

RANDOM HOUSE *e*BOOKS



Living Proof

John Harvey

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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 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. In 2007 John Harvey was awarded the CWA Cartier Diamond Dagger for sustained excellence, and in 2009 he was awarded an honorary degree, Doctor of Letters, by the University of Nottingham.

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

Also by John Harvey

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

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

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

*Find out more about John Harvey by visiting his website
at:*

www.mellotone.co.uk

Living Proof

John Harvey



arrow books

For Liz

*What if I did not mention death to get started or how love
fails in our well-meaning hands*

ROBERT HASS: Thin Air

One

The man running down the middle of the Alfreton Road at five past three that Sunday morning was, as Divine would say later, absolutely stark bollock naked. Poetic, for Divine, if not scrupulously true. On his left foot, the man was wearing a size eight, wool and cotton mix, Ralph Lauren sock, a red polo player stitched on to the dark blue. And he was bleeding. A thin line of drying blood, too light in colour to match the Lauren logo, adhered to the man's side, its source, seemingly, a puncture wound below his pendulous breast.

The surface of the road was hard; it bruised his feet and jarred his knees: his breath rasped harsh against his chest. Promises to give up smoking, take up swimming, resume playing squash – little in the man's past ten years had prepared him for this.

Still, he continued to run, past the Forest Inn and the Queen Hotel, the carpet tile shop and the boarded up fronts of the café and the fruit and veg shop, both long closed down; past Don Briggs Motorcycles, the Freezer Centre and Kit 'Em Out, all closed down; on past the Krishna Vegetarian Restaurant and Take Away and the tiny health food shop that offered vitamins and ginseng, athletic supports and marital aids.

Stumbling along the broken white line at the centre of the road, he passed the boarded-up branch of Barclays Bank, Tony's Barber Shop, the Bismilla Tandoori, the Regency Bridal Salon and the Running Horse pub, before finally, outside the vivid green front of Il Padrono Ristorante Italiano, balance all but gone, arms flailing, he collided with

a car parked near the kerb and cannoned sideways, falling heavily to his knees.

Under the changing glow of the nearby traffic light, his eyes were bright with tears. Not wanting to, he pressed his fingertips against his ribs and groaned.

The next time the light turned green, he pushed himself back to his feet and though at first his legs refused to move, he forced himself to carry on. Overweight, balding, middle-aged, a wound near the centre of his chest that had started to bleed again, the man had no idea where he was running to, only what he was running from.

Two

Across the city, Resnick was sleeping soundly, cats curled here and there among the humps and hollows of his bed.

He had spent the weekend in Birmingham, at a conference called to address the establishment of a national police force. More silver epaulettes and high-flown phrases than he had encountered in one place since Marian Witczak had dragged him along to a revival of *The Merry Widow* at the Theatre Royal.

'I feel,' one senior officer had said, 'that we are already moving towards the formation of such a force in a very British way.' Piecemeal, ill-considered and over-cautious then, Resnick had thought, somewhere between the reorganisation of the National Health Service and the building of the Channel Tunnel.

'Y' never know, Charlie,' Jack Skelton had said, when he pleaded a backed-up schedule and sent Resnick along in his place, 'might not do you any harm, putting yourself about a bit. Letting yourself be seen. After all, don't want to stick at plain inspector all your life.'

Didn't he?

Watching all the high fliers like Helen Siddons, Home Office approved, race past him in the fast lane, didn't make Resnick feel he had a great deal of choice. Although, truth to tell, if he had wanted promotion badly enough, he would have pushed for it by now himself. Got it, like as not, for all that he had long ignored the lure of the local Masonic. Lodge and had maintained a steadfast preference for watching County over chipping balls on to the green, getting his handicap down below double figures.

No, the team he had working with him now – no one fussing overmuch with how he went about his job – thanks very much, Resnick liked it where he was.

The alarm aroused him a few minutes short of six and he padded, barefoot, towards the bathroom, cats, instantly alert, winding between his legs.

The shower head was in need of cleaning again and the water jetted out at him, unevenly, too hot or far too cold.

