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The Times

John Harvey

Good
Bait

FROM THE MASTER OF BRITISH CRIME WRITING

Contents

About the Book
About the Author
Also by John Harvey
Title Page
Dedication

Chapter 1
Chapter 2
Chapter 3
Chapter 4
Chapter 5
Chapter 6
Chapter 7
Chapter 8
Chapter 9
Chapter 10
Chapter 11
Chapter 12
Chapter 13
Chapter 14
Chapter 15
Chapter 16
Chapter 17
Chapter 18
Chapter 19
Chapter 20
Chapter 21
Chapter 22
Chapter 23
Chapter 24

Chapter 25
Chapter 26
Chapter 27
Chapter 28
Chapter 29
Chapter 30
Chapter 31
Chapter 32
Chapter 33
Chapter 34
Chapter 35
Chapter 36
Chapter 37
Chapter 38
Chapter 39
Chapter 40
Chapter 41
Chapter 42
Chapter 43
Chapter 44
Chapter 45
Chapter 46
Chapter 47
Chapter 48
Chapter 49
Chapter 50
Chapter 51
Chapter 52
Chapter 53
Chapter 54
Chapter 55
Chapter 56
Chapter 57
Chapter 58
Chapter 59

Acknowledgements
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About the Book

When a seventeen-year-old Moldovan boy is found dead on Hampstead Heath, the case falls to DCI Karen Shields and her overstretched Homicide and Serious Crime team. Karen knows she needs a result. What she doesn't know is that her new case is tied inextricably to a much larger web of gang warfare and organised crime which infiltrates almost every aspect of London society, from the back streets and high rises of Tottenham to the multimillion-pound hideaways of the new international entrepreneurs.

Several hundred miles away in Cornwall, DI Trevor Cordon is stirred from his day-to-day duties by another tragic London fatality. Travelling to the capital, determined to establish the cause of death and trace the deceased's daughter - an old acquaintance from Penzance - Cordon becomes entangled in a lethally complex situation of his own. A situation much closer to Karen's case than either of them can imagine...

Brilliantly plotted and filled with rich, subtle characters, John Harvey's latest novel reveals him once again as a masterful writer with his finger firmly on the pulse of twenty-first-century crime.

About the Author

John Harvey is the author of the richly praised sequence of eleven Charlie Resnick novels, the first of which, *Lonely Hearts*, was named by *The Times* as one of the '100 Best Crime Novels of the Century'. His first novel featuring Frank Elder, *Flesh and Blood*, won the CWA Silver Dagger in 2004, and a Barry Award for the Best British Crime Novel published in the US in 2004. In 2007 John Harvey was awarded the CWA Cartier Diamond Dagger for sustained excellence, and in 2009 he was awarded an honorary degree, Doctor of Letters, by the University of Nottingham.

Also by John Harvey

In a True Light
Nick's Blues
Gone to Ground
Far Cry

The Elder Novels
Flesh and Blood
Ash and Bone
Darkness and Light

The Resnick Novels
Lonely Hearts
Rough Treatment
Cutting Edge
Off Minor
Wasted Years
Cold Light
Living Proof
Easy Meat
Still Water
Last Rites
Cold in Hand

Short Stories
Now's the Time
Minor Key
A Darker Shade of Blue

Poetry
Ghosts of a Chance
Bluer Than This

As Editor
Blue Lightning
Men From Boys

For more about the author visit www.mellotone.co.uk

Good Bait

John Harvey



WILLIAM HEINEMANN: LONDON

Oakley Hall
1920-2008

May his work live on.

1

THE FACE LOOKED back up at her from beneath the ice. Dead eyes, unblinking, their focus defused as if through bottled glass. Off to one side, a small covey of ducks, uncomprehending, shuffled this way and that. In places, Karen Shields thought, the skin would have stuck fast: the forehead, the bridge of the nose, the chin. Little doubt the substance that had pooled close alongside the head, then frozen, was blood. That wanker, she thought, the artist - what was his name? - a small fortune for slicing animals in half and shoving them on display, pickled in formaldehyde.

