

ANOTHER ONE GOES TONIGHT

A PETER DIAMOND INVESTIGATION

Peter Lovesey



*A*nother one goes tonight.
This time I'm ahead of myself so this isn't a to-do list. Everything is in place, as they say. But being methodical I want something on record to look at when it's all over. You're on your own in this game, so any debriefing is with myself.

The only thing left is to make sure I get the timing right. I'm going for 2 A.M. when he'll be sleeping soundly, guaranteed. Get gloved up, let myself in, do the necessary and get out without leaving any trace. The police have no idea and I'm not doing them any favours.

He'll rest in peace and so will I, with the difference that I'll wake up tomorrow morning.

1

“I’ve seen a few things on the night shift,” Police Sergeant Lew Morgan said, “but this beats them all.”

“Shall we stop him?” his driver, PC Aaron Green, asked. “What for? He’s not speeding.”

“No helmet.”

“He doesn’t need one. It’s only a trike.”

“It’s motorised. He’s not turning the pedals.” Aaron Green wasn’t there simply to drive the car. Typical of young bobbies out to impress, he was constantly on the lookout for offenders.

Lew was older and reckoned he was wiser. He took stock. There were reflectors on the pedals and, sure enough, they weren’t moving, but the tricycle was. Three hours to go and the boredom was getting to him.

Might as well do the business.

He pressed the control on the dash and triggered the blue flashing lights. “Okay, chummy, let’s see if your brakes work.”

Their patrol car slowed to tail the offending vehicle and draw in behind. The stretch of minor road near Bathampton was otherwise deserted at 2:30 in the morning.

The tricycle came to a controlled stop. Its rider turned his head in a way that involved rotating most of his upper body. He wasn’t young.

“You know what?” Lew said. “That’s a fucking deerstalker he’s wearing.”

“Still illegal,” Aaron said.

“Who does he think he is?”

“Fancy dress?”

Lew got out and approached the rider of the tricycle.

“Switch off, sir.”

“I beg your pardon.”

Deaf as well.

Lew shouted, “Switch off,” and mimed the action with his hand.

The tricyclist obeyed. The hat was definitely a deerstalker. And the rest of the clothes matched. Lew was no fashion expert but he had an idea he was looking at a Norfolk jacket worn over a check shirt and trousers kept in place by leather gaiters. Like some character out of a television costume drama.

And the voice was vintage BBC. “How can I be of assistance, officer?” How patronising was that?

“Do you have a licence to ride this thing?”

“I do not.”

Lew almost rubbed his hands. He was going to enjoy this. “You’re aware that it’s a form of motorcycle?”

“I suppose it might be described as such.”

“So you need a licence.”

“Actually, no.”

“What do you mean, no? You just agreed with me it’s a motorcycle.”

“In the eyes of the law, it’s a beast of another colour, so to speak.”

“A *what?*”

“In point of fact this is an EAPC.”

Lew was supposed to be the voice of authority here. He wasn’t about to show frailty by asking what an EAPC was. “That may be so but it’s motor-powered. You were riding without moving your legs.”

The man gave the sort of smile that gets the seat by

the window. “Only because the poor old pins aren’t up to pedalling so far these days.”

Lew didn’t have any sympathy for the elderly. They did far too well out of the state with their inflation-proof pensions and all the extras. “So it’s a motorbike. You’re not wearing a helmet either.”

“That is true, officer.” Far from sounding apologetic, this lawbreaker was oozing confidence.

Lew remained civil, but firm. “Did you know it’s also against the law to ride a motorcycle without a helmet?”

Now the silver eyebrows peaked in concern. “You’re worried about my safety?”

“I’m not worried. I’m not worried in the least. I’m telling you it’s illegal.”

“Oh dear.” But the concern wasn’t for himself, it was for Lew. “I don’t suppose you come across many drivers of motorised tricycles.”

“That’s beside the point, sir.”

“Forgive me, officer. I’m trying to save you some embarrassment.”

“Trying to save *me*?” Lew said.

“You see I wouldn’t be out on the public highway if I knew I was in breach of the law. However, if you’ll bear with me a moment . . .” He dipped his right hand towards his jacket pocket.

Lew reacted fast. “Don’t do that!”

The startled old man almost fell off the saddle.

“Put your hands where I can see them, on the handlebars. What’s in the pocket?”

“Only a piece of paper. I always carry a copy of the official government advice, which I believe is still in force. I was about to invite you to look at it.”

“I don’t need to.”

“That’s a shame, because if you did you would see that provided I don’t exceed fifteen miles an hour and my

vehicle doesn't weigh more than sixty kilograms and the power is not more than two hundred and fifty watts, my choice of transport—contrary to appearance—is not classed as a motorcycle but an electrically assisted pedal cycle.”

An EAPC.

All this had been spoken with such self-assurance that Lew knew with a sinking heart it had to be right. The figures the old jerk had quoted were faintly familiar. Out on patrol you don't often come across motorised trikes. This road user was a pain in the arse, but he was in the clear. He didn't require a licence or a helmet.

Lew should have stuck to his first impulse and told young Aaron to drive straight past. Now it was a matter of saving face. He pointed to the large bag strapped to the back of the saddle.

“What's in that?”

“Nothing of interest to the police, I promise you.”

“Answer the question, please.”

“A plastic box containing a banana and a slice of date and walnut cake. I come prepared, in case I get hungry.”

“Is that all?”

“I haven't finished. A flask of tea. Also my binoculars, camera, tripod, an ordnance survey map.” He smiled. “And Trixie.”

“What's that?”

“You mean, ‘Who's that?’ Trixie is my late wife.”

There was a pause for thought. “In this bag?”

“I always bring her ashes with me. We shared so much in life. She passed away six months ago. Examine her, by all means. And I forgot the puncture repair kit. It's surprising how much the bag holds.”

Best insist on the old man handling his own possessions. The power to search at a road check has to involve suspicion of a serious arrestable offence. Lew asked him to unzip the saddlebag. This involved a contortion that was

clearly uncomfortable, but Lew wasn't going to get caught out a second time.

The vacuum flask and the sandwich box containing a banana and a wedge of cake were visible on top. And so was the lid of a plastic urn. Lew didn't need to meet Trixie close up.

