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SF PERUSALS

DIAL M FOR MURDER

A Play in Three Acts

by Frederick Knott

SAMUEL FRENCH

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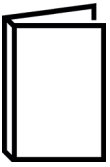
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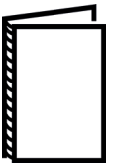
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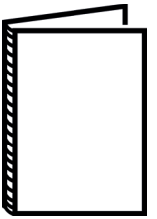
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Frederick Major Paull Knott (28 August 1916 — 17 December 2002) was an English playwright and screenwriter known for his complex, crime-related plots. He completed only three plays in his career: the London-based stage thriller *Dial M for Murder*, which was later filmed in Hollywood by Alfred Hitchcock, and the chilling 1966 play *Wait Until Dark*, which also became a Hollywood film.

PRODUCTION NOTE

The scissors stabbing in ACT II Scene Two can be done in either of two ways: Sheila can pretend to stab Lesgate with the scissors and he will fall in such a way that the audience can imagine the scissors are in his back, without actually seeing them. Or, a device can be arranged whereby a pair of "trick" scissors come out of Lesgate's back with a spring device controlled by Lesgate himself.

In any event, Sheila, after "stabbing" Lesgate, should place the scissors in the drawer of the desk, which is left slightly open. This drawer should have a felt pad so that the scissors dropping in will make no noise.

Note: If Sheila should drop the scissors on the floor during the struggle, it will be just too bad! For this reason, it is a good idea to have the scissors secured to the table with sticking tape so that they do not get knocked off in the struggle.

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DIAL M FOR MURDER

First presented on the stage by James P. Sherwood at the Westminster Theatre, London, on 19th June, 1952, with the following cast of characters:

SHEILA WENDICE	Jane Baxter
MAX HALLIDAY	Alan MacNaughtan
TONY WENDICE	Emrys Jones
CAPTAIN LESGATE	Olaf Pooley
INSPECTOR HUBBARD	Andrew Cruickshank

The play directed by John Fernald
Setting by Paul Mayo

First presented in America by James P. Sherwood at the Plymouth Theatre, New York City, on 29th October, 1952, with the following cast of characters:

MARGOT WENDICE	Gusti Huber
MAX HALLIDAY	Richard Derr
TONY WENDICE	Maurice Evans
CAPTAIN LESGATE	Anthony Dawson
INSPECTOR HUBBARD	John Williams
THOMPSON	Porter Van Zandt

The play directed by Reginald Denham
Setting by Peter Larkin

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action of the play takes place in the living-room of the Wendices' flat in London

ACT I

Scene One	A Friday evening in September
Scene Two	An hour later

ACT II

Scene One	Saturday evening
Scene Two	Later that night
Scene Three	Sunday morning

ACT III

A few months later. Early afternoon



To face page 1 — Dial M for Murder

Photograph by Graphic House

ACT I

Scene One

Scene—The living-room of the **WENDICES***' flat in London. About 6.20 p.m. on a Friday evening in September.*

This is the ground-floor flat of a large house which has been converted into flats. There are french windows right which look out on to Charrington Gardens. There is a small terrace immediately outside. The windows have heavy full-length curtains and inside the windows are shutters. These are folded back into the wall and are hardly noticeable. The fireplace is down left. A door up left leads to the bedroom. At the back there is a small hall, with a door right of it giving access to the kitchen. Back centre of the hall is the main entrance door to the flat. It has a Yale lock. When this door is open we can see through into a narrow passage outside which leads to the street door off left. At the back of the passage is a staircase leading up from left to right to the flat above. The stairs pass the hall doorway at about the fifth step. Inside the hall door and to left of it is a coat rack; to right of it is a chair. In the back wall, right of the hall alcove, there are built-in shelves with books in the top and bottles and drinking glasses on the bottom shelf. There are similar shelves left of the hall alcove in which are **TONY***'s silver tennis trophies; a tennis racket is on the top shelf and on each side of the shelves, on the walls, are tennis photographs. In the corner up right is a standard lamp. There is a fl.at table-desk right centre on which there are an address book, a desk diary and a telephone*

which is at the upstage end. A desk chair stands with its back to the french windows, and there is a waste-paper basket below the desk. There is a sofa left centre with an oblong table behind it and a low coffee table below it. A stool stands right of the sofa. Down left there is an upright chair. Behind the chair is an occasional table on which there is a wicker mending basket filled with stockings, scissors, etc. At night, the room is lit by a chandelier—or overhead lights—centre, the standard lamp, and two pairs of electric-candle wall-brackets over the fireplace. The chandelier and wall-brackets are controlled by switches inside and right of the hall door. The standard lamp is switched on and off at the lamp itself. (See the Ground Plan and Photograph of the Scene).

