

# ROCKY OF THE ROVERS®



# FRANCE 2019

Join Rocky, Roy and Ffion as they follow the Lionesses on an incredible adventure at the Women's World Cup!

# ROCKY OF THE ROVERS FRANCE 2019

## Première partie

SUDDENLY THERE WAS light. Eye-burningly bright and beautiful light. Rocky Race put her hands to her eyes and peered through her fingers at the countryside and sky outside the train window.

This was it.

They were here.

In France.

Rocky looked across the table of the Eurotunnel *Shuttle* at her football coach, Ffion. Then at her brother, Roy.

‘We’re here,’ Rocky gushed.

‘We are,’ Ffion grinned. ‘In an hour we’ll be in Paris. Then, by dinner time, we’ll be in Nice, where England play their first World Cup game against Scotland.’

‘That’ll be nice,’ Roy said.

Rocky stared at her brother and shook her head. ‘Really, Roy? Is that the best you can do? You’re a professional footballer and that’s your top banter?’

Roy shrugged and glanced at Ffion, who shook her head too.

There was a brief uncomfortable silence.

Ffion filled it. ‘Have you two ever been away before?’ she asked. ‘I mean: without your parents?’

‘Never,’ Rocky said.



‘Nor me,’ Ffion echoed.

Rocky felt an irresistible burst of excitement as she saw the green fields of France flashing before her eyes. Three weeks away from home. No parents. And she was just fourteen. How many other fourteen-year-olds could boast that?

‘This is going to be soooo good,’ she said. ‘Train journeys all over France. Fanzones. Watching England winning the World Cup. No parents! It’s like one of those children’s books where the adults have been removed so the kids can have more fun. This is a *proper* adventure.’

‘I’m an adult,’ Roy said.

‘Yeah, right,’ Rocky sneered. ‘You, an adult?’

‘I’m seventeen.’

‘Still a child, technically,’ Rocky argued. ‘Ffion’s eighteen, so she’s the adult. *And* in charge.’

‘Suits me,’ Roy said.

Ffion sighed. ‘I’m not in charge,’ she said. ‘No way. We all are. We made a deal with our mums and dads and – so long as we stick to it – we’ll be fine.’

The deal was simple. Their parents had given them a list of places they had to send selfies from every day. They had a fixed itinerary. If they didn’t post those selfies on Instagram when they were meant to, then they’d have to come home. Immediately.

Rocky remembered how her mum had been before she left. Worried. Excited. Emotional. She knew her mum was anxious for her, but also excited for

her. She'd told her she'd be careful. She'd told her she would do whatever Ffion or Roy asked of her. She'd promised.

'Are we clear?' Ffion asked.

'Clear,' Rocky and Roy said in stereo.

'First stop, the Eiffel Tower, then,' Roy said.

TWO HOURS LATER, after walking from the Gare de Nord, past the charred ruins of Notre Dame Cathedral that had been so tragically burned down earlier that year, Rocky, Ffion and Roy were standing on the banks of the River Seine, Rocky taking a selfie, making sure the Eiffel Tower was in full view behind them.

The first comment on their post was from Ffion's brother, Vic.

**Lucky start. You won't last 24 hours.**

Rocky noted Roy's frown.

Vic Guthrie. Roy had mixed feelings for him.

On the pitch – as a teammate at Melchester Rovers – she knew her brother would die for Vic, his team captain. Off the pitch he was the biggest

pain imaginable. And Rocky knew for a fact that Vic was desperate for them to fail, to come home, tails between their legs, then he could wind Roy up about it for... well, forever.

Rocky grabbed Roy's phone and replied to the club captain.

**Got to go, Vic. We should hit the beach in about five hours.**

**Sweltering here. Is it still raining back home?**

After visiting the fanzone for the opening game of the tournament – France v Korea – the trio headed to the Gare de Lyon to catch a train across France to Nice.

As Ffion and Roy slept opposite her, the blue wallet with their passports in on the table between them, Rocky read. She was too excited to sleep. She was leafing through her copy of the Women's World Cup Official Book, checking out the teams England had to play in the group stages:

**9 June: Scotland**

**14 June: Argentina**

**19 June: Japan**

If England qualified, the quarter finals would be at the end of the month. The semis and final in early July. And all the matches were on the TV. But that wasn't important to Rocky. She wasn't going to watch her heroes on TV: she was going to watch them in the stadiums.

Rocky must have stopped reading two – maybe three – hours into the journey from Paris to Nice. She might even have fallen asleep. Or at least dozed.

When she woke there was a woman standing over them, holding up a silver smart phone. She could have been pointing it at Roy and Ffion. Or just taking a photo out of the window. It was impossible to tell. Rocky just had a feeling about it. But then she realised she was being paranoid and forgot about the woman, who had already left the train carriage.



The train had passed through Marseille now and they were travelling along the south coast of France. The views were spectacular: the sea a soft deep coloured blue, the light sharp and sparkling off the water, wispy clouds on the horizon like a distant mountain range. Rocky felt so happy, so excited. It was like she was living in a dream.

This was going to be the best adventure ever.

ONCE IN NICE, they found their hotel on the seafront. After checking – one room for the girls, another for Roy – they went for a walk along the *Promenade des Anglais*. They sat with their backs to the city, gazing out at the sea.

Ffion propped their rucksack up against a palm tree, the passport wallet balanced on the top. She touched the tree's rough surface. 'These trees are weird,' she said.

They sat in silence and watched the sea and the sun setting in the west.

'Come on,' Rocky said, checking her watch. 'The France-Korea match kicks off in half an hour. We need to get some food and go back to the hotel.'

Ffion and Roy stood up. Ffion grabbed the rucksack. Something blue slipped down between the palm tree trunk and the boardwalk as she lifted the bag onto her back. But none of them noticed.

'Shall we watch it in a café, instead?' Roy suggested. 'It might be fun to see it with loads of French fans?'

'Yeah,' Ffion agreed.

'Okay,' Rocky added.

They found a café on the seafront that was showing France versus Korea, live from Paris.

This was it.



Game one.

The World Cup.

Rocky Race's smile was so broad her face was hurting. For a half-second she thought she saw the woman with the silver phone case from the train. But she dismissed it as a coincidence. Why would some random woman be following them? They were just three British children on a trip enjoying the World Cup. Rocky realised she was being too careful, taking her mum's worries too seriously.

There was football to be watched. France now. Then England – live and in person – on Sunday night. She wanted to see them start with a victory. She wanted to see her country win the whole tournament. Imagine if England were world champions at football. How amazing would that be?

This was a dream come true for Rocky. There was no need to think it was going to turn into a nightmare...

*Rocky, Ffion and Roy are all set for the adventure of their lives. In two days' time they'll be watching England play Scotland in both teams' opening games. But will they realise what they have lost? And who is the woman stalking them on the streets of Nice, if she is...?*

You can watch tonight's France v Korea game at 8 p.m. on BBC TV. Check the BBC listing to see which channel it is on. England and Scotland kick off at 5 p.m. on Sunday evening. You can read how our three heroes get on at the match in the next episode of **Rocky of the Rovers: France 2019**, which will be published before 8 a.m. on Monday 10<sup>th</sup> June at <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/womensworldcup>.

Thank you for reading.

# ROCKY <sup>OF THE</sup> ROVERS®

## *Rocky of the Rovers: France 2019*

### Deuxième partie

Rocky tried not to think about the crowd of 400+ England and Scotland fans watching her on the football challenge stage at the World Cup Fanzone in Nice.

The record to beat was 228.

If she did it, she'd win an England top and a year's subscription to the football magazine, *She Kicks*. She was desperate to win those prizes.

But, there was more. If she won, she'd beat her brother, who'd just set the record. He'd done 227. Her professional footballing brother needed putting in his place. Who better to do than his little sister?

But could Rocky do 228 keepie-uppies? She gazed out at the South of France blue sky, the palm trees and a giant dartboard on the other side of the crowd.

Then she began.

Rocky kept it close and controlled, tapping the ball with her left foot, keeping her balance right. She quickly reached fifty and smiled, glancing at Roy.

Fatal error.

Rocky's balance wobbled. She had to loft the ball high and scramble to keep the ball in the air to keep it going. She managed it. Just. And the crowd applauded and cheered Rocky to carry on.

100. 150. 200.

