

## Chapter 2 *McNab Music International*

Twenty-five minutes later Shepherd walked through the front doors of the Grand Hotel. She felt much better after a bacon sandwich and a cup of coffee. It was eight o'clock and Webb was waiting for her. There were a number of comfortable sofas and chairs near the front desk, but at this time in the morning not many people were around.

'I've got us a room,' said Webb, leading the way to the back of the hotel. 'It's the Wells room – named after H.G. Wells, the famous writer. Did you know that he lived near here – between Hythe and Folkestone?'

'No,' said Shepherd, her voice uninterested.

Soon they came to a door with the word 'Wells' on it.

Webb opened the door.

'It's not a very large room,' he said. 'The hotel uses it for small meetings and parties.'

'It's fine,' said Shepherd looking round. There was a table in the centre of the room and four chairs down each side of the table.

Shepherd took a chair and waved a hand for Webb to sit down too.

'OK,' she said. 'What have you got?'

'The dead woman is Claudia Engel,' said Webb. He took a piece of paper from inside his jacket and looked at it. 'She's German, but she lived in London. She was here with three other people from a company called MMI – McNab Music International. They're a music company from London.'

They use the hotel for meetings from time to time.'

'Who are the others?' asked Shepherd.

Webb looked down at his piece of paper again. 'James McNab. It's his company. Then there's Ajit Chowdury and Harriet Johnson.'

Just then the door opened. A man came into the room and stopped. He was tall, in his early forties, clean-shaven and good-looking. He was well dressed: expensive dark grey suit, clean white shirt and red tie. Shepherd could almost smell the money.

The man looked at Webb, then at Shepherd.

'I'm James McNab,' he said to Shepherd. 'Your sergeant said you wanted to see me.' His voice was rather high for a tall man. 'I asked him why, but he said he couldn't tell me.'

Shepherd got the feeling that this was a man who liked to be the boss. He certainly didn't mind walking into a room without knocking first.

'Well, what's the problem?' said McNab, looking at his watch. 'I've got a meeting at nine o'clock and a lot to do before it.'

With Webb so new to the job, Shepherd couldn't see him asking many questions. She looked at McNab and tried to decide how to begin. 'I'd like him to feel less sure of himself from the beginning,' she thought.

'Does Claudia Engel work for you?' asked Shepherd.

'Yes, she does,' replied McNab. 'And?'

'I'm afraid I've got some bad news,' said Shepherd. 'We found a body on the beach this morning. We believe it is Claudia Engel. We also believe that someone murdered her.'

'What?' McNab's mouth fell open. 'Claudia? I don't believe it. It can't be true.'

'I'm afraid it is,' said Shepherd.

