely. This was worrying. What was Rose up to? He had a feeling deep down in his guts that this was going to be a difficult week.

Questions

Does telling the story from Rose's point of view for the first time make a difference to what you think about her?

Does it bother you that the only girl character in the story might now be a villain? Do you think there should be a more positive girl character in the story – or doesn't it matter?

Chapter fourteen

Rose has challenged the boys to prove to themselves once and for all that she is on their side. Or not. They have a week. And they have to do it while living up to the England Rugby core value of Discipline. But the boys do not seem ready to work together on this fourth of five challenge. Rory believes in Rose, but Woody and Owen are not so sure. And, now that Rose has left Rory with her phone number, the chances of group discipline appears even more remote.

Rose made her way down the quiet shopping street without looking back. A fast pace, but not so fast as to attract attention. It was windy and cold. Grey clouds overhead. As she walked she slipped an earpiece into her ear and opened an app on her mobile phone. She had some work to do. She found a coffee shop, ordered a hot chocolate and sat at the back where it was quiet.

Then she listened.

Owen: He's coming back from the toilet. What shall we say?

Woody: I don't know. Do you think he's phoned her already? Anyway, let's drop it and talk about something else.

Rose could hear footsteps in her earpiece.

Owen: Er... okay. So, er, have you got over England losing, Woody?

Woody: Not that. I said I don't want to talk about that.

Owen: Sorry. But... ah... nothing.

Rose heard a scraping noise. Someone pulling up a chair.

Woody: So what now, Rory?

A pause.

Owen: Talk to us, Rory. We need to sort this out. We need to sort how we can show discipline.

Rory: We need to work out why you don't trust Rose, more like.

Woody: How can we? She was at the Aussie hotel. But she made no explanation.

Owen: Yeah. She didn't mention that once. And how come we were arrested? She could have stopped all that before we were arrested rather than after.

Rory: Well, you should have asked her, shouldn't you? She got us out of there. We're safe. If she was a bad person why did she get us involved in proving all the five values?

Woody: That's what we don't know Rory. And we also don't know why does she doesn't just help us. And why is she always doing what Mr G asks and why does she talk to him at all? And why have we never met or seen Mr G?

Rose heard another scraping chair sound. A more violent one. Then a loud bang. A chair falling over, she thought.

Rory: Why this? Why that? I trust Rose. I like Rose. You two are the ones who are wrong. I can prove that she's good. And I can show discipline. On my own. Not with you two.

Another chair scraping the floor.

Woody: We're meant to show discipline together, that's the point. Like a rugby team is supposed to show it so that they don't give away stupid pen...

Rose heard a door slam.

Owen: Shall we go after him?

Woody: Give him half an hour. Then we'll call him.

Owen: Okay.

Rose opened another app on her phone, there was a map of the town centre. And four little dots, all different colours. The red dot was moving quickly along the high street. It represented Rory. The blue and yellow dots were not moving. She was the green dot.

Rose laughed to herself as she stood up and put her coat on. But quickly she noticed that another girl was looking at her. A girl aged about eleven, wearing a rugby hoody and Docs. She had long light brown hair that fell in ringlets.

Something on Rose's radar made her look at the girl again and put her hand inside her coat pocket to check the small pistol she kept there.

She looked at the girl again.

But the girl was staring at her iPhone now, so Rose dismissed her from her mind: she was just a girl in a café waiting for a friend. Nothing else. But you had to be careful. There were spies everywhere.

As she left the coffee shop the girl did not follow her, so she took her hand off the pistol. She didn't need that for the girl. But she'd need it soon. Her plan was simple. To make Rory jump off the top of the ArcelorMittal Orbit at the fanzone in the Olympic Park. That would test Woody and Owen. That would finish them – and rugby – off for good.

Rory stopped walking when he reached the city centre cinema complex. He went inside. It was quiet. Adults queueing for films. No kids.

Rory knew what he had to do, even though he was burning with fury. He took out his phone and the piece of paper Rose had given him. Then he dialled her number.

Questions

Given that you can only hear the voices of the three boys and not see their gestures, is it harder to understand what is going on?

Do you like listening this story as a play? Would you like chapter in verse? Do you think a story can be told in verse? Or shall I go back to prose?

Do you wish the story would end because you are not interested in the Rugby World Cup now that England are out?

Thank you very much for your fantastic questions yesterday. There was an overwhelming amount of and I am sorry that I can answer to so few on the video. But thank you for asking them.

