

Evans Tries an O-Level



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF COLIN DEXTER

English crime writer Colin Dexter was born in Stamford, Lincolnshire. He earned both his bachelor's degree and master's degree in classics from Christ's College, Cambridge. He was a teacher for most of his life and eventually had to retire due to his worsening deafness. After a stint writing textbooks, Dexter turned to mysteries, eventually penning thirteen mystery novels. He created the famous detective Inspector Morse in 1975. The Inspector Morse series soon moved to the small screen, and so did Dexter—he made frequent cameo appearances on the TV show. Dexter earned two Silver Daggers, two Golden Daggers, and a Diamond Dagger from The Crime Writers' Association of Britain. He was knighted in 2000, honored as an Officer of the Order of the British Empire. He married Dorothy Cooper in 1956, and the couple had a daughter and son.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Much of "Evans Tries an O-Level" takes place at HM Prison Oxford, which was housed in Oxford Castle from 1888 to 1996. By the fourteenth century, the Norman medieval castle was no longer a valuable military post and was in increasingly poor shape. It then served a stint as a county administration building, an informal jail, and a criminal court. In 1611, King James sold the castle, whose new owners promptly sold it to Christ Church College. Although much of the castle was destroyed in the English Civil War, the remaining structures were turned into a formal prison by the seventeenth century and gradually built upon in the following century. Conditions were harsh—the prison was infested with vermin, and there were often 60 people to a room. It was also a for-profit entity, as Christ Church College leased the space to prison wardens who then made money by charging prisoners for room and board. John Howard, a prison reformer, visited the prison in the 1770s and made scathing criticisms that spurred the County to purchase, rebuild, and remodel the premises. By 1876, the prison also housed children—the youngest being a seven-year-old girl named Julie-Ann Crumpling, who was sentenced to seven days of hard labor at the prison after being caught stealing a baby carriage. At the time, it was common for children to be jailed at Oxford Castle as punishment for relatively minor offenses—a dramatic attempt to break the child's rebellious spirit and scare them into proper behavior. In 1888, the establishment took on the name HM Prison Oxford (as it appears in "Evans Tries an O-Level") in the wake of national prison reforms. Despite the reforms, the prison closed

in 1996 due to overcrowding and poor conditions only a few years after Dexter's story was published. Oxford Castle was then renovated and turned into a multiuse development, boasting of a hotel, marketplace, museum, restaurant, and office building.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Colin Dexter's "Evans Tries an O-Level" falls in with a long list of prison-break stories, including Alexandre Dumas's classic, [The Count of Monte Cristo](#). In this book, the imprisoned Edmond Dantès ingeniously poses as the corpse of his neighboring inmate, and the guards throw the "dead" body into the sea, allowing Dantes to swim to safety. Likewise, in "Evans Tries an O-Level," Evans cleverly disguises himself as his test proctor (covering himself with fake blood as to seem like he's been attacked), allowing him to escape for safety when he's sent to the hospital. Stephen King's novella *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption*, which appears in his 1982 collection *Different Seasons*, follows a man named Andy who breaks out of prison (and successfully makes it to Mexico) by carefully constructing a tunnel for nearly thirty years. Andy's careful dedication to his escape plan—and the clever way he acquires his tools and covers his tracks—echo Evans's own meticulous plan and careful way of procuring the different elements of his disguise. Dexter's *The Daughters of Cain*, one of his many novels following the adventures of the notorious Inspector Morse, contains a similar sense of confusion and deception that appears in "Evans Tries an O-Level." In *The Daughters of Cain*, a university don is murdered, and the authorities think they have the case figured out—until the most likely suspect is found dead by the same knife that killed the don. Dexter's *The Way Through the Woods* is also rife with deception and disguises, following Inspector Morse as he tries to piece together the disappearance—and potential murder—of Karin Eriksson, only to realize that the real Karin is actually posing as the primary suspect's wife. This deception echoes Evans's clever disguise as his test proctor, trying to "help" the prison guards find Evans.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Evans Tries an O-Level
- **When Published:** 1993
- **Literary Period:** Twentieth-century literature
- **Genre:** Short story, detective fiction
- **Setting:** HM Prison Oxford in the Oxford Castle in Oxford, UK
- **Climax:** Stephens returns to Evans's prison cell to find McLeery (who is actually Evans in disguise) covered with

blood.

- **Antagonist:** James Evans
- **Point of View:** Third person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Prison Break. Tourists now can take part in a prison-break experience of their own at the Oxford Castle's Jailbreak Escape Room. Visitors must solve a series of puzzles and clues to aid their escape while being carefully watched by a prison guard—a daunting task Evans pulls off successfully in “Evans Tries an O-Level.”



PLOT SUMMARY

In March, the Secretary of the Examinations Board receives a call from the Governor at Oxford Prison, asking if one of his prisoners can take the final exam in O-level German. James Roderick Evans is a jovial, “congenital kleptomaniac” who’s escaped from various prisons three times, though the Governor is determined to not let that happen at Oxford Prison. The Governor and the Secretary decide that Evans will take the test in his own cell, and that they’ll get a parson to be the proctor.

At 8:45 A.M. one morning in June, Reverend Stuart McLeery makes his way to Oxford Prison, where he’s scheduled to proctor a two-hour exam at 9:15 A.M. When McLeery arrives, the senior prison officer, Jackson, searches his briefcase. The officer is baffled by a strange, partially inflated rubber ring that looks like a child’s pool toy; McLeery irritably explains that it’s a special cushion he sits on because of his hemorrhoid problem. Embarrassed, Jackson apologizes and sends the proctor back to Evans’s cell. After a few more hiccups, the exam finally begins at 9:25 A.M.

The Examinations Board calls the Governor; the Assistant Secretary with a “special responsibility for modern languages” explains that “some fool” forgot to include a correction slip in the envelope with the other exam materials. The Governor wonders if the call is a fake but tells himself he’s being silly. Since Evans’s cell has been bugged, the Governor listens in as McLeery reads out the corrections to Evans. Meanwhile, Stephens peers into the peephole of Evans’s cell every few minutes. At one point, he’s surprised to see a blanket draped over Evans’s shoulders. Stephens wonders if this is the kind of “slight irregularity” he should report, but reasons that it is cold in the prison.

At 11:20 A.M., McLeery informs Evans that there are only five minutes remaining. Two minutes later, Jackson receives a call from the Governor asking for Stephens: Stephens is to escort McLeery out of the prison when the exam is over. When Stephens escorts the man out, he observes that the minister’s Scottish accent seems “broader than ever,” and that he seems

thinner than before. Once McLeery is gone, Stephens returns to Evans’s cell—there is McLeery, sprawled out and covered in blood.

Chaos ensues, and the Governor arrives on the scene. McLeery feebly thrusts the German exam into his hand; there, on the last page of the exam, is a “cleverly superimposed” photocopied sheet instructing Evans about how to escape. After having Detective Superintendent Carter take McLeery to the hospital, the Governor berates Stephens for ignorantly letting the criminal go free, but he stutters that he was only following the Governor’s orders. The Governor screams that he never gave Stephen those orders—the call was a fake. The Governor calls the hospital to check up on McLeery, but the hospital says they don’t have any patients named McLeery. Suddenly, the Governor realizes his mistake: “It had not been Evans, impersonating McLeery, who had walked out; it had been Evans, impersonating McLeery, who had stayed in.” Fifteen minutes later, they find the real McLeery gagged and bound at his flat.

After a pleasant dinner, Evans returns to the Golden Lion Hotel. He thinks about how the fake McLeery had worn two of everything (two clerical shirts, two clerical collars, two coats), and Evans had managed to wiggle into his disguise underneath the grey blanket. Evans enters his room and instantly freezes: there, sitting on the bed, is the Governor. Realizing he can’t escape, Evans begins telling the Governor about his scheme. He explains that the most pivotal part was the fake call to Stephens in the last three minutes of the exam, which gave Evans and McLeery time to use the pig’s blood, which was concealed in McLeery’s inflatable rubber ring.

A silent prison officer handcuffs Evans and loads him into a prison van. Evans asks if the Governor knows any other modern languages—he noticed that the prison was offering O-level Italian in September. The Governor says that Evans might not be at Oxford Prison come September; Evans agrees that the Governor might be right. The Governor watches the van pull away.

When the van reaches the main road, the silent prison officer hurriedly unlocks Evans’ handcuffs and snaps at the driver to drive faster, as “It won’t take ‘em long to find out.” In a thick Scottish accent, the driver asks where they should “make for,” and Evans suggests Newbury.



CHARACTERS

The Governor – The Governor of HM Prison, Oxford is a proud, no-nonsense man and the protagonist of the story. When James Evans breaks out of three prisons and is eventually sent to Oxford Prison, the Governor is determined to outwit Evans and keep the prisoner securely locked up. Even though the Governor thinks he will “see to it personally” that

Evans doesn't break out of prison, he has very little personal contact with Evans, instead delegating duties to Jackson and Stephens. This opens up space for miscommunication (and for the other officers to take their own liberties in how to handle Evans), ultimately leading to crucial mistakes that work in Evans's favor. The Governor does, however, listen in on Evans's German exam through a receiver, though this method of supervising the prisoner proves ineffectual—since Evans and McLeery's plan was premeditated (presumably due to the German teacher's help), the two men don't have to talk as Evans wiggles into his disguise. The Governor constantly feels torn between wanting to do everything in his power to ensure Evans is secure and wanting to look unruffled and in control. Although he frequently worries about being paranoid, all of his hunches prove correct, suggesting that his pride repeatedly stood in the way of his ability to effectively carry out his duties as Governor. The Governor redeems himself when he tracks Evans down at the Golden Lion Hotel—seemingly without help from high-level detectives Carter and Bell—though he is outsmarted once again when he sends Evans back to prison in a van driven by the criminal's two accomplices, the silent prison officer and "McLeery."

