

# **The Announced Murders**



# **Special Detective Chau**

Book #6

# **The Announced Murders**

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Cozy crime

Police novel

Fiction

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# 1.

**T**he briefing room of the Highfields police station has undergone a metamorphosis on this day.

The room has been transformed into a banquet hall with garlands and balloons, and the small table next to the big screen has been replaced by a larger one. There are many gifts on the table and on the middle of the table is a large birthday cake.

It is a hive of activity; everyone is mixed up and busy with one task or another. There is nothing to indicate that anyone is engaged in a police task. Not even the chief commissioner, who was also there early that morning to provide his assistance.

The chief commissioner is in talks with Commissioner Sam Archer and his wife Sophie, who is also present to manage this birthday party for her best friend. It is Chau's eighteenth birthday, and of course that gives him reason to go big. The little big boss is probably more nervous than the topic of the day itself.

"Have we not forgotten anything? They can be here in ten minutes; we have passed eleven o'clock. We all need to gather now. Call your people to order, Commissioner Archer. I walk to the reception desk to meet the family. As soon as they arrive, Fred will rush here to give you a heads-up. Everything clear?" Archer smiled.

"Everything is clear Chief, go ahead." The chief commissioner turned and hurried to the reception. That was the moment Sophie could finally let herself go.

"Ha-ha, my goodness, he looks like a child at his own birthday. But it is also funny and it shows how loved our Chau is, also by him." Archer had an answer to that.

"Indeed, dearest, and that was a bit different in the beginning. But Chau has indeed wrapped him completely around her little fingers and has also made our boss a lot more pleasant to work with. Oh, I see Fred coming. People, here they come, all at your place and as soon as they are at the door I count down and we all start singing. Oh, no more time, one, two, three!"

And then, upon the entrance of Chau and her family, a deafening chant broke out, but some singers struggled not to burst out laughing. The chief commissioner had, of course, let the family go first, but now had difficulty working his way back to the front, through the human hedge that had formed around Chau and her family. But in the end, the moment the singing came to an end, the chief commissioner reached a position in front of the group. Of course, he had some trouble getting everyone to quiet down, but in the end, he got all the faces his way.

"Good morning, dear Chau, dear family. Please come and stand beside me, and you here, dear Chau." Chau looked impeccable again, and was dressed this day in a festive dress that clearly showed that she was not only turning eighteen on this day but was also no longer a girl, but a beautiful young woman. Chau was now standing in front of her highest boss, and on one side of him was her father, and on the other side her mother and her brother Minh. Meow sat next to Chau and, like her, looked in the direction of the chief of police. The chief commissioner began his speech.

"Ahem, yes. Dear Chau, welcome to your party, which we have all organized and prepared for you here.

Welcome also to your father and mother, your brother Minh, and of course to the living mascot of our corps, your dog Meow. I hope the criminals will leave us alone today because there is quite a lot organized for this day.

So today is your birthday and you turned eighteen, an age at which you can call yourself an adult. But for us, you are just the same Chau who walked in here for the first time about three years ago. In those three years you have grown into one of the best detectives in our force, always in collaboration with your boss of course. Not only have you grown in that area, but our love for you as a human being has also risen to great heights. Anyway, I promised not to make it too long, and so Chau, congratulations. Have a nice day, a great party, and now, unwrap those presents!" Of course, another deafening noise broke out from cheering colleagues, but Archer and Sophie had come to Chau by now, kissed her each on one side of her cheeks and led her to the table with gifts.

When Chau had unwrapped and admired all the presents, all that remained on the table was a letter addressed to the birthday girl. It was a bit quieter now, and everyone was curious who the letter was from, of course. Chau opened it and began to read, but after less than a minute she stopped, looked directly in the direction of her boss, and then walked over and whispered something in his ear, after which she handed the letter to him. He immediately started reading and everyone was holding their breath, because it was clear to everyone that this was not a normal birthday letter. Chau walked over to her father and mother and Archer called his boss and started to whisper something in his ear. The chief commissioner did not hesitate for a moment and resumed his position in front of the group.

"Yes, uh, folks, pay attention please. What I am about to tell you is of course extremely annoying, but it is too serious not to give it all the attention right away. Unfortunately, Chau, we will have to take a break from your party.

