

TERROR

Kofi opened his hotel room door cautiously when Danny knocked. He was staying in a budget hotel on the other side of the inner ring road, two hundred metres from the *Evening Post's* offices.

'Danny!' Kofi said loudly when he saw who it was. He shook Danny's hand, then let him in.

Danny stepped inside, checking up and down the corridor before he did.

'Are you OK, Kofi?' Danny asked.

'Yes. Better. Thank you. You have helped me. And this hotel. It is beautiful.'

'Have you seen Anton's article?'

Kofi shrugged.

'The thing Anton wrote about you?' Danny went on.

'No,' Kofi replied, 'not yet.'

Danny handed the newspaper to Kofi. He realized he had twisted it into a tight roll.

Kofi read it quickly. Then he put the newspaper down and closed his eyes.

Danny said nothing for a moment. He could see that Kofi was breathing in and out. Quickly.

'What is it?' Danny asked.

After a pause, Kofi opened his eyes.

'This. At the end. About Mr Shearer ...'

'Yes?' Danny asked, wondering when he should break the news to Kofi about the call he'd just had.

'It is not good.'

Danny nodded. He knew that. Now.

Kofi's mind was in a frenzy. He was remembering what he had heard about football agents at home. If you did as they asked everything was fine. They would get you a football club in Europe. They would make you rich. But if you didn't do what they asked ... there were stories.

Kofi had heard about one family who confronted a so-called agent at one of Accra's academies. They said that he had cheated them out of money. Kofi had never believed it. Why would an agent find a player a club in Europe, then be accused of cheating them out of money?

It had ended badly. The family had been attacked. Their home burned down. Nobody could link it to the agent. But there were rumours.

Kofi had a gut feeling about this article: naming

Jonathan Shearer was not a good thing. He was scared that something bad would happen. To him. Or, worse, to his family at home in Ghana.

Then he heard Danny speak.

'There's something else,' Danny said.

Kofi looked at Danny, again saying nothing.

'I had a call,' Danny said, 'on your mobile.'

Danny handed the phone back to Kofi.

'My family?' Kofi asked.

Danny shook his head. 'It was a man. With a deep voice.'

Danny watched Kofi check his mobile phone. To see the number that the call had come from.

It was Shearer's. He recognized it.

'What did he say?' Kofi asked.

Danny wasn't sure how he should reply. Should

he tell Kofi everything? Or tone it down? To make him feel better.

Danny knew he had to do the right thing. He breathed in.

'The man said not to talk to the newspapers any more.' Danny paused again. He wanted to be completely upfront with Kofi. 'That he was coming to get you ... to kill you.'

Two hundred metres away, underneath the *Evening Post* building, Anton Holt swung his bag into the back of his car. He was heading off to interview a player at City FC's training ground.

He was smiling. He was a happy man.

Today he'd had two stories in the paper. Two big stories. A scoop about something that had never

been reported in the UK before and an investigative piece about an ongoing story. One he was sure was going to develop. And one he was sure that he was going to be at the centre of: the inevitable takeover of City FC.

He glanced up when he heard a Transit van edging through the car park. He was surprised to see one down here. There were no pick-ups due from the newspaper at this time: all the early editions would be in the newsagents' by now. Then he smiled again. It must be an extra van. They must be printing more papers. Because of his story.

Holt stepped close to his car, half shutting the door, to allow the van to pass him.

As he did the van stopped. A man got out.

'Can you help me?' the man said, not in a local

voice.

‘Sure,’ Anton said, smiling. ‘Are you looking for the loading bay?’

Thinking back, Holt would remember the moment he said this. That at the same time he heard the back doors of the van open and feet landing on the tarmac. But he hadn’t registered it. He was too busy talking to the man in front of him.

The next thing that happened was that he was grabbed from behind, then plunged into semi-darkness. And he could hardly breathe.

It took a few seconds to realize there was a sack over his head. And that he had been punched or kicked hard in his side. So hard that he had to spend all his energy trying to catch his breath, trying to breathe in, then out.

As he did this he heard the van rev its engine and felt his body roll to hit the side of what he assumed was the van.

Then he blacked out.

‘You have to tell Anton,’ Danny said to Kofi.

But Kofi was not listening. He was stuffing his few clothes into his bag.

‘Kofi!’

‘No,’ Kofi said, quiet and calm. But Danny could tell he was terrified.

‘What are you doing?’

‘Leaving here.’

‘To where?’

‘Leaving here,’ Kofi repeated.

‘Anton can help.’

‘No,’ Kofi said again, moving past Danny to the door, then stopping. He turned to face Danny. ‘You have tried to help me. Thank you.’

Danny said nothing. He wondered if he *had* helped. Or if he’d made things a lot worse for Kofi.

Neither boy said anything until Kofi put out his hand for Danny to shake.

Danny shook it.

Then Kofi left, his bag hanging from his right hand, leaving Danny alone in the hotel room wondering what the hell he should do next.