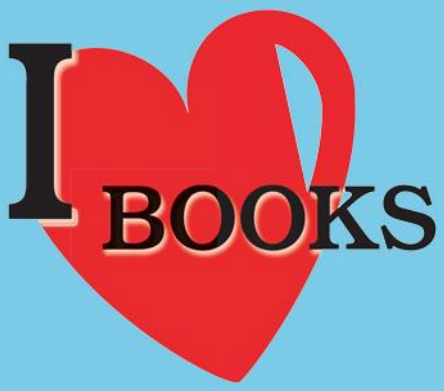


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Spitfire

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ONE

Greg was inside the centre circle when it happened.

"Play the ball, Greg," he heard one of the coaches shout. "And get back into your goal. If you cross that half way line again I'll kick you off the pitch. In fact, I might kick you out of the summer school too if you're not careful."

But Greg didn't listen. He was intent on dribbling the ball forward, then playing a killer pass to one of his team's forwards. And the players on the other team were still backing off.

'Being a keeper is rubbish,' he thought. 'Things only happen to you. You never make

them happen yourself.' But Greg would make things happen. And then, as soon as this game was over, he'd chuck his goalie gloves away for good.

And Greg pushed on, nudging the ball forward. As he did so, he heard a buzzing, humming sound, as if an old plane was flying above him. He glanced up at the sky. The dazzle from the sun blinded him.

And – in that second of lost focus – two of the opposition players rushed him fierce and fast.

No words.

No warning.

It was a pincer movement by the two sisters who'd been bothering him all game. Maddie and Jess.

Greg panicked.

And his panic made him retreat back to his goal, leaving the ball out on the pitch. That meant Maddie and Jess had it without a defender in sight.

Disaster.

Jatinder – the boy Greg had got to know best this week – was the only one of Greg's team-mates to react, but he was in the wrong half of the pitch.

As Greg scrambled back to his goal, he glanced over his shoulder, half expecting one of the sisters to loft the ball over him and into the net.

But the older one, Maddie, was still running with the ball as her sister moved off wide, yelling for the pass.

Greg could hear the coaches shouting at him again as he got back into the edge of his penalty area. They were furious.

So he chose that moment to turn round and face down the girls.

"Pass," he heard Jess shout. "Pass it to me!"

But Greg could see Maddie laughing as she bore down on the goal.

'She knows they'll score,' he said to himself. 'It's two against one. I don't stand a chance.'

Greg backed into his goal mouth some more, then stood tall as Maddie came at him. There was no way he could deal with it if she passed now.

"Paaaaasssssss," Jess yelled again. She was standing in miles of clear space in front of the open goal.

Maddie shaped her body to pass. Greg glanced from sister to sister, and he knew his situation was hopeless.


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But then – from nowhere – Jatinder arrived. He slid into the path of the pass, and his kick pushed the ball out of play as soon as it left Maddie's feet.

Greg found himself on his bum.

And from there he watched Jess bawl at Maddie for hogging the ball. "You are SO selfish!" she screamed. Maddie's reply was drowned out by the coach's yells about Greg being out of position – again. The coach told him to get himself off the pitch.

Greg closed his eyes. Everyone was angry about something. And he felt like the angriest of them all.

What had possessed him to sign up as a goalkeeper? He was an idiot.

Never again. Playing in goal was a nightmare. It was either full-on stress or

standing around with nothing to do. It got you into trouble.

And Greg knew that a shed-load of trouble was heading his way right now.