The Twickenham Trials

Chapter 15

This week the boys have been set the challenge of defending the England Rugby core value of *Discipline*. But that challenge has not started well, as Rose appears to have driven a wedge between Rory and his two friends, Woody and Owen. Can the boys show discipline as a unit? And is Rose *really* planning to murder Rory?

Rory dialled Rose's number and listened to it ring three times. His heart was beating too fast. He felt sick. But, still, he had to do this.

'Hey,' Rose answered.

'Hi. It's Rory.'

'I know.'

'I've left the other two,' Rory volunteered.

'I know that too.'

'So what now?' Rory asked, not bothering to ask how Rose knew everything about him. He was well aware that she was bugging and filming them all.

'We meet up,' Rose said.

As Rory and Rose spoke, Rory saw a girl enter the cinema complex. She was the only other child there. She was young. Eleven or twelve. She had long light brown hair. Very curly. Rory wondered what she was doing there on a school day.

The girl looked directly at Rory, smiled at him, then looked away, walking on to buy a ticket for a film.

Rory felt weird. These days he felt that everyone was suspicious, that everyone was following him. It was like he was a spy or something. Or they were.

'Is someone there?' Rose asked, sensing that Rory had stopped talking so freely.

'Just a girl,' Rory said.

'What does she look like?' Rose asked quickly.

'Black short hair,' Rory replied. 'Tall.'

'Oh fine,' Rose said, her voice relaxing. 'Look. We should meet. I can tell you what you need to do to pass the Discipline test. How about tomorrow at the South Africa v USA game? At the Olympic Park in London.'

'Tomorrow? Sure,' Rory said. 'Just tell me where and when?'

Rory phoned Woody next.

'Listen Woody,' he said. 'I'm sorry I got angry. You know I think differently about Rose than you do.'

'Er... yeah,' Woody said. He was still in the café Rory had left them in.

'I just need a bit of space,' Rory went on. 'Let's meet at the Namibia v Georgia match in Exeter tomorrow. I've got some tickets for it. For all of us.'

There was a pause at the other end of the telephone line. Rory knew Woody and Owen were planning with each other what to say to him. They didn't trust him now. He knew that. Just like they didn't trust Rose.

‘We thought about going to investigate this sighting of a ghost in the Wales team hotel in Surrey,’ Owen said. ‘They’ve reported seeing things. It sounds like something that’s been set up for us to look at.’

‘No,’ Rory replied. ‘Rose hasn’t mentioned that. Let’s leave it.’

A pause. A long pause. Each of them waiting for the other to speak.

Woody broke the silence. ‘Erm... okay. We’ll see you in Exeter tomorrow afternoon, yeah?’

‘Yeah,’ Rory agreed.

Listening to the boys’ conversation in another cafe with another hot chocolate, Rose chuckled. This was working like a dream. She’d have Rory on her own in London while the other two were two hundred miles away. This was going to be easy. And fun, too. She planned to live-feed Rory’s accident to Woody and Owen’s phones.

That would sort them out.

Rose rubbed her chin. It was funny how this whole thing was becoming more about destroying the three boys than destroying rugby for her now. She chuckled again. Whatever! She’d just go with it. She hated rugby. But she hated the boys’ slavish devotion to the five stupid core values even more.

After Rory had cut the call to Woody and Owen he saw the younger girl standing at the far end of the popcorn stand about twenty metres off. She was watching him. And this time she didn’t look away. In fact, she was walking towards him,

Questions

Have you read about the ghost at the Wales rugby team's hotel? Can you think of what might be going on?

Rory has told two lies. What are they? Why has he told them?

At this point Tom was challenged to write the next day's chapter as a poem to celebrate National Poetry Day.

Chapter Sixteen

Rory is going to meet Rose at the Olympic Park in London. But it looks like it's a trick by Rose and that she is planning to kill him. For some reason, Rory has sent Woody and Owen off to Exeter, so they are not around to help him. He is in danger and he is on his own. Or is he?

Today's chapter is in verse, to celebrate National Poetry Day today. This was the idea of St John's Primary School in London. Thank you for challenging me to do this.

I'm not a published poet, as you will see. Normal prosaic service will be resumed tomorrow.

As Rory walked to meet his end,
his life, it flashed before his eyes.

A memory.

He'd been here once.

When he was of a smaller size.

