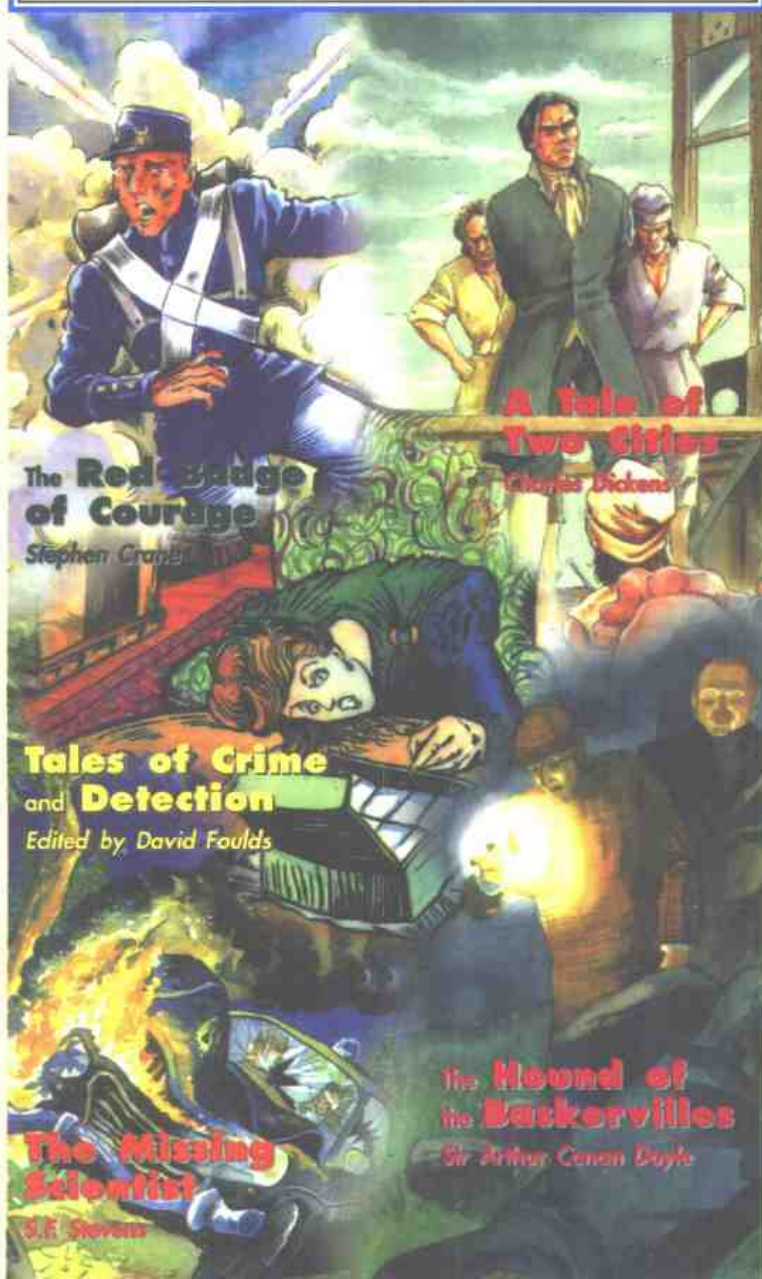


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The Missing Scientist

失踪的科学家

S. F. Stevens

Syllabus designer: David Foulds

[注释] 张 宏

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The Missing Scientist

S.F. Stevens

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THE KIDNAPPING

A mystery

'Sit down, Roberts. We've got a problem.'

The Assistant Commissioner of Special Branch pointed to a chair at the side of his desk. Roberts sat down. 'A few minutes ago,' the Assistant Commissioner began, 'we heard from the Chief Security Officer at the National Atomic Research Centre at Welltown. He reported that one of their scientists is missing. No one knows where he has gone or why. And the biggest mystery of all is how he disappeared without anyone knowing about it.'

The Assistant Commissioner was normally a calm, quiet man, but as he continued with his story, he became more excited. Detective Superintendent Roberts, however, did not look surprised. After so many years working at Special Branch, nothing that his boss could say would surprise him.

