

MURDER AT AGE

SPECIAL DETECTIVE CHAU

Murder at Age

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BOOK #7

COZY CRIME
Police novel

Fiction

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PROLOGUE

The seventh book in the cozy crime series about Special Detective Chau.

Special Detective Chau goes to the beach for the day, with her parents, brother, and Meow, her dog, together with her boss, Superintendent Sam Archer, and his wife Sophie.

As is often the case during an outing or school holiday, they soon end up in an unadulterated murder investigation with various murders and other crimes. A variety of scenarios lay bare and the direction of the investigation, and the list of suspects, changes several times throughout the investigation. Also, during this case, there is an important role for Meow, who is now almost indispensable in every case that the team gets its hands on.

This case is characterized by complex theories and is also a case in which the chief commissioner of the corps will have a large and valued input.

The first victim is special of its kind, as well as the first suspect, and even more special is the place where the victims and suspects have their home or work; a retirement home.

Murder, threats, blackmail and deceit are the focus of this investigation, but for a long time the all-encompassing motive and the all-encompassing initiator of this intrigue remains a mystery.

The most unlikely victims and perpetrators pass in review, and every time, just as unlikely surprises loom up. At the end of the book, Chau also makes a decision that will change, and possibly determine, the rest of her life.

Chapter 1.

***I**t is the first day of the summer holidays. Chau has two months off before her sophomore year at university will begin.*

Her mother calls from under the stairs, with a usual message at times when Chau is about to go somewhere.

"Chau, are you hurrying up now? Sophie and Sam will be here in no time, and I do not want us all to have to wait for you again. Minh has been ready to leave for half an hour, and you still have to have breakfast." Chau then stunned her mother by coming straight down, and yet as always in full glory of dress and appearance.

"Mom, do you already have your bathing suit on under your clothes? Then, if we want to go into the sea, all we have to do is take off our clothes. I also packed that very large bath towel." The mother looked at Chau, and then saw two large bags on the floor, next to her daughter.

"What are you up to, Chau? We are just going to the beach for a day. What do you have in those bags? I have already packed everything I need in one bag, half the size of yours." Chau looked surprised, because it was the most natural thing in the world for her to be prepared for anything. She decided not to respond, and quickly went into the kitchen to get something to eat. Then the door opened, and Chau's father entered.

"What's up here? Can we finally leave? Sam and Sophie are already waiting in the car. Chau, sure again? Chau," he shouted to the kitchen. "Come now, take your sandwich with you in the car, there will be something to get at the beach as well, if you are still hungry.

We need to go now, otherwise the most beautiful places will be taken before we get there. By the way, what kind of bags are that? Have I not been told something? Is someone going on a two-week vacation or what?" Chau's mother laughed at her husband's remark, and only moved her head toward the kitchen with a sigh. Her husband understood, and sighed too, but still picked up the bags and left the house.

Five minutes later, Chau and her mother finally got into the car. They greeted Sophie and Sam warmly, and the father did not wait any longer, and rode away. As always when the family went out with their friends, the family's car was used, as it had seven seats. Chau sat in the back row, along with Meow, and Sophie, Minh and Chau's mother in the middle row. On the passenger side was Sam, the superintendent of the detective team and leader of the police station in Highfields, where they all lived. Sophie, as usual, took the first word.

"How lovely, folks. A whole day at the beach, and with such nice weather. We are going to have a good time." Immediately there was an enthusiastic bark from Meow, who apparently was also looking forward to the day. "Hi-hi, hear Meow being enthusiastic too. How nice that there is a special part on the beach of Ramsgate, where we can have Meow with us. I got a big bag of bones from the butcher yesterday, so we have plenty to nibble on for him today." Sam had a comment about this.

"I would give those bones to him in dribs and drabs Sophie, otherwise they will be gone before we drink our first cup of coffee." And there came a comment from the father of Chau.

"Coffee? Say Sam, you know I got a driver for the way back, right? So, we are not going to drink coffee all day, mate.

Barry is closed on Mondays, so he did not mind being our driver tonight, and bringing us home safely. Pete brings him, and Nathan comes along too, so they can also have a beer with us, except for Barry."

