Helping your children choose books they will love

I ♥ reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

The Secret Football Club

Written by

Tom Palmer

Published by

Puffin Books

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

The Railway Children

It was the first day back at school after the summer break. Six weeks of fun and holidays over. Finished.

But Lily, Zack and Khal were not sad to be back – they were delighted. Standing in the playground, they looked around the school grounds. Nothing had changed. Kingsfolly Primary School was as it always had been.

The school building was old and brown. The car park, tightly packed with teachers' cars. The small wood beyond the playground, mysterious as

ever. And the playground itself, marked out as a football pitch, ready for the first game of term.

'Kick-off at morning break?' Lily said.

Zack and Khal nodded. Zack was short and stocky with tightly plaited dark hair. He was known for being clever and full of good ideas. Khal was tall and had a thin face.

'Yeah,' Khal said. 'I can't wait.'

'Nor me,' Zack agreed.

'It's been a long time since we've played football,' Lily added, pushing her curly blonde hair away from her face.

And it had been. A very long time.

Kingsfolly Primary School was in the middle of

the city. Its triangular grounds were surrounded by a very busy road on one side and several railway tracks on the other two. Trains thundered loudly past the school every few minutes.

The part of the city where Lily and the others lived was so built up that there was no room for fields and parks. No room for football. There were just houses and shops and warehouses and roads and railways. All packed in together.

The only place children *could* play football, without being flattened by trains and cars, was the school playground.

And that was why they were so excited about being back at school: they hadn't played a proper

game of football for weeks. Every time they'd passed Kingsfolly Primary in the holidays they'd gazed longingly at the playground, but there was no way they could get over the four-metre fence that protected it from the outside world.

Zack rubbed his hands together, grinning. 'Did you see that Porsche in the car park?'

'No,' Khal replied. 'Is there really one?'

'*I* saw it,' a voice said above the racket of shouting and screaming in the playground. It belonged to a girl who was now standing next to Lily. She had long dark dreadlocked hair, held back with a tie. Maddie was Lily's best friend. 'It's a Carrera 911,' she added matter-of-factly.

Lily turned to Maddie. 'Do you reckon it's his?'

'Whose?' Zack asked.

'His!' Lily said. 'The new head teacher. Mr Whatsisname.'

'Edwards,' Maddie said. 'Has anyone seen him?'

Everyone shook their head.

'Well, he must be cool if he's got a Porsche,' Khal said, just as the school bell went off.

'We'll find out in assembly,' Lily said, looking at her watch. 'It starts in five minutes.'

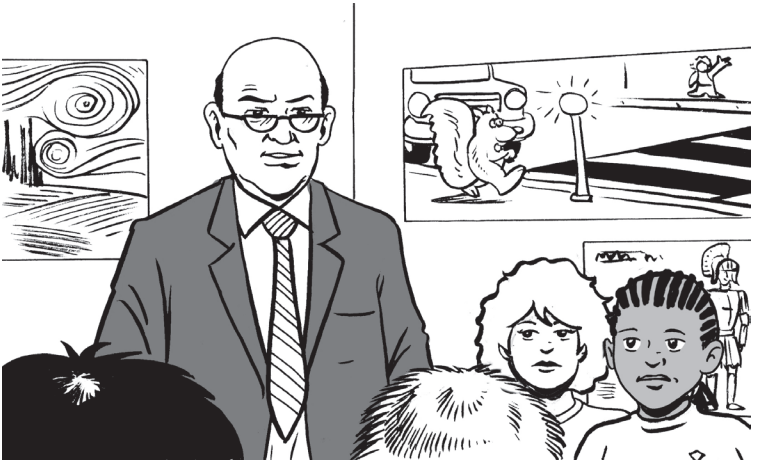
And the four friends headed into the school, where they'd find out just how cool their new head teacher really was.

Double Trouble

'Good morning, children.'

'Good-mor-ning-mis-ter-ed-wards,' a hundred and twenty voices chanted back.

Mr Edwards nodded and gazed around the school hall. At the murals on the walls. At the



wooden flooring that gleamed after a polishing. He was a short bald man, wearing a thick black suit and glasses. Watching him, Lily noticed that he had not yet smiled. She remembered the previous head teacher, Mrs Warner, had always smiled.

Lily elbowed Zack. 'Ask him,' she said, grinning.

'What?' Zack said, confused.

'If it's his car. The Porsche.'

Zack shook his head and looked down as he felt Mr Edwards' eyes flick towards him. Then the new head teacher stared at all the children.

'Before we sing,' he said, 'a few announcements.'

Lily looked around at the rest of the children

and teachers. There was *something* strange about the atmosphere today. Something different from how it had been last term. But what was it? And why?

'Firstly, thank you for your welcome this morning,' Mr Edwards said. 'I am very happy to be your new head teacher.'

Lily thought his voice sounded like he didn't mean he was happy at all. It was hard and unfeeling.

'Secondly, I want to let you know that the school celebrates its hundredth birthday in October. And the school's longest-serving teacher, Mrs Baker, has been charged with thinking up a way to celebrate this. I'd like you all to support her as much as you can.'

Lily looked at Mrs Baker, who was their class teacher this year. She was nice. All the children liked her. But Mrs Baker wasn't smiling, even though she'd been mentioned and everyone was looking at her. Lily felt a panic rising in her chest. Something was wrong. She could sense it.

'Thirdly –' Mr Edwards's voice suddenly sounded even harder – 'and before we sing our first song, I need to inform pupils that after a series of injuries in the playground last year and the concern of some parents . . . from now on football and all other ball games are banned in the school grounds.'

There was a huge collective gasp, then silence.

As if everyone had been breathing in, shocked. This news was so sudden. So unexpected.

'I am,' Mr Edwards said, pausing briefly, 'sorry about this. But I have a duty of care to protect you from dangerous activities and the serious injuries you could suffer playing football.'

Lily felt her head go hot inside. And then she realized that she was on her feet. The only child out of all the school.

Mr Edwards looked over his glasses at her. 'Yes?'

'You can't,' Lily said in a whisper.

'I can,' the head teacher said. 'And I will.'

Then Lily felt a hand on her shoulder. It was Mrs Baker.

‘Sit down, Lily,’ she said in a kind, but very firm, voice.

Lily sat. She could feel her eyes beginning to sting. A thick lump in her throat. Her face itching.

Mr Edwards looked at Lily for a second longer. Then, after an uncomfortable silence, he nodded to Mr Nokes on the piano.

‘Now for our first song,’ he said, as music filled the hall and everyone stood to sing.