It was going well. Really well. But now for the hard bit. Closer to winning the fanzone prize. Closer to beating Roy. That's when Rocky started to lose her focus.

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*Just keep it together, she said to herself. Come on.*

210. 220. 225.

Three more. That's all she needed.

228. She'd done it!

Rocky punched the air and the ball span away from her, hitting a palm tree. She eyed Roy as the crowd went wild. She liked this. Beating her brother. Crowds cheering her football skills. That's what she craved.

One day she'd play for England. She promised herself that. The next World Cup Finals were in Japan. And Rocky Race intended to be there.

'Nice one, Sis,' Roy said, ruffling her hair. Rocky could see he was vexed, but maybe... just maybe a tiny bit proud of her.

After winning the England top and the magazine subscription at the World Cup Fanzone, Rocky, Ffion and Roy raced into the Allianz Riviera Stadium, a spectacular bowl of red and white.

Their seats were very close to the players' tunnel. Rocky felt a thrill passing through her.

Here she was.

Watching England play Scotland in the World Cup finals.

What could be better than this?

The game began at full pace, England looking strong, passing the ball about, playing like they had in the *She Believes Cup* earlier in the year.

England were carving out chances.

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After 13 minutes, they pushed forward and Fran Kirby put a cross into the penalty area, the ball glancing off a Scotland defender as it came over. Rocky was on her feet without hesitating.

‘Handball!!!!!’ she screamed.

Roy shook his head. ‘Never,’ he said. ‘It was ball to hand. No penalty.’

The game went on. But only for a few seconds. Now the referee was consulting, talking to her lineswoman. And Rocky glanced at Roy when she gave a VAR penalty.

‘See,’ she said.

Roy shook his head. But he was leaping around the rest of the England fans when Nikita Parris hammered it home.

1-0 to England.

‘Good spot, Rocky,’ Roy conceded.

After 40 minutes Ellen White was through, placing a crisp shot to the bottom left hand corner of the goal.

Ffion grabbed Rocky and they danced in the aisle.

At half time England led 2-0. But, like the players, Rocky became tenser and tenser in the second half. And, when Scotland scrambled a goal after 79 minutes and it was 2-1, she felt sick.

‘Noooo,’ she called out as the Scotland fans celebrated their first goal in World Cup Finals ever.

The last 10 minutes seemed to last another hour. But then... mercifully... the final whistle and Rocky leapt into the air. It had been tight. It had been nervy. But England had won their opening game in the World Cup. Rocky Race’s dream of seeing them play in the final was still alive.

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As the players were coming off and Rocky, Roy and Ffion went down to the pitch side to applaud the team off, Ffion received a text. From her brother Vic.

**No selfie yet... Does that mean you've failed?**

'Nooooo,' Ffion gasped. 'We forgot the selfie. We need to show we're capable of doing this trip without messing up.'

They had agreed – before coming out to France – to send a selfie home each day to show they were where they were supposed to be. And safe.

Rocky quickly took Ffion's phone and stood in front of her and Roy.

'Smile,' she said.

They smiled. Then applauded some more as the England team jogged down the tunnel behind them.

After Ffion had sent the picture to Vic, Rocky checked the photo.

'Look!' she gasped.

The trio gathered round Ffion's phone. Behind them on the photo they saw three figures. The first was the England star, Beth Mead, photobombing with her thumbs up. The second was England striker, Ellen White, her hands up to her eyes, looking through her circled fingers like they were sunglasses. Her trademark celebration.

But Rocky's face fell away when she saw who the third person was. It was a woman. With a phone. In a silver phone case. Taking a picture. Of *them*. The woman had long brown hair and sunglasses. But the sunglasses didn't conceal who she was.

'Do you know who that is?' Rocky asked Ffion.

Ffion shook her head. 'No. Why?'

'I keep seeing her.'

'Maybe she's with the team?' Roy butted in.

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‘I don’t think so,’ Rocky disagreed. ‘I noticed her on the train. Yesterday. Let’s... let’s just keep an eye out for her, yeah?’

The others agreed.

The three travellers collected their bags from Nice railway station, ready to get the 9 p.m. night train to Paris, then on to Le Havre for England’s game with Argentina on Friday. Rocky loved the idea of a fast train crossing France in the darkness and arriving in Paris for breakfast. She stared out of the window as night fell, at stations in cities called Cannes, Toulon and Marseille.

When it was dark, Rocky looked back into their carriage to see Ffion, all of the contents of her bag out on the table and chairs. Roy looking through his bag too.

‘What’s up?’ she asked sleepily.

Ffion’s face was pale. ‘The passports,’ she said. ‘I... I can’t find them.’

‘For getting home?’ Rocky was trying to work out when they next needed them.

‘Not just that,’ Ffion said. ‘We need them to stay in any hotel. If you’re from abroad you have to show your passport to be allowed to stay. Or they kick you out onto the street. Even out of the country.’

**We leave Rocky, Roy and Ffion’s train thundering though the French night. All the elation of England winning and being top of their World Cup group has gone. Without their passports, they’ll have nowhere to stay when they get to Le Havre. And little do they know, but the woman who Rocky keeps seeing is in the next carriage, tapping into her laptop computer, then sending her words and a photograph of the trio by email back to England.**

**You can read episode three on Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> June, as the children prepare for England’s next game and work out a plan to stop their World Cup dream becoming a nightmare.**

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## *Rocky of the Rovers: France 2019*

### Troisième partie

None of them slept well on the train north to the Gare de Lyon station in Paris. In the dark of their small sleeper couchette – four bunks, two on each side of a small wood-panelled room – Rocky lay waiting for passing stations that flooded the small cabin with light.

*What are we going to do now?* She asked herself. *We can't just give up and say we've lost our passports and go home. But what choice do we have if we can't find them?*

Rocky had no answer to her question. Only the rattling of the train on the tracks interrupted the terrible thought that maybe they wouldn't get to see any more England games in the World Cup.

'No', she said quietly. 'Never.'

Rocky would not be defeated. She sat up.



'We need a plan,' Rocky told Ffion and Roy as they sat in the mild morning sun outside the Gare de Lyon, a huge white clock and a row of ornate arches as a backdrop.

The other two nodded, but did not speak.

'We have two problems,' Rocky went on. 'Tonight we have nowhere to sleep. And, on top of that, we have no passports.'

'Go on,' Ffion said.

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‘This is what we do.’ Rocky leaned forward. ‘We can’t sleep in a hotel because we don’t have passports. But we *can* sleep on trains. We have an open ticket to travel anywhere on trains in France for a month. So we sleep on sleeper trains until we solve our other problem.’

‘Where to?’ Roy asked.

‘What?’

‘Where do we get the train to?’

‘To Nice, of course. We can’t just sit here in Paris feeling sorry for ourselves. We have to get back to Nice and solve our other problem and *find* the passports. Go to every place we went to.’

‘It’ll be hard,’ Ffion said. ‘Impossible.’

‘The alternative is going home’, Rocky said, shaking her head.

Rocky watched Roy and Ffion gaze at each other, and then both turn to her.

‘Deal.’ Ffion said.

‘Yeah,’ Roy added. ‘Great idea.’

‘In the meantime,’ Rocky finished, ‘we might as well go and watch Japan and Argentina. See if England have got anything to fear.’



After watching Argentina pull off a heroic 0-0 draw with Japan in the Parc de Princes, the trio found themselves back at the Gare de Lyon. Another evening. Another long overnight train journey.

‘I like it,’ Roy enthused. ‘Sleeping on trains. Waking up hundreds of miles from where you were when you went to sleep in another country. It’s alright.’

The two girls agreed.

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As the train pulled out of Paris, Ffion fired up her laptop.

‘Need to catch up with World Cup stuff,’ she said. ‘Wi-Fi... is... working. Yes!’

Rocky and Roy stared out at blocks of flats and warehouses as the south of Paris rushed before their eyes, the sun setting in the west.

After 15 minutes of silence in their couchette, Ffion gasped.

‘What?’ Rocky asked.

Ffion stuttered, but couldn’t speak. She just turned her laptop round and showed Rocky and Roy what had shocked her so much.

Rocky put her hand to her mouth. Roy choked on his bottle of water.

Because there was a picture. Of the three of them. On a British newspaper’s website. Taken after the Scotland game the night before, when they were photobombed by Beth Mead.

But it was the headline that had made Roy choke.

