



We won't have time to read the rest of this book this half term.

If you would like to read the rest of the book, this document has the rest of the pages you need.

THERE GOES MY EVERYTHING

"I have to tell your father," Mum says.

My eyes start to refocus. Mum's hand rests on my shoulder. She looks at me as though I've just woken up.

"Then I'm going to the hospital. To say goodbye. Do you want to come with me?"

"No," I mumble. "I'll stay here."

It's almost as though if I don't say goodbye, Grandma can't leave. If I don't see her, no one can prove that she's... no one can prove anything and it will never become real.

"Are you sure?" Mum asks. "I don't like the thought of you being here on your own like this."

"I'm okay," I say. "I'm sure."

She squeezes my shoulder and wipes a tear from her cheek.

"Okay," she says, straightening up. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

She closes her eyes and takes a deep breath. Then she steps out into the night.

I sit on the bald rug, picking at the tassels. There is still the smell of cigarette smoke in the air, the shape of Grandma in the cushions. Sitting in the gloom, I trick my ears into hearing her voice, my eyes into seeing the glowing tip of a cigarette. But it doesn't last.

A movement by the door makes me look up, and against the darkness of the street is an even darker silhouette.

"Little Lazaro," the voice says, "it's time to settle a debt."

The Dragon steps through the doorway and leans against the wall. His wet skin glistens, and his sirih-stained teeth look black when he smiles.

"Nobody saw this earthquake coming," he says, running a stubby finger along a crack in the wall. "Do you think I can still get the homeless to pay rent? Ha! It's just as well I've moved into other lines of business."

My hands clench into fists.

"I don't want to help you any more."

He frowns. "What was that? You want your father to

rot in a cell for the rest of his life? You want your mother to live in the slums? Is that what you really want, Little Lazaro?"

I look at the empty armchair and let out a long, slow breath. My hands relax.

"No, Bapak."

"Then get up and follow me."

The Dragon spits at me, his red saliva spattering the rug and mixing with my blood.

"Yes, Bapak."

I get to my feet and walk towards the door. But as I pass the Dragon, he grabs me by the shirt and leans in so close I can see the little red veins in his bloodshot eyes. He reaches down to his belt and draws something up to the side of my face.

A knife.

"Now, listen to me very carefully. My brother told me that while your father was being interrogated, he revealed a little family secret. It seems you all suffer from the same weakness." The Dragon moves the blade closer to my face. It flashes in the dim light. "The tiniest cut and it could all be over."

I want to tell him that it doesn't work like that. That it's bleeding on the inside that counts. That I'm bleeding

on the inside already. But then the Dragon snatches my hand and lifts it up between our faces. He squeezes my finger until blood oozes from the three cuts.

"I suggest you are very careful tonight. You wouldn't want to be the cause of a family tragedy, would you?"

When I don't reply the Dragon squeezes my finger again. I wince as fresh blood dribbles down to my palm.

"No, Bapak."

"Good boy." He lets go of my hand and tucks the knife into his belt. "Now, let's not keep your uncle waiting any longer."

The Dragon shoves me out into the rain and we pick our way through the rubble. Little streams of dirty water flow in the spaces between broken concrete. As the Dragon approaches, people fade into the shadows and disappear between ruined buildings. It feels as though we're walking through a ghost town.

We reach a car just off the main road and the Dragon tells me to get in the back. Uncle sits on the backseat, clutching a rucksack on his lap. He's wearing a pair of gloves, the plastic ones I've seen doctors wear when Kieran Wakefield needs treatment. Uncle smiles at me but I have to look away, out of the window. I thought I was doing the right thing by making Grandma's choice

for her, but now Uncle will never see his mother again. And it's all my fault.

Raindrops streak across the window as one of the Dragon's thugs drives us to the factory. Every so often the Dragon glances over his shoulder at us, but no one says anything. The only sound is the whining of the wiper things as they try to clear the screen, and the thudding of fat raindrops on the roof. Every few seconds a scooter splashes by, and the rain trails on the window glow white and flash red as it passes.

We pull in around the back of the factory, parking just out of sight of the gates. The engine is cut, the wipers stop mid-thrash, and the dying headlights plunge us into darkness. Raindrops rattle off the roof and bonnet like bullets. The Dragon twists around in his seat and checks his wristwatch.

"Give us the signal when you're in the compound," he says. "The van will be here any minute. Take your nephew with you."

"Can't Budi wait here?" Uncle says. "I'm used to working on my own. He doesn't need to come."

The Dragon shakes his head. "Take him with you – we might need him. He can carry your bag if nothing else."

Uncle glances at me, and we climb out of the car.

