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AVRAINVILLE, a small hamlet near Paris. Three houses: the very ordinary villa that belongs to an insurance agent, Michonnet, M. Oscar's garage, and an old house in a park that belongs to two wealthy (?) foreigners (Danish), Carl Andersen and his sister Else. Michonnet comes to Oscar's garage to report the disappearance of his luxury car (a 6 cyl). A gendarme who had stopped at Oscar's gas pump comes over to find out what the excitement is all about. The people immediately begin to complain about the foreigners, the Danes who live nearby, saying that they should be driven back to the border. Michonnet asks the gendarme to search the Danes' house. Everyone except the garage owner, Oscar, and his mechanic, run to the Andersen's house. They discover the missing car in the garage and at the wheel a dead man, a certain Mr. Goldberg, a diamond dealer.

PARIS -- A newspaper stand. The morning papers headline the murder of the diamond dealer and the arrest of a suspect. At the police headquarters, Inspector Maigret (Pierre Renoir) is questioning Carl Andersen, who says that he never saw "that Jew" before. Maigret and his assistant Lucas continue the interrogation throughout the day without success. Maigret becomes insistent. Andersen explains that he is in the habit of going to the garage early in the morning because he goes to fetch wood for his sister who is always terribly cold. He didn't keep wood in the house because it comes from very old trees so it's full of insects, and his sister is scared to death of insects!

Andersen continues to deny any complicity in the crime. He has no idea what happened; besides, Goldberg was actually found in Michonnet's car, not his. He didn't hear anything because he sleeps very heavily and there is a lot of traffic on the nearby highway. The questioning continues after a short break. Maigret wants to know why he and his sister live in such an isolated place when he has a job in Paris. He explains that he is a textile designer and works at home and only needs to go to Paris once a month. They finally decide to let him go.

PARIS -- The evening papers announce that Maigret is going to continue his investigation on the scene of the crime.

AVRAINVILLE -- 8:53 p.m., Oscar's garage. He is playing a concertina. Maigret arrives and is told by his assistant Lucas that these people are pretty strange. Lucas describes the three houses to Maigret as they stand in the middle of the road. Lucas then goes ahead to find some lodging in a nearby village. Maigret decides to pay a visit to the Andersens. Carl invites him in and goes to find his sister Else. She asks Maigret to sit down and sends her brother to fix something warm to drink. She tells Maigret that given Carl's personality, it is pretty hard on him to be accused of murder. Maigret inspects the room while pursuing his questioning: does she smoke a lot? does she often play records? She says that she likes the record on the phonograph because it reminds her of when she was a little girl.

MEANWHILE, LUCAS IS WALKING ON THE ROAD.

Maigret continues to question Else. She says that Carl had a tough upbringing, so their primitive lodging is not particularly hard on him. She also tells him that his family used to be very wealthy but that they lost all their money. She asks Carl to bring some light. Maigret calls Carl back and shows him a telegram that Lucas has just given him announcing the arrival of Mrs. Goldberg that very evening. (Hence the mention of the time when the train goes by earlier in the sequence). Carl asks Maigret to let him go to Paris to get some money.

OUTSIDE, NEAR OSCAR'S GARAGE -- As the two inspectors walk past the garage they overhear someone asking if the horn has been fixed. Somewhere on the road, a car asks for directions to Avrainville. A man carrying a rifle is seen disappearing behind a wall. Mrs. Goldberg arrives in a taxi. Maigret introduces himself. As she is about to step out of the taxi she is shot. Maigret fails to find the gunman. He goes to Oscar's garage. His wife tells him that he should be back any minute. At that point, Michonnet comes in the back door carrying a rifle. Maigret checks it and gives it back to him. Michonnet explains that he just went for a walk and adds that if the police were doing their job they would keep an eye on foreigners who steal Frenchmen's cars. And he complains that he hasn't gotten his car back yet. Mrs. Goldberg dies. It is established that she has been killed by the same type of bullet as her husband.

OSCAR'S GARAGE is bustling with activity the next morning. Andersen is about to leave for Paris in his little car (a 5 Hp). Maigret is waiting. Oscar arrives holding a rabbit. He starts playing his concertina and teases Maigret, telling him that Andersen has probably reached the border by now. Maigret asks the mechanic to cut down the noise. He sends everyone out of the room so that he can make a phone call and talk to Lucas. He finds out that Andersen never made it to his office and that his car was found near the Gare du Nord (the train station for Belgium). He sets a meeting with another of his associates and sends a strange (coded) message.

