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SF PERUSALS

A Touch of Danger

A Play

Francis Durbridge

Samuel French – London
New York – Sydney – Toronto – Hollywood



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A TOUCH OF DANGER

First produced at the Theatre Royal, Windsor, on 21st July, 1987. Subsequently presented in London by Bill Kenwright at the Whitehall Theatre, London, on 12th September, 1988, with the following cast of characters.

Liz Ferber	Virginia Stride
Harriet Telligan	Pauline Yates
Jeff Seago	Derren Nesbitt
Max Telligan	William Franklyn
Vincent Crane	Charles Rea
Lloyd Mitchell	Max Mason
Graham Digby	William Lucas
Connie Palmer	Cathy Flanagan
Rose	Sarah Beeson

The play directed by Mark Piper
Designed by John Page

The action of the play takes place in the living-room of Max Telligan's apartment near Sloane Square, London

ACT I	SCENE 1	Tuesday afternoon
	SCENE 2	Tuesday afternoon. Later
	SCENE 3	Tuesday night
	SCENE 4	Tuesday night. An hour later
ACT II	SCENE 1	Tuesday night. Immediately after
	SCENE 2	Wednesday morning
	SCENE 3	Wednesday afternoon
	SCENE 4	Thursday morning

Time—the present

ACT I

SCENE 1

The living-room of a ground-floor apartment in one of London's old houses, near Sloane Square. It is spring. Tuesday afternoon

It is a well-furnished, comfortable room, reflecting both the good taste and industry of a best-selling novelist. There are comfortable chairs, a sofa, drinks table, a filing cabinet, an antique chest of drawers, tables with lamps, etc. There is also a large desk on which are several unopened letters, a dictating machine, reference books, telephone, and an attractive lamp. A raised alcove, back C, *is used as a dining area*

A section of the hall can be seen leading, UR, *to the front door. The kitchen and rear entrance to the flat are reached through a door* DR. *A second door, always kept open,* UL, *leads to the bedrooms, etc. A collection of leather-bound "Max Telligan" novels is on view in the room together with several signed photographs of well-known personalities*

When the CURTAIN *rises, Liz Ferber is at the desk, typing. From time to time she consults a notebook which contains handwritten notes. After a little while the front doorbell is heard*

Liz rises and goes out into the hall

We hear the opening of the front door and the sound of voices

Liz (*off; surprised*) Why, hello, Harriet!

Harriet (*off*) Don't look so surprised, Liz! You make me feel I'm not welcome . . .

Liz (*off*) Of course you're welcome! Come along in!

Harriet Telligan enters with Liz. Harriet is an attractive, well-dressed woman who at this moment appears faintly agitated. Liz now carries a copy of the "Evening Standard" which she puts down on one of the tables

Harriet (*looking around the room*) Where's Max? Is he out?

Liz He's in Munich. I'm expecting him back this evening or tomorrow morning at the latest.

Harriet What on earth is he doing in Munich?

Liz He's meeting an American film producer who's interested in his latest book.

Harriet Well, let's hope he doesn't do to *Still Life* what that Italian producer did to *A View from the Patio*. It was disaster! The worst film I've ever seen.

Liz I never saw it. It was before I worked for Max. Are you staying in town, Harriet?

Harriet Yes, just for two or three nights. I shall be going back to Beaconsfield on Thursday. (*Taking an Inland Revenue envelope out of her handbag*) This arrived yesterday. I opened it by mistake. It's another tax demand.

Liz (*nodding*) I'll take care of it.

Harriet (*restlessly pacing the room*) Max has been living here for nearly two years, yet these wretched tax things still keep coming to the house! Why? You're his secretary, Liz. Can't you do something about it?

Liz The accountants have written to the Inland Revenue, more than once.

Harriet Well, tell them to write again!

Liz I'll see to it, Harriet. Now stop worrying!

Harriet (*turning; and relenting slightly*) I know I'm making a fuss, Liz. I just can't help it. I make a meal of everything these days. (*She moves down to the sofa*)

Liz Once the divorce has gone through you'll feel differently. Everything will be perfectly straightforward.

Harriet I doubt that. I doubt that very much. I saw my solicitor the other day . . .

Liz What did he have to say?

Harriet I went with a mass of questions and he didn't answer one of them. Just gave me a quiet little lecture. I sometimes wonder whose side he's on. (*A moment*) Liz, if I ask you something will you be perfectly frank with me?

Liz Oh, dear! Now what am I letting myself in for?

Harriet You're not letting yourself in for anything. Just be honest with me, that's all.

Liz All right. Fire ahead.

Harriet Would you say that I was a difficult person?

