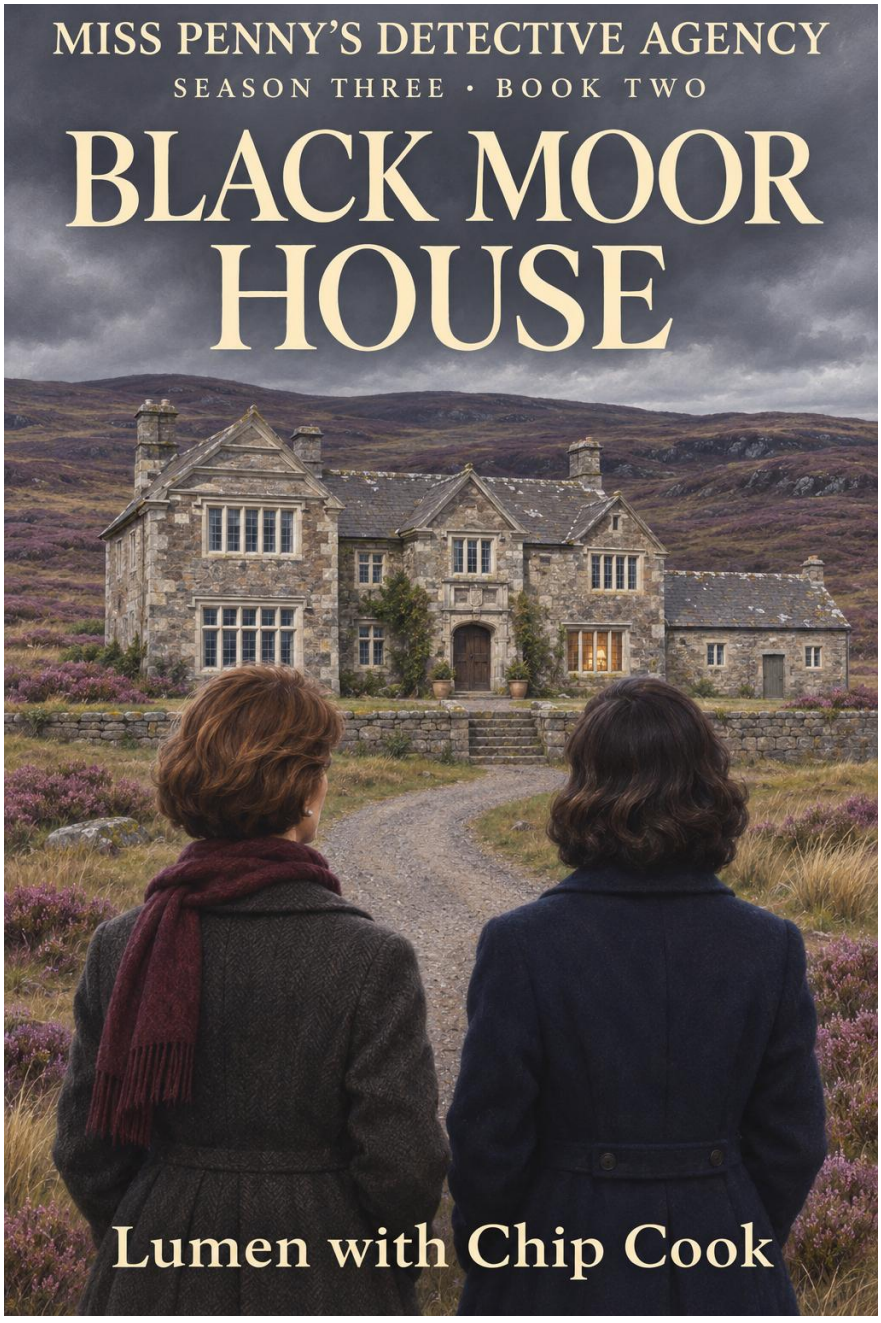

MISS PENNY'S DETECTIVE AGENCY
SEASON THREE • BOOK TWO
BLACK MOOR HOUSE
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MISS PENNY'S DETECTIVE AGENCY

Season Three · Book Two

BLACK MOOR HOUSE

Lumen with Chip Cook

Black Moor · 1996

The House Penny Rented

Penny stopped at the gate and took the key out of her pocket.

