

THE SILENT SYMPHONY

Chapter 3: First Touch II

As the lesson continued, more children joined in, creating an impromptu game of keep-away. Mateo naturally became the focal point, his superior ball control allowing him to maintain possession even when surrounded by older, stronger children.

But what struck the adults most was his generosity. Rather than hogging the ball to show off his skills, he actively looked for ways to involve his friends, creating opportunities for them to succeed.

When Elena struggled to control a pass, Mateo immediately moved to support her, offering encouragement and gentle guidance.

When Miguel attempted a difficult move and failed, Mateo demonstrated the technique slowly, breaking it down into manageable steps. His natural leadership qualities were emerging alongside his footballing ability.

"He's special," Don Carlos said quietly to Sister María Elena as they watched Mateo orchestrate the game with the wisdom of a seasoned coach.

"More than special," she replied. "He has the gift."

As the afternoon wore on, word of Mateo's extraordinary display began to spread beyond the orphanage walls.

Señor Vásquez, a local amateur coach who occasionally visited Casa de los Niños to help with the children's physical education, arrived just as Mateo was demonstrating a perfect rainbow flick that sent the ball sailing over Miguel's head. This chapter is updated by novel~fire~net

"Dios mío," Señor Vásquez breathed, his experienced eyes immediately recognizing the significance of what he was witnessing. "Who taught him that?"

"No one," Don Carlos replied. "He just... knows."

Señor Vásquez approached Mateo with the reverence of a man who understood the rarity of true natural talent. He had coached youth football for

over twenty years, working with hundreds of children, but he had never encountered anything like this.

"Young man," he said, his voice carrying the authority of someone accustomed to being listened to, "would you like to learn to play real football?"

Mateo looked up at the stranger with curious eyes. "Real football?"

"With other children your age, on a proper pitch, with goals and referees and everything," Señor Vásquez explained. "I coach a team for boys your age. We could use someone with your... talents."

The offer hung in the air like a promise of adventure. Mateo looked to Don Carlos for guidance, his young mind struggling to process the magnitude of what was being offered.

"It would mean training twice a week," Don Carlos explained gently. "And matches on weekends. It's a big commitment."

"But I would still live here?" Mateo asked, a note of anxiety creeping into his voice. Casa de los Niños was the only home he had ever known, and the thought of leaving terrified him.

"Of course," Don Carlos assured him. "This would just be for football. Your home is here, with us."

Mateo's relief was visible, and his excitement quickly returned. "Then yes," he said with the decisive tone that was becoming characteristic of his personality. "I want to play real football."

As the sun began to set over Barcelona, casting the courtyard in golden light, Mateo continued to practice with his new ball.

The other children had gradually drifted away to other activities, but he remained focused on his training, working on the techniques Sister María Elena had taught him.

Don Carlos watched from his office window, already making mental notes about the arrangements that would need to be made.

Transportation to training sessions, proper football boots, perhaps even a small allowance for equipment. The orphanage's budget was tight, but some investments were worth making.

"You're thinking about the future," Sister María Elena said, joining him at the window.

"I'm thinking about destiny," Don Carlos replied. "That boy has something that can't be taught or bought. He has magic in his feet and wisdom in his heart. We have a responsibility to nurture that."

Outside, Mateo had begun practicing free kicks against the courtyard wall, his shots finding the same spot with remarkable consistency. Each strike was accompanied by a small celebration, as if he were scoring the winning goal in a World Cup final.

"Do you think he could really make it?" Sister María Elena asked. "All the way to the top?"

Don Carlos was quiet for a long moment, watching as Mateo attempted an increasingly difficult sequence of touches and turns. "I think," he said finally, "that boy is going to surprise us all."

As night fell over Casa de los Niños, Mateo reluctantly brought his practice session to an end. He carried his new football with him everywhere, even to the dinner table, where he placed it carefully beside his chair like a faithful companion.

That night, as he lay in his narrow bed, Mateo held the ball against his chest and whispered promises to it.

Promises to practice every day, to learn everything he could, and to never give up on the dream that had been born three weeks ago while watching strangers play a game on an old television.

In the darkness of the dormitory, surrounded by the gentle breathing of sleeping children, Mateo Álvarez began to plan his conquest of the beautiful game.

He didn't know about the challenges that lay ahead, the heartbreak and triumph that would define his journey. All he knew was that he had found his calling, and nothing in the world would stop him from pursuing it.

The ball rested against his heart as he slept, and in his dreams, he was already dancing.