The rain falls so hard that my face and arms sting. We jog through a long puddle towards the chained gates and Uncle quickly glances over each shoulder to check we're not being watched. Then he digs into the rucksack and takes out some tools.

"Put these on," he says, snapping off his gloves and handing them to me. "The last thing we need is for all this to be traced back to you."

"But what about you?"

Uncle smiles. "I think I'm in trouble either way."

I pull them on, struggling to get the stretchy plastic over my wet hands.

"Point this at the padlock," he says, clicking a torch on and passing it to me.

I do as I'm told and watch as his fingers fiddle with the lock. I never thought you could actually pick a lock with a pin – I just thought it was something they did in the movies. But within a few seconds the padlock pops open, and Uncle unravels the chains that hold the gates together. He crouches down and works the bolt out of the ground before pushing the gates open.

"Budi, flash the torch twice at the car. Then turn it off."

I follow Uncle's instructions, and through the noise

of the rain I hear two car doors slam shut.

"Come on," Uncle says, passing the rucksack to me and hurrying through the gates. I swing the rucksack over my shoulder and follow him towards the container truck. In the darkness it looks like a living thing, long and dark like a huge whale. The factory looms up out of the gloom beyond it, and along one wall, on the other side of the chain-link fence, I see the rows of bins where I found Uncle. Despite everything, I can't help wondering if my poster of Kieran Wakefield is still in one of them.

When we reach the back of the truck, Uncle asks me to shine the torch again, and he starts picking the two padlocks that fasten the back doors. As he works the pins in the first lock I notice a van pulling in through the gates. Its headlights are off, and it rolls into the fenced enclosure without making a sound. It turns and reverses alongside the container truck, parking as close as possible. I recognize the two men who jump out of the driver's cab from the Dragon's house: Bayu and Boaz. They hunch against the rain and lift the shutter on the back of their van. They are wearing the same gloves as me. To start with they haul out a couple of barrels and a few crates, but then people start climbing out of the back. Most of them are men, but every so often a child is lowered into the rain.

The second padlock pops open, and Uncle lifts them both out of their holdings.

"Give me a hand," he says, grasping one of the levers and pulling it to the side.

I unhook the other lever and push with all my strength to prise the doors open.

And then we step back and stare into the truck. I shine the torch on stacks and stacks of shoeboxes, hundreds and hundreds of them piled up on wooden pallets and wrapped in plastic.

The Dragon strides across and smirks at the sight.

"Let's make it quick," he says.

Then his brothers start shouting orders, and the strongest men climb into the container truck and push a pallet to the edge. One time I watched a group of ants carry a huge cockroach back to their nest. It looked a lot like this. As each pallet of shoeboxes is transferred across to the van, another person climbs into the container truck. The barrels and crates are lifted in, and Uncle turns to the Dragon beside him.

"Are those all the provisions they have?"

The Dragon shrugs. "Some of them won't make it. I never guaranteed anything."

The men keep working. A little girl stands to the side,

her black hair hanging in strands, a sodden blanket clutched in her hand. She stares at the Dragon and his brothers without any fear, and when she looks at me I have to turn away. One of the men helps her into the back of the container. She argues that she doesn't want to go, and I'm glad when her brother or cousin or whoever he is clamps a hand over her mouth and drags her backwards, deeper into the container. I turn the torch off and drop it into my pocket.

It takes about an hour to fill the Dragon's van with pallets. Then Bayu and Boaz close the shutter, climb into the cab and drive away. The men from the van look exhausted, but they clamber into the back of the container and huddle near the remaining pallets at the far end. As the doors close they look out, a dark shape with many glistening eyes.

And then the doors clang shut, and the Dragon swings the levers across and fastens the padlocks through the loops.

I wonder where the container is going, and how long it will take to get there, and who will open it on the other side.

I wonder what they'll find.

But I think I already know.

"Now you can release Elvis," Uncle says. "I want to see him before your crooked brother comes to arrest me. After what I've done for you it's only the right thing to do."

The Dragon stands with his back to us, his gloved hands resting on the container doors. He shakes his head, tutting.

"Aaron," he says, turning round slowly. "You should know by now there's no honour among thieves."

In one smooth movement the Dragon pulls something from his belt. But it's not the knife I'm expecting. It's a revolver, just like the ones the police use.

"I think you knew it would come to this, Aaron. There isn't any other way it could end."

I feel as though my legs might give way at any moment, but Uncle doesn't even flinch at the sight of the gun.

"You can shoot me if you want," he says calmly. "But Budi won't be here to see it."

The Dragon raises his eyebrows and rainwater trickles down his face. "So you want me to shoot him first?" He points the gun at me, and my heart thumps in my chest. This is what it must be like to take the deciding penalty in a Cup Final. It feels as though I'm about to vomit my heart into the puddle in front of me.

