



7

## Evans Tries An O-Level

Colin Dexter

### Before you read

*Should criminals in prison be given the opportunity of learning and education?*

### Dramatis Personae

The Secretary of the Examinations Board

The Governor of HM Prison, Oxford

James Evans, a prisoner

Mr Jackson, a prison officer

Mr Stephens, a prison officer

The Reverend S. McLeery, an invigilator

Mr Carter, Detective Superintendent

Mr Bell, Detective Chief Inspector

*All precautions have been taken to see to it that the O-level German examination arranged in the prison for Evans does not provide him with any means of escape.*



### Read and find out

- What kind of a person was Evans?
- What were the precautions taken for the smooth conduct of the examination?

It was in early March when the Secretary of the Examinations Board received the call from Oxford Prison.

“It’s a slightly unusual request, Governor, but I don’t see why we shouldn’t try to help. Just the one fellow, you say?”

“That’s it. Chap called Evans. Started night classes in O-level German last September. Says he’s dead keen to get some sort of academic qualification.”

“Is he any good?”

“He was the only one in the class, so you can say he’s had individual tuition all the time, really. Would have cost him a packet if he’d been outside.”

“Well, let’s give him a chance, shall we?”

“That’s jolly kind of you. What exactly’s the procedure now?”

“Oh, don’t worry about that. I’ll be sending you all the forms and stuff. What’s his name, you say? Evans?”

“James Roderick Evans.” It sounded rather grand.

“Just one thing, Governor. He’s not a violent sort of fellow, is he? I don’t want to know his criminal record or anything like that, but — ”

“No. There’s no record of violence. Quite a pleasant sort of chap, they tell me. Bit of a card, really. One of the stars at the Christmas concert. Imitations, you know the sort of thing: Mike Yarwood stuff. No, he’s just a congenital kleptomaniac, that’s all.” The Governor was tempted to add something else, but he thought better of it. He’d look after *that* particular side of things himself.

“Presumably,” said the Secretary, “you can arrange a room where — ”

“No problem. He’s in a cell on his own. If you’ve no objections, he can sit the exam in there.”

“That’s fine.”

“And we could easily get one of the parsons from St. Mary Mags to invigilate, if that’s — ”

“Fine, yes. They seem to have a lot of parsons there, don’t they?” The two men chuckled good-naturedly, and the Secretary had a final thought. “At least there’s one thing. You shouldn’t have much trouble keeping him incommunicado, should you?”

The Governor chuckled politely once more, reiterated his thanks, and slowly cradled the phone.

Evans!



“Evans the Break” as the prison officers called him. Thrice he’d escaped from prison, and but for the recent wave of unrest in the maximum-security establishments up north, he wouldn’t now be gracing the Governor’s premises in Oxford; and the Governor was going to make absolutely certain that he wouldn’t be *disgracing* them. Not that Evans was a *real* burden: just a persistent, nagging presence. He’d be all right in Oxford, though: the Governor would see to that — would see to it personally. And besides, there was just a possibility that Evans was genuinely interested in O-level German. Just a slight possibility. Just a very slight possibility. At 8.30 p.m. on Monday 7 June, Evans’s German teacher shook him by the hand in the heavily guarded Recreational Block, just across from D Wing.

“*Guten Glück*, Herr Evans.”

“Pardon?”

“I said, “Good luck”. Good luck for tomorrow.”

“Oh. Thanks, er, I mean, er, *Danke Schön*.”

“You haven’t a cat in hell’s chance of getting through, of course, but — ”

“I may surprise everybody,” said Evans.

At 8.30 the following morning, Evans had a visitor. Two visitors, in fact. He tucked his grubby string-vest into his equally grubby trousers, and stood up from his bunk, smiling cheerfully. “Mornin”, Mr Jackson. This is indeed an honour.”

Jackson was the senior prison officer on D Wing, and he and Evans had already become warm enemies. At Jackson’s side stood Officer Stephens, a burly, surly-looking man, only recently recruited to the profession.

Jackson nodded curtly. “And how’s our little Einstein this morning, then?”

“Wasn’t ‘e a mathematician, Mr Jackson?”

“I think ‘e was a Jew, Mr. Jackson.”

Evans’s face was unshaven, and he wore a filthy-looking red-and-white bobble hat upon his head. “Give me a *chance*, Mr Jackson. I was just goin’ to shave when you bust in.”



“Which reminds me.” Jackson turned his eyes on Stephens. “Make sure you take his razor out of the cell when he’s finished scraping that ugly mug of his. Clear? One of these days he’ll do us all a favour and cut his bloody throat.”

