

**4 a.m.**

**NINA DE LA MER**

**m<sup>∞</sup>**

Myriad Editions

First published in 2011 by

Myriad Editions  
59 Lansdowne Place  
Brighton BN3 1FL

[www.MyriadEditions.com](http://www.MyriadEditions.com)

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Copyright © Nina de la Mer 2011  
The moral right of the author has been asserted.

Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders and obtain their permission for the use of copyright material. The publisher apologises for any errors or omissions and would be grateful to be notified of any corrections that should be incorporated in future reprints or editions of this book.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means without the written permission of the publisher, nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the  
British Library.

ISBN: 978-0-9565599-5-1

Printed on FSC-accredited paper by  
Cox & Wyman Limited, Reading, UK

# Chapter One

*Fallingbostel British Army Base, Germany*

Cal

I nick tae the block and check on Manny. Are my eyes playing tricks or what? Forty-eight hours later and he's still buzzing – sprawled on his pit, throwing out shapes wi his hands in the air, music blasting fae his stereo. Still, the vital signs are there, so I fling him a 'Back in a bit' and march across the parade square tae the cookhouse.

Ye've got tae be kidding me.

The kitchen thermometer's only went up a degree in the few minutes I've been gone. Insult tae injury, it's an Indian summer and the fans are on the blink. One degree higher and that'll be me, melted away tae a greasy spot. But there's bugger-all use complaining, so I get tae work, my hands shaking as I dice the onions and mince the beef, my eyes watering as I add the sweating bulk tae a vat of oil. *Hissss*. The air clags thick wi bogging, fatty smoke. Oh, Christ, I think, my mouth swimming wi liquid, I'm never?

I am.

I'm gonnae boak. I'm defin-ately gonnae boak.

Deep breath in... deep breath out... and the danger's over, just in time tae add the garlic before the mince mixture burns. From the other side of the kitchens Corporal Clarke throws me daggers. I wince.

‘Wilson!’ That’s him, Clarkey, his temples swelling in irritation as he shouts over, ‘Look lively! That food’s going out on the hot plates in half an hour... and counting!’ he adds wi a fake smile.

‘Yes, boss,’ I reply wi mair enthusiasm than I feel, a shower of sweat pouring fae underneath my chef’s hat. I wipe it away, my hand wilting in the heat. Whoops! A few beady drops splash intae the spag bol. I grin.

‘Slop jockeys’, the other squaddies call us. A slagging I wouldnae contest, the night.

Today’s going fae bad tae shagging worse.

Nine hours I’ve been here working like a daftie, huvin as much fun as an ice cube in a sauna. Manny’s only got himself a sick chit, and guess who he buttered up tae cover fur him? Aye, right. Muggins here.

But hang on, before yous take me fur some kind of misery bucket, chill out – it’s no my usual style tae pish and moan. In fact the other lads call me Happy, after wan a they seven dwarves. They’d say that’s ’cause I’m ‘happy-go-lucky’; I’d say they’re taking the urine, ’cause I’m only five foot five in my bare feet.

Anyway. Truth be told, the reason I’m on a downer is on account of all the dirties Manny and me done this weekend. Dirties? Dirty rugs. Drugs, yeah? Which reminds me. He’s needing something tae bring him back down. I know! Orange juice. Manny’s always on at me: ‘Vitamin C’s a bender-mender; it sorts you right out.’ I huvnae a clue if he’s right. But who knows? Mibbe it’ll huv wan a they – what d’ye call it? Placebo effects.

C’moan, Cal, concentrate! ’Scuse me a minute while I deal wi the spag bol – a bit of seasoning here, a stir there. Nope. Still looks and smells like shite. Whoah! Here comes the boakiness again. If Clarkey doesnae let me vamoose soon, my liquid brekkie’s gonnae end up in the lads’ dinner. I do a recce tae see how the land lies fur a quick exit. Nae chance. The others on duty the night are just the type of cunt tae land you in it, if ye let on ye’ve been out on the randan.

'I'm watching you, Wilson,' Clarkey bellows over the din of ten lads and lassies scuttling like ants across the cookhouse.

My face becomes a mask of pure hard graft.

That Clarkey, he's an arse-wipe, so he is; loves a whinge mair than he loves himself. Just. I'll gie yous a fur instance. Say he parked on double yellas and the man gied him a ticket, he'd make a fuss, get violent even mibbe, even if he was in the wrong. Or say I made a mistake in the cookhouse, that'd be me in the *merde*, even if I apologised my cock off and all that malarkey. That's just the kind of cunt he is.

