

'It's rare to come across a debut novel so carefully crafted.  
Eva writes with faultless plotting and attention to detail'  
Mari Hannah

**EVA DOLAN**

**LONG  
WAY  
HOME**



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## About the Book

Peterborough is changing. Migrant workers, both legal and illegal, are working in the fields, the factories and the pubs of the town. Most keep their heads down, keen to avoid trouble and DI Zigic and DS Ferreira from the local Hate Crimes Unit know all too well the issues that come with having a foreign name, no matter how long you've lived here. While Zigic ignores his father-in-law's needling about his Serbian background, Ferreira still burns with the resentment of years of childhood bullying for her Portuguese name and looks.

But when a man is burnt alive in a suburban garden shed, it brings an unwelcome spotlight on to that world, and the two detectives are faced with investigating a murder in a community that has more reason than most not to trust the police.

Against a background of simmering racial tension, Ferreira and Zigic must work with both victims and villains alike in this brilliantly written debut from a new crime writing talent.

## About the Author

Eva Dolan is an Essex-based copywriter and intermittently successful poker player. Shortlisted for the Crime Writers' Association Dagger for unpublished authors when she was just a teenager, *Long Way Home* is her debut novel and the start of a major new crime series.

# Long Way Home

Eva Dolan



*Harvill Secker*

LONDON

## Prologue

THE LAST THING he remembered was the pattern on the carpet, barbed strips of indigo and puce-like bruises inflicted by alien implements, then a steel toecap coming at his face. Now there was blood in his mouth, a seep not a flow, and when he probed with the tip of his tongue he found the splintered terrain of broken molars.

His hands were tied behind his back, feet bound with the laces out of his work boots. Through his jeans he felt the barn's concrete floor, cold and wet, a spray of broken glass under his right thigh. That was a distant and unimportant pain, nothing that would kill him. The pain in his head when he tried to focus on the barn door, that might.

He heard men's voices outside, shuffling feet, then the clang of a metal gate. They were moving the pigs, bringing them in to feed.

He had to get up. Get to his feet and get out. Now.

The blood was singing in his ears, running out of his broken nose down the back of his throat. This would not be the last thing he saw, this rank barn with its asbestos roof and barrels of dead chemicals. He would not die here. If they wanted to kill him they would have to catch him out there in the fields, in the darkness and the filth.

He rolled onto his back and brought his knees up to his chest, hooked his hands out from behind him, swearing as his flailing leg caught a metal butt and sent it ringing. The rope around his wrists was wet, the knots quickly tied, and he managed to pull his left hand free, skinning his knuckles. With shaking fingers he unpicked the laces knotted around his ankles.

Outside the voices were rising, not enough that he made out the words but he heard the tone change, the new belligerence. It made no difference, no one was arguing to spare his life.

The barn door shot back and he saw the floodlit yard.

'If you've not got the stomach for it, fuck off back to your old woman,' a man shouted.

His heart was thundering, deafening in the quiet of the barn, and ahead of him he watched his breath billowing hotly into the air, wondering how many more times that would happen before the last long one blew out of him.

He swore at himself. One on one he was as likely as anyone else to win a fight. That's why they had come for him in the middle of the night, knocked him out while he was sleeping, tied him up and gagged him. They were not the hard men they thought they were.

He moved into the shadows, hugging the wall.

The pigs were trotting in. Dozens of them, snuffling and snorting, huge pink beasts spotted with black, barging against the metal rails. He could smell them, saw the heat rising off their backs in the glare from the floodlights.

There was no way out, he realised. He would never get across the open yard unseen.

How many of them were there?

His brain lurched. Three men in the caravan was it? Two standing over the bed and a disembodied voice nearby? He remembered the walnut stock of a shotgun near his face as he fluxed in and out of consciousness, was sure he had smelled the oil on it.

The front third of the barn was lit now and he saw arcane machinery ranked up but rotting, blades blooming corrosion. There was nothing small enough to use as a weapon, nothing he could get his hands on without being seen.

