

Prologue

Early May

Petar Belic raised his racquet high in the air, his body arched back in the service motion recognizable to thousands of tennis fans around the world. His long, evenly tanned legs stretched upwards taking his feet off the ground. The sun glinted on his gold bracelet as his arm came over his head. His opponent had just enough time to register that it was going to be a smash as the racquet bore down. A nanosecond later the ball whizzed past him in a fluorescent yellow blur, crashed onto the service line and bounced out of court.

What the heck, thought Danny Moore. *I'm hot, I'm tired and I want a drink*. He went forward to the net and shook hands with Petar. "Well done, mate," he said. "You win. Again."

Petar laughed. "You weren't trying; not on that last point anyway. You were just thinking about that pint of beer waiting for you."

"Ah, you know me so well," replied Danny as the two men entered the pavilion of the exclusive Surrey tennis club to which they belonged. Twenty minutes later, showered and changed, each with a drink in front of them, they relaxed into the leather upholstery of the club's pavilion bar. They gazed out across the array of courts as they listened to the rhythmic "thwacks" of games in progress, while the sun began its lazy descent towards the western horizon.

They sat for a while, each with his thoughts. Danny nursed a pint of beer while Petar sipped a Scotch on the rocks. The

sound of Petar's mobile phone ringing interrupted their companionable silence. He pulled it out of his pocket, glanced at the screen and rejected the call. Danny looked at him with raised eyebrows.

"Vinni?"

"How did you guess?"

"Doesn't give up easily, does she?"

Petar gave a humourless grin. "Lavinia never gives up. She always thinks if we just go through it all one more time the whole thing will be hunk-dory again."

Danny nodded. "Hunky-dory," he corrected absently. He cast a sideways glance at his friend. "Does she know you've got other fish to fry?"

Petar's eyebrows shot up.

Danny looked pleased with himself. "I've got my spies."

Petar laughed. "Of course, I should have guessed."

"You and Una giving it another go?"

"Yes," he replied after a moment. "It's gently, gently catching the monkey, as they say – but, yes, we are trying again."

Danny didn't bother to correct the idiom this time. "I bet the kids are delighted."

"Oh, you can be sure," began Petar, but just at that moment they were interrupted by a discreet cough. They turned to see a man in his mid twenties, wearing jeans and an anorak, waiting for an opportunity to speak. Petar and Danny stiffened slightly, wondering if the anorak pockets held a notepad and a recorder. They'd both been in the limelight long enough to recognize a journalist.

"Mr Belic? Petar Belic?"

"Yes, who wants to speak to him?" answered Petar.

The young man came closer. "I'm Greg Thompson from *The Herald*. We're hoping to do a series of pieces in the run-up to Wimbledon."

“How did you get in here? You’re not a member, are you?” asked Danny, displeasure clouding his amiable features.

Petar turned to him. “It’s OK, Danny. I am cool with this.” He turned back to the journalist. “What kind of piece do you plan?”

“Well, with you, Mr Belic, the article would be two-pronged. You’ve been a great champion in your own right, of course, and I’d like to cover that. And then there’s the fact that you’re the coach to Stewart Bickerstaff, and since you’ve started working with him he’s become the British number one. Obviously a lot of people will be watching very closely to see how he does this year.”

Petar nodded as he considered the matter. “Do you have any of our cards on you?” he asked Danny.

“Yep.” Danny fished in his pocket and brought out a couple of business cards for the Bel-Mor Sports Agency, their joint business venture.

Petar took the cards and gave one to Greg Thompson. “Call this number,” he said kindly. “Tell the secretary I am willing to see you. Make an appointment.”

Beaming with delight the journalist took the card, thanked Petar profusely and made his getaway.

Danny gave a rueful smile as he gazed at the disappearing back of the young man. “I’d still like to know how he got in here.”

“A determined journalist will squeeze himself between the narrowest of cracks.”

“Or bribe one of the staff.”

“Or that, yes,” conceded Petar. He turned the remaining card between his fingers as the silence lengthened. After some moments, Danny took a sip of beer and put the glass down resolutely.

“I’ve got something I need to discuss with you, Pete, about the business.”

“Yes.”

“You knew?”

“Yes.”

“You didn’t say anything.”

“No, I wanted you to come and tell me of your own free will.”

Danny leaned back in his seat, his cheeks suddenly flushed. “It’s scary, having someone know me as well as you do.” He sat up and took a deep breath. “I’ve been a bit silly with our company finances.”

“More than a bit, I think, my friend.”

Danny took another deep breath and spread his hands. “Very silly.”

Petar’s eyes searched his friend’s. Danny felt the gentleness of his gaze. “Talk to me.”

Danny leaned in close to Petar and began to speak.

Chapter One

Late June

He looked in good shape. The cream linen designer suit couldn't hide his taut thigh muscles or the pectorals, honed to perfection. He probably had an impressive six-pack hidden under the hand-finished shirt. His blond-streaked hair fell away from his handsome, Slavic face and the whole picture screamed – *fit*. This man is fit.

Except he was dead.

