



The Sleeping Car Murders

Sébastien Japrisot

Francis Price, Translator

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In Sébastien Japrisot's taut mystery novel *The Sleeping Car Murders*, a woman's corpse is found on a train that just arrived in Paris. The train originated in Marseilles, and the woman appears to have been strangled in the sleeping car. A police photographer and detectives are summoned to investigate the murder.

The attractive victim, Georgette Thomas, had a fondness for men and monogrammed possessions. Her fellow passengers offer varied degrees of information, and the detectives try to determine a motive for the crime. As the narrative perspective shifts, each passenger's secrets, fears, and compulsions are revealed. Then other travelers also begin to die, stalked by a murderer who's able to enter and leave without notice.

Set in the early 1960s, *The Sleeping Car Murders* evokes a stylish tension and intrigue. Beyond its polish, however, is a focused penetration of each character's thoughts. There is the insecure, vulnerable actress, Éliane Darrès; and René Cabourg, a lonely bachelor. Overburdened detective Pierre "Grazzi" Grazziano tries to balance family obligations with his demanding job. Bambi and Daniel are teenage lovers who meet on the train, then run away in desperation, afraid of becoming the killer's next victims.

Grazzi and his colleagues work together with both camaraderie and irritation. Their dogged efforts are often affected by their personal lives, and by the pressure to make an immediate arrest. Rotrou, the ballistics expert, has spent decades "studying bits of lead." Detective Pardi is Corsican, which gives him access to a special network of informants. And when another body is found and the investigation reaches a literal dead end, Grazzi feels his face harden into a "foolish, almost tearful grimace."

Amid a bustling backdrop of Parisian streets, cafes, and brasseries, *The Sleeping Car Murders* is a kaleidoscopic, captivating narrative that intensifies its pursuit of a calculated killer.

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