

An excerpt from

ACROSS THE LINE

by Penny Garnsworthy

Tino was yelling at me to run. I raced from the twenty metre line towards the opposition. Their winger had grabbed the ball and was sprinting up close to the sideline. Just as I reached him, he dropped it. Cold. I picked it up.

The ref didn't call a knock-on so I just ran, and ran. I must have run seventy metres down the length of the field. My legs were aching as I dived for the try line and found myself sliding over the dead ball line.

I heard the deafening cheer as something slammed into my head. Pain speared through me and everything went black.

I opened my eyes slowly. At least I was alive, I thought, as I tried to get up. A medic had arrived and was telling me to stay still.

I swayed a bit as they helped me up, and I felt like I was going to be sick. A medic took one arm and someone else, I don't know who, took the other and walked me off the field.

'Great run, Casey,' a voice said as they sat me down on the bench. I looked up, expecting to see the coach, but it wasn't him. It was some other guy, wearing the wrong colours. Our colours were blue and purple, you couldn't miss us. This guy was wearing yellow and brown.

I just stared at him.

'Casey,' he said, 'you took a nasty hit to the head. Their prop forward landed on you just as you went over the dead ball line. You okay?'

I shook my head to try to clear it. Who was this guy anyway?

'Let's get you to the hospital,' one of the medics said, 'just to get you checked out. You got parents here?'

'No, my dad's not here today.'

'Okay, let's go then.'

Dad had taken Mikey my little brother, to his soccer game this morning and dropped me off on the way.

'What's your phone number and we'll call your dad,' he said, matter of fact, 'he can meet us there.'

Everything was still a bit blurry and I was having trouble balancing. I gave them dad's mobile number, I think.

At the hospital they ran me through a cat scan and some other tests. Finally I was glad to climb into a nice clean bed with fresh white sheets. The nurse brought in some sandwiches and laid them on the tray in front of me.

'The doctor will be in soon, why don't you have something to eat?'

I picked up a sandwich and looked at it, turning it over in my hand. I felt too tired to eat.

'It's hospital food, Casey. Don't expect too much,' she said, grinning. 'When your mum arrives the doctor will speak to her about your condition.'

'My mum?' I exclaimed, dropping my hand, and the sandwich.

'Yes, she's on her way here.'

What? Was this a joke? 'My mum died three years ago.'

The nurse's face lost all its colour. 'Oh, I'm so sorry, there must have been a mix-up. I'll just check at the desk.'

She disappeared and I looked out the window, across the carpark. Just the time I needed my mum and she wasn't here.

I hadn't thought a lot about her lately but now, with my head all banged up, I was. And now I could feel tears rushing to my eyes. Embarrassed, I wiped them away.

Just then the door opened and the doctor walked in. He had on a white coat and a stethoscope. I didn't realise who it was for a second, I wasn't used to seeing him in uniform.

'How are you feeling Casey?' Dr Azzopardi asked, his forehead creased in concern.

'Okay I guess,' I muttered, reaching for my sandwich.

'You're not in any pain, are you?'

'No, I'm fine.'

'Okay, well your tests were clear but we thought it would be best just to keep you in overnight, for observation. You never know with these knocks to the head.'

'Sure,' I said, between mouthfuls.

'You can probably go home first thing in the morning. And hey, you scored the winning try!'

'Way to go,' I said, brightening a little. 'Were you there?'

'Of course, you know I never miss any of Tino's games. Unless there's an emergency of course. Anyway, your mum will be here soon.'

What? Not again! If this really was Dr Azzopardi then he would know my mum wasn't around any more.

'My mum.' It was more of a statement than a question.

'Yes, she's on her way. We had trouble finding her, she was with Lily at a soccer game across town.'

'Lily?'

'Your sister.' He paused, 'are you sure you're all right Casey? Could be just the shock setting in,' he nodded to himself.

Just then the door opened again. And in walked mum, with a blonde girl in tow. If she was a boy, she would have been Mikey. It was unbelievable.

'Casey!' mum exclaimed, coming over to the bed and wrapping her arms around me, 'are you okay, darling?'

I don't know what happened then. I must have blacked out.

When I woke up I was still in the hospital bed and mum was sitting on the chair beside me. I closed my eyes, and opened them again, but she was still there. This wasn't happening. This couldn't be happening.