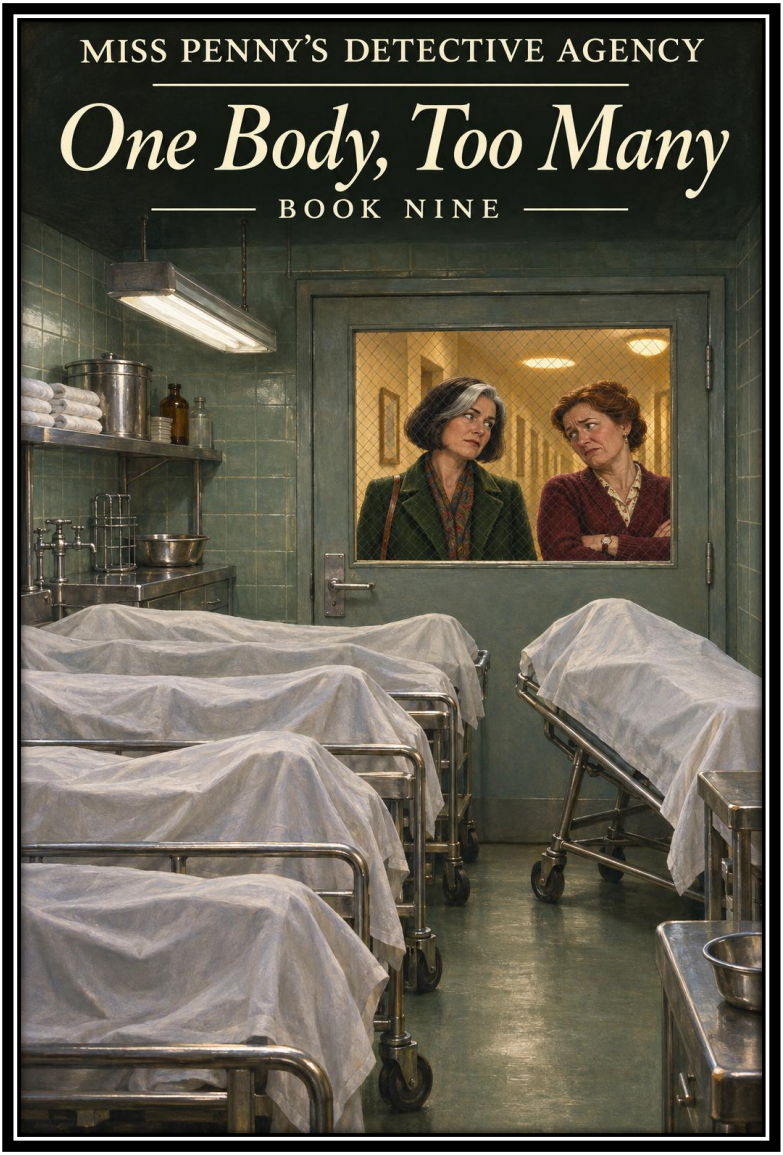


Lumen with Chip Cook

One Body, Too Many

BOOK 9

The Parish Boundary

The extra trolley stood across the end of the row. Through the mortuary window Watson could see that anyone who wanted to get past it would have to wheel it out into the corridor. Penny caught her eye. Both women shook their heads.

"Are those all from around here?" Watson asked.

"From all over the district," said Lucas. "Most of them are waiting for the undertaker. The one we came about is still waiting for a name."

Watson looked back through the glass. Until Lucas spoke she'd been counting the sheets.

Lucas asked them to wait while the attendant fetched a property envelope. Someone was expected at eleven to look at a coat. The attendant had arranged the coat on a chair in the relatives' room and turned the chair so that its back faced the door. No one would have to see it before saying they were ready.

"Where was he found?" Penny asked.

“By the old county road, this side of the boundary. A walker saw him from the stile.” Lucas opened the envelope on a cleared table. “Your number was in his pocket.”

On the back of a return bus ticket somebody had written the agency's telephone number. Underneath were a capital P and the word THURS. There was a slash through the seven. The ticket had been torn at the fold, as if it had spent a good while inside something smaller than itself.

“Did he ring?” Lucas asked.

“I don't remember anyone who mentioned the road,” Watson said. “That's all I can say.”

Penny tried to pick up the ticket before she remembered it was under a clear sleeve. She drew her hand back. Watson watched her button her coat, miss the second buttonhole, and start again.