Och, c'moan! I'm gonnae fuckin burst if I don't get out of here, right now, this minute! There's nothing fur it but tae raid the fridge and shove an OJ carton under my whites, telling the other lads, 'I'm away fur a pish.'

Clarkey watches me, eagle-eyed, but what can he do? If ye've gotta go, ye've gotta go, eh?

Still, I cannae be too long, so once again I bolt back tae the lines and find Manny Bert-alert, eyes hanging out his heid, continuing his manual re-enactment of the raver's favourite dance move – big box, little box, big box, little box.

No change there, then.

I decide it's time fur action. 'C'moan, pal,' I say, 'yer no gonnae come down if ye carry on like that!' and, offering him the juice, 'Here, get this down yer neck.'

He doesnae move a muscle, but. I fling the OJ carton at him in frustration. Tae my shock and surprise, he catches it. No flies on him, even if he is in fuckin la-la land. Not that he drinks it, mind, just tosses it fae hand tae hand as if it was a ball or something.

Is he acting it, or what?

'C'moan. I huvnae got all day. Gonnae just make an effort...?'

Silence.

'For me?' Fuck me, he's almost got me begging now. 'Please?'

Then, out of nowhere, he gives up, opens his gub, and knocks back the OJ carton in a wanner. Watching him gulp it

down, my own comedown smacks me in the face, as if tae say, *I'm here, ye stupid bastard, did you really think ye'd got away wi it?*

Aw tae fuck – I'm no huvin that!

I check the coast is clear and rack up a quick line of speed, putting two fingers up tae the comedown, as well as the regiment. Aw, c'moan! Yous can hardly blame me. Only a wee wan tae get me through the arse end of my shift. The minute the bitter white stuff hits the back of my nose and throat, my heid clears and I waken up. Right. I can do it – a wee while mair and I'll be in my pit and in the land of the big zeds. Besides, going back tae the cookhouse doesnae seem so bad wi a wee bit of billy up my nostrils.

Och, no. What now? Manny's only back at the happy-clapping, grinning at me, making zero effort tae come back tae the land of the living.

I am beelin now, so I am.

'Nae bother!' I spit out sarcastically as I turn on my heel tae leave. I mean! He husnae thanked me fur risking my backside tae bring him the juice *or* fur covering his arse again. Double whammy! I storm out, imagining masel like wan a they comic book characters, smoke blowing out my ears, clouds of dust following behind.

Back in the kitchens I take a pure maddy, banging the pots and pans and accidentally on purpose smashing a few plates. My anger doesnae last long, but. I mean, Manny's my best pal here. We've pallied about thegither since haufway through the basic training, even though he's a soft southerner. Aye, he tried tae pull the Big Man act when we first met, was up himself 'cause he'd started his Army career training fur the infantry. Still, the rest of us chefs soon twigged how hard he is – about as hard as a bag of marshmallows, if yous want tae know the truth. It was mibbe when he put his Take That calendar up in the kitchens that we finally hud him sussed. The numpty.

If ye forget the boy bands, we've a lot in common, me and Manny, so we huv. Both scored the same on wur Army

entry tests. That is, no very highly. Not that I came up the Clyde in a banana boat, as my granda used tae say. I mean tae say, I'm no stupid. Manny neither. The main thing we huv in common, though, is wur love of the rave. Kept us sane back at the training down Aldershot. Okay, you's've got me. Insane's probably mair like it – going tae the dancing Saturday nights, getting zebedeed fur days on end.

Anyway. Ye know how an Eccy buzz makes you pally up wi folk, even if yer just after meeting them? That's how it was wi Manny and me. Pure bezzie pals after wan all-nighter at the Rhythm Station. There we was, hammering the dance flair tae the sounds of DJ Slipmatt when we clocked wan another across the smoky room. Buzzed off each other all night, then broke back intae camp, tunnelling through a piece of broken fence. And that was that – bezzie pals fur life.

Talking of the rave, it's often misunderstood, if yous want my opinion. Folk that aren't on the scene, they think raving's all about drugs, forgetting that it's the music that sends most ravers mental. Och, okay, scratch that, it's the combination of the two that's magic: like bacon and eggs, beer and fags, Kylie and Jason... Alright, alright, I'm kidding yous wi that last wan. But tae get back tae my point. If yous huvnae a Scooby what I'm on about, yous'll huv tae take my word fur it: there's nothing beats hardcore rave music on this Earth. The banging bass lines, the breakbeats, the speedy-up vocals.

