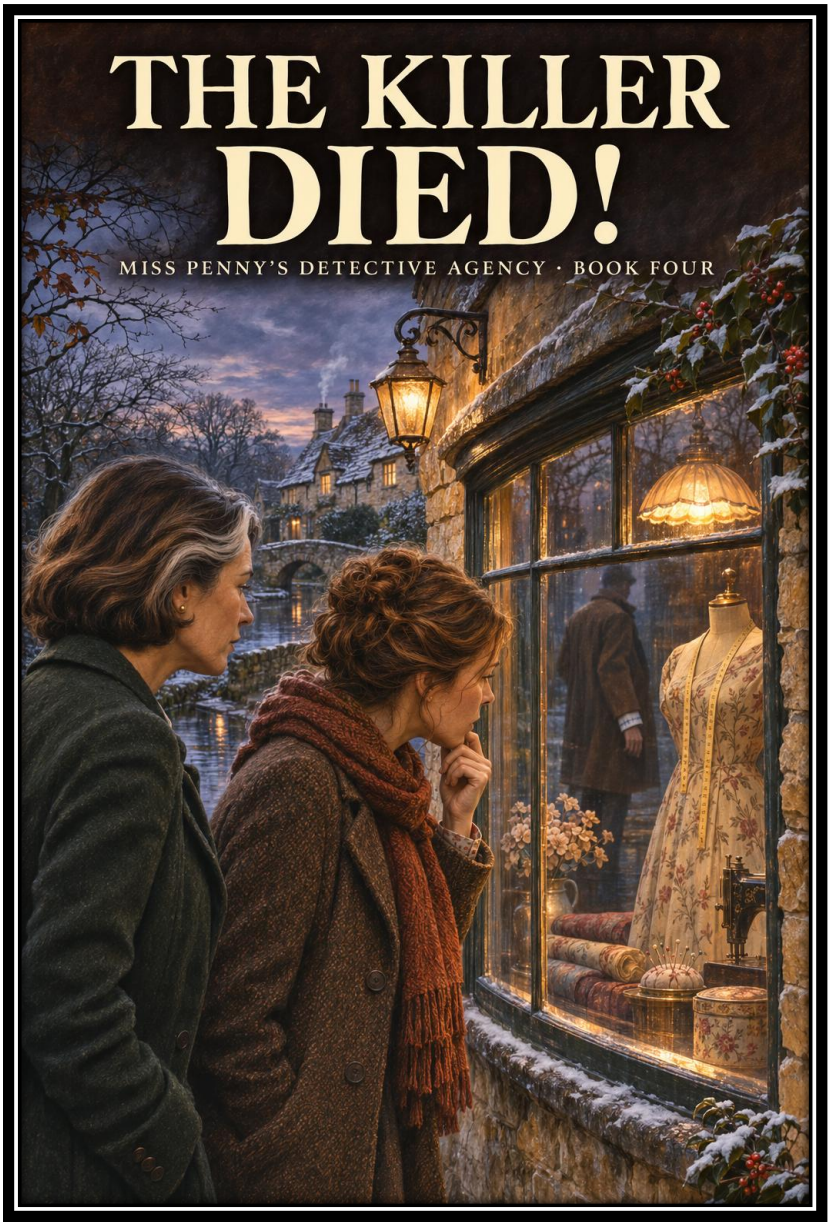

THE KILLER DIED!
MISS PENNY'S DETECTIVE AGENCY · BOOK FOUR

The Cotswolds · February 1997

A woman who asked for Watson

"The killer died," the woman said.

Penny stood in the doorway with a tea towel over her arm. It was eleven in the morning. She'd been looking for a plain cup without a crack in it, and hadn't managed to find one.

"Who did he kill?"

The woman looked past her into the office. "Is Miss Watson here?"

Watson came out from behind the door. She was carrying an armful of old newspapers. She set them down on the bottom stair and said, "Mrs Bellamy?"

"Thank goodness. You do remember."

Watson remembered the sleeves of her winter coat being taken up in a workroom in Upper Slaughter. She remembered Mrs Bellamy having three pairs of scissors and saying that her husband used to borrow the best pair to cut the labels off his new shirts. From the way she said it, he must have been dead some time.

