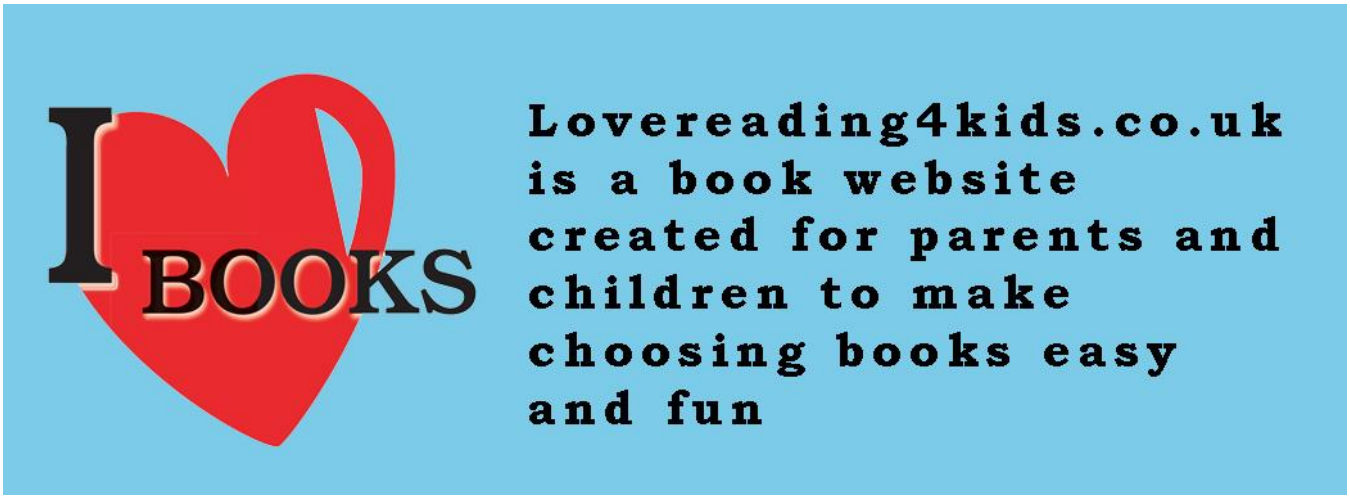


Opening extract from

Flyboy

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ONE

Jatinder took the ball on his chest, then let it drop to his feet. Perfect control. He looked up to see that he had three options.

One, shoot from 40 metres.

Two, knock the ball back to Greg, the keeper, who was standing on the edge of his area.

Three, thread a pass through to Rachel on the wing.

