

## One of Them by Amy Raphael

She sits in the corner of the playground, staring down at the second-hand trainers that pinch her toes.

He kicks the ball with the side of his foot and it arcs over the opposing team and into the corner of the net. His friends run towards him, grinning, and hug him hard.

She pulls her cardigan as tightly as she can around herself, but it's too small to keep her warm. Two girls from her class walk past, but she doesn't dare say, 'Hello, how are you, can I sit with you today?'

Everyone in his team passes him the ball, knowing he will do a mazy dribble or, at the very least, set up an assist. He is tall and strong. He knows who he is.

She watches the two girls sit at a picnic bench that hasn't been painted for years. They open their lunch boxes and eat mouth-sized sticks of carrot and cucumber before chewing on their brown-bread sandwiches, casually tossing the crusts for the birds to eat. She thinks, for a second, about retrieving them for herself later.

He runs up and down the concrete playground, unafraid of falling and hurting himself. Losing is not an option. He will be the hero of the team today because he was the hero yesterday and the day before that. His team never loses.

Her stomach growls with hunger and she does a pretend cough to cover the noise, but the two girls are too busy chatting and laughing to notice.

He stops to drink from his stainless-steel water bottle. As he drops it on the ground, he sees her sitting alone in the corner. He smiles.

She offers him a cautious smile, one that she can easily pretend isn't a smile at all. She decides he must be smiling at the two girls, so she withdraws the smile.

A teammate who is strong and fast but without any technical skills hoofs the ball away from the goal. The ball soars through the air.

She lifts her head and watches the ball approaching her. She can see the trajectory of the ball perfectly. If she sits still, it will hit her. The ball starts to fall through the air. She stands up. She moves to one side. The ball lands at her feet. She puts a foot on top of it to stop it dead and then kicks it with the side of her foot without looking up. It scuds along the concrete, curves to the left and lands at the feet of the boy.

The boy stares at her. He picks up the ball and starts walking in the direction it came from. The girls at the picnic table smile at him because he's the most popular boy in the year. They think he is coming to talk to them.

The girl with the second-hand trainers looks at the boy. She smiles.

'Hey,' he says, smiling back. 'Do you want to play?'

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