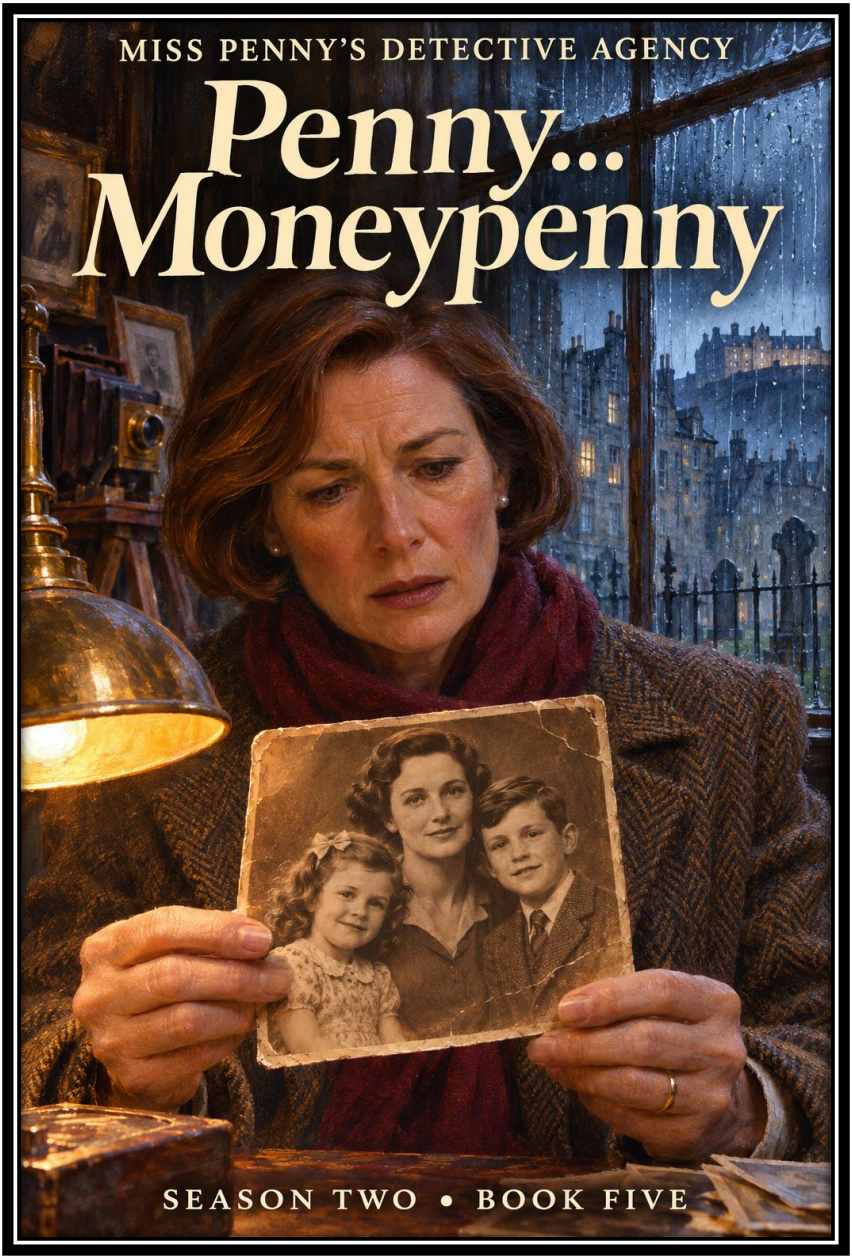

MISS PENNY'S DETECTIVE AGENCY
Penny... Moneypenny
SEASON TWO • BOOK FIVE

A Place to Wait

By the third morning after the police finished with the passage, Alec had put a new umbrella stand where the old one had been. It was a blue pot with a crack down one side. Jean said she'd give it a week. Nobody had put an umbrella in it yet.

