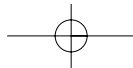
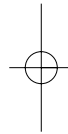
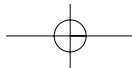
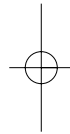
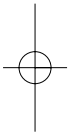


## CASE FILE FIFTEEN

# THE GHOST AT THE WINDOW





# CHAPTER ONE

SOMETIMES, LIVING THE LIFE OF a brilliant schoolboy detective can have its drawbacks. 'Drawbacks'? No, on second thoughts, perhaps 'complications' would be a better word. Er, or possibly 'strange and unforeseen effects'?

What I mean is, sometimes the results of investigating a case can be very unexpected. Now and again a case comes along which forces me to wonder whether I should have got involved in it at all.

I once tackled a case – a case I've labelled *The Ghost at the Window* – which made me think deeply about why I'd decided to become a brilliant schoolboy detective in the first place. The end of this case left me flopped in my Thinking Chair, mulling over all sorts of horribly difficult questions, such as: 'Would it have been better if

SAXBY SMART - PRIVATE DETECTIVE

I hadn't interfered?', and 'Have I done a *good* thing or a *bad* thing?'

I got through a whole packet of chocolate biscuits before I could even get these questions straight in my head. It's no wonder people keep telling me to cut down on the carbs!

*The Ghost at the Window* was a rather sad and tragic case. It began shortly after I'd had a dazzlingly stupendous idea.

For a while, I'd been trying to reorganise my garden shed so that there was more room for my detective stuff in there, next to all the gardening and DIY equipment I'm forced to share the shed with. You'd think that a job like that would be quite easy, wouldn't you? Wrong. It was driving me absolutely *mad*!

Each time I took everything *out* of the shed, and then put it *back*, I seemed to end up with more boxes of this 'n' that than I started with. I was starting to believe that the lawnmower and the old paint tins had invited a load of friends over, just to annoy me! This was a *simple* matter or reorganising things: *why* did it keep going *wrong*?

And then I had that dazzlingly stupendous idea I just mentioned. If, I thought to myself, I can't stack all this rubbish up without leaving myself less than four square centimetres of space, then why not simply *step over* the problem? A-ha, all I've got to do is lay down the

### THE GHOST AT THE WINDOW

gardening and DIY stuff in a layer across the shed floor. Then my desk, my filing cabinet of case notes and my Thinking Chair can all sit *on top*. I'll even have room to pace up and down in! Now *that* is a dazzlingly stupendous idea!

Unfortunately . . .

By the time I'd finished, I'd realised that it wasn't quite such a clever zap of inspiration after all. My desk, case notes and Thinking Chair were all lurching at peculiar angles. I couldn't take more than a step or two before getting my foot wedged in a plant pot or caught up in the garden hose.

I shut my eyes and sighed, sliding my hands down the sides of my face in despair.

And then there was a gentle knock at the shed door. A voice called, 'Anyone home?'

'Come in!' I cried.

The door was opened by Jennifer Bell, a girl in my class at school. She was a big girl, with rosy cheeks and prominent features. Her dark hair was sliced into a sharply defined bob, and the legs of her jeans were tucked into a pair of green wellies.

'Hi, Jen!' I said.

She looked at the layer of debris on the shed floor. 'Oh, should I stay out here?'

'No, no, come on in. Just tread on stuff. Sorry about the

SAXBY SMART - PRIVATE DETECTIVE

mess. I'm reorganising. Not quite finished yet.'

She crunched over the lawnmower flex. I indicated for her to sit in my Thinking Chair while I hopped on to the desk.

I often perch on the desk when talking to clients. It allows me the chance to strike thoughtful, detective-like poses, if necessary.

'Oh,' I said, 'I didn't know you help out at the Wild Rabbit Sanctuary.'

'Yes. I've . . . Hang on, how can you possibly know that?' she asked.

'Your wellies,' I said. 'It's a warm, dry day. The only place I can think of around here where you'd need to wear wellies is the Wild Rabbit Sanctuary.'

'How do you know I wasn't just visiting?' she said.

'A visitor wouldn't have got those little bits of straw stuck to their jeans. You've been cleaning out the hutches. Now then, how can I help you?'

She paused for a moment, almost as if she was reluctant to continue. 'Have you heard of a thief nicknamed Pat the Hat?'

'Hah! You bet I have!' I cried.

**A Bit of Background Info:** About ten or eleven or so years ago, Pat the Hat (or the Mad Hatter as the media called him before his identity was known), was a

### THE GHOST AT THE WINDOW

criminal based in London. He chose his targets with great care, and when he struck it was with breathtaking nerve and ingenuity.