He wanted to be at home. He wanted his warm bed and his warm girlfriend and the familiar glow of the street light coming through the curtains she had made him buy in Ikea.

He wanted to close his eyes and roll over and press his face into her hair.

A rat darted across his foot, escaping from the pigpen. The animals were rooting in the straw snorting, impatient for the food they couldn't find, knowing it was what they had been brought in for.

He stumbled, aware of voices now, loud, coming closer, and the sound of a rifle bolt ramming home.

Then he was running. Across the yard, heading for the unfamiliar woodland looming in the distance. He vaulted the post-and-rail fence as a gunshot rang out and dropped automatically onto his knees. Behind him dogs were snarling and he heard a barked command as they were released.

He ran across the uneven field, legs pumping and his heart hammering. He sucked down the night air, knowing he was crying, knowing the divine intervention he was begging for wouldn't come. He kept running, zigzagging as shots ripped past him.

The gibbous moon slipped behind a cloud and he ran on faster, knowing they would have night sights, that even in the woods he was as good as dead.

The field rose up to the margin of the wood and he threw himself across the narrow ditch at the perimeter. The dogs were almost on him, fifty or sixty yards away, he could see their eyes in the moonlight, two massive grey lurchers. Behind them a pickup was bouncing over the grassland, coming up slow enough that the man in the back could brace himself against the cab to shoot.

He moved into the woods, stumbling over the twisted roots, the rocks he couldn't see until he was on them.

This was it.

A bullet whistled past his head and he ducked behind a stump, dropping down onto his haunches. There was nowhere left to go now. They would hunt him down even if he reached the road. He could get to the village and it wouldn't matter. False dawn was falling, the streets would

be deserted and no one came outside for gunshots in places like this. It would be rabbits or deer, some stupid bastard who probably deserved it.

He swore at the sky and pushed on.

WEDNESDAY

Four days earlier

# 1

SHREDS OF SMOKE lingered between the close-packed terraces on Highbury Street. Not much escaped from there; it was a narrow, congested road, cars parked both sides, barely enough room for the fire engine to squeeze between them. It was easing out as DI Zigic turned off Lincoln Road and his brakes bit a couple of inches from the high black bumper. The driver threw his hands up - *where am I going to go?*

Zigic backed onto a wedge of tarmac between the Hand & Heart pub and the garage next door, locked-down roller shutters emblazoned with a red English Nationalist League tag.

It was the third new one he'd seen this week. All within the few dozen streets which comprised New England, or as the locals were calling it these days Englandistan, a bustling suburb just north of the city centre, and home to the vast majority of Peterborough's migrant workers.

Highbury Street had been predominantly Polish five years ago, when he was first put in charge of the Hate Crimes Unit. Plenty of jobs around back then and the property market flooded with cheap money. The Poles moved up and on, bought houses in Paston and Westwood, gentrified the 1970s ghettos they were when he was a kid, opened supermarkets and beauty salons, turned the slums into suburbs. Now Highbury Street was more mixed, Bulgarians and Estonians, a Slovenian couple he knew from their son getting glassed on the embankment over Christmas. Nice kid, but the ones on the receiving end usually were.

Zigic got out of the car and buttoned his parka up to his chin, watching a woman retreat from the upstairs window of

the house opposite, curtains a few inches too short swinging back into place. The house looked cheaply renovated and badly maintained, mismatched plastic windows packed out with bright yellow expanding foam, a front door showing the painted-over scars of old locks, busted and replaced.

The neighbours were more house-proud, neatly mown front lawn and primped hanging baskets on the porch. They had a St George's cross tacked up across the living-room window and somehow he didn't think it was there in readiness for the weekend's rugby.

There were a few English in the area still and the ones Zigic had run into operated under a siege mentality. Wouldn't be forced out; as if anyone was trying to.