Watson had stopped going to look when a chair scraped at the bottom of the stairs. Penny still liked to know who came in before breakfast. There were days when she knew before they spoke, from the way the draught moved the door against its catch. She couldn't have explained what she thought she'd do with the information.

Alec set her cup down. He had turned the handle toward her left hand.



“I never asked where you got that saucer,” she said.

“Which saucer?”

“The one that was on the wall with Sam's cup.”

“Probably from here. If you ever find out where the rest are, let me know.”

Penny had meant to ask about the dog. She hadn't told him there might have been a dog. She finished her tea and asked Watson if she'd like to walk as far as Greyfriars.

“Is this about the saucer?” Watson asked when they were out in the close.

“I thought it might be about what was drinking out of it.”

“That would be a pleasant change.”

Nobody was waiting in the shelter of the arch. They went up Candlemaker Row and through the kirkyard gate. Penny found the stone for Bobby and read enough of the inscription to think of the animal sitting through Edinburgh winters. She wouldn't have known what to do about it if she'd lived then. She thought she would have taken him indoors. He would almost certainly have got out again.

Watson heard her say, “There you are.” By the time she caught up, Penny was looking across a rather wet piece of grass at an empty path.

“Did you see the dog?”

“I saw something with a very definite idea where it was going.”

There was a shallow white saucer near the bench. An old man in a green coat sat with a paper bag on his knee. He was eating a roll he hadn't taken out of the paper, peeling the edge down a little at a time. He moved the bag to make room.

“Are you waiting for him?” Penny asked.

“If there's a dog, it'll be waiting for me to drop a bit of this.”

He didn't look down. Penny sat. She had spent several days wondering where to start looking for somebody who'd given her nothing but a flower and a house key. It was restful, for a moment, to be expected to say nothing.

The man finished his roll. He asked where she was staying. Penny told him, and he said he'd once had a back-door key for that pub when he was a policeman. People used to hand things in there when they'd found them after the police desk shut.

“Who do I thank for the seat?” she asked.

“Robert Lennox,” he said. “And you?”

“Penny.” Memories of the office came back to her in a rather foolish rush. “Moneypenny.”

He folded the bag across his knee. “Your mother called you Penny.”



A Man Who Remembered

Watson waited for Penny to decide what to say next. She had learned to wait quite well in the years they'd worked together. Nothing had prepared her for how long it might take to wait beside someone who had just been given her own name.

“Everybody did,” Penny said.

“Aye,” said Lennox. “She called him Jamie.”

Penny set both feet flat on the path. “Did you know my father?”

“Only the once. He was coming to see about a lock on a case. Your mother said he was an admiral. I thought she meant he told people what to do even when he was out of uniform. She said that was true as well.”

“Did she tell you who Jamie was?”

“She called him her son. I saw no reason to ask her if that was what she meant.”

Watson asked if he would tell them the years he was thinking of. He named a lodging house off the Grassmarket and a winter when the pipes had frozen. He couldn't give them the date. He had gone round to fetch the landlady's insurance papers after a break-in. Penny's mother had put the kettle on for him and apologised for making enough tea for two because nobody else could come downstairs without waking the children. The girl fell asleep on a chair while he waited. The boy took her shoes off and put them by the stove. One of them had an odd buckle. He remembered that because there was nothing he could do to get it through the strap in the morning.

Penny looked at her own shoes. She had always thought of her childhood as taking place on carpets

that one wasn't supposed to mark. She could remember sitting close enough to a stove to smell singed wool, but she'd never known where it had been.

“Did you come here hoping to meet me?” she asked.

“I come here on Fridays,” Lennox said. “I hoped to eat my roll.”

It was Friday. This was the sort of thing Watson could find out. She asked if he would be prepared to talk to Inspector Kerr. He said he had known her when she was a constable and would be happy to hear he'd remembered her correctly. Then he took a pencil from his inside pocket and gave them the name of the photographer. He wrote it small, so the scrap of paper left room for a second name and the address of the lodging house.

“What is that one?” Penny asked.