When the curtain rises, it is daylight, and the lights have not yet been switched on. The window curtains are open, a fire in the hearth is burning brightly and the doors are closed. **SHEILA WENDICE** *and* **MAX HALLIDAY** *are seated on the sofa.* **SHEILA** *hands a drink to* **MAX.** *She suddenly hears something in the passage outside, rises, goes to the hall door, which she opens and peeps through for a moment. Then she closes the door and turns to* **MAX.**

SHEILA *(a little worried)* For a moment I thought it was Tony. *(She moves to right of the sofa)* I'm sorry I interrupted you. What were we talking about?

MAX I was just telling you that I've murdered exactly fifty-two people since I saw you last.

SHEILA *(picking up her drink; with a laugh)* Oh, yes, one a week. How *did* you do it? *(She resumes her seat on the sofa)*

MAX Various methods. I electrocuted some in their baths. Shut others in the garage with the engine switched on, or pushed them from an enormous height. Other weeks I preferred to poison, shoot, strangle, stab, slug or suffocate.

SHEILA Just according to how you felt?

MAX Commercial television writers don't *feel* anything. Not when they're churning out a murder a week. I just wrote them down on bits of paper and drew them out of a hat.

SHEILA Sounds rather like sorting the week's washing.

MAX It's about as artistic as that. But one mustn't be a prig: they paid ten times as much as the B.B.C., and it all went to prove that Whito makes teeth bright, white and *bite.*

SHEILA *(laughing)* Let's have your glass, Max.

MAX No—I'm all right.

SHEILA I hope Tony isn't too late. Poor darling—he always gets caught when we're going to the theatre. I could hardly believe it when I heard your voice. I thought you were speaking from New York at first.

MAX Yes, I thought you were shouting rather louder than was necessary. As a matter of fact, I was just round the corner. *(He pauses. Anxiously)* Was it—all right my phoning like that?

SHEILA Yes, of course.

MAX Was that—Tony who answered the phone?

SHEILA Yes. *(She pauses)* When did you arrive?

MAX The day before yesterday.

SHEILA Are you—going back again?

MAX No. It was a year-to-year contract, and they didn't renew.

SHEILA Oh—I'm sorry. I mean I'm glad you're not going back, but I'm sorry they didn't renew your contract. Were you very disappointed?

MAX Well, of course, I loved the money. But I'm not cut out for a murder a week. I'd like to starve for a year and write a really good one.

SHEILA Another crime story?

MAX Yes, I must stick to crime, it's my one stock-in-trade, but a good murder story is as good as anything else, and I know I can write one if only I take the time.

There is a silence for a few moments. **SHEILA** *goes into a thoughtful stare.*

You look very serious all of a sudden.

SHEILA It's—about Tony. I ought to explain something.

MAX Yes?

SHEILA I didn't tell him anything.

MAX Oh.

SHEILA When you rang up yesterday, I just said that you were a television writer I'd met when he was in America.

MAX Which is quite true.

SHEILA I said I'd met you again just before you left for New York and you promised to look us up when you got back.

MAX I see.

SHEILA Max, I know you think it's silly, but when you get to know Tony, you'll understand why.

MAX How are things?

SHEILA Couldn't be better. I just want to keep them that way.

MAX *(sincerely)* I'm very glad—at least I suppose I will be when I get used to the idea.

SHEILA There's something else, though, Max... *(She breaks off)*

MAX Let's have it.

SHEILA I wasn't going to tell you, but... *(She pauses)*

MAX Come on.

SHEILA Well—you remember those letters you wrote me?

MAX Of course.

SHEILA After I read them I burnt them. I thought it best. All except one. You probably know the one I mean.

MAX I can guess. *(He pauses)* What about it?

SHEILA It was stolen.