"No," Uncle says. "I want you to let him go. He shouldn't be here. He's nothing to do with this. With that." He points at the container truck behind the Dragon.

"I can't do that, I'm afraid," the Dragon says. "He knows too much."

He reaches into his pocket and takes out a mobile phone. The little keypad lights up when he presses a button, and it throws a sickly glow across his face as he lifts it to his ear. He holds the revolver at arm's length, aiming at the space between Uncle and me.

"Brother," the Dragon says. "It's done..." He glances at us. "Yes, bring him here. Do you want me to wait and we'll do all three together? Or should I get these two over with...? Yes, I've got your gun. You'll get the credit, don't worry... Yes, I know...in the back while trying to evade capture. You said that already... Okay. Bye."

He puts the phone back in his pocket.

"Turn around, Aaron," he says.

He knows that we've heard him. When Uncle hesitates the Dragon aims at me. Rain drips from the end of the barrel.

"Do you really want to watch your nephew die?"

Uncle sighs and turns around. He closes his eyes. The Dragon raises the revolver and aims at the back of

his head. I turn around too. I can't watch. The rain seems to get heavier, and every drop feels like a bullet against my back.

I close my eyes.

I take a deep breath.

"I'm sorry," I say, but I don't know if Uncle can hear me.

Then there is a click.

My eyes open, and Uncle is no longer beside me. I turn just in time to see the Dragon pull the trigger again. But nothing happens. It just clicks. There must be water in the mechanism. And then Uncle tackles him, slamming the Dragon against the doors of the container truck. They land heavily, splashing into a puddle. The revolver falls to the ground. The Dragon is a much bigger man than Uncle, and as they thrash around he manages to pin Uncle down. He pushes his face into the puddle and reaches for something tucked into his belt.

It glints in the darkness.

I rush forward without thinking, shoving the Dragon before he can bring the knife down. Uncle gasps for breath, wiping the muddy water from his face. The Dragon swings an arm back and his bejewelled hand catches me on the side of the head.

For a moment there's nothing. Then all I can see is the rain as it falls towards my face out of the blackness. From somewhere nearby come the sounds of grunting, splashing. Gargling. I try to sit up but my head is heavy, and the ground seems to tilt. I roll onto my side and force myself onto all fours. I retch but nothing comes out. The world stops rocking. My vision settles, but the puddle beneath my face seems to be turning red. I look up.

The Dragon lies on his back. His domed stomach is still. A knife sticks out of his chest. Beside him my uncle struggles to get to his feet. He clutches at his ribs and shuffles around the side of the truck. I manage to stand and stagger over to him, but he falls before I can catch him. He twists around and sits with his back against one of the truck's wheels.

"You've got to get out of here, Budi," he says, wincing against the pain. He peels his hand away from his side and I see the cut across his ribs.

A cut like that won't stop bleeding. Not without a bucket of coconut butter.

"But first you've got to get those people out of the truck. There's a pair of bolt cutters in the rucksack. Use them to cut the padlocks."

I open the rucksack to find the bolt cutters, but all I

can see are multicoloured bundles of paper. In the darkness it's difficult to make out what they are, but when I take one out I realize exactly what it is.

"They're not all for you," Uncle says, trying to smile.

I just stare at him.

"What?" he says. "You didn't think I'd miss an opportunity to rob that pig, did you? Once a thief, always a thief."

He laughs, but doubles over immediately. I look back into the open rucksack.

"But there must be millions in here," I say. "Millions and millions."

"Well, everyone in the truck paid a million, and I think it's only fair they get that back. But the rest is for you, Budi. Do whatever you want with it. I've heard that football academies can be expensive places."

I blink away the tears. I'm holding the bag that could change my life. No more days at the factory. No more blows from the *rotan*. No more fake, leaky boots. Just days of playing football at the academy in new boots. Real boots. The same boots that Kieran Wakefield wears. Playing my way up through the academy and into La Liga.

I realize I've got to tell my uncle something before it's too late.

"Grandma died today," I say. "The only reason I gave you over to the Dragon was so that she wouldn't have to choose between you and Dad. I'm sorry, Uncle. I thought you'd get to see her. I thought we could all be together. I was just trying to do the right thing."

"You did," he says, closing his eyes. "And I did get to see her. I visited her this morning, after the earthquake." He smiles. "I think she thought I was Elvis. She just said, 'My son, my son!' and hugged me. She never could tell us apart as children. I got to hold her hand. I got to say goodbye. I told your mother not to tell you that I'd visited – I didn't want her to know about all this. I just wanted to make things right. I think she understood."

I nod, looking down at the rucksack.

"Thank you," I say.

