

FRIDAY

IN THE DARK

Holt sat without moving. When he had come round he had absolutely no idea where he was.

It was pitch black. The floor and the wall were cold metal beneath and behind him.

He could hear cars racing past, but they were very muffled.

His senses were hyper-alert, picking up

everything. Anything. Something that he could use to help make sense of what had happened.

What he knew was that he was in some sort of room. Probably a prefabricated hut, like a Portakabin. He knew that he had an extreme pain in his head. And he knew that he had been attacked, abducted and now – no doubt – was a prisoner.

But there was also a lot he didn't know.

Where he was. Why he was here. How long he'd been here. And how he was going to get out.

It did occur to him that he might not get out. Ever. But that thought filled him with such fear and panic that he had to suppress it, think of something else.

He tried to think clearly.

Why would he be abducted and imprisoned?

Something to do with his new girlfriend? No. She was an ordinary nice girl. No mafia connections there.

Something to do with the five-a-side match he'd been involved in last week, when it'd got a bit nasty? No, it was only football.

What did that leave?

His job?

That was it. He had been taken because of his job.

So why would a journalist be abducted?

Well, it happened a lot in other countries. They were tortured in Myanmar. Murdered in the street

in Russia. Arrested and imprisoned in China.

And why?

Because they wrote about things people didn't want them to write about.

Then Anton realized why he was here. It was obvious.

Because he had written about the City takeover. Because he was on to something.

But what?

Who would go to the extreme of kidnapping him?

And what would they do with him?

Again the thought that he might be here forever, locked in a metal box and left to die, began to take over his mind. He was terrified. That he could be

here day after day, slowly dying.

Anton stopped himself. His ears had picked up something new. The noise of the cars was the same in the background. But in the foreground he could hear one car, a louder engine, the sound of heavy tyres on tarmac.

Then the noise stopped.

Was someone coming?

Holt felt his way up the metal wall and stood. He wanted to be standing if someone came in. He didn't know why. He just had to be on his feet.

He heard loud metal clanging noises next. The door. Someone was opening the door to this prison. He covered his eyes as the headlights of a van shone

into the container, blinding him. He couldn't see. Apart from two silhouettes breaking the light.

'You are Anton Holt,' one of the two men said. 'You are the chief sports writer on the *Evening Post*. You support City FC. You were born in the city, have always lived in the city, apart from three years studying to become a journalist in Darlington. Your mother and father moved to Cumbria two years ago, after your mother retired. She was a teacher. Your father was a welder. They live at The Cottage, Lakeview Crescent, Lindale, Cumbria. Yesterday they spent most of their time in the garden, tending to their plants.'

Now that he could see properly, Anton looked at both men. One had silver hair and what could have been a South African accent. He was tall and thin. His skin leathery. The other man was tall too, but muscular, tattooed and dressed head to foot in black.

Anton shivered. He thought of his parents and the fact that this man was clearly a threat to them. They were old. He felt a fierce aggression building in his arms and legs. But he knew better than to show it. The bigger man would crush him in a second.

‘What have you done to them?’ Anton said, his voice cracking as it was the first thing he’d said

since he had been taken.

‘Nothing,’ the silver-haired man said. ‘Yet.’

Anton nodded. ‘What do you want?’ he asked.

He knew there would be a demand – stop following the story about the City takeover. Or else.

But the silver-haired man surprised him.

‘What else have you written about Kofi Danquah?’

‘What?’ Holt asked, genuinely surprised.

‘Danquah?’ the man repeated. ‘Have you written any more? Is there more to come out?’

Although Holt was keen to say things that would please the man who had his life in his hands, he knew he needed to be careful. If he said he had

written nothing, the man might kill him. Or just leave him here. If he said he had written more but that its publication could be stopped, it might help save him.

And why was he asking about this? Was this man something to do with Kofi's story? Was he the agent behind it all? Was *this* the reason for his kidnap? Nothing to do with the club takeover at all?

Anton knew he had to reply quickly. And to appear scared to death. Which would not be difficult: because he was.

'I have a couple of articles ready to go,' Anton said. 'I did some research. There's more.'

The silver-haired man nodded. 'Maybe,' he said.

'But maybe not.'

Anton said nothing. He felt utterly helpless.

'I will wait to see what happens before I kill you,' the man said. 'I may need you later. So no death yet.'

The man smiled. He was enjoying his power.

Anton tried to breathe in and out slowly. To keep calm.

He eyed the door. Could he get out?

'I am Jonathan Shearer,' the man said. 'I bring boys from Ghana to Europe. I tell them they have a place at a big club. Like AC Milan, Barcelona. I take money off them. Then I take their money. Like Kofi Danquah.' He went on. 'And don't look at the door.'

Don't think of escaping. Bjorn here will kill you without a second thought. How will your parents feel? Their son missing, no body, just the faint smell of a corpse at the side of a motorway for a couple of weeks.'

Anton nodded again. He did not want to hear what this man was telling him. He knew that, by giving him all this detail, Jonathan Shearer would not let him go now. He really was intending to kill him. That was why he could be so open. He was actually boasting!

'Your story. About Kofi. It will cost me money. I was hoping to take my business into the UK. The governments in Italy and Belgium and France are

making things difficult for me.' Shearer paused. 'Or do you think your newspaper will be happy to retract the story you wrote about poor Kofi Danquah?'

Hearing Shearer's question, Anton looked up.