They were the ones who squinted at his card, asked, 'Zygick? Zigick? Is that how you say it?' Then when he corrected them - *Zhigitch* - they got it wrong again. The ones who always wanted to know where he was from. No, really from.

Despite the Peterborough accent, burred with a fen edge he couldn't quite shift, they thought he was just off the bus. Taking some hard-working English copper's job.

They weren't entirely wrong. The ACC needed a foreign name to head up Hate Crimes and he wanted it attached to a third-generation body. Someone just different enough.

Zigic crossed Highbury Street between the cars, clocked an out-of-date tax disc in one, an empty vodka bottle on the dashboard of another. At the far end of the road a transporter van was unloading the night shift, another group waiting on the kerb to get in.

People were coming out of the houses, togged up against the early-morning chill in quilted coats and woollen hats, heading down towards the collection points strung along Lincoln Road. A couple of women with supermarket uniforms under their jackets grinned at Zigic as he stepped aside for them on the narrow path and he caught a fluttering of

Latvian, recognised the shape of the words but couldn't translate them.

They had walked past number 63 without even glancing down the driveway. Despite the police tape and the WPC standing guard with her hands tucked into the small of her back they hadn't let their curiosity get the better of them.

Zigic wondered where they learned that. What had been bad enough to override the hard-wired human instinct to look where you shouldn't?

Anywhere else the neighbours would be out in numbers but the group at the edge of the cordon was only four strong, an elderly couple in grubby anoraks and a young woman holding a squirmy toddler to her chest. None of them spoke. They hardly moved, only looked along the cracked tarmac driveway towards a pair of high wooden gates, which stood open a few inches, showing a sliver of metallic paintwork and the back window of an Astra van.

The house was 1930s, a pebble-dashed detached painted white, but not recently, with wooden windows done in the same expensively dingy green Anna had insisted they buy for their front door at home. It was still in the garage; Zigic told her you couldn't put it on while there was a risk of frost. He was hoping she'd come to her senses and let him paint it red.

'Morning, sir.'

The WPC lifted the perimeter tape for him and Zigic ducked under.

'Any trouble?'

'No, sir. Most of them are at work by now I reckon.'

'Has the doc been?'

'You just missed him.'

Zigic went through the gates into number 63's back garden, the smell of smoke hitting him full force, an unmistakable meatiness to it which snagged at the back of his throat. Flecks of black swirled in the air and he tried not

to think what they had been part of as he picked one from his bottom lip.

The charred hulk of the shed was tucked into the far corner of the garden, against a run of old red-brick wall. It was a standard issue eight by twelve larch lap with a felt roof collapsed in on itself and a stable door smashed off its hinges. Inside Zigic saw a twist of blackened metal and springs which could only have been a sunlounger, and a body caged by it, slumped in the middle. Only the head was clearly visible in a shaft of weak morning sun, scorched skin cracked and seamed red.

DS Ferreira was standing nearby with the fire officer, hands shoved into the pockets of her duffel coat.

‘What have we got, Mel?’

‘One lightly toasted corpse,’ Ferreira said. ‘Looks like he was in a sleeping bag.’

The fire officer nodded. ‘I’ve dossed down worse places.’

‘Me too.’ Ferreira turned away. ‘Expert witness says we’ve got accelerant.’

‘Smells like kerosene,’ the fire officer said, wiping his face with the front of his T-shirt. Neither were very clean. ‘Reckon it might have been stored in the shed but you take a shufti in there, Inspector.’

He stepped back and Zigic looked beyond the remains of the sunlounger and the body which was bigger than he first thought, definitely a man and a well-built one at that, saw a few empty bottles next to a melted crate and a galvanised metal bucket which was somehow perfectly untouched. Other than that the shed was empty.

‘Wish yours was that tidy, hey?’ the fire officer said.

‘It might’ve been an accident. He’d been putting some drink away by the look of him.’