James Evans – Known to prison officers as "Evans the Break," antagonist James Evans is a "congenital kleptomaniac" who's escaped three times from various prisons. He's now a prisoner at HM Prison Oxford, which is overseen by the Governor. Not the typical criminal, Evans is known for his friendly, joking attitude and maintains a playful, teasing relationship with the prison officers, especially Jackson. While at Oxford Prison, Evans begins taking night classes in O-level German and is the only student in the class; after six months of this, he asks to take the final exam. Seeing this as strange but harmless, the Governor bends to his request and arranges the details with the Secretary of the Examinations Board. They decide to have Reverend S. McLeery, a parson at St Mary Mags, act as the proctor to oversee Evans's exam. Despite being closely watched by the Governor and many others, Evans manages to escape in the moments following his exam by posing as the proctor—a complicated plan made easier by the fact that Reverend McLeery is not, in fact, the real McLeery but one of Evans's old friends. Eventually, the Governor catches up with Evans and manages to send him back to prison, interacting with him light-heartedly like it's one big game of cat-and-mouse. Ultimately, Evans's friendships with people outside of the prisons' walls, along with his penchant for deception, allow him to escape once more—perhaps this time for good.

Reverend Stuart McLeery – Reverend Stuart McLeery, a parson at St. Mary Mags, is sent to Oxford Prison to act as a proctor for Evans's O-level German exam. He has a short, choppy haircut and wears a clerical shirt and collar, glasses, and a long coat. He initially appears to be a patient, respectable man who only briefly loses his patience when one of the prison

officers, Jackson, searches his briefcase and interrogates him about a strange blow-up tube he's carrying—which, he tersely replies, is a special cushion he has to sit on due to chronic hemorrhoids. Near the end of the story, the so-called Reverend McLeery turns out to be an imposter—one of Evans's many "friends" who helps him escape from prison. Readers only get a brief glimpse of the real McLeery—at the end of the story, he's found tied up with ropes in his office, but the narrative quickly departs from him.

Jackson – Jackson is the senior prison officer at Oxford Prison, which is overseen by the Governor. A World War II veteran, Jackson stands "ramrod straight" and displays his war medals on his jacket pocket. He and Evans are "warm enemies," frequently exchanging gruff but good-natured insults. Jackson refers to Evans as "Einstein," poking fun at his bizarre (and possibly suspect) interest in O-level German, but also wishes him well on the exam, saying, "Good luck, old son." He does feel a slight twinge of empathy for Evans, seen especially when he bends to Evans's heartfelt (and theatrical) story about needing to wear his grubby **hat** for good luck—Jackson had told Evans to take it off for the exam, but Evans secretly needs the hat to disguise his new haircut, and, more importantly, his plans to impersonate the proctor to break out of prison.

Stephens – Stephens is new to his post as an officer at Oxford Prison, where he reports to the senior prison officer, Jackson. Stephens is a "burly, surly-looking man," who is supposed to sit in Evans's cell during his exam. Evans balks at this, however, claiming he can't concentrate. Afraid of looking too concerned about the threat of Evans escaping, the Governor allows Stephens to leave the cell and just check on Evans through the peephole every minute. Everything appears normal each time Stephens peeks through the peephole, and he takes the liberty to change his interval from one minute to two—until he notices that Evans has donned a blanket around his shoulders. Although Stephens has been ordered to report anything that seems even vaguely "fishy," he reasons that Evans is just cold due to this wing of the prison not getting any sunlight and not having any heating during this time of year. Like the Governor, Stephens is adept at talking himself out of his suspicions for the sake of looking in-control and unbothered. Stephens is also in charge of escorting McLeery out of the prison after the exam. Although Stephens feels proud that he's the one chosen for such an important job, his confidence and pride quickly deflate upon returning to Evans's cell—there lies McLeery (who is actually Evans), covered in blood.

The Assistant Secretary – The supposed Assistant Secretary of the Examinations Board has "a special responsibility for modern languages." He calls the Governor midway through Evans's German exam to explain that the exam sheet has a few typographical errors, but that "some fool" in the Examinations Board office forgot to include the correction slip in the sealed exam envelope that McLeery received. In actuality, the

Assistant Secretary is one of Evans's cronies who is helping with his intricate escape plan. The purpose of his call to the Governor is twofold: most obviously, the so-called corrections he provides for the exam are actually a veiled way of telling Evans which hotel to flee to after breaking out of prison (the Golden Lion). However, he also crucially—and casually—finds out from the Governor exactly what time Evans's two-hour exam started. This information allows him to know when to make the fake phone call to Jackson and Stephens three minutes before the end of Evans's exam so that the criminal can douse himself with blood without being supervised.

The Silent Prison Officer – The silent prison officer who escorts McLeery inside the prison initially seems inconsequential, but is later revealed to be one of Evans's many accomplices. The officer is either posing as another prison officer or actually works at the prison—the story never makes this distinction—but is particularly instrumental in Evans's second escape from the Governor's clutches. Right in front of the Governor's eyes, the silent prison officer handcuffs Evans and loads him into a prison van, presumably about to take him back to Oxford Prison. Once the van pulls away from the Governor, however, the silent prison officer snaps at the driver—whose thick Scottish accent betrays that he's the fake McLeery—to drive faster so that they don't get caught.

The German Teacher – Evans's O-level German teacher claims to hail from the Technical College, but the Governor never conducts a background check on him. In actuality, the German teacher is one of Evans's many "friends," or accomplices, who help him break out of Oxford Prison. The story implies that the German teacher may be the same person as the Assistant Secretary with "a special responsibility for modern languages" at the Examination Board, but McLeery's flawless German accent hints that he might be the German teacher instead. Evans was the only student in the German teacher's six-month course, suggesting that the two had plenty of time to construct Evans's intricate escape plan.

Carter – Detective Superintendent Carter is the first to arrive on the scene after Stephens finds McLeery (who is really Evans in disguise) covered with blood in Evans's prison cell. The Governor realizes that McLeery is the only one who understands the situation at hand, so he instructs Carter to take McLeery with him to track down Evans. Along the way, McLeery's health begins to decline rapidly, so Carter calls him an ambulance but leaves to continue the search for Evans. In leaving McLeery alone to wait for the ambulance, Carter unknowingly leaves Evans unsupervised, allowing him to escape before the ambulance arrives to pick him up. Later, Carter calls the Governor and confidently says that McLeery is at Radcliffe Hospital and that he thinks Evans doubled back into the city. The Governor disagrees with this theory—and explains his reasons for believing otherwise—but knows that his words might not hold any weight, since this is "a police job

now" and the Governor is "just another good-for-a-giggle, gullible governor." The Governor's critical thoughts illustrate his own pride, along with Carter's, and also suggest a power struggle between prison officers and police officers.

Bell – Bell is the Detective Chief Inspector at St Aldates Police Station. In the wake of Evans's escape, the Governor sends Jackson and Stephens to Bell, presumably for questioning. While the two officers are en route, the Governor calls Bell on the phone to bring him up to speed on the situation. All Bell says in response is, "We'll get him, sir [...] We'll get him, with a bit o'luck." Like Carter, Bell doesn't appear to be especially helpful in tracking down Evans, as it's the Governor who pieces together Evans's plan and tracks him down at the Golden Lion Hotel in the nearby town of Chipping Norton.

The Secretary – The Secretary of the Examinations Board arranges for McLeery to oversee Evans's exam. Although he's initially surprised by the Governor's request to have a prisoner sit for an O-level German exam, the Secretary is happy to oblige. The Secretary is warm and friendly; despite the peculiarity of the request, he thinks they should give Evans "a chance," and he laughs "politely" and "good-naturedly" throughout his conversation with the Governor. Since the Governor is the one to contact the Examinations Board in the first place, it seems that the Secretary is a real employee of the Examinations Board and not one of Evans's accomplices, though one of Evans's "friends" later poses as the Assistant Secretary.



THEMES

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INTELLIGENCE AND DECEPTION

Colin Dexter's "Evans Tries an O-level" follows kleptomaniac James Evans's creative and highly complicated attempts to break out of prison. After three escapes at various maximum-security prisons, Evans is transferred to Oxford Prison, overseen by the prideful, no-nonsense Governor. Despite the Governor's best efforts, Evans escapes yet again—he studies O-level German for six months, sits for the final exam, and escapes disguised as the proctor in the final moments. Although Evans's deception is not necessarily lauded as something the reader should replicate, Dexter takes a permissive, almost admiring attitude toward Evans's trickery. As the story unfolds, Dexter suggests that Evans's deception is successful—and somewhat commendable—because it requires intelligence, careful

preparation, and flexibility.

Throughout the story, Evans displays various kinds of intelligence, all of which work together to ensure his successful escape from prison. In preparing for his escape, Evans uses his emotional intelligence to cleverly appeal to the senior prison officer's empathy and make sure his plan goes according to plan. On the day of Evans's exam, the officer, Jackson, gruffly tells Evans to clean himself up and take off his filthy **hat**.

