

quotas originally asked for be lowered by twelve and a half per cent. *(Pause.)* The Home Secretary has written to the lawyers of Mrs. Margot Wendice to say that he has decided that there are not sufficient grounds to justify his recommending a reprieve. At the Old Bailey last November Mrs. Wendice was found guilty of the murder of Charles Alexander Swann and was sentenced to death. *(Pause.)* The official forecast is that there will be bright periods and showers in all districts today. Frost is expected again tonight, especially in the South. *(Phone rings.)* The time is now eleven minutes past one and that is the end of the news . . . *(Tony switches off radio and crosses to phone on desk.)*

TONY. *(Into phone.)* Hullo!

PENDLETON. *(Offstage, heard through receiver.)* Mr. Wendice?

TONY. Yes?

PENDLETON. Pendleton here.

TONY. Oh, good afternoon.

PENDLETON. Have you decided about the letters?

TONY. Yes—I'll be quite frank with you—the cost of the defense has been very high. I shall have to ask for five hundred pounds.

PENDLETON. Five hundred! But I'm only asking for her letters . . .

TONY. That's all very well—how would you like your wife's letters read by millions of people?

PENDLETON. I'm prepared to offer three fifty . . .

TONY. No, I'm sorry. I've quite made up my mind.

PENDLETON. Could you give me a little time to think this over?

TONY. By all means, think it over—only I'm going away the day after tomorrow. *(The door buzzer. Tony glances anxiously at the door. Quietly.)* Excuse me. I shall have to ring you back. *(He rings off. Goes to hall door and opens it. Max stands in the passage outside. He wears neither coat nor hat. They stare at each other for a moment or two.)*

MAX. Hullo, Tony.

TONY. Hullo, Max.

MAX. May I come in?

TONY. Of course, you're quite a stranger.

MAX. *(Entering.)* I'm sorry I haven't been around before. I wasn't sure how you felt—after . . .

TONY. That's all right. It's rather chilly in here. I'll switch on . . . *(Tony stops short as he sees attaché case on bed.)* I'll switch

on the fire. Let's find somewhere for you to sit. *(Tony picks up his robe from sofa and throws it over attaché case to hide it from Max.)* I've hardly seen anyone for weeks. I'm getting quite used to it. I've had to move in here because everybody stops in the street and peers in at the bedroom window. When the appeal failed they started climbing into the garden. You can't blame them, I suppose—it's cheaper than the zoo and far more topical.

MAX. I—had to come—in case there was anything . . . *(Tony takes a typed letter from his pocket and hands it to Max.)*

TONY. *(Quietly.)* I'm afraid it's settled, Max. Our lawyer received this from the Home Secretary this morning. *(Max reads letter and hands it back to Tony.)*

MAX. You mustn't give up trying. It's not over yet.

TONY. I'm afraid it is. *(Sits on bed.)* We've done all we can. I went to the prison this morning to—say good-bye, but she wouldn't see me. I was rather glad—she never did like good-byes. *(Pause. Simply.)* I shan't see her again.

MAX. Tony. I take it you'd do anything—to save her life?

TONY. *(Surprised.)* Of course.

MAX. Even if it meant going to prison for several years?

TONY. *(After a pause.)* I'd do absolutely anything.

MAX. I think you can—I'm certain. *(Slowly.)* If you tell the police exactly the right story.

TONY. The right story?

MAX. Listen, Tony. I've been working this out for weeks. Just in case it came to this. It may be her only chance.

TONY. Let's have it.

MAX. You'll have to tell the police that you hired Swann to murder her. *(Long pause. Tony can only stare at Max.)*

TONY. *(Rises.)* What are you talking about?