"Would you come in?"

Mrs Bellamy took a small photograph from her purse. There was a man in it standing in front of a row of lockers. His collar was turned up. He was frowning at whoever had taken the picture.

“That’s the man who killed Frank,” she said. “The police told me last week he was dead. Yesterday I saw him in Lower Slaughter.”

Penny knew the face. It had last been turned away from her at the foot of a flight of iron steps. Watson had knelt to see whether the man was breathing. His name had meant nothing to either of them when Lucas eventually told them what he’d called himself.

“Did you see his face yesterday?” asked Watson.

“I saw his coat.”

“Mrs Bellamy,” said Penny, “I was there when he died.”

“I know that. The constable told me.”

“Then it seems to me we can save you a great deal of upset.”

The woman folded the photograph so the face was inside. She got up, took her gloves and thanked Watson for remembering her. Before Watson fetched the appointment book, the front door closed.

Penny put the tea towel on the back of a chair. “I thought she’d be relieved.”

“She told me a man killed her husband,” said Watson. “Nobody had asked her how she knew.”

Two Slaughters

“Which of them do you dislike more?” Watson asked.

They were standing at the edge of the green. The car was facing the wrong way for Upper Slaughter and Watson had been sitting with the engine running while Penny found her purse.

“Lower,” said Penny. “People always say it’s the prettier one, as if that settles it.”

“The villages have survived worse opinions.”

“So have I, but I don’t invite people to repeat them.”

Mrs Bellamy’s workroom was the front room of a small house in Upper Slaughter. Its window was just high enough for a person seated inside to see heads going by and low enough for everything else to be kept private. A row of pale cotton reels stood along the sill. Watson had written the house number on the back of an alterations ticket. That was the only reason she knew where to go after Mrs Bellamy left without giving her address.

Mrs Bellamy drew the curtain an inch farther back when she saw them and then came to the door. Watson told her she’d come to hear what she’d tried to tell them earlier. Penny said she would be glad to wait in the car.

“You may as well hear it too,” Mrs Bellamy said. “It may save me having to say it twice.”

She put them on two chairs facing a dressmaker’s dummy. The dummy wore a man's waistcoat pinned

along one shoulder. Mrs Bellamy had used pins with red heads so the customer would notice them before he put it on.

“My husband was Frank Bellamy. He took a night job minding a stone yard outside the village. One night he was found there at the bottom of a loading stair. The company said he’d fallen.”

“What did the police say?” Watson asked.

“They said they could be sure he died in the yard. That was what they could be sure of.”

She said that a man called Hale had come to the workroom before Christmas. He’d wanted his coat altered because his right arm didn’t straighten all the way. When she asked him how he’d hurt it, he said Frank had done it on the stairs.

Mrs Bellamy lifted the waistcoat off the dummy. “He said Frank put up more of a fight than he’d been told to expect. I remember putting the pin in my mouth so he wouldn’t see I couldn’t shut it.”

Penny didn’t touch her notebook. “Did he tell you who’d sent him?”

“No. He said there was something he could leave me. I told him he could leave by the door.”

“He came back?”

“He left an envelope through the letter box. The week before he died.”

She went to a drawer. The envelope was between two lengths of tape. It had a word written on it in small, hard capitals.

ARDEN.

A photograph at the station

Lucas had been the one who showed Mrs Bellamy a photograph from Hale's lodgings when he told her Hale was dead. Penny found that out when she rang to ask whether the dead man had ever been identified beyond the name he had given at his lodgings. She left Mrs Bellamy's name out of it because Watson had asked her to. At that point it seemed an easy enough promise to keep.

"Hale was the name on the rent book," Lucas said. "There was a photograph of him with his arm in a sling on the mantelpiece. The man he rented from told us he'd hurt it at a stone yard. We took the picture round when we were asking about the yard."

"Who took the picture of him with the lockers?"

Lucas let a pause go by. "What makes you ask about lockers?"

"I've seen a different photograph."

He asked whether she could bring it in. Penny said it belonged to somebody else. He said she had the advantage of being able to ask the owner, and there he left it.