"What are the binoculars for?"

"Oh, you're thinking I might be a peeping Tom. Absolutely not. I'm well past that sort of nonsense."

"Most people are in bed at this time of night," Lew said.

"But it's not compulsory. We're living in a free country."

"Do you mind telling me where you're going?"

A reasonable question that got an unhelpful answer. "I won't know until I get there, will I?"

Lew was being led into a minefield of embarrassment. He knew it. The only mercy was that Aaron was out of earshot.

The old man added, "They don't stay in one spot. They're moving steadily closer to Bath, you see."

He didn't see. He didn't see at all. But he wasn't so stupid as to ask. He waited for something more, and he got it.

"They can cover as much as a mile in a single night, using hops."

"A mile a night?" Lew pictured a colony of travelling rabbits. What was that film he'd once seen about rabbits on the move? *Watership Down*. "And you hope to see them through your binoculars?"

"Unless I can get really close and observe them with the naked eye. It depends on the terrain."

"If they're always moving, how do you know where to look?"

"I would have thought that was obvious."

"Not to me, sir."

"You can hear them some way off."

"Hear them doing what?"

"Digging their holes."

This was the moment Lew decided to quit. “On this occasion I’m going to leave you to it. For your own safety, I advise you to get a cycle helmet. And keep off the A roads.”

“I’m obliged to you, but I always do.”

“Go carefully. Other traffic may not see you coming.”

The old man looked skywards. “A full moon helps.”

You bet it does, you old loony, Lew thought, as he returned to the patrol car. He opened the door, got in and watched in silence as the tricyclist moved off.

Watership Down was a real place somewhere in Hampshire, seventy miles down the M4. The rabbits couldn’t have travelled that distance, even at a mile a night. Must have been a different colony. Oh Christ, Lew thought, he’s got me thinking it’s real.

“You didn’t book him, then,” Aaron said from the world of modern policing.

“No.”

“Let him off with a caution?”

“No need. He’s legal.”

“How can that be?”

“It’s an EAPC.”

“Ah.”

Like Lew, Aaron wasn’t betraying his ignorance. He turned the car and headed back towards the lights of Bath. No more was said for some time.

Eventually Aaron asked, “Did the old bloke say what he was up to?”

“Stalking rabbits.”

“To shoot?”

“To watch.”

“Like a safari?”

Lew didn’t smile. He was smarting from the experience. He realised he hadn’t even asked the old boy his name. “It takes all sorts.”

A shout from the control room saved them both from

more of the same. Some people with a ladder had been seen acting suspiciously near a church north of the city in Julian Road. In the last six months the lead had been stripped from several roofs in Bath. The thieves could make as much as twenty grand from one night's work.

Two patrols were ordered to the scene.

The burst of activity using blues and twos brought much-needed distraction. Aaron jammed his foot down and they arrived first, just as two chancers from Swindon were loading their loot into the back of a pick-up truck.

Gotcha.

The arrest filled an hour profitably and made a success of what had promised to be a long, barren night. The other patrol didn't show up, but Lew and Aaron didn't mind. By the time they had delivered their prisoners to the custody centre in Keynsham and gone through the formalities with the sergeant their shift was almost over.

It wasn't worth going out on the roads again. Their relief would be coming in at 7 A.M.

Cue for a coffee.

Every officer working a shift knows the final hour is the worst possible time to get involved in a fresh incident because it has to be followed through regardless of when you're supposed to go off duty. So Lew and Aaron weren't overjoyed when ordered at 6:19 to investigate a report of a naked man in Beckford Gardens.

"That's all I want, another nutcase," Lew said.

They returned to the car.

"What are we dealing with here—a drunk?" he asked the control room as the early morning traffic moved aside for their flashing lights. "Is he dancing in the street and singing 'I want to break free'?"

The operator giggled. "You tell me when you get there."

To Aaron, he said, "Bet you it's a domestic. His wife kicked him out of bed."

“He could be a sleepwalker.”

“Don’t talk to me about sleep. I could have been home and horizontal if it wasn’t for this.”

They crossed North Parade Bridge and turned left on Pulteney Road. Getting to Beckford Gardens wouldn’t take long. Questioning a naked man, possibly drunk or asleep, might be a slower process.

“We’d better decide how to deal with him.”

“Cover him up?” Aaron said.

“What with?”

“Dunno. We’ve got high-vis jackets in the back.”

“That’s what he wants, high visibility.”

At the end of Darlington Street the road joins Sydney Place and curls around Sydney Gardens. The traffic was lighter here.

“It’s a long one,” Aaron said.

“How do you know? We haven’t seen it yet.”

“The road. Beckford Gardens, I’m talking about Beckford Gardens.”

Lew yawned. “Okay. Get us there soon as you can.” He closed his eyes.

The next thing he knew was Aaron yelling, “Jeeeee!” followed by the screech of brakes and a lurch as the car tipped sideways.

Lew was thrust forward like one of those dummies you see in films of accident testing. This wasn’t in slow motion but to Lew it might have been, because in the milliseconds before his face impacted, his brain flashed images like a slideshow. The sudden braking swung the car out of control. They veered right, mounted the steep bank, bounced off and teetered on two wheels, hurtling left. The crunch was imminent. His head would be crushed unless the airbag inflated. When the car turned over—as it was sure to—he might be crushed anyway.

He expected to die.

* * *

How long it was before he regained consciousness he didn't know or care. All he cared about was the excruciating pain in his hip and leg. He opened his eyes to a blur.

Impaired vision.

Fumes of burnt metal told him his sense of smell was unaffected.

Couldn't move his head. Couldn't move anything much. Possible paralysis, then. But how could he be paralysed and feel this pain?

Gradually he became aware that he was in the wrecked patrol car and the reason he couldn't move was the inflated airbag acting like a vice. The blurred vision was an illusion. The windscreen inches from his eyes had cracked into myriad fragments still held together.

Glass chips started raining on his face. Someone was hammering at the thing.

Lew needed to let them know he was there. Urgently. He made a sound that was meant to be a shout and came out as a yelp.

A bigger chunk came down and a hole appeared.

A voice said, "This one's alive."

Next a hatchet was poked through and used to enlarge the hole.

The voice said, "Hang on, mate."

