A Classic Case of Murder

AN INSPECTOR CROSS MYSTERY JIGSAW PUZZLE THRILLER
Read the short story. Assemble the puzzle. Search for clues. Solve the mystery!

Story By Henry Slesar
Sergeant Kingsley was baffled.

In truth, Sergeant Kingsley was often baffled, despite his profession. As far as he was concerned, police work had only two goals: Pursuit and Apprehension. He left the mystery solving to his superior, Inspector Cross, who seemed capable of doing his job while studying the ceiling cracks in his office.

But this time, the mystery that perplexed the Sergeant was Inspector Cross himself.

It had started with some strange absences. Every afternoon for the past four days, Cross had mumbled something about an appointment and skulked out of Headquarters. *Skulked* — that was the only word for it. There was never a reason given, never an invitation to come along. Kingsley wouldn’t admit it, but he was hurt as well as puzzled. He began to wonder if the old bachelor had finally found *amour*. Even more troubling, he wondered if Cross was working on a criminal case without him.

That theory was furthered when Kingsley “accidentally” glanced at a notepad the Inspector had left on his desk. It read:

TALBOT
LEYLAND
HOTCHKISS
DELA GE
AUSTIN

To the Sergeant, there was only one explanation for this. Inspector Cross was compiling a list of suspects, and his afternoon forays were made in pursuit of evidence — *without* Sergeant Kingsley’s stolid but well-intentioned assistance.

That Friday, when the Inspector did his mumble-shuffle routine for still a fifth afternoon, the Sergeant decided on a course of action in which he was highly experienced. He would shadow his boss.

Whether it was Kingsley’s brilliant surveillance skills, or the Inspector’s preoccupied state of mind, Cross never knew he was being followed. Kingsley kept the taillights of the Inspector’s battered old Chevy in sight all the way to the posh suburb of Lakeside, where they had both investigated their share of upscale crimes. Most recently, there had been a burglary. Was that the Inspector’s purpose?

The first hint of his intentions came at a crossroads, where a large sign had been posted. It read:

**ANTIQUE CAR EXHIBIT**
May 9-14
Canfield Motors

Sure enough, the Inspector’s car made a right turn at the sign, and chugged directly towards the neat one-story office of the automotive dealer whose sign boasted “*Classic and Luxury Vehicles, New and Used.*”

It didn’t take long for Kingsley to look around and realize that his first theory had been correct. It really was *amour* that was responsible for the Inspector’s odd behavior — but his love
was directed to objects of metal, leather, and rubber. Wryly, the Sergeant noticed the identifying placards that read: *Talbot 110, Leyland Eight, 3 Litre Hotchkiss, Delage Series D8, Austin 7.* The Inspector’s “suspects” were all classic automobiles.

A big man with a loud voice and an even louder sports jacket slapped Kingsley’s broad back.

“Really make your mouth water, don’t they?” he said. “Get a load of that old Austin tourer. Built in ’25. Only got half a million miles on it.” He broke into hearty laughter that made Kingsley flinch. Then the man’s huge hand was clutching Kingsley’s. “I’m Bruce Canfield,” he said. “What can I show you?”

“The exit,” The Sergeant said, slipping out of his grasp. He had been keeping his eye on Inspector Cross and moved off just in time to avoid his approach.

Cross spoke to Canfield. “You mentioned you were expecting a Stutz Black Hawk. Did it ever arrive?”

“Not yet,” Canfield replied. “But I’ve just uncrated a 4-1/2 Litre Lagonda LG 45 Rapide . . . greatest sports car the English ever made!” He glued his arm around the Inspector’s shoulder and steered him in another direction.

It was a sad drive home for Sergeant Kingsley. He felt as if he had discovered some shameful secret of his superior. But of course, the only shame was that Inspector Cross could never afford to consummate his passion. His ’77 Chevy was as close as he would ever get to owning an “antique” car.

If it hadn’t been for the visit to Canfield’s, Sergeant Kingsley would probably never have told Inspector Cross about the tragic accident that took the life of Mrs. Victoria Teasdale.

Cross looked at him blankly when he did.

“A road accident? Why did you think I’d be interested?”

“Not exactly a road. The poor woman was run over in her own driveway. She was putting some letters in the mailbox. It was a dark night. She was wearing a black dress.”


“Her own husband,” Kingsley said, as if determined to make Cross more concerned.

“And who else would be likely to use the driveway?”

“He said he simply didn’t see her crossing the driveway. He was driving pretty fast, a bad habit he has admitted to quite often. He was anxious to get home. Anxious for her to see the car.”

