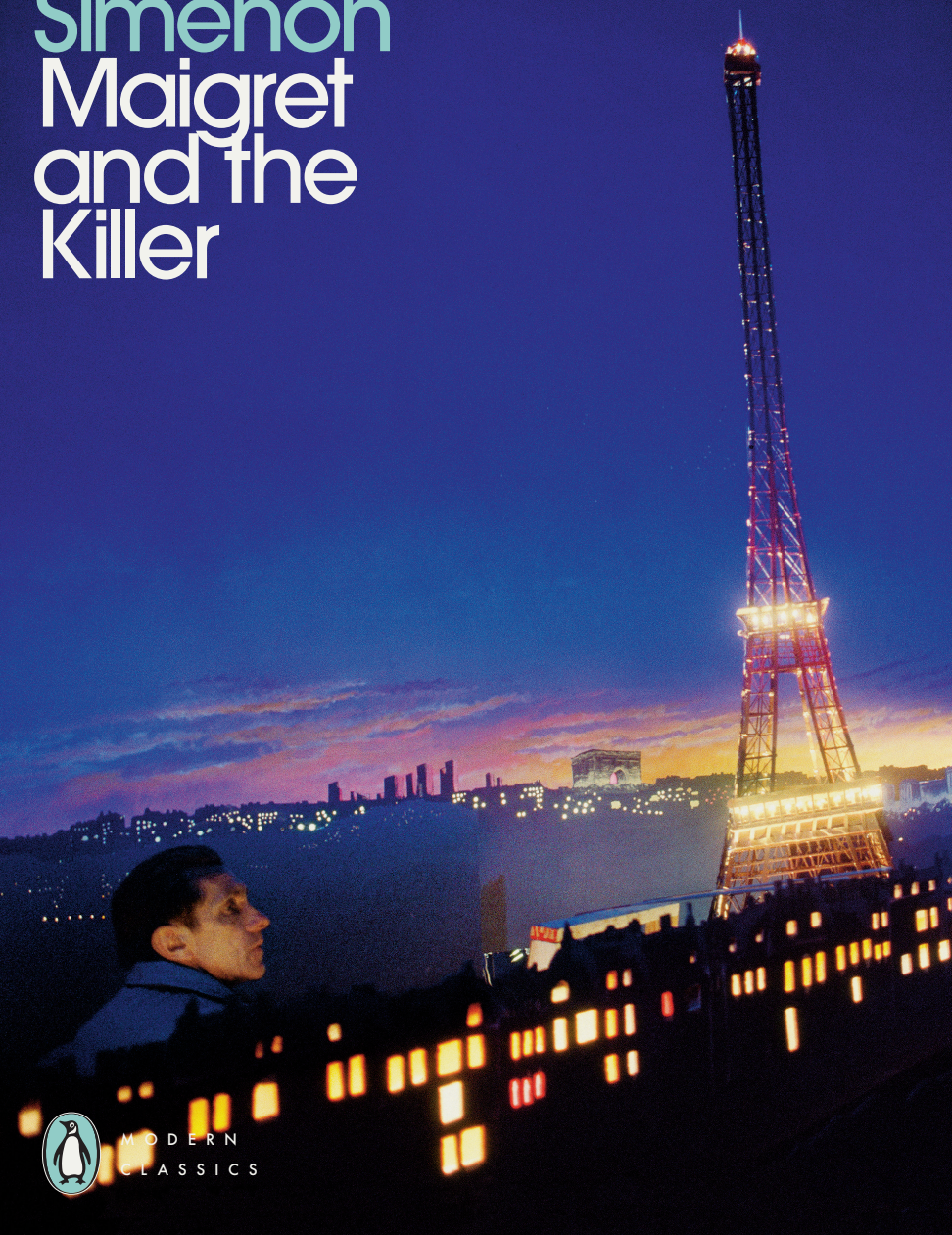


# Georges Simenon Maigret and the Killer



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*Maigret and the Killer*

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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

*Maigret and the Killer*

*Translated by* SHAUN WHITESIDE



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## 1.

For the first time since they had been going for dinner with the Pardons once a month, Maigret had a memory of the evening at Boulevard Voltaire that was almost painful. It had started in Boulevard Richard-Lenoir. His wife had phoned for a taxi, because for three days it had, according to the radio, been raining harder than at any time in the past thirty-five years. The rain was coming down in sheets, frozen, lashing people's hands and faces, making their wet clothes stick to their bodies.

On the stairs, in lifts and offices, feet left dark prints, and everyone was in a terrible mood.

