



## CHAPTER ONE

“Hey, ball boy! How’s it going?”

Jackson Mbemba’s heart sank. He’d just been home to collect some clean clothes and was on his way off the estate when he met Blake, gang leader and all-round troublemaker.

Blake and his gang were always causing problems. They threatened, they bullied, they stole. They were criminals. One of the main reasons that Jackson wanted to make it as a footballer was to get his family away from the estate and Blake’s gang.

Jackson’s parents had come to the UK as refugees from Africa. His dad’s life had been in danger because he had spoken out against the government. Jackson wanted more than anything for his dad to have an easy life.

Jackson wasn't scared of Blake and he'd told him so, but many others were.

Blake had mostly left Jackson and his family alone, and Jackson really wanted it to stay that way.

Jackson only came back to the estate on Sundays now. The rest of the week he stayed in a house nearer the Stanford ground. He didn't miss seeing Blake, that's for sure. But now, here he was, with his sneery grin and his empty, black-hole eyes.

"I'm fine," Jackson responded at last. He moved to go.

Blake blocked him. "Hey, chill, man. What's the hurry? We've got things to talk about."

Jackson shook his head. "I don't think so."

Blake's sneery grin grew wider. "That's not friendly, bro."

Jackson stood and looked Blake in the eye. "What do you want?"

Blake held out his hands in a mock plea.  
“Just a bit of information.”



Jackson had expected this. He knew Blake's gang was responsible for robberies on the estate, and now that Jackson was in the Stanford first team, Blake saw an opportunity. He wanted Jackson to give him information about other players — where they lived, what cars they drove and when their houses would be empty. He said Jackson owed him for keeping his family safe.

Jackson laughed, "Keeping them safe? You're the last person I'd trust to do that."

"This estate can be a dangerous place, bro..." Blake threatened.

He was still grinning, but the menace in his words was clear.

Jackson put down his bag of clothes and took a step forwards.

"I don't want anything to do with your dirty business, Blake," he hissed. He pointed a finger at the gang leader. "Stay away from my family."