“Because it was new?” the Inspector sighed, already absorbed in the morning reports.

“Yes. He just bought it. It was a Cord.”

Cross looked at him for the first time.

“Did you say a Cord?”

“That’s what it was called in the accident report.” He lifted the perforated sheet and skimmed the sentences until he found what he was looking for. “An 810 Model Cord, built around 1936.”

“A Westchester, maybe,” the Inspector said, almost in a whisper. “One of the fastback models. I just saw one a few weeks ago . . .” He caught himself, and then snatched the paper from the Sergeant’s hands.
"I thought you might be interested," Kingsley said. "I mean, we've done a lot of work up at Lakeside, and this Mrs. Teasdale, she's one of the richer ones. She was a Pemberton before she got married a couple of years ago."

But Inspector Cross was too absorbed to hear him.

"It happened just last night," Cross mused as he continued reading. "Ten minutes past eleven. I suppose they left the scene just as it was. Pictures! Why aren't there any pictures?"

"It wasn't a crime scene," Kingsley said gently. "I mean, there's no suspicion of vehicular homicide or anything. I just told you about it on account of . . . well, you sort of like old cars, don't you?" He added the last phrase carefully.

But the Inspector hardly seemed to notice the question. "You know what?" he responded. "We never closed the book on that Lakeside burglar. We were planning to talk to a few more homeowners weren't we? That might be worth doing this morning, Sergeant."

Kingsley's smile was almost smug, but Cross didn't notice.

The Inspector had been mistaken in assuming there would be no changes at the scene of the accident. There had been two obvious changes since last night. Although there were still half a dozen letters scattered on the driveway and the mailbox was still open, the automobile had been moved and Mrs. Victoria Teasdale's body was removed. Some well-trained police official had outlined her body on the driveway, only a few feet from the imposing, pontoon-type fenders of the ominous driving machine which had become an instrument of death.

Cross caught his breath as he looked at the scene, and Kingsley wondered if it was the sight of the chalked outline or the spectacular vehicle.

"Is that the car you were thinking of?" the Sergeant asked.

Cross nodded slowly. "Yes. I just happened to be visiting a classic car dealer."

"Looks like something from the sixties," Kingsley said. "Hard to believe it was made in 1936."

They stepped closer, and Cross touched the alligator-shaped hood of the Cord. "Stroked" was a more accurate word.

"It was well ahead of its time," he said. "It had front-wheel drive, for one thing. And look at those headlights."

"But there aren't any headlights!"

Cross smiled. "They fold away. Just like the Corvette Stingray did much later on. It took a little more manual effort to work them on the Cord — there are independent cranks to turn — but the idea was the same. And it has no running boards." He opened one of the doors so they could view the interior. "That's why the floors are so flat."

The Inspector sniffed the air inside the car, and then tore his eyes away from the elegant instrument panel as a slim man in a tailored jacket came down the driveway. There wasn't any doubt about his identity. He had obviously emerged from the luxurious house.

"It's all right," Kingsley said quickly, yanking out his fat wallet to expose his badge. "We're with the police."

" Didn't you see enough last night?" the man snapped.

