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Opening extract from

One Nil

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For Oscar – the best footballer I know



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Chapter 1
Secret Training

"You're kidding," said Luke. "You must be joking!"

"I'm not," said Jamie. "My dad said the full England squad are training at the City ground tomorrow morning."

'Jamie's dad should know,' thought Luke. After all, his job was looking after the pitch at City, the local club. He was the chief groundsman. Jamie and Luke were best mates,

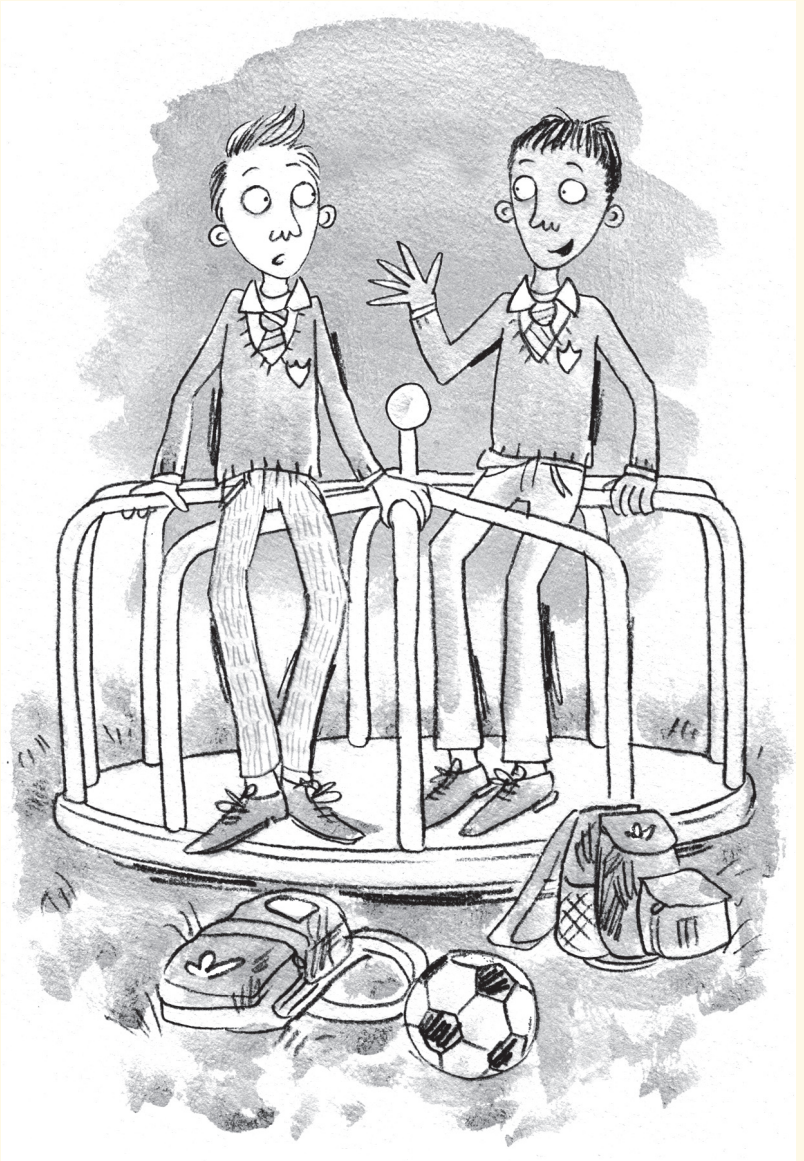
and they were both in their school's football team. Luke had often gone to City with Jamie. Jamie could get in any time because his dad worked there.

Luke and Jamie were on their way home from school. When they got to the gates of the local park, they stopped. Most afternoons they had a kick-about there. But today they went over to the playground and sat on the roundabout instead.

"My dad says no one's meant to know. It's a big secret," said Jamie.

"They must want to practise some set-piece moves without anyone seeing them," said Luke. "It's the big match next week, isn't it?"

England were due to play France in a World Cup game.



“Plus my dad says I can have the day off to go down and watch them train,” said Jamie. “Do you want to come too?”

Luke closed his eyes. The roundabout was going round, and he dreamed he was standing on the centre spot in a great stadium. He was turning so he could wave to the crowd. He couldn’t think of anything he’d rather do than watch England training – unless it was to pull on a real England shirt, trot out onto the pitch and score a goal. In his mind he saw his hero Steve Browning crossing the ball, he heard the crowd roaring …

“But I bet your mum won’t let you have the day off,” said Jamie.

Luke opened his eyes. Jamie was right.

He knew it wasn’t even worth asking his mum. She didn’t like football, or think it was important. And when it came to having time off

school, she was very strict. She got cross if she thought Luke was trying it on.

Luke felt really fed up. The England squad – including Steve Browning – were going to be so close. But they might as well be on the moon for all the good it would do him.

Then suddenly he had an idea.

“I’ll be there, Jamie,” he said. “I’m not missing out on this.”

There was one thing that might make his mum let him stay away from school. But it would need very careful planning …