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SF PERUSALS

A Sting In The Tale

A play

Brian Clemens
and
Dennis Spooner

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



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A STING IN THE TALE

First presented by arrangement with Michael Codron at the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guildford, on 11th May, 1982, with the following cast of characters:

Nigel Forbes	Jack Douglas
Max Goodman	Pete Murray
Jill Prentice	Marguerite Hardiman
Ann Forbes	Dilys Laye
Detective Inspector Berry	Bill Pertwee

The play directed by Val May
Setting by Graham Brown
Lighting by James Baird

This revised version subsequently presented at the Theatre Royal, Windsor, on 21st February, 1984, with the following cast of characters:

Nigel Forbes	Jack Douglas
Max Goodman	Richard Kay
Jill Prentice	Su Douglas
Ann Forbes	Rosemarie Dunham
Detective Inspector Berry	Davyd Harries

The play directed by Hugh Goldie
Setting by John Page
Lighting by Neil Goodwill

The action of the play takes place in Nigel Forbes' study in his country house in Oxfordshire, over one weekend

ACT I SCENE 1 Saturday morning
SCENE 2 Some time later
SCENE 3 That night

ACT II SCENE 1 Sunday morning
SCENE 2 That night

Time—the present

ACT I*

SCENE 1

Nigel Forbes' study. Saturday morning

It was probably once the drawing-room of this large, oldish house, set somewhere in isolated Oxfordshire. Upstage, and placed L *of* C *french windows lead out onto a terrace and garden beyond. What we can see of the garden suggests that it is overgrown, and somewhat neglected. Stage* R, *a door leads to the hallway, and the other rooms of the house. Near to the door is a large, excellent quality desk. The desk is very neat; a telephone, an antique desk lamp, neatly stacked papers, an antique paper knife, and an electric typewriter. Behind this desk is a good quality swing chair, some built-in shelves. These shelves contain books, interspaced with objets d'art, and a tape recorder. Stage* L *is a cheap, folding-type table, with an equally cheap bentwood chair. This table serves as a desk too, but it is very untidy. It is cluttered with papers, jam jars containing pencils, and a tatty manual typewriter. Beneath the table a cheap tin waste basket is filled almost to overflowing. Elsewhere in the area is a sofa; a small fridge with a tray of bottles and glasses on top of it, and—downstage* C*—an antique chest. There is also at least one easy chair in the area. Framed, theatrical posters, of various productions of Forbes and Goodman's plays adorn the walls. The impression is of a lived-in, worked-in, office. No one has designed the layout, it has just "happened" over some years*

At this moment the drapes are drawn across the french windows, and the room is lit by overhead light, and by the desk lamp on Forbes' desk

As the CURTAIN *rises we hear the sounds of the countryside at night. The hooting of an owl. There is the rumble of thunder in the air*

Nigel Forbes is alone on stage. He is anything over forty-five or so, a tall, well set-up, attractive man, with an almost languid, cultured drawl that adds to his enormous—albeit cultivated—charm. He is always immaculate, and dresses with great taste. Forbes—wearing gloves—crosses to his desk. He picks up a document, and his spectacles (which are almost always to be found on his desk) and—without even putting them on—he holds them, and squints through the lens at the document. Satisfied, he places the document back on the desk projecting from under a blotting pad. He returns his spectacles to his desk

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*N.B. Paragraph 3 on page ii of this Acting Edition regarding photocopying and video-recording should be carefully read.

Goodman enters the study through the door that leads to the hallway. He is a complete contrast to his partner. He is smallish, his hair either thinning or ill cut. He is around forty years of age, and has an almost neurotic nervous energy. His clothes are casual and ill-matched. A loose red cardigan, a yellow shirt, and green socks. Goodman—also wearing gloves—is tense, and this tends to manifest itself in an air of excitement

Goodman OK, Nije. We're ready.
Forbes You unlocked the side door?
Goodman Yes. We haven't overlooked a thing.
Forbes Excellent, Max. Excellent. (*He picks up a knife from his desk, and offers it to Goodman*)

Goodman regards it for a moment

Come on, take it. We agreed that you should do it.
Goodman (*taking the knife reluctantly*) God, I'm nervous. What if it doesn't work?
Forbes It's got to work—for both our sakes. Now, come on, Max—motivate. We have been in the grip of a ruthless blackmailer far too long. And in a few moments he'll be coming through that door . . .

We hear a car draw up outside

That's him!

Immediately, between them, they switch off the lights, and—in the darkness—take up positions of hiding

The door bell rings, a few moments, then it rings again

(*Whispering*) He thinks the house is empty. . . . He'll make his way to the side door.
Goodman (*whispering*) I'm still nervous!
Forbes (*whispering*) Ssssh. We're nearly there. He's found the side door unlocked. . . . He's in the house now—coming down the hall . . . and in a few moments. . . .

The handle of the drawing-room door rattles a fraction, and the door slowly starts to open

A man enters carrying a torch. He wears a full beard, snap brim hat, coat with collar turned up, plus gloves. He moves to start searching the drawers of Forbes' desk. Then, finally, he spotlights—with his torch—the document slipped under the blotting pad. He reaches for it, and—as he slowly slides it out . . .

So Forbes and Goodman attack him. Forbes grapples with, and holds the man, and turns him so that Goodman can stab him twice

The man falls to the floor—dead!

Working as a practised team Forbes and Goodman pick up the body, carry it over to the antique chest, and place it inside

Goodman hurries over to switch on the desk lamp, and looks to where Forbes is just closing the lid of the chest

Goodman I did it! It was easier than I thought.
Forbes (*shaking his head, and moves away from the chest*) It's no good, Max. We're not going to get away with it. . . .
Goodman What? Why, Nije—everything went as planned. . . .

Goodman crosses to stand behind Forbes—who is still shaking his head

Behind them—out of their sight—the lid of the chest slowly opens. The "man" stands up. "He" is actually Jill Prentice, their attractive secretary

Jill Have you finished? Or do I get buried under the summer house now?
Forbes We've finished for the moment, Jill. We'll have coffee at the usual time.
Jill Right. . . .

Jill removes her hat and beard, steps out of the chest, closes the lid, and exits

At the same time Forbes moves to pull aside the drapes covering the french windows, and—as sunshine floods in—we realize it is day

Goodman Nije? What did we overlook?
Forbes What did we overlook? The critics, Max. And our audience.

We hear the night sounds of the owl and thunder

Forbes (*moving to the tape recorder and switching it off*) The plot is banal. Totally unacceptable.
Goodman But we can't throw away three months hard work.
Forbes It would be laughed off the stage.
Goodman Perhaps we should change it into a comedy then?
Forbes That isn't our field, Max. We're thriller writers.
Goodman We're the only ones who remember that. We haven't had a hit in years.
Forbes Well, let me assure you—this one isn't even a near miss. (*He picks up a sheaf of papers from his desk as he speaks and hands them to Goodman*)
Goodman You're right of course. It is terrible. (*He tears up the pages, and deposits them in his overflowing waste basket*) But what do you expect? Our early plays are out of fashion—the amateur rights drying up. You know damn well I've got a great tax bill looming over me—creditors piling up—and starting to get nasty. How can I be expected to work under such pressures?
Forbes I am in exactly the same boat, Max. My tax bill is even larger than yours—my creditors more numerous—and nastier! I'm only just managing to keep up appearances, and clinging to this house by the skin of my teeth. But for the fact that Ann has some money of her own, I would have sunk without trace months ago.
Goodman And who's fault's that, Nije? Who said let's get rid of our agent and save ten per cent? Who said he could handle all our business affairs?
Forbes Oh, yes, and what about your business affairs? The money you invested and lost in a series of crackpot schemes!

Goodman Some of those schemes you went along with!

Forbes Oh dear, all this bickering—it only confirms what I've been thinking for some time now. That we should call it a day.

Goodman Eh?

Forbes Max, undeniably over the years our writing collaboration has brought us a measure of success, adulation, fame, money, and even one good review from Milton Shulman—but equally undeniably the creative spirit that once sparked between us appears to have died.

Goodman appears that he is about to protest, but:

No, Max, hear me out. I'm not apportioning blame—indeed, I am willing to accept the brunt of it upon my own shoulders, but perhaps it is, quite simply, like a once fruitful marriage that is no longer working—time for a divorce.

Goodman You can't be serious. You and me split up?

Forbes You and *I*, Max.

Goodman You and I. You and me, whatever. We couldn't do that. It'd be like . . . like . . . Black without Decker.

Forbes I would have preferred Fortnum without Mason.

Goodman We're a team—Max Goodman and Nigel Forbes.

Forbes *Forbes* and Goodman.

Goodman Right! You take top billing, Nije, and I wouldn't have it any other way. I couldn't do it without you. There, I've admitted it at last. I may come up with the ideas—but without you? You channel them—point me in the right direction. Well, start pointing me, Nije, start motivating!

Forbes We-ll, if we *are* to have another go at it . . .

Goodman Of course we are. We must. Think of those creditors. Think of yours—they're nastier than mine!

Forbes We would have to start from square one. A completely new plot.

Goodman Agreed! And we'll sweat over it, we'll burn the midnight oil . . . and we'll do as we always do—run it through, act it out, until we're sure that every last detail works. Now—where to start—a nice juicy murder—something bizarre and outrageous—and yet, so real it would stand up in a court of law. That's *my* speciality . . . something that will keep them on the edge of their seats, with bated breath, until the big, big twist, at the end . . . and that's *your* speciality, Nije!

Forbes It sounds wonderful, Max—but we don't have a beginning or an end yet. We don't even have a victim. And, as you know, we always start with a victim.

Goodman nods, and starts to pace to and fro. Suddenly he has a thought

Goodman A de-frocked priest! No, we tried that and it didn't work. (*He resumes his pacing. Then gets another idea*) I've got it! A heart surgeon. It hasn't been done before. He gets the operation wrong. The husband dies—the wife's seeking revenge. . . .

Forbes But all our sympathy would be with the surgeon! In the best thrillers one must always have a sneaking regard for the murderer. No, what we want is the victim the *audience* would cheerfully strangle. The victim you love to hate!

Ann Forbes enters, and stands, hands on hips, glaring at Forbes

Ann You know why I'm here, don't you?

Forbes You've run out of gin?

Ann If that's your idea of wit, no wonder no one buys your plays any more. I want some money.

Forbes Money? But I just gave you thirty pounds.

Ann That was yesterday. Today I've got to go and face that man in the off-licence.

Forbes You do most of the damned drinking. Anyway, you've got a cheque book of your own.

Ann Husbands are supposed to keep wives. Not that you'd notice around here—I've been paying most of the bills lately. And now, what I've got I intend to keep. The way you two are going, it looks as though I'm going to need it! Money! Now! Twenty pounds will do.

Forbes I haven't got twenty pounds.

Ann Then find it!

Forbes How?

Ann Make savings! Fire your secretary . . . fire Jill. Oh no, you wouldn't do that, would you? You'd put her before me every time. . . . There's probably something going on between you. . . .

Forbes That's ridiculous.

Ann Oh, is it? It wasn't ridiculous in "Death Game" was it—that actress with the long legs? Or "Murder me Softly"? Or "Killer's Return"?

Goodman That was a failure.

Ann Not for him and the leading lady it wasn't. Mind you, that was a long time ago when he could still do it. Now he can't even write a successful play.

Goodman And we're just about to do it again—we're on the brink of something big. Aren't we, Nije?

Ann Oh, *you're* going to give him a leg up, are you? That depresses me. Now do I get that money or don't I?

Forbes I haven't bloody well got it.

Ann Well bloody well get it.

Forbes How? Where?

Ann Well, if your friends weren't all paupers you could borrow it.

Goodman Not quite paupers. (*He takes some money from his pocket, and gives it to Ann*) There's your twenty pounds.

Forbes and Ann are surprised. Eventually:

Ann Don't run away with the idea that this is a loan. You've been poncing food and drink off us for weeks. . . . (*She moves to the door and regards them*) "On the brink of something big?" Huh!

Ann exits

Forbes (*after a long moment*) *That's* who we should be planning to kill. (*He moves across to pour himself a drink*) For the umpteenth time in our long relationship, Max, I apologize for my cow of a wife.

Goodman Don't apologize. Why apologize? Don't you see? You said it. *She's* it!

Forbes regards Goodman with a puzzled frown

Goodman Ann. The perfect victim. "A sneaking regard for the murderer"—when we kill Ann, the audience will give us a standing ovation!

Forbes When we kill Ann?

Goodman In the play, Nije, in the play. I can see it shaping up now—there's this alcoholic harridan with her hand on the purse strings. Married to this man . . .

Forbes . . . a man she trapped into marriage. Yes, I see him as tall, handsome, mature . . .

Goodman That's you.

Forbes And virile. Yes, definitely virile. (*Then*) No, out of the question.

Goodman Why?

Forbes The husband would be the first suspect.

Goodman But we'll give him a cast-iron alibi.

Forbes How?

Goodman We-ll. . . . Well, he has to be miles away when the murder actually happens—with witnesses to prove it.

Forbes There's the weakness. If he's miles away, how does he do it?

Goodman Well, er. . . . He doesn't do it!

Forbes He doesn't?

Goodman No—because he has a friend—right? A good friend. . . .

Forbes That's you.

Goodman Right. *Right!* And these two friends . . .

Forbes That's you and I. . . .

Goodman Right. They're partners in some venture. Accountants. No, too dull. Vets? No. . . .

Forbes Writers?

Goodman Of course. You've done it again, Nije. A writing partnership.

Forbes Mmmm . . . Ira Levin did it in *Deathtrap*.

Goodman *They* were homosexuals. Now as far as *we're* concerned, for homosexual read "buddies" . . . camaraderie.

Forbes It's terribly close to "Strangers on a Train".

Goodman They *swapped* murders. We're not swapping . . . I'm just doing your murder for you.

Forbes You *are* right, Max. It *is* taking shape.

Goodman Taking shape, it's terrific—we're really cooking again, Nije. Now—why do I agree to commit your murder?

Forbes (*after a long pause*) Their writing partnership hasn't been working?

Goodman Right! *Right!* In fact, it's falling apart, and to make matters worse, they're desperate for money—particularly the good friend—that's me. And the nice guy—that's you again is too . . . is too . . .

Forbes Noble?

Goodman Exactly! He's too noble to reveal to his partner the real reason. To tell of the sleepless nights, his wife's constant nagging . . .

