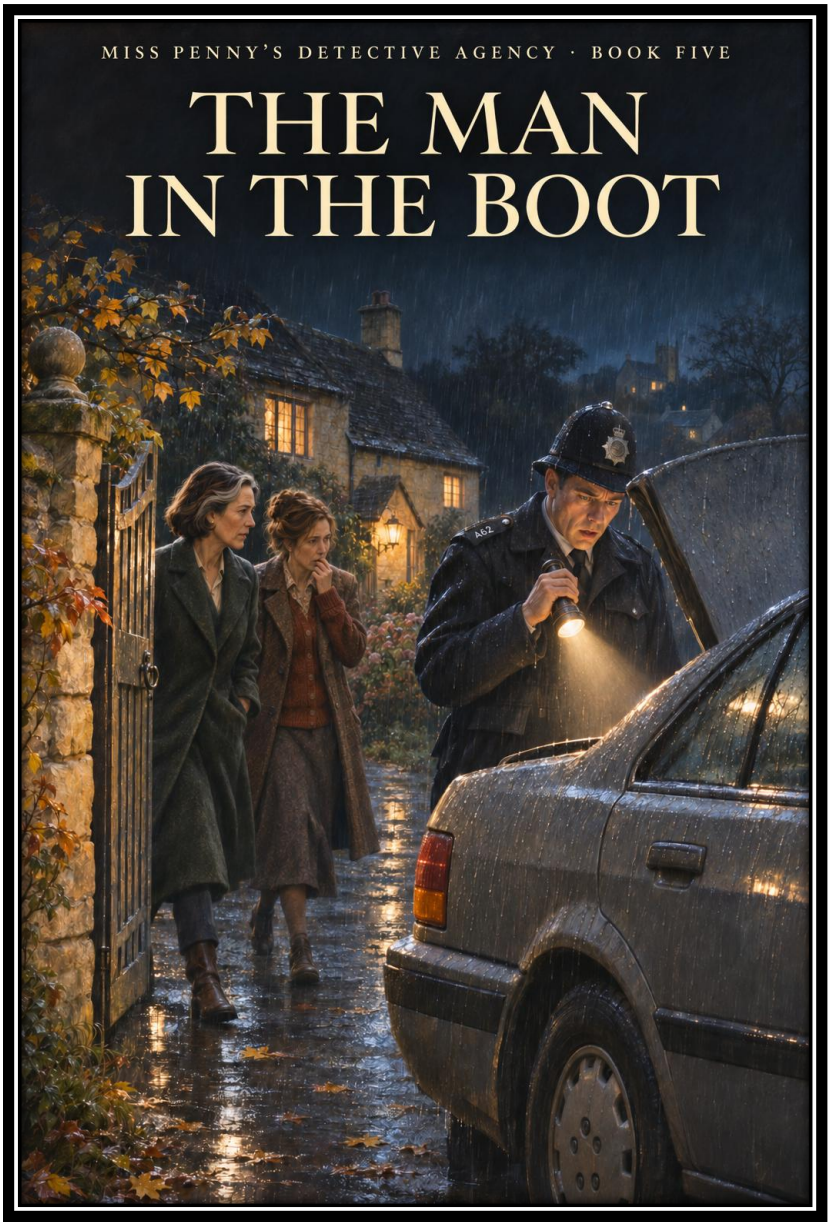

MISS PENNY'S DETECTIVE AGENCY · BOOK FIVE
THE MAN IN THE BOOT

The plate

Watson put the plate down. She placed it on the table with both hands, gently enough that the sound it made was like nothing at all.

“Penny?”

“Here.”

The voice came from the floor on the far side of the fallen chair. Watson went round the table. Penny was trying to sit up. One leg of the chair lay across her skirt.

“Were you hit?”

“I don’t think so.”

Watson knelt. She looked at Penny’s face first and then at her shoulders and hands. There was dust on one sleeve and a splinter of wood caught in the cloth. Penny’s cheek had begun to redden where she had put her hand against it. There was no blood.

“I felt it go past,” Penny said.

The piece of wood had come from the doorframe, behind where her head had been. Watson looked at the splinter in Penny’s sleeve and drew her hand back before she touched it.

“Stay here,” she said. “I’m ringing Lucas.”

She went to the telephone in the hall and dialled the police. When she came back Penny was still there. The chair had been moved far enough for her to stand. She had chosen to sit on the floor instead.