‘And it might’ve been spontaneous combustion, but there was a padlock on here heavy enough to hold down an elephant.’

‘Inside?’

'Outside.'

'Where is it now?'

'Still on the door,' the fire officer said. 'Knew you'd want your people in here.'

The mobile on his belt sounded a plunging tone and he was already moving as he checked it. 'I'll get my report over to you before five, Inspector. Mel - a pleasure as always.'

He jogged off towards the gates.

'God, he fancies himself,' Ferreira said. 'What is it with firemen?'

'I honestly couldn't tell you.'

'Man must be fifty.'

'Mel -'

'Just trying to lighten the mood.' The shed roof gave an ominous crack and she stepped away smartly, kicking up water onto Zigic's jeans. 'Sorry.'

'What do you think - a vagrant?'

'Maybe. Or a tenant.'

Peterborough had a high proportion of illegally converted sheds and garages. The rents were running at four hundred pounds a month and the planning department was having trouble keeping on top of them. For every one they cleared out, another three sprang up.

Highbury Street wasn't in their red zone though. Not yet.

Zigic looked to the back of the house, blinds drawn in every window, no lights on. There was a half-built conservatory poking out into the garden, brickwork up to knee height, a mound of waterlogged sand on a plastic sheet. Half a dozen plastic signs advertising Barlow Property Maintenance were stacked against the fence, a mobile number but no landline, a small fish decal so you knew the owner was a good Christian; old folk liked to see that.

'Are they home?'

'Yeah. They're too shocked to answer any questions right now.' Amusement flicked around Ferreira's near-black eyes. 'At least that's what Mr Barlow's saying.'

'What about Mrs Barlow?'

'Puffy eyes, snotty nose . . . she didn't say much.'

'Which one of them called the fire engine?'

'Neither. Alec Lunka.' Ferreira pointed to the neighbouring house, a red-brick terrace with wind chimes jangling near the back door and three blue towels stiff on the washing line. 'He's Romanian. His English is pretty good though.'

'You talked to him?'

'Briefly - just wanted to keep him from going anywhere. I asked him to hang on until the boss got here. He's happy to cooperate.' She tucked her chin down into her plaid scarf. 'Thought I should try and get what I could out of the Barlows while they were still raw. So much for that. Didn't even get a cup of coffee.'

'Have you called forensics?'

'On their way.'

'Door-to-door?'

'Bobby's on it. He's got hold of a couple of off-duty CSOs. There's some new guy at London Road who speaks Hungarian - he's a techie or something but they're bringing him too.' She shrugged. 'It'll be a total washout this time of day, you know that? Anyone who might have seen anything will be at work now and anyone who's home now would have been on shift when this happened.'

'Lunka saw something.'

Zigic started for the gates. As he did, the kitchen door opened.

'Mrs Barlow, I'm -'

She slammed the door so hard that the wooden blinds clattered against the glass. The lock turned and a few seconds later turned back again but the door stayed firmly shut. Ferreira gave him a questioning glance and Zigic put a hand out to stop her. A man's voice cut sharply into the quiet and there was a sound like a stack of plates smashing, then another door slammed and the crying started.

'Try her now,' Zigic said.

## 2

GEMMA BARLOW WAS pale under her fudge-coloured spray tan and Ferreira guessed that without it she'd be just another blotchy pink lump of English womanhood. She made a lot of effort though - three different colours in her shoulder-length hair and a French manicure with half-inch tips. She was missing one on her thumb and she worried at the ragged stump while Ferreira gathered together the pieces of broken crockery.

'They just slipped out of my hands.'

'They're only plates, don't worry about it.' Ferreira dumped them into the bin and Gemma flinched at the sound like she'd been slapped. 'It must be a shock for you.'

'We didn't know he was in there.'

'You don't expect some guy to bed down in your shed, do you?'

Gemma took a packet of Silk Cut out of her cardigan pocket and lit up, the lighter flame wavering as her hand trembled. She wore a thick gold wedding band over a diamond chip, thin rings biting on two more fingers.

