

W is for Woman

I AM A 21ST CENTURY Police Officer, a fearless and relentless crime fighter, and I'm very, very tired.

In fact, I'm dozing in a Transit van.

We're en-route to a 'domestic'. A concerned Mop - a member of the public - has called us to report that the man in the flat above may be murdering his wife.

Apparently, there has been a lot of banging around and screaming and shouting about knives.

We get a lot of calls like this, and they always mean blue lights and lots of nee-nawing. We know the couple in question, and there probably won't *be* a knife - there seldom is when you attend a report of a person with a knife, though if you attend a report of someone driving without car tax, or trying to return goods to a shop without a receipt, the odds are you're about to come face-to-face with an axe-wielding maniac. This kind of unpredictability just makes our job more exciting.

Somewhere in my dreams, the warmth of the van and the revving of the diesel engine has mutated and I feel I'm on a boat, somewhere in the middle of the sea. It might be the Med. I'll probably have a cocktail in a minute.

I jolt out of my pleasant reverie as the police carrier lurches to a halt.

Wiping the drool from my chin and unsticking my eyes, I glance around. Did anyone notice that I was asleep? The rest of the team are climbing out of the Transit, batons in their hands, so it looks as if I got away with it. I follow them, blinking in the glare of the harsh orange streetlights and shivering momentarily at the cold.

There are six of us, seven including the sergeant. We don't normally send a van load of officers to a domestic, but we're all out in

Diary of an On-Call Girl

the Transit tonight on 'Operation Patronise'. The aim of the Operation is to pour out of the van at strategic locations around town and Reassure the Public. So far, we have Reassured the staff in the Wild Bean Café and a few hoodied youths in McDonalds. But domestic violence is a high priority for us - perhaps the highest - so the duty inspector has ordered us to break away from the important business of Reassuring to come here.

I spend a moment or two reorientating myself, and flick open my own baton as I do so. It's a retractable metal stick, a snazzy, lightweight little thing which replaced our heavy wooden truncheons some time ago. As a means of subduing a drunk and angry male it's virtually useless, but it does hang nicely on my belt.

Everyone is milling around and whispering urgently to each other as they look for the address. Although well-known to us, the couple regularly move, and we're the first officers to visit them at this latest flat. House numbers on Britain's rougher estates seem to have been designed with the object of confusing the police: if you're outside No15, you can be sure that No39 is next door and No16 will be a quarter of a mile away. There's a lot of head-scratching going on, so I look down at the back of my hand. This is where all the important information gets recorded and there, underneath the team supper order (7 x pie and chips), is a number: 22.

Blinking, I look at the flats in front of me. A sign above the doorway says, '16-24'.

I check the back of my hand again.

Then a surge of adrenaline wakes me up.

'It's here!' I say, and move quickly towards the door. The team flocks over, elbowing and jostling each other to be first; chances to wrestle a knife-wielding man to the ground are all too few.

I open the door and dash up the concrete stairs.

Bongo is inches behind me, panting and grunting down my neck like a wild boar. As I run, I wonder whether it might be charitable to let him have first crack at the lunatic, but decide against it. He'll think I'm scared.

We arrive at the first landing, and pause. I glance at the door numbers and start up again. For some reason, incidents requiring the police always happen on the top floor.

'Do you want me to go first?' gasps Bongo.

W is for Woman

Our shoulders jam in the stairwell for a moment. I wrestle an elbow free, jab it into his heaving ribcage and surge ahead. I even find time to glance over my shoulder and give him one of my looks.

Suddenly, I find myself at the door of No22.

One by one, my colleagues arrive in various stages of panting dishevelment. We form a professional queue, backs pressed to the walls either side of the door, all gasping for air as quietly as possible. I can feel my heart thumping. I reach out a fist to knock, politely. The door isn't latched and it swings inwards.

It's gloomy inside, but I can see a man illuminated by the landing light. He's facing away, his upper half bare, his lower clad in scruffy combats. He's not wearing shoes and his hair is sticking out like straw, with sweat leaking out of it and running down his back.

It's unmistakeably Wayne Perril.