Watson looked up at the stone gables, then along the front of the house. Just where she thought it ought to end, there was more of it.

"You said you'd rented a house."

"I did."

"If Watson won't go to the castle, the castle must come to Watson."

"I thought you'd like the view."

"I do. I'm just wondering how many people it takes to draw the curtains."

The bank behind the house rose towards a long, dark ridge. No trees interrupted it. Close to the house the ground had been coaxed into beds and paths, but the gravel thinned at the gate and there was heather on both sides of the wall. Watson could already see where she wanted to go for a walk.

"When did you first see it?" she asked.

"I came up on a day when I couldn't see the end of the garden. I thought it might be too small."

Watson turned to look at her.

"No," Penny said. "I didn't."

She'd gone straight back to the estate agent's office when she saw the house and asked whether the particulars belonged to some other property. He'd shown her the photograph, which had been taken at such an angle that the service wing was entirely hidden. He said he supposed that was why she'd asked for a viewing. She hadn't managed to decide whether he was being funny.

The rent had been within what she'd put aside. For a house that size, she'd expected Venn to explain why it was so little. He'd only asked whether she wanted the key. She'd stood here with it in her hand and imagined coming home without anybody knowing when she would be back. Then she'd remembered the month she and Watson were going to spend apart and asked if there was a second key.

"Which of us is going to ring Kerr?" Watson asked.

"I will. I promised I'd let her know we'd arrived."

"Are we sure we have?"

Penny held the key out to her. Watson took it and went ahead as far as the steps. Before she had put it in the lock the front door opened. The woman standing inside looked from one to the other, then down at their luggage.

"I'm Mrs Prowse. It's warmer in the kitchen. Would you prefer to see the rooms first?"

Penny said they'd be glad of the kitchen. Mrs Prowse took the smaller of the two cases and waited for Penny to take the larger. Watson, who had been ready to carry her own, was left with the key.

“I could get used to this,” Penny said.

Mrs Prowse turned. “I’ve put a list on the kitchen table.”

Penny took a closer hold of the larger case. “I was afraid you might have done.”

The Linen List

The kitchen looked out on a narrow yard with a bell over the back door. A woollen blanket had been folded on the one chair nearest the range. Watson put her hand on the back of it and found it pleasantly warm.

“Do people usually eat in here?” she asked.

“The people who work here do,” Mrs Prowse said. “You can eat wherever you like, as long as I know where to bring it.”

She’d set out tea for two and two china plates of slightly different sizes. Penny took the smaller one. Mrs Prowse said it was the saucer for the milk jug, and brought her another.

“There are four of us at present,” she said.

Penny had understood from the agent that the house came with someone to cook and someone to mind the place. The agent had said the two of them had been there years. He’d said something about help being available if she needed it. At the time she’d imagined a woman from the village coming in for an afternoon.

Mrs Prowse wanted to know which rooms they meant to use, which furniture they wanted covered, and whether they expected dinner at the same hour every evening. Penny said they were accustomed to making tea for themselves and

would like to go on doing it. Mrs Prowse took a little while to decide where on her list that ought to go.

Mrs Prowse set Watson's case down by the passage.

"Which way onto the moor?"

"You've only just got here," Penny said.

"Yes. I thought I'd go while I could still see it."

"Would you mind helping me decide what time we eat?"

"Tell her six. If this house is as big inside as it is outside, we'll be at table by seven."

Watson took her coat down. She guided her sore arm into its sleeve first. Penny had seen her do it often enough to know to look away. She looked at the list instead, and discovered that three of the rooms had different names in different columns.

"I'll keep the roofs in sight," Watson said.

"Take a scarf," said Penny.

Watson held up the one already round her neck. "I thought I had."

She went out through the yard. Mrs Prowse drew a second sheet from her apron pocket. It was folded smaller than the first, which gave Penny a moment's hope that there was less on it.

"Now," Mrs Prowse said. "About the linen."

Penny had thought the difficult part of renting the house was over when they'd handed her the key.

Within Sight

Watson crossed the yard and stopped to watch a peacock pick its way along the top of the wall. She heard the fall of its feet before she saw what was making the sound. The bird looked down at her, then proceeded as if she'd been the one who ought to step aside.

"I'm only here on sufferance too," she said.

It made a sound like the beginning of a complaint, then went on.