Even in this painful situation Lew thought the remark was stupid. He wasn't going anywhere.

"Can you hear me? We'll get you out of this."

Another yelp was the best he could manage.

A hand came through the hole, groped in the space, found his face and felt for his mouth. He knew what was going on: the basic first-aid drill of making sure his airways weren't blocked.

"Can you speak?"

Not a syllable anyone would recognise.

“Never mind. I can hear you. I’m going to ask you some questions. One squeak for yes, two for no, okay?”

Wasn’t that the system ghost-hunters used? He wanted it known he was still living. He managed a grunt.

“Are you in pain?”

One for yes.

“We’ll give you something in a second. Are you bleeding?”

Am I bleeding? Bleeding terrified.

He didn’t know, so he didn’t answer.

“Can you feel your legs?”

And how! He confirmed it.

“That’s good. Tell me where the pain is. Upper body?”

Two grunts.

“Okay, you’re making sense. You have pain below the waist, right? Can you move your leg at all?”

Two more.

“But you can feel it, and that’s good. We’ll get you out of here as soon as we can. In the meantime I’ll give you something for the pain.”

Extracting him from the wreckage took a week and a day by his reckoning. While the paramedics administered oxygen and morphine and kept talking to him, fire officers with metal cutters worked at the bits that were trapping him. A horrific moment came when they decided to puncture the airbag that was restraining his head. Finding he could move a little, he looked to his right.

He was staring into the mask-like, dust-covered face of Aaron.

The paramedics had discovered Lew’s name. He didn’t remember telling them, maybe because his brain wasn’t functioning well. Or they’d got the information from the control room. They told him their first names, as matey as if they’d all just met at a drinks party. Needing to keep him conscious, they prattled away about things unrelated

to the situation, favourite TV programmes, football and music. Some way into the process he managed to get his voice working—and he wasn't wasting words on the rubbish they were going on about.

“My driver—I think he's dead.”

“Afraid so. We got to him first but he was gone.”

“He was young, not long married.”

“Try and stay calm, Lew. We've got a job to do here.”

“He was driving okay. I don't know what we hit.”

“Looks like you sheered off a wall of turf and turned right over. You may not feel like it right now, Lew, but you're a lucky man.”

2

“So what happens now?” Paul Gilbert, the youngest member of the Bath CID team, asked. Everyone was talking about the fatal accident.

“It gets investigated,” DCI Keith Halliwell said from across the room. “A police car crashing is big time, a job for Professional Standards. It could go all the way to the IPCC. They’ll need to know all kinds of stuff, like what was their speed and were they using blues and twos.”

“They’ll have a job on their hands with the driver dead,” DI John Leaman said in his usual downbeat tone.

“The other guy survived—Lew Morgan,” Gilbert said. “He ought to know what happened.”

“Yeah—but how much does he remember? He was knocked out. It blanks out everything.”

“Not necessarily.”

“Are there cameras along Beckford Gardens?”

“Not when I was last there.”

“You can tell a lot from skid marks.”

“Were they on an emergency?”

“Only if you can call a naked man an emergency.”

“Bloody hell—is that what they were attending—some crazy stalker?” Leaman said. “Fancy being killed for that.”

“I wonder how the naked man will feel when he hears what happened,” Gilbert said.

“He won’t give a shit,” Leaman said.

True or not, that cynical declaration drew a line under the discussion.

At the same time, the head of CID, Detective Superintendent Peter Diamond, was in denial in the assistant chief constable's office. He'd been called at home before breakfast and told to report as soon as possible. He didn't object to that if there was serious investigative work to be done. The job he'd just been given wasn't what he had in mind.

"Me?" he told Georgina Dallymore, his boss. "You can't cast me as the professional standards man. Everyone in this place will fall about laughing."

"No one here is laughing after the tragedy this morning." Georgina knew how to turn the screw.

"I'm not cut out for this. You need someone who is blameless. My file looks like a jumbo crossword, there are so many black marks on it."

"Nothing was said about your reputation, Peter. You'll be the local investigator acting for the PSD at Portishead," she said as if it was a done deal.

"PSD?" He hated abbreviations.

"Professional Standards Department."

"There's a *department* for it?"

"They asked for a senior officer who can punch his weight, who doesn't shrink from asking questions."

"What's wrong with the collisions experts? They employ them just to investigate crashes."

"The CIU? They're involved, don't worry. But their emphasis is mainly on the mechanical causes, if any. Yours will be on the people, the driver and the sergeant who was with him and whether they were negligent in any way."

"I'm a detective. I come down hard on criminals, not my brother officers."

"Peter, nobody volunteers for a job like this. Think of it as a moral obligation."

“Moral? What’s moral about it?”

“And when all is said and done,” Georgina motored on, “it’s what you do better than anyone else—an investigation. Interviewing witnesses, evaluating evidence.”

“To stitch up someone I rub shoulders with every day?”

“Not necessarily. If you find they weren’t at fault, you say so. You give them a clean bill of health.”

“Just so it can be vetted by the PSD and passed to Police Complaints, who will pick it to pieces and say I conspired in a whitewash. This is a no-win job.”

“Now you’re being cynical.”

“Realistic.”

Georgina shifted to a more humane approach. “Put yourself in the shoes of the driver’s people. They’ll want to know how it could have happened and they’ll want one of our own to be in charge.”

“Did he have family?”

“A wife and a son of only eight months.”

Diamond’s obdurate face softened and creased. “That’s tragic . . . dreadful.”

Georgina leaned back in her chair with the look of a chess-player who has made the winning move.

He asked, “Is someone with them?”

“Of course. And there’s his co-driver, Sergeant Morgan, in hospital with multiple fractures and in danger of losing a leg. They’re entitled to the best enquiry we can give them. Do you know Lew Morgan?”

“If I do, it’s only by sight. In CID, we don’t spend much time with the uniformed lot. It’s not personal. Our work keeps us at a distance.”

“Which is why you’re so well placed to carry this out. You’re not too close to be swayed. I’m assigning you to this, Peter, and I don’t want any more objections.”

He’d been about to say he couldn’t be spared from the murder squad, but murders had been as rare as pay rises

this last two months and Georgina knew. Saying there was a huge backlog of paperwork wouldn't impress her; there was always a backlog. He was stuck with the accident investigation. Better make the best of it. "If I do this, I'm going to need assistance."