For a few seconds Evans looked thoughtfully at the man standing ramrod straight in front of him, a string of Second World War medals proudly paraded over his left breast-pocket. “Mr Jackson? Was it *you* who took my nail-scissors away?” Evans had always worried about his hands.

“And your nail-file, too.”

“Look!’ For a moment Evans’s eyes smouldered dangerously, but Jackson was ready for him.

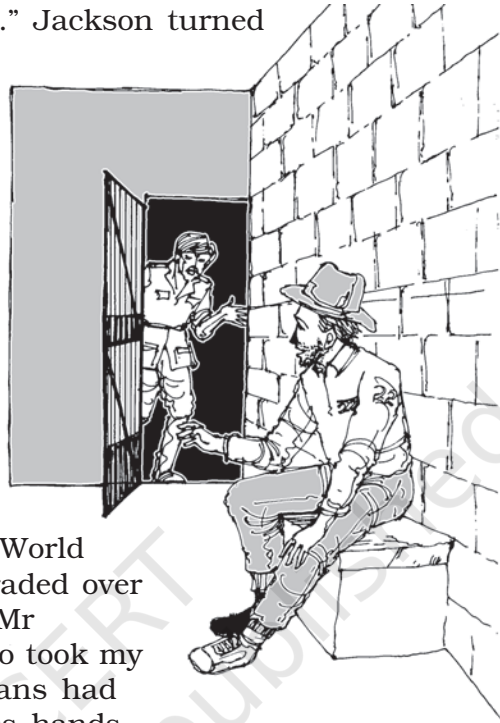
“Orders of the Governor, Evans.” He leaned forward and leered, his voice dropping to a harsh, contemptuous whisper. “You want to *complain?*”

Evans shrugged his shoulders lightly. The crisis was over.

“You’ve got half an hour to smarten yourself up, Evans — and take that bloody hat off!”

“Me ’at? Huh!” Evans put his right hand lovingly on top of the filthy woollen, and smiled sadly. “D’you know, Mr Jackson, it’s the only thing that’s ever brought me any sort o’ luck in life. Kind o’ lucky charm, if you know what I mean. And today I thought — well, with me exam and all that...”

Buried somewhere in Jackson, was a tiny core of compassion; and Evans knew it.



“Just this once, then, Shirley Temple.” (If there was one thing that Jackson genuinely loathed about Evans it was his long, wavy hair.) “And get shaving!”

At 8.45 the same morning the Reverend Stuart McLeery left his bachelor flat in Broad Street and stepped out briskly towards Carfax. The weatherman reported temperatures considerably below the normal for early June, and a long black overcoat and a shallow-crowned clerical hat provided welcome protection from the steady drizzle which had set in half an hour earlier and which now spattered the thick lenses of his spectacles. In his right hand he was carrying a small brown suitcase, which contained all that he would need for his morning duties, including a sealed question paper envelope, a yellow invigilation form, a special “authentication” card from the Examinations Board, a paper knife, a Bible (he was to speak to the Women’s Guild that afternoon on the *Book of Ruth*), and a current copy of *The Church Times*.

The two-hour examination was scheduled to start at 9.15 a.m.

Evans was lathering his face vigorously when Stephens brought in two small square tables, and set them opposite each other in the narrow space between the bunk on the one side and on the other a distempered stone wall. Next, Stephens brought in two hard chairs, the slightly less battered of which he placed in front of the table which stood nearer the cell door.

Jackson put in a brief final appearance. “Behave yourself, laddy!”

Evans turned and nodded.

“And these” — (Jackson pointed to the pin-ups) — “off!”

Evans turned and nodded again. “I was goin’ to take ‘em down anyway. A minister, isn’t ‘e? The chap comin’ to sit in, I mean.”

“And how did you know that?” asked Jackson quietly.

“Well, I ‘ad to sign some forms, didn’t I? And I couldn’t ‘elp — ”

Evans drew the razor carefully down his left cheek, and left a neat swath in the white lather. “Can I ask you



something, Mr. Jackson? Why did they 'ave to bug me in this cell?" He nodded his head vaguely to a point above the door.

"Not a very neat job," conceded Jackson.

"They're not — they don't honestly think I'm goin' to try to — "

"They're taking no chances, Evans. Nobody in his senses would take any chance with *you*."

"Who's goin' to listen in?"

"I'll tell you who's going to listen in, laddy. It's the Governor himself, see? He don't trust you a bloody inch — and nor do I. I'll be watching you like a hawk, Evans, so keep your nose clean. Clear?" He walked towards the door.