Liz (*after a brief pause; fencing*) No, no, I wouldn't say that you were . . . difficult . . .

Harriet Argumentative, perhaps?

Liz That's not a word I would use.

Harriet What word would you use?

Liz I'd say that you were inclined to be a little . . .

Harriet A little what?

Liz (*with a laugh; changing her mind*) Look, Harriet—I haven't known you very long, so it's impossible for me to answer your question. I can only say that I like you—and I like Max. And I'm very sorry that the pair of you split up. Why you split up, I don't know. And it's none of my business.

Harriet We just never stopped having arguments. We used to argue over the most ridiculous things. Quite absurd some of them. Towards the end almost everything sparked off a row of some kind. It's sad really, because I'm still very fond of Max . . .

Liz Harriet, do you know what I would do if I were you?

Harriet No. Tell me. What would you do?

Liz I'd take a holiday. Go away for a couple of weeks and try and stop worrying about the divorce, about Max, about everything that's happened to you during the past two years.

Harriet (*shaking her head as she rises*) Would you now? And where would you go? Some exciting little health farm brimming over with yoghurt. It's no use, Liz. Going away wouldn't help. Not one little bit.

Liz How do you know it wouldn't?

Harriet Because I've been away. I had a short stay in the South of France. I only got back on Thursday.

Liz I didn't know that.

Harriet I didn't tell anyone I was going. Not even Marsha. She was staying with some friends in Ireland and I just didn't know what to do with myself.

Liz It's ages since I was in the South of France. Did you go on your own?

Harriet stares at her for a split second, obviously surprised by the question

Harriet Of course I went on my own! Who do you think I went with?

Liz I—I don't know, Harriet. I just wondered if you'd gone with a friend, that's all.

Harriet No, I didn't go with a friend. I was on my own. I'm on my own most of the time these days.

Liz You needn't be, Harriet. You're an attractive woman.

Harriet The holiday, if you can call it that, was a disaster. Utter disaster! Apart from everything else the weather was awful and the hotel was dreadful—full of the most frightful people. I just couldn't wait to get back to Beaconsfield. Anyway, I can't leave Marsha just now, even if I wanted to. She's just started a new job. I don't know whether Max told you, she's now in the book department at Harrods.

Liz Yes, he told me. Does she like it?

Harriet Enormously. She adores the job—but the silly girl's talking about moving into a place of her own. Which is quite ridiculous. She's far too young to leave home. Don't you agree, Liz?

Liz (*evasively*) Well—let's just say, I'm glad it's your problem, Harriet, and not mine.

Harriet You're just as bad as Max! He won't commit himself. I wrote him a letter about Marsha—must be over a fortnight ago—and I don't even know whether he read it.

Liz I'm sure he did.

Harriet glances across at the desk

Harriet What's he working on at the moment? (*She crosses and looks at the script in the typewriter*) I needn't have asked! The diary, of course! A couple of weeks ago I asked Max if he'd let me read it. What there is of it, so far. He refused.

Liz That doesn't surprise me. He won't let anyone see it, not until it's finished. And it's more than my job's worth to even talk about it, he's made that quite clear on more than one occasion. You've never stopped

telling Max that he's wasting his time and ought to be writing another novel.

Harriet Liz, for heaven's sake, I was married to the man for nearly twenty years! I want to know what he's written about me!

Liz It so happens he's written some very nice things about you.

Harriet (*with a shrug*) Anyway, why should I worry? In spite of all the publicity it'll be a flop. People are only interested in novelists when they're dead. Although Marsha doesn't agree with me, of course. She thinks the diary will be a terrific success. But then she thinks everything her father does is terrific. (*She moves down to Liz, a puzzled expression on her face*) Liz, tell me: does the name Lloyd Mitchell mean anything to you?

Liz No. Should it?

Harriet He's an American and a great fan of Max's. At least, he says he is.

Liz We get lots of letters from the States. Lloyd Mitchell? . . . I don't recall the name . . .

Harriet He bought a copy of *Still Life* and got talking to Marsha about the book. It transpired he'd read practically everything Max had written. Marsha was highly amused and finally, of course, she told him who she was. He didn't believe her at first. Then, when he did believe her, she had great difficulty getting rid of him. (*A shade agitated*) It was very odd. He wanted to know about the diary. When he discovered she hadn't read any of it he simply bombarded her with a whole lot of other questions.

Liz Yes, well—there's a perfectly simple explanation. He's not just a fan, he's from a newspaper or one of the magazines. It's the usual ploy. Marsha gave him an interview without realizing it. I know those people! They're the same the world over!

