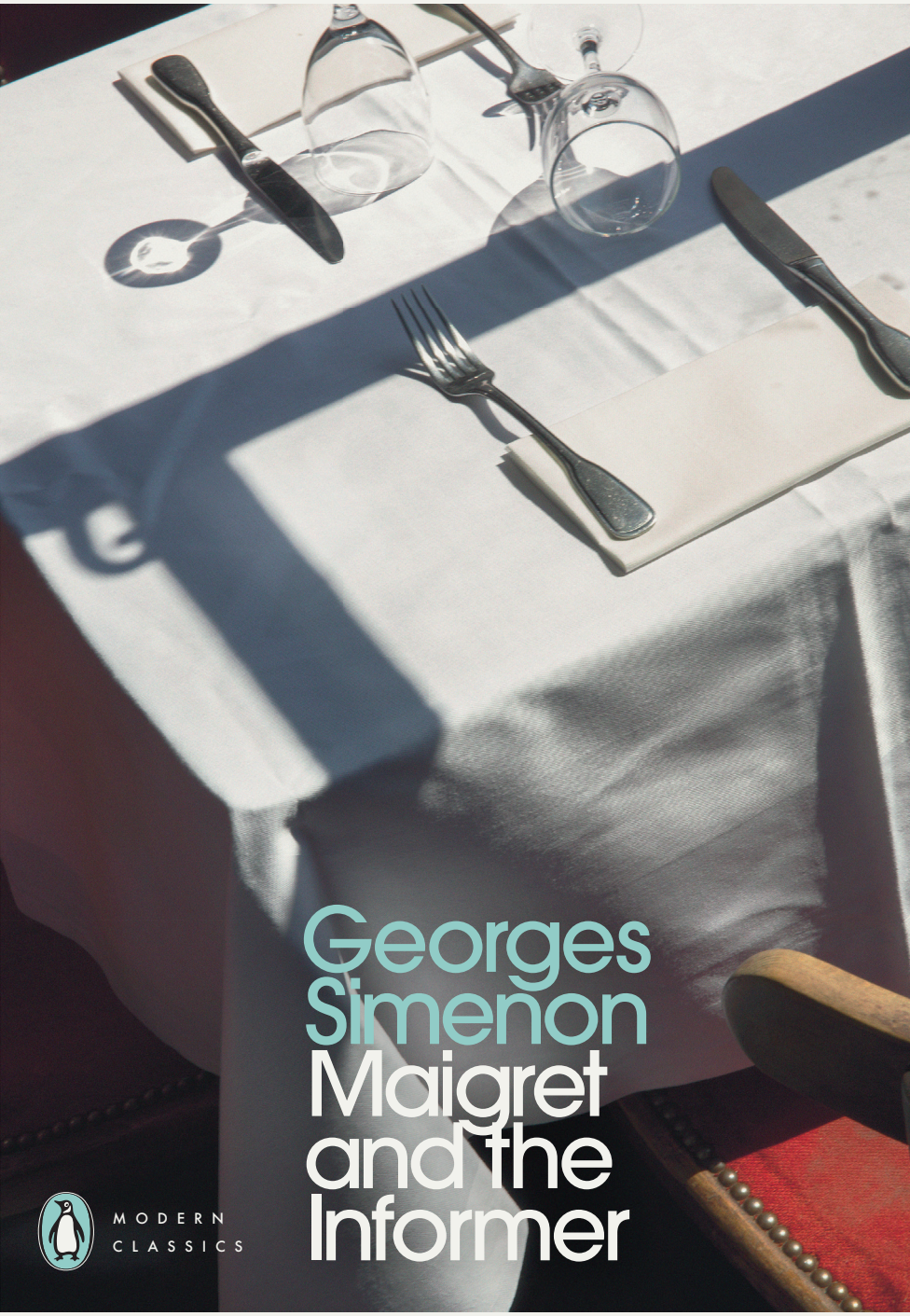
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Maigret and the Informer

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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 Informer

Translated by WILLIAM HOBSON

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Penguin Random House UK
One Embassy Gardens, 8 Viaduct Gardens, London SW11 7BW

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First published in French as *Maigret et l'indicateur* by Presses de la Cité 1971
This translation first published 2019
Published in Penguin Classics 2025
001

Typeset by Palimpsest Book Production Limited, Falkirk, Stirlingshire
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorized representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland, Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978–0–241–30436–5

Maigret and the Informer

1.