Sorted!

Oh, and while I'm on the subject, I was forgetting another reason the lads call me Happy. I'm intae 'happy hardcore': it's got mair BPMs than your common-or-garden hardcore, it's mair euphoric and uplifting, working harder tae get yer heart racing and yer blood pumping. Problem is, Manny and me huv seen mair of the above than a fitba fan at an Auld Firm game, so we thought we'd knock it on the heid fur a bit. Ye know? Go straight; sort the heids?

Aye, right. The other day wur pal Taff turned up wi some Eccies we'd asked fur a while back, and Manny had the bright

idea tae arse the whole lot in the wan go. Nice wan, pal! You see, I'm no intae double dropping so it was a mathematical certainty he'd end up in a worse two-and-eight than me.

So, he starts off on Thursday wi two tablets – snowballs they were, the wans that fuck you right up. Aye, I know I said he was soft, but when it comes tae the dirties he's harder than a fuckin brick wall. I took just the wan tae start. I'm no being funny but I like the dancing too much, so if I'm on Eccy and we're no at a rave I hold back, otherwise my mind can go off on a ramble. Sometimes I even think of the bad stuff, like my da dying, my ma's love of the cheeky water, and how the Army's no lived up tae expectations. Aw, c'moan, yous can put yer hankies away. Plenty of time tae use them by the time wur stories are finished.

Anyway. Where was I? It's Thursday, Manny's double-dropped, I'm on the wan, we're both trying tae act casual, waiting fur the Eccy tae work its magic, when he says tae me, 'I'm thinking of jacking it all in, mate, going back to Southend. Fuck the consequences.'

Kick in the baws, or what? I mean, I know he isnae huvin the best crack ever, but leaving? So I goes, 'C'moan. Who'll I pally about wi if you go AWOL on us?'

His answer? 'You'll always be alright, you will.'

And I was thinking, *What's he mean by that?* but I didnae huv time tae mull it over 'cause my fingers were tingling and my heid was birlin, which could only mean wan thing – coming up – so I made my way tae the lavvies fur a dump. Job done, I took a look at masel in the mirror. I get obsessed by my reflection when I'm coming up 'cause the size of my pupils tell me whether the gear's working and how far gone I am.

That night they wernae saucers, they were fuckin flying saucers. I was defin-ately buzzing.

Thing is, the rushes were coming on so thick and fast that my eyes went skelly. Took me a pure hauf-hour tae feel my way along the corridor tae wur pit, me and the wall being best of pals by the time I'd finished. And obviously I avoided the

eyes of any square pegs walking past me in the block – nothing worse than huvin a serious blether when the dirties are kicking in. But would you believe, by the time I got back, Manny hud only gone and dropped his third E?

*Houston, I thought, we huv a problem.*

Little did I know he'd wind up doing four by 4 a.m.

Which reminds me. Best check on him again. I glance at the clock, willing it tae be heading towards six. Wicked! Five to!

'Come on, you mongers!' Clarkey bellows, and the whole kitchen becomes a hive of activity: tomato soup, kedgerree, spag bol, raspberry bombe and baked Alaska all on the menu, the night.

My part of the menu's ready, so I lug this culinary delight tae the hot plates in the mess hall, and wi a, 'Night, Clarkey,' I lug my ugly self back tae the accommodation; my eyes going thegither now, I'm that shaggin tired.

Ah, here I am at wur block, my pit and my pillow just beyond the door, which judders as I open it, my body screaming fur some –

C'moan tae fuck! You willnae believe what Manny's up tae now, the crazy bastard?

'Manny! Manny, get down fae yer pit!'

He's standing on his bed, wearing nothing but his boxers, by the way.

'Aooooouuuuuuh!'

Who's he think he is? Tarzan, King of the Jungle?

'Hoy, Manny.' I go. 'Keep the heid.'

Aye, yous are right, it's a losing battle – he's away wi the fairies this time, mibbe all the way tae Neverland, and without a return ticket. My throat closes up and my palms start sweating – somebody's sure tae come in and clock what's going down.

'Come on, ye tube, pull yersel thegither!' I say. I've lost all patience with his antics now.

'I am invincible.'

What's that? He's mumbling something at me, through a spittle mouth.

‘Manny, pal, gonnae speak –’

‘I AM INVINCIBLE!’

Alright, alright! Nae chance of missing that yin: he’s pure hollering now.

But no sooner has he opened his gub than he buttons it and falls back ontae his pit, launching intae some major zeds. There’s nothing else fur it. I lay him in the recovery position and bunch down next tae him, in case he takes a baddie.