A woman came in carrying a clean shirt in a supermarket bag. She was younger than Watson had expected relatives to be. The attendant showed her into the room, leaving the door ajar. A moment later they heard her say, with evident relief, “His was brown.” Then she asked if she should leave the shirt for the other man's family.

The attendant took her back out through the public entrance. Lucas slipped the ticket into its envelope.

“People will hear your number was on him,” he said. “I wanted you to hear it from me first.”

Outside, Watson waited for Penny to catch up. Since the hospital Penny could manage the length of the green, provided nobody made a fuss when she stopped. This morning she stopped at the corner of the building and watched a laundry van trying to reverse. Watson had begun to recognise the things Penny chose to stand and look at.

“You can go ahead,” Penny said.

“I can also stand here. He's going to hit that post.”

The driver got out, looked at the post and moved it. It was a traffic cone with a stone inside. They laughed, although neither of them had found the morning funny.

On the way out, Watson asked Lucas how many murders Guiting Power had had before the agency opened. He said he’d need to know how far back she meant and what she counted as Guiting Power.

“That’s exactly what I’m asking you.”

“One of yours was recovered downstream. Another was in a stolen car. A body tells you where somebody ended up. Sometimes that’s all it tells you.”

The Spare Key

Watson had taken the spare key off its hook in the cottage kitchen after Marian Bell disappeared. The key was only useful to someone who already knew where to look for it. Watson used to think she knew who that meant.

Penny had asked for her old brown mug when she came home from hospital. Watson had taken that to mean she never wanted to see blue china again. On Monday, Penny had brought a blue saucer home from the shop because the woman selling it couldn't find its cup and was going to throw it away.

“I keep trying to find the first thing I should have noticed,” Watson said. “The biscuits. Her teeth. The telephone.”

“Which telephone?”

“Both of them. The man pretending to be Peter and the call she said came from Ellen.”

Penny took the saucer down and put it on the table. “I was listening to somebody use Peter's name. You were listening to someone you'd had tea with for weeks. I know which of us had the easier decision.”

Watson had brought home a copy of the cancelled hall booking she had traced through Marian's hospital card. She had looked at the signature until she could

have drawn it from memory. What she knew of the signer amounted to a surname she could not verify and the fact that a man had come to the hall to reclaim the deposit. Ellen thought she'd remember his face if he walked in. She could only describe his hat.

The note on the dead man's ticket made Watson want to lay the two papers side by side. She fetched a fresh sheet of paper instead. At the top she wrote the mortuary reference Lucas had given them and beneath that, in small letters, the exact wording on the ticket. She left space for who had put it there.

Penny looked over her shoulder. “You've put a space in for when.”

“The ticket was issued three weeks ago, on a Thursday. The writing could be from yesterday.”

“Then put three weeks ago down for the ticket. That's a date you've got.”

Watson wrote it in. There were days when working together felt entirely ordinary. She had missed it badly enough to tell Penny so, until she saw Penny had taken the kettle to the sink and was lifting it with both hands. She went over and took it by the handle. Penny let her.

Lucas let Watson use a map from the station, on condition that she draw on a copy. A retired constable named Mr Price lent her the parish incident book he

had kept as a volunteer after leaving the force. He told her where its gaps were before he let her look. Two winters were missing altogether. In the fifteen years he could account for, he could name one suspicious death, and that had turned out to be a man who had fallen off a ladder alone.

“One report you can remember in fifteen years,” Watson said.

“And that leaves the years I can’t account for,” said Mr Price. “You want a better number, ask someone who counted at the time.”

She wrote down the years the book covered and marked the gaps. It was enough to ask Lucas for the district figures, if he could get them.

Fifteen Winters

Mr Price sent a note round after supper. He had found a duplicate page which might belong to one of the missing winters. It had two items on it, a chimney fire and a bicycle leaning against the church wall for six days. Watson went back to see him the following morning.

“How did you decide what went in?” she asked.

“People told me things. I wrote down what I thought somebody might come back and ask about.”

He showed her the entry for the man on the ladder. The first report said a passer-by had found him. Six weeks later Mr Price had added that the police had been satisfied it was a fall. The second sentence took up most of the margin.

“Would you have written that if his daughter hadn't been working at the post office?”

“I'd like to say I would.” He took off his glasses. “She asked me whether I'd put it right. It had got round that the man who found him had pushed him.”

“Did anybody tell the man who found him?”

Mr Price thought about it. “I expect we all thought somebody else would.”

Lucas came to the agency that evening with two pages from the district office. The first covered recorded homicides by reporting year. The second gave the locations he could establish from the files. Watson counted a line twice before he showed her the amended entry. It was the same death, reclassified and carried forward with a different date.

