EVE AINSWORTH



SEEING RED

Illustrated by LUNA VALENTINE

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Barrington Stoke

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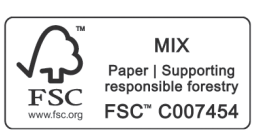
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For Riley – a ray of sunshine.
Keep being awesome xx

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CHAPTER 1

LATE AGAIN

Amelia was woken by her alarm going off. She groaned and pulled the duvet over her head. It felt far too early to be getting up. Her body felt stiff, and her eyes were still heavy with sleep. All she wanted to do was slip back into her dreams. She shut her eyes, and warmth swept over her. Suddenly, she was back in her dream, on the pitch with the ball at her feet, playing at Wembley.

Half an hour later, Amelia woke again with a jolt. Her heart thudded hard in her chest. She'd overslept! She couldn't be late for school again

today. Mrs Rogan would give her a detention for sure, and Amelia had football training tonight.

Slowly, Amelia dragged herself out of bed. It was a dark, grey morning, and she could hear the rain lashing at her window. She shivered and reached for her dressing gown at the end of the bed.

She only had twenty minutes to have a shower, eat breakfast and get dressed. She looked around for her school uniform and spotted it in a crumpled mess on the floor. It needed to be washed, but Amelia couldn't worry about that now.

Maybe Mum would give her a lift, she thought as she padded out towards the bathroom. That would save Amelia some time.

The flat was in darkness, and Mum's bedroom door was firmly shut. She pushed it open carefully and peered into the murky room. She could just about make out Mum's shape

huddled on the bed. Her covers were pulled up tight around her, making Mum look like a caterpillar in its cocoon.

"Mum?" Amelia whispered, and then repeated a bit louder, "Mum? Are you awake? I'm late for school again."

Her mum groaned and rolled over slowly.

"Please, Mum, I'm going to get into trouble."

"I'm sorry, Amelia," her mum mumbled. "I'm not well. You should have gone to bed earlier. You'll just have to walk fast."

As Amelia showered, tears flooded from her eyes, but she tried to ignore them. It wasn't fair, what Mum had said. The only reason Amelia had gone to bed late was because she had waited up until Mum was in bed to make sure she was OK. And Amelia always walked to school fast, so that wouldn't make any difference.

Mum had been like this ever since Dad had left a few weeks ago. There had been days of constant loud arguments, then suddenly the front door had slammed shut, and Amelia's world had changed.

Her parents had always argued; this was something that Amelia had grown used to – the shouting, the crying and the slamming of doors. It had never ended in one of her parents leaving before. Not for good anyway.

After one of their big arguments, her parents would try to make things up to Amelia by buying her nice things or fussing over her. Amelia would tell herself that everything was OK because she had everything she wanted. Yet deep down she had known her mum and dad weren't happy.

But now things were really bad. Her mum spent a lot of time in bed or sitting on the sofa in a tatty dressing gown, watching TV and crying over silly things. She hadn't gone

to work since Dad had left, and Amelia was worried. She knew that her mum's boss had been calling. Mum was expected to go back and do her shifts at the cafe. How long would it be until she lost her job?

When Dad had been here, there had been good days between the bad days. Her mum had cooked dinners and cleaned the flat. Her dad had been there to talk to Amelia about football and help her with her homework – especially Maths.

But now he was gone and was staying at her nan's, miles away. He'd tried to call Amelia a few times, but she hadn't answered. She was too angry. He had abandoned her and Mum. He'd left them both when they needed him most.

Amelia could never forgive him for that.

*

After getting out of the shower, Amelia rushed to get ready. She spotted the dirty plates in the sink that she had been too tired to wash last night and poured some hot water on them to soak. She would clean them when she got back later. Then she scooped up her dirty football kit



from Saturday's match and put it in the washing machine. She'd asked Mum to do it yesterday, but she must have forgotten. Just like she had forgotten to wash Amelia's school uniform.

Mum seemed to be forgetting a lot of things at the moment.

Amelia glanced at the time. She now only had ten minutes to get to school, and the walk took at least fifteen. She would have to jog some of the way.

Amelia decided to skip breakfast. She grabbed a biscuit instead, dragged a brush through her messy hair and picked up her schoolbag that was sitting by the front door.

It was only when she was halfway to school that she realised she had forgotten to do her Maths homework last night.

She was definitely going to be in trouble.

As she jogged the last part of the way to school, Amelia tried to calm her mind by thinking about the upcoming game against the Panthers. It was going to be a tough match for her team, the Lightmoor Lionesses. Amelia knew that their coach, Mr Allen, was keen for them to do well. The Panthers were top of the league and unbeaten for seven games.

Amelia felt herself begin to relax as she thought about being on the pitch again. Things always felt better when she was with her team, fighting for a win and being part of something special. When she was playing football, Amelia didn't have to worry about school, or home, or whether or not her mum would be OK. She could just focus on one thing – winning. She knew she wasn't the best player on the pitch, but she was determined to get better.

Amelia picked up speed as she neared the school gates. One thing was for certain – she couldn't miss training tonight. If she wasn't

there, there was a good chance she wouldn't be selected for the match on Saturday, and that would be awful. She rushed into the playground, puffing past Mr Leon, the head teacher. He frowned at her as she passed.

"You just made it on time, Amelia Ross," he warned, tapping his clipboard. "But this is the third day in a row you've arrived on the bell. Please improve your timekeeping."

Amelia could only nod as she ran over to the main building. Her body was already hot and uncomfortable, and she knew her hair was a mess. This was the way every day seemed to start for Amelia now.

She just hoped that things would improve.