Evans nodded. He'd already thought of that, and Number Two Handkerchief was lying ready on the bunk — a neatly folded square of off-white linen.

"Just one more thing, Einstein."

"Ya? Wha's 'at?"

"Good luck, old son."

In the little lodge just inside the prison's main gates, the Reverend S. McLeery signed his name neatly in the visitors' book, and thence walked side by side with a silent prison officer across the exercise yard to D Wing, where he was greeted by Jackson. The Wing's heavy outer door was unlocked, and locked behind them, the heavy inner door the same, and McLeery was handed into Stephens's keeping.

"Get the razor?" murmured Jackson.

Stephens nodded.

"Well, keep your eyes skinned. Clear?"

Stephens nodded again; and McLeery, his feet clanging up the iron stairs, followed his new guide, and finally stood before a cell door, where Stephens opened the peep-hole and looked through.

"That's him, sir."

Evans, facing the door, sat quietly at the farther of the two tables, his whole attention riveted to a textbook of elementary German grammar. Stephens took the key from its ring, and the cell lock sprang back with a thudded, metallic twang.





It was 9.10 a.m. when the Governor switched on the receiver. He had instructed Jackson to tell Evans of the temporary little precaution — that was only fair. (As if Evans wouldn't spot it!) But wasn't it all a bit theatrical? Schoolboyish, almost? How on earth was Evans going to try anything on today? If he was so anxious to make another break, why in heaven's name hadn't he tried it from the Recreational Block? Much easier. But he hadn't. And there he was now — sitting in a locked cell, all the prison officers on the alert, two more locked doors between his cell and the yard, and a yard with a wall as high as a haystack. Yes, Evans was as safe as houses...

Anyway, it wouldn't be any trouble at all to have the receiver turned on for the next couple of hours or so. It wasn't as if there was going to be anything to listen to, was it? Amongst other things, an invigilator's duty was to ensure that the strictest silence was observed. But... but still that little nagging doubt! Might Evans try to take advantage of McLeery? Get him to smuggle in a chisel or two, or a rope ladder, or —

The Governor sat up sharply. It was all very well getting rid of any potential weapon that Evans could have used; but what about McLeery? What if, quite unwittingly, the innocent McLeery had brought in something himself? A jack-knife, perhaps? And what if Evans held him hostage with such a weapon?

The Governor reached for the phone. It was 9.12 a.m.

The examinee and the invigilator had already been introduced by Stephens when Jackson came back and shouted to McLeery through the cell door. "Can you come outside a minute, sir? You too, Stephens."

Jackson quickly explained the Governor's worries, and McLeery patiently held out his arms at shoulder level whilst Jackson lightly frisked his clothes. "Something hard here, sir."

"Ma reading glasses," replied McLeery, looking down at the spectacle case.

Jackson quickly reassured him, and bending down on the landing thumb-flicked the catches on the suitcase. He



picked up each envelope in turn, carefully passed his palms along their surfaces — and seemed satisfied. He riffled cursorily through a few pages of Holy Writ, and vaguely shook *The Church Times*. All right, so far. But one of the objects in McLeery's suitcase was puzzling him sorely.

"Do you mind telling me why you've brought this, sir?" He held up a smallish semi-inflated rubber ring, such as a young child with a waist of about twelve inches might have struggled into. "You thinking of going for a swim, sir?"

McLeery's hitherto amiable demeanour was slightly ruffled by this tasteless little pleasantry, and he answered Jackson somewhat sourly. "If ye must know, I suffer from haemorrhoids, and when I'm sitting down for any length o' time —"

"Very sorry, sir. I didn't mean to, er..." The embarrassment was still reddening Jackson's cheeks when he found the paper-knife at the bottom of the case. "I think I'd better keep this though, if you don't mind, that is, sir."

It was 9.18 a.m. before the Governor heard their voices again, and it was clear that the examination was going to be more than a little late in getting under way.

McLEERY: "Ye've got a watch?"

EVANS: "Yes, sir."

McLEERY: "I'll be telling ye when to start, and again when ye've five minutes left. A' right?"

*Silence.*

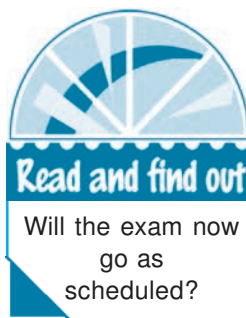
McLEERY: "There's plenty more o' this writing paper should ye need it."