Through the broken window came the sound of water running down the drainpipe. There was no other voice from the garden. They waited until they heard Lucas call to them from the side of the house.

The boot

The gate was shut. Watson had left it open when she brought the shopping in. One of its bolts had been replaced the previous week. Since then it had closed cleanly, so that a person standing in the kitchen might have expected to hear it latch and heard nothing.

The grey saloon stood outside on the lane. Its lights were off. There was a strip of trim missing above the rear wheel. Lucas went round the driver's side and shone his torch through the glass. A second officer asked the women to stay by the gate. At first they did.

"Anybody in it?" asked Watson.

Lucas shook his head. He went round to the rear. For a moment they could see only the back of his neck. Then the boot lid went up. In the light from the torch his face seemed to change before it had moved at all.

Watson took two steps down the lane. Penny came as far as the gatepost.

“What is it?” she asked.

“A man,” said Lucas. “He’s dead.”

He asked the other officer to keep the lane clear, then looked back towards the kitchen. He’d noticed the glass as he came up the path. Now he wanted to know what they’d heard after it broke.

“One word,” Watson said. “Wait.”

“Whose voice?”

“I couldn’t place it.”

Lucas glanced down at the man in the boot. The way his head lay against the side made him think his neck was broken. He left the lid open and his torch turned away while he called it in.

Penny looked along the lane towards the green. The man in the garden had called out as though he expected somebody to stop. She tried to put herself back in the kitchen and listen to the word again. She discovered that she could not do it without feeling the air move against her cheek.

The quiet village

They spent what remained of the night upstairs at a neighbour’s. The woman gave Watson a bedspread to put round Penny and brought both of them a hot-water bottle, though only one of hers had a stopper. She asked them which of them was most likely to talk and put Watson nearest the bedroom door.

In the morning Watson found Penny making toast in the neighbour's kitchen. The bread was burning on one side. Penny was watching the other side as though it might improve.

"So much for retiring to a quiet little village where nothing ever happens," said Watson.

Penny took the bread off the grill. It broke when she put it down. "I was promised reasonable rent. The rest I may have supplied myself."

Watson had gone into the bakery for a loaf the week before. A man had come out as she went in and held the door for her. She might not have remembered him if Penny hadn't told her later that a stranger had asked about her walk home.

There was a knock. Lucas was at the back door with a folder under his arm. He had a photograph of the dead man and wanted to know whether either of them had seen him before.

Watson studied it for a long time.

"At the bakery," she said. "He was coming out as I went in. I thought about him when Penny told me what the baker said, but I couldn't be sure it was the same man."

"Can you be sure?"

"I can be sure I saw that face coming out of the shop. I can't tell you what he said inside it."

Lucas wrote that down. The baker had remembered the question about Penny's walk home and had been unable

to remember his face well enough to pick it out. There would be no point putting what one woman knew into the other woman's head.

"Do you think he fired the shot?" Penny asked.

"I think somebody tried to kill you," Lucas said. "The man at the bakery was asking about you. Watson recognises the face, but I can't yet tell you who fired or how he got into that car."

He left them with a number to ring. When he was gone, Watson pushed the good side of the toast towards Penny. Penny turned the plate so they each had half of it.

A car called a nuisance

Mrs Ivy Pritchard came to see them two days later. She was tall and moved very carefully round the glass the police had missed under the kitchen dresser. At the agency door she'd been asked by a neighbour whether she was a witness and had said she was the owner of a nuisance.

"The grey car," she explained.

Her husband had used it to take her shopping. After he died she'd put a cushion on the driving seat so she could see over the wheel. She'd never quite grown to like it, but she'd intended to sell it herself. It had gone to a garage for repairs in October. She'd been staying with her sister while the work was done. When she came home the garage said it had been collected. She reported it stolen.

“Lucas says I’m to wait before I can see it,” she said. “I don’t mind waiting. What I mind is what Ernie’s telling people.”

Ernie Barlow ran the garage. He said a young mechanic, Neil Haines, had handed over the keys to a man who claimed to be collecting the car. Neil had lost his job. His mother was Ivy’s cousin. Ivy had asked him about it and he’d said all he could say was that he hadn’t done it.

“I told him that wasn’t much,” said Ivy. “Then I went home and realised it was what I would have said.”

Penny asked which part Ivy wanted them to look into. She thought she ought to ask that first. Mrs Bellamy’s photograph had been taken because Penny had gone looking for the wrong name in the wrong place. She had no wish to offer another woman whatever part of her own case she happened to be most interested in.

