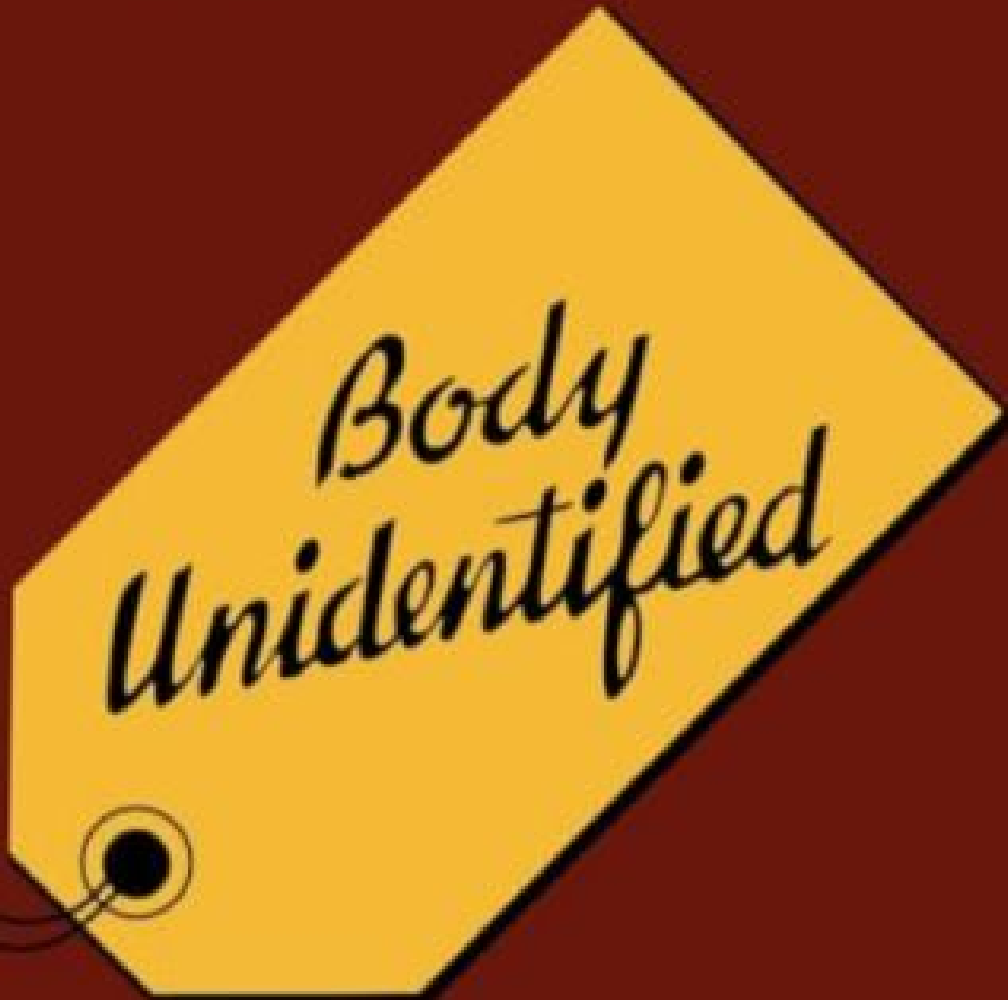


**A DR. PRIESTLEY  
DETECTIVE STORY**



*Body  
Unidentified*

**JOHN RHODE**

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# *Body Unidentified*

BY JOHN RHODE

Author of  
“DR. PRIESTLEY INVESTIGATES,”  
“DEATH SITS ON THE BOARD,”  
etc.

Mr. Wedgwood was puzzled. It was odd, he thought, as he looked from his bedroom window, that someone should leave a large closed car in the middle of his front yard, but what confused him even more was the shimmering brilliance it seemed to assume as the sun rose higher. Suddenly the unpleasant truth burst upon him with a shock. It was not a car at all. It was a hearse!

Jimmy Waghorn first followed the grisly trail from the abandoned hearse to the “thing” in the tar boiler, and as luck would have it, on that same day Inspector Hanslet finally stumbled on a really substantial clue to the Patton jewel robbery. But only after Dr. Priestley made his seemingly enigmatic suggestion did it occur to either one that the two crimes could possibly be related.

An exciting book! John Rhode with his usual ingenuity and scrupulous care has worked two apparently diverse crimes into a fascinating pattern of mystery and intrigue.

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DODD, MEAD & COMPANY, INC.

Department R B

449 Fourth Avenue, New York

*A Dr. Priestley Detective  
Story*

BY

JOHN RHODE

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**BODY  
UNIDENTIFIED**

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NEW YORK 1938

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## PROLOGUE

“THINGS happen like that,” said Superintendent Hanslet. “There are times at the Yard when things are as dull as ditchwater. For weeks on end we may spend our days, and our nights, too, for that matter, over the most trivial matters. And then suddenly, as happened the other day, two really important cases are thrust upon us at once.”

It was ten o'clock on the evening of Saturday, August 22nd. The Superintendent had been invited to dine with his friend Dr. Priestley, that uncompromising scientist, who combined an interest in criminology with an unsparing devotion to pure mathematics, at the latter's house in Westbourne Terrace. Dinner being over, the party had adjourned to Dr. Priestley's study. There were present Dr. Priestley himself, his secretary, Harold Merefield, his friend, Dr. Oldland, a general practitioner with an extensive practice in Kensington, and the Superintendent.

Oldland laid down his glass of whisky and soda and replied to Hanslet's observation. “I wonder what exactly you define as triviality, superintendent?”

Hanslet shrugged his shoulders. “Oh, all the things which are only crimes because some regulation or other makes them so,” he replied. “You'd be horrified if you knew the amount of time that's wasted investigating alleged breaches of the Licensing Laws, or the Gambling Act, or the Shop Hours Rule or any one of half a dozen similar technical offences. The people who pass these silly laws never stop to think of the expense involved in enforcing them or trying to enforce them. However, it isn't for me to complain, I suppose. But I must say that it comes as a positive relief sometimes when a real crime is reported to us. One feels that one's labour isn't altogether wasted.”

“But two major cases at once must be a bit overwhelming,” Oldland suggested.

“I don’t mind as long as I have somebody that I can depend upon to help me,” Hanslet replied. “And I’m bound to confess that things have been a lot easier since young Jimmy Waghorn has been with me. He’s got his head screwed on straight and I can trust him to look after a job while I’m otherwise engaged.”

“This is the first time that he has been entrusted with the entire responsibility for what Oldland has called a major case, is it not?” Dr. Priestley remarked.

“That’s right, professor,” Hanslet replied. “Of course, if the other matter hadn’t cropped up at the same time I should have taken on the Fallowchurch business myself with Jimmy to help me. But as I’ve told you, I’d scarcely put down the telephone on Thursday when the chief sent for me. And when I got to his room I found that Sir Stanislaus Wherwell had rung up, and I had to listen to the yarn about the diamonds. The chief told me that I had better take on that business myself and send Jimmy down to Fallowchurch.”

“Inspector Waghorn has proved worthy of your trust, I gather,” Dr. Priestley remarked.

“Oh, he’s done very well, professor,” Hanslet replied with a touch of condescension. “But then, you see, the matter turned out to be not so puzzling as it seemed at first sight. It was a perfectly clear case of murder, with robbery as the motive. And there’s no doubt whatever as to the identity of the murderer. Jimmy has a full description both of him and of his car. It can only be a matter of a day or two before he runs him to earth. He’s busy on the job now, and that’s why he couldn’t accept your invitation to come here with me to-night.”

“I fully appreciate the reason for the inspector’s inability to accept my invitation,” said Dr. Priestley. “I am very glad that the case upon which you are yourself engaged did not hinder you from coming.”

Hanslet laughed. “Oh, I’ve got a breathing space for a moment,” he replied. “I’m waiting for news from the Continent. In some ways my case is not unlike Jimmy’s, though it concerns a robbery and not a murder. I know who stole the Wherwell diamonds—the name is spelt Wherwell, but pronounced Hurrel, by the way—just as Jimmy knows who murdered Alfred Pantony. And in my case, as in his, I’m bound to catch my man before very long.”

“You know the origin of the Wherwell diamonds, I suppose?” Oldland asked.

“I heard Sir Stanislaus tell the story, but I didn’t quite follow the details,” Hanslet replied. “From what I can make out, they were brought back from Russia by his great-great-grandfather, about a hundred and thirty years ago.”

Oldland nodded. “That’s right,” he said. “I’ve heard my father talk about them often enough. He knew the Wherwell family in the old days.”

“Under what circumstances were the diamonds brought back from Russia?” Dr. Priestley asked.

“Well, the story as I’ve heard my father tell it is this,” Oldland replied. “This man’s great-great-grandfather was Sir James Wherwell. He had interests in Eastern Europe and married a Polish woman, just before the Third Partition of 1795. King Stanislaus of Poland stood godfather to their eldest son, who was naturally named after his royal sponsor. The Christian name Stanislaus has remained in the family ever since.

“Sir James and his wife appear to have been born intriguers, though I don’t suppose that anything definite is known of their activities. Anyhow, after the Partition, they managed to insinuate themselves into the good graces of Prince Alexander. And, at about the same time, Sir James seems to have been entrusted with a sort of semi-diplomatic mission by the British Government. They were certainly in St. Petersburg on the night of the Emperor Paul’s assassination in 1801, and it has been whispered that they had had a hand in the preliminaries of that affair. Anyhow, some months later they returned to England, and Lady Wherwell was seen wearing a set of diamonds which was pronounced to be the finest in Europe. Where she got them from remains something of a mystery. Sir Stanislaus did not enlighten you on that point, I suppose, superintendent?”

“He said that they had been presented to his family by one of the Emperors of Russia,” Hanslet replied.

“Is it not an established fact that the Emperor Paul was insane for some years before his death?” Dr. Priestley remarked dryly.

Oldland laughed. “I dare say that, as usual, you’ve hit the nail on the head, Priestley,” he said. “But I fancy that if Paul had given Lady Wherwell the diamonds in a moment of infatuation, Alexander I would have managed to get them back again somehow after his father’s death. However, I don’t suppose the superintendent is very much interested in that ancient history. He is more anxious to know where they are now.”

“They’re on the Continent somewhere, there’s no doubt about that,” said Hanslet confidently. “And as things are, the thief will find it quite impossible to dispose of them openly. The police all over Europe have been warned, and at his first attempt to do so, he will be arrested immediately. And he

would only realize a fraction of their value if he tried to get rid of them surreptitiously.”

Dr. Priestley shook his head slightly. It was obvious that he was not interested in the diamonds or their possible fate. The technique of the crime and the mentality of its perpetrator were, to him, far more congenial subjects.

“I gather that in each of the major cases upon which you and Inspector Waghorn respectively are engaged the situation is similar,” he said. “You have satisfied yourselves as to the identity of the criminals, and you confidentially expect their early apprehension. But are you in a position to prove a conclusive case against either of them?”

Hanslet laughed. “I know how difficult you are to convince, professor,” he replied. “But in both these cases the evidence is conclusive. We don’t see how any jury could fail to return a verdict of Guilty in both cases. Well, if you don’t mind, professor, I’ll be getting back to the Yard. I’m expecting to hear any moment that my man has been arrested.”

The superintendent left the room and there was silence for some moments after his departure. Then Dr. Priestley turned to Oldland, who was pouring himself out a second whisky and soda. “What made you employ the term ‘major cases’ just now?” he asked.

“Oh, I don’t know,” Oldland replied in some surprise. “It’s a suitable term by which to describe a murder, and a theft of a very valuable set of diamonds, isn’t it?”

Dr. Priestley shook his head. “It might appear so to the policeman, but not to the criminologist,” he said. “To the latter, the importance of the case is not determined by the seriousness of the crime. His interest lies in the skill displayed by the criminal on the one hand, and the police on the other. And, listening to the superintendent this evening, I fail to recognize the slightest display of skill on either hand.”

“Oh, I don’t know, Priestley,” Oldland objected. “His criminals appeared to have bungled things pretty badly, I admit. But both he and Jimmy Waghorn have been pretty smart in getting on to their tracks so quickly.”

“I’m afraid I don’t agree with you,” replied Dr. Priestley testily. “The only facts which they have ascertained would have been immediately apparent to any intelligent child.”

“Well, you can’t expect one of your favourite problems every day, Priestley,” said Oldland soothingly. “I know that it is only when Hanslet has to confess himself beaten that you take any interest in his affairs. Perhaps

he'll come along in a week or two with a teaser which will appeal to you. By jove, it's getting late. It's time I finished my drink and said good-night."



*Part One*  
*Jimmy's Case*





THE GREEN BEAR at Fallowchurch is a fine old timbered building, with a wide, open space for a “pull in” in front of it. Fallowchurch is a fair-sized village standing a few miles off the direct road from London to Folkestone.

Mr. Sidney Wedgwood, the manager of the Green Bear, was a man of regular habits. He and Mrs. Wedgwood had been tenants of the house for fifteen years, and during the whole of that period their daily routine had never varied. This routine began with Mr. Wedgwood invariably awakening shortly before sunrise and ended with his retirement to bed directly after supper between eleven o’clock and half-past.

When Mr. Wedgwood opened his eyes on Thursday, August 20th, a faint light filled the bedroom occupied by himself and Mrs. Wedgwood. He felt for the watch which he always placed under his pillow at night, found it and held it so that the most favourable light from the window fell upon its hands. These pointed to exactly half-past five.

It was not often that Mr. Wedgwood actually got out of bed before six o’clock. He would lie there very quietly so as not to disturb Mrs. Wedgwood, and concentrate on the details of his business. The brewer’s order, for instance, always took a lot of consideration. Especially in summer, when the beer was apt to go off if it stood too long. One had to make a pretty close estimate of one’s requirements. It would never do to order too little, and so run the risk of being short at the end of the week. On the other hand, ordering too much meant that the stuff remained in the cellar longer than was advisable. It was upon problems like these that Mr. Wedgwood’s not very rapid thoughts ruminated during his first waking minutes.

But on this particular morning, no sooner was Mr. Wedgwood awake than he resolved upon physical rather than mental activities. At the back of the Green Bear was an extensive kitchen garden which Mr. Wedgwood

cultivated with care and success. He had at this time a magnificent crop of runner beans, and on the previous day one of his customers had asked him to sell him half a bushel of these. Mr. Wedgwood had agreed to do so, and every one knew that runner beans were best picked in the early morning. Here was the very opportunity, before the regular routine of the house began at six o'clock.

So Mr. Wedgwood slipped carefully out of bed, being careful not to disturb his sleeping wife. He tip-toed on his bare feet to the window, drew the curtains aside and looked out. He was greeted by a fine still morning which gave promise of a hot day later on.

Having surveyed the heavens, Mr. Wedgwood's gaze fell to earth. The window at which he stood was set in the front of the house and looked out over the open gravel space between it and the road. And in the centre of this space stood what Mr. Wedgwood took at first to be a large closed car.

Well, there was nothing surprising about that. It sometimes happened that people left their cars for the night in front of the Green Bear, instead of seeking the hospitality of Quain's Garage, a little farther down the road, especially if they arrived in the village late at night, for Mr. Quain was very deaf and once in bed was impossible to arouse.

But just as Mr. Wedgwood was about to turn away from the window, the eastern horizon began to glow with a pinkish light. Instantly the car seemed to appropriate to itself an undue share of this light, and to shimmer all over with unexpected brilliance.

The phenomenon was sufficiently marked to attract Mr. Wedgwood's attention. Once again he glanced at the car, to discover with surprise that its sides were panelled with glass. And then, with an unpleasant shock, the truth burst upon him. It was not a car at all. It was a motor hearse.

Now, Mr. Wedgwood, like many another stalwart publican, was profoundly superstitious. If he came upon a ladder bridging the pavement he would step into the roadway rather than walk under it. Not many years before, he had pulled the kitchen range to pieces in search of a death-watch beetle, which he believed to be concealed behind it. And if any of his customers, eating their bread and cheese in the bar at dinner-time, happened to spill a particle of salt upon the floor, he immediately produced a dust-pan and brush and swept it up.

So that now, staring wide-eyed at the hearse, he experienced a sensation of profound discomfort. He had no idea what misfortune the ominous machine might portend. But if it were unlucky to see a magpie first thing in the morning it must certainly be trebly so to see a hearse. With a shudder he

turned away from the window and drew the curtains to hide the evil vision from his eyes.

But as he sat down to pull on his socks, his forebodings gave place to a righteous anger. People had no business to leave hearses on other people's property like that. Likely enough the chap who had been driving it was asleep somewhere inside it. As Mr. Wedgwood pulled on his trousers, he decided that he'd go and wake him and give him a piece of his mind.

Burning with indignation, he thrust on his waistcoat and coat and then crept downstairs to the kitchen. Here he pulled on his boots and, without troubling to lace them, went to the front door and opened it. As he did so, a voice from the road hailed him.

"Morning, Sidney. Lovely morning, isn't it?"

Mr. Wedgwood recognized the figure on the passing bicycle. It was David Gurney, the foreman of the roadmen who were tarring the road between Fallowchurch and Dimbury.

"Morning, David," he replied. "We're going to have a scorcher later on, you can see."

"Seems like it," said David, as he passed on in the direction of Dimbury, leaving Mr. Wedgwood free to turn his attention to the hearse.

Seen from the window, it had a sufficiently ominous appearance, but now, viewing it close at hand, Mr. Wedgwood got a still greater shock. For the hearse was not empty as he had supposed. It contained a plain and somewhat discoloured elm coffin.

This was more than Mr. Wedgwood could stand. He turned back into the bar, poured himself out a stiff tot of whisky and drank it down neat. The warm glow of the spirit gave him courage to continue his investigations.

He went outside again and walked round the hearse, keeping at a respectful distance from it. There was no sign of any one in it. No living person, that is. But the coffin suggested sinister possibilities. Coffins, as Mr. Wedgwood reflected, are used for one purpose and one alone.

He walked out into the road and looked anxiously up and down it. David and his bicycle had disappeared and there was nobody else in sight. It was barely six o'clock yet, and the only wakeful creatures in the village were the cocks who were crowing lustily.

Mr. Wedgwood glanced furtively at the hearse over his shoulder. He couldn't bear the thought of Mrs. Wedgwood waking up and seeing it standing there. It would give her a turn that she wouldn't get over for days. It must be removed without delay. But how?

This question puzzled him for a minute or more. Then his face suddenly lighted up with a bright idea. It was a matter for Sergeant Playne.

He set off briskly and reached the sergeant's house, which was at the farther end of the village, within a few minutes. As he knocked on the door, the church clock struck six. A few seconds later, a window above his head was flung open, and the sergeant's head appeared.

"Well, what's all the racket about?" a surly voice demanded.

Mr. Wedgwood looked up, and Playne recognized him. "Why, landlord!" he continued more affably. "What are you doing rousing folks out of their beds at this time in the morning?"

"Sorry to disturb you, sergeant," replied Mr. Wedgwood apologetically. "But I'd like you to come round to my place at once if you don't mind."

"What's the matter?" Playne demanded abruptly. "Somebody broken in and pinched the till?"

"No, nobody's broken in," said Mr. Wedgwood. "But somebody's gone and left a coffin standing outside my door."

"Left a *what!*" exclaimed Playne incredulously.

"A coffin. Leastways, it's a motor hearse, with a coffin in it. And what may be inside the coffin is more than I can tell."

Playne chuckled to himself. He was well aware of Mr. Wedgwood's superstitions, which were indeed notorious. And he could imagine what a shock the discovery must have given him. But after all, the matter seemed to call for no active intervention on the part of the police.

"I shouldn't worry about it if I were you, landlord," he said soothingly. "The driver of the hearse isn't far away, you may be sure. I expect he found himself running out of petrol in the night and left the thing in your pull-in, as being the first convenient place he came to. I dare say he's gone along to try and wake Quain down at the garage. You'll see him come back with a tin of petrol pretty soon, and as soon as he's filled up, he'll drive away."

Mr. Wedgwood seemed hardly reassured. "And what if he doesn't, sergeant?" he replied. "I can't have that thing standing in front of my house all the morning."

"Afraid it might keep custom away, I suppose? Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll get up and make myself a cup of tea, and then, after I've finished one or two things, I'll stroll up to your place. And if the hearse hasn't gone then I'll take a few particulars. How will that suit you?"

"It's very good of you, sergeant, I'm sure," replied Mr. Wedgwood gratefully. "I never could abide coffins and such."

Mr. Wedgwood might have lingered, but the sergeant's face disappeared and the window closed with a bang of finality. There was nothing left for Mr. Wedgwood but to return to the Green Bear. The hearse still stood outside the front door, looking more sombre than ever in the growing light of morning. Mr. Wedgwood averted his eyes from it and shuddered.

He entered the house, shut the door behind him and locked it. Then he lighted the gas and put the kettle on the ring. It was his invariable habit to make a cup of tea for Mrs. Wedgwood and himself at this time in the morning.

But, as he busied himself with the teapot, he remained alert for any sound from without. It was quite likely that the sergeant was right, but Mr. Wedgwood had no intention of letting the driver get away with it so easily as all that. He'd have something to say to him first. He'd tell him what he thought about a chap who left coffins lying around to scare decent folks out of their wits. When Mr. Wedgwood was sufficiently aroused his vocabulary became mordant and extensive. While the water boiled he mentally framed sentences calculated to sting the most hardened.

Having made the tea and stirred the pot vigorously with a spoon, he carried a cup upstairs. He found Mrs. Wedgwood still asleep, and awakened her by laying a heavy hand upon her shoulder. "Wake up, mother," he said. "Here's your tea all waiting for you."

This was his usual formula. But there must have been an unfamiliar note in his voice, for Mrs. Wedgwood, half-asleep as she was, detected at once that all was not well with her husband.

"Why, whatever's wrong with you this morning, Sidney?" she demanded. "If it's your stomach, you'd better take one of those tablets the doctor gave you last year. You'll find them on the mantelpiece in the kitchen."

"It isn't my stomach," replied Mr. Wedgwood gloomily. And then in a desperate attempt to break the news as gently as possible, he added, "I've just been along the road to see the sergeant."

Mrs. Wedgwood, now thoroughly awake, sat up abruptly. She was a big woman with a jolly face and a deep voice, which even the most turbulent customer instinctively respected. She stared at her husband suspiciously. "Been down the road to see the sergeant?" she exclaimed. "Whatever for?"

But her sudden movement had alarmed her husband. He hastily placed himself between the bed and the window. "Now don't you go looking out on to the front," he said.

“It’s my belief that you’ve taken leave of your senses this morning, Sidney,” she said with an air of decision. “Now, just you pull yourself together, and tell me what all this is about.”

Mr. Wedgwood lowered his voice as he imparted the macabre tidings. “There’s one of them motor hearses standing outside the door,” he said sepulchrally. “And what’s more, there’s a coffin in it. And what’s inside the coffin you can guess as well as I can.”

“God bless my soul!” exclaimed Mrs. Wedgwood in a tone of relief. “I thought you were going to tell me that there’s been a terrible accident, at least. What’s a hearse, or a coffin for that matter, to make all that fuss about? Now, you go along downstairs and sweep out the bar while I put my things on.”

“Well, don’t say I didn’t warn you before you looked out,” said Mr. Wedgwood sulkily.

He went slowly downstairs, feeling distinctly aggrieved. Nobody but himself appeared to appreciate the ominous portent. Well, they might say what they liked. He, for his own part, felt in his bones that no good would come of it.

He set to work to sweep out the bar, not because his wife had told him to, but because it was his invariable practice at this time in the morning. But in spite of himself, his glance kept straying to the window. The hearse was still there, its glass-panelled sides shining brightly in the risen sun. A sparrow had alighted on its roof and was chirping noisily.

The hearse seemed to have an uncanny fascination for Mr. Wedgwood. Do what he would, he could not keep his eyes away from it. It was as though he expected some hair-raising drama to unfold itself. As if at any moment the coffin lid might raise itself and the shrouded head of a corpse be thrust out. Mr. Wedgwood shivered and poured himself out another tot of whisky.

The consumption of this dispelled these hideous fancies. But still the hearse absorbed his attention. In the end he abandoned his sweeping and, leaning against the door-post, stared gloomily at the object of his resentment.

In the course of this prolonged inspection he perceived that the hearse was by no means new. One of the glass panels was cracked and only kept in place by strips of sticking plaster. The paint-work, which had once been uniformly black, now showed ugly patches of rust. The bonnet was crooked, the wings were dented, the tyres showed the canvas beneath their tread. Altogether the abandoned vehicle seemed to Mr. Wedgwood too dilapidated

even for the purposes of a pauper's funeral. The very coffin inside it, as he noted with a shudder, looked second-hand.

The sound of his wife's footsteps as she came downstairs aroused Mr. Wedgwood from his contemplation. He seized his broom once more and began bustling about the bar with an appearance of intense energy. But this sudden activity did not deceive Mrs. Wedgwood.

"Why can't you leave that old hearse alone, and get on with your work?" she demanded. "What a man you are to let a thing like that get on your nerves. You run along to the back and chop me some wood for the copper fire. By the time you've finished, some one will have come along and driven the old thing away. You see if they haven't."

But her comforting prediction was not verified. The hearse continued to stand outside the Green Bear, casting its sombre shadow on at least one of the inmates of the house. And it was not until half-past seven, when Mrs. Wedgwood was frying bacon for breakfast, that Sergeant Playne appeared in fulfilment of his promise.

Mr. Wedgwood, who had secretly been on the look-out for him for the last hour, went out to meet him. The sergeant, with that dignity of movement peculiar to policemen, dismounted from his bicycle. "Well, landlord," he said cheerfully, "you haven't got rid of this hearse of yours yet, then?"

"No," replied Mr. Wedgwood morosely. "What am I going to do about it? I can't have it standing about here all day, sergeant."

"Let's have a look at it," said Playne. "It's seen its best days, that's a certainty. A coat of paint wouldn't do it any harm, either. I shouldn't wonder if somebody hadn't dumped it here to get rid of it."

The number-plates were obscured with rust and Playne had to rub them over with a cloth borrowed from Mr. Wedgwood before he could read them.

"ZZ 542," he said. "I'll just make a note of that in case any inquiries are made. Now let's look at the licence."

The licence, which bore the stamp of the Berkshire County Council, showed that a black hearse No. ZZ 542, had paid tax until the end of the current year. "Nothing wrong about that," commented Playne. "As I said just now, I expect the chap in charge of it ran out of petrol or had a breakdown of some kind. I'll just unscrew the lid of the tank."

But the tank upon inspection proved to be far from dry. "There's a gallon there, at least," said the sergeant. "That can't have been the trouble, then. Well, I'm sorry, landlord, but I can't do anything about it. This pull-in of yours is private property, and you've always allowed people to park their cars upon it."

“Cars, but not hearses,” said Mr. Wedgwood firmly. “And what about the coffin inside it? That’s what I want to know.”

“Oh, that’s empty, of course,” the sergeant replied. “Nobody would leave a body unattended like that, even in a private parking place. Hallo, who’s this coming along the road? He seems to be in a tearing hurry, whoever he is.”

A cyclist was approaching from the direction of Dimbury, pedalling as though for dear life. His head was bent down low over his handle-bars and it was not until he was nearly abreast of them that Mr. Wedgwood recognized him.

“Why, it’s Dave Gurney,” he exclaimed. “Whatever can have come over him? I never saw him ride like that before.”

Gurney, hearing the landlord’s voice, looked up. Then, catching sight of Sergeant Playne, he applied his brakes sharply.

“Ah, there you are, sergeant!” he exclaimed, as he half fell off his bicycle. “It’s you I’m looking for. There’s something terrible happened way back along the road where we’re tarring.”

“Accident?” demanded the sergeant sharply. “Cars in collision, I suppose. Anybody hurt?”

Dave shook his head. “No, there’s been no collision,” he said. “But somebody’s been and fallen into my tar boiler.”

“Fallen into your tar boiler!” exclaimed Playne. “How did he manage to do that? Is he badly hurt?”

“I dunno, for he’s still in there,” replied Dave. “The chaps don’t come along till eight o’clock, and I couldn’t get him out by myself, could I? That’s why I came along to see you.”

The sergeant was a man of quick decision in emergency. He turned to Mr. Wedgwood. “You run along to Dr. Menslowe,” he said. “Tell him that somebody’s fallen into a tar boiler on the Dimbury road, and that he’d better come along as soon as he can. I’ll go to the place with Gurney here and wait till the doctor comes.”

The sergeant, pedalling along the Dimbury road in Gurney’s wake, had no breath to spare for asking questions. This particular stretch of highway, though in no sense a main road, was in excellent condition. It wound in a series of fairly sharp turns through a prosperous agricultural country. A few isolated cottages and farmhouses were scattered along it, but there were no villages between Fallowchurch and Dimbury, a distance of four and a half miles. A solitary inn, suitably named The Halfway House, stood, as its name implied, roughly equidistant between Dimbury and Fallowchurch.



As they neared the second milestone from Fallowchurch, Gurney slackened his pace. A red notice-board was propped up beside the road, bearing the words: "TARRING IN PROGRESS. PROCEED WITH CAUTION." A few yards farther on, the newly-gritted surface of the road showed where the operation was proceeding. And here, drawn up on the grass by the side of the road, was a black pot-bellied object on wheels, with an iron chimney. The sergeant recognized this as one of the tar boilers belonging to the county council.

Gurney dismounted from his bicycle and Playne followed his example. The foreman of the roadmen approached and with obvious repugnance swung back the lid.

"There you are, sergeant," he said, "you have a look for yourself. It isn't so terrible hot now, for I drew the fire afore I came along to fetch you."

Playne stood upon one of the wheels of the tar boiler, from which point of vantage he could look into the interior. For a second or two he could perceive nothing but blackness and a reek of hot tar. Then he made out something vague and undefined floating on the surface of the viscous liquid. As his eyes recovered from the smart of the tar vapour, this object took upon itself the shape of a human body.

The sergeant jumped hastily off the wheel. "We've got to get him out somehow, though I'm blest if I see how we're going to do it," he exclaimed. "I've got it; there's a tap at the bottom of this concern to run the tar off by, isn't there? Look sharp and get it open."

But Dave shook his head doubtfully. "I'm not so sure about that," he said. "What's the surveyor going to say to me when he hears that I've wasted three or four barrels of good tar? Likely as not he'd stop it out of my wages."

"Oh, I'll make it all right with the surveyor," said Playne impatiently. "Come on, look sharp and get that tap turned on."

Gurney, muttering something about it being no affair of his, turned the tap from which a black stream immediately issued, forming a pool upon the ground. It was evident that it would take several minutes to empty the boiler, and Playne produced his notebook.

"Now then, Gurney, tell me all you know about this," he said.

"I don't know nothing about it," replied Gurney sullenly. "All I can say is that I came along here at my usual time, between half-past five and six. Sidney Wedgwood can bear me out in that, for he was standing at the door of the Green Bear and saw me go past."

"You start earlier than the men of your gang, then?" the sergeant asked.

“Why, of course, I do. That’s only natural, isn’t it? Somebody’s got to get the fire started so that the tar will be boiling by the time the men come to work, haven’t they?”

“I see,” said Playne. “You got here between half-past five and six, this morning. What did you do then?”

“Why, got out the sticks and coal from that sack you see lying yonder. Then I went to the fire door to open it and rake out the ashes. And it was a funny thing, but the fire hadn’t burnt right out. The tar in the boiler was well nigh hot enough to work and I’ve never known that [to] happen before.”

“You don’t rake out the fire in the evenings when you finish work, then?”

“Well, sometimes I do, and sometimes I don’t. Yesterday evening I didn’t. It hardly seemed worth while. It had pretty well burnt itself out by the time we knocked off. That’s why I can’t understand how it still came to be alight this morning.”

“What did you do when you found that the fire was still burning?”

“Well, just chucked in a few lumps of coal. It saved me the trouble of lighting it all over again. And then I sat down to drink the flask of tea what I’d brought with me.”

“You didn’t lift the lid of the boiler and look inside?”

“Not me. What should I do that for? We had emptied a couple of barrels of tar into it just before we knocked off yesterday evening. I knew there was plenty in there to start work this morning.”

“How did you find out that there was somebody in it, then?” Playne asked.

“It was like this. As the fire began to get hold, I saw that everything wasn’t right with the old boiler. She began to splutter and crackle and I knew that something had got in along with the tar. A cupful of water will do that, and it’s a terrible job to get it out sometimes. But there hadn’t been any rain in the night, so I knew it couldn’t be that. So I left it alone for a bit, thinking it would settle down, but it didn’t. At last I says to myself, I’ll lift that lid and take a peep inside to see what’s the matter. And then when I got poking about with a piece of stick, I found that there poor chap.”

“He didn’t show any signs of life, I suppose?”

“You wouldn’t show much signs of life, sergeant, if you’d been all that time in a lot of hot tar. So I let go the lid and drew the fire, and came along to fetch you. I did quite right, didn’t I?”

“Yes, you did right enough,” said Playne thoughtfully. He made a few rapid entries in his notebook and then looked up as he heard the sound of an approaching car. “That’ll be Dr. Menslowe,” he said. “He’s too late to do any good, I’m afraid, but he may be able to tell us something. You stay here, Gurney, I’ll go and meet him and tell him what’s the matter.”

In a few hurried words, Playne informed the doctor of what had happened. Then the two of them rejoined Gurney beside the tar boiler. The black stream from the emptying tank had dwindled to a mere trickle. The sergeant opened the lid and glanced in.

“Come along and bear a hand, Gurney,” he said.

“There’s one or two of the chaps coming along the road now,” Gurney replied. “The more of us there are the easier the job will be.”

This seemed sensible enough. Three men on bicycles, the first arrivals of the tarring gang, appeared on the scene. Gurney, in a halting whisper, explained the circumstances to them. For a few seconds, the group stood round the boiler looking at it distrustfully, wondering how the body was to be extricated.

“I’ve got it,” exclaimed Dr. Menslowe suddenly. “There are enough of us here to tip the confounded thing over on its side. Then we can roll the body out, instead of having to fish for it.”

Gurney seemed inclined to oppose this idea. Such disrespectful treatment of the council’s property was contrary to all his instincts. But a look from the sergeant silenced him. By dint of their united efforts, the tar boiler was heaved over till it lay on its side on the ground. The removal of the body then proved to be an easy task.

Dr. Menslowe bent over it and the sergeant turned to Gurney.

“Dix, the landlord of the Halfway House, has got a hand-cart,” he said. “Send a couple of your men along there and ask him if we may borrow it. He’s got plenty of room in those outhouses of his and he’ll be able to find us somewhere to put this body for a while. You will have to knock off your tarring for the day, I’m afraid. The best thing you can do is to slip back to Fallowchurch and get on to the surveyor by ’phone. You can tell him that you’re acting under orders from the police, if you like.”

Gurney grumbled audibly at the receipt of these instructions. Clearly he resented the interruption of his work by such a trifle as the chance discovery of a body. However, he sent his men off in the direction of the Halfway House and himself mounted his bicycle and pedalled off towards Fallowchurch.

After an interval Dr. Menslowe straightened himself. "The man's quite dead, of course," he said. "And what's more, the body is utterly unrecognizable. The hot tar has burnt away the features almost completely. I heard you say you'd have him taken to the Halfway House. When you've got him there I'll try to get as much of the tar off him as I can. But I warn you that you're going to find identification a very difficult matter indeed. Unless, of course you've already got some idea who it is."

Playne shook his head. "I haven't the slightest idea who he is, or how he got into the tar boiler, doctor," he replied. "Isn't there any way of telling whether he was dead or alive at the time?"

"There may be," said the doctor doubtfully. "I wouldn't count on that, though, if I were you. And, under the circumstances, it's not a bit of good asking me how long he has been dead. I don't think anybody could possibly tell you that. You'll take the necessary steps, I suppose?"

"You can leave that to me, doctor," the sergeant replied. "As soon as we get his body safely to the Halfway House I'll go back to Fallowchurch and send one of my men here to keep any one from messing with the boiler. Then I'll get on to the super and make my report. You will notify the coroner, I dare say?"

"Yes, I'll do that as soon as I've made a preliminary examination. He's certain to order a post-mortem and send somebody along to carry it out. Ah, here come those fellows with the hand-cart. We'll get the body on to it at once."

The body, wrapped in a tarpaulin which was part of the equipment of the tarring gang, was lifted on to the cart and the melancholy procession moved away.

Sergeant Playne, having seen to the disposal of the body in a convenient outhouse of the Halfway House, bicycled back to Fallowchurch. As he passed the Green Bear he noticed the hearse standing where he had last seen it. Since it was now getting on for nine o'clock, this struck him as curious. However, his mind was now fully occupied with more serious matters than derelict hearses. He rode on to his own house, whence he immediately got into communication with the Superintendent of Police who was his immediate superior.

If the body found in the tar boiler had been recognizable, the County Police would probably have kept the investigation in their own hands. But, faced with the difficulty of identifying it, and with the ascertained fact that no one in Fallowchurch or its neighbourhood had mysteriously vanished, the Chief Constable decided to summon the aid of Scotland Yard. The matter

was referred to Superintendent Hanslet, who, under normal circumstances, would have dealt with it himself. But, as he was to explain later to Dr. Priestley, a second major case had arisen to claim his attention. He was compelled, therefore, to depute the Fallowchurch affair to his assistant, Inspector Waghorn.

Jimmy Waghorn, a graduate of Cambridge and the Metropolitan Police College, Hendon, had been for a couple of years attached to Hanslet at Scotland Yard, where he had made himself very popular with his colleagues. Among his superiors he was considered a highly promising detective officer. He had the gift of learning the experience of the older men of the Force and grafting this on to his own by no means inconsiderable educational attainments. He also had the inestimable advantage of knowing Dr. Priestley, from whom he had acquired something of the latter's own respect for facts.

The telephone message from the County Police reached Scotland Yard shortly before half-past two. Jimmy caught the three o'clock train at Charing Cross, arriving at Fallowchurch Station at 4.26 p.m. Here he was met by Sergeant Playne, who seemed distinctly taken aback by the youthfulness of the inspector.

Jimmy, always pretty shrewd at guessing other people's thoughts, laughed outright. "I'm not so young as I look, really, sergeant," he said. "At all events, I've been two years at the Yard and that's calculated to take the callowness out of any man. Besides, I shall have your fund of experience to draw upon. I'm only here to help and advise, you know, not to take charge."

"It's very good of you to put it in that way, sir," said Playne in some confusion.

"Let's drop the 'sir' except on formal occasions," said Jimmy. "You and I are just two policemen engaged on the same job and we don't want any stiffness between us. Is there anywhere where we can have a cup of tea together, while you tell me this story of yours?"

It ended by Jimmy being entertained to tea in the sergeant's house. Playne told the story of the discovery of the body in the tar boiler and its removal to the Halfway House.

"Since I reported to the superintendent this morning, I've had a further report from Dr. Menslowe," he continued. "The doctor managed to get most of the tar off the body, but he says that it's still absolutely unrecognizable. And that's hardly wonderful, considering that it must have been lying in that nearly boiling tar for some hours."

"Can the doctor give us any particulars about the body at all?" Jimmy asked.

“He says that it is the body of a man about five feet eight inches in height. The man was well nourished, though probably not over-stout. As to his age he was probably over forty-five. And those are the only particulars that the doctor can give.”

“What about the man, David Gurney, who found the body?”

“He’s a thoroughly respectable chap who’s been employed by the County Council for years. He lives here in Fallowchurch and has a blameless reputation. He’s got a wife and two daughters, both of whom are in domestic service, and he sings in the choir. I don’t think that it’s at all likely that he knows more than he has already told me.”

“I’m not an expert on road work, though of course I know what a tar boiler looks like. What is the routine in the case of this one exactly?”

“I’d better tell you what Gurney and his gang have been doing during the last few days. To begin with, the council decided to tar the road between Dimbury and here, beginning at the Dimbury end. The first step was to get the materials ready. A lorry came along dropping tar barrels at intervals, and these were rolled on to the grass at the side of the road. Then other lorries came, bringing grit from the gravel pits, which they dumped here and there, also on the grass.

“Everything was ready towards the end of last week, then Dave and his lads got to work with the actual tarring. You say you know what a tar boiler looks like? Well, this one’s got a pump and a sprayer. The idea is this. Tar is poured into the boiler from the barrels and the fire stoked until the tar is boiling. Then a horse is harnessed to the shafts of the boiler and the thing is dragged along the road. One man works the pump which forces the tar out through the nozzle of the sprayer. Dave himself holds the nozzle and spreads the tar over the road. Other members of his gang follow up with a hand-cart full of grit which they sprinkle over the surface of the road as Gurney passes.”

“I’ve got that all right, I think,” said Jimmy. “What happens exactly when the men knock off work for the day?”

“The boiler is run into some convenient place where it won’t be in the way of the traffic. Gurney’s practice is to see that it is full up with tar, or nearly so, before the men go away, so that no time is wasted in the morning. Gurney himself sees that the fire is out, or so low that there is no danger of its setting anything alight. Then one of the men goes off with the horse—they usually park him with one of the farmers near where they are working—and the rest go off home on their bicycles. The next morning, Gurney

goes out to the tar boiler about a couple of hours or so before the rest of the gang, lights his fire again and watches it until the tar boils.”

“No sort of watch is kept over the boiler at night, I suppose?”

Sergeant Playne shook his head. “It isn’t necessary,” he replied. “Nobody would be likely to steal it. The worst they could do would be to run off some of the tar and take it away.”

“I think you said that when Gurney reached the boiler this morning, he found the fire still burning?”

“So he says. He can’t understand it, for he has never known such a thing to happen before.”

“Is there much traffic on the road between here and Dimbury?”

“There’s a fair amount during the day-time, but as a rule, there’s not much at night. As it happens, one of my chaps had a point with the constable from Dimbury outside the Halfway House at half-past eleven last night. I questioned him, of course. He says that not more than three or four cars passed him from the time he left Fallowchurch until he got back again. As for the tar boiler, he saw it standing by the roadside, but he’s quite certain that there was nobody hanging round about it.”

“I suppose no one who would correspond with the doctor’s very vague description has been missing from these parts lately?”

Again Playne shook his head. “I thought of that at once,” he replied. “I made what inquiries I could, and I can’t hear of any one. But if you’ve finished your tea, I dare say you’d like to walk out to the Halfway House and look round?”

“I’d rather borrow a bicycle,” Jimmy replied. “Walking isn’t much in my line, I’m afraid.”

“Then I can very soon fix you up,” said the sergeant. He was as good as his word, and within a few minutes he and Jimmy had mounted their bicycles and were riding through the village.

It was not yet six o’clock, and consequently the Green Bear was not open. But as they passed the house the sign caught Jimmy’s attention. “Nice looking pub, that,” he said approvingly. “But is the landlord an undertaker as well as a publican?”

“Mr. Wedgwood an undertaker!” Playne exclaimed. “Why, he’d faint away at the very idea of such a thing. Oh, you mean that hearse standing outside? That’s rather a queer thing. Somebody left it here in the middle of last night and has never come back to fetch it. Wedgwood’s very upset about

it, I can tell you. If I hadn't been so busy over this tar boiling business I might have tried to do something about it for him."

"We may as well have a look at it as we're passing," said Jimmy.

He got off his bicycle and walked round the hearse on the pretext of examining it. Actually his imagination was busy with a theory which had flashed upon him. A hearse naturally suggested a dead body. Had this hearse any connexion with the body which had been found in the tar boiler?

There was really no logical reason to connect the appearance of the hearse with the discovery of the body. But Jimmy had already made several mental notes upon the case with which he had been entrusted. Most of these concerned the means by which the body had found its way into the boiler. There were three possibilities to be considered. The first was that of accident. It was, he supposed, conceivably possible that some inquisitive person had come along during the night and opened the lid of the boiler. Peering into its interior, he might have overbalanced and fallen in. On the whole, Jimmy was not inclined to favour this explanation.

The second possibility was that some individual had hit upon an entirely novel form of suicide. But it seemed incredible that any one should seek so painful a form of death as being boiled alive. This explanation, too, might be discarded as supremely improbable. The only remaining possibility was that of murder.

That he was confronted with a case of murder, Jimmy had from the first been convinced. Everything pointed to it. The body had been disposed of in such a way that when discovered it would be unrecognizable. This of course was greatly to the murderer's advantage. It was probable that his victim was already dead when he was thrown into the boiler. It did not follow that the murder had been committed in the immediate neighbourhood. In that case the murderer had been faced with the problem of the transport of the body from the scene of the murder to the boiler.

Now a dead body was not an easy thing to transport. It could not readily be disguised, and its conveyance in any ordinary vehicle might well lead to remark. But a hearse! Hearses were constructed for the very purpose of transporting dead bodies. A murderer might drive his victim all over England in one without arousing the slightest suspicion. No one would stop him to inquire into the origin of the body which the hearse must be presumed to contain. And this particular hearse had mysteriously appeared upon the scene during the very night in which the body had been deposited in the boiler.



Jimmy did not reveal his thoughts to the sergeant; time enough for that when he had found even a particle of evidence with which to support his theory. As Playne had done before him, he glanced at the number-plates and at the licence.

“It wouldn’t waste much of our time to put a call through to the Berkshire County Council, and find out who this thing belongs to,” Jimmy remarked.

“I’d have done that before if I hadn’t had so many other things to attend to,” the sergeant replied. “I’ll nip back to my place and tell one of my chaps to do it now. He’ll have got an answer by the time we get back from the Halfway House.”

“You say that the landlord of this pub doesn’t like the thing standing here. Well, I don’t blame him. It’s not altogether a cheerful spectacle. Isn’t there a garage in the village we could run it into?”

