

MURDER AT HOME

Murder at Home

A Special Detective Chau Novel

Book # 5

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Police novel

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Introduction

In this fifth book about Special Detective Chau the reader will see how Chau matures while there is a real threat to her life, to her family and friends and to almost everyone she had contact with during the previous investigations. This investigation will have several murders to solve and behind these murders lie several stories. It becomes an investigation of all the people involved in the four previous murder investigations and during this all, the direction of the investigation will get changed more than once. The suspect list grows and grows, and time becomes a stressful but decisive item. Superintendent Sam Archer needs all his skills in leadership to keep his group safe and still do their job. Special Detective Chau gets tested up to unhuman levels. The chief constable in distress and a dog which almost seems capable of thinking. The reader is the real winner in this book, because there is a lot to guess, and a lot to take in.

Murder, possible series killing, complot theories, actions of revenge or out of jealousy? For a long time nothing is sure and for a long time there is the constant threat. And even what kind of threat exactly, or when things could happen are not sure for a long time as well. The biggest question is and stays for long; who is or are behind it all? It will put the pressure on everyone, and the reader could now ask themselves one question:

Will there ever be a book number six in these series?

The big day

Valentine's day, 6:00 a.m. Chau already had her breakfast and was busy doing her hair and getting ready for the big day.

It is the day of the wedding between her boss, Superintendent Sam Archer, and his fiancée, Sophie Simmonds. Just two months ago, just after they had all returned from their vacation at the resort, and because of everything that had happened to the murders that had taken place, they had decided not to let the time pass. So today is the big day and Chau was chosen to be the bridesmaid. In fact, she would be the only bridesmaid besides her mother, because Sophie wanted to show them and everyone else that they had grown into being her very special and valued best friends. Chau's mother was the maid of honor, and she was also in charge of the entire wedding organization. Chau's father was Archer's best man, and there was also a special role for Minh, Chau's younger brother, and of course, Meow, Chau's dog. The wedding promised to be the biggest event ever in their small village of Highfields. The whole village was invited and the whole village also participated in the organization. Even the mayor had his share, as he had suggested that the wedding party be held in a large tent on the main square of the village. Hannah and Abel, the owners of the local pub, had taken on the challenge of arranging and preparing everything on the square and in the tent. The local shops and businesses had all contributed, providing labor to make everything perfect. On this day, at 7 a.m., the newlyweds were taken (separately) to the resort where they had stayed a few months ago, and where the fresh commissioner and his group had to solve several murders.

Everything in the resort was arranged so that the bridal couple would not see each other, and both were prepared to look perfect for the wedding party.

The wedding itself had already taken place, in a very informal way at the town hall. The couple had decided to do it this way for various reasons, and due to the absence of relatives of both the bride and groom.

During the day it was noticeable that everyone in the village was busy making it a day to remember.

At 4:00 p.m. a guard of honor of most of the Highfields residents and other guests had formed to greet the couple as the limousine carrying the newlyweds drove into the village at slow speed. The limousine drove towards the square and everyone started following it on foot. At the entrance of the tent stood a small guard of honor from the mayor of Highfields, the chief of police, Chau and her family, and all the detectives commanded by the groom. When the limousine stopped some distance from the tent entrance, the mayor walked over to the limousine and welcomed the couple, after which they all walked the red carpet to the tent. The mayor walked right behind the newlyweds and at the entrance he was accompanied by the chief of police, Chau's family and all the detectives. Behind them all the other people joined and soon all the seats in the tent were taken and Archer and Sophie walked to the back of the tent and watched all the people take their places at the tables. Their table was at the back, the width of the tent, with the mayor and chief constable at either end, and on the long side overlooking the guests, the couple, and their friends.

The other tables of guests were all on the sides of the tent, surrounding a large dance area. A stage had been built next to the wedding couple's table, on which a group of musicians played background music.