“I want to know who took the car,” Ivy said. “And I’d like the truth told to the boy before everybody else gets it.”

Watson took the job. She asked Ivy what she’d left in the car. Ivy thought for a moment and said there was a blue cushion on the seat and half a bar of toffee in the glovebox.

“Does it matter?” she asked.

“Not yet,” Watson said. “I’d like to know it before it does.”

The bus into town

Ivy brought a photograph of the car. Her husband was beside it holding flowers he'd just bought for her. They'd been going to somebody's anniversary and neither could remember whether it was a silver wedding or a fortieth birthday. The shop had written *Congratulations* on the card at their request. It was the only part of the arrangement that had gone to plan.

Watson asked if she might borrow the photograph. Ivy took it out of its transparent sleeve and handed it over. On the wheel arch there was a little black strip missing. Ivy said her husband had got too close to a post once and then waited a week before he told her, as though the car might find a way to put it right for him.

"That was missing when you took it into the garage?"

"For years. I got a quote for a replacement, then decided there was no point giving the post a second thing to knock off."

Penny went with Ivy to catch the bus home. At the stop Ivy talked about why she had waited before reporting the car. She had been away, and Ernie had been so certain that someone had collected it on her orders that she had begun by ringing everybody she could remember talking to before she left. Her sister wanted to know why she hadn't called her first. She'd already called her sister twice.

One by one Ivy had run out of women she felt able to ask. That was a thing a person like Ernie could use without ever having to say he meant to use it. He only had to say he was sure she'd mentioned something and leave her to do the rest.

"Did you ask him to show you what he'd put in the book?" Penny said.

"I didn't know I could."

When the bus came, Ivy sat near the front where the driver would remember to let her off. Penny watched it pull away. She had spent much of her working life being shown less than she thought she was entitled to see. Sometimes she had gone home and thought of a better question. Sometimes a better question had made no difference. She put the photograph in her handbag beside the appointment book.

The entry that ought to be there

Before she'd rung them, Ivy had asked the garage for a copy of the receipt Neil was supposed to have accepted. Ernie had told her the man took it with him. It was the kind of answer that had sounded reasonable in a room with other customers in it. Later she'd wondered why the man would take his receipt away after somebody else had ticked it off.

Watson asked Ivy what she had taken away when she left the garage herself. Ivy produced a small card showing that the estimate was for a pair of brake cylinders and an

hour's labour. On the reverse somebody had written the date and crossed out a previous date in the same red pencil. There were initials beside the change.

"Who wrote this?"

"The woman in the overalls. She said the part wouldn't come in until Friday."

"Did she tell you what time to collect the car?"

"She told me she'd ring when it was ready."

Watson slid the card under the photograph and asked Ivy whether the garage had rung.

"No. The garage said the man who picked it up was in a great hurry, and that's why nobody thought to ring."

Penny looked down at the printed word *estimated*. It was on every line of the card. The only word anybody had been prepared to stand by was *collected*, and the one person who had paid to have the car looked after had never seen it written down.

"I'll come with you when you go there," Ivy said.

Watson asked if she'd prefer them to come to the garage first. Ivy thought for a moment and agreed. She'd had enough conversations with Ernie in front of strangers. She'd always been the one he smiled at most. If she went back again she'd like to know whether there was anyone else in the building willing to look her in the eye.

The wall diary

Barlow's garage stood beyond the last cottages of a neighbouring village, in a low building with a hand-painted sign. A clock over the office door was ten minutes slow. An invoice pinned up beneath it carried a note saying that the clock was right and the invoice had been issued ten minutes early.

Ernie sat at a desk with a tray of spare cash-register rolls. A woman in blue overalls stood behind him putting invoices into date order. He introduced her as his sister Jean. Jean said she ran the books whenever she could get a chair.

"The lad said somebody came with a receipt," Ernie said.

"Which lad?" asked Watson.

"Neil. We had two in at one time, but he was the only one that week."

"Did he tell you that himself?"

Ernie slid the tray towards the telephone. "He told me he handed the keys to a customer."

"Did he say the keys were Mrs Pritchard's?"

"Must have been. It was her car that went."

Jean looked up from an invoice. "He handed Mr Young a key. I know because I had to cut the string. He'd tied it in a knot."

Ernie said he couldn't keep track of everything a boy did. Jean put the invoice down. "You seem to have kept track of that one."

