

A DANIEL JACQUOT NOVEL

MARTIN O'BRIEN THE DYING MINUTES

Some people take their secrets
to the grave. Some don't.

'Tight plotting,
excellent
characterisation.
Jacquot is
here to stay'
Daily Mail

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Copyright

About the Book

A gold bullion robbery takes place on the outskirts of Marseilles in 1978. No one is ever arrested for the crime, nor is the gold ever found.

But twenty years later, two men receive an unexpected gift. Chief Inspector Daniel Jacquot's is from an old fisherman who recently passed away. And lawyer Claude Dupont's is from a gangland boss on his prison deathbed.

Why?

The clues will lead Jacquot and Dupont into a bitter war against two of the most feared criminal families on the Cote d'Azur and a race against time to find the lost bullion.

But after twenty years, is the gold still there?

And if it is, who will get to it first?

About the Author

Martin O'Brien was educated at the Oratory School and Hertford College, Oxford. He was travel editor of *British Vogue* in the 1970s and has written for a number of international publications. After more than thirty years on the road Marseilles remains one of his favourite destinations.

Also by Martin O'Brien

Jacquot and the Waterman

Jacquot and the Angel

Jacquot and the Master

Jacquot and the Fifteen

Confession

Blood Counts

Writing as Jack Drummond

Avalanche

Storm

MARTIN O'BRIEN

The Dying Minutes

A Daniel Jacquot Novel



preface
publishing

For Olly and Chris,
Jaimie and Jacqueline,
and for all the fine times
around *la table noire*

November, 1972

Madrague de Montredon

SHE WAS STRONG and she was fit and she was young.

And very determined.

Matched the two men she worked with, the older and the younger, load for load, back and forth, from truck to vessel.

The night was black as pitch. Somewhere in that dead, silent space between three and four in the morning. There was no moon, so no real form or shape to the blackness, just a few distant lights across the harbour, glimmering over the water. Even the stars had gone, put out by a band of low storm clouds that had moved in the evening before, filling the air with a salty crackle of electricity. She may have been sweating but she could feel the hairs on the back of her neck prickle with fear and excitement.

None of them checked the time but it had to be three hours since the take. And they were nearly done. Better than expected. Ahead of schedule. Maybe thirty bars still stacked on that pallet. Three bars at a time. Ten more trips between the three of them. They'd brought the truck as close to the boat as they could but it was still thirty metres between pallet and mooring.

Slotting the bars into the sailcloth waistcoats she'd made for them, panting past each other, back and forth, coming and going.

No shadows, just that inky blackness, the repeated shuffle of their feet, and the hungry suck and slap of water on stone. All that, and the heavy clunk and clink of the bars as they set them down in a double line from for'ard cabin to aft deck, spreading the weight.

A ton of gold.

A little over nine hundred kilos.

Seventy-five bars.

If their arms and shoulders didn't cramp from the loads, or their legs buckle as they scuttled back and forth across the quay, they'd be away. Another thirty minutes and they'd be free and clear.

And very, very rich.

Everything had gone so well, so smoothly. Just as they'd planned. Up in that chill midnight air on the Col de la Gineste, and down here in the port of Madrague. While she and her older companion had prepped the boat, their man on the inside had hidden out with the others, up among the rocks on the high pass road between Marseilles and Cassis, city lights spread out beneath them like gems twinkling on a cloth of black velvet.

They'd crouched there from ten until midnight, twenty in the gang, either side of the road, waiting for the convoy in that whispering darkness, finally spotting the headlights winding up towards them, hearing the engines rumble and strain on that last juddering bend before they brought the makeshift barriers crashing down. Ahead of the convoy and behind it. No way on and no way back, the three trucks brought to a standstill, brakes wheezing on the slope.

In short order they'd dealt with the four outriders, then cracked the three trucks. A cake of C4 taped to each windscreen, primers set, had seen to that. Security crews scrambling out, their own crews clambering in. The C4 bars removed.

Six minutes after springing the trap, the higher barrier was pushed aside and they were out of there, one after the

other, a seamless operation, up over the ridge and down into the city. Three security trucks, in a tidy line, nose to tail along the tree-lined straight of boulevard Michelet, only splitting up when they reached the higher Prado roundabout: the first truck straight on, through the green lights, direct to the city centre; the second truck taking the first exit off the roundabout, up along boulevard Rabatau to the A50 cross-town; and their man, driving the third truck, taking the last exit, south, as planned, towards the beach. Three different routes through the city to minimise any hold-ups, to lessen the odds, each truck heading for the same rendezvous in the unlit railyards behind the docks of La Joliette.