Roberts's boss continued, 'All that we know is that he was supposed to go to Manchester University this morning, but he didn't arrive.'

'What did you say his name was, sir?'

Roberts knew that his chief would be annoyed by the interruption, but he wanted to have all the details, and he wanted them in order. Keeping things in order was the way he solved his cases.

'I didn't.' The Assistant Commissioner gave Roberts a hard stare. 'The man's name is Professor Nicol.'

'As I was saying, Professor Nicol was supposed to be giving a talk at Manchester University. The Research

Centre made all the arrangements for his journey. Our people at London Airport and the police at Manchester were told about the trip late last night. Professor Nicol was driven to the airport this morning in one of the
5 Research Centre's cars. He was supposed to catch the six o'clock flight.

'Now, we don't know why, but our Special Branch man at London Airport failed to meet him. According to the airline passenger list, it seems that he did get on
10 the plane. But no one saw him arrive at Manchester.'

Roberts decided to interrupt again. 'It's a non-stop flight to Manchester. If he didn't arrive, he could not have been on the plane. So someone else must have given the Professor's name to the airline staff and got
15 on instead.'

The Assistant Commissioner still did not speak.

'You say this happened this morning, sir?' asked Roberts.

'Yes. The police at Manchester telephoned Welltown
20 immediately after they discovered that Professor Nicol had not arrived. I sent for you as soon as I heard.'

Why is the Professor so important?

The telephone on the Assistant Commissioner's desk rang. He picked it up. The person at the other end of
25 the line had a loud, clear voice. From where he was sitting, Roberts could easily hear what was being said.

'Is that the Commissioner?' the voice asked.

'No. This is the Assistant Commissioner speaking.'

'Hatfield here,' said the voice. 'You have heard about
30 this Welltown business, I suppose? Well, listen, Assistant Commissioner. Professor Nicol must be found quickly. If we fail, there will be a great deal of trouble for all of us.'

'I realize that, sir.'

'Who will be in charge of the job?'

'Detective Superintendent Roberts, sir. I think you know him.'

'Oh yes, I remember. He's a rather slow and heavy 5
type for this kind of work, isn't he?'

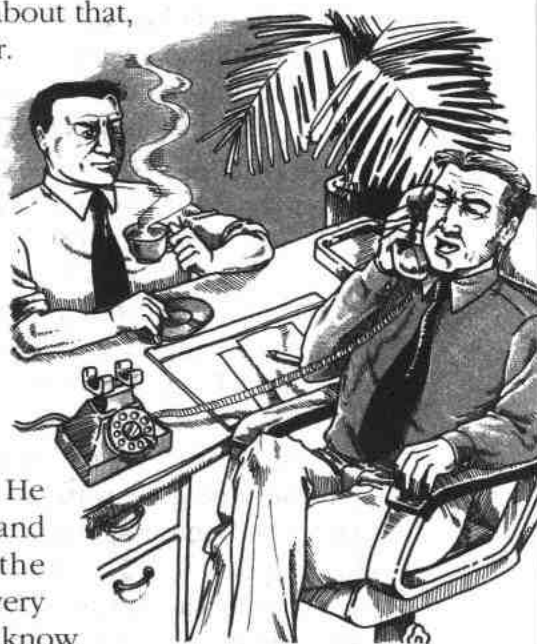
'He may seem so, sir, but he is the best man for the job.'

The Assistant Commissioner looked thoughtfully at Roberts sitting on the other side of the desk. He silently 10
agreed with the caller. Roberts was very fat.

'I hope you are right about that,
Assistant Commissioner.
Goodbye.'

The Assistant Commissioner turned to Roberts with an embarrassed smile. 'That was the Minister,' he explained. 'He was speaking so loudly you would have heard everything, I imagine.'

Roberts did not look embarrassed. 'I did, sir.' He paused for a moment and then continued. 'All the people at Welltown are very carefully guarded, sir, I know, and I know that the Minister has a special interest in 30
the Welltown Research Centre. I am not surprised that he should be worried if one of the scientists disappears. But he seems even more worried than I would expect. Is there something else about Professor Nicol I should know — something that you haven't told me yet?' 35



'There certainly is,' said the Assistant Commissioner. 'Listen, Roberts. I am sure you have heard how important the element uranium is in atomic power. At Welltown, they have just discovered a new way of
5 obtaining uranium. It is fast, safe and cheap. They say that it is the greatest discovery in atomic science since the war.'