“Well, there’s Quain’s place just up the road. I dare say he wouldn’t mind taking it in. But he’ll expect to be paid for it, you know. Shall I slip in and ask him to send a chap round to drive it there?”

“There’s no need for that,” Jimmy replied. “If the thing can be made to go, I dare say that I can drive it.”

“I expect it’s broken down or something, else it wouldn’t have been left standing out here,” said the sergeant dubiously.

“Well, let’s try our luck, anyhow,” said Jimmy. He sprang into the driving seat and put his foot on the self-starter pedal. After two or three attempts the engine started. Guided by the sergeant, Jimmy drove the hearse into the yard of the local garage.

Mr. Quain yielded to the sergeant’s representations and raised no objection to the hearse standing in the yard for a reasonable time. But Jimmy was still unsatisfied. “I suppose we ought to find out what’s inside that coffin, sergeant,” he said.

Playne grinned. “The coffin’s empty, I’ll be bound,” he replied. “You don’t expect to find a body in it, do you?”

“I’ve learnt by now that a policeman never knows what to expect,” said Jimmy. He opened the back of the hearse, caught hold of one of the handles of the coffin and gave it a tug. “I can’t budge it,” he said quietly. “Come and bear me a hand, sergeant.”

It was with the greatest difficulty that the two of them dragged the coffin from the hearse and laid it on the ground.

“Well, I’m bound to admit that I was wrong,” said Playne as he mopped his face with a large handkerchief. “The blessed thing isn’t empty, that’s certain enough.”

“Well, we’ll very soon find out what’s in it,” Jimmy replied. “There are only two screws holding the lid, I see. If you can borrow a good-sized screwdriver from your friend, Mr. Quain, we’ll very soon have them out.”

The tool was produced, and Jimmy rapidly extracted the screws. Between them they lifted the lid off the coffin. It proved to be rather more than half-full of gravel.

Jimmy’s face lighted up. This surely was evidence in support of his theory. He bent down idly, picked up a handful of the gravel, looked at it and then put it in his pocket.

“Well, that’s that,” he said. “We needn’t waste any more time over this little lot. At least, not for the present. We’d better be getting along to the Halfway House.”

Once more they mounted their bicycles, and set out on the road towards Dimbury. In less than quarter of an hour, they reached the overturned tar boiler over which one of Playne’s constables was still standing sentry. The sergeant explained to Jimmy how the body had been extracted, and the steps which had subsequently been taken.

Jimmy listened and then began to examine the boiler for himself. It had been drawn up beside the road, at a spot where the grass verge was about five yards wide. A few yards away from the boiler was the remains of a heap of grit, the greater part of which had already been used for sprinkling the roads. Jimmy bent down and picked up a sample of this grit. It seemed to him exactly similar to the handful which he had taken from the coffin.

Jimmy next turned his attention to the tar which had been run out of the boiler. This had now cooled and spread into a thick viscous pool over the surrounding part. It was not a promising subject for exploration, and Jimmy felt that it might be left where it was for the present.

Having completed his preliminary survey, he suggested to the sergeant that they might go on and view the body.

This most unpleasant duty was soon completed. A single glance satisfied Jimmy that the remains were indeed completely unrecognizable. Finally, they returned to Fallowchurch, after Jimmy had expressed a wish that the guard upon the tar boiler should not be relaxed.

Upon reaching the sergeant’s house, they found that a reply had been received to their inquiry. The Berkshire County Council had looked up the record of the registration number ZZ 542. It had been allotted to a sixteen

horse-power motor hearse, the property of Messrs. Colder & Brown, funeral furnishers, of Reading.

“It’s wonderful how things change their name,” said Jimmy. “An asylum has become a mental hospital, a workhouse a Poor Law Institute, a pair of pyjamas a slumber suit, and an undertaker a funeral furnisher. However, the things remain the same whatever people care to call them. So this hearse of ours belongs to a firm of funeral furnishers, does it? Now, why do you suppose, sergeant, that they took it into their heads to dump it outside the Green Bear at Fallowchurch?”

Playne shook his head in complete perplexity. “I haven’t the slightest idea, inspector,” he replied.

“But I think I have,” said Jimmy. “Look here, sergeant, you know the provisions of the Road Act as well or better than I do. What do you have to do when you sell any sort of motor vehicle to any one else?”

“You have to notify your Registration Authority, on a form R.F. 70, which may be obtained from any money-order post office,” Payne replied promptly.

“Well done, sergeant; you’ve got the regulations by heart, I can see that. What particulars do you have to give on this form?”

“The registration, make and class of the vehicle and the name and address of the person to whom it was handed over.”

“Splendid, but do you have to do all that before you part with a vehicle?”

“The regulations don’t say so. They say ‘at the time when the vehicle is handed over.’”

“Most people would interpret that as giving a margin of a few days. I think it extremely probable that Messrs. Colder & Brown have sold this hearse quite recently, and have not yet notified their registration authority. In that case they’ll know who they sold it to, and will be able to tell us.”

“And we can get in touch with them and inform them that the hearse has been deposited in Quain’s yard,” said the sergeant complacently.

“No, I don’t think we’ll do that exactly,” replied Jimmy slowly. “It’s in my mind that the present owner of the hearse could tell us quite a lot about the body that’s lying at the Halfway House. Listen, sergeant, and I’ll tell you the theory I’ve formed.

“I don’t believe that the dead man comes from this part of the world at all. I believe he was murdered a considerable distance away by an individual who for the present we’ll call X. Now X is faced with the problem which is

the curse of all good murderers. He has to dispose of the body without casting suspicion on himself. In this case he has hit upon a very good dodge for making the body of his victim unrecognizable.

“But he didn’t care to select a tar boiler too near the scene of the murder. People might jump to conclusions when the body was found. He had then to consider the transport of the body to a safe and convenient distance. And once again he got hold of an extraordinarily bright idea. If he has a hearse at his disposal, his problem disappears. Far from having to conceal the body of his victim, he has only to put it into a coffin and then he can drive it openly wherever his fancy inclines him. It’s really rather a wonderful scheme when you come to think about it.”

The sergeant looked slightly incredulous. “But I don’t quite see — —” he began.

“I haven’t finished yet. I’m not going to conjecture now when and where the body got into the coffin and the coffin into the hearse. I’m going straight on to what happened last night. The hearse, coffin and body reached the tar boiler at some time after your man had come back from his point at the Halfway House.

“We don’t know when that was. Let’s say two o’clock in the morning, for the sake of argument. The driver of the hearse pulls in as near as he can to the boiler. He takes the body out of the coffin and transfers it to the boiler. Then he puts a few shovelful of grit into the coffin by way of make-weight.

“But by two o’clock in the morning the fire would be out and the tar would be nearly cold. Since one of the murderer’s objects is that the body should not be identified, it is necessary for him to rekindle the fire. There would, as you have probably noticed for yourself, be no difficulty about that. Apart from the sack of coal which I saw lying near the boiler, there were several pieces of wood about which, smeared with tar, would make excellent kindling. The murderer, I feel pretty certain, relighted the fire and made it up well. And that would account for Gurney finding it still smouldering this morning.

“All that remained then was to dispose of the hearse. I don’t doubt that the murderer had explored this ground beforehand. He had discovered the pull up in front of the Green Bear and realized that it would serve his purpose excellently. He just quietly drove up, stopped the engine and slipped away.”

“Where would he slip away to?” Sergeant Playne asked.

“That’s one of the things we’ve got to try and find out,” Jimmy replied. “I don’t suppose he hung about the village and took the first train from the

station this morning. That would have been far too risky. It's more likely that he walked some distance across country before he ventured to enter a public vehicle. And since at present we have no idea of his appearance, we're going to find it a difficult job to trace him.

"Now this is what I suggest, sergeant. I shall catch the first train in the morning to Reading. Meanwhile you had better find out what quarry the grit used on the road between here and Dimbury comes from. Get hold of the manager, show him the grit in the coffin, and ask him if it is the same. I'm pretty sure that it is, but it's just as well to have expert evidence on every possible point."

Next morning Jimmy took an early train to Reading, where he arrived about half-past nine. He found his way to the establishment of Messrs. Colder & Brown, and introduced himself to the manager. To him he explained that he was inquiring about a motor hearse, registered in the firm's name under the number ZZ 542.

"Oh, that old thing!" exclaimed the manager contemptuously. "We sold it two or three days back."

"Then how is it that it is still registered in your name?" Jimmy asked.

"Because I only notified the sale to the registration authority last night. They'll have got my letter by now."

"Would you mind giving me the name and the address of the purchaser?"

"Willingly," the manager replied. "I've got a note of him here. Mr. John Ambrose, High Street, Fallowchurch."

Jimmy succeeded in concealing his amazement. If the hearse had been purchased by a resident of Fallowchurch, its unexpected appearance in front of the Green Bear was very simply accounted for. In which case, his ingeniously constructed theory had crashed about his ears.

"Are you personally acquainted with Mr. Ambrose?" he asked.

"I saw him for a minute or two on Wednesday afternoon, when he called to take away the hearse. And a very decent sort of chap he seemed. Rather different from what I had expected."

"What reason had you to expect anything else?" Jimmy asked quickly.

The manager laughed. "The chap who actually bought and paid for the hearse struck me as being rather a tough customer," he replied. "I'll tell you the whole story if you like. This particular hearse hasn't been in use for some little time now. It's out of date and hardly worth reconditioning. We kept it in reserve in case of breakdown, and at last we decided that it was

taking up more space than it was worth, and that the best thing we could do was to sell it. So we advertised it in the *Commercial Motor* at a price of £25.

“We had no reply until last Tuesday afternoon, when a fellow walked in here and asked if he could see the hearse that was for sale. He was a man of between fifty and sixty who looked and spoke like a typical countryman. What’s more, he was a remarkably ugly looking customer, for he had a harelip and a deformed left ear which looked like nothing so much as a horse mushroom. He was wearing a black coat, blue trousers and a hard hat. And I could see at a glance that he had had a good deal more to drink than was good for him. Altogether he seemed to me a very unlikely purchaser.

“I asked him what he wanted the hearse for, and he said that he had a brother-in-law whose name was John Ambrose, and who had an undertaker’s business in Fallowchurch. He told me that his own name was Alfred Pantony, and that as he happened to be coming to Reading that day, his brother-in-law had asked him to look at the hearse and buy it for him if it was any good. I still wasn’t altogether satisfied, and by way of testing him I told him that if we sold the hearse, we would only accept spot cash. To my astonishment, he produced a roll of notes, waved them in my face and asked me if they were good enough. Until then I couldn’t bring myself to believe that it was a genuine inquiry.

“Well, to make a long story short, I took him into the garage and showed him the hearse. He was in such a state that I am sure that he saw at least a couple of them. Anyhow, he never attempted any sort of examination. He just goggled at the thing and patted it like one might a horse. Then, with the typical gravity of a drunken man, he assured me that it was the very thing that his brother-in-law wanted. I took him back to the office where he paid over the money and I gave him a receipt. I asked him what he wanted done with the hearse and he said that his brother-in-law would call for it the next day. Then he went away and I’ve never seen him since. But I’d recognize him in a minute if I saw him again.

“Sure enough, his brother-in-law turned up next day just before lunch-time. He introduced himself as Mr. John Ambrose, the brother-in-law of Mr. Alfred Pantony, whom I had met the previous day. He was a fairly tall, smartly dressed fellow, wearing a black suit and a bowler hat. He produced the receipt which I had handed to Pantony, and told me that he would like to take the hearse away at once, as he wanted to get to Fallowchurch that afternoon. While my chaps were filling up with petrol, oil and water I had quite a chat with him. He told me that he was doing pretty well as a carpenter and an undertaker in Fallowchurch, and that he had already a horse-drawn hearse. But his trouble was that his horses were getting old and

past their work, and that he had decided to go in for a motor hearse as being cheaper to run. I told him that the one he had bought could do with a bit of paint, but he said that there would be no difficulty about that. As long as the machinery was in order he could manage the rest. I told him that to the best of my belief he would find nothing wrong with the chassis. Before he went off, he asked me if I had a ready-made coffin which I could let him have cheap, as he had a funeral on the next day. I showed him two or three, and he chose one which he paid for. My chaps put it in the hearse for him; then he said good-bye and drove away. I suppose that he got to Fallowchurch all right, or I should have heard from him before now."

"Yes, he got to Fallowchurch all right," Jimmy replied. "Well, thanks very much. You've given me all the particulars I wanted. Good-morning."

Jimmy caught the next train back to Fallowchurch. During the journey he tried to reconcile his theory with the particulars he had just learnt. Obviously both the inebriated Mr. Pantony and his alleged brother-in-law had given false names. They must both be concerned in the murder of the unknown man.

Upon arrival at Fallowchurch, he went straight to the sergeant's house, and found him enjoying a well-earned rest after lunch. "Is there an undertaker in this village?" he asked.

"Well, not exactly," Playne replied. "If anybody wants a posh funeral, they have to go to some one in Maidstone or one of the other towns round about. But Joe Purchase, the carpenter, will fix any one up with a funeral if they aren't too particular."

"That's not the name," said Jimmy. "There's nobody called John Ambrose living in the place, of course?"

"Why, yes, there is!" the sergeant exclaimed. "And not more than a couple of doors away, either. You may have noticed that little shop with the Handy Stores written up above it. Well, that belongs to John Ambrose and his wife, and has done for as long as I've been here."

This of course could be no more than coincidence, Jimmy thought. "Has this John Ambrose got a brother-in-law?" he asked.

"He has, and a pretty tough customer he is. Mrs. Ambrose's brother, that is. She was a Miss Pantony and she's got one brother, Alfred."

Jimmy dropped into a chair with a groan. "This is getting beyond me!" he exclaimed. "What would you say, sergeant, if I told you that John Ambrose bought that hearse and that Alfred Pantony paid for it?"

"I should say that you were pulling my leg," Sergeant Playne replied without hesitation.

“Well, I’m not doing so, intentionally, at all events. Just listen while I tell you what I learnt at Reading this morning.”

The sergeant listened with ever-increasing amazement. “Well, that’s the rummiest thing I ever heard in my life,” he commented. “We’d best go round and see what John Ambrose has got to say about it, hadn’t we?”

“I’d like you to tell me something about these folk, before we do that.”

“I don’t know if there’s much more to tell you about the Ambroses, inspector. They’re a decent hard-working pair who make a comfortable little living out of that general shop of theirs. I suppose Ambrose is getting on for sixty and his wife may be a few years younger.”

“And Alfred Pantony? He must be a pretty conspicuous sort of chap with that lip and ear?”

“He is that. There can’t be another like him.”

“What does he do for a living?”

“He doesn’t do anything now. He never did more than he could help. When I first came here, he was living with the Ambroses. He never had regular work, but used to do odd jobs about the village. He wasn’t a bad worker, I believe, but as soon as he got a few shillings in his pocket, he’d go on the booze and wouldn’t turn up at his work again for a long time. People wouldn’t stand that, of course, and it wasn’t always that he could find any one to employ him. I fancy that he lived on his sister’s charity most of the time.

“Then, a couple of years back, he had a wonderful stroke of luck. It always seems to me that these things happen to the least deserving people. Anyway, Alfred Pantony won a thousand pound prize in the Irish Sweep. But I will say this for him. There weren’t many folks sober in Fallowchurch on the night that he got the money.

“However, when Alf pulled himself together again, a day or two later, he acted more sensibly than one might have expected. He gave half the money to his sister right out, on the understanding that she keep him for the rest of his days. The rest he put away to spend as he wanted it, and I don’t mind guessing that there’s a good bit of it left still.”

“Some of it has gone in liquor, I suppose?” said Jimmy.

“That’s about it. I will say this, though. He’s learning to carry his drink without making a fool of himself. But you’ll find him in the bar of the Green Bear morning and night, whenever the place is open. And I’ve heard it said that he’s grown mingy lately. He doesn’t mind being treated, but doesn’t care about treating other folks.”



“Because he wants his money to last out as long as possible,” said Jimmy. “You’re right, we’d better go round and see John Ambrose. I think we’ll begin by asking him where he was on Wednesday afternoon last.”

“Wednesday is early closing day here,” said the sergeant.

“Yes, and that may be significant. Come along and you can introduce me.”

It was Mrs. Ambrose whose inspiration had christened the establishment the Handy Stores. The name was not inappropriate for the shop stood practically in the centre of the village. But in respect of its internal arrangements the word “handy” scarcely applied. The miscellaneous goods which it contained were heaped together in a thoroughly inextricable confusion. If you asked for a bar of soap Mr. or Mrs. Ambrose had to shift half a dozen such unlikely things as rubber boots before it could be found. You might reckon that it would take ten minutes to effect the simplest purchase. However, Mr. and Mrs. Ambrose were always good-tempered and ready to please. It would have been positively cruel to express the slightest impatience.

As Jimmy and the sergeant entered the place, an elderly man was standing behind the counter, weighing out pounds of sugar with the aid of a primitive balance.

“Good-afternoon, Mr. Ambrose,” said the sergeant. “I’ve brought round a friend of mine from Scotland Yard to have a word with you.”

Mr. Ambrose turned round and Jimmy saw at a glance that he could not have been the man who had collected the car from Reading. He was undersized, with a wizened face and a short unkempt beard. He differed in every respect from the description which Colder & Brown’s manager had given of the man who called himself John Ambrose.

“Pleased to meet you, I’m sure,” said Mr. Ambrose, apparently somewhat bewildered by the sergeant’s introduction.

“The pleasure’s mine,” said Jimmy politely. “There are just one or two questions I should like to ask you. To begin with, can you tell me what you were doing about midday on Wednesday, the day before yesterday?”

“What I was doing?” Mr. Ambrose replied. “Why, what would I be doing but serving in the shop here? You see, we close at one o’clock on Wednesday, and there’s always a rush for an hour or two before that. People never seem to remember till the last minute that there’s something they want.”

“And what did you do after the shop was closed?”

“Why, I had some dinner and a bit of a nap afterwards. Then I went out into my kitchen garden and dug a few potatoes. Wednesday afternoon’s the only chance I have to do any gardening.”

“Was Mrs. Ambrose with you all the time?”

“Why, of course she was. She had dinner with me and then helped me to dig up the potatoes afterwards.”

“Was your brother-in-law, Alfred Pantony, with you too? He lives here, doesn’t he?”

“He certainly has his meals here. It isn’t much that we see of him, since he won all that money. But he wasn’t here on Wednesday and he isn’t here now. He’s gone away with that Mr. Cartmell who’s been staying at the Green Bear.”

“Where’s he gone to?” Jimmy asked sharply.

But Mr. Ambrose shook his head. “That’s more than I can say,” he replied. “He wouldn’t tell us where he was going. And we didn’t know anything about it until after breakfast on Tuesday, when he asked me if he could borrow an old Gladstone bag I’ve got. I asked him what he wanted it for, and he said just to put a few things in. He said that he was going away with Mr. Cartmell for a few days, and we mustn’t expect him back till we saw him.”

Mr. Ambrose paused as a sudden idea struck him. “He hasn’t got into any trouble?” he asked anxiously.

“Not that I know of,” Jimmy replied reassuringly. “You haven’t heard from him since he’s been away?”

“Alf was never much of a hand at writing,” said Mr. Ambrose. “We shouldn’t be likely to hear from him unless he wanted anything.”

Jimmy looked round the shop speculatively. It seemed to him to contain an extraordinary number of articles which nobody could possibly want. “Have you ever thought of going into the undertaker’s business, Mr. Ambrose?” he asked suddenly.

“Now, whatever could have put that into your head!” Mr. Ambrose exclaimed. “Whatever should I think of doing that for, when Joe Purchase is doing the very same thing just across the road? Besides, the missus and I have enough to do here in the shop without worrying about anything else.”

“Then I suppose you don’t happen to have bought a motor hearse recently?”

At this apparently foolish question Mr. Ambrose stiffened and glared at his questioner. “I don’t know whether you’re trying to make fun of me, sir,”

he said indignantly. "The sergeant here will tell you that I'm a respectable man who wouldn't have anything to do with motor hearses and such. They do say that one of them things was left outside the Green Bear yesterday morning. But that's got nothing whatever to do with me."

"I'm afraid it'll turn out that you are the legal owner of it, Mr. Ambrose," said Jimmy pleasantly. "However, we needn't stop to talk about that just now. Good-afternoon, and many thanks."

Jimmy left the shop, followed by the sergeant who seemed secretly amused by the turn events had taken. "What about it now, inspector?" he asked slyly.

"I don't know," Jimmy replied. "The only grain of comfort seems to be that Alfred Pantony left the village on Tuesday. Who is this Mr. Cartmell that Ambrose talks about?"

"He's a commercial traveller of sorts, I believe. He doesn't belong to these parts, but I know that he's been staying at the Green Bear for a fortnight or so. I've seen him a few times—he's a big powerful-looking chap with a long drooping moustache. I've always seen him dressed in an old shooting coat and plus fours, and he wears big horn-rimmed glasses. He's the sort of chap you'd know again as soon as you'd seen him once. He owns a car which he goes about the country in, but that's about all I can tell you."

"Better see what the landlord of the Green Bear can tell us," said Jimmy. "It's three o'clock now and the pub will be shut. But I dare say we shall find him at home."

"Sure to," the sergeant agreed. "He'll have finished his dinner and will be having his afternoon nap. But I dare say he won't mind if we knock him up for once."

By dint of constant hammering on the door, they succeeded in rousing Mr. Wedgwood. He came downstairs in his shirt-sleeves and a pair of carpet slippers, and looked none too pleased at the interruption of his slumbers. But, on recognizing the sergeant, he brightened up at once.

"Come along inside, sergeant," he said. "I've got you to thank for driving that blessed hearse away from my front yesterday afternoon."

"It's this gentleman you've got to thank," Playne replied. "Inspector Waghorn from Scotland Yard, and he's just looked in to ask you a few questions."

"I'll be glad to answer them as best I can," said Mr. Wedgwood. "Come into the front room, both of you—you'll be more comfortable there. Now then, sit down. Is there anything I can offer you?"

The sergeant glanced at Jimmy, who replied promptly. "I'd enjoy nothing better than a glass of beer, Mr. Wedgwood."

The landlord nodded sagely and disappeared into the cellar. He emerged a few seconds later with three pints of beer on a tray. He handed two of these to his visitors, keeping the third for himself.

"Here's the test!" he exclaimed, as he took a generous pull. "Now then, what is it that you gentlemen want to know?"

"Here's to your very good health," Jimmy replied. "You've got a visitor of the name of Cartmell staying with you, haven't you?"

"Well, I have and I haven't, if you understand me," Mr. Wedgwood replied. "Mr. Cartmell went away on Tuesday morning, and told me that he would probably be back again before the week-end. I haven't seen him yet, but he might turn up at any time now."

"How long had he been staying with you before he went?"

"A matter of a fortnight or so. He came into the bar just after I'd opened it one evening. A fortnight ago last Tuesday, it was, I recollect. Yes, that's right. The fourth of this month. He was a perfect stranger to me, I'd never set eyes on him before. He called for a pint and stood there for a bit, drinking it. There were no other customers in the place, for the local chaps don't usually get round much before seven. He chatted to me for a bit and then told me that he was looking for somewhere to stay in this part of the country for a month or so. Did I know of anywhere he'd find himself comfortable?"

"Well, as the sergeant knows, we've got a spare room and don't mind taking in anybody who won't give us any trouble. So I asked him what he would want and he said only a bed, with a trifle of breakfast in the morning and a bit of supper at night. Most of the time he'd be about the country in his car. So I went and had a word with the missus, and she said we might as well take him in."

"Have you ever had reason to repent of this decision?" Jimmy asked.

"No, that I haven't," the landlord replied emphatically. "Mr. Cartmell has never given us the slightest trouble. And what's more, apart from his board and lodging he's spent a lot of money in the bar. Whenever he came back in the evenings he'd come in here and treat such customers as there might be around."

"That's how Pantony made his acquaintance, I suppose?" the sergeant suggested.

"Well, you know what Alf Pantony is," said Mr. Wedgwood apologetically. "Mind, I'm not saying anything against him, for he's a very

good customer of mine. But if there are free drinks going, Pantony's sure to be there, in spite of the money he's got put away. And, somehow, Mr. Cartmell seemed to take to him from the first, though you'd have thought the two were as different as chalk from cheese."

"We're told that Mr. Cartmell and Pantony went away together on Tuesday," said Jimmy. "Do you happen to know anything about that, Mr. Wedgwood?"

"Well, as it happens, I do know something about it," Mr. Wedgwood admitted cautiously. "They fixed it up between them in this very bar on Monday evening. Mr. Cartmell went up to London by train that day, as he had done once or twice before since he'd been with me. He caught the ten-three in the morning, I remember, and said that he mightn't be back until late. And sure enough, he walked into the bar that evening just after half-past ten. As you know, sergeant, we don't close until half-past ten here during the summer months."

Playne nodded. "That's right," he agreed. "And you usually give yourself five minutes' grace, I know. Mr. Cartmell had come back by train, I suppose?"

"Yes, he told me that he had caught the last train from London Bridge."

"That gets in at ten twenty-eight. Give him five minutes to walk from the station and he'd have been here between half-past ten and five and twenty to eleven."

"So he was. In fact, all my customers had gone except Alf Pantony. He was just getting up and he'd have been gone too, in another minute. But as soon as Mr. Cartmell saw him, 'You're just the man I want to talk to, Pantony,' he said. Then he turned to me and said that since he was living in the house, there was no harm in his treating one of his friends, even though it might be after hours. So he ordered two pints of beer, one for himself and one for Pantony. I drew them and then the missus called to me that my supper was ready, so I left them both sitting in here.

"I dare say I was a matter of ten minutes or so eating my supper, and then I came back here. Pantony had finished his pint and got up to go, and, I heard clearly enough what Mr. Cartmell said to him."

"What did he say, Mr. Wedgwood?" Jimmy asked.

"He said, 'Very well, that's settled. You meet me here at half-past ten to-morrow morning, and we'll start off together as soon as we've had a drink.' Then Alf went out and Mr. Cartmell turned to me. 'I've got to go away on a longer trip than usual to-morrow, landlord,' he said. 'I don't know how long I'll have to be away, but I'm pretty sure to be back by the end of the week.'

And since I hate driving about the country by myself all day I'm going to take Pantony with me.' I thought it was a pretty queer choice for a man in Cartmell's position, but naturally I didn't say anything.

"Next morning, Tuesday, that was, Alf was round here at half-past ten sharp. Mr. Cartmell had his car standing all ready outside the door with his suitcase in it. Alf was carrying an old-fashioned sort of Gladstone bag which looked as if it had seen its best days. Mr. Cartmell told me to bundle it into the car and then they had a couple of pints each. It was just gone eleven o'clock when I saw them drive away together."

"And you've seen or heard nothing of either of them since?" Jimmy suggested.

Mr. Wedgwood shook his head. "No, and I can't say that I expected to," he replied. "Mr. Cartmell knows well enough that he'll find his room ready for him when he comes back. As for Alf, I don't suppose his sister and her husband will worry much if he does stay away for a few days."

"Can you tell us anything of Mr. Cartmell's business?"

"Only what he told me, and that isn't much. I asked him in a friendly sort of way, after he'd been with me a day or two, whether he meant to settle down in these parts. He said he might do that when he retired, for he liked the locality of Fallowchurch and the folk here. But until that happened, he had to go where his firm sent him."

"Did he happen to tell you the name of his firm?"

"No, he didn't. Mr. Cartmell is one of the nicest gentlemen you could meet, but he keeps his own counsel about his business, and I don't blame him. He told me that his firm had a big place in the south of London, but he didn't tell me what their business was. A day or two later, though, when we were chatting in the kitchen after closing time, he did loosen up a bit. He said that his firm was thinking of opening up in a pretty big way in this part of the country, and that they'd sent him to look round and make inquiries. And he said that he had to be very careful who he saw and what he said, in case his firm's competitors should get wind of anything. There's one thing I'm certain of, and that is that Mr. Cartmell has a pretty good job. He's always got plenty of money and he doesn't mind spending it."

Jimmy remembered Playne's impression of Mr. Cartmell. "He dresses rather queerly for a commercial representative, doesn't he?" he asked.

Mr. Wedgwood laughed. "That's what the missus said to me when she first set eyes upon him," he replied. "But you may take it that Mr. Cartmell isn't just an ordinary traveller. It wouldn't surprise me to hear that he was one of the heads of the firm, though he doesn't want people to know it."

“What gives you that impression?” Jimmy asked.

“Well, I couldn’t exactly say, but it’s something about him. You can tell a traveller as soon as he walks into your house, whether he’s on business or not. There’s something about the way he talks and the way he looks at you as though he were sizing you up. And I’ve never been in the company of a traveller for five minutes before he began spinning yarns. Why, some of the tales I’ve heard travellers tell are enough to blister the varnish on the counter. Sometimes when they come in here I have to shut the door at the back of the bar in case the missus should hear them from the kitchen.”

“Mr. Cartmell isn’t in the habit of spinning yarns like that?”

“Not he. A cleaner spoken gentleman you couldn’t hope to meet. And he hasn’t got any of the traveller’s patter about him, either. As for the clothes he wears, I suppose he finds them comfortable, though it does seem to me a bit odd that he wears them when he goes up to London.”

“What was he wearing when he left here on Tuesday morning?”

“Just the same as I’ve always seen him. That old shooting jacket of his with a hole in the right elbow. The missus offered to mend it for him once, but he said that he was too fond of the old coat to have it tampered with. A pair of them plus-four knickers which didn’t match the coat; stockings, a pair of shoes that were a bit down at heel, and a soft hat which had precious little shape left in it.”

“And Alfred Pantony, what was he wearing?”

“Oh, Alf had put on his Sunday best for the occasion. He was wearing a black coat, a pair of blue trousers, brown boots and a hard black hat. What’s more, he put on a collar and tie, which he never does unless it’s Sunday.”

“Where does Mr. Cartmell keep his car when he’s here?”

“In my shed round at the back. There’s plenty of room for half a dozen cars in there.”

“You don’t happen to remember the number by any chance?”

“Ah, but I do,” Mr. Wedgwood replied proudly. “Once I’ve got anything like that into my head, I never forget it. It was like this, you see. A week ago, Mr. Cartmell had to go into Maidstone and asked me if I’d care to come with him for the ride. I said I would for I had a few odds and ends of things that I wanted to fetch from town. And Mr. Cartmell told me that while he was in Maidstone he would leave the car at the Royal Star Hotel. He picked up a bit of paper that happened to be lying on the bar, wrote the number of the car on it and gave it to me. ‘There you are,’ he said, ‘if you want anything sent round to the car, you can tell the people the number GX 692. Put that piece

of paper in your pocket and you won't forget it.' And that's how I come to remember the number, you see."

"What sort of a car is it?"

"It's a fifteen horse-power Comet saloon, painted dark green. I know that, for a customer of mine who calls this way sometimes has one just like it. In fact, when Mr. Cartmell's car first pulled up outside here, I thought that was the one."

"The number doesn't suggest that the car was a new one," Jimmy said thoughtfully.

"Well, it's seen a bit of service, there's no denying that. The wings are a bit bent and the paint has worn off the body in places. But as Mr. Cartmell once said, appearances don't matter so long as the old bus will go. And she goes well enough, I can say that, for as I tell you I've been out in her."

"Mr. Cartmell seems to like company when he goes out in the car. Has he ever to your knowledge taken any one else out for a run?"

"Only Alf, as far as I know. Mr. Cartmell seemed to take a fancy to Alf from the first. He must have treated Alf to more pints than I care to reckon up by now."

"Pantony has money of his own, hasn't he?"

"Well, he had a year ago, when he won that prize in the Irish Sweep, for I saw the money myself. He must have a good bit left still, in spite of his having given his sister half. I don't think he ever spends any money outside this house, and not more than he can help here."

"The prize was a thousand pounds, wasn't it?" Jimmy asked.

"That's right. Then he gave his sister five hundred pounds on condition she'd make a home for him for the rest of his life. I know that for a fact, for John Ambrose, that's his brother-in-law, came round and asked my advice as to what he'd best do with the money."

"That leaves him five hundred pounds for himself," said Jimmy thoughtfully. "Now, Mr. Wedgwood, how much do you reckon that he's spent with you since he got the money?"

"Well, I couldn't say exactly," the landlord replied. "He went on the spree the first night and stood everybody a drink who cared to have it. And he didn't stop at one drink either. He stood in this bar and called for round after round, until the missus and I were fair run off our feet. I dare say you remember that evening, sergeant?"

"I do," said Playne grimly. "If I hadn't shut my eyes to a lot of things that I didn't want to see some of your customers would have found



themselves in trouble.”

“Well, it isn’t every day that a Fallowchurch man wins a prize in the Irish Sweep,” replied Mr. Wedgwood. “I dare say Alf spent five pounds that night, or perhaps a bit more. And it’s wonderful what a lot of beer five pounds will buy you in these days. I know that I had to send round to the brewers the next day for a couple of eighteens, for I was nearly drunk out.”

“I gather that Pantony’s hospitality has rather cooled off since then,” Jimmy remarked.

“You’re right there. It was only the first night that Alf was so free with his money. Since then, he seems to expect the other customers to treat him in return. But I’m bound to admit that he still spends a bit, especially if he suddenly finds himself in here alone. He’ll have three or four pints in the morning and maybe three or four more at night. That’s what he pays for himself, I mean.”

“Let’s say that his average is eight pints a day. What sort of beer does he drink?”

“He always drinks bitter, and that’s sixpence.”

“Then his expenditure is four shillings a day, twenty-eight shillings a week, or say seventy pounds a year. At that rate he can’t have got rid of more than a hundred out of his five hundred pounds. He ought to have about four hundred pounds left.”

“I don’t think that’s far wrong,” said Mr. Wedgwood. “In fact, I overheard him telling Mr. Cartmell once when they were alone in the bar here together that he’d got rather more than four hundred pounds put away, which ought to last him for a good bit if he went carefully.”

“He didn’t say where it was put away, did he?”

“If he did, I didn’t hear him. But you may bet it isn’t in a bank or anywhere like that. Alf wouldn’t let money go out of his own keeping. I expect he’s got it hidden away somewhere safe enough over at his sister’s place. Unless, of course, he’s taken it away with him. He mightn’t care to leave it behind him in case there was a fire or anything like that.”

After some further unimportant conversation, Jimmy and Playne left the Green Bear and returned to the sergeant’s house.

“I believe we’re beginning to get the hand of this thing,” said Jimmy as soon as they were alone. “There are several things about it that still want a lot of explanation, I’ll admit. But there’s one thing I feel pretty certain about. The landlord of the Green Bear has seen the last of Alfred Pantony and of his curious Mr. Cartmell too, for that matter.”

This was not altogether clear to Playne. "What makes you say that?" he asked.

"I'm pretty sure that the body found in the tar boiler is Pantony's and that Cartmell murdered him," Jimmy replied. "What brought Cartmell to Fallowchurch in the first place, I don't know. It is just possible that he'd heard of Pantony's luck in the Irish Sweep and made up his mind to secure the money for himself. Anyway, as soon as he got here he made friends with Pantony. We have Mr. Wedgwood's word for that. And at last he suggested that he should go with him for a few days in the car. I think Mr. Wedgwood's quite right and that Pantony took with him what money he had left.

"You may say that four hundred pounds odd is a pretty poor motive for murder. But I don't know that it is. People have been bumped on the head for considerably less than that. When, how and where was the murder committed, I don't know, but I'm going to make it my job to try and find out."

"What I don't understand is where the hearse comes in," said Playne doubtfully.

"No, that's one of the puzzling points of the whole thing. Don't think there can be any manner of doubt that it was actually Pantony who bought and paid for the hearse on Tuesday afternoon? Let's go over the evidence of that point by point.

"To begin with, the purchaser of the hearse gave his own name as Pantony and said he was buying it for his brother-in-law, Mr. John Ambrose, of Fallowchurch. By itself that is no proof, for anybody who knew Fallowchurch could have supplied those particulars. But the description of the purchaser corresponds exactly to the description of Pantony. He was an obvious countryman, he was wearing a hard hat, black coat and blue trousers. Then there are those two very striking characteristics the harelip and the deformed ear. Quite a number of people have harelips, and I suppose almost an equal number have deformed ears. But the number of people who have both must be very small indeed. And I don't believe that any expert in disguise could reproduce these characteristics so faithfully that they would be taken as genuine. You've got a road-book, I see, sergeant. You might lend it to me for a moment."

Jimmy consulted the road-book for a few minutes jotting down some figures on paper as he did so. "From what I can make out the distance from here to Reading is somewhere about eighty miles," he continued. "Now, according to Mr. Wedgwood, Cartmell and Pantony left here just before eleven o'clock. According to Golder & Brown's manager, the hearse was bought about four o'clock. We can assume that Pantony reached Reading in

Cartmell's car. To cover eighty miles in five hours would not require any very furious driving. It would allow plenty of time to stop for several drinks on the way. And from all accounts of Pantony's state when he bought the hearse, he must have had several drinks before he left the Green Bear."

"What on earth did he buy it for?" Playne demanded. "To begin with, how did he know that Golder & Brown had one for sale?"

"I was told that an advertisement had appeared in the *Commercial Motor*. I happened to notice when we were in the Green Bear just now, that a copy of that periodical was lying on one of the tables in the bar. Consequently, of course, Pantony might have seen the advertisement. But what I think is much more probable is that Cartmell told him of it."

"But still, why should Pantony have wanted to buy a hearse?" the sergeant insisted.

"Cartmell must have put it up to him, on what pretence I can't possibly guess. Come to think of it, it's rather a subtle idea to persuade your intended victim to buy the means of transporting his own dead body."

"It's the first time I've heard of such a thing," said Playne in a tone of strong disapproval.

"I can't think of any precedent myself for the moment," replied Jimmy cheerfully. "Now, what happened between Tuesday afternoon and the discovery of the body on Thursday morning, I don't know, but I wouldn't mind betting that the man who called for the hearse on Wednesday and gave the name of John Ambrose was none other than Cartmell."

The sergeant shook his head. "From what you tell me, inspector, the descriptions don't tally," he said. "You've never seen Cartmell, and I have. He's the sort of man you couldn't mistake. Anybody would notice him, wherever he went."

"I don't doubt that, if they've seen him as you have seen him," Jimmy replied quietly. "But you know, the more I hear of Cartmell's appearance, the more it suggests a disguise to me. A long flowing moustache, stuck on in such a way that anybody could tell it wasn't natural. Horn-rimmed glasses can be bought anywhere. Then the very slovenliness of Cartmell's taste in clothes seems to be suspicious. I'm pretty certain that he wanted to impress his appearance on people, and for that reason strove to make it unique.

"However, we won't labour that point just now. Cartmell has left us one clue, although I'm afraid it's rather a slender one. Where was his own car during the time he was driving the hearse?"

"We've got the number and description of that car," said Playne hopefully.

“I know we have, and that’s why I said the clue is rather a slender one. Cartmell seems deliberately to have impressed the number of his car upon Mr. Wedgwood. Would he have done so if he could be traced by that number? I very much doubt it. However, I can’t neglect a clue just because I doubt it will lead anywhere. It’s my business to trace that particular number. GX is a London mark which was current about five years ago. When is the next train to London?”

Playne looked at his watch. “It’s a quarter to five now,” he replied. “There’s a train at five o’clock. You can catch it comfortably, if you want to.”

“Good!” Jimmy exclaimed. “What time does it get to London?”

The sergeant consulted a time-table hanging on the wall. “6.25,” he replied.

“Then you might ring up the Board Licences Department of the London County Council. Tell them that I’ve got an urgent inquiry on hand and that I shall be calling at the County Hall as soon after half-past six as I can. The office will be closed by then, I expect, but you might ask them to have somebody waiting for me. By the way, did you find out anything about that gravel in the coffin?”

“The road surveyor himself happened to come along and I showed it to him,” Playne replied. “He says it’s exactly the same as the grit he’s been using on the road between here and Dimbury.”

“Good enough,” said Jimmy. “Unless anything crops up to detain me I’ll see you again some time to-morrow.” And with that he set off for the railway station.

His train was punctual and he reached the County Hall soon after half-past six. An official was waiting for him, and at his request searched the register. The history of the fifteen horse-power green Comet saloon GX 692 was soon traced. It had originally been licenced five years earlier and registered as the property of a gentleman living in Kensington. Four and a half years later, in the previous March, a change of ownership had taken place. The car had been transferred to the Passway Garage Ltd., Passway Road, S.E. 11.

Jimmy made a note of these particulars as the official extracted them from the register.

“There’s a record of a second change of ownership only three weeks or so ago,” the official continued. “There’s a second entry dated July 29th of this year. The present owner of the car appears to be Mr. George Cartmell, of 26 Mutley Street, London, S.W. 11.”

“Well, I’m damned!” Jimmy exclaimed. “That’s the very last thing that I expected.”

“You know something about this man Cartmell, I daresay,” the official remarked.

“I’d like to know a jolly sight more,” Jimmy replied. “I was pretty sure that I was tracing a false registration and it appears to have been a genuine one all the time. Well, I’m very much obliged to you. I’ll go and see if I can find this address, 26 Mutley Street. It will be in Battersea somewhere.”

“Hold on a minute,” said the official. “There’s a note which may interest you attached to that last entry. It’s an instruction that the registration book should be sent to Mr. George Cartmell at the Green Bear, Fallowchurch. Cartmell must have made that request when he sent on the book to us.”

“Well, I’m dashed if I can make head or tail of it,” said Jimmy. “Everything seems perfectly straight and above board, which is very different from what I expected. You haven’t any other startling disclosure to make, I suppose?”

“No, that’s the end of the record,” the official replied. “Good-evening, inspector, and good luck to you.”

Jimmy took a tram to Battersea and inquired at the local police station for Mutley Street. A constable was detailed to pilot him and they arrived at a dingy but respectable thoroughfare, bordered by small dwelling-houses. In the front window of No. 26 was printed a card bearing the word “Apartments.” The door was opened by an elderly woman who looked at her caller with some disfavour. A likely lodger would have been a more desirable visitor than the police. However, she admitted them and expressed her willingness to answer Jimmy’s questions.

“Is any one of the name of George Cartmell living in this house?” he asked.

“No, nor ever has been,” the woman replied. “Though it’s true enough that the gentleman took my best room for a few days.”

“When was that?” Jimmy asked.

“It was the Wednesday before Bank Holiday that I first saw him. It must have been about eight o’clock in the evening, and I was standing on the front steps trying to get a bit of air. And I saw a gentleman coming along the street carrying a suitcase and looking up at the windows. And I thought to myself, ‘He’s looking for lodgings, I’ll be bound.’

“Well, my best room happened to be empty just then, so I could do with a lodger. There’s a lot of ladies in this street lets rooms and I didn’t want him to go to any of them first. So I just strolled towards him casual like, and

when I got up to him I made a curtsy. 'If I may make so bold as to ask you, sir,' I said, 'you don't happen to be looking for a nice room, do you, sir?'

"That's just what I am looking for,' he said. 'You don't happen to have one to let, do you?'

"Well, when I saw the gentleman a little closer, I began to wish that I hadn't been so forward. It wasn't that there was anything wrong with his looks, though his long moustache and big horn-rimmed spectacles did make him look rather queer. But it was his clothes, not a bit like what you'd expect a gentleman to wear. He had on a shabby old coat, a pair of baggy knickers that didn't match and a hat I should have been ashamed to give to the dustman.

"I think he must have seen me looking him over, for he laughed. 'I've only just come up from the country, and haven't had time to change,' he said. 'If you've got a room to let I'll take it at once and I'll pay for it in advance, too.' And with that he took out one of them wallet things and flipped over a lot of pound notes. There must have been a dozen of them or more.

"Seeing them was good enough for me. I brought him back here and showed him my best room. He said that would do for him famously, and that he would take it on the spot. And he gave me two of his pound notes then and there. I asked him if he'd like me to get him a bit of supper and he said No, that he couldn't stop. He had to go and see some friends whom he had promised to stay the night with, but it might be that they would want him to stop with them over the holiday, but that didn't matter. He would leave his things in the room for me to look after and come back when he could.

"Well, since he'd paid for the room, I didn't worry. It was all one to me whether he slept in it or not. So he went away and I didn't see him again, not until the day after Bank Holiday.

"I thought he'd come to stay for good then, but he hadn't. It was just after I'd had my dinner, about one o'clock, that he came in. And in the same old clothes as before, but he seemed in a terrible hurry. And then he told me that he couldn't stop with me after all, for his firm had suddenly sent him down into the country. He did tell me the name of the place he was going to but I can't recollect it now."

"Fallowchurch," Jimmy suggested wearily.

"That was the name!" the woman replied. "He told me that he had to go where his firm sent him, but that perhaps he'd come back to me another time. He fetched his suitcase and went off, and I haven't seen him from that day to this."

“You didn’t happen to look into his suitcase while it was here, did you?”

“Well, I did think of it. You see, I thought there might be some dirty linen in it that I could wash for him. But when I tried to open it, I found that it was locked.”

At a matter of routine Jimmy asked to be shown the best room, though he was assured that two lodgers had occupied it since Cartmell’s last visit. Having found no trace of Cartmell there, he left Mutley Street and once more boarded a tram.

This time his destination was Passway Road, which he knew to be a turning off Kennington Lane. It was just possible that the people at the garage where Cartmell had bought his car might be able to throw some light upon him.

Upon reaching the place Jimmy was lucky enough to find the proprietor upon the premises. The latter perfectly well remembered the sale of the 15 h.p. Comet car. He always had a few reliable second-hand cars in stock, most of which had been taken in part exchange. This particular car he had bought from a dealer who had taken it in part exchange for a new car from a gentleman who lived in Kensington. The car was in perfectly good running order, though perhaps a bit shabby, so he had added its particulars to the list which he kept in his window of second-hand cars for disposal.