Except their man had taken a left, not a right, at the statue of David on Prado Beach, had somehow got rid of his four companions - neither she nor the older man had asked how he planned to do it, just knew that he would - and made it alone to Madrague, switching off his headlights as he coasted down rue Tibido, turned in to the quay, reversed and braked. Engine killed, doors swung open.

And now it was nearly done, just the last bars to shift, the older man staying on the boat, just her and the young one jogging back to the truck, breathing hard from the effort, waistcoat pockets empty, arms loose and aching at their sides, legs almost weightless from the work-out.

It was then that a single gunshot rang out across the quay, the sharp cracking sound of it clattering and battering its way around the houses on the far side of the harbour, followed by a second and a third shot, brief muzzle flashes from the corner of rue des Arapèdes.

And her companion, running beside her, suddenly grunted and pitched sideways, the breath punched from his body when he hit the stone quay.

She knew when she touched him that he was dead. One of those three shots a lucky one to the side of the head that left the back of his skull mushy, warm and splintered.

*She couldn't believe it. Wouldn't believe it.
Not now. Not him.*

Behind her, from the boat, she heard the older man call out. A desperate, whispered scream, 'Vite, vite,' not knowing what had happened to them, out there in the darkness, with guns firing.

Then she heard the engines turn, chortle, splutter and catch, and she knew she had to run, knew she had to leave him, and prayed she'd make the twenty metres of open ground without another lucky shot taking her down.

She pressed the young man's shoulder, slick with blood, whispered her farewell and, stripping off her cumbersome waistcoat, she turned for the quay.

This time the gunshots were closer, the bullets too, zinging past her like hot, angry hornets as she made her crouching, zig-zag dash for life and freedom.

But now the twenty metres were thirty, and lengthening.

While she'd delayed, the older man had cut the boat loose from its mooring, backed it out from the slip and turned it, low in the water now, heading for the harbour entrance, pushing the throttles forward.

'Jump!' she heard him call from the wheelhouse, his voice louder now, over the engines. 'You'll have to jump.'

And as the bullets whined past her, she ran with what little strength she had left in her legs, reached the end of the quay and flung herself from it, flew through the air, arms and legs wheeling, into the darkness.

Part One

1

August, 1999

Madrague de Montredon

SOMETIMES IT BEGINS with a death.

Not a murder, just a natural passing.

This one had been long and slow and painless, ending in an old man's single bed. At night. In a shadowy, shifting darkness, with the distant shuffling sound of the ocean drifting through slanted wooden shutters and the sharp scent of sea salt and dried netting dampening the air he breathed. Long, slow, painless breaths, drawn in over toothless gums, sleeping breaths that softened, shortened and, in the dark hour before dawn, ceased with a final, wet, fluttering cough that might have woken a younger man.

But not this one.

Not Philo.

Philo was a fisherman, born in the spring of 1922 in a *cabanon* on a calanque slope past Sormiou. Of course, Philo was not his real name, and nor was he French despite his place of birth. His father was Greek and his mother Italian, and it was her surname that she'd given him since she couldn't remember the father's.

Whatever his real or adopted name, this old fisherman was known among friends and acquaintances as Philo, *Le Philosophe*, the scholar. Not that he was particularly clever or wise, not that he even thought he was, but because for as long as anyone could remember Philo had always had a book in his hand, something to read. He might just have

been a fisherman, supplying local restaurants with the daily makings of a *bouillabaisse*, but he was a reader too. And in the port of Madrague de Montredon where Philo moored his six-metre skiff, there weren't too many fishermen who lay back on their drying nets to read a book.

If it was the sea that had given Philo his living, it was to the sea that he was returned, like a debt repaid, nine days after his thin, cold body was found in his bed.

An hour before dawn, with stars still glittering in the night sky, at the very time he had taken that last rattling breath, a twenty-metre sloop set out from Madrague a few kilometres along the coast from Marseilles. The air was still and cold, no breeze to fill the sails, just the oily scent of diesel and the rumbling chug of the sloop's motor, a verdigrised prop churning up a steady phosphorescent wake, a lengthening lifeline leading back to land.