They had gone downstairs and spent almost half an hour on the doorstep, increasingly numb with cold, waiting for the taxi to arrive. Then, on top of everything, they had had to haggle for the driver to agree to take them such a short distance.

'I'm sorry. We're late.'

'Everybody's late these days. Would you mind if we sat down at the table straight away.'

The apartment was warm and intimate, and they felt all the better for the sound of the storm rattling the shutters. Madame Pardon had made her unparalleled boeuf bourguignon, and the dish, filling yet refined, had been the focus of their conversation.

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Then they had talked about provincial cookery, about *cassoulet* and *potée Lorraine*, about *tripes à la mode de Caën* and *bouillabaisse*.

‘Basically most of these recipes were born of necessity. If they had had refrigerators in the Middle Ages . . .’

What else had they talked about? The two women, as usual, had ended up going to sit in a corner of the sitting room, where they chatted in low voices. Pardon had taken Maigret into his surgery to show him a rare edition given to him by one of his patients. They had sat down in their usual places, and Madame Pardon had come to bring them coffee and calvados.

Pardon was tired. For quite a long time his features had been drawn, and sometimes a kind of resignation appeared in his eyes. He still worked fifteen hours a day, without a word of complaint or recrimination, in his surgery in the morning, and spent part of the afternoon lugging his heavy medical bag from street to street, then back home, where the waiting room was always full.

‘If I had a son and he’d told me he intended to become a doctor, I think I would try to dissuade him.’

Maigret nearly looked away out of modesty. Coming from Pardon, these words were most unexpected, because he was passionate about his profession, and it was impossible to imagine him practising another one.

This time, though, he was discouraged and pessimistic, and most importantly he was going so far as to express that pessimism.

‘They’re turning us into civil servants, and transforming medicine into a big machine for producing basic treatment.’

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Maigret studied him, lighting his pipe.

‘Not only civil servants,’ the doctor continued, ‘but bad civil servants, because we can no longer devote the necessary time to each patient. Sometimes I’m ashamed as I guide them to the door, nearly pushing them. I see their worried, even imploring faces. I feel that they expected something from me, questions, words, minutes, in short, during which I would attend to their case.’

He raised his glass.

‘Your good health.’

He tried to smile, a mechanical smile that didn’t suit him.

‘Do you know how many patients I’ve seen today? Eighty-two. And that’s not exceptional. After which they make us fill in various forms that take up our evenings. I’m sorry for boring you with that. You must have worries of your own at Quai des Orfèvres.’

What had they talked about after that? The sort of mundane matters that you don’t remember the next day. Pardon was sitting at his desk, smoking his cigarette, Maigret in the stiff armchair reserved for the patients. The air was filled with a particular smell with which he was very familiar, because he encountered it every time he visited. A smell that in a way reminded him of the offices at the station. A smell of poverty.

Pardon’s patients were local, almost all of them from a very modest background.

The door opened. Eugénie, the maid, who had worked at Boulevard Voltaire for so long that she was more or less part of the family, announced:

‘It’s the Italian, sir.’

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‘Which Italian? Pagliati?’

‘Yes, sir. He’s in a terrible state. Apparently it’s very urgent.’

It was 10.30. Pardon got to his feet and opened the door of the sad waiting room, in which magazines were scattered over a pedestal table.

‘What’s wrong, Gino?’

‘It’s not me, doctor. Nor my wife. There’s a wounded man on the pavement who seems to be dying.’

‘Where?’

‘Rue Popincourt, less than a hundred metres from here.’

‘Was it you who found him?’

Pardon was already in the doorway, putting on his black overcoat, looking for his doctor’s bag, and Maigret, quite naturally, put on his coat as well. The doctor opened the door to the sitting room.

‘We’ll be back right away. An injured man on Rue Popincourt.’

‘Take your umbrella.’

He didn’t take it. It would have seemed ridiculous, holding an umbrella as he leaned over a man dying in the middle of the pavement in the pelting rain.

Gino was a Neapolitan. He kept a grocer’s shop on the corner of Rue du Chemin-Vert and Rue Popincourt. More precisely, it was his wife, Lucia, who kept the shop while he made fresh pasta in the back room, ravioli and tortellini. The couple were popular in the area. Pardon had treated Gino for high blood pressure in the past.

The pasta-maker was a short man with a heavy, thick body and a flushed face.

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‘We were coming back from my brother-in-law’s in Rue de Charonne. My sister-in-law is going to have a baby, and we’re expecting to drive her to the maternity hospital at any moment. We were walking in the rain when I saw . . .’

Half of his words were lost in the storm. The gutters were real torrents that you had to jump over, and the few cars sent dirty water spraying several metres.

