

POT

POURRI

N^o # 42

introducing

INSPECTOR

CONNERY

A BIT OF AN ERROR.

The cup had a chip knocked out of the rim, just where the lips should be. Not only that, but the tea was lukewarm. It was nice that everything was normal. If the sloppy light brown liquid in the cup had tasted like tea, or if the cup had been clean and wholesome, then Inspector Connery would have been worried, because the slightest divergence from normality had that effect on him.

Then of course, normality again, there was a drizzle starting outside, and his window rapidly assumed a symmetric pattern of oval dashes all pointing downwards at an angle of 45 degrees. It was also slightly foggy and some of the red corporation 'buses had switched on yellow spot-lights.

He could see a pigeon on the outside of his window-cill, cowering from the elements. And those pigeons were hardy.....

He turned to the pile of files on the scratched desk top in front of him.

Connery dealt with files. It was acknowledged throughout the force that not only did he know the law, but he also had the ability to get to the kernel of a particular subject by a brief resume of the papers concerned. At least, people who didn't know thought it was a 'brief resume', and all that usually implies. Connery could also pen a very disconcerting minute on a file, especially when he was playing 'ping pong' with the file, and a senior officer was serving.

He had always been an 'outdoor' policeman until a couple of years previously, when he'd been involved in a semi riot at a football match, and succeeded in getting trampled on for his pains. The left leg, when it finally healed, was a couple of inches shorter than the right. Actually, he was lucky he hadn't been discharged as medically unfit, but after all, someone had to write on files, and he'd always been good at it....

The top file concerned a shop-breaking at Messrs. Grymble; Antique Dealers, Broad Street. Stock to the value of £17,000 was missing. A Form 23/3 was clipped to the front of the file. This was bad. It meant that the crime hadn't been cleared, and it was the third time a negative report had been submitted. All serious crimes had Forms 23/1, 2, 3 or 4 submitted weekly if they hadn't been cleared. It was a pink form. Connery sniffed. He'd been seeing quite a lot of pink forms lately. And they'd all been concerned with shop and store-breakings in and around the city centre.

He picked up the black telephone, asked for Registry, told them to send him all the recent files concerning unsolved crimes where a large amount of stock was stolen. He guessed there were nine altogether.

Eight files reached his desk in less than five minutes.

The first thing he did was to limp over to a large-scale wall map of the city centre, and stick in red pins where the nine outrages had occurred. It didn't assist him, merely confirming what he'd known before, that they were all in an area of about half a square mile.

Connery read ever single word of the nine files. All the jobs were done in an identical manner, a brace and a $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch bit being used to bore through the panels at the back or side doors - no fingerprints, extensive signs of woollen gloves everywhere - no tyre marks of the vehicle or vehicles obviously used - the value of goods and cash stolen between six thousand pounds (G.C.Stewart, Travel Agents, 29, St. John's Street) and twenty-one thousand pounds (F.Mason, 103A Gt.Albort Street.)

They wore (and the nine pink-fronted files bore mute testimony to this) as near perfect crimes as you could get. Seven of the shops had various anti-burglar devices which should have alerted the police at the nearest station, but didn't. Connery knew why. The master criminal had spotted the one secret flaw in the radar-beam (magic eye) burglar alarm system. If you dialled the number of the firm about to be robbed, and let the receiver dangle, whilst the 'phone was ringing in the attacked premises (and once inside you took it off the hook and let it dangle too) the automatic out-going call (when the radar beam was broken) could not go out.

The newspapers, the insurance companies, but most of all the Chief Constable wanted to know when the culprits were going to be apprehended and the property recovered. It wasn't Connery's problem. It was his job to send out a snotty letter to the detectives concerned asking just that, why were there no arrests ? But it was pointless, really, because, like the chipped cup, it would keep coming back again.

Attached to each bulky file was a set of photographs of the scene, and Connery also scanned those. You could have taken one set and attached them to another file and no one would have noticed the difference - just interior shots of the premises, with sexy close-ups of the brace and bit holes, mostly bored in a square so that the holes were just touching. A deft flick of a boot would have knocked the square hole out for the criminals to clamber in.

and then Connery noticed something. It might have been imagination, but he thought that before he saw the clue, a shiver had run up and down his spine. In other words, he'd experienced that cliché-ridden expression (in fiction, anyway) that 'something was wrong'.