MAX When?

SHEILA Last February. Tony and I were going to spend the week-end with some friends in the country. When I got into the train I noticed it was missing.

MAX *(puzzled)* The letter?

SHEILA No—my handbag. The letter was inside.

MAX I see. Where was this?

SHEILA Victoria Station. I thought I must have left it in the tea-room, but when I got back it had gone.

MAX So you never found it?

SHEILA I recovered the handbag about two weeks later from the lost property. But the letter had gone. *(She pauses)* Then a week after that I received a note. It told me what I had to do to get the letter back.

MAX Go on.

SHEILA I was to draw fifty pounds from my bank in five-pound notes, and then change them for used one-pound notes. It said that if I went to the police or told anyone else—he would show the letter to my husband.

MAX May I see it?

SHEILA *rises and exits into the bedroom.* **MAX** *gets up and paces uneasily around the room. He takes a cigarette from the silver box on the table behind the sofa, and lights it.*

SHEILA *re-enters from the bedroom and crosses to* **MAX** *She carries two white envelopes. She hands one of these to* **MAX** *who takes out the note and examines it.*

Block capitals. Anyone could have written this.

SHEILA *hands him the second envelope.*

SHEILA Then—two days later—I got this one.

MAX *takes out the second note.*

MAX *(glancing at the postmarks)* Both posted in Brixton. *(He reads)* "Tie up money in a parcel and post to N. S. King, twenty-three Newport Street, Brixton, S.W. nine. You will get your letter by return." What bloody cheek!

SHEILA *(moving to the sofa and sitting)* That address is a little tobacconists'. They act as agents for forwarding letters and advertisements.

MAX *(resuming his seat beside* **SHEILA** *on the sofa)* Did you post the money?

SHEILA Yes, but the letter was never returned—so after waiting two weeks I went there. They said they'd never heard of a man by that name, and the parcel was still there. It had never been opened.

MAX Well, that's something. *(He replaces the notes in the envelopes and puts them into his wallet)* May I keep these?

SHEILA *(after a pause; hesitantly)* Yes—if you like.

MAX You didn't tell Tony?

SHEILA No. I didn't tell anyone. *(She pauses)* I can't understand why the man didn't collect the money.

MAX He was probably in jail by that time. *(He pauses)* You never heard from him again?

SHEILA No.

MAX Well, let me know if you do. I'll fix him so he can't read, let alone write. *(He pauses)* Is this why you asked me to stop writing?

SHEILA Yes, I was in an awful panic. I imagined that every letter you wrote would be opened and read by someone.

MAX Why didn't you tell me?

SHEILA You couldn't have done anything. At least you would probably have insisted on my telling Tony and the police. As it was only fifty pounds, I thought I'd pay up and have done with it.

There is a pause.

MAX Sheila—are you ever going to tell Tony—about us?

SHEILA *(horrified)* No. I can't possibly tell him. Not now.

MAX Why not? Don't you think we'd all get on better in the end if...

SHEILA Please, Max**.** I know Tony—you don't.

MAX No need to rub that in. I'm nervous enough to meet him as it is.

SHEILA Oh, you'll get on fine. He's changed a lot this last year—now, he's a model husband. *(Slowly and thoughtfully)* In fact, it was exactly a year ago that it happened.

MAX What happened?

SHEILA Tony suddenly grew up. He seemed to change overnight from a rather selfish little boy into a perfectly reasonable grown-up. You remember that night—I came to say good-bye?

MAX Will I ever forget it? Tony had gone off to play in a tennis tournament.

SHEILA He did—but he came back. I'm not much good at writing about things like this—so I didn't try. But when I left you that night I came back here. I sat down on the sofa and had a good cry. Then I fell asleep. When I woke up he was standing in the hall with all his bags and tennis rackets. He just said that he had decided to give up tennis for good and settle down.

MAX Just like that?

SHEILA *rises, picks up* **MAX***'s glass and her own, moves to the drinks shelf in the bookshelves up right, and refills the glasses with sherry.*

SHEILA Just like that. Of course, I didn't believe him at first. I'd got so used to tagging around after him wherever he went, I could see no end to it. But he meant it all right. He spent a week painting the kitchen, and then went out and got a job.