'Did Professor Nicol discover it?'

'Not exactly. A group of scientists has been working
10 on the problem for some years. But only Professor Nicol knows the whole process.'

'Well, if he has been kidnapped, he will have a very unpleasant time. The kidnappers will probably try to get as much information out of him as they can. But is
15 it possible that he disappeared because he wanted to?'

'You mean you think he might have gone over to the other side — to the Russians? I don't think so, but in a situation like this, we must look at every possibility.'

Roberts raised himself from the chair and smoothed
20 down his jacket. Although he was a large man, he moved surprisingly easily.

'Well, sir, if I am in charge, as you told the Minister, I must make a start. There is a lot to be done.'

'All right. You can have as many men as you need.
25 Just tell me who you want to work with you,' replied the Assistant Commissioner.

'Thank you, sir. I would like Lane and North: Inspector Lane can go to London Airport and get the full story there. And I'd like Inspector North to go to
30 Manchester to find out all he can. I shall set off for Welltown, myself, immediately. Inspector Rawsley will come with me, of course.'

'Very good, Superintendent. I shall see Lane and North and give them the details. That will save you
35 some time.'

Roberts's methods

Special Branch is an important department of Scotland Yard, the headquarters of the London police force. Its job is to look after the safety of the nation.

The senior officers who work there are seldom well known to the public. Sometimes, people who met Detective Superintendent Roberts for the first time thought he was a doctor or a lawyer. Few people guessed that he was a police officer, and only the people he worked for knew he was one of the cleverest detectives in the London police force.

When Roberts joined the police, people thought he was very unusual. He was one of the first of the 'new' policemen. He had a degree — he had studied modern languages at Oxford University. He could have chosen many other jobs, but he never felt sorry that he had become a policeman. In his twenty-five years as a detective, the work was always interesting.

Unlike his work, however, Roberts's methods were never exciting. They were sensible and thorough. He usually solved crimes by collecting the right kind of information and keeping it in order. He looked carefully at every detail. He did not make much use of clever thinking, or brilliant guesswork.

When he had a new and difficult case, he would first form an idea of the person he was looking for. Then he would order several men to search through information stored in the offices of Special Branch. Sometimes he was able to recognize just one small, unimportant fact that would help him find the answer to a mystery.

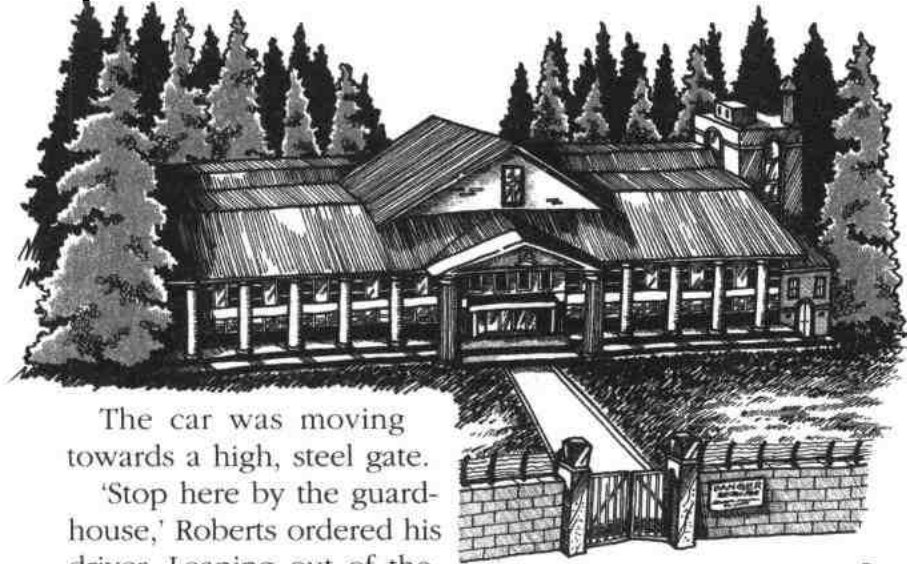
On the journey to Welltown, he thought carefully about this new case. He felt sure that the Professor had been kidnapped.

