



CHAPTER ONE

Seventeen-year-old Callum Cooper opened his eyes in the darkness.

He blinked and frowned for a moment as he tried to work out where he was. Everything was strange.

Then Callum remembered. He wasn't in his bedroom at home or in his shared room by Stanford FC's football ground. He was in a fancy hotel room.

Well, at least it felt fancy to Callum, who had never stayed in his own room in a hotel before.

It was the night before Stanford's final in the Cathay Cup against Roma FC.

Stanford's manager, Ron Grant, had insisted that his First Team squad stay together at a local hotel. He said it would be good for team bonding, but it was more likely that he wanted to make sure no one got into trouble.



Mani Gronier was usually the player who got into trouble, but he wasn't here because he had been suspended for being racist to Callum's friend, Jackson Mbemba.

Callum wasn't going to make a big deal about it, but he was the one who had reported Gronier's behaviour to the manager. He just couldn't stand by and do nothing.

Callum knew it was important to speak out against racism, or, in fact, any hate crime. That was the only way the world would change.

Gronier would have to pay for his actions. Callum just hoped he would learn something too.

There was no question that Gronier was a great player. He had been vital to Stanford's success, working with Jackson in midfield to turn defence into attack. His passes had helped to create lots of chances for Callum to score, and he would be missed.

But some things were more important than football.

Winger Angelo was great at assisting too, but Callum was worried about him. It seemed like he had an injury and should have some treatment, but the young winger shrugged it off, saying he was fine.

Angelo said he had to play, as half his family were coming over from Italy to watch him.

Callum totally understood why Angelo was so keen to play. All three of them — Callum, Jackson and Angelo — were dying to show off their skills.

A couple of weeks ago, the manager had challenged them all to impress him. And they had! Their reward was to play for the First Team.

And now they were in the final of the Cathay Cup!

This final was so exciting — who wouldn't want to play in a cup final against one of Europe's top teams?