'We didn't even know there was anything wrong until we heard the sirens,' she said. 'Was it an accident?'

'It's still too early to say.'

Gemma nodded, took a deep drag. 'Sorry, do you want a cuppa or something?'

'Coffee if you've got it.'

'Instant alright?'

'Tea then.' Ferreira took a tobacco tin out of her handbag. 'You don't mind?'

'My grandad used to roll his own,' Gemma said. 'Cheaper, in't it?'

'I prefer the taste of them.'

Gemma leaned back against the worktop, eyes on Ferreira's hands as she rolled the tobacco between her fingertips, packing it tight inside a liquorice paper.

'You're not English, are you?'

'I was born in Portugal. We came over when I was seven.'

'No work over there, was it?'

'Not much opportunity.' She ran her tongue along the edge of the paper and twisted it into a slim torpedo. 'We went to Spalding first, then when my parents got enough money together they moved us here.'

'Do they work?'

'Yeah.' Ferreira lit up. 'They've got a pub.'

'They've done all right out of it then.'

Out of what, Ferreira wondered, grafting sixteen hours a day, seven days a week, Dad in the fields, Mum in freezing cold pack-houses, living in a caravan for two years, then a barely habitable pit for another five, four kids sharing two bedrooms; her and three younger brothers?

'They must be proud of you, getting into the police.'

'It was a pretty big deal, yeah.'

'They always send you when an immigrant gets killed?'

'What makes you think he was an immigrant?'

The skin around Gemma's small blue eyes tightened and Ferreira bumped her age from mid-twenties to early thirties.

'Well, you know, they're all foreign round here now.'

'You're not.'

She picked the kettle up before it hit the boil and poured water into their cups, sloshing some onto the fake terrazzo worktop.

'I just thought - who else'd be sleeping in our shed? No English person's going to do that, are they?'

'There're plenty of English people sleeping rough.'

'Not round here there's not.'

The kitchen door opened and Phil Barlow filled the gap, a bulldozer of a man in badly cut jeans and a designer T-shirt. He was older than Gemma by ten years or so but he was wearing a lot of gold and Ferreira guessed that probably helped.

There was a smudge of yellowish bruising under his right eye.

'Making a brew, love?' he asked, holding his voice calm while he brushed one big hand over his bald head. 'Good idea. 'Spect you could use one too, Constable.'

'Sergeant.'

'Sorry, yeah, Sergeant.' He blew out a long breath. 'What happens now then?'

'We've got a forensics team on the way; they'll conduct a thorough search of the shed and your garden. When they're finished we'll take the body away -'

Gemma gasped and pressed her fist to her mouth.

Phil put his arm around her shoulders and she started to cry.

'Come on, love, come on, it's all going to be alright.' He gripped Gemma's forearm. 'She's a bit upset, that's all. Why don't you go in the front room? Have a sit-down. I'll talk to the sergeant.'

'I'll be alright in a minute.' Gemma wiped her eyes on the cuff of her cardigan. 'It reeks in here. The whole house reeks of it.'

Ferreira stubbed out her half-smoked cigarette, almost put the rest in her pocket but caught herself in time; old habits.

'Why don't we do this in the sitting room?' she suggested.

It was gloomy with the curtains drawn in the bay window, aubergine paint on three walls and gaudy damask paper on the fourth, not much of it on show between the huge black marble fireplace and the forty-six-inch flat screen hung above it. The smell was fainter in there, just an acrid hint under the bludgeoning sweetness of a magnolia room spray which puffed at Ferreira as she walked past it, going to a

shelf of family photos, Phil and Gemma on holiday, beaches and swimming pools, toasting the camera inside a little hut with a banana-leaf roof. There were a few of a teenaged boy, chubby and freckled.

‘Is your son here, Gemma?’

‘He’s my son,’ Phil said. ‘Craig. He stays with his mum during the week. We have him weekends.’