Forbes Yes! He's far too noble to admit that *she* is the reason for his mental exhaustion. So he invents an excuse—a fiction. . . .

Goodman . . . something like, "The spark of creativity once between them appears to have died."

Forbes That's a rather good line, Max—make a note of it.

Goodman nods, moves to his desk, and writes on a sheet of paper

So—the husband is close to breaking up their working relationship . . .

Goodman But his friend won't hear of it.

Forbes And he's ready to help.

Goodman Ready to do anything. Anything at all.

Forbes So together—they come up with this plan to murder the wife. What shall we call her?

Goodman Why not "Ann"? It's short, and easy to type.

Forbes All right, for the moment, we'll call her Ann. Now, the question is—how do they do it?

Goodman Slow poison?

Forbes Tempting—especially if we're calling her Ann. By the way, where did you get twenty pounds?

Goodman You know what a camera buff I am?

Forbes Yes.

Goodman Well, now I'm not.

Forbes You sold your camera . . .? Oh, Max. . . .

Goodman There'll be other cameras. Once we've written this new play. And we're nearly there—we have a victim—now all we need is a murder method . . .

Jill enters carrying a tray of coffee

Jill Coffee up!

Goodman Thanks, Jill . . .

Jill puts the tray on the antique chest, then moves away to Forbes' desk

Forbes I always like a good strangulation.

Goodman Yes—it goes on as long as you want it to—if the play's running short, a good director can pick up some time there.

Forbes And not only that, it's sort of sexy too . . . flexing a stocking between one's hands . . .

Jill picks up a card from Forbes' desk and waits

Goodman And you know how actors love props.

Jill tries to attract attention

Jill Hmm . . . Hmm . . .

Forbes But one does lose the marvellous shock effect of blood suddenly splashed across the stage.

Goodman But you do get the choking cries.

Jill Excuse me . . .

Forbes They seem to expect violence these days. Television has ruined them.

Jill *Excuse me.*

Forbes Yes, what is it?

Jill I'll be going into town later. This card from the optician's has been lying

here for more than a week. Your spare pair of glasses have been repaired. Do you want me to pick them up?

Forbes Yes, yes, collect them . . . (*He turns back to Goodman*) Now about this murder method.

Jill There'll be something to pay. Twenty-five pounds, perhaps thirty . . .

Forbes Oh, well, er . . . I'll pick them up myself. Next week. How, Max . . . ?

Jill clears her throat to denote that she has not finished

Forbes (*turning on her*) Are you still here?

Jill I'm sorry, but while we're on about money—I hate to bring this up, but . . . well, I haven't been paid for last month.

Forbes If you hate to bring it up, why did you?

Goodman Oh, come on, Nije—that's unfair!

Jill I'm not asking for the money.

Forbes Why not? Everybody else is!

Jill I'm just pointing out that I have to eat too. Come the end of the month I'll have to start looking elsewhere. It's not that I *want* to leave—no—I've loved working for you, I really have . . . but . . . well . . . it's just that. . . . You must understand?

Forbes Oh, yes—we understand all right.

Goodman Nije! (*He moves round to face Jill*) Sure we understand—but it may not come to that, Jill. We're onto something—all we have to do is work out the details, and then . . . get at it.

Jill I hope so. . . . And I wish you luck. (*She moves to the door, opens it, then pauses and looks back*) Why don't you use a gun?

Goodman reacts

For the murder you're planning. I don't think I've typed in a gun since I started working for you.

Jill exits, and closes the door behind herself

Goodman You shouldn't bully her like that, Nije. She's a terrific girl—good-looking too. Attractive.

Forbes Mmm, yes—I suppose so. *Why not a gun?*

Goodman There's the noise factor. It'll wake up the maid, the butler. . . . Although I suppose it could be a household without servants?

Forbes A thriller? Without servants? And who would answer the ringing phone as the curtain goes up? Besides, we may need a minor character to carry the humour.

Goodman You think so? I thought the two writers would be quite funny guys.

Forbes Oh, no. One of them has a rapier-like wit. . . . (*He—unnoticed—looks Goodman up and down*) I see the other as . . . rather dull.

Ann enters—dressed to go out—and carrying some mail—which she puts down as follows

Ann Mail. . . . (*She puts down one letter*) Bills. . . . (*She puts down a batch of envelopes*) Final demands! (*She puts down a bigger batch of envelopes. She*

moves to exit, then pauses) Just look at the two of you. Has-beens, still scribbling away to try and find the old fire. Well, you won't—it isn't there any more. Perhaps it never was. You may have to start thinking about getting a proper job!

Ann exits

Goodman Marvellous! They'll hate her the minute she comes on. Do we have a victim, or do we have a victim! It's terrific. It's wonderful. It's no good.

Forbes What?

Goodman Motive. Why would you want to kill Ann?

Forbes You ask me . . . after that?

Goodman That was real life—but we need to do better than that for the theatre. Why *would* you kill Ann?

Forbes I'm not going to kill her—you are.

Goodman Why would *I* then? Wouldn't I just tell you to divorce her? You've got grounds enough.

Forbes For the money.

Goodman For twenty quid?

Forbes For the insurance.

Goodman What insurance?

Forbes Two hundred thousand pounds upon her death—I took it out during the flush of our first real success.

Goodman The "Murder Plot"?

Forbes Ah, Max, things were going well then.

Goodman Don't remind me. . . . Two hundred thousand pounds?

Forbes It would come straight to me of course.

Goodman Now that's a really strong motive. That's the kind of money a man would murder for.

Forbes Yes, and I could certainly use one hundred thousand pounds right now.

Goodman A hundred? I thought you said it was two hundred thousand pounds.

Forbes I'd split it with you, wouldn't I? I mean, as you would be doing the actual killing.

Goodman A hundred thousand.

Forbes Each.

Goodman That *would* get us out of a hole.

Forbes The pressure would be off us then.

Goodman We could take our time about the next play.

Forbes Refine. Get it right. Just like the old days, Max, before I married Ann.

Goodman Sounds like a wonderful dream.

Forbes Yes.

Goodman But a pipe dream. It won't work.

Forbes Eh?

Goodman The insurance, Nije. The motive. It would point the finger straight at you!

Forbes You're right. I thought for a moment we were on to another "Death Has No Exit". *That* gave us a lot of early problems too.

Goodman Yes, but making the vicar's wife a karate expert won't help us here!

Forbes Hmmm. . . .

Forbes moves to his desk. He sits down and idly opens and glances through his mail. He puts on his heavy reading glasses

I remember you buying that camera, Max—how excited you were . . .

Goodman Get this right and there'll be a dozen cameras!

Forbes Yes, and by God, Max, we've got to make this play work somehow. We've got to!

Goodman I've been thinking about it. Suppose the husband has a secret mistress?

Forbes gives Goodman a hard look

OK, OK. No secret mistress. But you see where I'm leading? We have to create another suspect. *Invent* one.

Forbes (*scanning a letter*) An anonymous letter containing a veiled threat to kill my wife.

Goodman Oh, great, Nije, you've done it again! Where do they come from?

Forbes (*examining the envelope*) London South West Ten. That's Fulham, isn't it? Or is it Chelsea?

Goodman What? You mean an actual letter?

Forbes An actual letter, postmarked yesterday afternoon. Obviously from some crank—listen to this. (*He reads*) "Dear Mr Playwright, I suppose you think you're brilliant. . . ."

Goodman Well, so far so good . . .

Forbes ". . . creating a wonderfully worked-out hanging on stage. . . ."

Goodman He's talking about "Death Game". That was six years ago . . . and anyway the hanging was *my* idea, why is he writing to you?

Forbes Because you have no wife. It continues . . . ". . . as a result of seeing this perverted play presented under the guise of entertainment. . . ."

Goodman It's a critic—got to be a critic!

Forbes ". . . as a result, my dear wife was so influenced as to emulate the sick example you set in such detail and now lies dead, leaving me bereft and bitter. But let me assure you that one day soon you will come to know the shock of bereavement . . ." It's ending on a brighter note. ". . . and be left a sad and lonely widower as I am".

Goodman How's it signed? "A Well-wisher"?

Forbes No signature. Typewritten. (*He removes his glasses, and hands the letter to Goodman*) It's the vicar's wife all over again—the breakthrough. Oh, I know we've had crank notes in the past. But never one that actually mentioned my wife . . .

Goodman But, as you said, it's only a *veiled* threat.

Forbes That's its strength, don't you see? Its ambiguity. Of course you and I know he has no intention of actually doing anything.

Goodman But if Ann *were* to be murdered . . .
Forbes And I . . .
Goodman Suspect Number One . . .
Forbes Had an absolutely cast-iron alibi . . .
Goodman They'd have to look elsewhere. . . .
Forbes This letter would become enormously significant then. It would be their only clue.

A pause. They regard each other

Goodman I like it. You know why I like it? It isn't contrived. It has a neat simplicity about it. This crank never actually says he *is* going to kill your wife . . .
Forbes But the hint is there.
Goodman It's the kind of clue you or I might have written.
Forbes Just enough to muddy the waters.
Goodman Cast a doubt.

Forbes regards the letter he now holds, then carefully puts it away in his desk as:

Forbes This suddenly makes everything possible.
Goodman Now it's just a question of mechanics—and dreaming up exactly the right plot.
Forbes I'm not sure that it's *dreaming*, Max. More a question of choosing . . .
Goodman What do you mean?
Forbes I mean originality might be dangerous—we want something that's come under close scrutiny and passed muster. Something proven.
Goodman Eh?
Forbes A classic concept.
Goodman You're not suggesting . . .? You don't mean *steal? Plagiarize?*
Forbes Let's be realistic, Max, we thought our last play was superbly original, and look what happened to that. No, we have to go back to the grass roots for this one—to the classic murder plays.
Goodman But in the classic plays, the murderer always gets caught.
Forbes Because the author wanted him caught. Our play will have a happy ending. For the murderer. (*He wanders over to the bookshelves, and runs his hand over a section*) I think we can eliminate all the Christie plays. . . . Much as I admire the old duck, they do lean rather heavily upon exactitudes of time, esoteric clues, and policemen on skis. . . .
Goodman *Night Must Fall*?
Forbes (*shuddering*) The idea of touting that head around in a hat-box is utterly repellent. What about *Sleuth*?
Goodman Brilliant, craftsmanslike job . . .
Forbes I agree. But all that dressing up . . .! (*He takes a book from the shelves*) *Dial M For Murder*!
Goodman I hated that play.
Forbes Why on earth should you? It's in constant production—made a fortune.

Goodman That's why I hate it.

Forbes Ah, Max, but now is not the time for professional jealousies . . . now is the time to learn from the best—and, in my opinion, Frederick Knott *is* one of the best. *Dial M For Murder*—superbly constructed, exciting denouement, big film sales—what more could one ask? Yes, *Dial M*. That's the one.

Goodman There's another reason I'm against that play.

Forbes Oh?

Goodman Under our present construction, I'm the murderer—right?

Forbes I wouldn't have cast it any other way.

Goodman Well—in *Dial M* it's the murderer who gets killed!

Forbes Ah, but when Freddy Knott wrote *Dial M* it suited his purpose to have the murder go wrong. *Ours* is going to go right.

Goodman How?

Forbes Well. . . . How many times have you seen the play?

Goodman Half a dozen at least.

Forbes I thought you hated it.

Goodman I'm a masochist.

Forbes All right. Chief plotter—that's me—blackmails potential murderer—that's you—into killing Chief plotter's wife. . . . Is my recollection correct?

Goodman So far.

Forbes Now the murder—and this is Freddy Knott's master stroke—killer waits here in the shadows—phone rings—wife enters to answer it—killer pounces.

Goodman And she stabs him dead.

Forbes That's *his* version—we're going to fix that. Now—*our* version is—killer waits—phone rings—wife in—killer pounces—*wife* dead. Does that suit you better?

Goodman It's easy to say—how are we going to achieve it?

Forbes We are going to improve upon Freddy Knott's construction. What was the weakness of *Dial M For Murder*?

Goodman It only ran five years?

Forbes The murder method. Strangling—thus putting killer and victim in close proximity—and, as if that wasn't enough—leaving a convenient pair of scissors on the desk for her to stab him with.

Goodman Got you! We've going to move the desk.

Forbes No, we are not going to move the desk.

Goodman Move the scissors?

Forbes No, you are going to use a gun. And fire from over there, by the french windows.

Goodman I like it. I like it. I don't like it.

Forbes Why not?

Goodman We're two writers—OK?

Forbes Yes.

Goodman And I'm going to kill your wife for you.

Forbes Yes.

Goodman With a gun.

Forbes Yes.
Goodman So where does a *writer* get a gun from?
Forbes (*pointing towards the ceiling*) From the attic! I got it from my father; and *he* got it from a German Officer. It's illegal, of course, but utterly untraceable to me.
Goodman It's a good job we just *write* crimes.
Forbes Yes, ironic isn't it? Our only talent is for murder and mayhem and getting away with it until the last page. Just suppose we put all that experience to a more practical use?
Goodman If we did—we'd have to get away with it *beyond* the last page.
Forbes Oh, I'm sure we could—if we put our minds to it, don't you?
Goodman I wouldn't be *that* confident. Our detectives are always so bloody brilliant.
Forbes Only because we write them that way.
Goodman Anyway, it's all hypothetical—we're not doing it for real, are we?
Forbes (*after a pause*) I'll get the gun. It may inspire us.

Forbes exits

Goodman, alone on stage, moves about, obviously turning the plot over in his mind. He becomes the killer—makes a gun with his fingers—and "fires" at the door

Goodman Bang! Bang!

At that precise moment Jill enters—she is startled and gives an involuntary cry

Oh, sorry, Jill—I wasn't aiming at you.

Jill recovers, smiles, and collects the coffee cups

Jill You know, I hate the thought of a stranger being buried under the summer house.
Goodman What?
Jill Well, someone will have to take my place as the bearded blackmailer.
Goodman Oh, we've dropped that—we're working on a new idea now.
Jill And I shan't be here to help you act it through. I shall miss all this.
Goodman But you may not have to leave.
Jill That's typical of you, putting a brave face on things—but if you don't mind my saying so, I'm very worried about you.
Goodman Why?
Jill I've known for some time now that Mr Forbes is thinking of ending the writing partnership. You really mustn't let him do that, Mr Goodman. It would destroy you.
Goodman Destroy? What do you mean—destroy?
Jill I'm sure Mr Forbes could get along without you—he's a survivor. But you without him? Much as I like you . . . well—you have to admit, you're not Mr Forbes, are you?
Goodman Don't worry, Jill—whatever it takes, I don't intend to let this partnership break up!