A church clock chimes. There is a pause as **SHEILA** *and* **MAX** *look at each other.*

What were we doing—exactly a year ago?

MAX I was just putting the mushrooms into the spaghetti. I nearly turned round and said, "I can't go through with this. Let's find Tony and have it out with him".

SHEILA I felt that way, too. I wanted so much to say something—and all I could do was to stand there—quite uselessly—with a drip on the end of my nose. What did you do when I'd gone?

MAX I walked along the Chelsea Embankment and stared at Battersea Power Station.

SHEILA *(with a laugh)* Were you thinking of Battersea Power Station—or me?

MAX Neither. I was writing a story. I always do when I'm miserable.

SHEILA A sad story? *(She brings the glasses and stands right of the sofa)*

MAX A triumphant story—of one Max Halliday returning from America with his pockets full of coin—to snatch his lady love from the arms of her jealous husband.

SHEILA *(smiling)* Only to find that husband and wife were very happy, thank you. *(She resumes her seat on the sofa)*

MAX And that he was very glad to know it.

SHEILA *(handing* **MAX** *his glass)* Max, let's drink to—the way things turn out.

MAX *(raising his glass to her)* Way things turn...

But before they can drink, there is the sound of a key in the hall door. They both rise and turn towards the door, as if it has interrupted their toast.

TONY WENDICE *enters by the hall door. He is in his early thirties and has an easy charm. His mind is always active, and he usually seems very sure of himself.*

SHEILA Hullo—what have you been up to?

TONY Sorry, darling. The Old Man blew in just as I was leaving. *(He takes off his overcoat and hangs it up)*

MAX *stands a little awkwardly, facing the hall.*

SHEILA Tony, this is Max Halliday.

TONY *(crossing to* **MAX***)* Hullo, Max.

MAX *(shaking hands)* Tony.

TONY *goes to* **SHEILA** *and kisses her on the cheek.*

SHEILA Hullo, darling. We've been drinking ourselves silly waiting for you. *(Glancing at the clock)* What time does it start?

TONY *takes some theatre tickets from his pocket and looks at them.*

TONY Seven.

SHEILA Well, for heaven's sake. *(She crosses towards the bedroom door)* Get your coats on, boys.

TONY Oh, darling. Slight alteration to plans.

SHEILA Now don't say you can't come.

TONY *(with a shrug)* I'm afraid so. The Old Man's flying to Brussels on Sunday, and he wants my monthly report first thing tomorrow.

SHEILA Oh no! Can't you do it when you get back tonight?

TONY *(shaking his head)* It will take hours. I shall have to cook half of it. *(He hands the tickets to* **MAX***)* Here are the tickets, Max.

MAX Thanks.

SHEILA Can you join us for supper afterwards?

TONY Give me a ring in the interval. If I'm inspired I might make it.

SHEILA Do try. I'll just get my things, Max.

SHEILA *exits to the bedroom.*

TONY *(to* **MAX***)* I'm afraid this is extremely rude of me.

MAX Not at all. I'm sorry you can't come, though.

TONY You must come to dinner one night.

MAX Thanks, I'd like to.

TONY *has a sudden idea.*

TONY I say—are you doing anything tomorrow night?

MAX Saturday. I don't think so.

TONY *(delighted)* That's perfect. How would you like to come to a stag party—just down the road?

MAX *(puzzled)* A stag party?

TONY Yes. Some American boys have been playing tennis all over the Continent, and we're giving them a sort of farewell dinner.

MAX But I'm no tennis player.

TONY That doesn't matter. You know New York and all that.

SHEILA *enters from the bedroom. She wears her overcoat and carries her handbag.*

Darling, Max is coming to the party tomorrow night.

SHEILA *(crossing to right centre)* Oh, good. *(To* **MAX***)* You'd better drop in here first and have a drink.

TONY That's the idea.

SHEILA *(to* **TONY***)* By the way—aren't you dressing?

TONY Dinner-jackets—yes. *(To* **MAX***)* Is that all right?

MAX I'm afraid not. My heavy luggage hasn't arrived yet.

TONY *(quite upset)* Oh. *(He pauses)* You could hire one, of course.

SHEILA Don't be silly. Max doesn't want to go to all that bother.

TONY Just a minute.

