

The Mystery of the Stolen FA Cup Medal

Tom Palmer

Part one: introducing David Rooney, football fan

David Rooney looked at the clock above the fireplace.

Eight-thirty. Time for bed.

He picked up his portable radio, switched off the front room light and went up the staircase to his bedroom, leaving the hall light on because his mum would need it to see by when she came home at midnight.

David kept his radio on as he went up the stairs. He'd been listening to a football match and it was half time now.

Liverpool 1 United 1.

David always listened to football in the evenings. There *was* a television in the house, but most football was on satellite television and it cost £40 a month. There was no way his mum could afford that. She had to work hard enough just to put food on the table. That's what she always said.

David's mum worked in a pub in the evenings and at weekends during the day.

He didn't have a dad. Or a brother and sister.

When he'd brushed his teeth and was in his pyjamas, David looked out across the housing estate where he lived. There was a group of kids from the high school standing outside the shops. They were kicking an empty Coke can around on the floor.

David closed the curtains quickly and got into bed.

He had until half past ten to read. Then it was lights out. That was his mum's rule. And he always stuck to his mum's rules.

David picked up a book he'd borrowed from the library. An Illustrated History of United Football Club. And then he was lost in the facts and pictures about his favourite team, as he listened to the match.

David was allowed to stay up until 9.30pm. That's when matches finished usually.

An hour later David's light was off and his eyes were shut. United had drawn at Liverpool. 2-2. So he was neither happy nor sad.

This was one of his favourite bits of the day. He closed his eyes and pretended he had been at the United game, chanting with the crowd, celebrating the goals. He did this every night. This was how he got to sleep without his mum being in the house. It was something he'd taught himself.

Although he lived less than a mile from United's stadium, David had never been to see them play. That cost £50 a ticket. Too much.

Sometimes noises interrupted David's football fantasies.

The kids on the street outside.

Police cars going past with their sirens blasting.

And, sometimes, noises from next door.

David had never met his next door neighbour. In fact, he barely knew anyone in the street where he lived. But he knew some things about the old man next door.

He knew he went to bed at 10pm. Because that was the time he could hear him brushing his teeth and switching his light off.

He also knew that every Saturday – and sometimes Sunday – a posh car would arrive and the old man would get into it and be away for a few hours. That that was the only time the man went out in a week.

David had asked his mum what she knew about the old man. But mum had said he was just an old man and she didn't want David talking to strangers.