

THE SILENT SYMPHONY

Chapter 2: First Touch I

The morning sun streamed through the windows of Casa de los Niños, casting long shadows across the courtyard where the children gathered for their daily activities.

Three weeks had passed since the Champions League final, and Mateo's obsession with football had only grown stronger. Every spare moment was spent with the makeshift ball, practicing the movements he had memorized from that magical night.

Don Carlos had been watching the boy's progress with increasing amazement. Mateo's natural coordination was extraordinary, but more impressive was his dedication. While other children played games or watched cartoons, Mateo could be found in quiet corners, working on his ball control with the focused intensity of a professional athlete.

This morning was different, though. Don Carlos had made a decision that would change everything.

"Mateo," he called from the courtyard entrance, holding a package wrapped in brown paper. "Come here, pequeño."

The boy looked up from where he had been practicing his juggling, managing to keep the rag ball in the air for seven consecutive touches before it fell. His face was flushed with exertion, but his eyes sparkled with the joy that only came when he was playing football.

"Sí, Don Carlos?" Mateo asked, jogging over with the easy grace that was becoming his trademark.

"I have something for you," Don Carlos said, his voice carrying a warmth that made several other children look up with curiosity. "But first, tell me why you love football so much."

Mateo considered the question seriously, as he did everything. At six years old, he possessed a thoughtfulness that often surprised adults.

"When I watch football," he said slowly, "I can see things that others cannot see. The ball wants to go places, and the players... they dance with it. I want to dance too."

Don Carlos smiled and handed him the package. "Then perhaps it's time you had a proper partner for your dance."

Mateo's small hands trembled slightly as he unwrapped the paper, revealing a genuine leather football.

It wasn't new... the surface showed signs of use, and there were a few scuff marks along the panels...

but to Mateo, it might as well have been made of gold. The ball had been donated to the orphanage by a local sports shop, and Don Carlos had been saving it for the right moment.

"It's beautiful," Mateo whispered, cradling the ball against his chest as if it were a precious infant.

"It belonged to a young player who outgrew it," Don Carlos explained. "The shop owner thought it should go to someone who would appreciate it properly."

Mateo set the ball on the ground and simply stared at it for a long moment.

The other children had gathered around, drawn by the excitement of seeing something new and special.

Elena, an eight-year-old girl with fierce protective instincts, stood closest to Mateo. She had appointed herself his guardian since his arrival at the orphanage, recognizing something vulnerable yet extraordinary in the quiet boy.

"Go on," she encouraged. "Touch it."

Mateo's first contact with a real football was a moment that would be etched in his memory forever.

As his right foot made contact with the leather surface, he felt a connection that transcended the physical.

The ball responded to his touch with a precision and predictability that the makeshift version could never provide. It was as if he had been speaking a foreign language his entire life and had suddenly found his native tongue.

He began with simple touches, rolling the ball back and forth between his feet. The leather felt alive under his control, responding to the slightest pressure or change in direction. Within minutes, he was attempting more complex movements, his confidence growing with each successful touch.

Pablo, a seven-year-old boy who had become Mateo's closest friend, watched in amazement as Mateo began to juggle the ball. One touch, two, three, four... the count continued to climb as the ball seemed to stick to Mateo's feet like a magnet. The other children began to count aloud, their voices rising with excitement.

"Diez! Once! Doce!"

When Mateo finally let the ball drop after fifteen consecutive touches, the courtyard erupted in cheers. Even Miguel, a nine-year-old who had initially bullied Mateo out of jealousy, couldn't help but applaud. The display of skill was simply too impressive to ignore.

"How did you do that?" Pablo asked, his eyes wide with wonder.

Mateo shrugged, genuinely unsure how to explain what felt so natural to him. "The ball tells me where it wants to go," he said simply. "I just listen." The source of this content is novel★fire.net

Sister María Elena had been watching from the kitchen window, and she quickly made her way to the courtyard.

Her background in football allowed her to recognize that what she was witnessing was far from ordinary. Mateo's touch was already more refined than many teenagers she had seen playing in local leagues.

"Mateo," she said, kneeling down to his level, "would you like to learn some proper techniques?"

The boy's face lit up with an enthusiasm that transformed his usually serious expression. "You know football, Sister?"

"I played for many years before I came here," she admitted. "Perhaps I could teach you a few things."

What followed was an impromptu lesson that drew the attention of every child in the orphanage.

Sister María Elena demonstrated basic ball control techniques, showing Mateo how to use different parts of his foot for different types of touches.

She taught him about the inside and outside of the foot, the importance of keeping his head up while dribbling, and the fundamentals of passing accuracy.

Mateo absorbed every instruction like a sponge, his natural ability allowing him to implement new techniques almost immediately.

When Sister María Elena showed him how to strike the ball with the inside of his foot for accuracy, his very first attempt found its target with pinpoint precision. When she demonstrated a simple stepover move, Mateo replicated it perfectly on his second try.

"Incredible," Sister María Elena murmured to Don Carlos, who had been watching the lesson with growing excitement. "I've never seen a child pick up techniques so quickly."

But it wasn't just Mateo's technical ability that impressed them. It was his understanding of the game's deeper principles.

When Sister María Elena explained the concept of creating space by moving away from the ball before receiving it, Mateo immediately grasped not just the technique but the tactical reasoning behind it.

"If I move here," he said, pointing to a spot several feet away, "the defender follows me, and then there's space for Pablo to run into."

Sister María Elena exchanged a meaningful look with Don Carlos. This level of tactical awareness was remarkable in a professional player, let alone a six-year-old child who had been playing with a real ball for less than an hour.