

CHAPTER 1

The first meeting

Talking to the press was not Detective Inspector Lestrade's favourite part of being a police officer, but it was a necessary part of the job. And on a day like this, when the body of a politician, Beth Davenport, had been found dead, the press were hungry for information.

Lestrade was sitting at a long table at the front of the room, with one of his officers, Sergeant Donovan. She was explaining the facts about the politician's death to the waiting reporters in New Scotland Yard's press room. .



'Apparently the death was suicide,' she said. 'Certain elements were similar to the recent suicides of Jeffrey Patterson and James Phillmore. Because of this, we believe that there may be a connection between the three deaths.' Donovan's voice was flat – she was just giving the information as plainly as possible. But the reporters all knew that something unusual was happening here.

One of them raised his hand. 'Detective Inspector

Lestrade, how can there be a connection between three suicides?'

'Well, they all took the same poison,' began Lestrade carefully. 'They were all found in places where they had no reason to be. None of them had been acting strangely before their deaths ...'

'So what is the connection between them?' asked another reporter.

Lestrade moved uncomfortably in his chair. This was a difficult question to answer. 'We don't know yet, but there *has* to be one.'

Suddenly the room was filled with electronic sounds as every mobile phone there received a text message. The reporters all looked down to see the same message on their phones, just one word:

WRONG!

Sergeant Donovan received the same message on her phone. She looked up at all the reporters. 'If you've all got text messages, just ignore them,' she said crossly.

The reporters had more questions to ask. 'If the deaths are suicides, what are you investigating?'

'As I said, there's clearly some connection between these suicides. It's an unusual situation and we've got our best people working on the case ...'

Again, the room filled with the sounds of text messages arriving. Again it was just a one-word message:

WRONG!

A female reporter had her hand in the air now. 'Is there any chance that these deaths are *murders*?' she asked.

Lestrade took a deep breath. 'I know that you all like writing about killers,' he said carefully. 'But these do appear to be suicides. We do know the difference.'

'But if they *are* murders,' continued the woman reporter,