“Oh, yes!” I ran across the grass, punching the air with my fist. “What a goal!” I'd just scored with a hard, right-footed shot that had blasted its way past the goalie. Taz and Gary looked well fed up. They glared at each other, as Tony and I celebrated. “Hey, man, what were you waiting for?” Gary roared at Taz. “A flippin' bus?” I grinned to myself as Taz took his shirt off and threw it down on the ground in disgust. “Oi, Jess! Over here!” I looked round. Monica, Bubbly and Meena were sitting on a nearby bench, waving frantically at me. “What do *they* want?” I thought irritably. They didn't bother with me much, usually. Reluctantly[[1]](#footnote-1) I ran over to them. They were all tarted up as usual, and were completely overdressed for sitting in the park. But then, they didn't look too impressed with my Manchester United shirt and trackies[[2]](#footnote-2) either. “Jess, man, who's your friend with the gorgeous bod[[3]](#footnote-3)?” Monica demanded.

“Who?” I didn't have a clue what they were talking about**. “**The one with the six-pack,” Meena squealed[[4]](#footnote-4) impatiently. “If he looks at me, I really will faint,” Monica said in this totally melodramatic voice. I frowned and looked over at the boys. “Do you mean Taz?” “Taz, is that his name?” Monica asked eagerly. Their tongues were practically hanging out as they watched Taz fooling around, doing stupid kung-fu moves on the other lads. !He is *so fine” “*'Hey, Jess,” Tony called to me. “Come on.” Thank God. I'd had enough of all this girly stuff. “Go on, Jess,'” Bubbly said cattily[[5]](#footnote-5). “Lover boy's calling you.” “Shut up,' I snapped. “You know he's just my mate. We're not all slags like you lot.” I turned and ran off, feeling really annoyed. I didn't want anyone getting the wrong idea about me and Tony. Auntie's words came flooding back: *It'll be* your turn soon ... Not likely'. I shook. my head, and. jogged back on to the pitch[[6]](#footnote-6). Taz and Gary were determined to stop me this time, but when Tony passed me the ball, I took them on again. I wrong-footed Taz. Then I pushed the ball past Gary, ran round him and collected it on the other side. It was just too easy. Before they knew what had hit them, I'd scored again. Taz and Gary were so mad, I thought they were going to kill each other.



We were walking back to restart the game, when I saw a girl coming towards us. At first I didn't take any notice, thinking that she was just using the pitch as a short cut. But she was looking straight at me and smiling. “Hi**.” “**Er - hi.” I stared at her. She was tall and thin, with short blonde hair, and she was wearing a trackie top and shorts. She was pretty too. But I'd never seen her before in my life. “That was brilliant” she said eagerly. “Do you play for any side?” I was completely gobsmacked. I glanced at Tony, who looked puzzled too. The other lads nearly bust a gut laughing. Typical. “Like who?” Taz grinned. “Southall United Sari Squad?” The girl ignored him. She obviously wasn't as impressed with Taz's six-pack as Meena, Monica and Bubbly were. “I play for Hounslow Harriers girls’ side**.”** I looked blank. I didn't know there *was* a Hounslow Harriers girls’side**.** “It's closed season now, but we've got a summer tournament[[7]](#footnote-7) coming up.” She smiled at me. “You should come and havea trial**.”** “A trial?” I stammered. I couldn't get my head round what she was saying. “Do you think I'm good enough?” The girl nodded. “Yeah. I've watched you a few times while I've been out running. You've got really good. It's up to our coach, but -“ she shrugged “- I know we could do with some fresh blood.” “That's brilliant, Jess,” Tony said excitedly[[8]](#footnote-8). The boys started laughing hysterically again. “Nice one, Jess,” Taz teased. “D'ya swap shirts at the end of matches?” “And get in the big bath together?” Sonny added. The girl raised her eyebrows at me and shook her head. “I'm Jules,” she said, stretching out a hand. “Jess” I said breathlessly[[9]](#footnote-9). I didn't care how much the boys laughed at me. Jules thought I was good enough to play for a *proper* side. At last, this was my chance to do something different with my life. *This* was what I'd been waiting for.

I stood at the side of the pitch, trying to take it all in. Hounslow Harriers had a *real* ground. A proper pitch with lights and corner flags and changing-rooms and stands for the crowd. Instead of Taz and Sonny and Gary and the others taking the mick and fooling about, there were women doing some serious training on the pitch in front of me. They were all different. Some of them were slim and lean, like Jules, and some of them were more powerfully-built, like athletes. There were a couple of black girls, but no Indians. No surprise there, then. My heart thumped[[10]](#footnote-10) with excitement. Those were the girls I'd be playing with if I got into the side, I told myself. No, *when* I got into the side. I wasn't going to throw this chance away. But I had to meet the coach first. That was why I was here. Jules had told me that the coach was called Joe. I watched him running up and down the pitch, yelling at the players. Some of them were practicing ball control, and some of them were banging the ball into the net, one after the other. I wondered how Joe felt, being the only guy out there. He didn't seem to mind, though. He seemed pretty much at home ... And kind of good-looking - if you're interested in that sort of thing.

