

Tony Lesgate

~~TONY. It was when I saw you in the pub that it happened. Since everything became quite clear. Only a few months before Margot and I had made our wills—quite short affairs leaving everything we had to each other in case of accidents. Hers worked out at just over ninety thousand pounds. Investments, mostly—all a little too easy to get at. And that was dangerous as they'd be bound to suspect me. I'd need an alibi—a very good one—and then I saw you. I'd often wondered what happened to people when they came out of prison—people like you, I mean. Can they get jobs? Do old friends rally round? Suppose they'd never had any friends. I was so curious to know that I followed you. I followed you home that night and—would you mind passing your glass? (Lesgate, bewildered, hands Tony his glass.) Thank you, thank you so much—and I've been following you ever since.~~

~~LESGATE. Why?~~

TONY. (Wipes Lesgate's glass and puts it back on coffee table.) I was hoping that, sooner or later, I might—catch you at something and be able to . . .

LESGATE. Blackmail me?

TONY. Influence you. After a few weeks I got to know your routine which made it a lot easier.

LESGATE. Rather dull work.

TONY. To begin with, yes. But you know how it is—you take up a hobby and the more you get to know of it the more fascinating it becomes. You became quite fascinating. In fact, there were times when I felt that you—almost belonged to me.

LESGATE. That must have been fascinating.

TONY. You always went dog-racing on Mondays and Thursdays. I even took it up myself—just to be near you. You'd changed your name to Adams.

LESGATE. Yes, I got bored with Swann. Any crime in that?

TONY. No, none at all. And you used to go to a little private club in Soho. It had an odd name . . . (Remembering.) The Kettle of Fish, that's it. The police closed it down recently, I believe—some one was caught taking drugs or something.

LESGATE. (Casually.) I never heard about that. I went there to eat. There's no crime in that either.

TONY. None whatever. In fact, there was nothing really illegal about you. I got quite discouraged, and then one day you disappeared from your lodgings, so I phoned your landlady. I said, "Mr.

Adams owed me five pounds." . . . Apparently that was nothing. Mr. Adams owed her six weeks' rent and her best lodger fifty-five pounds! And Mr. Adams had always been such a nice gentleman. That's what seemed to upset her most.

LESGATE. Yes, that's what always upsets them most. (Lesgate strolls to coffee table and reaches for the brandy bottle.)

TONY. (Tony indicates gloves on arm of sofa.) I say, old boy, if you want another drink, do you mind putting on these gloves? (Lesgate glances at the gloves but does not pick them up.) Thanks.

Now, where were we? Oh, yes, I'd lost you and then I found you one day at the dog-racing and tailed you home to your new lodgings in Belsize Park. There Mr. Adams became Mr. Wilson. Mr. Wilson left Belsize Park last July owing fifteen weeks' rent and somewhat richer for his brief encounter with a . . . Miss Wallace. You used to go out with Miss Wallace on Wednesdays and Sundays. She certainly was in love with you, wasn't she? I suppose she thought you were growing that handsome mustache to please her. Poor Miss Wallace.

LESGATE. This is all most interesting. Do go on.

TONY. July—August—September . . . Apartment one two seven Carlisle Court . . . Occupant . . . A Mrs. Van Dorn. Her late husband left her two hotels and a large apartment house—furnished. What a base to operate from, Captain Lesgate! The only trouble is, she does rather enjoy being courted, and she is so very expensive. Perhaps that's why you've been trying to sell her car for over a month.

LESGATE. Mrs. Van Dorn asked me to sell it for her.

TONY. I know. I called her up just before you arrived here. She only wanted eight hundred. (Pause. Lesgate remains perfectly still.)

LESGATE. (Casually.) Where's the nearest police station?

TONY. Opposite the church. Two minutes' walk.

LESGATE. Suppose I walk there now?

TONY. What would you tell them?

LESGATE. Everything.

TONY. Everything? All about Mr. Adams and Mr. Wilson?

LESGATE. I shall simply tell them you are trying to blackmail me into . . .

TONY. Into?

LESGATE. Murdering your wife. (Pause.)

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