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THE TWO TICKET PUZZLE

J·J·CONNINGTON

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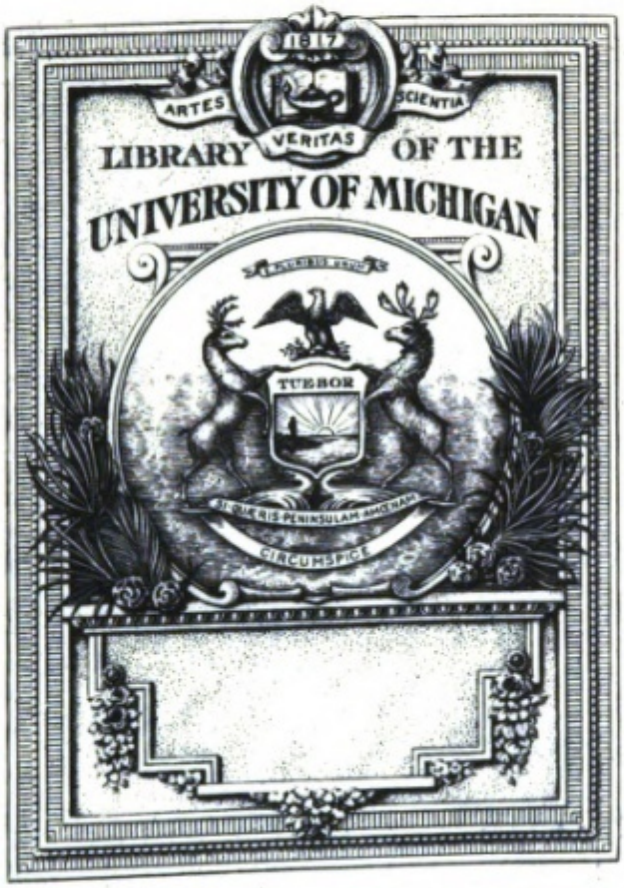

Bequest of
Orma Fitch Butler
Asst.Professor of Latin

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By J. J. Connington

DEATH AT SWATHLING COURT
THE DANGERFIELD TALISMAN
MURDER IN THE MAZE
TRAGEDY AT RAVENSTHORPE
MYSTERY AT LYNDEN SANDS
THE CASE WITH NINE SOLUTIONS
GRIM VENGEANCE
THE EYE IN THE MUSEUM
THE TWO TICKET PUZZLE

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Stewart, Alfred Walter

THE TWO TICKET PUZZLE

BY

J. J. CONNINGTON (pseud.)

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1930

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O. F. Butler
Bequest
10.29.40

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CHAPTER I: ROMANCE AND THE 10.35

No luggage had come by the midday local; and George Mossley, foreman porter at Kempsford Junction, watched the passengers straggle past the ticket collector and off the platform. When the last of them had gone, he sauntered up to the gate to continue an interrupted conversation.

"This Kipling we was talkin' about," he resumed, "I've got another book o' his out o' the Free Library."

The ticket collector showed no enthusiasm at the news. George's new-born fervour for Kipling and his habit of quotation had, willy-nilly, imprinted most of "If" on his mate's resisting mind; and Ketton shrank from the further tuition which he suspected was in store. He contented himself with an absent-minded gesture, by way of response.

" 'E mentions railways in this un," George hurried on, lest the conversation should peter out. " 'E says—listen, Ketton!—'e says: 'And all unseen, Romance brought up the nine-fifteen.' "

"No 9.15 ever come to this junction," pointed out Ketton, who was a literalist by nature. "Not in my day, nor in yours either, George. You ought to 'ave known that time-table of ours better nor that."

George, with difficulty, restrained a movement of impatience.

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"You don't get the idea, Ketton," he explained laboriously. "You're just one o' the sort o' people Kipling's writin' about. What 'e means is that things may be right in front o' you, and yet you never see 'em at all."

As Ketton digested this, his glance travelled up the platform and was caught by the figure of the station master who was standing with his back to them, peering into the mist which veiled the further parts of the junction. Ketton seemed to derive inspiration from the sight.

"I get you," he admitted at last. "What you mean is something like old Boyson's shirt tail. It's there, right in front of you; but you can't see it, nohow. I don't see much in that to make a song about, George."

Much to Ketton's annoyance, George treated this with contempt and refused to discuss it. Instead, he approached the point from a fresh direction.

"Look at this last trainload o' passengers, Ketton, and just think of what may be happenin' to them. I seen you havin' a good look at that pretty girl that lost 'er ticket. Engaged, she is—I seen 'er ring when she took off 'er glove for to hunt in 'er bag. Dressed up so fine; probably off to meet the bloke she's engaged to, when 'e gets out of 'is office. There's romance a-starin' you in the face, you blind bat. And perhaps the cove alongside her is off after a job that'll bring him in ten pound a week. That would be romance too. And the bloke I helped out o' the front carriage—I know him by sight. He lost his peepers at St. Hubert. Romance again. And these

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two kiddies runnin' up the platform to meet their daddy. Why, the whole train may have been packed with romance and you'd never see it. F'r instance, just ask yourself: the last man what give up his ticket. Where was 'e goin'?"

"To the bar," declared the literalist triumphantly. "I seen him make a bee line for it as soon as he got through the gate. I'd be there myself, if I wasn't on duty, to get something for to take the taste o' this fog out o' my throat."

He paused to let this information sink in, then continued:

"You're addlin' your brains with all this poetry stuff, George. I'm sayin' that seriously, and I'm sayin' it for your good. 'Romance brought up the nine-fifteen' did 'e? Well, it must ha' been an express that didn't stop at this here junction. All the romance you get, George, is walkin' up and down the train, singin' out 'Kempsford Junction—Kempsford Junction—' and varyin' that on the bay platforms to 'Kempsford Junction, all change!' There ain't no romance in that, not that I can see. And this 'If,' that's just the same. 'Ow does it go?

'If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch.'

"When are you like to talk with crowds, George, I ask you? The only crowds you ever see are at football matches and they wouldn't listen to you if you did talk to them. And the nearest you ever come to kings was once when the Royal Special went

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through here at fifty miles an hour and nobody so much as looked out of the window to see you standin' with your cap off on the platform.

'If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you.'

"That would be last week, like enough, when you pulled that silly old woman out o' the wrong train just when the whistle went. She'd lost 'er 'ead, right enough, and she blamed it on you quite accordin' to the book, for I 'eard 'er from 'alfway along the platform. But I don't see much romance in that. It might 'ave 'appened to any one."

George's powers of repartee were feeble; and as he gave up the contest and turned away, all he could think of was:

"Well, some of it seems to 'ave stuck in your mind, for all that, Ketton."

Ketton's uncompromising rejection of Kipling was more of a disappointment than an annoyance. George regarded "If" as a most valuable moral tonic although, as Ketton had pointed out, few opportunities of practising its gospel seemed to come his way; and being of the type which wants to share good things with fellow creatures, he had done his best to make a convert of Ketton.

The engine had been detached from the empty train and had gone over the points to take in water outside the station, so that only a block of deserted carriages faced George as he walked up the platform, brooding over his failure as a missionary of

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culture. He opened the doors of the forward third-class compartments, one after another; glanced inside to see if anything had been left behind; and all the time he felt Ketton's sardonic glance in his back. "Found any o' that romance o' yours, this time?" Ketton would be sure to inquire, when he had finished his inspection. "No? Why, then, I suppose they must ha' took an' throwed it out o' the window on the road 'ere." He knew Ketton's heavy-handed kind of humour.

The middle section of the train was made up of a first-class carriage; and as he came to it, George's interest increased. The first-class people often left newspapers behind them; and George had to do his reading on the cheap, if possible. The first compartment yielded nothing; but from the floor of the next, George rescued a copy of the *Times*. Then again he drew blank; and at last he put his hand on the handle of the rearmost first-class compartment and swung the door open.