Jill Oh, I do hope so, Mr Goodman.
Goodman You're a really nice person, Jill.

At this moment Forbes enters carrying a closed box

Jill (*picking up the tray as she leaves*) Good luck, Mr Goodman. And don't forget what I said.

Jill exits

Forbes (*frowning after her*) Good luck?
Goodman With the play.
Forbes Oh, yes—the play. (*He unlocks and opens the box and takes out a gun. He places it on the desk*)

Goodman regards it, then—tentatively—picks it up and examines it with some awe

Goodman A gun. A real gun.
Forbes With real ammunition. (*He produces ammunition from the box, and places this on the desk*)

Goodman picks this up to examine it too

I've been thinking of the advantages of setting this play here—in the house—and *doing it for real.*
Goodman For real? What do you mean?
Forbes I mean—*for real.*
Goodman Nije, you can't be serious.
Forbes Hear me out, Max. This is the best idea you have had in years, and I am confident—I *know*—it will work.
Goodman Nije, you're not suggesting . . .? You can't mean . . .? That you and I . . .? That we should . . .?
Forbes Murder Ann. Yes, that's exactly what I'm suggesting. Half an hour ago I too would have considered it madness. But you have suddenly made it entirely possible.
Goodman Murder Ann?
Forbes It was you who pointed out that she is the perfect victim.
Goodman *Murder Ann!*
Forbes Let's approach it as we do all our plots. The "fors" and "againsts" For . . . she is a drunken shrew we would be well rid of. What money she does have would come to me. And two hundred thousand pounds insurance. A return to solvency for both of us. The againsts? You tell me, Max.
Goodman Well. . . . Well, we might not get away with it!
Forbes Fail? Us? If you think that, Max—that the team of Forbes and Goodman is not capable of producing a plot without a single error . . . well—perhaps my earlier instincts were right, and it *is* time for the parting of the ways.
Goodman I didn't mean that.
Forbes Then what did you mean? (*Then*) It's time for a decision, Max.
Goodman Is that policy paid up to date?

Forbes Absolutely. It's the one thing I haven't let fall by the wayside.
Goodman Two hundred thousand pounds?
Forbes Split two ways.
Goodman One hundred thousand each. It's a lot of loot.
Forbes Our salvation.
Goodman Yes. . . . And she did call me a ponce. (*He suddenly hurries over to his typewriter and starts to type*)
Forbes Max, what are you doing?
Goodman Got to get it down while it's still fresh.
Forbes No, Max, I don't think we will be committing this one to paper, will we? We'll tape it. (*He draws the paper from the typewriter, and moves away, tearing it up, and throwing it into the waste basket. He crosses to the tape recorder*)

We hear the clicks as he operates the buttons

We'll record, play back, assimilate. . . . And then—erase. It's nice to be back in harness again—working together on something we *both* believe in.
Goodman The thought of killing Ann . . .
Forbes Max! Get a grip on yourself!
Goodman No. . . . No, I was just going to say. . . . It makes me feel *alive* again!

CURTAIN

SCENE 2

The same. Some time later

As in the opening of Scene One, the heavy drapes at the french windows are drawn, and the set is very dark

Goodman can just be seen in the shadows near the french windows

The telephone is ringing

After a few moments the door opens, and Jill enters. She is carrying some letters for signature

Goodman brings up his hand, and, using his fingers as a gun, "aims" at the door

Jill switches on the light, and is startled to see Goodman. He is embarrassed, and "hides" the gun behind his back

Jill I'm sorry, I didn't think anyone was in here. . . . (*She looks towards the ringing telephone, and back at Goodman*)
Goodman It's the engineers. . . .

Jill—still puzzled—moves to the desk, and answers the telephone

Jill Hallo . . .? Yes. Yes, the line's working perfectly. Thank you. (*She replaces the telephone and looks at Goodman*)
Goodman I was just checking something. . . . (*He indicates his typewriter*) For the new play. . . .
Jill (*smiling, and understanding immediately*) Oh, I see. The new play. What's it about?
Goodman Oh, I, er . . . I can't really tell you at the moment. But it's all up here. . . . (*He taps his head*)

Jill puts the letters on to Forbes' desk

. . . ready to flood out at any moment.
Jill Then you'll want me to stay late to do some typing . . .
Goodman Ah—no! I didn't mean it's going to flood out right now. Nije and I have still got a lot to discuss. Details. Loopholes to plug. It's for real this time. (*Then, realizing what he has said*) Oh, I don't mean really for *real*. What I mean is. . . . Well . . . I . . .
Jill I know what you mean.
Goodman You do?
Jill You mean that Mr Forbes and you are working as a team again. . . .
Goodman Of course I do. . . .
Jill I'd like to think that I had something to do with it. . . . (*She moves to exit*)
Goodman Turn the light out as you go, will you, Jill . . .?
Jill Of course. . . .

Jill turns out the light, and exits, closing the door behind herself. The set is again very dark

Goodman moves back to the french windows

(*Off*) I've put those letters on your desk, Mr Forbes. . . .
Forbes (*off*) Thank you, Jill—I'll sign them right away. . . .

Goodman—in the shadows—again brings up his hand, his fingers making a "gun"

Goodman Ring ring. Ring ring. Ring ring.

Forbes enters, and puts on the light. He registers Goodman

Goodman (*in exasperation*) Everybody puts on the damned light!
Forbes But it's the natural thing to do.
Goodman But if she turns on the light and sees me—she might duck—perhaps even throw something. . . .
Forbes She won't put on the light.
Goodman But she will—like you just said it's the natural thing to do. . . .
Forbes (*pointing to the overhead light*) We will replace that bulb with a dud one.
Goodman Then she'll go straight to the desk lamp and put that on!
Forbes Max—am I writing this on my own? She is not supposed to get as far as the desk.

Goodman But she might. . . .
Forbes All right—we'll put a dud bulb in there too.
Goodman *Two* dud bulbs? Any copper worth his salt would be onto that in a flash.
Forbes I'll replace them next morning before I call the police.
Goodman Right. *Right!*
Forbes But if all goes to plan she will not get to the desk lamp—because she will be dead—because you will shoot her as she opens the door and stands silhouetted—a perfect target. Your killing position will be over there, by the french windows. The phone rings—she enters. . . .
Goodman She mustn't be allowed to answer the phone. . . .
Forbes Why not?
Goodman Detail, Nije, detail. She mustn't be allowed to answer the phone because we can't guarantee it will be you on the other end.
Forbes Yes, I see.
Goodman It's agony to fail at the box-office, Nije—but to fail at the Old Bailey would be fatal.
Forbes Let's run it through from the top again. I'll be staying at my club in town—thus establishing a cast-iron alibi.
Goodman Ann will be in the drawing-room.
Forbes With her gin and television. Then—at precisely nine fifteen I will call the business number which rings here—and Ann will have to come in to answer it.
Goodman I'll already be in the room. Having entered through the french windows.
Forbes Which I will make sure are unlocked. So—Ann enters—you get your silhouette.
Goodman And . . . "bang-bang".

Forbes and Goodman stare at each other, and Goodman gives a big smile

It's going to work, Nije . . .
Forbes Of course it's going to work . . .
Goodman Now. . . . (*He stands, moves to the french windows, and surveys the room. He points to where the body will lie*) After I've done it I mustn't go near the body—I can't risk the tiniest splash of blood.
Forbes No—you leave the house the way you came in, and—next morning—I return, discover the body, call the police and . . .
Goodman Suppose you don't discover the body?
Forbes Max—I shall make a definite point of doing so.
Goodman No, no, suppose somebody beats you to it?
Forbes Who for example?
Goodman I don't know—the shooting is going to make a noise.
Forbes The curtains will muffle it, and our nearest neighbour is miles away.
Goodman You might have a burglar.
Forbes I would welcome a burglar. I would welcome any unexpected visitor as just another suspect. Let's continue. The gun?
Goodman Untraceable to you. He brought it with him. I leave it on the floor.

Forbes Yes—but how do we give the crank some substance . . .?

Goodman Mmmm. I've got it. His letter referred to the hanging in "Death Game"—before the phone rings I take *our* copy of the play, and tear it up. . . .

Forbes *Before* the phone rings . . .? That's another hole to plug. Suppose the phone rang ahead of time, and Ann came in to answer it . . .?

Goodman . . . and walked in on me while I was still setting up—before I was ready. OK first thing I do is take the phone off the hook. . . .

Forbes . . . and replace it at nine fifteen.

Goodman Right. I take up my position, and . . . it's going to work, Nije. We've overlooked nothing. Yes we have!

Forbes What?

Goodman If both bulbs are dud—I'll be in the dark. I won't be able to see a thing?

Forbes *Max. . . . (He opens a drawer in his desk and takes out the torch)*

Goodman The torch! (*He crosses and takes it*) It's like we always say—come to a complex problem, and invariably you can solve it in the simplest way . . .

Forbes Now where were we?

Goodman I'd just replaced the phone . . .

Forbes Correct. At nine fifteen precisely, I call this number—the phone rings. . . .

Forbes and Goodman are both startled as the phone does *start to ring*

Forbes (*answering it*) Hallo? Ah, yes, Superintendent, this is he. You have a man on his way? Splendid! Yes, I look forward to meeting him. Goodbye. (*He replaces the telephone, and turns to Goodman*) The police about the crank letter. I rang earlier this morning. There'll be a man here anytime, but there should be time for one last run through to check fine details. You get by the curtains, Max. . . . (*He crosses to switch off the light as he speaks*)

Goodman stands by the french windows, and once again the set is in darkness

All right. Make your entrance.

Goodman steps further into the room, and immediately collides with the fridge

Goodman Damn! I forgot the torch!

On the collision the door of the fridge has swung open, and the light from within illuminates the room

Forbes Stay where you are! Don't move! (*He crosses to the fridge and swings the door to and fro to give a lighting effect*) Compliments of Frederick Knott. *Wait Until Dark.*

Goodman But we're not doing that play! Besides I'll have the torch!

Forbes closes the fridge, and moves to the french windows. He draws the curtains, and sunlight beams through

Forbes It's a weak link, Max. You still might bump into the fridge—and then what? The door opens—light floods out—Ann sees you. . . .

Goodman Well, what do we do about it?

Forbes As soon as you come in, you pull the plug on the fridge.

Goodman But who'll put it back? I won't have time.

Forbes I'll put it back the next morning.

Goodman It's getting awfully complicated—dud bulbs—fridges—unhooking phones—tearing up plays. . . . I hope I'll have enough time left to do the actual murder! By the time I've finished, my fishing trip will be more than an alibi, it'll be a convalescence.

Forbes Ah, yes—your alibi. I'm glad you reminded me.

Goodman Well, it may not be the best I've ever written but it'll do.

Forbes But will it hold up? Alone on a desolate stretch of river, fishing through the night until dawn.

Goodman Nobody can prove otherwise, and it has a ring of truth. Everybody knows I go fishing. And I know that area. You can go a whole weekend and never meet a soul.

Forbes On the other hand, the lack of witnesses means that you cannot prove you were there.

Goodman Nije, at the time of the murder, I'd like to be on Concorde, mid-Atlantic, accompanied by a nun's convention, but somebody has to be here to actually do it!

Forbes But with me in the clear, we can't have you becoming a suspect—it wouldn't be fair.

Goodman Why should I become a suspect? I've no reason to murder Ann.

Forbes Well—you don't exactly like her.

Goodman Now that is a bit of an understatment. I hate the bitch!

Forbes Exactly—and suppose that were to come out?

Goodman Mmmm. I see what you mean.

Forbes It's a point we'll have to cover—for your sake. But how? (*He paces, in thought, then*) Detective Inspector Berry!

Goodman Who's he?

Forbes The policeman who will be arriving here at any moment. Max, we've created enough policemen to know that they form first, immediate, and lasting impressions. There mustn't be the slightest hint that you hate her.

Goodman What are you driving at?

Forbes You and Ann. If we can contrive that the two of you are seen together—without acrimony, without hate—with a rapport even . . .

Goodman A rapport? Me and Ann . . .?

Forbes Just for Inspector Berry's benefit. A kind word, a gesture of affection . . .

Goodman Affection! Ann'll think I've gone round the bend . . . or I'm trying to get my twenty quid back!

The door bell rings

Forbes That's probably him now! Max, if you can contrive to send him away with the impression that there *might* be a little more between you and Ann. . . .

Goodman I'll try, but it won't be easy.

Forbes You're talking to a man who has endured her for fifteen years.

Jill (*off*) This way, Inspector. . . .

Forbes "Enter a detective"—let me "carry" this scene. Let me do the talking.

The door opens, and Jill enters

Jill There's a detective. . . .
Forbes . . . Inspector Berry? Yes, please show him in.

Detective Inspector Raymond Berry enters. He is perhaps thirty-five years of age, or more. Tall, and rather thin, with a walrus moustache that adds to his general, mournful look

Berry Good-morning, sir. Detective Inspector Berry . . .
Forbes Good-morning, Inspector, and I am . . .
Berry Oh, I know who you are, sir. . . . And you too, sir. Nigel Forbes. . . . And Max Goodman. Neither of you needs any introduction.
Forbes I had no idea we were so notorious.
Berry Oh, famous, sir, we look upon you as our local celebrities. (*He surveys the room*) Just as I imagined it. Typewriters, shelves full of scripts, drinks at hand, a smattering of antiques . . . and, of course french windows. I knew you'd have french windows. My goodness, you'd be lost without them, wouldn't you?

Forbes and Goodman are a bit taken aback, but, before they can comment

Berry Now then, sir. I understand it's a matter of a threatening letter?
Forbes Well, not exactly threatening. In fact, on reflection, I feel rather embarrassed troubling you with it.
Berry No trouble, sir, no trouble at all. And you two should know better than most that it's from small beginnings that a major crime can blossom. . . .

Forbes and Goodman exchange uncomfortable looks, then:

May I see the letter, sir?
Forbes Yes, indeed. . . . (*He puts on his glasses, moves to the desk to search for, and find, the letter*)

As he does so Berry picks up his case, and takes out a clear plastic folder. He holds it open so Forbes can drop in the letter

There we are, Inspector. Can I offer you a drink?
Berry Thank you, sir—a lager if you don't mind. . . .
Forbes Max?