The spectacle that awaited him in Rue Popincourt was unexpected. There were no pedestrians from one end of the street to the other, and only a few windows, apart from that of a small café, were still lit.

About fifty metres from that café, a stout woman stood motionlessly beneath an umbrella shaken by the wind, and the light from a streetlamp revealed the shape of a body lying at her feet.

It brought back old memories for Maigret. Even before he had been at the head of the Crime Squad, while he had only been an inspector, he had sometimes been first on the scene of a brawl, a settling of scores, a knife attack.

The man was young. He looked barely twenty, he was wearing a suede jacket, and his hair was quite long at the back. He had fallen forwards, and the back of his jacket was stained with blood.

‘Have you called the police?’

Pardon, crouching beside the injured man, interrupted:

‘Tell them to send an ambulance.’

That meant that the stranger was alive, and Maigret moved towards the light that he could see fifty metres away. Inscribed on the faintly lit display window were the

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words: 'Chez Jules'. He pushed the glass door, hung with a cream-coloured curtain, and stepped into an atmosphere so calm that it was almost unreal. It was like a genre painting.

It was a bar in the old style, with sawdust on the floor and a strong smell of wine and spirits. Four middle-aged men, three of them fat and red-faced, were playing cards.

'Can I make a phone call?'

They watched with surprise as he walked towards the telephone on the wall, beside the zinc bar and the rows of bottles.

'Hello . . . Is that the station of the eleventh arrondissement?'

It was a stone's throw away, at Place Léon-Blum, formerly Place Voltaire.

'Hello. This is Maigret. There's an injured man in Rue Popincourt. Towards Rue du Chemin-Vert. We need an ambulance.'

The four men grew animated, like figures in a painting coming to life. They kept the cards in their hands.

'What is it?' asked someone in shirt-sleeves, who must have been the owner. 'Who's injured?'

'A young man.'

Maigret set some change down on the counter and headed towards the door.

'A tall, thin guy in a suede jacket?'

'Yes.'

'He was here a quarter of an hour ago.'

'On his own?'

'Yes.'

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‘Did he look nervous?’

The owner, probably Jules, glanced quizzically at the others.

‘No. Not especially.’

‘Did he stay for long?’

‘About twenty minutes.’

When Maigret was outside, he saw two officers on bicycles, capes dripping, standing near the injured man. Pardon had got back to his feet.

‘There’s nothing I can do. He’s been stabbed several times. They missed his heart. And none of his arteries has been cut either, at first glance, or there would have been more blood.’

‘Will he regain consciousness?’

‘I don’t know. I don’t dare to move him. Until we get him to a hospital they won’t be able to . . .’

The two vehicles, the police car and the ambulance, arrived almost simultaneously. The card-players, rather than getting wet, stood in the doorway of the little café and watched from a distance. Only the owner came over, with a sack over his head and shoulders. He recognized the man’s jacket straight away.

‘That’s him.’

‘He didn’t say anything to you?’

‘No. Except to order a cognac.’

Pardon gave instructions to the orderlies who were bringing their stretcher.

‘What’s that?’ asked one of the police officers, pointing to a black object that looked like a camera.

The injured man wore it across his body. It wasn’t a

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camera, but a tape recorder. It was drenched with rain, and when the man was being slipped on to the stretcher, Maigret took advantage of the fact to release the strap.

‘To Saint-Antoine.’

Pardon got into the ambulance with one of the orderlies while the other one took the wheel.

‘Who are you?’ he asked Maigret.

‘Police.’

‘If you want to get in beside me . . .’

The area was deserted, and, less than five minutes later, the ambulance, followed by one of the police vans, reached Saint-Antoine Hospital.

Here too, Maigret found old memories: the globe-shaped light above reception, the long, badly lit corridors where two or three people were waiting on benches in silent resignation, giving a start every time a door opened and closed, or when a man or a woman in white moved from one place to another.

‘Do you have his name or address?’ asked a matron enclosed in her glass cage with a counter in front of it.

‘Not yet.’

A doctor, alerted by a bell, approached from the end of the corridor, reluctantly stubbing out his cigarette. Pardon introduced himself.

‘Have you done anything?’

The injured man, lying on a trolley, was being pushed into a lift, and Pardon, who followed it, made a vague gesture to Maigret from a distance as if to say: ‘I’ll be back in a minute.’

‘Do you know anything, inspector?’

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‘No more than you do. I was having dinner with a friend in the area, when someone came and told my friend, who is a doctor, that there was an injured man lying on the pavement in Rue Popincourt.’