Numbers were easiest when you could see what had been counted. Years with a blank against them were another matter. The district sheets were complete for the period Lucas had asked for, and showed no recorded homicide allocated to the parish in those years. The district had several. One body on the district list had been recovered miles from where the victim was last seen. The town of recovery had come first on the clerk's sheet.

“What do we put down for the last twelve months?” Watson asked.

“The same questions I asked about the old ones. Where did it happen? When? What can we say it was?”

She pulled the copy of the parish map toward her and removed two of her crosses. One had been well outside the boundary. The other had been made for the unknown man in the boot, and she had put it on the lane where the car was found. She wrote that

location on a separate sheet. The new dead man went on a third sheet, headed with his mortuary number. The line for cause was empty.

“So it is a quiet village,” Penny said.

“It was a quiet village in the years we can account for,” Watson said. “I suppose I ought to find out why I'm counting from the day we put up the sign.”

“Because that's the day we put up the sign.”

Watson saw that Penny had understood the objection before she had. From that day forward, people had brought them cases they would once have taken elsewhere. There might be something unusual in the numbers, but an address that collected stories of trouble was bound to look like a place where trouble happened.

She asked Lucas if she might see the dead man's other possessions. He said he would ask what could be shown.

“The village isn’t the thing these deaths have in common,” she said. “Our list starts with people we’ve crossed paths with.”

Penny sat down. “We are.”

Watson made a second list. She put every date in twice, once for the first time anyone remembered seeing the person and once for the first time they

could be certain of it. The dates drifted apart on paper. The man in the boot had no name. There was a date for his death, within limits, and a date for Watson’s sighting at the bakery, if it had been him. She left the question mark there.

By afternoon it was the blank places that bothered her most. She thought she might have started with the wrong event.

A Man Who Mended Things

Lucas telephoned before breakfast. The mortuary attendant had found an alteration inside the dead man's coat. Where the lining was usually closed, someone had put a strip of cloth stamped with the name of a bus company. A tailor might have used any old offcut, but the bus ticket had come from the same company.

Watson took the morning service, which left her at the depot with an hour before the next bus home. She showed the company name to the woman at the counter and asked if anyone there did alterations.

“Try Mr Shaw's daughter. She turns up trousers for half the drivers.”

Mr Shaw's daughter was called Ruth. She worked in the depot canteen and was taking orders through a hatch. Watson waited until the rush of drivers had gone. Behind Ruth's head there was a shelf of cups with names written on them in different inks. Somebody had drawn a black line through one name and Ruth had written it back above the line.

“Would you put this sort of tape in a coat?” Watson asked.

Ruth held the photograph close. “I've never used it. My dad cuffs his sleeves with it. Says if a thing's still

good enough to have a name on it, it's good enough to wear."



The canteen was silent except for a kettle. Watson could see the moment Ruth decided she was going to ask the question.

"Where did you get that picture?"

Watson asked her to sit down. She told her only what Lucas had authorised her to say, and gave her his number. Ruth listened without looking away. Then she took the photograph back and pointed to the end of the tape. It was folded into a little point. Her father did the same to the tabs on the tea towels so he could get them back on the hooks.

"Did you know him?" she asked.

“I'm trying to find out if he knew us.”

Ruth put the photograph down carefully. “I can tell you who knew him. He kept everybody's broken clocks.”

Ruth’s recognition of the stitching gave the police a name to check. By afternoon she had supplied a dental practice and the address of a rented room. The following day the police confirmed the identification by comparing his teeth with his dental records. The man across the end of the row was Peter Shaw, sixty-three, a former depot fitter. The cause of death remained under inquiry. Watson put his name on the sheet and drew a line through the reference number she had been using in its place. She could still read it underneath.

Penny asked whether Ruth had seen her father with Marian. Watson said she hadn't shown Ruth the hospital card.

“Why?”

“Because there was a minute when she thought he'd just bought a different coat. I wanted her to have that minute.”

Penny took the case sheet and put it back in the folder. Then she wrote Ruth's number in the address book at the place where they kept ordinary numbers, between a plumber and Rose Vale.

Before Rose

Rose Vale kept the receipt for her first appointment in the same envelope as the supper photograph. She gave Watson the date without asking why. Then she asked whether Watson wanted to come in and see Helen, who was staying for a few days and teaching Rose to play one piece all the way through.

