



Changing life stories



# ROY OF THE ROVERS.



## *Euro 2020: A Ghost Story by Tom Palmer*

### Chapter Two

**Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2021**

**Melchester Rovers players Roy and Rocky Race have been offered a tour of the Euro 2020 host cities. By a ghost. However weird the opportunity seems, they decide to go for it. Now all they have to do is tell their parents...**

‘Mu-um?’

Rocky raised it. Like she always had to raise problems, even though her brother was older than her.

The Race family were sat having breakfast the next morning. Weetabix and Corn Flakes. Juice. Cups of tea. The back door was open, letting some cool air into the house.

‘Yes, love?’ Mum said.

‘Can we ask you a favour?’

‘Sure.’

Rocky noticed her dad smile as she explained that the ghost of Toby Morton had promised them a tour of the Euro 2020 stadiums to watch any games they wanted. She also clocked that Mum said nothing until she had finished.

‘Sure,’ Mum said at last. She was grinning. Even laughing.

Rocky knew she didn’t believe them. And why should she? It was madness.

Mum went on. ‘We know you’ll stay safe because you’ll always be together. And, so long as you prove you’ve been to all these places, we are happy.’

‘How are we supposed to do that?’ Roy asked.

‘Postcard,’ Dad said.

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Mum, Rocky and Roy stared at Dad in shock. Since he had been ill, Dad barely spoke. He couldn't. One word a week was the best they could hope for. But this was the permission they had wanted. Roy and Rocky quickly promised to send their dad a postcard from every venue.



Roy and Rocky made their way to Mel Park for 7p.m. on Friday night to watch Italy vs Turkey. They'd agreed the time with the ghost of Toby Morton the night before. The plan was to go into the stadium and walk out into the stands as if they were fans going to watch a match at Mel Park. Then – the ghost had promised – they'd be in the EURO 2020 stadium of their choice.

'Is this for real?' Roy said as they climbed the steps towards the main stand.

Rocky shrugged. 'Maybe. Maybe not. But it's something to do, isn't it? We can always go home and watch it on TV if it was all fake.'

'It won't happen,' Rocky told her brother. 'You'll see. It's stupid.'

And nothing did happen. Up into the stand. Nothing. The pitch in front of them. Nothing.

'It was worth trying,' Roy said.

And then they were hit by the clouds of cigarette smoke and the noise of football rattles they'd heard on Thursday night. And there was Toby Morton.

'Welcome to the Stadio Olimpico,' he said.

Roy gasped. Rocky grinned. They were there. In Italy. The air was hot, like an oven. The light clearer, brighter.

'You didn't believe me, did you?' the ghost asked as the Italy and Turkey teams emerged from the players' tunnel. The roar of the home fans was deafening. And the game was fantastic. Three-nil to the Azzurri. What a start to EURO 2020.

After the final whistle the siblings walked out of the stadium to try to buy a postcard. It was dark now, but they located a kiosk, saying *grazie* to the vendor. The postcard had a picture of a far older stadium in Rome. Thousands of years old. Roy and Rocky quickly wrote a message to their dad and mum and posted it home. They didn't see a figure behind them, tracking them. A strange

dark mist swirling around him. But Roy did feel that he was being watched. He just decided to ignore it. He was probably being paranoid.



‘What stadium shall we go to next?’ Rocky asked.

‘Wembley,’ Roy said. ‘No question.’



Wembley was bathed in blazing sunshine, light bouncing off thousands of red seats around the lush green pitch. The stage was set for England’s opening game against Croatia. Roy grinned as he heard chanting and singing and the murmur of pre-match conversations: crowd noises that he had missed for over a year.

It was back to real football. Football with fans. And Roy was sure England would start with a win. He glanced to grin at his sister, to see that she was staring at the pitch, her chin resting heavily on her hands.

‘What’s up?’ he asked.

Rocky shrugged.

Roy could tell something was worrying her. ‘Tell me,’ he pressed.

‘I’m still feeling weird about last night,’ Rocky confessed.

Roy nodded. He knew she was talking about Christian Eriksen. He remembered seeing on the TV how the Danish footballer fell suddenly in the game against Finland. And how the medical team had come to help immediately. And the other things that they'd seen on screen. Roy had to be honest with himself: he felt troubled by it too.

