

Saturday, 18th November

CHAPTER 1

THE CHIEF

I could hear the damn thing ringing in my sleep like it was never going to stop. I'd always leave my mobile just inside the front door because I don't want to get a brain tumour. The wife was sleeping next to me. She woke up as I leapt out of bed. She saw I was getting up muttering grumpily to myself, so she decided it was best not to say anything. I felt my way around and turned on the light. It was six in the bloody morning and Mert, the duty officer, was phoning from the station. I knew it was going to be bad news.

—What's happened?

—Oh, Chief, it's horrible. Sami Tuzcu's been murdered. In his own home. The news's just come in, while I've been on duty.

Sami Tuzcu was an old man who devoted himself to charity, a well-known and well-liked businessman. Who on earth would want to kill him and why?

I had faced situations like this many times in my twenty-nine years on the job. They have some problem they can't get their heads round, so they call yours truly. You wake up at some ungodly hour and go off somewhere where there's a rotting corpse and then you're on the trail of some killer, ripper or pervert.

Have you any idea what it's like to live through harrowing scenes like this hundreds of times? It's hell. I'm head of Istanbul Homicide Task Force; I'm pushing retirement, a cop they should be getting ready for the good life for all he's done for them, who they should be putting out to pasture. But it's got to the point where the bastards won't even accept my resignation.

I left my anger at the bedside. I had something serious, inhuman on my plate. It was dark. I groped around for the light switch. My first reflex was to ask what had to be asked.

—How did it happen?

—First, they robbed him. They opened the safe and walked off with his jewellery collection. Then they stabbed him through the heart.

—Do we know what time it happened?

—Not yet. His servant just reported it. Him and his wife—they're a lovely old couple—thought there was something strange and when they came in the house early this morning, they found him in the middle of the living room, lying dead on the carpet. I sent Serdar over straight away. I'm off too; shall we meet over there?

—Has Robbery got in on the act yet?

—I don't think so. It was phoned in as murder, so 999 sent us over.

I paused. I still wasn't completely awake. I was looking for something to say to buy some time, but I couldn't find anything so I shut up, thought and took a deep breath. Mert was holding the line. Finally, I reached a decision and flung myself into the experienced arms of my common sense.

—Mert?

—Chief?

—Listen, what I'm about to say is very important. No one is to hear about this incident. And I mean no one. If even the tiniest bit of news gets out, all the crime correspondents and media bastards will be wanting to get in on it; they'll be crawling all over the place and won't let us get our job done. We won't even be able to scratch our own arses without it making the front-pages. Sami Tuzcu was a household name. Got it?

—Yes, Sir, but what about procedure, the police...

I knew what he was going to say so I interrupted him.

—Mert from this moment on, you are forbidden to breathe a word about the Sami Tuzcu murder to anyone. And that's an order!

—But, but, what'll I say if they ask?

Mert was always one to make mountains out of molehills.

—If anyone asks you, you'll say you've got your orders! I only hope I haven't told you too late. And don't mention it in your duty report, and don't tell anyone anything while you're there.

—Don't worry, Chief. No one's got a sniff of it yet. Like I said, the operator transferred the call directly to us and I told them not to call anyone else.

I kept one ear on the phone, went through to the bedroom and rummaged around in the wardrobe for something to wear.

—I was going to ask about that. You've done well. Go over straight away. I'll be there in half an hour. Don't touch anything till I get there. And tell that to Serdar and the lads from Crime Scene, too.

I got into a pair of trousers using one hand and went into the bathroom to squeeze some shaving foam onto my face.

—You go. Don't take your radio and don't give the game away.

—OK, Chief. See you over there.

I hung up and started to shave. The worn face I saw glaring at me in the mirror was disturbing. It had years of weariness and fatigue scrawled all over it. And what fatigue! You could call it 'The Story of the DCI Who Couldn't Say No': everyone'd be tucked up in bed and he'd be working; everyone'd be stuffing their faces and he'd be training. And for what? Peanuts.

Oh yes, they always gave me commendation medals, but shiny medals don't pay the rent, do they? They don't make it any easier to make ends meet.

Poor bugger, you tell other people to go to bed and sleep, but what's the use when you've got used to putting up with it?

Well, it was time for me to put my violin away. I crept back into the bedroom and picked up my keys and reading glasses. The kids hadn't woken up yet. I tiptoed out of the house and left the door on the latch. There was a terrible chill in the air. I turned on the heating in the car and waited a while for the steam on the windscreen to clear. I lit a fag and slowly began to wake up.

I called Mert on the way over. Of course, I'd been in this game long enough to have a rough idea where Sami Tuzcu's house was. So I just got the house number and I was there. I entered by the garden gate and saw Mert trying to bring the Crime Scene boys round and send them on their way. They'd come up from the station in Beşiktaş and were familiar faces. It takes a cop to know a cop. Their boss and me went

back a long way. When the lads saw me, they stood to attention and made themselves scarce. I went inside with Mert.

Sami Tuzcu's body was face down in the middle of the living-room floor. Blood had seeped out from the edge of his jacket and had formed a half-dried brown pool on the floor. Detective Sergeant Emanet was in the corner of the living room going over some of his notes. He saw me and saluted. He had a serious look on his face.

There was a short, blonde-haired young woman sitting in one of the chairs to the left, crying. Mert turned to me and said she was the victim's daughter, Billur Solmaz. He began to brief me, but there was a hint of desperation in his voice.

—Chief, we haven't been able to find any clues at all! There's no fingerprints, no fibres, no footprints, no nothing. Crime Scene took photos of everywhere; they turned the whole place upside down. I can't see them finding out who done it myself.

It'd be a miracle if our lot did find out who done it! Take a normal burglary, you could have heaps of clues, witnesses coming out of your ears, but the number of cases we actually solved was few and far between. But then again, this case was a bit different from your normal burglary: a prominent businessman had been murdered and a valuable jewellery collection had been stolen. This type of case is very important; it's a golden photo opportunity for the bigwigs in the media, the police and local government.

I forgot my weariness and despair for a moment and started firing off all the standard questions to Mert. He should have known what was coming because it was me who'd taught him, and questions form the basis of good policing.

—How did they enter?

—They opened the door locks with a skeleton key.

—And the servants?

—They stay in the outbuilding in the garden. Both of them were either drugged or fell asleep before it happened, at about half past ten.

I wondered how he could tell the difference. I asked.

—We don't know. Neither do they. They didn't hear or see anything. It could be knockout gas or something like that. But the last thing they remember is hearing the dog barking in the garden. Then the electric was cut.

—And the dog?

—Oh, fit as a fiddle and ready to hang.

He thought that he'd cracked the joke of the century. I glared at him and he stopped grinning and was serious again.

—I mean, they don't understand why the dog didn't kick something off. Maybe it was drugged as well.

I didn't say anything. I walked up to the entrance hall and took a look at the wall opposite the door. There was a white plastic box with the word 'alarm' clearly written on it off to the left hand side, towards where the wall joined the ceiling. I called Mert over and pointed it out to him.

—Wasn't the alarm working then?

He was flummoxed.

—Hmm, well... It's interesting... the alarm didn't go off for some reason.

—And why was that?

I'd asked him this on purpose. I'd worked my bollocks off for years, instructing him and all the other nitwits at the station how to answer questions like this.

—I said, the electric was cut...

Mert saw my eyes were boring into him. He realised what he'd said but felt the need to finish off his sentence.

—...maybe that had something to do with it?

He lowered his eyes in shame, but I continued firing questions.

—Well, is it working now?

He bit his lip and avoided making eye contact. He mumbled:

—I haven't checked.