



CHAPTER ONE

“Rise and shine, Callum! You’ve got a big day ahead,” said Callum’s mum as she drew back the curtains.



Today was the biggest day in the whole of Callum's seventeen years of life. It was the first match in the Cathay Cup, a pre-season tournament hosted by Premier League team Stanford FC. It featured some of the biggest clubs in Europe. And Callum was in the Stanford squad for the first time ever!

Okay, he was only on the bench, but five subs were allowed and the manager Ron Grant said he planned to use them all.

The tournament format was simple: two groups of four teams with the winners going on to play the final. Stanford's first match was against Spanish side Sevilla and Callum couldn't wait.

"Did you sleep all right?" Mum asked.

Callum yawned as if on cue. "I couldn't get to sleep for ages," he said. "I was too excited."

Lying in bed, he had imagined lots of ways the game might go. They all ended with him coming onto the pitch and scoring the winning goal.

“Well, jump in the shower and I’ll make you breakfast,” Mum said.

In the shower, Callum thought back to just over a week ago when Ron Grant had called him and four other young players from the Under-21 team to his office.

Grant had given them a challenge. He said they could train with the First Team and, if they impressed him, they would be part of the squad for the Cathay Cup.

Callum hadn’t had the best week, but somehow, he’d made it through with two of the others, Jackson and Angelo.

Ten minutes later, dried and dressed, Callum sat at the kitchen table eating scrambled eggs on toast, followed by a banana and a glass of fresh orange juice. Usually he wolfed down his breakfast but today he had to force himself to eat. He felt shaky with nerves.

“Good luck, my brilliant boy,” Mum said with a smile, as Callum opened the front door. She kissed him on the cheek. “Score a goal for me.”

Callum returned her smile, nervously. "I'll do my best, Mum. If I even get on the pitch."

Callum was glad it was only a five-minute walk from his house to the Cathay arena, Stanford FC's home ground. He needed to be with other people to keep him distracted from the upcoming game.

In the car park, Callum met up with Jackson who was coming from his digs. They grinned and slapped hands.

"How you feeling, mate?" Jackson asked.

"Good," Callum replied, trying to hide his nerves. "Excited."

Jackson nodded. "Me too."

Jackson was in the starting lineup for the first time. He was taking the place of Mani Gronier, one of Stanford's biggest stars.

"You'll be great," Callum said. He really meant it.