



READING WITH INSIGHT

Q1. Reflecting on the story, what did you feel about Evans' having the last laugh?

Ans: It is Evans who has the last laugh. The play makes a fun of the routine procedure followed by prison authorities and police. It depicts how the criminals are one step ahead of the jail authorities. All precautions have been made by the Governor of Oxford Prison to see that the O-Level German examination, held in prison for the prisoner Evans, does not provide him means to escape. The examination passes off peacefully. Mr Stephens, a prison officer, sees off McLeery, the invigilator and on returning to the cell finds injured "McLeery" sprawling in Evans's chair.

It is easy for Evans impersonating as McLeery to leave the prison along with police officer. He claims to have spotted Evans driving off along Elsfield Way but loses track at the Headington roundabout. He grogs off near the Examination offices. Then he disappears. He is located in the Golden Lion in Chipping Norton by the Governor of Oxford Prison. Instead of bringing Evans securely back to prison, the Governor lets him come in a prison van guarded by a prison officer. It is just what Evans had planned. The driver and the 'prison officer' are his friends and Evans escapes from prison once again.

In fact, Evans has made elaborate arrangements. He joins the night classes in September. The German teacher is one of his friends. He has his friends in the Examination Board as well. He waits patiently till June. Two of his friends bind and gag Reverend Stuart McLeery in his Broad Street flat. One of them personates him. He is dressed up as a minister. He has two collars and two black fronts on his person. Evans fiddles about under the blanket with the black front and the stud at the back of the collar. His friends also arrange a car where he can change his make up as well as clothes. He successfully deceives the police as well as the prison authorities.

Q2. When Stephens comes back to the cell he jumps to a conclusion and the whole machinery blindly goes by his assumption without even checking the identity of the injured 'McLeery'. Does this show how hasty conjectures can prevent one from seeing the obvious? How is the criminal able to predict such negligence?

Ans: On his return to the cell of Evans, Stephens saw a man sprawling back in Evans' chair. For a semi-second Stephens thought it must be Evans. But the small black beard, white clerical collar and black clerical front and red blood dripping from the front of his head, made Stephens jump to a conclusion—Evans impersonating McLeery, had walked out.

Almost immediately the whole machinery jumped into action. No one bothered to check the identity of the injured "McLeery." The assumption of Stephens prevailed. It was reinforced by the broader Scots accent and slimmer body of the parson he had seen off and the blood coming out of wound and dress of the "parson" in the cell. The hasty conjecture prevents one from seeing the obvious. The jail breaker might have played a trick again. Even the Governor is deceived. He believes what his staff says. The man who doubted everything and cross checked it, does not even examine the victim. Due to their long sojourn in prison the criminals become familiar with the temperaments of prison officers as well as the routine they

follow. A criminal is always disbelieved. On the other hand, an officer's word is always accepted. The criminals are sure that negligence of the prison authorities is their only passport to freedom. They doubt the remotest possibility and doubt genuine telephone calls as fake ones, yet an assumption is accepted as truth and the obvious is ignored. Hence, the criminal is able to predict such negligence on the part of prison authorities.

Q3. What could the Governor have done to securely bring back Evans to prison when he caught him at the Golden Lion? Does that final act of foolishness really prove that "he was just another good-for-a-giggle, gullible governor, that was all".

Ans: The Governor should have escorted Evans himself to the Oxford Prison. He had only two persons with him, and later it turned out that these two persons were associates of Evans. One of them, who posed to be the silent prison officer instructed the driver to move on faster. The driver, who spoke in a broad Scots accent, was the person who acted as the Reverend S. McLeery. The Governor should have at least checked the identity of the staff to whom he was entrusting the prisoner.

Secondly, he should have contacted Mr Jackson and Mr Stephens, the two prison officers, Detective Superintendent Carter and Detective Chief Inspector Bell, who were all searching Evans. It was perhaps his over excitement and childish enthusiasm at his arm-chair reasoning in locating the hide-out of Evans and catching him at the Golden Lion, that he threw all cautions to wind and acted foolishly by reposing confidence in wrong persons. Evans and his associates had befooled him earlier as well. The German teacher and the invigilator were friends of Evans. The correction slip sent from Examination Branch was a clever device to convey the route of escape and the hide-out. The Governor's last act of foolishness really proved that he was only worth being laughed at as he was too credulous and trustful.

Q4. While we condemn the crime, we are sympathetic to the criminal. Is this the reason why prison staff often develop a soft corner for those in custody?

Ans: People condemn the crime as it is an evil act against law and society. In the past, punishment was the only way to treat the criminals. The greater the crime, the harsher and harder the punishment, which could go to the extent of life-imprisonment or death sentence. In the modern age, efforts are on to reform the criminals, even the hard core, and bring them back to the mainstream. Hence police, prison officers, judges and other law-enforcing agencies develop a soft corner for the people in custody. While the sufferer should get justice, the innocent must not be punished. This idea too helps the prison staff often develop a soft corner for the prisoners.

The behaviour of prison officer Jackson amply illustrates the above point. He is very strict in enforcing the rules and regulations of prison as well as the Governor's orders. Yet somewhere in him we find a tiny core of compassion. Even Evans knew it. Mr Jackson has asked Evans to remove that filthy bobble hat. Evans requested him to allow it to wear it during exam as it brought luck to him. It was kind of lucky charm for him. Jackson agreed.

Q5. Do you agree that between crime and punishment it is mainly a battle of wits?

Ans: Crime and punishment are like two sides of the coin. Punishment follows crime. It is only after a crime has been committed that the law-enforcing agencies become active and try to nab the offenders and bring them to book. If efforts of the police are successful, suitable punishment is awarded to the criminals. Since the location, time and victim of a crime cannot be predicted in advance, preventive action to check the crime is not possible. Even tight security fails when hardened criminals or suicide-minded

human bombs come into play. Criminals are always one step ahead of the police. It is always a battle of wits between the two. The police tries to trace the clues left by the criminals and apprehend them on the basis of these. On the other hand, the criminals devise a foolproof plan and try to leave no clues which might help in identification later on. Since the legal system is based on evidence—both human and material—police as well as criminals and their lawyers, use their wits to turn the case in their favour and win it.

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