“It was July 29th that I sold it,” the proprietor continued. “About seven o’clock that evening, a gentleman—he spoke like a gentleman though he didn’t look like one—came into the place and said that he saw I had a 15 h.p. Comet for sale. He was so queerly dressed in an old coat and plus fours, that he didn’t look to me as though he had the money to pay for it. But when I told him that I wanted sixty pounds cash for the car he took a roll of notes out of his pocket and said that if he liked it he would pay a deposit of fifteen quid down.

“Well, I showed him the car and after he’d seen the engine running and looked over it a bit, he said he’d have it. He told me that he wouldn’t want it until after the holiday, when his firm might be sending him down to the country on business. He gave me his name and address, Mr. George Cartmell, 26 Mutley Street, S.W. 11, but he told me that for the next fortnight or so he would be staying at the Green Bear at Fallowchurch.

“The car was licenced and registered until the end of the year, so there were no formalities about that. He paid down the deposit and said he’d come and fetch the car and pay the balance some time on Tuesday, August 4th. And he was as good as his word, for he turned up on that day, about two o’clock I think it was. He paid over the rest of the money and then he asked

me if I would mind sending the registration book to the County Hall for him. I said I'd do that, and he gave me a note to put in with it, asking that the book should be sent to him at Fallowchurch. And then he drove the car away, after telling me that I would be sure to see him again when he got back from the country; and see him again I did, right enough."

"When was that?" Jimmy asked with scarcely concealed eagerness.

"Why, last Tuesday as ever was," the proprietor replied. "We keep open here until eleven o'clock at night, for we do quite a lot of evening trade. It was round about ten o'clock that Mr. Cartmell came in with the car. 'Here I am, you see,' he said as friendly as could be. 'Back again from the country.'"

Jimmy could hardly control his excitement. "This was at ten o'clock last Tuesday, August 18th?" he said.

"That's right. I knew him at once, for he was wearing the same old clothes that I'd always seen him in and you couldn't mistake his moustache and glasses."

"Had he any one with him?"

"No, he was alone. All he had with him in the car was his suitcase. He told me that he had to stop in London for a few days, so that he wouldn't want the car again for a bit. However, his firm would certainly send him out on the road again very shortly, and he wanted to know whether I could keep the car for him in the meanwhile. Naturally I said I would and charge him as little as I could for it. So he thanked me and said good-night, taking his suitcase with him. I haven't seen him since, but I daresay he'll be back for the car next week."

"Where is the car now?" Jimmy asked.

"Why, over there, in one of those lock-ups. You can have a look at it, if you like. I'll get the key if you'll wait a moment or two."

The lock-up was opened and Jimmy proceeded to examine the car minutely. It was exactly as Mr. Wedgwood had described it. A green 15 h.p. Comet saloon, with GX 692 on the registration plate and licence. There was nothing in any way remarkable about its appearance, but when Jimmy came to examine the interior, he made a curious discovery. The cushion of the left-hand front seat—the one next to the driver—was discoloured by a dark, irregular patch. Jimmy, testing this patch with his finger-nail, dislodged a few particles of reddish-brown matter.

He drew the proprietor's attention to this disfigurement. "Was this cushion stained like this when you sold the car?" he asked.



“No, I’m sure it wasn’t,” the proprietor replied. “I noticed particularly that all the upholstery was in very good condition. Mr. Cartmell must have done that somehow while he owned the car.”

“It couldn’t have been done after the car was brought back here last Tuesday?”

The proprietor shook his head. “Quite impossible,” he replied. “Mr. Cartmell drove the car into this lock-up himself. I turned the key before he left the garage and nobody has opened it since. That stain must have been there when Mr. Cartmell brought the car back, though I can’t say I noticed it then, for I didn’t look inside.”

Jimmy finished his examination of the car without discovering anything else of interest. “We’re very anxious to get in touch with this Mr. Cartmell,” he said. “We believe that he can give us some information of which we are very badly in need. I’m quite sure you will help us. If Mr. Cartmell comes in to fetch the car, keep him hanging about on some excuse or other and tell the nearest policeman to ring up Scotland Yard, Whitehall 1212.”

The garage proprietor promised to do this. At Jimmy’s request he shut the lock-up again and gave him the key. Armed with this, Jimmy left the garage.

His destination this time was Scotland Yard. He went straight to his own room and proceeded to write a description of both Cartmell and Pantony. Fortunately, in each case, there were certain characteristics which were not likely to be mistaken. Cartmell’s queer dress, his flowing moustache and his horn-rimmed spectacles. Pantony’s harelip and deformed ear. For once, Jimmy thought, he had descriptions which stood some chance of being recognized. Then he turned to the notes he had made and from them compiled a time-table of Cartmell’s known movements. When completed the time-table was as follows:

*July 29th, 7 p.m. approximately.* Cartmell appears at the Passway Garage, inspects car GX 692, and pays deposit upon it.

*July 29th, 8 p.m. approximately.* Cartmell engages a room at 26 Mutley Street, leaves his suitcase there and goes away.

*August 4th, 1 p.m. approximately.* Cartmell reappears at Mutley Street and collects his suitcase.

*August 4th, 2 p.m. approximately.* Cartmell reappears at the Passway Garage, completes the purchase of the car, and drives away.

*August 4th, 6 p.m. approximately.* Cartmell arrives at the Green Bear, Fallowchurch, with the car and engages a room there.

From this time until August 15th, Cartmell's movements have not yet been accurately ascertained. He appears to have spent most of his night at the Green Bear, but during the day-time to have been absent upon unknown business.

*August 17th.* Cartmell is said to have travelled to London by the 10.30 a.m. from Fallowchurch, and to have returned by the train reaching Fallowchurch at 10.28 p.m. That Cartmell actually visited London that day rests upon his statement alone. There is no confirmation of this.

*August 17th, 10.35 p.m.* Cartmell enters the bar of the Green Bear. He meets Pantony there and apparently arranges with him to take him away next day.

*August 18th, 10.30 a.m.* Cartmell meets Pantony in the bar of the Green Bear. They drive off together in the car at approximately 11 a.m.

*August 18th, 4 p.m. approximately.* Pantony appears on the premises of Messrs. Colder & Brown at Reading. He buys and pays for a motor hearse with the registered number ZZ 542. Note:—Nothing has been heard of Pantony since this time.

*August 18th, 10 p.m. approximately.* Cartmell arrives at the Passway Garage in car GX 692. He leaves the car there and goes away, taking his suitcase.

*August 19th.* An unknown man, possibly Cartmell without his disguise, giving the name of John Ambrose, calls at the premises of Messrs. Colder & Brown. He produces the receipt for the hearse and drives it away, having also bought a coffin.

*August 20th, 5.30 a.m. approximately.* The hearse is discovered by Mr. Sidney Wedgwood standing outside the Green Bear at Fallowchurch.

*August 20th, 7.30 a.m. approximately.* An unrecognizable body possibly that of Pantony, is found by David Gurney, the foreman of a road gang, in a tar boiler. This tar boiler is standing by the roadside approximately two miles from Fallowchurch in the direction of Dimbury.

Jimmy set to work to study this time-table. It seemed to him that it could be made to fit in very well with the theory which he had formed. According to this, Cartmell and Pantony had reached Reading together in the Comet car. Cartmell already knew from the advertisement in the *Commercial Motor* that Messrs. Colder & Brown had a motor hearse for sale. He prevailed upon Pantony, who was then very much the worse for liquor, to purchase it in the name of his brother-in-law.

So far all was plain sailing. But after this, Jimmy found himself reduced to guesswork. What had happened between four o'clock and ten o'clock on the afternoon of the 18th, when Cartmell appeared at the Passway Garage?

One thing appeared quite certain. Sometime during that period, Cartmell had murdered Pantony. Jimmy felt pretty sure in his own mind that the matter which he had scraped from the seat of Cartmell's car was congealed blood. Probably Cartmell and Pantony had left Reading together. Having reached a sufficiently secluded spot, Cartmell had pulled up and murdered Pantony. The motive doubtless being the four hundred pounds which Pantony was carrying with him. Cartmell had then concealed the body and had driven the car back to London.

This was the only possible explanation, but as Jimmy saw for himself, it contained two weak points. It involved the necessity for Cartmell having to conceal the body for twenty-four hours at least. And bodies are notoriously difficult things to conceal. Then again, why had Cartmell been so criminally careless about the blood on the seat? If he had not been able to mop it up while it was still wet he might have concealed the cushion with the body and prepared some story to account for its disappearance. However, there were the facts, and, as Jimmy told himself, he couldn't get away from them.

The next day, Wednesday, presented fewer difficulties. On August 19th, the day after the murder, Cartmell had changed his appearance and gone to Reading. There he had collected the hearse and coffin and had driven these to the spot where the body was concealed. He had then transferred the body to the coffin and driven towards Fallowchurch, timing his arrival at the tar boiler for the early hours of the morning. He had then flung the body into the boiler, relighted the fire, and put a few shovelful of grit into the coffin. Lastly, he drove the hearse to Fallowchurch, left it outside the Green Bear, and disappeared.

It was now late, past eleven o'clock, and there was nothing more to be done, so Jimmy went home to his quarters.

Next morning, Saturday the 22nd, he arrived early at the Yard. His first act was to issue a description of Cartmell and Pantony for circulation to the police in the counties of Kent, Sussex, Surrey and Berkshire.

He then got into touch with the Home Office authorities, regarding the stain on the seat of Cartmell's car, and handed over to them the key of the lock-up at the Passway Garage. He was just about to leave the Yard to catch a train back to Fallowchurch when Superintendent Hanslet entered his room.

"Hallo, Jimmy!" said the superintendent cheerfully. "They told me you were here, so I thought I'd just look in and see how you were getting on. By

the way, I've got a note from the professor asking us both to dine with him to-night. What about it?"

Jimmy shook his head. "I'm afraid I'll have to cry off," he replied. "I've got an inquest at Fallowchurch this afternoon, and work to do down there that'll keep me busy over the week-end."

"Had any luck so far?" Hanslet asked.

"Not so bad, on the whole," Jimmy replied. "I've a pretty good idea of what happened, anyhow. My chief difficulty at the moment is that though I know who did it, I don't know who the man is."

"What do you mean?" Hanslet demanded. "If you know the man who did it you surely know who he is."

Jimmy laughed. "I'm sorry to be obscure, but it isn't altogether easy to explain. If you've got ten minutes to spare, I'd like to give you a short résumé of the business."

"I can manage that," said Hanslet. "Carry on."

Jimmy ran rapidly through the facts of the case as he had ascertained them. "I think you'll agree with me that Cartmell was a personality adopted for the purpose," he continued. "He did not exist before July 29th, and he ceased to exist last Tuesday, very shortly after he had left his car at the Passway Garage. My job now is to find out who assumed this personality. I'd be very grateful for any helpful suggestions."

"Your funeral, Jimmy, not mine," said Hanslet. "You seem to have done jolly well so far. Stick to it, for if you lay your hands on this chap it'll be a fine feather in your cap. I rather wish I'd taken on your job and left you the diamond business."

"How are you getting on with that?" asked Jimmy.

"Ah!" exclaimed Hanslet mysteriously. "That affair isn't by any means clear yet. But unless every one concerned is lying, and I don't think that they are, there's one possible explanation. But I'm not going to give away my theory until I've got a few more facts. I shall have quite a lot to talk to the professor about this evening."

"You'll manage to find time to dine at Westbourne Terrace, then?"

"I'll make time somehow. And it's rather a pity you can't, for if the professor happens to be in the mood to drop hints, he'll be well worth listening to. Well, I won't keep you any longer—you want to catch that train, I can see."

Jimmy reached Fallowchurch shortly before the inquest opened upon the body found in the tar boiler. The proceedings were brief and necessarily

inconclusive. The doctors concerned testified to the impossibility of identifying the body. In their opinion, it was the body of a man, probably between forty-five and sixty, well nourished and about five feet eight inches tall. The bones were undamaged and showed no signs of fracture. The internal organs appeared to be in a healthy condition, and no sign of poison had been found. But the external soft tissues had been burnt away to such an extent that no report upon them was possible.

The coroner addressed his questions to the surgeon who had carried out the post-mortem at his request. "Have you been able to form any opinion as to the cause of the deceased's death?"

"Under the circumstances this is impossible, but there are certain deductions which can be drawn. In the first place, very little of the tar or its vapour appears to have penetrated to the lungs or the stomach. This would suggest that the deceased was already dead when his body was thrown into the boiler."

"Can you give the jury any idea of the time which elapsed between deceased's death and the discovery of his body?"

"I would rather not express a definite opinion. All the usual signs by which such a period is estimated have been obliterated."

"The point is obviously of considerable importance," the coroner insisted. "Is it possible, for instance, that the deceased had been dead for a week or more before his body was found?"

"In my opinion it is extremely unlikely. On the other hand, certain appearances of the internal organs suggest that he had been dead for at least several hours. Purely as a matter of personal opinion and without wishing to influence the jury in any way, I should limit the period in question to about three days. That is, from the time of the deceased's death to the time of my examination."

"Your examination took place yesterday, Friday morning. You think, then, that the deceased cannot have died earlier than Tuesday morning?"

"That is my private belief. But I repeat once more that no reliance should be placed upon it."

"Can you tell us anything further as to the possible cause of death?"

"I can only enumerate the causes which appear unlikely. The cause of death was certainly not a fractured skull, or extensive internal injuries. It appears improbable that it was a gun-shot wound, a deep incision, or poison in any form. Beyond that I am not prepared to go."

Gurney told of the finding of the body and the position of the tar boiler. His evidence was confirmed by Sergeant Playne. The coroner then addressed

the jury. He suggested that the evidence at present available made it impossible for them to determine the identity of the deceased or the cause of his death. He thought that no member of the jury could have any doubt that deceased had met his death through foul play. He was glad to know that the assistance of Scotland Yard had been evoked and that an inspector from the Criminal Investigation Department was in charge of the case. Under the circumstances, his only course was to adjourn the inquest for a week, at the end of which period he hoped that further evidence would be forthcoming.

After the completion of these formalities, Jimmy returned with the sergeant to the latter's house. Here he told him the results of his investigation in London and the conclusions that he had formed.

"I don't think there can be any reasonable doubt that Cartmell murdered Pantony for his money and threw his body into the tar boiler," he said. "But what is Cartmell's real name, appearance and occupation? That's what we've got to find out before we can start to track him down. He won't come back to the Green Bear, that's quite certain. But it's just possible that he's left a clue of some sort behind him. I think we'd better go round there and search his room."

They walked across to the Green Bear and sought the necessary permission from Mr. Wedgwood. He in turn, referred them to Mrs. Wedgwood, who was in charge of the domestic details of the establishment.

Mrs. Wedgwood took them upstairs but held out no hope that they would find anything. "I've been right through the room already myself," she said. "You see, as Mr. Cartmell said that he'd be away for three or four days, I thought it was just my chance to give it a thorough turn out. And so I did, that very Tuesday afternoon. And Mr. Cartmell had taken everything of his away with him. I didn't find so much as a collar stud."

"You found nothing unusual about the room at all, Mrs. Wedgwood?" Jimmy asked.

The landlady shook her head. "Nothing at all," she replied firmly. "Or at least nothing to speak of. One of the sheets was missing off the bed and I can't find it anywhere. But Mr. Cartmell wouldn't have taken it away with him. What would he want to do such a thing for?"

"Did Mr. Cartmell bring much luggage with him when he first came to you?"

"Only one suitcase, the one he took away with him on Tuesday. And all I ever saw in that was shirts, underclothing and the like."

"Did you ever do any washing for him, Mrs. Wedgwood?"

Again she shook her head. "No. I asked him when he'd been here a day or two if he'd like me to, and he said that he wouldn't think of troubling me. Anything he wanted washed he'd take up to London when he went and bring down a clean lot."

"Well, I think we'll have a look round his room all the same," said Jimmy. "That is, if you've no objection, Mrs. Wedgwood."

"I don't altogether like it," replied Mrs. Wedgwood doubtfully. "I'll have to tell him as soon as he comes back what you and the sergeant have been up to."

"Of course," said Jimmy gravely. "And if he cares to ask us for an explanation, we shall be quite ready to give it. Come along, sergeant."

But although they spent an hour or more examining every crevice and cranny in the room, they found nothing whatever to reward them. Cartmell on his departure on the preceding Tuesday had evidently been careful to remove every trace of his tenancy.

But Jimmy refused to be cast down by this failure. "I didn't expect anything else," he said to Playne. "But there's another thing I've been thinking about. If you don't mind I'll borrow that bicycle again, and we'll go out together and have another look at the tar boiler."

The sergeant agreed to this, and they set out. They found the tar boiler exactly as it had been left on Thursday morning, with a constable still on guard over it. Having satisfied himself that nothing in the vicinity had been touched, Jimmy unburdened himself to the sergeant.

"I've been trying to imagine what happens to things that are kept for some time in boiling tar," he said. "We know well enough by now what happens to a human body. But what would happen to any clothes that body might be wearing?"

Playne shook his head doubtfully. "I couldn't say, I'm sure," he replied. "The boiling tar wouldn't do them any good, you may be sure of that."

"It wouldn't do them any good, certainly, but would it destroy all trace of them? I'm pretty sure it wouldn't. For instance, it wouldn't destroy metal or bone buttons, or collar studs or the nails of the boots, and what we're going to do now is to see if we can find anything of the kind. Let's look inside the boiler to begin with."

The boiler having been thrown upon its side, was by now almost completely drained of tar. But a lump of something still remained within it. With the help of a stick, Jimmy drew this out. It turned out to be a piece of material of some kind, rolled into a ball and thoroughly saturated with tar.

Jimmy laid this aside for future examination. Then they proceeded to rake through the tar which had been run out on the grass. At the end of a couple of hours of unremitting work upon this, they had found nothing whatever, not even a single button.

Not until Jimmy was thoroughly satisfied that every cubic inch of the tar had been thoroughly examined, did they return to Fallowchurch. They took the lump of tar-soaked material with them and, at Jimmy's suggestion, this was plunged into a bucket of petrol. After considerable labour, the original nature of the material was revealed. It had undoubtedly once been a cotton sheet.

"That's the sheet that's missing from the Green Bear, I'll bet," said Jimmy. "I'm quite satisfied by now that the body was unclothed when it was thrown into the boiler. It was almost certainly merely wrapped in this sheet. Let's give it another petrol bath and see if there is any sort of mark upon it."

This time, their industry was rewarded. In one corner of the sheet they found the name "Wedgwood" neatly printed in marking ink.

"Well," said Jimmy, "I think that clinches the case against Cartmell, whoever he may be, and I believe that when the inquest reopens, we'll be able to convince the coroner of the identity of the deceased. Now, we've just got to slog along until we find some clue which will lead us to the murderer's present whereabouts."





*Part Two*  
*Hanslet's Case*



SUPERINTENDENT HANSLET was summoned to his chief's room at Scotland Yard in the early afternoon of Thursday, August 20th. As he entered the room, the Assistant Commissioner looked up.

"Good-afternoon, Hanslet," he said. "You haven't anything very important on at the moment, have you?"

"Well, I hadn't, sir," Hanslet replied; "but there's a message just come through from a place called Fallowchurch. They've found a body there which seems to upset them a bit and they want some one from the Yard to go down."

The Assistant Commissioner frowned. "That's a nuisance," he said. "You happen to be the only senior man available just now. And I've got a job that can't be entrusted to just anybody."

"There's Inspector Waghorn, sir," Hanslet suggested. "He could go down to Fallowchurch to make the preliminary investigations. And if there's anything in the affair, one of the senior men could take it over later."

"That's a good idea," said the Assistant Commissioner. "Young Waghorn can be trusted not to do anything foolish. All right, go and see him and give him his orders. And when you come back, I'll tell you about my job."

Hanslet went out to return again within a few minutes.

"Now then, sit down and make yourself comfortable," said the Assistant Commissioner. "I'll tell you what I want you to do. I've just had a trunk call from a man I know slightly. I want to make it quite clear from the start that he's no more than a club acquaintance, and that I know nothing whatever about his circumstances or private affairs.

"This man's name is Sir Stanislaus Wherwell. He comes of an old family and lives at Holmden Hall, near Swineshead in Lincolnshire. Having heard

what he had to say I advised him to take the next train to London. He told me that he would do so, and that he would arrive at King's Cross at five minutes to six. I told him that I would send somebody from here to meet him, and I want you to go."

"Very good, sir," Hanslet replied. "How am I to recognize Sir Stanislaus?"

"He will wait just outside the ticket barrier until you go up and speak to him. He is the owner of a very famous and valuable set of diamonds, and, according to his statement, these diamonds have gone astray.

"Naturally he could not go into any very great detail on the telephone. But the facts, as I understand them, are these. On the 15th of July last Wherwell himself brought the diamonds to London and took them to the firm of Patton and Fairfield in Hatton Garden. This firm was to value them and advise upon certain alterations to the settings.

"Wherwell left the diamonds in charge of the firm, and certain correspondence between him and them ensued. It was eventually arranged that the senior partner of the firm, Mr. Patton, should himself take the diamonds back to Holmden Hall and discuss with Sir Stanislaus and Lady Wherwell what was to be done with them.

"On Monday last, August 17th, Wherwell received a letter from Patton. In this letter Patton said that he would come to Holmden Hall with the diamonds on the following Wednesday, the 19th. That, of course, was yesterday. Patton said that he would leave King's Cross by the four o'clock train, which arrives at Swineshead Station at 7.23 p.m. He asked Wherwell if he would send his car to meet him there at that time. Wherwell replied by wire that morning that he would do so.

"Yesterday evening, then, Wherwell sent his car and chauffeur to meet Patton at Swineshead Station at seven twenty-three. But Patton apparently had failed to arrive. The chauffeur, having ascertained that there was no other train from London that night, went back to Holmden Hall and reported.

"Wherwell supposed that something must have happened to prevent Patton's journey. He could do nothing that night and expected to have an explanation by post this morning. Since he heard nothing then, he rang up Patton and Fairfield's office to make inquiries. There he was told by the chief clerk that, to his certain knowledge, Mr. Patton had left with the diamonds at four o'clock the previous evening.

"Wherwell informed the local police and sent his car to meet the morning train from London at Swineshead Station. He could hear no news

and at last, remembering his acquaintanceship with me, he rang me up. And, as I say, I told him that he'd better come up here straight away. From this moment, it's up to you, Hanslet."

"I'll do my best, sir," the superintendent replied. "I would be very grateful if you would tell me what you know about Sir Stanislaus."

"Precious little. We happen to be members of the same club, that's about all. I've heard of the diamonds, of course, because they're by way of being famous. They came from Russia originally, I believe, and have been in the family well over a hundred years. Wherwell, I understand, is on the local bench and interests himself in farming. I've heard that Holmden Hall is a fair-sized place with quite a lot of land attached to it. And I've also heard that Wherwell finds it a bit of a struggle to keep it up. But that, I want you to understand, is merely gossip. There may be no truth in it whatever."

"In appearance Wherwell is not unlike a prosperous farmer. The man I suppose is between fifty and sixty, with a round clean-shaven face and hair that's going grey. He's a biggish, powerfully built sort of chap. I should think he is about six feet tall, and thick rather than stout. He's got a hearty appetite and unless I misjudge him, a rather pronounced fondness for whisky; he's not a man who's ever attracted me very greatly. But on the other hand, there's nothing about him that one would actively dislike. I'm sorry I can't be more helpful."

"I'm much obliged to you for what you've told me, sir. It's nearly half-past two now and you say that Sir Stanislaus will not arrive at King's Cross before five minutes to six? I think I'd better go and see these people in Hatton Garden and hear what they've got to say."

"I rather thought that would be your first move," said the Assistant Commissioner. "When you've met Wherwell, you'd better bring him back here. I'll see him for a moment and then leave him to your tender mercies."

Hanslet took a bus to the lower end of Hatton Garden and then walked up that not very inspiring street. The offices of Messrs. Patton and Fairfield, when he found them, turned out to be no more impressive than those of their neighbours. Hanslet wondered vaguely why people who dealt in such brilliant things as diamonds preferred to do their business in such gloomy surroundings.

He entered the inquiry office, produced his card and asked if he might see one of the partners. He was informed that neither of them were in at the moment, but that he could see Mr. McNaught, the chief clerk. A couple of minutes later, he was ushered into that gentleman's presence.

Mr. McNaught was as Scotch as his name implied. He was a man of between forty and fifty, tall, bony and red-haired. He looked at Hanslet with an eye of disfavour. "And what might your business be, superintendent?" he asked.

"I have been instructed to meet Sir Stanislaus Wherwell at King's Cross at five minutes to six," Hanslet replied quietly.

Mr. McNaught's face contracted in a frown. "I don't know anything about Sir Stanislaus," he said shortly. "I'm only the chief clerk here and Sir Stanislaus's business was conducted entirely by the partners themselves."

"Who are the partners?" Hanslet asked.

"Mr. Edward Patton and Mr. Leslie Fairfield. Unfortunately neither of them is here just now."

"Can you tell me where they are?"

McNaught eyed the superintendent askance. "Mr. Fairfield is abroad and is not expected back in London until the early part of next week," he replied.

"And Mr. Patton?" Hanslet asked innocently.

"Mr. Patton left London yesterday afternoon," McNaught replied stolidly. "He told me that he expected to be back in the office some time today."

This very cautious fencing began to get on Hanslet's nerves. "Look here, Mr. McNaught, we're wasting one another's time," he said. "The police have received information that Mr. Patton left London yesterday with certain very valuable articles in his possession and has not been heard of since. Are you in a position to confirm or deny that report?"

"I can only say what I have already said," McNaught replied doggedly. "Mr. Patton left King's Cross by the four o'clock train yesterday afternoon. Since then I have seen or heard nothing of him. I received a telephone message this morning from somebody who said he was Sir Stanislaus Wherwell. That telephone message informed me that Mr. Patton had not then reached his ostensible destination, which was Holmden Hall. If this is actually a fact, I am wholly unable to account for it."

"You are aware of the object of Mr. Patton's journey?"

"I am only aware of what Mr. Patton told me about that journey. On Tuesday morning last, he informed me that on the following day, Wednesday, he would personally return certain diamonds, the property of Sir Stanislaus Wherwell, to their owner."

"You knew that the diamonds were then in possession of the firm?"

“Certainly. In the course of my duties, I had learnt that Sir Stanislaus had brought them here in person. From time to time since then, various dealers and others have called here to inspect them.”

“Why did these people come and inspect the diamonds?”

“I really could not say,” McNaught replied dryly. “I do not even know why the diamonds were entrusted to the firm’s keeping.”

“You say that the diamonds were in the firm’s custody from the time Sir Stanislaus Wherwell brought them here until yesterday afternoon. Were they on the premises the whole of that time?”

“Certainly not. They were deposited with the London and Kensington Bank, at their Holborn branch. When an appointment had been made for their inspection, either Mr. Patton or myself went to the bank and drew them from the strong-room. As soon as the inspection was over, the diamonds were returned to the bank. They were finally withdrawn from the bank yesterday afternoon at three o’clock.”

“Who withdrew them?”

“Mr. Patton and myself. Just before three o’clock Mr. Patton called me into his room and gave me my instructions. We walked to the bank, which is only a short distance from here, and were shown into the manager’s room. At our request, the diamonds were taken from the strong-room and examined by Mr. Patton and myself in the manager’s presence. Mr. Patton then gave the manager a receipt for them.”

“What happened then?” Hanslet asked.

“Some time ago Mr. Patton had a special satchel made in which to carry valuables. It was his own idea and he believed that it afforded the utmost security. The satchel was made of leather with a pair of strong locks. It was lined inside with fine steel mail, proof against slashing with a knife. It had in addition a steel chain by which it could be attached to a belt which Mr. Patton wore round his waist when he was carrying the satchel.

“Having satisfied himself that the diamonds were all there, Mr. Patton replaced them in their case and put this case in his satchel. He then chained the satchel to his belt. You will understand that the belt, being worn underneath his coat, was invisible and that the chain was of sufficient length for him to be able to carry the satchel at arm’s length without inconvenience.

“Meanwhile one of the bank clerks had summoned a taxi. As soon as we were informed that the taxi was at the door, Mr. Patton and I took our leave of the manager and left the bank. We entered the taxi and drove back here. Mr. Patton remained in the vehicle while I got out, went to his room and

fetches a suitcase which he had left there that morning. I then rejoined Mr. Patton in the taxi.”

“How long did it take you to fetch the suitcase?” Hanslet asked.

“Perhaps two minutes, certainly not more. I am not aware of the contents of the suitcase. But Mr. Patton had told me that he intended to spend the night at Holmden Hall, and I presume it contained the clothes that he would require during his visit.

“As I re-entered that taxi, I told the driver to take us to King’s Cross Station. He did so, and we reached the terminus without incident. I handed the suitcase to a porter, telling him to remain with Mr. Patton in the entrance hall. I then went to the booking-office and bought a first-class return ticket to Swineshead, for which I paid the sum of twenty-nine shillings. I returned to where Mr. Patton was standing and gave him the ticket. The porter told us that the train was already standing at the platform and the three of us went to it together. We found an empty first-class non-smoking carriage and Mr. Patton took his seat in this. The porter put his suitcase on the rack and then went away. I remained talking to Mr. Patton until the train started. When I last saw Mr. Patton he was sitting in a corner seat with his back to the engine and the satchel resting on his knee.”

“Could you identify the suitcase and the satchel if you saw them again, Mr. McNaught?”

“I could certainly identify the satchel, for I imagine it to be unique. The suitcase, I noticed, was nearly new. It was made of brown leather with Mr. Patton’s initials, E.P., stamped on the lid in black.”

“Mr. Patton had told you that he intended to spend the night at Holmden Hall? Did he tell you when he expected to return here?”

“He told me that he hoped to return by the first train this morning which leaves Swineshead at 9.30 a.m. and gets to King’s Cross at 1.03 p.m. In the absence of his partner, Mr. Fairfield, Mr. Patton’s time is fully occupied and he did not wish to be away from London longer than he could help.”

“According to Sir Stanislaus Wherwell, Mr. Patton never arrived at Swineshead yesterday evening. Can you offer any explanation of this?”

McNaught shook his head. “I can offer no explanation whatever,” he replied. “It is most unlikely that Mr. Patton changed his mind once he had started on his journey. Perhaps when you meet Sir Stanislaus he will be able to throw some light upon it.”

Hanslet could not mistake the significance in the chief clerk’s tone.

“What’s your idea, Mr. McNaught?” he asked quickly.



“I have already told you that I have no idea. Sir Stanislaus is a client of the firm and it is not for me to throw any doubt upon his sincerity. But so far as I am aware, we only have his word for it that Mr. Patton did *not* arrive at Swineshead yesterday evening.”

McNaught, having overcome his first reticence, was becoming quite communicative. Hanslet resolved to take advantage of this.

“That’s a very interesting suggestion,” he replied. “Now, entirely between ourselves, Mr. McNaught, can you suggest any reason why Sir Stanislaus should have entrusted the diamonds to your firm for a period?”

“I don’t know, but I can guess,” said Mr. McNaught. “It’s the business of diamond merchants to buy and sell, you know. It wouldn’t surprise me to learn that Sir Stanislaus, finding himself hard up, had decided to sell the famous Wherwell diamonds. That would account for the dealers who came here from time to time to inspect them.”

“But if Mr. Patton had been commissioned to sell them he would have done so instead of returning them to Sir Stanislaus, surely?”

McNaught shook his head. “It isn’t always as simple as all that,” he replied. “Diamonds aren’t as valuable as they used to be, or as their owners in most cases still think they are. I daresay Sir Stanislaus has an exaggerated idea of the present value of the Wherwell diamonds. In which case he might have put a prohibitive reserve upon them. I know that he has them insured for a hundred and fifty thousand pounds. And I don’t suppose they’d fetch a third of that in the open market.”

“Have you informed Mr. Patton’s partner of what has happened?”

“Mr. Fairfield went abroad on the Thursday before Bank Holiday, and I’m not sure of his present address. He is moving from place to place and he does not tell us in advance where he will be on any particular date. He sent us a telegram from Brussels about a week ago, telling us where to communicate with him there if we wished. But I do not know how long he was staying there. And I don’t think Mr. Patton knows either.”

“Is Mr. Fairfield abroad on business or pleasure?”

“He is, I expect, combining both. He always takes a month’s holiday at this time of year and usually goes abroad. But he takes the opportunity of calling upon some of the leading Continental diamond merchants.”

“Can you tell me anything of Mr. Patton’s circumstances? Where he lives and so forth?”

“Mr. Patton is a widower with no children. His wife died, I believe, after they’d only been married a few months and he never married again. He has a

flat in Great Portland Place, where his niece, Miss Edna Patton, lives with him.”

“Have you made inquiries there, by any chance?”

“After my conversation with Sir Stanislaus on the telephone this morning, I rang up Miss Patton. I did not tell her that her uncle was reported not to have arrived at Swineshead. I merely asked her if she had heard anything from him regarding the time of his return. I gave as a pretext that one of his customers had asked me to arrange an appointment with him. Miss Patton replied that she had heard nothing from her uncle since he left the flat yesterday morning.”

“Can you describe Mr. Patton’s appearance?”

“He is fifty-four years old. Seeing him for the first time you’d hardly take him for that, for he has a round, rather chubby face, which gives the impression of youthfulness. Between ourselves, superintendent, he does his best to encourage that impression, for he dyes his hair. It was turning grey over the temples some years ago, but now it’s as black as ever it was or blacker.”

“Any other special characteristics?” Hanslet asked.

“It’s very difficult to describe anybody, even though you may have seen them nearly every day of your life for the last twenty years. And there’s nothing particularly striking about Mr. Patton’s appearance. As I say, he’s got a round, rather boyish face, clean-shaven and with grey eyes. Snub nose and rather a long upper lip. He’s of medium height and his bones are pretty well covered. I don’t mean that he’s noticeably stout, but I think that one might call him plump. He likes to do himself well and he doesn’t take much exercise. He always seems perfectly well, and I should think he has a pretty good constitution. But I shouldn’t think that he is really a strong man, in the muscular sense at all events.”

“What clothes was he wearing when you saw him off yesterday afternoon?”

“A dark-grey suit, black shoes and a grey felt hat. Over his suit he was wearing a light raincoat. And of course, under his coat he had that belt I spoke about which is of black leather with a steel ring for the chain of the satchel.”

“I suppose there isn’t by any chance a photograph of him about the place?”

“I’m afraid we don’t go in for photographs in this office. Wait a minute, though. I wonder!”

“You’ve got an idea, Mr. McNaught?” Hanslet suggested.

“Yes, but I’m not sure what Mr. Patton would say to it. It’s like this. Both Mr. Patton and Mr. Fairfield often have to go abroad at very short notice. And I happen to know that Mr. Patton always keeps his passport in a drawer in his desk in case he wants it in a hurry.”

“There’ll be a photograph in the passport,” said Hanslet.

“Yes, I know. But I’m wondering whether I should be justified in looking for it. Mr. Patton wouldn’t like the idea of me rummaging amongst his things. Still, if his desk is unlocked, I know exactly where to lay my hands on the passport.”

“It’s worth having a look, I think. If by any chance, anything has happened to Mr. Patton, it’s up to us to do anything we can to help him.”

“Yes, that’s true,” McNaught agreed. “I’ll take you along to his room if you like, superintendent.”

It turned out that Mr. Patton’s room was next door to the one in which they were sitting. On opening the door they found everything in order. The most conspicuous pieces of furniture were a massive mahogany bureau and a fair-sized safe. McNaught went up to the bureau and pulled gingerly at the handle of one of the drawers.

“It isn’t locked,” he said. “But I don’t know whether I ought.”

“I think I’d risk it,” Hanslet urged him. “A photograph of Mr. Patton would be of the greatest use to me, you know.”

McNaught overcame his scruples and opened the drawer. He rummaged among the few papers it contained and then turned to the superintendent.

“The passport isn’t here, after all,” he said.

“Perhaps it’s in one of the other drawers,” Hanslet suggested.

But McNaught shook his head. “If it isn’t in this drawer, it’s not in the office at all,” he replied. “Mr. Patton is a most methodical man. He’s very particular that everything should be kept in its proper place. He’s very fond of saying that more time is wasted in most offices looking for things than in actual work.”

“Well, it can’t be helped, Mr. McNaught,” said Hanslet. “I’m very much obliged to you for the information you’ve given me. If you have any news of Mr. Patton I shall be grateful if you will ring me up at the Yard and let me know. Good-afternoon.”

He left the offices of Messrs. Patton and Fairfield and took a bus to King’s Cross. It was barely five o’clock when he reached the station and he had time for a few preliminary inquiries before Wherwell’s train came in.

At the stationmaster's office he sought information as to the four o'clock train to Swineshead. He learnt that this train was actually an express to the north. Passengers for Swineshead would have to change at Grantham. The train reached that junction at six-two.

"Is there any stop between King's Cross and Grantham?" Hanslet asked.

"Yes," replied the clerk who was dealing with his inquiries. "There is a three-minute stop at Peterborough from five twenty-four to five twenty-seven."

"What about the connexion from Grantham to Swineshead?"

"A train leaves Grantham for Boston at six thirty-six. It stops at all stations except Barkston and reaches Swineshead at seven twenty-three."

"So that passengers for Swineshead by that train have to wait thirty-four minutes at Grantham? From six-two to six thirty-six?"

The clerk nodded. "Yes, that's right," he replied.

Hanslet made a note of these times. Then he asked that inquiries should be made along the line for a satchel and a suitcase, both of which he described to the best of his ability. He also asked if it was possible to check the surrender of a first-class ticket from King's Cross to Swineshead and was told that this could be done. The clerk promised to have the necessary inquiries made and to report the result to Scotland Yard. He also promised to try and find the porter who had taken Mr. Patton's suitcase on the previous day.

Hanslet then went to the barrier to await the arrival of the five fifty-five. The train came in and a crowd of passengers descended from it. Most of them gave up their tickets at the barrier and went about their business. But one man, having given up his ticket, stepped aside a couple of paces and waited expectantly.

Hanslet recognized him at once from the Assistant Commissioner's description. He went up to him.

"Sir Stanislaus Wherwell, I believe," he said.

The man, who had not noticed Hanslet's approach, turned round sharply. "Yes, that's right," he replied. "You're from the Yard, I suppose?"

"I am Superintendent Hanslet. The Assistant Commissioner instructed me to come here and meet you. He would like to see you himself."

"That's very good of him," Wherwell replied. "We'd better get a taxi and go straight along, hadn't we?"

Hanslet agreed to this. As soon as the taxi moved away from the station, Wherwell turned to him eagerly.

“Have you any news of my diamonds yet?” he asked.

“Not yet, I’m afraid,” Hanslet replied. “You have, I understand, mentioned the matter to the police at Swineshead?”

“Yes, I have, purely as a matter of form. But since Patton never arrived there, it doesn’t seem much use. I can’t think what’s become of him. I believe that he never started at all, in spite of what that chap at the office told me on the telephone.”

“How long have you known Mr. Patton, Sir Stanislaus?” Hanslet asked.

“Well, we were in the same house at school together, and that’s forty years ago and more. His father was a diamond merchant before him, you know, and he must have told Edward Patton about the Wherwell diamonds. We were by way of being rather chummy at the time and Edward Patton was so interested in the diamonds that I had him up to Holmden Hall one holiday and persuaded my father to show them to him. I remember how enormously impressed he was by something which then didn’t interest me in the least.”

“You have been friendly with Mr. Patton ever since then?” Hanslet suggested.

“Oh, dear me, no! We drifted apart after our schooldays. It wasn’t till a couple of months ago that I thought of him again. I wanted some advice about the diamonds and I made inquiries. I found that Patton’s father was dead and that he was in business himself as a diamond merchant, and was the senior partner of Patton and Fairfield’s. I got in touch with him, and the ultimate result was that I brought the diamonds up to his place for him to look at.”

“Was your renewed friendship with Mr. Patton merely a business one?”

“We certainly talked business whenever we met. But I’m bound to admit that we talked about a lot of other things besides. I spent a week in London when I brought the diamonds up, and we saw quite a lot of one another. He asked me to dine at his flat in Portland Place, and a very good dinner he gave me. I returned the compliment by asking him to my club and he seemed to enjoy it; and it was arranged that he should come and spend the night or longer if he could spare the time at Holmden Hall whenever he cared to arrange it.”

“Mr. Patton was to have stayed with you last night, wasn’t he?”

“He was, and it was his own suggestion. He wrote to me telling me that he would be bringing the diamonds back yesterday, but that he could not get away until the afternoon. I’ve got my letter in my pocket now, if you care to see it.”

“I think we had better wait till we get to the Yard,” Hanslet replied. “We shall be there in a couple of minutes.”

On their arrival at Scotland Yard, Hanslet escorted Wherwell to the presence of the Assistant Commissioner. After they had greeted one another, the Assistant Commissioner assured his visitor that he would do everything in his power to trace the missing diamonds. “You may rely upon me, Wherwell, to take a personal interest in the affair,” he said. “Naturally, I can’t undertake the investigation myself, but I’ve done the next best thing for you. Superintendent Hanslet is the very man to get to the bottom of this business. He’ll take you to his room now and you can have a confidential chat about it. And if there’s anything that I can do for you, don’t hesitate to ask.”

Once they were comfortably settled in the superintendent’s room, Hanslet resumed his questions. “You were going to show me the letter you received from Mr. Patton,” he said.

Wherwell produced a folded sheet of paper which he handed to the superintendent. “That’s it,” he said. “You can read it for yourself.”

The letter was typed upon the headed notepaper of Messrs. Patton and Fairfield and was dated August 15th. This, of course, was the previous Saturday. The wording of the letter was as follows:

DEAR WHERWELL,—I quite agree that under the circumstances, the best course will be for me to return the diamonds to you, at least for the present. Since you say that you will be unable to come to London during the next few days, I will myself bring the diamonds to Holmden Hall. You will remember that you were kind enough to suggest that I should take an opportunity of spending a night with you there. If convenient to you and Lady Wherwell, I will do so when I return the diamonds, and we can then, perhaps, discuss our future policy concerning them.

In the absence from London of my partner, Mr. Fairfield, my time is fully occupied and I can afford to pay you no more than the shortest of visits. Wednesday afternoon will suit me best for the return of the diamonds. I suggest that I should leave King’s Cross by the four o’clock train on that day, the 19th. There is a connexion to Swineshead which reaches that station at 7.23 p.m. Perhaps you will arrange to have me met there.

I should be glad to know as soon as possible whether this arrangement will suit you.

Yours sincerely,

The letter was signed in a bold hand,

“That sounds straightforward enough, doesn’t it,” said Wherwell, when Hanslet had finished his perusal of the letter.

“I got that letter by the first post on Monday morning. Since the date suggested by Patton suited my wife and myself perfectly well, I sent him a wire. I merely said, ‘Arrangements suggested in your letter quite satisfactory.’ At the same time I wrote confirming this, telling Patton that my car would be at Swineshead Station at 7.23 p.m. to meet him. He should have got that letter on Tuesday.”

“You have heard nothing from Mr. Patton or his firm since the receipt of this letter?”

“Nothing whatever. I hardly expected to. Since I had agreed with this suggestion, there was nothing further to say.”

“You did not go yourself to the station yesterday to meet Mr. Patton?”

“No. As it happened, I had other business on hand and I couldn’t manage it. I sent my chauffeur with a car, gave him a rough description of Patton and told him to look out for him. Swineshead isn’t a very big place, and there was no chance whatever of his missing Patton.”

“Your chauffeur is, I suppose, a perfectly reliable man?”

“Absolutely. He was my coachman before I gave up horses and took to a car. And he was in my father’s service before that. His name is Thomas Maple and he is a year younger than I am. I’m fifty-five, by the way. It’s not much more than a couple of miles from Holmden Hall to the station, but Maple started in plenty of time. He came back at ten minutes to eight without Patton, and without the diamonds.

“Maple came straight to my wife and told what happened. He had reached the station in plenty of time, before the train was signalled, in fact. He had left the car in the yard and had gone on to the platform. When the train came in, only three people got out of it. These were a man and two women, all three of them local people whom Maple recognized. I had told him that Patton would be travelling first class, and he had the sense to look into all the first-class carriages in case Patton should not have realized that he had reached his destination. He is absolutely certain that there was nobody in any of them in the least resembling Patton.

“Maple’s next move was to consult the stationmaster who, of course, knows him well. The natural assumption was that Patton had missed his train and would come on by the next. But the stationmaster assured Maple that there was no next—at least not that evening. The four o’clock was the

last train by which it was possible to reach Swineshead from London, except on Saturdays. Having found this out, Maple returned to Holmden Hall to get my instructions.

“I was amazed when I heard that Patton hadn’t turned up. In all my dealings with him, I had found him a man of extraordinary punctuality. It was of course, possible that something unforeseen had caused him to miss his train, but in that case he would certainly have communicated with me. He would probably have sent a telegram which would have reached me in a couple of hours at most. I spent a very anxious evening expecting every moment to hear something. I consoled myself with the thought that I should get a letter by the first post this morning. When nothing came from Patton then, I put a call through to his office. A man who told me that his name was McNaught and that he was the chief clerk, answered me. He assured me that he had himself seen Patton off by the four o’clock train from King’s Cross yesterday afternoon. But of course, the man may be lying for some purpose of his own.”

“Steps have already been taken to verify his statement,” said Hanslet.

“Well, if it turns out to be true, I simply can’t understand it. If Patton left King’s Cross at four o’clock, there was nothing on earth to prevent him from arriving at Swineshead at seven twenty-three. It’s ridiculous to suppose that he can have been robbed and murdered in the train in broad daylight.”