There was a wall diary in the workshop. It was meant to show which jobs had been booked in. Ivy's car was entered for a Wednesday and marked off on the Friday. Next to the Friday date was a word in red pencil.

"Collected," Watson read. "Who wrote that?"

"I did," said Ernie. "Neil told me."

Jean opened a book under the counter. She ran a finger down a column while Watson and Penny waited. In the book Ivy's registration was entered under Saturday, with the note *still in bay two*. The ink from the note had left a reversed mark on the facing page. The book had been shut while the ink was wet.

"Who wrote that?" Penny asked.

"I did," said Jean. "I did a check before I locked up."

Ernie said they must be looking at different weeks. Jean gave him the two dates. He went out to see to a car at the pumps which, from the window, they could see had nobody in it.

What Neil remembered

They drove up to Snowshill to see Neil. They passed the church and a low sweep of grass with a stone cross on steps, then went slowly past the cottages, whose roofs seemed to follow the slope of the lane. Penny had expected to find the workshop without using the directions. She changed her mind when the road narrowed between stone walls and they met a delivery van whose driver clearly expected them to go back the whole way.

Watson lowered the window and asked him where the tyre shop was. The driver pointed to a turn they'd already passed. He said he could give them a minute to get into it if they didn't mind his finishing the apple he had in his hand.

"You don't get that sort of arrangement in town," Penny said when they had found the turning.

"He got to finish his apple. I'd have offered the same arrangement."

The workshop was in a long, unremarkable shed down a lane beyond the cottages. Somebody had put a milk bottle in the gutter where the rain fell from a hole in the roof. Every few seconds there was a sound like a spoon against a teacup. Neil Haines was working there now. He wore a borrowed overall with somebody else's name above the pocket. His new boss said he could talk for ten

minutes if he'd do it in the doorway, so the next customer would see there was somebody to serve them.

"Mr Young had a van," Neil said. "I gave him his van key and took his money to the office. I had nothing else to collect for anybody."

"Did you ever move Mrs Pritchard's car?" Watson asked.

"Twice. Out of bay two and back in. I had to sit on her cushion so I could see the marks on the floor. In the end I took it out and worked the pedals with the door open."

"Anything happen to the cushion?"

"I put it back. She'd asked me not to lose it. Her husband had driven the car for years and she still felt as if she was trying his shoes on when she sat in it."

"Did you ever see it outside the garage?"

"No. I did see it leave the floor, though."

Neil took them round to the side of the shop, where there was a view of an empty stretch of road. He seemed to think better outdoors. Ivy's saloon was losing brake fluid. They wouldn't drive it even across the yard, so on Saturday, before Ernie replaced the cylinders, Neil helped him move it on a workshop trolley. Ernie had said he might send it to somebody with a better lift.

Watson asked if Neil had seen the tow vehicle. He said there hadn't been one when he left. He did remember Ernie telling him to take the cushion back into the car, though he'd just taken it upstairs to keep it dry.

"Did he say why?"

“He said the customer liked it there.”

“The customer being Mrs Pritchard?”

“That was what I thought. She was the customer I knew.”

A car came into the tyre shop. Neil went inside. When he came out again he asked if they would tell Ivy about the cushion. It had been the one thing he could do about the car according to her instructions, and he’d managed to get that right.

Watson said she would.

A key for Mr Young

Before trying the garage again, Watson called on Mr Young. He kept a van for delivering things people had bought at auctions. That week he had three wardrobes and a clock with no hands. The clock had been bought by somebody who wanted to be able to tell his visitors there was no time in the house. Mr Young said he wondered how long the joke would last.

Watson asked whether he remembered collecting the van from Neil. He did. He'd had someone with him to take his own car home. He'd had to go back into the garage to get the van receipt because Neil had brought out the keys and forgotten to ask for the money.

"Funny thing to forget," he said. "You'd think it would be the first thing they taught him."

"Did anybody come while you were there to collect a grey saloon?"

"Couldn't say. I went into the office. Came out again when I'd paid. My son was on the forecourt. He might know."

His son was next door trying to see whether the biggest wardrobe would go into the van on its side. He remembered the visit because his father had wanted him to drive the van home so he could take the car. He had watched Neil cross the forecourt with the van key, then back again with the money. No customer had come up to the workshop when he'd been there. He couldn't say

what anybody had done after he left, and Watson told him that was exactly the answer she wanted.

