

MAN DOWN

Danny, Charlotte and Paul hid behind a lime-green VW camper van two parking bays away from the first of the containers. The containers that Charlotte said might contain Anton Holt.

Kofi was standing among the cars, waiting for the silver Mercedes, hoping it would do another circuit of the car park.

And it did.

The men inside *had* to be something to do with Holt's disappearance.

Eventually the Mercedes stopped in a parking bay fifty metres from the containers. The men got out and one of them approached. He was tall and muscular with dark curly hair. He had his hand

on his jacket. As though, Danny thought, he had a gun under it. As the man came closer to the container, he looked to each side, paused, then took a set of keys out of his pocket.

He was standing in front of the container. Unlocking it.

It was time for the next stage of the plan.

Danny turned to see Kofi emerge from among the cars. The Ghanaian walked quickly towards the containers. Then he slowed down and stood still.

Waiting to be seen.

He's not bothered about his safety at all, Danny thought. *He's just going there saying, Come and get me.* Danny could feel his heart hammering inside his chest.

The curly-haired man had the container

padlock open by the time Kofi was standing behind him. At the same moment the second Mercedes man – tall and well built – leapt out of his car and ran towards his colleague. He was shouting. He had seen Kofi.

'Bjorn! Bjorn! Behind you! The boy!'

The first man dropped the padlock and turned to see Kofi now running away.

Danny watched in horror as the two men pursued Kofi around a convertible Porsche Carrera. But he was so fast, so nimble, that they couldn't get near him. Even when the smaller man walked through the car, across the exposed seats, to try to reach him.

This is terrifying, Danny thought. But it was still working like clockwork. Kofi had completely distracted the two men. And now the container

was unlocked.

Danny stood up and – with Charlotte and Paul – rushed towards it.

Danny fumbled with a giant lever, then Charlotte and Paul hauled the door open.

It made a horrific noise. On its hinges. A screeching-grinding.

Danny looked in. Paul and Charlotte were at his shoulders.

And there he was. Anton Holt. Squinting like a creature that had never seen daylight.

The three of them rushed towards him. Into the echoing container. Round a stack of pallets that half concealed the journalist. The plan was going to work.

Holt was not tied up, as they had thought he might be, so they just had to lift him to his feet.

Then they turned to drag him to freedom.

And that was when the plan *stopped* going like clockwork.

First Danny heard a shot.

Then a cry of pain and the sound of someone hitting the ground.

In the background there were screams and shouts as other people in the car park ran, terrified.

Then the container door closed.

And they could see nothing, as the noise of the door being shut echoed inside the container. That terrible screeching.

For a moment nobody said anything. They listened to a rattling sound that they knew was the padlock being put back on. And locked.

There was nothing they could do.

Then Holt spoke in a quiet voice. 'How did they catch you?'

'What?' Danny asked.

'They brought you here. They must have caught you. How did they manage it?' Holt went on.

Neither Charlotte nor Paul had spoken yet.

'Charlotte? Paul?' Danny called, hoping neither of them would answer. He wasn't 100 per cent sure they were in the container.

But they both replied. Together.

'Are you OK?' Holt said, sounding confused.

Holt obviously thought they'd been brought here, so Danny decided to explain. 'We were breaking in to release *you*,' he said. But that was all he could manage. Because a cold feeling had washed over him, like he was caught in a current

that was dragging him to the bottom of a deep, wide river.

The three of them – *and* Anton – were locked inside.

One person knew where they were.

And that person, Danny was pretty sure, had just been shot.