When everyone was seated, the mayor climbed onto the podium and positioned in front of a microphone on stand. Then he took both ends of his mustache between his fingers and twirled them around, looked into the crowd, and started talking.

“Dear Sophie, dear Sam and lovely people, all gathered in this special place for this special event. Here in front of you, you see a proud man. Proud to be the first to address all of you on this very special day at this very special event. Today I am not going to tell you that I will keep it short, haha. There are two reasons why I simply cannot cut it short. The first is because there is so much to tell about this special couple we have in our midst today, and the second is because this is an event that touches most of us here, I am sure. Today we have the biggest wedding party ever in our beautiful village. It will be a party for and by all of us because everyone has found it important to contribute to the organization in one way or another. Here we see how much loved our newlyweds are and how important they are to our small but united community.

Sam Archer is a man of such dignity and devotion that I have never seen in a man before. Sophie Simmonds, now Sophie Archer-Simmonds, haha, is a woman with the same dignity and the same dedication to doing good. This makes them the perfect couple, and this also makes them a couple of immense importance within our community.

I am sure; I am not the only one speaking for you today, I can already guess someone who would like to take my place, haha, but chief constable”, and then he looked in the direction of the chief. “I am telling you now, you have to wait a little longer because first we are going to give our first toast together, and then we will give everyone some time to enjoy the start of this party. This brings me to name a few more people before we actually get started. Actually, this is at the request of our honored bridal couple.

The people I am about to name are also loved and highly valued and respected within our community, even though they only just moved to our village three years ago. Despite coming from a faraway country, from a totally different culture, they only took so long to become one of the most loved and important families in our village.

I think I can say without a doubt that they are loved and admired by all of you. Of course I am talking about Special Detective Chau and her family. You know them all, and you all know all about them already, haha. Therefore, to finally get to that first moment of cheering, I welcome the family in this special way, but I must mention one more thing. Everything today, every minute, every detail of the entire event has been conceived, orchestrated and coordinated by the mother of the family, who has spent the past two months working on it with endless energy and determination. Now let us raise a toast and give a round of applause to this very special organizer and her respected family, and of course to the happy couple we are about to celebrate. Please get up, raise your glass and rejoice with me!”

And then everyone got up and cheered and shouted at the celebrated table of people, and the noise lasted for minutes, until the mayor decided it was time to leave the podium and take a seat at the table of honor.

It became a day that would go down in the history of Highfields village as one of the most special days in the village, but not just because of the wedding celebration.

A party with an abrupt end

Chou was sitting at the table where the detectives were seated and was talking to Susan. It was already almost midnight, and the party was still going strong, with many people on the dancefloor and others in pleasant conversations and laughter at the tables.

Meow, Chau's dog, had been following her all evening and was now lying at her feet, enjoying a bone he just got from Abel, the chef and co-owner of 'The Three Crowns', the local pub which handled all the catering. Suddenly Meow stood up and ran, barking loudly, towards the exit of the tent. Chau immediately understood there was something wrong and asked Susan to come with her to find out the reason of Meow's actions. Susan and Chau hurried outside where they could easily follow Meow because of his barking, and by now, almost crying sounds. They found him at the back of the tent where there was a temporary lavatory group set up. At the side for the men they found Meow behind one of the toilet cabins, but they did not only find Meow.

Meow was now just standing and crying next to a body on the ground. It was right away clear to Susan and Chau, that they were looking at a dead body of a man of which they could not see the face because he was lying faced down with a pool of blood showing from under his head. They also saw a gaping wound at the back of his head, and now also knew they had another murder in their village. Susan took the lead.

“Chau, go get the superintendent, Jack, and the doctor, and take Meow with you to bring it to your father. Tell your father not to show anything to the other guests until further notice. I will wait here for you four.”

It only took a few minutes for Chau to return with Archer, Jack, and the doctor.

The latter right away bended over the victim to do his first examination. Archer took his detectives a little away from the victim to give the doctor enough space to do his work.