“Do you think it’ll help?” he asked.

“It tells me somebody remembers what Neil did that afternoon.”

“Did he get into trouble?”

“He did,” said Watson. “It looks as though the wrong person got the blame.”

On the way home she stopped at the post box and wrote a short note to Neil, telling him what Mr Young had said. She had no promise to give him that anything would come of it. In the agency she would have had a sheet of their headed paper and would have written rather better. At the post box she had the back of a car park ticket and a pencil she’d had to sharpen with her teeth. It would do.

Evidence of a Saturday

At home Penny drew a line from Friday's mark in the wall diary to Saturday's entry in Jean's book. She had an urge to ring Edmund and see whether he knew what had happened to the car. She recognised the urge as soon as she had it. Her hand was on her pencil. She kept it there.

Watson asked Lucas whether he would ask for the records himself. She told him about the Saturday check and what Neil remembered. Lucas said that the original stolen-car report had been taken some distance away, where Ivy's sister lived. A man had attached the garage's account of the collection to the report. The account had been signed by Ernie. Neil's name had been written in the space for a witness, in the same red pencil used on the wall diary. Nobody had asked Neil to sign anything.

"The owner's word and the garage's word," Penny said. "Somebody decided whose to write first."

"Usually the person already in front of you," Lucas said.

Jean telephoned the agency after supper. She wanted them to come to the garage when it was shut, with Ivy if Ivy would come. She was willing to show them the books for the last weekend in October. She did not want to be there alone when Ernie saw what she'd done.

Watson arrived first. Jean was standing in the workshop with the ledger open across the end of a workbench. She'd taken off her overalls but left an oily rag tucked into the band of her skirt. When Ivy came in she folded

the rag and put it on the bench as though it were a handkerchief.

The Saturday page was fuller than the Friday page. The record of the car in bay two was still there. Below it was a sum of money with no name alongside. It had been entered after the rest of the figures. Jean said she'd watched her brother put the notes in the cashbox that evening.



"He told me it was a deposit," she said. "I asked what they'd put a deposit on. He said a favour."

"Did you see who paid?" asked Watson.

"A man with a recovery truck. Ernie went outside to speak to him. I saw the truck leave with Ivy's car on it. I

copied the truck's registration into the margin because I thought I might have to ring about a towing bill."

"Did he tell you why it was going?"

"He said the owner wanted it gone."

Ivy looked at the entry for bay two. "I'm the owner. I wanted it fixed."

Jean gave her the ledger. Ivy set it down as gently as Watson had set down the plate.

What Ernie sold

Ernie had been standing by the side door long enough to hear the last part. He came in and asked Jean if she'd put the kettle on. Jean stood where she was.

"Did the man pay for repairs?" said Ivy.

"That was for the brakes," said Ernie. "I'd finished them by the time he came for it."

Jean turned the ledger round. "Ivy's repairs are still on the unpaid page. Show her the receipt you gave him."

"I must have put it somewhere else."

"You told me it was a deposit. I saw you take it and I saw you watch him load the car. What did you think he'd paid for?"

Ernie looked at Ivy. "The use of it. He said he only wanted it for a few days."

"Did he get it back to you?"

Ernie looked at the bench. “He rang up and asked for another week. Then he stopped ringing.”

“You told me I’d sent somebody for it.”

“I put it down as collected because I could see where it would end if it came back damaged.”

Watson thought about the order of those words. He had wanted it to appear that Ivy’s car was out of his hands before he let it out of them. In the week afterwards he’d had enough time to put the entry right. He’d used it to get rid of Neil instead.

“Did you know the man?” Penny asked.

“He’d paid me to tow things before. Called himself Mr Smith. He had cash this time. He said it was better for both of us if I didn’t write down his number.”

“Is he the man they found in the car?”

“I’ve seen the picture. No.”

Ernie went to the shelf and found a small cardboard box of job cards. He pulled out the one with Ivy’s registration and slid it across the bench. Ivy’s signature was there, on a line giving approval for work on the brakes. She looked at it for a while.

“Did you ever do the brakes?”

“Yes,” he said. “I did that much.”

Jean asked him to stay until Lucas came. Ernie sat down on the edge of the workbench. There was no chair near it.

When Jean brought one out for him he said “Thank you” very quietly and didn’t sit in it.