Aye, I could leave him there tae choke on his own boak, but – as yous huv mibbe already guessed – that just wouldnae be me.

Pte C. Wilson  
231042189  
BFPO 179  
4 Sept 1993

Dear auntie Edie

Its bean a while so I thought id drop you a line and let you know how im getting along. Lifes treeting me not so bad but I do still spend too much time board out my brains. Sometimes youd think we serve up shite with sugar on top seeing the looks on the other lads faces! As you would say, so I don’t feel bad for swaring. I cant wait for my next leave when Ill cook a rare feast for you and uncle Bob.

Im looking forward to a wee hug as well as I do get lonely sometimes. Ive got my pals around me. Remember Manny and Iain? There good pals and make life bareable and we all go to the dancing when we can which just about gets us through the boardom. Though Ive been trying to take it easy and consintrate on my work the last couple of weeks. I hope uncle Bob is okay and helping with the messages and that while your legs bad. Sometimes I think hes so lazy he wouldn’t get out of bed if he won the Pools. I hope your getting on and not missing me too much.

Please write soon and tell my cousins to stop being so lazy  
and write to me. Their letters put a smile on my face.

Love from Cal

### *Fallingbostel British Army Base*

#### **Manny**

I'm sweating worse than a paedo in a playground, so I shake the gorgeous girl lying next to me awake. *Babe, open the window, will ya?* Phwoar! While she does as she's told – good girl – the towel wrapped round her slim, tanned body slips to the floor to expose her massive... (Manny!) She pouts, her fuck-me eyes pleading, like some grot-mag slapper. *She really wants it, she does*, I think, as her hand slips towards my... (Manny!)

What the fuck? It's Amy! My ex! Nause! How did I...?

'Manny! Wake up, ye lazy cunt. It's seven o'clock.'

Seven o'clock? Fuck about. Must be a PT morning. Physical training. No chance of me making that – ten hours' kip and I still feel like a bag of shite. Then I remember, nah, it's Sunday, on duty but no PT, and I slouch back into the comforting filth of my bedclothes and the filthy comfort of my woody... Cal's bang out of order cutting my dream short just when things were getting interesting, even if I was fooling around with my ex. Can't be arsed to go into that messy little story right now. 'Aw, mate, give us five,' I say. 'I'm well sketchy.'

'Now there's a surprise after what you pulled this weekend. C'moan. I'm no kidding. Up. Shower. On duty.'

'Oy, oy!'

The fucker's only dragged off my sheet, exposing my naked body – crown jewels and all! Alright, alright, I know sleeping naked in a shared room's weird, but if you had to sleep in a feckin' sauna, you'd have yer kit off and all. Anyway. There's no effing way I'm getting up: my head's pounding, my mouth tastes like a badger's arse and my comedown's probably gonna

cling to me all day like a bad fart. I screw my eyes shut, trying to drift back into the sexy mood of my dream.

Not if Cal has anything to do with it. ‘Your fuckin funeral, pal, if you want tae end up on ROPs again, and no weekend passes.’

*Shut the fuck up, you big girl’s blouse!* That, I’m screaming on the inside. Out loud, I just go, ‘Yeah, yeah, whatever.’

‘Later,’ our other roommate, Jonesy, says, flobbing out the window on the way out.

‘Oy, oy!’ I shout – meaning at the spitting. Christ, that lad gets on my tits with his filthy habits. Been following us about like a lapdog recently and all, trying to get in with us and that. Trust our luck to land only three in a six-man room, but end up with Jonesy as the spare prick.

Anyway. Cal really lets rip now he’s out of the picture. ‘Cheers, pal – what happens then about wur trip tae Hamburg this weekend? I’m no being funny but yer no just fucking things up fur yersel, are ye?’

Fair dos. Stay in bed now and there’s no way I – or anyone else – is getting battered at the Tunnel Club in Hamburg, Saturday night. The thing is, no other fucker’s prepared to drive, so if I land up in the punt they’ve had it.

‘Alright, alright, keep yer knickers on,’ I say. ‘Give us a minute.’

Fuck all this ‘going straight’ malarkey. Couldn’t take another weekend without a healthy dose of my medicine, if you catch my drift. I mean, I ain’t being funny, but the only thing’s gonna get rid of this comedown is coming up again. Specially when OJ’s done nothing for me this time, apart from leave a ton weight on my pelvis.

I am fucking aching for a slash!

