

End Game

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Chapter 1

London, late 2002

'Chasing suspect...'

I moved as quickly as I could. It was definitely Nina's voice on the radio, and it sounded like she was after our target.

The house had appeared empty. The SO19 firearms officers had declared it clear and we had moved in to start a more thorough search. We were looking for paperwork, documents – anything that might lead us further into the world of the trafficking gang we were investigating.

I was in the kitchen and had just unearthed some interesting passport-sized photographs of young women. Nina's voice was shrill, excited.

She was on the first floor checking the bedrooms so I headed that way. Just as I turned towards the hallway and stairs, I caught a sudden movement out of the corner of my eye. A figure falling from the flat roof extension into the rear garden: dark clothing, moving quickly.

'Garden ... garden. Male ... dark jacket.' It was Nina's voice again.

I reached the door to the back garden in time to see one of the German Shepherd dogs from the firearms support team launch head-long towards a man desperately trying to climb a fence. I heard screams of pain and guessed what had happened even before I saw it with my own eyes.

As I jogged across the garden I found the dog firmly locked onto the left calf muscle of Nina's fleeing suspect, who was trying to shake himself free of the animal's grip. His efforts were pointless and time was against him. On both sides of the fence I could see armour-clad cops closing in.

Nina appeared behind me. 'They got him?' she panted.

'Looks like it ... at least the dog has. The Ninjas will have him cuffed in a tick.'

‘Excellent. Good job we decided to use them. Bastard dropped out of the loft hatch and climbed through the window.’

Nina moved to push past me further into the garden.

‘I wouldn’t,’ I said. ‘Wait till they’ve got the dog back on its lead.’

‘Ah ... OK. Can I leave it with you? I left Matt upstairs on his own.’

I nodded, and Nina headed back to the first floor.

I watched her go. She moved smoothly, like an athlete. I had no doubt that, even with a head start, she would probably have caught our suspect without any help. I’d now known Nina Brasov for nearly a year. We were no longer Sergeant and Inspector, any conscious reference to rank was long since jettisoned. Matt was a Detective Inspector, a DI, the same as me. But to Nina, we were just Matt and Finlay. Two parts of the ‘Three Degrees’, as she called our team.

One of the SO19 lads – the Ninjas – gave me a thumbs-up as they lifted the injured suspect from the fence, checked the bite wound to his leg and slipped a set of ridged cuffs over his wrists. Satisfied the coast was clear, I walked over to them. The man Nina had described raised his head and turned towards me.

‘Hello, Costas,’ I said, smiling.

Costas Ioannidis curled his lip and snarled.

I ignored him and turned to the two dog handlers. ‘Good effort, lads.’

Then, as our prisoner was led from the garden, I heard Nina call from an open window behind me.

‘Was it him?’ she asked.

‘Yes,’ I shouted. ‘In the flesh.’

‘Come upstairs, Finlay. We all need a good laugh, and you’ll never believe what Matt has found.’

The first thing to hit me as I climbed the stairs was the smell. Stale ammonia. I was still puzzling as to the cause when I heard a squawk from behind one of the bedroom doors.

For a moment, I wondered what on earth they had discovered. Then, as I walked in, it became clear. The room was full of cages. Wall to wall parrots. African greys, to be exact.

Matt had counted them. There were eleven, he announced.

Nina produced a can of Easy-Start spray and shoved it towards my face. 'Have a sniff, Finlay.' She laughed at my puzzled expression. 'It contains ether. The junkies go into pet shops; one distracts the owner while another sprays the bird. Poor mister parrot keels over, which makes it easy to nick.'

'Seriously?' I asked.

'Damn right. These fetch over a grand a piece. Costas is the fence, he deals in stolen birds.'

It was my turn to laugh. 'So, what are we going to do with them?'

Matt interrupted as he brushed past me, heading towards the stairs. 'Nothing. Leave 'em where they are. I've already called the local CID. They've got loads to put to Mr Ioannidis. They knew someone was at it locally ... it looks like we've found out who.'