Watson listened to the two of them at the piano. They went back to the second bar three times. Rose made exactly the same mistake each time and laughed more on the third.

“Does anybody ever get it right just because you tell them?” Watson asked Helen when they were done.

“No. But they sometimes hear it for themselves.”

With Rose’s date written down, Watson tried the village hall again. They had been clearing out that cupboard for months. In the carbon copy of a different booking form, filed behind the one Marian had numbered, she found a question written along the edge. It referred to the cottage across the green. The person who wrote it wanted to know whether Miss Penny was generally at home on Thursdays.

Ellen knew the handwriting. It was her own. A caller had asked on two successive days and she’d written the question down the second time because she didn’t

want to keep answering it. No name had been given. She remembered the form it was written on because the booking had been cancelled when a pipe burst. The entry could be dated from the plumber's bill.

The call came a month before Rose's first appointment.

"Did you tell him?" Watson asked.

"No. I asked his name. He hung up."

Watson copied the words and the plumber's date. She left the original with Ellen.



The Other Copy

Penny came over to the hall while Watson was putting the file back. The cancelled booking tipped forward in Watson's hand. On the next slip there were two staple holes, the upper one torn to the edge. They were in exactly the same place as the holes in the carbon she had copied.

"What was fastened here?"

"Oh, the shop would put a notice up for us if there was a room to let. We used to staple the notice to our slip so we'd remember to take it down."

The shopkeeper, Jean, had known Shaw from his days on the buses. When the village hall clock lost half an hour overnight, she had given him the job of putting it right. Watson remembered Ruth saying he kept everybody's broken clocks, and asked how people got hold of him.

"Usually they left a message here. The call was cheaper than getting up from the chair, apparently."

As Jean checked her old message pad, Watson turned the ticket over in her mind. There was nothing on it that said the number belonged to the person who had written it down. A bus ticket also made a decent scrap of paper to hand someone.

Jean found Shaw's entry by looking for the clock, whose invoice had been paid out of the shop's petty cash. The desk pad had a carbon leaf under each detachable message. On Thursday the 12th, at nine in the morning, a caller had asked that Shaw be sent to look at a clock at Miss Penny's. The agency number had been left so he could ring ahead.

Penny had never asked anyone to repair a clock. She did like the electric clock in the agency sitting room set five minutes slow. Watson had set it herself, and it was still working. That was the sitting-room clock. The kitchen clock that had been four minutes slow on the day Penny was poisoned was a separate one.

“Did he go?” Watson asked.

“He came for the message. I saw him take it away. Don't think I saw him after that.”

The agency number was written in Jean's round hand in the duplicate. The seven had a stroke through it. Watson asked if Lucas could speak to her. When he came, Jean said she had no idea whether the request was from a man or a woman. It had been busy and she knew which message she meant only because she had written Shaw's name across both sheets.

Lucas took a statement. At the door he said, “If the ticket was copied from this, Shaw could have written it himself. He might have tried to save a scrap of

paper before catching his bus. Someone wanted him to get your number. We can check what he did with it. That's a different question from who put him by the road."

The depot timekeeper remembered Shaw catching the 5:20 bus into Guiting Power that same Thursday. She could place him boarding at the depot. She couldn't say where he got off. Ruth gave Lucas the addresses of his regular customers. The list took up two sides of a page.

Watson went home with copies of both messages, one made months before Shaw's death, one on the day he was last seen. Two different women had heard the calls. Both had written down what they were asked. It was possible that the first caller wanted to speak to Penny and the second had simply given a wrong number. A wrong number seldom came with the right name and the right day of the week.

She put the copies under separate clips. Somewhere between the two dates there might be a third person who had heard something and thought it too ordinary to mention.

The Last Stop

Lucas met Watson at the lay-by where the bus dropped passengers for the old county road. The shelter had once had a timetable behind glass. In its place was a clean rectangle on otherwise dirty plywood. From here Watson could see the top of the stile. The footpath beyond it disappeared under trees.

The district file gave the walker's time as twenty past eight on Friday the 13th, the morning after Shaw took the bus. Watson had been treating that as if it were an appointment the dead man had kept. She copied the words "body discovered" onto her sheet and drew a box around them.

"Does the driver remember him?" she asked.

"Better than that, he remembers talking to him. Shaw got off at the far end of the green at about 5:40 on Thursday. He was going to make a telephone call. The driver told him the box there was out of order."

"Then why would he get off?"

"Because, according to the driver, he said somebody was meeting him."