Fortunately, I know that you probably have the least trouble with that of all of us. Well folks, as you will have already understood, this letter did not contain a birthday wish, but rather a birthday threat.

In fact, it contains such a terrible message that it compels us to pay full attention to it immediately." Here the chief commissioner was interrupted by Archer.

"I am sorry, Chief. Unfortunately, I have to take over now. As you said, we need to take immediate action. I am sorry, Chau and family, Sophie. I think it is better if you go home, and salvage something from this birthday in your own community. As I said, we will have to get back to work immediately." And here Archer was interrupted, by Chau.

"Boss, I cannot go home now, this concerns all of us and my birthday has already been successful with what you all had organized. Moreover, there is a clear demand in the letter about my presence here. So, I would rather stay here, please. I am sure my parents and Sophie will understand this. Luckily, it is Saturday, and at least I have today and tomorrow off from uni." Archer smiled, and knew that there was little point in trying to change Chau's mind.

"Ok Chau, I understand. Agreed, but the rest remains as I said. All detectives will stay here, everyone will focus on their normal work until we report otherwise. Harry, you take that letter with you to your lab for trace research." Harry, the leader of the lab and the forensics team, was already holding a plastic bag open, and after accepting the letter and envelope, immediately left the room. Archer continued.

"All colleagues who are not currently scheduled in the normal work schedule will go home as usual, possibly until further notice. Sophie, will you accompany Chau's father, mother, Minh and Meow home?"

I will let you hear from us later today; we have to get to work now. Fred, please arrange for a replacement at the desk and then come back here for the briefing. Sam, of course you are going to stay here too," he told the Corps Special Adviser.

Ten minutes later, Archer started the briefing in a room that did not quite feel like it, because of the still present decoration of garlands and balloons.

In attendance were Commissioner Sam Archer, Special Detective Chau, Sam Bos, the team's advisor, the Chief Commissioner Otto Daimler, Chief Inspector Jack Savage, Sergeants Susan, Peter, and Jim, and Fred, the station's most experienced police constable, who had been assigned to the detective team during the previous investigation. Archer had taken a seat in front of the group, and Chau was already at her usual spot next to the right big screen.

"So, folks, this is not what we all expected from this day, and it is really a shame for Chau, but I think we will just have to do the birthday celebration again when we have solved this mystery. You all know about the letter by now, but you do not know all its contents yet. That is why I am beginning this briefing by reading out the letter, a copy of which I have here. Listen and shudder.

*Special Detective Chau has her birthday today and has turned eighteen years old. Reason for a gift. I give her an indefinite break from her studies. I demand that she works on this investigation, every day, until I am arrested, or until the eighteenth murder has taken place. Every week, on Saturday, starting today, someone will be killed. This has already happened today, and the victim will soon be found, very close. The next one will be next Saturday, this time where there are a lot of people, and where the smell of fries and fish meets your nostrils from afar. That is all you get from me. This is the only communication from my side.*

*Another reason why it is very easy for me to get the presence of this student detective away from her studies.*

*Simple. If she does not participate in the investigation on a daily basis, the cycle changes from one murder a week to one murder a day. Eighteen murders to solve or prevent, the birthday present of someone you do not know yet, and if you do not come up with a solution before the eighteenth murder you will never get to know me, because the eighteenth victim is you, Special Detective Chau!"*

Archer needed Jack's help to quiet everyone down, but then he was able to move on.

"I understand that this is hurting people, but we really have to park the emotions for now, as difficult as this is. We have no time to lose. First of all, a few remarks. There is no salutation in the letter, but it is clearly addressed primarily to Chau. No sender, so a riddle to solve for now. The writer of the letter announced that he had already committed a murder, and very close to here. Fred, gather a few uniforms and have the office and the immediate surroundings searched. Chau, even though the message about the eighteenth murder is of course terrible and ominous, it also means that you are safe for the time being." With these words, Archer looked in the direction of Chau and was surprised to see that she was apparently 'normally' at work, as if it were a normal investigation. He saw her look up with a totally usual and normal look. This was also evident from her reaction.

"I have the feeling that this letter writer is going to communicate with us in a certain way, and that is through his victims. Everything indicates that this man or woman is challenging us." Everyone was now distracted by the chatter of two hands on two legs. It was Sam, the team's special advisor, the diminutive ex-security guard at the SPA resort just outside Kent, where two previous investigations had taken place.