"No argument about that," she said, encouraged. "This will be too much for one man. I can deploy a sergeant from uniform to help you."

"No use at all," he said.

"Why on earth do you say that?"

"As you just remarked yourself, anyone from uniform can be swayed. I need neutrals like myself. CID people."

She gave him a long look. "You're a devious man."

He waited.

She sighed. "Who are you thinking of—bearing in mind that we want CID to function efficiently while this is going on?"

"Keith Halliwell and Ingeborg Smith."

"Two of your best officers?" She shifted her bottom as if he'd made her uncomfortable.

"John Leaman is perfectly capable of running things without us. He'll jump at the chance."

He'd asked for two, expecting her to limit him to Halliwell, but she surprised him by saying, "Very well. Take Halliwell and Smith." Then she added, "Don't lose any time. You'll want to look at the scene. All the wreckage has to be cleared away before the day is out."

With Keith and Ingeborg he drove out to Beckford Gardens. His two colleagues were every bit as uneasy as he had been about investigating a fatal traffic accident, and said so.

"The technical stuff is taken care of," he told them. "We won't be measuring tyre marks. The Collision Investigation Unit will take care of all that and supply us with the facts."

Our job is to talk to the people involved and make sure they acted professionally.”

“Person,” Ingeborg said.

“What?”

“You said people. My understanding is that there’s only one survivor and we won’t be talking to him for a while. He’s in intensive care.”

“Sergeant Morgan,” Halliwell added. “Lew Morgan.”

“You know him?”

“Been at Bath as long as I have.”

They pulled up in Beckford Gardens some way short of the taped-off area. A patrol car parked sideways with beacon lights flashing was blocking the road. Beyond were more police vehicles and lifting gear. “We’ll get a sense of the scene as we always do,” Diamond said, trying to sound upbeat before they left the car. “Let’s treat it as we would a crime scene.”

“Except that the body will have been removed,” Ingeborg said, making clear she was every bit as unhappy about this assignment as he was. “It’s not the same at all, guv. We won’t be looking for a murder weapon. Or suspects.”

“Or motives,” Halliwell chimed in.

“It was a traffic accident,” Ingeborg said. “Shocking, but no mystery.”

“Hang on, there are things to investigate,” Diamond told them. “And there are victims.”

“Casualties.” Ingeborg was unconvinced.

“One fatal, one critically injured,” Diamond said. “As I understand it, they were called out to a so-called emergency about a naked man. In my book, they were victims.”

“Who made the call?”

“That’s one of the mysteries we have to unravel.”

“Whodunit,” Halliwell said, and triggered one of those moments when there was imminent danger of Diamond combusting.

This time he just rolled his eyes.

They stepped into the taped-off area.

The stretch where the crash had happened was about halfway along Beckford Gardens, a long narrow road in the north-eastern section of the city known as Bathwick. Houses and bungalows along one side faced bushes and trees on the other. You couldn't see the railway and the canal on the undeveloped side but they weren't far off.

The mangled wreckage of the Ford Focus police car was across the pavement. It had demolished someone's garden wall and come to rest on its side with the front end in their rose-bed. Bits of the bodywork in the familiar blue and yellow Battenburg livery were lying where they had been dropped by the rescue team.

Diamond's hope of treating this as a crime scene had to be swiftly revised. Massive tyres had crisscrossed the surfaces where he would have hoped to find tracks of the original crash. Heavy machinery, a truck-mounted crane and a flat-bed lorry stood close to the centre of things, as well as a fire tender. The car roof had been removed with hydraulic cutters to get at the casualties inside. Fire and rescue officers, police and highways officials couldn't avoid splashing through pools of oil and water as they went about their business removing equipment.

He went over to one of the police and identified himself. He was taken to meet the collision investigator, who looked about seventeen and said his name was Dessie. He was in a high-visibility jacket and hard hat with the word CHIEF across it. Two young women, similarly dressed, except that their hard hats had nothing written on them, were close by, using a laser rangefinder.

"Who do you represent?" Dessie asked. "I'm the specialist here."

"Professional Standards. We won't tread on your toes. Can you run through what happened?"

“Man, you’re joking. The only guy who can answer that is in intensive care.” Dessie might have been young but he wasn’t subdued by rank.

Diamond didn’t particularly like being addressed as “man,” but equally Dessie probably didn’t appreciate people who called themselves Professional Standards muscling in on his territory. “You must have formed an opinion. A police car doesn’t smash into a wall for no reason.”

“Take your pick,” Dessie said, spreading his hands. “Driver fell asleep at the wheel, had a stroke, an epileptic fit, an attack of cramp, a visual problem, a call on his mobile. His brakes failed, his steering went. A stone shattered the windscreen. A deer ran across the road. Or a cat, or a dog, or a runaway ostrich.”

“A naked man?” Halliwell said before Diamond could turn ballistic.

“Don’t come clever with me,” Dessie said, regardless that he was being clever with them.

“That’s what the call was about—a naked man.”

“Sure, and they were expecting him. He wouldn’t have caused the crash.”

“If he stepped out from behind one of those parked cars, he would,” Halliwell said. “Anyone, clothed or not, would have made them hit the brakes and very likely go out of control.”

“That’s one more scenario. I’m trained to keep an open mind.”

“Perhaps you should tell us what you’ve learned so far,” Diamond said through gritted teeth.

“Now you’re talking, man. I’ve noted three points of interest. I can walk you through if you want.”

“It would help.” He resisted the urge to add “sonny.”

Dessie was already on his way to a place some thirty metres from the wrecked police car, zigzagging between groups of fire and rescue officers. He was a fast mover.

He stopped where a white Toyota and a silver Renault were parked close to the kerb. Presumably they belonged to people from the adjacent houses. “There’s bugger all left to see because of all the vehicles that have come through since,” Dessie said when Diamond and the others joined him, “but everything was photographed and measured—skid marks this side of the Toyota indicating that something braked hard here and narrowly avoided hitting the thing. Delta Three—our patrol car—was travelling north along here, on the lookout for the naked man. You can see for yourselves how narrow it is. There isn’t much space for overtaking.”

