

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Cold Light

John Harvey

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About the Book

'Forty-eight hours, that's what they reckon, isn't it? Forty-eight hours. If you don't find them in that, likely they're sodding dead . . .'

A cabbie's just been beaten up, there's a drunk and disorderly in the interview room and a possible child abuser on the way in. Nothing unusual there, then, just a pretty normal Christmas holiday for DI Resnick and his team.

Normal, that is, until Dana Matheison calls to report her flatmate, Nancy, missing.

Dana's had a pretty grim Christmas herself: she's been sexually harassed by her boss, and may even have lost her job as well as her friend. Pretty soon the police have proof that Nancy was kidnapped, and then - as the New Year celebrations wind down - the first tape arrives, and Resnick knows they're dealing with a dangerous psychopath . . .

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 retired Detective Inspector 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. John Harvey is the winner of the 2007 CWA Cartier Diamond Dagger for Lifetime Achievement and in 2009 he was awarded an honorary degree, Doctor of Letters, by the University of Nottingham.

Find out more about John Harvey by visiting his website at:
www.mellotone.co.uk

Also by John Harvey

Nick's Blues
In a True Light
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
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

Cold Light

John Harvey



arrow books

Although this novel is set in a real city, it is a work of fiction and its events and characters exist only on its pages and in the author's imagination.

One

She slid out from beneath Gary's sleeping body and eased herself to the edge of the bed. Always the same, the way he would turn towards her each night, arm and the heft of his thigh heavily upon her. Weighing her down. Since they'd been moved here it was worse. He couldn't sleep without her. Holding her breath, Michelle waited for the thin squeak of the bedframe to still. Cracked lino cold at her feet. Gary sighed and when she looked round she could see his face, young in the faint light, open-mouthed. She saw the way one hand gripped the sheet, the knot of skin above his eyes and was thankful she knew nothing of his dreams.

Slipping one of Gary's sweaters over her T-shirt, a pair of his socks on to her feet, she left the room.

The children had a bedroom of their own along the narrow landing, but these past weeks it had been too cold. Ice overlapping on the insides of the windows and their breath pigeoning the air. Get an oil stove in there, neighbours had said, keep it low. But Michelle knew of two house fires less than half a mile from here since winter had set in, ladders reaching up too late and never close enough, kiddies trapped upstairs and overcome by fumes.

Now they banked up the living-room fire with slack, made sure the guard borrowed from her parents' home was fixed in place. Natalie's cot they lifted into the middle of the room once the TV had been switched off and Karl's bed was the settee, curled beneath a nest of coats and blankets, thumb in mouth and dead to the world.

Downstairs, Michelle smiled at the baby, who had wriggled round again until her head was pressed against the bottom

corner of the cot, one leg poked through the bars. Raising both hands to her mouth, Michelle warmed them before touching her daughter's tiny foot and easing it back, carefully, out of the cold. Both of them would need changing when they woke. She was reminded that it was her bladder that had woken her and she braced herself for the bathroom, the old scullery that had been converted and badly, quarry tiles laid on bare earth and made uneven by the frost.

She rubbed a circle from the inside of the window and the dark looked back at her. No more than two or three blurred lights pale along the street. If she were lucky, she might yet sit with yesterday's paper and a pot of tea, a little stolen time before the children woke to crying and she heard Gary's feet upon the stairs.

Resnick had been awake since four. So attuned to disruption, he had been blinking back sleep and reaching towards the telephone before, it seemed, he had heard its first ring. Kevin Naylor's voice was indistinct and oddly distant and Resnick, irritably, had to ask him to repeat everything twice.

'Sorry, sir, it's this mobile phone.'

All Resnick heard were particles of words, breaking up like starlings in the early morning air.

'Redial,' Resnick said, 'and try again.'

'Sorry, sir. Can't hear you.'