Uncle doesn't respond. He just sits there smiling. I say it again, louder this time.

"Thank you."

But Uncle doesn't respond.

I sit on the wet ground, cradling the rucksack. I dig down to the bottom of it for the bolt cutters, but before I can bring them out a pair of headlights swings through the gates. I scurry around the back of the container and press myself flat against the doors. The Dragon's body is

so close and everything about it – the gold chains on his motionless chest, his slack, bejewelled hands, his still-open eyes – urges me to run. But I don't move. I take a deep breath and push myself closer to the truck as the sound of an engine draws nearer.

Then it cuts out and I hear a door slam.

Someone spits.

"Get out," a voice says, and I know it's the Chief Inspector. Another door slams. "Move it!"

And then I hear something that makes me wish the Dragon had shot me in the back of the head. I hear Dad sobbing, and I know he's just seen his brother for the first time in ten years. And his brother is dead.

"Aaron," he says, as though he's pleading with him to wake up, to change his mind. "Aaron."

"Shut up," the Chief Inspector says. "You haven't seen the worst of it yet."

Dad cries out as though someone is torturing him.

"Oh, no!" he sobs. "Not my boy. Please, no." And I am filled with a rage like I have never felt before. I always thought I hated Uston and Barcelona and Lazaro Celestino, but now I know what hatred really is. It's a burning, seething venom that poisons your blood and makes you fearless.

I spot the Dragon's revolver on the floor and swoop down to pick it up. It feels cold and heavy in my hand. The Chief Inspector's footsteps come closer. It sounds as though Dad is being dragged forward. I wait until they must only be a couple of steps away before spinning round the side of the container and pointing the gun in the Chief Inspector's face.

He almost slips over as he tries to back away. He lets go of Dad's arm and raises his hands in front of his face.

"Don't shoot!" he says. "You don't know what you're doing. You can't shoot a police officer!"

"No," I say, shaking my head. "But I can shoot you."

He smirks as though he is about to dare me, but then he glances over my shoulder and his eyes widen. He must have seen the Dragon's body. He takes another step backwards.

"What have you done?" he asks.

I take a step forward, hoping he won't call my bluff.

"By tomorrow everyone will know how corrupt you are, and the Dragon won't be around to protect you. They'll hunt you down and send you to Nusa Kambangan. I'm giving you a chance to run. Go and tell your brothers that the Dragon is dead, and don't ever come back here again."

I cock the revolver and aim it straight at the Chief Inspector's heart.

This time he doesn't smirk. He just turns and runs, slipping in the mud as he fumbles with the car door. I keep the revolver aimed at him until the car swerves through the gates and races out of sight.

I drop the gun. Dad rushes over and hugs me. I look at him properly for the first time. He looks awful. He mustn't have slept since he was taken. He hugs me again and holds me for a long time. The rain starts to ease.

Eventually Dad goes over to Uncle and crouches by his side.

"He just wanted to make things right," I say.

Dad nods. "I know." He bows his head, resting a hand on Uncle's shoulder. "A mother and a brother in one day."

Then he looks up at the sky, as though asking Allah for an explanation.

But the sky just spits.

I take the bolt cutters from the rucksack and break both padlocks on the container. The people inside are surprised to see me, and when they see the Dragon lying in a pool of blood, a knife sticking out of his chest, they look horrified. But I don't think any of them can look at

the Dragon for long without realizing they have one less thing to worry about in Jakarta.

They shuffle out one by one, and as they pass I give them a roll of cash each. I help the little girl with the blanket down and she gives me a hug.

"Thank you," she says. And the last of the rage seeps out of my veins.

Some of the men look down at the body and pat me on the shoulder, like I'm the hero. Like I stepped up and scored the final penalty. But it wasn't me.

When they pass my uncle they bow their heads and leave in silence.

In the end it's just me and Dad and the rucksack, still heavy with bundles of cash. Dad stands up and puts his arm across my shoulders. The rain finally stops.

"We've got to leave him here, haven't we?" I ask. "They'll never stop looking for him."

"Yes, son." Dad sighs. "There's nothing else we can do."

We stand side by side in silence. Then, without saying a word, we turn and make our way home.

Someone is waiting at the end of the street. The name on the back of his shirt reads: *B LM NTE*. He sits on a chunk

of concrete, knocking a stone from one foot to the other. As we get nearer he glances over his shoulder and stands up.

I nod at Rochy. He nods back.

Dad reaches out and puts a hand on Rochy's shoulder, squeezing it slightly.

Rochy lowers his head.

"I'll leave you two to talk," Dad says. "I need to see my wife."

We don't say anything until Dad is almost home. He shuffles like a much older man, gazing at the destruction all around him. Then Rochy looks at me and frowns.