Hanslet was about to reply when his telephone bell rang. “Excuse me one moment, Sir Stanislaus,” he said, as he put the receiver to his ear. “Yes, Superintendent Hanslet speaking. Very well, put him through.” A few seconds’ pause, during which Hanslet listened to the message. Then the superintendent’s voice, “Yes. . . . Yes. . . . I’m very glad to hear that. . . . Yes. Under the circumstances, I should strongly recommend you to do so. You will let me know when he arrives? Thank you very much. Good-bye.”

Hanslet put down the instrument and turned once more to Wherwell.

“I must apologize for the interruption,” he said. “In the course of your dealings with the firm, did you ever meet Mr. McNaught, the chief clerk, who spoke to you on the telephone this morning?”

“Not to my knowledge,” Wherwell replied. “I may have seen him about the place, but the only people I’ve actually talked to there are Patton and his partner, Fairfield.”

“Mr. Fairfield, I understand, is at present abroad?”

“So I gathered from Patton’s letter. In fact, Fairfield told me when I last saw him that he was on the point of going abroad for his holidays. He struck me as being a very good fellow. A good deal younger than Patton, but I



should imagine a very keen business man. Patton thinks very highly of him, I know. He told me that he thought himself extremely lucky to have found such an energetic partner. I gather that they've been in partnership for ten years or more now."

"Would it be indiscreet, Sir Stanislaus, to ask you why you entrusted the diamonds to the care of Messrs. Patton and Fairfield?"

It seemed to Hanslet that Wherwell frowned slightly at this question. At all events, he hesitated a second or two before replying.

"Well, you see, the diamonds are not much use to any one as they are. Nobody wears that heavy old-fashioned sort of jewellery nowadays. So my wife and I thought that they might be reset in a more modern fashion. Of course, we had to take expert advice before doing anything of the kind. For all we knew any re-setting might diminish their value. But after we'd talked about it a bit I remembered my old school-fellow Patton. As I told you, I made inquiries and found out where he was. So I wrote to him and asked his advice. He replied that he would have to see the diamonds again before he could give an opinion. So I told him that I would bring them up to him and show them to him, and I did."

"Mr. Patton gave you an opinion in due course, I suppose?"

Again Wherwell looked distinctly uncomfortable. "Oh, yes," he replied. "He told me that he had had several experts to see them and that they all agreed that it would not be advisable to reset the stones. That explains his last letter to me, you see. I wrote and told him that if the diamonds were not going to be reset, I had better have them back as they were. He agreed to this and said that he'd bring them back himself. But all that's ancient history now. The point is, what are we going to do about it?"

Hanslet smiled. "We're going to make every effort to trace the present whereabouts of Mr. Patton and the diamonds," he replied. "In fact, the investigations started immediately your telephone message was received. What are your own plans, Sir Stanislaus?"

"I am entirely at your disposal," Wherwell replied.

"Then I think it will be best for you to arrange to stay in London for a day or two. I may find it necessary to consult you at short notice."

"Then I'll put up at my club. You'll always be able to catch me there. I needn't ask you to let me know the minute you have any news."

Hanslet promised to keep Wherwell informed of any developments and then escorted him from the building.

He then returned to his own room, to make a note of the telephone message which had interrupted their conversation. His caller had been Mr.

McNaught, who told him that he had received a telegram from Mr. Fairfield announcing his arrival in Paris. McNaught had suggested that he should wire Mr. Fairfield to return to London as soon as possible, and the Superintendent had concurred in this. McNaught had then promised that as soon as Mr. Fairfield reached London, he would let Hanslet know.

Hanslet, considering the accounts which he had heard, thought that an interview with Mr. Fairfield would be very enlightening. Fairfield knew all the persons concerned more or less intimately, and since he had been abroad at the time of Mr. Patton's disappearance, he might be considered an impartial witness. And Hanslet felt that an impartial witness was the very thing he needed.

For he was not by any means satisfied with the bona fides of any of the present actors. McNaught had not impressed him very favourably. There was something furtive about the man's manner. He somehow gave the impression of telling the truth, but not the whole truth. At present there was no confirmation of his story that Mr. Patton had left King's Cross by the four o'clock train. And upon the actual fact of that departure the whole matter hung.

Wherwell's account of the affair had been apparently straightforward and freely given. He had produced Mr. Patton's letter in support of his own story. But his manner had changed as soon as Hanslet had asked why the diamonds had been deposited with Messrs. Patton and Fairfield. He had produced a plausible enough reason, it was true. But was it the true reason? It seemed to him that McNaught's conjecture was nearer the mark. And if Wherwell was capable of making a false statement in one respect he might be capable of doing so in others.

Finally there was Mr. Patton himself. If it was confirmed that he had actually left King's Cross by the four o'clock train, what had happened to him subsequently? Wherwell had said that it was ridiculous to suppose that he could have been robbed and murdered. And in that respect at least Wherwell had been perfectly right. If anything of the kind had happened, his body must certainly have been found by now. The murder must have taken place either in the train or during the wait at Grantham. Apart from the difficulty of hiding the body under such circumstances, it was impossible to imagine such a crime being committed in broad daylight.

Then there was the rather peculiar instance of the passport. Hanslet realized that this rested entirely upon McNaught's statement. But supposing McNaught to have been stating the truth, the facts were these. Patton habitually kept his passport in one particular drawer in his desk. It was not there now. The natural inference was that Patton had taken it with him. But

why should he have done so when his express intention was to travel no further than Holmden Hall and to return next day?

Hanslet went home to dinner to meditate upon the case. His first visit on the following morning, Friday, was to King's Cross. And there, in the stationmaster's office, he acquired some very interesting information.

Only one first-class return ticket to Swineshead had been issued at the King's Cross booking-office during Wednesday. This ticket was numbered 4173 and bore the date August 19th. The outward half of this ticket had been surrendered at Grantham on the same date. The return half had not yet been given up at King's Cross.

The porter had been found, and was prepared to confirm McNaught's statement up to a point. "The man's in the station now," said the stationmaster's clerk. "I'll send for him, if you like, and you can talk to him yourself."

The porter was sent for and Hanslet questioned him. He remembered perfectly well the arrival of two gentlemen in a taxi on the previous Wednesday between half-past three and a quarter to four. He remembered the incident because of a peculiar-looking satchel which one of the gentlemen carried.

"I took the suitcase in one hand, sir," said the porter, "and I put out my other hand to take the satchel from the gentleman. But he wouldn't let me have it. He said he would look after it himself. And then I saw that there was a chain fixed to it but I couldn't see the other end of the chain. I stayed with this gentleman in the entrance hall while the other gentleman went to the booking-office to buy a ticket. Then one of them told me that he wanted a seat in a first-class non-smoker in the four o'clock for Swineshead. I found an empty compartment and the gentleman with the satchel got in. I put the suitcase in the rack above his head and told him that he'd have to change at Grantham. He thanked me and gave me a bob and that's the last I saw of them."

"You can't be certain that the gentleman with the satchel was actually in the train when it went out?" Hanslet asked.

"No, I can't be certain of that, for after I'd got my tip, I went away to look for another job. But I happened to be on the platform just after the train pulled out and I saw the other gentleman walk away by himself."

"Did you happen to notice if he was carrying anything?"

"I didn't notice that he was. But then I didn't pay any particular attention to him."

The porter was dismissed and Hanslet returned to Scotland Yard to digest these new facts. It now seemed probable that Patton had left London by the four o'clock train. Only one first-class ticket to Swineshead, that numbered 4173, had been issued on Wednesday. This must have been the one purchased by McNaught for Patton. But why had the outward half of that ticket been surrendered at Grantham? And had it been surrendered by Patton himself or by somebody else?

Hanslet considered this problem for a moment then sent for a railway time-table. From this he discovered that there were three trains from Grantham to London after 6.02 p.m. It was possible to imagine that Patton, on his arrival at Grantham, had decided not to go on to Swineshead but to return to London. He might, for instance, have imagined that he was being followed. But, had he done so, on arrival at King's Cross he would have surrendered the return half of ticket No. 4173. And this, according to the railway company, he had not done.

The superintendent's meditations were interrupted by the telephone bell. He answered it to learn that a Mr. Fairfield was on the line and would like to speak to him. A moment later a fresh, pleasant voice greeted him. "Is that Superintendent Hanslet?"

"Yes," Hanslet replied. "Is that Mr. Fairfield of Messrs. Patton and Fairfield?"

"It is. I am speaking from the office of the firm in Hatton Garden. Mr. McNaught has given me an outline of what has happened, and, naturally, I should like to meet you as soon as possible. Would you like me to come to the Yard or would you prefer to come here?"

"I think it will be best for me to come to your office, Mr. Fairfield," Hanslet replied. "I will start immediately and should be with you in a quarter of an hour."

Hanslet took a taxi and found himself in Hatton Garden well within the stipulated time. On his arrival at the office, he was immediately introduced into the presence of Mr. Fairfield. The latter was a man of between forty and forty-five, tall, well set-up and square-shouldered. He was clean-shaven with closely cut fair hair. Hanslet particularly noticed his eyes, which were keen and penetrating, and his resolute chin.

"Sit down, superintendent," said Fairfield briskly. "From what McNaught tells me, we've got to work shoulder to shoulder in this affair. I can't offer you a cigarette, for I never smoke the things. But if you'd care for a cigar, I've got some pretty decent ones here."

“Thanks very much, Mr. Fairfield,” Hanslet replied, “if you don’t mind I shall be very much happier with my pipe.”

“Go ahead,” said Fairfield. “Now, to begin with, I’d better introduce myself. My name is Leslie Fairfield, my age is forty-two, and I am a junior partner in this firm. I joined Mr. Patton about ten years ago, and I think I may say that he and I have worked in perfect harmony ever since.

“For the last three or four years I have always taken a holiday for a month or so in July or August. I am not married and consequently my leisure is my own. A holiday without any sort of object has never appealed to me. I like poking about the old continental cities as well as any one, but at the same time I like to have a secondary object to my journey. You will understand that our firm is in close touch with all the leading continental diamond merchants. This year I started my holiday on July 30th, and in the course of it I called upon several of these, not necessarily with a view to immediate business. It seemed to me a gesture of politeness which costs neither me nor the firm anything.

“It has always been understood between Patton and myself that when one is away on holiday the other does not trouble him with unnecessary correspondence. Consequently, during the last few weeks, I have not troubled to keep in constant touch with the office. As I daresay McNaught has already told you, I have reported my whereabouts by telegram at intervals of roughly a week. The idea was that if any emergency arose the firm could get hold of me with very little delay. I’ll admit that I never anticipated so grave an emergency as this.

“A week or so ago I was in Brussels where I called upon a business acquaintance of ours. I notified Patton of my presence there, and received from him a wire to the effect that he had nothing special to report. From Brussels I set off on a very leisurely tour through the Ardennes to the French frontier and eventually turned up in Paris yesterday afternoon.

“My first business on arriving in Paris, was to send Patton a wire. I rather expected to receive a reply from him asking me to call on a business friend of ours there. Before I left London there had been some talk of a deal between us and I thought the time would now be ripe for me to call upon him. Instead of which I got a wire from McNaught. ‘Grave news return as soon as possible.’

“McNaught is not the sort to panic over trifles, and I knew that if he used the expression ‘grave news’ something pretty serious must have happened. So I wasted no time, but caught the eight o’clock train from the Gare St. Lazare and travelled back by way of Havre and Southampton. I reached Waterloo at nine o’clock this morning and took a taxi straight here, where I

found McNaught who told me the most extraordinary story I've ever heard in my life. You understand, superintendent, that I am entirely at your disposal. As you must see for yourself, it's a matter of vital importance to the firm that this business should be cleared up with the least possible delay."

"I quite appreciate that, Mr. Fairfield," Hanslet replied. "And I'm very much obliged to you for your very lucid statement. I'm sorry to say that up to the present I have no news for you beyond that which Mr. McNaught must have given you. You won't mind if I begin by asking a lot of questions, I hope?"

"Not in the least," Fairfield replied readily. "And you may be sure that I'll do my best to answer them."

"To begin with, then, have you every confidence in your office staff, and especially in McNaught?"

"There is nobody in the place who has not been with us for several years and proved himself entirely trustworthy. McNaught started as an office boy in old Mr. Patton's time, and has risen to the position of chief clerk. Both Patton and I have regarded him as a model of reliability. If he has a fault, it is a certain reluctance to act on his own responsibility. As I told him just now, he should have informed the police yesterday, as soon as he had the telephone call from Wherwell."

"What did he say to that?" Hanslet asked.

"His reply was characteristic; he said that he didn't think Mr. Patton would like him to do that without the sanction of either of the partners."

"He has told you, no doubt, that he accompanied Mr. Patton to the bank when the diamonds were withdrawn on Wednesday afternoon, and that he subsequently saw him off at King's Cross? Do you find anything surprising in his statement?"

"Nothing whatever. Every detail is exactly what I should have expected. I daresay you remember the Café Monico pearl robbery of some years ago. Since that time we folks take care not to be alone when we are carrying valuables about with us."

"Yet Mr. Patton intended to travel alone from King's Cross to Swineshead?"

"Oh, a corridor train is safe enough, at least during the hours of daylight. McNaught tells me that Patton had arranged for Wherwell to meet him with his car at Swineshead."

"Sir Stanislaus, according to his own account, did not meet the train himself, but sent his chauffeur. You are personally acquainted with him, Mr.

Fairfield, I believe?"

"I met him for the first time when he brought the diamonds to us just before I went on holiday. He is an old school-friend of Patton's and he selected our firm to do his business for him on the strength of that."

"What exactly was the nature of that business, Mr. Fairfield?"

"Why, don't you know?" exclaimed Fairfield in surprise. "He wanted us to sell the famous Wherwell diamonds for him. Patton and I examined them thoroughly together, and Patton, who can tell you the value of any diamond to the nearest farthing, told him that he thought he could get him an offer of seventy thousand pounds.

"This was a bit of a blow to Wherwell. He told us that the family had always understood that they were worth a hundred and fifty thousand, and that they were at present insured for that amount. I think he thought that we were trying to get them cheap. Patton told him pretty straight that if he didn't believe him, he'd better take them somewhere else and get another opinion. In the end he came to an arrangement with us. The diamonds were to remain here—or rather in our bank—for a bit, and Patton would invite various people who might be interested to have a look at them. If any offer above a hundred thousand was made we were to let Wherwell know at once. And that was how the matter stood when I went away."

"You don't of course know what happened subsequently?"

"I don't suppose that anybody but Patton knows. McNaught tells me that several people in the business have seen the diamonds. What offers they made, if any, of course, he doesn't know. That would be a purely confidential matter between them and Patton. But I'm willing to gamble upon Patton's valuation. If he said seventy thousand that's just about the figure the stones would fetch. I've got the copy of Patton's last letter to Wherwell here. Would you like to see it?"

"I've already seen the original, but I should like to see if it corresponds exactly with the copy," Hanslet replied.

Fairfield produced the carbon copy of the letter which Wherwell had shown to Hanslet. The two corresponded exactly.

"There's a previous letter from Patton to Wherwell written a few days earlier," said Fairfield. "In it Patton says that he has been unable to obtain an offer anywhere approaching the sum named, namely one hundred thousand pounds. He therefore asked Wherwell for his instructions as to the disposal of the diamonds. Wherwell replied rather huffily that he couldn't accept anything less than a hundred thousand and that the diamonds had better be returned to him. The letter you have just read completes the correspondence,

except for a wire and a letter from Wherwell agreeing to Patton's suggestion as to the method of their return."

Hanslet decided at this stage to take Fairfield into his confidence. "There is one very puzzling point in this affair," he said. "I think there's little doubt that Mr. Patton reached Grantham on Wednesday afternoon. But he did not continue his journey from there to Swineshead by train. The ticket which McNaught bought for him at King's Cross—a first-class ticket from King's Cross to Swineshead—was surrendered at Grantham on Wednesday. Can you suggest any explanation of that curious fact?"

Fairfield glanced keenly at the superintendent, but made no immediate reply. "I can think of a possible explanation, but it doesn't sound very plausible," he replied after a longish pause. "Is there a through carriage from London to Swineshead on that train?"

"No. Mr. Patton would have had to change at Grantham and he had just over half an hour to wait."

Fairfield nodded. "I see. Now, what I'm going to suggest is purely imaginary. You know as well as I do that there are always gangs of crooks on the look-out for valuables such as the Wherwell diamonds. One of these gangs may have got wind of Patton's journey and travelled by the same train from King's Cross. They wouldn't have risked trying any of their little tricks in the main line between London and Grantham. But they may have somehow aroused Patton's suspicions, causing him to think it unsafe to take the local train from Grantham to Swineshead. So he tried to give them the slip at Grantham by leaving the station. That would account for the surrender of the ticket."

"In that case Mr. Patton would have hired a car and completed his journey by road," Hanslet suggested.

But Fairfield shook his head. "He would never have done that and taken the diamonds with him. To go alone in a car driven by an unknown man is a risk which nobody in his position would take. If he left the train at Grantham under those circumstances, this is what I should have expected him to do. He would go to the stationmaster's office and ask him to send for a policeman. He would have told the policeman of his suspicions, and asked him to escort him to the nearest hotel. From there he would have rung up Wherwell and told him what had happened. He would probably have arranged with Wherwell to meet him at Grantham in his car the next morning, certainly not that night. Or he might have returned to London under police protection. I can say this with some confidence, for we have often discussed what we should do in certain eventualities."



“It is hardly possible that Mr. Patton is still at Grantham awaiting developments,” said Hanslet gravely.

“I must agree with you there,” Fairfield replied. “I’m afraid we’ve got to face the facts, that the diamonds have been stolen and that something pretty serious has happened to poor old Patton. But how that can have happened is more than I can imagine.”

Hanslet made no comment on this. “Assuming for the moment that the diamonds have been stolen, could they easily be disposed of?” he asked.

“It is never very difficult for a crook to dispose of diamonds,” Fairfield replied. “But how he would set about trying to dispose of them is another matter. It all depends on the kind of crook who had managed to get hold of them. An ordinary snatch-and-grab man would take them to the nearest fence, who, if he touched them at all, would give him a ridiculously small sum for them. The fence, if he knew his business, would then break up the set and sell the stones separately one by one. It would be impossible to sell the Wherwell diamonds in their present form, and realize even a small percentage of their value, for they are familiar to every diamond merchant throughout the world. The only hope of any one who had acquired them unlawfully, would be to realize the value of each individual stone.

“It is a matter of common experience that individual stones can be sold without much risk to the seller. The classical case, of course, is the necklace known as Marie Antoinette’s, though that unfortunate woman never wore it. Messrs. Bohmer and Bassange, the Parisian jewellers, had collected stones from all over Europe in order to make it. It would of course have been practically impossible for any thief to have disposed of the necklace as it stood. Yet Madame de la Motte and her associates had very little difficulty in realizing a considerable sum from most of the stones after they had cut the necklace to pieces. And these people, so far as one knows, had no previous experience of dealing in diamonds.”

“I daresay conditions have changed a bit since then,” Hanslet suggested.

“Not very much, I fancy. But I’m afraid I’m getting away from your questions. If the Wherwell diamonds have been stolen, I think we may take it for granted that the thief is an expert. By which I mean that he had a knowledge of diamonds and of the markets which exist for them.”

Hanslet nodded. “I think everything points to that,” he said. “Perhaps you can tell me, Mr. Fairfield, how such a man could realize the full value of the diamonds.”

Fairfield shook his head. “I can’t tell you that,” he replied. “No thief could realize the full value of the diamonds. Unless, that is, he could find an

utterly unscrupulous purchaser, which is unlikely. You see, these stones in their present setting have an historical or, if you like, a sentimental value. In order to realize that, they would have to be sold as they are, and any attempt to do so would give the thief away immediately.

“The easiest way to answer your question is to tell you what I would do in the thief’s place. We’ll suppose for the moment that I had stolen the Wherwell diamonds. At the very first opportunity I should remove the stones from the setting, and melt down the setting itself, so that it should be unrecognizable. The stones I should hide until the first excitement of the theft had blown over. By the way, you would like an expert description of these particular diamonds, I expect?”

“I was going to ask you about that,” said Hanslet.

“I’ll let you have one and also a photograph which we had taken when Wherwell brought the stones to us. But to return to what we were saying. I should expect, of course, that such a description would be circulated to all possible purchasers. Consequently, having found a safe place in which to hide the stones, I should bide my time. It might be a couple of years or more before I took any further action.

“Then I should make a beginning, quite quietly and unostentatiously, with the least valuable of the stones. I should offer them for sale, one at a time, to different agents and likely buyers in different parts of the world. Then, gradually, and at long intervals, I should do the same with the more valuable stones. In this case, there are perhaps half a dozen of the biggest which would be easily recognized by the experts. Probably I should not attempt to sell them in their present form. I should have them cut into different shapes before attempting to dispose of them. I haven’t a doubt that I could find half a dozen diamond cutters who would do the work without asking awkward questions. Of course, the cutting process would take some of the value off the stones, but I should consider that better than having the theft traced back to me.”

“How long would it take you to sell all the stones?”

“At least five years—perhaps rather more. I should have to be very careful not to put more than one or two stones on the market at once.”

“What proportion of the value of the diamonds would you eventually realize?”

“That’s very difficult to say. You appreciate, of course, that my method of disposing of the stones would allow me to deal with reputable dealers from whom I should obtain the full market value. Patton values the diamonds as they stand at seventy thousand. I’m quite prepared to accept his

estimate. In which case the stones unset are worth somewhere about sixty thousand. Selling them separately I ought to be able to realize at least fifty thousand. But I want to point out to you that it is only the expert who would know how to set about this disposing of the stones properly. And I needn't remind you that some of the crooks are nearly as expert as we are."

"Do you think there's any likelihood of a gang of crooks having got to hear in advance of Mr. Patton's journey?"

Mr. Fairfield shook his head. "Frankly, I don't know," he replied. "You must remember that I've been away. When I left London there was no talk of the diamonds going back to Holmden Hall. The idea was, or at least so I understood it, that they should remain in our custody until they were sold.

"So far as I can make out, Patton only suggested his journey for the first time in the letter which he wrote on the previous Saturday. Now, I know Patton pretty well. If he intends to carry valuables about with him, he says nothing whatever to anybody except myself and possibly McNaught. So that it seems most unlikely that the projected journey can have leaked out from this office."

"What about the person who typed the letter?" Hanslet asked.

"The only person who is allowed to type letters of that kind is McNaught," Fairfield replied. "I think it would be quite safe to assume that nobody but Patton and McNaught knew that that particular letter had been written. And you will notice that neither Wherwell's telegram nor his letter give the show away. They merely express agreement with the arrangements suggested by Patton. Of course, I don't know what Wherwell may have told people. He probably told Lady Wherwell when and how the diamonds were coming back, for instance. If a gang of crooks got to know of Patton's journey, it was probably through some indiscretion on Wherwell's part."

"I'll talk to Sir Stanislaus about that," said Hanslet. "By the way, Mr. Fairfield, when I was here yesterday afternoon, I asked Mr. McNaught if he could supply me with a photograph of Mr. Patton. He suggested his passport, but on looking for that document, he couldn't find it."

"He can't have looked in the right place," Fairfield exclaimed. "Patton and I always keep our passports in the office. We never know when we may have to dash off to the continent at a moment's notice. I'll bet you I can lay my hands on Patton's passport for you. If you care to come along to his room, I'll give it to you."

So for the second time Hanslet found himself in the senior partner's room. Fairfield went to the desk and opened the same drawer as McNaught

had opened previously. He also turned over the few papers which it contained, and then remained staring at the drawer in puzzled astonishment.

“Well, that’s a very queer thing!” he exclaimed. “Patton must have slipped the passport into his pocket before he started on Wednesday.”

“He may have put it away somewhere in his flat,” Hanslet suggested.

“Well, in all the years I’ve known him, I’ve never known him do such a thing. He’s a man of almost absurdly regular habits and once he’s found what he considers the right place for anything nothing will induce him to change it. I’m ready to swear that he must have taken his passport with him.”

“Why should he have done so when his journey would not take him out of England?”

“I’m blessed if I know,” Fairfield replied. “I’ve never known him do such a thing before. I can only suggest that he’s carried it with him as a means of identification in case of emergency.”

Hanslet glanced at his watch. He had sketched out an ambitious programme for the day and time was getting on.

“I’m very much obliged to you, Mr. Fairfield,” he said. “Naturally, I shall want to keep in pretty close touch with you for the present. Will you be leaving London again during the next few days?”

“You may take it from me that I shan’t stir until this business has been cleared up,” Fairfield replied. “If you want me you won’t have any difficulty in finding me. I shall be in the office here from half-past nine till six every day except Saturdays. My private address is 16 Olcombe Street, Bloomsbury. You will find a grocer’s shop and store on the first two floors and my flat above that.”

Hanslet thanked Mr. Fairfield once more and left the office. He then took a taxi to King’s Cross, reaching the station just in time to catch the next train to Grantham.

During the journey he occupied his mind with what Fairfield had told him. The fact, if indeed it was a fact, that Patton had surrendered his ticket at Grantham seemed more unaccountable than ever. It was quite possible that he had been followed and had become aware of his pursuers. Hanslet was not nearly so satisfied as Fairfield that the news of his intended journey could not have leaked out from the office. And, of course, Wherwell might have spoken of it, deliberately or otherwise. But if Patton had imagined that he was being followed, he would certainly have behaved as Fairfield had suggested. He would have sought protection of some kind, instead of just giving up his ticket and doing nothing more about it. And there was that

very significant matter of his missing passport. The more Hanslet considered that, the less he liked it.

On reaching Grantham Hanslet interviewed the stationmaster and enlisted his help. The ticket collector who had been on duty on Wednesday afternoon was summoned and interrogated.

“Yes, I do remember taking a first-class ticket for Swineshead,” he said. “I couldn’t say exactly what train the gentleman came off, but I think it must have been the 6.02. I was taking the tickets from the passengers as they left the station, and the gentleman handed me the outward half of a first-class ticket from King’s Cross. He asked me if the ticket was all right and said something about going the rest of the way by road. I told him it would be all right, and that’s the last I saw of him.”

“Do you remember what the gentleman looked like?” asked Hanslet.

“I’m afraid I don’t,” the ticket collector replied. “You understand I get a good many passengers through the barrier one way and the other. But I did notice that he seemed to be carrying a curious-looking bag which seemed to have a chain on it.”

“Was he carrying a suitcase as well?”

The ticket collector looked doubtful. “Not to my recollection,” he replied. “In fact, I don’t think he can have been. So far as I remember he was holding this bag of his in one hand and he handed me the ticket with the other. And I don’t remember him putting down a suitcase and picking it up again.”

“Was he alone, or was there any one with him?” Hanslet asked.

“I couldn’t tell that, but I don’t remember him speaking to any one else.”

“You don’t know what happened to him after he passed the barrier?”

“He must have gone outside the station, that’s all I can say. And from where I stand on the platform side of the barrier, I can’t see what happens outside.”

Hanslet realized that this was all the ticket collector could tell him. The next step was to interview one by one the porters who had been on duty at the time. But none of these had noticed the gentleman with the satchel. And none of them remembered having carried a suitcase for any one answering to Mr. Patton’s description. Quite a number of passengers had come off the 6.02 and Patton might well have passed unnoticed among the crowd.

The one not very promising clue was the remark made to the ticket collector by the man who had given up the ticket. He had said something about completing his journey by road. In spite of what Fairfield had said, it

was just possible that Patton, imagining himself to be followed, had thought of this method of shaking off his pursuers. Hanslet's next step was to call upon the local police. He provided them with a description of Patton, laying special stress upon the satchel, since this appeared to have attracted notice wherever it had been seen. He then asked that inquiries might be made at all the garages in the town. It was possible that a man answering to Patton's description had hired a car some time after six o'clock on Wednesday afternoon.

The superintendent then returned to the station and caught the next train to Swineshead. Here again he interviewed the stationmaster. The information which he received confirmed in every particular what Wherwell had told him. The stationmaster remembered the arrival of the 7.23 on Wednesday from the fact that Maple, Wherwell's chauffeur, had spoken to him. Maple told him before the train came in that he was expecting a visitor to Holmden Hall. Only three passengers, however, had alighted from the train and all three were known to both Maple and the stationmaster. Maple had looked into the first-class carriages and had seen nobody who could have been Patton. The 7.23 was the last train down from London that day. The stationmaster was perfectly certain that nobody carrying a satchel with a chain attached to it had arrived at Swineshead Station either then or subsequently.

Hanslet returned to London tired, but with the elements of a theory in his head. It seemed established with practical certainty that Patton had abandoned his journey at Grantham. From the time he had given up his ticket no trace had so far been found of him. After six o'clock on Wednesday afternoon, Patton's movements could only be conjectured.

The vital point was this. Why had Patton abandoned his journey and given up his ticket? It was incredible that if he had thought he was being followed, he should have taken such a step without seeking assistance. Besides, what had happened to him since? He could hardly have been kidnapped in broad daylight in the streets of Grantham. Had he hired a car to drive him to Holmden Hall? If so, why had he not arrived? If he had met with an accident of any kind, the local police would certainly have known of it.

The obvious thing to do now was to circulate a description and photograph. Hanslet sent a subordinate to Patton's flat in Portland Place to ask Miss Patton if she could supply any sort of a likeness. The subordinate returned with quite a good full-faced photograph taken only a year previously. Hanslet gave instructions that this should be reproduced together with a written description.

Meanwhile his theory began to develop. It was impossible to believe that Patton on arriving at Grantham Station had simply vanished into thin air. What was the alternative? That Patton, after leaving the station, had re-entered it and taken a train for some unknown destination. Perhaps he thought that this dodge might throw his pursuers off his track. He would still have had plenty of time to catch the 6.34 to Swineshead. But he had surrendered his ticket and would have had to buy another. And certainly it was definitely established that he had not arrived at Swineshead Station.

On the other hand, he may have thought it unsafe to have continued his journey and have caught a train back to London. But had he done so, he would presumably have used the return half of his ticket No. 4173. How was it then that the return half of this ticket had not been surrendered at King's Cross?

So far the argument had been based upon a pursuit of Patton, real or imaginary. But it was not impossible that Patton's motive had not been uneasiness at all. He might have abandoned his journey for reasons of his own. Once embarked upon this line of thought, Fairfield's conversation with the superintendent took on a new significance. Fairfield had told him that an expert finding himself in possession of the diamonds should be able eventually to realize fifty thousand pounds upon them. And Patton, of all people, was the man who knew how to do so.

How easily and inconspicuously Patton could have made off with the diamonds! The details, each more convincing than the last, poured in upon Hanslet's imagination. Patton had made a great parade of taking precautions up to the departure of the four o'clock train from King's Cross. But once the train had steamed out of the station there was nobody to watch his movements. He had left the train at Grantham carrying his suitcase and the famous satchel. The suitcase he had left on the platform. He had then gone out of the station, carrying only the satchel. A few minutes later he had re-entered the station by the booking-office and bought himself another ticket to London. He had then retrieved the suitcase and carried it with him into the lavatory. There he had divested himself of the satchel, which was unduly conspicuous, and packed it inside the suitcase. He had then quietly and unobtrusively returned to London.

What had been his next move? That was just where the missing passport came in. With that in his pocket he could slip across the Channel by one of several routes. Fairfield had said that this was the very thing that an expert thief would have done. By this time, no doubt, Patton was securely hidden somewhere on the continent, with the individual stones of the Wherwell diamonds in his possession.

The more that Hanslet considered this theory, the more it seemed to him the only one that would fit in with the facts. It was all very well to harbour suspicions of Sir Stanislaus or McNaught but, up to the present, there was not a vestige of evidence against them. They might be held for innocent unless . . . and at this stage, the superintendent's mind evolved a new and surprising possibility.

It revealed itself to him in a series of facts which arranged themselves like the links in a chain. Wherwell had misrepresented the reasons for bringing the diamonds to London. He had said that he was merely seeking the advice of Messrs. Patton and Fairfield upon certain alterations. Whereas almost certainly the truth was that he had wished to sell them, but had not secured a bid which he considered adequate. The diamonds were insured for a hundred and fifty thousand and Patton's valuation was no more than seventy thousand. If the diamonds were lost or destroyed, Wherwell would receive the full value of the insurance. Was it possible that Patton and Wherwell had entered into a conspiracy? Patton was to disappear with the diamonds. The underwriters would hand over a hundred and fifty thousand pounds to Wherwell. Patton, as his reward, might dispose of the stones to the best advantage.

It occurred to Hanslet as he considered the possibility of such a conspiracy, that the disappearance of the diamonds had been exceedingly well-timed. Patton and Wherwell were old acquaintances and probably had no difficulty in coming to a satisfactory arrangement. But there was Fairfield to be considered. Either he would have to be let into the plot, or it would have to be carried out without his knowledge. No doubt the conspirators had decided that the latter course would be the best.

Now Fairfield was in the habit of taking his annual holiday about the same time every year. Wherwell and Patton had arranged that the diamonds should disappear during his absence. Wherwell had brought the diamonds to London before Fairfield's departure. There was no risk in that—in fact, it made the whole affair look rather more plausible. Wherwell's reserve was purposely fixed at a ridiculously high figure. Patton had valued the diamonds at less than half of this, and his valuation had seemed perfectly reasonable to his partner. Fairfield would not be in the least astonished to learn that Wherwell's reserve had not been reached, and that it had been decided that the diamonds should be returned to Holmden Hall.

Hanslet's theory was fully developed by Saturday morning, when he had his brief conversation with Jimmy at Scotland Yard. After the latter's departure for Fallowchurch, the superintendent sat down to draw up a timetable of events. This, when complete, read as follows:



*July 15th.* Wherwell brings the diamonds to London and deposits them with Messrs. Patton and Fairfield.

*July 30th.* Fairfield leaves London for the continent.

*Saturday, August 15th.* Patton writes to Wherwell suggesting the return of the diamonds to Holmden Hall on the following Wednesday. The original of this letter is retained by Wherwell and the copy is filed in Messrs. Patton and Fairfield's office.

*Monday, August 17th.* Wherwell receives this letter. He sends a telegram of agreement and also a letter. This telegram and letter are filed at Patton and Fairfield's office.

*Wednesday, August 19th.* At 3 p.m. approximately, Patton draws the diamonds from the Holborn Branch of the London and Kensington Bank. He does so in the presence of McNaught. He then, still with McNaught in his company, drives to King's Cross, where he catches the 4 p.m. train. McNaught is thus in a position to give evidence that Patton actually left London by this train with the diamonds in his possession.

*The same day, 6 to 6.15 p.m.* Patton leaves the train at Grantham. But instead of taking the 6.34 to Swineshead, he leaves the station, surrendering his ticket. From this point, no further trace of his movements at present exist.

*The same day, 7.23 p.m.* Patton's train is due at Swineshead. Wherwell sends his car, driven by Maple, to meet it. Patton does not arrive. Maple drives back to Holmden Hall to report this to Wherwell. Wherwell apparently takes no action until

*Thursday, August 20th.* About 10 a.m. Wherwell rings up Patton and Fairfield's office. He speaks to McNaught who assures him that Patton started for Holmden Hall by the four o'clock train on the previous day. Wherwell then informs the local police of the circumstances. It is not until approximately 2 p.m. that he rings up the Assistant Commissioner at Scotland Yard. Note: By this time twenty-two hours have elapsed since Patton's departure from King's Cross.

*Same day, 5.30 p.m. approximately.* McNaught receives telegram from Fairfield, reporting the latter's presence in Paris. With the concurrence of Hanslet, McNaught replies that Fairfield should return to England at once. Fairfield crosses that night, arriving in London at 9 a.m. on the following day.

Hanslet had barely finished these notes when he received a telephone message from Grantham. The local superintendent reported that he had

made exhaustive inquiries. The net result of these inquiries was:

That nobody answering to the description of Patton had been seen in or about the town of Grantham.

That no car had been hired by such a person on the afternoon of Wednesday, August 19th, or at any other time.

That no car had been hired that afternoon or subsequently to drive a stranger to Swineshead.

That no accident involving anybody answering to the description had come to the notice of the police of the Kestwen Division of Lincolnshire.

This information was fully in accordance with Hanslet's expectations. It confirmed his theory that Patton had re-entered Grantham Station immediately after leaving it.

A few minutes later the superintendent's telephone rang again. This time the caller was an official of the Passport Office.

"You were asking on the telephone yesterday about a passport issued to a certain Edward Patton," said the official. "Well, by some extraordinary coincidence, we've got that very passport in the office now. It's rather a long story. I suggest that if you can find time you should come along here, and I'll tell you about it."

"I'll find time all right," Hanslet replied. A few minutes sufficed him to reach the Passport Office in a taxi. Here he was taken immediately to the room of the official with whom he had spoken.

"Good-morning, superintendent," said the official. "I thought the discovery of this passport might interest you. Here it is, you can see it for yourself. It is perfectly genuine and corresponds in every respect with our records. As you will see, if you examine it, it was originally issued to Edward Patton seven years ago and renewed two years ago. It is therefore current."

Hanslet took the passport eagerly and looked at it. There was no doubt whatever that it was genuine. But it had evidently been very badly treated. Several of the pages were torn, and the cover was crumpled and disfigured by stains, apparently of oil. The photograph of the possessor was, however, undamaged. Hanslet recognized it from its likeness to the photograph he had secured from Patton's flat.

"How did this passport come into your possession?" the superintendent asked.

"It was received here by post this morning," the official answered. "Accompanying it was a note from the stationmaster at Folkestone Harbour.

Here is the note, you had better read it for yourself.”

The note was written on a sheet of paper bearing the printed heading of the Southern Railway. It was dated Friday, August 21st, and ran as follows:

“TO THE PASSPORT OFFICE, LONDON.

“DEAR SIRS,—The enclosed passport was found by one of my staff this afternoon on the quayside here. As I have been unable to trace the owner, I herewith forward it to you according to instructions.

“Yours faithfully,

“HENRY WAKEFIELD,

“Stationmaster.”

“That’s the usual procedure,” the official remarked. “The Stationmaster probably showed this passport to the local passport officer and asked him what he should do with it. The passport officer told him that it should be sent up here. And that I’m afraid is all I can tell you.”

“It’s quite enough to be going on with,” Hanslet replied. “I’m most awfully grateful to you for letting me know so promptly. You don’t mind if I keep this passport for a bit, do you?”

“Not if you undertake to return it in due course,” the official replied.

Hanslet gave the necessary undertaking, left the Passport Office and took a taxi to Charing Cross, where he caught the next train to Folkestone.

Mr. Wakefield, the stationmaster at the Harbour Station, expressed his willingness to help him to the best of his ability. “The passport was found on the quayside about four o’clock yesterday afternoon,” he said. “It happened like this. When the Boulogne boat came in at 3.45 p.m. it was found necessary to shift the crane used for unloading the baggage a few yards. As you are probably aware this crane runs up and down the quay on rails. This allows it to be run in the most favourable position for hoisting the heavy baggage from the deck of the steamer on to the railway trucks.

“Yesterday afternoon the craneman, having unloaded the baggage, saw what he took at first to be a notebook lying between the rails of the crane. He picked it up and found that it was a passport. He brought it to me, and after I had spoken to the local passport officer I sent it up to the Passport Office in London.”

“Is it possible that the passport was dropped by some one disembarking from the Boulogne boat?” Hanslet asked.

“Hardly, for that person could not have passed the barrier without producing it,” the stationmaster replied. “Besides, from the look of the

passport when I saw it, it had lain where it was found for some little time.”

“Do you think it likely that the passport was dropped by a passenger disembarking from the Boulogne boat yesterday?” Hanslet asked.

Mr. Wakefield shook his head. “It seems to me practically impossible,” he replied. “I expect you know the passport routine as well as I do. Passengers to England holding foreign passports have these examined on the boats. Passengers holding British passports have to pass the passport officer here before they can reach the train. Now, any one coming off the boat would reach the crane before they reached the passport officer’s barrier. If they had dropped the passport as they came off the boat, they would not have been able to produce it at the barrier and would have been stopped. Do you follow what I mean?”

“Perfectly. The passportless person would have been detained pending further inquiry.”

“You’ve got it, superintendent. Besides, the passport cannot merely have been dropped beside the crane. It must have been deliberately thrown right under it. And, as I say, from the look of it when it was brought to me it must have been lying under the crane for some time.”

“It is very difficult to understand why any one should deliberately throw away a passport,” said Hanslet thoughtfully. “There’s no night service from here to the continent, is there?”

“Oh, yes, there is,” replied Mr. Wakefield. “There’s the Dunkerque service. The boat train leaves Victoria at 11 p.m. and the steamer leaves here at 12.30 a.m., arriving at Dunkerque at 4 a.m. The service is primarily intended for passengers to Eastern France and South Germany, but there are connections from Dunkerque all over the continent.”

“What is the passport procedure for travellers by the boat train?”

“They have to produce their passports at the barrier here. Then they are free to go on board the steamer.”

“Once past the barrier they don’t have to show their passports again?”

“Not on this side of the Channel. But, of course, they have to produce them at Dunkerque before they are allowed to continue their journey.”

After some further conversation with Mr. Wakefield, Hanslet interviewed the craneman who had found the passport and the chief passport officer at Folkestone Harbour Station. They confirmed all that the stationmaster had told him. He returned to London with the satisfactory feeling that his theory was now fully confirmed.

Patton's scheme was now apparent, though whether or not he had been acting in collusion with Wherwell was not yet established. The superintendent had already deduced his actions at Grantham Station on Wednesday afternoon. What had happened subsequently was now sufficiently clear. Patton having hidden his satchel in his suitcase and possibly effected some trifling alterations to his appearance, had taken the next train back to London. By doing so, he could have reached King's Cross at half-past nine at the latest. This would have given him plenty of time to cross London and reach Victoria by eleven o'clock. No doubt he had provided himself in advance with a ticket to some continental destination. Using his own passport he had passed the barrier at Folkestone Harbour and so reached the quayside.

Here he had attempted to divest himself of the passport which revealed his true identity. It would be pretty dark on the quay and his actions would not be noticed. He had thrown the passport, as he thought, into the harbour, where the tide would very soon sweep it out to sea. But either owing to his carelessness or perhaps to an untimely gust of wind, the passport had been carried, not into the water, but under the crane. Whether Patton had been aware of this or not, he would not have dared attempt to retrieve it. It was essential to his scheme that he should board the steamer without attracting any attention.

Once on board the steamer, the rest was easy. Patton had obviated the difficulty of landing at Dunkerque by the simple expedient of providing himself with a second passport. And this second passport had been issued not to Edward Patton but to some mythical individual such as John Jones.

Now Hanslet knew by experience that a false passport is not a very difficult thing to obtain. It is only necessary for an applicant to fill up a form which must be counter-signed by some person in a responsible position. Hanslet remembered that the assistant commissioner had told him that Wherwell was a magistrate. This fact now assumed its proper significance. No doubt Wherwell was the person who had backed Jones's application for a passport.

Probably Patton, in adopting the personality of John Jones, had availed himself of some simple make-up. A false moustache and a bottle of hair dye, for instance. In this guise he had been to the photographers, had his photograph taken, and sent the necessary two copies with his application to the Passport Office. The passport in the name of John Jones would then have been issued without question.

Patton had both passports in his pocket before he left London on Wednesday afternoon. During the passage from Folkestone to Dunkerque,

he had assumed the make-up of John Jones. On arrival at Dunkerque, he had shown the passport in this name and so had passed through the barrier. He was now no doubt, comfortably established at some spot which had been determined beforehand.

It was, the superintendent reflected, a confoundedly ingenious trick. Patton had left his true personality behind him at Folkestone. He was now on the continent with an altered name and an altered appearance. And, since it was impossible to guess what name he had assumed, it was obviously futile to attempt to trace the passport which had been issued to him.

Everything fitted in so neatly that Hanslet had not the slightest doubt that he had deduced the truth. The rest depended solely upon the alertness of the continental police, with whom Hanslet had already put himself into communication. His frame of mind as he unfolded the story to Dr. Priestley that evening was one of complete satisfaction.



*Part Three*  
*Jimmy Gets a Shock*





AT FALLOWCHURCH the week-end passed without further development. But on Monday morning, Jimmy began to receive replies to his inquiries concerning Cartmell and Pantony. It will be remembered that he had circulated descriptions of these two to the police in the neighbouring counties. And it now transpired that their progress from Fallowchurch had not by any means passed unnoticed.

The landlord of a public house at Ightham, some ten miles from Fallowchurch, remembered them perfectly well. They had driven up in a green closed car shortly after half-past eleven on Tuesday, the 18th. The taller gentleman, the one with the moustache and glasses, had called for drinks. To the best of the landlord's recollection, he had drunk half a pint of beer himself and ordered a double whisky for his companion. There was no doubt as to the identity of his companion. The landlord had particularly noticed the harelip and the deformed ear. After a second round of drinks, again paid for by the taller gentleman, they had driven away in a westerly direction.

They were next heard of at Westerham, twelve miles further on. Here again they had stopped at a public house between a quarter and half-past twelve. The procedure here had been the same as at Ightham. The gentleman with the glasses had called for a half-pint of beer for himself and a double whisky for his friend, whom he had addressed in the landlord's hearing as Pantony. The landlord remembered the name as it was somewhat unusual. In the course of conversation the gentleman with the glasses had told the landlord that they were bound for Reading, where they had business.

