

my chest, my cheek. I can taste it on my tongue. Rocky stands over me, panting. He takes half a step towards me and I brace myself. But he doesn't kick me.

He just steps back.

Turns around.

Walks away.

I lie completely still, breathing in the salty, earthy smell of the wet ground. My ribcage hurts. When I get to my feet my body feels heavy and numb, like I've slept for a long time in an awkward position. I dust myself down and rub my side. I'm not crying any more.

I pick up my shirt and football and shuffle home, dragging my feet.

Kieran Wakefield could earn my yearly wage in the time it takes me to get home.

When I walk through the door Mum almost drops the cup of water she's holding up to Grandma's lips. Grandma must have had another coughing fit because her eyes are red and watery, and she scowls at the cup in front of her. She doesn't seem to notice that I'm here.

"Budi!" Mum says, her eyes wide. "What have you been doing?"

I look down at my aching, shirtless body. There is a big muddy stripe along my side. Rainwater drips from my

fringe onto the floor. My shirt feels cold and heavy in my hand.

"You're absolutely filthy!" Mum says, setting the cup down on the table and coming over to me. "You've been out playing football, haven't you? What were you thinking? Have you cut yourself anywhere? Your clothes are soaked – and look at your boots! We can't afford to buy you a new pair if those get ruined."

My feet feel soggy and sandy inside my shoes. As I roll my foot to the side I notice that the upper is coming away from the sole.

"You know how tight money is at the moment, Budi, and the last thing we need is to be buying clothes to replace the ones you've ruined. You can't play football for ever, you know. You'll have to grow up one day."

"What about professional footballers?" I ask, tears coming to my eyes again. "They play football all the time. When I'm a professional footballer I'll get a new pair of boots every week."

"Stop being childish, Budi, and don't talk back to me like that."

"That's enough," Grandma says. "Bickering won't solve anything."

Mum takes a deep breath and sighs.