Blind Eye

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Extract

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See How They Run . . .

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Waiting was the worst bit: hunkered back against the wall, eyes squinting in the setting sun, waiting for the nod. A disused business unit in Torry – not exactly the most affluent area of Aberdeen – downwind of a fish factory, and a collection of huge yellow bins overflowing with heads, bones and innards that festered in the hot June evening.

Half a dozen armed police officers – three teams of two, all dressed in black, sweating and trying not to breathe through their noses – listened for sounds of movement over the raucous screams of Jurassic-Park seagulls.

Nothing.

A big man, nose and mouth covered by a black scarf, held up a hand. The firearms officers tensed.

And three, two, one. . .

BOOM – the handheld battering ram smashed into the lock and the door exploded inwards in a shower of wooden splinters.

'GO! GO! GO!'

Into a gloomy corridor: grey walls, grubby blue carpet tiles.

Team One took the workshop at the back, Team Two

took the front offices, and both members of Team Three hammered up the stairs. Detective Sergeant Logan McRae slithered to a halt at the top: there was a dust-encrusted desk upended on the landing; a dead pot plant; dark rectangles on the walls where pictures used to hang; four open doors. 'Clear.'

PC Guthrie – the other half of Team Three – crept over to the nearest doorway, MP5 machine pistol at the ready, and peered inside. 'Clear.' He backed up and tried the next one in line. 'This is such a waste of time. How many of these things have we done this week?'

'Just keep your eyes open.'

'There's no bugger here,' he said, stepping over the threshold, 'it's a complete—'

His head snapped backwards – a spray of blood erupting from his nose. Guthrie hit the floor hard, helmet bouncing off the grimy carpet tiles. There was a harsh CRACK as his Heckler & Koch went off, tearing a hole through the plasterboard at waist height.

And then the screaming started. High-pitched and painful, coming from inside the room: '*Proszę, nie zabijaj mnie!*'

Logan snapped the safety off his weapon and charged through the door. Office: broken typist chair, rusty filing cabinet, telephone directory . . . woman. She was slumped back against the wall, one hand clutching at the large stain of dark red spreading out from the hole in her side. And in her other hand she had a heavy-duty stapler, holding it like a club. There was blood on the end.

Logan pointed his machine pistol at her head. 'On the floor, now!'

'*Proszę, nie zabijaj mnie!*' The woman was filthy, her long dark hair plastered to her head. She was sobbing, trembling. '*Proszę, nie zabijaj mnie!*'

Something about 'please' and 'not hurt'?

'*Policja*,' said Logan, doing his best to pronounce it right, 'I'm a *Policja*. Understand? *Policja*? Police officer?' Sodding hell . . . this was what he got for not paying more attention during Polish lessons back at the station.

'*Proszę. . .*' She slid further down the wall, leaving a thick streak of red on the wallpaper, saying 'please' over and over: '*Proszę, proszę. . .*'

Logan could hear footsteps clattering up the stairs, then someone reached the landing and swore. 'Control, this is zero-three-one-one: we have a man down; repeat, we have a man down! I need an ambulance here, *now*!'

'*Proszę. . .*' The stapler fell from her fingers.

A firearms officer burst into the room, gun pointing everywhere at once. He froze as soon as he saw the woman slumped against the wall, legs akimbo and covered in blood.

'Jesus, Sarge, what did you do to her?'

'I didn't do anything: it was Guthrie. And it was an accident.'

'Bloody hell.' The newcomer grabbed his Airwave handset and called in again, demanding an update on that ambulance while Logan tried to calm the woman down with pidgin Polish and lots of hand gestures.

It wasn't working.

The other half of Team Two stuck his head round the doorframe and said, 'We've got another one.'

Logan looked up from the woman's bloodshot eyes. 'Another one what?'

'You'd better come see.'

It was a slightly bigger office, the roof sloping off into the building's eaves. A dusty Velux window let in the golden glow of a dying sun. The only item of furniture was a battered desk, with a missing leg. The air was thick with the smell of burning meat, and human waste.

The reason was lying on the floor behind the broken desk: a man, curled up in the foetal position, not moving.

'Oh Jesus. . .' Logan looked at the PC. 'Is he. . .?'

'Yup. Just like all the others.'

Logan squatted down and felt for a pulse, double checking.

Still alive.

He placed a hand on the man's shoulder and rolled him over onto his back.

The man groaned. And Logan's stomach tried to evict the macaroni cheese he'd had for lunch.

Someone had beaten the living hell out of the guy – broken his nose, knocked out a few teeth, but that was nothing. That barely merited a band-aid compared with what had happened to his eyes.

Just like all the others.