

TONY. (*Amused.*) I almost wish you would. When she heard that we'd have the best laugh of our lives.

LESGATE. Aren't you forgetting something?

TONY. Am I?

LESGATE. You've told me a few things tonight.

TONY. What of it?

LESGATE. Suppose I tell them how you followed her to that studio in Chelsea—how you watched them cooking spaghetti and all that rubbish. Wouldn't that ring a bell?

TONY. It certainly would. They'd assume you followed her there yourself.

LESGATE. Me? Why should I?

TONY. Why should you steal her handbag? Why should you write her all those blackmail notes? Can you prove that you didn't? You certainly can't prove that I did. It will be a straight case of your word against mine.

LESGATE. (*Amused.*) Huh, that ought to puzzle them. What could you say?

TONY. I shall say that you came here tonight—half drunk—and tried to borrow money on the strength that we were at college together. When I refused you said something about a letter belonging to my wife. As far as I could make out you were offering to sell it to me. I gave you what money I had and you gave me the letter. It has your fingerprints on it. Remember? (*Takes wallet out of pocket and shows it to him.*) Then you said if I went to the police you'd tell some crazy story about my wanting you to murder my wife. But before we go any further, old boy—do consider the inconvenience. You see, I'm quite well known . . . and there would be pictures of you as well. Sooner or later a deputation of lodgers and landladies would come forward to testify to your character. And someone is almost certain to have seen you with Miss Wallace. (*Pause.*) You were always careful not to be seen around with her—I noticed. You usually met in out-of-the-way places where no one would recognize you—like that little tea shop in Pimlico.

LESGATE. That was her idea, not mine.

TONY. Yes, it was a bit crummy, wasn't it? Hardly a place to take Mrs. Van Dorn. By the way, does Mrs. Van Dorn know about—Mr. Adams—and Mr. Wilson . . . and Miss Wallace? You were planning to marry Mrs. Van Dorn, weren't you?

LESGATE. Smart, aren't you?

TONY. Not really, I've just had time to think things out—putting myself in your position. That's why I know you're going to agree.

LESGATE. What makes you *think* I'll agree?

TONY. For the same reason that a donkey with a stick behind him and a carrot in front goes forwards and not backwards. (*Long pause.*)

LESGATE. Tell me about the carrot. (*Long pause. Tony looks straight at Lesgate.*)

TONY. One thousand pounds in cash. (*Long pause. Lesgate looks up at Tony and their eyes meet.*)

LESGATE. For a murder?

TONY. For a few minutes' work. That's all it is. And no risk. I guarantee. That ought to appeal to you. You've been skating on very thin ice.

LESGATE. I don't know what you're talking about.

TONY. You should know. It was in all the papers. A middle-aged woman found dead due to an overdose of cocaine. Appeared as though she'd been taking the stuff for quite a time—but no one knows where she got it. . . . But we know—don't we? Poor Miss Wallace! (*This bites Lesgate and there is a long silence. Tony changes his tone.*) Yes, you should take a long holiday abroad. Surely a honeymoon with Mrs. Van Dorn would be preferable to ten years' detention at Dartmoor. My thousand pounds should see you safely married to her. You'll find it makes such a difference to have some money in the family.

LESGATE. This thousand pounds—where is it?

TONY. (*Quite serious.*) It's in a small attaché case in a check-room. (*Pause.*)

LESGATE. Where?

TONY. Somewhere in London. Of course, we don't meet again. As soon as you've—delivered the goods, I shall mail you the check-room ticket and the key to the case. (*Tony opens drawer in desk and, using his handkerchief, takes out a bundle of one-pound notes. He throws this across the room so that it lands on the sofa.*) You can take this hundred pounds on account. (*Lesgate looks down at the money but doesn't touch it.*)

LESGATE. (*Still skeptical.*) The police would only have to trace one of those notes back to you and they'd hang us from the same rope.

TONY. They won't. For a whole year I've been cashing an extra

twenty pounds a week. Always in fivers. I then change them for these at my leisure.