Resnick cursed and broke the connection himself and when Naylor rang back he could hear him perfectly. A taxi driver had been taking two youths from the city centre to an address in West Bridgford; as they neared Lady Bay Bridge, one of them had tapped on the window, asked the driver to pull over as his mate was feeling sick, like to throw up. When one young man got out of the car on to the pavement, the other went around to the driver's side and threatened him with an iron bar. Before the driver could pull

away, the windscreen had been splintered in his face. The youths dragged him out of the cab and beat him around the head and body. He had been crawling across the centre of the road when a milk lorry turned on to the bridge and stopped. The youths had run off and the driver's takings had gone with them.

'The weapon?' Resnick asked.

'Tried to chuck it into the Trent, sir, but only landed in the mud.'

'And the driver?'

'Queen's. Accident and Emergency.'

'Who's with him?'

'Uniform patrol should be there now, sir. There's nobody

...

'Graham Millington . . .'

'Leave, sir. He and the wife, they were going away. In-laws, I . . .'

Resnick sighed; he should have remembered. 'Divine, then. But I want someone with him all the time. The cabbie. We don't know how many chances we'll get.'

'I could . . .'

'You stay where you are.' Resnick narrowed his eyes towards the bedside clock. 'Twenty minutes, I'll be there. And see no one gets their sticky fingers all over that cab.'

Absent-mindedly, he lifted away a cat that had folded itself into his lap and set it back down on the bed. One of the others was over by the bedroom door, scratching its head against the heavy edge of wood. The last time something like this had happened, the weapon had been a baseball bat and the taxi driver had died. Quickly, he showered and dressed and went downstairs, grinding coffee for a cup he would only half drink before stepping out into the cold light of another day.

'Bloody hell!' Gary said. 'What sodding time is it?'

'It's late.'

'It's what?'

'It's past seven.'

'And you reckon that's late, do you?'

Michelle arched her back and shifted the baby's weight against her arm. She didn't think Natalie was taking any milk now, just suckling for the comfort of it. 'Depends how long you've been up,' she said.

Gary was leaning sideways inside the doorway, head stooped, still wearing the boxer shorts and County shirt he had slept in. 'I've been down since before six,' Michelle told him, though he hadn't asked.

Gary gave himself a scratch and walked past the end of the table where she was sitting. 'I suppose that's my fault, too,' he said, not quite loud enough for her to be certain.

'What?'

'You heard.'

'If I heard, why would I . . . ?'

'You waking so early, I suppose it was my fault.'

'Don't be silly.'

'What's silly? Don't tell me I'm fucking silly. Everything else is my fault, why not that?'

'Gary . . .'

'What?'

Sitting between them, eating a mush of warm milk and cornflakes too big for his mouth, two-year-old Karl's eyes flicked from one to the other.

'Gary, no one's saying it's your fault. Not any of it.'

'No?'

'No.'

He tossed his head and glanced away. 'Wasn't what you said the other day.'

'Gary, I was angry. I lost my temper, right? Don't you ever lose your temper?'

She knew it was a stupid thing to say. She watched his fingers tighten around the curve of the kitchen chair.

'Gary . . .'

Michelle stood carefully with the baby still at her breast and went to him. He turned from her and she rested the side of her face soft against his back, unkempt curl of her hair brushing the nape of his neck. The baby wriggled a little between them and Michelle shushed into the feathery down of her head.

The last job Gary had had, six months back, labouring on a building site, cash in hand at the end of the week, no questions asked, had ended when the firm went bankrupt. Gary had turned in one morning to find the whole place cordoned off, all the heavy machinery being repossessed. Before that it had been the night shift in a factory that manufactured plastic switches for the fittings on table lamps. Then there had been piece-work, Sellotaping free floppy discs to the covers of a short-lived computer software magazine. Three jobs in as many years. More than a lot of people they knew; more than most.

‘Gary?’

‘Mmm?’