A message left with Jean

Jean came to Guiting Power before Lucas brought back any news. She was wearing the clothes she wore when she expected to have to sit still somewhere. She said a recovery driver had telephoned the garage and asked whether there would be any problem about him coming back to collect something. Ernie had said no. Jean had heard enough of the conversation to know that the man didn’t give a name.

“I told Lucas,” she said. “It felt like something somebody ought to do quickly.”

Watson asked what the caller had meant to collect. Jean didn’t know. The following afternoon a recovery truck came in while Ernie was out. Jean recognised the registration from her October ledger. The man at the wheel had an old invoice for a different job and wanted to be paid. When Lucas asked about the truck, the driver produced a dated bill of sale. He’d bought it in January, more than two months after Ivy’s saloon left the garage. Jean had recognised the vehicle. She couldn’t say who’d driven it in October.

“Were you disappointed?” Watson asked.

“I was relieved,” Jean said. “I didn’t want him to be the man. He had his daughter with him. She was waiting to be taken somewhere with a gym bag on her knees.”

Watson said she'd been disappointed. It was no better answer than Jean's. She had wanted the truck to lead to somebody who could give them a name. A stranger coming for an unpaid bill didn't owe her anything beyond what he'd already said.

Before Jean left, she asked what she should tell people who came in wanting to know why Neil had gone.

"Ask Neil first," said Watson. "He might have something he wants you to say."

Jean got up and took her gloves off the radiator. She said she would do that. From the window Watson watched her go round the green to the bus stop, passing the place where Ivy's car had waited with its lights out. Now there was only a man walking a wet dog. He had stopped to let it examine the wall. He was going to be there for some time.

No match

Lucas took the books and the job card. He told Ivy that what Ernie had said about Neil would be corrected in the record. There was a good deal of work to do on the car before it could be released. He wouldn't promise her when she could have it back.

"Will I have to take it?" she asked.

He said he would find out what arrangements could be made.

Over the following days the garage called Neil and offered him his old job. Neil stayed at the tyre shop. He said the new boss had found him a set of overalls with no name on. He'd put his own on as soon as he could work out how to make it sit straight.

Ivy asked Watson to meet him in the village shop. She told him she'd been wrong to ask what he had done with the keys. She'd known him since he was small enough to need both hands to hold an ice cream and should have let him finish his answer. Neil said he had not been very good at finishing it. They stood by the bread while two people went round them to get to the counter.

At the agency, Lucas came in wearing a coat which still had rain on the shoulders. He wanted to go over the man in the boot one more time. There'd been no identification on him. No missing person they could match to him. His fingerprints had brought them no name. The laboratory

had nothing on record that matched him. His neck had been broken.

“Nothing in the car?” Watson asked.

“Nothing that ties him to a name. Mrs Pritchard can account for almost everything that was there before it was taken. Ernie can tell us who took it from the garage. He can’t tell us to whom that man passed it, or how many people have had it since.”

Penny asked whether they’d found a weapon.

“Nothing I could put in this man’s hand outside your kitchen. The shot was aimed at where you were standing. If you hadn’t moved when you did, we’d be having a different conversation.”

Penny turned her cup on its saucer. “We probably wouldn’t be having it at all.”

Lucas didn’t tell her she was wrong. He asked whether she could think of anybody who had reason to watch the garden. Penny thought of Edmund asking whether she’d be alone. She told Lucas exactly how he’d put the question. He asked her whether that was evidence of anything she could be certain of.

“Only of what he asked me,” she said.

He wrote it down in those words.

What the baker could say

The baker had asked Lucas whether Watson would come to the shop again. She wanted to clear something up. Watson went at the end of the morning when most people had bought what they meant to buy. The baker was in the middle of moving a row of buns out of the shade. It had always seemed a pity to her that the jam couldn't catch the light from where the shelf had been put.

She told Watson that the man who asked about Penny had first asked where he might sit down. He'd looked wet and tired. She had offered him the stool she used at the till. She remembered him sitting without taking his coat off.

"He said he'd been here before. He asked if Miss Penny still took the short way home. I thought he meant he'd called on her in the past."

"Did you say that to Lucas?"

"I said I thought he was a client. I've thought it over since. It comes to very much the same thing, except somebody might think I'd seen him coming out of your door."

Watson put her notebook on the counter. She asked where he'd been sitting. The baker showed her. From the stool you could see the agency beyond the window and, when a car went by slowly, the person sitting on the passenger's side. The stool would have been warm by

then. Watson had never thought of warmth as a thing people might use against you.