“Your mother's name before she married your father.”

Penny read it. Eleanor Grant. She knew both words. She had never seen them together.

Two Mounted Prints

The studio had sold cameras once. Its window now held a wedding photograph, three frames without

glass and a small notice promising to copy portraits of old people from even older photographs. Mrs Fraser, who ran it, had carried plates for her father as a teenager. She kept his negative books because people still came in who knew what they wanted and had no words for how they knew.

Watson asked for the name written on Lennox's scrap. Mrs Fraser didn't recognise it. She did recognise the address of the lodging house. Her father had taken a number of photographs there, most of them for people going abroad. At the back of the negative book an index was arranged by the places he went to, which told her why a mother and two children should be photographed against a background she'd never seen in the studio.

The print envelope said two copies. One was marked for Mrs Alice Penny, collected on a Saturday. The other was paid for and put aside for a son. In a narrower hand, under the second entry, someone had added a date from the previous week.

“Is that when he came?” Penny asked.

“It’s when I gave the print out.”

“Did he give a name?”

“He showed your order number. He asked whether the little girl had ever seen her copy.”

Penny was silent long enough for Mrs Fraser to think she wanted an answer. “I told him I didn't know,” she said.

“Would you have remembered him from before?”

“No. The gentleman I remember had wet cuffs and a dry hat. It can mean a great many things in Edinburgh.”

Penny asked if she could have a new print. Mrs Fraser said she could, if the negative still existed. The original instructions had been to cut away the sides so the picture would fit two mounts. The plate ought to show a bit more. That wouldn't tell them where Alice's print had been kept.

Penny knew where her aunt kept every family photograph she was willing to let visitors see. The ones that went on the piano got silver frames. The ones that could be brought out after dinner got pasted into a green album. There had also been two drawers nobody opened while her aunt was alive. After she died Penny had not looked in them for almost a year.

“Aunt Alice did collect it, then,” she said.

Mrs Fraser let her turn the book round. Under the date was a firm A and a P that looked as if it had never been written in a hurry. Penny couldn't think of the last time she had seen her aunt signing anything. She

remembered how she'd make her wait if she was going out and the ink was still wet.

The Papers at Home

The letter about Eleanor's death had come to Alice's house. Penny remembered the envelope. Thick, with a flap that never stuck down even on the day her aunt found it. She had brought it to Edinburgh without knowing why, inside an old dispatch case with her father’s letters. It took less than an hour to walk back to the Thistle and most of the afternoon to be ready to get it out.

Watson made herself useful checking the dates on the other letters. John Penny wrote home from ships in a hand Penny could read without wanting to know whether he meant what he said. He took it for granted she would tell him whose birthday parties she'd been to and which presents she hadn't cared for. He often asked Alice whether the girl had got her shoes wet. When Penny was small she'd thought sailors had deeper feelings about water than other people did.

The official letter gave a date. Thursday. It said Eleanor had died in the service of the Crown. It had no place in it and no account of what happened. Alice had underlined the words *in service*. The letter

appeared to have been sent several weeks after the date it gave.

There was a note tucked behind it. Alice had written: *If he asks, there is nothing here for him.* Penny didn't recognise the paper. She recognised the feeling it gave her. Her aunt could say a thing so hard that for years afterwards Penny would continue trying to find something kind she might have meant by it.

“Who is he?” Watson asked.

“It might have been anybody.”

“Would it make a difference if it was Jamie?”

“Yes,” Penny said. She felt it was the first easy question she'd had all day.

Watson lifted the letter to see if the note had made a mark on it. There was none she could see. They put both back on the table.

Downstairs Alec was unwrapping a parcel of glasses. He kept the paper flat before putting it away, so it wouldn't make a noise when the next person opened the drawer. Penny sat at the bar and told him she had found an old letter. She didn't say from whom it came.

“Did it tell you something you didn't know?” he asked.

“It told me what it didn't tell me the first time.”

He pushed a stray piece of paper out from beneath her cup. “I've had letters like that.”