The police car was passing through the little village of Welltown. It looked just like many other English villages: twenty or thirty well-kept houses, some of them very old; a church with a tower, built at the top of a small hill; an area of grass; a large pool with a few ducks swimming about on it. Everything seemed quiet and peaceful. It could hardly have changed at all in the past three hundred years, Roberts thought to himself. Who would imagine that somewhere, less than a mile away, people were working on the very latest scientific discoveries?

Although Welltown is over an hour's drive from London, Roberts had hardly spoken to Inspector Rawsley, who sat beside him, during the trip. The inspector, like his chief, was a big man. But, unlike Roberts, he was the sort of person who enjoyed talking to other people. He usually worked with the Superintendent on important cases. It was his job to make friends with people and listen carefully to what they told him. Roberts usually asked questions in a more official way. He was more interested in getting information quickly and directly.

Questions at Welltown

Just outside the village, the car turned into a side road and began to drive through a wood. For a while there was no sign of the Atomic Research Centre anywhere. Then, suddenly, they were out of the trees, and passing across an area of open ground. A large, old building could be seen about half a mile ahead, surrounded by a high wall. On top of the wall, there was an electric fence. There was a notice on large red boards, which told people that the wire would kill anyone who touched it.



The car was moving towards a high, steel gate.

'Stop here by the guard-house,' Roberts ordered his driver. Leaning out of the window, he called to the uniformed man standing in front of the gate. 'I'm Detective Superintendent Roberts of Scotland Yard. Here is my card.'

The guard, who carried a gun, replied, 'All right, sir. Our Chief Security Officer, Inspector Gates, is waiting for you in his office. One of our men will show you the way, sir.'

He waved his arm, and the gate swung slowly open to allow the car through. A second guard climbed into the car. He sat by the driver, then turned to Roberts and said, 'Inspector Gates' office is at the end of this road, sir.'

The Chief Security Officer was a tall man, about fifty years old. He was not wearing a uniform. He greeted the Superintendent politely. 'Please sit here, sir,' he said, pointing to his own desk.

Roberts quickly settled down. 'Now, tell me, please, what has been done since the Professor disappeared?' he asked.

'I sent the driver, who took Professor Nicol to London Airport, back to the airport. I told him to report to the Controller there,' Gates replied. Roberts said nothing,

so Gates explained, 'I thought the driver should be at the airport to answer questions.'

'Good,' said Roberts.

5 'I have talked to all the people who work with the Professor,' continued Gates, 'and I have searched his house. You know that all the senior scientists live here at the Centre?'

'Yes, I know about that. Have you discovered anything?'

10 'Not yet.' Gates did not like having to confess that. He explained to the Superintendent that he had carefully questioned all the people who worked with the Professor, and he had searched through everything that belonged to him. But he had not found anything
15 important. He continued, 'The only unusual thing was that, before he left, the Professor asked his secretary to give a message to a lady who might telephone him. The secretary was to tell her that the Professor could not have dinner with her. His trip to Manchester had
20 been arranged unexpectedly, and he had not had time to tell the lady himself.' Gates paused to see if Roberts wanted to say anything. He did not, so Gates went on, 'This lady is French. Her name is Durant. The secretary thinks she comes from Paris and is staying in a London
25 hotel, but she does not know the address. It is probably not important, but I asked the Professor's friends, here, if they could tell me about this lady. None of them seems to know much about her.'

30 'I'll talk to the secretary later,' said the Superintendent. 'Who at the Centre knows the Professor best?'

'That would be Dr Walters. I thought you might like to talk to him. He's waiting in a room next door.'

Roberts looked pleased and said, 'Excellent. I'll see this Dr Walters immediately, and afterwards I'll talk to
35 the Professor's secretary.'

WHAT KIND OF MAN IS THE PROFESSOR?