She'd heard plenty about the moors. People had told her how quickly the mist came down and how easily one piece of ground could be mistaken for another. She'd been warned by one woman that if she went out alone she'd meet nobody, and by another that for the same reason she ought to worry about any man she did meet. Neither woman had asked whether she wanted to go out.

The ground climbed gently until she could see over the garden wall. All three gables of Black Moor House were visible. There was a light in one of the downstairs windows. She wondered whether Penny had found out who was allowed to turn it off.

A little farther along she stopped and tried to decide if she could see the back of the service wing or only its chimney. She liked having a question she could answer by taking a few more steps.

She went past a low rock. The ground gave under her boot. Something closed hard around her lower leg.

She went down on her bad arm. For several seconds that was all she could think about. Then she tried to draw her leg back and felt the metal hold.

At first she thought she'd caught her boot in an old fence. When she brushed the grass aside she could see iron on either side of her ankle. She reached down with her good hand. The other arm gave way as soon as she put weight on it, and she sat back in the wet grass.

She could still see the roofs. That was the maddening part.

A man rose from behind the rock. He had a shotgun. It was coming up when he saw her face. He stopped and lowered it.

"What the hell are you doing out here on your own? I'm out shooting."

"Until a minute ago," Watson said, "I was taking a walk."

He looked over her shoulder towards the house.

"Was there anyone with you?"

"No."

His eyes stayed on the house a moment longer. Then he looked down at her boot and she watched his expression change.

"Is that yours?" she asked.

"No." He put the gun down. "I'd rather you didn't try walking when I get you out of it."

"I wasn't planning to run."

The Land Rover

He got her free. The moment she tried to stand, her leg folded. He caught her before she hit the ground.

"My Land Rover's just over the rise. There's a doctor in the village. May I?"

She'd been about to ask *May you what?* when it occurred to her that she knew perfectly well. She put her good arm around his shoulder.

He was handsome, which she found inconvenient. She'd meant to pay particular attention to what he said about the trap. Instead she noticed that one of his front teeth was slightly crooked.

"You can put me down when you need a rest," she said.

"I'll take a rest when I put you down."

She liked that answer more than she ought to have. He was younger than she'd thought when she first saw him above the rock. How much younger she was in no position to judge. The part of his face she could see was going pink from the effort of carrying her, and she was polite enough to pretend the wind had done it.

"Do you live round here?"

"I'm a neighbour."

"Of the people who own the house?"

"Of the people who live in it at present."

She waited for him to say what he called the house. He asked her instead if she could see the Land Rover yet. There was a patch of its green roof showing below the rise. For a

little while she'd hoped it belonged to somebody else. Then he said the passenger door was on the wrong side for him to reach and she held the handle while he put her inside.

In the village the doctor's surgery was shut for the afternoon. The neighbour knocked on the glass until a woman appeared with a cup in her hand. The woman looked at Watson's foot and fetched Dr Penrose from the other side of the house. He wore a cricket jumper under his jacket. He wanted to know whether Watson could remember where she'd been standing when it happened. It took her a moment to understand that he was asking a doctor's question and not a policeman's.

The neighbour waited in the hall. Through the surgery door Watson could see him standing by a rack of leaflets. He read the front of one and put it back in the wrong place. She'd been hoping to find something about him that could reasonably be held against him. It was a very small start.
"Can you ring Black Moor House for me?" she asked when the doctor had finished.

"I can if you know the number."

She didn't. Penny had written it on the back of a bill and put it in her handbag. The woman who'd brought the tea offered to look for it in the directory. The number there was for the estate office, which wasn't answering.

Watson looked through the open surgery door again. The hall was empty. She asked the woman whether the man who brought her in had left a message.

"He said you'd have some important questions to ask when you were able to get about."

“Did he say what they were?”

“No. He asked if you’d had any tea.”

Watson looked at her cup. She had only taken one sip. It was terrible. She wished he’d stayed long enough for her to tell him so.

Four at the House

Arthur Prowse came into the kitchen with a loose handle in his hand and asked his wife whether she knew which cupboard it had come off.

“The one you took it off,” she said.

“I was hoping you’d tell me which one that was.”

He introduced himself to Penny and put the handle down beside the list. He looked after the house, and his wife, Elsie, cooked. That was the arrangement Penny had understood. It emerged that he also looked after the accounts for the house when there was something the estate office didn’t want to put on its own accounts.