MAX. It's all right, Tony—I've been writing this stuff for years. I know what I'm doing. Margot was convicted because no one would believe her story. Prosecution made out that she was telling one lie after another—and the jury believed him. But what did his case amount to? Only three things. My letter—her stocking, and the idea that, because no key was found on Swann, she must have let him in herself. *(Pause.)* Now Swann is dead. You can tell any story you like about him. You can say that you did know him. That you'd met him, and worked out the whole thing together. Now the blackmail. Swann was only suspected of blackmail for

two reasons. Because my letter was found in his pocket and because you saw him the day Margot's bag was stolen.

TONY. Well?

MAX. You can now tell the police that you never saw him at Victoria. That the whole thing was an invention of yours to try and connect him with the letter.

TONY. But the letter was found in his pocket.

MAX. Because you put it there.

TONY. (*Pause.*) You mean I should pretend that I stole her hand-bag?

MAX. Sure. You could have.

TONY. But why?

MAX. Because you wanted to find out who was writing to her. When you read my letter you were so mad you decided to teach her a lesson.

TONY. But I can't say that I wrote those blackmail notes.

MAX. Why not? No one can prove that you didn't. (*Tony thinks it over.*)

TONY. All right. I stole her bag and blackmailed her. What else?

MAX. You kept my letter and planted it on Swann after he'd been killed.

TONY. Wait a minute—when could I have done that?

MAX. After you got back from the party and before the police arrived. At the same time you took one of Margot's stockings from the mending basket and substituted it for whatever Swann had used. (*Tony thinks it over.*)

TONY. Max, I know you're trying to help but—can you imagine anyone believing this?

MAX. You've got to make them believe it.

TONY. But I wouldn't know what to say. You'd have to come with me.

MAX. No. I couldn't do that. They know the sort of stuff I write. If they suspected we'd talked this out they wouldn't even listen. They mustn't know I've been here.

TONY. Max! It's ridiculous. Why should I want anyone to murder Margot?

MAX. Oh, one of the stock motives. Had Margot made a will? (*Pause.*)

TONY. I—yes, I believe she had.

MAX. Are you the main beneficiary?

TONY. I suppose so.

MAX. Well, there you are.

TONY. But thousands of husbands and wives leave money to each other, without murdering each other. The police wouldn't believe a word of it! They'd take it for exactly what it is. A husband desperately trying to save his wife.

MAX. Well, it's worth a try. They can't hang you for planning a murder that never came off. Face it. The most you'd get would be a few years in prison.

TONY. Thanks very much.

MAX. . . . And you'd have saved her life. That doesn't seem too big a price.

TONY. That's fine coming from you, Max. Her life might not be in danger at all if it hadn't been for you. It was because of your—association with her that she lost the sympathy of the jury. Don't get me wrong, Max. If there was the slightest chance of this coming off—of course I'd do it. But it's got to be convincing. How—how could I have persuaded Swann to do a thing like this?

MAX. You'd have to say you offered him money.

TONY. What money? I haven't got any. *(Pause.)*

MAX. You would have Margot's money.

TONY. It would be months before I could lay my hands on that. And people don't commit murder on credit. No, we'll have to think up something better than that . . .

MAX. All right—we will. There is an answer and we've got to find it. *(Pause.)* How much time have we got?

TONY. *(As though he can hardly say the words.)* It's tomorrow morning . . . *(Offstage door slams. Footsteps. Door buzzer.)*

MAX. Sssssh! *(They stop and listen. They look at each other. Tony goes to open the hall door. Max snaps his fingers to attract Tony's attention. He motions Tony to wait and crosses quietly and exits into kitchen. When Tony opens the hall door Inspector Hubbard is standing in the passage outside. He carries a raincoat over his arm and a brief case.)*

TONY. Oh—hullo, Inspector. *(Hubbard enters and Tony closes the door. Anxiously.)* Is it—about my wife?

HUBBARD. *(Sympathetically.)* Er—no, sir. I'm afraid not.

TONY. *(Surprised.)* What is it, then? *(While they talk Hubbard hangs his brief case on the same chair as Tony's raincoat and then hangs up his bat and raincoat on coat rack.)*