I took a deep breath, and ran out on to the pitch. Jules had stopped to chat to Joe as I rushed overto them. The first thing I noticed was that Joe didn't look too pleased to see me. But that couldn't stop me grinning from ear to ear. I was excited just to *be* there. “Where do you usually play?” Joe said. No hello, nothing. It would have sounded really off, if he hadn't had such a soft Irish accent. I beamed[[11]](#footnote-11) at him. “In the park.” He looked at Jules and frowned. “I meant, what position?” “Oh, sorry.” I felt a bit of a fool. “I usually play all over, but up front on the right is best.” Joe looked me up and down. “Get your boots on, then,” he said. My face fell. “I haven't got any.” For a minute, I thought he was going to chuck me out before I'd even got started. I stared at him anxiously[[12]](#footnote-12), trying to make him realise how desperate I was to play. Jules was looking a bit uncomfortable. I guessed that she'd had to persuade Joe to give me ago. “All right,” he said at last. “Join in and start warming up.” I smiled with relief, and unzipped my tracksuit top. I had my Beckham shirt on underneath. Maybe soon I'd be wearing the Harriers strip like the other girls. But first I had to show what I could do ...

I felt nervous as I took my place on the pitch with the other players. I never felt nervous when I was playing against Taz and that lot, but this was different. I had to do well to earn a place in the side. But once the ball was at my feet, I lost all my nerves. It was just like being back in the park. Adrenaline pumped through me as I dribbled down the pitch, managing to avoid two defenders. I did my famous double-step over the ball to get round a third and ran forward. I had the goal in my sights. “Pass to Jules!” I heard Joe yelling from the touchline. I slid the ball across the box, straight into Jules' path, and she sidefooted it into the net. “Brilliant!” Joe called, and I glowed with pride. I wanted this so much it *hurt.*

When the game was over, I was so nervous, I felt sick. I wanted to know if I'd made it into the side. I *thought* I'd done well - I hadn't scored myself, but I'd set up goals for Jules and another girl whose name I didn't know. As we trooped off the pitch, I felt my heart lurch as Joe came over to me and took me to one side.

“How'd it feel out there?” he asked. “Excellent” I gasped. I was red in the face and out of breath, but I felt fantastic. “Really great.” Joe looked at me curiously. “I've never seen an Indian girl into football.” I smiled shyly at him. “I would have come sooner, but I didn't even know they had a girls' team here.” “It's all her fault” Joe said. He nodded at Jules who'd run over to join us. “When I was playing for the men's club, she used to hang around whining that there was no team for her.” “I wasn't *whining[[13]](#footnote-13)”* Jules argued. “But there was nothing for us girls. Just junior league boys' stuff. But when he busted his knee and couldn't play any more, he set up a girls' side “ she grinned at Joe, and I realised, with a bit of a shock, that she had the hots for him “ and he's been on my case ever since.” “I really want to coach the men's side, but the club made me start at the bottom,” Joe said. It was the first time I'd seen him really smile. “And you can't get much lower than her.” “Oh, you're so full of it!” Jules laughed. I was beginning to feel a bit left out. She and Joe obviously got on pretty well. “We win just as many trophies as the men's side. So ...” She flung an arm round my shoulders. “Does she pass?” I looked eagerly at Joe. “Your folks up for it?” he asked. I looked as innocent as I could. “Oh, yeah, they're cool.” No way was I admitting the truth. “Right, you'd better come back then.” Joe leaned over and punched Jules playfully on the shoulder. “And I suppose I'd better go and open the bar. Do some real work.” He went off towards the clubhouse. I glanced at Jules. She could hardly take her eyes off him. Actually, I didn't really blame her. He *was* a great coach. Jules turned to me. “He likes you.” For no reason at all, I blushed. “You think so?” “He asked you back, didn't he?” Jules grinned. “How long have you been playing?” I shrugged. “Oh, for ages, but nothing as serious as this. Just in the park.” “Serious, this?” Jules laughed. “It'll do for now, but I want to play professionally.” My mouth fell open in amazement[[14]](#footnote-14). “Wow! You can *do* that?” I gasped[[15]](#footnote-15). “As a job, you mean?” “Sure.” Jules nodded. “Not really here, but you can in America. They've got a pro-league there with new stadiums and everything.”

“Really?” I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Women could play football professionally? Suddenly, becoming a boring old solicitor seemed even less interesting than it had before. Jules was lucky, I thought enviously[[16]](#footnote-16). Her mum and dad must really support her to let her go all the way to America to play. I felt a stab of anxiety[[17]](#footnote-17). And here I was not even knowing how to tell mine about Hounslow Harriers...

1. modstræbende; uvillig [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. træningsbukser [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. T fyr; krop [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. skrige [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. katteagtigt [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. til fodbold etc. - bane [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. turnering [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. ophidset [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. åndeløst; forpustet [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. dunke; støde; slå; banke [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. stråle; smile stort [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. ængstelig; bekymret; urolig [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. flæbe; klynke; jamre [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. forbavselse; forbløffelse [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. gispe; stønne; snappe (el. hive) efter vejret [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. misundeligt [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. bekymring; ængstelse; [↑](#footnote-ref-17)