*Silence.*

McLEERY: "Now. Write the name of the paper, 021-1, in the top left-hand corner."

*Silence.*

McLEERY: "In the top right-hand corner write your index number-313. And in the box just below that, write your centre number-271. A' right?"





*Silence. 9.20 a.m.*

MCLEERY: "I'm now going to — "

EVANS: "E's not goin' to stay 'ere, is 'e?"

MCLEERY: "I don't know about that. I — "

STEPHENS: "Mr Jackson's given me strict instructions to — "

EVANS: "How am I suppose to concentrate on my exam... with someone breathin' down my neck? Christ! Sorry, sir, I didn't mean — "

The Governor reached for the phone. "Jackson? Ah, good. Get Stephens out of that cell, will you? I think we're perhaps overdoing things."

"As you wish, sir."

The Governor heard the exchanges in the cell, heard the door clang once more, and heard McLeery announce that the examination had begun at last.

It was 9.25 a.m.; and there was a great calm.

At 9.40 a.m. the Examinations Board rang through, and the Assistant Secretary with special responsibility for modern languages asked to speak to the Governor. The examination had already started, no doubt? Ah, a quarter of an hour ago. Yes. Well, there was a correction slip which some fool had forgotten to place in the examination package. Very brief. "Could the Governor please...?"

"Yes, of course. I'll put you straight through to Mr Jackson in D Wing. Hold the line a minute."

Was this the sort of thing the Governor had feared? Was the phone call a fake? Some signal? Some secret message...? But he could check on that immediately. He dialled the number of the Examinations Board, but heard only the staccato bleeps of a line engaged. But then the line *was* engaged, wasn't it? Yes. Not very intelligent, that...

Two minutes later he heard some whispered communications in the cell, and then McLeery's broad Scots voice:

"Will ye please stop writing a wee while, Mr Evans, and listen carefully. Candidates offering German, 021-1, should note the following correction. 'On page three, line



fifteen, the fourth word should read *goldenen*, not, *goldene*; and the whole phrase will therefore read *zum goldenen Löwen*, not *zum goldene Löwen*.' I will repeat that..."

The Governor listened and smiled. He had taken German in the sixth form himself, and he remembered all about the agreements of adjectives. And so did McLeery, by the sound of things, for the minister's pronunciation was most impressive. But what about Evans? *He* probably didn't know what an adjective *was*.

The phone rang again. The Magistrates' Court. They needed a prison van and a couple of prison officers. Remand case. And within two minutes the Governor was wondering whether *that* could be a hoax. He told himself not to be so silly. His imagination was beginning to run riot.

Evans!

For the first quarter of an hour Stephens had dutifully peered through the peep-hole at intervals of one minute or so; and after that, every two minutes. At 10.45 a.m. everything was still all right as he looked through the peep-hole once more. It took four or five seconds — no more. What was the point? It was always more or less the same. Evans, his pen between his lips, sat staring straight in front of him towards the door, seeking — it seemed — some sorely needed inspiration from somewhere. And opposite him McLeery, seated slightly askew from the table now: his face in semi-profile; his hair (as Stephens had noticed earlier) amateurishly clipped pretty closely to the scalp; his eyes behind the pebble lenses peering short-sightedly at *The Church Times*; his right index finger hooked beneath the narrow clerical collar; and the fingers of the left hand, the nails meticulously manicured, slowly stroking the short black beard.

At 10.50 a.m. the receiver crackled to life and the Governor realised he'd almost forgotten Evans for a few minutes.

EVANS: "Please, sir!" (A whisper)

EVANS: "Please, sir!" (Louder)

EVANS: "Would you mind if I put a blanket round me



shoulders, sir? It's a bit parky in 'ere, isn't it?"

*Silence.*

EVANS: "There's one on me bunk 'ere, sir."

MCLEERY: "Be quick about it."

*Silence.*

At 10.51 a.m. Stephens was more than a little surprised to see a grey regulation blanket draped round Evans's shoulders, and he frowned slightly and looked at the examinee more closely. But Evans, the pen still between his teeth, was staring just as vacantly as before. Blankly beneath a blanket... Should Stephens report the slight irregularity? Anything at all fishy, hadn't Jackson said? He looked through the peep-hole once again, and even as he did so Evans pulled the dirty blanket more closely to himself. Was he planning a sudden batman leap to suffocate McLeery in the blanket? Don't be daft! There was never any sun on this side of the prison; no heating, either, during the summer months, and it could get quite chilly in some of the cells. Stephens decided to revert to his earlier every minute observation.