His strained face and stilted walk had made him look older, but Cross guessed that the man was still in his early thirties; he was handsome but his good looks didn't hold up well under stress.
“Would you be Mr. Teasdale?” asked Cross.
“Yes, I’m Derek Teasdale. And I’ll thank you to take your hands off my car!”
The Inspector closed the door carefully. “My name is Inspector Cross, and this is Sergeant Kingsley. We, uh, just happened to be in the neighborhood, on another matter. A burglary, actually.”
“I don’t give a damn about a burglary! My wife is dead! And I killed her! What more do you have to know?”
He buried his face in his hands, but made no sound. Kingsley’s face twitched, and he looked ready to depart, but something made the Inspector stand his ground.
“I know it’s a difficult thing to do,” he said softly. “But if you could just tell us again what happened . . .”
“Isn’t it obvious?” Teasdale uncovered eyes that were almost savage. “I killed Victoria! I ran her down! We were only married a few years! I loved her! And then — I did this!” He thrust out his wrists in a dramatic gesture. “Go on, arrest me! Handcuff me. Those other cops last night, they wouldn’t do it. Maybe you will! God knows I deserve it.” He turned his burning gaze to the chalked outline with the tire tracks bisecting it.
“Easy now,” Kingsley said comfortably. “We saw the police report.”
“I’d still like to hear it from you,” Cross persisted. “This car, for instance. It came from Canfield Motors, didn’t it?”
“How did you know that?”
“You took possession of it only yesterday afternoon, isn’t that correct? Paid quite a bit for it, according to Mr. Canfield.”
“Well, yes. And I wish I’d never seen the damned thing,” Teasdale said bitterly.
“It wasn’t your first classic car purchase, was it? Mr. Canfield said you were one of his best customers.”
“It wasn’t my first. But it will be my last, I promise you.”
“What other cars do you own?”
“A Bugatti! What model?” The Inspector’s eyes shone.
“A Type 575 C.”
“I’ve never even seen one! You’re quite a serious collector, Mr. Teasdale. How many cars do you own, anyway?”
“I guess the Cord makes it a round dozen. Although I ought to sell the miserable thing after what happened.”
“Which was — exactly what?”
Teasdale leaned against the fender and looked at the ground.
“I picked the car up at four yesterday afternoon. I had to drive it, of course. I went out to Route 22 and then to 680 where I could, you know, open it up a little. The traffic cops are noticeably more lenient on 680. This baby geared up to sixty in thirteen seconds. You can downshift with a speed that will give you whiplash. Cruises at eighty without a complaint.” . . . He was losing some of his dejected look.
“And what time did you get home?”
“It was late. After eleven. The last thing in the world I expected was that Victoria would be mailing letters at this time of night! And wearing that damned black dress! I just caught a flash of her in my headlights when there was this horrible . . . thump. I jumped out of the car and went to her. I knew she was dead, but I ran into the house and called for an ambulance.”

“Did you return outside at any point?”

“No. I couldn’t face it. I waited in the living room until the EMS arrived, along with the police . . . . They confirmed what I thought. Her neck was broken, crushed by the impact. She didn’t suffer, they told me. It was all over in a moment . . . . Poor Victoria. She never even got to see the car”.

After visiting the Teasdale residence, Cross and Kingsley followed up on the burglary investigation, but produced no new leads. Thus Inspector Cross’s original theory that the “burglary” had been committed by the homeowners themselves, in need of insurance cash to keep up their posh lifestyle, was confirmed. During the drive back to the city, the Inspector’s mood was quiet, even pensive. Kingsley assumed he was thinking about the car.

But the next morning, he learned that Cross’s thought process had been more complex.

He found the Inspector staring at his cracked ceiling. Cross was still staring when he said, “Why do I think that man is lying?”

“You mean Teasdale?”

“I don’t know what it is. I don’t trust intuition — mine or anyone else’s. And yet, there was something about the scene yesterday that doesn’t seem right.”

Kingsley was shocked.

“You’re not saying that Teasdale deliberately . . . .”

“I’ve already talked to people who know them. Gossipy people. The kind who’ll fabricate dirt if necessary. None of them could give me a motive for homicide, vehicular or any other kind. Despite the fact that Mr. Teasdale may well have been a bought-and-paid for husband.”

“He was younger than his wife, I know that. The newspaper stories say there was at least twelve years between them.”

“And Teasdale had very little money of his own when they married. But that hardly qualifies as a murder motive. If anything, Teasdale would want to keep her alive, if that’s where all the Bugattis and Daimlers and Cords came from.”

“That’s true enough. Why kill the golden goose?”

“If it was a matter of inheritance, that would be different. But there was a prenuptial agreement. Teasdale can keep what he has, but he won’t get another dime from the Pemberton vaults.”

“Then — why waste your time, Inspector?”

“I just have this feeling. I keep thinking about that car. There was something about it, inside and out . . . .” Cross sighed. “But you’re right. It’s been officially declared an accident. There’s no use worrying about it any more.”

He picked up his morning mail.

Sergeant Kingsley had already left the office when Cross opened an envelope. It contained only a simple white card. The printed message read:

LAST TWO DAYS OF CLASSIC CAR EXHIBITION
It was signed by Bruce Canfield.
Cross leaned back and looked at the ceiling cracks.