It was a close-up of the hole in a heavy wooden door. (P.T.Smyth, Auctioneer, 10, Ambassador Way). The edges of the bit holes gave the hole edge a serrated appearance, and in one place it appeared that the bit had been put in reverse before it had completely traversed the inch-thick wood - maybe it had scraped into a screw, or a solid knot-hole. In itself, this was nothing, but the typewritten caption under the particular photograph stated it was an 'INTERIOR VIEW OF BACK DOOR OF PREMISES'. This was obviously a mistake, because it meant that the brace and bit had been used from inside the premises.

Connery picked up the telephone again, asked for the Photography Department, asked to speak to Sergeant Johnston. He asked Johnston to come up and see him immediately.

Johnston blanched visibly as the Inspector turned the photograph towards him. An untidy strip of collotape affixed a strip of paper across the title of the photograph.

"You took this shot at Smyth's, Ambassador's Way, remember, Johnston."

"Er, yes, sir."

"D'you recall taking it?"

"Not exactly, sir - I've done dozens of photography jobs since then."

"Understandably so, Sergeant. Presumably when on a job you scribble down the essential details in a notebook - immediately?"

"Yes sir."

"Well, pop back to your office, look up your little book, and ring me back. I want to know from what vantage point this photograph was taken from."

"Right, sir."

Johnston telephoned through fifteen minutes later. Connery thought this was too long, suggesting maybe Johnston had scribbled in some data in the meantime. In police jargon it was known as keeping one's self 'right'.

"It was an interior view of the back door, sir, showing how the brace and bit holes had been cut in the panels to make the hole through which the criminal's gained entrance."

"Thank you, Sergeant."

This was most significant. If the photographer was correct, the brace and bit was used from inside the premises to give the investigating police the impression that entry had been made from outside. Therefore a key had been used - an 'inside' job. Quickly, Connery examined the other sets of photographs. Only one other photograph (F.W. WOOLWORTHS, Union St) was there a suggestion of a back-peddling bit mark, in fact it was only a half circle, as if a slight turn had been made, and then the bit put in another place. It could have been the outline of a scratch, or a knot hole. But Connery was left with what his fleeting imagination and optimism he considered a concrete fact. The nine jobs had all been done with keys. But not the accepted type of 'inside' job, in which a member or members of the staff had been implicated. In big robberys this was often an ingredient, but it couldn't happen in nine jobs and not get caught on....could it? So where did this criminal organisation get the keys from?

Every high-ranking police officer has a favourite amongst the rank and file - a constable whom he thinks has all the necessary drive and initiative to be promoted, but who has been ruthlessly weeded out during promotion examinations and interviews. Usually it is merely a matter of time before a situation arises where the protégé can be slipped into an advantageous position which will reveal to all that the man should have been noticed long ago as possessing outstanding abilities.

Inspector Connery had such a man in mind - Police Constable Ronald Jameson - and he thought this was the time when Jameson could be given his chance. He had a word with Jameson's inspector in 'F' Division, and next day, Jameson, in plain clothes, presented himself before Connery. It would be fair to say that Jameson was unaware that Connery was working for him behind the scenes.

Connery told the constable to sit down.

"Jameson," he said. He began to speak slowly, so that the full import of his statement could sink home. "Jameson, what I am about to tell you is confidential - a secret between us two, in fact. It concerns the nine serious breakings in the city centre, you know about them, of course."

Jameson nodded. He didn't look what you could call bright. Also he

possessed an uncanny physical feature. He looked as though he was cross-eyed, but he actually wasn't. Connery sighed. He supposed what really started Jameson off on the wrong foot was the time he was in the traffic section. He was driving a camouflage van, a souped-up police vehicle, with SMITH'S VEGETABLES painted on both sides. His assignment was to keep observation and try and capture a youth who had an obsession to take and drive away anything on four wheels. Jameson nipped into a shop for a packet of cigarettes, and when he returned he found his van was missing, illicitly driven away, as it transpired, by the orring youth. That's when Connery first became aware of Jameson. Later, Jameson was transferred to the Dog section, and created a precedent not only in the city force, but, so far as is known, in the whole of the British Isles. He left on patrol one night with a large Alsatian dog strapped to his right wrist, and returned without it. Connery wrote him out of that caper with consummate skill.