Watson looked down the county road. It was the way she would have walked if the person who was meeting her hadn't come. It was also the way she

would have walked if the person had come and she had changed her mind.

“Can't we find out what he said at the stop?” she asked.

“We've found out exactly what the driver remembers him saying.”

On the other side of the road a van came out of a turning she had taken for a field entrance. She watched it go past. On the map the turning was marked as a footpath, but there was a row of council garages behind the hedge. From the stile you could see all the way to them. From the road it looked as if the hedge ran unbroken.

Mrs Orme, who used one of the garages, was willing to talk. She had taken her grandson home that Thursday, having promised he could sit in the driver's seat while she shut the garage doors. She remembered another man standing near the end of the lane but could only say that he was carrying something about the size of a child's lunch tin. Shaw might have carried tools in such a tin. So might half the men who rented the garages.

“You’ll want to ask who was actually using them,” Mrs Orme said. “My husband’s name is on ours, and he hardly ever comes down.”

Lucas asked if she had seen a car stop. She thought she had. When he asked about the colour she looked at Watson and asked what colour they were looking for.

Watson closed her notebook. “What can you see if you picture the boy waiting for you?”

Mrs Orme considered. “I can see his hand on the horn. I was hoping he wouldn't sound it.”

“Can you still see the car?”

“No,” Mrs Orme said. “I think my husband told me about the car. He wasn't there either.”

At the cottage Watson took the report of the car out of her notes. Then she put it back with a line through it. If she left it out completely, she might ask the same question of the next person and feel twice as sure when she got the same answer.

She left the question of a meeting open. There was a man alive and speaking on Thursday and a body found on Friday, and nothing in between she would have felt easy repeating to Ruth.

Behind the desk Penny was making a list of the things Shaw had left at the depot. Ruth had asked if he might have left something belonging to a customer. Penny read out six clocks, including one small brass carriage clock with a cracked face.

“Did any of them belong to you?” Watson asked.

“No. I can say that about the clocks.”

“And about the man?”

Penny folded Ruth's list along its original crease. “About the man I can say I wish I'd met him.”

Watson could imagine him listening to their clock, which ran to its own idea of time because Penny asked it to. She turned over her notebook and wrote down the dates the two separate calls had been taken. It was something she could check, even if the witnesses never remembered another word.

The Shop Bell

That afternoon a man named Arthur Cade stopped in to ask whether anybody recognised the photographs he’d been sent. Len Cade had died years before, in another county. Arthur had been telling the police for a week that someone had posted him an envelope of old photographs, all belonging to Len, without any explanation. He wanted to know who had kept them.

Penny asked why he had brought the envelope to them.

“Because that’s where it came from.”

It bore the agency address on the back. The handwriting was too neat. Penny kept thinking of labels she had made herself when she was trying to imitate a typewriter. Watson thought of the hospital card Marian had left and slipped the envelope into her folder before she had asked the obvious question. Did Arthur recognise anyone else in the pictures? He said he recognised the churchyard behind his brother.

Jean remembered selling a stamp of that design to a young woman who'd asked the way to the church. The stamp proved little on its own, but Arthur remembered Len's daughter had been to the grave a fortnight before. He hadn't seen her since his brother died.

Penny found the daughter by asking Arthur for her name and looking in the directory. She remembered coming to the shop. She admitted sending the photographs because she thought Arthur might burn them if he knew they came from her. She'd put the agency's address on the back because she remembered passing the sign and thought it sounded official.

"Did you want an official answer?" Penny asked.

"I wanted him to keep the photographs."

Arthur had already put them into an album. When he and his niece came to collect the envelope, he asked if

she could tell him who was standing beside Len in one of them. She could. It was herself, with her hair cut short. Neither asked Penny to stay for the rest.

A Thursday Without Visitors

Watson called Ruth to tell her what they had found. She heard the sound of the canteen hatch closing at the other end.

“Was he doing you a favour?” Ruth asked.

“He was asked to. We didn't send the message.”

Ruth was quiet for long enough that Watson checked the receiver was still connected. Then she said her father had once taken a clock apart for a man who couldn't afford to have it put together. He had gone back a week later and done the second half for nothing. She wished somebody had given him a chance to tell them why he was going out.

Watson asked if there was somebody who could be with her that afternoon. Ruth said there was, and asked whether the person who had asked for her father could have known he would always go. Watson said she thought they might have.