With that settled, he marched briskly to the steep grass verge that fringed the road opposite the houses and rose to about five feet above the level of the road surface. Tyre tracks were clearly visible, showing something had mounted the slope and veered back to the road several metres on. “Second point of interest. The tracks show where the front offside wheel mounted the soft shoulder. The indentation is deepest at the high point. When you look at the wheels in a moment you’ll see mud and grass adhering to the tyre wall. It’s pretty obvious they struck this bank and lost control. The speed they were going and the angle were enough to tip the car over.” He headed across the road to the wreck of Delta Three, embedded in what remained of the garden wall.

“It’s a miracle anyone got out alive,” Ingeborg said when they caught up.

“What you’re looking at now is my third and final piece of evidence, the shell of the thing after they were cut out,” Dessie told her. “Take note of the mud on the wheels.”

The young man was justified in treating them as beginners in accident investigation, Diamond had to remind himself, but he couldn’t take much more of it. “When did you get here?”

“While they were extracting the dead driver. The survivor was already in the ambulance on his way to the Royal United.”

“So you didn’t see the car in its original state after it hit the wall?”

“Others were here. It was photographed. I won’t be short of evidence.”

“*We* won’t be short of evidence,” Diamond told him. “We’ll need copies of everything you have. Has anyone from the houses come forward?”

“A few I spoke to,” Dessie said. “None of them saw the crash. Several heard it.”

“We’d better do some doorstepping.”

“Hold on,” Dessie said. “That’s my call.”

“Have you made it?”

“Not yet. I’ve been far too busy with other stuff.”

“And you don’t have much help by the look of it. But you’re in luck, because we’ll knock on doors and share information with you.”

The young man blinked.

“Better get on, then,” Diamond said. “Can’t keep you from your duties any longer.”

He waited for Dessie to get out of earshot. “Something’s not right here,” he told his companions. “An experienced driver doesn’t lose control, even on a 999 job.”

“Mechanical failure?” Ingeborg said.

“How often does that happen? Police cars are well maintained.”

“We can’t rule it out.”

“Can’t rule out all the other possible causes he was rabbiting on about. We simply have to stop guessing and get some evidence. Now that we’ve done the tour with Dessie, I want to walk through his points of bloody interest myself. You two had better talk with the gawpers. A few have collected by the tapes. See if they can offer anything helpful.”

He crossed the road again to point of interest number two, the place where they'd been shown the tyre tracks. The bank Dessie had called the soft shoulder was much more than that, more than head-high in places. At the top was a long strip of scrubland with well-established trees planted to screen the stark grey walls of the railway embankment beyond. A London-bound train had just thundered past at the level of the rooftops.

He didn't need to study the grooves in the mud. He could understand how the car had been thrown off course and turned over. He was more interested in what had happened immediately prior to that. A higher viewpoint might help. He reached for an overhanging branch, hauled himself up the bank and found he could see much more. The work of hosing away foam and oil continued around the wreck of Delta Three. A flatbed truck was being backed towards it. Difficult to picture the scene before the accident.

The possibility of an animal, a fox or a deer, making a dash across the road from the wild area and causing the driver to slam on his brakes had made sense until now. Unlikely. The railway company had installed railings all the way along, not obvious from below. The bushes hid much of this iron barrier from view. There was only a narrow strip of ground to stand on.

Diamond was forced to think again.

He edged a short way along for a better angle, gripping branches and railings to keep his balance. A fire engine was parked immediately below him and he couldn't see past it.

He hadn't gone far when he was forced to stop for a tangle of metal heaped against the railing. At first he thought some piece of the police car must have broken off in the crash and been flung up here, but it became obvious this wasn't a car part. Chrome tubing, twisted cable and a circular grooved object that looked like a chain wheel

were half-buried in the long grass. He crouched for a closer look. None of it was rusted. The metal had been scraped bare on one piece, gleaming as if it had just happened.

Then he found a bicycle saddle.

This could change everything.

He stood up and looked for Halliwell and Ingeborg. Too far off to get their attention.

And now he noticed that a whole section of the railing a little further on had come off its support and was angled inwards, as if it had been struck hard by the bike. In fact, there was an entire, undamaged bicycle wheel just below it on the grass, the tyre intact. He groped his way towards it.

Had someone been riding this thing? If so, where was he?

The damage to the railing had left a v-shaped gap that Diamond squeezed through.

Tall, coarse grass. Nettles and brambles everywhere.

He cupped his mouth and shouted, "Anyone about?"

No response.

He took out his phone.

Halliwell's voice said, "Guv?" From below, still at the level of the road.

"You'd better join me, both of you, up on the wild bit behind the fire engine. I found something."

He hadn't even pocketed the mobile when he saw a shoe.

Then a leg.

The familiar shock-horror adrenalin surge.

Someone face down in the grass, dead-still.

A corpse?

Diamond squatted, caught his breath, composed himself, tugged at a shoulder.

The pale, wrinkled face of a grey-haired old man, eyes closed, mouth gaping, with dried blood at the edge of the lips. Gently, he turned him on his back.

Dead, apparently, but was he?

What right did he have to decide such a thing?

Do the drill, Diamond told himself. Feel for a pulse. Press two fingers to the side of the neck, in the hollow part beside the Adam's apple.

If there was anything, it was faint and feeble. Could have been the blood circulating through his own fingertips.

No other hint of life. And no obvious injuries other than the blood at the mouth. A cut tongue may have caused that.

He tried opening one of the eyelids. The pale blue eye was motionless, unseeing.

The airways were clear. What else could he do?

CPR.

Mouth-to-mouth resuscitation of an old person, very likely dead, isn't for the squeamish. The urgency of the situation overrode the reluctance. Gently he rotated the body, tipped the chin upwards, leaned over, made contact with the slack, cold lips and breathed into the mouth, enough to cause a slight rise of the chest.

Didn't mean there was life.

He tried a second breath and then started chest compressions, linking his fingers and flattening his palms against the old man's shirt.

Thirty, wasn't it? Thirty compressions followed by two breaths. And you do it as if you mean it, with brute force, regardless that this is a frail old body. Work that ribcage, using the weight from your own upper body and don't even think about his brittle bones splintering. You're the only chance he has, so do all you can to get the blood pulsing around his body.

