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opening extract from

Football Fever

written by

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published by

Andersen Press Ltd

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Bobby, Charlton and the Mountain



For Thomas, William and Piete





Chapter 1

My family is football mad! Mum and Dad are so football crazy they even spent their wedding day at a football match.

Dad asked Mum: "How many kids do you want?"

And she said, "A whole football team!"

When they got to me he said, "Well, we've made it to five-a-side!"

I was born with loads of ginger hair, and Dad started singing, "Come on, you reds!" He was embarrassing even then!

It was Dad's idea to call me Charlton, but everyone calls me Charlie. At school they used to say, "That's a funny name for a girl!" Hardly anyone had heard of my dad's hero, Bobby Charlton. My big brothers are called Wembley, Striker, and Semi (we reached the semifinals that year); then it's Bobby, and last of all, me.



We were brought up on football right from the first whistle. Babies in our house didn't dribble drool: as soon as we could toddle we dribbled footballs! We never had soppy plastic rattles with baby bells: no, we went straight on to big, wooden football rattles. And when we were little, Mum hardly ever shouted at us: if we were naughty she just blew a whistle and produced a yellow card. Two yellow cards meant straight to bed – and NO arguing with the ref! Bobby and I were always getting sent off!

We're a kind of team, Bobby and I, so when he has a problem, it's my problem too.

Well, one Friday Bobby came in gasping: "Queenie comin', Charlie – me's agiving f'owers – got no goalie kit!" The Queen was visiting Bobby's school, and he had been chosen to give her a bouquet; more than anything in the whole world, Bobby wanted to wear his team's goalie kit for the royal appointment!

"Mum . . ." I began. But I already knew what she was going to say – "I'm sorry, Charlie, but we can't afford it. Perhaps when your father . . ."

Dad lost his job when the factory closed. He helps with the football at Bobby's school, but not for money. Bobby's face

slipped and his eyes went all swimmy. I couldn't let him down.

"I'll get the money somehow," I told him. "I'll work on it."

Chapter 2

It wasn't until the school fête that I realized Bobby was working on it too.

Bobby was doing "Beat the Goalie". He's the best goalie in his class! I used to get jealous because his school has real goalposts, but we only have traffic cones. And he gets to go by taxi. You see, Bobby goes to a special school cos he's got Down's



syndrome. Mum says we're all special. Just different.

Well, we were at the school fête, and Bobby stood in the goal, running on the spot. He jigged a

bit, then flung himself at the ball – *whoosh*! – flat out. He never worries about hurting himself: he just goes for it – *whoomph*!

In between goals he trotted over to me, peered in the money jar, and grinned. All afternoon he shouted, "'Ow much? 'Ow much now, Charlie?" But still I didn't get it. Not till the very end of the afternoon when he shook the can and cried, "Nuff for a goalie top, Charlie?" did the penny drop: Bobby thought the money was for him!



"Nuff now?"



His eyes were all beamy bright. It was like in those cartoons when you see pound signs in people's eyes. Well, I could see goalie kits in Bobby's. I stood there, shaking my head. And his eyes went all cloudy; his face crinkled up, not understanding.

"Goalie kit?" For a second the light in his face swooshed on again.

"No! The money's for the new swimming pool."

"Goalie kit!" he wailed, and shot up the goalpost, wrapping himself round the crossbar.

"I wan' my goalie kit!" he yelled.

All these people appeared.

"Ooh dear," they clucked, "poor little lamb – he'll hurt himself!"



They were worried about Bobby hurting himself. I was worried about getting him down! Help! What would Mum do?

I grabbed a lolly wrapper, flashed it at Bobby, and yelled: "Yellow card!" Bobby glared.

I glared back. The audience carried on clucking.

"I'm going to count to five, and then it'll be the red," I tried. "One, two . . ." Bobby clung on tighter.

Then Dad sailed through the crowd. Phew! He lifted his arms up and said: "Never argue with the ref, Bobs!" Bobby dropped into a big hug and Dad swung him onto his shoulders, saying, "Always accept the ref's decision, and hold your head high!"

They galloped off to throw sponges at a teacher.

I thought it was all over. And I hoped Bobby would forget about the goalie kit. He often forgets

which way round his T-shirt goes, or when it's his turn to do the washing up, but some things stick in his mind like chewing gum. This was one of them!