'Good evening, Wayne,' I say. He doesn't seem to have a knife. 'Is everything all right?'

I peer round him, sussing out the flat. Old takeaway containers are piled up around his feet. Beer cans litter the floor.

'Yeah,' he says. 'Everything's fine.'

'Is Lisa here?'

As if on cue, the bathroom door flies open and she staggers out. She's about twenty-three and dark-haired; her cheeks are flushed and splotchy. She is completely hysterical, gasping for breath and crying silently. Eventually, she recovers enough to start bawling.

'Look what he's fookin done to me!' she howls, pointing at her face.

I look at her. He seems to have plastered her in cheap make-up.

'I haven't done nothing, you stupid bitch,' says Wayne. 'But I fookin can if you want.' He raises a fist.

'Go on then, have it!' she shrieks back.

While it's very tempting to stand back and let them settle things with a good old-fashioned fist-fight, it probably isn't a good idea. So I step into the flat and get between them, my baton across Wayne's chest like a bar. Bongo follows me and pushes Wayne out onto the landing. I collapse my baton and turn to Lisa.

'He's beat me up,' she cries, gesturing to her face again.

I peer closer; the dark patch on her cheek is not mascara but the beginnings of a bruise, and her lower lip is puffy and bleeding. I poke

Diary of an On-Call Girl

my head out of the door and talk in the general direction of the rest of the team. 'He needs nicking for assault.'

This is highly magnanimous of me. Not only am I giving my teammates the chance to grapple with a half-naked drunk - something all police officers love to do - but I am presenting one of them with a free opportunity to edge one step closer to their monthly target of eight arrests.

While police officers love to prevent crime, protect the public and keep the Queen's Peace, it's really all about 'targets' these days. One of our most important targets here in Blandmore is arrests. Our force isn't all that bothered who we arrest, or why, as long as we fill our cells with bodies, so each officer has a monthly arrests target. You can count an arrest towards your monthly target if you are the one who says the magic words (which are, believe it or not, 'You are under arrest'). Bongo is an arrest machine; he already has 15 for the month and is looking to beat the station record, set by 'Swanny' on Team 3. I'm currently on five.

I turn back to Lisa. 'I'll need to get a statement from you about what happened, and you'll have to come down and get some photographs taken of your injuries,' I say. I have a whole spiel that I give to victims of domestic violence, about bail conditions, prosecution, court and victim support, and I launch into this with a well-practised air.

Lisa listens, nodding and sniffing.

When I've finished, she says, 'You ain't gonna arrest him, are you?'

I am taken slightly aback. 'Well, of course we are. In fact, we have.'

She starts crying, and stamps a foot. 'I don't believe this. I don't want him arrested!'

'It's too late,' I tell her. 'And it's sort of what we do.'

The pitch of her wailing rises several notches - she sounds like a hare caught in a trap - and now both feet are stamping alternately, faster and faster, until the door shakes shut.

'Does this mean you're not willing to give us a statement?' I say.

There is no response, so I go on. 'Perhaps you'd sign here to confirm...?'

The proffered pocketbook is met with an even louder screech, and Lisa storms back into the bathroom, slamming the door behind her. I scratch my head. I need a signature to prove to my supervisors that

W is for Woman

Lisa has refused to give a statement. Otherwise they might even have to take my word for it, and they don't like having to do that.

I tap hopefully on the bathroom door. 'Er... Lisa?'

'Go away!'

'Um, unfortunately, we *are* still going to be arresting Wayne, so you may as well talk to us. You see, we can't leave him here with you both so angry, and at the end of the day he has smacked you and should answer some questions about it...'

Before I can listen for a response, I feel a nudging on my back. It is Lloyd bending down from his six foot four tower to murmur in my ear, 'Did you say we're arresting Wayne?'

I turn my head. 'Yes... I said he needed nicking?'

'Ah,' he says. 'I didn't hear you. So where is he?'

'He's just out there.'

'Out where?'

'Out there, on the landing. The half-naked drunk guy covered in sweat... you know, the one who looks exactly like Wayne Perril?'

'He's not out there, Bloggsy.'