But he knew. Michelle’s free hand was stroking him through the striped cotton of his shirt, sliding up against the edges of his ribcage, along the flat of stomach just above the top of his shorts. She craned up to kiss him and his mouth was slightly sour from sleep. Behind them, Karl spun his spoon around the bowl too fast and it landed on the floor. Michelle lifted Natalie away from her breast as she turned and at once the baby screwed up her face and began to cry.

Mist rolled off the river in swathes. Hard against the kerb, its offside door wide open, the cab sat cordoned off with yellow tape. Bright in the headlights of Resnick’s car, glass sparkled on the surface of the road like ice. Immediately beyond, the road narrowed to a single lane across the bridge and Resnick knew that within an hour the traffic

would be building up into the city worse than ever: Christmas Eve, for many the last day of this working year.

The scene of crime team were dusting the outside of the taxi now, the interior would be more safely and thoroughly examined when the vehicle had been removed. Uniformed officers were sifting carefully through the frosted mud and sparse grass of the riverbank below, others checking the path which led back off the bridge towards the city. This was the direction in which the driver of the milk lorry had seen two men running, down the slope towards the all-night garage and the road that would take them - where? On towards Colwick and the Country Park, the race course, or left into Sneinton. Yet according to the message the driver had called into base and the entry he had made in his own log, the destination for this fare had been across the river. A ruse, or had they simply run off, unthinking, panicked by what they had done?

‘Sir?’

Naylor stepped towards him, the usual hint of deference and apology in his voice. At first Resnick had found it grated on him, waited for it to change with use and time; now he simply accepted it, the way the man was. The reverse, perhaps, of Mark Divine’s bullish eagerness. How had Lynn Kellogg described Divine? All mouth and trousers? Resnick’s mouth widened, letting in a smile.

‘The cabbie - they’ve moved him to Intensive Care.’

The smile faded: an all-too-familiar pattern falling into place.

‘Mark wants to know, should he stick around or come back in?’

‘He stays. As long as there’s any chance he’ll get some answers, he stays put.’

‘Yes, sir,’ said Naylor, hesitating. ‘Only . . .’

‘Well?’

‘I know it’s not . . . it’s just, he seemed a bit het-up about getting stuck there all day. The shops, you see, they close

early some of them and . . .'

'And he wants to be let off duty to do a bit of last-minute Christmas shopping?'

'It is for his mother,' Naylor said, not believing it for a moment.

'Tell him he'll be relieved in the usual way, as and when we can.'

'I'll say you're keeping it in mind, then.' Naylor grinned.

'If you like,' said Resnick. One of the scene of crime team was walking towards him; likely they were ready to winch the cab on to the waiting lorry and drive it away. The last thing Resnick wanted cluttering up his mind - thoughts of what Divine might be putting into someone's Christmas stocking.

Two

She'd been getting things for the kids for months now. Oh, nothing much, not a lot, not expensive. Just, you know, little things that had caught her fancy - a Dennis the Menace T-shirt for Karl, bright red on black, a toy dog for the baby, yellow, with blue stitching for its paws and nose, not too big, soft, something she could cuddle up to in her sleep. Michelle had joined the Christmas Club at the shop on the corner, opposite the old Co-op. Putting by a pound a week, not telling Gary, slipping in when she was on her own.

As long as there was something there for the children Christmas Day, enough to make it feel special. Not that either of them really knew, not yet, what it was all about. Too young to understand. They had been to the fair, though, the one in the Old Market Square; walked around the Christmas tree in its red tub outside the Council House, staring up at the coloured lights and the star at the top. A present from Norway or Sweden or somewhere, though no one seemed to know why.

Gary'd bought them a jumbo hot dog, running over with tomato sauce, onions crisped, some of them, till they were black and brittle. They'd sat on the wall behind the fountain, sharing it between them, Michelle blowing on a piece of sausage and chewing it a little before pushing it into the baby's mouth. All around them, other kids with parents, kids on their own in gangs. Pushchairs and prams. Arms and coats to tug at. 'Dad, can I have this?' 'Can I have a go on that?' 'Can't I? Can't I? Can I not? Oh, Mum! Dad!'