Readers immediately get the sense that the hat is somehow critical to Evans's escape plan; the prisoner instantly tries to make himself seem as pitiful and humble as possible so that Jackson will allow him to keep it on. With one hand resting "lovingly on top of the filthy woollen," Evans "smile[s] sadly" and tells Jackson that his old cap is "the only thing that's ever brought me any sort o' luck in life. Kind o' lucky charm [...] And today I thought—well, with me exam and all that..." As Evans trails off, he thinks to himself that there must be "a tiny core of compassion" that is "buried somewhere in Jackson." Evans is permitted to keep his hat—but "Just this once, then, Shirley Temple"—showing that he used his emotional intelligence to skillfully manipulate the otherwise gruff officer's emotions. Evans demonstrates his intelligence in other ways, too. During the actual exam, Evans picks up on the extremely subtle clues that his proctor (one of Evans's accomplices disguised as a parson named Reverend Stuart McLeery) leaves for him. For example, when McLeery tells Evans to write his "index number" and "centre number" in the corner of his exam (313 and 271, respectively), Evans discerns that this is actually a six-figure reference on a map: 313/271 on the Ordnance Survey Map for Oxfordshire points to the nearby city of Chipping Norton. He also knows that he's specifically supposed to go to the Golden Lion Hotel in that town because of a different clue McLeery (and another accomplice, posing as the Assistant Secretary at the Examinations Board) dropped during the exam, pointing out that a certain phrase on Evans's exam sheet contains a typo and should actually read "*zum goldenen Löwen*," or "golden lion."

When the Governor catches up to Evans after his escape from prison, Evans shows off a surprisingly academic brand of intelligence. Despite his struggles with German (he openly admits that he barely understood any German over the six months he "studied" it), he demonstrates his inexplicable knowledge of chemistry. He explains to the Governor that the blood he doused himself in when pretending to be the freshly attacked McLeery was actually pig's blood. Obtaining the blood wasn't too difficult, but clotting was the real issue: "to stop it clotting you've got to mix yer actual blood (...) with one tenth of its own volume of 3.8 per cent trisodium citrate! Didn't know that, did you sir?" All the Governor can do is slowly shake his head in "reluctant admiration" for the surprisingly astute Renaissance Man that Evans is shaping up to be.

Evans's meticulous preparation and flexibility when things go astray also play a key role in his deception and success. When

Jackson tells Evans that it's no use trying to escape today—his cell his bugged, and both Jackson and the Governor will be "watching [him] like a hawk" during his exam—Evans is unruffled. The extra eyes don't concern him, because "He'd already thought of that, and Number Two Handkerchief was lying ready on the bunk—a neatly folded square of white linen." Although readers aren't yet given insight into how the handkerchief will aid his plot (or the meaning behind its name), it seems to be somehow part of Evans's well-thought-out plan. (Later, the handkerchief appears as part of Evans's careful disguise as McLeery.) Near the end of the story, it's clear that the man whom the Secretary of the Examinations Board arranges as the proctor, Reverend Stuart McLeery, is not the real McLeery but is one of Evans's cronies from the outside. Evans's careful planning extends even to the fake McLeery, somehow instructing him ahead of time to bring a "smallish semi-inflated rubber ring" in his briefcase and to pass it off as a special cushion to sit on that alleviates his chronic hemorrhoid problem. This ring, which is covertly filled with pig's blood, is essential in Evans's plan to disguise himself as the proctor who has been brutally attacked by Evans. When the prison officers search McLeery's briefcase and question him about the rubber ring, he tersely explains its use, and the officers blush and allow McLeery to carry on (though they do confiscate the proctor's metal paper knife). It seems that Evans' ingenuity led him to choose bizarre "tools" that would not be at risk of being confiscated.

When things diverge from the plan, like when Evans successfully escapes but is then found at his hotel room, he manages to think quickly and adjust his plan accordingly. As the Governor leads Evans into a prison van, readers rooting for the loveable antagonist may believe all hope is lost. However, as the Governor watches the van drive away toward the prison, the scene suddenly shifts to inside the van, where someone is quickly unlocking Evans's handcuffs and discussing where they should run off to now.



INSTINCT, PARANOIA, AND PRIDE

"Evans Tries an O-Level" follows the Governor of Oxford Prison as he deals with a new and particularly unruly prisoner named James Evans, a cheerful kleptomaniac known for his uncanny ability to break out of prison. The prison officers find Evans's sudden interest in German particularly suspicious—he takes night classes in O-level German for six months (as the only student in the class) and eagerly asks to take the final exam, claiming he's "dead keen to get some sort of academic qualification." In the story, the prison officers' suspicions about Evans are right. However, all of the prison guards repeatedly ignore their own nagging suspicions, telling themselves that they're just being paranoid. This careful, logical self-talk is almost always a way to avoid looking stupid. As the story unfolds, Dexter emphasizes the

power and accuracy of human instinct while also revealing the extremes people will go for the sake of protecting their pride.

Dexter gives his readers insight into the prison officers' minds to show humans' unproductive (and sometimes dangerous) impulse to protect their sense of dignity and avoid looking silly. From the outset, the Governor is particularly preoccupied with preserving his pride. Evans has already escaped three times from various prisons, making him a bit of a national celebrity, and the Governor is determined to not let Evans "disgrace them." As the head of the prison, all mishaps and scandals directly reflect on the Governor. Since Evans is so well known at other prisons, his escape from Oxford Prison could seriously threaten the Governor's reputation. Even months before the exam date, the Governor instinctively feels that Evans will try to make a break for it during his test. That day, the Governor puts several extra security measures in place. However, the Governor's pride slowly begins creeping in, and he questions if he's being overzealous: "But wasn't it all a bit theatrical? Schoolboyish, almost? How on earth was Evans going to try anything on today?"

The Governor's repeated internal questions reveal a conflict between his persistent instincts, which are fighting to be noticed, and his desire to look and feel like he's in control. If the Governor looks too concerned about Evans, he may also appear weak and impotent to the other officers at the prison. Despite the "little nagging doubt" that crops up throughout the two-hour exam, the Governor continues to go back on his careful security measures, like having Stephens simply look through the peephole to Evans's cell every minute instead of sitting inside the cell and watching the exam. When the Governor receives a call from the Assistant Secretary at the Examinations Board claiming that "some fool" at their office forgot to include a corrections slip in Evans's testing materials, the Governor's suspicions are aroused again. After transferring the call to Jackson to take care of the situation, the Governor wonders if the call is a fake, and if it's a "signal" or "secret message" of some sort. He quickly dials the number for the Examinations Board to confirm that the call did just come from them and not an imposter, but the line is in use. He assures himself that this is to be expected, since Jackson is presumably still speaking with the Assistant Secretary: "But then the line was engaged, wasn't it? Yes. Not very intelligent, that..." As he does throughout the story, the Governor ignores his reasonable (and accurate) hunch and instead carefully convinces himself that he's just being paranoid and might appear "silly."

Stephens, too, ignores his intuition out of pride. New to Oxford Prison and to the profession in general, Stephens is concerned about looking stupid or incapable as a prison officer. At the beginning of Evans's exam, he "dutifully" follows orders and looks through the peephole at one-minute intervals to ensure Evans isn't misbehaving. The job seems pointless to him,

though, so he takes the liberty to change the interval time to two minutes. However, one of the next times he peers through the peephole, he's surprised to see that Evans has donned a blanket around his shoulders. Stephens grapples internally with whether or not to "report the slight irregularity." He tells himself to not be "daft," and swiftly convinces himself that Evans is just cold: Deep down, however, it seems that Stephens knows his instincts are correct, and that the blanket is suspect: immediately after constructing a logical explanation for Evans's behavior, "Stephens decided to revert to his early every minute observation" through the peephole rather than looking every two minutes.

Prior to the exam, Jackson had firmly instructed Stephens to report "Anything at all fishy." The fact that this order came from Jackson, Stephens's immediate superior, seems to play a role in Stephens's subsequent decision to disregard the blanket situation. Later, when Stephens receives (fake) orders from the Governor, ordering him to be the one to escort McLeery, Evans's proctor, out of the prison, Stephens swells with pride, "pleased that the Governor had asked *him*, and not Jackson, to see McLeery off." Stephens's desire to look confident and capable at his new post—and apparently to have the Governor like him more than Jackson—causes him to overlook his instincts out of pride, ultimately opening up room for error to let Evans escape.

By the end of the story, the prison officers' suspicions prove well-founded—Evans *does* escape, and the exam was the epicenter of his scheme. Evans has outmaneuvered the prison officers, effortlessly sidestepping their efforts to keep him secure at the prison. "Evans Tries an O-Level" ultimately stresses the necessity of listening to one's gut feelings and not only following one's sense of pride and decorum. The critical mistake the prison officers make in the story is talking themselves out of their genuine, persistent feelings in order to seem like they're still in control of the situation at hand.



APPEARANCES VS. REALITY

In Colin Dexter's "Evans Tries an O-Level," a notorious kleptomaniac named James Evans makes his fourth escape from prison, this time from Oxford Prison, overseen by the no-nonsense Governor and a senior prison officer named Jackson. A tension between appearances and reality runs throughout the story, as many characters—especially Evans—subvert the expectations and judgments other people make of them based on their appearance. This impulse to judge based on appearance is particularly dangerous in the world of this mystery story, which is filled with deception and disguises. Dexter ultimately highlights how making judgments based on appearances is an unproductive habit, and that people and situations are not always what they seem.