Before the cats could be fed, the caked residue of the previous day's Whiskas had to be prised from their bowls and Bud, the youngest, seized the opportunity to perfect that pathetic mew of hunger which, allied to the soulful stare of his eyes, would have served well amongst the young men begging beside the mural in the Broad Marsh bus station. What had someone at the conference called it, homelessness? A choice of lifestyle? As if, Resnick had thought, anyone would deliberately choose to sleep rough through the kind of wet winter they had just experienced.

He forked food into the four bowls, allowing the others to get a head start before letting Dizzy in through the back door, from where he had been patrolling the night. Tail angled high, the black cat stalked past him, green eyes narrowing against the extra light.

Resnick dropped a handful of Costa Rican beans into the grinder, sliced rye and caraway, set the kettle on to boil; he removed the outside layer from what remained of the Polish garlic sausage and cut thin slices from a stump of Emmental cheese. Behind him, through the glass at the top of the door, the sky was turning through purple and orange to red.

Resnick carried his breakfast through to the living room, switched the radio on low and sat with yesterday's paper on the arm of his chair, while Miles assiduously cleaned himself on his lap, pink tongue licking deep between extended claws.

It was the time of day Resnick liked best, the quiet before most of the world had got under way. Even back in the days when he had been married – before the advent of the cats – he would slide from the bed early, careful not to disturb Elaine, and wander contentedly through the empty rooms before settling with a cup of coffee and a new record on the stereo, headphones to his ears.

These days he rarely used the headphones for fear he would fail to hear that first summons, hauling him into the working day – bit of an emergency, sir, something's come up.

This morning he got as far as the sports round-up just ahead of the half hour – another England bowler laid low by a strained groin – before the phone rang and he swivelled towards it, Miles jumping to the carpet before he was pushed.

Divine's voice was loud with cynicism and wonder. 'Those blokes who were attacked a few months back in the red-light district, looks like we might have another.'

'Serious?'

'Serious enough. Lorry driver picked him up by Canning Circus, not far short of running all eight wheels right over him. Stretched out in the middle of the chuffing road he was, absolutely stark bollock naked.'

'Twenty minutes,' Resnick said. 'I'll be there.'

Three

Those blokes.

The first had been your average punter, run of the mill; confectionery salesman with a wife and kids in Hinckley and a four-year-old hatchback stuffed full with Snickers and liquorice chewing gum. Halfway along one of the alleys off Waterloo Road, lured by leopard-skin leggings and red high heels, and two men had suddenly been standing there behind him, quick and still from the darkness. Three weeks on the critical list, it had taken all the skills of the Senior Registrar and her neurosurgery team to reconstruct his skull, fragment by fragment, piece by broken piece. Every day his wife had come in on the bus to sit at his bedside, reading *Woman's Weekly*, filling in puzzles, eating his grapes. A couple of months later, one of his credit cards had turned up in Leicester, part of a job lot being offered for sale in a pub near the covered market.

The second victim had been an Italian soccer fan, jubilant after his team's victory in the Anglo-Italian Cup and celebrating on the open spaces of the Forest Recreation Ground with his friends, waving thousand-lire notes and singing Pavarotti's *Greatest Hits*. A young redhead, newly arrived on a Super Saver from Newcastle, had offered him a quick hand-job in the trees off the road, anything to stop him singing. A couple of early morning dog-walkers found him tied to a sycamore hours later, terrified, stripped of everything save his first-team replica shirt. Seventeen stitches it had taken to mend the gash in his forehead. His plane ticket had been found in a rubbish bin near the Forest park-and-ride and his passport, torn in two and two again,

finally surfaced floating on the duck pond by the entrance to the Arboretum.

The most recent occurrence had been at the nub end of March, another sales rep, in the city on a roll and booked into the Royal Hotel. He had met a woman in the penthouse bar, nice looking, good clothes, nothing garish but out for business just the same. Back in his room, she had undressed him on the bed, encouraging him, he said, to talk dirty to her all the while. Call her, you know, a slag, a dirty whore, stuff like that. When he was down to his Jockey's, she had pulled a knife from her handbag and stabbed him, once in the side, once through the flesh of the upper arm. Frantically, he had pushed her clear away and she had fled, off out of the room and down the hotel corridor, leaving him in no position to chase her. The description he gave of her, detailed as it was, matched no known prostitute on the Vice Squad's books. Just another housewife, most likely, eking out the Family Support.