At 11.20 a.m. the receiver once more crackled across the silence of the Governor's office, and McLeery informed Evans that only five minutes remained. The examination was almost over now, but something still gnawed away quietly in the Governor's mind. He reached for the phone once more.

At 11.22 a.m. Jackson shouted along the corridor to Stephens. The Governor wanted to speak with him — "Hurry, man!" Stephens picked up the phone apprehensively and listened to the rapidly spoken orders. Stephens himself was to accompany McLeery to the main prison gates. Understood? Stephens personally was to make absolutely sure that the door was locked on Evans after McLeery had left the cell. Understood?

Understood.

At 11.25 a.m. the Governor heard the final exchanges.



McLEERY: "Stop writing, please."

*Silence.*

McLEERY: "Put your sheets in order and see they're correctly numbered."

*Silence.*

Scraping of chairs and tables.

EVANS: "Thank you very much, sir."

McLEERY: "A' right, was it?"

EVANS: "Not *too* bad."

McLEERY: "Good... Mr Stephens!" (*Very loud*)

The Governor heard the door clang for the last time. The examination was over.

"How did he get on, do you think?" asked Stephens as he walked beside McLeery to the main gates.

"Och. I canna think he's distinguished himself, I'm afraid." His Scots accent seemed broader than ever, and his long black overcoat, reaching almost to his knees, fostered the illusion that he had suddenly grown slimmer.

Stephens felt pleased that the Governor had asked *him*, and not Jackson, to see McLeery off the premises, and all in all the morning had gone pretty well. But something stopped him from making his way directly to the canteen for a belated cup of coffee. He wanted to take just one last look at Evans. It was like a programme he'd seen on TV — about a woman who could never *really* convince herself that she'd locked the front door when she'd gone to bed: often she'd got up twelve, fifteen, sometimes twenty times to check the bolts.

He re-entered D Wing, made his way along to Evans's cell, and opened the peep-hole once more. *Oh, no!* CHRIST, NO! There, sprawled back in Evans's chair was a man (for a semi second Stephens thought it must be Evans), a grey regulation blanket slipping from his shoulders, the front of



his closely cropped, irregularly tufted hair awash with fierce red blood which had dripped already through the small black beard, and was even now spreading horribly over the white clerical collar and down into the black clerical front.

Stephens shouted wildly for Jackson: and the words appeared to penetrate the curtain of blood that veiled McLeery's ears, for the minister's hand felt feebly for a handkerchief from his pocket, and held it to his bleeding head, the blood seeping slowly through the white linen. He gave a long low moan, and tried to speak. But his voice trailed away, and by the time Jackson had arrived and despatched Stephens to ring the police and the ambulance, the handkerchief was a sticky, squelchy wodge of cloth.

McLeery slowly raised himself, his face twisted tightly with pain. "Dinna worry about the ambulance, man! I'm a' right... I'm a' right... Get the police! I know...I know where... he..." He closed his eyes and another drip of blood splashed like a huge red raindrop on the wooden floor. His hand felt along the table, found the German question paper, and grasped it tightly in his bloodstained hand. "Get the Governor! I know... I know where Evans..."

Almost immediately sirens were sounding, prison officers barked orders, puzzled prisoners pushed their way along the corridors, doors were banged and bolted, and phones were ringing everywhere. And within a minute McLeery, with Jackson and Stephens supporting him on either side, his face now streaked and caked with drying blood, was greeted in the prison yard by the Governor, perplexed and grim.

"We must get you to hospital immediately. I just don't — "

"Ye've called the police?"

"Yes, yes. They're on their way. But — "

"I'm a' right. I'm a' right. Look! Look here!" Awkwardly he opened the German question paper and thrust it before the Governor's face. "It's there! D'ye see what I *mean*?"

The Governor looked down and realised what McLeery was trying to tell him. A photocopied sheet had been carefully and cleverly superimposed over the last (originally blank) page of the question paper.





“Ye see what they’ve done, Governor. Ye see...” His voice trailed off again, as the Governor, dredging the layers of long neglected learning, willed himself to translate the German text before him:

*Sie sollen dem schon verabredeten Plan genau folgen. Der wichtige Zeitpunkt ist drei Minuten vor Ende des Examens...* “You must follow the plan already somethinged. The vital point in time is three minutes before the end of the examination but something something — something something... Don’t hit him too hard — remember, he’s a minister! And don’t overdo the Scots accent when...”

A fast-approaching siren wailed to its crescendo, the great doors of the prison yard were pushed back, and a white police car squealed to a jerky halt beside them.

