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Maigret  
and the  
Dead Girl

*Maigret and the Dead Girl*

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Georges Simenon was born on 12 February 1903 in Liège, Belgium, and died in 1989 in Lausanne, Switzerland, where he had lived for the latter part of his life. Between 1931 and 1972 he published seventy-five novels and twenty-eight short stories featuring Inspector Maigret.

Simenon always resisted identifying himself with his famous literary character, but acknowledged that they shared an important characteristic:

My motto, to the extent that I have one, has been noted often enough, and I've always conformed to it. It's the one I've given to old Maigret, who resembles me in certain points . . . 'understand and judge not'.

GEORGES SIMENON

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*Translated by* HOWARD CURTIS



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*Maigret and the Dead Girl*

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## 1.

*In which Inspector Lognon discovers a body and complains that it is being taken away from him*

Maigret yawned and pushed the papers to the edge of the desk.

‘Sign this, boys, and you can go to bed.’

The ‘boys’ were probably the three toughest characters to have been through the offices of the Police Judiciaire in a year. One of them, the one they called Dédé, looked like a gorilla, and even the slimmest of the three, who had a black eye, could have earned his living as a fairground wrestler.

Janvier passed them the papers and a pen. Now that they had finally confessed, they were no longer bothering to argue and didn’t even read their statements, just signed wearily.

It was a few minutes past three by the marble clock, and most of the offices at police headquarters on Quai des Orfèvres were shrouded in darkness. For a long while now, there had been no noise apart from the occasional distant car horn or the brakes of a taxi as it skidded on the wet roadway. When they had arrived the previous day, the offices had been deserted, too, because it wasn’t yet

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nine o'clock in the morning, and the staff hadn't come in yet. It had been raining even then, with that thin, sad rain that was still falling.

They had now been within these walls for nearly twenty hours, sometimes together, sometimes separately, while Maigret and five of his colleagues had taken turns at grilling them.

'Idiots!' Maigret had said as soon as he saw them. 'This is going to take a long time.'

Idiots are stubborn and always take the longest time to spill the beans. They imagine that if they don't answer, or they come out with any old nonsense, even if it means contradicting themselves every five minutes, they will somehow get away with it. Thinking they are smarter than anybody else, they invariably start by showing off.

'Don't think you're going to get me!'

For months, they had been operating in the area of Rue la Fayette, and the newspapers called them the wall breakers. Thanks to an anonymous telephone call, they had finally been arrested.

There were still coffee dregs in the cups and a small enamel coffee-pot on a portable stove. Everyone was grey-faced, with drawn features. Maigret had smoked so much that his throat was irritated. Once the three men were taken away, he would suggest to Janvier that they go somewhere for onion soup. His desire for sleep had passed. It was at about eleven o'clock that he had had a sudden feeling of tiredness and had gone to his office for a quick doze. But now, the last thing on his mind was sleep.

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‘Ask Vacher to come and get them.’

Just as they were leaving the inspectors’ office, the telephone rang. Maigret picked up the receiver.

‘Who’s that?’ a voice asked.

He frowned and did not reply immediately.

‘Jussieu?’ the voice continued at the other end of the line.

That was the name of the inspector who should have been on duty. Maigret had sent him home at ten o’clock.

‘No,’ he grunted, ‘Maigret.’

‘Sorry, detective chief inspector. Raymond here, from the central switchboard.’

The call came from the other building, from the vast room where all police emergency calls ended up. As soon as the glass on one of those red call-boxes found throughout Paris was broken, a little light came on somewhere on a map that occupied a large part of one wall, and a man would insert a plug into one of the sockets of the switchboard.

‘Central switchboard. Go ahead.’

Sometimes it was a fight, sometimes a troublesome drunk, sometimes an officer on the beat who needed help.

The switchboard operator would insert a plug into another socket.

‘Rue de Grenelle station? Is that you, Justin? Send a van to the embankment, number 210 . . .’

There were two or three men on night duty at the central switchboard, and they probably also made themselves coffee. Sometimes, when it was something serious, they alerted the Police Judiciaire. At other times, they would

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simply phone headquarters to say hello to a friend. Maigret knew Raymond.

‘Jussieu’s left,’ he said. ‘Did you have anything in particular to tell him?’

‘Only that the body of a young girl has been found on Place Vintimille.’

‘Any details?’

‘The men from the second district should be on the scene by now. I got the call three minutes ago.’

‘Thanks a lot.’

The three robbers had left the office. Janvier returned, red-eyed as he always was when he had to stay overnight, and with stubble that gave him an unhealthy look.

Maigret put on his coat and looked for his hat. ‘Coming?’

They went down the stairs, one behind the other. Normally, they would have gone to Les Halles for their onion soup. Seeing the little black cars lined up in the courtyard, Maigret hesitated.

‘A young girl has been found dead on Place Vintimille,’ he said. Then, like someone looking for an excuse not to go to bed: ‘Shall we have a look?’

