

TRAPPED

Danny walked as fast as he could without running. Even though he had some terrifying thoughts going round his head, he needed to get to school. This would be worse if he didn't make it look to his family and teachers like everything was normal.

He had never walked to school from the city centre before. It was a different route from the one he'd take home. He could have caught a bus, but he wanted to walk, to think, to get his head straight.

He'd rarely been in the city centre so early on a weekday. Only when he was doing a work placement at the newspaper with Anton a couple of months ago. There were hundreds of people

streaming from the railway station, most of them dressed in black. People of all ages, from not much older than Danny to as old as his grandad, walked en masse from the station, then in smaller and smaller groups up side streets and over roads, disappearing into buildings.

To work, Danny thought.

And he shuddered. He hated the idea that after school he would join this mass of people getting off trains and buses, walking into buildings, to offices, computer screens and fifteen-minute tea breaks. He wanted more than that. He wanted every day to be different. A new crime to solve every week.

But he knew he had to think, not about this but about his problem. Kofi's problem. Danny wanted to know, most of all, where Kofi had gone.

After leaving the hotel, Kofi could have gone anywhere in the city. He could be alone – with the threat hanging over him that someone wanted to find him. To kill him.

And to make it worse, if it could be any worse, some of this was Danny's fault. If he hadn't led Holt to Kofi only half of these things would be happening. He had thought, at the time, it was the right thing to do. Now he wasn't so sure.

Danny was confused. And what he liked to do when he was confused was talk to someone.

Normally his dad.

But his mum had banned him from detective work. So that was out.

Then there was Charlotte. But she wasn't talking to him.

So Danny decided to call Anton. He was the obvious choice anyway. Danny speed-dialled the journalist. The phone rang six times, then went dead. Danny rang again. This time there was only the message: *The person you are telephoning is not available. Please try again later.*

What was Holt up to? Surely he'd be at the paper by now? Like he had been yesterday.

About a kilometre away, across the city, a white van arrived at the far end of the IKEA car park. At the very edge of the car park there were two huge metal boxes. Containers. The kind you see on the backs of lorries. Or stacked ten high on massive container ships.

The van stopped, then reversed up to one of the

containers. A man climbed out of the van and opened a large padlock on the front of the container. Then he banged on the back of the van.

Nobody watched as three men bundled a fourth into the container. Nobody saw the door padlocked again before the van moved off.

And nobody knew that the *Evening Post's* chief sports writer was inside the container. In the dark. Without food or water. Without a phone. Without hope.

As he approached school Danny changed his route, wanting to walk the way he knew Charlotte came into school.

There were streams of children heading into school. *A bit like the adults streaming out of the*

station in town, Danny thought. And for the first time that day he felt tired. Tired because he'd been up too late, then up too early. Tired because he'd been thinking about Kofi and everything else.

Danny phoned Charlotte.

It rang three times, then went dead.

Danny sighed. She had hung up on him again. He put the phone to his forehead. He didn't like this. He needed to be friends with Charlotte. Without having her there, something inside him felt wrong.

Then he heard her voice.

He put the phone to his ear. 'Charlotte?'

He heard laughing. He looked at his phone. And for a moment he was completely disoriented.

Then the laughing was louder.

Not coming from the phone. He knew that now.

He closed his eyes and slipped his phone into his pocket. Then he turned. And there was Charlotte. With Sally Graham and Rebecca Page. Standing outside a newsagent's.

And he knew what he was going to do next was important. He missed having Charlotte as a friend. He needed her. So he had to play this right.