His routine was to glance first at the luggage racks. Finding them empty, he lowered his gaze and caught sight of a man's hat on the floor. Then, *Times* in hand, he involuntarily stepped back a pace on the platform. Two streams of blood flowed from under the seat and soaked into the carpet of the compartment.

George's nature had always inclined him to keep out of fights if possible; and he had a physical aversion to blood. At the sight of these ominous rivulets, he suddenly gulped and felt sick. His first inclination was to hurry off and put the responsi-

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bility of further proceedings on some one else's shoulders.

But just as he opened his mouth to shout, the message of "If" floated up in his mind almost without his being conscious of the call. Here was the emergency. Now was the time to keep his head. He turned back towards the gruesome compartment, swallowed hastily once or twice, and forced himself to peer under the seat. One glimpse of the huddled-up figure there was enough for him. He stepped back off the footboard and glanced around for assistance. The station master had gone to his office; the guard of the train was nowhere visible; but Ketton still lingered beyond the gate, talking to the boy at the bookstall.

"Here! Ketton! There's a dead man under the seat o' this compartment 'ere. Get the p'lice, quick! 'E's been shot or somethin'—blood all over the place. 'Urry, now; 'urry, man! Get a move on you, do, for 'eaven's sake, 'stead o' wastin' time over silly questions!"

This final sentence was a comment on Ketton's first reaction to the news. In George's excited condition, time seemed to have changed its quality; he watched Ketton's rush to the exit from the station with the feelings of a spectator examining a slow-motion film, and he felt exasperated at what seemed deliberate sluggishness on the part of his mate. Ketton vanished through the door; and his disappearance freed George's mind for the consideration of other things.

"If you can keep your head . . ." George sud-

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denly realised that he had much to do himself. What was the first thing? Keep the place clear? The book-stall boy, with fewer qualms than George, had left his papers and was running up the platform to conduct an investigation on his own account. George set off at a lumbering trot, still clinging to the *Times*, intercepted the boy, hustled him off the platform, and slammed the gates in his face.

"Outside, you!" he growled as he closed the barrier.

So that was done. What next? It occurred to George that his initial inspection had been over-cursory; and that possibly the man under the seat was still alive and in need of assistance. His memory assured him that he was mistaken; his physical feelings fought against any return to the ugly scene: but that unvocal inward message bade him keep his head and carry the thing through. In response to its summons, he set off again at a trot, back to the fatal compartment.

George was no expert in matters of life and death; but the limpness and the attitude of the silent figure were enough to persuade him that his first conclusion had been right. The body had been thrust under the seat, face downwards; and the blood was flowing from the head. As the porter withdrew from the compartment, his eye was caught by a glitter of light from something on the floor. He made a movement as though to pick it up, then he bethought himself that the police would want things left untouched.

As he stepped off the footboard, he realised with

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"I feel sick," he said simply. "I'll go over there and sit down for a minute."

He walked across to one of the benches on the platform, sat down, and watched the proceedings with a wholly unfamiliar sensation of curiosity and detachment. He wanted to see what they would find to do; and at the same time his personal interest in the affair had completely evaporated. What he most desired was to be left alone for a while until he had recovered control of himself; but something occurred to him and he called across to the constable.

"Mind that bit o' glass on the floor, will you? It might be a clue or somethin'."

The constable nodded curtly, knelt on the foot-

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board, and made a careful inspection of the interior of the compartment; while the station master craned over his shoulder to see anything he could. Evidently they had stronger nerves than George. After a few moments the policeman, yielding his place to the station master, withdrew and pulled out his notebook.

"Nothing much to be seen yet," he mused aloud, as he jotted down the essentials. "Body of man thrust under forward seat of first-class compartment. Last first compartment in carriage . . ."

"Last in the train," the station master amplified. "There's only thirds beyond this down to the van."

"I'll draw a picture of it," the constable assured him. "What train's this? Where does it come from?"

"It's the 10.35 local from Horston," Boyson explained. "It stops at every station on the road and gets in here at 12.04 by the time-table. Shade late to-day, of course, owing to the fog."

The constable nodded and continued his note-taking.

"Brown felt hat on floor of compartment. Looks as if it had been knocked off in a struggle. Part of footmark in dust on the brim and hat battered rather out of shape. Bit of glass on floor. Looks like spectacle lens. That ought to be a clue of sorts, for there's no sign of a gold frame or anything like that. Must have come from the murderer's glasses; or it looks like that, anyway. No bag. No umbrella. H'm!"

He reflected for a moment before continuing.

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whitey stripe. Hair beginning to go grey. Wounds—two at least—in head. No blood from anywhere else that I can see. You don't recognise him, do you?"

The station master shook his head.

"Can't be sure till I see his face, of course; but I don't think it's likely. I don't place him."

"Cushions," pursued the constable. "A hole torn in the covers. Looks like a bullet hole. We'll leave it alone just now. Windows, both shut. Glass frosted over so that no one can see into the carriage very well from outside, except at one small bit, here on the platform-side window next the engine. Nothing else that I can see just now. By the way, what's the name of the man who found the body?"

"George Mossley."

The constable made a jotting, then closed his notebook.

"No firearms that I can see. Now I'll need to go off and ring up some one to look into the matter thoroughly. You'll see that no one gets on to this platform; and that this Mossley waits on the premises till the Superintendent comes along. He'll be wanted then."

"What do you make of it?" the station master demanded, as the constable turned away.

"Much the same as you do, I expect. If I was committing suicide, I don't believe I'd tuck myself away under the seat to do it; and I'm pretty sure my dead body wouldn't get up and chuck the pistol out of the window afterwards. Somebody murdered the poor beggar, right enough, whoever he was."

The station master nodded his agreement.

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"Whoever did it, he must have had a good nerve," he commented. "The longest clear run between stations that that train makes isn't more than seven minutes anywhere; and he must have done his job in that time, complete. Gosh! That's quick work, that is!"

"Well, I'll be off to the 'phone," the constable concluded.

With a final glance round the compartment, he turned away and passed George, still clutching the copy of the *Times*, as he followed the constable's figure with an incurious eye.

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CHAPTER II: THE PRIZE RAM

"THAT's the best we can do for you," said Superintendent Ross. "It should be enough, along with what you have already, I think; and if I were in your shoes, I'd be inclined to pull him in now, without waiting for anything else. You'll get a conviction. And if you wait much longer, he may clear out; and then you'll have a lot of bother in picking him up again."

As though to mark the close of the discussion, he rose from his chair, crossed over to the fire, and bent down to warm his hands. Superintendent Campden blotted his last note and stowed away his papers in a drawer of the desk at which he was sitting.

"I think we'll risk it," he concurred.

The matter on which they were engaged was a minor one, but it had been tricky; and Campden was relieved to find that his colleague's view reinforced his own. Ross's judgment had seldom been at fault. He seemed to have an uncanny knack of gauging exactly how evidence would look from the standpoint of the jury box; and when he was prepared to take a case into court, it generally meant that a conviction was as nearly certain as it could be made, with the facts available. The Superintendent from Horston never overlooked the human factor in the final arbitrament. "Don't forget," he used to

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Superintendent Campden closed the drawer of his desk and turned to the hearth.

"Thanks for coming down," he said. "Beastly cold morning for the journey. I suppose the fog's made all the trains late. You came down on the express, didn't you?"

Superintendent Ross nodded as he straightened his big figure and turned his back to the fire.

"The express was late at Horston," he explained, "and after that we got held up once or twice. The fog signals were going off every minute or two; it's pretty thick here and there on the line. We passed the local betwee. Seven Sisters and Hammersleigh, so it was just as well I took the express."

