

THE LEEDS UNITED CENTENARY STORY

By Tom Palmer

Chapter 4

Thursday 17th October 2019



After school they went to Alex's gran's house, which was nearest to the school grounds. It was a bungalow with only one bedroom. Gran lived there with three cats and two shelves full of Russian dolls.

Alex had put on his *100% Leeds* tee-shirt.

The stone was crumbling on the outside walls of Gran's house, but her garden was perfect. Even, after all the rain in October, it had flowers and the lawn looked like Elland Road's turf on a good day.

'Have you done your research?' Kofi asked Alex. Each of the three children had a cat sat on them within minutes of arriving at Gran's. Gran had fallen asleep.

Meera and Kofi had agreed that Alex would be in charge of deciding who was the most 100% of Leeds players. He knew the Leeds dressing room better than he knew their classroom, they said.

'So...' Alex beamed, excited by his task, knowing he had done it well. 'For me, the most 100% Leeds player is the one who has *only* played for Leeds United and was born in or near Leeds. Agreed?'

Kofi and Meera nodded. That sounded okay to them.

'There are three candidates... One is Jamie Shackleton. *Shack*. Born in Leeds in 1999. He's played for the club 21 times up to October 5th and never scored.'

Kofi and Meera nodded.

'Two is Jack Clarke. Born in York in 2000, he played for Leeds 22 times. Scored twice.'

'I've got him on Match Attax,' Meera said. 'But... hang on... he's a Spurs player.'

'True,' Alex said, but he's back at Leeds on loan and he's not played for Spurs. Yet.'

'Hmmm,' said Kofi.



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Alex went on: 'Three is Calvin Phillips. *KP*. He was born in Leeds in 1995. He's played for Leeds 133 times and has scored 10 goals. He turned down a move to Aston Villa and the Premier League in August because he loves Leeds United.'

The three children looked at each other.

Meera spoke first: 'I rule out Clarke. He's from York. And he signed for Spurs.'

'Yeah,' Kofi agreed. 'Me too.'

'So, Phillips or Shackleton?' Alex asked, having noticed that his gran was coming round now. He urged the others to speak more quietly. Then he said: 'Each of us should say what they think. Then we can decide.'

The three children agreed: it was time to decide what to say to the ghost. If they got it right they'd have season tickets to watch the team of their choice. If wrong, maybe nothing. There was a lot riding on this next conversation.

Kofi went first. 'It's obvious. I think Calvin Phillips because he has lived in Leeds longer, cause he's older and he's played more for the team.'

Meera went next. 'I think Calvin Phillips, too, because he could have left like Jack Clarke did, but he chose to stay out of loyalty. He could be in the Prem this season, but he is hoping he'll play for Leeds there *next* season.'

'I agree,' Alex said. 'So let's agree that...'

Suddenly Alex saw that his gran was looking at him.

'Alex, love?' she interrupted.

'Yes Gran?'

'There's something you need to know. And you need to know it now.'

'Gran?'

'I know you love your *100% Leeds* tee-shirt, Alex...'

Alex could feel a BUT coming on. His legs felt weak. He stared at the cat on his knee.

'Yes Gran.'

'Well... it looks like you've forgotten this, but my great grandfather, Alexander Sergeevich – so your great great grandfather – escaped to England in 1917. He came from Russia. You're named after him. Do you understand?'



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Alex understood.

He looked up from the cat on his lap into the eyes of Meera and Kofi.

Now what? he thought.

'So, although you are wearing your *100% Leeds* tee-shirt,' Gran finished, 'you are at least 6.25% Russian.'

Gran squeezed Alex's shoulder. 'And proud?' she asked.

'Yes Gran,' Alex replied.

'I'll make you all a drink,' Gran said, avoiding stepping on the trio of cats who were weaving between her feet as she walked out of the room.

Alex and his friends sat in silence. Kofi and Meera weren't sure what to say to their friend.

The television in the corner flickered on, taking their attention. The ghost of Elland Road was there, his face large on the screen.

'So, have you solved your third mystery?' he asked.

'Er...'

'I think we need...'

Then Alex stood up and faced the screen. 'I think I know the answer,' he said boldly.

'Can I?' he asked the others.

Meera stood next to Alex. 'I trust you to say the right thing,' she said to him.

Kofi looked into his friend's eyes and said: 'Me too.'

Alex coughed. 'I think... I think that *anyone* who plays for Leeds is 100% Leeds,' he said. 'Just like anyone who supports Leeds is 100% Leeds. If no-one lived in Leeds 10,000 years ago, then everyone has family from someone else, not Leeds, so that means no-one can be 100% Leeds.'

The old man on the TV screen raised an eyebrow. The three children couldn't tell whether he was pleased with the answer or not. Nor whether they'd get their reward.

Have the children got it right? Will they win a season ticket each? Or come away with nothing? Find out in the last episode tomorrow. Thanks for reading



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Chapter 4 - WORD OF THE DAY is ... crumbling