Detective Superintendent Carter swung himself out of the passenger seat and saluted the Governor. “What the hell’s happening, sir?” And, turning to McLeery: “Christ! Who’s hit *him*?”

But McLeery cut across whatever explanation the Governor might have given. “Elsfield Way, officer! I know where Evans...” He was breathing heavily, and leaned for support against the side of the car, where the imprint of his hand was left in tarnished crimson.

In bewilderment Carter looked to the Governor for guidance. “What — ?”

“Take him with you, if you think he’ll be all right. He’s the only one who seems to know what’s happening.”

Carter opened the back door and helped McLeery inside; and within a few seconds the car leaped away in a spurt of gravel.

“Elsfield Way”, McLeery had said; and there it was staring up at the Governor from the last few lines of the German text: “From Elsfield Way drive to the Headington roundabout, where...” Yes, of course. *The Examinations Board was in Elsfield Way*, and someone from the Board must have been involved in the escape plan from the very beginning: the question paper itself, the correction slip...

The Governor turned to Jackson and Stephens. “I don’t need to tell you what’s happened, do I?” His voice sounded







almost calm in its scathing contempt. "And which one of you two morons was it who took Evans for a nice little walk to the main gates and waved him bye-bye?"

"It was me, sir," stammered Stephens. "Just like you told me, sir. I could have sworn — "

"What? Just like I told you, you say? What the hell — ?"

"When you rang, sir, and told me to — "

"When was that?" The Governor's voice was a whiplash now.

"You know, sir. About twenty past eleven just before — "

"You blithering idiot, man! It wasn't *me* who rang you. Don't you realise — " But what was the use? He *had* used the telephone at that time, but only to try (unsuccessfully, once more) to get through to the Examinations Board.

He shook his head in growing despair and turned on the senior prison officer. "As for you, Jackson! How long have you been pretending you've got a brain, eh? Well, I'll tell you something, Jackson. Your skull's *empty*. Absolutely empty!" It was Jackson who had spent two hours in Evans's cell the previous evening; and it was Jackson who had confidently reported that there was nothing hidden away there — nothing at all. And yet Evans had somehow managed to conceal not only a false beard, a pair of spectacles, a dogcollar and all the rest of his clerical paraphernalia, but also some sort of weapon with which he'd given McLeery such a terrible blow across the head. Aurrgh!

A prison van backed alongside, but the Governor made no immediate move. He looked down again at the last line of the German: "...to the Headington roundabout, where you go straight over and make your way to...to Neugraben." "Neugraben"? Where on earth — ? "New" something. "Newgrave"? Never heard of it: There was a "Wargrave", somewhere near Reading, but... No, it was probably a code word, or — And then it hit him. Newbury! God, yes! Newbury was a pretty big sort of place but —

He rapped out his orders to the driver. “St Aldates Police Station, and step on it! Take Jackson and Stephens here, and when you get there ask for Bell. Chief Inspector Bell. Got that?”

He leaped the stairs to his office three at a time, got Bell on the phone immediately, and put the facts before him.

“We’ll get him, sir,” said Bell. “We’ll get him, with a bit o’luck.”

The Governor sat back, and lit a cigarette. Ye gods! What a beautifully laid plan it had all been! What a clever fellow Evans was! Careless leaving that question paper behind; but then, they all made their mistakes somewhere along the line. Well, *almost* all of them. And that’s why very very shortly Mr clever-clever Evans would be back inside doing *his* once more.

The phone on his desk erupted in a strident burst, and Superintendent Carter informed him that McLeery had spotted Evans driving off along Elsfeld Way; they’d got the number of the car all right and had given chase immediately, but had lost him at the Headington roundabout; he must have doubled back into the city.

“No,” said the Governor quietly. “No, he’s on his way to Newbury.” He explained his reasons for believing so, and left it at that. It was a police job now — not his. He was just another good-for-a-giggle, gullible governor, that was all.

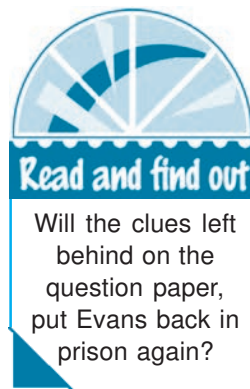
“By the way, Carter. I hope you managed to get McLeery to the hospital all right?”

“Yes. He’s in the Radcliffe now. Really groggy, he was, when we got to the Examination offices, and they rang for the ambulance from there.”