When the telephone rang, Maigret groaned with annoyance. He hadn't the slightest idea what time it was, and it didn't occur to him to look at the alarm clock. He was emerging from a deep sleep and still felt a tightness in his chest.

He shuffled over to the telephone in bare feet like a sleepwalker.

'Hello.'

He didn't take in that it was his wife, rather than him, who had switched on one of the bedside lights.

'Is that you, chief?'

He didn't recognize the voice immediately.

'It's Lucas here. I'm on the night shift. I've just had a call from the eighteenth arrondissement.'

'And?'

'They've found a man murdered in Avenue Junot.'

That was right at the top of the Butte de Montmartre, not far from Place du Tertre.

'I'm calling because of the dead man's identity. It's Maurice Marcia, who owns La Sardine.'

A distinctively Parisian restaurant on Rue Fontaine.

'What was he doing on Avenue Junot?'

'Apparently he wasn't killed there. First impressions are that he was left there when he was already dead.'

'I'm on my way.'

'Do you want me to send a car to pick you up?'

'Yes.'

Madame Maigret had been watching him from her bed throughout this exchange, but now she got up and felt around for her slippers.

'I'll go and make you a cup of coffee.'

It was a bad night for it – or maybe too good a one. It had been the Maigrets' turn to have the Pardons over for dinner. There was an unspoken agreement between them, consolidated over the years.

Once a month Doctor Pardon and his wife would have the Maigrets over to dinner at their apartment in Boulevard Voltaire. Then two weeks later it would be their turn to come to Boulevard Richard-Lenoir.

The wives would cook up a storm and swap recipes, while the husbands would chat idly over a glass of sloe gin or raspberry brandy.

Tonight's dinner had been a particular success. Madame Maigret had made a pintadeaux en croute, and Maigret had dug out from his cellar one of the last bottles from a case of vintage Châteauneuf du Pape that he had bought at auction one day when he was passing Rue Drouot.

The wine was superb, and the two men hadn't left a drop. How many little glasses of sloe gin had they followed it up with? Either way, when he was jolted awake at two in the morning, Maigret didn't feel his best.

He knew Maurice Marcia well. Everyone in Paris did. Back when he was a duty inspector, before Marcia had

become a respectable member of society, he had had him in his office for questioning on various occasions.

Later, he and Madame Maigret had had dinner from time to time at Rue Fontaine, where the cooking was first-rate.

She brought him his cup of coffee when he was almost dressed.

'Is it serious?'

'It could cause a stir.'

'Someone well known?'

'Monsieur Maurice, as everyone calls him. Maurice Marcia, that is.'

'From La Sardine?'

He nodded.

'Has he been murdered?'

'Apparently. I'd better go and have a look.'

He sipped his coffee, filled a pipe, then went and opened the window a little to see what the weather was like. It was still raining; such a fine, slow rain that you could only see it in the haloes of the streetlights.

'Are you taking your raincoat?'

'I won't bother. It's too hot.'

It was only May – a glorious May until recently, but then the weather had broken, and storms had given way to this vague drizzle that had been falling for the past twenty-four hours.

'See you soon.'

'You know, that guinea fowl you made was marvellous.'

'Not too heavy?'

He chose to leave that question unanswered because he could still feel it sitting on his stomach.

A small black car was waiting for him at the door.

'Avenue Junot.'

'What number?'

'You'll probably see a crowd.'