Watson was standing by the coal scuttle. She had been listening with her back to Penny, taking small lumps of coal out of the bag so the dust could fall to the bottom.

“He wanted to know where she got it,” Penny said.

“So do I. I think she’d tell me if I put it to her.”

Watson went back on her own. Mrs Bellamy said the photograph came from a set of Christmas prints Frank had brought home from the yard. The foreman had left Frank to hand out the spare copies, and this one had stayed in his desk. Mrs Bellamy had never known the man by the lockers until he came to her workroom. She’d stood face to face with him while she pinned up his sleeve. After he left the envelope, she went through Frank’s prints and picked him out.

“Is it any use?” she asked Watson.

“It tells me you’ve been looking for him for longer than we have.”

Mrs Bellamy put it away. She asked whether Watson ever sent her work to anyone else when she couldn’t manage it herself. Watson said she sometimes asked for help, but she would come back and tell her before she asked anyone else about the envelope. Mrs Bellamy took up a needle and continued repairing a seam so carefully that Watson couldn’t see where the original stitching had ended.

On her way out, Watson stopped to look at the workroom from the pavement. Nobody who came down the road could have seen the dressmaker’s face while she sat

there. They could have seen the lamp come on and the shape of a woman take her place behind it. Watson wondered how many evenings someone would have to wait outside before that became as useful as knowing her name.

The blue thread

Watson asked Mrs Bellamy to describe the man she'd seen in Lower Slaughter. Mrs Bellamy said he wore Hale's brown overcoat and had a hat pulled down. She'd been on her way to leave a hemmed skirt at the shop for collection when she saw him behind her.

"Behind you?" asked Watson.

"In the window. I was looking to see if the skirt was still straight in its bag. I looked up when I heard him whistle."

She gave them the first few notes. Penny didn't know the tune. Watson asked if Hale had whistled it on his other visits. Mrs Bellamy said he used to start while he was still outside the workroom door.

"What made you sure of the coat?"

"I did the cuff in brown first. The cloth was so worn it tore when I took the stitches out. I joined it with a much stronger thread. I only had blue in that weight. I said I'd do it over free of charge when I got the right colour."

She opened her sewing box. There was a card with eight blue stitches drawn through it, a sample she had kept because she wanted to be able to show the supplier what

she meant. Watson looked at the thread. It was the dull blue of an old school blazer. “Which cuff?”

“Right.”

“Which did you see in the window?”

“It looked like his left,” she said. “He turned towards the glass when he whistled. I could see the blue stitches, but I kept thinking I’d shortened the other sleeve.”

She put the sample back. Penny took out her notebook at last and wrote nothing down. Mrs Bellamy had left the envelope between them on the cutting table. The paper bore a faint diagonal crease as if it had been carried for some time in a pocket that was too small for it.

“Did you ever open it?” Penny asked.

“No. I thought if I opened it, I might have to do something about what was inside.”

“Did Hale tell you what it was?”

“He said it was what he should have given the police the night Frank died.”

Watson asked whether she could tell Lucas that there was an envelope. Mrs Bellamy said that she’d think about it. Above all she didn’t want her son’s name put into anything. He had a new job and hadn’t been in the village since the funeral.

“Your name stays with us until you tell me otherwise,” Watson said. Penny was beside her when she made that promise.

The account book

They drove down to see the window in daylight. Standing where Mrs Bellamy had stood, there was very little to see through the glass. The shop was closed. A shawl on a stand and a string of price cards made it hard to tell where the room ended. The view behind them was much clearer.

Watson asked Penny to stand across the road. Penny did so, then moved where Watson pointed. It was cold, but she took off a glove and cupped her bare hand to her ear to hear Watson's instructions. She'd only done it for a minute when a woman with a shopping basket asked if she was waiting for the bus. Penny said no and found the woman rather disappointed in her.

Watson called her back. Through the window there had been the reflection of an archway neither of them would have seen if they'd faced the road. A person coming out of it could walk straight across the reflected scene and disappear when they reached the line of the window frame. From the pavement they would seem to be coming from beside the shop. In fact they would be across the road.

"Mrs Bellamy will know who uses the arch," said Watson. "We can ask her and see if it still looks the same at the time she was there."