Campden glanced at his watch.

"Want to catch the 1.22 back to Horston?" he inquired. "You might just manage it. Or will you have lunch first and take the 2.55?"

Before Ross could answer, a constable knocked at the door of the office and gave Campden a message in an undertone.

"Oh, show him in," the Superintendent ordered in a tone which betrayed a certain weariness.

He turned to Ross.

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trict and I've stirred your people up about it; but he lives close by here—he's a farmer in a biggish way—and he looks on me as his information office instead of going to your people direct. I've been pestered out of my life with him lately. He's continually wanting to know what's being done in the matter; and when he drops in twice a day it gets a bit difficult to invent progress enough to satisfy him—specially when there's been no progress made at all in the affair. Let him get his wind out to you, will you, if you don't mind? I'm getting sick of it. Perhaps you'll be able to soothe him down a bit and take him off my hands."

He dropped his voice just in time, as the door opened and a big man was ushered into the room. A well-meaning friend had once described Chepstow as "a face like a full moon with a smile on it, and some curly hair on top." The description was accurate enough up to a point, though it had not altogether pleased the farmer. Ross, glancing up as Chepstow entered the office, thought he had never seen any one who came so close to the typical John Bull. Only the clothes differed from the model. A big, likeable, hearty, open-air sort of man, with honesty written broad on his face: that was the impression Chepstow conveyed at the first glance.

" 'Morning, Superintendent," he said to Campden, with a glance at Ross, who was still standing with his back to the fire. "I've just dropped in again about that ram of mine, just to see if you've got any further forward. He's in a bad way, poor beast, a very bad way indeed, I'm sorry to say. The vet takes

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a very serious view of it; thinks he's done for, in fact, I can see, though he won't say so in just so many words. Now have you got on the track of the scoundrel who did it yet; or can you make out what's at the back of it all? Phew! This room of yours is hot when one comes into it from the cold."

He pulled out a coloured silk handkerchief and mopped his brow with it. Campden pushed forward a chair and Chepstow sat down, restoring his handkerchief to his pocket. Campden seized the opportunity which the pause gave him and instead of answering the questions, he diverted the farmer's attention to his colleague.

"This is Superintendent Ross, Mr. Chepstow."

The farmer swung round a little in his chair and inspected Ross's big clean-shaven face with an obvious mixture of interest and approval.

"I've heard of you, sir," he said, with evident respect. "You're the man that hanged that scoundrel Hyndford, aren't you? Now that was a good bit of work, if you'll let me say so. It was indeed. And I'm sure if I could get you interested in this ram of mine, you'd soon get to the bottom of the affair. Not but what the Superintendent here's doing his very best, I'm sure," he added unfortunately, though clearly with the intention of being complimentary to Campden.

"You'd better tell Superintendent Ross the whole story, Mr. Chepstow," Campden suggested, with an impish glance at his colleague. "He's got half-an-hour to spare just now; and it's really in the Horston district, you know, not in ours. The Horston

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people are working on it; and any details you can give Superintendent Ross at first-hand will always be a help to them."

Ross's glance at his colleague betrayed no particular pleasure at the prospect; but when he turned to the farmer only friendly interest showed in his face.

"Let's hear all about the trouble, Mr. Chepstow," he said cordially. "No miracles promised, of course; but we like to do our best for people, you know."

"The trouble's just this, Mr. Ross," Chepstow began, crossing one leg over the other and leaning forward to enforce his story on his auditor. "Last summer I bought an Oxford Down ram, 'Frolic 6th.' You may have heard about it; his picture was in the *Kempsford Advertiser* at the time, and a very good likeness it was, too. He was bred by Mr. Alford of Richmind Maisey, in Gloucestershire; and he took second prize at last year's Royal Agricultural Society's Show, so you can understand that he's a fine beast. I've seldom seen a ram I like the looks of so well; and I had to give a stiffish price for him, I can tell you. He didn't come cheap; but Oxford Downs do well in this part of the country, and I wanted him, and I could pay the price for him, and I got him."

Chepstow's face showed that his pride was in his purchase and not merely in the fact that he had been able to afford its price. Superintendent Ross, unlike Campden, was not bored by these details. Rams he cared nothing about; but he had an acute interest in humanity; and if Chepstow was inter-

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ested in rams, then Ross was prepared to listen sympathetically to him. He was learning something about Chepstow; and he was also smoothing down a man who evidently felt a certain grievance against the police because they had not managed to produce results.

"Well, that was how it was, Mr. Ross," the farmer continued. "I bought the ram and brought him up here. Most of my land's round about Kempston; but I've got a nice bit of pasture just on this side of Seven Sisters. Likely you've seen it yourself; for the railway runs through it and you must have passed it often enough. I've got a very good man there; and I put him in charge of Frolic 6th. Tarland's got his head screwed on right; and I'd trust him just as soon as I'd trust myself—thoroughly reliable, I've always found him. Now, that was all right; and the ram did very well down there."

Chepstow's face grew clouded as he continued his tale. It was clear that he was both puzzled and deeply wounded by the turn of events.

"I've no enemies that I know of, Mr. Ross. I treat people well, and they treat me well, and I never had reason to think that any one wished me ill. That's just the plain fact; and that's what puzzles me and worries me so much over this affair. This last week, I've turned it over and turned it over in my head and tried to think of any one who could even think I'd done him a bad turn, and I can't bring to mind a single case. Not one. I'm not saying that by way of a boast, you understand, Mr. Ross; it's just the honest truth. I don't know any one that

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has a grudge against me. That's what makes it so perplexing."

He broke off and stared at the two officials in obviously honest perturbation and bewilderment. Campden, who had heard the whole story before, hardly concealed his boredom; and the farmer turned directly to Ross as he continued his story.

"It was just a week ago to-day, on the 16th of November, Mr. Ross. Tarland has the ram in a field close to his cottage; and he says that he saw Frolic 6th about eleven o'clock in the morning—within a few minutes one way or the other—and Frolic was all right then, just grazing quietly somewhere between the house and the railway. Tarland was cutting down a tree in his garden that morning; it had got a bit shaken by a storm a day or two before, and he was afraid of it coming down altogether if the wind got up again. He was busy with that, and while he was working, Frolic 6th moved a bit across the field and got out of his sight. Tarland went on with his job and after a while he knocked off to rest himself and to keep himself from catching a chill—he was pretty hot, you understand—he took a turn up the garden. The wind was blowing pretty cold, he told me. When he came in sight of the ram again, there was the poor beast lying on its side, kicking like anything and any one could see something had hurt it. So Tarland jumped over the fence and made for it as hard as he could go."

"Has he any idea of what time it was then?" Ross demanded.

"It would be somewhere about twenty past eleven,

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he says," Chepstow answered. "Well, as I was saying, Mr. Ross, he ran to where poor Frolic was lying; and then it was plain enough what had happened. The poor beast had been shot. There was a wound in his side and some blood on the fleece."

"Not a shotgun then? A single bullet, eh?"

"A single bullet, as you say. Well, you can guess how Tarland felt, being in charge of the ram. He was just completely taken aback, and I don't blame him for that—or for anything else, either. There's no question of blame in the matter, so far as he goes. He sent off posthaste for the vet at once; and in the meantime he did what he could for the poor beast. By and by Mr. Lorton—that's the best vet in that neighbourhood, as I expect you know—he came along and examined Frolic 6th. There's no question about it—the beast has been shot with a fairly heavy bullet, to judge from the size of the wound; and it's touch and go whether anything can be done for the ram. He's alive still; but the bullet's gone pretty deep—Lorton won't risk trying to extract it—and he frankly won't answer for anything. All we can do is just to let things take their course and hope that the poor beast will pull himself together again."