He slapped his thighs hard with both hands in amazement and admiration at the moment Chau had spoken. Archer did not want to pay any attention to it and turned to Chau again.

"You might just be right, Chau. But you are stunningly calm again under this threat." Chau smiled, and again she showed herself to be totally unimpressed by the terrible threat made to her with the letter. She even had the cleverness of mind to explain this first, as a reassurance to her colleagues.

"I am sorry, but as far as I am concerned, no one should worry about the threat in my direction.

I find it rather weak, and even a little insulting. Eighteen weeks he or she has given us, when it comes to preventing the threat to me. That should work, don't you think?" Now a liberating laughter broke out and everyone realized that once again their SD had been the only one who had managed to control her emotions. Everyone in the briefing room looked at Chau, who immediately moved on.

"I also do not think this is someone from our past. He or she stated very clearly in the letter; 'You do not know me yet'. Of course, the word 'you' is explicitly addressed to me, so it is possible that one or more of you do know him or her." Chau did not get any further because Fred came back into the briefing room at a rapid pace, with an ominous message, which he immediately dropped at Archer.

"We found the victim, boss. How the hell someone managed to do this is beyond me, but we found the dead body of a man unknown to us on the roof of your car, in the parking lot. The doctor is already doing his preliminary examination, because he just came to congratulate Chau.

Ten minutes later, the briefing room was empty and Archer, the detectives, Sam, and the chief commissioner had moved to the crime scene.

It was an unrealistic spectacle that showed itself before their eyes. It was as if the man had landed on the car from the air, but there was no tall building or anything like that nearby. Archer made it even worse with his first remark.

"Jack, please contact air traffic control at Zestienhoven Airport immediately. Ask if there has been any air traffic above our station in the last half hour." Again, Fred came running and he had another remarkable announcement. Jack had seen him coming and had waited a while before leaving, which had apparently been a good decision when they heard Fred's news.

"Boss, I just got a curious notification. A hot air balloon has just landed on the market square, but no balloonist has been found." Now it was the chief commissioner who could no longer remain silent.

"It should not get any crazier. What impertinence, and all in broad daylight. All this must have been very well prepared, and do you think it could have been done by just one person?" Archer nodded, and took over the conversation from his boss.

"Indeed, brutal, that is the right word. And could this have been carried out by one person? That is for us to investigate, but first I want to hear from the doctor. I see that he has reached that point. Doctor, can you tell us anything meaningful about the cause of death? Did the man really come out of the blue, do you think?" Paulus de Graaf, the doctor, could just keep a straight face, because this was really one of the most special cases of his career. Nevertheless, he quickly came up with an answer, however, only after he had addressed Chau.

"Yes, Chau, you are already a special person, but that will also apply to the day of your eighteenth birthday from now on.

Still, congratulations girl. But now for the special subject. At first glance, and from what I can see here on the ground, it actually looks like the poor bastard has fallen from the sky, yes. By the way, you can already see from the large dent in the roof of the car that the man landed on that roof at great speed, and from a great height. Apart from that, I have already been able to determine that few bones of this body are intact anymore. I cannot say anything about the time of death, because his journey through the air may have had a major influence on the body temperature. For the correct facts, I must refer to the result of the autopsy which I will begin as soon as the body is in front of me in my workspace. Greetings." While they saw the doctor leave and Archer released the body to be transported, he called out to everyone to follow him back to the briefing room.

"You too, please, Harry," he said to the leader of the forensics team, who had just arrived with the announcement that he had found no traces on the letter and envelope.

Back in the briefing room, Archer quickly resumed his position in front of the group, and Chau was already seated at the small table next to the big screen. She was already busy filling the search system with all the data that had been collected so far. The first images appeared on the screen on the left. There was the spell of the letter, the hot air balloon and the place where it was found, the still unknown victim, and the announcement of the next murder, next Saturday. And then, with that last note, they saw something that almost no one in the room understood, and of course everyone immediately looked at Chau with a questioning look. She immediately understood that she had something to explain.

"Yes, you see the word market there in the note about the possible next murder, with a question mark. I brought that in myself.