Michelle thought their Karl was like to carry on the same when he first saw the carousel, all the horses, brightly

painted, prancing up and down. But she did his work for him, taking hold of Gary's hand to ask him softly, 'Do look at his face, you can see how much he wants to have a go.'

'You're all right,' said Gary. 'Just this once.'

They had stood back and waved at him, Michelle shaking the baby's hand as well, and Karl, for all his smiles, had never quite felt sure enough to loose his grasp of the saddle and wave back.

'Snowman,' said Gary later, pointing at the figure in front of the dodgems with its yellow hat and gloves. 'See the snowman, Karl?'

'Noman,' Karl had replied, excited. He had seen snowmen in his cartoons on TV.

'Snowman,' Gary laughed. 'Not noman, you daft pillock! Snowman.'

'Gary,' Michelle said, starting to laugh herself. 'Don't call him that.'

'Noman!' sang out Karl, jumping up and down. 'Noman! Noman! Noman!'

He lost his footing and went sprawling, bruising his face and grazing the fingers of the hand from which he'd earlier lost his glove. Not long after that they all caught the bus home.

Michelle looked up from what she was doing and listened; footsteps that might have been Gary's outside on the street. As they went on past, she slid her hands back into the soapy water, washing out a few clothes in the sink. Natalie she'd put down half-hour back and mercifully she'd stayed. Last time she'd checked, Karl was belly down in front of the TV lost in a programme about lions; at least he was quiet.

She lifted the clothes clear of the water while she emptied the bowl ready to rinse. She only hoped Gary would be pleased with what she'd got for him, a replica goalie's shirt, twenty-eight quid it'd set her back; they'd kept it on order for her at the County shop, twenty-eight pounds less one penny.

Well, it was only once a year after all.

The door stuck as she was taking the washing through to the back yard to peg out and when she nudged it with her hip the bottom half of the door came away from the frame.

'Michelle! Michelle! You there?'

'I'm out back.'

'You might've shut the door behind you. Like a bloody fridge in here.' He stopped short, staring at the twisted hinge.

'I'm sorry,' Michelle said. 'It wasn't my fault.'

Gary turned on his heel and a moment later she heard the front door open and slam shut. Upstairs in her cot, the baby woke up crying.

'Ion,' said Karl from the doorway. 'Ion!' And he made his tottering run towards her, hands stretched high like claws, growling loudly.

Mark Divine was three degrees short of pissed off. First they'd told him, sorry, he'd have to wait outside the Intensive Care unit, they'd be certain to let him know the minute Mr Raju regained consciousness. So he'd sat there, his bulk awkward on the low chair, legs at all angles, watching various other Rajus as they were shepherded in and out, whispering and wailing. The one time he wandered off in search of the WVS canteen and a decent cup of tea, one of the staff nurses came out looking for him.

'He's come to, then, has he?' Divine asked when finally she found him.

As well as the plastic cup of tea, which was threatening to burn a hole in his fingers, he was trying to balance two chocolate cupcakes and a lemon puff.

'Concerned about your sugar levels?' the staff nurse asked, raising an eyebrow in the direction of Divine's one-handed juggling.

'Not as I know of,' Divine said cockily.

'Well, perhaps you should be.'

One of the cupcakes fell to the floor and rolled underneath the nearest chair. 'Don't worry,' she said, 'the cleaners will find it. Why don't you put the rest of them down on the table over there and come through?'

'You mean now, like? This minute?'

'You do want to see him, don't you?'

'Yes, but . . .'

'Ask him some questions?'

'Yes.'

'Then I should do it before they take him down to theatre.'

Divine took a large bite from the lemon puff, risked burning his tongue on a swig of tea, and followed the staff nurse through the double set of doors towards the ward. Nice arse, he thought, wonder if they've got any mistletoe strung up in Intensive Care?

