

Margot/Max

telephone is on the upstage end of desk.) The desk chair has its back to the windows. Below the desk is a waste-paper basket. L. C. is a sofa. R. of this is a stool. Behind sofa is an oblong table on which there is a silver cigarette case, an ash tray, and a vase of flowers. D. L. is a chair and behind this chair is a small wall table with a wicker mending basket filled with stockings, scissors, etc. Below the sofa is a low, round coffee table. There is a chandelier (or overhead lights) over the C. of the room, and two wall brackets in the L. wall above the fireplace. Both of these are controlled by light switches inside and at R. of the ball door. The standard lamp is switched on and off at the standard lamp itself. At present no lights are on, it still being daylight outside, but the light begins to fade during the first scene between Max and Margot. The fire is burning brightly and the ball door is closed. As the curtain rises, Margot is handing Max a drink. They are both seated on the sofa. She suddenly bears something in the passage outside, rises and goes to the ball door, which she opens and peeps through for a moment. Then she closes the ball door and turns to Max.

MARGOT. (A little worried.) For a moment I thought it was Tony. I'm sorry I interrupted you. What were we talking about . . . ?

MAX. I was just telling you that I murdered exactly fifty-two people since I saw you last.

MARGOT. (With a laugh, picks up her drink from coffee table. Sits on sofa.) Oh, yes—one a week. How did you do it?

MAX. Every way I could think of. I electrocuted some in their baths, locked others in the garage with the motor running or pushed them through windows and over cliffs. Other weeks I preferred to poison, shoot, strangle, stab, slug or suffocate.

MARGOT. Just according to how you felt?

MAX. When you write for that kind of television you don't have time to feel anything.

MARGOT. Where do you get all your ideas from?

MAX. Oh—newspaper stories—police files—bad dreams—other writers . . .

MARGOT. You once told me you'd never write anything that wasn't original.

MAX. Huh—you try being original fifty-two times a year!

MARGOT. Suppose you just dry up and can't think of anything?

MAX. If it comes to that I just use my three hats.

MARGOT. What do you mean?

MAX. I've got three old hats marked: Who kills who, How, and Why.

MARGOT. Which is what? I mean what's Why?

MAX. Why is the motive for killing. You've got to have a motive, you know. There are only five important ones. Fear—jealousy—

money—revenge—and protecting someone you love. I just write them down on pieces of paper and pick one out of the Why hat.

MARGOT. Sounds rather like sorting the week's washing.

MAX. It's about as artistic as that. But better paid. It's no more frustrating than writing plays that aren't produced or novels that aren't published. . . . And don't forget this: It all goes to prove that WFTO makes teeth bright—white and bite!

MARGOT. (Laughs.) Let's have your glass, Max.

MAX. No . . . I'm all right, thanks.

MARGOT. I could hardly believe it when I heard your voice. At first I thought you were phoning from New York.

MAX. Yes, I thought you were shouting a little louder than necessary. As a matter of fact I was just around the corner. (A pause

anxiously.) Was it all right . . . my phoning like that?

MARGOT. Yes, of course.

MAX. Was that—Tony who answered?

MARGOT. Yes, it was. (An awkward pause.) I do hope he isn't going to be too late. Poor darling. He always gets caught when we're going to the theater. (Pause.) So you're not here on a holiday—this time?

MAX. No, not this time. I came over to write some short TV films. After that I think I'll knock off for a year and write that novel. I've got to write it some day.

MARGOT. Another crime story?

MAX. I have to stick to crime—it's my stock in trade. But there's no reason why a murder story can't be as good as anything else.

And I think I could write a good one if I took the time. I thought of a pretty fair gimmick on the plane coming over. There's a pair of twins—identical—one lives in Paris and the other in New York

—all of a sudden they both decide to . . . (Margot has been

growning anxious and loses interest in all this.)

MARGOT. (Interrupting.) Max, before Tony comes I ought to explain something.

MAX. Yes?

MARGOT. I didn't tell him anything about us.

MAX. Oh.

MARGOT. When you rang up yesterday, I just said that you were a television writer I'd met when he was in America.

MAX. Well, that's true enough.

MARGOT. I said I'd met you again just before you went back to New York and you promised to look us up if you ever came back.

MAX. I see.

MARGOT. Max, I know you think it's silly, but when you get to know Tony, you'll understand why.

MAX. Margot, I'd like to get one thing straight. (Rises and sits on arm of sofa.) Things are O.K. now between you and Tony?

MARGOT. They couldn't be better. And I want to keep them that way.

MAX. I'm very glad—at least I guess I will be when I get used to the idea.

MARGOT. There's something else, Max.

MAX. Yes?

MARGOT. I wasn't going to tell you but . . .

MAX. Come on, let's have it . . .

MARGOT. Well, you remember those letters you wrote me?

MAX. Of course.

MARGOT. After I read them I burnt them. I thought it best. All except one. You probably know the one I mean.

MAX. I can guess. I never should have written it.

MARGOT. I know. But I loved it just the same. I used to carry it round wherever I went. Then one day Tony and I were going to spend the week end with some friends in the country. While we were waiting on the platform I noticed my handbag was missing . . . and the letter was inside.

MAX. I see. . . . Where was this?

MARGOT. Victoria Station. I thought I must have left it in the restaurant but when I went to look for it, it had gone.

MAX. You never found it?

MARGOT. I recovered the handbag about two weeks later from the lost and found. But the letter wasn't there. (Pause.) Then a

week after I received a note. It told me what I had to do to get the letter back.

MAX. Go on.

MARGOT. I was to draw fifty pounds from my bank in five-pound notes, then change them for used one-pound notes. It said that if I went to the police or told anyone else—he would show the letter to my husband.

MAX. May I see it? (Margot exits into bedroom. Max gets up and paces uneasily around the room. He takes a cigarette from the silver box on table behind sofa and lights it. Then Margot enters from bedroom holding two white envelopes. She hands one of these to Max who takes out the note and examines it.) Printed—all capitals. Anyone could have done this. (Margot hands him the other envelope.)

MARGOT. Then—two days later—I got this one. (Max takes out the second note.)

MAX. (Glancing at the postmarks.) Both mailed in Brixton. (Reading.) "Tie up money in a package and mail to John S. King, 23 Newport Street, Brixton, S.W.9. You will get your letter by return." Well, of all the . . .

MARGOT. That's a little shop. People use it as a forwarding address.

MAX. Did you mail the money?

MARGOT. Yes, but the letter was never returned. . . . So after waiting two weeks I went there. They said they'd never heard of a man by that name, and the parcel was still there. It had never been opened.

MAX. Well, I suppose that's something. (Max puts the notes back in the envelopes and puts them into his wallet.) May I keep these?

MARGOT. (Hesitates.) Yes. . . . If you like.

MAX. You didn't tell Tony?

MARGOT. No, I didn't tell anyone. (Pause.) I can't understand why the man didn't collect the money.

MAX. He was probably in jail by that time. (Pause.) You never heard from him again?

MARGOT. No.

MAX. Well, let me know if you do. I'll find him and fix him so he can't read, let alone write. (Pause.) ~~That's why you asked me to stop writing.~~