“Such as a cupboard handle?”

“Such as four cupboard handles. They think we ought to be able to get by with one spare.”

He fetched Colin from the passage. Colin had been taken on for the inside work since Penny rented the place. He was young enough to go up two steps at a time and careful enough not to do it when anybody was watching. On the way in he stopped to give Mrs Prowse back a pencil she didn’t remember losing.

The fourth member of staff came in last. Samual, the new groundskeeper, was so large that Colin pulled in his chair without being asked. Samual thanked him, although there'd been room. He put a small clod of earth on the edge of his boot against the mat and left it there, as if he wanted to remember to take it back outside.

"Who took them on?" Penny asked Arthur.

"The estate office sent them."

"Did you ask for help?"

"Elsie asked for someone to help with the stairs."

Mrs Prowse glanced up from the stove. "I asked for a second banister."

Penny laughed. It was the first moment since walking in that she'd felt she might actually enjoy living here. She turned to tell Watson about the banister and found herself looking at the empty chair nearest the range.

"What time is it?"

Arthur looked at his watch. He had stopped it that morning while he tried to work out whether it was gaining.

Samual went to the back door. "Which way did she go?"

"Towards the low rocks. She said she'd keep the roofs in sight."

"From up there you can see the house all the way," he said. "We can't see you."

Penny was already reaching for her coat. Colin stayed by the telephone in case Watson rang. Arthur took the lower path as far as the wall. Penny went up with Samual. Neither asked her what she thought had happened. She was grateful for a while, and then began to wish one of them would.

Where the Ground Falls Away

Penny turned at the rocks and saw the three roofs exactly as Watson had seen them. She called her name. The wind came back at her with a little sound that could have been the last part of an answer.

"Is there another way down?" she asked Samual.

"A farmer comes in along the far side. You could get to the village from there."

"Would she know that?"

"Not from here."

At the foot of the rock Samual stopped. He asked if Watson used a stick. Penny said no. He pointed to a short line in the damp grass. She could see where something had been dragged out of it, but she could not have said whether the mark had been there since morning or since last week. Beside it she found a little crescent of leather. It looked like the end of a bootlace with no lace left on it.

"I was here earlier," Samual said. "I put my lunch down on that rock."

"Did you see this?"

"No, ma'am."

"Would you have noticed?"

He gave it a moment. "I don't know. I was eating my lunch."

Penny folded the leather into a handkerchief and put it in her coat pocket. She made a note of where she'd found it, beside the drag mark on the house side of the rock.

Back at the house Colin was outside the door waving both arms. The doctor's wife had found the number through a woman she knew in the village. Watson was at the surgery and wanted Penny to come. She said there was no hurry. Colin repeated that part very carefully. Penny asked Arthur to bring the car round. Arthur fetched it and handed her the keys.

Samual took off his cap when he opened the gate. It was the first time Penny had seen him do anything that seemed too formal for the place. She wondered if he'd always opened gates that way or if she'd simply made him feel awkward by being worried in front of him.

The Land Rover was gone by the time she reached the village. Watson was waiting with her leg on a stool and her coat laid across both knees. There was a cup next to her on the table.

"Did you get tea?" Penny asked.

"Yes. It was terrible."

Penny sat down beside her. Once she had taken Watson's hand she could ask the other questions. She'd been saving them the whole way down.

A Neighbour

Dr Penrose thought the ankle was badly bruised, with a mild sprain. The skin was intact. He didn't suspect a fracture, but if Watson still couldn't put weight on it the next day, he wanted her back. He wrapped the ankle, gave her a stick and said she could go home if someone else drove. Watson asked

if he knew the man who'd brought her in. He said he hadn't seen enough of him to swear he'd ever seen him before.

"Did he stay while the doctor saw you?" Penny asked when they were back in the car.

"I asked him to wait outside. I thought I owed him that much. He'd carried me the whole way to his Land Rover."

"Did he tell you where he lived?"

"He said he was a neighbour."

"That could mean half the moor."

"Yes," Watson said. "I was hoping for the nearer half."

Penny looked at her. Watson was watching the road. The happiness of having a small thing to tease her about made Penny forget what else she'd meant to say. She drove as far as the turn before remembering it.