LESGATE. *(Rises, crosses to desk.)* Let's see your bank statement.

TONY. By all means. *(Tony opens desk drawer and takes out his bank statement. He holds it open for Lesgate to see. Lesgate puts out his hands to touch it.)* Don't touch!

LESGATE. Turn back a page. *(Tony turns back the page.)* Your balance has dropped by over a thousand pounds in the year. Suppose the police ask you about that.

TONY. *(With a smile.)* I go dog-racing twice a week.

LESGATE. They'll check with your bookmaker?

TONY. Like you—I always bet on the Tote. . . . *(Pause.)* Satisfied? *(Long pause. Lesgate is standing R. of desk with back to windows. Tony faces him from other side of desk.)*

LESGATE. When would this take place?

TONY. Tomorrow night.

LESGATE. Tomorrow! Not a chance. I've got to think this over.

TONY. It's got to be tomorrow. I've arranged things that way.

LESGATE. Where?

TONY. Approximately where you're standing now. *(Lesgate reacts to this. A long pause.)*

LESGATE. *(Quietly.)* How?

TONY. Tomorrow evening, Halliday—that's the American boy friend—and I will go out to a stag party just down the road. She will stay here. She'll go to bed early and listen to Saturday Night Theater on the radio. She always does when I'm out. At exactly twenty-three minutes to eleven you will enter the house by the street door. *(Moving to hall.)* You'll find the key of this door under the stair carpet—here. *(Tony opens the hall door and leaves it wide open. He looks around to see that no one is watching and then points to one of the stairs which is clearly visible through the open door. He then comes in and closes the hall door.)*

LESGATE. The fifth step.

TONY. That's the one. Go straight to the window and hide behind the curtains. *(Pause.)* At exactly twenty minutes to eleven, I shall go to the telephone in the hotel to call my boss. I shall dial the wrong number—this number. That's all I shall do. *(Pause.)* When the phone rings you'll see the lights go on under the bedroom door. When she opens it the light will stream across the room, so don't move until she answers the phone. *(Pause.)* There must be as little

noise as possible. *(Pause.)* When you've finished, pick up the phone and give me a soft whistle. Then hang up. Don't speak, whatever you do. I shan't say a word. When I hear your whistle I shall hang up and redial—the correct number this time—I shall then speak to my boss as if nothing has happened and return to the party.

LESGATE. *(Looking round.)* What happens then? Go on! *(Tony points to leather suitcase resting on wall L. of R. bookcase.)*

TONY. You'll find this suitcase here. It will contain some clothes of mine for the cleaners. Open it and tip the clothes out onto the floor. *(Tony picks up the suitcase. He carries it back of couch to fireplace and puts it on the floor. He points to trophies on mantel-piece.)* Then fill it with the cigarette box and some of these cups. Close the lid but don't snap the locks. *(Pause.)* Then leave it here—just as it is now.

LESGATE. As if I left in a hurry?

TONY. That's the idea. Now—the window. If it's locked, unlock it and leave it open. *(Pause.)* Then go out exactly the same way as you came in.

LESGATE. *(Indicating hall door.)* By that door?

TONY. Yes—and here's the most important thing—as you go out, return the key to the place where you found it.

LESGATE. Under the stair carpet?

TONY. Yes. *(Lesgate looks round the room, puzzled.)*

LESGATE. Exactly what is supposed to have happened?

TONY. They'll assume you entered by the window. You thought the apartment was empty so you took the suitcase and went to work. She heard something and switched on her light. You saw the light go on under the door and hid behind the curtains. When she came in here you attacked her before she could scream. When you realized you'd actually killed her, you panicked and bolted into the garden leaving your loot behind.

LESGATE. Just a minute . . . I'm supposed to have entered by the windows. What if they had been locked?

TONY. It wouldn't matter. You see, she often takes a walk round the garden before she goes to bed and she usually forgets to lock up when she gets back. That's what I shall tell the police.

LESGATE. But she may say that . . . *(Pause.)*

TONY. She isn't going to say anything—is she? *(Pause, while Lesgate sees the logic of this.)*