

CHARLOTTE DISAPPEARS

As he got into his stride, coming down the hill,
Danny caught something out of the corner of his
eye. In a window. A movement. A flash of light.

He ran on for a few seconds. Then slowed.

Could it be?

Danny walked slowly back to the window. He
peered in. But there was nothing there. And Danny
wondered if he was seeing things he wanted to see:
not real things.

‘Kofi?’ he said gently.

No reply. Just the noise of the motorway. The
noise of the seagulls.

He turned to go. Back up the road to IKEA. And

there, in front of him, was Kofi, trying, but failing, to smile.

Danny couldn't help grinning, even though he was worried about Charlotte. At least he'd found Kofi.

Danny explained to Kofi what was going on as they ran. About Holt. About Charlotte and Paul.

Danny didn't ask what Kofi had been up to. He knew that if Kofi wanted to tell him about it, he would.

When Danny and Kofi arrived at IKEA, Paul was already there. They knew they had the right place: two containers, close together, in the IKEA car park. It matched Charlotte's description exactly.

Except that Charlotte wasn't there.

'Where is she?' Danny asked.

'I got here a minute ago,' Paul replied, looking at Kofi, smiling.

'This is Kofi,' Danny said to Paul. 'He was at the industrial estate.'

Paul and Kofi nodded to each other, then both were looking at Danny. He seemed distraught. Not bothered with making introductions. It was hardly the time.

The car park was packed. There were hundreds of cars. Dozens of people.

Danny pulled out his phone to call Charlotte again. But then he stopped. If she was in danger, he didn't want her answering to give away where she was.

'Let's search,' Danny said.

Neither of the others answered him. They were just waiting to be told what to do.

‘But where?’ Paul said eventually. ‘There are so many people, so many cars and shops.’

‘I don’t know,’ Danny said quietly.

His mind was going mad. Where was Charlotte? Was she in danger? And, if she was, how would he ever forgive himself? He was mad to get her involved in this.

In fact, he was mad to involve anyone else in these things. Maybe he was mad to get involved in them himself. He used to find this exciting. But now, because he’d put other people in danger, he was beginning to wonder if his dad had been right.

Where was she? And where was Jonathan Shearer? The thought that he might have something

to do with Charlotte not being where she said she’d be was too much to bear.

‘Danny,’ Paul said, ‘what shall we do?’