He worked out amazingly clever schemes for robbing banks, jewellers, all sorts. He once conned a supermarket into letting him drive away with a lorry load of TVs, by making them think he was an undercover cop and that the TVs were stolen! His schemes were both brilliantly simple and brilliantly executed. If it wasn't for the fact that he was a common thief who was simply *stealing* from people, you could almost admire his sheer guts!

He got his nickname from the way he'd leave a little, neatly folded paper hat at the scene of each crime. I mean, this guy was just stringing the police along and having a laugh! There'd often be cheeky notes written inside the hats: *Here's a clue – I got in through the sewers*, that sort of thing.

Those hats were the only way the police even knew that these robberies had been done by the same man. He was, as they say, a master of disguise – he created a whole new identity for every job.

What's more, he was never caught. For two reasons: 1) he made a clean getaway every single time, and 2) after several years on the Most Wanted lists, he was killed during a high-speed chase with detectives from Scotland Yard. He'd been hired by a gang who wanted to

SAXBY SMART - PRIVATE DETECTIVE

rob a security van carrying millions of pounds in cash. He double-crossed the gang and ran off with the loot. A couple of days later the police got an anonymous phone call (obviously from one of the boiling-mad gang members!) telling them the Mad Hatter's real name (Patrick Bell, as it turned out).

The chase was on. Pat the Hat managed to get as far as the south coast of France before the cops cornered him! At a hundred and ten miles per hour, his car skidded, went off a cliff and hit the rocks below.

'Oh yes,' I said. 'I've definitely heard of Pat the Hat. What's he to do with you?'

Jennifer looked at me glumly. 'And there was me thinking you were a great detective! Do you really need me to tell you?'

I crumpled my brow. Umm . . .

Have you spotted what I hadn't?



### THE GHOST AT THE WINDOW

'Of course!' I cried, snapping my fingers. 'His surname was Bell, and so is yours. Sorry, you're right, I should have spotted that one. What was he, your uncle?'

'No,' said Jennifer, 'Pat the Hat was my father. I was barely a toddler when he died. I don't remember him at all.'

'But what brings you here today?' I said. 'His death was more than a decade ago.'

'I can trust you, can't I?' said Jennifer in a low voice.

'Of course,' I said seriously.

'A couple of days ago, the police came to see my mother and me,' said Jennifer. 'They told us that the day before, the Steadfast & Permanent Building Society up in town had been robbed. The thief had simply walked in, disguised as the Head of Accounting. He hacked into the office computer, then transferred seven hundred thousand pounds out of various bank accounts into an untraceable account overseas somewhere. On top of that, he opened the safe in the Head of Accounting's office and made off with another twenty thousand in cash.'

I almost gasped in amazement. 'This Head of Accounting. He's very fat, right? They think the thief hid the cash inside the fake stomach that was part of his disguise?'

'Yes.'

'Hah!' I cried, clapping my hands together. 'That's

SAXBY SMART - PRIVATE DETECTIVE

*exactly* what Pat the Hat did, oooh, where was it? Some big bank in the City of London. He dressed up as the most unpopular bloke in the office. Nobody took a second look at him! Genius! Er, well, y'know, *evil* genius, obviously.'

From the stern look on Jennifer's face, I realised it was time to stop looking so gleefully interested in Pat the Hat and start looking more sensitive and concerned instead.

'The police said that this crime followed every last detail of what my father did,' said Jennifer. 'There was even a paper hat left in the safe. Inside, the words *Greetings from a dead man* were written in what looked like my father's handwriting. The police said it was as if my father had risen up out of his grave, and was re-starting his career in crime. As a ghost!'

## CHAPTER Two

'WHY HASN'T THIS BEEN ALL over the news?' I asked. 'It'd be front page stuff – nothing like that's happened around here for ages.'

'The police are trying to keep it quiet as long as possible,' said Jennifer. 'They say they want time to investigate without the press looking over their shoulders. Even so, they reckon it'll hit the papers in a day or two.'

'Have they got no clues so far?' I asked. 'After all, it's a pretty startling coincidence, this Pat the Hat robbery taking place in the same town where Pat the Hat's family just *happen* to be living.'

'They say they've got nothing,' said Jennifer. 'And the coincidence is more than startling, it's frightening. I

SAXBY SMART - PRIVATE DETECTIVE

think *that's* why the police came to talk to my mother and me. But they're clutching at straws. They wanted to know if my mother could remember anything from the old days which might give them a lead.'