There were five men aboard: one at the wheel, three in the cockpit, with Philo's body stitched into a stiff sailcloth wrap, secured to the deck railing beside them, and weighted with a length of anchor chain. Four kilometres past the breakwater, heading south-west, a sharp slap of spray came off the bows, out of the darkness, stinging their faces, and the skipper ordered the jib and mainsail up. Cutting the engine, he spun the wheel to port, set a course south-east and felt the sloop heel and pull as the sails caught the breeze and they surged forward, four knots, then five, faster than the engine had driven them. But now there was no engine sound, just the splash and lash of the water, the straining tug of taut, stretched canvas and the creak of varnished timbers. Sounds each one of them knew well, fishermen all, coming to them as the steep slopes and crags of the Îles de Maire and Riou and Pénitents loomed ahead, jagged, crouching shadows set against a lightening dawn sky.

'Old Philo would have liked this,' said the man at the wheel, breathing in the sharp sea air.

'Coming home, he wouldn't,' replied the netmaker from Madrague, wiping the salt spray from his cheeks.

'He'd have stayed over at Sormiou,' said the oldest man in the party, now that Philo was gone. 'Or maybe chanced it closer to shore, other side of Jarre and Calseraigne.'

'Anyone for more coffee?' said the fourth man, making for the hatch.

'Calva, too,' the skipper called out, bracing his thighs against the wheel, legs apart, bare feet in tattered espadrilles. 'Bring the Calva this time. In the cupboard under the charts. That's what Philo would want.'

An hour after they'd set out from Madrague, warmed by the coffee and apple brandy, the skipper had the sails trimmed and brought the sloop round into a stretch of dead black water downwind of Île des Pénitents, the furthest of the islands. Up in the bow a trailing anchor was thrown out and the sloop began to turn and drift astern, the distant mainland lights of Sormiou twinkling into sight as they passed the headland seven kilometres offshore.

'He always did well here,' said the netmaker from Madrague, as they unclipped the tags that secured their old friend and shifted him closer to the railing. 'Just smelled them down there, he did.'

'Anyone want to say anything?' asked the skipper, heaving up the length of chain and cradling it in his arms.

'*À Dieu* should do it,' said the oldest man among them. 'That's all he needs now.'

'And fat nets, wherever he's going,' said the man who'd brewed the coffee and found the Calva.

'And pretty girls, too. Don't forget the pretty girls,' added the netmaker, as the three men got a grip on the sail-cloth shroud and hoisted it up to the railing.

'Philo first,' said the skipper, and he watched as his three companions heaved their friend overboard, the canvas cocoon smacking on to the water, bobbing on the

surface and starting to twist like the points of a compass, as though trying to decide which direction to take.

There was only one direction.

Leaning over the rail, the skipper let the length of chain unravel through his arms and splash down into the dark, lapping sea.

For a moment more Philo bobbed there in his sailcloth coat, and then he was gone, as though snatched by an unseen hand, taken down into the depths.

2

Three weeks later

THE LAWYER, CLAUDE DUPONT, did not hear the phone ringing. The call came through as he breakfasted on the terrace of his home off the Niolon road. He'd smeared the last of his *petit pain* with the remains of the plum jam, popped it into his mouth and was reaching for his newspaper when his wife, Francine, came out with the phone in her hand, a long lead snaking out behind her.

'*C'est pour toi,*' she said, offering the receiver with one hand, the other holding closed the front of her dressing gown. There was a tight, disapproving expression on her face. Francine Dupont did not like business calls coming through to the house, particularly at the weekend. She had made it clear often enough. Business was office, home was home - *n'importe quoi*. No matter what.

Dupont swallowed his bread and jam, wiped his fingers on his napkin and took the phone with a nod of thanks and a weak smile.

'*Oui? Allo?*' he said, curtly, so his wife would register his annoyance as she left the sunlit terrace for the villa's cooler, shadowed interior, a shared irritation at this unwanted, unexpected intrusion.

It was Jules Ranque, assistant warden at Les Baumettes prison on the other side of Marseilles. After the formalities, Ranque came straight to the point.

'He wants to see you. Today.'

There was no need for Ranque to give a name. Claude Dupont might have had more than a dozen clients currently confined in Les Baumettes but he knew exactly who wanted to see him.