Janvier got in behind the wheel of one of the cars. They were both too dazed after the long interrogation they had just conducted to speak.

It didn’t occur to Maigret that the second district was Lognon’s patch – Lognon, the man his colleagues nicknamed Inspector Hard-Done-By. Even if he had thought of it, it wouldn’t have made any difference, because Lognon wasn’t necessarily on night shift at the Rue de La Rochefoucauld station.

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The streets were wet and deserted, with fine drops of rain forming haloes around the street lamps and the odd shadowy figure hugging the walls. There was one café still open on the corner of Rue Montmartre and the Grands Boulevards, and further on they glimpsed the neon lights of two or three nightclubs, with taxis waiting outside at the kerb.

Although not far from Place Blanche, Place Vintimille was like an island of calm. A police van was parked there. Near the gate to the tiny park in the middle, four or five men were standing around a light-coloured shape lying on the ground.

Maigret immediately recognized Lognon's short, thin figure. Inspector Hard-Done-By had moved away from the group to see who was coming, and he, too, recognized Maigret and Janvier.

'Damn!' Maigret muttered.

Because, obviously, Lognon would again accuse him of doing it deliberately. This was his neighbourhood, his patch. Something dramatic had taken place on his shift, something that might perhaps give him the opportunity to distinguish himself that he had been waiting for all these years. And now a series of chance occurrences had brought Maigret to the scene almost at the same time as him!

'Did they phone you at home?' he asked suspiciously, already convinced that there was a conspiracy against him.

'I was at headquarters. Raymond rang. I came to have a look.'

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Maigret certainly wasn't going to leave without knowing what it was all about just to avoid hurting Lognon's feelings.

'Is she dead?' he asked, pointing to the woman lying on the pavement.

Lognon nodded. Three uniformed officers were there, as well as a couple who had been passing and who, Maigret learned later, had spotted the body and raised the alarm. If it had happened only a hundred metres away, a large crowd would already have gathered, but not many people go through Place Vintimille at night.

'Who is she?'

'We don't know. She doesn't have any papers.'

'No handbag?'

'No.'

Maigret took a few steps and bent down. The young woman was lying on her right side, one cheek on the wet pavement, one of her feet shoeless.

'Have they found her shoe?'

Lognon shook his head. It was quite startling to see her toes through the silk stocking. She was wearing a pale-blue satin evening gown, and, perhaps because of the position she was in, this gown seemed too big for her.

The face was young: no more than twenty or so, Maigret thought.

'What about the doctor?'

'I'm waiting. He should be here soon.'

Maigret turned to Janvier. 'Call Criminal Records and get them to send some photographers.'

There was no blood visible on the dress. Maigret shone

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a torch belonging to one of the officers on the face and noticed that the one visible eye was slightly swollen, as was the upper lip.

‘No coat?’ he asked.

It was March. The air was quite mild, although not mild enough to walk about at night, especially in the rain, in a light gown that left the shoulders bare and was held up only by narrow straps.

‘She probably wasn’t killed here,’ Lognon murmured glumly, as if he was doing his duty by helping Maigret, but was personally losing interest in the case.

He was deliberately keeping his distance. Janvier had set off for one of the bars on Place Blanche to telephone. A taxi soon stopped, bringing a local doctor.

‘You can have a look, doctor, but don’t move her before the photographers get here. There’s no doubt she’s dead.’

The doctor bent down and touched the wrist and the chest, then stood up again without a word, quite unconcerned, and waited like the others.

‘Are you coming?’ asked the woman, who was holding her husband’s arm and was starting to feel cold.

‘Wait a bit.’

‘What for?’

‘I don’t know. They must be about to do something.’

Maigret turned to them. ‘Have you given your names and address?’

‘To that gentleman, yes.’

They pointed to Lognon.

‘What time was it when you discovered the body?’

They looked at each other.

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‘We left the cabaret at three.’

‘Five past three,’ the woman corrected him. ‘I looked at my watch while you were getting your coat.’

‘Whatever time it was, it only took us three or four minutes to get here. We were going to walk round the outside of the square when I saw a splash of colour on the pavement.’

‘Was she already dead?’

‘I suppose so. She wasn’t moving.’

‘You didn’t touch her?’

The man shook his head. ‘I sent my wife to inform the police. There’s a police emergency call box on the corner of Boulevard de Clichy. I know it well because we live nearby, on Boulevard des Batignolles.’

Janvier soon came back. ‘They’ll be here in a few minutes,’ he announced.

‘I don’t suppose Moers was there?’

Although he couldn’t have said why, Maigret had the impression that this was the start of quite a complicated case. He waited, his pipe in his mouth, his hands in his pockets, glancing every now and again at the form lying on the ground. The blue gown wasn’t at all new, and the material was quite ordinary. It could have been the dress of one of the many hostesses who worked in the clubs of Montmartre. The shoe, too, a silver shoe with a very high heel and a worn sole, could have belonged to one of them.