“Well, actually for some reason I am not surprised at all, this happening at our wedding party. Luckily it is at the end of it, and we already enjoyed most part of this very special day, which will now end with the beginning of a new murder investigation. Also again, it is at the beginning of your holiday from school, SD. It almost looks like our killers only kill at such moments. Did anyone of you recognize our victim? I don't.” All nodded no, so Archer asked the doctor if he was ready to turn the victim on his back. The doctor confirmed and did as was asked. At that same moment everyone looked with wide opened eyes and mouths at the victim because all of them recognized him immediately. It was Jarvis Mortimer, the private detective they had worked together with during their latest murder investigation, which actually grew to the investigation of three murders and even the kidnapping of Chau's little brother Minh and her dog Meow. Archer was the first to respond.

“What is this, I do not understand. Jarvis? He was not even among the guests today, was he? I knew he was invited and just had a thought earlier this evening that it surprised me he had not shown up, and now we find him here like this. The doctor, who was still kneeled beside the victim stood up and started to talk.

“Well, what I can tell you already is that this man has been killed less than an hour ago, and of course the autopsy has to confirm, but I am quite sure he got killed by a heavy blow on the back of his head. The only thing that is not totally clear yet is what kind of object has been used to hit this poor man on the back of his head. I need to examine that further, because I see something strange in the wound, as if the object the victim was hit with left an image of something. I've examined his hands and fingers and it doesn't seem to me that there was a struggle or anything like that, so again presumably, the victim was taken by surprise.

Further details will be provided after a full autopsy. I now go to my workplace and wait for the body to arrive. I am sorry, Sam, for you and your bride, that this is happening right now. Still, I think you can look back on a great day. I will talk to you tomorrow." And then the doctor left the crime scene and Archer spoke to his detectives.

"Okay folks, no time to lose. Chau, can you please get Harry over here? Do it quickly but try not to alarm anyone else, I want to give this day a normal end, for the people in the tent. Fortunately, the time brings no questions as it is already a normal time to end the party. That said, try to get the chief and the mayor here as well, without disturbing anyone else. They are the perfect men to bring the party to a close without anyone noticing what is really going on. Go Chau, we await your return."

"Yes Boss"

A few minutes later, Chau returned with Harry, the head of the engineering team and the lab, but without the mayor and without the chief. Archer immediately asked for an explanation which Chau was already beginning to give.

"I was able to talk to the chief and the mayor because they were with my father, and no one else was there. They told me to go get Harry and let them handle the rest in the tent. So, here we are." Archer was pleased and turned to Harry.

"Harry, as you will have noticed or at least understood, we have another murder on our hands, but I want to avoid any chaos, so we're going to try to keep the guests of this day in the dark for now. I am going to take the gamble that my initial feeling and assumptions will turn out to be correct, believing that we won't find the killer among our guests. That is why I want them to go home without unnecessary inconvenience. We know exactly who was present this evening, so even if my assumption turns out to be wrong, we already have about two hundred suspects," he said with a smile.

You take some of your men aside, luckily everyone we need is here, and you wait for everyone who should not be here to leave. Then you start your own investigation around the crime scene. Let us hope that the mayor and our chief will succeed in their special task as soon as possible. You all stay here except Chau. SD, you are coming with me. We return to the tent, to take part in the end, and to raise no questions about our absence.”

Chau and Archer returned to the table in front of the podium just as the chief of police and the mayor took their places in front of the microphone. They did a perfect job, and no more than fifteen minutes later the place was empty with just Chau and her family, Sophie and the detectives and some officers, and Meow of course, at the big table.

Archer had already arranged for Harry and his people to conduct their investigations at the crime scene, and he had gathered the rest of those present at the large table in the tent. Archer first looked at his wife Sophie, and as he spoke to her first, he also briefed his detectives and Sam, their trusted advisor who, of course, had also been one of the special guests at today's event.