Forbes moves to the drinks tray, followed by Goodman. They pour drinks for themselves, and a lager—taken from the fridge—for Berry

Berry puts on his heavy-framed reading glasses, and studies the letter, inside the clear plastic folder

Forbes moves back to Berry, and hands him the glass of lager

You can see for yourself, it's obviously from some crank . . .
Berry (*taking the lager*) Thank you, sir. . . .

Goodman But you never know—better to be safe than sorry, Nije. . . .

Berry I echo those sentiments, sir. Can see what you mean though—it's cranky enough, but there *is* a hint of threat to your good lady, and perhaps even to yourself. I don't really have to ask *you*, sir, if you kept the envelope?

Forbes Yes, of course . . . it's here. . . . (*He delves into the desk, produces the envelope, and—as Berry again profers the open clear plastic folder—drops it in with the letter*)

Berry is eyeing the typewriter on Forbes' desk

Berry And this is where it was written?

Forbes (*reacting, horrified*) No, no, *I* didn't write it. How could you possibly think that I. . . .

Berry Not the letter, sir. "Crazy Kill". Of all your plays it's my favourite.

Goodman Oh, you've seen all our plays, have you?

Berry Seen or read every one of them. But I've told you that before . . . about three years ago.

Forbes and Goodman react, and exchange a look

(*Smiling*) Aha, that's intrigued you, hasn't it? Wondering where we've met before? (*He removes, and puts his spectacles onto Forbes' desk. He picks up his lager, and takes a drink. Then he puts the glass down onto the desk. Then—suddenly—he clutches his throat, and emits a terrifying cry*) My God, the drink. The drink was poisoned. . . . (*He staggers, and falls to the floor. He rolls onto his back, and lies spread-eagled, his eyes staring glassily*)

Forbes and Goodman are transfixed. They stare, unmoving, at Berry on the floor. Then, slowly, and together, they rise, and move towards him. As they bend over, and look down on him, Berry suddenly sits up

Berry "Crazy Kill" Act Two, Scene Three, where the villain gets his comeuppance. . . . (*He gets to his feet*) Yes, I've had the honour of appearing in several of your plays, sir. That's where we met—The Home Counties, Thames Division Drama Festival. You adjudicated. Of course, I was aged up, and wearing a full beard at the time, but you both congratulated me on my portrayal of Captain Carruthers. Your praises still ring in my ears. You *do* remember, don't you, sir?

Forbes Oh, yes, the amateur dramatics thing. . . . Yes, of course we remember, *don't we, Max*?

Goodman Eh? Oh, yes, yes, memorable performance.

Berry Thank you, sir, I tried to rise to the quality of the writing.

Forbes Do sit down, Inspector.

Berry (*sitting*) We're doing "Death Has No Exit" this year, sir, and . . . er, as a matter of fact, I have a confession to make.

Forbes Oh?

Berry Yes, sir, when your call came through . . . well, it shouldn't strictly have been my enquiry—but I pulled a bit of rank, sir, not just to renew our acquaintance, but to ask your advice too.

Forbes Advice?
Berry How to attack the role, sir.
Forbes "Death Has No Exit" . . .?
Berry It's the one with the parrot.
Forbes Oh, yes—you'll be splendid, Inspector, absolutely splendid as the bumbling Interpol agent. . . .
Berry Well, actually, sir—I'm playing the Spanish gardener. This time I wanted to try my hand at something a bit more dynamic. But there'll be time for more of that later, I hope. Now, this letter, sir.
Forbes Letter?
Goodman (*nudging Forbes*) The threatening letter!
Berry A veiled threat.
Forbes That's exactly the construction we put on it.
Berry Well, as you can see for yourself, it's not written on hand-made, silk-pressed paper, with a water mark indicating it was expressly made for one exiled anarchist. No, I'd say it was Basildon Bond. Sold everywhere. The envelope too—postmarked South West Ten—well, that's a big area. . . . So, the only clue is the reference to the play.
Goodman Oh?
Berry The only play of yours with a hanging on stage is "Death Game"—correct me if I'm wrong.
Forbes No, no, you're not wrong.
Berry And this letter has a note of bitterness about it that suggests immediacy. I mean, few people carry this kind of grudge for any length of time.
Goodman So?
Berry Where in the last week or two, has "Death Game" been performed?
Goodman That's good. That's terribly good, Nije, we must remember that.
Forbes The Isle of Wight.
Berry Sir?
Forbes Just a fortnight ago it had a production in the Isle of Wight.
Berry How long did it run, sir?
Goodman Judging by the royalties, about ten minutes!
Forbes A week, Inspector, just a week.
Berry So—we possibly have a man resident in the South West Ten area of London—on holiday two weeks ago with his wife on the Isle of Wight—and now recently bereaved due to her death by hanging.
Forbes My goodness, Inspector, I am impressed, that has really narrowed it down.
Berry If I have any gift for deduction, sir, it doesn't come from the Police College. It comes from Agatha Christie, Francis Durbridge, and from your goodselves.
Forbes / **Goodman** (*together*) { That's really very flattering. / Most kind of you.
Berry Crime is my business, sir—and my hobby. Investigating them. Appearing in them. I'm probably the leading expert in this area., I guessed the murderer in your last play—before the second act. I wouldn't be surprised if in your next effort I didn't spot the killer immediately. . . .

Goodman reacts, and exchanges a look with an equally perturbed Forbes

(*Failing to notice*) By the way, sir, is the earring mandatory?

Goodman Earring?

Berry For the Spanish gardener, sir. I honestly don't feel very happy wearing it. You must remember that our audience is predominantly CID, and a lot of Vice Squad.

Forbes It's not essential, Inspector, it comes down to getting under the skin of the part.

Berry Quite, sir.

Goodman The letter, Nije . . .

Forbes Eh?

Goodman We do have other things to do. Another play to write. . . .

Berry Oh, I'm taking up your valuable time, and I promised myself I wouldn't. The letter, yes. Well, on the positive side, we can run all recent female deaths by hanging through the computer—and narrow it down even further. That's if he was telling the truth.

Forbes What do you mean?

Berry Cranks are deluded, sir—and sometimes they delude even themselves—oh, this man has a grudge all right, he obviously doesn't like you . . . but he may be cunning enough to have hidden the real reason. I think all we can safely assume, sir, is that your wife may be in some danger.

Goodman That's great!

Berry and Forbes turn to look at Goodman

Great that you've come to that assumption.

Forbes Perhaps you'd like to meet my wife, Inspector?

Berry Oh, yes, a pleasure, sir.

Forbes Max, would you go and fetch her?

Goodman What?

Forbes I think it's important, and I'm sure the Inspector would agree, that he meets the whole household—sees what kind of people he may be protecting . . . *how we relate to one another*.

Berry Sort of setting the scene—establishing the main protagonists. Like you always do, sir.

Goodman Oh, yes—understand—got you—with you. I'll get her. . . .

Goodman exits

Forbes (*regarding Berry for a moment*) Burning to ask questions, aren't you?

Berry Well, as a matter of fact, sir . . .

Forbes How a writing collaboration works? Does he write the lines, or do I?

Berry Let me guess, sir. You attend to the dramatic structure—right?

Forbes Well, you're very close . . .

Berry And Mr Goodman—all that nervous energy—he's the one who comes up with the wild and wonderfully murderous ideas.

Forbes "A" for observation, Inspector.

Berry Yes, it must take a very special kind of mind to come up with things like "Death Has No Exit".

Forbes Yes, Max *is* volatile—but sensitive too. And even a little irrational sometimes.

Berry And, if you'll forgive me saying so—even a streak of cruelty. The final scene can be very harrowing. You know, when the girl crosses to the cupboard and pulls out the knife?

Forbes I don't think I've ever met such a devotee. Surely, in your own line of work, you get involved in more dramatic situations than we could ever invent?

Berry Not really, sir. It generally all comes down to a matter of routine. Statements, counter statements, files, reports. In all my years on the Force, I've never once found myself in the library of a snowbound vicarage with all the suspects assembled and the villain waiting to break down and confess under my incisive interrogation. Mind you—I never give up hoping. . . .

Jill enters to put some writing paper down on Forbes desk

Forbes Of course, you've met my secretary, Miss Prentice. . . .

Berry Indeed, sir. I do envy you your job.

Jill Oh?

Berry Being in at the conception so to speak—and in at the death. Was it Miss Prentice who brought you the letter, sir?

Forbes No, ironically enough, it was Ann herself.

Berry Ahh. We won't have to fingerprint *you* then.

Jill Fingerprint?

Forbes The Inspector is helping us with some research, Jill.

Jill Oh, I see. Well, Inspector. . . .

Jill smiles, and exits

Forbes Fingerprints?!

Berry I'll have to ask everyone who has handled the letter to pop down to the station to be fingerprinted—it's a matter of elimination, you understand, sir?

Forbes Of course, and Max and I will be happy to oblige. But my wife . . .? I hate to alarm her unnecessarily. . . .

Berry I understand, sir. Well, we'll just have to be subtle about it. I know it's a bit early in the day—but do you think you could persuade her to have a drink?

Forbes Yes. I think that might be arranged.

Berry Then I'll just smuggle the glass away, and . . .

Ann enters, and walks straight to the drinks tray. As she pours herself a large drink

Forbes Ann, my dear, I'd like you to meet Detective Inspector Berry.

Berry extends his hand, but Ann is too busy with the drink, she merely gestures, as

Ann That raving lunatic of a partner of yours is up to something. He's just enquired after my health so many times, you'd think he was a beneficiary in my will!

Forbes That's unfair, dear. You know that Max is very fond of you.
Ann Since when?

Goodman enters

Goodman Ann, do sit down. I'll get you a drink. Oh, you've got one. Never mind, sit down anyway. Next to me.
Ann Definitely up to something.
Berry Mrs Forbes, I'm a great admirer of your husband's work.
Ann Oh, so you've seen the toolshed, have you?

Forbes and Goodman exchange a look, and then laugh

Forbes You see now where we get our funny lines.
Goodman Ann, dear, what will we do without you? Would. *Would*! What *would* we do without you. . . .
Ann Certifiable. Do you deal much with dangerous lunatics, Inspector?
Berry No, Mrs Forbes—usually just mundane old criminals.
Ann How exceedingly dull. A bit like your last flop.
Forbes It was miscast.
Goodman And they had to carry that awful director.
Ann Well, thank God, they only had to carry him for three days.
Berry (*suddenly slapping his thigh*) By George! This is a day to remember.

Forbes, Ann, and Goodman, all stare at him

Me being here with you *real* theatricals. It's something I won't forget in a hurry.
Ann You *are* a real policeman, aren't you?
Berry Of course, Madam.
Ann For a moment I thought this was one of their terrible rehearsals.
Berry Rehearsals?
Ann They act everything out—they're always at it. Sometimes the sofa is an acid bath, or a lime pit. And I never know when I get up in the morning whether my husband is a High Court Judge, a brilliant amateur sleuth—or just the man who is planning to murder me!

Forbes and Goodman both reach for their glasses, and take a drink, in unison

Berry Oh, you run through all your crimes, do you, sir?
Ann Run them through? They *commit* them! (*She moves to exit as*)

Jill enters

Don't believe me—ask her! There are times when I think she knows more about what's going on here than I do!

Ann exits, leaving—for a moment—an embarrassed silence

Jill I wondered if the Inspector would like some coffee?
Berry Well, as a matter of fact. . . .
Forbes I think not, Jill—the Inspector has important work to deal with—and so do we.
Jill All right. Nice meeting you, Inspector.

Jill exits

Berry moves to Forbes' desk to collect together his things. Forbes picks up Ann's used glass, using a handkerchief, and crosses to Berry. Berry takes from his case a plastic bag, and Forbes drops the glass into it. Berry puts it into his case, with the folder containing the letter and envelope

Berry This letter, sir. What are we going to do about it?

Forbes I feel that just having told you is sufficient.

Berry It's up to me then—to put two or three of my best men watching the house day and night.

Forbes
Goodman } (*together; with alarm*) What?!

Berry That's what I'd do if I had the unlimited resources of a policeman on the telly. The fact is, though—we're seriously understaffed.

Forbes I think policemen lurking in the shrubbery might frighten my wife more than the crank.

Berry Take your point, sir. What I *will* do is subject this letter to closer examination, try and run the writer to earth—and tell George to keep an eye out.

Forbes George?

Berry Constable Kingham. Your house is on his patch. He patrols past this house most mornings. . . .

Forbes Only mornings?

Berry I suppose I *could* change his route, have him or his relief double back here every night too.

Forbes I wouldn't hear of it. In fact, I would be most annoyed—*most annoyed*—if the obviously over-stretched resources of the police force were diverted in any way just for the sake of a . . . a stupid crank. It would make him altogether too important.

Goodman Absolutely.

Forbes And I would not like that, I would not like it at all.

Goodman Absolutely not!

Berry It's very good of you to see it that way, sir.

Forbes It's the only way I *will* see it, Inspector. And I demand you promise there will be no nightly surveillance on our account.

Berry Very well, sir. . . . (*He picks up from Forbes' desk the spectacles he* THINKS *are his, and pockets them. he collects his case, and moves to the door*) Well . . . I'll stay in touch—let you know if there are any developments. And again, I wish you every success. . . .

Forbes and Goodman stare at Berry

With your *murder*. Every success . . . and thank you for letting me lose the earring, sir. Early on in my career I foolishly did *Charley's Aunt* and I am sure that delayed my promotion. Mr Goodman. Mr Forbes. Or should it be—Forbes and Goodman?

Forbes Yes—Forbes and Goodman. Do drop by again, Inspector . . . any time.

Goodman Not quite *any* time, Nije. . . .

Forbes During the day of course. The evenings . . . we guard them zealously

. . . re-charging the batteries, that kind of thing. I'm sure the Inspector understands . . .?

Berry I do, sir. And . . . in the words of your own Felix Posner in "Murder Has No End". (*He suddenly adopts a crouch and attitude of some character, as, in a terrible foreign accent*) "Our paths will cross again. You may not have seen the last of me . . . only . . . the first of me." (*Then, normally*) Good-day, gentlemen. . . .

Berry exits

A moment, then Forbes follows him out, to see him off the premises

Goodman is left alone. He collects up the glasses, and puts them on the drinks tray. He is very thoughtful

Forbes enters

Goodman Do you know what? *He* could be the crank letter writer!

Forbes What? No. . . .

Goodman He knows all our plays. I think he can see right inside our minds—the wheels going round.