Resnick arrived back in his office after a brisk thirty minutes with the superintendent, to find a large parcel stuffed into his waste basket. Brown paper and string inside a pair of plastic bags. Around ten pounds, he thought, weighing it in his hands. One of the plastic bags contained quite a little puddle of blood. He hadn't realised Lynn Kellogg was due back in the office so soon.

The files detailing the night's events, messages and memoranda, the movement of prisoners in and out of police cells, still lay on his desk barely touched. Half-a-dozen men and one woman drunk and disorderly; Resnick recognised most of the names. Likely by now they'd been cautioned and pushed back out on to the streets. By noon most of them would be drunk again, winding themselves up for the night. After all, it was Christmas, wasn't it? Wasn't that what Christmas was about?

In the outer office two phones began ringing almost simultaneously and Resnick switched them from his mind.

Considering the possibilities - so many homes left empty, all those expensive presents ready-wrapped - the increase

in burglaries was less than might have been expected. Even so, enough people would have returned from their firm's annual pre-cooked Christmas dinner, the ritual risqué jokes and innuendo, to find the golden goose had flown. All those expensive tokens of status and admiration liberated in under fifteen minutes by eager hands using a pair of the homeowner's socks as gloves.

The phones were still ringing. Resnick pushed open the door to his office, ready to shout an order, and realised there was no one there. A filing cabinet with the drawer not pushed fully back, mugs of tea staining deeper and deeper orange, typewriters and VDUs all unattended. Resnick picked up the nearest receiver, identified himself and asked the caller to hold while he dealt with the second. A postman had been cycling to work at the sorting office off Incinerator Road when a taxi had turned past him, heading for the bridge; he'd got a pretty good sight of the two youths in the back. A woman on her way back from the garage shop with a packet of cigarettes and a carton of milk had nearly been knocked off her feet by two lads rushing past. Resnick made a note of their names and addresses, was still arranging for the postman to come into the station, when Lynn Kellogg came backwards through the door.

When she turned to face him she had two sandwiches in her hands, two cups of filter coffee, one of them black. Medium height, hair medium brown, red-faced, stocky, Detective Constable Lynn Kellogg, back from her parents' poultry farm in Norfolk, by way of the deli across the street.

'Mozzarella and tomato,' Lynn said, handing Resnick a brown paper bag already leaking French dressing. 'I thought you might not have eaten.'

'Thanks.' He prised the plastic lid from the coffee and drank. 'I thought you weren't due in till this afternoon?'

Lynn widened her eyes and moved to her desk.

'Things at home not so good?' Resnick asked.

Lynn shrugged. 'Not so bad.' She shook some loose pieces of lettuce from the paper bag and pushed them back inside her sandwich.

'I found the turkey,' Resnick said, nodding in the direction of his office.

'Good.' And then, suddenly grinning, 'It's a duck.'

'I was just wondering,' Divine said. He was on his way out of the ward, interview over, and he'd timed his move to perfection, coinciding with Staff Nurse Bruton's purposeful walk towards the drugs trolley. Lesley Bruton - tall, her height accentuated by the mass of dark hair untamed by her nurse's cap . . . it was there on her badge, printed out for all to see. 'Like I say, Lesley, I was wondering . . .'

'Yes?'

'What time you got finished? You know, came off shift.'

'I know what it means.'

'So?'

She gave him a look that would have scuppered a more sensitive man and lifted a clipboard from the side of the trolley.

'Look, it's not a chat-up, you know. No way.'

Amusement flirted across her eyes. 'Help you with your enquiries, can I? Something like that?'

What? Divine thought. Give me half the chance!

'No,' he said, 'not official . . .'

'I thought perhaps not.'

'See, what it is, I've got to stay here till he gets back on the ward. Raju. Could be - well, what? - hours.'

'Could be.'

'Thing is, there's this present I've got to get. You know, for tomorrow.'