"The ram's insured, of course?" Ross asked. "You're not going to lose financially over it, I suppose?"

Chepstow confirmed this with a nod.

"Frolic was insured, just as you say; and at the worst, I daresay the Company'll pay up without a word. It's not that that's worrying me, Mr. Ross. Just look at it from my point of view for a moment.

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Here's somebody shot a ram of mine that was well known all over the countryside . . ."

"Just a moment," interrupted Ross. "Did Tarland see any one in the neighbourhood when he went down to the ram first of all? Could any one have shot the ram and got away without being spotted?"

Chepstow shook his head.

"That's the funny bit of it, Mr. Ross. From Tarland's garden you get a fair view over the neighbouring fields and he says there was no one in sight anywhere. I've fences on my ground, you see, and no hedges; so there wasn't any cover to speak of anywhere. Tarland's quite convinced that there wasn't anybody lurking about anywhere. Now, coming back to what I said before, there's only three ways out of it: either it was malice or it was mischief or it was an accident. You'll agree with that?"

Ross nodded in agreement, without making any comment.

"Well, then," Chepstow went on, "suppose it was just an accident. Somebody with a rifle must have been shooting away off in the distance and not caring a damn—excuse me!—where his bullets were going. If that's how it happened, then I want that man found and warned about his foolishness. It's bad enough having a valuable ram killed, but it might just as easy have been Tarland or any of his family, just as easy. That sort of thing needs putting down. And the insurance people will likely have something to say too, if the man's laid by the heels."

The tone of his voice showed, however, that he regarded this hypothesis as being unlikely.

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"We can't trace any one owning a rifle in the neighbourhood," Campden contributed. "Shotguns if you like, but not a rifle; and the wound wasn't made with a shotgun. We've accounted for all the military rifles round about there. It wasn't done with one of them."

"It doesn't look like an accident, then, does it?" Chepstow pursued. "Not to my mind. But if it wasn't an accident, then it was mischief or else malice. If it was mischief, then the man who makes mischief ought to pay for his fun; that's my idea about it, and I want him caught before he does any more in that line. I've heard of these cattle-maiming cases before now; and if it's that, then it's a public danger. If it isn't mischief and if it isn't accident, why then it can't be anything else than personal spite. That's what makes me so uncomfortable, Mr. Ross. How would you like it if you'd gone on thinking for years that every one liked you and that you'd always dealt straight with every one—and suddenly you'd found that some one had a grudge against you, a bad grudge? I don't like the idea. I don't want to think about it. If I did, I'd soon get to asking myself when I met any one: 'Is this him?' And that would be the end of any peace of mind to a man like me. That's what makes me so desperate keen to get this thing sifted to the bottom."

Ross nodded understandingly.

"I quite see it," he assured the farmer. "You can count on us doing our best. But," he added, with a whimsical expression on his face, "I've got to repeat what I said at the start. We don't promise

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miracles. And you haven't given us much to go on, remember."

"That's all admitted," said Chepstow cordially. "And, if you don't mind my saying it, you've seen my point of view, I'm sure. It's a worrying sort of thing to have happen, isn't it? It's not a money matter at all, with me; I'm covered, so far as that goes. But I'd been counting on that ram, you understand? And over and above all that, it's the mysteriousness of it all that bothers me. I'm a man that likes to have things plain; and this business isn't a bit plain to me. It leaves a taste in my mouth that won't go away until the whole thing gets cleared up."

"Well, you can count on me to do my best in the matter," Ross assured him.

At this moment came an interruption. A constable hurried into the room and gave some message to Campden in an undertone. Campden nodded and then turned to Ross.

"That's a message from the station," he explained. "A man's been shot on the 10.35 train from Horston."

Chepstow's face expressed rather mingled emotions which were explained by the comment which broke from him involuntarily:

"There! Now, wasn't I right in saying the sooner you got to the bottom of this affair, the better it'd be? Here's some more of this shooting going on, right under your noses. First my ram, and now some poor beggar or other."

Campden ignored the comment.

"It's been done on the Horston train, Ross. Likely

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enough it may turn out to be linked up with your district. You'd better come along with me now to the station and have a look into things for yourself, just in case."

Superintendent Ross nodded a slow agreement with this proposal.

"It may concern either your district or mine," he admitted. "It won't do any harm if we both look into it. If it's my case, I'll be all the better off if I've had your ideas as well as my own at the start."

"The police surgeon's been rung up. He'll follow on as soon as possible," Campden explained. "We'd better go now."

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CHAPTER III: THE BULLETS

"THIS isn't my show," Superintendent Ross pointed out to his colleague as they passed through the booking hall. "I'll stand by, while you do the questioning. There's no use both of us butting in."

He left Campden's side for a moment and crossed over to the bookstall.

"Here, boy. Give me a local time-table—the penny one."

Stuffing the booklet into his pocket, he rejoined Campden, who was making his way, under the guidance of a porter, to the bay platform at which the carriages of the 10.35 train were still standing.

Under Campden's incisive questioning, the main facts in the case were elicited from George Mossley, the station master, and the constable.

"That's that, then," said the Superintendent as he turned away, greatly to George's relief. "Now we'll have a look at the carriage. Lucky nothing's been touched."

Ross noted that the train was composed of a first-class carriage sandwiched between two pairs of thirds. The body lay in what had been the rearmost first-class compartment. Campden walked towards it, opened the door which the constable had shut, and looked keenly about the interior for a few moments. Then he pulled an inch tape from his pocket

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and made some measurements before picking up a small object from the floor.

"Looks like half a spectacle lens," he said, after examining it.

Ross took the glass fragment from his colleague, held it up to the light and looked through it, turning it this way and that as he did so.

"Now that's rather interesting," he pointed out. "It looks as if somebody mixed up in this affair was near-sighted and suffered from astigmatism."

"Sherlock!" Campden commented ironically. "And how d'you make that out?"

"It's a concave lens: therefore it's for near sight. If you reflect something in it—use it as a concave mirror to reflect the girders up above there—you'll find that one side of it gives a sharp image; but you won't get a sharp image from the other surface, no matter how much you shift it about. That's the cylindrical grinding they use for correcting astigmatism."

Campden tried the experiment and found that Ross's observations were correct.

"It may have belonged to the dead man, of course," he suggested, "but if it didn't, it ought to narrow down the field considerably. There can't be so many short-sighted, astigmatic people about."

"More than you'd think," Ross retorted.

He glanced again at the broken glass.

"It looks to me rather like the sort of lens you find in tortoise-shell-rimmed reading glasses. But you can't bank on that very much, Campden. Perhaps we'll find the case or the frame in the carriage."

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He handed the broken disc to Campden for safe keeping.

"We might do worse than take it round to an optician's by and by," he suggested, as he did so. "He'd be able to tell us at once what sort of sight the owner had, and that might be useful if it belonged to the murderer."

The next object to attract Campden's attention was the soft brown hat lying on the floor of the compartment. He picked it up gingerly, turned it over, and inspected the lining.

" 'Thursby and Son, Brazenhall Street, Horston,' " he read out. " 'Best Quality.' And the initials inked on the band are O. F. P. It shouldn't be hard to identify the owner at this rate."

As Ross made no comment, Campden laid the hat down on the seat for safety and continued his quest. Pulling out a pocket flashlight, he threw its light under the rear seat of the compartment.

"Somebody's been burning paper," he reported. "The ash is all scattered about."

Groping laboriously, he succeeded in retrieving two unconsumed fragments which he handed up to Ross.

"The rest's all burned away, so far as I can see," he said at last, straightening himself up. "Make anything of it?"