Barry, Pete and Nathan were the bookseller, the painter, and the garage owner of Highfields, and were regular bar patrons in their favorite pub, The Three Crowns.

It was only nine o'clock when the group found a good spot on the beach, close to their favorite beach pavilion, but it was already quite busy. Fortunately, there was still a nice place available, where enough stretchers were immediately taken, and ten minutes later everyone had settled in. But there came Sam again.

"So, they are not going to take this away from us anymore. Let us have a cup of coffee in the beach bar first. It is still quiet there, and we can sit on the terrace for a while, maybe with a small snack, in the form of a sandwich, or maybe a little more, ha-ha. I am already hungry, and after all, it is a day off and we can do whatever we want." This immediately brought the necessary fun, and it was Minh now, who had a sharp remark.

"Uncle Sam" was what Minh had come to call Sam, when they had become real friends, after Minh and Meow were kidnapped during a murder investigation that Chau and Sam had been working on the year before. "Do you know that it is bad for your health to drink too much coffee? How much coffee do you actually drink every day? Ten liters or so?" This, of course, got everyone laughing, and it was Sam who responded.

"Well, well, Minh. Ten liters? I hope not, but I do not know either, ha-ha. Could just be true, sometimes that is. But today we are not looking at anything, so who is going to come with me?" Sophie responded.

"Well, all right, let us turn a blind eye to it today and all go along, but no coffee for me."

They were all just walking onto the terrace of the beach bar, when Meow ran away barking loudly, down the terrace again, in the direction of the back of the beach bar. While everyone just looked at Meow in amazement, Sophie let out a deep and loud sigh.

"Of course, if that were not true. I can feel it coming. This is going to be another day out, without my husband, Chau, and Meow maybe even. Go and have a look Sam, Chau. I think there is work for you again. This is slowly becoming a habit. When we go out or have a party, there is always something going on." In the meantime, Sam and Chau had already followed Meow, and the others resigned themselves to the terrace.

Sam and Chau arrived behind the beach bar, where Meow now stood still, with some sort of crying noises, and looking up at the approaching Sam and Chau. What they saw made it clear that Sophie had been absolutely right. On the ground, next to a large garbage container, they saw the body of an elderly lady, and it was clear that she was no longer alive. Of course, Sam checked this first, but found confirmation because the lady no longer had a pulse, and already felt quite cold. Sam gave his first instructions to Chau, and it was ranks and positions again.

"SD, take Meow with you, and bring him to your parents. Then call our helpers and the doctor, and then sit down with the family and reassure them. As soon as I am back at the beach bar, when our troops have arrived, you will join me again."

"Yes, boss."

It lasted about half an hour, when the sirens became audible, and ten minutes later the entire detective team appeared. Harry, the leader of the forensics team and the lab, a number of uniforms from the station, and also Doctor Grant Harris immediately walked to the crime scene. Sam spoke to the people directly, starting with the doctor and Harry.

"Grant, Harry, you can see it already, I do not have to give you any instructions, do your job, and let us hear as soon as possible please. Peter, take a few uniforms with you, and mark out the area. Jim, take two uniforms as well, and carefully search the area. Jack, Susan, you are coming with me for now.

We look for a free table in the beach bar, and discuss the first things there. By the way, is Sam not there?" Sam Forrester, was first a security guard at a resort, where two previous murder investigations had taken place. He was then added to the detective team as an advisor, because of his important input in the said murder investigations. Chief Inspector Jack Savage, Archer's first assistant, answered his boss's question.

"No, he has a day off and is at the golf club with the chief commissioner, for a day of golf, but they will have been warned by now and will probably arrive here soon." His words were not yet cold, when indeed the chief commissioner and Sam sat down at the table that Archer had chosen, in a somewhat sheltered corner of the beach bar. In any case, Archer got his way as far as the coffee was concerned. The owner of the beach pavilion, an acquaintance of Archer, brought coffee, tea, and water to the table, and was immediately approached.