Much the same thing had happened at Shere, twenty miles from Westerham, where they had arrived between one and half-past. Here the landlord of the inn at which they called had noticed that though the tall

gentleman was all right, the one with the harelip had already had about as much as was good for him. They had the same drinks as before, and the tall gentleman had asked if they could have something to eat. The landlord had replied that if they cared to wait for a few minutes, he could get them a chop or steak. But the tall gentleman said that they did not want to wait as they had an appointment in Reading and would have to push along if they were not to be late. The landlord suggested bread and cheese, which they accepted. They had left the inn at Shere about two o'clock. According to the landlord, the gentleman with the harelip had to be assisted into the car by his companion.

The next trace of them was at Wokingham, where they had arrived shortly before three o'clock and pulled up outside an inn on the outskirts of the town. Here they had found the door shut, since it was after closing time. They had, however, hammered on the door until the landlord opened it. They had demanded drinks, but the landlord had refused to serve them. At this, the gentleman with the harelip had become abusive and threatened to smash the place up. The landlord, however, was fully equal to the occasion. He told them to clear out before he telephoned for the police, at which they re-entered their green Comet saloon and drove off towards Reading.

Jimmy, piecing these scraps of information together, was able to reconstruct the hilarious journey. Cartmell's tactics were perfectly clear. While remaining sober himself, he had plied Pantony with drinks until the latter was hardly aware of what he was doing. Having induced his companion to buy the hearse, he had chosen his own time and opportunity to murder him. And his choice of such an original method of disposing of the body was easily explained. Pantony, with his harelip and deformed ear, was a conspicuous person. It was known that Pantony had left Fallowchurch in Cartmell's company. It was therefore necessary that his corpse, when found, should be unrecognizable. Hence its disposal by Cartmell in the tar boiler.

If the obvious theory required confirmation, every detail of Jimmy's energetic investigation supported it. For instance, he and Sergeant Playne persuaded the Ambroses to permit a search of the room in their house occupied by Pantony. This search revealed a cash-box, cunningly hidden under the floorboards. The absence of dust upon the cash-box showed that it had recently been handled. But it was unlocked and empty. No doubt that Pantony, when he left Fallowchurch, had taken his hoard with him.

Naturally, in a place like Fallowchurch, the activities of Jimmy and the sergeant could not be kept secret. By Sunday afternoon it had become common knowledge in the village that the body found in the tar boiler was that of Alf Pantony, and that Mr. Cartmell had murdered him for his money.

This local sensation, the first which Fallowchurch had known since the local butcher had drowned himself in his own cesspit, formed the sole topic of conversation in the bar of the Green Bear. Until the outrage, Pantony had scarcely been popular. A strong feeling existed that he might have spent more of his chance-gained money upon buying drinks for his neighbours. Surely if a man had a stroke of undeserved luck like that, he might share it with the cronies whom he had known since childhood! But now suddenly Pantony assumed the character of a martyred victim. His meanness, his incorrigible cadging for drinks, were forgotten. David Gurney, who, as the finder of the body, was listened to with respectful attention, pronounced the dead man's panegyric.

"Poor old Alf!" he exclaimed to a crowded audience in the Green Bear on Sunday evening. "Well I remember the night that he got the money for the Sweep ticket. It was a Wednesday, and the usual crowd was in here when in comes Alf."

"It was a Thursday," Mr. Wedgwood interrupted gloomily. It had long been understood in Fallowchurch that Mr. Wedgwood brooked no contradiction in his own bar.

"Well, Wednesday or Thursday, it's all the same," Gurney continued. "As I was saying, in comes Alf and walks right up to the counter just where Steve Cutlow's standing now. We all knew that he'd won the prize, of course, and we sort of sat there looking at him."

"And then he says, 'Well, boys, I've got my money. I'm standing treat all round. What's it going to be?' Those were his very words, weren't they, Sidney?"

Mr. Wedgwood, thus appealed to, nodded. "That's what he said, or something very like it," he replied.

"Those were his very words," Gurney insisted. "So we had drinks all round. Mine was a pint of stock, if I remember rightly. And Alf wouldn't let anybody else buy a drink for the rest of the evening. It didn't matter who came in. Alf would say, 'Hallo, George,' or 'Jim,' or 'Bert,' or whoever it might be. 'You're going to have a drink with me this evening. Speak up and tell the landlord what it's to be.' You must have done pretty well that evening, Sidney."

"Maybe I've done better since," Mr. Wedgwood replied sourly. He was not going to allow it to be thought that his record profits had depended upon Pantony's generosity.

"Well, maybe you have and maybe you haven't," said Gurney. "Anyhow, that's the sort of chap that poor old Alf was. Who'd ever have thought that

he'd have been done in by a low-down Londoner like that there Cartmell."

There could have been nobody present who had not been refreshed at one time or another at Cartmell's expense. But Gurney's observation produced an angry growl. "Dirty swine, that's what he was."

"Aye, that he was," Gurney continued. "Hanging about here like that all for to get hold of poor old Alf's money. It's a wonder to me, Sidney, that he didn't murder you in the night for what you'd got in the till."

"Wouldn't have been worth his while," said Mr. Wedgwood sharply. "Chaps who sit here all night without drinking up don't fill my till overmuch."

A few of the more conscientious took the hint and there was a pause while Mr. Wedgwood drew half a dozen pints. Gurney accepted one of these gratefully.

"Well, here's luck, mate," he said as he raised it to his lips. "And here's hoping that the cops get that bloke Cartmell before he does any more mischief."

"If I was to meet that beggar, do you know what I'd do to him?" suddenly asked a high-pitched voice.

"You'd ask him for the price of a drink, I reckon," somebody replied scornfully.

The high-pitched voice ignored this insult. "I'd bash his ruddy face in for him, that I would," it replied.

There was a general laugh at this, for Lou was a puny youth with a firmly established reputation for cowardice.

"That inspector chap from London's smart enough," some one else remarked when the merriment had subsided.

"Aye, smart enough," replied Gurney darkly. "But it isn't always the smartest what gets there first. I shouldn't wonder if it was our sergeant who got the chap, after all."

"He got Bill Halley last month, that time he was riding a bike without a light."

"Cost me five bob and the loss of a day's work to go before the Bench," grumbled Halley, who was present. "Still, I don't bear the sergeant no malice. He was only doing his duty, in a manner of speaking."

"And he'd warned you twice before, Bill, to my certain knowledge."

"I daresay. But when I've got a drop of beer inside me, I never can remember to light that plaguey lamp."

But in spite of such digressions, the conversation always returned to the subject of Pantony and Cartmell. The facts as known were discussed in every possible bearing. It transpired that it had been perfectly plain from the first to Gurney and several others, that Cartmell had only come to stay at the Green Bear for what he could get.

“Why, you could tell that just to look at the bloke,” said Gurney indignantly. “What did he want to wear them great ugly glasses for if it wasn’t to hide what he was thinking about?”

This was a little too profound for some of his audience. “Maybe he couldn’t see without them,” somebody suggested.

“See!” Gurney exclaimed contemptuously. “He could see right enough when it suited him. He saw that poor old Alf had a bit of money put away. And he saw how he could pinch it for himself, didn’t he, now? Answer me that.”

But nobody seemed disposed to answer, and the talk drifted into a series of anecdotes concerning the two men. It might have puzzled the impartial to find anything very much to say in favour of Pantony. But somehow, his neighbours managed to whitewash his character and to paint that of Cartmell in the darkest and most depraved colours. Cartmell was a stranger—worse, he was one of that distrusted tribe, a Londoner. Londoners were notorious for every vice which figures prominently in the popular press. It was a mercy that Cartmell had contented himself with murdering poor old Alf instead of wiping out the whole village in a frenzy of slaughter.

By closing time it had been suggested that the vicar should put up a stained-glass window to Alf, the spotless martyr, while that bloke Cartmell, when captured, should be subjected to every torture known to the Inquisition.

Jimmy, meanwhile, was faced with a situation very similar to that with which Hanslet was wrestling. The crime which he had been called upon to investigate had ceased to be in any sense a problem. The victim had been identified and the criminal was known. Further, the latter had been traced to London. It was only a matter of time and patience to run him down and bring him to justice.

True, in the course of Monday afternoon, Jimmy’s theory received a trifling and unimportant set-back. He received a telephone message from the Home Office expert who had undertaken to examine the stain found on the seat of Cartmell’s car.

“Well, inspector,” said the expert, “the stain was blood all right, if that’s any satisfaction to you.”

“It’s a lot of satisfaction to me,” Jimmy replied. “It suggests that the poor chap was killed while he was sitting in the car.”

To his astonishment, he heard a guffaw at the other end of the wire. “It doesn’t, you know,” the expert replied. “That stain is blood all right, but it isn’t human blood, it’s bullock’s blood. I’m posting you down a detailed report. Good-bye.”

Jimmy’s expression as he put down the telephone was one of puzzled amusement. Bullock’s blood! How the deuce was that to be accounted for? Did this new fact in any way invalidate his carefully elaborated theory? The thought of the body, now safely interred, reassured him. Unrecognizable though it might be, it was certainly that of a man and not of a bullock. The fact that a stain of bullock’s blood had been found in Cartmell’s car did not weaken the certainty that he had murdered Pantony. But it was curious, all the same.

Monday was never a busy day at the Green Bear. The great majority of Mr. Wedgwood’s customers were working men, and only a limited portion of their wages could be spared for beer. The greater part of this was usually expended during the week-end. By Monday evening, only the more opulent could afford a pint, to be consumed with great deliberation and spread over as much time as possible.

So when Jimmy walked into the bar shortly after six o’clock, opening time, he found himself the only customer. He ordered two pints, one for himself and one for the landlord, and once again set to work to question Mr. Wedgwood on the subject of Cartmell’s sayings and doings. There was just a chance that in some apparently trifling action or remark he might find a clue to the man’s true identity.

But Mr. Wedgwood, though full of reminiscence, was unable to tell him anything which he did not already know. “Cartmell never told me much about himself and, naturally, I didn’t ask questions,” he said. “He never even mentioned the name of his firm, though he was always talking about them. It was his firm that sent him here and his firm that he was going to see on the days that he went to London. But he never said a word about his firm’s business.”

“Did he actually do any business while he was with you?” Jimmy asked.

“That’s more than I can say. He certainly didn’t do any business in the village itself, or I should have got to know about it. But most days he was out in that car of his and two or three times he stayed away for the night. And when he wasn’t out in the car he’d go up to London by train like he did

last Monday. There's no telling what he might have been up to when he wasn't here, is there?"

"Did he receive any letters while he was staying here?"

"Yes, he used to get two or three most mornings. I know that, for I'm always about when the postman calls and I used to take them in for him. Business letters they were, too, typewritten and in long-shaped envelopes."

"You didn't happen to notice if they all came from the same place, I suppose?"

"Well, I did look at the postmarks sometimes, just out of curiosity. The letters came from a lot of different places. London sometimes, and towns round about this county. I suppose they were from his firm and various people that he might have called upon."

"He used to answer these letters, I suppose?"

Mr. Wedgwood scratched his head. "Well, now you come to speak of it, I don't ever remember seeing him write a letter or post one either. But then, I dare say he wrote them when he was alone in his room and posted them when he went out next day."

"What did he do with the letters he received? Tear them up and throw them away or what?"

"Whatever he did with them I never saw them again once I'd given them to him. He never left any waste-paper lying about his room, if that's what you mean."

"You say that he stayed away for a night sometimes. Did he give you any explanation of this?"

"Oh, yes, he'd tell me or the missus before he went. He'd say that he had a long journey to do and several calls at the end of it. It wouldn't be worth his while to come back that night, but we'd see him the next evening. And sure enough we always did."

"Did he take his suitcase with him on these occasions?"

"Yes, he always took that wherever he went. Even if he was only going out for the day in the car. I thought at the time that he used to carry samples about in it."

"He never told you where he had been or what he had been doing, I suppose?"

"Never a word. I said to him one time when he came back, 'Had a busy time, Mr. Cartmell?' And he said, 'Busy's not the word for it. My firm won't be content till they've worked me to death.' And then he asked for a pint and didn't say any more, and of course I didn't like to press him."

At this point a couple of regular customers drifted in. Jimmy finished his beer and went thoughtfully back to the room that Sergeant Playne had placed at his disposal. Cartmell's behaviour seemed more inexplicable than ever. What had brought him to the Green Bear in the first place? Had his sole object been to possess himself of Pantony's hoard? If so, why these daily and sometimes nightly absences? Surely one would have expected him to devote his time to cultivating Pantony's acquaintance?

Unless, of course, as Jimmy had suspected from the first, Cartmell was merely a temporary alias. The real man, devoid of moustache and glasses and normally dressed had his own affairs to attend to. And the maddening part of it was that the real man, having discarded Cartmell for good, was now walking about somewhere in perfect security with Pantony's money in his pocket.

Meanwhile, at the Green Bear the unfailing topic was still under full discussion. Jimmy's visit had been observed, as even the most trifling incident cannot fail to be observed in a village like Fallowchurch. Mr. Wedgwood might have fresh news to circulate. Pockets were hurriedly searched for a precious sixpence which would buy a pint. By a quarter-past seven, there were at least a dozen customers in the bar of the Green Bear, all eagerly discussing the mystery and eulogizing the character of the departed Alf Pantony.

And then the miracle happened. At five and twenty minutes to eight precisely, the door opened and a figure carrying a Gladstone bag slouched in. "Good-evening, all," he said amiably.

For an instant the only sound heard in the bar was the solemn tick of the clock. Then panic broke loose. Men crowded back against the wall, away from that familiar figure with the harelip and the deformed ear. They spilt a regrettable amount of beer in the process. Even Mr. Wedgwood recoiled from the counter upon which he had been leaning, and stood with arms upraised as though invoking some protecting Providence.

Pantony, amazed by the commotion caused by his entrance, let fall his Gladstone bag with a thud. "Why, mates, whatever's come over you?" he demanded.

It took some seconds to convince Mr. Wedgwood that he was confronted not by a ghost but by solid flesh and blood. And at last he found his voice.

"You've no right to come in here terrifying folks like that," he said resentfully. "Don't you know that you're dead—aye, and buried too?"

"First I've heard of it," replied Pantony cheerfully. "Can't a chap go away for a few days and enjoy himself without folk carrying on like this



when he comes back? Anyway, I'm dry. Aren't any of you chaps glad enough to see me to stand me a pint?"

But none of them, in spite of the eulogies they had so recently repeated, seemed in the least glad to see him. Pantony, the hapless victim of a brutal murderer, had appealed to their sympathetic imaginations. His return, manifestly in the flesh and cadging for a drink, was the height of anti-climax. David Gurney, feeling himself deprived of his fame as the discoverer of Pantony's body, voiced the sentiments of the rest, "You can buy your own ruddy beer," he grumbled.

But there was nobody to buy it from. Mr. Wedgwood, vaguely aware that this was a matter for the police, had dashed out of the Green Bear. As it happened, he narrowly escaped being run over by Sergeant Playne, who was returning on a tour of duty on his bicycle.

"Why can't you look where you're going!" exclaimed the Sergeant as he dismounted hurriedly and ungracefully. "Hallo, it's you, landlord, is it? Where the dickens are you off to in such a hurry?"

"I was coming to look for you, sergeant," Mr. Wedgwood replied. "You'd best come into my bar right away and see what's up."

"Somebody got drunk and making trouble?" said Playne sharply. "Who is it this time?"

"It's nobody drunk," replied Mr. Wedgwood indignantly. "It's Alf Pantony. He's back and cadging for a drink."

"Alf Pantony!" exclaimed the sergeant. "Why, man, you must have taken leave of your senses."

"It's Alf, right enough," said Mr. Wedgwood. "Just you come and see for yourself."

The sergeant followed him to the door of the Green Bear. "Alf Pantony," he muttered to himself. "Why, whatever will the inspector say to that?"

Playne and Mr. Wedgwood entered the bar to find Pantony the centre of an excited group. His neighbours had recovered from their first amazement at his unexpected return and now crowded round him vociferously. Every one shouted questions at him at once. Some even pinched him sharply to convince themselves of his material presence. Pantony's angry protests were drowned in the general uproar.

The sergeant elbowed his way through the throng and laid a heavy hand on Pantony's shoulder. "Now then," he said commandingly. "You come along with me."

A sudden hush fell upon the bar. Nobody heeded Pantony's querulous protest. "Why, what have I done, sergeant?" Not until Playne had propelled him through the door and into the roadway did the clamour of rude voices burst into an excited roar. Never before had Fallowchurch known such a sensation.

The protesting Pantony was led down the road and into the sergeant's house. The hat hanging in the hall showed Playne that Jimmy was at home. He entered the door of his room dragging Pantony after him.

Jimmy looked up from the paper upon which he was entering a few notes of his conversation with Mr. Wedgwood. "Hallo, sergeant!" he exclaimed. "Who have you got there?"

"Alfred Pantony, inspector," Playne replied.

Jimmy leapt out of his chair as though a pin had been driven into him from behind. Alfred Pantony! The thing was impossible. Pantony was dead—murdered by Cartmell days ago. The sergeant must have taken leave of his senses and arrested somebody else.

Jimmy seized the newcomer by the arm and jerked him round until he faced the window. The harelip and the deformed ear became hideously apparent. Jimmy stared at him for a few moments in silence. And then "Who are you?" he demanded almost savagely.

"I'm Alfred Pantony," the other replied indignantly. "The sergeant here knows me well enough. If you don't believe him you can ask my brother-in-law, who keeps the shop only a few doors away. And what I want to know is what I have done to be treated like this!"

It was only too evident to Jimmy that the wretched man was speaking the truth. In a flash he saw his carefully built theory crumble to the dust. What on earth would his superiors at the Yard say when they heard of this? Would he ever be allowed to forget it?

With a supreme effort he managed to control his feelings. "Sit down, Pantony," he said in a voice of almost unnatural quietness. "There are a lot of questions we want to ask you. In the first place, where have you been since last Tuesday morning?"

"I haven't been doing no harm," replied Pantony defiantly. "I can take a holiday the same as any one else, can't I?"

"Certainly, but you should be careful about the companion you take with you. Where is George Cartmell?"

"Why, hasn't he got back yet?" asked Pantony in obviously genuine astonishment. "I got a letter from him only this morning telling me he'd meet me at the Green Bear this evening."

“What have you done with that letter?” Jimmy asked sharply.

“I’ve got it here in my pocket now. But I don’t see that it’s any concern of yours.”

Jimmy was getting near the end of his patience. “Look here, Pantony, you and I had better understand one another,” he said. “Cartmell is wanted on a very grave charge and I am an officer from Scotland Yard. And I warn you that to withhold information from the police is a very serious offence.”

“Why, what’s old George been doing?” Pantony exclaimed, obviously impressed.

It would have puzzled Jimmy to answer that question, since Cartmell’s supposed victim was standing before him, unharmed and intact. “Never you mind,” he replied. “Come along, hand over that letter.”

Pantony produced from his pocket a fat wallet from which after much fumbling he sorted out an envelope. “There you are, then,” he said sulkily, handing it to the inspector.

Jimmy glanced eagerly at the envelope. It was of commercial shape, had been posted in London on August 22nd, and bore the typewritten address: Mr. Alfred Pantony, The White Swan, Shipsfield, Wilts.

The envelope contained a sheet of poor quality writing paper, upon which the letter was typed.

DEAR ALF,— Sorry I haven’t been able to get away before this. I shan’t be able to come down to Shipsfield to fetch you. You’ll find a quid in this letter which will buy your ticket to Fallowchurch by train. I’ll meet you at the Green Bear on Monday evening.

Ever yours,  
GEORGE.

Jimmy passed the letter on to Playne for his inspection.

“Now then, Pantony, we want to hear the whole story,” he said. “What made you go off with Cartmell last Tuesday?”

“There wasn’t any harm in that,” Pantony replied. “I only went with him because he asked me. He’d talked about it for some days before. He said that when next he had a long journey to do, he’d take me with him and we’d see life together. And then on Monday evening in the Green Bear he said that he was going off the next morning and asked me if I’d come. And since he said that it wouldn’t cost me anything, I agreed. There’s nothing to stop me from doing what I like.”

“Then you’re a lucky man,” Jimmy remarked. “Well, tell us what happened after you’d started.”

“I don’t know that very much happened. George said that he had a call to make at Reading, but that we had plenty of time to get there. We stopped at a pub here and there on the way and had a drink or two. But it wasn’t until we were nearly there that George told what the game was.”

“And what was the game?” Jimmy asked.

Pantony chuckled. “George said that he was going to have a laugh on Sidney Wedgwood at the Green Bear. Sidney’s all right, but he’s terrible superstitious. Why, if any one broke a looking-glass in his house, he’d have fits. And George said we could have a bit of fun with him.”

“And what particular form was this fun to take?”

“Well, you see it’s like this. George has a cousin who’s an undertaker somewhere in Wales, I think he said. And this cousin had asked George to look out for a second-hand motor hearse for him. George, travelling about the country as he does, would be a likely chap to hear of one, you understand. And George had heard of one for sale in Reading. That’s why we were going there.”

“But what has George’s cousin to do with Mr. Wedgwood?” Jimmy asked.

“I’m coming to that. George said his cousin wasn’t in any hurry for the hearse for a few days. We’d buy the hearse and have some fun with it before we handed it over. He said we’d buy it in the name of somebody living in Fallowchurch. And then he said it would be a good joke to buy it in my brother-in-law’s name and make out that he was an undertaker. Then we’d pick up a coffin somewhere, put it in the hearse and leave the lot outside Sidney Wedgwood’s window one morning. See?”

“Yes, I see,” said Jimmy patiently. “But who was going to drive the hearse?”

“Oh, George had got that all fixed up. He said he knew a young chap, a regular sport and up to anything. He’d drop him a line to pick up the hearse at Reading, drive it to Fallowchurch and slip back to London by the next train. Then nobody would ever know that we had anything to do with it.”

“Well, the joke came off all right, if that’s any satisfaction to you. Did George happen to mention tar boilers, by any chance?”

“Tar boilers!” Pantony exclaimed. “No. What should he talk about tar boilers for?”

“I only wondered,” said Jimmy. “Well, what happened when you got to Reading?”

“I don’t rightly remember about that. What with the pubs we stopped at and one thing and another, I’d got properly primed by then. But I recollect that George showed me the place where the hearse was for sale, shoved a lot of notes into my hand and told me to go in and buy it. Well, I went in and looked at the thing, though I’ll admit I wasn’t in a state to know a hearse from a heifer. I said it was for my brother-in-law and the chap gave me a receipt which I passed on to George.”

“Where was George while you were buying the hearse?”

“Why, waiting with the car a couple of streets away. He said he didn’t want the hearse people to see him as he was well known in Reading and they might recognize him, and that would spoil the joke.”

“And what happened next?”

“Why, after I’d given the receipt to George we started off again. George said that his next call was at Shipsfield, fifty or sixty miles further on, and that we’d get there easily by the time the pubs opened. And after that, I must have dozed off, for the next thing I remembered we were stopping outside a pub called the White Swan. George told me this was Shipsfield and that we were to stay there for the night. So we went into the pub carrying our bags, and George spoke to the girl behind the counter and said that we wanted a room for the night. And when she asked for the names and George told her, she said that there was a telegram waiting for him which had been there since the day before.”

“Did you see this telegram?” Jimmy asked.

“Oh, yes, I saw it right enough. The girl gave it to George and he tore it open and read it. And when he’d done that he seemed struck all of a heap. ‘That’s just like my blessed firm!’ he said. ‘Make up their minds one moment and change it the next. They want me to get back to London on urgent business at the earliest possible moment. I’ll have to drive there straight away. It’s a blessed nuisance, but there’s no help for it. I’ll have to get right away now.’

“‘And what’s going to become of me?’ I asked him.

“‘Oh, you’ll be all right,’ he said. ‘You can stop here until I come back. I’ll see about a room for you and all that. You’ll have plenty to amuse you while I’m away, for Shipsfield races begin to-morrow.’

“Well, the long and short of it was that he took a room for me and gave me ten quid. And he said that I should hear from him within a day or two

and that until then I'd best stay where I was. But it wasn't until this morning that I got that letter you've just seen."

"What time was it when Cartmell left you at the White Swan?"

"Somewhere between half-past six and seven, as near as I can remember."

"And you haven't seen him since?"

Pantony shook his head. "I've never so much as set eyes on him," he replied. "And the only thing I've heard from him is that there letter. It was him I was expecting to see when I went into the Green Bear just now."

"You say he gave you ten pounds before he left you. What was that for?"

"Why he'd said all along that if I would go with him, the trip wouldn't cost me anything and the ten pounds was to pay for my keep at the White Swan while he was away."

"A pretty generous allowance," Jimmy remarked. "Hadn't you any money of your own with you, Pantony?"

A cunning expression promptly came into Pantony's eyes. "I'm only a poor man," he replied. "But maybe I had a little bit of my own hidden about me."

"And you have brought back as much as you took with you?" Jimmy insisted.

Pantony's eyes twinkled. "Maybe a few bob more," he replied. "You see, having nothing to occupy myself with while I was waiting for George, I went to the races each day. I met a few chaps at the White Swan who were in the know, and I managed to win a bit more than I had lost."

"And yet the first thing you do when you get back to Fallowchurch is to go cadging for drinks at the Green Bear," said the sergeant severely.

"Who says I was cadging for drinks?" exclaimed Pantony indignantly. "You'd think any one would stand a chap a drink after he hadn't seen him for the best part of a week. Instead of which they all stood round staring as if I'd come back from the grave."

"So, in a sense, you have," replied Jimmy wearily. "You'll hear all about it before long, I dare say. Meanwhile, tell me this. What made George Cartmell so anxious for your company?"

Pantony shrugged his shoulders. "I couldn't say," he replied. "We seemed to hit it off somehow from the first moment we met."

"When did you first meet?" Jimmy asked swiftly.

"Why, the very first night George stopped at the Green Bear. He and I got on talking in the bar and that's what began it. We saw one another most

days after that. You see, George was on the look-out for a steady chap who would look after things for him while he was away.”

“Oh, he was, was he? And you were the steady chap he’d got his eyes upon, I suppose? And what sort of things were they that you were to look after?”

“That’s more than I can say. George said that there would be plenty of time to explain all that later on. All we had to do for the present was to get to know one another.”

“And how much did you get to know of Cartmell? Where did he come from, and what was his business?”

“Why, he came from London, where else? I know that for sure because before he left me at Shipsfield he wrote down his address on a piece of paper. I’ve got it in my pocket now.”

Jimmy’s face lighted up. “Let’s have a look at it,” he said shortly.

Pantony searched his pockets and eventually produced a grimy slip of paper. “There you are,” he said, “that’s what George wrote out for me on the counter of the White Swan.”

Jimmy snatched at the paper, unfolded it, glanced at the address and swore volubly. Scrawled on the paper were the words “26, Mutley Street, S.W. 11.” The slenderness of Cartmell’s connexion with this address he already knew.

“What about his job?” Jimmy asked. “He must have told you something about that, I suppose?”

“He told me that he was the head traveller for a big firm in London. But he didn’t tell me the firm’s name or what their business was. He said that one day when we’d fixed things up together, he’d take me up to see them and introduce me. All I’d have to do was to watch out for him while he was away and they’d give me a screw of five quid a week.”

“Didn’t Cartmell tell you anything about himself? Whether he was married and had any children, for instance?”

“No, he never told me that, and I never thought to ask him. The only relation of his that I ever heard him speak of was that cousin he bought the hearse for.”

“Oh, damn the hearse!” exclaimed Jimmy irritably. “All right, Pantony, that’ll do for the present. Run away from here, but don’t leave the village again. The sergeant or I may have other questions to ask you. Off you go.”

As Playne escorted Pantony from the room, Jimmy laughed mirthlessly. So his beautiful theory had toppled down like a house of cards. For if

Pantony was not a victim, was there any reason to suppose that Cartmell was a murderer?

The problem, which at first had seemed so absurdly simple, had suddenly become utterly insoluble. Apart from that mysterious and unidentifiable body, the whole chain of incidents seemed like a fairy tale. Cartmell's behaviour was utterly inexplicable, except upon the theory that he was the perpetrator of a most elaborate but pointless practical joke. He had gone to considerable expense for no other apparent reason. He had bought a car, the one now lying at the Passway Garage, which he could not claim again without finding himself forced to give explanations to the police. He had spent quite a lot of money during his stay at the Green Bear. He had bought a hearse, second-hand and in indifferent condition. He had financed extravagantly Pantony's holiday at Shipsfield. And what had he to show for this? Nothing whatever. He had disappeared from the scene as mysteriously as he had appeared upon it.

Disappeared. A sudden and disturbing thought flashed upon Jimmy's mind. That confounded body, so disfigured by the boiling tar as to be quite unrecognizable. Was it by any chance Cartmell's? Had the rôles of victim and murdered been reversed? Had Pantony for some inscrutable reason of his own lured Cartmell to destruction? Or had Cartmell as a grim climax to his practical joke, plunged naked into the tar boiler after leaving the hearse outside the Green Bear? Both theories seemed equally fantastic.

But then the whole affair *was* utterly fantastic. Cartmell's friendship for Pantony, their hilarious journey together to Reading, and the purchase of the hearse. Why, if Cartmell's purpose was murder, had he burdened himself with such a conspicuous companion as Pantony? Nobody having seen Pantony once could fail to recognize him again.

If Pantony's story were true, and that was a matter which could easily be determined, Cartmell had murdered nobody between half-past six or seven on Tuesday, August 18th. Jimmy looked up Shipsfield in the road book, and found that it was ninety-three miles from London. Cartmell had apparently left Shipsfield in his car about seven and arrived at the Passway Garage about ten. Ninety-three miles in three hours was not bad going. It seemed to leave insufficient leisure for murder en route. It might be assumed that Cartmell was still innocent of bloodshed when he left his car at the Passway Garage.

But in that case how to explain the stain on the cushion of that car? The fact that it was the blood of a bullock and not a human being offered no solution. What part had this wretched beast played in the nightmare drama? How had it come to deposit its blood upon the seat of Cartmell's car? Or



was this another of Cartmell's practical jokes? Had he, not knowing that blood from various sources can be distinguished, deliberately attempted to fasten on himself the suspicion of murder?

Again Jimmy was struck with an intriguing idea. Nobody, not even the most confirmed practical joker, would deliberately cast himself under suspicion of murder. Far more likely that he would lay a clue implicating somebody else. Was it possible that the cushion of the car had been stained with blood by some unknown person in order that Cartmell might be suspected of murder? But, if so, how, when and where? And then again, how was Cartmell's disappearance to be explained?

But then, after all, had Cartmell disappeared, in the sinister sense of the word? Jimmy realized for the first time that the story he had told Pantony might be strictly true. He might indeed be the agent of a firm whose business he was not anxious to disclose. The telegram received by him at Shipsfield might have been perfectly genuine. Again, the letter sent by him to Pantony at that address might have been perfectly sincere. He had certainly said that he would meet him at Fallowchurch that evening. He had not done so, yet there was still time. The last train from London had not yet come in.

This suggested another disturbing thought. What proof existed of any connexion between the body found in the tar boiler and the adventures of Cartmell and Pantony? Only the very slenderest. The grit found in the coffin resembled that lying by the roadside in the vicinity of the tar boiler. The tar stained sheet was almost certainly the one missing from the Green Bear. These clues alone formed dubious links between the body on the one hand and Cartmell, Pantony and the hearse on the other.

Pantony had told his story, which was already confirmed up to the time of his arrival at Reading.

It would, of course, be necessary to go to Shipsfield and make inquiries at the White Swan there. Unless, of course, Cartmell turned up at Fallowchurch with a reasonable account of his extraordinary proceedings. Jimmy had taken steps to ensure that if Cartmell entered the Passway Garage to fetch his car, he would be detained. He half-expected a telephone message from the Yard to tell him that this had actually happened. Meanwhile, there would be no harm in walking to the station to meet the last train.

He took Sergeant Playne with him and reached the platform just before the train drew in. Half a dozen passengers alighted and the two policemen eyed them narrowly. But as the last of them left the station the sergeant shook his head.

“I know them all perfectly well,” he said. “You can take it from me that Cartmell was not among them.”

Jimmy sat up till midnight racking his brain for some plausible solution to his problem. When eventually he went to bed, he dreamt that he was being chased by a bullock ridden by Pantony, whose harelip and deformed ear were monstrously exaggerated. He woke up unrefreshed, loathing the prospect of the day before him.

He and the sergeant had just finished breakfast when there came a knock on the door. The sergeant opened it, to admit Mr. Ambrose, obviously in a state of excitement and waving a long-shaped envelope in his hand.

“Hallo, Mr. Ambrose, what’s bitten you?” Playne exclaimed. “Come in and tell us the trouble.”

Mr. Ambrose flung the envelope upon the table. “That’s the trouble,” he replied. “And I’d be glad if you or this other gentleman here would tell me what to do about it.”

Playne picked up the envelope and withdrew from it a motor car registration book. The envelope was addressed to Mr. John Ambrose, and the registration book concerned a motor hearse, No. ZZ 542. An entry of first change had been made from Messrs. Golder & Brown of Reading, to Mr. John Ambrose, of the Handy Stores, Fallowchurch.

The sergeant glanced at these particulars and then passed the book on to Jimmy. “Well, Mr. Ambrose, what do you want me to do about it?” said the latter. “You’d better talk to your brother-in-law, he knows more about this than anybody else.”

“What, Alf!” exclaimed Mr. Ambrose. “He’s never been and bought the thing, surely? Why, he never buys anything more than he can help. And what would he want to go and buy a hearse for?”

“You’d better ask him,” Playne replied crisply. “Meanwhile, the hearse appears to be registered in your name. As I dare say you’ve already guessed, it’s the one that was left outside the Green Bear last Thursday, and is now standing in Quain’s yard.”

“I know that well enough,” said Mr. Ambrose indignantly. “That’s just the trouble, don’t you see. As soon as Quain hears that the thing is registered in my name, he’ll come down on me for the storage of it and it’s been with him for the best part of a week. What I want to know is how can the County Council say that it belongs to me when I don’t know anything about it?”

“Cheer up, Mr. Ambrose,” said Jimmy. “There’s a notice in this book which seems to have escaped you. This is what it says: ‘Important. The person in whose name a vehicle is registered may or may not be the legal

owner of the vehicle.' I suppose that means something, though I really can't tell you exactly what. But if Mr. Quain comes down on you for garage expenses, I'd tell him to put that notice in his pipe and smoke it."

"That's all very well," said Mr. Ambrose, still far from satisfied. "What does the law say about it? Does that plaguesy hearse belong to me or does it not?"

"That I couldn't say," replied Jimmy. "It appears to me to be a very nice point. But I promise you this; since the police ordered the removal of the hearse to Quain's garage, they will be responsible for the present for any expenses connected with it. Meanwhile, the best thing you can do is to follow my advice, and have a chat with that brother-in-law of yours."

Mr. Ambrose went out muttering, and Jimmy went to the station to take a train to Shipsfield.

He arrived there about one o'clock and inquired his way to the White Swan. This turned out to be a modest little inn situated in one of the back streets of the town. Its principal trade was the selling of liquor, but it had three or four bedrooms available for visitors in humble circumstances.

Jimmy ingratiated himself with the girl behind the bar. She turned out to be the proprietor's daughter and seemed to have most of the running of the house on her shoulders. She remembered Pantony perfectly well. "Yes, he was with us for the best part of a week," she said, "from last Tuesday evening until yesterday morning. And I wasn't sorry when he got a letter and said that he'd have to go back home."

"Didn't he behave himself properly then?" Jimmy asked.

The girl tossed her head. "He didn't seem to know how to behave himself," she replied. "But then, I suppose, he's not to blame, for he came from some outlandish place I've never heard of. Not that he gave us any trouble, but he used to make himself a nuisance to our regular customers. He'd sit in the bar here all day, when he wasn't at the races last week, that is; and if any other customer came in, he'd get him to talk with him in the hope of being stood a drink."

"One of your regular customers brought him here, didn't he?" Jimmy asked artlessly.

She shook her head. "I'd never set eyes before on Mr. Pantony or the gentleman who came with him," she replied. "The other one was tallish with a big moustache and glasses, and wearing clothes that our pot-boy would have been ashamed to have been seen about in. But he did speak like a gentleman, I must say that. He and that Pantony walked in here last Tuesday evening. It must have been soon after six o'clock, for we hadn't been open

very long, and the tall one said that his name was Cartmell and could they have a room with two single beds in it for they had come to stay over the races.

“Now as I say, I had never set eyes on either of them before. But I knew the name Cartmell, for we’d had a telegram in that name delivered the evening before. It was standing upon the rack there among the bottles and when the gentleman told me his name was Cartmell, I took it down and gave it to him. He opened it and I heard him tell his friend that it was from his firm and that he’d have to drive back to London at once. And then he told me that he would take the room just the same, that his friend would stay here, and that he would come back and join him as soon as he could. And then when he’d had a quick one, he went out and drove away in his car. And that’s the last I’ve seen of him.”

Jimmy ordered a pint of beer and a couple of sandwiches, which he consumed hurriedly. He then left the White Swan and made his way to the post office, where he was successful in tracing the duplicate of the telegram addressed to Cartmell. It had been handed in at London, S.E. 1, at four-ten on August 17th. It was addressed to George Cartmell, the White Swan, Shipsfield. The message was as follows:

URGENT. Return here for important conference 9.30 Wednesday morning. Lubbock.

On the face of it the telegram appeared perfectly genuine. Lubbock was presumably a director of Cartmell’s mysterious firm. The message was peremptory, and afforded Cartmell an excellent pretext for leaving Shipsfield the moment he received the telegram.

But all the same, Jimmy was sceptical. He remembered that, according to his own account, Cartmell had spent the whole of August 17th in London. He had left Fallowchurch early that morning and had not returned until the last train. His business in London had been, presumably, to call upon his firm. It seemed highly improbable that his firm should have sent him a telegram at four-ten that afternoon, addressed not to Fallowchurch but to Shipsfield. On the other hand Cartmell might easily have sent the telegram himself during his visit to London. In which case he had intended all along to park Pantony in Shipsfield and to ensure that he should remain there out of harm’s way for the next few days. Was this merely another practical joke on his part, or was it part of an elaborate scheme?

From the post office Jimmy went to the police station, where he asked that inquiries might be made about the town for any one who remembered

seeing Cartmell. This he regarded as a mere formality, for there could be little doubt that Cartmell had driven straight to London after leaving the White Swan. Finally, Jimmy took a train to London, arriving at Scotland Yard shortly before six o'clock. He inquired for Superintendent Hanslet and hearing that he was in the building, went up to his room.

Hanslet looked up as his subordinate entered. "Hallo, Jimmy, you're looking a bit down in the mouth," he exclaimed. "Sit down and tell me what it's all about, that is if you feel inclined to."

"Thanks, I'm simply bursting to unbosom myself to somebody," Jimmy replied. "And I'll bet I don't look half as down in the mouth as I feel. The bottom has dropped clean out of that lovely case of mine."

Hanslet chuckled. "You'll get used to that sort of thing happening when you've been in the force as long as I have," he said. "What is it? Anything really serious?"

"It's just about as serious as it can be," Jimmy replied. "My own pet victim has returned to his usual haunt, bright, smiling and full of unctuous vitality. I don't know how I refrained from murdering him myself."

"You mean that you backed the wrong horse when you spotted the identity of that corpse of yours, I suppose?"

"That's it in a nutshell. Now perhaps you'll tell me what I'm going to do about it, for I'm blest if I know which way to turn."

Jimmy described rapidly the return to Pantony and the steps which he had taken to verify the latter's story. The superintendent listened to this with unconcealed amusement.

"Rotten luck, Jimmy," he exclaimed when the inspector had come to the end. "You'll have to start all over again and it seems to me that you haven't very much to go upon. Half a minute."

Hanslet's telephone bell had begun to ring insistently. He took up the instrument and listened to a message. "All right, show him up," he said. Then, turning to Jimmy, "That's Fairfield, the partner of the man who has bolted with the Wherwell diamonds. He rang me up just before you came in and asked if he could come and see me. No, don't run away. I don't expect he'll stay very long."

A moment later Fairfield was shown into the room. In spite of his notably smart clothes and his immaculate appearance, he was obviously worried. He bowed gracefully when introduced to Jimmy and then took the chair which Hanslet drew up for him.

"Well, Mr. Fairfield," said Hanslet cheerfully. "Have you come to tell me that you've found out what's become of the Wherwell diamonds?"

Fairfield shook his head ruefully. "I wish I had," he replied. "I don't suppose you realize what all this means to me. It's fatal to the reputation of a firm of diamond merchants to lose valuables entrusted to their charge. And Patton's extraordinary disappearance puts the whole responsibility upon my shoulders. I don't think I should feel any more anxious if I had made away with the diamonds myself. No, I've come to tell you a most extraordinary story. You must take it for what it's worth, of course. To me, it sounds positively incredible."

"I'd very much like to hear it, Mr. Fairfield," said Hanslet.

"Well, you remember our conversation in this room last Sunday morning? I went home and took the steps we had agreed upon. I wrote to six of my Continental friends in all and posted the letters that evening. A minute or two before I rang you up just now I had a telephone call from one of them. Monsieur Jules Baudin, of 17 Avenue Louise, Brussels."

Hanslet made a note of the name and address. "And what did M. Baudin tell you?" he asked.

"His message was so extraordinary that I thought that I'd better come along and tell you about it at once. He said that he had got my letter and couldn't understand it, for he had a telephone message from Mr. Patton soon after six o'clock last Thursday afternoon."

Hanslet's astonishment was not so great as Fairfield appeared to expect. "That's very interesting," he said. "Did M. Baudin give you any further particulars?"

"Naturally I asked for details. Then he told me that he had been sitting in his office a few minutes after six o'clock on Thursday, August 20th, when his clerk told him that Mr. Patton wished to speak to him on the telephone. Thinking that this must have reference to a visit which I had paid him some ten days earlier, M. Baudin gave orders that the call should be put through to his room. He then heard Mr. Patton speaking in English. He seemed very agitated. He told M. Baudin that he must see him as soon as possible upon business of the utmost urgency. He said that he was speaking from Dunkerque and would catch the next train to Brussels. It's only a matter of four or five hours' journey. Before M. Baudin could reply, Patton rang off, apparently very suddenly."

"Mr. Patton rang up from Dunkerque, did he?" said Hanslet. "What had he to say to M. Baudin when he turned up in Brussels?"

"That's the most extraordinary thing about it," Fairfield replied. "He never did turn up. M. Baudin assures me from the time of the telephone

message until now, he has seen or heard nothing whatever of Patton. And he seems a little bit upset, for apparently he sat up all night waiting for him.”

“M. Baudin probably guessed that the urgent business concerned the Wherwell diamonds?”

“I think he must have done so. He was one of the people with whom I had discussed the matter. But on the other hand, his firm and ours do quite a lot of business together. A communication between us would not necessarily concern those particulars.”

“Is M. Baudin personally acquainted with Mr. Patton?”

“I couldn’t say for certain,” Fairfield replied. “M. Baudin has probably met Patton during one of his periodical visits to London. But I don’t think that Patton has ever called upon him at Brussels. As a rule, most of the foreign interviewing falls to my share; Patton is one of those people who either can’t or won’t learn foreign languages. He always says that English is good enough for him and he expects every one else to understand him when he speaks it.

“That’s why his telephone message to M. Baudin appears more extraordinary to me than it may to you. If our firm had urgent business with M. Baudin, and I can find no trace that it had, Patton would almost certainly have entrusted it to me. He knew that I should be in Paris last Thursday afternoon or Friday morning, and where to get hold of me, for I had told him when I wrote to him from Brussels a week earlier. He could have got in touch with me without the slightest difficulty. As a matter of fact, at the very time he telephoned, I was in the office of another of our business friends, Le Maistre Frères, of the Rue de la Paix, Paris. I went straight from there to my hotel, where I got McNaught’s telegram a little later. If you can make anything out of Baudin’s story, it’s more than I can.”

“I’ll puzzle it out as best I can,” said Hanslet. “Have you heard anything from any of your other friends?”

“Not yet. I’ll let you know the moment I do. Is there anything else you want me to do for you, superintendent?”

“Not at the moment, Mr. Fairfield, thanks very much. We know where to find one another in case of need. It’s very good of you to let me know about this telephone message so promptly.”

Hanslet escorted Fairfield to the door, then came back to his chair and chuckled.

“Excellent!” he exclaimed. “That, I think, pretty well proves my theory as to Patton’s movements. I don’t think it’ll be very long before we have

news of him. But I wonder why he didn't go and see this M. Baudin after all? Got the wind up, I suppose, and daren't risk it."

"Your show looks a lot healthier than mine," remarked Jimmy despondently.

"Never mind," said Hanslet good humouredly, as he glanced at the clock. "Just on eight o'clock. I'll tell you what, Jimmy. I'll ring up the professor and ask him if we can go round and see him after dinner. He'll like to hear how this business of the Wherwell diamonds is getting on. And it will be a good chance to ask him how one sets about identifying a body that nobody can recognize. I'll get on to him now."

Dr. Priestley, through his secretary, Harold Merefield, consented to the proposed interview. So, shortly after nine o'clock, Hanslet and Jimmy found themselves in the familiar study in Westbourne Terrace. Dr. Priestley was in a gracious mood and freely agreed to listen to the further details which Hanslet offered him.

"You'll remember, professor, how far I'd got when I was here last Saturday evening," said Hanslet. "It was pretty clear then that Patton had bolted with the diamonds and taken them over to the Continent. The discovery of his passport on the quayside at Folkestone suggested that he had doubled back to London and caught the night boat to Dunkerque. And that guess of mine was confirmed by his partner, Fairfield.