The next Thursday Penny left the cottage at her usual time, taking books to Rose. The caller had asked about Penny’s Thursday routine before the mill inquiry, and Shaw had been sent to the cottage on a Thursday much later. Watson wanted to see whether there was something quite ordinary about that morning that made it worth asking about: who opened

up, who came to the gate, and what they could see from it. She watched for an hour. From the front room she could only see the front gate.

Mr Price passed twice. On the second occasion he stopped to bring in their dustbin. Watson went out to thank him and found he was holding an envelope addressed to the people who lived two doors down. The postman had given it to him when he enquired about a television licence. There was a surprisingly large amount of other people's business everybody knew around the green. The difficulty was deciding which bits belonged to you.

She asked Mr Price whether Shaw had ever visited him. He said he thought he had, then went away to look. Half an hour later he returned with a receipt for a clock repair. The date was two years old. He had first remembered it as recent because he still wound the clock every Sunday.

Watson invited him in. She showed him her columns and asked him where he would have put the dead man on the map. He adjusted his glasses and turned the page almost upside down.

“I'd have put him where he was found,” he said. “Until his daughter came in. Then I'd have wanted to rub out that cross and put one where he'd lived.”

Watson thought about Ruth's first question. She had wanted to know if her father had been doing a favour, as if knowing how he came to leave the depot might make it possible to bear where he'd ended up. Watson could give her that much. It was the only answer she could give her yet.

By the time Penny came home, Watson had telephoned Lucas once more. He was going to take another look at the places Shaw might have been heading. Watson asked whether anyone using the garages could see the stile from where they parked. Lucas said he'd ask. Watson put the receiver down and heard a cup rattle against its saucer behind her.

"It's just me," Penny said.

Watson turned. Penny had put both cups on the table where Watson could see them. She was waiting to fill them.

Two days later Lucas rang. One of the tenants had lent her garage to her brother while his van was being repaired. His name hadn't been on the list. He'd been loading the van on Thursday evening when he saw a man with a small metal case put a foot on the stile. The tread gave under him. The man fell on the far side of the hedge. The witness heard him swear and saw a hand come briefly above the bank. He thought the man was getting up. Ever since Lucas had asked

about the stile, he'd been wondering why he hadn't gone over to check.

The brother showed Lucas where he'd been standing. From there he could see the top of the stile, but a bank hid the ground where Shaw had landed. The broken tread had slid beneath the bank. On the first search the police hadn't seen it or Shaw's tool case, which had caught under the brambles. Once the brother showed them where the man had fallen, they found both. The pathologist said the head injury was consistent with the fall the man described. Lucas had evidence for an accident now, and a witness who had seen Shaw reach the stile on his own. He still couldn't tell Watson who Shaw thought he was meeting or who had called the shop.

Watson went to see Ruth with Lucas. After he'd told her what they could establish, Ruth asked to be shown the case. She ran her thumb over a dent in the lid. She'd dropped it herself, years before, when her father let her carry it home. "So he did take his tools," she said. Watson heard what she'd been waiting to know. Her father had gone to the village because somebody had asked him for help.

The Extra Mark

Watson cleared Arthur's envelope off the map. She'd filed it with Shaw's papers because both had brought the agency's address into something she couldn't explain. Arthur's niece knew no one at the agency. She'd simply wanted her uncle to open the envelope. Watson took the photographs off her list and left the false repair call where it was.

Penny put the copy of Ellen's note beside the dates for the mill. "This one still stands."

"Someone wanted to know when you were at home," Watson said. "What did they think you had?"

"You're assuming they wanted something."

"People tend to."

Penny went to her desk and found a photograph of herself and Diana at a bookstall. It had been taken in public. On the back she had written nothing. Her private memories of Diana took up less space in the cottage than this one photograph. She wondered how much room they took up somewhere else.

On the back of her copy of Jean's message, Watson wrote Peter Shaw's name in full. In the file for Marian Bell she added a note about the clock, with the date, and copied in the mortuary reference. She left the line for the caller empty in both places.

“Would you tell me if you remembered what you were doing on those early Thursdays?” she asked.

Penny kept the photograph in her hand. “I think I can tell you where I was on one of them. I'd have to ask somebody about the others.”

Watson waited. Penny bent the photograph slightly between her fingers and then set it flat. Watson had met women who paused like that before giving her a name. She moved the kettle nearer Penny's elbow so Penny could choose whether to reach for it.

Watson turned the map over. With the marks face down, it stopped looking like evidence of one thing. She laid Ellen's note on the clean side.

"I can prove somebody was asking about you before we'd heard of the mill," she said. "I can work with that."

Penny went back to the kettle. This time Watson brought her cup with her.