Harriet (*not convinced*) You could be right. It's just that I find it strange that he should have asked so many questions. (*She hesitates, then:*) Well—I mustn't keep you any longer. When you see Max tell him I called . . . (*She moves towards the hall*)

Liz Yes, of course, Harriet.

Harriet I must talk to him about Marsha. I really must. Perhaps you'll tell him that?

Liz Yes, I'll tell him.

Harriet (*after a slight hesitation, as if wishing to prolong the conversation*) Well—I'll be off.

Harriet goes out to the hall

Pause. Liz picks up her notebook and is about to return to the typewriter, when . . .

Harriet re-appears with Jeff Seago. He is a well-built man in his late thirties

You've got a visitor, Liz.

Liz (*surprised*) Why, hello, Jeff! What are you doing in town? (*She rises and joins Jeff and Harriet*)

Jeff I had a luncheon date and drank too much. So I thought I'd better take the rest of the day off. No use telling someone to keep their eye on the ball if you can't see it yourself! Is Max around?

Liz No, I'm afraid he isn't. He's away at the moment.
Jeff Ah, well! Not to worry. Some other time.

He suddenly realizes that Harriet is staring at him

Liz Oh, I'm sorry. Do you know Mrs Telligan?
Jeff (*turning towards Harriet*) Jeff Seago, Mrs Telligan. (*After a small pause*) I'm the golf professional at Midway Park.
Harriet Yes, of course! How stupid of me! I thought I recognized you.
Jeff You came to the club several times, to pick up Max.
Harriet Yes, I remember.
Liz Is there anything I can do, Jeff?
Jeff Well—as a matter of fact . . . I was going to ask Max for a signed copy of one of his books. It's for my nephew, it's his birthday on Sunday.
Liz Oh, I see. Leave it with me. What do they call your nephew?
Jeff Robert . . .

Liz returns to the desk and picking up a pen makes a note of the name on a pad

Harriet How old is he?
Jeff He'll be sixteen. Books—books—books—he thinks of nothing else. Golf, he just doesn't want to know! (*To Liz*) I've been shooting a line about Max, so I know he'd be thrilled to get a signed copy of one of his novels.
Liz No problem, I'm sure.

Pause

Jeff Do you play golf, Mrs Telligan?
Harriet No, I'm afraid I don't.
Jeff You should. You've got the build for it.
Harriet (*none too happy with the remark*) Thank you. That's nice to know.
Jeff If you ever feel like taking it up, please don't hesitate to get in touch with me. I'd be delighted to give you a few lessons.
Harriet You're very kind.
Liz Yes, well—take my tip, think twice, Harriet! He once talked me into having a lesson and we spent most of the time in a bunker. It took me a week to get the sand out of my hair!
Jeff (*laughing*) You gave up too soon, Liz. That was your trouble. (*Turning towards the hall*) Remember me to Max.
Liz I'll do that. And I'll make sure you get the book.
Jeff Thank you. I appreciate it.

Jeff smiles at Harriet and, giving Liz a friendly nod, goes

Harriet moves down to Liz as the phone starts ringing

Harriet What did he mean, I've got the build for it?
Liz It was a compliment, Harriet.
Harriet You could have fooled me!
Liz (*picking up the phone*) Hello? . . . yes, it is . . . (*Surprised*) Oh, hello, Marsha! . . . Yes, your mother's here; we've just been talking about—— (*She stops; alarmed*) What is it? What's the matter, my dear?

Harriet instinctively moves nearer the phone

Why are you crying? . . . (*Staggered*) What!!! . . . Who told you? . . . When did you hear this? (*Softly*) Oh, my God!

Harriet What is it? What's happened?

Liz looks at Harriet, stunned

What is it, Liz?

Liz Max is dead . . .

Harriet (*aghast*) Dead? No, no, that can't be true!

Liz It was on the radio . . .

Harriet grabs hold of the phone

Harriet (*on the phone; tensely*) Marsha, are you sure about this? . . . When did you hear it? . . . Marsha, for God's sake stop crying! . . . Yes, I'm listening. . . . (*Long pause*) Yes, all right, my dear. . . . (*Quietly*) No, don't do that, I'll go straight back to the hotel and pack. . . . I'll see you later . . .

She replaces the phone and obviously badly shaken by the news, moves slowly down to Liz who has picked up the evening paper

Liz It's not in the paper . . .

Harriet slowly buries her head in her hands. Liz continues searching the paper

(*Suddenly*) Yes, here it is! It's in the stop-press . . .

Harriet looks up

(*Reading*) "Max Telligan, the well-known novelist, whose eagerly awaited diary is to be published next year, was found dead in a car on the outskirts of Munich in the early hours of this morning . . ."