Gemma shifted her weight on the black leather sofa, punched her elbow into a cushion.

‘I’ll need to speak to her,’ Ferreira said. ‘Just to confirm.’

‘He didn’t set fire to the fucking shed.’

‘It’s routine, Mr Barlow, there’s nothing to panic about.’

She took out her phone and entered the details he gave her; his ex still using his name, living in Woodston. Close enough for the boy to have come over on his bike in twenty minutes. If he felt like causing trouble. Close enough to disappear this morning too. It was still dark when the call came in, who’d notice him slip away?

‘You two don’t have kids?’

‘We’re trying,’ Gemma said, a whole payload of want and frustration in her voice.

Phil sat down on the sofa next to her and took hold of her hand.

‘What happened to your eye?’ Ferreira asked.

He touched it quickly, glanced away.

‘I was fitting a security light at a place over in Dogsthorpe, didn’t have it hung right.’

‘Looks nasty.’

‘It’s not that bad.’

‘You’re a builder? That right?’

‘Property maintenance,’ he said. ‘Have to do a bit of everything.’

‘You’re multidisciplined.’

‘Jack of all trades,’ he said and gave a self-deprecating smile laced with bitterness. ‘I was a kitchen fitter before, but

the way the building is now . . . not many people want new kitchens when they can't afford the mortgage.'

'Looks like there're plenty of sites running around town,' Ferreira said.

'Can't get on them unless you're with an agency and you know what that's like, they're not going to pay me two hundred a day when they can get some Polack for sixty.'

'Just you, is it?'

'Same for everyone.'

'I meant, do you work alone?'

He nodded. 'I had an old boy with me last year but I had to let him go. He's working in Asda now, trained City & Guilds chippie and he's stacking fucking shelves. Way it is.'

Ferreira sat down on a fat leather footstool, moved aside a copy of *Grazia* with Cheryl Cole on the front cover.

'OK, so this morning . . . why don't you tell me what happened?'

Phil and Gemma Barlow looked at each other but he spoke.

'We don't know what happened. First we knew of it was sirens blaring out here.'

'We never thought anything of it,' Gemma said.

'There's always sirens round here. You ignore it.'

'Where's your bedroom?' Ferreira asked.

Phil Barlow pursed his lips for a moment. 'Over the kitchen.'

'So the shed's right outside your bedroom window and you didn't notice it was on fire?'

'We've got blackout blinds,' Gemma said.

'Which one of you's the light sleeper then?'

'Neither of us,' Phil said quickly.

'But you've got blackout blinds.'

They nodded in unison, didn't try a proper answer.

'When did you finally work out what was going on?'

'One of the firemen near battered our front door down. I got up then,' Phil said. 'I couldn't believe it.'

Ferreira's mobile vibrated and she went into the hallway to answer it, closed the living-room door behind her. The Barlows already had their story straight, no point letting them overhear what she was saying.

'What you got for me, Bobby?'

'They're all clean,' DC Wahlia said. 'The Lunkas and the Barlows.'

'What, nothing?'

'I know, what's the fucking world coming to?'

'I'd have laid money this arsehole had form.'

'Is he giving you shit?'

'Just the usual.' Ferreira checked the mail on the hall table, bills and circulars, the new Lakeland catalogue. Tucked behind the table was a hefty red crowbar. 'They're hiding something. The atmosphere's like cancer.'

A car pulled up outside the house, an insistent bass line pounding for a few seconds after the engine stopped. Forensics had arrived.

'What do you want me to do?' Wahlia asked.

'That's it for now. Unless you're going to come down here and beat some answers out of them.'

### 3

'YOU WANT COFFEE?' Alec Lunka asked, the pot already in his hand, a battered aluminium stovetop which looked like it had crossed continents.

'Black with one. Thank you.'

