

## The Character Strikes Back

by Tom Palmer

*This story has been written in five parts to act as a classroom read that teachers can read to children for five minutes every day during a single week. It is a twist on Tom Palmer's Foul Play books, which are published by Puffin. [www.tompalmer.co.uk](http://www.tompalmer.co.uk)*

### **Day Two: The Man in the Library**

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The first thing I did in the morning was look out onto the street again. To see if the man in black was there.

He wasn't.

'What are you looking at?' my wife asked.

'I'm looking to see if the man who followed me home, then was standing outside in the dark last night, is still there,' I said.

I always tell my wife the truth.

She laughed.

Because I wasn't in a school that day, I had a nice breakfast with my wife and daughter.

Then I took my daughter to school.

Once my daughter was in school, I went into Todmorden. To write.

I wish could write at home. But I can't.

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It is too easy to find other things to do at home. Like putting the rabbit out on the grass. Or washing up. Or reading the post. Anything except writing.

So I go to a cafe in Todmorden. It's called the *Bear* and its right opposite the library. There I have to work, because there's nothing else to do.

I ordered a coffee and started writing on my laptop.

I was finishing a book called *Captain Fantastic*. It was the last book in my Football Academy series.

When I'm writing I often put things into the story that are new in my life. For instance, when I got a PSP, I included a FIFA 09 tournament for the boys in the team in my book, *Free Kick*. Or when I got an iphone I gave one to Danny in the last *Foul Play* novel, *Own Goal*.

So, as the man in black was on my mind, I included him in the story. I had him hanging around the training ground being scary. He seemed like a good character to use.

When I get into writing I lose all sense of time. I'd been hammering away on my laptop for two hours, when I felt like getting another drink. Just to keep me going. So I got up to go to the counter. As I did I glanced over at the library on the other side of the road.

And there he was again.

The man in black.

When he saw me looking, he turned and went into the library.

Suddenly this felt serious.

I knew I had to face him, find out what he was doing following me around. But first I needed some facts.

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I phoned the school I'd been at the day before.

'Hi. It's Tom. The author from yesterday.'

'Hello Tom. Thanks again for a lovely day.'

'You're welcome,' I said. 'Do you mind if I ask you a question *about* yesterday?'

'Fire away,' the teacher said.

'You know the teachers at the back? The one in black with dark hair. Is he at your school today?'

'Him?' the teacher said, surprised. 'He's not a teacher. He's your publisher.'

'What?' I was feeling agitated now. I looked over at the library. The man – whoever he was – was still inside.

'He *said* he was your publisher,' the teacher clarified.

'What?'

I realised that I must have shouted when I saw several other people in the cafe staring at me.

I ended the phone call, paid quickly and left.

As I walked across the road and into the library my head was spinning with questions.

Who was this man? He certainly wasn't my publisher.

Why was he at the school, on my train and outside my house last night? And why was he in the library – my local library – now?

I marched into the library.

Because I felt threatened I decided to be strong. I could have run away home and closed all the curtains. But that wouldn't have done me any good.

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There were several people in the library. Queuing to take books out. Reading the newspaper. Checking out DVDs and CDs. But there was no sign of the man in black. It's a lovely library. Warm. Friendly. And full of books about anything and everything.

The librarian was standing at the counter. She said hello.

'Hello,' I said. Then I lowered my voice. 'Is there a man in here, dressed in black, with dark curly hair?'

'Oh him?' she replied. 'He's just gone.'

I looked at the side door to the library. It was still swinging on its hinges.

'He was looking at your books, in fact,' Roberta went on, pointing at a pile of books in the children's section. 'Is he a friend of yours?'

I shook my head.

Then I went over to my books.

There was a copy of *Dead Ball* there. My book about the Russian billionaire who tries to kill England players. And, next to it, a book called *A Russian Diary* by a Russian journalist called Anna Politkovskaya.

I knew the book well. I'd borrowed it from the library when I was researching Russia. I had based my villain – the evil billionaire – on a man I had read about in the book. Dmitri Borisoff\*\*. She had written about how he was a ruthless businessman who was happy to murder his enemies. And that he had had journalists killed who wrote bad things about him.

Anna Politkovskaya had been murdered herself. In Moscow. Probably by Borisoff.

So why was this book sat here next to mine?

I leafed through Politkovskaya's book as my mind tried to piece things together.

I came to some photos in the middle.

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And then I saw it.  
A picture.  
Of Dmitri Borisoff.  
And it was him.  
The man in black.  
The man who was following me.  
My heart started pounding so hard I felt sick.

I had to get home. To look after my family. To get them away from Todmorden, until I knew what was going on.

*\*\* - I've even had to keep his name a secret now, just in case any of you might know him and could get some of his friends to come after me!*

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