"Ferry, we had imagined this differently as far as this day is concerned, but alas, our duty calls. Will you take a seat next to me, please? Of course, you are the one to whom the first questions should be asked. Now I will have to show you a picture of the victim, which I just took, so I will warn you. It is not a pleasant sight." The man next to him sighed, but nodded his head in confirmation. Sam showed him the photo, after which the man recoiled, let out a scream, and then looked at Archer with bewildered eyes. It took him a while, but then he came up with a response.

"That is Betsy, oh my goodness, the poor darling. Why? How? What does this mean? Such a sweet little person.

I thought it was weird that she was not here yet. She was killed? Why? The darling had no enemies, I would think? This lovely old lady was kindness and helpfulness itself." Archer found it necessary to calm his friend down for a while.

"Relax, Ferry, it is as it is, and we do not know much yet.

First, tell me who our victim is, what your relationship with her is, and why she should be here in the first place? After you have answered these questions, we will leave you alone for a while, and you can take a break. I will send one of my detectives with you, because there are of course more questions we have to ask you. But first, the data about the victim. Do I have to repeat my questions again?" The man shook his head, and began to answer with a trembling voice.

"It is Betsy, I do not even know her last name, I think to myself now, even though she has been coming here for quite some time. She is already over ninety, but was still very scratchy. At the beginning of the beach season, she started coming here, every morning, and then had a cup of tea, and after half an hour she would leave again. After a while I had conversations with her, because she was always here early, just after opening, when there were few other guests. One thing led to another, and at a certain point she started to help me every day, with starting up and getting the business ready. From that moment on, she was standing or sitting here on the terrace every morning, waiting for me to arrive. However, she never told me anything about herself, and I did not ask her anything, because I noticed that she did not like to talk about herself. So, I do not really know much about her, which I am very sorry for. That poor little person, why is that?" Archer thought it was enough for this moment, because he also had to address the others.

"Ok Fer, take a rest now. Sergeant Peter here, stays with you for the time being. I will see you again later." Peter took the man with him and Archer turned to the others.

"Well, we will just wait here until we get the first findings from the doctor and from Harry. So, we now know that it is an unknown woman, about ninety years old, listening to the name Betsy, or maybe Elisabeth, or something. What I have already been able to observe is that she had a wound at the back of her head, because there was a pool of blood under her head. However, she was lying on her back, so that requires further investigation.

Another thing I noticed was that, as far as I could tell, she did not have anything with her, no handbag or anything like that, and she was dressed in a dress, nylon stockings, and white leather shoes with flat soles. What also struck me immediately was that she did not wear any jewelry, but I could see from her right ring finger that she probably wore a ring normally, or has always worn one and only recently took it off. The skin showed white, on that finger, at the place where she probably had worn a ring. Oh, I can already see Grant coming. Let us listen to him first." The doctor sat down next to Sam and began with his preliminary conclusions, but first had a comment for Archer.

"How do you do this, Archer, and actually you too, SD? You just should not ever have a party again, or go out, or go on vacation. When you do, there is always one or more death to mourn, which put us all back to work. Anyway, my first findings.

So, it is a lady of respectable age, I estimate between eighty and ninety years old, maybe even a little older. According to my first observations the woman probably died from a blow to the back of the head with a blunt object, but this object did not leave a large wound in size. It seems to me to have been a round, flat object, about four centimeters in diameter. The time of death must have been between one and three o'clock last night. Of course, I can only give more details after the autopsy.

Oh, I did notice that she normally wore a ring on her right ring finger, but when I examined her I did not find anything on her body. Of course, it is also possible that she has always worn a ring, but has only recently taken it off. I have not even been able to see a handbag or anything like that, but that is Harry's job and your job to get on with that. You will hear from me as soon as I have done the autopsy. Otto, at least I assume this will be our case, since Archer was the first at the crime scene?" The chief superintendent, Chief of Police Otto Daimler, straightened up and reacted to the doctor's words.

"Indeed, Grant. This is our case, not only because our superintendent was the first on the scene, but also simply because Ramsgate belongs to my region." The doctor left the building, and Archer spoke again.