TONY *crosses and exits quickly into the bedroom, leaving the door open.*

MAX *(moving to the hall door)* Shall I try and get a taxi?

SHEILA No. We can usually pick one up. *(She glances towards the bedroom)* What's he up to now?

MAX *takes his overcoat from the coat-rack and is about to put it on.*

TONY *enters from the bedroom. He carries a single-breasted dinner jacket.*

TONY *(crossing to* **MAX***)* Hold it a second. Just try this on, Max.

SHEILA What on earth?

MAX *takes off his jacket, and* **TONY** *helps him on with the dinner-jacket.*

TONY *(anxiously)* It's only my old single-breasted—but it might do.

SHEILA We can't send Max out looking like a scarecrow.

TONY *(looking at the fit)* But that's perfect. How about a shirt?

MAX I've got an ordinary white one.

TONY And I can find you a tie so there you are.

MAX *takes off the dinner-jacket and hands it to* **TONY**. **SHEILA** *moves to* **MAX** *and helps him on with his jacket and overcoat.*

SHEILA *(moving impatiently to the hall door)* Come on, Max. Let's get as far as the street before he tries on the pants.

SHEILA *and* **MAX** *exit by the hall door to left.* **TONY** *moves to the open door and watches them go.*

TONY Enjoy yourselves. *(He calls)* Hey, Max!

MAX *(offstage)* Yes?

TONY Try and sell the odd ticket and have a drink on the proceeds.

MAX *(offstage)* Thanks—we will.

The front door is heard to slam. **TONY** *closes the hall door, moves to the standard lamp, switches it on, then crosses to the french windows. He draws the curtains shut. Then he lifts one curtain slightly as if he half-expected to see someone hiding behind it. He drops the curtains and turns and looks thoughtfully at the telephone. After several seconds he sits down at the desk. He pauses with his hand on the telephone, then lifts the receiver and dials quickly.*

TONY *(into the telephone)* Hullo? Hampstead two-eight-three-seven? ...Could I speak to Captain Lesgate, please? ...Oh, good evening. You don't know me. My name's Fisher... I understand you have a car for sale... That's right. I saw it at your garage. How much are you asking? ... *(After a pause)* Eleven hundred! I see—it certainly looks just the job for

me, but I don't like that price much... *(He laughs)* Now, when can we meet? ...*(After a pause)* I don't think I can manage that. *(He pauses)* No, I can't. And I'm going up to Liverpool on Sunday. I was rather hoping... I say—I suppose you couldn't come round to my flat tonight? ...Maida Vale... *(After a pause)* I'd call on you only—I've twisted my knee rather badly... Sixty-one A Charrington Gardens... No—Charrington... That's right. Turn left at the Tube station. It's about two minutes' walk... *(Delighted)* In about an hour? That's extremely good of you... *(Anxiously)* By the way, will you be bringing the car? ... *(He looks relieved)* You can't... No, that doesn't matter. I had a look at it. Perhaps you'd bring the registration book and any necessary papers... I don't see why we shouldn't settle the whole thing here and now—provided you drop your price sufficiently... Huh—we'll see what a couple of drinks can do... All right, then—good-bye— *(He replaces the receiver; after a short pause)* Captain Lesgate.

Curtain.

Scene Two

Scene—The same. One hour later.

When the curtain rises, the room is softly lit by the standard lamp and wall-brackets. A pair of white cotton gloves lies on the stool. **TONY** *enters from the bedroom, carrying an old leather suit-case which he places carefully against the wall by the coat-rack. Then he turns and surveys the room. He looks at the cotton gloves for a moment, and then goes and picks them up and lays them neatly on the left arm of the sofa. He considers the effect, and is satisfied. He then crosses to the bedroom, and is about to exit when the door bell rings and interrupts him. He turns, deliberately assumes a painful limp, crosses to the hall door and opens it.* **CAPTAIN LESGATE** *stands outside. He wears his overcoat. He is in his middle thirties and has a military moustache.*

LESGATE Mr Fisher?

TONY Yes. Captain Lesgate?

LESGATE Yes.

TONY Do come in.

LESGATE *comes into the hall.*

(he closes the hall door) This is very good of you. Let me have your coat.

LESGATE *takes off his overcoat.*

(he takes the overcoat and hangs it up) Have any difficulty finding your way?