The car dealer wasn’t quite as bluff and hearty as usual. From the red-rimmed eyes and slow-motion movements, Cross speculated that Canfield had enjoyed a hard night and was paying the consequences. When Cross offered to buy him lunch, Canfield readily agreed, but his appetite was negligible.
“‘The ladies, the ladies,’” Canfield said, with a grin that was almost a wince. “You can’t keep up with them these days. You’re lucky you’re a bachelor, Inspector.”
“Something wrong with that logic,” Cross smiled.
“‘It’s the married men who have the most trouble with women, take my word for it.’
“Do you know any good examples?”
Canfield laughed. “Too many of them. Especially the rich ones. Throw in the money factor, and you’ve really got a problem.”
“Did Derek Teasdale have a problem?”
Canfield was caught off guard, which was exactly what Cross had intended.
“Teasdale?” he said uneasily. “Well, I wouldn’t really know.”
“He was your best customer,” Cross said. “You must have gotten pretty chummy. For instance, you might know if Mrs. Teasdale was his only . . . driving companion.”
“What makes you think otherwise?”
Cross smiled. “For one thing, Mrs. Teasdale never had the privilege of sitting in that Cord 810.”
“So?”
“When I opened the door yesterday, there was a distinct smell of perfume. I don’t mean after-shave lotion. I’ve got a pretty good nose, and I recognize expensive perfume when I smell it. How would you account for that?”
Canfield hesitated, but there was something about the Inspector’s unwavering gaze that made him say, “Well, if you really have to know, there was a young lady with Teasdale when he left the parking lot. He said she was his secretary. I guess he dropped her off before going home.”
“Ah,” the Inspector said. “And did you happen to hear her name?”
“He called her Denise.”

It didn’t take long for Inspector Cross to determine that there was no secretary named Denise at the brokerage office where Derek Teasdale spent an occasional hour or two during the business week.

Luckily, his inquiries produced another result. The receptionist mentioned that there was a dental hygienist named Denise Holliday who called the office frequently leaving messages for Mr. Teasdale about his appointments. The receptionist giggled. Since Miss Holliday called every week, Mr. Teasdale must have exceptionally clean teeth.

It took more than a dozen phone calls before Cross located the young woman who did, indeed, clean teeth.
Denise Holliday was shapely even in her starched white uniform. But the moment Cross identified himself in the anteroom of Dr. Feigen’s small office, Denise Holliday began having breathing difficulties.

“Oh, my God. Oh, my God,” she kept saying.

“Please don’t be upset,” the Inspector said. “You’re not accused of anything, Miss Holliday. I just wanted to ask about your relationship to Derek Teasdale.”

“He kept telling me that nobody would find out about us! I told him he was being much too careless, that he had to spend more time at the office in case his wife was looking for him. I mean, instead of being in my apartment all the time.”

“Are you saying that Mrs. Teasdale did find out? About you and her husband?”

“Yes!” the hygienist said tearfully. “His secretary kept giving her the same excuse — that he was at the dentist. So one day, she came to my office, and followed me home. Derek had one of his cars parked outside. I mean, it was a 1931 Aston Martin. How could she not know it was him?”

“When did this happen?”

“It was — the day before that terrible accident.”

“I see,” Cross said dryly. “So Derek had only one day to keep the gravy train running. One day to fill out his collection of classic cars.”

“It was all he talked about,” Denise sobbed. “He kept muttering about it all day, like a madman. That all he needed was a Cord. That’s what he kept saying. That everything would be all right, if he had a Cord . . . .”

Inspector Cross called Sergeant Kingsley from the dentist’s office and instructed him to meet him at the Teasdale estate.

“I want one more look at the accident scene,” he told him. “I think I can show you three clues pointing to murder!”

**How did the Inspector know that this murder was no accident? Assemble the jigsaw puzzle to identify the clues at the accident scene. Can you help Inspector Cross crack this Classic Case of Murder?**
The Solution:

Inspector Cross realized that the "accident" scene had been carefully prepared—-that the linoleum on the Coft's automobile was just the innocent vehicle for Dr. Tressel's escape.

The lighter clue was the open mailbox. If his wife had opened the mailbox, the inference was firmer. The mailbox would have been closer. The letters lying in the driveway were clearly not being mailed. Since they still had canceled stamps.

The second clue was even more compelling. The peculiarities of the Coft 810 were reported.

But Dr. Tressel had been driving at night, with the lights on, when he presumably struck and killed his wife. Would he actually have taken the time to work the indistinguishable ciphers that resembled the peculiar police insignia?

The third clue was the most dramatic of all. It brought him to the loop, the body had been deliberately placed near the mailbox. wells are not of the car after Victoria's death. If the linoleum was removed, and the woman never been on the body—or on the driveway! The ciphers on the mailbox were the exact ones that Inspector Cross reported to Sergeant Kinsley.

"Now we know why Tressel murdered his wife. And what else really meant when he kept muttering 'Tell me what happened to the Coft'. He wasn't talking about the car. He was talking about the case that the Coft had to sustain.