Prisoner LB67-426.

Also known as *L'Hippocampe*. The Seahorse.

Real name Pierre-Louis Lombard.

Five years into a twenty-year stretch for the murder of a Marseilles hoodlum who'd had it coming. Lombard had done the State a service, but he'd still got the maximum. Sticking to his 'not guilty' plea hadn't helped either. After two failed appeals, and no parole, he'd be in his eighties by the time he got out.

Ten minutes later - apologies rendered to his wife; he'd likely be late for their lunch with the Rosseaux - Claude Dupont passed between the villa's high wooden gates, drove up the winding lane towards La Rove and turned right onto the road leading down to L'Estaque. He would follow the coast, he decided, around Marseilles' Vieux Port, along the swooping curves of the Corniche Président John F. Kennedy, and up Avenue du Prado. It would take him longer than driving cross-town, following *Toutes Directions*, but the sight of the sea on his right-hand side would calm him, distract him, give him time to prepare.

In his professional capacity as a defending advocate in the Marseilles *Judiciaire*, Dupont had spent a considerable amount of his working life in prisons. But that didn't mean he had ever grown used to them. At sixty-two years of age, after a lifetime of prison visits and as senior partner in his own law firm, Maître Dupont would normally have instructed one of his colleagues to make the trip he was making now. Pascal, the most junior, or Fabien who was eager for advancement in the firm. But Dupont knew that the summons he had received that bright and sunny Sunday morning demanded his presence, and his presence alone.

As he turned off Boulevard Michelet, passing the Mazargues war cemetery en route for Morgiou, Dupont felt a deep weariness slide over him. It was always the same. In just a few moments he would exchange the sunlight and verve and vibrancy of this ancient sea port for the daunting, deadening compound of Les Baumettes - its brooding windowless walls, its tightly coiled wreaths of razor wire, and its grim watchtowers. He'd exchange, too, the sound of birdsong and rolling surf and traffic and distant ships' horns for the jangle of keys, the echoing slam of steel doors and the dread finality of a turning lock. Even worse, the piney, salty scent of fresh air slicing through his open window would be replaced by the confined, foetid reek of sweat and food and fear that seemed to pulse through a prison like the flow of blood through veins, clinging to his clothes for hours after every visit. And if all that were not enough to ruin his day, there was that sudden, crowding proximity of evil, of lost hope, of brutal desperation, diluted out in the real world, but here distilled into a shoulder-hugging closeness.

Up ahead, through the BMW's windscreen, Claude Dupont saw the walls of Les Baumettes rise up on his left-hand side, shaded by a line of plane trees, walls and trees stretching the length of a broad dusty boulevard. There was word that renovations were due, that the sixteen hundred or more inmates might soon enjoy less cramped and savage surroundings. Dupont had heard the rumours, but he knew that any improvement in the prisoners' living conditions was still a long way off. He parked the BMW in a patch of shifting leaf shadow, listened to the tick of the engine die, then got out, locked the car and walked to the gate.

The assistant warden, Ranque, in a crumpled linen suit and tasselled loafers, was waiting for him at the entrance to the hospital wing. He was taller than Dupont, but where the lawyer was healthily tanned and scrupulously clean-

shaven, Ranque was as pale as paper, his cheeks pock-marked, and his greying moustache in need of a trim.

'He's HIV-positive,' Ranque told Dupont as they climbed the polished concrete stairs to the top-floor isolation ward. 'Rape ... Needles ... Who knows? *Enfin*, he may have had it before he came to us. Whichever, it's full-blown now. We've done as much as we can, but the doctor says he's close. Not much longer.' The assistant warden shrugged as they reached the landing, with a what-else-can-I-say wave of a hand. He pushed open the door and stood aside for Dupont to pass.

The news of Lombard's illness stunned the lawyer. When he'd been directed to the hospital wing, he'd imagined an injury - a fall, a fight, an operation maybe. Not this. He felt a chill sweep of apprehension as he stepped into the ward and Ranque let the door close behind him.

It was eighteen months since Claude Dupont had last seen Lombard, in Marseilles' Palais de Justice at the hearing for his second and final appeal. He'd been inside for three years by then and had held up well. A lifetime along the Marseilles docks would have given him all the skills he needed to survive in Les Baumettes. But now, not two years later, the man Dupont had known, the man Dupont had defended, and the man whose testimony he had believed in and whose freedom he had fought for, was dying.