“Sophie, my dear wife. I am sorry, we won't have a normal wedding night and I will even have to let you go home alone as we will be busy here and at the station, probably most of the night.” Here Archer was interrupted. It was Chau's mother.

“Nothing like that will happen, sorry, but Sophie should come with us and not go to an empty house at a time like this. Sophie, I know you will say it is not necessary, but I urge you to listen to me now. Please come with us, and Sam, as soon as you are ready for the day you will come to our house, along with Chau of course. Chau will show you the guest room where you will find Sophie, and in the morning we will all have breakfast together. You too, young lady.” With these last words, Chau's mother looked at her daughter as Sophie responded.

"Thank you so much for your concern, Kim. Of course I will listen to you, my dear friend. Sam and Chau, you should listen too." She spoke these last words with a smile, but Archer understood they were serious.

"But of course dear. Ok, that is settled then." And then he turned to his detectives again: "People, back to work, alas."

Sophie and Chau's family left the tent and Archer turned to his people. They had already arranged for four agents to attend, so there were eleven of them, including Archer and Chau.

"Okay folks, let us get everything and everyone going. Jack, you make sure everyone gets their work done. I want uniforms to be on the scene for surveillance, and two uniforms to search the area to see if there is anything of interest, especially a murder weapon. Susan, you and Jim go to the station and start researching our victim's last whereabouts. Sam and Pete, you both go to our victim's home and stay on guard there until Jack, Chau and I arrive. Once we get there I want to be able to go in and look around. First the three of us are going to see how far Harry and his men are. Let's go people!"

Harry and his men were still at the scene of the murder, but as soon as he saw Archer, Harry came over to him. "Archer, looks like you cannot have fun without a murder, can you? We are not done yet, but I thought I should bring you this already. We found it on the body, too bad, I liked the man."

Harry handed Archer an evidence bag containing a bank check. It was worth a thousand pounds and was signed by a Mr. Ratcliff sr. But Harry went on.

"I also have to tell you right away that Jarvis left his car at the entrance of the village, I noticed that when I arrived. I think this means he did not want anyone to know he was here. I have already given instructions to take the car to the station where we can take a closer look.

Now I will continue the investigation here, and then I will come to you with my preliminary report." "Thanks Harry, good job. Does anyone know that name on the check?" Archer did not expect an answer, but it was Chau who responded.

"Actually, I have seen that name a lot, boss. It is the name of the company, which was hired by our headquarters to do the formal integration work of our search system with the already existing police database. It could of course be a coincidence and have nothing to do with the same name on the check, but it is not really a common name." Jack had a comment ready.

"See? That girl never sleeps, not in real life and not in her head." Archer followed. "You are right Jack, very keen observation SD. Okay, we will have to look into that. Chau, call Susan and tell her so she can get started. At first I was afraid we would not have a clue of what has happened here, but suddenly we have several clues to investigate. Luckily I can already see Harry coming again, so hopefully we can be on our way soon." Harry presented himself and as they watched the body being removed to be taken to the morgue, he began to give his preliminary findings.

"Boss, we have not found much more than what I have already given you. Only this. We found a footprint just next to the victim, where there was sand on the ground. We made a print. Jarvis also had all his personal items with him, except for his cell phone. I assume he certainly had one with him when he came, so another assumption is that the killer must have taken it. We could also see that the body must have moved a bit, perhaps to pick up the phone. It looked like the victim had been pulled up with his belt, so we will check it for fingerprints as soon as we get back to the lab. That is all I can give you now." Archer looked happy enough to give Harry a friendly thank you and everyone set off. The officers stayed behind, and Archer, Jack, and Chau headed toward the desk where Jack had left his car, giving him the opportunity to make another comment.

“We do not look like detectives now, do we? Luckily it is dark, haha.” “I had not even thought of it, but hey, you are right Jack,” Archer replied. “Still, I am fine with it, we are not going to waste time changing clothes.