I look at him, and then I go to check. He's quite right. Wayne's nowhere to be seen.

'But,' I say. 'But Bongo sent him out there.'

All eyes turn to Bongo. 'Well, I just pushed him out of the way, really,' he says. 'Didn't anybody think to stop him?'

We all freeze, and then run to the nearest window. Through the smeared, greasy glass I can just make out a dishevelled figure staggering at some speed between the blocks of flats.

'There he is!'

We charge down the stairs in a flurry of elbows and clanking batons, half-climbing over each other in the race to get after him.

Outside, Wayne is nowhere to be seen: he must have ducked for cover. Somebody calls up on their radio to alert the rest of the police in Blandmore, and we break off into pairs to look for him.

I fall in with Becks, half-jogging, half-walking in the direction we saw him last.

'What's he done this time?' she asks.

'Smacked her about a bit,' I say. 'She doesn't want him arrested, again.'

Becks sighs. 'She's just as bad as him.'

Diary of an On-Call Girl

‘Well, that’s not very feminist,’ I say.

‘Yes it is,’ she says. ‘Women are just as capable of committing crime as men. She’s just weaker, so she always loses the fights. What’s not feminist about that?’

We have now circled two of the neighbouring buildings, checking all doorways and bins, and are emerging onto the main road. Still no sign of Wayne.

I hear on the radio that the force helicopter and a pair of dogs are on the way to assist. The chopper costs about £2,000 for every minute it’s airborne, and is rarely deployed for anything less serious than a fleeing drink driver, so this is really quite thrilling.

We’re instructed to take up static points to contain the area. This means we stand still at strategic locations to avoid running all over the track that the dogs are about to follow. Unfortunately, we’ve been running all over it for a good ten minutes.

Becks and I come to a halt by the edge of Wayne’s block and fix our gazes on the various paths threading between the buildings. We wait fifteen minutes and then finally hear the whap-whap-whap of the helicopter above us. Shortly afterwards, the dog handlers arrive and deploy their wet-nosed charges on long rope leashes. A small crowd of Mops is gathering on the pavement.

The nearest dog has latched onto a strong scent and is straining to pull his handler along behind.

Becks clears her throat. ‘Do you think we should tell him that he’s following the trail we just left?’

The handler in question is Trevor. I first met him when I was new in the job and had accidentally wandered through an area he was about to search for a burglar. He called me names I’d never even heard of and he wasn’t even sorry when I burst into tears.

‘What he doesn’t know won’t hurt him,’ I say.

Trevor is getting increasingly frustrated as his German Shepherd keeps trying to run over to us. ‘Get back here, you daft hound,’ he says. ‘Those are police officers.’ After half an hour or so, he calls it a day. ‘No dinner for you,’ he says to his dog, and they disappear off back to his van.

Becks and I giggle discreetly.

The helicopter peels off, and the other dog van leaves, too. Defeated, we traipse back to the Transit. Sergeant Woodcock arrives last, lathered in sweat and about as annoyed as he ever gets.

W is for Woman

'Well, that was professional,' he says.

'Sorry, sarge,' we all mumble.

'Down to Bongo, so he can buy the doughnuts,' he says.

If you're late for work, fall asleep in the passenger seat of a police car or lose a prisoner, you have to buy doughnuts for the whole shift. As losing a prisoner is a disciplinary offence for which you could be fined, demoted or even fired (if you kept doing it), no-one complains much about the doughnut rule.

Lloyd fires up the engine and we head out of Corinthian Way in the direction of the late night Tesco. A couple of minutes later, we park up in the bus stop and Bongo gets out, heading for the bakery counter. Becks gets out to have a cigarette, and I follow to chat with her while we wait.

'Trev wasn't amused,' she chuckles, blowing smoke out of the corner of her mouth.

'I know, he...'

I break off, staring at the entrance to the supermarket.

There, still shoeless and shirtless, and remonstrating with a security guard, is a familiar figure.

'Look,' I say. 'There's bloody Wayne.'

Becks stubs out her cigarette and we go across together to address the runaway. He waves a laden carrier bag and throws us a cheerful grin.