There were eight beds in the room - four a side, each set between barred and pebble-glassed windows - but only one of them was occupied. It was breathtakingly hot, stifling, in that high, narrow room, and as Dupont walked towards his client in the far corner the heat closed in on him, wrapped around him. Pulling up a chair, he felt the sweat slide down his back, sucking his silk shirt against his skin. He didn't look at the man in the bed until he'd settled, but when finally he did, his breath caught and he reeled back. It was

just as well his client's eyes were closed, but the sudden scuff and creak of the chair brought them open.

There were three reasons why Pierre-Louis Lombard was called The Seahorse.

First, his place of work, his *milieu*. The city's quays - every ship, every official, every *permis*, every bundle of contraband - all in his control; nothing happened along the Marseilles waterfront, from L'Estaque to Madrague, without The Seahorse having a hand in it.

Second, there was his style of operation. He was quiet, discreet, blending into the background, hard to find, tricky to pin down. He worked alone, lived alone. No wife, no children. But when he lifted the phone, made a call, people scrambled to do his bidding - or faced the consequences.

Finally, his eyes. The third and major reason for his nickname. In his late twenties a thyroid condition had resulted in exophthalmia - and once gentle, mischievous grey eyes now bulged wildly from their sockets, seeming to swivel in opposite directions as though run by two separate motors.

Just like a seahorse - eyes everywhere.

These same eyes - or, rather, one of them - settled now on Dupont.

The lawyer managed a smile, nodded.

'Pierre-Louis. A long time.'

'It is good of you to come, Maître,' whispered Lombard, working his lips painfully, scraping a dry tongue across them. The man's skin was jaundiced, the colour of old ivory, dappled with raised black lesions that seemed to throb with malice, and his bare arms lay on the sheet like thin kindling.

Dupont's first reaction to these words was one of relief. Relief that he was able to hear them. If the voice had been any softer he would have had to draw closer to the bed. And he certainly didn't want to do that. Instead he started

to say something, he didn't really know what, just something appropriate, suitably cheering.

But Lombard slowly shook his head, as though he knew what was coming and had no time for idle talk.

'I want you to know I was guilty,' he began, without preamble. 'I want you to know that I lied to you. It *was* me who sliced up that arab *con*.' A small smile stitched itself across those peeling bluish lips.

Dupont was taken aback, shocked out of any discomfort. Despite his client's reputation he had believed every word the man had told him. Every detail, every nuance of his alibi, from the very start, in that holding cell at police headquarters on rue de l'Évêché.

Now he felt a shiver of irritation at the deceit, at being taken in and played. It wasn't the first time it had happened, and it wouldn't be the last, but given a choice he'd have preferred not to know. There was something damning in such a casual revelation, something that made him feel complicit in some way. And irritation swiftly sharpened into an unsettling anger, even if the man in front of him was dying.

But Lombard wasn't finished.

With some considerable effort, enough for Dupont to wonder if he should help, Lombard pushed himself over on to his side, brought up his knees and squared his shoulders. A warm waft of stale bed breath fanned up from beneath the sheet and Dupont was hard pressed not to cover his nose or sit back. With eyes swivelling wildly, Lombard reached one arm slowly behind him, and seemed to rummage for something. He closed his eyes, pursed his lips and his brow creased with the strain. A moment later he rolled back, wiping his fingers on the sheet. He was holding something. Before Dupont could do anything about it, Lombard reached out and caught hold of the lawyer's wrist.

'My pension,' he said, pressing a warm, rubbery package into Dupont's unwilling hand and closing his fist

around it. 'I won't be needing it now. But I'm sure you can have some fun and games with it. For me, you understand. Debts to settle. There's people out there who owe me, and I want you to see they pay. It's all there.'

He squeezed Dupont's hand then released him, sinking back on the bed, breath short and fast now.

'As for the rest, Maître, consider it thanks for your professional services. Past and future.'

And with that, Lombard closed his eyes and waved the lawyer away.

Ranque was waiting for him on the landing.

'A last request?' he asked, pulling a handkerchief from his pocket, blowing his nose, wiping it vigorously. 'Was that what it was?' He bundled up the handkerchief and pushed it away.

