

THE CHASE

He ran without thinking. Across the road. Towards the football stadium.

‘Hey, stop!’ he heard one of the policemen shout.

What would happen to him now – if the police caught him?

He’d done nothing wrong. But, because he was running, he’d suggested he *was* doing something wrong. Even if he was just brought home by the police he’d be in severe trouble at home. And what would they do about his caution? Would they give him another? Or worse?

So he kept running. Over the road. Into the car

park at the back of the chip shop, Hand of Cod.

Danny needed an alleyway. Or something that was not a road. If the police followed him on the road, in their car, they’d catch up with him in seconds.

At the back of the chip shop there was a cul-de-sac. A street of houses. Danny had walked here before. There was an alley at the end. He’d go up there.

By now he was running at top speed. He knew he was fit. He didn’t smoke, like some other kids his age, so he could run with full lungs of air.

Instead of looking back to see where the police were, he just ran, not listening to hear if they were chasing him. He ran past families getting out of

cars. Past men pulling shutters down in front of shops. Past queues of traffic heading home.

The air was thick with exhaust fumes.

Ten minutes later Danny felt safe. He was on the top of the hill now. There was a large grassy slope here, a playground and a row of trees. He headed left, for the trees. Towards a bench where he could sit and get his breath back.

Danny noticed that there was a group of lads his age in the playground. They appeared to be making a fire on a children's roundabout – or something like that. And they were all wearing hoodies like him. They'd already started staring at him. Like they wanted trouble.

And Danny smiled. He knew what sort of trouble they'd bring. Lots of bravado. Asking him stupid questions. Shouting stuff. But he could cope with that. It was easier than being chased by the police – and easier than coming across a strange boy hidden in an industrial estate.

Danny sat on the bench.

Think. He needed to think. About Kofi.

He decided he'd go to Anton's office first thing in the morning. Before school. Anton got in early. Danny could get down there by half seven. Then he'd help Kofi all he could. Because he was appalled by his story. He couldn't believe anyone could get away with what this agent had done to him.

And he was going to use all his skills as a

detective to nail him.

‘Who are you?’

Danny looked up. It was the boys from the playground. Five of them. They were holding cans and bottles. One who was a bit taller than the others was talking to him.

Great, Danny thought. But he stayed calm. That was the answer. Be calm. But be ready. To run.

Danny smiled up at the lads, then stood. He was about the same height as they were.

‘I said, *Who are you?*’

‘Danny,’ he said. ‘Danny Harte.’

Danny couldn’t see their faces. Their hoods were up and the lights from the main road behind them were bright, making silhouettes of them.

And there was something else now. The police car that had seen Danny earlier had drawn up next to the playground. Two officers emerging, walking towards them. The other boys had not seen the car; they had their backs to it.

Danny made sure his hood was down and out of sight. Then he took the book he’d been reading out of his bag and placed it on the bench next to him. He needed to make himself look different. Lose the hoody. A quick identity change and the police might not recognize him from earlier, down the hill.

‘What’s that?’ the taller one sneered, looking at Danny’s book.

Danny wondered how to respond. Normally in a situation like this he would try to escape, not make

anyone angry. But with the police only a few seconds away he knew he was relatively safe. Then an idea came to him. A way to get himself out of both these situations. The gang and the police.

He would make himself look like a victim.

If he did, the police might see him in a different light. They'd never think of the boy they chased being the same one who was being bullied ten minutes and a kilometre later.

'Have you never seen one before?' Danny asked, answering the question at last. 'They're called books.'

Danny heard one of the gang laugh. The leader swung round and hit him on the mouth. None of the rest of the gang moved. Then the leader turned

back to Danny.

'You're dead.'

Danny wondered what to do next. If he could just get the lad to push him over. Something minor. Not a punch. Just something so the police would come to his rescue. He could see that they were less than a hundred metres away now.

So Danny pushed the leader. Just a small shove. And he did it in a way the police wouldn't see him. Like a footballer getting a nudge into another player on the blind side of the referee.

The lad looked surprised. Like no one had ever pushed him before. And – like a child – he pushed Danny back. Not with massive force, but Danny saw the police were on them now, so he fell, gazing up at

the gang.

‘HEY! Stop that.’

The policeman had shouted. The gang turned round to see two policemen bearing down on them.

They looked even more surprised now.

‘What’s going on?’ the policeman said to Danny.

‘Nothing,’ Danny said.

‘Nothing. Come on, son. What are they doing to you?’

‘Nothing. We were just having a disagreement about this book.’

Danny heard another gang member laugh.

One of the policemen put his hand out. Danny took it and eased himself up.

He was safe. Now he had to get home on time and

plan what he was going to say to Anton the next day.