## **ROY RACE HAVING FUN IN THE SUN**

### **AS PREMIER LEAGUE GIANTS SWIPE HIM FROM MELCHESTER**

‘You’re leaving Melchester?’ Rocky gasped. ‘Like... the team me and Ffion worship and you’re leaving without telling us?’

‘Roy?’ Ffion added, sounding wounded, betrayed, defeated.

Roy said nothing. His face was pink. But still he did not speak.

‘Roy?’ Ffion pressed him.

‘It’s a lie,’ Roy said at last.

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‘So how... I don’t get it... but how...? Ffion asked.

‘I’m going nowhere,’ Roy insisted, then peered closer at the screen. At a small image of the journalist who had written the story. He carefully put both fingers on the screen enlarging it.

Now Rocky was coughing too. The image was of the woman. The woman with the silver phone case. The one Rocky had been so suspicious of.

‘Her name’s Fran Clampard,’ Ffion said, studying her by-line.

‘I hate her!’ Rocky snapped, her voice shaking with emotion. ‘No one lies about my brother. No one. Except me. I am the ONLY one who gets to take the mick out of Roy.’

Rocky stopped herself, overwhelmed by her emotions.

‘Well?’ she snapped at Roy.

‘Well, what?’

‘Well what are you going to do about it?’

‘Don’t blame me,’ Roy defended himself.

‘I don’t, but I will if you don’t sort it.’

‘I’m more worried about the passports,’ Roy countered. ‘Let’s make a list of places we went to in Nice... Focus on that. I’ll call Melchester once we’ve sorted that.’

The trio agreed they’d deal with the passport problem first. Then this news from home. Rocky resolved – to herself – that she would look out for this Fran Clampard. She couldn’t wait to give her a piece of her mind.

‘Let’s get some sleep,’ Ffion said, leaning back against her bunk.



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Rocky opened the blind of the couchette to look at the view now the sun was rising over France. It was six in the morning. Outside she saw a large body of water – a river or a shallow lake – and above the water a strange pinkish shimmering cloud.

Except it wasn't a cloud.

'FLAMINGOS!' Rocky shouted, making Roy and Ffion jump in their beds. 'LOOK!!!!'

The three of them stood and stared out of the window, all of them grinning. In the water were dozens and dozens of pink flamingos, standing one-legged in the shimmering early morning water.

'It's a sign,' Rocky said. 'It means were going to find the passport and I'm going to find Fran Clampard and tell her exactly what I think of her lies. But first we'll find the passports. They're bound to be in one of the places on our list. Remember what we decided. The station. The hotel. The stadium. The fanzone. And that café where we ate all our meals. They're the only places we went to.'

Rocky didn't notice Ffion and Roy share a look, both of them frowning, clearly not sure they'd find their passports at all. They knew – deep down – that if they didn't find them then the trip would be over and none of them would get to the Argentina game on Friday.

**Chapter Four will be ready to read at 7 a.m. on the morning of Friday 14<sup>th</sup> June, the date of England's next match against Argentina. But will Rocky and the other two still be in France? If they don't find their passports they really have to tell their parents, and that means they'll be coming home.**

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**NOTE FOR TEACHERS:** This episode contains a scene which some children might find upsetting. Please read through the chapter and make sure that you are happy to read aloud before you do so.

## Rocky of the Rovers: France 2019 *quatrième partie*

‘So that’s it?’ Ffion sighed. ‘We’re agreed?’

Rocky, Roy and Ffion had searched and asked everywhere that they could think of in Nice: the hotel, the station, the football stadium. Finally, they searched the café on the Promenade des Anglais, the place they had eaten all their meals and where they were now standing, crestfallen.

Their passports were nowhere to be found. Lost.

‘We’ve checked everywhere,’ Roy said, glancing at his sister.

Rocky said nothing, so Ffion slipped her phone out of her pocket.

‘I’m calling home,’ she said gloomily. ‘I know what my mum will say. She’ll say if we can lose our passports we can’t be trusted. That we have to come home. We have to be ready to just go back to England. It’s ringing...’

It was over.

Rocky felt hot tears welling behind her eyes. She looked down the Promenade des Anglais, scanning the dozens of people walking up and down the seafront, her eyes finally focusing on a familiar figure.

Her.

She was here.

Clampard, the journalist.

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‘Ffion stop,’ Rocky shouted.

‘What?’ Ffion tapped her phone, killing the call.

‘It’s her,’ Rocky was now overwhelmed by a tsunami of rage.

Then she was off, her bag still over her shoulder, marching towards Fran Clampard. All the rage and frustration she had been bottling up about how their adventure was stupidly over came pouring out of her.

The journalist waved when she noticed Rocky coming at her.

Now Rocky was even more outraged.

‘I need... I need your help...’ Fran Clampard said.

‘YOU?’ Rocky raged. YOU NEED *OUR* HELP? HOW DARE YOU EVEN COME NEAR MY BROTHER AFTER THE LIES YOU WROTE ABOUT HIM? HE’S NOT LEAVING MEL PARK, YOU...’

‘Just put your bag down...’ Fran Clampard raised her hands in the air.

Rocky did what she was told. Only to free up her hands. ‘I will,’ she shouted. ‘Because I hate you! Leave us alone!’

A crowd had stopped to watch Rocky’s rant. With her hands free, Rocky lunged at the journalist. Then – at the last minute – felt two arms round her waist, pulling her back, just before she could do something crazy.

Rocky turned to see Ffion restraining her by the arm.

‘Don’t...’ Ffion cautioned.

Then Roy took her by the arm, easing Rocky further away. She had given up the fight now, anyway. Fran Clampard had walked away, frightened, dejected. She seemed to have given up too – whatever it was she had wanted.



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They sat on the edge of the promenade as Rocky calmed down, her mind flitting with thoughts of what she might have done to the journalist if Ffion had not restrained her.

*Just put your bag down...* she heard Clampard say. Over and over. Like an echo. Then, like a bolt of lightning, something came to her.

She stood up.

'Ffion?'

'Rocky?'

'Put our bag down...'

'What?'

'Do you remember – on Friday – the day we arrived – how we put our bags down... and... and then we looked at the palm trees and the sea?'

'Yeah?' Ffion said. 'So what?'

And then, before Rocky had the chance to explain, Ffion's eyes lit up.

Now they were running. All of them. Up the Promenade des Anglais.

'Why are we running?' Roy called out from the back as they reached the place they'd sat that first afternoon.

The promenade.

The wooden decking.

The palm tree.

Ffion fell to her knees and slipped her hand down the gap between the tree and the boardwalk, next to where she had propped her bag. Rocky studied Ffion's face. A frown first. Then shock. Then a smile becoming a grin becoming laughter as Ffion withdrew a blue folder from the gap.

'The passports,' Ffion beamed. 'Rocky... you're a genius.'

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Friday morning. The sun was shining in Le Havre, Northern France.

The World Cup was well under way now. The USA had beaten Thailand 13-0. Germany had won both their games. France too.

And Rocky felt good. More than good. They had their passports. She'd seen the journalist off. Her brother had promised her one hundred times that he was not leaving Melchester Rovers. Added to that, they were about to watch England play – a game that, if England won, they'd be through to the knock-out stages of the World Cup finals.

Things were good.

But now for the Fanzone football dartboard challenge. Once again Rocky was playing against Roy. In Nice it had been keepie-uppies. In Le Havre it was the giant dartboard. It was like a penalty shoot-out, but with a dartboard that the ball stuck to when you hit it.

One shot each. That was it. To see who was best.

Rocky took the ball in both her hands to feel its weight. She bounced it once, placed it down, then stepped up and... hit it.

An outer bullseye. Next to perfect.

'Next to perfect,' the host said into her microphone, starting a round of applause for Rocky.

Rocky was pleased, about to beat her brother at a football skill once again. And he was supposed to be the League One star.

'Beat that, Roy,' she grinned at her brother, giving him a little push on his chest.

Roy stared back at her. 'I will,' he said.

Rocky watched as her brother did as she had done: felt the ball, bounced it, then put it down.

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Now Roy winked at Rocky. She felt a surge of anger. He did her head in sometimes. But it made her more eager to beat him.

Roy stepped up and hit the ball.

A huge cheer went up.

‘First bullseye of the day,’ the host on the microphone called out. ‘Well done.’