He'd already lost count, and that was careless. He pumped five more and stopped.

The grey face framed by the grey hair showed nothing.

He stooped lower for more mouth-to-mouth. The first instinctive revulsion had gone. He cared, he really cared. Hot lips against cold. Two lungfuls of air.

Then back to the compressions. Already he felt the

emotional bond that lifesaving creates. He couldn't allow himself to think this might already be a corpse. He and his mate here were not letting go. There had to be life. Come on, old friend, he urged as he worked his aching shoulders, you and I can do this. He was trying to keep counting, but it was next to impossible. Maybe some inner clock was controlling him.

He heard a shout.

Halliwell had scrambled up the bank and was running towards him.

Diamond shouted, "Call an ambulance. There may be a chance."

Paramedics must have attended the crash but they'd long since left with the known casualties. All the attention in the first critical hours had been on the men trapped in the car. No one had thought to climb up here.

He remained on his aching knees beside the unconscious man, working the chest and speaking occasional words of encouragement. So much of him was invested in this rescue bid that he'd actually felt a spasm of anger at Halliwell's interruption. He and his helpless old man were on a mission and nobody had better unsettle them.

Halliwell had put through the call. "They're on the way. Want me to take over?"

"I'm managing. I think there was a pulse."

"He's not looking great."

Ingeborg joined them and had the good idea of wrapping coats around the lower half of the body for warmth. She and Halliwell unzipped their padded jackets.

"Is that the remains of his bike?"

"Must be," Halliwell said. "He was hit by the car and thrown up here."

"What was he doing, an old guy on the road at six in the morning?"

Nobody had an answer. Diamond continued with his task

as if it was *his* only chance of keeping alive. He was counting aloud now, almost shouting the numbers to inform his two colleagues that they'd better shut up asking pointless questions that were only a distraction.

Halliwell heard the ambulance siren first and went to meet the paramedics. Diamond continued resolutely with the CPR. There had been no change.

The flashing blue lights drew close and lit up the scene, giving the accident victim an even more deathly look.

The roof of the ambulance was on the same level as the top of the bank. Two paramedics scrambled up.

"I thought there was a faint pulse," Diamond told them between counting.

"You did good," one said as he pulled open the shirt and stuck defibrillator pads to the motionless white chest. "Got to be positive. We'll give him a jerk with this and some more compressions and then get him to the resus bay and see if he was born lucky."

After the ambulance had powered away, siren screaming, massive anti-climax set in. Diamond felt shattered, exhausted, mentally bereft. The people he'd worked with daily for years were like strangers at this minute. The frail old man being rushed to hospital was the only reality. And yet he had to accept that his part in the rescue effort was over.

Recriminations wouldn't be long in following. Someone else should have checked the wild part long before they had got there. The fact that it was across the street from the crash and well above eye level was no excuse.

And now Dessie had been drawn here by all the activity. He stood gazing at the mangled bicycle parts lying in the long grass. If he felt he should shoulder some blame for missing the hidden victim he wasn't admitting it.

"So here's another point of interest," Ingeborg said acidly.

He gave her a sharp glance. “Arguably, yes.”

Nothing more was said for a time. Then Halliwell commented, “Funny sort of pushbike.”

“I was thinking the same,” Ingeborg said. “Isn’t that a third wheel?”

“It’s a tricycle,” Dessie said. “An adult trike, with a small electric motor.” He indicated with his foot. His hands remained in his pockets as if he hadn’t yet accepted that this piece of wreckage was part of his remit.

Halliwell squatted and tugged back the grass for a closer look. “There’s some kind of bag attached to the handlebars.”

“Don’t touch,” Dessie said. “All the pieces will have to be photographed *in situ* and then taken to our investigation bay. Was he dressed?”

Halliwell and Ingeborg exchanged puzzled glances.

“I get you now,” Ingeborg said to Dessie. “You’re thinking of the naked man. Sorry to disappoint. He was clothed.”

“Rather eccentrically,” Halliwell said, “in an old-fashioned Norfolk overcoat and trousers with gaiters.”

“And a deerstalker,” Ingeborg added. She’d found one a few yards off in the long grass.

“So what’s your expert opinion, Dessie?” Diamond asked. It was taking a huge effort to force himself back to the demands of the job.

“About this? I’ll wait for more evidence.”

“It’s obvious, isn’t it?” Halliwell said. “Poor old geezer out for an early-morning ride gets hit by the patrol car and is thrown up here on impact.”

“I’ll need to see all the technical evidence. There are so many factors—the speed, the visibility, the weather, the skid patterns . . . We always make a computer-aided simulation.”

“Which will tell you they swerved to avoid him and mounted the bank and went out of control,” Diamond said.

Halliwell said, “I see the patrol car travelling at speed

towards the two parked cars, pulling out to pass them and suddenly being faced with the trike. It's early morning, still dark. They won't have seen him coming. They're used to reacting to headlights, not the little lights you get on a bike. Split-second decision. The driver jams on the brakes, pulls the car sharp right and up the verge and still hits the trike."

"Wouldn't he be thrown inwards, towards the centre of the road?" Ingeborg said. "He wouldn't end up here."

"Don't count on it," Diamond said. "If he hit the side of the car swinging towards him at an angle, he'd be bounced this way."

Maybe Dessie had a point. The accident wasn't so straightforward as it had first appeared.

"And he wasn't wearing a helmet," Ingeborg added.

"Crazy," Halliwell said, speaking for all of them.

Dessie went off to fetch a police photographer.

Diamond said to the others, "It's okay trading theories with Dessie. There's some overlap with what we're trying to find out. But let's be clear that he's dealing with the mechanics of the crash. We're concerned with the officers and how professional they were, and suddenly there's a worrying new dimension to it."

"A civilian casualty," Halliwell said.

"Who may have been killed," Ingeborg added. "And as an ex-journo I know what the papers will make of that."

"Let's not lose time talking about what may or may not happen," Diamond said. The emotional aftermath was still churning him up. "Did you learn anything from the rubbernecks down there?"

They shook their heads. "It happened before anyone was about," Ingeborg said.

"I'm not taking that for granted. One witness could transform this case. We need to knock on doors now. Every door. One thing they'll be able to tell us is if our guys were using blues and twos."