INSIDE ANDERSEN'S HOUSE. Else's room. She is playing with a turtle. Maigret checks the stairs, the windows. Thinking that her brother has come back she talks to him in Danish. Maigret tells her that he wants to talk to her. She explains that she is locked in (by her brother) because she is afraid of prowlers. He tells her that it is pretty strange that she is smoking in her locked room upstairs but that he has found her lit cigarette downstairs. She tells him that if all the French cops were like him she would love to be a thief. As he tells her that her brother has crossed the border, she begins to panic saying that Carl couldn't have done that unless he just went crazy. Since she hasn't had anything to eat, Maigret asks her to come downstairs with him. Someone lurking behind the kitchen window puts two bottles of beer on the table and disappears. Maigret finds a bottle of poison (?) behind the painting hanging above the sofa where she is lying down. As Maigret lets himself be charmed by Else a truck full of police pulls up in front of the house. While they take positions outside, Else tells Maigret that her brother is innocent and she denies knowing Goldberg. She says that Carl wanted to go to the police when they first found the car but he was afraid because they are foreigners. She says that she is unhappy and collapses (evidently there was something in the beer). Maigret opens the window.

OUTSIDE, Oscar, carrying a rifle, goes behind a wall again. A man stumbles in from the dark: Carl. He is wounded, and he is taken upstairs. He explains that he was shot at the Porte d'Orleans and thrown out of the car. Maigret asks someone to lock Else up in her room. He then goes to Oscar's garage who teases him about looking for killers at that late hour. Meanwhile, Oscar asks the driver of a truck if he wants a spare wheel. The man takes it (it does not match the other wheels), and leaves. Maigret asks the mechanic what the man is going to do with that wheel. He kicks him down. Maigret pulls a gun and shoots at a tube hanging on the wall. He inspects it and finds cocaine inside the tube. He asks the mechanic if he is the one sniffing dope. At this point a man runs into one of the cars in the garage. Maigret fires at him. The man runs away. Maigret rushes to the car but the car mechanic tries to stop him. They struggle.

A RESTAURANT IN PARIS -- M. Lecat is called to the phone.

BACK TO OSCAR'S GARAGE -- Maigret searches the car and finds Goldberg's jewels.

RESTAURANT IN PARIS -- Lecat returns and tells the other men sitting at the table that they'd better beat it.

OSCAR'S GARAGE -- Maigret questions the mechanic, who says that he doesn't know Goldberg. He shows him a list of the stolen jewels and asks if there is a signal. As Maigret leaves, a carful of hoods pulls up and starts shooting. The mechanic is wounded. A doctor arrives and the inspectors begin to make an inventory of the loot. Maigret calls the police station in the next town to warn them, and he sends an inspector after them in a fast car (a Bugatti). Pursuit in the night. They catch up with them and arrest them.

Meanwhile, Michonnet tries to kidnap Else. She is rescued by the inspectors. Maigret runs upstairs to see the wounded man. The inspectors return with the hoods and put them in the room downstairs. Maigret goes to Else's room. She is sitting in front of her vanity table. He asks her how many men have gone through her bed. He says that she seduced Michonnet and her fake brother and then blackmailed them. He looks at a scar above her breast and tells her to get dressed. She explains that she was a prostitute and that one night she was wounded while she was being the look-out for her husband while he was cracking a safe. Maigret picks up the bottle of sleeping pills and asks her if she used them to put her brother to sleep so that she could receive her lovers at night: Michonnet, Oscar and others. He also finds a picture of her husband and handcuffs her. He takes her downstairs where the hoods and the inspectors are still waiting. She asks for a cigarette. Maigret questions the hoods. Oscar says that he has been a fence for about two years. Maigret keeps on asking who killed Goldberg and pushed Andersen off the road, and then puts on the record. One of the policemen puts a gun at the window to startle Else.

Upstairs, the wounded man is asking for Else. Maigret tells Oscar that he must be Else's first husband and that she must have furnished him with the address for the jewels. He accuses him of Goldberg's murder and of planning to share the loot with Else and the others. They walk upstairs and he takes off her handcuffs telling her that two years (in jail) will go by quickly and that after that she'll be free.

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RENOIR on LA NUIT DU CARREFOUR:

In LA NUIT DU CARREFOUR I tried to imitate Simenon. I don't know if I succeeded, but in any case, let's say that I had a communion with him that was terrific. I tried to create the impression that mud sticks when one walks in the mud, that fog blocks one's vision when one walks in the fog. I tried to do what Simenon does in his books, i.e. to transport the spectator into a very special atmosphere. To do that, I overemphasized darkness, I put darkness everywhere, not only in the shots but in the story, in my scenario, in my shooting script, in the dialogue. Furthermore, I did the editing and the dialogue with Simenon. But, most of all we tried to keep the mystery.

--"Jean Renoir presente 20 de ses films," Jean Renoir. Entretiens et Propos. Paris, Les Cahiers du cinema, 1979.