It's the grubby James Evans—who is terrible at German,

dresses in ridiculous clothes, and cracks jokes so frequently that no one sees him as a “*real burden*”—who outwits everyone, showing that appearances can be deeply deceiving. Evans’s silly “red-and-white bobble **hat**” symbolizes the way Evans intentionally fulfills and subverts people’s expectations of him based on his appearance. The hat, a grimy knit beanie with a massive pom-pom fastened to the top, plays into people’s perceptions of him as a cheerful, ridiculous trickster. The Governor himself articulates the common stereotype of Evans at the beginning of the story: “Quite a pleasant sort of chap [...] Bit of a card, really. One of the stars at the Christmas concert. Imitations, you know the sort of thing: Mike Yarwood stuff.” Evans’s penchant for impressions sums up the story’s warning of mistaking appearances for reality. Like Mike Yarwood—the 1960s impressionist, actor, and comedian—Evans has the capacity to convincingly pretend to be other people. However, this isn’t always for comedic effect; his well-honed acting skills allow him to believably impersonate his test proctor, McLeery, taking on the man’s clerical dress, Scottish accent, choppy haircut, and general demeanor in order to break out of prison. The extent to which appearances are misleading run even deeper in the story, however, when it’s revealed that Evans is actually doing an impersonation of an impersonation—the so-called Reverend McLeery who comes to conduct Evans’s German exam is an imposter himself (one of Evans’s many accomplices), as the real McLeery is bound and gagged back at his apartment.

The aftermath of Evans’s clever escape also reveals the futility of trusting in appearances. The two detectives, Detective Superintendent Carter and Chief Inspector Bell, are supposed to be the ones to solve the crime—once a prisoner has escaped the prison’s walls, it’s “a police job.” However, the confident detectives prove incompetent and fade from the story soon after being introduced. Despite being a “good-for-a-giggle, gullible governor” (as he assumes the police see him), the Governor is the one who cracks the case of Evans’s escape from Oxford Prison, piecing together Evans’s convoluted clues and ultimately tracking him down in the nearby city of Chipping Norton.

The story closes with yet another startling reminder that not everything is what it seems. After tracking down Evans, the Governor gloats quietly as he watches a silent prison officer handcuff Evans outside the Golden Lion Hotel and load him up in the prison van to be transported back to Oxford Prison. The Governor tells Evans that he’ll see him soon, and the two men say goodbye like “old friend[s] after a cocktail party,” leading the reader to believe that this a story that ends neatly with the “good guy” winning and the “bad guy” being successfully captured and sent back to prison. However, as the Governor watches the van drive away, the narrative suddenly jumps to the conversation unfolding inside the van, where the silent prison officer is unlocking Evans’s handcuffs and bickering with

the driver about where they should run off to next. Once again, Evans (with help from his friends) has outsmarted everyone, a bittersweet ending that leaves readers with the unsettling reminder that appearances aren’t always trustworthy.



FRIENDSHIP

In “Evans Tries an O-Level,” “congenital kleptomaniac” James Evans comes up with a creative and ultimately successful plan to break out of Oxford Prison: he takes night classes in German for six months, asks to take the final exam, and then disguises himself as the proctor, Reverend McLeery (who is actually one of Evans’s accomplices disguised as the real proctor) when the day finally comes. Having escaped three times from other prisons in the past, “Evans the Break” has quite the reputation among prison guards. However, as the story unfolds, it’s clear that Evans doesn’t work alone, nor does he proudly assume credit for himself—he’s grateful to have a lot of “friends,” and also has the skillful ability to endear people to him (whether they realize it or not). The value Evans places on friendship, coupled with his ability to make friends (or at least “warm enemies,” as his relationship with the senior prison officer, Jackson, is described) is critical to his eventual escape from prison—and his ability to escape *again* in the process of being sent back.

Evans forms a playfully irreverent relationship with the prison officers, warmly exchanging insults and cracking crude jokes with them. This behavior endears Evans to the officers, even if they won’t admit it. Although this doesn’t necessarily make his initial escape from prison easier, it does make the aftermath of his escape less severe, ultimately allowing him to escape again. When the Governor carefully pieces together how Evans managed to escape from Oxford Prison, he intercepts Evans at the Golden Lion Hotel in the nearby town of Chipping Norton. After Evans’s initial (apparent) shock upon finding the Governor waiting for him in his hotel room, the two men act like old friends playing a game of chess—not a domineering prison warden tracking down a notoriously slippery criminal. In his typical open, cheerful way, Evans excitedly tells the Governor all about how he managed to escape. After Evans is done recounting his exploits, all the Governor can do is shake his head in “reluctant admiration.” He then says, “Come on, m’lad,” implying that it’s time for them both to head back to the prison. In using the term of endearment “m’lad” to refer to Evans, the Governor betrays just how much Evans has ingratiated himself to the prison officers. The Governor doesn’t yank Evans outside in handcuffs and throw him into a prison van; instead, the two men walk “side by side” as they continue to chat and casually make their way down the hotel stairs. Even when Evans does get handcuffed and loaded into a van, it’s the silent prison officer (later revealed to be one of Evans’s accomplices), and not the Governor, who does it. The Governor just stands

back and continues chatting with Evans. Despite being recaptured, Evans happily calls “Cheerio,” and the Governor tells Evans that he’ll see him soon, “as if the Governor were saying farewell to an old friend after a cocktail party.” The complex, high-stakes chase to recapture Evans is conflated with a cocktail party, emphasizing how the aftermath of his escape from prison is much less severe—and far more fun—than it would have been for other criminals.

Evans’ many “friends” from the outside world are also critical to his successful escape from prison (and his escape from the Governor that same day). When the Governor asks Evans how he managed to pull off such a complicated plan, given that the prisoner hasn’t had any visitors or letters, Evans simply replies, “I’ve got lots of friends though [...] Me German teacher, for a start.” Dexter breezes past this moment quickly, leaving readers to sort through the implications of this statement. Given that Evans took night classes in German for six months and was the only student in the class all that time, it seems that Evans’s plan to break out of prison was formed over the course of six months of unsupervised “class” time with his supposed German teacher. Evans’s other crucial accomplices include the silent prison officer, the fake McLeery, and the Assistant Secretary—a small handful of what’s implied to be a large pool of loyal friends willing to help Evans however they can. In explaining his ingenious and complicated escape plan to the Governor, Evans frequently uses the collective pronoun “we,” pointing to the value he places in friendship and teamwork. He doesn’t take all the credit for himself, stating that “we” planned a phone call as a diversion at the end of the exam, “we” planted a fake clue, “we” used pig’s blood, and so on. In this way, both Dexter and Evans himself stress that this prison break was not a one-man job. The “congenital kleptomaniac” (which sounds fittingly reminiscent of “congenial kleptomaniac”) is charismatic to his core, earning varying degrees of respect (or “reluctant admiration”), loyalty, and camaraderie from criminals and prison officers alike.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



EVANS’S HAT

Evans’s “filthy-looking red-and-white bobble hat” (a knit beanie with a big pom-pom jauntily perched on the top) symbolizes the way that Evans both fulfills and subverts people’s judgments of him based on his appearance. At the beginning of the story, Jackson thinks the disgusting hat is concealing Evans equally disgusting long, wavy hair (which Jackson hates); in actuality, the hat is hiding Evans’ choppy new haircut, meant to mimic McLeery’s, so that Evans can eventually impersonate him. When Jackson brusquely tells

Evans to clean himself up before his exam—starting with taking his grubby hat off—Evans quickly and expertly tugs on Jackson’s heartstrings by insisting that the grimy hat is the only thing that’s ever brought him any luck, so he was hoping to wear it for his big German exam. More than just a good luck charm, the seemingly harmless, humble hat is a critical part in Evans’s complicated plan to break out of prison. The same goes for Evans himself; his jokes, trickery, and banter with the prison guards lead everyone to believe that he’s more of an annoying, “nagging presence” than “a *real* burden.” Evans leans into the judgments people make about him based on his grubby appearance and jovial manner, allowing this image to distract from his sharp intelligence and extraordinary talent for deception. Like a fool in a Shakespearian play, Evans is not taken seriously—written off as a jokester in a funny hat—and yet is the most intelligent, clever one present, using his sharp wit to outsmart detectives and prison wardens alike.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the National Council of Education Research and Training edition of *Vistas* published in 2015.

Evans Tries an O-Level Quotes

☞ “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.”

Related Characters: The Governor (speaker), The Secretary, James Evans

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

This passage appears at the very beginning of the story, when the Governor is telling the Secretary of the Examinations Board about one of his prisoners, James Evans, who wants to take the final exam in O-level German. The Governor paints Evans as a fairly harmless—if ridiculous—man who is more interested in making people laugh than actually committing crimes. The Governor describes Evans as a “congenital kleptomaniac,” meaning that he is genetically predisposed to stealing and doesn’t actually *want* to do so. This makes Evans seem like a fairly innocent criminal and allows readers (and the prison

officers) to instead focus on Evans’s extraordinary, jovial personality—it’s perhaps not a coincidence that “congenital kleptomaniac” sounds like “congenial kleptomaniac.”

