



THE LEEDS UNITED CENTENARY STORY

By Tom Palmer

Chapter 5



Friday 18th October 2019



Saturday afternoon. The children were back at Elland Road for Leeds United versus Birmingham City, the match to celebrate the football club's centenary. One hundred years since the very beginning of the club: the atmosphere was electric.

Meera, Kofi and Alex were excited, but exhausted. They'd had an intense week. They'd been given three mysteries to solve and three lessons to learn. But had they achieved everything that the ghostly figure they'd first met, here, at Elland Road, had set them?

After Alex had made his Thursday night speech about every player and fan being 100% Leeds, then having found out that even some of *his* family hadn't lived in Leeds throughout history, the ghost had given them their verdict.

'You've been amazing,' he told them. 'I am so excited that the three of you – and all the other children in the city – are the future of Leeds. You should all be very proud.'

Then the ghost chose to praise each of the children one by one.

'Alex... for understanding that everyone could say they were 100% Leeds, whether their ancestors were from the city or not.

'Meera... for being proud of your grandparents for taking the risk to move to England all the way from India, not leaving their history behind, but bringing it with them and adding it to the history of Leeds.



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‘And, finally, Kofi... for saying that he wanted his children to be born in Leeds.

‘Well done all of you...’ the ghost paused. ‘I chose you three because I knew you were good kids and would do the right things. I never doubted you for a minute.’

The ghost of Elland Road paused again, then went on: ‘I’d also like to say well done to the children sitting listening to this story, probably in your schools, all over Leeds today. I’ve seen what a fantastic generation of children you are. And I am just as excited that you – along with Meera and Kofi and Alex – are going to make sure *your* city, Leeds, has a good future. And... please say a big thank you from me to whoever is reading this story to you.’

When the ghost had finished, Alex had a question.

‘May I ask who you are?’ he said politely.

‘You may,’ the ghost replied. ‘But I think – perhaps – you know already.’

Alex nodded. ‘I think I do.’

‘Go on then...’

Alex glanced at his two friends, then back to the ghost. ‘Are you Major Frank Buckley?’

‘I am,’ the ghost smiled. ‘Or... I was,’ he laughed..

Kofi and Meera looked at Alex for an explanation.

‘Tell them,’ Major Buckley said.

Alex began: ‘Frank Buckley was manager of Leeds from 1948 to 1953. He helped kick start the club becoming one of the great teams in Europe after the Second World War.’

‘And?’ Buckley smiled.

‘And he signed the club’s greatest ever player, John Charles, from Swansea in 1949.’

‘And?’

‘And – in the First World War – he set up the Footballers’ Battalion, encouraging football players to sign up to fight together to defeat Germany. He’s a bit of a legend.’

‘Just a bit,’ Buckley said. ‘Like you three this week.’

Saturday afternoon – back at Elland Road – the stadium was alive. The pitch looked amazing, a huge expanse of glowing green. Added to the music and the smells of food and cheering from the fans, Alex, Meera and Kofi were buzzing.



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They found their seats and got ready for ninety minutes of footballing action. They were near the front. So close that, as the team was warming up, they could pick out the players.

‘That’s Shack and KP,’ Alex told the others. ‘I mean Calvin Phillips. You know, the two players we were talking about on Thursday night?’

And then, as he spoke, the two players turned round and waved. All three children were stunned. There was no one near them. It was clear KP and Shack were waving at them.

Then a man in a big coat – *Leeds United Steward* printed on its back – beckoned the two players over. And – for a few seconds – Meera, Alex and Kofi chatted with Calvin Phillips and Jamie Shackleton.

They were awestruck, starstruck, not quite dumbstruck.

Once the players had gone off to warm up for the game, the steward turned round and they saw who he was. It was Major Buckley again. He was holding three envelopes.

‘Your season tickets,’ he announced. ‘You just have to decide who to go and watch.’

‘Leeds,’ Alex said without hesitation.

Major Buckley handed Alex his envelope, then eyed the other two children, arching a single eyebrow like a question mark.

‘I’ll take Leeds, too,’ Meera said. ‘I know I’m a Liverpool fan, but it’s good here. I’ll support them against everyone except Liverpool. And I’d rather come to Elland Road with someone than go to Anfield and not know anyone.’

‘Fine by me,’ Major Buckley said, handing Meera her envelope. ‘Now... Kofi?’

Kofi frowned. He had never wanted anything more in his life than a Juventus season ticket. Imagine going to watch Cristiano Ronaldo every week. But there was something else he felt he wanted more.

To belong.

He’d been at his new school for six weeks and now he had two friends – two good friends – and he didn’t want to lose that. If he could join them here, every week or two, that would feel good. Wouldn’t it? He’d feel like he belonged. In Leeds.

‘Leeds please,’ he said to Major Buckley. ‘But...’



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Major Buckley grinned. ‘... but... let me work out what you might be about to say... when you are older and those kids of yours have been born in Leeds, I’ll find a way of getting you a Juventus season ticket. For all of you. And for you at Liverpool, too, Meera. How about that?’

Meera smiled and Kofi nodded. ‘Deal,’ he said. ‘But, for now,’ he took the envelope, ‘let’s just say we’re Leeds, aren’t we?’

The trio stood up as the crowd roared, the match was about to kick off. Leeds United versus Birmingham City. This was the end of a hundred years of Leeds United playing football in their city: and the beginning of the next hundred years.

Kofi, Alex and Meera knew they would be proud to be part of it.

The End

Thank you for reading this story. We hope you enjoyed it and that you have a great weekend.

Tom Palmer and Leeds School Library Service.



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Chapter 5 - WORD OF THE DAY is ... hesitation