Officers in protective clothing were cordoning off the path that ran down between the ponds with tape, no urgency now, time theirs to take. A brace of early runners stymied in their tracks, hats and gloves, jogged up and down, looking on; Karen could see their breath bobbing in the air.

When the call had come through she'd fumbled uneasily awake, mobile falling between her fingers and down on to the bed.

'Hey!' A shout as she leaned her elbow against something soft in the shape alongside. 'Hey! Go easy, yeah? Chill.'

She had almost forgotten he was there.

She spoke briefly into the phone then listened, the man beside her moving grudgingly to give her room, whatever

was tattooed between shoulder blade and neck starting to fade into the natural darkness of his skin. She wondered if she would pick him out again in a crowded bar. If she would want to.

'Twenty minutes,' she said into the phone. 'Thirty, tops.' No way she was leaving without a shower.

'What's all the fuss?' the man asked.

Scooping up his shirt and trousers from near the end of the bed, she tossed them at his head. 'Dressed, okay?'

She arrived as the Crime Scene manager and his team were assembling: no agreement as yet on the best way to free the body from the ice. Someone from the Coroner's Office would decide.

Where the ground rose up beyond the pond's edge, threads of trees were laced against the sky. Christmas in four days. No, three. Presents bought for her family in Jamaica but still not sent. Come spend it with us, her sister had said, Lynette, the one in Southend with the twins. You don't want to spend Christmas on your own.

'Ma'am.' Without his helmet, the young PC barely topped her shoulder. 'The Chief Super, he wants a word.'

Karen looked up.

Burcher was standing on the broad slope of path that led on to the Heath, beyond the point where the route for entry and exit to the scene was marked. Overcoat unbuttoned, green wellingtons protecting the trousers of his suit, pale yellow gloves. Detective Chief Superintendent Anthony Burcher, previously with Covert Intelligence and now head of Homicide and Serious Crime Command. Twenty-four Homicide teams under his control, one of them hers.

'What the hell's he doing here?' Karen asked.

No reply.

Burcher stood with one glove removed, as if he might want to shake her hand. Waiting for her to come to him.

'All under control?'

'Sir.'

'No idea yet, of course, who ...?'

Karen shook her head.

'Yes, well ...' His gaze slipped past her, attention caught for a moment by something at the farther side of the pond. 'I was in the area, last night, friends. Picked up the call first thing.'

There were more people gathering now, peering interestedly before being moved on: cyclists on their way to work, solitary walkers, joggers, people with dogs, too many dogs. The gravel was deeply freckled with frost.

'Much on your plate right now, Chief Inspector?'

Her plate. Oh, yes. A double murder for starters. Holloway. Mother and child. The mother only seventeen, little more than a child herself. Battered, then stabbed: edge of a stool, underside of a saucepan, a kitchen knife, whatever had been to hand. The child, a girl, suffocated with pillows, three years old. The estranged father had been seen hammering on the door of the flat two days before. 'I'll kill you, you bloody bitch! Bloody kill you!' The neighbours had heard it all before, shut their windows fast, turned up the volume on the TV, made yet another cup of tea. Karen had seen it, too. Too many times now. Inadequate men unable to cope without anger, lashing out. Family life. The police were, as the phrasing went, anxious to speak to the father, Wayne Simon, in connection with both deaths.

So far there had been sightings in Sheffield, Rotherham, Leeds. Rumours he'd slipped abroad. Karen would still not be surprised to find he'd strapped himself into his car in a lock-up somewhere, sucking down carbon monoxide; either that or hanged himself from a length of flex; walked off the edge of a cliff. Beachy Head, that was popular. More often than not, it was what they did, men like that, men she despised, too cowardly to face the consequences of their actions, the way they'd lived.

