

READING THE GAME

This section includes the first chapter of the episodic story and the Euro 2017-themed reading activities and challenges.

DUTCH DIARIES – a Euro 2017 story by Tom Palmer

Monday 3 July 2017

My bedroom. My house. With Katniss, who is sat on my feet, purring.

I'm just back from school. We had that REALLY IMPORTANT meeting about the school trip to Holland. It was good, VERY good, a bit BAD and another thing I'm not sure about.

First some background, as Mrs Mahal would say.

Our head teacher and sports teacher – that's Mrs Mahal again – has set up an AWESOME school trip. We're going to Holland in the last week of school before summer. For two reasons. Two EXCITING reasons.

REASON ONE. To watch England play Scotland in our first Euro 2017 match. That's the GOOD thing.

REASON TWO. To go to Anne Frank's house in Amsterdam. That's the VERY good thing. I mean... I love watching sport. I've been to see England women play football and England men play football. England men and women play rugby. England women play cricket. All with my dad who will watch anyone doing anything in an England shirt. Seriously.

Anyway, I love watching sport... I mean, I watched the Lionesses play Denmark in their last warm up game two nights ago... but Anne Frank. I mean... ANNE FRANK. She's my hero. My heroine. My role model. My idol. My inspiration. My everything and anything.

We've been reading Anne Frank's diaries at school. Since we came back from half term, a few pages every day in registration. I love them. The diaries, I mean. And I know it's a sad story, a REALLY sad story, and I know she dies and I know it was awful, but I LOVE her book and I LOVE her and I LOVE the idea of going to her house.

So that's why going to Anne Frank's house is better than going to watch the Lionesses play in a finals tournament. Anne Frank is the reason I write this diary. She's the reason I am going to be a writer when I grow up. She is the reason for a lot of things.

Mo was sat next to me at the school trip meeting. You remember Mo? From when I started writing this diary. Mo, who was the first in our school to bring in a fidget toy and he still keeps one in his pocket, even though Mrs Mahal banned them. (Only I know that. Don't tell anyone.) Mo, who keeps tropical fish at home and names them after his favourite authors. (Currently he has seven, called Michael, J.K., Anthony, David, Jacqueline, Helena and Roald.) He says he can read their minds. The fishes' minds: not J.K. Rowling's.

And Mo, who, when I dropped my tray of food at lunch last term and everyone turned to stare, suddenly gave me his tray and made it look as if it was him who dropped it, so that everyone laughed at him, not me. That Mo. My friend.

'So, what are you most looking forward to?' Mo asked me, as Anya, a girl in our class put her hand up to ask a question.

Anya. I don't like Anya. Her mum is a school governor and Anya never lets anyone forget it. *My mum told me this. My mum told me that. I know this. I know that.* I swear that the teachers are scared of Anya. Even Mrs Mahal. She's like... their BOSS.

I smiled at Mo's question. He knew. He knew I was looking forward to the football and to Anne Frank's house. He knew Anne Frank was my big thing.

'I love England,' I said. 'I love the Lionesses. But I've seen them before. And I think going to Anne Frank's house will be...'

A loud shush came from the front of the room. I saw Mr Douglas, Mrs Mahal's sidekick, glaring at me.

I shushed.

'Anya? What did you want to ask?' Mrs Mahal said.

'Mum says we're going to watch the Lionesses training. And that we're going to be allowed to play with some of them. This week.' Anya turned and stared at the rest of us triumphantly. Like SHE'D arranged it or something.

I ignored Anya and watched Mrs Mahal's face. The head teacher's mouth was smiling, but her eyes were not. (Do you know what I mean?). And Mr Douglas looked at her in a way teachers do, eyebrows raised, saying nothing, because the only things they want to say they don't want the children to hear.

Mrs Mahal sighed. Then – in her cheerful voice – she said: 'Yes, Anya. I was going to tell EVERYONE that at the end to finish the meeting off on a high. And it's true. On Wednesday we have been invited to go to see the Lionesses train and we MIGHT have the chance to have a little session with some of them. And we have space for some parents too.'

Noise now. Lots of noise. EVERYONE talking. Lionesses this. Lionesses that. And I KNEW it was exciting and I KNEW my dad would take a day off from his business to come and he'd be really excited too, in a Dad sort of way. But I felt cross too. Cross that Anya had told everyone. Like she'd spoiled it. Like she'd made it hers. Do you know what I mean?...

I looked at Mo. He was smiling at me. 'Forget about her,' he whispered. 'It'll be fun.'

Sometimes I think Mo can read my mind. Like he thinks he can read his fishes' minds.

'One more thing,' Mrs Mahal said, raising her voice.

Almost quiet.

'In the run up to the trip – and while we are there – Mr Douglas and I would like to set you all four challenges.'

Complete quiet now. She had our attention. And mine. I love challenges.

'The Lionesses have four values they try to think about,' Mrs Mahal explained. 'Like we do work on resilience and mindset in school, the Lionesses try to live up to their four values.'

Anya's hand shot up. She knew the values. That was clear. Her mum had told her that too. OBVIOUSLY.

Mrs Mahal shook her head. 'Put your hands down, everyone,' she said, even though only one person had her hand up. (YOU KNOW WHO.) 'I will tell you the values. Excellence. Pride. Integrity. Collaboration.' Mrs Mahal paused. 'That's what all of England football tries to live up to. And, when we go to train with England, I want you to try to live up to the first one of those. Excellence. We'll work on the other three when we are in Holland.'

Mrs Mahal went on. Asking what we thought those four values meant. But I had stopped listening. I felt like I'd heard a knock at the door and that something bad was about to happen. Like that bit in Anne Frank's diary when she thinks the Germans have found them in their secret hideaway and they are about to be taken away and killed.

Well, not that bad. But a bit like that. A tiny bit. Actually, nothing like that. But I felt a bit bad.

Why did I feel bad?

I was worried. Worried about playing football with the Lionesses and about trying to be EXCELLENT. Because I wasn't going to be. I love watching football, but I'm not great at playing it. Nowhere near excellent.

And that was when I saw Anya grinning at me. And I could tell she was thinking the same thing about me and playing football.

And now I am in my room on my own – even Katniss has abandoned me. Worrying about meeting the England players now. Worrying about not being excellent.

Chapter two of *Dutch Diaries* will be published at www.literacytrust.org.uk/lionessesresources  before 8.00am on Wednesday 5 July 2017. Subsequent episodes will be published on July 7, 10, 12, 14, 17, 19 and 20.