"I should explain that I have been in pretty close touch with Fairfield during the last three days. I saw him for the first time, if you remember, on the Friday morning. On Saturday afternoon, soon after lunch, he rang up the Yard and asked for me. They told him that I was out—as a matter of fact, I was on my way to Folkestone—but that any message he cared to leave would be given to me as soon as possible, though I wasn't expected back for some hours. He said that it wasn't particularly urgent and that perhaps I'd ring him up. He left a telephone number where he said he was always to be found. I didn't get the message until just before it was time to come here to dinner, so, as Fairfield's business was not urgent, I didn't ring him up until Sunday morning.

"When I did ring him up, he told me that he would like to see me for a few minutes if I could spare the time. I invited him along to the Yard and he came straight away. He told me that he'd had an idea but didn't like to do anything about it until he had seen me.

"His idea was this. As he had already told me, while he had been abroad he had varied his holiday by doing a little business. He had called on half a dozen of his business friends, and in the course of conversation, had given



them to understand that the Wherwell diamonds were for sale, if satisfactory terms could be arranged. He had said that at present the owner appeared to have an exaggerated idea of their value, but that in time he might become more reasonable.

“Fairfield explained to me that this kind of information very soon spreads through the whole of his profession. It might easily have reached the ear of whoever had stolen the diamonds.

“I couldn’t at first see what Fairfield was driving at, but he very soon explained. ‘Look here, superintendent,’ he said. ‘You asked me the other day what an expert thief might do with the stones, and I told you what I should do if I were in his place. Now, we’ll carry that a step further. I, knowing that we have let it be known on the Continent that the diamonds are for sale, manage to pinch them from poor old Patton some time on Wednesday evening. I make my way to the Continent by the quickest route. I’ve got nearly twenty-four hours in front of me before the police take action, remember.

“‘Once on the Continent I give out that I am a representative of Messrs. Patton and Fairfield. I go to some merchant that I have previously selected, show him the stones and tell him that the owner has agreed upon a price somewhere in the neighbourhood of Patton’s estimate. Of course, I’ve provided myself with the necessary forged documents to prove my bona fides. It seems to me to be a perfectly feasible plan, and I shouldn’t be at all surprised if it had been followed, and if the diamonds had not already changed hands.’

“It seemed to me a pretty bright thought—brighter even than Fairfield imagined it to be. You see, Fairfield knew nothing of his partner’s passport having been found. He may have his suspicions of Patton, but, if he has, he’s far too loyal to mention them to me. But with Patton as the thief all the difficulties mentioned by Fairfield disappear. It would have been unnecessary for Patton to make himself out to be the firm’s representative, or to supply himself with false documents. His authority as head of the firm of Patton and Fairfield, would enable him to dispose of the diamonds, openly and without arousing the slightest suspicion.

“However, I didn’t say anything of this to Fairfield. I merely asked him if he had any suggestions to make. After all, I can’t be expected to be familiar with all the intricacies of the diamond trade. Fairfield’s expert advice might be very helpful.

“Fairfield replied that to the best of his knowledge, only about half a dozen of the leading diamond dealers on the Continent had been told that the diamonds were for sale. He suggested that it might be a good thing if he

were to write a personal letter to each of these people. We put our heads together and managed to evolve a sort of non-committal formula. In effect we said that before any final purchase of the stones was effected, it would be as well for the prospective purchaser to communicate immediately with Patton and Fairfield, as certain complications had arisen. Fairfield promised to write these letters in his own name and sent them off. He evidently did so, for this afternoon, he received a telephone message from one of his correspondents. And that telephone message, though utterly unintelligible to Fairfield, seems to me to make the whole thing as clear as daylight.”

Hanslet proceeded to describe his conversation with Fairfield, and then continued.

“That established the fact that Patton was in Dunkerque at 6 p.m. last Thursday the 20th. The obvious question is: Why didn’t he call on M. Baudin as arranged? My first idea was that he had a sudden attack of cold feet and didn’t dare to undertake the journey. But, on thinking it over, it seems to me that there is another possibility.”

Dr. Priestley, who up till now had been listening attentively, nodded. “There would appear to be room for quite a number of other possibilities,” he remarked.

“Well, professor, here is one that occurs to me,” said Hanslet. “M. Baudin spoke of Patton’s voice as being agitated, and said that his conversation with him was abruptly terminated by Patton ringing off. Doesn’t that rather suggest that Patton was being hunted? But by whom, that’s the question? Not the police, certainly, for the Continental police had not been warned by the time of his telephone message. But it’s possible that some crook or other had found out that he was carrying valuable stones about with him.”

“That is certainly one possibility,” Dr. Priestley replied. “May I ask what steps you have taken in the matter?”

“Well, I can’t very well go chasing Patton all over Europe. I’m bound to depend on the Continental police, and I’ve always found them remarkably efficient. I’ve given them all the information I can and I’ve asked that M. Baudin should be interviewed in case he can supply any further details. There’s very little else I can do for the present.”

“Perhaps not,” replied Dr. Priestley thoughtfully. “But there is one detail that appears to me as somewhat curious. Your theory, as I understand it, is that Patton returned from Grantham to London and caught the night boat from Folkestone to Dunkerque. He would, then, have arrived in Dunkerque early on Thursday morning.”

“That’s right, professor,” Hanslet replied. “The boat is due to arrive at 5.30 a.m.”

“Then why did Patton allow twelve hours to elapse before telephoning to M. Baudin? One would have thought that he would have been anxious to dispose of the diamonds with the least possible delay.”

“It doesn’t seem to be a matter of any great importance,” said Hanslet. “Perhaps he made other attempts to get rid of the loot before he thought of ringing up M. Baudin. Or perhaps he was dodging round looking for a suitable place in which to hide himself. Anyhow, it’s only a matter of time before we get track of him and the diamonds. By the way, professor, Jimmy hasn’t been so lucky with his case as I have.”

“Luck is apt to be deceptive at times,” said Dr. Priestley good humouredly. “Am I to take it, inspector, that your criminal still remains at large?”

“I’m afraid that’s the case, sir,” Jimmy replied ruefully. “And even if I laid hands upon him I really don’t know what I could charge him with. You see, the body in the case turned out not to be the one I thought it was.”

“Bodies may be deceptive as well as luck. May I ask in what way this particular body has disappointed your expectations?”

Thus encouraged, Jimmy told the story of the disconcerting reappearance of Alfred Pantony. “You see, sir, my difficulty is that I have very little to go upon,” he continued. “The body is utterly unrecognizable. There is no question of any external distinguishing marks being left upon it. All that the doctors can tell me is that it is of a man, middle aged, about five foot eight inches tall, and well nourished. That might apply to any one of thousands of people. The only other hint I get is the probability that the man had been dead for a day or two before his body was thrown into the tar boiler. And there is no definite evidence that the body was conveyed to the tar boiler in the hearse.”

“And yet I confess it is the hearse rather than the body which interests me,” Dr. Priestley replied. “It was bought by Pantony at Reading at about four o’clock on the afternoon of Tuesday the 18th. There is, I suppose, no doubt that it was actually Pantony who paid over the money for it?”

“I don’t see how there can be any doubt of that, sir. To begin with, Pantony admits the fact and we have the seller’s description of him. Pantony’s appearance is so striking that it is almost impossible that any one else should be mistaken for him. Besides, who else would have given the name and address of Pantony’s brother-in-law?”

“Very well, we will assume that Pantony paid for it. According to his own account he did so with money supplied to him by Cartmell and on his behalf. I would point out, in passing, that until Cartmell is found and confirms this statement, it must be accepted with reserve. However, let us return to the hearse. From 4 p.m. on the eighteenth until midday on the nineteenth it remains at Reading. It is then collected by a person who gives the name of Pantony’s brother-in-law, and driven away. When and where does it next appear?”

“In the early hours of Thursday morning the twentieth, sir. It was then seen standing outside the Green Bear at Fallowchurch.”

“An interval of five hours at the very least. How far is it by road from Reading to Fallowchurch?”

“Only a matter of eighty miles or so, sir. And the hearse, although certainly shabby, appears to be in perfect running order.”

“Exactly. Does that not suggest a delay en route or a considerable detour? The first might have been due to mechanical trouble. I would suggest that an inquiry circulated to garages might be advisable. Further, I would suggest a very tedious investigation on your part, inspector. It would, I think, be desirable to know exactly how Cartmell spent his days during the weeks preceding his disappearance. He is supposed to have visited London and various towns in the vicinity of Fallowchurch, is he not?”

“We have the evidence of the landlord of the Green Bear for that, sir.”

“But that evidence is hardly sufficient. What towns did Cartmell visit and what transactions did he carry out during those visits? I think the superintendent will agree that that line of inquiry might shed light upon his identity.”

“I do agree, professor,” Hanslet replied. “If Jimmy’s wise he’ll follow up those hints of yours.”

“While you remain quietly at Scotland Yard expecting news of Patton?” Dr. Priestley suggested.

Hanslet laughed. “Oh, no. I’ll give Jimmy a hand while I’m waiting.”

“In my opinion you’d be better employed in your own case,” said Dr. Priestley with some asperity. “There are at least two matters connected with it which might profitably engage your attention.”

“I’d be glad to know what they are, professor,” said Hanslet somewhat nettled by this rebuke.

“The first deals with Patton’s movements after he left Grantham Station. You maintain that he re-entered it and caught an up-train to London. But, so

far as I am aware, you have no facts whatever to support this theory. In your place, I should ask the Grantham police for a report of any incident, however apparently trifling, which took place in the neighbourhood that afternoon and evening.

“The second matter is this. Who visited the premises of Messrs. Patton and Fairfield during the days preceding Patton’s journey? It appears to me at least a possibility that one of these visitors may have had a hand in the affair. Has it occurred to you, for instance, that Patton may have a confederate waiting for him at Grantham? Or that on leaving the station he entered this confederate’s car, and was driven by him straight to Folkestone, thereby avoiding risk of recognition while passing through London?”

“No, I confess that’s something which hadn’t occurred to me,” Hanslet replied. “But, while I admire your passion for detail, professor, it’s all beside the point. It doesn’t matter much how Patton reached Dunkerque, since we know that he was there at six o’clock on Thursday evening. However, I’ll try to clear up those points. But now, Jimmy, it’s time we left before we out-stay our welcome.”

“The professor wasn’t quite so bright as I hoped he might be,” said Hanslet as he and Jimmy left the house together. “I thought he’d be able to suggest how you could identify that body of yours. Instead of which he expects us to dig round after a lot of details which aren’t of the slightest importance. Well, good-night, Jimmy, and better luck than you’ve had so far.”

For the next day or two Hanslet and Jimmy occupied themselves in purely routine inquiries. The superintendent, while awaiting news from abroad, decided there could be no harm in following Dr. Priestley’s suggestions, irrelevant though they seemed. He therefore called upon Fairfield and broached the subject of visitors to the office during the previous week.

“Perhaps Mr. McNaught could tell us who called here while you were away,” he suggested.

McNaught was summoned and interrogated. But, according to him, no strangers had called during the week preceding Mr. Patton’s journey. He recited a list of names, at which Fairfield nodded. “You’re quite right, McNaught,” said the latter finally. “They are all people with whom we do regular business. Thanks very much. We needn’t keep you from your work, unless the superintendent has any other questions to ask you.”

But Hanslet shook his head and McNaught returned to his own room.

Fairfield produced a box of cigars and handed it to the superintendent. "Try one of these," he said. "We keep them in the office here to offer to important clients. The firm pays quite a lot of money for them. Now I'm going to ask a possibly indiscreet question. Why do you want to know about the people who came to see Patton last week?"

Hanslet hesitated before he answered that question. His reply must necessarily reveal his own suspicions. But, after all, Fairfield was an intelligent man. He must long ago have guessed the truth, even if he refused to admit it.

"I am anxious to find out whether Mr. Patton acted alone last Wednesday, or whether he had a confederate," said Hanslet at last.

Fairfield frowned. "So it's come to that," he said quietly. "Am I to understand that it is the official view of the police that my partner has made away with the Wherwell diamonds? A rumour of that kind is hardly likely to enhance the reputation of the firm."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Fairfield," Hanslet replied. "But you know the facts, or most of them, as well as I do. Candidly, now, can you suggest any other theory to account for them?"

"You suggest that there are certain facts with which I am not acquainted?"

"There is one to which I attach considerable importance. You will remember that I asked you the other day to look for Mr. Patton's passport?"

Fairfield nodded. "Yes, I remember that well enough," he replied.

"Well, that passport has been found on Folkestone Quay in circumstances which suggest that it was deliberately thrown away there."

"But that's amazing!" Fairfield exclaimed. "Are you sure that there's no mistake? We know from Baudin's telephone message to me that Patton was in Dunkerque last Thursday. How could he have landed in France if he had thrown away his passport?"

"He might have provided himself with a second passport in another name," Hanslet replied.

"Do you know, I find all this most difficult to believe. You never knew Patton. I did. He is, I suppose, the most scrupulous man I have ever met. I cannot imagine anything that would induce him to misappropriate a single penny."

"It's our experience that people who are scrupulously honest over pennies are sometimes tempted by thousands of pounds. Can you tell me anything of Mr. Patton's circumstances?"

“You mean his personal finances? Not very much, I’m afraid. It’s been no secret, I suppose, that we’ve both of us done pretty well out of the business in recent years. But Patton got rather badly hit a year or two ago and I don’t suppose he’s quite so well off as he was. He never told me whole story, but I gathered that somebody induced him to put money into a concern that looked very well on paper. Unfortunately, however, the thing fizzled out, and Patton’s money went with it. I can’t tell you the amount involved, but I fancy that it was more than most of us care to lose just like that. Even so, I don’t for a moment believe that in order to recoup himself he would steal diamonds which had been entrusted to his care.”

Since Hanslet could not share Fairfield’s confidence in his partner’s integrity, he made no comment upon this. “What is your opinion of Sir Stanislaus Wherwell?” he asked.

Fairfield looked at him curiously. “You’ve been frank with me and I’ll be equally frank with you,” he replied. “I took a dislike to the fellow the first time I spoke to him.”

“Can you tell me why?”

“It’s never easy to explain one’s impressions. When Wherwell and I first met he was the very essence of matiness. He was delighted to meet his old friend’s partner and all that. I must certainly come and see him at Holmden Hall. Did I care for an occasional day with a gun? Very well, then, we must make a date for next October and have a pot at the pheasants. You know the kind of thing, I daresay. But he didn’t strike me as genuine. There was something shifty about him that I didn’t like.”

“Shiftiness of manner?” Hanslet suggested.

“Rather more than that. Perhaps you know how some people behave in a pawnbroker’s shop? They take in an article to pledge and hasten to assure the pawnbroker, who doesn’t care a damn anyway, that they’re only doing it to oblige a friend to whom the article belongs. Well, Wherwell’s attitude in this office was very similar. He began by explaining that the only reason he wanted to sell the diamonds was that his wife couldn’t possibly wear them because they were so hopelessly old-fashioned.

“Patton told him that there was no need to sell the diamonds on that account. They could be reset in modern style at comparatively slight expense. We could prepare designs for Wherwell to choose from and then give him an estimate of the cost of re-setting.

“I saw at once that the suggestion did not appeal at all to Wherwell. He hummed and hawed and at last said that he’d rather the diamonds were sold. His wife mightn’t like the re-setting when it was done and then the expense

would have been wasted. It was then that he asked Patton what they would fetch. And when Patton's estimate was about half what he had expected it gave him a nasty shock. I assure you that he went dead white. It was just as though he were going to faint.

"In our line of business, we see quite a lot of people who have things to sell, and we can generally make a pretty shrewd guess at their reasons for selling. I'm fairly sure in my own mind that Wherwell wanted the value of those diamonds pretty badly. I shouldn't wonder if he'd lost a lot of money recently. Backing horses, or something like that, at a guess. Anyway, he was frightfully anxious that the diamonds should be sold for at least a hundred thousand. And, which was equally important, the fact that they were for sale was to be kept a secret between the three of us, Patton, me and himself."

"Lady Wherwell must have been in the secret, of course," Hanslet remarked.

"No, she wasn't. That's just the point. Lady Wherwell was to know nothing about it until the money was received. Now perhaps you understand what I mean when I say that there was something shifty about the fellow. He obviously meant to sell the diamonds without his wife's knowledge. I suppose he thought that he'd be in a better position to face the music if he had the money to dangle before her eyes."

Hanslet nodded. This was in full agreement with what he already knew of Sir Stanislaus. He had maintained that the diamonds had been brought to London for alteration and not for sale.

After some further conversation, Hanslet was about to leave the office, when Fairfield detained him.

"While you're here, superintendent, I should like to tell you of rather a queer thing which happened to me yesterday evening. After I'd been to the Yard to see you, I came back here. I'd left some things in my room which I wanted to take home with me. By the time I got here McNaught and the rest of the staff had gone home and the place was locked up. That didn't worry me, for both Patton and I have keys and can let ourselves in whenever we like. Just as I reached the door I met a policeman, whom I know very well by sight. I don't know his name, but we usually exchange a few words when we meet. And yesterday evening I happened to say to him that we hadn't met for some weeks as I'd only just come back from my holidays. The policeman then said that he had seen me a week ago almost to the minute but that I hadn't seemed to recognize him.

"That struck me as peculiar. Yesterday was Monday and, as you know, I didn't get back to London till last Friday morning. At the time the policeman



thought he saw me, I was hundreds of miles away. I told the policeman this and he seemed very much surprised. He told me that last Monday week, just about eight o'clock, he saw a gentleman walking down the street a few yards from our door and made sure that it was me. He particularly thought it was me because he was almost sure that the gentleman had come out of this house.

"I told him that he must have been mistaken and bade him good-evening. But I wasn't quite happy about it, for all that. You must understand that we don't keep anything of outstanding value on the place. Anything like the Wherwell diamonds, for instance, we always take to the bank. But there was always the possibility that somebody had got in to see what they could pick up.

"This morning, before you came along, I had a talk with McNaught. I asked him if any one had been here late last Monday week. He told me that Patton had gone home, as he usually does, at half-past five; McNaught himself had seen the rest of the staff off the premises and gone home just after six, locking the place behind him. Then I asked him if he had found anything missing or out of order when he arrived on Tuesday morning, and he assured me that he had noticed nothing of the kind. There's probably nothing in it. The policeman was certainly mistaken. But I thought that you might like to know about it."

Hanslet thanked Fairfield and left the office. He went straight to the local police station, where he interrogated the sergeant on duty. It was soon established that the policeman on duty in Hatton Garden from 4 p.m. until midnight on Monday the 17th had been Constable Bidwell.

Bidwell, who happened to be on the premises, was summoned and the superintendent questioned him.

He was young, intelligent, and had served in this particular division for the last five years. In the course of his service he had got to know by sight most of the gentlemen who had offices in Hatton Garden. Some of them he knew by name. Among these was Mr. Fairfield. He had learnt Mr. Fairfield's name through calling upon him with reference to a car which had been left standing outside the door of Messrs. Patton and Fairfield's offices for an unreasonable time. This had been a year or more ago, since when Mr. Fairfield had always spoken to him when they met.

But when it came to Bidwell's recognition of Mr. Fairfield on the evening of the 17th, things became less definite.

"I certainly thought it was Mr. Fairfield, sir, and I was rather surprised that he didn't take any notice of me."

“What made you think that it was Mr. Fairfield?” Hanslet asked.

“Well, sir, I thought he came out of the house where Mr. Fairfield’s office is.”

“You thought!” Hanslet exclaimed irritably. “Now look here, Bidwell, let’s try and get something definite. You saw this man come out of one of the houses in Hatton Garden. How far were you away at the time?”

Bidwell hesitated. “Maybe fifty yards, maybe a bit more, sir,” he replied.

“Can you swear that he came out of the house in which Patton & Fairfield’s office is situated?”

“No, sir,” said Bidwell hastily. “I couldn’t swear to it. But he must have come out of that house or one of the others close to it.”

“Did he pass close to you after he came out?”

“Not exactly close, sir. He was on one side of the street and I was on the other.”

Hanslet picked up an almanac and consulted it. “The sun set at 7.13 on the 17th,” he said. “What was the light like when you saw this man?”

“Sort of betwixt and between, sir. It wasn’t exactly dark, but the lamps weren’t giving much light.”

“Could you see the man’s face distinctly?”

“Well, not exactly distinctly, sir. But from the sight I got of it, I thought he looked like Mr. Fairfield. And he was the same height, too. But I saw Mr. Fairfield yesterday evening, sir, and he told me it couldn’t have been him because he was abroad at the time.”

“Are you still convinced that it was Mr. Fairfield that you saw?”

“No, sir, I’m not. It must have been another gentleman very like him.”

Hanslet left the police station wondering if there was anything significant in this instance. There was nothing to prove that the man whom Bidwell had mistaken for Fairfield had come out of the latter’s office. But if he had, there was just a possibility that he had had a hand in the disappearance of the Wherwell diamonds.

The superintendent reasoned this way. His inquiries about strangers visiting Patton had been fruitless. But when one came to think of it, that was only to be expected. Patton would not give an interview to a confederate during business hours. He would naturally wish to avoid the inquiring eyes and ears of his staff. But, after business hours, with Fairfield on the continent, Patton could be sure of being alone in his office.

Suppose now, that he had wished to consult his confederate on that Monday evening, what would he have done? He would have left the office at

his usual hour of half-past five. He would know that McNaught would lock up the office at six o'clock, having seen the remainder of the staff off the premises. He would then return when the coast was clear and let himself in with his own key. Having done so he could admit his confederate at the appointed time. Bidwell had probably seen the departure of the confederate after the conference. He and Patton would have been careful not to leave the place together for fear of attracting attention. It occurred to the superintendent that Sir Stanislaus was about the same height as Fairfield.

On his return to Scotland Yard, Hanslet found nothing to claim his attention. He therefore decided upon a second visit to Grantham. Here he interviewed the local police with a request that he might be shown the report for Wednesday the 19th.

The reports were produced but they contained nothing out of the ordinary, until the inspector who had received Hanslet came to the case of the two bicycles.

"That was rather a peculiar thing," he said. "Though I don't see that it can have any possible bearing on your inquiries, superintendent."

"I may as well hear about it, all the same," Hanslet replied.

"Very well, then, I'll tell you the story. At 6.20 p.m. on Wednesday the 19th, we received a telephone message from the constable stationed at Lingby, about five miles from here. He reported that a bicycle had been stolen in Lingby and that he suspected that it had been ridden into the town. It turned out subsequently that the bicycle belonged to the local carpenter. He had a job to do at an isolated cottage and had left his bicycle outside the gate about half-past four that afternoon. When he finished work at six o'clock, the bicycle was no longer there. He had been compelled to walk home, and happening to meet the constable on the way he told him of the theft. The bicycle was found that same evening by one of our chaps, abandoned outside a public lavatory in the town. Next morning it was shown to the Lingby carpenter who identified it as his."

"Smart bit of work," said Hanslet approvingly. "But I don't see anything peculiar about it."

"Wait a minute," the inspector replied. "You haven't heard the other half of the story. At 7.35 that evening, a man walked in here and asked to see me. I happened to know him personally—he's a clerk in one of the insurance offices in the town. He told me that on his way home from work he had dropped into the Fountain for a drink. The Fountain of course is a public house. I daresay you've noticed it. It's next door to that big garage

belonging to the South Lincolnshire Motor Company. You must have passed it on your way here from the station.”

“I don’t know that I noticed the pub, but I remember seeing the garage,” said Hanslet.

“Well, this chap had his bicycle with him and left it on the kerb outside the Fountain. And when he came out about half-past seven, the bicycle had gone.”

“Folk in these parts seem to take considerable liberty with other people’s property,” Hanslet remarked. “Were you as successful in this second case as in the first?”

“That’s the queer thing about it. The second bicycle was found by the Lingby constable. He found it leaning against the wall of Lingby Mill when he was going his rounds at eleven o’clock that night. And since he couldn’t find any one about, he took charge of it. Of course, he thought it was the carpenter’s missing bicycle, but as I’ve already told you, it wasn’t. Queer, that one bicycle should be stolen in Lingby and left in Grantham and another stolen in Grantham and left at Lingby, both on the same evening.”

“It is queer,” Hanslet agreed. “What sort of a place is Lingby?”

“It’s a scattered village, with perhaps a couple of hundred inhabitants. There’s an old mill there, which used to employ a good many hands, I’m told. But it’s been disused for years and had practically fallen into ruins. Hardly anybody ever goes near it, and that’s what made the constable wonder when he found the bicycle leaning against the wall.”

“There’s nothing of value in the place, I suppose?”

“Nothing whatever. Only the bare walls, a few rusty pieces of machinery and heaps of rubbish. I daresay an occasional tramp takes up his quarters there, for there’s nothing to prevent any one strolling in or out of the yard.”

Having secured a copy of the report, Hanslet left the police station and caught a train back to London. He had wasted several hours upon a fruitless errand, for the episode of the two bicycles, curious though it might be, could have no possible bearing upon the case of the Wherwell diamonds. Patton had not even reached Grantham at the time when the Lingby bicycle had been stolen. And what possible reason could he have had for taking a bicycle outside the Fountain and leaving it at Lingby Mill? The sight of a prosperous diamond merchant, complete with suitcase and satchel, pedalling a bicycle along a country road would surely have attracted attention.

Upon Hanslet’s return to the Yard, he found a detailed communication from the Belgian and French police awaiting him. Jules Baudin had been interviewed at his house in the Avenue Louise, Brussels. He had repeated the

story of his telephone message to Fairfield and of the circumstances which led up to it. He had not been surprised at receiving a message from Mr. Patton since Mr. Fairfield, who had visited him a week before, on the morning of August 15th, had mentioned the subject of the Wherwell diamonds and said that his firm would probably communicate with him again upon the matter. What had surprised M. Baudin had been the agitation in Patton's voice and the extraordinary sudden termination of his conversation with him. It was just as though Patton had been cut off in the middle of a sentence. M. Baudin had sat up waiting for Patton until past midnight. But from the time of his message till the present, he had neither seen nor heard anything of him. M. Baudin had never met Patton personally, though he had frequently corresponded with him.

The Paris Sureté had interviewed Le Maistre Frères of the Rue de la Paix. This firm of diamond merchants were in close business association with Messrs. Patton & Fairfield. M. Auguste Le Maistre was a personal friend of Fairfield's. During the past few weeks, Fairfield had twice visited him. The first occasion had been on the morning of Thursday, August 6th. Fairfield had then told him that the owner of the Wherwell diamonds wished to sell them. At the moment he was asking far too high a price, but it was possible that he might be persuaded to accept more reasonable terms. Fairfield had promised M. Le Maistre that he would keep him advised of further developments.

Fairfield's second visit had been on the afternoon of Thursday 20th. On this occasion he had told M. Le Maistre that, since he was on holiday, he had heard nothing further about the diamonds. But he proposed to stay for a few days in Paris, and if M. Le Maistre was interested, he would put a telephone call through to his partner next morning and ask for the latest news. M. Le Maistre had asked him to do so since he had a prospective customer for the diamonds. However, next morning he had received a note from Mr. Fairfield, written from the hotel at which he was staying, saying that he had been suddenly recalled to London. M. Le Maistre had met Mr. Patton on more than one occasion, but had seen or heard nothing of him for the past few weeks.

This fully confirmed all that Fairfield had said. But it threw no light upon Patton's present whereabouts. From the moment of his telephone conversation with M. Baudin, neither the French nor the Belgian police could offer any suggestion as to what might have become of him. Nor had their inquiries thrown any light upon the fate of the Wherwell diamonds.

While Hanslet had been thus occupied, Jimmy had not been idle. He received a message from the police at Shipsfield which seemed to make

Cartmell's behaviour more inexplicable than ever.

In accordance with his request, the police of that town had been making inquiries locally. A butcher whose shop was situated in the London Road had now made a statement which might be of interest. Shortly before seven o'clock on the evening of Tuesday 18th, the butcher was shutting up shop for the night. While he was doing so, a green Comet car pulled up outside. A tallish man in shabby clothes and wearing wide horn-rimmed glasses got out of it. The butcher remembered that the gentleman had a big moustache. The gentleman had asked him if he had any bullock's liver, saying that he wanted it for a Siamese cat which would eat nothing else.

As it happened, the butcher had a piece of bullock's liver exhibited in the window. He had asked the gentleman how much he wanted, and the latter had replied about two pounds. And he had said that the bloodier it was the better, for his cat was very particular and would not eat liver if it was too dry. The butcher had cut off two pounds of liver, wrapped it in paper and given it to the gentleman, who laid it on the seat beside him. The gentleman had then driven off in the direction of London. The butcher was quite certain that he was alone in the car.

Jimmy shook his head in despair over this. The purchase of the liver certainly accounted for the blood-stain on the cushion of Cartmell's car. But what in the name of heaven did it all mean? Cartmell's purchases on that hectic Tuesday had certainly not lacked variety. A hearse, an inordinate quantity of alcohol, a coffin, and now two pounds of bullock's liver. Was the man a lunatic, whose mania was meaningless practical jokes? Or was it possible that he really had a cousin who was an undertaker, and a Siamese cat which could eat nothing but bullock's liver?

This question being unanswerable, Jimmy decided to follow Dr. Priestley's advice. He drew up a full description of the hearse, with the instructions that this should be circulated to the police in the southern counties. They would visit the garages and the filling stations in their respective areas in the hope of tracing the movements of the hearse after it left Reading. This accomplished, Jimmy took a train to Fallowchurch to confer with Sergeant Playne.

The sergeant was glad enough to see him. Alf Pantony's adventure, told and re-told in the bar of the Green Bear and elsewhere, had lost its freshness and was growing distinctly musty. But it still rankled in the sergeant's mind. The village, to a man, regarded it as a huge joke against him. He had, perhaps unguardedly, stated quite definitely that the body found in the tar boiler was Alf Pantony's, and a few days later Alf had turned up bright and smiling to refute him. People grinned offensively when they met him. Dr.

Menslowe had so far forgotten the respect due to the police as to hail him across the road one morning. "Hallo, sergeant, you haven't found my body lying about anywhere, have you?"

In any case, there was the original body still unaccounted for. Certainly, it lay in the churchyard, but it refused to moulder into forgetfulness. The coroner, with the adjourned inquest on his mind, was beginning to ask awkward questions. Were the police not yet ready with evidence which would enable the jury to return a verdict? The state of affairs was most unsatisfactory.

Jimmy listened sympathetically to the sergeant's catalogue of woes. But he could suggest no remedy. There was nothing for it but to wait as patiently as possible for some clue to the identity of the dead man. Meanwhile it might be of use to trace Cartmell's movements during his stay in the country.

Then began yet another business of descriptions and inquiries. This time the descriptions were of Cartmell and his car, and the inquiries were directed to garages, hotels and inns. By the instructions of the chief constable, the police throughout the county were set to work to see people who might have seen or done business with the missing man.

Partly because of Cartmell's somewhat unusual appearance, and partly because he seemed to have made himself known wherever he appeared, these inquiries were immediately successful. So successful, in fact, that Jimmy was enabled to compile a diary of his movements from the date of his arrival at Fallowchurch until his disappearance. This diary was naturally somewhat fragmentary and lacked detail. But it certainly suggested that Cartmell had business of some kind in the south-eastern towns.

This diary, as compiled and finally elaborated by Jimmy, was as follows:

*August 4th, Tuesday.* Cartmell arrives in his car at the Green Bear, Fallowchurch, about 6 p.m. Comes to terms with Wedgwood and arranges to stay in the house until further notice. Source of information Wedgwood. Confirmation of Cartmell's presence at the Green Bear during that evening by several regular customers.

*August 5th, Wednesday.* Cartmell leaves the Green Bear in his car some time during the morning, telling Mrs. Wedgwood that he might not be back that night. Source of information Mrs. Wedgwood. She is sure of the date because it was the morning after Cartmell's arrival.

A man answering to Cartmell's description and driving a green Comet car lunched at the Duke's Head, Ashford, some time between one and two

p.m. Sources of information head waiter and garage attendant at the Duke's Head. Former reports that Cartmell in conversation with him said that he had important business in the town and asked when the last post went out.

A green Comet car arrives at Taylor's Garage, Folkestone, about 5 p.m. The driver says that he wished to leave it there overnight. He gives the name of Cartmell and answers to that description. He says that he wishes to leave the car there overnight as he has business in the town. He asks for the name of a good quiet commercial hotel. He is recommended to the Four-in-Hand. Source of information attendant at Taylor's Garage; confirmed by counterfoil of garage ticket bearing the number GX 692.

About 5.15 p.m. Cartmell enters the Four-in-Hand. He does not book a room but asks to be given tea with two boiled eggs. Having finished this he asks to be shown to the bathroom. Nothing is seen of him after this. He was not seen to leave the Four-in-Hand.

Note: Inquiries among hotels and boarding-houses at Folkestone have so far failed to reveal where Cartmell passed the night.

*August 6th, Thursday.* Cartmell reappears at Taylor's Garage, Folkestone, about 6.30 p.m. He tells the attendant that he has finished his business satisfactorily and drives away. Source of information attendant at Taylor's Garage.

Cartmell arrives at the Green Bear about 8.30 p.m. He asks for supper and spends the rest of the evening in the bar.

*August 7th, Friday.* Cartmell leaves the Green Bear at a quarter to nine in the morning, telling Wedgwood that he is about to catch the 8.58 a.m. to London. He is recognized at the station by one of the porters who had spent the previous evening at the Green Bear. The porter confirms that he entered the train. Cartmell reappears at the Green Bear at 10.35 p.m. He tells Mr. Wedgwood that he returned by the 10.28 from London.

*August 8th, Saturday.* Cartmell leaves the Green Bear in his car about 11 a.m. Man and car answering to description arrive at Municipal Car Park, Maidstone, about 11.45. Source of information, attendant at car park, confirmed by counterfoil of garage ticket. Man answering to description lunches in grill-room of Royal Star Hotel, Maidstone, about 12.45 p.m. Source of information, grill-room waiter. Car GX 692 collected from car park about 2 p.m. Cartmell and car return to Green Bear shortly before 6 p.m.

*August 9th, Sunday.* Cartmell did not leave the Green Bear all day. During opening hours he sat in the bar talking to Pantony and other customers.



*August 10th, Monday.* Cartmell leaves the Green Bear in his car about 9.30 a.m. telling Mrs. Wedgwood that he had a long round in front of him and might not be back until late. Man answering to his description is seen in the Green Dragon, Herne Bay, about 12.30 p.m. He orders a drink and a couple of sandwiches. Source of information, barmaid at Green Dragon. Man answering description dines at the Swan and Heart, Canterbury, between 8 and 9 p.m. Source of information waiter at Swan and Heart. Cartmell and car return to Green Bear shortly before 11 p.m.

*August 11th, Tuesday.* Cartmell receives three or four letters by the first post. Wedgwood believes that postmarks were all of towns in the neighbourhood. Cartmell tells Mrs. Wedgwood when she brings his breakfast that he hoped to take a day off, but that his firm had sent him a lot of business to do. He drives away in car about 9.30 a.m. Man answering his description lunches at the Bull at Rochester about 1.30 p.m. Source of information waiter at the Bull. Man answering description enters the Kentish Yeomen, Sheerness, shortly after 6 p.m. Gets in conversation with barmaid there and tells her that he has just brought off a very satisfactory deal in the town. He does not mention the nature of the deal. Source of information barmaid at Kentish Yeomen. Cartmell and car return to the Green Bear shortly before 9 p.m. He tells Wedgwood and the company in general that he has had a very good day and stands drinks round on the strength of it. He also tells Wedgwood that he will have to go to Maidstone on the following day and asks whether Wedgwood or Mrs. Wedgwood would care to come. Wedgwood accepts his offer. Sources of information Wedgwood and customers of Green Bear.

*August 12th, Wednesday.* Cartmell and Wedgwood leave Green Bear at 11.30 a.m. They drive straight to Maidstone where Cartmell leaves car in the yard of the Royal Star Hotel. Cartmell tells Wedgwood to meet him there 3 p.m. Wedgwood does so punctually and Cartmell appears a few minutes later. They drive back to the Green Bear. Cartmell tells Wedgwood that he will have to go to London next day to see his firm. Source of information Wedgwood.

*August 13th, Thursday.* Cartmell leaves the Green Bear at 7.45 a.m. in order to catch the 8.03 to London. He is seen to enter this train. He returns to the Green Bear at 10.35 p.m., stating that he has just come back from London by the last train. He complains that his firm have put more work upon his shoulders and that he will be driven off his feet for the next couple of days.

*August 14th, Friday.* Cartmell leaves Green Bear in car about 8 a.m., telling Mrs. Wedgwood that he is very doubtful that he will get back that

night. Man answering to his description and driving car GX 692, arrives at Taylor's Garage, Folkestone, about 10.15 a.m. Attendant recognizes him as the man whom he saw on the 5th and 6th. Cartmell says that he wishes to leave his car overnight as he again has important business in the town.

Note: Inquiries at hotels and boarding-houses again fail to reveal any trace of Cartmell's presence in Folkestone that night.

*August 15th, Saturday.* Cartmell collects his car from Taylor's Garage, Folkestone, about 8.30 p.m. He returns to the Green Bear shortly before 11 p.m.

*August 16th, Sunday.* Cartmell does not leave the Green Bear but repeats his programme of the previous Sunday.

*August 17th, Monday.* Cartmell leaves Fallowchurch by train, ostensibly for London. He returns to the Green Bear at 10.35 p.m., as already ascertained.

*August 18th, Tuesday.* Cartmell and Pantony leave the Green Bear about 11 a.m.

Jimmy and the sergeant studied the items of this diary very carefully. To the sergeant it seemed to establish Cartmell's bona fides.

"That's just the way you'd expect a commercial to carry on," he said. "A commercial has to go and see his firm sometimes and get orders. That, you may be sure, is what Cartmell was up to when he went to London. For the rest, we've got traces of him in several towns round about. Folkestone, Maidstone, Herne Bay, Canterbury, Sheerness. All the likely places for a commercial to visit."

"Yes, but why is it that we only get traces of him in pubs and garages?" Jimmy objected.

"Because we haven't made inquiries anywhere else," Playne replied with sturdy common sense. "I daresay you'd find if you went round the business folk that several of them knew Cartmell well enough. It's my belief that there was no harm in the chap, beyond a fondness for playing practical jokes."

"That's all very well," said Jimmy. "But what's become of him? Why did he dump Pantony at Shipsfield? Why, after sending him a wire that he'd meet him here last Monday, did he never turn up? And why, in heaven's name, did he buy two pounds of bullock's liver and make that filthy mess on the seat of his car?"

Playne shrugged his shoulders. "Something unexpected may have happened to him," he replied. "You never know with commercials. They're

always at the beck and call of their firms. Perhaps Cartmell was sent away to the North of England at a moment's notice. Or perhaps he met with an accident after he left the Passway Garage and hasn't been able to get about since."

Jimmy shook his head. "It's no good, sergeant," he said, "I simply can't bring myself to believe that Cartmell was as innocent as all that. How do you explain the hearse business, even supposing that the hearse had nothing whatever to do with the body found by Gurney in the tar boiler?"

"Very likely what he told Alf Pantony was true. For all we know he may have a cousin who's in the undertaking business. And likely enough it was the cousin who collected the hearse from Reading."

"Then why on earth did he give the name of Ambrose, and why did he abandon the hearse outside our friend Wedgwood's front door? I'd like to remind you that the hearse is still in Quain's place and that nobody has turned up to claim it."

But the sergeant's imagination was not to be roused. "Maybe the cousin will come and fetch it when he wants it," he replied.

"If he does I shall have a hell of a lot of questions to ask him. Let's have another look at that diary and see if it will give us any ideas."

But a second inspection of the diary failed to suggest anything very startling.

During Cartmell's stay at Fallowchurch, he had only spent two nights away from the Green Bear. During these two nights his car had been garaged at Folkestone. The fact that he himself had not stayed at an hotel or a boarding-house there seemed of no particular significance in the light of his remark to the garage attendant. He had probably found his friends at home and stayed with them. For the rest, as the sergeant maintained, the diary suggested the itinerary of a commercial traveller.

But, although it had been comparatively easy to ascertain the movements of Cartmell, those of the hearse remained wrapped in obscurity. Not a scrap of information was received as a result of the inquiries among the garages and filling stations. Nobody on any of the roads from Reading to Fallowchurch had seen it, from the time of its departure to that of its arrival.

Jimmy, inspired by an idea, went to Quain's Garage and examined the hearse once more. He measured up the petrol tank and found that it would hold approximately twelve gallons. There was now about a gallon of petrol in it. Messrs. Golder & Brown's manager had told Jimmy that the tank had been filled before the hearse left Reading. It might be assumed that the hearse did somewhere in the neighbourhood of fifteen miles to a gallon.

Eleven gallons of petrol had been used from the tank, suggesting a journey of 165 miles. But this was double the distance between Reading and Fallowchurch by the direct road. This was puzzling, but the essential fact remained. If the hearse had been filled up before it left Reading, the driver would have found no need to stop for petrol during the journey to Fallowchurch. What had become of the driver after he had deposited the hearse outside the Green Bear remained a mystery. Certainly nobody resembling Cartmell had been seen in the neighbourhood that Thursday morning.

The next few days were spent unprofitably by Jimmy at Fallowchurch. He interviewed Pantony repeatedly, without being able to extract from him more than he already knew. The inquest on the unknown body was resumed, and once more adjourned, to the accompaniment of certain rather scathing remarks on the part of the coroner. Finally, on Saturday morning, the 29th, Jimmy returned to Scotland Yard to make what he knew to be a thoroughly unsatisfactory report.



*Part Four*

*Dr. Priestley Comes to the Rescue*



ON SATURDAY, AUGUST 29th, Hanslet and Jimmy dined by invitation with Dr. Priestley. Oldland and Harold Merefield were also present and the meal was, as usual, an unqualified success. But it was not until the party had settled down in the study after dinner that reference was made to the case upon which the two policemen were engaged.

It was Dr. Priestley who introduced the subject. "Have you made any progress in the matter of Mr. Patton and the Wherwell diamonds, superintendent?" he asked.

Hanslet shook his head despondently. "Not very much, I'm afraid, professor," he replied. "I've had confirmation of Fairfield's statement about Patton's telephone message to M. Baudin. And I followed out the suggestions you made the other evening. But I'm bound to say that my inquiries did not lead to much. It was only by chance that I found out that Patton had a visitor at his office after business hours on Monday the 17th."

"Are you aware of the identity of this visitor?" Dr. Priestley asked.

"No, but I'm not inclined to attach any great importance to the incident. In fact, it isn't by any means confirmed. The policeman on beat in Hatton Garden saw, at a distance and in an uncertain light, a man whom he took to be Fairfield. His only reasons for thinking it was Fairfield, were that the man was about his height and appeared to come out of the offices of Patton & Fairfield. On thinking it over, however, I've come to the conclusion that the policeman may have been right up to a point. If Patton had a visitor who was not anxious to attract attention to himself, it would be a good dodge on his part to get himself up to look as much as possible like Fairfield. The sight of a stranger leaving the office after business hours might cause some surprise."

“Has it occurred to you to speculate upon the object of the interview between Patton and this unknown man?”

“Oh, it had something to do with the Wherwell diamonds, no doubt. If Patton had a confederate they must have met sometimes to discuss their plans.”

Dr. Priestley nodded. “Exactly,” he said. “The theft of the diamonds was, I am convinced, the subject of much previous scheming. And it occurs to me that there is some significance in the date upon which this unknown person visited the office, if in fact he did so. It was on Monday the 17th, I believe, that Mr. Patton secured Sir Stanislaus Wherwell’s approval of his proposed journey to Holmden Hall?”

“By jove, I hadn’t thought of that!” Hanslet exclaimed. “Patton had a telegram from Sir Stanislaus that morning. But that may have been all eyewash, for I am not at all satisfied that Sir Stanislaus himself is not in the plot.”

“That is possible,” said Dr. Priestley quietly. “Have you any facts with which to support your suspicions?”

Hanslet laughed. “I felt quite sure you’d ask that question, professor. Quite frankly, I haven’t. I don’t want to go round making too many inquiries about Sir Stanislaus. If he’s in the plot, he knows where Patton and the diamonds are at this moment. Then there’s a very good chance that, when he thinks the time is ripe, he will slip over the Channel and join Patton. And if he does, I shall be on his heels. But if he thought for a moment that I had any suspicions of him, he’d lie low and that chance would be lost.”

“I admire your caution, superintendent,” said Dr. Priestley. “Have you been in communication with the police at Grantham?”

“I went down there myself and looked through their records. I found absolutely nothing that throws any light upon the case. The only unusual event that happened that day was the theft of two bicycles. But bicycles won’t fit in with Patton’s disappearance. I’ve been making inquiries and so far as Miss Patton and Fairfield are aware, Patton has never ridden a bicycle in his life.”

“Whether or not Mr. Patton is a cyclist is of no importance whatever,” exclaimed Dr. Priestley sharply. “Am I to understand that the Grantham police had particulars of two bicycles having been stolen on Wednesday the 19th? If so, I should be interested to hear the details.”

Hanslet, complying with this request, told the story as he had heard it from the inspector at Grantham. Dr. Priestley, pencil in hand, made rapid



notes as he did so. He studied these notes for a minute or two in silence after the superintendent had finished, and then spoke.

“Lingby is approximately five miles from Grantham, you say. The first bicycle was stolen from Lingby before 6 p.m. and was recovered in Grantham about 10 p.m. The second bicycle was stolen from Grantham before 7.30 p.m. and recovered in Lingby about 11 p.m. Those are the facts, I believe?”

“That’s right, professor,” Hanslet replied. “But if you can see any connexion between those bicycles and the disappearance of Patton with the diamonds, it’s more than I can.”