Rocky went up to her brother and ruffled his hair. ‘Nice one, Bruv,’ she said as condescendingly as she could.

She was upset she had lost to him, but the fact that they were here to watch England v Argentina and were staying at the World Cup made it easier to bear.



Rocky would never forget the feeling of horror that she would feel as they entered the Stade Oceane in Le Havre. Not for the rest of her life.

As she followed Roy and Ffion into the stadium, she noticed that her brother and her football coach were occasionally touching hands. She looked away, confused. She knew they liked each other; but now it was becoming more serious.

That – however – was not the thing that horrified Rocky Race.

It was when they made their way to their seats that something dropped from just above them in the stand, down into the players’ tunnel below. Just as Rocky noticed a man in a dark coat run from where it had fallen.

Then, screams and shouts from a circle of people below.

Rocky, curious, looked down to see what had fallen. So did Roy and Ffion.

It was a person.

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A woman.

And by her side there was a mobile phone, shattered. It was silver.

Now – as she stared down at the people below, one of them giving mouth-to-mouth to the woman – the crowd stared up at Rocky and the few other people looking down, wondering how the woman could have fallen.

There was no question that it was the journalist, Fran Clampard.

And, now that someone had placed a blanket over the face of the woman, there was no question that she was dead.

**Please see the next page for information about how to vote...**

**Once you have voted you can look forward to watching Scotland v Japan (2 p.m.) England v Argentina (8 p.m.) tonight on the BBC.**



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## Voting

Now it's time for you to choose what happens next.

There are three options. You can choose one and vote for it by email.

Your choices are:

**A: a crime thriller as the children are suspected of the journalist's murder after Rocky's rant in Nice. The trio have to prove someone else did it to clear their name.**

**B: a ghost story as the ghost of the journalist haunts them until they agree to do something for her.**

**C: Ignore the crime angle and focus back on the football more, as Rocky talks to players and gets a job helping them out behind the scenes, so she can help them win the World Cup.**

Please vote by visiting <http://tompalmer.co.uk/world-cup-2019-literacy-resources/> or in case of difficulty email [vote@tompalmer.co.uk](mailto:vote@tompalmer.co.uk) with A, B or C in the subject line. Voting closes at 8 p.m., Friday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2019, just as England kick off their next game.

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# ROCKY <sup>OF THE</sup> ROVERS®

## *Rocky of the Rovers: France 2019* *cinquieme partie*

Rocky found it almost impossible to concentrate on the England-Argentina game. How could she just watch football after witnessing someone falling to their death?

She was supposed to be at the World Cup group game to enjoy herself. But now she couldn't stop thinking about when she had run into Fran Clampard in Nice, the journalist asking her for help.

What help could she possibly have wanted?

Throughout the match, Rocky leant into her brother who was sitting next to her. She would never have wanted to even sit next to Roy normally, but today she needed to be close to him.

The first time she really got into the game was when England won a penalty, Greenwood scythed down as she ran in on goal.

Rocky was on her feet shouting 'PENALTY' so loud that her throat hurt sharply. She focused hard as Nikita Parris ran up to the ball and hit a perfect penalty to the keeper's left, but, the Argentine keeper, Correa, miraculously palmed the ball onto her post and when Jodie Taylor missed the rebound the chance was gone.

Rocky smiled thinly at her brother.

'I really want Taylor to score,' she said.

'Agreed,' Roy nodded. 'Are you okay?'

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‘She just needs one goal then all her confidence will come back,’ Rocky ignored her brother’s question and he squeezed her shoulder.

A few minutes later Rocky was on her feet again as Beth Mead lined up a shot, but, just as Mead was about to strike it, Rocky saw a huge face appear on the big screen at the far end of the Stade Oceane and she was distracted.

The face. Looked familiar. Was it the journalist? Was it really her?

Rocky looked again and saw no face: just Mead’s powerful shot being parried by Correa. She shook her head. She was seeing things now?

At half- time Rocky decided to go and buy a programme.

‘Shall I come with you?’ Ffion asked, looking concerned.

Rocky shook her head. She wanted to be brave. If she was going to feel normal again – and the for the weirdness to stop – she had to be independent.

‘Thanks, but I’m fine,’ Rocky said.

But, sadly, under the stand, amid the thousands of fans there for the game, the weirdness *hadn’t* stopped.

Queuing for the programme Rocky heard the clatter of someone drop a mobile phone. She looked at the concrete floor to see a silver phone case skittering across it. Rocky stepped back, nearly knocking a man off his feet.

‘Pardon,’ she said in French, upset. She was winding herself up now, imagining that Fran Clampard was haunting her.

*It’s in my head*, she said to herself. And stayed brave enough to buy her matchday programme.

The second half was all England again. Trying to break down the Argentina defence and beat their inspired keeper.

# ROCKY OF THE ROVERS®

Rocky found herself becoming more and more anxious about whether England would score and less about the strange events off the pitch.

And then it happened.

A ball wide to Mead. One touch, then a perfect cross into the six yard box. And there was Taylor! Side-footing the ball home!

Gooaaaaaalllllll!

England 1 Argentina 0.

Rocky jumped around, grabbed her brother, then Ffion, shouting louder than before, her throat in agony.

But Rocky didn't care.

Jodie Taylor had scored!

England had scored!

If things stayed this way, the Lionesses were in the knockout stages and that meant that Rocky, Ffion and Roy would not have to go home on Wednesday after the Japan game.

In a break for an injured Argentina player, Rocky leafed through her programme, checking the Group D table. If England held on the Lionesses would be top of the group and would need only a draw with Japan to finish top and have an easier passage to the next round. In theory.

That was good.

That was great.

Rocky smiled. It would be such a pleasure to get back to Nice for the Japan game and away from the Stade Oceane in Le Havre: Rocky wanted to forget about Fran Clampard and the accident, put it all behind her.

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It was when she turned the next page that Rocky felt her lungs stop working. There was a picture of Fran Clampard in the programme.

But there was more to it than that.

The picture was moving. Like a screen.

Rocky snapped the programme shut and breathed in sharply.

She stared out at the pitch, saw the England players attacking again, the ball high in the air and Jill Scott heading it onto the roof of the net. No goal. But that meant nothing to Rocky now.

She looked at the programme again.

Opened it.

‘Rocky? I...’

Rocky panicked and dropped the programme, then kicked it away. The moving picture. It was still there. And now it was talking to her.

Automatically, Ffion picked up the magazine and handed it to Rocky.

‘Here.’

‘Thanks,’ Rocky said, swallowing, but taking the magazine, rolling it up and holding it like a relay baton in her hand.

Now what?

Tell the others?

Look one more time?

Rocky was terrified that she was going mad.

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It was either that... or the ghost of Fran Clampard was trying to communicate with her through the pages of a football programme.

Had she really heard the journalist speak, seen her move on the page?

This was crazy. Fran Clampard could not be there on the page. That was impossible. Rocky laughed, then heard a roar as the final whistle went.

England had won and were into the last sixteen.

‘You okay?’ Roy asked again.

‘Fine,’ Rocky muttered and took a deep breath.

She had to get past this madness.

She would open the programme and see that Fran Clampard was not there, staring at her and talking to her from the inside of a magazine.

Rocky opened it to the right place.

She her breath and looked at the page.

**Chapter six will be published early on the morning of Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> June, in advance of the England-Japan and Scotland-Argentina matches. Thanks for reading. And thank you for voting on Friday. There might be another vote on Friday this week if you would like one. Let me know by emailing [vote@tompalmer.co.uk](mailto:vote@tompalmer.co.uk). Many thanks.**



# ROCKY <sup>OF THE</sup> ROVERS®

## *Rocky of the Rovers: France 2019* *sixième partie*

It was Wednesday morning when Rocky Race found herself alone. Alone for the first time since England had beaten Argentina in northern France. Since the events of that strange and troubling night.

Now, two days later, Rocky, Roy and Ffion were back in Nice.

Rocky sat with her feet up on a table, leaning back in her deckchair on the narrow balcony of the Yurei Hotel on the seafront, the sun sparkling off the sea, a warm dry wind coming across the Mediterranean from North Africa.

She was alone because the other two had gone for a walk before they headed off to watch England v Japan. Rocky told them she didn't want to go for a walk. She didn't tell them that there was something she needed to do. And she hadn't told them about the strange vision she'd had while looking in the matchday programme. This was something she wanted to do alone.