Three incidents, probably unrelated, and now a fourth.

Resnick crossed the street from the centre of Canning Circus, early traffic already building up on its way along Derby Road towards the city centre. Time was, he would have bumped into Jack Skelton at this hour, the superintendent setting out on his regular three-mile run. But since early spring, Skelton's exercise had been restricted to pacing the four walls of his office. Whether the superintendent's relationship with DI Helen Siddons had progressed beyond an older man's fantasy or not, Resnick could imagine only too well the tartness with which Alice Skelton would have scolded him for his folly. And Siddons' accelerated promotion to the West Country had done little to ease the situation, leaving Skelton increasingly disgruntled and grey-haired, his girth thickening at a noticeable rate.

The CID office was close to the head of the stairs on the first floor, an L-shaped room with filing cabinets ranked along the far wall, below detailed maps of the city. A succession of desks and tables ran along two of the walls and down the centre of the room. Graham Millington's desk was on its own, adjacent to the thinly partitioned office which had the words *Detective Inspector Charles Resnick* on its door.

Behind Millington's desk were the kettle and mugs and the rest of the paraphernalia for tea- and coffee-making. Most of the other surfaces were clogged with official forms in a variety of shades and colours, typewriters and VDUs, here and there foil containers harbouring the remains of the previous night's chicken korma or lamb kebab.

In the usual way of things, only the officer on early shift would have been present when Resnick arrived, busy updating the files that logged the night's activities, after which the primary investigation of the inevitable breakins would be his or her responsibility. This morning, though, Mark Divine had been there from first light, back aching after sharing the interior of a rusting blue Transit with Kevin Naylor, the pair of them peeing into old orange juice cartons and waiting forlornly for the Home-care warehouse on the Abbeyfield Industrial Estate to be raided for a third time.

'What buggers me,' as Divine was overfond of saying, 'is who'd go to all that trouble to liberate three gross of sink plungers and a couple of dozen aluminium ladders?'

The fourth night in a row in which they were no nearer to finding an answer.

Naylor had snuck off home to snatch a quick hour snuggled up to his Debbie, while Divine, for whom home offered no such luxury, had opted for a kip behind his desk. He had been snoring nicely when the duty officer rang up from below with details of a man who'd been brought in barely conscious from the end of the Alfreton Road. Soon after which, he had phoned his superior.

‘Mark,’ Resnick said, door swinging to behind him.

‘Boss.’ Divine swung his legs down from his desk and stood to uncertain attention.

‘Best fill me in.’

Divine told him what little he knew about the man who was presently in a bed at Queen’s Medical, barely conscious and temporarily restricted to fluids.

‘This stab wound,’ Resnick asked. ‘Life threatening?’

‘Seemed so at first, now they reckon he’s going to be okay. Missed anything vital, by the sound of it.’ Divine shrugged. ‘Lost a fair bit of blood all the same.’

‘And the nature of the attack, how much do we know about that?’

‘Not a heck of a lot. I mean, when he first come round he was full of it. Tart and whore, over and over, blaming her, like, for what had happened.’

‘It was the woman who stabbed him, that’s what he’s claiming?’

‘No two ways about it. Aside from that, though, started asking him a few questions, clammed up tighter’n a virgin’s arse. Wouldn’t even tell us his name.’

Resnick frowned and shook his head. ‘All right. Have a word with Vice, see if they had anyone on patrol last night, late. They might have noticed something that’ll tie in. Minute Kevin arrives, pair of you can get up by the Forest, talk to the girls on the early shift. Meantime, I’ll drop by the hospital. Maybe if our mystery man knows he’s out of danger, he’ll be more ready to talk.’

‘Right, boss.’ Divine was alert now, tiredness fallen away. It wasn’t every day Resnick was prepared to trust the younger man’s instincts and there was a grin around the corners of Divine’s mouth as he sat back behind his desk, reaching for the phone.