Dr. Priestley shook his head impatiently. “What possible connexion could be established upon such meagre facts?” he demanded. And then abruptly he turned to Jimmy. “I trust, inspector, that your progress has been more satisfactory than the superintendent’s,” he said.

Jimmy avoided answering this question directly. “I’ve been unable to pick up any trace of the hearse during its journey from Reading to Fallowchurch, sir. On the other hand, I’ve managed to compile a fairly complete record of Cartmell’s movements. I’ve got it here, sir, if you care to see it.”

Dr. Priestley nodded and Jimmy handed him the diary. He studied this deeply for several minutes, then handed it to Harold. “You’ve no objection to a copy being made of this, inspector?” he asked.

“Not the slightest, sir,” replied Jimmy readily.

“Thank you. And may I ask what conclusions you have reached as a result of your inquiries?”

“I feel pretty certain, sir, that Cartmell is a murderer and that the unidentified corpse is that of his victim. I can’t think of any other explanation of Cartmell’s actions. In that case, he has planned and executed an extremely clever crime.”

“I’m inclined to agree with you, inspector,” replied Dr. Priestley. “But I should be glad if you would explain exactly where the cleverness of his crime lies.”

“In the steps he took that both murderer and victim should be unidentifiable, sir. By putting the body in the tar boiler he ensured that it should not be recognized. But there was always the risk that sooner or later the probable identity of the victim would be established. The next step, of course, would be to seek for any person or persons who might have a motive for murdering the victim. Those persons would then fall under suspicion and every detail of their actions would be investigated.

“But Cartmell had provided against this danger. For a period of a fortnight he adopted, not only a disguise, but a completely false identity. Cartmell’s first appearance is on the evening of July 29th in Mutley Street. He then disappears until August 4th. From that date until the 18th, he appears daily. But on the evening of the 18th, he walks out of the Passway Garage and no further trace of him is found. I think you’ll agree with me, sir, when I suggest that no such person as Cartmell existed before July 29th and after August 18th.”

Dr. Priestley nodded. “I do agree,” he replied. “It seems highly probable that some unknown person adopted the identity of Cartmell for a definite period and for his own purposes. But how do you explain Cartmell’s visits to the various places mentioned in the diary?”

“I fancy those visits were all in the nature of camouflage, sir. Cartmell, having chosen the part of a commercial traveller, played it thoroughly. The business of a commercial traveller is to visit his customers in various places. Cartmell had no customers, but he made a pretence of visiting them in order to make his rôle more convincing.”

“That may be so,” said Dr. Priestley. “You have, I observe, made a note of the fact that you have been unable to ascertain where Cartmell spent the two nights when he was absent from the Green Bear. Have you any suggestions to make on that point?”

“I think I have, sir. On both occasions, he left his car at a garage in Folkestone. That rather suggests to me that he had genuine business, under his real name and appearance, in Folkestone or the neighbourhood.

“It seems to me that his behaviour at Folkestone on the 5th gives us the clue. He asked to be recommended to a quiet commercial hotel. He goes there, has tea and then asks to be shown to the bathroom. Nobody sees him leave the hotel. We know that he had a suitcase with him. It seems quite likely that in the bathroom he changed from Cartmell to his true self. And that he remained his true self until the following afternoon when he resumed the Cartmell personality. In which case he would not be recognized during the interval.”

“When and where do you suppose that the murder was committed?”

“Not very far from Fallowchurch, sir, and some time between noon on the 19th and the early morning of the 20th. And I am inclined to think that the murderer had resumed his true personality before he met his victim. The hearse was employed for the conveyance of the body from the scene of the crime to the tar boiler.”

“Have you come to any conclusion as to the part played by Alfred Pantony?”

“I think his rôle was purely passive, sir. Cartmell selected him because he was the very man he wanted. He had no regular work and was in possession of a small sum of money. You may be sure that Cartmell had heard all about him before he had been twenty-four hours at the Green Bear. But what appealed to Cartmell most were Pantony’s harelip and deformed ear. One can’t help being struck by Cartmell’s efforts to make himself conspicuous; the flowing moustache, wide-rimmed glasses and shabby clothes to begin with. Every one who has described him has remarked upon these points. As a general rule, commercial travellers don’t specialize in a farouche appearance. It would hardly be considered an advertisement for the firm they represented. And, not content with taking pains to be easily recognized, Cartmell was always ready to tell his name and hint at his alleged business to any one who cared to listen to him. And, for the last scene of his masquerade, he chose a companion even more conspicuous than himself. The pair of them were not likely to be forgotten by any one who had seen them.”

“That’s very interesting,” said Oldland, who had hitherto taken no part in the conversation. “I begin to understand the fellow rather better than I did. His masquerade, as you call it, was merely a curtain-raiser for the central tragedy.”

“That’s what I believe,” Jimmy replied. “He had planned a murder of which one of the essential features was that the body of his victim should not be recognizable. He knew that the desired result could be achieved by boiling the body in tar. He was aware that a tar boiler was at work between Fallowchurch and Dimbury, but the body had to be conveyed from the scene of the crime to the tar boiler. Cartmell had no doubt realized that the conveyance of dead bodies is rather a ticklish business. But there was one method of conveyance which could give rise to no comment. Not even the most inquisitive policeman would stop the driver of a hearse and ask inconvenient questions about his deceased passenger. Hence the preliminary masquerade, which had more than one object. It provided a false identity for the murderer and his victim, and it misled the police, at all events during the early stages of the investigation.”

“It strikes me as being a pretty clever dodge,” said Oldland. “The problem he’s set you is almost insoluble, to my mind. You said just now that sooner or later you would discover the probable identity of the dead man. Suppose you do. Suppose you collect evidence which proves with practical certainty that he was a certain Mr. Jones. You make inquiries about this Mr.

Jones and you find that he had a savage and relentless enemy in Mr. Brown. The assumption is, then, that Brown murdered Jones.

“But how could you possibly prove it? Are you in a position to state that Jones was murdered? The fact that his body was found in a tar boiler does not prove it. He might have been killed accidentally and his body thrown into the boiler to avoid awkward questions.

“However, we will suppose that the presumption of murder is sufficiently strong to justify the next step. The individual who placed the body in the tar boiler was undoubtedly the murderer. The probability is that this individual was Brown posing as Cartmell. But again, how can you prove it? You know nothing whatever of Cartmell’s movements after ten p.m. on the 18th. You know that he incited Pantony to buy the hearse and gave him the money to pay for it. But you don’t know that it was Cartmell who drove the hearse away from Reading on the following day. Finally, it would be very difficult to establish satisfactorily that Brown the murderer and Cartmell the commercial traveller were one and the same. What do you say, Priestley?”

“I say that the inspector’s problem is to be approached from an entirely different direction,” Dr. Priestley replied. “Considered by itself the problem is, as you say, well-nigh insoluble. But taking it in conjunction with its sequel many of the difficulties disappear.”

“It’s sequel!” Oldland exclaimed. “The only sequel to the adventures of Cartmell has been the return of Pantony to the land of the living.”

“The only obvious sequel, perhaps,” Dr. Priestley replied. “But one fact which seems to me very significant appears to have escaped attention. Inspector Waghorn speaks of Cartmell’s masquerade as the prelude to a crime. What was the crime?”

“Why, murder, of course,” Oldland replied. “The unidentified body is sufficient evidence of that.”

“And yet, as you have justly pointed out to the inspector, the body itself affords no proof that a murder has been committed.”

Hanslet, who had been listening impatiently, could stand this no longer. “But, hang it all, professor,” he exclaimed, “if Cartmell’s crime wasn’t murder, what was it?”

“In the absence of definite proofs, I am not prepared to say,” Dr. Priestley replied. “But I would point out that Cartmell’s last appearance in public was on the day preceding the disappearance of the Wherwell diamonds.”

Hanslet and Jimmy stared first at Dr. Priestley and then at one another. Then after a few moments of intense silence, the superintendent spoke. "Don't let us interrupt you, professor," he said quietly.

Dr. Priestley smiled. "I have very little further to say on that point. At present there is no apparent link between Cartmell and the diamonds. You and the inspector have each taken a friendly interest in the case upon which the other was engaged. But, being quite properly absorbed in your own cases, your interest has not amounted to detailed examination. A disinterested spectator, supplied with details of both, might legitimately conjecture that some connexion existed between them."

"I'm bound to say that I can't see any obvious connexion," Hanslet remarked.

"Because you have not sufficiently studied the time-table compiled by the inspector, nor has he studied yours. I propose to devote considerable attention to both.

"Let us see if and when there is any correspondence between those time-tables of events. I have already pointed out that Cartmell's adventures ended on the day before the diamonds disappeared. That in itself is hardly significant. But let us examine the events of Monday the 17th. On that day Cartmell reached Fallowchurch from London by train at 10.28. That train, I have ascertained, leaves Charing Cross at 9.05 and London Bridge at 9.16.

"We now come to the statement of Mr. Fairfield, as confirmed by Bidwell the policeman. It is possible, I will not use a stronger word than that, that an unknown man came out of the offices of Patton and Fairfield about 8 p.m. This man would have had plenty of time to catch the train by which Cartmell reached Fallowchurch."

"Hold on a minute, professor," Hanslet exclaimed. "Bidwell mistook this unknown man for Fairfield and he must therefore have borne some sort of resemblance to him. But Fairfield isn't in the least like Jimmy's description of Cartmell."

"That is one of the difficulties with which you have to contend," Dr. Priestley replied. "The personality of Cartmell was, as the inspector believes, an assumed one. Probably no single person has seen both Cartmell and Mr. Fairfield. It is impossible to establish whether the individual who assumed the personality of Cartmell bears any resemblance to Mr. Fairfield or not. I merely point out that this individual might have been seen by the policeman in his true shape and would then have had time to assume the disguise of Cartmell and catch the train to Fallowchurch. Further, in the

course of his visit to the office, he would have learnt the particulars of Mr. Patton's proposed journey with the diamonds to Holmden Hall."

"In other words, this man Cartmell was Patton's confederate?" Hanslet suggested.

"I am not formulating a theory, but merely pointing out the possibilities. Now, passing over Tuesday, let us turn to the time-table of events of Wednesday the 19th. On that day the hearse was driven away from Reading about 12.30. It is stated that when it left the petrol tank was full. The inspector has told us that he estimates the capacity of the tank as twelve gallons and the petrol consumption of the hearse as 15 miles to the gallon. Now, I have ascertained that the distance from Reading to Grantham by the most direct road is approximately one hundred and thirty miles. Now, inspector, what speed would you estimate the hearse to maintain over such a distance?"

Jimmy was too dazed by this extraordinary suggestion to answer promptly. "I really don't know, sir," he said vaguely. "But I should think it ought to average somewhere between twenty-five and thirty miles an hour."

"Let us then assume its average speed as twenty-six miles an hour, for the sake of a round figure. It would then take five hours to cover the distance from Reading to Grantham and its petrol tank would not require replenishment during the journey. If it left Reading at 12.30, we should have expected it to have arrived at Grantham at 5.30. Mr. Patton's train reached Grantham half an hour later, at 6.02."

"But what makes you think that the hearse may have been driven to Grantham, sir?" Jimmy ventured.

"Must I repeat once more that I am only pointing out certain possibilities? We know that the hearse reached Fallowchurch during the early hours of Thursday morning. Again, I have ascertained that the distance from Grantham to Fallowchurch is a hundred and sixty miles. And I think, inspector, that you may see some significance in this particular distance."

This time Jimmy caught the point at once. "I do, sir," he replied. "The amount of petrol in the tank suggests that the hearse had been driven about that distance since it was last filled up."

"That is so. Accepting your previous estimate of speed, the hearse would take approximately six hours as a minimum to cover that distance. That is to say that if it left Grantham about eight o'clock on Wednesday evening one would not expect it to reach Fallowchurch before two o'clock on Thursday morning."

A few moments of silence followed the conclusion of Dr. Priestley's sentence. Then Hanslet spoke.

"That's all very well, professor, but I don't see that these possibilities of yours help either Jimmy or myself very much. You suggest that it was Cartmell who visited Hatton Garden on the evening of the 17th. There's no question of his having made a forcible entry, for everything was found in order the next morning. Therefore Patton must have admitted him. In other words, Cartmell was Patton's accomplice.

"So far I am ready to agree with you, but this hearse business is beyond me. Cartmell may have driven the hearse to Grantham in order to meet Patton there. We'll suppose that Patton joined the hearse somewhere and that he, too, for some reason or other, then drove to Fallowchurch. But what did they do next and where does Jimmy's unidentified body come in?"

"I am not in a position to answer those questions," Dr. Priestley replied. "But there are one or two points to which I may perhaps direct your attention. If you will glance at the inspector's diary of Cartmell's movements, you will see that on two occasions during his stay at Fallowchurch Cartmell drove to Folkestone, being absent for a night from Fallowchurch on each occasion. The distance from Fallowchurch to Folkestone is not great, being somewhere in the neighbourhood of forty miles. It is quite possible that either Cartmell or Patton had left the hearse at Fallowchurch, and made his way to Folkestone and caught, not the night boat to Dunkerque, but the morning boat to Boulogne which sails at 10.55 a.m."

"It must have been Patton since it was his passport that was found on the quayside at Folkestone. What time does the boat reach Boulogne?"

"At 10.55 p.m.," Dr. Priestley replied. "In that connexion I have acquired another piece of information which may interest you. On Fridays, throughout the year special week-end tickets are issued to Boulogne from Folkestone, and to Ostend from Dover. Passengers holding these tickets may return on any day until the following Tuesday and no passports are required."

"But we're not talking about a Friday, professor," said Hanslet patiently. "It was on Thursday morning that the hearse was found at Fallowchurch. However, there's no great difficulty about the passport. Patton could easily have provided himself with a second one in another name. How long would it take him to get to Dunkerque from Boulogne?"

It was Oldland who answered this question. "Say about two or three hours by train or car," he said.

“So he wouldn’t have got to Dunkerque before well on in the afternoon,” remarked Hanslet thoughtfully. “That helps to account for his not ringing up M. Baudin before six. But you haven’t yet offered any suggestion about the body, professor.”

“The body, as the inspector has assured us, was unidentifiable,” Dr. Priestley replied gravely. “But I cannot help being struck by the fact that the whereabouts of both Patton and Cartmell remain undiscovered.”

Hanslet whistled softly. “By jove, that’s an idea!” he exclaimed. “You’re suggesting that the crooks quarrelled and that one of them knocked the other on the head, then shot his body into the tar boiler. That sort of thing has happened often enough before now, I’ll admit. We know that the body can’t be Patton’s. It was found early on Thursday morning and Patton rang up M. Baudin from Dunkerque at six o’clock that evening. Therefore, according to your suggestion, the body must have been Cartmell’s. What have you got to say about that, Jimmy?”

“It’s a possibility that’s been at the back of my mind for some time,” Jimmy replied. “But Cartmell has generally been described as being fairly tall. The doctors say that the body is that of a man about five foot eight. People would not notice a man of that height as being particularly tall.”

“I don’t think there’s very much in that,” said Hanslet. “According to you this chap Cartmell must have been a bit of an artist in disguises. It’s not a very difficult thing for anybody to give an impression of being two or three inches taller than he really is. And, by jove, if Patton has murder on his conscience as well as robbery, no wonder he was agitated when he rang up M. Baudin. But, professor, the question still remains, who is this chap who posed as Cartmell? Your suggestion that it was his body that was found in the tar boiler seems to put Sir Stanislaus out of the picture, doesn’t it?”

“I would point out that it was your suggestion, not mine, that the body was Cartmell’s,” Dr. Priestley said mildly.

Hanslet laughed. “We don’t quarrel about that, professor,” he said. “It was your suggestion that the body was either Patton’s or Cartmell’s, and since we know that it couldn’t be Patton’s, it must have been Cartmell’s. However, I was going to tell you about Sir Stanislaus. I’ve thought for some time that Patton must have had an accomplice in this affair. And the most likely person seemed to me to be Sir Stanislaus. In the first place, he concealed the true reason for the diamonds being brought to London. And in the second, his behaviour on the day they disappeared has always seemed to me rather odd. Why did he send his chauffeur to meet Patton that night at Swineshead Station instead of going himself?”



“Now, while I was at Grantham the other day I made a few discreet inquiries about Sir Stanislaus. As it happened the Grantham inspector, before his promotion, had been stationed at Swineshead as a sergeant, and he knew Sir Stanislaus pretty well. He told me that he was popularly supposed to have run through a lot of money and to have been pretty hard put to it from time to time to find any more. Lady Wherwell was a rich woman when he married her, but it’s doubtful whether she is still. And Holmden Hall is heavily mortgaged.”

“His father was that way inclined, so I’ve always heard,” Oldland remarked. “What is this man’s particular form of extravagance?”

“Horse-racing. They say that he’s never at home, but is always gadding about the country to some race-meeting or other. The inspector told me that there was a very popular local event on Wednesday the 19th and that he was sure to have been at it.”

“That might explain why he sent his chauffeur to meet Patton,” Oldland remarked. “Perhaps he didn’t get back from the races in time to go to the station himself.”

“I daresay you’re right,” Hanslet replied. “In any case, if the professor is on the right track Sir Stanislaus doesn’t come into the affair. I thought for an instant just now, when the professor showed us that Cartmell might have been Patton’s confederate, that Cartmell might have been Sir Stanislaus in disguise. But that won’t do, for Sir Stanislaus was very much alive when I met him at King’s Cross on Thursday afternoon. I’m bound to say, professor, that you’ve given us plenty of room for thought this evening. From this moment Jimmy and I shall work hand in hand. Two heads are better than one, even if they’re sheep’s heads as they say. Come along, Jimmy, we’ll get back to the Yard and have a chat about all this.”

When the two policemen had left the house, Oldland poured himself out another whisky and soda. He took a generous sip of it, then laid it down on the table beside him. “You always were an aggravating bloke, Priestley,” he said. “You’ve got an irritating knack of telling half a story and then shutting up like an oyster. I believe you’ve a pretty shrewd idea of what’s become of the Wherwell diamonds.”

“I may have my own ideas on the subject, but that is no excuse for indulging in conjecture,” Dr. Priestley replied. “I have absolutely no data upon which to form a theory, except that supplied by Hanslet and Waghorn. It is for them to piece together the clues which they have separately obtained. I emphasize the word ‘separately’ for I believe that had they been working jointly, they would by now have brought their cases to a satisfactory conclusion.”

"I'm bound to confess that the vital clues don't exactly leap to my eye," Oldland remarked.

"Because they have not been fully explored," Dr. Priestley replied. "Both Hanslet and Waghorn are in possession of facts which seem to me highly significant. But because they have not realized their significance, they have neglected them. The incident of the stolen bicycles is a case in point. The superintendent, believing that it had no connexion with his case, has taken no interest in it whatever. He did not even take the trouble to visit this place Lingby. My curiosity is sufficiently aroused for me to repair his omission. You and I, Harold, will take a convenient train to Grantham tomorrow morning."

"In that case I'll get off home," said Oldland, as he finished his drink. "With such a strenuous day ahead of you, you'll be glad to get to bed, I dare say. Good-night, both of you."

Next morning, Sunday, August 30th, Dr. Priestley and Harold reached King's Cross shortly before eleven o'clock. They caught the eleven-ten to Grantham and lunched on the train. On arriving at Grantham at one-six they hired a car outside the station and asked to be driven to Lingby. The driver took barely a quarter of an hour and the car set them down outside the local inn. Dr. Priestley told the driver to await them there and then asked a passer-by to direct them to Lingby Mill. He was informed that it was rather less than a mile from where they stood. But, as his informant warned him, there was nothing left of the place now, but the bare walls.

This information did not deter Dr. Priestley, and he and Harold set off on foot. Their way took them for some distance along a country lane, apparently very little used, for the grass verges had been allowed to grow unchecked.

At length they came to a high wall bordering the lane. In this wall was a wide gap with rotting posts on either side, where the entrance gates of the mill-yard had once hung. They passed through this gap to find themselves in a paved court. Grass and weeds had grown up between the stones and the whole place bore a look of utter desolation. At the further side of the court rose the gaunt shell of a roofless building, revealing through its unglazed windows the rusty limbs of some unwieldy machine.

Even in the sunlight of the August afternoon, the place had an air of almost terrifying loneliness. The only sound which greeted Dr. Priestley and Harold as they entered the courtyard was the hollow echo of their own footsteps. When these ceased an utter silence supervened. The two intruders upon this solitude might have been visitors to an uninhabited world.

Dr. Priestley looked critically round the courtyard. It measured perhaps eighty feet by fifty and was surrounded on all sides by a high wall which, having been stoutly built, had resisted the ravages of time and was still in reasonable repair. The only gaps in this wall were the ruined gateway by which they had entered the yard and the doorway of the mill itself, now almost filled up by a heap of rubbish.

“The gateway is amply wide enough to admit a car,” said Dr. Priestley. “Once within the yard here and driven close against the outer wall, it would be practically invisible from any one passing along the roadway. Especially towards sunset, when the shadow of the mill-house would be thrown across the yard.”

“There’s a mark on the stones inside the gateway which looks as if it had been made by the tire of a motor car,” Harold remarked.

“Very possibly. Unfortunately, we cannot identify the car from so indistinct a mark. But we should not, I think, be wasting our time if we instituted a search for something more tangible.”

Harold took the hint and began slowly to pace the courtyard, his eyes fixed upon the ground. It was not very long before he made a discovery. He caught sight of a glint of white metal half-hidden by the weeds which grew between the stones. Bending down to pick it up, he found that it was a sixpenny piece.

Dr. Priestley nodded his approval. “Excellent!” he exclaimed. “But this coin is no better evidence of identity than the supposed track of the motor car tire. It merely suggests that other people besides ourselves have been here comparatively recently. Perhaps we shall find other evidences of their visit.”

Thereupon Harold continued his search. Within the next few minutes, he found three more coins, two shillings and a penny. The positions in which he found them suggested that they had fallen upon one of the paving stones and rolled away to lie concealed by the grass and weeds.

“I can’t make it out,” said Harold, as he retrieved the fourth coin. “It looks as if somebody had dropped a pocketful of money on these stones. I suppose he picked up as many of the coins as he could see, but he can’t have wasted much time looking for these. They could have been found easily enough by any one who knew in which direction they had rolled.”

“That suggests either pressure of time or darkness—possibly both,” said Dr. Priestley gravely. “Our expedition to-day has not been entirely fruitless. If coins were dropped from this unknown person’s pocket other articles may

have been dropped as well. I should like you to continue your exertions a little longer, my boy.”

Once more Harold bent to his task. But he could find no more coins, however carefully he might grope among the joints between the stones. At last, however, he thrust aside a large dock leaf and as he did so, uttered a sharp exclamation. He bent down and picked up a small square of discoloured pasteboard, limp and earth-stained, but still recognizable as a railway ticket. He handed this triumphantly to Dr. Priestley. “That looks a little better, sir,” he exclaimed.

Dr. Priestley eagerly examined the piece of pasteboard. “It is indeed better,” he replied warmly. “Indeed, I did not dare to hope for such a convincing piece of evidence. This is the return half of a first-class ticket from King’s Cross to Grantham issued on August 19th of this year and bearing the number 4173. It is, in fact, the return half of the ticket purchased for Mr. Patton on the day of his journey.”

“I rather thought it might be,” replied Harold. “But what on earth made Patton come to a place like this? By jove, sir, you don’t think — —”

He stopped abruptly, but Dr. Priestley gazed at him benignly through his glasses. The discovery of the railway ticket had obviously put him into an excellent temper. “On the contrary, I think quite frequently,” he replied. “But your thoughts have obviously led you in a new direction. What is it?”

Emboldened by his employer’s manner, Harold ventured to complete his sentence. “You don’t think that the diamonds are hidden somewhere round here, do you, sir?”

“I am so doubtful of their still being hidden here that I do not propose to waste our time in a search for them,” Dr. Priestley replied quietly. “We have already been successful beyond our expectations. We will now walk back to the inn and let our car take us to the station. There is, I believe, a train to London at four-forty.”

They reached Westbourne Terrace a few minutes after seven o’clock. As soon as they had done so, Harold, on Dr. Priestley’s instructions, rang up Scotland Yard, leaving a message for Hanslet to come to Westbourne Terrace as soon as possible. The superintendent arrived just as eight o’clock struck, obviously not in the best of tempers.

“Well, here I am, professor,” he said. “I wasn’t at the Yard when your message came, because I take Sundays off whenever possible. But Jimmy was there and he passed the message on to me at home. I came along as quickly as I could, for Jimmy said that he thought the message was urgent.”

“I hope that your visit will compensate you for any inconvenience to which you may have been put,” Dr. Priestley replied. “Ah, there is the dinner gong. You will not, I hope, refuse to share our meal with us? And after that I will explain the reason for my apparently inconvenient summons.”

Hanslet laughed. “No wise man would refuse an invitation to dine with you, professor,” he said. “But I suppose it’s no use asking you for some sort of explanation first?”

“Not the slightest,” replied Dr. Priestley firmly. “While explanations were proceeding the soup would grow cold and the kitchen time-table would be completely disorganized. Let us go into the dining-room.”

Hanslet resigned himself to the inevitable. He did full justice to the meal, which was up to the high standard of Dr. Priestley’s cuisine. Then, when the three of them had adjourned to the study and Hanslet had been established in his favourite chair with a bottle of beer within his reach, Dr. Priestley offered his deferred explanation.

“It has always seemed to me that in the case of the Wherwell diamonds, your chain of facts possessed one very weak link. Up to a point the sequence of events was satisfactorily established. It is almost certain that Mr. Patton left King’s Cross by the four o’clock train on the nineteenth with the diamonds in his possession. There is, again, very little doubt that he left Grantham Station shortly after the arrival of that train at six-two. But here comparative certainty must give place to conjecture. What became of Mr. Patton during the hour immediately following his surrender of the outward half of his ticket?”

“My first idea was that he came back to the station, bought himself another ticket and caught the next train to London,” Hanslet replied. “But after your suggestions about Jimmy’s hearse and Patton’s possible confederate, I’m not so sure.”

“For my part I am now fully convinced that more than one person was concerned in the disappearance of the diamonds,” said Dr. Priestley. “Let us assume that this confederate was the driver of the hearse, either Cartmell or some other person. I have already pointed out that it is possible that Mr. Patton’s journey was continued from Grantham in the hearse.

“But an obvious difficulty presents itself. A hearse travelling along a main road among other traffic would not attract any particular attention. But a hearse standing in a station yard would certainly be noticed and its presence would be remembered. Further, if a passenger had entered the hearse which had then driven away, the incident would certainly have

caused some comment. The point is this. If the hearse were the vehicle in which Mr. Patton left Grantham, he certainly did not join it openly in the station yard.

“Where then did he join it? The answer to this question was suggested to me by your account of your conversation with the inspector at Grantham. The episode of the two bicycles led to the mention of Lingby Mill, described as a deserted spot five miles from Grantham. What more suitable spot could be found for the commencement of Mr. Patton’s journey as a passenger on the hearse?”

“Not having been there I can’t say,” said Hanslet without any very great show of interest.

“It is perhaps a pity that your curiosity was not sufficiently aroused. However, Harold and I, having nothing better to do, made an expedition there to-day. And I think I may say that our time and trouble are fully justified.”

“You’ve been to Lingby Mill?” Hanslet exclaimed incredulously. “What on earth made you do that, professor?”

“The insatiable curiosity of which I’ve never been able to cure myself,” replied Dr. Priestley, with a smile. “We found that the mill was indeed deserted and apparently very rarely visited. I could hardly have believed that on a Sunday afternoon in summer so unfrequented a spot could be found in the whole of England. However, by dint of search, Harold enabled me to discover traces of previous human occupation. I have here the results of his labours, which may interest you.”

From his desk Dr. Priestley produced an envelope which he handed to the superintendent. “You may care to open that,” he said.

Hanslet tore the envelope open and poured its contents into the palm of his hand. Two shillings, a penny, a sixpence, and a faded piece of pasteboard. He stared at these for a moment or two and then as he recognized the piece of pasteboard his eyes lighted up.

“By jove, a railway ticket!” he exclaimed. “First class Grantham to London. Why, it’s the return half of the ticket issued to Patton at King’s Cross!”

“You confirm my own suspicions,” said Dr. Priestley dryly. “And the ticket, I think, confirms my theory that it was at Lingby Mill that Mr. Patton met the hearse. If, indeed, it was the hearse and not some other vehicle.”

“Well, you’ve beaten me again, professor, and I’m the first to admit it,” said Hanslet. “But it’s not by any means clear to me yet. How far is Lingby Mill from Grantham Station?”

“Fully five miles. It took Harold and me nearly a quarter of an hour to drive from the station to the inn at Lingby.”

“Then how do you suggest that Patton got there? Did he walk all that distance carrying a suitcase and a satchel?”

“I think it most unlikely. But possibly the episode of the two stolen bicycles may suggest a means.”

“Why, what on earth can the bicycles have had to do with it?” Hanslet exclaimed.

“There is no proof that they had anything to do with it. But let us enter upon a little careful speculation. We calculated last night that the hearse might have reached the neighbourhood of Grantham at about five-thirty on the afternoon of the nineteenth. Let us suppose that the hearse was driven, not to Grantham but to Lingby Mill, by the man who called himself Cartmell. His intention, no doubt, was to meet Mr. Patton’s train and to convey him to the waiting hearse at Lingby Mill.

“Since the train was due at six-two he found himself with little more than half an hour in which to cover five miles. Realizing that he could not accomplish this feat on foot, he looked round for a more rapid means of transport. Fortune favoured him in the shape of this unattended bicycle belonging to the carpenter. He borrowed this and rode it into Grantham. There he abandoned it, met Mr. Patton and conveyed him to Lingby Mill.”

“Hold on a minute, professor,” Hanslet interrupted. “How did Cartmell convey Patton to Lingby Mill?”

“That question we will discuss later,” Dr. Priestley replied. “For the moment let us confine ourselves to speculation upon Cartmell’s movements.

“We will suppose that he and Mr. Patton arrived at Lingby Mill somewhere about half-past six. The position then was this. The hearse was more or less securely hidden in the yard of the mill. But there was also the conveyance which had brought Mr. Patton from the station and was now no longer required. This could not be left at Lingby Mill. Sooner or later it would be discovered and would form a valuable clue. It must be returned to the place from which it had come.

“What I believe to have happened is this. Cartmell left Mr. Patton and the hearse at Lingby Mill and drove the conveyance back to Grantham. Having disposed of it, he was again faced with the necessity of covering the distance between Lingby Mill and Grantham, but this time in the reverse direction. He was not anxious to leave Mr. Patton and the hearse longer than was absolutely necessary. The carpenter’s bicycle had served him well, but it would not be safe to use it again in case its loss should already have been

discovered and notified. He therefore borrowed a second bicycle and rode it back to Lingby Mill, where it was discovered by the local constable later that night. Upon his return to the mill the hearse and its occupants began their journey to Fallowchurch. You will, I think, find that the times of the theft of the respective bicycles are in accordance with this theory.

“Now, I believe we are in a better position to consider the nature of the conveyance used to take Mr. Patton to the mill. It was almost certainly a motor vehicle of some kind. Cartmell must have driven it himself, for he would not have cared to have a witness to his actions. He would not have ventured to hire a car to drive himself, for this would have led to too many inquiries. The most plausible alternative is, I think, that he used his own car for the purpose.”

“Hold on, there’s a snag there,” Hanslet exclaimed. “Didn’t Jimmy tell us that Cartmell’s car was driven into the Passway Garage at ten o’clock on Tuesday night and had been there ever since?”

“I see no reason why he should not have owned two cars,” Dr. Priestley replied. “The first was the green Comet GX 692 which he used for his masquerade at Fallowchurch. The second is at present entirely unknown to us. But there exists a very faint clue which may eventually lead to its identification. The second bicycle, as you were told, was stolen outside the Fountain public house which adjoins the garage of the South Lincolnshire Motor Company. That suggests that it was in this garage that the conveyance was deposited.”

“I’m going back again to Grantham by the first train to-morrow,” said Hanslet. “Perhaps the people at the garage may remember something about it. Do you suppose that Cartmell fetched the car from there, too?”

“I think it probable that the car had spent the greater part of Wednesday at some other garage,” Dr. Priestley replied. “Still assuming that Cartmell was the person concerned, let us try to follow his movements. It seems unlikely that he left the car at Grantham for any length of time. In all probability he deposited it there shortly before it would be required.

“Now I have here a copy of the inspector’s time-table of events. Two items upon it are significant to our present purpose. Cartmell left the green Comet car in the Passway Garage at 10 p.m. on the eighteenth. The hearse was called for at Reading at 12.30 p.m. on the nineteenth. Assuming that it was Cartmell who called for it, how had he occupied the intervening fourteen hours?”

Hanslet shook his head. “Not lying quietly at home, in bed, I imagine,” he suggested.



“He may have allowed himself a short rest,” Dr. Priestley replied. “The distance between London and Grantham is a hundred and twelve miles, which in a suitable car could be covered in between three and four hours. If Cartmell left London at four o’clock on the morning of the nineteenth, with his second, unidentified car, he would have reached Grantham by eight o’clock. He could have left his car in one of the garages there and caught the eight-thirty train which arrives at King’s Cross at ten twenty-eight. He could then have taken a taxi to Paddington and caught a train to Reading. There is one at ten forty-five which reached Reading at eleven thirty-six. This time of arrival would correspond with that of his visit to Messrs. Golder & Brown.”

Hanslet nodded. “That works out all right,” he agreed. “But I don’t suppose there was more than one other chap in the show besides Patton. It must have been Cartmell who collected the hearse. But he had changed his appearance pretty considerably by then. If I remember right he was described to Jimmy as a quiet, respectable-looking chap, dressed in black. I dare say Cartmell looked respectable enough without his false moustache and glasses and naturally he’d put on a suit of black clothes if he meant to drive a hearse about the country.

“And it wasn’t only Cartmell who changed his appearance. The railway ticket proves that. Patton’s suitcase contained some sort of disguise, you may be sure. I expect the first thing he did when he reached Lingby Mill was to strip off the clothes he had left London in. In doing so he dropped his loose change and the return half of his railway ticket on the ground. He picked up all he could see, but he didn’t like to waste time looking for the rest.”

“Something of the kind occurred, very possibly,” said Dr. Priestley. “No doubt you and the inspector will devote all your energies to endeavouring to trace this man Cartmell.”

Hanslet shrugged his shoulders. “The poor chap is traced already in one sense,” he replied. “There can’t be any reasonable doubt now that his was the body found in the tar boiler. But what we shall do is to try to find out who he really was. Even then I don’t know that we shall be a lot further towards laying our hands on Patton.”

“The evidence against Patton may be regarded as conclusive, I suppose?”

“I don’t see how it could be more so. There’s not a shadow of doubt that he left London with the diamonds in his satchel. He had led every one to suppose that his intention was to deliver them to Sir Stanislaus at Holmden Hall. Instead of that he breaks his journey at Grantham, and, as this railway ticket shows, went out to Lingby Mill. That in itself would take a bit of

explaining away. But it isn't all by any means. He took his passport with him, which is pretty definite proof that his real destination was not Holmden Hall, but somewhere abroad. Finally, he is heard of in France next day alive and well, though not unnaturally agitated. I don't think anybody would stand much chance in the face of facts like that.

"But, of course, that's only so far as the theft of the diamonds is concerned. The murder charge is going to be a bit more difficult. We shall have to know quite a lot more about the relations between Patton and Cartmell before we proceed with that. Well, I can't tell you how grateful I am for the discoveries you've made, professor. I know I ought to have gone to Lingby Mill and looked round for myself, but the significance of those confounded bicycles didn't occur to me. Now, if you don't mind, I'll get off home, for I want to make an early start for Grantham to-morrow."

Before Hanslet went to bed that night he got into touch with Jimmy, whom he told to meet him at King's Cross at half-past eight next morning. Jimmy duly kept the appointment and the two travelled together to Grantham by the 8.45 a.m. train. They secured a carriage to themselves, and during the journey Hanslet told Jimmy of the discovery of the railway ticket.

"That definitely links up Patton with Lingby Mill," Jimmy commented. "And I'm bound to confess that the professor's theory of the movements of the hearse sounds most plausible. But, actually, we haven't established any connexion between Patton and Lingby Mill on the one hand, and Cartmell and the hearse on the other."

"I'm hoping we'll be able to do that this morning," Hanslet replied. "We know at all events that Patton must have had a confederate. Somebody must have taken him to Lingby Mill and driven him away from there afterwards. That somebody may or may not have been Cartmell. But if it was Cartmell's body that was found in the tar boiler, that would account for his complete disappearance."

"I've been thinking about that over the week-end," said Jimmy. "If Cartmell was killed during the night of Wednesday, who sent Pantony that telegram on the following Monday? It's rather an interesting point, if you come to think about it."

"Oh, any one can send a telegram!" Hanslet replied scornfully.

"I know. But so far as we are aware nobody in London knew that Pantony was at the White Swan at Shipsfield."

"Patton knew, of course. You may bet that he was fully aware of every detail of the scheme. In fact, he probably worked them all out and Cartmell merely obeyed his orders."

“That’s just it,” said Jimmy. “But don’t forget that that telegram was sent from London. Your suggestion would imply that Patton, who was in Dunkerque on Thursday, had returned to London by Monday.”

“Hell!” exclaimed Hanslet violently. “That point hadn’t occurred to me. I made sure that the blighter was still abroad somewhere trying to get rid of the diamonds. But of course, it’s quite possible that he had disposed of them somehow and is safely back in this country. And I shouldn’t wonder if Sir Stanislaus is sheltering him. I’ve a very good mind to go on to Holmden Hall and have a look round, though I don’t suppose for a moment we should find Patton there.

“However, there’ll be time for that later. What we’ve got to do this morning is this. We’ve got to go round all the garages in Grantham and make inquiries. According to the professor, Cartmell must have parked his car early on the nineteenth and taken it out again shortly before six o’clock in the afternoon. He must have brought it back either to the same or to another garage between seven and half-past. Since he hasn’t had an opportunity of fetching it since then, it is probably still there. It will save time if we separate and take half the garages each. Our rendezvous if we find out anything can be the local police station. They know me there by this time.”

As soon as they arrived at Grantham they put this programme into operation. Hanslet began his quest at the garage of the South Lincolnshire Motor Company, which, from its proximity to the Fountain, seemed the most likely spot. He found, as he had hoped, that a record was kept of all the cars left there by their owners. This record showed that half a dozen cars had been left in the garage between 6.30 p.m. and 7.30 p.m. on the nineteenth. But the manager assured him that all of these, with one exception, belonged to regular customers who were known to him personally. The exception was a car with the number XYX 1035 which had been left at the garage at 7.05 p.m.

Hanslet made a note of the number. “Is the car still here?” he asked.

The manager consulted the register. “No, it was taken away at 4.30 p.m. on Saturday the twenty-second.”

“On Saturday!” Hanslet exclaimed. “I hardly expected that. You can’t tell me anything about the person who took it away, I suppose?”

“I’m afraid I can’t. But we’ll send for the chap whose business it is to issue and collect the garage tickets. He may remember something about it.”

The attendant was sent for and the manager showed him the register. “You’ve usually got a pretty good memory, Tom,” he said. “Do you

remember anything about this car, XYX 1035? It's a current London number, so the car must have been pretty well new."

Tom, a thoroughly intelligent-looking man, thought for a moment. "That will be that new fourteen-horse Solway sports saloon," he replied. "I remember noticing it when the chap drove it in here."

"Do you remember what the driver looked like?" Hanslet asked.

"Yes, I do. He was a middle-aged chap, clean shaven and dressed all in black with a bowler hat. I took him to be somebody's butler, for he said he'd just left his master at the station. He told me that the car would be garaged for two or three days, and asked me to see that the wings didn't get scratched for his master was very particular."

"Do you remember who fetched the car?"

"The same chap. He wanted the tank filled, and I put in ten gallons. He told me then that he was just going to meet his master at the station and asked me which was the best road to Swineshead."

"The devil he did!" Hanslet exclaimed. "You haven't seen him or the car since, I suppose?"

Tom was quite certain that he had not done so. He was able to add to his description of the car that it was quite new, looking as though it had not been driven many miles. Hanslet, fully satisfied with the information he had secured, proceeded to the police station.

Meanwhile, Jimmy had visited several other garages without success. It was not until he reached a comparatively small and inconspicuous establishment that his luck turned. Here he learnt that one morning, not long before, a stranger had left a car just before eight o'clock and had collected it about six o'clock the same afternoon.

This garage appeared to be a one-man show, and the owner, a stout, good-tempered man, did his best to satisfy Jimmy's curiosity.

"It was one morning the week before last," he said. "Wednesday or Thursday it must have been. No, it can't have been Thursday, for that's early closing day. I went out for an hour or two that afternoon and left the missus to mind the shop. It wasn't that day, I know, so it must have been Wednesday. And I remember the chap and the car, too, for it isn't often that strangers find their way here. They usually go to one of the bigger places where they get charged more and don't get half the attention I give them."

"You remember the driver of the car, you say?" Jimmy asked.

"I remember him well enough. He was round about forty, I should say, and looked and talked quite like a gentleman. What I noticed most about

him was that he was dressed all in black, just like an undertaker. I couldn't understand it until he told me that he had come in to attend a funeral in the town. I wished him good luck and then he cleared off, saying that he was going to find himself some breakfast somewhere."

"And he fetched the car again about six o'clock, you say?"

"That's right. It may have been a few minutes before six, I wouldn't swear to it. He came running in here in a terrible hurry, and said that he'd been kept much later than he had expected. He'd asked me in the morning to fill up the car, and I put five gallons into her. He paid me for that and for the garage and then went off."

"Did you happen to notice the number of the car?"

"I can't say that I did. But it was a smart-looking turn out and quite new by the look of it. One of those fourteen horse-power sports saloons that the Solway people are making such a song about."

Jimmy's inquiries were not confined solely to a possible car. It had occurred to him that if the tank of the hearse had been full when it left the neighbourhood of Grantham, the driver must have secured petrol somewhere. But his inquiries in this direction were entirely fruitless. No garage or filling station could remember supplying petrol to the driver of a strange hearse.

It was one o'clock when Jimmy reached the police station, where he found Hanslet impatiently awaiting him. The two hurriedly exchanged notes, then went to the railway station where they caught the 1.32 p.m. train back to London.

"The professor was right again, then," said Hanslet as the train started. "Your man and the car are the same as mine, there's no doubt about that. What's more, I've got the number of the car, so we'll be able to trace that as soon as we get back."

"There's more than a chance that the car was running under a false number," Jimmy suggested.

"You don't suppose I didn't think of that, do you?" Hanslet replied scornfully. "I asked the manager of the South Lincolnshire Garage if he had compared the number-plates with the number on the licence. And he told me that this was always done as a matter of routine in the case of a strange car. These chaps do it for their own protection, you know. They don't want stolen cars dumped upon them if they can help it."

"There are one or two other things I found out while I was waiting for you. Any one walking from Lingby Mill to Grantham would be bound to pass the cottage outside which the carpenter had left his bicycle. And I asked

about that spot where the bicycle was found. From what you tell me it can't be a hundred yards from the garage where you got news of the car. We've done a pretty good morning's work between us, I consider."

"We haven't found out yet who this chap was," Jimmy ventured. "We are supposing all along that he was Cartmell, but we've found nothing to prove it. It's always been my idea that the appearance of Cartmell was a pretty transparent disguise. Cartmell and this chap with the fourteen horse-power Solway, may well have been one and the same person. But — —"

"Go ahead, Jimmy," said Hanslet encouragingly. "But what?"

"If Cartmell drove the car away from the South Lincolnshire Motor Company's garage on Saturday the 22nd, it wasn't his body that was found in the tar boiler on Thursday the 20th."

"Even the professor wouldn't quarrel with the logic of that argument," Hanslet remarked. "I'm beginning to believe that three people and not two are concerned in the affair. First of all Patton, who was probably the ring-leader. Then Cartmell, whose identity we don't know, but whose job it was to pick up Patton at Lingby Mill. Both these people have shown signs of life since that confounded body of yours was found. From which one may guess that there was a third person of whom we know nothing. But why he should have been murdered completely passes my comprehension."

Upon their arrival at Scotland Yard, Hanslet's first action was to get into communication with the London County Council Registration Authority. Within a few minutes he had learnt that the registration number *YXX 1035* had been issued to Sir Stanislaus Wherwell of Holmden Hall, near Swineshead, through Messrs. Burrell & Shearer, motor car dealers of Piccadilly, as recently as August 13th.

"There you are, you see," he said as he repeated this information to Jimmy. "I rather expected something of the kind when I heard this morning that the chap had been making inquiries about the route to Swineshead. That pretty well settles it, I fancy. I've had my suspicions of Sir Stanislaus all along, but I couldn't exactly fit him into the plot. I was right when I said just now that there were three fellows in it. Patton, the man who called himself Cartmell, and Sir Stanislaus. But I think we'll go and see these folk Burrell & Shearer before we tackle Sir Stanislaus on the subject."

Messrs. Burrell & Shearer occupied imposing showrooms just off Piccadilly. Hanslet and Jimmy made their way straight there and inquired about the sale of a fourteen horse-power Solway sports saloon, the thirteenth.

The manager looked up his books and nodded. "That's right," he said. "If you want particulars you'd better talk to our Mr. Carter. He is the salesman who saw the deal through."

Mr. Carter was summoned. He turned out to be a well-groomed young man with an energetic and decisive manner. He remembered the sale of the Solway saloon perfectly well. "It was one of the easiest deals I've come across for a long while," he said. "Selling a car isn't as simple as selling a joint of beef, not by half. In nine cases out of ten, there's the question of another car being taken in part exchange, and very often there are hire purchase terms to be arranged as well. But in the case of this particular customer, there were no difficulties of any kind. He just walked in here, looked at one or two models, bought one of them and walked out."

