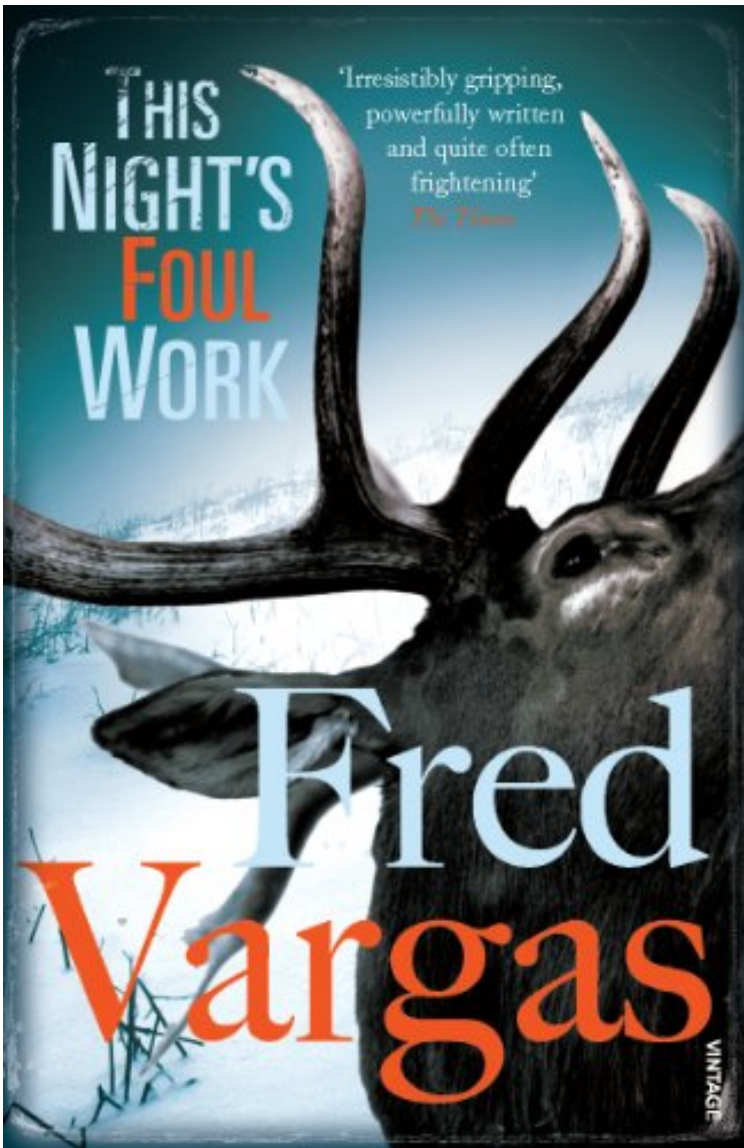


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This Night's Foul Work



Par Fred Vargas
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurOn the outskirts of Paris, two men have been found with their throats cut. In Normandy, two stags have been killed and their hearts cut out. Meanwhile a seventy-five-year-old nurse who has murdered several of her patients has escaped from prison. Is there a connection between the three cases?In this mystery, Commissaire Adamsberg is pitted against nemeses past and present: Ariane Lagarde, France's foremost pathologist and Adamsberg's enemy since they argued over a case twenty-three years earlier, and Louis Veyrenc, a new recruit with a grudge, who has been assigned the job of protecting the Commissaire's ex-girlfriend. As the different strands of Vargas's compelling story begin to intertwine, events move towards a gripping climax...Shortlisted for the Duncan Lawrie International Dagger.ExtraitIBy fixing