Connery looked at Jameson and hoped he wasn't making a mistake.

"Well, insofar as the Detective Staff are concerned, they haven't made any progress. This, unfortunately, is understandable, because the robbers haven't left any clues. However, in order to discover if anything could be found out by collating the nine files, I've spent some time reading through them."

He looked up at Jameson, and the constable blinked his eyes, and seemed to strain his mental reserves in order to give the impression he was way ahead of the inspector.

"I have wondered," announced Connery, "why these nine premises in particular have been attacked. There are other shops and stores with more potential loot, with easier situations from the point of view of making speedy and efficient get-aways. So I have concluded that there is an affinity between the nine premises - there is a common denominator - your job, to find out what it is?"

Connery sat back, to see what Jameson thought of the plum he'd presented him with.

"Excuse me, sir," said Jameson, "but what does affinity mean?"

Connery smiled, his lips somewhat stiff.

"To put it another way, I'm looking for one factor which exists in all the attacked premises - for example, maybe all the manager's were born in Scunthorpe - possibly all the lavatory seats are painted blue - understand?"

Jameson didn't say anything, but his furrowed brows met in the middle above his nose, accentuating even more a distinct cross-eyed appearance.

"Right, sir," he offered, as if nothing in the world was right.

"Visit all the premises, Jameson," said Connery, giving the man a final verbal boost to see him through, "and call and make your report in - er- one week's time...if another place is attacked, come and see me immediately."

Jameson raised a finger to the metaphorical forelock. As he left the room, Connery distinctly heard him utter something about 'blue lavatory seats.'

The week passed quickly. Most of the time Connery was so absorbed with his work, pouring endlessly over files and keeping them moving with a sentence of approval here and several long paragraphs of criticism there,

that he forgot about Jameson. Then his door was knocked heavily, and when he'd said "Come in" three times, the loudest last, Jameson shuffled in. Connery didn't like the bewildered look on his face.

"Well, how did you get on?" smiled Connery, hoping to put Jameson at his ease, and to let him know that the inspector was all for him.

"Very little, sir," said Jameson glumly. "Seven of the toilet seats are painted a light oak varnish, the other two were white."

Connery froze, and the pen in his right hand almost squeezed itself out of his grip like a wet bar of soap. The man, deferential to officer rank, would never dare to make a joke like that, he really had checked on the toilet seats.

"Hard luck," growled Connery, "it was only a long shot, anyway. But continue."

Jameson opened a grubby notebook, and, consulting it frequently, spoke for several minutes. Connery had to admit that, in a stolid way, the man had shown imagination and thoroughness - he'd permed practically every possibility under the sun, and there was just no common denominator, or, as Jameson put it, numerator. Just as he was about to thank Jameson for his hard work, Jameson added, "Of course, sir, it wasn't easy questioning the manager's of the shops. I don't know them as well as the other shop owners."

"Why, man, why?" panted Connery.

"Because the places attacked are all new shops, sir, most of them have only been open for a few months."

Connery closed his eyes. At heart he'd begun to realise that Jameson was a lost cause, and even with his, Connery's backing, the man would never make it. And yet, face facts, Jameson had come through with the vital data, albeit it was only a passing remark. Jameson didn't know he'd done it, but he had - and at the same time these thoughts were running through Connery's mind, they were arrested by another thought - a jolting thought - if only Jameson had come up with it.

Connery chatted with Jameson for an hour - prompting - telling the man that the photographs proved they were unusual jobs, and gosh, all the places done were under new management - but Jameson couldn't mentally connect the two. Connery wanted him to, desperately. True enough it would be of considerable credit for Connery, an 'office-wallah', to solve the crimes, but there would be bad feeling engendered, they would say he should have told the detectives all he knew - it was their job. But Connery could see a new opening for his particular talent, sitting in an office, dealing with files. He saw himself as a sort of 'last-resort' figure - when a crime appeared to be impossible to solve, they would send all the data to him for a final scrutiny. For example, if he could solve the robbery cases, and give Jameson a lot of the credit, he could talk his way out of malicious gossip afterwards - "hell, it seemed far-fetched, and so I put Jameson on it, in case - I didn't want to be a laughing stock, Jameson could afford to be."