She looked up. He was only watching her to see if she wanted anything to eat. At least, that was what she would have put in a statement.

Friday at Waverley

Lennox came to see them in the morning. He brought a pocket notebook with a torn cover and a tin of sweets from which they were all expected to help themselves. He had written down errands in the back. The entries ran from December to well into the spring. He showed Watson one for Tuesday, to take Mrs Penny to the station. She had told him she wanted to catch an early train south and asked that he wait outside. He never saw which platform she took.

“You called her Mrs Penny,” Watson said.

“By then she was.”

There was a Friday entry too. A single line with nothing against it but the time. He had promised to go back to the station and see if there was news. He went three more Fridays after that. The boy came with him.

Penny fetched the letter. Watson put it down beside the notebook with the dates showing. The date Eleanor died fell between the first two entries.

“Did she ask you to go back on the Friday?” Penny asked.

“She asked me to tell the boy if I heard anything. He wanted to go with me. I thought he might find it easier if he could ask somebody himself.”

“Who did he ask?”

“The man who took her case. The woman at the ticket window. A porter who said he had seen a woman get into a motorcar instead of getting on a train. He never said whether it was your mother and I had no idea who he meant. I tried to tell Jamie that. He was the kind of child who listened very carefully to the bit he needed.”

Watson let the last page lie open. She wanted to know whether anyone had seen Eleanor after that Tuesday. Lennox couldn't give her one person who claimed to have done so. The next week somebody asked him why he kept coming to the station. He said he used to work there. That wasn't his reason and he'd never regretted giving it until now.

“What did I do?” Penny asked.

Lennox looked down at the sweets before answering. “You made Alice promise she'd tell you if the telephone rang while you were asleep.”

Something came back to Penny with an exactness she wouldn't have trusted in somebody else's account. A telephone on a little side table with a gap in the wallpaper behind it. Her aunt telling her to go upstairs. The sound of a click that could have been a telephone settling on its base or a radiator cooling on

the other side of the wall. She had spent a great part of one evening listening for it to happen again.

“Somebody had to be there,” she said.

Lennox put the lid back on the tin. “Your brother wanted to know who was supposed to meet her at the other end. He always made it sound as if that person had a question of his own to answer.”

Penny had heard James ask a version of that question in the office more than once. Who was supposed to meet the train? Who had seen the man off? If a name was missing, he usually went to find it himself. He would tell her to go home while there was still time to catch a bus. Once she came in from the corridor and found him on the telephone, asking to be put through to her, though it was long past the time he’d told her to leave. She’d only gone to get a cup of tea.

“He knew I’d be at the desk,” she said.

Watson looked up. “Even before he asked you to stay?”

“I don’t think he ever asked.”

Watson put her hand on the date in the letter, covering it briefly. The old man offered them another sweet. He had brought three of the same kind because it kept anybody from having to make up their mind.

The Back of the Picture

Mrs Fraser telephoned in the afternoon. The negative was still in its envelope. She had made a full print as a favour to herself, because she could remember her father asking the children to move nearer their mother, and had spent years thinking he'd been talking about a different photograph.

Penny went to the studio with Watson. The young woman in the print had a catch in her smile, as though a laugh might still interrupt the photographer. The little girl had an odd buckle on one shoe. Her feet were braced against the floor. At the bottom, where the mounting guide would have cut the hands off, the boy was holding hers.

Watson saw it first. Penny tried to remember what profession had taught her to look at a picture from the outside in. She could usually tell herself exactly where her eye had gone first. This time it had gone straight to the face she'd never learned to recognise at that age.

Mrs Fraser gave them the envelope. Behind the negative was a piece of thin card that had been cut to fit the second mount. It was the small proof her father had sent out for approval. The full picture was on the front, faint but clear enough to show the children’s

hands. Eleanor had returned it with the order. There were four lines on the back.

Jamie, take Penny's hand. She'll tell you she isn't frightened. Take it anyway.