"What have you been doing?"

I look down at my soaked, dirty, bloody clothes.

"Slaying a dragon. It's a long story."

He nods and we fall silent.

"I just came to say goodbye," Rochy says, looking at his shoes. "I think I've got some relatives near Surabaya so I'm going to head that way. They've got a farm, I think. There's nothing left for me here."

My heart falls into my stomach. Just when I thought the wound was finally closing, Rochy tears it open again.

"You can't leave, Rochy, and you can't work on a farm. You're a genius."

He smiles. "I don't really have a choice."

For a moment I think he's right. What choice does he have? Then I realize that for once *I* have a choice. And I could choose to give Rochy a choice.

My fingers tighten around the strap on the rucksack. It seems to get heavier as I stand here, as if it's filling with all the things I want, all the things it could give me. I look around at the broken buildings, the empty lives – the ruins of everything. I watch my dad, only just reaching the apartment now, looking broken, looking beaten. The rucksack gets heavier and heavier until I'm sure the Bernabéu – the world – must be inside it.

Then I look at Rochy – jobless, homeless, alone – and I let out a long, slow breath.

"Here," I say, offering him the rucksack.

"What's in it?" he asks.

"Just take it. It's for you."

He takes the rucksack and opens it.

"Where did you get this?" he asks, taking out a roll of notes.

"My uncle stole it from the Dragon. He told me to do whatever I want with it. And I want to give it to you."

Rochy starts to shake his head. "I can't take this," he says. "You could do so much with it. You could afford to

train at the academy. It could be the first step to Madrid. I can't take it."

He holds the bag out to me but I don't reach for it. I put my hands in my pockets.

"Go back to school, Rochy. Start again."

I walk away before he has time to argue, before he has time to notice me crying. I just leave him standing among the rubble, clutching a bag full of money.

When I reach my apartment I look back. Rochy stands at the end of the road, the rucksack hanging by his side.

I pat my chest where the Real Madrid badge should be and make my hands into the shape of a heart.

I hold the heart above my head.

Then I step through the door.



TODAY, TOMORROW AND FOREVER

The next day I go to the factory.

There are quite a few empty seats, and I can tell the foreman is really angry about the earthquake. He paces along each row with his *rotan*, making sure we don't talk, don't fall asleep, don't fall behind. But he leaves me alone. He stares at me a lot, just like everyone else, but he doesn't shout at me once. I think maybe he read the newspaper this morning.

All the papers are full of stories about how one of Indonesia's most wanted criminals was found dead with one of Jakarta's most notorious landlords next to a half-empty container truck.

This is the other thing the foreman is angry about. A group of white men showed up this morning and spent a

long time going round the factory with the foreman. I've never seen so many white people outside of a television before. There were almost enough to make a football team. The foreman was sweating like Elvis and kept mopping his forehead with his handkerchief. He looked glad to see them leave.

Annisa, the same girl as before, sits in Rochy's place. I ask her whether she knows the El Clásico result. But she doesn't. She just shrugs and refuses to make eye contact. I think she might be a hopeless case.

During my break I sit in the canteen, staring into my tray of rice and "Sauce of the Day". It's the same sauce every day – it never changes. I scrape the grey rice into little piles and move them around the tray. No one sits at my table, they just glance over and whisper to each other. When the buzzer goes, I head back to my station with an empty stomach and make some more football boots.

The next day there is another story in the newspaper about a senior police officer who is now a missing person.

The next day there is another story in the newspaper about a senior police officer who is now a wanted person.

The day after that two men are arrested with a van full of stolen football boots. The white men make sure they end up on a boat to Nusa Kambangan. When they

eventually find the Chief Inspector, hiding in a shack in the slums, they put him on the boat as well.

There are no stories about a teenage boy being found with a rucksack full of money. I make Dad read the entire newspaper out loud every evening, week after week, to make sure.

Uston is really annoyed at Rochy for disappearing. He still hasn't forgiven him for punching him in the face.

"If he ever shows his face in this square again I'll knock him out," he says.

"It's not technically a square," I say. "It's a quadrilateral quadrangle."

"Do you want a punch as well?"

He curls his right hand into a fist and waves it in my face.

"Come on," I say. "Let's play."

Now that Rochy is gone I have to play two-on-one against Uston and Widodo. We pretend I've had a player sent off. I don't mind. It means I have to work harder. It's what all the professional players do. If you can win when you're outnumbered, then one day you'll be a champion. That's a fact.

So long as you don't forget how to pass the ball.