Visits to the people we already have on our interest list still have to wait until morning. As this is an investigation with major question marks, at least for now, we need to keep up the momentum and move forward without undue delay.” At that point, they reached the car and drove towards Kent where the victim had his home and office at the same address.

Sam and Pete were nowhere to be seen when they arrived, so that was a bit of a surprise, but they soon got the answer. As soon as they got out of the car, the office door opened, and Sam and Pete stepped out. Pete immediately started talking.

“The door was open, boss, so we looked around quickly and carefully. It is very clear that the office has been searched, it is chaos there. Sam had a clever observation though. Sam, you will have to tell yourself.” “Okay Pete, thanks,” Sam replied. “Yes, boss, I think we can determine the time of the search of the office, because the perpetrator or perpetrators must have thrown a small desk clock on the floor, and it had broken in the fall. The time it says is five past ten, so I think it is safe to assume they have searched the office at that point.” Archer smiled and responded.

“Good work Sam. Yes, I think it is safe to make these assumptions, but it also shows something else. The perpetrators searched this office before the murder took place. So probably they did not find what they were looking for and then they went looking for Jarvis.

Okay, we should leave it here and let Harry and his men do their job first, here too. Jack, can you call Harry please? Sam, Pete, I have to ask you to stay here until Harry and his men have arrived and done their thing. Then you can lock the premises and come to the office we are returning to.”

Back at the station, Archer headed straight for the canteen, with his detectives following him. When they entered, they saw that it was already fully operational, and they saw Susan and Jim sitting at their usual table in the front corner of the canteen. Archer fetched a cup of coffee and some sandwiches from the counter, and Jack and Chau did the same, then they all sat down with Susan and Jim. Susan immediately turned to her boss.

“Boss, we have been investigating that name from the check that was found on the victim's body. It turns out to be the owner of a company with the same name as on the check. The company is a well-known IT company and has even done work for the police. Basically they did the integration of Chau's search system with the existing police database. They also have another division where they develop and manufacture computer chips. That division is led by the son of the owner of the company, Martin Ratcliff senior.” Archer responded with a smile.

“Okay, we already knew about that company, but we were not sure if it had a relationship with the name on the check, so now we know. Susan, find out where we can reach that owner. Also find out more about his son so we can talk to him too if we need to. We are going to visit Ratcliff senior early in the morning. Ah, there are Sam and Pete, just at the right time. Listen folks, we have got plenty to go on and we have got a few other visits to make as well, but we cannot do that right now due to time. We should all go home now and get a few hours of sleep. We will meet again here at 7:00 a.m. Chau, we are going to your home.”

Suspicious relationships

It was 7 a.m. and everyone was there and had a hot cup of coffee or tea in front of them. Archer had not eaten anything because he already had a sumptuous breakfast at Chau's home.

"Good morning folks. Good to see you all with clear faces. I should have been on my honeymoon by now, but instead here we are again, faced with another murder. A person we know again, me in particular, because I was once a member of the same rowing club with him. Jarvis Mortimer, we all know him, from his cooperation in the previous murder investigation we had and because he was the uncle of Paul Mortimer, one of the four friends in that investigation. I have already sent some uniforms to pick him up so we can talk to him, give him the terrible news and ask him to do the official identification. After that conversation, SD Chau, Jack and I will pay a visit to that gentleman Ratcliff sr.

Fifteen minutes later, Archer had a conversation with Paul Mortimer, who was very upset by the news he had just received.

"I am sorry Paul, I need to ask you some questions. Are you ok with that, or do you want us to talk about it later?" The young man nodded his head.

"No, ask your questions, superintendent. No time should be lost trying to find the beasts that did this. But sir, maybe I already have something important for you. Last night my uncle came to my house and gave me a letter for you. He told me to keep the letter with me and give it to you if anything happened to him. We had an awkward conversation after that strange instruction because of course I was worried about it. My uncle would not explain it because he did not want me to get involved. He just told me to do it this way and left without saying anything more.