Carefully, Connery chose his words - a thing he always seemed to have to do when talking to Jameson.

"Surely the facts at our disposal must take us a step further. Thanks to your shrewd observations, we know they are all under new management - and we have reasoned that the bit holes were made from the inside to make us assume the entrance was made from outside."

"They must have used keys" stammered Jameson.

Connery tried hard to allow astonishment to crowd his face.

"I say, that's right. Now then, where did they get the keys from, copies of them? Let's take it step by step. The old managements left the shops vacant - the sale of the premises passed into the hands of Estate Agents, they usually allow clients to view the premises before sale, and..."

He waited at "and" for as long as he could, as though his powers of reasoning had been suddenly cut off, just as he was in full flow - would Jameson take over?

And then Jameson suddenly stood up, his hands pressed down on Connery's desk, fingers splayed.

"I have it, sir. Someone, posing as a potential purchaser, borrowed the keys on the pretext of looking over the premises, copied them, then handed them back. Then, months later, when the new shop is opened and is fully stocked, they come along at night, open the front door with the key, swipe the stock, and then use the brace and bit to make the 'tecs think they entered by forcing the back door."

Connery sat back, aghast. He was really startled. He couldn't believe that Jameson was capable of such a lucid explanation, even though he'd been carefully fed.

"That's...that's right, Jameson, extremely well thought out. But remember it's still only a theory. No good letting the detectives know, until we build up a more concrete case. What do you think we should do now?"

"I'll go round and see all the Estates Agents, sir, and try and get a name or description of one or more persons who visited all the premises but didn't buy."

"Good lad," breathed Connery, exhausted with his work, but pleased that Jameson had at last reached top gear, "good lad."

"It's a small man, with spectacles, plus-fours and a Harris Tweed jacket, sir."

Jameson, flushed, excited, had rushed into Connery's office, the requisite brushing of knuckles on the door panels flowing in one movement into a rapid opening of the door, culminating into a literal sprint across the austere carpet to his side of the desk.

"Yes, yes," panted Connery, caught in the spirit of the moment, "what's his name?"

"That's the rub, sir. He's used the names" - a quick reference to the eternal constabulary notebook - "Timothy St. John Drake; Arthur Cadbury Carruthers; Dalby Hickson Junior, and others. But it's the same man - I've a few more details...about 45 years old, Harrow tie, suede shoes, educated accent."

Connery pondered. He had never encountered the present Modus Operandi before, and although it was so simple, he doubted it had ever been used before. To approach the M.O. Branch, therefore, would in all probability, prove unfruitful, but it would alert their questing minds, and in half an hour the entire detective staff would have the data to work on. A 'name' search of the aliases in the Criminal Record Office index probably wouldn't assist either, but it could at least be done without arousing suspicions.

"Good work indeed, Jameson, but still, I consider, insufficient to inform the detectives. It would be wise to get the C.R.O. to check those aliases, but, um, don't go near M.O. another thing - this should prove interesting, and you've probably entertained a similar notion

yourself, but compile three lists (A) the dates our unknown man visited the agents to borrow the keys; (B) the dates the new ownerships of the premises were taken over, and (C) the dates the breaking outrages were committed. Then evaluate the lists, and see if you can come up with something."

"A very good idea, sir - I'll do that right away."

Jameson, Connery decided, was very keen - he liked to see that in a policeman....

Of course, there were varying degrees of keenness - Connery considered himself (and he wouldn't agree it was snobbery) a degree above the ordinary-duty police inspector, and he hated telephone calls or patrol cars calling at his house after he'd finished in the office at 5.p.m. There was nothing he could do outside ordinary working hours. C.R.O, M.O, Photography and Fingerprint Departments were all on a 24-hour call-out schedule, but he was beyond all that. He satisfied a particular need in police circles, an energetic and clever administrator, who could get every metaphorical ounce out of a file, and should things get nasty, always be guaranteed to top everything with a deadly missive, ending ominously 'to be noted for future compliance.'