"Do you remember what he looked like?" Hanslet asked.

"I think I could describe him fairly well. He was tall and smartly dressed, like a man who goes to a good tailor for his clothes. I should put him at somewhere between forty and fifty, clean-shaven, fair-haired and wearing a gold signet ring. I noticed his cheeks particularly. They were noticeably red as though he spent the greater part of his time in the open air. And he spoke in rather a loud voice, which put me off a bit at first. I soon found, though, that he didn't mean to be in the least offensive.

"As I say, he walked straight into the showroom and said that he wanted to buy a car. Well, there are cars and cars, as you probably know, so I asked him if he had any idea what he wanted. He said that he wanted a smart car for his wife to drive herself. It must be fast, of medium power, and not too expensive.

"Well, as it happened we had the very thing. Only the day before we'd taken delivery of a fourteen horse-power Solway sports saloon. It had been cleaned and polished up, and was standing in the middle of the showroom here. First of all I showed my customer one or two others which I knew wouldn't exactly suit him. It's not good salesmanship to produce the article you want to sell straight away. Much better show your buyer one or two others first. Then, when he sees exactly what he's got in mind, he's so pleased that he probably snaps it up at once."

"I see," said Hanslet dryly. "And when you showed your customer the Solway, he fell for it at once, I suppose?"

"As soon as he set eyes upon it, he said it was the very thing he wanted. I offered him a trial run, of course, but he said he had no time for that kind of thing. He would buy the car on the strength of our reputation and that of the Solway people.

“Then we got down to business. I started off by trying to find out as tactfully as possible if there was another car to be taken in part exchange, and whether he wanted deferred terms. But he very soon cut me short. He said that he wasn’t parting with either of his own cars and that he was accustomed to pay cash for things. He produced a wallet and laid the purchase price, two hundred and seventy-five pounds, down on the table in front of me. Five fifty-pound notes and twenty-five one-pound notes.”

“Did you take the number of the fifty-pound notes?” Hanslet asked.

“It wasn’t my business. But they’ll have done so at the office, sure enough. Well, I got his money and all I wanted then were his instructions. He told me that he would want delivery of the car within the next three or four days. He asked me to be sure and get it registered in his name. He gave me his name and address, Sir Stanislaus Wherwell of Holmden Hall, Swineshead, Lincolnshire. I told him what the insurance and registration would come to and he paid me for them with more notes.

“The arrangement that we came to about his taking delivery was this. I said I’d get on to the County Council and the insurance people at once, and get a number and a covering note. Meanwhile, I’d have the car taken round to our service depot in the Harrow Road where it would be looked over, filled up and the number plate fitted.

“I didn’t see him again until the morning of Monday the 17th, when he came in here between eleven and half-past. He told me that he’d come to take delivery of the car and that he was going to drive it to Swineshead straight away. I took him round in a taxi to our place in the Harrow Road, satisfied myself that the car was in order and handed it over to him. He drove off and I haven’t seen or heard of him since.”

“You’d recognize him if you saw him again, I suppose?” Hanslet asked.

“Oh, I should know him again right enough,” replied Mr. Carter with conviction.

It turned out that the office had taken numbers of the notes for fifty pounds. Having secured these, Hanslet and Jimmy left the premises of Messrs. Burrell & Shearer.

“Well, that’s all plain sailing,” said the former triumphantly. “I think we’ve got on the track of this affair at last.”

“I’m not so sure,” Jimmy replied doubtfully. “I’ve been through all this before. I thought I’d traced the ownership of the Comet car, GX 692, but unfortunately the registered owner didn’t exist.”

“Ah, but Sir Stanislaus does exist,” said Hanslet. “I’ve spoken to him myself, and what’s more, he’s a friend of the chief’s. I’m rather wondering



what he'll say when I tell him that Sir Stanislaus is concerned in this affair. But I'm not going to do that just yet. I promised the professor that I'd go and see him again when there were any fresh developments to report. We'll slip round to Westbourne Terrace this evening after he's had his dinner."

Dr. Priestley welcomed the two policemen graciously enough. He listened to Hanslet's account of their adventures in Grantham and the information which they had obtained from Mr. Carter. "You should now be in a position to identify the criminal," he said quietly.

"It's not a case of the criminal, but of a gang of three," Hanslet replied. "Two of them we know already. Patton made off with the diamonds. Sir Stanislaus was in the plot, but what part he played beyond buying this car I don't yet know exactly. But we've found out where he got the money to buy it with. Patton supplied it. The notes with which Sir Stanislaus paid for the car have been traced. They were issued by the Holborn branch of the London and Kensington Bank to Messrs. Patton & Fairfield on July 23rd last.

"Either Wherwell or Patton murdered the third member of the gang and chucked his body into the tar boiler. He, of course, was the man who called himself Cartmell, but who he really was we haven't been able to find out yet."

Dr. Priestley's face remained inscrutable. "You are still convinced that Mr. Patton stole the diamonds," he said.

"Well, professor, that's the one thing that is established beyond the possibility of doubt," Hanslet replied patiently. "He walked out of Grantham Station with the diamonds in his possession and we know that he bolted with them to France. If that isn't stealing, I should like to know what is."

"The facts as you present them certainly suggest theft, but they seem to be capable of an entirely different interpretation. To begin with, it is possible that when Mr. Patton left Grantham Station, he had no intention whatever of stealing the diamonds."

"Then why did he leave the station?" Hanslet demanded. "Why didn't he complete his journey as he had arranged with Sir Stanislaus?"

"It seems fairly certain that after Mr. Patton left Grantham Station he was driven to Lingby Mill, probably in this car, XYX 1035. And no doubt he entered the car willingly. But that is no proof of his intention to steal the diamonds."

"Oh, come now, professor!" Hanslet remonstrated. "If he hadn't meant to steal the diamonds he wouldn't have gone joy-riding with them. And how else are you going to explain his behaviour?"

“Easily enough. You will remember that Mr. Patton, in the course of his journey to Swineshead, had to change at Grantham. Suppose that when he stepped out of the London train he was met by some one he knew and trusted. This person told him that he had a car waiting and would drive him straight to Holmden Hall, thereby avoiding the inconvenience of waiting half an hour for the Swineshead train.”

“Meaning by some person he knew and trusted, Sir Stanislaus, of course. I’m bound to say that’s an ingenious idea, professor, but it won’t wash. The next thing, I suppose, was that Sir Stanislaus drove him to Lingby Mill and there relieved him of the diamonds. But in that event how do you account for Patton’s bolting to France and lying doggo there all this time?”

“What proof have you that Mr. Patton bolted to France?” the professor asked.

“I thought I’d explained all that long ago, professor. First of all there’s that telephone call to M. Baudin in Brussels that Thursday afternoon. Then there’s the fact that Patton took his passport with him before he started on his journey. Finally, there’s the fact that this passport was discovered on the quayside at Folkestone. You couldn’t want more conclusive proof than that.”

“I could and I do,” Dr. Priestley replied. “Let us take the telephone message first. Have you traced the place of origin of this call?”

“No, it’s not worth while, for there’s not the least doubt that M. Baudin received it. You’re not going to suggest that M. Baudin is also in the plot, I suppose?”

“I see no necessity for such a suggestion. I understand that M. Baudin and Mr. Patton were not personally acquainted with each other.”

“According to Mr. Fairfield, though they had frequently corresponded, they had probably never met. But M. Baudin was on sufficiently good terms with Patton for him to wait up half the night.”

“What guarantee had M. Baudin that it was actually Patton who spoke to him? Since he did not know him personally, he could not recognize his voice.”

“Who else could have had an object in telephoning such a message? Besides, there’s this about it. Only two people could have known that M. Baudin was on terms of close business relationship with the firm of Patton & Fairfield. These were the two partners themselves. Fairfield, as we know from an independent source, was in Paris at the time the call was put through. That fixes Patton as the caller beyond a doubt.”

“Very well,” said Dr. Priestley. “Now let us turn to the matter of the passport. How do you know that it was in Mr. Patton’s possession when he

started on his journey?"

"Because after his departure it couldn't be found in the place where he always kept it. Two people, McNaught and Mr. Fairfield looked for it there, independently and in my presence."

"They had no difficulty in opening the drawer in which it should have been?"

"None whatever, since it wasn't locked."

"Exactly, the drawer was not locked. Therefore, I maintain that any one gaining access to Mr. Patton's room during the days preceding his departure could have taken the passport. Mr. Patton would probably not have noticed the loss of the document until he required it. And if some one had indeed stolen the passport its discovery at Folkestone is no proof of Mr. Patton's guilt."

"But look here, professor," said Hanslet persuasively. "If Patton didn't bolt to France, what on earth was the point of the telephone call and the monkeying about with the passport?"

"The object in both cases was, no doubt, to mislead the police," Dr. Priestley replied. "It was an essential of the plot that you should believe that Mr. Patton had gone abroad with the object of disposing of the diamonds there."

Hanslet shrugged his shoulders. "You seem convinced that he didn't go abroad, professor," he said. "In that case perhaps you can give me a clue to his present whereabouts."

"I have very little doubt that his remains are in the cemetery at Fallowchurch," Dr. Priestley replied gravely. "In my opinion everything points to him having been murdered and to the man calling himself Cartmell as being guilty of the crime."

"On the theory, I suppose, that Cartmell and Patton were in the plot together and quarrelled over the division of the spoils, or something like that."

Dr. Priestley shook his head. "I think not," he replied. "I believe that Mr. Patton was entirely innocent, that he fully intended to deliver the diamonds to Sir Stanislaus Wherwell at Holmden Hall that Wednesday evening, and that he was the victim of a peculiarly diabolical murder. I will, if you like, explain my reasons for this belief."

"I wish you would, professor," said Hanslet eagerly.

"Very well then, let us once more have recourse to the inspector's diary of Cartmell's movements. From it we will select certain dates. First, August

5th and 6th. During these dates Cartmell's car was garaged at Folkestone. Now Folkestone, as you are already aware, is a port of embarkation for the Continent. It does not escape my notice that Cartmell may have crossed to Boulogne on the fifth and returned from there on the sixth. The possibility of his having travelled to France and having spent several hours there on those particular dates may not be without significance.

"Now let us turn to Thursday, August 13th. On that date we are told that Cartmell left Fallowchurch for London by an early train, returning that evening. It was on the thirteenth, you tell me, that the Solway saloon car was purchased from Messrs. Burrell & Shearer."

"You're suggesting that Sir Stanislaus was the man who posed as Cartmell," said Hanslet. "A glimmering of that idea has entered my head already. But there's just one objection. It concerns that telephone message again. If it wasn't sent by Patton it must have been sent by Cartmell. But at the very time that it was sent Sir Stanislaus was sitting in my room at the Yard. Dash it all, professor, your explanation only makes things more impossible than ever!"

"Perhaps you will allow me to proceed," replied Dr. Priestley patiently. "The fact remains that the car was purchased on the thirteenth and driven away from the service depot in the Harrow Road on the seventeenth. Reference to the inspector's diary shows that Cartmell was in London on both those dates.

"Now let us turn to the entries for the fourteenth and fifteenth. Cartmell arrived at Folkestone on the morning of the fourteenth and leaves again on the afternoon of the fifteenth. He may have again crossed to Boulogne. On the other hand Folkestone is only a short distance from Dover. He may, on this occasion, have visited Ostend via Dover. If so, he would have found it unnecessary to produce a passport for, as I mentioned the other day, weekend passengers do not require them. The inspector has mentioned the incident of Cartmell's visit to the bathroom in the hotel at Folkestone. He suggested that this visit may have been for the purpose of discarding his disguise. Such a step would have been necessary preliminary to his travelling with a passport issued to him in his true personality. When travelling without a passport, however, he could have discarded his disguise upon the steamer itself without attracting attention. But perhaps the inspector knows of some fact which would invalidate this theory."

"I don't know of any, sir," Jimmy hastened to reply. "It's quite possible that Cartmell was abroad during the night that I supposed him to be at Folkestone."

“But what did he want to go abroad for while the diamonds were still in London?” Hanslet asked.

“The significance of Cartmell’s visits to the Continent, if indeed they took place, may become apparent to you later. But let us return to Monday, August 17th. It has already been suggested that Cartmell may have visited the offices of Messrs. Patton & Fairfield about eight o’clock that evening. The man seen by the policeman Bidwell did not resemble the man who posed as Cartmell. But Cartmell in that disguise, must have entered the train at Fallowchurch shortly after nine o’clock. If, then, the visitor to Hatton Garden was Cartmell, he must have altered his appearance between eight and nine o’clock that evening. This, I think, is a point worth bearing in mind. Hitherto, superintendent, you have imagined that this man Cartmell, or some other person, visited the office in order to consult with Mr. Patton. You have not, I think, considered the possibility that the visit was made entirely without Mr. Patton’s knowledge.”

“I considered the possibility as soon as Mr. Fairfield mentioned the incident,” Hanslet replied. “But how did the fellow get inside the place if there was nobody there to admit him? Next morning there was no trace of forcible entry or anything having been disturbed, according to the chief clerk, McNaught.”

“It would not be impossible for a suitably equipped person to enter the premises without leaving any traces of his having done so. But we need not labour that point for the moment. Let us suppose that, in fact, Cartmell did obtain access to the office on the evening of the seventeenth. And let us suppose that he perused the correspondence files which he found there. He would find Mr. Patton’s letter to Sir Stanislaus Wherwell containing the details of his proposed journey with the diamonds on the following Wednesday to Holmden Hall. He would also find Sir Stanislaus’s telegram agreeing to the proposal. He would thus learn that Mr. Patton was to leave London by the four o’clock train on the nineteenth. A study of the time-table would show him that to reach Swineshead by this train a change at Grantham and a delay of half an hour was involved. How does this possibility appeal to you, superintendent?”

“Not very powerfully, I’m afraid, professor,” Hanslet replied doubtfully. “You say that Cartmell need not have been in league with Patton. If he wasn’t, who in the world told him that there was any likelihood of the diamonds being returned to Holmden Hall? Only Sir Stanislaus and the people in Patton & Fairfield’s office knew about that. And if Cartmell didn’t know about the diamonds, what did he visit the office at all for? You’re not

suggesting that he looked in merely on the chance of picking up information which might be valuable to him?"

"No, I am not suggesting that," said Dr. Priestley quietly. "I believe that Cartmell knew all about the diamonds from the first, and that his whole procedure from the time that Sir Stanislaus brought them to London was inspired by his knowledge."

"Then he must have been in league either with Sir Stanislaus or with somebody in Patton & Fairfield's office," Hanslet insisted. "And if he was, why did he visit the office on the Monday evening? His confederate, whoever he was, could have informed him of the arrangements that had been made. Anyhow, I don't see where all this speculation is leading us to. Certainly not to the true identity of Cartmell. Or, for that matter, to the present whereabouts of the diamonds. Look here, professor. You've told us your idea of what became of Patton. Won't you tell us your idea of what's become of the diamonds?"

Dr. Priestley smiled. "My idea is that they are safely locked up in Messrs. Patton & Fairfield's safe at their premises in Hatton Garden," he replied.

Hanslet stared at Dr. Priestley in amazement. "Do you mean that they never left London after all?" he demanded.

But Jimmy, whose imagination was more lively than his superior's, suddenly sat bolt upright in his chair. "By jove, I believe I've got it!" he exclaimed.

Dr. Priestley turned to him encouragingly. "Perhaps you will unfold your theory to us, inspector," he said.

But Jimmy hesitated. "I'd like one more hint first, sir," he replied. "It's all a matter of comparing the time-table of events, isn't it?"

"I have myself found such a comparison extremely helpful," Dr. Priestley replied. "I wonder what conclusion you will derive from it."

Jimmy glanced at Hanslet. "It's not really my case, you know, sir," he said. "I've only been working as the superintendent's assistant."

"It's half your case, anyhow, Jimmy, my lad," Hanslet remarked generously. "If you can see what the professor's been driving at all this time, go ahead and tell us, and don't mind me."

Thus encouraged, Jimmy took out his notebook, and studied it for a few moments in silence.

"I think one ought to start as long ago as July 29th," he began slowly. "That is the first date upon which we have any record of Cartmell. He

appeared at Mutley Street at eight o'clock that evening and engaged a room there.

"This date was the Wednesday before Bank Holiday. It was, therefore, the last day on which Mr. Fairfield attended the office before he went away. Mr. McNaught told the superintendent that Mr. Fairfield started his holiday on the Thursday before Bank Holiday. Mr. Fairfield's first stopping place was presumably Brussels, for on the following Saturday Mr. Patton received a letter from him posted there on Thursday evening.

"Cartmell is next heard of on August 4th. We have no evidence of how he spent his time in the interval. But on August 4th, the day after Bank Holiday, he collected the Comet car, GX 692, from the Passway Garage and drove it to Fallowchurch. From this time until his final disappearance we have a fairly complete record of his movements. On the morning of August 5th, the day after his arrival at Fallowchurch, he left there and did not return until the evening of the following day. His car was garaged at Folkestone during the interval. We have no trace of his movements from the time he left the car in the garage until he picked it up again. The professor has suggested that he may have crossed the Channel in the interval."

At this point Dr. Priestley interposed. "One moment, inspector," he said. "Harold, will you be good enough to find the Southern Railway Continental time-table. Now, inspector, at what time was Cartmell last seen in Folkestone on the 5th?"

Jimmy referred to his diary. "He entered the Four-in-Hand at about a quarter-past five," he replied. "He was not seen after he had had tea and gone to the bathroom. Presumably he left the hotel somewhere about six o'clock."

Dr. Priestley turned to Harold. "What does your time-table suggest?" he asked.

"A boat leaves Folkestone for Boulogne at 6.25 p.m.," Harold replied. "It reaches Boulogne at seven thirty-five and the connecting train reaches Paris at 11.10 p.m."

Dr. Priestley nodded. "What time did Cartmell fetch his car from Folkestone garage on the sixth?" he asked.

"About 6 p.m., sir," Jimmy replied.

This time Harold did not wait to be prompted. "A train leaves Paris at 12.15 p.m. to connect with a boat at Calais which reaches Dover at 4.55 p.m. There is a train from Dover at five fifty-six which reaches Folkestone at six-sixteen."

Again Dr. Priestley nodded. "It is quite possible that Cartmell travelled by this train. If so, he would have an hour in Dover in which to resume his disguise. The public lavatory at Dover Marine Station would have served his purpose well enough. Cartmell, then, may have been in Paris from midnight on the fifth until midday of the sixth. Does that suggest anything to you, inspector?"

"Not by itself, sir," Jimmy replied cautiously. "The only other reference to those dates is in a piece of information obtained by the superintendent. M. Le Maistre informed the Paris Sureté that Mr. Fairfield called upon him on the morning of the sixth.

"The next significant date is the thirteenth. The Solway car was sold by Mr. Carter of the firm of Burrell & Shearer's on that day. It is supposed that Cartmell was in London on the thirteenth. The next day Cartmell left the Comet car at Taylor's garage, Folkestone, about 10.15 a.m."

He paused and glanced at Harold, who consulted his time-table. "There's a train from Folkestone at ten forty-six which reaches Dover at eleven o'clock," he said. "The Ostend boat leaves Dover at twelve-fifty and reaches Ostend at four-ten."

"What time does the connecting train reach Brussels?" Jimmy asked.

"6.25 p.m.," Harold replied.

"On the following day, Saturday, August 5th, Cartmell collected his car from Taylor's Garage about 8.30 p.m.," Jimmy continued. "How does that fit in with the connexion from Brussels?"

"A train leaves Brussels at 2.02 p.m. connecting with the boat from Ostend which reaches Dover at 7.35 p.m. There's a train from Dover at 8.13 p.m. which reaches Folkestone at 8.33 p.m."

"According to M. Baudin, Fairfield visited him during the morning of the 15th," said Jimmy quietly.

"Here, what are you getting at!" exclaimed Hanslet impatiently. "You're not suggesting that Mr. Fairfield rigged himself up as Cartmell, are you? That's merely ridiculous."

"Why is it ridiculous?" Dr. Priestley asked.

"Because it simply doesn't make sense," Hanslet replied. "Why — —"

Dr. Priestley held up his hand. "One moment," he said. "Let us hear if the inspector has any other dates to compare."

"I'm coming to the most significant date of all," said Jimmy. "Thursday, August 20th, the day after Mr. Patton's journey. The hearse was left outside the Green Bear at Fallowchurch during the early hours of that morning. The



driver was presumably Cartmell, but I have hitherto been able to discover no trace of him after he abandoned the hearse. But I believe now that he made his way across the Channel as soon as possible. He would hardly have ventured to take a train at Fallowchurch Station. But the next station down the line, Staplehurst, is only three or four miles distant. What time is the first train from Staplehurst to Folkestone, Merefield?"

"There's a train from Staplehurst at seven-one which gets to Folkestone at eight twenty-four," Harold replied. "The next boat from either Folkestone or Dover is the ten fifty-five from Folkestone. A connecting train from Boulogne reaches Paris at 3.47 p.m."

"On the afternoon of the twentieth, Mr. Fairfield visited M. Le Maistre. We are told that the interview came to an end somewhere before six o'clock."

"That's all very well," exclaimed Hanslet impatiently. "You're selecting the facts which happen to fit in with your theory and neglecting the rest. The professor has accused me of that very crime often enough. You haven't explained Patton's telephone call to M. Baudin on the afternoon of the twentieth, nor how his passport came to be found on the quay at Folkestone."

"I dare say the professor could explain both those things," replied Jimmy, not anxious to incur his superior's wrath.

Dr. Priestley smiled. "I have no doubt that the inspector's ideas upon the subject coincide with mine," he said. "Let us deal with the telephone call first. I have already pointed out that M. Baudin is not familiar with Mr. Patton's voice. I will now point out a detail connected with the reception of this call. It was not taken by M. Baudin himself, but by one of his clerks. M. Baudin was informed that Mr. Patton wished to speak to him on the telephone. He gave instructions that the caller should be put through to him. He therefore had no knowledge of the source of origin of the call.

"Upon being put through to M. Baudin, the caller introduced himself. We do not know exactly what formulas he employed, but we can assume that it was something like this. 'This is Mr. Patton of Messrs. Patton & Fairfield, calling from Dunkerque.' M. Baudin would naturally accept the statement without inquiry. If the caller said that he was speaking from Dunkerque, there was no reason to doubt it. But there is no proof either that the caller was Mr. Patton or that he was in Dunkerque at the time. The call may have been put through from Paris. And it is significant, I think, that it was put through very shortly after Mr. Fairfield had left the office of M. Le Maistre.

“The discovery of the passport need present no difficulty. Once we assume that Mr. Cartmell and Mr. Fairfield were one and the same our problem becomes greatly simplified. To begin with, Constable Bidwell’s observation is justified. It was indeed Mr. Fairfield whom he saw in Hatton Garden on the evening of the 17th. Further, the difficulties attending the entrance of a stranger upon the premises of Messrs. Patton & Fairfield do not arise. Mr. Fairfield himself informed you, superintendent, that each partner possessed his own key. Nor did Mr. Fairfield, in his own personality, arouse any suspicion by his action, as the policeman’s behaviour proved.”

“What do you mean by that exactly, professor?” Hanslet asked.

“I mean this. Bidwell, as soon as he set eyes upon the familiar figure, was convinced that he was Mr. Fairfield. Perhaps my meaning will be clearer if I say fully satisfied rather than convinced. It was not until the conversation with Mr. Fairfield and subsequently with you that this satisfaction was in any way shaken. Had he suspected that it was a stranger who had come out of Messrs. Patton & Fairfield’s office, he would have investigated the matter immediately. As it was he took no further notice of the incident.

“Now exactly what was Fairfield’s object in visiting the office? He had, I think, two ends in view. The first, of course, was to inspect the correspondence between his partner and Wherwell. You may ask how it was that he timed his visit so opportunely. The answer is, I think, that this was not his first call. He had probably been to Hatton Garden on each occasion when he came up to London from Fallowchurch.

“His second aim was to secure Mr. Patton’s passport. He knew perfectly well where it was kept and guessed that if he removed it his partner would not miss it before the following Wednesday. In my opinion the theft of the passport was a very clever move. Immediately its loss was discovered it would naturally be assumed that Mr. Patton had taken it with him on his journey. The inference was that it was his intention to go abroad. In other words, that he had intended to appropriate the diamonds for himself before he started from London.”

“Our friend Fairfield seems to have planned his crime with considerable ingenuity,” Oldland remarked. “I wish, Priestley, you’d tell us, in narrative form, as they say, exactly how he set about it.”

Dr. Priestley smiled. “Any continuous narrative must involve some conjecture,” he replied. “However, in order to make my theory perfectly plain I will risk that for once. You will find, I think, that in no case does my conjecture contradict the facts as at present known.

“It is impossible to say when the idea of the crime first occurred to Fairfield. Probably very soon after Sir Stanislaus Wherwell brought the diamonds to London. It was very soon obvious that Sir Stanislaus hoped to secure more money than the diamonds were worth. If he persisted in his demands the diamonds would not be sold and would sooner or later be returned to Holmden Hall. If he consented to accept a more moderate figure, the diamonds would probably change hands. And during their transfer there might be a chance of acquiring them.

“It is apparently Mr. Fairfield’s custom to take his holiday abroad every year. Ostensibly he did so this year. No doubt he left England on July 30th and returned on August 21st after receipt of Mr. McNaught’s telegram. No doubt, again, at intervals during this period he communicated with his firm from various places abroad. He went so far as to visit the business associates of the firm, such as M. Baudin and M. Le Maistre. But I maintain that there is no evidence whatever that he remained abroad during the whole of the period. And it is significant that the dates upon which there is evidence of his being abroad correspond with those upon which sight is lost of Cartmell.

“It was, of course, essential to Fairfield’s scheme that he should keep himself informed as to the fate of the diamonds. Had he asked his partner to keep him informed, suspicion might have been aroused after the event. Since he had access to the office it was much safer for him to look through the correspondence periodically. That is why I have suggested that he visited the office at fairly frequent intervals.

“His principal object at this stage was to supply himself with an apparent alibi. He wished it to be thought that he was abroad uninterruptedly from July 30th until after the commission of the crime. If, therefore, he wished to return to England during the period, it would be necessary for him to adopt a second personality.

“The personality of Cartmell was well adapted to his purpose. What connexion could there be between Cartmell the commercial traveller conducting some confidential business with Fallowchurch as his centre, and Mr. Fairfield, the prosperous diamond merchant on holiday abroad? Further, the disguise was a particularly easy one to assume or to discard. You already know, I think, my views upon disguises. Shall we say that it would be impossible for Harold to disguise himself so effectually that the inspector, meeting him every day, would not recognize him. But if Harold adopted some simple disguise and went to some place where he was not known and called himself John Smith, nobody would have any reason to suspect his true identity.

“Fairfield adopted the simplest disguise possible. I do not suppose that his apparatus went beyond a false moustache, a pair of spectacles and some articles of shabby and threadbare clothing. His strong point was, that no keen observer was ever likely to see him in both of his personalities—the true and the false. He could convert himself from Fairfield to Cartmell or vice versa in a very few minutes. He was thus enabled to appear at Fallowchurch as Cartmell and very shortly afterwards in Paris or Brussels as Fairfield.

“Let me cite an example of the rapidity of his metamorphosis. The occasion of his visit to the office on the 17th. He was seen by Bidwell as Fairfield, yet an hour later he must have joined the train as Cartmell. This suggests that he had some convenient place at hand in which to assume his disguise. Fairfield himself told you, I think, superintendent, that his flat in Bloomsbury was conveniently near his office.”

Hanslet nodded. “That’s right, professor,” he replied. “It didn’t strike me at the time how conveniently near it was.”

“Your theory certainly appeals to me,” said Oldland. “I’m deeply interested in Fairfield’s motives at this stage. No doubt he adopted the Cartmell disguise to enable him to return to England when convenient. But did he stay in England only to watch the developments regarding the diamonds?”

“I do not think so,” Dr. Priestley replied. “I think that he had already evolved the outline of the crime. Sooner or later the diamonds would leave London, and it was during their transit that Fairfield had determined to acquire them. This would almost necessarily involve the murder of the carrier. And Fairfield had already evolved a plan for committing this murder with very little risk to himself. The victim’s body was to be rendered unrecognizable, and the murderer’s apparent personality was to disappear before the crime was committed. This was the problem which he presented to you, inspector. I venture to say that but for certain coincidences between the facts discovered by you and those discovered by the superintendent, the problem would have remained insoluble.

“Fairfield’s employment of Pantony as an unconscious agent in his drama was, I think, highly ingenious. Pantony’s disfigurement made him conspicuous wherever he went. He and Cartmell disappeared together, leaving clues behind them which could not fail to be discovered. Of these the most important was the purchase of the hearse. It had certainly been used to convey the unidentifiable body to the tar boiler. The obvious deduction was that Cartmell had murdered Pantony for the money which he was known to possess. True, Pantony would eventually reappear, but in the

interval Fairfield had gained the time which was so essential to him. It was in order to perfect this plan that Fairfield took up his residence at the Green Bear at Fallowchurch.

“No doubt he selected Fallowchurch deliberately. It is approximately half-way between London and the Channel ports. And he would be compelled to visit both during the preliminary period. Further, it was extremely improbable that any one who knew him in his business capacity would visit Fallowchurch. No doubt he realized that the Green Bear would afford him a perfectly safe base of operations.

“Having assumed the rôle of a commercial representative of some kind, he would be bound to carry it out. This, I think, accounts for his daily visits to the surrounding towns, where he took good care to leave traces of his passage. He was not anxious to conceal himself. Far from it. He wished the personality of Cartmell to become as widely known as possible.

“We come now to Monday, August 17th. I am assuming that Fairfield, during his visit to London on the 13th, had visited the office. He had ascertained then that Sir Stanislaus Wherwell had not modified his demands. It was not difficult for him to guess that Mr. Patton would very shortly refuse to be any longer responsible for the diamonds. This explains his purchase of the Solway car. Two cars were necessary for him. The Comet car was already associated with Cartmell, and no suspicion of Cartmell being in any way associated with the theft of the diamonds must ever be aroused.

“The fact that the notes with which the Solway car was purchased were originally issued to Messrs. Patton & Fairfield has, I think, a different significance from that which the superintendent attaches to it. I believe that these notes were purchased from his firm by Mr. Fairfield before his departure, and were still in his possession on the 17th.

“On that day Fairfield learnt that the diamonds were to be returned in two days time. It was necessary for him to take immediate action. The inspector has already unravelled for us the details of this action. One point will serve to illustrate Fairfield’s attention to detail. He wished it to be thought that the body which would be found in the tar boiler was that of Pantony. Also that Pantony had been murdered by Cartmell. This illusion could be strengthened by providing a clue to murder in the Comet car. He knew well enough that a parcel of bullock’s liver would provide a most suggestive stain. No doubt he threw the liver away by the roadside before he reached London. He was probably unaware that expert examination can differentiate between human and bovine blood.

“We do not know what he did with the Solway car after driving it away from the service station. I think in all probability that he deposited it in some garage near his own flat. On the evening of the 18th, having left the Comet car at the Passway Garage, he went home and removed the Cartmell disguise. Neither that nor the Comet car would ever be required again. I do not suppose that he assumed any alternative disguise beyond a black suit suitable for the driver of a hearse.

“We have already discussed his probable actions during the next twenty-four hours. I have no doubt that he drove the Solway car to Grantham and left it in the garage, where the inspector heard news of it. He then went to Reading by train, collected the hearse and drove it to Lingby Mill. Stealing a bicycle, he rode to Grantham and took out the Solway car. In this car he drove to the station, where he awaited the arrival of Mr. Patton’s train.

“This I think is one of the most interesting points in connexion with the crime. It was Fairfield’s intention to make it appear that his partner had absconded with the diamonds. His subsequent conversation with you, superintendent, might be described as masterly. While apparently refusing to believe in Mr. Patton’s guilt, yet he demonstrated that there was no possible alternative. In no circumstances whatever, would Mr. Patton have discontinued his journey at Grantham without taking steps for the safe custody of the diamonds. This is what Fairfield impressed upon you. You, finding no evidence whatever of force having been employed, naturally assumed that Mr. Patton’s conduct proved that he had stolen the diamonds.

“But there were circumstances in which Mr. Patton might have behaved as he did, and yet been perfectly innocent of any intention of theft. And those circumstances I believe to have been as follows.

“When Mr. Patton left the London train at Grantham he was met on the platform by Fairfield. What explanation Fairfield gave of his presence there, I will not attempt to conjecture. But it would not have been difficult for him to invent some plausible story. It must be remembered that Fairfield was Mr. Patton’s partner, and was known and trusted by him. Perhaps Fairfield said that it had come to his knowledge that an attempt was to be made to steal the diamonds during the train journey from Grantham to Swineshead. Perhaps he told Mr. Patton that he had just come from abroad with an offer for the diamonds which the partners must discuss between themselves before Mr. Patton met Sir Stanislaus. In any case, he told his partner that he had a car waiting outside the station in which he would drive him to Holmden Hall. Mr. Patton would have raised no objection. This arrangement would save him an uncomfortable half-hour’s wait at the station with the diamonds in his possession. They left the station, Fairfield taking care that it was not

obvious that he was in the company of Mr. Patton. They entered the waiting car without attracting attention, and drove off.

“I do not suppose that Mr. Patton’s suspicions were aroused until the car drove into the courtyard of Lingby Mill. And before he had time to protest, Fairfield had attacked him. I imagine that the method of murdering was throttling. Mr. Patton was utterly unprepared and could offer no resistance in the confined space of the car.

“Mr. Patton once dead, Fairfield acted swiftly. He stripped the body, wrapped it in the sheet which he had brought with him, and placed it in the coffin, already in position on the hearse. The discovery of the coins and the railway ticket on the spot show the haste in which he worked. He was naturally not anxious that the hearse with the body in it should remain at Lingby Mill longer than possible. He then drove back to Grantham in the Solway car.”

“Here, hold on a minute, Priestley,” Oldland interrupted. “What did he do with the diamonds, and, for that matter, with Patton’s clothes?”

“The diamonds?” Dr. Priestley replied. “It does not seem to me that their disposal offered any difficulty. I have noticed that most modern cars have at the back a luggage receptacle which can be locked. Perhaps one of you can tell me whether this is so in the case of the fourteen horse-power Solway saloon.”

“It is, sir,” said Jimmy. “One of the points in the advertisements of the car is that it is provided with a very capacious luggage compartment.”

“Very well, then. Fairfield put Mr. Patton’s suitcase, his satchel, his clothes and the diamonds into this compartment and locked it. As I was about to say when Oldland interrupted me, Fairfield drove the car back to Grantham and deposited it in the garage of the South Lincolnshire Motor Company. He felt quite safe in assuming that nobody would tamper with the luggage compartment until he returned for the car. He then stole the second bicycle and rode back to Lingby Mill. It only remained for him to drive the hearse from there to the tar boiler between Dimbury and Fallowchurch. I have no doubt that during this journey he followed the main road wherever possible. A hearse would attract less attention on a main road than on byways.”

Dr. Priestley paused and Jimmy ventured a remark. “He must have stopped for petrol somewhere, sir. The tank of the hearse wouldn’t hold enough for the journey from Reading to Lingby Mill and thence to Fallowchurch.”

Dr. Priestley smiled. "No doubt the tank of the hearse was replenished, but not at any public filling station. It has not escaped my notice that the tank of the Solway car was filled up at both garages in Grantham. That is to say that when the car left Grantham its tank was full and that when it returned shortly afterwards, the tank was nearly empty. On the second occasion, ten gallons were put into it. Do you not see the significance of this fact?"

"I do now that you point it out, sir," said Jimmy. "While the car and the hearse were together at Lingby Mill, Fairfield transferred petrol from the first to the second. It would be easy enough, especially if he had a syringe of some kind."

Dr. Priestley nodded his approval. "The journey to the tar boiler was accomplished without incident," he continued. "No doubt during his stay at the Green Bear Fairfield had familiarized himself with the routine of Gurney and his gang. It need not have taken him very long to deposit the body, relight the fire under the boiler and put a few shovelful of grit into the coffin."

"I don't quite understand why he bothered himself about the grit," Hanslet remarked.

"He hoped that the grit in the coffin would be compared with the grit by the tar boiler. This actually happened and the probability that they came from the same source was established. Remember that Fairfield was doing his best to produce the impression that Pantony had been murdered by Cartmell. The connexion between the abandoned hearse and the body found in the tar boiler was merely one of association. The grit and the sheet stolen from the Green Bear were intended to strengthen that association.

"The inspector has suggested how Fairfield may have reached Folkestone. If my theory is correct he had Mr. Patton's passport in his possession. As he went on board the boat he threw this passport under the crane where it was subsequently found. He knew that the eventual discovery of the passport would strengthen the assumption that Mr. Patton, having made off with the diamonds, had gone abroad.

"Again, he ascertained that had Mr. Patton returned straight from London to Grantham, he could most conveniently have caught the boat train connecting with the Dunkerque service. It was for this reason that, when he telephoned to M. Baudin from Paris, he told him that he was telephoning him from Dunkerque. It was highly unlikely that M. Baudin would institute inquiries into the place of origin of the call.



“His statement as to his return to England is probably correct. He telegraphed to the office of his firm, knowing that by that time some action regarding the diamonds would have been taken. Mr. McNaught replied urging his immediate return. He took the first available service and arrived in London perfectly ready to reply to the superintendent’s questions.

“His plan, though it had succeeded perfectly up till then, was not complete. He had not cared to risk taking the diamonds with him across the Channel. They could not conveniently be stowed about his person, and would certainly have aroused the curiosity of the customs-officer. The discovery of the diamonds would infallibly bring the crime home to him. This is why I believe him to have left them in the Solway car at Grantham.

“Once again he showed that his natural cunning had not abandoned him. He must have known that at any moment the police might call upon him in the course of their investigations. If he could not be found, questions would be asked, which might lead to the discovery that he had visited Grantham. So he took the bull by the horns and rang up the superintendent on the Saturday after the crime. He was told that the superintendent was not at Scotland Yard, and that his return was not expected for some hours. This was his opportunity. He took a train to Grantham, and collected the Solway car in which were the diamonds. The car, no doubt, he left in some convenient garage, probably under the name of Sir Stanislaus Wherwell. I feel pretty certain that he deposited the diamonds in the safe at his office.”

“Why are you so certain about that, Priestley?” Oldland asked.

“Because it is what I should have done had I been in his place. His partner being dead he alone had access to the safe and the diamonds, therefore, their loss could not have been found by any inquisitive person. Further, that safe was the last place that the police were likely to inspect. Is that not so, superintendent?”

“That’s so, professor,” Hanslet replied grimly. “Anyway, I’ll make it my business to examine the contents of that safe this very night. You’ll excuse us if Jimmy and I hurry off rather unceremoniously, won’t you?”

Dr. Priestley raised no objection to the immediate departure of his guests. But, after they had gone, he permitted himself so pronounced a smile that Oldland’s curiosity was aroused. “What’s amusing you now, Priestley?” he asked.

“The contemplation of the difficulties which still beset the path of our friend the superintendent,” Dr. Priestley replied. “He will, no doubt, secure powers to open the safe immediately. If my conjectures are correct, he will find within it the Wherwell diamonds.”

“But that discovery will surely end his difficulties,” Oldland remarked.

“I am by no means certain of that. His task is to secure the conviction of this man Fairfield on two charges, the theft of the diamonds and the murder of his partner.

“But Fairfield, if he keeps his head, can offer a very plausible defence. On the first charge, he can submit that the discovery of the diamonds in his firm’s safe is in itself proof that they were never stolen at all. He can declare that he had no knowledge of their being there, since he had not had occasion to open the safe since his return to England.”

“But in the face of McNaught’s evidence that Patton took the stones with him when he left London, he will have to offer some explanation of their presence in the safe,” Oldland objected.

“Not at all, he has only to plead complete ignorance. It is for the prosecution to prove that he put them there himself. And that, I imagine, will be no easy matter. There is a vast difference between solving a problem to one’s own satisfaction and persuading a jury that one’s solution is correct.

“The second charge presents peculiar difficulties of its own. I see no way in which the body of the victim can be identified with certainty as that of Mr. Patton. All that the superintendent can maintain is this. Circumstantial evidence very strongly suggests that Cartmell is guilty of the murder of some unknown person. But can the identity of Cartmell be satisfactorily established? How many people, when confronted with Fairfield, will be prepared to swear he is the individual whom they formerly knew as Cartmell? Very few, I hope.”

“You hope!” Oldland exclaimed.

“Yes, because such a declaration on oath would be necessarily insincere. The witness might have very strong suspicions, based upon a similarity of voice, manner, gait or some similar characteristic. But, under the circumstances, no honest witness could commit himself further than this.”

Oldland nodded. “I expect you’re right, as usual, Priestley,” he said. “What would you do if you were in Hanslet’s place?”

“I should allow events to develop, and, by apparently abandoning the case, lull Fairfield into a sense of security. Then, sooner or later, he would begin to dispose of the diamonds, and the theft, if not the murder, could be brought home to him.”

Oldland shook his head. “That’s all right in theory, but it wouldn’t work in practice,” he said. “By the time that Fairfield thought it safe to move, your chain of circumstantial evidence would have become so rusty that it would be impossible, because of the coincidences of time and date upon which it so

largely depends. It seems to me not at all improbable that the ingenious Fairfield will get away with it.”





## EPILOGUE

ON their way to Scotland Yard from Dr. Priestley's house, Hanslet outlined to Jimmy his plan of campaign.

"I haven't a doubt that the professor's right," he said. "But the proof of his theory depends upon our finding the diamonds in Fairfield's possession. If he's got them at all, he's most likely to have put them in the office safe. And that's the first place where we're going to look for them.

"But we've got to watch our step. If we open the safe with Fairfield's knowledge, and the diamonds aren't there, all we've done is to put the chap on his guard. My plan is to get hold of Old George. I know where he'll be at this time of night, and we'll see what he can do for us. There won't be any difficulty about securing the necessary warrant. George will get us into the office, and, with any luck, he'll be able to open the safe. And if we find the diamonds there, we'll go straight on to — — Street and arrest Fairfield in his bed."

A couple of hours later a police car left Scotland Yard in accordance with the superintendent's plan. Its driver was Jimmy, and its passengers Hanslet and a mysterious individual known as Old George, who had a way with him that very few locks could resist.

It was by now half-past two in the morning and, beyond Trafalgar Square, Jimmy found the streets practically deserted. He turned to the left off Holborn into Hatton Garden, drove slowly and quietly past the house in which Messrs. Patton & Fairfield's office was situated, and pulled up a few yards beyond it.

The occupants of the car stepped on to the pavement and walked rapidly back to the house. "That's the place," said Hanslet, pointing to the doorway. "How long is it going to take you to let us in, George?"

“About three minutes, I reckon, super,” George replied as he bent down to examine the lock. And then suddenly he stiffened. “There’s somebody inside!” he exclaimed in a hoarse whisper. “And, by the sound of it, he’s coming out.”

There was no time for concerted action: the three men could take no more than a couple of hasty steps backwards before the door opened and Fairfield appeared on the threshold.

He recognized Hanslet on the instant, and must have thought that his mission was to arrest him. He glanced swiftly up and down the street, and caught sight of the waiting car.

The rest happened in a flash. Before either Hanslet or Jimmy could intercept him, Fairfield had raced to the car and leapt into the driving seat. Jimmy, almost on his heels, swung himself on to the running-board, but a violent push sent him tumbling on his back into the roadway. With its engine roaring, the car shot in a northerly direction up Hatton Garden.

Jimmy picked himself up and was joined by Hanslet and George. In silence the three of them watched the rear light of the car, which turned right into Hatton Wall and disappeared from their sight. Hanslet swore viciously, then recovered himself. “Well, he won’t get far, that’s our comfort,” he said. “Every policeman in London knows the number of that car, and he’s bound to be held up before very long. Hallo, listen to that!”

The echoes of the crash had scarcely died away before they were all three running in the wake of the car. They turned into Hatton Wall, and so reached the Clerkenwell Road. A few yards further on, at the junction of the Clerkenwell and Farringdon Roads, a group was already collecting.

As they reached the spot, it was apparent to them what had happened. The police car, attempting to cross the Farringdon Road at high speed, had come into collision with a heavy lorry travelling southwards towards Smithfield Market. The car was smashed to bits, and a policeman was bending over a prostrate form in the road. Fairfield had been killed outright.

His body was taken to the mortuary, where Hanslet extracted a bunch of keys from the dead man’s pocket. Then, having dismissed George, whose services were no longer required, he and Jimmy returned to Messrs. Patton & Fairfield’s office. One of the keys on the bunch fitted the door, and they entered the premises.

Hanslet led the way to Mr. Patton’s room, where he had previously noticed the safe. Another of the keys unlocked this, and the superintendent swung open the door. In a few seconds the correctness of Dr. Priestley’s theory was established. The Wherwell diamonds lay in their original case,

but with half of the stones already removed from their settings and put aside in carefully numbered boxes.

“That explains it!” Hanslet exclaimed. “I’ve been wondering all the time what Fairfield was doing here. I expect he’s been putting in an hour or two every night taking these stones out of their settings. Well, my case is closed, anyhow. But I’m not at all sure what Sir Stanislaus will say when he hears about it. It’s in my mind that he’d have preferred the insurance money to the diamonds. You’re looking very glum.”

“I’m wondering what sort of yarn I shall have to tell the coroner at Fallowchurch,” Jimmy replied thoughtfully.

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Body Unidentified (Priestley #27)* by John Rhode]