More recently there'd been a shooting in Walthamstow. All the appearances of a drug deal run sour. The teenage victim gunned down as he ran. Some disagreement still as to how involved he had been, mistaken identity a possibility, the family swearing by his good name - a lovely boy and loving son, a grade A student, college place secured. So far, there had been two arrests, both men - Liam Jarvis and Rory Bevan - released, insufficient evidence to charge.

Before that a fatal stabbing in Wood Green. An argument over nothing that had ballooned from threats to fists, fists and boots to knives. By rights it should have been handed over, lock stock and barrel, to Operation Trident, which dealt with violent crime in the black community, but since the new government had taken power Trident's resources had been cut and they were already overstretched. Sixteen murders in London the year just ended, none of the victims older than nineteen.

'Enough, sir,' Karen said.

'Handle this yourself then, or ...?'

'A reason why I shouldn't? Sir?'

Something interested him near the toe of his boot. 'See how it develops, but at the moment I can't see any need ...'

'Need?'

'You know, delegate. Reassign. Besides ...' Inclining his head towards her, he smiled. 'Can't go on plundering the minority thing for too much longer. Good result now, not go amiss. Been a while.'

'Which minority thing is that, sir? The gender minority or the black?'

'Either. Both. You choose.' The smile had disappeared.

Fuck you, Karen thought, the words unsaid.

Burcher heard them nonetheless, read them in her expression, her stance.

'Don't let me keep you, Chief Inspector.'

A magpie startled up raucously from a branch as she walked away.

Back down at the pond, they were gingerly breaking the ice in a broad circle around the body, preparing to float it closer to the shore.

All the way back to the office it nagged at her, a good result, not go amiss. Knowing it to be true. She remembered the first time she'd been introduced to him, Burcher, some function not long after he'd been confirmed in post; the way he'd looked at her, appraisingly, so much prime meat.

She'd seen the victim's face freed from its frozen mask before she'd left, the last drops of moisture caught along his upper lip, hair that curled against the nape of his neck: a young man's face, eighteen at most. Younger. The body stripped naked before immersion. Two knife wounds in his back, either one deep enough to have punctured his lungs. Bruises. Other marks. The second finger of his left hand missing, severed below the knuckle. Expediency? Identification? A stubborn ring?

At the last check there were no mispers that matched, no worried parents, lovers, brothers, aunts. Not his. Within an hour, the details, such as they were, would have been passed on by the Press Bureau to the media. Some Riz Lateef wannabe on work experience with BBC London News, shivering in front of the camera and hoping her make-up hadn't smudged and the cold wouldn't make her nose run. If nothing new had emerged by the end of the day, they'd release the victim's photograph in time to catch the dailies, maximum exposure, pray no natural disaster or ministerial cock-up shunted them off to the bottom of page six or eight.

On the computer screen the images were strangely bleached out, so that the face resembled something

sculpted, cast in plaster: Roman, Greek. An altarpiece. A minor god. All colour gone from his eyes.

Karen remembered his eyes.

His eyes had been blue.

2

CHRISTMAS CAME AND went. Karen spoke to most of her close family on the day itself – mother, uncle, aunt, a smattering of cousins – trying not to count the cost of calls back and forth to Jamaica; talked to her sister later, reining in her impatience while her nieces vied with one another over never-ending litanies of presents.

Mid-afternoon, she sat herself down in front of the TV, a bargain meal from M&S assembled on her tray, a decent red to wash it down. New Year's Eve she went for a meal in Exmouth Market with four of her girlfriends, then on to a club near the Angel; not for want of offers, she was home by half twelve, in bed before one alone, reading a book. There'd been a time, not so long ago, when if she hadn't pulled she'd have reckoned the evening a failure.

God, girl, she thought, you're getting old!

January kicked off with sleet, then rain, then snow, then sleet again. At night it froze. Coming down the steps from her front door her first full day back in the office, she'd almost lost her footing, had to grab hold of the railing to avoid going headlong. The pavement was like a skating rink, ice packed solidly along the kerb's edge. Fresh snow fluttered, moth-like, in her face as she walked. The latte bought at Caffè Nero had lost most of its heat before she even reached the Tube.