“I haven’t been able to ask Penny about it,” the baker said. “I don’t suppose it helped that I told him where she usually walked.”

Watson thought of Mrs Bellamy’s name going down a telephone line. There had been a moment, she now knew, when Penny might have thought she was passing on no more than a perfectly ordinary fact. There was no use pretending she’d found that easy to forgive.

“You can tell her yourself if you’d like,” Watson said. “I’ll come with you.”

The baker put two buns in a bag and set it beside Watson’s notebook. She asked whether Penny would be in after two. Watson said she would, and waited until the baker asked if she might walk over with her. They went out together.

Mr Invisible

Diana reached Penny by telephone the following afternoon. She’d heard Penny had had a fright and thought it sounded like one of those expressions people used when they’d already been told not to repeat what had happened.

“Were you hurt?”

“No.”

“Was Watson?”

“No.”

There was a pause long enough for Penny to hear a chair being moved at the other end.

“Do you still want to come to lunch?” Diana asked.

“I do. I don’t want to have to tell the story to anybody else at lunch.”

“Then I’ll tell them you’re there to hear mine.”

Penny laughed. She had been told a great many times since the shooting that she was lucky. She had understood each person’s reasons for saying it. Diana had managed not to say it at all.

Watson had made a short note for their own file. At the top she’d typed *Unidentified man, grey saloon*. She asked Penny if that sounded like somebody they knew. Penny said it sounded like somebody they might have given an appointment to without taking his full name.

Watson pulled out the sheet. In pencil below the typing she wrote *Mr Invisible*.

“He could see me,” Penny said.

Watson drew a line under the name, so there would be room to write a better one if they ever found it. They never did.

The first visit back

Watson met Neil’s mother in Snowshill a few days after they had taken the books to Lucas. They stopped by the

cross while a man spread grit on the steepest part of the lane. He took an interest in where they were going and claimed not to take an interest when he heard the answer.

Neil had been told that if he wanted work back at Barlow's he could have it. He had written to say no thank you. His mother wanted somebody to check the wording, because he'd put two thank yous in and she thought one of them might be unnecessary.

Watson read it by the door of the workshop. "I think you can leave both in. If he reads it properly, he'll know which one is for what."

Neil folded the letter and put it back in his pocket. On a shelf stood an empty blue cushion cover. He'd bought it from the shop where his mother did her washing and meant to put something inside it if Ivy ever got her car back. He said he didn't know what had happened to the other one.

Watson told him Ivy had decided to have the car sold if and when it came back to her. She hadn't wanted to see it again. She would, however, be glad of the cushion if he could think of something other than a car to do with it.

Neil looked up the lane towards the church. His mother was waiting for him at the gate.

"We've got a pew at home," he said. "Dad bought it when they were clearing a chapel. Nobody's sat in it for years. It might do for that."

Watson said he could ask Ivy. She walked down with him to the lane where his mother was waiting. The man

with the grit had gone. There was a path of little yellow stones on the pavement where there had been ice that morning. Watson walked round them, then thought better of it and walked on them. Somebody had come out in the cold to put them there.

CASE FILE 01 · M. PENNY

Grey saloon traced to Ivy Pritchard. Removed from Barlow's garage without her permission. Subsequent custody unestablished.

Man found in the boot. Identity unknown.

Voice heard in the garden. One witness. One word.

The new pane

The glazier fitted the new pane on a Thursday. He kept it wrapped until he was ready to lift it into place. Watson watched him work from the kitchen while Penny went to get the two cups they habitually used before anybody came to the door.

“Do you want the old glass?” he asked.

Penny had been about to say nobody wanted broken glass. She thought of Lucas taking samples away and of the little piece of doorframe in her coat sleeve. “No,” she said. “Thank you.”

He put his tools in the van and went away. Watson ran a cloth along the window ledge. After dark, when she turned on the lamp, the new pane reflected both women so clearly that Penny could see Watson raise her cup without looking away from the garden.

“A cup of tea in a quiet little village,” Penny said.

Watson picked up the other cup and put it nearer her. “That’s as much as I remember promising.”

Outside, the side gate was open. The glazier had left it that way to carry out his tools. Penny went as far as the back door before she stopped.

“Leave it,” Watson said. “We can shut it when we’re ready.”

Penny sat down again. She could see the open gate past her own reflection. There was nobody coming through it.

For the first time since the shot, they let it stand open while they drank their tea.

