

COVER-UP

Charlotte and Danny got the bus into town after school. They were outside the *Evening Post* offices well before 4 p.m.

‘Shall we just check if Kofi’s gone back to his hotel room?’ Danny asked.

‘Good thinking.’

They walked in the direction of the hotel. Under the inner ring road. The air was poisonous with exhaust fumes because of a traffic jam. Danny could hear horns beeping as drivers became more and more impatient.

They walked into the hotel. To the reception desk in the cramped entrance. Not a posh hotel, like the

ones he'd seen in Moscow.

'Excuse me. Is your guest Kofi Danquah still here, please?' Danny asked the receptionist, wondering if he sounded too formal, as he was never sure how to behave in hotels.

The receptionist checked a list. 'No,' she said. 'He left unexpectedly this morning. But he's still got unlimited nights left here. We've kept his room for him.'

'Right, thanks,' Danny said.

'Are you with the other guy?' the receptionist said.

'Anton Holt?' Danny asked, assuming Holt had been in to call for Kofi.

'Yeah, the older guy.'

Danny nodded. 'Sort of,' he said, and made for

the door.

But something stopped him.

Older guy?

He was about to laugh and remember to tell Holt he'd been called 'older'. It was a strange phrase for a man in his twenties.

Danny backtracked. There was a tiny question in his mind. And he knew, from having read a hundred crime novels, that even the tiniest question had to be followed up.

He headed back to the desk, leaving Charlotte holding the door, puzzled.

'This older guy?' Danny asked the receptionist.

'Yeah?'

'How much *older* was he?'

'White hair,' the receptionist said quickly. 'Posh

suit. Funny accent.'

Danny nodded. 'And he was the only one in asking for Kofi?'

'Yeah,' the receptionist said, smiling uneasily. 'You're starting to sound like a policeman.'

'Thanks,' Danny said. For him that was a compliment.

'Listen,' the receptionist said, 'seeing as you're his friend, you'd better take this.' She handed Danny Kofi's mobile phone.

Danny looked at it, puzzled.

'He left it,' she said. 'On the bed. I'm surprised he didn't see it when he left.'

'The guy the receptionist mentioned,' Danny said to Charlotte, as they walked back under the inner ring

road.

'What about him?'

'He must be the agent.'

'I suppose he must,' Charlotte agreed.

'That's not good,' said Danny.

He looked around to see if there was someone with white hair and a posh suit hanging around.

There wasn't.

'We need to talk to Holt.'

'I know.'

They walked towards the *Evening Post* building. The sky had darkened since they left school and now the first drops of rain had begun to fall. Most of the front of the building was glass and Danny noticed flecks of rain making a sweeping pattern on it.

Then he noticed the police van. And six policemen standing across the front of the building.

Instinctively, Danny took Charlotte's arm. Just like this morning.

She looked at him, half smiling, half puzzled.

'There are police everywhere,' Danny said.

'Aren't there always?' Charlotte said.

'No.'

'I see.'

Danny and Charlotte carried on walking. Up to the revolving doors.

'ID please,' a police officer said, stopping them and moving her body between them and the door.

'I don't have any,' Danny said.

'It's limited access, sir,' the policewoman said.

'I'm here to see a reporter.'

'Have you got an appointment?'

'No.'

'It's limited access, then, sir.'

'So we can't come in?'

'I'm afraid not, sir.'

Danny wasn't sure which was the most unsettling thing: his worries about Kofi or this policewoman calling him 'sir' all the time.

'What's going on, then?' Danny asked.

'There's no information at the moment, sir.'

Danny nearly smiled. He could have been talking to a robot, not a human being.

He sighed. 'Thanks anyway.'

Danny and Charlotte walked away from the newspaper building.

'What's all that about?' Charlotte asked.

'I don't know.'

'What are you going to do?'

'Wait,' Danny said.

'Why?'

'If you just wait and watch,' Danny replied,
'something sometimes happens.'

They waited on the edge of a small car park at the front of the building. It was not the main car park where, Danny knew, Holt parked his car. It was the car park for the newspaper's editor, Giles Forshaw, and visiting VIPs. It seemed to Danny a good place to watch who entered and left the building. He needed to work out why there was a police presence at the *Evening Post* on the day that Kofi Danquah had disappeared.

Thirty minutes later Danny got what he wanted. Someone was walking towards them. Someone he recognized. One of Holt's sports-writing team. Ellen Droad.

'Danny,' she said, approaching quickly. 'I saw you from upstairs.'

'Hello,' Danny said.

He knew Ellen from the offices where Holt worked. From when he had been on a work placement there.

Ellen was breathless. She smiled quickly at Charlotte, then glanced round at the police who were manning the doors.

'Anton's been taken.'

'What?' Danny said.

'He was taken from the car park. We've got it on

CCTV. In a white van. Do you know *anything*? About the takeover? They think he's been taken because he was about to spill the beans. That he'd found something out.'

Danny shook his head. In disbelief.

'No. All I know is what I read in the paper. That he knew something. That he was about to announce it.'

Ellen looked at the floor, then up at the building. Danny could see her eyes welling with tears.

'He'll be OK,' Danny reassured her, before he even knew what he was saying.

Ellen shrugged.

And Danny wished he'd not spoken. Because he wasn't sure – not sure at all – that Anton *would* be OK. In fact, he had a feeling of dread that made him

worry that it would definitely *not* be O