

Claire Baptiste, Fionnuala McGrath and Chief Inspector Lovegrove were sitting in his office. It was just big enough to fit them around the table, though it required entry-level contortion skills and the ability to sit in one awkward posture for an unreasonably long time. Perhaps fortunately, these were capabilities they had acquired over long years of necessity. On the plus side, the physical discomfort of convening in Lovegrove's office guaranteed that it wouldn't be a long meeting.

'I've seen today's *Oxford Mail* story,' Claire Baptiste said.

'What does it say?' Lovegrove asked.

'It reports Professor Burakgazi's death without naming her, mentions the other two killings and says that they are all believed to be murders. Are we happy to call them that?'

'It seems premature,' Lovegrove said, pulling a face. 'Can we get away with saying they are suspicious and we're investigating?'

'With two, possibly. But with three unexplained deaths, I think that ship has sailed. We are better off coming clean about what we're investigating. Get some credit for transparency.'

'Okay.'

'There's also the point the *Oxford Mail* ends on,' Baptiste continued, 'that this is the first serial killer in Oxford in decades and maybe ever.' Lovegrove and McGrath's eyes briefly met. 'For starters, is that true?'

'We have certainly been a very long time without anything like a serial killer,' Lovegrove said circumspectly. 'Oxford is one of the safest cities in the country.'

'I would be careful about saying that,' Baptiste countered. 'The statistics say that it is actually the most dangerous town or city in Oxfordshire.'

'That's probably to do with bike thefts and drunken punch ups down George Street on a Saturday night,' Lovegrove said. 'What about "Oxford is a very safe city to live in"?''

'Fine,' Baptiste said. 'Back to the serial killer history—?'

'There may have been one,' McGrath said. 'Fifty years ago. Four or five people were murdered over a fortnight. It was called the Black Summer.'

'There was an official report,' Lovegrove said, looking directly in front of him, 'and it said that it *wasn't* a serial killer, or even the work of a single killer.'

'A report that sounds for all the world like a fix engineered by the senior bigwigs at the