Sitting in her England top and a pair of tracksuits bottoms, all set for the game, Rocky held the football programme from the England-Argentina game tight in her hand. She had not even opened it since that game.

But she knew she would open it. Eventually.

Even though she was afraid.

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The good thing was that Rocky understood that she was in control. Even if she was scared. She could open the programme and hear what the journalist had to say – if she was still there. She could close it at any point. She could even leave it unopened and she would never be troubled by Clampard again.

So why was she going to open it? This woman had written lies about her brother in her newspaper, putting his football career in jeopardy.

Rocky put the programme down again next to her café au lait.

Yeah... why *should* she look? Why *should* she listen?

Rocky closed her eyes and felt the warm wind moving around her. Then she opened them again.

The answer was obvious.

She would open it because of the look in the woman's eyes when she had pleaded with Rocky; the time that they had first met properly. And the look in her eyes when she stared up from the pages of the magazine. Rocky would never forget how troubled the journalist had seemed.

Hands trembling slightly, Rocky picked up the magazine and flipped it open to the right page.

'Thank you,' a voice said.

Rocky forced herself to look down at the programme. The journalist was there. Well, her face was. Like a screen embedded in a magazine, even though that didn't make sense.

Rocky waited for more.

'I am sorry I wrote lies about your brother,' Fran Clampard said.

Rocky stared back, impassive.

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The woman smiled, then nodded, understanding that Rocky would only listen. She began again:

‘Please, just listen to my story...’

‘Okay,’ Rocky said, her heart hammering with fear, but a determination to go on. ‘I’m listening.’

‘I have been a writer for years,’ Clampard explained. ‘My life’s work was a book about my great grandmother, Lily Halifax. When she was a young woman, during the First World War, Lily worked as a farmer, with all the men away at war. But at the weekends she played football. She loved football. Her team were good and during, and after, the war fifty thousand people would come to watch her and the others play. She wanted to be a footballer. As a job. But as a hobby too. Then – in 1921 – women in England were banned from playing football on FA pitches, because – they said – “it was unseemly for women to play the game.” My grandmother died in 1970. She was heartbroken that women were still not allowed to play football. I was seven then. It was only after she died – in 1971 – that women were allowed to play again.’

Rocky was outraged. She felt a rush of silent anger. *Women banned from playing football because it was unseemly! Unseemly? What did that even mean?*

‘So?’ Rocky asked.

The page became brighter. As if Rocky’s words had given the ghost power.

‘So I wrote a book about her life,’ Fran Clampard went on. ‘It took me three years. And I went to every book publisher I could find. No one would publish my great grandma’s story. But they don’t see that my book is about more than history. It’s about how girls and women in countries around the

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world still face barriers to wanting to become footballers. It's as much about *you* as my great gran.'

Rocky closed her eyes. She felt so sorry now. Sorry she had not helped this woman when she was alive.

'Why?'

Fran Clampard paused.

'Why?' Rocky insisted.

'They said that no one would want to read about women playing football.'

'I understand that,' Rocky said. 'I mean why... why did you have to write those lies about Roy?'

'Money,' the journalist said. 'I needed money. And I had nothing left. Not even enough to travel to France and try to find someone here who might be interested in my book. I thought I could use World Cup fever to find someone who might be interested. The newspaper offered me £3,000 if I could get a story about Roy. I regret it now, of course. It was wrong. It wasn't kind. But it was the only way I could carry on with my dream of getting this book published.'

Rocky nodded.

'Will you help me?' the journalist asked.

'I don't know,' Rocky replied, hearing a voice from the corridor. Her brother. 'I'm confused. Part of me hates you. Part of me feels sorry for you. And it's time for the match,' Rocky said. 'I'll think about it. Okay?'

'But I need you to retrieve the book,' the journalist pleaded as Rocky heard a key in the hotel door.

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‘What?’ Rocky asked. ‘Where is it?’

‘I hid the only copy on a ledge near the top of the Eiffel Tower,’ Fran Clampard told her. ‘I need you to go there, find it, then get the attention of the Lionesses. They might listen to me. Maybe they’ll help me find a publisher.’

‘Rocky?’ Ffion was calling into the hotel room. ‘We’d better get off to the stadium...’

‘Will you still be here?’ Rocky asked the journalist.

‘I will,’ Fran Clampard said. ‘I am a Yurei, as they say in Japan. That’s who we are playing tonight, after all. Ask a Japanese fan what a Yurei is: then you will understand.’

Rocky snapped the magazine shut and slid it under her pillow as she passed through the hotel room. She would make her mind up if she was going to help later.

It was weird.

It was dangerous.

But maybe... just maybe...

Rocky turned her mind away from her problem. Onto the game.

Japan v England.

Kicking off tonight.

If England won or drew they’d finish top of the group and have to play a much weaker team giving them a relatively easy passage to the quarter-finals. If they *lost* to Japan then they’d have to play the Group E winners. Much *much* harder.

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This was a massive game. The biggest match Rocky had ever been to watch. She wanted to give it all her support, all her energy. And once she'd given England the 100% they needed from her as a supporter, then she'd deal with the other matter.

'I'm coming,' Rocky called out to her brother, grabbing her England scarf, and checking her England top in the mirror.

**Please join Rocky and millions of others in watching England's match against Japan tonight and cheer them. The match is on BBC1 and kicks off at 8 p.m.**

**Chapter seven will be published early on the morning of Friday 21<sup>st</sup> June, by which time we'll know who England and playing in the last 16 and if Scotland have made it through. On Friday you'll be able to vote to choose what Rocky decides to do about the ghost of Fran Clampard and thus decide the journalist's ghost's fate.**

**There will be three more episodes next week and maybe – depending on how England and Scotland progress – one or two more.**

**Thank you for reading.**



# ROCKY <sup>OF THE</sup> ROVERS®

## ***Rocky of the Rovers: France 2019*** ***septieme partie***

Rocky was determined to enjoy the game. Yes, she needed to talk to the others about the strange events concerning Fran Clampard.

But not yet. There was a game to watch.

Rocky was 100% football focused now.

England v Japan.

Rocky knew that, if England won or drew, the Lionesses would have a much easier passage to the semi-finals of the World Cup.

She sat on the edge of her seat behind the goal, an England flag draped around her shoulders. Ffion and Roy were in the same pose, cramped forwards, following the action. A bag of croissants they'd bought on the way to the game was untouched: they were far too nervous to eat.

The game began well. England advancing. Japan retreating. Just like the first half against Scotland.

'An early goal,' Rocky muttered to Roy after Japan had forced a great save out of the England keeper, Karen Bardsley. 'That's what we need.'

Seconds later, Rocky was on her feet. Georgia Stanway – the young England forward – was on the ball, sliding a perfect pass into the feet of Ellen White.

The Japan goalie was off her line.

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Rocky saw Ellen White clip the ball goal-bound.

Then...

‘YEAAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!’ Rocky was shouting. Roy next to her. Dancing in the stands with hundreds of jubilant England fans.

1-0 to England. What a start! Surely they’d top the group now.

Rocky’s nerves had settled. A bit. She reached for a croissant and smiled. It was funny: when she was at the football whatever the problems she had in her life, she could put them to the back of her mind. Especially if her team were winning.

As the first half progressed both keepers made a string of fantastic saves, leaping to cover all four corners of their goals.

Ffion was on her feet for every save. Rocky knew she loved a good keeper.

After another astonishing stop from Bardsley, Ffion turned to Rocky. ‘You know – a few years ago – they wanted to make goals smaller for women’s football?’ the older girl said.

‘Whaaaaaat?’ Rocky said.

‘The football authorities,’ Ffion shouted above the noise of the crowd and the England band. They were going to make goalposts smaller. Because they said women couldn’t reach the ball.’

‘Unbelievable!’ Rocky said, a burst of rage flushing through her. ‘Are you serious?’

‘Deadly,’ Ffion said.

‘Maybe we should use fluffy pink footballs and play half-an-hour each way instead of forty-five,’ Rocky snapped, making the row of people in front of her turn round and laugh along.

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But – as the second half progressed – the mood became more and more serious. England’s fluid fast-paced attacking had dried up and now every England touch seemed to go wrong. Misplaced passes. Poor control. Japan were all over England now, moving in neat triangles, short-passing, intelligent running off the ball.