Forbes He doesn't live in Chelsea—or Fulham—or wherever South West Ten is. . . .

Goodman He could. Perhaps he's a top Scotland Yard man 'specially brought in to this area. . . .

Forbes stares at Goodman

In the play, Nije. I'm talking about in the play!

Forbes Max—we are not writing a play.

Goodman (*after a moment, he registers*) Oh, no. I'd forgotten. . . . I don't know if I'll be able to live with it.

Forbes But Ann deserves to die.

Goodman Not *that*. The fact that our best plot in years will only have one performance.

Forbes moves to his desk, takes out the gun, and starts to load it

Goodman What are you doing?

Forbes We must do it soon, Max. In fact, we must do it tonight.

Goodman Tonight? Oh, I don't think we should rush into it. . . .

Forbes You heard what Inspector Berry said, "Few people carry such a grudge for any length of time." That's advice straight from the mouth of an expert—and advice we must heed. . . .

Goodman Yes, but it's Saturday night, and you always go to your club on . . . Saturday night. . . .

Forbes So I do. . . . (*He hands Goodman the loaded gun*) Come on, Max, I'll walk you to your car. (*He puts his arm round Goodman's shoulders, and steers him towards the french windows*) There's plenty of time for you to prepare, get your fishing togs together, run through your alibi, and then put your feet up for a while. . . . Relax. . . .

Forbes and Goodman exit through the french windows

A pause

Ann (*off*) Nigel? What did that policeman . . .?

Ann enters, and registers the study is empty

She looks around, and moves across to the drinks tray. She picks up a bottle, tests it is a full one, and pours a drink. When she speaks it is obvious she is a little drunk

Nigel Forbes, you *are* up to something. Aided and abetted by Max-bloody-Goodman!

Ann moves to Goodman's desk and looks at some of the papers there, finds nothing and crosses to Forbes' desk. She rifles through the papers, then turns to look at the tape recorder. She moves to it—pushing this and that button. Finally

Forbes' Voice At precisely nine-fifteen I will call the business number which rings here. And Ann will have to come in and answer it.

Goodman's Voice I'll already be in the room, having entered through the french windows.

Forbes's Voice Which I will make sure are unlocked. So Ann enters—you get your silhouette. . . .

CURTAIN

SCENE 3

The same. Saturday night

The set is empty, the heavy drapes at the french windows are drawn. The room is as dark as theatrical licence will allow

A moment, then we hear the french windows open. Goodman enters. He is dressed for an all night fishing trip—anorak, khaki trousers, scarf, etc. He wears gloves

He flicks on the torch he holds, and directs the beam around the study

Goodman Gloves . . . torch . . . gun . . . now, take phone off hook. . . . (*He crosses to Forbes' desk, and removes the telephone receiver*) Unplug fridge. . . . (*He crosses the room, and unplugs the refrigerator*) What's next? Set up crank killer. . . . Find copy of "Death Game" and tear it up. . . . (*He moves away towards the shelves, trips over the edge of the carpet, and falls headlong, dropping the torch*) Blast! (*He gets to this feet, retrieves the torch, and tries to switch it on. It fails to work. He starts to bang it with his hand, as*) Bloody torch is broke! I can't see a thing now! Find copy of "Death Game"! I'll be lucky to find the shelves! (*He stumbles across towards the shelves. He reaches them, and starts to search*) I'd stand a better chance if they were all in Braille! (*He continues looking for the book. Eventually*) It must be nearly nine-fifteen. (*He applies the torch to his watch*) I can't see

my watch either! It was ten past when I left the car . . . it must be nine-fifteen by now. . . . Phone back on hook . . . Where's the phone? Where's the bloody desk? (*He moves across the room, and walks into the desk*) Found it. Replace phone. . . . (*He replaces the telephone receiver*) Oh, this is a lovely bit of stage business, Nije—you'd love it. So long as you didn't have to be bloody well doing it!

The telephone rings

Goodman panics, rushes back to the shelves, takes down a book, tears it to pieces, and throws it onto the floor

Got to get back over there. . . . (*He—more clumsily than ever—blunders back across the room—hitting his shin. He just about gets to his "killing position" when the door opens*)

A woman enters—and is silhouetted in the doorway. She wears a fairly voluminous top coat, boots, scarf—and there is no light on her face

In the event we see her only briefly, because, as soon as she appears Goodman fires several shots

The woman falls to lie virtually out of sight behind Forbes' desk

As she falls she grips the wall, or door jamb, and leaves behind a bloody smear from her hand

Goodman (*exultantly*) I did it! I did it! (*Then, in a more sombre tone*) Oh, my God . . . I did it. . . .

Goodman drops the gun on the floor, turns, and runs to exit through the french windows

The telephone rings on continuously

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE 1

The same. Sunday morning

The drapes at the french windows are open, and sunshine streams in

Forbes stands by the french windows, staring out

The body has been removed, and along with it whatever blood was splashed around in the preceding scene. The torn up play has gone too

Berry stands by the desk. For a few moments both men are utterly, grimly, immobile

Forbes Gone forever. The old precept that an Englishman's home is his castle . . .

Berry It must have been a terrible shock for you, sir.

Forbes Yes. . . . (*He turns from the french windows, and moves into the room*) Utterly shocking. I knew the man was a crank—possibly dangerous—but to return to one's own home and to be met with . . . with *that*!

Berry We'll find him, Mr Forbes. He won't get away with it—we'll run him down.

Forbes I hope you do. By God, I hope you do!

Berry (*picking up the telephone*) You say this is your *business* line, sir?

Forbes Yes, it's imperative to have one clear line for important overseas calls, that kind of thing. . . .

Berry And, naturally it is ex-directory?

Forbes Naturally. (*He reacts as he realizes the significance*)

During the next exchange, we see Goodman appear at the french windows. He looks in—then, perceptibly "braces himself" and arranges a smile on his face. He enters. He still wears his anorak, and has brought in his fishing bag

Berry So the amount of people who might have this number is limited?

Forbes I never thought of that.

Goodman Well . . . good-morning, and a nice one too. Oh, it's you, Inspector. I saw the police car in the drive and wondered. New development in the case of the crazy crank?

Berry Yes, sir, I'm very much afraid there has been a new development. And a very serious one too.

Goodman Oh?

Forbes He phoned here this morning, Max—a vile and particularly obscene call!

Goodman (*utterly "thrown"*) Oh. Is that all? (*He edges across the room to deliberately peer to where the body fell. Then he turns to stare at Forbes*) Nije . . .?

Forbes I didn't send for the Inspector—he arrived, quite fortuitously, with a very important clue.

Goodman Clue?

Forbes Yes, Inspector, would you mind . . .?

Berry Not at all, sir—it's in the car! I'll fetch it.

Berry exits through the french windows

Goodman (*instantly rounding on Forbes*) Nije . . .?

Forbes Shhhh! (*He hurries to the french windows to look out, and check that Berry has gone. He turns, as*)

Goodman Am I mad—or are you? Or is he? You're standing around talking about crank phone calls. . . .

Forbes It actually happened. He phoned here . . .

Goodman But what about the *murder*? Where's the body? *Where's Ann*?

Ann enters, and crosses to pour herself a drink

Goodman is utterly stunned, and stares at her

Ann Don't worry, it's just Fernet Branca—for medicinal purposes. I feel *dead* from last night. (*She notices Goodman's attitude*) You don't look too good either—but then you *never* look too good.

Ann exits

Goodman stares after her

Forbes *Now* do you understand? God, I had to think fast. The body's in the chest.

Goodman (*turning to stare at the chest*) The body is in the . . .? How *can* Ann be in the chest? She's there . . . I just saw her. . . .

Forbes (*crossing to the chest and lifting the lid*) You bloody idiot . . .! (*He pulls Jill's head and shoulders up into view*) You killed the wrong woman! You killed Jill! (*He reacts as he hears Berry returning. He lowers Jill back into the chest, and closes the lid. Then he sits on the chest*

Goodman will remain utterly dazed for some time to come

Berry enters, holding a large stiff piece of card

Berry Here we are, sir. . . . (*He proffers the large card for Goodman to see—but Goodman is not seeing anything too clearly for this moment*) It's a blow-up of the original letter. Well, sir, you see here? It's brought to light some indentations . . . where someone has . . .

Forbes . . . obviously written something else and used this piece of paper to lean on. We've used that device a dozen times ourselves.

Goodman Writing?

Berry Block capitals. The Lab. boys assure me it says: "Rehearsal, Drill Hall, Sandown, Wednesday the fourth. . . ."

Goodman stares at him

Forbes Sandown is on the Isle of Wight, Max. . . . And Wednesday the fourth . . .

Berry Was ten days before the production of "Death Game" there.

Goodman (*after hesitating*) I think I must sit down. . . . (*He almost sits on the chest—then he recoils from it—and moves to his chair at his desk. He puts his head in his hands*) Poor Jill. Poor, poor, Jill.

Berry Oh, something wrong with your secretary?

Forbes Oh, just a migraine, nothing serious—we've made her lie down in the dark.

Goodman (*staring at the chest*) Yes, you could say that . . .!

Forbes Max . . .!

Goodman I'm all right. Just . . . I . . . I've been up all night, you know.

Berry Oh, yes, fishing trip, wasn't it?

Goodman Yes.

Berry Catch anything?

Goodman Couple of bream—a few eels.

Berry Down by the weir there?

Goodman Beyond the weir.

Berry You must like your own company then, sir. I know the place. Very lonely. . . .

Forbes Would you like a drink, Max?

Goodman Yes, yes I would. . . .

Forbes How about you, Inspector . . .

Berry It's a bit early for me, sir. . . . (*He glances at his watch, and raises an eyebrow*)

Forbes (*moving to pour Goodman a drink*) The Inspector has come up with a most interesting theory . . .

Goodman is staring at the chest

Max?

Goodman It's the chest there . . .

Forbes brings Goodman his drink, and hands it over as

Forbes (*warningly*) *Max!*

Goodman Oh, er . . . I was thinking about *Rope*.

Berry *Rope*? By Patrick Hamilton. Yes, splendid play, sir. And you're right . . . (*he taps the chest with his foot*) Lovely place to hide a body. . . .

Forbes moves across to the chest, and sits on it

Forbes *This* chest? Oh, no—one would have to *cram* a body into here . . .

Goodman Nije . . .!

Forbes You must listen to Inspector Berry's theory, Max. It may spring-board a plot development in the future.

Goodman looks at Berry

Berry I think your crank is someone you know. Someone who worked in

that company on the Isle of Wight. First we have these indentations . . . then the thorough knowledge of the play "Death Game" . . . then the fact that he called on *this* line . . . the business line . . . which is ex-directory.

Goodman reacts and stares at Forbes

Forbes Yes, that was a bad mistake . . .

Berry And finally, the voice that spoke to you this morning, Mr Forbes, sounded familiar.

Goodman Familiar?

Forbes It did, Max. . . . It was disguised, of course, but nevertheless it had a familiar ring.

Berry Which is why I have been waiting here for you, Mr Goodman . . .

Goodman What?

Forbes The cast lists, Max. I know you type one up for every production, but I'm damned if I can recall where we file them . . .

Goodman Under "P".

Forbes "P"?

Goodman With the press cuttings. . . . (*He moves to take a file from the shelf or cabinet, and puts it on Forbes' desk ready to open it. He suddenly notices a torn up play on the desk-top*) Hallo! Who the hell did that? (*He picks up the torn play, and studies it*)

Forbes What?

Goodman It's our copy of *The Odd Couple*—and someone's torn it up. . . .

Berry Malicious damage? Here, you don't think our crank has actually gained entrance to this house, do you . . .?

Goodman No, no, I remember now—I did it!

Berry Eh?

Goodman I . . . I must have done. (*He bundles the torn up copy of the play into one of the drawers of Forbes' desk*) A momentary aberration, Inspector. . . . When you've . . . you've. . . .

Forbes . . . had your tenth rejection in a row. . . .

Goodman Exactly. . . .

Forbes . . . you go ape.

Berry Ape?

Goodman Ape?

Forbes Ape!

Goodman Right! Ape! Ape-ape-ape. And who do you turn against when you're that frustrated? The man whose *laundry* list would probably run on Broadway for ten years, Neil Simon.

Berry Mr Goodman. . . .

Goodman (*quickly taking a sheet of paper from the file in front of him*) Here's the credits you wanted. . . .

Berry Oh—thank you. . . . (*He takes it*) I'll get my men checking out these names right away. . . . Right, gentlemen . . . good-day to you. . . .

Berry exits through the french windows

Goodman watches him go every step of the way, then almost collapses across the desk

Goodman How could I have done such a thing? Jill—such a lovely girl. . . .

Forbes makes sure Berry has gone, and crosses to join Goodman

Forbes Don't you think I'm just as upset as you?
Goodman *Upset*? I killed an innocent woman!
Forbes Yes, and how on earth could you have made such a mistake? Surely you could see it wasn't Ann?
Goodman That was the trouble—I could hardly see a damn thing.
Forbes But she stood there—silhouetted. . . .
Goodman Exactly—*silhouetted*! The silhouette of a woman. . . . Mind you, it crossed my mind why was she wearing a coat and scarf? But I thought she'd decided to pop down to the pub. . . . (*Then, with a change of manner*) Oh, God, Nije—what are we going to do? (*He collapses across the desk again*)
Forbes Turn our long and sometimes fruitful association to advantage. . . .

Goodman slowly lifts his head to stare at Forbes

Forbes It will mean a rewrite. But a very small rewrite. I wish I'd thought of this earlier, Max—but I panicked. You can imagine my panic. When I came in here this morning and found all that blood, I foolishly wiped it all up—even cleaned the gun and put it away. And then compounded the felony by hiding the body.
Goodman I would have done the same.
Forbes No! You would have thought it through, as I am now. What do we have, Max—at this moment—what do we have?
Goodman A couple of hours to flee the country?
Forbes We have a crank on the loose—and one corpse. You didn't kill the wrong woman, Max.
Goodman I didn't?
Forbes No—our crank did.

Goodman stares at Forbes and starts to follow his line of thought

Do you remember that time when Jill's car wouldn't start—so she borrowed Ann's? Well, we have to convince the police that happened again. Last night. We can pull the lead off a spark plug to disable Jill's car. . . .
Goodman But why?
Forbes To make it look as though our crank killer was lying in wait to attack Ann. And he saw *Jill* driving off. . . .
Goodman In *Ann's* car. . . .
Forbes Right—so he followed her and gunned her down in some remote spot.
Goodman Let me get this straight. You're saying we should take Jill out of the chest—put her in Ann's car—and then drive it off the road in some woods somewhere?
Forbes Exactly.
Goodman It won't work.
Forbes Why won't it work?