LESGATE None at all.

They come into the room. **LESGATE** *is about to sit on the stool.*

TONY *(waving* **LESGATE** *to the sofa)* I think you'll find the sofa comfortable.

LESGATE Thank you.

TONY Now how about a drink?

LESGATE *sits on the sofa.* **TONY** *limps to the drinks shelf.* **LESGATE** *watches him curiously for a few moments.*

LESGATE You know I can't help thinking I've seen you before somewhere.

TONY *(looking up sharply)* Funny you should say that. The moment I opened the door I... *(He stops suddenly)* Wait a minute—Lesgate? You're not Lesgate—Swann! C. J. Swann—or was it C. A.?

LESGATE C. A.—you've a better memory than I have. *(He pauses)* Fisher? When did we meet?

TONY Must be nearly fifteen years ago. Bennet's House. You wouldn't remember me—I only came your last term.

LESGATE Well! It's a small world.

TONY, *at the drinks shelf, collects a bottle of brandy and two brandy glasses.*

TONY This calls for a special drink. I was planning to palm you off with an indifferent port. *(He holds up the brandy bottle)* How about this?

LESGATE Perfect. *(He pauses)* By the way—how did you know my car was for sale?

TONY *pours brandy into two glasses before answering.*

TONY Your garage told me.

LESGATE That's odd. I don't think I mentioned it to anyone there.

TONY I was stopping for petrol. I told them I was looking for an American car, and they gave me your phone number. I say—it is for sale—isn't it?

LESGATE *(laughing)* Well, of course.

TONY *(picking up the glasses and moving to the sofa)* Good. But I refuse to discuss the price until you've had at least three brandies. *(He hands* **LESGATE** *his glass)*

LESGATE I warn you. I drive a hard bargain, drunk or sober.

TONY So do I.

They laugh.

LESGATE You know—I think I must have seen you since we left school.

TONY Ever been to Wimbledon?

LESGATE That's it—Wendice—Tony Wendice. *(Bewildered)* Then what's all this about Fisher?

TONY *(with a teasing glance)* What's all this about Lesgate?

LESGATE *looks embarrassed.*

Do you like a cigar?

LESGATE *(taking out his pipe)* I'll stick to this pipe—if you don't mind.

TONY *takes a cigarette from the box on the table behind the sofa.*

TONY That's one habit you've changed.

LESGATE Oh? *(He puts his glass on the coffee table, then fills and lights his pipe)*

TONY You smoked cigars at school.

LESGATE *(laughing)* Yes—I believe I did. All I could get at the time.

TONY *sits on the sofa, makes himself thoroughly comfortable and lights his cigarette.*

TONY I remember barging into Boving's study one evening when I was fagging for him. You were all playing poker, and you were smoking an enormous cigar.

LESGATE *(with a laugh)* I remember. So that frightened little face was you, was it? Of course, we thought it was Daddy Bennet on the prowl.

TONY Old Daddy Bennet. He's still alive and kicking, apparently. Must be nearly eighty.

LESGATE Yes, I suppose so.

TONY Let's see—he left the same term as you did.

LESGATE Don't I know it. I spent half the term collecting for his good-bye present.

TONY And the whole lot got pinched, didn't it?

LESGATE Yes—over twenty quid. I kept it in a money box in my study. I remember the morning I found it had gone. It still makes me sweat.

TONY It was the bootman, of course.

LESGATE Yes—poor old Alfred.

TONY They found the money box in his boot cupboard, didn't they?

LESGATE Yes—but—er—not the money.

TONY Fifteen years ago? What are you doing nowadays?

LESGATE *(after a pause; uncertainly)* I deal in property. *(He changes the subject)* I don't follow tennis very closely. Did you play at Wimbledon this year?

TONY No. I gave up tennis about a year ago. One has to earn a living some time, and I'd had a pretty good innings. I went round the world three times.

LESGATE I suppose you were treated like a film star?

TONY Film stars get paid.

LESGATE There is that.

TONY Of course, I managed to save a bit on expenses. In seven years I put away just over a thousand. Not much compared with your film star.

LESGATE What are you doing now? Making up for lost time?

TONY I sell sports equipment. Not very lucrative, but it gives me plenty of spare time.