When Fachry, Uston and Widodo aren't around, I

practise kick-ups. Sometimes when I'm tired and bored and my legs ache, and it feels as though the Bernabéu is a million miles away (instead of just 7,500), I go to the academy and watch them play through the fence. Sometimes the groundskeeper is there, and we watch together. Sometimes there's no one at all, so I just close my eyes and breathe the smell of grass and feel the glare of floodlights on my face. Then I go home and practise some more.

Without Rochy's television I lose track of Real Madrid's season. Uston tries to convince me that Real Madrid are in the relegation zone and Kieran Wakefield has been sold to a team I've never even heard of for 100,000 rupiah. But I know he's lying. And it just makes me want to beat him even more.

After a few months it stops raining, and the factory goes from being really, really loud and really hot to really loud and really, really hot. Annisa still doesn't like football, but sometimes we talk about other things. I suppose she's not all bad.

Since Rochy left I have to walk home by myself. I usually practise my skills by dribbling a stone back to my apartment. With stones you have to concentrate extra hard because otherwise you can lose them down a drain.

It helps if you commentate as well.

"Wakefield goes past one...and another...he's unstoppable! Just the keeper to beat—"

Suddenly a leg flicks out and drags the stone away from me.

"But Belmonte takes it off him and slams it into the net! *Gooooooooal!*"

The stone pings off a metal shutter and the person who kicked it pulls his shirt over his head. It isn't until he uncovers his face that I realize who it is.

"Rochy!" I shout. I hug him and don't even feel embarrassed. Footballers do it all the time, so you know it's okay. "What are you doing here? Where's your Manchester United shirt?"

He looks down at the T-shirt he's wearing – it's grey with a planet printed on the front. For some reason he doesn't seem as tall any more.

"Well, it was getting a bit small for me, and all the letters were peeling off. Besides, I'm not a Manchester United fan."

"I like this T-shirt better," I say, smiling. "You're fired, by the way. I forgot to tell you."

Rochy laughs. "Well, you can tell the foreman that I quit."

"What are you doing instead?"

"I'm back at school," he says, and he can't keep the smile from his face. But then it falls.

"Did you hear that Atlético won the league?"

My mouth drops open. "What? At least it wasn't Barca, I suppose."

Rochy nods and squints into the setting sun.

"Do you want to come to mine for dinner?" I ask. "Dad's got a new job so there should be enough to go around."

"It's okay, I've already eaten. I'm working as a waiter and they give me my meals. It's a pretty good deal. Sometimes, white people eat at the restaurant and just give me money for nothing when they leave. Especially when I speak English."

"Cool." It sounds like one of Rochy's dubious facts to me. "Do you want to play football instead?"

"No, I'm going home. I want to see if anything's changed. I haven't been back since...well, since then."

I nod. I understand. But it hurts.

"I've got a surprise for you though," Rochy says.

"Really? What is it?"

"If I told you it wouldn't be much of a surprise, would it? Just meet me at the factory in a couple of hours and I'll show you."

"Okay, I'll be there." I give Rochy another hug. He doesn't mind. Like I said, it's good practice for goal celebrating.

I rush home to tell my parents that Rochy is back, and they're both glad to hear he's at school. Mum makes a delicious curry with garlic rice for dinner, and as soon as I've finished the last mouthful I jump up and run to the door.

"Where are you going?" Dad asks.

"Rochy's planned a surprise. I don't want to be late."

"You'll get indigestion if you don't slow down," Mum says. "What time are you coming back?"

"I don't know, but I'll be careful!"

I'm already out the door and running down the street by the time my parents say goodbye. Within thirty seconds I have indigestion and have to slow down to a walk. The air is warm and still, and everything about the city seems lazy. The people who are in the street look like they've got nowhere to go; a lot of buildings are still just piles of rubble. When I finally arrive at the factory my stomach cramps have gone, and Rochy is waiting for me on the kerb.

"Okay," he says. "Are you ready?"

I nod.

"Let's go."

I ask him where we're going but he won't tell me anything. We walk for a long time – mile after mile – and even though my shoes split weeks ago they still get tighter and tighter the further we walk. Eventually, we reach roads that are clean and well marked, and Rochy asks someone for directions to a place I've never heard of.

"When are you going to tell me what we're doing?"

I ask. "My feet hurt."

"I'm not. We're just going to get there and then you'll see what it is."

We pass big houses that are set back from the road and surrounded by smooth concrete walls. It's like the earthquake never happened. I stop at the tall iron gates of one house but Rochy tells me that we need to keep moving. There is a shiny car in the driveway, and flowers planted in tubs by the front door.

"So what are you doing at school?" I ask. "Are you on the space programme yet?"

Rochy laughs. "Not exactly, but I'm learning some pretty interesting stuff. Did you know that there might be an infinite number of parallel universes?"

I don't even know where to start with that question.

"What?"