'Special, is it?'

Divine nodded, looked sincere.

'Girlfriend?'

'Sort of.'

‘Underwear, then?’

Divine treated her to his lop-sided grin; he was starting to sweat more than just a little.

‘Black and sexy?’

‘Could be. Why not?’

She looked at him, saying nothing. Waiting.

‘There’s this place,’ Divine said. ‘That arcade back of the Council House. Real posh.’

‘I know it,’ Lesley Bruton said. ‘My boyfriend buys me stuff there all the time.’

Jesus! Divine thought. His eyes slithered down her uniform, wondering if she was wearing any of it now.

Lesley slid her hands along the rail of the trolley. ‘And you’d like me to pop in there when I finish?’ she said. ‘Pick up something for you. For your girlfriend. A bra and pantie set. Maybe a camisole top. One of those teddies.’

‘Yes,’ said Divine, ‘that sort of thing.’ Wondering if a teddy was what he hoped it was, one of those all-in-one jobs like a swimsuit made out of lace.

‘Maybe try them on for you while I’m there?’

‘Why not?’ Divine said, not quite able to believe his luck.

‘Why not?’ Lesley said, fixing him with her eyes. ‘For you?’

‘Well, I . . .’

For a moment, voice lowered, she leaned towards him. ‘In your dreams,’ she said. And without a second glance, she walked away.

Gary had been working on the door the best part of two hours, more, if you included the time it had taken him to walk up the street to his mate Brian’s house and borrow a decent-sized screwdriver and a rasp. Michelle had finished a second lot of washing, fed Natalie, given Karl fish fingers and beans and made herself some toast. Gary had said he wasn’t hungry. Her mum had asked her to take the kids round some time that afternoon so she could give them their presents and even though it meant carting the

pushchair off and on two buses, Michelle thought she'd better make the effort. First thing in the morning, her parents would be off up the A1 to Darlington to have their Christmas dinner with Michelle's older sister, Marie, and her family. Three-bedroom semi, that's what they had. Picked it up dirt cheap after it was repossessed.

'Michelle!' Gary's voice from the back.

'Yes?'

'Lend us hand, will you?'

'Be there in a minute.'

'No, now.'

The kettle was coming to the boil, Natalie was getting into a right old grizzle, Karl was calling something from the front room and she couldn't tell what; she'd thought while the tea was mashing, she'd see if there was mincemeat enough left to make some more mince pies. Last she'd made were almost as good as you could buy in the shop.

'Michelle! You coming or what?'

Michelle sighed and pushed the teapot to one side. Through the open front-room door, she could see Karl painstakingly climbing on to the settee so he could roll back off.

'You be careful now,' she called at him on the way past. 'You'll only hurt yourself.'

'Here,' Gary said, pointing. 'Steady that for me there.'

'Where?'

'Jesus Christ, girl! There!'

Michelle pushed two fingers against the top of the hinge, her thumb against the bottom.

'Okay, now budge over, give me room to get the screwdriver to it.'

She could hear his breathing clearly, loud and slightly ragged beneath his shirt. He hated doing jobs like this.

'Right. Whatever you do, don't let go. Hold it firm. Push.'

There was a shout, sudden and loud, from inside the house and she knew that Karl had fallen and hurt himself.

Gary sensed her move and stopped it. 'I'll be done in a minute. Hang on.'

'It's Karl, he . . .'

'I said bloody hang on!'

Gary gave a final turn and the screw splintered sideways through the wood of the frame, jerking the screwdriver from his hand. The hinge fell away from Michelle's fingers and the whole door slid sharply outwards, wrenching the bottom hinge away with it.

'Fuck!' Gary yelled. 'Sodding bastard fuck!'

'Gary!' Michelle called. 'Don't.'

From somewhere, blood seemed to be running between her fingers, collecting inside her hand.

Karl was standing close by the doorway, fists jammed against his eyes, mouth widening through a succession of screams.