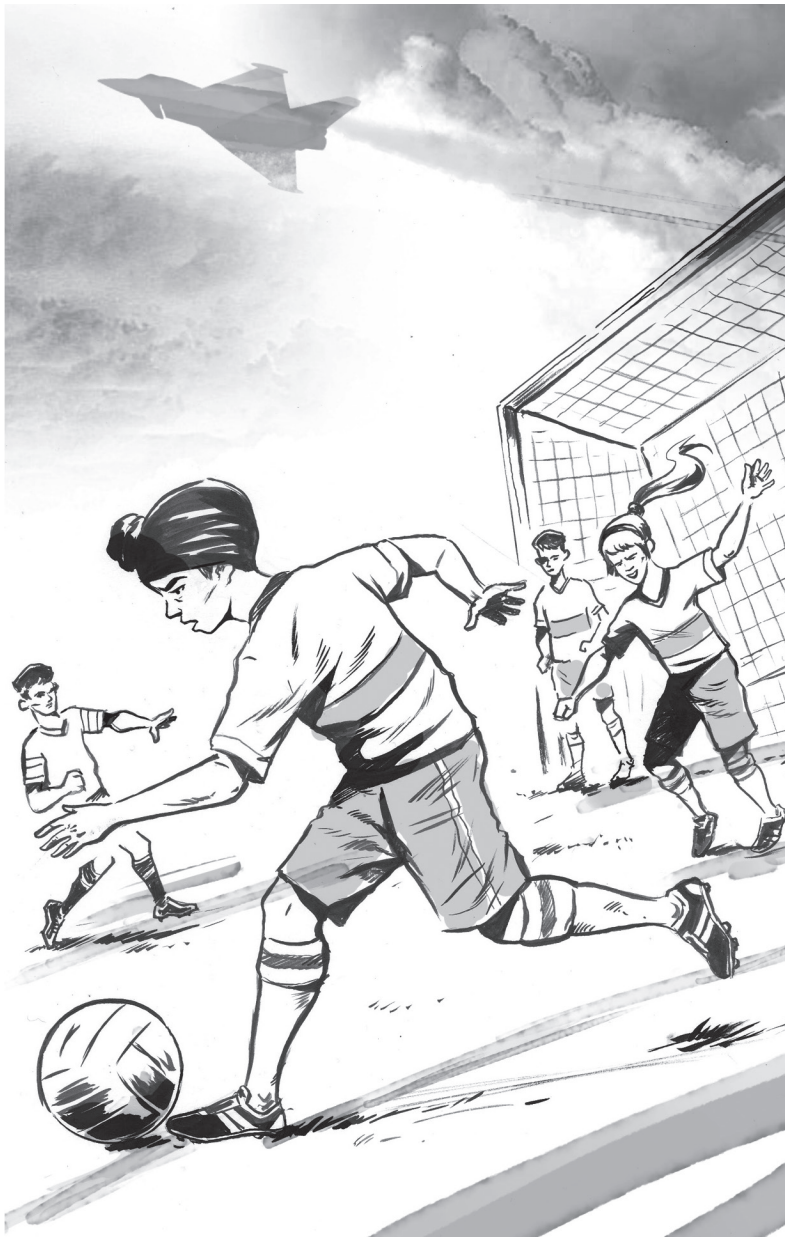
Jatinder made up his mind and stroked the ball wide, taking three defenders out of the game with a neat slide rule pass.

Rachel controlled it, ready to fire a cross into the penalty area.

And now Jatinder was running. Running hard with a tall blond defender following like his shadow. Jatinder was determined to be on the end of the cross. That's what he was all about. Mastering midfield, then breaking into the box.

As he ran, Jatinder ignored the sky-bursting noise of the fighter plane that was coming in to land at the RAF airbase near by. He angled his run towards the penalty area. He ran as fast as he could, but not quite fast enough to outrun the defender powering along beside him.

Jatinder watched Rachel fire a cross in from the right. He heard the thwack of her boot on the ball and he sped up again, then got ready to break into the area, just as the defender nudged him with his shoulder.



Jatinder went down and hit the ground hard. Tumbled. Cried out.

The ref's whistle blew.

Free kick to Jatinder's team, right on the edge of the area.

"Are you OK? Do you want to take it?" Rachel jogged over to Jatinder, gasping for breath. "You earned it."

Jatinder nodded and let Rachel help him stand. His ankle was sharp with pain, but he wanted this. It was well within his range. He had practised this kind of free kick at home on his own, hammering the garage door time after time in the top or bottom corners when everyone else was out.

Rachel handed Jatinder the ball.

He turned it in his hands and squinted at the goal so he could check out the position of

the keeper. A little too far off his line. Jatinder could get the ball up and over the wall and the keeper, drop it into the net.

He placed the ball.

The ref's whistle went again.

Jatinder stepped backwards.

Most of the players were bunched around the defending team's wall, ready to defend or attack after the free kick. Only Rachel was to Jatinder's right, with two defenders marking her loosely.

Jatinder stepped back three paces, breathed in, then out. The keeper was even further off his line now, calling to his wall. Bad tactics on his part.

Jatinder could do this. He knew he could.

He moved towards the ball, and his eye caught the top left corner of the goal, the corner he was going to target.

Then, with everything lined up, Jatinder played the free kick short. To his right. To Rachel.

He felt a hot surge of anger rush over him. Why had he done that? Why hadn't he had the go at goal that he'd set up so carefully?

What was that all about?