Photographs and a description of the Heath victim had been passed on to the Met's Intelligence Bureau before the holiday for possible identification. Since when, nothing. Karen had emailed the Intelligence Bureau's Co-ordinating and Tasking Office from home and chased up her request. Co-ordinating and Tasking Office - it sounded like something out of *Bleak House*, the boxed set of which her sister had sent her for Christmas. Automatically generated, a reply had bounced back by return. This office is currently closed.

At her desk her stomach rumbled; coffee aside, no breakfast. Maybe she should give Mike Ramsden a call: Ramsden, for years now her bag man, aide-de-camp, her sergeant-at-arms. Mike, if you're coming in, you might stop off at Pret and pick up one of those egg and tomato baguettes. Pain au something while you're about it.

She wondered if he'd spent Christmas alone like her or whether he'd found company; Ramsden, who seemed to be permanently between wives, usually other people's.

Pushing back her chair, she walked to where the detailed map of the area where the body had been found was pinned to the wall.

The road from the Whitestone Pond down towards South End Green allowed access to that side of the Heath at several points, none of which - Karen had found this almost impossible to believe - were directly covered by CCTV. The only cameras on that stretch of road belonged to private individuals intent on protecting their valuable property and focused accordingly.

'Most of them locked up and shuttered,' Ramsden had said in disgust. 'Wintering in fucking Mustique.'

As far as they'd been able to determine, the actual killing had taken place off the path to the north of the pond: traces of a struggle that had been brutal and swift, branches broken, hard earth kicked up, filaments of blood

that had proved, discouragingly, to be the victim's own and nothing more.

There was no sign of the victim's clothes in the immediate vicinity; stripped from his body, they'd likely been bundled into bin bags and burned or else been transported to some far-flung field, a contribution to the national landfill.

The area around the pond had been fingertip searched, bins, drains, bushes, everything. The pond itself had been drained. Thirty-one large bags of debris to be sifted and listed; at the last count, seventeen were still in storage, slowly festering. She had asked for volunteers to sort the remainder - no overtime, just a sign or two of her endearing love and respect - but with half the world still on holiday, takers were few.

Through the square of window, the sky was a resolute grey.

The snow had faltered to a halt.

Perhaps she would call Mike Ramsden after all. They could get miserable together, curse the world.

Even as she was thinking that, the phone rang at her desk.

'Mike?'

It was Gerry Stine, Intelligence Support. Karen listened, made careful notes, confirmed the information and thanked Stine profusely, wishing him the happiest of new years. After checking against UK Border Agency records, he had come up with a name. Petru Andronic. Country of origin: the Republic of Moldova. Date of birth: 27 November 1994. Seventeen years old.

Almost unbelievably for someone his age, he had no account traceable on Facebook or any of the other social networking sites, nor on Twitter. Even more remarkable, an initial check of the major networks failed to register him as the owner of a mobile phone: presumably he used a cheap prepaid model or, if the need arose, borrowed a friend's.

Karen shook her head: the Republic of Moldova. She didn't think she even knew where Moldova was. Not enough to point to it on a map. She had heard of it, at least. Or was that Moldavia? The same country, different names? You say Moldova and I'll say Moldavia.

She looked again at her notes. Andronic had applied for a student visa in the summer of the previous year.

She speed dialled Ramsden's number.

The background noise suggested he was engaged in a one-man Status Quo revival.

'Leyton High Road, Mike, you know it?'

'Back of my hand.'

The college was squeezed between a discount DIY store and a halal butcher's and, even though it was doubtful the new term had started, a dozen or more putative student types were standing around on the pavement outside, heads down, plugged into their iPods and MP3 players; smoking, most of them, occasionally stamping their feet but otherwise feigning not to notice the extreme cold.

A narrow corridor led to some narrow, uncarpeted stairs. *This college is fully recognised by ASIC*, read a poster on the wall, *the Accredited Service for International Colleges*. The *No Smoking* sign had been decorated with the smiley face of someone enjoying a large spliff. *Please do NOT bring food into the building* had been handwritten on a sheet of A4 and pinned alongside.

