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SF PERUSALS

PERSONAL CALL

by Agatha Christie

SAMUEL FRENCH

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PERSONAL CALL was first performed on the BBC Radio Light Programme on Monday, 31 May 1954 and produced by Ayton Whitaker. The cast was as follows:

FAY ..... Jessie Evans
JAMES BRENT ..... James McKechnie
PAM BRENT ..... Mary Wimbush
MRS. LAMB ..... Joan Sanderson
EVAN CURTIS ..... Hamilton Dyce
MARY CURTIS ..... Janet Burnell
MR. ENDERBY ..... Norman Chidgey
INSPECTOR NARRACOTT ..... Edgar Norfolk
WITH ..... Sulwen Morgan, Cyril Shaps, Peter Claughton, Dorothy Clement, Alan Reid, Hugh David, and Ruth Cracknell

CHARACTERS

FAY

JAMES BRENT

PAM BRENT

MRS. LAMB

EVAN CURTIS

MARY CURTIS

MR. ENDERBY

INSPECTOR NARRACOTT

OPERATOR

STATION ANNOUNCER

FIRST PORTER

SECOND PORTER

WOMAN

MAN

Scene One

(The confused noises of a cocktail party are heard. For further dialogue see Appendix Chatter Band A.)

VOICES. *(Jumbled.)* "Hullo Pam, you're looking wonderful. Marriage seems to agree with you."

"Come on in, old man. So glad you could make it."

"Pam's about somewhere."

"Darling, have you heard about Mona?"

(A telephone rings. It is unheeded for a moment or two then **MRS. LAMB***, a housemaid, answers it.)*

MRS. LAMB. 'Ullo, 'ullo... Yes, Kensington 34598... Wot? ... Just a moment, please. I can't 'ear you.

(A door shuts and the cocktail party fades into the background.)

'Ullo, yes?

OPERATOR. Can Mr. James Brent take a personal call, please, from Newton Abbot?

MRS. LAMB. I'll try and get 'old of 'im but there's a party going on.

(The door opens. A surge of noise. Scraps of conversation are heard. For further dialogue see Appendix Chatter Band B.)

VOICES. "Mary, it's lovely to see you. It's been simply ages."

"Hullo, Johnnie, you must meet my wife. She's somewhere about."

"Cocktail, or would you rather have sherry?"

MRS. LAMB. Please, sir – please –

JAMES. We certainly are, but how we're ever going to manage on this travelling allowance I don't – eh, what?

MRS. LAMB. You're wanted on the phone, sir.

JAMES. What now? Who is it?

MRS. LAMB. It's a personal call, sir, from something Abbot.

JAMES. People will ring up at the most inconvenient moments. John, get Mona another drink. Hullo, Lois, lovely to see you. Pam's about somewhere –

(The party noises fade as the door shuts.)

Hullo?

OPERATOR. Is that Mr. James Brent speaking personally?

JAMES. James Brent speaking.

OPERATOR. Just a moment, please.

(The **OPERATOR** *connects the call.)*

Go ahead please. Mr. Brent is waiting.

*(***FAY** *is put through. Her voice sounds remote and rather unearthly.)*

FAY. Hullo James?

JAMES. Who's speaking?

FAY. Don't you know?

(She laughs, mockingly.)

It's Fay...

JAMES. Who did you say? Sorry, the line's bad and there's a lot of noise going on here.

*(***FAY** *speaks again, sounding nearer.)*

FAY. It's Fay...

JAMES. *(Startled.)* What did you say?

FAY. It's Fay, James? Don't you remember?

(There is a pause.)

JAMES. *(Upset.)* Who are you? Where are you speaking from?

FAY. I'm at Newton Abbot station. Where you left me.

JAMES. What's that? *(Angrily.)* Who is this?

FAY. I told you. I'm Fay... You remember – Fay? I'm waiting for you to come and meet me.

JAMES. Meet you? What do you mean?

FAY. I'm waiting at the station. At Newton Abbot.

JAMES. Look here, one of us is mad. What are you talking about? And who are you?

FAY. How often have I got to tell you that I'm Fay!

JAMES. If this is a practical joke, let me tell you that it's a very heartless and silly one.

FAY. It isn't a joke, James. I'm here – waiting. You'll have to come.

JAMES. Look, this is absurd. How dare you pretend –

(The door opens. A surge of party noise. For dialogue see Appendix Chatter Band C.)