"Not much," Ross confessed. "The irregular bit's out of to-day's *Horston Advertiser*. The other bit looks like a strip of the edge of a letter, but there's no writing on the paper. It might be the margin of a note or else it might have been torn off a plain

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sheet of notepaper. Torn off, in any case, I'd say; and charred after it was torn, because it's singed on both edges."

"There's nothing to be made out of the ash," Campden said regretfully. "It's all in flinders—impossible to patch together now. I'll have another look."

He peered about under the seat for a while, but when he raised his face again it was clear that he had found nothing of interest.

"It's all fine stuff," he announced. "Newspaper ash is all I can see; thin, light stuff with the printing showing on it here and there, when it isn't too curled up in the burning. Now we'll take the other side of the compartment."

He put his flashlight back into his pocket, stepped into the carriage, and began to examine the upholstery.

"Ah, here's something!" he exclaimed after a second or two.

Ross saw him feel for some object which had pierced the cloth at the back of the seat.

"This is something definite, at any rate," Campden said with a tinge of triumph, as he turned and held out a nickel-covered bullet between his fingers.

Ross inspected his colleague's find.

"A .38 by the look of it," he commented. "The kind of thing that fits these automatic pistols. I wonder, now—" he stopped, abruptly, and continued in a rather different tone. "Are there any more of them about?"

Campden was ferreting among the cushions.

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"Here's a second one," he announced. "I got it lying loose between the cushion and the side of the carriage. Same calibre as the first one, apparently."

He handed it to Ross for comparison.

"Yes, the same calibre," Ross confirmed, placing the two missiles side by side on his palm, so that the constable and the station master could inspect them. "Pretty things, aren't they? A bit dented at the point, but otherwise as good as new. Not a scratch on them. Have a good look at them in case you're asked to identify them," he suggested, with a faintly sardonic glance at his colleague as the two spectators wrinkled their brows in an effort to memorise the appearance of the projectiles.

"Now I think we'd better get him out from under the seat," Campden suggested. "I've gone over everything that might have got disturbed while we were moving him, so we can do as we like. Here! Porter!"

George Mossley woke suddenly from his torpor.

"Get a long luggage truck," Campden ordered. Then turning to the constable he added, "You'd better go and clear all these gaping idiots away from the gate there. Shove them right out of the station for a minute or two. We'll need to take him into one of the waiting rooms and I've no use for a lot of rubbernecks pushing around as if it was a circus procession. Some people could do with a bit more manners and decency. Give them a lesson."

The constable set off, nothing loath; and succeeded in dispersing the crowd of would-be sightseers who thronged about the gate of the platform.

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The last of them were still arguing their right of access to the station when the rumble of wheels announced George's return with the truck; and this stimulated the constable to more drastic measures. With the assistance of the grinning Ketton, he personally conducted the ultimate pair of Paul Prys to the booking-hall entrance, put them outside, and turned the key in the lock.

By the time they reached the train, George Mossley had again retired to the bench on the platform, where he sat with averted eyes, looking even paler than before. Superintendent Campden was covering the body on the truck with a tarpaulin.

"I'll have one more look round," he said to Ross, as he completed his task. "There might be something left under the front seat."

Examination with the help of the flashlight, however, revealed nothing fresh.

"No bag, or umbrella, or anything of that sort," Campden reported, as he switched off his lamp. "We seem to have got all that's to be found. Now we'd better take him to the Third Class Waiting Room."

When the dead man had been transported there and laid out, Campden posted the constable outside to keep off intruders and despatched Ketton to unlock the closed door.

"We can go through his pockets while we're waiting for the surgeon," Ross suggested. "It may save time."

"I'd just like to have a look at the wounds," Campden said, going over to the body. "The sur-

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The last of them were still arguing their right of access to the station when the rumble of wheels announced George's return with the truck; and this stimulated the constable to more drastic measures. With the assistance of the grinning Ketton, he personally conducted the ultimate pair of Paul Prys to the booking-hall entrance, put them outside, and turned the key in the lock.

By the time they reached the train, George Mossley had again retired to the bench on the platform, where he sat with averted eyes, looking even paler than before. Superintendent Campden was covering the body on the truck with a tarpaulin.

"I'll have one more look round," he said to Ross, as he completed his task. "There might be something left under the front seat."

Examination with the help of the flashlight, however, revealed nothing fresh.

"No bag, or umbrella, or anything of that sort," Campden reported, as he switched off his lamp. "We seem to have got all that's to be found. Now we'd better take him to the Third Class Waiting Room."

When the dead man had been transported there and laid out, Campden posted the constable outside to keep off intruders and despatched Ketton to unlock the closed door.

"We can go through his pockets while we're waiting for the surgeon," Ross suggested. "It may save time."

"I'd just like to have a look at the wounds," Campden said, going over to the body. "The sur-

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geon'll give us an expert opinion after he's done his P.M., but we may as well see what's what before he starts on his job."

He stooped over the body and scanned it closely, turning it as he did so.

"Five wounds, so far as I can see; and all of 'em in the head," he reported at length. "It seems to have been a fair bombardment the poor beggar went through. Slight wound behind right ear—like a glancing shot. Serious wound under left eye—the surgeon'll be able to tell us more about it. Another wound on left forehead—"

He bent closer and passed his finger lightly over the dead man's face.

"Look here, Ross, the bullet's lying just under the skin. I can feel it; it's just the same calibre as the ones I found in the carriage."

"Is it?" said Superintendent Ross.

If his tone sounded slightly absent-minded, Campden paid no attention to it, but continued his enumeration.

"And two wounds below the left ear: one of them looks a good deal worse than the other. There's some sign of singeing, I think, round about the wound on the forehead."

"Is there?"

This time Superintendent Ross's voice betrayed quite clearly that something was puzzling him; but Campden had discovered a fresh detail which arrested his attention to the exclusion of other matters.

"Poor devil!" he exclaimed, startled out of his professional stolidity. "The shots—or some of them

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—seem to have been fired from behind; and the poor beggar had pulled up his coat collar—trying to protect himself. See! The shot's gone clean through the cloth, before it got into him. He was alive when that shot was fired, anyhow. Lord! How helpless the average man is against a really determined murderer. Think of what the poor soul must have gone through in that carriage. And yet, if we get our hands on him, there'll be plenty of well-meaning blighters who'll sign petitions for a reprieve, you bet. Well, I'm all for the Frenchy who said, 'Let Misters the Murderers commence.' If they don't like hanging, then, damn it, let them stop before they start murdering."

Superintendent Ross had a more vivid imagination than his colleague. He could conjure up the scene well enough: the helpless victim shrinking from his assassin and pathetically sheltering himself with the collar of his overcoat, as though the bullets had been hailstones.

"We'd better see if we can identify him," he said brusquely.

Campden agreed with a nod and began an examination of the dead man's personal belongings, laying each article down by itself as he proceeded with his enumeration.

"Right-hand pocket of overcoat," he began, "a pair of gloves, fur-lined. 'Made in France' on one metal clip and a lot of hieroglyphics and *J.R.* on the other. Nothing much there."

He laid down the gloves.

"Left-hand pocket, a box of Swan vestas, half

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empty. Ticket pocket of overcoat— Ah, here's something useful— A first-class return ticket, Horston to Hammersleigh, outward half snipped by the ticket examiner. Now!"

"It looks as if he'd been killed between Horston and Hammersleigh, on the face of it," Ross admitted. "But of course he may have overshot his station, or changed his mind and gone on past Hammersleigh of his own free will before he was murdered. Don't let's get too many preconceived notions, Campden."

His colleague grunted rather contemptuously; read out the ticket's number, 6431, and the current date, November 23, which was stamped on it; and then put the ticket along with the rest of the collection.

"Right-hand breast pocket of jacket," he continued, "a leather case with some papers in it. This is what we want."