Goodman Forensics, Nije—they'll check out the car and establish she was killed elsewhere.
Forbes Not if we set light to the car and destroy it completely.
Goodman I like that.
Forbes Yes—we could collect the insurance on the car as well.
Goodman Great! That's beautiful. . . .
Forbes I haven't told you the master touch yet. The sequel.
Goodman Sequel?
Forbes It leaves the field wide open. Our crank killer has made a mistake. . . .
Goodman But he's still at large.
Forbes Exactly.
Goodman So he could—he might—come back. To have another go at Ann. . . .
Forbes In a week or two's time, when this has blown over. Weaknesses?
Goodman None—except moving the body to the car.
Forbes You can do that tonight.

Goodman reacts

I'll take Ann down to the pub at nine—and make sure we don't return until closing time. . . .
Goodman Why me again? Isn't it about time you did some of the dirty work?
Forbes Do you think Ann will go to the pub with you?
Goodman No, I suppose not. . . .
Forbes Then that's settled. . . . It will work, Max it will work.

Forbes and Goodman sit down on the chest

Goodman Why aren't we rich, Nije? We're bloody brilliant.
Forbes But our brilliance *is* going to bring us riches, Max.
Goodman Yes. . . . One thing I don't understand. Jill. Why did she come back here last night?
Forbes I'm afraid that is something we will never know.

Ann enters

Ann Still plotting?
Forbes No, we've worked it out.
Ann Oh—will I like it?
Forbes I doubt it.
Goodman You're so hypercritical. . . .

Ann looks through the drawers of Forbes' desk

Forbes What are you looking for?
Ann Writing paper. And I've found it. I have an important letter to write. (*She moves to the door then pauses*) That secretary of yours—Jill—she has absolutely no system. You really should get rid of her.

Ann exits

Goodman and Forbes look at each other

Forbes Do you think it's enough—the body found in the car?
Goodman What did you have in mind?
Forbes I don't know . . . a little added something.
Goodman A cryptic note? Skin under the fingernails?
Forbes More unusual than that . . . but obliquely relevant.
Goodman Well? What do we have . . .?
Forbes The original letter.
Goodman In which he accused you of being responsible for his wife hanging herself, and threatened to take his revenge.
Forbes That's it, Max!
Goodman It is?
Forbes Hanging . . . *rope*. . . .
Goodman We've already been through that. . . .
Forbes No, no—not the play—*a* rope. A symbol. . . . How about a little hangman's noose?
Goodman Found at the scene of the crime . . .?
Forbes Yes, a hangman's noose—hanging from a nearby tree. . . . There should be some string in my desk. . . . (*He moves to his desk, and starts going through the drawers*) There has to be. . . .
Goodman I've got some in my bag. . . . (*He crosses to his fishing bag, and produces some string*)

Forbes pulls a length free, then tries to cut it with a paper knife, but to no avail

Forbes Damn!
Goodman Don't worry, Nije . . . (*he produces his fishing knife, and cuts the twine*)

He watches Forbes as he tries to tie a hangman's noose

Forbes That's not right—does it go over, or under?
Goodman Here, let me. . . . (*He puts his fishing knife down on his desk, takes the string, and begins to fashion it into a hangman's noose*)

Forbes crosses to his own desk—picks up some of his neatly stacked scripts—and moves to put them on Goodman's desk, scattering them carelessly—(and, in doing so, he covers the fishing knife from sight)

Forbes Now, in the unlikely event that someone *should* see you coming in here tonight . . . you were checking up on early typed scripts of our plays—making sure we didn't duplicate action in the new one.
Goodman Right, Nije. . . . (*He turns, and dangles a perfect little hangman's noose*) How's that?
Forbes Perfect. . . . Now—how to shift the body?
Goodman That's easy—the same way we were going to shift the bearded blackmailer. . . .
Forbes Of course, the wheelbarrow. . . .

Goodman You just leave everything to me. I won't get anything wrong this time.

Forbes We must make it appear to be an ordinary Sunday. You go to the pub . . . I'll do a spot of gardening. . . . (*He moves to a drawer, and collects some gardening gloves and secateurs*)

Goodman I'd better get going then. . . .

Forbes Yes, run along. . . .

Goodman collects his fishing bag, and exits through the french windows

Almost immediately Ann enters. She carries a full glass and is already on the way to being tipsy

Ann Now what are you up to?

Forbes What does it look like? Gardening gloves. Secateurs. Sunday morning.

Ann Oh, you're going to cut me some roses?

Forbes Ann, you never fail me. If I lay enough clues you home incisively onto the answer! And I thought, by the way that the drink was purely medicinal.

Ann *That* was the Fernet Branca. *This* is a g and t. (*She moves to start pushing buttons on the tape recorder*)

Forbes Now what are you doing?

Ann I don't trust you.

Forbes There is nothing on the tape this time. The plot is finished—finalized.

Ann Ah, but am I still in it?

Forbes regards her

The last time I played this tape I was the star of the show—worth two hundred thousand pounds. (*She laughs, drinks, and then drunkenly*) That's a bloody joke, isn't it? And I've always been saying, Nigel . . . your plays could do with a few more jokes. . . . (*She turns to regard Forbes*) Well, am I? Am I still in it? You've never used my name before, never created a character around *me*. Know why that thrills me, Nigel? Because to create a character around me, you have to look at me, examine me, know me. . . . And you haven't done that in a long, long time.

Forbes Ann, my dear, I assure you that you are still in it. Right up to your neck!

Ann What the hell does that mean?

Forbes stares at Ann, then laughs. He turns, and exits through the french windows

Nigel—don't you walk out on me! Come back here . . . Nigel . . . Nigel!

Ann exits after Forbes

the CURTAIN *falls*

Scene 2

The same. Sunday night

The room is in darkness, and empty

We hear a sound beyond the french windows, then the latch opens, and the drape is pulled aside by Goodman. He briefly takes in the room, and crosses to his desk to swtich on the lamp

Goodman turns to exit again through the french windows, but returns almost immediately negotiating a wheelbarrow into the room, and over to stand by the chest. He crosses back to close the french windows, and draw the curtains. He returns to the chest and regards it distastefully

Goodman God—I hope her eyes aren't open—staring at me. ... (*The thought of this causes him to move to the drinks tray, and pour himself a glass of something. He gulps it down, then, steeling himself says:*) Now come on, get a hold of yourself. It's got to be done. It's just a body—it can't hurt you.

(*He purposefully opens the lid of the chest—and two hands dart out and grab him round the throat! He yells, pulls himself free, and—staggering back—has a nervous breakdown before our eyes! The hands are followed out of the chest by Inspector Berry. Without taking his eyes off Goodman he moves to the door—switches on the light—and calls off*

Berry Mr Forbes!

Almost immediately the door opens, and Forbes enters

You were right—he did come back.

Forbes Oh, Max—poor Max. ...

Berry That's very generous, sir—after what he's done to you.

Goodman (*recovering at last*) Done?

Forbes I'm sorry, Max, I had no alternative—I had to tell him the whole story.

As Forbes and Goodman talk, Inspector Berry removes the wheelbarrow, taking it out through the french windows

Goodman The *whole* story?

Forbes From A to Z.

Goodman But why, Nije—why?

Forbes For your sake.

Goodman But it was all working so well.

Berry returns, and hears the last line

Berry No, sir—you see there was one weakness in your plan ... a vital element you overlooked. ...

Goodman No—it isn't possible. ... It was such a brilliant plan—foolproof. ...

Forbes This isn't a play, Max. It's real life.
Goodman It isn't fair. It can't end like this. *Not like this!*
Berry (*gently*) Mr Goodman. *Max.* Your partner's right you know, this isn't a work of fiction. I know that in your mind it must be all mixed up . . . but, well . . . why don't you tell me exactly what happened?
Goodman I thought *he'd* told you—from A to Z.
Berry Nevertheless, I'd like to hear *your* side of things. . . .

Goodman hesitates and looks at Forbes—who nods, encouragingly

Forbes Go on, Max. . . .
Goodman Well . . . Nije, *are you sure*?
Forbes It can't do any harm now. . . .
Goodman OK. . . . We were going to murder Ann . . . Nije?
Forbes It's all right, Max. It's all in the open now.
Goodman We were going to kill her. *I* was. Shoot her with Nigel's gun. His alibi was fixed, he spent the whole of last night at his London club. Jill had gone home—she was *supposed* to go home—and Ann was alone in the house. I got here just before nine—fifteen—that's when we—*I*—had planned it. . . . (*He lapses into silence*)
Berry Then what?
Goodman I took the phone off the hook—unplugged the fridge—tore up our copy of "Death Game"—except that it wasn't "Death Game"—it was *The Odd Couple*—very apt!
Berry Then?
Goodman As we planned, Nije called on the business line. Ann had to come in to answer it . . . there were no lights, because of the dud bulbs . . . and she came in. But she didn't. It was Jill . . . and I shot her. I shot the wrong woman. Later Nije put her body in the chest and pretended that nothing had happened, and . . . and the rest you know.
Berry (*pacing away in thought, then*) And what was the motive for this murder?
Goodman Motive?
Berry Why did you want to kill Mrs Forbes?
Goodman The insurance. . . .
Berry Insurance?
Goodman The insurance on Ann's life—two hundred thousand pounds. We were going to split it equally, two ways, a hundred thousand each. And we were going to write happily ever after. . . . Oh, damn!
Berry And tonight? What did you have planned?
Goodman Take Jill's body out of the chest—wheel it away—dump it in Ann's car . . . and let *you* think it was the work of the crank letter writer.
Berry I see. . . .
Goodman I'm sorry, Nije. I'm sorry. . . .
Forbes It's all right, Max . . . all right. . . .
Berry It's quite a plot.
Goodman But it wasn't a plot. It was *real life*!
Berry As *you* see it.
Goodman Eh?

Berry (*looking at Forbes*) I think you were right. . . .
Forbes I'm afraid so.

Goodman is at a loss

Berry (*bearing in on him*) Mr Goodman, let me get this straight again. In that chest was the body of your secretary, Jill Prentice, whom you shot and killed last night?
Goodman Yes. But you know that. It was you who moved her body, wasn't it?
Berry We removed the body of a woman from that chest, yes. . . .
Goodman Well, what else do you want—I've confessed to the crime?

Jill silently enters the room—Goodman is unaware of her—and remains in the background, as:

Berry I'd like an explanation for the fact that the body we removed from that chest was *not* that of Jill Prentice, but *Mrs Ann Forbes*—and she was not shot—but stabbed to death . . . with this knife. . . . (*He produces Goodman's knife from his pocket. It has an identifying tag attached to it*) Your knife, I believe—it bears the initials "M.G."
Goodman (*thunderstruck*) Ann? No, not Ann—you've got it all wrong . . . the woman I killed, the woman in that chest was . . . (*And, it is at this moment that Goodman sees Jill*) *Jill*! (*He is thrown for a loop again*) She's alive!
Berry It's a very wonderful, spell-binding story and it's easy to see why you are a writer, Mr Goodman.
Goodman I'm not a murderer—*you're alive*!
Jill Well, of course I am, Mr Goodman. . . .
Goodman No, but you can't be. You're dead—dead and in that chest. . . .
Berry Well, you can see for yourself that she's not dead—and as to the other . . . have you ever been in that chest, Miss Prentice?
Jill Yes.
Goodman You see!
Jill Yesterday morning he and Mr Forbes murdered me and put my body in the chest. Mind you, I was dressed as a man and wearing a beard at the time.
Goodman No! Not yesterday morning—last night! You came through that door . . . you were wearing a dark coat, and . . . and some kind of head scarf. . . .
Jill (*turning to Berry*) I have clothes like that in my wardrobe—I'm sure most women do. But last night? I was at home watching television.
Goodman Why are you lying? She's lying, Inspector.
Jill I'm not lying, Mr Goodman . . . and as I told you yesterday. . . .
Goodman . . . You were worried about me yesterday.
Jill Yes, I was—and I'm even more worried about you today. I tried to warn you—I've seen this breakdown coming on for weeks now . . . I mentioned it to you several times, didn't I, Mr Forbes?
Forbes Yes, you did. . . .
Berry Thank you, Miss Prentice.

Jill nods, moves to the door—then pauses, and looks sadly at Goodman

Jill I'm so sorry. . . .

Jill exits

Goodman This is a dream, isn't it, Nije? I'm going to wake up in a minute. . . .

Berry I'm afraid it is very much for real, Mr Goodman—your problem is that you're unable to distinguish fact from fantasy—which is probably how you came to make such an elementary mistake. . . .

Goodman Mistake?

Berry Elementary—and yet, I must confess it was something I completely overlooked. No, it was your eagle-eyed partner here who brought it to my attention.

Goodman Nije, what's he talking about?

Forbes Max, please do try to understand . . . I had no choice. It was my duty to phone the Inspector and tell him.

Goodman Tell him what?

Forbes That they were the same.

Goodman What were the same?

Berry The crank letters, sir . . . and the cast list you gave me . . . and all your scripts.

Goodman What about them?

Forbes Max, soon after you left here earlier today I received a second crank letter. It had not been mailed but had been slipped under the french windows. I opened it, and sat at your desk to read it—inadvertently placing it alongside one of your typed scripts—scrutinized it closely, and then it struck me. And I immediately phoned Inspector Berry. It's probably something you haven't noticed, Max. The little "h". . . .

Goodman The little "h"?

Forbes On your typewriter—it is marginally out of alignment. . . .

Berry Soon as Mr Forbes called me I had the Lab. boys check out the crank letter I hold, against the cast list. And they matched. The little "h". They were both typed on the same typewriter. *Your* typewriter, Mr Goodman. Then Mr Forbes happened to mention he hadn't seen his wife in some hours. We became alarmed, started to check out the house, and noticed a trickle of blood here—by this chest. And then. . . . (*He gestures*)

Goodman A big twist at the end—*your* speciality—you bastard!

Forbes Oh, Max. . . .

Goodman Don't bloody Max me. (*To Berry*) He's set me up, can't you see that . . .?

Berry Mr Goodman . . .

Goodman (*rounding on Forbes*) It was you! You sent those letters to yourself. And you used *my* typewriter . . . and there wasn't an anonymous call this morning. You crumb arse. . . .