Love, Mum

Penny turned it over twice. There was a small dark dot where the pen had rested at the end of the instruction. She remembered that careful little pause at the end of a sentence in one of her father's letters, where Eleanor had added a few lines in her own hand. She would show it to Watson once she'd got home. She wanted for a moment to be able to recognise the handwriting all by herself.

“Could the man who took the other print have seen that?” Watson asked.

“He might have. I let him look inside the envelope before I took the plate away. He didn’t ask to take anything except the picture.”

“Did you see what he did with it?”

“He put it in a newspaper. He kept the picture flat on the counter until he had the paper open. Most people carry a photograph by one corner.”

Penny could see Dr Stocker setting a review copy of a book on his lap to bring it through the hall without

crushing it. She could see James feeding her report into an envelope without taking his eyes off a man standing in the doorway. There were a hundred people who might carry a photograph carefully. She didn't want to begin making one out of the hundred until she had something better to go on.

Mrs Fraser asked whether she would like the proof wrapped separately. Penny said she'd keep it against the photograph. She wanted it to go home the way it had been waiting.

What Alice Kept

Kerr took them seriously about Lennox and the photograph. She also asked whether Penny wanted any of it put in the report about Hale. Penny said she'd tell her if she found something that belonged there. Kerr said she would much rather hear that than have somebody give her a family story to make a report look complete.

She checked a date for Watson. The entry Kerr had found in an old departmental index had been made several weeks after the day it named. The notice to the family and the entry gave the same date. Neither named a place. She would have to ask elsewhere for the original return.

“Is there an original?” Penny asked.

“There ought to be something from which the entry was made.”

“The person who asked you for it before us, what did you tell him?”

“Nobody asked me for it before you.”

Penny put her gloves back on. Kerr had answered the question about herself, which was all Penny could have expected. She wished she knew whether she'd asked the question of the right woman.

Alice's green album was still in Guiting Power. Watson rang a neighbour who watered the plants and asked her to look inside the album for a picture of Eleanor and Penny. Penny said the neighbour could take out the loose page and send it to her whole. Penny sat for two days pretending she was only waiting to find out what the post would cost.

When it came, there was a photograph pasted to a square of black album paper. It showed Eleanor with Penny on her lap. Someone had cut away most of the boy, with the result that one of his shoes remained at the edge and no one had ever been obliged to explain it. The bit of his sleeve by Penny's shoulder had looked to her, growing up, like a shadow.

Her aunt had written the date underneath, and beneath the date in pencil, *Both were good.* She had meant to write more, or she had meant to rub it out. Penny could find no way of telling by looking harder.

“Is that the copy she collected?” Watson asked.

Penny laid the full image beside it. The tilt of her mother's head was the same. The little girl's foot was in the same place. There was a nick in the studio image which went across the bottom of the album copy too. She had owned part of the photograph for years.



She would have said she knew where her mother was sitting when it was taken. She could only have known where her aunt had stopped cutting.

“My father knew her name,” Penny said finally.

“I expect he did.”

“I mean Penny. He knew it was what she called me. I thought he’d made it up.”

Watson fetched two cups. She put one down in front of Penny without taking the photograph away. That was what Penny needed her to do, although she hadn't been able to put it into words.

The Address for Replies

Watson went to the lodging house with the address Lennox had written on the back of the photographer’s name. At the front door a woman was having a new pane of glass fitted. She told Watson the business had closed years before and she wished somebody would tell the people who wrote to it for rooms.

“What do you do with the letters?”

“Send them back if there’s an address. There must be a hundred people in the world who think I’ve got a spare bed.”

She was the old landlady’s niece. A few things from the business were still in a trunk upstairs. The niece brought down a bundle of bills kept together by a ribbon with the word Christmas printed on it. She said her aunt had never thrown out anything she might be asked to remember on oath. Receipts for repairs were

on the top. Under them, on the same wire, there were slips recording money the landlady had paid out on guests' behalf.