“I doubt if they would have had the siren on,” Ingeborg said. “A quiet residential road so early in the morning. Lights, yes, as they were going at speed.”

“Even so, we want confirmation, so we ask. And from now on our main priority has to be the tricyclist, a member of the public who was hit by a police car and seriously injured, may have lost his life, in fact. We all know how that will go down.”

“Riding a trike at night is asking to be hit,” Halliwell said. Ingeborg turned on him, “Fascist.”

“What do you mean? It’s crazy.”

“It won’t be seen that way,” Diamond said. “But we need everything we can get on this man. Was he right in the head, sober, capable of riding a bike? If he’s local, somebody will know who he is.”

“And the naked man?” Halliwell said. “We ought to ask about him. Who’s the local fruitcake who likes to get his kit off?”

They started at the houses closest to the crash. Diamond didn’t need to knock at the bungalow with the smashed garden wall. The occupant was just emerging with a tray loaded with tea and biscuits. “Would you like one, my darling?” she asked him. She was about eighty, with hair almost as sparse as his.

“That’s kind. I haven’t been here long,” he said. “Give me the tray and I’ll pass it to someone who needs it more.” He handed it to the nearest fire and rescue man and then turned back to the old lady. “Bit of a shock for you, waking up to this.”

“I don’t mind,” she said. “I grew up in London in the war. You never knew what each new day would bring. I’m sorry for the poor men in that police car. Is it true that one was killed?”

He showed his card and asked if they could speak inside the house. She was only too pleased to cooperate but it didn’t take long to discover she knew nothing. The first

she had learned of the incident was when she parted her curtains and saw what the patrol car had done to her wall. By then the rescue team was already at work.

“Didn’t you hear the crash?”

She shook her head. “I don’t wear my hearing aids in bed, my dear.”

When asked if she’d ever seen a man on a tricycle riding past, she shook her head. “I’m not much help, am I?”

“Then perhaps you can tell me if any of your neighbours behave strangely. There was a report of a man in the street with no clothes.”

“Really? Disgusting.” Her eyes lit up. “And to think I missed it.”

He tried the next house and was kept on the doorstep by an elderly Asian woman who didn’t speak any English. Communication was only achieved with gestures and sound effects. He was thankful his team didn’t hear his “Nee Naa Nee Naa Nee Naa” or watch him clap his hands to simulate the car hitting the wall. That was the easy part. The man on the trike was a bigger challenge and the nude neighbour almost impossible to convey without causing offence. All his efforts were rewarded only with disbelieving eyes and a shake of the head.

Finally at the house facing the parked cars, he got a result. The owner, a large, muscled man in a black singlet and combat trousers, had heard the collision while at breakfast and been one of the first on the scene. He’d called the emergency number on his mobile and tried speaking to the two officers in the smashed patrol car, but neither had shown any sign of life until the paramedics arrived. He worked nights at a petrol station on the Warminster Road and hadn’t long been home. The white Toyota belonged to him. He was certain the police siren hadn’t been used. When asked about the tricyclist, he said he was sure he’d seen an elderly man on a trike.

Diamond's hopes soared. "Today, you mean?"

"No, mate. One morning last week, between six and seven, when I was coming home from work."

"Which day was that?"

"I couldn't tell you. I remember, because he wasn't all that easy to spot. He had one of those LED flashers. He was coming towards me, so he can't have come far."

"Why do you say that?"

"The top of this street is a dead end. It goes a long way and gets a change of name—Hampton Row—but you can't drive any further. It ends in a footbridge across the railway, and that's it."

"Could he have brought the tricycle across the footbridge?"

"Unlikely. Too many steps."

"So it looks as if he starts in Hampton Row. What's it like up there—just an extension of this, with houses one side and rough ground the other?"

"Pretty similar, except they're small terraced houses all the way along." It was said in a superior tone. Beckford Gardens was the smart end.

"No garages, then, where you could store a trike? Thanks. This is useful," Diamond said, thinking it shouldn't be too difficult to trace the tricyclist's home if he lived in one of the terraced houses. He needed to know more about this man who had apparently been the cause of the crash. That was a given. And at a deeper, emotional level, he was tied to the life he still hoped he had helped to save.

"One other question. The police car was on its way here to check on a report of a naked man. Can you think of anyone locally who gets up to stuff like that?"

"Round here? Unlikely. Who reported it?"

"At this stage I'm not sure. Our control centre ought to know the source of the call but I haven't been able to check yet."

“What a weirdo.”

“It takes all sorts.”

Diamond returned outside to see if Ingeborg or Keith Halliwell had discovered anything more. He’d visited the three houses he’d picked for himself. Halliwell had got through his three and learned nothing of use and Ingeborg was still not back.

“Probably getting coffee and cake,” Halliwell said.

“If she is, she’d better have something to report.” He called the control room and asked if there was news from the hospital of Lew Morgan’s condition. The injured sergeant was under sedation. He wouldn’t be fit to interview for at least the next twelve hours. “How about the man on the trike?” Diamond asked.

“They’re trying to resuscitate him,” the operator said.

“I know that. Do we know his name? Was he carrying any form of ID?”

“Apparently not.”

He was stung by their lack of urgency. “Someone at your end should have identified him by now. It’s not rocket science. How many blokes in Bath own motor-powered tricycles? Was he registered to ride the thing?”

“One moment, sir.”

He told Halliwell the operator was checking. “Idle bastards. This should save us no end of time and hassle.”

The operator got back to him. “An electric bike is an EAPC.”

“What’s that when it’s at home?”

“I’m not quite sure, sir. The thing is, it doesn’t have to be registered, taxed or insured.”

“Great.” He ended the call and told Halliwell.

“Not to worry, guv. As soon as it’s on the local news, someone will know who he was. You can’t ride a thing like that around Bath without people asking who the hell you are and why you do it.”

“Good point.” He checked his watch. “Which house did Ingeborg go into?”

“The one with the tiled porch.”

“D’you think she’s okay?”

“What do you mean?”

“She’s been in there the best part of half an hour. The naked man could be in one of these houses.”

“She’d kick him where it hurts most, guv.”