LESGATE *(looking around the room)* Well—I'm here to tell you you manage to run a very comfortable flat.

TONY *(modestly)* My wife has some money of her own. Otherwise I should hardly feel like blowing my thousand on your car.

LESGATE Eleven hundred. Yes—people with capital don't realise how lucky they are. I'm already resigned to living on what I can earn.

TONY *(after a pause; thoughtfully)* Of course, you can still marry for money.

LESGATE *(after a pause)* Yes—I suppose some people make a business of that.

TONY *(quietly)* I know I did.

LESGATE *(after a pause; with a laugh)* You mean the girl you fell in love with happened to have some money of her own.

TONY No. *(He pauses)* I always intended to marry for money. I had to. Whilst I was in first-class tennis I met wealthy people all over the world—I was somebody—while my wind lasted. I decided to snap up the first chance I got. I nearly married a tubby Boston deb with five million dollars; it got as far as pictures in the papers, and then she threw me over for an heir to a chain of grocery stores. Funny how they stick together. I finally settled for a good deal less—a lot more easily. My wife had been a fan of mine for some time.

LESGATE *(after a pause)* Well—that's putting it pretty bluntly.

TONY Have I shocked you?

LESGATE No—I always admire a man who knows what he wants.

TONY To know what you want *to pay for*—that's the thing. Everything has its price. People fail because they want to buy cheap. I've learnt to pay a big price for anything I really want—I usually get it.

LESGATE Yes, I'm sure you do. *(He looks at his wrist-watch)* I haven't a great deal of time. I wonder if...

TONY I was telling you about my wife. She got her money from her late aunt; who got it from her late husband; who got it from his first wife. Of course, a large chunk gets lopped off every time somebody dies, but quite a bit has managed to filter through.

LESGATE *(joking)* You say you married for money. Why do you think she married you?

TONY *(quite simply)* I was a tennis star. She would never have married a commercial traveller.

LESGATE But you gave up tennis a year ago. She didn't leave you.

TONY *(after a pause)* She nearly did. *(He starts to get up rather painfully)*

LESGATE *(rising)* Let me, Wendice; you've got a groggy knee.

TONY Oh, thanks, old boy. Let's have that bottle over here, shall we?

LESGATE Good idea. *(He collects the brandy bottle and refills his own and* **TONY***'s glass)*

TONY *watches* **LESGATE** *all the time.*

TONY Would you—like to hear about it?

LESGATE Hear what?

TONY About my wife—how she nearly left me.

LESGATE It's your privilege—you're the host.

TONY Oh, thanks. To be frank, I think you might help. Just man-to-man advice, you know.

LESGATE I'm at your service. *(He puts the brandy bottle on the coffee table, and resumes his seat on the sofa)*

TONY After we were married I played in the various championships, and Sheila tagged along. I think she found it all a bit much. Hospitality—outside this country—can be pretty exhausting. When we got back she tried to persuade me to give up tennis and play husband instead. *(He rises)* In the end, we compromised. I went alone to America for the grass-court season and returned after the National Championships. I soon realised that a lot had happened while I was away. For one thing—she wasn't in love with me any more. And there were phone calls that would end abruptly if I happened to walk in. And there was an old school friend she used to visit from time to time. Then one day we had a row; I wanted to play in a covered-court tournament, and as usual she didn't want me to go. While I was in the bedroom the phone rang. It all sounded pretty urgent. After that she seemed rather keen that I should play in that tournament after all, so I packed my kit into the car and drove off. *(He pauses)* I parked the car two streets away and walked back on my tracks. Ten minutes later she came out of this house and took a taxi. I took another. *(He pauses)* Her old school friend lived in a ramshackle studio in Chelsea. I could see them through the studio window as he cooked spaghetti over a gas ring. They didn't say much. They just looked very natural together. Funny how you can tell when people are in love. *(He pauses)* When I left them I started to walk. I can't remember ever being so scared. I dropped into a pub and had a few drinks. As I sat in the corner I thought of all sorts of things. I thought of three different ways of killing him. I even thought of killing her. That seemed a far more sensible idea. I'd been around and picked up some expensive tastes. Big tennis had finished with me, and now it all seemed to have been wasted. We'd both made our wills only a few months ago—quite short

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