The Governor compares Evans to Mike Yarwood, a British impressionist, comedian, and actor who was popular in the 1960s. Through this comparison, the Governor reaffirms that Evans enjoys making people laugh and has a big personality. More significantly, the conflation between Evans and a famous impressionist emphasizes Evans’s uncanny ability to convincingly pretend to be someone else—as he does with his proctor, McLeery, later in the story. In addition, the reference to impressions in this passage points to the wider theme of appearances and reality that runs throughout the work. In the story, appearances can’t be trusted, and Evans is the very embodiment of that message.

“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.)

Related Characters: Jackson, James Evans (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 73-74

Explanation and Analysis

Here, the senior prison officer, Jackson, orders Evans to remove his filthy hat before his proctor arrives. Even though it seems like a fair request, Evans launches into a dramatic monologue about how his lowly life is made brighter only by his humble knit hat. Evans privately thinks that he’s trying to find the “tiny core of compassion” that is “Buried somewhere in Jackson,” revealing that he is skillfully and intentionally making an emotional appeal in order to get his way. The seriousness with which Evans takes the threat of removing his hat suggests that something bigger is at stake here beyond a simple lucky charm. Later, readers learn that

the hat was concealing Evans’s short, choppy new haircut, which was meant to mimic McLeery’s and aid in Evans’s disguise.

This sob story surprisingly resonates with the gruff, outwardly unfeeling prison officer, revealing the two men’s unexpected friendship. Either to restate his authority or to avoid looking too emotional and soft, Jackson insults Evans by calling him “Shirley Temple,” a famous child actress known for her curly hair. However this insult is rather benign, once again pointing to the way that the two men express their friendship through insults and teasing. Evans’s ability to win over Jackson speaks to the way that Evans has “got lots of friends,” many of which aid in his escape.

“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?”

Related Characters: Reverend Stuart McLeery (speaker), James Evans

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Evans’s exam has just begun (after a series of minor hiccups), and Evans’s proctor, McLeery, is walking him through a few administrative tasks before he can dive into the actual test. This is one of the many moments in the story that looks completely innocent and insignificant upon first glance. However, at the end of the story, Evans reveals that the so-called McLeery (one of Evans’s many accomplices disguised as the proctor) was actually giving Evans an important clue in this moment. The “index number” seems to be some sort of permission number to take the exam, while the “centre number” refers to the number assigned to the testing center in question (in this case, Oxford Prison). On a deeper level, however, 313/271 also refers to a position on a map. Once in the getaway car, Evans uses the Ordnance Survey Map his accomplices left for him and finds 313/271, which lands him in the neighboring town of Chipping Norton. This information helps him know which hotel he’s supposed to stay in for the night (in another cleverly disguised clue, McLeery reads out a “correction” to Evans’s exam in German, carefully repeating the phrase “golden lion” several times, pointing him to the Golden Lion Hotel).

☛ 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 dialed 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...

Related Characters: The Assistant Secretary, The Governor

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

The Governor has just received a phone call from a person claiming to be the Assistant Secretary at the Examinations Board “with special responsibility for modern languages.” The Assistant Secretary had explained that there were some typos on the exam that needed to be brought to Evans’s attention, but this fairly reasonable situation arouses the Governor’s suspicion. Throughout the story, the Governor’s instincts prove correct, alerting him to when things are amiss. However, he repeatedly stamps out his suspicions by self-deprecatingly telling himself that he’s being paranoid. Here, he tells himself that he’s “Not [being] very intelligent” for wanting to check if the phone call actually came from the Examinations Board, and his resulting suspicion when their line was conveniently in use. The Governor and Stephens (a new prison officer) are the two characters who prioritize their own fragile pride over the security of the prisoner in their keep. Through their repeated mistakes, Dexter emphasizes the importance of human instincts and the destructiveness of pride.

☛ “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...”

Related Characters: Reverend Stuart McLeery (speaker), James Evans

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 78-79

Explanation and Analysis

After receiving a call from the Assistant Secretary at the Examinations Board about typos on Evans’s exam, the Governor transfers the call to Jackson, who gets the information to McLeery, who then reads out the information to Evans. This sometimes-literal game of telephone happens frequently throughout the story and often opens up room for miscommunication and mistakes. However, this passage also emphasizes the number of people Evans has aiding in his escape, whether knowingly or unknowingly. Here, one of Evans’s accomplices (the Assistant Secretary) makes the phone call with the fake corrections, the Governor and Jackson then unknowingly act as mere carriers for Evans’s plan, and then the information gets back into the hands of another one of Evans’s accomplices (McLeery), who in turn transmits the information to Evans.

Furthermore, what appears to be a very minor correction is later revealed to be an important clue that helps Evans know where he’s supposed to go after breaking out. McLeery repeats the phrase “golden lion” in German several times, making it clear to Evans (and later, to the Governor) that Evans is to go to the Golden Lion Hotel.

☛ 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 dropped already through the small black beard, and was even now spreading horribly over the white clerical collar and down into the black clerical front [...] 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.

Related Characters: James Evans, Reverend Stuart McLeery, Stephens

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 81-82

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Stephens returns to Evans’s cell after escorting McLeery out of the building and finds this gruesome scene. The fact that Stephens immediately thinks the man is Evans, despite being dressed as McLeery, is in line with the story’s overarching suggestion that human instincts are usually accurate. This passage also reiterates the different parts of McLeery’s costume to slyly convince

readers that this man *is* actually McLeery. However, careful readers may find the detail of the white linen handkerchief suspicious, as it recalls Evans carefully placing a white linen handkerchief on his bunk before the exam, dubbing it “Handkerchief Number Two”—it seems like Evans could have snagged the handkerchief when he went to get the blanket on his bunk during the exam.

This moment also recalls the comparison the Governor made earlier between Evans and famous British actor and impressionist Mike Yarwood. Here, Evans is being both an actor and an impressionist as he impersonates McLeery and pretends to have just been attacked.

“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.

Related Characters: Stephens, The Governor (speaker), Jackson, James Evans

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

At this point, the prison officers think that the bloody, injured McLeery that Stephens found inside Evans cell really is McLeery. When this knowledge sinks in, they realize that must mean that Stephens naively escorted Evans out of the prison, simply letting a notoriously slippery criminal go free. Here, the Governor lays into Jackson and Stephens for their mistakes, conveniently failing to mention all of the mistakes of his own. Though Jackson and Stephens were duped by a fake phone call, the Governor was duped by at least one, if not two phone calls (the Assistant Secretary calling about the test corrections and the Magistrates Court calling to borrow a prison van).

Furthermore, the Governor berates Stephens for walking “McLeery” out of the prison, but the Governor had been too distracted at the time to give anyone proper orders about seeing the proctor out. It seems that scolding Jackson and Stephens is a way for the Governor to sidestep his own shortcomings over the last few hours, rescuing his pride by degrading the two men in front of him.

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 [...] 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 [...].

Related Characters: James Evans (speaker), Stephens, Reverend Stuart McLeery

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

Enjoying a pleasant evening of freedom in the nearby town of Chipping Norton, Evans rehashes some of the events from earlier that day. Dexter includes this passage as a way of answering any lingering questions that the reader might have, knowing that there are bound to be a few. For instance, Evans notes that he didn’t have to hide any clerical paraphernalia in his cell, nor did McLeery have to bring it in his briefcase and risk being searched. Instead, McLeery wore two of everything—coat, shirt, collar—and managed to get the extra set of clothes to Evans during his exam. Evans also explains the significance of the blanket—he needed something to covertly change under—and the reason why Stephens saw McLeery with his finger stuck in his collar.

In narrating Evans’s thoughts, Dexter uses the collective pronoun “they” to illustrate that Evans is not the type to pridefully take credit for himself. In this passage, he repeatedly affirms the necessity of his friends’ help, and moments after this passage, he thinks about how deeply grateful he is to have such “good friends” and “clever friends.” Teamwork is the crux of Evans’s plan—despite his own intelligence, talent for impressions, and ability to gain unlikely friends, it seems that Evans could not have succeeded without his accomplices. Evans’s dependence on

his friends is reaffirmed at the end of the story, when his accomplices (disguised as prison officers in a prison van) whisk Evans away to safety once more.

“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.”

Related Characters: James Evans, The Governor (speaker), Reverend Stuart McLeery

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 90

Explanation and Analysis

After cleverly tracking Evans down in the town of Chipping Norton, the Governor grills Evans for details about how he pulled off such an extravagant escape. Evans stresses the importance of getting help from his friends, once again positioning the escape as an act of extraordinary teamwork rather than a one-man show. Evans also gestures to his ability to endear himself to other people in claiming that he’s “got lots of friends.” Despite his penchant for impressions and the fact that he takes part in a massive act of deception in the story, Evans otherwise appears to be a genuine, kindhearted, jovial person that others are drawn to—even Jackson and the Governor can’t help feeling fond of the quirky prisoner.

In this passage, Evans also reveals that his German teacher is a close friend and accomplice of his. Readers will recall that Evans was the only student in the class for six months, so it seems that the teacher and his sole student used those six months primarily to craft this escape plan.

“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’r’aps I won’t,” he said.

Related Characters: James Evans, The Governor (speaker), The Silent Prison Officer

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 91

Explanation and Analysis

As the story comes to a close, the Governor watches as a silent prison officer handcuffs Evans and loads him into the prison van to head back to Oxford Prison. The two men’s temporary goodbyes are the clearest depiction of their unexpected friendship: they part like “old friend[s] after a cocktail party,” and Evans openly jokes about trying another escape plan in the future, but this time with O-level Italian rather than O-level German.

