



Euro 2020: A Ghost Story by Tom Palmer

Chapter Three

Roy and Rocky had enjoyed England's victory over Croatia until they were confronted by the ghost of a man claiming to be called Carlos Villar. Villar told them that he was their enemy and that he planned to make trouble for them. But why? And just who is Carlos Villar, anyway? And what trouble did he have in mind?

Sun 13th June, 5 p.m.

The blazing sunshine faded as Carlos Villar laughed, repeating his intention. 'I'll tell you exactly what I am going to do,' he smirked.

Roy glanced up to see the only cloud in the sky eclipse the sun over Wembley Stadium. He scowled. What on earth was happening?

'Go on then,' Rocky taunted Villar, noticing him wince slightly, his dark moustache twitching, before he recovered himself.

'I shall...' the ghost purred. 'I am going to make sure the British teams carry on as they always do at the EUROS. Badly. Your pathetic British teams that never win anything. I will make menace. For all. For Wales. For Scotland. For England.'

'That's not true,' Roy countered. 'Wales got into the semis last time.'

But Villar had gone, disappearing, leaving a strange dark swirling mist and the stench of sewage in his place.

Roy glanced at Toby Morton. 'Is he for real?'

Morton shuddered. 'Oh yes,' he replied.

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‘Like he could really affect the games?’ Roy queried.

‘Maybe. It’s possible.’

‘Who is he, anyway? Villar? He stinks,’ Rocky joked.

‘Carlos Villar? Ask your dad,’ Morton muttered. ‘Come on. We need to go. I’m feeling weak. He does that to me.’

Rocky and Roy heard the sounds of the crowd at Wembley fading, replaced by football rattles and the smell of cigarette smoke. And soon they found themselves back at Mel Park in Melchester. Happy, but unhappy too.



Monday 14th June, morning

The next morning – at breakfast – Roy and Rocky prepared to ask Dad about Carlos Villar. They were all together at the kitchen table. It was something Mum insisted on if they could. To eat meals together. Their dad was ill. Two years earlier dad had suffered a brain tumour. A cancer in his head. It meant he could barely speak and that he had lost the use of his left side. His arm. His leg. Mum’s hope was that, if they ate together, it might help him get better.

‘How was Rome?’ Mum asked, smirking. She didn’t believe they’d been.

‘Great thanks,’ Roy said.

‘Course it was,’ Mum laughed. ‘Where are you going next? Munich?’

‘Yeah,’ Rocky smiled. ‘That’s the plan.’

‘Dad?’ Roy interrupted the teasing. ‘Who was Carlos Villar?’

Dad’s reaction was remarkable. He jerked in his wheelchair and his eyebrows furrowed. Dad never looked angry. Not normally. But today he did. He made a gesture with his right arm.

‘The scrapbooks,’ Mum said. ‘Do you want us to find your Mel Rovers scrapbooks?’

It never failed to amaze Roy how his mum could guess what his dad meant just from a single gesture.

Once they had Dad's scrapbooks, newspaper clippings about when Melchester Rovers were one of the best teams in Europe, in the 1970s, they found what they were looking for. Carlos Villar had played for one of their great rivals and was the dirtiest of players, the most corrupt of managers and had been prosecuted for bribery and kidnap. In addition, he seemed to have a weird hatred of Melchester Rovers and any other British team. Rocky saw a photo of Villar in a scrapbook, confirming that was who they had seen outside Wembley. She shivered. Even alive, he looked... evil.

'Why the interest in Villar?' Mum asked.

'Just research,' Rocky said as they heard the letter box in the hall clatter.

Distracted, Mum went to fetch the post. Her face was pale when she returned, her mouth hanging open.

'What's up Mum?' Roy asked.

Mum was holding a postcard. It said **I love ROMA** on it, with a picture of the Colosseum.

'Seeeeeee,' Rocky said. 'We promised we'd send you a postcard from Rome. You'll get one from Munich, too.'

'Good,' Dad said. 'Rome.'

Roy couldn't help but look into Rocky's eyes. Dad was speaking more. Maybe he *was* getting better! This was amazing. They wanted to get him more postcards. The postcards were starting to feel as important as the football.



Monday 14th June, afternoon

That afternoon Roy's teammate – Lofty Peak – came round to watch Scotland vs Czech Republic.

They all wanted Scotland to win. But when the Czechs went one-nil up with a pinpoint header from Patrik Schick, Roy and Rocky couldn't see anything weird that had gone on. It was a fair goal. The Czechs deserved their lead. There were no signs that Villar had anything to do with it.

It was Lofty who raised concerns about the second Czech goal. It was a weird one. They watched the replay to see that Schick took a pass from his own half, touched it once over the half-way line, then hoofed the ball towards the goal.

And it went in. Looping over the Scottish keeper, who ended up trapped in his net like a floundering fish.

‘That shouldn’t have gone in,’ Lofty objected. ‘Did you see how it dipped at the end? It was going miles over. I tell you, it didn’t look right. I don’t get how that didn’t fly over the bar.’

Roy and Rocky stared at the screen, then at each other. They were both thinking the same thing. Had Villar just done what he said he’d do? To Scotland? Had it started?



Tuesday 15th June

Roy and Rocky made their way to Mel Park in time to be transported to Munich for the France-Germany game. Once in Munich, they found a little shop selling pretzel pastries and bought a postcard and a stamp. They said ‘Danke’, and then left to find a post box to send it home to Dad. That was the most important thing to do.



The match was good. Two strong teams. France superior. Rocky frowned watching it.

‘Why so gloomy?’ Roy asked.

‘You do realise that if we finish top of our group we have to play whoever comes second out of France, Germany and Portugal. Don’t you?’

‘Let’s take every game as it comes, shall we?’ Roy muttered. But he knew his sister had a point. Would it be better if England came second in group D?

When the final whistle went the score was France 1 Germany 0. An own goal deciding it.

‘It’s weird seeing Germany lose, though, isn’t it?’ Rocky mused as they stood up to leave the stadium.



Arriving back at Mel Park, as they walked home through the darkening streets, Roy and Rocky talked about the next day. They’d not seen Villar in Munich. But then he’d made no threat towards France or Germany. It was the British teams they needed to worry about. It was possible he’d already caused Scotland to lose to the Czech Republic.

His next crimes might take place in Baku. Tomorrow. At Wales vs Turkey.

Roy and Rocky pledged to do everything they could to make sure Villar didn’t mess with Wales’ EURO hopes. They would go to Baku. They would try to stop any ill deeds that Carlos Villar had planned for the trio of British teams.

Now Rocky and Roy are heading to Baku in Azerbaijan with Lofty and the ghost of Toby Morton. Their mission to stop Carlos Villar making trouble for Wales. Wales’ best chance to qualify for the knock out stages of EURO 2020 is to beat Russia. Roy and Rocky are determined to make sure everything is fair.

Thank you for reading.

Find out what happens in Baku in chapter four, which will be published at 7.30 a.m. on Friday 18th June.

Tom would like to say thank you to all the schools who voted for how you wanted our story to play out. The votes were close with 24% for C, 36% for B and 40% for A. There will be another chance to vote in a few days. Thanks for reading!