There was a door on the first landing labelled *General Office*, another poster, purple and gold, fixed to the wired glass: *OTHM* in big capitals - *Registered Centre for the Organisation of Tourism and Hospitality Management, supporting the tourism and hospitality industry throughout the world*.

'Who'd have thought it?' Ramsden said. 'The centre for tourism and hospitality, here in downtown Leyton.'

The woman behind the desk - middle-aged, spectacles, brown hair dislodged on one side from the combs intended to secure it in place - scarcely glanced up from what she was doing. 'If you want to enquire about courses, enroll a student, prospectuses are all online. Keeps the print costs down. Application's the same.'

No immediate reply, she half-turned in her chair. There was another door behind her: *Dr D. G. Sillet, College Principal.*

'Is it the gas? It's not the gas? Gas and electric? Public utility bills, all paid, direct debit, straight from the bank. If payments are delayed, I'm afraid that's not of our doing.'

Karen took out her ID and placed it on the desk.

The woman shook her head and another strand of hair slipped astray. 'I've told them till I'm blue in the face, we've all told them, don't block the pavement outside, it constitutes a public nuisance. But do they listen?' A small grunt. 'Do they understand?'

'Petru Andronic,' Karen said. 'He was a student here.'

The woman removed her glasses and looked them up and down. Ramsden in well-worn leather jacket, stomach resting easily on the belt of his jeans. Karen, thanks to her boot heels, taller by a couple of inches; black trousers that accentuated the length of her legs, black woollen belted coat, sweater, scarf loose about her neck.

'Was he?' the woman said.

'Apparently. He applied, at least. Summer of last year.'

'Ah.'

'Ah?'

'Many apply. Few are chosen.' Pleased with that, she allowed herself a little smirk.

'Keep records?' Ramsden asked.

'Of course.'

'Matter of minutes, then, if that. To check.'

The door to the inner office opened and a man stepped through, late forties, balding, a suit that had been to the

cleaner's too many times.

'Mrs Dawes?'

'The police, Mr Sillet, just a routine inquiry.'

'Very well.' He paused, a moment, no more; a quick glance towards Karen and Ramsden, an inclination of the head and he was gone.

'Busy man,' Ramsden observed.

Mrs Dawes' fingers clicked briskly on the computer keyboard. 'Yes, here we are. Andronic, Petru. Date of birth, November 27th, 1994. Passport number. Date of entry. Place of residence in this country. He applied to take three courses: ESOL, Administration and Office Skills, Computing and ICT.'

'ESOL?'

'English for Speakers of Other Languages.'

'Of course.'

'According to this, he was offered a place in September, September last, but never seems to have enrolled.'

'Is that unusual?' Karen asked.

'Oh, no.'

'And in that event what happens?'

'We send a letter to the address we've been given. After that, a follow-up, if necessary, warning the student that unless the place is taken up by a certain time it will be forfeited and offered to somebody else.'

'And that would have happened in this case?'

'I assume so.'

'After that? If you hear nothing after that?'

'We're obliged to inform the UK Border Agency of his failure to attend.'

'Which you would have done?'

'We take our responsibilities seriously.'

'Give or take the odd gas bill,' said Ramsden quietly, an aside.

'I'm sorry?'

'Nothing.'

September, October, November - by the time the Border Agency had been informed, Karen thought, Petru Andronic didn't have so very long to live.

'His details,' she said. 'UK address and so on, you can print us out a copy?'

No sooner said, almost, than done. The address was in Green Lanes, off St Ann's Road. She knew the Salisbury pub.

3

THE MAIN STREET was awash with Kurdish and Turkish bakeries and cafés; mini-markets whose stalls, laden high with fruit and vegetables, stretched down across the pavement towards the kerb. Windows advertised cheap calls to Africa and the Middle East, secure ways of sending money home.