Harriet In a car? Was it an accident?

Liz (*still staring at the paper*) I don't know . . . it doesn't say . . .

Harriet moves down to Liz and takes the newspaper from her. Pause

Harriet (*staring at the announcement; stunned*) "Found dead in a car on the outskirts of Munich . . ." I can't believe this! I just can't . . . What do you think happened, Liz?

Liz I don't know! But we'll find out! I'll phone the paper!

Liz takes the newspaper from Harriet and searches the paper for the telephone number. Eventually she finds it and quickly crosses to the phone. She dials. A long pause. The number is ringing out

(*On the phone; tense, keyed-up*) This is Liz Ferber, Max Telligan's secretary—please put me through to the news room. (*Pause*) This is Max Telligan's secretary . . . I've just seen your announcement in the stop-press and I'd be grateful if you could give me some further information. . . . Yes, but what happened, exactly? . . . Yes, I know! It says that in the paper! But *what happened*? (*Tense pause*) Yes, I'm listening. . . . I see. . . . That's very kind of you. Thank you . . . (*Liz slowly replaces the receiver*)

Harriet (*overwrought*) Is it true?
Liz (*her thoughts elsewhere*) Yes, it's true.
Harriet Well—what happened?
Liz (*hesitant, as if trying to make a decision*) They don't really know what happened . . .
Harriet Surely, they must know! Was it a car accident?
Liz It—it doesn't sound like it.
Harriet What do you mean, it doesn't sound like it? Liz, you're keeping something back from me!
Liz Harriet, wait! Please wait! Give me time to think! (*She finally reaches a decision and begins a frenzied search of the desk. She finally comes across a British Airways timetable. She consults the timetable, at last finding the details she is looking for*) There's a British Airways flight to Munich at sixteen-twenty! Can you make it?
Harriet Yes. I—I think so . . .
Liz Go back to the house as soon as you can and pick up your passport. I'll arrange for the tickets . . .

As Liz speaks we hear the noisy opening and closing of the front door. Both Liz and Harriet turn towards the hall

Max Telligan enters. He is a distinguished looking man, casually dressed. He carries a suitcase and a large parcel. He stops in his tracks, both surprised to see Harriet and the expression on Liz's face

Harriet Max!
Max What is this? What's going on? (*He puts down the suitcase and parcel*) Has something happened?

Liz hands him the newsaper. A tense pause, whilst Max reads the stop-press announcement

How on earth did they get hold of this story?

Black-out

Scene 2

The same. Late Tuesday afternoon

Liz is sitting at the desk talking to someone on the telephone

Liz (*on the phone*) . . . Yes, of course I will, Samantha. Not to worry, I'll take care of it. What is it this time, a mink coat? . . . Yes, I promise . . . Yes, I will . . . No problem, no problem at all . . . (*She replaces the receiver*)

Max enters from the bedroom

Max Isn't it time you left, Liz?
Liz Yes, I'm just off.
Max Who was that on the phone? Another newspaper?
Liz (*with a gesture towards the ceiling*) No, it was the young lady upstairs.

She's expecting an important parcel tomorrow morning and she's going to be out all day. I said we'd take care of it for her . . .

Max (*moving down to the desk*) You know, this is getting out of hand, Liz! If it isn't parcels it's flowers!

Liz Yes, but she's always terribly grateful, Max. And she did give you some after-shave, remember.

Max You don't have to remind me! I came out in a rash!

Liz picks up a folder and a notebook

Liz I've finished the typing.

Max Oh good. (*He takes the folder from her. He looks at the contents of the folder*)

Liz Only four split infinitives this time.

Pause. Max continues reading the manuscript, turning over the pages. He finally closes the folder

Max We'll go through this tomorrow. What about the material I dictated over the phone?

Liz I think I got most of it, but it wasn't a particularly good line. (*She consults her notebook*) Would you like me to read part of it?

Max If you've got time.

A tiny pause; whilst Liz studies her notes, then:

Liz (*reading*) "April thirtieth, Munich. Terry Wilde arrived this evening—shortly before six o'clock, and just when I was beginning to think he wasn't going to turn up after all. It's pretty warm here, for the time of the year, but that hasn't stopped our Terry from wearing a fur hat and what appears to be a mink-lined anorak. It must be seven or eight years since we last met, but he hasn't changed a great deal. He still calls me Max with monotonous regularity . . ."

Max Tex! He still calls me *Tex* with monotonous regularity . . .

Liz Oh! (*She smiles and makes the alteration in her notebook*)

Max Thank you, Liz.