‘We can’t lose this,’ Rocky grumbled. ‘It’ll be so bad for us. And I can see Japan nicking two goals at this rate.’

Ffion nodded. Her face was like stone as she stared at the pitch.

‘It’s only a matter of time before Japan score,’ Roy said, rubbing his chin, as Karen Carney passed to Ellen White who hit the ball hard.

Then Rocky was in the air again, her elbow hitting Roy in the face. But he didn’t mind. He was up too. With Ffion.

White had scored again.

2-0.

Top of the group secured. Mission accomplished.

The noise of the England fans celebrating echoed around the stadium.



After the final whistle – and once the England players had been round each of the four corners of the pitch to applaud the fans – Ffion and Roy stood up, ready to go. The ground was emptying out now.

But Rocky remained on her seat.

Roy and Ffion stared at her quizzically.

‘I have to tell you something,’ Rocky told them.

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Her brother and her football coach sat down.

‘Go on,’ Ffion said, hearing the serious tone in Rocky’s voice.

*How should I play this?* Rocky thought. It was weirdness itself. She was being haunted by a dead football journalist through a football programme. And the ghost had set her a quest to recover a lost book. She wondered if there was a way of asking Roy and Ffion without telling them everything.

But no.

There was no other way than to be honest. Not with something so serious. So she told them. Everything.

At first Rocky could see that they didn’t believe her. But she stuck to her story. Insisted it was true. Going over and over what she’d seen, how she’d felt.

But, still, neither of the other two looked impressed.

‘Look... even if you don’t believe me,’ Rocky argued. ‘Can you just go along with this? It’s important to me.’

She watched Roy and Ffion glance at each other, then back at her.

‘Okay,’ Roy sighed. ‘Go on.’

‘I’m not asking you to help me,’ Rocky said. ‘Well... I am... but first I need to ask you if you *think* we should do something about it. Or if you think we should *forget* about it and concentrate on the World Cup 100%.’

‘I don’t,’ Roy said. ‘I think scrabbling around on the Eiffel Tower to find a missing book would be dangerous. And for what? How would it help that woman now? She’s dead. I know that sounds mean. But why risk our lives too?’

‘The book,’ Ffion argued. ‘That’s why.’

‘What?’ Roy asked.

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‘The book. It’s important. It’s about how football for women was banned and how one woman – no, thousands of women – couldn’t play a game they loved because they were told women and girls weren’t meant to do that.’

Rocky stood up.

She looked around her and realised they were the last three left in the Allianz Arena, Nice. Their voices were lost in great chasms of space around them.

She was torn. Both Roy *and* Ffion were right. Even though they disagreed with each other.

‘But,’ Roy added, after a silence, ‘if you decide to do it, Rocky, I’ll back you and I’ll help you.’

Rocky nodded her thanks.

But the thing was... she still wasn’t sure if she should help Fran Clampard or not. It was too hard to call.



**Will England make it into the quarter finals to play Norway or Australia? Should Rocky and the other two decide to help Fran Clampard’s ghost publish her book about women’s football? Or should they just focus on enjoying the later stages of the World Cup?**

You can now cast your vote at [www.tompalmer.co.uk/world-cup-2019-literacy-resources/](http://www.tompalmer.co.uk/world-cup-2019-literacy-resources/); or, in case of any difficulty, email [vote@tompalmer.co.uk](mailto:vote@tompalmer.co.uk) with your choice of **HELP** or **DON’T HELP** in the subject line. Voting opens at 9 a.m. on Friday 21 June and closes at midday on Saturday 23



# ROCKY <sup>OF THE</sup> ROVERS®

June. Tom will be writing the next chapter on Sunday evening after you have voted. (Your details will not be used for marketing purposes or shared with any third party.)

**Chapter 8 will be published early on the morning of Monday 24 June. Chapters 9 and 10 will be published on Wednesday and Friday next week, completing the story. Probably...**

**England's next game is against Cameroon in Valenciennes the far north of France. The game kicks off at 4.30 p.m. on Sunday 23 June and will be on BBC 1.**



# ROCKY OF THE ROVERS®

## *Rocky of the Rovers: France 2019*

### *Huitième partie*

Monday afternoon. Rocky, Roy and Ffion were on the train out of Valenciennes, following the long and winding route of the Scheldt River. The weather was hot, the water sparkling as the train weaved south over bridges and through tunnels.

Most of the England fans appeared to be heading west to Le Havre for the quarter-final against Norway on Thursday. But not Rocky and her friends: they had something they needed to do before the big match. Something vitally important.

Before their train departed, Ffion managed to find an English newspaper in a Tabac, meaning that the three of them were now reading about England's extraordinary last 16 game against Cameroon the night before.

The elbow in Nikita Parris' face.

Tony Duggan being spat on.

Steph Houghton's free kick through a forest of Cameroonian legs.

Ellen White's disallowed goal which was then allowed.

The rage of the Cameroon players.

Cameroon's disallowed goal.

More rage from the African team.

Then England's third from a corner and the game playing out to the boos of the crowd.

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So much to talk about.

Which is exactly what they did for the two hour journey.

And then they were in Paris, football off the agenda.

‘So we’re definitely doing this?’ Rocky asked.

‘You said you wanted to,’ Roy said.

‘I do.’

‘So?’ Ffion added.

‘So... so... we’re doing it,’ Rocky said.

They walked along a busy platform – in the cool shade of the station – into the large busy city square. Cars coming from every angle. The smell of strong coffee and pain au chocolat wafting through the Parisian air. And bright sunshine dazzling them.

As her eyes adjusted to the sunlight – for a half-second – Rocky thought she saw a familiar figure.

A man.

In a dark coat.

But then her attention was taken by someone else. And she did not see that the man turned, scowling, disappearing to conceal himself behind the stream of people leaving the Gare du Nord.

Rocky gasped.

‘What?’ Roy growled, standing in front of her protectively.

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‘It’s...’

‘Who? What?’ Ffion asked, agitated.

‘It’s... it’s Helena Pielichaty,’ Rocky said. ‘You know. My favourite author. She did the *Girls FC* books. All twelve of them. I need to... I... HELENA!!! Helena Pielichaty?’

Roy and Ffion stood slightly apart from Rocky as she chatted to the famous children’s author. Listening, but letting her get on with it. Roy’s sister had rarely looked so animated, so excited. After overhearing her talk about the books, tell the author who her favourite characters were, they heard Rocky’s voice change.

Go deeper.

Conspiratorial.

It was hard to tell exactly what Rocky was saying, but Roy had a good idea what it was all about. It was only when they’d said goodbye to Helena Pielichaty that Rocky told them what they had been discussing.

‘She said...’ Rocky was grinning. ‘She said that if we can get hold of Fran Clampard’s book about her great grandma, that she could help us. She said she had known Fran Clampard a little – and that she had no idea she had been writing a book. But that any story about how women were banned from playing football *needed* telling and she’d do everything she could to help us find... a publisher.’

# ROCKY <sup>OF THE</sup> ROVERS®

Roy grinned. 'That's so good, Rocky.'

'I know.'

'Well, that's it,' Ffion said. 'We have to get that book now.'

Tuesday morning.

Two days before England were due to play Norway in Le Havre for a place in the semi-finals of the World Cup.

Three young people – after a night in a two-star Paris hotel – stood underneath a huge iron structure, one of the most recognisable buildings in the world.

The Eiffel Tower.

But, even though Rocky was in awe of the tower, she had something far more important on her mind.

'We go up and do a recce?' she said.

'Yeah,' Roy agreed.

'But we take it easy,' Ffion added. 'Don't make it obvious? They probably have crazy security here.'

'Yeah,' Rocky conceded. 'Course.'

The trio stared at the lift up the tower. It wasn't moving. But that was the only way they'd get up, then try to find the ledge the journalist had mentioned. The place she had secured her book.

None of them saw the man – wearing a dark coat – watching them, his eyes narrowed in concentration. He was too well hidden by a busload of tourists snapping photographs.

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But – as they moved over to the main entry – they *did* see the sign in front of them.

FERME  
AUJOURD'HUI

Ffion frowned.

‘What’s up?’ Roy asked.

‘The sign.’

‘Yeah. What does it mean? Welcome to the Eiffel Tower?’

Rocky and Ffion shared a disappointed smile.

‘It means *closed today*,’ Ffion told him.