He opened the case, extracted some documents, and, from a second compartment, took several Treasury notes.

"Eight pounds ten," he commented. "Doesn't look like robbery at that rate, unless he had a bigger lot of notes in a separate case. Oh, here are some visiting cards in a compartment by themselves. Oswald F. Preston, Hillcrest, Abbey Road, Horston. That accounts for the initials in the hat; evidently it's his."

He turned over the letters and glanced at the superscriptions on them.

"Some of them are addressed to O. F. Preston,

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Esq., and some to Prestons, Ltd., Great Deacon Street, Horston. H'm! Prestons? Isn't that the firm that manufactures weighing machines for shops, Ross? Scales and so forth? You ought to know."

Superintendent Ross nodded.

"Yes, that's the firm. Their head office is in Deacon Street; but their factory's out at Hammersleigh, which would account for the Hammersleigh ticket you found in his overcoat pocket. He must have been going out to the factory on business this morning."

"That limits things down a bit, then," Campden pointed out, as he pursued his search. "If he was going to get out at Hammersleigh, then he must have been shot before the train reached there, somewhere between Horston and Hammersleigh. He would know the line well enough not to get carried past his station, even in a fog like the one this morning, one would think."

A moment or two later he added:

"There's nothing more of any importance in his pockets: just keys, fountain pen, cigarette case, some loose money in the trouser pockets, cigarette holder, and handkerchief. Well, we've got something definite to start on, at any rate; we know who he is."

The constable put his head in at the door to announce the arrival of the police surgeon. Doctor Kegworth was a clean-shaven, hard-faced, competent-looking man, who wasted no time.

"All the wounds are in the head, the constable says," he said, as he took off his hat and put down

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his bag. "We'll need to make sure of that. I don't want to be biassed by suggestions, if you don't mind, Superintendent. I'll hand you my report as soon as possible. You don't want to stay now, do you? All right."

And with very little ceremony he dismissed them from the room.

"The constable here can give me a hand if I need it, I suppose?" he said, as he ushered them out.

Superintendent Ross glanced round the station and picked out a remote bench on one of the platforms.

"Suppose we postpone lunch for a while?" he suggested to his companion. "I'm not exactly keen on food at this moment, somehow. Let's spend a minute or two trying to pull this thing into shape, first of all. Then I think we might do worse than drop into an optician's shop and see what he can tell us about that bit of spectacle lens. By that time, perhaps, we'll be more in a mood for lunch."

Campden made no objection and they walked over to the isolated seat, where they could talk without the risk of being overheard. As he sat down, Ross took from his pocket the time-table he had bought at the bookstall, opened it at the page showing the service between Horston and Kempsford Junction, and ran his finger across the columns until he reached the figures for the 10.35 a.m. train. Alongside them were the times for the express by which he himself had travelled that morning.

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	Local	Express
Horston	10.35	10.47
Acton Holm	10.42	
Poppleford	10.49	
Nottage	10.53	
Ingstone	10.58	
Summerfield	11.05	
Hilton-le-Gay	11.10	
Seven Sisters	11.16	
Hammersleigh arr.	11.22	11.10
" " dep.	11.25	11.14
Morpledene	11.29	
Nether Kinton	11.33	
Forest Forge	11.40	
Menham	11.47	
New Keyling	11.53	
High Catton	11.59	
Kempsford Junction	12.04	11.37

Campden leaned across and examined the figures.

"Must have been pretty quick work, that murder, wherever it was done," he pointed out, after a few seconds spent in mental arithmetic. "The longest time between stops anywhere on the line is seven minutes."

"Less than that," Superintendent Ross corrected. "Your seven-minute difference includes the stop at the station and that would be round about a minute on the average, I should guess. Besides, he'd have to be well away from the station before he started; and he'd have to get everything cleared up by the time he ran into the next station. Allow another min-

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ute for these two items, and your maximum time allowance drops to five minutes."

"Five minutes to shoot a man several times and then stuff his body under the seat? It's quick work. But hold on a moment! That fog held up the local, you said, didn't you? Perhaps he had more time than that, really."

"Possibly he had," Ross conceded, "but whether he had or not, he's a cool card and he backed himself to manage it, even in the five minutes that the time-table allowed him."

"You seem to know a lot about him," Campden commented with a tinge of irony. "An old friend of yours who took you into his confidence beforehand, perhaps?"

Superintendent Ross grinned broadly.

"Just for that, Campden, I'll leave you to worry this out for yourself, instead of telling you now. I'll give you my views, just the inferences without the evidence. First, this affair was deliberately planned beforehand by a rather clever—no, I'll stop there. I'm practically sure of that much, on the evidence we've got up to the present; and I'll be very much surprised if Kegworth's P.M. doesn't confirm what I say. Just wait till you see his report on the fatal wounds."

"I'll wait," said Campden sardonically. "It'll be a treat to look forward to, won't it. A bright spot in my young life. Go on."

"Well, it's obvious enough that if the thing were planned in advance, the fog was outside the calculation. No one could predict that beforehand. A

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fog in town doesn't imply a fog all along the line, so that even if the preparations had been made that morning, the fog was an unforeseeable factor at the point on the line where the murder had been pre-arranged. But the preparations weren't made this morning. So the time-table was the schedule for the scheme."

"Ah, indeed?" Campden interjected, in a sceptical tone.

"Indeed, indeed," Ross retorted chaffingly. "And if you admit all that—"

"Not I," said Campden bluntly. "I never was keen on fairy stories, not even when I was a child."

"Who's telling you fairy stories? I'm giving you the plain facts of the case in a way suitable to my hearers, leaving all the hard parts out. And the fact that this was a prearranged affair limits it a good deal. For one thing, the murder must have been done before the train reached Hammersleigh, because Preston's ticket took him only that length and there was no foreseeable chance that he'd go past his station. Ergo, Campden, we needn't pay much attention to the strip of line between Hammersleigh and here, so far as the murder itself goes. All we can look for there is traces of people leaving the train after the murder was done. And that reminds me, you'd better arrange for an S.O.S. on the wireless, asking all passengers to communicate with the police. That's our best chance of raking in evidence on that side."

"I'll see about that," Campden agreed. "Go on with the fairy story. I'm beginning to get a taste for

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these things. I'll have a look at my little girl's Hans Andersen to-night, like enough."

Superintendent Ross ignored this.

"If the murder took place before the train reached Hammersleigh, then it must have been done on one of three stretches of line: between Horston and Poppleford; or between Ingstone and Summerfield; or else between Hilton-le-Gay and Hammersleigh. On all the rest of the line the stops are too frequent to allow time for a man to be shot and stuffed under the seat and a piece of newspaper to be burned to ashes."

"That newspaper ash puzzles me a bit," Campden admitted grudgingly. "What would any man want to burn a bit of newspaper for? If it had been letters or anything like that, one could understand. But newspaper—"

Ross laughed at the expression on his colleague's face.

"I don't know why it was burned," he volunteered, "but I can make a guess at it, perhaps. Suppose somebody got blood on their hands in manhandling the body when it was pushed under the seat. It needn't have been much blood, if care was taken; but it would be safest to get rid of it. The natural thing to do would be to clean it off with a handkerchief, if you were a man—a woman's handkerchief wouldn't go far in that job. But whoever planned this affair had brains; and blood on a handkerchief sometimes takes a bit of explaining away. Why not use a newspaper—and burn it afterwards to destroy both the blood traces and any fingerprints

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you may have left on the paper? That's what I'd do myself, I think; and I should think that's just what happened in that carriage."

"That sounds all right," Campden conceded readily enough. "In fact, it sounds pretty certain. I almost begin to think you've got your reputation honestly, Ross. Ah! But what d'you make of the second bit of paper—the edge of the sheet of notepaper? That needs explaining too. You don't tell me the murderer wiped his hands on a bit of notepaper when he'd got newspaper handy. That won't wash."