Lynn Kellogg was on the stairs as Resnick went down. After the traumas at the start of the year, she had had her hair

cut short, making her face seem less rounded, more severe. More often than not now, there was a haunted look, hunched at the back of her eyes.

‘Morning, Lynn. Everything okay?’

‘Fine.’

Neither of them believed it.

Resnick made a mental note to ask if she were still seeing the police psychiatrist, and if she were, whether it was doing any good.

Four

After circling the inner ring road twice, Resnick squeezed into a parking place at the rear of the hospital, close to the offshoot of the canal. Above, the sky showed a flat, unbroken blue, but the sun, for early summer, gave off little warmth. He thrust both hands deep into his jacket pockets as he walked.

That way in took him past the psychiatric wing and an image of his ex-wife, Elaine, slipped unbidden into his mind: the way she had looked the last time he had seen her, after spending God knows how much time in places like this. And Lynn, he kept thinking of Lynn – two years without a relationship worthy of the name, and when she had come close to giving her trust to someone again, it had been the wrong man.

It had been a mistake that had cost her more than pride and self-esteem; it had very nearly cost her life. Resnick remembered how it ended: the mud that had sucked, thick, about his feet as he had run across the field-end, awkwardly towards her, helicopter hovering noisily above; the way the blood had pumped, jaggedly, from his heart when he knew that she was safe.

In the months since then, all conversation between them had been formal, withdrawn, as if what each had glimpsed in that despairing clutch of arms was more than they would dare acknowledge. And Michael Best was in custody awaiting trial for kidnapping and murder. His days in court – and Lynn's – still to come.

The single door which Resnick knew led through to the rear of Accident and Emergency was directly in front of him

and he pushed it open and went in.

They sat in small groups of relatives and friends or else they sat alone, staring off into that space where time, long since, had decided to stand still. For so many of the people here, Resnick thought, this was how they spent their lives; uncomfortably, on institutional chairs in institutional rooms, waiting for the number clicking slowly over to correspond to the one clutched in their hands. Social services, the housing department, medical centre, the dole; the bored clerk checking their answers, painstakingly scrawled upon this form or that. Rent rebate, clothing allowance, disability benefit. The women, pregnant, or with three kids under five who ran and chased between the lines of chairs, defying all the shouts and threats, sporadic and half-hearted, until finally they went flying, arse over tip, crashed into the wall and cried. Men with short moustaches, tattoos and sallow faces, shutting out all noise, clenching and reclenching their fists at their children's screams – the futility of dreams.

An Asian family sat off on its own, near the door, the man in a brown suit, bandage lopsided about his head, his wife in a sari, pale blue and green, carpet slippers on her feet, a small child, little more than a baby, sleeping fitfully inside her arms. Close to Resnick, a middle-aged man with tight grey hair and lined face, wearing someone's cast-off Fair Isle pullover pocked with holes and small burns, sat smoking a cigarette, after each drag carefully tapping the ash into the empty can of Strongbow cider clenched between his knees.

The nurse Resnick intercepted was wearing a sister's uniform and the badge on its lapel told him her name was Geraldine McAllister. Almost certainly she was older, but all she looked was twenty-five or -six.

'Excuse me,' Resnick said. 'But you had somebody brought in earlier, a stab wound . . .'

'We had several.'

'This one . . .'

‘Three, to be exact.’ Resnick had expected Irish and what he got was Scots, not broad but unmistakable, musical.

‘The one I’m interested in . . .’ he began.

She was looking at the warrant card he held out in one hand. ‘That would be John Smith, then, I expect.’

‘Is that his name?’

She smiled. ‘Probably not. But we had to call him something. He refused to give a name.’ The smile was still there, broader if anything. ‘Not very inventive, is it?’

‘I’m sure you’ve got better things to do.’

‘Than be inventive? I doubt that. Not round here.’

‘Gerry,’ a male nurse called from round a curtain, ‘can you take a look at this a minute?’

‘You,’ she said to Resnick. ‘Inspector. Don’t go. Two shakes now and I’ll be back.’

One small emergency extended into another and it was not so far short of half an hour before they were sitting in a cramped office behind the receptionist’s desk. A polystyrene cup of lukewarm grey coffee sat, unwanted, between Resnick’s feet.