His mum and dad had brought him here

to see his hero, Jessica.

He watched her throw and jump and run -

then cheered and hugged his dad and mum.

The day she won.

But this was not the same as that.

This second trip to Olympic Park.

No mum and dad.

No cake. No coke.

Just tightening feelings in his throat.

He knew he might lose his life today –

and yet he could not keep away.

The Arcelomittal Orbit.

No word is that, for a poem fit.

But that is what they named the thing.

So we'd better just get on with it.

Just seconds it took to the top of the tower,
at this most ungodly of an hour,
with no one there but him and her.
This private party
arranged by a murderer.

And just before he met his match
he heard his mobile telephone whine.
And pressed decline.
He had to stop it.
No words from Woody
No Owen's wit.

Just Rose.
Just him.
Just discipline.

*He knew he might lose his life today –
and yet he could not keep away.*

The lift doors open and Rory sights
a silhouette against a view
of London and its billion lights
The shadow is Rose.
His time is through?

But Rory's the one who needs the time.
For, although he does love her a bit,
there is something bigger.
Something else.
His friends. His sport. That he can't quit.

So he speaks.

'It's National Poetry Day,' he says.

'It is,' she doth reply to him.

'I have a poem to read to you.'

She smiles. Half blushes. The lights are dim.

'Okay,' she says.

And he sees her take away her hand

from the place he thinks she keeps her gun.

Then hears the lift stop below.

The doors open and shut.

Then coming back.

He reads. Slowly.

O Rose thou art sick.

The invisible worm,

That flies in the night

In the howling storm:

Has found out thy bed

Of crimson joy:

And his dark secret love

Does thy life destroy.

Her face is puzzled.

'What *do* you mean?'

She tries to smile. But fails, in anger.

'Am I sick?' she shouts.

'What worm?'

'What life destroyed?'

Then she laughs.

Not my life! Yours!

Then pulls her gun and quickly aims.

And Rory droppeth to the floor.

Chapter seventeen

Rory goes to meet Rose alone in the tall tower structure with the funny name on the Olympic Park. He arrives and manages to distract Rose by reading her a poem to mark National Poetry Day. But *The Sick Rose* by William Blake makes Rose angry and she pulls out her gun. Then Rory falls to the floor.

Rose texted Woody and Owen a message, including a link to a live stream she'd set up at the Olympic Park. She wanted them to see the execution she had planned for Rory. She wanted them to suffer too.

The two boys had been waiting for Rory in Exeter, at Sandy Park rugby ground. But he wasn't there or answering his phone. They were about to get a very big shock.

'What is it?' Owen asked, squinting at the screen.

'Dunno,' Woody replied.

The boys then watched the phone in silence as it showed Rose waiting on the far right of the screen, smiling into the camera and pointing at the closed lift doors. Then the doors opened.

Woody and Owen gasped as they saw Rory emerge from the lift at the top of the tower. They turned to each other in horror. What was Rory doing *there* in London? He was supposed to be with them in Exeter. Then they watched Rose and Rory talking. It looked strange, Rose just standing there, passive. It was hard to tell what was going on until Rose suddenly became angry, pulling out a gun.

'No...' Owen muttered, as they watched the horror unfold.

Woody then gasped as they saw Rose appear to fire her gun, with Rory dropping to the floor.

But then there was a sudden flash of yellow light. And another figure standing there where Rory had been.
A girl.

Then it was Rose who dropped to the floor. And Rory was standing again, punching something into his mobile phone.

Utter confusion.

The two boys had no idea what was going on. But were relieved when Owen's mobile rang, showing Rory's name.

Owen put it straight onto speaker phone.

'I suppose you saw that,' Rory said. His voice was breathless, as if he had been running hard.

'Er... yeah, we did,' Woody shouted. 'Can you please... explain? Now!'

'We thought you were dead,' Owen added.

'This is Lily,' Rory said.

The younger girl who was now kneeling over Rose, checking her pulse and binding her hands with a plastic tie, looked up at the camera and waved. Behind her Owen and Woody could see police lights flashing at the foot of the tower.

'Lily works for MI5,' Rory explained. 'She contacted me earlier in the week. Told me about Rose. That Rose used to be an MI5 agent too, but turned bad. So bad she wanted to destroy the UK and she was going to start with rugby and the World Cup. That Mr G is just something she invented. I've known all week that Rose was no good.'