He glanced up and detected, with some irritation, a quickly suppressed smile on Ross's face.

"The notepaper?" Ross retorted. "You want everything explained at once, Campden. This case has hardly begun yet, you know. Did you notice anything interesting about the bit of notepaper, by any chance, apart from its being singed?"

Campden pondered over his recollections for a few moments, as though he were trying to visualise the scrap of paper.

"It was about half an inch wide," he announced at last, weighing each statement as he uttered it. "It was plain white notepaper. It had a sort of curl on it, as if it had been rolled up into a spill. And it was singed at both edges, though the straight line of the paper edge wasn't burned into on the original edging side."

"Quite accurate," said Ross, approvingly. "You have a sound pair of eyes in your head, Campden, I'll say that for you. It's what's behind the eyes that counts, though, in a case like this."

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"Meaning brains, I suppose?" Campden said indignantly. "I haven't the kind of brains that make up fairy tales, I admit. I suppose by your way of it, the murderer, after he'd done his job, felt he wanted a smoke. So he screwed a bit of paper into a spill, walked over to the drawing-room fire, and lit his pipe with it. Funny world you must live in, with chimneypieces and railway carriages all mixed up together."

"That nasty sneering habit," said Ross deprecatingly. "Don't let it grow on you, Campden. Here it's robbed you of another bit of priceless information; for now I'll just wait till Kegworth's finished his job before I tell you what I think. I can't be quite sure myself, till I see his results; so we're not losing anything by waiting. But I bet I'm right."

He rose to his feet as he spoke.

"Now, what about an optician's shop? You know the nearest one where we're likely to get the information we want."

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CHAPTER IV: THE LENS

As they emerged from the station, the sight of a telephone box suggested a fresh ramification of affairs to Superintendent Campden.

"Now that we're sure it's Preston," he pointed out, "we ought to notify his relations, whoever they are. Some one will have to identify him, just to be on the safe side."

Superintendent Ross had followed Campden's glance towards the telephone box. Before answering, he paused for a moment to make a mental calculation.

"Rather a brutal way to break news of that sort," he suggested, with a gesture towards the telephone box. "It's not a pleasant job; but some one has to do it, and it may as well be me. I'll be back in Horston again quite soon enough to go over to his house and explain things before they see it in the evening papers. No one but ourselves knows who he is yet, and if a reporter tackles you, you can always forget that point for an hour or two, can't you?"

"I daresay I could," Campden agreed. Then, with a change in tone, he added, "Talk of the devil! Here's one of them already. You can do your own lying, Ross. I'm off to ring up our people and get them to 'phone Scotland Yard about that S.O.S. on the wireless."

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He walked off in the direction of the telephone box, but before he had taken half a dozen steps he was intercepted by a middle-aged man who had just come up.

"Sorry, Mr. Wolvey, I can't spare a moment just now," Campden apologised. "You'd better speak to Superintendent Ross here; he knows all about the affair. Ross, this is Mr. Wolvey of the *Kempsford Herald*. I won't keep you a minute; and then we must hurry along," he added meaningly, as he turned away towards the public telephone.

Ross had often been indebted to newspapers for help in his cases; and he believed in keeping on the right side of the press. He dictated to the reporter a concise account of the whole affair so far as it had gone, with the exception of the name of the murdered man.

"You can amplify that if you get hold of the porter who found the body; and the station master can probably give you further information. Of course, you won't mention anything specific in the way of clues. We don't want the murderer to learn how much we know, naturally."

"Who's the victim?" Wolvey demanded. "You forgot to tell me that."

"The body hasn't been identified yet by any one who knew him," Ross said, covering his evasion with a firm tone. "But I tell you what, Mr. Wolvey. The *Herald's* a morning paper, isn't it? And there's no evening paper in this place? Well, if you'll look up Superintendent Campden about six o'clock, I think we'll be able to give you the name. That'll be

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in plenty of time for your purposes, so you're losing nothing. Awkward for all of us if you published the wrong name, you know; and deuced awkward for us, at any rate. Call him a well-known business man and you'll be quite safe. It's a good general description."

Wolvey had the sense to see that nothing more was to be extracted from the Superintendent at the moment; and Ross took care to make it clear that no one else would get the information before the hour he had named.

"So you needn't be afraid of being done out of a scoop," he pointed out.

"I'd meant to wire one of the Horston evening papers," Wolvey explained regretfully, "and it makes a poorer story without the name."

"Nobody here recognised the poor beggar," Ross responded disingenuously. "He doesn't belong to this neighbourhood."

Campden emerged from the telephone box and rejoined them.

"Well, what about it?" he demanded. "Time we were moving along, isn't it?"

He turned to Wolvey with a broad smile.

"No use sleuthing around, Mr. Wolvey, to see what we're going to do next. We're on the road to Palmer's restaurant; and then Superintendent Ross is going to take the first train home."

Ross explained the matter of the six o'clock appointment to his colleague, who reassured the journalist.

"Come and see me at six o'clock and I'll prob-

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ably have some news for you. And now, Ross, I'm hungry."

Wolvey went into the station to hunt for further details.

"And now," said Ross, "what about this optician? I sort of gathered from your frank and honest statement that his shop's on the road to Palmer's restaurant."

"It is. I'm always strictly truthful. We go down this street here."

Their call at the optician's did not occupy much time. There was quite enough glass left to identify the type of lens.

"Write down the technical formula for the thing, please," Campden asked the man behind the counter, after the examination had been made.

When the slip of paper was passed across to him, he read on it:

— 5.50 sph. + 0.50 cyl.

"Of course I can't say what the position of the axis may have been," the optician pointed out. "You need to see the thing in the frame to tell that."

"What sort of sight would a person have who needed a glass of this sort?" Campden inquired.

"From the look of the lens, I'd be inclined to think it came out of a pair of tortoise-shell-rimmed reading glasses. I can't swear to that, of course; it's just an opinion. But in that case, the lens would suit somebody with a fairly short sight and a quite perceptible amount of astigmatism."

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"I'm not quite clear about astigmatism," Ross interjected. "Suppose these are reading glasses. I take it that whoever wore them was short-sighted and would need other glasses for his ordinary use in the street. Now would these other glasses have a cylindrical curve on them too, or would ordinary spherical lenses serve well enough?"

The optician looked rather doubtful.

"I think it's likely that both sets would need to be made to suit the astigmatism; but I shouldn't care to swear to it. You'd better try an oculist for an answer to that; all I do is to test people's eyes and give them the lenses that seem to fit their sight. I'm not an expert, really."

Campden recovered the lens fragment, picked up the paper with the technical description on it, and bade the optician good afternoon.

"Now, we'll have some food," he suggested. "That'll leave us just time to get back to the station and hear if Kegworth's found anything startling, so far; and then it'll be time for your train."

Their meal did not take long; and they reached the station again in plenty of time for the Horston train. Doctor Kegworth was still engaged on his gruesome task; but he had already a fair amount of information to give them.

"All the wounds are in the head," he explained curtly. "Five of them. If only four shots had been fired, the man might have lived, though one of the wounds is serious. The fifth shot was fired from behind and below. The bullet went in behind the

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left ear and lodged somewhere in the anterior part of the brain. It killed him. As to the other wounds, one of them is purely superficial. The shot entered the tissues but didn't damage the bone. A scalp wound merely. I haven't found the bullet. Probably it glanced off the bone and emerged again."

"That would be one of the bullets we found in the carriage, likely," Campden confirmed. "Yes, go on, Doctor."

"There's another wound, much the same, behind the right ear. I found no bullet there, either."