Lunka poured a shot of espresso into a mug and returned to the kitchen table while the kettle boiled. He picked up a bowl of milky porridge and tried to spoon some into his daughter's mouth. She was grizzly and stubborn though and turned her head away no matter how gently he coaxed her, twisting and dipping like she might escape the high chair at any moment.

'They're great at that age, aren't they?' Zigic said.

Lunka wiped her chin with her bib and she scowled at him.

'She only eat for Mama.' He said something to her in Romanian, his voice soft and hopeful, the tiny pink spoon held to her firmly closed mouth. 'You have children?'

'Two boys, five and three.'

'And they eat?' The kettle rattled to a boil just as the little girl opened her mouth. Lunka gestured away. 'You make.'

Zigic finished his coffee, added sugar from a canister and dropped the spoon into the washing-up bowl, checking the view out of the kitchen window. The Barlows' shed was less than thirty feet away, close enough to lay a sooty film across the glass. The inside was sparkling clean, like the rest of the small white kitchen.

At the table Lunka was making an elaborate display of trying the porridge; he mugged it up but the girl wasn't buying. Zigic remembered doing the same thing with Stefan; he was finicky, would eat something one day and

not the next, refused it off a plastic spoon, had to be fed from the grown-ups' cutlery. Eventually they realised the only way to make him eat was giving the food to Milan first, then he'd scream and snatch at it.

Lunka sat back, defeated. 'They will feed she at nursery.'

Zigic sipped his coffee, the little girl watching him now, wondering who this strange man was.

'Can you tell me what happened this morning, Mr Lunka? Right from the beginning.'

He shrugged, frowning. 'I am in bed. I hear noise, wake up. I go to window, see fire in shed.' Another shrug. 'I call 999.'

'What noise woke you?'

'Some noise. A bang maybe.'

'Did you see anyone near the shed?'

'No.'

'But you knew there was someone inside,' Zigic said. 'You told the dispatcher that you thought there was a man in there.'

Lunka nodded.

'How did you know he was in there?'

'I hear, last evening. He come home, is drunk, singing.'

Zigic put his cup down. 'Came home? He lives there?'

'Some time, yes I think.'

'But not every night?'

'I am not policeman, stand at window watch neighbour. I see when I see,' Lunka said. 'If these people want make money for he to sleep in shed . . . plenty people do this. When I am come to Peterborough first I sleep in garage. Pay old woman fifty pounds week.'

'How long's he been there?'

'Two week. Three. I do not count.'

'Did you know him?'

'If is same man, yes.' Lunka picked up the tiny pink spoon and turned it between his fingers. 'He is . . . *cersetor* . . .' He cupped one hand at Zigic. '*Cersetor* . . . for money?'

'A beggar.'

'He come here, want money - I say fuck off. He want food. I say him leave or I get knife.'

Zigic nodded, waiting for Lunka to realise what he had just said to a police officer, but his expression remained neutral. It looked like innocence and Zigic decided to go with his gut unless the post-mortem uncovered a stab wound.

'Do you know his name?'

'No.'

'Is he Romanian?'

Lunka considered it for a moment, watching his daughter's fists close on air in front of her.

'Not Romanian. I think . . . Kosovan, maybe. He has nose like Kosovan.'

It would explain why he was dossing down in a shed. Illegal, no papers. It wouldn't be impossible to get work but it would be badly paid and precarious and if his bosses decided not to pay him at the end of shift what was he going to do about it?

'Have you had any other trouble from him?' Zigic asked. 'Other than the begging?'

'No. He sees I will not give nothing. What else is here?'

'Nothing's been stolen?'

Lunka shook his head. 'Is accident, this fire. Why questions now?'

'It's standard procedure, Mr Lunka, I can assure you.'

'I do right thing. Call for help. I am not criminal,' he snapped.

His daughter's face flushed and she let out a long, extravagant wail which drilled through Zigic's temples.

Lunka lifted her out of the high chair.