'Hello, girls,' he says, his attempt at flirting rather spoiled by a large belch that almost over-balances him.

'Hello, Wayne,' says Becks. 'We've been looking for you.'

'And I've been looking for you,' he leers.

She rolls her eyes, and then lays both hands on his right arm. He swings round in surprise, the carrier bag flying up and hitting me in the chest with a thud. I pull it from his hand and take his other arm, and together we handcuff him.

'You're under arrest for assault,' I tell him. This moves me onto six arrests for the month. Result!

He puts up no resistance as I caution him and lead him over to the Transit. I know Sergeant Woodcock is elated because he goes so far as to raise his eyebrows. We open the cage doors and insert our prisoner.

Becks is peering into the carrier bag.

'What is it?' I ask.

She reaches in and withdraws a six-pack of Carlsberg.

Diary of an On-Call Girl

It turns out Wayne wasn't running away; he just went to buy some more beer.

Bongo returns, armed with doughnuts, and we all clamber back into the van. He sits down at the back and rubs his head, clearly embarrassed at the fiasco he's created. To make himself feel better, he inserts an entire doughnut into his mouth.

'Here,' says Wayne, through the mesh of the cage. 'Can I have one?'

Bongo's eyes open wide in amazement, and he starts to choke. Eventually he recovers and points at Wayne. 'H-h-how the bloody...?' he stutters.

'Oh yes,' says Becks. 'Funny story, actually...'

She fills him in while we drive to the police station and I am deposited with my prisoner, Bongo staying to help me go through the booking-in procedure.

The rest of the shift pile back into the van and head off to the next family crisis.

* * * * *

I should probably mention at this stage, in case you have not gathered, that I am a woman Police Constable. WOMAN. I have been doing this job for several years and if I wasn't a moody, bossy cow before (which I was), then I am now.

Being a WPC means I'm a member of a special club. I get invited to special seminars. People phone me at home with offers of promotion. When I joined, I was permitted to ask for a skirt (although this privilege has now sadly been stripped away) along with the 'tight allowance' - not just a description of my salary, but a special bonus to pay for tights. I also get to put 'W' before my title to pre-warn members of public that they have the privilege of being served by a Woman. This 'W' also appears on my personnel screen, next to 'R' for Response driver and 'L' for Languages (apparently, I once said I could speak French), so that the bods in the control room can search for officers with the correct Woman training required for certain jobs.

All in all, being a WOMAN POLICE CONSTABLE is pretty special. Lucky me.

W is for Woman

I am one of two females out of eight officers on my Shift, a Shift being a team of Response officers whose main job is to race out to crimes in-progress, crimes just happened, or crimes which 'happened last week but I only decided to call the police today because my partner called the police on me first'.

In case you were unaware, 21st Century Women are EQUAL to men. It's taken us a few millennia to catch up, but at last we've done it and the view from up top is pretty fab. Where once we were only allowed out with a male officer, I am now permitted to be crewed with another female, which makes for lots of girly chatting. I am also permitted to be single-crewed, which gives me lots of chances to fight men and show how equal I am. For the first time, not all female police officers are lesbians, so that makes for a much happier atmosphere of flirting and inter-colleague affairs, rather than all the nasty insults about 'dykes', which are now just reserved for those women officers with really short hair or who don't flirt enough.

Occasionally, you hear a gobby female mouthing off about how 'we still have a long way to go', about 'sexism in the workplace' and such clichés. These females need to have it pointed out to them just how far we have come. Over just a few months in 2005/06, no fewer than three Woman Police Constables were shot, SHOT, in the line of duty. One even died. How much more equal can we get?

Because women have found it so hard to become equal, there is a lot of help out there for the Woman Police Constable. Take the police fitness test. In 2004, the pass standard was lowered to ensure applicants would not actually have to break sweat. This was because of campaigns by various Friends of Women societies making the point that women simply cannot run faster than a slow jog, it is JUST NOT POSSIBLE. Anyway, you don't need to run quick to be a police officer, male or female. We're all equally unlikely to get out of our station or car on any given day, and on the few days per year where a chase occurs I've found it's better to let the men win anyway, as they really do love catching baddies more than we do.

