

## ***DETECTIVE NO MORE***

‘Sit in there.’

Mum pointed into the front room. Her voice was ice-cold. Danny had heard her speak like this to his sister. But never him. It was a horrible feeling.

He went into the front room and sat down.

Then he waited. On the sofa, a tasselled cushion on his knee. The curtains were drawn, a table lamp lit.

His mum and dad were in the kitchen.

He tried to work out what was going on by listening. He closed his eyes to focus. But he could only hear the odd word, not full sentences.

Still, he knew they were arguing.

Arguing.

'... that you encourage him to do this sort of thing ...' he heard his mum say.

'He's fourteen ... freedom,' Dad replied.

'Does he?'

'Yes, because isn't it better he does it ... his *life* ... take this away from him...'

But Danny wasn't getting everything. Their words were broken by noises from the kitchen. And other noises: his sister's soft footsteps coming down the stairs.

Danny swallowed. This was great. He'd been arrested and cautioned by the police. His parents were arguing because of him. He was going to get

some serious punishment. And his sister was about to come into the room.

Danny breathed in. His chest ached. Could it get any worse?

'Hey, Danny Boy.'

*Danny Boy* wasn't good. *Danny Boy* meant Emily knew she had the upper hand.

Danny said nothing.

'What have you done?' Emily asked. She was beaming with delight.

'Nothing,' Danny said.

'I don't think so,' Emily said, her voice breaking into a laugh.

Danny shrugged. He knew what his sister was thinking. He knew she was delighted that for once it

was not her who was in trouble, but Danny.

‘So why are Mum and Dad arguing about you?’ Emily insisted.

Danny blanked his sister. He had nothing to say to her. All she wanted to do was stir it. She didn’t care about him.

Then his mum’s voice, coming from the hallway. ‘Upstairs, Emily.’

‘But I want to watch TV,’ Emily purred.

‘Upstairs.’

Danny watched Emily pausing, wondering what to do. He could see her calculating.

‘OK.’ She shrugged. ‘Call me when you’re done with him.’ She was beaming again.

Danny listened to her footsteps dancing up the

stairs as his mum followed his dad into the sitting room. Mum shut the door behind her.

Another pause. A too-long pause. And Danny found himself craving his parents’ anger.

He could see Mum looking at Dad. As if she wanted him to start telling Danny off. But he was sat stony-faced, speechless.

‘What were you doing?’ Mum asked, her voice surprisingly soft.

Danny had decided to be completely honest with them about what he had done. He knew – from experience – what happened when you lied. It came back to haunt you. And he wanted to get this over with.

‘I was watching who was coming in and out of the

stadium,' he confessed. 'To see if I could find out anything about the people who want to buy City.'

*That was honest, he thought. That was clear.*

'And you needed to truant from school, trespass on private property and get yourself arrested to do that?' Mum said, still soft. Frighteningly soft.

'I'm sorry,' Danny said. He knew that after honesty, the best thing to do was to apologize.

'So am I, Danny,' Mum said, looking at Dad. 'So am I.'

But Dad added nothing.

And Mum stood up. 'This is one of the most horrible days of my life, Danny.' Her voice was hard and strained.

Danny looked at her. Her eyes were red. She went

on.

'I never thought I'd have to go and pick my son up from a police station because he had been arrested – *and* hear him cautioned.' Mum's voice was increasing in volume now. 'And then to hear you ... to hear you explain it away like it is normal for you to get caught trespassing. Like it is normal for you to truant from school.' Mum sat down, staring fiercely out of the window. Not at him.

'It has to stop, Danny,' Dad said quietly.

'What?'

'Putting yourself in danger. Missing school. Breaking the law,' Dad said.

Danny nodded. 'OK.'

'Do you want to be a detective?' Mum interrupted

sharply.

Danny wasn't sure how to answer.

Mum caught his eye. 'I mean in the future,' she said. 'When you're an adult.'

'Yes,' Danny said.

'Well, it won't happen if you get a conviction, Danny,' she said. 'You can't join the police if you have a conviction. Your life changes forever if you get a conviction. You can't go to places like America. You can't get all sorts of jobs. You're marked once you've been convicted.'

Danny nodded. 'I know,' he said.

'That's it, then,' Mum said.

Danny did not reply. He knew what was coming. His punishment. And he could see that Mum was

looking at Dad again. She was going to make him deliver the final blow.

'No more, Danny,' Dad said, understanding it was his turn to speak.

'No more what?' Danny asked.

'No more of all this,' Mum interrupted. 'I want the maps down off your walls. I want the notebooks packed away. I want the desk and the swivel chair out. I want it all to stop.'

Danny's mouth went dry. He couldn't imagine his room without his maps and notebooks. Without his detective agency.

But he'd brought it on himself. He knew that too.

And there was no arguing with Mum. Not this time.

Upstairs, Danny gently eased the pins out of his wall. His giant map of the city cracked and crumpled as he took it down. He placed everything in a box. And when it was all in the box, he closed the lid.

He felt terrible. Like he was cutting an organ out of his body and packing it away.

Once he'd finished he picked up his mobile and called Charlotte. He needed to talk to her too.

The phone rang only twice before she picked up. Danny took it as a good sign. She was going to be OK with him.

Except she hadn't picked up; she'd hung up.

He called again. Two rings. Then the busy signal again.

Danny stared at the bare walls of his bedroom. And back at his unanswered phone.

Then he closed his eyes and began to wonder: what *had* he done?