'You could say,' replied Dupont, feeling the small weight of the wrapped package in his trouser pocket, desperate to find somewhere to wash his hands.

3

'YOU CALL ME as soon as you get there, okay? Paris, and the island.'

It was midday, a Sunday, in the Departures Hall at Marignane Airport outside Marseilles, and Claudine, Midou and Jacquot were heading towards passport control. Mother and daughter had checked in their cases, stopped for a final coffee with Jacquot, but now their flight had been called. It was time to part.

'As soon as we arrive, I promise,' said Claudine, turning to take his face in her hands, kissing him lightly on the mouth, the cheeks, then hugging him tight. She wore cream slacks, brown mocassins and a blue denim shirt that showed her tan, her long black hair caught in a mother-of-pearl clasp. When she was done with him, she stepped back, tears brimming, lips tight, and her daughter took her place.

'I'll take good care of her, just you see,' said Midou, and slid her good right arm up round his neck, her left arm still in its plaster cast.

If Jacquot had straightened his back, if he'd been able to straighten it without feeling wincing shafts of pain lance through his left hip, he could have lifted her off the floor.

'I know you will,' he said. 'You have fun, you hear?'

With sad smiles and nods and waves the two women turned away from him, and Jacquot marvelled at the passing of time, and regretted it. Just last week it had been

days before their departure. Then a day. Then hours. And now ... within a minute they would be gone from sight, and he would be alone. He watched them approach the passport desk, Midou first, then Claudine, nearly five months pregnant yet not a sign showing beyond a rounding swell to her belly, and just the faintest limp as she stepped forward, not as marked as Midou's, all that was left from their ordeal in that basement in Pélissanne. Passports were handed over, examined with a brisk formality, returned with a nod, and then, with a final turn and wave and a blown kiss, the doors slid together and shut behind them.

Now they really were gone.

Turning on his stick Jacquot wheeled round and stumped off across the concourse, pausing one last time at the Departures board. Air France Flight 360, Marseilles to Paris Charles de Gaulle, departing 13:25. By the time he got home they would be flying somewhere above him. And this time tomorrow, when he woke in a lonely bed, they'd be landing at Pointe-à-Pitre on the island of Guadeloupe in the French West Indies.

And it had all been his idea.

They had come out of hospital within a week of each other, just a month earlier, Claudine first, with gauze bandaging taped over the entry and exit gunshot wound in her left thigh. They had given her a crutch, but by the time Midou was released a few days later, her shattered arm pinned in two places and coated in a plaster cast, the crutch had been discarded in favour of that light, tip-toe limp, as though she were about to start dancing.

Jacquot had been the last of them to leave hospital, the 9x19mm bullet that he'd taken in his hip chipping away a splinter of pelvis, and tearing its way out of the back of his thigh. In addition to these not insignificant wounds were the raised pink scars from the two operations carried out to repair the damaged bone and to secure the shredded muscles.

Age played its part too, Jacquot was sure. The two women were younger, fitter than he, and possibly their wounds were not as serious, or rather not as restricting as his. When Claudine came to collect him from the hospital, pushing his wheelchair to the waiting car, helping him into it, making him comfortable, no one would have believed that she had been shot as well. But for all the show, Jacquot could see the wounds still there, hidden behind her smile, the memory of those terrible moments when a killer's gun had been levelled on her and her daughter, and a trigger pulled.

And so he had suggested, without really thinking, after dinner one evening, that when Midou returned to Guadeloupe, maybe Claudine should accompany her, to assist on the journey and settle her daughter back into her island home.

Claudine had been the first to object, but just as he saw the wounds behind her smile so, too, he could see the flash of excitement at such a proposal – spending more time with her daughter, visiting the island for the first time. Beaches, sunshine, the warm Caribbean ...

‘But ... but what about you?’ she’d asked. ‘How will you manage?’ Before adding, ‘And I’m pregnant. I can’t fly when I’m pregnant.’

All of which he’d waved away, assuring her he’d be just fine, and that a five-month pregnancy shouldn’t hold her back; she should go.

At which point Midou, equally delighted by the sudden prospect of having her mother come to stay, declared that she knew of women nearing full-term pregnancy taking flights. And the sun would do her good, a break ... And the baby too.

And so it had been settled.

And now they were gone.

At his own insistence.

And he was on his own.