His body had been found on a lawn. Not just any patch of grass. This was a Wimbledon tennis court, and the Championships would be starting in just a few hours.

Detective Inspector Angela Costello gazed down at the body. She gave a long, regretful sigh as a weight of sadness settled round her heart. She didn't need a formal process to identify this man. A tennis fan since childhood, his images had taken precedence over those of pop stars on her bedroom wall for most of her teenage years.

She raised her head and took in the whole of the scene around her. She loved this place. The sights and sounds, the battles and emotions, the excitement of the Championships were essential components of the summer as far as she was concerned. Sunshine. Health. Vitality. But this had never been part of the picture.

Oh, Petar, what on earth's happened? she thought.

She looked up at the three men who had been standing nearby since she had first arrived.

“Local CID?” she asked.

The nearest of them nodded: a solid, heavily built man. Under his tie she could see his shirt straining across his chest. "D.I. Coombes," he said. "We didn't like the look of it, not here, not today of all days. Thought the best thing to do was to get straight on to you lot in Homicide."

Angela nodded. *D.I. Coombes. I'm a detective inspector as well.* The reality was still a novelty to her. *I know the fact that I've only just been promoted doesn't show, she thought, but I still feel as though I'm carrying some sign saying "wet behind the ears".* She took a few seconds, allowed herself a deep breath and gave a tight smile.

"Not a problem, Inspector," she said. "We can deal with it."

Coombes nodded. "We'll get out of your way, then. The official handover can be sorted out later."

"Yes, thank you. Before you go, who found him?"

Coombes stood aside and Angela found herself gazing on what looked like a boy dressed in a policeman's uniform. She blinked and looked again, taking in the slight build. She noted the smooth face and the clear, innocent eyes under the peak of a hat that, like the uniform, seemed slightly too large. Goodness, was she getting so old that the new recruits looked like kids to her?

"What's your name, Constable?"

He cleared his throat. "Martin, ma'am. Martin Pearse." Angela found herself resisting the temptation to ask him if his mother knew where he was.

"OK, Martin. Did you discover the body?"

"No, ma'am." He was unable to hide the note of disappointment and, aware that she knew this, he blushed.

She smiled in sympathy. "OK, Martin, put me in the picture."

"I was on crowd control outside when one of the groundsmen came running out of the club and asked me to come in. This is what I found."

Angela nodded. "So, did you call the station?"

“No, ma’am.” She waited. Anxiety crawled across his face as he tried to remember all the training school procedures for such an incident, worried that he’d plumped for the wrong action. Eventually he risked: “I... er... I felt for a pulse.”

“Well done, Martin. I presume you didn’t find one.”

He relaxed. “No, but then I’m not good at that sort of thing. I sometimes can’t feel my own pulse. Fortunately a doctor came along just at that moment and he examined the... him... the body. And he declared him dead.”

“That was handy. Was the doctor just passing?”

“I’m not sure. When he fetched me, the groundsman mentioned that he’d sent for one. I presume in a place like Wimbledon the medics are never very far away. I’ve got his name and contact details when you’re ready, ma’am.” Confidence rang in his voice as he said this last sentence. He knew without any doubt he’d ticked the right box this time. “And I’ve called the station,” he added. “They’re getting in touch with the coroner’s office.”

Angela nodded. She wondered if her husband would be the one to take the call. Patrick Costello was a coroner’s officer. “Thanks, Martin. So what strikes you about this scenario, then? Do you know who he is, by the way?”

A look of genuine regret passed across Martin’s face. “Sorry,” he replied. “I know he’s something in tennis.”

He’d got that right. “He was one of the best tennis players of the twentieth century, Martin. His name is Petar Belic.” A shaft of grief shot through Angela and she stopped speaking; “*was*” – *his name “was” Petar Belic*. She cast her eyes about, looking for a distraction. These lawns were amazing, like velvet. Rye grass, that was it; somebody had told her once that they used rye grass here, not wheat grass. She tuned in to the young constable again.

“Ah, well, I’m more of a rugby man, myself,” he was saying.

Angela allowed herself a fleeting image of young Martin getting flattened in a scrum. She glanced across to the far bulkier D.I. Coombes, who was waiting patiently. "Right," she said. "Well, what we've got is a very odd sight."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Hmm..." Angela looked silently beyond Martin to the perimeter of the court. She felt acutely aware of people passing, some dressed in their uniforms as stewards or line judges, their heads drawn as if by a magnet to where she stood, each somehow finding a reason to make a detour by Court 19. Ideally she would like to keep the lid on this, but didn't for one moment imagine that would be possible. She could already anticipate the buzz of speculation rapidly spreading to every corner of the club.

"OK, Martin," she said. "That'll be all for now. Hand in your report of the event before you go off shift, OK?"

"Yes, ma'am," he said, and followed D.I. Coombes away from the court.

Angela caught a movement out of the corner of her eye and turned to see Detective Sergeants Rick Driver and Jim Wainwright and Detective Constable Gary Houseman hurrying across the grass towards her. She had arrived with them in the Homicide Assessment Team car but got out at the club gates so she could get straight to the court.

"So, what have we got, then?" asked Rick.

