

‘This is exactly the sort of sensationalist story we don’t need on the front page of the newspapers,’ he said. ‘I want you to lead this one – Barnes can be your deputy SIO, given that we still haven’t got a new detective sergeant assigned to the team. I’ll have him pick you up as soon as possible.’

Kay had sensed the familiar spike of an adrenalin rush caused by the prospect of a new investigation.

She had to give the newly promoted DCI credit, too. Since her promotion to DI, Sharp had ensured that she got the opportunity to work on a number of high profile investigations in between her management obligations.

Detective Constable Ian Barnes had turned up on her doorstep twenty-five minutes after Sharp ended his phone call.

Kay enjoyed working with Barnes. In his late forties, he possessed a humour and fortitude that had been a welcome tonic to the dark crimes they were often faced with.

Now, standing beside their vehicle as she peered up the lane to where a strip of crime scene tape fluttered in the breeze, she turned to him as he slammed the driver's door shut and joined her.

A little taller than Kay, he had pale brown hair that had turned to grey at his temples, and much to his consternation, he had started to wear reading glasses.

‘Still glad to be out of the office?’ he said as they watched the scene-of-crime officers working in the lay-by.

‘Shame about the circumstances,’ she said, and pushed a strand of her blonde hair behind

her ear. She straightened her shoulders. ‘All right. Let’s go and find out what’s going on.’

She made her way up the sloping gradient of the lane, nodding to the traffic officers who kept passing motorists from gawking at the scene and ensured any passing traffic remained at a constant low speed to avoid injury to the emergency responders attending the site.

The crime scene investigation team had erected a screen between the lane and where they worked, while two uniformed officers stood on the perimeter of the crime scene tape to ward off any nosy passers-by. A female uniformed officer and her colleague had corralled a group of garishly-clothed cyclists and glanced up as Kay and Barnes approached.

Kay relaxed as she recognised the familiar face. Debbie West had been a police constable

since her early twenties, and Kay held high hopes for the woman. She was one of the most meticulous officers Kay knew and could be relied upon to manage a tight crime scene.

‘Morning, Inspector.’

‘Morning. What’s the latest?’

Debbie gestured to her colleague, who shepherded the cyclists away from the crime scene tape and continued to speak with them as he took notes. She turned back to Kay.

‘The guy in the red and yellow jersey is the one that found it. Lee Temple. Apparently, he and his friends are all local to West Farleigh and cycle together on a regular basis at weekends.’

Kay squinted against the bright sunshine to where the man stood next to Debbie’s colleague, and noted the line of expensive

bicycles propped up against a telegraph pole or laid on the thick grass that bordered the road.

‘How is he doing?’

‘Threw up his breakfast, but thankfully not on the evidence.’

‘That’s something, I suppose.’

Barnes jerked his chin towards where the CSIs were painstakingly checking the verges and hedgerow bordering the lay-by, their heads bowed as they worked.

‘Have they found the rest of him?’

Debbie wrinkled her nose. ‘Not yet.’

Kay checked over her shoulder at the steady stream of traffic that now passed the crime scene, and had to agree with Sharp’s view that the media would be keen to have the story on the six o’clock news that night, with whatever scant information they’d glean from