



THE LEEDS UNITED CENTENARY STORY

By Tom Palmer

Chapter 3



Wednesday 16th October 2019



They found themselves standing together on a street, old fashioned trucks and cars driving up and down a dirt track. There were small wooden houses in either side. Children and women sitting out on the front steps.

'We're here,' Alex gasped. 'Like the ghost said. South Africa in 1961.'

Everything around them was unfamiliar. A different continent. A different time.

Meera looked up at a bus stop sign. She couldn't believe what she saw. The sign said that white people could not stand at the bus stop. She didn't understand. How did that work? And why? She wanted to laugh, but she knew, deep down, that it wasn't funny.

As they wandered along the street, Kofi pointed at another sign to Alex. It was a toilet. It said WHITES ONLY.

Alex was speechless, but he felt sick. What sort of a place was this? He had seen a sci-fi film once – or was it a horror movie – where people were divided because of the colour of their skin.

Close to the edge of the street there was a park. The air was warm. They could hear the whooping sound of a bird they had never heard before.

'We're in South Africa,' Meera whispered.

'I know,' Kofi said. 'How cool is this?'

Meera wasn't sure what to say. She knew that South Africa now was not as bad as it had been in 1961. But that man had said they'd be going in 1961. She was pretty sure that was not so cool having



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read, last night, about how white people and black people were treated very differently back then under a regime called Apartheid.

On the park they saw several young black men playing football. One of them was exceptional. He was fast, dribbling the ball, beating man after man, then crossing for a striker to score.

'That's him,' Meera said.

'Why are they all black?' Kofi said, ignoring her.

'Maybe white people aren't allowed in the park?' Alex suggested. 'Like in that toilet?'

The voice next to them made the children jump.

The ghost from Elland Road was standing shoulder to shoulder with them.

'Non-whites had to go to some places: whites to others,' he explained. 'The white people had the best places, though. Look. This park is small and has broken stones and is dangerous. Is that fair?'

Alex said 'No.'

'People like Nelson Mandela changed all that,' the ghost smiled, then went on. 'But it's still not perfect in Africa.'

Kofi remembered something from the Bulgaria v England game two nights before. How the England players had been racially abused.

'It's still not perfect in Europe either,' he said.

They all agreed.

'So, have you found out anything yet?' the ghost asked.

'I think it's that footballer there,' Meera suggested, pointing at the outstanding player.

'That's right,' the ghost said. 'But who is he?'

Meera shrugged. How was she supposed to know that?

Then Alex interrupted. 'Albert Johanneson,' he said.

'Very good,' the ghost seemed impressed. 'And what about him?'

'He comes to Leeds?' Alex replied.

'Correct.'

'And he is first to,' Kofi's voice tailed off. 'To what?'

'Win the league?' Meera grinned, 'like Liverpool will this season.'

'No,' the ghost said.



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'Champions League?' Kofi suggested.

The ghost shook his ghost head.

Then Alex knew. Again. Reading that book he'd borrowed from Mr Wilkinson had helped him. A lot. 'Play in the FA Cup final? That's it. Is it?'

'It is! Well done,' the ghost praised them all.

'What year?' Kofi asked.

'1965,' Alex answered before the ghost could. 'Against Liverpool.'

'That's right.'

'And he was a Leeds player?' Kofi sounded surprised.

'He was.'

'So the first black player to play in an F.A. Cup final was a Leeds player?' Kofi pressed.

'Correct.'

'Wow,' Kofi muttered. 'Maybe Leeds are not so bad...'

They watched as Albert Johannsen took on three more players, beat them all then slotted the ball past the goalkeeper.

'I never knew,' Meera said. '*That* is pretty cool.'

'Right you lot,' the ghost said suddenly. 'You need to wake up soon. Say goodbye to Albert Johanneson.'

When they met in their classroom first thing, Meera had something to tell the boys. They were the only ones in the classroom so far. Just them and the white board next to Miss Bielsa's desk.

That morning, earlier, she'd had a chat with her gran about 1961. But she would save that until later.

'We know the story about Albert Johanneson, but what lesson have we learned?' said Meera.

'We need to get that to move on to the last mystery.'

'That Leeds have had African players,' Alex said looking at Kofi.

'I talked to my dad about that last night,' Kofi said. 'He said loads have. Lucas Radebe. Phil Masinga. And he said the reason he wanted to live here is because – when he was young – a Ghanaian legend called Tony Yeboah played for Leeds.'



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'That's a joke,' Alex said.

'What is?' Kofi sounded defensive.

'That you live in Leeds because of Leeds United.'

Kofi narrowed, then laughed 'I suppose... I suppose that's true.'

'Can we get back to what we're supposed to be doing?' Meera insisted, breaking the tension between the two boys. 'The first mystery was that lots of people leave Leeds to play football in other counties, like John Charles did, so maybe *this* mystery is that lots of people come to Leeds from other countries to play football and, well, live...'

'Live!' that's it, Kofi said. 'Like the football team, lots of people travel here to live in Leeds. Like me and my family.'

The classroom white board began to flicker: but the children missed it for now.

'I read up this morning online,' Meera said. 'Albert Johanneson arrived in Leeds in April 1961. So I asked my gran about it. She said she came here in 1961. In April. Isn't that weird?'

'To play football?' Alex asked, bleary eyed.

'No...' Meera laughed. 'Gran hates football. No, she had just married my grandad and he came to work in England on the railways. After the Second World War anyone from Commonwealth country, like India, could come to live and work here. They were needed because so many British men had died in the war. And someone had to do the jobs they used to do. But my mum and dad were both born in Leeds like me.'

'I was born in Ghana,' Kofi said. 'But maybe my children will be born in Leeds?'

'What about you, Alex?' Meera asked.

'My family have always been from Leeds,' Alex smiled. 'I am one hundred percent Leeds. I've even got a tee-shirt that says that on the front.'

Meera laughed.

Then Kofi was talking. 'But in a history book I read before I came to England,' he said, 'about Yorkshire in the library, it said no one lived here thousands of years ago. There was an ice age. Nobody lived in England even.'

Alex shrugged. 'I'm still 100% Leeds,' he countered.

But Meera and Kofi weren't listening. They were staring past Alex, their mouths open wide.



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Alex turned to look at the white board. Words were forming on it.

YOU'RE DOING WELL. TWO DOWN ONE TO GO.

NOW... FIND THE CURRENT LEEDS UNITED PLAYER WHO IS 100% LEEDS.

FB

'FB?' Kofi said. 'What's that? Facebook? My mum goes on that.'

'Might be his initials,' Meera suggested.

'Forget the ghost,' Alex spoke over them, now 100% sure he knew who the ghost was. He wanted to get on. Get his hands on that Leeds United season ticket. 'That's our third mystery to solve. We've done one and two. One more and we get the prize. Remember?'

'So,' Meera mused, 'who is the most 100% Leeds player in the current Leeds United team?'

Can the children solve the third mystery? They need to work out who they think the most 100% Leeds United player is. But how can they do that? What does it mean? And will they sort it out in time to win a season ticket at the football club they most want to watch? Thanks for reading.



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Chapter 3 - WORD OF THE DAY is ... speechless