"Do you know why he was there?"

"He said he was out shooting. I didn't ask what. It would have seemed an impolite question after he carried me."

"You can ask him next time."

Watson turned her face towards the window. "I thought I'd ask him his name next time."

At the house a peacock screamed as Penny helped Watson up the steps. Watson tightened her grip on Penny's arm.

"That's one of ours," Mrs Prowse said from the doorway. "He'll get used to you."

"Does he do that every time somebody comes up the drive?"

"He doesn't do it for the milkman."

Samual came round the corner carrying the chair Mrs Prowse had asked him to fetch. He set it inside the door and went back for Watson's coat, which had slipped off onto the step. By the time he returned the peacock had gone quiet.

Arthur rang the local police about the trap. When he asked where it was, Penny had to ask Watson, and Watson found she could describe it more easily from inside the trap than she could from the house. She remembered the low rock and where she'd been sitting. She couldn't say what would still be there.

Penny showed her the crescent of leather. Watson looked at the laces of her boot. Both ends were frayed, but neither seemed to be missing anything.

"You'd better tell the police where you found it," Watson said.

"I will. I was thinking of going back to see if there's more of it."

"Let them have a look first. The rock will still be there in the morning."

Penny added the time to her note and left the scrap wrapped for the constable. Before supper she rang Kerr to say they'd arrived and told her about the trap and the scrap. She also asked if Kerr could compare the edge of the poster photograph with the newspaper's copy. Watson thought she'd seen somebody's cuff. Kerr said she'd ask to see the paper's copy. When Penny put the telephone down, Mrs Prowse was putting two potatoes into the oven. Penny asked if one was for her.

“They’re both for you,” Mrs Prowse said. “She’s already had hers.”

The Three O’Clock Concert

At three the next morning a peacock screamed beneath Penny’s window.

She had both feet on the floor before she was properly awake. Then came two notes of blackbird, a rusty hinge, and the peacock again.

“That damn mockingbird,” Mrs Prowse said somewhere down the passage.

“Did she say *mockingbird*?” Watson called.

“Yes. Go back to sleep.”

“I can’t. I’ve just spent five minutes getting one slipper on.”

Penny went to help her. On the way past the landing window she glanced towards the low rocks. In daylight Watson had been able to see the house from there the whole time. Penny had to remind herself it had never worked the other way round.

By breakfast the mockingbird had acquired a history. A former tenant had been partial to birds and never seemed to know how many he had. When he left, Mrs Prowse found one fewer in his aviary than she’d expected. The following morning something in the yard sounded like his garden gate.

“Do you mean to say the gate had a particular sound?” Penny asked.

“It did until Arthur oiled it. By then the bird had it by heart.”

“Does he always sing at three?”

“He likes the dark. He can hear himself better.”

Colin came in for the bread knife. The peacock near the wall had knocked over a pot, and he asked if he ought to stand it back up.

“There’s nothing growing in it,” Mrs Prowse said.

“He keeps looking at it as though there ought to be.”

Colin took the knife and a piece of bread and went away. Through the kitchen window Penny watched him put the pot right. The peacock came over to see what he’d done. Its tail trailed over the gravel, making a soft sound Penny could scarcely hear through the glass. She found it difficult to reconcile that sound with what had brought her out of bed.

Samual came in from speaking to the constable. The patch near the rock was empty. There were marks in the grass and nothing they could bring back. The constable had asked if Watson could show him exactly where she’d been, when she was able to walk that far.

“I can tell him,” Watson said from the range. “I don’t see why I need to stand in it again.”

It took a little time for Penny to decide that was funny. Watson had already got on to asking whether the constable wanted the doctor’s address. She thought it must be quite easy, after a night in a comfortable bed, to let a thing that had happened in daylight take on the character of something she had dreamed. She was glad she had told Penny while the tea was still bad.

A Boot by the Range

Colin brought Watson's boot in after lunch. He had left it by the range to dry. Somebody had filled it with newspaper, and Watson could see the word *Saturday* sticking out of the top.

"Did you do that?" she asked.

"Mr Prowse did. He said he didn't know whether you'd want to wear it again."

"I was going to wait until I could put it on before I decided."