Thinking of the remark in the letter, about the smell of fish and chips, I think it is quite possible that the next planned crime scene could be the market, which is here every Saturday on the square."

There was an immediate buzz through the room and Archer had to silence everyone again, but he did have an immediate comment.

"Ok SD, that has been sharply noted again, but we should not forget our current victim, who we know little or nothing about. Hopefully our lab people will come up with results soon. Harry, I assume that attention will be paid first to a possible identification of our victim?" Harry replied immediately.

"Of course, Archer. The hot air balloon, as we speak, is being taken to our technical room for examination. As soon as something is known, you hear about it."

Archer wanted to continue quickly, but was prevented from doing so by the sound of his phone. He answered and learned it was the doctor. Just minutes later, he reported back.

"As you will have gathered by now, that was the doctor, who did not want to wait to pass on two of his observations to us. First of all, the fact that, in all likelihood, the victim did not die from the fall from the hot air balloon, if the latter is confirmed. It turns out he has been dead for more than five hours, and it is almost one o'clock now. The doctor has also made an even stranger observation. In the victim's mouth he found a red rose, almost intact, so apparently put in his mouth after his death, presumably by the perpetrator, or a possible accomplice. Furthermore, the doctor could not yet give a cause of death, he is waiting for the results of the toxicological examination.

Slowly but surely, we are starting to get some clues, even if it is not immediately telling.

First of all, we have to find out who and what our victim is, and we have to be sure that he did indeed fall out of that hot air balloon.

An interesting question will also be whether the place of his landing was chosen and prepared exactly as it was.

Susan, what we have to do now is to get a detailed picture of the movements of that hot air balloon, and to check along the route and the eventual landing site to see if there are any witnesses to be found. Please organize that, and take Jim and Peter, and a few uniforms with you for support. Sam, with the help of our camera specialist Fred, you are going to view all the camera images of the area. Jack, SD, you are coming with me to Harry, who we will probably find in the technical examination room. Later today we will have another briefing, the time of which will be announced to you later. Let us get to work, folks."

Everyone left the room, but one person remained, sitting in a seat in the front row. He was in thoughts, and it occurred to him that maybe it was time to start thinking about early retirement. His wife has talked about it many times, and here? Here, apparently, they were not even aware of his presence. The chief commissioner stood up, and left the office with drooping shoulders.

## 2.

*I*t was three o'clock, the afternoon of the murder, and everyone was back in their seats in the briefing room. Archer was already standing in front of the group and Chau was back at her usual place next to the large right screen.

"Ok, folks. Here we go again. By the way, has anyone seen the chief commissioner? I tried to call him, but his cell phone has been turned off." No one responded, so Archer shrugged and continued.

"Ok, first a recap of what we have collected so far in terms of data and facts. A lot of news has been added since we left this room this morning. Let us start with the findings of our forensic colleagues from the lab and from the technical department, and the doctor. First of all, the fact that our victim has been identified. It concerns thirty-four-year-old Arnold Baker from Kent. Arnold was a restaurateur of restaurant Baker on the market square of Kent-West, where no market has been held for a year. He has no antecedents, but because of his entrepreneurship his details were known. We will go on about him later, but first the rest of the findings. The cause of death is most likely a cocaine overdose, but the doctor has been able to determine that the victim has not been a regular user.

Then the rose that was found in his mouth. It is unbelievable, but our people have managed to establish the origin of that rose. The rose comes from a flower shop, located at the same square as our victim's restaurant.

Then the hot air balloon and the possible connection with the victim, and his death. There is evidence that our victim was in the hot air balloon. However, according to our people, not in a living state, at least not in a moving state.

They were able to conclude this from the places where they found the victim's DNA, all from one corner of the basket, and from the bottom. It can therefore be assumed that the victim was murdered elsewhere. Furthermore, again remarkably, no other trace has been found, neither of the victim, nor of any other person. However, we can conclude that the victim was dropped from the hot air balloon onto my car. My car, by the way, is a total loss according to our people. A mobile phone was found on the victim's body. That phone is currently under investigation.