'Have you?' Woody asked. 'I thought you fancied her.'

'Maybe I do,' Rory said in a quieter voice. 'But I still knew she was bad news.'

'Sorry, mate,' Woody said.

'So I agreed to come to meet Rose,' Rory went on. 'To try to avoid being shot, so that Lily could zap her with her laser-stunner. That yellow light thing.'

'Is Rose dead?' Owen asked.

'No,' Lily's voice now. 'She's paralysed for an hour or so. From the neck downwards. The police are coming now. She's finished. You've passed all your challenges. Well done.'

'I reckon that somehow together we showed discipline,' Rory added. 'You trusted me enough to go to Exeter and me and Lily sorted Rose out.'

Suddenly – above the noise of police sirens' approach – a croaky voice called out.

'But you still have one more test to pass,' the voice said.

Rory looked at Rose. 'It's over, Rose,' he said.

'It's not,' Rose cackled.

'How's that?' Woody snapped over the speaker phone.

'Well, I knew you'd want to *enjoy* the last challenge. Enjoy! Do you get it? That's the last test. So, I've left a little surprise for you at your lovely school. Borderlands, isn't it?'

'What surprise?' Owen snapped.

'You'll just have to see,' Rose croaked on. 'But if you don't get back to your lovely little school in the countryside soon, there'll not be much more left of it for you to enjoy.'

Rose's voice broke up as she laughed manically.

Rory looked at Lily.

Lily frowned. 'Rose is capable of anything,' she said. 'I think we'd better get back to your school as soon as possible.'

Questions

Are you disappointed that Mr G does not really exist?

Which kind of story would you like it to be next week?

Which kind of story do you think it will be?

Thanks to all of you for voting go Rose to be a villain. The vote was 60-40 in favour of her being a baddy.

At this point, the direction of the story would depend on the rugby scores over the weekend:

under 300 points	love story
300-349 points	ghost story
350-399 points	bomb-defusing thriller
Over 400+	sports action story

Chapter 18

With the help of Lily, the boys have defeated Rose. Rose is now safely in police custody. But – even though paralysed by Lily’s laser – Rose made a chilling threat to the boys’ school. A surprise, she said, suggesting that there might not be much left of their school on their return. Can the boys get back to Borderlands (with Lily as support) and work out what Rose means before it is too late? And – with more than 400 points scored during this weekend’s games – it means that there will also be sports action for the boys to enjoy this week.

As soon as Woody, Owen and Rory had dropped their bags off in their dormitory at Borderlands, late on Sunday evening, they were searching. Looking for anything different at school. Something that Rose could have done that could threaten the building and everyone in it.

They checked all the dorms and the classroom and when they went into the common room they were given a big welcome by some of the other lads in their year. Sunil and Gareth stood up and were introduced to Lily. But the welcome only lasted for a minute. The rest of the lads were too busy watching the Japan v USA game. It was 17-8 at half time. That had their attention more than the return of three of their friends.

Rory, Woody, Owen and Lily left the lads to it.

‘Do you think we should tell the others about Rose’s threat?’ Owen asked.

‘No,’ Woody said. ‘Let’s check things out first. Then we can tell them if we have to. We need to speak to the head teacher first anyway. If we think it’s serious. She didn’t seem too worried when we told her everything earlier. She said no-one unknown had been in the school in the last week.

The four were agreed. They’d keep it to themselves. For now.

By the time they finished their search of the school – taking in its wooden panelled halls, its eerie tower, the trees on the edge of the school grounds – they came to the sports hall. The last place left to search.

‘Nothing,’ Owen said, when they’d checked it out.

‘Nada,’ Woody agreed. ‘I reckon Rose was having us on. She said there’d be nothing left of the school when we got *back* and it’s still here. I think we should forget about Rose and watch the match with everyone else.’

Owen and Rory nodded.

‘Okay, but what’s that smell?’ Lily said vaguely, scrunching up her nose.

‘What smell?’ Rory asked.

‘Like oil.’

‘Oh, there’s a petrol station that backs onto the sports hall. It always smells a bit fumey when the tankers come to drop off petrol.’

Lily nodded.

Then a voice. A sudden booming voice.

‘Boys. You’re back. Great stuff. I am so glad to see you.’

It was Mr Johnson, the school rugby coach. The boys worshipped him. Not only was he a great coach, who had taken their school team to the World Schools Championships in New Zealand (where they lost in the final), he was also an ex-England international.