PAM. So that's where you are, darling. Telephoning! For goodness' sake come back, people are pouring in. We want some more cocktails mixed.

(Her voice becomes concerned.)

Why – darling. What is it?

(The telephone receiver is slammed down.)

JAMES. *(Furiously.)* A cruel, silly, practical joke! You'd think people had something better to do.

(The door is shut. The party noise fades.)

PAM. Darling, what is it? Who was it ringing up?

JAMES. *(Irritably.)* How should I know? But I'm going to try and find out.

(He picks up the telephone receiver and dials.)

Can you possibly carry on for a few minutes without me, Pam? I'll be along as soon as I can, my sweet.

PAM. Yes, of course.

(There is a pause.)

PAM. You're really upset, aren't you, darling? What did whoever it was say?

OPERATOR. Operator. Can I help you?

JAMES. Oh, operator, yes. My name's Brent. Kensington 34598. You put through a personal call to me just now. Can you tell me where it came from?... Yes... Yes... You'll ring me back?... As soon as you can...

(He replaces the telephone receiver.)

Sorry Pam, but it really made me see red.

PAM. But who was it?

JAMES. I'll tell you all about it later. Do go now, darling. The party will be getting out of hand.

PAM. It's being a great success – that's really the trouble. All right, darling, I'll cope. But do come soon.

JAMES. Yes, I will.

(The door opens. Party noise is heard briefly before the door shuts and it fades. For dialogue see Appendix Chatter Band D.)

(Softly.) Fay... I wasn't dreaming it, she said Fay. And it was her voice too... Who the devil can have been playing a trick on me?

(The telephone rings. **JAMES** *answers it.)*

OPERATOR. Mr. James Brent?

JAMES. Yes.

OPERATOR. I have made enquiries. No personal call has been put through to you today.

JAMES. What? But I can assure you –

OPERATOR. No personal call has been put through to you.

*(***JAMES** *hangs up the telephone.)*

JAMES. *(Shaken.)* But I don't understand. I don't understand... I heard her...

(The door opens. Party noise is heard briefly before it closes.)

PAM. *(Crossly.)* Really James, if you've finished telephoning you might come along. You just stand there looking as though someone had socked you on the head!

JAMES. I really am sorry, Pam. I'm with you.

PAM. Who was it who rang you up?

JAMES. Oh – just somebody trying to be funny.

PAM. What did he say?

(She has a slight change of tone.)

Or was it a she?

JAMES. I don't know... I mean, it was a she... It was nothing particular.

PAM. *(Uneasily.)* Darling, you're not leading a double life, I hope? I shouldn't like that at all.

*(***JAMES***' tone is a little forced.)*

JAMES. You're the only woman in my life, Pam. I can assure you of that.

PAM. You'd have to say so anyway! But something seems to have shattered your morale.

JAMES. *(Bitterly.)* I just don't like silly jokes.

PAM. Well come on, back to the scrimmage. By the way, I asked Evan and Mary in for bridge tomorrow. I haven't seen Mary for ages and one can't talk at a show like this. Is that all right?

JAMES. Yes dear, quite all right.

(A swell of noise as **JAMES** *and* **PAM** *rejoin the party. For further dialogue see Appendix Chatter Band E.)*

Hullo Evan, not seen you for ages. I hear you're coming in to bridge tomorrow? Good show...

(The party fades.)

Scene Two

(The sounds of a railway station. The scream of an express engine is heard rushing through the station.)

FIRST PORTER. Mind them cases, Joe.

FAY. Porter!

FIRST PORTER. Yes ma'am, what is it?

FAY. Please can you tell me where I can find –

(The sound of shunting trains briefly drowns out her voice.)

FIRST PORTER. Sorry ma'am, couldn't hear you. What did you say?

FAY. The telephones?

FIRST PORTER. Out by the booking office. Over the bridge.

FAY. It's a trunk call I want.

FIRST PORTER. The first box.

FAY. Thank you.

SECOND PORTER. Hullo Bert? Seen a ghost?

FIRST PORTER. 'Tis funny, you saying that. That woman was asking me the way to the telephone boxes – reckon as I've seen her before somewhere. And seems to me as when I saw her, 'twas something to do with a death. I can't just call to mind –

(A train is heard coming into the station. The **STATION ANNOUNCER** *calls.)*

ANNOUNCER. All stations to Plymouth stopping. Newton Abbot. Newton Abbot. From Plymouth. Stopping train to Plymouth.

(The station noises fade.)

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