"Not too clear at the moment," replied Angela, "but the locals thought they'd better call us in, given what's going to be happening here for the next two weeks."

Jim looked puzzled for an instant and then his brow cleared. "Oh, yeah," he said.

Angela, resisting the temptation to roll her eyes at Jim, nodded at the third man, Gary Houseman. His brand new suit and nervous expression made her suddenly remember that for him this was also the first day in a new job. She gave him a smile.

“Sorry, we’d barely been introduced when the call came through. Welcome to the team.”

“Thanks.” He returned her smile and she thought he relaxed a little.

“You’ve struck lucky, in a manner of speaking. There are worse places to start off.”

“Yeah,” grinned Rick. “It’s downhill all the way after this.” He turned his whole attention to the body. “All looks very neat and tidy, doesn’t it?”

“Yep,” added Jim. “Hmm... nice threads.” He squatted beside the corpse. “Kept himself in shape.”

“Yeah,” agreed Rick. “You’d think twice before taking a pop at him, wouldn’t you? He looks like he could handle himself.”

“Didn’t this time, though, did he?” Jim’s expert gaze took in the details. “Nice clean hands. Manicured nails.”

“Yep,” said his partner. “No obvious sign of struggle.”

“Know anything about him yet, Angie?” asked Jim.

“You bet I do,” she replied. “Petar Belic, ex-champion. During my teenage years I was one of his biggest fans.” She looked from one man to the other and could almost hear their minds calculating. “It wasn’t *that* long ago,” she added, hoping it didn’t sound like too much of a protest. “You should have seen him. He caused a real sensation the first time he played here. He was just this skinny boy from the wrong side of the Adriatic back then.”

“You what?” asked Jim.

Angela glanced at him impatiently. “Look it up,” she said. “Anyway, nobody noticed him at first and then all of a sudden, there he was in the quarter-finals with everybody scrabbling around trying to find out something about him. They couldn’t even pronounce his name. By the way, make sure you get it right, won’t you? You say it ‘Beleech’, which isn’t what it looks like.”

“Oh yeah, I remember now!” Light dawned for Rick. “Big-

time champ; my mum was his number one fan. When we were young, whenever he came on the telly we had to get our own tea. She was that keen on him.”

Ouch! That's right, make me feel old, thought Angela.

Jim shrugged. “Don't look at me,” he said. “If it doesn't involve a round cork board that you can throw pointy things at I don't know anything about it.”

Each to his own, Angie thought, casting a glance at Jim's chunky figure. She'd always assumed he was just built that way, but she now wondered if his girth had anything to do with standing around in pubs and consuming beer while waiting for his turn to throw the darts. Rick, she knew, had a fondness for road racing, a hobby to which his spare, muscular frame bore ample witness. As the pause lengthened she realized, with a small stab of nervousness, they were waiting for her to speak. “OK,” she said briskly. “We've got to seal this place.”

“If this turns out to be murder it'll be your first case as a D.I.,” remarked Jim. Angela wondered if he was deliberately ignoring what she had said, or just following his own train of thought. She mentally noted the possibility that he might even be trying to needle her. She hadn't realized until they'd turned up just how nervous she was about her first outing as a detective inspector but she was determined not to show it. *Take a deep breath, Angie,* she said to herself. *OK, so Jim applied for promotion at the same time as you did and didn't even get an interview. That's for him to deal with.*

“Will you find whoever's responsible for the games to be played on this court today and explain it will have to remain out of bounds, at least until the scene of crime officers have done their stuff?”

“Will do,” said Rick.

“And find out how to get the undertaker's van to this court – preferably not through the main gates.”

“Check.”

“And don’t forget to apologize for the inconvenience caused.”

Jim looked puzzled. “For what? They’ve got an unexplained death in their club.”

“Yes,” she said patiently. “But they’ve also got a very high-profile international event beginning in a few hours and a little diplomacy goes a long way.”

“That’s their problem,” he replied, a little truculently.

Angela saw Rick making a great study of his shoes. “Just be polite, Jim,” she said. “It’s better to have their cooperation than not.”

There followed the merest of pauses. They were all equal colleagues a short while ago and now Angela was giving them orders. *It probably feels as awkward to him as it does to me*, she thought.

“No probs,” replied Jim after a moment. “You’re the boss.”

Angela gave a sigh of relief as she watched them move away. She looked back down at Petar’s body as she remembered something else. Surely it was on this very court that he had achieved his first victory?

She turned and hunkered down for a closer inspection, careful to touch nothing. This man had seen her through a pivotal stage in her development. She had spent her adolescent years dreaming of what she’d do if she ever got the chance to meet him, and now here she was, leaning in close over those beautiful cheekbones. She found nothing and rose a few moments later. It was best left to the scene of crime officers who had now appeared beside her and were ready to get on with their job.

“SOCOs,” announced one of the men unnecessarily, casting an appraising glance at the body.

Angela nodded. “I’ll leave you to get on with it.” She took one last look at the dead man’s features, perfect in death. *Well, Petar*, she thought. *It’s the big question. Did you fall or were you pushed?*