Forbes Arse? Yes, that was one of the lesser terms of abuse he used this morning.

Goodman Who used?

Forbes The anonymous caller. (*To Berry*) I told you the voice had a familiar ring.
Berry (*nodding towards Goodman*) The same?
Forbes Very like. . . .

Goodman moves towards Forbes but is restrained by Berry

Goodman Oh, you stinker. You . . . you absolute turd!
Forbes *Very* like!
Goodman He *has* set me up. Trapped me in my own construction . . . but I helped build it, I'll demolish it. The insurance—what about the insurance?

Berry looks at Forbes

Forbes Ann was insured, yes. . . .
Goodman Ah-ha!
Forbes A policy her mother took out . . . worth a few hundred pounds at the most.
Goodman Damn you. Damn you! *The gun.* What's he done with the bloody gun, eh?

Forbes moves to open his desk drawer, and—with a sad smile—he produces the gun, and clicks the trigger

Forbes You will find no other gun than this. As you will immediately observe, Inspector—it is a replica incapable of firing anything other than blanks.
Goodman That's how it was done! Blanks! And it *was* Jill instead of Ann. . . . Blanks . . . and she used stage blood . . . and then you briefly showed me her body in the chest, and I thought. . . . (*To Berry*) Can't you see what's happening here? Can't you see what he's doing to me?
Berry I can see what you're doing to yourself, sir.
Goodman Eh?
Berry First thing I noticed the other day—your neurotic drive. And this morning you *admitted* you suffered momentary aberrations.
Goodman What?
Berry Tearing up *The Odd Couple* . . . hating Neil Simon.
Goodman I like Neil Simon. I worship him. *Barefoot in the Park, The Goodbye Girl, The Sunshine Boys,* I love the bastard! Anyway, I only tore up *The Odd Couple* because the damn torch wouldn't work!

Forbes and Berry exchange a look

Forbes You see what I mean?
Berry Yes, sir, I do. And it's very sad.

Forbes and Berry both regard Goodman

Goodman Don't look at me like that! As though I was out of my skull. As though I was a raving bloody lunatic. . . . *The noose*!
Berry Noose?
Goodman The hangman's noose to be found beside the car—points to the crank—and muddy up the waters, eh? Ha-ha, that's something you forget

about, isn't it . . . that's something you over . . . looked. . . . (*He trails off as he suddenly touches his pocket*)

Berry is quick to dart in and wrest the "something" from Goodman's pocket—it is the noose he fashioned earlier

Well . . . I *was* going to plant it. . . . (*To Forbes*) But planting it didn't matter, did it? It was just a trick, wasn't it? To make absolutely sure my fingerprints were on the knife. . . . You bastard!

Goodman again moves towards Forbes but Berry intervenes

Goodman (*turning on Berry*) How do I know you *are* a policeman?
Berry Eh?
Goodman How do I know? You could be his brother in disguise. How do I know that moustache is real? (*He struggles to get his hands on Berry's moustache and pull it off, as:*) I've seen *Sleuth* you know. Three times!

Berry finally quells Goodman, and thrusts him down into a chair. Berry stands menacingly over Goodman

Berry Fact and fiction is all mixed up in your mind—and that's how we knew you'd come back and collect the body. . . .
Goodman What do you mean?
Berry It was Mr Forbes who pointed it out—the play you're working on. Where the bearded blackmailer is murdered—put in this chest—and later the body is taken away and buried under the summer house. You see?
Goodman See what?
Berry Fact and fiction—you can't distinguish one from the other anymore. You murdered poor Mrs Forbes thinking she was the blackmailer. I expect that right now, in your addled mind, you think that this is a play.
Goodman It is! And he wrote it! With a lot of help from me as usual!
Berry You're not a well man, sir.
Goodman You might feel a bit under the weather too—if you were facing a life sentence!
Forbes I don't think it will come to that, Max.
Goodman You mean this is all a joke. He *is* your brother?
Berry That isn't what we mean at all, sir. You er . . . probably won't even come to trial. . . .
Goodman Eh?
Berry The courts are very sympathetic towards . . . mental illness, sir. . . .
Forbes Max, it's for your own good, believe me. You've been on the verge of a breakdown for months . . . I've tried. . . .
Goodman . . . To push me over? So that's how the curtain falls, eh? I'm nuts! Well—I will be . . . if I don't figure out *why* you did this! If there's no insurance . . . then why?
Berry Mr Goodman. . . .
Goodman (*suddenly quite calm*) Inspector, could I have a word or two alone with you?

Berry and Forbes react

The criminal is *always* allowed a few minutes alone with the copper.

Berry I don't see that it can do any harm, do you, sir?

Forbes It may help to quieten him down. I'll get Jill to make us all some coffee. . . . (*He moves to the door*)

Goodman (*as he does*) But don't open the champagne for a while. You haven't got away with it yet!

Forbes exits

(*Settling back on the settee*) That's nice. To hold the stage on my own for a change. Oh, begging your pardon, Inspector. . . .

Berry Mr Goodman . . .

Goodman I meant what I said. Nigel has to have a motive for setting me up . . .

Berry Mr Goodman . . .

Goodman All right, so I'm mad—the ramblings of a lunatic. . . . But you are supposed to humour me, aren't you? He's overlooked something, I know him—he always does, and when I find it. . . . Would you like a drink, Inspector?

Berry reacts

Lager? That's your tipple, isn't it? A nice cold lager?

Berry stares at him

Goodman I'm hardly likely to get you drunk with one lager.

Berry Very well. . . .

Goodman moves to open the fridge door. He takes out a can of lager, and pours some into a glass, as:

Goodman The room had to be in darkness when I did the shooting. He put dud bulbs in the lights, and then replaced them. . . . (*He gives Berry the glass and can of lager*) I also unplugged the fridge. I wonder if he remembered that?

Berry takes a sip of the lager

Is that lager to your liking, Inspector? Ice cold, the condensation beading on the glass?

Berry Room temperature. . . .

Goodman He did forget! (*He crosses, and picks up the unplugged lead behind the fridge*) That's one point to me, isn't it?

Berry One warm lager . . .?

Goodman A crack in his armour. . . .

Berry It doesn't mean anything on its own.

Goodman It means I *might* know what I'm talking about. . . .

Berry regards Goodman—his attitude just slightly altered

Berry "Crazy Kill"—I'll bet the shirt button was your idea.

Goodman Not only the button but the whole damned shirt. . . .

Berry Found stuffed behind the hi-fi. Bit obvious. . . .

Goodman That was Nigel's idea. You see what I mean, Inspector, I must still be in there with a chance when I'm dealing with a brain that can stuff a shirt behind a hi-fi. (*Reference to the hi-fi draws his attention to the tape recorder. He stares at it, then, turns on Berry*) Give me five minutes alone with him.

Berry Oh, I couldn't do that.

Goodman Why not?

Berry Suppose you kill him?

Goodman And eliminate the only character that knows the truth?

Berry No, sir, I'm sorry. . . . (*He moves to exit*)

Goodman Inspector, have you ever seen *Gaslight*?

Berry stops by the door, turns slowly, and is suddenly very interested

Berry *Gaslight*?

Goodman The Patrick Hamilton play. . . .

Berry Oh, yes, sir—I know the work. It's in my list of all-time favourites. . . .

Goodman Remember the final scene? Where Mrs Manningham begs to be left alone with her husband—the *villain*. . . .

Berry And Sergeant Rough agrees reluctantly. . . . But he handcuffs Manningham to the chair first. . . .

Goodman So how does that grab you?

Berry considers, and seems to have an inward battle, then he nods, and produces a pair of handcuffs from his hip pocket

(*Moving to sit in the large chair behind Forbes' desk*) Here I think. . . . (*He surveys the view from Forbes' chair and swings it around*) I never realized before—this chair looks down on mine. (*He picks up Forbes' spectacles which are, as always, lying on the desk. He puts them on, and mimics Forbes for a moment*) Trust me, Max—trust me. . . . (*He screws up his eyes, takes the glasses off, and winces*) Christ! His eyesight must be getting worse. (*He puts the glasses back on the desk, and regards Berry*) Come on then, good old Sergeant Rough.

Berry If you *were* to try and kill him. . . .

Goodman What with? We've established the gun only fires blanks. And this . . .? (*He picks up the paper knife*) He couldn't cut string with it a few hours ago. . . .

Berry Nevertheless. . . . (*He takes the knife and slips it into his pocket. He goes to put the handcuffs on Goodman, then has second thoughts*) This is *awfully* theatrical, sir. . . .

Goodman If I am right . . . wouldn't you like to know *why* he did it? If not as a policeman, then as a student of the drama?

A moment, then Berry handcuffs Goodman's left hand to the chair

Berry I'll give you five minutes—no more. . . . (*He moves to open the door and call out*)

As Berry moves to the door Goodman swings round in the chair and switches the tape recorder on

Mr Forbes!

A moment—then Forbes appears

Forbes Yes, Inspector?
Berry Now he wants to talk to you alone. If you're willing. . . .

Forbes enters

Forbes Very well. . . .
Berry Five minutes, that's all you've got. I'll call the station from the car. . . .

Berry crosses the room, and exits through the french windows

Forbes moves towards the french windows, and makes sure Berry is out of earshot. Then he turns to Goodman

Goodman regards him, then contrives, despite the handcuffs, to applaud

Goodman I don't know which deserves the most applause—the plot or the performance.
Forbes The performance . . .? (*He gestures his hand this way and that way as though to say "So-so"*) But the *plot* . . . I knew I'd surprise you one day. . . .

During the ensuing scene Forbes will keep a constant eye on the french windows, to make sure Berry is in the garden and not eavesdropping

As Forbes does this Goodman will glance at the tape recorder to make sure it is running

Goodman Then you admit you set me up?
Forbes Yes . . . between friends. . . .
Goodman But why, Nije, why? I would have done the murder—I went through with it—why did *you* kill Ann? I'll go mad if you don't tell me.
Forbes I'll tell you something . . . it proves what I have always suspected. I don't really need you, Max, to put together the perfect plot.
Goodman But why did you do what you did? You've admitted there's no insurance. What was your motive?
Forbes Motive? Which one would you like? One—the fact that I hated Ann, and this was a quick and final way to get rid of her. Two—I intend marrying Jill. . . .
Goodman Jill!
Forbes Yes, as you pointed out, she's an attractive girl, and we have been having an extremely pleasant affair for some months now.
Goodman That's a terrible cheat. You've never given any hint that there might be something going on between you.
Forbes Initially it was to conceal it from Ann. Then we had to include you too. . . .
Goodman But why? I can understand you wanting to get rid of Ann, and marry Jill. I can even understand you not wanting to have to tell me there was no insurance if you'd have let me do the actual killing. But what I *don't* understand is *why*?

Forbes Max, over the past year or two you have become an increasing irritation to me. The wild shouting every time you *thought* you had an idea. Your dog-like affection. Your pathetic enthusiasm, and—worst of all—'*Nije*".

Goodman "Nije".

Forbes (*wincing heavily*) It sets my teeth on edge every time I hear it. "Nije". My name is Nigel. *Nigel*!

Goodman Is that why you did it? Because of a name?

Forbes No, no . . . that just added a spice of pleasure to doing it. . . .

Goodman Doing what for Chrissakes?

Forbes You remember Posner?

Goodman Posner?

Forbes Felix Posner, that extraordinary detective we created in "Murder Has No End".

Goodman Yes, of course I do.

Forbes Well, a month ago, Jill took a call from Twentieth Century Fox. They want to buy the rights in that character for a television series. The contract is drawn up and only requires a signature. It's a two million dollar deal, Max—plus the usual merchandising and residuals. . . . Two million dollars payable to our partnership and to be equally shared. That is . . . (*he points to himself*) One million for me . . . (*he starts to point at Goodman—then again points to himself*) . . . and the *other* million for me.

Goodman I don't get it. . . .

Forbes No, and you're not going to. That's what I just said.

Goodman But you can't do that, we've got a legal agreement.

Forbes Ah, Max . . . and that really is the *prime* motive. Excuse me. . . . (*He leans past Goodman to open a drawer, and to produce a document. He flourishes it*) A copy of our partnership agreement. You recall, I had it redrawn soon after taking over the running of our affairs? It's the usual stuff—shared credits, etcetera . . . but it's in the *small print* that the sting really lies—as usual, you never even bothered to read it, did you? Allow me to quote. . . . (*He picks up his glasses from the desk, puts them on, and holds the document in an important manner. He then frowns as he finds that he cannot see through the glasses*) I really must collect my new glasses—I can afford them now, Max. . . . (*He takes off his glasses, and puts them back on the desk*) Briefly, our contract stipulates that should either partner be found to be suffering from a mental illness, then the other partner gets full power of attorney in all rights. Or, in plain English, if you go "Ape" I've got you by the short and curlies.

Goodman I signed that? I must be mad!

Forbes Ah, I see you've slipped so easily into your role. Yes, Max, as from now, in the eyes of authority, you *are* mad. Weaknesses?

Goodman None that I can see. (*He covertly glances towards the tape recorder as he speaks*)

Forbes Think it over, Max—everything fits conveniently into place. Well, that's about it. . . . (*He moves to exit, then pauses*) Oh, there is one other thing that might amuse you. Ann was terribly relieved when I took her out to dinner last night—*and* showed some affection. She had this silly

idea that we were planning to murder her. It took me some time to reassure her otherwise. To tell her that what she had heard on this tape recorder was merely you and I plotting another play.

Goodman reacts

Yes, Max ... I switched it on, then foolishly forgot to erase it. Oh, but don't worry. I have taken care of it since—and learned an important lesson. Always erase, Max. Always erase.... (*As he speaks he manipulates the tape recorder to erase. He turns, smiling at the discomforted Goodman*) I'll tell Inspector Berry you're ready to leave.

Forbes exits

Goodman turns to stare at the tape recorder, and then—in despair—leans his head on his hands. This places him over the desk on which resides Forbes' glasses, and the legal document. After a moment Goodman reacts as he stares at the legal document. He picks it up, examines it closely, and then—his mind racing—he starts to make connections. He picks up Forbes' glasses, and looks through them

Berry enters, through the french windows

Berry Time we went. Mr Goodman. I'll just collect my things....

Berry crosses the room, and exits through the other door. After a moment he returns with his brief case, and a raincoat. He puts them down, and moves to Goodman, to remove the handcuffs

All the time Goodman has looked at the legal document, and at Forbes' glasses. Now, as he is released

Goodman My big mistake was the typewriter, wasn't it? The misaligned "h".

