

# Escape Artist

by

*M.J. Scheck*

*English 3*

*To Chuck and Lee*

It was a small place, and smelled of onions thinly veiled by cigarette smoke. Olivia Bernard sat in a corner booth, toying with a half-empty glass of Mateus rosé. Bottled contentment lit her normally sallow face and she gazed about the room randomly, noting the clusters of mushroom-shaped tables, the oak floor. Margorie should be here soon, Olivia thought. She shook her head lightly, thinking what a truly batty lady her sister Margorie was. It was so convenient to tune her out so easily, but not totally unkind either. Margorie's conversation was self-indulgent babble, and she acknowledged this. Olivia shrugged and shook her head again.

Outside, rain touched the corner window lightly. Olivia Bernard sighed and watched the rain stream across the window pane. Rain, she thought, was so incredibly romantic. Rain . . .

. . . Rain fell softly. Olivia Bernard was walking down a meadow road, feeling the stinging pleasure of the light shower on her cheek. Her dark hair was slick against her collar and she felt tiny droplets trickle down her neck. Olivia heard horsepower nearing and she turned as a car slowed up. The window rolled down.

"Are you going my way?" The man's voice was deep and pleasant. Olivia Bernard wiped the rain from her face and ran a hand through her hair . . .

"Yes," Olivia Bernard said.

"Yes what?"

Olivia glanced up and smiled. "Oh, hello, Margorie. How lovely to see you."

"You were miles away."

"Was I?"

"Yes."

"I was only thinking."

Margorie sniffed the air attentively. "It smells good in here. Are you hungry?"

"Not really," Olivia replied. "You go ahead and order."

Margorie caught the waitress's attention as she sat down, and she ordered. The jukebox had been fed and the strains of a Frank Sinatra oldie rose through the smoke. Olivia shivered. *Strangers in the Night* always touched her. Margorie looked pleased at the prospect of food. She chattered aimlessly.

"Harry bought a new car yesterday. He had been deciding between a Cutlass, Pinto, and Jaguar. Quite a combination, isn't it? If you were to ask me, I'd say that a Jaguar is the trickiest. Don't you think so, Olivia?"

. . . The Jaguar sliced through the rain and Olivia Bernard began to feel warmer. She glanced at the man's profile leisurely. His skin shone with a dark male energy that she found attractive. He caught her look and smiled and asked Olivia if she would like a cigarette . . .

"But of course," Olivia Bernard said.

"My sentiments exactly, Olivia dear. Harry did buy the Jaguar, but he won't let me drive it yet. Thinks it would be an inhumane act on my part. As if *I* would damage his baby. Ah, well. Harry named it Felicity, which is quite clever of him, really. He and his literal joyride! Harry always did have an unusual way with names, though. It's a good thing he let me name the children, don't you think?"

. . . "What's your name?"

"Olivia."

"How lovely."

"And yours?"

"Nicholas, but my friends call me Nick."

They laughed. Nick slowed the Jaguar as they neared the lights of the city.

"Where," Nick said . . .

"It is up to you," Olivia Bernard said.

"You're damned right." Margorie tapped her cheek lightly. "Oops! Sorry for the blasphemy, sweetie. I wonder what is taking that waitress so long. You know, I didn't realize that this little cafe was so close to such impressive dwelling places. It must be really different living so high above everybody else. I don't think I could handle it. Could you, Olivia?"

. . . The Jaguar came to a halt. Nick got out and went around to the other side to help Olivia out. He took her hand and continued to hold it as they entered the building. An elevator slid open and Nick and Olivia Bernard entered it. Nick pushed button ten.

"Penthouse?" Olivia asked.

Nick smiled. "One of the pleasantries of enterprise. You do not mind, do you, Olivia . . ."

"No, not at all," Olivia Bernard replied.

"*C'est la vie*, sweetie. Hey, could you believe that Jack Benny died? I was so shocked. The humor that that man created! George Burns will not be the same. *The Horn Blows at Midnight* was my favorite film of his. But then, *Charley's Aunt* was good too. Do you remember those films, Olivia?"

. . . Nick and Olivia Bernard got out of the elevator and walked down a thick, blue-carpeted hallway. Nick opened a mahogany door silently and they entered. He pushed a knob and a soft light lit the room. He placed their coats on a leather chair.

"Could I get you a drink?" Nick said . . .

"Yes," Olivia Bernard said.

"They don't make movies like those anymore," Margorie said sadly. "Ah, well. Harry and I watch the oldies on the late late show and derive much pleasure from them. Oh, there is that waitress."

A slender girl placed down a roast beef sandwich and a glass of red wine. Margorie thanked her briefly.

"I am just starved," Margorie said. She took an enormous bite out of the sandwich and munched contentedly. "Maybe I

should order a side of deep-fried mushrooms. Doesn't that sound good? I really should watch my weight, though." Margorie sipped the wine and made a face. "I've been meaning to start my new diet. Would you go on one with me, Olivia?"

. . . Nick poured Rhine wine into two glasses. He walked over to the couch where Olivia Bernard was sitting and placed a glass into her hand.

"What shall we toast to?" Olivia Bernard asked.

"Intimacy," Nick said. Their glasses clinked and they both drank slowly. Nick sat next to Olivia, reached over, and placed her glass on the wood table next to his. He leaned over and kissed Olivia on the mouth . . .

"I could change into something more comfortable," Olivia Bernard said.

"I must confess that changing into something more comfortable as a result of dieting hadn't occurred to me," Margorie said. "That is awfully companionable of you, sweetie. I'd like to get back to my naturally healthy self—nice and slinky—you know. When shall we start?"

. . . "I'd like to see you natural," Nick said. His hand moved to the pale buttons of her beige dress and slowly undid them. Olivia Bernard closed her eyes.

"I hope I can fulfill your toast," Olivia said.

"I have faith in my capability," Nick said. "But yours . . ." He faltered, teasingly.

"I'll prove mine," Olivia said.

"Oh, yes?" Nick asked . . .

"Oh yes, now," Olivia Bernard said.

"Really now, Olivia, not in the middle of lunch!" Margorie exclaimed. "Monday will be soon enough. Everything was so delicious here today. I really must try these tucked-away places more often. Mother told me that you two went to The Ballister last week. Was it any good?"

. . . "How was it for you, Olivia?" Nick said. Olivia stirred in his arms and ran a thin hand through the dark mat of hair on his chest . . .

"It was excellent," Olivia Bernard said.

"I will have to go there with Mother sometime. Well, dear, I really must be going." Margorie reached under the table for her bag and then straightened up. "It is so kind of you to listen to me. Harry says I'm cute, but mouthy, which isn't necessarily kind, but somewhat true."

Margorie reached across the table and clasped Olivia's hand. "Bless you, really, Olivia." Olivia squeezed Margorie's hand back and winked. Margorie smiled and left.

Olivia collected the tab and went up to the cashier and handed her a crisp bill. She pocketed the change and went outside. The sky was slightly misty, and Olivia shivered. She hailed a taxi and waited patiently for the Yellow Cab to reach her.

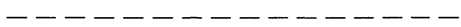
"Where to, Sister?"

"2900 Hoover," Olivia Bernard replied.

"Now that is a lovely church, Sister. Yes indeed. Watch those black robes of yours when you get in the cab, now," the man said.

"Yes. Thank you, sir."

Olivia shut the door carefully and the taxi nosed its way through the traffic. She leaned back on the frayed upholstery and gazed serenely out the window.



## Orgasm I

by

*Mike Wirkus*

*Social Work 4*

A kindled flame  
adds strength  
to its length  
at each gentle stroke.  
Am I to blame  
the piston broke?