‘Hi Sir. What’s up?’

‘Well, you remember Auckland Grammar School who we played in the final of the World Trophy last year?’

‘Yeah.’

‘Well, they’re in England for the World Cup and they want to come to Borderlands for a game.’

‘Have they brought the trophy with them?’ Owen joked.

Mr Johnson nodded. ‘They *have*, Owen. And they want to play us for it. Very sportsmanlike, if you ask me. They say it can be a second World Schools Final. And that if we win, we’re the world champions.’

Woody, Owen and Rory all looked at each other, then said ‘Yesssss,’ as one.

‘So seeing as Rose is history,’ Rory said. ‘And there’s no apparent threat and we’ve got a huge game to look forward to, we can *enjoy* ourselves.’

Owen and Woody looked at their friend. ‘Meaning?’

‘Meaning *enjoyment*. We can show the fifth England rugby value – *enjoyment* – even though there’s no great threat hanging over us, we can still do it. Just to prove that we can do all five.’

They agreed that Rory was right.

But suddenly Lily’s phone rang. She glanced at the screen, frowned, then answered.

‘Hello... yes... yes... yes, I’m secure... What? REALLY? Okay. Thank you, Sir.’

Woody and the others stared at Lily. Something was up. Something was *definitely* up.

‘Well?’ Woody asked.

‘It’s Rose,’ Lily said. ‘She’s told them something. From her prison cell. She’d said... hang on HQ have texted me her exact words.’

‘Go on.’ Woody was being impatient.

‘She said she *hopes there are no bright sparks because bright sparks can cause explosions.*’

‘What does that mean?’ Owen asked.

‘I don’t know,’ Lily said. ‘But I think we have more than your match this week to worry about.’

Chapter 19

Lily and the three boys have arrived at Borderlands, hoping to work out what Rose meant by her threats to their school. They are pretty sure she is bluffing until they receive a chilling message from her prison guards that 'bright sparks can cause explosions'. Woody, Rory and Owen are puzzled. But they are also distracted by the thought of enjoying a game of rugby against the World Schools Champions from New Zealand. There's a lot going on. And, little do the boys know, but there is even more excitement to come. Some of it... not very nice.

They knew immediately they had to search the school for a second time. When they had gone through it the day before they had not been looking for anything in particular. But *today* they had something more specific to home in on.

'Sparks?' Owen asked.

'Fires. Electrics. Machines. Lightening.' Rory said rapidly.

They made a plan. Rory and Owen went round the school with one of the caretakers checking all the electrical points and devices. Lily and Woody did a full fire risk assessment of the building. It took them all morning and all afternoon and by 7 p.m. they were exhausted, sat together on the beanbags in the common room. Together all they had found was one smoke alarm with a dead battery.

But at least that was something!

'Let's pack this in,' Owen suggested. 'We've searched absolutely everywhere and we've found nothing.'

'Agreed,' Rory said.

They slumped back into their beanbags and shared a few second of silence.

Woody was the first to notice a brightness in the sky through the window. He jumped up, panicked.

'What's that? What's going on?'

'It's the floodlights coming on,' Owen said, calmly. 'Relax Woodster.'

‘Relax?’ It was Rory who was on his feet now. ‘We can’t relax. It training. Now. It’s two days until we play Auckland Grammar. Remember? The World Schools Trophy? Move it. Everyone.’

Rory and Woody trained with the backs. Owen with the forwards. It was hard to build up to the intensity the other boys were at. They had all been training for this match for days. But – after half an hour – they all felt good. Physically and mentally on top of the game. Owen was at his happiest in the scrum. Especially that – now he was school team captain – he was able to boss it.

At one point, Mr Johnson – a former lock himself – caught Owen smiling.

‘Why are you smiling, Owen?’ the coach joked. ‘You shouldn’t be smiling. You should be hurting. You should be so exhausted you can’t move a single facial muscle.’

‘I can’t help it, sir,’ Owen replied. ‘I’m enjoying myself.’

Training nearby, Rory laughed. He felt the same. And – as training was coming to an end – he had a question for Mr Johnson.

‘Sir,’ he asked. ‘Can I have a favour?’

‘You want the floodlights left on for an hour,’ Mr Johnson anticipated. ‘So you can practice kicking?’

‘Er... yes, sir.’

Mr Johnson nodded. ‘No problem. You know, you remind me of someone I used to play with, actually.’