The officer jotted this down in his notebook. Less than ten minutes passed in a disagreeable silence, and Pardon reappeared at the end of the corridor. It was a bad sign. The doctor’s face was anxious.

‘Dead?’

‘Even before they had time to undress him . . . Haemorrhage in the pleural cavity. I feared as much when I heard his breathing.’

‘Was he stabbed?’

‘Yes. Several times. Quite a thin blade. In a few minutes we’ll bring you the contents of his pockets. Then, I suppose they’ll send them to the Forensic Institute.’

This version of Paris was familiar to Maigret. He had experienced it over the years and yet he had never completely got used to it. What was he doing here? A knife blow, several knife blows, that didn’t concern him. That happened every night, and in the morning it would be summed up in three or four lines in the daily reports.

By chance he had had a ringside view, and he also felt somewhat involved. The Italian pasta-maker hadn’t had time to tell him what he had seen. He must have gone home with his wife. They slept on the first floor, above the shop.

A nurse came towards the little group, holding a basket.

‘Who’s in charge of the investigation?’

The plainclothes officers looked at Maigret, and she spoke to him:

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‘This is what I found in his pockets. You’ll have to sign for it.’

There was a small wallet of the kind that can be slipped into the back pocket, a ball-point pen, a pipe, a tobacco pouch containing some very pale Dutch tobacco, a handkerchief, some change and two cassette tapes.

The wallet contained an identity card and a driver’s licence in the name of Antoine Batille, twenty-one, with an address at Quai d’Anjou in Paris. It was on the Ile Saint-Louis, not far from Pont Marie. There was also a student card.

‘Now then, Pardon, will you ask my wife to go home without me and go to bed?’

‘Are you going over there?’

‘I’ll have to. He probably lives with his parents and I have to inform them.’

He turned towards the policemen.

‘You could question Pagliati, the Italian grocer in Rue Popincourt, and the four men who were playing cards at Chez Jules, if they’re still at the café.’

As always, he regretted not being able to do everything by himself. He would have liked to go back to Rue Popincourt and go into the little café, were there was something like a fog around the globe light, and where the card-players had probably resumed their game.

He would have liked to question the Italian, his wife, perhaps a little old woman that he had only glimpsed at a lit window on a first floor. Had she already been there when the tragedy had occurred?

But first of all the parents had to be informed. He called

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the duty inspector at the eleventh arrondissement and told him what had happened.

‘Did he suffer a lot?’ he asked Pardon.

‘I don’t think so. He lost consciousness straight away. There was nothing I could do, there on the pavement.’

The wallet was of excellent-quality crocodile skin, the ball-point pen was silver, the handkerchief hand-embroidered with an A.

‘Would you be so kind as to call me a taxi?’ he asked the nurse.

She did so, from her cage, without a hint of courtesy. Admittedly it couldn’t have been pleasant spending whole nights in so gloomy a place, waiting for local tragedies to wind up at the hospital.

Miraculously, the taxi arrived less than three minutes later.

‘I’ll drop you off home, Pardon.’

‘I don’t want to hold you up.’

‘You know, with this news I have to deliver . . .’

He knew the Ile Saint-Louis from when they had lived on Place des Vosges, and at that time they had often walked arm in arm around the island in the evening.

He rang at a green door. Cars were lined up along the pavements, most of them luxury models. A narrow door opened up in the larger one.

‘Monsieur Batille, please?’ he asked, stopping by a kind of skylight.

A sleepy woman’s voice replied simply:

‘Second on the left.’

He took the lift, and some of the rain drenching his

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overcoat and trousers formed a puddle at his feet. The building, like most of the ones on the island, had been restored. The walls were white stone, the lighting came from torches in carved bronze. On the marble landing, the doormat bore a big red letter *B*.

He pressed the button and heard an electric bell ringing very far away, but a very long time passed before the door opened silently.

A young parlour-maid in a fashionable uniform looked at him curiously.

‘I’d like to talk to Monsieur Batille.’

‘The father or the son?’

‘The father.’

‘Monsieur and madame haven’t come home, and I don’t know when they’ll be back.’

He showed her his badge. She asked him:

‘What is it?’

‘Detective Chief Inspector Maigret, of the Police Judiciaire.’

‘And you’ve come to see monsieur at this time of night? Does he know what it’s about?’

‘No.’

‘Is it that urgent?’

‘It’s important.’

‘It’s almost midnight. Monsieur and madame have gone to the theatre.’

‘In that case, it’s possible that they’ll be back soon.’

‘Unless, as they often do, they go for supper with friends afterwards.’

‘Didn’t the younger Monsieur Batille go with them?’

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