Berry That was the vital clue, yes....

Goodman Can I go over it again, as I remember it?

Berry sighs, then nods

Please. Nigel received a second crank letter—right? He sat down at my desk to read it ... and just *happened* to place it alongside one of my scripts, and—weren't they his exact words—he scrutinized it closely?

Berry His exact words.

Goodman What would you say was the definition of "scrutinize", Inspector?

Berry Well, er ... to examine carefully. In great detail.

Goodman Thank you, Inspector. Now, would you please look at this? (*He picks up the legal document and hands it to Berry*)

Berry takes it, squints at it, pats at his jacket pocket, as:

The small print.... (*He picks up the glasses from the desk, and offers them to Berry*) Try these....

Berry looks puzzled, but then takes the glasses, looks through them, and reacts

Berry Oh, I wondered where I left them. Yes, they're mine.
Goodman Are you sure?
Berry Positive—there's a nick on the frame. (*He crosses to his raincoat and takes out a pair of glasses*) So these must belong to Mr Forbes.
Goodman Exactly! If those are your glasses—*those* must be Nigel's. . . .
Berry Must be. . . .
Goodman Now—can we establish exactly when this swapover occurred?
Berry Well. It has to be yesterday morning—when I used them to look at the first crank letter. Yes, I stood there . . . put on my glasses . . . and then put them down.
Goodman And as you got ready to go, you picked up the wrong glasses. Nigel's glasses!
Berry That's how it must have happened—yes.
Goodman How can you be sure it was yesterday?
Berry Well, I used them before I came here. Then, after I left, I popped into the garage, then the pub, then back to the station—which is where I first missed them. I thought I'd left them at the pub—didn't cross my mind that it might have been here. . . .
Goodman Inspector, you can see where I'm leading, can't you?
Berry Yes. The misaligned "h".
Goodman The vital clue. The most damning piece of evidence against me . . . that teeny little misaligned "h" that he so "closely scrutinized"—this morning—*through your glasses*!

For a moment Berry is so "caught up" that he almost believes Goodman

Berry Oh, it's a clever twist—and exactly what I'd expect from you, but I'm afraid it doesn't hold up. . . .
Goodman Why not?
Berry Because everyone keeps a spare pair. I do myself—got them in my desk at the station. And Mr Forbes, being a writer too. . . .
Goodman . . . but not a very clever one. (*As he talks he takes up the optician's card from Forbes' desk tray, and gives it to Berry*) From his optician—see for yourself—his spare pair are awaiting collection.
Berry He hasn't picked them up yet?
Goodman No. . . .
Berry Well, that's something we can easily check.
Goodman Hallelujah! You're starting to believe me, aren't you?
Berry Suppose I am—where do we go next?
Goodman Look, I stumbled onto this out of desperation—it may take Nije a few years longer—perhaps never—unless we jog his elbow.
Berry How do you mean—jog his elbow?
Goodman Through Jill. Get her back in here.

Berry hesitates

Trust me!

A moment, then Berry moves to open the door, and call

Berry Miss Prentice? Could I have a word please?

Goodman settles into Forbes' chair behind the desk, as though still handcuffed

A moment later Jill enters

Jill Yes, Inspector?
Goodman It's me who wants to talk to you, Jill.
Berry (*sotto voce*) Humour him.
Jill Yes, Mr Goodman?
Goodman The Inspector won't believe me when I tell him you haven't collected Nigel's glasses yet . . . (*he holds up the optician's card, and starts to show signs of distress as he speaks*)

Jill reacts then looks at Berry, who shrugs profoundly

Well, tell him. Tell him!
Jill No, as a matter of fact, they haven't been collected yet. Why—is it important?
Berry (*looking at her, implying that Goodman is off his rocker*) Mr Goodman seems to think so. Thank you, Miss, you can go. . . .

Jill moves to exit, but pauses to listen

Goodman There's a weak link somewhere, and it's got something to do with Nije's glasses . . . I know it. . . . But I don't know how . . .!

Jill exits

There—did you see that?
Berry I still don't understand where you're leading . . .
Goodman Inspector—suppose we left Nigel alone in here, and he secretly swapped those glasses back . . . then what?
Berry I'd take that as evidence of your innocence and his guilt.
Goodman That's all I wanted to hear.
Berry *I* would take it as evidence . . . but a court of law? It would come down to my word against his—with Miss Prentice backing him up. . . .
Goodman Don't I count?
Berry The testimony of a madman? (*He shakes his head, and paces away*)
Goodman There must be something . . . some way to catch him red-handed! And we don't have much time—Jill's already told him about what I've been raving about in here—and now Nije's mind is working overtime—trying to make sense of it all. . . . He'll be back in here soon. . . .
Berry Red-handed! You've given me an idea. . . . We may be lucky. . . . (*He crosses to fetch his briefcase. He sets it on Forbes' desk, and opens it. He reaches in a hand, and brings out a small bottle*) Yes, I thought I had some on me. . . . (*He studies the bottle label*) We'll have to settle for green-handed I'm afraid. . . . (*He picks up Forbes' glasses, and—using the bottle, and brush inside—dusts the frames with a powder*)

Goodman watches Berry at work and starts to smile

Goodman I know what you're up to! "Crazy Kill".
Berry Act two, scene two. Of course, it may not work.
Goodman Of course it will bloody well work—I wrote that bit. . . . It's got to bloody well work. . . .

Berry (*finishing dusting the spectacle frames*) Now—my glasses on his desk.... (*He puts a pair onto Forbes' desk*) And these ... back in my raincoat.... (*He goes to put the doctored glasses into his raincoat pocket*)
Goodman Wait—Nije will have to see you put them in there....
Berry (*nodding*) Spot on.... If you *are* right, and Mr Forbes comes back in here—we have to find an excuse to leave him alone.
Goodman Easy—you take me out to the summer house.

Berry stares, and frowns at Goodman

Well, it's supposed to be where I bury the body of the bearded blackmailer.... Ah ...!

The door opens and Forbes enters. He is as smooth and urbane as ever, but concealing an inner tension

Forbes Excuse me, Inspector, but will you be finished here soon? I'm sure you understand it's been a harrowing day....

Berry takes his time. He polishes the spectacle lenses with his handkerchief—twirling them as he does so—then he slips them into his raincoat pocket which is lying over a chair. Berry is seemingly unaware of the fact that Forbes seems fascinated by the glasses, as:

Berry Won't be much longer, sir. We'll be off as soon as I've taken a look around the summerhouse....
Forbes The summerhouse?
Berry Just going through the motions ... (*sotto voce*) Humouring him....

Berry and Goodman exit through the french windows

Forbes hurries over to stare off after them

Jill enters

Jill What's wrong?
Forbes Just stand here and keep an eye on them.

Forbes puts Jill in a position to keep watch out of the french windows while he hurries to his desk, picks up Berry's glasses—squints through them—then hurries over to where the raincoat is draped. He delves into the pockets of the raincoat until he finds his glasses. He puts Berry's glasses in the pocket, then hurries back to his desk to put his *glasses there*

During this action:

Jill Something *is* wrong.
Forbes Nothing's wrong, darling—but there might have been if I hadn't spotted it in time.
Jill Spotted what?
Forbes Somehow my glasses got swapped with Berry's—been carrying them around for the last twenty-four hours—during which time I am supposed to have seen a misaligned "h"—the smallest of small print....
Jill They're coming back!
Forbes Don't worry, it's done—the last loophole plugged....

Berry ushers Goodman back into the room

Berry As I suspected—a wild goose chase. . . . (*He starts to put on his raincoat*)
Forbes You're taking him off now?
Berry I'm taking the murderer away, yes sir.
Forbes Well, Inspector . . . (*he offers his hand for Berry to shake*)

Berry takes it and turns it—palm up—to reveal it is bright green

Berry Well, well—your hand's gone bright green. That couldn't be the dye I put on the glasses that were in this pocket, could it, sir?
Goodman You fell for it—you fell for it—you swapped the bloody glasses back!
Forbes (*staring at his green hand—stunned*) "Crazy Kill".
Goodman Act two, scene two. Remember how you resisted me—said it was a gimmick that would never work? *Never work*!
Forbes Inspector, surely you're not going to . . .?

Berry snaps handcuffs onto Forbes' wrist as Forbes turns to Berry with hand held high

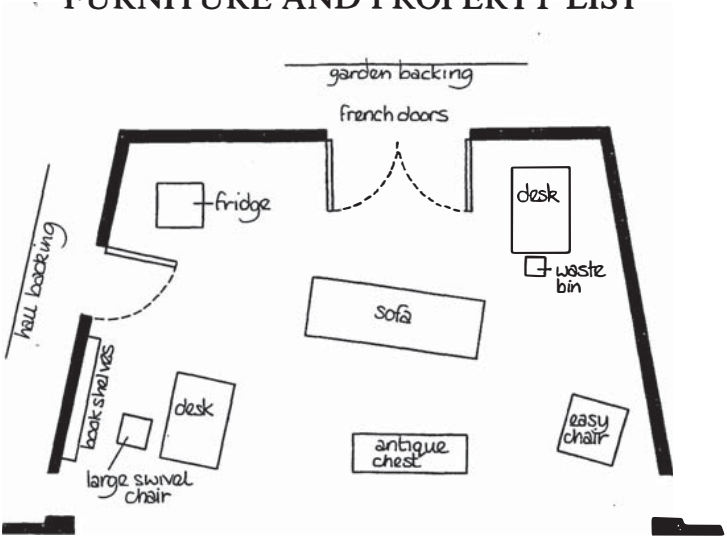
Forbes reacts

Jill You fool . . . you bloody, incompetent, old fool! You've ruined everything!
Forbes But it wasn't supposed to end like this.
Goodman No—it's not quite the happy ending you planned for the murderer, is it . . . *Nije!!*

Forbes winces

the CURTAIN *falls*

FURNITURE AND PROPERTY LIST



ACT I

SCENE 1

On stage: Large desk. *On it:* telephone, antique desk lamp, neatly stacked papers, antique paper knife, electric typewriter, reading glasses, blotting pad, card. *In the drawer:* torch, gardening gloves, secateurs
Swing chair
Built-in shelves. *On them:* papers, books, tape recorder, *objets d'art*
Folding-type table. *On it:* papers, jam jars containing pencils etc., manual typewriter
Bentwood chair
Tin waste basket filled to overflowing
Sofa
Small fridge. *On it:* tray of bottles and glasses. *In it:* tins of lager
Antique chest
Easy chair
Framed theatrical posters
Carpet

Off stage: Tray of coffee **(Jill)**
Mail, outdoor clothes **(Ann)**
Box containing a gun and ammunition **(Forbes)**

Personal: **Forbes:** gloves
Goodman: gloves, money in pocket
Jill: false beard, snap brim hat, coat, gloves, torch

SCENE 2

Set: French window drapes drawn

Off stage: Letters **(Jill)**
Writing paper **(Jill)**

Personal: **Berry:** briefcase. *In it:* clear plastic folder

SCENE 3

Personal: **Goodman:** anorak, khaki trousers, scarf, fishing gear, gloves, torch, watch
Jill: voluminous top coat, boots, scarf

ACT II

SCENE 1

Strike: Blood from the wall

Set: French window drapes open, torn up play on Forbes' desk, file of press cuttings on the shelf

Off stage: Large stiff piece of card **(Berry)**
Glass of drink **(Ann)**

Personal: **Goodman:** fishing bag. *In it:* some string, fishing knife
Berry: watch

SCENE 2

Set: French window drapes drawn, replica gun and legal document in desk drawer, **Forbes'** glasses on his desk near his optician's card

Off stage: Wheelbarrow **(Goodman)**
Briefcase. *In it:* small bottle of green powder. Raincoat with glasses and handkerchief in pocket **(Berry)**

Personal: **Berry: Goodman's** knife, labelled, handcuffs in pocket
Goodman: noose in pocket

LIGHTING PLOT

Property fittings required: practical overhead light and desk lamp. Fridge with working inside light

Interior. A study. The same scene throughout

ACT I

To open: Lighting from the overhead light and desk lamp only to denote night

Cue 1	**Forbes and Goodman** *switch off lights* *Practical lights off, dim lighting only*	(Page 2)
Cue 2	**Goodman** hurries to switch on the desk lamp *Lights up slightly*	(Page 3)
Cue 3	**Forbes** pulls aside the french window drapes *Lights up, sunshine effect*	(Page 3)
Cue 4	As Scene 2 opens *Dim lighting only*	(Page 15)
Cue 5	**Jill** switches on the light *Lights up*	(Page 15)
Cue 6	**Jill** turns out the light *Dim lighting only*	(Page 16)
Cue 7	**Forbes** puts on the light *Lights up*	(Page 16)
Cue 8	**Forbes** switches off the light *Dim lighting only*	(Page 18)
Cue 9	**Forbes** draws the curtains *Lights up, sunshine effect*	(Page 18)
Cue 10	As Scene 3 opens *Dim lighting only*	(Page 28)

ACT II

To open: Lights up, sunshine effect

Cue 11	As Scene 2 opens *Dim lighting only*	(Page 38)
Cue 12	**Berry** switches on the light *Lights up*	(Page 38)

EFFECTS PLOT

ACT I

Cue 1	As the Curtain rises *Sounds of the countryside at night; an owl hooting, a rumble of thunder*	(Page 1)
Cue 2	**Forbes:** "... coming through the door. ..." *Car draws up outside*	(Page 2)
Cue 3	**Forbes** and **Goodman** hide *Door bell rings. A few moments, then it rings again*	(Page 2)
Cue 4	**Forbes:** "And our audience." *Owl and thunder noises*	(Page 3)
Cue 5	**Forbes** switches off the tape recorder *Owl and thunder noises cease*	(Page 3)
Cue 6	As Scene 2 opens *Telephone rings*	(Page 15)
Cue 7	**Forbes:** "... the phone rings. ..." *Telephone rings*	(Page 18)
Cue 8	**Goodman:** "... to get my twenty quid back!" *Door bell rings*	(Page 19)
Cue 9	**Ann** pushes some buttons on the tape recorder *Taped voices of* **Forbes** *and* **Goodman**	(Page 28)
Cue 10	**Goodman:** "... to be bloody well doing it!" *Telephone rings until the Curtain falls*	(Page 29)
Cue 11	**Goodman** fires several shots *Several gun shots*	(Page 29)

ACT II

No cues

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