‘Noooooo,’ Rocky complained. ‘We have to leave for Le Havre tomorrow morning.’

Ffion shook her head. ‘The quarter final’s not until Thursday. We’ll stay on in Paris for another day.’

‘Are you sure?’ Rocky asked.

‘Yeah,’ Roy agreed. ‘We stay.’

‘Thanks,’ Rocky said. She was desperate to get up the Eiffel Tower. Desperate to find Fran Clampard’s book. Desperate to get it published so that the world would know the story it told.

‘Just a minute,’ Ffion said.

‘What?’

# ROCKY <sup>OF THE</sup> ROVERS®

‘There’s another sign that says it’s shut tomorrow too.’ Ffion faced Rocky, her face all serious. ‘Rocky, the tower is isn’t open until Thursday lunchtime. You won’t be able to get up to find the book and watch England’s quarter final. It’s going to be impossible.’

**Chapter nine will be published early on the morning of Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> June. The final chapter on Friday. Thank you for reading.**



**LIONESSES**

# ROCKY OF THE ROVERS®

## *Rocky of the Rovers: France 2019* *neuvieme partie*

Thursday lunchtime.

The queue for the Eiffel Tower was long, snaking from underneath the huge iron monolith out into the blazing sunshine of summertime Paris.

It was hot.

Red hot at 2 p.m. in the afternoon.

Only those who had arrived underneath the Eiffel Tower to be at the very start of the queue had some shade to enjoy. Those who had been there since 8 a.m., including three figures in gleaming white England tops.

Rocky, Roy and Ffion.

All three were drinking water. Vital on a hot day like this.

The trio watched as the staff opened the gates to the Tower. Rocky felt a surge of adrenaline. This was it. First in the queue. First up the tower. Find the book by Fran Clampard, then on to watch England play in the World Cup quarter-final against Norway.

‘What time’s the train again?’ Rocky asked Ffion.

‘Five p.m.,’ Ffion replied. ‘That gets us into Le Havre for 7.15 p.m. Then we should get into the stadium for kick off.’

‘But it’ll take up to an hour to get to St-Lazare from here,’ Roy cautioned. ‘So we need to be off the tower by four.’

# ROCKY <sup>OF THE</sup> ROVERS®

Rocky nodded. 'We have two hours, then,' she summarised. 'We go up as high as we can go. Fran Clampard said her book was at the very top. On a ledge. We get it. Then we leave. By 4 p.m. Agreed?'

The three England fans looked into each others' faces, sharing serious expressions, and nodded.

'Bonjour. Allez...' a smiling man in a uniform said.

Then they were in. Paying their entry fee.

Up some steps.

A lift.

Some more steps.

Another lift.

And then the view.

The breath-taking city of buildings, gardens, parks and wide straight roads, the River Seine weaving through it all, under a cloudless deep blue sky.

They studied Paris through a wide mesh of wire at the very top of the tower.

Roy put his hand out to steady himself. The city looked to be in gridlock: no cars moving on the hundred streets he could see.

Ffion lifted her face to the cool breeze that was fluttering through her hair and clothes, they were so high up. She smiled.

Rocky was already searching.



# ROCKY <sup>OF THE</sup> ROVERS®

He watched them closely. He'd been at the tower for forty-eight hours, waiting for them to come. He'd wanted to get the book off the journalist before he killed her. But you can't have everything. He had her laptop, anyway. He'd destroyed that. Now there was only one version of that stupid feminist book left. The one he knew that the girl was searching for. He'd leave the girl alone until she found it. Then he'd swoop. Wipe the story of women and football from the face of the earth.

He didn't want to kill the girl. But he would if he needed to.



It took Rocky and hour of searching the structure to find a thin parcel taped to the underside of a length of iron, one of 18,038 pieces of metal that the Eiffel Tower had been built with in the Eighteen-eighties. Along with two and a half million rivets.

Rocky knew he was there.

He thought he was clever at hiding and staying out of her line of sight. But she was always one step ahead of him. When she saw him fish his phone out of his pocket, she took her chance and detached the package from its hiding place.

But as she did so, she saw the man backing towards her, as he texted someone from his phone.

An error.

He had her cornered now, though she wasn't sure he knew about it.



LIONESSES

# ROCKY OF THE ROVERS®

Rocky found a hiding place where several lengths of iron met. She squatted so that she was out of sight, panicking now.

What would he do if he found her?

She knew he knew what she looked like.

He was a tall man, muscular. She wished Ffion and Roy had not gone off to another part of the tower to search.

To be safe, Rocky made herself small and waited for the man to go. She was running out of time, but there was nothing she could do.

She heard a ringing sound, squinted to see the man take out his phone again.

‘Boris here,’ he answered.



The man spoke into his phone trying to make himself clear to the idiot on the other end of the line. What was she going on about? After a while he just had to stop her talking.

‘Because,’ he shouted, interrupting her, ‘it is a book about women and football. Because it is a book that makes women’s football look good, makes it look like men tried to stop women playing football.’

Silence as he listened again.

‘I know that men *did* that in the last century... I know that it’s true. But men *should* stop women playing football. We *should* do it more now.’

# ROCKY <sup>OF THE</sup> ROVERS®

Silence again. Rocky wondered what the person on the other end of the line was saying.

‘Why?’ the man started again. ‘I’ll tell you why. Did you see those Cameroon players? Spitting and elbowing. It was vile. Women shouldn’t behave like that. It’s fine if men do. But women? That’s why women shouldn’t be allowed to play football. It’s not *ladylike*.’

He shut down the call. He hated the way his wife nagged him. She was supposed to be on his side.

But where was the girl. He’d not seen her for a long time now.

He cursed.

He’d lost her. Maybe she’d gone. He felt a sharp pain in his chest. He’d have to move to Plan B now.

A smile played across his lips. Plan B was always more fun than Plan A anyway.

And then he was running.



Rocky was furious. But she had managed not to give herself away. Spitting and elbowing people in the face was horrible. She knew that. But it was equally horrible if men did it as if women did it.

This man. She loathed him now.

Ladylike?

Really?

# ROCKY <sup>OF THE</sup> ROVERS®

But Rocky was pleased to see the man was leaving. She tracked him as he descended three short flights of metal steps and entered the lift. Then she watched carefully as the lift descended to the foot of the Eiffel Tower.

Now to find Roy and Ffion. Time to run for the train. Or get a taxi in those heavily congested streets.



They made it to the train with three minutes to spare. Rocky, Roy and Ffion all red hot sweating and panting. They sat right by the door of the carriage so that the draught of air from outside might cool them down.

The 6 p.m. to Le Havre.

‘We get in at 8.15 p.m.,’ Ffion said. ‘If it’s on time. Then it’s a two-mile taxi ride to the stadium.’

Rocky frowned.

‘So we’ll miss most of the first half?’ she sighed.

‘Yes. But you did something good,’ Roy said. ‘The book. You got the book. You can see that Helena Pielichaty at the stadium. You’ve done it. Nothing can go wrong now.’

Rocky nodded. It was true.



# ROCKY <sup>OF THE</sup> ROVERS®

Once he'd lost them on the Eiffel Tower he knew what their next move would be. They'd get the next train to Le Havre. They were England fans, after all. They had somewhere to go.

Time for Plan B.

He raced to see if they were on the 5 p.m. from the Gare St-Lazare.

They weren't.

So he waited. He'd ditched his coat now. He was wearing a black tee-shirt, jeans, Converse. They appeared at 5.50 p.m. to climb onto the 6 p.m. train instead.

'They'll miss the first half,' he said aloud, two elderly men glancing quizzically at him as he began laughing.

'You'll miss the book next,' he growled, as he walked from one of the train carriage to the other, the door open at the far end, the girl fanning herself with a thin package.

He heard the beeping of the train door as it was about to close when he reached the girl and snatched the book and jumped out of the train, the automatic doors beginning to slide shut.

He had it.

And he just couldn't stop himself looking back to see their faces.



**The final chapter of *Rocky of the Rovers: France 2019* will be published early on the morning of Friday 28 June.**



# ROCKY OF THE ROVERS®

You can learn to draw Rocky with this Lisa Henke resource which is free to download from: <http://tompalmer.co.uk/roy-of-the-rovers/>

To mark the end of the story, on Friday, there will be a free signed certificate for you to download and we'll be running a competition to win all six of this season's *Roy of the Rovers* novels and graphic novels.



