I

The Present

Police Scotland HQ

The Detective Chief Inspector of Police Scotland's Organised Crime Unit Amelia Langley looked across her desk at the photo on the wall. Three rows of young police officers stood in a passing-out day group photograph. Langley barely recognised herself; but there was no doubt the fresh-faced young woman under the cap was indeed her.

The sight made her smile. But as she looked along the line of brand new police officers, the pinched face of Mary Green jumped out. Now her boss – an Assistant Chief Constable, no less – her rise had been meteoric. This woman was her nemesis – or so it felt. Now her smile turned into a scowl, a scowl because there was more, much more. It haunted Langley, but she had to live with it.

She had considered taking the photograph down, reasoning – quite reasonably – that she felt the same mix of emotions every time she looked at it. But Langley realised that removing ACC Mary Green from her office wall would certainly not have the same effect on her life. Green worked in a much larger office on the floor directly above her. Her presence would still loom over Langley, photo or no photo.

They had been the intake of 'bright young things', as

one instructor at the police college had sarcastically named them. All university graduates, they were promised a rapid rise through the ranks. This was a proper career in senior management, rather than an unpredictable trudge through the lower levels of 'the job'.

For many it had worked – she had certainly benefited from the Accelerated Promotion scheme. Others had fallen by the wayside. The tall young man to her right had quickly decided that the police service was not for him. He was now CEO of an oil company in Aberdeen. Langley guessed he had few regrets about ending his law enforcement career after only a few short weeks.

She knew that she should be happier with her lot. But Green, superior in rank – well above her, as she was physically in the building – would always be a source of her dissatisfaction. This notion was not merely the product of jealousy; it came from the genuine belief that Green had taken shortcuts. Langley knew she'd made all the right friends in the force's hierarchy, but she'd also moved far too freely among some of the people they were employed to bring to justice. Unfortunately, as far as the latter was concerned, she could prove nothing.

The thought also made her feel like a hypocrite.

A knock on the door shifted her thoughts from what might have been firmly into the here and now. DS Neil Dickie sat down heavily on the chair opposite.

'Well, what have you managed to find out, Neil?' Langley liked her right-hand man in the Organised Crime Unit, despite a nagging feeling he didn't relish having a female boss, and at times made that far too obvious.

'The Albanians are like that Japanese knotweed, ma'am. They're coming out of the woodwork.'

'Carving up more of Glasgow?'

'Aye, doing their best. Paisley is just about finished. Well, the Finns are, at least.'

Langley sat back in her chair. She should have been thinking about the rise to power of Eastern European organised crime in central Scotland. Instead, she could picture only one face: a man who had seemingly disappeared off the face of the earth when his son had been gunned down in a Paisley pub two years before.

Zander Finn.

London

As there were a few spaces in the Notting Hill street, he had been able to park reasonably close to Mrs Quinn's ground-floor flat. She and her husband had bought it in 1979 for fifty thousand; now it was worth over two million pounds.

She was of the old school – no airs, no graces. A straight-talking Londoner, originally from the East End.

'We'll just get you onto the ramp, Mrs Q,' he said, pushing her slowly past a Ferrari towards the patient transport ambulance.

'It's roast beef today down at the centre. A good old sing-song round the old Joanna, too. I love a Tuesday, me.'

'I could do with some roast beef myself,' he said.

'I thought you Jocks liked haggis.' She laughed at her own joke.

'Can't stand it, dear. I'm more of a caviar man, myself.' He smiled as she laughed heartily at the seemingly unlikely nature of this.

'You're always a tonic, son. Remind me a bit of my Jake, you do. He loved a laugh, did Jake.'

He positioned the wheelchair on a flat ramp, secured

the guard rail, pressed the button and watched Mrs Quinn ascend into the back of the ambulance.

'It's like Southend when I was a gal,' she chortled. 'Only thrill I get these days.'

'I'm sure you've still a few thrills left, dear.'

'Huh, the nearest I get is having a good piss in the morning. Trust me, son, you don't want to get old.'

As he made sure her wheelchair was secured in the back of the vehicle, the thought of getting old made him suddenly melancholy. Too many young people didn't make it. Though he tried, day after day, not to think of this vexed subject, nearly every morning he was reminded of the tragedy of it all when Capital news told of another young person who had lost their life to knife crime. Unprompted, the old sadness returned.

'That's you, Mrs Q,' he said, knowing she loved the rhyme.

'Thank you, son. If we get round there sharpish I'll get a space near the piano.'

As he closed the back door he heard a shout echoing down the street. It was a particular name that bounced from the high buildings, repeating as though he was in the mountains. Or maybe he just imagined that. It was, though, a name he wanted to forget.

'Zander! Hang on, big man.' A tall, heavy-set figure was making his way towards the ambulance at what could best be described as half-jogging, half-walking pace. By the time he reached the rear of the vehicle, his face was as red as his hair had once been. That hair had now faded, flecked with grey, as was his drooping moustache.

'Don't worry, I've a defibrillator on board, Malky.'

Struggling to get his breath back, Malky grinned. 'Two years and that's all you've got to say to me?'

'No, I want to know how the fuck you found me?'

'Come on, big man. I've known where you've been for over a year.'

Zander looked his best friend Malky Maloney straight in the eye with an expression that was, at first, hard to judge. Then a broad smile spread across his face and he embraced the man he'd known since he was three years old.