Bongo, whose 'real' name is Paul, is a prime example of a man who loves catching baddies. He has very little interest in victims, witnesses, decaying bodies or speeding cars. But put him in sight of a running man and a recently-robbed old woman, he will chase the offender down until he nails him, whether it takes a minute or an hour.

Diary of an On-Call Girl

This might have something to do with his enormous arrest rate. How many of his arrests actually make it to court is another matter.

Bongo leans on the counter as I fill out the search forms and then he takes Wayne's handcuffs off and pats him down. It's impossible to carry out a full search on the street, so we have to wait until we get them to the nick. Custody law dictates that a search must be same-sex, which is a relief. A surprising number of male criminals hide weaponry and stolen goods in their underwear, and, odd as this may seem, I have no desire to prod around in the underwear of our male customers. I should add that I don't especially desire to prod around in female underwear, either, though sadly, from time to time, I have to.

I watch my colleague carry out the search, impressed, as always, with his thoroughness. Despite banter to the contrary, it is a remarkably uncomfortable feeling having to run your hands over a stranger's body. When I first joined, I was intensely squeamish about it and it took an incident where I overlooked a syringe in a woman's bra before I got my act together. Nowadays, if arrested by yours truly, you are going to feel searched good and proper by the time I'm finished with you. Oh, and no matter what offence you've been arrested for, you WILL have your shoelaces, jewellery and belts taken off you. The gaolers really don't want any of these items plunged into or wrapped around their necks as they walk past later on.

Unsurprisingly, Bongo finds no knife secreted within Wayne's clothing.

It takes forty minutes to book him into custody, take his fingerprints, photograph him and thrust him into a cell. We then consider our options and come to the conclusion that we should at least pay Lisa another visit to see whether she has changed her mind about prosecuting.

Sadly, she hasn't. She just wants Wayne Back Home Now.

There are some incidents which can be written off with the words, 'This is not a police matter.'

These include: Cars parked on the kerb, someone you lent a mobile to not returning it, your divorce, being locked out of your house, needing a lift home, spending all your benefit money and pretending it was stolen to get a crime reference so they'll issue it again, and wanting to trace a long-lost relative. Believe it or not, some people do

W is for Woman

contact us for help with these matters. Some of them even dial 999 and then they make a complaint when we tell them they need to call a taxi/locksmith/lawyer.

There are some things, however, which are *always* police matters. One of these is DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. If you learn nothing else as a 21st Century Police Officer, you learn that your sole aim in life is to prevent Domestic Violence. To prevent people from living in fear. To help victims make 'good choices'. To help women who are with 'the wrong guy'. To arrest 'the wrong guy'.

It can only be a matter of time before the police are called on to vet all relationships at an early stage to prevent women from getting hooked up with 'the wrong guy' in the first place.

For now, though, we must fall back on our training and our powers of arrest.

It is impressed upon us, in computer-delivered training sessions sent to us by email, that as soon as we discover that the person who has called the police is in a relationship, we should look to arrest their partner. If it isn't clear which party is the offender, both should come in. This is because every arrest for Domestic Violence should be thought of as preventing a potential future murder, and thus keeping the name of Blandshire Constabulary out of the papers. You might imagine that most police officers don't actually want Members of the Public to die horribly at the hands of their maniac partners. Further, you might assume that, given that we have vast experience of visiting domestics, we ought to be trusted to decide who really needs arresting and who can be let off with a stern talking-to. This is because you are Naïve. Blandshire Constabulary is not Naïve: hence the training.

I first saw our training put into practice by none other than Bongo himself. It was in my first few weeks on Response, and I was paired with him on a night shift.

The call came in, 'Male is being hit by his partner.'

As we drove, blue lights a-flaring, the crucial information was added: 'A crime report for assault has already been created.'

The golden rule of modern policing is that a crime report, once created, cannot be deleted, altered or removed without the use of deep magicks beyond our ken (involving dozens of forms and emails between officers and our Auditors). This unalienable truth guided our actions for the next minute or two.