The streets looked black and glossy, as if they had been lacquered. There was almost no traffic. It took only a few minutes to get to Montmartre, but not the Montmartre of nightclubs and tourists. Avenue Junot was on the fringes, so to speak, of all that hustle and bustle, a street mainly lined with villas which artists, who had started on the Butte and remained loyal to it, had commissioned after becoming successful.

They spotted a crowd on the right-hand pavement and, despite the late hour, saw lights on in the windows and people in their night clothes leaning out.

The local chief inspector had already arrived, a shy, thin little man who came rushing up to Maigret.

'I'm glad you're here, detective chief inspector. This is something that really could cause a scandal.'

'Are you sure it's him?'

'Here's his wallet . . .'

He handed him a black crocodile-skin wallet which was empty except for an identity card, a driving licence and a piece of notepaper with a few telephone numbers written on it.

'No money?'

'A big roll of notes – three or four thousand francs, I haven't counted – in his hip pocket.'

'No gun?'

'A Smith and Wesson that hasn't been used recently.'

Maigret went over to the body and had a strange sensation looking down at Monsieur Maurice. He was wearing a dinner-jacket, as he did every evening, and there was a large bloodstain across his shirt-front.

'Any blood on the pavement?'

'No.'

'Who found the body?'

'I did,' a soft voice said behind him.

It was an old man whose white hair formed a halo around his head. Maigret thought he recognized quite a well-known painter but couldn't remember his name.

'I live in the house just opposite. Sometimes I wake up at night and have trouble getting back to sleep . . .'

He was wearing an old raincoat, which he had put on over his pyjamas, and a pair of red slippers.

'When that happens, I go over to the window and look out. Avenue Junot is quiet, deserted. Cars hardly ever come down here. I was surprised to see a black and white shape on the pavement and I went down to have a look. I rang the police station. These men turned up in a car with its siren blaring, and all the windows filled with inquisitive faces.'

There were about twenty people on the street, passers-by and neighbours in night clothes, looking at the body and the little knot of officials. A local doctor explained:

'That's me finished here. He's very much dead, I can assure you. Now it's a matter for the pathologist.'

'I've called him,' announced the chief inspector. 'And I've informed the prosecutor's office.'

An assistant prosecutor was getting out of a car at that

moment, in fact, accompanied by his clerk. He was surprised to find Maigret on the scene.

'Do you think it's an important case?'

'I'm afraid it might be. Do you know Maurice Marcia?'

'No.'

'Haven't you ever eaten at La Sardine?'

'No.'

He had to explain to him that it was the sort of place where you were as likely to run into socialites and artists as you were major-league criminals.

Doctor Bourdet, the pathologist who had taken over from Doctor Paul, got out of a taxi, grumbling. He distractedly shook hands and remarked to Maigret:

'Hah! You're here too!'

Bending over the body, he examined the wound by the light of an electric torch produced from his bag.

'Only one bullet, if I'm not mistaken, but large calibre and fired practically at point-blank range.'

'What was the time of death?'

'If he was brought straight here, the murder must have been committed around midnight. Let's say between midnight and one in the morning. I'll tell you more after the post-mortem.'

Maigret went over to Véliard, an inspector from the eighteenth arrondissement who was discreetly keeping his distance.

'Did you know Monsieur Maurice?'

'By reputation and by sight.'

'Did he live locally?'

'I think he lived in the ninth. Around Rue Ballu.'

'He didn't have a mistress around here, did he?'

It was a strange thing to do, really, if you had a dead body on your hands, to travel from another neighbourhood so you could leave it in sleepy Avenue Junot.

'I think I would have heard about it. Someone who could tell you is Inspector Louis of the ninth arrondissement. He knows Pigalle like the back of his hand.'

Maigret shook hands all round and was getting into the little black car when a journalist appeared, a tall fellow with unkempt red hair.

'Monsieur Maigret . . .'