"We found two bullets in the compartment."

"Then there's a third wound on the left forehead," the surgeon continued. "There was no injury to the bone. It's a purely superficial wound. Here's the bullet. I found it lying just under the skin."

He held up a nickelled bullet similar to those which had been found in the compartment.

"Same calibre as the others," Campden commented, taking it from the doctor and inspecting it closely.

"The fourth wound's much more serious," Kegworth continued. "It's under the left eye. I've extracted the bullet. It's not the same as the others—a leaden one, not nickel-covered, and bigger calibre. Here it is."

He produced the projectile and handed it to Campden. But Campden, instead of examining it, turned to stare at Ross with marvel in his eyes.

"You guessed something of this sort?"

Ross nodded.

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"It was fairly simple, if you just happened to look at the facts in a particular way," he said.

"This complicates things a bit," Campden mused, turning the leaden projectile absently between his fingers. "Two pistols of different calibre—does that mean two murderers or was it one man with two pistols?"

"Neither," said Ross, with a suppressed smile.

"Neither?" echoed Campden, in unashamed surprise. "It must be one or the other."

"The whole thing was done by one man with one pistol," Ross asserted confidently. "Look at the facts and you'll see the thing staring you in the face. There are five wounds in all. The fatal one was probably made by a leaden bullet, but as we haven't got it in front of us yet, we'll leave it out and confine ourselves to the four projectiles that we've actually seen with our own eyes."

"Three nickelled bullets from an automatic pistol and one heavy-calibre leaden bullet fired from a revolver, I should say," Campden emphasised. "You said the automatic bullets were point thirty-eighths yourself; and this leaden one looks to me like a point forty-five or thereabouts."

"I'll come to the bullets immediately," Ross explained. "First of all, consider the wounds made by the nickelled set. One hits him behind the left ear but doesn't damage the bone at that place. Same in the case of the wound behind the right ear. Then in the third case, the bullet strikes him on the left forehead, doesn't injure the bone, and actually

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comes to rest under the skin. And in this last case the shot was fired so close to the head that there were actually slight signs of burning on the skin and hair. You'd never make me believe that a normal automatic would produce results like that, Campden. It's got a fairly high muzzle velocity and you couldn't persuade a village idiot that a bullet from it would stick in the skin six inches from where the pistol was fired. The shot might have glanced off the bone; but it would have had far too much speed on it even then to lodge under the skin of the forehead. It's simply incredible, that's all about it."

"Damn it! I ought to have seen that!" Campden admitted frankly. "And I suppose you've got something further?"

"Take the nickelled bullets themselves, that you were so eager about a moment or two ago. Where are the marks of the pistol's rifling on their castings? There's hardly a scratch on them, so obviously they never were fired from the pistol they were meant to fit. They must have come through a barrel of a much bigger calibre; and the leakage of gas between the bullet and the barrel accounts for the low penetrating power. They had nothing like the full energy of the cartridge behind them; and one shot—the one that made the forehead wound—was hardly better than a misfire."

"Now I see what that strip of paper was for," Campden interrupted. "You mean that the murderer used a heavy-calibre revolver and he rolled strips of paper round the .38 bullets to bring them

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up to the diameter of the revolver barrel? Then why did we find only one strip?"

"Perhaps he picked up the rest; or perhaps they stuck in the revolver rifling. I expect he picked them up and missed the one we found, because it had blown under the seat somehow. He was in something of a hurry, remember, Campden, with a five-minute time limit on his work."

"I think I see how it was done now," Campden went on. "The murderer had a .45 revolver. The first chamber was loaded with an ordinary .45 cartridge with a leaden bullet; the next three had the paper-rolled .38 bullets in them; and the fifth chamber had a .45 normal cartridge. He attacked Preston suddenly and shot him in the face with leaden bullet No. 1. It wasn't fatal; and Preston turned round and buried his face in the corner of the carriage. Then the murderer came up close to him. Preston instinctively turned up his overcoat collar, poor beggar, to shield himself; and the murderer blazed thrice at him at close range without doing much damage, since the .38 bullets had no penetrating power. Then he finished the job with leaden bullet No. 2, fired upward from somewhere on the left side. Is that it?"

"It's as near as we're likely to get, I expect," Ross confirmed. "And now you see why I said it was a put-up job, all thought out beforehand? A man might have a revolver in his pocket by accident. But he wouldn't accidentally have a revolver ready loaded in a peculiar way like this. Premeditation's as plain as the nose on your face, thank good-

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ness. We've so much to go on. It isn't merely a homicidal lunatic on the loose. And I expect to get some more evidence yet—perhaps in a day or two. If it turns up, then we can convince any jury that this was a completely cold-blooded affair, thought out long beforehand—and that helps a lot towards a conviction."

Superintendent Campden's nod gave assent to this view of the case.

"It's going to be a matter of pure circumstantial evidence," he said reflectively, "and that's always a tricky thing to put to a jury unless you've plenty of it and all hanging together nicely. The bother is that except for that bit of spectacle lens—which may belong to Preston, after all—there doesn't seem to be a single thing in the compartment that puts us on the track of the criminal, not one."

"He's had plenty of time to think things out," Ross said confidently, "and he's made no mistakes, apparently."

Campden thought he saw a possible flaw in his colleague's assertion.

"H'm!" he grunted. "I'll admit that he must have made his arrangements before he got on to the train—the bullets more or less prove it. But that carries you back only to about 10 a.m. this morning and you talk as if you thought this had all been planned much longer ahead than that."

"I can't prove it," Ross confessed frankly, "so there's no use going into it just now. But I expect to get the evidence before long, from what I've seen."

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He turned to the police surgeon and took his leave. Campden followed him out on to the platform.

"My train's in a minute or two," Ross said, glancing up at the clock dial. "Let's run over the next moves. If the murder was done on the stretch between Horston and Hammersleigh, then it's a case for us in Horston. We'll need to hunt up all the information we can at intermediate stations along the line, to see if we can pin down the murderer amongst people who left the train at any of these places. I'll put a detective-inspector on to that job—Mornington's a good man. He'll work up from Horston to Hammersleigh, including Hammersleigh station. Would you put some one of your lot to do the same for the stretch between here and Hammersleigh? It'll save time to work from both ends. We'll need to get the ticket collectors and porters while their memories are fresh, or else they'll begin recollecting dozens of things that never happened at all."

"They'll do that anyhow," Campden interjected.

Ross glanced again at the clock.

"Would you mind ringing up Mornington now and telling him to meet me on the platform at the terminus when my train gets in? Then I can start him on his job at once, before I go out to Preston's house. It'll save time."

"All right," Campden assured him, as Ross turned to hurry towards the waiting train. "I'll fix that up for you; and I'll send a man down the line from this end."

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CHAPTER V: IN SEARCH OF A MOTIVE

Superintendent Ross secured a carriage to himself; and as the train steamed out of the Junction, he lit his pipe and settled down to an undisturbed consideration of the Preston case. Very little reflection satisfied him that he had extracted from the known facts everything that he judged valuable. So far as he had gone, he felt on firm ground.

Dismissing that side of the subject, he began to turn over in his mind the points which were still lacking in the story of the crime, and the type of evidence which would be needed to fill the gaps.

Obviously, the murderer and his victim had travelled together, for some part of the journey at least. Inquiry would have to be made in the hope that some one who knew Preston might recall seeing him in company with the criminal. Superintendent Ross had little real hope in this direction. He knew too well the unobservant nature of the ordinary town dweller when in a crowd at a railway station. Still, there was always a chance, he reflected. Mornington could be trusted to rake through the whole station staff at the terminus and unearth any information that could be got.

It was on the cards, though, that the murderer had not joined the train at Horston, but had got into Preston's compartment at one of the stations

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