Liz rises and, preparing to leave, gathers up her handbag, etc., from the desk

Liz What finally happened in Munich? Is Terry Wilde going to buy *Still Life*?

Max (*after a moment*) No.

Liz (*surprised*) He's not?

Max No. He's not interested in the book. I doubt whether he's even read it.

Liz Then why the meeting? What was it all about?

Max hesitates, then looks at her. A tiny pause

Max He wants to buy the diary.

Liz (*astonished*) The diary?

Max Yes.

Liz You mean——(*Puzzled*) How on earth can he make a movie out of the diary?

Max He doesn't want to make a movie out of it. He's not in the film business, not any longer. He's in publishing.

Liz But you're under contract to Cromwell House . . .

Max Only for novels. Wilde's made me a fantastic offer, Liz. For the life of me I just don't see how I can turn it down. (*A moment*) He wants to buy the diary outright and he's offered me a million dollars.

Liz (*thunderstruck*) A million dollars!

Max Yes. For the world rights.

Liz You're joking!

Max No, I'm not joking.

Liz A million dollars! The man's crazy!

Max He may be crazy, but he's serious. Dead serious. He's coming to London next week and we're going to discuss it further.

As Liz shakes her head in apparent disapproval

How can I refuse this sort of an offer? Apart from solving the tax stituation, it just wouldn't be fair to either Harriet or Marsha if I turned it down.

Liz (*after a tiny pause*) Incidentally, Marsha came to see me.

Max Marsha did? When?

Liz A couple of days ago. She wants to share a flat with a girl friend. They've seen a place they like in Holland Park and Marsha asked me to talk to you about it.

Max Yes, Harriet's been on about this for some time. She's against the idea.

Liz And you?

Max Frankly, I don't know whether I'm against it or not. (*A moment*) I suppose Marsha would be better sharing a flat with someone, rather than taking a place of her own—which is what she's been talking about during the past six months.

Liz Yes, well, it's not for me to take sides, but—Marsha told me she hasn't been getting on at all well with her mother just recently . . .

Max I know, and I've been worried about it. (*After a tiny pause*) I'll talk to Marsha. She's staying here at the weekend.

Liz There's been another tax demand, by the way. I've sent it to the accountants. They want to see you. I've made an appointment for five o'clock tomorrow.

Max nods

Liz Harriet's been away, she went down to the South of France for a few days.

Max (*surprised*) I didn't know that.

Liz It was while Marsha was in Ireland. It was a disaster, I'm afraid. The weather wasn't good and she hated the hotel she was staying in.

Max And everyone in it, I'll bet.

Liz (*moving towards the hall*) I doubt whether I'll be in before tomorrow afternoon, Max. I have a dentist appointment in the morning and I'm not sure how long it will take. Or what I'll be feeling like!

Max Not to worry. If you don't feel like coming in give me a ring.

As Liz is about to go she notices a very attractive clock on one of the tables

Liz That clock's new . . .
Max Yes.
Liz Did you buy it in Munich?
Max I didn't buy it at all. It's a present for Marsha from Terry Wilde.

He joins Liz who is admiring the clock

I happened to tell him that Marsha was hoping to move into a place of her own one day and the next morning he handed me this and said, "Give this to your daughter—it's for the flat."

Liz It's a lovely clock.
Max I was quite embarrassed. (*With a shake of the head*) Terry's an extraordinary chap, he really is! He'll argue like the devil over the price of a cup of coffee—then he'll do this sort of thing.
Liz It must have cost the earth. (*She turns towards the hall again, then hesitates*) When you next see Harriet, try and be nice to her. She really is worried about Marsha. Teenage daughters aren't easy to deal with.
Max (*a shade querulous*) I'm acutely aware of that . . .
Liz I'm sorry, Max, I didn't mean to . . . (*With an uneasy little laugh*) One of these days you'll tell me to mind my own business.
Max (*regretting his reaction*) I daren't, you might walk out on me. Then I'd have nothing left—except my split infinitives.

Liz laughs and exits

Max turns his attention to several letters on the desk. He is about to read one of them when voices are heard in the hall

Liz returns with Vincent Crane. He wears a dark suit, carries a valise, and walks with the aid of a stick. His manner is pleasant if somewhat disarming

Liz (*puzzled*) There's someone to see you, Max.
Crane Mr Telligan?
Max (*putting the letter down*) Yes?
Crane I must apologize for dropping in like this, sir, without an appointment. But it is—rather important. My name is Crane. Vincent Crane.
Max (*none too friendly*) Yes Mr Crane?
Crane I think we have a mutual friend at Scotland Yard, sir? Chief Superintendent Hamley.
Max Dave Hamley?
Crane That's right. He wishes to be remembered to you.
Max (*after a moment*) Thank you, Liz.