"Okay, then we will just wait for Harry to come up with his first findings, before we can take a better look at and around the crime scene ourselves. By the way, is there any service here yet? I could use a cup of coffee." Chau got up, smiling, and made her way to the bar to see if she could fulfill her boss's wish. Soon she returned, followed by a waitress, who provided the people at the table with what Chau had ordered for them. As soon as the waitress had disappeared, Archer took the floor again.

"Well folks, here we are again. It was just meant to be that way. I think by now we all know our tasks for the next few hours, so I am going to take a moment to give my wife and Chau's family a brief explanation of what is going on here. I will take my coffee with me, and as soon as I see Harry appear here, I will get back to you." The remark about the coffee brought a smile back to the faces of the people at the table, as Archer walked in the direction of the other table. Sitting there, he began to talk with a sigh of resignation.

"Yes, I will start with the same words I just used at the other table. Here we are again. It just had to be that way." Sophie interrupted her husband.

"Sam, never mind. We have understood it a long time ago, and we have already talked about it. Do not worry about us. We feel sorrier for you, and understand that you have your responsibilities. I can already see Harry walking up to your table. Now go quickly, and do not pay attention to us. We will have a good time, hi-hi." Archer was completely reassured, gave his wife a kiss, and got up and walked to the table where everyone was already waiting for him. He took his seat again, and Harry immediately started his first report, but of course he also had a comment first.

"Well, Archer, would it not be better to just stay at home, forever? Maybe then we could have a little peace and quietness sometimes. Anyway, here we go again.

Pathetic scene, what we found here again. However, there is little to report by me, at first glance. Of course, we will go further, but for the time being I have little useful to report. I think Grant had more important information for you in that regard, even though that too would have been limited. In any case, we did not find anything on or around the body, except for some marks on the ground. It seems to us that someone has been walking around there with a walking stick, or something like that, judging by the imprints in the sand of about four centimeters in diameter, in a round shape. So it could be that the victim was knocked down with the other end of that cane. Perhaps it will even turn out that the word precipitated is not or was not the right word. As I see it, it could well be that the perpetrator had the stick in his hand like a spear, when he struck with a kind of throwing motion, but without letting go of the stick. And this when the victim was standing with her back to him, but the doctor will probably be able to tell you more about that later.

The perpetrator must have really needed that stick to walk, because that is probably why we still found those tracks, while the ground around the victim was clearly raked, or something like that. But we have not found a rake, or anything else that could have been used for it, either. I also let my people investigate the immediate surroundings, and a piece of the dunes behind here, and the footpath, which goes from here to the parking lot, on the other side of the dune, there. So, you will hear later if we can make you happy with something more, but for now I do not have anything else to report." Archer did not know what to say, so there was Chau, who had something on her mind.

"Boss, I think we should first investigate whether there might be a retirement home in the area. Maybe our victim stayed in something like that? Even the perpetrator, judging by the scant information we got from Harry, may be of an older age.

That would actually make it even more pathetic, I think, but we cannot dwell on that now. What do you think of my remarks? Shall Sam and I take this on? I heard from Sam that he knows this area, and he already thought that there was such a complex for the elderly around here. We could do some research there, using the photo you took of the victim?" Archer immediately agreed, but had an addition.

"Great proposal SD, but, Chief Commissioner, is it perhaps something for you to go with Sam and Chau? I am not saying this because of your age, really, that has nothing to do with it. It is more because I know from experience that older people look up to someone from your rank and position, more than they do to us. It might help us get the much-needed information that we are currently lacking." The chief commissioner had no problem with Archer's words, in fact, he once again felt very important and immediately agreed.

"Come SD, Sam, we are going with my car, I am here today with a driver, as Sam already knows, because he came with me."

Five minutes later, the three had left and Susan and Jim were also sitting at the table with Archer, Jack and Peter.

Chapter 2.

*O*f course, Archer had already provided fresh coffee and tea, and there was even a plate on the table with all kinds of sandwiches.