'Fuck!' Gary swore again, kicking at the frame. 'And you,' he said, grabbing Karl by both arms and lifting him into the air. 'You want something to bloody cry about!' He dropped his son towards the floor and before he could land, had cracked his hand, hard as he could, back across Karl's face.

Three

'Crying out for it, she was.'

Meal time in the canteen and Divine, relieved from his duties at the hospital, was telling Kevin Naylor about his encounter with Staff Nurse Bruton over the drugs trolley. A year or so back, Naylor would have been impressed; now his expression was, to put it mildly, sceptical.

'No, she was. Straight up.'

'Told you, did she?' Naylor asked. 'I mean, you know, came right out and said it?'

Divine dipped one of his chips into the pool of brown sauce spreading across his plate. 'Don't need to say, do they? Know what's what, you can tell.' He pointed his fork across at Naylor, sprinkling the table with sauce. 'Lot of your problem, you and Debbie . . .'

'Debbie and I don't *have* a problem.'

'For now, maybe.'

'We don't have a problem.' Naylor's voice getting louder, attracting attention.

'All I'm saying,' Divine went on blithely, spearing another chip, 'all the evidence shows, you know bog all about bloody women.'

'Whereas you,' Lynn Kellogg leaned over from the next table, 'expert by now, aren't you, Mark?'

Sarcastic cow! Divine thought. 'Don't believe me,' he said, 'catch me in action, this do tonight. The man who made pulling an art form.'

'I can't wait!'

'No?' Divine forked up a piece of meat pie. 'Well, shame but you just might have to. I mean, I'd like to help out, but

there's just so many others in line before you.'

Lynn pushed back her plate and stood up. 'What do I have to do to keep it that way? Wear a cross round my neck? Eat garlic?'

Divine gave her a swift appraisal. 'No need. Just keep looking the way you do.'

He leaned back and winked across at Naylor, as Lynn walked away, muffled laughter from some of the other officers flushing her face.

'You didn't need to say that,' Kevin Naylor said quietly.

'Nobody asked her to stick her nose in. Any road, it's no more'n true. I mean, would you fancy it? Be honest.'

Naylor looked back down at his plate and made no reply.

'That prick,' Lynn said to herself on the stairs, 'knows as much about women as the average five-year-old.' She remembered him picking a magazine off her desk once, attention drawn by blonde hair and bright red lips and the headline, *Shere Hite and the Clitoral Tendency*. Divine had thought they were a new pop group.

Gary James had been waiting close to two hours and there were still five people in front of him, two of them Pakis. Turn a place over to them and the next thing it'd be swarming, aunts and uncles, sisters and cousins, floor to ceiling like bugs. He'd seen it happen. Next to them, this couple lolling all over one another, tongues in each other's ears half the time, looked as though they should still be at school, not in the bloody Housing Office. Tattoos all up their shoulders and necks, her with enough little rings in her nose to open a shop; bloke with his hair twisted round like some Rasta, though he was white as Gary himself. Down the row from Gary there was this West Indian woman the size of a sodding house herself, three kids clinging to her and another one on the way.

Jesus! Gary didn't have a watch and the clock on the waiting room wall had been at twenty-five past seven the

past three times he'd been there.

'Hey, mate,' he said, tapping the nearest Paki on the shoulder, then pointing to his own wrist in case the bloke didn't understand. 'What time you got?'

'Very nearly a quarter to four,' the man said politely and smiled.

Don't smile at me, you smarmy bastard, Gary thought as he sat back down, save that for when you get in there. And then, Christ, that's nearly three hours, never mind two.

'Hey!' he shouted. 'Hey, you!' He pulled one of the metal-frame chairs out of line and pushing it hard towards the wall. 'Think I'm going to sit here all bloody day? I want to see somebody and I want to see them bloody now!'

'Sir,' the receptionist said. 'Sir, if you'll just go back to your seat, you'll be seen as soon as possible.' All the while her fingers moving towards the panic button underneath the counter top.