'Listen, we need to talk, Zander.'

'I need to get Mrs Quinn to the day centre or she'll miss her roast beef. We can talk when I've dropped her off.'

'What will I do – stand here like a numpty?'

'You can come with us. Get moving!'

As Zander Finn watched his friend struggle into the front passenger seat of the ambulance, he could tell that what he wanted to talk about could only be trouble. He wasn't surprised that Maloney knew where to find him. After all, they'd been tracking down people they wanted to 'speak' to for years together. What troubled him more was why Maloney had chosen now to make contact.

As Finn turned the key in the ignition he wished he'd gone to France, not London, to escape his past. But he was shit at languages and it had never been a real possibility. What would be would be, as his mother always said.

His mother; something else he'd tried not to think about for a long time.

'How are you doing, darling?' said Maloney.

'Oh, another Scotchman, how nice.' Her smile was brief. 'I think we'll have to make it quick, Sandy. Me bag's just about full.'

As the noisy diesel engine burst into life, Maloney leaned into his friend, now at the wheel. 'Her bag?'

'Stoma – colostomy bag, you know.'

Maloney took a few moments to process this information. 'Oh, for fuck's sake, Zander.'

'She can't help it. Hey, who knows how we'll end up?'

'It's not just that. I mean. *Sandy*, come on. Could you not have used more imagination?'

In the back of the ambulance, Mrs Quinn let rip with a loud belch. 'I am sorry, boys. Had some beans for tea last night. Leaves me like fucking Windy Miller.'

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Maloney watched as Finn delivered his charge into the day centre. It looked like an old school, but now instead of children starting their lives, those nearing its end walked through the gates. 'Walked' wasn't even the right description: some in wheelchairs, others on sticks, crutches, walking frames, disability scooters. Only a few unaided.

He shuddered as Finn arrived back. He'd lost weight, that was obvious, not that he'd ever been fat. But it was clear to Malky Maloney that his old mate no longer did an hour a day in the gym. The grey streak in his otherwise dark hair that had appeared in his twenties was now even more pronounced.

'Can I have a fag in here?' asked Maloney.

'If you must. I'll drive for the next patient with the windows open.'

'Good man.' Maloney produced a cigarette and lit it with a gold lighter.

'Right, enough of the fucking about. Why are you here?'

'I'll come straight out with it, Zander.'

'Please do.'

'You need to come back.'

Finn looked at Maloney for a few seconds before bursting into laughter. 'Are you serious?'

'Aye, I am.'

'You think I can just come back, business as usual, after what happened to Danny?'

'It wasn't your fault. You know that.'

'I should have protected him!'

'He pissed people off everywhere he went, Zan.'

Silence for a few moments, then Finn spoke. 'Never say that to me again, Malky.' His green eyes were brimming with hatred and hurt.

'Okay, we'll not talk about that. Keep calm, eh?'

'So, tell me. Why would I come back?'

'To save the people you have left, that's why.'

'Gillian?'

'Aye, and Robbie, too.'

'Robbie's in Afghanistan.'

'No, he's not. He's in a rehab unit in Hertfordshire. He lost a leg, Zander. A landmine.'

Finn took a deep breath and gripped the steering wheel until his knuckles were white. 'Fuck!' he swore loudly. 'He was there as an advisor – non-combatant, that's what he said!'

'Guess he was unlucky.'

'I'm cursed – all of us are.'

Maloney caught him by the lapel of his blue uniform. 'Listen, you're the only man that can sort this.'

'What?'

'These Albanians, they're getting heavy. I mean *heavy*, big time.'

'Eh? There's only about a dozen of them.'

'That was when you left, Zan. There's a load of them now. We're all losing business.'

'I don't give a fuck about business. I'm happy doing what I'm doing.'

Maloney watched an old man lean against the railings of the centre to catch his breath, a slick of drool slipping down his grey stubbly chin. 'It's no' just about dosh. They've threatened families. Big Joe Mannion's oldest boy is in the hospital. He might not walk again.'

'My son is dead! Or had you forgotten that?'

'Aye, but Gillian and Robbie aren't. And don't forget Sandra.' He paused. 'There's been a direct threat – to them, I mean.'

'In what way?'

'The Albanians want to be the only suppliers. Not just at home, Glasgow too. They're not for giving up, either.'

'That's pish.'

'Tell that to Senga.'

'As in my *wife* Senga?'

'You've not slowed down any. Aye, your wife!'

'They've threatened her, too?'

'In a roundabout way, aye.'

'Why in a *roundabout way*?'

'She's been running things. Well, sort of. Since you left, I mean.'

'Fuck me . . .'

'Listen, she's gone in with Glasgow. We have to stick together to survive.'

'Ally myself to the bastards who killed my son. You must be out of your mind, Malky.'

'It's not as simple as that.'

'Why?'

'Mannion didn't kill Danny.'

'Who did then – Mickey fucking Mouse?'

'It was the Albanians. And if you don't come back and run things, they'll do the same with Robbie, Gillian, Sandra – with us all!' He hesitated for a few moments. 'Oh, and your mother's ill – dying, I hear.'

'She's been dying since 1973. And don't mention Sandra to me. You know why.' Zander Finn waved his hand dismissively.