Pissing in my pit’s not an option – I get enough shit from this lot as it is – so with maximo effort I kick off my sheets, scowling at Cal as I make my way to the bogs.

‘Good doggy, off you trot,’ Cal goes, flicking me on the arse with a towel – the wind-up merchant.

A toxic stench swamps the late summer air, overpowering me as I get nearer to the bogs. Yup, that's it – the unmistakable reek of *eau de crap*. I cough up a glob of sick and wipe it away with the back of my hand. I guess one of the lads has only gone and staged another dirty protest. Would you believe some joker finds it funny as fuck to smear his own shit over the cubicle walls and graffiti in it with his finger?

Here we go: *You are fuckin dead meat.*

Whoah! That's well suspect. My eyes dart about; that ain't aimed at me, is it? Wouldn't fucking surprise me. I'm not exactly Mr Popular round here.

Not surprised the graffiti shit artist has lost it either, mind you, living in this fucking dump. Still, don't give him the right to fuck up the bogs for the rest of us, does it?

Lucky I only need a slash for now, so I head for the urinals... pull out my dick as I go... steady myself against the wall with both hands as I empty... try to control my breathing. It's difficult, 'cause when I think of the amount of gear I done over the last forty-eight hours, my chest squeezes in and out like one of them accordions. I close my eyes for a second, try and blot the anxiety out. Wish I hadn't bothered.

Behind my eyelids my own guilt and dread gang up to chew me out:

*Only got yourself to blame, intya, ya gob shite?*

Better to open my eyes and deal with looking and feeling like shit in the cold light of day. Fuck, no, that ain't much better! There's still a load of negative thoughts twittering through my brain.

I feel like kicking something, like blubbing, disappearing into a black hole. It's as if everyone hates me, and I hate them; or something bad has happened or is about to happen; as if something's not right with the world but I'm fucked if I know what.

In short, my chums, I'm consumed by The Fear, that nagging post-drugs-binge worry that you did something majorly not big or clever the night before.

Right now, I have got The Fear big time.

I mean, did I say summit to Cal last night that I shouldn't have? Did I fess up to what's doing my nut in? Nah, couldn't have done, wouldn't have done. He's been a blinding mate to me. Still, there are some things – some things you don't even tell yer mates.

Got to watch each other's backs in this game though, innit? Especially 'cause Corp Clarke's been breathing down my neck more than usual recently. He's always had me down as a loser, a fucking nobody, 'cause he knows the truth about me leaving the infantry training. Now though, he seems to really have it in for me. Went and reported me to the troop sergeant for having an 'incomplete kit' the other week, and I copped a beating – had me marching around the football pitch carrying a sack of spuds on each shoulder. Yeah, yeah. Doesn't sound that bad, does it? But it was twenty-five degrees in the shade that day; he's lucky I didn't get heatstroke.

Still, could have been worse. Corp Clarke's got form for dicking me about.

*Yeah, and we all know why that is, don't we?*

Fuck about! Things have gone pretty tits-up when even yer own thoughts have turned against ya, eh?

I try and block them out by humming a favourite tune as I slope over to the block.

*I'll take you up to the highest heights,*

*Let's spread our wings and fly away...*

By the time I get back the dorm's empty. Cal must have fucked off to the cookhouse without me. Oy, oy! I know what you lot are thinking, but get back in your prams. Yeah, he's been good to me. Being late for once in his life wouldn't fucking kill him, though, would it? Fuck's sake, where's my fucking gear – my whites? Could have sworn I had my kit out ready before we started our session the other night. What a top buzz, though. A shiver of pleasure runs through me. Worth

the agony I'm going through now. That's what it's all about, people: the agony and ecstasy. What I'm all about.

Course Clarkey's waiting for me when I finally rock up to the kitchens. Two minutes late. It might as well be two years.

'Oy. You. Manning!'

He's striding towards me as if I've told him I fucked his mother. In the arse. Here it comes. The Payback.

'SNCO kitchens – and you're lucky that's all I'm dishing out to you, you woeful little cretin.'

He's got to be kidding me. I don't mind rustling up the scran for the lads – quite enjoy the banter as it happens. Cooking for the officers, that's a different story. Fucking complaining wankers, they are. Everything has to be 'just so'.

And this, he's having a laugh, ain't he?

Got to make two hundred marzipan rosebuds to go on some Rupert's wedding cake! A cunt of a job at the best of times, never mind when my arse is hanging out my elbow.