'Not now. Talk to the inspector or the chief inspector.'

Turning to his driver, he said, 'Rue Ballu.'

He had automatically hung on to the dead man's identity card. Glancing at it, he added:

'21a.'

It was quite a sprawling town-house, one of several in the street, which had been turned into apartments. Among the brass plates on the right of the door, they saw one with the name of a dentist, referring people to the second floor. On the third floor was a neurologist.

The bell woke the concierge.

'Monsieur Maurice Marcia, please.'

'Monsieur Maurice is never in at this time. Not before four in the morning.'

'What about Madame Marcia?'

'I think she's back. I doubt she'll see you, though. Still, have a try if you think it's worth it. First floor on the left. They've got the whole floor, but the door on the right is blocked up.'

The staircase was broad and thickly carpeted, with walls of yellowish marble. The left-hand door didn't have a nameplate. Maigret rang the bell.

There was silence at first. He rang again and eventually heard footsteps inside. Through the door a woman's voice asked sleepily:

'Who is it?'

'Detective Chief Inspector Maigret.'

'My husband isn't at home. Go and ask at the restaurant, Rue Fontaine.'

'Your husband isn't there either.'

'Have you been there?'

'No. But I know he's not there.'

'Wait a moment while I put something on.'

When she opened the door, she was wearing a golden-yellow dressing gown over a white silk nightdress. She was young, much younger than her husband, who was several years older than Maigret, around sixty or sixty-two.

She observed Maigret indifferently, with the merest flicker of curiosity.

'Why are you looking for my husband at this time of night?'

She was tall and very blonde, with the thin, lithe body of a model or a chorus girl. She couldn't have been more than thirty.

'Come in . . .'

She opened the door to a large drawing room and turned on some lights.

'When did you see your husband last?'

'Around eight, as usual, when he left for Rue Fontaine.'

'In his car?'

'Of course not. It's five hundred metres away.'

'Doesn't he ever take his car?'

'Only when it's pouring with rain.'

'Do you sometimes go with him?'

'No.'

'Why not?'

'Because it's not my place. What would I do there?'

'So, you spend your evenings here, do you?'

She seemed surprised by these questions but didn't take offence. She didn't show much curiosity either.

'Most of them. Like everyone, I sometimes go to the cinema.'

'You don't drop in and say hello when you're passing?'

'No.'

'Did you go to the cinema tonight?'

'No.'

'Did you go out?'

'No. Except to walk the dog. I only stayed out for a few minutes because it was raining.'

'What time, roughly?'

'Eleven? Maybe a little later.'

'You didn't run into anyone you know?'

'No. What's the point of these questions? Why are you interested in what I was doing this evening?'

'Your husband is dead.'

She stared at him, wide-eyed. Her eyes were light blue, rather affecting. She opened her mouth as if to scream, but her throat closed up and she brought her

hand to her chest. She searched for a handkerchief in the pocket of her dressing gown, then buried her face in it.

Maigret waited, sitting motionless in an uncomfortable Louis XV armchair.

'His heart?' she asked finally, crumpling the handkerchief into a ball.

'What do you mean?'

'He didn't like to talk about it but he had a heart condition which he saw Professor Jardin about.'

'He didn't die of heart failure. He was murdered.'

'Where?'

'I don't know. His body was moved afterwards to Avenue Junot and dumped on the pavement.'

'That's impossible! He didn't have any enemies.'

'He seems to have had at least one because he was shot.'

She jumped up.

'Where is he now?'

'At the Forensic Institute.'

'You mean they're going to . . .'

'Perform a post-mortem, yes. There's no way around it.'

A little white dog trotted slowly down the corridor and rubbed itself against its mistress's legs. She seemed oblivious.

'What are they saying at the restaurant?'

'I haven't been there yet. What could they say?'

'Why he left La Sardine so early. He's always the last to leave. He locks the door before cashing up.'

'Have you worked there?'