

Maybe Football is Exciting

Tom Palmer

Thursday

School was okay today. Sally's still being weird. But what's new?

She wants to walk round the corridors of the main block all dinner time. AND she wants ME to come with her. I think she fancies someone.

So I asked her. I said 'Who is it then?'

'Who's what?'

'Who are you looking for?'

She said 'No-one.' But she said it so quickly, I knew.

I was kind of glad we went walking round, anyway. Because I saw Danny Harte. Again.

He saw me, but he looked away. Like he does.

He's funny is Danny Harte. I mean, I like him. But he's one of those boys who... you know... who needs to grow up a bit. He's fourteen and what he NEEDS to do – in my opinion – is (1) to stop talking about FOOTBALL all the time.

He's one of those boys who's obsessed with football. They go on about it all the time. Who scored what at the weekend. Who is the best team – or not. That sort of thing. And they're always rushing off to play it at break time. I mean, I like football. I've been to watch City. I like it when we play it in games. But it's not my life...

The other things he needs to so (2) is get a haircut.

That's it.

I told Sally that. And she was a bit funny with me (AGAIN). She said Danny was Emily Harte's brother (which I already knew) and that, if *she's* anything to go by, I should stay well away.

Transforming Lives

Friday

URGGGGHHH.

Something happened in the corridor today. Sally Graham dragging me round the school at dinner time, searching for this mystery boy. Her annoying friend, Phoebe, came too.

So, we were coming down the corridor, just along from the dinner hall. And there he was: Danny Harte. With his mate, Paul somebody-or-other.

I saw Paul nudge Danny. Then Danny looked up. Right at me. And I grinned. And it was meant to be a NICE grin. But it came out funny. I think. (I'm not sure.) But, after what happened next, I'm not definitely sure how he interpreted it.

As we walked, about to pass them, Sally thrust a note out at Danny. At first I thought it was from her and that it was Danny she fancies.

And I felt angry. Sort of.

And then we were past them and she and Phoebe were laughing hysterically and I was starting to think Sally is... you know... not that nice a friend...

But then, once we were round the corner and Danny had disappeared, Phoebe told me that Sally had said the note was about ME.

'What?' I asked, stopping Sally.

Sally smiled. But it was a false smile.

'What did it say?' I asked.

'Nothing,' she said.

'What?'

I wasn't going to take any RUBBISH from her about this. Sometimes she can be a right little...

Anyway...

I could tell she was feeling funny about it.

Transforming Lives

'I just said his sister told me he fancied you,' she spluttered.

'What?' I asked. (And, yes, I know I'd said it four times on the trot.)

'Well she did,' Sally said.

'I was there,' Phoebe said. 'She did.'

So now I'm panicking about what Sally put in her STUPID note and what Danny Harte's going to be thinking about me and if he thinks I had something to do with it.

And to make it worse, it's the weekend, so there's nothing I can do about it for three days.

Saturday

Oh my God!

As you know me, you also know I don't use that phrase. Ever. But today was an OMG day.

Sally texted me this morning.

She said she was sorry. Did I want to go into town?

So all morning she was really nice to me. We went round all the shops. We'd been to H&M, Zara, Topshop. I'd got a new top and some shoes that were in a sale.

There was a strange atmosphere in town. A City football player has been kidnapped. It's been all over the news. It's quite exciting really. Every TV channel has stuff on about our city. And there were loads of TV and radio people interviewing people in the main street. It was like being on a film set. (Not that I've ever been on a film set, but you know what I mean.)

And Sally says, 'I'll take you for a coffee.'

So we go to Starbucks in town. The one near the station. And we're sitting there for a bit...

And I've nearly finished my coffee... And this man sits at the table next to us. He's blind and I kind of recognise him.

Then Sally suddenly goes quiet. And I think it's because of the man. But she points at the counter.

'Look at him,' she says. 'He's fit.'

I look. And recognise him immediately.

Transforming Lives

'It's Danny Harte,' I say.

'It's not,' she replies.

'It is,' I go on. 'He's had a haircut. Look at him. He looks... he looks amazing.'

(You see, I was right about the haircut.)

And then he's coming towards us. Weaving his way through the tables, not looking up. Just carrying this tray with two coffees and two cakes.

And then, eventually, he does look up. We're face to face. And his dad is sitting right next to us, having heard me say I fancy him.

And he's gone red.

And I feel red.

And I need to say something.

(And I need to stop starting sentences with 'And'.)