The Governor suggests that Evans might not still be at Oxford Prison come September, implying that Evans might be at a different prison by then—given his successful escape from Oxford Prison, it seems unlikely that he’ll be allowed to stay there much longer. Evans “ponder[s] the Governor’s words deeply” and answers, “No. P’r’aps I won’t.” It seems that Evans is thinking about his impending escape—the driver of the prison van and the officer who loaded him into it are both his accomplices, ready to whisk him away once more. In this way, Evans is perhaps considering whether or not this escape will be for good.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

EVANS TRIES AN O-LEVEL

In March, the Secretary of the Examinations Board receives a call from the Governor at Oxford Prison, asking if one of his prisoners can take the final exam in O-level German. The prisoner, James Roderick Evans, has been taking night classes since September and claims to be “dead keen to get some sort of academic qualification.” The Governor isn’t sure if Evans is especially talented at German, but he was the only student in the German teacher’s class, so he’s basically had a private tutor for the past six months.

The Secretary bends to the Governor’s request to let Evans take the exam, agreeing that they should “give him a chance.” He asks if Evans is violent, but the Governor hurriedly assures him that Evans is “Quite a pleasant sort of chap,” though he is a “Bit of a card.” He’s “just a congenital kleptomaniac” with a penchant for “Imitations [...] Mike Yarwood stuff.” The Governor is about to add something else but quickly decides against it—“He’d look after *that* particular side of things himself,” he thinks. The Governor explains that Evans has his own cell, so he can sit for the exam there. He suggests they ask a parson from St. Mary Mags to be the proctor, and the Secretary agrees.

Known as “Evans the Break” by prison officers, James Evans has escaped three times from various prisons. He was going to be sent to a maximum-security prison in the north, but due to the “wave of unrest” up there, he was sent to Oxford Prison instead. The Governor is determined to keep Evans secure and avoid being “disgrace[d].” He doesn’t consider Evans a significant threat—more of a “persistent, nagging presence.” Thinking about Evans’s upcoming exam, the Governor decides there’s a “possibility” that Evans is truly passionate about German—“Just a slight possibility. Just a very slight possibility.”

In early June, Evans attends his final night class in German before his big exam. His German teacher wishes him good luck in a thick German accent, and Evans awkwardly asks him to repeat himself. The German teacher repeats his well wishes in English and reminds Evans that he doesn’t have “a cat in hell’s chance of getting through.” Evans interrupts, breezily claiming that he “may surprise everybody.”

The opening lines of the story introduce the story’s protagonist, the Governor, and its antagonist, James Evans. The Governor implies that Evans is not some highbrow, academic criminal—his sudden interest in German is uncharacteristic, and his wording of being “dead keen to get some sort of academic qualification” implies a lack of understanding of academia and hints at a potential ulterior motive for studying German.



This passages paints Evans as a friendly, quirky man who happens to be a “congenital kleptomaniac” rather than a violent criminal. Evans clearly has a big, amusing personality—like the 1960s impressionist and comedian, Mike Yarwood—suggesting that he’s not the typical antagonist. The Governor’s hesitance to add one final detail about Evans—and his decision to “look after that particular side of things himself”—suggests that there is something concerning about the happy-go-lucky Evans.



The Governor is worried that Evans will somehow use the exam session to break out of prison for the fourth time, something the Governor sees as a serious threat to his reputation. If Evans were to escape, it would directly reflect upon Oxford Prison, but it would also affect the Governor—as the head of the prison, all mishaps concern him, too. The Governor seems concerned with protecting his pride, an impulse that will prove unproductive.



In declaring that Evans doesn’t have “a cat in hell’s chance of getting through,” the German teacher is perhaps trying to deter Evans from undertaking a plan that is bound to fail. However, near the end of the story, Evans reveals that the German teacher is actually a friend of his—making this moment seem more like the German teacher is egging Evans on and teasing him about the challenge he’s about to face.



The next morning, two prison officers visit Evans, who is wearing his signature “filthy-looking red-and-white bobble **hat**.” Jackson, the senior prisoner officer, has “already become warm enemies” with Evans. The other man, Stephens, is a “burly, surly-looking man” who is new to Oxford prison and to the prison-officer profession in general. Jackson gruffly greets Evans by calling him “Einstein” and reminds Stephens to confiscate Evans’s razor before the proctor arrives; Jackson has already taken away Evans’s nail scissors, much to Evans’s dismay (Evans claims that he’s always been “worried about his hands”).

Jackson barks at Evans to clean himself up for his exam and to remove his filthy **hat**. Evans’s hand immediately flies up to his hat; “smil[ing] sadly,” he explains that it’s “the only thing that’s ever brought [him] any sort o’ luck in life,” and that he especially needs it for his exam today. Evans thinks to himself that there must be “a tiny core of compassion” somewhere inside of Jackson. Jackson gruffly lets him keep it, but “just this once, then, Shirley Temple.” Jackson thinks to himself that the only thing he genuinely hates about Evans is his “long, wavy hair.”

At 8:45 A.M., Reverend Stuart McLeery leaves his bachelor flat and makes his way across town to Oxford Prison, where the two-hour exam is scheduled to begin at 9:15 A.M. In his briefcase is the proctor form, the exam in a sealed envelope, a “special ‘authentication’ card from the Examinations Board,” a Bible (for McLeery’s talk later that day at the Women’s Guild on the Book of Ruth), a paperknife, and an issue of *The Church Times*.

After Evans washes up, Jackson pays him another visit. He orders Evans to take down his posters of pin-up girls on the wall, and Evans nods—he was already planning on taking those down, given that his proctor is a minister. Jackson quietly asks Evans how he knows his proctor is a minister, and Evans says that it was listed on the forms he signed earlier.

Both Jackson and Stephens seem to fulfill the stereotype that prison officers are cold, gruff, and hostile. However, the fact that Jackson and Evans have “already become warm enemies” complicates Jackson’s image. As the story goes on, it seems that Jackson and Evans are fond of one another and use insults as the basis of their friendship. Meanwhile, Evans’s ridiculous knit cap points to his unthreatening, silly demeanor, which largely disguises his sharp intelligence.



Jackson bends to Evans’s sob story about his hat, showing that he does care about Evans as a friend. In order to not seem too compassionate or soft, though, Jackson adds an insult for good measure, comparing Evans to child actress Shirley Temple, who was known for her curly hair. This passage also shows one of the many ways that Evans skillfully endears people to himself and wins friends.



The bulk of the story unfolds over the course of just a few hours, and every minute counts in Evans’s complicated prison-break scheme. Noting the time is also Dexter’s way of alerting readers that something important is going on. Here, Dexter introduces Evans’s proctor, who is later revealed to be his accomplice impersonating the real Reverend McLeery. With that in mind, the “special ‘authentication’ card” is deeply ironic, as he is not, in fact, the authentic proctor. Dexter emphasizes this irony with his playful use of quotes around “authentication.”



This moment introduces the theme of instinct, paranoia, and pride, as Jackson instinctively thinks that Evans knows more than he should. As always, Evans has an explanation at the ready to deflect suspicion.



Gesturing to the ceiling, Evans asks Jackson why he had to be bugged. Jackson reminds him that the prison officers have to be extra cautious with Evans, and that the Governor himself will be listening in on the exam. Evans thinks to himself that he already accounted for that—"Number Two Handkerchief was lying ready on the bunk." Jackson brusquely tells Evans, "Good luck, old son," and leaves.

Part of what makes Evans's plan so successful is that he finds creative uses for ordinary items. Although the guards have taken away Evans's nail scissors and razor, he doesn't need them—he is able to utilize items that don't seem suspect, like a handkerchief. Meanwhile, the fact that the cell is bugged (just audio, not video) reminds readers that the Governor's reputation is at stake, while Jackson calling Evans "old son" reaffirms their unexpected friendship.



Once at the prison, Reverend Stuart McLeery signs in and follows a silent prison officer, who then hands him off to Jackson, who hands him off to Stephens. Meanwhile, the Governor switches on the receiver to listen in to Evans's cell, wondering if all the extra safety precautions are a bit over the top. Suddenly, the Governor realizes something he's overlooked—it's not enough to confiscate potential weapons Evans might have and make sure he's securely locked in. McLeery could have unknowingly brought something that Evans could use against him as a weapon. The Governor quickly orders Jackson to search McLeery.

McLeery is handed off from one officer to another in quick succession, emphasizing how many people are monitoring this exam and how tight security is at Oxford Prison. The Governor is torn between wanting to ensure all his bases are covered through extra security measures and not wanting to look too worried (and thus weak and not in control) about Evans. This conflict, with pride at its core, endures for most of the story.



Jackson retrieves McLeery and searches him. The minister is patient and understanding as Jackson ruffles through his belongings—until Jackson questions him about a "semi-inflated rubber ring" buried in the briefcase, asking in jest if the minister is going swimming later. McLeery stiffens, replying to "this tasteless little pleasantry" that it's a special cushion for his hemorrhoid problem. Jackson flushes pink and stammers an apology.

This moment feels oddly detailed and detached from the action otherwise centering around Evans and his exam. However, the fact that this interaction feels so out of place is Dexter's way of alerting readers that this moment is important to the story and to Evans's plot.