'I, umm, don't want to ask an insensitive question,' I said, carefully, 'but all those years ago, when Pat the Hat was committing his original crimes, didn't your mum know what was going on?'

'No,' said Jennifer. 'He fooled her every bit as much as he fooled the rest of the world. Believe it or not, she thought he had a well-paid job . . . in a bank! He'd leave the house every morning, research his next robbery, then come home at night pretending he'd spent the day in business meetings. At the time, my mother had a job which involved a lot of travelling, so it wasn't hard for him to maintain his cover story.'

I almost chuckled 'genius' again. But I didn't. (Think sensitive and concerned, you fool!)

'Well,' said Jennifer, 'she knew right at the end, but by then it was too late.'

'At the end?'

'When he double-crossed that gang who'd hired him. He realised he'd have to lay low for a while, go somewhere where he couldn't be traced, because the gang were out for blood. And laying low would blow his cover. So he told my mother everything. But that night

### THE GHOST AT THE WINDOW

the gang gave the police his name, as revenge. He went on the run and then a few days later he was dead. The police questioned my mother but they soon realised she was totally shocked by what he'd told her and that she hadn't been involved in his crimes.'

It occurred to me that there were really only two possibilities that I needed to consider here. That is, two possibilities about *who* was responsible for the robbery a few days ago.

They amounted to a simple logical choice. Have you spotted them?



SAXBY SMART - PRIVATE DETECTIVE

**Possibility No 1: Could Pat the Hat be alive?**

'Have, umm,' I began, not quite knowing how to put the question without, you know, touching a bit of a raw nerve, or, maybe, you know, asking something that . . . Oh, just *ask* the bloomin' question!

'Have you considered the possibility that your dad is still alive?' I said. 'Could he have escaped from that crash?'

'We've been considering it non-stop,' said Jennifer. 'The thought has been upsetting my mother terribly. All this has brought back a lot of horrible memories for her. That's the reason we moved out of London years ago and came here. To escape the past. She still misses him a lot and she says she still loves him.'

'I take it, then, that it's a possibility you've dismissed?' I said.

'When his car went off that cliff,' said Jennifer, 'it dropped almost fifty metres. It hit rock at over a hundred miles an hour and exploded so hard that all that was left were scraps of metal. The police found DNA traces in the wreckage. They even found the two tiny diamonds he'd had specially embedded into his gold wedding ring. My mother said those diamonds were supposed to symbolise the two of them, him and her. No, he's definitely dead. DNA evidence can't be faked.'

'Yes, that's true,' I said.

THE GHOST AT THE WINDOW

So . . .

**Possibility No 2:** Someone is imitating Pat the Hat's crimes.

'It's the only explanation,' I said.

'Right,' said Jennifer. 'And it's why I've come to see you.'

I frowned. 'How do you mean?'

Jennifer leaned forward on the Thinking Chair. The gardening stuff beneath the chair creaked and shifted. 'I think I know who did it,' she said. 'The robbery.'

'You do?' I cried.

'That's what I need your help on. I need you to help me catch him.'

'So, who is it?' I asked.

'One of my next-door neighbours,' said Jennifer. 'A guy called Henry Westwick. I've noticed that —'

'Waitwaitwait,' I interrupted. 'Your *neighbour*?'

'Yes,' said Jennifer. 'Another startling coincidence, right?'

'You're telling me!' I cried. 'Has he got any reason to dislike you or your mum?'

'No, we get on fine.'

'But, he knows about the connection between you and Pat the Hat, yes?'

'No,' said Jennifer. 'It's not a *secret*, but neither Mum nor I ever talk about it.'

SAXBY SMART - PRIVATE DETECTIVE

(I frowned. This coincidence stuff was zooming past 'startling' and heading straight for 'incredible'! I decided to put the matter to the back of my mind, and give it some more thought later.)

'If the police are doing this all-out investigation,' I said, 'shouldn't you go to *them* with this? I mean, obviously, having a brilliant schoolboy detective like me on the case will get things sorted out much quicker, but even so . . . Surely they need to know first?'

Jennifer shook her head abruptly. She'd obviously thought hard about this, and she'd come to a firm decision. 'No. This is personal. My mother's upset, I'm upset; it's as if this guy is laughing in our faces, as if he doesn't care who he's hurting by copying Pat the Hat. I want to sort him out myself. I want to be able to hand the man responsible over to the police personally. I want to give them proof.'