Halliwell was right. Ingeborg could look after herself. She hated being treated as the helpless female. More than once, Diamond had made the mistake of fretting over her as if she was a daughter. He hardened his heart and watched the lifting gear being attached to the wrecked car, ready to hoist it on to the flat-bed truck. At least one life had been lost, but for the professionals it was just another traffic accident.

There was a movement under the tiled porch.

“Here she comes,” Halliwell said, “looking none the worse.”

“I hope you’ve got something for us,” Diamond told her when she joined them.

“Afraid not,” she said. “It was an old lady in a panic because the carer hadn’t arrived. She had no idea what was going on outside.”

“So you did some caring?” Halliwell said in a mocking tone, still smarting from being called a fascist.

“I couldn’t just walk out. She was in a wheelchair.”

Diamond stopped himself from making an approving comment about Ingeborg’s feminine side.

“I did ask her the questions,” she added, “just in case.”

“And the other people you spoke to?”

“No help at all. Just like her, they had questions for *me*.”

He decided to cast the net wider. He wanted to explore the top end of this road, where the man on the trike had come from, leaving Ingeborg and Halliwell to knock on

doors at the other end. When he stepped over the DO NOT PASS tape, edged through the gawpers and headed up the street, it was a relief to leave the mayhem behind.

If the truth were told, he needed a chance to collect his thoughts. Accident investigation was new in his experience. At a murder scene, he'd be making the decisions. He'd decide the scale of the investigation, how many CID people to employ. A procedure was observed. As SIO he'd seal the immediate area and control the access and the screening of the body. He'd liaise with the scene-of-crime people, a police photographer, the divisional surgeon and usually a forensic pathologist, and there was no question who conducted the operation.

Here, he'd been one of many response people from the different emergency services. They respected each other, for sure, only they all had jobs to get on with. Nobody wilfully contaminated the scene, but it was a dog's breakfast compared with the painstaking process he was used to. And the noise level had been a pain. In these conditions it was easy to act and hard to think.

He asked himself what he could usefully do before the doctors allowed him to interview the key witness, Lew Morgan. In the next twenty-four hours or so there would be a postmortem on the dead driver. He'd long ago learned that a postmortem was a false dawn. It happened soon after death and you hoped for swift information, but then samples of blood and body fluids were sent for testing and the testers wouldn't be hurried. In this case the cause of death was obvious. All he wanted to know for sure was that the late PC Aaron Green had no trace of alcohol or drugs in his system.

As Halliwell had rightly commented, identifying the civilian victim shouldn't be a problem once the incident had some publicity. Not many people rode the streets of Bath on tricycles. Somebody would be able to put a name to him.

Towards the end of Beckford Gardens he found he'd been misinformed. The street didn't just become a dead end in Hampton Row as the man in combat trousers had claimed. Beckford Gardens ended at a left turn called Rockliffe Road. The man on the trike could easily have come from there.

You need to check every damned thing yourself.

He moved on, muttering. After the Rockliffe Road turn, Beckford Gardens had a change of identity as Cleveland Row and finally Hampton Row. At least the description as a terrace of small dwellings had been accurate. By the look of them, they were two hundred years old or more, some shabby, some nicely renovated. At the far end, where the road went no further, was the bridge over the railway, and he couldn't imagine anyone struggling to hoist a tricycle over that. He climbed the steps and watched a First Great Western express from Paddington shoot beneath him on its way to Bath Spa station. The small boy in him thrilled to the power of the train making the bridge vibrate.

On returning to street level he spotted a postman dressed in shorts, as so many are in all weathers. He went over.

"Morning, postie. Is this your regular route?"

"It is." The postman spoke the words on the move, making clear he hadn't much time to chat.

"It's a part of the city I don't know too well," Diamond said, keeping pace. "I'm in the police, investigating the crash back there."

"I saw." The postman had his attention on the letters in his hand, checking address numbers.

"The driver was killed and two people are in intensive care. One of them was travelling from this direction on a tricycle. Quite early, before seven. Have you ever seen him along here?"

"No." He hadn't even looked up.

Diamond wasn't letting him off so easily. "If he lived in

one of these houses, he'd need to park his trike in front. I noticed bikes leaning against some of the railings. I expect you'd have spotted a trike if someone owned one."

"I haven't." Which closed that line of enquiry.

Try the other, then. "Someone called 999 about a naked man in Beckford Gardens. That's why the patrol car was here."

Not a flicker of interest.

"Ring any bells? I'm asking you as someone who knows this neighbourhood."

"Can't help you," the postman said, almost causing another accident by swinging his trolley wide and over Diamond's foot.

"Do you mind? You don't even sound surprised. A man with no clothes on. It's not a common sight."

"I expect he came up from the lido."

A light bulb went on in Diamond's head. Something had been on the local TV news a while back about an old Georgian swimming baths beside the Avon that had got into disrepair and was having millions spent on it. There was a trust and they'd staged some kind of open day when over a thousand people had turned up, including folk in costume looking like characters out of Jane Austen. He hadn't connected the report with this row of poky artisan dwellings.

He almost hugged the postman. "Now that could be vital information. Would that be the outdoor pool they're renovating with lottery money? It's round here? I've heard about that, and never seen it. Where exactly is it?"

"You walked straight past."

"You're kidding."

But this postman wasn't the kidding sort. "Them two stone pillars between Fir Tree Cottage and Rose Cottage. Now can I get on with my round?"

"Is it open to the public, then?" he shouted after him.

There may have been a shake of the head. There wasn't anything more.

He'd have to see this for himself, so he stepped out and entered the narrow passage between the terraces. The footpath was steep, and he wouldn't care to make the descent after frost. But after being in that narrow road between the houses and the railway it was good to see the valley open up below him.

Before he had gone far, the lido came into sight among the trees, the view he remembered from the TV, a cream-coloured crescent-shaped facade reflected in the pool. The centrepiece was the supervisor's cottage with a grey tiled roof and arched entrance. Rows of changing cubicles extended either side. They looked elegant in the context of the building, dark, perpendicular spaces at regular intervals, but he guessed the interiors would need updating to modern standards. However, it was not impossible that some resident of Beckford Gardens or Hampton Row was in the habit of going for an early-morning dip—even a skinny-dip.

He didn't need to go right down there. He'd learned all he wanted, so he turned and picked his way up the path. When he reached Hampton Row the postman wasn't around for further questioning.