EVE AINSWORTH

ALL TO PLAY FOR



ILLUSTRATED BY
KIRSTI BEAUTYMAN

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To the children of Milton Mount Primary School. Always strive to be the best you can be.



Chapter 1

Lewis was in his happy place.

It was just a strip of grass at the back of the estate where he lived. At one end stood the bins, where residents stacked up their rubbish and recycling. At the other end was the small, crowded car park.

But here, in the shadow of the tower blocks, Lewis could slam his ball against the grey wall that lay between the Seven Hills estate and the main road. And no one would bother him.

It was the start of the summer holidays and Lewis was glad that he had more time to spend outside.

Lewis didn't care that the road was just behind him. He blocked out the noise of the traffic and the sounds of music and chatter from the flats. All his focus was on controlling the ball. He loved the sound it made.

Thud, thud, thud.

Lewis carefully controlled every rebound with his right foot and then kicked it back to the wall with his left. He was trying to hit the same spot every time – a grey brick right in front of him. He needed to be dead accurate. He could feel his frustration grow every time he missed it even by a few centimetres. He would never get better if he kept doing that.

The ball wasn't a good one. His mum wouldn't buy him one, so Jermaine, his best

mate, had given Lewis one of his old ones. It used to be bright yellow, but the colour had faded a bit. There were patches where it was going bald, and it was heavy and flat.

Lewis didn't mind. Any ball was better than none. He kept it hidden in a tiny gap behind the bin store and every evening before his tea he came outside to practise.

Just across from the estate was the park and playing fields where most of the older boys played. Lewis watched them sometimes. They were tall and clumsy and shouted at each other a lot. It looked to Lewis as if they spent more time taking each other out than actually playing a decent game.

He had gone across once to ask if he could play, but that had been a mistake. They had laughed at his old trainers and said he was "skinny" and "weak". Lewis didn't bother asking again.



Anyway, he liked it here behind the tower blocks because it was quiet. No one could disturb him or wind him up. No one took any notice of him.

He liked it here because he could pretend to be somebody else. As he slammed the ball once more against the wall, hitting the grey brick perfectly, he raised his arms in the air, a tiny smile stretching across his face.

Just for a moment he could pretend he was like his hero, Sancho. At Wembley. Scoring the winning goal for England.

A proper footballer.

That was the best dream of all.

"Hey, Lewis!"

He looked up. Jermaine and Harry were standing by the car park, waving him over. Jermaine's dad was in the car waiting for

them. They were dressed in bright blue football kits. Lewis looked down at their feet and then at his. They both had the newest and best boots on, not like his scruffy trainers. He knew those boots were really expensive. And that made him feel even more left out.

Lewis picked up his ball and strolled over. He felt shy, which was silly really. Jermaine had been his best friend since Nursery. Even so, he didn't like people seeing him practising.

"Are you going to training?" Lewis asked.

Jermaine went to a football training school called Ace Academy on the other side of town. It was meant to be a really good one. Jermaine had been nagging Lewis to go for ages, but Lewis knew his mum would never agree. Now the training school was running a club over the summer holidays and Jermaine was going to it.

Jermaine nodded. "Dad's taking us now." He looked slowly over at Lewis. "It would be great if you could come one time, Lew? We could take you too."

"Yeah, you should come," Harry said. "You'd be so good."

Lewis smiled. "Nah – it's OK. I'm not bothered about training. I'm not into it that badly."

It was so easy to lie. Lewis knew Jermaine could see right through it, but his friend didn't say anything. Instead, he just nodded slowly.

"Well – the offer is there, yeah?" Jermaine said.

"Thanks."

Lewis watched as the boys piled into the car. Jermaine's dad gave him a friendly wave. Lewis felt small and sad as he watched them pull

away. A part of him longed to run after them, to call them back. To tell them that he had been wrong. He did want to go. He wanted to go more than anything. But Lewis had found out how much the football school cost ages ago and it was really expensive.

Lewis walked back over to the bin store and carefully pushed his ball back into its hiding hole.

It didn't matter anyway. Even if she could afford it, Mum would never let him play football.

Not after what happened to his dad.