'So, you can't actually prove that this Henry Westwick is guilty?' I said.

'Not yet. That's where you come in,' said Jennifer.

'What makes you so sure he did it?' I said.

'Henry Westwick works at the college in town. He's a teacher. He lectures in psychology, the human mind, human behaviour, that sort of thing. He's an absolute nut about crime and criminals. He's even worse than you!'

'Er, thanks,' I muttered.

THE GHOST AT THE WINDOW

'I've been doing some detective work of my own. He's been missing classes. I know because my friend's sister's boyfriend is on the course he teaches. I asked around. One of those missed classes coincides *exactly* with the time of the robbery. Plus, he's been lying to his family about where he's been going during these absences —'

'How —'

'I'll explain later. Plus, he has a grudge against that building society he robbed, the Head of Accounting in particular. He hates that man! *And* there are other people in my street I think he might target —'

'How —'

'I'll explain later. He had the motive, the opportunity, and the method. Those are the things *you're* always talking about in terms of suspects, aren't they? The only problem is, I don't have the *proof*. I need *you!*'

'Saxby Smart is on the case!' I grinned. 'Go home, keep a close eye on our suspect, and I'll come over to see you later on. If you're right, we haven't a moment to lose. Pat the Hat struck when least expected, so we can assume his imitator will do the same. He might be planning another crime right now.'

My mind was still reeling from the sheer oddity of it all, but I quickly reminded myself that my job was to find answers. As soon as Jennifer had gone, I got on the phone to my great friend Isobel 'Izzy' Moustique, that

SAXBY SMART - PRIVATE DETECTIVE

Mistress of All Data. I asked her to dig around for anything she could find on the Mad Hatter. If this Henry Westwick was setting himself up as Pat the Hat Mark 2, it was vital that I know as much about the original as possible.

The hunt was on!

### A Page From My Notebook

Here's a newspaper cutting Izzy found, dated 22nd August, eleven years ago:

#### END OF THE ROAD FOR MAD HATTER

*. . . Detectives from Scotland Yard, in co-operation with the French police force, pursued the Mad Hatter as he fled south of the town of Avignon along the River Rhone. The thief, who is now said to be the mysterious fifth gang member in the recent Knightsbridge security van robbery, lost control of his car. It fell into a narrow rock gully along the river valley and was completely destroyed when the petrol tank exploded. Forensic experts are still at the scene, but unofficial sources have confirmed that DNA traces from the Mad Hatter have been recovered from the crash, along with small fragments of bone and a wedding ring which could not be removed from*

## THE GHOST AT THE WINDOW

*Bell's finger, as the knuckle above it had become too large . . .'*

And here's another, from a different newspaper, published on the same date:

### **HATTER'S ESCAPE ENDS IN DEATH**

*. . .The Mad Hatter's identity - now known to have been Patrick William Bell - was supplied to police in a phone call made at 11:33 p.m. five days ago, 17 August. A team of officers immediately moved in on Bell's address, but he evaded them at the last minute, abandoning his wife and young daughter. In disguise, he crossed the Channel to Calais by ferry, but was spotted - while swapping fake identities - by an English tourist who had seen pictures of Bell on the TV news on the morning of 18 August. . .*

**Oddity 1:** How to account for all the startling coincidences? SURELY the appearance of a Pat the Hat imitator RIGHT HERE is linked to the fact that Jennifer and her mum live RIGHT HERE? Has SOMEONE discovered the truth about them? And if so, WHY would that inspire a Pat the Hat imitator?

**Oddity 2:** As Jennifer said, this Henry Westwick ticks

SAXBY SMART - PRIVATE DETECTIVE

all the boxes in terms of motive, opportunity and method. But WHY would someone like that turn to crime? Sure, he's INTERESTED in the subject, and yes, he apparently has a grudge against that building society, but . . . Why would that lead him to such an EXTREME? After all, reading ghost stories doesn't turn you INTO a ghost! So WHY turn to crime? There's something I'm missing here.

Sudden thought - Henry studies crime, so he'll already know about Pat the Hat. Could it be that HE'S found out the truth about Jennifer and her mum, through his studies?

**Oddity 3 (this one's an oddity from the past):** Pat the Hat's robberies were planned down to the last detail. So that was a strange mistake for him to make: allowing the gang to know his real name. When he double-crossed them, they could put the cops on his tail at once! Or . . .? Could it be that he didn't INTEND to double-cross them? Is there more to the story than I think? There's something ELSE I'm missing here!