



THE LEEDS UNITED CENTENARY STORY

By Tom Palmer

Chapter 2



Tuesday 15th October 2019



They met in the school library at break time. Mr Wilkinson – the librarian – was setting up a book display for Halloween, stretching false spiders’ webs across the bookshelves and the big screen above his desk. He asked the children to look after the library while he went to get a pumpkin out of his car.

‘When I get back I’ve got something to show you, Alex,’ he declared.

Alex frowned, but focused on what they needed to do. It was half-ten. They didn’t have long to solve the Elland Road ghost’s first mystery.

The three children sat at Mr Wilkinson’s desk and Kofi typed in the words:

JUVENTUS 1950s LEGENDS

The screen filled up with so many words and headlines it was hard to choose where to go. There were lists and Wikipedia entries, but it felt to the children like information overload.

How were they going to find what they wanted?

‘Click images...’ Meera suggested.

Kofi did as Meera said.



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The first image was of three men, all wearing Juventus' famous black and white stripes, a football stand full of fans in the background.

'That's John Charles!' Alex gasped.

'Who?'

'John Charles. The tall one in the middle. He played for Leeds. Some people think he was our best ever player.'

'Nah,' Kofi said. 'He's in a Juventus top. He's not from Leeds.'

And then the light changed. And the volume went up. Meera felt Kofi hold onto her, he seemed so shocked. They were surrounded by grass and stands full of football fans, cigarette smoke wafting across the pitch.

'We're in...' Alex said.

'I know,' Kofi swallowed. He couldn't believe it. The Juventus Stadium. This was the one place in the world he yearned to be. And here they were. It was warm, like the height of summer. The sky was dazzlingly bright, the chanting of the fans increasing.

Kofi shouted something, but neither Alex nor Meera could hear him.

And there, in front of them, were three men in black and white striped tops. The taller one in the middle noticed the children and smiled broadly, putting his thumb up.

'Alright, kids,' he said in a deep Welsh accent.

The trio were so stunned they couldn't speak.

Then it was quiet.

And cooler.

Changing again.

They were back in the library. Each of them had to reach out and touch a table or a chair, to ground themselves.

Outside the sky was grey and rain was splattering against the library windows.

'How... what... where...' Kofi managed to splutter.

'Were we really there?' Meera gasped.

Alex nodded. 'We were, Kofi. We were in the Juventus stadium.'

Kofi beamed and Alex noticed a tear in his friend's eye. He didn't comment on it.



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'I could smell the air,' Kofi enthused. 'It was warm. And the light. It was just like...'

'When you lived in Turin?' Meera asked.

Kofi nodded. He was quiet for a moment. Then he spoke. 'But I never went in the stadium. Until now...'

'But...' Alex started, then stopped himself. He understood. Kofi had never been inside the Juventus stadium when he lived in Italy. He'd made up that bit. But he didn't want to embarrass his friend.

'It was the best stadium I've ever seen,' Alex said.

Kofi just nodded, still too emotional to speak.

Now Mr Wilkinson reappeared carrying a giant pumpkin. Staggering, he put it on top of his spider's web bookshelf. Then he picked up a blue book and handed it to Alex.

'My wife let me bring it,' he said. 'It's hers. But I know you're a big Leeds fan, so she said you could have a look at it.'

100 YEARS OF LEEDS UNITED

by Daniel Chapman

Alex's face lit up.

'I need this,' he muttered.

'Ask for it for Christmas,' Meera said, trying to take it from him. 'We've got a job to do.'

Alex stared at the book. 'Maybe,' he said, 'this can help us.'

They leafed through the pages to the photographs near the middle. It didn't take long to find him. The same tall man with the confident but kind expression was there, jogging next to Elland Road.

'That's the West Stand at Leeds,' Alex gasped.

Kofi looked closely and said 'Oh yeah...'

They found his name in the index. John Charles. There were dozens of pages about him.

Born Swansea 1931.

308 games for Leeds United. Scored 160 goals.

Signs for Juventus for a British transfer record.



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155 games for Juve. Scored 108 goals

'That's nearly as good as Ronaldo,' Kofi interrupted. 'He's scored 24 goals in 37 games.'

Rated by many as the greatest ever British all-round footballer.

Never booked or sent off in his whole career.

His nickname *Il Gigante Buono*.

'The Gentle Giant,' Kofi whispered.

'What?' Meera asked.

'That's what *Il Gigante Buono* means: the Gentle Giant.'

'You've done well,' the ghost was on the library screen above Mr Wilkinson's desk, smiling down at the children. 'That's just who I had in mind. You've succeeded with the first challenge.'

Mr Wilkinson was busy pulling exciting Halloween books out of a Leeds School Libraries Service crate, oblivious to this latest haunting.

Alex narrowed his eyes and looked at the man on the screen. 'You knew him?'

'I signed him for Leeds,' the ghost said. 'From Swansea Town. You see what an international club Leeds are?' he went on, turning to Kofi. 'He came from Wales and we sold him on to Italy to one of the world's greatest ever teams.'

Alex studied the ghost's face. He knew who he was, or had been.

'So,' the man went on. 'Kofi. Tell me. What was the lesson you learned?'

Kofi leaned forward. 'That Leeds used to have good players? That they sent players to big clubs all over the world? Even to mega clubs like Juventus,' he grinned.

'That's right. Leeds players have gone on to Real Madrid, Juventus, Liverpool. They've played in Champions League Finals. Even World Cup finals.'

'Okay,' Kofi nodded. 'I admit that Leeds selling the world's most expensive player to Juventus is not bad. But...'

'But?' the ghost laughed.

'Well...' Kofi went on, 'the best teams in the world have African footballer like me. Look at Mane and Salah at Liverpool. I bet Leeds never did that.'

The man smiled. 'That brings me to your next challenge,' he said.

Meera, Kofi and Alex stared at the screen, silent, waiting.



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'I want you to find me a footballing first from Johannesburg in South Africa.'

'Eh?' Alex asked.

'That's your clue,' the ghost went on. 'But... how about I send you there. Just for a moment. Tonight. While you're asleep. You'll dream you're in Africa. In 1961. Can you handle that? I promise you'll be safe.'

Kofi stepped towards the screen. 'I can. I'd like to go to Africa again.'

Alex said 'Okay.'

Meera was frowning.

'What is it, Meera?'

'That year. 1961,' she pondered. 'I think that's when my grandparents came to settle in Leeds.'

The rest of the school day seemed to last forever. By home time the children were desperate to go and for night to fall. In the playground, while most people were saying *See you tomorrow*, Kofi, Alex and Meera were saying *See you tonight* and wondering if the ghost really was going to transport them thousands of miles south and back decades in time. Were they really going to South Africa in their dreams tonight? What would they find out? And why had the ghost said they'd be safe?

Why *wouldn't* they be safe?

Meera decided she'd find out some facts about South Africa before she went to bed. Just in case anything went wrong...

Can the children solve the second mystery? They need to work out who was the footballing first from Johannesburg. Something that must be linked to Leeds United. Can you find out before tomorrow's episode? Thanks for reading.



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Chapter 2 - WORD OF THE DAY is ... desperate

