

STRANGE CITY

Kofi walked out of the airport to be hit by the cold air.

And that was *just* what it felt like: as if he had been struck by it.

He drew the coat that Raphael had bought for him around his chest. It was a heavy coat, feeling more like a blanket. The air was dry and, when he breathed out, it was as if smoke was coming from his mouth.

Everyone had said he would be shocked by the cold. And he was.

Shivering, he looked back through the huge glass

panes of the airport at the bright lights and the shops, at the hundreds of people queuing and meeting. And at the two armed police officers who, he had thought, had been watching him.

He needed to get away from them. If they found out he had no one to meet him here, what would they do? Would they ask him all those questions again? Would he have to give different answers? And what would they do with him when they knew the truth?

Kofi wondered if they would put him on a plane, send him back to Ghana. Part of him yearned for that, to be out of this strange country, this cold world. But then another thought came to him. If he were to go home, what would his family say to him?

If he told them he had taken all their money and that he had nothing to give them in return. He could not do that.

And a part of him knew the whole thing was a mistake. That everything would be OK.

So he began walking. Just walking. To look as if he was going somewhere, maybe to meet someone.

He went away from the front of the airport terminal. He was shocked that everything was so different. Not just the air, but the trees and the buildings. There were tower blocks with dozens of floors. One after the other as the road led away from the airport. And the trees were darker and taller. And they had grown in rows, like they'd been put there on purpose.

As he walked, he glanced around him. What were the threats? he wondered. Would there be gangs of children with knives, like he'd been warned? Would the police be searching for people who had come over from places like Ghana, to send them back or put them in prison?

He knew it was important that he appeared to have a purpose. So he looked at the sign posts. CITY CENTRE, some said. That was where he would go. That was where the football stadium would be. Like in Kumasi. He would go there and ask the City FC people to take him on. Tell them that he had come this far and that it was not fair to leave him like this. He would do it first thing in the morning. He would find the coach and show him how good he

was at football.

So Kofi carried on walking. Towards the city centre. Over busy roads with eight lanes of traffic. Over footbridges.

He followed the signs. Soon he could see the city's lights. Tall towers. Floor after floor of illuminated buildings. It was like Accra had looked in the dark, the night before Raphael had taken him to catch the plane.

Kofi walked along what looked like a motorway. But there were houses on each side. Large houses with grass and tall trees. Most of them had curtains drawn across the windows. At first he had walked beside the houses. But in front of a row of buildings that looked like they could be important shops, with

great iron shutters outside, a large group of boys, some on bicycles, started to shout at him.

When they did, he knew to run. Without even looking back, he ran across the road as fast as he could. He could hear them laughing. Loud, raucous laughter. Within seconds the sounds had faded and he saw that they had not even tried to follow him.

The walking was helping to keep him warm. He knew that when he stopped walking he would have to find somewhere to shelter. He felt confident that he would be able to find a place to sleep. It would not be like it was in Accra, where some children slept in the street. Here the streets would be empty. There would be no night people. Here everyone had money. Everyone had a home.

Some time after he had run from the gang of boys, he found himself climbing a hill. He was not used to hills. The streets rose, houses built at their sides. But soon he came to the top. He was suddenly struck by the beauty of the country he had come to. Black hills. Lines of street lights heading into the distance.

And then he saw, among it all, a black shape, unlit.

Instinctively he knew what it was. He had seen this in Kumasi. A football stadium at night. The patch of dark surrounded by street lights. Empty and quiet.

That was where Kofi would go.

He would sleep in the stadium. In one of the

stands. At the side of the pitch. Then, in the morning, he would go to talk to the coach and show him what a great footballer he was.

Kofi was starting to feel better.

The football stadium was like a fortress. Huge iron gates. Walls without windows. Great sheets of glass. And three times as tall as Kumasi's stadium.

Kofi wandered to the front entrance, a huge City FC badge lit up on the wall, and came eye to eye with a man in a uniform. The man was sitting behind a desk. He stood when he saw Kofi. So Kofi waved, then jogged off.

He realized he had been stupid thinking he could sleep in the stadium. He would have to find

somewhere better.

He looked around. He felt hopeless, a panic rising inside him. What would happen to him?

He kept walking. And that was how he found the warehouses. Up the road from the great football stadium. A cluster of one-storey concrete buildings. With big signs on the doors and car parks.

There was no one here.

It would do. For tonight.