

Evans Tries An O-Level by Colin Dexter

1. It was in early March when the Secretary of the Examinations Board received the call from Oxford prison that a prisoner named Evans wanted to write his O-level German exam.
2. James Roderick Evans , the prisoner had earlier escaped thrice from the prison, so he was known as 'Evans the Break'. He was a fun loving man and was good at imitation. He was not violent by nature but was a congenital kleptomaniac. He started night classes in O-Level German in the prison.
3. The governor of the prison was suspicious of Evans' intentions. On the exam day, he was given time to smarten up. Evans insisted on keeping his filthy hat on calling it his lucky charm.
4. Elaborate arrangements were made for the examination to avoid prison break. Evans' scissors and nail file were taken away from him. McLeery, a parson was to invigilate during the examination. His prison cell was fitted with a listening device and prison officers Jackson and Stephens were posted to guard the cell.
5. On the day of examination McLeery arrived with the required papers and an inflated rubber ring kept in his small suitcase. The exam was scheduled to start at 9.15 a.m.
6. The exam began a little late. The parson asked Evans to write index No., centre No, 313 and 271. At 9:40 a.m, there was a call from the Assistant Secretary, Examination Board regarding a correction slip. McLeery gave instructions from the correction slip
7. Evans hardly understood anything, kept his pen between lips staring towards the door. At 10:15 Evans requested for a blanket. The exam got over at 11:25.

8. Stephens accompanied McLeery to the prison gate at the Governor's orders who spoke rapidly. On the way he asked Mcleery about Evans. McLeery's Scots accent seemed broader and he appeared slimmer in his long black overcoat.

9. After seeing McLeery off, Stephens wanted to take one last look at Evans. He saw McLeery sprawled in Evan's chair, his blanket slipping from his shoulders and blood dripping through the beard.

10. McLeery moaned and asked for police and told them he knew where Evans was. He opened the German question paper and found a photocopied sheet carefully and cleverly superimposed over the last page of the paper with instructions and the plan written in German

11. The Governor was furious as he had not made any call to see off McLeery at the prison gate. Later the Governor was puzzled to know that Mcleery was not in the hospital.

When the ambulance reached Elsfield to pick him up, Mc Leery was not there.

12. The real McLeery was discovered bound and gagged in his apartment. Now they understood, it was not Evans impersonating as McLeery who had walked out but it was Evans, impersonating Mc Leery who stayed in

13. Evans reached his hotel at Golden Lion, happy with his successful escape. He was able to hide his closely cropped hair due to his lucky hat.

14. As he reached the reception, he found a new receptionist. He collected the keys, asked for early morning call at 6.45 am.

15. He was shocked to see the Governor sitting on the narrow bed. The correction slip left behind provided the clue about his hotel.

16. The Governor wanted to know where the blood came from. It was pig's blood in the ring. The German teacher was his friend.

17. Finally , Evans was hand cuffed and clambered into the back seat of prison van. As he turned right , the officer unlocked hand cuffs and asked to drive fast, The prison officer was Evans' own man and the Governor was fooled once again.

Short Answer Questions

1. What was unusual about the request received by the examination board?
2. How is Evans not a typical criminal?. What is he better known as and why?
3. The prison authorities were not taking any chances with Evans'. What precautions did they take?
4. How did Evans convince Jackson to allow him to wear his hat?
5. What reason did McLeery give for bringing the rubber ring with him?
6. What did the governor instruct Stephens to do after the exam got over?
7. What did Stephens discover in Evans' cell after McLeery had left?
8. Who had impersonated whom in the plan to escape?
- 9.. Mention two changes that Stephens noticed in McLeery when he was leaving after the exam?
10. How did Evans manage to procure the things that had helped him in his escape?
11. How did Evans manage to get blood? How was its clotting prevented?
12. What clues did the answer sheet of Evans provide to Governor?
13. How is Evans able to manage his escape in the absence of visitors and letters?

14. How did the correction slip kill two little birds with a single stone?

15. What fate did the real McLeery meet?

16.. How did Evans manage to give a slip to the governor at the end?

Long Answer Questions

1. What steps were taken by the prison authorities to prevent any escape attempt by Evans?

2. How was Evans able to turn the table on his captors?

3. “The Governor was just another, good for a giggle, gullible governor.” Do you agree?

Suggested answers

1. Evans was a prisoner in the Oxford Prison. He had convinced the authorities that he was genuinely interested in learning German and was tutored for a while. When the tutor announced that Evans was prepared for an O'Level exam, the Governor of the prison applied to the Examination Board for his exam.

2. a fun loving person, not violent by nature, good at imitation, notorious for escaping from prison hence called ‘ Evans the Break’.

3. Elaborate arrangements were made for the examination to avoid prison break. Evans’ scissors and nail file were taken away from him. McLeery, a parson was to invigilate during the examination. His prison cell was fitted with a listening device and prison officers Jackson and Stephens were posted to guard the cell.

4. called it his lucky charm, took advantage of Jackson’s compassionate nature

5. suffered from haemorrhoids, needed to sit for long hours.

6. instructed Stephens to escort McLeery out of prison gate.

7. found a man sprawled in Evans' chair, blanket slipping from his shoulder, blood dripping through his beard
8. Evans impersonating McLeery stayed in, Evans' friend impersonated McLeery, real parson gagged and bound
9. broader Scots accent, seemed slimmer
10. The parson who was his friend got them with him.
11. inflated rubber ring filled with pig blood, mixed one tenth of its volume with trisodium citrate,
12. the Governor came to know about the hotel and its location
13. the German teacher was Evans' friend, planned his escape in advance
14. Evans wanted to know the name of the hotel where he had to go and at what time the examination started. The correction slip supplied both.
15. was found bound and gagged in his apartment
16. Evans was hand cuffed and clambered into the back seat of prison van. As he turned right, the officer unlocked hand cuffs and asked to drive fast, The prison officer was Evans' own man and the Governor was fooled once again.

Sample Answers

Q.1. Why did Evans ask for a blanket while writing the exam?

A.1. As part of his escape plan, Evans had to dress up as Mc Leery, the invigilator. He had to wear the minister's black front, collar. He could conveniently wear these while hiding under the blanket.

Q.2. How did the filthy hat prove to be a lucky charm for Evans?

A.2. Evans had to hide his closely cropped hair. His haircut would him disguise himself as McLeery.. Evans had to cut his long hair with his only razor blade because Jackson had taken away his scissors.