The Governor rang the Radcliffe a few minutes later and asked for the accident department.

“McLeery, you say?”

“Yes. He’s a parson.”



“I don’t think there’s anyone — ”

“Yes, there is. You’ll find one of your ambulances picked him up from Elsfield Way about — ”

“Oh, *that*. Yes, we sent an ambulance all right, but when we got there, the fellow had gone. No one seemed to know where he was. Just vanished! Not a sign — ”

But the Governor was no longer listening, and the truth seemed to hit him with an almost physical impact somewhere in the back of his neck.

A quarter of an hour later they found the Reverend S. McLeery, securely bound and gagged, in his study in Broad Street. He’d been there, he said, since 8.15 a.m., when two men had called and...

Enquiries in Newbury throughout the afternoon produced nothing. Nothing at all. And by tea-time everyone in the prison knew what had happened. It had not been Evans, impersonating McLeery, who had walked *out*; it had been Evans, impersonating McLeery, who had stayed in.

The fish and chips were delicious, and after a gentle stroll round the centre of Chipping Norton, Evans decided to return to the hotel and have an early night. A smart new hat concealed the wreckage of his closely cropped hair, and he kept it on as he walked up to the reception desk of the Golden Lion. It would take a good while for his hair to regain its former glories — but what the hell did *that* matter. He was *out* again, wasn’t he? A bit of bad luck, that, when Jackson had pinched his scissors, for it had meant a long and tricky operation with his only razor blade the previous night. Ah! But he’d had his good luck, too. Just think! If Jackson had made him take his bobble hat off! Phew! That really *had* been a close call. Still, old Jackson wasn’t such a bad fellow...

One of the worst things — funny, really! — had been the beard. He’d always been allergic to sticking plaster, and even now his chin was irritatingly sore and red.



The receptionist wasn't the same girl who'd booked him in, but the change was definitely for the better. As he collected his key, he gave her his best smile, told her he wouldn't be bothering with breakfast, ordered the *Daily Express*, and asked for an early-morning call at 6.45 a.m. Tomorrow was going to be another busy day.

He whistled softly to himself as he walked up the broad stairs... He'd sort of liked the idea of being dressed up as a minister dog collar and everything. Yes, it had been a jolly good idea for "McLeery" to wear *two* black fronts, *two* collars. But that top collar! Phew! It had kept on slipping off the back stud; and there'd been that one panicky moment when "McLeery" had only just got his hand up to his neck in time to stop the collars springing apart before Stephens... Ah! They'd got *that* little problem worked out all right, though: a pen stuck in the mouth whenever the evil eye had appeared at the peep-hole. Easy! But all that fiddling about under the blanket with the black front and the stud at the back of the collar — that had been far more difficult than they'd ever bargained for... Everything else had gone beautifully smoothly, though. In the car he'd found everything they'd promised him: soap and water, clothes, the map — yes, the *map*, of course. The Ordnance Survey Map of Oxfordshire... He'd got some good friends; some very clever friends. Christ, ah!

He unlocked his bedroom door and closed it quietly behind him — and then stood frozen to the spot, like a man who has just caught a glimpse of the Gorgon.

Sitting on the narrow bed was the very last man in the world that Evans had expected — or wanted — to see.

"It's not worth trying anything," said the Governor quietly, as Evans's eyes darted desperately around the room. "I've got men all round the place." (Well, there were only *two*, really: but Evans needn't know that.) He let the words sink in. "Women, too. Didn't you think the blonde girl in reception was rather sweet?"

Evans was visibly shaken. He sat down slowly in the only chair the small room could offer, and held his head between his hands. For several minutes there was utter silence.





Finally, he spoke. “It was that bloody correction slip, I s’pose.”

“We-ell” (the Governor failed to mask the deep satisfaction in his voice) “there *are* a few people who know a little German.”

Slowly, very slowly, Evans relaxed. He was beaten — and he knew it. He sat up at last, and managed to smile ruefully. “You know, it wasn’t *really* a mistake. You see, we ‘adn’t been able to fix up any ‘otel, but we could’ve worked that some other way. No. The really important thing was for the phone to ring just before the exam finished — to get everyone out of the way for a couple of minutes. So we ‘ad to know exactly when the exam *started*, didn’t we?”



“And, like a fool, I presented you with that little piece of information on a plate.”

“Well, *somebody* did. So, you see, sir, that correction slip killed two little birds with a single stone, didn't it? The name of the 'otel for *me*, and the exact time the exam started for, er, for, er...”

The Governor nodded. “It's a pretty common word.”