The exam begins a few minutes behind schedule, made even later by Evans's insistence that he can't concentrate with Stephens hovering in the cell. Having overheard this through the receiver, the Governor orders Stephens to leave, admitting that they might be "overdoing it." After a few administrative tasks (McLeery instructs Evans to write his "index number" and "centre number" in the corner of the exam), the test begins at 9:25 A.M.

Here, the Governor begins to go back on his careful security precautions, not wanting to look too dramatic or nervous about Evans escaping.



At 9:40 A.M., the Governor receives a call from the Examinations Board. The “Assistant Secretary with a special responsibility for modern languages” asks what time the exam began and explains that there’s been an error on their end: “there was a correction slip which some fool had forgotten to place in the examination package.” The Governor wonders if the phone call is fake—a signal or distraction of some kind—but transfers the call to Jackson so that he can take care of it. To check if the call really did come from the Examinations Board, the Governor dials their number, but all he hears are the “staccato bleeps of a line engaged.” The Governor assures himself that this is to be expected, given that the Assistant Secretary is probably still speaking with Jackson.

Moments later, the Governor hears McLeery reading off the corrections to the exam to Evans: “the fourth word should read *goldenen*, not *goldene*; and the whole phrase will therefore read *zum goldenen Löwen*, not *zum goldene Löwen*.” Having studied German in his youth, the Governor smiles as he hears familiar words and adjectives. The Governor’s phone rings again—the Magistrates’ Court needs a prison van and a couple of prison officers due to a remand case. After hanging up, the Governor thinks to himself that perhaps *that* phone call was fake, but he quickly reassures himself that he’s being paranoid.

No longer stationed inside the cell, Stephens now peers through the peephole into Evans’s cell for five seconds every minute (eventually transitioning to every two minutes)—a task he finds entirely pointless, given that Evans has barely moved. At the small table across from Evans is McLeery, silently reading his issue of *The Church Times* with one finger hooked under his clerical collar. He strokes his beard with his other hand, his fingers “meticulously manicured.”

Sometime later, the Governor is startled to hear noise coming from Evans’s cell—the prisoner is asking for permission to drape his blanket over his shoulders. McLeery tersely gives him permission. One minute later, when Stephens peers into the peephole, he’s surprised to see that Evans has donned a blanket. He wonders if this “slight irregularity” ought to be reported (Jackson *did* say to report “Anything at all fishy”) but decides he’s overreacting. The prison is cold, after all. Still, Stephens decides to return to one-minute intervals at the peephole.

The word “special” appears again here; earlier, it was used in regard to McLeery’s “special ‘authentication’ card from the Examinations Board.” Because of the irony in the fake McLeery carrying a “special ‘authentication’ card,” readers get the sense that this supposed “Assistant Secretary with a special responsibility for modern languages” might also be ironic or suspicious in some way. The Governor instinctively feels that something is amiss too, though he talks himself out of it.



McLeery reads off the phrase “golden lion”—a small but crucial detail that will reappear later. Once again, the Governor instinctively feels that something fishy is going on but talks himself down from his fears, telling himself he’s just being paranoid. Throughout the story, the Governor does this for the sake of pride, wanting to look unruffled, confident, and in control of the situation at hand. Fear and worry, to him, are reflective of weakness.



The detail of McLeery’s “meticulously manicured” fingernails seems out of place, and points to Evans’s earlier concern about his hands. This connection between the two men’s fingernails, though bizarre, is significant, as is the way that McLeery’s finger is hooked through his collar. In Evans’s scheme, nothing is as innocent as it seems.



Just like the Governor, Stephens instinctively feels that something suspicious is going on but convinces himself otherwise. Since Stephens is a newly instated officer, it’s possible that he doesn’t want to seem stupid or incompetent by overreacting about a blanket. However, Stephens recommits himself to looking through the peephole every minute rather than every two, which suggests that he has lingering suspicions.



At 11:20 A.M., The Governor listens as McLeery informs Evans that there are only five minutes remaining in the exam. With “something still gnaw[ing] away quietly in the Governor’s mind,” he picks up the phone. At 11:22 A.M., Jackson shouts for Stephens to come to the phone—the Governor is on the line. The Governor instructs Stephens to escort McLeery off the premises after the exam and to ensure that Evans is properly locked in his cell.

At 11:25 A.M., Stephens escorts McLeery to the prison’s main gates, bursting with pride that the Governor had chosen “him, and not Jackson” for the task. As the two men walk, Stephens privately observes that the proctor’s Scottish accent sounds thicker than before, and that the proctor’s long, knee-length coat “fostered the illusion that he had suddenly grown slimmer.” After McLeery has gone, Stephens returns to Evans’s cell to check on him. He feels slightly paranoid—like a TV show he’d seen “about a woman who could never *really* convince herself that she’d locked the front door when she’d gone to bed.”

Stephens peers into Evans’s cell and is met with a horrifying sight: McLeery is slumped in Evans’s chair and is drenched in blood. The blood is seeping through his beard, short hair, and clerical collar. As Stephens shouts for Jackson, McLeery weakly presses a white linen handkerchief to his bleeding head. Clutching the German exam in one hand, McLeery murmurs that he knows where Evans went.

The prison explodes with noise and activity—sirens wail, officers shout, and heavy metal doors clang into place. When the Governor arrives, McLeery shows him the German exam: “A photocopied sheet had been carefully and cleverly superimposed over the last (originally blank) page of the question paper.” Clunkily translating the German, the Governor reads, “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 police car whizzes up to the prison gates, and Detective Superintendent Carter jumps out, demanding an explanation.

Winning in pain, McLeery tells the men to go to Elsfield Way. The Governor quickly realizes that the Examinations Board is headquartered there—one of their employees must have been involved in Evans’s escape. He tells Carter to take McLeery with him, since McLeery knows the most about the situation.

The Governor’s gut feeling that Evans will escape won’t go away, no matter how much he tries to tell himself he’s being paranoid, pointing to the power and accuracy of human instinct. Meanwhile, it’s strange that the Governor would give Stephens, the new guy, such an important job as ensuring Evans is locked in and escorting McLeery out.



Stephens’s smugness implies that he resents Jackson, his immediate superior. His desire to find favor with the Governor adds a layer of pride to Stephens’s past actions—like not reporting Evans’s blanket in order to avoid looking stupid. Stephens begins to feel instinctively unsettled about Evans here. He compares his reasonable concern to true paranoia or other types of mental illness. This allows Stephens to tell himself that he’s just being crazy.



Either Stephens just escorted Evans (disguised as McLeery) out of the prison, or this McLeery is actually Evans. The detail of the white linen handkerchief points back to Evans’s plan to somehow use a handkerchief in his escape—perhaps this is Evans, and the handkerchief is just part of his disguise.



The fact that Evans’s exam contained instructions for how to break out of prison—and that those instructions were photocopied onto the actual exam—suggests that someone from the Examinations Board is on Evans’s side. This perhaps points back to the Assistant Secretary, who conveniently had a “special responsibility” for language exams. The Governor’s translation of the instructions reveals that his German is rusty but still helpful in the case. However, the arrival of the detective suggests that the case is now going to change hands from prison officers to the police.



The Governor begins to piece together the case alongside the reader. His earlier suspicion about the Assistant Secretary may have been correct all along.



Turning sharply to Stephens and Jackson, the Governor demands to know who led Evans off the premises; Stephens stutters that it was him, but that the Governor was the one who gave him the orders over the phone. The Governor screams that it wasn't him who gave those orders—the call was a fake. The Governor thinks to himself that he *had* been using the phone at that time, trying (unsuccessfully) to get in touch with the Examinations Board.

The Governor screams at Jackson for his stupidity. Jackson had searched Evans's cell for two hours the previous night—and yet, the prisoner had managed to hide a clerical collar and shirt, reading glasses, a fake beard, a coat, and whatever weapon he attacked McLeery with. The Governor turns his attention back to the instructions on the last page of the German exam, trying to make sense of what “Neugraben” means. He decides it must mean the town of Newbury. He barks at a prison-van driver to get Jackson and Stephens to the police station and to ask for Chief Inspector Bell when they get there.

The Governor quickly gets Chief Inspector Bell on the phone to bring him up to speed. After this, Detective Superintendent Carter calls, explaining that McLeery is now at Radcliffe Hospital—once they got to the Examinations offices, McLeery started feeling particularly poorly, so they called an ambulance for him and left him to wait for it while they continued their search. Carter also mentions that McLeery spotted Evans near Elsfeld Way, and he looked to be heading back to the city. The Governor explains his theory about Evans heading for Newbury and then hangs up, telling himself that finding Evans is “a police job now.” The Governor “was just another good-for-a-giggle, gullible governor, that was all.”

The Governor calls the hospital and asks after McLeery. The hospital clerk says they don't have a patient with that name, and the Governor explains that McLeery was picked up from Elsfeld Way. The clerk interrupts, saying that the ambulance did go to pick up a patient from Elsfeld Way earlier, but no one was there: “the fellow had gone. No one seemed to know where he was. Just vanished!” Suddenly, the Governor realizes his horrible mistake.

Fifteen minutes later, the prison officers discover the *real* Reverend Stuart McLeery, bound and gagged at his flat, as he had been since 8:15 A.M. By that afternoon, everyone at Oxford Prison had heard the story: “It had not been Evans, impersonating McLeery, who had walked out; it had been Evans, impersonating McLeery, who had stayed in.”

