

**FRANK LAMPARD**

# **FRANKIE'S MAGIC FOOTBALL**

**THE GREAT SANTA RACE**





## CHAPTER 1

Frankie pulled his jumper over his head and set it on the bench. Even though it was December 23rd, he was sweating. He had been playing football in the park all afternoon with his friends Charlie and Louise. Now, the sun was starting to go down.

“No chance of a white Christmas this year,” said Louise,

balancing the football on her head.

The goal had been set up between two tree trunks. Charlie stood in position and clapped his goalie gloves together. "Come on, have a shot," he called. "You haven't got one past me yet."

Frankie saw a glint in Louise's eye. She let the ball fall and caught it on her ankle.

"Is that a challenge?" she said.

Charlie dropped into a crouch and spread his arms, grinning. Frankie's friend wasn't lying. He'd been amazing all day, diving and jumping and blocking the ball.



Louise took position like she was about to shoot, then at the last minute she slid the ball to Frankie. As Charlie turned to face him, Frankie stabbed his toe underneath the ball and sent it in a soft looping chip over the goalkeeper's head.

Charlie flapped but couldn't reach it, and the ball sailed over his outstretched arms. It landed beyond the goal line. Charlie's face flushed red.

"Don't worry," said Frankie, going to clap his friend on the shoulder. "It was a lucky shot."

The sound of shuffling footsteps made them all turn. A paunchy man in a tracksuit was jogging slowly along the path towards them, bent over and panting. Frankie recognised the scruffy trainers, and the dog trotting on a lead.

"Hi, Dad!" he called. "Hi, Max!"  
Frankie's dad waved weakly.

Max, Frankie's dog, broke free and ran towards them, the lead trailing behind him. He jumped up and placed his paws on Frankie's legs. As Frankie stroked Max behind his ears, his dad started stretching and touching his toes.

"How come your dad's running?" whispered Charlie. "I've never seen him exercise before."

Frankie chuckled. "He's training for the town Santa Race tomorrow," he said. "It's a circuit around the park, dressed like Santa Claus."

Charlie frowned. "Will he make it?" he asked.

“I hope so,” said Frankie. “He’s been training really hard since November.”

At last, his dad strolled over.

“Good luck tomorrow in the Santa Race,” said Louise.

“Thanks, Lou,” said Frankie’s dad. “I’ll need it!” He paused to catch his breath. “I came to tell you, Mr Harris next door is switching on his lights soon. Do you want to come and watch?”

“Sure!” said Frankie. Every year their next-door neighbour had the best light display in town. Frankie’s dad always said their electricity bill must be through the roof.

Frankie picked up Max's lead.

"Don't forget your ball," said his dad.

Frankie couldn't believe he almost had. His dad didn't know that the football had magical powers – if someone else found it, anything could happen! He tucked the ball under his arm, and they set off home.

By the time they reached Frankie's road, the sky was dark. There was already a crowd gathered in front of the Harris house. The lights were all strung up, with cables stretching across the lawn and the front of



the house. Bulbs hung from the upstairs windows, and the front door was covered in holly wreaths. Spaced across the lawn stood four model penguins. Mr Harris was up a ladder in front of his garage, fixing a life-size Santa and sled, complete with two reindeer. Next door, Frankie's house just had a few lights twinkling along the windowsills.

"It doesn't seem quite right – penguins with no snow," said Charlie.

"It's wrong," muttered Louise. "Santa's from the North Pole, but penguins are from the South Pole."

You'd never find them next to each other like that."

"Don't tell Mr Harris," replied Frankie's dad. "He takes his lights very seriously."

Frankie grinned. As he reached the house, Mr Harris spotted him. "Keep that football away from my lights," he grumbled.

Frankie nodded. "Yes, Mr Harris." His neighbour got angry because Frankie's football was always flying over the back fence and squashing his flowers.

"Done!" said Mr Harris, climbing down. "Right everyone – two minutes till I flick the switch!"

Frankie's mum and Kevin joined the crowd. Frankie's mum was carrying a tray of mince pies for everyone. Mrs Harris came out of her house with a tin. "I've baked, too!" The two women started handing out mince pies. *I love Christmas!* Frankie thought, as he stuffed the pastry into his mouth.

"Don't you want to take off your gloves?" Mrs Harris asked as Charlie fumbled with a mince pie.

Frankie shook his head. "Can't do that," he said.

"He's got to stay ready," added Louise.

Mrs Harris looked confused.