‘Who, sir?’

‘Never mind.’

Whilst all the other players had their showers and were eating, Rory was still outside. He wanted to kick six penalties, all from different places on the pitch. And if he didn’t kick all six he had to start again.

He'd done okay. But the first time he got to five kicks he was distracted by a lorry rumbling past the school grounds, slowing down. He'd seen the side of the lorry. It was a huge truck full of fireworks. Rory smiled. He liked fireworks. It was only three weeks until Bonfire Night. One of his favourite nights of the year.

Rory focussed again and slotted over all five kicks for a second time.

He knew that he wasn't alone while kicking. Lily was sat studying him. But she'd said nothing for the entire period. Respecting the kicker, Rory thought. That girl knew her stuff.

As Rory was lining up kick six he glanced at Lily. It was weird. He trusted *her*. Unlike Rose. Although he'd liked Rose, he was never 100% sure of her. But he had no such worries about Lily. He ran through some of the things she'd said to them since they met. Everything she said was straightforward. No messing. No power games. No ambiguity.

And then it struck him. Lily. Sniffing the air. Petrol. Sparks. Fireworks. What Rose had said.

Rory immediately sprinted towards Lily. And towards the school buildings.

'Lily,' he shouted as he ran. 'We've not searched everywhere. The petrol station. We've not checked the petrol station. If there were sparks there... Clear the school. Get everyone onto the rugby pitches away from the buildings. Move.'

As Rory ran, now towards the petrol station, he saw Lily race off too.

He knew that the lorry full of fireworks had been slowing down. And why else would it slow down other than do stop at the petrol station?

And that gave him a bad feeling. A *very* bad feeling. But he had no choice other than to run towards the petrol station. Because, if this was the attack that Rose had threatened, people needed to be warned. Now.

Questions

Do you have smoke alarms in your school or house? Have the batteries been checked lately? Ask an adult today!

Do you know which legendary England rugby union player Rory is based on?

Do you have any routines or lucky things you have to do to help you do well at sport?

Chapter 20

As Rory is training for Borderlands' crucial World Schools Rugby final, he works out Rose's threat to devastate the school may still be live. A lorry packed with highly explosive fireworks has just drawn up in the petrol station that backs onto the school. Lily has seen to it that school will be evacuated. Rory is running towards the danger zone, with no idea, yet, of what is about to happen and what he can do to stop it.

When Rory arrived at the petrol station – leaping over the school wall and past a row of houses – the firework truck was still there, blocking all access to the petrol pumps. He knew he had to act quickly.

Rory checked the driver's cab, but there was no-one in there. Nor any keys in the ignition.

Next, he looked into the petrol station shop. He could only see one man in there. And *he* was behind the till. Rory jumped down from the driver's cab and ran into the shop. As he ran he was sure he could smell something burning. But he ignored the smells. For the moment.

'Where's the driver?' Rory gasped, pushing the door hard against a rack of crisps.

'Dunno,' the man behind the till said. 'I was wondering that.'

Rory turned when he heard footsteps approaching behind him. He stared out at the petrol station forecourt and saw Woody. And Owen. And then he saw the whole Borderlands' team standing there, poised to take action to save their school.

Rory also noticed sparks coming from gaps in the side of the truck, settling like snow on the floor of the petrol station.

And he knew. Knew that the place could go up in flames. At any moment. And that he had to act quickly.

What should he do?

Get everyone to run?

But, if they ran, the petrol station and the school would blow up. No question. He could just imagine Rose finding out she'd managed to destroy their school. He didn't want that. He wanted her to know that she had *failed*. And he knew that, even if they all ran away from the explosion, people in the nearby houses would be killed.

There was till time.

So Rory ran again, leaping into the cab of the truck, shouting orders to Owen.

'Get the pack to the back of the lorry and push it down the hill. I'll steer. Into the river.'

'But...' Owen said.

'Just do it,' Rory shouted, disappearing into the cab, where he slipped the handbrake off and pulled hard on the steering wheel.

He knew the boys had already started pushing because he could see them – twenty or more of them – like a giant pack pushing at the back of the truck, showered in sparks.

But the truck was not moving.

'Push,' Owen screamed. 'Push. We've got to move this thing. Push...'

And then Rory felt it move. Slowly at first. Then faster. Faster... faster... faster...