Next to the arch stood a house with its curtains open. A large clock was visible from the pavement. Its minute

hand had gone past the quarter but the householder was still setting two places for lunch. Penny moved away from the glass. There were things one saw when one stood where a witness had stood, and things one saw because one shouldn't have been there in the first place.

At the agency, Watson put a ruler on the page of the appointment book and drew two parallel lines for the road. She went upstairs for a sharper pencil. Penny stayed at the desk.

On a shelf above the telephone was a file in which Penny had kept Ruth Bell's name and the two possibilities from her diary. Vale. Arden. She'd written them on separate slips so she wouldn't start to think of them as a pair. Neither had meant anything by itself. Then she'd seen the capital letters on Mrs Bellamy's envelope.

The woman at the window

While Watson was upstairs somebody knocked at the door. It was Mrs Bellamy. She'd come to show them a note that had been pushed through her letter box. There was no signature. Whoever had written it said he would be at the shop in Lower Slaughter the next day and she should bring what he had left her.

"Did you tell the police?" Penny asked.

"I've spent three years telling them there's more to it than they think. I thought I would ask you what you made of that before I started again."

Penny read it twice. The writer didn't say what he had left. He seemed to know she would recognise what was meant. Penny thought of Edmund at his desk, frowning into a telephone while someone waited for him to find a missing receipt. She could ask him to check the handwriting as well, if she could get the original.

Watson came down. Mrs Bellamy held out the note. Watson read it and asked if she would like to leave it with them. Mrs Bellamy said she would rather have a copy. Watson fetched a sheet of paper and put it next to the original so they could make sure she got every word.

"Will you go to the shop?" asked Penny.

"I won't take the envelope."

Watson finished copying and let Mrs Bellamy read the two sheets together. She'd even left the same spaces

between the lines. Mrs Bellamy put the original back in her purse. At the door she said she'd been afraid they might tell her to tear it up.

Watson went out to see whether the road was clear before she crossed. Penny stayed by the telephone. On the desk was a slip bearing the word Arden. It was in her own hand, of course. She had been looking at it so long that the letters had ceased to look like anything a person had written.

What Penny gave away

She dialled a number she still knew without looking it up.

The man who answered was Edmund, who had once worked two desks from Penny. He'd shown her how to keep a difficult person on the telephone while looking up what they said couldn't be found. She had remembered his kindness on several occasions when he would have preferred she remember his discretion.

"I'm trying to place a name," she said. "Arden."

He asked whether she had seen it written down.

"Yes."

"Was there anything else on the envelope?"

Penny held the receiver away from her ear for a moment. She hadn't said envelope. She could have asked him how he knew and let him answer. It was the sort of advice she gave to other people.

Instead she asked whether he could tell her whose name it was.

“Give me something to go on.”

She gave him Mrs Bellamy’s name and said where she worked. She wanted to be understood the first time. Edmund promised to make an enquiry and ring back.

Watson came back to the desk with a pencil and a second ruler.

“If you look from the pavement,” she said, “the arch sits exactly where the shop door appears to be.”

“It’s a good piece of work.”

“Have you done any?”

Penny looked at the receiver. “I made a telephone call.”

She might have told her the rest then. Watson would have been angry, but they’d have had time to ring Mrs Bellamy. Penny picked up the ruler Watson had brought and straightened it on the page.

“Nothing useful yet,” she said.

The shop door

The woman at the Lower Slaughter shop had known Frank Bellamy. She said so when Watson asked whether she might stand by the window again that afternoon. She remembered Frank because once when the catch on the shop door had stuck he had stayed to fix it before he went home. He never charged her. His wife had charged her

for taking up a skirt on the following Monday, and the woman had been rather relieved. There were only so many debts you could remember without getting muddled.

“There’s a man who thinks he can collect something here,” Watson said. “I wonder if you’ve seen him.”

The woman put a price card down she had been moving from one shelf to another. “Someone told me a coat had been left in my back room. I said I don’t take alterations in unless I’ve got a ticket for them.”

“Did he give you a name?”

“He gave me Mrs Bellamy’s. I knew then he hadn’t spoken to her. She’d have told him where to go to collect a coat. The back room’s for things I sell myself.”