'What happened to you yesterday,' I say. 'I didn't see you in Chemistry.'

Then he glances at his dad and puts his finger to his lips.

And I realised I'd just blown his cover. He's knocked off school the day before.

I mouth 'Sorry' at him and he stares at my mouth for a second. Then he starts to smile too.

Then I say 'See you on Monday?' trying to make it sound like a question, like I wanted to see him.

And he say 'Yeah. See you then.'

Then we left.

I wished I'd said something to him about the kidnapped footballer. I know he supports City.

He was probably feeling sad about it. But I didn't. I was too... surprised.

I glanced back, once we were outside. His dad was talking to him. And I knew his dad was telling him what I'd said. And I felt SO embarrassed. But, deep down, a bit happy.

Transforming Lives

I wanted to talk to Sally about it, but she'd gone quiet. Thinking about her corridor boy, I thought. Whoever he might be.

Sunday

Two things happened today.

One, I woke up and realised who the boy Sally likes is.

Danny.

That's why she said what she said about his sister. That's why she was funny with me after we'd met in town. It's obvious.

Two, what was on the news tonight. Dad called me down to watch it.

'There's some sort of siege at the City Stadium,' he said.

So we all sat there. It was live on Sky News. They had a helicopter over the stadium. And cameras in the car park.

Apparently there'd been shots fired.

The police were outside.

Anyway, at the end, this footballer, Sam Roberts – quite fit, in fact – came out in a blanket, with fresh scratches on his face and a police warning was put out for the City chairman, Sir Richard Gawthorpe, saying that he was on the loose, armed and dangerous.

Dad immediately got up and locked all the doors. He even brought the rabbit in early. Like some mad gunman on the loose would head for OUR house to shoot OUR rabbit.

Back on the TV, two men came on and they were interviewed. Two builders or something. They'd saved the player's life, apparently. But, as they were being interviewed, I noticed someone pass behind them.

Danny.

Transforming Lives

Danny Harte.

I swear it was Danny. And I swear he hid his face from the camera. Like he didn't want to be seen. Like he had some fascinating secret life...

And now I can't wait to see him at school tomorrow. He's got a new haircut AND he's got some mysterious other life going on.

Monday

So, I got to school and I went to Danny's classroom and I said I wanted to meet him that night.

Why mess about? That's I wanted. That's what I asked for.

And he said, YES!

I said I wanted to ask him about last night. I'd seen him on the TV. He said I was the only one who'd spotted him. And that, if I told nobody else, he'd tell me what had happened.

So, after school, in town, in Starbucks, he went to the counter to get me a latte and I sat down.

When HE sat down I asked him straight.

'So what happened?'

And he told me.

All week he'd been investigating the kidnap.

He'd been there in the night when Sam Roberts had been kidnapped.

He'd discovered him in an underground bunker, held at gunpoint.

He'd been shot at.

That was why he'd got his hair cut. So he could go back and not be recognized.

He'd gone into the stadium, last night, to rescue him. With the two builders.

And his parents had told him he couldn't be revealed as the person who had REALLY saved Sam Roberts.

And, you probably think I'm stupid, but I believe him. Because I feel like I trust him.

Transforming Lives

Am I mad? No one should believe a story like that. That someone like Danny, a boy from school, is also a secret detective who solves major crimes. But I want to believe it. I mean, it would be better if I had evidence to prove it.

But I liked listening to him tell me about it. It sounded exciting.

When they were about to shut the Starbucks, I said 'So what now?' Meaning, what was he going to investigate next. Was he going to go after Sir Richard Whatshisname?

And he said: 'I wondered...' But then he stopped.

'You wondered what?' I asked.

'If you'd like to go to see a film sometime?' he said.

I wanted to explode inside, but I just smiled and said. 'I might do.'

'Tomorrow?' he said, his voice going a bit funny.

'Go on then,' I said.

Tuesday

This morning I got a Facebook friend request from Danny.

I accepted.

And, almost immediately, he sent me a photo. Of him and SAM ROBERTS, the footballer, taken in his house last night.

It had to be taken last night. Danny had his hair short and Sam Roberts had the same scratches he'd had on his face when he was kidnapped.

And I knew that I'd been right to trust Danny. And that... maybe football is exciting after all.

Tom Palmer writes the *Foul Play* series for Puffin Books, a series of five football detective novels featuring the investigations of Danny and Charlotte. To see these scenes from Danny's point of view and find out what really happened, read *Foul Play*.

More information at www.tompalmer.co.uk.

Transforming Lives