Helping your children choose books they will love

I reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

Over the Line

Written by

Tom Palmer

Published by

Barrington Stoke Ltd

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

First published in 2014 in Great Britain by
Barrington Stoke Ltd
18 Walker Street, Edinburgh, EH3 7LP

www.barringtonstoke.co.uk
www.firstworldwarfictionforkids.co.uk

Text © 2014 Tom Palmer
Illustrations © 2014 Ollie Cuthbertson

The moral right of Tom Palmer and Ollie Cuthbertson to be identified as the author and illustrator of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in whole or in any part in any form without the written permission of the publisher

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library upon request

ISBN: 978-1-78112-393-5

Printed in China by Leo

For Jack

Do people ever ask what you want to be when you grow up?

What do you say to them?

That you'd like to be a doctor? A singer? A soldier? A vet?

Or do you say, "I want to be a footballer"?

That was my dream when I was a boy. To be a footballer. To play for my country.

And, for me, the dream came true.

Sort of.

So, now I am waiting for the whistle. When that whistle blows, my dream to play for my country will come true. I will go over the line.

But I never dreamed it would be like this.

Part 1

Footballer



ONE

It was the day of my debut as a professional footballer. My dream had come true.

But even when your dream comes true, you still have to keep trying.

Within a minute of kick-off, Fred Bullock passed the ball to me. He was my team captain at Huddersfield Town. I controlled the ball with my left foot, then played it wide to our winger. So far, so good.

Now it was my duty to get into the penalty area. I was a forward. I was a goal scorer. Our winger would cross the ball soon, so I needed to get up field.

The mud was thick on the pitch, even though the game had only just begun.

A Grimsby defender tracked me as I powered towards the goal. Sid Wheelhouse. His deep-furrowed frown made him look like a bull and he was big too. Big and strong.

The ball came in from the left.

I strained every muscle to reach it.

I lunged towards the Grimsby keeper. But somehow Wheelhouse had come between us. I hit him hard, but I just bounced off him and the keeper collected the ball close to his chest.

No goal. Not a sniff of a goal. And I wanted one.

The first half of that first game was tough. I didn't get past Wheelhouse once. He tracked my runs. He beat me to the ball. He protected his goalkeeper.

When the referee blew the whistle for half-time, I put my hands on my knees.

All that effort and nothing to show for it. I felt a fierce frustration deep inside – a sense of panic that things weren't going to plan. I had to do better in the second half.

Or this could end up being my last game as a professional footballer, as well as my first.

I followed my team-mates off the pitch, the sweat on my body cooling now I had stopped running.

Fred Bullock came up to me and gave me a powerful slap on the back. He pushed back his



dark hair and smiled. "You worked hard," he said. "You got into the right places. Keep doing what you're doing."

I nodded, still too breathless to talk. But I was pleased. Perhaps I hadn't been as bad as I thought.

As we walked off the pitch, I saw a group of people gathered by the players' tunnel. They were shouting and waving wooden signs.

"Who are they?" I asked Bullock.

"Protesters," he replied.

"Protesters?" I said. "Against what?"

"Against footballers," he said. "You and me. They're angry that we're playing football, instead of fighting."

He meant fighting in France, as soldiers. The year was 1914 and our country was at war. The Germans had invaded Belgium and France and the British Army was over there fighting them. Tens of thousands of men had volunteered to join up.

"That bald man is an MP," Bullock went on. "He thinks there should be a battalion of football players."

I looked at the protesters as we passed. I understood why they wanted men to fight – young men like me. But this was my debut as a professional footballer. Why should a war come between me and my big chance? A war that would be over in weeks.

Then a woman stepped out of the crowd and reached out to give me something. Her hand was so cold that it shocked me. I took what she had given me, but I kept walking.

"Who was that woman?" I asked Bullock as we walked down the tunnel.

"Roebuck's wife," he said.

Larrett Roebuck was a Huddersfield Town player who had been killed by the Germans two months before. I had put some money into a fund for his family when he died.

And now Roebuck's wife had given me a piece of paper torn from a magazine. Bullock and I looked at it together. It was a cartoon. A character called Mr Punch was talking to a footballer at the side of the pitch. "No doubt you can make money on the football field," it said,



"but there's only one field where you can get honour."

"What does it mean?" I asked Bullock.

Bullock paused. Then he asked, "You're making money playing football today?"

"Yes, of course," I said. "It's my job. I get paid."

"The cartoon is asking if you get honour from it too," Bullock explained. "As well as money."

"Honour?" I asked. "Like I would get if I was fighting?"

"That's it," Bullock said. His face was serious. "That question is for you and me. How can we play on a football field, when men like Roebuck are dying in France on the field of war? We need to go too. That's the honourable thing to do."

I nodded. I understood now.

I also understood that Sid Wheelhouse was not the biggest threat to my football career. The biggest threat was the war.

"But forget that for now, Jack," Bullock said. "You need your mind on today's game, right?"