his curtain to one side with a clothes-peg, Lucio could better observe the new neighbour at his leisure. The newcomer, who was small and dark, had stripped to the waist despite the chilly March breeze and was building a wall of breeze-blocks without using a plumb line. After an hours watching, Lucio shook his head abruptly, like a lizard emerging from its motionless siesta. He removed his unlit cigarette from his mouth. That one, he said, pronouncing his final diagnosis, has no more ballast in his head than in his hands. Hes going his own sweet way without the rule book. Pleasing himself. Let him get on with it, then, said his daughter, without conviction. I know what I have to do, Maria. You just enjoy upsetting other people, dont you, with your old wives tales? Her father clicked his tongue disapprovingly. You wouldnt talk like that if you had trouble sleeping. The other night I saw her, clear as I see you. Yes, you told me. She went past the windows on the first floor, slowly like the ghost. Yes, Maria said again, with indifference. The old man had risen to his feet and was leaning on his stick. Its as if she was waiting for the new owner to arrive, as if she was getting ready to stalk her prey. That man over there, I mean, he added, jerking his chin at the window. The neighbour? said Maria. Itll just go in one ear and out the other, you know. What he does after thats up to him. Pass me a cigarette Im going over there. Maria placed the cigarette in her fathers mouth and lit it. Maria, for the love of God, take off the filter. Doing as she was asked, Maria helped her father on with his coat. Then she slipped into his pocket a little radio, from which a hiss of background noise and muffled voices emerged. The old man wouldnt be parted from it. Dont go scaring the neighbour now, will you, she said, knotting his scarf. Oh, the neighbours had worse than this to cope with, believe me. Jean-Baptiste Adamsberg had been working on his wall, unperturbed by the watchful gaze of the old man across the way but wondering when he would be coming over to test him out in person. He watched as a tall figure with striking, deeply scored features and a shock of white hair walked across the little garden at a dignified pace. He was about to hold out his hand to shake when he saw that the mans right arm stopped short at the elbow. Adamsberg raised his trowel as a sign of welcome, and looked at him with a calm and neutral expression. I could lend you my plumb line, the old man said civilly. Ill manage, said Adamsberg, fitting another breeze-block into place. Where I come from, we always put up walls by guesswork, and they havent fallen down yet. They might lean sometimes, but they dont fall down. Are you a bricklayer? No. Im a cop. Commissaire de police. The old man leaned his stick against the new wall and buttoned his inner jacket up to his chin, giving himself time to absorb the information. You go after drug dealers? Stuff like that? No, corpses. I work in the Serious Crime Squad. I see, said the old man, after registering a slight shock. My speciality was the bench. He winked. Not the Judges Bench, wooden benches. I used to sell them. A joker in days gone by, thought Adamsberg, smiling at his new neighbour with understanding. The old man seemed well able to amuse himself without any help from anyone else. A joker, yes, a man with a sense of humour, but those dark eyes saw right through you. Parquet floors too. Oak, beech, pine. If you need anything, let me know. Your house has nothing but tiles on the floor. Thats right. Not as warm as wood. Velascos the name. Lucio Velasco Paz. The shops called Velasco Paz and Daughter. Lucio Velasco smiled broadly, but his gaze did not leave Adamsbergs face, inspecting it thoroughly. The old man was working up to an announcement. He had something to tell him. Maria runs the business now. Shes got a good head on her shoulders, so dont go running to her with stories, she doesnt like it. What sort of stories would those be? Ghost stories, for instance, said the old man, screwing up his dark eyes. No chance. I dont know any ghost stories. People say that, and then one day they do know one. Maybe. For all I know. Your radio isnt tuned properly, monsieur. Would you like me to fix it? What for? To listen to the programmes. No, hombre. I dont want to listen to their rubbish. At my age, youve earned the right not to put up with it. Yes, of course, said Adamsberg. If the neighbour wanted to carry around in his pocket a radio that wasnt tuned to any programme, and call him hombre, that was up to him. The old man staged another pause as he watched Adamsberg line up his breeze-blocks. Like the house, do you? Yes, very much. Lucio made a joke under his breath and burst out laughing. Adamsberg smiled politely. There was something youthful about Lucios laughter, whereas the rest of his demeanour suggested that he was more or less responsible for the destiny of mankind. A hundred and fifty square metres. The old man was speaking again. With a garden, an open fireplace, a cellar, and a woodshed. You cant find anything like this in Paris nowadays. Did you ever ask yourself why it was going so cheap? Because its old and run-down, I suppose. And did you never wonder why it hadnt been demolished either? Well, its at the end of a cul-de-sac its not in anyones way. All the same, hombre. No buyer in the six years its been on the market. Didnt that bother you? Monsieur Velasco, it takes a lot to bother me. Adamsberg scraped off the surplus cement with his trowel. Well, just suppose for a moment that it did bother you, insisted the old man. Suppose you asked yourself why nobody had bought this house. Let me see. Its got an outside privy. People

dont like that these days.They could have built an extension to reach it, as youre doing now.Im not doing it for myself. Its for my wife and son.Gods sakes, youre not going to bring a woman to live here, are you?No, I dont think so. Theyll just come now and then.But this woman, your wife. Shes not proposing to sleep here, is she?Adamsberg frowned as the old man gripped his arm to gain his attention.Dont go thinking youre stronger than anyone else, said the old man, more calmly. Sell up. These are things that pass our understanding. Theyre beyond our knowing.What things?Lucio shifted his now extinguished cigarette in his mouth.See this? he said raising his right arm, which ended in a stump.Yes, said Adamsberg, with respect.I lost that when I was nine years old, during the Civil War.Yes.And sometimes it still itches. It itches on the part of my arm that isnt there, sixty-nine years later. In the same place, always the same place, said the old man, pointing to a space in the air. My mother knew why. It was the spiders bite. When I lost my arm, I hadnt finished scratching. So it goes on itching.Yes, I see, said Adamsberg, mixing his cement quietly.Because the spiders bite hadnt finished its life do you understand what Im saying? It wants its dues, its taking its revenge. Does that remind you of anything?The stars, Adamsberg suggested. They go on shining long after theyre dead.All right, yes, admitted the old man, surprised. Or feelings. If a fellow goes on loving a girl, or the other way round, when its all over, see what I mean?Yes.But why does he go on loving the girl, or the other way round? What explains it?I dont know, said Adamsberg patiently.Between gusts of wind, the hesitant March sunshine was warming his back, and he was quite happy to be there, building his wall in this overgrown garden. Lucio Velasco Paz could go on talking all he wanted, it wouldnt bother Adamsberg.Its quite simple. Its because the feeling hasnt run its course. Its beyond our control, that kind of thing. You have to wait for it to finish, go on scratching till the end. And if you die before youve run your lifes course, same thing. People whove been murdered, they go on hanging about, their presence makes you itch non-stop.Like spider ...From Publishers WeeklyThe outstanding fourth whodunit to be made available in the U.S. from Vargas (Wash This Blood Clean from My Hand) makes its easy to see why shes twice won the CWAs International Dagger Award. Paris Commissaire Jean-Baptiste Adamsberg, an endearing oddball sleuth in the tradition of John Dickson Carrs Henry Merrivale, is convinced that the two narcotics dealers recently found with slit throats werent the victims of business rivals, relying largely on his intuition and the unexplained presence of dirt under the dead mens fingernails. Adamsbergs dogged pursuit of small details leads him to a series of unusual mutilations of wild deer as well as to a serial killer who targets virgins and may be seeking the ingredients to an elixir for eternal life. While the final twist will be less than shocking to some readers, the immensely enjoyable prose, seasoned liberally with humor, should help the author gain the larger American audience she deserves. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.