I glance sideways at the other lads. Yeah, course. They've only gone and jiffed me up, 'cause I'm late again. Nothing like sticking up for your mates. I throw out evils to anyone who catches my eye. Cal don't have the guts to look at me, of course, making himself busy chucking potatoes in the chipping machine. Still, at least I'll be flying solo, can get lost in my own thoughts, not have to speak to any fucker.

*Like they want to talk to you – loser!*

Fuck about! There's them negative thoughts again. I try and shake them off as I walk over to the counter.

'Right, mate,' Clarkey goes, a token gesture of friendliness 'cause he knows he's landed me in the *merde*. 'Made these before?'

'Um, yeah. I guess you just have to, um, make sure the marzipan's thin enough to, um –'

'Come on, speak up, son.'

What I wouldn't do to punch his lights out.

'Yeah, you have to make sure the marzipan isn't sticky, and it's thin enough to shagging roll out –'

Death stare from full-screw Clarke.

‘Corporal,’ I add in the nick of the time – best to be formal with Clarkey when you’re in the shit.

Seems to do the trick ’cause he goes, ‘Okay, fill yer boots,’ and stomps off, leaving me to roll out the marzipan. Fuck about! What a mare. Make it too thin and it breaks, too thick and it won’t look right. I settle on my third attempt – I mean, who gives a flying one if the Rupert’s wedding cake looks like it came from Tesco?

*Always cutting corners, eh, you useless slacker?*

*Fucking hell, mate, concentrate, I tell myself, ignore your constant self-loathing and self-pity!*

I try and do just that, and start again from scratch, laying down the marzipan and rolling it into a soft smooth ball. ‘Perfectly pink’, they want the roses, so in goes one tiny drop of red food colouring. Looks more pukey pink than perfect. Whatever. It’ll have to do. Next, I lay out the wax paper, starting to roll out very fine layers of the pink gunk between each sheet – the thinner each layer the better, to make sure the roses are delicate. Then, as precisely as possible, I cut out three circles for each rosebud petal, overlapping each one to roll it up into a cylinder. Whoah! My fingers surprise me with a massive tremble as I try to roll up the first petal. This is hardly the job for someone with the shakes, I tell ya.

*I’ll take you up to the highest heights,  
Let’s spread our wings and fly away,  
Surround you with love that’s pure delight,  
Release your spirits, set you free.*

There’s that tune again. Baby D, ‘Let Me Be Your Fantasy’. Wicked!

And as it continues to rumble around my head, I rack my brains to remember the last time I heard it out at a rave. Fuck, yeah! It’s that last time me and Amy went to Dreamscape, with my crew back home. She and I had a stonking row, over –

Hold up. I don't want to think about that. Why did that little nugget pop up? Always freaks me out, that. How thoughts steal their way into your mind, as if some evil ghost-fuck had whispered them in your ear. So now I'm thinking about thinking. Where do our thoughts come from? And that one too. Where did that last one come from? And that, why that? Fuck about! A fella could go fucking mental if he went on like this all day.

I tune in to the *tick, tick* of the big clock on the wall instead, trying to blot out all this other shit chasing about. Don't want to look at the time, mind you – I've probably only been at it for half an hour. But yeah, you guessed it: now the 'what time is it?' seed has been planted I can't help myself. I steal a quick look. Harsh! Over an hour to go till lunch, or, put it another way – another fifty sodding rosebuds.

It's not like me to be a clock-watcher, as it goes. Hate them, in fact. I was brought up to work hard. Had to. My mum's a teacher, my dad's a copper, always pushing, pushing, pushing me to make the best of myself. Yeah, yeah, Cal's started on his life story, now you're getting mine. What did you expect – one of them books where the characters appear out of thin air?

Anyway. Right now I can't stop myself looking at the clock. I think: if I can just follow the second hand round for one tour of the clock-face without chucking up, throwing a whitey or screaming, *That's it, you got me, I'm a fucking druggie*, then I'll be alright till the end of the shift.

*One.* I button my lips and clench my arse cheeks together, to stop myself fainting like a girl. *Ten.* I take a few deep breaths to stop my heart from going like the clappers. In out, in out, in out. *Twenty.* The last, tiny frail rose I've made rebels, gluing to my hands. *Forty.* What's stopping me from doing one? Holding my hands up, handing myself in for drugs and fucking off back to Blighty? Fastest fucking way of signing yer papers, so they say. Answer? Fear, most probably. Don't want to leave Cal in the shit, neither. *Sixty!* Right. Times that last minute by what – seventy? – and I'll be out of here faster than a virgin jizzing over a porno.