The first idea that came to mind was that a hostess, on her way home, had been attacked by someone who had stolen her handbag. But in that case, one of the shoes

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wouldn't have disappeared, and the attacker wouldn't have gone to the trouble of removing the victim's coat.

'She must have been killed elsewhere,' he said to Janvier in a low voice.

Lognon, who had his ears peeled, heard this, and gave a kind of bitter grin: he had been the first to put forward this theory.

If she had been killed elsewhere, why had the body been left on this square? It wasn't likely that the killer had carried the young woman on his shoulder. He must have used a car. In that case, it would have been easy for him to hide her on some patch of waste ground or throw her in the Seine.

Maigret wouldn't have admitted that what intrigued him most was the victim's face. All he had seen of it so far was one profile. Was it the bruises that gave her that sullen air? She looked like a bad-tempered little girl. Her combed-back brown hair was very smooth but naturally wavy. The rain had diluted her make-up a little, and, instead of making her older or uglier, it made her younger and more appealing.

'Come here a moment, Lognon.'

Maigret drew him aside.

'I'm listening, chief.'

'Do you have any thoughts about this?'

'You know perfectly well I never have any thoughts. I'm just a local inspector.'

'Ever seen the girl before?'

Lognon knew the area around Place Blanche and Place Pigalle better than anyone.

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‘Never.’

‘A hostess?’

‘If she is, she’s not a regular. I know just about all of them.’

‘I’m going to need you.’

‘You don’t have to say that just to please me. Once Quai des Orfèvres gets involved, it’s none of my business any more. Not that I’m complaining. It’s only natural. I’m used to it. You just have to give me my orders and I’ll do my best.’

‘The best thing you can do right now is question the doormen of the nightclubs, don’t you think?’

Lognon glanced at the body and sighed. ‘I’m on to it.’

In his mind, he was deliberately being sent away. They watched him cross the street with that eternally weary walk of his, and he took care not to turn round.

The car from Criminal Records arrived. One of the officers on the scene was making an effort to get rid of a drunk who had approached and was becoming indignant at the fact that nobody was helping the ‘little lady’.

‘You’re all the same, you coppers. Just because someone’s had a bit too much to drink . . .’

Once the photographs had been taken, the doctor was able to bend over the body and turn it on to its back, revealing the whole face, which now looked even younger.

‘How did she die?’ Maigret asked.

‘Fractured skull.’ The doctor had his fingers in the dead girl’s hair. ‘She was struck on the head with a very heavy object, a hammer, a spanner, a piece of lead piping, something like that. Before that, she’d been struck in the face, probably punched.’

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‘Can you determine the approximate time of death?’

‘In my opinion, between two and three in the morning. Dr Paul will be able to tell you more after the post-mortem.’

The van from the Forensic Institute had also arrived. The men were just waiting for a signal to put the body on a stretcher and take it to Pont d’Austerlitz.

‘Go ahead!’ Maigret said with a sigh. He looked around for Janvier. ‘Shall we go and eat?’

Neither of them was hungry, but they went to a brasserie all the same and ordered onion soup, just because they had decided to do so an hour earlier. Maigret had given instructions for a photograph of the dead girl to be sent to the newspapers so that it might appear in the morning editions if at all possible.

‘Are you going over there?’ Janvier asked.

Maigret knew he was referring to the Morgue, which was now called the Forensic Institute.

‘I think I’ll drop by.’

‘Dr Paul will be there. I phoned him.’

‘How about a calvados?’

‘Why not?’

Two women were eating sauerkraut at a nearby table, both hostesses, both in evening dress, and Maigret watched them attentively as if trying to spot the subtle differences between them and the dead girl.

‘Are you going home?’

Janvier made up his mind. ‘I’ll go with you.’

It was 4.30 by the time they got to the Forensic Institute. Dr Paul, who had only just arrived, was putting on his

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white coat, a cigarette dangling from his lower lip as always when he was about to conduct a post-mortem.

‘Have you examined her, doctor?’

‘I’ve had a quick look.’

The body was naked on a marble slab and Maigret turned his eyes away.

‘What do you think?’

‘I’d say she was between nineteen and twenty-two. She was in good health but I suspect she was malnourished.’

‘A nightclub hostess?’

Dr Paul looked at him with wicked little eyes.

‘You mean a girl who sleeps with the customers?’

‘Something like that.’

‘Then the answer is no.’

‘How can you be so categorical?’

‘Because this girl has never slept with anyone.’

Janvier, who had been mechanically looking at the body under the spotlight, now blushed and turned his head away.

‘Are you sure?’

‘Certain.’ He put on his rubber gloves and got his instruments ready on an enamelled table. ‘Are you staying?’

‘We’ll go next door. Will you be long?’

‘Less than an hour. It depends on what I find. Would you like an analysis of the stomach contents?’

‘Preferably. You never know.’

Maigret and Janvier went into an adjoining office, where they sat down, as formally as in a waiting room. Both still had the image of the white young body on their retinas.

‘I wonder who she is,’ Janvier murmured after a long

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