And today we are taking delivery of 5,000 *Roy of the Rovers* posters that we can send direct to schools. More details of that tomorrow.

Even if Rocky, Roy and Ffion don't make it, you can watch England play their quarter-final against Norway tomorrow, Thursday 27 June – live from Le Havre – on BBC1 from 7.30 p.m., with the game kicking off at 8 p.m.

Thank you for reading.



# ROCKY OF THE ROVERS®

## *Rocky of the Rovers: France 2019* *dixième partie*

Turning to see Rocky, Roy and Ffion staring desperately from the train, the man burst out laughing, waving Fran Clampard's book at them. He continued gloating as the train door began to slide slowly shut.

What happened next happened quickly.

The older girl leapt from the train, spinning through the air to knock him off his feet. He felt himself falling, and, although he tried to cling onto the package containing the book, he felt it being wrenched from his hand.

He looked up from the floor to see that the doors had shut and the train had begun to ease out of the station

The girl was standing over him, a fierce look on her face.

Rocky watched in horror as she saw Ffion and the man in the dark coat on the platform. She wasn't thinking about the Fran Clampard book now: just her friend's safety.

But the train to Le Havre was easing out of the station. There was nothing she could do to help. She was relieved to see two police officers arrive and take the man by his arms. A third, kneeling next to Ffion to help her up.

# ROCKY <sup>OF THE</sup> ROVERS®

And – just before Ffion was out of her sight – Rocky saw her smile and stick her thumb up, shouting: ‘I’ll get the next train, Rocky. I’ll see you there.’

Then the platform disappeared and the train was on its way.

Roy was beside Rocky now. In his hands, Fran Clampard’s book.

‘She threw it back in before the doors shut,’ Roy told her. ‘It’s a miracle.’

Rocky read the story of Lily Halifax, the young football fanatic who had never been allowed to play the game she loved the way she wanted. Rocky was astonished that the football authorities had banned women from playing on official pitches for half a century, that they’d not been allowed to use qualified referees, that they’d been told year after year that football *was not the right sort of game for ladies*.

But then she read on. This was not just a story of defeat.

She read that women had still found a way to play. On dodgy pitches. With their own referees. Not listening to stupid opinions. And they’d done this for 50 years until, in 1971, it was impossible to ignore the women’s game any longer and the ban was lifted.

Rocky grinned as she read the book, taking a photo of every page as she read it. Just in case.

But she still felt sad.

The book ended with the news that Lily Halifax had died in 1970: she never saw things begin to change. She never saw what the Lionesses were capable of.

# ROCKY OF THE ROVERS®

They arrived at Le Havre stadium 40 minutes into the game, sprinting up the steps to see the lush green pitch glowing under the floodlights.

Roy and Rocky stopped in their tracks, as Lucy Bronze screamed down the right wing, passing to Nikita Parris, who played it to Ellen White.

‘YEAAAASSSSSSSS!!!!!’ Rocky said, jumping up and grabbing her brother.

Goal. Another Ellen White beauty.

‘Two-nil,’ Roy beamed. ‘That’s one foot in the semis.’

Rocky had been following the match on her phone – using the train’s Wifi – and she knew England had gone one-up in the first three minutes. But she was still nervous about the match.

‘I’ll only be happy when it’s 3-0,’ she whispered to Roy.

He nodded.

‘And when we’ve found Helena Pielichaty and given her this book,’ Rocky added.

And it was true. She was still nervy. Very nervy.

Even though England had a stranglehold on the game, Rocky yearned for a third goal.

She sang.

She chanted.

She called encouragement to the players.

Her voice box aching with the effort.

But – when Lucy Bronze hammered in England’s third – Roy jumped at the noise his sister made.

# ROCKY <sup>OF THE</sup> ROVERS®

A roar. That's how Roy would describe it when they got home. A roar. Like a Lionesses' roar.

Ffion arrived alongside Roy and Rocky 10 minutes after the final whistle, as the England players ran in joy, hand in hand, towards their fans.

'Oh... I'm so sorry you missed it,' Rocky croaked, her voice broken now.

'It was worth it,' Ffion replied, smiling, then stepping aside to reveal that she wasn't alone. Two women were with her. One was Helena Pielichaty. The other Rocky didn't recognise.

'What happened?' Rocky asked, still focusing on her friend.

Ffion told them she'd jumped on the man and managed to get the book back and throw it into the train before the doors shut.

'But what happened to the man, I mean? Is he still at large?'

Ffion shook her head. 'Arrested,' she said. 'Detained at the pleasure of the Gendarmerie.'

'No way,' Roy grinned. 'Did he say anything?'

'It was weird,' Ffion began. 'He did. He went on about how his dad – who had some powerful position in football years ago – didn't think women should play football. And that he promised his dad on his deathbed that he'd do everything he could to put a stop to the women's game. Then he said he'd found out that some of the really mean things his dad had done were in Fran Clampard's book. That he had to hide them from the world. Then he started crying. It was a bit sad really.'

# ROCKY OF THE ROVERS®

‘Very sad,’ Helena Pielichaty said. ‘Can I introduce you to Roberta Power. She’s an editor at the top publishing house, Rebellion. I’ve told her about the book and she’s said she’d like to publish it, so that everyone can read it.’

Rocky studied the woman.

‘You can trust her,’ Helena Pielichaty assured them. ‘I can vouch for her.’

Rocky nodded and handed the woman the book.

‘So now the story of Lily Halifax can be told,’ Helena Pielichaty put her hand on Rocky’s shoulder. ‘You’ve done a great thing for football,’ she said. ‘You should be proud.’

‘I am,’ Rocky grinned. ‘But not as proud as I am of the England players.’

And, as she said it, the England players ran towards them, holding hands in a line and cheering. Next step: the semi-finals of the World Cup.

**Thank you for reading *Rocky of the Rovers: France 2019*.**

**If you’ve enjoyed our story, you can print off a free special signed certificate for each of your class, group or family for following the whole story. Or you can order a *Roy of the Rovers* poster by visiting**

**[www.tompalmer.co.uk/world-cup-2019-literacy-resources/](http://www.tompalmer.co.uk/world-cup-2019-literacy-resources/)**

**You can continue to follow the adventures of Rocky, Roy and Ffion next season – and catch up on the story so far – in the new series of books and comics published by Rebellion. More here: [www.tompalmer.co.uk/roy-of-the-rovers/](http://www.tompalmer.co.uk/roy-of-the-rovers/)**



# ROCKY OF THE ROVERS®

To WIN a full set of last season's book – three novels and three comic books  
– please answer the following question:

How did the England players celebrate their win against Norway last night?

- a) Singing along with the England band
- b) Holding hands and running towards the crowd in a line
- c) Making a human pyramid with Phil Neville at the top

You can enter at [www.tompalmer.co.uk/world-cup-2019-literacy-resources/](http://www.tompalmer.co.uk/world-cup-2019-literacy-resources/).

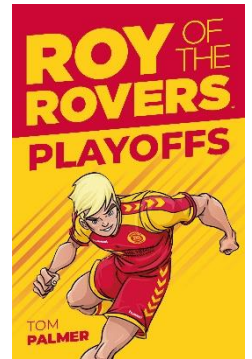
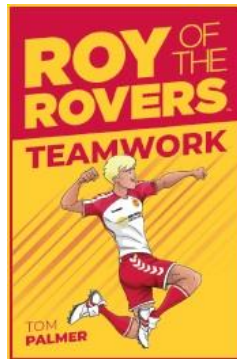
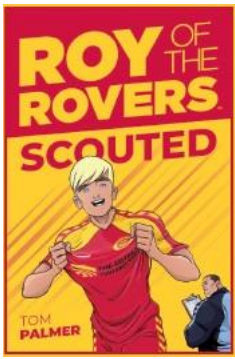
Please enter by 11 p.m. on Sunday 30 June 2019. One winner will be drawn on Monday 1 July.

Thank you to Windmill Academy in Nottingham for helping me brainstorm the ideas for this chapter. And to Frog Class at Hinstock Primary School for the idea about why the man in the dark coat was so keen to stop Fran Clampard's book being published.

And enjoy the rest of the tournament. Thanks, again, for reading.

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A blue ink signature of Tom Palmer, written in a cursive style.

Date

7 June - 7 July 2019