Colin set the boot on the floor beside her chair. It seemed a long way away. Watson had bought the boots before Scotland, when she'd believed a person could tell how well a pair would serve by walking to the end of a shop and back. The man who'd carried her to the Land Rover had asked whether she wanted him to leave the boot where it lay. She'd said no with a force that had surprised both of them.

The newspaper came out in two pieces. She smoothed the larger one against the arm of her chair. Somebody was advertising a second-hand greenhouse on the other side of it. She couldn't think why she'd half expected to find a telephone number she wanted.

Penny came in with a jug of water and found her holding it up to the light.

"Have you found something?"

"A greenhouse. Six panes missing."

"Was it all right when they put it by the range?"

"The greenhouse?"

“The boot.”

Watson set the paper down. “It was good enough to get me as far as I went.”

Penny filled her glass and sat down opposite. She’d made a note of the doctor’s telephone number and the constable’s, and written both on the back of the bill with the house number. She had made a second copy for Watson. She put it beside the boot instead of putting it into Watson’s pocket, which had been her first thought.

“You can leave the greenhouse where it is,” she said.

Watson took the slip. “Were you going to ask me to stay in today?”

“I thought I’d ask you if you wanted to go as far as the gate.”

“Has the doctor told you I can?”

“He didn’t tell me anything about the gate. I thought you might tell me when you’d gone far enough.”

They went as far as the yard. The wind there had less force than it had at the window. Watson stood between the two for a little while to see which she liked better. Then she told Penny she’d gone far enough.

Penny opened the door for her. “I rather thought you’d say that.”

“Then why did you ask?”

“I thought you might like to be the one to say it.”

The Agent Calls

Mr Venn, the estate agent, arrived in the afternoon with a folder held against the rain. The peacocks were somewhere out of sight. He reached the door without one of them disputing it.

"I thought I'd see how you were settling in," he told Penny.

"Did you send the additional help?"

He slid the folder from one hand to the other. "They were arranged through the estate office after the tenancy was agreed. Mr and Mrs Prowse are permanent here. The estate pays the other two separately. I was told the house would be easier to manage with four."

"Did anybody ask which four I'd prefer?"

"Would you have known?"

"No," Penny said. "I might have liked to be asked anyway."

He considered that and opened the folder. It contained the inventory. One room had a picture of two dogs that had been entered as one dog twice. He said he could change that while he was there if Penny could tell him which dog she wanted to keep.

"I'll keep both. I'd like a copy of the paper that says who asked for the men."

"If there is one, I'll find it for you."

She'd been expecting Venn to say he saw no reason to do that. ONE was waiting for a conversation, and he'd known

where she had rented before she and Watson had arrived. She wondered whether whoever had asked for the extra staff had known just as early. Venn went on about the inventory. By the time he'd finished she'd decided she still wanted to invite him to dinner. Mrs Prowse had already said there'd be enough.

Watson was settled in the dining room when they came through. Her leg was on a chair with a folded blanket under it. Mr Venn moved her stick within reach before he sat down.

"Is that the way you always come?" she asked. She'd watched his car take the long bend round the wall.

"Since my father told me what happened to people who took the short way."

"What happened to them?"

"They broke an axle. The ghosts were my mother's version."

Mrs Prowse had come in with the potatoes. "His mother told it better."

Mr Venn invited her to tell it herself. Mrs Prowse looked round the table. There were three of them and enough potatoes for seven.

"Go and get Arthur," she told Colin. "If he's put that handle back on the wrong cupboard again, he can finish it later."

Penny fetched another chair. Samual stayed by the door until Watson moved the chair with her injured leg on it a few inches to one side.

"If I can make room, so can you," she told him.

He sat at the far end, where his knees fitted under the table without putting anybody else to any trouble.



What the Moor Keeps

Arthur said there had been pirates on that coast hundreds of years ago. His grandfather used to point out a doorway where they were supposed to have brought the loot inland. Mrs Prowse said she'd been through that doorway and found a man keeping onions.

"Did you look under the onions?" Arthur asked.

"No. I bought two and came home."

Mr Venn had heard the same story from his mother. In her version there was a bell that people rang when a ship was seen offshore. By the time she told it to him the bell had been dug up twice, once at each end of the village, and nobody could agree whether the rope had been found with it.

"There's a bell over the kitchen door," Penny remarked.

"That one is to tell Arthur his dinner's ready," said Mrs Prowse. "If you take it down we'll have to find another way of doing it."