Women friends

A messenger was sent to fetch Dr Walters. When they had been introduced to each other, Roberts said to him, 'Dr Walters, please tell me, as exactly as you can, what kind of man Professor Nicol is.'

5

'Very well, Superintendent,' replied the scientist. He paused for a few moments to think. 'Nicol isn't most people's idea of a scientist. He is only thirty-six, which is very young for his job. But he is a good scientist, and has a very clever mind.'

10

'Go on,' said Roberts as the other paused.

'He has plenty of interests outside his work. That's why I say he's not the sort of man that people expect a scientist to be. He did not like living here because it was not possible for him to have a very interesting private life.'

15

'Is he married?'

'No.'

'Do you know if he is planning to get married?'

'He has never said anything about it to me.'

20

'Does he have any women friends?'

'He seems to have a lot,' replied Walters.

'What were his chief interests outside his work at the Research Centre?'

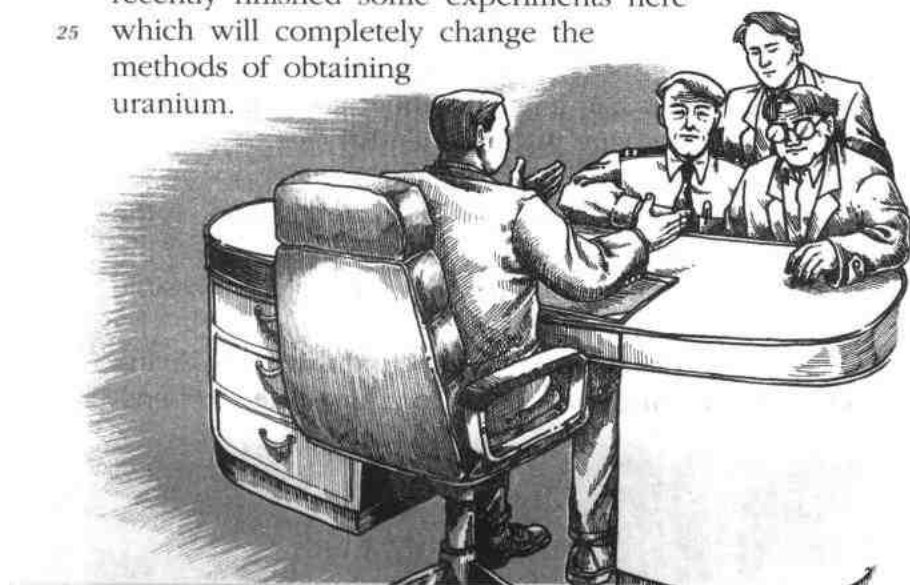
'Music, art, plays — all the things that are impossible for us down here.'

25

'I suppose that's why you say he did not like living here. How often did he go to London?' asked Roberts.

'About twice a month. But unless he was on holiday.

recently finished some experiments here
25 which will completely change the
methods of obtaining
uranium.



I also understand that only the Professor knows all the details of the new process. Tell me, what will be the effect of Nicol's disappearance if he is not found?

Would the Professor give away the secret?

Dr Walters looked very serious. 'I have been asking myself that question ever since I heard the news.' He sounded like a teacher talking to his students. 'Our discovery is important because it will reduce the cost of building an atomic power station by nearly eighty per cent. The trouble is that we will not be the only country to know about this process for much longer. Other countries will make the same discovery. When they hear about our experiments, that will perhaps happen sooner rather than later. At the moment we are ahead of all the others, but if Nicol isn't found, it will delay our work by three months. Then we will be three months behind in our race against other countries.'

He paused and waited for Roberts's next question. After a moment, Roberts asked, 'Let us suppose that the Professor has been kidnapped, what will happen if the kidnappers torture him? Does the Professor carry all this knowledge in his head? Can he, without his notes, tell anyone the secret of the new discoveries?'

Walters looked very thoughtful, and for several seconds he made no reply. Finally, he said, 'The exact answer is that he doesn't carry the full story in his head. But, of course, he might be questioned by a scientist who knows a lot about this subject. If Nicol was forced to tell the truth, then he could tell them enough to point them in the right direction.'

'I see,' said Roberts. 'But I suppose it would take quite a long time for another country to test the information.'