Resnick had gone to talk to Mavis Alderney himself. Mavis thankful for the chance to catch a fag out back from the laundry off Trent Boulevard where she worked.

It had been Mavis who had come close to being sent flying by two youths that morning. 'Arse over tip,' was how she put it. 'Someone wants to get hold of the like of them and give them a good thrashing. Well, don't you think? Should've been done to 'em long time back. Then happen they'd not be the way they are now.'

Resnick had grunted something non-committal and pressed for her to be more specific with her descriptions. 'A pair of them tearaways, you know, them boots and jeans, no respect for anyone, not even themselves,' wasn't quite going to do it.

Now he was in the market, upstairs in the Victoria Centre, all the seats around the Italian coffee stall taken and having to stand to drink his espresso, listening to an animated

discussion about why both the city's soccer teams were languishing near the bottom of their respective leagues.

'Ask me,' someone said, 'best thing could happen, bloody managers ship 'emselfes either side of Trent, swop jobs.'

'Now you're talking rubbish, man.'

'Well, they couldn't do a lot worse.'

'No,' put in somebody else, 'I'll tell you what. Best present they could have, both clubs. Christmas morning, chairmen of directors gets 'em both, Cloughie and Warnock on the phone, wishes them a merry Christmas and tells them they're both sacked.'

'What? They'll not sack Cloughie, they'd never dare. They'd have a full-scale bloody riot on their hands.'

'Aye, maybe. But not as much as if they go down.'

Resnick smiled and reached between two of the men, setting his cup and saucer back on the counter. On his way out of the market he'd buy a little Polish sausage to go with his duck, a chunk of Gruyère and some Blue Stilton, a good slice of apple strudel and some sour cream to take the place of a Christmas pudding.

Down below, crowds were pushing their way from store to store and last-minute shoplifting was in full swing. Even more people than usual were gathered around the Emmett clock, holding up small children to see the fantastic metal animals revolve and laugh with wonder as streams of water splashed off its gilded petals as they opened. Again, again, again.

Suspended from the high ceiling, a Santa on a bright red sledge chased polypropylene reindeer through stale air.

Resnick was out on the street when he heard the first siren.

Nancy Phelan had emerged from her office at the sound of shouting, curious to know whoever it was making all that noise. Besides, she could do with a break from her present assignment, explaining to a couple with an eighteen-month-

old kid that by leaving the damp basement room for which the girl's mother had been charging her a robbery of a rent, they had made themselves voluntarily homeless.

'Voluntarily sodding homeless,' the man kept saying. 'What in buggery is that?' Not loud, not even angry, simply swearing by rote.

What it bloody is, Nancy had thought, and not for the first time, was an almost meaningless form of words dreamed up by some official to get the housing authority off the hook.

That hadn't been what she'd said to her client; what she'd said was, 'Sir, I've already explained it to you several times.'

Several? Half a hundred.

Whatever disturbance was going on outside, it had to be more interesting than that. A little light relief.

Wrong.

Gary James - Nancy thought she recognised him, thought he might even be one of hers, though she could never have put a name to him - was standing pretty much in the middle of the corridor, both hands holding a chair above his head. The metal kind with the canvas seat and back. The receptionist, Penny, was cowering against one wall, bent forward, arms folded up in front of her face. He'd either hit her with the chair or was about to.

Howard, the security guard, was down at the far end of the corridor, squinting hopefully in their direction. Nancy knew for a fact he could scarcely see his own hand in front of his face without his glasses on.

'You!' Gary called over one shoulder.

'Me?'

'It's you I want to see.'

Oh, God, Nancy thought, it would be. Her second application to join a TEFAL course, train to teach English to polite, suited businessmen in Hong Kong or Japan, had just been turned down. This morning she'd been convinced - though it was difficult to tell - that one of her stick insects had died. And if that wasn't enough she was three days late.