"Some people think our universe might be just one of countless variations. There could be millions and millions of parallel universes, each one with its own reality. Why have you stopped? We need to keep moving."

I stop rubbing my head and start walking again. "What?"

"Each universe is just a replica of this one, except little things are different."

"Different how?"

"Well, in one variant, Indonesia might have won every World Cup there's ever been. In another, you might live in one of these big houses. In another, Kieran Wakefield might play for Barcelona."

I shake my head. He's taken it too far.

"I don't think your teacher knows what he's talking about."

Rochy laughs again. "But the exciting thing is that if there are an infinite number of universes, that means there are an infinite number of possibilities. Nothing is impossible."

"But how do you know which universe you're in? How do you know what's possible?"

We both stop and Rochy holds out his arms.

"You don't – you just have to work it out for yourself. Come on, it's not much further."

We set off again. My feet are really starting to get sore. I'm just about to give up hope of ever finding out what the surprise is when Rochy cuts down a pathway between two walls. He lifts a finger to his lips and I follow him in silence. We stop at a wooden side gate and Rochy looks along the alley in both directions. Then he interlocks his fingers and crouches down beside the gate.

"What are you doing?" I ask.

"Shhh!" he says. "Keep your voice down. What does it look like I'm doing? I'm helping you over."

"But why?"

"You'll see. Now, come on."

"But what if I get caught?"

"No one will see you if you keep quiet and stick to the shadows. Hurry up!"

I place one foot on Rochy's hands and grip the top of the gate. As Rochy stands up I swing my leg over the top and drop down on the other side. I land in a crouching position on a lawn of thick, cool grass. There is a tree in the middle of what I soon realize is not a park but someone's garden. I hear Rochy scramble over the gate and land beside me.

"What are we doing here?" I ask. "You're going to get us in trouble."

"Calm down. Just stick with me and you'll be fine. Come on, we're not finished yet."

Rochy scurries across the lawn towards the house. I have never seen a house as big as this one, except for in the movies. I run after Rochy, who kneels behind a low wall that separates the lawn from a path that runs around the house.

"Get down," he says.

I dive onto my stomach and wriggle the rest of the way like some kind of commando.

"Who lives here?" I whisper.

"A businessman who eats at the restaurant sometimes," he says, grinning. "From Spain."

"So what are we doing here?"

I can hear my heart pounding in my ears, and I worry that it might be loud enough for someone else to hear. Rochy peers over the wall and smiles.

"Have a look through the window," he says.

Slowly, I raise my head above the wall. The room beyond the window is bathed in green light, and it takes me a moment to understand what I'm looking at.

"That's got to be the biggest television in the world," I whisper. "No wonder the house is so big – it has to be, otherwise nothing would fit."

Then there is a close-up on the screen. Hair swept back. Brilliant white shirt. Yellow and orange boots.

I suddenly realize what we're doing in someone's garden.

"Real Madrid made it to the Champions League final!" I blurt out.

Rochy's hand clamps over my mouth, but when I look at him he's smiling.

"And you'll never guess who they're playing," he says.

I look back at the screen. There is another close-up.

Lazaro Celestino – the most overrated player in the world – darts between a triangle of cones in the dreaded red and blue shirt of the enemy: *Barcelona*.

"Come on," Rochy says, "let's sit on the wall."

On a long sofa in front of the television, a man sits with his back to us. When the adverts come on he scratches his head and drinks something out of a green bottle. Even though I can only see the back of his head, he somehow looks lonely.

We're just in time, because when the adverts end the players walk out onto the pitch and the game begins. The screen is so big that everything is really clear, and it doesn't matter that we're watching from the garden. When I look across at Rochy he is so transfixed by the

game that he doesn't notice me, and I watch the little green rectangles dancing in his eyes.

Barcelona score in the first half even though Real Madrid are the much better team. The businessman must be a Barcelona fan because he jumps up and spills his drink everywhere when the ball hits the back of the net. They do so many action replays I start to feel sick. It gets worse every time. Slow-motion Lazaro Celestino should be banned.

At half-time we are one-nil down. The man on the sofa gets up and leaves the room but comes back a few minutes later with another green bottle. I imagine what's going on in the changing room.

The players sit around the edge of the room on benches. They sip water from sports bottles and pull their socks up. One of them is receiving treatment from the team doctor.

The manager stands in the middle of the room in a suit, pointing to a board covered with arrows and crosses.

"Belmonte, you need to run at their defenders. Draw out players to create a space behind for Bello and Tapia on the overlap. Noguerra, Ochoa – you need to move the ball faster. You should be looking to release Wakefield as soon as you get the ball. He's too quick for their back line and he'll cause them lots of problems.

"I'm also making a change. Rubio, you're coming off."

The manager looks around the dressing room.