Liz goes

Max How is Dave?
Crane He's well, but unfortunately he gets very little time for squash these days. Which doesn't please him, I'm afraid. I gather that's how you met, sir?

Max Yes, at the RAC club. He beat the living daylight out of me.
Crane Well—I'm certainly delighted to meet you, Mr Telligan. I've always enjoyed your books. Especially *A View from the Patio.*
Max Thank you.
Crane I'm afraid I haven't got round to reading *Still Life* yet . . .
Max I trust you will. (*A moment*) Why did you wish to see me?
Crane (*hesitantly*) I wonder—may I sit down, sir?
Max Yes, of course. I'm sorry.

Crane looks at the sofa, then at the chairs. He finally decides on one of the armchairs

Crane (*indicating his ankle*) My wife's a keep-fit fanatic. The other morning, when she was doing her exercises, I said any damn fool can do that sort of thing. (*As he lowers himself into the chair*) Alas, this fool couldn't . . .

Max smiles and sits on the arm of the sofa

Max Are you a colleague of Superintendent Hamley's?
Crane Yes, I am. (*He takes out his wallet and displays a CID identity card*) We used to share the same office, but about a year ago he was assigned to special duties—whatever that may mean!—so we see very little of each other these days, unfortunately. (*Replacing his wallet*) Mr Telligan, I'm making inquiries about a friend of yours and I'd be grateful, most grateful, sir, if you'd answer a few questions . . .
Max A friend of mine?
Crane A man called Terry Wilde.
Max (*surprised*) Terry Wilde?
Crane Yes, I understand you saw him, quite recently, in Munich?
Max Yes, I saw him. But why are you interested in Mr Wilde?
Crane (*ignoring the question*) I'd like you to tell me a little bit about the gentleman, sir. Amongst other things, how you came to meet him in the first place—and why you had dinner with him at the Vier Jahreszeiten?
Max (*a momentary hesitation; his curiosity managing to control a slight irritation*) I first met Terry Wilde about seven or eight years ago when he was making a film at Pinewood Studios. Last week my agent telephoned me and said that Terry had read *Still Life*, was interested in the film rights, and wanted to see me . . .
Crane Go on, sir . . .
Max I flew to Munich and, as you quite rightly say, had dinner with him. During the course of the meal I discovered my agent had got it all wrong—or Terry had misled him. He wasn't interested in making a film. He simply wanted to buy the rights in a diary I've been keeping over the years.
Crane Did he make an offer for the diary, sir?
Max Yes he did. A fantastic offer.
Crane (*after a moment*) Was anyone else present when you had dinner with Mr Wilde?
Max No. No-one. Why do you ask?

Crane (*ignoring the question*) Did you see Mr Wilde again, sir, before leaving Munich?

Max Yes, he came to my room this morning, just as I was leaving for the airport. He had a present for my daughter.

Crane A present for your daughter?

Max Yes.

Crane (*after a thoughtful pause; reaching for his stick*) Well—thank you, sir. I won't take up any more of your valuable time. You've been most helpful.

They both rise

Max Have I? Well—I'm glad you think so. And now, may I make a suggestion?

Crane Of course, by all means . . .

Max Since you're quite obviously interested in Mr Wilde and his activities, to say nothing of his friends, don't you think it might be a good idea if you addressed some of your questions to Mr Wilde himself, rather than to me?

Crane Under the circumstances that might prove to be a little difficult, sir.

Max What circumstances?

Crane He's dead.

Max (*stunned*) Dead!

Crane His body was found in a car, early this morning on the outskirts of Munich. He'd been shot between the eyes. Several times . . .

Max (*suddenly, staring at Crane in amazement*) Near Munich?

Crane That's right. The car in question was rented. The police found a copy of the rental agreement in the glove pocket. The agreement had your name on it, Mr Telligan, and was signed by you. (*A watchful pause*) Can you account for that, sir?

Max Yes, I can! I rented the car on arrival in Munich but this morning I was pushed for time so I decided to take a cab to the airport. Terry offered to return the car to Hertz for me, so I gave him the key.

Crane (*after a moment*) It's as simple as that?

Max Yes, it's as simple as that. (*Still stunned, more or less under his breath*) Terry Wilde murdered . . . I—I just can't believe it . . .

Crane It's true, sir. (*He moves slowly towards the hall, then hesitates*) You said just now that Mr Wilde gave you a present, for your daughter?