Watson had begun to ask what he looked like when a customer came in for a pair of socks. The woman went to the till. She didn’t look back. Watson waited until the socks had been wrapped and paid for and asked her again. She’d had to do a thing like that at their agency with Penny once, when Penny was still convinced that a person leaving a room meant she had finished speaking. The customer was halfway down the road when the woman came back to the window.

“I didn’t look at him,” she said. “I was listening for his voice to make sure I knew it. Then he said he was going over to the other side of the village. I heard the shop door go, and I thought, of course you know him. He used to come in three times a week.”

“Do you know now?”

The woman looked down. “I don’t think I can tell you until I’ve had a word with Mrs Bellamy.”

Watson left her to do that. Outside, she wrote down what the woman had actually said. There were already three men on the page who could have come into the shop three times a week. It would have been possible to underline any one of them and go home feeling she had made some progress. She put the notebook away.

The picture beside the bed

The door to Mrs Bellamy’s rooms was standing open. There was a drawer on the floor with all the handles pointing upwards. Somebody had set it down rather than dropped it. One of the red-headed pins from the waistcoat lay beside it.

Watson called from the threshold. Mrs Bellamy answered from the little room at the back. She came out holding the empty frame of a photograph.

“He left the glass,” she said.

“Who did?”

“I wasn’t here.” She put the frame down. “I went round to get milk. I might have been gone ten minutes.”

There had been a picture of her son at a railway station. She kept it on the table beside her bed. He’d sent it to her in a cardboard sleeve for Christmas. She’d written his new lodging address on the back in case she lost the

envelope in which he'd sent it. The envelope from Hale was gone as well.

Penny said, "I spoke to somebody about Arden."

Mrs Bellamy watched her in silence.

"I gave him your name."

The woman set the frame on the only part of the table that had stayed clear. "Miss Watson, would you come in?"

Penny stood outside on the landing. She could see a little blue light in the stairwell window and a telephone wire running across the top of the door. She found herself listening for a sound that would give her a reason to go in. Watson spoke quietly. After a time Penny realised there was nothing she could do there but wait.

On the wall beside the door hung an ordinary metal letter box, emptied into the workroom when it was opened. Penny remembered Mrs Bellamy saying the envelope had come through the front letter box. A man waiting on the pavement could see exactly where he had put it. Anybody on the landing could hear who was expected to answer.

Watson came out twenty minutes later. She had left her coat inside.

"Mrs Bellamy wants me to ring her son."

"Can I do anything?"

"Did the man you rang already know about the envelope?"

Penny looked up.

“I can ask you because I know you,” said Watson. “I couldn’t ask her. Did he?”

“He knew it was an envelope.”

“Then think how long he’s known whose it was.”

Watson went back inside. A moment later the door closed completely.



A man at the bakery

In the morning Penny bought a loaf. The woman behind the counter asked if the gentleman had found her. He had been in twice, she said, and the second time he’d asked if Penny still crossed the green after the agency shut.

“Was he a client?” Penny asked.

“I thought he must be. He didn’t buy anything.”

“Did he say when he’d come back?”

“No. He said you’d be easy to recognise.”

Penny carried the loaf home under her arm. She had once been told by a man who knew her work that the point of

recognising a person was to know which call to make later. She had offered to take the man out for lunch and made him order first. His work had been rather different from hers. That distinction had always mattered to her.

At the agency the telephone was ringing. Edmund asked whether she'd be alone at closing time. He said he might have something to drop off. Penny wanted to ask about Mrs Bellamy. She wanted badly enough to ask that she could hear herself answer the easier question first.

"Yes," she said. "I expect so."

When she did ask, Edmund said, "You asked me a question about a name. That was as far as I took it."

"You were the only person I told."

"Then you should be able to work out who else knew without troubling me."

Penny tried to ring back after he put the receiver down. The man who answered said Edmund had left for the day.

An old lesson

Watson came in before closing with a message from Mrs Bellamy. She would meet them at the shop the following afternoon. She had been asked once already if she meant to go to the police and wished to see the arch before anybody asked her again. She had told Watson who asked her. She had also asked her, very particularly, to keep it to herself until she'd spoken to him.