'My old man brought me here once,' Ramsden said. 'Up the road from here. Dog track. Haringay. Couple of years before it closed down. I was still at school. Tucked a fiver into my top pocket. See how long it takes you to lose that.' He grinned, remembering. 'Couple of races. Three, maybe. Neither of us had a winner the whole night.'

'Miss him?' Karen asked. 'Your dad?' He'd died, she knew, the year before, cancer.

Ramsden shook his head. 'Don't give it much of a thought.'

He looked away.

'He saw all this now, poor bastard'd be turnin' in his grave.'

The street they were looking for ran off to the left, two rows of small terraced houses, flat-fronted, some showing signs of recent renovation, others dwindling towards decay. The address they'd been given was stranded midway between two extremes, work started and abandoned; a new window in the front downstairs, fresh paint, new curtains;

the first-floor window had been removed and not replaced, a sheet of tarpaulin flapping in the wind and failing to keep out the snow that had begun, once more, to fall. Tiles had slipped from the roof and lay like crazy paving across the bare patch of garden. A coat of primer on the front door.

Ramsden rang the bell and, when nothing seemed to be happening, knocked loudly twice.

The woman who came to the door was wearing a black burkha, impossible to guess her age; a child of no more than a few months asleep in a sling across her chest. Seeing Ramsden she took a step back inside; stood impassive in the face of Karen's questions, then called back into the house. The boy who sidled towards them was twelve or thirteen, dark-eyed, hair grown long.

'You speak English?' Ramsden asked.

'Course. So does my mum. She don't like to speak to no strangers, yeah? My dad, he goes crazy.'

His mother had retreated into the hall, a hand cupped round the baby's head.

'You from the council?' the boy asked. 'No. Police. Police, i'n it?'

Karen nodded. 'We're looking for someone who might know a Petru Andronic.'

'Who?'

'Petru Andronic. We were told he lived here.'

The boy was shaking his head, shifting his weight from foot to foot. 'Just me an' my brothers, my sisters, mum an' dad, that's all.'

'And where are you from?' Ramsden asked.

'Tottenham. South Tottenham.'

'Before that?'

'Iraq, i'n it?'

'How long have you been living here? This house?' Karen asked.

'I dunno. Ages. Long time. A year? More'n that. 'Fore my birthday. Yeah, more than a year, got to be.'

'And there's been no one else living here during that time? No one staying with you? A lodger?'

The boy shook his head. Behind him, the baby cried, just once, and was shushed.

'You're sure?'

'Course I'm sure.'

Karen showed him the photograph. 'You ever seen this person before?'

'No.'

'Please look at it carefully.'

'I did.'

'So look again,' Ramsden said.

The boy scowled and murmured something beneath his breath, then, with exaggerated deliberation, did as he was asked.

Nothing.

Karen thanked him for his help.

They tried the other houses in the street. Three people thought they might recognise the face, without being a hundred per cent certain; one man - slow to the door with the aid of a stick, lived there the best part of forty years - deliberated carefully and then said he'd seen him for sure. 'Last year, hangin' round, that house over there. All them plants in the window. That's the one.'

They'd tried there already: no reply. The other end of the street from the address they'd been given, but numbers can become confused, misread, misheard. There were plants clearly visible between slatted wooden blinds, luxuriant, shiny and green. The blinds themselves were white and expensive, the kind Karen had enquired about getting for her flat, then balked at the cost. There was a small painting visible on the wall - painting, Karen thought, not poster; a standard lamp left softly burning.

'Raising the tone of the neighbourhood single-handed,' Ramsden observed.

They walked back to the main road, sat in a café and ate borek with feta cheese and spinach, shortbread dusted with powdered sugar, drank strong sweet coffee. Fortified, they took the photograph from door to door, shop to shop. Blank faces, suspicious looks: some eager to be helpful, some not. Andronic? Andronic? A lot of shaking heads. You tried Turnpike Lane, maybe? Finally, they went back to the house with the plants.

This time there was a cat on the window ledge, ginger and white, waiting to be let in. When Ramsden reached out a hand to stroke it, it arched its back and hissed.