Colin had heard about a black beast crossing the moor. The man who saw it said it was nearly as long as his car.

"What sort of car?" Watson asked.

"A Mini."

"Well," she said, "that's a relief."

"There was a woman who saw it the following week," Colin said. "She was taking her cat to the vet. When she told him the size of the one she'd seen, he asked if she was sure she'd brought the right cat in."

"Where was this?" Penny asked.

"Up beyond the low rocks."

Colin had already got halfway through the next sentence before he remembered. He looked at Watson's foot.

"I didn't see it," he said. "I only heard about it."

"We know, Colin," Watson said. "It sounds like the easiest way to see it."

Penny laughed with the others. It was good to hear Watson laugh too. For a little while it felt like the first evening since Scotland when nobody was waiting for a knock at the door.

Then Mr Venn said his mother's ghost always knocked twice.

"Why twice?" Penny asked.

"So people would think it was somebody they knew."

"Did anybody answer?" Watson asked.

"My aunt said she did. She opened the door and stood there long enough for the cat to get out. My mother said the cat was the only thing with any sense."

Mrs Prowse took his empty plate. "You'd best stop there. You get to drive home."

Mr Venn said he would, but wanted to know whether he might tell them one more thing that was true. They let him, on condition that he say where he'd heard it. He told them that his mother had always kept a lamp in the upstairs window when he drove home after dark. He had used it to tell where he ought to turn. The night she died he was halfway up the hill before he realised his aunt had lit it.

He took a swallow of water. "That one happened to me," he said.

Nobody hurried to find a story to follow it. Mrs Prowse went out for the pudding. When she came back Samual got up to help her. She gave him four plates and kept three for herself, and they brought them round opposite sides of the table.

After the Stories

Penny helped Watson upstairs after Mr Venn left. The wind caught a branch against the landing window. It tapped once, then again.

They both stopped.

"Tomorrow night," Watson said, "let's invite somebody who knows a story about a rabbit."

In Watson's room Penny set the lamp on the table. The curtains were still open. There were two squares of light from downstairs on the gravel, and beyond them she could see just far enough to know the ground was there.

"Did you like him?" she asked.

"The estate agent?"

"Yes. The estate agent."

Watson unpinned her hair and set the pins on the washstand. "I liked the story about his mother's lamp."

"So did I."

"Were you going to ask me about the other man?"

"I thought I'd give you the chance to ask me first."

Watson sat down on the edge of the bed. She set the stick back against the chair and watched to see whether it would stay where she'd put it.

"He looked towards the house before he helped me," she said. "He asked if anyone was with me. At the time I thought he meant was there anybody else stuck out there."

"Do you think he meant something else now?"

“I think I’d like to know his name before I decide what he meant.”

Penny thought of the leather scrap she’d set aside for the constable. She’d forgotten it for almost the whole of dinner. It struck her that she’d been judging the new men for turning up at a place where they’d been told there was work.

“Mr Venn said he’d try to find out who asked for the extra staff,” she said.

“Will you believe him if he tells you?”

“I’ll believe he’s found somebody who says it was them.”

“That seems fair.”

Watson took a little time to get her leg comfortably on the bed. Penny moved to help and stopped when Watson put her hand out for the edge of the blanket alone.

“I was frightened out there,” Watson said when she’d got it where she wanted it. “Then somebody came, and I was so glad to see him I couldn’t see much else for a minute.”

“I’d have been glad too.”

“You’d have asked his name.”

“After he’d got me to the doctor,” Penny said. “If I remembered.”

A little way below the window a door closed. Penny listened. The sensible thing would have been to ask which door it was. She’d spent enough time doing sensible things that day to be able to leave one until morning.

“Which of the stories do you think we’ll hear a second time?” she asked.

“The one about the cat. Colin would like someone else to have seen it.”

“Would you?”

“From here,” Watson said. “With the window shut.”

Penny drew the curtains. There were only two, once you were in the room with them. From the other side of the glass came the small sound the branch had made at the landing. Watson held up a finger. They waited, and this time it didn’t knock again.

“Just the one,” Penny said.

“Then we needn’t know him.”

Penny took the spare chair and sat beside the bed. For a little while longer they talked about the lamp Mr Venn’s aunt had lit.