Gerry McAllister held an X-ray in her hand, slanted up towards the light. ‘You can see, the wound isn’t very deep, a couple of inches at most. Even so,’ she shook her head, ‘a little bit higher and to the left . . .’

Her hair was not chestnut as Resnick had first supposed, but auburn, redder at the ends than at the roots. And she was older, a cross-hatch of worry lines around her eyes. Thirty-four or -five?

‘Was it consistent with, I mean, did it seem to have been made with a knife?’

‘Rather than what? A knitting needle, something like that?’

It hadn’t been precisely what Resnick had in mind.

‘A couple of weeks back,’ Gerry McAllister said, ‘we had this woman come in. She’d flagged down a taxi on the road;

didn't have any money, but the driver brought her here just the same. There was a knitting needle sticking out from the corner of her eye.'

Automatically, Resnick cast his mind back, trying to recall whether the incident had been reported.

'There'd been a row at home, apparently. Things had got out of hand.'

Resnick nodded. 'Boyfriend or husband?'

The sister shook her head firmly. 'Mother. Should they go to the bingo or stay in and watch *Blind Date*.' She smiled. 'Alarming, isn't it, the way things get blown up out of all proportion? Arguing like that over something like *Blind Date*.'

'Our Mr Smith,' Resnick said. 'He didn't say anything about how he came to be stabbed?'

'My hand slipped a little on the needle,' Gerry said, 'when I was giving him his injection. Punctured the skin more than I'd intended. He didn't even open his mouth then.'

Resnick grinned and got to his feet.

'I've checked up on the ward, it's okay for you to go up and see him. Maybe he'll talk to you,' she said.

Resnick doubted that were true, but thanked Gerry McAllister and followed her out of the room. Immediately, three voices were calling her from three different directions, each as urgent as the next.

The anonymous victim had been put into a side ward which he shared with two men way past pensionable age and a nervous-looking youth whose bed was marked 'Nil by Mouth'.

He was lying on his side, face towards the wall, a tray of barely browned toast and soggy cereal on the bedside cabinet, untouched.

'Not hungry?' Resnick asked, pulling out a chair and setting it down close to the bed.

The man raised his head enough to look into Resnick's eyes, then rolled away.

'Whatever happened,' Resnick said, 'you were lucky. Lucky someone found you, brought you to us; lucky to be here. That whoever did this wasn't stronger.'

He reached out and, without force, rested his hand on the upper edge of the sheet, bone and flesh of the man's shoulder beneath. At his touch, the man flinched but nothing more.

'Listen,' Resnick said, 'if there's somebody out there attacking men, men who put themselves in a vulnerable position – we need to bring them in. If we don't, well, you understand what I'm saying. The next person might not get off as easy as you.' His voice was soft beneath the squeak of passing trolley wheels, the muffled inanities of breakfast television from the main ward. 'You wouldn't want to be responsible for that, would you? Someone dying?'

Beneath his hand, Resnick felt the muscles tighten through the loose flesh of the man's arm.

'Whatever you were up to, last night, no reason that shouldn't remain your business. No need to broadcast it around. Time to time, we all do things we'd rather nobody else knew. Family. Friends. It's something I can understand.'

For an answer, the man shuffled further across the bed, shrugging off Resnick's hand; sheet and blanket he pulled up until they half-covered his head.

Resnick leaned low across him, close enough to sense the damp ripeness of the man's sweat. His fear.

'Think on what I've said. Talk to us. Co-operate. You'll find it easier all around.' Resnick raised his head and then, almost as an afterthought: 'There is a charge, you know, obstructing the police in the course of their duties.'

He took a card from his wallet and slipped it between the man's reluctant fingers.

'I'll be waiting for you to call me. Don't leave it too long.'

Five

'Yes, madam,' the uniformed PC was saying to the old lady at Enquiries, 'of course I can arrange for the Crime Prevention Officer to call round. If you'll just let me have your name and address and phone number, then he'll get in touch with you and agree a time.'

Resnick stepped around the woman as she fumbled in her handbag for the scrap of paper on which she had scribbled all the details down. 'I've just moved, you see, and I forget . . .'