“Good job it is pretty common, sir, or I'd never 'ave known where to come to, would I?”

“Nice name, though: *zum goldenen Lowen*.”

“How did you know which Golden Lion it was? There's 'undreds of 'em.”

“Same as you, Evans. Index number 313; Centre number 271. Remember? Six figures? And if you take an Ordnance Survey Map for Oxfordshire, you find that the six-figure reference 313/271 lands you bang in the middle of Chipping Norton.”

“Yea, you're right. Huh! We'd 'oped you'd run off to Newbury.”

“We did.”

“Well, that's something, I s'pose.”

“That question paper, Evans. Could you really understand all that German? I could hardly — ”

“Nah! Course I couldn't. I knew *roughly* what it was all about, but we just 'oped it'd throw a few spanners in the works — you know, sort of muddle everybody a bit.’

The Governor stood up. “Tell me one thing before we go. How on earth did you get all that blood to pour over your head?”

Evans suddenly looked a little happier. “*Clever*, sir. Very clever, that was — 'ow to get a couple o' pints of blood into a cell, eh? When there's none there to start off with, and when, er, and when the “invigilator”, shall we say, gets, searched before 'e comes in. Yes, sir. You can well ask about that, and I dunno if I ought to tell you. After all, I might want to use that particular — ”

“Anything to do with a little rubber ring for piles, perhaps?”

Evans grinned feebly. “Clever, though, wasn't it?”





“Must have been a tricky job sticking a couple of pints

“Nah! You’ve got it wrong, sir. No problem about *that*.”

“No?”

“Nah! It’s the *clotting*, you see. That’s the big trouble. We got the blood easy enough. Pig’s blood, it was — from the slaughter’ouse in Kidlington. But to stop it clotting you’ve got to mix yer actual blood” (Evans took a breath) “with one tenth of its own volume of 3.8 per cent trisodium citrate! Didn’t know that, did you, sir?”

The Governor shook his head in a token of reluctant admiration. “We learn something new every day, they tell me. Come on, m’lad.”

Evans made no show of resistance, and side by side the two men walked slowly down the stairs.

“Tell me, Evans. How did you manage to plan all this business? You’ve had no visitors — I’ve seen to that. You’ve had no letters — ”

“I’ve got lots of friends, though.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Me German teacher, for a start.”

“You mean — ? But he was from the Technical College.”

“Was ‘e?’ Evans was almost enjoying it all now. “Ever check up on ‘im, sir?”

“God Almighty! There’s far more going on than I — ”

“Always will be, sir.”

“Everything ready?” asked the Governor as they stood by the reception desk.

“The van’s out the front, sir,” said the pretty blonde receptionist. Evans winked at her; and she winked back at him. It almost made his day.

A silent prison officer handcuffed the recaptured Evans, and together the two men clambered awkwardly into the back seat of the prison van.

“See you soon, Evans.” It was almost as if the Governor were saying farewell to an old friend after a cocktail party.

“Cheerio, sir. I, er, I was just wonderin’. I know your German’s pretty good, sir, but do you know any more o’ these modern languages?”

“Not very well. Why?”



Evans settled himself comfortably on the back seat, and grinned happily. 'Nothin', really. I just 'appened to notice that you've got some O-level Italian classes comin' up next September, that's all.'

"Perhaps you won't be with us next September, Evans."

James Roderick Evans appeared to ponder the Governor's words deeply. "No. P'raps I won't," he said.

As the prison van turned right from Chipping Norton on to the Oxford road, the hitherto silent prison officer unlocked the handcuffs and leaned forward towards the driver, "For Christ's sake get a *move* on! It won't take 'em long to find out —'

"Where do ye suggest we make for?" asked the driver, in a broad Scots accent..

"What about Newbury?" suggested Evans.





## Reading with Insight

1. Reflecting on the story, what did you feel about Evans' having the last laugh?
  2. When Stephens comes back to the cell he jumps to a conclusion and the whole machinery blindly goes by his assumption without even checking the identity of the injured 'McLeery'. Does this show how hasty conjectures can prevent one from seeing the obvious? How is the criminal able to predict such negligence?
  3. What could the Governor have done to securely bring back Evans to prison when he caught him at the Golden Lion? Does that final act of foolishness really prove that "he was just another good-for-a-giggle, gullible governor, that was all"?
  4. While we condemn the crime, we are sympathetic to the criminal. Is this the reason why prison staff often develop a soft corner for those in custody?
  5. Do you agree that between crime and punishment it is mainly a battle of wits?
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