Watson found two railway fares on a slip for the week after Eleanor's departure. One had been paid for by Alice Penny. The other was marked *boy, to his uncle*. There was no surname. The niece asked if she was sure Penny was the name she wanted. There was a postcard in the trunk with that name on it.

It had been posted from a station. Alice wrote that the girl was safely with her. She asked the landlady to pass on any letter that came for the girl, and to forward anything for the boy to his father's family. Two addresses followed. There was no suggestion that either child had been told where the other was going.

"Would you like me to leave it with the other papers?" Watson asked when she showed Penny the copy.

"May I have it until tomorrow?"

Watson put it in her hand. Penny turned it over. The picture was of an empty beach with three deckchairs facing the sea. She remembered Alice keeping a postcard of a beach in the kitchen because somebody had once asked what it would cost to go there.

“She could have told me,” Penny said.

“Yes.”

“She could have told me when I was twenty.”

Watson waited.

“I used to think she had a great deal of courage,” Penny said.

“She may have had.”

Penny folded the copy across the picture. She felt as if she had found something she could put in her aunt’s charge at last, after a great many years of trying to give it back to herself. She wondered whether she would ever be able to put it down.

At Kerr's suggestion they sent one inquiry to the address for the boy. The present owners had a photograph of the family who had lived there before them, printed on a card advertising a farm sale. They could say nothing of a child. Kerr said she would try to find out where the records of the sale had gone. Penny thanked her and asked her to stop if she found anybody who still lived there and wanted to be left alone.

“Do you want to be left alone?” Kerr asked.

“Some days,” Penny said.

She took the card back to the Thistle. Alec had moved the blue pot out of the passage because somebody had at last put an umbrella in it and it had begun to drip. He fetched a plate to put underneath it. Penny watched him wipe the floor where it had been.

“Have you found him?” he asked.

“I found out where he went when he was a boy.”

Alec put the plate down. “That’s a long way to have come.”

“It’s a long way for him to have gone.”

He let her go upstairs without answering. She had been waiting all afternoon for somebody to do that.

Another Letter

Lennox came to the Thistle to collect his notebook. He said the girl from the studio had told him about the photograph. Penny showed him both copies. He looked at the one her aunt had cut before looking at the other. Then he put on his glasses and made her show them to him again.

“Did James ever thank you?” Penny asked.

“He went with me on Fridays. At the time I thought that was more use.”

“Did she laugh much?”

Lennox took the glasses off. “At an inquest, once. She had been asked if she could manage a straight answer. She said she could if they'd stop giving her crooked questions.”

It struck Penny that she would have liked to be in a room with her mother on an ordinary day, while somebody waited for a door to open and nothing whatever depended on which person opened it. She tried to put that into a question. What came out was, “Did she take sugar?”

“Only when she thought the tea was going to be bad.”

At the bar Alec waited until Lennox had gone before asking if Penny wanted another. She said yes and let

him put the sugar down where she could reach it. It was several minutes before she touched it.

In the room upstairs, she found the letter she'd written after James left. She could still read it without regretting the last line. On a fresh sheet she wrote a much shorter one.

Dear Jamie,

Would you tell me what you talked about on the Fridays at Waverley?

She signed it Penny. She laid the folded letter in front of the lamp next to the old one, just as Watson came in and asked if she had an address. Penny said she had the studio's. Mrs Fraser had offered to leave a letter with the order book in case the man came back. That was where Penny meant to send it.

“Would you like me to take it to the post?”

“I'd like to come with you.”

Watson found her coat. Penny put the new letter in her handbag and left the first on the shelf beside the thistle. When Penny came back to the room that evening there was no answer. Watson had gone to ask Jean for another towel. She hadn't expected one. Mrs Fraser had given her a standing frame from the shop. Penny set it against the lamp and turned it so she could see both children.

There was a sound in the close, like a small animal waiting to be let in. Penny stayed where she was long enough to hear it again. Then she put the kettle on. There was every likelihood Watson would be back before it boiled.