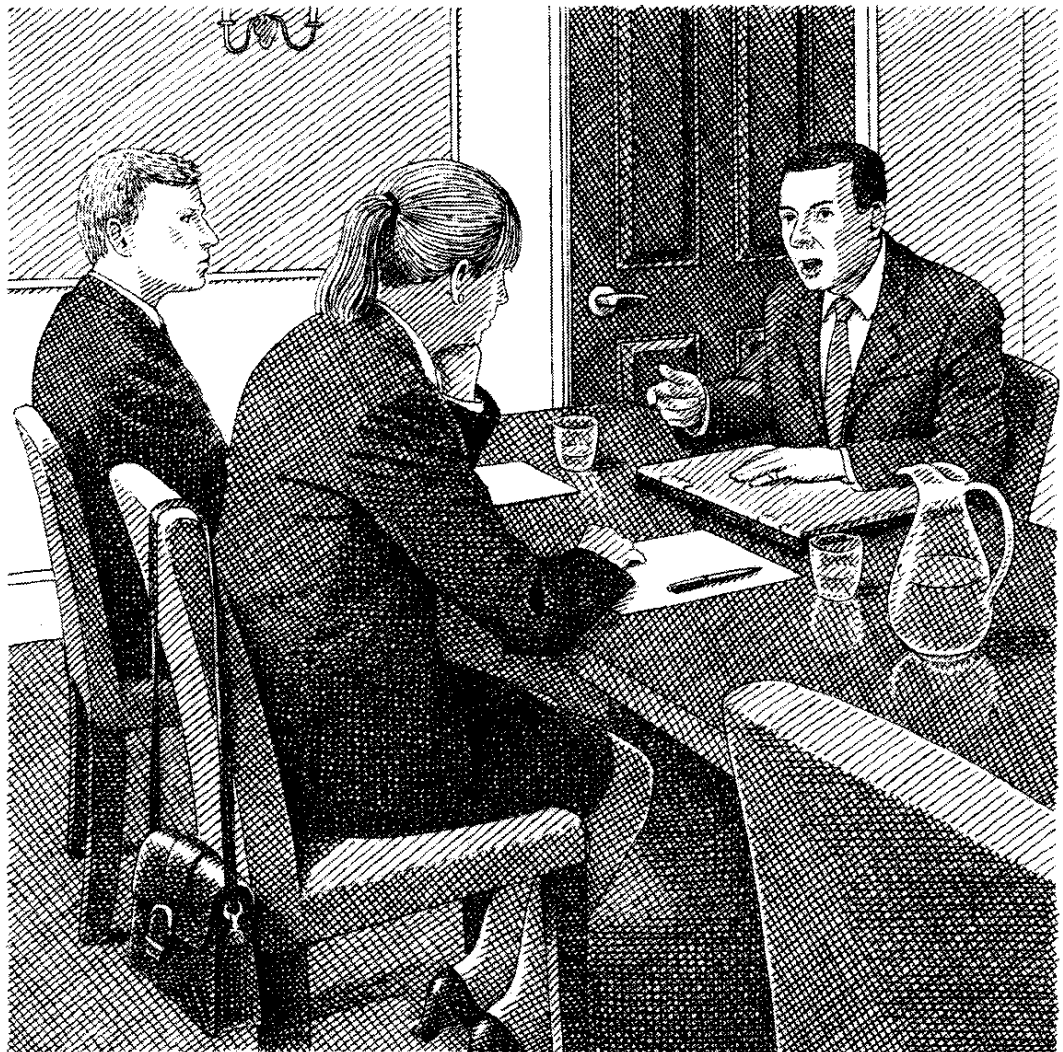
'That's terrible!' said McNab. 'Terrible!'

'I need to ask you some questions,' said Shepherd. 'Take a seat.'

'Well,' said McNab, looking at his watch again. 'Of course, I'll do what I can to help.' He pulled a chair out and sat down.

'Tell me why you're here in Hythe,' said Shepherd.

McNab took a moment to think. He looked at Webb and then at Shepherd.



‘Two or three times a year we come here for a day or two,’ he began. ‘Our offices are in London, but it’s sometimes easier to work without the phone going every five minutes. We come here to get away and talk about important business.’

‘What important business?’ asked Shepherd.

McNab moved on his chair. ‘Why do you want to know?’ he asked. ‘I don’t like to tell people too much about our business. Do you need to know this?’

Shepherd put both hands on the table and sat up.

‘Mr McNab,’ she said quietly, a hard look in her eyes, ‘we’re talking about a murder. I’m going to ask any question I want and you’re going to answer it.’

McNab put both hands up in front of him, as if keeping Shepherd away. ‘OK, OK,’ he said. ‘I was only asking.’

Shepherd sat back.

McNab put his hands down and started speaking again. ‘MMI is a music company. We make and sell CDs. We sell music over the internet. We work with musicians. Anything to do with music, we do it – like I say, we’re in the music business.’

‘So what did you come here to talk about?’ asked Shepherd.

‘We had to decide a number of things,’ replied McNab, but said no more.

Shepherd looked at him. ‘Mr McNab,’ she said angrily, ‘this is going to be much easier if you help me. What things did you have to decide?’