The earlier abnormality of Stephens being tasked with such an important job despite being new to his post is finally explained—those were fake orders given by someone pretending to be the Governor over the phone. Once again, seemingly normal phone calls are at the heart of a devious plan, keeping readers on their toes.



It seems unlikely that Evans could have hidden so much in such a small, sparse cell. Although the prison officers are not yet suspicious of the proctor, readers might be at this point. In walking McLeery out of the prison, Stephens had privately observed that the proctor looked suddenly thinner—suggesting he had been wearing two layers of clothing and had given one of the layers to Evans for his disguise.



This passage reveals another tension between appearances and reality—it seems that the high-level detectives should be the ones to find Evans, but the Governor seems to be more adept at piecing together Evans's clues. However, the police majorly underestimate the Governor, stereotyping him as an unintelligent, blustering fool. Meanwhile, it's significant that Carter leaves McLeery unsupervised and that McLeery is the one who claims to have spotted Evans.



McLeery seems to have made a break for it after Carter left him alone but before the ambulance could come pick him up. The hospital clerk's assertion that McLeery “vanished” immediately points to the slippery criminal James Evans, suggesting that he was, in fact, disguised as the attacked McLeery.



The inclusion of the time 8:15 A.M. implies that this is the first time readers are meeting the real McLeery—the fake McLeery first appeared in the story at 8:45 A.M. This passage also contains the most succinct explanation of Evans's deceptive plan.



After a pleasant evening, Evans returns to the Golden Lion Hotel. His new **hat** hides “the wreckage of his closely cropped hair.” It was a shame that Jackson had confiscated his nail scissors—Evans had to cut his hair with his razor blade instead, which was arduous. He’s glad that Jackson at least let him keep his hat on for the exam—“old Jackson wasn’t such a bad fellow,” he thinks.

As he climbs the stairs to his room, Evans thinks about how it was such “a jolly good idea” for the fake McLeery to wear two clerical shirts and two clerical collars. It was tricky, though, especially since one of the collars kept slipping off—“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...” He trails off. It was also challenging to do “all that fiddling about under the blanket” to get the clerical shirt on.

Luckily, Evans’s friends had left him all the necessary supplies in the getaway car: clothes, soap and water, and the Ordnance Survey Map of Oxfordshire. He’s grateful to have such “good” and “very clever friends.” Evans opens the door to his room and suddenly freezes “like a man who has just caught a glimpse of the Gorgon.” There, sitting on the bed, “was the very last man in the world that Evans had expected—or wanted—to see,” the Governor.

The Governor quietly tells Evans it’s no use trying to escape—he has the place surrounded (he only has two officers outside, but chooses not to reveal this detail). “Visibly shaken,” Evans sinks into a chair. After a few minutes of silence, he asks if the correction slip gave him away. Unable to conceal “the deep satisfaction in his voice,” the Governor says, “there are a few people who know a little German.”

Evans relaxes, knowing he’s been caught and there’s no use fighting it. Evans excitedly tells the Governor that the most important thing in his plot was the phone call that distracted Stephens and Jackson a few moments before the end of the exam. The correction slip was important, too, though, because it gave Evans the name of his hotel, and it ensured that Evans’s outside help—whoever called pretending to be the Examinations Board with a correction to the exam—know exactly when the exam started, so that they could know exactly when to make the distracting phone call three minutes before the end of the exam.

Evans’s thoughts help fill in the gaps for the reader: although he is somewhat obsessive about his nail scissors (which is why McLeery had to have perfectly manicured nails too, so that the men’s hands looked identical), he mainly needed them to cut his long hair to match McLeery’s. Despite this being Jackson’s fault, Evans still feels fondly towards him, calling “old Jackson” not “such a bad fellow.”



Since McLeery did wear two of everything, Stephen’s observation that McLeery suddenly seemed slimmer after the exam was well-founded. Evans also flashes back to the moment when Stephens noticed McLeery’s finger casually hooked through his clerical collar—in actuality, McLeery was desperately trying to keep it from springing off, which would have revealed that he was wearing two collars. Evans also explains why he needed the blanket, which was yet another thing Stephens was instinctively right about but didn’t act on out of pride.



The Gorgons were monsters from Greek mythology, taking the form of three sisters with snakes for hair, and with the power to turn to stone anyone who looked at them—just as Evans seems turned to stone upon seeing the Governor.



The Governor’s pride rises to the surface in this passage. Even though it was his pride that led him to make so many mistakes throughout the day, he is still proud of his ability to save the day—so he thinks.



Evans continues to reconstruct his scheme, this time for the Governor. He affirms that the many suspicions the Governor harbored throughout the day were correct. The confirmation that the correction slip was part of Evans’s plan reveals that the “Assistant Secretary with special responsibility” for foreign languages was a hoax. Once again, appearances can’t be trusted—even the seemingly innocent correction slip had a twofold purpose in Evans’s plot.



Evans also explains how he knew which Golden Lion Hotel to go to: McLeery had instructed Evans to write “index number 313” in one box and “centre number 271” in another box, as if it were some administrative task in filling out his exam sheet properly. Then, in the getaway car, Evans looked up “the six-figure reference 313/271,” which led to the city of Chipping Norton. The Governor says he figured this out too, which is how he knew to track Evans down in Chipping Norton, though he admits to initially thinking Evans was headed for Newbury; Evans says that he left that clue on purpose as a red herring.

The Governor asks Evans if he really did understand German all this time, and Evans says he just knew the gist. The Governor also asks how Evans managed to cover himself in blood. Evans excitedly recounts his clever idea to have the fake McLeery bring the inflatable rubber ring under the pretense of needing it for a hemorrhoid problem—Evans knew that such a thing wouldn’t be confiscated. Filling it with blood was easy (they got pig’s blood from a slaughterhouse), but the issue was keeping it from clotting. To do so, “you’ve got to mix yer actual blood [...] with one tenth of its own volume of 3.8 cent trisodium citrate!” The Governor shakes his head with “reluctant admiration,” saying, “come on, m’lad.”

The two men walk alongside one another down the stairs. The Governor asks how Evans managed to communicate with the outside world—he’s had no visitors or letters. Evans breezily replies that he has “a lot of friends,” including his German teacher. The Governor is incredulous, declaring that the German teacher was from the Technical College. Playfully, Evans asks, “Was ‘e? [...] Ever check up on ‘im, sir?”

In the lobby, a blonde receptionist informs the Governor that the prison van is waiting out front. Evans gives her a wink, and she winks back, which “almost ma[kes] his day.” Outside, a silent prison officer handcuffs Evans and loads him into the van.

The Governor says goodbye to Evans as if he were “saying farewell to an old friend after a cocktail party.” Evans brightly answers, “Cheerio, sir,” and asks the Governor if he knows any other modern languages besides German. The Governor says no and asks why; Evans smiles and says that he noticed that the prison would be offering O-level Italian classes in September, “that’s all.” The Governor tells Evans that he might not still be at Oxford Prison in September. “Ponder[ing] the Governor’s words deeply,” Evans answers that the Governor may be right.

Evans’s plan gets increasingly complex as he recounts it for the Governor—even something as nondescript as a “centre number” (a number assigned to a testing facility for administrative purposes) played a careful role in the scheme. The fact that the Governor is also able to figure this out himself further disproves the detectives’ assumptions that the Governor is “gullible” and “good-for-a-giggle.”



Unrefined as it is, the “semi-inflated rubber ring” was one of the most important elements of Evans’s plan. As with the handkerchief, Evans built his scheme around nondescript items that weren’t at risk of being confiscated. Due to the medical nature of the rubber ring—and Jackson’s subsequent embarrassment—there was no way that the officers would confiscate the item. Evans also demonstrates startlingly complex knowledge about chemistry here, reaffirming that he’s far more intelligent than he first appears.



The German teacher finally reappears in conversation here, as Evans implies that he was an integral part of the plan. Readers may recall that Evans was the only student in the German teacher’s class for six whole months—six months of (presumably) unsupervised time to plan Evans’s escape.



The flirtatious interaction between Evans and the receptionist is suspect, as it’s unclear if Evans is merely being his charming self and endearing yet another person to him, or if she is one of his many “friends.”



Evans and the Governor interact like “old friend[s],” once again emphasizing Evans’s uncanny ability to charm people. The fact that this whole chase is compared to a “cocktail party” makes Evans’s escape seem more like a light-hearted game than a serious escape from prison. This speaks to the way that the Governor’s fondness for Evans lessens the severity of the situation when he’s recaptured. Meanwhile, Evans does seem to consider it all a game, as he cheerfully asks about other O-level language classes, implying that he’s looking forward to breaking out all over again.



As the prison van merges onto the road, the silent prison officer who had loaded Evans into the van sharply tells the driver to speed up—"It won't take 'em long to find out." In a thick Scottish accent, the driver asks where they should go; Evans suggests Newbury.

Once again, Evans has outsmarted everyone—with a little help from his friends. The silent prison officer, who has made a few subtle appearances throughout the story, is revealed to be one of Evans's accomplices, while the driver is clearly the McLeery imposter. The fact that Evans suggests going to Newbury—where the Governor first looked for him—suggests that he might even want to be caught so that he can undertake the challenge of breaking out again. However, going to Newbury could also just be a clever way of hiding in plain sight.





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