Max hardly hears him, he appears greatly puzzled, his thoughts elsewhere

Max Yes . . .

Crane Have you delivered the present, sir?

Max (*after a moment, realizing what Crane has said*) No, not yet. (*He indicates the clock*) It's over there . . .

Crane (*surprised*) The clock?

Max Yes.

Crane crosses to the table. He stands looking at the clock. Pause

Crane How old is your daughter, sir?

Max How old? She's seventeen. She'll be eighteen next month. Why do you ask?

Crane It seems a curious present for a young lady. (*His eyes are still on the clock, admiring it. Slowly; a shade hesitantly*) I wonder—if I could ask a favour of you, Mr Telligan?

Max It depends. What is it you want?

Crane I'd rather like to borrow this clock, if I may?

Max (*surprised*) Borrow it? Why do you wish to borrow it?

Crane I'd very much like a colleague of mine to take a look at it. But I shall quite understand if you don't wish to part with it, sir.

Max What is it you're looking for, Mr Crane?

Crane (*after a moment*) We'll take great care of the clock, I assure you.

Max You haven't answered my question. What is it you're looking for?

They take each other in

Crane (*still ignoring the question*) The clock won't be tampered with in any way, and it'll be returned to you this evening, without fail, I promise you.

Another pause. Max is hesitating, undecided—finally he crosses to the desk and produces a large carrier from one of the drawers. He brings the carrier down to the table, picks up the clock and carefully places it in the carrier

Thank you, Mr Telligan. (*Taking the carrier*) That's very kind of you. You've been most co-operative, and I appreciate it.

He gives a friendly nod and exits

Max stands looking towards the hall, a strange, puzzled look on his face—then he suddenly makes a decision and crosses to the phone. He dials. Pause

Max (*on the phone*) Could I speak to Superintendent Hamley? . . . My name is Telligan. . . . Thank you. . . . Hello? . . . Dave? . . . Yes, it's Max! . . . That's right, but it wasn't George Washington it was Mark Twain. . . . Dave, I've just had a visit from a colleague of yours—Vincent Crane. . . . Yes, he told me you'd once shared an office. . . . Did you? Now that's interesting. . . . (*After a moment; curious*) Yes, but who is he, exactly? . . . The anti-terrorist branch? . . . Oh—oh, I see! . . . I haven't the slightest idea, Dave, except that he took away a clock which was intended for my daughter. . . . Look—why don't you drop in for a drink one evening and I'll tell you all about it? (*Another pause, then:*) Yes, please do that, I'd very much like to see you again. . . . Thank you, Dave . . .

Max replaces the receiver and stands for a moment deep in thought, then he walks towards the bedroom—as he does so the doorbell rings. He turns; looks towards the hall. A slight pause. The doorbell rings again. He hesitates, then as he crosses into the hall the bell is heard again, loud and insistent

We hear the opening and closing of the front door, followed by Harriet's voice

Harriet (*off*) Didn't you hear the bell the first time?

Max (*off*) I'm sorry, Harriet. If I'd known it was you I'd have jumped to it. You're the very last person I would want to keep waiting.

Max enters followed by his wife

Harriet Have you discovered how the papers got hold of that extraordinary story about your being found dead?

Max Yes, I have. A man called Terry Wilde was murdered. They found his body in a car which, it so happens, was rented by me. The documents were in my name.

Harriet Who told you this? Who told you the dead man was Wilde? It's not in any of today's papers.

Max I've had a visitor, from Scotland Yard. A friend of Dave Hamley's. He put me in the picture.

Harriet Well, I must say, I find this quite extraordinary!

Max gives a little sigh as he crosses to the sofa

Max (*sitting*) Yes, I thought you would. After you left here I said to myself, "One thing's for sure, Harriet's going to find this quite extraordinary."

Harriet Oh, dear! What have I let myself in for? You're in one of those moods, are you?

Max What mood would you like me to be in? I have a large selection to choose from these days.

Harriet I'll bet you have! (*She sits in one of the armchairs, at the same time indicating the typewriter on the desk*) I gather you're still wasting your time on the diary.

Max Yes, Harriet.

Harriet You're a fool. You should be writing another novel. For goodness sake, Max, come to your senses! The public aren't going to get excited over *your* diary! Who cares whether you had lunch with the Prime Minister? Who cares whether you were very nearly killed in a typhoon?

Max Monsoon, Harriet.

Pause

Harriet I take it you got my letter?

Max Yes, I got it.

Harriet Did you read it?

Max Of course I read it!

Harriet Why of course? I'm quite sure most of my letters find their way into your waste-paper basket.