Penny asked whether Watson intended to do that.

“Yes,” Watson said.

She set one of Mrs Bellamy’s blue cotton samples on the desk. The woman had given it to her without being asked. Watson had to hold it against the paper to see the dark of it.

“Will you want me to come tomorrow?” Penny asked.

“I’ll ask her.”

Penny put the sample back where Watson had left it. There was a time when somebody had let her work things out for herself without making her ask permission. She remembered it in an unexpected place, a room where James had taught her to shoot. The bit she remembered had come after the lesson. She’d been trying to tell him she could see perfectly without her reading glasses. He’d waited until she put them on and asked her to read the name on the card underneath the target. It was somebody else’s.

“What would you have done if I’d told you first?” he asked.

“Looked where you pointed.”

“Yes,” he said. “And I’d never have known where you meant to look.”

Penny had been inclined to take it as praise until she understood she’d been looking at the wrong card. Now she thought she could see why he’d waited.

“I ought to have told you what I did as soon as you came down the stairs,” she said to Watson.

“You ought to have told me before you did it.”

Penny had come to the same conclusion alone. It sounded different when Watson said it. She put the covers on the typewriter and waited while Watson finished a letter.

“Did you want me to say something else?” she asked.

“No,” Watson said. “I’d like to finish the letter.”

Penny put her coat on and went to the shop before it shut. She bought two sorts of biscuits because she could not remember which Watson liked better. At home she discovered that she’d known perfectly well and bought both so she could put off choosing.

The other side of the glass

Watson brought Mrs Bellamy back to Lower Slaughter when she asked to go. They stood by the closed shop while the light failed. The old price cards showed up in the glass first, and then the arch came clear behind them. Mrs Bellamy lifted one hand to mark where the brown coat had passed.

“That’s a house I’ve been in,” she said.

“Whose?”

“Cecil Marsh’s. He rents the room over the arch. He used to keep the stone yard books.”

Watson stood beside Mrs Bellamy, facing the window, and raised her right hand. “Watch the woman in the glass. If she were standing in front of us, you’d say she

was raising her left.” Mrs Bellamy looked from Watson’s hand to the reflection. Then she stepped sideways until the arch fell where it had been when the man passed.



“He came out right there,” she said. “I thought the door beside the shop had been left on the catch. It was Cecil’s door I heard.”

“Did he know Hale?”

“Hale lodged with him. I took the coat there once when the rain was too bad for him to come out for it. He kept it on a peg by Cecil’s back door.”

Watson asked who used to whistle the tune before Hale did. Mrs Bellamy didn’t answer at first. She put her hand in her pocket and took it out again.

“Frank,” she said. “He whistled it on the walk home. Cecil used to give him a lift if it was raining.”

They waited for a man with a dog to pass. In the glass he seemed to go in the opposite direction from the one Watson expected. It was surprisingly hard to think about two pictures of a street at once.

“Do you want to keep going?” Watson asked.

“Yes. I’ve had enough of people deciding when I’ve heard enough.”

An address on a photograph

Mrs Bellamy’s son answered his own telephone. Watson had prepared a sentence in which she would say his mother needed his help. As soon as she heard his voice she decided to say that his mother was with her and wanted to speak to him. She held the receiver out.

Mrs Bellamy had not told him everything Hale had said. She had hoped, she said now, that she could do the thing herself and keep him from having to give up a shift. Her son asked where she wanted him to go. She said she would get the bus. He said he had a car and had been trying for a fortnight to think of a reason to drive it farther than the filling station.

She was smiling when she put the telephone down. Then she turned to Watson and wanted to know how long it would be before somebody came for the envelope again.

“I can ask Lucas to be near when we call on Mr Marsh,” Watson said. “If you want to go.”

Mrs Bellamy began to answer and stopped herself. “You think he took it?”

“I think he wore the coat. The person who took the envelope took the photograph with it. I’d like to hear what he has to say about both.”

“Will you tell him my son won’t be at his lodgings?”

“No. He can spend all evening wondering about that.”