That's why he felt irritated one Tuesday evening at 9.37 pm - his wife told him the police were on the 'phone - he was totally emersed in his mental absorption of Bruckner's 3rd symphony on the Third Programme.

"Yes," he said aggressively, "Connery here - what is it?"

"I'm very sorry to bother you, sir, this is Jameson here."

"Yes, Jameson," he said, rather sharply - he was intruiged, it must be admitted, but never show it, that was the technique.

"I've been working on those lists you told me to compile, sir, and to come to the point, BRODERICK'S FASHIONS, at the corner of Regent Street and Commercial Row, is due to be done anytime now."

"Better get a car from Control to bring you round to see me now, Jameson," ordered Connery, "number 127, Hawthorne Drive."

He put the 'phone down. That was the one big lesson in police-work. When a climax came, it was when you least expected it....

They sat in the front room, the 'parlour' as it was known in Hawthorne Drive. Mrs. Connery brought in tea and fruit cake, and left discreetly as they talked 'shop'.

"You see, sir, when I talked to some of the Estates Agents, I discovered that a man who appears to be our man took the key to view BRODERICK'S FASHIONS, or the vacant OAKAY STORES as it was known then. As you see from the list you suggested I prepare, the average time-lag between viewing and robbery is 14 weeks, and it was exactly 14 weeks ago that BRODERICK'S was 'viewed'!"

Connery was thoughtful, and this gave Jameson the opportunity to study the decor and furnishings of his superior's house, to see how it compared with his own semi-detached Corporation house.

"We'll tell them now, Jameson, and I'd like you to listen to what I have to say."

Connery dialled a number and asked to speak to Detective Superintendent Adkins. Not in his office. Only to be expected, although Adkins always said he was chained to his office desk. He asked for Adkin's home number, got it, dialled it, got Adkins in a mozent - presumably, from the

gruff manner of identification, an inopportune moment.

"This is Inspector Connery, Headquarters here."

"My God, if it's about my car being polished - "

The local press, fed by an unknown but obviously disgruntled policeman, had published a paragraph about a high-ranking police official getting his car cleaned and serviced in the police workshops by police mechanics during police time. Pleased by the response of self-described 'down-trodden taxpayers', the official had been named the following night. A file had been started, and Adkins knew it was Connery who had elaborated the eight questions 'which must be answered....'

"No, sir. I've some red-hot information about the big robbery cases."

"About time you rang. I've heard all about your seconded man sneaking around."

"Oh," said Connery, and paused. "I presumed that the vital information I was about to give you should be done verbally. However, although the matter is pressing, and I have a very strong line on the next place to be attacked, if you would prefer it, I will forward the information to you through the Chief Constable, and you will then...."

"For chrissake come of it, Connery," snarled the detective, "if you've anything, give it me now."

Connery smiled, and in his moment of triumph, winked at Jameson.

"This is the situation, Super. Some days ago I scrutinised all the files of your outstanding jobs, and from the vaguest of clues I got Jameson temporarily transferred to me to investigate. I couldn't let you know before, because, frankly, it was guesswork. However, using his own methods, Jameson has now concluded that BRODERICK'S FASHIONS is due to be done now."

"Jameson has concluded -" began the Superintendent. He sounded distinctly disappointed.

"Super," said Connery firmly, and he could afford to be firm, after all, he was a Headquarters man, "BRODERICK'S FASHIONS could be in the process of being ransacked right now. It would be most embarrassing for me if the place is done and you've neglected to prepare for it. Oh, and er, when you make the capture, mention Jameson, will you?"

He put the 'phone down, and wiped his clammy hand across the front of his cardigan.

"You did exactly right to call me when you did," said Connery, forcing himself to admit it, as he showed Jameson to the front door, "now one further thing for tomorrow. I want an Identikit picture of the man who approached the agent for the keys."