"Budi, get your boots on. I want you to play in the centre – stop Barca from getting at our defence, and support Wakefield when we're on the attack."

I look across at Kieran Wakefield. He winks at me.

"We can still turn this around!" the manager says, clapping his hands. "This is your moment! And that trophy is yours for the taking! Hala Madrid!"

Every player gets to his feet. The dressing room echoes with the clapping of hands and the clacking of studs on the floor. We jog along the tunnel and out onto the pitch. The crowd chant and cheer, and thousands of camera flashes make the stadium sparkle like a jewel.

Rochy nudges me in the ribs.

"Here we go."

The second half kicks off and Real Madrid are constantly on the attack. We have shot after shot, but somehow the ball stays out of the net. When it gets to seventy minutes gone and we still haven't scored I start biting my fingernails. When it gets to eighty minutes gone I have to watch through my fingers.

The clock reaches ninety minutes and we move into injury time.

And then it happens.

One second there's nothing.

No hope.

And then a brilliant flash of white, like light across a needle, as Kieran Wakefield slips between two defenders and Belmonte flicks the ball into the gap behind them.

I jump to my feet as every player charges towards the Barcelona goal.

But ahead of them all is Kieran Wakefield.

And no one is fast enough to catch him.

He reaches the ball just inside the penalty area and pulls back his left foot. The goalkeeper steps forward, arms stretched wide, eyes fixed on the ball, and I swear my heart stops beating in that moment. My breath catches in my chest. I can't take my eyes off his left boot as it swings towards the ball.

I don't see the defender, lunging in from behind. Not until he's crashed through Wakefield's standing leg and sent him tumbling to the ground. But Rochy must see him, because his hand slaps over my mouth before the scream even reaches my throat, before Wakefield even hits the grass. I wriggle and try to get away from him, but he won't let go.

"Budi!" he hisses in my ear. "Shut up or we'll miss

what happens next. He's pointing to the spot – look."

Rochy is right. The referee already has the red card in his hand as he reaches the box. And he's pointing to the penalty spot. Players from both teams surround the defender and shout and shove at each other. Kieran Wakefield gets to his feet, wincing as he bends his knee and a trickle of blood seeps into his white sock.

But he's reaching for the ball in the goalkeeper's hand.

And the goalkeeper gives it to him like he's handing over the Champions League trophy.

It takes a long time for the rest of the players to leave the penalty area – and even longer for the sent-off defender to leave the pitch – but eventually it's just Kieran Wakefield and the goalkeeper. With everyone gone, there is a close-up of Wakefield holding the football. He looks tired. Exhausted. Like he might only have one kick left in him. I reach out and put my hand against the window. But there's no tingle, no shock. It's just cold glass. Kieran Wakefield starts to blur, but I blink it away. Not in front of Rochy. I know there is a universe where he equalizes, where we go on to win. But how do you know which one? And what if this isn't it? I blink it away again. But what if this isn't it?

I lower myself onto the wall. My fingers leave a smudge on the glass.

Kieran Wakefield steps forward and bends over the penalty spot. The camera follows the ball as he places it on the white circle of grass between his feet. Sweat drips from his fringe, and a drop of blood falls from his knee and splashes onto the toe of his left boot.

But he doesn't notice.

He just turns and walks to the edge of the box.

Even when he stoops to pull his socks up he still doesn't notice. But the splash of red is all I can see. I look at Rochy and I know he's seen it too, because how could anyone *not* see it? How could anyone ignore it?

"He's got blood on his boots," I whisper. "He's got blood on his boots."

And I look at the three little scars across my fingertip, and I can taste the blood at the back of my throat.

But Kieran Wakefield just puts his hands on his hips.

Puffs his cheeks out.

And waits for the whistle.

The keeper stands on his line, waving his arms like he's about to fly. With every sweep he seems to get bigger, until his fingertips brush the posts and his head scrapes the underside of the bar.

And Kieran Wakefield suddenly seems a long way out.

The space between the penalty spot and the goal

stretches and stretches until the goal is nothing more than a speck on the far side of a vast ocean. Wakefield looks small and lonely – marooned – like a little boy who can't possibly make it; the keeper is too big, the goal is too small, and the whole crowd – the whole *world* – is against him.

It's impossible.

But then the camera flicks to a close-up of his face, and he's staring so hard at the ball I realize he can't see the keeper towering up like an impossibly tall palm tree. He can't see the impassable ocean that's opened up between them.

He can't see the impossible, because impossible is nothing.

All he can see is the football, waiting for one final kick.

And then the referee blows his whistle.

And Wakefield starts his run-up.

And Rochy holds my hand.

It's now or never.

And I know, I just *know*, it's now.

The end