Max Harriet, I'm tired and I've several things I must see to, so I'd be grateful if you'd get to the point. Why did you come here?

Harriet You know perfectly well why I came! I'm worried about Marsha and this friend of hers . . .

Max stares at her for a moment, trying hard to suppress his irritation

I really am worried, Max.

Max You don't like her friend, is that it?

Harriet I haven't said I don't like her.

Max Your letter gave me that impression.
Harriet As a matter of fact I was quite fond of the girl until there was all this talk about her sharing a flat with Marsha.
Max But Marsha's never stopped talking about having a place of her own. You know that. Surely it would be better for her to share with someone?
Harriet I thought you'd say that. I thought you'd side with your daughter!
Max I'm not siding with her! Why do you always pick a quarrel with me about Marsha? Surely to God you must realize by now that's why I walked out on you! I just couldn't take any more of it!
Harriet (*softly*) I'm devoted to my daughter . . .
Max Of course you are! We both are! But why do we have to quarrel about her the whole time? (*A moment*) What's your objection to Marsha sharing a flat with a girl friend?
Harriet What's my objection? (*With a kind of ironic bitterness*) Max, you never fail to surprise me! You must have written twenty novels, yet there are times when you're utterly and completely devoid of imagination! (*Scathingly*) Don't you realize what's happened to my life since you walked out on me? Don't you realize how much I depend on Marsha? How lonely I'd be without her?
Max (*a trace of guilt in his voice*) That's nonsense, Harriet, and you know it. You have a large circle of friends.
Harriet (*angrily*) WE had a large circle of friends! How many times do you think I've been invited out to dinner during the past eighteen months?
Max I don't know, Harriet. I really haven't the slightest idea.
Harriet Twice. Once by the doctor and his wife and once by that randy little bank manager.

Max gives a slightly embarrassed little shrug and looks away from her. There is a long, uncomfortable silence

(*Hesitating*) I—I saw the car the other day.
Max (*turning*) The car?
Harriet Our car. (*She looks at him*) The Volvo . . .
Max Oh! Are you sure?
Harriet I'm quite sure. NPE two-eight-four L.

Pause

Max Where did you see it?
Harriet It was on a meter near Peter Jones.

Pause

Max It must be ten years old.
Harriet Older than that surely? Marsha couldn't have been more than five or six when you bought it. It now belongs to a little man called Wadilove. He has an art gallery in Pimlico.
Max How do you know?
Harriet I was taking a good look at the inside of the car when he suddenly arrived carrying a picture.
Max (*shaking his head*) Fantastic car! Did you tell him we once owned it?

Harriet Yes, I told him. He was very sweet. Except that he tried to sell me the picture. (*A small pause*) I was dying to ask him if he'd done anything about the heater. We just never stopped arguing over that wretched heater! Did we, Max?

Max I seem to recall you mentioned it from time to time.

Harriet (*after a moment; hesitating*) Later, when I was having a coffee on my own, I realized how silly I'd been.

Max Silly?

Harriet Getting sentimental about a car, for God's sake!

Max (*with a peculiar intensity*) Why shouldn't you get sentimental about a car? We had some marvellous times in that Volvo. It was like parting with a dog when I sold it. (*A moment*) Why are you smiling?

Harriet You never liked dogs.

A strained silence, then Max rises

Max I'll talk to Marsha. I shall be seeing her at the weekend, she's staying here.

Harriet Yes, I know. It was my idea. (*Getting up*) She's going to a party in Chelsea and I didn't want some young fool driving her back to Beaconsfield.

Max Unfortunately I shan't be here on Saturday. I've got to go to Birmingham. I'll be back on Sunday morning. (*He takes a key out of his pocket*) You'd better give her this key—and tell her to take care of it, she very nearly lost it the last time she stayed here.

Harriet takes the key and puts it in her handbag

Harriet You're always off somewhere. What are you up to in Birmingham, signing copies of *Still Life*?

Max (*nodding*) It's one of those promotion dinners. The publishers insist on my being there. They're nearly always a crashing bore. (*A slight pause. Not unfriendly*) Harriet, I really have a hundred and one things to see to. So if you'll excuse me . . .

Harriet makes no comment, but crosses towards the hall

Are you driving back to Beaconsfield?

Harriet No, I'm staying in Town for a couple of nights. I'm on one of those shopping sprees we always used to quarrel about. (*She pauses. Anxiously*) What are you going to do, Max?

Max (*not looking at her*) Do?

Harriet About Marsha and this friend of hers?

Pause

You've just got to do something!

Pause

(*Exasperated*) Max, please tell me! What do you intend to do?

He finally looks at her again, having made his mind up

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