

**TOM PALMER**



# **THE FEAR**

**Illustrated by Robin Boyden**



## ***CHAPTER 1***

# ***AZEEM***

Kian and Azeem made fifty-seven low passes before one of Kian's balls spun high into the air.

Azeem managed to catch it.

"Good catch," Kian said. "Why aren't you a keeper?"

Kian waited for Azeem to smile and roll the ball back to him, but his friend held on to the ball.

"What's up?" Kian asked.

“Will you come with me this afternoon?”  
Azeem said.

“Sure,” Kian said. “To what?”

“There’s a football team in the park asking for new players. Why don’t we join?”

“Oh no.” Kian shook his head. “Not that. I’m sorry.”

“But why not?” Azeem asked. “You’re the best footballer on the estate.”

Kian gave a shrug and ignored the butterflies in his stomach. “I’m not that fussed about playing in a team,” he lied.

“Oh right ...” Azeem said. He rolled the ball back to Kian.

Just then they heard Azeem’s dad coming back from work and parking his taxi. Azeem

said he had to go. He left Kian alone in the garden with the ball at his feet.

Kian's mum came out and stood by the back door.

"Kian?" Mum said.

Kian picked up the ball and turned round to her.

"I heard that," she said. "Why don't you join the team with Azeem?" she asked. "Please. It would be good for him if you went too, and you used to love playing football."

Kian looked down at his old leather football. He felt sick at the idea of playing in a team.

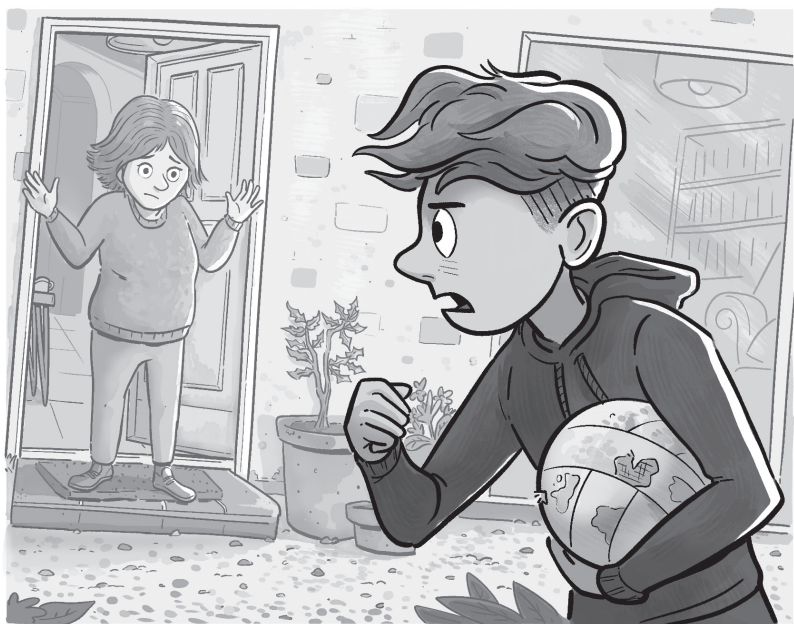
He didn't mind playing football in the garden. Alone. Or with Azeem. He'd even have a kickabout in the school playground. But he could not play in a proper football team. Not any more.

Mum didn't know that. Kian hadn't told her. He was too sad to explain. All he'd said was that he didn't enjoy football any more.

"Kian?" Mum said again. "Did you hear me?"

"I don't want to go," Kian said.

"Maybe you don't," Mum replied. "But you should do it for Azeem. He needs this. He and his dad—"



“I know about all that,” Kian snapped. He kept his voice down. He wanted his mum to talk softly too so that Azeem wouldn’t hear them from next door.

“You know what he’s been through, don’t you?” Kian’s mum went on. “Coming here from Afghanistan?”

“Yes, Mum. I know. He told me!”

“He and his dad had to leave his mum and sister behind in a refugee camp in Pakistan, even after all Azeem’s dad did for the British Army.”

Kian wanted Mum to stop. He didn’t want Azeem or his dad to hear what she was saying.

But it was true. Azeem’s dad had been a translator for the British Army in Afghanistan. It was a risky job, and the Army had made a promise to him that after the war, he and his family could move to the UK.

They hadn't kept that promise, as Azeem's mum and sister were still waiting for their visas.

"Fine," Kian said. "I'll go." But as soon as he said it, the Fear hit him hard.