'You see. You do this.' He kissed the top of her head. '*Shhh, draga.*'

The little girl snuffled, gave a small, half-hearted mew and fell silent against Lunka's chest.

‘You want ask question?’ he said quietly. ‘Ask why they no answer door when I knock? I ring bell. Five, ten minute I ring, shout through letter box, tell them is fire – no answer. They are in house. And no answer? Why is this?’

Zigic took a card out of his wallet. ‘I’ll need to speak to your wife at some point, Mr Lunka. Can you ask her to call me when she gets in?’

‘She will call.’

‘Thank you for your help, it’s much appreciated.’ They shook hands. ‘I’ll see myself out.’

The group in front of number 63 had moved on and the street was deserted now. Gone seven, everyone was where they needed to be. Some of the residents would be into their second hour of work, talking about the fire perhaps, but whatever they knew wouldn’t come to light until the end of the day when they returned home and found the incident notice pushed through their letter box. Many would ignore it as another piece of junk mail and Zigic knew he would have to organise a fresh round of door-to-doors first thing tomorrow morning, catch them before they left for work.

He didn’t hold out much hope for witnesses though. The countries these people came from, you didn’t trust uniforms of any colour; play dumb, keep quiet, try to stay off the authorities’ radar.

He couldn’t blame them for thinking the situation was no better in England.

His grandparents had been here sixty years and they still spoke in hushed tones when they discussed money or politics, convinced that some shadowy state apparatus was waiting to swoop down and punish their dissent.

Along the street, half a dozen houses away, he saw a civilian support officer talking to a black-haired woman in a dressing gown. She was shaking her head, putting a defensive hand up as the CSO pointed to number 63. A loud *nic* rang out and the door closed with hard finality.

There were still a few Polish on Highbury Street then.

A scientific support van had arrived while he was in with Lunka and he saw Kate Jenkins's red Mini parked badly, half on the kerb, a couple of doors down. She was heading for the gates, her slight frame bent as she lugged a silver case two-handed, banging it against her thigh.

'You want some help with that?'

'It won't get the job done any quicker,' she said, but let him take it. 'Bugged my back up at the gym.'

Two of her team were already at work in the garden, androgynous figures in baggy blue plastic coveralls inching through the long grass where the shed's window had been blown out by the fire. In the doorway the photographer was squatting down, getting some good tight shots of the dead man's head.

'Is it safe for you to go in there?' Zigic asked.

Jenkins looked up at the clouds gathering overhead. 'If the wind picks up we could be in trouble. We'll throw a tent over it, hope for the best.'

'The roof's collapsed already.'

'That's something, I suppose.'

The photographer moved tentatively into the shed.

'Watch yourself, Tony,' Jenkins said.

'Yes, Mum.'

'If you were my son you wouldn't have that bolt through your nose.'

'But I could keep the one in my dick?'

Jenkins smiled faintly. 'I didn't need to know that, did you?'

'Not really,' Zigic said. 'Call me when you've got something?'

'Always do.'

He went round to the front of the house and rang the Barlows' doorbell, held it down and heard an amplifier echoing inside. Nobody could have slept through that.

Ferreira let him in and he followed her into the living room.

The Barlows sat close together on the sofa. Neither looked like they'd had enough sleep. There was thick grey stubble on his cheeks, bags under her eyes.

Phil Barlow stood up as Zigic went in.

'Are you in charge?'

'DI Zigic.' He stuck his hand out and Barlow hesitated a moment before he shook it with a strong grip. 'I'd like you both to come down to the station and give us a formal statement.'

'Can't we do it here?' Gemma said. 'I don't want to go to a police station.'

'We've done nothing. What d'you want statements from us for?'

'A man's died in your garden shed, Mr Barlow.'

Barlow drew himself up to his full five eight, six inches shorter than Zigic, but he was broad and powerfully built and Zigic knew he'd have to be quick if the man was stupid enough to throw his bulk around.

'I can't imagine any good reason why you wouldn't want to help.'