With the momentum, Rory steered the truck hard to the left as it moved off the petrol station forecourt and onto the main road.

As he steered he heard the noise of thousands of rockets and catherine wheels going off inside the truck. He could smell the burning, see bright lights reflecting off the buildings behind him. The truck was about to go up with a massive bang.

He had to get to the river.

But he was on a hill now. The truck picking up speed. He could do this. He just had to get the truck to the water. The river was deep. Just a little further and he'd stop the explosion. He didn't think for a minute about what was about to happen to him.

Questions

When you play sport what is more important: winning, or enjoying yourself?

Chapter 21

Rory, Woody, Owen and Lily were joined by the whole Borderlands rugby team to push a truck of exploding fireworks away from the petrol station and save their school and houses nearby from certain destruction. But, as the truck accelerated towards the river, nobody had realised that Rory is still inside.

Owen and Woody smiled when they saw the fireworks truck tip into the river, the firework chaos of light and sound smothered by the water. The rest of the team were ecstatic. Cheering. Shouting. Punching the air.

Together they had saved the school.

But Owen had a question. 'Where's Rory?' he asked.

'Dunno,' Woody replied.

'And Lily? Where's she?'

Woody shrugged, but his face was panicked.

Just as they were about to sprint down to the river, they saw two figures silhouetted against the light cast by the few rockets that were still going off in the sinking truck. As they came closer it was clear that it was Rory and Lily.

And that – mercifully – they were safe.

It was after 4 a.m. when the fire brigade and the police left Borderlands. Most of the boys had gone to bed by then. But Owen had asked the rugby team to stay behind in the school hall.

The team happy to stay, asking Rory to explain – for a fourth time – how he'd been trapped in the cabin, as the truck tipped onto its side. And how Lily had arrived just at the right moment, taking a small hammer from her bag and smashing the side window glass so that Rory could climb to safety.

'She saved my life,' Rory said, smiling at Lily.

'That's my job,' Lily said. 'And – on that subject – you need to get yourself to bed. You look grey you're so tired.'

Owen agreed and climbed onto the stage of the school hall. He had never felt so tired in all his life. He could see from his teammates that they felt the same. He couldn't imagine how Rory felt after what he had been through.

'Lads,' Owen said and saw twenty faces looking towards him. 'We did a good thing tonight. We saved the school. But in eleven hours we have another good thing to do. We're playing Auckland Grammar for the honour of being World Schools Champions. We'll be tired physically. We'll be tired mentally. But we'll still play. Just imagine if we win! But, saying that, I want you to remember one thing about tomorrow.'

'What's that?' Sunil called up.

'So long as we play our best, I'm not bothered if we win or lose.' Owen looked at Rory and Woody and smiled. 'Enjoyment,' he said. 'I just want us to enjoy ourselves.'

The match was tight. The first half saw no tries. Three penalties each, it was nine all.

But the second half opened up. Auckland scored a try, missing the conversion. Then Borderlands scored a try, scoring the kick. Then a penalty to Auckland. A second try for Borderlands. Not converted. And another two penalties for Auckland.

All the players could hear the crowd now. Hundreds of children and locals cheering them on. With seconds to go the score was Borderlands 21 Auckland Grammar 23.

But Borderlands had the ball. And they were moving forward, with Owen forcing scrums and mauls closer to the Auckland twenty-two. And Woody making as many yards as he could at centre.

Rory, at fly-half, had drifted out of the game in the last quarter. He was exhausted.

But then – with second to go – he felt a burst of adrenaline. The ball had come out of the back of the scrum and moved wide to the left of the pitch through several hands. Woody piled into another Kiwi tackle, offloaded the ball to Owen who threw a long accurate pass right to Rory, who was still a few yards behind play.

But that gave him time. Time to attempt a drop goal.

Rory took two steps, holding the ball in front of him, then dropped it. The ball bounced and Rory gave his last ounce of energy to give it everything he could.

Now all they could do was watch as the ball left his boot and looped high to the far end of the pitch.

If it went through the posts, Borderlands would have won. If it missed they had lost.

It seemed as if the world held its breath.

Questions

The next – and last – chapter of *The Twickenham Trials* will be published here before 6 a.m. on the morning of Friday 16th October. Thank you for reading *The Twickenham Trials*.

Chapter 22

With all threats from Rose finally neutralised, the boys are representing their school against Auckland Grammar from New Zealand. The prize is the World Schools Rugby Trophy. With seconds to go the score is 23-21 to Auckland. But Rory has just attempted a drop goal. If it goes over Borderlands are World Schools Rugby Champions...