"Well folks, I am just going to say it for the third time, before someone comes up with another comment. Here we are again. It was just meant to be that way again. But what did we find here? For now, we do not have many clues, although Harry's suspicion about the cane could turn out to be a very big one, of course. Hopefully the chief commissioner, Sam and Chau will come up with results soon. I had the victim taken away, because there is little more to do here, as far as that is concerned. However, we should focus on the victim, because that is our only source of information at the moment. I see the building here slowly filling up. Of course, a large part of those guests now come in mainly out of curiosity, but there may also be guests who come here more often. So, Susan, Jim, Peter. You will move between the guests and of course ask the standard questions, but you will also use the photo, which you can now all call up from our search system, to see if there are any guests who knew our victim and can tell something about her. In the meantime, Jack and I sit down with the owner. For your information, we know each other, because we grew up together in the same street. This has been a while ago, but I have seen Ferry Sanders, as he is called, more often lately, after I heard about the fact that he had started this beach pavilion last year. This was a special change for him, because he had previously been a chemistry teacher at a secondary school in Kent for almost fifteen years.

Anyway, we are going to talk to him again, because he is the only one of all of us here, from what we know now, who knew the lady. After you have talked to everybody, come back to this table. We will talk to Ferry here.

You know what you have to do. Jack, I will pick up Ferry, and will be back with you with him in no time." That was not going to happen for a while, because suddenly Chau's father came running towards Archer, pulling Meow on the leash with him, who clearly did not like that. The father immediately told Archer what had made him come to this in such a hurry.

"Yes, uh, Archer." The father was probably afraid to call Archer by his first name while he was in front of his people.

"I was letting Meow out in the dunes for a while, when suddenly, with loud barking and whining, he pulled me somewhere. You see, he still wants to go back, but I thought I should go to you immediately, and I did not dare to leave him there alone. He took me to a trash container there, like you see so many here, but because Meow kept jumping on it, I looked in. I did not touch anything, because I immediately saw a handkerchief, with what looked like blood on it in the container and also a hand rake like for the garden. Well, because I knew what had been found here this morning, I decided to go this way immediately. I did call Sophie and Kim first, to relieve me at that bin. As soon as they were there, I came here with Meow. So, the ladies are keeping watch there now. Now I think that maybe I should have left Meow with them. I do not know if it is safe there. Shall we go at once?" The answer was that everyone immediately stood up as one, with Archer telling the father to let go of Meow. As soon as he was free of the leash, Meow sprinted out of the beach bar again, and everyone followed. Meow's barking made it effortless for everyone to follow him. Soon, Archer saw Chau's mother taking care of Meow, and he went straight to the trash can himself.

Jack was already standing next to him and held open an evidence bag to put the little rake in. The handkerchief went into yet another bag, and Archer looked carefully into the container. Jim and Peter looked at the place around the barge, and Susan wanted to go back to the beach pavilion with Sophie, Chau's father and mother, and Meow.

Meow still seemed not happy, that was plain to see, and Archer called out once more to let go of the dog, and to give the leash to Jack.

"Now go back to the pavilion Susan, we will come a little later. Jack, you can put Meow back on the leash now, and then you walk around with him here for a while. Jim, you go with them, but be careful, so as not to damage any useful traces. You can also see those imprints here, as Harry called them earlier. Maybe there is something we could use after all. Meow still does not seem satisfied to me, but what we have now is already great. Peter, we are going back now, here you have the evidence bags. Make sure that they are brought directly to our lab, where Harry can then do research."

Half an hour later, Susan, Peter, and Archer were back at the table, and Jack, Jim, and Meow returned. Jack still had a few evidence bags in his hand.

"Meow did indeed bring us other possible pieces of evidence, boss. He started sniffing around right after you left, and then stopped at this. Now Jack showed a black lady's bag and a black hat, both put in a separate evidence bag. The hat had clearly belonged to a woman. Archer immediately called Ferry, the owner of the beach pavilion near them.

"Fer, can you tell us if this hat and the ladies bag belonged to our victim?" The man looked only briefly at the two objects and answered resolutely.

"Yes, definitely, they both belonged to Betsy. She always wore that hat, and I also recognize the lady's bag with one hundred percent certainty. Come to think of it, maybe it is something for you, she was always very vigilant about her bag.

It often happened that she suddenly shouted; 'oh where is my bag, where did I put it?', or something like that. However, I never saw or asked what was so important about it." Archer was satisfied again.