They went back to the agency for Watson’s coat. Penny had put the kettle on and laid out cups. She saw Mrs Bellamy in the hall and moved aside so there was room for the woman to pass without having to choose whether to speak. Mrs Bellamy asked for a glass of water. Penny took one from the cupboard and filled it. It was the only thing the woman had asked her for that day. She handed it over without saying she could do more.

The room over the arch

Cecil Marsh’s downstairs room contained a desk, three upright chairs and a set of shelves built along the wall. A brown overcoat hung on the back of the door. Watson could see a dull blue seam where the right sleeve folded back. She put her notebook on the desk, closed.

“Mrs Bellamy said you might have something that belongs to her.”

“What has she lost?”

“She can tell you herself.”

Mrs Bellamy stepped in. She had come without Penny. At her own request Lucas was waiting outside, close enough to come if called. She had told him the name of her son’s employer but asked him to keep it out of anybody else’s notebook while she was still trying to get the young man somewhere else to sleep.

“Why did you whistle Frank’s tune?” she asked.

Cecil touched the pocket of his waistcoat. “I whistle all sorts of things.”

“Then why in that coat?”

Cecil looked at the coat. “It was still on my peg when Hale died. He’d gone out in another jacket. Yes, I wore it. I thought you might bring me what he’d left if you thought he’d come back for it.”

“You could have asked.”

“I did write you a note.”

“You wrote it as if you were him.”

Cecil didn’t answer. Watson heard the latch move in the wind. Mrs Bellamy waited until it was quiet again before she asked her next question.

Mrs Bellamy looked round the room. “So you went in while I was out.”

“I wrote the note. I never went into your rooms.”

“You could have taken the frame as well,” she said. “I wouldn’t have had to look at it empty.”

“Did you think my son had kept a copy?” Mrs Bellamy asked.

“How would I know where to find him from a picture at a station?”

Watson opened her notebook. “Mrs Bellamy hasn’t told you the photograph was taken at a station.”

Cecil went to a drawer. He brought out two things: the photograph of the young man at the station and a sheet of writing paper, folded in three. The photograph had been put in a fresh envelope. The sheet was unmarked where the name Arden ought to have been.

“Where’s the envelope it came in?” Watson asked.

Cecil said he’d burnt it. Then he said the writing on the outside hadn’t been his. He talked for a while without either woman asking him another question.

The statement was signed Hale and dated two days before Mrs Bellamy found it in her letter box. She recognised the cramped signature from his alteration ticket. He’d written that Frank had been blamed for payments for stone never delivered and that his widow had a right to know who had used his initials. He gave a delivery docket number and the amount Cecil had entered against it. He admitted holding Frank on the loading stairs while Cecil tried to take the copied accounts off him. When Frank got free, Hale pushed him. The line for a witness’s signature was blank.

Watson put a finger beside the docket number. “Lucas can check this against the yard books,” she said. “And he’ll want to see that ticket.”

Mrs Bellamy read the sentence giving the time of the fall. Then she read it again. “He was already late,” she said. “I thought he’d stopped for a drink.”

Cecil looked towards the coat. “He should never have left this with you.”

“Frank was my husband,” she said. “Who else was going to ask?”

Watson pushed the folded paper back towards her. Mrs Bellamy put her photograph on top of it. She asked Watson to bring Lucas in.

The boy in the photograph

Lucas came in at Mrs Bellamy’s request. Cecil put Hale’s coat across the back of the empty chair. Until he did it, Watson hadn’t been conscious of keeping her eyes on the blue cuff. With the sleeve folded away, Cecil looked like the man who’d offered to carry a bag for her outside the village shop a fortnight earlier.

Lucas asked whether Mrs Bellamy would rather make her statement somewhere else. She looked at Cecil and said she would like to start here. She told Lucas about Hale, the envelope and the photograph. When he asked when she’d last seen Frank, she gave a date and then changed it by a day. Cecil started to correct her. Lucas told him he’d have a chance to make his own statement.

“Could I have a look at the back of the photograph?” Mrs Bellamy asked.

Watson turned it over. In addition to the address there was a date and a few words about how cold the station had been. Mrs Bellamy read them as though she’d forgotten what the boy looked like when he had cold hands.