From where he was standing, Owen was sure the ball was heading straight through the goal and was going to win the game for Borderlands.

But that's not what happened.

Instead, it hit the post high up and tumbled back towards the pitch. Woody stared in horror, shoulder to shoulder with Owen.

Then they were running. All of them. The players from both teams. Because, whoever got to the ball first would win now. The Auckland players by just booting the ball into touch. The Borderlands players by scoring a try.

As all thirty players ran towards the goal, they watched the ball drop from the post and hit the bar, falling miraculously on the far side of the posts. It was over!

The touch judge's flag went up to confirm it.

The final score was 24-23 to Borderlands. The last points of the game.

They'd done it. Borderlands were World Champions.

Although they celebrated when the game was over, carrying Rory on their shoulders, Owen made sure his team shook the hand of every Auckland Grammar School player.

After that, the trophy came out and was presented to Owen. He grinned and – as he lifted the cup – he wished that Sam Warburton would be doing the same in three weeks' time for Wales.

Rory was awarded the man of the match award.

Walking off the pitch, Woody talked with one of the Kiwi centres. They'd come up against each other several times during the game. Woody wanted to say something nice. To be friendly.

'Good luck to New Zealand for the rest of the World Cup,' he said. 'I hope you win it.'

'Thanks mate,' the centre said. 'I wish I could say the same to you. I'm sorry about England.'

'I know,' Woody replied. 'Me too. I'm gutted we're out. But it's not going to stop me enjoying the rest of the tournament. I'm kind of over it now. The thing for me is the rugby. The quarter finals this weekend are going to be amazing.'

Then Woody felt Owen's arm around his shoulder from one side and Rory's from the other.

'So, you're definitely going to *enjoy* yourself, then Woodster?' Owen grinned.

Woody nodded.

'That's good,' he said. 'I suppose that means we've lived up to the fifth value.'

'I suppose we have,' Woody laughed.

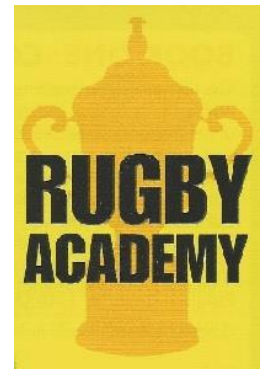
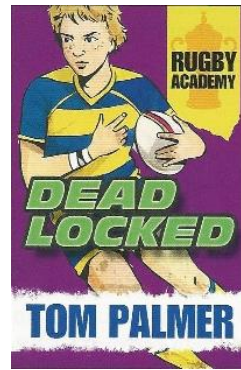
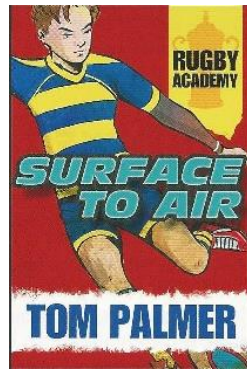
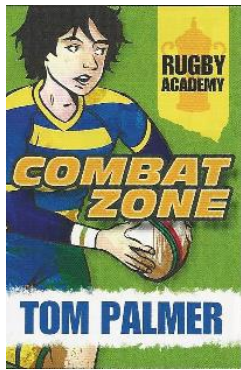
THE END

Thanks to all the children who have contributed ideas and votes to help the story along. Thanks to Chase Bridge School, which is right next to Twickenham. Their reading group have helped me develop ideas. Thanks too to the RFU for commissioning the story in the first place. And to Iolo for his idea about the ball hitting the post in this chapter.

Please say thanks to the teacher – or parent – who has read it to you.

My greatest thanks are to my wife. Every night – after I wrote my chapter – my wife edited it. She is a legend, who is the unsung hero behind my writing career. And I thank her! (She will try to edit this paragraph out, but I'll only put it back in when she's gone to bed.)

If you want to know more about Owen, Woody and Rory please check out my *Rugby Academy* series here: <http://tompalmer.co.uk/rugby/rugby-academy/>



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Signed

Tom Palmer

Date

16 October 2015



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A message from Tom Palmer, the author of The Twickenham Trials ...

Thank you for following the story.
I hope you enjoyed listening to it
being read to you as much as
I am enjoying writing it!

Thank you for voting!