Detective Constable Samuels lay fast asleep behind a long display counter. The first night he'd spent in BRODERICK'S FASHIONS had shown his keenness to the full. He'd prowled around all night with his right forefinger on the torch button and the mouthpiece of his whistle almost caressing his lips. Now it was his seventh night. He'd never studied yogi, but he'd made a marvellous discovery, concerning physical well-being, which he thought came in that province. This is what you did. You lay down on a hard surface where ordinarily you couldn't rest without a form of pillow. You slightly clenched your right fist and bent it backwards and rested your head on it. Then you draped one leg over the other, and let the upper ankle hang. There was no 'pins and needles' effect, it was really comfortable, and you could sleep for hours...

Samuels didn't hear the door open quietly, seduced as it was by an oiled latch-key. The first thing he was aware of, as if in a dream, was stealthy noises of footsteps, followed quickly by a slight cough, a muttered curse, the whole illuminated dimly by a pencil-thin probing light. He broke out in a cold sweat, and discovered the arm he was resting on had developed the blasted cramp after all. He sneaked a look at his luminous watch, saw it was 12.15 am. His fingers groped round for his torch, found it...he stuffed the cold end in his mouth (it had an acidic taste) and crawled on his hands and knees behind the counter towards the front of the shop. Upstairs, on the floor above, he could hear the muffled noise of a heavy object being dragged along the floor.

"Christ," thought Samuels, " has Carlisle woke up ?"

Detective Constable Carlisle had 'kipped down' (those were his own words) in the back of the shop under a table, with a woollen jumper for a pillow.

His sleep was particularly deep, and yet a sixth sense had alerted him to the questing beam of light shining from the doorway. It flickered over him, but didn't stop. The only reason Carlisle kept still and silent was because he thought it was the Duty Sergeant looking for him. The man who flashed the torch, Robert Charles Stanton (three previous convictions for shop-breaking) ignored what he thought was a bundle of rags under the table. The suggestion that it could be a detective was farthest from his mind. His job was to 'get cracking' with the brace and bit. He placed the tool on the tiles before him, flexed his fingers before commencing his woodwork chore.

Carlisle lay still under the table, waiting to see what Samuels did.....

Samuels reached the front door, felt for the keyhole and unlocked the door. He guessed it would be locked. They had to lock it, in case a mundane police constable on the beat tried to open the door - his nightly task being to open all the doors he could find.

"Police" yelled Samuels, "the place is surrounded." He heard sounds of a scuffle from the room Carlisle was in. Things moved quickly. The Corporation Electrical Utility van (or so it said on the side) outside the premises was hemmed in by a van which had been parked a hundred yards down the road, and which bore the legend DE WITT GENERAL CONTRACTORS on both sides. It was full of policemen.

Samuels saw a huge Alsatian dog pawing at the door, and a strong-looking uniformed policeman was trying to hold it back.

Samuels winced. He'd been savaged by police dogs before ...they weren't what you'd call selective....

"I just wanted to tell you, Jameson," purred Connery in his office a couple of days later, " that the gang we caught the other night have cleared all the outstanding jobs. They're tied up in various ways, the bit for instance, is the same one used in all the jobs, the Forensic boys can prove that. The Detective Superintendent informed the Chief Constable of your assistance when reporting to him. None of the men captured resemble the unknown man who visited all the premises and copied the keys, but I've sent Mr. Adkins your Identikit photograph, and I expect some of the Yard lads will identify him. I shall return you to your Division now, but I wanted to thank you for your outstanding assistance

and to assure you that I shall ask for you again if the occasion arises."

Jameson, looking suitably humble, thanked the Inspector, saying it was a pleasure to work for him.

Connery sat back when he'd gone, looking out of the window at the dark storm clouds overhead. There seemed to be more starlings about than usual. He sighed, meditatively, then pulled the Parker pen out of his breast pocket. He reached for the top file.....

John Berry
1965

This is the first of a planned series of INSPECTOR CONNERY stories, three of which are already written. I've made them as factual as possible, and I do promise that all the crimes around which the stories are written have actually happened. This is important to remember, because although this story is fairly mundane, the other plots appear to be unbelievable. Of course, the future stories depend for publication upon how this one is accepted, which is a subtle hint...you know what to do....

And this IS Pot Pourri # 42, printed and published by John Berry, number 31, Campbell Park Avenue, Belmont, BELFAST 4, Northern Ireland in November 1965. It is due to be issued through SAPS mailing number 74, dated 15th January 1966.