Off to the right of the stairs, a repetitive yelling came from the direction of the police cells, the same two words, over and over, deadened of all meaning. 'Hold it down in there,' came the custody sergeant's voice. 'I said, hold it down!'

Resnick grinned into the silence that followed. The newly appointed custody sergeant had been transferred from Central CID; six foot three, boots that shone whenever he was on duty and shirts that were always freshly ironed. Most Saturdays he played alongside Divine in the Force's first XV and when he said hold it down, only the most drunken or foolish disobeyed.

Resnick turned left at the head of the stairs, towards the bird-like clamour of phones.

'CID. DC Kellogg speaking . . .'

'CID. DC Naylor . . .'

'CID . . .'

'Graham,' Resnick raised a hand in greeting as he threaded his way between the rows of desks towards his office. 'Any chance of a cup of tea?'

‘Kev,’ Millington said, looking across at Naylor. ‘Mash for us, will you?’

Naylor drew the telephone away from his face, one hand clamped across the mouthpiece. ‘Mark, you’re not doing anything.’

‘Lynn,’ Divine began, noticing that she was on her feet, ‘while you’re up . . .’

‘Don’t,’ Lynn shook her head, ‘as much as think about it.’

‘Chuffin’ hell!’ Divine moaned, heading for the kettle. ‘At least when Dipak was still here, you could count on him to fall for it.’

Overhearing, Lynn treated him to a look that would have stripped several layers of wallpaper. Although off duty, DC Dipak Patel had intervened in a brawl in the city centre and been fatally stabbed for his trouble: he had been a close colleague and a good friend.

‘What I meant,’ Divine grinned, seizing his chance to wind her up, ‘one good thing about encouraging all these minorities into the Force, they’re so grateful to be here, they don’t mind doing a few chores.’

‘Yes?’ Lynn was out from behind her desk, blocking his path. ‘All these minorities? Take a look, Mark. How many can you see?’

‘Aside from you, you mean?’

‘All right,’ Millington said, setting himself between them. ‘Shut it. The pair of you.’

‘The pair . . .’ Lynn began.

‘Enough!’ Like a referee about to issue a yellow card, Millington raised a hand in the air and glared. Lynn held his gaze for ten, twenty seconds, before turning aside, and grudgingly resuming her seat.

Blowing her a kiss over Millington’s shoulder, Divine wandered across towards the kettle.

‘And you,’ Millington said quietly, coming up behind Divine as he was flipping tea bags into the pot, ‘don’t be so quick

with your mouth. That way you might give what you call a brain a bit more of a chance.'

There were three Home Office circulars waiting on Resnick's desk for him to read, initial and pass on; a subscription renewal form for *Police Review* and information about a forthcoming course on the computer analysis of fingerprints at Bramshill College. Resnick pushed these to one side and shuffled through his drawer, searching for the flier from the newly refurbished Old Vic – the Stan Tracey Duo were playing that season and, if at all possible, he didn't want to miss them.

'Boss?' Millington knocked and entered, two mugs of tea precariously balanced in his one hand.

Resnick reached out and relieved him of one of the mugs, found a space to set it down; was it Millington or his wife, he wondered, who'd selected that particular shade of olive green from the suit rack in Marks and Spencer's?

'Ram raiding,' Millington said, helping himself to a seat. 'Buggers have come up with a new twist.'

Resnick sipped his tea and waited; over the past eighteen months there'd been a dramatic increase in the number of robberies carried out with the aid of stolen cars. As a method it was bog simple: drive the car fast through the front window of a city centre shop, jump out, grab what you can, either slam the car into reverse and drive back out or run like fuck.

'Bloke out at Wollaton, just back in from tending his begonias – holly-leaved, apparently, not so easy to grow . . . anyway, sat himself down to watch a spot of racing, wife about to do the honours with the biscuit barrel and a pot of Earl Grey, when this four-year-old Ford Escort comes steaming up his front drive, detours across the lawn, smack into the conservatory at the side of the house.'

'After his prize blooms, then, Graham?' Resnick asked. But Millington was not to be diverted.