

MONDAY

FAIR TRADE

Breaktime. Monday morning. And it was Danny's first chance to talk to Charlotte and Paul that week.

They met at the usual place: their *secret* place.

At one end of the school there was a four-flight staircase. Between lessons it filled with students going from English to maths, drama to science. But at breaks and dinnertime it was quiet. Empty. So nobody would notice if you carried on going down

after the ground floor to an extra set of steps that served as a fire escape.

Except Danny, Paul and Charlotte. This was where they went. So they didn't have to go outside or be moved along the corridors by teachers.

Danny was first there. Then Charlotte.

Even before she sat down Danny sensed that, today, Charlotte was unusually quiet. And not looking particularly happy either. He had wanted to talk to her about his mum and dad. How they didn't seem to be getting on. But it looked like *she* needed to talk more than he did.

'What's up?' Danny asked carefully.

'Nothing,' Charlotte said, not looking Danny in the eye.

'What's up?' Danny repeated.

Charlotte sighed. 'Nothing.'

'What's up?' Danny said, grinning.

Charlotte gazed out of the bottom doors and sighed again. Danny looked at her. Her shoulder-length hair had grown since they had become friends. Now it was curling down the back of her school uniform.

'Your sister,' she said, facing him.

Danny's heart froze. His sister?

'What about her?' he said cautiously.

'She's just funny with me, that's all.'

'Like what?'

'I dunno. She acts all nice and friendly. But ... I'm not sure. Why is she being so nice to me? She's not

supposed to be nice. She's *supposed* to be angry and rebellious.'

Danny could feel himself going tense inside. He knew what Emily was up to. She was playing games. She was always playing games. But what game was she playing now? And why with Charlotte?

'She and Mum are arguing a lot,' Danny said eventually, trying to say something that had nothing to do with him and Charlotte.

Charlotte shrugged. Then neither of them spoke for a minute.

Danny was relieved to hear Paul's footsteps on the stairs.

'Where've *you* been?' Charlotte said.

'In the library,' Paul said breathlessly. 'Online.'

Danny waited for Paul to say more. It was clear he had something to tell them.

'They reckon there's some sort of meeting going on at City today,' Paul said. 'About the takeover. But City are denying it.'

'What meeting?' Danny said quickly, standing up. He was surprised that his voice echoed loudly around the stairwell.

'Something to do with the Russians. Or whoever it is that's taking over.'

'We need to get down there,' Danny said. 'There'll be a protest.'

Danny heard Charlotte laughing.

'What?' Danny asked, irritated.

'There'll only be a protest if *you* go down there,'

she said. 'Nobody else is bothered.'

'Yes, they are,' Danny shouted. His voice echoed again. So much so that Paul gave him a warning look.

'Everyone's at work or at school,' Charlotte said. 'It's Monday. There'll be no one there. Is there anyone there, Paul?'

'No,' Paul said, looking at his friend. 'No one. Not so far anyway.'

'Well, *I'm* going.'

Charlotte stood up. 'No, you're not.'

Her voice was loud. Danny was shocked.

'I am,' he said, defiant.

'You're not going, Danny. You're at school today. It's Monday. And, if you've not forgotten, you're a

schoolboy.'

Charlotte's face should have been smiling, Danny thought. It normally was when she was arguing with him. But this time it wasn't. Danny felt weird. She sounded like his mum.

Danny said nothing. He'd bunked off to go down to the City Stadium before. If he went, he wasn't going to tell Charlotte. Not if she was going to be like this.

Charlotte picked up on his silence. 'You're thinking about it,' she said.

'So?'

'So promise me you're not going.'

Danny shrugged.

'Promise me, Danny.'

Charlotte *did* sound like his mum now. Why was she being like this?

He could feel her eyes on him. And Paul's. Pressure building.

'I won't go. All right?' Danny said almost automatically. Not having a clue why the conversation was going the way it was.

'Yes,' said Charlotte. She tapped him on the head with her folder. 'I'm off now. You two are only going to talk about football. And, frankly, I've got better things to do.'

Paul and Danny stood in silence, listening to Charlotte's footsteps going up the stairs.

Paul raised his eyebrows at Danny.

'What?' he said. He felt defensive. Uneasy.

'You and her,' Paul said.

'What?'

But before Paul could reply, the school bell went. He grinned at Danny. 'What have you got next?' he asked. 'History?'

'Yeah,' Danny said, relieved that Paul had obviously let him off the hook this time. 'I'll see you later.'

Paul sprinted up half the steps, then turned to look back at Danny, who was still standing there.

'You are *going* to history?'

'Course I am,' Danny said, smiling.

History this term meant slavery.

Having to be in this lesson instead of casing the

City Stadium felt a bit like slavery to Danny. He was desperate not to be there.

'So who can remind us of what we covered in the last lesson?' the teacher, Mr Reynolds, asked.

No one spoke. They just stared at the display he'd made on the wall last term. For Black History Month. Pictures of boats full of black people in chains. Diagrams of how many slaves could be fitted into one ship.

'Danny?'

Danny knew that was coming. More often than not Mr Reynolds would ask *him* to recap the previous lesson. He didn't know why.

'We talked about the transatlantic slave trade, sir.'

'And what did we learn?'

'That the British bought millions of slaves from Africa, shipped them to places like America and the West Indies. And that cities like Liverpool and Bristol were built on the profits of slavery.'

'Good. And where did most of this happen in Africa?'

'The Gold Coast,' Danny replied, surprising himself.

'And why was the Gold Coast called that?'

Danny wondered why he was getting this inquisition. He wanted to think about City. Not slaves. He was sure the slaves had had a bad time, but he didn't want to worry about that now. So he decided to stop answering. Maybe Mr Reynolds

would ask someone else.

‘Danny?’ Mr Reynolds said.

Danny sighed. He wasn’t sure of this answer anyway. ‘Because they paid for the slaves in gold?’

Mr Reynolds looked like he was thinking for a second. Then he smiled and said, ‘No. Good try, Danny. But the answer is that it was because, before the British traded *slaves* through the Gold Coast, they traded *gold*. Like further west they traded *ivory*.’

Danny had switched off. He was looking out of the window.

‘You’ve heard of Didier Drogba?’ Mr Reynolds asked.

Danny suddenly snapped to. ‘Yes,’ he said,

uncertain what the teacher was up to.

‘Well, he was from the *Ivory Coast* – before he was raised in France: the coast where they traded *ivory*.’

Danny wondered if Mr Reynolds was doing this on purpose, talking about football. To get his attention. Whatever. Now he was certain that once this class was over he was going. To City. To see what on earth was going on.