Diary of an On-Call Girl

We pulled up outside the address. Bongo was first in to the house. I paused to lock the panda and, as I got to the front door I met him coming the other way with a handcuffed woman, uttering the words, 'You do not have to say anything, but it may harm your defence if you do not mention when questioned something you later rely on in court. Anything you do say may be given in evidence.'

These are the words of the police Caution, said whenever someone is arrested. Without these hallowed phrases, any instantaneous confession offered by your prisoner is invalidated and you run the risk of being labelled 'oppressive'.

As he marched past, he said over his shoulder, 'Find out what she's meant to have done, won't you?'

I looked at him, blankly. Surely *he* must know what she had done, in order to have arrested her? You see, at that stage of my career, I was still Naïve.

I located the caller at the back of the lounge, still on the phone to the police operator. He hung up when he saw me.

'What happened?' I said.

'She punched me in the mouth,' he said.

I saw a red spot on his lip and relayed this fact via radio to Bongo.

'Come on then,' he radioed back.

And that was it. We carted the female, whose name I still do not know, to custody, and other officers went to the address to take a statement from the victim.

As we drove, I cleared my throat tentatively and raised the issue. 'So,' I said. 'That was... efficient.'

Bongo shrugged. 'If there's already a crime report with the Domestic Violence box ticked, you know we're going to have to arrest her at some point,' he said. 'It will either be tonight, or next week after ten emails from the Auditors. Why waste time talking to the victim? If it turns out the assault isn't serious or can't be proved, she'll just be released. Just like she will if it is serious, actually.'

I nodded slowly. 'What if there isn't a crime report?'

'Well, then it's up to us to decide whether there's actually been an assault or not.'

Crime reports. Auditors. Boxes ticked. Back then this was all desperately confusing to an idealistic young girl like myself, who had joined the police with the vague notion that I would arrest

people when I had proper evidence that they had committed a crime.

But the beauty of Bongo's approach soon became clear. Not only would we end up spending less than ten seconds inside often unpleasant homes, our actions would actually be supported by force policy. Nowadays, I'm equally efficient when I attend these incidents. If I see a bruise, a cut or even a slight reddening of the skin, my handcuffs are out of their pouch before the victim has even opened his or her mouth, never mind the suspect. In this way, I can feel I am achieving great things for Blandshire Constabulary. Soon we will be able to declare ourselves the Top Force for Domestic Violence Arrests with the least amount of time spent on them. And look at the money we save. Rather than training police officers to be sensitive, flexible and compassionate, we merely need to teach them the words of the Caution.

There are people out there who live in desperate hope that the police will swoop to their door and rescue them in their time of need, that we will comfort and advise them, and then make an informed decision about what to do. I can give you my advice without needing to swoop anywhere: if you don't want him arrested, don't call.

* * * * *

By now you may be thinking I am some sort of cynical, hard-nosed bitch, and possibly a 'dyke' to boot. You probably have an image of a ginger-haired, lean, mean fighting girl who attends a rifle club on her days off and owns an Alsatian with a studded collar.

If this is the case, please indulge yourself.

There are women like that in the police. And there are also girls like Joanna from Team 1.

Jo is in the report room when Bongo and I return from seeing Lisa again. She is leaning over Lloyd as he scans a website for holiday destinations; one delicately-manicured fingernail is tapping the desk. Her shirt is undone to the third button and she's wearing her warrant card on a red cord around her neck as the next best thing to a necklace.

But Lloyd is a through-and-through family man whose only quirk is an unnatural interest in flatulence (bizarrely shared by the rest of the blokes on my team) so he is oblivious to Jo's blond-streaked, straightened hair and her teeny weeny turned-up nose. That doesn't

Diary of an On-Call Girl

stop her from strategically deploying these attributes and she is equally oblivious to his obliviousness.

Guy, another bloke on my shift, is watching Jo's antics wistfully from the other side of the room, and trying to get her attention by stapling pieces of paper together.

Bongo wishes to get past me, so - as usual - he grasps the scruff of my stab vest and lifts me bodily to the left. I consider lodging a complaint of sexual harassment, but instead take my revenge by filling an envelope with hole-punch circles and putting it in his post tray. That will give us a moment of hilarity next week when he sprays them across the room. Unless it's one of the many envelopes that he bins without opening.