'Did it worry you?' Roy tried.

'Yes,' Rocky said.

So Roy and Rocky spent the rest of the time before kick-off chatting about how the events in Copenhagen had made them feel. Rocky ended the conversation telling her brother that the medical team were the real heroes, not the footballers.

Roy agreed. And he was pleased they'd talked about it. It helps to talk about things that worry you.



And then the football. Roy and Rocky sat on the edge of their seats as England took the game to Croatia, pacy football in the 28 degree heat. Foden striking the post. Calvin Phillips hitting a ball through a crowd of players. Both players so close to scoring.

But then the match went quiet.

'It's boring now,' Roy said, feeling again like someone was watching them, looking round to see a dark shape in the shadows of the stands opposite.

Rocky shrugged.

'Don't you think it's boring?' Roy asked, noticing Rocky tracking one player in particular.

'No,' she said, not taking her eyes off an English midfielder. 'I'm watching Calvin Phillips. He's amazing.'

'Is he?'

'Sometimes I wonder how you are a professional footballer, Roy. You're no student of the game, are you? Phillips is class. Eighteen passes. All successful,' she said. 'He's made four small fouls to break up the play. But avoided a

booking. And that shot he had. He nearly scored. He's the kind of player I want to be.'

It was **England 0 Croatia 0** at half time. England had not scored, even after all that pressure. As a result, the game was becoming tense. England no longer on top. And that tension continued into the second half. Until the 57<sup>th</sup> minute, that was.

When a pass reached Calvin Phillips. Two touches, then he slid a ball through to Raheem Sterling, who clipped it past the Croatian keeper.

GOAL!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Rocky leapt off her seat and grabbed her brother, screaming in his face. Roy punched the air. One-nil.

And that is how the game finished.



Leaving the stadium through the Wembley fans' exit with Toby Morton, they knew they'd find themselves in Mel Park again. That it would be quiet. No crowd. No blazing sunshine. No people. Just them and Toby Morton.

Except they were wrong.

The dark figure Roy had seen fleetingly for a couple of days was standing there in the open, not hiding anymore.

Toby Morton stopped and stood in front of the two young footballers. Roy noticed that their friendly ghost appeared to fade, tremble. As if his energy was draining away.

'Roy and Rocky Race, I presume?' the figure said. Toby Morton seemed stunned into silence. 'So you've been taking advantage of Toby's ghost travel service?'

Roy and Rocky said nothing, but felt frozen. Morton was silent. Almost invisible now.

'Let me introduce myself. I am Carlos Villar. And you are my enemies.'

'Us?' Rocky gasped. 'Why?'

'You. All of you. Melchester Rovers. I despised you when I was alive. I despise you even more now I am dead. A ghost. Like Toby here.'

'So what are you going to do?' Roy stepped forward.

Villar laughed a menacing laugh. 'I'll tell you exactly what I am going to do,' he cackled.

**Roy and Rocky have had a great day at the England-Croatia game. England were off to a flier and the brother and sister were all excited and looking forward to a month of football across Europe. But now they are faced with a threat from Carlos Villar. And *you* have to choose what that threat is and what their main challenge is going to be for the rest of this story.**

**Your class can choose one option. Whichever option gets the most votes will become the main storyline of this story.**

**A – Villar says he is going to mess things up for all three UK teams at the EUROs, Wales, Scotland and England. Roy and Rocky have to stop him.**

**B – Villar says he intends to ruin Roy and Rocky's careers by tricking them, because he despises Melchester Rovers and he knows they are the club's future.**

**C – Villar says he will find a way to stop Rocky and Roy's postcards reaching their dad, meaning they won't be able to do what their dad asked them to with his last word.**

**One vote per class. You can vote by visiting <https://tompalmer.co.uk/euro-2020-a-ghost-story/>. Please vote before 7p.m. on Monday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2021. But if you can vote nice and early it will help Tom. Thank you!**

*Tom would like to say thank you to the schools who have suggested ideas for chapter two and beyond. As you can see I've used some of them. Keep them coming.*