Then we go to the interviews on the street. I think, the most important fact to report is that Abel, one of the two owners of 'The Three Crowns', our favorite pub, arrived at the station around the time of the victim's fall on my car for a delivery to the kitchen. He did not see the man fall, that had already happened when he got here. Later, however, he remembered that when he was leaving the pub, he was almost knocked over by a car that left the village at great speed. He could still remember that it was a dark blue BMW, fairly new, and with a license plate that started with the letters CEN. So, we should be able to do something with this, although of course there is no evidence yet that this car has anything to do with the crime.

Then there was also a statement from Barry, the owner of the bookstore in the square. He has seen the hot air balloon land, and has seen a man climb out of it and run towards the parking lot behind the church. Barry could not tell us much about the man because he was completely in the dark and dressed tightly. He did suspect that he was a fairly young man, between thirty and forty years old. He was not able to see the man's face.

All in all, quite a few clues that we can do something with, and this is how we are going to do that and what everyone's tasks will be. Jack, Chau and I will first visit restaurant Baker and try to find out more about the victim. We already know that he was not married, and we cannot find any immediate family of him.

We also have to check whether the man was right-handed or left-handed, because if he turns out to have been right-handed, we can already assume that the cocaine was inflicted by the perpetrator, and not by himself. The lab results of the victim's blood also showed the presence of a sedative. Thus, a possible scenario could be that he was first given a sedative, and once asleep, cocaine, after which he must have been transported from the original crime scene to the balloon, before starting the air journey. Of course, that original crime scene is also an important missing link in our investigation. Maybe our visit to the restaurant can shed some light. We will also visit the flower shop where the rose came from. Then we go to The Three Crowns, to ask Abel and Barry some more questions.

Susan, Jim, Peter, you are going to map out everything the lab has brought us and go after that car, and of course the possible driver. The victim's phone should also be turned inside out. Susan, you divide those tasks, and also give Sam and Fred the details of that car, so that those men can add that to their research as well. That is all for the moment, as far as I am concerned. Anyone have anything to add?" Of course, who else but Chau was the first to respond.

"Boss, I also think that with all the facts we find, we should consider possible connections with the possible next murder that has already been announced. Shall I deal with that?"

"Excellent idea SD, that's good, but first you go with Jack and me. Let us get to work, folks!"

Half an hour later, Jack parked the car in front of restaurant Baker. Archer immediately had a comment.

"Hey, the staff was already informed, was it not? The restaurant seems to be open as usual. Well, we will know soon, and if it is, at least most of the staff will be there."

Once inside, it turned out that the restaurant was indeed open, it was even quite busy.

There was no indication that the owner of this restaurant had been murdered earlier in the day. The detectives were immediately welcomed by a hostess upon arrival.

"Good afternoon gentlemen, lady, may I ask, have you made a reservation?" Archer quickly made it clear that this was not the case and that they were not there to eat.

"I am Commissioner Sam Archer, and these are my colleagues Special Detective Chau and Chief Inspector Jack Savage. We are here in connection with the murder of your boss. First of all, what is your name and position, and may I ask what the reason or justification was for keeping the restaurant open, and also, by whom that decision was made?" The detectives clearly saw the lady startled at the questions that were fired at her, but then she asked them to follow her to a free table in the far corner of the restaurant. When everyone had taken their seats, the lady immediately started talking.

"My name is Barbara Fields and I am the hostess and manager here. The decision to stay open was made by me, but is actually an instruction from our so tragically deceased boss.

This instruction is known to all personnel here in the restaurant, and even to some regulars. The restaurant will even be open on the day of the funeral; there are instructions for that too. This will probably all become clear during the reading of the will, which will take place tomorrow morning at ten o'clock, at the office of notary Brand, here in Kent. I suppose you will want to be there?" Chau was earlier than Archer with a reaction.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Fields. I have the impression that you already know what is going to come out of the will. Am I right? And if so, two more questions. Can you tell us a little bit more about that? And the other question. What was your relationship to the victim, other than staff member?" Archer smiled, indicating that he was not unhappy with Chau's interruption.

Barbara Fields had to come to herself for a moment because of Chau's sharply pointed questions, but then she started to answer, somewhat hesitantly.

"Yes, I think I already know most of the contents of the will. I was engaged to be married with Arnold. I must also tell you that there is a reason why Arnold had arranged everything for his eventual death at such a young age. He was terminally ill and had only a short time left to live. He had a tumor in his head that was inoperable and grew rapidly. He already had problems with vision, hearing, and balance." Now the lady got emotional and started crying. Archer took over.