“That’s why I thought you might have been going there,” she told Cecil.

He sat down for the first time. “I thought he might have kept a copy of what Frank took.”

“Did you think I’d send my son to work with a piece of stolen paper in his pocket?”

Cecil said nothing. It was odd, Watson thought, that he had been prepared to let Mrs Bellamy imagine any number of things about her son’s safety, and couldn’t bear to say out loud what he had wanted her to imagine.

When they left, Watson asked whether she wanted a lift to the station. Mrs Bellamy said her son would ring before he came for her. Watson went back with her and helped put the drawers in. They put the one with the red-headed pin in last, and Mrs Bellamy counted all the others out of the waistcoat. Someone would be coming to collect it on Saturday. She’d promised he could wear it to a christening and there was no reason now why he couldn’t.

What the name bought

They sat in the agency after dark. Mrs Bellamy had gone with her son to stay with his aunt. She'd given Lucas the statement and the photograph, because it had her son's address on the back in her own handwriting and she wanted there to be a record of what had been taken. She'd asked Watson to tell Penny she was grateful for the work. There was nothing for Penny in the wording beyond the words themselves.

"Did Cecil say when he decided to search her rooms?" Penny asked.

"After he got a telephone call. Somebody said she'd heard from us and meant to turn the papers over."

"Did he give you a name?"

"No. He said he'd known the voice for years."

Penny sat down.

"Lucas has his statement," Watson said. "Mrs Bellamy asked me to stay while she gave hers. I stayed."

Penny had expected to feel relieved when Mrs Bellamy knew what happened to Frank. She did, a little. The relief felt as if it belonged to somebody who'd worked in another room.

"Would you have listened if she'd asked for you?" Diana asked later, over the telephone.

Penny had rung to see about lunch and then found herself talking about the first interview. She had presented the

facts as a disagreement between two women both trying to help. Diana let her finish before she asked the question.

“Yes,” Penny said.

“Would you have given away her name?”

Penny looked towards the dark window. She’d meant to tell Diana about Arden. Instead she told her yes again.

“Come to lunch anyway,” Diana said. “We can talk about the things you did and the things I did. We don’t have to start with the ones we’re proud of.”

When Penny came back into the sitting room, Watson had opened the appointment book to a fresh page. Penny told her about the conversation with Edmund from the beginning, including the point at which he’d mentioned an envelope she hadn’t told him about. Watson asked if Penny would write it down.

“Are you going to send it to Lucas?”

“I’m going to keep it where we both can see it.”

Penny wrote it down. She signed the statement with the initial she usually avoided.

The gate

A man stood by the side gate after the lamps went on. He waited in a place that would have been hard to see from the sitting-room window. Once he took his hands out of

his pockets and flexed his fingers as if he'd been holding something cold.

Somebody came down the lane and stopped beside him. There was a quiet exchange. The waiting man looked at the house, then went away. The other person remained by the gate a moment and left in the opposite direction.

Penny was upstairs putting books away. When she brought the rubbish out later, she found she didn't have to lift the gate to make it shut. She swung it back and tried again. It went into the latch without touching the post.

She told Watson that Edmund had said he might come round but hadn't.

"What did he ask you?" Watson said.

"If I'd be here at closing."

"Is that what he said?"

Penny ran through it again. She could hear the tone in which he'd asked. It had been familiar enough for her to supply the rest of the conversation herself.

"He asked if I'd be alone."

"You weren't. I was upstairs."

Penny looked out at the gate. "I thought that was the same question."

Watson put the tea towel on its hook. "It isn't."

The last plate

An evening or two later they ate in the kitchen. Penny could hear the rain coming down the drainpipe. Watson had done the washing-up and was putting the plates away in the order she liked them, the chipped one underneath all the others. Penny always put the chipped one on top so it would be used up first. Neither of them had ever established what that meant.

“Leave it,” said Penny. “I’ll put it away.”

Watson took the last plate in both hands. “You’ll put it on top.”

Penny was beside the kitchen window. As she turned to answer, the air compressed against her cheek. The pane burst inward. Her chair caught behind her knees and tipped.

Watson heard a man cry “Wait!” from the garden.

Penny fell.

