

Mydworth. Such a *tidy* little town, Loxley thought. More like a village. And he wondered, being honest with himself, how long he would be satisfied with the sleepy ebb and flow of life here.

Life in the Metropolitan Police in London would be much more to his taste. *Plenty* of crimes to deal with, and Loxley knew that the Met had to be exploring the very latest methods of solving all sorts of cases.

But here, Sergeant Timms had been quick to inform the new constable on his first day at the station: “*We do things the old-fashioned way, Loxley. Methods that stand the test of time.*”

Except, Loxley guessed, Timms’ “methods” probably didn’t get tested on a regular basis.

But the world was changing, growing more complex every day. People wanting different things, peacetime life not bringing everyone

the peace or prosperity they had expected. Or been promised by the politicians.

And tonight – brisk, a chilly November night as if winter was in rehearsal, Mydworth remained sleepy and safe.

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Finally – crossing the square, past the Town Hall and the bank, all secure, to Hill Lane – Loxley scanned the quiet side streets, the nearby small shops shuttered, most homes now dark. *Early to bed being very much an adage held close by many in this little town, even on a Saturday night.*

He'd soon be done. Time to return to the station where that, too, would quickly go dark.

Any rare late-night summons would be directed to Timms at home, who would – for any significant matter – come and roust Loxley

from the single room that he rented above the gentlemen's outfitters.

Halfway down Hill Lane, past the shops now, and just at the point where the street lights came to an end, he took his usual left turn into Slip-Knot Alley. This oft-used shortcut led up to the football pitch and a line of tumbledown cottages at the edge of the town which marked the end of his rounds.

What was it, the locals called these alleyways?

Ah yes, "twittens", that was it.

He unclipped his torch from his belt, turned it on: the pale beam of light catching swirls of mist on the pathway ahead.

His own steps echoed as he walked down the serpentine lane, a wall of brick on both sides.

This *twitten* must, he imagined, be a favoured spot for the young couples of the

town, seeking a few minutes hidden away from prying eyes.

Wouldn't be surprised if I stumble upon something like that, even on a chilly night like this.

Then, as if in answer, the narrow lane curved for its final time, revealing a grassy opening, neatly surrounded on the side by thick bushes.

And Constable Loxley saw something in the cone of light from his torch.

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For a moment he froze, thinking that what was ahead, curled up on the grass, might be the romantic pair he'd been imagining previously.

But no. Loxley immediately knew what the shape must be.

Of course. Some fellow heading home from the pub, using this as a shortcut, must

have stumbled and decided a few minutes of a chilly snooze was exactly what the doctor ordered.

Before he got to the person, Loxley cleared his throat, to give the chap some warning.

“All right then. Having a spot of trouble, are we? Best you try to—”

Loxley expected the man to stir at the loud voice, giving it the heft that a request from the authorities *should* bring.

But this person – nothing.

Loxley moved closer, now – with the air growing chillier by the moment – even a bit concerned for the fellow.

“Now c’mon then, my lad. Time you were off home, time to get up.”

At that, Loxley gave the back of the man’s shoes a little kick. Just a small “tap, tap”, a last manoeuvre before dragging the drunk to a standing position.