‘We have some new bands we’re interested in – we wanted to talk about them,’ answered McNab, not looking at Shepherd. ‘Two of them are very good. And I wanted to

talk to the others about where the company is going over the next few years.'

'Tell me about the other people who work for you,' said Shepherd.

McNab looked happier now he was talking about the people in the company and not company business.

'Well, there's Ajit Chowdury,' said McNab. 'He's the money man, the company accountant. Harriet Johnson looks after sales. She sells MMI's music all round the world. And then Claudia looks ... looked after the music side of things. The music itself, and the musicians and the bands.'

'And how does everyone get on?' asked Shepherd.

McNab thought for a moment.

'I think we get on well,' he said. 'Of course, we don't always agree with each other, but we're always adult about it. Nobody takes their ball home and says they don't want to play any more, if you see what I mean.'

McNab smiled. Shepherd didn't smile back.

'Tell us about last night,' she said.

'There's not much to tell,' answered McNab. 'We worked until about five. Then we met in the bar some time between seven and seven thirty. We had dinner together in the restaurant and finished about nine thirty. Then we went our different ways. I went to my room and watched TV for half an hour. Then I had a shower and went to bed.'

Shepherd looked at Webb to see if he had any questions.

'Did anything unusual happen yesterday evening?' he asked.

'Good question,' thought Shepherd. 'Maybe there's more to Webb than I thought.'

'No ...' began McNab, but then he stopped and thought. 'Actually, yes. There was something strange.'

Webb didn't say anything. He just waited for McNab to speak again.

'When we were in the bar,' said McNab, 'a man came in. As soon as he saw Claudia, he turned round and walked out again – but she saw him. It was very strange. Her face turned white. For a moment she looked terrible. We asked her if she was OK. She said yes, she was fine. She said it was just someone she once knew.'

'What did the man look like?' asked Webb.

'I really don't remember,' said McNab. 'Fair hair, not tall, not short, nothing unusual. I only saw him for a few seconds.'

Shepherd felt it was important to find out more about this man and decided to end the conversation, but McNab was speaking again.

'Inspector,' he said, 'I hope you find this man soon. I mean, I'm sure the news of Claudia's murder will be in the newspapers. But I'd like to keep MMI away from this kind of news as much as I can.'

Shepherd smiled to herself. McNab, the boss, was looking after his company again.

'It'll take as long as it takes, Mr McNab,' she said. 'I'll probably want to talk to you again, after we've spoken to Ms Johnson and Mr Chowdury. I'll also want my officers to look round all your hotel rooms. You can go now, but don't leave the hotel.'

McNab opened his mouth to say something, but then he saw the look in Shepherd's eye. He closed his mouth, looked at Webb, then back at Shepherd.

'Right,' he said.

'Thank you,' said Shepherd.

McNab left the room, closing the door behind him.

Shepherd turned to Webb.

‘With people like McNab, you’ve got to let them know who’s the boss,’ she said. ‘It’s us – the police – not them. Don’t forget that.’

‘Right, Shep,’ replied Webb.

‘Now,’ said Shepherd. ‘Harriet Johnson next. But before that, we need to know more about that man who came into the bar last night. Get someone to ask around the hotel. Did anyone see a man – our Mr X – come into the hotel between seven and seven thirty, go into the bar and then leave quickly? If so, who is he? I also want to know when Claudia Engel left the hotel. And was anyone with her?’

‘OK,’ said Webb. He stood up.

‘And we need a look at these people’s rooms,’ said Shepherd, ‘Engel’s room and the other three. Two officers to each room. If they find anything strange or unusual, I want to know.’

‘Right, Shep,’ said Webb, going to the door.

‘And, Sergeant?’ said Shepherd.

‘Yes,’ said Webb.

Shepherd looked at her watch. It was too early for a glass of wine.

‘Get someone to bring us some coffee.’