‘Not very friendly, I’m afraid. Still hasn’t really settled in.’

He was white, thirties, rimless glasses; neat, short hair. Tan chinos, grey T-shirt, grey sweater in a different shade. The cat slipped past him into the warm interior as, with some care, he looked at their ID.

‘Adrian Osborne.’ He held out a hand. ‘No sense catching your death out here, why don’t you come inside?’

He and his partner had bought the place a little over six months ago, summer; kept their flat in Stoke Newington while the bulk of the work was done; downstairs rooms knocked through, new kitchen, shower. Like to put in a big window at the back eventually, more light, but you can’t do everything. Not at once. People before, they’d been renting. Not long. Less than a year. Andronic? No, I don’t think so. Can’t remember exactly what it was, to be honest. But a family. Quite a few of them, I believe. Four or five at least, couple of younger girls, teenage son. Football posters on the walls. Only met them a couple of times. The father, when we first looked round. Scarcely said a word. After that, it was the estate agent, mainly. Going round with the builder, you know?

Osborne leaned forward, looked again at the photograph. ‘I wish I could be more definite, I really do. I mean, he could have been one of the boys, the boys I saw,

but, to be honest, I didn't pay them a lot of attention. It wasn't as if we were introduced or anything.' He slid the photo back along the table. 'I'm sorry.'

'Perhaps you've got a forwarding address?' Karen said.

'Asked for one, several times. Thought they'd leave one when they went, but no.' He shrugged. 'You could try the guy we bought from. He's the one, rented it to them originally. I've got his details, phone number, email. He should have something.'

The cat lifted a paw and looked at Ramsden balefully as they left the room.

The letting agency was just along the Broadway from Shopping City, slush splaying round their feet, splashing up the backs of their legs as they walked. The office was on the second floor, a faint smell of incense mixed with hair oil. The vendor was Asian, Pakistani. Music playing, vaguely classical, guitars. A quick shake of hands, lingering on Karen's just a fraction too long. Manicured nails. Parma violets on his breath. A forwarding address, of course. Mile End, somewhere. A few swift manoeuvres with the mouse, wireless controlled, and there it was on the screen. Mile End, indeed.

'If you're ever looking for property,' the agent said. 'Investment ...'

Out on the street, Karen breathed in cold air.

'Fancy a drink?' Ramsden said.

'Bit early, isn't it?'

'Early or late. Depends.'

They found a small pub away from the High Road, a few old men wishing their lives away over slow-drawn pints of best. While Ramsden got in the drinks, Karen called in on her mobile, sent a request, the address in Mile End, get through to the local station, send somebody round. They were well into their second round, Ramsden's conversation beginning to veer off into the now familiar fear and

loathing, when the call came back: the address as given didn't exist.

Like so many others, Petru Andronic had come into the country, severed all traces, and, until his body had surfaced on that frozen December morning, virtually disappeared.

4

CORDON TURNED AT the edge of the hill, salt from the night air bright on his tongue, and looked back across the bay. Early January and cold as a witch's tit. A forecast of more snow. What kind of a happy new year was that?

Beyond the lights of the far town it was just possible to make out St Michael's Mount, a hump of black against the blackness of the sea. Amongst the huddle of houses to his right, a light flickered and then went out. Collar up, he turned again and continued to climb, cobbled stone beneath his feet, key already in his hand.

He'd bought this place, a converted sail loft in Newlyn, before prices had spiralled out of control. Now all around him were holiday lets and second homes, kids with names like Tristan and Toby and people carriers with customised number plates blocking the winding lanes.

Not that he was quick to judge.

A long room with a kitchen at one end and a bed at the other, lavatory and bathroom partitioned off, it had been somewhere to move into, move on from, part of the plan. Chief inspector in another five or six years, superintendent by the time he was fifty. One of those nice old Georgian places in Penzance, down near Penlee House, that was where he'd seen himself by then, what he'd fancied. Till some bastard pulled away the ladder and, perforce, he'd stayed put.