I sit down to log onto a computer. It's always worth logging onto a computer if there's one free, as you never know when it will happen again and there's always some pre-emptive paperwork you can do. Beside me, Rich is playing an Internet game where you fire cats into the air in order to kill moles and across the desk Becks is 'surfing' the Incident Control System to read transcripts of incidents where people have died. This hum of inactivity isn't down to laziness; it's merely evidence of the important police skill of Email Avoidance. Most police officers receive around 100 emails a week. Most of them are completely pointless and sent by someone in an office somewhere who is paid solely for this purpose. The best thing is just to delete them without reading them.

I produce a report on Wayne Perral so that someone can interview him when he's sober. We have this time-wasting attitude that if someone has whacked his partner, at the very least he should have to answer some questions about it. The report contains the words 'as bad as' and 'each other' to reflect past occasions when Lisa has thumped Wayne, but in the interests of fairness also the words 'abusive', 'drunken' and 'thug' to highlight his possibilities as a prosecution candidate. I then pass it to the sergeant to sign.

Sergeant Chris Woodcock has twelve years' service and is therefore considered competent to sign a large number of forms every day. Chris has wanted to be in charge of signing things since he was a little boy, and it's wonderful to see him achieve his ambition. Bear in mind that only two other people check the work he's signed afterwards to make sure he hasn't lied or cocked up. Now *that's* trust.

W is for Woman

He shakes his head wearily as he reads the paperwork. ‘Those two *both* need locking up,’ he says, ‘We’re called out to them at least once a month.’

‘I know, sarge.’

I take back the signed document ready for dispatch to the Domestic Violence Unit (DVU). ‘Do you think DVU will deal with him this time?’

‘Only if there are no Strategy Conferences going on in the entire country.’

DVU staff *do* seem to attend a lot of conferences. There’s a momentary pause.

‘What do DVU *do*, sarge?’

‘They support shift officers, Bloggs, as do all support departments.’

‘*How* do they support us, sarge?’

‘Well, we send them completed risk assessments and they support us by reading these and further assessing the risk to that victim.’

‘Hmmm,’ I say. ‘Is that *it*?’

‘Don’t forget that they then ring up the victim and fill out another, longer risk assessment.’

‘And...?’

‘They then set up a meeting with the local Council to compare risk assessments and decide on a new and final level of risk which will be reassessed and agreed by their supervisors.’

‘I see,’ I say, my eyes glazing over slightly. ‘Sorry, *how* do they support us again?’

‘Well, with all that risk-assessing, they are then fully equipped to send us emails telling us where we went wrong and what we need to do next to put it right. That’s where the support comes in.’

Sergeant Woodcock is *so* wise.

I take the information on Wayne Perril up to DVU. One baffled officer is working the late shift. This is due to an administrative error: there shouldn’t be any, as DVU is strictly a 9-5 sort of thing.

I discuss the case with him. He explains that if there’d been airtight evidence proving the crime, his unit might have been able to help. But since there isn’t, the incident is better investigated by someone with less specialist training, who doesn’t have so much risk-assessing to do. That is, an ordinary response officer like me.

Diary of an On-Call Girl

The night shift of response officers are delighted to take over the job from me, and I sign off-duty at 11pm sharp with the pride of someone who has just saved her force from paying her any overtime. I can now afford to forget about the mad, sad plight of the Perrils, although something tells me that I will be hearing from them again soon.

On arriving home I am confronted by a naked white mattress and duvet. I just about remember putting every sheet I own into the wash at lunchtime in a fit of anger over an offhand remark made by my boyfriend, Luke, which may or may not have been to do with women and housework. I don't remember taking them out again. This oversight is known as Policeman's Fog and you should bear in mind that any police officer attending your house might be suffering from it at the time he or she inserts your complaint into a bin. I said 'might'.

It will take half an hour to dry a sheet, so I give up and lie down on the mattress with a towel for a blanket.

I dream that I have received emails regarding my lack of laundry expertise and suggesting that some re-training is in order.