"I am sorry, Miss Fields. All this must be particularly difficult for you, especially since, more or less forced, you just have to do your job and also speak to the guests in a friendly and cheerful way. We will therefore no longer burden you today and may meet again tomorrow, after the reading of the will. However, I hope you will be able to answer two more questions. The first question is, when was the last time you saw your fiancé and where?" The woman replied sobbing.

"This morning at half past five, in bed. Arnold always gets up at that time to go to the restaurant. We live at the back, here, in the converted garden house. Arnold liked to be alone in the restaurant a few hours before the day started, make some preparations for the day and sometimes work on the administration. The cleaning lady comes every day at seven o'clock, and the chef at eight o'clock. The restaurant opens at eleven o'clock every day, for lunch. But this morning, by the way, the cleaning lady told me that my fiancé was not there at seven o'clock." Archer had one more question.

"Was your fiancé right-handed or left-handed?" The woman was a little surprised by that question, but answered fairly quickly.

"Arnold was right-handed."

"Ok, then we will be happy to get the details of this cleaning lady and your chef, so that we can speak to them as well. Here you have my card. Please send the details to the e-mail address mentioned on it." He stood up, and after wishing the lady strength, he left the restaurant with his two colleagues.

Outside again, it was Jack who immediately posted a surprised-sounding remark.

"Now get some. Our colleagues should have told us that. Look, that flower shop is next door. We only have to take a few steps, and then we are in."

There were no customers in the flower shop at the time, so Archer was able to speak directly to the lady behind the counter. He introduced himself and his colleagues and immediately asked the first question. Jack stayed behind at the door for a moment, because his phone rang.

"As you will understand, we are here in connection with our investigation into the death of your neighbor, Mister Baker.

Did you know the gentleman well, and did he ever come to your business, or you to him?" The lady, a slender middle-aged woman, with cheerful-looking eyes, introduced herself as Patty Bell, and replied with a sigh.

"Oh yes, the poor man. Who could have imagined that he would come to his end like this, knowing that he had only a short time to live? So tragic, and to think that only yesterday he was here and very happily bought a big bunch of red roses for his fiancée, that poor darling. He did that every Friday, starting from the day, about three months ago, when he got the terrible news in the hospital. That same evening, he proposed to Barbara. Here, look, there on that table is the bridal bouquet. I do not understand how Barbara manages to work now. Everything was ready for the wedding tomorrow. I know that Arnold moved heaven and earth to get this arranged on a Sunday. And then I also hear that he had arranged it in such a way that his will would be read the day after his eventual death.

So that now means that this is going to happen on the actually planned wedding day, on Sunday? How horrifying." This lady also became very emotional and could not hold back the tears. Archer, like his two colleagues, was also quite taken aback by the story of the woman in front of them, and decided to end the conversation early. He thought it better to let all this sink in first, and to discuss with Jack and Chau in the car back to Highfields. He also wished this lady strength, and a minute later the three detectives were outside again, walked to the car without saying a word, got in, and Jack drove away. It took ten minutes for Chau to be the first to start talking again.

"I am sorry, but I find it a bit strange that, despite everything, Barbara Fields did not mention the impending marriage when she told us that she was engaged to the victim.

Of course, it could be because of the emotions, but again, she told us that she was engaged to Arnold Baker. It seems to me that you would almost scream that the other day would have been the wedding day. Maybe I should not think like that, because I do not see a motive so quickly, but it still seems a bit suspicious to me. Am I going too far with my thoughts?" Archer was also in his senses and had his answer ready."

SD, you never go too far with events like this. We have to take everything into account, and as long as there is no complete clarity, everyone in the victim's immediate vicinity is a suspect. I also find it very strange that she did not say anything about it, as you also pointed out, especially since she did tell us that she was engaged to the victim. What about you, Jack?" Jack had listened and thought quietly while driving, and came up with a two-pronged answer.

"Yes, I totally agree with you, and I cannot reconcile it all. So, what could be the connection? And what on earth can this have to do with eighteen possible announced murders, even announcing that Chau will be the eighteenth if we do not catch that insane perpetrator by the collar before then?"